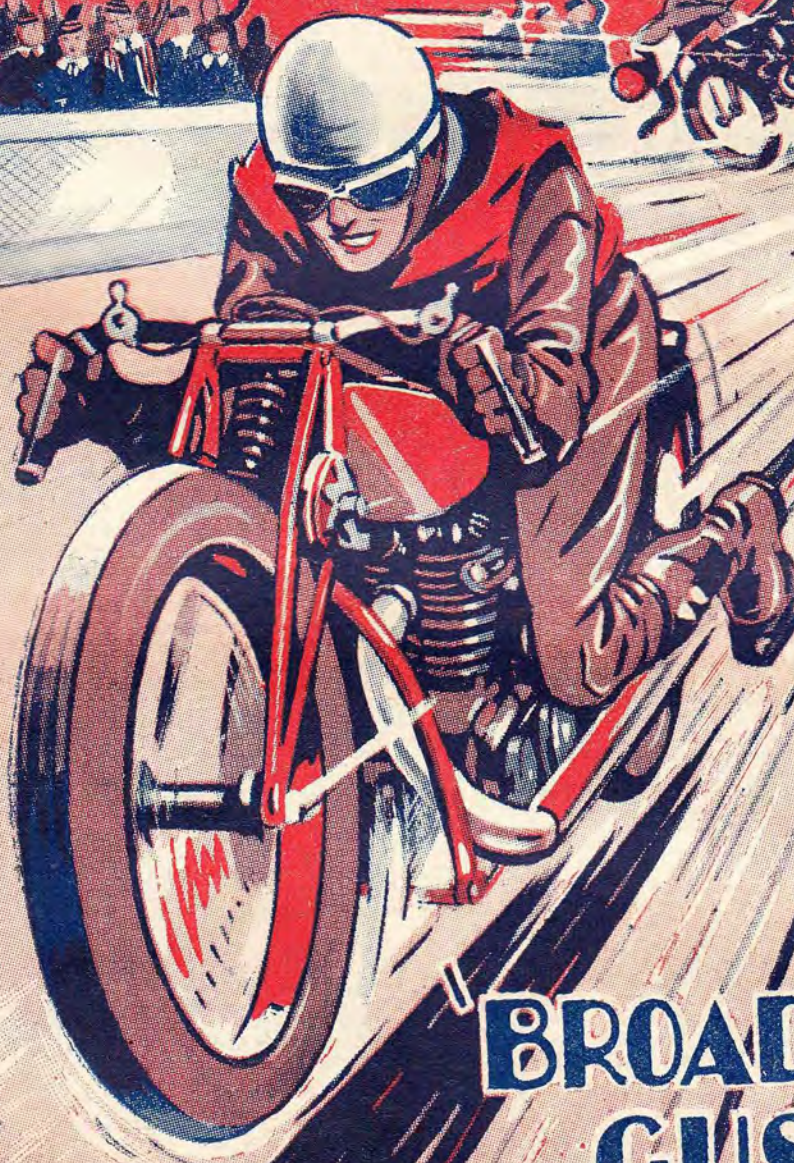


SPECIAL BOOK-LENGTH "DIRT-TRACK" STORY INSIDE!

THE GEM

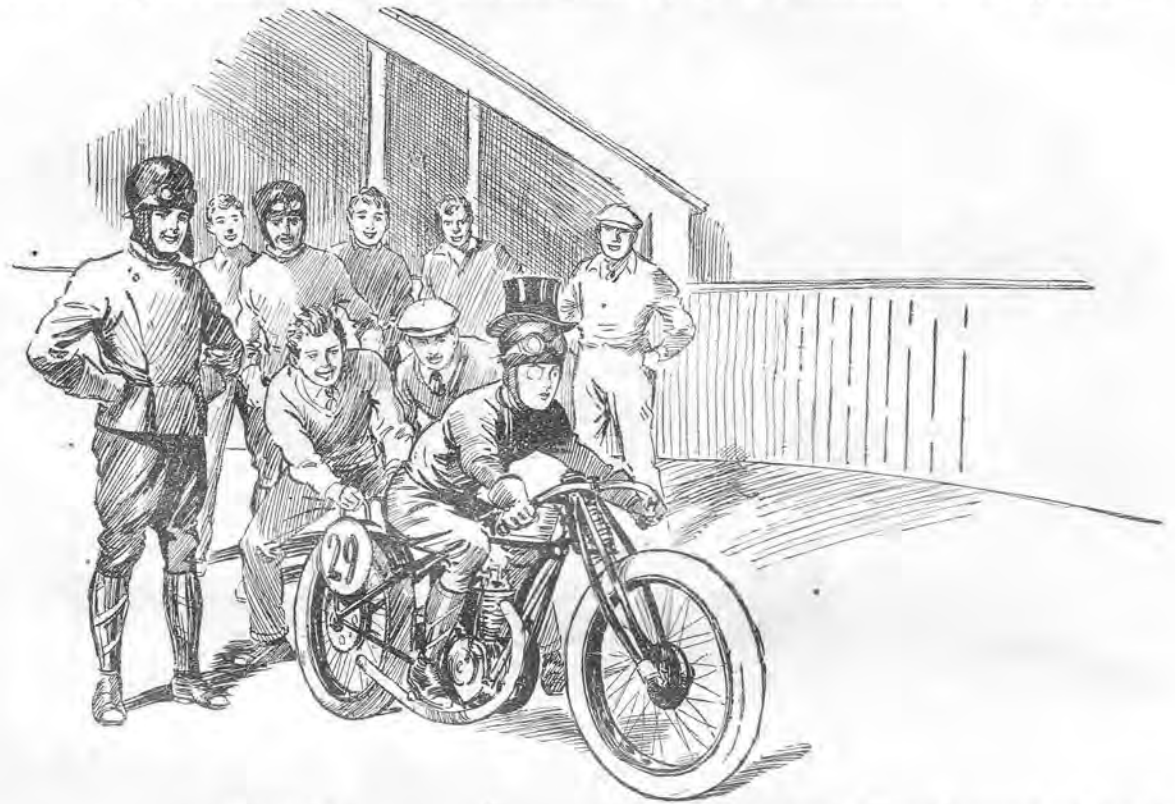
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EVERY
WEDNESDAY



**BROADSIDE
GUSSY'
WINS!**

RAAAAAAAAAA! THERE GOES GUSSY, THE SWELL OF ST. JIM'S—



CHAPTER 1.

King, of the Speedway!

"IT'S wotten!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that gloomy observation.

Arthur Augustus was standing in the quad, his famous monocle jammed in his eye as he watched eleven flannel-clad figures, some of them carrying cricket-bags, who were piling cheerily into a motor-coach that was drawn up just inside the big gates.

"Wotten!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

It was a Saturday afternoon, just after dinner—a bright, sunny afternoon. It was not often that any St. Jim's junior looked gloomy on a sunny half-holiday. But on this occasion the usual cheerful spirits of Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, seemed to be somewhere down in his elegant boots.

As Monty Lowther of the Shell had just remarked, Gussy's face could not have looked more dejected had he just swallowed his last sixpence, as he watched the cricketers piling into the motor-coach.

The St. Jim's junior eleven, skippered by Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, were off to Abbotsford. Abbotsford was a rival school, who usually managed to give St. Jim's a hard tussle on either the cricket or footer field.

And Arthur Augustus, one of the junior eleven's star batsmen, was being left behind!

Hence the doleful countenance of the Hon. Gussy.

A bandaged finger showed the reason why he was not accompanying the others to Abbotsford. He had cut it rather deeply with a penknife on the previous day, and though a cut was nothing much in itself, it was sufficient in this case to prevent Arthur Augustus holding a bat with any hope of knocking up a score. So Tom Merry had been forced to drop the swell of St. Jim's from the eleven, and Manners of the Shell was playing in his place.

"It's wotten!"

Arthur Augustus made that gloomy observation a third time.

The cricketers grinned. They felt sorry for their noble chum, but his doleful countenance, as he watched them taking their seats in the coach, made them smile nevertheless.

"Cheer up, Gussy!" sang out Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth, from one of the back seats. "You know, old hoss, it's just possible we may manage to lick Abbotsford, even without you!"

The other cricketers chuckled. Despite the omission of the swell of St. Jim's from the eleven, Tom Merry was taking a "hot" team over to Abbotsford, and they felt very confident of beating their old rivals.

But Arthur Augustus shook his head gloomily.

"I hope you will manage to beat 'em, deah boys," he said dubiously. "But it seems to me weally wathah doubtful—vewy doubtful, I'm afraid. Howevah, I wish you the best of luck, deah boys."

The "deah boys" chuckled louder. It was quite clear that in the opinion of Arthur Augustus they were doomed to defeat, since they would have to play without him. He had wished them luck in about the same tone he would have used had they all been off to the gallows.

"Well, if you feel lonesome at being left behind, Gussy," grinned Monty Lowther, "just go and sit in your wardrobe, among all your fancy waistcoats. That ought to cheer you up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah! Pway do not be an uttah ass—"

"What are you going to do with yourself, Gussy, to pass the time while we're getting—ahem!—licked by Abbotsford?" queried Figgins of the New House gravely. "You'll need to do something to keep your mind off it, you know. Buzzing over to Spalding Hall, or what?"

Spalding Hall was a school for girls near Wayland, where Gussy's pretty cousin, Ethel Cleveland, and other girl chums of the St. Jim's juniors, were pupils. Arthur Augustus was a fairly frequent visitor there. But at Figg's query he shook his noble head.

"No, deah boy! Hewwies' wotten dog, Towsah, wuined my best paiah of bags

Monocled Schoolboy Novice
"Wipes Up" Crack Dirt-
Track Speedman!

—SHIFTING THE CINDERS AS HE BROADSIDES ROUND THE BEND

BROADSIDE GUSSY

By Martin Clifford

yestahday, and, of course, I couldn't possibly go ovah to see the gals in second-best bags. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The cricketers shrieked. Arthur Augustus surveyed them indignantly.

"Bai Jove! Nothin' to cackle at, you dummies!" "I'll tell you what you can do, then, Gussy—even in a second-best pair of bags," grinned Tom Merry. "Why not buzz over to the new speedway at Wayland and see the dirt-track racing?"

Again Arthur Augustus shook his noble head. "No, deah boy! Those dirt-twack widahs must wuin their clobber howwibly when they cwash, and it always depvesses me to see any fellow wuinin' his clobber—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I see nothin' to gwin about!" snapped Arthur Augustus. "I considah that a fellow's clobber—"

"Well, please yourself, Gussy!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Only for goodness' sake look a bit more cheerful! Abbotsford haven't licked us yet, you know! All aboard, you chaps? Good egg! Right away, driver!"

"Cheerio, Gussy!" "Ta-ta, deah boys!"

The motor-coach rolled out into the road. Arthur Augustus, his eyeglass jammed in his eye, watched it vanish round the distant bend, and sighed.

"Nothin' for it but a stwoll, I suppose! It's wotten!" he murmured disconsolately. "Blow Towsah!"

And, tucking his silver-headed cane under his arm, and settling his gleaming topper at an elegant angle, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sighed again and sailed gracefully forth into Rylcombe Lane.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gave that sudden exclamation as he turned a bend in the moorland road near Wayland, some time later.

Arthur Augustus had been strolling elegantly along with his thoughts far away—in fact, at Abbotsford! But, on turning the bend, a sight had met his eyes which had brought his mind to earth with a bump.

A young fellow, grim-faced, was standing with his back to the hedge, hitting out at four hooligans who were attacking him on three sides. Near by, a motor-cycle combination, with a float, on which was tied a speed-bike in place of a sidecar, stood at the edge of the road—evidently the machine which the fellow with his back to the hedge had been riding when stopped by the roughs.

Arthur Augustus had come to a startled halt. As he did so he saw one of the hooligans go flying before a smashing punch on the jaw. But it was clear that at any moment odds must tell, and the lone fighter would be dragged down.

Arthur Augustus did not wait. Jamming his topper firmly on his head, he raced to the rescue.

Biff!

One of the toughs had the surprise of his life as he felt himself seized unexpectedly by the shoulder from behind and was swung round. The next moment a fist landed on his ear—the fist of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—and he sat down on the road, with a bump and a yell.

"Come on, you wottahs!"

The startled roughs had not noticed the approach of the swell of St. Jim's. Now, as Gussy sailed in, something like a panic seized them for a moment. Then they found that it was only a single ally who had come to the rescue of the young fellow they had set upon, and from one of them there broke a snarling exclamation.

"Git 'im!"

Two of them turned and hurled themselves at Arthur

Augustus, with the intention of "gitting 'im!" But Arthur Augustus did not mean them to get him!

He hit out, straight from the shoulder, with a deadly left. It connected beautifully with the left optic of one of his foes, and the tough-looking gentleman sailed backwards into the hedge, gasping with surprise. The other succeeded in planting a swinging blow on the swell of St. Jim's chest, and for a moment Arthur Augustus staggered. But the next instant he had knocked the hooligan flying after his pal into the hedge. The two of them floundered painfully among the thorns and brambles, gasping breathlessly, and the swell of St. Jim's turned his attention to the others.

But he found that there was no need for him to lend a hand with them.

The athletic-looking, fair-haired fellow to whose rescue he had dashed had just dropped one of his attackers into the dust with a powerful, right-hand smash. The other, scrambling up with a vicious countenance, had found himself promptly seized and swung clean into the air.

There was a ditch at one side of the road with a good deal of water in it. The swell of St. Jim's watched, with a delighted grin, as his unknown companion carried the struggling figure of the hooligan towards it, and flung him in, with a cheerful chuckle.

There was a mighty splash!

"Yah! Yooooossssh!"

The hooligan vanished amid the water-weeds.

"Wippin' bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh, wippin'! Come on, you wottahs!" he added breathlessly, as the two who had been floundering in the hedge freed themselves at last of the loving embrace of the brambles, and returned to the attack. "Take that, you boundah—"

"That" was a healthy buff on the jaw, delivered with all the fighting skill for which the swell of St. Jim's was renowned.

The young fellow at his side dealt similarly with the other rough, and the two collapsed together over the third, who had been scrambling dazedly to his feet.

"Good work!" chuckled Gussy's companion.

It was clear that the roughs had had enough. They did not return to the attack; instead, they jumped to their feet and bolted away through the hedge, followed by the dripping figure of their friend from the ditch.

Arthur Augustus chuckled breathlessly. The fair-haired young fellow turned to him and thrust out his hand.

"Shake!" he said simply.

They shook hands. Arthur Augustus found himself looking into a pair of very cheery blue eyes.

"You just about saved my bacon!" grinned the other. His grin died away, to be replaced by a grim frown.

"Vewy glad I happened to dwift along at the wight time, deah boy," murmured Arthur Augustus gracefully. "But what was the wow about?"

The other's frown deepened. His jaw seemed to stand out another inch.

"My name is Bob King," he said bluntly. "I'm a dirt-track rider at the Wayland Speedway. This afternoon I'm booked to have a shot at beating the one-lap record for the track, and I fancy there's someone who doesn't want me to beat it. I may be wrong, but I fancy that's why I was attacked just now!"

"Gweat Scott!" breathed the swell of St. Jim's. King glanced swiftly at his watch.

"I must get along to the speedway quick," he said grimly. He glanced at Arthur Augustus. "Like to come?"

Arthur Augustus glanced at the speed-iron lashed to the trestle of the combination near them, then at Bob King. He nodded with sudden conviction.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!"

A minute later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, clinging to the pillion of the big combination, was being whirled along the lanes towards Wayland by his new friend—King, of the speedway!

CHAPTER 2.

"Panther" Caradoc!

WITH a shattering roar four leaping speed-irons hurtled down the front straight of the Wayland Speedway. A few seconds, and they were at the first bend, the flaying back wheels scattering the cinders far over the safety fence. Safely round, all four, while the spectators held their breath—a few moments more, and away along the back straight, storming for the next curve at smashing speed.

"Bai Jove!"

In his seat near the front of one of the stands Arthur Augustus held his breath.

His topper was tilted far back from his aristocratic brow, at an angle far different from its usual elegant one. His fingers were clutching at his stick, and his eyes were alight with excitement, riveted, fascinated, upon the flying quartet of riders.

Bob King had piloted him to his seat, ignoring the grins of some of the speedway "fans" at sight of the swell of St. Jim's polished topper. And from the very first race Gussy had found himself utterly enthralled.

The riders were hurtling round into the front straight again. One of them came down in a spinning smash, and only a magnificent swerve on the part of another saved the latter from crashing into him as he lay on the cinders beside his still roaring bike. The fallen rider staggered up as the other three leapt away along the straight, picked up his machine, and leapt into the saddle, storming in pursuit to a deafening cheer from the spectators.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus again.

He had forgotten all about the St. Jim's cricket team over at Abbotsford. The thrill of the speedway had gripped him, to the exclusion of all else.

A team of Danish riders, touring the country, were visiting the Wayland Speedway that afternoon. One of the heats of their challenge match was being run off now—and the visitors were leading the two home riders.

But one of the Wayland men—a big fellow on a thundering Merz machine—fought ahead at the next bend, and was a length in the lead as the foremost three surged along the back straight, with the second Wayland rider—the one who had crashed—still far behind.

Half a lap to go!

"Come on, Caradoc!" yelled someone near the swell of St. Jim's in the stand. "Come on, Panther!"

"Panther" Caradoc, the star of the Wayland riders, was still hanging on to his length lead as he rushed into the bend at smashing speed—the two Danes hot behind him.

But one of his challengers, bucking round close by the white line, in a desperate attempt to cut into the lead, lost control of his machine, and went flying over sideways. The other swept round close by the outer edge, his flaying back wheel scattering the cinders over the spectators beyond the safety fence. But he had lost ground, and he was more than two lengths behind the leading machine as he hurtled round into the straight.

The "crashed" Dane staggered up rather dazedly only a second or two before the chequered flag proclaimed Panther Caradoc the winner. The other Dane took second place, and the second home rider came thundering up to take third.

The event was over, and Arthur Augustus leaned back in his seat among the shouting fans, and breathed freely once again.

He glanced at his programme.

The next event announced on the printed page caused his eyes suddenly to gleam. Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and read:

"ATTACK ON FLYING LAP RECORD"

(The present record being by Panther Caradoc—
20secs.—45.91 m.p.h.)

by
BOB KING."

"Oh, wippin'!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Bob King had ridden in one of the heats against the Danish team earlier in the programme, and had taken first place in that event. The cheers which had greeted him had been enough to show Arthur Augustus that his new friend was one of the most popular of the Wayland riders.

From the eager talk in the stand around him it was

clear to the swell of St. Jim's that Bob King's attack on the flying lap record was an eagerly awaited event.

The voice of the announcer hushed the spectators, as the coming event was given out. Then came a terrific cheer as the leather-clad figure of the young challenger appeared, wheeling his speed-iron on to the track.

It was difficult for Arthur Augustus to realise, as the crouching, hunched figure on the roaring bike was pushed away, that this was the same fellow to whose aid he had gone in the lane earlier that afternoon. A scarcely human figure, welded to the machine beneath it—utterly different from the cheery-faced young fellow of that other occasion.

There were encouraging cheers from the onlookers as Bob made his preliminary circuit. Then, as he came round into the front straight again, and stormed forward with smashing acceleration, every other sound but the thunder of the machine's exhaust was drowned.

As the lone rider hurtled into the first bend, Arthur Augustus caught his breath.

He watched, fascinated, thrilled to the very backbone of his elegant figure, as Bob King, his toeplate tearing through the cinders, came round in a fierce slide, flames belching from his exhaust-pipe.

"Go it, deah boy—"

A smashing broadside brought Bob round into the straight. He flew along it at hurricane speed, bike and rider seeming to fling themselves at the next bend in a way that spelt disaster. But not for a moment did the machine get out of control. With the handlebars dragged round by iron wrists against the skid, the speed-iron came hurtling round superbly, the cinders flying from beneath its tearing wheel.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sprang excitedly to his feet.

He found himself yelling with a number of other excited onlookers—yelling himself hoarse!

Bob King was certainly all out for the record! He seemed utterly contemptuous of the possibility of disaster as he and his leaping machine fought the split seconds with the track record for the prize.

The thrill that gripped the spectators could be felt in the very air. All eyes round the oval track were riveted spellbound on that thunderous, hurtling machine—speed incarnate!

"I believe he'll do it!" snapped someone just behind Arthur Augustus. "If only he can! I'd give a lot to see Caradoc beaten—"

Round the last bend, handlebars bucking madly, the lone figure on the speedway came flying, and tore all out for the finishing flag.

"Oh, wippin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly, as he sank down into his seat again, while Bob King eased up, and circled comfortably round towards the opening into the pits. "I wonder if he has beaten that fellow Cawadoc's record? My hat, I hope he has!"

But Gussy's hopes were doomed to disappointment.

When the voice of the announcer came through the amplifiers, it was to inform the disappointed "fans" that Bob King's attack on the flying lap record had failed. His time had been 20 2-5th seconds—equalling 45.01 miles per hour.

It had been a close thing, at any rate, and there was a sympathetic cheer for Bob. From the talk around him Arthur Augustus gathered that Bob was a far more popular rider with the crowd than Panther Caradoc.

Other events followed. The Danes were narrowly defeated by the home team, and in the match race final, between the two fastest riders of the opposing teams, Panther Caradoc beat the captain of the Danish team by a handsome margin.

It was clear enough to the swell of St. Jim's that even if Caradoc was not too popular with some of the crowd, owing to something in his character, he was, at any rate, a superb speedman.

The final event over, Arthur Augustus made his way to the pits.

Bob King, standing with a number of riders and mechanics, caught sight of him at once.

"Well, how did you like it?" he inquired, with a grin, crossing towards Arthur Augustus.

"Wippin', deah boy!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, with gleaming eyes. "Fwightfully thwillin', bai Jove! Wotten luck you just missin' the track record—"

Bob laughed and shrugged. He turned to the group of leather-clad riders near.

"This is the youngster that sailed in so rippingly and saved my bacon with that gang of hooligans this afternoon," he said quietly.

"Oh, wats, deah boy!" protested Arthur Augustus modestly. "I didn't do much, weally—"

"Rubbish!" grinned Bob King cheerily. "You got me out of the dickens of a mess. There were four of them on to

me, Caradoc!" he added suddenly, turning to a powerfully-built figure with heavy, black brows who was standing not far away, smoking a cigarette.

Arthur Augustus glanced round quickly. So this was Panther Caradoc!

Caradoc was looking rather odd as he faced Bob King.

"Oh?" he growled. "Funny business, that—"

"Very!" nodded Bob dryly, and turned away.

He introduced some of the riders to Arthur Augustus, and the swell of St. Jim's had one of the biggest thrills of the afternoon in shaking hands with some of the men he had seen hurtling round the track earlier on.

Soon after that the swell of St. Jim's took his leave of the speedway, Bob King gripping him warmly by the hand as he said good-bye.

"Come and see the boys again," urged King. He took out a scrap of paper and pencil, and jotted down an address. "Here's where I live, by the way. If ever you're passing, drop in and see me! If I'm not in, mother'll be glad to see you. I'll be telling her how you got me out of that fix this afternoon."

As he spoke, the young speedman glanced again at Panther Caradoc, who was talking to his mechanic a few yards away.

There was something in that odd look that caused Arthur Augustus to wonder, as he set off back for St. Jim's. Could it be that Panther Caradoc, star of the Wayland Speedway,

"You don't seem very interested!" snapped Blake.

"You see, Blake, deah boy," explained Arthur Augustus, "I was busy w'itin' a lettah—"

"Dash it all, that's no reason why you should forget all about the Abbotsford match, is it?" hooted Blake, thoroughly exasperated.

"It's a vewy important lettah to the A.-C.U."

"The—the which?" ejaculated Blake, staring.

"The A.-C.U.—in othah words, the Auto-Cycle Union!" sniffed the swell of St. Jim's. "I am witin'—"

"The—the A.-C.U.?" repeated Blake, rather dazedly.

"What the thump are you writing to the A.-C.U. about?" "I am witin' to get a permit to do dirt-track widin'," explained Arthur Augustus, with another sniff.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waded into the ruffians, hitting out right and left!



was the mysterious individual to whom Bob King had referred when he had said that "someone" would have been glad to keep him from attempting to smash the flying lap record at the meeting that day?

Was Caradoc afraid of Bob King—afraid that the popular, cheery youngster, who was rapidly becoming an idol of the track, would before long oust him from his place of star turn at the Wayland Speedway?

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus, as he sailed gracefully towards the school. "I wondah if that's what the twouble is?"

He had not liked the look of Panther Caradoc.

And had Gussy only known it, in his suppositions regarding Bob King and Caradoc, the swell of St. Jim's had hit the nail on the head!

"Hallo, hallow!"

Jack Blake pushed open the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage with a crash.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in the study, seated at the table, writing a letter. He glanced up at his chum's entry, with rather a far-away look on his face.

"Hallo, Blake, deah boy!"

Blake marched into the study, and threw his cricket-bag down in a corner. He grinned cheerily.

"Well, we won, old hoss!"

"Back, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus vaguely. "Did you?"

Had the swell of St. Jim's stated that he had been writing to ask permission to fly to the moon, Jack Blake could not have been more surprised. He leapt almost a foot into the air.

"Wha-a-at?" he shrieked, goggling at his noble chum.

"I twust I speak plainly," said the swell of St. Jim's icily. "I wepeat, I am w'itin' for a permit—"

The door flew open just then, interrupting him. Herries and Digby marched into the study, followed by Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners. Herries and Dig had got back from an after-tea spell at the nets, and had run into the Terrible Three in the passage, and invited them in.

They all roared with laughter when they heard about Gussy's letter, and they listened with interest while Gussy told them of his adventures of the afternoon. But they none of them took his determination to ride very seriously.

CHAPTER 3.

Speedway Rivals!

"READY, you chaps?"

Blake asked that question the following Saturday, as he put his head in at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, in search of the Terrible Three. Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. had planned to go over to Wayland Speedway that afternoon to see the dirt-track racing.

"All ready, old hoss!" nodded Tom Merry.

Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were waiting at the foot of the stairs as Blake and the Terrible Three arrived in the Hall. A minute later they were getting their push-bikes out of the shed, and cycling out of the gates.

They reached the speedway in plenty of time, and Arthur Augustus rather proudly led the way to the paddock. Bob King was in the pits, with his mechanic, and his face lit up at sight of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Hallo!" he called out, and hurried across to the fence, holding out his hand—rather an oily hand, for Bob King, unlike some of the riders, knew a good deal about speed-irons, and helped his mechanic. "How's things?"

Arthur Augustus introduced his chums over the wire fence.

"Glad to meet you," grinned Bob King. "I fancy you'll enjoy the meeting this afternoon. As you know, there's the league match against Markford. They're a hot bunch, the Markford crowd, and they'll take some beating, I can tell you!"

"Well, best of luck!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Thanks!"

"I see you've got a match race on against Caradoc, for the Golden Belt!" added Tom. "Hope you get it!"

As he spoke, he caught sight of a scowling figure not far away. It was Panther Caradoc himself, and it was clear that he had caught Tom's words. The expression on his face as he turned away, showed plainly enough that he resented Bob King's popularity.

Tom grinned. He cared nothing for Caradoc's feelings. He knew that the man had the reputation of being a bad sportsman.

"See you later, I hope!" said Bob King cheerily, as he nodded to the St. Jim's party, and returned to his mechanic.

A few minutes later Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were taking their seats in the stand.

The first event that afternoon, after the parade of the visiting and home teams, was heat one of the inter-track league match. Caradoc and a rider named Phil Evans rode for Wayland, in red and blue respectively, against the yellow and white of the two Markford men. It was soon obvious, as the quartet thundered round in amazingly close formation, that the two visiting riders were just about a match for the pair of Wayland cracks.

As they rocketed round the bend into the back straight on the fourth lap, however, Panther Caradoc, by superb riding, snatched a half-length lead from the "white" Markford man.

"That chap can manage a speed-iron all right, whether he's a sport or not!" muttered Tom Merry, as he watched the flying quartet hurtle for the next bend. "Bob King will have his work cut out to lick him for the Golden Belt this afternoon!"

"Yaas, wathah!" breathed Arthur Augustus, watching with his monocle jammed in his eye as the riders came round the last bend with lashing wheels, their toe-caps tearing through the cinders. "Bai Jove, come on, Wayland!"

The chequered flag fell for Caradoc as he flashed past the finishing-line a length in advance of the white Markford rider. Phil Evans, of Wayland, was third.

"Good for Wayland!" grinned Blake. "That's four points for us to Markford's two! First blood to us!"

"Bob King's in the second heat, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly, as the times for the first heat were announced. "He and a fellow called Eddie Ives! Bob's weawin' wed!"

It was with especially keen interest that the St. Jim's party watched the four riders for the next heat pushed off.

Bob King was placed on the outside berth. The exhausts roared out as they set off round the track for the preparatory circuit—then thundered madly as the four machines rocketed forward as they came out of the bend before the starting-line. One of the Markford riders, however, in his eagerness, had over-accelerated, and was well ahead of the other three as they crossed the line. A false start was signalled, and once again the riders circled the track at an easy pace.

"Come on, Bob!" breathed Monty Lowther eagerly, as they came round the bend towards the starting-line again—this time in perfect alignment.

The riders wound open their throttles, and, with a shattering, tumultuous roar of sound, the four speed-irons went rocketing away along the front straight, in front of the stands, and flung themselves at the bend. They reached it without any of the four having gained so much as a yard of advantage. But as they swept slithering round the curve, one of the Markford riders—the one wearing a yellow helmet-cover, who had the inside berth—took the lead.

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They came skidding out of the bend into the back straight with the yellow helmet a length in front. Then came the other Markford man, neck and neck with Bob King, who had snatched position with a smashing slide. Side by side the two tore in pursuit of the yellow helmet, Bob drawing away a trifle from the rider challenging him.

Yellow was still leading Bob by a length as they swept into the next curve and shut off. The cinders from the leading rider's back wheel spurted into Bob's face, rattled against his bike, as he stormed in pursuit.

With Bob still getting smoke and cinders in plenty from the bike leading him, the riders came round into the front straight, and shot away all out. The other Wayland man, Eddie Ives, was overhauling the second Markford rider, and there was a yelling cheer from the stands as the four flung themselves at the next bend.

Bob King, riding with all his skill, strove desperately to steal the lead as the two foremost bikes took the curve. But his rival was not giving anything away, and there was still a length between them as they flew at breakneck speed out of the bend into the straight once more.

For the time being the race had developed into two separate duels—Bob and the yellow-helmeted Markford man battling for the lead, and the other two almost neck and neck some lengths behind.

Bob seemed to lose ground slightly along the straight, but he regained it, with a bit to spare, at the next bend. There was a shout from the stands as it was seen that the Markford man had swung out rather far, enabling Bob's red helmet to come up on the inside.

"He's won the inside berth now!" breathed Manners excitedly. "Oh, good egg!"

The eyes of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were shining as the two leading riders came hurtling along the straight in front of the stands once more—this time with Bob against the white line! They stormed into the bend, and the Markford man, high up towards the safety fence, lost ground again.

Bob King was more than a length in the lead as they swept away along the back straight with flaming exhausts.

In the meantime, the other two were still almost neck and neck, with the Markford rider slightly in the lead. But as they came out of the bend there was a gasp from the onlookers.

The Wayland rider, Eddie Ives, had somehow got into a wobble. Unable to check himself, he went shooting on to the turf, skidded round, and was flung yards clear of his machine. He lay still, the wheels of his speed-iron lashing round wildly at the edge of the track—and the white-helmeted Markford man tore away in pursuit of the leaders.

Attendants ran to the fallen rider, and he was carried away.

"Rotten luck!" muttered Monty Lowther.

For the moment the juniors' eyes had been turned from Bob and his rival. Now, as they came shooting into the front straight for the finish of the third lap, they saw that the Markford man had taken the lead once more.

There was a groan of disappointment from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

With his eyeglass jammed in his eyes, the swell of St. Jim's scarcely seemed to breathe as he watched, fascinated, the two speedmen flashing past the stand. The yellow flag fluttered.

Only one more lap to go—and Bob King was a length behind.

"That Markford chap is hot-stuff!" grunted Digby.

"So's King! He'll beat him yet!" breathed Jack Blake.

The shouts of the spectators had died away into a tense hush as the two leading riders plunged for the bend.

"Come on, Bob, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Catch the boundah—"

Their toe-caps shooting through the cinders, the two riders broadsided, their handlebars wrenched round against the skid.

Bob challenged the other with a magnificent slide, and the spectators raised a breathless cheer as it was seen that he had gained ground.

There was no more than half a length in it, as the pair hit the back straight.

The other Markford man was still well behind—out of it, so far as first or second place was concerned, unless there was a crash.

And with the leaders battling so desperately for the lead, a crash did not seem unlikely!

The speed-irons heeled over as the riders, lying flat, slashed into the curve.

Dirt flying from their flaying wheels, they stormed madly round. The Markford man was striving to hold the inside berth, but at his terrific speed he came out from the white line more than he intended—and Bob King snatched the chance.

Bike and rider seemed to leap for the opening like a wild animal springing for its prey.

For a second it looked as though the rivals' handlebars had touched. But then the two speed-irons swung into the straight for the finishing line—with Bob a length ahead.

He wound open the throttle, twisting round the grip with a flashing movement. He sensed the rider coming up on his right with smashing acceleration—but his own motor, tuned to a fraction, responded nobly. It shot forward down the straight like a streak—and the chequered flag fell, with the Markford man still well behind.

"Oh, good man!" gasped Jack Blake, leaping to his feet. "Hurrah!"

There was a storm of cheering round the track.

CHAPTER 4.

All Square!

"WOTTEN!"

It was Arthur Augustus who gave vent to his feelings with that remark.

The first heat of the Golden Belt final was over—and Caradoc had won.

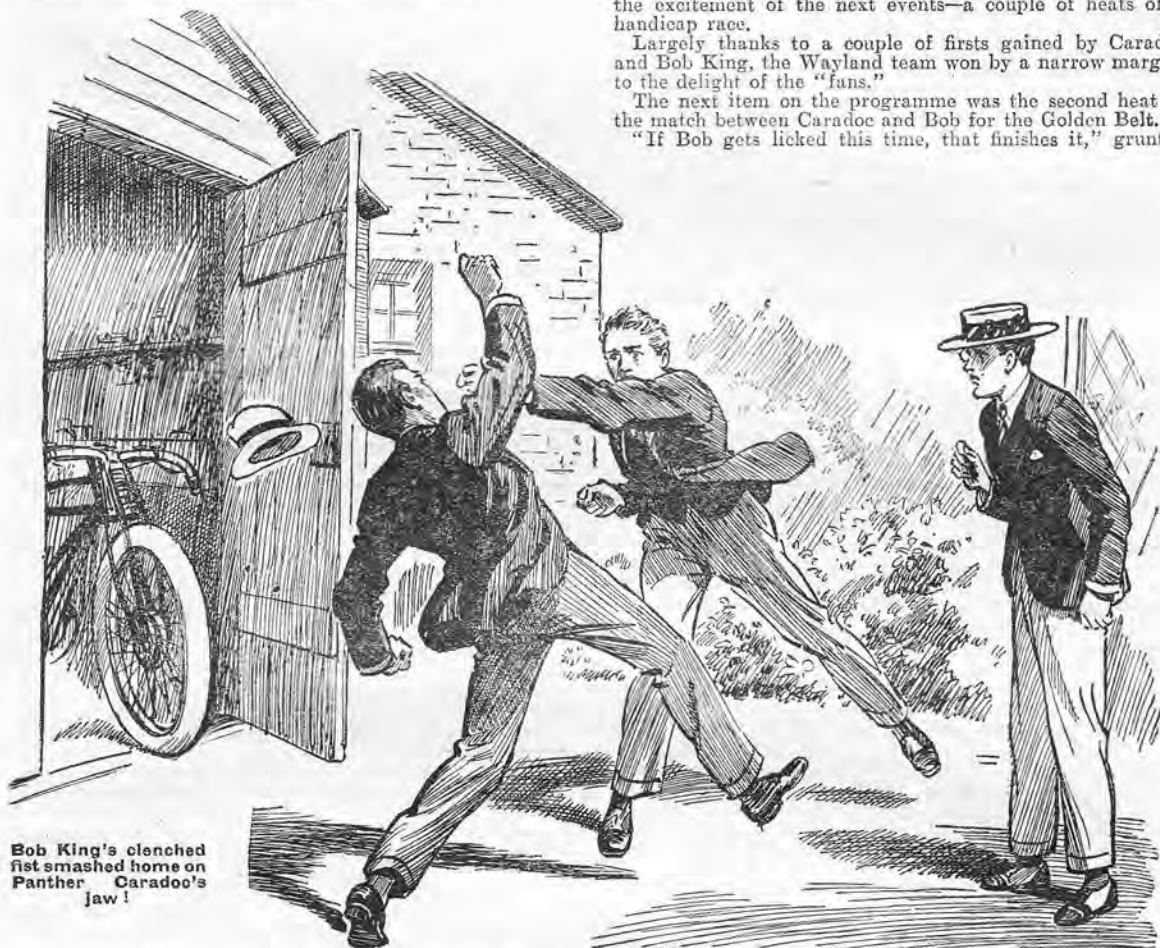
It had been a close tussle—a matter of split seconds almost. That the crowd had been disappointed had been plain from the way in which it had received Caradoc's victory. And the face of the thick-set speedman had been ugly beneath its leather mask as the Panther had re-entered the pits.

The juniors forgot their disappointment, however, during the excitement of the next events—a couple of heats of a handicap race.

Largely thanks to a couple of firsts gained by Caradoc and Bob King, the Wayland team won by a narrow margin, to the delight of the "fans."

The next item on the programme was the second heat of the match between Caradoc and Bob for the Golden Belt.

"If Bob gets licked this time, that finishes it," grunted



Bob King's clenched fist smashed home on Panther Caradoc's jaw!

The times were given out, together with the welcome announcement that Eddie Ives was not much hurt, although he would be unable to take part in any more racing that day.

Seven more heats of the league match were run off, at the finish of which the Wayland team were three points ahead of the visitors. Then came the event for which the juniors were waiting eagerly—the first of the three heats to be fought out between Bob King and Panther Caradoc for the Golden Belt.

"I hope to goodness that wottah Cawadoc doesn't win it," muttered Arthur Augustus, when the announcement concerning the event had been made. "I can't stand the boundah! I considah he is a shifty-lookin' wottah!"

"You're about right, Gussy," nodded Tom Merry. "Good luck, Bob!" he added eagerly, as the two competitors appeared from the paddock, Bob King in red again, Panther Caradoc in white.

"Four laps, rolling start," remarked Manners, glancing at the programme. "Come on, Bob!"

Hundreds of eyes were fixed upon the pair of riders as they were pushed off and circled the track at an easy pace.

The St. Jim's juniors scarcely breathed as Bob and Caradoc swung round into the front straight for the starting line, switching round their throttle-grips, and leaping away together for the first heat of the big race!

Blake rather gloomily, as the two riders made their preparatory circuit, Caradoc in the inside berth.

"There they go!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Good luck, Bob, deah boy!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's, as the rivals flashed past the stand, roaring all out for the first bend. "On the ball!"

From the very first, that second heat held the spectators spellbound.

Caradoc was first to take the lead. But he gained no more than half a length by it, and as the two came surging round, scattering the dirt, into the front straight again, there was an excited yell as it was seen that Bob had regained the ground he had lost, and was leaping along dead level.

The screaming exhausts echoed shatteringly against the stands as the speed-irons hurtled with lashing rear wheels round the bend again. Caradoc this time failed to repeat his success of the first time round at that bend, and it was Bob King who hit the back straight in front of his rival.

There was a cheer from the St. Jim's juniors that was taken up by more than half the people near them.

Bob King was certainly the favourite!

Another mad scramble at the curve, with the cinders raking out through the safety fence, caused the spectators there to duck hastily. Bob had lost some of his lead, and

only the width of a bucking front wheel separated the red helmet from the white as the speed-irons flashed thunderously past the stand, and leapt away on the third lap.

With pounding front wheels nosing the dirt, fists locked to the grips, bodies stretched low from saddle to steering-head, and toecaps grinding, Panther Caradoc and his young challenger smashed round the first curve again at nightmare speed. And Bob King hung on to his lead! As they took the straight once more he was almost a length ahead, and a hoarse, excited cheer once more rang out above the thunder of the belching exhausts.

"Come on, Bob—come on—"

Blake was on his feet, yelling excitedly. Arthur Augustus, gripping his silver-headed cane fiercely, had half-risen, too. The others were leaning forward, motionless, breathless with the thrill of that desperate duel on the oval track.

The yellow flag was out, showing that the competitors were entering the last lap, as Bob and the Panther came out of the bend into the front straight once more, to hurricane away for the next bend—dead level!

"Not an inch in it—my giddy aunt!" muttered Monty Lowther. "Caradoc's caught him up!"

Not an inch to spare!

Into the bend they flew, broadsiding fiercely, Caradoc again hanging on to the inside berth. He was riding superbly—there was no doubt about that. But so was Bob King; and there was no more than half a length between them as the pair shot away along the back straight, the white helmet leading the red.

"Caradoc'll do it!" groaned Digby.

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus was on his feet now, his topper tilted far back from his aristocratic brow.

Wheels flaying the cinders, the two speed-irons with their breakneck riders stormed for the bend.

Caradoc was out to finish things! He was viciously determined to end the match with that second heat. But his savage determination was fatal!

He did not cut off soon enough, and as he broadsided, his back wheel flew over too far. He wrenched the handlebars, but lost control. The next moment he had gone over in a flying crash, his machine hurtling against the fence sickeningly.

There was a breathless gasp from the onlookers.

It looked as though Bob King was bound to strike the fallen man.

But he did not. With magic skill, he swerved between the threshing wreck of Caradoc's machine and the sprawling figure of its rider, missing the rear wheel of the other speed-iron by a hair's-breadth. Round the curve he came slithering, on the outside edge of the track—and there was a thunderous cheer from the spectators as he hurtled on towards the chequered flag that proclaimed him the victor of that heat.

Caradoc was scrambling to his feet unassisted by the attendants who had gone racing towards him. It was clear that he was unhurt.

He turned sullenly towards the paddock.

In the stand, the St. Jim's juniors were yelling themselves hoarse.

CHAPTER 5

"Conked Out!"

"NOW for it!" breathed Tom Merry.

The second semi-final of the handicap race had just finished, and the next event, as the announcer was giving out, was the final of the match race between Bob King and Panther Caradoc for the Golden Belt.

"Talk about thrills!" grinned Monty Lowther. "This giddy dirt-track racing beats the blessed band!"

"My hat, yes!" chuckled Blake.

Arthur Augustus glanced at his chums, but did not speak. There was a queer look in the face of the swell of St. Jim's.

The thrill of the speedway had gripped Arthur Augustus strangely. But he was keeping his thoughts on the subject to himself! His chums of the Fourth and Shell had already been facetious enough about his enthusiasm.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Manners, as for the third and last time that afternoon Bob King and Panther Caradoc took the track in their fierce duel for the coveted Golden Belt.

It was a struggle which would be settled, one way or another, this time!

The pair circled the track in a way that seemed thoroughly leisurely, compared with their first appearance

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together. Round into the front straight, speeding up with sudden fierceness—and the final had begun!

Both riders were smashing into it with a determination that seemed almost savage, so it appeared to the spectators, as they rocketed for the bend.

They could not see the queer, sour smile on the face of the Panther beneath his leather mask—a smile that would have caused anyone to wonder!

The two shot out of the bend into the back straight with Bob King in the lead, and there were murmurs of satisfaction from his supporters as the red helmet flew down the straight a couple of lengths ahead of the white.

"Go it, Bob!"

"My hat, if only he can keep it up—"

The riders whirled into the bend, and the cinders flew.

There was a sudden gasp of dismay from the St. Jim's juniors. Bob King seemed to be cornered poorly this time, and Caradoc's white helmet forged past him. The riders' positions had been reversed by the time they came into the front straight again, finishing the first lap, and pounding for the corner once more.

As the two helmeted riders came past the stands, it was seen that Caradoc was leaping away from his rival. Lengths separated them as the Panther shot into the bend.

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Tom Merry, in astonished consternation.

"What the dickens—"

"Somethin' the mattah, bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus, his face oddly set.

A queer note was issuing from Bob's exhaust as he passed the stand where the juniors were seated.

That something was wrong was only too evident. His engine seemed to be petering out—and as he slid into the bend, it "conked" altogether. Bob's speed-iron slithered to a standstill, while Panther Caradoc roared away along the back straight, with an invincible lead.

For a moment or two Bob was seen tinkering with his bike. Then he dragged it off the track on to the turf. It was evidently hopeless. A sound like a groan of disappointment went round the track, to the accompaniment of Caradoc's surging exhaust-note.

It was a walk-over for Caradoc—only the bare chance that he might "conk out" too still allowing a forlorn hope to Bob's supporters. But it was a faint hope enough, and one that was soon extinguished. At an easy pace, the Panther completed the four laps, and the chequered flag fell.

Caradoc had won the Golden Belt!

The juniors streamed out of the stadium with the crowd, gathering again outside the entrance. Blake, Herries, Dig and the Terrible Three had soon collected. But of Arthur Augustus, whom they had missed in the crowd, there was no sign.

Arthur Augustus had deliberately given his chums the slip in the crowd, and hurried to the pits in search of Bob King.

For the swell of St. Jim's had a very special reason for wishing to see his friend of the speedway!

CHAPTER 6.

The New Speed-Iron!

"WELL, what's the favour, Gussy?"

Bob King's face, which had borne rather a grim, thoughtful frown through tea, broke into a smile as he asked that question.

The young dirt-track rider had taken Arthur Augustus home to the cottage where he lived with his mother, for tea. The two were alone together, enjoying their meal in the cosy little front-room. Bob King had been rather silent; but now he remembered that Arthur Augustus had said that he had a "favah" to ask.

Arthur Augustus, piling into home-made cakes with a will, grinned a trifle sheepishly.

"I was wonderin', deah boy, if you could do me a favah," he nodded. "I'm wathah keen on this dirt-twack wacin', don't you know—"

"I've noticed that!" grinned Bob.

"And if I could bowwow a speed-iron, I'd like to have a twy wound the twack myself!" blurted out the swell of St. Jim's eagerly.

Bob smiled across the table at Gussy's eager face. He nodded.

"O.K!" he said. "I can lend you a bike."

The swell of St. Jim's eyes gleamed.

"I say, that's wippin' of you!"

(Continued on page 10.)

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BROADSIDE CUSSY!

(Continued from page 8.)

"Oh, rats! Only too jolly glad to do something for you after what you did for me the other day! Some of the boys will be practising on Monday evening. Come along and we'll see what you can do! You can ride a motor-bike, I suppose? Good! We'll call that settled."

"Thanks awfully!" murmured Arthur Augustus gratefully.

The frown crept back into Bob's face as they continued their tea. Arthur Augustus noticed it, and guessed the reason, he thought.

"Wotten luck, your bike conkin' out this aftahnoon like that in the final for the Golden Belt!" he said sympathetically. "Fwightful bad luck. I considah—"

A twisted grin appeared on Bob's good-looking face.

"Luck!" he said, almost fiercely. "That's the thing, Gussy—it wasn't a question of luck!"

Arthur Augustus stared at him in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! You don't mean—"

"It was foul play," said Bob King quietly.

"G'weat Scott!"

"Someone put iron-filings in the petrol tank."

Bob's eyes gleamed fiercely as he spoke, though his voice was strangely quiet. The twisted smile came back to his face.

"That's why I seized up at the start of the second lap. Iron-filings in the petrol! An old trick for doing in a bike. Someone took the opportunity, I suppose, when Jim—my mechanic—had been called away, in the pits, before the final."

Arthur Augustus was staring at his friend as if he could scarcely believe his ears. He adjusted his eyeglass, surveying Bob in utter amazement.

"M-my hat!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "G'weat pip! But—but who—"

"Caradoc!" snapped Bob. "I'm certain of it! He meant to win that trophy—fair or foul! When he found there was a chance of losing it fairly, he adopted foul means to make sure. He's a rogue, if ever there was one."

"B-but dash it all, deah boy, if you can p'rove it—"

"I can't!" said Bob bitterly. A grim smile appeared on his face. "Never mind that, anyway. I wouldn't have him hounded off the speedway now if I could! I want to lick him first on the dirt-track! And, by gum, I will!"

He gripped the edge of the table, and leaned forward with gleaming eyes.

"I'll tell you a secret! Don't let it go any further. I'm building a bike to a new design—it's nearly finished. It's an idea of my own that I've patented quietly—a new wheeze for frame-design—and with it I'll smash Caradoc's track records and lick him in a challenge match—lick him into fits!"

Bob's eyes were shining eagerly as he leaned back in his chair again.

"I'm keeping this as a little surprise for Caradoc! He'll get the shock of his life next Saturday, when I take the track with that new bike of mine! My mechanic knows, and you know, but nobody else—except for a chap in the Benson Motor-Cycle Company. They're pretty interested, are Benson's, and I'm hoping to sell the patent to them for a big figure!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It'll mean a lot to me, to sell my idea to Benson's," went on Bob quietly. "My mother's been ill, and doctors' fees, and so on, have been heavier than I care to think about. I want to send her to the South of France, but I can't unless I can persuade Benson's my bike is worth a big figure to them. Well, I mean to prove that on Saturday."

He grinned.

"Next Saturday, Benson's are sending a man to the speedway to watch my performance. If that bike smashes a few records, as I mean it to, everything's fine! And, incidentally, it'll be all the revenge I want on that scoundrel Caradoc!"

He rose to his feet.

"Come outside, and I'll show you the bike," he suggested.

"Bai Jove! Wathah!"

Arthur Augustus jumped eagerly to his feet.

The speed-iron that Bob had designed, and which he had nearly finished assembling, was housed in a shed at the back of the cottage, behind padlocked doors. He unlocked them and swung them open, and led the swell of St. Jim's inside.

Even to Arthur Augustus' inexperienced eye it was obvious, as he surveyed the bike through his gleaming monocle, that Bob's design was of an almost revolutionary nature. The front forks, in particular, were very different from those of any machine he had ever seen. Though he did not understand the technicalities of the design, to Arthur Augustus the secret bike looked like "Speed" with a capital S!

"Isn't she a beauty?" grinned Bob proudly.

Then both he and Arthur Augustus gave startled exclamations and swung round.

For a third voice had answered Bob's question, from behind them—a voice that held an unpleasant ring:

"Sure! She's a beauty!"

A thick-set figure was standing on the path behind them.

Panther Caradoc!

CHAPTER 7.

The Challenge!

THERE was a sour grin on Caradoc's face as he surveyed Bob King, standing by the speed-iron that was to have been a secret—but was a secret no longer!

"Perhaps I'm not welcome?" sneered Caradoc, his eyes riveted with a very queer expression on the new speed-iron, Bob King laughed abruptly.

"What are you nosing round here for, anyway?" he asked, with gleaming eyes.

Caradoc shrugged.

"Just looked in!" he answered coolly. "Couldn't get an answer at the door, so I walked round into the garden. I didn't get a chance in the pits, but I wanted to say what bad luck it was your bike packing up like it did this afternoon."

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

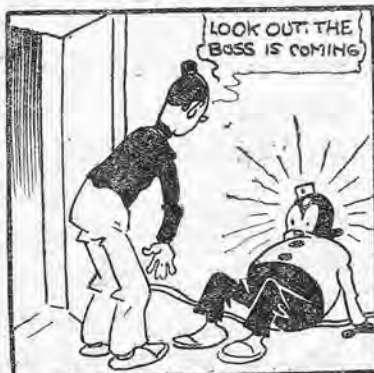
Knowing what he did, the man's cool insolence staggered him.

Even Bob seemed taken aback for a moment. Then his face set in grim lines.

"Very kind of you!" he retorted dryly. "But the less I discuss that with you the better I shall like it."

"What do you mean?" cried Caradoc blusteringly.

THE MISADVENTURES OF THE WIGGA WAGGA BOYS!



Bob's eyes gleamed into the other man's.
"I fancy you know! Iron filings aren't good for an engine, are they, Caradoc?"

A slow flush mounted to the man's swarthy cheeks. For a moment his eyes dropped. If ever Arthur Augustus had seen guilt written in a man's eyes it was stamped in those of the scoundrelly speedman now.

Evidently Caradoc had not dreamed that Bob had guessed the truth when he had come to the cottage. Had he known, he would doubtless have been prepared. As it was, he betrayed himself by his voice almost as much as by his face as he cried thickly:

"What in the blazes do you mean, you hound?"

Bob did not answer in words.

Instead, his clenched fist shot out, smashing home on Caradoc's jaw. The Panther staggered back against the door of the shed.

"No man calls me a hound and gets away with it!" said Bob between his teeth. "I'll give you the thrashing of your life if you repeat that, Caradoc!"

For a moment or two it looked as though Panther Caradoc would hurl himself at Bob. But the sight of the athletic young speedman's clenched fists and gleaming eyes made the other think twice apparently. His own clenched fists relaxed. He felt his aching jaw, eyes riveted on Bob with an ugly light.

"You'll pay for that blow!" he snarled.

"Certainly! Any time!" nodded Bob. "Now get out!"

Caradoc's eyes went past him to the new speed-iron in the little shed. A sneering smile appeared on his swarthy face.

"So you mean to give me a surprise with that grid, eh?" he taunted, with an ugly laugh. "You mean to challenge me to a match—and wipe up the track with me? Oh, I heard all you said to this youngster—"

"You know now, then!" grinned Bob in a grim way. "Yes, this bike of mine is going to lick your records at the Wayland Speedway—and it's going to lick you!"

Caradoc was quivering with anger still at the blow he had received—the blow that he had not dared return. He was glad to seize any chance of giving vent to his seething feelings.

He surveyed the speed-iron that was Bob King's pride with deliberate contempt.

"What—that?" he grinned, with vicious derision. "I'd lick that with a push-bike! What do you know about speed-irons? That thing couldn't lap in sixty seconds, I'll bet—"

"Right!" cut in Bob. "You'll get your chance to prove it before long—if you can! If you don't funk the match, Caradoc, when it comes to it!" he added with a chuckle.

That chuckle seemed to enrage the rival speedman beyond all reason. His black, rather bloodshot eyes blazed furiously.

"I'll show you!" he snarled. "Right now!"

He snatched from his pocket a cheque-book, and a pen. Whipping it open, he scrawled a name and a sum of money upon it, crossed and signed it, and thrust it with quivering fingers towards Bob King.

The cheque had been made payable to Bob—a cheque for fifty pounds!

Arthur Augustus, a silent spectator of the amazing scene, caught his breath as he stared into Caradoc's oddly working face.

"There you are!" snarled Caradoc. "Cover that, King—if you dare! Put up a cheque for fifty pounds against mine, and on Saturday we'll ride for the two of them! That

tells you what I think of your scrap metal!" he finished viciously, with a flung glance at the new speed-iron.

Bob King stared into Caradoc's blazing eyes.

"You mean that?" he ejaculated.

"I do!" snarled Caradoc. "A match for fifty quid a side! As you know, I was to have ridden against the Australian, Blunden, on Saturday. He crashed to-day, at the Leicester Speedway, and won't be fit for Saturday. They want something to take the place of that match! Well, a private challenge between you and me will fill the bill! And on the quiet there'll be fifty quid hanging on to it, from each of us!"

"My bike against your Merz?" grinned Bob.

"Yes, hang you! You want to sell your machine to Benson's, I know! By thunder, I'll ruin your chances! I'll show Benson's man how much your bike is worth—and that's exactly nothing!"

He took a step closer to Bob, his jaw thrust out.

"That's my challenge! Fifty quid a side!" he cried thickly. "Here's my stake, ready. Do you accept?"

For answer, Bob King reached out and took the cheque from the man's shaking hand. He tore it across, and tossed the fragments of paper to the ground.

"That's what I think of your little scheme, Caradoc!"

"Afraid!" taunted Caradoc, with a laugh. "I thought you would be, when it came to backing up your boast with solid cash!"

"Not at all!" grinned Bob. It was a grim kind of smile.

"We'll ride this match, Caradoc—your Merz against my bike. You can write out another cheque for fifty quid—and this time you'll make it payable, not to me, but to the Wayland Hospital. I'll do the same. Whichever of us loses hands his cheque over to the hospital on Saturday sight!"

"Very well!" snarled Caradoc. "If you are so squeamish about a bet, the hospital shall get your money from you—it's all the same to me! But remember—it's your new bike I'm riding against! You're not to take the track with anything else. I'm going to prove it no good, for the pleasure of seeing Benson's turn you down. I don't care who rides it. You can get any crack you like along—British, Australian, American, anybody, if you feel your own riding isn't good enough!"

Bob laughed. He was not allowing a taunt like that to anger him.

"I expect to ride it myself, Caradoc," he said coolly. He took out a cheque-book, and wrote a cheque. "There's my fifty! We'll hand them to the general manager to-night, and arrange this match. Now get out!"

Caradoc grinned savagely, and swung on his heel, striding along the path to the little gate. For a moment his hand went to his jaw. It was evidently still aching.

Bob watched the man vanish into the road, with a frowning brow. Arthur Augustus gave a low exclamation.

"Gwreat pip!" breathed the swell of St. Jim's. "Fifty quid, bai Jove! It's a lot of monay!"

Bob grinned twistedly.

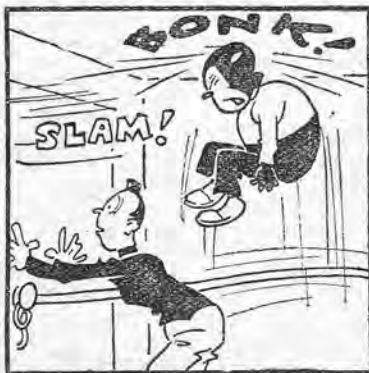
"I know. And between you and me, I can't afford to lose that fifty just now, even to a hospital. Maybe I was a fool. But—well, I couldn't let Caradoc think I funked it! And if I win, it'll give me a good deal of pleasure seeing Caradoc's cheque go to the hospital. It'll be about the first bit of cash he's ever given away in his life!"

"You simplay must beat the wottah!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

Bob nodded, and turned to his new speed-iron—the bike upon which so much depended!

He stood staring at it with shining eyes.

ONE UP—TWO DOWN!



"I feel sure I can beat Caradoc's Merz with that," he breathed. "Even though Caradoc's mechanic is a wizard with a Merz, I know. And if I can beat him—well, it's not only that fifty quid that matters! There's that chap down from Benson's, as I was telling you. If my bike licks the Merz, it'll mean—well, the South of France for my mother."

"Best of luck, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus. He glanced at his watch. "I must be gettin' along—"

"Ta-ta!" grinned Bob, holding out his hand. "Don't forget Monday evening! You said you'd be along at the speedway to have a trip round yourself, remember!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And wheeling his push-bike out into the road, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, a prey to very excited thoughts, vanished in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy Means Business!

"NOW then, let's see what you can do!"

Bob King grinned as he spoke.

It was the Monday evening, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seated astride a speed-iron on the dirt-track of the Wayland Speedway.

The swell of St. Jim's was surveying the track with a distinctly doubtful expression in his aristocratic eye.

Now that it had come to it, Arthur Augustus was beginning to realise that it was no light task he had set himself.

"Ready, Gussy?" grinned Bob.

"Ahem! Y-yaas!"

The little group of dirt-track riders gathered round, grinned. They were expecting to get some fun out of Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's was wearing a crash-helmet and full riding kit, with which Bob King had fitted him out. But he was not wearing goggles, for since he was to attempt a circuit on an empty track there would be no flying cinders to endanger his eyes, and since he had found that the heavy goggles seemed to constrict his vision, unused to them as he was, Gussy had elected to ride without them. His usual eyeglass was jammed in his aristocratic eye as he sat astride the speed-iron.

There were chuckles as one of the riders appeared with the swell of St. Jim's topper in his hand. He came up behind Arthur Augustus, and without Gussy being aware of the fact, planted it on his crash-helmet.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The riders roared. The sight of Arthur Augustus with his topper worn over his crash-helmet and his eyeglass jammed in his eye, was certainly one for gods and little fishes!

Bob King laughed with the others. His pals of the speedway were all good-natured fellows—Caradoc was not there that evening—and he did not mind them having a little fun at the expense of his visitor.

Arthur Augustus did not notice the laughter of the speedmen. With his eyes glued to the track, he grasped the grips firmly.

"Wight away, deah boys!"

They pushed him off, and with a roaring exhaust the swell of St. Jim's, topper and eyeglass all complete, went skidding away down the straight. A yell of laughter followed him.

Arthur Augustus was an experienced motor-cyclist—on the road! But the loose cinder-surface was a different matter. And the terrific acceleration of the speed-iron he was astride took him unawares.

Floundering wildly, Arthur Augustus arrived at the bend long before he had expected to do so!

He gave a gasp as he found himself shooting full for the safety fence, and wrenched the handlebars round, digging his steel-protected toes into the cinders.

The bike bucked and swung round, wobbling madly. Arthur Augustus gave a gasp of alarm.

"Oh! Ow! Oh, Gad!"

Crash!

The speed-iron had gone flying over—and so had Arthur Augustus!

"Yawwooop!"

A wild howl broke from the swell of St. Jim's as he sailed through the air and landed in a wild heap on the dirt.

From the group of riders watching him there came a yell of laughter.

Arthur Augustus sat up dazedly.

With his topper, of which he was still utterly unaware, tilted rakishly over his helmet, his eyeglass still fixed in his eye in some mysterious way, the swell of St. Jim's sat by the overturned speed-iron and blinked round feebly.

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"Oh! Bai Jove! Oh Gad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The speedmen yelled with mirth. They could not help it. Arthur Augustus limped to his feet as Bob King came running up.

"Hard luck!" chuckled Bob. "Had enough?"

Arthur Augustus fixed his friend of the speedway with a resolute gaze.

"No!" he snapped. "No, bai Jove! I'm goin' to get the hang of this game if I bweak my neck!"

Bob King's broad grin died away.

"Good man!" he said quietly. "That's the spirit! Hop on! And cut off sooner at the next bend!"

He took the topper from Gussy's head, and raised the fallen bike. Arthur Augustus climbed into the saddle very grimly.

"Wight-ho!"

And with a do or die expression on his aristocratic countenance, the swell of St. Jim's set off again along the cinders. He got round the bend safely, even though very unsteadily, and roared away along the straight in a thoroughly workmanlike fashion.

Bob King watched without smiling now.

"He's got it in him!" he muttered. "He'll make a rider yet!"

"It's Gussy!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were crossing the quad later that evening, with cricket bats under their arms. The Terrible Three had been having some net practice. As they passed near the gates, the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had cycled in from the road.

"Hallo, Gussy!" called out Tom Merry. "Where the dickens have you been all the evening?"

Arthur Augustus dismounted.

"Out, deah boys!"

"We can see that, ass!" grinned Monty Lowther. "But what's been keeping you? We've all been at the nets—we thought you'd be there!"

"I—ah!—had an engagement, deah boy!"

"Spalding Hall?" chuckled Manners.

"Nunno, deah boy!" replied Arthur Augustus calmly.

With a nod he turned towards the cycle-shed. Though he felt strongly tempted to inform the Terrible Three that he had been riding at the Wayland Speedway, he resolutely overcame the impulse. His chums had all laughed at him when he had announced his intention of doing so; by now, he knew, they believed he had forgotten all about his intention. Well, let them go on thinking that, for the present.

One day he would show them!

Tom Merry & Co. stared after him, puzzled, as he vanished round the corner.

"Gussy's looking jolly mysterious!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's in the wind?"

But that was a question that neither Manners nor Lowther could answer.

CHAPTER 9.

Foul Play!

"WELL, that's that—eh, Jim?"

"Yes, she's O.K. now, Bob!"

Bob King and his mechanic, Jim Frazer, had been busy most of the day on the new speed-iron that was housed in the shed at the rear of King's cottage. It was Friday evening—the evening before the speedway meeting at which Bob and Panther Caradoc were to fight out their challenge match, Caradoc's Merz against Bob's home-designed machine.

"I fancy Caradoc's beginning to wonder if he wasn't a bit rash himself," chuckled Bob. "I hear he wasn't in the best of tempers this morning. If you ask me, he's got the wind up!"

"Shouldn't wonder!" chuckled Jim. He glanced round, as there was a sound behind them along the path from the gate. "Hallo, here's your young pal from St. Jim's!"

The elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sailing gracefully towards the shed with gleaming topper and monocle.

"Hallo, Gussy!" grinned Bob cheerily.

"Just looked in to wish you the best of luck for to-morrow, deah boy," explained Arthur Augustus, halting beside the pair.

The three stood talking for some minutes. They were interrupted after a while by a sudden hail from the garden gate.

The grinning face of Jack Blake could be seen, and the faces of Herries and Digby and Tom Merry & Co. as well, Arthur Augustus gave a sudden exclamation.

"I say," he muttered, "keep it dark about my havin' been widdin' at the speedway, deah boys! I've kept it quiet from the fellows! I want to surprise 'em one day!"

"You'll surprise 'em all right," grinned Jim Fraser. But, despite his words, even Jim Fraser did not dream as he spoke just to what extent, and in what amazing circumstances, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was destined to surprise his chums.

Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three came along the path towards them. They had been over to Spalding Hall that evening, where they had arranged with Ethel Cleveland & Co. to take their three girl chums to the speedway on the following afternoon to see Bob King's great match with the Panther.

"So there you are, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake, as the St. Jim's junior halted by the shed. "We looked for you everywhere, to come over to Spalding Hall with us!"

"Sowwy, deah boys! I wanted to see Bob—"

Tom Merry broke in with an exclamation of eagerness as he caught sight of the gleaming speed-iron.

"Is that the bike you're riding to-morrow?" he inquired.

"My hat, what a beauty!"

"Yes, that's the new King speed-iron!" nodded Bob. The juniors gathered round the machine admiringly.

"Isn't she a ripper?" breathed Monty Lowther.

"Well, I must put her away now," grinned Bob King. The bike was wheeled into the shed, and the doors padlocked.

Bob and his mechanic had to go into Wayland, and they said good-bye cheerily to Arthur Augustus and his chums before speeding away from the cottage on motor-bikes. The St. Jim's juniors turned towards St. Jim's.

A short hill ran up from the cottage in that direction. Road repairs were in progress at the top, though the work-

men had knocked off for the evening some time ago. A steam roller and a watchman's hut were outlined against the sky at the top of the rise as the juniors pushed their bicycles up it.

"What the dickens—"

The sudden exclamation broke from Jack Blake. He was staring up the hill.

The sudden sight of struggling figures had caught his eye. "Great pip! Look!"

"Bai Jove! What on earth—"

An old man, evidently the watchman, was being held by three rough-looking men, despite his struggles. A fourth figure was climbing up on to the steam-roller. A wild shout from the helpless watchman rang out as the St. Jim's juniors stared in utter astonishment up the hill.

Though they were some distance away, something about the figures of the four roughs seemed curiously familiar to Arthur Augustus.

Suddenly he remembered. They were the same four hooligans who had attacked Bob King on the afternoon when he had first made the acquaintance of the young speedman!

What their object was in attacking a nightwatchman guarding road repairs was a mystery. But the St. Jim's juniors were not waiting to inquire!

"Come on!" yelled Tom Merry. "We've got to lend a hand here!"

Dropping their bikes against the hedge, the juniors broke into a run, racing up the hill.

Even as they did so the big steam-roller began to move, rolling forward down the slope.

"Look!" cried Manners hoarsely.

Slowly at first, grinding the loose stones beneath its great

(Continued on next page.)

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roller, the big machine was clanking down the hill, gathering pace at every moment. The juniors saw the figure of the man who had set it moving leap clear.

"Good heavens!" panted Tom Merry.

The steam-roller was coming down the slope fast now. Thundering madly, it was running free, roaring down towards them.

The juniors seemed rooted to the spot as they stared at the great bulk of the roller that was bearing down upon them from the top of the hill. The men who had been the cause of it had released the old watchman now, and were vanishing into the woods that flanked the road on the farther side at that point.

In a flash Arthur Augustus D'Arcy realised the truth.

They were Caradoc's scoundrels, he knew. Only one reason why they should have set the steam-roller careering down the hill—Bob King's new speed-iron!

The swell of St. Jim's glanced round swiftly, white faced.

In an instant he saw what he had guessed—that the curve of the road by the foot of the slope was such that the shed where the speed-iron was housed stood directly in the path of the runaway steam-roller.

Caradoc, afraid of a beating on the speedway the following afternoon, was trying a desperate chance to destroy the wonder bike that might cost him not only fifty pounds in cash, but his reputation as the crack speedman of his team as well!

Thunderously, the steam-roller was crashing down the slope at a mad pace now—straight for the shed where the precious bike was locked away.

CHAPTER 10.

St. Jim's to the Rescue!

"GREAT Scott!"

Arthur Augustus shook the daze of consternation from his brain, and seized Tom Merry by the arm.

"The shed!" panted the swell of St. Jim's. "The bike—we've got to rescue it!"

Without waiting for Tom's answer, Arthur Augustus raced away down the hill.

Herries and Digby and Manners had already gone scrambling through a hole in the hedge, out of the path of the onrushing roller. But Monty Lowther and Blake heard, as well as Tom Merry, the swell of St. Jim's breathless shout.

In a flash they grasped the situation. They turned and dashed down the hill after the flying figure of Arthur Augustus.

Over the low fence of the cottage garden they scrambled.

From the slope behind them came the roar of the great roller as it bore down upon the shed, rocking and swaying wildly, but keeping an amazingly straight path.

Arthur Augustus, coming to a breathless standstill outside the locked doors of the shed, flung a swift glance over his shoulder, and saw it coming.

And the doors were padlocked—with the key in Bob King's pocket!

"Oh, gad!"

Arthur Augustus stared round with a feeling of numbed helplessness.

A number of large stones, forming a rockery, were near at hand. He seized one with both hands, and swung it into the air, bringing it down with smashing force upon the wooden doors.

Crash, crash!

"Good man, Gussy!"

Tom Merry had come panting up, with Monty Lowther and Blake close behind.

The doors flew inwards before another smashing blow of Gussy's impromptu battering-ram. Tom Merry leapt forward, kicking away the splintered boards. Another moment, and the four juniors were inside the shed.

With a shattering sound the garden fence broke like cardboard before the mighty roller of the runaway machine. They could hear the crash of smashing bushes outside the shed—nearer every moment.

For an instant it crossed Tom Merry's mind that perhaps they were not only too late to save the speed-iron, but were too late even to save themselves—that they would be mown down and crushed, killed horribly. But even as the thought flashed through his brain he found himself lifting the precious bike, with Arthur Augustus and Blake and Lowther, and stumbling for the splintered doorway behind him.

Crash!

With a mighty roar the steam-roller struck the shed

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full. It collapsed like a pack of cards before that terrific impact, and the steam-roller surged on, to come to a standstill, with its wheels amid the wreckage.

But the juniors were safe, and the bike as well. In the very nick of time, without a second to spare, they had got out on to the path again with their burden.

Their faces were as white as chalk, their eyes curiously dazed-looking, as they set the bike down, and stared at one another dumbly.

Tom Merry was the first to find his voice. It sounded oddly unlike his own.

"Phew!" was all he said, even then. "My hat!"

Blake laughed shakily.



"Narrow shave, you chaps!" he mumbled.

"Y-yaas!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "Cwums, yaas!"

He adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the steam-roller, and the trail of ruin it had left between the broken fence and the shattered shed, and a wry grin appeared on his aristocratic countenance.

"Cawadoc is pweety thorough when he gets goin'!" he muttered.

"Caradoc?" echoed Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, Cawadoc!" snapped Arthur Augustus fiercely. "Panthah Cawadoc! Those fellows that set this steam-wollah loose meant it to smash this shed, and the bike as well, bai Jove! And Cawadoc put them up to it! I recognised them as the wottahs he set to attack Bob King the first time I met him!"

"Good heavens!" breathed Tom Merry. "Gussy, is this really true?"

"Absolutely, deah boy!" nodded the swell of St. Jim's grimly. "Can't pprove it, of course; but that doesn't altah the fact."

Tom, Blake, and Monty Lowther stared at Arthur Augustus incredulously. They could scarcely believe that he was right. And yet there was no doubt that the men they had seen had deliberately set the steam-roller running down the hill on to the shed.

"And it's too late to catch the scoundrels now!" muttered Tom.

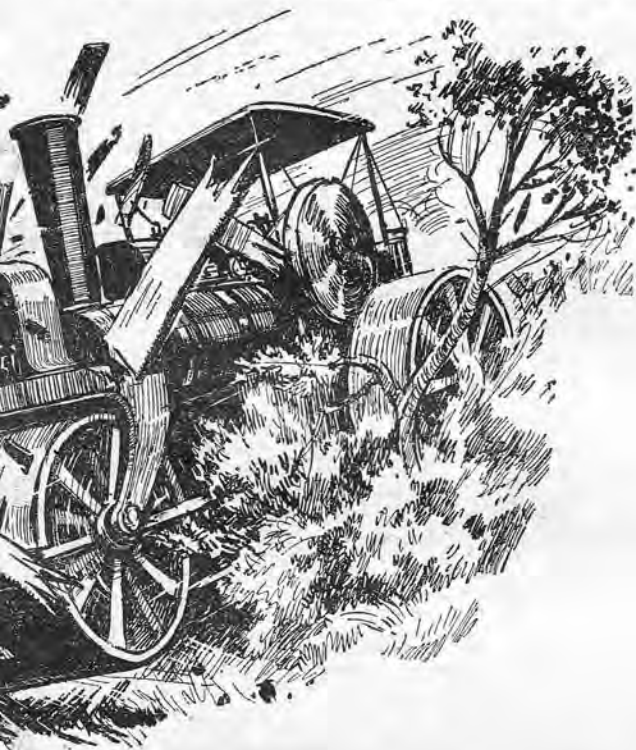
Manners, Herries, and Digby appeared by the broken fence, looking thoroughly relieved to see their chums all safe. A few moments later, the figure of the old watchman came into sight behind them.

"The 'ounds!" he gasped excitedly. "They set it rollin' down the 'ill on purpose! Held me while they did it!"

"We saw 'em!" nodded Tom Merry grimly.

The sound of a motor-bike in the road, coming from the direction of Wayland, caused him to turn his head quickly. He gave an exclamation as Bob King came into sight and drew up in astonishment by the broken fence.

Bob had come back to the cottage for a puncture outfit, Jim Frazer having been caught unawares without one when



With a mighty roar the steam-roller struck the shed, and it collapsed like a pack of cards. But the juniors and the bike were safe!

the mechanic had got a puncture not far along the road after leaving the cottage.

He listened in utter silence as Tom Merry briefly explained what had happened. As Tom finished, Bob's face set.

"Yes, this is Caradoc's work right enough!" he muttered. "He sticks at nothing, that's clear." His fists clenched. "And if it hadn't been for you youngsters, he'd have succeeded, too! Well, I'll get Jim to sit up with the bike all night, after this!"

He swung off his bike and surveyed the damage done. Except for the fence and the shed, the steam-roller had not done very much harm, though it might easily have swung off its course and more or less destroyed the cottage itself.

"Thank goodness mother's not at home to-night!" breathed Bob. "The shock of this might have killed her!" His eyes blazed. "Well, this makes me all the more keen to thrash Caradoc on the track to-morrow!"

"My hat, yes!" nodded Tom fiercely.

"And there's one thing!" growled Bob. "This shows that Caradoc knows well enough he's in for a hiding on the speedway when the new King speed-iron gets up against him! He shan't have another chance of wrecking it, though; and to-morrow, by thunder, that bike of mine will bring me revenge when it smashes that hound's track records into pieces!"

CHAPTER 11.

The Great Match!

THE next event on the programme is one which will appeal to all the supporters of this speedway! The match this afternoon between Panther Caradoc and Bob King is the result of a personal challenge. Bob King has designed a new speed-iron for himself, and in a discussion concerning its merits, Panther Caradoc was led to declare that his own Merz would be more than a match for it. A challenge resulted, of which this match is the sequel. So confident is each of these two riders in the powers of his machine that it was agreed between them that the loser should donate fifty pounds to the Wayland Hospital, and we feel sure—

The voice of the announcer, very clear through the amplifiers, continued to enlarge on the subject of the next event.

It was the following afternoon, and the Wayland Speedway was packed. A handicap heat had just been run.

And the next event was the first of the three heats between Caradoc and his Merz, and Bob King and the King speed-iron.

In one of the stands, Tom Merry Co. and Blake & Co. were seated with Ethel Cleveland, Doris Levison, and Lady Peggy Brooke, their girl chums from Spalding Hall. Ernest Levison of the Fourth, Doris' brother, and Sidney Clive, the South African junior, and Kangaroo, the Shell fellow from "Down Under," were with them, too.

Quite a big party, in fact, had come from St. Jim's that afternoon to see the great match between Panther Caradoc and Bob King.

"Here they come!" breathed Ethel Cleveland, her pretty face alight with excitement.

Bob and Caradoc had appeared from the pits on their speed-irons—Caradoc on his famous Merz, Bob astride the new bike, fashioned to his own ideas, which everyone was so anxious to see perform.

The hum of excited talk in the stands died away, as, with howling exhausts, the two rivals swept along the front straight, slithered round the bend, and away on their preliminary circuit.

They came round again swiftly enough, but as they shot past the start, Caradoc's machine leapt across the line too far ahead of Bob's, as he opened out. A false start was signalled, and the riders eased up, circling the track once more at an easy pace.

This time they bore down upon the starting-line dead level. The exhausts roared deeply as they opened out full, and streaked away neck and neck along the straight.

The great match had commenced.

Caradoc was half a length in front as they hurtled into the bend.

But it was on the bends that Bob King hoped to have the advantage, thanks to the cunning design of his forks and frame, built for faster cornering than was possible with any other machine on the speedway. And at the very first corner the new bike proved its worth.

There was a yell of delight from Bob's supporters all round the track as he came flashing round the bend, and shot into the straight a couple of lengths ahead of the Panther.

But there was a long way to go yet, and as the two speed-irons thundered along the back straight Caradoc reduced Bob's lead by half a length, thanks to the wonderful acceleration of his Merz machine. But at the bend Bob won back that half length, and more! He came storming round into the straight again four lengths at least in advance of Panther Caradoc.

"Greatest pip!" gasped Arthur Augustus jubilantly. "That new gwid is a wippah, bai Jove!"

"My hat, yes!" breathed Lady Peggy, her eyes glued to the flashing figure of Bob King, as he leapt away at hurricane speed with Caradoc storming after him.

Bob hit the bend, and man and machine came sweeping round steadily as a rock. But Caradoc, clearly straining every fibre to catch up, cut off a fraction late, and went spinning round dangerously, almost striking the safety fence.

It was a corner that cost him dear. He lost three lengths more, and Bob was leading him by a stretch as they came along the back straight again.

"It's a giddy walk-over!" gasped Jack Blake.

Caradoc never looked like catching up. When the chequered flag fell, as Bob shot past in front of the stands at the finish of the fourth lap—with the St. Jim's juniors on their feet yelling themselves hoarse—Caradoc was yards behind, hopelessly beaten.

And when the voice of the announcer informed the "fans" that Bob's time had been seventy-eight and a fifth seconds, smashing the previous record, held by Caradoc, by two and four-fifths seconds, the yell that echoed out round the speedway could have been heard all over Wayland.

It was quite clear that nearly everyone present was jubilant at the result. Bob King was the idol of the "fans" without a doubt, and that he had licked the unpopular Panther at last for the track record, and seemed certain of thrashing him in their great challenge match, caused the crowd to let itself go with a vengeance.

Again and again the cheering crashed out.

"Isn't it ripping?" chuckled Tom Merry.

Knowing, as they did, the grim undercurrents, and all that had taken place "behind the scenes" in connection with the great match, Bob's victory was even more of a thrill to the St. Jim's juniors than to the excited crowd.

"Bob's going to square things with that rotter Caradoc this afternoon all right!" gasped Blake, hoarse with cheering. "Hurrah!"

"Mind you, that's only the first heat," put in Manners warningly. "Two more to come!"

"Oh, Bob'll lick him into bits, dear boy! There won't be any need for a third heat, I considah," grinned Arthur Augustus happily.

After that, the next three events seemed comparatively tame to the St. Jim's juniors! But when the eleventh event was announced—the second heat of the match between Bob and Caradoc—they sat up and took notice again, as Monty Lowther expressed it, with a chuckle.

A tremendous cheer greeted the appearance of Bob King in his red-covered helmet, astride the new wonder-bike—a cheer that was gale to the heart of Panther Caradoc.

The cheer was still echoing from the stands as the two deadly rivals got going on their preparatory circuit.

And then, in a moment, the shouts died away, to be replaced by a gasp of astonishment and dismay.

Unseen by the watching throngs, a stone had come whizzing through the safety fence as Bob came slowly round the bend, settling himself in the saddle—a stone sped from a heavy catapult held hidden in the hands of a hooligan whose face would have been familiar to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had he seen it; one of the gang that Caradoc had employed on two previous occasions!

Surrounded by his friends, the scoundrel's action had not been observed by anyone else. And the flying stone was invisible to the crowd as it sped on its evil mission.

It struck Bob on the wrist with smashing force, as he came round the bend. He gave a cry and jerked up his arm, his whole hand suddenly limp and useless. With a sharp swerve he went skidding across the track on to the turf, his exhaust thundering out, for the jerk of his damaged hand had twisted the grip, opening the throttle wide.

There was a gasp of dismay from the spectators as they saw the bike heel over, and Bob flung on to the hard ground. He lay still, the bike roaring beside him on its side, with threshing back wheel.

"G'eat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet.

What had happened he did not know, none of the crowd knew, except the four scoundrels who had been responsible for the foul deed, and Caradoc, who had put them up to it. All Gussy knew was that his friend was lying motionless on the turf inside the track, almost opposite where he sat.

The next moment the swell of St. Jim's was clambering over the edge of the stand, racing across the track to the figure of his injured friend.

Attendants had come running up, and Caradoc had ridden quickly to the spot. Someone shouted at Arthur Augustus, but the swell of St. Jim's was heeding nobody.

He dropped on to one knee at Bob's side.

"Bob, dear boy—"

Bob stirred. His eyes fluttered open. He had taken a terrible fall. His gaze fell on the white face of Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy, old chap! Somebody—chucked something! I can't ride now. But it's the bike Caradoc's got to ride against—doesn't matter who rides it. I want you to—"

His stumbling words broke off. His eyes closed as he lost consciousness.

Arthur Augustus rose dazedly to his feet.

"G'eat Scott!" he gasped. He wants me to wide for him!"

It did not occur to Arthur Augustus, any more than it did to any of the others who were gathered round and had heard the words, that Bob's sentence had been unfinished, that he had probably been about to say, "I want you to ask one of the boys to ride for me!"

"Doesn't matter who rides it. I want you to!"

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Those were the words they had all heard spoken, and there seemed but one meaning to them.

As Bob was borne away by the ambulance men, the track manager, who had happened to be near the scene of the accident, turned curious eyes upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"That's right enough what he said," He jerked out. "The match is not between the men, but between the machines. By the terms of the challenge anyone can ride 'em—it's the machines that count! And he wants you to carry on for him! Can you?"

A resolute gleam came into the eyes of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Got an A.-C.U. permit?"

"Yaas! Here you are—"

The swell of St. Jim's plunged a hand into his pocket and produced the precious permit—a permit that none of his chums knew he had ever received. The manager nodded.

"All right. Get hold of some kit—one of the boys'll fix you up! What's your name? D'Arcy? Better be anonymous—Mysterious Unknown Rider, specially selected by Bob, eh? I'll get that announced. We'll run the twelfth event while you're getting ready! Thank goodness that bike of King's wasn't damaged!"

In the stand the St. Jim's party and their girl chums watched in utter bewilderment as they saw their noble chum hurried into the pits.

"Here, I'm going to see what's up!" muttered Blake, and left his seat hastily.

The announcement that a "mysterious unknown rider" would deputise for the injured Bob King, at Bob's special request, caused a sensation among the "fans" as it was given out!

But that was nothing compared with the sensation among the St. Jim's juniors and the Spalding Hall trio when Blake returned to his seat some minutes afterwards, while a quartet of riders were hurtling round the track in a heat of a handicap race, to inform his incredulous hearers that the "mysterious unknown" was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Gussy?" echoed Tom Merry. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"Trying to be funny?" queried Monty Lowther.

"I tell you it is Gussy!" panted Blake, beside himself with excitement. "Apparently he's got an A.-C.U. permit all right, and he's been practising nearly every blessed evening lately on this track! Bob's mechanic says Gussy's quite a hot-stuff rider, though he can't understand why Bob wanted Gussy to take over, instead of one of the regular riders. But Bob specially asked Gussy to, and so, of course, no one can say anything!"

The juniors, even then, took some convincing. But at last it was clear that Blake was not trying to pull their legs, but was really speaking the truth.

"My giddy aunt!" breathed Tom Merry.

The handicap heat had come to an end, and again the voice of the announcer was heard. The juniors listened almost dazedly as it was made clear to the spectators that the fifty-pound challenge would be decided by the results of the heats between Caradoc and Bob King's deputy, since the terms of the challenge had been expressly worded to make it a match between the bikes rather than the riders.

There was a roar of exhausts from the pits.

Two riders came bumping out on to the track, one with a red helmet, the other with a white.

And though he was quite unrecognisable in his riding-kit the juniors knew that the red-helmeted rider was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's!

They watched dumbly, with riveted eyes, as Arthur Augustus and Panther Caradoc set off round the track together. Even from that opening, easy circuit, it was clear at once that the swell of St. Jim's was no longer a novice on the speedway.

"Gussy!" breathed Herries. "Gussy, of all chaps in the world! I suppose I'll wake up soon!"

"Our one and only Gussy!" muttered Kangaroo dazedly.

"Now they're off!" snapped Ernest Levison, as the two riders completed the circuit and accelerated for the starting line. "Go it, Gussy!"

"My hat, yes—go it, Gussy!" panted Tom Merry excitedly. "Give him a yell, you chaps!"

And it was with a burst of wild cheering from the party of St. Jim's fellows that the swell of St. Jim's and Panther Caradoc raced away for the first bend!

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus—Speedman!

DESPITE the enthusiasm of the St. Jim's party, there was an anxious shade in the eyes of some of the juniors and in Ethel Cleveland's, as they watched Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, hunched over the petrol-tank of the King speed-iron, hurtle for the first bend of the dirt-track.

It was clear enough that Gussy could ride. But he was pitted against one of the "cracks" of the speedway; and it was more than possible that in his eagerness to beat Caradoc the swell of St. Jim's might attempt more than he was capable of doing, and crash seriously.

The faces of Tom Merry and Jack Blake and the others were set in anxious lines as their chum hurtled into the bend.

Ethel caught her breath sharply, as she saw the red-helmeted figure of her cousin broadside through the flying cinders, shooting high up towards the outer edge of the track. But Arthur Augustus kept control of his machine, and though in taking the corner so widely he had lost some ground, he was barely a length behind Caradoc as they shot into the back straight with belching exhausts.

"Come on, Gussy!" breathed Blake hoarsely. Along the straight, the thundering Merz drew away from its rival, with smashing acceleration. They hit the next bend with Caradoc's lashing rear wheel flinging the cinders into the swell of St. Jim's face.

Round the bend, slithering and bucking! Arthur Augustus was riding well; but Caradoc was cornering superbly, and he was several lengths ahead as the two machines flashed past the stands at the finish of the first lap.

"Can't expect Gussy to ride like Bob," muttered Herries. His tone was rather hopeless. Herries was wondering, as the others were wondering, was it possible for the swell of St. Jim's to catch up a rider like Caradoc?

Again Arthur Augustus lost ground at the bend. The juniors watched in grim silence as the two roaring machines rocketed down the back straight, lengths between them, the white helmet seeming to draw still farther away from the red with every flashing second.

"A pity that rotter Caradoc never seems to crash!" growled Digby.

He watched with burning eyes as Caradoc came round the bend in tearing fashion. But this time Arthur Augustus came slashing round after him in hurricane style, and the distance between the pair was lessened a length as they came into the front straight once more.

"Gussy's after him, by gum!" muttered Monty Lowther fiercely.

Tom Merry, seated between Monty and Doris Levison, nodded silently.

His eyes were gleaming.

There was no doubt that Gussy was smashing into it all out now—neck or nothing! Tom realised that the swell of St. Jim's had been riding more or less cautiously at first, not quite sure of himself, perhaps—perhaps unnerved by the importance of the event, and the hundreds of eager watching eyes that were fastened upon him. But now, as they flashed away for the third lap, Arthur Augustus had forgotten all else but his grim resolution to pass that flying white helmet that raced ahead of him, flinging the cinders in his masked face!

Neck or nothing! Arthur Augustus was out to win, even at risk of his neck!

Flame shot from his exhaust as he flung his machine at the next bend.

Caradoc was a better rider than Arthur Augustus, naturally enough. But the swell of St. Jim's had the better machine, and he knew it. That knowledge gave him fierce confidence now. Bob's bike could beat the Merz, if its rider would let it!

And Arthur Augustus meant to let it!

He cornered with a long raking slide that made the spectators hold their breath, fearful of disaster. But the new speed-iron was built for the job! It never wavered, but tore out of the bend in pursuit of the flying white

(Continued on next page.)

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helmet, bent low over the handlebars of the thundering Merz, with only three lengths between the two hurtling machines.

"He's catching up!" gasped Lady Peggy.

"Oh, come on, Arthur!" breathed Ethel, with shining eyes.

She had forgotten her anxiety for her cousin. The thrill of the speedway had gripped Ethel, like the others. All she was conscious of was a burning desire to see the red helmet of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy overtake—and pass—the machine in front of it.

And then a great roar of excited shouting burst from the spectators. Caradoc had cornered wide, his back wheel lashing sideways, and Arthur Augustus had leapt between him and the white line, snatching the inner berth by sheer skill and daring, with only inches to spare.

The two speed-irons were neck and neck, as they flew past the yellow flag that signalled the fact that they were entering upon the last lap.

The shouting had died away—the excitement was too intense.

Arthur Augustus had the inside berth now. He lost nearly a length along the straight again, but regained it at the bend, with a yard or two to spare.

There was not a sound in the stadium, but for the howling of the engines, as the two machines cartered along the back straight, the whirling front wheel of the Merz creeping up, passing its rival at last; and then they were at the last bend—dead level.

Tom Merry licked his dry lips.

"Now for it, Gussy!"

Caradoc attacked that last bend like a madman.

He had lost the first heat to Bob King. Now, to his amazement and bitter chagrin he seemed likely to lose the second to Bob's deputy, a mere novice—thanks to the wonderful bike that was pitted against him. If he lost this second heat as well, he would lose the match that meant so much to him, the match that he had stuck at nothing to try to win!

He went for the bend like the panther he had been nicknamed, teeth gritted savagely, every nerve and muscle

strained to aid the leaping machine he bestrode. Round in a shirlwind sweep, at suicide speed, wrists battling to hold the jerking bars, his bloodshot eyes blazing behind their goggles with the furious determination that burned in his brain.

But Arthur Augustus was aflame with an equal determination!

He was thrilling through and through with the speed and knowledge that he stood a chance of beating Caradoc, the famous speedman. Even as he came storming round the bend, the swell of St. Jim's had time to wonder vaguely how it could be that he was level with the man, to feel thoroughly astonished at finding himself holding Caradoc, the famous Panther, the man who till that afternoon had held the track record. He realised that it was the machine he was riding, not himself, that had enabled him to do it; though even so he knew that he had cause for pride in his amazing achievement.

The swell of St. Jim's handlebars wrenched round fiercely, rocketed into the straight.

A chequered flag, somewhere ahead to the left of the track, penetrated his consciousness vaguely, as he flung the machine for it, full out. He was dimly aware, too, that the thundering machine beside him had gone spinning away in some mysterious fashion, away towards the fence. He heard, behind him, a muffled crash.

Then he was past the chequered flag, scarcely noticing it, but filled with the surging thrill of the conviction that he had crossed the finishing line ahead of the Panther.

Arthur Augustus did not know that Caradoc was lying very still against the safety fence beside a wrecked machine; that the soundlessly speedman had never crossed the line at all!

In his mad attempt to save himself from defeat, Panther Caradoc had staked everything upon an impossible bid! He had crashed across the track upon a machine that had fought free of his control—had finished his race in a twisted heap.

CHAPTER 13.

All Serene!

"Gussy, old chap!"

"Gussy, old scout!"

It was in the pits that the St. Jim's juniors and Ethel Cleveland & Co. descended upon Arthur Augustus in a jubilant crowd and pressed around him, gripping his hand one after another.

Arthur Augustus, still in his riding kit, looking very far from his usual elegant self, grinned modestly.

"It was nothin', deah boys! Weally!" he protested. "It was the bike, don't you know! It's a wondah, bai Jove! It pvetty well dwove itself, don't you know!"

"I think you are wonderful!" breathed Cousin Ethel; and Arthur Augustus went crimson to the roots of his hair.

"Why, here is Bob King!" cried Doris Levison eagerly, a moment later.

Bob was pushing his way towards the group, his face shining. He still looked a little "groggy." But he had not been badly hurt in his crash, and he had been in time to watch the last lap of that thrilling duel that had ended so triumphantly for his machine and so disastrously for Panther Caradoc.

One of the ambulance men was with him. But Bob had insisted upon going to the pits to see the swell of St. Jim's. He came striding up now, his hand outstretched, looking as though Gussy's victory had been the best tonic in the world for him after his spell—which, in fact, it had been!

"Gussy!" grinned Bob. "Shake!"

And the look in his eyes as he grasped Arthur Augustus by the hand told the swell of St. Jim's more than any words could have done what Bob King thought of him!

"How's Caradoc?" muttered Arthur Augustus.

Bob frowned.

"Pretty bad. He's got concussion. He asked for trouble, taking that last bend as he did."

A tall man in a felt hat came up and planted himself in front of Bob. It was the man from Benson's, the great motor-bike firm.

"Congratulations, King!" he said. "That bike of yours is a knock-out. Benson's want all the rights in that frame design, I can tell you. Can we talk business some time this evening?"

"You bet we can!" grinned Bob cheerily.

The fact that Mrs. King, Bob's mother, went off to the South of France, under Bob's personal care, not many weeks afterwards, showed that the young speedman's design had brought him in all the money he wanted from



Stunned—

and they recovered consciousness in a wind-jammer bound for South America: Nelson Lee, famous detective, and his schoolboy assistant—shanghaied! Here's a story which grips from the first; full of thrilling action; breathlessly exciting, such is "Shanghaied."

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the Benson Company! And when they set off on their journey from Wayland Junction, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, together with Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co., was at the station to see them off and wish them the best of luck.

Bob returned, not long afterwards, leaving his mother rapidly regaining her lost health in the Southern sunshine.

Panther Caradoc never again rode on a speedway, after his great duel with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He had not been badly injured. But he had been unconscious for a fairly long time, and during that period in delirium he had talked constantly of his evil schemes against Bob. He had said more than enough to be warned off the speedways of the country—and warned off he was!

D'Arcy did not ride again on the dirt-track.

Dr. Holmes sent for him, and Arthur Augustus went in fear and trembling.

But to his great relief the Head did not punish him for what really amounted to a breach of the school rules.

Perhaps the fact that Gussy had put up such a wonderful show appealed to the old Head's sporting instincts! He merely talked gravely, finally insisting upon a promise from Arthur Augustus that he would never again ride on a dirt-track while he was a pupil at St. Jim's.

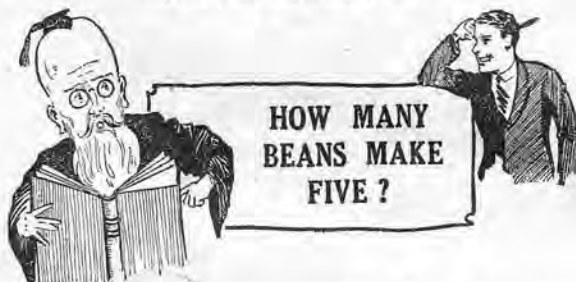
It was a promise which Arthur Augustus hated giving. But there was no choice in the matter; he had to give it. And, once given, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the last fellow in the world to break a promise.

And, at any rate, the swell of St. Jim's had the consolation of knowing that—even though it had been brief—his career as a dirt-track rider had been a glorious one during the time when he had suffered so severely from speedway fever!

THE END.

(A good yarn this, what? There's an even better one next week in "THE KIDNAPPED CRICKETERS!" You'll miss a treat, chums, if you fail to order next week's GEM well in advance!)

The Editor thinks the Oracle is a bad omen. But old whiskers says he's not the worst o' men!



"YOU'RE looking very smart this morning," said the Editor to me, when I arrived at the office. "Yes, sir," I said,

"I'm feeling smart, and the office-boy, he's smarting a bit, too. I'll teach him to put white mice in my desk!" "You mean, you'll teach him not to. But why all this thushness, my whiskery one?" The Editor looked inquiringly at my spotted spats. "You do look a guy, and no mistake!"

"I feel a guy," I said—"that is, I mean, it's my birthday, sir, and I've written a little poem, sir, which you might like to print in the jolly GEM. I'll read it."

Before the dear old Ed. could say a word I was reading as follows:

"I'm a hundred and ninety-nine, and at answering posers I shine. There is nothing I cannot explain, for my noddle is bung-full of brain. I know when the Conqueror conked, and the bashibazoukers bazonked. I can tell you why cows chew the cud, and how long it rained in the flood; why Scotsmen grow hair on their knees, and you can't make a snuff-taker sneeze. I know all the kings and their reigns, and the treatment for fractures and sprains. I can tell you the shape of the noise that oysters all make when they're boys. I know all the streets in Siam. I'm a whiskery wizard, I am! My eloquence nothing can stem; I'm the very best thing in the GEM!"

"Stop!" shouted the Editor. "If you don't you won't! I've a lot of brain-teasers in the mailbag this morning. To start with, a reader at Fenge wants to know how cut-glass is cut?"

"Vases, and so on, that are decorated in this way are held against a revolving wheel," I said. "The wheel is power-driven, and is made of stone or iron. It has a sharp edge, upon which a thin stream of water, mixed with fine sand, continually trickles. This process leaves a rough surface on the glass, which is removed by another revolving disc of cork or leather."

"Will Stevens, of Sevenoaks, wants to

know what club holds the record F.A. Cup-tie score?"

"The answer to that is Preston North End, who scored 26-0 against Hyde in 1887."

"Can you tell a Hornsey reader where the London water supply comes from?"

"I can. Write down these names. The Chadwell Spring in Hertfordshire, the River Lea, the Thames, and various wells in Kent."

"Percy Rush, of Basingstoke, wishes to be told what remuneration the Australian Test team will receive while in England?"

"Six hundred pounds each, and thirty shillings a week out-of-pocket expenses."

"How did the River Mississippi get its name?"

"From two Indian words—missi, meaning great, and sepe, meaning water."

"When a ship is in 'soundings,' what depth of water is beneath her?"

"A hundred fathoms or less."

"What is 'spelter'?"

"That is the commercial name for zinc."

"How did shrapnel get its name?"

"From the inventor, Henry Shrapnel, who died in 1842."

"What is a puck?"

"The name given to the disc used in ice hockey. This is used in place of a ball, and is flat and circular, and made of vulcanised rubber, an inch thick and three inches in diameter. It weighs from five to six ounces."

"Can you tell J. Bates, of Eastbourne, what a shaddock is?"

"A shaddock is another name for the grape-fruit. It was so called after Captain Shaddock, who introduced it into the United States."

"And what is the width of a cinema film?"

"One inch and three-eighths."

"How many players are there in a Rugby team?"

"Fifteen."

"And what is the middle man in the first line of forwards known as?"

"The 'hooker.'"

"Can you tell 'Regular Gemite,' of Chepstow, what isinglass is, and what it's used for?"

"I can, sir, and I will. Isinglass is obtained from the swimming bladder, or, as it's sometimes called, the 'sound,' of various fishes. It is a form of gelatine. The best kind of isinglass comes from Astrakhan and Taganrog, both Russian ports, and is obtained from the sturgeon. One of the important uses of isinglass is that of clarifying wines. It is used for making jellies and stiffening jams, though pure gelatine is often used instead. When mixed with gum, it is employed to give a lustre to silk, and it is one of the ingredients of Indian ink, the others being water, Spanish liquorice, and lamp-black. Dissolved in acetic-acid, it is used for mending broken pottery and glass."

The Ed. gazed admiringly at the shining exterior of my thinking-box and picked up another letter.

"A reader asks why the top rooms in houses are called 'garrets'?"

"The reason for that," I explained, "is this. The word comes from a French one, meaning 'to defend.' In the old days a garret was a small lookout tower built on a wall. We haven't had a real brain-baffler yet, have we?"

"Wait a minute, my lad," said the Editor. "Listen to this one. A reader



Playing Ice Hockey with a "puck."

says: "'Can your fungus-faced old footler tell me what a mahooohoo is?' Now, your bearded bladder of lard, what's a mahooohoo?"

"It sounds a funny sort of noise to me. Do that again," I said; "it amuses the children."

"You don't know," said the Editor—"you don't know."

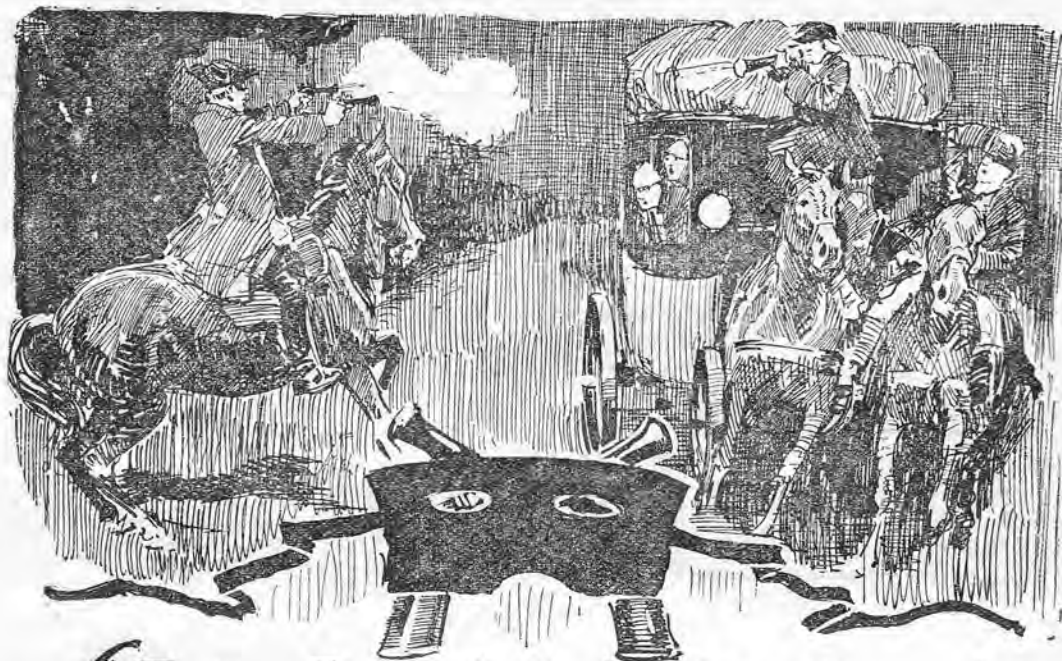
The old Ed. began to dance round the room while he chortled this strange word several times. He really thought he had caught me at last, but there was some swift work going on under the old pate, believe me, chums, and I remembered just in time what a mahooohoo was, and I said quite calmly:

"That is the name given to the white, two-horned rhinoceros of Africa."

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No. 1 of a Dandy New Series of Romantic Tales of "the good old days."

By CECIL FANSHAW.



Nick o' the Highway

CHAPTER 1.

"Stand and Deliver!"

"FAITH, but things ha' been getting a bit hot lately! I warrant somebody's blowing the gaff, and I'll make him smart if I lay him by the heels."

Thus Highwayman Nick Cranley, known to the countryside as "Swift Nick," as he reined his black horse back into the gloom of the trees overhanging the road.

Black-masked, wearing a long blue coat that reached to his knees, white riding-breeches, and huge thigh-boots, Nick was waiting to hold up the London mail-coach. His three-cornered hat was pulled down to his eyes, and his right hand gripped a heavy, bell-mouthed pistol.

The frauds of his guardian had robbed Nick of his inheritance, and, outlawed by trickery, he had been forced to become a highwayman at the age of nineteen. Crack shot and dashing horseman, Swift Nick had come to love his wild life, however. But well he knew the risks of it, for in this year of Grace, 1740, "Gentlemen of the High Toby"—so-called—were ruthlessly hunted by minions of the law, and always hanged soon after capture.

Recently Nick had had several close shaves. He felt certain someone had betrayed his hiding-places, and was determined soon to discover the traitor.

"Twill take smart Runners on rare good nags to catch me!" he grinned, patting his mount's satin neck. "Treachery is all I fear. Who can ha' been splitting—" Nick broke off, and his eyes flashed through his mask-slits.

From down the moonlit road came the rumble of wheels, the clatter of hoofs rapidly approaching. A second later, as he stared excitedly from his cover, Nick saw the yellow glimmer of coach lamps, could dimly see the figures of postillions straining forward on their galloping horses.

"The London coach!" Nick gasped, every nerve athrill. "Now for a rich haul o' purses, by thunder!"

On came the thundering coach, horses' manes and tails flying wildly, hoofs striking sparks from stones, none of the passengers aware of the presence of the hidden highwayman. Nick's black horse, a big thoroughbred, which he had named Sultan, melted into the darkness, like a lump of charcoal in ink. Horse and rider were almost invisible as the mail-coach thundered towards the belt of trees.

Nick dropped his reins, and now had a bell-mouthed pistol in each hand. He saw the leading coach-horses whirl up almost abreast of his hiding-place, then clapped his heels to Sultan's sides.

Forth from the shadows leapt the big black horse, to bar the road, and loud above the racket rang Swift Nick's challenge:

"Stand and deliver!"

Instantly there was uproar and confusion. The startled postillions shouted in fury, but saw the road was barred, saw Nick's pistols gleaming in the moonlight, and knew better than to argue with a Gentleman of the High Toby.

They reined in their horses in a cloud of dust, and the same instant night-capped heads were thrust out of the coach windows.

"A highwayman, i' faith!" bawled a quavering voice. "By my life, 'tis Swift Nick himself!" yelled another. "I know that black horse o' his with the white star on its forehead! Don't shoot, sir, and we'll turn out our pockets!"

But the guard of the coach was made of sterner mettle. "Swift Nick, is it! Ride him down, lads!" he roared at the postillions, and up came his blunderbuss.

Bang! The heavy weapon belched smoke and flame, but the bullet missed, for Nick ducked in the nick of time. He had spotted the guard in his seat atop of the huge coach,

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BETRAYED HIGHWAYMAN Catches a Two-Faced Traitor!

and even as the postilions shouted and raised their whips he blazed reply.

Bang, bang!

Nick's first shot smashed the stock of the guard's blunderbuss, his second roared across the faces of the plunging coach horses. Then, quick as lightning, he thrust his smoking barkers into his deep pockets, and snatched two others from his saddle-holsters.

"How now, friends!" he laughed gaily. "Down with you! Your money or your life!"

Seeing themselves defeated, down clambered the guard, breathing vengeance; down leapt the postilions, to hold their horses' heads, as ordered, and from out of the coach tumbled the five passengers.

Nick bade the latter throw their valuables on the ground, and they lost little time in obeying, knowing that Swift Nick was not to be trifled with.

"Two fat wallets, several purses o' guineas, and a haul o' sparklers!" laughed masked Nick, eyeing the booty. "Nay, madame, keep those jewels, for I do not rob ladies. 'Tis enough! Proceed! I trust the delay has caused no inconvenience."

With a bantering laugh Nick swept off his hat and bowed, and a few seconds later the coach thundered on its way again, the guard and postilions yelling abuse and threats. But Nick only laughed as the coach vanished, holstered his pistols, and swung to the ground.

But he was not to get away with his plunder so easily. Even as he snatched up wallets and purses, there came a fierce drumming of hoofs up the road, then loud shouts of triumph. Nick glimpsed the blurred shapes of two men in three-cornered hats and grey cloaks, galloping furiously towards him, spotted the gleam of pistols.

"Runners!" he gasped fiercely. "How the plague did they get warning? Betrayed again!"

In fact, the newcomers were Bow Street Runners, and that they had got wind of Nick's intention to rob the coach, almost in time to frustrate it, was evident from their shouts:

"'Tis Swift Nick, by thunder! The informer told us the truth!" bawled one. "Surrender, knave, in the King's name!"

"Never!" yelled Nick, and grabbed his plunder and swung to Sultan's back.

A split second later the night was again rent and torn by deafening pistol-shots. With the bullets whistling past his ears, Nick spurred away up the road, however. He would not willingly shoot at men who were only doing their duty, and suddenly he wheeled Sultan and charged full tilt at a five-barred gate.

Over the gate sailed the black horse, without rapping it, then Nick was drumming away across dim fields, laughing heartily. The Runners followed, but lost a lot of time opening the gate, and then there was a wild chase over hedges and ditches for about two miles.

But Swift Nick on Sultan simply flew away from his pursuers, and at last drew rein in a dark wood.

"Ditched 'em!" he laughed. "But 'twas a narrow squeak! Had yon Runners turned up a little sooner I might ha' been nabbed, would, at least, ha' got no plunder! Who the deuce blew the gaff?"

Frowning, Nick ran over in his mind the names of such of his acquaintances who might know his plans, but could not decide who was the scurvy betrayer. Then, hearing no sounds of pursuit anywhere, he shook up his horse.

"We'll to the Grey Goose Inn, Sultan!" he cried. "For at least I can trust Mat Tyler, the worthy innkeeper, who has always a good share of my spoils. And I lay we find a good feed ready for us."

So saying, in cheery but puzzled mood, Swift Nick rode back by way of hedge-girt lanes to the London road. His pistols he reloaded, and then trotted along towards the Grey Goose Inn, his coat collar turned up to his ears and his three-cornered hat pulled down to his eyes, alert for further trouble.

But no sounds disturbed the silence of the night, except the lowing of cattle in a field, and the distant barking of a farm dog. And at last Nick came in sight of the Grey Goose Inn, kept by Mat Tyler, a man who secretly befriended highwaymen and warned them of Runners' movements.

An old inn was the Grey Goose, two-storeyed, and with a thatched, gabled roof and diamond-paned windows. Black timbers were built into its white walls, which contained several secret hiding-places and passages, and a creaking sign hung over the front door.

In the background stood shadowy barns and stables, surrounded by towering oak-trees.

Swift Nick rode quietly round to the stables, placed Sultan in a straw-lined stall, and watered and rubbed the horse down. Then he found him oats and hay from a

barn, and was careful to leave his saddle handy in case of accidents and his bridle hanging on a peg.

Sultan attended to, left hock-deep in straw and contentedly munching his feed, Nick made towards the tavern, and knocked gently on the back door.

He rapped twice in a peculiar fashion, and then heard from within the sound of chair-legs scraping on flagstones. A moment later the latch clicked and the door flew open, and there on the threshold stood Mat Tyler with a lantern in his hand.

A fat fellow was Mat Tyler, landlord of the Grey Goose tavern, wearing a white shirt, brown knee-breeches, white stockings, and buckled shoes. He was clean-shaven, rubicund, and jolly-looking, but there was a furtive look in his watery-blue eyes, as though he was always listening for enemies.

He gave a violent start at sight of Nick, black-masked, and with the butts of his pistols projecting from his coat pockets, and nearly dropped the lantern.

"Zounds, 'tis you, Swift Nick!" he exclaimed softly.

"Who else?" laughed Nick. "Dost not know my knock by now? Hast seen a ghost, cully? Why so scared?"

"Runners are abroad to-night!" whispered Mat.

"Runners be blowed!" chuckled Nick. "I cleaned out the London coach to-night, despite two o' 'em. But, i' faith, Mat, I was nearly nabbed, and 'tis plain someone—"

"Ssh!"

Mat glanced furtively over his shoulder.

"There may be someone in my tap-room yonder," he breathed. "Wouldst shout it all over the county that I befriend highwaymen? Come into my parlour."

He held open the door, which Nick entering softly closed behind him. Often had Nick taken refuge and remained hidden for days together in the Grey Goose Inn, so that he knew every secret room and way of escape, and did not suspect danger as he followed fat Mat. Nevertheless the bold young highwayman was soon to find himself in the tightest fix of his wild career.



Flinging one booted leg across the window-sill, Nick fired and then glimpsed a man running away.

CHAPTER 2. Tyler the Traitor!

THROUGH the red-tiled kitchen, with its oak-beamed ceiling and rows of gleaming pots and pans, fat Mat led Nick, thence to his private parlour. Here was another low-ceilinged room, with oak-panelled walls and a great stone fireplace, and Mat hastily drew the curtains before he lit the lamp. Then he rounded on Nick with a soft chuckle.

"Another rich haul! T' London coach!" he laughed, rubbing his podgy hands together. "Faith, Master Nick, 'tis a rare Knight o' the High Toby you are. But have a care! I saw Dick Turpin hanged at York last year. Ay, and Tom Rumbold at Tyburn. Yours is a dangerous trade, by thunder!"

"And a free one!" laughed Nick, removing his black mask and thrusting it into his pocket. Then he frowned.

"But I have enemies! Could I but learn who is the scurvy knave who has twice at least betrayed me, I'd blow his brains out. But, by my life, I warrant I'm never caught while I have Sultan to ride."

He squared his jaw as he spoke and his eyes flashed. It would indeed be an ill day for the informer when Swift Nick discovered him.

"And I hope you soon will," declared Mat, lowering his voice anxiously. "For I risk my neck, too, in befriending you, Nick."

"Ay," laughed Nick. "But you're well-paid, you fat rascal!"

"As to that, I earn it!" came the chuckled reply. "Well, what's my share to-night?"

"A purse of guineas."

"Good enough, I' faith!"

"And here are two wallets stiff with banknotes," Nick went on, laughing. "Keep them and the other purses safe

for me, for I have promised a few gifts to some poor friends of mine."

Mat Tyler nodded and swept the loot from the mail-coach into his secret cupboard, where already lay many other valuables deposited with him by "tobymen." These Mat sold in towns where he reckoned it safe, keeping a good share of the spoils for himself.

He knew that Nick was mighty open-handed and generous with his plunder, giving lavishly to poor country folk. He also knew that Nick hoped one day, when he had collected enough money, to turn the tables on the guardian who had defrauded him and hounded him to the Road.

"Soon may it be, Master Nick," Mat said earnestly. "And then you'll not forget your former cullies, I warrant. I risk my neck daily helping you!"

Then he fetched Nick supper in the parlour. Shortly afterwards Nick retired to rest in an upper room, of which the small diamond-paned window overlooked the stable yard.

Nick was too cautious to undress, and merely threw himself down on the big four-poster bed, placing two of his big horse-pistols under his pillow. But he was tired out, and almost instantly fell asleep.

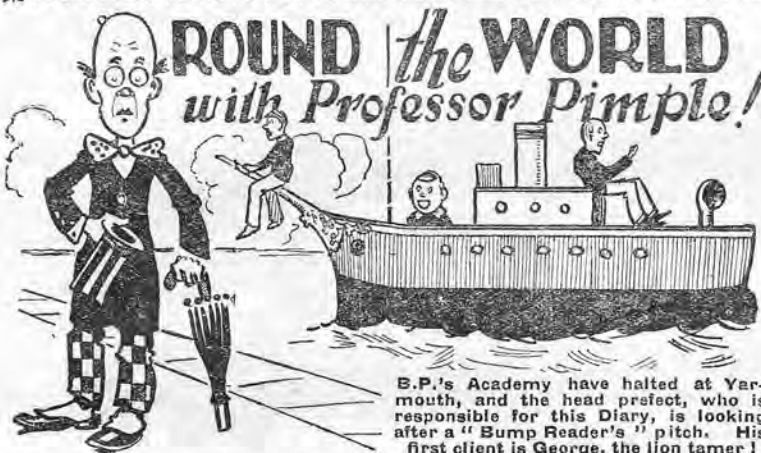
No sooner did the sound of his steady breathing reach the ears of a man listening at the door, than that man chuckled grimly and turned the key in the lock.

He was a fat, red-cheeked fellow, with watery eyes, furtive-looking, and wearing brown breeches, a white shirt, and white stockings.

He was none other than Mat Tyler himself, landlord of the Grey Goose Inn. For, unknown to Nick, fat Mat took pay from the highwaymen and police officers alike, secretly betraying each side to the other.

There was a reward of five hundred pounds offered for Swift Nick, and the fat, sleek Mat considered it wiser to

(Continued on next page.)



B.P.'s Academy have halted at Yarmouth, and the head prefect, who is responsible for this Diary, is looking after a "Bump Reader's" pitch. His first client is George, the lion tamer!

"THIS is a remarkable head," I said. "A remarkable head, the same shape as the head of Christopher Columbus who discovered America in 1492, and you'll do some exploring one day, and be happily married."

Then a fierce-looking lady started waving her parasol at me, and said how dare I suggest that her husband was going off on the razzle, and I wasn't to go putting ideas into his head, because it wasn't used to it—his head, she meant—and if I dared to suggest that he was going to be happily married she'd put me in charge. So I said p'raps I'd made a mistake, 'cos there was another bump I hadn't noticed, which showed that he wouldn't be much good as an explorer, after all, and he'd better stop as he was.

Then the little man asked me if I could tell him what profession he ought to follow, and I said I thought he would do very well collecting cigarette coupons; whereupon the big lady with the parasol flew into a rage, and said I was nothing more or less than a humbug, and pulled George off the chair,

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striking me forcibly at the same moment with her parasol.

We were all very frightened, and I was glad when Professor Cranio came back and took over his pitch.

I was jolly wild at getting that bang on the head from the lady's parasol, 'cos Sniffy was standing near and he saw it, and he kept grinning and asking me if it hurt. So presently I asked Professor Pimple if we could have a swim. I thought that would give me a chance to get even with Sniffy by holding him under water till he was nearly drowned, then filling his mouth with seaweed. I also had a good notion which I had thought out of burying him in the sand with only his head showing, like the Chinese do, and leaving him in the sun without any water, but with a bottle of ginger-beer out of his reach, to add to the agony of his suffering.

I asked some of the other chaps about this, but they said they didn't think it was the right sort of sand for doing tortures, the sand in China being more Chinese than ours.

So we hired some costumes and plunged into the breakers, which were breaking about half a mile from the beach. I told Sniffy there were a lot of

sharks in the lagoons round about, and he got very frightened, and then I found two long pieces of wood beside one of the breakwaters, with nails sticking in them.

These pieces of wood gave me a bright idea, so I crept up behind Sniffy without him seeing me, and suddenly brought them together with a sharp movement, with Sniffy in between. Of course, the silly kid thought these pieces of wood with the nails in them were shark's jaws biting him in two, and he let out a frightful yell.

Soon after that Buster found a sardine tin, only it was empty, and the kids got excited, and asked me how the sardines got out of the tin, and began to dive about looking for some more sardine tins, hoping to catch a lot.

Then one of the kids came to the surface with a bottle, but there was no message inside, so we concluded the people who had thrown it into the sea were on a desert island, but had forgotten to put the message inside, being very worried at the time.

When we waded ashore we showed the bottle and the tin to Pimple, and he said that sort of thing was washed up from the big liners, and it was flotsam and jetsam, and Buster Brown said he had seen them at the Victoria Palace. Then Pimple got wild, and said Buster was a disgrace to the Academy, and if his parents didn't pay up the fees they owed he'd expel him directly they got back. Buster asked Pimple if he couldn't be expelled at once, 'cos he had an uncle in Yarmouth who cured herrings, and he didn't want to go on the rotten tour, anyway.

So Pimple said in that case he would have to stop, and told him that flotsam was the name given to stuff found floating on the water, and the word came from a French word meaning "to float." Then he said jetsam came from a word meaning "to throw," and jetsam was stuff thrown overboard, and as none of us was paying attention we would have to write an essay on those two words when we got back.

(I've got a lot more to tell you next week, chums.)



Hardly had Nick planted himself at the scarecrow's stake when the three Runners drummed up to the gap in the hedge!

go for that reward than continue to befriend Nick at risk of his own neck if discovered. He it was who had recently been sending information to Runners of Nick's plans!

"By my life, I'll ha' t' reward, as well as all t' plunder you tobyman has placed with me!" Mat grinned wickedly, as he locked the door of Nick's room.

Then he padded swiftly downstairs in his stockinged feet, his pale eyes gleaming with greed and excitement.

Into the lamp-lit tap-room he burst, where in a high-backed wooden settle sat two ragged men, who looked like poachers or footpads.

"Got him, cullies!" he cried softly.

"Who?"

"Swift Nick himself!"

"The deuce you have!"

"Ay, locked in his room, sleeping safe and sound!" grinned Mat. "One o' you run t' Halwood village for the Runners, the other stop and help me in case he wakes. But his door's locked and his window mighty small, by thunder. There'll be fifty guineas for each o' you, cullies."

That was enough for the ragged rascals in the tap-room. Up leapt one, to seize his fur cap and dash full pelt from the inn. The other drew a pistol from his pocket, while fat Mat reached down a blunderbuss from over the fireplace and swiftly primed and loaded it.

Then Mat and his shabby accomplice, the latter Gasson by name, crept out of the back of the inn, to conceal themselves in the shadowy stable-yard, whence they could keep watch on Nick's window. But first Mat padlocked the door of the stables, thus securing Sultan in case of accidents.

His pale eyes glittered evilly as he hid himself behind a water-butt, straining his ears for sounds of the Runners he had sent for. Round the sleeping Nick the net had been drawn tightly.

Swift Nick, meanwhile, slept on in the upstairs bed-room, not dreaming of treachery in the Grey Goose Inn, of all places.

He was suddenly roused from slumber by the faint drumming of hoofbeats from away up the London road. Living the wild life he did, Nick slept on a hair-trigger, and the menacing, oft-heard sounds reached his alert brain.

"By thunder, what's yon?"

With a gasp, Nick sat up, instantly wide-awake. Faint at first, the sound of hoofbeats was rapidly increasing in volume, rising and falling, then swelling to a thunder like muffled drums. It was plain to Nick that several horse-men were fast galloping to the inn, and he knew better than to take any chances.

"Methinks I'd best flit from Mat's tavern and lie hid in the woods a while!" he chuckled grimly. "Runners may be on my trail again!"

At a bound he left the four-poster bed, clapped on his black mask, snatched his pistols from under his pillow, and leapt at the door. He gripped the handle, twisted it, and pulled sharply.

But the door wouldn't yield an inch.

"Zounds!" barked Nick, and tugged again.

Still the strong door resisted his efforts. In a second it was plain that it was locked on the outside, and louder in Nick's ears rang the fast-approaching hoofbeats.

"Trapped! Some scurvy knave thought to ha' me taken asleep! Who can the cur be?"

Even then Nick did not suspect fat Mat, but reckoned that his unknown betrayer had stealthily followed him into the inn. Nor, being great-hearted, would he shout to Mat to release him, fearing that the innkeeper would get into trouble for assisting his escape. He little

guessed the ugly truth, did Swift Nick.

He glanced swiftly round the little bed-room, on the carpeted floor of which the moon flung lacy patterns through the diamond-paned windows. His nerves thrilled, but his brain was clear and ice-cold. But the door was locked, and there were no secret exits from this room.

Remained only the small window, and Nick was at it in one bound. But, even as he made to launch himself from the stone sill, he glimpsed the muzzle of a blunderbuss, protruding about an inch round a water-butt almost below him.

"Ha!"

Nick's eyes flashed through his mask-slits. The sound of a shot could make no difference now. Nick knew he was being hunted, could hear the approaching hoofbeats mighty close, and up came his pistol, to be levelled at the tub.

Bang!

The report shattered the night. Then sounded a yelp of pain, and forward from behind the water-butt pitched fat Mat head-foremost, his blunderbuss flying from his hand and exploding with a roar.

Nick's bullet had gone clean through the tub, to hit the rascally innkeeper in his fleshy calf.

"Faith, 'tis you are the traitor, Mat!" bawled Nick, in surprise and fury. "Then here's another lead plum for—"

But fat Mat scrambled up with amazing agility for one of his bulk, to vanish round the corner of the inn, shouting to his hidden ally and the Runners.

"Shoot him, Gasson!" he screeched. "This way, Runners! Thieves! Highwaymen! Help! 'Tis Swift Nick himself, lads!"

At that, all was uproar, with yells and shouts mingling with drumming hoofs, for the shots and Mat's shouts were heard out on the road. With a gasp of fury, Nick flung one booted leg across the window-sill, only to see a flash from the shadows below him and to hear a bullet strike the stonework near his head.

The man Gasson had let fly from his hiding-place. Nick fired at the flash, heard a howl, then glimpsed a man running away. There was no time to fire again, however, and Swift Nick swung lightly out of the window, then dropped to the ground, laughing grimly.

A dash took him to the stable door. It was fastened, but with one blow of his heavy pistol-butt Nick smashed

the padlock, to dive into Sultan's dark stall and clap on the bridle.

No time to saddle up! Nick swung himself up, then stormed out on his black horse, riding bare-back, a bell-mouthed pistol in each hand and his eyes glinting through his mask-slits.

"Faith, Mat, we'll meet again, traitor!" he shouted grimly, and spurred for the back exit.

But, almost at the same instant, four grey-cloaked figures came thundering round the inn into the stable-yard, to glimpse Nick's dim figure and utter roars of triumph.

"Catch him, Runners! Shoot! I claim t' reward—alive or dead!" screamed the ghoulish Mat. "For goodness' sake don't let him escape!"

"He won't escape, landlord!" roared the leader of the Runners. "Zounds! Swift Nick shall hang at Tyburn at last!"

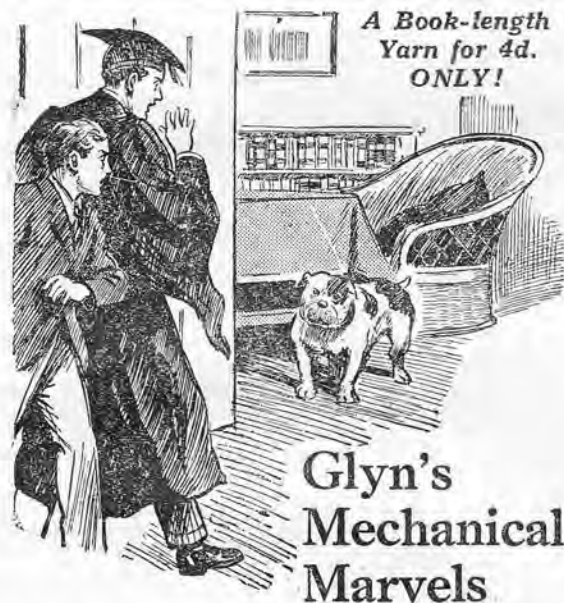
In fact, Nick's chances of escape looked mighty slim, for he had four well-mounted Runners at his heels, and Sultan was weary from previous work. In desperation, Nick twisted round and let fly.

Bang, bang, bang! came answering shots from the Runners' pistols. But the men's bullets missed Nick's phantom-like, flitting figure, while Nick's shot fetched a bellow of pain, and a Runner's pistol clattered to the ground. Then out of the stable-yard fled Nick, bent forward over his mount's neck, going great guns.

"We'll meet again, I warrant, Mat!" he flung grimly over his shoulder.

"Ay, at Tyburn Tree! Ho, ho!" Fat Mat howled in ghoulish mockery.

But the din drowned Mat's voice. The chase after Swift Nick was in earnest.



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CHAPTER 3.

Unmasked!

"O N, Sultan!" Nick breathed in his mount's ear. "You'll need your best pace to-night, by thunder!"

The black thoroughbred responded nobly, shooting away from the Grey Goose Inn, racing up a side lane like a catapulted stone. He laid himself out, head outstretched, mane and tail flying in the wind, covering the ground with effortless strides.

But, shouting, bawling, and jostling each other, in close pursuit, came the Runners. One man Nick had shot through the arm, but the fellow pluckily stuck with his comrades, and the chase roared down the lane like a hurricane.

No more shots were fired, however, for the Runners could hardly see Nick in his dark blue coat, bent forward on Black Sultan. They reserved their ammunition till they got to closer quarters, and suddenly uttered a storm of howls as Nick swung his mount round and popped over a hedge.

"Yonder he goes!" bawled the Runners' leader, a burly man in grey cloak and three-cornered hat. "Stick to his trail, lads! We'll have him!"

Two Runners smashed through the hedge, the others spurred their mounts through the gap thus made. It was to see Swift Nick skimming across a moonlit field, whooping defiantly, and they urged their mounts in grim pursuit.

Away over hill and dale, past wooded copses, sleeping farms, Swift Nick led the headlong chase. Haystacks loomed up, came abreast, were left behind, ditches and hedges were cleared at mighty bounds.

Despite the grimness of the hunt, Nick whooped at the joy of speed. His blood coursed in his veins as he felt Sultan gliding under him, hoofs drumming rhythmically, trim legs of steel driving steadily.

For nearly an hour the chase ran on, but ever and again Nick glanced back. Still pursuing hoofbeats made thunder on the sod; still he could see his bunched pursuers, not a hundred yards behind, cocked hats pulled low, grey cloaks flying in the wind.

"By my life, they're sticking it!" Swift Nick gritted, eyes flashing through mask-slits. "I'll lead 'em back to the road—and a merry dance along the London turnpike."

The moon shone down fitfully through gaps in the ragged clouds but away in the distance Nick could make out church spires, showing black against the velvet sky. He reckoned that a town must lie near those spires, where he might lose his pursuers by doubling up and down side streets.

So he wheeled Sultan, and went drumming up a steep meadow, suddenly to see a bristling hedge loom up before him, with a muddy ditch on the take-off side. A clap of Nick's heels, and Sultan, ears pricked, charged the hedge, gathered his hooks under him, then sailed over in dashing style, to gallop on in his stride.

Shouts burst forth from close in the rear. Nick glanced back, to see the Runners had put on a spurt, and were racing in a bunch at the hedge barely fifty yards behind him.

"Not so fast, cullies!" Nick laughed grimly.

Luckily, he had crammed his spare pistols in his pockets before retiring to rest in the Grey Goose Inn. And out he snatched one, to let fly as the leading Runner galloped at the hedge.

Bang! Nick's bullet hummed within an inch of the Runner's horse's head, causing the animal to shy violently, cross its legs, and come down with a mighty thud. Head foremost into the ditch shot the Runner, and across his fallen mount two others came crashing down.

Arose howls and roars of anger; and Nick, laughing heartily, eased Sultan, as he saw a riderless horse go tearing away across the fields, with loose reins and stirrups flying wildly.

"One's got a dirty jacket, i' faith!" Nick whooped.

But the Runners were hard men to beat, and were quickly up again and in hot pursuit. There were now only three, however, for it was the man with the wounded arm who had lost his horse, and the delay at the hedge enabled Nick to draw away. But the remaining three spurred after Nick might and main.

Over a five-barred gate, then down the turnpike, Swift Nick led on; but he could not lose his pursuers, and soon saw he would never make the town. For now Sultan was flagging, for he had been a tired horse when Nick started his headlong ride. In desperation Nick cleared a hedge, and took to the fields again.

Things were now looking serious. Never before had Swift Nick been so closely pursued. The Runners obviously had fleet nags, nothing like Sultan, but a great deal fresher, having done no work the previous day, and were still going strong.

"By my life, this cannot last!" Nick frowned anxiously. "If I can but reach Midham Woods, I'll slip yon knaves none the less. There are hidden caves in the woods. On, Sultan! We'll not be nabbed through fat Mat's treachery!"

Gasping to his horse, Nick galloped on across dim meadows, with the wind whistling in his ears. But Sultan was now reeling, his nostrils were red and wide, his black neck white with sweat; foam blew back from his jaws to fleck Nick's big riding-boots.

It was plain Nick, on tired Sultan, would not outstrip the Runners, after all. A final spurt Nick made towards a dim copse, intending therein to turn at bay. He could see a hedge-girt lane leading towards the copse, rode Sultan into the lane by jumping a gate, then went drumming up it.

Now Nick was out of sight for a moment, hidden from the Runners by tall hedges. But suddenly his heart missed a beat, for Sultan stumbled, recovered badly, then staggered on in obvious distress.

All seemed up! But that very moment Nick glimpsed a large turnip field through a gap in the hedge, and saw a scarecrow amidst the turnips, with an owl perched on its battered cocked hat, and its ragged coat flapping in the wind.

At once a desperate plan leapt to Nick's mind.

"Faith, 'tis my only chance!" He laughed grimly, and set Sultan at the gap, then went thudding up the side of the field, hidden from the Runners by a hedge.

Level with the scarecrow he drew rein, leapt to the ground, then slapped Sultan's shoulder. Down flat on its side dropped the clever horse, well-trained by Nick and knowing its master's signal. Then breathlessly through the turnips Swift Nick dashed to the scarecrow.

Away flew the owl into the gloom. Swiftly Nick threw aside his cocked hat, seized the battered hat of the scarecrow, and crammed it on his head. Then he drew the ragged coat on over his own, and planted himself at the scarecrow's stake, with his arms outstretched along the crossbar.

Not a second too soon!

Hardly was Nick in position than the three Runners drummed up to the gap in the hedge, to see Sultan's hoof-marks in the muddy lane where the animal had taken off.

"By my life, t' knave has turned into yon field, cullies!" roared the biggest Runner. "After him! His horse must be nigh spent! I saw it reeling back yonder."

Pell-mell over the gap the Runners came leaping, only to shout in amazement, however, when they landed in the turnip field and could see no sign of Nick nor his horse. They could see dimly a ragged scarecrow, with tattered coat flying in the wind, but nothing of the galloping highwayman.

"Where t' plague has he gone!" roared a Runner, as all three drew rein. "There's hardly cover for a rabbit in this field! Can he ha' crossed it already? I warrant not!"

Swift Nick, the ragged scarecrow, gasped in anxiety as the roars of baffled rage reached his ears. He could see the angry horsemen, hear what they shouted, and wondered if his ruse would be suspected. Or would Sultan rise and give the game away? Not likely! The grand horse was too well-trained.

Followed seconds of tense anxiety for Nick, who remained rigid, with his arms out-stretched. At last, to his relief, a Runner uttered a shout of fury and all three spurred forward.

"Gone away! Hark for'ard!" yelled the burly leader. "Zounds, but t' knave must ha' crossed this field after all. Never was such a tobyman as Swift Nick! And what a horse is his! But we'll catch him yet, cullies!"

"Will you!" Nick chuckled grimly.

He saw the angry Runners go thudding and pounding past within twenty yards of him, little dreaming that their quarry watched them from under a battered scarecrow's hat. He waited until they were out of sight and hearing, then he dropped his arms to his sides with a low hoot of laughter.

"Fooled 'em, by thunder!" He laughed uproariously, then gritted: "And now to reckon with fat Mat! Up with you, Sultan!"

The black horse rose from the shadow of the hedge, and Nick dashed across, swung up, then headed back for the Grey Gocse Inn.

He rode slowly to ease his tired mount, but saw nothing more of his pursuers, and at last arrived in sight of the old, thatched tavern, with its timbered walls and diamond-paned windows. For a second time this night, Nick calmly stabled Sultan, then strode across the dim yard towards the inn, with his jaw set, his loaded pistols in his pockets, and his eyes gleaming through his mask-slits.

But he didn't knock on the kitchen door this time. He entered the inn by thrusting open a little masked door which he knew gave into a secret passage leading to fat Mat's private parlour.

That moment the rascal innkeeper was in his parlour, bent over his table, reckoning up for the tenth time the spoils which Nick had deposited with him on various occasions.

"And with t' reward o' five hundred pounds for his capture—" Mat laughed softly. "I reckon I have made a tidy haul out of Swift Nick—"

Something clicked behind fat Mat, who spun round abruptly.

Then his jaw dropped, and his flabby red cheeks went ashen grey, for there close behind him stood Swift Nick, who had entered the parlour silently by the secret passage and a sliding panel. It was the click of Nick's pistol that had startled Mat Tyler, and now the rascal found himself staring at the black muzzle, at Nick's grim, masked face above it. He was thunderstruck, hardly able to believe his own eyes!

"Stand and deliver, Mat!" Nick breathed menacingly, then: "Traitor! So that's why you looked amazed when I turned up after cleaning out the London coach! 'Twas you set yon Runners on my tracks! You were the informer all the time!"

"Never—" Mat lied foolishly, gaping in dismay, still thinking he saw a ghost.

"Bah!" snapped Nick, and his pistol hammer rose.

At that fat Mat went crazy with fear and backed away, his eyes bulging and his hands outstretched imploringly.

"Mercy!" he gibbered. "Spare my life! Never again will I betray—take all I have—"

Swift Nick glared, and for one dreadful moment, the rascally innkeeper feared he was done for. But at last Nick laughed harshly and lowered his weapon.

"Faith, I will take all you have, Mat, both the plunder I have placed in your keeping and your share, and in future you shall keep my spoils for nothing. And, hark 'ee, you sleek villain, should you ever betray any tobyman to the Runners, I'll send 'em word to search your inn. I lay you have enough tobymen's plunder hidden to hang you, Mat, and the Runners shall learn that you take pay from both sides! How now, Mat, unmasked at last!"

Fat Mat glared in dumb rage. He knew that henceforth Swift Nick had the whip-hand of him, owing to his own treachery.

(Next Week's GEM will contain another thrilling yarn featuring Nick o' the Highway! No "Gemite" should miss it!)

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Treason!

"THERE will be plenty of room for me," urged De Selvas desperately. "I can make you and your friends rich men for the rest of your lives. Why should you worry about that doddering old fool, Latimer? He wishes to remain here, and if he remains the girl will stay as well."

"You are suggesting that we hop off in the plane, and leave Latimer and his daughter in the lurch?"

The danger-signal was now plainly to be read in Chick's eyes and strained voice; but De Selvas was too blind to notice it. Rather did he think that the young airman was beginning to succumb to his tempting offer.

"I can fix it up with Matturis so that we can get away at once!" he assured him glibly. "He won't object to our departing, so long as the girl is left behind. You understand? He wants the girl. He—"

The man's voice died away in a gurgling cry of alarm and protest as Chick's lean, muscular fingers clamped around his scrawny, corded throat, lifting him clean off his feet, his arms and legs jerking like the limbs of a sawdust doll.

"You dirty, black-hearted jackal!" panted the young airman. "Try to bribe me, would you? Leave Latimer and the girl behind, and sneak off with you, and the old boy's diamonds! By James, for two pins I'd screw your head clean off your shoulders!"

"The blinking rat! Give him one for me, Chick!" urged Horace enthusiastically. "Shake the stuffing out of the two-legged toad!"

De Selvas' eyes bulged, and his swarthy face slowly turned purple. It was not until the man was on the verge of suffocation that Chick Chance loosened his fingers, and hurled him from him.

De Selvas tottered back, and collided with Burk Roscoe. The latter instinctively grabbed the Belgian in order to retain his own balance, and for a moment his lips were on a level with De Selvas' ear, his chin almost resting on his shoulder as he clasped him to his chest.

"I'm your man, De Selvas!" he hissed out of the corner of his mouth. "I'll take you up on that offer! Get rid of Chance and his crowd, and you and I'll fly back to the coast together! And there'll be plenty of room for all the diamonds as well!"

That De Selvas heard and understood the swiftly whispered words was evident by the expression that flashed across his swollen face. He dug Roscoe knowingly in the ribs with his elbow as he broke away from him, and backed towards the doorway.

"By heavens, I'll make you pay dearly for this, Chance!" he wheezed, levelling a trembling finger at the young airman. "You've thrown away your last hope! You and your friends will never leave the Black City alive! Matturis and I will see to that. You'll regret the day you refused my offer!"

"Git, you polecat!" snapped Herbert, prancing like an angry bantam-cock. "Hop it, you double-crossing dago!"



King Zernes was stone dead! His head lolled forward and the hilt of a knife protruded from his chest.

With a final imprecation the Belgian turned on his heel, and slipped away through the doorway. Chick shrugged his shoulders resignedly, but his face was grave as he stared out across the river to where the monoplane stood gleaming in the sunlight.

"I don't seem to have made myself very popular in this quarter," he said quietly. "But I just couldn't stand for that beggar's line of talk."

"You've got nothing to feel sorry about, old son!" agreed Horace. "But, all the same, things don't look none too healthy. Do you think they'll seize the plane and try to keep us here along with Latimer and his daughter?"

"You fools!" snarled Roscoe contemptuously. "A nice thing you've done now!"

Chick ignored the man. He stared thoughtfully at the ring on his finger.

"I can't believe that the king will go back on his word," he declared hopefully. "He seemed a decent sort of old bird, and I don't think he'd have given me this ring unless

THE STORY SO FAR.

Chick Chance and his two chums, Horace and Herbert, and Lobula, a native guide, are searching for Eustace Latimer, who has come into a fortune. He is believed to be a prisoner, together with his daughter, in Black City, in the heart of Central Africa. If Latimer does not return to England within a given time, the money will go to Burk Roscoe, a scoundrel, who is at present a captive aboard Chick's fast plane. Chick and his pals eventually arrive over Black City, where they are met by the giant warriors of the Amazeli and taken before the king by Matturis, the head man. The king consents to Chick carrying out his mission, but Latimer is unwilling to return to England. Seizing the opportunity, De Selvas, an escaped murderer from the Belgian Congo, offers to lead Chick to the treasure-cavities of the kings of the Amazeli in exchange for a passage to England and freedom. The young airman, however, refuses.

(Now read on.)

he meant what he said. All the same, it's a dead cert that De Selvas and Matturis will do their best to prejudice him against us."

He lit a cigarette, took two puffs at it, and threw it impatiently to the floor.

"You fellows wait here. I'm going to find out what's happened to Latimer and the girl!" he jerked.

He switched through the doorway and went up the stone steps three at a time. The Amazeli guards on the next terrace made no attempt to stop him when he flashed the ring under their noses.

"Hallo, Latimer! Where are you?"

Chick stared uneasily around the big chamber, with the carved stone walls, where he had last seen the old explorer. It was now empty. There was no sign of Latimer or his daughter. The slab of rock in the centre of the floor was still littered with the man's notebooks, specimen-cases, and other paraphernalia, but he himself was conspicuously absent.

Chick shouted again and again. Only the sound of his own voice came echoing hollowly back to him. Suspicions of foul play crept into his mind as he wandered aimlessly around the deserted room. What had become of the old explorer and his daughter? Had Matturis spirited them away, in order to delay their departure, and give him time to sway the king to his way of thinking?

The young airman came to a swift decision. It was a time for immediate action. He would demand a show-down, and find out exactly how they stood. Hurriedly he rejoined his companions on the lower terrace.

"Latimer and the girl have disappeared," he announced tensely. "I don't like the look of things at all, boys. There's some funny work going on, and I'm going to find out what it's all about."

"Say the word—we'll back you up!" declared Horace, screwing his monocle more firmly into his eye. "What's the next move?"

"See Matturis, and demand another audience with the king," snapped Chick. "Lobula, tell that ebony statue outside to send for Matturis."

The gigantic Amazeli, who stood on guard outside the door merely shrugged his shoulders, and shook his head. Evidently he dared not leave his post.

"Matturis! De Selvas!" Chick called both men by name, but neither appeared in answer to his stentorian summons.

Herbert peered keenly towards the distant plane. It stood alone, just as they had left it, in the centre of the open piece of ground where they had landed. None of the Amazeli had dared to approach the strange-winged monster that had dropped down from the skies with the white men and their native servant.

Burk Roscoe leaned back against the wall, a crooked smile on his thin lips, and a cunning glint in his eyes as he fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. He was waiting for something to break. He knew that Dr. de Selvas would not ignore the offer he had whispered in his ear.

Below, at the base of the great rock, the huddled houses of the Black City were basking in the blazing sunlight. In the spacious square the giant warriors of the Amazeli leaned on their spears, as black and as silent as their own shadows. There was a tension in the atmosphere like the calm before a storm. Chick Chance could feel his nerves jumping like fiddle-strings. He halted in his restless pacing, and stared speculatively at the passage-way that led through the stone-walled chamber where he had interviewed King Zernes earlier in the day.

"Come on, you fellows," he said suddenly. "There's no use us standing here like a lot of big hams. If the king's in there I'm going to see him. Watch Roscoe! He's got a look on his face that I don't like. If he makes a false move sock him on the chin."

Chick strode boldly into the passage. It was no more than half a dozen yards in length. At the farther end was another archway, covered with a hanging curtain of lion skins.

He swept the curtain to one side, and stepped through, with the others close at his heels. Shafts of golden sunlight stabbed through the embrasures in the outer wall of the rock. One of these fell full on the figure of King Zernes, who sat with his back turned towards them in a carved chair that was inlaid with pure gold and draped with the skin of a magnificent snow-leopard. He was alone in the room.

"Suffering crumpets, is that the boss of the works?" exclaimed Herbert, in an awed whisper. "Looks more like Father Christmas than a blessed king."

Chick coughed and shuffled his feet on the stone floor in an endeavour to attract attention. But the king did not stir. His hands, yellow as old ivory, rested on the arms of his chair, and his white head was nodding forward on his chest.

"The old boy's having forty winks," muttered Horace. "Probably be mad enough to bite himself if we woke him up."

"Got to risk that," decided Chick. He signalled to Lobula, who stepped forward and spoke a few words in the Amazeli dialect. Still there was no response or movement from the seated monarch.

Puzzled and vaguely uneasy, Chick advanced until he was directly facing the man. The next instant a gasp of horror and dismay escaped his lips.

King Zernes was stone dead, with his head lolled limply, and the hilt of a dagger protruding from his chest!

"By heavens, he's dead! He's been murdered!"

Chick's voice was hoarse, and his face was white as he turned to his companions and pointed dazedly towards the lifeless figure of the king of the Amazeli.

"Murdered!" echoed Horace in cracked, incredulous tones, as he tiptoed forward and peered nervously over the young airman's shoulder. "Great Christopher, he's got a blessed skewer stuck clean through him! Who could have pulled a dirty job like this?"

Chick had not time to reply. The doorway leading out on to the terrace was suddenly darkened as two figures appeared in the opening and paused for a moment before rushing on into the room. The first was Dr. de Selvas; close behind him came Matturis, lean and scowling.

"What does this mean? What are you insolent dogs doing in here?" demanded De Selvas haughtily. "How dare you force your way into the king's presence? Your Majesty—"

"The king is dead!" jerked Chick huskily. "He's been murdered! We found him just as he is, with a knife—"

De Selvas staggered back with a ringing shout of rage and horror. He did not trouble even to glance at the dead man in the chair. His eyes were ablaze with evil triumph as he pointed an accusing finger at Chick Chance.

"You hound! You dastardly murderer!" he screamed. "So this is the way you repay the king's trust in you! Take his life with the hand that wears the Royal signet! Creep in here when he is asleep, and stab him with his own dagger!"

"You lie! I never laid a finger on the king—"

De Selvas turned and rushed towards the terrace, bawling at the top of his voice and waving his arms like a madman.

"Treason! Treason! The king is dead! The white strangers have murdered the King of the Amazeli!"

Matturis added his own raucous voice to the din. He jerked hard on a metal lever that protruded from a slot in the wall, and the brazen clangor of a great bell boomed out over the Black City and the sun-scorched valley beyond.

An answering roar of voices swelled and vibrated on the air; the very rock shook to the stamp of naked feet pounding up the stone steps as the black warriors rushed towards the king's apartment.

Bewildered as he was, an inkling of the truth flashed into Chick Chance's brain. His face was white and set as he turned towards his chums.

"Boys, we've been trapped!" he declared hoarsely. "This is a put-up job, and Matturis and De Selvas are at the bottom of it! They knew that the king intended to keep his word and allow us to leave in peace! One of them deliberately murdered him, and they are trying to place the crime on our shoulders!"

"By James, the treacherous skunks!" gasped Horace, dropping a hand to the butt of his pistol. "We're in a mighty tight corner, Chick!"

Instinctively the three adventurers darted towards the passage by way of which they had reached the king's room. They were too late! Already it was packed chock-a-block with black warriors, and more were swarming in through the other doorway that led on to the wide terrace.

The airmen fell back until they could go no farther, and their shoulders were pressed hard against the smooth stone wall. There was no way of escape. A bristling array of spears completely hemmed them in, backed by a semicircle of scowling black faces.

"Don't shoot! Hold your fire, boys!" warned Chick urgently. "We might kill a few of the beggars, but the rest would riddle us with spears before we could wink twice."

Lobula raised his great voice and gabbled excitedly in the Amazeli tongue.

"It is false! The white men did not kill your king!" he vowed. "Why should they harm him when he was about to let them depart in peace? Does not one of them wear the king's ring on his finger? O men of the Amazeli, there is treachery in your own midst!"

The giant blacks half-lowered their spears and stared uneasily at one another. Matturis' face was crimson with fury as he stood well in the background, jabbering and chattering like a demented monkey, waving his arms, and pointing to the lifeless figure of King Zernes.

(Chick and his chums are in a pretty tight fix! How's it all going to end? Chums, you'll get the thrill of your lives when you read next week's gripping instalment. Don't miss it, whatever you do.)



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