

"THE DEAD CITY!" Starring the St. Jim's Flyers
in a Thrilling New Adventure— **INSIDE.**

The **GEM** 2^D



BLAKE ANSWERS BACK!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Plant himself! But keep your letter **SHORT**, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction in this page. No photos can be returned and no replies given by post.

R. F. A., of Stoke Newington, writes:

I've read the GEM nearly two years now. What about having badges for GEM readers available at a small price? Now for some questions:

1. What are your favourite sports besides football and cricket?
2. Does Herries play any other musical instrument besides his cornet?
3. Is there an actual St. James' School? You have always answered this question somewhat doubtfully.
4. Can D'Arcy fight Digby, Herries, Manners, Lowther, and Redfern? Don't put it to the test. I'm too tender-hearted to expect that! Good-bye.

P.S.—I am a keen cyclist. (See photo.)
P.P.S.—Thanks! BEST WISHES FOR THE GEM.

ANSWER: I'm still suffering from eyestrain after trying to make your features out in the microscopic snapshot you enclosed. I take it that it shows you plus a bike plus a chunk of scenery, all of a size suitable for an anti's cinema. Little but good, did you say? It's a good wheeze, agreed.



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging views on matters of mutual interest. If you wish to reply to a notice published here you must write to the Pen Pal direct. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

I. Morgan, 56, Volunteer Street, Pentre, Rhondda, Glamorgan: pen pals, age 17-18; England only.

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to have a GEM badge. I've passed the suggestion to the Editor. Replies:

1. **Boxing, cycling, running, and taking photographs** big enough to be seen!

2. **No. Does he play the cornet?**

3. **Yes, haven't I? You see, the Head and the governors are rather against publicity.**

4. **They'd have to do something pretty awful, like wearing football shorts with a dinner jacket, to make Gussy want to lick them. On points, Gussy ranks top of the list, though. Toodle-pi!**

P.S.—But not a keen photographer?

P.P.S.—Lots of luck. And send a bigger snap next time.

Rosemary (giving no address) writes:

1. Who is your best pal?

2. Who is the most handsome boy (a) in the Shell, (b) in the Fourth (barring yourself)?

3. Are you jealous of Tom Merry?

4. Give me a description of (a) yourself, (b) Lowther.

ANSWER: I am (a) *jealous of nobody*, (b) *equally pally with Herries, Dig, and Gussy*, (c) *no judge of male beauty, though Tom Merry (Shell) and D'Arcy (Fourth) might fulfil your requirements*. Plain Yorkshire to look at—that's me! I'm a great admirer of Lowther's humour, though not of his good looks.

That "handsome" enough, Rosemary?

J. Coe, of Marston, Cheshire, writes:

I'm 15, and 5 feet 3 inches in my socks. I'm pretty tough, and weigh 8 stone 6 lb., and do a great deal of boxing. I challenge anyone at St. Jim's, and any reader my age and weight, so step on the scales, chums!

P.S.—I will forward my photo soon.

ANSWER: Here's a "big fish" whose "scales" look tough! Any "whale" of a fighter care to tackle him?

P.S.—Let me have a swap of the victor in your first scrap. I like your "line," but mind the "hooks"!

The Anglo-Argentine Correspondence Club desires members in all parts of the world. For particulars write to the Secretary, 156, Prospect Road, Woodford Green, Essex.

W. Carney, 8, Duke Street, Tanshelf, Pontefract, Yorks: age 17-20; anything of interest; anywhere except British Isles.

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The Young Authors Society, 55, Stratford Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, would like to hear from those readers interested in writing and literature. Write to the above address for particulars, enclosing stamped addressed envelope. Monthly magazine issued.

PEN PALS COUPON

29-4-39

TOM MERRY & CO. TAKE OFF ON THE NEXT STAGE OF THEIR CONTINENTAL AIR TOUR—AND FLY INTO DANGER AND THRILLS! SUPER, NEW, EXTRA-LONG STORY.



"Montpellier-le-vieux," said Gonsac, the guide, pointing with his stick. And from the high ridge of the cause the St. Jim's juniors looked down on one of the strangest sights in Europe—a desolate city formed of rugged rock masses.

CHAPTER 1.

Voices in the Night!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY grinned. He was amused.

Sitting-up in bed, in his room at the Hotel Perrache, in the city of Lyons, Arthur Augustus silently jammed his eyeglass into his eye and gazed across at the window.

It was a french window. It opened on a balcony. It was half-open. Bright moonlight gleamed on it. And three dark shadows intercepted the moonlight.

And through the opening came a murmur of low voices—the voices of his loyal chums, Blake and Herries and Digby.

"The ass!"

"The chump!"

"The fathead!"

In expressing their opinion of their noble chum within, Blake & Co. were evidently in full agreement. It was a case of three souls with but a single thought; three hearts that beat as one!

"The window's open!" went on Blake's whisper. "Did you fellows hear me tell that booby, three times over, to shut and lock his window?"

"We did!"

"And has he?"

"He hasn't!"

"Anybody could climb this balcony! And that chump leaves his window

open, after I warned him, three times over, to lock it."

"These French bed-rooms are pretty stuffy with the windows shut!" murmured Herries.

"I know that! Can't be helped! Is that dago, Giuseppe, after Gussy or isn't he?" grunted Blake. "Bet you he knows our quarters here—he's been watching us round Lyons. Isn't this Gussy all over?"

"What-ho!"

"I've a jolly good mind to step in and wake him up with a jug of water over his silly head!" breathed Blake.

Arthur Augustus grinned more widely than before. Evidently his chums took it for granted that he had gone to sleep after going to bed. But he hadn't. He was wide awake when those whispering voices reached his ears.

"And I've a jolly good mind," went on Blake, "to rouse him out and boot him all round the room! It—it would make him lock the window! But you know what an obstinate ass he is!"

"Blithering idiot!" agreed Dig

"But I'll teach him a lesson!" hissed Blake. "I'll give him a tip about leaving a french window open on a balcony after I've warned him! Gussy's going to get a visitor soon after midnight! Think

Bound for the Riviera in the Silver Swallow, the flying chums of St. Jim's land in the Cevennes Mountains to explore the Dead City—only to be lost in the rocky desolate region by their treacherous guide!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

he'll fancy it's the dago when somebody suddenly sits on his head?"

There was a suppressed chuckle on the moon-lit balcony.

"Let him go on snoozing with his window open!" went on Blake's whisper. "He's got it coming. I'll jolly well teach him not to be such a silly owl! I'm going to keep awake till midnight, and then come along and call on him. And if he isn't sorry that he left his window open, I'll eat my hat and yours after it!"

There was another suppressed chuckle. Then three shadows faded away from the window, and the moonlight streamed in unshadowed.

Blake & Co. were gone! They had returned to their rooms, which opened on to the same balcony.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, grinning.

Whispering voices and stealthy footsteps having died away, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped quietly out of bed.

He was not going to close his window. There was only that one window, and Gussy liked fresh air and disliked extremely a stuffy bedroom.

It was true that Giuseppe Fosco, the Italian, had been trailing the St. Jim's Easter party across Europe—in quest of that mysterious little black box which was in Gussy's keeping.

But that mysterious little black box was in no danger now. Gussy had dispatched it from Paris, by registered post, to Cannes, which was the destination of the St. Jim's trippers.

So that was all right!

It was possible that the dago, being unaware of that circumstance, might try to pay him a visit in the night after that black box. Blake & Co. see need to think it possible. But that mere possibility was not going to make Gussy shut the ventilation out of his room.

But whether the dago had any designs on him or not, it was clear, after those whispered words on the balcony, that he was going to have a midnight visitor!

"The uttah ass!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "It is weally vewy peculiah for Blake to fancy that he knows best! He knows perfectly well that I am the bawny man in Studay No. 6—I have told him so often enough! There is no dangah, and if there were, I should certainly not twy to sleep in a stuffay bed-woom."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Bai Jove! I would watah like that wotten dago to barge in!" he murmured. "I fancy I could deal with him! I told Blake I was bwingin' up a walkin'-stick! What more does he want? But—"

Arthur Augustus grinned again.

He did not believe for a moment that the dago would come, or doubt that he could deal with the dago if the dago did! But it was clear that he was going to have a visitor—Jack Blake! And he strongly objected to Blake suddenly sitting on his head in the middle of the night as a tip to keep his window shut! Forewarned was forearmed!

Arthur Augustus knew what he was going to do! Any fellow who butted in at that french window that night was going to get a surprise!

Gussy chuckled.

Blake thought that he as going to give him a tip! Arthur Augustus thought that he was going to give Jack Blake a tip! It

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remained to be seen which was right! Blake considered that Gussy needed a lesson. Gussy considered that Blake needed one!

Gussy had not the remotest intention of locking that french window. But if it was left open Blake was going to butt in. If he butted into a booby-trap, it would be a warning to Blake not to argue with a fellow who knew ever so much better than he did!

Gussy looked round in the moonlight for materials. He thought of lodging a suitcase on top of the door. But that would have been too severe. He did not want to damage his chum; only to teach him a necessary lesson.

"Bai Jove! This will do!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He picked up a rather large, flat cardboard box. Gussy had been shopping in Lyons—as a matter of course! Gussy could seldom see a shop without buying something. Recent purchases had been delivered in that cardboard box. It was empty now. Lodged on top of the half-open door, full of something unpleasant, it would instruct Blake without damaging him!

It was quite a strong box, made of thick cardboard. But it would not hold water—for long! Gussy thought of soot, but no soot was available. Besides, soot was rather too rough on a fellow. What about flour?

Gussy chuckled again and trod across to the bell. It was easy to ring and ask the garcon for a bag of flour!

Just before he touched the bell he remembered that he had forgotten the French for flour!

He paused.

Tom Merry was Gussy's resource in such difficulties. So Arthur Augustus put on his slippers, draped himself in a beautiful dressing-gown, and trotted out of his room to wake up Tom Merry and ask him the French for flour!

CHAPTER 2.

Night Alarm!

MONTY LOWTHER awoke quite suddenly. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had rooms on the other side of the corridor. There was a light in the corridor. The St. Jim's fellows were early to bed; but the hotel was still awake. Arthur Augustus knew the three rooms occupied by the three Shell fellows; but he did not remember, at the moment, which was which. So he sagely started at the first of the three, assured that by that method he would arrive at Tom Merry's sooner or later.

Thus it was that Monty Lowther, fast asleep, was suddenly awakened by a hand catching at his nose.

Gussy was going to shake him by the shoulder to awaken him. In the dark he got Monty's nose. Monty came out of slumber with a bound.

"Who—what—" he gasped.

"Sowwy to wake you up, Tom Mewwy, deah boy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"You blithering idiot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You crass ass! You howling jabberwock! You perishing piffler!"

"Bai Jove, that is not Tom Mewwy's voice! Is that you, Lowthah? Pewwaps you can tell me the Fwrench for flouah, deah boy, and then I need not wake Tom Mewwy."

Monty Lowther sat up in bed. He gripped his pillow as he sat up.

"You've woke a fellow up in the middle of the night to ask him the French for flour?" he hissed.

"It is not the middle of the night yet, Lowthah. It is barely half-past ten. If you know the French for flourah, will you— Yawooooop!"

Monty Lowther did not tell Gussy the French for flour. He landed out with the pillow, and placed it in the middle of Arthur Augustus' features. Tutoring in the French language had, it seemed, no appeal for Lowther at that hour.

Bump!

"Yawooooh! Why, you wuffian, what are you up to? Lowthah, you uttah beast, you have knocked me wight ovah!" howled Arthur Augustus.

Lowther leaned over the side of the bed and swiped again. Action seemed to appeal to him more than words.

Swipe!

"Wooooooooh!"

Arthur Augustus caught the pillow with his noble chin. He rolled over, tangled in his dressing-gown. He roared as he rolled. Another swipe, though rapid, missed him as he rolled out of range.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Have you gone mad, Lowthah? What do you mean by swipin' at a chap with a pillow when he asks you a civil question? Are you off your wockah?"

"Wait a minute!" gasped Lowther. "I'll be up in a tick!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet.

"I wufuse to wait a minute, Lowthah! I wufuse to speak anothah word to you, you wuffian! I am goin' this moment!"

"Wait a minute, will you?" howled Lowther. "I want to give you a few more before you go!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Lowther's door closed quickly, with Arthur Augustus on the outer side of it. He did not want a few more. What Monty was getting so excited about D'Arcy did not know, but he knew that he did not want a few more from the pillow.

The swell of St. Jim's spent a minute or two in recovering his breath. Then he moved on to the next door and opened it.

A Shell fellow of St. Jim's was asleep in bed. Whether it was Tom Merry or Manners, Gussy did not know. He decided to make sure before awakening him. Moonlight streamed in at the window and fell across the bed. He had only to peer at the sleeper's features in the moonlight.

He trod across to the bed and bent over the sleeper.

His eyeglass dropped from his eye as he bent down, and dropped on the sleeper's face. It awakened Harry Manners as suddenly as Monty Lowther had been awakened.

Manners started up.

Bang!

"Ow!" roared Manners.

"Wow!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

It was a surprise to both. Manners, newly awakened, had no idea that, as he started up, his head would bang on a chin bent over him. Arthur Augustus had no idea that that head was going to pop up so suddenly—not till it happened! Manners roared, and rubbed the top of his head. Arthur Augustus roared, and rubbed his chin.

"Ow! My hat! Wow! What's that? Ow!" roared Manners.

"Oh ewikey! You clumsy ass! You have

neahly dwiven my chin through the back of my head!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "I have a feahful pain in my chin!"

Manners glared.

"Is that that potty idiot Gussy?" he exclaimed. "You mad ass! What are you up to? Wait till I get hold of my bolster!"

Arthur Augustus faded out of the picture quite promptly. Lowther's pillow had been enough for him; he did not want Manners' bolster. The door shut promptly on the retreating form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

In the corridor, Gussy rubbed his chin. But it was all clear now; he knew, at any rate, which was Tom Merry's room. And, having rubbed his noble chin till the agony abated, he marched on and entered Tom Merry's room, sure of his goal at last.

This time he did not approach the bed. Tom Merry was a fearfully good-tempered chap. Still, after his experience with Tom Merry's chums, Gussy sagely decided to keep out of reach when he awakened him.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy!" he called.

No reply. The captain of the St. Jim's Shell was deep in the healthy sleep of happy youth.

Arthur Augustus glanced round in the moonlight from Tom's window and picked up a cushion from a chair. He tossed it on to Tom's bed.

He did not intend it to land on Tom's face, but perhaps the uncertain moonlight spoiled his aim. It did land on Tom's face, and Tom Merry came out of slumber with a startled howl.

"Oh! What— On crickey! Is the dashed ceiling falling in? What—"

"It's all wight, Tom Mewwy—"

"What?"

"It's only I, old chap! Wight as wain!"

Tom Merry sat up. He blinked at the cushion, which had rolled off his face on to the pillow, and he blinked at Arthur Augustus, shadowy in the moonlight.

"Gussy! Gone mad?" he gasped.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you're not gone potty, what have you come in here shying cushions at a fellow for?" shrieked Tom Merry.

"I wanted to ask you the French for flourah, deah boy."

"Wha-a-at?"

"The French for flourah—"

"Oh, great pip!" Tom gazed at the swell of St. Jim's. "You—you—you've come here and buzzed a cushion at my head to ask me the French for flower?"

"Yaas, old chap! It's wathah odd that I should have to ask you, Tom Mewwy, as I know French so much bettah than you do. But I don't seem to wemembah the word. What is the French for flourah, if you happen to know?"

Tom Merry gripped the cushion, but he restrained the impulse to whiz it back at Gussy.

"You born idiot! I thought you'd gone to bed and were asleep!" he growled. "Are you sitting up doing French?"

"Not pweicely, deah boy! I just want to know the French for flourah. You see, the garcon does not know English, so it is no good askin' him unless I know the French word."

"What the thump do you want it for?"

"I don't want it!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "It's for that ass Blake!"

"What does Blake want it for, then?"

"He doesn't want it!" chuckled Gussy. "But

he's goin' to have it, all the same! What is the Fwench for flouah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Go back to bed, old chap, and I'll ask Pawson to call in a doctor in the morning!" said Tom Merry soothingly. "You don't want the French for flower; you want a mental specialist!"

"Pway don't b. an ass, Tom Mewwy! If you know the Fwench for flouah, pway tell me the Fwench for flouah!"

"Fleur!" snorted Tom. "Now shut up, and let a fellow go to sleep!"

"You are suah it is fleur, deah boy?"

"Yes, ass! La fleur, the flower; les fleurs, the flowers. Have you forgotten the Villa des Fleurs, where we're going at Cannes? Now shut up!"

"Bai Jove! I don't mean that sort of flowah, deah boy! You are undah a misapprehension. I mean flouah, not flowah!"

"Flower, not flower!" repeated Tom. "Oh, flour! You unbelievable ass! What do you want flour for in the middle of the night? You don't want flour; you want a strait-jacket!"

"Wats! If you know the Fwench for flouah, Tom Mewwy——"

"Farine!" yelled Tom Merry. "Now shut up and go to bed, and I'll ask Pawson in the morning whether there's a comfortable lunatic asylum in Lyons where we can leave you!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Get out!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Buzz off!"

"I am just goin', deah boy, now I know the Fwench for flouah! There is nothin' to get excited about! Good-night, old chap!"

"Good-night, old fathhead!"

Arthur Augustus went to the door. But at the door he turned back as Tom was laying his head on the pillow again.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy——"

"Are you going?" hooted Tom.

"Yaas. But——"

"Scoot!"

"I was only goin' to ask you——"

"Buzz!"

"If you are quite suah that fawine is Fwench for flouah? You see—— Oh ewikey!"

The cushion flew. It flew with deadly aim. It caught Arthur Augustus under the ear and bowled him out of the doorway like a ninepin. Gussy and the cushion rolled in the corridor together.

"Oh ewikey! Oh cwumbs! You feahful ass! Yawooh! Oh Chwistophah Columbus! Wow! Oh, bai Jove!" spluttered Arthur Augustus. "You fawightful wuffian, what did you buzz that cushion at me for? Have you gone pottay?"

"Hurt?" called out Tom Merry.

"Yaas, you ass!"

"Wait a tick, and I'll come and hurt you some more!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus shot away to his own apartment.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Getting Busy!

"HONGWEE!"

"M'sieur!"

Henri, the garçon, came quite cheerfully at the ring of the bell from D'Arcy's room, though it was getting near eleven o'clock. Tom Merry & Co.'s stay in the city of Lyons was

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brief; but during that brief period Arthur Augustus had exuded tips, and Gussy was a man whom the whole of the Hotel Perrache delighted to honour.

Having several times mistaken the word "cent" for the word "cinq" on French paper-money, Gussy had several times tipped Henri a hundred francs, when he had intended to tip him five. Which had made Henri quite devoted in the service of the rich English milord.

So Henri came at the ring of the bell with his widest smile and his best bow, prepared to do anything that the English milord required, and happily anticipative of another hundred francs.

"I wequiah a bag of flouah," explained Arthur Augustus. "I mean to say, Je veux—I want. Got that? A bag—an bag, you know——"

"Monsieur desire une bague?" asked Henri, in astonishment.

"That's wight, Hongwee—that's wight!"

"Faut chercher un joaillier, monsieur," said the astonished garçon.

"Bai Jove! What's the good of goin' to a jeweller for a bag?" asked Arthur Augustus blankly. "Jewellers don't sell bags, do they?"

"Les bagues, monsieur, chez le joaillier," said Henri. "La bague comme ça?" he added, indicating a ring on his grubby finger.

"Oh ewikey! I wemembah now, a wing is called a bague in Fwench. Non, non! Pas comme ça. Not that sort of bague. A bag of flour! Fawine. Got that? I mean, gottez-vous that? Fawine."

"Farine," repeated Henri blankly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Monsieur desire farine?" asked Henri, falling over his own feet in astonishment.

He understood now what Arthur Augustus wanted, but he did not understand what the English milord wanted flour for in the middle of the night. That was far beyond Henri's comprehension.

"Wee, wee!" said Arthur Augustus, nodding. "Wee, wee, wee! Apportez moi fawine——"

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Henri. "Mais oui, monsieur, certainement."

Henri departed for flour.

Flour was easily to be obtained in the regions below. Henri was prepared to carry up flour if milord wanted flour. He supposed, of course, that Gussy was a little mad to be asking for flour to be brought up to his room.

But that was not really surprising, for Henri, like most Frenchmen, was aware that all the English were a little mad. People who washed themselves every day could hardly be sane, from the Gallic point of view. Henri knew that D'Arcy washed himself several times a day, so he was obviously a little madder than the rest. His desire for flour was really not much madder than his desire for soap.

Henri carried up the flour, and was duly rewarded.

Arthur Augustus shut the door after him. Then, at long last, he got to work on his surprise-packet for Jack Blake.

It was quite a large bag of flour. Arthur Augustus carefully poured it out into the flat cardboard box.

He placed a chair by the french window. Lifting the box of flour in both hands, he stepped on the chair.

It was rather unfortunate that he tangled his foot in his dressing-gown as he stepped on the chair. This caused him to miss his footing, and

sit down suddenly on the floor. The box of flour was neatly upended over his head.

"Gwoooooogh!"

Arthur Augustus spluttered wildly in a sea of flour.

Clouds of flour rose round him. Flour filled his hair, his ears, his nose, his mouth, and trickled down his neck. Gussy was of the flour, floury.

"Oh cwikey! Oooogh!" gurgled Arthur Augustus, clawing wildly at flour. "Oh cwumbs! Oh deah!"

Gussy had intended this for Jack Blake. He had not intended it for himself. Unfortunately, he had got it.

"Urrrghh!"

Arthur Augustus staggered up in an ocean of flour. He gasped for breath; he spluttered frantically; he gouged at flour.

"Oh cwumbs! Oh deah! Owoooogh!" gurgled Arthur Augustus. "How feahfully unfortunate! Oooogh!"

He grabbed a towel, and dusted off flour. For ten minutes or more he was busy with flour. He clawed it off, and scraped it off and brushed it off, and dusted it off. He was frightfully floury.

Gussy was feeling quite tired when he had got rid of the worst of the flour.

The box was empty. Gussy had had all the

flour. There was only one thing to be done. He rang again for Henri.

Prompt to the ring of the bell came the garcon. What milord wanted this time the garcon could not guess; but he was prepared to bring him anything, from coals or coke, to cauliflowers or cucumbers.

"Monsieur sonne! Ah, mon Dieu!" gasped Henri, as he stared at the sea of flour on the floor, and the visible traces that clung all over Arthur Augustus' dressing-gown.

If Henri had doubted before that this English milord was a little mad, he could not have doubted it now.

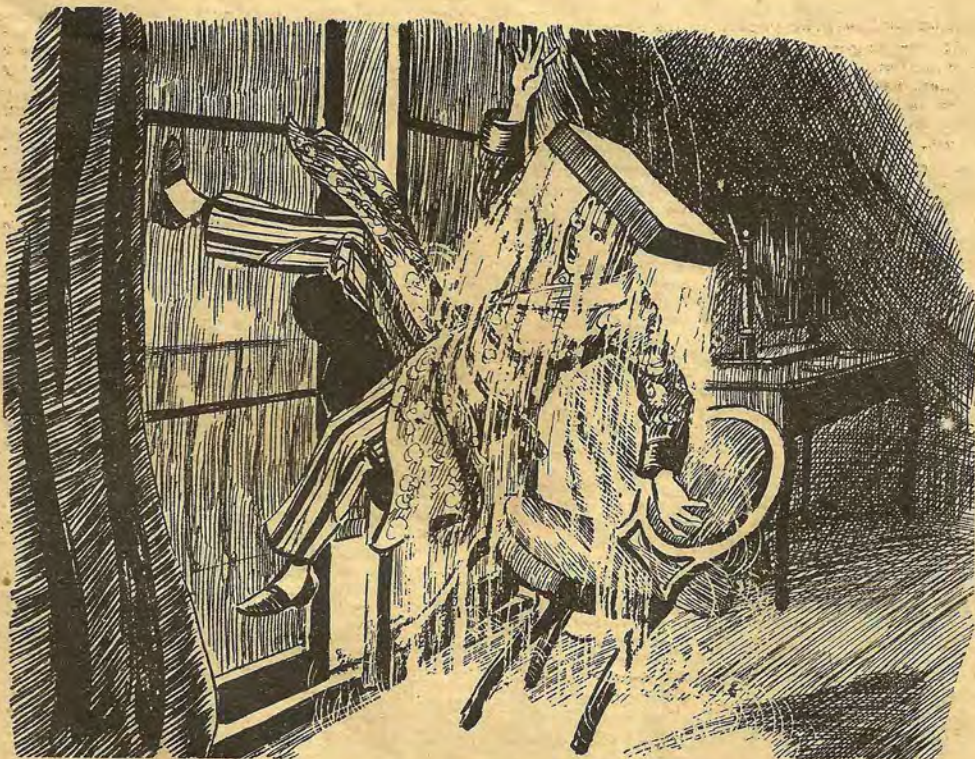
Milord had smothered himself with flour in the middle of the night. That, evidently to Henri, was what he had wanted the flour for—to smother himself from head to foot. Henri wondered whether this was one of the strange customs of the English, like their extraordinary custom of washing every morning.

"Awf'ly sowwy to bwing you up again, Hongwee," said Arthur Augustus. "But I have spilled the flouah, you see. Bwing me anothah lot."

"Comment?"

"Apportez moi farine—de la farine! Gottez-vous that?"

"Oui, monsieur!" gasped Henri.



Just as Arthur Augustus stepped on the chair to set up the surprise packet for Blake, he missed his footing. The next moment he sat down suddenly on the floor, the box of flour upending over his head!

He went away for more flour. He went like a man in a dream. This was the strangest milord who had ever come from the strange country where it was foggy and rainy all day, and every day, and where they ate raw beef-steaks at every meal.

But if milord wanted to smother himself with flour a second time, Henri had no objection. Every nation had its own strange customs. Henri would not have liked it himself, any more than he would have liked to wash every day; but milord could do as milord liked.

So up came Henri with another bag of flour, and departed with another handsome tip, in the hope that the English milord would keep this up.

Arthur Augustus, happily unaware of the impression he had made on the garcon of the Hotel Perrache, got going once more on his booby-trap.

This time he discarded his dressing-gown before he stepped on the chair. And he was awfully, fearfully careful.

The flat cardboard box, loaded with flour, was safely lodged at last on top of the half-open french window. One end rested on top of the glass door, the other on the lintel over the doorway.

If that door was pushed open from without that box of flour would descend—wallop!—on the head of the person entering. There was no doubt about that. It was all right at last. Nobody could come in from the balcony without getting that surprise-packet on his head.

Arthur Augustus surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction.

Then, having given another quarter of an hour or so to cleaning off remnants of flour, he went back to bed. As it was now about half-past eleven, he was sleepy.

He closed his eyes, in the full assurance that he would wake as soon as Blake arrived—long before Blake had time to sit on his head, even if Blake thought of sitting on anybody's head after getting the flour. Arthur Augustus grinned, and went peacefully to sleep.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise for the Dago!

GIUSEPPE FOSCO stopped in the deep shadow of a pillar supporting a stone balcony, and glanced to and fro with watchful eyes under the slouched brim of his black felt hat.

It was an hour after midnight. The rumble of traffic had long died away. From a distance sounded, now and then, the honk of a belated car. But the Rue Perrache was silent and still; the Hotel Perrache wrapped in darkness.

For several long minutes the dago watched and listened. Then he grasped the pillar and climbed. It was not a difficult climb to an active man, and Giuseppe was as active as a cat. And he was swift. In a minute or less he was grasping at the ornamental iron balustrade round the balcony, and whipping over it. Breathing hard, but silently, he stopped at the half-open french window of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's room.

Blake had been right—the dago had been watching! Not only had Giuseppe learned that the St. Jim's party were lodged at the Hotel Perrache, but he had—from the opposite side of the street—

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seen Arthur Augustus at that window, more than once, and learned which was his room.

It was all plain sailing for the dago so far; but he had hardly hoped to find the window unfastened. He grinned, with a flash of white teeth, at the sight of the half-open french window.

Evidently the English schoolboy was not on his guard! It was a walk-over for Giuseppe.

He had no doubt that the black box was there. It had not been on the Silver Swallow, the passenger plane in which the St. Jim's trippers had travelled from Paris to Lyons. It had not been in the packet Giuseppe had snatched from D'Arcy's hand outside the post office in the Rue de l'Hotel-de-Ville. But he had no doubt that it had reached D'Arcy by this time, and that it was to be found in the room to which he now had free access.

He put a dark, greasy head within, and listened. Through the silence came a faint sound of regular breathing. D'Arcy was asleep—as was only to be expected at that hour! If he awakened, a knock on the head would keep him quiet enough—Giuseppe was not the man to stick at trifles in his quest of the black box—and what it contained!

There was a sardonic grin on his swarthy face as he stepped in. The glass door was about a foot open; he pushed it farther and stepped in, and—

Swish!

Squash!

Up to that moment the dago had been as silent, as cautious, as a prowling leopard. But as something—he did not know what—descended suddenly on his head, he let out a yell that woke nearly all the echoes of the Hotel Perrache.

Something powdery smothered him, choked him, blinded him. He yelled, he spluttered, he gurgled, and, stumbling in the doorway, fell headlong into D'Arcy's room—not at all the way he intended to enter it.

"Oh! Ah! Cospetto! Ooogh! Dio mio! Che cosa e! Yurrggh!" came spluttering from the amazed and half-suffocated dago.

He sprawled blindly, knocked over a chair with a crash, and howled and swore and spat. It was quite a surprise for Giuseppe!

The regular breathing of the sleeper ceased. Arthur Augustus had expected to wake if a visitor arrived and captured the flour! He woke!

"Bai Jove!" came an ejaculation from the bed.

"Urrrggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Is that you, Blake, deah boy? How do you like it?"

"Wurrggh! Gurrgh!"

"Are you goin' to sit on my head, old chap?" chortled Arthur Augustus. "Feel like sittin' on a fellow's head aftah that? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "You sound feahfully funnay, deah boy! Have you got some of the flouah in your mouth? Ha, ha! This will be a lesson to you about playin' twicks, you duffah! Ha, ha!"

The door on the corridor was thrown open. Tom Merry's voice called into the room.

"Gussy! What's the row? What on earth's up? This row can be heard all over the shop! What—"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's all wight!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Only poor old Blake puttin' his head into a booby-twap! Ha, ha!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom, staring at the sprawling figure, snowy white from head to foot,

spluttering just within the wide-open french window.

"Is that Blake?" gasped Manners, staring in over Tom's shoulder, while Monty Lowther stared in over the other. All three of the Shell fellows had been roused out by the uproar from D'Arcy's room.

"Yaas, wathah!" chortled Gussy. "You see, he was goin' to come in and play twicks, so I fixed up the boobay-twap—see? Ha, ha!"

"Urrggh! Gurrgh!" came spluttering from the half-suffocated figure on the floor, as it, clawed wildly at flour. "Hooooogh!"

Three shadows darkened the moonlight on the balcony. Blake and Herries and Dig had been roused out also, and they came along by way of the balcony to see what was up. From outside they stared in at the spectral white figure that sprawled and gurgled.

"What's up?" shouted Herries.

"Who's that?" roared Dig.

"It's all wight, deah boys," trilled Arthur Augustus. "That's Blake—"

"It's me?" yelled Blake. "What do you mean, ass? How can it be me?"

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus fairly bounded at Blake's voice from the balcony. He had had no doubt for a moment that it was Blake who was gurgling flour on the floor just inside the window.

"Blake!" he stuttered. "Is—is—isn't it you? Bai Jove! Then who is it? If it isn't you, it must be somebody else!"

"By gum! Is it the dago?" gasped Blake. "It's somebody!"

"Oh cwikey!"

Tom Merry was groping for the lighting-switch. He found it, and switched on the light. Sudden illumination revealed the flour-smothered figure that sprawled and spluttered.

"Bai Jove! It—it—it isn't Blake, ahtah all!" stuttered Arthur Augustus. Certainly it was Blake who was staring in at the french window.

The floury figure bounded up. Giuseppe had been too utterly overwhelmed with surprise and confusion to think of escape, or anything else. But he thought of it now!

"Stop him!" roared Tom Merry as the floury figure made a desperate bound out on the balcony. He rushed across—too late.

Blake and Herries and Digby all grabbed at the figure together. They could not see who it was—it was too floury for that. But they could guess that it was the dago who had haunted Arthur Augustus all through that Easter trip. They all grabbed together as it flew out.

Herries was shouldered to the right, Dig to the left, but Blake got hold! He hung on as the dago tore across the balcony to the balustrade.

Then, with a desperate wrench, Giuseppe flung him off, put his hands on the rail, and swung over.

Blake was after him like a shot! Giuseppe was feeling for the pillar below with his legs, when Blake's fist landed with a terrific crash on top of the slouched felt hat!

The crown of that hat was knocked right in! The frantic howl from Giuseppe sounded as if the crown of his head had been knocked in, too! He dropped like a stone, and rolled over on the pavement below. He howled again as he rolled, picked himself up, and flew into the night—still howling, and leaving a trail of flour behind him as he ran.

CHAPTER 5.

Pawson Stops the Punch!

"MASTER ARTHUR—what——"

Pawson hurried into the room.

Pawson's quarters were at some distance from those of the juniors. But evidently he had been awakened by the row. Half-dressed, with the bald spot on his head gleaming in the light, Lord Eastwood's man hurried in—and stared in amazement at the sea of flour on the floor.

"It's all wight, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus.

"That's the flour!" explained Monty Lowther.

"That makes it all white, Pawson."

"You burbling jabberwock!" said Jack Blake.

"You pie-faced, perishing, piffing, pop-eyed apology for a tailor's dummy, so you meant that for me!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You frabjous, frumptions, foozling freak!"

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous, fwumptions, foozlin' fweak, Blake! Pway keep your tempah——"

"You put up that booby-trap for me?" roared Blake.

"Yaah, wathah! You see, I wasn't asleep when you fellows came along the balcony and babbled outside the window!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "So I got it all ready for you when you butted in!"

"So that's why you wanted to know the French for flour?" hooted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And if I hadn't gone off to sleep, I should have put my head into that!" roared Blake.

"Yaas! Wathah a surpwise for you, deah boy!"

"The Kidnapped Millionaire!"

"Crusoes" on Blackrock Island, Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, seem to be enjoying life, regardless of hardships and the roughest of rough quarters. But there are others on the island, among whom is Mr Samuel Vernon-Smith, a millionaire financier and father of one of the Greyfriars juniors. Imprisoned in a vault, unbeknown to Harry Wharton & Co., he is shut off from the world. Why? The question is answered in this thrilling story, written as only Mr. Frank Richards can write a story, and every boy and girl should make a point of reading it. Ask for

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"You see, I meant it as a warnin' not to butt in and play the goat!" explained Arthur Augustus. "But who—what—" exclaimed Pawson. Lord Eastwood's portly valet seemed bewildered. Tom Merry laughed.

"Somebody climbed the balcony and got in at that window, Pawson," he said. "We think it must have been the dago."

"And he put his cheeky head into the boobay-trap I had fixed up for Blake!" explained Arthur Augustus, with a chuckle. "It must have been as big a surprise for him as it would have been for Blake. Ha, ha!"

"You cacklin' image!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Can't you see that that window ought to have been locked now that that dago has butted in?" hooted Blake.

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps I had bettah lock it for the west of the night! But you should not twy to reach your gwandmothah, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "And I object vewy much to a sillay ass bargin' in and sittin' on my head!"

"You fixed that up for me!" roared Blake. "Well, the dago's had it, but you're going to have some, too! I'm going to rub your face in it!"

"Bai Jove! Keep off, you ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I do not want to give you a feahful thwashin', Blake—Yawoooh! Leggo!"

Arthur Augustus struggled as his exasperated chum grasped him and whirled him towards the sea of flour on the floor.

"Draggimoff, Hewwies!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!" retorted Herries. "Stick him in it, old man!"

"Will you dwaggimoff, Dig?"

"No fear! I'll lend him a hand!" answered Dig.

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mannahs—Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall punch your sillay head, Blake, if you do not let go!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Mind, I shall punch you vewy hard!"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" exclaimed Pawson. He waved plump, soothing hands. "At this hour, young gentlemen! You will alarm the hotel—"

"Leggo, you wottah!"

"Over you go!" gasped Blake.

"Dwaggimoff, Pawson!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

Pawson made a clutch at Blake. Blake dodged him and hooked Arthur Augustus' leg. Over went Arthur Augustus, landing in the flour, which flew up round him in clouds.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled six fellows.

"Yawoooh!"

Arthur Augustus squirmed in flour for the second time that eventful night. Flour caked on his beautiful silk pyjamas and smothered him from head to toe.

"There, you ass!" gasped Blake. "There, you fathead! There, you footling frump! That will teach you to put up booby-traps for your pals who have to look after you, you footling fathead!"

Arthur Augustus bounded up.

He was wrathful. He rushed at Blake with fists clenched and eyes gleaming. Blake dodged behind Pawson; and Arthur Augustus, rushing blindly on and landing out, planted a wrathful

fist on the widest part of Pawson's circumference, which was considerable.

"Ooooooooh!" gasped Pawson.

He sat down.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake. "Poor old Pawson! What are you hitting Pawson for, Gussy?"

"What has Pawson done?" asked Herries.

"Think your pater will like to hear of you knocking his valet about, D'Arcy?" asked Herries.

"Oh cwumps!" gasped Arthur Augustus, overwhelmed with dismay and remorse. "Pawson! My deah chap! I nevah meant to jolt you in the bwad-basket! I assuah you, Pawson—"

"Ooooooooh!" moaned Pawson.

Pawson was portly; he was plump. Pawson was a wonderful man. The St. Jim's fellows had an impression that Pawson had been everywhere and knew everything, if not a little more. Pawson could speak any language that was required, and was equal to any situation that arose. But if there was one thing Pawson was short of it was wind. And what wind Pawson had, had been jolted out by that unexpected and unintentional jolt on his equator.

Pawson rocked on the floor and moaned.

Arthur Augustus forgot the flour, he forgot Blake—he forgot everything but that unintentional damage to the incomparable and faithful Pawson.

"My deah chap, are you hurt?" he gasped.

"Mooooooh!" came from the unfortunate Pawson, like the dismal mooring of a very sorrowful cow. "Moooooooh!"

"Blake, you uttah ass, you see what you've done!"

"I!" ejaculated Blake. "You punched Pawson! What did you punch him for?"

"Brutal, I call it!" said Herries.

"So far as I can see, Pawson did absolutely nothing," remarked Dig. "Yet Gussy sets about him and knecks him about like this!"

"I did not set about Pawson!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I had no intention whatever of knockin' him about! I was punchin' Blake; and if Blake had not dodged wound Pawson it would not have happened! You know vewy well that I was punchin' at Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Moooooooh!"

"Oh cwikey! Are you vewy much hurt, Pawson? I wegwet feahful—that you stopped that punch. I apologise mos' pwofoundly!" exclaimed the distressed Arthur Augustus. "I cannot sufficiently expwess my wegwets, Pawson! Pway twy to wecovah your wind, my deah chap! Pewwaps I had bettah pat you on the back. Is that bettah, Pawson?"

Smack!

"Ow!" howled Pawson. "Stoppit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He keeps on hitting Pawson!" said Blake. "I can't begin to guess what Pawson's done—but Gussy keeps on hitting him—"

"We'd better hold Gussy till Pawson gets out of the room," suggested Monty Lowther. "We can't see a good and faithful servant knocked about like this."

"I was not hittin' Pawson!" raved Arthur Augustus. "I was pattin' his back to bwing back his bweth—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cacklin' asses, dwy up! Are you bettah, Pawson, or shall I give you anothah pat on the back—"

"Urrgh! No! Please do not, Master Arthur!"

gasped Pawson. "I—I should much prefer not. Ooogh! I am better now. Woogh! Moogh!"

Tom Merry helped Pawson to his feet. Lord Eastwood's man was still gurgling, but he was recovering. Arthur Augustus surveyed him with a friendly and anxious eye.

"If you are suah that anothah pat on the back would not do you good, Pawson. I will give you as many as you like—"

"Thank you, no, sir!" gasped Pawson. "I—I am much better. I will return to my room. Grooogh!"

"Hold Gussy while he gets away!" said Blake. "No more violence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cwass ass!"

Pawson tottered away. His last gurgle died away down the corridor.

The juniors sympathised with Pawson. It was rough luck on Pawson. But they could not help chuckling. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed them with deep indignation.

"You uttah asses!" he said witheringly. "Is there anythin' funnay in poor old Pawson gettin' a dwive in the bread-basket?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fwithful fatheads—"

"You'll be the death of me yet, Gussy!" gasped Blake. "But you haven't told us yet what Pawson's done—"

"He has done nothin'!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Then what were you knocking him about for?"

"Yes, what were you pitching into the poor chap for?" asked Dig. "Did you knock him down for nothing?"

Arthur Augustus did not answer those questions. He stared round for the walking-stick he had placed at his bedside. He grabbed it—and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther faded out of the doorway on the corridor, and Blake, Herries, and Digby out of the french window on the balcony. And they faded out only just in time!

CHAPTER 6.

Over the Cevennes!

"UP!" said Tom Merry.

The Silver Swallow took off like a bird. It was a glorious morning. From the windows of the cabin in the passenger plane the St. Jim's juniors had a wide view of the city of Lyons and the rolling waters of the Rhone and the Saone as the Silver Swallow soared into the blue.

The Easter trippers were on their way again.

The engines were running sweetly. The plane bowed on as smoothly as a good car on a good road. Up a thousand feet, Tom Merry & Co. looked down on city and town, hamlet and village, winding rivers and wooded hills. Up to two thousand feet glided the Silver Swallow, and fleecy clouds drifted by.

The St. Jim's fellows were enjoying life. Any fellow who could not have enjoyed life while on an air trip over Europe must have been hard to please.

But there was a faint cloud on the noble brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was a little worried about Pawson.

He thought a great deal of Pawson, as his noble pater—Lord Eastwood—did. So did all the St. Jim's juniors—excepting, perhaps, Harry Manners.

Manners had his doubts about Pawson.

Tom Merry, to whom he had confided them, did not agree. He had confided them to no one else. Perhaps he was not quite sure of them himself when he watched Pawson and saw him so continually, so incessantly, attentive and obliging and useful and respectful.

And yet, unless Manners was mistaken, Pawson took a deep and undue interest in that mysterious black box.

No one knew what was in it—or, indeed, how to open it. Pawson knew no more than anyone else.

But from Giuseppe Fosco's lawless and desperate attempts to obtain possession of it, all the juniors knew that it must contain something extremely valuable—and Pawson, of course, knew that as much as the schoolboys did.

Obviously, the Italian knew what was in it, and considered it worth the risks he was taking to get hold of it. But Tom Merry & Co. wondered in vain what its contents could possibly be; though they agreed with D'Arcy, of course, that it must not be opened, as it had been placed in his hands as a trust.

The bother of it was off D'Arcy's mind for the time, as it was in the post, to be delivered at the Villa des Fleurs at Cannes when they arrived there. Harry Manners had a lurking suspicion that Pawson, somehow, was going to intercept that delivery if he could. And if he tried it on, Manners was going to see that he did not get away with it.

No such thought was in the innocent, unsuspicious mind of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was thinking about Pawson because he was worried about him—on account of that jolt in the bread-basket.

Several times he had assured Pawson with great earnestness how much he regretted that accident. Pawson, with his usual respectful urbanity, begged him to think no more of it.

But the tender-hearted Gussy could not help thinking of it. The fact was that Pawson seemed to be showing bad effects from that jolt.

He was as attentive, as obliging, as useful, as ever; Pawson never failed in any of his duties. But every now and then, as if inadvertently, he pressed a plump hand to a well-filled waistcoat and caught his breath a little.

Naturally it worried the kind-hearted Gussy. It was not his fault, of course—it was Blake's fault; but it worried him just the same.

"By gum! That's not an easy-landing country," remarked Tom Merry, looking down. "What are those hills called, Pawson?"

Pawson was in the passengers' cabin with the schoolboys. He was in official charge of the party; but so unobtrusive was Pawson that they often forgot that he was there. Pawson, however, was always there when he was wanted, and always had an unlimited fund of information at the service of his youthful charges.

Pawson rose—giving a faint gasp as he did so. He stepped to the window to look.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, who had noticed that little gasp. "I am afraid you are still suffewin' fwom that jolt, Pawson!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Pawson. "Pray do not think of it, sir! Those hills, Master Merry, are the celebrated Cevennes Mountains!"

"The Cevennes!" exclaimed Blake.

"Where Robert Louis Stevenson travelled with a donkey!" said Manners.

"Where King Louis the Fourteenth put over the Dragonades!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, sir!" said Pawson. "Among those hills are many hamlets where King Louis quartered his dragons on the inhabitants in the religious persecutions of those times." Pawson evidently knew all about it, as he knew all about everything!

"Looks a tough country from up here!" said Tom.

"Yes, sir, this part of Languedoc consists very largely of barren hills, but there are very fertile valleys," said Pawson. "In some places, as you will see, the rivers have cut very deep channels; sometimes to a depth of a thousand feet, in the limestone plateaux—which are called 'causses' in this country. Very tough going on foot!"

"You have travelled in the Cevennes, Pawson?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, sir; I am very well acquainted with this country," answered Pawson. "We shall land at a place near Millau—a small town on the railway. There is not an aerodrome available, but we shall land quite safely at the spot I have selected. I have discussed the matter with the pilots, sir, and given them full instructions."

"You are weally invaluable, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus. "When the patah told us he was sendin' you with us, I wathah considahed that I could look aftah the partay all wight. But I am jollay glad that the patah sent you along."

"You are very kind, sir!" murmured Pawson. "I am sure that you will find a day's exploration in the Cevennes very instructive and entertaining. We shall land only a short distance from Montpellier-le-vieux."

"Montpellier-the-Old!" said Tom. "What's it like, Pawson? A big town?"

Pawson smiled.

"Not a town at all, sir, but a collection of strangely shaped rocks and monoliths that gives the impression of a dead city."

"Bai Jove! That sounds feahfully intewestin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I should not like to miss that!"

"I had hoped, sir, to be your guide here," went on Pawson. "But I do not quite feel up to the exertion of footwork in such a rough country, owing to—"

"Poor old chap, I quite undahstand!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am feahfully sowwy that you got that jolt, Pawson!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Pawson. "But I certainly do feel, sir, a slight shortness of breath, which will pass off before long. Pray do not concern yourself about it in the least, Master D'Arcy. But since you are so kind, sir, I am encouraged to ask you a favour."

"Anythin', my deah chap!" said Arthur Augustus instantly. "Anythin' I could possibly do, Pawson—"

"The motion of the plane, sir, slight as it certainly is, seems to incommode me just a little," confessed Pawson. "Unless you object, sir, I should like to complete the journey to Cannes by train from Millau."

"Bai Jove! But surely if you feel queeah, Pawson, a twain is much more wocky than a plane!" said Arthur Augustus in surprise. "Especially a Fwench twain. Fwench twains wock about like anythin'!"

"I think, sir, that I should feel more composed in a train, if you will give me permission."

"Of course!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway

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don't mench! Anythin' you like, Pawson! We shall be all wight—you can wely upon it that I shall look aftah these fellows while you are away! I trust you will be all wight when we see you again at Cannes."

Manners of the Shell fixed his eyes on Tom Merry with so significant a look that Tom started.

Manners did not speak.

But Tom knew what was in his mind.

Manners had said, when they left Paris, that Pawson would contrive somehow to get hold of that registered packet at Cannes before it could reach the hands of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from the post office.

Now—under cover of that accidental jolt on the waistcoat—he was calmly arranging to leave the St. Jim's party exploring the Cevennes while he went on to Cannes by train!

Tom caught his breath.

Was Manners right, after all? He did not think so—he could not think so—but he could not help wondering.

In reply to that look from Manners, Tom shook his head. Manners shrugged his shoulders. Then Pawson's smooth voice went on:

"You will reach Cannes before I do, sir. It is the best part of a day's journey in a train! But it is a very brief hop in a plane! If you spend to-morrow exploring the Cevennes, and take off late in the afternoon, you will reach Cannes before dark, but my train is not likely to be in before midnight."

Tom Merry looked at Manners in his turn.

He could not help grinning.

Manners coloured with vexation.

He had suspected instantly that Pawson was planning to get in at Cannes ahead of the party. But not only Pawson's words, but a minute or two's reflection, showed that a journey by train must be almost endlessly longer than a swift hop in the Silver Swallow! The juniors had ample time to explore Montpellier-the-Old, and then hop across to Cannes, and arrive long before Pawson turned up by railway. It was quite a facer for Manners!

Pawson was going on:

"I should not venture to ask you this favour, sir, but I am assured that everything at the villa is in a perfectly satisfactory condition. You will, I am assured, find it so, sir!"

"That's all wight, Pawson!" assured Arthur Augustus. "Wight as wain, my deah chap!"

And so it was settled; and the Silver Swallow swept on over rocky hills, deep gorges, and barren causses that baked in the Provencale sunshine, heading for Millau and the landing-place.

CHAPTER 7.

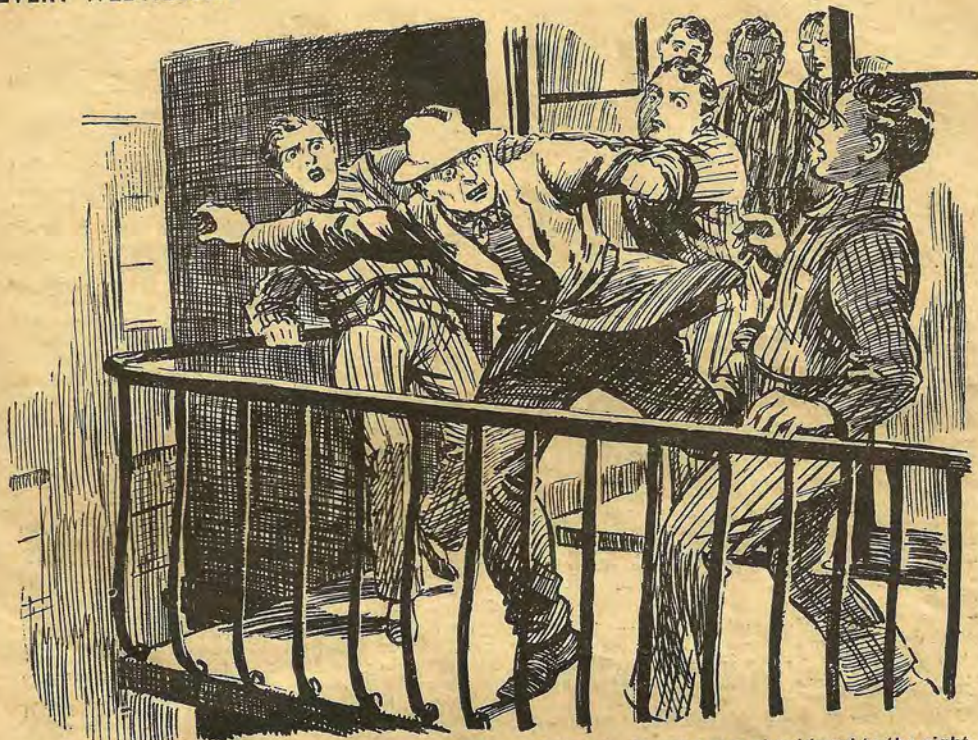
Landing in the Cevennes!

TOM MERRY & CO. watched from the cabin windows as the Silver Swallow circled like a bird seeking its nest.

It was, as Tom had remarked, a tough country for landing in a plane.

From an aerial view, the country looked wildly rugged and broken—hills rising against the sky of azure blue, rivers flowing at the bottom of deep, deep gorges, which their waters had cut in the limestone during century after century; barren causses stretching endless miles, dry and arid.

The Cevennes were wildly picturesque. It looked like a country where giants had been at play with huge rocks. Here and there opened vast pits, which Pawson told them were called



Blake & Co. all grabbed together as the floury figure flew out. Herries was shouldered to the right, Dig to the left, but Blake hung on to the dago as he tore across the balcony to the balustrade.

"avens"—yawning gulfs in the rocky earth that looked bottomless.

"Avens!" repeated Monty Lowther, with the glimmer in his eyes which warned his prospective victims that a pun was coming.

"Yes, sir, the natives here call them avens!" said Pawson. "Some of them are of immense depth—indeed, of unknown depth!"

"Avens of rest, if you tumble in!" suggested Lowther.

Tom Merry and Manners, like loyal chums, chuckled. By dropping the "H" from "haven," Monty had got away with a fairly good pun.

But Arthur Augustus looked puzzled.

"Did you say an aven of west, Lowthah?" he asked.

"No: I said aven of rest."

"Yaas; aven of west! I can quite undahstand that a chap would get a west, and a jollay long west, if he tumbled into one of those avens. But—"

"Haven of rest!" hooted Lowther. "Haven't you ever heard of a haven of rest?"

"Yaas, wathah! But I do not see the connection between a haven and an aven. Is there any connection, Lowthah?"

"If you drop the 'H' it's the same word, isn't it?" howled Lowther.

"Yaas, but you don't dwop the 'H,' do you?" asked Arthur Augustus. "If we dwopped 'H's' in the Fourth at St. Jim's, old Lathom would be down on us like a ton of bwiicks. Suahly Linton does not let you dwop 'H's' in the Shell?"

"You blithering ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"It's a pun!" hissed Lowther. "You can drop an 'H' from a word to make a pun, see? Haven't you?"

"Not quite, old chap! I should wegard it as fwihtfully bad form to dwop one's 'H's'!"

"It's a joke!" groaned Monty.

"Yaas. I can see that you think it is a joke, deah boy, but I don't quite see where the joke comes in, in dwoppin' 'H's.' Suppose I called old Hewwies 'Ewwies instead of Hewwies, I can't see that it would be a joke—or pun, either. Can you, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can you, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, as you fellows are laughin', I suppose it must be a joke! Pway explain to me where the joke comes in, Lowthah. I should weally like to undahstand."

"My name's not Methuselah!" answered Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I fail to see what that has to do with it, Lowthah! I am quite awah that your name is not Methuselah! But what has that got to do with it?"

"I mean, I should have to live as long as Methuselah to make you understand anything!" explained Lowther. "Even then I should have no time to lose—old Methuselah only lived eight hundred years!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the humorist of the Shell with a very severe gaze.

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"I wegard that wemark as asinine, Lowthah," he said. "I twust that I am as quick on the uptake as most chaps! I can always see anythin' funnay if there is anythin' funnay to see. But, at the pwesent moment, I entiahly fail to see anythin' funnay!"

"Oh, I'll give you something to cure all that!" said Lowther. "I can show you something funny that you'll see instantly."

"What's that, deah boy?"

"Look!"

Monty hooked a pocket-mirror out of his pocket and held it up before the surprised countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus gazed at his own reflection therein in astonishment.

"Well?" he asked.

"Don't you see anything funny in that?" demanded Lowther.

"Not at all, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus blankly. "There is nothin' funnay, that I can see, in holdin' up a lookin'-glass! Can you fellows see anythin' funnay in this?"

Five fellows gathered to look in over Gussy's shoulders.

"Yes, rather!" they said, all at once.

"You can see something funnay in that lookin'-glass?" asked Arthur Augustus, quite mystified. "What-ho!"

"Funnay as anything!"

"A real shriek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if there is anythin' funnay in that lookin'-glass, I own up that it beats me!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you will explain, Lowthah, what there is funnay in that lookin'-glass?"

"Think it out!" suggested Lowther. "Reflect, old chap—you see, it's a matter of reflection."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is quite useless to weflect on the mattah, Lowthah! I do not see anythin' funnay at all! It is quite a widdle to me. If there is anythin' funnay in that lookin'-glass, what is it?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"What is it?" repeated Lowther. "Well, I hardly know what to call it—but I expect you would call it a face!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. Even Pawson smiled, though he respectfully turned away his portly countenance before he did so.

"Bai Jove!" It dawned on Gussy's noble brain at last. "You unuttewable ass, Lowthah, if you are alludin' to my weflection in the glass—"

"He's guessed it!" gasped Lowther. "What a brain! What an intellect! How do you do these intellectual gymnastics, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, na!"

"You silly ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "If you wegard that as a joke, Lowthah, I can only say—Oh cwikey!"

The plane gave a sudden slant, and everybody but Gussy caught hold, but, Gussy's attention being occupied, he did not catch hold. He sat down quite suddenly with a bump.

"Oh! Oh cwikey! Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus as he sat. "Bai Jove! Oh Chwistophah Columbus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to laugh at, you duffahs, in a fellow sittin' down unexpectedly!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled up. "I have made my twousahs dустay!"

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"Those beautiful satin trousers!" sighed Lowther.

"Bai Jove! My twousahs are not satin, Lowthah—they are tweed twousahs—"

"They were sat in a moment ago!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus dusted his trousers, what time the Silver Swallow circled down to the landing-place. It was a stretch of level turf, where several paths met on a hillside, with a single building in sight.

That building looked like a small country inn, or auberge, of the poorest kind. No other was to be seen. The landing-place was several miles short of the town of Millau. But barren and uninhabited as the region looked, the landing-place was good, and the passenger plane came easily and gracefully to rest on the turf.

CHAPTER 8.

At the Auberge Soleil d'Or!

"WE shall have to wuff it a little, you fellows."

Tom Merry & Co. did not need to be told that, after a glance at their surroundings.

They trooped cheerfully down from the plane. The hot sun of the south poured light and heat on the hillside. It drew many smells from the little auberge and its grubby environs.

So far, the Easter trippers had tripped on the most comfortable lines. But they were quite prepared to rough it a little. In fact, a spot or two of roughing it gave zest to the holiday.

That little auberge, which was called the Soleil d'Or—or Golden Sun—stood alone at the cross-roads, or, rather, cross-paths, which were so dimly marked as to be only just perceptible.

Apparently it drew its livelihood from the pedestrians who passed on those paths every now and then—not one of whom was to be seen at the present moment. But, to judge by the aromatic scents that hung about the place, the patron cultivated pigs as a sideline. Likewise there were chickens, scraggy fowls that hopped and cackled round the juniors as they approached the auberge. And a sorrowful-looking goat gazed at them thoughtfully.

"Not a Grand Hotel!" remarked Lowther.

"Not quite!" agreed Tom Merry, laughing. "But what's the odds, so long as you're happy?"

"Bai Jove, it looks a feahfully poor place!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah glad we dropped in here."

"You like places specially poor?" inquired Blake.

"No, deah boy, but the people here must be fightfully hard up, to judge by the look of the place," explained Arthur Augustus. "It will be quite a windfall for them for a party of twavellers to dwop in with money to spend."

"Same old ass, aren't you, Gussy?" said Blake, with an affectionate grin.

"Weally, Blake—"

Patron and patronne both came out to greet the travellers, evidently greatly astonished to see them there. A roughly clad man, whose looks and scents indicated that he took care of the pigs, stood staring at the plane as if he had never seen one before.

But the host and hostess, though astonished, were polite and delighted to see the "windfall." Mine host was in his shirtsleeves, his leather trousers supported by a single suspender that

slanted across one shoulder. His shirt, like his face, looked as if it had had its last wash when its owner was a small boy. But his grubby, greasy face beamed with delighted hospitality. At one glance he could see that he was going to gather a bigger harvest from this party than he was accustomed to gather in a whole year from the peasants who used the mountain paths.

He spoke voluble French; but it was far from being the French that Tom Merry & Co. learned at St. Jim's, and seemed equally unlike the French they had heard in Paris. Hardly a word was comprehensible to the juniors of the local "patois" spoken by the patron of the Golden Sun.

But the invaluable Pawson did the talking, once more surprising the juniors with his unlimited knowledge. In Paris Pawson had talked the purest French; now he talked the local Provencale dialect as if born to it.

"Bai Jove, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, "how does Pawson do it? I weally wondah whethah there is anythin' Pawson doesn't know."

The St. Jim's party were ushered in.

The quarters at the Auberge Soleil d'Or were rather cramped, and not over clean. But there were two rooms in which the juniors could be parked, and Pawson told them that the pilots and the steward would camp in the plane for the night. Only one night was to be passed there; the following afternoon the Silver Swallow was to take off again.

The juniors sat down to a meal in a grubby salle-a-manger, waited on by the patron, and by the indefatigable Pawson. They were not surprised to find that pork figured prominently on the menu.

Pawson advised them not to drink the water—advice hardly needed after they had glanced round the surroundings of the Soleil d'Or. They had no fancy for the red and white wines, but there was coffee, in which grounds seemed to be mixed in about equal proportion to the fluid. But they were not disposed to grouse about anything.

"Weally, quite a jollay meal!" Arthur Augustus declared stoutly, when it was over.

"Topping!" declared Tom Merry.

"Nothing to complain of," said Monty Lowther.

"Except—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Except—"

"I twust you are able to wuff it, Lowthah!"

"Except the coffee. There were grounds for complaint in the coffee!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha!" ejaculated Tom Merry and Manners together.

"Bai Jove! Is that anothah wotten pun, Lowthah?"

"Not at all!" Lowther shook his head. "One of my best, old chap!"

"Bai Jove! Then I weally wondah what one or your worst would be like, old fellow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we've drunk the coffee, let's take a walk in the grounds!" suggested Lowther.

"But there aren't any grounds to the place, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Only just that field where the plane landed, and the hill-side, you know."

"The coffee grounds!" shrieked Lowther.

"But you can't walk in the coffee grounds, Lowthah! I admit they are wathah thick, but walkin' in them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Let's get out."

And the juniors strolled out of the auberge. They followed a barely marked path that led across a steep causee a vast rocky plateau that lay between the auberge and the town of Millau.

It was very rough going, and gave them a hint of what they were to expect on the morrow, when they began exploring. In a few minutes the wild and rugged rocks hid the auberge from their sight, and they might have fancied that they were wandering in a desolate and uninhabited desert.

But as they came round a great rock at a curve of the path, the sound of voices fell on their ears. Both were speaking French—or rather, the local dialect of that language; but one was recognizable as Pawson's. Pawson had left them after their meal, and had been gone out a quarter of an hour when Tom Merry & Co. walked away from the inn. Quite unexpectedly they had come on him on the path over the causee.

"Bai Jove! That's Pawson's voice, I think," remarked Arthur Augustus.

The next moment, rounding the great rock, they saw Lord Eastwood's man, standing in talk with the rough-looking fellow whom they had seen at the auberge.

He was speaking very earnestly, and the peasant was listening to him very attentively, with a faint sardonic, unpleasant grin on his hard, stubbly face. That expression struck all the juniors at once, and they could not help wondering what Pawson could possibly be saying to call up such an unpleasant leer to the face of the listening man.

But as they appeared, Pawson ceased to speak immediately. The peasant's disagreeable grin vanished as if by magic, and his face became stolidly expressionless, only his sharp little eyes casting a furtive look at the juniors.

Manners glanced rather sharply from one to the other.

It struck Harry Manners that there was something a little surreptitious in this interview between Pawson and the man from the auberge, out of sight of the inn and the travellers, especially taken in conjunction with the man's sardonic leer, and Pawson's instant silence when the juniors appeared in sight.

"Bai Jove! Here you are, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Fancy wunnin' into you here!"

Pawson gave his deferential cough.

"I am sending Jean to fetch the guide, sir," he explained. "As I mentioned, sir, you will require a guide for your visit to Montpelier-le-vieux to-morrow, and there is an excellent man with whom I was acquainted when I was here some years ago—a man named Gonsac. I am very glad to learn from this man that Gonsac is available, though he will have to be fetched from a considerable distance. He is, I think, the best guide in the district, sir."

"Wight-ho, Pawson! A chap can always twust you to make the vewy best awwangements," assented Arthur Augustus.

The juniors walked on, and in a few minutes passed out of sight of Pawson and Jean. Manners, glancing back over his shoulder, saw the dark-faced Jean looking after the party—again with that sardonic grin on his face.

Manners' face was very thoughtful as they sauntered on.

When Tom Merry & Co., half an hour later, walked back to the auberge, they found Pawson there. Jean was in the ill-smelling yard, saddling a bony horse. The juniors watched him as he mounted and clattered away into the falling dusk over the rocky causse.

"Gone to fetch the guide, Pawson?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes, sir," said Pawson. "Gonsac will be here in the morning, sir. I am sure that I can rely upon him after he receives my message. A most reliable man, sir; he knows this strange country like the back of his hand, and can be relied upon to carry out his instructions to the very letter—to the very letter, sir!"

To Manners' ears it seemed as if there was a tone of sardonic amusement in Pawson's voice as he repeated the last words. He glanced quickly at Lord Eastwood's man, but Pawson's face wore its usual expression—an almost expressionless respect and deference. And Harry Manners wondered whether he was getting altogether too suspicious of Pawson.

CHAPTER 9.

Gonsac the Guide!

"**T**OPPIN' mornin', you fellows!"

"Oh, ripping!"

Tom Merry & Co. turned out bright and early in the spring morning. They breakfasted in the *salle-a-manger*, and came out of the auberge in a cheery crowd into the almost blazing sunshine.

Early as it was, it was bright and warm, and the rocky causses were already glowing with heat. Outside the inn they found Pawson in talk with a man they had not seen before, and whom they guessed to be the guide for whom Jean had been dispatched the previous evening.

He was a man of burly frame, with a black beard and a dark, southern face, that struck the juniors as rather grim in its expression. That expression was not merely stolid, but seemed sullen. He gave the juniors a very penetrating look with a pair of keen and searching black eyes as they came out of the auberge. Then he went on speaking with Pawson.

Pawson, however, broke off as they came up.

"The guide, gentlemen!" he said. "This is Gaston Gonsac, whom I knew many years ago to be a faithful and capable guide."

"Glad to see you, Monsieur Gonsac!" said Arthur Augustus politely. "I mean, *je suis—nous sommes—er—how the thump do you say you are glad to see a chap in Fwench, Tom Mewwy?*"

"Bonjour will do!" said Tom, with a smile.

"Bai Jove! Yaas! Bonjour!" said Arthur Augustus.

The guide touched his black felt hat, gave the slightest perceptible inclination of the head, and a grunt. He was, apparently, a man of few words.

"Cheerful sort of sportsman!" remarked Monty Lowther.

Pawson coughed.

"The peasants of this region are a taciturn race, sir!" he said. "But they are good and reliable men—very reliable indeed. I can trust Gonsac to carry out my instructions while you young gentlemen are not in my charge."

Again it seemed to Harry Manners that he detected a peculiar tone in Pawson's voice. But

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if Manners did, no one else did, least of all the cheery, unsuspicious Arthur Augustus.

Certainly, it was not likely ever to occur to the cheerful Gussy that a mocking, sardonic, malicious spirit might possibly lurk unseen behind Pawson's outward show of respectful deference.

"Gonsac will show you everything that is to be seen at Montpellier-le-vieux!" continued Pawson. "He has guided many parties over that strange place, and knows it thoroughly."

"I am suah we can wely on him, Pawson, as he is recommended by you."

"Thank you, sir! I have instructed the aubergiste to pack lunch, which Gonsac will carry for you in his haversack. I very much regret that I shall not be able to be your guide, personally, sir, but I am sure that in the circumstances—"

"Yaas, wathah, Pawson! I twust you are not still feelin' any ill effects fwom that jolt, though."

"A mere trifle, sir—a slight shortness of breath. I shall be completely recovered in a day or two, Master Arthur. Pray do not concern yourself about it! I have been able to obtain a vehicle to carry me to Millau, where I shall take the train."

An ancient vehicle, that looked as if it had come out of the Ark, stood before the inn. That, it seemed, was the conveyance that was to convey Pawson to Millau, a few miles away, that morning—in the opposite direction from that the St. Jim's fellows were to take.

"I twust you will have a comfortable twip in the twain, Pawson!" said the considerate Gussy.

"Thank you, sir; you are always kind," said Pawson. "I shall see you started, sir, before I leave. You should reach Montpellier-le-vieux at midday, and will lunch there, and return in the afternoon, after exploring the place under Gonsac's guidance. I am sure I can rely upon you all, sir, not to wander away from his sight, in a strange untrodden country."

"I will look atfah that, Pawson! While you are absent, I wegah these fellows as bein' undah my care."

"Fathead!" remarked Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ass!" observed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Chump!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

Pawson coughed.

"You will return, gentlemen, not later than four o'clock to this auberge," he said. "The pilots have instructions to take off as soon as you return, in order to land at Cannes well before dark."

"I will make a note of it, Pawson."

"I am not likely to reach Cannes, sir, before midnight; and I am sure you will realise that I must see you safely there when I arrive, as I am responsible for you to his lordship! You will not fail, sir, to return here in time for the plane to take off early?"

"Wely on us, Pawson!"

"Very well, sir; all is ready now."

And in a few minutes more the explorers started. Gaston Gonsac, who had not spoken a word, led off by a path that wound away over the causse towards the north-east, in which direction Montpellier-le-vieux lay from the auberge. Tom Merry & Co. followed him, tramping up the rugged causse in a cheery party.

At a little distance, they looked back on the roofs of the auberge and its outbuildings. They

saw Pawson step into the ancient vehicle, with a bag in his hand, and drive away to the south-west for Millau.

In a few minutes, the vehicle and Pawson disappeared from sight. Arthur Augustus shook his head thoughtfully.

"It is wathah wuff!" he remarked.

"Must expect it rather rough on these giddy mountains!" said Blake.

"I mean it is wathah wuff on Pawson! It is evah so much bettah in the Silvah Swallow than in a twain, and poor old Pawson's gone on by twain, just because you played the goat the othah night at Lyons, Blake. I suppose you cannot help bein' a thoughtless kid, but weally, it is wathah wuff on poor old Pawson!"

"My dear chap, if you lose your temper and pitch into Pawson, I can't stop you!"

"You uttah ass, Blake, you are perfectly awah that I did not lose my tempah and pitch into Pawson!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Hitting below the belt, too!" said Blake, shaking his head. "I was really surprised at you, Gussy! Not St. Jim's style."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wufese to answah such widiculous wemahs, Blake! I wegah you as an uttah ass! Bai Jove! What is that fellow gwinnin' at?" added Arthur Augustus, with a gesture at a man who was staring up from the auberge yard at the bunch of schoolboys high up on the causee.

It was the man Jean. He was staring after the party with the same peculiar sardonic grin on his face that they had observed before. As he caught their eyes on him, however, he turned away, and disappeared among the pigsties.

"He seems amused about something!" remarked Tom Merry. "Can't say I like his looks."

"Perhaps he can see something funny here!" suggested Monty Lowther. "You remember that awfully funny thing I showed you on the plane yesterday, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

Pawson having disappeared from sight, the juniors resumed their way. Gonsac, who had halted when they halted, tramped on again, and they tramped after him. The next glance back failed to reveal the auberge—it was hidden under the high shoulders of the causee.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, rang the boots on the rocky way.

The St. Jim's fellows tramped on through an utter solitude. Down in the valleys, no doubt, there was population; and there were strips of fertile soil by the rivers in the deep gorges, where little fields were carefully cultivated. But high up on the barren causee, they seemed to have the universe to themselves.

The sun, as it rose higher, was hot—and the rocky earth reflected the heat. It was hot, it was dusty, it was dry and arid. It was, undoubtedly, hard going, a tramp over a causee in the Cevennes!

But Tom Merry & Co. were cheery in spirits and full of beans. The only dark spot on the horizon, to the cheerful juniors, was the silent, sullen guide, who tramped on ahead with tireless limbs, without glancing round, and without speaking a word.

But, far from pleasant companion as Gaston Gonsac seemed, they were glad to have him there, and very careful not to risk losing sight of him—for, before they had covered a mile, they knew

that they would have been hopelessly lost without a guide.

On the trackless causee, a stranger might have wandered for days and nights without finding his way.

Tramp, tramp, tramp! they went, dusty and a little tired, fanning their faces every now and then, but merry and bright. And at length, towards the hour of blazing noon, Gonsac turned his head and spoke for the first time, pointing with his stick as he uttered the words:

"Montpellier-le-vieux!"

And from a high ridge of the causee the juniors eagerly looked down on one of the strangest sights to be seen in Europe.

CHAPTER 10.

The Dead City!

"A CITY—"

"A town—"

"A dead city—"

"Bai Jove, what a vewy extwaordinawy place!"

"Well," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath, "this was worth coming a long way to see! But—what a weird, eerie spot!"

"Nobody there, unless it's ghosts!" said Lowther. "Blessed if I should be half-surprised to see a giddy spectre or two!"

It was strange—it was eerie—it was uncanny! Looking down on that city of desolation, the juniors could hardly believe that it was not a real city—deserted by its inhabitants, stricken by some strange plague or terror.

The length of it looked like a couple of miles, and it was a good mile wide, seemingly laid out like a town, in streets, "circuses," and broad avenues.

Houses, mansions, chateaux, reared lofty walls, but with no sign of door or of window! Yet even when they knew what these strange forms were, it was hard to believe that they were monoliths—rugged rock masses, and not buildings put up by human hands at all.

Manners' eyes gleamed as he unshipped his camera! This was a chance for getting some remarkable photographs that Harry Manners was not likely to neglect. Manners' eyes danced at the thought of a few pictures of Montpellier-the-Old, to stick up in Study No. 10 in the Shell at St. Jim's.

"By gum, I'm glad we never missed this!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "It is not a vewy inspiwitin' sight—but it is vewy intewestin' and extwaordinawy! I am vewy much obliged to Pawson for takin' this in on our Eastah twip! I had nevah heard of it till Pawson told us about it."

"It's weird!" said Blake in quite a hushed voice. "Wouldn't you fellows swear that they were houses—rows of houses—regular streets—and circuses just like Piccadilly Circus! How the thump did the stuff get chucked about like that?"

"Bai Jove! I would ask Pawson, if Pawson were here!" said Arthur Augustus innocently.

The juniors chuckled. Extensive as Pawson's knowledge was, they did not suppose that even the inimitable Pawson would be able to explain that amazing freak of Nature.

"I shall get some jolly good pictures of this," said Manners. "Splendid light, too—everything O.K. Let's get down to it."

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"Hallo, there's one jolly old inhabitant!" exclaimed Tom Merry, pointing to a moving figure, tiny in the distance, in one of the "avenues." The juniors could not help thinking of the ways in that strange city as avenue and streets, though it was by the blindest chance that they had been formed.

"A tourist!" said Monty Lowther. "Sight-seeing like our jolly old selves."

The air was clear and bright, and they could see long distances. The figure in the avenue of monoliths looked toylike as it was so far away, but they could pick it out with peculiar distinctness.

It was that of a tall, thin man, with a long, bony face, which was shaded by a large-brimmed hat.

Slung on him were two leather cases, both open. From one came a gleam of a red cover, indicating that it contained a guide-book. From the other, he had seemingly taken a camera, which he had in his hand.

He was taking shots at a strange group of monoliths, almost on the verge of one of the great pits which Pawson had told the juniors were called "avens."

Within two or three feet of the spot where the bony man stood yawned the deep, dark gulf in the earth, his back carelessly turned to it as he sighted his camera for a shot.

"That sportsman's got some nerve!" remarked Blake.

"Lots!" agreed Tom Merry. "If he took a stumble at that spot—"

"He's taking photographs!" remarked Manners, interested in the stranger on that account. "Might give him a cheerio when we go down there. Must be an intelligent sort of chap, interested in photography, you know."

At which Manners' friends grinned. The mere possession of a camera was a passport to Harry Manners' esteem.

"Allons!" said the guide abruptly.

"Hold on," said Manners as he was starting. "Make for the spot where that chap's standing, see?"

Gonsac stared at him without replying.

"He doesn't undahstand English, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I had bettah put it to him in Fwench."

"Think he'll understand that?" grunted Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

Tom Merry touched the guide's arm and pointed with the other hand at the tall, bony photographer in the distance.

"Nous voulons parler a cet homme!" he said, in his best French. "Nous voulons le trouver."

Gonsac's sullen face seemed to become a little more sullen. He did not answer, but led the way down from the high ridge on the cause, in the direction of the mock city.

In a few minutes the rugged way hid the long lean man from the schoolboys' sight. But that strange city of rocks remained under their view all the way down.

They saw no other human form. Doubtless tourists, like themselves, often came to view Montpellier-le-vieux; and there was a road from Millau by which cars could travel; but they saw no signs of others.

They entered the strange city at last.

Grass-grown streets, avenues, lanes, paths, wound among the gigantic monoliths, and by the edges of deep, shadowy avens.

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But they saw no sign of the long lean man in the shady hat. Gonsac had apparently failed to head for the spot where he had been seen.

They looked round for him, but they looked in vain.

The rock city was so extensive that a hundred people might have been within it, without being aware of one another. It was not, perhaps, surprising that the guide had missed him, for the great rocks obscured the view at even a few yards' distance.

But Manners was a little annoyed. He liked to compare notes with a brother photographer.

"Can't you find the spot where that chap was standing?" he demanded. "Oh, blow the man, I mean, ou est l'homme—cet homme?"

Gonsac looked at him stolidly.

"Cherchons!" he answered.

"Bai Jove! What does he mean about a church?" asked Arthur Augustus. "There can't be any churches here."

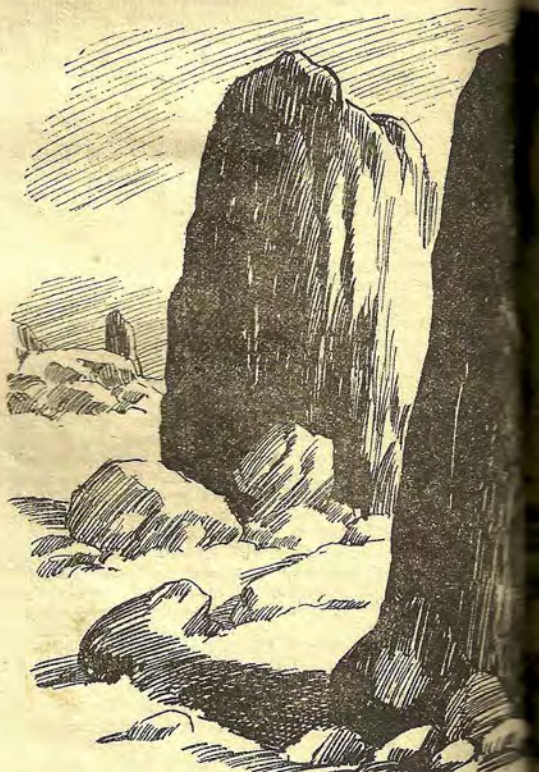
Tom Merry chuckled.

"Cherchons means to search, fathead," he said. "Cherchons means let's look."

"Bai Jove! So it does! I should wemembah a lot more Fwench if I didn't keep on forgettin' it, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cheery laugh of the schoolboys echoed strangely among the lifeless rocks. For a good hour, under the bright sunshine, they explored



To the surprise of the juniors, as they rounded the bend, they found the long lean man standing round them in surprise. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Looks as if he's been here."

the strange ways of the strange city, Manners keeping a sharp eye open for the long lean man. But they saw nothing of him, and when Blake suggested lunch at last, they were all in agreement.

That long tramp over the cause had tired them, and wandering in the rock city after it made them feel that they wanted a rest more than anything else. So they sat down on the rocks in the shadow of a mighty monolith, and lunch was unpacked from Gonsac's haversack.

Cold chicken, cold salad, and hard bread, with cold coffee to wash them down, made a very good lunch. Tom Merry & Co. disposed of the same with very good appetites.

Gaston Gonsac sat at a little distance, eating his own meal, silent, and not looking at the party.

"Sulky brute!" muttered Manners.

"He doesn't seem fearfully gregarious, and that's a fact!" remarked Monty Lowther. "This isn't a happy excursion to him, of course—it's just a day's job."

"No need to be a sulky, sullen, disobliging brute, all the same!" grunted Manners. "He could have found that chap with the camera if he'd liked."

"Weally, Mannahs, I don't see why he shouldn't have if he could have," said Arthur Augustus. "What can it mattah to him whethah we speak to another twippah or not!"

"Nothing, except that he's a sulky brute!" grunted Manners.

"It does seem odd that he couldn't find the man!" remarked Tom Merry. "This place is strange to us, but Gonsac must know it like a book. Still, I don't see why he shouldn't, if he could."

Grunt from Manners. Manners was the only fellow in the party with a camera. When he talked photography, Tom and Monty listened, but not with the enthusiasm of camera-addicts! Manners would have been really glad to meet with a fellow enthusiast. However, whether intentionally or not, Gaston Gonsac had failed to find the long, lean man, and Manners could only grunt—which he did expressively.

CHAPTER 11.

Mr. Honk, of Beavertown, Iowa!

"SAY, big boys, I'll tell you this is the cat's whiskers!"

A voice that seemed to come a long way through a long nose made that remark, and Tom Merry & Co. jumped, and stared round.

They had finished lunch, and were leaning on the rocks, taking a rest before restarting their explorations of the dead city, when that unexpected nasal voice startled them.

Round a corner of the tall monolith, in the shade of which they had camped, came a long, lean figure—the same that they had viewed from the far distance up the cause.

The long, lean man, evidently a tourist of American nationality, stopped, looked down at them, nodded, smiled, and wiped his perspiring face with a red handkerchief.

"I'll mention that it's hot!" he remarked. "A few! And then some!"

Manners jumped up with a joyful grin.

The St. Jim's party had failed to find the lean man! But the lean man had unexpectedly found them!

"Glad to meet a fellow traveller here, sir!" said Manners. "We saw you taking pictures! Jolly place for it, what?"

"You said it!" agreed the lean man with a nod. "I guess my pictures will make them sit up and stare at Beavertown, Iowa. I'm telling you! Say, is that your guide, and what's got him?"

The lean man stared at Gonsac, and the juniors stared at him, too.

At sight of the American the guide jumped up from the rock where he was sitting and smoking a cigar, while he waited for the juniors to get a move on. He was staring at the newcomer with undisguised hostility, his sinewy hand grasping the long, iron-bound stick he carried.

There was irritation, anger, and what seemed like dismay in the dark face of the Cevennes guide.

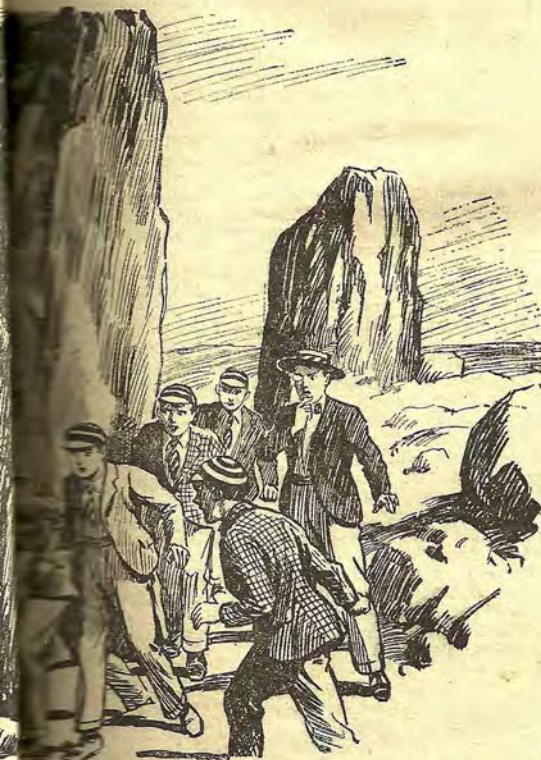
Why, the juniors could not imagine. But that look on the guide's face told them one thing; he had purposely avoided establishing contact with the lean man, and was annoyed at seeing him join the party.

"Bai Jove! What the dooce is the mattah with the man?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

"Your guide?" asked the American.

"Yaas; he is a vevy good guide, though his mannahs do not seem to be feahfully polished."

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h guide had disappeared. They halted, staring at each other. "He can't have lost himself, I suppose!" said Blake.

said Arthur Augustus. "He seems to be wowwied about somethin', I weally do not know what."

"I'll say he don't like this baby," drawled the American, "and I'll mention that I don't give two hoots whether he does or not!"

And the American gentleman sat down on a boulder and stretched out his lengthy legs, with his back to the scowling guide.

"You're more than welcome, sir!" said Manners. "Jolly glad to meet you, in fact! We've just had lunch—if you haven't had yours, we've lots left."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll say that's really kind and hospitable!" said the American. "I guess I've parked a few cats, but if you've got any drinks lying around loose, Hiram Honk isn't going to say nope to the same!"

"Cold coffee—lots!" said Manners.

He hastened to get a clean cup and the big can of cold coffee.

"Young man," said Mr. Honk, "you're the goods!"

Mr. Honk emptied the cup at a single gulp.

"I'll tell anybody," he said, "that it's dry work peddling round this burg! I've left my flask in the auto, and I've been honing for a drink ever since I stepped off that auto."

Manners refilled the cup. Hiram emptied it again at another gulp. Evidently he was thirsty. It was, as he said, dry work exploring Montpellier-le-vieux in the blazing sunshine of the South.

"You came up here by car?" asked Tom.

"Sure! I've left the auto on the Millau road—a good step from this spot. Me, I'm doing Yurup," continued Mr. Honk, talking to the juniors as if he had known them for five years instead of five minutes, in the easy, cheery way of the travelling American. "You wander into Millau, and you'll locate me at the Grand Hotel. Beavertown, Iowa, is my home town. You'll have heard of it in your lessons at school, I guess."

Mr. Honk had discerned at a glance that Tom Merry & Co. were schoolboys on holiday. But his idea that they had no doubt heard of Beavertown, Iowa, in their geography lessons at school made them rather disposed to smile—which, however, they carefully and politely did not do.

Luckily, Mr. Honk ran on without waiting for an answer.

"I've seen some things in Yurup," he remarked, "but nothing so far to lay over Beavertown, Iowa. I allow Parrus is a fine city."

"Is it, weally?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Where is it, Mr. Honk?"

Mr. Honk stared.

"You doing France, and you ain't struck Parrus!" he ejaculated. "Well, you do surprise me! Every American hits Parrus first shot."

"Is it weally vewy fine?" asked D'Arcy.

"And then some!" assured Mr. Honk.

"Bai Jove! It's wathah surpwisin' that Pawson has nevah mentioned it, as he knows ewewythin'!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Where is Pawvus exactly, sir? I must own up that I have nevah heard of it befoah."

"You ass!" whispered Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You ain't heard of Parrus!" exclaimed Mr. Honk, in astonishment. "I'll say that's the opossum's eyelids! Say, where was you raised?"

"What are you gwinnin' at, Tom Mewwy? Have you evah heard of Pawvus? It is quite a stwange name to me."

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"Paris!" gasped Tom.

"Oh cwikey! I—I mean, I beg your pardon, Mr. Honk! Were you weferwin' to Pawis?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Didn't I say Parrus?" asked Mr. Honk.

"Oh, yaas! Quite! My mistake!" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

"And where are you young folks putting out your washing?" asked Mr. Honk.

"We haven't put out any washin' since we left Lyons," explained Arthur Augustus, astonished by such a question.

"He means where are we staying," murmured Tom Merry.

"Oh cwikey!"

"We're travelling by plane," Manners explained. "We've left it at the Auberge Soleil d'Or, about four miles from here. Know the place?"

"Sure! I hit it in my auto last week," said Mr. Honk. "Travelling by plane, are you? Well, I'll tell a man! A plane surely is better for these roads than a car. That road to the Soleil d'Or is the cat's eyelids! When I tell them at Beavertown, Iowa, what that road's like they'll opine that I'm stringing them along. Anything more in that can?"

Manners filled the cup again.

"I see you pack a camera," said Mr. Honk, after another gulp. "What luck you been having?"

Monty Lowther winked at Tom Merry, and they rose. When Manners got on to photography with an interested interlocutor, they were not needed to help keep the conversation going.

"Bai Jove! It's time we walked wound a bit if we are goin' to get back by four o'clock!" said Arthur Augustus. "Anybody comin'?"

Gaston Gonsac was standing regarding the party with a lowering brow. Tom Merry & Co. rather liked the cheerful, voluble American, and were glad that they had fallen in with him at Montpellier-le-vieux. Only too plainly, Gonsac was not glad, but the reverse, though what it mattered to him was quite a mystery.

"We'd better make a move," said Blake. "We want to take a sprint round before it's time to start back to the plane."

"Yes; come on, Manners!" said Tom.

"Mr. Honk's sticking to us," said Manners, rising. "We're going to take some photographs."

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Honk, unrolling his long limbs, as it were, and getting on his feet.

"Jolly glad!" said Tom. "Get going."

"Allons, donc!" exclaimed Gaston Gonsac, breaking into sudden speech, as the long-limbed American moved in company with the juniors. "Pour cela, non."

"Bai Jove! What does he mean?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass in astonishment on the guide.

"Blessed if I can make the man out!" exclaimed Tom, puzzled. "What do you mean, Gonsac? Qu'est-ce-que vous voulez dire?"

Gonsac, scowling, indicated the tall American, and repeated:

"Non, non!"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Manners. "Are you going to decide whom we speak to? Mind your own business, and shut up!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "Shuttez-vous up. tout de at once! Shuttez la bouche!"

"Je dis, non!" snapped Gonsac

The juniors were utterly amazed. It was possible, of course, that Pawson had instructed the guide to keep the party clear of any undesirable characters, of whom there were plenty in the South of France. But anyone could see that Mr. Hiram Honk was a respectable tourist, such as were met in thousands in the hotels and pensions of the Riviera, and such as the juniors might have met anywhere. But the guide was evidently in angry earnest.

"Search me!" ejaculated Mr. Honk, staring at the guide. "I'll surely say that guy don't like this baby! What's got him?"

"Allez-vous-en!" snapped Gonsac.

"That means git," said Mr. Honk calmly. "And if my company ain't welcome to any guy in this outfit I'll surely walk my chalks instanter."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Tom Merry, while Manners gave the guide a glare. "Please remain with us, Mr. Honk! We're very glad of your company!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly glad of it!" exclaimed Manners.

"You said it," agreed Mr. Honk. "I'll say that guy's got me beat, unless he's aiming to pick your pockets. But I ain't taking all that back-chat! I'll talk to him a few!" Mr. Honk stepped towards the guide and talked to him a few. "You slab-sided, mug-faced, unwashed, bottle-nosed big stiff, pack up the chinwag! You get me? Take that scowl off your dirty face and quit chewing the rag! Pack it up, bo, before I pack it up for you! Get me?"

If Gonsac did not understand the words, at least he understood their purport, for his scowl grew blacker and blacker. He gripped his iron-bound stick as if with the intention of handling it on the American.

"Look out!" gasped Blake.

Mr. Honk did not look out. He stepped a little closer to the guide, and his bony jaw jutted at him.

"You figure on handling that stick?" he inquired. "I'll put you wise, pieface, that if you lift it an inch, I'll land you such a sockdolager that you'll want a new face sewn on the front of your head! Chew on it!"

Again it was plain that the guide understood the purport, if not the words. He backed away and slouched to a little distance, eyeing the tall American like a sulky dog, but making no further attempt to intervene.

And Tom Merry & Co., irritated and puzzled, but glad that the scene was at an end, resumed their explorations of Montpellier-the-Old, Manners happily chattering photography with Mr. Honk and both of them snapping photographs, regardless of the lowering looks of Gaston Gonsac, and, in fact, forgetful of his existence

CHAPTER 12

Left in the Lurch

"THAT'S the last film," said Manners.

"Thank goodness!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What?"

"I mean, how lucky you had all those films with you, old chap!" said Monty Lowther blandly. "And how jolly lucky you can't develop them here!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Time we got trotting, Manners, old chap," he said

It was high time for the juniors to be returning to the Auberge Soleil-d'Or. In such a place as Montpellier-le-vieux, which he had never seen before and was not likely to see again, Manners was not to be persuaded away till he had used up his last film. Now, fortunately, it was used up, and Manners packed his camera, slung on the case, and was ready.

"Coming over way, Mr. Honk?" asked Manners.

The lean gentleman was still busy with his camera, his supply of films apparently being more extensive.

"I guess my way is more or less your way, as you're hitting Soleil-d'Or and I'm hitting Millau," said Mr. Honk. "But I ain't hitting Millau yet."

"Then good-bye!"

Mr. Honk cordially shook hands all round with the St. Jim's fellows, begged them to drop in if they ever found themselves at Beavertown, Iowa, and, having said good-bye, cast a disparaging eye at the guide.

Gonsac was waiting and watching them, with sullen impatience. But at the sight of the hand-shaking his scowling brow cleared a little. That indicated that the schoolboys were parting with their new friend, and they could all see that Gonsac was relieved to see it.

"Say, big boys," said Mr. Honk, "I don't like that guide of yours a whole lot. You trust him?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "He seems wathah a grumpy beast, Mr. Honk, but he is feafully trustworthy."

"Got that straight?" asked Mr. Honk doubtfully.

"He was picked out by the man who's in charge of this party, who knows him well, Mr. Honk," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"Oh! I guess that goes then!" said the American, though his keen eyes still lingered dubiously on Gonsac. "I'll tell any man that I don't value him high on his looks! And it sure does seem to get his goat to see me around. But if you young guys are sure of him——"

"Oh, quite! That's all right!"

"Well, it's your funeral. Good-bye!"

And Mr. Honk was sighting his camera again as the juniors left him and followed the impatient guide.

Gaston's sullen face cleared a good deal as they wended their way among the streets of monoliths and the American disappeared from sight behind.

Whether it was sullen temper, or whether he was over-zealous in carrying out the instructions that Pawson had given him, it was plain that he had been angry and uneasy all the while the American was with the party. Now it was easy to see that his mind was at rest.

"It's been a jollay day, you fellows," remarked Arthur Augustus, as they left the stone city behind and tramped over the rugged cause. "I wouldn't have missed Montpellier-le-vieux for anythin'."

"No fear!" said Manners. "I've got some splendid pictures! I shall be able to develop them to-morrow at Cannes. Is there a dark-room at the Villa des Fleurs, Gussy?"

"Blessed if I know, Mannahs! There is a tennis court——"

"Can I develop on a tennis court?" granted Manners.

"Of course you can," said Monty Lowther. "Nothing like tennis for development. It develops the muscles, and——"

"Idiot!"

"Anybody getting tired?" asked Blake, fanning his face with his hat. "I wonder how many more miles it is?"

"It's tough going, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry. "But we'll hit the Soleil d'Or soon after four all right."

The juniors dropped into silence as they tramped on. They had had a rather tiring day, but they were all good for the few miles back to the spot where the plane had been left.

But they were undoubtedly fatigued, and the tough going on the rocky cause seemed tougher and tougher.

The sun, sinking in the west, blazed in crimson and gold across the dry, arid expanse of the plateau they were traversing. It seemed to be getting hotter and hotter.

"Bai Jove! I shall be glad to sit down presently!" murmured Arthur Augustus at last. "I weally feel as if we have done fortay miles instead of four."

"Jolly near time we saw the auberge," said Tom, rather puzzled. "It's close on four o'clock now."

They tramped on. Gaston Gonsac was slouching ahead, with a backward glance and without uttering a word. The juniors followed him in a tired bunch.

He turned round a huge rock that rose thirty feet to the sky, and disappeared from their sight. He had done so, leading the way, a dozen times at least, and they expected to see him again, as usual, when they rounded the rock.

To their surprise, he was not to be seen when they came round. They halted, staring round them in surprise.

"Where the dickens has the guide got to?" exclaimed Manners.

"Bai Jove! He can't have lost himself, I suppose!"

"Looks as if he's lost us!" said Blake. "What fool game is the man playing, getting out of sight like this? Better call to him!"

"Gonsac!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Show a leg, Gonsac!" yelled Monty Lowther.

The shouts echoed among the rugged rocks. But only the echoing replied. There came no answer from Gaston Gonsac.

The juniors looked at one another uneasily.

The guide seemed to have vanished as mysteriously and suddenly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Among the huge, scattered rocks he might have been within a dozen yards, unseen if he chose to keep out of view. But they could hardly suppose that he was doing so intentionally.

"Better look for him," said Tom Merry. "We're utterly done for without a guide here. We shan't get back to the Soleil d'Or by four—or at all—if we've lost our guide."

"But we can't have lost him!" gasped Herries. "He must be here somewhere. Look for him and shout."

"Keep together," said Tom. "If we get separated among these rocks we may never get together again."

"Bai Jove! That would be wathah feahful, deah boy! Pway keep togethah, you fellows! Don't let me lose sight of you. If we have lost that beastly guide I shall have to get you out of this somehow!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come on!" said Tom.

And the juniors moved on, carefully keeping

in a bunch and shouting Gonsac's name as they went.

But there came no answer.

Nothing was seen of the guide. They stopped at last in doubt and dismay. They could not tell whether they were taking the direction that Gonsac had taken, and it was useless to proceed.

"Well," said Tom, with a deep breath, "this is a go!"

"What on earth has become of the man?" said Lowther blankly. "He can't possibly be dodging us, I suppose?"

"Can't he?" said Manners between his teeth.

"Well, why should he?"

"He's missed us somehow," said Tom.

"Bai Jove! Those avens, you know," said Arthur Augustus in a faltering voice. "If the poor chap has tumbled into one of those feahful avens——"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

It was a terrible thought, and it explained the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the guide. The thought of the man shooting down into the unknown depths of the earth made the juniors shudder.

"It's not that," said Manners quietly.

"I twust it is not, Mannahs, but how do you know?"

"We're diddled!" said Manners in the same quiet tone. "That's why that hound was so savage when that American chap joined up with us—he was afraid that Honk might stick to the party and queer his game."

"Manners!" gasped Tom.

"He's lost us here and done it intentionally," said Manners. "He brought us here to lose us, and he's got away with it! As likely as not he's a dozen yards away, among these rocks, laughing in his sleeve! We're lost, and we're going to stay lost as long as that treacherous scoundrel chooses."

— — —

CHAPTER 13.

Lost on the Causee!

DEAD silence followed Manners' words. The juniors looked at one another.

Manners spoke with quiet conviction. But it seemed impossible to the other fellows. They could imagine no reason why the guide should play such a rascally and unscrupulous trick on them!

Manners could—Manners had it quite clear in his mind now. Now that the St. Jim's fellows were lost—hopelessly lost—on a wild and desolate causee in the Cevennes, Manners knew why Pawson had gone on by train. Many little circumstances that had puzzled him were explained now. There was not a spot of doubt in his mind.

"Wot!" said Arthur Augustus at last.

"Manners, old man——" murmured Lowther.

"Utah wot!" Arthur Augustus spoke hotly. "That fellow Gonsac seems a cwusty sort of blightah, but he is quite weliable. You seem to forget, Mannahs, that he was picked out by Pawson, who 'knew him yeahs ago in this country, and welies on him."

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"I've not forgotten that," he answered.

Tom Merry gave his chum a quick look. He understood now what was in Manners' mind. And he caught his breath.

Manners had said that Pawson would somehow get ahead of the party at Cannes and bag that registered packet containing the black box before

it could be delivered to D'Arcy. Now that the Easter trippers were lost on the causee there was no doubt that Pawson would get in ahead at Cannes!

"Oh!" gasped Tom. "Manners!" He gave Manners a warning look. Whether he was right or wrong, there was no proof—only surmise.

But Manners did not need warning. He had no intention of mentioning Pawson and making an accusation he could not prove, and which would only have evoked scornful indignation on the part of Arthur Augustus—and disbelief from the other fellows.

But the certainty in his own mind was complete. He recalled now that faint hint of mockery in Pawson's tone when he had said that Gonsac would carry out those instructions to the very letter. Manners knew now what those instructions had been; at least, he had no doubt.

"Rubbish, old man!" said Blake, shaking his head. "I don't see why even that crusty brute should play such a trick."

"Uttah wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus. "We can wely on Pawson's judgment in pickin' out a guide, I think."

"Of course!" said Dig. "Something's happened to the man, that's all! I only hope he hasn't tripped over into one of those awful pits."

"I am afraid he has!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's dweadful to think of it, but that is weally the only explanation. He cannot have lost his way, so somethin' must have happened to him."

Manners compressed his lips.

"I've said what I think!" he answered. "Never mind that! In any case, it's no good sticking here waiting for him! We've got to get back to the auberge somehow, and get on the plane before dark. The pilots won't take off after dark."

"There is no feahful huwwy, Mannahs, so fah as that goes," said Arthur Augustus. "Except for wowwyng Pawson when he awwives at Cannes, and finds that we haven't blown in, it doesn't mattah vewy much if we stay ovah anothah night."

Manners laughed.

"Weally, Mannahs, I see nothin' to cackle at in what I have just remarked!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, not at all!" said Manners. "Still, even if we're going to put in another night on the Cevennes, we don't want to spend it in the open in this rocky desert, if we can help it!"

"Wathah not!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "We shall have to get back to the Soleil d'Or somehow."

"We're lost!" said Blake. "But you never know your luck! We've got to find our way, if we can! There's a road somewhere, going down to Millau—the road that American chap came by in his car. If we could spot the road, it would lead us somewhere or other."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've got to try!" said Tom.

All the juniors knew how little chance they had of finding a way on the wild and trackless plateau of limestone rock. But they were going to try their best. The alternative was sitting down and submitting to Fate, which was not the way of Tom Merry & Co.

They looked round over rugged expanses of limestone, barred in many places by ridges of rock and detached boulders—a wilderness of trackless stone. No doubt there were many landmarks known to native eyes; but to the eyes of strangers the scene was simply bewildering.

All they knew was that Montpellier-le-vieux was a few miles north-by-east of the Auberge Soleil d'Or. They started, with little hope, but plenty of resolution.

"After all, we can't be far from the Soleil d'Or," said Herries hopefully. "We must have done most of the distance when we lost Gonsac."

"May see the place any minute!" said Dig.

"You think he was leading us in the right direction?" asked Manners, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes, ass!" grunted Blake.

"I am quite suah of it, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wefuse to suppose for a moment that the guide was deliberately playin' us false. You know vewy well that Pawson weliad on him."

Grunt, from Manners.

Five members of the party, at least, had no doubt that they were somewhere near their destination. Manners was certain otherwise, and Tom Merry was dubious.

As they tramped on wearily, following what looked a little like a track among the limestone masses, Tom dropped behind the other fellows to speak quietly to Manners. There was something like a sneer on Manners' face—quite an unaccustomed expression.

"Look here, old chap," said Tom, in a low voice, "I can see what's in your mind—you think Pawson put the guide up to this?"

"I don't!" answered Manners.

"You don't?" exclaimed Tom Merry blankly.

"Not at all; I don't think anything about it! I know he did, if that's what you mean!" said Manners coolly.

"Fathead!" said Tom. "You can't know it,

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anyhow; you can only suspect it. For goodness' sake, not a word to Gussy!"

"What would be the good?" said Manners derisively. "Pawson will be able to explain this! He was deceived by that bad man Gonsac—if we were able to prove that the guide left us in the lurch. But we shan't be able to prove even that. Gonsac will turn up—when it's too late for us to take off in the plane—with some lie about falling into a crevice or something! Everybody will believe him—except me."

"Well, a chap might easily take a tumble in a place like this—"

"Of course he might," grinned Manners sarcastically. "He hasn't—but, of course, he might! Good enough for telling the tale, anyhow." He laughed. "Gussy would believe him—so would you, Tom."

"I—I suppose I should!" admitted Tom. "We shall never know whether you've got it right or not, Manners."

"Oh, we may!" said Manners. "If we have luck enough to get on the right way back, Gonsac will turn up all right—to stop us! You can bet that he won't let us get back in time to take off—he's got Pawson's orders not to. You will believe him, and he will lead us astray again."

"Um!" said Tom.

"He's not far away," said Manners calmly. "He's got an eye on us while he's laughing in his sleeve."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom uneasily. "Look here, we can't be far from the Soleil d'Or now, Manners, after the distance we've covered."

"We're nowhere near it!" answered Manners.

"Um!" said Tom again.

"Buck up, you fellows!" called out Arthur Augustus, looking back. "Pway don't lag behind, you know! I must keep you all undah my eye."

"Fathead!" answered Tom and Manners together. They pushed on and rejoined the party. Lowther looked at his watch.

"Half-past four!" he said. "Late, old beans!"

"Yes; but plenty of time yet, if we could only spot the Soleil d'Or," said Blake. "Hours of daylight yet! But where is the dashed place?"

"O where and O where can it be?" sang Monty Lowther dismally.

"Cheeah up, old chaps!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly. "We must weally be quite neah home, and we may spot the place any minute."

Long minute after minute dragged by. The juniors pushed on manfully, though they were so tired by this time that every leg in the party was aching, and some feeling as if they were going to drop off.

The causee was trackless and seemed endless. Wearily they tramped on in the red glow of the sun in the west. Another hour passed slowly, dismally, hopelessly. Then at last the weary party, by common consent, came to a halt!

They were tired to the bone; and on every mind it was borne in that further foot-slogging was futile. If they had, as most of them believed, been anywhere near the Soleil d'Or when the guide vanished, they evidently had not taken the right direction. Still the causee stretched round them, wild and rugged, burning with heat. They halted.

Arthur Augustus sat down on a boulder. His noble legs almost refused to support him any longer. His comrades followed his example.

In grim silence they sat resting their weary limbs—hopelessly lost in the wild Cevennes.

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CHAPTER 14.

A Friend in Need!

BANG!
It came suddenly.

Bang!

"What—"

"A gun—"

"What the thump!"

Bang!

Weary as they were, Tom Merry & Co. fairly bounded to their feet. The succession of loud reports sounded like machine-gun fire. Whatever it was, it indicated human beings at hand. It was a joyful sound to the schoolboys lost in the wild waste of the causee.

"That's not a gun!" said Tom. "That's a motor back-firing! We must be somewhere near a road!"

Bang!

"Oh, bai Jove, what wippin' luck!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "If that's a motah, deah boys, we've only got to follow the wow. Come on!"

Bang!

Nothing was to be seen but the wild waste of desolate limestone rocks. But that banging came from a westerly direction, and was easy to place. It was a car back-firing, and that meant a road. Wherever that road led mattered little—it was a way out of the wilderness.

Tom Merry & Co. forgot that they were fatigued. They ran. Again and again came the heavy report. Every time they heard it, it guided them. But if it ceased before they sighted the road, they were left as hopelessly lost as ever.

Somebody evidently was having difficulties in starting up a car. They could only hope that his difficulties would last a little longer.

"Bai Jove!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Look!"

"The car—"

"The road—"

"No; that weird place again!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "We must have walked back to it."

"Oh, gum!"

Through an opening of the rocks the juniors had a sudden view of a spot they had never expected to see again. It was Montpellier-le-vieux, the dead city of monoliths, that they had explored that day.

They stared at it in stupefaction. Evidently they were nowhere near the auberge, or the plane. They were back where they had started from.

"Montpellier-le-vieux!" stuttered Blake. "We're back again. Oh, holy smoke! That beats it!"

Manners gave an angry laugh. He, at least, was not surprised to see Montpellier-le-vieux again. He would have been surprised to see the auberge or the Silver Swallow.

"Well, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as another bang rang and echoed loudly among the rocks. "We know where we are now, at any rate. For goodness' sake, don't let's miss this chance of getting to a road!"

"Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

And they ran. Hurrying, stumbling, breathless, they followed the sound of distant back-firing—not so distant now. Bang, bang! rang more loudly in their ears.

"The road!" roared Tom.

"Oh, what luck!"

It was not a good road, but it was a road, unmistakably a road. They stumbled and scrambled down into it, panting for breath, but with bright faces and light hearts. All they

wanted just then was a road in that wilderness of trackless rocks. And, thanks to the back-firing of the motor, they had found it. They stood in the road, panting and gasping, but glad at heart.

Bang, bang! Snort!

The car was not in sight; but they could still hear it. The motorist was not through his difficulties yet. Tom Merry & Co. could sympathise with a motorist in difficulties, but they could not help being thankful that that particular motorist had struck trouble with his car.

"Come on!" said Tom cheerfully. "We can ask that chap the nearest way to anywhere where we can pick up a lift."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bang, bang!

The juniors hurried down the rugged road in the direction of the sound. From beyond a mass of rocks, where the road curved, a voice reached their ears, raised in tones of intense exasperation.

"Jumping snakes! I'll sure say a few words to the guy that wished that auto on me at Millau! I'll tell that guy a few things, I surely will! If I told them about this auto at Beaver-town, they'd sure say I was stringing them along. I guess this was found on Mount Ararat when the Ark landed there. And I'll say it was an old model then. Oh, yep!"

The juniors knew that voice.

"Honk!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! That Amewican chap—"

"Hail, Columbia!" trilled Monty Lowther.

"Up the Star-Spangled Banner! It's the Honk bird—l'oiseau Honk!"

They rushed on, and in another minute saw the car, and the long, lean American standing by it. Hiram Honk turned his lean face at the sound of running feet, and jumped at the sight of them.

"You'uns!" he ejaculated.

"Us'uns!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Turned up again like seven bad pennies! Thanks for the solo!"

"Search me!" said Mr. Honk. "What you doing around? Where's your guide? Lost yourselves?"

"Exactly!" answered Tom Merry. "And we should be still lost if we hadn't heard your musical effects on that car."

"Search me!" repeated Mr. Honk.

"Talk about the music of the spheres!" said Monty Lowther. "Nothing like the back-firing of a motor—in certain circumstances."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Well, I'll tell a man," said Mr. Honk. "I'll surely tell a dumb man from Missouri. This is the cat's whiskers. It's more; it's the elephant's left hindleg! It's the opossum's eyelids! Search me!"

"I suppose this is the road to Millau, as we've found you and your car on it, Mr. Honk?" said Manners.

"That identical road," said Mr. Honk. "And if a pesky crook at Millau hadn't wished on me an auto that was left him in his great-grand-mother's will, I'd sure be back in Millau chewing my eats long ago. But, seeing that you're lost, and you heard the music, I won't tell that guy all I was going to tell him. Nope! I'll say I'm pleased."

"That's jolly kind of you, Mr. Honk!" said Tom. "Thank goodness we've met you! We were booked for a night out on the causee."

"Where's your guide?"

"We've lost him."

"He disapeahed all of a sudden, in a vewy mystewious and alarmin' way," explained Arthur Augustus. "I gweatly feah that he has met with some feahful accident."

"You would," agreed Mr. Honk. "I'll whisper that you're the sort they like to get hold of. Forget it, boy! I don't know what game that crook is playing, losing you around like this. But I had him tabbed for a crook the minute I gave him the once-over. You English are sure innocent ducks."

"Weally, Mr. Honk—"

"Know where we can get a lift of any sort, Mr. Honk?" asked Tom. "I suppose you know the nearest village, or any place—"

Mr. Honk looked at him, and looked at the rather ramshackle car he had hired at Millau to drive out to Montpellier-le-vieux. The car had ceased its machine-gun effects, and the engine appeared to be running smoothly. Mr. Honk nursed his bony chin thoughtfully.

"Yep," he said. "How many are there of you—six, seven? Lucky you ain't in large sizes like the Honk family. I guess you can go in like sardines in a can—what?"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Mr. Honk and his car. It was rather an ample car, but it was likely to be rather like a well-filled sardine tin, with seven schoolboys packed in it. They had never dreamed of this, and their faces expressed their gratitude for Mr. Honk's kind-hearted offer.

"O.K.!" he said. "I guess we can manage. I've been nigh an hour at that pesky engine, but it's talking now. I'll have you round at the Solly Door before, you can say 'no sugar in mine.' It's a cinch."

"Bai Jove! That's feahfully genewous of you, Mr. Honk," said Arthur Augustus. "We

(Continued on the next page.)

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THE ROYAL NAVY

shall be able to take off, aftah all, you fellows, if Mr. Honk stands by us in this wippin' way."

"Hurrah!"

"Pack in!" said Hiram.

"We really don't know how to thank you, Mr. Honk," said Tom Merry.

"Then don't begin," said Mr. Honk genially. "Jest pack in!"

"What-ho!"

"I am wathah wowwied about the guide," said Arthur Augustus. "I feah that somethin' has happened to the poor chap."

"You needn't worry," said Manners dryly.

"And why not, Mannahs?"

"Because here he comes."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors, about to pack in the car, fairly spun round to stare at the burly figure and sullen face that emerged from the rocks at the roadside. It was Gaston Gonsac—evidently not at the bottom of an aven.

CHAPTER 15.

The Fight!

TOM MERRY & CO. stared at Gonsac. The guide, with a sullen, scowling face, slouched into the road, approaching them.

He touched his black felt hat with a sort of sullen civility as he came up.

"Mille pardons," he mumbled. "J'ai tombe—dans un aven—comprenez?"

They understood his meaning easily enough. He was saying that he had fallen into an aven. If he had, he had succeeded in climbing out again without much damage.

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped Manners. "What's the good of telling us lies like that, you rascal?"

"Comment?"

"Lie—mentez!" said Manners deliberately.

"Vous mentez?"

The guide's sullen face reddened, and a savage glitter came into the eyes under the dark brows. "What are you sayin' to him, Mannahs?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "What does voo mongtay mean?"

"Vous mentez means 'you lie'!" said Manners coolly.

"Bai Jove! Are you callin' the man a liah?"

"Just that!"

"Weally, Mannahs, it is feahfully wude, and aftah the poor chap has fallen into one of those howwid pits, too—"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Gussy!" said Manners unceremoniously. "I told Tom that he would turn up if we found a chance of getting back to the Soleil d'Or, with some lie to tell us! Well, he's turned up and told it!"

"Wats!"

"His game now is to get us to trust him again, if he can—and lead us astray again, and lose us once more!" snapped Manners. "Well, he's not losing me again—I'm sticking to Mr. Honk!"

"Yaas, wathah! But you might as well be civil—"

"I've no civility to waste on that rascal! I'd thrash him if I were big enough to handle him!" retorted Manners.

"Wubbish! You are an ass, Mannahs!"

"Blessed if I know what to think," said Blake. "It looks jolly suspicious—but I can't see why he should want to lose us! Anyhow, we're going in Mr. Honk's car—that settles it."

"That's settled, anyhow!" agreed Digby.

"I'll say so!" said Mr. Honk, with emphasis.

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"You figure I'd trust you lads with that lobo-wolf again? Not in your lifetime. Pack in."

"I will explain to him," said Arthur Augustus. "Bettah leave it to me as I speak the best Fwench. My deah chap," went on Gussy, "I mean, mon cher homme, we are goin'—I mean, nous allons—in the car—dans l'automobile! Göttez-vous that, mon cher homme?"

Gonsac's brow grew blacker.

"Non, non!" he muttered. "Venez avec moi!" He pushed between the juniors and the car and shoved them back.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Is the man cracked?"

"No, only a dashed rascal!" said Manners. "Get out of the way, you eur, or you'll be booted out of it!"

"Stand aside!" Tom Merry's eyes blazed. "Allez-vous-en!"

"Vous venez avec moi!" yapped Gonsac. "Blessed if I don't think Manners is right, or else the man's cracked," said Blake. "Anyhow, shove him out of the way."

The St. Jim's fellows were quite ready to do that. They advanced on the guide together, and Gonsac instantly swung up his iron-bound stick, circling it round his head, and they jumped back again.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"We're handling that ruffian, stick or not!" he said. "By gum! Does the brute think he can bully us! Come on."

"Forget it, boy!" Hiram Honk's long, lean figure interposed between the schoolboys and the scowling, threatening ruffian. "I guess you're leaving this on my plate."

"Weally, Mr. Honk, we cannot possibly allow you—"

"Park it!" said Mr. Honk.

He stepped towards the guide, with lean jaw jutting.

"Git!" he said briefly.

Gonsac did not stir. He stood like a rock, barring the juniors' way to the car. Whether he had instructions from Pawson, as Manners believed, or not, he was going to keep them lost till it was too late to take off in the plane, if he could! And as the big American lifted a bony but powerful hand to shift him aside, he swung back the heavy stick to strike.

"Look out!" shrieked Blake.

Hiram Honk hopped back as the heavy stick slashed down, with an activity remarkable in a guy of his bulk. Next moment his lean hand shot to the back of his trousers, and something gleamed in the sunlight on the Millau road.

Bang!

For a second the schoolboys fancied that it was the motor back-firing again. But it was a revolver in the lean hand of the gentleman from Beavertown, Iowa! From Gaston Gonsac came a fearful yell.

The ironbound stick dropped from his hand, crashing on the earth, his right arm fell to his side, paralysed. He reeled to and fro like a drunken man, his left hand claspings his right elbow and the blood streaming down his sleeve.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

It had passed so swiftly that the juniors had had no time to intervene. But the American evidently did not need their aid.

"I'll mention," drawled Mr. Honk, "that that guy has got what was coming to him. Did I

(Continued on page 36.)

The TERROR of THOMPSON!

Bunchy Fives is the terror of Thompson Town, but Bunchy holds no terrors for the Gentle Shepherd, the dude master of Cedar Creek!

By Martin Clifford.

Gunten's Little Game!

"HA, ha, ha!"

Mr. Shepherd, the new master of Cedar Creek, looked round rather suspiciously as he heard that shout of laughter in the corner of the playground. A number of the Cedar Creek fellows were gathered there, and they were evidently greatly entertained by something.

Mr. Shepherd, being a somewhat lackadaisical young man with affected manners and speech, had not earned much respect among the hearty Canadian boys, and it had lately dawned upon him that he was more or less an object of ridicule. Why that should be so he did not appear to understand, but the discovery had made him somewhat tart in temper.

He strode towards the group of schoolboys with a knitted brow, suspecting that he was the subject under discussion.

Kern Gunten, the Swiss schoolboy, was the centre of the group, and he had a paper in his hand, which he thrust hastily out of sight as the master approached.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said meekly as Mr. Shepherd came up.

"Good-mornin'!" said Mr. Shepherd. "What is it you have there, Gunten?"

"Where?" asked Gunten.

"You had a papah in your hand," said Mr. Shepherd, who was apparently a little sharper than Gunten supposed. "Show it to me at once!"

"Really, sir—"

"Do as you are told!" snapped Mr. Shepherd.

Gunten, with a scowl, fumbled in his pocket. Evidently Mr. Shepherd, who had been the victim of a number of practical jokes already, suspected that Gunten was planning another, and meant to make sure about it, at all events.

There was a clatter of hoofs outside the gates as Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beauclerc arrived. They led their horses into the corral, and then, spotting the crowd in the school ground, came towards it to see what was on. Gunten was still fumbling in his pocket as they came up.

"I am waitin' for you, Gunten," said Mr. Shepherd. "I shall not wait much longah!"

Kern Gunten's hand came out of his pocket at last, and he held out a small handbill to the master. Mr. Shepherd took it and gazed at it in surprise. It was an advertisement for the



Before Bunchy Fives could recover from a right to the head, the Gentle Shepherd was upon him. The new master's left shot out and landed full in the face of the terror of Thompson.

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"Thompson Press," issued by Mr. Penfold, the enterprising editor and proprietor of the local paper. Certainly there was no harm in that handbill.

"Is this the papah you had in your hands, Gunten?" asked Mr. Shepherd.

"Yes, sir!"

"Nothin' to laugh at in this papah, surely?" "No harm done, I suppose?" said Gunten sulkily.

"No, certainly not," said Mr. Shepherd. "Here is your papah!"

He handed the bill back to the Swiss, and walked away towards the log schoolhouse.

Gunten grinned mockingly as he disappeared. "I guess I wasn't going to show him the paper!" he said. "Luckily I happened to have the handbill in my pocket!"

And Gunten felt in his pocket and took out again the paper he had hidden there. He held it up for the schoolboys to see, and there was another howl of laughter.

Frank Richards & Co. stared at it in amazement. It was written in what appeared to be a feminine hand. The letter ran:

"Beloved Horatio,—I have seen you twice, but my heart has gone out to you. Why, oh, why did you come hither with your fatal beauty?"

"Horatio, I pine for you! Sleeping or waking, your noble face is ever before my eyes!"

"Dearest Horatio, will you grant me even a few words from your dear lips? To hear you speak will make me happy."

"I dare to hope that you will grant me this request. In hope and longing, I will wait for you this evening in the Red Deer glade, only a few minutes' walk from your school, under the old oak."

"Come, oh, come!"

"ANGELINA."

"Is that a letter sent to Mr. Shepherd?" asked Bob Lawless, in wonder.

"No; I wrote it, I guess," answered Gunten coolly. "I'm going to send it to the Gentle Shepherd!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "But—but even the Shepherd won't be idiot enough to be spoofed like that!"

"Won't he?" grinned Gunten. "Isn't he the most conceited jay that ever stepped into the Thompson Valley? I tell you, when he gets this letter it will puff him up no end, and he will fairly hop out to meet Angelina in the glade!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And nobody will be there?" asked Beauclerc. "Somebody will be there, I guess!" grinned Gunten. "I calculate I shall be up in the oak when Mr. Shepherd stops under it. I guess I've hidden a bucket of tar and a bag of feathers there ready for him!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Shepherd!" ejaculated Bob Lawless. "I say, it's really too bad!"

"Well, if a man will be such a silly jay he's asking for it!" said Dick Dawson.

"Let Gunten go ahead; it will do the Shepherd good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Cedar Creek fellows had grinning faces as they trooped in to morning lessons. If Horatio Shepherd took that ridiculous letter seriously, he deserved some punishment, and assuredly he would get it.

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The New Romeo!

WHEN Cedar Creek came out after morning lessons an Indian lad was waiting outside the porch. He came up to Mr. Shepherd when he appeared. The lad was a Kootenay employed at Mr. Gunten's store in Thompson. He had a sealed letter in his brown hand.

"Mr. Shepherd?" he inquired.

"Yes, my lad," said the young master, stopping.

"Dis letter for you," said the Kootenay. "White lady in Thompson gib Pie Face letter for school chief."

Mr. Shepherd took the letter in some perplexity. He was new to the section, and not yet acquainted with any of the few white ladies who made Thompson their dwelling-place.

"Thank you, my boy!" he said, dropping a quarter into the Indian's hand.

The Kootenay hurried away. He had made no sign of recognition towards Kern Gunten, the son of his employer. That was part of his instructions from Gunten.

Mr. Shepherd walked to his cabin with the letter in his hand as the Indian disappeared out of the gates.

"Well, he's got it," murmured Bob Lawless.

"Surely he won't take such rot seriously?" muttered Frank Richards.

"I guess he will."

The schoolboys kept an eye from a distance on Mr. Shepherd's cabin. They knew that he was reading the absurd letter from "Angelina" within, and they were keen to see the result.

Just before dinner Mr. Shepherd reappeared. There was a smile on his face—a smile which Frank Richards & Co. could only describe as absolutely idiotic. He appeared to be walking on air. It was evident that the young man had read the letter, and was greatly flattered by the adoration of his unknown admirer. His egregious self-conceit prevented him from suspecting that the letter might be nothing more than a practical joke.

During afternoon lessons he was very absent-minded. Sometimes a smile would break out on his face, which puzzled those of his pupils who were not in the secret.

Mr. Shepherd was really a very good-looking young man, and when he smiled he was quite attractive, or would have been but for the scarcely hidden self-satisfaction that lurked in his face. He was evidently in a happy mood that afternoon.

When lessons were over Mr. Shepherd fairly bolted away to his cabin.

Gunten scudded out of the school gates immediately he was free. "Angelina" had to be on the spot before Mr. Shepherd.

Frank Richards & Co. did not start for home as usual. Few of the fellows did. They were far too keenly interested in the adventures of Mr. Shepherd to think of going home till he had kept his appointment. They played leap-frog on the trail outside the gates till the Gentle Shepherd appeared. When he came out he was, as Eben Hacke expressed it in his native language, "a sight for sore eyes."

Mr. Shepherd was always dressed with great care, but now he was dressed to kill. From the crown of his hat to the soles of his shoes he looked a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. He wore a flower in his coat, too, and as he passed the schoolboys they caught a whiff of delicate scent.

"There goes Romeo!" said Vere Beauclerc as

the new master walked away down the Thompson trail "But what a merry Juliet he will find in the glade!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Play up the trail," said Bob. "We can't follow the galoot or he will get suspicious, but we want to keep a peeper on him."
"Right-ho!"

And the leap-frog went on, taking the schoolboys along the trail on the track of Mr. Shepherd, though at a good distance behind. They wanted to see Romeo after he had met Juliet!

Tar and Feathers I

MR. SHEPHERD walked on airily. There was not the faintest shadow of suspicion in his somewhat vacant mind. Indeed, it seemed to him quite a natural thing that some young lady should have been struck by his manifold charms.

He sauntered gracefully along the trail and turned into the wood at last and reached the beautiful and secluded glade where he was to meet Angelina. It was deserted, and very quiet.

Angelina had not exactly specified the hour of meeting. The appointment was to be for after lessons; but Mr. Shepherd felt that he could not have long to wait as the lady would surely allow herself time to return to Thomson before sundown.

As a matter of fact, he had only a few moments to wait while Kern Gunten was getting the tar-bucket from its hiding-place in a recess of the thick branches of the oak-tree. But Mr. Shepherd did not know that. He stood under the old oak, as bidden by his unknown correspondent, and struck a graceful attitude.

He had been standing in that graceful attitude about three minutes when there was a rustle in the foliage overhead. Mr. Shepherd glanced upward then, wondering whether there was a squirrel or a lynx in the tree. As he looked up a thick, black mass came shooting down. It smote the young man full upon his head and his upturned face, fairly smothering him. He gave a horrified gasp and staggered wildly.

"Groooh! Ow! Ooooooch!"
As he staggered, utterly astonished and blinded, a bag was opened in the branches above him and a thick shower of feathers swept downward. The feathers stuck to the tar wherever they touched it.

"Groooogh! Gug-gug-gug!" came from under the tar and feathers as the unfortunate victim staggered to and fro, gouging at his eyes and nose frantically.

There was a rustle on the other side of the tree as Kern Gunten dropped to the ground and vanished into the thickets. He came out breathlessly into the trail at a distance from the glade, and a howl from the Cedar Creek fellows greeted him.

"How did it go, Gunten?"
"Has he got it?"
"He's got it!" exclaimed Gunten.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Poor old Shepherd!" gasped Bob Lawless.
"Here he comes!" shrieked Tom Lawrence.

A weird figure appeared from the wood into the trail and came staggering towards them. It was Mr. Shepherd; but he was hard to recognise. His features were completely hidden by sticky masses of tar, to which the feathers adhered in chunks. He had gouged his eyes

clear enough to see his way, and he was tottering back to the school to get cleaned.

The schoolboys roared—they could not help it—as he came up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, carry me home to die!" gasped Bob Lawless. "That jay will be the death of me!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooh!" That was Mr. Shepherd's remark as he came up. "Gug-gug!"

"Anything happened, sir?" gasped Bob.
"Gug-gug! There is noddin' to laugh ad!" spluttered Mr. Shepherd. "I am—gug-gug—covaied with horrid tar! Groooh!"

"Ha, ha! Sorry, sir! Ha, ha!"
"I have been the vigdim of an oudrage!" gasped Mr. Shepherd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Mr. Shepherd gave the almost hysterical schoolboys a furious and tarry glance and rushed on frantically towards Cedar Creek. The schoolboys, yelling, followed him.

"What will Miss Meadows say?" gasped Frank Richards.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Meadows met the tarry gentleman as he rushed in at the gates, with the yelling mob at his heels. She was speaking to Mr. Slimmey there, and both of them stared, petrified, at the new master as he appeared.

"What—what— Who is that?" exclaimed the schoolmistress.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Slimmey, blinking at the weird figure over his gold-rimmed glasses. "I—I think it—is Mr. Shepherd!"

"Groooh! Gug-gug!"
"Mr. Shepherd! Is that you, Mr. Shepherd?"
"Groooh! Yes, Miss Meadows! Groooogh! Ooooh!"

"However did you get into that dreadful state?" exclaimed the schoolmistress.

"I am the vigdim of a bractical joke!" spluttered Mr. Shepherd. "Grooooh! I am smothahed! Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Silence!" exclaimed Miss Meadows, with a stern look at the Cedar Creek fellows. "Who did this, Mr. Shepherd?"

"I do not know," gasped the wretched Romeo. "I was standing undah a dree when this awful stuff—groooh!—game dowl on my face—oooh!"

"This must be inquired into!" exclaimed Miss Meadows sternly. "It is a practical joke, of course, and I fear that some boy here is concerned in it. Did any of these boys induce you to stand under the tree, Mr. Shepherd?"

"No!" gasped Mr. Shepherd. "I—I was—was there to—to—"

He stuttered and stopped. It had dawned upon Mr. Shepherd by this time that Angelina was responsible for the tarring and feathering—whatever Angelina was. Not for his life would he have confessed the facts or have shown that absurd letter to Miss Meadows.

He rushed away to his cabin to rub and scrub, and scrub and rub, which is really what he chiefly needed now.

"Gunten!" rapped out Miss Meadows. "Do you know anything about this? There is tar on your hands."

Gunten started.
"I—I—Mr. Shepherd brushed against me on the trail, ma'am," stammered Gunten. "I guess I got it from him."

Miss Meadows gave him a severe look, but the

matter had to drop. There was no getting the truth from the Swiss.

Cedar Creek School started for home that evening howling with laughter.

But it was not a laughing matter for the unhappy Horatio. All that evening, with intervals for rest, he was rubbing and scrubbing to get rid of the tar. But with all his efforts, he could not rid himself of it, and the next morning in class he presented a somewhat piebald appearance, which evoked smiles on all sides.

Gunten's Revenge!

ANGELINA remained undiscovered. No one was punished for the outrage on Mr.

Shepherd. No one could be found guilty without the Gentle Shepherd making all the facts known; and that he was not likely to do.

But during the next few days Kern Gunten came in for some severity from the new master. Mr. Shepherd could prove nothing, but he had his suspicions. He was aware that Gunten had been spotted with tar that afternoon, and he remembered the incident of the mysterious paper which Gunten had been so unwilling to show him in the playground.

He had little doubt now that the Swiss was the originator of the letter from Angelina. And so, for a few days, Gunten had to pay for his sins, indirectly, and his feelings towards Mr. Shepherd became almost homicidal.

After morning lessons one day Gunten was found playing poker with Keller in the old corral, and was caned by Miss Meadows. It was the Gentle Shepherd who found him.

Gunten came out after his caning with glittering eyes. He did not stay for dinner at the lumber school that day. He was free to go home to Thompson for dinner if he liked, and that day he did so.

But the other fellows guessed that he had not undertaken that long ride simply to have his dinner at home for once, and when he came back, a few minutes before afternoon lessons began, he was questioned.

"What have you been up to?" Chunky Todgers asked him.

Gunten gave an evil grin.

"I guess the Gentle Shepherd is going to be sorry for getting me into trouble," he answered. "I've been to see Bunchy Fives."

"Bunchy Fives!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "What on earth do you want to see that bulldozer for?"

"He's coming here to see the Gentle Shepherd!" grinned Gunten.

"What!"

The schoolboys stared at Gunten. Bunchy Fives was the man in Thompson who gave the sheriff most work to do. He was a bulldozer of the first water—the kind of ruffian who prided himself on the fact that he would rather fight than eat.

"He's coming here?" repeated Frank Richards. "What is that ruffian coming to see Mr. Shepherd for?"

"Guess!" sneered Gunten. "Dudes ain't popular in Thompson. Bunchy said he would like to handle him. Well, I've asked him to come and do it where we can see the fun. I've stood him a dollar for drinks, and he will be along after lessons to-day."

"Look here, you rotter!" exclaimed Frank hotly. "Mr. Shepherd can't tackle that hulking

ruffian. If he touches Mr. Shepherd we'll stop him fast enough!"

"If Shepherd hides behind schoolboys he's welcome to!" sneered Gunten. "I guess that would set him down more than a licking!"

The bell rang just then, and the boys had to go in to lessons. But Frank Richards & Co. were feeling worried that afternoon. The Gentle Shepherd was an absurd fellow, and they did not respect him; but they felt very strongly on the subject of his being "handled" by the worst ruffian in the Thompson Valley. They resolved that Mr. Shepherd should not be left to the tender mercies of Bunchy Fives.

After lessons the chums did not go for their horses as usual.

"I guess we're staying on a bit," Bob Lawless remarked. "If that bulldozer comes humping along, we're going to be here, you fellows!"

"Certainly!" said Vere Beaulere quietly. "It's a cowardly trick of Gunten's, and it's not going to succeed. If Bunchy Fives goes for the Shepherd, we'll go for him—a dozen of us can handle even that ruffian!"

"What-ho!" said Frank Richards, with emphasis.

"Hallo! There's the galoot!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers.

Bunchy Fives was already on the scene. He had been leaning on the gate, smoking and waiting for the boys to come out of school. As the Cedar Creek fellows streamed out of the log schoolhouse, Bunchy Fives detached himself from the gate and strode into the playground.

He was a big fellow, over six feet in height, with huge, muscular limbs, and fists that looked like legs of mutton. His face was hard and brutal, and half-covered with a bristly beard.

"Whar is he?" he roared.

"What do you want here?" demanded Bob Lawless.

"I guess I'm arter that dude!" roared Bunchy Fives. "Whar is the galoot hiding? You sarch him out, and you tell him that Bunchy Fives is on the warpath!"

"Look here, you'd better clear off," said Bob. "You'll have to answer to the sheriff if you kick up a row here, Bunchy!"

"Whar is that dude?" roared Bunchy Fives. "I'll larn him to walk into Thompson in a b'iled shirt! Whar is he?"

Miss Meadows stepped out of the porch.

"Go away at once!" she rapped out. "How dare you come here and make a disturbance!"

"Whar's that dude, marm? Ain't he man enough to show himself when a galoot's asking for him, hey?"

There was a step behind Miss Meadows and Mr. Shepherd came out. He glanced curiously at the hulking ruffian.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Meadows?" he asked quietly. "Is this man troublin' you? Now, then, get off, my man!"

The schoolboys simply blinked. This was not the way they had expected the Gentle Shepherd to address the terror of Thompson.

"Aire you the dude?" roared Bunchy Fives. "Yep, I know you! I've seed you strutting in the street at Thompson!"

"Have you any business with me?" asked Mr. Shepherd.

"I guess I have!" grinned Bunchy. "I guess I've come hyer to show you that dudes ain't wanted in this hyer valley!"

Mr. Shepherd looked at him calmly. To the

amazement of all, including Miss Meadows, he showed no sign of fear. Perhaps Mr. Shepherd's absurdities were only skin-deep, after all.

"Kindly remembah that you are in the presence of a lady, and moderate your voice, my man!" he rapped out.

"Waal, carry me hum to die!" ejaculated Bunchy Fives.

"Shall I remove this man, Miss Meadows?"

"Please do not attempt anything of the sort, Mr. Shepherd!" exclaimed the schoolmistress.

"I guess he'd better not!" roared Bunchy.

"Your wish is my law, Miss Meadows," answered Mr. Shepherd. "But the man has apparently come here to cause a disturbance, and if he refuses to go away quietly—"

Bunchy Fives spat on his hands.

"Come on!" he bellowed. "Come and be smashed up, you dude!"

"Miss Meadows," said Mr. Shepherd quietly, "you can see that this man is bent upon making a disturbance. I beg of you to retire indoors while I deal with him."

"We'll help you, sir!" said Bob Lawless.

"I do not require your help, my boy, and you will kindly stand back!"

"Oh, by gum!" murmured Bob.

The Gentle Shepherd drew Miss Meadows back and faced the terror of Thompson.

"Now, my man," he said quietly, "you are not wanted here. Either you will leave these premises immediately, or I shall eject you. Which is it to be?"

"I guess I'm dreaming!" murmured Bob Lawless to Frank. "Pinch me, Franky, and wake me up!"

Frank Richards chuckled.

"The Gentle Shepherd's got pluck, after all, Bob," he whispered. "And he's a Public school man, you know. He has learned how to use his hands."

"He's a lion in an ass' skin," smiled Beauclerc.

"Look out! There he goes!"

Bunchy Fives had stood blinking at the young master for some moments, too taken aback to realise how matters stood. But as he understood that Mr. Shepherd had actually meant what he said, the ruffian's wrath knew no bounds. With a bellow like an excited buffalo he rushed at the young master, and all Cedar Creek looked on breathlessly.

Pluck Will Tell!

MR. SHEPHERD stood up steadily to the attack. To the breathless schoolboys it looked as if he must be overborne and swept away by that terrific charge of the heavy, muscular ruffian. But it did not happen.

Mr. Shepherd gave ground a little, and swerved aside, but he hit out at the same time, and his right came home unexpectedly on the side of Bunchy's head. There was a muffled roar from Bunchy Fives as he staggered under the drive.

Before he could recover, the young master was upon him, and his left fist landed in the ruffian's undefended face. There was a buzz of deep-drawn breath as the giant went sprawling on the ground.

Guntzen looked on like a fellow in a dream. Frank Richards pressed Bob's arm ecstatically.

"He's the man, Bob!"

"Yes, rather!"

Miss Meadows gazed at her new assistant master in astonishment. She had never dreamed that such strength lay hidden in the dude of Cedar

Creek. Her feelings towards him had been tinctured with contempt hitherto—she did not admire dudes. But it was evident now that Mr. Shepherd was something more than a dandy.

Bunchy Fives sat up. He blinked round, with an air of stupefied astonishment.

"By gosh!" he muttered, scrambling to his feet. "You knocked me down—hey?"

"I did," said Mr. Shepherd tranquilly, "and I shall repeat the performance unless you retiah at once!"

"By gosh!" repeated Bunchy Fives.

He came on again, like a charging buffalo. In size and strength the ruffian had an enormous advantage, but in science he was nowhere. And science, backed by pluck, was more effective in the long run than weight or brute strength. But the fight was hard.

Once Mr. Shepherd went down under a terrific blow, but he was up again like a jack-in-the-box. Pluck he had in plenty, that was clear. He fought on without turning a hair, though both his eyes were growing dark and his nose was streaming red.

But by that time Bunchy Fives' bearded face was simply a study in damages. Both his eyes were half-closed, his nose was swelling, his lips were cut, his hairy cheeks thick with bruises. He could scarcely see as he came on again and again with blind ferocity.

"The Shepherd's winning!" murmured Bob Lawless. "Why, he's got his man beat! No more jokes on the Shepherd, Franky!"

Bunchy Fives went down again, landed on his back by a terrific upper-cut that almost lifted him off his feet. He lay on the ground feebly clawing at his jaw and groaning.

Mr. Shepherd panted as he looked down on him.

"Are you satisfied, my man?" he asked.

"I ain't no hog, and I know when I've had enough," gasped Bunchy Fives, blinking feebly at him. "Yow-ow-ow!"

"I think the mattah is settled, Miss Meadows," said Mr. Shepherd. "I am sorry such a scene should have taken place in your presence. But there was really nothin' else for me to do. I am suah you will admit that."

Miss Meadows smiled. Even at that moment, with both eyes blacked and his nose streaming, the Gentle Shepherd had not forgotten his drawling accent.

"I think the man will go now," said the schoolmistress. "I should never have suspected, Mr. Shepherd, that you could perform such a feat. Sam, please see that man out of the gates!"

Sam, the negro stableman, had been looking on, grinning. He laid an ebony hand on Bunchy's collar and dragged him to his feet. Bunchy Fives stood up unsteadily, blinking.

"I'm going," he gasped. "I'm sorry I came. Mister Dude, I'm sorry I woke you up—real sorry! You're a man, you are!"

And he went. Bunchy Fives had come for wool, and was returning shorn. The terror of Thompson had met his match at last!

"Please go and attend to your injuries, Mr. Shepherd," said Miss Meadows. "I am afraid you are very much hurt."

"Not at all!" gasped Mr. Shepherd; and he limped away.

And from the Cedar Creek fellows a roar of cheering followed him. Cedar Creek had learned to respect the new master at last.

Next Week: "THE HAUNTED MINE!"

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DRAKE AND DAUBENY, ONE-TIME ENEMIES, ARE UNITED IN HITTING BACK IN NO HALF-HEARTED MANNER AT THE -



Jack Drake uttered an angry exclamation as he read the notice directed against him on the wall of the Common-room. Fortunately for the author of that humorous notice, he had made himself scarce!

The White Feather!

"LOOK here, Daub—"

"Well?"

"This won't do!"

Daubeny & Co. were in their cabin after lessons on board the Benbow. North of the Azores, the old ship was plunging her way through the tepid waters of the Gulf Stream.

Egan and Torrence were smoking cigarettes, but Vernon Daubeny had declined the offer of Egan's case. There had been a change in Vernon Daubeny during the past few days—a change that had not passed unnoticed by his chums.

"What won't do?" inquired Daubeny.

"What's come over you?" demanded Egan. "You haven't been the same fellow since Drake had his ducking. You never liked the fellow, but you went about looking like a ghost while he was missing—"

"Rot!" said Daubeny uneasily.

"There was a fight arranged between you when Drake went overboard," continued Egan. "It's four or five days since Drake was picked up, and the fight hasn't come off yet. When is it comin' off, Daub?"

"It isn't comin' off."

"You're showin' the white feather, after all?" sneered Egan.

"Look here, Egan, I'm fed-up with raggin' Drake and his pals!" exclaimed Daubeny. "I've made it up with him, and there's an end."

"There isn't an end," answered Egan. "We're not goin' to give the Fourth best, if you do. They've been chippin' us about it. Tuckey Toodles—"

"Bother Tuckey Toodles!"

"Tuckey Toodles asked me to-day when we

MISCHIEF-MAKERS of the BENBOW!

By Owen Conquest.

were goin' to bring our giddy champion up to scratch. Sawyer major suggested borrowin' a windlass to screw your courage up to the stickin'-point."

Torrence chuckled.

"You needn't repeat to me the cackle of the Fourth Form fags," said Daubeny. "I'm not goin' to fight Drake, and there's an end. I'm goin' to try to pull with him in future."

"Because you're afraid of a lickin'?" sneered Egan. "Ever since he had his duckin' you've been playin' the goat. Not a game of cards in the cabin, and now we're givin' up smokin'. What next?"

"Daub's turnin' over a new leaf," said

When trouble-makers on the Benbow try to cause a "war" between Jack Drake and Vernon Daubeny, they find themselves in the wars!

Torrence solemnly. "He's settin' us a good example. Let's follow it, Egan."

Tap!

The door of the cabin opened, and the fat face and plump figure of Tuckey Toodles were presented to the view.

"Message for Daub!" said Tuckey, tossing an envelope on the cabin table. "It's from Drake."

And, with a chuckle, Rupert de Vere Toodles retired to the doorway to watch.

Vernon Daubeny picked up the envelope rather curiously and opened it. He wondered why Drake should send him a message instead of coming to his room himself.

The chief of the bucks was no longer on his old bitter terms with Jack Drake. Since he had struck the hasty blow that sent Drake over the side of the Benbow, Daub had done a good deal of thinking. Drake had kept the secret; the consequences of Daubeny's action, which would have been very serious, had been avoided owing to the generosity of the junior who had gone so near to death.

The lesson was not lost upon Vernon Daubeny, careless and selfish as he had always been. The chief of the bucks was making an honest effort to pull round, and he had started by shaking hands with Drake over their old quarrel.

"What the thump is Drake sendin' letters for?" growled Egan. "Perhaps it's an invitation to tea in his cabin. I suppose that will come next."

Daubeny opened the envelope. There was no letter inside. The envelope contained a white feather! Daub started as he saw it. Torrence grinned, and Egan's lip curled.

"From Drake," he said. "By gad, I suppose you'll fight him now!"

Daubeny sat staring at the white feather. For a full minute he did not speak. Then he rose to his feet, with a passionate look on his face.

"Where are you goin', Daub?"

"To see Drake," answered Daubeny between his teeth.

"Good! We'll come."

Daubeny strode out of the cabin, with his comrades at his heels.

Trouble in Cabin No. 8!

"HALLO! Come in!"

Jack Drake called out cheerily as Daubeny of the Shell loomed up in his doorway. Behind Daub appeared the grinning faces of Egan and Torrence; but Daub's face was pale with anger.

"Drake, you cad——" he began, striding into the cabin.

Jack Drake started to his feet. Dick Rodney stared at the Shell fellow. There had been unaccustomed peace for some days between Daubeny and Cabin No. 8, but it was evident that the peace was now to be broken.

"What's that?" exclaimed Drake, flushing.

"What are you calling me?"

"Cad!" shouted Daubeny furiously. "You—your rotter, you were willin' to make it up—you shook hands on it—and now you dare to say that I'm afraid of you?"

Drake's lips set.

"I haven't said so——" he began.

"Liar!"

Drake crimsoned. He made a stride towards the Shell fellow, with his fists clenched, and Daubeny met him half-way.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Rodney, jumping up. "You can't fight here!"

But the two juniors were already fighting.

"Hurrah!" roared the voice of Sawyer major from the passage. "They're at it at last. Daub's got some Dutch courage from somewhere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

The fighting juniors crashed into the table, and there was a fluttering of books and papers and a spattering of ink.

Rodney forced his way between the combatants.

"Stop it, you silly asses!" he exclaimed. "Do you want to wreck the place? Keep back, Drake, and you, Daub——"

Daubeny panted.

"You can come into the Common-room and finish, Drake!" he gasped. "I'll lick you or you'll lick me!"

"My dear ass, I'm quite at your service!" said Drake coolly. "I don't know what you've got your silly rag out for, but I'm ready to lick you, if you want to be licked!"

"You know well enough!" panted Daubeny. "And only a rotten cad would send a chap a white feather, after shaking hands over a quarrel!"

"A white feather!" repeated Drake blankly. "I didn't send you a white feather!"

"You—you didn't?" stuttered Daubeny.

"Certainly not!"

"I say, don't you back out now, Drake!" exclaimed Tuckey Toodles anxiously. "Be a man!"

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" snapped Drake. "I tell you I never sent you a white feather, Daub. Some silly ass has been pulling your leg!"

"Toodles brought it to my cabin, and said it was from you!"

"Toodles, you fat villain!" roared Drake. "Here, collar him!"

Tuckey Toodles was backing out of the doorway, apparently not liking the turn the affair was taking. Jack Drake made a rush after him, and caught him by the collar. Toodles, with a wild howl, was yanked headlong into the study.

"Now, you fat rascal!" exclaimed Drake, slamming him against a bulkhead, and shaking him there. "What rotten trick have you been playing?"

"Yoop! Leggo!"

"He brought the white feather to my cabin, and said it was from you," said Daubeny, calming down. "I—I thought——"

"You oughtn't to have thought anything of the kind!" said Drake tartly. "But it's Toodles' fault. Anybody got a rope's-end?"

"Yaroooh!"

"So you're not going to fight, after all?" sneered Egan.

"There's nothin' to fight about!" said Daubeny savagely. "It was only a trick of that fool Toodles!"

"Any excuse is better than none when a chap's got cold feet, I suppose!" said Egan scornfully; and he lounged away.

Daubeny flushed hotly, and made a step after Egan, seemingly inclined to continue the fight, but with a different adversary. But he restrained himself.

Dick Rodney sorted out a rope's-end, which Tuckey Toodles eyed with great apprehension.

"I—I say, dear old top!" he gasped. "I—I was only bringing Daub up to the scratch, you know!"

"You told him a thumping lie!" growled Drake. "Shove the fat idiot over the table, Rodney!"

"Yarooop!"

Dick Rodney grinned, and grasped Tuckey Toodles by the shoulders. Daubeny whipped him up by the ankles. The fat junior was plumped on the table, face downwards.

Then Drake set to work with the rope's-end.

Whack, whack, whack!

The dust rose from the garments of Tuckey Toodles, and a series of fiendish yells from Tuckey himself.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-woop!"

"There!" gasped Drake. "That's six, you fat villain! You'll get a dozen next time you tell lies!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Drake looked at Daubeny with a smile, as Tuckey Toodles rolled off the table, howling dolorously.

"All serene now, Daub?"

"Ye-es," said Daubeny hesitatingly.

"If you don't mind, you might make an inquiry or two next time, before you burst out on the warpath!"

Daubeny grinned faintly and left the cabin.

Tuckey Toodles was rubbing himself and

groaning deeply. He was feeling a very ill-used youth.

"You awful beast, Drake!" he groaned. "If this is your gratitude for friendship—"

"It is," assented Drake. "And you'll get some more of the same kind of gratitude if you play any more of your tricks. I'm friends with Daub now, and I'm not going to fight him to please a fat idiot!"

Tuckey Toodles gave a snort.

"The wrong chap got the white feather!" he said.

"What?" exclaimed Drake.

He drew back his boot and Tuckey Toodles made a swift exit from the cabin.

Rodney burst into a laugh.

"It doesn't seem so easy to make friends as to quarrel," he remarked. "All the fellows are wondering why your fight with Daub doesn't come off."

"Well, it's not coming off!" said Drake. "I hope this is the end of it!"

But Jack Drake's hope was ill-founded. That was not the end of it by any means!

A Peculiar Persecution!

"WHAT silly ass—" began Jack Drake.

It was the following morning. The Benbow fellows were gathered for lessons on the sunny deck, with the great sails of the old ship swelling above their heads. A blackboard had been erected for the use of Mr. Packe in conveying instruction to the Fourth, and somebody had already been at work on the blackboard with a chalk. Some youth of humorous and artistic proclivities had chalked a picture on the blackboard, and the juniors were looking at it and chuckling, when Drake came along with Rodney.

Two figures were chalked on the board—one brandishing a fist in a threatening manner, the other upon his knees, evidently pleading for mercy. Names were scrawled under the pictured figures, revealing the fact that the threatening figure was that of Daubeny of the Shell and the kneeling form that of Drake of the Fourth. Out of the kneeling youth's mouth came a chalked scroll, bearing the words: "Mercy! I'm too proud to fight!"

Drake's brow darkened as he looked at it. Evidently, after the scene in Study No. 8 the previous evening, opinion had veered round, and it was now Drake that was suspected of "cold feet."

"Silly rot!" said Rodney.

"Who did this?" growled Drake, looking round over the grinning Fourth Formers. "You fellows know who it was?"

There was no reply to his question. Probably a good many of the juniors knew the identity of the humorous artist, but they were not inclined to inform Drake.

"It's a hint to you, Drake, old chap," said Sawyer major blandly. "It's about time your fight with Daubney came off, you know!"

"That's my business!" snapped Drake.

"We thought it was the Shell crying off," said Sawyer major warmly. "Now it turns out—"

Drake clenched his hands. Perhaps it was just as well that Mr. Packe arrived at that moment. The Fourth Form master stared at the chalked picture on the blackboard and frowned.

"Who has chalked this nonsense here?" he exclaimed.

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There was a dead silence.

"Sawyer, take the duster and rub the board clean," said Mr. Packe crossly.

Sawyer major obeyed, and the incident closed. The juniors had to give their attention to morning lessons now.

After lessons Sawyer major joined Drake and Rodney on deck.

"Look here, Drake—" he began.

"Do you know who chalked that rot on the blackboard?" demanded Drake.

"Never mind that," said Sawyer major. "But about your fight with Daubney—"

"I tell you I'm not going to fight Daubney!" exclaimed Drake.

"You can't disappoint all the fellows like that," said Sawyer major, shaking his head.

"Can't be did, you know! Why, we've been looking forward to it all the time. You can lick Daub. You licked him before, you know—"

"Fathead!"

"We thought Daub was funking it," said Sawyer. "and now it turns out that it's you who's too proud to fight. It's up against the Fourth Form, you know. The Shell will be cackling at us."

"Let them cackle!"

"Why don't you fight Daub now?" demanded Sawyer major, evidently very much perplexed.

"I've made it up with Daub, fathead!"

"Well, you could have made it up after a fight with him, I suppose? Looks to me a bit like funk, if you don't mind my saying so."

"But I do mind your saying so!" exclaimed Drake. "And if you don't ring off I'll jam your silly napper on the rail!"

"Well, I think—"

"Never mind what you think. Travel off!" interrupted Drake. "Besides, you can't think. Buzz!"

Sawyer major, looking extremely indignant, "buzzed."

"I'm fed-up with this, Rodney!" Drake growled. "If another ass comes along and wants me to fight Daubney, he will have a fight on his own hands."

But Drake was not troubled again. When he went down to the Common-room, however, he found a peculiar notice posted on the wall. It ran:

"TRY MUSTARD PLASTER FOR COLD FEET!"

Drake uttered an angry exclamation. If the author of that humorous notice had been at hand probably the vials of wrath would have been poured on his head. Fortunately, he had made himself scarce.

In the study at tea-time Tuckey Toodles regarded Drake with a very lofty expression.

"Sawyer major says you've got cold feet, Drake," he said suddenly. "I think it's a disgrace to this study, you know. I wonder Daub doesn't make you come up to the scratch, now he knows you're funking. Egan and Torrence and Selwyn and the rest are chipping him no end, but he's as funky as you are— Yaroooh!"

Tuckey Toodles' remarks were suddenly interrupted by a ship's biscuit landing on his fat little nose.

But his words had put a new idea into Drake's mind, and after tea the Fourth Former strolled over to the Shell quarters to speak to Daub. He found him alone, and explained his idea

to him. Daubeny stared at first, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"I'm on!" he said.

"They won't be satisfied without a fight," said Drake, laughing, "especially Sawyer major and Egan. Well, we'll have the fight, all right, and show that it isn't a case of cold feet. If they don't like the way it turns out, that's their business."

"I'm your man," grinned Daubeny. "I'll look for Egan now."

"And I'll look for Sawyer."

And they separated.

Drake's Way!

"IT'S on!"

That news came from Sawyer major, and it was not long in spreading through the Fourth Form on the Benbow. There was a crowd in the Common-room. The Fourth gathered there almost to a man, much excited and interested by the news that the fight was coming off at last.

Drake came in with Rodney, but the latter left him to Sawyer major, who had been selected by the captain of the Fourth as his second. Sawyer major was delighted with his task. Indeed, he was proud of the fact that it was chiefly by his efforts that the fight had been brought about at all. He confessed that he had been the artist of the blackboard and the author of the notice in the Common-room.

Most of the Shell were present, as well as the Fourth, when Daubeny came in with Egan, his second. Egan was looking as pleased and satisfied as Sawyer major. His sneers and innuendoes had been incessant, and he felt that he had succeeded at last in breaking the peace for good.

"Pile in, ye cripples!" said Conway. "Better late than never!"

Dick Rodney brought out the gloves. Somehow to the surprise of the juniors, he brought out four pairs.

"Hallo! How many chaps are going to fight?" asked Estcourt.

"Four!" answered Jack Drake, with a smile.

"You and Daub—" began Sawyer major.

"And you and Egan," said Drake.

"Eh? I'm not going to fight Egan!" exclaimed Sawyer in surprise.

"Quite so!" said Drake. "Daub's your man!"

"Little me!" grinned Daubeny, drawing on his gloves. "And I'm ready as soon as you like, Sawyer."

"But you're going to fight Drake!" howled Sawyer.

"Not the least little bit in the world! I'm going to fight you, dear boy!" answered Daubeny coolly.

"You see, Drake's got another fight on his hands, and there's no time for me."

"I'm going to fight you, Egan," put in Drake.

"Me?" yelled Egan.

"Yes, dear boy. Are you ready?"

"I—I won't! I don't want—" What the thump do you mean, anyway?"

"Blessed if I can make this out!" said Estcourt, with a stare. "I thought you and Daub had come here for a scrap, Drake."

"So did Sawyer and Egan," answered Drake.

"But, you see, that isn't exactly the programme. Sawyer and Egan are awfully keen on Daub and little me fighting. Well, we're going to fight—Sawyer and Egan. See? Any other gentlemen who like to say 'cold feet' will also have a

fight on their hands, after. But it's Sawyer's and Egan's turn first. Are you ready, Egan?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from the Benbow juniors as they understood Drake's rather extraordinary stunt. The war makers were to do the fighting—not at all a bad arrangement.

Sawyer major submitted to his fate; he was not specially averse to a "mill" with Daub. But Egan was less inclined for it.

"I'm not going to play the goat here!" he exclaimed savagely. "I came to second Daub in a fight with Drake, and if the fight isn't coming off I'm going."

"You're not going yet," said Jack Drake, with a chuckle. "You're going to fight me, my pippin, while Daub tackles Sawyer. I dare say the pair of you will be willing to keep the peace for a bit afterwards."

"I—I won't—"

"You will!" said Drake grimly.

Egan made a stride towards the door, but the next moment Drake's grasp was on the Shell fellow's shoulder and Egan was swung back into the middle of the room.

"Ready?" grinned Drake.

"No, hang you!" shouted Egan furiously.

Drake reached out, and his finger and thumb closed on Egan's nose. The Shell fellow gave a stifled hewl.

"Now are you ready?" asked Drake sweetly.

"Ow! Let go, you rotter! I'll fight you, if you like."

"Good!"

Rodney tossed the gloves to Egan, who donned them sullenly. He would have given a term's pocket-money to be safe outside the room, but there was no escape for the fomentor of trouble.

A crowded ring surrounded the two pairs of combatants as the double fight commenced.

Egan, finding himself fairly in for it, fought with savage vigour, and Drake had his hands full for some time.

Sawyer major put up a game fight against Daubeny, but he had no chance, and at the end of the fourth round he was on his back, unable to rise without Estcourt's assistance. At that point he gave in, and retired to bathe a damaged eye and nose.

Drake and Egan were better matched, and for a time Egan's sullen fury sustained him. But he was receiving some severe punishment, and Drake did not spare him. In the sixth round Egan went spinning under a heavy right-hander and crashed on the floor.

Dick Rodney counted.

"Out!"

Drake slipped off the gloves with a smile. Egan sat up, clutching at a nose that streamed crimson.

Drake glanced round.

"Any other gentleman present like a turn with the gloves?" he asked.

"No, thanks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, Daub, old chap!"

Drake slipped his arm through Daubeny's and they left the Common-room together.

The next day there were severe signs of damage about both Egan of the Shell and Sawyer major of the Fourth. And both of them had quite dropped the subject of the fight between Drake and Daubeny—which never came off. The hatchet was allowed to remain buried!

Next Week: "SAVED FROM THE SEA!"

