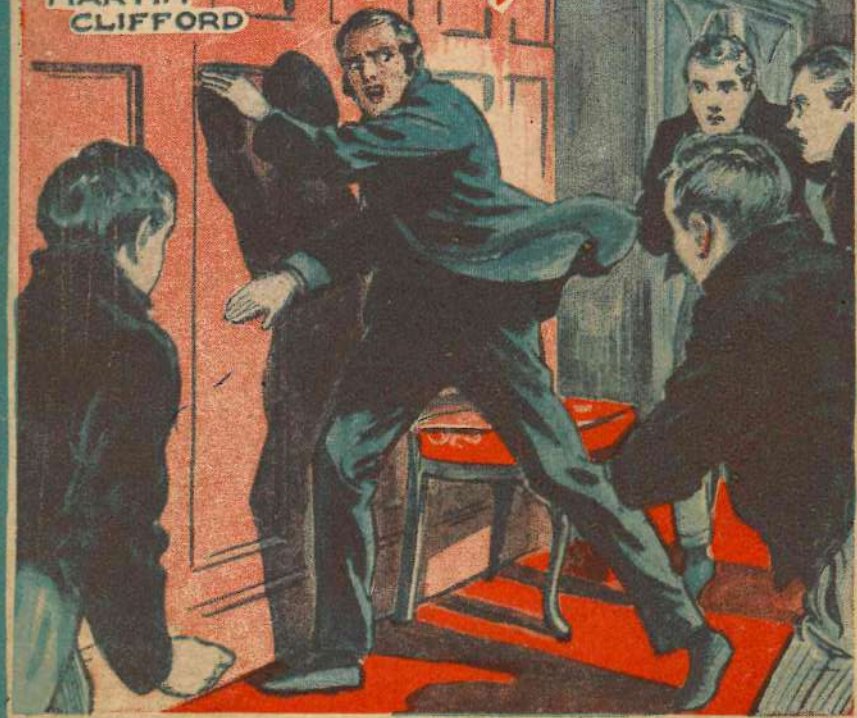


The Eastwood House Mystery

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD



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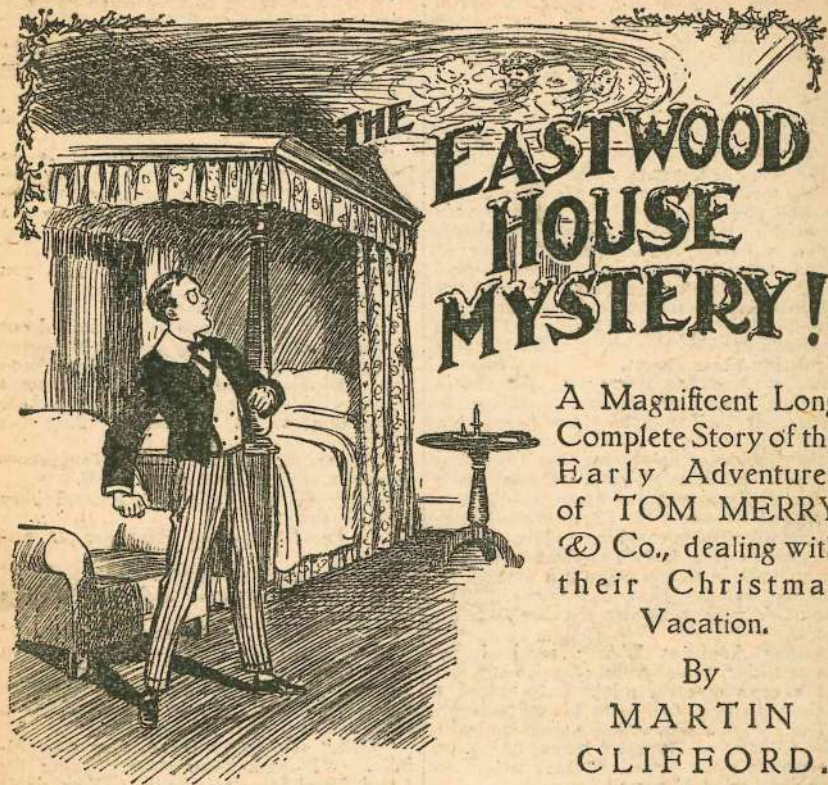
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CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Waiting for the Feed!

STUDY No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's presented an unusually festive appearance.

There was holly on the walls, and mistletoe over the door, and a spotless tablecloth gleamed upon the study table. And upon the tablecloth gleamed an enormous array of cups saucers, and plates—mostly of different patterns. It was evident that the owners of Study No. 6 had borrowed, or raided, crockeryware from all quarters,

in preparation for a "spread" of unusual dimensions.

The kettle sang on the hob, and the fire burned brightly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, spotlessly arrayed as usual, stood with his benignant smile of welcome upon his aristocratic face, to receive his guests. All seemed to be ready for a really first-class feed—excepting the provisions. Of eatables there was not a sign in the study. But so far as decorations and crockeryware and smiles of welcome went, everything was in the best possible order for the feast.

The study was already a little crowded.

Blake and Herries and Digby, D'Arcy's study-mates, were there, as a matter of course. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were the first guests to arrive from outside. Then Kangaroo had come in, and then Reilly of the Fourth. Other guests were expected, and, of course, the feed could not begin till all had arrived.

But some of the guests who were already on the scene were wondering a little at the absence of the feed itself. It was very pleasant to look upon the Christmas decorations of Study No. 6, and the array of crockeryware was certainly imposing—and the spotless state of the tablecloth could not fail to strike all observers. But, after all, something more solid was required for a feed, and some of the guests could not help wondering where it was.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the son of a noble lord, was generally rolling in money. It had been his idea to stand a really stunning feed in Study No. 6, to celebrate the breaking-up for the Christmas holidays now close at hand. A good many of the chums were going home with him to Eastwood House for the Christmas holidays, but not all of them could go, so it was really an excellent idea, and all of them were willing to do their best to make it a success, by piling in with the greatest good-will into the good things provided by the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy received his guests with a genial smile of welcome; and yet a close observer might have traced a slightly worried look upon his noble brow.

The mingling of a genial welcoming smile with a thoughtful worried frown, had quite a peculiar effect upon his face, which his guests politely did not notice.

There were footsteps in the passage, and three juniors came into the study doorway—Figgins, Kerr and Wynn of the New House.

They all wore their best smiles—such things as House rivalry and ragging were not to be thought of, of course, on an occasion like this. Fatty Wynn, especially, had a face like a full moon, so broad and beaming was his smile. His glance went mechanically to the table.

"Pway come 'n, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, smiling with an effort. "Pway come wight in!"

"I hope we're not late," said Figgins.

"Not at all, Figgay!"

"I tried to make Figgins come earlier," said Fatty Wynn. "But he was finishing some silly letter or other, and he wouldn't move. I hope we haven't kept you fellows waiting."

"Not in the least, deah boy!"

"Well, we're all here now," remarked Tom Merry.

"I haven't had any tea, so as to do justice to the spread," said Fatty Wynn confidentially. "That is, practically no tea—only some ham and eggs and cake and a few tarts."

"Glad to heah it, deah boy!"

"I'll help get the feed ready, if you like," hinted Fatty.

"Thank you vewy much!"

Blake and Herries and Digby looked out of the window, seemingly greatly interested in an early fall of snow that had powdered the quadrangle with white. For some reason, the colour was deepening in the aristocratic visage of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, are we all here?" asked Kangaroo—otherwise Harry Noble of the Shell.

D'Arcy did not reply; he seemed busy with his thoughts.

"All here?" repeated Kangaroo, in surprise.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Sowwy, deah boy! Did you address me?"

"Yes; I asked you if we were all here!"

"Not quite—I'm expectin' my minah, you know."

"Isn't Wally here yet?" said Figgins.

"He's generally on time when there's a feed. Better wait for him."

"Well," said Fatty Wynn, very thoughtfully. "I don't know about waiting for Third Form fags, you know. Fags don't count!"

"Oh, let Gussy wait for his minor!" said Monty Lowther generously.

"Certainly!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas wathah—I mean pway don't mench—that is to say—ahem!" Arthur Augustus' thoughts were evidently wandering. "Vewy warm weathah for this time of the year isn't it?"

"Warm!" said Kerr, with a stare. "It's snowing!"

"Is it weally? Yaas, that's what I meant to remark—it's wathah cold, isn't it?"

Kerr closed one eye to Figgins, and tapped his forehead in a significant sort of way; perhaps meaning to imply a belief

that the swell of the Fourth was a little loose in that region.

"You fellows been playin' footah?" asked D'Arcy, with a great effort to make conversation.

"Yes!" said Kerr seriously and solemnly. "We generally play footer after dark, in the snow, you know."

"Do you weally?" said D'Arcy, who—troubled by some mysterious inward trouble—was too preoccupied to notice that Kerr's reply was in a sarcastic vein. "How good! I trust you have had a good game?"

"Ripping!" said Kerr, still sarcastic. "Figgins scored fifty runs, and Fatty Wynn potted the red, and I made a grand slam."

"Did you weally?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That burst of laughter from all the fellows in the study recalled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to himself.

"Ahem! I meant to remark——"

"I say, Wally will be pretty peckish when he gets here," said Fatty Wynn. "Suppose we get the feed all ready for him. I don't mind helping. I like making myself useful, you know."

"Yaas!"

"Well, shall we get it ready, then?" said Fatty Wynn, puzzled.

"Yaas!"

"Where's the grub?"

"The—the gwub?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes. Where is it?"

"I suppose you fellows haven't seen the postman?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, I have!" said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove that's good—then he's come——"

"Yes, he's come, and gone!" said Lowther blandly. "It was this morning that I saw him, you know."

"You—you uttah ass, Lowthah——"

"Thanks! Are you always as polite as

that to your guests, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther imperturbably.

"Ahem! Sowwy, deah boy! I forgot!

You see——"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted by the arrival of three somewhat inky juniors of the Third Form. They were Wally D'Arcy, Gussy's minor, and his bosom pals Jameson and Curly Gibson. D'Arcy had not asked the latter two, as a matter of fact, but Wally had calmly assumed the right to bring his friends with him.

"Here we are!" said Wally, as he marched in. "All ready, eh?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! I'm hungry. So's Jameson, so's Curly. Why, where's the grub?" demanded Wally, staring round the study. It was evident that the manners and customs of D'Arcy minor were not modelled upon those of his elegant major.

"The—the gwub?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes; where is it?"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, who had been staring out into the dusk of the quad.

"Here's the giddy postman."

Arthur Augustus breathed a deep, deep sigh of relief.

"Pway excuse me a few minutes, deah boys, while I wun down and see the postman," he exclaimed. "I'm expectin' a letter f'rom home!"

"Right-ho," said Fatty Wynn. "We'll get the feed ready while you're gone. Ow! Yow! What are you treading on my foot for, Figgins?"

Figgins gave his chum a ferocious glare, and Fatty Wynn comprehended. It dawned upon him that the great celebration depended upon the timely arrival of the postman. Arthur Augustus had hurried out of the study, and the juniors waited for his return.

He returned in two minutes.

He came back empty-handed, and with a really rich colour in his cheeks.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" said Herries and Digby.

"Well?" echoed Fatty Wynn, with a dreadful foreboding.

"Well?" growled Wally.

"I—I—I—I'm awfully sowwy, deah boys," stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing to be scerry about," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "It's all right—let's go on with the feed!"

"I'm awfully sowwy—but—but——"

"But what?"

"But there won't be any feed!"

CHAPTER 2.

Startling News!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY pronounced the words in a faltering tone.

A dreadful silence followed.

It was broken by Fatty Wynn.

He groaned

He did not mean to; but he really could not help it. He had been saving up his appetite, so to speak, for that extra-special feed; he had been nourishing a first-class hunger for the special occasion. And now there wasn't to be any feed, and the feeling of emptiness and disappointment combined brought that involuntary groan to the lips of Fatty Wynn.

The other fellows felt the blow also.

Wally followed up Wynn's groan with a snort. He had brought Jameson and Curly Gibson to the study for a feed, for something extraordinary in the way of feeds, but not for a faltering explanation that there was to be no feed. Jameson and Curly were already glaring at him. Wally felt exasperated.

"Something gone wrong?" asked Monty Lowther, with elaborate politeness. Lowther could always be depended upon for sympathetic urbanity at dreadful moments like this.

"Yaas."

"So sorry!" murmured Manners.

"Too bad!" said Figgins.

"I weally can't unhandstand it," said Arthur Augustus, whose aristocratic countenance was assuming the hue of a well-boiled beetroot. "I have nevah known my patah fail me in this extwaerdinary way befoah. But the fivah has not come."

"Oh!"

"It was pwomised for this mornin'," said D'Arcy. "It was not merely a fivah that I asked for extwa, you know; if it had been, I shouldn't have counted on it. But the patah pwomised to send me this fivah to weach me to-day—two days befoah bweakin' up for the Christmas holidays. It ought to have awvived this mornin'."

"Oh!"

"But it didn't—nor this afternoon, either. I considered that there was pwobably some delay owin' to the cwush in the Chwistmas post, you know, and that it would awvive for certain by this post, but it hasn't."

"Oh!"

"I know it's wotten," said D'Arcy feelingly. "I am extremely sowwy to disappoint you chaps. It's weally wotten. I feel that I am to blame, but it is weally most inexplicable that my govahnah should fail me in this way. He knows I was goin' to stand a partin' feed befoah bweakin' up, and yet he has not sent the fivah."

Wally snorted again.

"You ass, Wally, bringing us here to hear your blessed major gas!" murmured Jameson, in a stage whisper that was heard all over the study.

"And young Frayne will have wolfed all the sardines by this time," said Curly, with an unhappy grimace. "I thought we shouldn't want the sardines, but now—"

"Let's get out," said Wally.

"I am sowwy, you youngstahs—"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "You're an ass, Gussy."

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"B-r-r-r-r!" said Wally. And he marched indignantly out of the study with the other two fags, and Curly Gibson closed the door with unnecessary force.

"I am weally awfully sowwy, you chaps," said D'Arcy.

"Don't mench," said Figgins politely.

"Accidents will happen in the best regulated studies. I hope your father isn't ill!" Arthur Augustus frowned in a worried way.

"The fact is, deah boy, I'm afraid he is, or else there is somethin' w'ong at home. He wouldn't have left me in the lurch in this remarkable way otherwise."

"Might have forgotten all about it," suggested Kangaroo.

"No feah. I w'ote to him yestahday, and, besides, it would be impos, undah the circs, for a D'Arcy to forget a pwomise."

"The D'Arcy's," said Lowther solemnly, "have first-class and well-established memories, which they brought over with the Conqueror."

"Sure, and it's hungry I am," remarked Reilly. "I've got five shillings, and anybody who feels inclined to come to the tuckshop with me can come."

And Reilly left the study, promptly followed by Fatty Wynn of the New House. Kangaroo followed, and then Redfern and Owen and Lawrence melted away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's distress was so evident that they forbore to give any expression to disappointment or indignation.

"If you chaps feel inclined to come over to the New House," said Figgins hospitably, "we've got half a tin of sardines and two rolls."

Figgins' generous offer was not jumped at. Together with Kerr he took his leave. The Terrible Three remained alone in the study, with the Fourth-Formers, and the imposing array of crockeryware—no longer wanted.

"It's weally wotten," Arthur Augustus repeated.

"Horrible," said Blake. "You must excuse us, you fellows. Gussy is always putting his blessed foot in it, and this is only once more."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Tom Merry. "I only hope it's only a case of forgetfulness, and that there is nothing wrong at Eastwood House."

"I feah there is somethin' w'ong," said Arthur Augustus.

"But your mater would let you know," said Tom.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"The matah's away," he explained. "My eldah bwothah Conway, is abwod with the matah, at Cannes. But Pilkington ought to have informed me."

"Who's Pilkington?"

"The butlah—our new butlah—a weally weliahle old chap," said Arthur Augustus. "I should certainly have expected to heah fwom Pilkington if the patah was ill. I weally think I will send a wiah to Pilkington and ask him what is w'ong, if you fellows will excuse me."

"Hold on," said Tom Merry. "You can send Toby with the wire. We're not quite stony in our study, and if you fellows would care to come to tea—"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake heartily.

"Now you're talking," said Herries.

"Corn in Egypt!" said Digby. "I hope it won't be another feast of the giddy Rammeeds like this—with nothing to eat."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Our board is frugal, but all are welcome," he said. "Better bring some of the crocks along with you—you've got all ours."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will w'ite out the telegwam, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "But once more pway allow me to apologise for the wotten fiasco—"

"Oh, that's all right."

"You get the giddy wire ready, and I'll call young Lynn," said Blake.

"Wight-ho! I twust some of you fellows can lend me some tin to pay for the telegwam; I am weally stony, you know."

"Heaps!" said Tom Merry cordially.

"It will be a wathah long telegwam," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully, as he sat down at the table and drew pen and ink

and a sheaf of impot paper from the drawer. "I must explain to the patah the weally awkward posish he has placed me in. Howevah, as you are comin' to Eastwood with me for the Chwistmas holidays, I will settle up with you at home, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus wrote out his telegram. His chums grinned as they read it over his shoulder.

"Dear pater—I was very much disappointed at not receiving the remittance as promised for to-day. It has placed me in a very awkward position, as I had invited quite a number of friends to tea, and there was no feed. I really cannot understand it at all, unless you are ill, which I trust is not the case. Will you kindly teleggraph me a fiver, and at the same time inform me whether there is anything wrong at home.—Your affectionate and anxious son, Arthur."

"You're going to teleggraph all that?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas; I have compressed it into as few words as poss., so as to save money, as we're in such beastly low funds, deah boy."

"Lucky you didn't write it at full length, then," said Tom Merry. "You would have had to wait for the fiver to come before you could teleggraph for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The boot-boy, was despatched with the teleggram and a pound note to pay for it! There was not likely to be much change.

Under the cheering influence of tea and toast and poached eggs the chums' spirits revived, but a cloud remained upon the noble brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He persisted in thinking that the non-arrival of the fiver meant that there was something seriously wrong in the household of Lord Eastwood, his noble pater.

The other fellows considered it quite probable that Lord Eastwood had forgotten all about the matter—indeed, as Manners feelingly remarked, they had all been through such experiences themselves.

But Arthur Augustus was not to be convinced.

He explained to his grinning hearers that it was utterly imposs. for a D'Arcy to forget any engagement that he had made.

And he waited with anxiety for a reply to his teleggram. But the reply did not come.

Tea in Tom Merry's study lasted a good while, but when it was over the reply to the teleggram had not arrive?

"Somethin' happened to the patah!" said D'Arcy, with conviction.

"Then the telegram won't be opened," said Blake.

"Yaas; his secwetawey will attend to it, and weply," said D'Arcy. "Or Pilkington. One of them ought to weply at once."

After tea the juniors descended to the doorway of the School House to wait for the expected reply. Tom Merry & Co. were curious, though they did not quite share Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's anxiety.

In the winter dusk a lad in post office uniform was seen at last coming across the quad, through the powdered snow, and he was heading for the School House.

"Heah he is, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, it's for me. Hand it ovah!"

Arthur Augustus opened the telegram. Then he gave a sudden start and uttered an ejaculation.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Bad news?" exclaimed all the juniors together, with real concern.

"It's extwardinaway!"

"But what is it?"

"It is vewy we-markable—"

"What's the news, you ass?" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Blake jerked the telegram away from the swell of St. Jim's and held it up for all the juniors to read. And they read it with wonder. It ran:

"Lord Eastwood disappeared three days ago. Am sending car to fetch you home at once.—PILKINGTON."

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus in Distress!

"DISAPPEARED!"

"Lord Eastwood!"

"Three days ago!"

"Great pip!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his famous monocle into his eye and stared blankly at the telegram. His aristocratic face had gone quite pale. Although he was sometimes a little severe upon his noble pater for shortcomings in the matter of sending fivers, he was deeply attached to his father, and the news was a shock to

"Disappeahed!" he murmured. "The poor old patah! I told you there was somethin' w'ong, deah boys! This is weally tewwible!"

"But—but how could he disappear?" said Tom Merry. "There must be some mistake. I suppose your man Pilkington isn't a practical joker, is he?"

"Certainly not! He is a vewy gwave and reliabie butlah—quite a pawagon of butlahs! What can possibly have happened to the patah? The poor old patah!"

There was a break in Arthur Augustus' voice.

"It's rotten!" said Tom sympathetically. "But he must be found. Blessed if I can understand how he could disappear! You'll hear all about it from the chauffeur when the car arrives."

Arthur Augustus nodded, and moved away by himself. He was very much upset, and he did not wish to show it. The Co. discussed the matter with great excitement. When the school broke up they were to go home with D'Arcy to Eastwood House for the Christmas holidays, but under the circumstances the holiday was not likely to be the cheerful time they had anticipated. But they did not think of that. They were thinking of the distress of their chum.

The news was soon all over the School House. Arthur Augustus had retired to Study No. 6, not wishing to be the object of curious glances and questions.

Almost all the fellows were sympathetic. Levison, of the Fourth, suggested that Lord Eastwood had disappeared of his own accord, pointing out that he was director of several City companies, and that City directors sometimes found it convenient to disappear. He suggested that a telegram should be sent to the Argentine Republic to inquire for the missing earl. But Blake promptly bumped Levison on the floor, and Herries trod on him, and the cad of the Fourth ceased to make humorous suggestions.

In the absence of all particulars it was difficult to guess what had happened, or what was the state of affairs at Eastwood House. But the fellows who were to spend their Christmas holidays at Eastwood House consulted about the matter. Manners suggested that, under the circumstances, D'Arcy might not care to be bothered with them.

"Possibly," Tom Merry agreed. "On

the other hand, we might help him look for his pater. If he's really disappeared, the police must be looking for him. But I dare say we could do it a little better."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

"Let's put it to Gussy and see," suggested Figgins.

And the prospective guests of Eastwood House proceeded to Study No. 6 in a body. There was quite a party of them—the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Figgins & Co., of the New House. The seven juniors found Arthur Augustus pacing up and down the study with a pale and distressed face, and his eyeglass dangling forlornly at the end of its cord. Never had they seen their noble chum in such a state of distress.

"Cheer up, Gussy!" said Figgins kindly. "I dare say it won't turn out to be so serious when you know about it. The car must be here soon."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Pway excuse my bein' in this wotten distwacted state, deah boys," he said, "but I am weally vewy much distwessed about the poor old patah!"

"What do you think about our coming down to Eastwood?" said Tom Merry bluntly. "If you don't care for it under the circs., don't mind saying so. We shan't mind."

Arthur Augustus looked quite alarmed.

"My deah chaps, you're not goin' to desert me in this wotten posish?" he exclaimed.

"No fear! But if we should be in the way—"

"But pewwaps you would not care for a vacation at Eastwood House undah these misewable circs.," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It would spoil your Chwistmas holiday. Of course, until the patah is found it won't be vewy jolly there. If you would wathah not come I shall not be offended."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"It's not that," said Tom Merry. "We'd like to come and help you look for your pater."

"Yaas, that's just what I was thinkin' deah boys," said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "If he has disappeared for thwee days the police must be lookin' for him, and as they haven't found him, it shows that it's time somebody else took the mattah in hand. If you fellows don't mind sacwificin' your

Chwistmas holidays on my account, I should vewy much like you to come and help me."

"Done!" said Lowther.

"Right-ho!" said Kangaroo. "We're coming, then. And depend on it, we'll find Lord Eastwood all right. If he disappeared at Eastwood he can't be very far away, and we'll find him all right. It's a pity we can't come with you to-day!"

"I was thinkin' of askin' the Head to let you come back with me in the cah, deah boys."

"Hurrah!"

"If you think it is a good ideah, I will pwoceed to the Head at once and make the wequest."

"I'm afraid he won't see it, but there's no harm in asking," said Tom Merry.

"Buzz off now, and if he says yes, we'll get our things ready to start."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus left the study to proceed to interview the Head. Tom Merry & Co. waited anxiously for his return. He came back in about ten minutes with the cloud still on his brow.

"Well?" demanded all the juniors eagerly.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Dr. Holmes is vewy much concerned," he said, "but he thinks that the police must be lookin' for the patah, and that they can handle the mattah bettah than we can. He says I can take two of my fwinds with me, but he weally cannot give permish for so many fellows to leave the school befoah bweakin' up."

"Only two?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Yaas; two fellows in my own Form."

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice. As they were in the Shell, that barred them out.

Herries and Digby and Blake exchanged glances.

"I'll tell you what!" said Herries. "I'll come and bring Towser with me."

"Towsah!"

"Yes; my bulldog, you know. You know what a splendid ripper Towser is at following a trail. He'll smell out what's become of Lord Eastwood in next to no time," said Herries confidently.

"Ahem!"

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake politely. "He'd never smell out anything but a

steak or a red herring. Of course I'm one of the two, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Then I'll be the other," said Herries.

"I'll bring Towser, and—"

"Excuse me!" said Digby. "Under the cires, I think I'd better be the other. You see, Gussy will want looking after—"

"Yes; I'll look after him," agreed Herries.

"Now, look here, Herries—"

"Look here, Digby—"

"Toss up for it!" suggested Kangaroo.

"Yaas, that's a good ideah, deah boys."

And Herries and Digby tossed up for it; and Arthur Augustus was observed to breathe a sigh of relief when Digby won the toss. He had not been overjoyed by Herries' kind offer to bring Towser. As Arthur Augustus often remarked, Herries' bulldog had no respect whatever for a fellow's trousers.

"It's Blake and Dig," said Tom Merry, while Herries grunted. "Get your bags ready, you chaps; the car can't be long now."

Zip-zip-zip! Hoot! Hoot!

"There it is, in the quad.!" exclaimed Blake.

And Arthur Augustus rushed downstairs to meet the Eastwood car.

CHAPTER 4.

Levison Eats His Words!

THE big Daimler car stopped outside the School House, and the chauffeur stepped down, as Arthur Augustus came dashing out. The chauffeur

ouched his cap to him. Arthur Augustus caught him by the arm in his excitement. In his anxiety for his father, the swell of St Jim's had quite lost the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"What has happened to my patah, Wuggles? Pway tell me at once!"

Ruggles was looking very grave.

"Lord Eastwood disappeared three days ago, Master Arthur," he said. "Nothin' has been heard of him since. The police have been at Eastwood House looking for him—and they're still looking for him; but he ain't been found."

"Bai Jove! I ought to have been informed befoah!"

"Mr. Pilkington did not wish to worry

you, sir, as you could not do anything," said Ruggles. "But when your telegram came to-day, he sent me off with the car to fetch you."

"But how did the patah disapeah? Was there an accident?"

"Nothing is known, sir. Lord Eastwood stayed up in the library after the rest of the house had gone to bed, and he was missing in the morning. His bed had not been slept in. A door was found open, and that was all."

"Gweat Scott! And has no twace of him been found?"

"Yes, sir—his hat was picked up in a field nearly a mile from Eastwood House. Excepting for that, there is nothing known."

"Then he must have left the house of his own accord, Wuggles?"

"So the police suppose, sir; but what became of him afterwards, nobody knows. Only—only—" The chauffeur hesitated.

"What—what? Quick, deah boy!"

"The servants say that the Eastwood ghost has been seen and heard since Lord Eastwood disappeared, sir. That is all!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"What's that about the ghost?" said Tom Merry. "Don't let rot like that worry you, Gussy. Pull yourself together."

"I—I—I don't let it wowwy me, deah boy, but—but—" Arthur Augustus faltered. "You don't know the ghost stowy in our family, you see. There's a legend in Eastwood House that when the ghost of Sir Bulkeley D'Arcy walks, it means the death of the head of the family. Of course, there's nothin' in it, but—but my patah has disapeahed."

Blake squeezed his arm affectionately.

"Buck up, old son; we'll find him soon enough," he said. "We'll be ready in a jiffy, and get off in the car. Come and get your coat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It did not take the three juniors long to get ready. Wally had gone off to the village tuckshop with Jameson and Curly, and, so far, he knew nothing of the strange news from Eastwood House. Blake and Digby and D'Arcy came out in their coats and mufflers, and their bags were placed in the car.

"Send us a wire to-morrow to tell us how you're getting on," said Tom Merry hope-

fully; "and the day after to-morrow we shall be with you, you know."

"And I'll bring Towser with me," said Herries.

And the chums shook hands and parted.

The car drove away, and disappeared in the gloom, leaving Tom Merry & Co. in a state of great anxiety and excitement.

They would greatly have preferred to accompany their chum, and help him in the attempt to solve the mystery of his father's disappearance; though, as a matter of absolute fact, it was not likely that they would succeed where the police had failed.

What had happened to Lord Eastwood?

Well the juniors remembered the stately, kind-hearted old gentleman who had welcomed, more than once, his son's chums to holidays at Eastwood House.

Would they ever see him again?

Had there been some terrible accident, and was the body of the kind old gentleman hidden under some frozen stream, or had he been kidnapped? One of the two theories seemed certain, but which, and how, and why? It was an impenetrable mystery.

Their anxiety for their chum threw a cloud over the spirits of the School House fellows, and Figgins & Co. fully shared their feelings.

The Terrible Three were discussing the matter in their study an hour later when Wally burst in. Wally was in a state of great excitement.

"Look here, what's all this about?" he exclaimed. "What's this about my governor disappearing? I've just heard it from Levison. Levison says there's news that he's bunked with the funds of the Solid Bank."

"The rotter!"

"I dotted him on the nose," said Wally, who showed signs of conflict. "I knew he was lying, of course. But what has happened? You chaps know, of course."

Tom Merry explained all he knew.

D'Arcy minor listened breathlessly.

"The poor old governor!" he exclaimed.

"How rotten that I wasn't here when the car came. And it's too late for a train to-night. But I shall jolly well buzz off in the morning, and see what's going on, you bet!"

And Wally, looking much more serious than was customary with the reckless scamp of the Third, walked out of the study.

A little later, when the Terrible Three had finished their preparation and were coming downstairs, they heard the sound of uproar from the junior Common-room. Wally's voice could be heard raised in tones of angry indignation, amid chuckles from other fellows. The chums of the Shell hurried into the room.

Levison, of the Fourth, was standing before a paper placard pinned up on the wall of the Common-room. A number of fellows were grinning over the placard. It bore the words in Levison's hand:

"NINEPENCE REWARD!

"WHEREAS Lord Tomnoddy has Mysteriously Disappeared with the Funds of the Bank of which he was director, and whereas the Police have been unable to trace him:

"The above REWARD will be paid to anybody giving information leading to his discovery and conviction!

"BY ORDER."

Wally was crimson with fury, and he was trying to get at Levison, but Croke, of the Shell, and Mellish, of the Fourth, were holding him back.

"You cad!" roared Wally. "You rotten outsider! You worm! Leggo! Lemme get at him! I'll smash him! I'll——"

"What's the matter with you?" grinned Levison. "Lord Tomnoddy isn't a relation of yours, is he, young shaver?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean that for my father, you rotten cad!" howled Wally, struggling to get away from Croke and Mellish.

"Cap fit, cap wear," chuckled Levison.

"If your pater has disappeared with the bank funds, of course that might apply to him. But you said he hadn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme go! I'll smash him!"

"Take that rubbish down," said Kerruish, of the Fourth. "It's a dirty, caddish thing to make jokes about what's happened to D'Arcy's pater."

"Mind your own business!" said Croke.

The Terrible Three came in, and they marched upon the scene at once. Tom Merry caught Levison by the shoulder.

"You'll take that paper down, you cad!" he said.

"I won't!" said Levison.

"Yes, you will," said Tom, grasping him by the back of the collar, and swinging him to the wall where the paper was pinned. "You're a lying cad, and you know that isn't true. You're going to eat your words. Take it down!"

"Grooh! Leggo my collar!" mumbled Levison. "You're choking me, you idiot!"

"Will you take that paper down?"

"No!" howled Levison.

Tom Merry raised his right boot, and it came into violent contact with Levison's trousers. There was a roar of anguish from the cad of the Fourth.

"Ow! Oh! Yarocoop!"

"Now take it down!"

Levison was helpless in the powerful grip of the captain of the Shell. Sullenly he grabbed the placard down from the wall.

"Now you're going to eat your words!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"What do you mean?" snarled Levison.

Tom Merry pointed to the paper with his disengaged hand.

"There are your lies, written on that paper. Eat them!"

"Eat that paper? Are you dotty?"

"Not at all! You're going to eat it," said Tom Merry determinedly. "It won't be nice—it's never nice to swallow one's own rotten lies—but you've got to do it. Wally, there's Gussy's cane in the corner. Get it!"

Crooke and Mellish had released Wally—under forcible pressure from Manners and Lowther. Wally grinned, and ran for the cane. Tom Merry exerted his strength, and twisted Levison over on the hearthrug, face downwards.

"Now thrash him, till he eats his words," he said.

"What-ho!" grinned Wally.

The cane rose and fell with vigorous lashes.

"Whack, whack, whack!"

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Levison. "You—ow! Crooke—Mellish—Gore—lend me a hand, you cads! Rescue! Ow!"

But Crooke and Mellish and Gore did not lend him a hand. And the other fellows stood round grinning, not all disapproving of the punishment of the cad of the Fourth.

"Whack, whack, whack!"

"We're waiting!" said Tom Merry.

Levison made a desperate effort, but he

could not get loose, and still the dust rose from his nether garments under the lashes of the cane. Wally was putting all his energy into it.

"Ow, ow, ow! Leave off!" yelled Levison. "I—I—I'll eat it—yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison grabbed the paper and stuffed it into his mouth, amid roars of laughter from the fellows looking on. Wally suspended operations while the cad of the Fourth furiously masticated the extremely unsavoury article of diet. Not until he had fairly eaten his words—with the paper they were written on—was Levison released.

"Now, you buzz off, and keep your funny little jokes for a more suitable occasion," said Tom Merry, shaking a warning finger at him.

And Levison, choking with rage and with his unpleasant morsel, limped away. And there were no more jokes from Levison of the Fourth upon the subject of Lord Eastwood's mysterious disappearance.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy's Homecoming!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was silent as the big car rolled swiftly through the gloom.

Through long, dark roads, under shadowy, leafless trees, the motor-car rushed on, the powerful lamps gleaming out far ahead through the darkness.

Blake and Digby were silent, too.

They tried at first to cheer up their companion with hopeful words; but it was useless. Arthur replied, only in monosyllables, and at last the two juniors ceased their good-natured attempts.

The swell of St. Jim's wrinkled his brows in troubled thought. His anxiety for his father was keen, and always there was a dread in his breast that something terrible had happened, and that he would never see him again.

If he were still living, where was he? How could he have been spirited away from his own home? If he had left the house of his own accord, as the finding of his hat in the field seemed to indicate, where was he now, and why had he not returned? If he had been taken by force, then by whom—and for what reason? Arthur

Augustus tried to puzzle out those questions as the car rushed on at breathless speed.

Mile after mile flew under the racing wheels, but the pace seemed slow to the anxious junior.

Would he never be home?

Easthorpe at last—the village near Eastwood House—where the juniors were to play the village team in a football match during the holidays. Arthur Augustus was not thinking much about football now. Unless his father was found, his Christmas holidays were not likely to be happy ones. The car slacked down in the village street. Outside the Eastwood Arms, Mr. Boker, the fat village constable, touched his helmet to Arthur Augustus as the car ran by, and, worried as he was, Arthur Augustus did not fail to raise his hat politely in acknowledgment of the salute. Then on up the road to Eastwood House—a pause at the park gates—and then up the drive, and Arthur Augustus was home at last.

The swell of St. Jim's jumped out of the car.

A stout, imposing, florid-complexioned gentleman in whiskers came forward to meet him as he alighted. It was the inestimable Pilkington. Upon Pilkington's florid face was a look of gravity and concern, which matched his stately manner and his respectable whiskers.

"Has anythin' been heard yet?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hastily.

The butler shook his head.

"I am sorry to say not, Master Arthur," he said sadly. "There has been no news."

"The police—"

"They are not here now, sir."

"And nothin'—nothin' has been heard—or discovered—nothin' at all?"

"Not yet, Master Arthur; but the detectives have hopes of finding his lordship soon," said Pilkington, with respectful sympathy. "Mr. Dodder of Scotland Yard is in charge of the case. He has been here several times, and I have taken the liberty, sir, of offering him a room."

"Quite wight, Pilkington. Has my brotah been told?"

"Lord Conway was informed by wire, sir," said Pilkington. "But Lady Eastwood is not at present in sufficiently good health to be informed, and Lord Conway has therefore not started for England."

"All wight, Pilkington," said Arthur Augustus wearily. "Have some wooms got

weady for my fiwends, will you—the othah chaps are comin' to-mowwow."

"Certainly, sir."

"Come in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was hopin' you'd come undah wathah more cheewy cires, you know; this it wathah wotten for you."

"Don't mench!" said Blake. "We're here to make ourselves useful. We're going to start on the hunt at once."

"Yes, rather!" said Digby emphatically.

They were in the hall when they made those remarks. Pilkington turned round and glanced at them curiously.

But it was only for a second that the stately Pilkington allowed so common a feeling as curiosity to influence him. Then his face was wooden and expressionless again.

"The Painted Room has been prepared for you, Master Arthur," he said.

"Good! The next two wooms will do for my fiwends, then, as they join. Come up with me, deah boys!"

And the juniors went upstairs.

Pilkington turned on the electric light in the Painted Room.

It was a large and handsome bed-room, with a balcony that gave a view of Eastwood Park in the daytime. The walls were of paneled oak, and the ceiling, which was of wood, was painted in the Italian style, with a blue sky and a scene from mythology. It was an old room, and its decoration dated from the days of Charles II. In the centre of the ceiling, amid the grouping nymphs, a fat and jolly-looking Bacchus reclined under clusters of ripe, purple grapes—a figure more than life-size, with lips that seemed to grin, and eyes that seemed to wink over the enjoyment of the foaming goblet he held in his hand. Round the figures and the grape-vine was painted the blue sky of Greece, and it was from that ceiling that the room derived its name.

"This is a jolly room, Gussy!" said Blake, glancing up at the painted ceiling. "You've changed your quarters. You weren't in here the last time we came down."

"No; why have you changed my woom, Pilkington?" asked D'Arcy. "Why didn't you get my old quartahs weady for me?"

"I am sorry, sir, but your old room is out of repair," said Pilkington. "There has been a fall of plaster from the ceiling, and the chimney is also out of order. Under

the circumstances, sir, I had this room prepared."

"Very good, Pilkington; it's all wight. This is quite an histowic charabah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "The Lord Eastwood, in the weign of George III. was found dead in this woom, so they say, killed by a sword-thwust, and the doer was locked on the inside, and nobody knew how the othah chap got away. Of course, that's all wot—unless he let himself down with a wope fwom the balcony. Pway have suppah pwepared, Pilkington!"

And the butler departed.

On either side of the Painted Room were doors communicating with the next apartments, and those were the rooms Blake and Digby were to occupy; but the rooms were not prepared for them yet, their arrival with Arthur Augustus that night being unexpected.

It had occurred to Jack Blake that the respectable Pilkington was not overpleased to see their arrival with Arthur Augustus; perhaps not wishing to be bothered by guests in the house during the period of anxiety that followed Lord Eastwood's disappearance. But as Pilkington's wishes in the matter were not of any consequence, Blake did not allow that to trouble him.

Supper was ready for the juniors when they came down, and both Blake and Digby were ready for it.

Arthur Augustus had very little appetite; indeed, he would not have eaten at all had not Jack Blake ordered him to do so, with all the authority of the leader of Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

"You've got work before you, if we're going to find your pater," said Blake, "and you've got to eat. You know what Fatty Wynn says—lay a solid foundation."

Arthur Augustus smiled faintly.

"I feel wathah upset," he explained.

"You'll feel still more upset if you don't eat," said Blake. "Now, pile into that chicken, and I'll watch you."

"I'd wathah not—"

"Under the present circumstances, Gussy, especially as your guest, I should be very sorry to give you a thick ear," said Blake. "But I shall certainly give you one if you don't start on that chicken at once."

And Arthur grinned a little and started on the chicken.

It did him good, too, and a glass of wine

after it brought the colour back to his cheeks.

Pilkington himself waited upon the juniors, and he did it superbly. There was no doubt that Lord Eastwood had a treasure of a butler in Pilkington.

During supper the juniors asked him incessant questions concerning the amazing disappearance of his master, and Pilkington gave them all the information that was known.

Lord Eastwood had stayed up writing in the library. The rest of the household had gone to bed. Pilkington understood that his lordship had been busy with some papers relating to the Anglo-South-American Syndicate, an enterprise of which he was a director. Papers relating to the syndicate had been found on the library table in the morning. His lordship had not gone to bed.

His room had been found unoccupied, his bed un slept in, by his valet in the morning.

But Pilkington had found a door open, which had certainly been locked as usual overnight, and so it was evident that Lord Eastwood had left the house.

As he did not return, the household became anxious for him, and when his hat was found at some distance from Eastwood House, Pilkington called in the aid of the police.

The local police discovered nothing, and Mr. Dodder, a prominent detective from Scotland Yard, came down to investigate.

Lord Eastwood's eldest son, Lord Conway, was kept informed by telegram, and he gave instructions for what was to be done.

That the earl had left the house of his own accord seemed certain, for how could he have been taken away by violence without a sound being heard?

But where he had gone since—what had become of him—was a mystery.

His colleagues of the Anglo-South-American Syndicate were very anxious about him, and from them, and from many other gentlemen, Pilkington had received a whole sheaf of telegrams of inquiry.

It seemed that the affairs of the syndicate required Lord Eastwood's presence urgently.

"And is there no theory as to what has happened?" asked Arthur Augustus. "What does Mr. Doddah think?"

"That he has not confided to me, sir," said Pilkington, and if it had been possible to suspect the stately butler of sarcasm,

Blake could have sworn that there was a sarcastic inflection in Pilkington's voice.

But Arthur Augustus did not notice it. He would never have dreamed of suspecting Pilkington of impertinence.

"But what do othah people think?" asked D'Arcy.

Pilkington coughed.

"There have been some unpleasant suggestions, sir, by persons unacquainted with his lordship's character," he admitted.

D'Arcy flushed.

"Whatevah do you mean, Pilkington?"

"Please do not make me say any more, sir. It would be an impertinence even to repeat the unpleasant suggestions that have been made."

"Tell me at once, Pilkington."

"Ahem!"

"I am waitin'," said Arthur Augustus sharply.

"If you insist, sir——"

"Yaas, I do—pway get on, and don't waste time."

"Ahem! Well, sir, it has been suggested—I hardly like to continue——"

"You are wastin' time."

"Ahem! Well, sir, it has been whispered—people will talk scandal, sir," said Pilkington apologetically—"that—that——"

"That what?" demanded Arthur Augustus, exasperated.

"That Lord Eastwood has disappeared of his own accord, sir, and that he could return if he wished. Of course, it is an infamous suggestion, and I am sorry you have compelled me to mention it, sir."

"The wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his nose. "The uttah wottahs! But I only wish I could think it was twue, and that the patah was really safe and sound all the time."

"We're going to find him," said Blake determinedly.

Pilkington's eyes turned upon him.

"You, sir," he said, and then added, at once. "Pray excuse me, sir, for speaking."

"That's all right," said Blake. "We're going to find him. Tom Merry and the rest will be here to-morrow, and we'll simply ransack the whole county for him, if necessary."

"I trust you will be successful, sir," said Pilkington respectfully. "It would be very gratifying to Mr. Dodder if you could assist him."

This time Blake felt certain that the

serious and solemn Pilkington was speaking sarcastically, and he felt an inclination to bestow his boot upon the stout and stately person of the butler.

He had an uncomfortable feeling that Pilkington, under his solemn reserve, and almost obsequious respect, was laughing at him in his sleeve. Such a thought would never have occurred to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who simply could never have realised that a servant could be capable of making fun, to himself, of his master, or his master's friends. If Arthur Augustus had had any experience of the servants' hall he would have been very much enlightened on that point.

"Let's begin," said Blake abruptly.

"Yaas, wathah! You can go to bed now, Pilkington, if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "We're goin' to start lookin' for my patah."

"Ahem! To-night, sir."

"Yaas, at once."

"Perhaps I can be of some assistance, Master Arthur," Pilkington suggested respectfully. "If you will allow me to help, it will be very gratifying to me."

"Vewy good," said D'Arcy. "Come on, deah boys! We will go to the libwawy first, and begin at the beginning."

And the juniors rose from the supper-table to begin their quest.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Dead of Night!

PILKINGTON led the way to the library.

Exactly what they were going to do, or how they were going to do it, the chums of St. Jim's did not know.

But one thing was certain. They could not rest until they had made an attempt, at least, to penetrate the mystery of the disappearance of Lord Eastwood.

The discovery that idle tongues were gossiping about his father's disappearance made Arthur Augustus keener than ever.

The household were all in bed at that late hour, with the exception of the butler and D'Arcy and his guests.

How to begin the quest they did not know. As D'Arcy said, they had to be guided by "circs." Arthur Augustus prided himself a little on his abilities as an amateur detective, and he had a vague hope of finding a clue of some sort.

The library was a vast apartment, book-lined from floor to ceiling, and where there were no books, the walls were of panolled oak, that gleamed in the electric light.

Pilkington stood in an attitude of respectful attention while the juniors began to search for clues.

"Undah such cires, Sherlock Holmes genewally finds the ash of a cigawette, or somethin'," said Arthur Augustus hopefully. "H'm!" said Blake.

No such clue was discovered in the library.

After ten minutes of looking about them and pondering, the juniors had to admit that nothing was to be discovered there.

In spite of themselves, they were growing discouraged.

Lord Eastwood seemed to have vanished without leaving a trace behind, and without a clue to follow. How could they hope to discover what had become of him?

"By the way, what was that Wuggles was sayin' about the ghost?" Arthur Augustus exclaimed suddenly. "Tell us about that, Pilkington."

The butler allowed himself a slight smile.

"It was some nonsense, sir, of Henry's."

"Who's Henry?" asked Blake.

"The second footman, sir."

"Good! Go on. What did Henry see?"

"I am afraid he saw nothing, sir, but he fancied he did. It was the night after his lordship's disappearance, sir, and it seems that Henry was uneasy, and came down to ascertain that all the doors and windows were locked. He asserts that he saw a dark figure in this room, that passed so close to him that he felt it breathe; but as he turned on the electric light, it vanished."

"That sounds like wot," said D'Arcy.

"I fear so. Henry's nerves must have been disturbed by the strange disappearance of his lordship."

"I will speak to Henry in the mornin'. So it was in this room that he fancied he saw the ghost?"

"Yes, sir."

"No trace of him left," said Digby.

"Let's see the door that was found open. There might be finger-prints or something. They find out lots of things at Scotland Yard through finger-prints and things."

"Yaas, come on."

Pilkington led the way again. They passed from the library into the picture-gallery, where fine old paintings glimmered from the walls, and the faces of a hundred

dead and gone D'Arcy's looked down upon their descendant.

At the end of the picture-gallery was a door giving on a balcony, where there were steps to the terrace.

"This door was found unfastened, sir," said Pilkington. "His lordship must have left the house this way, as most convenient at the time."

The three juniors examined the door attentively. Pilkington stood with an expressionless face while they did so. He seemed to have no desire then but to be respectfully useful, and yet Blake was certain that he was secretly regarding the whole proceedings as a foolish fancy of boyish minds.

And, indeed, if Pilkington looked at it in that light, it was not without some reason, Blake had to confess. What could they hope to discover, where a Scotland Yard detective had failed to find any clue?

Certainly they found nothing here. Arthur Augustus looked doubtfully at his chums.

"You fellows gettin' sleepy?" he asked.

"No fear!" said Digby manfully, stifling a yawn.

"We're going to see this through," said Blake.

"Wight-ho! Then we'll get a lantern, and go to the place where my patah's hat was found. Is it fah fwom heah, Pilkington?"

"About a mile, sir."

"You fellows willin'?"

"Yes, rather," said Blake; and Digby nodded assent.

"Ahem! It is considerably past midnight, sir," hinted Pilkington. "Perhaps in the morning. Master Arthur——"

"You can go to bed if you like, Pilkington. Just tell us where——"

"Not at all, sir. I was not thinking of myself," said Pilkington in a grievous tone. "I was thinking of your health, sir. I should be very pleased and gratified, sir, to have the honour of guiding you to the spot."

"Then get a lantern, please."

"At once, Master Arthur."

Pilkington departed, and returned in a few minutes with a lighted lantern. Then the four left the picture-gallery, and descended the stone steps to the terrace, and the butler led the way across the grounds. They quitted the park, and followed the course of the river beyond, along the towing-path by the frozen stream.

Pilkington, holding the lantern with the light gleaming out before him, turned from the river into a field.

Under a group of frosty, leafless willows, he stopped.

"It was here, sir," he said.

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then it was some distance from the wivah?" he said.

"Certainly, sir."

"Then—then—it is imposs. that—that

"The river was frozen, sir, and the ice was unbroken," said Pilkington. "It was quite impossible that his lordship could have fallen into the river, sir."

"But, what on earth could he have wanted in this lovely field?" said Blake, puzzled. "I mean, if he came here of his own accord."

Pilkington coughed.

"Have you any ideah about it, Pilkington?" asked D'Arcy sharply.

"None, sir."

"You were thinkin' somethin'—what was it?"

"Ahem! The gossip I mentioned, sir. There is a road on the other side of this field, and the traces of a motor-car were found there. I am quite sure that it was a motor-car with which his lordship had no connection whatever; but you know how idle tongues will gossip, sir."

Arthur Augustus compressed his lips.

He understood that everything pointed to a voluntary disappearance on the part of Lord Eastwood. Across the field was a short cut to a lonely road, where a motor-car might have been in waiting.

"Bai Jove, there are footpwints!" said Arthur Augustus suddenly, scanning the ground in the light of the lantern.

"Yes, sir; nearly all the villagers have been here out of curiosity," said Pilkington gravely.

"Oh!"

There was evidently nothing to be done.

"Let us return deah boys," said D'Arcy heavily.

And they walked back through the dark night to Eastwood House.

Pilkington carefully closed and locked the door of the picture-gallery, and put out the lantern.

"The young gentlemen's rooms have been prepared, sir," he said.

"Yaas. I suppose we'd bettah go to

bed, deah boys; there's nothin' more to be done to-night."

And the juniors went upstairs.

Bright fires were burning in the wide, old-fashioned grates in the three adjoining rooms. Arthur Augustus threw himself into an armchair before his fire.

"Not going to bed?" asked Blake.

"I—I don't feel sleepy, weahy," said Arthur Augustus. "You chaps go to bed, and I'll turn in as soon as I think I can sleep."

"Better turn in" urged Dig.

But D'Arcy shook his head.

"We'll sit up with you," said Blake.

"Wats! It's fwithighfully late now, and we've got to be up early in the mornin' to start again. I shall be all wight. Good-night, deah boys."

And Blak and Digby, who were very tired and sleepy, went to bed.

The doors on either side of the Painted Room closed upon them, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left alone.

The swell of St. Jim's sat before the fire, watching the leaping flames among the logs, and thinking.

What had become of his father?

That was the question that hammered in his brain, and drove away all thought of sleep. He was tired, and heavy, but he could not sleep.

The house was still and silent.

It was past one o'clock, and still Arthur Augustus sat in the deep, old chair, watching the dying embers.

The room was brilliantly-illuminated by the electric light, the old panelled walls glimmered and gicamed in it. Arthur Augustus' gaze wandered to the painted ceiling, and he idly watched the graceful forms of the nymphs delineated there, and the jolly face of Bacchus, crowned with vine-leaves.

The face of the god of wine seemed to grin at him and the eyes to watch him with a derisive smile. Suddenly Arthur Augustus gave a violent start. It seemed to him that the painted eyes of the Bacchus had actually moved—that they were actually living, and were watching him.

"Bai Jove, I suppose I'm gettin' vewy dweamy!" he murmured.

He watched the painted figure in a fascinated way.

Was it imagination?

Could an eye painted by human hands

gleam at him in that manner—watching him?

A shudder ran through D'Arcy's limbs.

The stillness of the house was oppressive. He wished that Blake and Digby had been with him still. What was the matter with him—was he half-asleep and dreaming, or—or what was it? With a tremor running through him, and a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, D'Arcy, reclining in the deep chair, gazed upward at the painted ceiling—gazed at the painted eye that was watching him, and suddenly he sprang to his feet with a cry.

"It is alive! It is alive! Good heavens—"

The light suddenly went out, and the room was plunged into darkness.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

BLAKE sat up in bed and yawned. The clear, wintry sunlight was streaming in at the windows of his room.

It was morning—a cold, clear winter morning. There was frost on the windows, and outside the trees were powdered with white.

"My hat, it's late!" Blake exclaimed.

He looked at his watch.

"Ten o'clock! Great Scott!"

He jumped out of bed.

The juniors had intended to rise very early that morning to recommence the search for the missing earl. But they had gone to bed so late and tired that it was not surprising they had slept late in the morning. D'Arcy had given Pilkington instructions to knock at his door at seven o'clock, and he had intended to call his chums. But apparently sleep had calmed him.

Blake, shivering in his pyjamas, ran to the communicating door, and opened it. He half-expected to see Arthur Augustus asleep in the chair before the fireplace, but the chair was empty.

"Gussy, old man, wake up!"

But the bed was empty.

Blake whistled.

"The young ass; He's gone out without calling me. I wonder whether Dig's up?"

He went into Dig's room. Digby was fast asleep in bed sleeping the sleep of the just. Blake awoke him by the simple pro-

cess of jerking off the bedclothes. Digby gasped, and awakened immediately.

"Groo! I say, 'tain't rising-bell!"

"You're not in the Fourth Form dorm, now, fathead!" said Blake. "Wake up! It's past ten o'clock, and Gussy has gone out without us."

"Ow!" said Dig, rubbing his eyes. "All serene. Touch that bell for me."

"Where is Master D'Arcy?" Blake asked the servant who brought the hot water; but the man did not know.

The juniors hurried through their toilet, and went downstairs. They were both a little anxious about D'Arcy. Their chum had been so disturbed the previous night, and so unlike his usual calm self, that they did not like his getting out of their sight like this.

"Just like Gussy to let us have our snooze out, but I wish he had called us," said Blake. "He will be getting into some trouble if we don't look after him."

"Blessed if I know where he can have gone to," said Digby. "He must have slept in his clothes last night, a thing he's never done before, you bet. Poor old Gussy must have been awfully upset to sleep in his clothes."

Pilkington, grave and urbane as usual, bade the juniors a respectful good-morning in the breakfast-room.

"Where's Master D'Arcy?" Blake asked.

"He has not come down yet, sir."

Blake jumped.

"Not come down!"

"No, sir. I knocked at his door at seven o'clock this morning, as he desired; but as he did not reply, I concluded that he did not wish to rise. He retired at a very late hour last night, sir, as you are aware," added Pilkington, with a respectful smile.

The juniors stared at him.

"Do you think D'Arcy is still in his room, then?" exclaimed Blake.

Pilkington looked surprised.

"Why, certainly, sir."

"But he isn't!" exclaimed Blake excitedly. "His bed hasn't been slept in. He didn't go to bed last night at all."

"Good gracious, sir!" said Pilkington.

"I thought he had slept in the chair, and gone out early this morning, and not come in," said Blake.

"I suppose he must have done so, if he is not in his room, sir," said Pilkington.

"But it is certainly very odd, for I do not think he has been seen downstairs.

"Perhaps I had better question the servants, sir."

"Please do," said Blake.

The two juniors sat down to breakfast, while Pilkington went away to make inquiries for Arthur Augustus.

Blake and Digby were very uneasy.

It seemed hardly possible that anything had happened to D'Arcy. Yet—

Of course, he must be about the house or the grounds somewhere, they reasoned. But after the mysterious disappearance of Lord Eastwood, D'Arcy's vanishing in this way made them feel very disquieted.

Excellent as the fare was on the breakfast-table, the two juniors did not enjoy it. They were too worried. They had nearly finished their breakfast when Pilkington came back, looking graver than ever.

"It is extraordinary!" he said.

"Where is he?"

"No one has seen Master D'Arcy this morning, sir. I have asked all the servants, and also the gardeners, and everybody about the house, but he has not been seen. Is it not curious that he should go out in this way without leaving a word? I presume he is searching for some trace of his lordship."

Blake felt his heart sink.

"Something's happened to him," he said, with conviction. "He wouldn't go off like that without leaving a word, or telling us. It's impossible."

"Something's happened," repeated Digby.

"I have ordered the servants to look for Master D'Arcy, and have also spoken to the head-keeper," said Pilkington. "Perhaps he may be found further from the house. I think he had some intention of revisiting the field where his lordship's hat was found."

"We'll look there first," said Blake.

"Come on!" exclaimed Dig, jumping up from the table, and leaving his rashers and eggs unfinished. "I know something's happened."

"You can find the place, young gentlemen?" asked the butler.

"Well, no," said Blake, "I don't know the way. Get somebody to show us."

"I will have that pleasure myself, sir."

"Come on, then."

In a quarter of an hour they were in the field they had scanned the previous night. But there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was possible that the swell of St. Jim's was among the willows, examining the ground for tracks. They knew he had great faith in his powers as a Boy Scout.

But Blake and Digby searched through the frosty trees, and they did not find the swell of St. Jim's. But Dig uttered a sudden exclamation, and stooped and picked up something from the ground.

It was a handkerchief, marked with D'Arcy's monogram in the corner.

"That's Gussy's!" exclaimed Dig.

"Might have dropped it here last night," muttered Blake. But even as he spoke he shook his head. He knew that D'Arcy had not been on that precise spot while scanning the ground the night before.

"He's been here since," said Dig.

"Then where is he?"

There was no sign of him. They searched along the river, and through the fields and the park, anxiously calling to their chum. Pilkington, looking very disturbed and anxious, left them, and returned to the house. It was possible that Arthur Augustus had some reason for his sudden departure, and would return. But, under the circumstances, Pilkington declared that he had better telephone to the police in Easthorpe, and the juniors fully agreed with him.

All through the morning the search for the swell of St. Jim's went on.

The local police from Easthorpe, the gamekeepers, and others joined in the search, and about lunch-time Mr. Dodder of Scotland Yard arrived.

But the search was in vain.

Blake and Digby, tired out, and almost haggard with anxiety, gave up the search at last. There was no doubt about it—Arthur Augustus had mysteriously disappeared, even as his father had disappeared. The same mysterious fate had fallen upon both father and son. Pilkington wired to Lord Conway at Cannes, and Blake determined to send a wire to Tom Merry at St. Jim's. He felt a keen desire to have his chums with him now. D'Arcy must be found, and the more there was to help in the search the better. Blake wrote out a telegram, and asked Pilkington to send it to the post-office.

The butler took the form, and hesitated. "Pardon me, Master Blake," he said respectfully. "Under the circumstances, is it desirable for a number of schoolboys to

come here? Pray excuse my making the suggestion, but really——"

Blake stared at him. He did not like Pilkington, and he did not intend to be interfered with.

"You shouldn't have looked at my telegram," he said brusquely.

The butler made a deprecating gesture.

"Pray excuse me, sir. I really could not help seeing it as you handed it to me. If I may venture to suggest——"

"You mayn't," said Blake curtly. "I want the fellows to come, and as quickly as possible."

A slightly obstinate look came over Pilkington's face.

"Excuse me, sir," he said smoothly.

"But by Lord Conway's orders, I am in charge of the house during my master's absence. I fear that the presence of a number of young boys holiday-making in the house would be inconvenient at such a time, as well as—if I may be allowed to say so—somewhat unseemly."

Blake flushed with anger.

"Do you think we shall feel much inclined for holiday-making?" he broke out. "We're going to look for D'Arcy, and find him."

"I think, under the circumstances, it would be better not to," said Pilkington firmly. "I beg to repeat that I have Lord Conway's authority for taking the head of affairs here. I was even about to suggest that perhaps you two young gentlemen might prefer to return to your school, or to your homes, until this matter is cleared up."

Blake bit his lip hard.

He was greatly inclined to plant an angry fist upon Pilkington's ample waistcoat, but he restrained himself. The man was acting within his rights, even if he was making himself unpleasant; and it was easy, too, to understand that the staid and solemn butler would have been glad not to have the house crowded with schoolboys, under the present distressing circumstances. Blake and Dig were there as D'Arcy's guests. But D'Arcy was gone now. If Pilkington, as he stated, and as was doubtless correct, was placed in charge of affairs by Lord Conway he certainly had the right and the power to exclude the Christmas party, unless some member of the D'Arcy family came on the scene.

And at that thought, Blake remembered Wally.

Lord Eastwood was gone, his eldest son was at Cannes, with Lady Eastwood, and now Arthur Augustus had disappeared. But Wally, though only a fag in the Third Form at St. Jim's, was a person of importance at Eastwood House in the absence of all his relatives. Wally would soon put this cheeky butler in his place, and Wally was just the person to do it.

Blake's troubled and thoughtful silence lasted some minutes. Pilkington was the first to speak. Digby was looking on helplessly.

"At what hour shall I order the car for you, Master Blake?" he asked.

"You needn't order it at all," said Blake. "I'm not going. And to-day, too, Miss Cleveland will be here."

"Yes, Gussy said Cousin Ethel and her aunt were coming here to-day," said Digby.

Pilkington remained impassive.

"I have already wired to Miss Cleveland that, under the circumstances, it would be as well to delay her arrival," he said calmly.

"What!" ejaculated Dig.

"It seems to me that you are taking a jolly lot on yourself, Pilkington!" said Blake hotly. "Do you understand that we are here as your master's guests?"

"Quite so, sir—quite so. And I am grieved if you think that I have exceeded my duty," said Pilkington. "I hope I shall be able to explain satisfactorily to Lord Conway on his return, if you should feel compelled to complain of my conduct, which I trust will not be the case."

"When is Lord Conway coming?" asked Blake abruptly.

"At present his lordship is unable to leave Lady Eastwood, as her ladyship is far from enjoying good health," said Pilkington. "The date of his lordship's return is uncertain."

Blake set his teeth.

"Well, we're not going, and our friends are coming," he said. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. Mr. Cheeky Butler! Go and eat coke!"

And Blake marched out of the room indignantly, followed by Dig, leaving Pilkington looking considerably annoyed. The two juniors left the house, Blake leading the way.

"Where are we going?" asked Dig, as he followed his chum.

"Post-office," said Blake shortly.

"You're going to send that wire yourself?"

"Yes."

"But I—I say. Can they come, if that fat chap is really in authority in the house?" said Dig, hesitating. "We don't want to—to run another man's house for him, you know. Lord Eastwood mightn't like our disregarding his butler. And

"I know. But I'm not going till Gussy's found. Pilkington's a fat old fool, and he doesn't like boys about the place, that's all. I believe he's glad of an excuse to get rid of us. Only he's jolly well not going to get rid of us so easily. And this afternoon there'll be a crowd of us to worry him, too!" added Blake, with satisfaction.

And ten minutes later the telegram was despatched. And then the juniors walked back to Eastwood House, regardless of all the Pilkingtons in existence.

CHAPTER 8.

The Plot Thickens!

TOM MERRY & CO. came out of the dining-room in the School House.

They were looking unusually subdued.

Arthur Augustus had promised to send them a telegram to tell them how he was getting on at home, but the telegram had not arrived yet.

Figgins & Co. joined them in the quadrangle, looking very grave, too.

"Any news yet?" asked Figgins.

"No!" said Tom.

"Time Gussy wired," Kerr remarked. "I wish the Head had let us go with him yesterday. Still, we break up to-morrow morning."

"Wire may be coming now," said Kangaroo. "Let's get down to the gates and look for the post-office kid."

They strolled down to the school gates. It was close upon time for afternoon lesson when the telegraph-boy came in sight. He knew Tom Merry, and as he saw the captain of the Shell he took a telegram out of his wallet.

"This is for you, Master Merry," he said. "Thanks! News at last, you fellows!"

The juniors gathered round eagerly. Tom Merry opened the telegram, and they all read it together.

Then there was a general shout of consternation. For the telegram ran:

"Gussy disappeared last night. No trace. Come down at once, and bring Wally. Butler cutting up rusty, so Wally must come. Urgent.—BLAKE."

"Gussy disappeared!" ejaculated Figgins. "Well, this is getting thick!"

"Gussy, too!"

"What on earth does it mean?"

"It can't be a joke," said Tom Merry, staring blankly at the telegram. "Blake wouldn't play such a joke as that. But how on earth can Gussy have disappeared?"

"It simply puts the lid on," said Kangaroo. "Anyway, one thing's certain—we've got to go, and at once!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Queer, that about the butler cutting up rusty," said Kerr thoughtfully. "I suppose that's why Blake wants Wally, to keep him in order!"

"Let's find Wally!"

Wally was found on the football-ground, showing Jameson and Curly Gibson and Frayne of the Third what kicking for goal was really like when it was well done. He looked considerably muddy.

"Wally!" called out Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor came up at once, as he saw the telegram in the Shell fellow's hand. He was anxious for news from home.

"Wire from Gussy?" he asked.

"No; read it!"

Wally read the telegram, and gave a long whistle.

"Well, that beats it!" he ejaculated.

"That fairly beats the band! What on earth has become of Gussy?"

"Come with us to the Head," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get leave to-day, instead of to-morrow, and you've got to come."

"What-ho!" said Wally. "I'll jolly soon put old Pilkington in his place, if he's making things unpleasant. He's a solemn old codger, you know, and he don't like boys—never was a boy himself. I believe I never liked him. He complained to the pater once about Pongo getting into the music-room and chewing up the music—poor old Pongo! I'll get some of this mud off, and we'll go to the Head!"

The juniors lost no time in presenting themselves in the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes looked at them inquiringly.

"If you please, sir, we want to leave to-day, instead of to-morrow," began Tom Merry. "We are wanted at Eastwood House, sir!"

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"Something's happened to D'Arcy, sir— he can't be found," said Monty Lowther.

"And we want to help look for him," said Kangaroo.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Very well, my boys; under those circumstances, you may leave by the afternoon train," he said. "You may go now and pack."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry joyfully.

And the juniors hurried away to pack.

"I'm going to take Towser," Herries announced, when they came down in caps and coats, ready for the journey. "We shall need him to look for Gussy."

"Well, keep him away from Pongo, that's all!" said Wally, with a grunt. "Bring the beast if you like. Not that he could track out anything that wasn't eatable."

Wally took leave of his friends. Frayne and Curly were going home with Jameson on the morrow. The juniors started for the station, Pongo and Towser glaring and sniffing at one another en route. Towser and Pongo were not good friends.

But Tom Merry & Co. paid no heed to their canine friends, for their thoughts were centred on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and what had happened to their elegant chum.

And as the St. Jim's juniors tramped through the crisp white snow they did not observe a number of grinning faces that peered out at them over the thick, high hedge that bordered the road. Had they done so, things might have panned out differently. As it was, Gordon Gay & Co., lining the hedge, looked upon the unwary approach of their old rivals in high glee.

The Grammarians and the St. Jim's juniors were always at war—a friendly war that consisted of rags and japes throughout each term, the honours of which were about equally divided.

It looked now as if Gordon Gay & Co. had a splendid opportunity of winding up the term with a win in their favour.

Gordon Gay, the leader of the Grammarians, ran his eye over Tom Merry & Co. as, all unsuspecting, they tramped towards the spot where their rivals lay concealed.

"Seven of them," said Gordon Gay to his chums, "and that cheeky fag D'Arcy minor is with 'em."

"Good!" chuckled Frank Wootton. "We'll give it to the swankers hot and strong!"

"What-ho!" said Monk, with a grin.

"How's the ammunition?" inquired Gay.

"Stacks of it!" chuckled Carboy.

"Enough for those St. Jim's asses, and chance it!" said Frank Wootton.

Gordon Gay looked on approvingly as his followers swiftly moulded snowballs and placed them on the growing pile which was apparently the ammunition dump.

There was a surprise in store for Tom Merry & Co.

Gordon Gay peeped through a gap in the hedge, and placed his fingers on his lips.

"S'sh!" he whispered.

The Grammarians immediately were silent.

"When I say three, let 'em have it!" was Gordon Gay's next whisper.

The Grammar School juniors grabbed snowballs from the ammunition dump, and waited for the signal. They outnumbered the St. Jim's juniors by two to one, and it was certain that these heavy odds would tell in the skirmish that was bound to follow.

Tom Merry & Co. could be heard now, as their feet crunched through the crisp snow.

"Steady!" whispered Gordon Gay to his followers. "One—two—three!"

Whiz! Squelch! Wallop!

Immediately the air became thick with flying snowballs, and started yells arose as each bullet found a billet.

"Yaroooop!"

Squelch!

"Grooough!"

Whiz!

Tom Merry & Co. were naturally taken by surprise. They staggered and gasped under that terrific bombardment.

"Let 'em have it!" roared Gordon Gay. "They look as if they could do with a wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz!

"Yowp!"

Wallop!

"Grooough!"

Squelch!

"Oh, crickey! Grooooooh!"

Tom Merry & Co. hardly knew whether they were on their heads or their heels. Snowballs were bursting over them in an

avalanche. The attack had been so utterly unlooked for that they had hardly recovered from their first surprise.

"Yowp!" gasped Tom Merry, gouging the snow from his eyes. "You silly asses, we— Ow!"

The captain of the Shell's remarks were cut short as Gordon Gay, with unerring aim, caught him full in the mouth with a particularly large snowball. A lot of the snow found its way into Tom Merry's mouth, and he gasped and gurgled incoherently.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Grammarians. "This is where we smile!" yelled Gordon Gay.

"You rotters!" gasped Figgins, clawing snow from his face and the back of his neck. "Why, we'll slaughter you— Oh, crumbs!"

Figgins' flow of eloquence was cut short as Frank Wootton found the bull's-eye, the bull's-eye being George Figgins' nose!

"Run for it!" panted Kerr, who had received a liberal supply of the ammunition over his face and person. "It's no good sticking here. The rotters have got stacks of snowballs already made."

"Grooooooh!" spluttered Fatty Wynn. "The rotters are— Yowp!"

The New House junior had no intention of saying that, but three snowballs landed almost simultaneously on his plump face, and talking in those circumstances was a matter of great difficulty.

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!

Again Gordon Gay urged his followers to give their old rivals another bombardment, and it looked for all the world as if Tom Merry & Co. would be completely put to rout as the snowballs fell thick and heavy in their midst.

But Pongo came to the rescue.

His master had, with the usual dash and recklessness characteristic of the Third Form at St. Jim's, tried to storm the Grammarians' ammunition dump. His advance had received a vigorous check, for three of the Grammarian juniors were putting up a barrage, in the face of which it was almost impossible to continue. But in the excitement Pongo was forgotten.

With a growl, he dashed in front of Wally D'Arcy and leaped through the hedge. Next moment the barrage that had been directed at Wally D'Arcy ceased as if by magic, and a chorus of yells, freely inter-

mingled with the growling of a dog, rent the frosty air.

"Keep that blessed dog off!" roared Tallboy. "Oh, crikey, he's torn my bags!"

Pongo evidently was doing great execution, and Wally's face lit up as he heard the commotion his beloved mongrel was creating.

"Go for 'em, Pongo!" he yelled.

Pongo, in his playful way, was going for 'em. But the Grammarians did not seem to appreciate Pongo's playfulness. True, he had only nipped the trousers of three Grammarians, but his teeth had been uncomfortably close to their calves; and, what was more, various portions of trouser had been left behind in Pongo's possession when the owners of the respective calves had jerked their legs away and fled.

Pongo's intervention certainly gave Tom Merry & Co. the respite they needed.

"Get together, chaps," yelled Tom Merry breathlessly, "and storm the rotters!"

The St. Jim's juniors, leaving their bags where they had fallen at the first moment of the attack, grabbed up handfuls of snow and rushed to the hedge. But Pongo had done all the storming on his own.

When Tom Merry & Co. burst through the hedge they found Pongo in full possession of the ammunition dump, the Grammarians having retreated about ten yards from their original ambush.

"It's our turn now!" roared Tom Merry, and he took aim with his snowball.

The rest of the St. Jim's party did the same. Next minute seven snowballs had landed on seven Grammarians, and Gordon Gay & Co. in turn enjoyed the experience of snow bursting over their collars and trickling down their necks.

"Stand together!" roared Gordon Gay. "And— Whoooooop!"

Tom Merry had snatched up a snowball from the pile by the hedge, and his aim was good. It caught the leader of the Grammarians fairly in the mouth, and Gordon Gay's remarks ended in a yell and a gurgle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "How do you like your own medicine, you Grammar School rotters? Here's one for your boko. Wootton!"

Whiz!

"Yaroooooh!" gasped Wootton as a snowball landed on his rather prominent nose.

"Go for 'em!" hooted Gordon Gay, trying to rally his followers. "Rush the cads!"

But the Grammarians did not obey that order. Pongo was still in the offing, so to speak, and Pongo had been joined by Towser. Both the dogs were barking shrilly. What the Grammarians did do, however, was to snatch up handfuls of snow and make an attempt to drive the St. Jim's juniors off at long distance range. But now the odds were in favour of Tom Merry & Co. While the Grammarians were making their snowballs the St. Jim's juniors were snatching them up from the dump and losing them off at the rate of one every two seconds, and all of the St. Jim's juniors were excellent marksmen.

Gordon Gay & Co. fairly wilted under that terrific and sustained bombardment.

"Stick it, chaps!" said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"What-ho!"

"St. Jim's for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

Under that fierce onslaught, some of the weaker vessels in the Grammarian contingent broke and fled. In their opinion, enough was as good as a feast. And at sight of the break in the ranks Tom Merry & Co. redoubled their efforts.

Snowballs whizzed amongst the Grammarians in a shower. Half blinded, Gordon Gay's followers began to retreat. Tom Merry & Co., with their arms full of ammunition, followed them up.

"Set Pongo after them!" panted Monty Lowther. "He'll complete the rout. We can't afford to miss our train, and once this pile of ammunition gives out we're done!"

"Good egg!" chuckled Wally. "At 'em, Pongo!"

With a shrill bark, Pongo leaped after the retreating Grammarians, and, not to be outdone, Towser joined in the chase. In a couple of minutes the Grammarians were in full retreat. What had promised to be an excellent ambush and a triumph for Gordon Gay & Co. had ended in an inglorious defeat.

Gordon Gay and Frank Wootton tried to rally their followers for a final effort. But their yells fell on deaf ears, and, with snowballs bursting about them at every few seconds, Gordon Gay and Wootton were perforce obliged to follow the example of their faithless followers, for to linger behind

now meant capture and further humiliation at the hands of the St. Jim's juniors.

"Yah!" roared Wally D'Arcy after the retreating Grammarians. "Who's top dog now?"

"St. Jim's!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

"And Pongo!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry called a halt at last. There was nothing to be gained by continuing the chase. Besides, there was a train to be caught, and a glance at his watch told Tom that the party would have to hurry if they were to catch it.

"Pack it up, you chaps," he said breathlessly, "and let's get back."

"Good egg!"

"Call off that tripehound of yours, Wally," said Figgins.

Wally D'Arcy flashed an indignant face at the New House junior.

"Not so much of the tripehound, Blake!" he said belligerently. "Pongo's a thumping good dog, with a jolly sight more sense than some fellows I know in the New House, anyway."

"Why, you cheeky fag——" began Figgins wrathfully.

Tom Merry intervened.

"Peace, my infants!" he said, with a smile. "Haven't you chaps had enough ragging? Let's get back!"

Figgins swallowed his wrath, and Wally D'Arcy sent a shrill whistle after his dog. In a moment or two Pongo was trotting back to his master, and Towser, doubtless feeling a trifle lonely on his own, did likewise.

Then the St. Jim's party gathered up their bags and set off at a run for the station. They reached it with five minutes to spare, and in that five minutes Tom Merry sent off a telegram to Blake.

The local train fussed into the station, and the party clambered into a carriage, a trifle out of breath, but feeling quite elated at their success over the Grammarians. But as the train crawled to Wayland their thoughts once more turned to the mysterious disappearance of Lord Eastwood and his son. Their anxiety about their elegant chum was keen, and that anxiety served as a damper on their spirits. Long before the local crawled into Wayland all thoughts of their late skirmish with Gordon Gay & Co. had been driven out of their minds. The St. Jim's juniors were impatient to be on the

scene of the mystery, and they sighed with relief when Wayland Junction was reached. At Wayland they changed into the express, and dashed away at rattling speed through the frost-bound countryside.

Even now they could hardly credit the startling news of Blake's telegram. How had Arthur Augustus disappeared—in his own home, with his chums with him? It was amazing, almost staggering.

It seemed an age to the juniors before the express ran into Easthorpe at last, and stopped. And as they poured out of the train, the first persons they saw were Blake and Digby, who were waiting for them on the platform.

CHAPTER 9.

Wally Puts His Foot Down!

BLAKE scudded across the platform to greet his chums. His face was pale and lined with trouble, showing only too plainly how deep and keen was his anxiety for his missing chum.

"Jolly glad you've come!" Blake exclaimed, with almost a gasp of relief. "Jolly glad you've brought Wally, too!"

"Yes, rather!" said Digby. "We shall have to walk to the house, though. Pilkington wouldn't send anything to meet you."

Wally snorted.

"You leave Pilkington to me!" he exclaimed. "I'll jolly soon settle his hash! Have you fellows been doing anything to him?"

Blake shook his head.

"No; only I fancy we get on his nerves."

"Butlers haven't any right to nerves in business hours," pronounced D'Arcy minor oracularly. "I'll give him something to stop all that. Has Ethel come down yet?"

"No; Pilkington's wired to her, or to her aunt—I don't know which—to suggest her not coming yet awhile."

"The awful nerve!" ejaculated Wally.

"He says Lord Conway has constituted him head-cook-and-bottle-washer while your pater is away," said Blake ruefully.

"Well, I dare say that's so—the pater and old Conway have endless confidence in him," said Wally. "He hasn't been with us very long, but they think a lot of him. But I don't like him. You see, Pongo doesn't like him, and when Pongo doesn't like a man you can rely on it that there's something wrong with that man!"

"Same with Towser," agreed Herries. "I always know if a chap's a rotter, because if he's a rotter Towser wants to bite him."

"Well, if we've got to walk, let's walk!" said Kangaroo.

"Wait a minute!" said Wally. "I'm going to send another wire to Cousin Ethel, after Pilky's. Like his cheek to wire to her! I'll let her know it was a mistake, and that we're expecting her."

"Jolly good idea!" said Figgins heartily.

And they stopped in the post-office for the telegram to be sent. Then they walked to Eastwood House through the keen, frosty air. The trees in the park were glistening with frost, and the lake was frozen over. Under other circumstances, the juniors would have gazed round them with enjoyment, and thought of the pleasant hours of skating on the frozen lake. But they were not thinking of holiday-making now. The dark mystery of their chum's fate had to be unravelled, and until they knew that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was safe and sound they were not likely to think of enjoyment.

The footman who opened the door to them had a slightly peculiar look upon his wooden face. He knew of the rift in the lute between the butler and his master's guests. As a matter of fact, that was as much talked of in the servants' hall as the strange disappearance of Lord Eastwood and his son. The general opinion in the servants' hall was that Pilkington would have his way. Mr. Pilkington was a very authoritative personage in the little world below stairs, and was regarded with much awe by the rest of the household.

"Hallo, Henry, old son!" said Wally, giving the stately footman a dig in the ribs by way of greeting. "Where's Pilky?"

"Mr. Pilkington is in the housekeeper's room at present, sir, torkin' to Mrs. Wipps," said Henry, with a gasp.

"Tell him to come here!" said Wally.

"Yessir!"

Henry departed.

"You fellows watch me," said Wally. "I'll settle him!"

And the juniors waited with great interest to see Wally settle the imposing Pilkington. Henry came back with a subdued grin upon his face, which he tried in vain to make as wooden as usual.

"Well," rapped out Wally, "where's Pilks?"

It seemed to amuse the scamp of the

Third Form at St. Jim's to make playful variations on the butler's stately name.

"Mr. Pilkington begs that you will excuse him, Master Wally, as he is busy!" said Henry.

Wally reddened.

In spite of Mr. Pilkington's civil message, it was evident that he simply refused to come, which meant that he declined to recognise the authority of the youngest member of the D'Arcy family.

"You buzz back," said Wally impressively, "and tell Pilky that he's to come here, or I'll come and fetch him!"

"Yes, Master Wally!"

Henry departed once more. Tom Merry & Co. waited with great interest. The contest between Master Wally and Mr. Pilkington was growing exciting.

It was three or four minutes before Henry came back, and now the grin on his face was less subdued. The grin, in fact, had almost entirely vanquished the wooden expression which Henry had been carefully trained to wear.

"Well?" snapped Wally.

"Mr. Pilkington is sorry he is too busy to come, sir," said Henry.

Wally breathed hard through his nose.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

"Mr. Pilkington is with Mrs. Wipps, sir."

"Come with me, you fellows!" said Wally.

"I'm going to rout the old rascal out!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.

Wally led the way to the housekeeper's room. Mr. Pilkington was taking tea with a stately, silver-haired old lady, who rose and greeted Wally with a bright and affectionate smile. Mr. Pilkington carefully placed his teacup in his saucer, and rose to his feet and bowed profoundly to Master Wally. He had never been more urbane, or more imposing, or more respectful in his manner.

"Now, then, Pilks, what's the little game?" demanded Wally.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Pilkington respectfully. "May I ask to what you refer, sir?"

"Do you happen to have bought this house while I've been at school?" Wally asked sarcastically.

Pilkington shook his head.

"No, Master Walter. I could not afford to do so; and the house of your honoured father is not for sale," he replied.

He spoke with profound gravity, as if

quite unaware of the sarcastic nature of Wally's question.

Wally felt baffled. The respectful urbanity of the obnoxious Pilkington was like a garment of mail, it was difficult to penetrate.

"I hear that Gussy has disappeared," pursued Wally.

"Master Arthur left the house last night or this morning, and has not returned," said Pilkington. "Mr. Dodder is here now searching."

"And we're going to search, too," said Wally. "Gussy being gone, I'm top dog in this show, do you understand?"

"I trust I shall always treat my honoured master's son with becoming respect, Master Walter."

"Oh, not so much gas!" said Wally. "Look here! I want the room got ready for these fellows—at once!"

"Your orders shall be obeyed, Master Wally."

"Also Miss Cleveland's room, and her aunt's. I've wired absence of Lord Eastwood."

"Very well, sir."

"And if you forget your place and cheek my friends again, you'll get into trouble," said Wally warningly.

"May I respectfully mention, sir, that Lord Conway has placed me in full charge of Eastwood House during the absence of Lord Eastwood?"

"Old Conway hasn't placed you in charge of me! And I'd jolly well punch his nose if he did!" said Wally. "Don't be an ass, Pilky!"

"My name is Pilkington, sir."

"Blow your name!" said Wally. "Have those rooms got ready at once, and order a feed for us! We're hungry!"

"Yes, rather!" murmured Fatty Wynn involuntarily.

"Is my room ready, Pilks?"

"No, Master Walter."

"Then I'll take Gussy's. Come on, you fellows! You can take your coats off in poor old Gussy's room!"

And Wally led the way upstairs.

"Gussy was in the Painted Room last night," Blake explained. "His old room is out of order—undergoing repairs or something. Dig and I have the rooms on each side. Look here, Wally, under the circles, we'd better keep together, I think. We don't want to disappear after Gussy. Suppose you have some extra beds shoved

into those three rooms, and we can keep together?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Wally.

"But Gussy didn't disappear in the house, did he?" asked Kerr.

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "We found his handkerchief in a field nearly a mile away, so I suppose he must have gone out."

"He must have been kidnapped," said Figgins. "There's no other possible way he can have disappeared like that. And that means that Lord Eastwood has been kidnapped, too!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Wally. "Some rotter trying to get money out of the pater, perhaps! I'll tell Pilks about the rooms."

He did so, and the butler received his lordly commands with unbroken urbanity and respect. It was quite certain that Mr. Pilkington did not want the juniors there; but he had apparently given up the contest. He could not turn them out of the house, nor could he refuse to obey his master's son, so he was evidently decided to make the best of it.

The early winter darkness had already set in.

The juniors were hungry after their long journey, and they sat down with keen appetites to a well-spread board. Mrs. Wipps, the housekeeper, saw to it that they were well provided. That kindly old dame evidently did not share Mr. Pilkington's prejudice against boys, and it was plain that she was very fond of Master Wally.

Fatty Wynn's plump face grew quite cheerful as he surveyed the varied and plentiful viands. He was as anxious about D'Arcy as the other fellows; but, as he remarked, they could not help poor old Gussy by going hungry. It was necessary to keep up their strength if they were going to hunt for him; and, indeed, the most judicious thing they could possibly do was to lay a solid foundation, Fatty Wynn considered.

They proceeded to lay the solid foundation; and, meanwhile, they discussed their plans.

Their plans were necessarily a little vague. Arthur Augustus had to be found, and he had to be hunted for; but where and how was the search to begin? That the swell of St. Jim's had been seized

and taken away by force seemed certain. But by whose hand? And where could he be concealed?

By that time he might be miles from Eastwood House; while it was equally likely that he was hidden somewhere quite near at hand. Only Herries was quite sure of a method for beginning well. He proposed to take Towser to the spot where D'Arcy's handkerchief had been found, and to set him on the track.

"You see, if we show Towser the handkerchief there, and make him pick up the trail, he will lead us directly to the place where Gussy is now!" Herries explained, evidently regarding it as the simplest matter in the world.

"Quite simple!" said Blake, with a snort.

"Yes, quite simple," said Herries emphatically; "and I really think you fellows might be a bit more keen about it, considering that Gussy may be in the hands of some awful rascals who are keeping him a prisoner!"

"We're keen enough about finding Gussy, but not about putting your blessed bulldog through his tricks!" growled Blake. "However, I'll take you fellows to the place, and it won't do any harm if Towser comes along!"

"Might be useful," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I see it! Do you think he can track down anything but a red herring or a dog-biscuit?"

"I tell you—" began Herries warmly.

"No," said Tom. "But if there's trouble, Towser's teeth will be useful. If we should succeed in finding Gussy, there may be a fight. Whoever it is that has collared him may cut up rusty, you know, and we may have a scrap on our hands. Then Towser will come in useful!"

"Well, that's true enough," admitted Blake. "And, considering that, we may as well take some sticks along with us, in case there's a scrap. If we do find Gussy, we're going to rescue him—I know that!"

And in the deep dusk the juniors started out, Blake and Digby leading the way. Blake carried a lantern, and Herries led his famous bulldog; and Herries observed quite confidently, as they started, that it was a matter of an hour or so now, that was all.

CHAPTER 10.

Towser on the Track!

DARK and gloomy looked the river and the fields adjoining as the juniors came up the path. The leafless willows rustled in the winter wind. Tom Merry & Co. halted by the willows, and Blake showed where the handkerchief had been found. That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been there the clue of the handkerchief seemed to prove, to the minds of the juniors. Kerr had not expressed an opinion; he was still thinking it out.

"Give me the hanky!" said Herries.

Blake handed it over.

Then the juniors watched Herries' proceeding.

Towser had sat down, and seemed inclined to go to sleep; but Herries jerked at his leash, and woke him up again. Then he showed him the handkerchief, dabbing it on Towser's nose.

Towser made a snap at it, apparently under the impression that it was something to eat. Then, with an expression of disgust at finding it uneatable, he allowed it to drop in the grass, and closed his eyes again.

"Well?" said Monty Lowther. "What's the next act? Are we going to watch Towser understudying the Sleeping Beauty in the wood?"

"You wait a bit," said Herries crossly.

"Towser hasn't got the scent yet."

"There isn't any," said Digby. "Gussy never uses scent!"

"Ass! I didn't say there was any scent on the handkerchief!" growled Herries.

"Towser will pick up the scent of Gussy soon, and follow the trail. If Gussy has been here, Towser will follow his trail!"

"Ahem!"

Herries exerted himself to interest Towser in the handkerchief. He dragged at the leash, and forced the bulldog to keep awake, at all events. Towser seemed to understand at last that he was expected to move, and he ambled off.

Herries brightened up at once.

"Now he's on the track!" he exclaimed.

"B-r-r-r!" murmured Blake.

"Stand back, you fellows! Don't get in Towser's way" Herries exclaimed excitedly. "Keep behind, and follow me!"

As there was evidently nothing more to be done upon the spot, the juniors had no objection to following Herries.

Towser, having once started, kept on steadily.

Herries gave him plenty of rope, so to speak, keeping back from him with the leash loose. Towser turned into the path along the river, and loped off towards Eastwood House. The juniors followed.

Herries turned an excited glance upon them.

"He's going back!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Looks like it," said Manners. "So are we."

"Oh, rats! You watch Towser."

Towser loped on to the park palings, and then round to the gates. Herries' excitement grew as he entered the park.

"We're right on the trail!" he exclaimed.

"This shows that Gussy came back to the house after he dropped his handkerchief there."

Towser kept on up the drive.

Tom Merry & Co. followed. No one but Herries had the slightest belief that Towser was on the track, but Herries' faith in the powers of his bulldog was touching. Along the park drive, powdered with snow, the crowd of juniors went, Towser leading the way.

In front of the house Towser paused.

He blinked at the great facade of Eastwood House, and hesitated for some moments, Herries watching him breathlessly.

"It's a bit parky here!" Fatty Wynn hinted.

"Shush!"

"What?"

"Shurrup! If you talk you may disturb Towser. He's thinking it out."

"Make him buck up, then, for goodness' sake!" said Blake. "I'm getting cold in this blessed wind!"

"Shush!"

Towser started off at last. Apparently he had made up his mind not to go into the house. He started off along the terrace, and led the way round the house to the stables. The St. Jim's juniors followed him into the stable yard.

Towser trotted into the stable, and paused again.

"Watch him!" said Herries, in a hushed voice. "Gussy must have come to the stables for something. Towser's right on the track, you can see that."

The juniors grinned.

At St. Jim's Towser always had a fancy for

going to sleep in the stables when he could get off the chain, and it was pretty clear that Towser had simply smelt his way to the stables to look for a comfortable bundle of straw.

The bulldog made his way into a corner and lay down.

His eyes closed.

"Second act of 'Sleeping Beauty,'" murmured Lowther.

"I fancy he thinks better with his eyes closed," said Herries. "There are people like that, too, you know. Towser is thinking it out."

But in a few minutes it became quite evident that Towser was fast asleep, and Herries jerked crossly at the leash and woke him up again.

"Get on, Towser, old boy!" said Herries encouragingly. "Go on! Smell him out!"

Towser rose and trotted out of the stables. He led the way into the garage, where Ruggles was cleaning a car in the electric light. Ruggles touched his cap to the juniors, and regarded the bulldog with some curiosity. Towser rolled up in a corner and closed his eyes again.

"I'm getting fed up!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Anybody but Herries could see that Towser is simply looking for a place to go to sleep."

"Yes, rather!"

But Herries, though he was beginning to have his doubts, perhaps, would not admit anything of the sort, even to himself. He jerked Towser out of his repose, and the bulldog, with a reproachful blink to his master, trotted off again. This time he went into the house.

In the hall they met Pilkington, who eyed the bulldog with keen disfavour. The butler did not like bulldogs, especially inside the house.

"May I request you young gentlemen not to bring dogs into the house?" asked Pilkington smoothly.

Wally sniffed.

"No, you mayn't!" he said.

"We're following D'Arcy's track," explained Herries. "Towser is smelling him out. We have found out that D'Arcy came back here."

Pilkington stared at him. Then he smiled.

"Indeed!" he said respectfully. "I am very gratified to hear it, sir. I sincerely trust that you will find Master Arthur, sir."

"Depend upon it, I'll find him right enough," said Herries. "Hallo, Towser! What's the matter with you, old boy?"

Towser had given a deep growl.

His eyes were fixed upon the butler, and he made a sudden movement towards him, and jerked the leash out of Herries' hand.

Pilkington turned quite pale.

"I—I hope that dog does not bite, sir?" he ejaculated.

"He only bites people he doesn't like," said Herries. "Towser—Towser! Hold on!"

But the bulldog was rushing right at Pilkington.

Probably he would not have bitten him very severely, but he would certainly have nipped Pilkington's ample calves if he had got at him.

The butler made a wild spring for the stairs, with an activity surprising in so solid and stately a person.

"Keep him off!" he yelled. "How dare you set your dog on me! Call him off!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" came from Towser.

He was after the butler like a shot.

Pilkington, with amazing activity, clambered on the broad balustrade of the staircase, and clung there astride, the bulldog glaring at him from the stairs and snapping up at the legs that were out of reach. Pilkington's calm repose had vanished now. His face was white with fury and terror as he clung to the balustrade.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally. "Towser doesn't like you, Pilks."

"Call him off, sir!" shrieked the butler. "Please call him off, sir! I shall fall! Oh, dear! Pray call that dog off, sir!"

"G-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Call the beast off, Herries, old man!" gasped Blake. "Don't let him bite Pilks."

Herries dashed on the stairs after Towser, and recaptured the leash, and dragged the bulldog down into the hall again. Towser went reluctantly. Evidently he desired very much to bury his teeth in the plump legs of the butler.

"Take that dog out of the house!" Pilkington gasped. "I insist upon it! Master Wally, pray have that dog taken out of the house!"

"Oh, I'll take him out," said Herries. "Sorry he went for you, but Towser has these fancies sometimes. He wouldn't have hurt you very much—only a nip!"

"Take him out!" roared Pilkington.

Herries led Towser away. The trail had come to an end on the staircase of Eastwood House. According to Herries' theory that Towser was following Gussy's trail, the swell of St. Jim's should have been found sitting on the stairs, as Lowther observed humorously. But he wasn't, and Herries led his bulldog away greatly disappointed. Not till Towser was safely out of the house did Pilkington venture to descend from the balustrade, and his face was still white as he disappeared downstairs, and his voice might have been heard later soundly rating Henry, the footman, who had committed the sin of grinning at the sight of the stately butler perched on the banisters.

CHAPTER 11.

What Henry Saw!

TOM MERRY & CO. spent the rest of the evening in their futile search.

The hopelessness of the quest was only too evident to them from the start. There was not the slightest clue to follow.

They thought the matter over without ceasing, discussed it, and talked it over under every possible aspect, but they got no nearer to the solution of the mystery.

Where was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy? Where was Lord Eastwood? Had they been taken to a great distance by their unknown captors, far from the radius of the search? These were questions the juniors tried to find an answer to, without success. Amid the endless discussion, Kerr said very little. The Scottish junior always thought more than he talked, and he was now thinking the matter over, and was content to listen to the wild theories and impracticable schemes of the other fellows without delivering an opinion of his own.

Mr. Dodder, the man from Scotland Yard, was at Eastwood House again during the evening. He talked to the juniors a little, asking about Arthur Augustus, and questioning especially Blake and Digby as to D'Arcy's movements of the night before. He did not confide his impression of the matter to them, but they could see for themselves that the detective was as puzzled as they were. There was simply nothing to account for the disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His father might have disappeared of his own accord, for some un-

known business reasons in connection with the Anglo-South-American Railway Syndicate, as some ill-disposed gossips suggested. But Arthur Augustus could not be supposed to have disappeared of his own accord.

Evidently the swell of St. Jim's had been kidnapped by force.

Why? Was it possible that in searching for his father he had fallen upon the right track, and the kidnappers had been compelled to make him a prisoner, too, in order to keep their secret? If so, it proved that Lord Eastwood was held a prisoner within easy distance of his own home.

Tom Merry guessed that Mr. Dodder was thinking something of the sort, for the Scotland Yard man remained at Eastwood House, and spent his time in the grounds or in the vicinity. It was hard to imagine any other reason for which Arthur Augustus could have been kidnapped. Mr. Dodder frowned a little sometimes when he encountered the juniors engaged also upon the futile search. It was pretty clear that he did not like the schoolboys invading his province, as he doubtless regarded it, and fully sympathised with the butler's desire to get rid of them. It probably appeared to the Scotland Yard gentleman as cheek on the part of Tom Merry & Co. to take up the search upon which he was officially engaged, but to the juniors Mr. Dodder's opinion was of no more consequence than Mr. Pilkington's. They intended to search for their missing chum until he was found, however their action might be regarded from the standpoint of professional dignity.

Tom Merry & Co. stayed up later that night than their bedtime at St. Jim's. But about ten o'clock, tired out with their long and useless searching, they went up to bed.

Wally's bed was in the Painted Room, occupied the previous night by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Eleven beds were wanted for the whole party, and Wally had ordered them to be placed in the three communicating rooms.

The disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made the Co. determine to keep together. Somewhere—perhaps near at hand, for they could not know—were the enemies into whose hands Lord Eastwood and his son had fallen.

True, it seemed that the kidnapping had taken place at a distance from the house—but who could tell whether the rascals

might not penetrate into the house itself, to deal with the other fellows as they had dealt with Arthur Augustus?

To wake up in the morning, and find that a member of the party had vanished, as D'Arcy had vanished, would not be pleasant. For that reason the juniors intended to keep always together, a very wise precaution.

The three rooms were very large, and there was more than ample accommodation for the beds placed in them. But as they came into the Painted Room, the juniors observed that there was only one bed there. There were five each in the two adjoining rooms.

Wally frowned as he noted it.

"Pilky must be off his dot," he exclaimed, "or Mrs. Wipps must be—as she must have looked after putting the beds here! I don't want to sleep by myself in this room—I want some of you chaps in here, too."

"Three or four in each room, certainly," said Tom Merry. "We don't know what might happen to-night."

"That's it! I'll go and see Mrs. Wipps."

Wally went downstairs, and found Mrs. Wipps in the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wipps explained that the beds had been so placed by the special instructions of Mr. Pilkington. Whereupon Wally grunted, and remarked that it was like Pilky's cheek to interfere, and directed a rearrangement.

While the beds were being changed, Mr. Pilkington made his appearance in the Painted Room, where the juniors were gathered before the sparkling log-fire on the broad hearth, chatting.

"Pray excuse me, Master Wally!" murmured Pilkington, as he glided in. "I am sorry the arrangement I made did not please you."

Wally grunted.

"What did you want to interfere with Mrs. Wipps for?" he demanded.

"I thought you would prefer an apartment to yourself, Master Walter," said Pilkington suavely. "I am very sorry!"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Wally. "It doesn't matter now."

"But I am very sorry indeed," murmured Pilkington contritely. "I was trying to please you, Master Walter."

"You'll get over it in time," said Wally unsympathetically. "When you go down,

send Henry up here. I want to jaw to him."

"Yes, Master Walter."

Henry, the footman, made his appearance soon afterwards. He stood in a respectful attitude before Master Wally, his face beautifully wooden in expression.

"You can squat down, Henry," said Wally, pointing to a chair.

"Thank you, sir," said Henry, making no movement, however, to sit down.

"It was you saw the ghost the other night, Henry?"

Henry shivered involuntarily.

"I—I did not say it was a ghost, sir," he stammered. "But—but it was very strange. I do not believe in ghosts, sir, but—but they say that Sir Bulkeley D'Arcy does walk at Christmas-time, sir."

"Jolly cold time to choose for walking," said Wally. "Tell us just what you did see, Henry. You told me you wanted to hear about it, Kerr."

"Just so!" said Kerr.

"Kerr did!" said Piggins, in surprise. He would never have suspected his practical, hard-headed chum of taking any interest in ghost stories. "Well, let's hear it."

"Pile in, Henry!" said Wally encouragingly.

Henry obediently piled in.

"It was the night after his lordship's disappearance, sir," he said. "I was very uneasy. I thought his lordship was kidnapped, and I feared that it might mean that some robbery was intended, as there are many valuable articles in the house. I came down in the night to make sure that all the doors and windows were fastened."

"What time?" asked Kerr.

"It must have been about two o'clock in the morning, sir."

"Good! Go on!"

"I finished in the picture-gallery, sir. You remember that the door of the picture-gallery was found unfastened in the morning, after his lordship's disappearance. Then I came into the library. Of course, it was very dark, and I was feeling my way to the electric light button to turn it on, when—when—" Henry's voice faltered, and he cast an uneasy glance about him.

"It—it was quite horrible, sir."

"But what happened?" asked Kerr.

"There was a dark figure, sir, somewhere in the room. We had been talking about the story of Sir Bulkeley's ghost in the servants' hall, sir, and perhaps I was feeling a

little nervous. But I would swear in a court of law, sir, that a dark figure brushed by me in the library. I could really feel it breathing, sir—and I was so startled that I stood quite still for some moments."

"If it was breathing it wasn't a ghost," said the practical Kerr. "Ghosts don't have lungs, and don't need to breathe, if there are such things as ghosts."

"Yes, sir, so I thought, after the first moment's shock, sir, and I thought it was a burglar, perhaps, and I turned on the electric light at once. But the room was empty."

"Empty!"

"Yes, sir," said Henry, his wooden face growing quite pale with recollection. "There was no one in the room excepting myself, sir. I was so startled I hardly knew what to do—but I examined all the windows—they were fastened. The door was shut, and it could not have been opened without my hearing it—indec, without my touching it, as I was standing close to it at the time."

"Perhaps the figure dodged into the picture-gallery?"

"I searched the gallery, sir, from end to end. It was empty, and the doors and windows were fastened."

"Might have dodged out by another door, and shut it quietly?" Kerr persisted.

Henry shook his head.

"I did not leave the matter at that, sir. I determined that the house should be searched. I hurried away to Mr. Pilkington's room to call him."

"And what did Pilkington do?"

"I could not awaken him, sir. His door was locked, and he is a very sound sleeper, and he did not hear me knock. So I called the other footmen, and we searched through the house, looking in every place where anybody might have been hidden. But there was no one—and all the doors and windows were fastened. No one could have got out without opening them, and he could not have fastened them on the inside after him, if he had gone out. Besides, it was a rainy night—and yet there was not a trace of mud or wet on the floors anywhere. I am quite certain, sir, that no one had come in from outside."

"Might it have been another servant who had come down just as you had done?"

"I asked everybody in the house, sir. It was not that."

"You did not awaken Pilkington?"

"No, sir; he knew nothing about it till the morning, and then he laughed, and—and—and—," Henry paused.

"What else did he do?" asked Wally.

"He called me a coward, sir, for being frightened over a ghost story, and said I must have fancied it, and ordered me never to come down in the night again, if I wished to keep my place. Mr. Pilkington was quite angry, sir."

"And you've never been down in the night since?" asked Kerr.

"Oh, no, sir! I should not like to repeat that awful experience, and besides, Mr. Pilkington has ordered me not to do so. He thinks that Lord Eastwood would be displeased to have ghost stories told about his house."

"And that's all, Henry?"

"That is all, sir."

And Henry respectfully took his leave.

Kerr's brows were wrinkled in thought, and the other fellows looked at him curiously. They all had a very great respect for Kerr's judgment; but they wondered a little at his interest in a ghost story told by a frightened footman.

"Well, what do you think of it, Kerr?" asked Figgins at last.

Kerr smiled.

"I haven't finished thinking yet," he said.

"But—"

"But what?"

"I've got something to think about, that's all. And I jolly well wouldn't sleep alone while we're here for any price."

"My hat! You're not beginning to believe in ghosts in your old age—and you a blessed Scotsman, and as canny as they make 'em!" exclaimed Kangaroo, in surprise.

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't believe in ghosts, but I believe in that dark figure that Henry saw in the library," he replied quietly.

"You don't think he fancied it?"

"No, I don't."

"Pilkington does," said Blake. "He said so; and I suppose he knows Henry better than we do."

"Oh, Pilkington!" said Kerr, with a curious smile. "Never mind Pilkington. He wasn't on the spot, you see, being such a sound sleeper that Henry couldn't wake him. Henry didn't imagine that ghostly figure, I think. You see, if he had imagined a ghost, he would have imagined something

in white, or at least something in the stock-ghost line. But he wouldn't imagine a dark figure breathing near him. If there was somebody in the library at two in the morning, when Henry got there, that's exactly what he would seem like in the dark."

"You think there was somebody there?"

"Yes."

"Then where did he get to when Henry put the light on?"

"That's what we're going to find out," said Kerr quietly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We're here to look for Gussy, not to look for the ghost," he said. "After Gussy's found we might amuse ourselves with a ghost-hunt. But not till then."

"We might find them both together," said Kerr.

"What!"

"By Jove!"

"You don't mean to say——" began Fig-gins.

"Yes, I do," said Kerr. "I mean to say that there seems to me to be a connection between Henry's ghost and Lord Eastwood's disappearance."

"In plain words, that the dark figure was the kidnapper, or one of them!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"But it was the night after Lord Eastwood's disappearance that Henry saw the ghost, not the same night," said Fatty Wynn.

"I know that!"

"Well, the kidnapper wouldn't come back twenty-four hours later, just for the sake of trotting round the library in the dark, would he?" said Blake warmly.

"Jolly queer proceeding, if he did," said Herries.

"The whole business is queer," said Kerr. "I'm going to have a big think about it before I go to sleep, and I'm going to turn in now—but not alone. And Wally specially must not sleep alone, or be left alone."

"Me!" ejaculated Wally.

"Yes, you!"

"Why me specially?"

"Because you're in more danger than any of us," said Kerr coolly.

"Oh, come Kerr, old man!" said Fatty Wynn. "How can Wally be in more danger than us—and how are we in danger, either, if you come to that?"

"I think that Wally's in danger of join-

ing his father and his major, if the kidnapper gets a chance at him," said Kerr, unmoved. "And I think that if Wally slept alone to-night, he would stand a jolly good chance of seeing the dark figure that Henry saw in the library—and that he wouldn't get away from it so easily."

Wally looked rather uneasy.

"I say, you're piling it on, you know!" he remarked. "Blessed if I think I shall go to sleep to-night at all, after that!"

"There will be three of us in the room with you," said Tom Merry, nodding towards the three extra beds that had been placed in the Painted Room. "Blake and myself and——"

"And myself!" said Kerr.

"Just as you like!" said Wally.

And the juniors, considerably impressed by what Kerr had said, turned in, with uneasy thoughts in their minds of the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER 42.

An Alarm in the Night!

KERR sat for some time in the easy-chair by the fire, as the embers grew duller, and the flames died down.

As he sat there, leaning back, his keen and restless eyes wandered over the room.

He scanned the panelling of the old walls, almost black with time, and the painted figures and the old blue of the ceiling.

From the centre of the ceiling, Bacchus, grinning under the vine-leaves in his hair, seemed to wink at him.

Tom Merry and Blake and Wally turned in, Wally taking the bed that should have been occupied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy the previous night, but which had not been slept in. Kerr remained in the chair some time, while the fire died down. Tom Merry watched him from the pillow curiously.

"How long are you going to sit there, Kerr?" he said. "You said you were going to turn in!"

"So I am," said Kerr, "when the fire's a bit lower."

"Can't you sleep in the light? I'm tired enough to sleep anywhere," yawned Blake.

Kerr nodded, and crossed to the electric light switch and turned it out. The room was filled with shadows immediately, moving on the glimmering old walls in a

ghostly way as the dying firelight rose and fell.

Lower and lower the fire died out.

"You fellows asleep?" asked Kerr.

"I'm not," said Tom Merry. "Those blessed shadows look like goblins. Why not have the light on all night? What do you say, Blake?"

Blake did not answer; he was asleep.

"Wally, are you asleep?" asked Kerr.

"Not yet," said D'Arcy minor uneasily.

"I say, it's not a bad idea to have the light on all night."

"The electric light can be turned off downstairs," said Kerr.

"But it never is," said Wally. "The light's always left all night, in case it's wanted. Pilky won't start turning it off to-night."

"I'd rather have it off, if you fellows don't mind," said Kerr.

"Oh, just as you like!" said Tom Merry at once.

"Same to me," said Wally.

"I've locked the door, and the doors of the next room are locked," Kerr remarked, as he began to undress.

"Safe as houses!" yawned Tom Merry. "We don't want the light. Tumble in!"

The fire was nearly out now.

Kerr turned into bed by the last gleam of light but he did not sleep. His wakeful eyes watched the grate till the last red embers had died out among the logs.

Then there was black darkness in the Painted Room.

And then Kerr moved. He slipped quietly out of bed and made his way to Wally's bed, and whispered:

"Wally, old fellow—quiet. Whisper!"

Wally started up.

"What's the row?" he whispered, considerably startled.

"I've got an idea—never mind what it is now—but will you change beds with me?" said Kerr, in a low whisper barely audible.

"Not a word—just do it!"

"But—"

"I've got a reason."

"You think—"

"Don't jaw, old kid—just do it."

"Oh, all serene!"

Wally turned out of bed, and slipped into Kerr's bed. Kerr took Wally's place, and drew the bedclothes lightly over him. Within easy reach of his hand he placed a heavy walking-stick he had brought up to-

bed with him. He lay resting lightly on his elbow, but he did not sleep.

The deep and steady breathing of Tom Merry, Blake and Wally soon showed that they were in the land of dreams.

But the Scottish junior did not once close his eyes.

He was tired, like the other fellows, and his eyelids were heavy, but he kept awake by sheer force of will.

The communicating doors between the three rooms had been left wide open, and from the adjoining chamber Kerr could hear Fatty Wynn give an occasional snore. Fatty Wynn had made a remarkably good supper, and he was in a deep and heavy sleep, dreaming of the tuckshop at St. Jim's, and Mrs. Taggles' jam tarts and rabbit-pies.

The night grew older.

Save for the breathing of the juniors, the Painted Room was plunged into a deathlike stillness. Long ago the last door had closed below, and the last light had been extinguished. Kerr could not see his watch in the dark, but he guessed that it was about two in the morning, when a slight sound in the stillness startled every nerve in his body, and caused him to strain his ears to listen.

It was an indefinable sound—merely a break in the stillness—but though Kerr did not know what it was, it was a proof of one thing—that all in Eastwood House were not plunged in slumber, as they should have been at that hour.

Who was moving in the darkness—and where?

The unknown dark figure that had breathed close to Henry in the library, was "it"—whatever it was—near now to the Painted Room?

In spite of his nerve and courage, Kerr felt a strange thrill run through his limbs.

The ghost of Eastwood House did not seem so absurd at that hour of darkness and stillness as it seemed in the time of light and wakefulness.

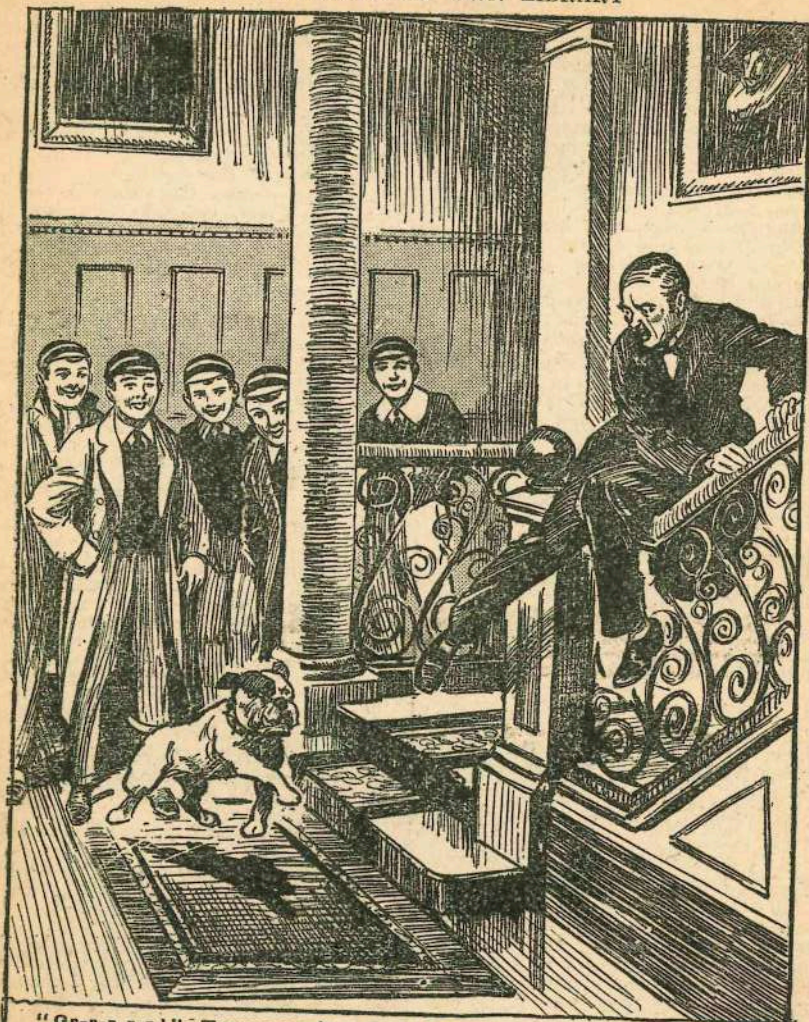
He listened intently, the blood throbbing to his heart.

Another sound!

It was like the creak of a moving door; a sound faint, and yet quite distinguishable in the deadly stillness of the Painted Room.

Kerr silently sat up in bed, and grasped, with a firm and steady hand, the stick he had placed in readiness.

Ghost or no ghost, the figure, if it came near him, would feel the weight of the



"Gr-r-r-r!" Towerer made a rush at Pilkington, and the butler, with amazing activity, clambered on to the broad balustrade of the staircase, and clung there. "Keep him off!" he yelled. "How dare you set your dog on me! Call him off!" (See Chapter 10.)

CHAPTER 13.

A Dreamer of Dreams!

stick. Kerr's eyes glistened in the darkness, and his teeth were hard set.

A stealthy sound—as of cautious creeping on the floor in stocking feet!

It was approaching Kerr's bed—the bed that would have been occupied by Wally D'Arcy, if he had not changed with the Scottish junior after the light was out.

And then Kerr became aware of a strange, soft, sickly smell in the room, hovering, as it were, over his bed.

All his senses were on the alert.

He knew what it was!

He had been in a hospital ward, and he had smelt that sickly odour there, and in the laboratory at St. Jim's.

It was the smell of chloroform.

The smell, which evidently proceeded from some wad soaked in the drug, hovered over the head of the bed, just above the pillow, where the face of the sleeper would have been if a sleeper had been there.

That the chloroform wad was held in a human hand was certain; and from the fact that it approached where the face of the sleeper should have been, Kerr was able to judge of the position of the holder.

He drew back the heavy stick silently, and calculating the distance that must intervene, he slashed out suddenly in the darkness. The slashing stick came into contact with something—and the wild, mad yell that followed showed what the something was.

It was a human face

The yell of agony rang through the Painted Room, and it awoke the juniors, who started up in bed with exclamations of alarm.

"What's that?"

"What is it?"

"Who the—?"

"Get a light!"

Kerr had already leaped from the bed on the other side. He was springing towards the switch of the electric light.

His hand found it, and he pressed it—and the room was flooded with light.

Kerr glanced round him quickly.

Tom Merry and Wally and Blake were sitting up in bed, and the two open doorways were crowded with the other juniors, alarmed by the sudden yell.

But there was no one else to be seen in the room!

TOM MERRY jumped out of bed.

"What is it, Kerr? Did you call out?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"He did!"

"He? Who?"

"Whoever it was that came here to chloroform Wally, and take him away," said Kerr grimly. "He found me instead."

"Do you mean to say that anybody has been here?" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The ghost of Eastwood House!" said Kerr, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But he was a pretty solid ghost—you heard the yell he gave when I caught him across the chivvy with my stick."

"It was the ghost that yelled?" said Figgins.

"It was."

"My hat! I—I say, Kerr, it wasn't a nightmare, was it?" said Figgins doubtfully. "You see, old chap, there's nobody here, and the outside doors are locked."

"Let's look at them," said Lowther.

The juniors examined the doors on the corridor without. They were still locked on the inside. The windows were secure. It was evident that no one had entered the Painted Room, or the adjoining rooms, by way of door or window.

The juniors gathered round Kerr again. They had seen nothing, so far as that went. They had all heard the wild yell in the darkness, but—

They could not help a suspicion coming into their minds that Kerr had been sleeping, and that he had yelled out in the grip of a nightmare.

"Tell us just what happened?" said Tom Merry.

"I stayed awake to watch," Kerr explained.

"Then you haven't been asleep?"

Kerr smiled.

"I haven't been dreaming," he said. "I did not go to sleep at all. I waited for the rascal to come. That's why I changed beds with Wally."

"I didn't know you had changed beds with Wally," said Tom, puzzled. "You changed after the fire was out, then?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

Kerr did not reply. He seemed to be plunged in deep thought. The juniors regarded him with amazement and curiosity.

"Look here, Kerr, old man, tell us just what happened," urged Figgins. "Of course, we know you were awake if you say you were, but—"

"But you might have fallen asleep without noticing it," said Manners.

"And dreamed about the ghost," said Herris.

Kerr did not reply.

"Come on, let's have it," said Tom Merry, puzzled by his silence. "Look here, you can see that there's no one in the room but ourselves, can't you, Kerr?"

"It looks like it," said Kerr.

"Look under the beds," said Wally.

They looked under the beds, and in the wardrobes, and in every recess where an intruder might possibly be hidden.

But no one was discovered. It was only too clear that there was no one but themselves in the Painted Room, and the adjoining chambers.

"Now, you can see there's nobody here, Kerr," Digby remarked. "Tell us what you think happened."

"Quite sure there's nobody?" asked Kerr, with a discouraged look.

"Quite sure!"

"We've hunted in every blessed corner," said Figgins. "There wasn't anybody here, unless he got out of the keyhole!"

Kerr hesitated.

"Well, I could have sworn that there was somebody," he said. "I sat up in bed and hit him with this stick."

"You didn't see him?"

"I couldn't see anything in the dark, of course!"

"Did he touch you?"

"No."

"You might have biffed something else with the stick," suggested Kangaroo. "If you landed out in the dark, it might have been the bed you hit, or the chair."

"Of course, it might!" confessed Kerr.

"You thought you hit somebody's head?" asked Tom Merry.

"I thought so."

"But you can see now you didn't, old man!" said Figgins sympathetically. "It was only a nightmare, you know."

"But who yelled?" asked Kerr.

"You did, when you woke up, of course," explained Figgins kindly. "You see, you

fell asleep without noticing it, and dreamed that you were hitting at the ghost. People often call out in their sleep when they're getting the giddy nightmare very bad. I've heard Fatty yell out about the School House bounders raiding a feed in the dorm at St. Jim's. You remember one night he yelled out: 'Stop him—he's got my tarts!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't remember it!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Well, you were asleep, so you wouldn't!" said Figgins. "But I remember it all right. You recollect I chucked a boot at you."

"Yes, I recollect that, you ass!" said Fatty Wynn, rubbing his chin reminiscently. It was upon the chin that Figgy's boot had caught him on that occasion.

"That's what's happened now," said Figgins, grinning. "You see, Kerr, old man, you dreamed you were tackling the ghost, and you yelled."

"But I was awake," urged Kerr, appearing, however, to be overcome by Figgins' explanation. "At least, I don't remember going to sleep. I intended to keep awake all night!"

"You wouldn't remember going to sleep," laughed Tom Merry. "You just dropped off, you know. Then you had the giddy nightmare, through thinking about Henry's giddy ghost."

"But—but—"

"But what, old chap?" asked Figgins. "Well it seemed real enough," said Kerr.

"If we had found somebody in the room—"

"But we haven't!"

"You're sure the windows and doors are all fastened?" asked Kerr.

"We've examined every one!"

"And—and nobody hidden in the rooms?"

"Nobody!"

"I—I—I'm sorry I've disturbed you chaps," faltered Kerr. "Of course, if I'd known it was a nightmare—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You wouldn't be likely to know it was one till it was over."

"No; I suppose not. But—but I don't remember calling out," said Kerr. "It's queer that I should yell out, you see, without knowing it. I seemed to hear the yell myself."

"You were asleep when you yelled, and it awoke you," said Figgins. "You gave

CHAPTER 14.

Cousin Ethel Arrives!

the pillow a buff with that stick, that's all. Never mind, old man, this only comes of thinking about the ghost story too much. It's all right!"

"Well, I've woke you all up," said Kerr, who looked very discouraged. "If that was a nightmare, I'm blessed if I shall ever trust my nerves again."

"Oh, don't worry about it," said Tom Merry, comfortingly. "We don't mind being woke up; and it might have been somebody, you know."

"Better get back to bed, I think," Kangaroo remarked, with a shiver. "It's jolly cold here in pyjamas."

"The ghost won't come again!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It's quite safe. If the ghost was walking, he's gone home to the churchyard now, and he's off duty till to-morrow night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't rub it in!" said Kerr. "I suppose I've made a pretty ass of myself. Let the blessed matter drop!"

"Only too glad to!" yawned Herries. "I'm cold. I'm going back to bed. If you dream again, try to get over it without yelling, will you?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins warmly, quick to defend his chum. "If we get to the bottom of this blessed mystery, it will be Kerr who thinks it out, I know that!"

"Thanks!" said Kerr. "But Herries is right—I oughtn't to have disturbed all you fellows for nothing. Let's turn in, and we'll leave the light on."

"But the ghost has vanished," chuckled Lowther.

"Leave the light on, all the same!"

"Anything for a quiet life. Tumble in, you chaps."

The juniors returned to bed. When first the alarm had been given, they had hoped that something definite had happened, and it was a great disappointment to find that it was merely a nightmare of Kerr's. They had not the slightest doubt on that point. Kerr had not actually owned up to it, but he had as good as admitted it. And whether Kerr had admitted it or not, the juniors would have had no doubt about it. The fact that no one was discovered in the rooms settled the matter for them.

They returned to bed, and were soon fast asleep again. But Kerr did not sleep. He took a book to bed with him, and read till the morning light was streaming into the windows.

TOM MERRY was the first to rise in the morning.

He found Kerr still awake, yawning over his book.

"Haven't you been asleep?" exclaimed Tom, in great surprise.

Kerr shook his head. "I prefer not to sleep," he explained.

"Afraid of another nightmare?" grinned the Shell fellow.

"Well, yes."

"But you'll be a wreck all day after missing your night's rest," said Tom, anxiously; "and we want you, you know."

"Yes, rather," said Figgins, putting his head into the room. "You're the chap who's got to think out the giddy problem for us, Kerr."

"And imagine ghosts and things of a night," grunted Herries.

"Oh, let's hear the end of that," said Kerr. "People have had nightmares before, I suppose, and yelled out?"

"Your nerves want seeing to," grinned Wally.

"Rats!"

"Cheese it, for goodness' sake," said Figgins. "Let Kerr alone. He's got more brains than the lot of us put together, even if he does dream dreams. I say, Kerr, you'd better take a snooze, hadn't you, or you'll be fagged out all day."

"I'm going to. I'll come down with you chaps, and I'll take a snooze while you kids go out. Cousin Ethel and her aunt arrive this morning, you know, and you'd all like to go down to the station and meet them."

"Yes, rather," said Figgins. "I'll take a rest while you're gone. Ethel will want to help us in hunting for Gussy, and we'll all start together after lunch."

"Good enough," said Tom Merry, "but why not stop in bed, Kerr; you'll sleep more comfortably in bed."

"I'd rather not."

"I say, that nightmare does seem to have upset your nerves, old chap," said Fatty Wynn. "Is it because you don't want to stay up here by yourself?"

"Yes, that's it!"

"Well, a good feed will set you right again," said Fatty.

"I shall be all right," said Kerr. The Scottish junior looked a little pale

and heavy about the eyes, but he freshened up after a cold bath, and he looked very nearly himself when he went down with the rest of the party. The juniors made a good breakfast. The keen winter air sharpened their appetites, and they did full justice to the excellent breakfast provided by the care of Mrs. Wipps. Fatty Wynn especially following his own advice to lay a solid foundation for the day.

After breakfast, the party prepared to go down to the station to meet the train by which Cousin Ethel and her aunt, Miss Drusilla Cleveland, were to arrive. Wally ordered Ruggles to bring the car round. Pilkington had not been seen when the juniors prepared to start, and Wally asked Henry where the butler was. There was a lurking grin on Henry's wooden face as he replied:

"Mr. Pilkington 'ave 'ad a little accident, sir."

"An accident?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, sir. He fell down the stairs goin' to the 'ousekeeper's room, sir," said Henry. "I 'eard him fall, and ran up, sir. He was 'urt."

"Sorry!" said Wally. "Much hurt?"
"Yessir; badly cut about the face," said Henry.

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry, with some compunction for the dislike he felt towards the butler. "I'm sorry! Tell him we're sorry, Henry."

"Certainly, sir."

"Is he keeping his room?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, sir; he went straight to his room."

"Did you see him before he fell down?" asked Kerr.

Henry could not help a little surprise creeping into his expressionless face at that question.

"No, sir," he replied. "It was werry early in the morning. Mr. Pilkington was down first, sir."

"Oh, I see. And his face is cut?"

"Yes, sir."

"Poor Pilky!" said Wally.

"The doctor 'ave been to see him, from Easthorpe, Master Walter," said Henry. "His face is all bandaged up now, sir."

It might have been noted that Henry did not seem much cut up at Mr. Pilkington's misfortune; indeed, a suspicious person might have supposed that he was pleased. Perhaps Henry had not forgotten the rating he had received from the butler on the subject of his ghost story.

"You're not coming, Kerr?" Figgins

asked, as the juniors were about to start, Ruggles having brought round the big Daimler.

"No," said Kerr. "I'll take a snooze here."

"Not in bed?" grinned Lowther, and the other fellows chuckled. Kerr had had to bear a considerable number of allusions to his nightmare, but he bore them with perfect equanimity.

"No, not in bed," said Kerr calmly. "I'll take a snooze on this lounge. Can I have your bulldog, Herries?"

"Certainly," said Herries, somewhat flattered that Kerr wanted his bulldog. "What do you want him for?"

"To keep with me while I'm asleep."

"To keep off the giddy nightmares," chuckled Lowther.

"By Jove, you are getting into a state of nerves, Kerr," said Digby sympathetically. "I'll stay with you, if you like."

"I—I'll stay, if you like, Kerr," said Figgins heroically. He wanted very much to be one of the first to greet Cousin Ethel, but he was loyal to his chum. But Kerr shook his head.

"No, that's all right, Figgy; you buzz off. Towser will look after me. Pilkington won't be able to make a fuss about his being in the house, now he's laid up."

Herries fetched his bulldog at once. Kerr wheeled a large soft lounge near the open French windows of the breakfast-room and tied the bulldog's chain to the leg of the lounge. Towser lay contentedly to sleep, but he slept in the manner of bulldogs, with one eye open. If Kerr feared an enemy more solid than the nightmare, it was quite certain that he was safe while Towser was there. Though what enemy was to be expected in the daylight, in a large house full of servants, was a puzzle. The other fellows attributed it all to Kerr's nerves, upset by the nightmare. Figgins, in fact, was quite concerned about his chum. He saw Kerr comfortably bestowed, with a rug over him, before he left the breakfast-room.

Big as the Daimler car was, it was not quite big enough for all the party, and half the junior walked down to Easthorpe. It was a pleasant walk, in the keen winter morning. The Fourth-Formers walked, the Terrible Three and Kangaroo being in the car. It was understood that Figgins was to be in the car coming back, Figgy's special rights to Cousin Ethel's society being tacitly recognised.

"Blessed if I quite know what to make of Kerr," Figgins remarked to Fatty Wynn. "I never knew he had any nerves at all, and now he seems all nerves. Jolly queer that a ghost story should upset a hard-headed chap like old Kerr."

"He didn't have enough supper last night," said Fatty, with a wise shake of the head. "I tried to get him to take some more of the goose, but he wouldn't. You have to keep pretty well fed up to keep your nerves in order, you know."

"Your nerves must be in a ripping state, then," grinned Blake. "But, really, I'm rather sorry about Kerr. He's the last chap I should have expected to get into a state of nerves. But he's got it, and no mistake."

And Figgys' face was quite clouded till they arrived at the railway-station.

The juniors crowded on the platform, waiting for Cousin's train to come in. When it came in, and they caught sight of the girl's bright face at the carriage window, they waved their caps enthusiastically. There was a rush to help Cousin Ethel to alight. Miss Drusilla Cleveland was the first to descend, and she accepted Figgins' helping hand, and Monty Lowther helped out Cousin Ethel. There was a general handshaking, and Figgins gained possession of Miss Ethel as they walked out to the car.

Cousin Ethel was looking as fresh and charming as ever, but her sweet face was unusually grave. She had been very much concerned about her uncle, Lord Eastwood; and the news of Arthur Augustus' disappearance, following his father's, had been a great shock to her. She was so serious and grave that Monty Lowther suppressed a whole series of little jokes he had intended to entertain her with, on the subject of Kerr's weird nightmare; and those jokes were never uttered.

"You have not heard anything of Arthur?" was Cousin Ethel's first question.

"No," said Figgins, "we're hunting for him."

"Is there not a detective at Eastwood House searching for him?" asked Aunt Drusilla.

"Yes, but he hasn't found anything out. We hope to find Gussy."

Aunt Drusilla smiled. Perhaps she did not think it extremely probable that the juniors of St. Jim's would succeed where

the police and the Scotland Yard detective had failed.

"It is terrible," said Ethel, with a quiver of the lips, as she sat in the car bowing along towards Eastwood House. "Poor Arthur! Of course, he must have been kidnapped."

"No doubt about that," said Figgins, "and we've got to find the scoundrels. Kerr's thinking the whole bizney out, you know, and Kerr's an awfully deep chap. I think he will hit on something or other."

"I hope he will," said Ethel, but the tone implied that she did not share honest Figgys' conviction on the subject.

"Well, he's frightfully deep, you know," said Figgins.

"Kerr isn't with you now?"

"No. He was awake most of last night, and he's taking a nap," confessed Figgins.

"Dear me! What was he awake all night for?" asked Aunt Drusilla.

"Watching for the giddy kidnapper," grinned Blake. "He found a nightmare, and that was all. Then he wouldn't go to sleep again."

Ethel looked at him quickly.

"That is not like Kerr," she said. "I always thought he was very practical. It is very strange if he should be frightened by a nightmare."

"He's not frightened," said Figgins. "Kerr is as brave as a lion. It's just a case of nerves, you know—simply that. Kerr's a bit run down, that's all."

Ethel asked many questions as to what the juniors had done since their arrival at Eastwood House. They had little to tell, but they told it. The car stopped at last before the house and they came in, in good time for lunch. Cousin Ethel and Aunt Drusilla went to their rooms, and Figgins looked in the breakfast-room for Kerr. The Scottish junior was still fast asleep on the couch, and Towser, with one eye open, was watching and dozing beside him.

Kerr woke up as Figgins came in, however, and sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Nearly lunch-time," said Figgins. "Had enough snooze?"

"Yes, I'm all right now," said Kerr, throwing off the rug and getting up. "I'm starting with you fellows after lunch."

"Starting?" asked Figgins, in surprise.

"Where?"

"We're going out."

"Well, we're ready. But where?"

"Into the park."

"The park!" said Figgins, puzzled. "What good are we going to do by going into the park, Kerr, old man?"

"I'll explain when we get there," said Kerr. "Let's get to lunch now."

Cousin Ethel and her aunt joined them at lunch. The meal would have been very merry but for the shadow that hung over all, owing to the unknown fate of their chum. Tom Merry & Co., like Figgins, were surprised by Kerr's idea of beginning operations in the park, not having the faintest idea what was to be done there. Kerr did not explain; but as no one had any better suggestion to make, Kerr had his way, and it was agreed that the search should begin in the park. And Cousin Ethel, of course, was to be in the party, and when lunch was over they started.

CHAPTER 15.

Awfully Deep!

THE park of Eastwood, with its big, leafless trees rimed with frost, was cold and chilly and desolate as the St. Jim's juniors came into it from the terrace. Tom Merry & Co. were following Kerr's lead, but they were puzzled and wondering. Indeed, they were almost inclined to suspect that the strange affair of the night had disturbed Kerr's nerves more than they had at first supposed, and that he was not quite himself. Figgins was very anxious about him.

"Old Kerr isn't quite the same as usual to-day," he confided to Cousin Ethel. "He seems to have queer ideas. I suppose he had an awful nightmare, and then missing a night's sleep has knocked him up, you know."

Cousin Ethel glanced at the healthy face of the Scottish junior.

"Kerr doesn't look knocked up," she remarked.

"No; he looks as fit as a fiddle," Figgins agreed. "Of course, he may have some scheme in his head—he's awfully deep, you know. But I admit that I'm blessed if I see what we're going to do in the park. There's nobody here but ourselves."

Kerr had stopped, and he caught the last words and looked back with a smile.

"That's why we've come, Figgy," he said.

"Because there's nobody here?" asked Figgins.

"Yes."

"I—I say, Kerr, you're not wandering in your mind, are you?" asked Herries.

"I think not," said Kerr calmly. "Let's get on to that seat by the lake, and Miss Ethel can sit down while I'm talking to you. I've got to explain to you chaps what happened last night."

"What happened last night?" repeated Merry, in wonder. "But that was explained in the Painted Room, Kerr, old man. Don't you remember?"

"I remember well enough."

"You had a bad nightmare, old man," said Figgins gently, really alarmed now for the state of his chum's mind.

Kerr laughed.

"I didn't have a nightmare," he said. "I let you fellows say so, for a reason you would have guessed if you'd had a bit more sense."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "And what was the reason?"

"I didn't want to be overheard," explained Kerr.

"Overheard!" exclaimed all the juniors at once.

"Exactly."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Wally. "Who could have overheard you? There was nobody but ourselves in the room, and nobody outside in the corridor listening, I suppose?"

"The person who could have overheard me was the person who came into the Painted Room, and whom I struck with my stick in the dark," said Kerr calmly.

"But—but you didn't, you know," said Figgins. "You owned up that it was a nightmare."

"I didn't, Figgy. I simply let you chaps say so, because I knew that the fellow, whoever he was, was listening to every word that was said in the Painted Room."

"You—you know that?"

"Yes; and I didn't want to tell him what I'd found out," said Kerr calmly. "So I let you call it a nightmare and that fellow went away thinking that I was satisfied that it was a nightmare. See?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

"Didn't I tell you old Kerr was awfully deep?" exclaimed Figgins in great admiration. "This beats the band!"

"I don't quite see it, for one," said

Herries, unconvinced. "We know jolly well that there wasn't anybody in the room but ourselves, and the Painted Room is so big that anybody at the door couldn't have heard what was said. It seems to me that Kerr is still dreaming."

"Where was the chap if he was still listening?" asked Tom Merry.

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't know yet. We've got to find him out. But listen, and I'll tell you exactly what happened. After we put the light out and the fire had gone out, I changed beds with Wally. I had my reasons for thinking that Wally was in danger of going after Gussy and his pater if the rascal got a chance at him. I didn't go to sleep. I did not even close my eyes once. About two in the morning someone entered the room."

"But how?"

"We've got to find out how. Someone was there, and he came to Wally's bed—where I was, of course—and the fact that he came to the bed where I was showed that he was after Wally."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally.

"I don't see it quite," said Kangaroo. "How could anybody outside the household know which bed Wally had taken?"

"I didn't say anybody outside the household knew," said Kerr calmly.

There was a general jump.

"You mean that it was somebody belonging to the house who came into the room?" Wally exclaimed, in great amazement.

"Draw it mild, Kerr, old man!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Don't pile it on too thick!" said Monty Lowther. "There's a limit, you know."

"Let Kerr go on," said Cousin Ethel, with an encouraging look on the Scottish junior. "I am very interested. Tell us what happened, Kerr."

"I repeat that, whoever it was, he came to the bed where Wally had lain down. Wally had changed out after the room was quite dark, and so if a watch had been kept the watcher could not know that Wally had changed out."

"A watch!" said Manners. "How could anybody watch us there? Through the key-hole, do you mean?"

"Through some opening, at all events," said Kerr.

"Oh, crumbs! said Blake. "You're piling it on, you know."

"Well, whoever it was, he came up to

the bed, hardly making a sound," said Kerr. "Then I smelt chloroform."

"Chloroform!" said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes, I know the smell well enough. I had my stick ready in my fist. I judged the distance as well as I could in the dark, and brought the stick down on the chap's head. I think it caught him across the face. You all heard the yell Le let out."

"But it was you that yelled out in your nightmare, you know," said Herries obtusely. "You as good as admitted it last night."

Kerr did not trouble to reply to that observation. He continued:

"I put on the light as quickly as I could, but the man was gone. I had had some hope of catching him, but I knew that he might be too quick for me, knowing the secret of the room and I not knowing it. But I counted on marking his face with my stick so that I should know him again."

"Oh, my hat!" said Figgins. "Didn't I say he was as deep as a well?"

"But how did he get out?" said Wally. "Did he go up the chimney, or vanish into thin air, or what?"

"That's easy to work out," said Kerr. "The doors were all locked, and the windows were all fastened. The chimney has iron bars across it inside. Yet the man had come in and gone out again. The obvious conclusion is—"

"That you dreamed it," said Herries.

"Fathead!" said Kerr politely. "The obvious conclusion is that there's a way of getting in and out of the Painted Room without using doors or windows."

"Vanishing through the ceiling?" suggested Monty Lowther humorously.

"I noticed that the walls are panelled," said Kerr. "And the room is very old—one of the oldest parts of the house, I should say."

"That's so," said Wally. "I know the ceiling was painted in the reign of Charles the Second."

"Those old panelled rooms in ancient houses often have secret doors," said Kerr. "They were common enough at the time the houses were built. Men often had to dodge out of sight in the time of Jacobite conspiracies. Isn't there a story that one of the lords of Eastwood was found dead in that room, and the doors fastened, and his murderer had escaped no one knew how?"

"That's only a yarn," said Wally.

"It might easily be true, if there's a secret door in the room. Have you ever heard of such a thing, Wally?"

D'Arcy minor shook his head.

"Never! If there was a secret door, the pater didn't know anything about it, either. Nobody knew. There was a sliding panel in the picture-gallery, once, but it was screwed up in my grandfather's time."

"Then it is known that such things have existed in Eastwood House?"

"Yes, so far as that goes."

"Depend upon it, there's one in the Painted Room," said Kerr, "and that's how the rascal got in and out."

There was a short silence.

Tom Merry & Co. hardly knew what to think.

If there was a secret panel in the Painted Room by which the possessor of the secret was enabled to enter and leave as he pleased, certainly the affair of the previous night was explained, without supposing that Kerr had been the victim of a nightmare, unusually realistic. And if the rascal had escaped by the panel and yet remained within hearing, it had shown great presence of mind on Kerr's part to allow the matter to be talked of and disposed of as a nightmare. It was, as Figins declared, very deep indeed. But—

"You fellows still think that it was a dream?" said Kerr, with a quiet smile, glancing round at the silent juniors.

"Well," said Tom Merry hesitatingly, "you see—"

"I see! I might have dreamed the dark figure. I might have dreamed the yell, but do you think I could have dreamed this?"

Kerr held up the stick he carried in his hand.

"That was the stick I had last night," he said quietly. "Look at it. Can you see a stain?"

The juniors, with awed looks, gazed at the deep dark stain on the wood. It was there, right enough, and they could not doubt what it was.

"Blood!" said Tom Merry in a hushed voice.

Kerr nodded.

"That came from the nose, I think—or the face somewhere. I think I caught him right across the face with the stick."

"Great Scott!"

"And if I dreamed that," grinned Kerr,

"do you think that I could have dreamed this?"

He took his handkerchief from his pocket. It was wrapped round something. The juniors watched him with breathless interest as he unrolled the handkerchief. A cotton wad was disclosed, from which came a faint, sickly smell.

"Chloroform!" said Manners.

"Chloroform! My hat!"

"Where did you get that?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"I picked it up on the floor of the Painted Room. The man dropped it when my stick caught him across the chivvy."

"Oh!"

The juniors gazed at the chloroform pad. There was no doubt about that, and Kerr's story was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Do you think that I dreamed it?" asked Kerr.

"No," said Tom Merry, "it happened; but—but it rather takes my breath away!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Suspect!

THE St. Jim's juniors were impressed at last.

The stain upon the stick was convincing enough, and the chloroform pad finished the matter. There was no other way it could have come into the Painted Room than in the way Kerr had described. Someone unknown had visited the Painted Room in the hours of darkness, with the intention of chloroforming Wally, and taking him away, as his father and brother had been taken. And the chloroform explained something that had puzzled them very much before—how Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus had been captured without being able to give the alarm. Evidently they had been chloroformed by the kidnapper.

Wally's face was quite white as he gazed at the pad. But for Kerr's foresight the previous night that pad would have been pressed over his face while he slept, and he would have awakened from a drugged sleep to find himself—where? Where his father and his brother were now kept prisoners by the mysterious kidnapper.

"I—I say, Kerr, old man, you've done me a jolly good turn," said the fag, in a

faltering voice. "They'd have had me sure enough."

"I think they would—or he would, rather; there was only one," said Kerr, as he carefully wrapped up the pad again, and restored it to his pocket.

"It's settled, then," said Tom Merry. "There's a secret way of getting into the Painted Room, and the kidnapper knows about it."

"Exactly."

"And we've got to find it out."

"That's right."

"We'll ask all the household," said Wally. "Pilkington may know something about it, as he's lived in the house for a year or more."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors stared at Kerr, as he burst into an involuntary laugh. They did not see anything comical in D'Arcy minor's remark.

"What's the joke?" asked Blake, puzzled.

"Nerves again?" demanded Herries.

"Oh, leave my nerves alone," said Kerr. "Last night it wasn't my nerves, but your brains that were at fault."

"Right enough," said Figgins. "Quite so!"

"I couldn't help laughing at Wally's idea," grinned Kerr. "Don't you see? Anybody outside Eastwood House couldn't know anything about the secret panel, and couldn't get into the house to use it, anyway. It must be somebody inside the house. If we say a word in the house about this discovery, we shall simply warn the kidnapper that we are up to his little game."

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane," said Wally, agast. "That's so, too!"

"Somebody in the house," said Cousin Ethel slowly. "Then you suspect that it was one of the servants, Kerr?"

"Naturally. As there is no one else in the house."

"Which one?" asked Figgins. "Go on, Kerr, I'll jolly well bet that you've got an idea which Johnny it was?"

"That's asking rather too much," said Tom Merry.

"Figgys's right!" said Kerr.

"What! You know which one it was?"

"I don't know, but I suspect. Let's take the facts in order," said Kerr, who was always very precise. "We've established

the existence of the secret door. An outsider couldn't know anything about the secret door in the Painted Room. It was one of the household staff. We've got to find the one that other circumstances point to."

"But there ain't any other circumstances," said Herries. "At least, I can't see any."

"I dare say you can't," said Kerr. "But I hope to be able to worry out one or two."

Figgins grinned.

"You leave Kerr alone," he said. "He'll think it out. Besides, it takes a New House chap to handle a problem like this."

"Oh, rats!" said Herries warmly. "If you come to that, I had found out already that there was something fishy in the house."

"You had!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yes. You know Towser followed Gussy's track back to the house," said Herries. "We thought at the time Towser was off the scent. Now it's quite clear Towser was on the track of the kidnapper. He came straight back to Eastwood House from the willows, and if we'd had sense enough to understand, we should have known that he was leading us to the kidnapper. Towser's all right."

"Ahem!" said Kerr. "Not quite right, because Gussy never was in the field under the willows at all the night before last, after the time he went there with Blake and Dig."

"His handkerchief was found there," said Herries.

"So was Lord Eastwood's hat; but Lord Eastwood was never there. I believe that both of them were kidnapped in the house."

"In the house!" said Cousin Ethel, with a deep breath.

"Yes, chloroformed and kidnapped under their own roof. Naturally the kidnapper wanted to make it appear that they had left the house of their own accord. He didn't want to have Mr. Dodder and the policemen searching Eastwood House for secret doors and things. It was quite easy for him to take Lord Eastwood's hat, and Gussy's handkerchief, and drop them in a field a mile away. That put the police on the wrong scent at once. And it was quite easy for him to leave the door of the picture-gallery unfastened to give the im-

pression that Lord Eastwood had gone out that night."

"Of course!" said Figgins.

"But the pater was in the library, not in the Painted Room," said Wally.

"The library has panelled walls, like the Painted Room," said Kerr. "There is another opening panel there, of course. Don't you remember Henry's ghost? I am quite sure that Henry really saw that dark figure in the library. By the time he got the light on the man had vanished through the wall."

"Oh!"

"I believe that Lord Eastwood was taken in the library and Gussy in the Painted Room," said Kerr. "I can fancy the kidnapper sneaking behind Lord Eastwood's chair, while he was writing at his table, and suddenly dabbing the chloroform pad over his face from behind. Everybody else in the house was in bed. He carried Lord Eastwood, insensible, through the secret panel, and that was all."

"The poor old pater," said Wally, clenching his fists. "I'd like to get within hitting distance of the rotter, whoever he is."

"You've been within hitting distance of him, I fancy," said Kerr, with a grin.

"Who do you think it is, then?"

"I'm coming to that. You fellows"—Kerr glanced at Blake and Digby—"you supposed that Gussy had slept in his clothes and gone out in the morning to look for traces of his father without calling you."

"Well, what were we to think?" said Blake, a little aggressively.

"Quite so. You thought that. His handkerchief was found under the willows, and what could seem more natural than that Gussy had gone there, and had been kidnapped there?"

"It looked reasonable enough," said Digby. "I believe Dodder thinks that Gussy found out something, and the kidnappers collared him to keep him quiet."

"Just so. But, as a matter of fact, Gussy was kidnapped in the Painted Room, just as Wally would have been last night if I hadn't chipped in."

"It looks like it—now," admitted Blake.

"And now we're coming to the point," said Kerr. "The kidnapper meant to kidnap Gussy all the time, and put him along with his pater. If he is holding Lord Eastwood to ransom, Gussy is another trump in his hand to make his lordship pay up. And there's another reason why he wanted

Gussy—the same reason that he wanted Wally."

"And what's that?"

"Because while there isn't any member of the family in the house he is safer from a search. You remember that Pilkington wanted to get rid of Gussy's guests. Without a D'Arcy in the house he is head of affairs there, by Lord Conway's instructions."

"Yes, that's why we wanted Wally to come especially," said Blake, with a nod. "Pilky was trying to get rid of us. But you don't mean that the kidnapper has got any influence over Pilky to make him play his game for him?"

Kerr smiled.

Tom Merry gave a sudden shout.

"Pilkington!"

Kerr nodded.

"You suspect the butler?"

"Yes."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I've thought it out," said Kerr steadily.

"Gussy was kidnapped in the Painted Room. Now, how did he come to be in the Painted Room at all?"

"Oh, that's simple enough!" said Blake.

"His own room is under repair, and Pilkington had the Painted Room got ready for him instead."

"I fancy that Gussy's old room was out of repair on purpose, and that Gussy was planted in the Painted Room simply because he could be kidnapped there, and nowhere else," said Kerr. "Look at the facts! If Gussy hadn't been in the Painted Room he couldn't have been taken—at least, not so easily. Who caused him to be put there?"

"Pilky," said Wally.

"That's a coincidence, to say the least. Last night when Mrs. Wipps arranged the beds for us in that room, Pilkington interfered with the arrangements. He tried to work it for Wally to sleep alone in that room."

"So he did," said Wally—"so he did! The rotter!"

"That's coincidence number two," said Kerr. "Then there's the fact that Pilkington wanted to get rid of us chaps. Of course, we know all about his being a precise old codger, who doesn't like boys, and so on, and doesn't like being disturbed. But that wouldn't make him so checky to his master's guests without a good reason. He had led the police on a false scent a

mile from Eastwood House. But we were in the house—a crowd of us—and we were pottering about looking for Gussy and his pater. We might have hit on something at any time, and it was safest to be rid of us. If he had captured Wally last night he would not have had any member of the family to stop him, and he would have tried his hardest to get us out. And, under the circumstances, I don't quite see how we could have stayed, as he has authority from Lord Conway."

"The rotter!" repeated Wally. "The awful rotter! It's clear as daylight!"

Blake shook his head.

"I don't like Pilky, and I admit that it looks suspicious," he said, "but it isn't proof."

"I've got proof," said Kerr coolly.

"Oh! And what is it?"

"I marked his face last night with my stick. Whoever came into the Painted Room last night has got his face marked this morning."

"Great Scott! Then we've only got to look at him and see—"

"Hold on!" said Herries. "It happens that Pilkington fell downstairs this morning and hurt his face. I heard Henry tell Wally so."

Kerr laughed.

"He had to account for the damage to his face somehow, you ass!"

"Oh!"

"But Henry heard him fall down!" objected Dig.

"Of course Henry heard him fall down! You remember I asked Henry if he'd seen Pilky this morning before he fell down? He hadn't; nobody had. Pilkington came down early, and tumbled down the stairs specially for Henry to hear him. Before anybody had seen him he arranged that little accident to account for his damaged chivvy. He could tumble down the stairs without hurting himself much, and he did it with Henry within hearing to make it quite convincing. But the damage to his chivvy was done by my stick last night, not by his tumble on the stairs this morning."

"Why, of course," said Figgins—"of course! If his face was damaged, he had to account for it somehow, and that's just what he would think of."

"Anyway, it's a wonderful coincidence that Pilkington's face is damaged this morning and the face of the kidnapper was

damaged last night," said Kerr. "Put two and two together and you'll come to the facts. It was Pilkington who came into the Painted Room last night to kidnap Wally."

The juniors were silent.

Kerr had certainly worked the problem out in a very convincing manner.

It was difficult to suspect the staid and imposing butler of being a secret schemer and kidnapper certainly, but every circumstance pointed to the correctness of Kerr's theory.

Pilkington had put D'Arcy in the Painted Room, and he had been kidnapped there. Pilkington had tried to get Wally to sleep alone in the same room, and there had been an attempt to kidnap Wally. Pilkington's face was damaged in the morning, and the face of the kidnapper had been damaged during the night. Pilkington had tried to get rid of the schoolboys from the house, and the kidnapper, of course, would be much safer when they were gone. The chain of circumstantial evidence was complete.

"What do you think, Cousin Ethel?" asked Figgins, breaking the silence.

"I think Kerr is very clever, indeed," said Ethel. "I am quite sure that he is right. All the circumstances point to the same thing."

"Thanks, Miss Ethel!" said Kerr. "I am quite sure, too, as a matter of fact. I fancy that Pilkington discovered the secret panels, and that very likely put the whole scheme into his head. He must have known of the screwed-up panel in the picture-gallery, and from that he reasoned out that there were others—and found them. Then he laid his plans, and so far he has scored."

"But we've got him now," said Blake. "We've only got to give information to the police and have him arrested, and make him tell where Lord Eastwood and Gussy are hidden."

"No fear!" said Kerr promptly. "In the first place, we've got no proof. The police would not take much notice of what I could tell them. They might even think it was a jape to score off Pilkington. Even if they searched for a secret panel, they wouldn't find it. But even if they took it all in, and arrested Pilkington, that would be the worst thing that could possibly happen."

"I don't see that."

"They can't put Pilkington to the tor-

ture, you know, in these days, to make him own up what he's done with Lord Eastwood. And if Lord Eastwood and Gussy are never found, Pilkington would have to be released for want of evidence."

"Yes, but—"

"And if Pilkington is in prison, he will keep silent for his own sake. And then what will happen to his prisoners? They may starve to death in their hiding-place before they're found."

"Good heavens!" murmured Wally.

"If Pilkington is doing all this alone—and I think he is—there would be nobody to take food to the prisoners if he were arrested," said Kerr. "We've got to consider that. Not a word to the police or to Mr. Dodder. We've got to handle this matter ourselves—if we don't want to risk being the cause of Lord Eastwood's and Gussy's death."

"It is quite true," said Cousin Ethel.

"But where are they?" exclaimed Figgins. "Can you make a guess about that, Kerr?"

"Yes, I can. Lord Eastwood has been a prisoner for five days now, Gussy for more than twenty-four hours. They are kept somewhere hidden, and they must be supplied with food; that goes without saying. Pilkington must keep them alive. Only Pilkington can be taking food to them, and as Pilkington is never long absent from Eastwood House, the conclusion is they're not far away."

"True!"

"Now we come to Henry's ghost again. The dark figure in the library was Pilkington. You remember that Henry couldn't wake him—his door was locked—when they searched the house that night. As a matter of fact, Pilkington wasn't in his room at all. He was hiding behind the moving panel in the library while the servants were searching for the mysterious dark figure."

"But what was he doing there?" exclaimed Herries. "Why should he be in the library at all? It was the night after the kidnapping, not the same night."

"Exactly! I've said that Pilkington must have taken food to his prisoner. Naturally, he would choose the night to do it, when everybody else was in bed. It would be the only safe way. My idea is that he had visited Lord Eastwood, and was coming back when he ran into Henry in the library in the dark. Of course, he

didn't expect Henry to be downstairs, and you can understand now why he rated Henry for being so jolly zealous, and forbade him ever to come down in the night again."

"My hat! That's so!"

"That means," said Tom Merry slowly, "that Lord Eastwood and Gussy are kept prisoners in some secret place in Eastwood House itself, and that Pilkington goes to them by way of the secret door in the library to take them food?"

"That's it," said Kerr.

"This beats Sherlock Holmes," said Figgins. "You ought to be a giddy detective, Kerr."

"Now I'm coming to my plan," went on Kerr.

"Oh, you've got a plan!" said Tom.

"Certainly. Pilkington must visit his prisoners, I should think at least once in every twenty-four hours, to take them food, if for no other reasons. He goes by way of the secret door in the library. I dare say he could go just as easily by way of the Painted Room, but we happen to be there. Now, if we keep watch in the library to-night, unknown to Pilkington, we've got a chance of spotting the secret panel."

"Oh, good!"

"The difficulty is, that he's a keen rascal, and we may be spotted," said Kerr. "I believe he's a thoroughly dangerous villain. I think I pulled the wool over his eyes last night in the Painted Room, by letting you fellows convince me that it was a nightmare," Kerr grinned. "But I can't be sure. That's why I had Towser along with me this morning while I was having my nap. But for that, I think I should have disappeared before you came back from the station, and I should know exactly where Gussy is, because I should be shut up along with him, with Wally to follow later. While I was napping in the breakfast-room this morning, Towser growled and woke me up—Pilkington was looking in at the door, with his face bandaged. But he couldn't come near Towser."

"Why didn't you let some of us stay with you, you ass?" said Figgins uneasily.

"Towser was all right. Towser doesn't like Pilkington," smiled Kerr. "If the butler had come within reach of his teeth the whole house would have heard it."

"Good old Towser!" said Herries. "I

know perfectly well that Towser spotted Pilkington as a rascal at the very start. You remember how he went for him."

Tom Merry looked round.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" he said. "I suggest that we appoint Kerr leader, and obey his orders, until Gussy is found."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins heartily.

And the motion was carried unanimously. Kerr had proved his ability to take the lead, and the whole Co. were more than willing to follow him. Kerr accepted the position with becoming modesty.

CHAPTER 17.

The Eye of Bacchus!

TOM MERRY & CO. strolled round the frozen lake in a state of great, but suppressed, excitement.

Kerr had been elected leader, and Kerr had given his instructions.

The juniors loyally promised to carry them out.

In the first place, not a word was to be uttered upon the subject inside the house, in case it should be overheard. It was a case, literally, of walls having ears.

In the second place, the juniors were to be exceedingly careful to show no change in their manners towards Pilkington, so that he should not have the slightest chance of guessing that he was suspected.

In the third place, for the purpose of throwing dust in the rascal's eyes, Kerr advised that the fellows should seem to slack down in their search, and give up as hopeless the task of finding the missing junior.

The Co. were eager to search in the library and the Painted Room for the secret panels, in the hope of thus finding the way to the hiding-place of the kidnapped father and son; but Kerr's advice was followed. It was pretty certain that if they made such a search, Pilkington would soon discover them at it, and then he would be instantly aware of how much they knew and suspected.

It was quite possible that, in this case, he would contrive some means of removing his prisoners to a safer place, so that even if the secret door was discovered, the discovery of the prisoners would not follow.

Indeed, a darker and more terrible pos-

sibility was hinted at by Kerr; if the rascal found himself in danger of discovery, with the prison looming before him, it was possible that he might secure himself by a more terrible crime than kidnapping. Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy might disappear for ever from the knowledge of men. They were utterly at the mercy of their captor, and he held their lives in the hollow of his hand. If he felt himself driven to it, for his own safety, it was quite possible that he might sacrifice their lives to his security.

The juniors realised that Kerr was right, and they promised to follow his instructions; and they faithfully kept their word.

If Pilkington observed them as he undoubtedly did, he could not fail to receive the impression that they had lost heart in the search for their missing chum.

After lunch Tom Merry & Co. strolled down to the frozen lake, their skates over their arms.

"Looks jolly inviting," said Tom Merry.

"Rather!"

"Thick enough for skating?" asked Monty Lowther, eyeing the frozen surface of the lake critically.

Wally D'Arcy nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Safe as houses!"

Manners looked thoughtful.

"I think I'll trot in and get my camera," he remarked. "I can take some snaps of you fellows on the ice."

Figgins' face lit up. The long-legged junior of the New House was fixing Cousin Ethel's skates on her shapely feet.

"Good man!" he said heartily. "Cousin Ethel and I are going to try a waltz on the ice. Make a good picture, don't you think so, Ethel?" he added.

And Cousin Ethel, a slight blush mounting to her cheeks, agreed that it would.

Thereafter the world seemed an unusually bright and happy place to live in, to George Figgins, at least. The juniors' skates were fixed at last, and the party stepped on to the ice. Meantime Manners hurried into the house for his precious camera. As he drew near the house the sound of Pongo's and Towser's barking, intermingled, came to his ears.

"Those mongrels are scrapping. I'll bet," said Manners with a chuckle. "I knew it would come to it sooner or later."

He hurried on.

Henry, the footman, stopped him at the

steps. There was a lurking grin on the footman's face that Manners did not fail to notice.

"Excuse me, sir," he said.

Manners stopped.

The barking of the two dogs echoed and re-echoed through the great house.

"Are those dogs fighting, Henry?" asked Manners.

The footman's face became very grave.

"Ahem! They're not exactly fighting, sir," he replied. "But they've broken loose and they're in the library!"

"In the library?" echoed Manners. "Then why don't you turn them out?"

"Mr. Pilkington is in the library, sir," continued Henry. "And—and he can't get out."

"What?"

The footman coughed.

"I think the dogs have taken a dislike to Mr. Pilkington, sir," he remarked. "They've taken up a position inside the room, near the door, and they won't let Mr. Pilkington leave the room."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Manners.

Evidently the dogs were making a feud of it; the dislike of Pilkington was a mutual affair.

Manners eyed the footman searchingly.

"Why haven't you gone to Pilkington's assistance?" he demanded.

"Ahem! The dogs appear very dangerous, sir," answered Henry. "And none of the servants is prepared to risk entering the room. I opened the door myself, sir, in answer to Mr. Pilkington's calls for help, and the dogs made a rush at me, sir."

Whether this was true or not, Manners did not need telling that Henry was secretly glad at the butler's predicament, and that he had obviously prolonged Pilkington's unhappy encounter with Pongo and Towser, otherwise he would have hastened to inform the owners of the respective dogs of the butler's plight.

And as Manners thought of the solution Kerr had arrived at in connection with the dastardly kidnapping of Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, he was secretly glad. Nothing was bad enough for Pilkington if Kerr's theory was correct.

Still, now that Manners knew of Pilkington's plight it was up to him to go to his assistance, a course in keeping with

the plan the juniors had decided upon in their dealings with the suspected butler.

With Henry an unwilling follower at his heels, Manners hastened towards the library.

From within came the growls of Towser and the shrill yapping of Pongo, intermingled with imprecations of a particularly lurid sort that obviously came from the lips of Pilkington, the butler. And as Manners listened for a few seconds he marvelled that such a quiet, dignified manservant as Pilkington appeared to be should be in possession of such a vocabulary. Evidently there were two sides to the character of the obsequious butler.

Manners pushed open the door.

An extraordinary sight met his gaze.

Pilkington, a poker in his hand, was standing on the table, making vicious lunges at Pongo and Towser who were jumping up at him with bared fangs. Although the greater part of the butler's face was bandaged Manners could plainly see the glitter in his eyes—a glitter that bespoke his rage and terror. The general outline of Pilkington's face, however, showed his savagery. And it would have gone hard with either of the dogs had one of his vicious lunges with the poker gone home.

The glitter died out of Pilkington's eyes when he saw the St. Jim's junior.

"Help me, sir," he said. "These dogs broke loose and followed me in here. I think they mean to do me an injury. Why I should be the victim of their dislike I am at a loss to understand. But really, sir, this sort of thing is intolerable."

Had Pilkington been anything but a wrong 'un Manners would have been in hearty agreement with him. Certainly a man of Pilkington's years was not likely to look upon the ridiculous, not to say dangerous, position he was in with a favourable eye.

But it behoved Manners, however, to be sympathetic.

"Down, Towser! Down, Pongo!" he commanded sternly. "Stay where you are, Pilkington, and keep that poker still. I'll soon have these dogs out of here."

"Thank you, sir," said Pilkington gratefully. "I am indeed obliged to you, sir."

Fearlessly Manners advanced towards Towser with outstretched hand. Manners

had always been a good friend to Herries' bulldog.

"Good boy, Towser!"

Towser's barking suddenly ceased. He seemed to forget the existence of Pilkington, and came rolling over towards Manners quite amiably.

Manners seized Towser's collar at once, and turned his attention to Pongo. That mongrel, doubtless-feeling that the battle with Pilkington had lasted long enough, and that it would be unwise to continue it without the useful assistance of Towser, came trotting over to Manners with wagging tail.

"Good boy!" said Manners, patting Pongo's head. "Good boy!"

He seized Pongo's collar with his free hand and coaxed the dogs towards the door, Pilkington eyeing them warily. Henry, the footman, was out in the passage, and he advanced with a length of cord which served as a lead for the two dogs. In two minutes Manners was escorting the dogs to the stable. Another two minutes and they had been fastened up there. Then Manners re-entered the house for his camera.

There was no sign of Pilkington now. That estimable gentleman had acted on the old maxim of beating it while the going was good.

With his camera in hand Manners hurried back to the party, on the lake and his account of what had happened in the library drew roars of laughter from the cheery party of skaters. No one had any sympathy to waste on Pilkington.

For the next twenty minutes Manners was busy with his camera, ten of those minutes being taken up with snapping Cousin Ethel and George Figgins in various positions as they gracefully executed a waltz on the ice.

It was dark when the juniors came in, and they came in red and rosy from their exercise, and over dinner they talked of a football match arranged for the morrow with the village team. That match had been arranged by Arthur Augustus with Boker, the son of the village policeman, who was captain of the Easthorpe Ramblers. The juniors discussed the matter with great keenness, and asked Henry about the form of the village footballers.

They did not see much of Pilkington.

The butler kept to his own room the greater part of the time; and when he was seen downstairs, he had a bandage over his face.

The part of his face that could be seen was pale, and his eyes gleamed over the bandage, showing very little of the professional calmness that had always characterised Mr. Pilkington.

But he kept out of sight as much as he could. His nose was very much swollen, and the doctor from Easthorpe came to see him again in the evening. When the medical man came downstairs, Kerr met him in the hall, and asked after Pilkington.

"We've very much concerned about Mr. Pilkington," Kerr explained. "Was it a very bad fall that he had, sir?"

"Very bad," said the doctor. "Mr. Pilkington's face is badly bruised. His nose must have come into violent contact with the stair or the floor."

"No other injuries, I hope, Dr. Williams?"

"No; curiously enough, all the damage is done to the face," said the doctor. "Mr. Pilkington must have fallen flat on his face, a very curious thing in falling downstairs. He was fortunate to escape with a bruised face, under the circumstances."

"Quite right," Kerr remarked, after the doctor had gone. "Under the circumstances—the doctor hasn't really been told about—Pilkie was lucky to escape with a swollen nose. Perhaps next time it will be a bit worse."

Herries made a gesture of caution.

"No talking inside the house," he said, in a stage whisper.

"Shurrup, Herries," muttered Blake hastily.

"Well, I was only giving Kerr a warning," said Herries. "If he talks inside the house, you know, we may be—"

But Blake dragged his chum away before he could give any more opinions on the subject.

During the evening the party adjourned to the music-room, and the appearance of careless forgetfulness on the subject of Arthur Augustus was very well kept up.

Indeed, in the knowledge that they were on the track, and that there was a chance now of rescuing their chum, the juniors

were feeling very much more cheerful; and so the jollity was not wholly assumed.

Only the thought of D'Arcy, languishing in some hidden corner, a helpless prisoner, marred their pleasure, and prevented them from enjoying themselves.

Cousin Ethel sang to Manners' accompaniment, Manners being an excellent pianist. Figgins rendered the famous football song, "On the Ball," with great gusto. It was past ten o'clock when the party broke up.

Cousin Ethel's face was pensive as she said good-night to Figgins, last of the juniors. Figgins was looking a little anxious. It was not likely that any danger threatened Ethel, but Figgins could not help feeling uneasy.

"I can't help thinking of poor Arthur," said Ethel, in a low voice. "I wish I could take part in the search for him."

Figgins shook his head at once.

"Oh, no, Ethel! You couldn't! There may be danger—besides, Miss Drusilla doesn't know anything about the matter, you know, and she wouldn't let you stay down."

Ethel nodded.

"I know! But—but don't run into danger, Figgins, and—the others, too. Don't do anything rash."

"That's all right," said Figgins confidently. "Kerr's leader, you know, and he'll see the bisney through. Trust old Kerr."

"There may be danger," said Ethel uneasily.

"I'm thinking about you," said Figgins. "You won't forget to lock your door, will you? And—I'm glad you're in the same room with Miss Drusilla. I can't help feeling a bit uneasy, you know."

The girl smiled.

"There is no danger for me," she said. "That wicked man can have no object in trying to injure me. I only hope that no one else will be hurt."

"Rely on us!" said Figgins. "Come down as early as you can in the morning, and we'll tell you if we've found out anything."

"I shall be down very early," said Ethel. And she went upstairs with Miss Drusilla.

"Bedtime," said Tom Merry, and the juniors made their way to the Painted Room.

What plans Kerr had made for the night they did not yet know; and in the

Painted Room, of course, it was impossible to discuss anything. From behind the secret panel the kidnapper, if he were there, could hear every word.

But Kerr was equal to the occasion. He drew a packet of Christmas cards from his pocket as he sat before the fire.

"Look at these cards, you chaps," he said.

The juniors gathered round him to look at the cards. Upon one of them Kerr wrote:

"It won't be safe for a lot of us to keep watch. We shall be spotted. I'm going down by myself."

Figgins and Wynn looked at him reproachfully, and the rest of the juniors looked very uneasy.

But they had agreed that Kerr was to be leader, and they loyally kept the bargain.

What he had written was true enough. It would be very difficult for any of them to escape Pilkington's sharp eyes, and certainly a number of them could never have kept watch in the library without discovery.

But the fellows felt a natural anxiety at the idea of Kerr taking on the task by himself.

But there was nothing to be said. Kerr had made up his mind, and the plan was undoubtedly the best, and most likely to lead to success. And it was impossible to discuss the subject while the enemy might be lurking within hearing of their voices.

Kerr slipped the card he had written upon into his pocket, and after keeping up a pretence of scanning the cards, the juniors prepared for bed.

It was curious and eerie to feel that probably, from some concealed spyhole in the room, they were being watched by keen eyes.

Yet if the kidnapper really had access to the house, and could watch them if he chose, it was pretty certain that he was there at the spyhole, to satisfy himself as to their proceedings. Whether he would have the nerve to make another attempt upon Wally they could not guess, but it was likely enough. It was understood that in each room one of the juniors was to keep awake all the time.

Kerr's keen eyes had scanned the walls

of the room many times, without appearing to do so, in search of a possible spyhole.

But there seemed to be no trace of anything like an opening in the old, time-blackened panels.

The Scottish junior stretched himself in the easy-chair before the blazing log-fire, and leaned back with eyes half closed.

In that attitude he was scanning the ceiling, lit up in every corner by the bright illumination of the electric light.

It was more than likely that if the spy-hole existed, it was in the ceiling, where the painting in heavy colours would help to conceal it.

The sprawling Bacchus, crowned with vine-leaves, amid the attendant nymphs, grinned down at the junior as he gazed upward at the painted ceiling.

Suddenly a thrill ran through Kerr's limbs, in spite of himself.

He could have sworn that the right eye of the Bacchus had gleamed like a living eye; that it had moved as no painted eye could move.

He kept quite still.

Through his half-closed eyelids he watched the painted face on the ceiling.

Yes, there was no doubt about it.

The left eye of the painted figure was lifelike enough, but it had not that moving gleam that he detected in the right eye.

Kerr understood.

There was an opening in the painted eye, and from above the spy was watching the room. When he placed his eye close to the little aperture, it caught the gleam of the electric light beneath.

Not the slightest hint did Kerr give in his manner of the discovery he had made. He closed his eyes, and seemed to doze.

Figgins shook him and roused him up. "No good going to sleep in the chair, Kerr," said Figgins. "Better turn in."

Kerr yawned, and rose.

"Right you are, Figgins!"

And he went to bed with the rest.

CHAPTER 13.

The Watcher in the Dark!

THE light was out in the Painted Room and the adjoining chambers.

The log-fire on the wide stone hearth was dying low.

Strange lights and shadows danced in the

room and played upon the polished old oak walls.

Not one of the juniors closed his eyes.

It had been arranged for them to stay awake by turns, in case of a visit from the hidden enemy; but as a matter of fact, not one of them felt he could sleep. Even Fatty Wynn, who had greatly distinguished himself, as usual, at the supper-table, only dozed a little occasionally. As the fire-light died down they lay awake and watchful.

The red embers died into blackness.

It was past eleven o'clock now.

At half-past eleven the last spark had expired. It was very nearly time for Kerr to take up his post in the library. True, he did not suppose that the kidnapper, if he visited his prisoners that night, would go before midnight, probably not till considerably after midnight. It was about two hours after midnight that Henry the footman had encountered the ghost in the library.

But it was only cautious to be on the spot early enough. As soon as the room was quite dark, and he was safe from the eyes of a watcher, Kerr slipped out of bed and dressed himself.

He put on a pair of rubber-shoes, in which he could move noiselessly, and drew a dark muffler about his neck over his collar, in order to be quite invisible in the darkness.

Then he slipped into his pocket a short, stout stick, which he had whittled during the day for the purpose.

Now he was ready.

In spite of his coolness and courage, the Scottish junior's heart was beating hard as he stepped towards the door of the Painted Room.

He had seen to that door himself when the juniors came up to bed. He had made a sound of locking it, but he had turned back the key with the same movement, and so the door had really been left unlocked, to allow his exit without a sound.

Kerr opened the door cautiously, noiselessly, and stepped out into the corridor.

The whole household was in bed, and not a single light gleamed in the whole of the vast pile of Eastwood House.

Kerr drew the door of the Painted Room softly shut behind him.

He waited for a few moments to listen.

But there was no sound in the great house. Only faintly from outside came the wail of the winter wind in the leafless trees of the park.

So silently had Kerr gone, that the other juniors hardly knew that he had started. Only Tom Merry had seen a faint shadow pass his bed.

Kerr crept cautiously towards the stairs, and stopping every moment to listen and to peer into the darkness, he descended silently in his noiseless shoes.

He reached the great hall on the ground floor, where figures in ancient armour loomed up in the gloom around him.

There was hardly a glimmer of light, the windows being covered with blinds excluding the wintry starlight.

Kerr waited in the hall for several minutes to listen, and to make quite sure of his bearings. He had studied the lay of the building carefully in the daytime, and he knew where he was going, but an accidental collision with one of the armour-clad figures would ruin everything.

But he reached the library door at last.

The big, heavy oaken door opened softly to his touch, and he stepped into the vast apartment.

Within was the densest blackness.

Not the faintest glimmer of light from the windows carefully veiled in blinds. Kerr grinned as he reflected that Pilkington had taken care of that. The kidnapper did not want to run the risk of being seen by chance.

Kerr closed the library door.

Black as the darkness around him was, he felt his way along steadily. During the day he had decided upon his place of concealment. It was possible, though not likely, that Pilkington might turn on the light when he came to the library, and in case of that Kerr had to be concealed from sight.

Close by one of the wall-cases was a large screen shutting off a recess of the wall, and behind that screen Kerr ensconced himself.

If the light was turned on he would be concealed, and might be able to peer out and watch the enemy.

If the light was not turned on he would

have to depend on his hearing for a discovery.

He waited.

Midnight passed.

The junior had taken the precaution of coming down very thickly clad, for the cold; but well-clad as he was, he felt the cold keenly as he stood there, motionless, silent, waiting. But he set his teeth and bore the discomfort quietly.

He had no means of telling the time. He had left his watch in the Painted Room, lest its ticking should betray him, and in any case, of course he could not have ventured to strike a light.

The deadly dull minutes of watching passed slowly, heavily, and always there was the dispiriting thought that perhaps it was in vain, that the man would not come that night.

And yet, Kerr reasoned, he was almost certain to come. He could not keep his prisoners without food and drink, and he would want to satisfy himself from time to time that they were safe. It was pretty certain that he would visit them at least once in the twenty-four hours, and he would choose the night-time as safest—the dead and desolate small hours when Henry had encountered the ghost.

Kerr did not know the time, but he knew he had been in the library, shivering in the darkness, at least two hours, when his vigil was rewarded.

All his senses started into alertness at the faint sound of an opening door.

Someone was coming into the library.

Faintly, almost inaudibly, the door closed again, and Kerr, hardly daring to breathe, strained his ears to listen.

There was the faint, indefinable sound of someone crossing the room, treading lightly, and picking his way in the darkness.

Kerr put his head round the screen and strained his eyes to see, but the darkness was too intense. He could see nothing.

Click!

Faint and almost inaudible as that sudden sound was, it struck upon the junior's straining ears with the startling force of a pistol-shot.

For he knew what it meant. The secret panel had opened. The unseen prowler had passed out of the dark library by the secret door

Click!

The same sound again—the secret door had closed.

And Kerr had seen nothing.

Unseen, weird, and eerie in the dense darkness, the unknown had passed within a dozen paces of him, and vanished.

He was gone.

But if Kerr had seen nothing he had heard, and he could depend upon his ears. That faint, tell-tale click had come from the wall between two of the large bookcases that extended from floor to ceiling—a space that was filled by panelled oak, with a large picture hanging at equal distance between the two cases.

Somewhere in the space of about eight feet in width the secret panel existed, which had opened at the pressure of the unknown finger.

Kerr waited five minutes or more, to make sure that the man was gone, and then he crept out from behind the screen.

He groped his way to the wall between the cases, and felt carefully over the panels with his hands, going over every inch of the surface within his reach.

In that careful examination, his hand must have passed over the secret panel; but he did not discover it. The hidden spring that worked the panel was too well hidden for him to find it. After ten minutes of careful search, the junior gave up the attempt as hopeless.

But his face was smiling with satisfaction in the darkness. He had discovered enough. He knew where the panel was, and, if necessary, it could be forced on the morrow. Kerr crept out of the library, and returned silently to the Painted Room.

He entered the room, and there was a faint whisper in the darkness—the voice of Tom Merry.

"Kerr, old man!"

And Kerr whispered back:

"Get up! Wake all the others, and dress quickly. But not a word—not a word."

"One word—you've found out—"

"Yes."

"Good egg!"

And in a few minutes the juniors, breathing hard with excitement in the darkness, were dressed and ready—and Kerr led the way.

CHAPTER 19.

In Dungeon Deep!

"GWOOH!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured that exclamation. A sudden light flared upon his eyes as he opened them and sat up.

Where was he?

That was the question he had been asking himself continually for forty-eight hours, without being able to find an answer.

Grim, cold stone walls shut him in. It was a stone cell—where? The heaviness of the air and the intense darkness made it certain that it was some distance below ground. On the floor were some old rugs, and wrapped up among the rugs for warmth the swell of St. Jim's had been sleeping. There was a clank of metal as he started up. Round his waist was a locked ring of iron, and to the iron ring was fastened a rusty chain, in its turn secured to a bolt in the stone wall.

Clank, clank!

Long centuries before hapless prisoners had been shut up in the grim dungeon, and had pined away their lives in the grip of those rusty old chains. Hundreds of years had rolled by since then. And now the stone-walled dungeon and the rusty iron chains found their use again. And the prisoner they held was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

In a heap of rugs and old blankets on the cold stone floor, Arthur Augustus had slept by night and huddled by day for warmth.

And he was not the only prisoner.

For from the adjoining cell, entered by a low arched doorway that one had to stoop to pass through, came occasionally the clank of another chain.

Another prisoner was there.

D'Arcy had not seen him—thick stone walls intervened. But he knew that it was his father.

He had solved the mystery of Lord Eastwood's whereabouts, only by sharing his imprisonment in this mysterious recess.

Where was he?

He did not know. In some ancient dungeon far beneath the old building; he knew that.

Was he under Eastwood House? There was an old story that dungeons existed under the old house, but had long since been walled up and forgotten. Had they

been brought into use again for this? But then who could know of them—who could have access to them? Who was his mysterious kidnapper?

Arthur Augustus, as he rose from the dirty rugs on the floor, with the chain clanking and clinking about him, looked at the man who had entered the dungeon.

The man held an old-fashioned lantern in his hand—probably one of the lanterns that had been used by the gaolers in days long since past and gone, and left where it had been last used.

The light gleamed upon D'Arcy and upon the stone walls reeking with damp. But it did not reveal the features of the man who held the lantern. His face was covered with a black cloth, fastened over his head, and provided only with opening slits for the eyes and the mouth and the nose. The black visage looked grim and terrible, with the eyes gleaming and glistening through the slits. The unseen man was clad in a long dark coat that covered him from chin to feet, completely concealing him. Even his hands were covered with black gloves, as if he feared to allow a fraction of his person to be seen, lest it might be known.

Arthur Augustus stared at him, his hands clenching and his teeth coming hard together. He would have been glad to have been at close quarters with this scoundrel; but the man took care not to come within the length of the chain.

It was the second visit Arthur Augustus had received since his capture; and on the previous occasion his captor had presented the same dark, impenetrable appearance. Who he was, and whether he had ever seen him before, D'Arcy could not possibly guess. For the kidnapper had been clad and masked in the same way on that terrible night in the Painted Room, when D'Arcy had been seized and carried off.

The junior had vague and oppressive recollections of that fearful experience—of the living eye that had watched him through the orifice in the painted eye on the ceiling—of the sudden extinguishing of the light—then of a grasp in the darkness, the pressure of a chloroform pad upon his face—

How had the assailant entered the Painted Room when the doors and windows were fast? How had he conveyed his prisoner to this place? D'Arcy did not know. From the moment when the chloroform pad was pressed upon his face all knowledge had

vanished. He had awakened sick and dizzy—here in this black and gloomy dungeon, and he knew no more.

"You scoundwel!" was Arthur Augustus' greeting to the man in black.

There was no reply.

The man in black stooped and placed a small basket on the floor near the swell of St. Jim's. It contained a loaf, a chunk of cheese, and a bottle of water. That was the fare of the prisoner in the dungeon.

"You wascal!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wish I could get neah you. I should like to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

No answer.

"Who are you, you scoundwel?" the junior exclaimed, exasperated. "What are you keepin' me heah for? How dare you tweek me like this? Do you undahstand that you will be sent to pwison when my fwriends find me?"

Still no reply.

The man moved on towards the low arched way leading into the adjoining cell. Arthur Augustus made a spring towards him, but the chain tautened and the iron ring round his waist stopped him short. He gave a gasp of pain.

"Oh, you wascal! You uttah wottah!"

Still without replying, the man in black passed into the next cell, and the light disappeared with him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left in darkness.

In the adjoining cell a man lay upon a heap of old rags, his face pale and worn and showing signs of exhaustion and emaciation.

He did not rise as the man in black came in, but fixed his eyes upon him. He had not been sleeping.

The man in black placed a second supply of food within reach of his second prisoner; the same fare—a loaf and cheese and water. Upon the floor lay the unfinished remains of a similar meal.

"You have not finished your last meal, Lord Eastwood!" said the man in black, speaking in a strange guttural voice, evidently adopted for the purpose of disguising his real tones.

"Rascal!" said the earl, his eyes burning as they were fixed upon the impenetrable masked visage. "How long will you dare to keep me a prisoner here?"

"Until you come to my terms, my lord!"

"That will never be!"

The man in black shrugged his shoulders.

"You can remain obstinate and remain here as long as you like, my lord," he said. "But you are aware that your son is now sharing your privations."

"I know it."

"Does that make no difference to you?"

"None—so far as yielding to you is concerned," said Lord Eastwood firmly. "I will die in this dungeon rather than yield to the infamous demands of a kidnapper!"

"You will certainly die in this dungeon if you do not yield," said the man in black coolly. "When you have exhausted my patience I shall simply cease to visit you. Then you will die of famine here in the darkness."

"Better that than making terms with a scoundrel."

"And your son will share your fate."

A spasm passed over the white face of the prisoner. It was evident that he felt more keenly the sufferings of his son than his own. The eyes of the man in black glittered through the holes in the mask as they watched the face of the prisoner.

"Does not that move you, my lord?" he asked mockingly.

"It does," said the earl in a low voice.

"Yet I will not give in. You do not understand a scruple of honour. But you may believe me when I tell you that I will never yield to your demands."

"What is it to you what I ask—ten thousand pounds for life and liberty?" said the man in black. "You have plenty, I have none. You can afford to pay for your liberty, and you shall pay my price. Your cheque for ten thousand pounds is the price. Once it is safely cashed you are free."

"And how do I know that you will keep your word and that you will not demand a second bribe after the first is secured?" exclaimed Lord Eastwood.

"You must take my word for that—I promise you."

The earl's lip curled.

"The promise of a kidnapper, a black-mailer, a thief! Even if I were base enough to yield to your threats I should not be so foolish as to trust you."

"Perhaps a few more days in this dungeon will cause you to change your mind. I am in no hurry. I shall give you another week before I take sterner measures."

"And then?"

"Then I shall visit you once in forty-eight hours instead of once in twenty-four; and you will be upon half-rations. If you do not yield by then, once in every third night. And if that does not cure your obstinacy, I shall fasten up the door of your dungeon and visit you no more. You will perish miserably of hunger here, with no sounds but the dying groans of your son!"

"I think perhaps you are capable of such villainy," said the earl in a low voice. "But I shall not give way to you. You must be discovered and condemned, even if it is after my death."

There was the sound of a mocking chuckle under the black hood.

"I have not been discovered yet."

"But you must be. You say you have my cheque-book. How did you obtain it? My secretary will miss it. It will be searched for. You are not so safe as you think."

"Your cheque-book is in its place, Lord Eastwood. I can obtain it when I choose—that is all."

"Who are you?" burst out the earl. "How is it that you have secret access to my house?"

"That is my secret!"

"You have some accomplice in Eastwood House," said the earl, his eyes searching the black-hooded face. "Perhaps you are even a member of my household. No one else could have such access to my house and my belongings."

"Perhaps!"

"You do not dare to show me your face, you scoundrel!"

"I do not choose to. But enough words. Are you prepared to sign the cheque I have asked for?"

"No!"

"Then good-night! I shall see you again in twenty-four hours."

"Villain!"

The man in black disappeared with the light.

He left black darkness behind him—darkness, cold, despair. The hope that had upheld Lord Eastwood in the four days of his imprisonment had sunk almost to zero now. He had not been found. He knew that he must be searched for, and yet the searchers had not succeeded in finding him. How could they guess the existence of this hidden dungeon? How were they to

penetrate to that recess in deep darkness? The light of hope flickered and almost expired.

Lord Eastwood called out, his voice sounding hollow and eerie in the silence and deep darkness.

"Arthur!"

Faintly from the next cell came the voice of the swell of St. Jim's in response.

"Yaas!"

"Arthur, my boy, do you wish me to yield to that scoundrel and pay him what he asks?"

And the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was firm as he replied:

"No, dad! It's up to us to stick it out—honah first!"

"You know what it may mean, my boy?"

"Yaas; and I'm not afraid. Besides, the fellows will be searchin' for us, dad. They won't give it up till they've found us. Nevah say die!"

And then there was silence again.

CHAPTER 20.

Laying the Snare!

TOM MERRY & CO. followed Kerr silently down the broad stairs.

Hardly a word had been spoken in the Painted Room, and then only in the faintest of whispers. It was not likely that the kidnapper was watching the juniors then, but Kerr left nothing to chance.

But the Scottish junior halted on a lower landing, and spoke in a whisper. In that spot there was no shadow of danger of being overheard.

"I think we've got a chance of the rascal at last! Anyway, I've found out something."

"What have you found out?" whispered Tom Merry.

"He came into the library—it was too dark to see him, but I heard him—and I heard the click of the panel opening."

"Good!"

"That makes it clear that Lord Eastwood and Gussy are hidden somewhere quite near, perhaps in some unknown dungeon underneath this house," said Kerr. "The man wouldn't go to them that way unless they were in some place connected with this house."

"Right enough!" said Figgins.

"There used to be dungeons under the house, so they say," Wally said. "They were walled up more than two hundred years ago."

"If necessary, the walling-up can be taken down, and we can get at them that way," said Kerr. "But that would be a last resource. I can't find the panel in the library wall, but I know just where it is—within a few feet. The rascal must come back that way. And we're all going to be in the library ready for him."

"Good egg!"

"There are more than enough of us to collar him as he comes through," said Monty Lowther. "We shall make sure of him, I think."

"Have the light on, and then he can't possibly get away," said Herries.

"No, no! There may be some spy-hole in the library, the same as there is in the Painted Room, and then he would see the light as he came back and take the alarm."

"My hat! You think of everything, Kerr, old man," said Figgins.

"He's a jolly cunning and slippery bird, and we can't take any chances with him," said Kerr.

"Then we're to wait in the dark?" asked Kangaroo.

"That's it!"

"He might give us the slip," said Manners.

"We must do our best. If we have the light on I don't believe we shall see him at all. We shall hear the panel click when it opens, and then we can rush on him and collar him. One of us can be standing by the electric light switch. Figgins can do that. I will call out as soon as I've got my hands on the rascal, and Figgy can switch on the light—see?"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins.

"Good!" said Blake. "Once we've got our hands on him he won't be able to dodge back behind the panel as he did the time when Henry spotted him and took him for a ghost."

"Exactly!"

"Come on, then," said Tom Merry; "we don't know how soon he may be back."

"Follow me—and not a word now."

They crept downstairs. The library was dark and silent as they entered it. Herries bumped into a chair and muttered, but that was all. Kerr, taking his companions in turn, led them in the darkness to the

panelled walls between the bookcases where the secret door was situated. By that way the rascal must come. And in the darkness the juniors waited in a ring ready to seize him.

They waited!

The darkness was so dense that they could not even see one another. It was agreed that Kerr was to make the first movement, and a call from him was to be the signal for attack.

Their hearts thumped as they waited in the gloom.

In a short time now the kidnapper, returning from his visit to his prisoners, must walk right into their hands. And then the secret of the panel would be known, and they would have but to follow the passage to the prisoners and find them in their hiding-place. If the rascal closed the panel before they seized him, they would make him reveal the secret of it. They were prepared to adopt the roughest possible measures for that. There was no need to stand upon ceremony with the kidnapper of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his father.

In the dead silence the juniors could almost hear their hearts beating as they waited. When would the man come?

He had been absent a long time now. Perhaps he had to thread long, dark passages to some hidden recess in the depths under the ancient house. Perhaps he was parleying with his prisoners, endeavouring by threats to extort from them the price of their liberty—for there was little doubt that his object was to hold them to ransom.

The juniors thought of their chum shut up in some cold, dark recess underground, and they longed to get their hands upon the kidnapper.

When would he come?

Their hearts throbbled harder than ever as there came a slight sound in the darkness. Figgins, on the other side of the room, had his hand upon the switch of the electric light—ready!

As soon as the rascal was seized, the room would be flooded with light, and then he would have no chance of escaping recognition. Figgins waited with pulsing heart for the signal from Kerr.

Click!

The juniors all knew what that sound meant. The secret panel had opened. Within a few feet of them, now, in the dense darkness, was the unknown man.

They could not see him—and they were invisible to him—and they hardly breathed.

Click!—again.

The panel had closed, and the man was in the room, with the secret door shut behind him, and at the mercy of the juniors!

Then Kerr, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him.

Kerr's hands, clutching in the darkness, closed upon a human form, and at the same moment he yelled to Figgins:

"The light—the light!"

There was a gasp from the unseen man—a gasp of terror and rage—and Kerr was flung furiously off. The other juniors stumbled over him as they swarmed to the attack. Even then the man might have escaped. But Figgins had obeyed the signal. The switch was turned. The vast apartment was flooded with light.

And in the flood of light the man was seen at the panelled wall, his hand seeking the secret spring—to escape!

But there was no escape for him!

Three or four of the juniors leaped upon him, and he went to the floor, with his assailants sprawling over him, clutching and grasping, in a silent and deadly struggle.

Kerr staggered to his feet, panting a little, and looked with a cool and grim eye upon the burly man struggling madly in the clutch of the juniors.

"Pilkington!" he said coolly.

And as he spoke the butler's struggles ceased, and he collapsed under his swarming foes, and lay, gasping, on the floor, with the juniors heaped on him.

CHAPTER 21.

Fairly Caught!

PILKINGTON it was! There was no doubt about his identity now.

The stout florid butler, no longer grave and respectable and imposing, lay on his back on the library floor, panting, exhausted, his face aflame, and his eyes blazing with fury.

"Pilkington!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Pilky!" said Wally, with a chuckle.

"And caught in the giddy act!"

"The scoundrel! We've got him!"

"The rotter! Sit on him!"

Pilkington stared up at his captors, rage and terror in his face. But even then the

nerve and presence of mind of the rascal did not desert him. With an effort he regained something of his calmness.

"Young gentlemen!" he exclaimed, with as much as he could muster of his old smooth and calm voice. "Young gentlemen! What does this mean?"

"I fancy you know what it means well enough!" chuckled Kangaroo. "It means that we've caught you in the act!"

"You're a downy bird, but you've been caught at last!" grinned Figgins. "There was a giddy Scotsman on your track, you see, and you really hadn't an earthly!"

"I don't understand, young gentlemen. Pray let me get up! I am quite breathless!"

"So am I," said Blake. "But you're not going to get up, you rascal. We've got you!"

"Yes, you have got me," said Pilkington; "that is certainly the case, Master Blake. But I do not understand why you have assaulted me in this extraordinary manner. I shall certainly complain to Lord Conway."

"Well, of all the nerve!" ejaculated Tom Merry, in amazement. "Are you trying to brazen it out, you rascal? Can't you understand that you're bowled out?"

"I cannot understand you. If I had known that it was you young gentlemen I should not have struggled," said Pilkington calmly. "I found myself attacked in the darkness, and imagined that it must be burglars."

"Oh!"

"I suppose this is a joke of you young gentlemen, but really it is too rough and violent for a man of my age. What have you done it for?"

The juniors gazed at him in astonishment. Having caught the rascal in the very act of coming through the secret panel, they never dreamed that he would attempt to brazen it out. His nerve was superb. He did not mean to throw up his hand while he had a card left.

"Well, you are a cool customer!" said Blake. "But we've got you! Can't you get that into your head? We've got you!"

"And now we want you to guide us to Lord Eastwood and D'Arcy," said Kerr quietly.

Pilkington smiled.

"Is that another little joke?" he asked.

"You won't find it a joke if you don't do

as we tell you!" said Kerr. "We're not going to stand on ceremony with a kidnapper!"

Pilkington looked astonished.

"I suppose this must be a joke," he said. "Why do you call me a kidnapper, Master Kerr? I do not understand you in the least."

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake.

"I appeal to you, Master Wally, not to let your honoured father's servant be treated in this outrageous manner," said Pilkington.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "He simply takes the cake!"

"If Master Walter will not interfere, and you refuse to release me, I shall be compelled to call for help," said Pilkington.

"Will you?" said Kerr grimly. "We'll nip that in the bud. Lock the door, Figgins!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins promptly; and he carried out the instructions at once. The juniors did not intend to have any interference in their dealings with Mr. Pilkington.

The butler made an effort to rise while the doors were being locked, but the juniors held him fast.

Fatty Wynn had taken a comfortable seat upon his chest, and that alone was enough to keep him securely pinned down. Fatty Wynn was not a light weight.

"Now," said Kerr "we want to know where Lord Eastwood and Gussy are."

"And we want to know at once," said Tom Merry. "You'll be good enough to open that panel in the wall, Pilkington."

"What panel?" asked Pilkington, looking astonished.

"The secret panel."

"I am sure, Master Merry, that if there is a secret panel in the wall, I am quite unaware of it," said Pilkington. "I have certainly never heard of such a thing."

"Then you came through it just now without hearing of it!" grinned Blake.

"You are joking, of course. I have just come down from my bed-room," said Pilkington.

"What?"

"I was nervous, and could not sleep," explained the butler. "I thought I heard a noise. Perhaps some of you young gentlemen made a noise here. I came down, thinking that perhaps it might be burglars, and then you attacked me in the dark."

"Ananias was a fool to this chap," said Blake, with conviction.

"Look here, Pilkington," said Kerr quietly, "it's no good. I'll explain to you. You got those marks on your face from my stick last night, when you came into the Painted Room and tried to chloroform me in mistake for Wally. I knew you were listening to all we said through the hole in the eye of the painted Bacchus on the ceiling—"

Pilkington gave a violent start.

"I am sure I do not understand you, Master Kerr. My face was hurt in a fall down the stairs this morning."

"That may do for Henry, but it won't do for us. I spotted you, Pilkington, and I was on the watch in this room when you went through the panel more than half an hour ago."

"What!"

"Then I fetched the fellows down, and we've been waiting here for you—waiting for you to come through the panel, do you understand? As soon as you'd come in, and we heard the panel close, we jumped on you. It's no good lying about having come down from your bed-room. We've been in this room a quarter of an hour or more before you came back through the wall, waiting for you."

Pilkington's face grew deadly pale.

He understood now, for the first time, how much the juniors knew, and a hunted look came into his eyes. He knew that he was caught. But the expression on his face was obstinate and unyielding.

"I don't understand you," said Pilkington, "and I know nothing about a secret panel. I insist upon being released immediately. Mr. Dodder is in his room, and I am willing for the matter to be placed before him, as an officer of the law, if you care to call him."

"That's piffle! You're leader, Kerr. What are you going to do with him?"

Kerr reflected.

"I suppose you fellows all agree that we're justified in using pretty rough means, to make this scoundrel tell us what he's done with Gussy?" he said.

"Yes, rather!"

"Very well! Herries, will you get round to the kennels and fetch Towser?"

"Towser!" said Herries.

"Yes, Towser has a special fancy for biting Pilkington. If Towser once got fairly at him, Pilkington would feel it, I think."

"No doubt about that!" grinned Herries.

"Then fetch Towser, and we'll see if Towser can persuade this scoundrel to open his mouth and tell us something besides lies."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

And he hurried away. Pilkington's face was very white now.

"He's got to be tied up!" said Kerr. "Tear his things into strips, and tie him up!"

"What-ho!"

The struggling, furious man was soon bound, hand and foot. His own tie and his coat, wrenched into strips, served for the bonds. He lay on the floor a helpless prisoner, glaring furiously at the juniors. Then there was a pause, and silence till Herries came back. In ten minutes, Herries came in, leading Towser, and the library door was locked once more. Towser's eyes gleamed at the sight of Pilkington on the floor, and he made a spring towards him, and the chain clinked. But Herries held him.

"Let him come within a foot of the rotter," said Kerr. "But hold him in till I give the word!"

"Right you are!" said Herries.

Pilkington's face was livid with terror as the great jaws of the bulldog gleamed within a dozen inches of him. Towser was evidently anxious to get to business. Towser had his likes and dislikes—and he disliked Mr. Pilkington very much. The gleam in his eyes sent a chill of terror to the butler's very soul.

"Take out your watch, Figgy!"

Figgins took out his watch.

"What time is it?"

"Just a quarter to three!"

"Good! Pilkington, you have exactly five minutes to make up your mind. At ten minutes to three, if you have not decided to show us the secret panel, I shall tell Herries to let the bulldog loose. You know what will happen then."

"You dare not!" yelled Pilkington.

Kerr's teeth set grimly.

"You will see! You have five minutes!"

Figgins laid the watch upon the table!

CHAPTER 22.

Towser Does It!

THE minutes ticked away. Pilkington lay upon the floor, his eyes fixed upon the bulldog, and the juniors stood round with their eyes upon Pilkington.

The rascal could not move—he could only lie and wait.

His face was white as death, and great beads of perspiration broke out upon his forehead and rolled down his colourless face.

Towser made a movement from time to time, but Herries' hand was firm upon his collar.

"Three minutes more!" said Kerr, breaking the dead silence.

Pilkington turned a haggard look upon him.

"You dare not!" he muttered. "You dare not!"

Kerr shrugged his shoulders.

Pilkington's eyes searched his face, searching for a sign of wavering. But there was no such sign to be seen there. The Scottish junior's face was hard as iron. The trapped rascal asked himself desperately whether the boy could be in earnest. If he was in earnest, the rascal had to give in—he dared not face the crunching teeth of the bulldog. A braver man than Pilkington might have shrunk from that. But was he in earnest? He looked as if he were.

Even the juniors did not feel sure that Kerr was in earnest. But one thing was certain—they would not interfere. The rascal before them had betrayed a kind master, had kidnapped the man whose bread he ate, and was keeping their chum fastened up in some dark, hidden den. There was hardly any step they were not prepared to take to rescue D'Arcy; and the obstinacy of a rascal and criminal should not stand in their way.

"One minute more!" said Kerr.

Dead silence!

Kerr had his eyes on the watch, his face grimly set. He looked up from it at last, and fixed his eyes upon the colourless face of Pilkington.

"Twenty seconds!" he said. "Are you going to show us the panel?"

"No!"

"Very well! Stand back, you fellows. It won't be a pretty sight."

"You mean it?" muttered Figgins.

Kerr's eyes gleamed.

"Are we going to leave D'Arcy, our chum, shut up in a cellar somewhere, because this scoundrel doesn't choose to tell us the way to find him?" he asked.

"No!" said Figgins, between his teeth.

"No!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"It isn't a case of acting on suspicion—he is caught in the act. He wants to gain time, to save a chance of moving D'Arcy and his pater to a safer place, where we can't find them. I believe he is capable of murdering them, to cover up his tracks, and save himself from prison," said Kerr quietly. "I think that their lives may be at stake. We are entitled to use any means against that scoundrel. Pilkington, the time is up. Are you going to show us how to work that panel?"

"No!"

Pilkington snarled out the word desperately.

"Then it's finished. Let the dog go, Herries!"

Herries withdrew his hand from Towser's collar.

The bulldog made one spring, right at the

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man on the floor, his eyes ablaze, his teeth gleaming in the light.

Pilkington gave a wild yell of terror; he had no further doubts as to whether the juniors were in earnest or not.

He rolled madly away over the floor.

"Call him off—I'll show you—I'll show you!" he screamed.

But Towser was upon him.

Herries and Kerr made a rush to stop him, and caught the bulldog by the collar and the leash—but Towser's teeth were gripping Pilkington's arm. Fortunately for the rascal, he had surrendered in time—the bulldog had not had time to get a grip, and only the cloth of his coat was in the jaws of Towser.

But Towser refused, after the manner of bulldogs, to let go his grip, and the piece of cloth came out in his teeth as the juniors dragged him off by main force. Towser growled with disappointment. Pilkington, who had felt the teeth graze his skin, rolled on the floor, panting with fear.

"Take him away! Take him away!"

"Hold him in, Herries!"

"Untie one of the rotter's hands, and let him open the panel," said Kerr.

Pilkington was dragged to his feet, and one hand was freed. He cast a glance of furious hate at the juniors.

"Open the panel!" said Kerr.

Pilkington hesitated one moment. But his experience at close quarters with Towser had been enough for him. His free hand glided over the panels in the wall, and touched the cunningly concealed spring.

Click!

A section of the wall slid back silently, and a back opening was revealed. In the light that shone through from the library, the juniors, as they stared curiously through the opening, could see the top of a flight of spiral steps, set in the thickness of the huge old stone walls.

"Good egg," said Tom Merry, with satisfaction. "That's the way Lord Eastwood was taken. We'll make the villain guide us—and Towser can come along, in case he shows any more obstinacy."

"What ho!" said Herries.

"We shan want a lantern!" said Jack Blake.

"That's all right!" said Kerr. "There's one here!"

Kerr had stepped into the cavity in the wall. He picked up an old-fashioned lantern—still warm, showing that it had been

recently used. Close by it, on the floor, lay a dark coat, and a black hood with eye-holes in it. Kerr picked them up, and the other fellows examined them with much curiosity.

"The rotter puts these things on when he goes to take food to the prisoners," said Kerr. "That's to prevent their recognising him. Why, after he'd done what he kidnapped them for, he could go on being butler here—all ready to play another trick like it again, if he wasn't bowled out. But he's come to the end of his tether now."

"Bring him along!" said Blake.

Pilkington's legs were freed, both his arms being tied again. The juniors did not intend to give him the slightest chance of escape. Arthur Augustus and his pater were not found yet, and Pilkington might yet be wanted. Kerr lighted the lantern, and led the way, and Tom Merry and Blake followed the butler by either arm. Herries came next with Towser, and the growl of the bulldog was sufficient to spur Pilkington on when he hesitated. The rest of the juniors brought up the rear.

The downward stairs led away into damp and chilly darkness. Kerr stepped cautiously down the steps holding the lantern before him.

Down and down and down!

They were far beneath the foundations of the house, and the stone walls about them were reeking with damp.

And it was in this dismal recess that Arthur Augustus was held a prisoner. The juniors, as they thought of it, were almost sorry that Towser had not been allowed to have his way upon Pilkington. There was hardly any punishment that the conscienceless rascal did not deserve.

Lower and lower, till they stood in a square stone chamber, without a sign of a door. Kerr turned to Pilkington.

"Show us the way!" he said curtly.

Pilkington hesitated a moment, and at that moment Towser growled. Without a word the rascal stepped to one of the slimy walls, and thrust his hand into a recess in the stonework, and a block of stone slid back, with a creak of rusty hinges. Beyond was a vaulted passage. Wally uttered an exclamation as they advanced through it.

"The old dungeons!" he exclaimed. "They've been walled up for hundreds of years. Nobody knew that there was a secret way of getting into them."

"But Pilkington found it out!" said Tom Merry, "and used it for kidnapping his master and keeping him a prisoner. We're at the finish now."

From the vaulted passage, low-arched openings gave admittance to the horrible dungeons where wretched captives had pined in the "good old times."

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, in a low voice.

They passed through the low arch.

The light gleamed into the dungeon, and a haggard figure sprang from the rugs on the floor, blinking dizzily in the lantern light.

"You scoundrel! Have you come back? I— Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy!"

The juniors gave a shout.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 23.

Rescued at Last!

"Gussy!"

"Gussy, old man!"
They were round him at once, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, with exclamations of joy and satisfaction.

Arthur Augustus blinked at them in a dazed way. Very different he looked from the elegant swell of St. Jim's they knew so well. His face was white and haggard, his clothes reeking with mud and slime; but it was Arthur Augustus—found at last!

Pilkington stood with a sullen, lowering face while the juniors joyfully greeted their chum.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I'm jolly glad you've found me, you know. I told the patah lots of times you would manage it somehow. Bai Jove, this is simply wippin'!"

"Hurray!"

"Yaas, wathab! Huwway, deah boys!"

"Is your father here?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas; in the next cell—chained up, the same as I am."

The juniors pressed through into the next cell, talking Pilkington with them. Lord Eastwood had heard their voices, and he was upon his feet, his face flushed with hope.

"My dear boys!" he exclaimed, as they crowded in. "You have found us!"

"Yes sir; and jolly glad to!" said Tom

Merry. "We'll soon have you out of that. Pilkington, you scoundrel, unfasten that chain!"

Lord Eastwood gazed at Pilkington in blank amazement.

"Pilkington!" he exclaimed. "Has Pilkington helped you to find us?"

"Yes, in a way—not of his own will, though," said Tom Merry.

"It was that scoundrel who kidnapped you, dad!" said Wally, with a ferocious glare at the cowed and sullen rascal.

"Surely that is impossible!" exclaimed the earl.

"Oh, we bowled him out, sir!" said Herries. "My buldog spotted him first, and then Kerr worked it out."

"But—but—"

"You didn't see who captured you, dad?" asked Wally.

Lord Eastwood shook his head.

"No. I was seized suddenly from behind at a late hour in the library, and I was made insensible with a chloroformed cloth pressed over my face," he replied. "I came to myself in this place, without knowing how I was brought here, or who had brought me. I did not think of Pilkington in connection with the outrage—"

"You've only seen him here togged up in black clothes, with a black mask on his face?" asked Kerr.

"Yes—exactly."

"We've found the outfit," said Kerr. "We made Pilky guide us here as soon as we bowled him out, sir. Now we'll make him let you loose. Do you hear, Pilky? Towser is still here, and he's anxious to get at you."

Pilkington, with a muttered curse, drew a rusty iron key from his pocket, and unlocked the iron ring that was fastened round Lord Eastwood's waist.

The earl stood free at last.

"Now for Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Bring that rascal along!"

They crowded back into D'Arcy's dungeon. Pilkington unlocked the junior's irons with the same key. Arthur Augustus chirruped with joy and relief as the irons fell away from him.

"Bai Jove, that's bettah!" he exclaimed. "So it was Pilkington? The awful wascal!"

"The beastly rotter!" said Wally. "He'll go to prison for this!"

"Yaas, wathab! I've had a wotten expewience, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

tus pathetically. "My clothes are utterly ruined! And—"

"The rotter collared you in the Painted Room, I suppose?" asked Blake.

"Yaas. I found somebody watchin' me through a hole in the ceilin', you know—"

"The eye of the Bacchus," said Kerr.

"Yaas; so you have found it out, too. I was feahfully alarmed, and I jumped up, you know—and then the light went out. Thinkin' ovah that, I realised that the vascal must have some confedewate in the house, as he must have had a switch placed somewah to contwol the electric light in the woom. Befoah I weally knew what was happenin' I was collahed, and a chlowoform wag was pressed on my chivvay, you know, and aftah that I didn't know what happened. I didn't have time even to call out and wake you chaps. It was howwible, to feel the chlowoform over-comin' me, and not to be able to cwyt out, though Blake and Dig were quite close to me." Arthur Augustus shuddered. "Thank goodness, it's all ovah!"

"All over for you—but it's just beginnin' for Pilky!" grinned Wally. "He is going to have a taste of prison himself, and he won't get out of it quite so quick."

"Wathah not!"

"Let 'em get out of this," said Kangaroo.

"Take my arm, sir," he added.

Lord Eastwood was tottering with exhaustion

"Thank you, my boy!"

And they left the dungeons, Lord Eastwood leaning heavily upon the arm of the sturdy Corastalk. Blake and Digby helped Arthur Augustus, who was also in an exhausted state.

The juniors followed with their prisoner. Pilkington was maintaining a sullen silence. He had no hope now, and his face was livid with hate and fury and despair.

In ten minutes more they were in the library of Eastwood House.

There Lord Eastwood sank into a chair.

Wally hurried away, and returned with a decanter, and a glass of wine brought a faint flush of colour into the wan cheeks of the earl.

"I wathah think that bed's the place now," Arthur remarked.

"That miserable rascal must be taken care of first," said Lord Eastwood. "He must be placed in safe hands."

"There's a Scotland Yard detective in

the house, sir," said Tom Merry. "He's here to find you, sir. He can take charge of Pilkington. You can make a charge against him, and give him into custody."

"Pray call him!" said Lord Eastwood.

Tom Merry hurried away to call Mr. Dodder. In ten minutes the gentleman from Scotland Yard, hurriedly dressed, and looking very amazed, was in the library. He almost fell down at the sight of Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Lord Eastwood raised his hand, and pointed to Pilkington.

"I give that man in charge, for kidnapping and attempted blackmail," he said. "Please take every care that he does not escape, Mr. Dodder. I am Lord Eastwood."

"I am glad you have been found, sir, though I did not succeed myself," said Mr. Dodder, producing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

The handcuffs clicked upon Pilkington's wrists.

Then, with the detective's grip upon his arm, he was marched out of the library, and a quarter of an hour later Ruggles was driving away the car, containing Mr. Dodder and his prisoner, to the police-station. Pilkington was gone to await in a prison-cell his trial and his condemnation, and then to retire from the world for three years, with ample opportunities for meditating upon his sins, in the intervals of breaking stones. At Eastwood House, the juniors who had baffled his rascality gave him no further thought.

CHAPTER 24.

A Merry Christmas!

C OUSIN ETHEL had a surprise the next morning.

She came down very early, as she had promised Figgins, in order to learn what success the juniors had had in the night.

Little did she anticipate how complete that success had been.

She could scarcely believe her eyes when she came down, for one of the first persons upon whom they rested was—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's, beautifully clean and elegant as usual, looked little the worse for his painful experiences of the last

forty-eight hours, save for a slight pallor in his aristocratic face.

Ethel stopped short in amazement, with a little cry:

"Arthur!"

Arthur Augustus' monocle dropped to the end of its cord as he ran forward to greet his cousin.

"Ethel, deah gal! Heah I am!"

"My dear Arthur! I am so glad! Then you succeeded, Figgins?"

Figgins grinned.

"I didn't," he said. "Kerr did. Kerr did it near'y all."

"And Pilkington—"

"In prison," said Tom Merry.

"And my uncle," said Ethel eagerly—"you found him, too?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah gal! The patah's in bed. He hasn't come down yet. He can't stand these things as I do, you know," said Arthur Augustus; "and he's had more of it, too. I don't think he'll come down to-day. But he's all wight."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Ethel. "We shall have a merry Christmas, after all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Over a very cheerful breakfast-table Cousin Ethel learned all the particulars of the adventures of the night. Aunt Drusilla held up her hands in amazement, but pronounced that Kerr was a very dear, clever boy—an opinion in which Cousin Ethel and all the juniors heartily concurred.

"The clouds have wolloed by now," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he rose from the breakfast-table, "and we're goin' to have a wippin' time deah boys!"

"Hear hear!" said the C's.

And they had:

That afternoon they played the village team on the football ground, and Tom Merry's eleven had the satisfaction of a

victory to start the Christmas holidays with. Arthur Augustus stood by with Cousin Ethel in the crowd that watched the match, favouring Ethel with his valuable opinion on every point in the game, and cheering loudly every goal for St. Jim's.

"Figgins is in good form," Arthur Augustus remarked, as the long-legged New House junior came dashing down the field with the ball at his toes. "See now he got the leathah away from young Bokab. He's weally playin' up well!"

"Yes, isn't he?" said Ethel, with a very bright smile.

"Yaas, wathah! Bwavo, Figgay! That was a vewy neat goal! Bai Jove, Ethel, I couldn't have done bettah than that myself, you know!"

"No, I don't think you could," Ethel agreed smilingly.

"Thwee goals to one," said Arthur Augustus, when the match was over. "I wegard that as vewy cweditable, considewin' that I was not in the team. I considah that you have done wemarkably well, Tom Mewwy!"

"Than which," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "there can be no higher praise."

To which Arthur Augustus replied cheerfully:

"Oh, wats!"

The Christmas holidays, which had started under such grim auspices, turned out very merry and happy, now that the clouds—as D'Arcy put it—had rolled by. Seldom had Tom Merry & Co. had so cheery a Christmas.

And when Arthur Augustus rose at the festive board to propose the health of Kerr, for having been the means of causing the clouds to "woll by," in a speech of considerable length, there were loud cheers from every member of D'Arcy's Christmas party.



1927.

A Review of the Year's "Unnoticed Incidents."

Towards the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, when the time for us to form a fresh batch of resolutions draws near, we sometimes look back on our doings of the past twelve months. Naturally the important affairs of the year linger in our memory, for each of which a thousand little actions are forgotten. But total up a year's unnoticed incidents, twelve months of continuous effort, 365 days of constant muscular output: the result will probably surprise you.

For instance, consider your conversation during the past twelve months; in print, these millions of words would cover enough land for the starting of a comfortable poultry farm, and paid for at the rate of one guinea per thousand words, would bring you thousands of pounds a year. No less amazing is the average person's annual amount of reading matter. To visualise it, imagine it compressed into one huge book—it would be half as long again as an ordinary man.

A Year's Waste:

The prodigious total of the energy which we expend every day gives us facts which are, perhaps, easier to grasp, but which nevertheless provide food for thought. Wasteful though we may have been it is doubtful whether we can hold a candle in this respect to Nature herself. In the course of a year enough electricity is generated in the body to keep a powerful dynamo going for twelve hours a day for one week, yet so far as is known to science, this power is entirely wasted.

Have you ever given a thought to the power of your eyelids? In twelve months they are raised many millions of times. If this energy could be concentrated and used it would have a lifting power of 50 lbs. Rather staggering, you will agree, but not so crushing as a year's handshakes.

Wonderful, too, are our performances in high-stepping and walking. You may never have been abroad, but a calculation based on your everyday walking reveals the fact that you travel on foot as far as from London to Constantinople every year. This walking displaces a certain amount of earth, and it is a fact that a man of fifty displaces enough ground during his lifetime to dig his grave many times over. As to high-stepping, you go up enough steps each year to take you up 3½ miles into the clouds, while with one mighty step comprising a single week's stair work you could have one foot on the ground and the other comfortably resting on the top of St. Paul's.

Right Away, Guard!

Our countless insignificant actions during each one of the 365 days all help to swell the annual total of expended energy. The combined force exerted by all the parts of the human body in the course of a year is stupendous. If it could be converted into steam it would have all the power necessary to drive an express train from London to Newcastle.

The air an average person pumps into his lungs by breathing in twelve months, whether he "breathes deeply," or not, would be enough to keep the largest organ in the world going for a week. Even the breath spent in occasional whistling mounts up during 52 weeks; with it you could play a solo on a French horn several times the length of a man.

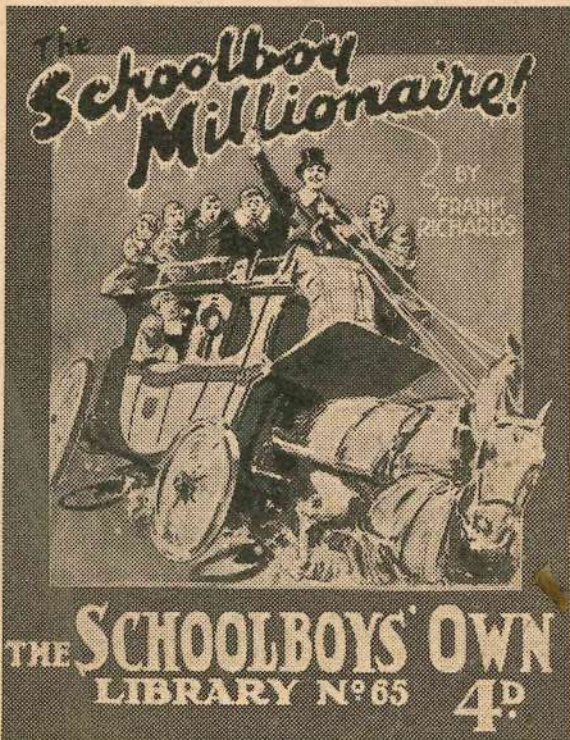
We spend four of the twelve months of the year in sleep, and if we are to believe those who tell us that most of our growth occurs when we are in the arms of Morpheus, it seems strange that we do not add a few more feet to our height. Nevertheless, with two exceptions, the passing of a year has comparatively little effect on our growth. The finger-nails constitute one exception, since the average person in good health sacrifices at least half a yard of nail to the toilet scissors in twelve months. The hair is the second. In a year's visits to the hairdresser enough hair is lost to cover an area 20 ft. square, or enough to fill a large pillow.

The Inner Man:

The total of our eating and drinking during 365 days is another example of how even the smallest actions grow and assume gigantic proportions at the end of a year. If you could save the food you consume in twelve months it would go a long way to providing the stock-in-trade of several shops—a butcher's, with over a hundred pounds of meat, a dairy, with nearly 200 eggs and 15 gallons of milk, while the 150 loaves (some of the January specimens a trifle stale, perhaps) would be a start for a thriving bakery business.

The subject of our mental and physical output during Anno Domini 1927 is almost exhausted. Only the commonest incidents that go to make up every day of our lives have been given here: the rest may, perhaps, be left to the reader's imagination at the most fitting time of the year—New Year's Eve.

HERE'S ANOTHER RIPPING SCHOOL
YARN. CHUMS. DON'T MISS IT!



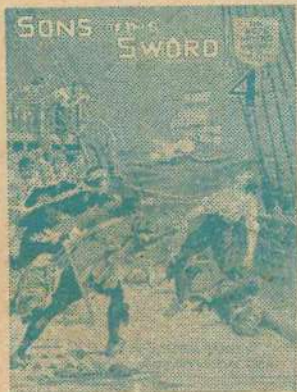
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