

THERE'S STILL TIME TO ENTER FOR OUR 10,000 GIFT PLAN.

See
page 11.

The GEM

2^D



READ —
DETECTIVE
D'ARCY-DUD
inside
THE BEST
FULL OF LAUGHS
STORY OF THE
WEEK

FOLLOW DETECTIVE D'ARCY ON THE LAUGHTER TRAIL IN THIS

DETECTIVE



Detective D'Arcy D U D, the youthful Sexton Blake,
Is on the trail, so look out, boys, there's laughter in his wake!

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy Is Mysterious!

"D'ARCY!"

There was no reply. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House at St. Jim's, was walking in the quadrangle, his hands deep in his trousers-pockets, and his brow screwed up into an expression of intense reflection.

"D'Arcy!"

D'Arcy evidently did not even hear. He walked on, without looking to left or right, and Tom Merry stared after him in amazement.

"D'Arcy!" he called out for the third time.

But Arthur Augustus did not turn his head.

"Well, my only hat!" murmured Tom Merry, gazing at the elegant form of the swell of the School House. "What on earth's the matter with Gussy? Is he in love again, or is he thinking out a new pattern in fancy waistcoats, I wonder!"

"Anything wrong, Tom?"

Manners and Lowther came by under the old elms in the THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,269.

quadrangle at St. Jim's, and they stopped at sight of Tom Merry staring open-mouthed after Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't know," he replied. "Did you see Gussy pass just now?"

"No," said Lowther. "Hallo! There he is!"

"He's turning back. Just watch him."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had reached the end of the row of elm-trees, and had turned round abruptly, and was stalking back. He was apparently not going anywhere, but just pacing to and fro under the trees while he thought out some weighty problem.

The Terrible Three looked at one another and grinned. Arthur Augustus had his eyes fixed on the ground, and did not see them. He was marching straight towards them, his brows still wrinkled in intense thought.

Monty Lowther, with a low chuckle, stepped right into the path of the swell of St. Jim's. Unless D'Arcy looked up, he was certain to run right into Lowther, and undoubtedly that would have the effect of startling him out of his brown study.

"One hundred pounds!" D'Arcy muttered the words aloud as he came nearer.

RIPPING COMPLETE YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S!

D'ARCY DUD!



By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Monty Lowther stood like a rock, and the rapt swell of St. Jim's did not look up. He walked right into Monty Lowther, and biffed upon his chest with considerable violence.

Lowther was prepared for the shock, and he braced himself to stand it—and stood it. But Arthur Augustus was taken by surprise, and he gave a cry and staggered back several paces, and finally sat down in the quadrangle.

As his hands were in his trousers-pockets, and he could not get them out in time, he could not save himself in any way. He bumped down heavily and gasped, and remained sitting there, staring up at the chums of the Shell Form in blank astonishment.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally," gasped D'Arcy, "I wish you would not get in the way, Lowthah. You have weally given me a most unpleasant bump on the beastly gground, and thwown my nerves into quite a fluttah!"

"Well, I like that!" said Monty Lowther indignantly. "You run right into a chap, and nearly knock him over, and then don't so much as apologise."

D'Arcy extricated his hands from his trousers-pockets and scrambled up.

"Weally, Lowthah, if you put it like that—"

"How do you expect me to put it?" said Lowther. "I'm waiting for the apology."

"I am extremely sowwy, Lowthah, that I walked into you," said Arthur Augustus, who was never known to fail when it came to a question of politeness. "I am weally vewy sowwy. But I wish you had not got in my way. You have intewwupted my twain of thought."

"What the dickens are you thinking about, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry. "I spoke to you three times, and you never answered."

"I am sowwy to have appeahed so wude, Tom Mewwy."

"But what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothin'!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We mustn't interrupt his train of thought," he exclaimed. "The result might be serious in a mighty brain like Gussy's. If he were to burst anything there, there might be a flood."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Come along, kids, and leave him to work out his problem."

The Terrible Three walked away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed after them vacantly for a moment, and then his eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, and he thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets again, and resumed his pacing under the trees.

The chums of the Shell looked back, and saw him pacing to and fro, his forehead wrinkled and his eyes on the ground.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "There's something working in Gussy's mighty brain, and I'm really curious to know what it is. You never know what that ass is going to do next."

"Let's go and ask Blake," said Lowther. "He's sure to know."

"That's a good idea."

And the chums of the Shell made their way without delay to Study No. 6 in the School House of St. Jim's accupied by the famous quartet, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, and found Jack Blake alone there.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy's Brilliant Idea!

JACK BLAKE was mending a fishing-rod. He looked up and took a tighter grip upon the thickest part of it, as he saw the Terrible Three looking in at the door.

There were very often strained relations between the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6. But on this occasion the visit was one of amity. Tom Merry waved his hand in reassurance, and walked into the study, followed by Manners and Lowther.

"Hallo, Blake, I see you're busy."

"Yes," said Blake amiably; "silly asses keep on coming in and interrupting me, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Have you seen Gussy lately?"

"Yes; he went out just after tea," said Blake. "Do you want him? I think he's reading somewhere."

"Reading!" said Lowther. "What's he reading?"

Blake chuckled.

"Some stuff about Sherlock Holmes. He's studying the methods, or something, he says. He hasn't got over his idea of being a detective yet."

Tom Merry started.

"My hat! Is that it?"

"Is that what?"

"We have just come in from the quad. Gussy's there, walking about under the trees, with a brow you could sharpen a saw on, and muttering something about a hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds!" said Blake, looking puzzled. "I don't know anything about a hundred pounds. I'm pretty sure Gussy hasn't anything like a hundred pounds. His governor keeps him well supplied with pocket-money, but not to that tune."

"That's what he was muttering about."

"Perhaps it's something from some detective yarn that he's got on the brain," said Blake. "I say, you remember Ferrers Locke, the detective, came here not so long ago?"

"Well, rather!"

"I've found out that before he went Gussy offered—ha, ha, ha—"

"Offered what?"

"He offered Ferrers Locke—ha, ha, ha—"

"Offered Ferrers Locke what?"

"To become—ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get it out!"

"Offered to become his assistant in London!" giggled Blake. "He was prepared to give up his career at St. Jim's, feeling that he was just cut out to be a detective."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Locke declined, of course—told Gussy he would have to adorn the House of Lords some day, and that he must keep that in view."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Gussy can't get the idea out of his head. He thinks a brain like his is built to grapple with mighty problems."

"The cheek of a Fourth Form kid—"

Blake's expression changed.

"What's that, Lowther?"

"The cheek of a Fourth Form kid—"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Monty Lowther—"

"I say, the cheek of a Fourth Form kid—"

"Oh, rats! What are you Shell fish doing in a respectable study, anyway? Just travel along, and don't worry me with your features!"

"Yes, come along!" said Tom Merry. "We can't be seen in a place like this. I think we shall be able to dig some fun up, too, this time."

And the Terrible Three quitted Study No. 6. They passed two juniors in the passage—Herries and Digby—who entered the study the next moment.

"Hallo!" said Digby. "Nearly finished, eh? There's still time for a little practice at the nets if you buck up!"

"Some silly ass keeps on coming in and interrupting me!"

"Oh, cheese it! Keep that for the Shell bounders."

"But, really—"

"Have you seen Gussy? I hear that he has been going about with a portentous frown on his brow, and not answering when spoken to," said Digby. "That means something new and startling in the fancy waistcoat line, I suppose."

"I've just heard about him from Tom Merry. He—Who's that?"

A large head was put into the study from the passage, and a pair of watery eyes blinked at the chums of the Fourth.

"Hallo, Blake! Is D'Arcy here?"

"No, he isn't."

"I want to speak to him," said Skimpole of the Shell, the freak of St. Jim's, and the brainy man of the Shell Form. "It's rather important."

"Is it? Then I advise you to go and look for him."

"Have you seen him?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen him!" said Digby.

"Where?"

"In the woodshed."

"Thank you, Digby!"

And Skimpole cut off.

Digby giggled as Blake stared at him.

"What the dickens is Gussy doing in the woodshed?" said Blake.

"Nothing. I never said he was there."

"You said—"

"I said I had seen him there. So I had—last week, when we were holding the meeting of St. Jim's Parliament."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimpole didn't ask me to specify the time I saw him. It only shows what a brainy man may overlook. Now, Gussy is—"

"Here he is!"

The elegant form of the swell of the School House entered the study. There was still a shade of deep thought upon the brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but a light of resolve gleamed behind his eyeglass.

"I say, deah boys—"

"Anything wrong, Gussy?" asked Digby.

"Wong? Certainly not, Dig!"

"I heard you'd been thinking."

"Pway don't wot, Digby! I have wathah a good ideah, and I am inclined to take you chaps into it, if you like."

"Well, we know your ideas," said Blake, distrustfully. "They generally want boiling. But you can go on till I've finished mending this fishing-rod, at any rate."

"That's hardly a respectful way of putting it, Blake."

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"Certainly, Blake. That is my intention. I was only pointin' out—"

"Get on, I tell you!"

"Well, I have a wippin' ideah—a weally first-wate, wippin' wheeze."

"Cut it short."

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"Oh, pway be patient, deah boys! I have a definite ideah in my bwain. How would you like to share a hundred pounds with me?"

"Got it about you?"

"Not exactly, Blake, but I can easily get it."

"How?" demanded three voices in unison.

"Listen to this."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy drew a folded newspaper from his pocket, and commenced to read out a marked paragraph.

"The little son of Sir James Jukes is still reported missing from his home, and the reward of a hundred pounds offered for his discovery has not yet been claimed."

"There!" said D'Arcy triumphantly.

"Well?" said Blake.

"There!"

"What the dickens are you getting at? What has that paragraph got to do with us? Is that the hundred pounds you were talking about?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And how are we to get it?"

"By formin' a company, accordin' to my suggestion, D'Arcy, Blake, Herries, Digby & Co., and findin' the lost son of Sir James Jukes!"

"You howling ass!"

"I uttally wefuse to be chawactewised as a howlin' ass!"

"How are we to find the lost kid? I suppose they didn't bring him into the quad at St. Jim's to lose him, did they?"

"I am not pwoposin' to look for him in the quad at St. Jim's," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "Don't be a wiculous ass, Blake!"

"Then where do you propose to look for him?"

"In the place where he was lost, of course!"

"Oh, I see! This is a little game you are planning for the vacation!"

"It is extremely pwob that the child will be found, and the weward claimed before the summer vacation starts," said D'Arcy. "I was not thinkin' of anythin' of the sort!"

"Then what's the idea?"

"We should have to leave St. Jim's!"

Blake stared aghast.

"Leave St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In the middle of a term?"

"We should pwobably only be absent a couple of days or so, deah boys. With my bwain bwought to bear upon the mattah, the case woud pwobably not take us long. We should find the lost son of Sir James Jukes, and westore him to the wespacted bosom of his pawents, and come back to the coll with a hundred pounds in our pockets!"

"And what do you think the Head would say when we got back?"

"Havin' found the lost child, we could point out to the Head that—"

"But—"

"He would, as a humane man, and a father himself, excuse us!"

"But suppose we didn't find the lost kidlet?"

"I must wefuse to entahtain any such supposition! When I take up a case I shall always follow it up to a successful conclusion!"

"But suppose—"

"It's no good askin' me to suppose that I should fail in my first important case, Blake! I wefuse to entahtain the ideah at all!"

"You shrieking ass!"

"I cannot allow such oppwobwious expwessions to be applied to me. If you do not care to join the Co.—"

"Catch me!"

"Then you wefuse, Blake?"

"I should say so! You're not going to get me to risk being expelled for the sake of hunting after a doubtful hundred pounds. That's an old paper, and you don't even know whether the kid's been found or not!"

"I am pwetty suah—"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I'm afwaid I haven't the time to argue with you, Blake. If you wefuse to join the Co. I shall seek assistance fwom othahs. I have already wefused to acquaint Tom Mewwy with the mattah, because I was weservin' the opportunity for you!"

"Rough on Tom Merry!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah, it was wuff on Tom Mewwy! I cannot vewy well withdwaw what I said to him now! If you chaps wefuse to join the Co., I shall have to go ova to the New House and ask Figgins & Co.—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Blake, pway weseft before you wefuse!"

"Rats! You can count me out!"

"And you, Digby?"

"I'm afraid that, in the pressing concern of multifarious other engagements, I shall not be able to accept your really flattering offer!" said Digby, with a perfectly serious face. D'Arcy looked at him suspiciously, and then turned to Herries.

"What do you say, Hewwies? We two——"

Herries grinned.

"I really think I must leave amateur detective business until after the cricket season, Gussy. When the cricket's over, you can ask me again!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!"

"Better go and ask Figgins!" said Blake. "I think I can see him, following your lead in search of lost infants and a hundred pounds. Go and ask Figgins!"

"That is what I intend to do, Blake! It will be your own

CHAPTER 3.

The Terrible Three Are Not Taking Any!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS adjusted his monocle into his eye. He always felt more comfortable when he could feel the rim of his eyeglass there. The Terrible Three exchanged glances, and waited patiently for him to begin.

"You were askin' me a short time ago what I meant by weferwin' to a hundwed pounds!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh!" said Lowther. "Is that it? Are we goin' to hear the history of the mystery now?"

"I am willin' to explain——"

"Go ahead!"

"Pway don't huwwy me, or I shall pwobably lose the thweed of my ideahs, and my twain of thought will be disturbed. You wemembah Fewwers Locke came heah not so long ago——"

"Oh, yes! Go on!"



D'Arcy was marching straight towards the Terrible Three, his brow wrinkled in intense thought. Monty Lowther stepped right into his path and stood like a rock. "One hundred pounds!" muttered D'Arcy as he came nearer. And then he walked right into Lowther and biffed on his chest with considerable violence. "Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy.

fault entirely if the cwedit of this entahpwise falls more to the New House than to the School House!"

"I think we'll risk it! Figgins is sure to jump at the offer. Go and ask him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the swell of the School House left Study No. 6, followed by a yell of laughter from the chums of the Fourth Form. D'Arcy heard it, but it made no difference to him. When Arthur Augustus got an idea into his head, nothing short of an earthquake could have shaken it out again. He left the School House and crossed the quadrangle to the rival House of St. Jim's to submit his really brilliant idea to the consideration of Figgins & Co.

Figgins & Co., however, would have nothing to do with his scheme, and he was forced to seek the help of Tom Merry & Co., whom he ran to earth in the gym.

"I offahed him my services as an assistant in his pwofession in London——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at in that, that I can see! Howevah, to wesume, he wefused to entabtain the offah, and I have been thinkin' of becomin' an amateur detective, like Sherlock Holmes——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle like that, Mannahs! It gets on my nerves; it does, weally! I am thinkin' of becomin' an amateur detective. I wegard it as extwemely pwob that in the near futuuh I shall always be consulted by Scotland Yard when they are troubled with vewy difficult cases, above the intellect of the ordinawy police——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But to explain the more immediate plans I have formed; I am thinkin' of formin' a company of amateur detectives, to be called D'Arcy, Mewwy, Lowthah, Mannahs & Co.—"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"I think it's a wathah good ideah, and I have already mapped out the case we are to take up first!"

"My hat!"

"It is a case of lost pwoerty! There is a weward of a hundwed pounds for the discovery of the missin' article. Pway wead that pawagwaph, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry read out the marked paragraph in the paper D'Arcy handed to him.

"The little son of Sir James Jukes is still reported missin' from his home, and the reward of a hundwed pounds offered for his discovery has not yet been claimed."

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"Is that the hundwed pounds you were talking about?"

"Yass, wathah!"

"But that's offered for the discovery of a lost kid."

"Exactly!"

"Then how—"

"We are goin' to find him, deah boy!"

Tom Merry stared.

"How are we going to find him? He wasn't lost in a class-room at St. Jim's, or mislaid behind the woodshed, or anything of that sort—"

"Pway don't wot—"

"Then what are you getting at? Have you the nerve to be attempting to pull the leg of such an important personage as myself?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Nothin' of the sort."

"Then what do you mean, ass?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass!"

"What do you mean, fathead, if you like that better?"

"I do not like it bettah!"

"Oh, come on!" said Mannahs. "We shan't get any exercise! When Gussy starts talking he goes on like a giddy gramophone."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Come on!" said Lowther.

"One moment, deah boys—"

"Time's up," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Anyway, we're not inclined to turn into a firm of private detectives to start looking for a needle in a haystack. It's not good enough."

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nuff said!"

"I have not fully explained my ideah."

"How long would it take?"

"Not more than a quath of an hour."

"Yes, I can see myself standing and being jawed at for a quarter of an hour," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "Go and eat coke!"

"But—"

"Travel along!"

"Oh, come on!" said Lowther. "What are you standing there for, Tom? Gussy will never leave off talking, as long as he can find a listener."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Scat!"

"I think upon second thoughts that I could compmess my wemarks into five or six minutes, deah boys."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Could you explain the whole thing in that time?"

"Yass, wathah!"

"Then start. You don't mind if we go on the parallel-bars while you're doing it, do you? It will save time."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm afraid that's the only way it can be worked," said Tom Merry; and the Terrible Three walked into the gym.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy to himself, "it weally seems as if I shall find no takahs for the most bwiliant ideah that has evah flashed into my bwain! It is wathah wotten to think of a hundwed pounds waitin' to be picked up, and a poor little chap waitin' to be found, and I can't get any of these wottahs to back me up! Ow!"

He broke off suddenly as he received a powerful slap on the back, which jerked his eyeglass from his eye. It dangled at the end of its cord as Arthur Augustus swung round indignantly, to find himself looking at the chums of Study No. 6. Blake, Herries, and Digby were just coming into the gym.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "Still working out mental problems?"

"I weally wish you would not be so wuff, Blake!"

"I thought I'd wake you up," said Blake. "Thought you might be going into a trance or something, you know."

"You have bwoken the thweed of my ideahs, and disturbed my twain of thought," said D'Arcy. "But I have

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somethin' to say to you. Have you thought of what I was sayin' to you in the study?"

"Yes," said Digby.

"And what do you think of the ideah?"

"I think it's about the rottenest I've ever heard of," said Blake. "That's my opinion. I may be mistaken. What do you think, Dig?"

"I think it's about the mouldiest old idea that was ever dug up," said Digby, with friendly candour. "Gussy ought to take it to a quiet place and bury it."

"What do you think, Herries?"

"I think Gussy's off his rocker," said the practical Herries.

"I am not off my wockah, Hewwies—"

"Well, I think—"

"It is a wippin' ideah, and I would wathah the School House have the cwedit of it. It would be more satisfactory than to allow Figgins & Co.—"

"Have you offered it to them?"

"Yass, wathah; but I would pwefer—"

"Did they take it up?"

"Well, no. As a mattah of fact, they wefused—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you chaps won't back me up, there are othahs," said Arthur Augustus, with some hauteur. "I shall find plenty of chaps willin' to back me up, and get a hundwed pounds."

"Good luck, then!" said Blake.

"But I would wathah you fellows—"

"Come on, kids!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby walked into the gym. D'Arcy went slowly and meditatively towards the School House in the dusk of the June evening. A really brilliant idea was going begging, and D'Arcy did not quite know to whom to turn next for support.

CHAPTER 4.

Reilly Makes a Suggestion.

GORE of the Shell was standing in the doorway of the School House, talking to Mellish of the Fourth. D'Arcy came in and glanced at him, and hesitated. He did not like either of the cads of the School House, but he wanted support in his ripping idea. He stopped to speak to them.

"Goah, deah boy—"

Gore turned his head to look at him.

"Hallo, ass!"

"That is wathah a wude expwession, Goah," said D'Arcy. "I should certainly give you a feahful thwashin' for usin' it to me, but at the pwesent moment I have othah fish to fwy. I have a new ideah—"

"Go hon!"

"There is a way of pickin' up a hundwed pounds as easy as fallin' off a form."

"My hat! A hundwed pounds!"

"Yass, wathah!"

"Gammon!" said Mellish.

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and stared at Mellish.

The cad of the Fourth retreated a pace or two.

"Did I understand you to say 'gammon,' Mellish?" asked Arthur Augustus, with really stately courtesy.

"Yes, I did!" growled Mellish.

"It is a term of vulgah slang," said Arthur Augustus, "and I believe it implies a doubt of my word. Is that the case, Mellish?"

"Oh, rats!"

"When a gentleman doubts anothah gentleman's word, he is bound to give him satisfaction if wequiahed to do so," said D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs. "I will twouble you to withdraw that word, Mellish, deah boy."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Are you goin' to withdraw that obnoxious word?"

"No, I am not."

"Then I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin' to you, Mellish. Will you pway put up your fists, deah boy?"

"Rats!"

"I am waitin' for you."

"Look here!"

Arthur Augustus evidently meant business. He squared up in quite a scientific way, and gave Mellish a tap on the nose.

"Now then, Mellish!"

"Oh, I was only joking!" said Mellish, who never got into a fight if he could possibly help it. "Don't be an ass."

"A joke that weflects upon a gentleman's honah is a joke in vewy bad taste, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus. "Only a wotten boundah would imply a doubt of a gentleman's word for the sake of a joke."

"Oh, cheese it!"
 "I wefuse to cheese it. I wegard you as a wottah!"
 Mellish muttered something under his breath.
 The clouds cleared from D'Arcy's brows, and he adjusted his monocle.

"I am sowwy I have been compelled to deal wuffly with you, Mellish," he said. "I have a new ideah to pwopose to you two fellows to get a hundwed pounds."

"Go ahead!" said Gore.

"There is a hundwed pounds weward offered for the wecovewy of the son of Sir Juke Jakes—I mean, Sir James Jukes—and my ideah is to form a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Gore, Mellish & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be serious, Goah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy looked scornfully at the two juniors, who were yelling with laughter.

Gore leaned against the doorpost and Mellish against the door, both of them shaking with merriment.

D'Arcy's brow clouded.

"If my ideahs are to be weceived in this wibald way, I shall certainly not take the twouble to speak to you furthah on the subject," he said haughtily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a pair of wude wottahs!"

And D'Arcy walked away, followed by a yell of laughter from Gore and Mellish.

The swell of St. Jim's was beginning to look a little despondent. Ripping as the idea was, it seemed to find no takers.

The sight of Kildare of the Sixth, captain of St. Jim's, coming down the stairs, gave a new turn to D'Arcy's thoughts.

He hurried to intercept the school captain.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Kildare?"

The big, athletic captain of St. Jim's looked down at the junior with a good-natured smile, and nodded.

"Go ahead!" he said tersely.

"I have a weally good ideah, but I cannot cawwy it out, as I cannot find any support in the Lower Forms," explained Arthur Augustus. "It has occurred to me that it would meet with a bettah weception among the more cultivated intellects of the seniahs."

Kildare grinned.

"Oh, go ahead, D'Arcy! What is the ideah?"

"I have been thinkin' of forming a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Kildare & Co."

Kildare took the swell of the School House by the shoulders and gently turned him round.

D'Arcy looked over his shoulder at the captain of St. Jim's, utterly amazed by this proceeding.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Take a little run," said the Sixth-Former.

"Eh?"

"Take a little run."

And the captain of St. Jim's gave D'Arcy a start.

The swell of St. Jim's ran a few paces to save his balance. Then he stopped, and looked round.

Kildare was walking away, and Arthur Augustus could see that he was laughing.

"Weally, Kildare is vewy wude," muttered D'Arcy. "I suppose, upon the whole, it's no use expectin' to get any support for my bwiliant ideah among the seniors. Ah, there is young Weilly! I'll twy him!"

Reilly of the Fourth was coming down the passage. Reilly was the member for Belfast in the school parliament at St. Jim's. He stopped as D'Arcy tapped him on the shoulder.

"Weilly, deah boy!"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" said Reilly.

"There isn't any twouble."

"What do you want, then?"

"I've got a good ideah."

"Get it off your chest, then," said Reilly. "Time's valuable. I'm making up a speech to my constituents, and you're spoiling it."

"Weally—"

"Oh, get on! What's the ideah?"

"There's a hundwed pounds weward for the discovery of the missin' son of Sir Jukes James—I mean, Sir Jake Jumes—and I thought of formin' a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Weilly, & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothin' funnay in the ideah."

"That's all you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Why don't you ask Skimpole?" said Reilly, chuckling. "He was inquireing after, you some time back. Why don't you ask him? He's the chap for you."

"Bai Jove! So I will!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's in the Form-room if you want him," said Reilly, and he walked away grinning.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I weally ought to have wemembahed Skimpole. I feel pwetty certain that he will jump at the chance."

And off went Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in search of the brainy man of the Shell.

CHAPTER 5.

A Supporter at Last.

"SKIMPOLE!"

"D'Arcy!"

"I want to speak to you, deah boy."

"And I want to speak to you."

"Good! I will speak first," said Skimpole, "as what I have to say will probably take some time, and—"

"Not at all. I will speak first, as what I have to say is wathah important."

"Now, my dear D'Arcy!"

"Now, my deah Skimpole!"

The two juniors looked at one another doubtfully.

Arthur Augustus had found the freak of St. Jim's in the Form-room, walking to and fro in the dusk, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers-pockets, evidently deep in the throes of intense reflection.

D'Arcy had regarded him through his eyeglass for some moments without speaking. Herbert Skimpole was not the comrade he would have chosen in his new enterprise, but it was a case of any port in a storm. It was, apparently, Skimpole or nobody.

D'Arcy was disheartened by his long search for support in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's.

"You see," said Skimpole, "ever since Ferrers Locke was here—"

"That is just the ideah, Skimmy! Evah since Fewwers Locke was heah—"

"I have been thinking of the detective business!"

"So have I! I have been thinkin'—"

"I don't think I had a fair chance to show what I could do—"

"Yaas, and the same with me!"

"Those fellows Merry and Blake and Figgins and the rest took the cake, as they always do!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And there really wasn't a chance for a fellow of real, unpretending merit to show what he could do!"

"That is exactly what I discovahed, deah boy!"

"I have been thinking that I was built for a detective, owing to my splendid powers of concentration and my keenness of penetration—"

"Bai Jove! That is layin' it on wathah thick, deah boy!"

"If you don't agree with me, D'Arcy—"

"Oh, I agwee to anythin', Skimpole, if you will only get finished, and let me explain my ideah to you!"

"It seems to me that I have more than usual ability in many directions!" said Skimpole. "I may be mistaken!"

"Oh, no! Not at all!" said D'Arcy politely.

"Very well!" said Skimpole. "We'll take it that I am not mistaken! We will take it that I have more than usual abilities! Natural modesty prevents me stating as much myself, but since you assert that it is the case—"

"But I didn't!"

"Since you assert that it is the case," went on Skimpole, unheeding—"since you, a disinterested observer, though perhaps a not over-intelligent one—since you assert that it is the case, I must believe it!"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I have taken up the great cause of Determinism, and endeavoured to spread the good news far and wide. With what result?"

"You have bored ewevybody feahfully, old fellow!"

"I have been treated with contumely. I have not been elected to a seat in St. Jim's Parliament!"

"That is wathah hard cheese!"

"My detective ability has been laughed to scorn. My great abilities in many ways have been laughed to scorn. But a time is coming!"

"Is it weally, Skimpole?"

"Yes, I say the time is coming—"

"Yaas, bai Jove, it is nearly eight o'clock! Are you wefewwin' to bedtime, Skimpole?"

"I say the time is coming," said Skimpole, "when the whole school shall recognise my abilities, and I shall be made a prefect—the first prefect ever selected from the Shell!"

"You surpwise ~~me~~!"

"No doubt! I am about to undertake a case which will lead to both glory and profit!" said Skimpole. "I need a comrade. Will you be that comrade?"

"That depends," said D'Arcy. "I came to see you, to ask you to join me in a new ideah. I am thinkin'—"

"My idea, in brief, is this—"

"This is what I was thinkin' of—"

"Let me finish, D'Arcy—"

"Pway don't interrupt, deah boy—"

"But—"

"But—"

"Really, D'Arcy, this egotism is unpardonable. I shall not be more than half an hour telling you about it—"

"I could get done in a quarter of an hour, and so I think I ought to start first—"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"The case I intend to undertake is most important. It is the case of a lost child, for whose discovery a reward is offered—a weard of—"

"A hundwed pounds?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

"Bai Jove, this is weally a wemarkable coincidence!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I also am on the twack of a lost child, for whose wecovewy the weard of a hundwed pounds is offered by the despawin' pawent!"

"How singular!"

"Wemarkable, bai Jove!"

"The lost infant I speak of is the son of Sir James Jukes, Baronet!"

"So is the one I am speakin' of. Either Sir Jukes Jay—I mean Sir Juck Jones—has lost two sons, and forgotten one of them, or else—"

"Or else we're on the same case!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It is very curious," said Skimpole. "I first knew of the case from coming upon an old folded newspaper in your study, when I was looking for your Greek lexicon. The paragraph was marked with pencil—"

"Wats! That is where I got my information fwom! It is not so much of a coincidence, aftah all!"

"Never mind!" said Skimpole. "If we're both on the same case, we can go ahead!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you formed any plans?"

"Certainly, deah boy! I thought of formin' a company of amateur detectives, to be known as D'Arcy, Skimpole & Co."

"A jolly good idea!" exclaimed Skimpole heartily.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could have fallen upon Skimpole's neck and hugged him. After the contumely with which his idea had been greeted on all sides, it was distinctly gratifying to have his idea greeted with such whole-hearted approval. He did not stop to reflect that Skimpole was about the only junior in St. Jim's who could possibly have thought of joining in his hare-brained scheme.

"Well, I'm vewy glad to hear you say so, Skimpole!" said D'Arcy. "I shall be glad to have you for a follower!"

"Eh?"

"I shall be glad to have you for a follower!"

"That's not quite correct! I shall be the leader, and you will be the follower!" explained Skimpole.

"Wot!"

"My dear D'Arcy, in an affair like this, the cleverer takes the lead naturally!"

"Yaas, that's why—"

"Now, look here—"

"Wats!"

"Well, perhaps we can balve it!" said Skimpole reflectively. "As a sincere Determinist, I do not believe in commanding unwilling followers. Every man has a right to his own opinion. Suppose we start on equal terms, each one doing what is right in his own eyes?"

"Yaas, I can agree to that."

"Then it's a go," said Skimpole. "Of course, it's impossible to search for the missing heir—I mean the lost kid—without leaving the school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it's equally useless to think of asking the permission of the Head. He would probably regard us as a pair of fools, and refuse his permission."

"That is extremely pwob."

"So we shall have to keep the matter dark until we are gone. When we return successful, and the hundred pounds in our pockets, and leading the missing heir by the hand, the Head could not possibly punish us."

"That's what I thought."

"Besides, if we once had the capital, we could leave

St. Jim's if we liked, and start in business as private detectives."

"Yaas, pewwaps so."

"Anyway, we could settle that afterwards—after we'd got the hundred pounds. The first thing is to find the missing heir. Are you game to leave the school?"

D'Arcy raised his head proudly, and screwed his monocle into his eye.

"I weally do not considah that question at all necessawy, Skimpole," he said.

"Oh, all right! Only we had better fix it now, so as not to be seen talking together again, or we may be suspected."

"Yaas, that is quite poss."

"Mind, not a word to a soul. If your study-mates knew that you were going, they would try to stop you."

"I shouldn't wondah."

"Mum's the word, then. When shall we go?"

"Suppose we wise at eleven, when all the fellows will be fast asleep. I'll pack a bag this evening, and you can do the same, and we can hide them in the quad. Then we shall only have to slip out of the window, and there you are!"

"That is a good plan. By the way, do you know in what part of the country the missing heir was missed—I mean lost?"

"Yaas. The papahs said it was near the village of Blackbewy Gween that he was missed by his nurse. That is near Sir James Jackson—I mean Sir James Jukeson's seat."

"Good! Then we'll strike out for Blackberry Green the moment we get outside the walls of St. Jim's," said Skimpole. "Till then, not a word."

"That's wight!"

"By the way, I hope you have plenty of money. I happen to be stony-broke."

"I have plenty of tin, Skimpole. I had a fivah fwom my govahnah on Saturday, and it isn't a quartah gone yet."

"That is fortunate. You can pay the expenses, and I will provide the brain-power, and we will share the profit and glory. We'd better cut off now, as it's getting jolly dark. Hallo, Merry!"

Tom Merry was looking into the dark class-room.

"What the dickens are you confabbing about here?" he demanded. "I heard voices, and thought I'd look in. Are you plotting a plot?"

"Only discussing matters of some importance to ourselves, but of no interest to others," said Skimpole.

"Ass! You can talk piffle there all night, for all I care," said the hero of the Shell, and he passed on his way.

The amateur detectives left the class-room; and by way of keeping the secret safely, each went about looking as mysterious as he could.

CHAPTER 6.

Lowther Suspects!

"WHAT is her name, Gussy?"

Monty Lowther asked the question suddenly as he encountered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the Junior Common-room.

D'Arcy gave a start.

"I do not quite comprehend, Lowthah."

"I said what's her name?"

"Whose name?" said D'Arcy.

Lowther chuckled.

"My dear kid, you can't take me in. Do you think I can't see that you're thinking about Ethel?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Is her name Ethel this time?"

"Weally—"

"Well, I can see you've got something on your mind," said the humorous Lowther. "If you're not in love again, what are you mooning about? Still thinking of looking for the lost son and heir of Sir Somebody Sykes?"

"Sir James Jukes, Lowthah."

"Ah, yes; I knew it was something or other. Is that the problem that is shadowing with care your noble and manly brow?"

"I have weally not the slightest intention of takin' you into my confidence, Lowthah," said the swell of the School House. "And I wegard your enquiwies as wathah impertinent."

And Arthur Augustus turned and walked away. Monty Lowther joined Tom Merry and Manners, who were playing chess in the corner of the room.

"I say, I believe Gussy has got that idea firmly in his noddle," he remarked. "He's looking as serious and mysterious as a villain in a melodrama."

"Check!" said Manners.

"He's thinking out some plan for discovering the missing kid and roping in a hundred pounds reward," went on Lowther.

"I can put in the knight," said Tom Merry.



"What! You'll put the knight on Gussy if—"
 "Ass! I was speaking to Tom Merry. I wish you'd go and bury yourself in some nice quiet corner, Monty Lowther."
 "Oh, very well!" grinned Lowther. "Pray go on, you asses! I can wipe both of you off the board in about six moves."

"You could do what?" shouted Manners, jumping up. But Lowther was walking away, laughing, and the incensed chess player resumed his seat with an expressive grunt.

Lowther looked round for the chums of Study No. 6, but as they were not in sight he concluded that they were in their study, so he strolled along to Study No. 6.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were there, as Lowther was soon warned by the sound of high voices from the open door.

"We've got to form one solid party," said Blake. "We are going to have peace and union in this study, if I have to fight every fellow present!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther, as he caught that speech. "A jolly nice way of promoting peace and union. What's the trouble?"

Blake glared at the Shell-Former.
 "Don't come in here when we're busy!"



As D'Arcy reached down for the bag his topper fell off, and he made a wild clutch to save it. Skimpole had ceased to support the bag at the moment Gussy let go, and it dropped on his foot with a bump. "Ow!" Skimpole gave a yell that startled the rooks round St. Jim's. "Is anything the mattah, deah boy?" murmured D'Arcy.

"I never said you couldn't," remarked Manners pleasantly.

"Well, you said check in such a positive way," said Tom Merry. "Anybody would have thought that it was mate in a couple of moves."

"It's mate in three, I fancy."

"Rats!"

"I say, you chaps, I shouldn't wonder if Gussy was working up a plan to make a break in search of the missing heir," Lowther remarked.

"What about my rook to king's fourth?"

"Bosh! I'd put the knight on him."

"By Jove! So you would. Thanks for the tip."

"Look here—"

"You look here, Monty Lowther! What the dickens do you mean by coming and talking to us about Fourth Form kids and their silly ideas when we're playing chess?" demanded Tom Merry. "Go and eat coke!"

"But I think it's likely—"

"I think it's likely that we shall jump on your neck if you don't travel along," said Manners darkly.

"I shouldn't wonder if—"

"Rats! Get out! Bunk! Vamoose! Absquatulate!"

"I think I'll speak to Blake. If Gussy were to make a break, we—"

"I shall put the knight on him, I tell you."

"I can hear you all over the School House," said Monty Lowther. "What are you three chaps ragging about now?"

"It's about the St. Jim's Parliament," said Digby. "You know, I stood for Cork under the name of Murphy, my grandmother having been an Irish woman. Reilly is Member for Belfast, and he wants complete separation. I don't see why I shouldn't back him up."

"Why not," said Lowther.

"Rot!" said Blake. "Utter rot! Confound you, I've made you Minister of the Interior as well as Speaker, and President of the Local Government Board, and now you want to dismember the giddy Empire."

"What I say is—"

"Understand, once and for all, that I refuse to allow Ireland to break away from the Empire!"

"But—"

"We shall have Fatty Wynn demanding Home Rule for Wales next."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, hang it! Why shouldn't I myself demand Home Rule for Yorkshire?" demanded Blake. "Yorkshire's my country, and I tell you—"

"That's all very well—"

"You can leave the question over. Governments can always leave over the questions that were raised at election times to get the votes in. It's political sagacity."

"Political what?" asked Digby, rather crushed.

"Political sagacity," said the leader of the Fourth triumphantly.

"Seems to be more like humbug."

"Well, politics is mostly humbug, of course," said Blake. "What the dickens is that Shell-fish blinking and grinning at there? The sooner you are on the other side of that door, Monty Lowther, the better it will be for your health."

"But I want to speak to you chaps."

"Car, I you see we're busy?"

"It's about Gussy."

"Then go and speak to Gussy. You'll find him somewhere, if he hasn't got mislaid."

"But I think—"

"Look here, Monty Lowther, I dare say your thoughts are very valuable to people of your order of intellect, but don't come telling them to us."

"I think Gussy will very likely—"

"Let him, then."

"Yes, but if he—"

"Hand me that inkpot, Dig."

"Certainly!"

"Now, then, Monty Lowther, I give you two seconds—"

But the study door was already slamming behind Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry's chum went down the passage, and he could still hear the excited voices in Study No. 6 discussing the question of Ireland as he went.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lowther, as Skimpole ran into him in the passage. "Hallo! Where are you taking that bag?"

The Determinist of St. Jim's had a bag, packed and strapped, in his hand. He coloured as he saw Lowther's glance fixed on it.

"Oh, that's all right!" he stammered. "I've packed it."

"Going off for a feed somewhere?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then what's the little game?"

"I'm afraid I cannot take you wholly into my confidence, Lowther. I may mention, however, that I am engaged in a good work, and that in all probability the school will shortly be taught to look up to me with great respect."

"My only hat! But—"

"If you have ten minutes to spare, Lowther—"

"Eh?"

"If you have a few minutes to spare, I will explain."

"Go on," said Lowther, looking curiously at the bag which Skimpole set down in the passage while he talked.

"I'll explain the great principles of Determinism," Skimpole went on.

"You'll what?"

"I'll explain the great principles of Determinism."

"Not to me," Lowther remarked.

And he walked away.

Skimpole picked up his bag and went his way. He passed out of the School House, and found D'Arcy waiting for him under the elms.

"Got your bag, deah boy?" asked the swell of the School House.

"Here it is."

"Good! I have hidden mine there. Nobody will see it in the dark. Let's go in now, as the pwefects might smell a wat if they saw us out of the House at this time of the evenin'."

"Right-ho! Come in!"

The two juniors re-entered the School House.

Darrell of the Sixth met them in the Hall, and looked at them curiously.

"Hallo! Where have you young rascals been?" asked the Sixth-Former.

"Weally, Dawwell—"

"I have to take exception to that question, Darrell," said Skimpole. "As a sincere Determinist, I must refuse to be questioned as to my doings by a prefect, who is appointed by the arbitrary will of the Head, instead of being elected by the free suffrages of the whole school. Ow! You're hurting my ear!"

Skimpole rubbed his ear as he walked on with D'Arcy. "Such are the difficulties of a reformer's career," he exclaimed. "Is it not enough to make one's blood boil to think that a reformer is liable at any moment to have his ear pulled for the mere crime of stating his opinions fearlessly."

"Well, I think you are wathah an ass, Skimpole," said D'Arcy. "A pwefect has the wight to look aftah the juniahs, otherwise what's the good of bein' a pwefect?"

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"Yes, if he were elected by the whole school."

"Yes; but then the Lower Forms would elect a juniah, who would let them do as they like all the time."

"Well, why shouldn't they do as they like all the time?"

This was a poser, and Arthur Augustus gave it up. A few minutes later bed-time arrived, and the amateur detectives separated to go to their respective dormitories.

CHAPTER 7.

The Die is Cast!

ELEVEN strokes boomed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started, and sat up in bed.

He had agreed to meet Skimpole in the quad as soon after eleven as possible, and he lost no time in getting out of bed. It was a warm June night, and the swell of St. Jim's was too excited to be sleepy. This was the first night of his adventurous career as an amateur detective. The morrow would see him fairly launched on the case that was to make the name of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy famous.

D'Arcy dressed himself hastily. He took only ten minutes over his toilet, which was probably a record for the swell of the School House. He dropped a boot on the floor with a loud thud as he had nearly finished, and then sat on his bed with beating heart, waiting to see if it had given the alarm.

A sleepy voice came from Jack Blake's bed.

"Hallo, there!"

Arthur Augustus sat quite still on the edge of the bed. It was very gloomy in the dormitory, and he was pretty certain Blake would not be able to distinguish him if he looked.

"Anybody moving?"

Blake's voice was very sleepy. The silence apparently satisfied him, for he turned over and went to sleep again. Arthur Augustus did not venture to move until Blake's steady breathing warned him that it was safe.

"Bai Jove, that was a narrow escape!" murmured D'Arcy, as he cautiously groped for the boot in the darkness.

He found it and put it on, and then crossed to the door on tip-toe. A moment more and he was in the corridor, thrilling with relief. The first and most difficult part of his enterprise was over.

He had escaped from the Fourth Form dormitory, unseen and unsuspected.

He made his way downstairs, and opened the Hall window. He found it unfastened, which showed him that Skimpole was already out. To climb through the window and drop to the ground outside would have been the work of a moment to any other junior, but not to the swell of the School House, who had the crease in his trousers to consider. But out he was at last, and he ran quickly under the elms.

"Oh!"

It was a sharp exclamation as D'Arcy ran full tilt into somebody in the darkness under the trees.

"Weally—" gasped D'Arcy.

"Is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why the dickens don't you look where you're going!" said Skimpole. "And what makes you so late? I've been waiting about ten minutes!"

"I am extwemely sowwy—"

"Did you get away all right?"

"Yaas, wathah! I dwopped a boot and woke up Blake, but he went to sleep again, so it is all wight!"

"Then let's get off!"

"Certainly, deah boy!"

The great School House lay dark and silent. From one or two windows a light still gleamed. But there was no sign of alarm. The departure of the two juniors had not been suspected. They picked up the hidden bags under the trees, and set off at a run towards the boundary wall. There they halted to take breath.

"A't's well so far!" said Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you give me a leg up?"

"With pleasuah, deah boy!"

D'Arcy gave Skimpole the required leg up. Skimpole could not be called an athlete. His brain had developed abnormally, but it had left his body far behind in the race. The Determinist at St. Jim's, in fact, was decidedly weedy. He put his hands on the top of the wall, and tried to draw himself up, and failed. He kicked out wildly, and D'Arcy's silk hat went flying.

"Ow!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

He made a dive for his precious topper, and Skimpole was left hanging without support from below.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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"Help!" gasped Skimpole. "Help—ow!"

His hold slipped from the wall, and he dropped to the ground and rolled over.

D'Arcy picked up his hat and brushed it tenderly with his sleeve.

"You clumsy ass, Skimpole!"

"You silly cuckoo!"

"I refuse to be called a silly cuckoo!"

"You let me come a cropper!"

"Serve you right! You let my toppah come a cwoppah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "If it had been seriously damaged I should have been tempted to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, give us a leg up!"

"Wathah not! You can give me a leg up this time, deah boy, and I will weach down and help you fwom the top of the wall!"

"I think I had better go first!"

"Wats! Give me a bunk up!"

"Oh, very well!"

Skimpole gave the required bunk.

D'Arcy jammed his silk hat tightly on his head and climbed the wall. He was soon astride of it.

"Now give me a hand!"

"Bettah hand up the bags first!"

"True! I had forgotten them!"

"Yaas, and that shows how necessary it is to have a bwa in like mine on a job of this sort!" D'Arcy remarked.

"Here you are! This is your bag!"

"I've got it!"

D'Arcy received the bag and jerked it over the wall, and allowed it to fall lightly in the lane outside.

"Now the othah, Skimpole!"

"Here you are!"

Skimpole reached up with the bag, and D'Arcy reached down for it. His topper lost its balance just as he reached for the bag, and he made a wild clutch to save it. Skimpole had ceased to support the bag at the instant D'Arcy let it go, and it dropped on his foot with a bump.

Skimpole gave a yell that startled the rooks round St. Jim's.

"Ow! You've crushed my foot!"

D'Arcy rescued his toppling topper just in time, and jammed it upon his head safely. Then he gave his attention to Skimpole.

"Is anythin' the mattah, deah boy?"

"You've dropped that beastly bag on my foot, you ass!"

"Weally, I did not dwop it. You should not have let it go, you know. But pway don't make a fuss about a twifle when there is sewious work in hand!" said D'Arcy. "Hand me up the bag again!"

"That's all very well—"

"Oh, pway hand up the bag!"

Skimpole did so, and this time the swell of the School House took a firmer hold upon it, and slung it safely over the wall and dropped it into the road.

"That's all wight, Skimpole!"

"Now give me a hand up!"

D'Arcy leaned down and gave the required hand. With considerable difficulty, Skimpole pulled himself to the top of the wall and climbed over it.

"That was rather a pull," he gasped.

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "It was easy enough, deah boy; but you haven't any wind, you know. I hope nobody heard that feahful wow you made just now."

D'Arcy dropped into the road. Skimpole followed him, with a grunt, and they picked up their bags.

"Bai Jove, we're off now, and no mistake!"

Skimpole smote his forehead.

"I say, there's one thing I never thought of."

"I think there are pwoably a good many things you haven't thought of, deah boy. What is the particulah one?"

"We're going to look for the missing heir at Blackberry Green, where he was lost?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you know where Blackberry Green is?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that eithah. No, I'm afraid I don't."

The amateur detectives looked at one another dubiously. The quest was to begin at Blackberry Green, but where was Blackberry Green?

"We shall have to find out," said D'Arcy at last.

"I suppose so."

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"We will take the twain at the station, anyway. We must get away from the vicinity of the coll."

"True."

"Then come on, dear boy."

The two amateur detectives started at a trot down the dark lane leading to the village of Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 8.

Missing!

JACK BLAKE happened to be the first awake in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House the following morning. He yawned and sat up, blinking in the bright June sunshine that poured in at the high windows.

"Hullo, kids; time to get up!" he called out, deftly hurling his pillow at Herries, and causing that youth to start suddenly out of a dream in which he was knocking up an impossible score on the cricket-field against the New House junior team.

"Ow! Ooo—oh! Ah!" gasped Herries.

"Lazybones! Time to get up!"

"Tain't rising-bell yet."

"I know it isn't. It's time to go for a run in the quad, though, to keep yourself from growing fat and lazy," said Blake severely. "Get up at once, and yank Dig out of bed."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

And he tumbled out of bed. He soon had the bedclothes off Digby, that youth loudly protesting, and Jack Blake stepped over to D'Arcy's bed to perform the same kind service for him.

"My only hat!"

"Hullo! What's the matter?" asked Herries, looking round.

"D'Arcy's up!"

"D'Arcy up before us! What's the matter with him?"

Blake pointed to the empty bed, where at that hour of the morning the elegant form of the swell of St. Jim's should have reposed.

"He's gone."

"So he is," said Digby. "That is about the first time on record that Gussy had been up first. I wonder what's on?"

"We'll go and look for him," said Blake. "It's a glorious morning, and it's a sin to stay in bed."

"How often do you feel like that?" grunted Dig. "This is the first time you've been up before rising-bell for a week or more."

"It's never too late to mend, Dig. Get your togs on and follow your uncle," said Blake serenely.

The three juniors were soon dressed and out of the dormitory. They met Kildare of the Sixth in the lower hall, and the captain of St. Jim's, who was going out with a towel on his arm for an early swim in the Rhyl, nodded genially to the Fourth-Formers.

"I say, have you seen Gussy?" asked Blake.

"D'Arcy, do you mean?"

"Yes; the only Gus."

"No, I haven't seen him this morning. Is he up?"

"He was up and out of the dormitory before we woke," said Blake. "I was going to yank him out of bed when I discovered that he was gone. I thought you might have seen him."

"No, I'm only just out myself."

Kildare strode from the House, and the juniors followed more slowly. There was a slight shade over Blake's brow.

He looked right and left in the quadrangle. The old trees looked very fresh and green in the morning sunlight, and the grass glowed like emerald. There was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in any direction. Early house-maids were at work on the steps of the School House and the New House, and the birds were twittering in the trees. There was no other signs of life in the deserted quad.

"Where is the boulder?" muttered Blake.

Herries and Digby looked at him curiously.

"You're not anxious about him, surely," said Digby.

"He's all right."

"Not exactly anxious, but—"

"But what?"

"Well, his bed wasn't warm at all, you know. He had been out of it some time."

"He must have been up at dawn, then."

"Yes, or before."

"Before!"

"Perhaps."

And the worried look deepened on Blake's brow. He did not speak again, but the faces of his chums were somewhat serious now. They went round the quad, and strolled down to the river, and looked in at the boathouse, but there was no sign of Arthur Augustus.

"I can't make it out," said Digby at last.

"Blessed if I can either," confessed Herries. "Where has the young boulder got to?"

Blake was silent.

They retraced their steps towards the School House, and met the Terrible Three in the quadrangle. The chums of the Shell hailed them at once.

"Hullo, Blake!" called out Tom Merry. "You're out early. Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole? No."

"He's up," said Tom Merry. "When we woke we found he was out of the dormitory, and Lowther thinks—"

"Suggests," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, suggests, then—that he has bunked."

"Bunked!" said Blake, in amazement.

"Yes—bunked, vamoosed, cleared off!"

"What on earth should Skimpole bunk for?"

"Well, that's my idea," said Monty Lowther. "I don't say it is so, but I've got my suspicions. I thought there was something on last night."

"You thought Skimpole was going to bunk?"

"Well, I thought there was something on; but not so much with Skimpole as with D'Arcy. I should have been less surprised to find that D'Arcy had gone," Monty Lowther remarked.

The chums of Study No. 6 started simultaneously. Lowther's words came curiously, at that moment, when they had hunted for D'Arcy for half an hour in vain.

"What do you mean?" explained Blake. "Do you know anything about—?" He paused.

"About what?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we can't find D'Arcy."

"Can't find him!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"No. He had gone out of the dormitory before we got up this morning, and we've looked all over the place for him, and can't find a trace of him anywhere."

"Phew!"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"I thought so," said Lowther, with conviction. "He's bolted."

"Bolted!"
"Yes. It's that detective wheeze he's got in his head. I thought there was something of the kind on last night, and I tried to warn you."

"Tried to warn me?"
"Yes."

"Blessed if I remember anything of the earth!" said Blake warmly. "You'd better put a dog chain on your imagination."

"I came to your study to warn you," said Lowther. "You wouldn't listen to me—"

"You came talking a lot of piffle when we were busy—"

"I tried to speak to Merry and Manners about it, too, but they wouldn't listen."

"You came jawing to us when we were playing chess," said Manners. "You couldn't expect us to pay any attention then."

"Well, there you are!" said Lowther, with the air of a fellow who had done his best, and now washed his hands of the matter.

"Yes, here we are," said Blake. "But where's Gussy—that's the question?"

"And where's Skimpole?" said Tom Merry.

"Well, it's not so important about Skimpole. He's only a freak in the Shell, but D'Arcy is one of us."

"Just so," said Dig. "We must find Gussy before morning roll-call, or there'll be a row."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You won't find him, if he's made a break as Lowther suggests. You know what Gussy is when he gets an idea into his head. Wild horses couldn't get it out again. And Skimpole is the same variety of an ass."

Blake looked extremely worried.

"It's a jolly serious thing to bolt like this," he said. "The Head is a good old sport, but if D'Arcy has bolted, it means a flogging."

"And serve him jolly well right!" said Digby. "What does he mean by making us anxious about him like this?"

"Come to think of it, it's pretty certain he's gone," said Blake thoughtfully. "He was saying that if he discovered the missing heir, or whatever it is that's missing, the Head would be bound to overlook his having left the college without permission. Of course, he won't find him. Probably he's found already, as that paper D'Arcy had was nearly a week old. The young ass!"

The breakfast bell called the juniors into the School House. They turned their steps slowly homewards, and encountered Figgins & Co. coming out of the gym.

Figgins stopped as he glanced at their serious faces.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes," said Blake. "Gussy's bolted."

"And Skimpole's gone with him."

"My hat! What's the game?"

The School House juniors explained what they suspected. Figgins looked very serious, and so did the Co.

"The young ass came over to us last evening, and wanted us to join some hare-brained amateur detective Co.," said Figgins. "Of course, we weren't taking any. Catch us coming into any School House wheeze like that."

"Looking for a black eye?" said Blake.

"Not at all. I'm sorry this has happened, as it will be

serious for Gussy. If he's gone, goodness knows where he will have got to by this time."

"I expect he's off to Blackberry Green in search of the missing heir," observed Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co.

"Most likely."

"The young ass!" said Blake. "There will be a fearful row. Skimpole ought to have known better, as he was in the Shell. They're a pair, though. They won't catch the missing heir, but they'll catch a record hiding when they return."

"They must have gone in the middle of the night, I suppose," Tom Merry remarked. "The thing was planned, too, from what Lowther says about the bag he saw Skimpole with."

"I hope they took some sandwiches with them," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "If they left in the middle of the night, they'd get fearfully hungry before they had a chance of getting anything to eat."

"Trust Fatty to think of that," grinned Figgins.

"Well, really, Figgy, it's a rather important matter. I don't like to think of anybody going short of grub," said Fatty Wynn. "And that reminds me—we're nearly a minute late for breakfast already. Come on!"

"See you kids later," said Figgins.

And he walked on with the Co. towards the New House, while the School House chums entered their own quarters.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who boarded in the School House, was at the head of the Shell table. He soon found that Skimpole's place was empty.

"Why has not Skimpole come down?" he asked, looking at Tom Merry.

Tom coloured uncomfortably.

"He is down, sir."

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Does anyone present know where Skimpole is?"

There was no reply.

"H'm!" said Mr. Linton, pursing up his lips in a way that did not bode good for the absent Skimpole. "H'm!"

"If you, please, sir," said Tom Merry, "I think he has left the college."

The hero of the Shell had thought the matter over. Ere long the truth must come out, and the sooner the better. The sooner the truants were found and brought back to St. Jim's, the less severe their punishment was likely to be.

Mr. Linton almost jumped from his chair.

"Left the college, Merry!"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

Mr. Linton looked at the junior's troubled face, and saw that the matter was serious. He rose from his place.

"Are you sure of what you say, Merry?"

"I think so, sir."

"You had better come with me to the Head."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Linton glanced towards the Fourth Form table. The voice of little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, could be heard.

"What is that, Blake? You do not know where D'Arcy is?"

"No, sir."

"Did he come down with you this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Then he must still be in the dormitory."

IRISH!



A MYSTERY AT ST. JIM'S! RIDDLE OF A HAMPER RECEIVED BY BLAKE FROM AME

"He was gone before we got up, sir."
 "Then—then—what—" ejaculated Mr. Lathom, blinking at Blake in amazement through his glasses. "What—?"
 "I'm afraid he has left the school, sir!"
 "What?"
 "I'm afraid he has left the school!"
 "Dear me!" murmured Mr. Lathom. "Dear me! What can have possessed him to leave the school? What a very singular proceeding!"
 "A boy of my Form is also missing!" said Mr. Linton.
 "Dear me! How very singular!"
 "They have probably gone together!" said the master of the Shell. "Do you think that is likely, Blake?"
 "Very likely, sir!"
 "You had better come with me to the Head, as well as Merry. Shall I take this matter in hand, Mr. Lathom?"
 "Oh, certainly!" said the Fourth Form master.
 "Then come with me, boys!"
 Tom Merry and Blake obediently followed the master of the Shell from the room. They left every table in a buzz of amazed comment.

CHAPTER 9.

A Tramp in the Country!

"**B**AI Jove, deah boy, I feel wathah fatigued, you know!"

It was Arthur Augustus who spoke.

While St. Jim's was in a state of uneasy wonder that morning as to what had become of the missing juniors, the amateur detectives were far away pursuing their quest. They had caught the last train from Rylcombe, and left it at a town some twenty miles from the school.

D'Arcy had inquired assiduously of railway porters, guards, and officials, as to the whereabouts of Blackberry Green, but information on the point was not easy to come by. Blackberry Green was not a well-known place, but at last the juniors heard something of it. A kind station-master informed them that it was a village a couple of miles off the line, and they left the station and started to walk.

Arthur Augustus had suggested taking the ancient hack which was waiting outside the station, but Skimpole argued against it.

"You see, we can't very well begin our investigations there before daylight!" Skimpole pointed out. "So we'd better walk and save the money. If we get into Blackberry Green by dawn that will be soon enough!"

"Yaas, I suppose so!" said D'Arcy. "That's wathah thoughtful of you, Skimpole!"

And they walked.

The amateur detectives were enthusiastic, and a walk of a couple of miles was not much. But the chief difficulty, after they had once started, was to find the way. They knew the direction to start with. But when they came to two or three branching lanes, without anything in the shape of a finger-post to guide them, Sherlock Holmes himself could not have guessed which road led to Blackberry Green and which didn't.

The worst of it was that when, after some lengthy searching for a signpost, they decided to walk back to the town and take a hack, after all, they could not find for certain which of the lanes led back to the place they had come from. The sense of direction is hard to keep in the darkness, with no prominent landmark to keep in sight.

The juniors were utterly at a loss. D'Arcy suggested guiding their course by the stars, but as he did not know one star from another, and had not the faintest idea how to set about doing so, the suggestion could not be regarded as having much practical value. Finally, they started off again, trusting to luck, and dawn found them tramping along a green lane bordered by cornfields, with no other human being in sight. The warm June sun rising over the cornfields cheered the two juniors, who were beginning to be despondent. They were beginning to be hungry, too.

It was then that D'Arcy observed that he felt rather fatigued. He followed up the observation by sinking down on the lower step of a stile, and pushing his silk hat back from his warm brow.

Skimpole was tired, too. The stationmaster had told them that it was a couple of miles from Fernfield to Blackberry Green, but the juniors felt as if they had walked a couple of hundred already. They had in reality covered about four or five. Blackberry Green seemed as far off as ever.

"Bai Jove, this is fatiguin' work, you know!" D'Arcy observed, fanning himself with his handkerchief.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Skimpole, leaping on the stile. "I

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am rather tired, and I must confess that I am getting hungry. This bag is very heavy!"

"I hope you have got something to eat in it, deah boy!"

Skimpole shook his head.

"No; I didn't think of it, D'Arcy! I am rather sorry now! I have brought with me most of the things we require—a life-preserver, and a change of linen, all my volumes of Sherlock Holmes, and a pair of handcuffs—"

"A what?"

"A pair of handcuffs! I bought them second-hand in Rylcombe! We may need them in case we capture any criminals!" explained Skimpole. "For all we know, the missing son of Sir Juke Jakes—I mean James Jukes—may have been kidnapped, and in that case we may have to



D'Arcy crouched on one side of the chimney-stack listening for...
 D'Arcy. "You think you've got me, do you!" There was no...
 silly ass?" "Mee-sw-wow-yw-ywywow!"

arrest the kidnappers when we have tracked them down! The handcuffs will come in very useful then!"

"Bai Jove! Some gwub would come in more useful just now, I think!" said D'Arcy, with a sigh.

"I should have thought you would think of that!" said Skimpole. "Your bag is bigger than mine. What on earth have you filled it with?"

"Oh, only a few absolute necessawies—thwee changes of linen, a hat brush, and thwee waistcoats, and some neckties—"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"I didn't think of the gwub at the time. You ought to have thought of that, Skimpole!"

EVEN FATTY WYNN CAN'T OPEN IT! SEE "THE NIGHT RAIDERS!" NEXT WEEK.

"I wish I had! But we shall be able to get some food somewhere, I suppose. You can get ripping bread and cheese at these country inns!"

"Yaas! But where is there a country inn?"

Skimpole scanned the horizon. He could see cornfields and trees and a distant orchard. But there was no sign of an inn.

"Well, we shall have to get on!" he said.

"Bai Jove, Skimpole, you are an ass, you know!"

"You mean you're an ass—"

"If we had taken the hack at Fernfield we should have been at Blackbawwy Gween long ago!"

"Well, how was I to guess that you would lose the way?"

"I? It was you lost the way, you ass!"



ound from the tucker on the other side. "You wottah!" growled. "You wottah!" howled D'Arcy. "Why don't you speak, you 'Arcy gave a violent start. "Bai Jove!"

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Now, look here—"

"I'm not going to admit that I lost the way! You remember that I wanted to take the other lane, and you insisted upon taking this one!"

"You wanted to mooch around all night lookin' for the way!"

"Well, and now—"

"Now we—bai Jove, what's that?"

A grimy face and an unkempt head emerged from the hedge a dozen feet from the two juniors at the stile. It was evidently the head of a tramp who had been sleeping under the hedge all night. The flabby face and bleared

eyes showed that he had been drinking before he sought that alfresco couch, and the evil expression of his face was evidence enough that he had not awakened in the best of tempers.

"Allo!"

Skimpole glanced at the tramp. D'Arcy rose to his feet. He was not a suspicious person, but he could see that the man was a dangerous neighbour in that lonely place. But Skimpole did not think of a trifle like that.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, returning the tramp's greeting.

"Good-morning, my friend!"

The man stared at him. He dragged himself from the hedge, and stood up in the lane, and shook leaves and twigs from his ragged clothes. He was rags and filth from head to foot, and his dirty face had a three or four days' growth of beard on it.

He came closer to the juniors, looking at them curiously. He gave one glance up and down the lane, and across the fields, and ascertained that there was no one in sight. There was a gleam of greed in his bleary eyes.

"Hallo!" he repeated. "Good-morning, young gentlemen! Can you 'elp a poor man who has been out of work for a long time?"

The tramp had certainly been out of work for a long time, and looked as if he intended to remain so. D'Arcy drew back with an involuntary expression of disgust as he caught a whiff of beer and foul tobacco from the ruffian.

Skimpole shook his head.

"I am afraid I cannot help you financially, my friend," said the Determinist of St. Jim's. "I have no money. D'Arcy has plenty of money."

The tramp's eyes glittered.

"Ho! He 'as plenty of money, 'as he?"

"Yes; but he will not give you any, owing to his aristocratic prejudices. I cannot help you in a financial way, but I can hold out to you the hope of better days—when you will be provided with regular work, and afforded facilities for cleaning yourself."

"Wot!"

"I am far from blaming you for appearing before us in this filthy and degraded condition," said Skimpole. "Neither do I visit upon your head the fact that you evidently went to sleep intoxicated last night. You were evidently trained in the ways of beastly self-indulgence, and, consequently, I can only pity and not condemn you. Your filthy and disreputable appearance is undoubtedly due to the vile training of your early youth, doubtless in some horrible slum."

The tramp's face was a study as the freak of St. Jim's proceeded.

"I have a book here," said Skimpole, opening his bag. "It is called: 'Determinism for the Young,' and is couched in simple language suitable to a defective intellect, and will, therefore, be just the book you want on the subject. I shall have great pleasure in presenting it to you."

The tramp put out his foot as Skimpole stooped over the bag, and sent the Determinist of St. Jim's rolling in the dust.

Then he turned savagely on D'Arcy.

"And over your watch and your money, young shaver," he said, between his teeth. "Quick, now, before I jump on yer."

D'Arcy rose from his seat and retreated precipitately. "I refuse to do anythin' of the sort," he replied. "I certainly shall not hand ovah my money to a disreputable fellow like you, and I have not the slightest intention of presentin' you with a twenty-five guinea watch eithah."

"Twenty-five guineas! My word! 'And it over!"

"Certainly not!"

The tramp sprang towards him.

Skimpole scrambled to his feet.

"My good man—"

"Shut up, you young fool!"

"Let me explain to you—"

"Will you 'and over that watch?"

"Wathah not—"

The tramp seized D'Arcy by the shoulder. He was a powerful ruffian, and the swell of St. Jim's was an infant in his grip.

Skimpole stood looking on dazedly.

"Now will yer— Ow!"

D'Arcy twisted his leg neatly in the ruffian's, and the next moment the tramp was rolling in the dust.

"Wun!" shouted D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!"

"But—" gasped Skimpole.

"Wun, you ass!"

"The bags?"

"Ass!" D'Arcy grasped Skimpole by the arm. "Wun, I tell you!"

The tramp was scrambling to his feet, muttering horrible oaths. If he had got to close quarters with the juniors he would certainly have done them terrible injury, and they would have had no chance whatever against the powerful ruffian. D'Arcy was full of pluck; but it was no time to show fight then. He dragged Skimpole away, and they ran swiftly up the lane.

"Come back!"

The tramp's heavy footsteps pattered after them. The juniors ran hard. The bags were lost now, with all they contained; but they would be lucky to escape with what they had in their pockets, and with unbroken heads. Fortunately, the previous night's potatoes had not left the ruffian in a good condition for running. His footsteps grew fainter behind. D'Arcy glanced back, and saw him standing in the lane, shaking his fist savagely after them.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's "What a feahfully nawwow escape."

"Yes," panted Skimpole. "We have lost the bags, but I do not wholly regret the loss, as the ruffian will certainly find the book on Determinism in my bag, and he may read it, and be turned from the error of his ways."

"Wats!"

"Really, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, wats! I wish Blake and Dig had been with us, and we'd have given him a feahful thwashin'. We are in a howwible fix now. I don't see how I can go on with the searchin' for the missin' heir without my bag. I haven't even a change of linen now. What am I to do for a clean shirt?"

"I'd give all the clean shirts in Christendom for a breakfast now!" murmured Skimpole.

"Yaas; bai Jove! I'm beastlay hungwy, too!"

"Hallo! Look there; there's a signboard!"

"Yaas; and there's Blackbewwy Gween on it, too," said D'Arcy, stopping under the post. "Blackbewwy Gween, four miles. Bai Jove!"

"Four miles! Then it's twice as far as when we started from Fernfield!"

"Looks like it, deah boy."

"You've wandered a lot out of the way."

"You mean you have wandered."

"I say you—"

"I say you—"

"Oh, let's get on!" said Skimpole. "We've got to walk four miles to get some grub. I'm rather glad that unfortunate victim of the social system has stolen our bags. I don't think I could have carried mine four miles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's get on."

And the amateur detectives started on the weary tramp of four miles.

As they limped along it was borne in upon their minds that the amateur detective business might have its drawbacks.

Skimpole looked at his watch.

"They're having breakfast at St. Jim's now," he remarked.

D'Arcy groaned.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I could do with a hot cup of tea and some eggs and bacon."

"Don't mention it!"

And in silence the amateur detectives tramped on under the hot June sun.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy Discovers a Clue!

"BLACKBEWWY GWEEN at last!" gasped D'Arcy.

The two fatigued juniors limped into the village. They were red and perspiring in the hot sun, way-worn and weary. The sight of a cosy-looking inn was a relief to them, and they limped into the shady porch.

"Bai Jove! This is bettah."

"Isn't it?" said Skimpole, sinking upon a bench in the porch. "I have never been so thirsty before, you know, or so hungry."

"Wathah not!"

"I could drink a well full of water now, I think. I'm awfully dry; but we're here on the spot at last, D'Arcy, all ready to begin our investigations. As soon as we've had something to eat and drink I will show you—"

"That you won't!"

"I will show you how to—"

"Nothin' of the sort!"

"What do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"I mean that I am leadah in this entahpwise. Aftah the ghastly way you have mucked up affairs alweady you can hardly expect a fellow to follow your lead."

"But—"

"Here's the waitah. Waitah!"

"Yes, sir?" said the fat-faced, ruddy-complexioned man in a white apron, coming out into the porch. "What can I get for you?"

"Bwead and cheese, please—and plenty of it," said D'Arcy. "Also some fwesh milk—and plenty of it. And some cake—and plenty of it."

"Yes, sir."

And the provender was soon set before the famished juniors in the shady porch on the low, oaken table. They set to with a will. Bread and cheese and milk is a wholesome diet, and very palatable when one is ravenously hungry. The way the juniors travelled through it was really creditable.

"I feel better now," said Skimpole presently.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with a sigh of contentment. "Before we start on our investigations, I think we will make up some bundles of this bread and cheese in case of accident."

"That's a good idea!"

"I think I will take a little west before I start," added D'Arcy. "I am not accustomed to exertin' myself so much, you know."

"I don't think we ought to waste time, D'Arcy!"

"I am not pwoposin' to waste time, deah boy, but to take a little west."

"Yes, but—"

"We may as well settle about the mattah we were speakin' of, too. You have so far mucked up the thing in a wascally way."

"You mean you have!"

"If we had taken the hack at Fernfield—"

"If you hadn't lost the way—"

"It's no good arguin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus,



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with a wave of the hand. "You will eithah have to follow my lead implicitly in this mattah, or else we shall have to part company and pursue our investigations independently of each othah."

"That will suit me very well," said Skimpole. "I should feel less hampered in my movements, but—"

"But what, deah boy?"

"But there's a difficulty—"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"You feel that you couldn't do without my assistance, deah boy?"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort!" said Skimpole. "But as I explained to you when we left St. Jim's, I haven't any money."

"Oh, I see!"

"So we shall have to remain together. But if we do so you will have to follow my lead, as I could not follow you, you see, as I know more about the business than you do, and—"

"Wot!"

"Then I don't see—"

"We can awnange the mattah easily enough. I will lend you a pound, Skimpole, and then you will have nearly as much as I have."

"That is a good idea!" said Skimpole, looking quite satisfied. "You hamper my movements a great deal, of course, but as I was stony—"

"And you hamper me a lot, too, especially when you insisted upon walkin', instead of takin' a conveyance, and then losin' the way."

"It was you who lost the way—"

"There's the pound, deah boy, and I wish you success. Of course, when I get the hundwed pounds I shall share with you just the same."

"Oh, yes, that's understood!"

"Now I'm goin' to have a little west, and then I shall go and look for a clue."

Skimpole rose to his feet.

"I cannot afford the time for resting," he remarked. "It is quite possible that the Head will have us searched for, and, in that case, the sooner we find the missing heir the better."

"I must have a little west!"

"Well, I'm off! Don't forget to settle the bill, will you?" And Skimpole walked out of the porch.

Arthur Augustus filled his glass with milk again and drank it slowly, turning the matter over in his mind. Here he was at Blackberry Green, all ready to commence his search for the lost son of Sir James Jukes—and all he wanted was a clue.

Where was he to find that clue? Doubtless information was to be gained by questioning the natives. As soon as he had rested, that was evidently the course to be followed. D'Arcy had just come to this conclusion, when a stranger entered the porch of the inn, and sat down and called for refreshment. He glanced at D'Arcy as he drained his glass, and the swell of St. Jim's glanced at him.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is a good chance to begin questionin' the natives. I suppose this chap belongs to these parts."

From the cut of the stranger's clothes, and his general manners and bearing, anyone but an amateur detective might have guessed that he was a racecourse tout tramping his way to some racing centre, and extremely hard up. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's knowledge of the world, especially of the seamy side, was limited.

He adjusted his monocle and looked at the stranger with a beaming smile.

"Good-mornin', sir!"

"Good-morning!" said the man, looking D'Arcy over, and not failing to note the signs of prosperity about him, in spite of his dusty appearance. "Fine morning!"

"Yaas, wathah! You belong to this village, I suppose?" The man stared.

That anybody should imagine that he belonged to any village was an insult to Jimmy Jex, the knowing sporty character. He could only stare at the genial swell of St. Jim's.

"I wondah if you could give me some information?" D'Arcy went on, unconscious of the feelings in Mr. Jex's bosom. "I suppose you have heard of the missin' son of Sir James Jukes? There's a hundwed pounds weward offahed for his wecovewy."

Mr. Jex stared harder.

"Yes, I've heard about that."

"I'm lookin' for the youngstah," explained D'Arcy.

"You're looking for him?" said Mr. Jex, in measured accents.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you don't know that—"

"Know what, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, as the stranger paused.

"Nothing," said Mr. Rex, changing his mind, apparently, about what he had been going to say. "I—er—was about to remark— Let me see, you are a friend of the missing youngster, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, I have nevah seen him!"

"Then what are you looking for him for?"

"I was afiah the hundwed pounds weward," explained D'Arcy. "I also wish to do a service to the unfortunate youngstah, and to welieve the sowwow of a suffewin' fathah."

Mr. Jex chuckled.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle tighter into his eye, and looked rather haughtily at the stranger.

"Weally, I cannot see anything to laugh at," he said coldly. "There is nothin' whatevah comical in the sowwows of an anxious pawent."

Mr. Jex became grave at once.

"Certainly not!" he said. "I was thinking that the police who have been searching for the—the missing youth will be very much annoyed if he should be found by an amateur, as I may say."

"Yaas, wathah! I think that is extwemely prob."

"Extwemely what? Oh, probable! I see!" said Mr. Jex, looking at D'Arcy curiously. "You have come specially to Blackberry Green to look for the missing lad."

"Quite wight!"

"Dear me, how singular!"

"What is there singular about that, deah boy?"

"Why, it happens that I know something about the matter, and I could give you some valuable information on the point," explained Mr. Jex.

D'Arcy's heart beat. His policy of questioning the natives was panning out more successfully than he had dared to hope.

"Bai Jove! Can you weally?" he exclaimed. "I shall be very much obliged. I am takin' up detective work in an amateur way, you know, and I should be vewy glad to make a howlin' success of my first case."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"If you can give me a clue—"

"I could easily do so, but—"

"If you are thinkin' of the weward, I should certainly considah myself bound to hand ovah to you a fair share."

"I was not thinking of that, sir. The thought of the reward never even crossed my mind. If I could help to restore a missing son to the arms of his sorrowing parents, I should consider myself sufficiently rewarded," said Mr. Jex, drawing his coat-sleeve across his eyes.

Arthur Augustus was considerably touched.

"That is vewy wight and pwopah of you!" he exclaimed.

"All the same, I should insist upon your takin' a fair share of the weward."

"I should refuse to touch it," said Mr. Jex. "If you find the missing boy, as I have no doubt you could easily do with the information I can give you, you are entitled to the reward. I do not deny that I am poor at the moment, owing to my lawyer having absconded with eighty thous'nd pounds belonging to me."

"Bai Jove! That was wathah wuff," said the unsuspicious D'Arcy.

"It was very rough," said Mr. Jex. "I think I could get on the villain's track if I had a pound to pay my fare to London."

"Bai Jove!"

"If you think I am entitled to any reward for the assistance I can give you, I will accept a pound," said Mr. Jex. "The reward offered by Sir James Jukes, however, would be wholly yours."

"That is vewy newewous of you."

"Not at all. If I can recover my fortune, I shall be rolling in money. I will tell you all I can of the missing boy, and leave the rest to your generosity."

D'Arcy was already feeling in his pocket for the pound note, and Mr. Jex's little eyes twinkled as he went on:

"Do you know the well by the roadside outside the village?"

"Yaas, I think we passed a well as we came in."

"At the bottom of that well," said Mr. Jex impressively, "there is a chamber cut out in the brickwork, and in that chamber the boy is kept a prisoner."

D'Arcy started.

"But the water—"

"There is no water in the well. It is disused."

"Oh, I see!"

"The kidnappers! Did I tell you he was kidnapped? The kidnappers go every day to ke him food. They are

(Continued on page 19.)

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,269.

HERE ARE SOME JOTTINGS FROM—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

GREETINGS, chums! I expect you are still laughing at the amazing antics of Detective D'Arcy, for this is one of the best yarns we have ever published since the "extra long" school yarns of St. Jim's were started. But spare a few minutes for details of next Wednesday's grand issue of the GEM. In the first place Martin Clifford obliges with another topping complete school story, which is entitled:

"THE NIGHT RAIDERS!"

It's packed with unusual thrills and excitement, and, of course, features Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. Don't miss this treat, whatever you do. The same applies to the next chapters of David Goodwin's fine story:

"CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET!"

Now that you have got to know and like Ned and Jinks, our two middies, it would be a rare pity to lose any of their adventures. In lighter vein will be found another humorous "strip" starring Potts, and also further tit-bits from my notebook. If you want any questions answered send me a letter and I shall be pleased to cudgel my brains for a correct reply. Letters containing queries of general interest will be answered via these columns, so that everyone can join in. If the questions are of a personal nature a stamped and addressed envelope enclosed with your queries will ensure a personal reply.

Don't forget to order next week's GEM early—you'll find another 50 point coupon in it which you can add to your collection, PLUS

A SPECIAL BIG BONUS COUPON WORTH 250 POINTS!

Don't forget that last item, chums—it's too good to lose sight of!

HUSTLE!

He was a business man and his medical advisers had ordered him to hospital for an operation on his foot. At the hospital it was discovered that he had also developed appendicitis. The patient was still cheerful. He insisted that the two operations should be performed at the same time. He was a busy man, he explained, to whom time was money! Needless to say, there is no prize offered for guessing him to be an American!

THE CHAMPION!

Escorted by a guard of honour, greeted by a mayor and played to the scene of his triumph by an enthusiastic band, is the latest experience of—a frog! No ordinary frog, mind you, but a champion for whom twenty thousand people cheered like billy-ho! Budweiser is the name of this frog, and he is reckoned to be the world's champion jumper. In the contest held last month at Angels Camp, California, Budweiser beat his own record made the previous year. He actually jumped eleven feet five inches in one go, leaving all his rivals, drawn from many parts of the country, standing, so to speak.

OUT OF THE BLUE!

Wallop! A workman at Brooklands not long ago wondered what it was that had thudded into the race-track close to the spot where he was working. Then he got a shock, for his eyes saw the outline of an aerial bomb which, strangely enough, had not exploded! Lucky for him it had not! That bomb, actually, was a dummy which weighed twenty pounds—quite sufficient to knock anyone out for keeps who happened to be in its way. A real bomb of that weight would account for quite a formidable "list" of damages. Examination showed that the dummy is the type used by R.A.F. flying officers when practising, yet it remains a mystery how that particular dummy came to be dropped over Brooklands race track!

HEARD THIS ONE?

Teacher: "Some artists are amazing people. With one stroke they can change a facial expression of joy to one of anguish."

Tommy: "So can my father—but he ain't an artist."

A CAMBRIDGE JOKE!

Bang! Bang! People at Cambridge wondered, just recently, whether a dangerous gunman had got loose, for from the roof on King's College Chapel came sundry puffs of smoke and loud reports. The crowd that gathered witnessed a very unusual sight. On the ancient pinnacles of the chapel, one hundred and sixty feet from the ground, were fixed two open umbrellas! Some practical joker, or jokers, had risked a very dangerous climb to fix them there and quite naturally the authorities were displeased. Accordingly two undergraduates, considered

marksmen with a rifle, were instructed to shoot the "stems" of the umbrellas. At the time of writing this paragraph only one umbrella has been "shot down." The other remains as an impudent testimony to a daredevil climb which might have resulted in a fatal fall for the climber who put it there.

The authorities are hoping that a favourable breeze will eventually dislodge the remaining umbrella, as its appearance on the pinnacle does not add to the dignity of the college, the building of which began as long ago as 1446.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS, BUT—

For five years the leader of a well-known dance band has journeyed from place to place in order to find a suitable "practice room" for his band. Everywhere he went the people complained of the "row" and so he had to move on. But he's solved the problem at last. He's had an underground room so constructed that its walls are sound-proof. Here he and his band make as much musical noise as they like, for their nearest neighbours are twenty-five yards away. Have you guessed the name of this famous band leader? It's Jack Hylton!

MUSIC WHILE YOU WAIT!

"I'm sorry you can't speak to Mr. X—he's engaged!" That sort of reply makes telephone users gnash their teeth, and often it puts them in a bad temper for the rest of the day. But a well-known firm is solving the trouble. If you ring them up and ask for Mr. X, and are told that he is engaged for the moment, a sweet voice says: "Would you care to hear some music while you are waiting?" It is said of old that the soft answer turneth away wrath. Even the nastiest-tempered person would be enraptured by what follows next, for a gramophone record plays exquisite music until such time as Mr. X is free. The stunt is already becoming popular, for a three-minute wait on the telephone now seems to be no more than a matter of twenty seconds. The firm employing this device has a gramophone going from nine o'clock in the morning until six at night, and, of course, the records chosen are of the soft and soothing kind!

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN!

The scientists are worried! Just recently, they discovered that an unknown planet came rushing across the path of the earth at the road-hogging speed of a thousand miles a minute. It missed this good old earth of ours by a small matter of six million miles—which is said to be the nearest any planet has ever approached Earth. Had this runaway planet bumped into us the world would have been set on fire, whilst terrible tidal waves would have swept over continents, drowning everything in their path! Phew! That sounds like a narrow escape. This same planet, which is three or four miles in diameter, is reckoned to be rushing our way again in the region of May, 1939, and the worried astronomers and scientists are convinced that it will come much nearer than it did this year. Why worry, though? A margin of six million miles is big enough for any of us!

YOUR EDITOR.

WATCH FOR IT!

250-point Big Bonus Coupon in Next Week's GEM!

DETECTIVE D'ARCY DUD!

(Continued from page 17.)

waiting till the reward for his recovery is increased to a thousand pounds before they restore him to his suffering parents."

"Th' wascals!"

"I came into possession of this information by overhearing their talk on the subject," explained Mr. Jex. "I was about to go to the police and lay in information, at the risk of losing the track of the man who has absconded with my fortune. If you choose to undertake the case—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I can safely leave it in your hands. If you think the information I have given you is worth a pound—"

"Bai Jove, wathah!"

"In that case I will accept it, but merely as a loan, to be repaid to you later."

"Just as you like, my deah sir."

Arthur Augustus laid the pound note on the table, and Mr. Jex picked it up very quickly.

He rose from his bench.

"I shall just have time to catch my train," he said hurriedly. "Good-bye!"

And he disappeared.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy settled his account, and followed in a more leisurely manner.

The swell of St. Jim's was looking very contented as he strode out of the village towards the well. He had found a clue already. In another quarter of an hour he would have found the missing youth, and the reward was as good as within his grasp.

What a triumph over the unbelieving juniors at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 11.

Deep Down!

"**H** BAI it is, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus stopped at the well. A low brick wall surrounded it, but there was no cover. The pulley and chain and bucket were there, and were in working order, whether the well was disused or not. Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and looked into the gloomy depths of the well.

The swell of St. Jim's was a little puzzled.

There was no sign anywhere near of the kidnappers of whom Mr. Jex had spoken. The coast was clear, so to speak. It was a grand opportunity of rescuing the kidnapped youth and bearing him away to safety; but how to get him was the difficulty.

D'Arcy rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I suppose I can make him hear!" he murmured. "Then I can tow the bucket, and he can get into it, and I can pull him up. Yaas, that's a good ideah!"

He bent over the brick rim.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

His voice rang curiously through the gloomy depths of the well.

"Hallo!"

The echoes thundered back, but there was no sound of a human voice.

"Hallo! Are you there?"

It reminded D'Arcy of Skimpole's telephone as he shouted.

"Are you there?"

There was no reply.

D'Arcy was disappointed.

"It is quite poss' that the kidnappahs, havin' suspected somethin' have removed him to a place of gweatah safety," he murmured, "or he has fallen asleep frowm exhaustion, perwaps. He doesn't seem to hear me!"

The swell of St. Jim's shouted into the well again, more loudly than before, and countless echoes thundered back.

"Hallo! Are you there?"

But there was no voice but his own booming up in reply. Either the prisoner was no longer there, or he was unconscious.

D'Arcy was baffled, but he was not beaten. He was on the track, and if he could not succeed one way, there were other ways.

"I shall have to go down!" he murmured.

It was a serious project. To go down might not be attended with any great danger to life or limb, but it was pretty certain to have a destructive effect upon the clothing. But D'Arcy was prepared to ruin even his trousers as

the price of success. He made up his mind, and after one more look round to ascertain that no man was nigh, he clambered into the broad oaken bucket in a sitting posture, and commenced to lower himself into the well.

The swell of St. Jim's felt rather giddy as he swung downwards into the well. His eyeglass fell off, and he made a clutch at it. The chain slipped, and rattled out swiftly, and the bucket shot downwards.

Splash!

D'Arcy gave a terrific yell.

Mr. Jex had told him that the well was disused, but if that was the case it was certainly not for want of a supply of water. Water was there in plenty, as D'Arcy discovered.

He went right under the water, and came up gasping, and clinging to the bucket.

"Bai Jove!"

He clung to the bucket and chain, and looked round him. Above his head the sky was a round patch of blue. The top of the well seemed an immense distance away. The walls round him were solid enough. There was no trace of the excavation in which, according to his informant's story, the missing heir of Sir James Jukes was kept a prisoner.

"Bai Jove! There is some beastlay mistake here," murmured D'Arcy. "It must have been some othah well the kidnappahs were speakin' of. I have had this wotten beastlay duckin' for nothin'!"

D'Arcy shivered. It was warm enough in the hot June sun, but it was decidedly cold in the water at the bottom of the well.

"Bai Jove! How am I to get out?"

That was something of a puzzle. The end of the chain had escaped D'Arcy's clutch when the bucket slipped, and it was now far out of his reach.

He gazed at the bare, inaccessible walls of the well, and at the patch of blue sky above.

"This is a feahful fix!" he murmured. "That chap must have been mistaken when he said that the well was disused. There's a lot of watah here, anyway! I dare say if I shout somebody will come!"

There was evidently nothing else to be done.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, clinging to the bucket, shouted with the full force of his lungs, and the old well echoed with the sound like thunder.

"Help! Help!"

Again and again the shouts rang, reverberating from the depths of the well.

"Help!"

A black patch darkened the blue sky over the rim of the well.

D'Arcy gave a gasp of relief. It was a human head.

"Help!"

"Hallo!"

"Bai Jove! It's Skimpole!"

"Is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me! What are you doing down there?"

"Gettin' soaked!" groaned D'Arcy. "Pway help me out, Skimmay, there's a good chap!"

"But what did you go down there for?"

"I was lookin'—for clues!" said D'Arcy. "Can you contrive to pull up the bucket with me in it?"

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"Possibly! I will try! I hope you realise now, D'Arcy, how helpless you are without my assistance!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy, under the circumstances—"

"I am catching a feahful cold! Pway pull me up, deah boy!"

"Certainly! I hope this lesson will not be lost upon you, however! Obstinacy is your chief failing! As the famous Professor Balmcyrumpet says in his great book—"

"Oh, never mind his great book—help me out!"

"Are you in the bucket?"

"Yaas, I'm in it now!"

"Then hold on!"

"I'm holdin' on!"

"I will raise you to the top! I hope that this will be a lesson to you, and that in future you will follow the lead of those wiser than yourself!"

D'Arcy did not speak, but he thought a great deal. Skimpole wound in the chain, and the bucket rose to the surface.

The drenched and dripping swell of St. Jim's clambered out.

Skimpole looked at him critically.

"Well, you do look a fearful object," he said. "Have you been in the well long?"

"It seems like hours."

"Impossible, as it is not an hour since we parted at the inn. I cannot imagine why you should have descended into the well. Were you thirsty?"

"No," snapped D'Arcy.

"You will have to get a change of things. I hope this will be a lesson to you not to leave me in the future, but to follow my lead—"

"Oh, wing off!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Cheese it!"

"I am willing to look after you—"

"But I am not willin' to be looked aftah."

"I consider this ungrateful, after I have saved you from a watery grave," said Skimpole.

"Wats! I shouldn't have been drowned. It wasn't dangewous, only beastly uncomfy."

"Well, really—"

"Oh, wats!"

And Arthur Augustus walked off to the inn.

Skimpole gazed after him, and shook his head solemnly.

"He is very ungrateful," he murmured. "I shall not trouble about him any more. It is fortunate for him that I had stopped near at hand to rest and think out the problem, or he might have stayed a long time in the well. I shall now pursue my investigations, and leave him severely alone."

Arthur Augustus made his way back to the inn in Blackberry Green as quickly as he could.

To the amused boniface he only explained that he had accidentally had a ducking, and asked for a room where he could dry himself, and a change of clothing.

The room was quickly provided, with towels and a roaring fire. But the change of clothes presented great difficulties. The only clothes available were corduroy trousers and a smock frock, which D'Arcy considered it impossible for him

to don. The only alternative was for him to stay in bed while his clothes were dried at the fire, and though he thought with great misgiving of the ill-fitting that would inevitably follow, he had no choice but to assent.

He borrowed a book, and sat by the window with a blanket round him while his clothes were drying. His dinner was brought up to him, but after that his clothes were not yet dry.

About an hour later he examined them again, and was glad to find that the wet was mostly gone.

"Anothah half-hour," he murmured, "then I shall get on the twack again! Weally, I have been vewy fortunate."

He returned to his seat at the window. As he sat down and took up his book, he gave a sudden start.

Through the open window, from below, the sound of a well-known voice floated—a voice familiar to his ear at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12.

Taking the Trail!

DR. HOLMES sat in his study at St. Jim's with an amazed and troubled expression upon his fine old face. He had just heard Mr. Linton's explanation of the absence of Skimpole and D'Arcy, and had questioned Tom Merry and Blake.

Tom and Blake had told him all they could. There was no question now of keeping anything back. Two juniors had left the college, and they might be getting into any kind of mischief. The sooner they were found and brought back the better. The Head had listened, with a troubled brow, and dismissed the juniors. The boys had gone into the class-room that morning the same as usual, but the whole school was discussing the latest escapade of the swell of the School House.

When Mr. Railton left his class he came to the Head's study. He was the man Dr. Holmes always turned to in a moment of difficulty.

"This is a serious matter, sir," the master of the School House remarked.

The Head nodded.

"Yes, very serious, Mr. Railton. I really hardly know how to deal with it. The two truants will have to be severely punished."

"But they will have to be found first," said the Housemaster; "and that does not seem to be an easy task."

"No. This idea of practising detective work seems to be at the bottom of the escapade. They have gone away, but it is pretty certain that they have not gone to their homes. I do not wish to alarm their parents by telegrams of inquiry. I would rather have them found quietly and brought back if possible."

"That would certainly be more satisfactory."

"But where can they be? Where are we to look for them?"

"I think it possible that their friends in the same Form will have some knowledge or suspicion of their destination," Mr. Railton said thoughtfully. "If you like, sir, I can inquire among the juniors, in an unofficial way, and may perhaps elicit something of importance."

"That is a good plan."

"As it is a half-holiday this afternoon, there will be no difficulty in my getting away," said the Housemaster. "If I can obtain a clue to the destination of the foolish lads, I can follow them quietly and bring them back without any publicity of any sort."

The Head drew a breath of relief.

"That would be very satisfactory indeed, Mr. Railton."

"Then I will inquire among the juniors."

"Pray do so."

After morning lessons Mr. Railton called Tom Merry and Blake into his study. Blake was looking animated, as if some excellent idea were working in his brain.

"There was one point the Head did not go into when he questioned you, boys," said the Housemaster. "Have you any idea of what might be D'Arcy's probable destination?"

Tom Merry and Blake exchanged glances.

"You must answer me freely," said Mr. Railton quietly. "You know as well as I do that the two foolish lads may get into some mischief, and that they must be brought back to the school as quickly as possible."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Tom Merry. "We know that."

"But, sir—" said Blake.

"Well, Blake?"

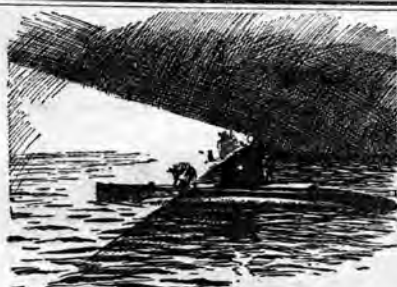
"It is a half-holiday this afternoon, sir—"

"What of that?"

"I was just thinking that it would be a good idea for two or three of us fellows to go and look for D'Arcy, sir. I was just suggesting it to Tom Merry when you called us in."

Mr. Railton looked thoughtful.

"Then you have some idea of the place D'Arcy and Skimpole would probably make for, Blake?"



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"I have a book here called 'Determinism for the Young,'" said Skimpole, opening his bag. The tramp flung out with his foot as Skimpole stooped over the bag, and sent the Determinist of St. Jim's rolling in the dust.

"Yes, sir."

"What is the place?"

"A village called Blackberry Green."

"Blackberry Green! I have heard that name before," said the Housemaster, looking puzzled. "I cannot quite recall where."

"It was where Sir James Jukes' son was lost last week, sir," said Tom Merry. "There's a hundred pounds reward offered for his recovery."

"Oh, yes, I remember now; that's what I was thinking of! I remember reading in the local paper yesterday that the boy had been found."

Blake chuckled.

"Blake!"

"Excuse me, sir. But D'Arcy and Skimpole have gone off to rake in the hundred pounds reward for the discovery of the missing heir."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. It seems funny that D'Arcy has gone hunting for the reward, when the kidlet is already found."

"The what?"

"The child, sir," said Blake, abashed.

"It is very curious," said Mr. Railton. "Perhaps some correction, when he returns, will teach D'Arcy not to be so impulsive. I was thinking of going this afternoon myself in search of D'Arcy and Skimpole."

"If you please, sir—"

"Well, Merry?"

"It would be better for us to go, because—"

"Well, why, Merry? You need not be afraid to speak out. I am only anxious to recover these foolish lads."

"Well, sir, they'll have their eyes open, of course, and if

they spotted a master near Blackberry Green, they would scoot—I mean, they'd give you a wide berth, sir."

"Quite likely."

"You could hardly search for them without making inquiries and showing yourself, sir. If we went, Gussy—I mean, D'Arcy—wouldn't be so likely to take the alarm if he saw us, and there would be two or three of us, too—"

"And if he bolted," said Blake, "we could run him down. But you couldn't buzz after him as we could, sir. It would look so—so conspicuous."

The Housemaster laughed.

"There is certainly something in what you say, my lad. I am inclined to think that you could deal with the matter more effectively than I could, in the peculiar circumstances. You will promise me, of course, to leave no stone unturned to find D'Arcy, and that you will bring him and Skimpole back to the school whether they are willing to come or not."

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I shall leave it to you at present, boys."

"Thank you, sir."

And Tom Merry and Blake left the Housemaster's study looking very contented. Mr. Railton was not sorry to be relieved of the task of hunting for two elusive juniors up and down the countryside, and it was a fact that the matter was more likely to prosper in the hands of the juniors.

"We'll start immediately after dinner," said Tom Merry. "The next question is, how many shall we take?"

"Not a crowd," said Blake decidedly. "If Gussy spots us there will be a run, quite as much as if he spotted Railton after him. Where we score is that we could chase him up hill and down dale, and a master couldn't, because his dignity has to be considered. But if a crowd of us

went, Gussy would see some of us, and bolt—and we don't want a hot chase if we can help it."

"That's so."

"My idea is to have a party of three—yourself, myself, and, say, Figgins—we three are the best sprinters in either House, and we could easily carry Gussy and Skimpole home if they resisted."

"Right-ho!"

"If you think it's a good idea, we'll go over and speak to Figgins. Better catch him alone, too. If the others get to know about it, we may have half the school following us to Blackberry Green, and then good-bye to any chance of catching Gussy. And we must catch him. Every hour he stays away will make it worse for him when he gets back, the young ass!"

"You're right there," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If he's away over to-night the Head can hardly help letting his governor know about it, and calling in the help of the police. That would make a regular uproar over the business. It might even get into the papers."

"He's got to come back," said Blake grimly. "Let us only find him, and we'll get him back right enough, if we have to tie him hand and foot, and bring him home on a wheelbarrow."

"Ha, ha, ha! I say, there's Figgins!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the lanky form of the New House junior crossed under the elms. "Now's our chance."

"Come on!"

The two School House boys ran towards Figgins.

Figgins promptly put his back to one of the elms and squared up with his fists.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, Figgys," he exclaimed. "It's not a House row this time. We only want to speak to you."

"It's pax," said Blake.

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins, dropping his warlike attitude. "One never knows, you know. What is it? Have you heard any news of Gussy yet?"

"No. We're going to look for him."

"Good."

"Mr Raiton has left it in our hands," said Tom Merry. "Two or three of us are to go and find the pair of silly asses, and bring them back. Would you care to come?"

"Rather!" said Figgins promptly.

"We can't take a crowd in case he spots us and gives us the slip," exclaimed Blake. "We three can manage the affair, I think."

"I should say so," assented Figgins. "I'll come with pleasure."

"Good! Come down to the gate immediately after dinner, then, and we'll be outside in the lane. Shove some grub in your pocket."

"I'll remember."

And the rivals of St. Jim's parted very cordially. Figgins was prompt to his appointment. After the juniors' midday dinner, the New House junior turned up at the gate and found Tom Merry and Blake already there. The Co. were on the cricket field, and for the moment the three leaders were not missed.

"By the way, which way are we going?" asked Figgins, as he joined the School House boys. "I haven't the faintest idea."

"But I have," said Tom Merry. "Gussy has gone to Blackberry Green to look for a chap who isn't lost, and we're going to Blackberry Green to look for Gussy."

"But where is Blackberry Green?"

"About twenty miles up the line. I've looked it out in the timetable. You take the train to Fernfield, and then walk a couple of miles."

"That won't hurt us."

"Rather not. There's a train leaves Rylcombe for Fernfield in twenty minutes, so we shall do it all right."

And the juniors strode down the lane. They caught the train at Rylcombe, and alighted from it at Fernfield. There they inquired of the stationmaster, who well remembered the two juniors he had directed to Blackberry Green in the middle of the previous night.

"They're the two!" said Tom Merry, as they left the station. "There's no doubt that the two chaps here last night were Gussy and Skimpole."

"None at all," said Figgins.

"It's plain sailing now. We've only got to hoof it to Blackberry Green and inquire for Gussy at the inn. He must have had a feed somewhere, and so they'll have seen him there. That's the programme."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Best foot forward."

A couple of miles on a sunny day was nothing to the three

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champion athletes of the junior Forms at St. Jim's. They arrived at Blackberry Green—without losing their way as the amateur detectives had done—quite fresh and fit, and proceeded straight to the village inn to inquire for Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 13.

Run Down!

D'ARCY gave a sudden jump as he sat at the window of the inn at Blackberry Green; for the voice that floated up from below was the voice of Tom Merry of the Shell at St. Jim's.

"Here's the inn, chaps! I'm pretty dry, too!"

"Let's get inside," said Blake's voice. "We'll have some ginger-pop, and then inquire for Gussy."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins.

The three passed into the inn. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat petrified for a minute. The juniors of St. Jim's were evidently after him, and they were close on his track.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is what I wedged as extremely wotten. Fancy the wascally boundabs havin' the cheek to follow me in this mannah! What the dickens am I to do?"

The swell of St. Jim's jumped up in a very perturbed frame of mind.

In his calculations he had remembered that he might be searched for from the school, but he had no doubt of his ability to elude any master who came to look for him—especially as he did not suppose that any of the masters would guess his destination.

But with the juniors it was different.

They had clearly come to fetch him back, and it would not be so easy to dodge three active and determined juniors as it would be to escape a more ponderous and dignified Form master.

At the thought of being taken back to St. Jim's like a naughty boy, the blood of all the D'Arcys boiled in the veins of the amateur detective.

"Bai Jove! I will give them a feahful thwashin' if they wowwy me!" he murmured. "They weally deserve a severe hidin' for comin' and intewwuptin' my investigations in this mannah! But, bai Jove, I can't sewy well thwash the three of them at once! I must think of somethin' else."

It would have been easy to slip downstairs and escape by the back of the house, while the juniors were discussing their ginger-pop at the front, if he had been in a fit state to go.

But, apart from the fact that his clothes were not yet dry, it would take him some little time to dress, and before that the searchers would have inquired of the landlord and learned that he was on the premises. In fact, they might come up at any moment. Every sound in the inn might be the footsteps of Tom Merry on the stairs.

At the thought Arthur Augustus scuttled across the room to the door, and turned the key in the lock. The door was a ponderous old-fashioned one of oak, and the lock equally massive, so for the present he was safe. Though, as a matter of fact, it would not advantage him much to be besieged in his room. Still, it was a respite, and gave him time to think.

"Bai Jove, what's a fellow to do?" he murmured. "It is like their feahful cheek to come leah aftah me; but the point is that they have come. I shall certainly no longah wegard Blake as a friend."

There was a sound on the stairs. D'Arcy stood just inside the door, draped in the blanket, and listened with beating heart. The footsteps stopped outside.

"Is this the room?"

It was Tom Merry's voice on the landing.

"That's the room, sir. The young gentleman is staying in there while his clothes is a-drying. He got a ducking somewhere."

"Thank you, landlord!"

There was a knock at the door.

D'Arcy stood still, his heart beating, but an extremely determined expression upon his face. The handle was tried immediately after the knock, but the door, of course, did not open.

Arthur Augustus smiled silently.

"Knock again!"

"Hallo, in there!"

D'Arcy did not reply.

"Hallo, in there! Gussy! D'Arcy! Do you hear?"

Still the swell of St. Jim's did not speak. He had a faint hope that the juniors would think they were mistaken and pass on. But the next moment there came a thundering



Splash! "Whoop!" D'Arcy gave a terrific yell. He had been told that the well was disused, but if that was the case, it was certainly not for the want of a supply of water. Water was there in plenty, and Gussy went right under it, and came up gasping and clinging to the bucket!

shower of blows on the panel, and Blake and Figgins joined their voices to Tom Merry's.

"D'Arcy!"

"Gussy!"

"Fathead!"

"Open this door!"

"Do you hear? Open this door, you young ass!"

"We've found you, Gussy! It's no good dodging any more. You've got to come back to St. Jim's! Open this door!"

D'Arcy bent his head to speak through the keyhole.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Hallo! So you're there!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Certainly not!"

"We want to come in!"

"I'm afwaid the want is all on your side, deah boys. You are not comin' in," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway go away! This continual knockin' at the door is disturbin' to my twain of thought, and throws me into a fluttah."

"You young ass!"

"I wefuse to be addressed as a young ass!"

"Open this door!"

"Wats!"

"We've come to take you back to St. Jim's."

"I absolutely wefuse to be taken back to St. Jim's."

"Look here, if you don't open the door we shall bust it in!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I weally think you will not be able to bust it in, Tom Mewwy. And it is extwemely impwob that the landlord would allow you to damage his pwperty in such a mannah."

"Look here, Gussy, the game's up!" called out Blake.

"You've played the giddy goat quite long enough! You've got to come back!"

"I decline to come back!"

"You will get a licking for bolting like that. You will get a worse one if you don't come back at once."

"When I weturn with the missin' heir the Head will have no alternative but to look ovah any slight iwwegulawity in my pwocceedin's, Blake."

"Ass! The missing kidlet has been found!"

"Wats!"

"I tell you he has been found! He was found long ago, before you started out on this rotten fathead detective business!"

"I must wefuse to cwedit that statement."

"Mr. Railton told us so!" called out Tom Merry.

"Mr. Wailton was pwobably mistaken."

"He saw it in the local paper."

"Perwaps the weportah was misinformed!"

"You obstinate young ass!" roared Figgins.

"I wefuse to be called an obstinate young ass! Unless you address me in a more wespectful mannah, I shall decline to hold any conversation with you."

"We'll bust the lock!"

"Pway do so if you can, deah boy! I weally wegard it as a difficult task, but I am quite willin' to see you twy."

Figgins did not try. He knew perfectly well that it was hopeless to attempt to break in either the lock or the door with the means at his disposal, even if the landlord of the inn did not interfere—as he would, in all probability.

Arthur Augustus examined his clothes. They were very nearly dry, and the underclothing was sufficiently aired to be put on. The swell of St. Jim's began to dress himself. The juniors outside knocked savagely at the door.

"D'Arcy! Gussy!"

"Pway go away, deah boys! You are disturbin' my reflections."

"If you don't open the door we'll camp down outside it, and then you won't be able to get away; so you may as well chuck up the sponge at once."

"I wufuse to chuck up the sponge!"

"You young ass! Where is Skimpole? Is he in there?"

"He is not heah."

"Then where is he?"

"I weally do not know. I parted company with Skimpole some time ago. He was not sufficiently wespectful to me."

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Certainly not!"

There was a muttering of voices outside, and then footsteps on the stairs. The juniors of St. Jim's had retired for the time, baffled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chuckled and went on with his dressing.

"The wotten boundahs!" he murmured. "They can camp out there if they like. I shall wait till it is dark, and then climb out of the window on to the beastlay woof, and escape down the back. They can wait as long as they like, the beastlay boundahs!"

And the swell of St. Jim's chuckled again.

CHAPTER 14.

On the Watch!

TOM MERRY, Blake, and Figgins descended the stairs. The June dusk was falling over the landscape, and the shadow of the big oak-tree lengthening before the inn. The juniors called for a fresh supply of ginger-pop, and sat down at the table outside the inn, under the tree, and produced their packets of sandwiches. They were hungry, and they fell to with a good appetite.

"The obstinate young rotter!" Tom Merry exclaimed. "He might as well give in, as he can't get away. But it's something to have run him to earth."

"We've got him safe here," Figgins remarked. "He can't get away, unless he climbs out of the window; and as that would soil his trousers, he's pretty safe."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

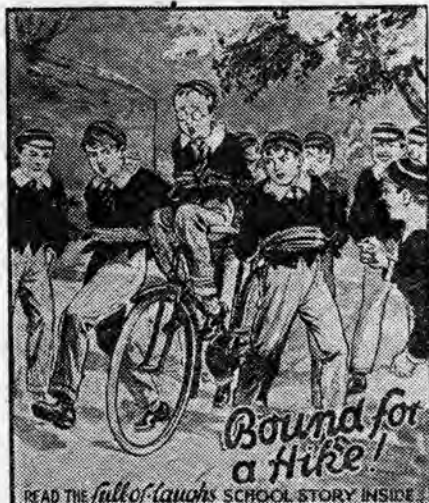
"I wonder where Skimpole is?" Tom Merry remarked. "We've found only one of the two idiots."

"I expect he's not far off. As soon as we've had a feed, one of us had better stay here to look after Gussy, while the other two go and hunt for Skimmy. We ought to get back to the school before calling-over if we can."

"THE NIGHT RAIDERS!"

Next week's grand yarn.

Take a look at the small cover reproduction shown here. It looks as though the Grammar School have scored over Tom Merry & Co. again!



Out Next Wednesday.

"That won't be possible, unless Gussy gives in."

"And he won't," said Blake, shaking his head. "I never met such an obstinate young mule in my life. We shan't be home till pretty late, I expect. Still, Railton knows where we are, so it won't much matter. As for Skimmy, we—"

"Talk of angels," said Figgins, "and you hear the rustle of their giddy wings. Look there!"

He pointed with his sandwich. A dusty and tired-looking figure was coming towards the inn. It was the freak of the Shell. Skimpole had evidently had a hard afternoon of it.

He caught sight of the juniors sitting at the table outside the inn, but the sight did not alarm him. He came straight on and sat down on the bench.

"Have you got any ginger-pop to spare?" he said. "I'm fearfully dry."

Tom Merry pushed a full glass towards him. Skimpole drank it in a way that showed how thirsty he was.

"Thank you," he said. "That is good. What are you fellows doing so far from St. Jim's? It's a rather long run for a half-holiday."

"Oh, we came over to look for a pair of escaped lunatics!" said Tom Merry.

"What do you mean?" said Skimpole. "I am not responsible for my actions to you."

"I know you're not responsible for your actions," agreed Tom Merry. "That's why we have come over to take you back to St. Jim's."

"I shall certainly not go back to St. Jim's with you. I am here on detective business, looking for the missing heir."

"Oh, he's been found!"

"Found! Do you mean to say that D'Arcy—"

"D'Arcy rats! The lost kid was found before you left St. Jim's. It was in the local paper."

"It's rather a disappointment! I intended this case to make my name ring through the length and breadth of the land!"

"Well, your voice will ring through the length and breadth of the School House when Mr. Railton starts the flogging," said Blake consolingly.

"Really, Blake—"

"Oh, travel along! You make me tired!"

Skimpole disappeared in the dusk.

The grinning juniors rose from the table.

"That's one ass caught and sent home!" said Blake. "Now let's go up and have another jaw with Gussy. He may be tired of staying in his room by this time!"

The juniors ascended the stairs again. Tom Merry knocked loudly at the door of the room tenanted by the swell of St. Jim's!

"Gussy! Hallo, there!"

"Hallo, deah boy!" came back through the keyhole.

"Are you going to open this door?"

"Certainly not!"

"We've found Skimpole! He's given in and gone back to school!" called out Tom Merry.

"Weally!"

"Yes, ass!"

"I weally do not care what Skimpole has done, Tom Merry! I wufuse to go back to the coll until I have found the missin' heir and weceived the hundwed pounds weward!"

"I tell you the kidlet was found long ago!"

"Wats!"

"Will you open this door?"

"No, I won't!"

"Well, we'll wait for you, you young waster, and we'll make it warm for you!"

"You can wait if you like, you wottahs! I wegard you as a set of impertinent boundahs, and I no longer wegard you as fwends! Pway cleah out, and don't disturb my twain of thought!"

The juniors, breathing vengeance, descended the stairs again. The swell of St. Jim's was evidently neither to be convinced nor persuaded.

"We'll wait for the obstinate bounder!" said Blake. "And when we get hold of him, if I don't bash his hat over his eyes you can use my head for a footer!"

And that was all the consolation the juniors of St. Jim's had as they waited.

CHAPTER 15.

On the Tiles!

D'ARCY was waiting, too—waiting for the darkness to grow, so that he could make his attempt to escape from the window. To make the attempt while the light lasted was to court failure. If he was seen, his escape could easily be cut off. After dark he had a good chance of getting away unseen and unsuspected. He chuckled

to himself as he thought of the feelings of Tom Merry & Co. when they found that the bird had flown!

Arthur Augustus got out on the window-sill and stood upright, holding to the brickwork.

The inn was a little, old-fashioned building, and climbing to the roof was not a difficult task. Arthur Augustus had scanned the wall before dark, and knew just how it lay. The roof was only a foot above his window at the edge, and there was a strong gutter and a rain-pipe. Close to the window was a buttress of the wall, and in the angle where the buttress joined the wall was a big, clamped rain-pipe. The climb would have been a child's task in the daylight. After dark it was more difficult, but D'Arcy accomplished it. He gave an inward groan as his trousers rubbed against the rusty, weather-stained pipe. But those precious garments had already been almost ruined by the soaking in the well and the drying before the fire, and a little further damage did not count for much.

"Heah I am, bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, as he drew himself on the roof and crawled up to the brick ridge, where the chimney-stacks stood out in a black mass against the sky. "I wathah fancy those boundahs are not up to this. It weally is no good their pittin' their bwains against mine. There are vewy few bwains like mine at St. Jim's!"

He crawled closer to the chimney. The moon was glimmering from behind a bank of clouds, and when the rays got fairly through it would be very light. But light was welcome to Arthur Augustus now. He was not in sight from the ground, and there was no longer danger of being observed, unless, of course, Tom Merry & Co. suspected his design, and looked for him on the roof.

"Bai Jove, I fancy I have done the wottahs this time!" murmured D'Arcy. "They could get out on the woof through the twapdoor if they smelled a wat, but they don't smell a wat. They're not quite up to my form in this sort of thing!"

The next moment D'Arcy's self-satisfaction received a shock.

There was a slight sound on the roof on the other side of the chimney-stack.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a start.

"My hat!" he murmured. "What's that?"

He crouched close to the stack and listened intently, with bated breath.

There was a sound again—the sound, as it seemed, of a moving body brushing against the brickwork as it crept cautiously close to the chimney-stack.

"The wottahs!" murmured D'Arcy. "They're on the woof!"

He remained quite still, and listened intently.

There was no sound now. Probably the other person on the other side of the chimney-stack was listening intently, too.

D'Arcy craned his neck to look round the stack. But, without quitting his place of safety, he was unable to see round it. He heard a faint sound that seemed to indicate that the stranger was doing the same.

"You wottah!" growled D'Arcy. "You uttah wottah! You think you've got me, do you?"

There was no reply.

"Oh, you needn't keep silent, you feahful wottah!" said D'Arcy. "I know you're there! But, understand me once and for all, you beast, I wufuse to go back to St. Jim's! I uttally wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

Still no reply from the mysterious lurker on the other side of the chimney-stack.

"You wottah!" howled D'Arcy, getting exasperated. "Why don't you speak, you silly ass? I tell you I know you're there, and I uttally wufuse to come back!"

"Mee-ew-wow-yw-ywywow!"

D'Arcy gave a violent start.

"Bai Jove!"

"Mee-ew-wow-wow-wow!"

"Bai Jove! It's a beastlay cat!"

"Mee-ow-ow-ow-wow!"

It certainly was a cat. D'Arcy blushed in the gloom. He realised that his defiant remark had been addressed to a feline Romeo on the tiles, who was doubtless surprised and indignant at the junior's invasion of his domain.

"Bai Jove!"

There was the sound of a voice below, under the tree. It was the voice of Tom Merry.

"My hat! He's on the roof! I heard his voice distinctly."

"So did I. He must have climbed out of the window."

D'Arcy could have kicked himself. The game was up now, with a vengeance. He had given himself away by his argument with the cat.

"How are we to get him down?"

"That's all right," said a deep voice. "I've got my gun here, young gentleman. If he won't come down, I'll fire. Hi, there! Come down off the roof!"

D'Arcy gave a gasp. He might or might not have been exposed to fire from below, as he sat astride of the ridge, but he was not inclined to risk it.

"Stop!" he yelled. "Pway don't shoot, you howling ass!"

"Then come down at once," said the deep bass voice.

"I will certainly come. I have no desire to wemain on the woof, but weinembah, Tom Mewwy, I wufuse to weturn to St. Jim's!"

"Come down!" repeated the deep voice.

"I'm coming."

"Come down the rain-pipe. If you try to get in at the window again I shall fire. Better be quick, as this gun might go off if I jerk it."

"Tom Mewwy, I call upon you to westwain that sillay ass!"

"Then come down!"

"I'm comin', you wottahs!"

There was no help for it. If D'Arcy had defied the gun, he could have been assailed by means of the trap in the roof. He climbed down the rain-pipe, and stood on the ground, looking extremely dirty and indignant.

"Got him!" shouted Figgins, grasping the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

"Pway don't put your paws on me, Figgy. Where is that wottah with the gun?"

"Here I am," said Figgins, in the deep bass voice which had deceived D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Figgins! You wottah! It was you playin' a twick all the time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come along," said Tom Merry, linking his arm in D'Arcy's. "Back to St. Jim's!"

"I wufuse to come. I uttally refuse. I—"

"Very well. We'll have a trap of the landlord here, and tie you up behind it like a lead horse, and drive back to the school," said Tom Merry. "Anything for a quiet life."

"I should wufuse."

"You won't have any choice in the matter."

"Wathah than be tweated in such an extwemely dis-wespectful way, I will weturn with you to the coll," said D'Arcy, "and I will give you my pawole to that effect. But I weserve the wight to give you all a feahful thwashin' to-morrow."

"I think we'll risk that, Gussy. Come along."

And a few minutes later Tom Merry & Co. were on the return journey to St. Jim's, with the amateur detective in their midst.

Mr. Railton smiled grimly as he looked from the door of the School House into the moonlit quad, about ten o'clock that evening. The hack from Rylcombe had just driven up, and four juniors alighted from it. The moonlight glimmered upon the battered silk hat of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the Housemaster knew that the fugitive had returned.

"Thank you, Merry, and you, Blake and Figgins," said Mr. Railton. "You may go to your dormitories. Skimpole has returned, and I have dealt with him. D'Arcy, you may follow me to my study."

"I would wathah go to bed, sir, if you have no objection. I am wathah fatigued."

"Follow me to my study!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir," said D'Arcy, with a jump, "if you make a point of it."

And he followed the Housemaster.

Blake was waiting up for him when he entered the Fourth Form dormitory.

"How did you get on with Railton, Gussy?" he asked.

"Wathah wottenly, Blake. Six on each hand."

"You would have got a flogging if it had been the New House master," said Blake. "Railton has let you down lightly, because we fetched you back so soon. You can thank me for having got off so easily, you young ass."

"Pewwaps so, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Of course, if the missin' heir is weally discowahed, it would be no use pursuin' my investigations. Upon the whole, I am vewy sleepy, and I'm not sowwy to get to bed, deah boy. Upon weflection, I think it would pewwaps be wathah a bore to be an amateur detective, so I shall give it up for the pwesent."

And he did.

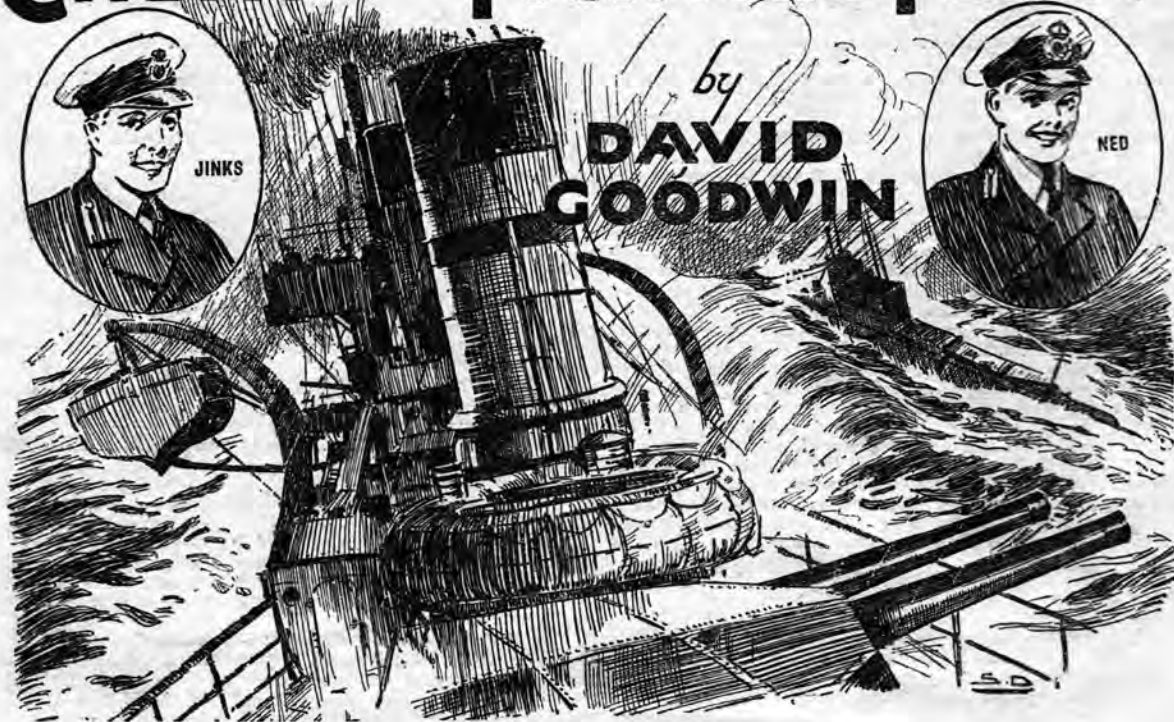
THE END.

(Next week's GEM contains a real rip-snorting yarn of Tom Merry & Co. called "THE NIGHT RAIDERS!" Order your copy now and make sure of it!)

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START RIGHT AWAY ON OUR SMASHING NAVAL ADVENTURE YARN.

CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET



Although he is only the junior middy on the Victorious, Ned Hardy is determined to clear the name of his brother Ralph, who was dismissed the service after being "framed" with a robbery. Hoaxed by a forged letter, Ned and his pal Jinks fall into the hands of foreign spies, but are rescued by two young prizefighters, who capture two of the spies. Ralph arrives on the scene with some policemen, and the two rogues are arrested. Later, Ned and Jinks and their friends attend a picnic given by the Admiral of the Fleet.

On the Track of Long Dennis!

IT is not necessary to describe the remainder of that luncheon party. The admiral proved himself a cheery old dog, quite different to the stern martinet he was known as in the Fleet; Raglan became a most charming and genial companion. The party broke up after lunch, and had a ramble over the beach and cliffs. Jinks managed to single out the admiral's daughter—cutting her out from under the guns of the flag-lieutenant—and departed with her to hunt for prawns among the rocks at low tide.

Finally, the middies helped pack up the baskets and gear, the admiral's car arrived on the beach road, and his party, after cheery farewells to Keppel and his juniors, packed themselves on the car for departure.

"Well, good-bye, youngsters!" said Sir Francis, shaking hands with them. "Sorry we can't give you a lift, but we're full up. Next time you ride a moke in the garb of Adam, always charge the nearest picnic party, and you'll always get a free feed. All clear aft, John? Full speed!"

The motor shot away down the road. The middies gave it a parting cheer, and then set out to tramp it to the town.

"Decent old bird, Tin-Top!" said Keppel. "Raglan, too!" "Raggy's always a good sort," said Ned. "He's been a brick to me!"

"That settles it, of course!" snorted Acland. "Jinks, wait till we get back to duty, and see if you don't get jolly well played alive for mashing the flag-lieutenant's best girl. Right under his nose, too!"

"I thought she wanted cheering up," said Jinks. "She's a topping fine wench. Never saw a smarter one. Old Buckley has no chance with a girl like that. She likes a dashing chap. She told me so. I—"

"Belay!" said Ned, dealing his chum a thump on the back that made him gasp. "We don't want to hear you burbling about your latest Jane. Step out, you fellows, or we shall be late, an' Buckley'll take it out of the lot of us."

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They arrived on board just in time—the stroke of eight bells—and though each of the party was sworn to secrecy, it was all over the station next day that Ned had ridden on to the admiral's table upon a hired donkey and clad in a striped cloth. The middies had a quarrel next night—settled by a fight with the gloves—as to which of these had let out the secret.

The truth is, it was Admiral Frobisher who spread the story, having told it at dinner at the Great Eastern Hotel.

Ned received a brief letter from his brother next morning.

"Dear Ned," it ran—"I find the date when you will be required to give evidence against the two prisoners we caught at the Jezreel Temple is the 30th next. They were brought up again to-day and remanded till then. I don't know where the Victorious will be at that time, but when you get the notice from the Crown Prosecutor you will have to apply to the captain for a day and night's leave.

"Don't forget what I told you about Long Dennis, though I don't suppose there's any chance of your running across him.

"Yours,
"RALPH."

Ned made a note of the date, and burnt the letter after showing it to Jinks, who would naturally require leave also for the trial.

"The 30th!" exclaimed Jinks. "That's a near thing! Naval manoeuvres come off in a day or so down Channel, and we shall be in them. Still, I expect they'll be over by the 25th, so we may be back in time to go to Chatham for the trial."

"I hope so," said Ned. "Ralph's depending on me."

"Here's disaster, old top!" exclaimed Jinks, bursting into the sleeping-flat as Ned was changing into his mess kit two evenings later. "Something wrong with the engines,

I heard the engineer-commander saying so. Flagship goes into dry dock for a fortnight."

"What?" said Ned, in dismay. "We shall miss the manoeuvres then?"

"They're cut right out—as far as we're concerned."

It was a disappointment. Ned had been looking forward to his first fleet manoeuvres. Still, it was only a sham fight at best, and he soon found there was a silver lining to the cloud.

Twelve hours later the Victorious was in the hands of the gangs of dockyard "mateys" and artificers. Consequently, as the manoeuvres were out of the question, there was not much for the inmates of the ward-room or gun-room to do, and several middies, including Ned and Jinks, applied for and were granted ten days' leave.

"Real good egg this!" said Jinks, when he brought the news to the school-room. "They'll let nearly all the snotties go. Ten whole days are worth having!"

"And it's a fortnight to the 30th, too. I shall get my day and night off for Chatham as well. Most of the chaps'll clear off home now. Let's land on the pier."

They did so, and discussed with some heat the manner in which they should spend their leave. Neither of them was keen on going home, for there was nothing doing at Briar's Hall.

"We might muck about here for a few days. It's a sportin' country," said Jinks, leaning on the rail. "Hallo! What's that gunboat coming in from sea? She's towing a fishing boat astern, too. Must have found her crippled outside."

Both midshipmen watched with interest the grey gunboat, looking as bluff as a little battleship, steaming in from seaward. She was one of the old ram-bow sort, but fast and sturdy, though out of date; apparently a fishing protection vessel. Astern of her was towing a foreign-looking smack, with sails stowed and a Navy crew aboard her.

"There's Watson on the bridge, in command!" cried Ned as the gunboat passed the jetty. The officer commanding saw the middies, and gave them a wave of recognition. "You remember the lieutenant that overhauled me that night on the Solent, when we captured the spy Dimitri? He's got a new command. A gunboat this time."

"Evidently. I say, it's queer about that smack. Looks all right. Doesn't seem a wreck. Foreigner, by the cut of her."

"Perhaps she's leaky. I'd like to get a word with Watson, and I believe he'd be glad to see us. He'll have a yarn to spin over the smack, too."

The middies' actual leave did not begin till next day; but as there was no difficulty about getting permission for half an hour's visiting later on, Ned and Jinks presently put off in the whaleboat. By that time the gunboat, whose name was the Merlin, had got rid of the fishing smack and anchored higher up the river.

Lieutenant Watson, who was commander of the gunboat, received the middies on deck. He made them welcome, and asked them below to his cabin.

"A bit of a change since I saw you last, Hardy," he said. "What a night that was! I got my steps through it, though. I'm a full lieutenant now. This is a more comfortable craft than that little tinpot of a harbour torpedo-boat, eh? Have a Marsala?"

"Thanks!" said Ned, and added: "By the way, what was wrong with that smack you towed in, sir?"

Lieutenant Watson laughed.

"Wrong!" he exclaimed. "You'd better ask what was wrong with her, the rip. She's my prize!"

"Prize!"

"Yes. That was the Dutch couper, Wulp; owner and skipper, Adrian Vandervell. You know what a couper is?"

"Of course! One of the drink-selling ships," said Jinks. "They peddle contraband rum and gin to the fishermen."

"That's it. Vandervell's an old hand at that game. I dropped on him up North, inside our British limit, if you please—not three miles from land! Did you ever hear such nerve? He'd just made two drifters' crews rocking drunk with his filthy bad liquor. Of course, you know it's against the law. It's got so bad lately that I've been sent up this way to try to nab some of the coupers."

The two middies exchanged glances. They said nothing, however, but listened eagerly.

"I captured the fellow and brought him in here," said Watson. "His smack's confiscated. He'll be fined as well. They're slippery beggars to get hold of, and you can't always be sure of 'em. I sail again in the morning, and I've got special orders to look out for one of them—about the worst of the lot. He'll take some catching."

"Who is he?" asked Ned.

"Dennis Clegg, of the couper Black Witch. They call him 'Long Dennis' on the Dogger, and he's one of the toughest blackguards afloat. There isn't a bigger brute on the North Sea; stick at nothing."

"You're after Long Dennis?"

"Rather! It'll be no easy job to run him down, I'm told. But I mean to have him."

"By gum!" cried Ned, springing up. "Look here, sir, couldn't you take me? I've got ten days' leave, and I'd rather go with you on Long Dennis' track than anything you could offer me. I know the man, and I could be useful to you."

"You want to sail with me?" said Watson, in surprise.

"Rather!"

"I'm in the game, and I'll come, too—if Lieutenant Watson'll have me!" exclaimed Jinks.

"I'll have you both, with pleasure!" said Watson. "It's a lonely job for me aft, as I've no commissioned man with me. My second in command is a warrant officer—nailing good one, too. Of course, you can only come as guests, not officially; but I bet I'll find a use for you when we're at sea. But what in thunder do you know about Long Dennis?"

Ned explained that Long Dennis, the couper, had been one of the crew of the black steam yacht on the memorable night when Watson first met Ned.

Watson whistled.

"You're just the man I want, Hardy!" he said. "I don't know the beggar from Adam; but I've a description of his vessel. She's a big yawl—ketch, rather—and very fast sailer, and the fellow doesn't even change her number. He has the insolence even to keep her name painted on her—the Black Witch."

"He would, by what I've heard of him!"

"He doesn't care a toss for anybody," added Watson, "and if there's a murder or two to his credit that can't be brought home to him it wouldn't surprise me. I'm keen to cross Mr. Dennis' bows. I sail on the morning tide. You chaps must be aboard by six-thirty."

"We'll be with you!" said Ned. And the two middies hurried back to the Victorious to pack their sea-kit and make arrangements. They said nothing in the gun-room about their altered plans. Next morning found them both on the jetty, and thence the Merlin's dinghy picked them up and took them aboard.

"This is as choice a bit of luck as we've dropped into!" said Jinks, on the way.

The Merlin was all but ready to weigh anchor when the boys reached her. Lieutenant Watson welcomed his guests aboard. The grey gunboat got under way smartly, and was soon forging out to sea past the bell-buoy in the first fresh breath of early morning.

"This is a jolly well-equipped vessel for her class, sir!" said Jinks. "Why, you've got a small steam pinnace there in davits!"

"Yes, a legacy from her last skipper," said Watson. "He stole it in one of the Southern dockyards."

"When shall we reach the Dogger?" asked Ned.

"Got to call at Hull first," answered Watson, "for stores and dispatches. That won't take long; but we shan't see the Dogger to-day."

They reached the broad mouth of the Humber late in the afternoon, and the Merlin had to off the port of Grimsby just inside the estuary. Her pinnace had already got steam up, and was lowered and sent to Grimsby with one man in her, an engine-room artificer. He had instructions to carry out certain orders at Grimsby, and then follow on up the river and join the Merlin again at Hull.

"Wish I could have sent somebody else instead of Simmons," said Watson to Ned, as he watched the pinnace steam fussily in towards Grimsby. "He means well, but he's a poor lot—the only slacker I've got. I couldn't spare anyone else from the engine-room."

"Well, he's got nothing of a job," said Ned. "Anybody could take the pinnace into Grimsby for an hour or two, and then twiddle her up the river and join us at Hull. Of course, he's single-handed."

"I'm rather sorry I didn't send a seaman with him; but the pinnace is so small, and her engines so close to the tiller, that one man's plenty to handle her, and I never send more unless I have to. We've a short crew here."

"I'd have gone with him if you liked," said Ned.

"Oh, it'll be all right!" said Watson. And, after watching the pinnace reach Grimsby Harbour, he gave orders to proceed. The Merlin moored amongst the forest of masts in the port of Hull just as daylight was fading. Lieutenant Watson went ashore at once to see about his dispatches and stores. The two middies accompanied him, and had an hour's ramble round Hull.

It was eight o'clock when they returned, to find their host looking very black over a telegram he was reading.

"That idiot, Simmons, who ought to have been here long before this with the pinnace, hasn't turned up," said Watson, "and he's sent me a wire that Solomon himself couldn't make sense of."

None of them could make anything of the telegram, so stupidly was it worded.

"There's the harbour-master's launch just starting for Grimsby," said Ned. "Shall I crib a passage on her, sir, and go and see what's up with Simmons?"

"I wish you would!" said Watson. "I can't leave the Merlin. Ginger the blithering idiot up, and bring him along! Twist his tail off!"

Ned took his boat-cloak and started off at once. The harbour launch gave him a passage willingly. They had only room for one, and Jinks, who wanted to go, too, was forced to stay behind, to the disappointment of them both.

The long grey miles of the river were soon reeled off. Grimsby came in sight, and the sea beyond. It was a wild night, a strong wind blowing down the river and off-shore. Ned thanked the launch's crew as they landed him at Grimsby Quay, and tipped the coxswain. He then set out at once to find Simmons, and discovered the pinnace moored in one of the docks. The artificer, with a very black face, was hammering away at her engine.

Broken Down!

"SIMMONS, ahoy!" hailed Ned. "What are you up to, man? I've been sent down after you!"

The artificer looked up in surprise, a broad bar of grease and engine black across his nose.

"Engine's given up, sir, an' I've had three hours' work to put it right. It looks to me as if someone's bin tamperin' with 'em while I was ashore. That's what I telegraphed about."

"We couldn't make head or tail of your wire. It might have come from a Zulu by the look of it, unless the telegraph clerk is a bigger fool than usual. Look alive, man, or Lieutenant Watson will curl your hair for you. How long do you want?"

"Just finished, sir. It'll only take 'arf an hour to get steam up, an' then we can go right ahead."

"Fire away, then!" said Ned. He went back to an hotel near the quay, where a hot joint of beef was going, and had a square meal, for he had missed his dinner by leaving in a hurry.

He brought away a huge packet of beef sandwiches and a large bottle of hot coffee for Simmons, and returned to the dock.

There was still ten minutes before enough steam pressure could be raised for a start. Ned put his provisions aboard and went up the deck ladder again. The wet wind rushing down the estuary was fast growing into a small hurricane.

"You'll have a rare rough job of it, sir, getting back to Hull!" said a big fisherman in oilskins, touching his sou'wester to Ned.

"Yes, a dead head wind," returned Ned, "and a tidy sea running for a pinnace, even in the river."

"We're main glad to see the Merlin up this way, sir," added the fisherman; "an' I hopes as how you'll nab Long Dennis an' his vessel!"

"Do you?" said Ned, turning and looking at him sharply.

"How do you know what we're here for, eh?"

"Well, sir, I see in the paper as how your ship caught the Wulp an' took her into Harwich, and there's a rumour that

the Merlin's after the Black Witch now. She'll take a lot more catchin'!"

Ned said nothing, not being disposed to discuss naval secrets with a stranger.

"It'll be a rare good job when Dennis Clegg's lagged an' put away, sir," added the fisherman, "if you'll excuse me sayin' so. I ain't again a drop o' liquor in the proper place, an' at the proper time; but if you'd seen what I saw last trip you'd understand how the decent chaps about here are down on Dennis!"

"Three herrin'-drifters, all with their crews so rockin' drunk they couldn't reef nor steer," replied the fisherman, "an' Long Dennis lyin' hove-to just to win'ward after he'd taken most all their earnin's for his rotten liquor! One o' those smacks ain't turned up yet—sunk in the gale o' the night afore last, like as not. And then Dennis'd up hellum an' serve some more o' the fleet the same way! Ay, them floating pubs is just floating hells—that's what they is!"

"If you chaps didn't give them your custom they'd have to shut up shop!" said Ned.

"Ay, sir; but it's a hard life on the Dogger, an' a temptation to some of us to get a skintful of liquor and a bit of a gamble after three weeks at sea on a fishing ketch. It depends on your skipper. If he's a loose 'un, the crew'll likely follow his lead. An' if Dennis an' his gin-casks are handy, then presently it's all hands drunk. P'raps a black squall comes up, an' not a man's fit to 'andle a rope—an' down she goes, with all aboard her! Dennis 'as always dodged the patrol-ships!"

"Must pay him well to take such risks!"

"It does, sir! Why, the Black Witch is fitted up inside like a gin-palace! Dennis has got a reg'lar sort o' bar in his main cabin, one of his crew plays the fiddle—an' he runs a sort o' gamin'-table as well! When he's lyin' to near three or four sailin'-trawlers on a calm night when there's no wind for fishin', it's odds if he don't get 'alf their crews aboard 'im, drinkin' an' chancin' their earnin's!"

"Gaining-table, has he?"

"Yes, sir. An' yet he can clear the whole show away if there's a chance of his bein' searched—not that he's likely to get caught! Yes, Long Dennis is the toughest beggar off our coasts, an' never dares show his face in an English port! He'd think no more o' shippin' a knife into a chap than I would of spearin' an' eel! I'm layin' an even five bob your skipper don't catch him!"

"You'll lose your money," said Ned, with a nod. And, slipping the price of a stick of bacca into the speaker's hairy paw, he went down the steps.

"Now, Simmons, got the steam-pot working?"

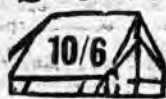
"Just ready, sir!" said Simmons, opening the throttle.

"I'm glad you're in charge, sir! I shouldn't 'alf fancy this voyage up the river by myself."

The pinnace glided out through the dock gates, cleared the harbour and shipping, and met such a blast as made her stagger. Ned settled himself down to a stern fight with the storm.

(How will Ned fare with the little pinnace in heavy seas? Look out for next week's thrilling instalment; there are strange adventures in store for our middy!)

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