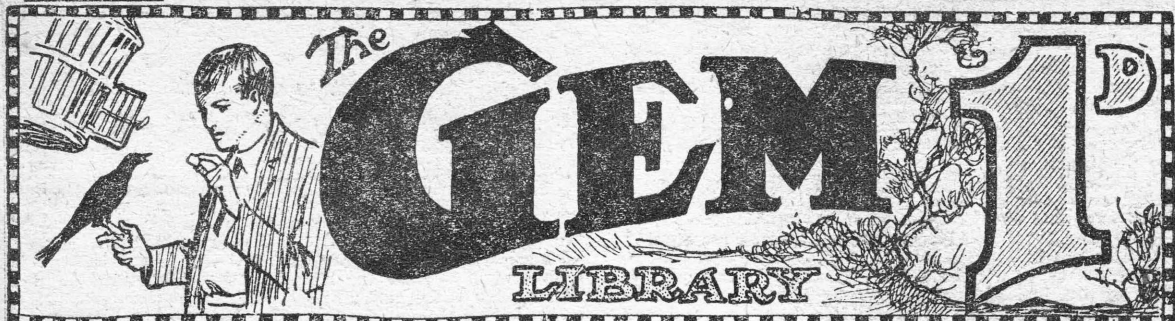


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Tom Merry's Concert Party!

A Splendid, Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Uncertainly!

"WHAT—"
"How—"
"Why—"

Blake and Herries and Digby spoke all at once. They had been seated round the table in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, engaged in doing their preparation, and there was no sound in the study save the turning of leaves, the scratching of pens, and an occasional grunt from one of the juniors.

And then, all of a sudden, the door of the study had been flung violently open, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth had rushed in.

As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth belonged to Study No. 6, he had of course a right to rush in if he pleased. But there was something so remarkable in the look of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that it was quite clear that he had not rushed in from ordinary motives, just to get on with his prep. His aristocratic face was pale as chalk, and his eyes were almost starting from their sockets; and his eyeglass dangled from the end of its cord, and clinked against his gold watchchain so violently that it was in danger of being broken. And Arthur Augustus did not speak. He simply stood and stared at his chums with wide-open eyes, gasping like a fish out of water.

And Blake and Herries and Dig stared at him. They had left their prep. rather late that evening, and were in a hurry to get it done before bedtime; but under

the circumstances they forgot all about their prep. The claims of friendship came first.

"What's the matter, Gussy?" Blake demanded, in amazement. "Knox after you?"

"No!"

"New House bounders on your track?"

"Oh! No. Oh!"

"Seen a ghost?"

"Yaas!"

"What!" roared Blake, Herries, and Dig together.

"Yaas. No! Yaas!"

Jack Blake crossed to the door, and closed it. Then he grasped his chum by the shoulders and shook him gently.

"Now, what's the trouble?" he demanded severely. "Have you been drinking?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Has the ginger-pop got into your head?"

"Plenty of room for it there!" murmured Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"If you've seen a ghost, what kind of a ghost was it?" asked Blake. "A really good old-fashioned one with rattling bones?"

"Weally—" said D'Arcy feebly.

Blake slapped him on the back to aid in his recovery. Herries and Digby, like true chums, came round and did the same. Arthur Augustus gave a roar.

"Ow! Ow! Leggo! Leave off! Yow!"

"We're trying to recover you—I mean, to make you recover—"

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND!" & "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

No. 235 (Now Series), Vol. 6.

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"Ow! Wow! Pway leave off, you feahful asses!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jerked himself away from his too friendly chums, and sank into the study armchair, gasping. The colour was beginning to come back into his cheeks now. But it was evident that the swell of St. Jim's had had a great shock. The chums of Study No. 6 regarded him with great surprise and curiosity.

"What on earth is the matter with him?" said Herries, in amazement. "I s'pose Towser hasn't got loose and gone for you, has he?"

"Ow No!"

"He wants another slap on the back!" said Digby.

"Keep off, you ass! I don't want anythin' of the sort!" roared D'Arcy. "If you lay your silly hands on me again I shall stwike you!"

"Then tell us what's the matter," said Blake indignantly. "Here we are, leaving our prep., at the risk of getting lines in the morning, all ready to sympathise with you, and you won't tell us what we're to sympathise about."

D'Arcy caught his breath.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have been so startled, weally," he said breathlessly. "But it was so howwidly weird, you know."

"What was?"

"It!"

Blake snorted.

"What was 'it,' you fathead?" he demanded.

"It was simply howwible," said D'Arcy. "It thwew me into quite a fluttah. It's vewy dark wound by the old chapel, you know, and I couldn't help thinkin' about the ghost of the old cwrypt as I came by. Then— Bai Jove! It was awfl'y cweepy!"

"What was, you frabjous ass?"

"It!"

"You—you—you—"

"Do you believe in ghosts, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus solemnly.

"That's accordin'," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "I believe ghosts still exist in some parts of the world—Fleet Street, for example."

"Fleet Street!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in surprise. "I should have regarded Fleet Street as a vewy pwactical and pwosaic place."

"There are ghosts there, and they are sometimes laid," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "Ghosts of authors, you know."

"Dead authors?" asked D'Arcy.

"No; live ones."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake. How can a live author have a ghost?"

Blake chuckled.

"I've heard that they do," he said. "Chap who writes their stuff for them, you know, when they go on the razzle—ahem! I mean when they're indisposed. They call 'em ghosts. Sometimes they get laid—sometimes the author gets laid, too, when he's found out. I've heard of such things."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I werged you as an ass, Blake. I was not talkin' of authors' ghosts, but of weal ghosts—weal howwid spiwits!" Arthur Augustus shivered. "It was howwid!"

"You don't mean to say that you've seen one?" demanded Digby.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Oh, no!"

"Have you seen anything?"

"No, deah boy."

"You ass!" roared Blake. "Then what do you mean by coming into this study with a face like a Dutch cheese—"

"I am unaware that my face beahs even the most distant wesemblance to a Dutch cheese, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "As a mattah of fact, I have not seen anythin'. But I heard it."

"Heard what?"

"The ghost!"

"What was it like?" demanded Blake, gazing in astonishment at his chum. There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was speaking in deadly earnest. His experience in the dark quadrangle, whatever it was, had certainly thrown him into a flutter.

"An awful, howwid wailin' sound, you know," said D'Arcy, shivering.

Digby looked very thoughtful.

"Had you been doing any of your tenor solos?" he asked.

"It might have been an echo."

"You uttah ass—"

"Where did you hear it?" demanded Blake.

"As I was passin' the ruined chapel. I'd been wound to feed the wabbits, you know, and I took a short cut back by the old chapel. As I passed, I heard that awful wailin'. I wemembahed at once the legend of the old monk who was buwied alive in the cwrypt by the wobbahs, and who's supposed to cw yout on the anniversary of his howwid fate. And—and it was just like that! A feahful shwiekin' sound fwom the cwrypt—"

"Somebody japin' you," said Herries.

"It wasn't a human voice, deah boy. It was too high and shwill to be human; it was an awful shwiekin', and it kept on."

"My hat! What did you do?"

"I was thunderstwuck! I stopped and listened for a minute or so, and then there came a deep, howwid gwoan, and—and I bolted," said D'Arcy frankly. "As a mattah of fact, I wan like anythin'. I wan wight in here."

"And interrupted our prep.," growled Digby, sitting down at the table again.

"It's jolly queer," said Blake, knitting his brows thoughtfully. "It must have been some chap hiding in the ruin to jape Gussy. Though I don't see how he could have known that Gussy was going round to the hutches just now; the ass thought of it all of a sudden just when we were beginning prep."

"It was not a jape, deah boy. It wasn't a human voice at all. It—it was howwid!"

And Arthur Augustus shuddered at the recollection of the dreadful sound.

Jack Blake looked at his chums.

"It's jolly queer!" he repeated. "Who's game to come down to the old crypt with me and have a look for the giddy ghost?"

"What about prep?" asked Digby.

"Oh, blow prep.!"

"What price Lathom in the morning?"

"Oh, blow Lathom!"

"You won't say that in class to-morrow," grinned Digby.

"There are times, my sons, when the human heart rises superior to such base considerations as prep. and Form-masters," said Jack Blake loftily. "I'm jolly certain somebody has been pulling Gussy's noble leg, and I think we ought to lam him for the honour of the study. We'll take a bike lantern, and a cricket-stump apiece, and bash him for the honour of No. 6. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, rising from the armchair. "I am quite willin' to come, deah boys, though I am certain that it was not a jape."

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

"All serene," said Digby resignedly.

And Jack Blake took his bicycle lantern from the study cupboard, and the juniors selected a cricket-stump each, and they left the study. Blake halted in the passage.

"Might as well take Tom Merry with us," he said. "The more the merrier. I'll call him."

"Buck up, then."

Blake ran along the passage to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage further along. He came back alone a minute later.

"They're not there," he said. "I suppose they're down in the common-room. Blow 'em! Come on, before the ghost evaporates."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Faith, and where are ye going intirely?" exclaimed Reilly, of the Fourth, looking out of his study as the chums of No. 6 passed.

"Ghost-hunting," said Blake solemnly. "Gussy has discovered a ghost or a banshee—he's not sure which—in the ruined chapel. Did you bring a banshee over in your box after the last vacation, by mistake, Reilly?"

The Irish junior grinned.

"Weally, Blake, this is no subject for wibald jokes!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Come along, Reilly," said Blake, taking the Belfast boy by the arm. "If it's a banshee, you can deal with it, and if it's a common or garden ghost, we'll lay it. If it's an author's ghost, we'll get Figgins to go for it, as he's an author—at least, he says he is."

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"SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!" is the Title of the Grand Complete School Tale contained in our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.



Tom Merry was seated upon an old box placed upon the flagstones of the vault. Manners was sitting on a camp stool, and Monty Lowther had an old chair. The three juniors had musical instruments in their hands, and Blake & Co., from the cover of the heavy stone pillars, uttered suppressed exclamations.

"You uttah ass, Blake!"

"Walk behind Gussy, Reilly, and see that he doesn't bolt."

"Weally, you fwrightful ass!"

"This way!"

And Jack Blake, with the lighted lantern in one hand, and the cricket-stump in the other, led the way out of the School House, with the other juniors at his heels.

CHAPTER 2.

Simply Awful.

DARK and gloomy looked the old chapel as the juniors approached it in the deep shadows cast by the trees. Even Jack Blake's face became grave and he was silent.

The matter seemed quite different out here in the darkness, far from the lights and the cheery voices in the School House.

The juniors felt that even ghost stories were not quite so absurd here in the gloomy shadows as they had seemed in the cosy study.

The old story of the ghost of the ruined chapel came into their minds. There was more than one ghost story in connection with St. Jim's; but the most weird of all was that of the buried monk of the chapel. He had been buried alive, so the legend ran, by robbers who had despoiled the abbey in the old days when St. Jim's was a monastic establishment, for refusing to reveal where the treasures of the abbey were hidden; and the story ran that his cries haunted the robbers for ever afterwards—and on the anniversary of his doom his

weird wailings were still to be heard in the ruins. Doubtless the howling of the wind among the broken walls and shattered casements had given colour to the story.

But Blake & Co. felt an uncanny feeling creep over them as they approached the chapel in the deep gloom. Thick branches overhead shut out the light of the stars, and the great fragments of shattered masonry loomed up before them dim and formless.

"Here we are!" murmured Digby.

"I—I wish I'd brought Towser with us!" murmured Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I heard somethin'!"

"Ass!" said Blake peevishly, staring round into the gloom.

"Rot! I heard nothing. Did you, Dig?"

"No. It was the wind."

"Faith, it's creepy here," said Reilly, with a shiver.

"Sure, it would be better to come by daylight."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Come on!"

They tramped on through the old shattered portal.

Here the light of the stars fell a little more clearly upon what remained of the ruins of the oldest portion of St. Jim's.

The juniors gazed round them uneasily, Blake flashing the light of the lantern to and fro.

"Nothing here," he said, in a rather more assured voice.

D'Arcy suddenly clutched his arm. The swell of St. Jim's was suddenly pale in the lantern-light.

"Listen!" he panted.

"Oh!"

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"My hat!"

The juniors stood petrified.

Apparently from the ground at their feet, from some deep recess of the ruined chapel, rose a piercing wail.

It was, to the excited imagination of the startled juniors, like the shriek of a lost spirit.

It rang and echoed in the silence of the old chapel, and died away shudderingly into the night.

"G-g-good heavens!" muttered Blake, when all was silent again. "W-w-what was that?"

"G-g-great Scott!"

"The gig-gig-ghost!"

"Oh, deah!"

Wail! Wail! Shriek!

The wild sounds, muffled in the distance, came to their ears again. Then followed a deep groaning sound.

"Let's go," muttered Digby. "I—I can't stand this. Let's clear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake stood firm.

"I'm not going," he muttered. "I don't believe it's a ghost. Stick here."

"But I—I say——"

"Weally, Blake——"

Blake was very pale, but he was determined. He strode away towards the entrance of the crypt.

"Come on!" he said.

"Blake, deah boy——"

"I say, Blake, old man——"

"Come on, you fatheads! I tell you we're going to clear it up, whatever it is."

And Blake stepped into the stone stairway leading down into the crypt.

The other fellows hesitated, but they could not leave Blake to go alone. With creeping flesh they followed him upon the stone stairs.

D'Arcy caught Blake by the arm.

"Blake, old man, it's howwid! Pway come back!"

"Rats!"

"It must be a g-g-ghost!"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, listen!" gasped Digby.

The wild wailing recommenced, and the deep groaning sound accompanied it. The sound came to their ears much more clearly now than they were upon the stairs downward.

Blake knitted his brows.

"It's somebody down here!" he muttered.

There was a wild, discordant shriek from the darkness below, and with a sudden gasp the juniors turned and fled, Blake with the rest.

They scrambled out of the stairway, and into the ruins above, the lantern knocking against a fragment of masonry, and going out.

"Wun for it!" gasped D'Arcy.

And they tore across the ruins towards the quadrangle.

Outside the limits of the old chapel Blake called a halt. The other fellows reluctantly stopped.

"Pway come on, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"We—we haven't finished our prep., you know," said Digby feebly.

"I've got to feed Towser, too," said Herries.

"Faith, and I've got a letter to write to me grandmother," muttered Reilly.

Blake did not move.

"What did you fellows bolt for?" he demanded.

"Well, you bolted, too."

"I—I just followed to bring you back" said Blake cautiously.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah, wats! You wan like anythin'!"

"Well, I'm not running any further," said Blake resolutely. "I tell you it must be a jape, and very likely the bounders, whoever they are, are watching us all the time. Nice set of asses we shall look!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I'm going back!" said Blake determinedly.

"Blake, old man——"

"Blake, deah boy——"

"Remember the prep.——"

"Look here——"

Jack Blake snorted, and marched back towards the crypt, fighting the lantern again to show the way.

"We—we can't desert the silly ass!" muttered Digby.

"Come on!"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake descended grimly into the crypt. The rest of the juniors followed him, their ears on the stretch to listen. Again from the silence, apparently from the deep bowels of the earth, came that wild burst of wailing and groaning.

Shriek after shriek, loud and discordant, rang through the hollows of the crypt.

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"Bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy, through his chattering teeth. "This is simply feahful, you know. 'It's howwid!'"

"Grooh! I——"

"My hat!" roared Blake. "Listen!"

The shrieking and wailing had changed, and the sounds now had a regular order in them, and the juniors, to their amazement, recognised a tune. Blake gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha! You chumps! You fatheads! You duffers! It's a fiddle!"

"What!"

"It's a violin!" yelled Blake. "He's been tuning up, and now he's playing like—like a cat scratching at the strings with all four paws at once! I tell you it's a fiddler!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on!"

Blake rushed into the crypt. On the left a series of arches opened out, leading into the vaults; and there, as the juniors turned the corner, there burst upon them a ray of light.

Blake promptly extinguished his lantern.

"Quiet!" he whispered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the Fourth-Formers advanced cautiously towards the light in the vaults, and, keeping in cover behind the heavy stone pillars, looked at the scene revealed by the light. Three juniors with musical instruments in their hands were there, and Blake uttered a suppressed exclamation as he saw them.

"Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Quiet!"

And the Fourth-Formers looked on at the peculiar scene in silence.

CHAPTER 3.

The Concert Party.

TOM MERRY, the captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, was seated upon an old box, placed on the flagstones of the vault. Manners was sitting on a camp-stool, and Monty Lowther had an old chair. A lamp was hanging upon a nail driven into an interstice of one of the stone pillars close at hand. On the floor were several bottles of ginger-beer and a tin of cakes.

The Terrible Three were resting from their labours as Blake & Co. stood watching them, unseen, from behind the pillars. The Shell fellows evidently had not the slightest suspicion of the proximity of the Fourth-Formers.

Monty Lowther idly plucked at the strings of his violin. It was evidently Lowther who was responsible for that dreadful wailing and shrieking which had so startled the Fourth-Formers.

Manners was armed with a trombone, and Tom Merry had a flute.

"Getting on all right, I think," Tom Merry remarked.

"If Lowther could only manage to keep his fiddle in tune——"

"Eh?" ejaculated Lowther.

"And if you could make that trombone do anything but grunt, Manners, old man——"

"What!"

"Then we should be all right!" concluded Tom Merry.

"What about your flute, then?" demanded Monty Lowther warmly. "Isn't it necessary for that to be played in tune?"

"I play it in tune, ass!"

"Then my ears deceive me," said Lowther. "I certainly thought it sounded like a cat on the roof. My mistake, perhaps!"

"Look here, ass——"

"Well, fathead——"

"We shall have to stick to practice for a good many nights if we're going to make up a concert party," said Tom Merry. "It's no good springing a violin like that on people. They'd throw things at us."

"Well, you silly ass——"

"I've been thinking," said Manners reflectively, "whether we mightn't ask Kerr of the New House to play the violin. He's ripping, you know."

"What about me?" bellowed Lowther.

"Well, you could play second violin," said Manners pacifically.

"Blessed if I'm going to play second fiddle to any New House bouncer!" said Monty Lowther emphatically. "Go and eat coke."

"I think perhaps we ought to have some more instrumentalists," Tom Merry remarked. "A concert party is a concert party, you know. We might have Kerr in it, and perhaps Herries of the Fourth with his cornet!"

"He makes such an unearthly row with that cornet," said Manners. "Hallo! Did you hear something?"

"No!"

"Sounded to me like some animal sniffing," said Manners, looking round into the deep darkness of the vaults. "I suppose no dog can have got in here."

"Imagination, old chap!" said Lowther. "You'll be thinking you hear the giddy ghost next."

"Oh, don't talk ghosts!" said Tom Merry. "You'll make us creepy here. What about having Herries and his cornet?"

"No good! My hat!" said Lowther. "I believe I heard a sniff then!"

"The wind!" said Tom Merry carelessly. "No; I suppose we couldn't have Herries with his cornet, without giving the show away to those Fourth-Form kids, and then D'Arcy would want to join the concert party as vocalist, and do tenor solos."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can laugh, but the audience wouldn't laugh if D'Arcy and tenor solos were sprung on them," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. Then he gave a start. "Did you fellows hear anything?"

"Something—it sounded like a dog sniffing or snorting."

"I suppose Towser can't have got loose, and wandered down here, can he?" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Call him! He'll come if he's here."

"Good! Towser, Towser, Towser!"

Tom Merry's call echoed among the stone pillars and arches of the old vaults. But there was no response, save the echo of his own voice.

"Only the wind, I suppose," said Lowther. "The wind makes all sorts of queer noises in the old crypt. That's where the ghost stories come from, I suppose. You remember the story of the monk being buried alive down here—"

"Ow! Cheese it! Wait till we get back to the School House."

"Oh, I'm not nervous!" said Monty Lowther. "I don't think we're likely to hear any wailing and shrieking. We've been coming down here to practice for three evenings now, and we haven't heard any yet."

Tom Merry laughed.

"If any chap came nosing into the ruins, he might hear some," he said. "That violin can be heard up above ground, I fancy."

"Well, nobody ever comes round here after dark," said Lowther, "and nobody else is likely to think of getting up a concert party, and practising secretly in the crypt. Look here, we can't do better than stick to our original idea, and keep the concert party a trio. As for singing, I can do the singing, and you fellows can accompany me."

"Well, we could accompany you," agreed Manners doubtfully. "I don't know about your doing the singing, though. You see, if there were any casualties—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Lowther. "I could give them 'On the Ball,' or 'What's the Matter with England?' first-rate. You fellows could try to play so as not to put me out."

"The audience might put you out, and we mightn't be able to stop them."

Monty Lowther glared.

"If Manners is going to set up as a humorist, I'll get back to the House," he said. "It's jolly near bed-time, anyway!" And he put his violin into its case.

Tom Merry yawned and rose.

"Yes, I think we've done enough for one evening," he said. "We've got more than a week ahead of us before the show comes off, and we shall be all right by that time. It was a ripping dodge to come down here to practise. I don't see how we could possibly have kept the wheeze a secret if we hadn't come down here."

"And risked the giddy ghost!" grinned Lowther.

"Oh, keep off the ghost!" grunted Manners, packing up his trombone. "I shall begin to think I hear him soon, with that wailing of your old fiddle in my ears."

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"Look here, Manners—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"You fellows ready?" asked Tom Merry. "I'll blow out the lamp, and you can strike a match to see your way to the stairs."

"Right-ho!"

Monty Lowther fumbled for a matchbox, and Tom Merry blew out the lamp. The chums of the Shell were enveloped in darkness.

Suddenly, from the dense darkness of the vaults, there came a deep and nerve-racking groan.

The Terrible Three gasped.

"Wh-w-what was that?"

"Great Scott!"

Groan!

Shriek!

The fearful, unearthly sounds echoed and rang in the dim vaults. Monty Lowther struck a match with a trembling hand, and it went out. The Chums of the Shell dashed madly towards the stairs, bumping into one another, and stumbling blindly in the dark. Behind them came wild shriek on shriek, filling the vaults with dreadful discordant sound.

"Run!" panted Manners.

"Oh, my hat!"

The Terrible Three tore up the steps. They emerged into the starlight of the old chapel, and ran for the School House. Half-way to the house they paused.

"W-w-what could it have been?" muttered Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know. The wind, I suppose."

"More likely a jape!" growled Lowther.

"Let's go back!"

"No fear—it's nearly bed-time!"

And the Terrible Three went on into the School House, their hearts still beating at express speed.

CHAPTER 4.

Blake's Idea.

"**H**A, ha, ha!"
"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"
"The giddy asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Study No. 6 roared. If the concert party had not fled quite so quickly from the ruins, they would certainly have heard the laughter, and would have known the kind of ghosts that had scared them.

Jack Blake lighted his lantern once more. The rays shone in the dark and gloomy vault. The Terrible Three had taken their musical instruments with them when they fled, but the tin of biscuits, and the bottles of ginger-pop remained. Blake sat down upon the old box and picked up one of the bottles.

"To the victor the spoils!" he remarked.

"Hear, hear!" said Digby heartily.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pop!"

And the Fourth-Formers drank to the discomfiture of their rivals of the Shell, in Tom Merry's own liquid refreshment.

"One good turn deserves another," grinned Blake. "They scared us first—at least, they scared you chaps—and now we've scared them!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I wonder if they'll come down here to practise any more?" chuckled Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It won't be much use if they do," said Blake, "the secret's out now. Fancy their having the cheek to put up a concert party without asking us to take a hand. I call that pure, unadulterated cheek of the Shell bounders!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not a bad idea, a concert party, though," said Digby thoughtfully. "I suppose the show they are speaking of is the Rylecombe Fete. Lots of amateur musicians turn up there—but I never heard of a concert party from St. Jim's before!"

"Kids!" said Blake seriously. "If St. Jim's is going to be represented at the fete by a concert party, that concert party ought to be in capable hands!"

"Yaas, wathah! I could do a tenah solo—"

"Ahem! I was thinking of singing a baritone solo myself. After that, your tenor solo would fall a bit flat!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What about my cornet?" demanded Herries warmly.

"Well, you see, cornets are barred!" said Blake. "You see—"

"I don't see! I—"

"And I could handle the concertina all right," remarked Digby thoughtfully. "It's not half a bad idea!"

"A tenah solo—"

"We're going to bag this idea," said Blake. "It will
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serve the bounders right, for having started it without consulting us!"

"Ha, ha! Quite so!"

"And it will be one up against the Shell."

"But they may run a concert party as well as ours," said Herries.

Blake shook his head.

"We'll make it quite clear that they're plagiarising our ideas if they do," he said. "We'll put a notice on the board, asking for amateur talent for our concert party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' ideah!"

"Come on, then!" said Blake. "We've laid Gussy's ghost, and drunk Tom Merry's ginger-beer, so we may as well be getting back!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 left the crypt.

They returned to the School House in a cheerful mood. Quite unexpectedly they had surprised the secret of the Shell trio, and they meant to make the most of it. The rivalry between the two Co.'s in the School House was very keen, though they generally united loyally enough when it was a question of going for Figgins & Co. over in the New House. The chums of No. 6 felt that they held the Terrible Three in the hollow of their hands this time.

They hurried up to their study, and Blake scribbled upon a sheet of impot paper. Digby suggested wiring into prep., and was promptly frowned down. It was no time for prep.

With his paper in his hand, Jack Blake descended to the junior common-room, followed by D'Arcy and Digby and Herries and Reilly.

It was close upon bedtime for the juniors of the School House, and most of them had finished their preparation, and were gathered in the common-room for a chat before going to bed.

The Terrible Three were there, standing in a group by themselves, and talking in low tones. Blake chuckled as he saw them. He could easily guess that they were discussing the strange events in the old crypt.

Blake looked round the common-room.

"Anybody got a tack?" he asked.

"Attack of what?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowther—"

"I didn't ask for a rotten pun," grunted Blake. "I want a tack, to tack a notice up on the wall. Anybody seen a tack?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Skimpole of the Shell.

"Good! Where is it?"

"I saw it in Taggles's toolbox this morning!"

"Ass!" roared Blake. "A pin will do. Anybody got a pin?"

"Here you are," said Monty Lowther, extending his hand.

"Ow!" roared Blake. "Yow! I didn't say stick it into me, you silly ass!"

"Sorry—"

"Ow! You fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake glared, as he took the pin and pinned the notice on the wall of the common-room. But he took comfort in the anticipation of the looks of the Terrible Three when they read the notice.

The juniors were curious to see what it was, and they crowded round. Kangaroo of the Shell read it aloud to the crowd:

"Notice.—Amateur musicians who desire to join a Concert Party are requested to send in their names to Study No. 6, Fourth-Form Passage, at their earliest convenience.—Conductor, J. Blake, Esq."

"Concert party—eh?" said Kangaroo.

"My hat!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the Terrible Three with one voice.

Blake looked at them innocently.

"New idea of ours," he explained. "We're going to get up a concert party to visit the Rylcombe Fete, and play to the people!"

"M-m-m-my hat!"

The Terrible Three stared at Blake, and then at the notice, and then at Blake again, in blank amazement.

"C-c-concert party!" stuttered Manners.

"Concert party!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Concert party!" howled Lowther.

Jack Blake nodded cheerfully.

"Yes; that's the idea!" he said.

"Wathah a good ideah, don't you think, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy affably.

"Not bad," said Reilly, with a chuckle, "is it, Lowther? Sure, I shall play the trombone?"

"Good egg!" said Gore.

"I'll be in with the cornet!"

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"That you won't!" said Herries promptly. "I'm cornet-player to this concert party."

"First and second cornets," said Blake pacifically, "the more the merrier. We want a good strong orchestra!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you bounders!" roared Tom Merry, finding his voice at last. "You've boned our wheeze!"

"Eh?"

"You've collared our scheme!"

"What scheme?" asked Blake, in great astonishment.

"Our concert party," yelled Manners.

"Oh, draw it mild," said Blake, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "I put it to the fellows, whether you chaps have said a single word on the subject of getting up a concert party?"

"Not a whisper, that I know of!" said Kangaroo.

"Not a syllable!" said Gore.

"We haven't said anything!" roared Lowther. "But it was our idea. Those bounders have got on to it somehow?"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Come off!"

"Don't be funny, you know."

"You—you giddy plagiarists!" shouted Tom Merry. "I tell you it's our wheeze."

Blake shook his head sorrowfully.

"You're dreaming," he said. "Of course, I suppose it isn't nice for you, for other fellows to get ahead of you in this way. But really, I must say this is awful cheek on your part."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"Feahful cheek, you know."

"Sure, it's the limit," said Reilly.

"I—I—I tell you—"

"My dear chap, you're dreaming."

"I—I—I—! Oh, go for 'em!" roared Tom Merry. "Bump them! They know jolly well it's our wheeze, and they've spotted it somehow. Go for 'em!"

And the Terrible Three rushed forward. At that moment Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, put his head in at the door.

"Bed, you kids!"

"Oh!"

And the threatened scrimmage was nipped in the bud.

"What's the matter here?" asked Kildare, frowning at the excited Shell fellows.

"Oh, nothing," said Blake, airily. "These Shell chaps are rather excited about a concert party we're getting up in the Fourth, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Blake wagged his forefinger reproachfully at Tom Merry, as he turned to go to bed. And Tom Merry very nearly committed assault and battery on the spot, in spite of the presence of Kildare.

The Terrible Three exchanged grim looks when they went up to the Shell dormitory.

"Game's up!" growled Lowther.

"They've spotted us somehow!" grunted Manners. "How on earth did they get on to it?"

Tom Merry snorted.

"The ghosts in the crypt!" he growled. "We know where those blessed groans and shrieks came from now."

"M-m-my hat!"

"They spotted us somehow—and they've bagged the wheeze! Never mind—they haven't got up the concert party yet!" said Tom Merry. "We'll see about that!"

And the Terrible Three went to bed thinking over plans for outwitting their rivals of the Fourth. Blake & Co. went to bed in high feather; and after lights out in the Fourth-Form dormitory, there were muffled peals of laughter as Blake & Co. told the story of the ghosts in the crypt.

CHAPTER 5.

Plenty of Talent.

JACK BLAKE & Co. had an unenjoyable quarter of an hour in the Fourth-Form room, the next morning, with Mr. Lathom. The master of the Fourth took no interest whatever in ghost hunts and concert parties, and so it was useless to explain to him why preparation had been neglected. The chums of Study No. 6 received a severe lecture and a hundred lines each, which they took with all meekness. It was worth while, as Blake remarked afterwards, to stand a little ragging, for the sake of bagging a really great wheeze from the Shell. And that it was a great wheeze was soon proved by the enthusiasm with which the fellows took it up.

The number of amateur musicians in the School House who were keen to join the concert party was astonishing.

Tenors and baritones and basses seemed to exist in the lower Forms at St. Jim's in hitherto unsuspected numbers; and nearly everybody played upon some instrument or another, it appeared.

Offers to make members of the concert party were thick and fast; some of them of a humorous description, but most in deadly earnest.

D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form, came along with Hobbs and Frayne and Jameson of that Form, to Study No. 6, immediately the school was dismissed after morning lessons. The four fags were first in the field. Blake & Co. had gone to their study, to sit in state and receive offers, and Wally & Co. came in cheerfully.

The Fourth-Formers met them with stately surprise. They did not intend to have fags in the concert party.

"What do you kids want?" demanded Blake. "Run away; we're just going to be rather busy."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass rather suspiciously upon his minor. "Wun away and play, my deah youngstahs."

"Now, don't you begin, Gussy," said Wally in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"Weally, Wally—"

"We've come!" Wally explained to the study generally.

"Yes, I can see you've come," said Herries. "Which way do you prefer to go—door or window?"

"We've come in answer to the notice," said Wally. "I hear you want members for a concert party."

"Weally, you young ass—"

"I'm a pretty good hand at singing," said Wally cheerfully. "In fact, I'm really the only member of the family that can sing at all!"

"Wally, you cheeky young wascal—"

"And Frayne can play the tin-whistle," said Wally. "Frayne is quite a good hand at the tin-whistle."

Joe Frayne chuckled.

"Hobbs can play the mouth-organ," went on Wally. "Jameson is a terror with a comb and paper. Shall we give you some samples?"

"No!" roared Blake.

"But you're wanting members for a concert party, ain't you?" demanded Wally.

"Not fags—and not combs and mouth-organs and tin-whistles," said Blake. "You fags clear out. We're busy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If it's a question of fees," said Wally loftily. "Perhaps we can meet you in the matter. We are willing to come for our bare cab fares."

And the fags grinned.

"Clear out!" roared Blake.

"That will be a guinea each—cab fare is usually a guinea in such cases, when a chap can get it, anyway," said Wally.

"Now what do you say?"

"Buzz off!"

"Better give them a sample of what we can do," said Wally. "As a matter of fact, we're a very good little concert party of our own, and if you don't admit us as members, Blake, we shall start a rival show."

Jack Blake laughed. He did not fear the competition of the Third.

"Well, trot off now, and play," he said.

"Yaas, pway wun away, deah boys."

"Look here, we're willing to play simply as amateurs," said Wally. "Not even a giddy cab fare—simply nix."

"Wats!"

"Just hear what we can do."

"Poof!"

"Strike up!" said Wally.

"What-ho!"

Frayne produced a tin-whistle from his jacket, and Jameson a comb with a paper wrapped over it. Hobbs took out a big mouth-organ, with an air of pride. Hobbs was quite accomplished upon that fearsome instrument. Wally was evidently the vocalist of the party, for he produced no instrument, but opened his mouth and cleared his throat with a little preliminary cough.

Blake & Co. regarded them with grinning faces. No other applicants for membership had appeared as yet, so they had a few minutes to spare, and they graciously decided to let the fags run on, unless the noise became unbearable.

"Now then," said Wally, raising his hand. "Give 'em your little best, you know. I'm going to sing 'em songs of Araby, and you chaps keep time."

"You keep time yourself," growled Jameson. "You know you jolly well always get ahead."

"That's because you lag behind."

"Rot!"

"Look here, Jameson—"

"Look here, young D'Arcy—"

"Horder!" said Joe Frayne. "The gents are waiting."

"Well, buck up, then," said Wally, with a glare at Jameson. "Keep in time if you can't keep in tune. I suppose one mustn't expect too much. Now then, on the beat."

And Wally sang.

"I'll sing thee songs of Araby!" chanted Wally.

Buzz—shriek—boooooof!

Comb and whistle and mouth-organ chimed in.

Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy stared at the Third-Formers, petrified. Their first impression was that it was a rag. But the serious countenances of the fags banished that suspicion. But that the fags really imagined that that dreadful noise resembled music in any way was amazing. The humorous Mr. Gilbert tells of a piper who, when playing the bagpipes, elicited something resembling a tune. But the same could not be said of Wally & Co. Wally had stated that he was going to sing "Songs of Araby," but they had only his word for it.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy major. "What a dweadful wow!"

"Horrid!"

"Awful!"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "How dare you make a row like that in a respectable study? Go out on the tiles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buzz off!" yelled Digby, stopping his ears.

"I'll sing thee songs of Araby!" bawled Wally.

Buzz—z-z-z—shriek-k-k-k—boooooof!

The four Fourth-Formers jumped up. Blake seized a cricket-stump, Digby grasped the poker, Herries the shovel. They made a rush at the musicians of the Third.

The songs of Araby came to a sudden stop.

Wally & Co. went sprawling out into the passage, still roaring, but not in song this time, though really it sounded quite as tuneful as before.

"Lam them!" roared Blake.

"Bash 'em!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ow!" roared Wally. "Yow! You fatheads! Yah! We hadn't really got fairly started. Give us a chance. Yah!"

"Ow! My heye!" gasped Joe Frayne. "I'm hoff!"

And he ran. Jameson and Hobbs ran, too. Wally paused a moment as he fled, to hurl back some personal remarks at the Fourth-Formers.

"You fatheads! You chumps! Yah! We'll start an independent concert party in the Third, and cut you out! Yah! I won't join your rotten old concert party now, if you ask me! Boo!"

And then Wally fled after his chums.

CHAPTER 6.

The Broken Melodies!

"B AI Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the Fourth-Formers returned rather breathless into Study No. 6. "Bai Jove! The young asses!"

Herries tossed the shovel into the fender with a clang. "I don't think they'll come back, and give us any more music," he remarked. "The young bounders! I've bent that shovel on young Jameson's head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a dweadful noise, you know," said D'Arcy. "As a mattah of fact, my young bwathah is not gifted vocally. It does not wun in the family at all."

"No; you're not a family of singers!" agreed Digby.

"Weally, Digby, I did not mean that. I think you would find it wathah hard to find a fellow at St. Jim's who could sing tenah solos as I do."

"Hard!" said Blake. "It would be impossible."

Arthur Augustus looked pleased at this tribute.

"Quite wight, deah boy," he said. "Quite wight. I—"

"Hallo! Here's Reilly."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Dig."

"Yes, I know. Come in, Paddy, old man."

The Belfast junior came in. There was a rather conscious smile upon his ruddy, cheery face, and he carried a roll of music under his arm.

"Plaze I've come!" he remarked.

"Good!" said Blake heartily. "We want you! Irish chaps can always sing. I've noticed that. Of course, the best singers in the world come from Yorkshire," he added thoughtfully. Blake was a Yorkshire boy.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Sure, I've got some music here," said Reilly. "I don't play instruments, you know, but they say at home that I can sing."

"Queer the ideas one's people have about one at home," Digby remarked, in a general sort of way.

Reilly glared.

"Faith, and if vez—"

"Shut up, Digby," said Blake. "You're growing as funny as Monty Lowther, and it can't be stood in this study."

"Faith, I should say not. I—"

"What have you got there?" asked Blake, with a nod towards the roll of music under the Belfast boy's arm.

"Father O'Flynn," said Reilly. "Sure, it's a ripping number for a concert party. I'll give ye a sample, if ye like."

"I'll accompany you on the cornet," said Herries. "I've played that number as a cornet solo. You remember I did it last Saturday, Blake, when the rain kept us in."

Blake looked puzzled.

"I don't remember," he said. "You only played one tune, and I thought that was the Toreador Song from 'Carmen.'"

"You utter ass!" said Herries witheringly. "Nice sort of a conductor you'll make, if you can't tell the Toreador Song in 'Carmen' from 'Father O'Flynn.'"

"Might have been the way you played it," said Blake. "I didn't mean to say it sounded much like the Toreador Song, but it was as much like that as anything."

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"Sure, and I can sing without an accompaniment, I think," said Reilly, with a rather nervous glance at Herries, who was taking his cornet out of its case. "Better let me try without an accompaniment first."

"It's all right," said Herries. "I shall be ready in five minutes."

"Oh, Father O'Flynn, ye've a wonderful way wid ye," sang Reilly, pretending not to hear Herries' remark. "All the old sinners are anxious to pray wid ye. All—"

"Hold on!" roared Herries. "I'm not ready."

"All the young childer are wild for to play wid ye!" sang on Reilly.

"Look here, you Irish bounder—"

"Ye've such a way wid ye, father avick!" roared Reilly.

"Hallo, you chaps," said Gore of the Shell, looking in at the door. "I've looked in to see about that concert wheeze of yours. I've brought my cornet—"

"You can take it away again, then!" growled Herries. "I've got a cornet."

"Father O'Flynn, ye've a wonderful way wid ye!" roared Reilly, forgetting the words, and starting again at the beginning, in order not to lose time. "All the old sinners are wild for to play wid ye."

"Yes, I know you've got a cornet, Herries," said Gore. "But a cornet isn't all that's necessary, you know. It's necessary to play it."

"If you think you can play the cornet as well as I can, Gore—"

"It isn't a question of thinking, old man; I know I can."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Look here, you fathead—"

"All the old children are anxious to pray wid ye!" roared Reilly, getting a little confused.

"What's Reilly doing that for?" asked Gore. "Has anybody hurt him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, and it's a silly spalpeen ye are!" exclaimed Reilly. "Ye're mixing me up wid me words intirely. Can't ye be quiet?"

"Well, you might set a good example," said Gore. "I don't see what you want to roar at a chap for. I've brought my cornet—"

"Hallo!" said Bishop of the Fourth, peering into the study over Gore's shoulder. "I've just brought along my flute, Blake—"

"You can take it away again, then," said Gore. "I'm going to give them a sample of my cornet, just now."

"You're not!" roared Herries. "One cornet's enough."

"Too much, sometimes," murmured Digby.

"Oh, rats!" said Bishop. "I'm going to play my fluté, so that Blake can see that he really must have me in the concert party. Look here, D'Arcy, I'll do a flute obbligato to your tenor solos, if you like. It sounds ripping."

"Weally, Bish—"

Herries had his cornet in going order by this time. He blew a loud blast, which rang through the study and along the passage. Gore, with a glare of defiance, blew an echoing blast, and there were cries of alarm down the passage.

"What's that?"

"Stop that row!"

Bishop, not to be outdone, proceeded to give a sample of his powers as a flautist. Reilly, either from a sense of emulation, or a sense of humour, started singing once more, and rolled out "Father O'Flynn" in a tremendous voice. Study No. 6 rang with sound. The performance of Wally & Co. had been a joke to it.

Another junior came along the passage. It was Kangaroo of the Shell, and he had a banjo in his hand. He glared into the study in astonishment.

"What's this awful row about?" he demanded. "You don't call that playing in tune, do you? Is this a concert? If it is, it's a jolly lot too classical for me."

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"Drive 'em out!" groaned Blake, stopping his ears. "My hat! I'll never undertake to start a concert party again."

"Shut up!" roared Kangaroo, jerking Gore's cornet away, and thereby stopping him very suddenly. "Blow that rotten thing, Herries—I mean, don't blow it! Dry up!"

Blake seized Herries, and backed him into an armchair, but the determined junior still blew. Gore retreated into the passage and blew. Reilly roared, and Bishop's flute shrieked. Kangaroo chuckled, and started with the banjo. The unhappy founder of the concert party yelled.

"Shut up! Dry up! Ow!"

"Bai Jove, this is feahful!"

There was a heavy step in the passage, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came along with a cane in his hand.

Kildare did not waste time in words.

The terrific uproar from Study No. 6 was sounding through the School House, and the head prefect had come to stop it, and he did!

The cane descended across George Gore's shoulders, and Gore gave a yell, and fled. Then the Sixth-Former strode into the study.

He did not speak. He laid about him with the cane. Kangaroo gave a terrific whoop, and bolted, and Bishop fled yelling, and Reilly dodged out of the study with the cane making rapid play behind him. Then the owners of the study, to their astonishment and indignation, came in for their share. It was in vain that they remonstrated, roared, yelled, and tried to explain: Kildare was evidently not in a mood for argument. The cane rose and fell, and Blake and Herries and Digby dodged out of the study and fled, breathing wrath.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made a last attempt to explain, but the cane was playing round his legs, and he gave it up and ran.

Kildare, breathing hard after his exertions, followed them out of the study, and shook his cane after the fleeing juniors.

"If there's any more of that row you'll hear from me again!" he shouted.

And then he strode away.

There was no more of it.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Conducts.

TOM MERRY smiled as he met Blake & Co. going in to dinner.

The unfortunate occurrences in Study No. 6 were the talk of the School House, and the Terrible Three had rejoiced to hear of them.

"Concert party getting on all right?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

Blake glared.

"I hear you've been having a musical evening," said Monty Lowther. "What was it they played—'The Broken Melody'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It sounded jolly broken, at any rate," remarked Manners. "Perhaps they played more than one broken melody at once. Or was it some of Richard Strauss's music, Blake? I heard a selection from 'Elektra' once that sounded very much like it."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Blake.

And the chums of the Shell chuckled.

Blake & Co. were looking very serious and thoughtful during dinner. Since the unfortunate contretemps in Study No. 6, Blake had received many offers from amateur musicians. But it was borne in upon him that the amateur musicians of the School House had not really reached the pitch of excellence at which they firmly believed they had arrived.

After dinner, Blake tapped Tom Merry on the arm as the juniors came out of the dining-hall.

"Look here, Tom Merry—" he began.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Are you fed up with amateur orchestras?" he asked.

"I've been thinking," said Blake. "Look here, if you like, we'll take you fellows into the concert party scheme."

The Terrible Three stared.

"Well, that's pretty cool, as it's our wheeze!" said Manners.

"Ours, you mean!" said Blake. "We've bagged it, anyway. Upon the whole, we're willing to take you chaps into the game, and give you a show in the band."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"My dear chap, we couldn't play along with Gore's cornet. Why, it's worse than Herries', and that is a terror. And as for Kangy, we've bagged him and his banjo."

"So you're going to run a concert party, too?" demanded Blake.

"Yes, rather!"



"Phir koho. Agar tum yih kam no karoge, to main ek paisah nahin dungah." "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, Hurrée Janset Ram Singh's remark translated into English meant—"Say it again. Unless you do so I won't pay you." But the unhappy palmist might just as well have been listening to Chinese. "I work in silence!" he said at last. "It is not necessary to speak. Give me your hand!" Hurrée Singh gave him his hand. "Ah!" said the palmist spitefully. "A short life—a very short life! You will be killed by a cricket ball before three weeks have passed. (The above amusing incident is taken from the splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!" which is contained in our popular companion paper "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

"Well, let's amalgamate," said Blake. "No good running rival shows. Let's stick together, and make up a good band."

"Well, that's all right," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "It was like your cheek to bag our wheeze, in the first place; but if you admit that you can't run it—"

"I don't admit anything of the sort," said Blake warmly. "Well, it's all right. Only, I conduct the band, you know."

"That's all right," said Blake. "I'd rather not conduct, when I come to think of it, because I'd rather put in my bit with the guitar."

"Good! First rehearsal at five in the wood-shed," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

During afternoon lessons that day, the thoughts of the juniors were running very much on music and concerts.

Lines fell thickly in the Fourth-Form and Shell classrooms, Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton both being considerably exasperated at an unexampled want of attention on the part of their pupils.

Masters and pupils were equally pleased when the hour of dismissal came.

After school, Tom Merry and Blake met to discuss matters, and then the members already selected for the concert party met in the wood-shed.

The wood-shed was a large building, which served other purposes as well as that of stacking faggots. Indeed, it had served purposes never intended by the builder, as it was a favourite place for amateur dramatic rehearsals; and on one occasion it had been the scene of a great cinematograph show got up by the enterprising juniors.

The Terrible Three came in, and the chums of Study No. 6 were soon after them; and then Reilly and Kangaroo and Bishop and Clifton Dane dropped in.

Tom Merry had the half of a broken cricket-stump in his hand, which he was to use as a conductor's baton.

"Gentlemen!" he said. "I think we are all here—"

"There'll be some more coming," grinned Harry Noble. "The word's got round that there's going to be a rehearsal here. I left Glyn hunting for his violin."

"Had he lost it?" asked Blake.

"No. I lost it for him," said Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gore was looking for his cornet, too," said Monty Lowther. "Unless he thinks of looking behind Gussy's trunk in the top box-room, I don't think he's likely to find it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen—" said the conductor

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen of the T. M. Concert Party—"

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"Hurrah!"

"We are going to get up a party to perform vocal and instrumental music in a way that will redound to the credit of St. Jim's. Some schools have amateur orchestras, and why shouldn't we?"

"Echo answers why!" said Jack Blake.

"Surely that is a mistake, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"Surely echo should answer 'we,' if Tom Mewwy's remark is echoed at all."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Gentlemen——"

"If echo does not answer the last word uttered, there must be somethin' decidedly wrong with the acoustics of this aildin'."

"Order!"

"Gentlemen, we are laying the foundation of a great movement—the immovable foundations of a rapid movement."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That movement will blossom forth," continued Tom Merry. "We may regard ourselves as the musical educators of the school. In the words of the poet—

"When Music, heavenly maid, was young,
When first in early Greece she sung——"

"Yes, I've seen her," said Monty Lowther.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I've seen a maid singing in early grease, when I've been down extra early in the morning," Lowther explained.

"If Lowther's going to be funny——" began Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I pwotest against Lowthah takin' advantage of us in this way——"

"Fathead!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to be called a fathead——"

"Order for the chair!" said Manners. "Order! Look here, hadn't we better get on with the washing? Lowther won't be funny if Tom Merry doesn't spout any more poetry. That's a fair arrangement."

"Hear, hear!"

"Get on with the washing, Tommy!"

"As I was saying, when you duffers interrupted me, this is the beginning of an immovable movement—I mean, a great foundation—that is to say——"

"Hear, hear!"

"We are going to set an example to St. Jim's. We are going to select the budding talent of the Lower Forms. Gentlemen, we shall now proceed to rehearse the first concerted number. I have selected——"

"We have selected," corrected Blake.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"We have selected," continued Tom Merry, when these amenities had been exchanged—"we have selected the celebrated coon song, 'Come and Kiss Me, Honey,' arranged for a band. We have the music here, and every chap will have to copy out his part. Parts for trombone, 'cello, and first and second violins are written out already, so those instruments can now rehearse, and the other fellows can listen."

"Good!" said Lowther, taking out his violin.

"Good!" said Manners, starting on his trombone.

"Good!" said Blake, who had also provided himself with a fiddle.

"Rotten!" said the others, with great unanimity.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "Would it not be bettah—I only suggest it, of course—to let me sing it, and the instruments accompany me? I have a copy of the song, and a solo——"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy——"

"The editor's decision is final—I mean, the conductor's decision is final," said Tom Merry. "This is a ripping tune, and it will do for overture when the concert party starts. Now then, first and second violins and trombone."

"Ready!"

"Faith, and I——"

"I'll put in a flute obligato," said Bishop, producing his flute.

"Got the part written?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No. I'll play it by ear."

"Ear, 'ear!" said Lowther.

"You won't!" roared Tom Merry. "None of your blessed rot! We're going to play this thing in tune, if we play it at all."

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"But I tell you I play better from ear than from music."
"I dare say you do; but if you can't play from music, old man, you can go and bury that flute. Now, then—— I wish we had a violoncello—it pulls a band together."

"Could hire one," said Digby.

"Who can play it?"

"Kerr of the New House can."

"Oh, blow Kerr! This is a School House wheeze, and the New House bounders are barred. It's bad enough to let the Fourth Form into it," said the conductor.

"What's that?" roared all the Fourth-Formers together. "Ahem! I mean—er—get on with the washing. Manners will have to do the best he can with the trombone. A piano would be all right, and I could play that; but we can't have a piano at the Rylcombe Fete."

"Jolly useful thing, a piano, for accompaniments!" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "And in case of a flood——"

"A what?"

"A flood," said Monty Lowther seriously. "I heard of a case once, when a musician was washed out by a flood, he floated away on his 'cello, and his wife accompanied him on the piano."

"You—you funny ass——"

"Order!"

"Now, then!" said Tom Merry, raising the half of the cricket-stump. "Ready?"

"All serene!"

And the band played.

CHAPTER 8.

Services Not Required.

TROMBONE and two violins wailed out in the woodshed.

Manners, with the trombone, took it easy. Lowther, with the first violin, bucked up. Jack Blake, second violin, hit the happy medium. The effect was striking, though it could not be called effective from a musical point of view.

Tom Merry conducted.

He put plenty of energy in the conducting. If his hair had been a little longer, and his face a little fatter, he might have passed for a fashionable conductor in a West End concert-hall—certainly his antics were wild enough.

He used both arms and both legs in conducting, in the latest modern style.

But somehow he couldn't quite keep the band together.

First violin was evidently in a hurry. He played two bars to anybody else's one. At times the trombone bucked up very creditably, but he never succeeded in catching up the first violin, though he sometimes overtook and passed the second.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Is that 'Come and Kiss Me, Honey'?"

"Tom Merry says so," grinned Kangaroo.

"It sounds more like Wichard Stwauss," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"Might be Debussy!" chuckled Digby.

"Or a lawn-mower run mad!"

"Or a saw-mill out of gear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared the conductor. "Order! Slack a bit, Manners! You're going too fast now! Put the brake on that fiddle, Lowther!"

The door of the woodshed opened, and Taggles, the porter of St. Jim's, put his head in. Taggles was looking very bewildered.

"Wot's all this, young gents?" he exclaimed. "It ain't like you young gents to torture cats in the woodshed, I'm sure—— Oh!"

Taggles saw that it was a band, and fled.

The band raced, and dragged, and shrieked on, and Tom Merry brandished his baton, and the other fellows stood round and watched the conductor with great interest.

"Good idea!" said Kangaroo. "Musical gymnastics, you know. It's bound to go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The strains died away. First violin was finished first, and then the second. Trombone had a dozen bars yet to play, and he played them out with grim persistence.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"If that's the way the band's going to play, we shall be chivied off the ground at the fete!" he remarked. "Of all the horrid cacophonies——"

"Well, that's a good word!" said Herries.

"First violin's fault," said Manners. "The trombone was exactly to time."

"Yes; if you'd been playing the 'Dead March in Saul'!" snorted Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther——"

"Look here, Manners——"

"Here they are!" roared a voice at the door.

Wally & Co. entered.

D'Arcy minor was accompanied by Frayne, Hobbs, Jameson, and Curly Gibson, of the Third. The Third-Formers had brought their musical instruments with them.

"Oh, get out!" said Tom Merry. "You mustn't interrupt!"

"Yaas, wathah! We've had wow enough!" said Arthur Augustus.

Wally snorted.

"We've heard that you're conductor of the concert party now, Tom Merry," he said, "instead of that ass Blake."

"Yes, that's so!" said Tom Merry. "But—"

"We've heard the awful row these chaps have been making," said Wally, with a nod towards the enraged band. "We want to give you a sample of what music is like. We've got music with us this time—The Wedding March of the Priests."

"The what?" yelled the concert party.

"I mean 'The War March of the Priests,'" said Wally hastily. "We were undecided whether to select that or 'The Wedding March,' you know. Both by the same composer—Wagner—"

"Wagner!" yelled Tom Merry. "Mendelssohn, you ass!"

"Yes; I meant Mendelssohn," said Wally, unabashed. "We can play it splendidly, and I should like you to hear it. You've got more sense than Blake."

"You—" began Blake.

"Order!" said Wally loftily. "I'm addressing the conductor of the band, Tom Merry Richter. Will you give us a show, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

He was good-nature itself, but he had heard the unearthly cacophony proceeding from Study No. 6 when Wally & Co. were there, and therefore he hesitated. Besides, as the conductor of a really musical concert party, such musical instruments as mouth-organs, and tin-whistles, and combs, were beneath his professional notice.

"Well, you see—" he began.

"If you don't let us into the band, we're going to run a rival concert party," said Wally. "I told Blake so. You know what to expect."

"So look out for squalls!" said Jameson truculently.

"We will—if Wally sings!" said Monty Lowther.

And the concert party chuckled.

"Play up!" said Wally, turning to his followers. "'The Wedding March of the Mendelssohn'—I mean, 'The War March of the Priests.' Now, then—tum—tum—tum! Tooral-looral—"

The Third-Form band struck up.

It might have been "The War March of the Priests"; it might have been the Wedding March from the "Midsummer Night's Dream"; it might have been anything else. Certainly it did not resemble anything in the earth, or above the earth, or in the waters under the earth. There was one unanimous roar from Tom Merry & Co:

"Shut up!"

"Play up, my sons!" said D'Arcy minor, unheeding.

"Kick them out!"

"Bump them!"

"Jump on them!"

And the concert party made a furious rush.

The Third Form band were swept out into the yard outside the wood-shed, rolling over one another, and their musical instruments were scattered far and wide.

"Bump them!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yow-ow!" roared Wally, as Blake and Kangaroo grasped him, and he smote the hard ground. "Yaro-oh! Yah! Leggo!"

"Ow! Help!"

"Oh! Ah! Yowp!"

"Gerro-o-oh!"

The concert party retired into the wood-shed again, leaving the fags and their musical instruments strewn upon the ground.

Wally & Co. picked themselves up dazedly.

"The rotters!" gasped Wally.

"The bounders!"

"Beasts!"

"Gro-o-oh!"

"That's their last chance!" growled Wally. "They haven't any ear for music. They don't know a good thing when they see it. We won't join Tom Merry's concert party now if he goes down on his knees and asks us."

"I can see him doing it—I don't think!" growled Jameson.

"Ow!" murmured Joe Frayne. "I've got a pain! Ow!"

"I've got an ache all over!" gurgled Hobbs. "Ow!"

Yow! Wally, you silly-ass, what did you bring us for?"

"That's right! Put it on me!" said Wally witheringly. "I'm trying to buck you chaps up, and show the fellows that the Third Form can't be passed over."

"They've passed over me with their blessed boots on!" groaned Hobbs.

"Ow! Yow! Yah!" murmured Jameson.

"We'll start a rival band!" growled Wally. "And when they go to play at the giddy fete, we'll go, too, and play against them. We'll take our biggest tin-whistles, and—play within a yard or two of them! We'll show the bounders!"

And the fags limped away. As they passed round the School House, they encountered three juniors belonging to the New House—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the Fourth. The New House juniors looked at the dusty and rumpled fags in amazement.

"Hallo! Been sweeping up the yard with yourselves?" asked Figgins.

D'Arcy minor snorted.

"No, ass! We've offered ourselves to Tom Merry's concert party, and they cut up rusty. They've got no car for music."

"Tom Merry's concert party!" echoed Figgins. "This is the first I've heard of it. Is it a new wheeze?"

"They're rehearsing in the wood-shed," growled Jameson, who was a New House fag. "Go and raid them, Figgy, old man, and smash up their instruments. They're making an awful row, and it would be a kindness to the whole school."

Figgins & Co. exchanged a joyous grin.

"My word!" murmured Kerr. "We're on this!"

"Come on!" said Figgins.

And the New House trio strolled away in the direction of the woodshed, while Wally and his comrades departed in search of a much-needed wash and brush-up.

CHAPTER 9.

A Tenor in Trouble.

FIGGINS chuckled as he drew near the wood-shed with his chums.

A voice, which may or may not have been a tenor, but which was certainly very high, was sounding through the open window.

It was the voice of D'Arcy of the Fourth.

"Caruso the Second!" murmured Figgins.

"Tamagno the Greater!" grinned Kerr.

"Sims Reeves in a fit!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus was evidently bestowing upon the concert party a specimen of his vocal powers, with which he intended to ravish all hearts when the party sang at the Rylcombe Fete. The voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose loudly and clearly, though the words were in a foreign tongue, which nobody understood excepting Kerr; probably Arthur Augustus himself having a very dim idea of what they meant.

"Vesti la giubba—" came the solo from the wood-shed.

Figgins & Co. approached the window and peeped in. The concert party were standing round with various expressions of anguish upon their faces. Arthur Augustus appeared rather at a loss for words, or perhaps the shriek of Lowther's accompanying fiddle put him out. He paused.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Monty Lowther sawed on.

"Lowthah, you ass, you are goin' too fast."

"Buck up, then," said Lowther. "You're going too slow."

"The accompanist has to keep time with the singah, you feahful ass, not the singah with the accompanist."

"Rats!"

"You fwightful duffah—"

"Why not let me give you a flute obbligato instead of that see-saw?" suggested Bishop. "That song goes all rights with a flute obbligato."

"Br-r-r-r!" said Lowther.

"Buck up, Gussy—unless you're finished," said Blake.

"I am not finished, you ass," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am goin' simply to knock them with this Italian aria. Vesti la giubba—"

"What on earth does that mean?" demanded Kangaroo.

"On with the motley," said D'Arcy. "It's a wippin' tenah solo, fwom Leoneavallo's opewah, 'I Pagliacci.'"

"Is it necessary to sing it now?" asked Bishop, putting up his flute with a sniff.

D'Arcy snorted.

"You uttah ass! Aren't we wehearsin'?"

"Well, go ahead, and get it over," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Pile in!" roared Blake.

"Oh, vewy well! Pway keep time, Lowther."

And the voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose in melody once more. It was certainly a ripping aria; and perhaps it was

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sung rippingly—at all events, it seemed to rip the air, as Figgins remarked in a whisper to Fatty Wynn. Kerr had strolled away from his chums for a moment, to jam a wedge of wood under the shed door, which opened outwards. The concert party were prisoners in the shed now. Kerr rejoined his chums with a grin. Arthur Augustus was going very strong now.

"Vesti la giubba.
E la faccia infarina,
La gente pagar, e rider vuole qua.
E se Arlecchin' t'invola Columbina,
Ridi, Pagliaccio, ognun applaudira."

Words and music, both straight from the heart of a great musician, needed a greater tenor than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to do them justice. And as the juniors understood hardly a word of Italian, and as D'Arcy's voice, like Mr. Gilbert's piper's bagpipe, wandered around into several keys, the concert party may be forgiven for not enjoying the performance.

D'Arcy had just reached "applaudira" when there was a sudden, sharp, loud squeak in the air, and it seemed so like a continuation of D'Arcy's note, that the swell of St. Jim's was almost deceived himself.

"My hat! If you're not sharp there, nobody ever was sharp!" growled Blake.

D'Arcy paused.
"Weally, Blake—"
"Is that all?" asked Tom Merry.
"No, it isn't all!" shrieked D'Arcy. "There's a great deal more to come, you silly ass!"

"Oh, dear!"
"Mercy!" sobbed Kangaroo.
"Weally, Kangy, you ass—"
"Pile in!"

"If I am intewuupted again, I shall have to wecomence at the beginnin'—"
"Death to the first interrupter!" said Manners.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, you ass! If I didn't think the Wylcombe folk would appreciate this solo better than you do, I should refuse to sing it at the fete. Pway shut up!"
And Arthur Augustus sailed on with Leoncavallo's masterpiece.

"Tramuta in lazzi lo spasmo ed il pianto—"
Squeak!

It was a loud and prolonged squeak from the window. Tom Merry & Co. glanced in that direction, and saw three grinning faces. Kerr held a toy "squeaker" in his hand, with which he was evidently bent upon accompanying the amateur tenor of the School House. It was one of those terrible instruments much used by hilarious youths at exhibitions and other places where holiday-makers most do congregate, and it had a particularly loud and raucous tone.

The School House juniors grinned. Arthur Augustus sailed on unheeding.

"In una smorfia il singhiozzo e'l dolor!"
Squeak-k-k-k!

"Ridi, Pagliaccio—"
Squeak!

"Sul tuo amore infranto—"
Squeak!

"Ridi del duol!"
Squeak, squeak!

"Che t'avvelena il cor!"
Squeak, squeak, squeak!

Arthur Augustus's eyes were gleaming with wrath. He lowered his copy of music, and glared round in search of the impertinent squeaker.

"You feahful asses!" he yelled. "You have uttably spoiled my aria!"
Squeak!

"Who is makin' that widiculous noise?"
Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The School House juniors burst into an irresistible roar of laughter; they could not help it. Arthur Augustus had his back to the window, and could not see Figgins & Co. there. The amateur tenor was pink with fury.

"I shall have to twy it ovah from the beginnin' again now," he said. "Lowthah, you may as well leave the fiddle alone. You put me out."

"You want putting out badly," growled Lowther.
"You have done it vevy badly, Lowthah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Vesti la giubba," recommenced Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, getting within some yards of the right note, "e la faccia infarina—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
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"La gente pagar—"
Squeak-k-k-k!
"You uttah asses—"
Squeak!

Arthur Augustus realised at last that the sound was behind him. He whirled round, and stared at the three grinning faces in the window. The juniors in the wood-shed yelled. Figgins & Co. blew kisses to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Go on," said Kerr sweetly. "I'm accompanying you— or punctuating you, whichever way you like to look at it."
"You frightful boundahs—"
Squeak!

"If you do not go away immediately, I shall come out and give you a feahful thwashin' all wound!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's.

Squeak!
"You awful wascals—"
Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus wasted no more breath in words. He rushed at the door and turned the handle. He expected it to open as he pushed it, of course; but as it was wedged from the outside, it did not budge an inch. Arthur Augustus bumped upon it, with the impetus of his rush, and his aristocratic nose came in violent contact with the wood.

There was a howl in the woodshed which put the top note of "Vesti la giubba" completely in the shade.

"Yow!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake, staggering to a heap of faggots and sinking upon them breathlessly. "Gussy will be the death of me yet; I know he will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the concert party.
"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus rubbing his nose.

"The beastly door's fastened somehow! Ow! Yow! Gwooh! Help me open this door, so that I can go and thrwash those New House boundahs!"
Squeak!

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus drove at the door, and after some minutes it yielded. The other fellows were laughing too much to help him. The door flew open at last, and Arthur Augustus, D'Arcy rushed out, on vengeance bent. But the squeaker was gone, and Figgins & Co. were gone with it; and only from the distance, round the corner of the house, came back a faint echo of them.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole's Generous Offer.

TOM MERRY wore a worried look. Two days had elapsed since the rehearsal in the wood-shed.

Those two days had not been lost by the amateur musicians. They had met again and again for practice. Some of them were doing well, some weren't.

Those that weren't outnumbered those that were. Tom Merry had taken on the task of conducting the concert party with a light heart. But he had found since that conducting amateur orchestras was not all beer and skittles, so to speak.

Jack Blake was not sorry he had given it up. He preferred to play an instrument, though his hearers did not share his satisfaction on that point.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther talked it over. It had been their idea in the first place, and they had intended to keep it quite dark, and spring a musical trio upon St. Jim's, by way of a surprise.

But the discovery of the secret rehearsals in the old crypt had changed all that.

The whole House was in the matter now; and Tom Merry, who was not insensible to the honour of conducting a really large orchestra, did his very best to select good players and get them going together.

But the task was an uphill one. The number of fellows who could play bore no proportion at all to the number who thought that they could play.

"It's a bit rotten," Tom Merry remarked, as he pushed his chair back from the tea-table, in his study in the Shell passage. "We want a good violinist, and we haven't got one in the House.—not in the Lower Forms. And we don't want to let in any giddy seniors."

"Not to mention the fact that they wouldn't play in a junior band," remarked Lowther.

"They would want to run the show," Manners observed.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; we know what comes of letting seniors into anything. But what are we to do for a really good first violin?"

Lowther glared.

"We've got one!" he said.
 "Ahem!"
 "Look here, Tom Merry—"
 "We ought to have a double-bass, too," said Tom Merry.
 "Now, Fatty Wynn can play both the double-bass and the 'cello like—like an angel."
 "Do angels play basses and 'cellos?" asked Lowther sarcastically. "I fancied they played harps."
 "Oh, don't be an ass, Monty! We want Kerr and Wynn in the orchestra, as a matter of fact; but, of course, we can't own that up to the New House bounders."
 "Of course not!"
 "We want a good clarinet, too," said Tom Merry.
 "Young Hancock has offered, but entre nous he can't play for toffee. Young Redfern, of the New House, does the clarinet beautifully."
 "Well, we can't have any New House bounders."
 "Oh, no!" said Manners.
 "It's a pity, though," said Tom Merry reflectively. "If we had Kerr, we could put in a violin solo. He's ripping."
 "Look here—"
 "Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry, with a sigh. "We shall have to manage to pull the orchestra together somehow. We've got to make some sort of a show at the Rylcombe Fete, now. Now the secret's out, and the whole coll. knows about it, we shall be chipped to death if we don't make some sort of a show."
 "Blake isn't bad with the guitar, to accompany a song," said Manners. "Herries and his cornet ought to be boiled together."
 "And Gussy's tenor solos—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Kangy is all right with the banjo, too," said Lowther. "Not what you'd call classical, but people like that sort of thing."
 "I wish we could get a chap to handl. a double-bass," said Tom Merry. "We could hire one in Wayland, if we had the man for it."
 A junior with a large, bumpy forehead, and a pair of large spectacles, looked into the study. It was Skimpole, of the Shell, the genius of the school. Skimpole was a youth with any amount of brain, though, as Lowther had remarked, it did not seem to be in very good working order.
 "Ah! I'm glad I found you fellows here," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile.
 "Can't say the same," growled Monty Lowther. "No; we don't want you to read out a chapter from Professor Balmcrumpet's book on Determinism. We don't want to hear anything on the subject of evolution, and we don't care twopence whether the human race evolved from a speck of jelly floating in a primeval sea, or from a rotten apple on the banks of a prehistoric river. And we don't care whether it happened twenty million years ago, or only the day before yesterday. Run away!"
 Skimpole blinked at him.
 "I did not come here to enlighten you upon scientific subjects, Lowther, much as that is needed," he said. "I have an idea—"
 "Go and tell it to Gore."
 "But it is about the concert party."
 "Oh! Do you want to play first fiddle?" asked Lowther sarcastically.
 "I was thinking of offering my services as 'cellist," said Skimpole modestly. "You need a 'cello in the orchestra. I've heard you say several times, and you can't find one. I should be very happy to oblige."
 The Terrible Three stared at him. They had never suspected the scientific Skimpole of musical proclivities before.
 "You play the 'cello?" demanded Tom Merry.
 "I did not say I played it," corrected Skimpole. "I merely remarked that I was willing to play it. A fellow never knows what he can do till he tries, of course."
 Tom Merry gasped.
 "You—you ass! Do you think we're going to let you start practising for the first time, in our orchestra?" he roared.
 "You—you fathead!"
 "My dear Merry—"
 "Oh, buzz off, Skimmy!" implored Lowther. "You make me tired!"
 "But, you see, I have a new scheme for playing the 'cello," Skimpole explained. "I intend to play it upon purely scientific principles. Pure science will enable me to deal with it, without previous practice—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "There is nothing whatever to laugh at," said Skimpole reprovingly. "You fellows do not understand the marvels of science. Science can combat deadly disease simply by puncturing you in the arm. Science can measure the unmeasurable void—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weigh the solar system—"

"And the anchor?" asked Lowther.
 "My dear Lowther—"
 "Better go and read Balmcrumpet on Determinism," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "Or perhaps the New House chaps might like you to play the 'cello to them on purely scientific principles. Go and try Figgins & Co."
 Skimpole shook his head.
 "No use, my dear fellows. Figgins is strangely obstinate. I have already offered him my services for his orchestra, and he has declined. He—"
 "His what?" roared the Terrible Three with one voice.
 "His orchestra!"
 "You—you mean to tell us that that New House bounder is starting an orchestra too?" roared Tom Merry.
 "My dear Merry, I see nothing to get excited about. I happened to come upon Figgins & Co. practising in the old chapel garden, and I offered—"
 Tom Merry looked at his chums.
 "The bounders!" he exclaimed. "They've had the cheek to bag our wheeze, the same as Blake. And—"
 "And they've got better players than we have!" grinned Manners.
 "The awful spoofers!"
 "How many were there of them, Skimmy?" exclaimed Monty Lowther.
 "I saw Figgins, and Kerr, and Wynn, and Redfern, and Owen. I offered Figgins to play the 'cello for him upon scientific principles—"
 "In the old chapel garden?"
 "Yes. I offered—"
 "Are they still there?"
 "I left them there," said Skimpole, blinking in surprise at the excitement of the chums of the Shell. "I offered—"
 "Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.
 The Terrible Three rushed for the door. Skimpole stepped in the way; he had a great deal more to say. But he had no opportunity of saying it. Three Shell fellows rushed right into him, and he rolled over on the carpet, and the Terrible Three tramped over him and ran into the passage.
 Skimpole sat up, looking very dazed and bewildered.
 "Dear me!" he gasped. "How very extraordinary! I really do not understand this at all! Ow!"
 But the Terrible Three did not stop to bother about whether Skimpole understood or not. They shouted to Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and yelled into Study No. 6 for Blake & Co., and the whole band rushed off to the chapel garden to interview the new Figgins orchestra!

CHAPTER 11.

A Capture from the Enemy.

SWEET strains of music proceeded from the old garden. It was a somewhat solitary spot, secluded from the rest of St. Jim's. The garden had belonged to the ruined chapel, and fragments of the old building encumbered it, and the walks were shaded by thick trees. Hidden by the trees, the Figgins orchestra was at practice.
 Tom Merry & Co. heard the sweet strains as they advanced. Tom Merry made a sign to his followers, and they approached quietly through the trees, with all the caution they had learned as Boy Scouts, to take the enemy by surprise.
 They glared from the trees upon the unconscious orchestra. Figgins & Co. were going strong.
 Figgins had a 'cello, Kerr a violin, Fatty Wynn a cornet, Redfern a clarinet, and Owen the second violin. They had music pinned on the trees, or on sticks stuck in the ground, and were playing in time and tune—wonderful to relate. There was no doubt that Figgins & Co. had made up a better orchestra than the School House Co. It was due to Kerr and Fatty Wynn, both of whom were born musicians.
 "The bounders!" murmured Tom Merry.
 "The awful wottahs!"
 "Kerr's conducting with his eyelashes, I s'pose," murmured Monty Lowther. "The cheek, to borrow our wheeze like this."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "This is what comes of Fourth Form kids bagging our schemes," said Manners.
 "Oh, rats!" said Blake.
 "I wonder whether Wally has offered Figgins his services?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Quiet! Listen!"
 There was a pause in the music.
 "Good!" said Kerr. "You'll have to buck up with that 'cello, Figgins. But really you're all very good, a bit different from the School House stuff!"
 "What-ho!" said the Co. heartily.
 "Like their cheek to take up the idea at all," remarked Redfern. "They can't play for toffee. Tom Merry can play the piano, but he's not good at anything else."

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"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND!" Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

"And have you heard Lowther's fiddling?" grinned Owen.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 The New House juniors laughed in chorus, and Monty Lowther turned crimson.

"Did you hear that, Monty?" murmured Manners. "What did I say?"

"Oh, shut up!"
 "And Manners' trombone!" went on Kerr, chuckling.
 "Have you heard Manners play the trombone? It's a treat!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the New House musicians laughed more heartily than ever; and this time it was Monty Lowther's turn to nudge his chum.

"Hear that, Manners?" he murmured. "What did I tell you?"

"Oh, cheeso it!" growled Manners.
 "And Reilly with the flute?" said Figgins.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And Gussy's tenor solos!"
 The musicians shrieked.

"Bai Jove," exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I refuse to remain here and listen to this wot! Let's wush the boundahs!"

"And Blake's guitar!" grinned Fatty Wynn.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "They'll get chased off the ground at the fete," said Kerr.
 "Serve 'em right for their cheek. We are the musical geniuses of St. Jim's."
 "We are!" said Redfern. "We is!"

"Queer we didn't think of the idea ourselves," Figgins remarked. "But we're the chaps to carry it out, anyway."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Well, let's get on to the next piece," said Kerr. "I've got the Grand March from Tannhauser written out for these instruments. I wrote it out after dinner to-day from the score. Hero you are."

"Good egg!"
 Kerr handed out the pencilled sheets.
 The band was about to commence, when there was a rush of feet, and Tom Merry & Co. burst upon the scene.
 In a moment each of the musicians was struggling in the grasp of a couple of the School House fellows.

There was a roar of wrath from Figgins & Co.
 "Yah!"
 "Leggo!"
 "Gerrout!"

The New House fellows could not offer a vigorous resistance for fear of damaging their instruments. They were taken at a disadvantage.

"Now, you bounders!" said Tom Merry.
 "Gerraway!" roared Figgins. "You'll damage my 'cello! Buzz off!"

"Put it down!"
 "Shove all those instruments down!" commanded Tom Merry. "We're going to bump you. If the instruments are bumped, too, they'll be hurt."

"Look here—"
 "Bump them!"
 "Hold on!" yelled Kerr. "If you damage my violin I'll scalp you."

"Put it down, then!"
 The infuriated musicians put their instruments down.

Then they fought, but they fought in vain. The School House party were two to one, and they were prisoners.

Tom Merry surveyed them with a stern and frowning brow.

"You bounders!" he exclaimed. "So you were going to borrow our wheeze, were you, and take a concert party to the fete?"

Figgins grinned breathlessly.

"All's fair in war!" he remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Exactly. All's fair in war; and so we're going to confiscate your instruments."

"What!" roared the New House juniors.

"Getting deaf?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Look here—"

"You awful rotter—"

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"Gather up the instruments, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "Take them away, and put them in my study in the School House."

"What-ho!" grinned Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 And Blake and D'Arcy and Kangaroo gathered up the instruments, and put them in their cases, and disappeared with them under the trees, in the direction of the School House.

Figgins & Co. struggled desperately.
 But they struggled in vain. The odds were too great, and Tom Merry & Co. had the upper hand.

"Look here, you rotters!" yelled Kerr, as he sank down again breathless under the weight of Reilly, of the Fourth.
 "Look here, you can't take our instruments!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Seems to me that we've taken them," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Of course, we're not going to keep them permanently!"

"I should say not!" yelled Redfern. "You—you giddy burglars!"

"We're only going to keep them till after the Rylcombe Fete," said Tom Merry. "We can't have a rival concert party there."

"You—you—"
 "We can do with that 'cello, too," Manners remarked.
 "Yes, and an extra violin, and a clarinet."

"You're not going to use our instruments!" shrieked Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Who's going to stop us?" asked Digby agreeably.

"Why, you—you—"
 "All's fair in war, as you just remarked yourself, Figgins, old man," said Tom Merry. "You bagged our idea, and you were going to take a rival concert party to the fete. We've bagged your instruments, and stopped you. One good turn deserves another."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "We'll take the very best care of them, and let you have them back the day after the concert," promised Tom Merry.

"You—you—"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back through the trees, with a sweet smile upon his aristocratic face.

"It's all wight, deah boys. The instuments are quite safe."

"Good!"
 "Look here!" roared the exasperated Figgins. "I tell you—"

"Bump them!" said Tom Merry. "Bump them for their cheek! Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" roared the juniors.
 "Who's done brown?"

"Figgins & Co.!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump, bump!

And Figgins & Co. were bumped heartily, and then the School House fellows departed, leaving the unfortunate orchestra sprawling in the grass, gasping for breath. From the School House party, as they retreated, came an echoing yell through the trees.

"Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 12.

The Only Way.

FIGGINS sat up.
 He was dusty, and he was rumped, and he was red, and he was enraged. He gasped for breath, and rubbed his nose, which had come into violent contact with somebody's elbow in the struggle, and was emitting a stream of red.

"M-m-m-my only Aunt Georgina!" gasped Figgins.

"Ow!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "Oh! Ah!"

"Groo!"
 "Yah!"
 "Oh!"

"Done!" grunted Kerr.
 "We were asses to let ourselves be taken by surprise like this. They've got our instruments."

"All's fair in war!" groaned Redfern.

Figgins snorted.
 "We're going to have them back!" he exclaimed.

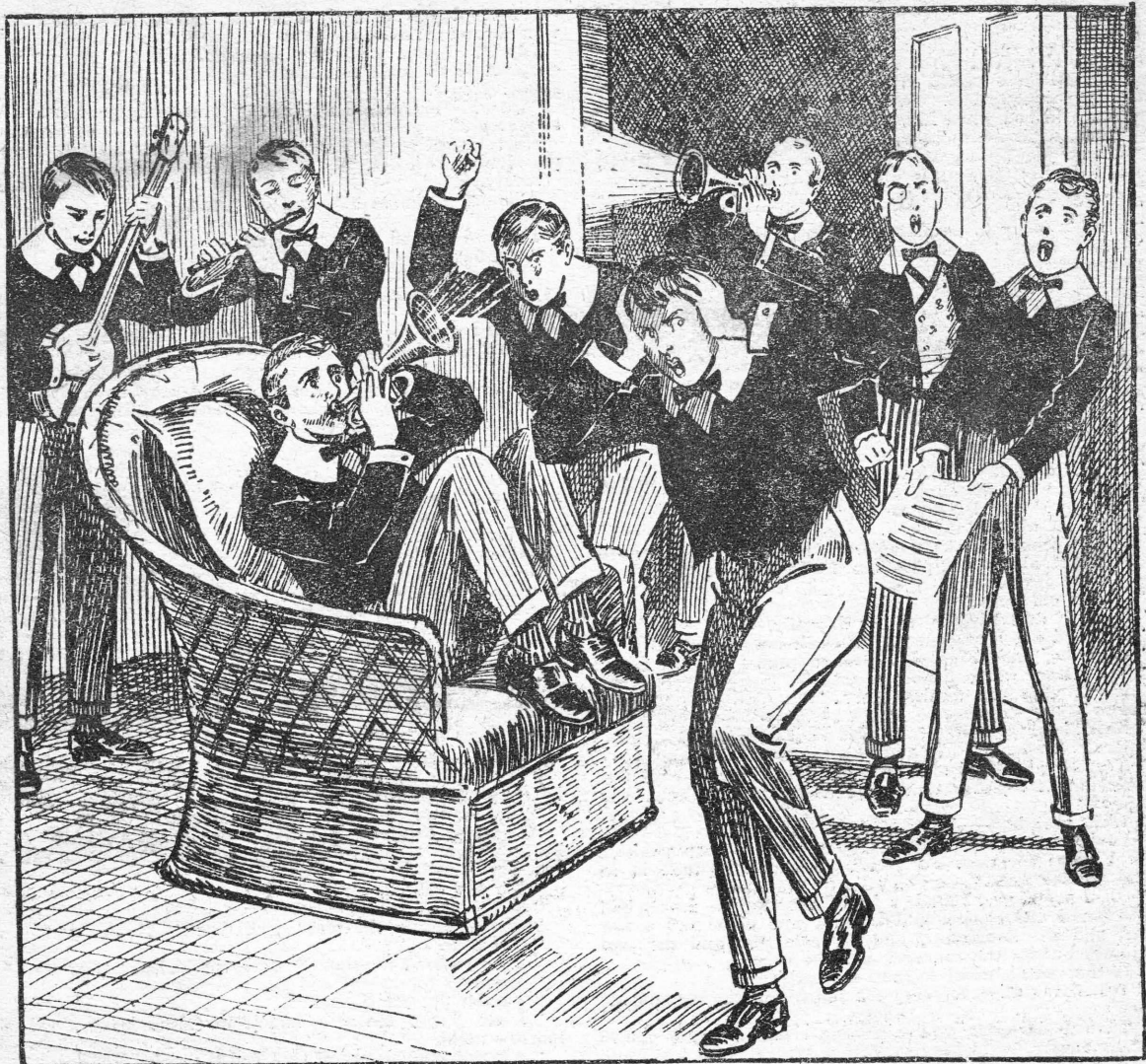
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TOM MERRY & CO.—

TOM MERRY & CO.

IN IRELAND!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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Blake seized Herries and backed him into an armchair, but the determined junior still blew. Gore retreated into the passage, and blew. Reilly roared, and Bishop's flute shrieked. Kangaroo chuckled, and started with a banjo. The unhappy founders of the concert party yelled. "Shut up! Dry up! Oh!" (See Chapter 6.)

"How are we going to get them?"
 "How should I know, fathead? We've got to think of a way."
 "We can't raid the giddy School House," growled Owen. "They've got 'em safe in Tom Merry's study. We shall have to make terms with them somehow."
 Figgins shook his head.
 "Can't be did! They won't give them back to us unless we agree not to start a concert party at all."
 "Impossible—after all our practice!"
 "Not to be thought of," said Kerr. "We've simply got to have a concert party, to show the people that there are some chaps at St. Jim's who can play in tune."
 "Let's go down to the tuck-shop and think it over," said Fatty Wynn, raising his ample person with an effort from the grass.
 "Blow the tuck-shop!" growled Figgins.
 The New House juniors, grunting and growling and gasping, picked themselves up, and made their way disconsolately towards their House.
 They passed the School House on the way, and as they glanced up at the window of Tom Merry's study, they had the pleasure of seeing the Terrible Three there. Tom Merry held up the captured violoncello and Lowther exhibited Kerr's fiddle. The New House juniors, with frowning brows, went on their way.
 They had tea in Figgins's study, and discussed ways and means. It was pretty certain that they would have to give up the idea of ravalling the School House concert party, unless they could recapture their instruments.

And it was impossible to raid the School House in broad daylight. So far, Tom Merry & Co. were masters of the situation. So long as they kept the captured instruments within the walls of the School House, Figgins & Co. were powerless.
 "And they won't bring 'em out," Figgins growled. "They'll do their practice in the studies and the box-rooms, you bet. They won't run any risk."
 "And they'll practise with our instruments," grunted Kerr. "And the music I wrote out for our band—they've got that. They'll play our march."
 "The rotters!"
 "We're done all along the line," said Figgins. "We've got to recapture the instruments, that's all."
 "But how?"
 "We shall have to raid 'em at night."
 "Phew!"
 "It's the only way," said Figgins decidedly. "We can't go into the School House before bedtime, without being chucked out on our necks. We shall have to wait till they're gone to bye-bye, and then get in somehow and raid Tom Merry's study."
 "Good!" said Redfern. "It's risky, but it's the only way."
 "And we may be able to burgle their own instruments at the same time," said Kerr.
 "Hurray!"
 Figgins's eyes gleamed.
 "That would be ripping!" he exclaimed.
 "Tit for tat!" grinned Owen.

And after some discussion, Figgins & Co. decided that it was the only way.

They waited eagerly for night.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were the selected burglars, and they all three looked extremely secretive and mysterious when they went to bed. They did not finish undressing, but they were in bed when Monteith the prefect came in to see lights out, so Monteith suspected nothing.

"What's the little game, you fellows?" demanded Pratt, of the Fourth, sitting up in bed when the prefect had gone.

"Burglary!" said Figgins.

"Eh!"

"There's going to be a burglary to-night."

"Great Scott," exclaimed Pratt, in alarm, "how do you know?"

Figgins chuckled.

"I'm one of the gang," he explained.

"What!"

"We're going to burgle the School House!"

"Oh!" said Pratt. "You ass! Is it a raid?"

"No; it's a burglary. We're going to burgle Tom Merry's study."

"Better not let a prefect spot you, that's all," said Lawrence.

"When are you going?" asked Pratt.

"Eleven o'clock. You can stay awake and wake us up, if you like, when the clock strikes."

"No fear!" said Pratt promptly.

And Pratt went to sleep.

The Co. remained awake after all the other fellows were asleep; but about half-past ten Fatty Wynn's voice was heard in sleepy tones.

"Figgy, old man!"

"Hallo!" said Figgins, rather drowsily.

"If I nod off, I suppose you can call me at eleven."

"Right-ho," said Figgins. "But suppose I nod off, too?"

"Well, Kerr will call both of us."

"Kerr! Are you awake, Kerr?"

Snore!

"Kerr!"

Snore!

"Kerr's nodded off already," chuckled Figgins. "I feel pretty like it myself. Can't you keep awake, Fatty, you slacker?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"I told you to make a light supper, so as to keep awake," said Figgins severely. "You were bound to tuck in as usual, all the same."

"Oh, I say Figgy, I made a jolly light supper. I only had some bread and cheese, and biscuits, and ham, and a few tarts, and the doughnuts, and the cold pie, and the jam pudding, besides the sausages and the cake."

"Is that all?" asked Figgins sarcastically.

"Yes, that's all—excepting the toffee and the marmalade tarts."

"Then I dare say you're getting sleepy because you're awfully empty," said Figgins, with a sarcasm that was quite lost on his fat chum.

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder if that's it," agreed Fatty Wynn. "Still, I'll keep awake, Figgy, old man, if you'd like to snooze. I'll make up my mind to it."

"You may make up your mind to it, but I don't suppose your fat corpus will take any notice of your mind," said Figgins. "It's all right; go to sleep, and I'll call you at sharp eleven."

"I'll stay awake, if you like," said Fatty drowsily.

"Oh, go to sleep."

"Good enough."

And Fatty Wynn was asleep in sixty seconds.

Figgins stayed awake.

He waited for the clock to strike; but it was not easy for a healthy junior, who was never troubled with insomnia, to keep awake.

Figgins was soon nodding. He closed one eye, and then the other, and then both. He started out of a doze.

"I must ke-e-ep awake," he murmured—"I—must—keep—"

And he slept.

The Fourth Form dormitory in the New House of St. Jim's was plunged into slumber, the silence only broken by heavy breathing and an occasional snore.

Figgins did not sleep so soundly as usual; the duty of awaking at eleven haunted him in his slumbers.

He awoke suddenly.

Deeply and dully the boom from the clock tower came through the night air, and sounded in his drowsy ears.

"My hat!" murmured Figgins. "Lucky I woke—there goes eleven!"

He waited for the clock to finish striking. But after that one stroke there came no more. Figgins listened in vain.

"Must be the last stroke that woke me!" he murmured.

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"SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!"

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He crept out of bed, and mounted to the dormitory window and looked out.

The old quad. was very dark and silent. Across the quadrangle he could not catch a glimmer of light from the School House.

"Queer!" murmured Figgins. "Everybody gone to bed—at eleven!"

He returned to his bed, and groped under his pillow and pulled his watch out.

Scratch!

A match flickered out, and he glanced at the dial of the watch.

Then he uttered an exclamation.

"My hat! One!"

The fact that he had heard only one stroke from the clock-tower was accounted for now. It was one o'clock in the morning.

He had slept for two hours and a half instead of for half an hour, as he had supposed!

"My word!" murmured Figgins. "One o'clock. Well, it can't be helped—we've got to go if it were seven o'clock."

He shook Kerr by the shoulder. The Scottish junior came out of the land of dreams with a start.

"Groo! 'Tain't rising-bell!"

Figgins chuckled.

"I know it isn't," he said. "It's Figgy! Time, Kerr, old man. Jump out!"

"Oh, is it eleven?"

"No; it's one."

"Phew!"

Kerr tumbled out of bed, and Figgins went along to Fatty Wynn's bed and shook the fat Fourth-Former. Fatty Wynn was a heavy sleeper, and he was more difficult to awake than Kerr.

"Groooooh!" he murmured. "I tell you the sausages were underdone!"

"Wake up, Fatty!"

"The pie was ripping—I cooked it—"

"Wake up!"

"Hallo! Who's that?"

"It's me—Figgy!"

"It can't be eleven yet," murmured Fatty Wynn, rubbing his sleepy eyes with his fat knuckles.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's past eleven, old man!"

"I—I say, Figgy—eleven's a bit too early, anyway," said Fatty Wynn. "Better leave it a bit later. I'll have just a few winks—"

"It's one o'clock, ass!"

"Eh?"

"One o'clock in the morning, fathead! Tumble up!"

"One o'clock!"

"Yes!" roared Figgins. "One—one o'clock! Get up!"

"Then it's too late!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Tumble up, you slacker!"

"I say, Figgy, old man, hadn't we better leave it till to-morrow night—"

"Are you coming out of that bed?" snorted Figgins.

"But I was thinking, Figgy—"

"Hand me that water-jug, Kerr."

"Certainly; here you are!"

"It's—it's all right," stuttered Fatty Wynn. "I'm getting up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn rolled out of bed, and put on his clothes. The other fellows were sleeping soundly at that late hour. Figgins & Co. dressed themselves and stole out of the dormitory. The House was very silent.

"Groo!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "We oughtn't to have left it so late, you know. It—it seems uncanny."

"Oh, buck up!" said Figgins.

He led the way to the lower box-room and opened the window. Two minutes later the heroes of the New House were standing under the stars.

CHAPTER 13.

Ghostly!

THE School House was buried in slumber.

Not a light glimmered from the great building as Figgins & Co. approached it, from the direction of the New House.

The deep silence and gloom of the midnight hour had its effect upon the spirits of the New House trio.

Fatty Wynn cast hurried glances into the dense shadows of the old elms, as they crossed the quadrangle, and Figgins himself was less full of cheery spirits than usual.

But the New House chums were committed to the task now, and they did not hesitate.

They reached the School House.

"We've got to get in at the back," Figgins whispered—

"the old box-room window, you know; we've been in that way before."

"R-r-r-right-ho!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"What's the matter, Fatty?"

"N-n-n-nothing!"

"Your teeth are chattering!"

"R-r-r-r-rot!" stuttered Fatty Wynn.

"Look here, if you're nervous—"

"W-w-w-what r-r-rot!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "But I say, suppose somebody should be awake—"

"Oh, rats!"

"They might take us for burglars! There was a b-b-burglary in the School House once, you know, and—and—and—"

"Bosh!"

"Suppose we should get s-s-shot—"

"Oh, you won't get shot," said Figgins cheerily. "If you were in any danger of that, there would be a notice up here."

"A n-n-notice!"

"Yes. 'Rubbish may be Shot Here,' or something of that sort!" explained Figgins.

"Y-y-y-you ass—"

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, come on!" he said. "Follow your leader."

And he led the way round the old House.

"I s-s-s-say!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "We shall have to pass in sight of the ruined chapel if we g-g-go that way."

"Well, what about it?" demanded Figgins.

"The g-g-ghost—"

"Ass! You don't believe in ghosts!"

"Not in the daytime," said Fatty Wynn. "B-b-but—"

"Oh, come on, and don't talk piffle, or you'll make my flesh creep!" growled Figgins. "Shut up, and let's get the burglary over!"

"R-r-r-right-ho!"

They skirted the House, and Figgins, in spite of his bold words, cast a very uneasy glance towards the ruins as they passed them in the distance. The starlight gleamed upon the old trees and the masses of fallen masonry. The wind whistled softly in the branches, and to imaginative minds it might easily have seemed the voice of the spectre monk calling from his untimely grave.

"B-b-b-buck up!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

"Here we are!"

They stopped by an outhouse, and Figgins climbed to the roof. Kerr and Wynn followed him. There was a window opening into a box-room before them, and Figgins had been through that window before on the occasion of a House raid. He slipped his penknife between the sashes and pushed back the catch.

"All serene!" he murmured.

He pushed up the lower sash.

Deep darkness lay before the enterprising burglars as they looked into the box-room.

Figgins clambered in over the window-sill, and dropped lightly into the room. He disappeared into the darkness, and the next moment there was an ejaculation in a sulphurous voice.

"Yow!"

"What's the matter?" murmured Kerr.

"Ow! I've knocked my beastly ankle on the beastly corner of a beastly box! Ow!"

Kerr grinned, and climbed into the window. He dropped inside, and there was a suppressed yell from his leader.

"Yarrah!"

"What's the matter?" gasped Kerr. "Have you knocked your ankle again?"

"Ow! No! Oh! Yow! You ass—"

"Why, what?"

"You've dropped on my toe! Yow!"

"Sorry!" murmured Kerr. "I didn't see it—"

"Well, get off it, you dangerous idiot, if you're not going to keep on it all night!" said Figgins, in a suppressed voice.

"Oh! I—I thought there was something under my boot!"

"You—you fathed!"

Fatty Wynn clambered into the window.

Figgins rubbed his foot and his ankle alternately for some minutes, his two chums waiting patiently until he had finished.

Then he opened the door of the box-room, and the three juniors crept out into the passage.

Figgins & Co. knew their way well enough about the School House, and they did not need a light to guide them.

Creeping about the silent, slumbering House in the dead hours of the night gave them a creepy and uncanny feeling; but they would not allow it to affect them.

They crept on without a pause, and in a few minutes found themselves in the Shell passage.

Figgins counted cautiously along the doors until he came to Tom Merry's study, and he tried the handle.

Then he muttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Good egg! It's not even locked."

"Hurrah!" murmured Kerr.

"I—I s-s-say, Figgy—"

"Oh, don't say anything!" growled Figgins.

"But while we are here, we may as well raid the grub, too!" said Fatty Wynn, in a thrilling whisper. "We'd better clear out the cupboard, too, and—"

"You—you fat gormandizer—"

"Well, it would be a big joke on them, you know. Besides, I'm peckish. Getting up in the middle of the night always makes me hungry, and at this time of the year, too—"

"Shut up! Quiet, you chaps!"

Figgins opened the study door.

He opened it wide, and the three juniors stepped in together.

The next instant there was a yell of terror in the darkness of the Shell passage, and three panic-stricken juniors came bolting out of the study, tumbling over one another in their rush to escape.

CHAPTER 14.

Not Dangerous.

"RUN!" gasped Figgins.

"Oh!"

"Help!"

The three terrified juniors bolted down the passage.

They did not stop till they were in the Fourth-Form passage, close to the head of the stairs, and there they paused, gasping with affright, and casting wild glances behind them.

"D-d-did you see it?" panted Figgins.

"Grooh! Yes! Oh!"

"It was the g-g-ghost!" moaned Fatty Wynn. "Let's get out—let's get out! We—we've come the wrong way for the box-room window!"

"We—we can't go back past the study!" groaned Figgins.

"S-s-s'pose it follows us?"

"Grooh!"

"Don't make a row!" murmured Kerr. "There would be trouble if we were found here!"

"But the g-g-ghost!"

"Quiet!" The keen, cool, Scottish junior was the first to recover his wits. "It's rot! It wasn't a ghost!"

"But I saw it!"

"And so did I!"

"So did I!" said Kerr. "But we ought to have guessed. Tom Merry guessed that we should be coming here to-night for the things, I suppose, and he's rigged it up to give us a scare. Anyhow, it hasn't followed us, you see."

Kerr's theory afforded his comrades some comfort.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," said Figgins, after a pause.

"B-b-but I don't see how we can make sure."

"I do!" said Kerr.

"How, then?"

"By going and seeing."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn shuddered.

"I—I'm not going back there!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"I d-d-don't like the idea," said Figgins.

Kerr grunted.

"I'm not going to be done by a dummy ghost, anyway!" he said. "I'm going back!"

"Hold on, Kerr—"

"Wait a bit—"

"Oh, come on!"

"L-look here!" stammered Fatty Wynn. "You—you say that Tom Merry & Co. guessed that we were coming, and rigged up that—that awful thing—"

"Of course they did!"

"Then, if they knew we were coming, they won't have left the musical instruments in the study for us to take, so it's no good going back," said Fatty Wynn, with quite a brilliant outburst of logic.

Kerr snorted.

"I don't care. We'll find 'em, wherever they are! Look here, I'm going back to burst up the ghost, and show those bouders that they can't frighten us."

"B-b-but they h-h-have!"

Kerr grinned.

"Well, if they have, we're not going to let 'em know it!" he said. "Come on! I tell you it's a rotten spof. I'll go in first!"

"That you won't!" said Figgins decidedly. "I'm leader!"

"Well, if you're leader, lead!" said Kerr impatiently.

"I'm waiting for you, Figgy!"

Thus adjured, Figgins led the way back along the passage, on tiptoe, and certainly with great reluctance.

Not a sound was audible in the Shell passage as the New House juniors re-entered it. But that did not reassure them. Ghosts were not expected to make any sound. The silence, in fact, was creepy and unnerving.

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They reached Tom Merry's study. The door was still wide open, as they had left it. Even Kerr hesitated a moment before he reached the doorway. Figgins noticed it.

"We—we'll go back if you like," he murmured.

"Oh, rats!" said Kerr.

And, taking his courage in both hands, so to speak, the Scottish junior strode into the darkened study.

Cool and courageous as he was, Kerr needed all his nerve not to turn and fly.

There was a dim glimmer of starlight in at the window of the study, and in the glimmering light stood a fearsome figure.

It was a white-sheeted figure, with two eyes that gleamed and shone with a strange unearthly light. Its right arm was raised, pointing towards the juniors in the doorway.

The sight was enough to unnerv the stoutest-hearted burglar in the profession.

Kerr heard Figgins's teeth chattering behind him in the doorway. Fatty Wynn's knees knocked together, and he held on to the doorpost.

Kerr struck a match with a shaking hand, and lighted the gas.

The flare of light illuminated the study, and immediately it shone upon the terrible figure, the juniors were relieved of their fears.

For in the clear light of the incandescent burner, the terrible figure was revealed as a dummy made of two chairs placed one upon another, with a couple of sheets draped over them with artistic effect. The outstretched arm was a fencing foil, draped in the white sheet. The face was made of cardboard, and the glittering eyes were two holes cut in the cardboard, and covered with green gauze, with a tiny electric torch burning behind.

The New House juniors grinned rather shamefacedly.

"The spoofers!" murmured Figgins.

"The bounders!"

"What asses we were!"

Kerr closed the study door. Then he calmly dismembered the terrifying figure, and laid the various pieces on the floor. He spread out one of the sheets upon the carpet, and laid the fender upon it to keep it down, and then selected a chunk of half-burnt coal from the grate.

"What are you going to do?" asked Figgins.

"Leave 'em a message!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn made a direct line for the cupboard. His fright had not impaired his appetite in the least. Figgins watched the Scottish junior, as the latter scrawled a message on the white sheet with the fragment of coal.

"Try again!" Signed, Figgins & Co."

"P.S.—Rats!!!"

"Good egg!" said Figgins, with a chuckle "That'll show 'em we weren't—ahem—frightened! What have you got there, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn gave a grunt of disgust.

"Nothing!" he growled. "They knew we were coming. Look here!"

Figgins and Kerr looked into the study cupboard. It was quite innocent of anything in the way of refreshments, but there was a card, written in Tom Merry's handwriting. But the composition was evidently Monty Lowther's; it was in his poetic vein:

"Like old Mother Hubbard,
Wynn came to the cupboard,
Though already he weighed a ton!
But when he got there,
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor beast got none!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn glared at his two chums.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in that!" he growled. "I call that adding insult to injury!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, for goodness' sake! Look here, they've hidden all the grub away somewhere. I call it a swindle!"

"Worse than that, they've hidden the instruments!" said Figgins, looking round the study. "I suppose it's no good looking for them here."

Kerr shook his head.

"They're not here," he said. "If we could guess where the bounders have put them—most likely taken them to the dormitory with them—"

"Bit too risky to try the dorm.," said Figgins dubiously.

Kerr's jaw set grimly.

"We haven't come all this way for nothing!" he said.

"But—we shall have to have a light—and then they'll wake up—"

"Let's chance it! We may be able to grab the things and bolt, or some of them, at any rate!" said Kerr.

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"Well, I'm game, if you are! What do you think, Fatty?"

"Eh? I think we'll try the next study!"

"What! They wouldn't be likely to leave the musical instruments in any of the Shell studies, as it's pretty clear now that they guessed we should come for them," said Figgins.

"I—I meant try the study cupboards!" said Fatty Wynn. "Goro has the next study, and he generally has plenty of grub—"

"You—you fat bounder!" said Figgins, in disgust. "Are you still thinking of the grub?"

"Well, you see, I'm hungry, and—"

"Come on," said Kerr, turning out the gas.

"Shall we try Goro's study first?" asked Fatty Wynn eagerly, as they moved out into the Shell passage in the darkness.

"No. The dorm."

"But I say. I'm—"

Figgins and Kerr took Fatty Wynn by either arm, and propelled him towards the upper staircase. And the Falstaff of the New House grunted and yielded the point.

CHAPTER 15.

No Go!

TOM MERRY started and awoke.

A sudden light had gleamed out in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

The captain of the Shell sat up in bed.

The long, lofty room was flooded with light. Three figures had entered at the door, and one of them had turned on the electric light. It was a bold move, but it was impossible for the New House raiders to search for the musical instruments in the dark.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Oh, rescue!"

Figgins & Co. were upon him in a moment, and they pinned him down in bed. Kerr and Fatty Wynn held him, and Figgins reached for the water-jug in the nearest wash-stand.

"Rescue!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Where's my fiddle?" exclaimed Kerr.

"Where's the clarinet?"

"Where's the 'cello?"

"Answer, you bounder!"

"Yow! Rescue!" bawled Tom Merry.

Figgins held the water-jug over him.

"Tell us where they are, or I'll swamp you!" he shouted.

There was no time to waste. The Shell fellows were waking up on all sides now, and moments were precious.

Tom Merry looked up at the water-jug, and shivered.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed.

"Where are the instruments, then?"

"Rats!"

"Will you tell me?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Rescue!"

Swoosh!

The water came down in a flood, and Tom Merry gasped and gurgled as it swept over his face, and drenched his head and his pillow, and half the bed.

"Gerrrrrooooooh!"

"There's some more to come!" grinned Figgins. "Tell us where the musical instruments are, or you'll get it—in the neck."

"Find out!"

Swoosh!

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Rescue!" shouted Monty Lowther, tumbling out of bed.

Manners and Kangaroo were only a second behind him. They rushed upon Figgins & Co. Figgins dropped the jug, and there was a crash as it smashed on the floor.

In a moment more, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were struggling in the grasp of the Shell fellows. They had to let Tom Merry go, and the captain of the Shell turned out to aid his chums. Gore and Dane and Bernard Glyn jumped out of bed, and came to their assistance, and Figgins & Co. were whirled towards the door.

"Not too much row!" gasped Manners. "We don't want to have a prefect up here."

"Yow!"

Bump!

"Yah!"

"Chuck them out!"

"Goo!" snorted Figgins. "Where are our instruments?"

Yow! Oh!"

"Sling 'em into the passage!"

Glyn opened the dormitory door. Figgins & Co. were whirled out, and bumped into the passage.

Tom Merry shook a warning forefinger at them.

"Now, buzz off! How dare you come burgling a respectable dormitory at this time of night?" said Monty Lowther.

"Give us our instruments!"

"We'll give you a set of thick ears if you don't buzz."

And Monty Lowther closed the door upon the gasping New House juniors.

Figgins rose to his feet ruefully. Kerr followed his example. Fatty Wynn remained extended upon the linoleum, still struggling to recover his breath.

"My hat!" said Kerr ruefully. "The game's up! Let's buzz before some rotten prefect wakes up, and comes to inquire what we're doing in the wrong House."

"I suppose we shall have to chuck it, now they're awake!" growled Figgins. "They've got our things in there right enough."

"Come on, Fatty!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn pumped in breath.

"Ow! Groo! Oh!" he murmured.

"Oh, come on! Drag him up, Figgins!"

Figgins and Kerr took an arm each of Fatty Wynn, and dragged him to his feet—no light task. Fatty Wynn was not a light-weight. They marched him away, gasping, and retreated from the School House the way they had come. The expedition could not be called a success. The bold stroke had failed, and Figgins & Co. had to go bootless home. But they had done their best, and they could not do more.

In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry towelled himself down, while the other fellows went back to bed.

"I'm jolly wet!" growled Tom Merry. "Lucky I woke up! Those bounders were here after their giddy instruments."

"And they are under the beds," grinned Monty Lowther. "If they'd known, they could have got 'em in the dark. I wonder if they've been to the study."

"And seen the ghost?" grinned Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, they haven't got the instruments," said Tom Merry. "And they jolly well won't get them. Phew!"

"What's the matter now?"

"My bed's soaked," said Tom Merry, regarding his bed in dismay. "I sha'n't be able to sleep in it again."

"Try the floor!" suggested Gore.

"Rats! Who's going to take me in?" asked Tom Merry.

"Here you are, old man!" said Lowther.

"Good!"

Tom Merry turned out the light, and got into Monty Lowther's bed.

The Shell fellows waited, awake, for some time, in case their enemies of the New House should return. But Figgins & Co. did not come, and one by one the Shell dropped off to sleep again.

Figgins & Co. were not thinking of returning. They had gone back to their House in an exasperated frame of mind, empty-handed; but they knew that the game was up for that night, at least.

They reached their dormitory, as two o'clock struck from the old tower.

"Hallo!" came a sleepy voice, as they entered the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House, and Fatty Wynn grunted as he caught his foot upon a chair. "Hallo! What's that?"

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Figgins.

Pratt sat up in bed.

"That you, Figgins?"

"Yes, ass."

"Been over the way?"

"Yes, fathead!"

"Got the things?"

"No, chump!"

"Well, I knew you wouldn't," said Pratt; and he turned over to go to sleep again.

Figgins grunted, and went to bed. Redfern had awakened, and he inquired drowsily what had happened.

"We did our best," said Figgins. "They'd got the things in their dorm., and they woke up when we went in. That's all."

"Hard cheese!" said Redfern sympathetically. "And after this they'll be more on their guard than ever, too, and there won't be a dog's chance of getting at the giddy instruments."

"You're a rotten Job's comforter, anyway!" growled Figgins, in disgust.

Redfern laughed.

"I've got a suggestion to make," he replied.

"Oh, go to sleep!" snapped Figgins, who was not in a humour just then to listen to any suggestions, good or bad.

"But it's a ripping one. We can't get the instruments back but we don't want to be left out of the show. Let's make it pax with Tom Merry, and play in his band."

"What?"

"He'd be glad to have us, you know; he knows we play

better than his crowd, especially Kerr," said Redfern confidently. "He'll jump at it if you propose it to him."

"Well, might think of it," conceded Figgins.

And the New House juniors went to sleep.

Figgins & Co. were not in a hurry to get up when the rising-bell rang out in the morning. They had a feeling as if they had been up all night—a most unpleasant "next-dayish" feeling. And they nearly nodded off to sleep in the Fourth Form room in class that morning, much to the amusement of Blake & Co., who had heard of the nocturnal adventure from Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 16.

Figgins & Co. Come Into Line.

TOM MERRY was looking particularly cheerful when he came out of the Shell class-room that morning after lessons.

Whether his instrumentalists were quite up to the mark or not, there was no lack of instruments for the concert party, and that was a good thing. And his rivals of the New House had been defeated, and that was better still.

The Terrible Three gloated. As they came down the wide Form-room passage, the Fourth Form came out of their class-room, and Figgins & Co. came over towards the Terrible Three at once.

The chums of the Shell were ready for war. But Figgins was not on the war-path this time. He held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he said.

"Certainly, old man!" said Tom Merry, smiling. "We found your message in the study this morning. Did the ghost give you several kinds of blue funk?"

"What rot!" said Figgins loftily. "As if we were likely to be scared by a dummy!"

"I wish I'd seen you, though!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Did you go straight into the study when you saw it?"

Figgins turned pink.

"Never mind that," he said, changing the subject abruptly. "Look here, I want to talk to you about the concert bizna!"

"Go ahead!"

"You've got our musical instruments—"

"Spoils of war, Figgy, old man," said Tom Merry solemnly. "To the victor the spoils, you know. *Vae victis!*"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right," said Figgins. "We would have done the same to you, and we're not grouching. But I've got a proposal to make."

"To which of us?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"All of you."

"Why, you giddy Mormon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Figgins. "I want to propose to you—"

"Ask mamma!"

"You ass! Don't be funny!" roared Figgins. "I want to propose to come into the concert party. You've got our instruments, but you can't play 'em for toffee. We're willing to come into the band and make it pax."

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Well, that's a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "We want some more instrumentalists. We are willing to take in recruits."

"But about the conductor?" said Figgins.

"I'm conductor," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's the Tom Merry Concert Party, you know. I conduct."

"Br-r-r-r! You couldn't conduct a 'bus!'"

"Look here—"

"Now, be reasonable," urged Figgins. "I don't say it because Kerr is a New House chap, but you know he's the best conductor we could get."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I'll be reasonable," he agreed. "Kerr could conduct better than I could, I know that. Only it's the Tom Merry Concert Party—that's understood."

"Right you are. But Kerr conducts?"

"Agreed!"

"We'll have a rehearsal before dinner," said Kerr briskly. "I dare say I shall be able to knock you chaps into shape before the Rylcombe Fete."

"Will you?" said Monty Lowther, rather truculently.

"Well, we'll try," said Kerr blandly. "Go and dig out the instruments, and we'll get down to the wood-shed and play up."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "It's pax, then—no larks? Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Figgins.

"Good enough!"

And the captured instruments were brought down, and the united bands—massed bands, as Tom Merry proudly called them—adjourned to the wood-shed for rehearsal.

Blake & Co. were quite agreeable to the new arrangement, and in a short time the united bandmen were going strong.

There was no doubt that Kerr was the best conductor that could be found in the Lower School, and his gift of writing out parts at express speed was very useful, too. He could write out a part for any instrument at a moment's notice—a power that seemed quite weird to some of the juniors.

Under the conductorship of Kerr, the now numerous band practised several pieces with great success.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus remarked, when the practice was over. "I wegard this as a wippin' awwangement! I shall be able to do a Wagnah solo with a full orchestral accompaniment. I am thinkin' of givin' them a solo from 'Die Meistahsingah,' you know. How do you chaps like 'Am Stillen Herd'?"

"What is it?" said Fatty Wyan inquiringly. "Something to eat?"

"Weally, Wynn—"
"The Meistersinger' is a bit too thick for the audience," said Kerr. "No good-going miles over their heads, you know. Besides, you'd have to sing it in German, and the people at Rylcombe Fete don't understand German."

"That makes no difference, deih boy. German opewahs are sung in German at Covent Garden, but the audience don't know German—only a very few of them," said D'Arcy. "But I suppose you wouldn't pwopose to have English translations of opewah sung at an opewah-house? That would be wotten! A singah's bizney is to educate the public, you know, and I should be vewy pleased to do my little bit."

"Ahem—"
"Pwavy accompany me while I give the chaps the first verse of 'Am Stillen Herd,' just to show how it goes."

"You see—"
"Better accompany me," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm going in to dinner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, you ass—"

Fatty Wynn departed. Redfern packed up his clarinet and followed him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his

eyoglass into his eye, and regarded the remaining members of the band somewhat wrathfully.

"You had bettah hear it, deah boys—" he began.
"But we haven't the music, you know," said Tom Merry.
"I will sing it fwom memowry."
"We can't accompany you from memory," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Just to show you how it goes, I will sing it without accompaniment."

"Go ahead, then," said Monty Lowther.

"Vewy well."
And the swell of St. Jim's, turning towards the stack of faggots at the side of the wood-shed as to an imaginary audience, started.

"Am stillen Herd, in Winterzeit,
Wenn Burg und Hof mir eingeschneit—"

The bandmen grinned to one another, and passed behind D'Arcy and quitted the wood-shed.

Arthur Augustus, with his eyes still fixed before him, sang on, unconscious of the fact that he was alone in the wood-shed.

"Wie einst der Lenz so lieblich lacht,
Und wie er bald wohl neu erwacht!"

The wonderful tenor voice rang through the wood-shed, and Arthur Augustus, carried away on the tide of melody, did not hear the retreating footsteps outside the shed.

"Ein altes Buch, vom Ahn' vermacht,
Gab das mir oft zu lesen,
Herr Walter von der Vogelweid',
Der ist mein Meister gewesen!"

"There you are, deah boys!" said the great tenor, pausing and looking round. "What do you think of that— Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyoglass a little tighter into his eye, and gazed round the wood-shed. It was untenanted, save by himself.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove!"
And he quitted the wood-shed with his nose very high in the air.

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CHAPTER 17.

Wally, Too!

THE Rylcombe Fete was drawing near.

It was a local affair of very considerable importance, and, indeed, famous for three or four miles in every direction from Rylcombe.

It was given in the grounds of General Sir Hotham Wapps, a retired Anglo-Indian veteran, whose extensive estate ran for many a mile along the banks of the Ryll. The fete was given annually in the cause of charity, the chief beneficiaries apparently being the local tradesmen, who did very good business on the occasion. Crowds came from far and near to the fete, and the St. Jim's fellows usually turned up in strong force.

But the idea of taking a school concert party there had not been thought of before that brilliant idea occurred to Tom Merry.

After many vicissitudes, the Tom Merry Concert Party seemed to be in excellent working order at last.

It had been greatly improved by the addition of the New House members, and under Kerr's conductorship it was going really strong.

By the time the fete day arrived, Tom Merry was quite satisfied with his band, and he had easily obtained permission for it to perform in the general's grounds on the occasion of the fete.

Some of the juniors suggested making a collection for the performance, but Tom Merry would not hear of it.

"Can't be did!" he declared. "We're amateurs, not professionals, and we're not after the shekels. It's in the cause of charity, my dear chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! When a chap has a wippin' tenah voice, for instance, I considah that he ought to be willin' to place it at the disposal of othahs," remarked D'Arcy.

"Ahem! Yes! We shall get lots of kudos, anyway—especially if Gussy sings Vesti la giubba!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"I suppose you're going to sing it in Dutch?" asked Redfern.

"Weally, Weddy, the song is in Italian, you know."

"Still, you might as well sing it in Dutch," said Redfern gravely. "The people won't know any difference."

"I shall sing it in Italian," said D'Arcy. "I will wun ova it now, if you fellows like—"

There was a rush to escape.

"Weally, you fellows, you know—"

But the concert party were gone.

The school had a half-holiday on the day of the fete, and after dinner that day, the concert party made great preparations.

There was a last rehearsal in the wood-shed, and Kerr expressed himself satisfied; and later in the afternoon, the bandsmen packed up their instruments and prepared to start.

As they came out with their bags and cases in their hands, another party emerged from the School House. There were five members of it, and they belonged to the Third Form. Tom Merry cast his eye suspiciously upon the fags.

"Where are you chaps going?" he asked.

"To the fete," said Wally cheerfully.

"Oh!"

"My band!" explained Wally, indicating the grinning fags, with a wave of his chubby hand. "We haven't been rehearsing quite so much as you chaps have but I think it will be all right."

"Your band!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor nodded.

"That's it! Jameson plays the tin whistle in first-rate style, don't you, Jimmy?"

"What-ho!" grinned Jameson.

"Frayne does the bones, don't you, Joe?"

"Wot!" said Joe Frayne.

"Curly does the mouth-organ, don't you, Curly?"

"Not half!" said Curly Gibson.

"And Hobbs can play the tin whistle, too."

"My strong point," said Hobbs blandly.

"I'm conductor," said Wally. "But I can play the tin whistle when required, or click the castanets."

"Look here, you young bounders!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "Do you mean to say that you are going to make a row at the fete?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!" said Wally imploringly. "As for making a row, Tom Merry, I don't know what you mean. We are a concert party!"

"A concert what?"

"Party!" said Wally affably. "P-a-r-t-y party! We're going to enliven proceedings at the fete, for the honour of the school. With a school band playing out of tune, you

know, it's up to us to show the public that there are some real musicians here."

"Bai Jove!"

"Curly can sing, too," said Wally. "He's a tenor. He can do the Chickabiddy song from La Bosh de Piffie, by the celebrated composer, Ratz."

"You—you young ass—"

"March!" said Wally, waving his hand to his orchestra. "Tempo di marcia! Buzz!"

And the grinning fags marched off towards the gates.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

"They'll have to be stopped!" exclaimed Kerr. "They're going to rot us at the fete, and spoil the whole show."

"The feahful young wascals! Pway hold my music, deah boys, while I wun aftah them and give them a feahful thwashin'."

"They're gone!" growled Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"But we can't let them rot us at the fete," said Manners excitedly.

"I don't see how we're to stop them."

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Why don't you keep your blessed minor in order, Gussy?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "If they bother us, we'll chase 'em out of old Wapps's grounds, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the concert party started off. But some of them were looking very thoughtful. They had almost forgotten about Wally & Co., in the intense interest of rehearsing for fete day; and they had now discovered that they had to reckon, after all, with the heroes of the Third Form.

There were a good many St. Jim's fellows on the road, all of them bound for the grounds of Sir Hotham Wapps.

Many country people, too, were coming in; and the village of Rylcombe seemed to have transferred itself bodily there.

The extensive grounds were crowded.

The trees were hung with Chinese lanterns, to be lighted when darkness fell; and there were entertainments of all sorts going on, and tents at which refreshments could be obtained in all varieties.

Fatty Wynn cast a glance towards the refreshment quarters as the concert party arrived upon the scene.

"I say, Figgy—" he whispered.

"No, you don't," said Figgins.

"I was just thinking—"

"I know what you were thinking of, my boy," chuckled Figgins, "and you're not going to."

"But, I say, I'm hungry."

"You will blow better when you're hungry, old man."

And Fatty Wynn grunted and gave it up.

CHAPTER 18.

Rival Bands.

SIR HOTHAM WAPPS, a stout old gentleman with white whiskers arranged like a fringe round a purple countenance, moved among the merry-makers with a benevolent smile. He spotted Wally & Co. as they arrived, before the real concert party, and gave them a very warm welcome.

"Ah! You are the concert party, I presume?" he remarked.

"Yes, sir," said Wally meekly. "We want to do our little bit at entertaining the people, sir."

"Quite right! Quite right!" said the general. "A very proper spirit."

"There's another concert party coming from St. Jim's," said Wally. "They're an imitation gang, and not much good."

Sir Hotham Wapps laughed.

"Quite a musical school!" he said. "Very well, the more the merrier."

And he passed on.

A band was discoursing sweet music near the river bank, and in a large tent couples were already dancing. When that was over for a time, Tom Merry's Concert Party got to work. Kerr planted his band on the great lawn, and the instruments were taken out of their cases, and the bandsmen tuned up. A good many St. Jim's fellows were in the crowd that gathered round to listen.

"My word!" said Gore. "You might have chosen something a bit more cheerful than that, Kerr."

Kerr glared.

"You ass! We're tuning up!"

"Oh!" said Gore blandly. "My mistake! I thought it was something very classical."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

The amateur orchestra were starting with the Grand March from "Tannhauser," a stirring march that was to give the entertainment a good send-off. As there were twelve

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Instruments in all, and the bandmen had been rehearsing hard, there was no reason why the march should not have been a big success.

But just as the opening bars crashed out, Wally & Co. appeared.

They took up their stand a few yards away, and produced their instruments.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gore. "What's that?"

"A rival concert!" grinned Pratt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr waved his baton to Wally, rather interrupting the time of the band he was conducting.

"Cut off, you young villains!" he shouted.

Wally did not reply.

He was conducting.

Two tin whistles, bones and castanets, and mouth-organ, crashed out and shrieked out together.

What tune they were playing, if they were playing a tune at all, was not easily recognisable.

But they made plenty of noise.

The shrieking of the tin whistles, and the braying of the mouth-organ jarred upon the sweet strains that were proceeding from Tom Merry's Concert Party, and the result was a most terrific cacophony.

But the spectators did not seem to mind.

They laughed.

A number of St. Jim's fellows in the crowd cheered on the fags to greater efforts, for no better reason than for the fun of seeing the genuine concert party growing more and more crimson with fury.

Kerr set his teeth, and conducted grimly. The Tannhauser march crashed out, and the medley of sounds from the Third-Form orchestra crashed out with it.

The crowd roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Wally!"

"Play up, Tom Merry!"

"Two to one on the Third!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The "Grand March" came to an end. Wally & Co. were still blaring away with all the force of their instruments.

Kerr rushed over to them.

"You young villains!" he roared. "Will you clear out?"

"No fear!" said Wally. "We're playing to entertain the people. It's a fellow's duty, when he's got a musical gift, to place it at the disposal of the poor. I read that in a book somewhere."

"Get out!"

"Rats!"

"We'll sling you out if you don't go!"

"You're liable to get your instruments damaged if you try it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr returned to his band, baffled. Certainly violins and flutes and cellos, and clarinets were out of place in a rough-and-tumble scrimmage with reckless fags. A crowd of Third-Formers had arrived, and were evidently ready to take sides with Wally & Co. in case of need.

"Gussy does his solo next!" said Tom Merry.

Kerr nodded speechlessly.

The band struck up the opening strains of "Vesti la giubba," and Arthur Augustus coughed a little preliminary cough, and started.

Immediately Curly Gibson stepped forth from the ranks of the Third Form band, with a sheet of music in his hand, in absurd imitation of Arthur Augustus.

As D'Arcy started "Vesti la giubba," Curly started a song to the tune of "Sulle labbra," but with words in an Italian that had been invented in the Third Form room at St. Jim's, and which would have puzzled an Italian very much. Instead of the words "Sulle, sulle labbra, sulle labbra, si potesse, dolce 'un bacio, ti darei, dolce 'un bacio, ti darei—" Curly Gibson sang:

"Candel-candelabra,
Candelabra, Saffronillo!
Greeko Streeto, Ice-cream!
Organ-grindo, hip, hip, hurrah!"

There was a yell of laughter. It drowned the voices of both the tenors.

Curly Gibson's humorous Italian quite cut out the real article as rendered by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's stopped.

"Keep on!" yelled Kerr.

"Impos, deah boy, undah the circs."

Tom Merry frowned.

"We shall have to clear those young rascals out!" he exclaimed. "Put the instruments down here, and Gussy can look after them. The rest of you follow me."

"Good egg!"

And the concert party rushed upon the rival band.

There was a shout of alarm from Wally.

"Look out! Rescue, Third!"

Then Tom Merry & Co. were upon them.

There was a wild and whirling scrimmage, and a crowd of Third-Form fags rushed to the aid of Wally & Co.

But Tom Merry & Co. were the champion fighting-men of the lower school at St. Jim's, and worth any number of fags.

Wally and his band were knocked right and left, and their rescuers were whirled to and fro, and put to flight amid roars of laughter from the spectators.

Tom Merry & Co. smote them hip and thigh, and their musical instruments—not very expensive ones, truly—were trodden out of shape under foot.

The breathless fags were chased out of the grounds, and saved themselves by scuttling up the road towards the school; and then the concert party returned to their instruments.

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped Wally, sitting down upon a grassy bank, and fanning himself with his cap. "That was warm!"

"Groo!" grunted Jameson, dabbing his nose with a handkerchief already crimson.

"Let's go back!" said Wally.

"Groo! No fear!"

"Nuff's as good as a feast," said Curly Gibson, caressing an ear that was decidedly thick. "It was funny while it lasted! But 'nuff's 'nuff!"

And Wally agreed that it was.

Tom Merry & Co., in a very breathless state, resumed their instruments, but for a time the laughter of the crowd was so great that they found it difficult to get a hearing. And it could not be denied that the appearance of the band was somewhat marred by the liberal distribution of darkened eyes and swollen noses among them.

"Pewwaps I had bettah give 'em some solos, while you fellows west," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suggested considerably.

Kerr sniffed.

"We don't want them to chase us off, same as we have the fags," he replied.

"Why, you uttah ass—"

"Play up!" said Kerr. "Give 'em the march from 'Carmen,' and they'll stop sniggering presently."

And the band played up!

The laughter died down after a time, and as the fags did not return, Tom Merry's concert party were allowed to get through the remainder of their performance without interruption.

And it was a very creditable performance indeed.

Number after number was performed, and the crowd became quite enthusiastic, and they cheered the items, and Tom Merry & Co. gradually found their good-humour restored. True, there was a recurrence of sounds of laughter when Arthur Augustus delivered a tenor solo; but everything else went down in first-class style; and after the concert performance, the party retired for refreshments amid loud cheers.

Indeed, there were a good many fellows at the fete who declared that the great item of the day, the piece-de-resistance of the whole show, was the amateur band from St. Jim's. The fellows who held that opinion were all members, needless to say, of Tom Merry's Concert Party!

THE END.

"Tom Merry & Co. in Ireland!"

NEXT THURSDAY.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 235.

"SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!" is the Title of the Grand Complete School Tale contained in our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

THE FINEST SCHOOL SERIAL EVER WRITTEN.

THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!

A Rousing, New and Original School Story of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk & Co.

By **PROSPER HOWARD.**

EDITORIAL NOTE.—There is no need to see back numbers for this serial. The preceding chapters have been carefully re-written in order to make what has already been told quite clear to new readers.



Gordon Gay remained motionless, transfixed, wondering if he were dreaming. For the man with the electric lamp, making the mysterious signals from the cliff over the dark waters of the North Sea, was Herr Otto Hentzel, the German master of Rylcombe Grammar School.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made.

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Dr. Monk's formal announcement of this step is greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the entire Grammar School, with the exception of Herr Hentzel, the unpopular German-master, who has, apparently, reasons of his own for objecting. Gordon Gay & Co., and Monk & Co., and indeed the entire Fourth, as the liveliest Form in the school, are particularly excited at the prospect of the change. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a

peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. Amidst great excitement the Grammarians travel down to their new abode. During the first few days Gordon Gay discovers that Mont Blong can speak English fluently, and is at first dumbfounded. He afterwards accuses the French boy of deceiving the school, whereupon Mont Blong challenges him to a duel upon the sea-shore. In the hands of Frank Monk & Co. the affair is turned into a huge jape, but the matter becomes serious when the party later find themselves surrounded by the sea; and in great danger of drowning. The juniors are hard pressed by the tide, when they notice a mysterious man signalling from a cave half-way up the cliff, and they determine to climb up there to escape the sea. On reaching the cave, Mont Blong shows a strange agitation, and is anxious for the juniors to hide. They no sooner do so than the sound of footsteps becomes audible in the cavern, coming closer and closer, while the glimmer of a light appears.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Spies.

The light was near at hand now, and the form of a burly man loomed up behind it. The juniors crouched behind the rocks as the light grew stronger, not venturing to look out until the man had passed. The footsteps passed them, as the man, carrying a lantern, went on towards the opening of the cave. Then Gordon Gay ventured to raise his head and look.

He caught a side view of the man. He had the lantern in his right hand, and a thick coil of rope slung over his

left arm. His face, of which Gay caught the profile, was hard and deeply earnest, as of a man engaged upon an enterprise of perilous importance. As Gordon Gay looked, he remained transfixed, too utterly astounded to draw back into cover again, and it was all he could do to restrain the cry of amazement that rose to his lips. If the man had turned his head, he would have seen the junior staring at him blankly across the boulder. But he did not look round; he evidently did not dream that anyone beside himself was in the cave. He moved on, and flashed the light over the sea.

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"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND!" Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

Gordon Gay remained motionless, transfixed, wondering if he were dreaming. For the man with the electric lamp, making the mysterious signals from the cliff over the dark waters of the North Sea, was Herr Otto Hentzel, the German master of Rylcombe Grammar School!

Gordon Gay drew back behind the cover of the boulder, his heart beating strangely, his face pale.

Herr Hentzel!

The German master!

There was no doubt about it, for he had seen the man plainly, his profile lighted up by the lantern in his hand.

What was Otto Hentzel doing there—signalling to some craft out in the darkness of the North Sea?

Gordon Gay felt a grasp upon his wrist. He started. Mont Blong's eyes were glimmering in the darkness close to him.

"You see?" whispered the French junior. Otto Hentzel had gone out on the ledge now, outside the cave, and was signalling with the lantern, and it was safe to whisper.

"Yes," muttered Gay.

"You see zat it was ze German master?"

"Yes."

"So I zink you see. You know now zat zere is danger."

"Why danger? Why should Herr Hentzel want to harm us?"

Gordon Gay asked the question; yet, while he asked it, he felt in his bones, as it were, that there was danger—terrible danger—if the juniors were discovered there. The look on Herr Hentzel's face, perhaps, had made him feel so. But he wished to know what the French junior thought upon the subject.

"You see zose signals?"

"Yes."

"Zey are to a craft out zero—ze steam-launch zat went out some time ago."

"But, why signal to it—"

"Zat steam-launch have gone out to a ship."

"Well?"

"A ship zat dare not come in sight of ze English coast."

"What?"

"A German ship—a torpedo-boat or a gunboat, mon ami—and zat steam-launch it bring somevun ashore here!"

Gordon Gray breathed hard.

"But, why—why?"

"Perhaps you see soon. Zey come here."

"Here?"

"Oui, oui! Ze German he have rope-ladder on ze arm."

"My hat!"

"Taisez!" muttered Mont Blong. "Ze silence!"

The German-master had ceased to signal. He set the lantern down in the mouth of the cave. From the darkness of the sea the hidden juniors could see the flashing of a responsive light. Then it vanished, and all was dark.

Gay raised his head cautiously to watch the German.

Herr Hentzel was kneeling on the rocky ledge, and the movements, and the sounds he made, showed what he was doing. He was engaged in fixing the end of a rope-ladder by means of iron spikes in the rocky ledge. The rope ladder hung down the cliff.

Either the launch, or a boat from the launch, was coming towards the cliff, and the light was a guide. The signalling had been to tell the strangers that the coast was clear.

Who were they?

So much was understood by the juniors—but who were the strangers? How came the German-master of the Grammar School to be mixed up in that? And the coast was hardly favourable for that enterprise. Smuggling cargoes would be run much more safely in the low shore further south, and in the estuary of the Blackwater. It was not likely to be smuggling. But what else? The juniors were utterly mystified.

A low whistle sounded at last under the cliff, and the keen ears of the juniors detected the rhythmic splash of oars.

There was a boat under the cliff.

Then a scraping of the rope-ladder against the rough rock, and a head rose into view against the cloudy sky outside the cave.

Cloudy as the night was, it was lighter outside the cave by comparison with the thick darkness within. The juniors thought they recognised the head, indistinct as the features were in the dimness. It was the head of the man they had "bumped" in the school-camp the night after Carker had brought their tent down, in mistake for the practical joker—it was the mysterious friend who had visited Herr Hentzel at midnight.

"Franz Pfalz!" muttered Mont Blong.

The German clambered on the ledge, and then stood ready to assist another man who was ascending the rope-ladder.

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He was a burly, square-shouldered man, with a large slouch hat drawn down over his face.

The juniors caught a glimpse of a square chin, and a thick military moustache with turned-up ends, in the gleam of the lantern.

The three men came into the cave.

By the manner of Herr Hentzel and Franz Pfalz, it was evident that the man with the slouched hat was a person of importance, in their eyes, at least. Their manner to him was deferential, indeed, cringing, and his, in return, was abrupt and commanding. As they came into the cave, Herr Hentzel carried the lantern, and the juniors crouched low. But Gordon Gay, covered by the jagged edges of the boulder he was kneeling behind, ventured to peep, and he saw the face of the third man—a hard, iron face, darkened by exposure to the weather, with steely grey eyes that glinted in the light, and hard-set lips. The man was a soldier, evidently, and the orders that glittered when he moved his cloak showed that he was an officer of rank. And he was evidently a German!

"A German military officer!" Gordon Gay murmured under his breath, feeling as if his head were turning round and round. "What on earth does it mean?"

The three men spoke together for a few minutes in guttural German.

The Grammarian juniors had a school smattering of that language, but it was not equal to following the rapid talk in low tones, and they caught but a few words they understood, and those words conveyed no meaning to them.

The three Germans moved on up the cave, Herr Hentzel carrying the light, and they disappeared from view, the light twinkling away till it was lost in the recesses of the cave.

Then Gordon Gay moved.

"Did you see?" he muttered.

"I didn't!" murmured Frank Monk. "What was it?"

"A German soldier—an officer!"

"My hat!"

"And he had a sword—and a pistol in his belt under his cloak!"

"Phew!"

"Must have been a big bug by the way the others treated him. They're gone now. Do you understand it all, Mont Blong?"

"Oui, oui!"

"Did you understand what they were saying?" Gordon Gay asked eagerly.

"Oui, oui! Yes!"

"What do they want here?"

Mont Blong was silent for some moments. He appeared to be thinking it out.

"Go ahead!" muttered Wootton major. "If you know what it's all about, explain to us, you young ass!"

"I'll explain, if you give ze word of ze honour to keep ze secret, all of you, until I give you ze permission to speak. Zat is necessary; zen I trust you!"

"Well, I suppose we can do that," said Gay dubiously.

"Yes, yes."

"Honour bright, Mont Blong!"

"C'est bien! Zen I tell you."

"Buck up! Who are they?"

"Zey are spies!"

A Capture from the Enemy.

"Spies!"

The six juniors uttered the word together.

They were utterly amazed.

In all their wild conjectures upon the subject, that explanation had not occurred to them.

"Spies!" repeated Gordon Gay dazedly.

"Great Scott!"

"German spies!" murmured Lane. "Oh, my hat!"

"It is true, my shums!"

"And our German master is in league with them?"

"Oui, oui!"

"By Jove! Are you sure, Mont Blong?"

"If you had understood vat zey said, my shums, you would know zis as well as I do."

"The rotters!" said Gordon Gay. "I say, we ought to give the alarm to somebody—they ought to be arrested!"

"Zat is impossible. Zey go before zey can be seized—and ze ozzers do ze work instead. Zey are being watched."

"Look here, Mont Blong, you seem to know a jolly lot," said Gordon Gay. "Blessed if I quite understand how you got on to it. I shouldn't wonder if it's true, though. Is that why you said there was danger—because they are spies?"

"Oui, oui!"

"And if they found us here—"

"Zey would throw us into ze zea, mon ami!"

"Not without a bit of a tussle first," murmured the Corn-

stalk grimly. "But we don't want a row with the rotters. That officer chap looked as hard as iron, and as if he would use the revolver he had in his belt. He would do more harm shooting with that than you did in your giddy duel, Mont Blong!"

And the juniors chuckled softly. "We'd better get out of this," said Monk; "and the sooner we give information to the police the better."

Mont Blong uttered an exclamation. "You have promise to say nozzing!" he exclaimed.

"Why, you young ass—" "I have ze promise," said the French junior, "and I tell you zat ze mattair is in ozzer hands—zey are being looked after. I not tell you how I know—but I do know. Zat is enough, my shums. I have ze promise."

"We'd better get out of this," said Gordon Gay. "Old Hentzel had no idea that we were here; but if they should think of examining the cave—"

Frank Monk gave a sudden chuckle. "What price taking their boat?" he asked. "If they haven't left anybody in it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Taisez—taisez—silence, my shums! Zere may be a man in ze boat."

"I'll soon see about that," said Gay. He crept silently on the ledge before the cave. Stooping down, he peered cautiously over the edge of the rough rocks. Below, on the lapping water, the boat floated, jarring softly against the rock with the motion of the tide. It was but a little skiff, and two oars were laid inboard in it, and there was no man visible. The painter was fast to a spike jammed in a crevice of the rock. The rope ladder dangled down, and was secured to the boat. Out on the dark sea twinkled a single light—that of the launch, doubtless, waiting for the return of the German officer. But the darkness was too thick for more than the light to be distinguished.

Gordon Gay crept back and rejoined his comrades. "The boat's empty," he muttered. "Those two rotters rowed themselves from the launch. They won't row themselves back. It will be as easy as winking to slip down the rope ladder and get off in the boat. They'll think that the painter was not fastened tight enough, and that she drifted off."

The juniors chuckled. It seemed an excellent jape to play upon the spies, and it was certain to place them in some difficulties. They would have to wait on the ledge until they had signalled for another boat to be sent from the launch, or until the launch risked ranging up close to the rocky cliff to take them off.

"Good egg!" said Monk. "I'm on!" "Look out!" muttered Lane. "They're coming."

In the far distance in the hollow cave a light twinkled. The Germans were returning.

"Plenty of time yet," said Gordon Gay, looking at the light. "They're ten minutes from here. Come on!"

The juniors crept out on the ledge. Gordon Gay clambered down the rope ladder, and his comrades followed him one by one, and in three minutes all of them were in the boat. It was a close fit for seven sturdy juniors. But the sea was very calm, and even if there had been danger they would not have cared. Gordon Gay jerked out the spike in the crevice of the rock to which the painter was secured, and cast loose the ends of the rope ladder. Frank Monk had an oar ready, and he shoved off at once.

The skiff danced away on the flowing tide. Gordon Gay and Frank Monk took the oars, and Wootton major sat at the rudder. The two oarsmen rowed swiftly, and as silently as they could. The tide was sweeping round the headland, and they only had to keep the boat well out from the cliff for the sweep of the tide to carry them on their way.

In a few minutes they were rounding the corner of the rocky headland, over the path which they would have followed if they had not been caught by the tide, and imprisoned between the cliff and the sea.

"Hark!" muttered Gordon Gay. "Quiet!" They lay on the oars, and the boat drifted on the tide. Monk shoved it off from the cliff as it floated too close.

From the direction of the cave came a sound of muttering voices in German. The three Germans had evidently arrived upon the ledge, and discovered that the boat was missing.

The juniors laughed softly. Monk punted the boat onward. A light gleamed out from the ledge, and was answered from the unseen launch. The Germans were signalling.

The mass of the headland intervened, and the light was shut out from view. Safe in the distance, the juniors put out the oars again, and rowed.

Ten minutes later the bows of the boat grated in the sand a quarter of a mile from the school camp. The juniors

pushed the boat in as far as they could, and then jumped ashore to clear the shallow water.

One by one they alighted safely on the land, and the boat remained pounding in the shingle.

"What are we going to do with the boat?" asked Lane. "Leave her where she is," said Gordon Gay. "If she is found floating, old Hentzel will think she drifted away, and won't suspect that anyone was there to help her."

"Good!" "I suppose we're not going to say anything about this?" said Frank Monk doubtfully.

"Well, we've promised Mont Blong." "I have ze promise," said Mont Blong. "Zat is right. Say nozzing. Ze watching of zose spies is in ze hands of ozzers."

The juniors were not quite satisfied. But they had promised Mont Blong, and there was no more to be said. They walked back to the school camp.

The Fourth-Form Reformers.

Delamere, the captain of the Grammar School, met the juniors as they sauntered in. Gordon Gay & Co. knew that they were very late for calling over, and they expected trouble, but they took it with their usual calmness. The canvas camp was lighted by electricity, and the juniors were visible immediately they came within the glare of the lights. The Sixth-Former bore down upon them frowningly.

"Where have you been, you young rascals?" he exclaimed. "Prowling along the shore," said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "Where have you been?"

"I've been looking for you," said Delamere grimly. "Do you know that you are an hour and a half late for calling-over, and that the Fourth are gone to bed?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Sorry."

"The Head was quite alarmed about you—"

"Oh, that's all right! We can be trusted to turn up, like the bad penny."

Delamere smiled grimly. "Well, they say that fellows who are born to be hanged cannot be drowned," he remarked. "But you can't miss calling-over, and then walk in calmly, and say you're sorry. Follow me to my study—I mean, my tent."

And the juniors followed the captain of the school to his tent. Hake and Corton of the Sixth were there, as the juniors followed the captain in. There were cards upon the table, and Hake muttered something between his teeth, and threw a cloth over them as he saw the juniors. Delamere turned red. If he had known how his chums were engaged, he would certainly not have brought in the juniors upon them so abruptly.

"Well, you are an ass, Delly!" muttered Hake. "Silly fathead!" murmured Corton.

"These young rotters have only just come in," said Delamere. "I'm going to cane them. Hand me my cane, Hake."

"With pleasure."

"Hold on!" said Gordon Gay, eyeing the bullies of the Sixth warily. "Draw it mild, you know, Delamere. One good turn deserves another."

"What do you mean, you young rascal?" demanded the captain of the school angrily.

"Well, suppose we were tell-tales, and and went and told Mr. Hilton about that little game of nap we've interrupted—"

"Why, I'll skin the cheeky young hound!" broke out Hake furiously. And he ran to a corner of the tent, and picked up a cricket-stump.

Gordon Gay faced him coolly. "Now, you young rotter—"

"If you touch me with that cricket-stump, Hake, I'll go straight to the Head, and tell him what I've seen here," said Gay coolly.

Hake glared at him, and then lowered the hand that held the cricket-stump. He was at the mercy of the junior, if he chose to sneak.

Delamere looked irresolute. Delamere of the Sixth was a good-natured fellow in the main, and pretty well liked by the juniors, but he was very much under the influence of the black sheep of the Sixth—Hake and Corton and Torrence. Under their influence he was a good deal of a bully, and, as the juniors suspected, a good deal of a blackguard. Of the latter they had just had proof, for Hake and Corton were evidently gambling in the captain's tent, and waiting for Delamere to join them in the game.

Gordon Gay grinned as he noted Delamere's expression.

"It's all right, Delly old man," he said. "You can lay into us if you like—we're not going to sneak about you. I dare say it's your duty to lam us for missing calling-over, but one good turn deserves another, you know, so lay it on lightly."

Delamere smiled awkwardly.

"I shall have to cane you," he said. "But I don't think you should sneak about matters that don't concern you."

"Better wheeze to give up that rot, and kick those two cads out of your tent, all the same," said Gordon Gay.

Hake and Corton made a simultaneous movement towards the Cornstalk. They were not accustomed to such plain speaking from a member of the Fourth Form.

"Keep off, my sons," said Gay. "We'll take a licking from Delamere, because he's our captain, but we won't take it from you. Hands-off!"

"Zat is correct."

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

"Let them alone," said Delamere gruffly. "I'm going to cane them. Hold out your hand, Gordon Gay."

The Cornstalk obeyed. He received a very light cut, and each of the juniors in turn was given the same. Delamere, on this occasion at least, did not seem disposed to follow the advice of the ancient sage—he spared the rod, at the risk of spoiling the child.

"Now, cut off!"

"Many thanks, great chief!" said Gordon Gay, with undiminished good-temper.

And the rival Co.'s of Rylcombe Grammar School quitted the tent.

"Come and sit down, Delly," said Corton. "Fasten the flap, and take a hand."

Delamere shook his head.

"I'd rather not, thanks," he said abruptly.

"But we came here for a little game."

"You must excuse me this time."

Corton burst into an angry laugh.

"Are you going to take any notice of that cheeky young cad preaching at you?" he exclaimed. "I should have thought you had more nerve than to be scared into a funk by a Fourth-Form fag."

Delamere knitted his brows.

"If you think I'm a funk, Corton, I'm willing to prove the contrary to you, if you'll step out on the beach with me for a few minutes," he said quietly.

Corton laughed uneasily.

"Oh, I don't want to get your back up!" he said. "I think you might join in the game, as we came here at your invitation, that's all."

"Well, I'd rather not, and that settles it."

And Delamere left the tent.

"Silly ass!" growled Hake. "I know he had a fiver from his people to-day, too."

"Oh, he'll come back!" said Corton confidently. "This will soon wear off. Let's get on with the game."

And the two young rascals were soon deeply absorbed in their play—a little amusement which would have procured them expulsion from the school if Dr. Monk had known anything about it. But the good old doctor would never have dreamed that there were fellows in the Sixth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School who were addicted to playing nap for money in secret places.

Gordon Gay & Co. said good-night to one another outside their own sleeping-tents. They saw the handsome figure of Delamere leave the tent where they had been caned, and stride away among the canvas dwellings. Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy went into their own quarters, and were soon in bed. Gordon Gay and the two Woottons and Mont Blong entered their own tent, where Tadpole was already fast asleep, his unmusical snore filling the tent with melody.

"I'm jolly tired, for one," said Wootton major, sitting on his camp-bed and beginning to take off his boots. "Why don't you get undressed, Gay? If that electric light burns long, we shall have old Corporal Cutts along. He's sounded lights out before we got into camp."

"Turn it out now, then," said Gay. "I'll do it myself." He pressed the switch, and the tent was plunged into darkness. "The moon's coming up at last, and there will be light enough to undress."

"Well, you ass," said Jack Wootton.

"It iz zat you do not go to bed yet," said Mont Blong.

"Exactly, my Parisian poppy," said Gordon Gay coolly. "I've been thinking."

"About those blessed spies?"

"Oh, blow those blessed spies! I expect they've got back to their launch long ago. No. I've been thinking about something nearer home. I suppose you chaps have seen the 'Daily Mail' and the 'Times,' and the lesser papers sometimes."

"What on earth—"

"If you have you will have learned that reform is in the air," said Gordon Gay calmly. "Every public man is a reformer now. A chap can't get into public life at all unless he's prepared to reform something. Even private men take

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up reforming people—not themselves, of course—but other people. Reform is in the air. We live in a reforming age."

The juniors ceased their occupation with their boot-laces to stare at Gordon Gay in blank amazement.

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Wootton major.

"Off your rocker?" queried Jack Wootton.

"I zink zat zat is it."

"No," said Gordon Gay. "I'm talking about the spirit of the age. What old Hentzel would call the zeitgeist, very likely. Reform is in the air."

"Reforms generally are in the air, and stop there!" grinned Wootton major.

"Everybody is being reformed," said Gay thoughtfully.

"They're reforming the poor law, and the House of Lords, and they'll be reforming the House of Commons some day—not before it needs it. The motto for a politician is—I reform, thou reformest, he reforms. We reform, you reform, they reform—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Now, why should Rylcombe Grammar School be behind the times?" demanded Gordon Gay.

"Eh!"

"Why shouldn't we take up reform as well as everybody else?"

"Reform ourselves!" said Wootton major thoughtfully. "No more japes—no more using up old lines for impots—no more talking in class—"

"Ass!" said Gordon Gay witheringly. "I wasn't talking about reforming ourselves. There's plenty of reform going on, but nobody thinks of reforming himself, of course. That hasn't occurred to anybody, and there's no need for us to start it. I was thinking of reforming somebody else, of course."

"Look here, you ass, what are you driving at?" demanded Jack Wootton, exasperated.

"Cut the cackle and come to the hosses, you fathead!" said Wootton major.

"Well, what about those bounders in the Sixth?" said Gordon Gay. "I think we ought to reform somebody or something, in order to keep up with the times; and Corton and Hake stand more in need of reforming than anybody else we know. They've got poor old Delamere under their thumb, and they're leading him into their naughty ways. It's a rotten shame, because he's a really decent chap when they leave him alone."

"No business of ours, I suppose?" yawned Wootton major.

"That's where you make a mistake," said Gordon Gay serenely. "A true reformer never minds his own business, as you could tell by reading up any of their speeches. My idea is to reform Hake and Corton."

"Ass!" howled Jack Wootton. "If you've got a good idea for a jape, shove it off your chest, and then shut up!"

Gordon Gay grinned.

"All serene," he said. "Look here. Hake and Corton are playing cards for money—in short, gambling, in Delamere's tent. They're going to get him into it, and I think it's rotten!"

"Beastly rotten!" said Wootton major.

"It would be no use our talking to them, and pointing out the error of their ways."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a laughing matter, young Wootton," said Gordon Gay severely. "I am in deadly earnest. Now, since our exhortations wouldn't be any use to such hardened bounders as they are, we must try something else. The ancient Greeks used to talk by the yard about purifying you by the influence of pity and terror—"

"Oh, don't give us that now!" implored Wootton major.

"Shut up! I don't know whether pity would have much effect on Hake and Corton; but if we make them thoroughly sorry for themselves, it will give it a chance. But terror is the thing. We've got to give 'em a scare to shift 'em back into the path of virtue, so that they will be worthy to associate with decent fellows—us, in short."

"Will you come to the point, you ass?"

"Certainly, when I get there. I have thought it out, and I've decided that the best way to scare those rotters back into the path of virtue is by letting the Head look in upon them while they're playing cards."

"You wouldn't sneak, Gay?"

"Of course not, fathead!"

"Then how the dickens—"

"Have you forgotten that, in our last private theatricals at the Grammar School, I made up as Dr. Monk?" demanded Gordon Gay. "What's the good of being president of the Fourth-Form Dramatic Society if I can't act?"

ANSWERS

"SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!"

is the Title of the Grand Complete School Tale contained in our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"My hat!"
 "I've got all the stuff here," continued Gordon Gay calmly. "In ten minutes I can change myself into Adams, the Form-master, or Dr. Monk, the headmaster, or anybody else who isn't too tall. What price that for a wheeze?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Just imagine their feelings when the Head looks in!"
 The juniors yelled at the idea. They could imagine the feelings of Hake and Corton on such an occasion.

Tadpole stirred in his slumber.
 "Shurrup, you fellows!" he mumbled sleepily. "Letter feller goter sleep."

"Go to sleep, and be blowed!" said Gordon Gay. "Lend me a hand to get the things out of my box, you bounders, and we'll give Hake and Corton the time of their lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The four juniors set to work with a will, Mont Blong as keen as any of them. Gordon Gay was the shining light of the Fourth-Form Dramatic Society, and his skill in impersonations was wonderful. He had an equal, perhaps, in Kerr, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's; but he had no superior in his peculiar line.

Gay was a born actor; and, indeed, at one period when fortune had frowned upon him, he had earned his daily bread upon the boards. He had a wonderful gift of mimicry, and could twist his features to resemble faces quite unlike his own, and mimic voices in every shade of age and expression.

Such imitations as those of the masters of the Grammar School were, of course, reserved for the chums' own edification in private. The masters themselves would probably not have appreciated the Cornstalk's cleverness in that direction.

Wootton major and minor and Mont Blong helped Gordon Gay with quick and nimble fingers. The moonlight streamed now in at the opening of the tent, and afforded ample light. The work of transformation proceeded rapidly.

"Ciel!" murmured Mont Blong, at the end of ten minutes labour. "Mon Dieu! But zat is wonderful! Mon Dieu! I zink zat I can do zese zings, but I not do zem like zat."

"Many thanks!" yawned Gordon Gay.
 "I think you're about finished now!" grinned Wootton major.

"Thank you, my boys," said Gordon Gay, in the voice of their respected Head. "This is very kind of you, I am sure—h'm! Quite so. Ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Gordon Gay stepped from the tent into the clear moonlight.

He was not likely to meet the real Dr. Monk, as he had heard that the Head had gone into the village of Netherby with Mr. Hilton, the master of the Fifth. Gordon Gay had to take the chance of his returning at an inopportune moment. Nothing venture, nothing win, was the maxim with which the scamp of the Fourth comforted himself.

Imitating the slow and stately stride of the little doctor with a fidelity that caused muffled explosions of laughter to follow him from his tent, Gordon Gay made his way towards Delamere's quarters.

Wootton major and minor, and Mont Blong followed him at a distance, keeping in cover among the tents to see the fun. Gordon Gay was seen to pause abruptly. He had almost reached the captain's tent, when the figure of Delamere came in sight, striding through the camp from the direction of the sea. The captain of the Grammar School was evidently coming back from his moonlight stroll, whether it was to join the gamesters or not.

Wootton major uttered a suppressed exclamation.
 "My hat! There's Delamere!"
 "Mon Dieu!"

"Gay will buzz right into him! Phew!"
 "Quiet!" murmured Mont Blong. "Taisez-vous, mes amis."

They watched with beating hearts. Gordon Gay had not calculated upon meeting the captain of the school; but he did not mean to turn back now.

(Another grand instalment of this thrilling serial next Thursday.)

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons. One taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

All requests should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C., England."

THIRD LIST.

D. Dyer, Manning Street, Kiama, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age 16, living in England.

Miss O. L. Ragless, Callanna Station, via Hergott, South Australia, wishes to exchange snapshot photographs with readers in the British Isles.

A. C. Sherlock, Grey Street, Thames, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with any boy or girl, age 15, living in the British Isles.

W. Burke (age 19), care of A. Thyer, Hairdresser, Stone's Corner, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, of the same age, living in England.

Miss Cissy Roberts, 2, Hou Fok Terrace, Shanghai, China, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in England.

J. E. Corbett, 9, Hotham Street, Moonee Ponds, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age 15, living in England.

R. Carpenter, care of P.O. Box 60, Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader living in England who is interested in stamp-collecting.

F. Nurnberg, 113, Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age 14, living in the United Kingdom.

M. Sterrett, Elderslie, Rathmines Street, Fairfield, Melbourne, wishes to correspond with a reader living in England.

A. Shields, Rochester, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond and exchange photographs (taken by correspondent) with a reader living in the United Kingdom.

A. Brown, G.P.O. Box 206, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in or near the Avenue, Braintree, Essex, England.

S. Read, age 16, Fraser Street, New Town, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy or girl readers about same age in any part of the world.

Miss M. Oldham, Herts Villa, Lindesfarur, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age about 18 or 19.

G. Beatey, Burton Street, Randwick, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader in England, age 17.

L. Wootton, 370, Goldhurst Road, Upper Ricarton, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl or boy reader age 15—16.

A. J. Hill, 8, High Street, Balmain, Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers between the ages of 16—24.

Miss N. Wearmouth, Hillgrove, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with boys or girls of 18 and over.

E. J. Macdonald, E. Jandahakot, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl Gemite, age 15—16, living in the British Isles.

B. H. Cavanagh, Brimpaen, via Horsham, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a Gemite, age 17—18, living in England.

J. B. Johansson, Clare Road, Kapunda, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader interested in photography.

Miss E. Major, Cornish Terrace, Wallaroo, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader.

Miss G. Hamlin, c.o. Union Electric Co., Margaret Lane, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to exchange postcards or correspondence generally with a reader, age 19.

NEXT WEEK! NEXT WEEK!

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND,"

By *Martin Clifford,*

and a long and exciting instalment of

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS."

Order Next Week's GEM Now! Price One Penny.

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND!" Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

**"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND!"**

is the title of next Thursday's splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's College. It is easy to imagine that the lively juniors find plenty to occupy their energies during a visit to the Green Isle, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, is in his element at the famous Dublin Horse Show.

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND!"

is packed with amusing incident and adventure, and will be especially interesting, not only to my Irish chums, but to all British and Colonial readers alike.

More Appreciation from Canada.

Letters of the keenest appreciation continue to flow in upon me, especially, it seems, from Colonial readers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries, who, in addition to extracting the utmost enjoyment out of the stories, appear to set particular store by the little books from the fact that they form, as it were, a link with the Motherland. It is with the intention of fostering this feeling that I have re-introduced a modified Correspondence Exchange, reserved exclusively for the use of my Colonial readers. The letter published below comes from an enthusiastic supporter to whom, no doubt, the latest facility I am extending to my overseas readers will specially appeal.

"Winnipeg, Canada.

"Dear Editor,—I am just sending you a few lines to let you know how I appreciate your two papers, 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet.' I have been in Canada ten months, and I do not think I have missed reading them one week during that time. My mother always used to laugh at me for reading them, but the other day she informed me that she had read 'The Gem,' and had much enjoyed it. So that shows that no one knows how good they are until they read them for themselves. I am sure Harry Wharton & Co. and also Tom Merry & Co. are all boys anyone might get interested in, as they are always up to some mischief, but it generally turns out good in the end. Am looking forward to obtaining this week's books, as I am sure they seem better every week, and help to pass many hours away.

"A Canadian Reader' (E. E. N.)."

Much obliged for your letter, E. E. N. I am pleased to be able to say that the steadily increasing popularity of your two favourite books proves that your opinion of them is pretty generally shared, both at home and abroad.

"Don'ts" for Cricket Captains.

Don't put your special friend in where he likes, unless he is a good enough bat to justify the position. In the same way, don't let the fact that you dislike a man alter his place in the batting side.

Don't let your men get slack. If anyone won't take the trouble to come to a cricket practice, he's not worth including in the team.

Don't forget that when you have a visiting team you should see every comfort possible is provided.

Unless you happen to be a bowler, don't put yourself on to bowl when the regular bowlers are being knocked all over the field. Don't lose heart when things are going against your side. A confident captain has often inspired other members of the team.

Above all, don't forget that you are captain, particularly in the field. The fielders, except when the bowler makes a few alterations, are to go where you tell them.

General Hints for Amateur Photographers.

Amateur photographers often find that their early efforts at group-photography are not attended with conspicuous success, and it is a fact that there is considerable art in arranging a group so that all the members thereof are done equal justice to by the camera. In giving a few hints on group photography, we will take, say, a picnic-party as a suitable subject. Such a party will, as a rule, arrange itself in the shade of a big tree, and to take a good picture, it is better to set the camera up on a light stand, and take a "time" photo.

Having arranged the group—the best way of doing this will be dealt with in a moment—put in the middle stop, if the camera is one of those equipped with three stops (if not, use F. 16), and give the films a short exposure, say three seconds. Of course you must impress upon the group the necessity of keeping perfectly still during this brief period.

When working with a hand-camera without a bulb, the swift jerking to and fro of the exposure button or lever is apt to jar the camera, and result in a blurred image. To obviate this, carry a small piece of stiff brown millboard—in an emergency a book-cover or the sole of a shoe may be used—and hold it in front of the lens before opening the shutter. Then make the exposure by swiftly withdrawing and replacing the cardboard.

Close the shutter before removing the cardboard from in front of the lens, and winding off the film.

To arrange a satisfactory group, make the picnickers seat themselves in the form of an oblong rather than a circle.

They will thus all be as far as possible in the same plane. If taken sitting in a circle, those nearest to the camera will dwarf those sitting on the opposite side of the cloth, in the resulting print. This oblong arrangement is more natural and effective than the usual professional photographer's plan of grouping the party in two straight lines, one above the other, and all staring fixedly at the camera.

Snapshotting, perhaps the most fascinating form of photography, requires considerable judgment to obtain the best results. The speed of moving objects must be gauged to a nicety, and the correct exposure must be made exactly at the right moment in order to catch the moving object just in the centre of the film.

The nearer the moving object is to you and to the camera, the shorter must be the exposure you can give it. To obtain a really sharp photo, the object photographed, if moving, of course, should not be less than fourteen or fifteen feet away from the operator. Then, again, the angle at which rapid-moving objects are "snapped" makes a great deal of difference to the length of the exposure that must be given. An express train, "snapped" when passing at right angles in front of the camera, requires a very small stop indeed, but when taken head on at an angle as it approaches the camera, it is a subject well within the range of an ordinary camera.

Replies in Brief.

"Fight and Die" (Aberdeen).—When Frank Kingston was first taken to the Iron Island, his name was Philip Graydon, but when he started his campaign against the Brotherhood of Iron he changed it to Frank Kingston, so that he could better work to bring about the downfall of the Society.

J. D. W. (Everton).—Many thanks for your interesting letter. I am sorry that the opening chapters appear to you in such a light, but I hardly think your criticism justified.

"Gemite" (Walsall).—I am afraid that it would be almost impossible for you to obtain the book you want, as it has been out of print now for such a long time.

"Hopeful" (Cardiff).—Thank you for your letter. With regard to your query I should advise you to first of all take some lessons in drawing and painting, when your pictures would be more likely to possess the requisite "finish" to enable them to sell readily.

THE EDITOR.