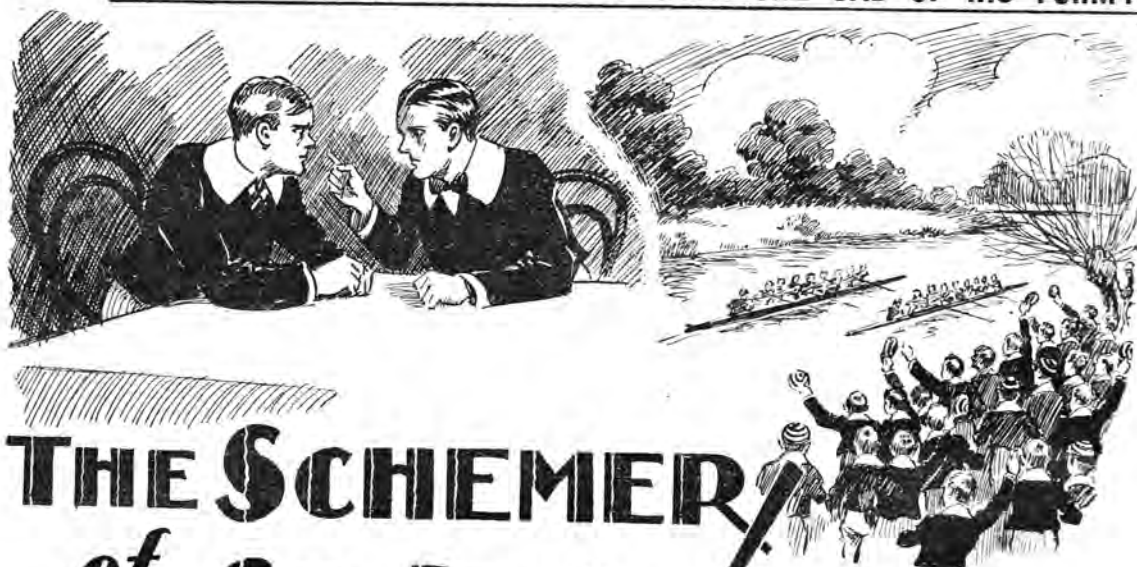


J. Leddison St. John
STAR SCHOOL STORIES TO SUIT EVERY BOY—INSIDE.

The GEM ^{2d}





THE SCHEMER of ST. JIM'S!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Sudden Alarm!

TOM MERRY came into the School House at St. Jim's with a cricket bat under his arm, and a very cheerful expression upon his ruddy face.

Blake of the Fourth was standing in the doorway, looking anxiously out into the old quad.

"Seen Gussy?" he asked, as Tom Merry came in.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, he wasn't at the nets."

Jack Blake grunted.

"I know he wasn't. He's gone down to Rylecombe, and I know he'll be in late."

"Better get in," said Tom Merry. "It's calling over now, and old Selby's taking the roll. There'll be trouble if you don't answer up to your name."

"I'm waiting for Gussy. I told him to buck up. The ass has got an idea of getting up at five and going down for an early bathe. I told him I'd call him—if I woke up—but he would go down and get an alarm clock. Old Bunn's got a special line in American alarm clocks, and Gussy's gone for one."

Monty Lowther and Manners of the Shell hurried in from the quad and caught Tom Merry, one by either arm.

"Come on, you'll be late."

"Buck up, Tommy!"

"Hold on," said Tom Merry. "D'Arcy hasn't come in yet."

"Blow D'Arcy!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "Old Selby's seeing red—Wally told me so. No need for us to get lines, if Gussy does. Come on."

"But, I say—"

"Bosh! Come on! Help him along, Manners, old man!"

"What-ho!" said Manners.

And the chums of the Shell propelled Tom Merry between them in the direction of Big Hall. The Terrible Three disappeared, and Jack Blake

remained alone at the doorway. Blake was getting exasperated. He did not want to go in without D'Arcy, and he did not want to get lines from Selby.

Suddenly, however, a silk hat and an eyeglass came into view at the school gates. They were followed by the rest of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. He was running, and he raced on across the quad to the School House.

"Oh, here you are!" growled Blake, as he came up.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy. "Am I late?"

"Yes."

"Sowwy, deah boy. I've been wuain' like anythin'."

"Come on!"

"Wait a minute, deah boy, I'm out of breathe! I trust I am not vewy late. Have you been waitin' for me?"

"Yes, ass!" roared Blake. "Come on!"

"I am weally sowwy. But old Bunn has been showin' me how to work the alarm clock, Blake. It's a weally wipin' one, and fwithfully cheap—only five shillings, you know."

"Are you coming in?"

"Certainly, deah boy. Will you look at the clock? I've got it in my pocket. It's not a big one, but it makes a feahful wuw when it goes off. It's set now, and if you like, I'll show you—"

"Will you come in?" shrieked Blake, in a frenzy. "Old Selby's taking call-over, and he's started already."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Blake grasped him by the arm, and started him towards Big Hall, and Arthur Augustus had to run with him, for Blake's grip was like iron. But he expostulated.

"Weally, Blake, you are wumplin' my jacket!"

"I'll rumple your features, if you don't buck up, you ass!"

"I wessue to have my featuahs wumped. Pway don't huwvy me like this! It thwows me into quite a fluttah!"

"Come on!" roared Blake.

"Weally—oh!"

Darrell, the prefect, was closing the big oaken door from inside. Blake bumped Arthur Augustus against the door, and it flew open again. There was a surprised exclamation from Darrell, and he glared at the juniors as they came in.

"You young sweeps—"

"Sorry, Darrell," gasped Blake.

"Don't want to be late, you know."

"Awfully sowwy, deah boy!"

Darrell laughed.

"Get in, you young rascals!"

And Blake and D'Arcy hurried to their places in the Fourth.

Mr. Selby was calling over the roll, and he glanced up angrily at the sound of footsteps interrupting him. Then he went on reading the names, frowningly.

"Blake!" rapped out the sharp, unpleasant tones of the Third Form master.

"Adsum!"

Blake was only just in time. Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket. The alarm clock which had nearly caused him to be late for calling over was there, and Arthur Augustus was wondering if the bump on the Hall door had damaged it.

"Burton!"

"Adsum!"

"Parker!"

"Adsum!"

"D'Arcy!"

"A—— Bai Jove!"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

"Gweat Scott!"

Buz-z-z-z-z-z!

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Kildare.

Mr. Selby jumped up.

"What—what—how dare you!" he exclaimed. "What is that noise? Who has dared to play this trick at calling over?"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

"My only nat!" gasped Blake. "It's Gussy's alarm clock!"

"Bai Jove! Oh!"

—A RIPPING LONG STORY OF THE ST. JIM'S RIVALS OF THE RIVER.

Arthur Augustus groped wildly in his pocket. The clock had started, and seemed determined to keep on its startling performance. The clock was small, but it was noisy enough. The raucous buzzing and jarring of the American alarm rang through the quiet Hall. Fellows craned their necks from all sides to see what the matter was.

"What is it?"

"What's the row?"

"It's Gussy!"

"Stop it, you ass!" roared Blake.

"I-I can't!" gasped D'Arcy, grappling wildly with the alarm clock. "It—it won't stop! There's a catch, or somethin' or othah to stop it, you know, but—"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

"Gweat Scott! I'm sowwy, sir—"

Mr. Selby strode down the Hall, his face like thunder.

"D'Arcy! So it is you?"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

"Stop that at once!" shouted Mr. Selby.

Buz-z-z-z-z!

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I—I— Bai Jove! It won't stop, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows were yelling with laughter. The sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face as he wrestled with the cheap alarm clock was quite a study.

Mr. Selby's face was a study, too, but of a different kind.

"How dare you, D'Arcy! How dare you bring an alarm clock into Hall!" he shouted.

"Weally, sir—"

"Go away at once! Take that dreadful contrivance away—and take a hundred lines!"

"Oh, sir—"

"Go!" shouted Mr. Selby.

"Get out, you young ass!" muttered Kildare, pushing D'Arcy towards the door.

"Weally, Kildare—"

Kildare grasped the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder and marched him out, and closed the door upon him. Faintly through the closed door the whir and buzz of the alarm clock came to the ears of the convulsed St. Jim's fellows.

Buz-z-z-z-z!

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy Gets Annoyed!

"HA ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seated in Study No. 6 with an alarm clock on the table before him when the fellows came up after calling over.

The clock was silent now. The swell of St. Jim's had not succeeded in stopping it, but it was run down.

D'Arcy looked indignantly at the grinning faces in the doorway. He did not seem to see anything funny in the matter at all.

"Pway don't cackle, you silly asses!" he exclaimed. "It is a vewy wemarkable thing that that wotten clock should go off like that. There is no cause what-evah for wibald mewwiment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a jolly good clock, you know. That alarm would wake anybody up if it went off at the right time—"

"It would wake the dead, I should think!" grinned Tom Merry. "But it's an American clock, my son, and they're all guaranteed not to go off at the right time."

"Wats! I have discovered how to set it now, and how to stop it. These things only need lookin' into," said

D'Arcy. "I can work it now, like anythin'. It will wake me up at half-past five in the morning—"

"And the rest of the school, too, I expect," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, it's a good ideah to wake up early on summaah mornings," said D'Arcy. "You chaps ought to turn out early for wovin' pwactice if you're thinkin' of beatin' the New House eight next week. If I were boatin' skippah I should keep you up to the mark."

"I am keeping them up to the mark, you ass!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "We shall beat the New House boat as easily as rolling off a form."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "Why, I shall be in the boat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall I call you fellows at half-past five?" asked D'Arcy. "I'm goin' down for an early bathe, and if you like to come—"

"Oh, don't trouble!" grinned Manners. "The rising-bell is good enough for us. I wish you joy of that alarm clock in the Fourth Form dorm!"

And the Terrible Three went on their way laughing. Blake, Herries, and Digby cast far from pleasant looks at the alarm clock as they came in to do their preparation. They seemed to

Crooke by name and crooked by nature—that's Gerald Crooke, the black sheep of the Shell Form at St. Jim's. But Crooke learns to his sorrow that courage as well as cunning is necessary in one who chooses the way of the transgressor!

think that it might go off again at any moment.

"Is that thing safe?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, fathead! It's all wight," said D'Arcy. "I'll show you how to work it."

"Hold on! Don't start that awful thing here!"

"You wind up this," explained D'Arcy, unheeding; and there was a loud creaking as he wound up the alarm. "And if you don't want the alarm to go off you pwess this catch, and it holds the stwukah back, you know. Sometimes the catch falls out of place, but that is only to be expected in an American clock, of course. Now, I—"

Whir-r-r-r-r! Buz-z-z-z-z!

"Bai Jove!"

"Stop it!" yelled Herries.

"The—the catch won't work!"

"Take it away, then!" roared Blake.

"You ass!"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

Blake jumped towards his cricket bat in the corner of the study, and then made a rush at the alarm clock. If the cricket bat had smitten that triumph of American inventive genius, certainly the alarm would never be sounded again. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy snatched it up just in time.

"Blake, you ass—"

"Take it away, or—"

Blake poked at the alarm clock with the end of the bat and succeeded in poking Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's fancy waistcoat, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a howl.

"You ass! Keep off!"

Blake made another thrust, and D'Arcy dodged out of the study in haste. Blake followed him into the passage, and the swell of St. Jim's fled to the dormitory. There he succeeded in stilling the raucous voice of the alarm clock.

Blake growled as he settled down to his preparation. Arthur Augustus came back a little later with an expression of the most lofty dignity upon his aristocratic face. He sat down to his preparation in lofty silence.

Blake, Herries, and Digby did not seem to observe that there was anything the matter.

The four juniors worked away busily, and Blake yawned at last and rose.

"That's done!" he said. "How's the alarm clock getting on, Gussy?"

D'Arcy put his eyeglass into his eye and looked at Blake.

"The alarm clock is getting on all wight, Blake," he replied. "I wegard you as a widiculous ass! The clock is simply wippin'! You have only to lay it on its side, and then the catch works all wight."

Blake chuckled.

"You'd better lay it on its side to-morrow morning, then," he remarked. "If that alarm starts at half-past five you'll get massacred by the Fourth."

"Wats!"

"We'd better have a jaw to Tom Merry about this boat," said Herries, in a thoughtful way.

"Figgins & Co. are in great form," Blake remarked. "They're going out to practice regularly. Of course, we shall beat them."

"Tom Merry hasn't decided on number eight yet," said Digby. "I should say Kangaroo or Reilly, myself. I hear that Crooke of the Shell wants the place."

Blake sniffed.

"Crooke's no good. Smoking cigarettes in the box-room is more in his line than rowing in a House race."

"Yaas, wathah! I should certainly keep Cwooke out. He's the biggest wottah in the coll since Levison's gone away."

"Thank you!" said a voice at the door.

Crooke of the Shell looked in with a very unpleasant expression upon his face. He had been passing the open door, and perhaps he had overheard by accident—though Crooke very frequently did overhear things, whether by accident or not.

"It's like you to talk about a chap behind his back," said Crooke, with a sneer.

Arthur Augustus turned crimson, and rose to his feet. He jammed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye and bestowed a glare upon the Shell fellow which really ought to have withered him to ashes on the spot. But Crooke was a hard case, and he did not look withered at all.

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy, in measured tones. "Do you mean to imply that I talk about any fellow behind his beastly back?"

"Well, I heard you!"

"I have said nothin' that I will not repeat to your face. You were Levison's fwind while he was here, and now he is gone you are the biggest wottah left in the school," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy deliberately, "and if Tom Mewwy should put you in the cwev for the wace I should wesign."

Crooke sneered.

"That wouldn't be much loss," he said. "It's only rotten favouritism that

makes Tom Merry put his own friends in."

"That's a lie, in plain English!" said Blake. "Do you see that door, Crooke? Do you prefer that or the window as a way out?"

"I can tell you!"

"Rats! We don't want to talk to you!" said Blake scornfully. "You've got about as much chance of getting into the junior eight as a Second Form fag has. You're no good. Go and eat coke, or smoke in the box-room, you cad!"

Crooke clenched his hands.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as an uttah wottah, Cwooke, and if you do not immediately wetiah fwom this study, I shall hurl you into the passage!"

"You tailor's dummy—" began Crooke wrathfully.

"I wefuse to be called a tailor's dummy!" Arthur Augustus came round the table and pushed back his cuffs. "Are you goin', Cwooke?"

Crooke glared at D'Arcy from his extra height of six inches or so.

"No, I am not going!" he said.

"Bai Jove!—Then I shall have no resource but to chuck you out, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy laid violent hands upon the cad of the Shell.

Crooke struck out, and D'Arcy was apparently not expecting that, for he sat down upon the floor of the study with a bump, and gasped:

"Ow!"

Crooke whipped out of the study and vanished along the passage. Arthur Augustus, gasping for breath, jumped up.

"Bai Jove! The awful blightah has had the extraordinaary cheek to stwike me!" he exclaimed, in astonishment and anger. "I will give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at, Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a silly ass, Blake. There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Digby. You are a silliah ass than Blake! You are anothah, Hewwies! I am goin' to look for Cwooke!"

And Arthur Augustus quitted the study on the warpath. But Crooke was not to be found, and a quarter of an hour later Arthur Augustus came back to finish his preparation, and the cad of the Shell had not received that "feahful thwashing!"

CHAPTER 3.

Crooke Means Business!

TOM MERRY laid down his pen and jerked his chair back from the table. He jerked the table in doing so and Manners gave a terrible howl.

Two big blots had dropped from his pen, and they adorned the sheet he was engaged upon.

Manners pride himself upon the neatness and clearness of his exercises, and he bestowed a glare upon his chum.

"You ass! Look what you've done!" he growled. "You've made me spill ink on my paper, you ass!"

"Never mind!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's a waste, but there's lots of ink: we had a new bottle to-day."

"You—you ass!"

"About the eight!"

"Blow the eight!" said Manners. "I shall have to erase this somehow. I—"

"About the eight," resumed Tom Merry calmly.

"Wait till I've done this rotten German!" growled Monty Lowther. "I can't write German and talk boats at the same time!"

"Then chuck the German!" said Tom Merry. "About the eight—I don't know about the eighth man, and we ought to settle it as we're rowing with Figgins & Co. next week. Figgins has got a good crew—Kerr, Wynn, Thompson, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, and Pratt. I've seen them at practice, and they are good!"

"Und marmobilder stehn und sehn mich an!" mumbled Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther!"

"Finished!" said Lowther, throwing down his pen. "I—"

There was another howl from Manners. He had erased two blots, and a spurt of ink from Lowther's pen bestowed upon him three new ones.

"You awful ass!" roared Manners.

"Oh, sorry! About the eight!"

"Bust the eight!" said Manners, in a frenzy. "I can't take in a sheet of erasures to old Linton. I shall have to do this again."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Well, do it quietly," he suggested.

"No need to make a row about it."

"You—you—you—"

"About the eight," said Tom Merry.

"There's Kangy, and there's Reilly, and there's also Bernard Glyn. They're all good—"

The door opened, and Crooke came in. The Terrible Three looked at him.

The Shell fellow looked as if he were in a hurry. He closed the door behind him and nodded coolly to the three.

"Do they all come in without knocking in the casual ward you were brought up in, Crooke?" asked Lowther.

Crooke did not reply to the question.

"I want to see you, Tom Merry!" he began.

"Well, I'm on view," said Tom Merry. "Take a good look, and go!"

"It's about the eight."

"What on earth does the eight matter to you?" demanded the captain of the Shell, in surprise. "You don't mean to say that you're taking an interest in sports, Crooke. We shall hear of your playing cricket next!"

"Blow cricket! I can row—"

"Crabs caught in any number at the shortest notice!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Crooke scowled.

"I can row," he repeated; "and I want to row in the junior eight!"

The Terrible Three stared at him.

Then Monty Lowther burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke gave him a glare.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"Aren't you joking?"

"No, I'm not!"

"My mistake—I thought you were," said Lowther blandly. "I take that laugh back, then. I certainly thought you were trying to be funny."

"I want to row in the eight!" said Crooke, looking at Tom Merry. "The fellows up and down the House say that you don't want any but your personal friends in the crew—"

Tom Merry flushed.

"I suppose the fellows up and down the House are yourself and Mellish?" he remarked. "I don't suppose anybody else would say anything so cadish."

"Well, it looks it!" said Crooke.

"The fellows you've selected are all your own personal friends."

"That's because the fellows I know are all decent!" said Tom Merry. "I should select a fellow I was on fighting terms with if he could row. But we've got to get the best oars we can to beat the New House."

"You haven't taken the trouble to see what I can do!"

"I'm willing to see what you can do, if you like to turn up to boating practice," said Tom Merry. "You've never seemed to take to it before. And I certainly shouldn't risk putting you in the eight all of a sudden like this."

"Well, I want to be in the eight!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Do you mean to say that there's no chance for me, and that you won't put me in under any conditions?" asked Crooke savagely.

Tom Merry nodded.

"You've got it!" he said. "If you like to come down to boat practice, and I should see that you're quite a remarkable oar, I might think of it. But I don't expect anything of the sort."

"I'll come down to practice fast enough if you're willing to give me a chance!" said Crooke. "I want to take up rowing seriously this summer. I'll be down on the river with you before brekker to-morrow morning."

"Quite welcome!" said Tom Merry.

"But I may as well say plainly that I don't think there's any chance for you. I've got a better crew without you. Blessed if I can understand your turning over a new leaf like this all of a sudden. You've never gone in for sports of any kind, and you've always grumbled at compulsory cricket."

"I don't care for cricket; but I want to row."

"Well, come down to-morrow morning, and I'll see what you can do!" said Tom Merry. "If you mean business, I'm glad to see you taking up something better than smoking and playing nap for pennies, anyway!"

"I'll be there," said Crooke. "And if you don't give me a chance, I warn you that there'll be trouble."

"Oh, shut up!"

Crooke left the study, and slammed the door behind him. The Terrible Three looked at one another in surprise.

"Blessed if I catch on to this!" said Tom Merry, in wonder. "This is quite a new line for Crooke to take up. I don't savvy at all."

And Manners and Lowther agreed that they didn't savvy, either. Certainly, rowing was not in Crooke's line. Any kind of manly sport was disliked by Crooke, Mellish, and Levison, and their set, as a rule.

Crooke went down the passage frowning. He stopped at Mellish's study in the Fourth Form passage, and went in.

Mellish and Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth were there, and Lumley-Lumley had just finished his preparation.

He rose as Crooke came in.

Time had been when Lumley-Lumley and Crooke and Mellish had been birds of a feather. That time was past, so far as Lumley-Lumley was concerned.

When Crooke came to the study now, Lumley-Lumley generally got out of it, as he now proceeded to do. Crooke watched him with a scowl as he went. As Lumley-Lumley closed the study door, Crooke turned to Mellish, who was grinning.

"Got into the eight?" asked Mellish.

Crooke knitted his brows darkly.

"No!" he replied. "But I'm going to get in, and I want you to help me."

"How on earth can I help you?" said Mellish, in surprise. "I've got nothing to do with the eight. Tom Merry's junior captain of the boats, and he's not likely to listen to advice from me."

"I don't mean that, ass! Tom Merry's as good as said that there's no chance for me. But I'm going to row."

"Well, I wish you luck! But I don't think you'll get into the eight, all the same," said Mellish, with a grin.

"You owe me a little sum, Mellish," said Crooke quietly.

"What on earth's that got to do with it?"

"You can't settle up?"

"You know I can't!" said Mellish, in alarm. "You knew that jolly well when you lent me the money. Chaps who have millionaire paters must expect to part with a little cash. You don't mean to say that you're short of tin?"

"Oh, no! I want you to help me in this matter, that's all."

"How can I help you?" said Mellish, with growing uneasiness. "Look here, I've had enough of being dragged into trouble when Levison was here, and I don't want—"

"It's not a question of what you want, but of what I want," said Crooke coolly. "You've sponged on me for a long time,

CHAPTER 4.

A Little Joke on Gussy!

KILDARE saw the School House juniors off to their dormitories that night, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, before he began to un-set his alarm clock at half-past five.

The Terrible Three looked into the dormitory on their way to their own quarters.

Arthur Augustus was winding the alarm.

"Going strong?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"It is goin' all wight," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I shall be up at half-past five in the mornin', deah boys, and if you care to come down and bathe, I'd give you a call."

a fellow has to be economical when his pocket-money is cut down in a howwid dwastic way like mine. What with bein' heavily taxed, my patah has made a fuss about sendin' me extiwa money. I wote to him for a fivah yestahday, and he sent me a postal ordah for ten shillings. I wegard it as wotten!"

Arthur Augustus extracted a postal order from his jacket pocket, and held it up to the general contempt.

"Look at that! A wotten postal ordah for ten shillings is simply insult added to injuwry!"

"Not worth acceptin'!" suggested Reilly.

"Quite wight, deah boy!"

"Faith, then give it to me! I'll accept it!" said Reilly generously. "I'll take the insult and the postal order all together, if you like."



Buz-z-z-z-z-z! As the raucous buzzing of an alarm clock rang through the Hall, fellows looked at Arthur Augustus from all sides. D'Arcy groped wildly in his pocket. "My only hat!" gasped Blake. "It's Gussy's alarm clock!" "What is that noise?" shouted Mr. Selby. "Who has dared to play this trick at calling-over?"

and now I want you to help me. I'm willing to make it worth your while, as far as that goes."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Help me, that's all. Tom Merry's determined to keep me out of the school's sports, and I'm determined to get in. If I can't do it by fair means, I'm going to do it the other way," said Crooke, between his teeth. "He won't give me a chance unless I get the whip-hand of him and make him."

"Make him? That won't be easy. And how are you going to get the whip-hand of Tom Merry?" asked Mellish. "You're talking rot!"

"I've got an idea in my head, and you're going to help me. There won't be any risk for you, and I'll make it worth your while. Listen to me."

Crooke opened the study door and glanced out, and then closed it again hurriedly. Then he began to talk in a low, muttering tone that could not have been overheard in the passage, even if there had been an eavesdropper. And Mellish, whose manner was at first uneasy and rebellious, grew more and more interested, until at length he was in full accord with the cad of the Shell.

"I expect you'd have to walk in your sleep to do it," grinned Manners.

"Weally Mannahs—"

The Shell fellows grinned and went on their way. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy finished winding his clock, and set it on the washstand at the head of his bed.

Jack Blake, who was sitting on the next bed taking off his boots, shook a warning finger at the swell of St. Jim's.

"If that blessed thing goes off in the middle of the night, there'll be a row!" he said.

"I guess that's a dead cert," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, there is no dangah of its goin' off till half-past five, as I have set it for that time. This is a jolly good clock!"

"Well, you know what will happen if it goes off at the wrong time," said Blake. "If you are bound to buy a rotten alarm clock, why couldn't you get a good one?"

"This one is all wight! I gave five shillings for it!" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "Of course, it is cheap. Mr. Bunn said it was vewy cheap indeed, and I suppose he ought to know. And

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked in.

"Not in bed yet?"

And the juniors turned in.

Kildare put out the light, and went along the passage to the Shell dormitory. There was a sound of chuckling in the Shell-room as the captain of St. Jim's opened the door.

Kildare looked round suspiciously at Tom Merry & Co.

"What's the joke?" he demanded.

The Shell fellows all looked very innocent.

"No larks to-night, you know!" said Kildare, frowning. "If I find any of you out of the dormitory, there will be trouble. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Kildare!" chorused the Shell.

And Kildare put the lights out and retired.

There was a chuckle from Monty Lowther's bed.

"It's all serene!" he said. "I'll wait till Kildare's gone to bed. Gussy will be fast asleep in an hour's time, and then I can scoot into the Fourth Form dorm and set the clock for half-past three."

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Gussy will be surprised not to find the sun rising when he gets up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Shell fellows chuckled over the intended joke upon the swell of St. Jim's, till one by one they dropped off to sleep.

Half-past ten chimed out, and then Monty Lowther sat up in bed.

"You awake, Tom Merry?"

"Groooh!"

Monty Lowther grinned and slipped out of bed. Tom Merry peered at him sleepily in the darkness.

"That you, Lowther?"

"Yes, slacker!"

"Oh, I'll stay awake till you come back!"

"All serene!"

Monty Lowther quitted the dormitory. He crept along the passage to the Fourth Form dormitory and quietly opened the door. He knew the position of D'Arcy's bed, and made his way silently towards it. At that moment the moon came out from a bank of clouds and lighted up the dark dormitory. Lowther saw the clock standing on the washstand. It was the work of a moment to alter the hands, and he grinned to himself as he put them on an hour and a half. Then he replaced the clock and silently left the room.

Tom Merry opened his eyes drowsily as Lowther returned.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" said Lowther. "It's all right!"

"Did you get the clock?"

"Yes. It's close to Gussy's bed, and he'll hear it when it goes off!" chuckled Lowther. "He will have to be jolly deaf if he doesn't. I've let the alarm alone, and put the clock on an hour and a half. The alarm will go off at four instead of half-past five, and if Gussy strikes a match and looks at the clock, he'll see it marking half-past five!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther turned in.

"Just as well we didn't tell Gussy to call us!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Monty Lowther turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER 5.

Very Early Rising!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stirred uneasily in his sleep.

He was dreaming that he was rowing in the junior eight, and leaving Figgins & Co., in the New House boat, helplessly behind. There were crowds of fellows on the bank, shouting and cheering, and gradually their cheering took on a more raucous and jarring sound till it seemed to D'Arcy that his ears were filled with deafening noise.

Then he awoke!

Buzz-z-z-z-zzzzz!

That was the noise which had mingled with his dreams.

It was the alarm clock.

There was the faintest glimmer of dawn in at the high windows of the Fourth Form dormitory.

Arthur Augustus sat up sleepily in bed.

Buzz-z-z-z-zzzzz! Buzzzzzzzzzz!

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I feel awfully sleepy! It's a remarkable thing that the sun isn't highah—vewy remarkable!"

Buzz-z-z-z!

There was a growl from Blake's bed. Blake had been awakened, too.

"Stop that row, you silly ass!" he

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howled. "I told you it would go off in the middle of the night, fathead!"

"It isn't the middle of the night, deah boy. I set it for half-past five, so it must be wight. The sun is wathah late, I suppose."

"Ass! Stop that row! It can't be four yet!"

"Weally, Blake—"

D'Arcy shut off the alarm at last, and Jack Blake grunted, and settled down to sleep again. Arthur Augustus glanced at the dark windows, and wondered. There was just a possibility that the clock had gone off too soon, and he struck a match and looked at it. The hands indicated half-past five.

"Bai Jove! It's wight enough!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, though, I feel wemarkably sleepy for half-past five!"

It was not surprising that D'Arcy felt remarkably sleepy, considering that it was only a few minutes past four, in reality. But the swell of St. Jim's was unaware of that little fact.

With a heavy head, and eyes that persisted in closing, in spite of himself, D'Arcy got out of bed and dressed himself. He uttered a slight exclamation as he reached out to take his jacket. Arthur Augustus always folded up his clothes most carefully when he went to bed, and his jacket had evidently been disturbed since then. It was rumpled and creased, and the swell of St. Jim's gazed at it in surprise.

"Bai Jove! Some awful wottah has been wumplin' my jacket!" he exclaimed. "Blake!"

Snore!

"Blake, deah boy—"

Arthur Augustus shook his chum by the shoulder. Blake's eyes opened, and he glared at the elegant Fourth Former with a glare like a basilisk.

"You frabjous ass!" he murmured. "Jemmo alone!"

"Have you been wumplin' my jacket?"

"No, ass!"

"I wegard this as a wotten twick! Somebody has been wumplin' my jacket! Blake, deah boy—"

Snore!

"Are you sure you wouldn't like to come out for an early batho, Blake?"

Snore!

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and took up his towels and left the dormitory. The House was strangely silent. D'Arcy's clock indicated a quarter to six, and at that time in the morning there was generally someone astir in St. Jim's in the lower regions. But the earliest of early housemaids was apparently still fast asleep. The passages and stairs were very dark. The school door was fastened, and Arthur Augustus halted at it in doubt.

"This is a vewy wemarkable mornin'," he murmured. "It is wemarkably dark for nearly six o'clock. The sun ought to have wisen by this time in June, but I certainly cannot see it. I suppose the housemaids are oversleeping themselves because the sun is so late in wisin'. It is wathah unfortunate, as I shall have to get out of the window."

The swell of St. Jim's climbed out of the window, and dropped into the quadrangle.

There was a dim twilight reigning there.

Very much puzzled by the failure of the sun to put in its customary appearance, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made his way down to the school gates.

At six o'clock Taggles, the school porter, certainly ought to have been astir. But there was no sign of Taggles. The porter's lodge was closed

and dark, and it was only too evident that Taggles was asleep. As D'Arcy required the gates to be opened to pass out, it was inevitable that Taggles should be awakened.

Arthur Augustus tugged at the lodge bell, and a terrific peal rang through the little building.

"Ting-ting! Jangle-jangle!"

"Bai Jove! Taggles must be sleepin' vewy heavily this mornin'!" muttered the perplexed swell of St. Jim's. "How-eyah, I shall have to wake him up. It will be doin' him a good turn, too, as he is ovahsleepin' himself!"

Jangle-jangle-jangle!

A window was slammed up violently, and a head in a nightcap was projected in the dim twilight, and an enraged voice demanded to know what was the matter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed in his eyeglass and looked up at Taggles.

"Taggles, deah boy—"

"Go away!" said Taggles sulphurously. "I'll report yer!"

"I wefuse to go away! It is neahly six o'clock, Taggles, deah boy, and it's time to get up! I want to go out and batho!"

"I'll report yer! Go back to bed!"

"Weally, Taggles—"

"It ain't 'half-past four yet!" yelled Taggles. "I'll report yer! Go away!"

"You are mistaken about the time, Taggles. The sun is wathah late in wisin' this mornin'. Will you come down and open the gate?"

"No, I won't!" roared Taggles.

"But I want to go out, and—"

Slam!

The slamming of the window cut short further argument. Arthur Augustus, very much surprised and displeased, rang the bell again. But this time there was no response from Taggles, and the junior gave it up at last.

"Everythin' seems to be wathah wemarkable this mornin'," he remarked. "I suppose I shall have to get ovah the wall."

And Arthur Augustus got over the wall.

He walked down to the river in the dim twilight, and stripped under the bushes. It was not pleasant to batho before the sun was up, certainly, but D'Arcy had come out to batho, and he could not miss it simply because the sun was acting in an unaccountable and most unwarrantable manner.

But D'Arcy's batho was a brief one. He had no temptation to linger in the water. There was a shade less dimness as he crawled out and began to towel himself down. The water was beginning to glimmer, but it was pitchy dark under the trees. The swell of St. Jim's shivered a little as he towelled himself down and dressed on the grassy bank. Then he took his way back to the school.

He had fully expected to find the school gates open now. But they were not open. The iron gate in the old stone gateway was closed fast, and there was no sign of anyone moving in the quadrangle.

Arthur Augustus was amazed.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "It is weally wemarkable! It must be half-past six, and the whole school is fast asleep. Vewy wemarkable indeed!"

Arthur Augustus re-entered the school grounds the way he had left them, by climbing the wall. He crossed over to the School House, and found the door still closed, and not a sign of life about the place. He had left the window unfastened, and he entered by it, and went up to the Fourth Form dormitory. The House was silent and still, and as he entered the dormitory he found the

juniors fast asleep in bed. There was a glimmer of light now at the windows.

Arthur Augustus stood perplexed and wondering.

As he stood there, the hour struck from the school tower.

One, two, three, four, five!

Arthur Augustus listened for another stroke.

But it did not come.

"Gweat Scott!" murmured D'Arcy, almost overcome with amazement. "Even the school clock has gone wong this mornin'. It's quite an hour slow!"

A suspicion that his alarm clock might have gone wrong came into his mind, and he went forward and looked at it. The clock was ticking away cheerfully, and its hands indicated half-past six.

Arthur Augustus approached Blake's bed and shook his chum by the shoulder. Blake's eyes opened.

"You again!" he murmured. "Ass! Fathead! Shurrup! Gerroff!"

"Blake, deah boy, it's a vewy remarkable occurrence; ewevythin' seems to be at sixes and sevens this mornin'. The school clock is slow—"

"Ass!"

"My clock says half-past six—"

"Somebody's put it on, then, fathead! Go back to bed!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

He looked at the clock again; it certainly indicated half-past six. He took out his watch and looked at it. It indicated a few minutes past five. Arthur Augustus stared at it blankly.

"Gweat Scott! Some awful wottah has put the clock on!" he gasped. "That must be the same wottah who wumped my jacket! It's a wotten joke. Blake—"

"Shurrup!"

"But I say, deah boy—"

Blake sat up in bed and grasped the pillow. There was a sudden whiz, and the pillow smote Arthur Augustus D'Arcy under the chin, and the swell of St. Jim's sat down with great suddenness on the floor of the dormitory.

"Owl! Yawooh!"

"Now, shut up!" growled Blake. "Go back to bed, and let a chap sleep!"

And he turned over. And Arthur Augustus, after a little reflection, took his advice, and went back to bed.

When he arose again, feeling rather tired, and came downstairs, he learned of the joke Lowther had played on him. And he was chipped by the Terrible Three and his chums so much that it would be some little time before he went in for rising early again!

CHAPTER 6.

The Missing Postal Order!

AFTER morning lessons that day, Tom Merry & Co. were under the elms in the old quad, talking rowing. For the time, the forthcoming contest between the School House and the New House had put cricket in the background as an item of interest.

The boat race between the School House seniors and the New House seniors was a big event at St. Jim's, and to Tom Merry & Co., at all events, the junior race was an equally big affair.

Tom Merry, on the one hand, and Figgins on the other, had selected crews for the contest, and the juniors of both Houses looked forward eagerly to the contest between the rival eights. The eights, in fact, almost monopolised interest among the juniors of St. Jim's; and both skippers had been inundated with offers from fellows who fancied that they could row.

Tom Merry was talking about the

choice of his eighth man with Lowther and Manners when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up.

The serious expression upon the face of the swell of St. Jim's caught their eyes at once.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom Merry. "Have you come to say that you can't row in the eight next week?"

"Wathah not!"

"Then what are you looking like a funeral for?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wasn't aware that I was lookin' like a funewal."

"You're aware of it now, then."

"But what's happened?" asked Tom Merry.

The swell of the Fourth hesitated a moment.

"I've lost my postal ordah," he said. "It is vewy remarkable that it should be lost. It was in the inside pocket of my jacket. I have nevah dwopped anythin' out of that pocket, you know, and I cannot help wegardin' it as vewy remarkable."

"Yes?" said Tom Merry.

"I suppose you chaps don't know anything about it?"

The Terrible Three stared at him.

"What on earth should we know about it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well, Lowther, then."

"I?" ejaculated Lowther. "How should I know anything about it?"

"I thought pewwaps it might be a jape. You came into my dorm last night and wumped my jacket—"

Lowther flushed.

"I came in and put your clock on," he said. "I shouldn't be ass enough to touch money for a jape! And I didn't touch your jacket, either. I put the clock on, and that was all. If your jacket was touched, it was done by someone in your own dormitory."

"Very well; I don't doubt your word."

Lowther glowered.

"You'd better not!" he growled.

"Pway don't lose your tempah, deah boy," said D'Arcy pacifically. "I have merely asked you for information before I begin huntin' for that postal ordah. That's all."

Lowther grunted, and D'Arcy walked away.

"Silly ass!" said Lowther. "Just like Gussy to lose his postal order at a time when I was japing him! I hope he'll find it."

"Oh, he'll find it all right!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I remember he lost his watch once, and found it in his old waistcoat pocket."

And the Terrible Three dismissed the matter from their minds.

Two or three fellows of the Fourth helped the swell of the School House to look for the missing postal order. They looked in the dormitory and in Study No. 6, and D'Arcy even followed his own footsteps of that morning down to the river, and looked in the grass and the bushes. But he did not find it. It had not turned up by dinner-time, when the juniors went into the dining-room.

Crooke tapped the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder.

"I hear you've lost a postal order," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Know the number?"

"How should I know the numbah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, in surprise.

The Shell fellow grinned.

"Well, the numbers are marked on them, you know, and when one is lost, you can stop it by the number. You'd better write to your governor and get the number."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"That's all wight," he replied.

"You're not going to let it go, surely? If it doesn't turn up it will look as if it's been stolen."

"Mind your own bisney, deah boy. You are not the kind of fellow I care to hold a discush with, anyway. I will trouble you not to talk to me!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Crooke's eyes glittered as D'Arcy walked away and left him. But the cad of the Shell did not seem displeased.

After dinner some further search was made for the missing postal order. But, with the exception of Crooke, no one suggested that it might have been stolen.

D'Arcy's carelessness with money was well known; and his very extensive wardrobe was well known, too. It was more than likely that he had changed a waistcoat or a jacket with the postal order in the pocket, and forgotten all about it. And the swell of St. Jim's seemed curiously indifferent on the subject himself.

"Pway let the mattah dwop, Blake, deah boy," he said, as he went in to afternoon lessons. "It's all wight, you know; the ordah will turn up. And if there's any fuss, some cad like Cwooke or Mellish will start a stowy that it has been stolen, and then there will be a scandal, you know. Bettah let it dwop."

"You ought to be careful, you silly ass!" said Blake.

"I refuse to be called a silly ass, Blake!"

Blake grunted and went into the Form-room. During afternoon lessons Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked very thoughtful; but he did not take any of his friends into his confidence as to what he was thinking about.

"Found your postal order, Gussy?" asked Mellish, meeting the swell of the school in the passage after lessons.

"I am Gussy only to my fiwends, Mellish!" said Arthur Augustus.

And Mellish sniffed and passed on without having his inquiry answered.

The Terrible Three stopped D'Arcy a little later. Monty Lowther was grinning cheerfully, all thought of the missing postal order evidently having passed from his mind.

"Getting up early to-morrow morning, Gussy?" he asked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I shouldn't mind the trouble of setting your alarm clock for you, you know," said the humorist of the Shell.

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah! Go and eat coke, deah boy!"

Tom Merry linked his arm in D'Arcy's.

"Time to get down to the river to practice," he said. "I'm giving Kangy a trial as eighth man. Come on!"

And the juniors were soon in the boat, pulling away upon the sunny river, under the shade of the big trees, in fine form, and in the highest of spirits; and perfectly convinced that when the eights came off they would beat the New House hollow. And Figgins & Co., who were at practice a little farther down the stream, were also turning out quite to their own satisfaction, and were congratulating themselves upon the absolute certainty of knocking the School House crew into a cocked hat.

CHAPTER 7.

Quite a Windfall!

THE Terrible Three came in hungry as hunters after their pull on the river.

Tom Merry and Manners went up to the study to get tea, and Monty Lowther lingered to look at the rack

in the Hall, stating that there was hope that his uncle might have written and enclosed a remittance.

Tom Merry lighted the fire in the study, and Manners opened the cupboard door. He turned out a loaf, a fragment of butter, and a tin of sardines. He looked at them on the table rather lugubriously.

"That all?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's all."

"My hat! I hope Monty gets a remittance, then. Looks to me as if we shall have to eadge a tea along the passage," said Tom Merry.

"Here's Monty!"

Monty Lowther burst into the study, all smiles. He held a letter in one hand and a postal order in the other.

"Hurrah!"

"How much?"

"Ten bob!"

"Good!"

"Jolly decent of nunky!" said Monty Lowther gleefully. "The curious thing is that he doesn't mention the remittance in the letter. Listen!"

"Dear Nephew,—My advice to you is to be more careful with your money."

"Your affectionate uncle,"

"J. LOWTHER."

"Short and sweet!" remarked Manners.

"Doesn't sound like a letter enclosing a remittance," Tom Merry remarked.

"Still, he's enclosed it, so it's all right," said Lowther. "I'll go and get this changed with Mrs. Taggles, and bring in some Tommy. I won't be long."

"Cut off, then!"

Monty Lowther scuttled out of the study. He returned in ten minutes or so, laden with packages. He spread his purchases upon the table. They made a good array. The chums of the Shell eyed them with great satisfaction.

"Three bob left," said Lowther. "We shall have to make that last us till Saturday. Eat, drink, and be merry!"

"Kettle's boiling!" said Tom Merry. "I'll make the tea, and you can poach the eggs. The ham looks ripping, and I've got a first-class hunger on."

"Same here!" said Manners emphatically.

And the Terrible Three sat down to a merry tea. They had just started when Crooke looked in.

"Hallo! You fellows in funds?" he asked.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" asked Manners.

"Yes, it does. I was going to ask you to tea in my study," said Crooke. "I thought I heard you say you were stony."

"So we were," said Tom Merry, "but Lowther's had a postal order since then."

"Oh, good!" said Crooke, with a peculiar glance at Lowther. "You're in luck, Lowther. A big one, I suppose?"

"Ten bob."

"Ten bob!" repeated Crooke, with a peculiar intonation in his voice.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, looking round at Crooke, surprised by his tone. "What is there in that?"

"Oh, nothing! I suppose Lowther gets lots of postal orders from his uncle," said Crooke carelessly.

"No, I don't," said Lowther; "only once in a blue moon. But I don't see that it's any business of yours. You seem mighty interested in the matter."

"Oh, not at all!"

"Travel along, then!"

Crooke left the study. Tom Merry glanced at Lowther rather reproachfully.

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"Might have been a bit more polite, Monty, when he said he was going to ask us to tea," he remarked.

"He was only romancing," said Lowther. "That was his excuse for putting his fat head in. He wanted to spy, that's all, as usual. I can't stand that chap!"

"I can't, either," said Manners thoughtfully. "He seems to have something up his sleeve just now, too, though I can't make out what it is."

"Oh, blow Crooke!" said Lowther. "Pass the eggs!"

Kangaroo of the Shell, and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn looked in a little later, and were accorded a welcome very different from that which had greeted Crooke. They stayed to tea, and Gore and Skimpole came in from the next study, too. There was quite a little party in Tom Merry's study to do justice to that excellent feed stood by Monty Lowther with the unexpected postal order.

Meanwhile, Crooke had strolled down to the tuckshop behind the elms in the corner of the old quad.

Dame Taggles came out of her little parlour.

Monty Lowther changed a postal order here a while ago, didn't he, Mrs. Taggles?" the cad of the Shell asked.

"Yes, Master Crooke."

"Would you mind letting me see it?" asked Crooke. "Lowther wants to know the number."

"Yes," said Dame Taggles, a little surprised, but not seeing any reason to object. And she fumbled in her till and took out the postal order.

"You give me the number, and I'll jot it down," said Crooke.

"Very well," Dame Taggles read out the number "00185."

"Thank you, Mrs. Taggles!"

And Crooke left the shop. In the quadrangle he took a telegram from his pocket and glanced at it with a grin. It read:

"00185.—Eastwood."

"Oh, good!" murmured Crooke. "I rather think that I shall row in the School House eight, after all."

Which was certainly a very mysterious remark for the cad of the Shell to make.

CHAPTER 8.

What Crooke Knew!

TOM MERRY sat alone in his study.

The Terrible Three had done their preparation after that excellent tea, and Manners and Lowther had gone down. Tom Merry had fifty lines to do, and he was staying up to do them before bed-time.

Crooke came into the study abruptly without knocking.

Tom Merry went on writing without looking up.

"Merry!"

"Hallo!" Tom Merry paused. "What do you want, Crooke?"

Crooke closed the door carefully.

"I want a few words with you, Tom Merry," he said, coming towards the captain of the Shell, and sinking into a chair lately occupied by Monty Lowther.

"I've got something rather important to say, and I've come because Manners and Lowther aren't here."

Tom Merry looked astonished.

"You're jolly mysterious!" he said.

"May as well keep it dark if we can."

"Keep what dark?" demanded Tom Merry.

"What I am going to tell you."

"Oh, rats! I don't want any blessed

secrets with you!" said Tom Merry disdainfully. "Go and tell 'em to Mellish; he'll like 'em."

"It's about the eight."

"What have you got to tell me about the eight that I don't know?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"You haven't decided upon number eight yet?"

"Yes; I've practically decided on Kangaroo."

"You'd better undecide again, then," said Crooke, with a very unpleasant glance.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I've told you before—that I said to you yesterday—that I want to row in the eight, and I've made up my mind on the subject."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I watched you row this morning," he said. "You didn't do so badly as I expected, but nothing up to the form we want for the eight. You haven't got a dog's chance! Now, will you buzz off and let me get my lines done?"

"Wait a bit! You refuse to put me in the eight?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then I shall have to make you."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Make me?" he repeated, as if scarcely able to believe his ears.

"That's what I said!" replied Crooke coolly.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh of contemptuous amusement.

"How could you make me?" he said.

"You're not proposing to lick me, I suppose? You couldn't do it, and even if you could it wouldn't make any difference. Nothing could make me put you into the House eight."

"You are going to put me into the eight," said Crooke coolly, "and you are going to take me up generally. You're going to chum with me in public, take me out to rowing practice, treat me with respect, and generally toe the line."

"I suppose you're off your rocker."

"Not at all."

"Then what's going to make me do all this?" asked Tom Merry, in scornful wonder.

"You're going to do it because I've got the whip-hand of you, and I'm going to make you."

"The whip-hand of me?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"Your friendship for Monty Lowther," said Crooke.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Lowther! What's Lowther got to do with it?"

"I have only to open my mouth to get him expelled in disgrace from St. Jim's," said Crooke icily. "If you want to save him you've got to toe the line."

"Lowther—expelled?"

"Yes."

"How? Why? Are you mad?"

"Because he's a thief!"

Crash!

Tom Merry's fist lashed out like lightning, and Crooke went backwards over his chair under the crashing blow.

The chair crashed on the floor, and Crooke bumped down beside it and lay there, gasping and panting.

Tom Merry stood over him with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

"You hound!" he said, between his teeth. "Get up and say it again, and I'll give you the licking of your life!"

Crooke lay on the floor regarding him with eyes that burned with deadly hatred.

"Get up!" said Tom Merry scornfully.

"Hang you!"
 "Get up and repeat what you said, if you want to be handled again."
 "I won't repeat it here," Crooke muttered. "I'll repeat it in the Head's study, Tom Merry. You shall be sorry that you treated me like this. You could have saved Lowther from being sacked; you haven't chosen to do it. When he goes, remember you could have saved him, that's all. I'm going to the Head."

He rose to his feet and turned to the door.

Tom Merry watched him in silence. There was something so determined and decided that it struck a chill to the heart of the Shell captain.

Was there anything in the rascal's threat? Was Monty Lowther in danger of being expelled? It was impossible! Yet what did Crooke mean? He had made the statement, and he could not, of course, expect Tom Merry to accept it without proof. What proofs could he have to offer?

Crooke's hand was on the door.

Tom Merry made a movement.

"Hold on, Crooke!"

Crooke paused.

"What do you want?" he sneered.

"I want to know what you've got against Lowther. If it's some yarn you've trumped up about him—as it must be—"

"You'd better accuse D'Arcy of trumping it up, not me!"

"D'Arcy?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes, it was his postal order."

"His postal order?" said Tom Merry, his heart sinking. "You're talking in rotten riddles. What do you mean? I remember now that D'Arcy said he had lost a postal order, but I dare say he has found it by this time. He's always losing things and finding them."

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"He won't find this one," he said, "unless he looks into Dame Taggles' till for it. The postal order Monty Lowther changed at Mrs. Taggles' to-day was the one D'Arcy lost last night."

"It's a lie!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

"The number is the same!"

Tom Merry staggered.

"The number! Impossible!"

"Impossible or not, it's true. I asked D'Arcy to write to his pater to get the number of the postal order, and he wouldn't. As a matter of fact, he more than half suspects that Lowther pinched the postal order when he went to his dorm last night, under cover of playing that jape with the alarm clock."

"He—He couldn't suspect Lowther!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Well, at all events, he wouldn't ask his pater for the number of the postal order. But I meant to know it, because I suspected. I felt jolly sure that Lowther didn't take the trouble to get up in the middle of the night just to play a jape with an alarm clock. I sent a telegram this afternoon to D'Arcy's father, asking the number of the postal order, in D'Arcy's name, the reply to be sent to a shop in Rylcombe. I called there in D'Arcy's name, and got the reply wire. I had to do it in D'Arcy's name, of course, or I shouldn't have had an answer from his pater. Here is the answer."

He held out the telegram.

Tom Merry grasped it with an unsteady hand.

"Handed in at Easthorpe. 00186.—EASTWOOD."

That was all. It was evidently the reply from Lord Eastwood to the wire

he had supposed to be sent by his son, asking the number of the missing postal order.

"That's the number of D'Arcy's postal order," said Tom Merry huskily. "But how dare you say that it is the same as that Lowther cashed this evening?"

"Because I've just asked Mrs. Taggles to tell me the number of that postal order, and it's the same."

"Impossible!"

"You can go to Mrs. Taggles and ask her yourself," said Crooke carelessly, "and you can write to Lord Eastwood, asking the number of the order again, if you choose. As a matter of fact, it's all quite clear now, and you can see it as well as I can. Lowther pinched the postal order last night when he was pretending he went to the Fourth Form dormitory to jape Gussy over the alarm clock. He pretended to get a postal order in a letter to-day to account for having one."

Tom Merry started again. He remembered that the letter from Lowther's uncle had not read like a letter in which a tip was enclosed.

Crooke watched him with a sneering smile.

"I don't want to make this public," he said. "If you want to let Lowther off, well and good. Don't say a word to him, and I'll keep mum. But I've got the whip-hand of you, Tom Merry, if you want to save Lowther, and don't you forget it."

"You cad! Listen to me! I shall write to Lord Eastwood, and ask him to tell me the number, and I shall go down to Dame Taggles, and look at that postal order she has."

Crooke nodded.

"Quite right," he said. "After you've done both, and had your reply from D'Arcy's governor, we'll talk of the matter again. Till then we won't say anything more about the eight."

And he left the study.

Tom Merry sank into a chair.

What did Crooke's coolness and confidence mean?

Tom Merry hoped against hope; but in his heart of hearts he knew that Crooke's confidence had its foundation in the fact that he knew that the numbers would be found the same.

And that meant—

Tom Merry sat in miserable thought. The door opened at last, and Monty Lowther came in cheerfully.

"Ain't you coming down?" he demanded. "I've been waiting to play a game of chess with you."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"I—I don't feel very well," he stammered. "I—I think I'll go to bed."

Lowther looked at him in concern.

"You were all right when I went down," he said. "Jolly queer you should come over like this. What is it?"

"I'm a bit seedy."

"Dash it all, let me take your arm." Tom Merry jerked his arm back.

"I tell you I shall be all right!" he exclaimed, almost fiercely. "I can manage."

And he hurried out of the study. Monty Lowther gazed after him in silent, blank astonishment. He could see that Tom Merry was not quite himself, but why his chum should have been so ratty with him was a mystery.

"What on earth's the matter?" Lowther muttered, at last. "Tom can't be waxy with me about anything. I say, Manners," he added, as his chum came into the study, "is anything the matter with Tommy?"

"Not that I know of," said Manners.

(Continued on next page.)



MAKE THE JESTER SMILE AND WIN HALF-A-CROWN!

Send your Joke to *The Gem Jester*, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

HIS HALLMARK.

Guest: "What made you guess I came from Aberdeen? It wasn't my accent."

Hotel Porter: "Oh, no, sir. It was the teeth-marks on this threepenny-piece you gave me!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. McKenzie, 60, Creighton Avenue, East Ham, London, E.6.

* * *

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

Guide: "It was in this very room that the prince was foully done to death."

Visitor: "Why, when I was here a year ago he died in an entirely different room!"

Guide: "I know; but that room is being decorated!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Franks, 11, Rushcroft Road, South Chingford, London, E.4.

* * *

WISDOM.

Master: "Tell me, Brown, what do we call the last teeth that come to the human being?"

Brown: "False ones, sir!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Fulcher, "Sunray," Nork Way, Banstead, Surrey.

* * *

EASY.

Jim: "Say, Joe, are you going in costume to the fancy dress ball?"

Joe: "Sure! I'm going as a plain-clothes detective!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Petch, Guthrie Road, Havelock N., Hawkes Bay, New Zealand.

* * *

SLIGHT ERROR.

Johnnie: "Gee, dad, I got into awful trouble at school to-day!"

Father: "Now what have you been up to?"

Johnnie: "You know that sum I asked you about last night—how much is a million pounds? Well, 'a dickens of a lot' isn't the right answer!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Johnson, 60, Peel Street, Westport, New Zealand.

* * *

GIVING THE GAME AWAY.

Magistrate: "You are charged with stealing fowls. Have you any witnesses for your defence?"

Prisoner: "Certainly not! I don't have witnesses when I go stealing!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Woodroffe, Western Hospital, Seagrave Road, Fulham, London, S.W.

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in surprise. "That cad Crooke has been in here, I believe, but I suppose that wouldn't hurt Tommy. Where is he?"

"He says he's seedy, and he's gone to bed," said Lowther seriously. "But he looked to me as much ratty as seedy."

"Oh, rot!" said Manners. But Monty Lowther thought it over for some time, and when the Shell went up to bed, Monty paused by his chum's bedside. But Tom Merry was apparently asleep.

CHAPTER 9.

The Whip-hand!

TOM MERRY came down the next morning looking very different from his usual self.

There was a wrinkle in his boyish brow, and a preoccupation in his manner that his chums noticed at once.

But it was useless to ask him what was the matter.

He replied evasively, or shook his head impatiently and did not reply at all.

"The ass has got something on his mind," said Monty Lowther to Manners. "He was queer last night, as I told you."

"Seedy, perhaps," said Manners.

"It's queer."

"Yes, isn't it?"

After morning lessons that day Tom Merry joined Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when the Fourth Form came out of their Form-room.

"You haven't found that postal order yet, D'Arcy, I suppose?" he said abruptly.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Do you know the number of it?"

"No."

"Haven't you written to your pater to ask?"

"No, deah boy."

"Why not?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, I'm goin' to let the mattah dwop, you know," said D'Arcy. "I dare say the wotten thing will turn up somewhere."

"I want to know the number," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know—"

"Will you write to your father and ask—or, rather, wire to him? I want to know it. You needn't ask me why, but I want to know."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I won't ask you any questions, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," he said quietly.

"I'll do just as you like. I'll wire at once, and ask my governah to wite, and I shall get his weply by to-night."

"Thanks very much."

And Tom Merry did not speak on the subject again.

Crooke avoided Tom Merry during that day. It was evidently his intention not to speak again until Tom Merry had obtained the proofs he wanted.

Then, when it was clear that the cad of the Shell held the whip-hand, it would be time to speak.

The day was a miserable one for Tom Merry.

He avoided his chums; he could not endure their inquiring glances. They had left off asking him questions, but they were evidently very much surprised and hurt by his want of confidence in them.

It was after tea when Arthur Augustus brought a letter to Tom Merry in the quad.

Lord Eastwood had evidently replied immediately after receiving the wire.

"It's wathah wemarkable," said the

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swell of St. Jim's, looking perplexed.

"Wead it."

Tom Merry read the letter.

"Dear Arthur.—I have already wired you the number, as you asked me. It is 00180. I hope you have found the postal order by this time. You are very careless, and I am glad it was not the five-pound note you asked me for.—Your affectionate Father."

"I haven't had any wire, you know," D'Arcy remarked.

"Somebody else wired in your name," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! What an awful nerve!"

"Nought, nought, one, eight, six!" said Tom Merry. "That's plain enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thank you very much, D'Arcy. By the way, are you going to do anything about this?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"You are going to keep that number to yourself?"

"Yaas, I shall destwoy this lettah immediately."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

He did not ask D'Arcy his reasons. He knew them already. The swell of St. Jim's suspected Lowther, and he would not be the one to begin a scandal.

Was it possible that Lowther had taken the postal order? Tom Merry asked himself as he walked away.

The order Lowther had received in the letter from his uncle bore the same number as the one Lord Eastwood had sent to his son.

Could anything be more clear?

Two postal orders could not have the same number, and therefore the postal order was the same; and therefore it was inevitable that Lowther had taken the order and had pretended to receive it in the letter from his uncle.

Tom Merry's faith in his chum had been complete—absolute. But in the face of evidence like this, what was he to believe?

He shrank from speaking to Lowther about it.

The only thing was to keep it a dead secret to save his chum from the consequences of his dishonest action.

Lowther had acted badly enough, but to see him disgraced and expelled from the school would be too terrible.

To keep on friendly terms with him would be hard enough. Tom Merry would have to try to bury his knowledge, as it were—to forget the horrible occurrence.

But he knew that he could not.

In spite of any efforts he could make he would not be able to act towards Lowther as if he still believed in him.

And there was another factor in the problem—Crooke.

Crooke had said that he had the whip-hand now—and undoubtedly he had it. For he knew the whole story, and he had only to open his lips to disgrace Monty Lowther and ruin him for life.

And if Tom Merry wanted to save his misguided chum he had to make terms with the cad of the Shell.

Crooke had already stated his terms. He wanted to be taken up, and to be put in the crew next week. That was his price.

Tom Merry went into the Form-room to think it over. He wanted to be alone. But Crooke's eye was upon him. The cad of the Shell followed him in.

Tom Merry turned upon him, his hands clenched and his eyes gleaming. He would have given a great deal to spring upon the cad of the Shell and knock him right and left. But he dared not, for Lowther's sake.

"Well?" said Crooke, in his disagreeable tones. "You've seen the answer from Lord Eastwood?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"You've seen Mrs. Taggles' postal order?"

"Yes."

"Are the numbers the same?"

"Yes."

Crooke grinned.

"Then you know now what Monty Lowther went into the Fourth Form dormitory for on Tuesday night, when he pretended that he was going to rag Gussy's alarm clock?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"What are you going to do?" asked Crooke. "I suppose it's your duty, as captain of the Shell, to give Lowther away, and get him sacked."

Tom Merry shivered.

"That's not my duty, as I see it," he said, in a low tone.

"Well, he's a thief, isn't he?"

"Hold your tongue!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"What are you going to do?" he repeated. "You know the truth, and D'Arcy suspects it. I know it, and there's no love lost between me and Lowther, and there never was. I see no reason for keeping his secret."

"I know that."

"Do you want it kept dark?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with an effort.

The cad of the Shell grinned.

"You know the price," he remarked.

"You rotten cad!" said Tom Merry passionately. "If I put you in the eight the other fellows won't row with you. They'll resign!"

Crooke laughed.

"I'll risk that," he remarked. "If you chum up with me in a very devoted way they'll swallow me whole, I dare say."

"Chum up with you?" said Tom Merry, with a gesture of disgust.

Crooke nodded coolly.

"Yes. Why not? I shall do you credit. I can row, and if you give me some good coaching, I shall go ahead splendidly. The fact is I'm tired of being a black sheep, and having to hang around with fellows like Mellish and Levison, whom nobody else wants to speak to. I'm going in for something better this term, and you're going to help me!"

"Something better—and you're beginning by blackmail!" said Tom Merry bitterly.

"Well, I must make a beginning somehow. I asked you to put me in the eight, and you refused. Now I've got the whip-hand, and you can't refuse!"

"I don't know. I—"

"I don't ask you to announce at once that I'm going into the eight. Just let it get out that you're taking me up in a friendly way to coach me in rowing. The rest can be let out later."

"And if I don't—"

"And if you don't I'm going straight to Mr. Linton to tell him that there's a thief in the Shell, and you and D'Arcy will be called upon to give evidence against Lowther."

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"You rotten cad! I'm in your hands, and I suppose you can dictate your own terms."

"Exactly! It seems to have taken you a long time to find that out, and I'm glad you've got on to it at last!" said Crooke, with a yawn.

"Get out, now—leave me alone!"

And Crooke got out, contentedly enough. He had the whip-hand, and

he was using it without mercy, and he was quite willing to be good-tempered and obliging about it.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry Causes a Surprise!

WHAT on earth's the matter with Tom Merry?"

That question was asked up and down St. Jim's during the next day or two.

Certainly the conduct of the captain of the Shell was unusual and surprising. Tom Merry had lost much of his old cheeriness of manner, and he did not seem so keen about cricket, and even the question of the eight did not move him to enthusiasm.

He was not so chummy with Manners

He had a reason for being keen about that. Crooke demanded a place in the junior eight as the price of his silence, and if he did not get it he would speak. And Tom Merry, as captain of the boats, could not think of putting a fellow into the crew who could not row. If Crooke by means of practice and assiduous coaching could so improve his form as to be able to take his place in the eight without letting the side down, one of Tom Merry's great worries would be gone. He would be able to pay Crooke's price without dereliction of his duty as junior captain.

Tom Merry's new friendship for Crooke was far from being approved by the other fellows.

Manners and Lowther felt very sore about it.

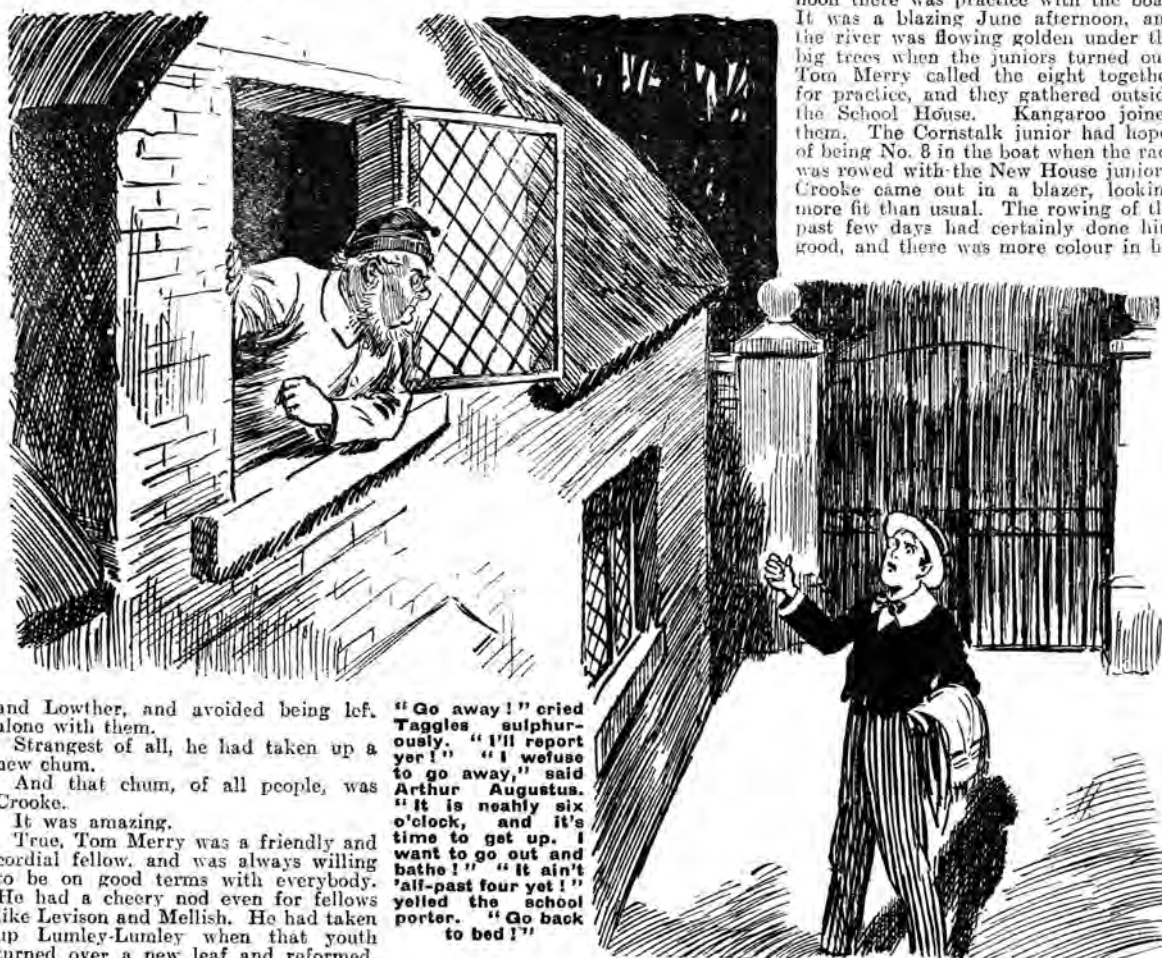
had thrown over his two tried and true old chums for the sake of a new friend.

Disloyalty of that kind was utterly unlike all that was known of Tom Merry, and the fellows simply could not understand it.

For some days Manners and Lowther nursed their injuries in silence, growing more and more sullen about it, but too proud to say anything on the subject to Tom Merry. If he did not want them, if he preferred the society of the cad of the Shell to theirs, he could have his own way, that was all.

They were bitterly hurt, but they would not speak. Indeed, the more they were hurt, the less likely they were to speak.

But that could not last, and it came out after a time. On Saturday afternoon there was practice with the boat. It was a blazing June afternoon, and the river was flowing golden under the big trees when the juniors turned out. Tom Merry called the eight together for practice, and they gathered outside the School House. Kangaroo joined them. The Cornstalk junior had hopes of being No. 8 in the boat when the race was rowed with the New House juniors. Crooke came out in a blazer, looking more fit than usual. The rowing of the past few days had certainly done him good, and there was more colour in his



and Lowther, and avoided being left alone with them.

Strangest of all, he had taken up a new chum.

And that chum, of all people, was Crooke.

It was amazing.

True, Tom Merry was a friendly and cordial fellow, and was always willing to be on good terms with everybody. He had a cheery nod even for fellows like Levison and Mellish. He had taken up Lumley-Lumley when that youth turned over a new leaf and reformed, and they had been good chums ever since.

But Crooke—

Crooke certainly hadn't turned over a new leaf. He had an ambition to shine as a member of the junior eight, but he was not willing to forgo any of his bad habits as the price of shining thus.

Yet Tom Merry had taken up with him.

It was not only that he was taking notice of Crooke, but they were seen everywhere together. Crooke would wait for him when classes were over, and link arms with him and walk with him into the old quad. He would go down to the river with him, and they would row together, and Tom Merry was evidently very keen in coaching Crooke.

"Go away!" cried Taggles sulphurously. "I'll report yer!" "I wufese to go away," said Arthur Augustus. "It is neahly six o'clock, and it's time to get up. I want to go out and bathe!" "It ain't 'alf-past four yet!" yelled the school porter. "Go back to bed!"

Hitherto the steady friendship of the Terrible Three had been unbroken. There had been little rubs and troubles at times, certainly, but they had always blown over. The three were inseparable; the idea of anything happening to separate them, and make them cold to one another, had never occurred to any of them.

But it was coming now.

Tom Merry avoided Monty Lowther, and as he could not explain, and would not explain why he did it, Manners naturally took Lowther's side in the matter.

The consequence was that Tom Merry saw less and less of Manners.

It looked as if the captain of the Shell

pasty face and a new alertness in his movements.

"We're going to have the eight-oar out for a run as far as the Pool," Tom Merry said.

"I suppose I'm coming?" said Crooke.

"Yes."

Monty Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Is Crooke going to practise with the eight, Tom Merry?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Kangaroo in dismay. "I was beginning to count on it, Merry, old man. I don't want to shove myself in, of course, but I think you might give me a run with the eight. I know Reilly and Lumley-Lumley are

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good enough, but it's a bit thick putting a chap like Crooke over my head."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Tom Merry disapprovingly. "I weally wegard that as wathah thick, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry looked worried. "I haven't decided to put Crooke into the eight next week yet," he said, "but I want to see how he shaves in practice with a full crew to-day."

"But you don't mean to say that you think Crooke's form is up to Kangy's?" demanded Blake.

"I should wegard such a view as ridiculous!"

"What-ho!" said Manners emphatically.

Tom Merry made an irritable gesture. During the past few days his temper was not so kind as of old.

"Oh, for goodness' sake let's have a little less jaw!" he exclaimed. "If you fellows don't want me to skipper the boat, I'm willing to resign."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nobody's suggesting that," said Kangaroo quietly. "I suppose I'd better say nothing; but I don't understand this, that's all, Tom Merry!"

And the Cornstalk walked away.

"And I don't jolly well understand it, either!" said Monty Lowther warmly.

"I don't understand passing over a decent chap and a good oar to put in a fellow like Crooke, and that's plain."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"The less you say about it the better!" he exclaimed.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Oh, rats! Let's get down to the river!"

And Tom Merry walked away to the boathouse, and the rest of the crew followed in an extremely bad humour.

It was not the humour in which to do good rowing.

The School House junior crew contrasted very much with Figgins & Co., who were also on the river for practice on that golden afternoon.

Figgins & Co. were in splendid form.

The sight of the New House junior eight pulling away in fine style increased the ill-humour of the School House crew.

They certainly did not make so good a show at practice, whatever they might do when the actual race came off.

After practice, they landed, and Monty Lowther and Manners walked away by themselves, without saying anything to Tom Merry. Crooke had slipped his arm through Tom Merry's in a very familiar way, and the sight of that made the chums of the Shell simply wild.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Crooke a glance through his eyeglass, and walked away after Manners and Lowther. Blake looked curiously at Tom Merry; the captain of the Shell had his eyes on the ground, and Blake was quite keen enough to see that he disliked Crooke's familiarity, and he was very much puzzled to know why Tom Merry did not resent it.

Blake slipped his arm into Tom Merry's other arm, and they walked back to the school; Crooke, at all events, in good temper and high spirits. He knew how everyone there resented his presence, but that only gave him a sense of power and added a zest to his enjoyment.

"We shall beat the New House all right!" he remarked.

Blake grunted.

"We shan't beat them if we don't do better than we've done this afternoon," he said tartly.

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"Oh, you fellows will have to buck up!"

"Shall we?" exclaimed Blake angrily. "I think it's Tom Merry who will have to buck up, and kick you out of the eight, Crooke. That's all we want to make us win."

Crooke swung round angrily towards Blake.

"Mind your own business!" he said savagely. "Tom Merry will please himself about whom he puts in the crew, I suppose?"

"He's not pleasing himself," said Blake bluntly. "I don't know what the little game is, or how you're working it, but Tom Merry doesn't want you with us any more than we do."

"Jolly plain to see, that is," said Clifton Dane, the coxswain of the School House boat.

Tom Merry coloured. The Canadian junior spoke the truth; his expression was more candid than his tongue with regard to Crooke.

"Let Tom Merry speak for himself," said Crooke. "Didn't you ask me to come to boat practice this afternoon, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Crooke."

"Well, I can't make it out," said Blake. "Blessed if I understand you at all lately, Tom Merry. Looks to me as if you're off your silly rocker!"

And Blake went into the School House very much puzzled.

CHAPTER 11.

The Old Chums or the New?

TOM MERRY came into his study in the Shell passage, and found a cheery scent of frying permeating that apartment. There was a frying-pan on the fire, and there was bacon in the frying-pan, sizzling away merrily. Manners was cooking it, and Monty Lowther was cutting bread at the table.

Lowther did not look up as Tom Merry came in, but Manners looked round from the fire.

Manners' face was a deep crimson. The June weather was warm, and the fire made the study very hot, and Manners seemed to be cooking himself almost as much as the rashers in the frying-pan.

"Hallo!" said Manners, not quite so cheerily as of old. "We've got tea nearly ready. I suppose you're hungry after the river, Tommy?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Good! There's plenty of rashers for tea."

"I—I—Crooke's asked me to tea in his study," said Tom Merry hesitatingly, and Manners gave him a look, and turned back to the frying-pan without another word.

Monty Lowther laid down the loaf he was dissecting, and looked at Tom Merry. There was a disagreeable tightness about Lowther's lips.

"You're going to tea with Crooke?"

"I told him I would."

"Without asking us whether we wanted you or not?"

"Well, I—I thought I could have tea with Crooke, you know."

"Crooke—the rottenest cad in the school since Levison went!" said Monty Lowther. "I must say I cannot compliment you on your choice of friends."

"Very likely!" said Tom Merry bitterly.

"Look here!" said Lowther. "I'm getting fed-up with this. I don't know what to make of it, and I don't like it. I didn't mean to say anything, but it's getting thick!"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Manners agrees with me, I know

that," added Lowther. "Don't you, Manners?"

"Well, yes," said Manners, turning the bacon. "I wasn't going to say anything, but since you mention it, I think it is rather thick."

"If you want to throw over your old friends for new ones, Tom Merry, you'd better say so out plainly," said Monty Lowther abruptly. "If that's the case, it's your own business if you pick out the worst cad in the School House to chum with, I suppose."

"Quite so," said Manners.

"You can take up Crooke, if you like, but we're jolly well not going to," said Lowther. "If it were possible, I should fancy that the rotter had some kind of a hold over you."

Tom Merry was silent.

He could not say that he thought exactly the same of the cad of the Shell as his chums did, and that every friendly advance Crooke made revolted him.

His conduct appeared singular enough, and it would certainly appear more singular if he gave expression to the feelings with which Crooke inspired him.

And he could not admit that Crooke had a hold upon him; that it was for the sake of his chum that he was enduring the most intolerable familiarity of the cad of the Shell. That at least must remain a dead secret.

"Well," broke out Lowther, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing."

"You're going to tea with Crooke?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"What have you taken him up for?"

No reply.

"Are you going to put him in the eight?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"You know Kangaroo and Reilly are both better men?"

No answer.

"Well, I'm sick of it, and Manners is fed up, too."

"Exactly," said Manners.

"I don't want to part with you, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry, in a constrained voice.

Monty Lowther flashed out at once.

"That means that you don't mind if you part with me?" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry did not reply.

Lowther's eyes blazed.

"Have you got anything up against me, Tom Merry?"

"I've got nothing to say," said Tom Merry quietly. "You know best whether you deserve a decent chap's friendship or not?"

Lowther turned crimson.

"I! What do you mean?"

"I've said enough."

"You've said too much!" said Lowther, in a white heat of anger.

"You've taken up a new chum, and you're hunting for excuses to drop the old ones. Well, I won't give you any need to find excuses. I've done with you, and I know Manners will stick to me."

Manners turned round, frying-pan in hand.

"That's only fair," he said. "I can't swallow Crooke, Tom Merry, if you can. If you want Crooke, you don't want us."

Tom Merry was very pale.

"You can change into Crooke's study, if you like, and have your precious new chum morning, noon, and night," said Monty Lowther scornfully, "and if you put him in the boat's crew, I shall resign, I give you warning."

Manners nodded.

"Same here," he said.

"Resign, and be hanged to you!"

broke out Tom Merry angrily. "I can find fellows to fill your places easily enough."

And he strode out of the study, and slammed the door behind him.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another.

"What's the matter with him?" Lowther asked, his anger fading away.

"He looks frightfully worried—and he's in the wrong; he must know that he's in the wrong—and it's not like him to stick it out like this."

Manners shook his head.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" he said. "I don't believe that at heart he likes Crooke any more than we do. He's got under his influence somehow, but I'm blessed if I can understand how."

Monty Lowther wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Crooke is a cunning rotter," he said. "He's about as deep as they're made. But I don't see how he could get Tom Merry under his thumb, unless Tom Merry chose."

"It's jolly queer altogether."

Lowther's face set grimly.

"Well, if he chooses to stick to Crooke, that settles it—I mean what I told him. I'm not going to chum with a fellow who chums with that awful outsider!"

And Manners nodded assent.

When they came downstairs they met Blake & Co. in the Common-room.

"We'll beat the New House bouncers in the eights, and make 'em sing small," said Blake cheerfully.

"That's not likely to happen!" said Monty Lowther.

"Why not?" demanded Blake.

"Manners and I are not going to row."

"But why aren't you going to row?" asked Herries.

"Because Crooke's in the crew."

"Crooke?"

"Yes," growled Lowther. "I told Tom Merry that I wouldn't row with that cad, and I mean it. If Crooke rows, I don't!"

"Bai Jove! I don't know that I care to wov with that wottah, eithah!" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It's wathah wuff on a fellow's personal dig, you know, to wov with an awful cad like Crooke."

"I don't like the idea, so far as that goes, but we can't go back on Tom Merry," said Blake thoughtfully. "Is it finally settled, Lowther?"

"Crooke says so."

"Well, I don't believe it yet," said Blake. "Where's Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I know or care, either."

"Hallo! Trouble in the family?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Here's Crooke!" said Lumley-Lumley, as the cad of the Shell came into the Common-room. "I guess he can give us the office. Is it true you're going to row in the eight next Saturday, Crooke?"

Crooke nodded coolly.

"Yes."

"Did Tom Merry say so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess it beats me."

"It's all rot!" exclaimed Blake angrily.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"Here's Tom Merry—you can ask him," he said.

Tom Merry had just come in. He did not look at either Manners or Lowther. His face was very clouded. He started as his name was shouted from all sides.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Is it true, Tom Merry?"

"What do you mean?"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! I'm told special dough is used for doughnuts. But the same old sort buys them. Herr Schneider, our German master, complains of insomnia. We suggest that he should try talking to himself—he "sends us to sleep" all right! "Where is Aberganfechschleff?" asks Dane. On the right, as you go in. Try this: 2 meet me 3 at 5s. 3ft. Meet me between two and three at the Crown Yard. News: When Gussy made the winning hit, Blake threw his "boater" in the air. The last "straw"—and the last of the "straw"! "Commercialism is eating into sport," we read. Let's hope it has bitten off more than it can chew. Well, thank goodness a horse need never starve, because it always has a bit in its mouth! "That's a great idea of yours to

employ a demonstrator," said the customer to the sales manager. "He isn't a demonstrator," answered the manager; "he's a customer who just dropped in to buy a model train for his son!" Skimpole says the world is slowly decaying. All rot! In the Wayland Museum there is a statue of a famous Scotsman, with a notice beneath it: "Don't Touch." "There was one continual chatter round the cricket pitch," says Blake. Yes, there was a cold wind. "You can always tell a schoolmaster," asserts a psychologist. Yes, but he won't always believe you. Then there was the hoop manufacturer who couldn't make ends meet. A perfumier has celebrated his 100th birthday. A scent-enarian! Statistics prove you must travel eighty million miles to be killed in a railway accident. But it's hardly worth the trouble. To-day's shriek: Wally D'Arcy has got up a pierrot troupe, and Jameson informs us that he plays the tangerine! As the absent-minded professor wrote to his friend: "I am living near the river, and shall be pleased if you will drop in one night." Stop Press: I hear hikers feeling stiff after a Sunday hike now call it Moan-day. As one workman said to another: "Mind 'ow you come down that ladder, 'Arry, I've took it away!" Watch your step!

CHAPTER 12. Suspicious!

JACK BLAKE came into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and threw his cap into a corner, and grunted.

It was two or three days since the announcement by Crooke of the Shell that he was to row in the eight—the announcement which had not been contradicted by Tom Merry.

During that time there had been a great deal of unrest among the School House junior oarsmen.

Nobody wanted to row with Crooke.

Although there was nothing definite to base such a surmise upon, some of the fellows felt that there was something underhand in the matter—that Tom Merry had yielded to the cad of the Shell for reasons which he had not stated in public.

Crooke was the last fellow at St. Jim's whom Tom Merry might have supposed to want to chum with. Yet Tom Merry was chumming with him, at the expense of practically breaking off with his hitherto inseparable comrades.

Most of the fellows could not understand it, and they were very restive about it; but no one went so far as Manners or Lowther as to declare that he would not row with Crooke.

Manners and Lowther, too, felt that they had been a little hasty in that. They did not want the School House to lose the eights.

Blake was most puzzled and worried of all. As he came into his study on this particular afternoon he looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sitting by the window carefully polishing his silk hat, and he glanced up at Blake sympathetically.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" he asked.

Blake sniffed.

"Oh, Tom Merry and that boulder Crooke!" he growled.

"I weally don't see that we can do anythin', Blake. Tom Mewwy is captain of the boats, and he can put Cwooke in if he likes."

Blake began to pace the study restlessly.

"If a chap could only get on to what's the matter, something might be done," he said. "Tom Merry can't have done anything to put him under Crooke's thumb. He's not the kind of fellow to have broken bounds at night, or gambled, or done anything that would give a cad a hold on him."

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Then how is it that Crooke has him under his thumb?"

D'Arcy shook his head. It was too hard a conundrum for him, and he gave it up.

"Mannahs or Lowthah might guess," he suggested.

"I've talked to them about it. Lowther says that Tom Merry was very queer on Wednesday evening last week, and Manners says that Crooke had just been in to see him then. Until that time nothing was noticed, but he was ratty with Lowther over nothing then, so Lowther says, and he doesn't understand it any more than we do."

"Watty with Lowthah—last Wednesday?"

"Yes." Blake looked quickly at his chum. "What are you thinking about, Gussy? I can see you've got some idea in your noddle."

Arthur Augustus was silent, and there was a thoughtful frown upon his aristocratic brow.

Blake crossed over to him, and shook him by the shoulder.

"I can see you've thought of something," he said. "What is it?"

"Bai Jove! I—I—"

"Out with it, Gussy!"

"If I tell you, deah boy, you'll have to keep it dark," said D'Arcy slowly. "I suppose Cwooke knows, and he's holding it ovah Tom Mewwy. I was an ass not to think of it before, but nevah dreamed that Cwooke would know anythin' about it."

"What are you talking about?" asked Blake.

"You wemembah what happened last Tuesday night?"

"Blessed if I do!"

"Lowthah came into our dorm and put my clock on, and I got up vewy early the next mornin', you know."

Blake grimaced.

"Yes; I remember that. What's it got to do with this?"

"My jacket was wumpled—"

"Blow your jacket!"

"But the next day I missed my postal ordah."

Blake started.

"I'd forgotten about that. Haven't you ever found it?"

"No, Blake; and I shan't find it, either!"

"It will turn up, I expect—"

"It has turned up."

"What?"

"It has turned up, deah boy!" said D'Arcy quietly. "When I found it gone, and wemembahed about my jacket bein' wumpled, I asked Tom Mewwy and Manners and Lowthah about it. I thought Lowthah might have taken it for a joke, meanin' to return it to me. He denied knowin' anythin' about it. The same day he cashed a postal ordah for ten shillings with Mrs. Taggles."

"You don't mean to say you think Lowther pinched your postal order, Gussy?" asked Blake incredulously.

"The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,426.

"Tom Mewwy thought so. I knew he thought so when he asked me to wite to my patah and get the numbah of it. Somebody else had wired to my patah for the numbah, too, and I know now it must have been Cwooke. He knows."

"But—but—but you don't mean to say that the number was the same?" Blake exclaimed, aghast. "Did you see Lowther's postal order?"

"Yaas, wathah! I asked Danie Taggles to show it to me, latah, to make sure, because I didn't like to be suspectin' a chap for nothin'. The numbah was the same—and she mentioned that two fellows had asked to see it already. I knew one of them was Tom Mewwy, and I suppose the othah was Cwooke, now."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Blake.

"It was my postal ordah that Lowthah pwetended to weceive in a lettah fwom his uncle," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I don't like suspectin' him of such a thing, but it was my postal ordah, and my postal ordah couldn't have got into a lettah fwom his uncle, could it?"

"I suppose not," said Blake.

"I nevah meant to say a word about it, and I could see that Tom Mewwy was goin' to keep it dark for Lowthah's sake," said D'Arcy. "I think it's wathah wotten to let a thief off, but I didn't want to get any chap into a awful twouble. But it looks to me now as if Cwooke knows all about it, and he's got the uppah hand of Tom Mewwy. That accounts for Tom Mewwy bein' watty with Lowthah, too. He knows he had the postal ordah, you know. Cwooke knows, and he's black-mailin' Tom Mewwy."

Blake clenched his hands.

"The cad! The awful cad!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But how did Crooke know—how did he get on to it in the first place?"

Blake asked suddenly. "I want to know that. Doesn't it strike you that this business of the postal order has happened just in time to suit Crooke's little game about getting into the eight?"

"Yaas, that's quite true."

"I suppose Crooke couldn't have pinched it and put it into Lowther's letter?" said Blake. "Look here, Gussy, I'd rather believe anything than that Lowther stole the postal order. It's too thick!"

"I wasn't willin' to believe it, deah boy; but the evidence was so cleah—"

"Yes; but we've got a new light on the matter since," said Blake keenly. "When it happened, it didn't look as if anybody had reason to plant such a thing on Lowther. But now we see that Crooke is using it as a lever for jerking himself into the eight. So there's a chance, at least, that Crooke worked the whole business from the start."

"Bai Jove! It's poss, of course!"



The boat was pushed off and Blake & Co. settled down to row on the island all night was a terrifying prospect. "Come back confess!"

"We're going to find out!" said Blake determinedly.

"I don't see how, Blake! You see, even if Cwooke worked it somehow, he's not likely to own up, and unless he does—"

"He can be made to!"

"But—I say—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake.

"We'll look into it! I'll get two or three fellows to help me handle Crooke, and we'll make him talk. I'll get Dig, and Herries, and Kangaroo—and you and I—we'll be enough!"

"Come on!"

"But, weally, Blake, what—"

"Come on!" roared Blake.

"Vewy well!"

And Blake rushed the swell of St. Jim's from the study.

CHAPTER 13.

Getting the Truth!

CROOKE of the Shell strolled along the towing-path in great good humour.

He had been at practice with the eight again that afternoon, and he was satisfied with himself. The fact that he would probably crack up under the strain of the race owing to his being out of condition, did not trouble Crooke much. He did not think so himself; but even if it happened, at all events, he would have had the honour of rowing in the junior eight, and he



to row away. Crooke's heart almost stood still. To sit bound me back!" he shrieked suddenly. "Come back, and—and I'll unless!"

would be able to "swank" upon that subject afterwards.

Crooke had begun, in fact, to swank already.

The dark looks of the other members of the crew did not trouble him. He did not care twopence for what they thought of him and his presence in the eight. He was going to row, he was going to get his cap for the eight, and show it about at home in the next holidays!

That was all he cared about—and he did not care very much even if his boat did lose.

Mellish met him on the towing-path and nodded with a grin.

"It's all serene?" he asked.

"Quite all right," said Crooke. "I'm in the eight! It's settled!"

"Good luck! And not one suspicion!"

"Hush! No, nothing of the kind! How could there be?"

Mellish chuckled.

"Quite so. How?" he agreed. "You can lend me five bob, I suppose, Crooke?"

"Rats!" said Crooke. "I promised you a pound, and I've given it to you!"

"You'll lend me five bob as well, I think!" said Mellish unpleasantly. "It will be safer, you know!"

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"You blackmailing cad!"

"Oh, come off!" said Mellish impatiently. "What are you doing with Tom

Meery, if not blackmailing him, if you come to that?"

"Mind your own business, hang you!"

"It's my business to make something out of it, too. You get into the eight. I don't care twopence about the eight; but I'm hard up. Shell out!"

Crooke gave him a deadly look for a moment; and then, without another word, he counted out five shillings into Mellish's palm, and strode on down the towing-path.

Mellish slipped the clinking coins into his pocket, and walked away grinning. Crooke's face was a little clouded now. His scheme had been perfectly successful; but there was this little weakness in it—that it placed him at the mercy of his confederate, who was no more scrupulous than he was himself. He had the whip-hand of Tom Merry, but Mellish had the whip-hand of him, in his turn.

"Anyway, I'm in the eight!" he muttered.

"Hallo, Blake!"

Blake had stepped out of the trees upon the towing-path. Herries and D'Arcy were with him and Kangaroo. The juniors surrounded Crooke without a word, and the cad of the Shell looked alarmed. He noticed that a boat was moored a little farther up the towing-path, and Digby was standing in it, evidently waiting for the others.

"I—I say, nothing up?" asked Crooke uneasily.

"We want you!" said Blake tersely.

"Well, here I am!"

"Got the rope, Herries?"

"Yes; here!"

Crooke backed away as Herries produced a coil of rope from under his jacket. He backed into Noble, who promptly collared him. Crooke

struggled, and four pairs of hands were laid upon him at once. He was bumped upon the towing-path, and the rope was tied round him and knotted. In a couple of minutes he was a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot.

"Got him!" said Blake, with satisfaction. "Bring him along!"

"Where are you taking me?" gasped Crooke.

"Into the boat."

"But—but what for?"

"You'll see. If you make a row you'll be ducked in the water," said Blake grimly. "For two pins we'd drop you in and tow you behind the boat, so be careful!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Three of the juniors lifted Crooke and carried him to the boat. Blake stepped in and helped Dig to receive him. Kangaroo, Herries, and D'Arcy handed Crooke into the boat, and followed him in.

The cad of the Shell was laid on the thwarts, and Blake pushed off.

He had at first surmised that this was some rough jest, but the grim faces of the juniors warned him that it was something more than that.

"Where are you going?" he demanded at last.

"To the island," said Blake.

"What for?"

"To leave you there."

"What!"

"Unless you tell us the truth about how you've got Tom Merry under your thumb."

Crooke turned deadly pale.

"I—I—" he stammered.

Blake held up his hand.

"We were watching you when you handed that five bob to Mellish a few minutes ago," he said. "We saw how you looked, and how he looked. It's pretty clear to us that he has helped you in this scheme of yours, or else that he has found you out, and he's making money out of you. If we wanted any proof, there it is. You've made Tom Merry believe something against Lowther, and we're going to know all about it. Understand?"

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"I've got nothing to tell you," he said, "and you can't make me say anything. If Mellish has told you anything, he's told you lies."

"Mellish hasn't told us anything yet," said Kangaroo. "You're going to tell us. You've made out that Monty Lowther stole that postal order."

"So he did!" growled Crooke. "D'Arcy knows it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head.

"I don't know anythin' of the sort," he replied. "I certainly did think so, but now I know what use you have made of the thing, I suspect you of havin' got it up from the beginnin'."

"I didn't. I—"

"Here we are," said Kangaroo, as the boat bumped upon the shore of the island in the river. "Yank him out!"

Crooke was carried ashore. He was tossed down upon the thick, green grass under the trees on the island.

"Now, are you going to tell us the whole truth?" demanded Blake.

"I've got nothing to tell you."

"Sure?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Very well; we needn't stay here any longer," said Blake. "Get back, you fellows."

The juniors stepped into the boat. Crooke yelled out threats and entreaties, to which no answer was returned. He struggled with his bonds, but they were too tightly tied. Blake pushed off, and the juniors took up the oars and settled into their places.

Crooke's heart almost stood still. Night was coming on, and to sit bound on the island all night was a terrifying prospect. He knew that the darkness and the solitude would drive him to distraction.

"Come back!" he shrieked. "Come back, and—and I'll confess. Come back!"

"Pull back, you fellows."

The juniors rowed back to the island, and landed. Crooke's face was white. Blake looked down upon him sternly.

"Well, you dirty blackmailing rotter, what have you got to say?" he asked.

"I—I—I—"

"Out with it! In the first place, you've made Tom Merry make friends with you, and promise you a place in the eight, by threatening to tell about Lowther?"

"Ye-es," muttered Crooke, through his trembling lips.

"You managed to fix it on Lowther, somehow, so as to be able to use it to twist Tom Merry round your finger?"

"It—it was really a joke!"

"No lies!" said Blake grimly. "By Jove, I've a jolly good mind to take you straight up to the Head now, and Mellish, too, and let him put you

through it. I'll bet he'd get the truth out of one of you!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should weccomend doin' so!"

"Hold on!" panted Crooke. "I'll—I'll tell you about it. It was really Mellish's idea as much as mine. He got the postal order out of D'Arcy's pocket. You put him up to it, you mean," said Blake. "But how did you manage the rest?"

"I—I—I—"

"Lend me your belt, Herries. I'll make him talk faster."

"I—I'll tell you!" gasped Crooke.

"I—I had seen a letter for Lowther on the rack, and I—I took it, you see. I opened the envelope with steam, and when Mellish gave me the postal order, I put it in and sealed it up again. The next day I put the letter on the rack again. When Lowther opened the letter he naturally imagined that the postal order had been sent him by his uncle. It—it was knowing that D'Arcy's postal order hadn't the name filled in that first put the idea into my head."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Of—of course, I never meant the thing to get out," gasped Crooke. "I never meant that Lowther should ever be accused. It was only to work it so that I could get into the eight. I never meant any real harm."

Blake's lip curled.

"Well, I'll believe that of you!" he said. "You wouldn't have had the nerve to carry the matter through and get Lowther expelled, I know that. You worked up the whole business so as to get Tom Merry under your thumb, through his regard for Lowther. If Manners had come into our dorm to jape Gussy over the alarm clock, you'd have fixed it on Manners instead."

"Well, I—I—"

"Or on me, perhaps," said Kangaroo, "or on anybody that Tom Merry was very friendly with, so as to get the whip-hand of him, you cur!"

"I—I—"

"Chuck him into the boat," said Blake contemptuously. "You can untie him. I've half a mind to chuck him into the river. Look here, Crooke, I'm going to have you and Mellish in Tom Merry's study when we get back, and you're both going to own up. You've busted up a friendship in that study, and you're going to set it right. Do you savvy?"

"I—I'll do as you wish," muttered Crooke.

"You'd better."

And with Crooke sitting white and dejected in the stern, the boat pulled back to St. Jim's. The cad of the Shell was beaten, and the game was up. He

realised that only too clearly. And from the bottom of his heart he wished that he had not schemed for his place in the eight when, half an hour later, he stood with pale face and downcast eyes in Tom Merry's study, under the indignant gaze of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 14.

The Winning Eight!

TOM MERRY had surprised the School House and St. Jim's generally by his sudden and unaccountable friendship with Crooke.

But the breaking off of that sudden and unaccountable friendship was more sudden and unaccountable still.

On Wednesday afternoon Crooke was chumming with Tom Merry, and it was understood by all that he was to row in the eight on Saturday.

On Wednesday evening Crooke was seen to leave Tom Merry's study head-first, and to land with a bump on the linoleum in the passage.

A minute later Mellish was seen to leave in the same unceremonious manner, alighting beside Crooke with a wild yell.

The two cads of the School House picked themselves up, with dark and savage faces, and walked away, without replying by a single word to the many kind inquiries the Shell fellows made as they passed.

It was evident that Tom Merry's friendship with Crooke was at an end.

Curious fellows questioned Crooke and Mellish, but they obtained no satisfaction. The cads of the School House had nothing to say, or, if they had anything to say, at all events they did not say it.

It was equally useless to question Tom Merry & Co. They had nothing to say, either. Only when asked whether Crooke was to row in the eight, Tom Merry gave a very emphatic answer in the negative. Kangaroo was to take number eight's place, and Crooke was quite out of it.

After Blake and his chums had gone that evening from Tom Merry's study, and the Terrible Three were left alone, Tom Merry turned to Lowther with a very red face.

"I'm sorry, Lowther, old man," he said. "I—I know I ought not to have believed anything against you."

"You—jolly well oughtn't," said Lowther.

"It—it was too rotten for anything. But—but how was I to know, when—when you yourself thought the postal order was yours? You owe Gussy ten bob."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"I'll settle up on Saturday," he said. "Upon the whole, I can't blame you, Tommy, when you saw me claiming a postal order that you knew belonged to D'Arcy. Of course, I couldn't guess that an awful rascal had opened my letter and put the postal order in. How could a chap guess a thing like that? Though I was surprised at my uncle sending me ten bob for a tip, too."

"It's all Lord Eastwood's fault for not filling in Gussy's name when he sent the postal order," said Manners. "So there you are; and you two can shake paws over it."

And Tom Merry and Lowther shook paws.

The cloud between the two chums of the Shell had passed away, and Lowther and Manners, of course, were to row in the eight. The crew was complete, and every day that week the junior crew were hard at practice. Figgins & Co., too, were keeping it up, and both crews were in great form, and looking eagerly forward to the Saturday.

It was a glorious afternoon when the juniors turned out for the race.

Nearly all St. Jim's crowded down to the river to see it. Loud cheers rang over the wide river as the two crews were seen carrying their boats down to the water.

The Head had come out, with Mrs. Holmes, to see the race. Kildare was the starter, and half the Sixth and Fifth, and all the juniors were looking on. Grimes, the grocer's boy from Rylcombe, had patised on the towing-path, basket on arm, to look on. And when the signal was given, and the two crews bent to their oars, a thunderous roar rolled along the river.

"Go it, School House!"

"Buck up, New House!"

"Pull, you beggars, pull!"

And they did pull!

It was, as all St. Jim's agreed, a ripping race. How Figgins & Co. led at the start, and how Tom Merry & Co. gained on them inch by inch, and passed them; how the New House pulled level, and kept level for half the distance, and then stole half a length; how Tom Merry & Co. put on a spurt, and drew ahead; how New House drew level once more, but could do no more, though every gallant oarsman was rowing as if for his life, and how the School House shot a quarter of a length ahead at the finish—all this was discussed over and over again in both Houses of St. Jim's that night, and it was agreed that both crews had deserved well of St. Jim's.

"School House wins!" came a roar along the towing-path. "Hurrah! Hurrah! School House wins!"

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry, with a muffer round his neck, was shouldered by the enthusiastic crowd, and carried off in triumph. But after the race, both crews met in a great feast in the School House, and victors and vanquished rubbed together on the best of terms. When the New House fellows took their leave, Fatty Wynn said that he would never forget the occasion. He said it was ripping.

"Yaas, it was a wippin' wace!" said D'Arcy, with a nod.

"Race!" said Fatty Wynn. "Oh, yes! But I was speaking of the feed. Good-night!"

And Figgins & Co. went home across the quadrangle, leaving the School House still rejoicing.

(Next Wednesday: "AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR!"—a powerful long yarn of sport and adventure, featuring Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.)

GREAT STORY OF AN AMAZING SCHOOLBOY FEUD!

WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?



When popular Harry Wharton resigns the junior captaincy of the Greyfriars Remove, his school-fellows sit up and take notice. Yet there's a reason for this sudden move of Harry Wharton's, as you will learn in:

"WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?"

By FRANK RICHARDS

the star school story in this week's issue of

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HALLO, chums! On Saturday England renews a forty-seven-years-old friendly rivalry with South Africa on the cricket field, for the first Test match is to start at Trent Bridge, Nottingham. It was not until 1907 that official Test games were played against the South Africans, but as far back as 1888 an England team was sent out to Cape Town.

In their games this season with County elevens the visitors have shown good form with bat and ball, and England will have to look to her laurels if she is to maintain her record of not having lost a Test match to South Africa in England. On the other hand, the Springboks will be all out to break their duck's-egg.

Six of the present South African side toured England in 1929, when they were last over here, so big-match experience is not lacking in their eleven. In addition, they are captained by H. F. Wade, who was well known in Yorkshire club cricket before settling down in South Africa, and, therefore, is not new to the game in this country.

As in County games, the new I.b.w. rule will be in force in the Test matches, and no doubt it will have a big bearing on the results of them. However, it is the same for both teams, and it will possibly be helpful in bringing the games to a definite conclusion in three days—providing the rain holds off. Let's hope we have a rousing first Test match to start the series.

"AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR!"

Talking of cricket, there is a grand St. Jim's yarn featuring the summer game in next Wednesday's GEM. But, as you will read in the story, it

is not a pleasant game—due to the unsportsmanlike and swanky behaviour of Ferndale, the team St. Jim's First Eleven play.

In fact, the rival skippers, Kildare of St. Jim's and Lagden of Ferndale, come to blows, and the situation leads to unhappy adventures for the captain of St. Jim's. It is a powerful story of an affair of honour that is fought out in secret, but comes to light in dramatic circumstances in the police court at Wayland. The yarn is yet another triumph for Martin Clifford, and it will appeal to all readers.

ANOTHER MONSTER!

Another monster has turned out a myth. The one I told you about recently, that was shot in Galway Bay, off the Irish Coast, is apparently only a shark. But since then another has bobbed up—this time at Plymouth. This monster is quite modern, and indulges in sun-bathing on the rocks. It has been seen by different people. First it was spotted in the sea, and later it was seen at Stoke Beach, when it did its sun-bathing. According to reports, the monster has a whale-sized, scaly body, with a head like a calf's.

Until one of these monsters is caught, however, people will always regard the stories about them with incredulity. But I doubt if a creature unknown to us will ever be landed. As Skimpole of St. Jim's, who is keenly interested in these matters, points out, there probably are amazing sea-serpents deep down in the sea, but as they exist

under a terrific pressure of water, they could not live on the surface.

Mention of Plymouth just now reminds me of a story of a small treasure that came to light in an unusual hiding-place not long ago. A man was auctioning secondhand goods in a Plymouth market when on offering for sale a pair of corsets, he saw a pocket on the inside of them. Out of curiosity he opened it, to find that it contained a bundle of notes. There were twenty-one pounds in that secret pocket!

WINNING A WAGER!

When a Birmingham clerk took on a wager that he could free himself from a steel collar and strait-jacket in five minutes, there were people who were sceptical of his chances of success. But Mr. Barron, the clerk, knew his powers of escaping from seemingly impossible positions, and he was quite confident of winning the bet. With a large audience looking on, he was put in the strait-jacket and the steel collar was locked round his neck. Then he was raised by crane to a 130-feet-high platform, where he proceeded to do his Houdini stuff. Inside the specified time he had wriggled free from the collar and strait-jacket and had won his wager of £20!

"REBELS OF PACKSADDLE!"

At last it has come—rebellion in the Texas cow town school! The sacking of Bill Sampson, the Packsaddle headmaster, and the advent of the new man, Elias Scadder, who is as unpopular as Bill was popular, could only have had this result. The rebels of Packsaddle are determined that if they can't have Bill they won't have anyone; but they are up against a tough proposition in holding out against the forces of law and order of the cow town. Whatever you do, don't miss Frank Richards' next thrilling yarn of Western school adventure.

Finally, for next week there is another instalment of the St. Frank's boys' adventures in "The Secret World!" and, as usual, our smiles section will contain all the best laughs of the week. Look out for this ripping number, chums.

TAILPIECE.

Mistress: "Why, Bridget, what are all those broken dishes doing on that shelf?"

Cook: "Shure, mum, yez towld me Oi wur to replace ivery one Oi broke!"

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON

15-6-35



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.

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THE HEADMASTER WHO WAS SCARED OF HIS OWN PUPILS!—

The NEW MASTER at PACKSADDLE!



By FRANK RICHARDS.

The Bunch Miss Bill!

"BILL'S gone!" muttered Dick Carr.

Even yet the Packsaddle bunch could hardly believe it.

The bright sunshine of the Texas morning streamed down on the cow town school and the shining waters of the Rio Frio. The bunch had come out from breakfast in the chuckhouse, and Tin Tung was clanging the bell for school. Small Brown, the Packsaddle teacher, whisked across from his cabin to the schoolhouse, his horn-rimmed spectacles flashing back the rays of the sun. A new day had dawned on Packsaddle School—a new day's work was to begin—with so tremendous a change that the Packsaddlers simply could not get used to it.

Bill was gone!

Bill Sampson, the six-gun schoolmaster, was gone—gone back to punching cows on the Kicking Mule Ranch. The bunch in the playground knew it, for they had watched him ride away the previous day. They knew that Bill was not coming back; they knew that Elias Scadder was headmaster in his place.

Yet when the school bell ceased to ring, and they had not yet entered school, they almost expected to see Bill's herculean form appear in the porch, to hear the crack of his quirt, and his powerful voice bidding them horn in for class.

Bill was part and parcel of Packsaddle School. He packed a gun, he wore leather crackers, a red shirt, and a

stetson hat, but he was the only schoolmaster Packsaddle had known—till now.

"I guess it ain't the same old caboodle without Bill!" said Slick Poindexter sadly.

"You said it!" mumbled Mick Kavanagh glumly.

Dick Carr's face was clouded. The tenderfoot of Packsaddle had learned to like Bill and respect him. As deeply as any guy in the bunch, the English schoolboy resented the action of the school committee in Packsaddle Town in "firing" Bill and installing a new headmaster in his place. But resentment was keen on all sides. Mr. Wash, the chairman of the committee, or Two-Gun Carson, its most influential member, would have been hardly safe in the Packsaddle playground that morning.

Only Steve Carson wore a grin. Steve had a deadly grouch against Bill, and it was his popper who had "worked the rifle" and got Bill Sampson dismissed. Steve gloated openly, but other fellows gave him dark looks.

In the porch, where the Packsaddlers almost expected to see the brawny figure of Bill appear, so used were they to it, another figure appeared—tall and thin, in a black coat.

It was Elias Scadder, the new headmaster.

He was not a pleasant-looking man. Tall as he was, he was a mere wisp of a man compared to Bill. He had a sharp jaw, a sharp voice, and sharp eyes with red lids. No doubt he packed great stacks of knowledge, but after Bill he was just a washout in the eyes of the Packsaddle bunch.

He had a cane in his hand. Bill had always used a quirt, herding the school bunch like a bunch of steers. A cane, no doubt, was more in keeping with a schoolmaster's position, but the rough and tough Packsaddle bunch preferred Bill and his quirt, often as they had squirmed under it in Bill's heavy hand.

"Some jay!" said Slick, with a disparaging stare at the new headmaster. "Say, big boys, what's the matter with putting his cabeza under the pump, jest to show him that we want Bill?"

"You said it!" exclaimed Mick. "You're shouting!" agreed Pie Sanders.

"I guess you guys want to watch out!" sneered Steve Carson. "That guy Scadder won't stand for any lip, I'm telling you."

"Can it, you, Carson!" "Pack it up, you skunk!"

Steve scowled, and "packed it up." Even his pals, Poker Parker and Slim Dixon, went with the rest of the bunch. He was the only guy who was against Bill and in favour of Bill's successor. There would have been rough handling next if Steve had not packed it up. Wisely he did.

Slick waved his stetson. "Who says duck that big stiff under the pump?" he shouted.

A roar came from nearly all the bunch. They were in a mood for trouble.

"Hold on, you fellows!" said Dick Carr.

"Can it, you, Carr!" roared Pie. "Hold on! You remember what Bill said when he went—give the new man a

—A GREAT YARN OF THRILLING SCHOOL ADVENTURE IN TEXAS.

chance to make good!" said Dick Carr. "I'd run him out of school as soon as any fellow here or sooner. But that's the last thing Bill asked."

"Bill's sure a soft guy!" snorted Poindexter. "He was going to pull guns and make a fight for it, but he let up and let them galoots run him out. I'll say he was a soft sap!"

"Bill was right," said Dick quietly, "and he was right in asking us to give the new man a chance."

Poindexter nodded slowly. All the bunch could do for Bill now was to carry out the last wish he had uttered before he rode away from Packsaddle with the Kicking Mule punchers.

"That goes!" said Poindexter. "I guess we better herd in."

He led the way towards the porch of the schoolhouse. Dick Carr and Mick followed him, then Pie Sanders and Domingo Duque, and then the rest of the bunch. Mr. Scadder had stepped out, and he was gripping his cane with a very unpleasant expression on his scraggy face. Mr. Scadder had been scared stiff by the six-gun schoolmaster, but now that Bill was gone he figured that trouble was gone with him. In more orderly sections than Packsaddle Elias Scadder had schoolmastered, and he did not know yet what the Packsaddle bunch was like, and did not doubt that he could handle them.

It did not cross his mind that only respect for Bill was stopping the bunch at that moment from putting his head under the school pump. Small Brown, who knew the bunch better, was twittering with nervousness in the school-room. Mr. Brown hoped that the day would pass without a ruckus. He hoped so, but he did not bank on it.

"Why are you not in school?" snapped Mr. Scadder in a high-pitched voice that was as musical as a saw with a file working on it. "How dare you remain out of class after the bell has ceased to ring!"

The bunch eyed him as a pack of prairie wolves might have done. A sign from Dick or Slick would have led a rush. But they were still mindful of Bill—tough and gruff, but loyal old Bill.

"Aw, caw it!" growled Slick Poindexter. "I guess—"

Swipe!

Slick yelled as the cane came down across his shoulders.

Bony as Mr. Scadder was, he seemed to pack plenty of muscle in his skinny arm. It was some swipe!

"Silence! Go in!" he rapped.

Slick clenched his hands hard. Dick Carr touched him on the arm, and Poindexter seeming to swallow something with difficulty, went in, and the rest of the bunch followed in silence—a silence that was grim.

Waking Up Trouble!

SMALL BROWN was not disappointed.

The Packsaddle bunch were rough and tough. They prided themselves on it. It was a full-sized man's job to handle that bunch, and they prided themselves on that, too. Bill Sampson could not have added a column of figures with a right result; his spelling would have made a lexicographer jump. He wrote a hand that looked as if a tarantula had dipped in ink and crawled across the page. But Bill could ride herd over the bunch, and see that Mr. Brown taught them. Bill had the authority, and Mr. Brown the learning. Now there was a double allowance or learning; but the authority was another matter.

Scadder was ready to use the cane; indeed, there was a gleam and a glitter in his red-rimmed eyes that showed that he liked handling it. The question was whether the bunch would let him.

Even Bill had not always been able to keep the bunch quiet. When Bill had been absent, often and often had they made Small Brown wish himself anywhere but in Texas. Now Bill was absent for good.

Steve Carson had been the roughest and toughest in Bill's time; but it was Steve's father who had worked the change in the school, and Steve was standing for the new headmaster.

Standing for the new headmaster did not, however, mean behaving himself—to Steve! It meant throwing his weight about. Mindful of the fact that Scadder owed his position to his father, Two-Gun Steve figured that he could do exactly as he pleased. If the cane whacked it would whack on others, not on Bug Steve!

In the playground Steve had been hooted and shouted down. All the bunch had a grudge against the fellow who was down on Bill.

But in the school-room, under the eye of Scadder, Steve guessed that he would make up for it.

Mr. Scadder sat at Bill's old desk, watching the class with his red-rimmed

Book-knowledge is useful in a headmaster, but something more than book-knowledge is required to run the rough and tough bunch at Packsaddle School—as Elias Scadder, the new master, soon discovers!

eyes, while Small Brown dealt with them. Perhaps those red-rimmed eyes did not observe Steve leave a geography book at the head of Slick Poindexter.

But certainly Mr. Scadder's long ears heard the yell that came from Slick as the volume crashed on the side of his head.

"Silence!" squealed Small Brown.

"Silence!" shrieked Mr. Scadder.

Heedless of both, Slick grabbed up the book and took aim at the grinning Steve.

Mr. Scadder bounded forward, cane in hand.

"Drop that book at once!" he thundered.

Slick glared at him.

"Say didn't you see that guy leave it at my cabeza?" he roared.

"Put it down!"

Steve chuckled. As Poindexter did not obey, Scadder gave him a cut across the arm with the cane.

Slick yelled and dropped the book.

Dick Carr's eyes glittered. Mick breathed hard and deep. This was the guy Bill wanted them to give a chance to make good! This was how he was beginning! Not a word to Steve. The son of Two-Gun Carson, clearly, was going to be a privileged person. And the bully of Packsaddle was the hombre to take the fullest advantage of it.

"Say you Poindexter, you hand me that book!" drawled Steve Carson, grinning.

"Doggone you!" roared Slick. "I guess—"

"Pick up that book at once!" thundered Mr. Scadder. "I will keep order

in this school! You will remember that you have a schoolmaster now, not a roughneck from a ranch!"

"Why, you pesky galoot!" roared Slick. "You ain't man enough to clean Bill's boots!"

Swipe!

"Gum! I—I—I guess—"

"Pick up that book! Return it to Carson at once!" yelled Mr. Scadder. "I shall cane you severely—"

"You doggoned old piecan!" gasped Slick.

He stooped and picked up the book. He returned it to Steve—with a whiz! It caught the bully of Packsaddle under the chin and bowled him off his bench.

Crash! Steve landed on his back, with a fearful howl as he hit the planks with the back of his head.

"Oh dear! Goodness gracious!" gasped Small Brown.

The trouble that Mr. Brown had anticipated had arrived!

Mr. Scadder, his face as red as his eyelids with rage, cut at Slick with the cane. It swiped across the school-boy's shoulders.

Poindexter grabbed the inkpot from his desk.

Up went his hand, with the inkpot in it, and the ink shot out in a stream, full at Mr. Scadder's bony face.

Splash!

"Oh, wake snakes!" gasped Mick.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll say that guy's got his!" chuckled Pie.

"Urrrgh!" spluttered the new headmaster of Packsaddle, staggering back, mopping wildly at the ink with both hands. "Urrrgh!"

The whole bunch roared. Mr. Scadder gasped and gurgled frantically. There was ink all over his bony features—ink in his nose, ink in his mouth. He lived and moved and breathed ink.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" squealed Small Brown. Mr. Brown knew that bunch, and knew that they needed a hand like Bill's. He doubted very much whether Elias Scadder could calm the storm he had raised.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Scadder.

"Urrrgh!"

"Give him some more!" yelled Mick Kavanagh, jumping up and grabbing his inkpot.

"Hold on!" gasped Dick Carr. He caught his comrade's arm and stopped the ink just in time. "Hold on, Mick! Remember Bill—"

"Aw, can it!" snorted Mick; but he sat down again, grunting.

Small Brown fully expected the whole bunch to break out in riot. But they kept their places, only Slick standing and watching his new headmaster like a cat. Slick was having no more of the cane. He had settled on that. Giving Scadder a chance to make good, as Bill wanted, did not mean knuckling under to injustice. Slick was through with Scadder.

Scadder, having dabbed the ink out of his eyes, leaped at Poindexter with brandished cane. Slick dodged him among the desks.

Small Brown looked on, his eyes bulging through his horn-rimmed glasses. The whole bunch yelled, and roared, and stamped. Up and down, round and among the desks and benches, Slick dodged the enraged Scadder. Then, darting across to the open door, he whipped out through the porch and vancoosed into the playground.

After him rushed yelling.

The bunch was left yelling. Scadder

was not likely to run the elusive Slick down in the open spaces. It was as well for Elias Scadder that he did not, for one yell from Poindexter would have drawn the whole bunch out of the school-room to the rescue.

But in a few minutes Scadder was seen to come back into the porch, breathless and panting. He did not return to the school-room; he went into his own quarters—formerly Bill's—in search of the wash he badly needed.

"Silence! Sit down!" squealed Small Brown.

Mr. Brown hardly expected to be heeded. The bunch did not heed him. They remained in their places, and that was all. Mr. Scadder had intended to take a class that morning, but he did not reappear in the school-room, and Small Brown was left to carry on.

He carried on, amid a buzz of voices and laughter, and a stamping of boots, only too glad that the bunch did not rag him, as they had done often enough when Bill was away. He dreaded it every moment. From the bottom of his heart Small Brown wished that Bill was still there. The school committee of Packsaddle, in their wisdom, had fired Bill and installed Elias Scadder in his place—a dwarf in a giant's robe! Small Brown could have told them it would not work. And it was very probable that before long they would find it out for themselves.

Steve Gets Wet!

WITH a roar that was rather like the war-whoop of apaches on the war-trail, the Packsaddle bunch came out when the bell rang. Small Brown quitted the school-room in great relief. He had got through the morning somehow. He looked forward with dread to the afternoon. But the bunch were in high spirits. Dick Carr was still entertaining a hope of carrying out Bill's last wish, and Mick backed him up, though dubiously. But it was clear that most of the bunch were getting out of hand. And if Scadder started again on Slick Poindexter, as he was fairly certain to do when Slick was within his reach again, both Dick and Mick knew that they would back up their comrade. And then, it was certain, the fur would begin to fly.

Slick was grinning as he joined his comrades in the playground. Mr. Scadder was still in his own quarters, apparently leaving Slick over till class assembled again. Or perhaps he was going to cinch him in the chuckhouse at the school dinner. Anyhow, he had not shown up since he had gone in to wash off the ink.

"Say, you guys!" said Poindexter. "I'll tell a man I'm through with that piecan Scadder!"

"But Bill—" urged Dick Carr.

"I guess I stand for Bill as much as any guy in this bunch!" hooted Slick. "But I ain't standing for being lambasted by no piefaced bonehead like Scadder—not so's you'd notice it!"

"He may let it drop."

"I guess I'll give him a chance to!" grinned Slick. "I'm telling you hombres we got to put that piecan Steve wise to it that even if his popper's got Scadder in his pocket he can't ride rough over this bunch. I'll say that Steve's cabeza is going under the pump!"

"You said it!" shouted Mick.

"Yes, rather!" said Dick Carr promptly. "And a ducking for Steve may warn Scadder to go slow."

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"If he don't go slow," said Slick, "I guess he'll go quick—outer this hyer school! This bunch ain't taking no buck from a guy of Scadder's left! Get hold of that piecan Steve!"

A crowd of fellows surrounded Big Steve. In the school-room Steve had been full of beans in the presence of Scadder, but after Scadder left, Big Steve had remained very quiet. If Scadder could have handled the bunch like Bill, the bully of Packsaddle would have been on velvet. But Steve was guessing now that Scadder couldn't.

"Aw, back off, you guys!" snapped Steve, as he was surrounded. "I guess I'll handle my quirt if you crowd me!"

The bully of Packsaddle had sorted out his quirt, in fear of trouble with the bunch. He grasped it hard and swung it in the air, with a threatening glare at a circle of angry faces.

"I'll say that quirt won't help you none!" said Slick Poindexter. "You had a hand in getting Bill fired, you pesky piecan, and you figured that you could ride rough over this bunch with that guy Scadder backing you! You want to forget it, Steve, and I guess we'll show you how!"

"Stand back!" roared Steve.

"Cinch him!"

Slick rushed at the bully of Packsaddle, and Steve brought down the quirt with a desperate slash. Poindexter caught the blow with his arm, and the next moment his grasp was on Carson.

Five or six other pairs of hands were added instantly. Steve's quirt was wrenched away, and he went over on the earth, bumping.

Mick brandished the quirt.

"Say, I guess he's going to have a few!" shouted Mick. "You galoots stand clear!"

Held by his arms and legs, Steve was stretched out, face down. Mick Kavanaugh brought the quirt down with a terrific swipe.

Steve Carson's yell rang across the Rio Frio. He struggled and squirmed frantically.

A bony figure appeared in the school-house porch. It was Mr. Scadder. He waved a skinny hand at the excited bunch.

"Stop! Stop this!" he shrieked.

"Release Carson at once! At once!"

Whack!

The quirt came down again on Steve's riding-breeches, and he yelled wildly. Mr. Scadder made a stride out of the porch.

"This way, you pesky lobo-wolf!" roared Poindexter. "I guess we'll give you a few when we're through with Steve!"

Scadder halted. The quirt came down on Steve again. His frantic yell rang far and wide. But the new headmaster of Packsaddle turned and went back into the schoolhouse. Perhaps he was doubtful of what might happen to him if he tackled the bunch in their present excited state, and was leaving them to cool down.

But his retreat brought a roar of derision from the Packsaddlers. They could not picture Bill Sampson backing down before the bunch. Bill would have waded in hard and heavy. Elias Scadder backed out.

Steve was left at the mercy of the bunch. They did not feel very merciful towards the fellow who had been against Bill, and who had tried to take the high hand under Scadder. Steve was dragged along to the pump at the end of the playground.

Struggling and spluttering, he was pitched under the pump, and Slick Poindexter grasped the handle to work it.

A stream of water shot out, engulfing

the bully of Packsaddle. A roar of laughter answered his spluttering gasp.

"Wade in, Slick!"

"Go it, old-timer!"

Slick, grinning, worked at the pump-handle. The stream of water became a torrent. Steve bounded out of its reach, only to be hurled back again, sprawling on his back under the descending water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mick. "I'll say that piecan's getting a wash!"

Splash, splash, splash! came the torrent from the pump on the wretched bully of Packsaddle. Again and again he squirmed and wriggled away—only to be seized and flung back under the pump. He gave up the struggle at last, and stayed where he was, drenched and spluttering.

"Say, you big stiff, you standing for Scadder any more?" demanded Slick.

"Gurrerrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess that ain't any answer! You sure are going to get the pump till you allow that you throw down Scadder!"

Steve gurgled wildly.

"Aw! Gurrgh! I guess I ain't standing for Scadder no more!" he spluttered. "I'll say I'm agin that guy! Yep! Gurrgh! Let up, you pesky gopher! Groogh!"

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

"You want Bill back?" grinned Mick.

"Gurrerrgh!"

"You're getting the pump till you allow you want Bill back!"

"Urrgh! Yep!" gasped Carson. "I guess I want Bill back! I ain't standing for no Scadder, and I allow I want Bill back a whole lot! Urrghh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slick ceased to work the pump at last. Steve was allowed to crawl away, drenched and dripping, leaving a watery trail behind him as he went. And the Packsaddle bunch, roaring with laughter, crowded away to the chuckhouse to dinner.

Breaking Out!

TIN TUNG, the Chinese cook, had an uneasy expression as he served dinner to the Packsaddle bunch in the chuckhouse. Tin Tung had known what it was like to be pelted with wooden platters when the bunch were wild and full of beans and Bill was not there!

The fat Chinese blinked with his slanting eyes, prepared to dodge missiles and anxious for the fate of his pigtail, which Steve had more than once threatened to cut off—a threat that Steve would have carried out but for his fear of Bill. Now that Bill was back on Kicking Mule, Tin Tung trembled for that adornment, and it was a relief to him to see the bully of Packsaddle drenched and half drowned, and in anything but a mood for fun.

But the rest were in a wildly excited state, and Tin Tung made up his Oriental mind that Packsaddle was not good enough for him if Scadder remained in the place of Bill Sampson.

Luckily for Tin Tung, the thoughts of the bunch turned on Scadder chiefly—apart from dinner. Still, Slim Dixon landed a maize-cake on the side of his head, and Poker Parker tripped him as he carried a dish of beans—signs of the wrath to come.

The chuckhouse was seldom silent while chuck was on; but there had always been a limit when Bill was on hand. Now there was a continuous roar. Every fellow was speaking at once. Some of them sat on the trestle-table instead of the benches, and took their platters on their knees there.

There was a roar to Tin Tung for more and more chuck—Pie Sanders, especially, who had the appetite of a prairie wolf, being determined to make hay while the sun was shining.

When the other fellows had got as far as pie, Pie Sanders was still going strong on frejoles, which Tin Tung cooked as well as ever they were cooked in Mexico. Well-cooked frejoles are good provender, and Pie Sanders was reveling in his fifth helping, while the others were eating pie and shouting to Tin Tung for more.

The fat Chinese buzzed to and fro like a busy bee, panting and perspiring, every now and then a playful missile landing on him to hurry him up. Packsaddle School was rather getting into the state of Israel of old, when there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

"Looks like Scadder running this bunch!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "I'll say it's some sizes too large for him."

"I should smile!" chuckled Mick. Dick Carr looked serious. He still had a hope of carrying out Bill's last wish and influencing the bunch to follow his example. But he had to admit that the prospect was not rosy. Bill had never found it easy to ride herd at Packsaddle, and it was clear that the bunch did not give a continental red cent for Elias Scadder.

"Search me!" exclaimed Slick. "If that ain't Scadder horning in! I'll say he's heard the row across the playground."

The bony figure of Mr. Scadder appeared in the doorway of the chuckhouse. He had a cane in his hand, and behind him came the burly figure of Hank, the hired man.

Hank, who was hired to split logs, and sweep, and handle horses, had evidently been roped in by Scadder for help in dealing with the bunch, and he was looking very doubtful. Hank knew that bunch!

Perhaps the din from the chuckhouse had drawn the new headmaster there, or perhaps he considered it time to deal with Slick. It was, at least, plain that if he let the uproar go on he might as well say good-bye to his authority as headmaster, such as it was, and he had the same kind of "rookus" to expect in school. There was rather an uneasy gleam in his red-rimmed eyes, but his sharp jaw was set hard.

Every eye turned on him as he strode into the chuckhouse, followed by the dubious Hank. Hank did not want to be fired, and Scadder had threatened to fire him if he did not help—so Hank was there to give what help he could. It was not likely to be a whole heap.

"Poindexter!" snapped Scadder.

"Yeah!" grinned Slick.

"Come here!"

"I guess I'm packing cats!" said Slick.

"Come here at once!" roared Scadder.

Dick Carr touched his comrade's arm. Slick gave a snort—but he nodded. He rose from his bench and went towards Mr. Scadder.

The bunch watched curiously and

eagerly. If Scadder had come there to lambaste Slick, there was going to be trouble for Scadder—that was a cinch. And it seemed that he had!

"I am going to punish you, Poindexter, for your conduct in the school-room this morning, as an example to the school!" said Mr. Scadder sternly.

"Sez you!" grinned Slick.

Mr. Scadder grabbed at his collar—and missed, as Poindexter dodged back. "Forget it, Scadder!" shouted Mick.

Mr. Scadder gave him a grim glare.

"I shall cane you next, Kavanagh!" he said. "Now, my man, seize that boy and hold him while I cane him."

He pointed to Slick with the cane. Hank, looking more dubious than ever, advanced on Poindexter to cinch him.

Whiz! came a wooden platter, crashing just above the buckle of Hank's belt! It came from one of the bunch—hard!

The hired man gave a fearful howl, and stumbled backwards and sat down. Both his hands were pressed to the spot where Hank had lately packed his dinner.

"Ooooooh!" roared Hank. "Search me! Oh! Ow! Woooooh!"

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

"Seize that boy!" roared Scadder.

"Aw! Forget it!" gurgled Hank.

"I guess I ain't cinching no guy in that doggoned bunch! Nope! I'll say I ain't, you Scadder! Urrrggh!"

Whiz! crash! whiz! crash! Hank scrambled up, gasping, and dodged out



Splash, splash, splash! A torrent of water shot from the pump, engulfing the bully of Packsaddle, and he squirmed under it, drenched and spluttering. "Say, you big stiff," demanded Slick, "you standing for Scadder any more?" "Gourrrrrgh!" came from Big Steve. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the bunch.

of the chuckhouse in the midst of a rain of platters.

"Get going, Scadder!" roared a dozen voices.

"Beat it, you piecan!"

"Vamoose the ranch, you piefaced gopher!"

It was a roar from the excited Packsaddlers.

There was a forward surge of the bunch. Dick Carr jumped to his feet.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "Bill asked us to give the man a chance! Mr. Scadder, for goodness' sake leave Slick alone, and—yarrooooo!" Dick broke off with a yell as Scadder swiped at him with the cane.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. He gave it up at that! Like the rest, he was through with Scadder now.

Mr. Scadder made a jump at Slick, and this time got him by the collar! The cane sang through the air and came down with a terrific swipe on Poindexter's back.

Scadder had time for only one swipe. The next instant Slick turned on him, grasped him, and hooked his leg. As Scadder staggered, Mick and Dick rushed forward and rushed him over.

The new headmaster of Packsaddle sprawled in the doorway of the chuckhouse. There was a roar of derision from the bunch. Bill, with his quirt, would have found it hard going to restore order just then. Scadder, with his cane, had not a dog's chance.

He scrambled to his feet, panting, and as he did so, Pie Sanders—nobly sacrificing his sixth helping to the common cause—hurled the contents of his platter! It was a waste of good frejoles—but Pie was excited! Pie had been going to enjoy those frejoles—but Mr. Scadder did not enjoy them! A shower of hot beans and hot gravy in his face made Mr. Scadder howl wildly.

Three or four platters followed. Mr. Scadder, howling, backed out of the chuckhouse doorway and fairly fled.

"After him!" roared Slick.

"Cinch him!"

"Lynch him!"

"Get Scadder!"

Dick, Mick, and Slick led the rush. Scadder's long legs were going like

lightning as he tore across the playground to the schoolhouse. After him, in a roaring mob, went the Packsaddle bunch.

Slam!

Scadder got the door shut just in time! Behind a bolted door he gasped in sheer affright. Outside the door the Packsaddle bunch roared and howled like a pack of prairie wolves!

It did not look as if Elias Scadder would be able to fill Bill Sampson's place and run Packsaddle School!

A Surprise for Mr. Wash!

JOB WASH, chairman of the Packsaddle School committee, walked or rather, rolled—in at the school gate. Job was fat and Job was an important guy—the leading citizen of Packsaddle; the biggest storekeeper; chairman of the school committee—an important guy in every way. Some of the committee, especially Marshal Lick, had been doubtful about firing Bill and putting in a new headmaster of a more high-toned brand. But Job had had no doubts, and Two-Gun Carson had backed him and he had had his way.

The fact that Bill had "fanned" him with bullets from a Colt when he came up to the school to announce the committee's decision had got Mr. Wash's goat, and made him more determined than ever to fire Bill. Now Bill was fired, and Scadder ruled in his place, and the fat storekeeper walked up to Packsaddle School to give the new outfit, the once-over, and see that it was working well. Bill had never had much use for Mr. Wash, but Scadder had more respect for the school committee, and especially for its chairman. Mr. Wash was going to give Scadder a word or two of encouragement, and deliver an address in the school-room to the assembled school, and generally air his own importance—which he had never been able to do while Bill ruled the roost.

It was lesson-time, but as Mr. Wash rolled in he was surprised to see that the bunch were all in the playground. They were gathered in a swarm in front

of the schoolhouse, shouting and tearing and howling; which did not look as if Scadder was getting away with it.

Job Wash frowned. He strode towards the schoolhouse, and there was a yell as he was spotted.

"Say, big boys, here comes that gay Wash!" shouted Slick Poindexter. "That's the guy that fired Bill!"

"Beat it for home, Wash!" yelled Mick.

"Absquatulate, you, Wash!" yelled Poker Parker.

Mr. Wash stared around him in amazement.

"Why are you not in school?" he asked. "Go into the school-room at once! This instant!"

"I'll say you got another guess coming, Wash!" roared Poindexter.

"Say, you fat guy, we want Bill!"

"We want Bill!" roared all the bunch.

Mr. Wash strode on to the schoolhouse door. It was closed and fastened, and he rapped on it sharply. Behind him the bunch gathered.

"You, Scadder! Ain't you around?" shouted the storekeeper. "Say, what's come to you, Scadder?"

Mr. Wash had no time to get a reply from within. There was a whizz as Slick's rope circled in the air, and the loop dropped over Mr. Wash's fat form, and tightened round his ample waist. Mr. Wash gave a wild, gurgling gasp, as a dozen hands jerked on the lasso, and he was pulled backwards from the door. He sat down with a bump that almost shook Packsaddle.

As he sat, gasping for breath, the bunch crowded round him. Other members of the committee had doubted the wisdom of firing Bill—the man who had ridden herd over that rough and tough bunch—and now, perhaps, Mr. Wash began to doubt the wisdom of it! He gave a wild howl.

"Scadder! Mr. Scadder!"

"I guess Scadder ain't hornin' in, not so's you'd notice it!" chuckled Slick. "I'll say that galoot has found out he can't handle this bunch!"

"You said it!" chortled Mick.

"We want Bill!" roared Poindexter.

"You get me, you, Wash? Say, you going to fire Scadder, and let old Bill horn in again?"

"No!" gasped Mr. Wash, struggling with the rope. "Never! Go into the school-room! Order! I shall instruct Mr. Scadder to punish every boy here—"

"I guess Scadder ain't honing for it!" grinned Slick. "I'll say that hombre Scadder knows where he gets off!"

"I should smile a few!" chuckled Pie Sanders.

"We want Bill!" roared the bunch.

Mr. Wash scrambled to his feet. His fat face was red with rage. He grabbed at the rope to get it off.

A swift jerk and Mr. Wash was rolling on the earth again. Then Slick, and five or six others pulling on the rope started for the gate. After them went the whole bunch, yelling. From the schoolhouse window Mr. Scadder's scared face looked—but Mr. Scadder did not think of emerging from his shelter to go to the aid of the chairman of the Packsaddle School committee. Mr. Scadder was only too thankful that a bolted door was between him and the Packsaddle bunch—and he only hoped that it would remain between them!

Over and over rolled the leading citizen of the town of Packsaddle, at the end of the rope, over and over to the gate. Mr. Wash had rolled in at the gate, fat and important! He rolled out, on his back, his hat gone, his coat

(Continued on page 23.)

The entire police force were searching for him!

Companies of soldiers were hunting for him!

A gang of crooks were itching to get their hands on him!



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The SECRET WORLD!



Just in time, the St. Frank's boys' craft swung round. Next moment, amid a splintering crash of smashed sweeps, the two galleys grazed sides. But the Gothlanders' attempt to ram the juniors' vessel had failed, and the strong current carried them past.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Action!

NORTHESTRIA, a country in a secret world belonging to the Middle Ages, is on the verge of coming to grips with their enemies, the Gothlanders. The enemy armada, every ship of which is loaded down with hordes of soldiers for the big onslaught, is over half-way across the lake which separates Northestia from Gothland!

In three motor craft armed with machine-guns, Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore, and others, who are fighting for Northestia, menace the invading galleys as they advance.

Meanwhile, the boys of St. Frank's, who were stranded in Northestia with Nelson Lee & Co. when their airship crashed, decide to do their bit in the war, too. They take a galley out on the lake, and, from a distance, stand by to give a hand in the fighting if needed.

In spite of the efforts of Nelson Lee & Co. to put the enemy to confusion, the armada steadily draws nearer to Northestia!

It could now be seen that there were three distinct armadas, so to speak. The largest—probably under Kassker's direct command—was making for the Northestrian capital. The others were spreading out on either side, with the intention of attacking the coast simul-

taneously, many miles distant. In this way it would be impossible for the Northestrians to concentrate their forces at the one spot. Kassker was certain that two of his armies, at least, would force a landing.

But for the combined work of Nelson Lee, Dorrie, and Captain Waring, the invasion would have been easy. These three men made an enormous difference. While yet many miles from their goal, the Gothlanders were badly cut up and disorganised. And now the Northestrian Navy was coming into real action!

From hidden creeks and bays, from river-mouths and coves, many ships appeared. They swung out grimly, ready to fight the enemy on the water. Lee had pressed every ship into service, and they contained Northestia's picked archers.

All this the juniors could see.

They watched, fascinated. There was something breathless in this great spectacle. Surely no schoolboys had ever before been eye-witnesses of such a battle at close range. But they were in no danger. As long as the galley kept its distance, it could watch at close quarters with impunity.

"I say, let's make a dash into 'em," suggested Handforth eagerly. "Let's join in at the death, anyway!"

"The death?" repeated Nipper, staring.

"Yes; these rotters are nearly whacked—"

"Don't kid yourself, Handy," interrupted Nipper grimly. "The battle has hardly started yet. What we have seen is nothing—just the preliminary skirmish. The Gothlanders are going to land, and this war looks like being a deadly one."

"Oh rot!" said Handforth. "Kassker's dogs can't do much harm!"

"We're not talking about his dogs; we're talking about his armies!" retorted Nipper gruffly.

"You silly ass—"

"Anyhow, things are only just beginning," said Nipper. "We're not dashing into any fray, old son, unless there's a sudden need for it. You'll have to be satisfied with standing by and watching."

But Edward Oswald Handforth wasn't satisfied at all.

Overboard!

UNLESS there's a sudden need!" murmured the leader of Study D. "If'n! What does that mean, exactly?"

"It means what it implies, and no more," growled Nipper.

"Well, there's a sudden need now—"

"Rats!" said the Remove skipper. "I'm in charge here, and I'll tell everybody if there's a sudden need for dashing into action. For example, if we saw one of these Northestrian ships getting

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the worst of things, with no other help near at hand, we'd butt in. That's what I mean by 'sudden need.' At the moment, Handy, I'm quite content to watch."

Handforth turned aside and gazed at Church and McClure ferociously.

"Disgusting!" he said, taking a deep breath.

"Well, you needn't shrivel us up with that look!" protested Church.

"I wish I could shrivel up Nipper!" snapped Handforth. "He's a good chap, but he's obstinate! By George! If there's one trait in a chap's character I hate more than anything else, its obstinacy!"

"You must loathe yourself, then, old man," said McClure.

"Eh?"

"Nothing!" said Mac.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Church suddenly. "Look at those two North-eastrian ships there!"

He pointed, and Handforth stared eagerly.

"What about 'em?" he rapped out. "They're not engaging!"

"Well, we can look at 'em, can't we?" grinned Church. "Anything to escape from your idle chatter!"

"Idle chatter!" Handforth nearly burst a blood-vessel. "Why, you— you—"

"Hurrah! There goes one of them!"

Handforth turned at the cry. Far away, three of the Gothlander transports had collided, owing to some feverish activity on Lord Dorrmore's part. And one of the ships, badly holed, was sinking. Even as the juniors looked, she heeled over and took the plunge.

"By George!" said Handforth. "It's a real naval action!"

"But why don't they use the aeroplane?" asked Jack Grey.

"That whippet machine is in good order, and two or three of the airship officers are trained pilots. I can't understand—"

"There aren't any more bombs," explained Nipper. "I heard the guy'nor speaking to Dorrie yesterday. The airship didn't start out on a war-like expedition, you know, so her supplies of ammunition were limited. If Dorrie wasn't such a thorough chap, insisting on being prepared for any emergency, there wouldn't even have been a machine-gun or a rifle on board. This affair proves the wisdom of being ready!"

"Talking about ammunition," said Pitt. "What about the machine-guns?"

Nipper frowned.

"I'm worrying," he admitted. "I know for a fact that there aren't very many rounds left. They're using them all up now, in one burst. I think, when they'll be most effective. If the Gothlanders gain the upper hand to-day, I'm afraid things will be pretty rocky in Northestia."

Nelson Lee was thinking exactly the same thing, and he had already warned his machine-gunner to conserve every possible shot. The weapon was not brought into action until it was certain to be effective. Nelson Lee gave the word from time to time, as he brought his strange craft round to a position of advantage.

Captain Waring, in charge of the other gondola, was adopting very similar tactics. These two craft were behaving magnificently. The floats had been scientifically constructed, and gave the gondolas not only high speed, but wonderful stability.

On any "sea," however, they would have been more or less useless. This lake was always placid, always smooth. So the floating gondolas had been practi-

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cable. Each one contained the pilot, the gunner, and three or four others armed with rifles.

William Napoleon Browne was prominent in Captain Waring's gondola. Browne was a crack shot, and he had pressed Nelson Lee so urgently to be employed that his plea had prevailed. Now he was justifying his selection.

Leaning out of a rear window of Waring's gondola, he was taking sniping shots at the enemy ships. Browne was mostly aiming at the brutal officers, who could be distinguished by their ornate headgear, or the helmsmen. Stevens of the Fifth was there, too, although he was not personally active.

"We progress, Brother Horace, we progress markedly," observed Browne, as he cheerily turned. "The fleets are disorganised, ships sail in every direction but the right one. Somehow I have an idea that Brother Kassker regards our scientific tactics as a raw deal."

"We haven't beaten the hounds yet," said Stevens.

"No," admitted Browne. "An illuminating remark, brother, and one that I entirely endorse. However, we have but started on this campaign, and we must not be too impatient."

The gondola gave a giddy, swerving lurch.

"Whoa!" gasped Stevens. "That was a nasty one!"

"Fear not!" said Browne calmly. "Brother Waring is at the wheel, and we can trust him to— But what is this? I can see that my trusty aim is required."

A shattering rattle had broken out as the machine-gun sent a hail of bullets into a Gothlander ship which had been selected for attack. The gondola swept past, and the enemy sent up yells of rage and fear.

Browne fired twice in rapid succession.

"Bullseyes, Brother Horace," he observed. "If you will now watch closely you will see another masterly display."

But Stevens was somewhat staggered by that "masterly display" which could hardly have been what Browne intended. The gondola swerved round again, and so violent was the lurch that Browne, who was leaning well out, lost his balance. His long body toppled over, and Stevens made a wild grab at his legs.

But it was too late!

William Napoleon Browne plunged down and vanished amid the foaming wake of the swiftly moving craft!

Sudden Need!

REGGIE PITT pointed.

"I'll bet that's Mr. Lee's gondola!" he said. "Look at the way it's attacking that Gothlander galley! Phew! I thought he was going to capsize just then, the way he spun round."

"It's Captain Waring's," said Nipper, who was looking through a telescope at the distant action. "I can see old Browne at one of the rear windows—"

"Let's have a look!" said Watson eagerly.

"Just a minute!" went on Nipper. "That boat isn't one of the ordinary transports. It's a big galley, very much like this one. I'll bet it contains one of Kassker's big men. A kind of special boat, capable of making circles round those transports."

"That's why Captain Waring is attacking it, I expect; there's nothing like going for the heads!" agreed Pitt. "If only the commanders can be sent to the bottom, the whole fleet will be in disorder."

Nipper gave a sudden shout. "Good heavens!" he gasped.

"Browne!"

"What about him?" asked a dozen voices.

"Poor old Browne!" shouted Nipper hoarsely. "He's overboard!"

"Good gad!"

"Overboard!"

"Yes; he overbalanced when the gondola gave that awful lurch just now," continued Nipper. "I say, what a tragedy! Old Browne, you know—one of the best!"

Handforth gave a tremendous roar.

"Isn't this a sudden need?" he shouted excitedly. "You were talking about us going into action if there was a sudden need—"

"All right; keep calm!" snapped Nipper. "You won't need to egg me on if I can see half a chance of being useful. I say! Great Scott! He's swimming! Old Browne's still alive!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, but he can't last!" went on Nipper. "That Gothlander galley is only just behind, and they're bound to plug him with arrows— But wait a minute! Well I'm blessed! He's climbing on board!"

"On board the enemy galley?" asked Pitt, staring.

"Yes!"

"Then he's done for!"

Nipper continued to watch, and although he was inwardly excited, his hand was perfectly steady. He held the telescope without a tremor. At the same moment he gave orders to the oarsmen to work at full speed. The galley swept onwards, blades flashing, foam streaming in her wake.

"We're going into action!" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"We're going to save Browne, if we can!" retorted Nipper.

"Hurrah!"

"Don't cheer!" continued Nipper. "They've got him! He managed to get on board, but they've dragged him down now, and there's no sign— Have the brutes killed him!"

The schoolboys wanted to be absolutely sure, and so they gave stern chase. There was no more sight of the unfortunate William Napoleon Browne, and the enemy galley was swinging off, and isolating itself from the rest of the fleet. No doubt there were many dead and wounded on board, as a result of the gondola's attack.

And Browne, as a matter of fact, was very much alive.

After falling into the water, he had realised that his only chance was to climb on board the enemy galley. The gondola had practically vanished, travelling at high speed. Captain Waring, indeed, at the controls, was totally unaware of the disaster. And it was a tragic feature of the affair that Stevens could do nothing to enlighten him. That rear compartment of the gondola, where Browne and Stevens had stood, was not connected with the main control room. So Stevens, to his horror, was compelled to watch, and could do nothing to make Waring turn about.

Browne knew this, and he also knew that there were strange monsters in this limpid water. Incidentally, there were other monsters in the enemy galley, so there was very little to choose. However, Browne clutched at the galley instinctively as it swept by him, and as he pulled himself over the clumsy bulwark, he expected a pike or a battle-axe to deliver a death-dealing blow.

Indeed, several members of the enemy force raised their weapons, but a commanding voice rang out.

"Hold!" it thundered. "Spare this

youth! Mayhap he will be of use to us. He is one of these accursed strangers—"

"Were it not better to slay him, my lord?" asked another.

"Nay! Let him live!"

The man with the commanding voice was Attawulf the Terrible—one of Kassker's most influential generals. The schoolboys had been right in surmising that this galley was a special craft.

Browne regarded his captors with all his usual complacency.

"But why this reprieve, brother?" he asked mildly.

"I talk not with vermin such as thou!" snarled Attawulf. "Take this youth, and bind him. Place him prominently, so that all can see. His presence may, perchance, protect us from further attack."

"A brainy scheme, brother," said Browne admiringly. "Needless to say, it has my entire approval. But let me disillusion you. The vessels of my friends can sweep up and kill you all—and my presence will not deter them any—"

"Away with him!" interrupted the Gothlander general.

"I like not the looks o' yon galley!" muttered one of the other officers. "Northestrian, by my bones! It cometh swiftly!"

Nipper, indeed, had commanded his men to use every ounce of their strength. For Browne, alive, was now visible. And the juniors were easily able to guess the reason for his preservation. He was there to protect his hosts! Dead, he would be useless; but alive, he was of value.

And then commenced a stern chase. Attawulf's galley fled down the lake, deserting the rest of the fleet. For Attawulf the Terrible had rather a fondness for his own skin, and he feared this pursuer greatly. He assumed that it contained those deadly weapons which spat death. Little did he imagine that the pursuing galley contained only schoolboys, with not a single weapon between them!

Into the Great Gorge!

HANDFORTH was now in his element.

Action! Just what he wanted! In his exuberance at this sudden turn of events, the warlike Edward Oswald was grateful to the luckless Browne for having overbalanced so opportunely. He quite failed to take Browne's own feelings into account.

"Faster—faster!" he shouted. "We're not gaining!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" growled Nipper. "These oarsmen are taking orders from me, please. Besides, they're using every effort already. That enemy galley is lighter than ours."

"They're heading straight down the lake, away from all the other ships," said Reggie Pitt. "By jingo, I believe they're scared of us."

"Of course they're scared!" said Handforth.

"But why should they be?" went on Reggie. "We haven't got so much as a popgun or a peashooter! We can't attack them, even if we do get to close quarters."

"But we can ram them!" snapped Handforth. "Anyhow, we've got to rescue old Browne—that's settled. We can't leave him on this enemy ship!"

"Nobody knows what's going to happen," replied Nipper. "Browne's all right so far—I can see him clearly. Those Gothlanders probably think that we've got machine-guns and rifles on

board. That's why they're bunking from us."

"You've hit it!" nodded Willy. "Our best plan is to let 'em keep thinking it! The more we chase 'em, the more they'll run!"

Attawulf the Terrible was hardly proving himself to be a capable and efficient general. Merely for the sake of his own skin, he was making a bolt for safety, leaving the transports he was conveying to fend for themselves. Naturally, those same transports were thoroughly at a loss, and the majority of them broke formation, and fell easy victims to the Northestrian vessels.

Attawulf had learned to fear the death-dealing weapons of these "stranger people" who had befriended the Northestrians. As Reggie Pitt put it, it was fairly obvious that Attawulf had no stomach for a fight. He didn't want to try conclusions with his pursuers.

Farther and farther down the lake went the fugitive and its grim follower, and for more than an hour there was scarcely a yard of difference between the two craft. The enemy was steadily maintaining his lead, and all the efforts of the pursuers were of no avail. Handforth was fuming all the time, and the rest of the juniors were keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. There was something exhilarating in this stern chase.

But for the fact that Browne was on board the enemy galley, the schoolboys might not have maintained the pursuit—for they could not give battle, even if the Gothlanders attacked. It would be their turn, indeed, to flee. But Attawulf and his crew did not realise this!

"We've left practically everybody else behind," remarked Nipper, as he glanced round. "There's not a sign of the other ships now, except for one or two dots in the far distance. These beggars aren't making for Gothland, either."

"What's their game?" asked Fullwood. "Why are they going down in this direction?"

"I don't know," replied Nipper, puzzled.

"Then I do!" said Handforth. "They're bunking from us—they're just going at random, and—"

"I wish I could believe that, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "But I can't help having a little misgiving that they're trying to lead us into a trap. They're cunning brutes, these Gothlanders."

"What trap could there be down there?" asked Handforth sceptically.

"None that I can think of—but this part of the oasis is all new to us," replied the Remove captain. "We shall have to go cautiously, and be ready for action at the first sign of a trick. I don't like the look of those rocky gorges ahead. Jove, look at those mountains, too! Don't they tower up?"

They were getting down to the lower end of the great lake, where the jagged rocks and cliffs came down to the water's edge, and where the glaciers, far above, could be seen towering upwards into the everlasting mists. It was an awe-inspiring sight. While the broad shores of the lake were rich with fertile lands, this narrowing end of the lake was nothing but a barrier of rock. Just as the lake itself divided Northestria from Gothland, so did these mountains of rock divide the two countries at either end of the long stretch of water. No enemy forces could get round into Northestria by land, for the mountain barriers were impassable.

And the enemy galley was speeding straight for a great gorge which wound

its way inwards between the menacing cliffs. It grew narrower, and Nipper noticed that the speed of the boat was much less. The oarsmen were toiling manfully, but the galley laboured.

"There's a pretty stiff current here, coming down this gorge," declared Nipper, as he looked overside. "It's getting faster and faster, too. Why are they leading us up here? I don't like it, Montie."

"Dear old boy, neither do I," said Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez and inspecting the frowning crags. "A frightfully unpleasant sort of place, begad! If it wasn't for old Browne, I'd suggest turning back—I would, really."

"We can't desert Browne," muttered Nipper. "Look ahead, there! Isn't that a tremendous cavern? This swift current seems to be flowing out of it."

"It's a mile away," said Pitt. "The enemy is making for it, though—I say, is it my fancy, or is the air a bit chilly?"

"It's not fancy, Reggie," said Nipper, with a keen look. "I've noticed the drop in temperature, too. I can't understand it. Why should the atmosphere be cooler? There's something about this spot I don't quite like."

Handforth fairly danced with impatience.

"I say, this is all rot!" he protested. "What's the good of a chase like this? We're not gaining a yard on them! Hadn't we better help the oarsmen, and put on a bit of extra speed?"

"Occasionally," said Nipper, "your brain functions, Handy."

"Look here, you ass—"

"It's a good idea!" put in Nipper. "Volunteers wanted!"

There were plenty, and a minute later, practically all the juniors had dropped into the seats, and were pulling at the great sweeps, and helping the perspiring men. A more rapid stroke was now possible, and the result was soon seen, for the schoolboy galley slowly but surely began to overhaul the fugitive.

"Are we gaining?" yelled Handforth, as he pulled.

"Yes, keep it up, old man," sang out Nipper.

Handforth, as he toiled, felt that the whole thing was wrong. The idea was his, and, naturally, he should have been in command, instead of acting the part of a galley slave! But it was something to know, at all events, that the enemy was being overhauled.

The Wiles of Attawulf!

NIPPER was keenly on the alert for treachery.

Vaguely he suspected a trick here, but he couldn't possibly see how it was going to be worked. The enemy galley was still nearly half a mile ahead, so there could be no immediate peril. This great gorge was narrowing all the time, and farther on—under a mile distant—the waters of the lake vanished into a vast cavern-mouth—a cavern which was several hundred yards broad, the roof towering seventy-five or eighty feet from the water's edge. It was a great opening in the base of the stupendous cliff.

The cliff itself rose sheer—monstrous, overpowering rock which reached upwards for untold thousands of feet. The proximity of the rocks seemed to dwarf the two galleys. Amid such surroundings of rugged grandeur, they looked like little toy vessels.

But, although Nipper was ready for any move, he knew that he was still safe. He was taking no desperate risk. For they were proving that they could

beat the enemy when it came to a matter of speed, and there was still plenty of room to manoeuvre. The current, however, was growing more and more difficult. Notwithstanding the great exertions of the oarsmen, the speed of both vessels had slowed down astonishingly. It was as much as they could do to equal the speed of the current.

"I don't like it!" muttered Nipper grimly.

The enemy was vanishing into that great cavern!

The fugitive galley was visible for just another minute, and then it became swallowed up in the blackness of the cavity.

Nipper did not give any order to relax speed. But he was very doubtful about venturing within the cavern. Out here, in the open, he was ready, but the advantage would be all with the enemy if the schoolboys continued.

"I thought so—it's a trap!" muttered Nipper, with a nod. "They want to lure us into that cavern, and they're probably lurking just inside, ready to smother us with arrows. Thanks all the same, my friends, but there's nothing doing!"

He gave another look at the black cavity in the distance, and then turned to the oarsmen.

"Ease up, you chaps," he said briefly. The men were only too ready.

"Hey, what's the idea?" demanded Handforth, staring. "You fathead! Just when we're gaining—"

"Can't help it, Handy—I'm not going into a blind trap like this," retorted Nipper curtly. "These Gothlanders are simply trying to get the advantage over us, and I'm not having any."

"My hat!" shouted somebody. "They're gone!"

"Vanished!"

"Into that cavern, too!"

"Good gad!"

Most of the fellows were astonished. They had been toiling at the oars, and had known nothing of the enemy vessel's manoeuvre until now. The schoolboys crowded up on to the decks, and stood staring. Meanwhile, their galley remained almost motionless, the men moving the sweeps just sufficiently to enable them to keep level, in spite of the current.

The air here was so perceptibly colder that everybody noticed it. The chilling effect seemed to be coming from that cavern, and the water itself had a different look about. Nipper was very curious.

"This beats me!" he said frankly. "We ought to press on—" began Handforth.

"I'm not talking about the enemy galley now," interrupted Nipper. "I think I can see through their game. I'm referring to this chilliness. Why does it come out of the mountain? And, if it comes to that, where is all this water coming from? It's not one of the ordinary mountain rivers."

"Why bother?" asked Fullwood. "We want to know what's happened to that beastly galley. Don't you think it would be wise to venture right into the cavern?"

"Wise? It would be suicide!"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "I vote for pressing on—"

"Dry up, Ted—Nipper's right!" interrupted Willy.

"What?"

"Of course he's right, chump!" said Willy curtly.

"Are you calling me a chump?"

"My hat! He's got to argue at a time like this!" snapped Handforth minor. "Can't you understand that?"

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these beastly Gothlanders are expecting us to go in after them so that they can let loose their arrows? Or perhaps they mean to ram us out of the darkness—"

"By Jove!" breathed Nipper, with a start.

"What's wrong?" asked Pitt.

"Ram us!" said Nipper. "Perhaps I was wrong about the trap. Perhaps Willy's explanation is right! If they're going to sweep down and harm us—Pull hard, men!" he added urgently.

"Swing round—"

"Look!" yelled Watson.

They all stared, astonished. The enemy galley had suddenly come into sight, speeding out of the mouth of the cavern almost magically. Coming down with the help of the current, and with all her oars flashing, the Gothlander was making a terrific pace. She came along like a destroyer.

And she was steering straight for the schoolboys!

"I feared something like this!" shouted Nipper anxiously. "Pull, men! Pull for your lives! She'll be on us in less than a minute!"

Attawulf was a cunning rogue. With his vessel's great speed, he could steer her perfectly, and she would answer the helm on the instant.

The schoolboys' galley, on the other hand, was labouring clumsily against the current, and, to make matters worse, she was practically broadside on, her oarsmen making frantic attempts to swing round to the current.

But it seemed that they would be too late.

The enemy was rushing down, bent on destruction.

A Near Thing!

THAT Attawulf was attempting to ram his enemy was obvious.

He had little fear of his own craft being sunk by the impact. With his great speed, he would crash clean through the other ship, and, moreover, the bows of his galley had been especially made for ramming purposes. The Gothlander chief was certain of success.

Browne, still a helpless victim, watched with a pained expression on his face. He was bound hand and foot, and for the moment his captors were paying no attention to him. Their gaze was fully occupied elsewhere.

"Alas, brothers, I deplore this exhibition of rashness!" murmured the Fifth Former. "While being grateful for your services on my behalf, I did not expect you to actually commit suicide! I fear there is a crash coming. Already I can detect the touch of the butcher's axe! For, assuredly, as soon as these unfortunates are sent to the bottom, my head will be sacrificed. A tragic fate for Napoleon!"

Browne, however, was not quite so pessimistic as his murmured words implied. He watched with acute anxiety. Would the schoolboys be able to avoid this deadly peril? The issue would be known in less than twenty seconds.

Attawulf himself was at the great tiller, and he was ready to swing the rushing galley round if the victim attempted to avoid the impact. But even Attawulf was not ready for Nipper's surprise move.

Just when all hope seemed over—when the collision appeared to be inevitable—Nipper yelled out to his men to back water. They had been prepared for this, and obeyed on the instant. At the same second, Nipper and four other juniors swung the tiller round with all their strength.

Nipper relied on the current, and it served him well. The nose of the galley turned on the second, and the clumsy craft spun round. Attawulf attempted to make a counter move, but there was no time.

Amid a splintering crash of woodwork, the two galleys grazed sides. The great sweeps were smashed to matchwood, and many men were badly shaken, and some slightly injured. But the schoolboys' galley had swung round in the nick of time, and the enemy thundered past in a swirl of foam. The vessel had bumped, but the ramming enterprise had failed. Already the Gothlanders were speeding away, unable to check their progress in that swift current.

"Great Scott!" gasped Nipper. "That was a near one!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glen-thorne, mopping his noble brow. "Ods shaves and close calls! I thought we were rammed, laddies!"

"We ought to have been too," said Reggie Pitt. "Hanged if I can understand how we escaped. By jingo, Nipper, old son, that was a smart move of yours!"

Nipper grunted.

"Never mind about it being smart—we never ought to have been in such a position!" he rapped out. "We'd better have a look at these men—some of them are hurt. All our oars on the port side are smashed, too—"

"Hi!" yelled De Valerie. "Look there!"

He pointed excitedly, and there was a general shout. It was a shout of amazement, not unmixed with joy. A figure was clinging desperately to a half-broken sweep—the figure of William Napoleon Browne!

"Greetings, brothers!" he called up, with all his usual coolness. "Pray don't hurry, but I have a slight inkling that this oar is slipping."

"Old Browne!" roared a dozen voices. "Grab him, you chaps!"

"Hold out one of those other oars!"

"That's no good!" snapped Nipper. "He's pretty well helpless!"

Without waiting another second, Nipper took a header overboard, and with a few strokes he reached Browne's side. It was as much as he could do to fight against the current and keep in close proximity to the galley. Browne was clinging to that smashed oar very precariously, for his arms were bound, and he had very little freedom of movement. If those bonds had been tightly drawn, he would never have survived. By a wonderful stroke of luck, he had clutched at the oar during the crucial moment.

"By Jove, Browne, this is too wonderful for words!" gasped Nipper, as he helped to support the lanky Fifth Former. "We had given you up for lost."

"Unless we are rapidly hooked in, I fear we shall both be lost," replied Browne. "Ah, our valiant friends are moving, it seems. Correct me if I am wrong, but is this water approaching zero, or is it my fancy?"

There was no fancy about it. The water was extraordinarily cold, and there was something else which gave Nipper a shock. He said nothing about it at the moment, for he was giving all his attention to Browne.

Willing hands drew them in, and dragged them to safety. The galley was now drifting down the gorge, and some of the confusion was righting itself. The enemy was already far distant, and a glance proved that Attawulf was speeding away as fast as his oarsmen could take him. Having failed

in his attempt to destroy the schoolboys, he was not risking a second encounter. And the juniors, for their part, were content to let the Gothlander go. For Browne was now with them, and that was really all that mattered.

The Fifth Former's bonds were soon cut, and he stood there, calm and composed. Nothing, apparently, could shake the lanky senior's equanimity.

"But how on earth did you manage to do it?" demanded Pitt.

"A comparatively simple matter," replied Browne. "Another fellow, perhaps, might have failed; but we Brownes, as you have reason to know, are of a different breed. Our motto—"

"Never mind your motto," broke in Handforth. "How did you escape?"

"I could foresee that an exceptionally shapely head would soon be severed from a pair of fine, manly shoulders," said Browne coolly. "Had this galley been destroyed, it is no mere guesswork to predict that a promising member of the Browne family would have been destroyed also. Imagine the consternation throughout the length and breadth of England! A Browne decapitated! Picture the expressions of horror—"

"You hopeless ass!" growled Pitt. "We're asking you—"

"Exactly!" said Browne gently. "Well, brothers, upon seeing that a crash was apparently inevitable, I preferred to take a chance. And so, at the crucial moment, I hurled myself overboard. It was careless of my hosts to take their eyes off me, for you can never know what a Browne will be up to! It has been truly said that we are an impetuous tribe! However, to continue, I leapt—I plunged—I grabbed. And, having grabbed, I firmly secured the half-nelson upon the one thing which seemed solid. And thus you found me. Precisely why I am alive, I cannot say. Strictly speaking, I ought to have been mangled to shreds amid the splinters. But is not the Browne luck almost as proverbial as the Handforths'?"

"If it's all the same to you, Browne, allow me to call you a spoofer!" said Pitt. "There wasn't much luck about it. You dived in, and took a chance."

"Anyhow," said Browne, "we are all out of the soup—we live. And Brother Nipper has a strange, far-away expression in his eye. May I venture to guess the workings of that massive brain?"

"I am puzzled, Browne—jolly puzzled!" replied Nipper.

"About the water, no doubt!" asked Browne.

"Yes!" said Nipper, staring. "About the water!"

The Mystery of the Cavern!

"WHAT'S wrong with the water?" asked Handforth. "What's all this mystery—"

"The water's salt!" said Nipper.

"Salt?"

"Yes, salt!"

"Anything startling in that?" asked Handforth sarcastically. "Why shouldn't the water be salt?"

"You apparently have failed to perceive the significance of this trifling fact, Brother Ted," said Browne gently. "And let me point out that we are not concerning ourselves as to why the water shouldn't be salt, but why it should be! As far as our own experience goes, we have hitherto regarded this lake as being distinctly fresh."

"By jingo, yes!" said Reggie Pitt.

"But it's salt here—and cold," said Nipper, shivering. "Frightfully cold. It's the current, of course—the flow from

that big cavern. I don't want to get any silly ideas, but I'd wager my shirt that it's sea-water!"

Browne nodded.

"In making such a wager, Brother Nipper, you are not risking a great deal," he said dryly. "You are undoubtedly right. I have tasted sea-water on many occasions, and I can personally vouch for the genuine nature of this sample. The sample, I may add, consists approximately of five quarts. It is now safely aboard, down in the hold!"

Browne held his middle, and made a wry face.

"Never mind about the water you swallowed—that's unimportant," said Nipper.

"To you, brother, possibly, but not to me—"

"Salt water!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly. "What can it mean? Sea-water! And flowing into this lake! By George! We ought to explore this cavern: we ought to—"

"If there are sufficient oars left, we'll have a shot at it!" interrupted Nipper. "I believe we've got some spare sweeps on board, haven't we? We'll try to force our way in against the current, and get into that cavern."

Everybody was filled with exciting thoughts—thoughts which none cared to put into words. Sea-water! And here it was, flowing swiftly and steadily into the lake. What could be the meaning of it? It could not have been in existence for long, or the whole lake would have become tainted by the salt.

By this time the oarsmen had cleared away most of the wreckage, and the galley was shipshape again. Down

one side she was badly splintered, but no severe damage had been done, and she was still capable of being controlled.

"The Arctic!" said Handforth abruptly.

"Eh?"

"This water's flowing in from the Arctic!" said the leader of Study D, his eyes gleaming. "Don't you understand? This river isn't just one from the mountain streams, but an influx from the open sea."

"A plausible theory, brother, but somewhat susceptible to question," said Browne. "To the best of my knowledge, the Arctic hereabouts, at this time of the year, is one solid slab of ice."

"That's right," said Pitt. "Everything's frozen up in this latitude. And this water isn't exceptionally cold—"

"In that I venture to differ," said Browne.

"Not cold in the Arctic sense, I mean," continued Reggie. "If it were, you'd have been numbed to a state of helplessness during the first second or two."

"It's no good discussing a problem that we can't solve," said Nipper. "We'll try to get into the cavern, although I'm not very hopeful."

He proved to be right, for the galley, with many of its oars missing, could not force its way up the gorge against the current. The men tried hard, but the effort was too great for them. The struggling vessel could only maintain her position at the best. No progress was possible. The yawning mouth of the cavern remained tantalisingly ahead.

"The only thing we can do is to turn



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back, and report the affair to Mr. Lee, when we get the chance," said Nipper at length. "Ease up, men! We'll swing her round, and then you can take a rest. We'll float down on the current."

Handforth frowned.

"What rot!" he protested. "Here we've got a chance of exploring—"

"Be reasonable, old man!" interrupted Church. "It's no good jibbing against the thing like this. If we had an engine on this galley, it would be different. As it is, we can't fight this current. It's got us whacked. We ought to be jolly thankful that we're all alive!"

"That's true enough," admitted Handforth soberly. "I thought we were all going under when that galley swept down on us. But, I mean to say—salt water! What the dickens can the explanation be?"

They were all agog with excitement and eager to report their discovery to Nelson Lee. But this could not be done at once, for they had come a great distance away from the scene of the other activities. Indeed, they had hardly realised the true distance, until they now went back on their tracks. Full three hours had elapsed before they saw a familiar landmark. They were skirting the North-east coast all the time, and were filled with new misgivings. There were hosts of ships further along, clustered against the beaches for miles. Every bay and inlet was filled with them.

Was the invasion a success? It was a disconcerting thought, and they were now anxious to know how affairs had been developing. By great good fortune, they espied the low, rakish motor-boat in the distance, and they were further delighted when the motor-boat came speeding towards them.

As it approached, the power was cut off, and the figure of Lord Dorrmore could be seen at the wheel.

Dorrmore was accompanied by a North-east officer, and the juniors saw that both of them were looking rather grave. It was unusual to see

such an expression on Dorrie's carefree face.

"Where on earth have you boys been to?" he shouted, as he looked up at the galley. "Do you know that we've been worryin' ourselves sick about you? Mr. Lee's tearin' his hair!"

"We chased a Gotthard galley," explained Nipper, leaning over the bulwark.

"Then you ought to have known better!" retorted Dorrie.

"But Browne was a prisoner on board it, and we've got him here," explained Nipper.

"Gad, you seem to find all the excitement these gals' about!" said his lordship. "That makes a difference, of course. Are you all right? Anybody hurt, or anything?"

Nipper gave a brief account of what had happened.

"All I can say is that you're infernally lucky!" commented his lordship at last. "There's one thing I can't quite get the hang of, though. How, in the name of all that's wonderful, did Browne get aboard that enemy boat?"

"A trilling matter, Brother Dorrie," said Browne. "Captain Waring was thoughtless enough to tip me out of his own craft, and I was picked up by the enemy. Being, as you know, a Browne, they hesitated to kill me."

"They kept him on board as a safeguard against an attack, I fancy," put in Nipper. "Anyhow, we're all safe, Dorrie. What's been happening? It's hours since we started off on this affair, and—"

"Enough's been happenin'!" snapped Dorrie. "Those confounded Gotthards have landed!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then the invasion's a real thing!"

"Tens of thousands of the vermin!" said Dorrie, frowning. "A terrific battle is developin'. I understand. The North-easters couldn't keep them out. You boys had better keep on board that ship until we know somethin' more definite. You're comparatively safe there, anyhow."

"There's something we want to tell

"Urrrggh! Urrrggh!" gurgled Mr. Wash. "Urrrggh!"

"You got me?" roared Slick, brandishing the quirt. "We want Bill! We don't give a continental red cent for Scadder, nor for the school committee, nor for you, Wash! Got that?"

"Gurrgh!"

"You beat it back to the burg, and put them wise that we want Bill! Got that?"

"Urrrggh!"

The rope was cast off. Mr. Wash scrambled to his feet. Slick lashed the quirt round his fat legs. Mr. Wash yelled wildly.

"Beat it!" roared the bunch.

Mr. Wash was glad to beat it! A lashing quirt round his fat legs urged him on. He started down the trail to

you, Dorrie!" called Nipper. "There's a rummy current in that gorge!"

"Where you followed the enemy galley?" asked Lord Dorrmore.

"Yes," said Nipper.

And he explained about the swift current and the saltness of the water. Dorrie listened with growing interest, and the North-east officer by his side became quite excited.

"It's my faith, this is strange news!" he said hoarsely. "A cold current with water of such saltness! By St. Guthrie, it's the famous Flow!"

"The which?" asked Dorrie.

"The Flow!" replied the North-east officer. "Not in my lifetime have I known this, but wondrous stories did my father tell—"

"We'll have a chat about this in a minute," interrupted Dorrie. "All right, boys; you'd better do as I say, and keep on the lake," he added. "I'll remember what you've told me about that current. Perhaps Mr. Lee will suggest an explanation."

With a wave, his lordship started up his engine, and then the motor-boat glided off. Lord Dorrmore was rather startled by what he had just learned, and he wanted to have a talk with his companion, who seemed to know something of it.

"Now, then, Sigbert, old man," said the sporting peer, as he headed his craft down the lake. "What's that you were saying about your father?"

"In our history, the Flow is well known," replied the North-east officer. "During the past hundred years the strange event has happened but thrice."

"About every thirty-five years, roughly?" asked Dorrie. "Haven't any of your scientific johnnies taken exact records?"

"Thou art jesting!" said Sigbert. "We of North-east accept these wondrous things without much disturbance of mind. 'Tis known that the Flow comes but twice, perchance, in a man's lifetime, and it heralds disaster!"

(What is the meaning of the strange discovery the St. Frank's boys have made? Another thrilling instalment of this popular serial next Wednesday.)

the cow town at a wild rush. Slick rushed after him lashing with the quirt, and the fat storekeeper, fast as he was, put on a speed that would have done credit to a cow-pony. Panting and gasping, puffing and blowing, the chairman of the Packsaddle School committee vanished down the trail.

"I guess that puts paid to the pesky committee!" grinned Slick. "I'll say they'll be wise to get it now that we want Bill! And now, you 'uns, get Scadder!"

"Get Scadder!" roared the Packsaddle bunch.

And the whole crowd rushed back into the playground to get Scadder!

(The new master has asked for it—and he's going to get it! Look out next week for "REBELS OF PACKSADDLE.")

The New Master at Packsaddle!

(Continued from page 22.)

split, his buttons flying, covered with dust, red with rage, gurgling for breath, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

Right out on the trail marched Slick and his comrades, dragging the rope, and after them rolled Job Wash, in such a dilapidated state that Packsaddle would hardly have recognised its leading citizen!

"Get a quirt!" roared Slick.

Mick rushed for a quirt.

"Now, you guy, Wash—"

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