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THE SOLUTION OF OUR HOME CINEMA COMPETITION IS INSIDE!

CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS -
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

The GEM

2^d



WALLY D'ARCY PROVES A STAUNCH CHUM IN THIS RIPPING---

HERO *and* CAD!



Everyone wanted to stop young Wally D'Arcy from chumming up with Dudley of the Third. They said Dudley was a waster. But Wally knew his own mind—and showed them all that they were wrong.

CHAPTER 1.

A Matter of Taste!

"PERSONALLY," said Tom Merry—"personally, I like this natty blue background with the green baskets of pink flowers."

"Loud!"

Monty Lowther hastily turned over the leaves of the huge wallpaper pattern-book, and plunged a forefinger down on a brilliant yellow paper relieved with silver stripes.

"There!"

"That thing?"

"Why, Tom Merry? If a neat, soft yellow isn't better than a gaudy blue—"

"The paper for this study," put in Manners coolly, "is this plain red."

"I don't think!"

"Beastly loud!"

"You fellows don't know what taste is," said Manners. "The red paper and white paint has it!"

"Rot! The natty blue with pink flowers, more like."

"Not much! Tom Merry means this neat, soft yellow paper—"

"Do I?"

"Look here—" began Manners wrathfully.

But the trend of his thoughts were interrupted by the door being pushed open at that moment.

The movement admitted the graceful form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the Swell of the School House. Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and glanced round the Shell study.

"No footah this aftahnoon, deah boys," he said. "Kildare's ordahs."

"Tell us something we don't know," grinned Tom Merry.

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looking at the window, against which the rain was driving with almost gale force. "Is croquet off as well, Gussy?"

"If that is meant for humah, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, cut, Gussy; we're busy!"

"I wefuse to cut!"

"Stay, then!"

"I wefuse to stay!"

"Do you?" said Manners, getting up; but Tom Merry pulled him down again.

"Let Gussy decide the question about the paper," he laughed. "We haven't any too much time if we mean to have the materials brought back by the workmen after dinner. Gus, we are going to do up this study this afternoon!"

"Weally?"

"Yes, weally. As the writer of the fashion notes in the Weekly, I suppose you know a bit about taste?"

"Yaas, wathah! In mattahs 'of taste, I wathah think I stand alone in St. Jim's."

"Good! Now, what is your candid opinion of this natty blue paper—"

"Wotten!" said D'Arcy promptly.

"What?"

"Isn't that what I told you, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Lowther. "It's loud—beastly loud! But just look at this neat, soft yellow, Gussy. Isn't that—"

"Wotten!" said Arthur Augustus.

Manners grinned with delight, and hastily turned the patterns over.

"I told you fellows this matter ought to have been left to me," he said cheerfully. "A fellow who goes in for photography must necessarily know more about the blending of colours than other fellows. There, Gussy—a plain red with white paint and—"

"Wotten, deah boy!"

By Martin Clifford.

“What?”
“Turn the ass out!”
“I wefuse!”
“Cut!”
“I wefuse to cut,” said D’Arcy coldly; “I wefuse to be turned out! I want some information, deah boys.”
“What about, fathead?”
“About young Wally, Tom Mewwy.”
“Hallo! What has young Wally been up to now? Refused to show you proper respect, or something serious like that?”

“Wally nevah shows me the wespect due to an eldah bwothah, I wegwet to say,” said Arthur Augustus; “but that is not the mattah now. Have you seen the young wascal?”

“Wally? Let me see. Yes, I saw him just after school. Why, ass?”

“Was he with Dudley, do you wemembah?”

“Dudley! Who is Dudley?”

“A Third-Formah and a wastah!”

“Oh, that thick-headed beggar who has stuck in the Third since the flood!” said Tom Merry thoughtfully. “Yes, I believe young Wally was with him, now I come to think of it. But why?”

“As an eldah bwothah, I have to keep an eye on Wally.”

“Oh, he’s all right! Trust the scallywag of the Third to look after himself, Gussy.”

“But Dudley is a wastah, and Wally is always with him when young Jameson and Gibson aren’t about. You see, deah boy—”

“Oh, that’s all right!” laughed the hero of the Shell.

“Wally won’t be corrupted, Gussy; you can be certain of that. He and his blessed dog Pongo both want chainin’ up, but they are young sports, you know.”

“It’s vewy decent of you to say that, Tom Mewwy,” said Arthur Augustus; “though, as a D’Arcy, I must wefuse to admit that my young bwothah wequiah chainin’ up!”

“Then that’s settled, and you can cut. I’m a bit surprised, though, at Wally chummin’ up with a waster like Dudley.”

“Yaas, I wondah, too. I will wemonstwate with him.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Manners. “Look here, you fellows, suppose we toss odd man out for choice of paper for the room? That will be the simplest method, and directly we have decided Tom Merry will slip along and tell the workmen, who are in Mr. Linton’s room, to bring us back the stuff. Let’s see, we shall want about six pieces of paper, some paint, and whitewash. Mine’s a head!”

As the others both showed tails, Manners grinned, and the fate of the Shell study was settled.

“The plain red has it!” said Manners.

Tom went off towards the master’s room in order to catch the workmen before they left for dinner. As he went he caught sight of Arthur Augustus D’Arcy talking to Blake, but he did not stop, although Jack Blake called out to him:

“Seen young Wally, kid?”

“No, Blake, deah boy,” exclaimed D’Arcy, “he hasn’t. I have just asked him.”

“Hard cheese! Well, Gus, if Wally has really taken up with Dudley or any of his set, it will have to be put a stop to. I mean, Dudley is a couple of years older than Wally, and though the kid has a head on his shoulders, it’s only a young head.”

“Yaah, wathah!”

“As I said, we shall have to nip a friendship like that in the giddy bud,” went on Jack Blake. “But, first of all, we must be certain that it’s going on.”

“It is, deah boy! Young Wally was playing draughts with Dudley last night.”

“Well, there’s nothing very desperate in draughts, Gussy,” said Jack Blake. “However, we’ll keep our eyes open, and if I know Tom Merry, he’ll do the same. What was that you were saying about the Shellfish papering their own study?”

“Yaas, wathah! They asked me to choose their papah for them!”

“Humph! This afternoon, did you say?”

“Yaas, wathah! But I can’t stop, deah boy. As an eldah bwothah—”

“What are you going to do?”

“Wemonstwate with young Wally.”

“I shouldn’t do that, if I were you, Gus.”

“It is my duty,” said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. “I shall wemonstwate firmly, and point out that it would be bettah if he were to dwoop a wottah and a wastah like Dudley.”

“Ha, ha, ha! Well, don’t let Dudley hear you wemonstwating, or you may sample a thick ear. But I can’t stop talking here all day; I want to see Digby and Herries. This afternoon, you said, the paperhanging wheeze comes off?”

“Yaas, wathah!”

“Good!”

And, as it happened, it was just at that moment that Arthur Augustus came near to finding his brother, for as he walked down the corridor a wiry youngster, with a soiled collar and still more inky fingers, faded briskly into a study. It was a master’s study, but that did not trouble Wally D’Arcy, the scallywag of the Third Form at St. Jim’s.

“I don’t want one of Gussy’s long-winded jaws,” Wally grinned to himself, “and I’m not having one!”

Wally D’Arcy remained in the study peering round the partially closed door while his brother passed, and then was just about to step out into the passage again, when he caught sight of Kildare, the captain of the school, walking towards him, talking to Lefevre of the Fifth!

“Phew!” whistled Wally. “Narrow squeak! Shall I get under the table in case they come in here?”

But there was no need for that, for the sound of the seniors’ voices was already receding along the corridor. The subject of their conversation caused the Third-Former unconsciously to prick up his ears, although he was really one of the last fellows in the School House to listen to conversation not intended for himself.

“Yes, it’s a fact,” Kildare was saying; “these wanderers have offered us a game next Saturday on our ground.”

“But St. Jim’s don’t play Rugby.”

“No. Still, I don’t see how the Wanderers could have known that,” came the captain’s voice, laughing. “I am sorry, because I dote on the game myself. You might write refusing but thanking them for the offer, Lefevre, will you?”

And then the voices became too distant for Wally to hear more. The Third-Former came out of the room, glanced indignantly after the two seniors, then scuttled off towards the dining-room.

CHAPTER 2.

Unexpected Aid!

“GOOD! I don’t think any of the prefects saw us!”

And Tom Merry placed a large pail of whitewash in the centre of the study. Lowther followed suit with rolls of paper, while Manners thoughtfully balanced two pots of dark green paint on the wide window-ledge.

“Very good idea of mine ordering the same coloured paint as the one already on,” he observed. “We shall only have to give one coat now.”

“Good egg!”

The chums of the Shell slipped off their coats, rolled up their sleeves, and moved with one accord to where the rolls of paper, huge scissors, and the paste were.

“After me, Manners!” said Tom Merry.

“I thought you were going to do the painting, old man?”

“Anyway,” said Lowther, “I will look after the papering, so you can settle amongst yourselves who does—”

“Look here, Tom Merry—”

The voices of the chums of the Shell rose, and so they failed to hear a series of polite knocks at the door. Manners seized the paste-brush, Lowther the paste itself, and Tom Merry whipped up the paper. Then they looked at one another wrathfully.

“You can go and eat coke, Tom Merry!”

“Oh, go for a walk, Manners!”

“Lowther, you selfish ass! Hallo!”

The knocking had ceased, and the door opened to admit Arthur Augustus D’Arcy. Arthur Augustus closed the door behind him.

“Hallo, deah boys!”

“Good-bye, Gussy!”

“Sorry you have to go, kid!”

“Which is it to be, Gus,” asked Tom Merry—by the window or the door?”

“I wefuse—”

“Choose! The window or the door?”

“I wefuse to choose, and I wefuse to go!” said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. “In mattahs of taste I wathah think—”

"Oh, get off!"

"In mattahs of taste I wathah considah I am at the top of the twee," continued D'Arcy, who had quite his share of obstinacy on occasion. "If you fellahs will attend to the paintin' and the whitewashin', I'll look aftah the papewin'!"

"I don't think!" said Tom Merry. "Throw the ass out, Manners!"

"I wefuse to be thwown out, deah boys, and I considah it wude of you to chawtwawise me as an ass. Mannahs, if you weequiah a feahful thwashin'—"

"Oh, let the ass stay!" said Lowther. "He'll do to wipe the brushes on. And, anyway, it's your fault, Tom, for telling him we were going to do up our own room."

"All right, then! Only shove the dummy into a cupboard, or somewhere. We aren't having anyone else in, though. Now, look here, Lowther, it stands to reason I'm the proper man to do the beastly papering!—How could asses like you—"

"Hallo, you chaps!" inquired a cheerful voice from the doorway. "Don't embrace me, Manners, old kid!"

"What do you want, Blake?"

"Nothing, Tom Merry," grinned the chief of Study No. 6, taking off his coat. "Just you three wire in at the painting, and I'll have the paper hung in no time!"

Jack Blake seized the paste-brush, whilst Lowther looked as if he meant to defend the rolls of paper with his life. Tom Merry jerked his thumb towards the door.

"Cut!" he said briefly. "We can't have Fourth-Formers fooling about here. We've got some work on! Clear!"

"Right-ho! When the tea-bell goes! No, don't shut the door; Herries and Digby are coming along in a minute."

"Then they can go back again!" shouted Tom Merry. "This isn't a home for stray Fourth-Formers. The window or the door, Blake?"

"Neither, kid! Come in, Digby, old son!"

Tom Merry & Co. made a dash for the door, but they were too late, for before they could get it shut, both Digby and Herries were in the room.

Herries was followed by his bulldog and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, by way of greeting. "We thought we'd just look in to give you a hand with the papering, Merry. You can safely leave that part to us."

"What wot! I wathah think you've got a cheek, Figgins, deah boy!"

"We've already bagged that item on the programme, kid," said Blake. "I'm attending to it myself."

"He means I am," said Herries. "You see, I wouldn't look at Towser, Manners, if I were you. Towser doesn't like being looked at."

"I'm not looking at the brute! Turn 'em out, Tom Merry! Throw the rotters out!"

"Ah!" observed a voice from the doorway. "D'Arcy told me I should find you here, Tom Merry! You intend papering your study, I believe?"

"Turn it out!"

"Clear, Skimmy!"

"Don't be so absurd!" said Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell. "I have come to offer Merry some advice, Merry, if you will leave the papering to me—"

A chorus of mixed nature greeted this suggestion, and it terminated in a somewhat plaintive observation from Lowther.

"How many more?" asked the humorist of the Shell. "Are the prefects coming? And did you leave a card at the Head's room, Tom?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly laughed Tom Merry, in his good-tempered way. "This is about the last word in cheek; but now you're all here I suppose you'll have to stop. We aren't having any more in, though!"

"I should think not!" said Jack Blake indignantly. "It would be like a fellow's cheek to attempt to come!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Figgins warmly. "Merry, if anybody attempts to come in, you may rely upon myself and the Co."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall wegard othah awwivals as intusions."

"We won't admit another one!"

"We couldn't!" groaned Fatty Wynn, who was pressed up in a corner.

"Well, I call it rotten cheek, myself," grumbled Manners, "and I insist upon this brute of a bulldog being removed. Remove him, Herries!"

"Oh, Towser's all right!"

"I tell you he isn't! The beast keeps looking at me!"

"Yes; that's because you keep looking at him. I've told

you before Towser doesn't like being looked at, and you look at him at your own risk. What's the matter, Blake?"

"Shove the beggar in that cupboard," grinned Blake, as Tom Merry & Co. began another argument about the papering. "He'll be all right there!"

Herries nodded, and, to his surprise, Towser went with unusual willingness into the partly-opened cupboard. Then Wynn made a remark.

"I suppose you haven't any grub, Merry? I get jolly hungry in this February weather!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we have," said Tom Merry, "because it was our intention to invite you Fourth Form kids in to tea as soon as we'd done up our room—as a sort of celebration, you know. You've saved us sending out invites, that's all. We'll have the spread the moment the study is done."

"Good!" said Wynn. "Excellent! And you must admit that ten fellows will get the papering done quicker than three?"

"Well, there is that—Hallo, what's Skimmy up to?" Skimpole was rapidly measuring the walls of the room with a two-foot rule, muttering figures half-aloud as he went.

Monty Lowther began to stir the paste, while Figgins suddenly pelted off for some more paint brushes.

"I say," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "what about a plank, deah boy?"

"What about it, ass?"

"To whitewash the ceilin', Tom Mewwy. We can't weach the ceilin' from the floor. I'll go and discovah a plank."

And he, too, left hurriedly.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole, Paperhanger!

"IN hanging wallpaper," said Skimpole, hastily running his two-foot rule across a recess, "you must be methodical. It is absolutely necessary that you be both methodical and correct. What is the sum total of nine, eight, and ten, Merry?"

"Between twenty and thirty, ass! Here, what are you up to, Skimmy?"

"Don't interrupt me, please! There, I have it exactly! If I cut this one piece of paper into three it will cover this side of the room. Pass the paste, please!"

"Go and eat cake! I'm doing the paperhanging!"

"Excuse me, Tom Merry—"

"Shut up, Blake, unless you particularly want a thick ear!"

"There are four sides to a study," said Skimpole. "I propose we do one side each."

"No fear!"

"Yes, we will!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as he jerked one of the extra brushes from Figgins' hand. "Skimmy, that's the first sensible idea you've ever had. Shove the paste in the centre of the room!"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins, keeping a firm grip upon the last of the extra paste-brushes he had just brought in.

"Merry, you'll have to use your hands to shove the paste on with. Pass me some paper!"

The four juniors took possession of the four walls respectively, and after a growl or two the others began to paint.

Digby and Fatty Wynn were at work on the door. Digby was slashing away at the upper panels, while the fat Fourth-Former was on his knees attending to the lower part of the door. There was a sudden and terrific bump outside, and the door flew open so suddenly that neither junior had time to get out of the way.

Digby yelled as a freshly-painted panel biffed on his nose, and Fatty Wynn gave a gasp as he was bowled over backwards. There was a paint-pot close behind, and Fatty Wynn hadn't time to avoid it. He sat in it, and there was a horrid squelch.

"Ow! Grooooooh!"

"Oh!" gasped Dig. "My nose!"

"Ow! My trousers!"

"Bai Jove, I'm sowwy if I startled you, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he marched in with a heavy plank, six feet in length, under his arm. "I got the plank, you see."

"You utter ass!"

"Taggles wefused to lend me the plank, and I had to abstact it fwom the shed when he wasn't lookin'. I weally considah that I managed it wathah neatly."

"You shrieking idiot!"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a shwiekin' idiot, Wynn! Pway what is the mattah, and what is Dig so excited about?"

"Look at my nose!" yelled Dig.

"Bai Jove, he's been paintin' his nose!"

"Look at my trousers!"

"Gweat Scott, he's been sittin' in the paint!"

"You utter ass!"

"Weally, deah boys, it's not my fault if you sit in the paint, and if I were payin' for it, I should insist upon your not wastin' it so wecklessly."

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

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is not exactly what I should wegard as a laughin' mattah, a chap spoilin' his twousahs," said D'Arcy. "Of course, as a mattah of fact, Fatty Wynn's twousahs were a ghastly fit. They had no cweases to speak of, and I am quite willin' to give him the address of my tailah for the next pair."

"You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—" D'Arcy turned towards his chum,

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy was growing quite bewildered by this time. He turned from one to another, apparently unconscious of the havoc wrought by the long plank turning round with him in the narrow study.

Few of the amateur decorators escaped a bump from the plank, and when they rushed upon D'Arcy to seize him, they received more bumps. But they collared him, and then he was bumped in his turn. He went down, with two or three excited juniors sprawling over him, and the plank was wrenched away.

"Got it!" exclaimed Figgins, as he tore it from D'Arcy's



The door flew open suddenly. Digby yelled as a freshly painted panel biffed on his nose, and Fatty Wynn gave a gasp as he shot backwards into a paint-pot. "Bai Jove, I'm sowwy if I startled you, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as he marched in with a six-foot plank under his arm.

and of course the plank under his arm swung round with him. "Weally— Bai Jove, what's that?"

"That" was a roar from Skimpole, as the plank caught him on the shoulder and hurled him to the floor.

D'Arcy swung round again quickly in alarm, and the other end of the plank swept Fatty Wynn off his feet, and he went over with a yell.

"Bai Jove!"

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole, groping for his spectacles. "I—I have been overthrown by a sudden terrific shock. It is possible that a terrible earthquake is visiting this country, and that Sussex is in the throes of a—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "It wasn't an earthquake, it was only D'Arcy's plank."

"Lemme get at him!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "I'll—I'll—"

"Weally, Wynn—"

D'Arcy backed away, and the end of the plank went through the window. There was a crash of breaking glass, and a tinkling of small pieces on the ground below. The swell of St. Jim's swung round in dismay, and Figgins gave a fiendish yell as the plank smote him on the side of the head.

clutch and let it bump down on the floor. "Hallo, Lowthor, what are you yelling at?"

"Ow, ow! You dropped that on my toe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!—I mean, I'm—ha, ha, ha!—sorry!"

"Pway don't be so beastlay wuff, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy. "Weally, you are uttaly wuinin' my clothes."

"Tread on him!"

"Sit on his head, Fatty!"

"Ow, ow! Don't! Anythin' but that!"

"Sit on him!"

"Pway don't be such wottahs!"

"Kick him out!"

D'Arcy staggered to his feet at last. He was looking considerably the worse for wear. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and glared at the gasping juniors.

"I wegard you as a set of wuff wottahs! You have wumped my hair and pwactically wuined my clothes. I wegard no one here as a friend, except Skimmay."

And he turned his back on them. He arranged a couple of chairs back to back at a distance of about five feet apart, mounted the plank on the top rail of the chairs,

and hoisted the huge pail of whitewash upon the plank. Then he carefully tested the arrangement with his hands, and gingerly clambered up himself. In this position he could reach the ceiling easily, and in a silence which was both dignified and chilly he began to whitewash.

Tom Merry glanced at the form of the whitewasher, and winked solemnly at Figgins. Figgins looked at the chairs, which were already showing a tendency to overbalance, and winked back.

At that moment the study door opened, and the inky, cheerful face of Wally D'Arcy intruded itself round the corner.

"I say, chaps, I've got some of the most rotten news you've ever heard," he began. "I— Ha, ha, ha!"

And at that moment Arthur Augustus came down. The two chairs which supported his plank tipped over towards one another, and, with a yell, the swell of the School House dropped. So did the whitewash pail, and if Skimpole, who was on his knees again, had not remained in the way, it is more than probable that Tom Merry's carpet would have suffered, despite its covering of newspapers. As it was, however, Herbert Skimpole's face disappeared.

Manners looked as if he would have been pleased, too, had not Gussy thrown the whitewash brush in his face, while Jack Blake had been doubled up with laughter until one of D'Arcy's artistically-shod feet caught him in the small of the back, and doubled him up still more. The only one who seemed to thoroughly appreciate the turn affairs had taken, though, was Arthur Augustus' brother Wally.

"My only Aunt Jane, you old fogeys aren't half having a time! Ha, ha, ha! It comes of not asking me to the circus."

"Cut!"

"Clear out!"

"Not much! Look out! Skimmy's choking!"

"No, he isn't!" groaned Jack Blake. "Skimmy doesn't exist! He told me so himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Yes, that's a fact. It's all right, Skimmy! You haven't got any whitewash in your eyes. You only imagine you have."

"Dear me!"

"It doesn't matter about Skimpole," said Tom Merry. "He deserves to be boiled in whitewash—in oil, I mean! What are we going to do about the wallpaper—that's what I want to know?"

"Pull it off again!"

"We couldn't, Manners!"

"Oh, I expect I could! He's put it on so badly. Yes, it comes off all right."

And while Skimpole was trying to squeeze whitewash from his hair, the others went to get cleaned up for tea.

CHAPTER 4.

The Challenge!

"DO you mean to stand there—sit there, that is—and tell me Kildare has refused to play the Wanderers? Rot!"

"Piffle!"

"You are talkin' wound your hat, Wally!"

"Very well, then," said Wally D'Arcy, "don't believe me. Pass me some more of the ham, and get on with the circus."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"If there is anything in this, you chaps," he said darkly—"if there is anything in it, Kildare has—has exceeded his authority."

"Hear, hear!"

"Speech, Merry!"

"Speech!"

"So he has! Here young Wally tells us that a challenge arrives at St. Jim's—not addressed to Sixth-Formers only, mind—a challenge to St. Jim's, and Kildare, Lefevre, and the others coolly refuse it. But you are rotting, Wally!"

"Well, I'm not. I thought it would stir up you old fogies, though. Hair-curler, isn't it, Gus?"

"I wish, Wally, you would not use those remarks. I considah—"

"Ring off, Gus!" said Tom Merry. "Look here, you chaps! What right has Kildare, or anyone else, to refuse a challenge?"

"None!"

"Of course, he hasn't! Like his cheek, I say!"

"Of course, it's like his cheek!" went on Merry, bringing his fist down on the table. "When a challenge is sent to a school, the majority should decide whether it is to be accepted or not. And whoever heard of St. Jim's refusing a challenge?"

"My hat—no!"

"The Wanderers—who are they?" asked Skimpole.

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"A touring Rugby fifteen," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Public school men—those who are just leaving, and that sort of thing; having a last flare-up before they begin life. Why, the local paper has been full of them! They've played heaps of matches in the county."

"And won most of them, too," said Jack Blake. "What I propose is—"

"I ppropose—"

"My idea is that we—"

Tom Merry, Figgins, and Jack Blake looked at one another.

"I would suggest—"

"Suppose we—"

"If you fellows will only let me get a word in edgeways, I'll explain my idea."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus—"weally, we aren't gettin' on with the washin', deah boy."

"It is these silly boundahs— Order! Order for the chair!"

"Who is in the chair, if I'm not?"

"I am!"

"The fact of the giddy matter is," said Wally D'Arcy coolly, "most of you kids are off your respective rockers. If you will only keep cool for a minute, I'll soon settle this matter for you."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! Tom Merry, when he has his steam up, is enough for one afternoon. And, as for Blake and Figgins—well, the brook isn't in it with them. The idea is—ought this challenge to be refused?"

None of the Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows spoke, but they one and all glared at Wally as if they expected him to suddenly foam at the mouth.

Wally went on cheerfully:

"You want a cool head for this matter. Well, I've put it to you. Ought this challenge to be refused? Of course, it oughtn't! What remains, then? That it must be accepted—"

"Weally, Wally, I must considah your wemarks out of place—"

"Order—order! We have decided that the challenge must be accepted, and the point now is how to get Kildare to accept it. I'm waiting for ideas."

"You are asking to be booted out, you mean," said Tom Merry.

"Yes; only I can't see the fellow who could manage it, old son. Now how are we to induce Kildare to accept the giddy challenge? I propose a deputation from the Third be elected to interview him."

"And whom shall we appoint to sweep up the bits afterwards? Just you dry up, kid, or there'll be trouble. I think it is agreed that I conduct this matter—"

"Wats!"

"What rot!"

"I don't think!" said Jack Blake. "If you will only allow me to speak—"

"You are talking, aren't you?" asked Wally. "It isn't our fault that you can't say anything worth listening to."

There was some commotion as the question arose as to whether Wally should be turned out or not, and it was terminated suddenly by Tom Merry.

"My hat—my only hat!"

"What's it now?"

"What's up, Merry?"

"I've got it! I've got the very idea! If only you fellows would have the foresight to leave these matters to me each time, and—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Yaas, dwy up, Tom Mewwy! If you have an ideah, explain what it is, and we will considah it."

"Out with it, kid!" said Blake.

"Why can't we accept the challenge ourselves? Why can't we write and contradict Lefevre's beastly letter?"

"Because there would be such an epidemic of thick ears afterwards that we shouldn't recognise each other—that's why, duffer!"

"Don't you believe it. I mean—"

"And what would be the good of accepting the challenge if the fellows wouldn't play them? My hat! Do you mean that we juniors are to play them?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, what's to stop it?" went on Tom Merry. "Surely some of you muffs must be able to play Rugby? Jack Blake, for instance. He comes from Yorkshire—and I never knew a Yorkshireman yet who couldn't kick a Rugger ball!"

"What-ho!" said Jack Blake emphatically. "I have played a little. And there's Fatty Wynn, too. Every Welshman can play Rugger as soon as he's born, you know."

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"Yes, rather!"

"But Kildare wouldn't let us take them on—the dignity of the thing—"

"Weally, Blake, I cannot agree with you there. In matters of dig I wathah think—"

"Oh, you ring off, Gus! I say, I don't think it could be worked, Merry. We haven't any goalposts or anything."

"Soon get those—borrow 'em somewhere, or, if it came to that, sub round and have some made. I tell you it's as simple as Skimpole!"

"Would the Head let us play, though?"

Tom Merry did not answer, so Figgins added his contribution to the discussion.

can prevent the Rugger match coming off. Just think of it, you fellows! The first Rugger game played at St. Jim's, excepting the game we had in the class-room once, when Fatty Wynn was showing us how they played in Wales!"

"Right!" said Wally. "From the chair I propose that a letter be written and sent to the sec. of the Wanderers offering them a game. We can settle the minor points afterwards. Let Gus write the letter. I say, though, one or two of the seniors may like to play!"

"If we're short I may play one or two," said Figgins; and though Blake and Merry glared at him he did not appear embarrassed. "Get on with the letter, Gussy!"



D'Arcy backed away, and the end of the plank went through the window. Then he swung round in dismay, and Figgins gave a fiendish yell as the plank smote him on the side of the head. "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus who was growing quite bewildered. "Bai Jove!"

"Why ask?" he suggested. "He has a lot to worry him just now."

"But he would have to know, ass! The game is to be played on our ground."

"I mean don't mention the matter until it's all fixed up," returned Figgins, looking as if he were troubled at Tom Merry's simplicity. "If only you people would let the New House settle these matters—"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Wynn and Kerr heartily.

"Suppose we sent a letter to the secretary of the Wanderers," said Tom Merry—"I know where they are staying—and they happened to agree to play us, how are we going on? There might be a row, and then we should have to get out of the compact on our necks."

"I don't see why," said Blake. "I don't see why the Head should stop us playing Rugger—and you know it would just show those blessed seniors up. They'd be on their necks—not us. The question is—how about the ground?"

"Oh, that's all right, as it happens," said Tom Merry. "Figgins and I had booked it for a practice Soccer game."

"Like your wotten cheek, bai Jove!"

"Trust Tom Merry for cheek," said Blake. "He wallows in it. Still, if we have got the ground I don't see what

"Yaas, wathah! What shall I say, deah boy?"

"That it has come to our knowledge that the Wanderers are without a match for Saturday, and, though St. Jim's is a Soccer school, we shall be very pleased to give them a game. Then add that we shall be composed principally of juniors, and ask them to reply by return."

"Deah Sir!—Keep the wotten table steady, Wally, or I shall weally have to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Shut up, you chaps!" said Tom Merry. "Let the one and only go ahead! Now how are we to send the letter? It won't do to drop it in the school box, Blake."

"Not much! We can send young Wally to express it at the post office. That'll be just time enough if Gussy doesn't go to sleep. I say, this is something like a wheeze!"

There was silence in the study for a few moments, then the letter was handed round. It was formally approved of by all, sealed, and handed to Wally.

Wally took it and grinned.

"Nice mothers' meeting you'd have made of it if I hadn't been in the chair," he said. "So-long!"

And he slipped off as hard as he could.

CHAPTER 5. Wally's Chum!

"HALLO, Dudley!" sang out Wally. "Going for a constitutional, my son?"

Dudley, a big, loose-limbed fellow, turned. He had rather a heavy, by no means brilliant face, which always seemed to wear an expression of discontent. There was nothing in the least striking-looking about him except, perhaps, the untidiness of his attire and the great size of his hands, which latter characteristic had earned him the name "Paws." But for their mutual untidiness he and Wally contrasted in almost every way, and, judging from appearances—a not always reliable method—the contrast was all in favour of the younger lad.

"If you've nothing on come down into the town with me," went on Wally, "I'm taking Pongo."

"I don't mind."

"Good! My hat! There isn't another fellow in the college Pongo takes to like you—bar myself, of course."

"He's a ripper!" said Dudley, putting his hands into his pockets, and looking enviously at the rough-haired little mongrel. "I wish you'd sell him, D'Arcy!"

"Go on wishing, then, my son!"

"I suppose you wouldn't exchange him for that fishing-tackle of mine?"

"Not for two motor-cars and some yachts!" grinned Wally. "If it came to giving Pongo or Gussy away I believe I'd have to toss up."

Dudley laughed, too.

"I wouldn't exchange him myself if I were in your place," he said. "Got any lines?"

"Two or three hundred—not many."

"I got five hundred this morning, you know."

"Yes, I know!" chuckled Wally. "Like your giddy cheek telling Selby you thought Virgil rot, and that it was a waste of time doing the stuff. Mind you, I jolly well agree, Dud, but I'm bothered if I'd have had the cheek to explain my views to Selby."

"I don't like Selby."

"My hat, neither do I! When are you going to do the lines, though? I thought they had to be shown up before brekker to-morrow?"

"So they have, and so they will, Wally."

"Good man! Got a store of things?"

Dudley laughed again, but it wasn't quite such a pleasant laugh this time. There was a harsh note in it.

"Not exactly a store," he explained. "Do you remember the five hundred Selby gave me last week?"

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha! For letting off crackers in class, wasn't it?"

"That's the lot! I'm showing 'em up again—it'll save a beast of a lot of time!"

"Showing up again? Don't follow, kid."

"Why, I gave Selby the lines in the corridor one day, you know, and as he was just going out he couldn't destroy 'em. He scrawled his name along the bottom and gave 'em back to me."

"Well?" said Wally.

"Well," answered Dudley, looking at the younger lad out of the corners of his eyes—"well, I have just cut Selby's name off the bottom of the dose, and he shall have them again to-morrow. Twig?"

He laughed loudly, but he was still watching Wally D'Arcy furtively. Wally was looking down at the rain-soaked road, flicking the few winter weeds at the roadside with his stick. He did not answer just then, and Dudley broke the silence which followed.

"Hallo! There goes Pongo after Farmer Hodges' donkey again! I believe the little beggar thinks Nicodemus wants exercise. My hat! Call him off!"

Wally whistled his shrill whistle, and as the dog came splashing through the mud towards him turned to the big Third-Former.

"I say, that isn't quite cricket, is it, Dud—the lines, I mean?"

"What isn't cricket? What do you mean?"

"Showing up the same dose of lines twice."

"Why not?"

Wally thought. Perhaps he could not have explained why it was not what he termed "cricket," still it was not according to Wally's unspoken code of honour. Wally D'Arcy was as strict a stickler about the cricket of a thing as his elder brother was in "matters of dig."

"Blessed if I know," he said at last, "except that Selby left it to your honour to throw the lines away."

"What about Selby's honour, anyway? I didn't think it particularly honourable when he called you a liar before the class because he pretended to think you kicked a football in his face on purpose, and wouldn't let you explain why—"

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"Yes, and if I remember, I took myself away from the coll in consequence," laughed Wally. "We came out quits in that deal, because Selby had to climb down just as much as I did. But that hasn't anything to do with the lines, Dud."

"Well, Selby does a lot of things that aren't cricket, doesn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose he does from our point of view. Still, two wrongs— Oh, bother it all, it hasn't anything to do with me! I know I'd burn those lines myself, that's all. I say, where is Pongo?"

He whistled again. The call was unanswered, and the two juniors looked anxiously about them.

"There's a caravan coming up the road!" exclaimed Dudley. "Ten to one he's gone to have a look at that—"

"Or slipped back to give Nicodemus some more exercise!"

"Well, he's all right if he's done that. I believe he is down by the caravan, though; isn't that him slinking along by the hedge?"

Wally nodded and pelted on ahead. Pongo was a dog who possessed many good points, but he had at least one bad one. If there was a chance of causing a row and getting into trouble, Pongo was the dog to rise to the occasion. He seemed to have an undying hatred of a monotonous life.

It had ceased to rain now, but the road was fearfully wet and greasy, and run as hard as they could, the two juniors were unable to reach the caravan before Pongo had effected what it was obvious had been his intention.

He had crept along by the hedge until he was level with the caravan; then he sprang out suddenly, and began barking at the horse's nose.

The horse reared—a most unusual thing for him to do—so unusual that the swarthy, gipsy-looking man seated on the shafts was not prepared for the manoeuvre.

With a yell he toppled backwards, and Wally and Dudley arrived on the scene just as the gipsy rolled into the mud.

"Collar Pongo!" panted Dudley, but it was too late.

The gipsy was on his feet again, his dark face glowing with rage.

The next instant he had caught Pongo by his collar, and was thrashing him brutally with his short horsewhip.

"Come on!" yelled Wally. "You coward! Come on, Dud!"

But Dudley had already flung himself at the gipsy, and it was as well for Pongo that he had.

"Let the dog go!" muttered the Third Former. "Let him go!"

He had his arms round the man's neck, and was attempting to prevent the heavy whip being used on Pongo. He succeeded in this for a moment or two, then the gipsy suddenly swung round, bowled Dudley over, and flung Pongo into the caravan. After that he slammed the door to.

"Now I'll attend to you, my lad," he growled. "No, my young shaver; the dog stays where he is—"

"Let him out at once!" exclaimed Wally. "If you don't, I'll—"

"He stays there until you hand over ten shillings for damage done," said the man, leering. "That's the verdict up to the present."

Wally and Dudley were standing a few feet away now, perplexed. It was obvious to both that the man had been drinking, and it was also obvious that the odds were about a hundred to one against anyone coming along that muddy road on such a dreary afternoon as that one was. The question was, what to be done?

"Anyway, I'm not going to square him," said Wally indignantly—"not to the extent of ten shillings, I mean. If the brute hadn't been half-tipsy, he would not have fallen. I say, you there, let the dog out, and promise not to touch him again, and I'll give you half-a-crown—"

"Ten shillings, my lad!"

"Rats! Look here—"

"Don't argue with him, Wally," said Dudley. "He won't understand verbal arguments. This will appeal to him more."

And before Wally had grasped what was going to happen, the bigger lad had flung himself at the man again. His fist shot out and it got home, sending the man staggering against the caravan; and before the gipsy could counter, Wally joined in.

"That's that!" muttered Dudley. "Pepper away, and I'll get Pongo. All right, you brute!"

Dudley had no idea at all of the art of boxing, he had never had a pair of gloves on in his life, but he had a big arm and a bony fist, and he could hit sledge-hammer blows until further orders. Only about one in three reached home on that occasion, but they were blows the gipsy did not forget for a long time. Still, the man was a good deal more than a match for the two juniors, and he removed Wally from the fight early on with a blow which sent the young scion of the house of D'Arcy into the hedge and almost stunned him.

That seemed to affect Dudley in a curious manner. His face flushed, and his eyes sparkled, and then he began lashing out with all his strength.

Wally remained lying in the hedge, dazed and badly shaken. He had a vague idea that Dudley was fighting someone, but it was some moments before he recovered energy enough to scramble to his feet again. In those few moments it was all over.

Gradually working his way round the gipsy, Dudley so arranged matters that he presently found himself between the man and the caravan. Then he acted in a way that showed fear of physical pain was not one of his faults.

He struck a last heavy blow at the man, then wheeling

Dudley knew the dog would be all right now, for Pongo was not given to being caught twice by the same man, and so he rushed to the other side of the caravan. He saw that Wally was already on his feet, looking dazed and white, but otherwise unharmed.

"Hook it, Wally!" shouted the bigger lad. "Through the hedge—anywhere! Pongo is all right!"

Then, after waiting till Wally was safely through the hedge, Dudley and Pongo took to their heels at a pace which caused the gipsy to give up pursuit after about ten yards.

The two juniors met again at a gateway in the hedge, over which Wally climbed stiffly.



Pongo sprang suddenly out of the hedge and began barking at the horse. The horse reared, and the swarthy gipsy-looking man on the shafts toppled backwards with a yell and rolled into the mud.

round, sprang up on the platform of the caravan. The next instant he was fumbling with the latch, endeavouring to open the door.

With a shout of rage the gipsy saw his chance. The whip was still near him, and he picked it up in a flash. Then came a few seconds which Dudley was long in forgetting.

Quite beside himself, the man lashed the junior as he stood on the small platform before the caravan door, and with his hands engaged in attempting to open the door, Dudley was incapable of defending himself.

Time after time the lash curled about his legs and body, causing him the most intense pain; but Dudley stuck to his task.

The door seemed to have caught in some manner, and try as he would Dudley could not get it open. The whole thing could not have lasted more than a few seconds, for at the end of that time Dudley suddenly sprang forward, got his shoulder to the door, sending it inward, badly splintering it.

"Pongo!" he gasped. "Come on, boy!"

And the mongrel responded to the call in a flash, the little fellow and Dudley springing down into the road together.

"Pretty warm, that!" he grinned. "How did you get Pongo free?"

"Opened the door!"

"Good man! What was the gypso doing while you were at it, though?"

"Taking some exercise with his beastly whip," said Dudley. "However, Pongo's all right, and that's the main thing. I'm glad we've got Pongo out of the brute's hands!"

"Glad you did, you mean. Jolly ripping of you, Dud, and I'm sorry I couldn't help. The beggar caught me one. I say, I shall have to hurry if I'm to get this letter off and back again in time for tea."

"Oh, we shall do it!" said Dudley. "Look here, I want to call somewhere. Suppose you go down to the town and I wait here for you after I've made my call?"

"Why can't you come on down with me and make the giddy call on your way back? How long will the call last?"

"Not long, but—"

"Then mine is the wheeze," said Wally. "That is, if it doesn't make any difference to you?"

"No, it doesn't make any difference, only—well, that doesn't matter. I'll call as I come back, then!"

And Dudley was unusually silent during the rest of the way to the post office, a fact which Wally failed to notice. He could always do talking enough for two.

CHAPTER 6.

A Question of Precedence!

"WALLY—Wally, you young wascal!"

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet. It was about fifteen seconds after Wally had left Study No. 6 on his way to the post office, and the eagerness of the swell of the School House to call him back staggered the others.

"Sit down, Gus," observed Tom Merry—"sit down and cool!"

"Wally! Call the young wascal back, Mannahs! Wally, come!"

"Oh, sit down!" said Jack Blake, yanking Arthur Augustus back into his seat. "That's all right; if you have forgotten to cross a 't' it doesn't matter. The Wanderers' secretary won't be able to read your scrawl, in any case."

"I wefuse to have my handwitin' chawactewised as a scwal, Blake! Figgins, deah boy, wun aftah Wally and tell him—"

"You wish to dot an 'i'?" suggested the head of Figgins & Co. "Yes, certainly—I don't think!"

"Was there anything wrong with the letter—the address, or anything like that?" asked Jack Blake, springing up. "If—"

"There was nothin' wong with the lettah, deah boy; but I wish to wemonstwah with Wally. If you persist in wefusin' to call him back, I shall weally have to wegard your action—"

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"Oh, ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off—"

"Then wring your own neck instead!" suggested Lowther, the humorist. "We can't waste valuable time because you refuse to ring off. You are a silly ass, Gus, and there's no getting away from it!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and looked at Lowther. The action was reflective and chilling until Lowther solemnly winked, then Blake laughed.

"Anyway, I don't see what you've got to sit on Wally this time for," he said. "I know he's as cheeky as a wagon-load of monkeys; but then, he always was—and always will be. Fancy a young beggar from the Third daring to pretend that he took the chair at a meeting of Fourth-Formers and Shellfish!"

"I did not wish to wemonstwah with Wally because of his cheek," said Arthur Augustus coldly. "I wished to wemonstwah with him on quite anothah mattah, deah boy."

"Oh! About Dudley?"

"Yaas, wathah, about the wastah of the Third, you know. I considah, as an eldah bwothah, that Wally—"

"Well, why didn't you considah all that when he was here?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because the mattah slipped my mind—"

"Yes, it would!"

"Sure your mind didn't slip its cable instead?" asked Lowther. "It might have, Gus!"

"I considah you a silly ass, Lowthah, and I considah Jack Blake and Tom Mewwy also silly asses. As I said, the mattah slipped my mind, and now you have pwvented me callin' the young wascal back. I have been lookin' for him all the aftahnoon, and when I discovah him—"

"The mattah slips your mind—exactly!" laughed Tom Merry. "Let it slip the mind again, so that we can get on with the washing, Gus; you'll be able to kick him when he comes back. Though, mind you, old chap, I'm with you when it comes to nipping this matter in the bud. Dudley is a waster, as everyone knows who has ever thought about him, and a waster is exactly what young Wally is not. Still, that will keep for half an hour."

"I considah—"

"Yes, and if you will consider in silence, you'll find you'll get on quite as well, and we a hundred times better. Now, look here, Blake! My proposal is that we at once form a committee to run this Rugby game. There is an awful lot to do—"

"If you left the matter entirely to me, old man—"

"I should be an ass, shouldn't I? No, a committee is the idea, and as we fellows started the wheeze, I reckon we needn't have anyone else to help us in the selection. What do you say, Skimpole?"

"That, perhaps, under the circumstances, it would be advantageous if—"

"Exactly! You see, Skimmy is with me, which shows that he is only partially insane. Now, who is to be on the committee? The fewer the better!"

"Jack Blake!" shouted Digby and Herries.

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Figgins!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Yes, Figgins," said Wynn, who was usually a trifle late in most things. "I vote for Figgins—"

"And Tom Merry," said Manners and Lowther.

There was a pause, which Tom Merry broke with a laugh. "Of course, it would be ripping if we could elect all the lot of us," he said; "but it would be too much of a crush. Still, three isn't many. Suppose we decide on five?"

"Well, that's all right."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "I pwpose that I be elected—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Yaas, wathah! Wuggah is a game—"

"You don't say so!" said Lowther scornfully. "A game, is it?"

"Well, as no one is proposed," exclaimed Jack Blake, "I propose D'Arcy has it."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry. "He's a harmless sort of ass!"

"He's an ass all right, but I don't know about being harmless. Still, he ought to be selected seeing he wrote the letter."

"Heah, heah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I disagwee with a lot of Lowthah's wemarks, but—heah, heah!—I wegard your twyin' to cw y me down, Mannahs, as beastly bad form!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I considah—"

"D'Arcy has it," announced Jack Blake. "Now for the fifth man. What price Skimpole?"

"Twopence," said Tom Merry, "and jolly dear! Who says Skimpole?"

"Really, Merry," began the brainy man of the Shell, "really, I must refuse to sit—"
 "Stand, then. I'll use your chair for putting my feet on. Those in favour of Skimpole?"

"Merry, I must insist that my name be withdrawn, as I have no knowledge whatever of the game, and because—"

"Skimpole is elected nem. con. Oh, shut up, Skimmy! You and Gus are like cackling hens."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The first committee meeting takes place at once," said Figgins. "Clear out, you other asses!"

"Here—"
 "I'll see you—"

"So long, and shut the door!" said Figgins coolly. "Turn the idiots out, Blake!"

"Of all the blessed cheek!" gasped Digby. "And after we've put them on the committee, too!"

"Out you go, my son! Good-bye, Herries! What's that? You want to punch my head? There's no time. Punch Digby's instead!"

"Yaas, deah boy, you have my permish!" said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"I look upon your objecting to leave this room after the committee have respectfully requested you to withdraw," began Skimpole severely, "as a breach—"

"Don't waste words on them," interrupted Figgins. "Hoof 'em out if there's any arguing. Like their cheek not going when we told them!"

The other six withdrew, stopping a few moments in the doorway to express their opinions on the matter. Then the door was slammed.

"Good!" grinned Tom Merry. "Nothing like a firm hand, unless it's a thick head. Speech, Blake! Now, as I happen to be sitting at the top of the table, I propose that I be duly elected to the chair."

The others stared at him.

"Good! That being settled, I propose that we get on with the washing. I suppose Gus is to go on with the secretarial work?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

"Good! All you have to do now, Gus, is to keep your mouth closed and take notes!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, weally. Now, what about Skimmy playing the part of treasurer?"

"Yes."

"Good idea!"

"But really," said Skimpole, "I cannot conceive why I was chosen to sit on this committee. As you know, I take life too seriously to trouble about games, and though I can understand my advice on committees is of great value, still—"

"Oh, it wasn't for your advice we selected you!" laughed Tom Merry. "It was because we couldn't have selected any of the others without raising Cain amongst those who were left out. Everyone looks upon you as an ass, Skimmy, and so there was no jealousy. You don't mind my mentioning it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as wathah funnay!"

"And it was the same with them. Now, the most important point of the whole thing is the election of the captain."

The chairman glanced round the room. There was a dead silence—a solid, determined sort of silence, and it did not look like being broken. Tom Merry coughed.

"Ahem! Although I say it—"

His words tailed off. Even the head of the Terrible Three had not the courage of his convictions, in the face of that steady stare. The silence was continued.

"Perhaps a secret ballot is the correct thing?" suggested the chairman, after a bit. "Those in favour?"

They were all in favour. Arthur Augustus began tearing a sheet of foolscap into five pieces.

"Write distinctly, deah boys," he said, "because as secwewaw I shall have to wead the names. There must be no altewawtions, you know. Should a mistake be made, wequest that anothah votin' papah be given you, and—"

"Ring off, Gus! Have you all got papers?"

They had. They all turned to look at Skimpole, who was slowly tearing up his slip.

"Not knowing the respective merits of the other candidates, and feeling that I myself am not qualified for the post, having never played the game of Rugby, I must decline to vote," said the brainy man of the Shell. "No, Merry, it is useless your winking, and I do not understand your signs, Figgins."

Figgins and the chairman blushed, and Jack Blake looked indignant.

(Continued on the next page.)



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GIVE HIM A CHANCE!

Judge (to Irishman): "Guilty or not guilty?"

Irishman: "How should Oi know, your honour, till Oi've heard the ividence?"

G. CHURCH, 19, Mill Crescent, Tonbridge, Kent.

WATERY!

Customer (to milkman): "This milk has got water in it!"
 Milkman: "Oh, no, sir! This milk is just as it came from the cow!"

Customer: "Then the cow must have grazed near the river!"
 CHARLES HARRIS, 42, Argyle Road, Custom House, E.16.

A LONG WAIT!

Diner: "Hi, waiter, when's my soup coming? I've been waiting ten minutes!"

Waiter: "That's nothing, sir. I've been waiting here for ten years!"

GORDON SMITH, Rozelle, 13, Northridge Road, Gravesend, Kent.

SLIPPERY!

Lady (to errand boy): "What has become of the lard and butter I ordered?"

Errand Boy: "They was so greasy, please, mum, that they slipped my mind!"

FRED TOWNSHEND, 18, Alfred Street, St. Helens, Lancs.

A THOROUGH SEARCH!

Pat and Jock were camping out in India for the first time, and they had to put their heads under the clothes to avoid the mosquitoes.

Pat put his head out and saw a firefly.

"It's no use, Jock," he said. "Here's one of those mosquitoes looking for us with a lantern!"

LESLIE FAWDRY, Strathmore, Pemberton Street, Booval, Queensland, Australia.

A SOFT ANSWER!

Customer (in tea-shop): "There is not much wrong with your service, but this egg—"

Waitress: "Sorry, sir; but I only laid the table!"

ARCHIE ALDERMAN, Winterbourne Stoke, nr. Salisbury, Wilts.

THE HERO!

Mother: "It was very brave of you to save a little boy who had fallen through the ice. Who was it, Tommy?"

Tommy: "Me!"

G. HEATLEY, 360, Coventry Road, Wesleyan Chapel, Chapel House, Small Heath, Birmingham, 10.

HOT ON THE SCENT!

Maid: "Please, mum, the gorgonzola cheese has run out!"

Old Lady: "Then why don't you run after it?"

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"You ought to vote, Herbert," he said, almost affectionately. "You really ought to vote, if only to punish Figgins and Merry for attempting bribery and corruption."

"My mind is made up, Blake."

"But, Bertie—"

"No, Blake, I must decline to vote."

"Then I can't see why we were asses enough to elect a wooden-headed idiot like you on committee!" said the leader of the Fourth Form tersely. "Your proper place is in a padded room. I say, Gus," he added, in a whisper, "it ought to be all right, though. There are two of us study fellows in the room. For the honour of the study, you know."

And he, too, winked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "For the honah of the study!"

And he returned the wink, losing his monocle in the effort. Then each of the members of the Rugby committee began scribbling on the voting papers, and when finished folded them up in neat, deliberate fashion.

"Drop them in that camera case," said Tom Merry. "Haven't you finished, Gus?"

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"Throw it amongst the rest, then. Now shuffle them up so that the secrecy of the ballot is maintained—good word that!—and let us know the verdict."

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancy I know who is the winnah, though!"

"Dry up! Get on with the washing!"

Arthur Augustus bowed, and solemnly unfolded the first slip of paper which came to his hand.

"Blake!" he read aloud.

"Ah! Me, eh?" said the leader of Study No. 6 of the School House, starting a little. "Fire ahead, Gus, old man!"

"Yaas, wathah! Figgins!"

"Figgins!" exclaimed Blake, looking surprised. "Sure it says Figgins!"

"Why shouldn't it say Figgins?" demanded that junior. "I'd like to know if there is a better fellow in this room to captain the team than myself, although I say it."

"Yes, you are about the only one who would say it, aren't you, Figg?" Let her rip, Gus!"

"The next papah is for Tom Mewwy, deah boys!"

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes, and a rattling sensible vote, too!" said the chairman heartily. "If you'd all have shown as much sense as that voter—What are you grinning at, Blake?"

"Nothing," said Jack Blake; but he grinned all the more.

There was only one more voting paper in the camera case, and, knowing what he knew, the leader of the School House juniors could have declared the winner before the vote was open. It was all right now. Study No. 6 would supply the captain. Jack Blake watched Arthur Augustus unroll the slip, with a bored expression.

"Who has it?"

"Well, undah the cires, Tom Mewwy—"

"Who has it, ass? Never mind about the cires. Is it I?"

"Well, I wathah think—"

"Look here!" exclaimed Figgins aggressively. "What we want to know is what name is on that paper?"

"I am afraid there has been a collusion," said Skimpole.

"It seems to me—"

"What name is on that paper, D'Arcy?"

"The name on that papah, deah boy, is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," said the swell of the School House coolly, "and weally I must say I am wathah surprised that the name did not appeah before—"

"D'Arcy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"That ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"That dummy—"

"Rot!" exclaimed Figgins. "What rot—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"What D'Arcy has said is quite correct," put in Skimpole severely, "and I regret to say that it seems to me the handwriting—"

"Shut up, Skimmy!" said Figgins, Merry, and Blake in one voice, and with one grab they seized what they took to be their respective voting papers.

However, it happened that each got someone else's paper, and in the next instant Tom Merry knew that Figgins had voted firmly for Figgins, while it dawned upon Jack Blake that Tom Merry had plumped for himself, and Figgins was just going to tax Jack Blake with also having voted for himself, when Tom Merry hastily gave a turn to the conversation.

"It seems to me that we all had one vote each, which is—er—curious."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, ring off! And so I, as chairman, have to decide the matter with my casting vote."

"Your casting what?"

"Casting vote, Blake."

"I don't think! Gussy, you ought to have your head punched!"

"Blake, I wegard an expression like that as diswespctful, and must wequest—"

"Well, what is to be done?" asked Figgins. "I refuse to agree to Merry having a casting vote, for one."

"I should just think so!"

"Why?" asked Tom Merry innocently. "Surely you don't think—"

"No, we don't think—we're certain! Your giddy conscience wouldn't let you vote for anyone but yourself. What is it, Skimpole?"

"As a committee man I wish to offer a suggestion," said Skimpole. "I take little interest in your games, and none whatever in Rugby, which I consider both rough and brutal—"

"Beastly wuff, deah boy!"

"Never mind what you consider; let's have the suggestion!"

"I propose that you four toss up for the captaincy."

"What do you say, Merry?"

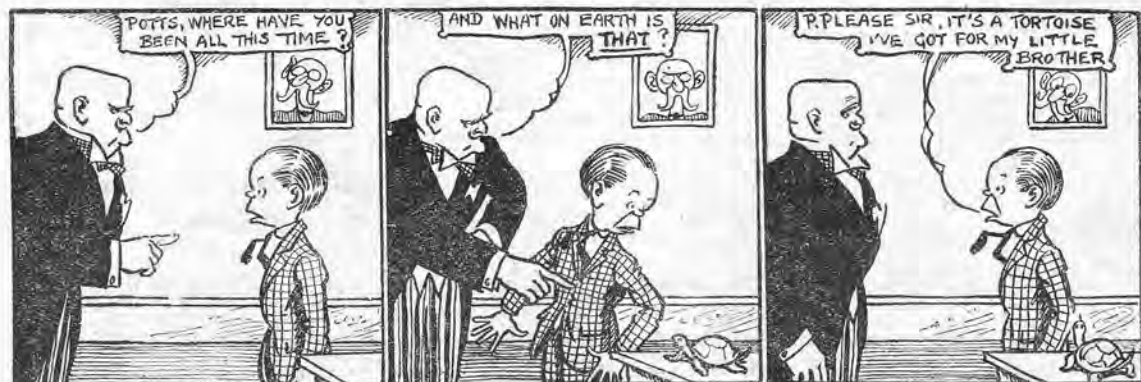
"Well, as chairman, I really ought to have the casting vote. Otherwise, what is the use of a chairman?"

"None, whatever," said Blake. "I'm agreeable if you others are."

Figgins said he wasn't, and Tom Merry was over-ruled.

"Of course, you haven't a casting vote," said Figgins indignantly. "You ought to think yourself lucky that you haven't been cast out of the study as it is. Odd man out, then!"

Potts, the Office Boy!



CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus Fails!

"TAILS, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think—"
 "Heads!" sang out the other three, and Jack Blake laughed.

"Serve you right, Gus, for being an ass! You're out of it!"

"So I am. Well, weally, it doesn't mattah a gweat deal, because I have suddenly wemembahed that I could not play undah any cires next Saturday."

"Can't play?"

"No, wathah not! I'm expectin' an invite to a party at Cleveland Lodge, and—"

"Then why on earth didn't you think of that before?" said Jack Blake. "If you had—oh, you ought to be boiled in oil! Heads, Merry!"

"So am I!"

"Tails!" growled Figgins, and he also retired from the contest.

"Shall I toss?" laughed Tom Merry, and the other nodded, calling tails.

"Then you have lost," laughed Tom Merry, "and the Rugger fifteen has the very best captain—ahem!"

Jack Blake grinned ruefully, but it never occurred to him to take the trouble to glance at the coin as it lay on the further end of the table out of sight amongst the plates. The rivalry between the leaders of the Shell and the Fourth was as healthy as it was pronounced, and it would have occurred to Blake to suspect Tom Merry of underhand dealing just about the time it would have occurred to Tom Merry to practise them, which times had certainly not yet come to pass.

"Anyway, good luck to the fifteen, Merry!" said Blake, pouring out a glass of lemonade. "Here's to a ripping game and to a win for the first Rugger match at St. Jim's. You can rely on Study No. 6 if you want any of us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rather!" said Figgins. "Just let me know if you want any of the New House fellows to play. They'll be ready."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We'll try to make a decent show somehow, though form will be something of a prize packet. I suppose you really have played, Blake?"

"A little," said Jack, grinning. "So has Figgins, haven't you?"

"I know the rules," admitted Figgins, with unusual modesty. "But I'm not what you'd call a brilliant player. Fatty here can give 'em as good Rugger as they can give us, can't you, Fatty?"

"I'll do my best," said Fatty Wynn modestly.

"I must wetiah and meet Wally," said Arthur Augustus, rising from the table. "I nevah thought of that, you know. It is weally the vewy thing, because if I meet him as he comes up from the village, he can't vewy well wun away or dodge me, bai Jove!"

"Oh, can't he?" laughed Tom Merry, as the swell of St. Jim's began putting on his overcoat. "He could roll you in the mud, though, couldn't he?"

"My youngah bwothah will, I hope, show pwopah wespect to me," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Oh, you can cut! I don't see that we can do anything more than we have done about this Rugger game until we are certain the match is on. I'll let all you fellows know when the next meeting is, which will be when the answer to Gussy's letter arrives. So long!"

"There's Kildare! You'd better ask him for a permit in case you are late for tea. Spruit!"

"Yaas, wathah; good idea, deah boy!"

And the swell of St. Jim's pelted off as hard as he could run.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, heard him coming, and stopped, with a laugh.

"Hallo, youngster, where do you think you are off to this time?"

"I want to meet my bwothah Wally."

"But you can't! He has gone into the village, and you would be late for tea!"

"That does not mattah in the least, deah boy, because I have had tea. I want to see Wally on important biz, and if you would give me permish to cut tea, I'd be awfully obliged."

Kildare looked at the junior curiously. The St. Jim's captain had made rather a study of Arthur Augustus, and saw a great deal in him which escaped less experienced eyes. He saw now that something was worrying the swell of St. Jim's.

"Well, as a matter of fact, D'Arcy, I am going into the village myself," he said pleasantly. "If you would care to walk down with me until we meet your brother, it will be all right."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good, then!"

They walked out of the school and from the grounds in silence—an unusual state of affairs with Arthur Augustus present—and once again the captain glanced at his companion.

"Nothing the matter with young Wally, is there?"

"Well, as a mattah of fact there is."

"Anything serious?"

"No—no, I don't think so, deah boy!"

And Kildare could see that that was all D'Arcy was going to say on the matter.

Arthur Augustus felt that that was a distinct point of honour not to explain, although he had been ready enough to talk about the friendship Wally had shown for the waster of the Third, with his chums of Study No. 6, and Tom Merry & Co. But they were juniors, and that made all the difference.

The two walked along the muddy road, chatting about football. Presently Arthur Augustus peered ahead in the gathering gloom, a puzzled expression on his face.

"It is wathah stwange that we haven't met young Wally, Kildare," he said. "He ought to be coming back from the village by now, I considah."

"Perhaps the young rascal took to the fields?"

"Yaas! Is there anyone ahead, deah boy?"

They had almost gained the village of Rylcombe by now—in fact, were almost upon the cross-roads. It was just where the main road was intersected by a lane that Arthur Augustus thought he had caught sight of some figures.

"Yes, there was someone there, all right," agreed the captain of St. Jim's. "Looked like a couple of juniors to me; they turned down to the left."

"Then it can't be young Wally, because that woad doesn't lead to St. Jim's."

Kildare hurried forward. He gained the cross-road, and peered down the lane, then he laughed.

"It certainly looks like your brother, D'Arcy," he said, "though what on earth he's doing down there I can't say. Who's with him, by the way?"

SPEED!



"Dudley of the Third."

"Dudley?" exclaimed the captain, raising his eyebrows. "Humph!"

The fading light was much stronger in the lane than it had been in the main road, for there were no trees there to add to the shadows, and Kildare and D'Arcy could both see the Third Form boys distinctly as they plodded through the mud. Arthur Augustus would have turned to go back to St. Jim's, for he wished to see Wally alone; but before he could make his excuse to the captain, Kildare caught him by the arm.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "Where are those youngsters going?"

"Weally, I cannot say—"

Arthur Augustus stopped dead. His brother and Dudley were turning from the centre of the lane. Then they stopped before a dirty, red-brick house and peered both ways.

Kildare and his companion were well in the shade of the trees, and neither Wally nor Dudley saw them. They turned at right angles and deliberately walked through the open doorway of the dirty, red-brick building.

The place was a public-house—it was not countryfied enough to be honoured with the name of an inn—and was, in addition, held in bad repute even by the rough farm labourers of the district. In fact, the place was on the condemned list, and would cease to exist as a public-house at all when the next licensing committee sat at Rylcombe.

"They went into the public-house, D'Arcy!"

"But weally, Wally wouldn't entah—"

Kildare did not answer, but strode down the lane to the public-house, his lips set firmly. Arthur Augustus followed, but he did not speak again. There were times when it was not policy to argue with the captain of St. Jim's—times when it was as reckless as it was useless to attempt to turn him from the path he had decided to follow.

Arthur Augustus followed the captain without uttering a word.

The light was rapidly fading, and by now it was as dark and gloomy in the lane as it had previously been on the main road; but it was still just possible for the pair to distinguish a couple of figures leaving the public-house.

This was when Kildare was less than twenty yards from the place.

"D'Arcy!" cried the captain. "Dudley!"

Hardly had the words left his mouth than the two figures flashed across the lane, leapt the hedge together, and dashed off amongst the trees. The captain pushed forward, calling again.

"Come here, you boys! Stop!"

But no sound answered him, and Kildare hesitated. There were several courses open to him. He could attempt to follow the juniors, or he could make inquiries at the public-house; but somehow neither of these alternatives appealed to him.

"The ruffian has lost his licence already, and I shall only get lies from him," he thought; "and I stand about as much chance of catching the young rascals as I do of flying. D'Arcy, that was your brother?"

The last statement was half-statement, half-question.

"I don't know," said D'Arcy. "I didn't actually recognise Wally."

"Are you saying that to screen the young fool?"

Arthur Augustus turned and faced the captain of St. Jim's, his monocle screwed deep in his eye.

"I'm sorry, D'Arcy," said the captain quickly. "I didn't quite mean that."

"Don't mention it, deah boy. As a mattah of fact, I didn't recoginise eithah of the pair."

"But you think it was Wally and Dudley?"

Arthur Augustus thought in silence for a moment or two.

"Yaas," he said at last; "yaas, I wathah think I do!"

"Well, don't say a word about this, see; not until I give you permission."

Arthur Augustus hesitated. He felt about as uncomfortable as he had ever felt. He was not at his ease with Kildare, perhaps for the first time during his stay at St. Jim's.

Kildare saw that the junior wished to say something. He waited.

"Well, D'Arcy, what is it?"

"What are you going to do, deah boy, about the mattah? I mean, if the Head hears of it, young Wally stands a chance of gettin' sacked, and as he is my youngah bwothah—"

Arthur Augustus stopped lamely, but the captain went on for him.

"And as he is your younger brother you would rather that did not come to pass, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you wouldn't have me hush the matter up in young
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Wally's case, if I should not do so for anyone else, I take it?"

Arthur Augustus thought for a moment or two.

"Undah the cires, I don't see that I can pwevent you, Kildare, though I suppose you ought to do what you considah the pwopah thing—"

"Yes," said Kildare quietly, placing his hand on the junior's shoulder. "You are a sportsman, D'Arcy, and to relieve your mind, I'm not going to report what we have just seen—at least, not till I have thrashed the matter out. A moment. Has your brother been with Dudley much lately?"

"Yaas, I am wathah afwaid he has."

"Ah! Then I think I know who is the principal offender. I shall speak to both of the youngsters myself."



"Yaas, wathah! And you have my permish, Kildare, to give young Wally a feahful thwashin'. I considah the uthah young ass deserves it!"

And Arthur Augustus began his walk back to St. Jim's, looking a good deal more thoughtful than usual.

CHAPTER 8.

Dudley Tears Up Some Lines!

"MY only Aunt Jane! I wonder if they saw us?" panted Wally.

"It looks as if they did, as they called out both our names. Who were they, do you think?"

"Kildare, for one. And I shouldn't be surprised if the other was my young ass of a brother, Gus. Pretty narrow squeak, wasn't it?"

"If they saw us," said Dudley quietly, "they might as well have caught us. I mean, it will be reported to the Head, and then the fat will be in the fire. I've brought you in for something this time, Wally!"

"Not you," said the scallywag of the Third Form cheerfully. "Besides, if I remember, you advised me not to go into the beastly public-house. I've landed myself, as a matter of fact, and you have landed yourself. The point now is, how are we to get out of it?"

"I shall explain as soon as the row comes on."

Wally whistled coolly to himself.

"No, you can't do that," he said at last, turning to the other. "If you start explaining, Dud, there'll be the very dickens of a flare-up. I expect you'd get sacked if you did. No, my son, the game is to lie low and say nothing!"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, we can tell the Head we didn't go into the public-house for a drink or for tobacco, or for anything else he'd get his back up about, and then we can refuse to say any-



The man lashed at Dudley as he stood on the platform before the caravan door, striving in vain to open it, and rescue Pongo. Time after time the lash curled round his legs and body, but Dudley stuck to his task.

thing else. As racks and thumb-screws are considered bad form nowadays, even the Head can't make a fellow speak if he's made up his mind not to."

"The Head won't believe us—about not going in for tobacco or anything of that sort."

"The Head will believe me," said Wally, looking up.

Dudley coloured. He knew well enough that very few of the masters with whom he had come into contact would believe him, and because the big Third-Former was no fool, he did not blame the masters. Dudley was ready to admit that it was a fellow's own fault if his word of honour was not taken after he had been found out in lies of various sorts.

The two juniors walked on in silence for a few minutes, then Dudley spoke again.

"I say, your brother knew you were out, Wally?"

"Of course. I came out to post a letter for him."

"Then, perhaps, he and Kildare guessed who we were and never really saw us. Kildare saw me leave the school earlier this afternoon, I know."

"My hat, yes, that may have been it! The captain only

called us by our name once, and because we did not stop he may think he made a mistake. It was jolly dark, too."

"We couldn't recognise them, and so it's likely enough they didn't recognise us. Anyway, it's a chance."

"Yes. Still, I don't see what good it will do us, Dud."

"Why, man, we needn't say anything about it!"

"No, of course we needn't—until Kildare romps in one of his straight questions and asks us outright if we were the fellows. When Kildare asks a straight question, you have to give a straight answer, and jolly quick. There's no beating about the bush and talking of the weather, or pretending to be deaf with the skipper."

Again the elder junior looked queerly at Wally, then he shrugged his shoulders.

"No, you're right!" he growled. "There's no way out of it on that tack. My idea wouldn't work!"

"Then it's a case of lying low and saying nothing," laughed Wally. "I shall enjoy it if Selby is the man Kildare reports to. I say, I believe that brute of a gipsy knocked you about. You are limping no end!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

The two juniors hurried on now, for they had not much time to spare if they wished to gain the school in time to escape an imposition, and they hardly spoke again until they were once more within the walls of St. Jim's.

"Another five minutes, and there would have been a row," grinned Wally. "Where are you off to?"

"I've got something I want to do!"

"Right-ho, then! Remember, we're lying low and saying nothing is the game. See you later, old man!"

And as Wally walked coolly towards Study No. 6 Dudley turned and almost ran towards the Third Form classroom.

The great room was almost in darkness. The gas had been turned low. But there was light enough for Dudley's purpose. He opened his desk, and began rummaging amongst the untidy papers and exercise-books it contained.

A few minutes later he hauled out some sheets of foolscap, closely written and signed at the bottom with Mr. Selby's signature. Dudley glanced at the sheets. They were intact, and numbered exactly five hundred lines.

Then the junior tore them slowly across the middle and threw the halves into the wastepaper basket, and sauntered from the class-room again.

"There'll be time to do some of Selby's lines after prep," he mused. "That is, if I buck up."

And he went in to tea, a little puzzled at his own action.

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry's Telegram.

"HALLO, Taggles!" sang out Tom Merry. "It is Taggles, I suppose, and not another nightmare?"

"Which it are not, Master Merry," said the porter, entering the dormitory where the fellows were dressing the following morning. "I 'ave a telegram for you!"

"For me—eh? Good egg! I say, Monty, perhaps it's another invitation to uncle's ranch at the other side of the Rockies! My hat!"

"What's up?"

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, waving the telegraph-form in the air. "There's no answer, Taggles. Kids, the Rugger match is on!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really," grinned the chief of the Terrible Three.

"The Wanderers sec says they will be delighted to play us, and will be on the ground in time to kick-off at two-thirty Saturday next. Ripping, I call it! Aren't those my braces, Manners?"

"So they are. What's the hurry, though?"

"I must get my fifteen as soon as possible. Why, we should be massacred if we went on to the field in the raw state! What we want is practice."

"Yes; and it wouldn't be a bad idea if we got permission from the Head to play the match, would it?" said Manners. "I consider that ought to have been done first."

"Not much; but I'll set your mind at rest now, though. I'll tackle Dr. Holmes just as soon as he is down this morning."

It was some time since rising-bell had awakened the Shell, and so, in any case, they would have to hurry their respective toilets along. However, on this occasion there was a double incentive, and when Tom Merry found himself in the corridor there was still twenty minutes to go before he would be required to attend call-over.

"Good!" thought the Rugger captain. "Now, I wonder if the Head is down yet? Soon settle that question, anyway!"

He pelted along the passage until he came to Dr. Holmes' THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,304.

room, then, as a cheery invitation to come in answered his knock, he obeyed politely.

Five minutes later he came out grinning, and absent-minded for once in his way—so absent-minded that he ran violently into Kildare's chest.

Tom Merry rolled off the sturdy form of the captain of St. Jim's gasping.

"My hat, Kildare, you might look where you are going! I say, do you play Rugger?"

"Eh? Rugger! What on earth made you ask that?"

"Oh, only because St. Jim's are playing the Wanderers next Saturday," said the junior coolly. "I want to get the best fifteen I can against them, and someone told me you were a ripper at the game."

"The Wanderers! What in the name of goodness are you talking about, youngster?" exclaimed the captain, looking puzzled. "We aren't playing the Wanderers."

"Excuse me, Kildare, but you are a trifle behind the times—you are what Gussy would call a 'back numbah.' We are playing the Wanderers, and it is our modest intention to put them through it, my boy!"

"But—"

"Oh, I can't stay here arguing all day, because I've the team to rake up! The fact remains that some weak-kneed seniors—no names mentioned—funked meeting the Wanderers just because St. Jim's happened to be a Soccer school. The fellows of the Lower Forms thought differently on the matter, and so took the matter out of the aforementioned weak-kneed specimens' hands, and the Rugger match is very much on. But I must go now—"

"No, you don't!" said Kildare quickly. "What do you mean by the match being on? The Head—"

"He has just been discussing details with me, old man," said Tom Merry coolly. "Everything is arranged, but as yet I cannot give you any details. If you play the game and would care to have your name entered as a 'possible,' say so."

"I don't understand a word of what you are saying, but, of course, I shall be pleased to play if the Head has decided—"

"The Head," said Tom Merry severely—"Dr. Holmes has wisely decided to leave everything in my hands. Where do you play?"

"Three-quarter; but—"

"Three-quarter; Kildare, three-quarter. I'll let you know whether you are selected or not later on. So long!"

And the Shell junior ran off before Kildare had recovered from his surprise.

The next fellow the Rugby captain met was Arthur Augustus, who looked as if he had not slept well.

"Hallo, Gussy! Still at large, then? I say, the Rugger match is on all right!"

"The Wuggah match! Ah, the Wandewahs have accepted our proposals, then, deah boy?"

"Of course they have! Do you or do you not play the game, Gus?"

"Yaas, I should wathah think I do! I considah I am somethin' of a dab at Wuggah, Mewwy!"

"Hum! Is there any reliable information knocking about as to what unbiased people consider on the matter? Still, if you play I may as well put your name down."

"Impos, deah boy! I wegwet that I shall be unable to help you in the match, as I wathah expect to receive an invitation to a party at Cleveland Lodge for Saturday, and, undah the cires—"

"Oh, never mind the cires! You'll play, kid, if you're good enough, but it's about a thousand to one you aren't, so don't worry about it!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, weally. Now, where is Blake?"

"In our woom. I do not wish there to be a bweach in our friendship, Mewwy, but I must wegard your wemarks about my not bein' good enough as wank wot. Undah the cires, Mewwy—Tom Mewwy!"

But Tom Merry was gone.

The news the telegram had brought to St. Jim's was received in Study No. 6 with loud applause and enthusiasm. "Ripping!" exclaimed Blake. "Topping! Must say that my idea of accepting the challenge was—well, quite up to the mark—"

"Yes," said Tom Merry pointedly, "it would have been if the idea had been yours. But to come to the point. How many of you kids play the game?"

The three Fourth-Formers looked at one another, and after a moment or two Jack Blake winked slightly. It took another moment or two for Herries and Digby to understand, then they winked back.

As a matter of fact, Jack Blake, after due consideration, and even before, had come to the conclusion that a great

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mistake had been made in the choice of captain, and the breasts of Herries and Digby still rankled at the instances of decided mental aberration, which had been the cause of excluding them from the newly formed Rugby committee. From that foundation it was by the simplest of reasoning that the chums of Study No. 6 came to the conclusion that Tom Merry was suffering from a swelled head.

After that it was wonderful that Blake's unspoken idea should communicate itself to the others through a no more expressive channel than one solitary wink.

"How many of you play?" repeated Tom Merry. "Don't all speak at once, please! I know you do, Blake."

"I'm not a star at the game, old man; nothing like yourself, you know."

"Eh?"

"Yes. I can kick a Rugger ball, and I know the offside rule and how to barge a three-quarter into touch. I once scored a try when the other side were three short."

"Whom do you play at home?" asked Tom Merry suspiciously.

"Only a potty little team. Put me down for three-quarter. Digby and Herries are both forwards."

"We're not brilliant, either of us," said Herries. "In fact, compared with you, Merry—"

"What's that?"

"Compared with you, old man, I expect to be something of a rabbit!"

"Yes," said Digby. "I personally hardly like playing with you, Merry. To tell you the solemn truth, I—I hardly like even having my name put down on the same page of your notebook!"

Tom Merry glanced at him sharply, but Digby's face wore an expression which was the essence of innocence.

"Well, it's sporting of you to tell me what to expect, Dig," he said coolly. "I half suspected you of being a rabbit before. Anyway, I shall soon be able to drop on the right fellows after we've had a practice or two. I'm sending Binks down for a Rugger ball as soon as I can drop on him."

"Good kid! Will there be a punt-about this afternoon?"

"Yes, rather! I say, though, did it freeze last night?"

"Let me see. Yes, I should say it did."

"It did," said Herries. "The puddles were covered with ice when I went down to feed Towser just now."

"Then there won't be a punt-about, after all," said Tom Merry disappointedly.

"Dr. Holmes only gave his permission for the Rugger match on the understanding that we didn't play if the ground was frozen. Seems he knows a bit about the handling game, doesn't it? Still, there's plenty of time till Saturday."

"Yes, of course. Where are you off to now?"

"To hunt up Figgins & Co."

And he hurried off towards the gym, where he rightly guessed Figgins & Co., of New House fame, were to be found.

The long-limbed Figgins greeted the Shell leader cheerily. "Cheerio-ho! We were just coming over to the School House to see you. Has an answer to Gussy's letter come?"

"Yes, and the game is on."

"That's the style! Getting the team?"

"Well, I'm jotting down the 'possibles,' old man, and I can tell you it is no easy work."

"Ah! If I had been elected— But fire away!"

"Yes; and a fat lot more you could have done than I have already done myself!" said Tom Merry indignantly.

"Here I have slaved away. Do you think I can help Blake and his rotten set being muffs at the game?"

"Muffs? Jack Blake a muff at Rugger?"

"Well, that's what he led me to believe—all three of them, in fact, kept on saying something silly about not being good as I am. What are you grinning at, Figgins?"

"Grinning! Who was grinning?"

"You were!"

"Was I? Still, I can quite understand Blake saying he wasn't to be compared with you at the game, Merry."

"What on earth for? None of you have ever seen me play."

"No—no, it's a fact we haven't. Still, we've heard you talk, old chap!"

"Heard me talk?"

"Of course, in your case we know it wasn't swank; but—"

"Swank!" exclaimed Tom Merry, closing his notebook with a snap. "You've heard me talk! Why, I don't believe I have said a word about actual play since I mooted the idea! If you are trying to be funny, Figgins— But no more rotting! Can you play?"

"I know the rules, but, as I said before, Merry, I'm not a dab at the game!"

"I know you are not!"

"And he isn't a Merry!" said Kerr thoughtfully.

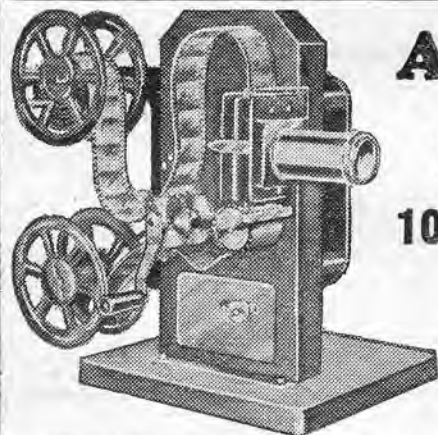
"Hullo! You still about, Kerr? Do you play?"
 "Yes, old chap!"
 "What about Wynn? But I needn't ask whether a Welshman plays Rugger."
 "Oh, he plays, only he's a bit run down just now," grinned Figgins. "He never seems to get enough to eat—do you, Fatty?"
 "Well, I certainly consider another meal a day wouldn't hurt anyone, especially in this February weather. Still, don't put me in the fifteen if you can get anyone better, Merry."
 "Don't you let that chance worry you! Forward, I suppose? You've got some weight, anyway."
 "Well, I admit I weigh a bit."
 "But not more than a ton, eh? I'm afraid there won't be a practice to-day on account of the frost, but to-morrow we'll all turn out right enough."
 "Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "Then you must take us in hand, Merry, and coach us. Did you play for your county last season?"
 "Do you pretend to be a silly ass, or are you only one by nature?" asked Merry, after a moment's thought.
 "You're a success either way, Figgins!"
 And he left the gymnasium, trying to call to mind some cause which would explain the manner in which his team-mate had answered his invitation to play.
 "It's not like 'em to be modest," he mused.

CHAPTER 10. Kildare Makes Inquiries.

"H A, ha, ha!" chuckled Figgins, as Tom Merry disappeared. "Hear me smile, Kerr! Ha, ha, ha!"
 "But what's the joke?" demanded the Scottish partner in the famous firm of Figgins & Co.
 "Oh, it's some rag Blake and his set have got up," returned Figgins, "and it isn't up to New House fellows to spoil a rag! It certainly did get his wool off, didn't it?"
 "It looked like it!"
 "Then I vote we pass it along to Lowther and Manners—they'll be game enough for anything after the way Merry turned them out of the committee-room. I'll slip off at once and find Manners, and we can get full particulars of the

wheeze from Blake later on. I— Hullo, Kildare! Don't say it's me you want!"
 "Is young D'Arcy in here?"
 "Wally? No, he hasn't been here yet."
 "Dudley of the Third, then?"
 Figgins looked up before replying. Why should Kildare want Wally, and if not Wally, Dudley of all fellows? Figgins remembered what Arthur Augustus had said about his young brother the previous night, and the chief of the New House juniors began to wonder. There seemed to be some link, then, between the scallywag and the waster of the Third, after all.
 "Have you seen either of them, Figgins?"
 "I'm sorry—no, Kildare, I haven't; they haven't been here."
 Kildare nodded, and walked off briskly. He went into the School House, looked in at Study No. 6, then went down to the Third Form class-room. Neither Wally nor Dudley were there, and with a frown Kildare turned into the corridor again. He almost ran into Arthur Augustus.
 "Ah, D'Arcy! Where is your brother?"
 "Bothahed if I know, deah boy; I am lookin' for him myself!"
 "Did you see him last night?"
 "Not to speak to, and—"
 "I am glad of that—I want to drop on him suddenly."
 "Hullo!" exclaimed a cheery voice from behind them.
 "Who is that you want to drop on suddenly, if I may ask? Not Mr. Selby, I hope?"
 And Wally sauntered up, his hands in his pocket and a rather more inky collar than usual round his neck.
 Arthur Augustus groaned at the sight of the collar and unconsciously turned away when he noticed that his brother had obviously overlooked doing his hair that morning. But Kildare did not notice that kind of thing.
 "I want to speak to you, kid," he said quietly. "Come into my room, please."
 "Right-ho! Any help I can give you about the footer? You look pretty solemn, Gus!"
 "I considah, Wally—"
 "Oh, then that, of course, accounts for it! Hard luck, Gus!"

(Continued on page 19.)



A WINNER WANTED for our Home Cinema Prize! 100 "Rigby" Model Planes for Runners-Up CLAIM NOW IF YOU Had 6 Errors or Less

HOW TO SEND YOUR CLAIM

ALL the entries in our recent "Home Cinema" Competition are now safely sealed up, so we here publish the correct solution.

If you entered, take the exact copy of your attempt and check it off carefully with the solution, which is published below. If you find that any attempt you sent contains six errors or less

you should send in a claim immediately. The details of your claim—simply a brief sentence stating the exact total of wrong words in your attempt, your name, initials, and town—must be clearly written IN INK on the back of a postcard. You should also write the number of errors in BOLD FIGURES in the top right-hand corner of the card. Then post your claim early to:

GEM "Home Cinema" Claim,
5, Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

All claims in this competition must reach the address given not later than Wednesday, February 15th. No claims or correspondence received after that date will be considered. The closing date for entries was, of course, January 18th, and only claims in respect of entries received by us on or before that date will be valid.

NOTE.—Competitors must send in their claims on postcards, bearing in mind that their names, initials, and towns must tally exactly with those on the backs of the envelopes containing their efforts, and by which the entries will, of course, be identified.

THE CORRECT SOLUTION.

- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| 1. PAPER | 7. BAIL |
| 2. SHORTS | 8. SETTLE |
| 3. FLARE | 9. RENT |
| 4. CAT | 10. JACGED |
| 5. RETAIN | 11. PILE |
| 6. TIM | 12. BOAR |

INTERESTING ITEMS FROM—



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

HALLO, chums! Just let me tell you all about next week's ripping issue of the old paper. Martin Clifford has written another tip-top yarn of Tom Merry & Co., and I know you'll enjoy it.

"THE CALL OF THE SEA!"

is about a rather unusual new boy called Jim Raleigh who comes to St. Jim's against his will. He's the son of a sailor and as "tough as they make 'em," and he leads St. Jim's a pretty dance before the story's done!

Battler Bart Crewison will again be to the fore in another of Cecil Fanshawe's gripping yarns of South Seas adventure, which will supply you with thrills unlimited. Potts, our amazing office boy, will once more hand you a good laugh, there will be another page from my notebook, and another column of prize-winning jokes sent in by GEM readers.

By the way, let me call your attention to the solution of our recent Home Cinema competition which appears on page 17 of this issue. You will find there full particulars for claiming, that is if your entries had six errors or less.

A SHORT STORY!

Arthur Poulter is keen on billiards. Recently he played in the boys' championship. Arthur is eleven years old and only just a little bit over four feet high. At one time during the championship Arthur found that he could not reach the table properly. He looked round and spotted an attache case, so he took that and stood on it while he made his shot. Later he was left a shot which he could not reach even with the case, so he stood on a chair while Miss Gardner, the professional women's champion, held his legs! In the end Arthur was beaten, but he will have lots more chances when he grows older—and longer, so to speak! Good luck, Arthur!

AMY'S DISGUISE.

Mrs. Amy Mollison, better known as Amy Johnson, the famous English airwoman, created a new record the other day. She was at St. Moritz for the winter sports and she decided that she wanted a new kind of thrill. Further, she decided that she wanted to go down the famous Cresta Run, but there was a snag. Women are not now allowed to go down this run, as this dangerous course is considered too risky for the fair sex. Amy, however, saw a way of getting over that. She arrived at the top of the run, very early in the morning, dressed as a man! And when she got to the bottom she received the badge that everyone

gets when they have completed the descent. So Amy is the first woman—it is said—to go down the Cresta Run since women were forbidden to use it!

CUNNING REYNARD!

Reynard the fox showed what a cunning fellow he is the other day, at a meet of the Belvoir. The hounds were close behind him, chasing him along a course which ran parallel with a railway line. It looked odds on Reynard being caught. Suddenly a goods train appeared, and at the last moment Reynard bolted across the line, just getting clear before the engine passed. The result was that the hounds had to be headed off until the train had passed, and by that time Reynard was clear away!

SOME WALLOP!

Would you like to have a punch exerting a pressure of three million pounds? I reckon you'd soon be the world's champion boxer if you had, but I pity your opponents! This punch is possessed—no, not by Carnera, but by a new hydraulic hammer at South California University. This little hammer can break up slabs of concrete six foot thick as if they were pieces of glass!

THE INVISIBLE EYEGLASS!

The latest type of eyeglass will be a boon to all people who think that glasses spoil their looks. It is called the "corneal glass," and is a tiny little lens, shaped something like a saucer. It fits over the eyeball and under the eyelid, and is invisible except to the most careful scrutiny. I have reason to believe, however, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy does not favour this new idea as he considers that his present eyeglass adds to his "dig."

HEARD THIS ONE?

He was a new hand on a building job. He approached the foreman nervously.

"Please, sir," he said, "I don't feel well enough to carry bricks."

"What's the matter?" asked the foreman.

"I'm trembling all over, sir."

"Very well," said the foreman. "Get to work on the sieve!"

LUCK!

A Folkestone woman had an amazing experience the other day. She went from the garden into her house, and had just closed the back door when the whole of the roof slid off into the garden just where she

had been standing! Beat that for a narrow escape!

A NEW SORT OF THRILL!

Speedway riders become pretty used to the hair-raising thrills of the dirt track, but three English riders in Australia recently had a thrill of a rather different kind. Eric Langton, captain of the Belle Vue, Manchester team and a team mate, Eric Gregory, were bathing with Tiger Stevenson, the West Ham captain, and several other people, at Piha Beach, near Auckland. Gregory got swept out to sea and Stevenson and Langton went out after him. Langton succeeded in rescuing Gregory but Stevenson got into difficulties, and was eventually rescued by some fishermen. It is said that Tiger thinks that dirt track racing is quite "tame" compared with swimming—swimming in circumstances like that, anyway!

GOOD NEWS!

In the near future some boys and girls are going to be very lucky, for there is a big move on foot to use films for educational purposes. What could be nicer than going to school in the morning with the knowledge that instead of sitting on a bench with a book, while the teacher "does his stuff," you are going to sit and watch a film which, being a "talkie," is teacher and book all in one?

THE WHISTLING GIRL!

A small girl was playing with a whistle when she accidentally swallowed the reed. The reed got into her lung in such a way that when she breathed she made a whistling sound! A hospital was rung up and over the telephone an amazed doctor listened to her "whistling." Then she went to the hospital and they took the reed out. Now she doesn't whistle any more!

TOO YOUNG—BUT NOT FOR LONG!

Are you fellows keen to fly? Maybe some of you are and think that you will have to wait a long time. If so, you will be encouraged to hear of the case of Keith Potter. Keith is a sixteen-year-old school-boy crazy on flying, and during the holidays he has learnt to pilot a plane with the greatest of ease. Recently he took his first solo flight round the aerodrome—the novice's greatest and most thrilling test. He did all that was expected of him, but now he has to wait until he is seventeen before he can get his pilot's licence—that's the law.

ONE UP—AND TWO TO PLAY!

No, this isn't a golf story! The above is our position in the Test matches with Australia. On Friday the Fourth Test begins at Brisbane, and Jardine and his men will be all out to press home their advantage and make quite certain of bringing the "Ashes" back with them by winning the match. At the moment of writing our team is not definitely known, though we can trust our selectors to pick the best possible side. And, above all, we know that our men will be splendidly captained by Jardine. Here's hoping he makes a big score, but don't forget that if he doesn't score a single run in the last two Tests, he will still have been well worth his place as captain: for surely it is many years since England was so brilliantly led as the Surrey amateur is leading her now.

YOUR EDITOR.

HERO AND CAD!

(Continued from page 17.)

And the cheekiest fag of St. Jim's followed the captain into his study.

"Shut the door!" said Kildare briefly. "Sit down! Now, kid, I want to know what it all means?"

"Thanks, Kildare! No, this chair will do A1. What does all that mean, though?"

"Don't you know?"

Wally coughed.

"Ahem! I don't see that a fellow is bound to commit himself. In fact—"

"You can drop that, D'Arcy minor, and at once. This is a serious matter—a very serious matter—as you will very likely discover before very long. I want to know everything connected with a visit you and Dudley paid to a filthy, evil-smelling public-house yesterday afternoon. Out with it!"

"Well, but—"

"I may as well tell you at the beginning," said Kildare quietly, but with the kind of quietness which is more awe-inspiring than any outward anger. "I may as well tell you that unless you give me a voluntary account of your action, and one that is entirely satisfactory, I wash my hands of the whole affair, and the matter is reported to Dr. Holmes. I think you know what to expect then."

"A sporting chance of the sack, I suppose," said Wally, some of the jauntiness vanishing from his face. Still, he stuck to his guns. "You'd better report it right away," he added, "because I can't properly explain it, Kildare."

"Why can't you?"

Wally thought for a moment or two.

"I can't even tell you that. I didn't go into the rotten place for tobacco, or anything like that, anyway."

"What did you go in for then—not to play cards or games? You weren't in there long enough for anything like that."

"It wasn't to play games. Look here, Kildare, I can't say why I went in, but it wasn't for any of those things we've mentioned. In fact, I'll give you my word it wasn't for anything you or even Selby would get his back up about. There! That's about all I can say!"

"Nonsense, D'Arcy!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's. "You know very well what the masters would think. Did you or Dudley suggest your going into the place?"

Wally did not answer, and Kildare rose to his feet.

"Your silence answers my question," he said. "If you had been the leading spirit, I think I know you enough to be certain that you would own up. Dudley took you into the place."

"I haven't said he did, and I don't think it quite fair of you trying to catch me tripping."

"You don't think it's quite fair of me! You silly young donkey, D'Arcy minor, what on earth do you think I am taking all this trouble for if it isn't for your own good? Wouldn't it be a hundred times simpler for me to report the matter, or, easier still, to let it drop? I thought you were a sharper youngster than that!"

Wally coloured.

"I am not going to visit the place again," said Wally. "I'll promise you that. I—I think I can even promise you that Dudley won't, either."

At that moment the door of the study was pushed open, and Kildare turned round.

"Who is it? Hallo, Lefevre! I'm busy now, old man. I'll come to your study later, if you like."

"Oh, it's nothing!" answered the Fifth Form senior, in tones which thrilled with indignation. "But what do you think of young Merry's cheek? Isn't it too—too rich for words?"

"About the Rugger? I don't know about cheek."

"You don't know? Here a Shell kid dares to—Great Scott, Kildare, what is the school coming to? But if you are busy—"

"Yes, I really am, old man. I say, do you mind stepping into the Third Form room and sending Dudley along here?"

"Certainly! Dudley's a young slacker, that's what I say. A little cad!"

The door was shut again, and the captain turned to Wally.

"You see what the seniors think of your friend Dudley?" he said quietly. "A slacker and a cad!"

Wally bit his lip, and was silent.

"You said you could almost promise me that Dudley would not visit a public-house again. Then you admit that it was he who took you there."

"No, I don't!"

"But it was," persisted Kildare. "You, a fellow who leads to some extent the lads of your Form, is, in turn, led by a cad, a slacker who does not play games, and led by the nose, too!"

"I wasn't!" cried Wally, colouring furiously. "It's all rot!"

"But facts speak for themselves, kid. You admit the public-house was a rotten place, and yet you were weak-minded enough to be led into it by one of your own fellows. Come in! Yes, I want to see you, Dudley. Lefevre sent you?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what I wish to see you about?"

Dudley glanced at Wally, but before he had time to answer Kildare answered his own question.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do, Dudley," the captain said coolly. "I am going to thrash you for taking D'Arcy minor into a public-house. Take off your coat!"

And as he spoke he took down his ashplant.

Wally was on his feet again, his face flushed. It really did appear as if Kildare was going out of his way to make him feel small.

CHAPTER 11.

The Captain Surprises Wally.

"TAKE off your coat, Dudley!" said Kildare again. "I'm not in the habit of giving juniors from the Third Form orders twice over!"

"He shan't!" almost shouted Wally. "At least, if you make him, you'll have to thrash me as well. He didn't take me into the rotten place."

"Dry up, Wally!"

"I'm not going to dry up! We went in together, Kildare. In fact, Dudley didn't want me to go in at all."

"Yes, I did, only I didn't say so. You're right in thinking it was all my fault, Kildare. It had nothing to do with D'Arcy."

"Ah! I'm glad to hear you say that."

"Anyway, it's true enough."

And the waster of the Third pulled off his coat. Wally was about to rush forward—for what purpose he did not know—when he suddenly stopped. Kildare had stopped, too, putting the ashplant down on the table. In slipping off his coat, Dudley's unlinked cuff had fallen back, laying bare his sturdy arm.

"What is the matter with your skin?"

It seemed to the captain that the flesh was one mass of weals and scars.

Dudley pulled his shirt-sleeve down.

"That's all right," he muttered. "You needn't take any notice of that."

"Who did it? Good heavens!"

The senior had caught the lad by the wrist, and with a quick movement exposed the whole length of his arm. It certainly was in a very ugly state.

"The gipsy!" cried Wally. "The gipsy did it, Dad!"

Dudley nodded.

"But you needn't take any notice of it, Kildare," he said coolly. "I can stand anything you're likely to give after this."

"The gipsy? What gipsy? What does he mean?"

"Why, a beastly, half-drunken gipsy, who looked like killing my dog Pongo for barking at his horse," exclaimed the scallywag of the Third. "If it hadn't been for Dudley I believe he would have killed him. You're a brick and a ripper, Dad, a jolly fine beggar, and I don't care what the school says."

"Put your coat on," said Kildare shortly. "I suppose this ruffianly gipsy horsewhipped you?"

"Yes. And I believe he could have saved himself if he had left Pongo in the caravan," said Wally, whose eyes were sparkling in a way they seldom sparkled. "The gipsy had thrown the dog into the caravan, you see, Kildare, and then he landed me one which almost stunned me. But I can understand what happened. You yourself said the door wouldn't open, Dad, so I suppose you stood there while the cad was lamming into you with the whip. My hat, his body must be as bad all over as his arm, I should say!"

"Is it?"

"He did catch me a bit, but it wasn't enough to make a fuss about. Don't be a fool, Wally!"

"I don't care what I am. I reckon you must have been a brick to have stood all that and said nothing. If anyone is a fool, it's Lefevre for saying what—that he did."

"What did he say, then?"

"Never mind what Lefevre said," put in Kildare, "and never mind what D'Arcy says now. Of course, I cannot thrash you in your present state, Dudley, but your having got into trouble with a gipsy who ought to be in prison cannot influence me in the serious matter of the visit to

the public-house. Dudley, I am going to put a question to you which I do not think I should have troubled to have put but for these scars, though. I am going to ask you to explain why it was you led D'Arcy minor into the public-house, and so save this younger lad from the very serious consequences that are bound to follow if you refuse. I am putting you on your honour, mind!"

"I'll explain."

"No, you won't!" interrupted Wally. "He shan't explain. Kildare, and you haven't any right to make him in—in that way. I don't care if I'm sacked for it, he isn't going to explain."

"Shut up, Wally! I—"

"No, you shan't! I'd rather be sent to the Head a hundred times after what he's done for Pongo."

Then Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, acted in a curious way.

"You can both go now," he said. "Think the matter over, and—and shut the door."

And they went, speechless with amazement.

Kildare waited for the door to close, then carefully put the ashplant back in its place in the corner.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "Those scars are just about the worst things that could have happened. Quite the worst, I should say."

The senior was thinking of the strange influences which spring up in school life, of the striking instances of hero worship which thrive amongst fellows who have yet to gain senior ranks, and it struck him that the most important detail connected with schoolboy hero worship is the choice of hero.

Dudley was one of the least successful pupils in the Third Form. A waster even to the fellows themselves, let alone masters and prefects. And just when he, Kildare, had been endeavouring to nip this friendship in the bud this had happened to strengthen it.

"Accidentally, though," thought the captain suddenly. "Dudley hadn't told D'Arcy about them!"

That was one point, at least, which might be remembered in making up the credit side of Dudley's shady account, and then there were the scars themselves.

It must be a curious sort of fellow who could be thoroughly contemptible, and yet go through what he had

evidently cheerfully gone through for a chum's dog! That struck Kildare too, and Kildare was given to acting upon his ideas at once. He left his study, and paid a visit to Mr. Selby's room. He had a little discussion with that gentleman about Dudley, and when he had learnt all there was to learn, he tackled the Housemaster and all the available masters with whom Dudley had come in contact.

After that he went in to breakfast, but he continued his investigations afterwards, for he looked up all the Third Form registers for the last term or so, examined most of the undestroyed detention books, and at the end of it all, had come to an unpleasant conclusion.

There could be no two questions about the matter. Dudley's record was a disgrace to any St. Jim's fellow.

"Still, he was ready to own up for D'Arcy's sake," mused the captain, more than a trifle puzzled, "and at some cost to himself, I should say. That was cricket, whatever anyone says. Humph! I wonder what would happen if I took no further steps in the matter?"

The unspoken question interested Kildare. Perhaps the juniors would think he had decided to overlook the affair. But they could hardly think that, because he had expressly said that he should not do so. Perhaps Dudley would come in and own up when Wally was out of the way.

Kildare liked the alternative. It was giving the junior with the black record a chance of proving himself better than they all thought him to be, and great things might come of a chance like that.

"Yes," thought the captain suddenly—"yes, that is what I'll do!"

And he went into his morning's work, uncertain as to whether he was pleased or otherwise with the turn events had taken.

CHAPTER 12.

Dudley Visits Kildare.

"I SUPPOSE you two fellows play Rugger?" said Tom Merry, bursting into the Shell study as soon as first school was over. "I know you do, Lowther."

"Ye-es, I play Rugger, old man; but nothing very great, you know."

Tom Merry looked up.

"I didn't expect you were anything very great. You aren't the sort of chap who looks as if he were great at anything, except playing the giddy goat; but if you don't think yourself good enough to play, say so, and I'll find someone else."

"Oh, I'm good enough to play, thanks," said Lowther hastily. "I was merely comparing myself with you. Beside you, of course, I shall look a bit of a rabbit, and so will Manners."

"That's a fact," said Manners. "Someone said you had played for your county, Tom."

"Then someone's a— Someone doesn't speak the truth," said the chief of the Shell, with rising anger. "How do you know I play at all, duffer?"

"Why, you've told us so! My bat, old man, if you can't play after what you've said! But it's only bluff and modesty on your part."

"No, it isn't bluff, and it isn't modesty, you shrieking ass, and I haven't said a word about being able to play. Look here, have Blake or Figgins been into this room?"

"Have Blake or Figgins been into this room—have they, Lowther?"

"Blake or— Yes, I believe Figgins did just look in, now you come to mention it."

"I thought so. Nice cheerful sort of a last word you are, aren't you? But it's my candid belief you are all a set of rabbits and can't play Rugger for nuts!"

"We can't, compared with you, old man," admitted Lowther. "Come in, Skimpole!"

"Ah, thanks!" said Skimpole, who had just left Jack Blake, and, unknown to himself, was well primed in a certain direction. "How do you do, Merry? I suppose I ought to offer you my congratulations, although—"

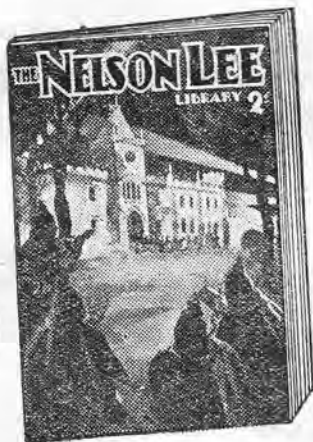
"Congratulations? What for?"

"About—the cap you won," explained Skimpole, blinking vaguely as if he was not quite certain whether it was a cap or a bowler hat which was supposed to have rewarded Tom Merry's prowess. "A Rugby cap, I believe it is called."

"A—what?"

"Rugby cap," repeated Skimpole. "Yes, I'm certain it was a Rugby cap someone told me you had won, although at the time I'll admit I was not struck with the value of the prize."

"Someone told you I had a Rugby cap?" almost shouted Tom Merry. "Who was it, Skimpole? Tell me who it was, and I'll see that he is slain at once!"



ST. FRANK'S BESIEGED!

WITH searchlights flooding every corner of the school, the hooded raiders trained their deadly machine-guns full on St. Frank's. All lines of communication had been cut, there was no help to be expected from the outside world—St. Frank's was completely besieged! This is only one of the startling incidents from "THE SIEGE OF ST. FRANK'S!" by E. S. Brooks, a powerful long complete school and detective thriller which appears in this week's issue of

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Suddenly Dudley was startled by a yell. "Look out! Oh!" It seemed to him that Wally had vanished into the earth. He sprang forward, his face white, and the sight that met his eyes sent a thrill of horror through him. Wally had fallen into the old well!

"I shall certainly give you no information, Merry, if it is likely to cause ill-feeling between you."

"Ill-feeling, eh? Look here, what is it now, Reilly?"

"Sure, and it's nothing to get touchy about, me bhoys!" grinned the Irish junior of the Fourth. "It's about the Rugby."

"What about it, then?"

"Faith, and now you mention it, I don't think there's anything about the foine old game. Someone told me you toured with a fifteen in Oireland, and I'd like to know if you played at all down Belfast way."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther and Manners together.

And the expression of wrath on Tom Merry's face was so startling that Reilly decided to leave, and did so as hard as he could run.

"I thought it was a rag as soon as Blake spoke," he chuckled. "But you don't catch an Irishman spoiling a rag. Faith, though, I'll give Tom Merry a wide berth after this."

Tom Merry had also left the Shell study, the laughter of his comrades being unsuitable to his present frame of mind, and it happened he met Kildare before he reached the end of the corridor.

The captain stopped him.

"Of course, you aren't thinking of having a practice this afternoon, Merry; the ground is much too hard."

"So I am afraid. We might try a little serum practice in the gym, don't you think?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. It'll get the pack into some sort of shape. Three o'clock! I'm afraid some of us will show up rather poorly by you, you know," added the captain, laughing. "You've played a lot, I understand?"

"Well, I haven't; I've hardly played at all, and it's that howling ass Blake who's set the wheeze round that I'm a dab at Rugger. I was just going to his study to break his neck—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Kildare. "Yes, Blake certainly led me to believe you were a big gun at the game, and that none of the others were any good. First time I'd ever known you to be really troubled with modesty, Merry, or any of you juniors, in fact."

And the captain went on, still laughing.

Tom Merry shook his fist after him, then also continued his way, vowing vengeance upon Jack Blake of the Fourth. However, he had only gone a few steps, when he found himself face to face with Dudley.

Somewhat to Tom Merry's surprise, the big Third-Former stopped, for the two had scarcely spoken more than a dozen words to each other all the time they had been at St. Jim's.

"Have you seen Kildare pass this way, Merry?"

Tom looked at the other narrowly.

"Yes," he said; "he's just gone into his study. Is anything up?"

"No. I want to speak to him, that's all."

And Dudley pushed by, entering the captain's study without hesitating.

Tom Merry whistled.

"Phew! I must say I agree with Gus. Wally has a rum taste in chums. I—I wonder if I should have helped things along at all if I had spoken to the waster about it?"

But he answered his own question with a shake of his head. Better leave things alone for a time; no doubt Wally would soon get tired of a fellow of Dudley's stamp.

And by the time Tom Merry had gained Study No. 6, he had forgotten all about his resentment towards the leading spirit of that select den, and at once plunged into a thoughtful discussion with the Fourth-Formers about young Wally.

They were still engrossed in their subject, and just as far away from any useful solution, when the bell rang announcing the second half of the morning's work.

"Bother!" muttered Digby. "I don't believe Taggles can tell the time. How's the glass?"

Herries tapped the old barometer and shook his head. "No change, you chaps. I—I believe this frost is going to last the week out; I do, really."

"Not it, kids!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Don't you worry. The Rugby match will come off all right. All we've got to do is train hard. Three o'clock in the gym for scrum practice, mind."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo! That ass Gussy has turned up again, then!"

"Tom Mewwy, I must wegard—"

"Yes, do, old man," said the hero of the Shell pleasantly. "I would if I were you. See something of you before dinner." And he, too, made his way into class.

CHAPTER 13.

Arthur Augustus Speaks His Mind.

"IT weally is wathah stwange that Kildare hasn't said anythin' about young Wally and that public-house," thought Arthur Augustus; "vewy stwange indeed. I wondah if it would mattah if I were to tackle Wally about it?"

But even as D'Arcy put the question to himself, he knew that there was only one answer. Kildare had expressly told him not to speak to his young brother until he—Kildare—gave him leave. And as yet the captain had not said a word on the subject.

"And it's two days, bai Jove, since he had young Wally in his study!" mused the swell of the School House. "If it were not entirely a mattah of personal honah with my young bwothah, I wathah think I should take Jack Blake into my confidence. It's vewy remarkable."

"Hallo, Gus! Cheer-ho, my boy!"

"Stop, stop, you uttah ass! Tom Mewwy, I wish you wouldn't thump me on the shouladah; it wumples my beastlay clothes."

"Ha, ha ha! By the way, you haven't seen the study since the paint dried, and all that, have you?"

"No, deah boy; I haven't been in your woom since the aftahnoon we—"

"No, that you haven't!" grinned Tom Merry. "Never mind, there'll be some invitations knocking around soon; but mum's the word. Coming into committee?"

"Undah the cires, deah boy, I am afwaid I cannot. You see—"

"I see that you are one of the Rugby committeemen, and as such have to sit," said Tom Merry. "Come along, Gus!"

"I must wefuse—"

"It's down this corridor, up the next, and through a doorway."

"Let go my arm, Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus coldly. "I must wequest you to let go my arm."

"Right-ho, Gus! Coat collar'll do quite as well. I say, Figgins, here's one of our committeemen trying to shirk his duties."

"Rotter!"

"I wefuse to be termed a wottah, and I considah Figgins beasty wude. Let go my collah, Tom Mewwy! Let go, or I shall have to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Figgins caught hold of Arthur Augustus' arm; then, with the swell of the School House between them, they started at a trot towards Study No. 6, chatting about the one absorbing question of the hour at St. Jim's just then, the forthcoming Rugby match.

The frost had lasted in the most exasperating manner—not a severe frost, but just enough to cause the football pitches to exhibit signs of a decided "bone." Dr. Holmes' verdict had been announced only that morning—Friday—that if the frost still held by breakfast the following morning, a wire would have to be sent to the Wanderers' secretary scratching the match.

"And now it's freezing harder than ever," said Figgins. "There are three degrees, Taggles says."

"Wescue! Wescue! Let go my beastlay collah, Tom Mewwy!"

"But it may be the last lap, as it were, Figgy," said Tom Merry hopefully. "I shouldn't be at all surprised myself if it thawed to-night; I shouldn't, really."

"That comes of being optimistic, kid."

"Wescue, Blake! Blake, deah boy!"

"Hallo!" came Blake's cheerful voice. "What's the matter? What are you doing with Gus, Merry?"

"Yanking the slacker into committee, old man."

"I wefuse to be chawacterised as a slackah, you wuff wottah."

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"Yes," added Figgins; "he said he wouldn't come at first, so we're press-gangin' him!"

"Wescue! Flooah the wotten boundahs, deah boys!"

"Good egg!" said Jack Blake. "Can't have slackers connected with the Rugby set of St. Jim's. Shall I push him from behind?"

And, to D'Arcy's utter disgust, Blake put his head down and "scrumped" the swell of the School House all the way down the passage. In this fashion they arrived at Study No. 6, where Skimpole was already seated in lonely state.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I'll take the chair, as usual. What's the matter, Gus?"

"I intend to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Good man! Now I propose from the chair that we settle all the unimportant biz first, then I'll tell you my team for to-morrow."

"Yes, if there's a match."

"Oh, there'll be a match, Figgy, old kid! I believe it's thawing already. It's as warm as toast."

"Yes, in front of a fire."

"Don't croak. Now, Skimpole, how goes the financial part of the concern?"

"Well, Merry," said Skimpole, opening his notebook, "the financial state is somewhat precarious, in fact, I will go as far as to say—"

"Oh, cut the cackle, and let's have the details! How much have we in hand?"

"In hand? As a matter of fact—"

"Oh, dry up!" groaned Blake. "How much have we in hand?"

"Yes, how much have we in hand?"

"Let us have it in round figures, Skimmey."

"In round figures," said Skimpole, looking up over the top of his spectacles—"in round figures we have in hand the sum of minus five shillings."

"Minus! My hat!"

"No, Mewwy, deah boy—minus five shillings! Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Arthur Augustus; but the effort passed in silence.

"Five bob out—eh?" said Blake. "That means a sub round. Is everything paid up, Skimmey?"

"Yes. I myself paid the carman for carting the goal-posts the Rylcombe people kindly lent us, and I decided to award Taggles the sum of sixpence as honorarium for helping to put the aforesaid goalposts up. Then there was—"

"That will do for the present," said Merry pleasantly. "We've got some important business on hand, so we'd be obliged if you'd ring off, Skimmey. We'll have a whip round afterwards for the five shillings. Two-thirty the match starts, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah; and if it weren't for the invitation I am expectin' from Cleveland Lodge for the party, I should be vewy pleased to be a membah of the team."

"Ah!" grinned the chairman. "Somehow, Gus, I can't quite see you playing Rugger."

"No, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus languidly; "it is a wottenly wuff game!"

"I don't think. Now, look here, you fellows, I've got my fifteen bar two. I'll read them from the forwards—Kerr, Manners, Lowther, Fatty Wynn, Digby, Lefevre, who I believe is pretty warm, Herries, and young Reilly."

"That sounds useful from a Soccer point of view, anyway," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "I mean, they'll be able to do some dribbling when wanted."

"Yes, that's what I thought. For halves, I can't think of anyone but Monteith. He has played, I know, and he has promised to turn out for me, which is rather decent of him. For the other half I haven't the faintest idea where to go; there doesn't seem to be a second Rugger half in St. Jim's."

"Let's leave that open, then. What about the three-quarters?"

"Kildare, Figgins, you, Blake, and myself. Kildare may carry us through on his back; he has a knack of doing that."

"Kildare?" said Figgins, in pronounced surprise. "We are all looking to you to do that for the team, Merry. After the way you have talked—"

"Oh, dry up! That gag is as ancient as the Rockies."

"Sit down, Merry," said Skimpole severely—"sit down at once! If there is any sign of a disturbance, I shall have to withdraw. I am surprised at you, Merry!"

"Oh, go and pick flowers! I can't think of a full-back at all, unless we ask Gussy or Taggles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned round, and screwed his monocle into his eye with a deliberate sort of twist.

"I wegard your laughah as a sign of vewy low intelligence, Figgins," he said. "There is nothing humorous in Tom Mewwy's suggestion, although, undah the cires, I shall

be unable to play, because I am accepting an invitation to a party."

"Hang Gussy's invite! Let's get on with the washing!" said Figgins. "Surely there must be someone in the school who can play full-back?"

"It's wathah a wesponsible posish, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, I should wegard it as a vewy wesponsible one."

"Of course, it's responsible. It's no good going to any of the Lower Forms for a full-back, you know, Blake. A Third-Former might manage as a half, because he could make up for his lack of weight with nippiness, but you must have beef at back. I'm blessed if I know what to do! And there you have it!"

"My only Aunt Jane—yes! Fancy there being only thirteen fellows in the school who can play Rugger!"

"Well, it's a Soccer school, you see. What do you say if we leave it until to-morrow morning?"

"Right-ho!"

"Then let's get on with the last biz," said Tom Merry.

"Gentlemen, I propose we have a run to-night to get fit."

"Get stiff, more likely!"

"Not much! I don't mean a marathon; just a knee-

loosening trot out towards the quarry, only, of course, not so far."

"Yes; that isn't so dusty."

"What about permish, deah boy?"

"I've got permission, Gussy, and Kildare and Lefevre have promised to come with us. Start at seven."

"Good!"

"You had better come as well, Gus."

"No feah, 'Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with a shudder. "The woads will be beastlay hard, and there's a wotten wind. Besides, I must wait for the post to see whethah my invite to the party at Cleveland Lodge awrives."

"Hard cheese! Well, there's nothing more, except the whip-round for the five bob."

"That's so," agreed Blake, looking at Skimpole severely.

"But before I consent to such a course of action, I should like to move that a vote of censure be passed upon the treasurer for the simply rotten way in which he has squandered the money of the club!"

"Really, Blake—"

"For the ruinous manner in which he has granted awards without our consent—"

"Really, I must protest," said Skimpole, getting up. "I made no awards whatever, except in the case of Taggles, and even in that instance I offered him twopence before I consented to sixpence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did; but Taggles would not accept. Then I offered fourpence, and he still refused to do the work, so what was I to do but to give him the sixpence he demanded?"

"Did you offer him fivepence?" asked Blake severely.

"No."

"There! You see, gentlemen, how the money has been squandered!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, really, a penny isn't—"

"From the chair," said Tom Merry solemnly—"from the chair I propose herewith that Herbert Skimpole be decapitated, and his remains be hidden in any selected chimney in the school."

"Yes, Skimmy," said Blake. "And the only thing that has saved you is the fact that you do not exist. You told me you didn't yourself. Hallo! What do you want, young Wally?"

"Nothing," grinned D'Arcy minor—"nothing, young Blake, only I heard that Merry wants a stand-off half for to-morrow."

"Yes, I do."

"Then take an old man's advice," said Wally, "and plump for Dudley of the Third. Straight tip! Honour bright!"

And he vanished before the words had sunk home. But almost as soon as the door was shut again there was a commotion in the room.

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet quite angrily.

"I pwotest!" he said indignantly. "If Dudley is picked, I wefuse to have my name connected with the game!"

"Ring off, Gus, old man, for a minute!"

"I wefuse to wing off! Dudley is a wotten cad! Only three nights ago he took my youngah bwothah into a beastlay—he got my youngah bwothah into sewious twouble. Dudley is a wank wottah, and—and I wefuse to have anything to do with a team which includes him as a membah!"

And Arthur Augustus sat down again.

All the others in that room had seen D'Arcy upset many times before that occasion, but never quite so earnestly.

Most of them knew by now that there was some link connecting Wally with Dudley, the waster of the Third, and it was obvious to all that Arthur Augustus was worried over the matter.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Don't get into a stew, Gus," he said. "I shan't worry Dudley to fill the place at half. I'll play anyone before him."

And nodding round the room he sauntered out into the passage.

CHAPTER 14.

The Waster of the Third.

"I SAY, you chaps, Kildare isn't coming, after all!" sang out Tom Merry. "He's going to work, or something."

"Hard luck!"

"Lefevre's just coming down."

The clock high up in the St. Jim's steeple was striking the hour of seven, and nearly a dozen of Tom Merry's fifteen were assembled before the gymnasium doorway, clothed in running shorts and white sweaters.

The moon was shining faintly through the frosty atmosphere, and the roads were hard and dry, an ideal night for a run. But that same hardness of the roads was not greeted with enthusiasm.

"Blessed if I can see what makes you think it'll thaw just to oblige!" grumbled Jack Blake. "It looks to me as if the frost was going to last till about Easter."

"Not it, kid. You'll see, we shall play the Wanderers all right. Feel fit, Wynn?"

"A little faint; but, then, I've had nothing to eat since tea, not counting a little snack of a few sandwiches just now, and some apples with Figgins. Are we going to stop anywhere for refreshments?"

"My only hat, no!"

"Ah!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

And he reflectively tapped his sweater, which was bulging suspiciously at one side.

At that moment Lefevre hurried up, and then the word was given, and the run commenced. The last of the bunch was hardly out of the grounds when two figures crept from the gymnasium. They were also in running things, and beside them trotted Pongo, the mongrel.

"Give 'em time to get well away," whispered Wally. "We mustn't be seen, Dud."

"Blessed if I can see any sense in the wheeze at all!"

"Of course, there's sense in it. You are going to play half with Monteith to-morrow, aren't you?"

"Not if Merry doesn't want me."

"But he does want you, kid. Tom Merry isn't a bad sort, for an old fogey, and he wants the best men in the school for his giddy fifteen. He may think he doesn't, but he does. And you've admitted that you are a Rugger man."

Dudley nodded.

"Anyway," he said quietly, "I'm not going to ask for a place in the fifteen. You can make up your mind to that, Wally."

"Of course, you are not going to ask. I'm going to tackle Gussy after this run, and give him a jolly good wiggings. He'll see who ought to play half all right. I should think we might start now."

Dudley growled a little, but he followed the younger lad's lead, and started off down the road at a good, swinging trot. Wally knew the direction taken by the others, but was content to follow without overtaking them.

Wally neatly jumped the wall, and made off towards the deserted, half-ruined old farmhouse. Dudley followed. He was still a long way from seeing the use of the run, for he had made up his mind not to offer his services to Tom Merry.

They were almost across the field by now, Wally some dozen yards or so ahead, when suddenly Dudley was startled by a yell.

"Look out! Oh!"

And it seemed to the big Third-Former that his chum had vanished into the earth. Dudley sprang forward, his face white. The sight of the black outline of the drum of a windlass on trestles standing out black against the moonlight sky, sent a thrill of horror through him.

The old well! Wally had fallen into the well!

Scarcely realising that such could be the case, Dudley flung himself down on his knees at the brink of the crumbling well mouth, and shouted down into the evil-smelling depths.

"Wally! Wally!"

There was no answer, except that Dudley's own call came vibrating back to him by echo.

Grasping the rope with his strong hands, Dudley began to lower himself with desperate speed. Hand under hand he

(Continued on page 28.)

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BATTLER BART MEETS A GANG WHO SAIL—

UNDER FALSE COLOURS!

BY
CECIL
FANSHAW



Three crooks succeed in fooling Battler Bart—but that's nothing to what he does to them when he finds out!

CHAPTER 1.

Too Quiet.

"WELL, Dick, what job shall we tackle next, old lad?" "Battler" Bart Crewison grinned lazily, as he stared out over the winking, blue Pacific.

Lithe as a panther, tough as copper wire, Battler lay back in a long cane chair in the veranda of Max Vandeleur's trading-store on Mahiki Island. His huge frame was clad in salt-stained ducks, and there was a strong-smelling cheroot between his lips.

"I suggest a quiet trading trip over to the Solomons, old son," he murmured, tilting back his sun-helmet. "Or how about a run in the Radio Ray to the Marshalls? We might chance on some birds of paradise feathers, or run a cargo of Chinese eggs to New Guinea—something restful. Too much excitement is bad for the nerves."

Young Dick chuckled.

The lad knew that his huge, good-natured brother really revelled in excitement. In fact, Battler, as men called him throughout the South Seas, was never happier than when running his trading schooner, Radio Ray, through a typhoon, or putting up a scrap against odds.

"Let's try a recruiting trip," Dick hazarded.

"Too hot, old son. An' far too exciting."

"Gammon!" laughed Dick.

As a matter of fact, the brothers had only just completed a trip recruiting black labourers for a plantation. That job had nearly cost them their lives at the hands of savage head-hunters, but they had made a packet over it and thoroughly enjoyed the adventure.

In their schooner, the Radio Ray, they were game for any job, from pearl-fishing to salvaging sunken wrecks. Battler was even now wondering what to do next. He hoped for a brainy suggestion from his nimble-witted young brother. Neither dreamt what a perilous adventure was about to be forced on them.

But it certainly was hot on Max Vandeleur's iron-roofed veranda.

It was noon, and the fierce tropical sun blazed down on copra-sheds and store-houses. It beat on the yellow fore-shore, where the surf hissed and creamed round bleached wreckage, half-buried spars, and broken barrels.

A few pearling luggers were beating slowly out to sea;

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two or three trading-vessels lay idle in harbour, moored near the ramshackle old jetty.

Amongst these the brothers could see their own trim schooner, the Radio Ray. On her sun-bleached deck four of their brown-skinned Kanaka crew lay basking, but Tokelau Jim, their stalwart Kanaka bo'sun, had sought the shade of the donkey-engine.

Nobody stirred ashore or afloat.

From out of a blinding blue sky the sun blazed on a sea like burnished metal. Heat-waves danced on the tin roofs of the store-sheds. There was no sound in the brothers' ears except the dull thunder of the reef, half a mile distant, and the clashing of palm-fronds stirred by a hot breeze.

"Nothing doing on Mahiki, old lad," Battler laughed, puffing at his cheroot. "Deadly dull hole—what? I think we'll pull up the mudhook and—"

That very instant a hideous uproar sounded from behind the row of store-sheds.

There sounded harsh shouts of triumph, mingled with yells of rage and protest. Then Battler and Dick saw a short, thick-set, white man shoot into view fiercely pursued by two others. They sat up astonished.

"What amazing energy!" Battler murmured. "In this heat!"

A ragged-looking rascal was the fugitive, bearded, hook-nosed, wearing a coolie's grass hat, and with frayed, salt-stained trousers flapping round his bandy legs. As he ran he yelled hoarsely, but his pursuers gained on him.

The taller of these was a scrawny individual, with long, ape-like arms, who was brandishing a hammer. Obviously dagoes, both were swarthy, olive-hued men, wearing grimed shirts and trousers, and seamen's caps with glazed peaks.

Battler feigned to be mildly interested, but his grey eyes blazed.

Both brothers saw the bandy-legged fugitive twisting and dodging on the sand. He raced along the shore, splashing wildly through the surf.

There sounded a hoarse yell for help as he stumbled, but the gaunt man with the hammer was on him and seized him by his neck. Down in the surf rolled all three, kicking and plunging.

"That's about enough!" snapped Battler, and started up.

"Ho, ho! Don't you bother about a beachcomber, Myn-heer Battler!" grinned Trader Max Vandeleur, suddenly appearing in shirtsleeves. "Der beachcombers vos a bad

nuisance here. I expec' that rascal has been thieving on der ships."

But Battler bounded from his chair, cheroot between his teeth at a fierce angle, chin thrust out.

"Beachcomber be hanged!" he grunted. "Dagoes don't bash a Britisher while I'm around!"

In one bound he was out of the veranda to go dashing across the sun-scorched sand, and with him raced Dick. The brothers saw the dagoes struggling with their captive, trying to drag him away, kicking him.

Dick bawled to them to stop.

At that the gaunt fellow swung round with an evil grin and whipped out a pistol.

"Keep off!" he yelled. "Zis not your affair. I am Captain Vezzis of Lisbon! Zis man a thief. All ze Engleezas are t'ieves!"

"Are they?" Dick snapped, and ran in.

Then things happened on the blazing beach. Dick saw the gaunt Portuguese leap for him, scowling savagely, pistol upflung. The lad ducked from under the pistol and slammed his fist at the man's stomach. But Captain Vezzis seemed used to a rough house, and Dick reeled to a crashing blow that made the sunlit ocean heave before his eyes.

Even as the lad staggered, however, with thunder and lightning jazzing in his brain, Battler waded in. Nor did Battler even trouble to shed his cheroot.

His grey eyes sparkled, but the cheroot was still between his teeth at a jaunty angle. In one bound he gripped the two Portuguese by their necks, his huge muscles bulged as he swung them apart, then—

Crack! There was a crisp sound like two coconuts meeting, and down in the hissing surf dropped Captain Vezzis and his swarthy comrade, Juan Silva by name. There rang out howls of fury and astonishment. Then the two half-stunned dagoes scrambled up, sodden, their peaked caps collapsed on their heads like squashed mushrooms.

"Great boilers!" croaked the bandy-legged fugitive delightedly. "Do it again, mister! That's the stuff! The yellow curs are lying—I never pinched a thing off 'em!"

"You Engleez pig!" screeched Vezzis, clapping his hand to his empty holster. "You pincha da pork! You—"

"Enough!" barked Battler, with a wintry smile. "Vamoose! Get to blazes along sea—savvy?"

The two dagoes glared at Battler. The gorilla-armed Vezzis was about his size. But neither liked his hard grey eyes, nor the set of his jaw, and were astonished at his obvious strength. They shambled off towards the copra-sheds, breathing blood-curdling threats.

Battler grinned. He was perspiring a little, and the scar on his cheek, left by a cannibal's throwing-stone, glowed red. Otherwise, the young giant showed no sign of exertion. Puffing at his cheroot, he turned to the derelict Briton whom he and Dick had rescued.

An out-and-out beachcomber looked the fellow, with his unkempt, black beard, grass coolie's hat, and his thick-set frame clad in grimed rags. His features were sharp, and he had a queer habit of blinking his eyes rapidly. But his tones were those of an educated Englishman.

"Much obliged!" he gasped jerkily. "My name's Morrison, and I used to be skipper of— Well, no matter! It's true I've come down a lot—"

"I'm not askin' for your history!" snapped Battler, used to the yarns of beachcombers.

"Maybe you're not!" came the spirited reply. "But— Well, have you any idea what those garlic-eaters were after?"

"Not a notion!" shrugged Battler.

"Pearls, mister," barked Morrison, blinking rapidly. "Twenty thousand pounds' worth—lying aboard the lost Matupi Queen! Ah, I thought that would make you sit up!"

In fact, Battler and young Dick were gasping incredulously. Both the brothers knew that the Matupi Queen, a small coasting steamer, had vanished several months previously, with all her crew and the pick of the season's pearling catch on board.

It was a well-known tale in the islands. The steamer, Sydney bound, had mysteriously vanished without trace, and had long been given up as a total loss by her owners and the insurance companies.

Did the ragged Morrison and the two dagoes really know what had become of her?

Apparently, for, encouraged by young Dick, Morrison came out with an astonishing yarn. He vowed he knew where lay the lost Matupi Queen, in twenty fathoms of water, with her hull crushed on a coral reef. He said a Gilbert Islander had shown him the wreck, lying off Uvuti Island, but no native divers would descend to it, for the spot was said to be haunted by demons.

"And those two dagoes wanted to make me pilot 'em, mister," Morrison ended, sweating with excitement.

"Would I trust 'em to share out afterwards? No fear! But you're the very sort of fellows I've been looking for. Have you got a diving-dress?"

"You bet!" Dick cried, with flashing eyes. "Say, Battler, here's our next job all right."

CHAPTER 2.

Trapped.

OUT on to the shimmering Pacific danced the Radio Ray, Morrison, in his tattered faded ducks and with his battered coolie's hat jammed on his tangled locks, had to pilot; for the Kanakas, as one man, went sick.

They vowed they had fever, that their stomachs walked about too much, that they had forgotten where lay the mysterious Uvuti Island—that, in fact, it didn't exist.

"There seems something mighty queer about it, Dick, old lad!" Battler chuckled hopefully.

The brothers were on the deck, with the beat of their small engine and the thump of the screw in their ears, and overhead the whistle of wind in wires and gear.

Battler watched Morrison at the wheel, blinking into the sun-glare. A queer sight was that patched, grass-batted derelict, steering in seaman-like fashion. Every nerve a-thrill, young Dick strained his eyes for'ard, as the schooner ploughed through the blue water, with the foam hissing at her bows, and the flying-fish skimming alongside.

Neither of the brothers gave a thought to Captain Vezzis or the sinister, black-moustached Juan Silva. No doubt those Portuguese scamps had given up their quest for the Matupi Queen, after failing to shanghai Morrison.

A haze hung over the vast ocean. The paintwork of the Radio Ray blistered in the heat; ironwork on deck was too hot to touch. The Kanakas muttered uneasily, and glanced fiercely at Morrison, as though he was a bird of ill-omen.

Feather-topped islands, sun-scorched atolls rose above the horizon, came abreast, were left astern. The sun sank in a blaze of purple splendour; then the swift, tropical night shut down, stars gemmed the sky, and the flying spray sparkled red and green on either side.

At last a ringing hail came from Tokelau Jim in the bows:

"Land, master! Big fella island close up!"

A few minutes later all saw a shadowy smudge in the gloom, which slowly took shape as a jungle island. Dick thrilled with excitement, seeing a dark mass of trees outlined against the stars, and a pale, starlit foreshore. He heard Morrison croak through his beard:

"Uvuti, lads! You'll soon learn I've not fooled you! Twenty thousand pounds' worth o' pearls, by thunder!"

Then they ran into a rock-bound cove, and dropped anchor with a rattling splash. Mighty careful they had to be of hidden reefs, for here, according to Morrison, the ill-fated Matupi Queen had sunk with all hands.

It was too dark to start work, and the brown Kanakas were too scared, anyway, to work by night. Battler set a watch, in case Uvuti Island was haunted by head-hunting savages, who might try to rush the schooner.

"It certainly is a rum place, Dick," he frowned, the end of a glowing cheroot lighting up his strong features.

"Bang off the ordinary shipping routes! What the deuce brought the Matupi Queen here on her last voyage—if she is here!"

Battler's problem seemed insoluble. There was no earthly reason why the ill-fated steamer should have run so far off her proper course to go down at Uvuti. That mystery seemed likely never to be solved. Morrison only blinked and shook his head when questioned.

The night passed quietly, however. At dawn they started to cruise slowly round the cove in search of the wreck, with the bearded Morrison taking soundings.

Suddenly an eager yell from Dick brought Battler to starboard, to see the lad staring overside and pointing downwards. Then Battler's rugged features broke into a grin of delight.

Away below them, down in the mirror-like water, both brothers made out the shape of a steamer. She lay jammed between jagged masses of pink coral, away down in the limpid depths.

Battler and Dick could see strange aquatic weeds trailing from her funnel, saw flights of fishes swimming in and out of her portholes.

"The Matupi Queen!" Dick shouted, eyes flashing. "So Morrison wasn't yarning."

A few minutes later Battler went overside, down the ladder, and his great copper helmet sank out of sight. He was gripping his heavy crowbar, had a diver's knife in his belt, and a powerful electric light fixed to his helmet.

In his free hand he trailed the rope with which the lost steamer's safe could be hauled to the surface.

Many times in his adventurous life had Battler been down to submerged wrecks. But even he felt a thrill as he was lowered down to the Matupi Queen.

The strange tales about the lost steamer flickered through his brain. There was the mystery about her sinking so far off her proper course, and the obvious terror of the Kanakas for Uvuti Island. Besides, twenty thousand pounds' worth of pearls were not salvaged every day.

Battler's lips were tight as he saw the submerged steamer just under him, saw her barnacled funnel.

Through his thick, plate-glass window he strained his eyes into the green gloom. He saw scores of fishes swimming away from him, saw trailing weeds, streaming like pennants from the steamer's masts, saw underwater plants, all the colours of the rainbow.

Battler landed lightly on the deck of the steamer, his air-tube, life-line, and haulage rope trailing behind him. It was dark in these depths. But the light fixed to his copper helmet shed a beam in the gloom, like a dimmed car light in a fog.

He started to work his way forward, getting brief glimpses of the steamer's boats and rails on either side.

He found a companion-way, and groped upwards to the bridge. At last he was in the captain's cabin, to see dimly a bunk and other furniture in the ray of his lamp. More fishes darted out through an open porthole. Battler's eyes flashed as his light fell on an iron safe standing at the foot of the bunk.

"Ha!" he muttered. "It seems yonder scarecrow aloft was not talking through his grass hat. No, I bet he wasn't!"

Then Battler fell on the safe with his crowbar.

The heavy, sharp-pointed tool was a toy in his huge hands, and the safe seemed to have been badly corroded by months under water. It looked, too, as though there had been an attempt to burst it open with explosives, for the door was cracked and bulged near the hinges.

"Which is strange," murmured Battler, his voice booming inside his diving-helmet.

Then he dealt the safe some terrific blows. Finally, bunching his great muscles, he used his crowbar for a lever, and cranked the safe open.

It was to see dimly through his glass window a mass of documents and pulped bank-notes, ruined by the salt water that had seeped through cracks.

Battler's search seemed to give him grim amusement. He chuckled to himself. A smile played round his strong mouth as he pounded the safe-door back into place, exerting all his great strength to jam it tight.

Then he fixed his haulage rope round the safe. That done, he signalled with tugs on his life-line for it to be hauled up.

He saw the rope tauten, saw the safe shift, then go gliding out through the cabin doorway. He followed it out on to the bridge. His eyes gleamed as he watched it go sailing upwards through the greenish gloom.

A few seconds later he signalled with his life-line, fastened round his waist, to be hauled up himself. Nothing happened.

Battler grunted angrily, signalled again.

That moment a gasp left his lips. He saw his life-line come snaking downwards through the depths. A split second later, he glimpsed his air-tube dropping.

"Ten thousand thunders!" Battler gritted. Many men would have been seized with panic. They would have lost their heads, suddenly finding themselves cut off in the depths. Even Battler was spellbound for an instant by the startling occurrence.

What on earth was happening, up above on the sun-scorched Radio Ray? Battler recalled the Kanakas' dread of Uvuti Island. What had happened to stalwart Tokelau Jim, and the other Kanakas, to young Dick at the wheezy air-pump?

But only a split second Battler hesitated. Then he swiftly closed the inlet valves of his diving-helmet.

Now he could breathe, but he wouldn't breathe for very long. His suit ballooned out round him. It was filled with air. But Battler knew he had only a few minutes to live under water, while the air lasted him, for no more was coming in.

And he was cut off below, on the sunken wreck, with his life-line trailing uselessly round him. But Battler didn't lose his head.

"I've got about four minutes to live," he gritted, the old scar on his cheek crimson with fury. "No time to sleep, by ginger! But I've enough air in my rig to float me aloft—if I look slippery."

And Battler, nerves steady, made to get rid of his heavy, leaden shoes. He relied on the air in his ballooned suit to

send him popping to the surface. But already it was getting foul and unbreatheable inside his helmet, and his head buzzed.

"Sharp's the word," muttered Battler, struggling with a weighted shoe.

That instant he felt himself seized from behind.

CHAPTER 3.

Pirates!

FOR the first time in his life, Battler Bart was horrified.

The young giant was as strong as three ordinary men. In fact his strength, love of danger, and reckless courage had made his name a by-word in the South Seas.

But his skin pringed.

About four minutes, or less, to live. Air-pipe and life-line useless. And it seemed that a giant hand had gripped his right arm—was holding it grimly.

The Kanakas' tales of demons flashed through his brain, and all the mystery about the lost Matupi Queen. He snatched up his crowbar, jerked round, teeth clenched, to see—the water-demon.

He saw the shapeless bulk at the cabin doorway, saw two baleful, saucer-like eyes. He discovered a snake-like band was wrapped round his right arm, saw other snaky things reaching out towards him.

"A giant squid, by gum!"

And Battler realised his peril. He was gripped by one of the worst monsters of the deep. This giant squid must live in one of the submerged caverns of the coral reef, had marked his descent, followed him, seen him emerge from the skipper's cabin.

Followed a grim battle. More snaky arms gripped Battler. But he hurled himself at the shadowy bulk of the monster, and lunged with his heavy weapon with all his might.

He drove, lunged, thrust, felt something like horny pincers grip his weapon. He wrenched it free, thrust towards the yellow eyes with all his great strength.

But this could not last. Battler was gasping for air, and a red mist seemed floating before his eyes. In his ears there was a thunderous crackling, and the pounding of blood in his veins. His air was becoming unbreatheable.

Again he thrust. It was a last mighty lunge of desperation.

To Battler's relief, however, he felt his weapon plunge home. Then he found himself suddenly enveloped in a black, inky fog.

The giant octopus had had enough of the fray with Battler. It was wondering what sort of prey it had tackled, something quite different from the naked, brown divers, who used to come swimming down for pearls on the Uvuti reef.

The monster was giving off a cloud of black fluid to cover its own escape. Behind this inky screen it scuttled off. Battler had won the fight for his life. The severed tentacles dropped off him, as he staggered in the black darkness that enveloped the submerged deck.

Battler was free. But could he rise to the surface in time, before he suffocated in his diving-dress?

There might, too, be other monsters around.

More desperate than ever before in his life, Battler struggled out of his leaden shoes. His head was ringing like a bell; he could see nothing in the fog, felt his senses leaving him.

But, all at once, as he shed his weighted shoes, he found himself rising. He was going up. His inflated suit was taking him to the surface.

Grimly Battler clung to his senses, as he choked and spluttered in the heat of his helmet. Then he thrilled with relief, glimpsing a shadow above him.

Battler knew he was rising almost under the Radio Ray.

A second later he bobbed to the surface right at the schooner's stern. With a mighty effort he opened his helmet valves, then he was gulping down fresh air, as he swayed like a huge cork in the shadow of his schooner.

Through his glass window he saw the schooner's sides rising sharply above him against the blue sky. He had reached the surface, after all, thanks to his own nerve and great strength.

But he knew he was not out of peril. Something strange and sinister had happened aboard the Radio Ray.

Recovering his breath, Battler racked his brains for a scheme. How to get out of his diving-suit? His huge copper helmet was clamped down on his metal collar and breast-plate, and fastened with a catch at the back.

The diving-suit must be sacrificed. There was nothing else for it.

"Nothing indeed!" gritted Battler, and whipped out his knife, and started to hack his suit to shreds.

In a few seconds he sliced a long slit in his tough dress, then he kicked his way out of it. But first he cut free a



Snaky arms gripped Battler, but he hurled himself at the shadowy bulk and lunged with his heavy weapon with all his might. Battler was gasping for breath, there was a red mist before his eyes—his air was becoming unbearably, but still he fought on!

small leather bag he wore on his belt, and thrust it into his shirt, as he kicked free of his ruined suit.

Now Battler trod water just astern of his schooner. His head was almost invisible as he swam close alongside, seeking a trailing-rope. He must get aboard somehow, without being seen.

Even as he swam beside the vessel, however, Battler heard the sudden thunder of engines and the churn of the screw.

As he struck out he saw the schooner gliding away from him. Desperately swam Battler, not daring to risk a shout for help. To his relief, he suddenly glimpsed a trailing-rope, and gripped it in the nick of time.

It didn't take the muscular, huge-framed Battler many seconds to shin up the rope. In his sudden, salt-stained ducks he dragged himself aboard, then lay gasping in the shadow of a boat on deck.

Battler waited until he had recovered his strength. That instant a clamour of angry voices reached his ears from amidships, rising above the beat of the engine. With a grim smile, he rose to his knees and peered over the gunwale of the boat.

Even Battler was astonished at what he saw.

He couldn't see young Dick nor the Kanakas. But he saw the ragged, grass-hatted Morrison standing on the sun-baked deck beside the air pump. Beside the bandy-legged scarecrow was the Matupi Queen's iron safe, sent up by Battler. Battler's eyes grew round, for he saw Morrison talking with two dirty-looking dagoes.

They were Captain Vezzis and Juan Silva.

On danced the schooner across the waves. Battler crawled out from cover on hands and knees, his eyes grim.

That instant he heard Morrison yelling:

"No pearls, after all! Nothing but sodden junk in the safe!"

"Well, we 'ave got zat fine schooner," leered the gorilla-armed Vezzis. "Ha, ha! Zis part of the game we've won, and left zat fighting fool below."

"Oh, no, you haven't!" roared Battler, and leapt to his feet.

Aghast, the conspirators swung round.

Gasp burst from Vezzis and Silva, and their eyes bulged. They thought they saw a ghost in the blazing sunshine.

But there was nothing ghostly about Battler's huge frame and swinging fists.

Recovering their wits, up sprang the dagoes with howls of fury. A knife glinted in the hand of Vezzis, and the wiry Silva whipped out a gun. But Battler charged in like a raging buffalo.

Bang! A bullet whistled past his ear, to strike flakes off the iron railing, then go screaming into space. He felt a pang in his shoulder as a flung knife came flashing through the air.

With a roar, however, Battler pounced on Morrison. He seized the yelling bundle of rags, swung him above his head, then hurled him crashing at the Portuguese. Morrison was helpless in Battler's iron grip, and found himself flying like a head-hunter's throwing-stone.

All three scoundrels crashed to the deck, roaring, kicking, arms and legs thrashing wildly in all directions. Then Battler was on them. In a trice he had the three rascals bound and helpless.

A shout of delight left his lips. Coming towards him he saw the missing Kanakas and young Dick, plainly just recovering his senses.

"What the deuce happened to you, my pippins?" Battler boomed gleefully, as all came whooping up on deck.

"That thug Morrison!" gasped Dick. "He whipped out a gun and sloshed me suddenly when I was at the air-pump, old man! The same moment those dago tykes rushed us. I guess they followed the Radio Ray all night in their rotten old hooker, and lay up round a bend of Uvuti Island."

"Humph!" chuckled Battler. "Like to see some nice pearls, Morrison?"

"What?" yelled the bandy-legged scarecrow.

"Da deuce!" howled Vezzis and Silva, struggling in their bonds.

"Pearls, from the lost Matupi Queen!" Battler beamed. "I suspected you, Morrison. You seemed to know such a lot about that wreck. So I boned the pearls before sending the safe aloft."

Then howls mingled with shouts of glee and laughter as Battler took a leather pouch from his shirt and shook a dozen marvellous pearls into young Dick's hands.

"Your yarn about your native informant was a clumsy lie, Morrison," Battler ended grimly. "I believe you were the skipper of the Matupi Queen, with yonder dagoes serving under you. And you took her off her course and sank her yourself, leaving the crew to drown, just to get these pearls. But your native divers got nabbed by the squid, eh? So you wanted a mug with a diving dress to get 'em for you, and meant to pinch the said mug's schooner, too."

Battler proved correct. Morrison and the dagoes, in fact, wrecked the Matupi Queen, and were the sole survivors, only to find that native divers could not recover the pearls for them. So they had planned to make use of Battler.

"Well, they fooled me for a time, Dick," grinned Battler, a week later, when the trio had been juggled. "But not all the time. And we've got a nice fat reward from the insurance company for restoring the pearls."

(There's another thrilling yarn of the adventures of Battler Bart Creweison in next week's GEM! Look out for it!)

HERO AND CAD!

(Continued from page 23.)

descended, calling Wally's name loudly. Suddenly Dudley was forced to stop. In lowering his left hand under his right he had discovered that there was no more rope, that he was at the end, with his feet still dangling in mid-air.

How far he was from the water, if there were water, Dudley did not know. He tried to calculate by means of the time it had taken him to descend, but that was useless. He had no idea how deep the well was, even.

"Wally!" he called again, the perspiration starting to his forehead. "Wally, old chap!"

His own words rebounded from the well sides monotonously, echoing again and again until they were lost in the open air above. Dudley set his teeth hard, and let go the rope.

Down he fell like a stone, but it could have only been for a few feet, for he felt himself plunged into icy water almost immediately, and the pale moon above the mouth of the well vanished from his sight.

"Phew!" choked the junior, coming to the surface again. "Phew!"

He was almost frozen by his sudden immersion, but his mind was clear enough. One single overarm stroke carried him to the opposite wall, another half-stroke, and he was off again at a different angle, then he felt his arm brush against some half-floating object.

"Wally! Is that you, old man?"

It was Wally; but the younger lad did not answer. With a muttered exclamation of relief, Dudley held his chum's head high above the surface of the water.

His relief was so intense that it was some moments before he began to think about their position, and even then it was a melancholy howl that attracted his attention.

"Pongo! Hallo, Pongo! It's all right, boy! Humpf! Is it, though?"

He swam to the side, feeling with his running-shoes for any projection which might serve as a foothold; but the well side was overgrown with moss, and as slippery as rocks at low tide. Dudley began to get desperate. Presently it dawned upon him that they would never get out of the well without outside help, that he would be able to keep himself and Wally above water until he became numbed with the cold, and then they would sink, and perhaps not be found for months afterwards.

The minutes slipped by slowly and terribly. Wally came round, and when Dudley had given him a brief account of what had happened, desperately cudgelled his brains for some means of escape.

How long they remained in that semi-conscious state, mechanically keeping themselves above the water, they never knew; but it seemed to Wally that the end of it all wasn't far off, when a series of echoing, excited barks startled him into wakefulness.

"Pongo! Dudley, old Pongo has come back!"

"What good can he do—"

But Dudley stopped speaking. The little mongrel, both fellows were so attached to was jumping about at the well mouth, in the last stage of excitement, occasionally running away, only to come back again in a moment's time. Then the two juniors in the well heard the pleasantest sound they had ever heard in their lives. Tom Merry's cheery voice.

"But, hang it all, Fatty, something is the matter!"

"A rat in the well, perhaps!"

Instantly Wally yelled one of his deafening yells.

"Merry, quick! We're down the well! Hurrah! Cheer up, Dud! Hurrah!"

And Dudley caught him by the arm again because he thought he was going to faint.

The rest was easy, with Tom Merry directing affairs from above, for the hero of the Shell did not waste much time.

"Unfasten that rope from the windlass, Figgins; they can't reach it. Rip off your belts and sweaters, and tie 'em together. That's the style! Can you stick it another minute, Wally?"

"Another half-hour now you fellows have come," came back a somewhat exhausted voice. "How did you know we were here?"

"Pongo brought us. We met him a mile or more along the road, and he's bitten Wynn, Figgins, and Digby for trying to capture him and take him back to the school. We thought he had escaped, and get lost, you know. Yes, tie the belt on to the rope, old man. Is it strong enough?"

"Yes, but will it reach?" asked Figgins. "Can you touch the rope, now, Wally?"

"Another inch! My hat, yes! Hurrah! Up you go, Dud!"

"Yes, after you," said Dudley quietly. "You've been in the water longer than I have. Don't be an ass!"

And up Wally went.

A few minutes afterwards Dudley was also pulled up from the well.

Tom Merry and the others listened to Wally's explanation as they walked hurriedly towards St. Jim's, but they did not say much. They glanced at Dudley in turn once or twice; but the waster of the Third took no notice of them. He was playing with Pongo most of the way back.

"And he actually let himself fall into the well when he knew there was no chance of getting out, Wally?" said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "You mean to tell me that Dudley did that?"

"He did, Merry; and he saved my life, if ever one fellow saved another's in this world!"

When Saturday came, and with it a thaw, great was the excitement, for everyone was keen to see St. Jim's play their first Rugby match. But when the match was over and St. Jim's had won by a try by Dudley and a goal brilliantly dropped by Arthur Augustus, to one goal scored by the Wanderers, the excitement was even greater.

Afterwards the team celebrated the occasion with a feed organised by Fatty Wynn, and Wally D'Arcy and Dudley were the guests of honour.

Finally the feed ended with Kildare saying a few words. "I think you all know," he said, "that Dudley and D'Arcy minor have been under suspicion for going into a low public-house, and I feel that it is only fair that I should tell you all that I have investigated the matter, and discovered that Dudley went there to break off his connection with the place and turn over a new leaf. That being so, I have decided to drop the matter, and leave it at that."

"Thanks awfully, Kildare!" said Dudley and Wally in chorus.

"Bai Jove, dear boy, d'you know, I think that's wippin' of you!" said Gussy.

But the great man just smiled and said nothing.

(Martin Clifford contributes another ripping St. Jim's yarn in next Wednesday's GEM, entitled "The Call of the Sea!" Don't miss it!)

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