

SPARKLING LONG ST. JIM'S STORY OF APRIL FOOL JAPING INSIDE!

The GEM ^{2d}



Gussy's Great Idea!



"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Look here!" The Terrible Three stared at the footprints in surprise. Someone had evidently been prowling round the School House in the hours of darkness. "Great Scott!" muttered Lowther. "The cracksman's been here!"

CHAPTER 1. No Backers!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his eyeglass thoughtfully upon a spotless handkerchief and coughed.

This was a sign that Arthur Augustus, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, had something to say.

But the three other juniors in Study No. 6 did not appear to notice it. Blake, Herries, and Digby were busy doing lines, and their pens were driving over the paper at a rapid rate. They were anxious to get out into the quad before the bell went for afternoon school, and they had fifty lines each to get finished before they could leave the study.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coughed. "Ahem!"

Blake looked up for a moment, taking breath, as it were, before he made a fresh onslaught upon Virgil.

"Gussy, old man, I wish you wouldn't sit there grunting; it puts me out."

"Weally, Blake—"

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

The three pens were driving on again in unison. A quarter to two chimed out from the clock tower of St. Jim's.

"I've got somethin' to say to you chaps—"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Got to get these lines done, fathead! Cheese it!"

"Weally, Dig—"

Blake gave a gasp of relief and threw down his pen.

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It scattered several blots over the spotless cuffs of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he leaned upon the table, and the swell of the School House gave a howl.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" asked Blake.

"Look, you frightful ass! Now I shall have to go and change my beastly shirt before afternoon lessons, you awful duffah!"

"Don't you wear detachable cuffs?" asked Blake innocently.

"You uttah ass!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Well, they would save you a lot of trouble," said Blake. "Never mind, lick the ink off before it gets dry."

"I wefuse to do anythin' so disgustin'!"

Digby laid down his pen in his turn. "Done!" he remarked. "How are you getting on, Herries?"

"Nearly finished," Herries grunted.

"Don't jaw!"

"I've got somethin' wathah important to say to you chaps—"

"Have you done your lines, Gussy?" asked Digby.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No, dear boy; I haven't had time. I've been thinkin'—"

"We've got to show them up at afternoon school, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, and I have had somethin' more important to think of. In the cires—"

"Don't jaw!" roared Herries. "You're putting me out!"

"A chap with wotten manna's like you wants puttin' out of any wespectable study, I should think, Hewwies!"

"Good for you, Gussy!" grinned Jack Blake. "Don't make yourself a general worry, Herries, because you've got a few lines to do!"

"Br-r-r!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent remark, Hewwies. What I was goin' to say to you fellows is—"

"There! I'm finished!" gasped Herries. "Fifty of the beastly lines done!"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Hewwies!"

"I know that, ass! It was too thick of Lathom to give us fifty lines each just for bumping Figgins in the passage. Where are we to bump New House bounders, I'd like to know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! I was sayin', dear boys—"

"Better get out into the quad now for a whiff of fresh air before lessons," said Herries, rising from the table.

"I was goin' to say—"

"Come on!"

"I insist upon you chaps listenin' to me, othahwise I shall go and propound my wippin' ideals to Tom Mewwy, and leave you chaps out of it."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

"You feahful ass, Hewwies! Look here, Blake, this is wathah important. Do you fellows know what to-morrow is?"

"The day after to-day," said Blake simply.

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! You know the date of to-morrow—it is the First of Apwil."

"Quite aware of that, Gussy! What about it?"

—FULL-O'-FUN YARN OF ALL-FOOLS'-DAY JAPING AT ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"Bein' the First of Apwil, I was thinkin' that we ought to pwoceed to make Tom Mewwy and those Shell boundahs, and also Figgins & Co. of the New House, sit up," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as an excellent opportunity for a jape on those boundahs. What do you think?"

Herries yawned. "I think we'd better get out and have a blow before lessons," he said.

"What do you think about my ideah?" howled D'Arcy.

"Oh, rotten!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Yes, rotten!" said Blake. "If anybody's japed on the First of April, Gussy, it will be you. You simply go about asking to be japed, you know. But we'll take care of you!"

"You uttah ass! I wufuse to be taken care of! I——"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "Take his other arm, Herries, and you lead him by the necktie, Dig!"

"Right-ho!"

"Welease me, you silly asses!" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's. "Ow! I ordah you to welease me at once."

Bump!

The swell of St. Jim's crashed against the table as he struggled in the grasp of his humorous chums, and it rocked and reeled. There was a yell from Digby as the inkpot went flying.

"Look out! Stop it!"

But it was too late to stop the rolling inkpot. The ink poured out in a flood, and fairly swamped over the three impositions which the juniors had written out with so much haste and determination. In a second the sheets were covered with ink, and the writing had become wholly illegible instead of only partly so.

There was a roar of dismay from the juniors, and they released Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and sprang, too late, to save their precious impositions.

"Oh!" yelled Blake. "They're spoiled!"

"You uttah asses!" gasped D'Arcy, setting his tie straight. "It was entirely your own faults!"

"Oh, bump the silly ass!" shouted Herries.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made one leap to the door. As a rule his manners savoured of that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But this time he stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once. The study door slammed behind him, and his footsteps died away down the passage.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were left with their ruined impots, breathing vengeance.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus sought out Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell and endeavoured to interest them in his wonderful idea. But he was even less successful with the Terrible Three than he had been with his own chums. D'Arcy, however, was persistent if nothing else when he got an idea, and he resolved to see Figgins & Co. of the New House after school and try to get them to take it up.

CHAPTER 2.

Jammy!

PORK PIES!" The murmuring voice proceeded from Figgins' study in the New House, and Arthur Augustus grinned as he heard it.

Lessons were over at St. Jim's for the day, and Arthur Augustus, after thinking the matter over very carefully, had walked over to the New House to try to interest Figgins & Co. in his scheme for a celebration of the First of April.

"Pork pies and potatoes, fried——"

Fatty Wynn was evidently getting tea in Figgins' study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in at the open door. Fatty Wynn was alone in the study, and he looked very busy. He was cleaning out a frying-pan with sheets of old exercise paper, and there was a bright fire glowing in the grate. The table was laid for tea, and several pork pies laid there in enticing array, and Fatty Wynn had peeled potatoes ready for frying.

He was buttering the pan ready when he caught sight of Arthur Augustus.

"Wynn, deah boy——"

"Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn, greasing the pan carefully. "Have you seen Figgins?"

"No; I have come oval to speak to him——"

"They've gone to get the jam tarts," said Fatty Wynn. "They ought to be back by now."

"Vewy good; I will wait."

"You can stay to tea if you like," said Fatty Wynn hospitably. "We've got pork pies and fried potatoes, and we're going to have a dozen jam tarts."

It's one thing for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to get a great idea for a First-of-April jape, but it's quite another to get his chums to give it a hearing. And that's where Tom Merry & Co. land themselves well "in the cart"!

"Thank you, deah boy, but tea is weady in my study. I just wanted to speak to Figgins about to-morrow."

"Well, here he is," said Fatty Wynn. He slid the chipped potatoes into the frying-pan and jammed it upon the fire.

Figgins and Kerr came into the study. Figgins laid down a large plate crammed with tarts in the armchair. Mrs. Taggles had run out of paper bags—hence the plate. Kerr placed a jampot on the table. The chums of the New House looked inquiringly at D'Arcy.

"Come to tea, Gussy?" asked Figgins affably.

"It's your birthday to-morrow. I believe," Kerr remarked.

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply to that observation.

"I have come oval to speak to you chaps about to-morrow," he said. "You are aware, of course, that it is All Fools' Day. I have a wathah good ideah, you know, for japin' somebody. I was thinkin' of japin' the New House, but——"

"Oh, were you?" said Figgins warily.

"Yaas, wathah! But the othah fellows declined to back me up, and I'm goin' to take you fellows in——"

"You'll have to get up very early in the morning to take us in," said Figgins.

"Pway don't misundahstand me, deah boy. I am goin' to take you into the scheme," Arthur Augustus explained.

"Oh!" said Figgins doubtfully.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Blake and the west as a set of asses, you know, and I have wesolved to jape them to-morrow. I considah that it will serve them wight for wefusin' to back me up in waggin' you chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah, Figgins. I'm goin' to let you chaps into the scheme. Of course, you will back me up, and we will make those silly asses look a set of awful duffahs, you know."

Figgins shook his head.

"We feel very much honoured, Gussy——"

"Yaas, wathah! That is only natuwal in the cires," Arthur Augustus assented.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "I was going to say that we feel much honoured, but you will have to excuse us."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"You see, we've got our own ideas about to-morrow," Figgins explained.

"Oh, that's all wight! You can throw up any plans you had made, you know, and follow my lead instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah. In a case like this a fellow of tact and judgment——"

"My dear Gussy, thanks!" said Figgins. "But we won't come into the wonderful scheme, if you don't mind! We'd rather be excused."

"I wegard you as a silly ass, Figgins. Kerr is a more sensible chap. What do you think, Kerr?"

Kerr grinned.

"I think the same as Figgins," he said.

"Ass! What do you think, Wynn, deah boy?"

"A little more fat."

"You uttah ass——"

"Well, look at them yourself," said Fatty Wynn.

"Look at what, you ass?"

"The potatoes," said Fatty Wynn, in wonder. "I think they want a little more fat. Don't you think so?"

"Never mind about the wheeze for the First, Gussy," said Figgins, laughing. "Sit down and have tea with us, and let it drop. You're not built for japing people, you know. You couldn't jape a frog."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"These pork pies are really good, and——"

"I wufuse to have tea. Upon second thoughts, I wufuse to allow you to back me up in my wippin' scheme, too," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wegard you as a set of silly asses, and I shall shake the dust of this stüday fwom my feet."

"Shut the door after you, then," said Kerr cheerfully.

"You fwabjous ass——"

"What I like about Gussy is his nice, polite manner when he visits people in their studies," Figgins remarked to space.

"As a mattah of fact, Figgins, I have a jolly good mind to give all three of you a feahful thwashin' before I go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cacklin' duffah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.

It was too much for the exasperated swell of the Fourth. He made a sudden rush at Figgins, and Figgins had just time to dodge a deadly drive on his nose. He closed with the School House junior, and they waltzed round the table.

"Look out!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

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"Don't biff me into the fire! If you make me upset these potatoes—oh, my hat! You villains!"

The struggling juniors bumped against Fatty Wynn, and disaster immediately overtook the frying potatoes. Fatty Wynn had hold of the handle of the frying-pan, steadying it on the fire, and as he was bumped he jerked the handle, and the pan turned turtle. There was a sudden, terrific sizzle, and the potatoes and the grease they were cooking in shot into the fire.

SIZZLEZZZZZZZZZZ!
"Oh! You chumps! My taters! Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"
"You fathead!" roared Kerr.

Fatty Wynn glared at the heap of potatoes burning in the glowing cinders. A strong smell of burning and thick clouds of smoke swept over the study. Fatty Wynn glared at the wasted potatoes for one minute, and then he turned upon the author of the catastrophe. He rushed right at D'Arcy, brandishing his fat fists. Arthur Augustus made an effort to avoid him, and stumbled backwards, and sat down violently in the armchair.

"Yawwooooh!"
Squelch!

"B-b-bai Jove! I'm sittin' on something—ow!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Kerr. "The tarts!"

"The—tarts!" gasped Fatty Wynn dazedly. "The tarts! Oh!"

D'Arcy jumped up quickly, and Fatty Wynn gave a yell of wrath as he looked at the tarts. The tarts were squashed out of all resemblance to tarts, and at least half the jam was upon D'Arcy's trousers.

"Bai Jove! My twousahs are ruined!" panted D'Arcy. "You uttah wottahs—"

"The tarts!" wailed Fatty Wynn. "They're done in! Collar the silly chump! We'll—"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus ran for the door. Fatty Wynn dashed furiously after him. The study was thick with smoke now from the burning potatoes. Fatty Wynn's foot flew up as D'Arcy escaped through the door, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a terrific yell as he was helped out into the passage. A considerable quantity of jam remained upon the Welsh junior's boot.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!"

"Great Scott! Is there a fire here?" exclaimed Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, dashing up the passage.

D'Arcy darted past him, and Monteith ran into Fatty Wynn, who was rushing out of the study. The prefect staggered back, and then, recovering himself, he caught the fat Fourth Former by the collar.

"What's the matter here? What's that burning?"

"Lemme gerrat him!" spluttered Fatty Wynn. "I'll slay him! I'll squash him! He's ruined my taters and tarts! Lemme go!"

"It's all right, Monteith!" grinned Figgins. "Only some cooking upset in the fire."

"Lemme go—"

Monteith swung the fat Fourth Former round and pitched him into the study. Fatty Wynn staggered across the room and sat down in the armchair, and there was a fresh squelch.

"You'd better stop that smoke," said the prefect sternly. "If there is any more of this I'll stop you having tea in the study at all."

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And he stamped away.

"Scrape this blessed jam off my trucks," said Fatty Wynn faintly. "We shan't be able to eat these tarts now—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I should think not!"

"It's not a laughing matter," said the fat Fourth Former indignantly.

"The tarts are mucked up, and the taters are done in. There's nothing but the pork pies left. My hat! I'll squash that chump D'Arcy! He's not safe to have in a place where there are eatables about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins threw open the window to allow the smoke to escape, and the chums of the New House sat down to a meal minus potatoes and tarts. A considerable quantity of the tarts had gone over to the School House by that time, attached to the beautiful trousers of the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Means Business!

TOM MERRY met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he came into the School House, and he could not help staring in amusement at the swell of the school.

Arthur Augustus' collar was torn out, his necktie was flying loose, and his hair was wildly ruffled. His jacket was rumpled and dusty, and there was jam all over his rearward, mingled with crumbs of the battered tarts. The elegant junior—who did not look very elegant now—was panting for breath.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you been in the wars?"

"I have been tweated with gwoss diswespect—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Where did you pick up that jam?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to discuss the wottah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus marched haughtily upstairs, followed by a yell of laughter. Herries and Digby were in the study, and they looked out as Arthur Augustus came by. They grinned—they could not help it.

"Been in trouble?" asked Blake sympathetically.

D'Arcy sniffed.

"I have been ovah to the New House to offah to take Figgins & Co. into my wippin' scheme—"

"And that is the result?" grinned Digby.

"Yaas."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatever for wibald mewwiment, Blake."

"Better come in and let us scrape you," Digby suggested.

"I wufuse to be scwaped, I am goin' to change my twucks. I wegard you as a wotten set of wottahs. Tom Mewwy is a wottah, too, and Figgins is a wottah. Yah!"

And Arthur Augustus tramped away to the dormitory, leaving the chums of the Fourth shrieking. With a frowning brow he changed his clothes and washed and brushed himself, and he did not come down again until he was looking his old elegant self again.

Then he presented himself in Study No. 6. Blake, Digby, and Herries were having tea, but there was no cup or plate laid for D'Arcy, neither was his chair at the table. He looked round the study through his eyeglass.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Want anything?" asked Blake, looking at him.

"I want my tea, you ass!"

"Oh!" said Blake, in surprise. "I didn't think you'd have tea with a set of rotters. My mistake."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Here you are," said Blake, laughing, as he pulled a chair up to the table. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do, Gussy. We'll listen while you tell us your idea."

Blake made that offer with the air of a fellow who felt that he was doing a generous thing. Digby and Herries nodded assent.

"We will!" said Digby. "After all, a friend's a friend, and we're called upon to let him talk rot sometimes for auld lang syne."

"Certainly!" said Herries. "Go ahead with the wheeze."

"I decline to do anythin' of the sort. I shall keep my wheeze to myself, and work it off on you chaps, and take you in as well as Tom Mewwy and Figgins & Co."

"Take us in?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha! You couldn't take in your left ear, you ass. Ha, ha, ha! He's going to take us in! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby and Herries.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glowered wrathfully. There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and the Terrible Three looked in.

"What's the joke?" demanded Tom Merry. "We can hear you from the end of the passage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at?"

"Oh, it's Gussy!" gasped Blake. "He thinks he can take us in on the First of April! He's going to take us in, and you and Figgins in—Gussy!"

The Terrible Three roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet. He jammed his monocle into his eye and regarded the yelling juniors with a look of lofty disdain.

"You uttah chumps—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy swung round on his heels and walked haughtily out of the study. The Shell fellows and the Fourth Formers roared as he went, and their laughter followed him down the passage. That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy should undertake to take them in on the First of April struck them as very comical. But there was a very determined look upon D'Arcy's face as he walked away—a look of grim resolve. He sought out Wally, his minor, later that evening, and had a long conversation with that cheery youth and Curly Gibson, his chum. At the end of it the three parted, chuckling.

CHAPTER 4.

An Alarm in the Night!

KILDARE of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, put his head into the Junior Common-room in the School House, with his good-natured smile.

"Bed-time, you kids!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet with a yawn. He had just finished a game of chess with Monty Lowther, in which both parties had had the benefit of expert advice from Manners, with the result that they had fallen into hopeless confusion. Monty Lowther had been beaten, and he seemed to attribute it to Manners' well-meant efforts.

"Mate," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Yes, but I should have had you mate



A strong smell of burning and thick clouds of black smoke swept over the study as the frying-pan was upset. Fatty Wynn rushed at the author of the catastrophe, brandishing his fists. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy decided to avoid him, but he stumbled against the armchair. Next moment he was sitting down in it—and a plate of tarts was on the seat!

in two!" grunted Lowther. "This is what comes of Manners helping."

"I didn't help Tom!" said Manners.

Lowther grunted.

"No, he's won!"

"Look here, Lowther, you ass—"

"Peace, my children," said Tom Merry pacifically. "It's time we were in our little bunks, and don't forget the cricket stumps!"

"Oh, all right!"

Kildare smiled. It certainly sounded rather odd for the Shell fellows to be talking of taking cricket stumps to bed with them, but for a week or more past they had done so.

There had been burglaries in the St. Jim's district lately. One cracksmen had been arrested, but his confederate was still at large. The police believed that he had fled from the neighbourhood, as was, indeed, very probable, as he would have been in very great danger if he had remained there. But the alarm of the burglars was still in the air, so to speak, and the juniors took the most elaborate precautions when they went to bed.

Bernard Glyn of the Shell, who was an inventive genius, had been with difficulty restrained from fitting up burglar alarms of his own invention. Some of the juniors took cricket stumps to bed with them, and some of them had bats, and several had electric torches. If a cracksmen had come to St. Jim's just then, he would not have stood much chance. Herries had gone so far as to propose introducing his bulldog, Towser, into the dormitory of a night—and it was only by the threat of instant slaughter that the Fourth Formers had made him drop the idea.

"Get off!" said Kildare. "I don't think you need be nervous about burglars, you kids."

"We're not nervous," Tom Merry

explained. "It's a case of defence, not defiance, you know."

The St. Jim's captain laughed.

"Well, well, off you go! So long as you don't lay in firearms, you can take what you like to the dormitory!"

"Nothing like being prepared," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The best thing is to have a burglar alarm fitted up to every door and window!" remarked Bernard Glyn. "I should be willing—"

"But nobody else would be willing," said Kildare, laughing. "Now, enough jaw; buzz off!"

And the juniors tramped up to bed.

The Fourth Formers stopped at the door of their dormitory, while the Shell fellows went farther along the passage to their quarters. Some of them looked under the beds when the light was turned on. As Gore remarked, there was nothing like making certain.

"Quite an easy thing for a burglar to get into the school and stay hidden under the bed," Kangaroo remarked.

"There was a burglar here once who got in at the window of this very dormitory!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! Can't be too careful!"

"Of course, we're not afraid of the rotters," said Tom Merry. "But it's no good blinking the fact. One villain is still loose!"

The Shell fellows turned in, their minds running upon burglars and burglaries. It was only natural, considering what had lately happened in the district. After Kildare had put out the light and left the juniors to go to sleep, the talk ran on the same subject.

Some of the Shell fellows, who wanted to jape the New House on the morrow, All Fools' Day, started that subject; but they had no chance—burglaries easily won, so to speak.

Manners told a story of a burglary he had heard of during the last vacation, and Gore capped it with a tale of a murder. Then Kangaroo told a story of a fearful outrage in the lonely Australian bush, which he had heard before he came to St. Jim's. By that time the juniors were very sleepy, but in such a state of uneasy shuddering that they hardly cared to close their eyes and go to sleep.

"Groogh!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Kangaroo concluded his thrilling yarn. "What asses we are to talk of these things after bed-time! We shall dream burglars now!"

"I—I believe I heard a sound!" muttered Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed, but his laugh did not have its usual cheery and hearty sound. His nerves were a bit shaken, too.

"Somebody tell a funny story!" said Glyn.

"Go it, Lowther!"

"All right!" said Lowther. "There's the story of the man with the iron saucepan—"

"Oh, we've had that!" said Gore.

"Then I'll tell you what happened to my uncle at Brighton—"

"Had that!" yelled Danc.

"Well, there's the story about the boiled cod—"

"Too old!"

"Look here," said Monty Lowther wrathfully, "if you're so jolly particular—"

"I'm going to sleep," said Manners, yawning. "Good-night, all!"

"Good-night!"

Monty Lowther's funny story was never told. The Shell fellows settled down to slumber, but as they did so there came a sudden sound through the

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silence of the dormitory. It was a sound of a rattle at the high windows.

In a moment every fellow was sitting bolt upright in bed.

"Wh-what was that?" gasped Gore. "D-did you hear it?"

"I—I hear something," said Tom Merry, staring towards the glimmering windows. "It—it sounded like the window rattling!"

"Or—or a stone rattling on the window!" muttered Skimpole.

"Ass! How could a stone rattle on the window?"

"Someone might have thrown it, my dear Lowther."

"Fatehead! There's nobody in the quad at this time of night, and if there was I suppose he wouldn't be chucking stones up at this window!"

"Well, no," agreed Skimpole. "Probably not. Still—"

"Listen!" muttered Tom Merry. "Don't jaw! Listen!"

There was tense silence in the dormitory as the Shell fellows listened for a repetition of the sound. There came a soft sound from the window, but it was the familiar sound of a shower of rain, driven on the panes by the wind.

"There's no one there!" muttered Lowther.

"It must have been the wind!"

"It's—it's all right!"

Tom Merry jumped out of bed.

"The sound certainly came from the window," he said. "I'm jolly well going to see!"

The hero of the Shell mounted to the window, opened it softly, and looked out.

There was a glimmer of starlight in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Below, Tom Merry could see a gleam of

ruddy light from lower windows. Certainly, if a burglar was there, he had chosen a very early hour for his visit; it was as yet barely ten o'clock.

Tom Merry leaned out and scanned the dusky quadrangle below.

Save where the glow of light fell from the windows below, he could see nothing; the quadrangle was very dark and silent, the faint starlight only serving to make darkness visible, as it were.

Tom Merry searched the quad with his eyes, and scanned the ivy upon the wall below the dormitory windows. It was rustling in the wind, and the rain-drops were dashing on it; but there was certainly no sign of a climber.

Tom Merry shivered and closed the window, and dropped back into the dormitory.

"Well?" demanded half a dozen breathless voices.

"Nothing there!"

"Oh, I suppose it was the wind!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm going to sleep!"

Tom Merry got into bed again.

"I hardly think it was the wind," he remarked thoughtfully.

"Well, it was the rain, then!"

"I don't see how the rain could rattle the windows."

"Well, what was it, then?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Good egg!" suddenly exclaimed Manners. "If there was anybody prowling outside the window we shall find traces of him to-morrow, anyway. It's raining, and the ground down there will be soft and muddy."

"Lot of consolation that will be, if

we get burgled!" said Monty Lowther, yawning. "Anyway, if I'm burgled, I'm going to be burgled asleep. Good-night!"

And Monty Lowther went to sleep. And the rest of the Shell were not slow in following his example.

CHAPTER 5.

Wally Gets Wet!

KILDARE came out of his study with Darrell, and the two Sixth Formers walked along the passages in the School House, looking in at the windows.

Since the burglaries in the district the prefects have been very careful of a night. Either Kildare or Mr. Railton made a round of the School House to make sure that the windows were secure before going to bed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Darrell suddenly.

He stopped at the window at the upper end of the dormitory passage. This window was a small one at the back of the House, and it looked out over an outhouse. More than once that window had been used by juniors when breaking bounds, as it was in a quiet corner and easily reached from the ground outside.

Darrell cast the beam of his torch upon it, and Kildare echoed his exclamation.

"By Jove it's not been fastened!"

"Lucky we saw it!" said Darrell.

Kildare slipped the catch into its place.

"That's done!" he said.

And the two prefects continued their rounds, and the passage was left in darkness and solitude again.

About ten minutes later there was a sound at the window. On the sloping roof of the outhouse below a dim form appeared in the starlight, and a hand glided over the window. If the prefects had been there they would certainly have imagined that the cracksmen had come.

A hand tried the window, and tried it again; and as it refused to budge there was a low exclamation.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

And if anyone belonging to St. Jim's had heard it he would have known that the dim figure was not that of a cracksmen but of Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form.

"My only aunt. It's fastened!"

Wally gave a low whistle of dismay.

It was raining with soft, steady persistence, and the hero of the Third was wet. He had a coat on, with the collar turned up, but the rain was soaking him. Over his boots he wore a very large pair of ragged boots, which had at some period belonged to a man with very large feet, and those boots were smothered with mud, as if he had been tramping in very soft soil.

The fag crouched under the window out of the rain, in dismay.

"Oh, Great Scott! Some silly josses has been and closed the window, and I'm dished!"

D'Arcy minor certainly was dished. Not being a cracksmen, he had no means of opening the window from the outside.

The rain beat down steadily. "Gussy won't come out of the dorm—that's part of the game," murmured Wally. "I'm dished, unless Curly thinks of me."

He waited.

He could do nothing else. In the Third Form dormitory in the School

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As over him pours the boiling soap.
The waiter's too busy—he's plainly smitten
With the finest school yarn that's ever been written



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House only Curly Gibson, his chum, knew of his nocturnal expedition. It was a secret from the other fellows. Jameson, his other close chum in the Third, was a New House boy, and was far enough away just then. And Curly was a sound sleeper. It seemed only probable that Curly, knowing that Wally had left the window unfastened for entrance, had gone off to sleep, and he would probably not wake again until the rising-bell went in the morning.

Half-past ten rang out from the clock-tower.

Wally shivered.

The rain was finding him out, although he was crouching close under the window, and the night wind of March was cold.

"Groogh!" murmured Wally. "I shall be catching a rotten cold! I shall be doing a sneezing turn to-morrow! Ugh! Oh, rats! Blow Gussy and his giddy schemes! What an ass I was to come out in the rain! Groogh!"

And Wally began to sneeze.

"Atchoo-choo-ooo!"

He listened in painful suspense. Had his sneeze been heard? If the prefects caught him outside the House at that hour of the night he knew what his fate would be. His hands seemed to tingle in anticipation.

But silence reigned.

Wally moved at last. There was no chance of Curly Gibson waiting up, apparently, and no other way of getting in, excepting at the window, which had to be unfastened. Wally dropped from the outhouse, and made his way round to the window of the Third Form dormitory. There it was, high above his head, beyond the possibility of scaling. But Wally was not thinking of that. He stooped and selected a small stone, and with unerring aim, he pitched it up at the dormitory window.

Clink!

The stone clinked on the glass, and dropped back noiselessly upon the rainy ground.

Wally waited and shivered.

Had it been heard?

Three or four minutes passed, and he was thinking of throwing up another pebble when the window above opened, and a shock-head was projected into the night. It belonged to Curly Gibson.

Wally gave a low whistle.

The head was withdrawn.

Curly Gibson turned into the dormitory.

The Third Formers were asleep, with two or three exceptions. Frayne and Hobbs had awakened. Curly Gibson had been sleeping but lightly, thinking of Wally as he dozed off.

"What was it?" asked Joe Frayne.

"I heard something at the window, I believe," said Hobbs.

Curly yawned.

"Oh, it's not a burglar!" he said. "You can go to sleep."

"But I'm sure I heard something," persisted Hobbs. "Did you see anything out there, Gibson?"

"Only the trees and the rain," said Curly truthfully enough.

He did not think it necessary to say that he had heard anything. He had not seen Wally in the gloom, but he had heard his chum's cautious whistle.

"Well, you remember giddy burglars are in the district," said Hobbs uneasily. "My dear chap, there aren't any burglars."

And Curly dropped into bed again and began to snore. Reassured, Hobbs turned over and went to sleep again; and Frayne followed his example.

Curly Gibson did not go to sleep this time. He knew that Wally's signal at the window must mean that he had been

shut out, and that he wanted to be let in. But Wally had cautioned him not to let a single fellow know of the wheeze, and so it was necessary to wait till Hobbs and Frayne were asleep before he made a move.

Curly Gibson waited ten minutes.

By that time Hobbs and Frayne were safely again in the arms of Morpheus, and their steady breathing showed that they slept.

Then Curly crept softly from bed.

Without waiting to put on any clothes he crept to the door and stole out into the passage, clad only in his pyjamas.

He stepped softly along the passage to the little window overlooking the outhouse. He knew, of course, that Wally would have returned there, to wait for admittance.

He reached the window, and found a face outlined outside, the nose flattened upon the pane. He tapped the window softly, and the face jerked back.

Curly Gibson unfastened the window, and opened it softly.

"Wally, old man—"

"Atchoo-ooo-ooo!"

"Don't make a row!" whispered Curly. "Somebody'll hear!"

"Atchoo-ooo-ooo!"

Wally sneezed chokingly.

"You—you frabjous ass!" he muttered. "Do you think I'm doing it on purpose? You silly ass, I've caught a cold! Why didn't you let me in before?"

"The other fellows woke up."

"Phew! Do they know?"

"No. I waited till they'd gone to sleep again."

"Oh, good!"

Wally had crept in at the window. He removed his boots before he entered, so that there would be no stains of mud on the floor inside. Curly Gibson closed the window softly, and refastened it.

Wally suppressed a sneeze, and nearly exploded in the effort.

"Poor old chap!" murmured Curly, with something that sounded suspiciously like a chuckle. "You have caught a cold, and no mistake!"

"Groogh!"

They crept away. Wally stopped at the box-room to hide the big muddy boots in an empty box, and then they hurried to the dormitory.

The Third Form were sleeping peacefully when they entered.

They tumbled into bed.

"It worked all right!" whispered Curly.

"Yes."

"Gussy will be pleased!" chuckled Curly.

"Blow Gussy!"

Wally sneezed again.

"Good - night!"

murmured Curly sleepily.

"Atchoo-oo!"

Wally did not sleep well that night. At intervals through the small hours, there came a sound of sneezing from his bed. And when the rising-bell changed in the morning Wally was already awake and sneezing.

CHAPTER 6.

Birthday Greetings!

THE aristocratic nose of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was held very high in the air as the Fourth Form went down to breakfast. But his frozen expression melted a little as he saw several letters piled beside his plate.

As a rule, letters were left in the rack for the juniors to claim them, but someone had evidently taken the trouble to bring D'Arcy's letters in.

"My hat! What a heap of giddy correspondence!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What a thing it is to be such a charming chap, and to have heaps of friends," remarked Lumley-Lumley.

"I cannot understand whom all these letters are from," said D'Arcy, with a perplexed look. "Bai Jove, there are five of them."

"Open them and see," said Digby.

"Yaas, that's wathah a good ideah."

Arthur Augustus picked up the top letter, and started as he looked more closely at the handwriting.

"Gwreat Scott! That's Lowthah's hand."

"Lowther's?"

"Yaas. It is vovy cuwious."

D'Arcy slit open the envelope and took out the sheet inside. There was a single line written upon it, with the date:

"APRIL 1—MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY."

Arthur Augustus grew crimson.

"The uttah ass!"

"What is it?" grinned Blake.

"Only a wotten joke."

"By George, I forgot that it was your birthday!" declared Horries.

"You uttah duffah! It isn't my birthday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! Not so much noise at the table, please," said Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth.

Arthur Augustus opened the second letter. It was in the well-known calligraphy of Manners of the Shell.

"April 1. Many happy returns of the day!"

"Bai Jove!"

"More kind wishes!" grinned Blake.

"Oh, wats!"

The third letter was in the hand of

(Continued on the next page.)



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Figgins, and the fourth in Kangaroo's sprawling writing, and the fifth was written by Lefevre of the Fifth. They all bore the same message: "April 1. Many happy returns of the day." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face was crimson as he finished looking at them, and his eyes gleamed.

The Fourth Formers up and down the table grinned joyously. It was not really D'Arcy's birthday at all, but D'Arcy almost began to believe that it was, with so much evidence to that effect.

"I fail to see what you chaps are gwin' at," said the swell of St. Jim's stiffly. "I regard this as a wotten joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Lathom. "Not so much noise!"

And the juniors chuckled more quietly. D'Arcy sat very still during breakfast. Like many other fellows, he failed to appreciate humour when it was directed against himself. He tore the letters across, and left them lying on the table when he walked out with the Fourth after breakfast.

In the Hall outside, Toby, the School House page, met him with a big box, marked "With care," in his hands.

"Postman left this for you, Master D'Arcy."

"Thank you, Toby!" said Arthur Augustus, taking the parcel.

"Birthday present, I suppose," suggested Digby, and the juniors roared.

A crowd of fellows gathered round to see D'Arcy open the parcel. He laid it upon the table in the Hall and cut the string.

"It cannot be a birthday present," he remarked. "It is not my birthday. Probably it is my new collars come home."

He unwrapped the paper. A cardboard box was disclosed, and the crowd of juniors looked on very eagerly as he removed the lid.

There was a mass of paper inside, and D'Arcy had to remove many layers of paper before he came to what the box contained. He gasped with surprise as he saw what was in it. It was an old boot!

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed, as he took out the boot. He stared dumbfounded at the now familiar legend attached to it.

"April 1. Many happy returns of the day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Which of you wottahs sent me this?" he demanded, glaring round at the crowd of chuckling juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors streamed out into the quadrangle, laughing. Arthur Augustus walked out with a crimson face. The Terrible Three were already out of doors, and they greeted the swell of St. Jim's with a shout.

"Many happy returns!"

"How did you like your birthday present?"

"You wottahs! So it was you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The infuriated swell of the School House made a rush at them, and they scattered. Figgins & Co. came over from the direction of the New House, and they grinned cheerfully at Arthur Augustus and greeted him.

"Many happy returns!"

Then they fled.

The idea that it was D'Arcy's birthday seemed to prevail in the whole

school. Fellows greeted him on all sides with "Many happy returns of the day."

D'Arcy returned into the School House at last, breathing fury. Kildare of the Sixth met him in the passage, and he gave the elegant junior a friendly nod.

"I hear it's your birthday, D'Arcy," he said. "Many happy returns!"

"You ass!"

Kildare jumped. He had never been called an ass before by a junior at St. Jim's. He stared blankly at the crimson face of Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy! What do you mean? How dare you!"

"It's not my birthday!"

"Oh, someone said it was!" said Kildare. "It's a mistake! But—"

"Sowwy, old man!" said Arthur Augustus, realising that Kildare, at least, had spoken in good faith. "Pwasy excuse me, but it's a wotten wag, you know. They are pwetendin' it's my birthday because it's the First of Apwil, you know."

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"Oh, I see! Well, never mind!"

He walked away, laughing.

"The wottahs!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He looked round the School House for Wally. He found him sitting over the fire, smelling strongly of eucalyptus oil, and sneezing.

D'Arcy looked at him in concern.

"Bai Jove, Wally! Have you caught a cold?"

Wally snorted.

"Yes, I have. It was the rain last night."

"I'm sowwy, old chap! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"Br-r-r!" said Wally. "If you catch me going out again helping you with your rotten wheezes, you can use my head for a footer!"

"I'm sowwy! But did it work all right?"

"Yes," growled Wally, "it worked all right. And if I don't get rid of this cold I shall be shoved into sanatorium! Gr-r-r! Don't come too near me, or you'll catch it!"

"Bai Jove, it's wotten!"

"I should say it is!" said Wally. "Have those Shell duffers found the footmarks yet?"

"I don't know. Pewwaps you had better get leave from your Form-mastah to go to bed again, Wally, deah boy."

Wally sniffed.

"Catch me going to bed again!" he said. "I've smothered myself with eucalyptus so that the other chaps won't catch it, and that's enough. Nice nilf, ain't it? Br-r-r!"

"I'm wolly sowwy!"

Arthur Augustus walked away, with a lingering odour of Wally's eucalyptus oil about him.

Wally sneezed and grunted over the fire till it was time for chapel. In the passage a fag yelled after Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! Many happy returns!"

Arthur Augustus gave chase, and the fag vanished. The swell of St. Jim's, who was feeling quite fed-up with the jape by this time, went into the Fourth Form Room, there to wait for the bell for chapel. He gave a snort as he caught sight of a card pinned upon his desk. It bore the inscription he was now getting used to:

"Many happy returns!"

"The wottahs! I will thwash somebody for this!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That is in Tom Mewwy's writin', the silly ass!"

Arthur Augustus' rage had reached boiling point. He threw the card into the Form-room fire and dashed out in search of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mysterious Footprints!

TOM MERRY & CO. were busy just then.

The chums of the Shell had not forgotten the incident of the night, and after breakfast it occurred to them to look for possible footprints under the windows of the dormitory. The rain of the night before had rendered the ground soft and spongy, and if a crackman had been prowling round the House in the night it was pretty certain that he would have left footprints behind him.

Even on the gravel paths in the quadrangle there would be traces of feet, and the juniors, who had had a great deal of experience as Boy Scouts, rather prided themselves upon their ability to follow tracks. The Terrible Three strolled round the House to examine the ground under the dormitory windows, and several other Shell fellows followed them.

"Mind where you tread!" said Tom Merry warningly. "If there are any tracks here we don't want to get them mucked up! You fags can clear out!"

"Rats!" replied Curly Gibson promptly.

Half a dozen fags of the Third were on the scene, and, in fact, quite a crowd of fellows had gathered to see the investigation. The Shell fellows had talked of that peculiar happening of the night before, and most of the School House had heard of it.

"Well, keep off the grass!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, you Shell chaps are a lot of giddy, nervous old hens!" said Hobbs. "You see a burglar in every shadow, you know!"

"That's just what's the matter!" agreed Curly.

Monty Lowther made a movement towards the fags, and they beat a prompt retreat. But Lowther was recalled by a shout of excitement from Tom Merry.

"My hat! Look here!"

"What is it?"

"Footprints!"

"Great Scott!"

"The crackman's been here!"

The Shell fellows stared at the footprints in surprise and some satisfaction. The alarm of the night had not been without grounds. Someone had evidently been prowling round the School House in the hours of darkness.

In the soft soil below the windows there were distinct footmarks. So deep, so distinct were the marks of the big, heavy boots, that it seemed as if the wearer of them had jammed his feet down specially hard in the soil on purpose.

There was a flower-bed along the wall at this point, and the soft soil was specially adapted for keeping traces of this kind. Deep in the soil showed the outlines of a very large pair of boots—quite close up to the wall, and then receding from it, back to the gravel path where the juniors were now standing.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with startled faces.

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry at last. "There was really someone here in the night! No mistake about it now!"

"No fear!"

"Chap with jolly big feet, too!" said

Monty Lowther, scanning the foot-prints. He took a tape-measure from his pocket and measured the nearest track. "This chap took at least nine, I should think!"

"Then it couldn't possibly be a chap breaking bounds!" Manners said thoughtfully. "Must have been a full-grown man!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo, you chaps! Found anything?" asked Blake, coming up.

"Look there!"

"Pshaw!"

Blake stared at the tracks.

"The giddy cracksmen!"

"Only one of them, I think," said Tom Merry. "The tracks all seem to belong to the same feet! He had gone up close to the wall. And look here! The ivy is dragged out in places, as if he tried to climb and then found it wouldn't bear his weight!"

"He must have climbed, if it was him we heard at the window!" said Gore.

"Yes; that's so!"

"And he'd have got in, too," said Kangaroo excitedly, "if we hadn't been awake! It was our being awake last night that prevented a burglary!"

"Looks like it."

"I suppose we'd better tell Mr. Railton," said Tom Merry. "The police ought to know about this. They may be able to catch the rotter!"

"I don't see why we shouldn't," said Blake. "I'd trust a Boy Scout to follow a track better than a policeman any day! Look here, it's a half-holiday to-day, and I think we might do worse than run him down."

"It's jolly dangerous having the villain hanging about the school like this!" said Herries thoughtfully. "He must have eyes on the school silver, though the other chap has been put in prison! It must have been the man the police are still looking for who came here last night."

"No doubt about that!"

The crowd was thickening upon the spot, staring at the deeply indented tracks. Figgins & Co. and a crowd of New House fellows came over to see what was up. They stared at the foot-prints with as much interest as Tom Merry & Co.

"Did you hear anything in the night, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins shook his head.

"Not a sound," he said. "But, of course, a burglar who knew about the place wouldn't come to the New House. All the valuables are on this side."

"Somebody had better fetch Kildare, I think," said Tom Merry.

"I'll go!" said Blake.

And he ran off towards the door of the School House. He passed Arthur Augustus on the way. The swell of St. Jim's did not deign to look at him, but came up to the crowd under the dormitory windows.

"Tom Mewwy, you ass—"

"Hallo, Gussy! No rotting now!" said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand.

"I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Pax!"

"Wats! I—"

"Don't rot, I tell you!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Can't you see this is serious? There were burglars here last night—one burglar, at any rate!"

"Burglars!"

"Yes! Look there!"

Tom Merry pointed to the tracks in the soil. To his surprise Arthur Augustus grinned.

"It's not a laughing matter, you ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "If

we hadn't been awake last night the school would have been robbed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you ass!" roared Lowther.

"What are you cackling at?"

The juniors gathered round him angrily. They could not understand what he was laughing at, but they decidedly thought that it was no occasion for laughter.

"Look here, you ass—"

"You burbling chump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled D'Arcy.

"Oh, he's off his rocker!" said Lowther. "We'll jolly well leave that silly ass at home when we track down that giddy burglar this afternoon."

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"You're goin' to twack down the burglar!" he gasped.

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Bai Jove! You won't succeed, you know! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm fed-up with your cackling!" said Tom Merry. "Bump the silly ass, and he may learn to be serious when things are serious!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove! Hands off! I—I— Oh, you wottahs!"

The exasperated juniors seized the swell of St. Jim's, and he was bumped in the mud. He quite obliterated one of the tell-tale tracks as he was brought down with a squelch into the soft earth.

"Ow! Yaw! Oh! Oh!"

"Roll him over!" roared Lowther.

"Ow—ow—ow! Yawooooh!"

"Mind the footprints!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily.

"Oh, good! Roll him in the gravel!"

"Yawooooh! Ow! Stop! Yow! Help! Yahl!"

They rolled the swell of St. Jim's over and over, to a considerable distance. He struggled in vain in the grasp of the angry juniors. They left him at last, floundering in a deep puddle in the middle of the quadrangle, and trooped away.

Arthur Augustus sat up in the puddle, groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and gasped wildly for breath. He looked a fearful wreck, smothered with mud and gravel from head to foot. His eyeglass was muddy, and he could not see through it. He wiped it upon his sleeve, but that did not improve it. He rose, dripping with water.

"Oh!" he gasped. "The feahful wottahs! Ow! Yow!"

The muddy junior staggered away towards the School House. Kildare was going to join the excited group under the dormitory windows as D'Arcy went in. Blake was with the captain of St. Jim's, eagerly and excitedly explaining to him. Kildare glanced at D'Arcy, but did not stop to speak, and the swell of St. Jim's escaped to the Fourth Form dormitory, where he succeeded in cleansing himself in time for morning school.

CHAPTER 8.

The Expedition!

MORNING school was a farce so far as Tom Merry & Co. were concerned.

Their thoughts were not on lessons, and the fortunes of Cæsar in the war with the Helvetians did not concern them nearly so much as the mysterious footprints in the quadrangle at St. Jim's.

In the Shell and the Fourth, the fellows whispered to one another about the mysterious footprints, much to the

(Continued on the next page.)



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Two Irishmen joined the police force. They were so keen on their job that they reported dozens of people on minor charges, and in most cases the offenders were fined.

The two young constables were on the eve of promotion, when the inspector was surprised to receive their resignations.

"Why do you wish to leave the force?" he asked. "Are you discontented in any way?"

"It's not that, sorr," replied one. "Mike and mesel' intend starting a police station of our own. Mike will run the beggars in, and I will fine 'em!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Black, 115, Dukes Avenue, Muswell Hill, London, N.10.

A LOT TO LEARN.

Musician: "I want a new E string for my violin."

New Assistant: "Yessir! Would you mind selecting it for yourself? I don't know the 'e's from the she's yet!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Fox, 119, Torrens Road, Kilkenny, South Australia.

THE BIG BULLY!

"From what your master tells me, Jones minor," said the headmaster, "you seem to have behaved like a big bully, with a complete disregard for life and property! Give me that pea-shooter!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Calder, 24, Glasgow Street, Dumfries, Scotland.

HE LIKED IT CUSHY.

Kind Lady: "What sort of work can you do, my man?"

Tramp: "Oh, just give me a newspaper and a cosy chair, and I'll see the fire don't go out!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Key, 138, Cambridge Street, London, S.W.1.

HIS OPINION OF RUGGER.

Jenkins was returning from seeing his first Rugby football match when he met his friend Williams. Said Williams:

"Well, and what do you think of Rugger?"

"Not much," replied Jenkins. "All that happened was a lot of chaps ran after the ball till one grabbed it. He fell on top of it, and half the other chaps dropped on top of him. All the spectators shouted 'Try! Try!' But it was no good. Try as they would, they couldn't bust it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Stone, 16, Ryebrooke Road, Leatherhead, Surrey.

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annoyance of Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton.

Lines came thick and fast. But they made little difference. The juniors were excited about what had happened, and they could not get it out of their minds.

After lessons they left the Form-rooms discussing the affair excitedly, and a crowd of them rushed to the spot again, and found it in possession of a constable and a fat inspector from Wayland. Inspector Skeet was examining the footprints and making copious notes in his pocket-book.

He looked very wise, too, and he went into the Head's study afterwards, and remained there some time. When he went away with the constable, both of them looked very important and mysterious; the fat inspector seemed simply to bristle with clues, so to speak. The juniors watched them go with considerable awe.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out in time to see them cross the quad. The swell of St. Jim's put up his eyeglass and looked after them in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "What have they been here for?"

"You ass!" said Blake politely. "Have you forgotten the discovery?"

"What discovery?"

"The footprints."

"The-footpwwts!" ejaculated D'Arcy dazedly.

"Yes, fathead!"

Arthur Augustus gave a gasp.

"You—you don't mean to say that the police have been here lookin' at those footpwwts in the flowah-bed?" he asked.

"Yes; of course they have. Railton telephoned for them."

"Bai Jove!"

"Why shouldn't he?" demanded Tom Merry. "It's a proper thing for the police to look into, isn't it?"

"Wot!"

"What's rot?" demanded Blake.

"It's all wot! You're a set of asses! But I suppose it can't be helped now. Bai Jove! Fancy the inspector comin'!"

"Oh, you're dotty!" said Blake crossly. "The police are going to search for the man, of course. They thought he had left the neighbourhood, but it's jolly clear now that he's still hanging round St. Jim's. Don't you think so?"

"How can he think so? He's got nothing to think with," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"It's a jolly serious matter, anyway," said Figgins, "and I think we ought to look for the scoundrel."

"The—the what?" demanded D'Arcy. "The scoundrel who made those footprints."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You see, he must be hiding in the woods about here somewhere," said Figgins sagely. "He can't be in any of the villages, because his description is all over the country. He must be sticking in the woods, or else in some nook on the moors, or perhaps in the quarries. It's certain that he's in hiding in the neighbourhood and we've got a jolly lot more chance of finding him than the police have. We haven't been Boy Scouts for nothing, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, if you want to be rolled in the mud again, you've only got to go on cackling!" exclaimed Figgins wrathfully. "Blessed if I can understand the ass at all!"

"Pway don't get watty, deah boy. But—"

"Hallo! There's the bell!"

The resumption of lessons put an end to the discussion.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was smiling as he went back to the Fourth Form Room. Even while lessons were going on the juniors discussed in whispers their plans for the afternoon. Quite a number of fellows had resolved to utilise the sunny April day in hunting for the cracksman. Fellows who had intended to perpetrate First-of-April japes on other fellows seemed to have quite forgotten their intentions now. In the deep interest evoked by the discovery of the footprints round the House, the St. Jim's fellows had almost forgotten, indeed, that it was April 1st.

When morning lessons were over there was a rush from the Form-rooms.

The Terrible Three, Figgins & Co., and Blake and his comrades had resolved to go together in search of the hidden scoundrel who was supposed to be lurking in the neighbourhood. Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen of the New House were going "on their own," and several more parties were made up with the same object.

Tom Merry & Co., recalling all their experience as Boy Scouts, prepared with great earnestness and determination for the quest. They intended to take the trail at the beginning, and follow wherever it led. It might fail them, but by trying up and down, and to and fro, there was no reason why they should not pick it up again. The man who had worn those big boots could not have got away without leaving footmarks here and there in the soil softened by the rain.

"I'm comin', you fellows," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, looking into Study No. 6 after dinner, where Blake, Herries, and Digby were engaged in an argument. Herries was urging the advisability of bringing Towser.

"Oh, you'd better not come, Gussy!" said Blake, with a sniff. "This will be hard work, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"If you do come, you've jolly well got to take the matter seriously, and not let us have any of your silly cackling," said Digby, with a glare.

"Vewy well, deah boy, I won't cackle," said D'Arcy, with unexpected mildness. "I will take the matter as seriously as poss."

"What about Towser?" persisted Herries.

"Oh, blow Towser!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"I object to Towser, Hewwies. That wotten bwute has no respect for a fellow's twousahs."

"I'm jolly well going to bring Towser. Towser has a wonderful gift for following a track. You chaps can remember how he followed a track before when burglars broke into the school chapel."

"I can remember how he followed a kipper!" growled Blake.

"Look here, you fathead—"

"We'll put it to the vote," said Blake. "Who says Towser?"

"Towser!" said Herries promptly.

But Herries' voice was solitary, like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Herries gave a snort.

"Well, I shall jolly well take Towser, and go on my own!" he exclaimed, and he quitted the study.

Blake and Digby selected a couple of stout sticks to take with them. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass inquiringly upon these weapons.

"What are they for, deah boys?" he asked.

"Ready for the cracksman, ass!" grunted Blake. "We don't want to have

to tackle him with our bare hands when we run him to earth."

"You fellows ready?" asked Tom Merry, looking into the study. The Terrible Three, Kangaroo, and Bernard Glyn had come down the passage together, and, like Blake and Digby, they were armed with stout sticks.

"Yes, we're ready."

"Just a minute!" said D'Arcy. "I'll join you fellows in the quad."

"Going to get your silk topper?" asked Monty Lowther, with heavy sarcasm. "Of course, you'll need it to do scouting in a wood and over ditches and things."

"Certainly not! I'm goin' to get a stick. I don't see why I shouldn't have a stick, in case we meet any stway burglahs."

"Well, buck up! We're starting now."

"Wight you are, deah boy!"

Tom Merry & Co. made their way into the quadrangle. Figgins & Co. were waiting for them, and Fatty Wynn carried a large bag. It was not necessary to ask what it contained. The Falstaff of the New House was not likely to run any risk of going hungry if the expedition should last a long time.

"Better pick up the trail from under the dorm windows, I suppose?" Figgins suggested.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The gravel has been trampled a lot all the morning," he replied. "There won't be a trace left to pick up. The cracksman must have got out into the road again, and we shall very likely pick up his trail there."

"All serene!"

Gr-r-r-r!

It was the gentle voice of Towser. Herries came up with the bulldog on a chain.

"Going to take Towser?" he asked. There was a unanimous shout in reply. "No!"

"All right! I'm going with him, then, and I'll bet I'll find more burglars than you do," said Herries defiantly.

And he tramped off wrathfully with the despised Towser.

Arthur Augustus came dashing after Tom Merry & Co. as they reached the gates. The swell of St. Jim's had a coat on with bulging pockets. Fatty Wynn gave him a glance of appreciation.

"Sandwiches?" he asked.

"No, deah boy. I've got a clothes-brush and a comb."

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Well, of all the asses—"

"We shall want our clothes bwushin' if we go wargin' the woods aftah the wain," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"Oh, rats!"

The swell of St. Jim's was twirling a light cane in his gloved hand. Tom Merry glanced at it and frowned.

"Is that what you've brought for a weapon?" he asked.

"It will be all wight."

"Do you think you could hurt a cracksman with that, you champion ass?"

"Yaas, all the cwwacksmen we are likely to meet, deah boy."

Blake halted.

"If Gussy is going to be funny, he's not coming along with this party!" he exclaimed. "I'm fed up with his humour. He's got to chuck it, or stop behind."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins. "I must say I'm fed up with it. The ass was talking yesterday about a joke on all

St. Jim's to celebrate the First of April. If these remarks are specimens, I can only say that his humour isn't the kind we want."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Quite right," said Tom Merry emphatically. "It's got to be understood, Gussy, that if you come you're not to be funny—no more funny than Nature made you, I mean."

"Why, you ass—"

"Is it a go?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, vewy well. I will be as sewious as a judge, deah boys!"

"Come on, then!"

And the party sallied out of the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

On the Track!

THE cracksman hunters were very serious, as befitted the serious occasion, and even Arthur Augustus had suppressed his desire to smile, and maintained a demeanour of perfect solemnity.

at St. Jim's, and had fled suddenly, it was very probable that he had taken directly to the wood to avoid pursuers. The juniors had high hopes of discovering tracks among the trees and under-bush.

"Mind you don't trample on any foot-prints!" Tom Merry called out, as the juniors scattered to search for traces.

"Look where you go!"

"Yes, that's all right."

"The chap who finds a track can whistle to the rest," said Figgins.

"All serene!"

To and fro in the trees and bushes on the border of the wood, the juniors went cautiously. All of them had measurements of the boots which had left tracks under the windows, ready to measure and compare any tracks they might find in the wood. The ground was soft, almost sloppy, and there was no doubt that if anybody had been tramping there traces would be left.

Wherever the juniors moved now they left tracks in the damp and clinging soil.

the tracks of Arthur Augustus' elegant boots led across it. But apart from D'Arcy's tracks, distinct to the view, was the mark of a large and clumsy boot.

"My hat!"

In a moment Blake was on his knees on the ground, regardless of the mud and his trousers, and was measuring the track.

It fitted exactly!

Blake rose and gave a shrill whistle. The signal was answered from all directions, and the juniors came along through the bushes.

"Found it?" shouted Kangaroo.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

"Stand clear! Don't tread on it!" shouted Blake.

"Right-ho! By Jove, here it is!"

The juniors gathered round the track in glee. They were almost as much surprised as they were pleased. They had hoped to find the track of the cracksman in the wood, but now that they had found it they realised how



"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally as he tried the window. "It's fastened!" He gave a low whistle of dismay. He was locked out, and only his chum, asleep in the dormitory, knew of his nocturnal expedition!

It was evident that the swell of St. Jim's did not desire to be left out of the party. They proceeded up the road.

"Let's look for the tracks along the road," said Blake. "My idea is that the villain bolted after he was alarmed last night, and very likely he came over the wall and ran right across the wood. He might have been afraid of having Taggles' mastiff after him. Don't you think so?"

"Very likely," said Tom Merry.

"Then we'll begin here."

Opposite the school wall, across the high road, was the wood, and a deep ditch separated it from the highway. There were planks across the ditch in several places, and the ground up and down by the border of the wood was very soft and spongy from recent rain. The juniors fled over the ditch by the planks, and plunged in among the trees on the edge of the wood.

Certainly if the cracksman had been

Raindrops fell upon them from the branches as they moved. There was much rain left in the wood, though the weather was fine and sunny now. But they did not mind a little wet. They were too keen on the search to heed little discomforts like that.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy plunged farther into the wood than the other fellows, and disappeared from view.

"Don't lose yourself, Gussy!" called out Blake.

"That's all wight, deah boy!"

"Anc don't run into danger, you ass!" said Figgins.

"Wats!"

"I think I'll keep close to him in case of accidents," said Blake. "He's an exasperating ass, but I shouldn't like him to run upon the burglar alone."

And Blake pressed on after the swell of St. Jim's.

Suddenly, as he came upon an open patch of ground under the trees, he uttered an exclamation. There was a stretch of muddy soil before him, and

slight their expectation had been, though their hope was strong.

But they had found it! It was the track of a right boot—only the one boot, but it corresponded exactly with the track that had been found under the windows of the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's. Half a dozen juniors measured it, and it fitted the measurements to a hair.

"There's no doubt about it," said Tom Merry, drawing a deep breath. "Look here, here's the very mark of a patch on the sole of the boot, just the same."

"It's the same right enough."

"Queer there's only one track, though," said Manners, with a puzzled look. "Where did the chap put his other foot?"

"The track must be here somewhere."

"I can't see it."

"Perhaps he hopped along on one leg," said Blake.

"Rot!"

"Well, there's only one track, anyway. That's enough to follow. Let's look round and see where it leads."

"I dropped on this quite by chance, following Gussy," Blake explained. He put his hands to his mouth and called out:

"Gussy! Gussy! Hallo!"

"Hallo, deah boy!" came back an answering shout through the wood.

"Have you seen any more tracks?"

"No, deah boy."

"Well, the silly ass would miss them, anyway!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Let's get on in this direction."

Herries and Towser joined the party, and the juniors pressed on eagerly in the direction in which the solitary footmark pointed. They were on the track, at all events.

CHAPTER 10.

A Hasty Capture!

KEEPING a keen look-out now, and their cudgels ready, the St. Jim's juniors pressed on.

Towser gave a growl occasionally, but each time it proved to be a false alarm. Towser was, apparently, simply exercising his vocal chords.

"Keep that blessed dog quiet, Herries!" said Tom Merry. "We don't want to give the rotter the alarm when we get near him."

Herries grunted.

"Rats! Towser won't give the alarm."

"Well, keep him quiet. Hallo! What is he after now?"

Towser had suddenly strained upon his chain, and he tried to bolt into the bushes.

Herries held fast on the chain.

"Hold on, Towser!"

Gr-r-r! growled Towser.

"He's on the track!" exclaimed Herries excitedly. "He's smelt out the villain! Come on! Towser will lead the way."

"More likely smelt out a rabbit," said Blake.

"Look here, Blake—"

"We're sticking to the trail," said Tom Merry. "Pull Towser in!"

"Rot! I'm going to follow his lead," said Herries.

And Herries followed the excited Towser into the bushes and disappeared. Tom Merry & Co. kept on the trail. They did not share Herries' implicit faith in the sagacity of the bulldog. And they were soon satisfied that they were right, for the footprint appeared again and again in the depths of the wood.

"The villain is making for the moor, or else the old castle at Wayland," said Blake. "The odds are on the castle. He may be hiding there now."

"Very likely."

The ruined castle, one of the great sights of the neighbourhood, lay on the edge of the moor. The juniors knew the place well. They picnicked there often in the summer, and once, as they all remembered well, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been kidnapped and kept a prisoner in the vaults below the old castle.

It was just the place where the cracksmen might have fled for refuge. The old masses of masonry came into sight on the edge of the wood, and among the mud on the slope of the hill leading up to the castle the juniors found the footprints again.

"He's there!" said Blake, as the party halted and looked towards the old walls of the castle, shattered and scored by the cannon of Cromwell hundreds of years before.

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"Hark!" exclaimed Manners, in a suppressed voice.

There was a sound from within the ruin.

It was the unmistakable sound of a boot scraping over loose stones as someone moved within the ancient moss-grown walls.

"Come on, and be careful!" muttered Tom Merry.

The juniors trod cautiously and silently towards the gateway. Huge blocks of falling masonry encumbered the ground, and afforded them ample cover as they advanced. The sounds within the old castle came more plainly to their ears. A stone clinked on the old flags, and they heard a hurried breath.

Tom Merry waved his hand to his followers, and they halted just outside the broken gateway.

Someone was within the old walls, and the sound of his footsteps showed that he was coming towards them.

"Cover!" muttered Tom Merry. "Lie low, and jump on him as he comes out!"

"Right-ho!"

The juniors waited breathlessly on either side of the gateway.

In a few seconds, whoever it was, would come into the gateway from within, and they would be able to hurl themselves upon him and make him a prisoner in the twinkling of an eye.

"It—it might be somebody else," murmured Lowther.

"Rot! Collar him as he comes out!"

"All serene!"

Clink!

A loose pebble rolled into the gateway from a foot within. Then a foot appeared in sight, and the next moment the juniors hurled themselves upon a form without stopping to speak, without even stopping to look.

Bump!

Down went the newcomer, with the juniors sprawling over him, and there was a wild yell.

"Ow—ow!"

"Got him!" shrieked Figgins.

"Yaroooh!"

"You scoundrel!"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry.

"It's not—it's not— My hat, it's Redfern!"

"Yow!"

"Yow!" roared Redfern of the Fourth. "Yaroooh! Lemme gerrup! What are you up to? You silly asses! What's the little game?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake.

The juniors released their prisoner.

It was not the cracksmen; it was Redfern, and he staggered to his feet, smothered with mud, and glowering with rage. Lawrence and Owen came running out of the old castle.

"What's the trouble?" asked Lawrence.

Redfern snorted.

"These silly asses piled on me!" he roared. "The chumps! They've let the burglar get away now! Oh!"

"Sorry!" gasped Tom Merry. "We—we took you for the burglar!"

"Me!" roared Redfern. "You ass!"

"What are you doing here, then?" demanded Blake angrily. "What were you sneaking about for, you silly chump?"

"Looking for the burglar, ass!"

"Have you seen him?"

"No, idiot! But we should have had him, I expect, if you hadn't given the alarm!" growled Redfern. "We heard him."

"We've been following his trail," Tom Merry explained, as the wrathful Fourth Former dusted down his

clothes. "The trail leads right up here."

"Ass! We've been searching the vaults under the castle," said Redfern. "We were down there when we heard somebody up here."

"You heard somebody?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes. Somebody moving in the ruins, and we came up jolly quietly," said Lawrence. "We thought it might be the man."

"I bet it was, too," said Blake. "We've followed the trail here, and it's quite fresh. We thought you were the villain when we jumped on you."

"You say the trail leads here?" asked Redfern, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Yes. You can see for yourself."

"Then it must have been the man we heard when we were in the vaults. He can't be far away. Scatter, and look for him!"

"Good egg!"

The juniors promptly scattered among the ruins.

Tom Merry climbed to the top of the shattered wall, and scanned the vicinity. There was nothing to be seen of the cracksmen. He caught sight of a figure in the distance for the moment before it disappeared into the wood. But it was the figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Seen anything?" called out Figgins.

"Only Gussy. He's just gone into the wood yonder."

"Oh, blow Gussy! Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Can't see anything of him down here," said Blake. "The chap seems to have the gift of disappearing into thin air. It's jolly curious! He must have been here; but he's gone now."

The juniors, excited and exasperated, gathered together again. They had searched the old castle on all sides, but they had found nothing. A shout from Redfern called them out from the old castle, however, and they found the New House junior scanning a deeply indented track on the hillside.

"Look here! Here it is!"

It was the footprint again.

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

"He's taken to the wood again, then," he said, glancing in the direction indicated by the toe of the bootmark. "That's the direction in which I saw Gussy going. The ass will run into the cracksmen, and get knocked on the head."

"Let's get on!" exclaimed Blake.

The juniors ran down the slope.

Again and again as they entered the wood they found the track, fresher than before, and here and there near it was the elegant footprint of D'Arcy's boot. "Gussy is tracking him now," said Blake.

"He'll get into trouble, as sure as a gun!"

"Hurry up!"

They dashed on into the wood. The footprints of D'Arcy disappeared, and nothing was seen of the swell of St. Jim's himself. But the track of the well-known boot was picked up again and again. It was always the track of the right boot; but the juniors had ceased to wonder over that peculiarity by now.

The track led through the wood, back the way they had come. The fugitive had doubled on his track—that was evident. The juniors hurried on. Every now and then they lost the track, and some minutes were spent in seeking it; but they always found it again, and pressed on more eagerly than ever.

They reached the edge of the wood

on the high road, opposite the wall of St. Jim's, within a dozen paces of the spot where they had entered the wood to begin the search.

There they halted, looking at one another in wonder.

"He's doubled right back to where he came into the wood," Tom Merry said, at last. "Of course, he thought that would throw us off the track. He must know we're tracking him."

"Not so easy to throw the St. Jim's Boy Scouts off the track," said Blake, with some satisfaction, which was surely justifiable in the circumstances. "He's taken to the road now."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's odd if he ventured on the high road in broad daylight," he said. "His description is known all over the country. I wonder—"

"What?" asked Redfern.

"Let's look across the road."

Tom Merry crossed the ditch by the plank and examined the road. There was a fresh track in the mud by the end of the plank, and another close by the school wall. Then another, and another, leading along the wall.

"He's gone along here, keeping close to the wall," said Figgins.

"Looks like it."

At the end of the school wall were the palings of a plantation. Tom Merry examined the palings. The tracks ceased there, and on the damp palings were plain signs of someone having climbed. The wood was scored with scratches as of nailed boots.

"He's gone into the plantation," said Tom Merry.

"And we're after him!" said Blake.

"Come on!"

Tom Merry climbed the palings. He dropped down inside among the trees, and the other fellows followed him fast. Excitement was now at fever heat. It seemed almost incredible that the fugitive should dare to seek refuge in the plantation under the very walls of St. Jim's. But the tracks told their own tale.

Among the firs and beeches of the plantation, the tracks were visible wherever the ground was soft and muddy. The juniors followed, and the trail led them by a roundabout way through the plantation to the east side of the school. There they stopped at the foot of the wall, and the juniors stopped, too, thunderstruck.

There was no doubting the amazing truth.

Whoever had left the trail had climbed the walls of St. Jim's on the east side, from the beech plantation, and was now within the precincts of the school.

CHAPTER 11.

Run to Earth!

TOM MERRY & CO. were silent with sheer amazement. They knew that they must have been close upon the track of the unseen fugitive all the time, and they could easily guess that he had been rendered desperate by their close pursuit.

But that he should adopt such a desperate, unheard-of resource as taking refuge in the precincts of the school itself, was astounding.

Yet there could be no doubt. The trail stopped at the foot of the wall, and there was no sign that the fugitive had turned back.

"My hat!" said Blake, breaking a long silence. "I never heard of such nerve! The fellow is in St. Jim's itself!"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! If there is any reader of mine named Prodnose, or Odd-face—is there?—I shall be glad if he will accept my deepest sympathy. Remember, if you jump fast enough the motorist will miss you. If you don't, your relatives will. Must tell you this: Skimpole thought the Khyber Pass was a move in football. "Pass out" quietly, please! "How much should I pay for a saxophone?" asks Blake. "Oh, get a good one, and "blow" the expense! As the grocer said to the little boy: "Do you want sweets?" "You bet I do!" replied the lad. "But I've got to buy soap!" "Do you believe in horoscopes?" asks Wally D'Arcy. Personally, I dislike "seeing stars." "What is a map?" asked Mr. Selby. "The world put through a mangle," replied Gibson. Pratt says he believes in the future of coal. Yes, "grate" stuff! In answer to a fags' deputation, Dr. Holmes has refused to instal black

"He must be. Yet—"

"It's a cunning dodge," said Figgins.

"Of course, he never thought that anyone would dream of looking for him in the school itself, and there are lots of old nooks and crannies in St. Jim's where a dozen men could hide. Only it wanted a jolly lot of nerve to try it in daylight."

"Blessed if I catch on to it," said Redfern. "I say—" He paused.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"I suppose there can't be any spoof about it?"

"Spoof! What do you mean?"

"Well, it seems jolly queer, after all," said Redfern hesitatingly.

"What rot!" said Blake warmly.

"We've tracked the fellow for miles, and it's been the same track all the time. How could there be any spoof about it? You're an ass!"

"Anyway, we're going to finish the bisney now," said Tom Merry. "Follow your leader!"

He leaped up, and caught the top of the wall in his hands. He clambered over, and the other fellows clambered over after him. Redfern, in spite of his doubts, followed with the rest.

Inside the school wall at this side was a shady walk, shadowed by big elms. It was quite possible that the fugitive had climbed the wall, and dropped inside without attracting any attention. Most of the St. Jim's fellows who were not out of gates were on the playing fields. The elm-shaded walk was quite deserted. The gravel was wet with the late rain, and in the soft ground the juniors soon picked up the trail again.

There could be no more doubt, as even the doubting Redfern admitted. There, in the soft gravel close to the wall, was the imprint of the burglarious boot—the same track that had been found under the Shell dormitory windows that morning—the same track that had led them on the long trail through the wood to the old castle, and back again to the walls of St. Jim's.

There it was, as clear and distinct as

towels in the school bath-rooms, as it would be impossible to tell whether the fags had washed or not. Skimpole says a bacon-and-egg breakfast fills him with dismay. It fills us with bacon and eggs. An airman ascribes his crash to an air pocket. One of those with a hole in it! I see Blankley's are marketing a new "Never-Fail" parachute. This should suit airmen down to the ground! "How can I tell whether a man wearing a bowler hat is bald?" asks "Puzzled." Ask him. I hear Crooke went to a crystal-gazer, but the crystal-gazer said he would have to use two crystals, as Crooke was leading a double life! Gore says his cousin was very disappointed when visiting Venice, because all the streets were flooded. "Canal" this be true? "Do you know any cheerful stories?" asks Figgins. How's this? I hear the cheering at the Glasgow Rangers matches is so terrific that it can be heard twenty miles away. Thrifty Scots are "listening-in" free of charge! Is that a "cheerful" story? Of course, you know what Noah said when he heard the rain pattering on the roof? "Ark! Was there anybody who didn't know that one? They say Levison always keeps his word. Yes, because no one will take it! One to finish: I hear the Wayland Town Council is requesting people not to sneeze when passing the new Council houses. They fear it may be a case of: Ashoo! Ashoo! All fall down! Happy landings, chaps!

ever—as distinct, as Blake sagely remarked, as if the fellow had deliberately made it so to help them track him.

There were other footprints near it, but they were not so easily discerned.

Again and again the track was picked up in the damp gravel. As the trackers came in sight of the quadrangle, they were observed, and several fellows joined them, inquiring what on earth they were doing.

"Is it a game?" asked Curly Gibson of the Third, as he came up.

"Playing follow your leader?" asked Lefevre of the Fifth.

"We're tracking the cracksman," said Blake loftily.

Lefevre stared.

"Here?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"What rot!"

Tom Merry pointed to a track, almost at the feet of the captain of the Fifth.

"Look at that!" he said coolly.

Lefevre looked at it.

"Well, what's that?" he asked.

"That's the same track that was found under the dorm window this morning."

"My hat!" exclaimed Lefevre.

"Honest Injun?"

"Yes. We've followed it through the wood, and then into the beech plantation, and now it's here."

"By George!"

"Here it is again!" said Blake.

"But—but the man can't be here!" said Lefevre, in amazement. "Some of us would have seen him if he's been inside the school walls in the day-time."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Curly Gibson. The juniors turned angrily upon the

fact.

"What are you cackling about?" demanded Blake wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Curly.

"You young ass!"

Curly Gibson retreated. He chuckled as he departed, evidently rushing off to inform his friends of the Third of the great discoveries Tom Merry & Co. were making. He could be seen in the

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distance talking to Wally, and a crowd of other Third Firmers, and all of them were shrieking with laughter.

"The young rotters!" growled Blake. "They'll laugh in another way when we've captured the cracksmen!"

"Yes, rather; let's get on!"

"You're being spoofed," said Lefevre, grinning. "It's all rot! How could the giddy burglar be here? If he's here, where is he?"

"Hiding somewhere," said Tom Merry.

"That's his dodge!" Blake exclaimed. "He thinks that nobody will dream of looking for him right on the spot like this."

"Rats!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—rats!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins. "Don't waste time talking to that ass, Tom Merry. Let's get on, and see where the trail leads."

And the juniors pressed on, leaving Lefevre of the Fifth laughing. He was soon seen talking to other fellows of the Fifth, and they were laughing, too. Taking no notice of their jeers, however, the burglar hunters went on their way. There was one most probable place where the fugitive might seek a hiding-place, and that was in the old tower of St. Jim's.

The old tower was in a shaky condition, and although the fellows were allowed to enter it, they were not permitted to ascend to the top of the spiral staircase. On the third story of the tower, the staircase was barred across, and any fellow who had gone farther and was discovered, was certain of lines, if not of a licking.

If the fugitive knew of the place, what more likely spot for him to conceal himself in? And the track was found again in the very doorway of the tower.

The juniors halted in the low, arched doorway with beating hearts. The track led inwards, but it did not lead outwards. The rascal could not escape them. He was fairly cornered at last.

"He's there!" said Tom Merry, with conviction.

There was a sound within.

"Hark!"

"It's somebody on the stair!" said Figgins.

"But he's coming down," muttered Redfern. "Careful! Don't collar the wrong chap again, as you did with me, you chumps!"

Tom Merry & Co. watched the lower steps of the spiral stair eagerly. Someone certainly was coming down. A form appeared round the curve of the staircase, and they made a movement, but it was the form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you seen him?"

D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and surveyed the eager juniors tranquilly.

"Seen whom, deah boys?" he asked.

"The cracksmen."

"Wathah not!"

"You followed the tracks here, I suppose, didn't you?" demanded Blake.

"You were ahead of us on the trail?"

"Yaas; I was ahead of you, deah boys!"

"Well, then—"

"Have you been to the top of the tower?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, deah boy."

"How high did you go?"

"Only as far as the second stowey, Tom Mewwy. It's out of bounds to go highah, and it's wathah bad form to go out of bounds, you know."

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"Ass! What do bounds matter when it's a question of laying a criminal by the heels?" growled Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake!"

"Oh, scats! Come on, you chaps! We're going to have him now!"

"He must be there," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Of course he must!"

"Come on!"

"Look!" exclaimed Digby.

On the lowest step of the tower was the print of a muddy boot. The stair was dry and dusty, and the muddy footprint was plain to see. It was the old familiar footprint.

"He's here!"

"Come on!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped out of the old tower, smiling. But the juniors had no eyes for him. Grasping their cudgels firmly, they pressed on up the narrow spiral stair.

CHAPTER 12.

Amazing!

THE juniors reached the second story of the tower. There was a wide landing, on the other side of which the spiral stair recommenced.

On the landing were two doors, and one of them was closed. Outside the closed door, clearly legible in the dust, was the final track of the boot they had followed so far. Farther it did not go. On the upper stair the dust was undisturbed. It was clear that whoever had made that track had stopped at the second story, and the closed door told the rest.

Outside the door the juniors halted, breathing hard. Tom Merry tried the door, and found that it was fast. There was a ponderous lock on the door, and there should have been a key in it—the juniors remembered the big, heavy iron key that belonged to it.

They did not doubt that it had been shifted to the inside. At all events, the door was locked.

"He's in there."

"Cornered at last!" said Redfern.

Tom Merry knocked at the door.

"You are run down, you scoundrel!" he called out through the big old-fashioned keyhole. "You had better give in!"

There was no reply.

"Obstinate brute!" said Monty Lowther. "He wants to make us fancy that he isn't there. If he isn't, what's the door locked for?"

Knock, knock, knock!

"Open the door, you rascal!"

Silence.

"We shall have to break the lock somehow," said Tom Merry, looking rather doubtfully, however, at the ponderous door.

"Better have Kildare up here first," said Blake. "It will make a fearful row, and the Head might be waxy if we burst it in."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good!" he said. "It's pretty plain that the villain doesn't mean to sur-



"Collar him as he comes out!" murmured Tom Merry, way as footsteps were heard approaching it. Clink! cracksmen then

render, and Kildare will be useful if it comes to a scrap."

"We'll keep guard here in case he makes a break while you fetch him."

"Good!"

Tom Merry hurried down the dusky stairs again. Outside the tower a crowd of fellows of all Forms had gathered. The Third Form fags were grinning joyously, as if they were in possession of some excellent joke not known to the rest of the school. But most of the fellows seemed amused. There was evidently little faith in the genuineness of the discovery made by Tom Merry & Co.

Indisputable as the evidence seemed to the trackers themselves, the other fellows did not seem to be convinced. Humorous remarks greeted Tom Merry as he appeared in the arched doorway of the tower.

"Got him?"

"Is he in your pocket, Tom Merry?"

"Have you slaughtered him?"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We've cornered him, and he's locked himself in the room on the second story."

"You don't mean to say that he's really there?" asked Thompson of the Shell.

"Yes, I do, ass!"

"Have you seen him?" yelled a dozen voices.

"I can't see through a locked oaken door six inches thick!" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "If I could I should have seen him. But my eyesight isn't quite



Juniors waited breathlessly on either side of the old gate-
pebble rolled out, and then a foot appeared. Was it the
were trailing?

he was enjoying the siege of the old tower.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had gone into the School House, but nearly everybody else belonging to St. Jim's seemed to have joined the thronging crowd round the tower.

Kildare had just changed after playing football, and was chatting with Darrell and Rushden, of his own Form, when Tom Merry came up, panting.

The seniors were already aware that something very unusual was proceeding in the quadrangle, and they looked inquiringly at the hero of the Shell.

"What's the row over there on the east side?" asked Darrell. "Some of you rascals exploring the tower? It's out of bounds."

"No!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's the cracksman!"

"The what?"

"The cracksman!"

Kildare looked at him sternly.

"If you are trying to play a First of April joke on the Sixth, Merry, you are going the right way to work to get a licking!" he exclaimed.

"It's not a joke, Kildare," said Tom Merry earnestly. "It's honest injun! We've been tracking the villain down, and he's been dodging us and we've routed him out of the ruined castle on the moor. He doubled back to St. Jim's, and now he's hidden himself in the room on the second floor in the tower, and locked himself in."

Kildare jumped.

"Are you sure, Tom Merry?" he ejaculated.

"Quite sure!"

"You've seen him?"

"No; he kept out of sight. But his tracks—"

"The same tracks that were under the dormitory windows?" asked Darrell.

"Yes."

Kildare whistled softly.

"Blessed if I quite understand this," he said. "It's jolly extraordinary. But I suppose we ought to look into it, if it's not a jape."

"Honour bright, Kildare!"

"Well, I'll come."

The three seniors hurried with Tom Merry to the old tower. There was a buzz in the crowd as they appeared, and a sound of laughter.

"You're being spoofed, Kildare!"

"First of April, old man!"

Kildare took no notice of the remarks. He entered the tower, followed by Darrell, Rushden, and Tom Merry, and ascended the spiral staircase to the second landing, where the burglar hunters were awaiting his arrival anxiously.

Kildare looked at the door, and tried it with his hand.

"It's locked!" said Blake.

Kildare cast a sharp glance round upon the juniors.

"Look here, you kids, I know it's the First of April," he said. "This door may be locked from the inside, but the key isn't in the lock. It may have been locked on the outside, and the key taken away by a practical joker.

Do you all say that this is not a jape, and that you have really followed the tracks here?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"Honour bright!" said Blake.

Kildare could not doubt their earnestness. If there was any practical joke in the matter, they were the victims of it, not the perpetrators, that was clear. They were all in deadly earnest.

Kildare nodded.

"Very well," he said. "Buzz off and fetch Taggles, one of you, and tell him to bring his tools for forcing a lock!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

And he dashed off.

Tom Merry pointed out the track of the famous foot in the dust of the staircase to Kildare, and the captain of St. Jim's could not help being impressed. It was the same track that he had examined under the dormitory windows in the morning, and if it was genuine then, why not now? And yet—the locked room was very silent—it was not easy to believe that a desperate criminal was lurking there. But soon all would be known, for in five minutes Blake returned with Taggles, the school porter, and his tools.

Taggles was not in a good humour; his surly expression was evidence enough that he suspected a First of April jape. But he had to obey Kildare.

"Break in that lock, Taggles!" said the St. Jim's captain.

"Wery well, Master Kildare!"

The lock, ponderous as it was, was old and rusty. Taggles drove an iron chisel between the door and the jamb, and dragged on it. There was a loud-sounding crack as the lock yielded.

Crack!

Kildare drew a deep breath. The juniors grasped their cudgels, and stood ready. Taggles hastily backed away. If there was danger in the room, Taggles had no intention whatever of bearing the brunt of it.

"The lock's broken, Master Kildare," he said, from the rear.

"Very good, Taggles!"

Kildare, with a firm hand, threw the heavy door open.

"Follow me!"

The captain of St. Jim's strode into the room. Tom Merry & Co. dashed in after him, with cudgels uplifted.

They were ready for the foe!

But no foe was to be seen!

Kildare's brows contracted into a frown, and a gasp of dismay and amazement escaped the juniors.

The room was empty.

CHAPTER 13.

Who'd Have Thought It!

TOM MERRY & CO. stared about them blankly.

There was no one in the room!

The little barred window in the corner would hardly have afforded passage for a sparrow; it was quite certain that the fugitive had not escaped that way. Then where was he? He was not in the room! The April sunshine fell in golden bars through the little window, and showed up every corner of the bare unfurnished room. The man was not there! Had he vanished into thin air? For a moment the dumbfounded juniors were almost prepared to believe that he had.

"Great Scott!"

"Gone!"

"He—he can't have been here!" stammered Blake. "He could not get out, excepting by the door. And it was locked! What does it mean?"

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strong enough for that. But he's there."

"I'll believe that when I see him!" said Pratt of the Fourth. "If he's got into the tower, how is it someone didn't see him?"

"Oh, he sneaked in, you know."

"Rats!"

"Faith, and it sounds too thick entirely!" remarked Reilly.

"I guess it's steep!" said Lumley-Lumley, with a grin. "Where are you going, Merry—to fetch the police?"

"I'm going to fetch Kildare."

"He's on the footer ground. They've finished, I think."

Tom Merry hurried away to the football ground. He left the great crowd surging round the tower of St. Jim's. Fellows were swarming from all quarters to join in as they heard of what was going on. There was a ceaseless buzz of voices, commenting upon the amazing news that the burglar was cornered in the tower, and there were many chuckles.

If the cracksman were really found there it would certainly come as a surprise to the greater part of the fellows. And yet—if the trail had really led there—there must be something in it, Lumley-Lumley remarked. It was certainly very curious, at all events.

Curly Gibson and Wally were chuckling together. Wally's chuckles were punctuated with sneezes, but he did not seem to mind his cold now. Apparently

"It's—it's magic!" muttered Digby.

Kildare frowned darkly. He did not think there was magic in it, though for the moment it seemed so to the thunder-stricken juniors. Kildare strode across the room, and pointed to a large, ragged, muddy boot that lay in the middle of it.

The juniors gazed at it. Their voices seemed to have left them; they made no sound. The captain of St. Jim's looked round at them angrily, then, as he saw their dismayed faces, his own relaxed a little.

"Is that the boot that made the tracks?" he asked.

"Oh!"

"Measure it," said Darrell, grinning.

Tom Merry silently measured it. It was exact! It was a boot belonging to the right foot, and it was the exact size, and there was the worn-down heel, and the patch on the sole that the trackers had come to know so well! What did it mean? Had the man been there, and vanished into space, leaving only a boot behind? Their brains reeled as they tried to think it out.

"That is the boot?" asked Kildare grimly.

"Ye-es, I—I think so!"

"You young asses!"

"But—but I don't understand!" stammered Tom Merry. "How did it get here? It's the boot that made the tracks under the dorm window last night—or one of them—there were left foot tracks as well under the dorm window. I don't understand this. How did the man get out, and how did he come to leave a boot here behind him?"

"You young fatheads!" roared Kildare. "He hasn't been here at all!"

"What?"

"Not been here?"

"Oh, draw it mild, Kildare!"

"He's not been here, you silly young asses! It's a jape—a First of April jape, I suppose, though I can't see who did it, or how it was done. I—"

"It—it can't be! I tell you we followed the tracks all the way—"

"And they led up here—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Darrell, who had taken the famous boot and was looking at it. "There's a letter in this."

"My hat!"

Darrell had taken a folded paper out of the boot. It had been pinned upon the inside. He unfolded it in amazement, and looked at it, and then he simply staggered. The boot fell from his hands with a crash to the floor, and Darrell reeled against the wall, gasping with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare jerked the note from Darrell's hand and read it. Then he burst into a roar, and the tears of laughter streamed down his cheeks.

The juniors were amazed and exasperated.

"Show us the letter!" yelled Jack Blake.

"Hand it over!" roared Tom Merry, making a grasp at the letter. Kildare was laughing too much to reply. Tom Merry caught the letter from his hand, and the juniors crowded round him to read it as he held it up. They were able to read it at last, and this is what they read:

"April 1st.

"Dear Boys,—I offered to take you into my scheme yesterday, and you treated me with the grossest disrespect. You all said that I couldn't possibly take you in on the First of April.

"I rather think I have done it!"

"The footprints outside the Shell
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dormitory windows last night were made by my minor, who put on an old pair of boots discarded by Taggles for the purpose."

"When you started to search for the burglar to track him down, I went with you, with one of the boots in my coat pocket. I made the tracks that you followed through the wood, keeping a little ahead of you all the time for that purpose."

"I rather think I have done you, dear boys."

"I trust you will bear no malice, and will all join me in a feed now that the search is over, just to show that you can take a little joke."

"Yours always,

"A. A. D'ARCY."

Tom Merry read the letter, and then it fluttered from his hand. Somebody else caught it up and read it aloud. The juniors looked at one another. For a time they could not even speak. The stupendousness of the jape had taken their breath away.

This, then, was the jape Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had wished to propound to them the previous night; this was the wheeze he had offered to Study No. 6, and then to the Terrible Three, and then to Figgins & Co., and having been laughed to scorn by all of them, he had proceeded to work it against them, and to take them all in, in a body!

It seemed almost incredible. The proposal to follow the trail of the burglar and to hunt him down had been simply playing into the hands of the practical joker.

No wonder Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had refused to take the matter as seriously as they desired, when he knew that the tracks outside the windows had been made by Wally with a pair of old boots on, and that the tracks in the wood had been made by himself, with the old boot he was carrying in his coat pocket for the purpose.

That accounted for the fact that the track showed only the right boot—D'Arcy had not even troubled to take the pair of them with him. And then he had laid the trail back to St. Jim's and led them to the school again.

They had actually passed him leaving the tower, as they entered it, and they had never guessed! But then, how could they have guessed? They had been taken in all along the line.

The juniors did not laugh. They did not feel like laughing just then. Monty Lowther held the note in his hand, gazing at it blankly, while Kildare and Darrell staggered helplessly out of the tower, weak with laughter.

A shout of inquiry greeted them from the crowd outside, but the seniors could not reply to questions—they had no breath left.

"Have you found him?"

"Where is he?"

"Where's the giddy burglar?"

"Ask Tom Merry!" gasped Kildare. "I can't speak! Ha, ha, ha! You can ask the kids in there! Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the fellows into the tower. Lumley-Lumley was the first in the room where Tom Merry & Co. were standing in dismay. He caught sight of the note in Monty Lowther's hand, and understood. He took the note from Lowther's fingers and rushed downstairs with it.

"Here, give that back!" shouted Tom Merry.

But Lumley-Lumley was already reading it out to the crowd.

Yells of laughter rose.

"Well, we're done!" said Tom Merry, at last. "It was a jape of that boulder Gussy! Who would have thought it?"

"And we told him he couldn't take anybody in!" murmured Figgins.

"The cheeky young villain! We'll give him the bumping of his life for this, anyway!" said Digby wrathfully.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Redfern.

"Come on, let's have him out!"

The juniors tramped furiously down the staircase, and wild yells of laughter greeted them from the crowd in the quad. All the fellows, of all Forms, School House and New House alike, were shrieking with merriment over the First of April burglar hunt.

"Have you caught him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First of April!"

Tom Merry & Co. tramped through the crowd with crimson faces, making directly for the School House. The crowd followed them, yelling and jeering, and reciting parts of the letter D'Arcy had left in the boot. One roar of laughter seemed to sweep across the quadrangle from the old tower to the School House. As they drew near to the House a well-known voice hailed them from above.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the window of Study No. 6.

"You rotter!" roared Figgins.

"You boulder!"

"You spoofer!"

"Gentlemen, and deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway listen to me for a minute. I have locked the door of this study, and bawwicaded it with all the furniture, so you cannot possibly get at me. If you are willin' to make it pax, I am willin' to ovahtook your gwoss diswespsect to me yesterday, now that I have proved to you that I can take you in quite easily—"

"You—you—you—"

"Pway take it smilin', deah boys, and come up and have a feed, instead of gettin' watty," suggested Arthur Augustus.

The juniors looked at D'Arcy, and looked at one another. The crowd round them were still laughing, and certainly they would not make the fellows laugh any the less by ragging the swell of St. Jim's. It occurred to them that it would be more sensible, and more sportsmanlike, to take the matter in a good humour.

Tom Merry had already recovered his temper. He burst into a laugh.

"Gussy's right!" he said. "It's no good feeling sore about it—as it was a jolly good jape! Make it pax!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm hungry."

"Oh, all right!" grunted Blake.

"Vewy good! Pway come up! I've got a weally wippin' feed, and I'm sure you must be hungry."

They were! They had not noticed it in the excitement of the chase, but they were certainly very hungry, and when they crowded into Study No. 6 and found what a really royal spread the swell of St. Jim's had prepared, they were glad that they had made it pax!

Arthur Augustus did not crow over his victory, and ere long, under the influence of the good cheer, Tom Merry & Co. were able to laugh heartily themselves over the great jape with which the swell of St. Jim's had celebrated the historic date.

(Next Wednesday : "THE MENACE OF THE RED TRIANGLE!" A grand story in more serious vein, telling of Tom Merry's dire peril from deadly enemies! Watch out for this great yarn, chums.)



**Let the Editor be your pal.* Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farrington Street, London, E.C.4.**

HALLO, chums! In case you haven't looked at the calendar lately, let me remind you that next Monday is All Fools' Day, and japers will be enjoying themselves to the full. (Excuse the pun!) The practice of "pulling someone's leg" on the first of April is a custom which is universal and very ancient. Its origin is lost in antiquity, but the custom is still carried on, though with less fervour nowadays, in most European countries. Many are the great hoaxes that have been played on nations by April japers. But it's the younger generation that usually contrive to get the best "kick" out of making someone look small, and you must all have your wits fully about you next Monday if you don't want to get caught.

A funny hoax was played on a London magistrate once. He was in his place in court when he wished to make some notes. He pulled out his pencil and began to write, but not a mark appeared on the paper. The magistrate pressed harder, but the pencil-point bent under the pressure. He looked at it closely, and it was then he saw that the point was made of rubber! It was All Fools' Day, and he was the victim of a jape. The magistrate smiled as he realised that his children had "put one over" on him!

"THE MENACE OF THE RED TRIANGLE!"

From far-off India came the remaining two members of a secret society of thieves and assassins who had been the terror of the Bundelpore district. Their mission in England was one of deadly menace, for the victim they sought was the relative of the man who had crushed their gang. The symbol of the society was a red triangle, with a circle in each angle, and it was the custom to send the symbol to their victim as a warning of death, and the unfortunate was left in a torture of fear until the blow fell.

But Tom Merry, the junior leader of St. Jim's, knew nothing of all this when one day he received the symbol of death! He thought it was some strange jape. And then came a new boy to the school—Kalouth Das, an Indian, and with his advent began an ordeal of menace and peril for Tom Merry—an echo of the extirpating of the Red

Triangle society by Tom's uncle in India!

This is the theme of the great story that will be awaiting you in the pages of next week's GEM. It's the thrill yarn of the year, chums! You will do your pals a great favour if you put them on to it.

A NEW GAME.

Good games are always worth passing on to your friends, so I'm taking this opportunity of telling you about an excellent one that I have discovered. It is called Mappa-Mundi, and to play it you have to place the capital cities of the world in their right countries on a huge jig-saw puzzle map. The player who gets the most cities in their correct places wins.

I thought it was going to be easy until I ran up against such names as Ankara and Antananarivo, and realised that my store of knowledge in this direction was not as wide as it should have been.

The set costs 3s. 6d., and can be bought at any bookshop, stationer's, or toyshop. Quite apart from the game, which is excellent fun, the jig-saw puzzle is worth the money by itself.

A REAL BAFFLER!

Talking about puzzles reminds me of a baffler I heard of the other day, and for the life of me I cannot discover the solution of it. Now, you mathematicians, see what you can make of it, and if you can solve it let me know. First multiply 1 mile 7 furlongs 39 poles 5 yards 1 foot 6 inches by 2. The answer to that is 4 miles. Now we will check that little sum by dividing by 2. That's right, isn't it? And what answer do we get? Two miles! How does that come about? Where do the extra 6 inches come from? Work it out if you can, or put it to your master.

"THE THOUSAND-DOLLAR TRAIL!"

This is the sequel to the grand yarn of the Packsaddle pals in this issue, and

PEN PALS COUPON

30-3-35

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Marine Parade, Brighton, wants correspondents; stamps.

It's another winner from the pen of popular Frank Richards.

For the chums of the cow town school to prove that Painter Pete, the Kicking Mule puncher, is a secret road-agent, there is only one thing they can do. That is, find his bronco which is running wild with the thousand dollars Pete stole from the Hard Tack back. So in the night Dick and his chums lose no time in setting out on the trail of the bronco—and so does Painter Pete himself! It becomes a race to rope in the bronco, with what success the cow town schoolboys attain you will read in next Wednesday's gripping yarn.

In the next chapters of "The Secret World!" affairs in Northestia reach a fever pitch. The Gothland armada is sighted—the enemy are on the way to attack! And it is doubtful whether the untrained Northestrian soldiers are strong enough to repel the hordes of invaders. You mustn't miss one thrill of this great serial, so be sure you read next week's gripping instalment.

A RECORD RAIL RUN.

Records are made to be broken, but thirty-one years have elapsed before the speed record for a steam train in this country, held by the Great Western Railway's City of Truro, has been beaten. As long ago as 1904 this crack express set up a speed of 102.3 miles per hour over a section of its run from Plymouth to London. But recently this record was put up another six miles by the L.N.E.R.'s Papyrus. Between Corby and Tallington, on the run from Newcastle to King's Cross, the express touched 108 m.p.h., and averaged over 100 m.p.h. for 12½ miles! The outward and return journeys between Newcastle and London, a distance all told of 536 miles, were completed at the wonderful average speed of 67.77 m.p.h. Other interesting features of the record run are that both drivers of the two train crews on duty were over sixty years of age, and that eight tons of coal were shovelled into the furnace by the two firemen!

WORLD'S BIGGEST CLOCK.

The largest clock in the world, John Baker, of Swindon, is the one newly built in Montreal. It stands on a steel tower sixty feet above the ground. The dial surface of this monster "time-piece" is roughly six times the size of Big Ben. There are three dials to the clock, and at night, when they are illuminated, they are visible from a distance of ten miles! To give you some idea of its immense size, the minute marks are three feet apart and the minute hands, thirty feet long, each weigh over one ton! The four hands are twenty feet long, and the whole mechanism of the clock weighs over six tons!

TAILPIECE.

Miffkins: "It is said that aggressive people have black eyes."

Biffkins: "That's right. If they are not born with them, they get them later!"

THE EDITOR.

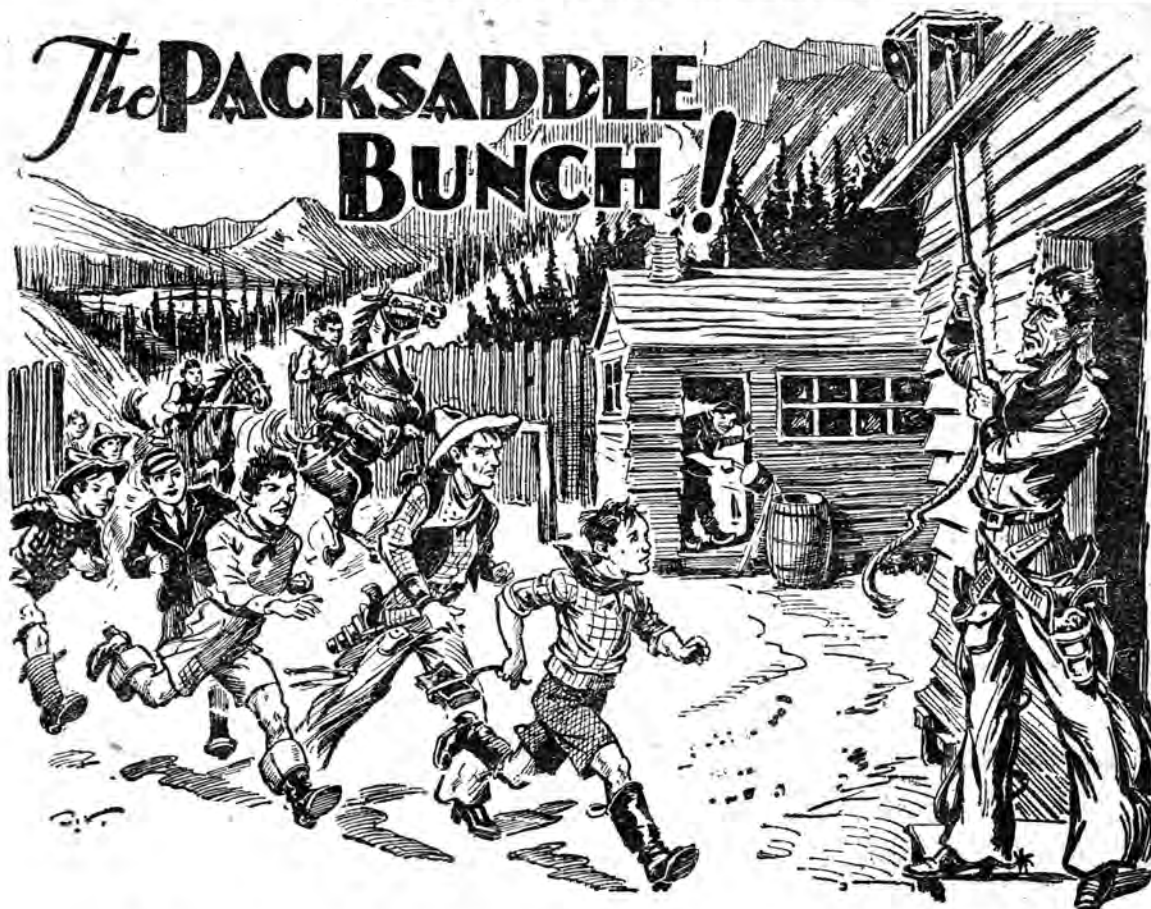
Miss Doris Stephen, 16, Dunblane Street, Roslyn, Dunedin, New Zealand, wants girl correspondents; age 12-14.

John Rudderham, Whitechurch, Blandford, Dorset, wants correspondents; aeroplanes, photos; age 10-12.

Bruce Livvie, Roseleaf, Perth Road, Blairgowrie, Scotland, wants correspondents interested in the "Magnet."

Miss Lily Kar, Milky Knowe, Chatton, Northumberland, wants girl correspondents; age 17-24; London, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, U.S.A.

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The Hold-Up!

"O H, look!" shouted Dick Carr. He reined in his pinto, and pointed with his riding-whip. "What the great horned toad—" exclaimed Slick Poindexter. "What the howly Mike—" exclaimed Mick Kavanagh. "Look!"

Classes were over at Packsaddle. Dick, Slick, and Mick were riding on the bluffs over the Rio Frio, a mile from the cow town school. At the point where Dick pulled in, the trail from Hard Tack ran along the bank of the river, overlooked by the high grassy bluffs that dropped almost like a wall to the lower level.

"Sure, it's only the hack!" grunted Slick, reining in his bronco almost on the edge of the bluff, and staring down. "Ain't you never seen Andy Butt driving his hearse from Hard Tack before, you gunk!"

"He's pulled in," said Mick. "I guess—"

"Look!" repeated Dick Carr. The next moment his companions saw what he had seen—the reason why the hack driver had halted on the trail by the river.

From a clump of trees under the bluff a horseman had pulled out. The schoolboys above could see little of him but his head—which was not covered by a stetson hat like almost every other cabeza in Samanta County, but by a flour-bag, inverted and pulled down over the face. And the horse-

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man's right hand was lifted, the sunshine glinting on the barrel of a levelled revolver in his hand.

That was why Andy Butt had halted. That was why he sat with his hands sticking above his head, reaching for the sky. It was a hold-up!

High above the strange scene the schoolboys of Packsaddle watched breathlessly.

"By gum!" said Poindexter breathlessly. "If a guy had a gun!"

But the schoolboys were unarmed.

THE THIEF OF PACKSADDLE!

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

The Packsaddle bunch were a rough-and-ready bunch, but they did not pack guns. Only Steve Carson, at Packsaddle, had ever ventured to pack a gun.

"Sure, we could get him from here!" said Mick with a nod. "I'll say it would surprise him a few!"

"But what's he after!" muttered Slick. "There's no passengers in the hack this time—there ain't a galoot for him to go through! I guess he can't

be after the baggage! What's his game?"

"He won't get ten cents off Andy!" said Mick.

Bang!

"Oh!" gasped Dick Carr.

The report of the revolver roared up from below. For an instant the tenderfoot of Packsaddle expected to see the hack driver reel over and topple from his seat. But the next moment he saw that the bullet had only spun the hat from Andy's head. It had gone close, however, for the driver's startled yell reached the ears of the schoolboys on the bluff.

Slick chuckled.

"I guess Andy's rattled!" he remarked. "That guy sure has given him a hint to talk turkey!"

"But why—" gasped Dick.

"I guess there's suthin' on that shebang he knows about, and wants, and Andy don't none to put him wise!" grinned Slick. "Andy brings up a packet of greenbacks from the bank at Hard Tack sometimes for the ranchers' pay-day. That'll be it."

It looked as if Slick was right. For Andy Butt, lowering his hands, stooped, extracted something from under his seat, and handed it over to the rider.

Even at the distance, in the clear air of Texas the schoolboys could see what it was. It was a buckskin bag; and they did not need telling that it contained money—dollar greenbacks!

The schoolboys saw the man in the flour-sack make a gesture with his revolver, and Andy promptly drove on.

—THERE ARE THRILLS THROUGHOUT THIS TEXAS SCHOOL STORY.

The rumble of wheels floated through the air. The hack disappeared from view up the bank of the Frio, the bluffs hiding it from sight in less than a minute.

The horseman was left alone on the trail, unconscious that three pairs of eyes watched from above. Sitting in his saddle, the road-agent had opened the buckskin bag and was counting its contents. So far as the schoolboys could see, there was quite a large roll of bills. They had a better view of the man now; but there was little to be seen but the flour-sack in which eyeholes were cut for vision.

Having examined his plunder, the rider dismounted, fastened up the buckskin bag again and thrust it into his saddlebag.

Then he remounted the bronco—a large and powerful animal, grey with black splashes, and rode down the river.

Slick shook a fist after him. With a gun in his hand, Slick would have tried a pot-shot at the rider. But he was far beyond the reach of a lasso.

"By gum! We got to see him ride clear with it!" growled Slick.

Dick's eyes gleamed.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed, and he wheeled his horse and rode away from the edge of the bluff.

Slick and Mick rode after him.

"Say, what's biting you, tenderfoot?" snapped Slick.

"Don't you see?" Dick was excited and breathless. "The trail follows the river only a mile. Where it leaves the prairie it goes through a dip in the bluffs. He will have to ride out that way, and we—"

"Jumping Jerusalem!" yelled Slick. "Come on! Hell-for-leather, you 'uns!"

Slick did not need to hear any more. He gave his pony the spur, and dashed on at a gallop. Dick and Mick spurred on.

The three rode at a gallop down from the bluffs to the prairie. A mile to the south they reached the spot where the stage-trail turned from the open plain, and followed a rugged break in the bluffs to the river bank. By that way only could the man in the flour-sack gain the open country, which was unquestionably his object. When he came up the dip the Packsaddle schoolboys were in his way.

To the risk of tackling an armed and desperate man they gave no thought. The road-agent was not getting away with his plunder if they could stop him, and they figured that they could. They were ahead of him, at the point he had to pass, and that was enough.

Breathless from the mad gallop, they drew in their panting horses in cover of a thicket of mesquite and post-oaks. Slick gripped his coiled lasso, ready for a cast. If the man in the flour-sack came within the sweep of Slick's rope, there was no escape for him, and his gun would not help him.

Waiting in cover, they listened for a rider coming up from the river. And they were none too soon on the spot, for in less than three or four minutes there was a thudding of horse's hoofs, coming up the trail from the bank of the Rio Frio.

Roping in the Road-Agent!

PAINTER PETE rode up from the Frio, with a cheery grin on his rugged, bearded face. There was no flour-sack over his head now, and there were no black splashes

on his grey bronco. The flour-sack had been thrust into a crevice in the bluffs, the black paint washed off the bronco in the waters of the Frio. Once clear of the scene of the hold-up, Painter Pete ceased to be a road-agent, and became a cow-puncher again.

Andy Butt, when he got to Packsaddle, could only describe the trail-thief as a man in a flour-sack, with a grey horse splashed with black. Painter reckoned that the Packsaddle crowd would be a long time guessing whose face had been covered by that flour-sack, and what horse had carried those black splashes. It was no wonder he grinned as he rode up from the river.

No guy in Santanta County was going to be wise to this. Even the Kicking Mule outfit would never dream that a man in that outfit had cinched the thousand dollars coming up from Hard Tack to pay the men on the ranch. Even Rancher Dunwoody would never guess that the dollars he was going to miss had reached Kicking Mule after all, though secretly and in the keeping of a man in the outfit.

Painter Pete saw before him a glorious prospect of a jamboree, spending money right and left down at Hard Tack, painting the town red.

It was a rosy dream—suddenly cut short and shattered by the whiz of a

To all appearances Painter Pete was an honest-to-goodness puncher. But appearances are sometimes deceptive—as the Packsaddle pals prove.

riata from a clump of thicket as he rode by it.

Painter Pete dodged too late. He was taken quite by surprise. The loop dropped neatly over his head and shoulders, tautened round his waist, and plucked him from the saddle like a giant's hand.

Crash went the trail-thief on the hard prairie, and the startled bronco, with a squeal, dashed on at a wild gallop.

Rolling on the ground in the grip of the rope, Painter had the use of his hands. He grabbed the Colt in his belt, and tore it from the holster. Burly man as he was, he was active and swift, hence his nickname of Painter—which was what a panther was called in Santanta County. But he was not given much chance with the gun, swift as he was.

Slick Poindexter spurred, the rope tautened again, and Painter was dragged head-over-heels over the rough ground. Slick was only too well aware what would happen if the ruffian got a chance with his gun.

Crash on crash went Painter, rolling and bumping. Bang, bang! came twice from his gun, but one bullet tore into the earth, and the other soared away skyward, utterly at random.

"Get that bronco!" yelled Poindexter to his companions. He had not forgotten that the trail-thief had packed his plunder in the saddlebag, and the grey bronco was galloping away.

Dick and Mick dashed after the fleeing animal. Keeping the road-agent rolling at the end of the rope, Slick had him safe, and they were eager to get hold of the buckskin bag.

But neither had a rope with him, and

the chase was in vain. Both were well-mounted, but the fleeing grey had no weight of a rider on his back, and he was a strong and swift animal. A half-tamed buck-jumper at the best of times, the grey was startled and scared now, and he was going all out for the open spaces. Swiftly as the schoolboys spurred after him, they did not gain an inch.

"Get back!" panted Dick breathlessly. "He will keep, anyhow! Slick—"

"You said it!" gasped Mick.

Leaving the grey bronco to career over the prairie, the two schoolboys wheeled and dashed back. Slick had a master's hand with a rope, but they were anxious about him, left alone with the trail-thief. Another ringing shot came to their ears as they rode hurriedly back.

"Let up, you gink!" They heard Slick's voice shouting. "You hear me whisper, you ornery guy! You drop that gun, or I guess you won't have a whole bone left in your carcass, in two shakes of a possum's tail! You get me, you doggoned geek?"

Bang! came another shot in reply.

But it was wasted in the air, as the breathless, bruised, desperate man rolled in the grip of the lasso. Slick's life was at stake, as he knew, if the man got a chance to aim, and he gave him no chance. His horse, in rapid motion, dragged Painter Pete headlong over rough prairie, crashing and bumping him every moment.

"Slick's got him all right!" panted Dick Carr.

"I'll say he has, a few!" grinned Mick.

The trail-thief got a grip on the lasso with his left hand. He dragged on it with all his strength, while he threw up the revolver in his right.

Bang!

But a leap of Slick's pony dragged him headlong as he pulled trigger. He crashed on the ground with stunning force, the revolver flying from his hand. Head over heels he rolled at the end of the forty-foot rope.

Mick dashed in, jumped down, and grasped the revolver. There was still a cartridge left in the six-gun. Mick Kavanagh gripped the butt.

"Say, let up, Slick!" he roared. "I sure got him if he kicks!"

Slick reined in.

The trail-thief sprawled on the ground in the gripping rope. Mick ran to him, and as Painter struggled to a sitting position, covered him with his own gun.

The three schoolboys surrounded the captured road-agent. He staggered to his feet, breathless, panting, bruised, crimson with rage. It was their first chance of getting a good look at him. He was unknown to Dick Carr, but from both Slick and Mick came an exclamation.

"Painter Pete!"

"You know him?" said Dick Carr, in surprise.

"I guess we seen that guy!" grinned Poindexter. "I'll say he's in the Kicking Mule outfit, and I sure reckon that's how he knew that Andy Butt had greenbacks on the hack."

Painter stood panting, too breathless and winded to speak. Dick Carr stared at him. He understood that the road-agent would naturally get rid of the flour-sack before hitting the open country. But the discovery that this man belonged to the Kicking Mule outfit was rather startling to Dick.

Painter found his voice at last.

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"You doggoned geeks! You all-fired young piccans! What you mean by this game? Say! I'll sure put Bill Sampson wise to this, and I'll say that he will quit you a few!"

Slick chuckled.
"You ain't getting free, Painter!" he answered. "I'll mention that we saw you hold up Andy Butt's hack from the top of the bluffs, and we sure laid for you here, getting away with the goods. What you got to say now, you goldarned thief?"

Painter did not reply for the moment. He glanced swiftly in the direction that the grey bronco had taken. The runaway horse was far out of sight now. All three of the boys noted the cunning gleam that came into Painter's eyes, and wondered what it meant.

"I guess we want to hit Packsaddle pronto!" remarked Slick. "And we'll sure tote this guy in at the end of the rope."

"Guess again!" snarled Painter. "I'll sure lambaste you a few for this, and then some! You've lost me my cayuse, with your fool tricks."

"I guess we'll rope in that cayuse some time, and a bag full of greenbacks along with him!" grinned Slick.

"Greenbacks nothing!" snarled the cowman. "I'll sure eat all the greenbacks you raise along with my cayuse, you geek. If Andy Butt's shebang has been held up, what'll I know about it?"

"A whole heap, I reckon, as you did it!" said Mick. "Mean to say you wasn't the galoot in the flour-sack?"

"I sure do!" said Painter coolly. "Ain't touched a flour-sack since I helped cookie with the chuck in the chuckhouse at Kicking Mule, and that's a week ago. If you see a guy in a flour-sack, I sure ain't wise to that guy."

"Where is he, then?" grinned Slick. "We was waiting here for that guy to come up from the river, and there ain't nobody come but you."

"How'd I know?" snapped Painter. "Now I think of it, I reckon I did see a guy fording the Frio, way back, me being down by the river looking for lost cows."

Dick Carr caught his breath. Was it barely possible that the Packsaddle trio had made an awful mistake and roped in the wrong man?

Unless the plunder was found on him, there was nothing to identify this puncher as the man who had held up the hack. And that could not be put to the test, as the grey bronco was gone. It dawned on Dick what that sudden, cunning gleam in the cowman's eyes had meant. He had realized that the proof against him had gone away into unknown spaces at a gallop.

But Slick only laughed.
"You want us to figure we got the wrong guy, Painter? Forget it! What you blaze away with that gun for, say?"

"I'll say that any galoot would loose off his gat if he was roped in that-a-way!" growled Painter. "You figure you can rope in a Kicking Mule puncher like he was a steer? Give me that gat, Mick Kavanagh, you young geek, and you, Poindexter, you git this rope off'n me. I sure got to get arter my critter and ride after them cows."

A chill of doubt was troubling Dick Carr. But it was plain that Slick and Mick had no doubts.

"Hit it for Packsaddle!" said Slick curtly.

"You letting up on a guy?" roared Painter.

"Not so's you'd notice it," answered Slick. And he set his pony in motion, and the cowman, turning the air of the prairie almost blue with his remarks,

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stumbled along after him at the end of the rope. Dick and Mick followed, the latter still with the gun in his hand. And Painter Pete was still safe at the end of the rope when Dick, Slick, and Mick hit Packsaddle School.

A Surprise for the School!

BILL SAMPSON, headmaster of Packsaddle School, stood with his thumbs hooked in his gun-belt and stared. Bill looked as if his eyes were going to pop out of his bearded face, so astonished was he. And Smali Brown, the teacher, seeing Bill gazing with such amazement out on the school trail, hopped along to blink through his horn-rimmed spectacles, and see what was surprising Bill. It surprised Mr. Brown in his turn, and led him to utter quite a startled squeal. And then all the bunch who were in the playground hit the same spot to "rubber," even Tin Tung, the Chinese cook, and Hank, the hired man. Crowded in the gateway, nearly every guy in the cow town school rubbered. It was quite a reception for the three schoolboys who rode up the trail, leading a Kicking Mule puncher on the end of a rope.

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Bill Sampson, finding his voice. "This hero is the tarantula's side-whiskers, and then some! I'll say them young guys is hoping for the quirt."

"Outrageous!" squealed Small Brown. "Most shocking! A very, very rough practical joke on a—man employed by Mr. Dunwoody at Kicking Mule."

Small Brown did not belong to Texas. He came from Boston, where they were cultured and refined. He made this clear by wearing store clothes and a Derby hat. But the Packsaddle bunch did not give ten cents for culture from Boston, and they led Mr. Brown a rough life. The more Bill quirted the bunch, the more Mr. Brown approved, and he entertained a hope of seeing Dick, Slick, and Mick quirted on the spot for what looked to him like a rough joke on a puncher. Mr. Brown did not see everything through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

Steve Carson, the bully of Packsaddle, shared that hope. He had a deep grouse against the tenderfoot, and against Slick and Mick for making friends with him. He grinned at his comrades, Slim Dixon and Poker Parker.

"I guess Bill will lambaste that bunch for this!" grinned Steve. "He's sure worn out that pesky quirt of his'n on me, and now it's the turn of that goldarned tenderfoot and his side-kickers."

"You said it!" agreed Slim. "I'll ask a man what the blue blazes have they roped in Painter for that-a-way?"

"I guess Barney Bailey and his outfit would make them howl a few if they was around now!" said Poker. "Carr's made friends with Barney, but I'll say Barney wouldn't stand for this."

Up the school trail, with a clatter and a jingle, rode the three, under a sea of staring eyes. They rode at a moderate pace, to give the stumbling cowman on the rope a chance. Many times had Painter Pete striven to wrench himself loose, but the drag on the riata prevented him from loosening the loop, and two or three rough falls on the prairie had rewarded him. His face was burning with fury as he was led up to the school gate. Had his gun been in his hand there would have been sudden death in sight of the Packsaddle bunch. But his gun was in Mick's hand, and Mick was ready to drop him with a

bullet in the leg if he handed over trouble.

"Say, Bill, we got a prize-packet for you to hand over to Marshal Lick at the burg!" shouted Slick, as the three halted. They could not ride in, with the rubbering crowd bunched in the gateway.

Bill strode out at them, glaring. "Jumping painters!" roared Bill. "You pesky piccans! What you figure you're doing, roping in a Kicking Mule puncher that-a-way? Say, you gone loco? Shoot!"

There was an answering roar from Painter before the boys could speak.

"Say, you Bill Sampson, you git me outen this durned rope! Say, you figure your durned school bunch are going to cinch a cowman and ride him off his range? Say—"

"Hold on, Bill!" shouted Slick, as the cow town schoolmaster put a hand to the rope. "You ain't letting that road-agent loose!"

"That what?" gasped Bill.

"I'm telling you!" hooted Slick. "That guy Painter held up Andy Butt's hack on the river trail, and cinched a bag of dollars. That's why we've roped him in."

"Great jumping painters!" ejaculated Bill, and his hand dropped back from the rope. "You giving me the goods?"

"We all three piped him from the bluffs, Bill!" declared Mick Kavanagh. "And Slick got him in the rope as he came up from the river."

"I'm saying that's a lie!" roared Painter. "I guess I was along the Frio trailing lost cows from my herd, when these young ginks took me for some other galoot."

He grasped the rope and wrenched it to loosen the loop. Poindexter gave it a sharp jerk, and he rolled over with a heavy bump.

"Forget that, Painter!" advised Slick. "You ain't hitting the horizon yet, not by a large piece, you ain't!"

Bill Sampson, more astonished than ever stood and stared. Painter scrambled up, breathless and furious, and yelled at him.

"You, Bill Sampson, you know me. You was riding in the Kicking Mule outfit afore they cinched you to run this here school."

"You said it!" growled Bill. "And I'll say I never did figure you was O.K., Painter. I guess I've seen you lose dollars at faro and poker down to Hard Tack that you never earned punching cows on the ranges! Yep! I guess this here is a matter for Mister Lick to horn into."

Steve Carson put in a sarcastic snigger.

"Aw, Bill, you want to watch out!" he said. "There's a bunch of Kicking Mule men' along to Packsaddle now. I'll tell a man they'll chip in, and there'll be gun talk if they see Painter roped in by them geeks!"

Bill turned and gave Big Steve a glare.

"Pack it up, you Carson!" he snapped. "Nobody's asking you! Say, any of you geeks seen the hack come in?"

"Nope!" answered several voices.

The Hard Tack hack had not yet arrived. Andy Butt's hearse did not travel fast. When it came up the trail to the cow town it passed within sight of the school and it had not yet been seen.

Steve laughed again.

"They're stringing you, Bill!" he said. "I guess when Andy Butt noses in he'll allow there ain't been no hold-up."

"I'm telling you to can it!" snapped

Bill. He turned to the three riders again. "Say, if you're stringing me I'll sure give you the quirt till the skin comes off!"

"Yeah!" grinned Slick.
"Sez you!" chuckled Mick.

"Here comes the hack!" shouted one of the bunch, as Andy Butt's vehicle appeared in sight on the prairie trail at a distance, heading for the cow town.

The hack was passing too far away for shouting. Bill Sampson strode out to meet it on the trail, waving his big stetson to the driver as a signal to halt. Andy Butt waved back and pulled in.

After the cow town schoolmaster went

"You allow he got the dollars?"

"Yep!"

"I guess that's a cinch then!" said Bill. "If that gook's got a bag of greenbacks on him I'll call it a clear case."

"Doggone it, Bill Sampson!" yelled Painter. "I'll tell a man I'll eat them greenbacks if you raise them in my rags, and my stetson after!"

"We saw him pack the bag into his saddlebag, Bill!" said Dick Carr. "His horse got loose when Slick lassoed him. It's running loose on the prairie now."

"Aw, can it; that's a little too thin!" sneered Steve Carson. "I guess I'd

him; he had no chance. With a sullen curse, he tramped after the hack, with Bill's grip still on him. And the whole bunch followed to see Painter to the calaboose.

Barney Bailey Gets Busy!

PACKSADDLE was in a roar. Andy Butt had pulled in his hack outside Hanson's Hotel and store, and in a couple of minutes after he had got off his box the news of the hold-up was spreading through the cow town. Long before Bill arrived with the prisoner, followed by the school bunch, all Packsaddle was wise to it. Barney Bailey, foreman of the Kicking Mule Ranch, was in town with half a dozen of his punchers. They were there to take over the bag of greenbacks and convey it to the ranch. And they got the news that there was no longer a bag of greenbacks to go to the ranch.

"Blue blazes!" growled Barney Bailey. "I guess we'll be arder that guy, and we sure won't worry the marshal with him if we get him. A rope and a branch will be good enough for that bulldozer!"

Andy grinned.

"Some young guys up to the school allow they've cinched him," he said. "They got hold of a galoot—young



"Look!" exclaimed Dick Carr. On the trail below the bluffs a horseman, with a flour-sack over his head and a levelled revolver in his hand, was holding up Andy Butt's hack from Hard Tack! "By gum!" said Poindexter, as the three schoolboys watched breathlessly. "If a guy had a gun!"

the whole bunch, only Small Brown being left in the gateway, blinking owl-like. Painter, still safe in the rope, stumbled after Slick's horse, sputtering oaths.

"Say you, Andy!" roared Bill, as he tramped to the stage trail. "Them young geeks allow you was held up coming up the Frio? Shoot!"

"I'll buy it!" answered Andy.

There was a buzz from the bunch, and Steve Carson scowled. It was certain now that there had been a hold-up.

"A guy in a flour-sack," went on Andy, "and he sure took a piece of skin off my cabeza, doggone him, afore I handed over the bag from the bank for Mr. Dunwoody. I'll say he beat it with a thousand dollars."

"You figure it was Painter?" Bill waved a hand at the cowman staggering in the rope.

Andy shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't put it past him," he answered. "But I sure never saw nothin' but a flour-bag on his front porch."

take Painter's word agin yours, and some over!"

"You spillin' more, you Steve?" hooted Bill. He whipped out a lash with his quirt, and Big Steve yelled as he caught it round his legs. "Now pack it up, you big stiff! Get me?"

Andy drove on the hack to the cow town. Bill Sampson, having reduced Steve to savage silence, rubbed his bearded chin in doubt.

"I guess," he said at last, "that Painter's cayuse has got to be roped in, and it's for the marshal to hold him till we get the critter. Painter, you're going on a paseo with this baby to see Mister Lick."

"I'll say—" began Painter, with a roar.

"Say nothing!" snapped Bill. "If the greenbacks ain't found on your cayuse I guess that lets you out!"

He threw Slick's lasso off the cowman and gripped him by his loose shirt. Painter eyed him fiercely and savagely, evidently reckoning the chances of a break for freedom. But burly as he was, the gigantic Bill towered over

Carr and Poindexter and the Irish Mike—

"Them three are bright lads!" said Barney. "I guess I'll be powerful glad to see the man they've cinched."

"You've seen him afore!" grinned Andy. "He's one of your crowd, Barney."

"What!" roared the Kicking Mule foreman.

"It's sure Painter Pete," Andy pointed up the street to the trail.

"There's Bill Sampson toting him along to the calaboose."

"Search me!" gasped Barney.

His face was red with wrath. Barney wanted to get a cinch on the man who had got away with Rancher Dunwoody's dollars. But he wanted a heap of convincing that it was a Kicking Mule man! Nothing short of finding the dollars on him would have convinced Barney that one of his outfit was a trail-thief and road-agent.

Bill Sampson marched the prisoner up the rugged street, the Packsaddle bunch behind him; Dick, Slick, and

Mick riding, the rest on foot. Barney Bailey strode to meet them, his hand on his gun.

After Barney crowded five or six Kicking Mule men, looking grim and with their hardware ready. Andy Butt dodged into Hanson's Hotel, and several more law-abiding citizens followed him. Bullets were no respecters of persons, and it looked as if gunplay was coming next.

"Say, Barney," shouted Painter, his face lighting at the sight of the Kicking Mule outfit—"say, you ain't standing for this, Barney!"

"I'll say nunk!" roared Barney. "You, Bill Sampson, you spill it, and spill it quick! What you got on Painter?"

"I guess I'm whispering it to Mister Lick!" answered Bill. "Keep your gun at home, Barney; you ain't running this town, old-timer! Some guy tote out that pesky marshal."

Marshal Lick was already coming on the scene. He came striding down from the calaboose, and the crowd opened for him. The Town Marshal of Packsaddle had already heard of the hold-up. A dozen voices addressed him as he arrived, and he waved his hand for silence.

"Pack it up!" roared Mr. Lick. "Shoot, you Bill Sampson! I guess you can chew the rag arter, you Barney Bailey."

"I'm saying—" roared Barney.

"Saying nothing! Pack it up, I'm telling you, and let the schoolmaster shoot!" snapped Mr. Lick.

Barney snorted angrily, but he gave Bill a chance to speak. Bill put it in a few words, to which the whole crowd listened eagerly.

"Let them young ginks shoot next!" announced the marshal, waving back Barney and his men.

Dick, Slick, and Mick told the tale briefly.

"I guess," said the marshal at length, "that there ain't no proof till we get a cinch on Painter's cayuse. I'll say I'm going to hold him till that cayuse is roped in."

"Hold Abraham Lincoln!" roared Barney. "Them young geeks is mis-

taken. They seen a guy in a flour-sack, I allow that much; but they lost sight of him, and they roped in a Kicking Mule puncher what was down by the Frio arter lost cows! That's what I'm a-shouting!"

"You said it, Barney!" panted Painter Pete. "I guess the outfit ain't standing for cinching a Kicking Mule man in any old calaboose."

"Not by a jugful!" snorted Barney. And there was a roar of endorsement from the Kicking Mule punchers.

Marshal Lick took hold of Painter Pete's neck-scarf with his left hand, and a Colt appeared in his right. Bill Sampson relinquished the prisoner to the Marshal of Packsaddle, and dropped his own hand on his gun. There was a surge forward of the Kicking Mule punchers. Every man had his hand near his gun now.

"You young geeks, beat it!" roared Bill, with a glare at the school bunch. "What you rubbin' round for? You want to stop but lead when the rookus begins? Beat it, I'm telling you!"

"You take your paw off'n that guy, Ezra Lick!" shouted Barney. "You sure ain't juggling a Kicking Mule man that-a-way! This outfit don't stand for it, and that's what I'm shouting!"

"I guess this guy will be safe in the jug while that cayuse is getting roped," said Marshal Lick. "And I got a gun here what says the same."

With that the Marshal of Packsaddle pushed Painter Pete before him towards the calaboose, his gun up in his right hand. Guns were drawn on all sides now, and brows knitted over fierce eyes. Bill Sampson pulled his big Colt to back up the marshal; and other men in the crowd not belonging to Kicking Mule followed his example. It was the presence of the crowd of school-boys, more than anything else, that prevented the outbreak of a wild affray.

Suddenly over the excited, roaring, surging mob came the whiz of a lasso. It whizzed from a Kicking Mule puncher, mounted on a bronco, on the edge of the crowd.

The loop dropped over Marshal Lick's shoulders, and dragged, and the

Marshal of Packsaddle was suddenly flung on his back, his revolver flying.

At the same moment his grasp on Painter's neck-scarf was dragged loose. Painter Pete did not lose the chance.

The instant he was released he darted into the crowd.

With a defiant roar the Kicking Mule punchers closed round him to cover his escape.

"Wake snakes!" gasped Mr. Lick, scrambling up, and jerking off the lasso. "Say, where's that guy? I guess I want that guy!"

"Forget it, marshal!" grinned Barney Bailey. "You ain't cinching no Kicking Mule man—not by a canful!"

The crowd swayed, surged, and roared. Marshal Lick pounced on his gun, grabbed it, and rushed after Painter Pete. But Painter, in the midst of three or four comrades, had scuttled away among the cabins and shanties along the irregular street. A beat of horse's hoofs rang back to the ears of the exasperated marshal. One of the punchers had handed Painter his bronco, and the suspected man was already burning the wind for Kicking Mule. Barney Bailey and his friends, grinning, went for their horses, and Barney shouted back as he rode out of town:

"Say, you want a Kicking Mule guy! You hit Kicking Mule, and ask for him. All the boys'll be glad to meet up with you."

And Barney and his men rode off triumphant, little dreaming that in standing by a man in their outfit, they were standing by the man in the flour-sack, who had cinched the rancher's bag of dollars.

Marshal Lick answered Barney's taunt with an angry snort. He was not likely to ride out to Kicking Mule after his man. Packsaddle would have needed a new marshal very soon afterwards.

Bill Sampson herded his bunch back to the school. He herded them back with his quirt like a bunch of steers. The bunch did the distance from the cow town to the school in record time.

Dick, Slick, and Mick were not feeling pleased when they went to their bunks in the school bunkhouse. They had got the right man—they were sure of that. But the mistaken loyalty of his comrades of Kicking Mule had let him loose again, to trail down his lost bronco, and get his hands on the bag of dollars taken from the hack. When the rest of the bunch were asleep Dick lifted his head from his straw pillow.

"Slick, Mick! You asleep?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," grunted Poindexter. "I guess I'm worrying a whole heap about that guy Painter getting away with it."

"You said it!" murmured Mick.

"He's not going to get away with it, if we can stop him!" said Dick Carr quietly. "You fellows, we're going to trail down that horse, and get him before that thief Painter can get him. What about it?"

"Big boy," said Slick, "you're shoutin'!"

"Shoutin' a mouthful," agreed Mick. Bill Sampson, sleeping over in the schoolhouse, was not wise to the fact that three fellows in the bunch were getting out of their bunks. And considering what a heavy hand Bill had with a quirt, it was just as well for them that he was not wise to it.

(Next week: "THE THOUSAND-DOLLAR TRAIL!" Read what happens to Dick & Co. on the track of the missing bronco.)



A Yarn You'll Like!

Horace Coker is the best footballer, cricketer, fighting man and scholar Greyfriars has ever had or is likely to have—at least, this is the great Horace's opinion of himself! But when he tries to outshine Sexton Blake in the detective business, Coker, the sleuth makes the usual hash of things!

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The MAGNET

**THE CALL TO ARMS! NORTHESTRIA PREPARE TO DEFEND THEIR SHORES
AGAINST INVADERS!**

The SECRET WORLD!



"You have challenged me to a combat," said Browne, "and honour compels me to accept. In this country a combat means a fight to the death!" "Death!" gasped Handforth. The other fellows grinned as Browne waved his hand to the spiked clubs and lances on the wall. "Choose your weapon, Brother Handforth!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

A Crisis!

WAR is in the air! Such is the climax to the long-strained relations between Northestria and Gothland, hidden medieval countries in the Arctic surrounded by volcanoes, which supply their eternal light and heat.

On the side of the Northestrians are Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and a crowd of St. Frank's boys, who were stranded in the land when their airship crashed. By reason of Nelson Lee & Co.'s daring in rescuing Prince Oswy, the young brother of Princess Mercia, Northestria's girl ruler, from the Gothlanders, Nelson Lee is made commander-in-chief of the army at a levee held in honour of the gallant raiders. The schoolmaster detective declares that there is no time to lose. Northestria must prepare for war. The Gothlanders will invade them at any moment!

"We have soldiers," put in the prince proudly. "We have great overlords, each with their own guards and archers. There are many men eager

and willing to lay down their lives for their country."

Nelson Lee shook his head. "Many men, yes; but in this crisis we shall need every man," he replied. "Not just the soldiers of your great feudal lords, but every able-bodied citizen, too. Kasser the Grim may be a savage, and his followers may be beneath the contempt of all decent people; but as fighters I'll warrant they are grim and deadly enemies. Once they gain a footing in Northestria they will sweep through the land like a plague. If these invading hosts succeed in their design and capture a section of Northestrian soil there will be no holding them."

"Tis impossible!" muttered Ethelbert, staring.

"You don't believe it?" said Nelson Lee grimly. "But it's true, my lord, whether you believe it or not. And those brutal Gothlanders are preparing even now—they have been preparing for years. What they have accomplished leisurely we must perform with the utmost speed. There is no other chance of saving your land from being despoiled. An invasion is inevitable, unless we can organise such

effective defences that the enemy will be kept out. There is no time for feasting—there is no time for rejoicing. We must all get to work in grim earnest. Furthermore, it is my wish to utilise certain materials from our great ship of the air. Indeed, this step may be the only saving grace."

Nelson Lee was choosing his words very carefully. He wanted to impress his listeners with the gravity of the situation, but, at the same time, he had no desire to precipitate a panic. Yet, if he had spoken as bluntly as his fears dictated, a panic would certainly have followed. For Nelson Lee knew well enough that the threatened invasion was a stark reality to be grimly reckoned with. The Northestrians were only just beginning to admit the possibility of such a thing.

It was rather curious that the young princess should reveal a keener understanding than her chief adviser and his satellites. There were many present in this assemblage—all the chief feudal lords of the country, who had come to the capital post-haste in order to take part in this joyous celebration of Prince Oswy's return.

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Scarcely one of them had had a thought of danger. Lee and Dorrie and the St. Frank's fellows were amazed at the total lack of understanding. These Northeastrian feudal lords persisted in their belief that Gothland was peopled by mere savages, who had not the sense to organise a war.

"Lee the Lionheart speaketh wisely," said the young princess quietly. "At my desire, he is in command of all our soldiers, good Ethelbert. Let him be obeyed in all things. Let his wisdom guide thee. 'Tis my wish."

Her words were final, and after a very few more words the levee broke up. Honours had been bestowed upon all the chief participants. Dorrmore the Brave and Waring the Dauntless were two of the new titles that had been conferred.

The whole affair had ended very differently from what the Northeastrian nobles had supposed. They had come here to take part in a great feast—a banquet of rejoicing. But there was no feast. The one concrete result of the assembly was that Nelson Lee had been made supreme commander of the army.

One entire wing of the royal castle was placed at the disposal of the strangers. And Nelson Lee was looking grim and thoughtful when he found himself alone with Lord Dorrmore and Captain Waring in one of the inner chambers. The St. Frank's fellows were excitedly discussing the situation elsewhere.

"Well, that's that!" said Lord Dorrmore cheerfully. "Gad, it's a relief to know that we're free agents, anyhow. I'm tired of being bottled up, Lee. What's the immediate programme?"

"I don't quite know, Dorrie," replied Lee, as he filled his pipe. "The whole position is difficult. It is unexpected, too. We bargained for no such development as this."

"Bein' placed in command of the army, you mean?"

"That's one thing, yes," replied Nelson Lee. "Our main object in rescuing Prince Oswy was to prove our friendliness, and thus earn our release. I don't think any of us foresaw that we should have these responsibilities thrust upon us."

"By glory, no," agreed Dorrie. "Still, it's no good grumblin'—an', as far as I'm concerned, I regard the future with cheery anticipation. There seems to be trouble in the air, an' if we can get a good smack at those blessed Gothlanders I shan't kick."

Captain Waring smiled.

"Yes, but what about our own troubles?" he asked pointedly.

"Exactly!" agreed Lee. "You've hit it, Waring."

"I don't understand," remarked his lordship, staring.

"You wouldn't," chuckled Nelson Lee. "We all know that you're an irresponsible adventurer, Dorrie. As long as there's some excitement, and a new thrill, you forget everything else. But we're in charge of a number of schoolboys, and schoolgirls, and it's just possible that their parents are beginning to worry a bit. We're lost in the wastes of the Arctic, and there seems precious little chance of getting away. Do you wonder that I'm just a bit anxious?"

Dorrie waved an airy hand.

"My dear man, what's the good of fightin' against Fate?" he asked, with his usual nonchalance. "We ought to think ourselves infernally lucky to be alive at all! An' since we're in the midst of all this medieval warfare, why

not take advantage of the situation an' thoroughly enjoy ourselves?"

"Dorrie, you're absolutely hopeless," growled Nelson Lee, frowning.

"I know it!" sighed his lordship. "I've known it for years."

"You're incorrigible—"

"Guilty again!" agreed Dorrie, grinning.

"Cease this nonsense, and be serious," said Lee gruffly. "Without the slightest desire to be placed on a pedestal, I find myself commander-in-chief of these Northeastrian soldiers! And there'll be precious little time, by what I can see, for any of us to think of our own troubles."

— — —

Handy Deposed!

LORD DORRMORE nodded.

"That's just the way I've been thinking, too," he agreed. "Old Kasker is a restive beggar, and he'll probably start that little invasion within a day or two. The prospect looks lively."

"In a way, of course, I feel honoured," admitted Nelson Lee slowly. "And there will be no getting out of the responsibilities. I must do everything I can faithfully to fulfil my trust."

"Why did you accept the position, if you didn't want it?"

"Man alive, what else could I do?" retorted Lee, as he lit his pipe with forceful puffs. "I am thinking of the boys and girls—of our responsibility to their people at home. In order to save our own lives, we must buckle into this task of defending Northeastria. We can't get away, and so we shall have to join in the general strife. But, at the same time, we must do everything in our power to communicate with the outside world. We mustn't lose sight of the fact that we are merely visitors in this place. This warfare between the Northeastrians and the Gothlanders is not our concern, although, willy-nilly, we are compelled to take part in it."

"Then what on earth's the good of kickin'?"

"I'm not kicking, Dorrie; I'm just thinking of the position in general," replied Nelson Lee. "Captain Waring, I want you to find Sparks, and hurry him off to the airship. Let one or two of the engineers go with him. If it is at all possible, they must rig up an aerial, and get the wireless into shape."

The airship captain nodded. He was a young man after Nelson Lee's own heart, and he had been chafing under recent idleness. His eyes now sparkled with anticipation.

"I'll get off at once! I'll go myself!" he said briskly. "And if we don't get into communication with the outer world, it won't be my fault."

"If no help can reach us, we can let them know that we are all safe and well," said Lee. "Thank Heaven the wireless apparatus was not hopelessly damaged when the airship crashed! If you can only rig up an aerial, Waring, I think you'll get results. But I'm rather doubtful about the transmission. This whole oasis is volcanic, and we are surrounded by extraordinary weather conditions. It may prove impossible to penetrate this natural barrier."

"Well, we'll try," said the captain. "There's something else, too, Mr. Lee. Have you thought of the possibilities of the airship? Two of the gondolas are practically unharmed—"

"I am glad to see that you have grasped the same idea that has occurred to me," put in Nelson Lee. "But this is hardly the time to discuss the matter, Waring. I have my own idea about those

gondolas. For the present, I should like you to concentrate your attention upon the wireless. Dorrie, we'll go and have a word with the boys."

"Anything you like," agreed his lordship. "But don't forget the pow-wow with the army chiefs."

"That will follow immediately afterwards," said Lee.

"By the way, who are these army chiefs, anyhow?" went on his lordship dryly. "As far as I can see, young Handforth is the only military officer in the place. He's captain of the bodyguard, an' I'm bothered if I can think of any other military force."

"We shall soon know the truth, anyhow," replied Lee, as he moved towards the doorway. "No doubt these feudal lords are regarded as army chiefs in this country. If so, I am afraid they'll be a poor lot—as military men."

They hurried out, and Captain Waring lost no time in finding the young wireless operator and some of the airship's engineers. In the meantime, most of the St. Frank's fellows were busily inspecting the quarters of the bodyguard.

Handforth didn't like it much. In fact, he regarded the whole affair as distinctly impertinent. As captain of the royal troops, he thought it decidedly thick that the fellows should come barging in as though they owned the place.

"You dry up, Handy!" said Nipper briskly. "We've been in captivity for days, while you've been lording it about with these soldiers! Your reign's over, my lad, and ours is just beginning!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Dry up, Handy! You're out of it!" Handforth glared round ferociously.

"I've kept my temper pretty well up till now!" he said ominously. "But there's a limit! I don't object to visitors looking round the quarters of the bodyguard; but if there's any rot, I'll shove my foot down!"

"Smother him, somebody!"

"Absolutely!"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"Out you go!" hooted Handforth. "Do you hear me, you rotters? Clear off before I get wild! For two pins, I'll order my troops to chuck you out on your necks! I'm boss here—"

"Poor old Handy!" sighed Reggie Pitt. "Until to-day you were the Big Noise, and you don't like to admit that your thunder is now as feeble as a little whisper. But it's a sad, sad fact, all the same!"

Handforth started.

"I'm still captain, aren't I?" he demanded aggressively.

"I suppose you can fool yourself, if you like!" grinned Nipper. "But the gov'nor is commander-in-chief now, Handy, and you're only just a little captain. You've got to take your orders from him!"

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Handforth, with a start.

He lost his bluster, and retired into a nook with Church and McClure.

"The bounder's right, too!" he muttered disgruntledly. "Why the dickens did they want to interfere? I'm the chap to be commander-in-chief, and now I've got to take orders from Mr. Lee! It's too jolly thick!"

Church grinned.

"You've had your run, anyhow, Handy," he said. "And you needn't growl, either. By the look of things, there's going to be a fearful lot of fighting soon, and Mr. Lee is the one man to take charge."

"Rather!" agreed McClure. "We can rely on Mr. Lee!"

Handforth brightened up slightly. "All the same, I'm captain of the bodyguard, and I'm not going to have these fatheads overrunning our quarters like a lot of rabbits in a warren!" he said, with a frown. "They'll take orders from me, or—"

"Rats!" said Church. "You're not their officer!"

"H'm! I suppose not," admitted Handforth. "But there's no reason—By George," he added, with a start, "that's an idea, Church, my lad! Why shouldn't all these chaps be shoved into the bodyguard? Then I should be able to order them about as I like!"

Somehow Church and McClure didn't seem to think much of the suggestion. They praised it highly—a sure proof of their real feelings. But when the other fellows heard it, they didn't praise it at all. In fact, they used such blunt expressions of frank criticism that something akin to a riot was in progress when Nelson Lee and Dorrie arrived.

"It's high time we came, I can see!" said Nelson Lee grimly, as he looked round at the excited juniors. "Boys, there's work for everybody to do, and the sooner we get at it the better. I'm going to make many changes in the general order of things, and I shall begin with the bodyguard."

There was something so crisp in Nelson Lee's tone that all the rotting ceased on the spot. Handforth looked alarmed.

"You're going to begin on the bodyguard, sir?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes, Handforth; I am," replied Lee. "All these boys—in fact, every man-jack of you St. Frank's fellows might as well join the bodyguard at once—"

"Why, that's my idea!" roared Handforth excitedly. "Mac, didn't I suggest it not more than five minutes ago?"

"Well, yes," admitted McClure. "But I'm not sure that you meant it in the same way."

"There has got to be a settled policy at once," continued Nelson Lee. "This bodyguard is far too big as it stands at present, so I shall draft out all the original members, and make them into the First Defence Battalion—at least, the nucleus of it. You boys will be quite sufficient for the bodyguard."

"Hear, hear, sir!"

"We're all game, sir!"

"It is fitting that the eldest should be in command," continued Nelson Lee calmly. "Therefore, I appoint you, Browne, as captain."

Handforth Doesn't Like It!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, the genial skipper of the Fifth, bowed.

At your service, Brother Lee," he said amiably. "Henceforth I serve the princess with—"

"But—but—but—"

Handforth seemed to explode. For a moment or two he had been getting redder and redder, and now he jumped forward, his eyes blazing with indignation.

"But what about me?" he roared aggressively.

Nelson Lee looked at him with a cold eye. "Is that the correct way to address your commander-in-chief?" he asked sternly.

Handforth's jaw dropped.

"I—I— Sorry, sir!" he gasped. "I—I didn't mean— But, look here! I'm captain!" he added tersely. "I'm captain of the bodyguard, sir."

"But we are now face to face with serious trouble, Handforth, and I need

GUSSY GETS THE SAINTS' HUNDREDTH GOAL

But Claremont Give Them A Surprise.

By Harry Noble.

The match at Claremont began under spring-like conditions, and though St. Jim's faced a brilliant sun, it was obvious that the forwards were "all out" to net the hundredth league goal this season—their total at the start of the game being ninety-nine. First Blake went close, and then Tom Merry all but beat the Claremont 'keeper with a snap shot. After fifteen minutes Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came dashing in from the wing, to slam the leather past Peters in hurricane style—to Gussy had fallen the coveted honour of netting that hundredth goal! Tom Merry immediately consoled himself for his early miss by popping in our second, and Blake put us three up. The game looked as good as ours, and for once we slacked off a little. Before we knew what was happening Teddy Baxter and his men had begun a ferocious counter-attack, and Baxter shot one goal and headed another in quick succession. St. Clair levelled the scores, and shortly after the interval Baxter put Claremont ahead, 4-3. Our fellows threw themselves grimly into the sock-pulling-up act, and Lowther put us on terms. Once again, however, Claremont went ahead through a great goal by Merivale, and we were fighting hard till within seconds of the finish, when D'Arcy scored again with

someone reliable in charge," interrupted Nelson Lee. "It is my decision that Browne shall be captain. He needs two lieutenants. I appoint Nipper and yourself."

Browne sighed.

"I could have suggested a better name for my second lieutenant, sir, but no matter," he said resignedly. "It is not my place to question the instructions of my commanding officer. Greatly as I fear the outcome, I will attempt to train Brother Handforth in the way he should go."

The rest of the juniors were grinning, but Handforth was bewildered and startled. Nelson Lee's decision, of course, was thoroughly sensible, and the juniors appreciated the real meaning of it. Lee was anxious to have the boys employed, and by making them all members of the bodyguard he was achieving his object. At the same time, the bodyguard was evidently destined to be a non-fighting force. Lee's mention of a First Defence Battalion had hinted as much. And it was only right, too, that a senior should be placed in command. And who better than the cool-headed, resourceful Browne? Lee knew well enough that Stevens—the only other senior in the party—would prefer to be in the rank and file.

"I shall give you further instructions within the hour," said Nelson Lee, turning to go. "I have special work for the bodyguard—urgent work—so you will see to it, Browne, that all your men get into uniform."

Lee marched out, and Lord Dorrie more grinned.

"A bit of a bombshell in camp—eh?" he chuckled.

"We've got to get things moving, Dorrie," replied Lee. "Handforth is a good fellow, but it needs a level head in command. I thought of making Nipper captain, but Browne is the elder, and a senior, too. I don't think

another swift cut-in from the wing. Fiv all was fair enough.

ANOTHER AWAY WIN FOR ST. FRANK'S.

Every League match is of vital importance to St. Frank's now, if they are to keep in the running for championship honours, and by reason of a good victory against Rookwood, away from home, they are hot on the heels of St. Jim's. Jimmy Silver opened the scoring for Rookwood with a fast drive, but St. Frank's buckled to, and two smart goals by Nipper gave them an interval lead. The second half was barely five minutes' old, however, when Tommy Dodd's head steered a corner kick into the net, putting the Rookwooders on terms. The St. Frank's forwards besieged their opponents' goal, but not until half an hour had ticked away did they round off a hot attack. Reggie Pitt scored during a melee in the goalmouth. From then on until the end Rookwood strove hard to get an equaliser, but the St. Frank's defence held them at bay, and in the closing minutes Nipper made a brilliant run down the centre of the field, to finish with an unstoppable drive. Result, 4-2.

FULL RESULTS.

CLAREMONT .. 5	St. Jim's .. 5
Baxter (3),	D'Arcy (2),
St. Clair,	Merry, Blake,
Merivale.	Lowther.
ROOKWOOD .. 2	St. Frank's .. 4
Silver, Dodd.	Nipper (3) Pitt.
ABBOTSFORD .. 0	RIVER HOUSE .. 0
BAGSHOT .. 3	GREYFRIARS .. 1
RYLCOMBE G. S. 3	REDCLIFFE .. 3

Nipper will misunderstand. Handforth will probably create some noise to start with, but that'll be nothing new."

And Lee dismissed the matter at that.

Edward Oswald Handforth didn't dismiss it at all. He was bubbling over with white-hot indignation, and the glare he bestowed upon Browne was like a blast from a furnace.

"What have I done to deserve this, Brother Handforth?" asked Browne regretfully. "Why the necessity for this X-ray-like inspection?"

"You rotter!" burst out Handforth. "You Fifth Form bouncer! I expect you faked it all up with Mr. Lee in advance!"

Browne winced.

"A foul accusation!" he said stoutly. "A base and unjust suspicion! I can assure you, Brother Handforth, that until Mr. Lee gave forth the edict, I was absolutely ignorant of it. I step into your shoes with reluctance, and only from a sense of duty. I trust—although I am beset with many misgivings—that they will not be too large!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I might have expected it!" said Handforth bitterly. "Not that I'm going to let you take my place, blow you! Not likely! I'm captain, and you can jolly well eat coke!"

He stormed out amid a yell of laughter, and Church and McClure hurried after him.

"Chuck it, Handy!" protested Church. "It's no good kicking."

"Am I going to be pushed out like this?" snapped Edward Oswald.

"But Mr. Lee is commander-in-chief, and—"

"Yes, but the princess is on the throne!" retorted Handforth, with a glitter in his eyes. "The princess

appointed me captain of the bodyguard, and I don't see why Mr. Lee should come messing about and altering things. In fact, I won't stand it! I'm going straight to the princess!"

"Yes, but—"

"Rats!" snapped Handforth. "I'm going."

He strode off, and his chums stood there, helpless.

"What the dickens shall we do?" asked McClure anxiously.

"Nothing," said Church. "Let him go!"

"But he'll probably worm his way round the princess—"

"Not likely!" said Church dryly. "If I know anything of Mr. Lee, he'll only remain commander-in-chief on the strict understanding that he's in supreme control. He won't be dictated to by the princess, or by Ethelbert the Red, or by anybody else. Handy will only make himself look silly."

"Yes, you're right," said Mac slowly. "By Jupiter, I'm glad! Old Browne may be a long-winded ass, but he'll make a better captain than Handy. Life's been a bit too strenuous of late, with Handy roaring his orders into our ears every minute of the day."

In the meantime, Handforth was hastening into the Princess Mercia's quarters. He wasn't feeling quite so confident now, although his determination was as grim as ever. He remembered Irene & Co., and had an instinctive feeling that he would run into them. As a rule, he was only too eager to seek Irene's company, but just now he was heartily anxious to avoid her.

Naturally, he ran into her at once.

"Oh, Ted, we were hoping to see you!" cried the girl. "Isn't everything lovely? Everybody is free; Mr. Lee is in full command of things; and we're all ladies-in-waiting, instead of just hand-maidens."

"How do you like our court robes?" asked Doris Berkeley.

There were several of the other girls present too, and ordinarily Handforth would have been full of enthusiasm for their rich dresses. Previously they had been compelled to wear the severe garb of menials. But everything was changed now.

"I—I think you look ripping!" stammered Handforth in confusion. "But—but the fact is— Look here, you girls!" he burst out. "Mr. Lee has barged in, and he's appointed Browne of the Fifth as captain of the bodyguard, and I'm reduced to a lieutenant!"

The girls didn't seem particularly horror-stricken.

"Yes?" said Irene, as if she expected some more.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Isn't that bad enough?"

"I don't see why you should be upset," put in Ena bluntly. "Everybody knows that you were only a joke, Ted. Mr. Lee is naturally putting things on a proper footing, and you ought to think yourself lucky to be a lieutenant even."

The other girls were thinking very much the same thing, but they hardly cared to put it into such blunt words. But Ena had a sister's privilege.

"I didn't ask for your rot, sis!" growled Handforth, frowning. "I'm going straight to the princess, and I'm going to make her countermand the order! I'll show Mr. Lee whether he can bluff me out of the captaincy like this!"

"You say you're going to the princess?" asked Irene. "You're going to

dispute Mr. Lee's authority, just after he has been put in full control? Oh, Ted! You stand there and tell us that you're going to snivel?"

Handforth turned pale.

"Snivel?" he panted helplessly.

The leader of Study D suddenly saw his mission in its true light.

"By George, you are right!" he said huskily. "It would be like snivelling, wouldn't it? Thank goodness you pulled me up in time! Blow the princess! I'll keep the captaincy by another method—I'll challenge Browne to a scrap, and whack him!"

He raced off. He was full of his new plan. The girls had diplomatically shown him that he would be acting weakly in making any complaint, and he was startled at the narrowness of his escape. He came upon Church and McClure out in the courtyard, and they met him anxiously.

"What did she say?" asked Mac.

"What did who say?"

"The princess."

"I haven't seen the princess!" snapped Handforth. "Not likely! Do you think I'm going to run to her with my troubles? I've thought of a better plan. Browne's been appointed captain, but he'll never be able to keep the job if I knock him out in front of the whole bodyguard, will he?"

"Knock him out?" gasped Church.

"Yes," said Handforth, with relish. "I'm going to challenge him to a fight, smash him to pulp, and then continue as captain! By right of conquest, my sons! It's the rule in this country, and even Mr. Lee can't dispute it!"

His chums looked at him aghast.

"But Browne will pulverise you!" said Church breathlessly.

"He'll eat you up!" yelled McClure. "He'll reduce you to jelly! Browne's the best boxer in the Fifth, champion of the Ancient House—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "We're not at St. Frank's now; we're in Northestria. We're in the Middle Ages! And if I beat my opponent in fair combat, I get the job! That's the understood rule."

He strode into the quarters of the bodyguard, leaving his chums feeling strangely weak. Handforth's confidence in himself was supreme. But he wasn't quite prepared for William Napoleon Browne's attitude.

"Oh, there you are!" said Handforth curtly, as he spotted the new captain. "I want a word with you, Browne."

The lanky Fifth Former looked round mildly.

"Say on, Brother Handforth," he urged. "I am all attention."

"Mr. Lee has appointed you captain, but I don't agree to it," said Edward Oswald. "In this country, such questions are settled by combat. So I challenge you here and now! The winner to be captain of the bodyguard!"

"Splendid!" said Browne promptly.

"Agreed, brother!"

Handforth started.

"You—you'll fight?" he asked, staring.

"Assuredly!" replied Browne. "What alternative is there? I have been challenged, and I must accept. Let the combat be joined, Brother Handforth! I am at your service entirely."

The other fellows crowded round, half amused and half excited.

"By George!" exclaimed Handforth.

"You're a sport, Browne!"

Now a fight seemed inevitable, he wasn't at all sure that he had done the right thing. Browne's readiness to enter battle was rather alarming.

"It'll have to be bare hands," said Handforth. "There's aren't any gloves here—"

"Gloves?" repeated Browne, staring. "Gloves? Did I hear aright? Are you suggesting, brother, that this is to be a fight with fists? A mere brawl?"

Handforth simply looked at him.

"What else?" he asked, at length.

"What else?" said Browne, in a firm voice. "Well, well! You amaze me, Brother Handforth! It takes a great deal to disconcert a Browne, but in this instance I am fairly rocking on my pivot. We are in Northestria, and we must do as the Northestrians do. You have challenged me to a combat, and honour compels me to accept. And in this country a combat means a fight to the death!"

"Death!" gasped Handforth.

Browne waved his hand to the spiked clubs and lances hanging on the wall, and the other fellows began to grin.

"Death!" said the Fifth Former. "I will leave the choice to you, brother. Shall we mount our steeds and fight this combat with lances? Or shall we select spiked clubs, and see which one of us can get in the first death-blow? The winner, naturally, becomes captain. Choose, Brother Handforth—lance or club! I am entirely indifferent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were by no means deceived by the gravity of Browne's tone. And Handforth turned crimson as he realised that his leg was being pulled again.

"You—you silly Fifth Form fat-head!" he roared.

"I assure you, Brother Handforth, that—"

"You don't mean to fight at all!" hooted Handforth. "You're just trying to be funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chorus of laughter was so uproarious that Edward Oswald was only too glad to escape. Quite privately, he wasn't exactly sorry that the fight was off. And his only course was to accept the inevitable.

Marching Orders!

NELSON LEE was looking rather grim as he emerged from the council of the army chiefs. He had termed it such, but it was really nothing of the kind—as he had soon discovered.

For the Northestrian army was a myth.

With the exception of the princess' bodyguard there were no national soldiers whatever. The various feudal lords maintained their own bodies of troopers and archers, but these could scarcely be called an army. The majority of them were merely kept for the sake of appearance—to make an impressive show when their masters travelled. Scattered in various parts of the country were a few fortresses, each with its own garrison, but they were mostly run on comic opera lines.

Nelson Lee had discovered everything after a very short consultation with the various overlords. His first impression had been correct. These people were the victims of prosperity and apathy. For centuries they had lived in peace, without any menace to necessitate formation of a national army. In a word, Northestria was utterly and absolutely unprepared for war.

There was no excuse for the lethargy of the country. The people had had warnings enough. For years they had known of the activities in Gothland. For years the Gothlanders had boasted their intention to conquer

their former masters. And since Kasker the Grim had assumed control, the Northestrians had known full well that Gothland was becoming an armed camp, preparing for The Day. And still they had gone on in the same old, slow-moving manner—blind and deaf to the threatened danger.

Nelson Lee was seriously perturbed. True, he had made these feudal lords thoroughly understand the position. He had left that council in a ferment, and the hitherto complacent overlords were now in a state of agitated concern. Their eyes were fully open to the peril. Nelson Lee's personality had startled them, and they were all shocked into action.

"By glory! You've started with a bang, old man," commented Lord Dorrmore dryly. "You've made these lackadaisical beggars sit up with a vengeance!"

Lee nodded. "I meant to make them sit up," he replied grimly. "Before long they'll be jumping, too. If I'm to be in command of this national defence campaign, I'll do it thoroughly or not at all. Dorrrie, there's danger—great danger. I didn't exaggerate a thing. Those Gothlanders mean to sweep into this country and commit the most horrible massacres—just as their ancestors did in Europe over a thousand years ago. And if they are to be kept out, Northestria will have to shake itself up and put on its fighting kit."

Lord Dorrmore beamed with delight. "What a man you are for action, Lee!" he said admiringly. "Gad, when you get going, there's no rest for anybody."

But Nelson Lee was not listening. His mind was full of plans for organising the people. He had accepted his position seriously, and he meant to carry out his plans for the defence of the country. Indeed, he foresaw that the very safety of his own party depended upon this. For the great detective was under no misapprehension. If Kasker's hordes swept across the lake, and invaded Northestria, the St. Frank's party would be the first to fall under the swords of the conquerors. That recent raid into Gothland had made Kasker a bitter enemy, and the brute would exact a terrible revenge if he only got the chance.

So Nelson Lee's motives were not entirely actuated by his concern for Princess Mercia's subjects. He had the lives of his own party to think of—and every move that he made now was as much on their behalf as on the behalf of Northestria.

Lee's personality was never so forceful as during a crisis like this. Normally, he was quiet and strong—always a man of power and resource—a man to compel attention. But when an occasion of this sort arose, his personality was electric; every one of those Northestrian feudal lords had felt it. Every man of influence in the country was staggered and aghast at Lee's exhibition of command. That he was the right man in the right place was obvious.

He paused in the courtyard, and saw that the bodyguard had turned out in full array; some had donned armour—but, in the main, the bodyguard uniforms had proved too large, and the boys were mostly in the ordinary clothes.

"This is fortunate," said Lee, as he strode up. "I have work for you youngsters, and I might as well give you your orders now. You will divide yourselves into three parties, each under an officer."

Browne saluted.

"It shall be done, sir," he said

promptly. "And then whither away? I take it that we are to be sent forth into the land on a recruiting stunt?"

"A shrewd guess, Browne—and a correct one," replied Lee, nodding. "Yes, that is my exact intention. Mounted, you are to sweep through every town and village, and do your utmost to arouse the populace. Word has already flown round, and the people will be partially prepared. Your mission will be to send recruits to the capital, where an immense training camp will be organised immediately."

"That's a great idea, gov'nor," said Nipper eagerly. "I think we ought to rope in thousands of men."

"You can trust us to use our best eloquence, sir," declared Browne. "One party will set forth under Brother Nipper, another under Brother Handforth, and the third under my own command. We will sweep the country."

"I shall give orders for your horses to be selected at once," nodded Lee. "You had better have a hearty meal, and be ready for the road within an hour. Browne, you will attend my quarters with your two lieutenants as soon as possible, and three routes will be prepared for you, with full instructions. Native riders will precede you in each case, and prepare accommodation for you. The actual recruiting methods I will leave to you. You thoroughly understand—you must make the people appreciate the danger! The country has got to be aroused, and there is not a minute to be lost."

Nelson Lee's methods were brisk and cut-and-dried. It was an excellent plan to send out the St. Frank's fellows on such a mission, for all Northestria was aroused by the tale of the raid into Gothland. These visitors within the gates were sure of a welcome everywhere. The country was just arousing itself, as though from a long, long sleep. The St. Frank's fellows could be trusted to complete this work of waking up the people. But Lee fully intended to send out other recruiting parties, too—he would have every one of these feudal lords acting as his agent, arousing their own subjects. But it would be better for the boys to sweep through the country in advance.

Handforth and the others could be trusted to startle the populace, and to set them an example of energetic activity. Thousands of men were needed, and the sooner they received some sort of training, the better. Indeed, Lee was filled with doubts, even as it was, for he suspected that Kasker would not delay for long. And it would never do to rely upon the Northestrians alone.

Nelson Lee had other ideas in mind.

But his one great object was to prepare as many defences as possible. Kasker the Grim was making all his own plans on the assumption that his armies would descend upon a helpless nation. If only Nelson Lee had time, he would give the Gothlanders the surprise of their lives.

Before twenty-four hours were over, Northestria would be aflame with enthusiasm, and already there was only one cry spreading throughout the land.

To arms!

Ready for War!

THE first-fruits of the recruiting campaign were evident that very day. William Napoleon Browne, with all his usual forcefulness, had entered heart and soul into the enterprise, and he had commenced operations on the capital itself. In Dunstane, the people were

already seething with subdued excitement. They were in close touch with the happenings at the Court, and when the St. Frank's fellows galloped through the streets, shouting their war-cry, there were many hundreds of men who instantly responded.

Out in the country towns and villages, the people were still sleepy and indifferent. Only the faintest ripples of the coming excitement had reached them, and they still lived on in their usual slow-going fashion. But here, in the capital, the population was thoroughly awakened.

And men fairly stormed the Royal Castle, eager to be accepted as soldiers. At first, old Ethelbert the Red was bewildered and confused. As chief adviser to the princess, he was practically the ruler of this land, and this abrupt upheaval almost bowled him over. But Nelson Lee's calm presence had its effect, and in a short time Ethelbert was catching the enthusiasm.

A great camp was organised outside the town—not far distant from the quiet valley where the wrecked airship lay sprawled over the meadows. Men were accepted as fast as they presented themselves, and the camp grew and grew.

Not only Nelson Lee, but Lord Dorrmore and Captain Waring were kept constantly busy. They introduced modern methods, and this recruiting camp was of such character that the natives were startled and amazed. Ethelbert the Red was turning out to be a thoroughly decent sort—now that he was fully convinced that the airship party could be trusted. He realized the danger to his country, and entered into the spirit of the great campaign with all his heart and soul. More than anybody else, perhaps, he appreciated the valuable work that these strangers were doing.

As for the three parties of St. Frank's fellows, their own success was gratifying. By the end of the second day, all roads to the capital were thronged with excited men—farmers, labourers, simple tradesmen, and serfs. Men were pouring in continuously, in converging streams. Never had Northestria known such exciting times as these.

Days could only be reckoned by actual time, for here, in this strange Arctic oasis, there was no darkness. During such a crisis as this, everlasting light was a wonderful advantage. Never for a single minute was the activity held up. Nelson Lee and his chief helpers were never sleeping at one and the same time—there was always somebody in charge to keep everything moving.

The St. Frank's fellows moved from village to village, and from town to town, covering every road in the land. And wherever they went, they were received with shouts of enthusiasm, and by great crowds. Word had gone on ahead, and in a surprisingly short time Northestria was aflame from border to border.

The boys' task was not so difficult, after all. Everywhere, the people were ready to respond to the call to arms. They only lacked initiative, but this was readily instilled into them by the energetic schoolboys. It was a strange situation, in all truth—that these youngsters should be able to arouse grown men into a national uprising in defence of their young princess and her threatened country.

Yet, after all, it was not so very astonishing. For centuries these people had known no warfare. The present

generation hardly grasped what it could mean. But Browne and Nipper and Handforth and their companions left them in no doubt.

An invasion was threatened, and the fair Mercia was in peril. This fact alone was enough to influence the imagination of the populace. The princess was beloved throughout the land, and the men were willing to rush to her defence.

And while this call to arms was sounding its clarion note, the activity round the capital was assuming immense proportions. Nelson Lee was quite certain that Kassker would try to keep in touch with Northestrian news, and that he had spies on this side, ready to carry word across the lake.

But Lee had no intention of Kassker learning of the great change that had come about. For such a thing would be fatal. Once the Gothlanders knew of this warlike activity, they would start their invasion without delay, even if they were not fully prepared.

So stringent measures were taken to keep the secret.

Vessels were sent out in a string, all down the lake, and not a boat of any description was allowed to pass out beyond the watchful fleet. They formed a complete barrier, and many harmless-looking craft were stopped and sent back—the majority of them carrying spies. Nothing was allowed to penetrate these outposts, and thus Kassker the Grim got no word of the great changes that were being wrought at Northestria.

The very absence of news was significant, however. Until now the Gothlander spies had come and gone as they had pleased, for things had been very lax. Suddenly there was silence. Kassker received no reports, and when fresh spies were sent out to cross the lake, they returned with news that they had been turned back. Northestrian vessels had refused to allow them to proceed.

So, although Kassker knew nothing of the actual truth, he suspected much, and he guessed—correctly enough—that the strangers of the airship were responsible for all these mysterious goings-on.

He hastened his plans for the invasion, but not to such an extent as he would have hastened them if he had known the actual truth. And every hour, every minute, was of value.

Northestria was undergoing a vast transformation.

Not only in the capital, but all down the lake, camps were being formed, and men were being turned into soldiers.

And there were other activities, too.

Captain Waring was hard at work on the airship with his engineers, and close by there was feverish activity with hosts of carpenters and wheelwrights. Nelson Lee's hand was at the bottom of all this, for he had seen many possibilities in the crippled dirigible.

The ill-fated Titan was a wreck—such a wreck, indeed, that there was no hope of ever getting her into the air again. But when she had crashed, the two main gondolas had escaped almost intact.

Captain Waring had brought his craft down with masterly skill. The stern had been shattered to fragments, it is true, but the vital parts of the airship—the wonderful engines—had not been harmed.

And those two gondolas were being put to a novel use.

Attached to the airship, they were now utterly useless. But what if they could be cut free and converted? Each gondola was a huge engine-room—a structure of metal, containing enormously powerful motors. The great air propellers were unharmed, and Nelson Lee had evolved a shrewd scheme.

At Lee's instigation, Captain Waring had designed a weird and wonderful chassis for each gondola. These chassis were constructed from the metal girders of the great body. Many of the girders were twisted and crumpled, but others were intact.

And while the engineers worked hard on these designs, Northestrian wheelwrights were busy in another direction. Great wooden wheels were made—broad wheels, light in construction, and twenty feet in diameter. They were made this size so that they could travel over rough country with impunity.

As an engineering feat the job was a remarkable one.

Each of those two gondolas was mounted upon the improvised chassis and the wheels were fitted. And those gondolas, instead of being useless, were now turned into engines of war.

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"The more noise they make, the better," said Nelson Lee, with satisfaction. "By Jove, Dorrie, I hoped they would be effective, but Waring has done his work famously. These monsters are marvellous."

"They'd scare any modern troops, let alone these medieval fellows," declared Lord Dorrinore, nodding. "A nice little surprise-package for old Kassker, by gad! I can see his invad'n' hosts doin' a pretty quick bunk!"

The tanks were indeed terrifying. They no longer looked like airship gondolas. Mounted on their fantastic chassis, and with such great wheels, they were between twenty and thirty feet high. They were propelled by means of the air propellers at the rear, and these were protected by special guards. A wicked-looking machine-gun was projecting from the nose of each craft.

These monstrosities, charging into an army of foot soldiers, were calculated to strike terror. And they were not the only results of Lee's ingenuity.

Another army of men were at work on the lake shore. Two of the fastest Northestrian ships—comparatively small vessels—were being fitted with engines. These engines had been taken from the smashed whippet aeroplanes.

The airship had carried four such aeroplanes, and two of them were perfectly intact, and were to be used, later on, for scouting purposes. But as it was impossible to repair the wrecked machines, Lee was using their engines.

It didn't matter very much about speed. The boats would be faster than any of the Gothland craft, in any case, and those aero-engines would create a terrific din. With the motor-boat, they would comprise the Northestrian navy.

A mixture of the Middle Ages and the latest modern inventions!

It seemed that the immediate future would be full of excitement and thrills!

(Make sure you don't miss next week's big-thrill chapters. The Gothlanders are on the attack! Order your GEM early.)

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