

"REBELS VERSUS ROUGHNECKS!" SMASHING YARN OF A WILD WEST SCHOOL REBELLION INSIDE.

The **GEM** ^{2d}

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*Ragging the
'Saints'!*

Humorous Incident from this week's Sparkling St. Jim's Story, **"MISS PONSONBY'S PETS!"**



A row of faces belonging to Shell fellows looked over the gate, admiring the scene in the Head's garden. "Don't they look sweet!" came Monty Lowther's voice. "Miss Ponsonby's pets been good little boys?" called Kangaroo. The Fourth Formers turned crimson and writhed under the taunts.

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy to the Rescue!

"**R**EAD it out, Crooke!"
"He, he, he!"
Tom Merry heard the remark and the unpleasant exclamation that followed as he came along the Form-room passage at St. Jim's.

A group of juniors were standing by the window at the end of the passage.

One of them—Crooke of the Shell—had a letter in his hand and a grin of enjoyment on his face. Mellish of the Fourth and Gore of the Shell and several other fellows were standing round him, grinning too. They evidently anticipated much amusement from the reading out of the letter Crooke held in his hand.

"Dear Mr. Lathom—" began Crooke, with a chuckle.

Tom Merry started.

He had glanced carelessly at the group, and concluded that Crooke was about to read out a portion of some letter from home; perhaps some piece of kindly advice from an elderly uncle which was worth retailing for the amusement of his friends. But as Crooke began the letter, he understood, and he strode towards the group, with a frown upon his brow.

"What's that letter, Crooke?" he asked sharply.

Crooke grinned.

"I found it in the Form-room passage," he said. "Lathom must have dropped it when he came out of the Fourth Form Room after lessons this morning. It's jolly interesting, I can tell you."

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"Have you read it?"

"Of course I have!" said Crooke. "And now I'm going to read it out to these chaps. If you don't want to hear it, you can clear off!"

"Yes; buzz off, Tom Merry!" said Mellish. "It's a letter from the vicar's sister to Mr. Lathom, you know, and Crooke says it's a case of spoons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tom Merry did not join in the laugh. The frown deepened upon his brow, and he made a step towards the cad of the Shell and held out his hand. "Give me that letter!" he said.

"Do you want to read it out?" asked Crooke.

"No, I don't, you cad! I'm going to take it back to Mr. Lathom. You're not going to read it!"

Crooke's hand closed tightly upon the letter, and he gave the captain of the Shell a look of defiance.

"What's it got to do with you?" he demanded. "I suppose I can read out the letter if I like, confound you! Mind your own business!"

"Yes, buzz off!" said Gore.

"Mind your own business, you know!" said Mellish.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"It's anybody's business to prevent a rotten cad from reading a private letter, especially a letter from a lady," he said. "Will you give me that letter, Crooke?"

"No, I won't!" said Crooke savagely. "Then I'll jolly well take it!"

Crooke backed away, and thrust the letter into his pocket. Tom Merry advanced upon him, his fists clenched. As a rule, Crooke would not have cared to provoke a conflict with the captain of the Shell, but his temper was up now, and he had four or five friends with him, and Tom Merry was alone. Most

of the fellows were out in the quadrangle in the sunny June weather.

"Hands off, hang you!" said Crooke, between his teeth. "You shan't have the letter!"

Tom Merry did not waste any more time in words. He ran straight at the cad of the Shell and grasped him. Crooke shouted to his companions:

"Stand by me, you fellows! Don't let him have the letter!"

Bump!

Crooke went heavily to the floor, dragging Tom Merry down with him. In a moment three or four pairs of hands were laid upon Tom Merry, and he was dragged off Crooke and rolled on the floor.

"Hands off, you cads!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Will you leave the letter alone?" demanded Pilker of the Fourth.

"No, I won't!"

"Bump him, then!" said Mellish.

"Good egg! Bump him!"

Tom Merry struggled desperately in the grasp of his assailants. Gore rolled on the floor, knocked flying by a drive from Tom Merry's right, and Pilker, caught by a swift upper-cut under the chin, dropped across him, yelling. But then Crooke and Mellish and another fellow were kneeling on Tom Merry, and he was pinned down, gasping.

"Got him!" said Mellish, between his teeth.

"Pile on him!" Pilker exclaimed, staggering up. "We'll teach the rotten cad to interfere! Sit on him, all of you, and Crooke can read the letter out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry almost disappeared under the juniors as they piled on him. With fellows kneeling on his chest and arms and legs, he was pinned down by sheer

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

weight, and his struggles only made the cads of the School House kneel harder. They grinned down at his red and furious face.

"Hold him down!" chuckled Crooke. "I'll read out the letter now, and he can hear it, and if there's any row about it afterwards, we can all say that Tom Merry heard the letter as well as the rest of us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cads!" gasped Tom Merry.

He made a desperate effort to throw off his assailants, but it was no good. The weight was too much for him. As he sank back under them, exhausted by the effort, Crooke began to read out the letter:

"Dear Mr. Lathom,—I shall be very pleased indeed if you can come to tea this afternoon—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry struggled again.

"Keep him quiet!" said Crooke.

"That's all right! Go on with the letter!"

"Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry, in the faint hope that some of his chums might be near at hand. "Rescue! Lowther! Manners!"

"Shove your fist into his mouth, somebody, or we shall have a giddy crowd here!" growled Crooke.

"Rescue! Ow!"

Gore stuffed a far from clean handkerchief into Tom Merry's mouth, and he choked into silence. But his shout had been heard.

An elegant figure came scudding along the passage. It needed only a glance at the immaculate clothes, the beautifully creased trousers, and the gleaming eyeglass to show that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"What is the mattah, deah boy?"

"Groogh!" gasped Tom Merry.

"This is not fair play, you know—four or five to one!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "I do not wish to intahfere with mattahs in the Shell; but, in the cires, I think I had bettah do so! Welease Tom Mewwy at once!"

"Clear off!" said Mellish.

"I wefuse to clear off," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Welease Tom Mewwy at once, or I shall give you a feahful thwashin'. I wefuse to see a fwienid of mine tweeked with such uttah diswespect."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Tom Merry ejected the handkerchief from his mouth with a great effort.

"Rescue!" he gasped. "Pile in, Gussy! There's a good chap. They're spring into a letter that doesn't belong to them."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus required no more. His eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, and he charged at the cads of the School House, hitting out with a force that few would have suspected the elegant junior capable of.

Crooke dropped as if he had been shot, and Gore rolled along the passage yelling. Tom Merry made an effort at the same moment as the grasp of his assailants relaxed under this new attack, and tore himself free. He leaped to his feet.

"Now then!" he exclaimed, with gleaming eyes.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Shouldah to shouldah, you know!"

And in a moment more there was a wild and whirling conflict in progress.

CHAPTER 2.

The Reward of Virtue!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was generally a peaceful fellow, not so much because he had any special objection to fighting, but because any rough play was liable to cause damage to his beautiful clothes.

But when he was excited, the swell of St. Jim's forgot even his clothes, and at such times he was a most dangerous antagonist. In spite of his elegant ways, he could always give a good account of himself in an encounter, as the cads of the School House learned to their cost on the present occasion.

Tom Merry and his ally did not wait to be attacked. They rushed upon their foes, hitting out. The odds were against them, but they did not mind that. And hard hitting at close quarters was not at all to the taste of Crooke & Co.

Mellish ran down the passage at the first onset and disappeared, and Pilker dashed after him at top speed.

The others would gladly have followed, but they had no choice. They

The Fourth Form at St. Jim's were sorry when their popular Form-master was laid up. But they were sorrier still when they learned that their new teacher was to be a lady!

were being knocked right and left under heavy blows, and in a couple of minutes three gasping young rascals lay at the feet of the victorious two.

"Thanks, Gussy," gasped Tom Merry. "Now then, you cads, if you care to get up again, we'll give you some more."

But the invitation was not accepted. Crooke & Co. lay gasping and groaning, and no earthly inducement would have made them rise and face more punishment.

Tom Merry laughed.

"They've had enough, Gussy," he said. "Will you give me that letter now, Crooke? I've got no time to waste on you; it's close on time for lessons."

"Yaas, wathah! What lettah is it, deah boy?"

Tom Merry frowned.

"A letter from Miss Ponsonby to Mr. Lathom. That cad picked it up—or pinched it more likely—and he was reading it out."

"The uttah cad! Cwooke, if you don't give that lettah up at once, I shall kick you!"

And Arthur Augustus drew back his elegant boot for the purpose.

"Hold on!" gasped Crooke. "I—I'll hand it over."

"Buck up, then, you cad!"

Crooke scrambled to his feet. He fumbled in his pocket for the letter, and then with a sudden spring he passed Tom Merry and rushed down the passage.

"Stop him!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

But it was too late. Crooke was gone—with the letter still in his pocket.

He had nearly reached the end of the passage, and would have disappeared in another moment, when two Shell fellows came round the corner. They were Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's special chums.

Crooke dashed right into them, and there was a roar.

"You ase!"

"Where are you running, you fat-head?"

"Collar him!" shouted Tom Merry excitedly.

Manners and Lowther grasped Crooke at once as he tried to dodge past. The cad of the Shell struggled frantically in their grip.

"Let me go!" he yelled.

"No hurry, my friend," said Monty Lowther calmly; "we'll see what Tom Merry wants you for first. If you don't keep quiet, Crooke, I shall hit you."

Crooke kept quiet, then. He did not want any more hitting.

He regarded Tom Merry very uneasily as the hero of the Shell came up.

"I want that letter," said Tom Merry. "Will you hand it over or take a licking?"

"Here it is, hang you!"

Crooke, with a savage scowl, handed over the letter. Tom Merry took it, and signed to his chums to let their prisoner go.

"He's been reading a letter that belongs to Lathom," he explained. "Kick him out!"

"Certainly," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

Crooke dashed round the corner, two powerful kicks from Manners and Lowther helping him on his way. A howl of pain floated back from the cad of the Shell as he vanished. The sound of the bell could be heard now, ringing for afternoon lessons.

"Time we got into the class-room, Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "You look in a beautiful state for lessons, I must say."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "I shall have to go and bwush myself down. I am in a howwid dustay state."

"How are we going to get this letter back to Lathom?" asked Tom Merry dubiously. "I shouldn't like him to think that anybody's been reading it. I can't say I found it—as I didn't."

"Let Gussy take it, and shove it on his desk in the Fourth Form Room," suggested Manners.

"Good idea!"

"Certainly, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Mind you don't lose it, then," said Tom Merry, as he handed the letter to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Wealthy, Tom Mewwy—"

"And now buzz off!"

The fellows were coming in to afternoon classes now.

The Terrible Three hurried off to the Shell Form Room, Tom Merry dusting himself down as well as he could as he ran. Most of the Shell had already gone in, and Mr. Linton, the Form-master, was there. Mr. Linton turned a severe glance on Tom Merry as he entered. The rough-and-tumble struggle in the passage had put the hero of the Shell into a state of considerable disarray, and his jacket and trousers were in a very dusty state.

"Merry!" rapped out Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"What do you mean by coming into the Form-room in that state?"

"I—I'm sorry, sir. I—"

"You have been fighting, I suppose?" said Mr. Linton, with a stern frown.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Then take fifty lines, and go and put yourself tidy at once."

"Ye-es, sir."

Tom Merry could not very well explain, in the circumstances, and he took the imposition with the best grace he could. Crooke of the Shell grinned at him as he left the Form-room. It was some satisfaction to the cad of the Shell to see Tom Merry punished, at all events. And Crooke grinned more widely as Manners and Lowther glared at him.

"You worm!" growled Monty Lowther, in an undertone. "If you had any decency, you'd own up to old Linton as you caused it."

Crooke chuckled.

"No fear!"

"Br-r-r-r! You rotter!"

"Never mind," said Manners consolingly, "we'll take it out of Crooke later."

And that thought, at all events, was some solace to the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 3.

Cause and Effect.

MR. LATHOM, the master of the Fourth Form, came into the Form-room that afternoon with a very cheerful smile upon his face.

Mr. Lathom was evidently in a cheerful mood, and the sight of it cheered the Fourth Form in proportion. Mr. Lathom was a kind little gentleman, with very benevolent eyes peering out through big glasses, and he was very popular with the Form. He was so good-tempered that the Fourth allowed themselves many little relaxations which were quite impossible to the Shell. And when he had that cheerful smile upon his face, the Fourth knew that they were in for an extra easy time.

"Where's Gussy?" asked Herries.

Digby chuckled.

"He was changing his bags in the dorm when I came in. He's been in the wars and got dusty."

Mr. Lathom glanced over his class.

"D'Arcy is absent," said the Fourth Form master, in his mild voice. "Do you know where D'Arcy is?"

"In the dorm, sir," said Blake. "He's had an accident, sir."

"Dear me! I hope not a serious accident!" said Mr. Lathom, with concern.

"Oh, no, sir; only made his trousers dusty, sir!"

"Oh, very well! We will commence without him then."

And they commenced. The lesson was half-way through when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the Form-room, newly swept and garnished, so to speak. He looked as clean and neat as a new pin as he came in.

"I am vewy sowwy to be late, sir," he said, addressing Mr. Lathom. "Owin' to an unfortunate circumstance, I had to change and bwush—"

"Very well; go to your place, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir. If you please—"

"That is enough. You may sit down."

"But I wished to ask you somethin' vewy particulah, sir," said D'Arcy. "I

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have had an invitation to tea this afternoon, sir, and I wish to leave the Form-room earliah, if you don't mind, sir. It is wathah important, sir."

Mr. Lathom shook his head.

"After coming in to lessons a quarter of an hour late, D'Arcy, it is hardly possible for me to allow you to leave lessons early," he said.

"But, sir—"

"Please say no more."

"Oh, vewy well, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. And he sat down.

The Form resumed their excursion into the realms of Roman history, which Arthur Augustus' entrance had interrupted. Arthur Augustus sat with a very dignified expression upon his face. He had two worries on his mind; one was that he wanted to get off early because he had an invitation to tea; and the other that he wanted an opportunity of restoring to Mr. Lathom the letter Tom Merry had entrusted to him. That would have to be done diplomatically, for if Mr. Lathom knew that he had it, he would naturally inquire into how it had come into his possession; and Arthur Augustus, of course, did not want to betray Crooke.

He was disgusted with the cad of the Shell, but laws of schoolboy honour forbade anything like betraying a fellow, however caddish, to a Form-master. He wanted to find an opportunity of dropping the letter into Mr. Lathom's desk unobserved.

Arthur Augustus was thinking the matter out, and as a matter of fact, he was not giving much attention to the lesson.

Mr. Lathom was asking questions, which the Fourth-Formers were replying to as well as they could.

"Who was Pyrrhus?" Mr. Lathom inquired. And as the Fourth had been told at least fifty times who Pyrrhus was, there was quite a rush of replies.

"King of Epirus, sir."

"Why did he invade Italy?"

"He was invited over, sir," said Blake, rather proud of his knowledge.

It wasn't every fellow at St. Jim's who knew that Pyrrhus had been invited over to Italy by the Tarentines to help them in their war with Rome in some forgotten century or other.

"Very good!" said Mr. Lathom. "By whom was the invitation sent, D'Arcy? Do you hear me, D'Arcy? I am speaking to you!"

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus, coming out of a reverie with a start. "Certainly, sir!"

"Answer my question, D'Arcy. By whom was the invitation sent?"

"The vicah of Wylcombe, sir."

"What!"

"Mr. Ponsonby, sir, the vicah of Wylcombe."

The Fourth Form giggled.

They were as much startled by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's reply as Mr. Lathom was, and they fancied that D'Arcy was pulling the Form-master's leg.

"D'Arcy!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom. "Is this—is this meant for impertinence, sir? I asked you by whom the invitation was sent to Pyrrhus to cross over into Italy."

"Oh, sir!" gasped D'Arcy.

He had not heard about the unfortunate Pyrrhus, and he had been thinking of his own invitation to tea that afternoon.

"What do you mean, D'Arcy? If you are venturing to joke here—"

"I beg your pardon, sir. It was a slip of the tongue, sir," stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lathom, frown-

ing. "Pray do not have any more slips of the tongue like that, D'Arcy! Now answer my question."

"Ahem, sir! I am afwaid I do not know, sir!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Then you will write out 'Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, was invited into Italy by the citizens of Tarentum,' fifty times!"

"Yaas, sir!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a little more attention to the lessons after that.

"You ass!" murmured Figgins of the New House, who was sitting next to D'Arcy. "What made you pitch an answer at old Lathom like that?"

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"I was thinkin' about my own affairs," he replied. "I have an invitation to tea at the vicarage this afternoon, and I want to get off early."

"Could you take a chap with you?" inquired Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Wats!"

"They have good feeds at the vicarage," said Fatty Wynn reminiscently. "I don't mind the old boy talking. His sister is a brick. She makes the cakes herself, and I can tell you they're prime. If you could take a friend with you, Gussy—"

"Wats!"

"I hope you aren't thinking of House rows on an occasion like this?" said Fatty Wynn, with dignity. "In fact, it would be a good idea if you could take a New House chap with you, as a proof to the vicar that we live in perfect peace."

"Wubbish!"

"Look here, you School House bouncer!" began Fatty Wynn wrathfully, and rather incantiously.

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"I must really insist upon silence in this class," he said mildly. "I do not wish to detain any of you boys, but if you are not silent—"

The whispering died away at once. Nobody in the Fourth Form wanted to be detained that glorious summer afternoon. And Mr. Lathom went on a personally conducted tour with the Fourth into Roman history, in the midst of a general attention which was really flattering to him as a master.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Lathom Catches It!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was troubled.

The afternoon was passing away, and he had not yet restored the lost letter to Mr. Lathom.

What the letter contained D'Arcy had not the faintest idea, for, of course, he had not looked at it. He knew that it was from Miss Ponsonby, the vicar's sister, and that was all. It might have been very important, and Mr. Lathom might miss it at any moment, and begin to make inquiries about it. That would make matters very awkward for Arthur Augustus.

There was supposed to be a kind of platonic affection between Mr. Lathom and Miss Ponsonby. The vicar's sister was a single lady of some forty years, very well liked by the St. Jim's fellows, some of whom had had the distinction of being invited to tea at the vicarage.

Tea at the vicarage was very attractive to the juniors, for the festive board was always well spread.

Miss Ponsonby was fond of children, as she sometimes told the juniors—a deadly insult which they swallowed as politely as they could. As Fatty Wynn put it, they could swallow that along with the cake, and the cake was certainly ripping. A girl who could make

a cake as Miss Ponsonby made it, must be all right, Fatty Wynn declared.

Her friendship with Mr. Lathom had lasted many years, and the Fourth Form master visited the vicarage at tea-time at least once a week, sometimes taking a specially favoured pupil with him.

It was generally noticed that when it was known that Mr. Lathom was going to the vicarage to tea, Fatty Wynn became remarkably attentive and painstaking in class, and acted in all respects like a model pupil.

As the letter in D'Arcy's pocket was from Miss Ponsonby, it might contain an invitation, and Mr. Lathom might not yet have read it. It was evidently very important to get it into Mr. Lathom's possession without delay, and Arthur Augustus tried to think of some means of accomplishing it.

"What are you scowling about, D'Arcy?" Blake asked him later in the afternoon. "Not bothering about the lines, are you?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No, deah boy, I've got a lettah that belongs to Mr. Lathom."

Blake stared.

"What on earth are you doing with that?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus explained.

"By Jove!" said Blake. "It might be important. Look here, give it to me, old man, and I'll give it back to him."

"How will you do that, deah boy?"

"He's going to use the blackboard next lesson. I'll screw up the letter, and pitch it across so that it will fall on his desk when his back's turned."

D'Arcy's face cleared.

"Bai Jove! That's a good ideah!" he said. "He is bound to see it on his desk soonah or latah, or if he misses it, he will look for it and find it there."

"Exactly. Hand it to me."

"Pewwaps I had bettah chuck it ovah, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "I thank you vewy much for the suggestion, but I would watah twust myself in a mattah of this sort. It wequiah a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Aas!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll make a muck of it, you fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead!"

The much-enduring Mr. Lathom looked round, and the whispered dialogue ceased.

Arthur Augustus prepared for business as the next lesson became due. Mr. Lathom turned his back, chalk in hand, when the blackboard was placed in position.

Arthur Augustus took the letter from his pocket and folded it twice to give it compactness, and prepared to throw it. "Careful!" murmured Blake.

"Pway don't bothah, deah boy. You'll put me off my thwow!"

"Well, go it, before he looks round!"

Arthur Augustus rose cautiously to his feet. He raised his hand, and was about to project the folded letter through the air when Jack Blake spotted Mr. Lathom turning round, and he caught at the swell of St. Jim's to drag him back into his seat in time.

It was too late—the missile had sped; and, unfortunately, Blake's sudden grip on D'Arcy had only the effect of swinging him round, so that the letter, as it left his hand, flew in the wrong direction.

Right towards Mr. Lathom it whizzed as the master turned round from the blackboard.

"Now, my boys," said Mr. Lathom, "I— Oh!"

He staggered back as the folded letter smote him upon the nose and then fell to his feet.

"My hat!" gasped Blake.

"Gweat Scott!"

Mr. Lathom stood gasping for a moment. Then his face flushed with anger and his eyes glittered through his spectacles.

"What—what—" he ejaculated.

"Who throw that paper at me? Answer me at once!"

"I—I—"

"Was it you, D'Arcy?"

"Ya-as, sir; b-b-but—"

Mr. Lathom made a stride towards his desk and seized his cane.

"Come out before the class at once, D'Arcy!" he shouted.

"If you please, sir—"

"Stand out here instantly!"

Arthur Augustus reluctantly went out before the class. The Form were all grinning, though most of them were amazed at the extraordinary nerve shown by D'Arcy in pelting the Form-master during lessons. That was the unfortunate construction that Mr. Lathom and most of the Fourth placed upon D'Arcy's action.

"Now, sir, hold out your hand!" said Mr. Lathom. "I have never in all my career as a master met with such an example of outrageous impertinence! I am astounded! I—"

"If you please, sir, I didn't thwow the lettah at you, sir!" gasped D'Arcy. "I thwow it at your desk."

"D'Arcy!"

"It went the wong way, sir," stammered Arthur Augustus. "I twust you do not think me capable of the astoundin' impertinence of thwowin' at a Form-mastah, sir."

"Ahem! But what do you mean by pelting my desk with paper, sir, even if I accept your explanation?"

"It's a lettah, sir," said D'Arcy reluctantly. "It belongs to you, sir."

"What!"

Mr. Lathom felt in his pocket, and then he picked up the folded letter. He glanced at it, and uttered an exclamation.

"Dear me! This is my letter. I did not know that I had lost it. How did this letter come into your possession, D'Arcy?" demanded Mr. Lathom sternly.

"I was twyin' to weturn it to you without attwactin' attention, sir."

"That is very probable; but it does not explain how you came to have it in your possession," said the Form-master tartly. "If I dropped this letter, and you picked it up, you could have come to me and told me so, I suppose, and handed it to me?"

"Ya-as, sir!"

"Then you did not pick it up?"

"No, sir."

"How did you come by it, D'Arcy?" Arthur Augustus hesitated.



Too late, Jack Blake tried to pull Arthur Augustus back into his seat as Mr. Lathom turned round from the blackboard. The letter had sped from D'Arcy's hand. But his aim had been spoiled by Blake, and the missile flew straight at the Form-master and smote him on the nose.

"It was given me to return to you, sir."

"By whom?"

"A—Shell chap, sir."

"How did he get it? Did he find it?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, you must give me his name, and I will inquire further into this. I will not have my correspondence spied upon. How did this boy you mention get the letter?"

"He took it away from a chap who had picked it up, sir, and was going to read it," said Arthur Augustus reluctantly. "We walloped him, sir, and took the letter away, so it's all right."

Mr. Lathom stared at the boy a moment, and then smiled. He put his letter into his pocket.

"Is that the reason why you had to change your clothes and came in late to lessons, D'Arcy?" he asked more kindly.

"Yaas, sir!"

"Indeed! In that case I am much obliged to you, and I will say nothing more about the matter," said Mr. Lathom. "The boy who wished to read the letter certainly should be punished, and—"

"He's been punished, sir," said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy and I gave him a fearful thwashin', sir."

"Oh! So Merry was the Shell boy who gave you the letter?" said Mr. Lathom, with a smile. "Well, well, I will let the matter drop, but on another occasion, D'Arcy, please do not test your powers of taking aim in the Form-room. You may go back to your place."

"Thank you, sir."

"And—and I think you asked to be allowed to leave early this afternoon, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Lathom, after a moment.

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"Very well, you are excused from lessons now. You may go," said Mr. Lathom graciously.

"Bai Jove! Thank you vewy much, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, and he left the Form-room with alacrity.

And Mr. Lathom, with his good temper quite restored, went on with the lesson. He glanced at the clock several times, and finally dismissed the Fourth ten minutes before the usual time. Mr. Lathom, as well as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was evidently thinking of the tea at the vicarage.

CHAPTER 5.

Mellish Has an Idea.

MELLISH of the Fourth had a thoughtful look upon his face as he came out of the Form-room after lessons, and a cunning gleam in his eyes.

He went up to the Fourth Form passage, and looked in at the door of Study No. 6, the famous apartment belonging to D'Arcy, Blake, Digby and Herries. As he had expected, Arthur Augustus was there.

The swell of St. Jim's was trying on a succession of neckties before a glass, evidently in some doubt as to which one he should wear—a very important matter indeed.

"Not gone yet?" grinned Mellish.

Arthur Augustus turned a haughty look on the cad of the Fourth.

"I weally do not know how you are aware that I am goin' to tea at the vicarage, unless you listened to my remarks to Blake in class!" he said loftily.

"Well, a good many fellows heard you," said Mellish. "I was one. I say, Gussy, the vicar wouldn't mind if you took a friend."

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"Weally, Mellish—"

"I'll come with you."

"I do not wegard you as a friend, Mellish; and, in any case, I am goin' alone. Will you kindly wetiah from my study, and not bothah me while I am selectin' a necktie?"

"You silly ass!" growled Mellish. As a rule he would not have ventured to apply that epithet to D'Arcy, but he felt pretty well assured that he was safe at a time like this.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was dressed with scrupulous care for his visit to the vicarage, and he was not likely to risk soiling his beautiful clothes by going for Mellish.

Arthur Augustus simply glared.

"Why, you wottah," he exclaimed, "how dare you! I will give you a fearful thwashin' for applyin' that opprobrious epithet to me!"

He started towards Mellish with his fists clenched, and suddenly paused. He remembered that if he indulged in a rough-and-tumble with the cad of the Fourth, he was not likely to remain in a fit state to visit the vicar. And he had no time to change, or he would be late.

Mellish chuckled.

"Well, come on," he said.

"I will thwash you another time," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. "I wegard you as an uttah wottah, Mellish!"

"Yah! Funk!"

That was too much for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Clothes or no clothes, tea at the vicarage or no tea at the vicarage, he could not stand that. He rushed at Mellish, and Mellish dodged down the passage and ran. He had no intention of meeting the "fearful thwashin'" he had been asking for.

Arthur Augustus paused in the passage, breathing hard. The Terrible Three came along the passage, and they stared at him. Mellish had just passed them at top speed.

"Trouble in the family?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

D'Arcy panted.

"That uttah wottah has been checkin' me!" he exclaimed. "When I went for him he was like anythin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Did you expect him to wait for a fearful thwashin'?" demanded Monty Lowther. "You should remember what an awful chap you are when you are roused, Gussy."

"Yaas, that is twue," said the swell of St. Jim's seriously.

Lowther nodded with emphatic gravity.

"Mellish probably remembered that he hadn't made his will, and he buzzed off to get it done before you got at him," said Lowther, with great solemnity.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and Manners.

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy, realising that Monty Lowther was being elaborately funny. "I wegard you as a silly fathead, Lowthah, and I should punch your silly head if I wasn't goin' to the vicarage to tea!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you looking for three devoted chums to take with you, Gussy? If so, Lowther withdraws his remark."

"I am not lookin' for anythin' of the sort. If I were, I should take Blake, Herries, and Dig." said Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't be an ass. But if you like—"

"Yes?" said the Terrible Three eagerly.

"You can come into my study and help me select a tie."

"You frabjous ass!" said the chums of the Shell together, and they marched

on their way, without lending aid in the important matter of the necktie.

Meanwhile, Mellish had dashed down the Shell passage, and he went into Crooke's study. Crooke was there, and Gore of the Shell was with him. Crooke looked a little startled as Mellish burst in. For the moment he feared that it was the Terrible Three, and he was very much relieved to see that it was Mellish.

"You ass!" he growled. "You startled me!"

"Never mind," said Mellish. "I've got an idea. Do you want a chance of getting even with D'Arcy for chipping in about that letter this afternoon?"

Crooke scowled and Gore nodded.

"What's the wheeze?" demanded Crooke.

"Gussy's going to tea at the vicarage, and he's getting his best bib and tucker on," said Mellish, with a chuckle. "He's going to arrive at the vicarage in great style."

"Well, we can't stop him, I suppose?" growled Gore.

"He's sure to go by the towing-path, and then up through the vicarage garden," said Mellish. "The garden towards the river end is all shrubbery, and three fellows could lie in wait there for a chap and roll him in the mud—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, that's a bit thick!" said Gore dubiously. "Gussy and his friends would rag us afterwards."

"They needn't know us. We'll change our Etons for old jackets, and tie handkerchiefs over our faces, and Gussy will think we're village kids—some of Grimes' gang."

"Oh, good!"

And the three cads of the School House sallied forth at once to be ready. As they passed Study No. 6 they could see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy still trying on neckties before the glass. They would evidently be in good time to prepare the ambush for the swell of St. Jim's.

They left the School House. Little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was just leaving, looking unusually spick and span, and wearing a shining silk hat. The three juniors raised their hats to him as they passed, and hurried on, and Crooke chuckled as they got out of hearing.

"Lathom's going to the vicarage, too," he remarked. "That's what that letter from Miss Ponsonby was—an invitation to tea. He'll be there the same time as Gussy."

"We don't want him to run into us," said Gore, a little alarmed.

"Oh, that's all right! He always goes in state, you know—Rylcombe way, and to the front door of the vicarage. It's only half the distance, too."

"That's all right, then," said Gore.

"Of course it's all right! Come on!"

And the three young rascals hurried on their way, to get well ahead of D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 6.

A Slight Mistake.

NOW then, quiet!"

Crooke & Co. had hurried along the towing-path, and reached the gates of the vicarage garden by the river.

Rylcombe Vicarage possessed a very long garden, which stretched down a great distance from the house to the river, and near the river it was thick with trees and shrubberies. A better spot for an ambush could not have been found.

The three juniors entered the garden quietly, and followed the path between

the high shrubberies for a dozen yards or so, and Crooke uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My hat! What luck!"

On the garden path lay the end of a hose, with water trickling from it. It had evidently been left there by the vicarage gardener, to be used again. There was no sign of the gardener returning, however, and Crooke picked up the end of the hose with a chuckle.

"What price letting Gussy have this as he comes up the path?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hose trailed away through the shrubbery. Crooke plunged into the shrubbery, carrying the end of it with him. Mellish and Gore followed him. There was ample cover for them, crouching among the shrubs.

They had put on old jackets, and now, crouching there in cover, they tied their handkerchiefs across their faces sufficiently to conceal their features.

Then they waited.

"I say," murmured Mellish, "if we get out into the path he'll see us, and—"

"No need to get out. I can let him have the water from the shrubbery," said Crooke. "We shall see his topper as he comes by, and then I can let him have it."

"Good!"

And the three young rascals lay in wait, looking for the gleam of a silk topper along the path over the shrubbery.

They had not more than ten minutes to wait.

Click!

It was the garden gate by the river.

Crooke drew a deep breath.

"He's coming!" he whispered.

"Ready?"

"I'm all ready. Quiet."

Gore and Mellish chuckled softly, and were silent.

Footsteps sounded along the path.

Over the tops of the high shrubs the three crouching rascals saw the gleam of a silk topper in the sun.

The victim was approaching.

Gore held the nozzle ready. As soon as the pedestrian came abreast of the ambush, he meant to let fly through the openings of the shrubbery, and the unsuspecting swell of St. Jim's would be simply swept off his feet by the rush of water.

Closer came the footsteps.

The silk hat gleamed almost abreast of the ambushed juniors, and Crooke made a movement. He caught a glimpse through the shrubs of a moving figure, and turned on the water.

Sizz!

Splash!

"Oh!"

The jet of water smote the figure in the path fairly in the chest, and bowled him over like a ninepin.

There was a startled gasp as he went down.

A pair of legs tossed in the air as he was bowled over, and Crooke scrambled forward, playing the garden hose upon the fallen figure.

Sizz! Whizz! Splash!

"Oh! Oh! Help!"

It was not D'Arcy's voice.

"You ass!" roared Gore, in terror.

"It's not D'Arcy!"

Crooke stared out into the path; in his confusion still allowing the hose to play at full force upon the fallen figure.

A little man was sprawling in the path, drenched with water, utterly confused and bewildered by the attack. His silk hat had fallen off, and his thin hair was dripping. His spectacles had slid down his nose, and he blinked with wet eyes.

Crooke dropped his hose with a gasp of terror.

"My hat! It's Lathom!"

Crooke stood staring at the fallen figure, too terrified to run, and lacking the presence of mind to turn off the water.

He realised that Mr. Lathom, tempted probably by the beautiful weather, had taken the longer path by the river for once, and had come into the garden by the gate from the towing-path.

Visions of a flogging in the public hall at St. Jim's floated before Crooke's terrified eyes.

Gore grasped his arm. Mellish was already running.

"Come away, you ass!" gasped Gore.

"Run for it!"

Crooke dropped the hose and fled.

The three of them ran down the path, leaped over the gate, and went tearing along the towing-path as if their lives depended upon it.

The hose had fallen with the nozzle towards Mr. Lathom, and it was still pumping out water.

Footsteps sounded up the garden. The three practical jokers had escaped only just in time.

The gardener came running from one direction, with a pair of shears in his hands, and from the house came the stout vicar of Rylcombe, followed by Miss Ponsonby.

"Good gad!" ejaculated the vicar.

Miss Freda Ponsonby gave a shriek.

"It is Mr. Lathom!"

The Fourth Form master of St. Jim's sat up.

He sat up in a pool of water, and water was running down his face and his shoulders.

The vicar kicked the hose aside. The gardener raised up Mr. Lathom to his feet. The Form-master was in a state of utter bewilderment.

"Goodness gracious! How did this happen?" cried Miss Ponsonby.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Oh! Ah!"

He spluttered and struggled for breath.

"Someone turned the hose upon me!" he gasped. "Someone rushed out of the shrubbery—a boy—a fiendish ruffian—with something tied over his face! Dear me, I am drenched! I shall catch cold! Oh dear!"

"Come into the house at once!" exclaimed the vicar. "I can give you a change of clothes. Quick! Let me help you! Freda, will you telephone for the doctor?"

Mr. Lathom was assisted into the house.

The vicar piloted him up to his bedroom, where the unfortunate master of the Fourth was able to towel himself down. But he did not feel equal to donning the clothes the vicar placed at his disposal.

A gentleman of Mr. Lathom's years could not be drenched suddenly with cold water with impunity. Mr. Lathom had caught a very bad cold, and he turned in, in the vicar's comfortable bed, and waited for the medical man to arrive.

Dr. Short arrived promptly, and ordered Mr. Lathom to remain in bed.

And Mr. Lathom remained.

Seriousness was not a weakness the chums were frequently guilty of. It was evident that something had occurred to disturb the habitual serenity of Study No. 6.

"It's rotten!" said Blake.

"Beastly!" said Herries.

"Horrid!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the Fourth were in full accord on the subject.

They could not be alluding to the tea, which was certainly a very plentiful one. The table was spread so lavishly that it was evident the four juniors expected visitors. And the visitors were coming.

Six fellows belonging to the Fourth Form and the New House had come into the School House, and they approached Study No. 6 with sweet smiles upon their faces.

They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—Figgins & Co., the leaders of the New House juniors, and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, otherwise known as the New Firm.

The rivals of the New House were evidently on excellent terms with one another just now, and on equally excellent terms with the School House fellows.

There was no special reason why they should all be overflowing with the milk of human kindness, excepting that Jack Blake had lately received a very liberal tip from an affectionate uncle, and in the fullness of his heart he was standing a big feed in the study.

He had asked his rivals of the New House to it; and the juniors had suspended House rows for a time in consequence, the fellows being at bottom on the best of terms with one another, in spite of the constant alarms and excursions which frequently made things lively at St. Jim's.

Figgins & Co. came in, and the New Firm followed, and the School House fellows welcomed them with great cordiality.

But the gloom upon their youthful brows did not escape the notice of their visitors. Fatty Wynn had eyes only for the lavish display of good things upon the table, but the other fellows inquired what was the matter.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Blake.

"No," said Figgins in surprise.

"What's happened?"

"Lathom's caught a bad cold. Gussy's just returned from the vicarage and told us. He lost his tea through it."

The New House fellows stared at Blake in amazement. It was very creditable of Blake to be so dreadfully concerned because his Form-master had caught a cold. But it was not exactly what was expected of Blake. Form-masters had caught colds before, and Blake had borne it with great fortitude.

"Is it a joke?" asked Kerr. "Of course, we're sorry for Lathom, but I don't see any special reason to go into mourning. I suppose he'll get over it."

"I heard about that," said Redfern, with a stress on the "that." "But I hadn't thought about putting on any sackcloth and ashes."

"But if you want us to do a little weep before tea," said Lawrence, "I don't know that we've got any special objection."

"Oh, don't be idiots!" said Blake crossly. "What I mean is that Lathom is laid up at the vicarage, and he's going to be laid up for two or three days. The doctor's forbidden him to be moved. You remember the last time Lathom was speedy, he went away, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,428.

CHAPTER 7.

A Petition to the Head.

JACK BLAKE looked serious as he sat down to tea in Study No. 6. Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby, who shared that famous study with Blake, were looking serious, too.

and they put the Fourth Form under a prefect.

"Oho!" said Figgins, looking serious.

The New House fellows understood.

On the occasion of a previous absence of Mr. Lathom the Fourth Form had been put under the charge of a prefect; and that prefect was Knox, the bully of the Sixth. There had been terrific trouble in the Fourth Form in consequence.

"Suppose we get put under Knox again?" grunted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll give him beans, as we did before," said Redfern.

"Yes, that's all very well, but it will mean trouble. We don't want to get detained for whole afternoons with all the cricket matches on. And Knox would be deeper this time. He would be careful to keep the peace, and rag us in his underhand way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Even if it's Kildare, or Darrell, it won't be much better," said Blake. "Lathom lets us have an easy time. Kildare, or Darrell, or Langton would be heavier on us than old Lathom, and if it should be Knox it would be—"

"Awful!" said Figgins.

"Enough to worry a chap," growled Blake. "Blessed if I know why Lathom wants to go and catch a cold for! It's just like a Form-master, worrying chaps in this way!"

"Might get a new master down, same as we did before," Lawrence suggested. Blake shook his head.

"Not for a couple of days. It wouldn't be worth while. They'll put us under a prefect, as sure as a gun, and the prefect won't be anxious for the job, either. They'd think it a lot of trouble—all excepting Knox. He'd like to take it on, for the sake of paying off old scores."

"I s'pose so," said Figgins thoughtfully. "But I don't see that we can help it. Let's have tea!"

The suggestion was too good not to be followed.

The crowd of juniors sat down round the table, and tea began. Under the influence of the good things that were provided in abundance the juniors took a more cheerful view of the matter; but they still discussed, with many misgivings, as to who was likely to be put in charge of the Fourth Form during Mr. Lathom's unavoidable absence.

Lumley-Lumley looked in at the door. "Come in!" said Blake hospitably.

"Thanks! I guess I haven't come to cadge a tea," said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully. "I wanted to speak to you fellows. Do you know Knox has asked the Head to let him have charge of the Fourth while little Lathom is on his giddy beam ends?"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors glared.

"Is it a fact?" asked Blake. "We might have expected it."

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"I guess so. I had it from Lefevre of the Fifth. Knox told him, and he thinks the Head will let him. Knox is training to be a schoolmaster, you know, and the Head reckons it will help him on to have a little bit of experience in handling a junior Form. All very well for Knox, but what price the Fourth?"

"We won't stand it!"

"Well, I'm going to see the Head about it," said Lumley-Lumley resolutely. "Will any of you chaps come and back me up?"

"See the Head!" repeated Figgins.

"I guess so! We don't want Knox."

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And why shouldn't we petition the Head not to put him over us, and give him the whip-hand of the Fourth?"

The Fourth Formers looked at one another.

"Bai Jove! The Head might regard it as cheeky, you know."

"Blessed if I see it! I'm going anyway. Will you fellows come?"

"I will!" said Blake, jumping up. "It can't do any harm if it doesn't do any good. I'm with you, my son!"

"In that case, I had better come, too, dear boys. You had better leave the talkin' to me. It is much better for the maffah to be put to the Head by a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Rats!" said Lumley-Lumley promptly. "I'm going to do the talking, but you can come if you like."

"Weally, Lumley—"

"We'll all go," said Redfern. "It will be a deputation of both Houses, and it is bound to impress the Head."

"Good egg. Come on!"

And leaving their unfinished tea, the juniors marched out of the study. Only one fellow remained behind. It was Fatty Wynn.

Figgins called back to him from the door.

"Ain't you coming, Fatty?"

"Eh?"

"Come on!"

"Oh, you fellows can manage without me!" said Fatty Wynn, without looking up. "This ham is ripping, and the poached eggs are a dream! You'll be all right. Don't let Gussy talk, that's all!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

The Fourth Formers marched down the passage with a very determined air. They were joined by several other fellows as they went—Reilly of the Fourth, and Brooke and Bishop, and several others. The Fourth Form might have little disagreements on all sorts of subjects; but they were all agreed upon one point—they did not want Knox to take charge of the Form. If that happened there would be trouble!

CHAPTER 8.

Quite the Limit!

DR. HOLMES, looking very thoughtful, was in his study, with a letter in his hand, which a messenger had brought from the vicarage.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was with him, also looking very thoughtful. The letter was in the handwriting of Mr. Lathom—somewhat shaky, as it had been written in bed, and the two masters had just perused it.

"It does not seem to be a bad idea," said the Head, evidently referring to some contents of the letter. "What do you think, Mr. Railton?"

"I do not see why it should not be satisfactory, sir."

"Mr. Lathom points out that his Form objects to being placed under a prefect," the Head continued. "There was trouble in the Form-room the last time. I am afraid the juniors were unruly, but some of the fault was certainly on the part of the prefect. Knox has requested to be allowed to take charge of the Fourth during Mr. Lathom's absence, with an eye to training in his chosen career. But—"

"But the Fourth would not like that, I think, sir; and indeed I think there would be some justification for their dislike."

"I am afraid, too, that a prefect is hardly equal to managing so large a Form as the Fourth is at present," the Head remarked. "In the circumstances, Mr. Lathom's suggestion comes very opportunely. If the Fourth really object so seriously to being governed even for a few days by a prefect—"

"They certainly do!"

"Exactly! I should pay no regard to their objection, of course, if there were nothing else to be done. But Mr. Lathom's suggestion, and Miss Ponsonby's kind offer, come at the very moment they are needed."

There was a sound of trampling feet in the passage.

Knock!

"Come in!" said the Head.

The door opened, and Lumley-Lumley and Co. walked in.

Dr. Holmes adjusted his glasses, gazing at the juniors in astonishment.

"What has happened?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing, sir."

"Then why do you invade my study in this way?"

"I guess—"

"Pway allow me to explain—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"One at a time, please!" said Dr. Holmes, raising his hand. "Lumley-Lumley, you appear to be the leader. Pray explain to me what is the matter!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Lumley-Lumley. "We are all sorry to hear, sir, that Mr. Lathom is laid up with a severe cold and won't be able to return to school for a few days!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Head looked surprised.

"If this is a demonstration of sympathy with Mr. Lathom, I am sure Mr. Lathom will be very much gratified when he hears of it," said the Head, somewhat dryly. "But—"

"Yes, sir. And—and we want to ask a favour—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We hear that there's some idea of putting the Fourth under a prefect, sir."

The Head and Mr. Railton exchanged glances.

"Well?" said Dr. Holmes patiently.

"We don't want Knox, sir," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"If you don't mind, sir, we don't want a prefect at all, sir; but if we have one, we don't want Knox, sir," said Lumley-Lumley. "We want to—ahem!—to set an example of order and—and good conduct while Mr. Lathom is away, sir, and—and—"

"And Knox would muck it up, sir," said Figgins.

"Indeed!" said the Head.

"I hope you don't think it cheek on our part to come here, sir?" said Redfern; "but we feel very deeply on this point, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"Very well, my boys," said the Head kindly. "As you feel deeply on the point, I am very glad to be able to say that your wishes will be met!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Blake heartily.

"If it had been necessary to put you in charge of a prefect," said the Head, a little sternly. "I should have done so, and I should have expected you to obey him and respect him as much as if it had been myself."

"Ye-es, sir."

"But, as it happens, it is unnecessary. I have just received a letter from Mr. Lathom, in which he states that the medical man has advised him to keep to his bed at the vicarage for

some days, and suggesting a substitute. It is not his wish that you should be placed in charge of a Sixth Form boy."

"Good egg!" murmured Digby.

"Good old Lathom!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Mr. Lathom is perfectly acquainted with your views on the subject," said Dr. Holmes. "He has suggested a substitute for himself, who has kindly offered to relieve him at his post for a few days, and I have decided to accept that offer."

The juniors exchanged glances of congratulation.

Their fears were relieved. Their enemy in the Sixth Form would not be placed in power over them, and they were satisfied. Whom the substitute might happen to be was a matter of lesser importance.

At all events, so they deemed so far. They did not know yet who the substitute was to be.

"I am very glad to be able to meet your wishes," said the Head, "and I am sure that you will meet Mr. Lathom's substitute with the same respect that you show Mr. Lathom."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very good!" said the Head. "She will arrive to-morrow morning to take charge of the Fourth Form."

There was a general start.

In spite of the great respect the St. Jim's fellows felt for the Head, it must be confessed that for the moment the juniors fancied that Dr. Holmes' brain was wandering.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!" murmured Figgins.

"You—you said, sir—"

"He will awyie to-morrow mornin', sir—"

"No," said the Head, with a smile.

"She will arrive!"

"She, sir?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes," said the Head calmly. "Miss Ponsonby has kindly offered to take charge of the Fourth Form while Mr. Lathom is indisposed."

"Oh, sir!"

The juniors could say no more than that.

They looked at the Head, with a sickly expression upon their faces.

They had had their way. They were not to be governed by a prefect; they were to have no dealings with the obnoxious Knox.

But the Fourth Form were to be taken by a woman!

Petticoat government in the Fourth!

Even Arthur Augustus, lady's man as he was, and unlimited in his devotion to the fairer and superior half of humanity, felt dismayed.

Dr. Holmes did not appear to notice the dismay in the faces of the unhappy Fourth Formers.

"Yes," he said kindly; "Miss Ponsonby has been so good. It is really very kind of her. She has had experience in taking a Form in a girls' school, and is, of course, quite able to take charge of a junior Form."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

"It is a very great pleasure to me to find, so easily, an adequate substitute for Mr. Lathom, and a great relief to Mr. Lathom, too," said the Head.

"And, of course, it is very gratifying to be able to meet the wishes of the Fourth in this way."

"Our wishes!" groaned Blake. "My hat!"

"Did you speak, Blake?"

"I—I—no, sir—yes, sir!"

"You may go, my boys!" said the Head graciously.

The juniors went.

They were incapable of speech, and they did not even thank the Head, and did not say how pleased they were. The study door closed upon them.

Mr. Railton and the Head exchanged glances.

They smiled.

Outside in the passage, the juniors did not smile. They paused and looked at one another, and each read his own dismay and disgust reflected in the countenance of the rest.

"Miss Ponsonby!" groaned Blake.

"A blessed gal teacher!"

"The Shell will rag us to death!"

"The whole coll will cackle!"

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire!"

groaned Figgins. "This is worse than Knox!"

"I—I say," said Herries desperately.

"Let's go back and ask the Head to let us have Knox instead!"

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Can't; it's settled now!" murmured Blake.

"Oh, what asses we've been!"

We ought to have gone to the Head and petitioned him to let us have a prefect!"

"I guess so!"

The juniors turned wrathfully upon Lumley-Lumley.

It had been his idea to go to the Head and petition against a prefect, and they regarded him as the author of their misfortunes. They glared at him.

"You ass!" said Blake.

"You fathead!"

"If you hadn't brought us here to play the giddy ox," said Redfern, in measured tones, "we should have heard about this, and could have come here with a different kind of petition! Now it's too late!"

"You chump!"

"You ass!"

"You burbling jabberwock!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Lumley-Lumley.

"How was I to know? How was I to guess that Lathom was going to spring this on us?"

"Yah!"

"Ass!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Blake mildly.

"We'll teach him to take us petitioning to the Head and getting caught in a trap like this! Bump him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bump the awful ass!"

"Here, I say, hold on! Ow! Yow! Oooooop!"

Bump!

Lumley-Lumley, grasped by many hands, descended upon the floor with a terrific bump. The juniors left him gasping there, and returned disconsolately to Study No. 6 and their unfinished tea. Fatty Wynn was still going strong, but the rest of the Fourth Formers had little appetite left. They had, as Figgins said, escaped the frying-pan only to fall into the fire, and their last state was worse than the first.

It was the limit!

CHAPTER 9.

The Fourth Form in a Fury!

A WOMAN to take the Fourth Form at St. Jim's!

Petticoat government in the Fourth Form Room! Blake, Figgins, and Redfern, and all the mighty men of the Fourth under feminine domination!

The whole school cackled when they heard it. But the Fourth Form—every fellow of them—simply writhed.

Even Mellich was exasperated. And the worst of it was that the other Forms

(Continued on the 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.).

APPRECIATION.

Wiggins: "I haven't asked you in yet to hear my new radio set, have I?"

Biggins: "No, old man, and I appreciate it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Cashmore, 187, Greenoak Crescent, Stirlchley, Birmingham.

ALL AIR.

"I can't be kept down," the street orator shouted. "I may be forced below the waves, but I always rise to the surface again."

"Yes," said a voice, "like a whale, to blow!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. MacKinnon, 136, Caledonia Road, Glasgow, G.3.

THE JURY DISAGREES.

The juryman had retired to consider their verdict.

On re-entering the court the judge asked if they had agreed on their verdict.

"No, your honour," said the foreman, "we have not. I have never met eleven such obstinate men in my life!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Bailey, 12, Leominster Road, Hall Green, Birmingham.

THEN HE WOKE UP.

Explorer (telling his adventures to a disinterested audience): "I had the lion in my grasp and I rolled over and over, and I—"

Bored Listener: "Rolled out of bed!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Abram, Gateon House Farm, East Keswick, nr. Leeds.

JUST LIKE PAT.

"Now come along, there!" shouted the sergeant. "You'll be late on parade."

"I'm looking for me belt, sergeant," called out Private Pat Flanagan.

"Why, you've got it on, you dolt!"

"Begorra, so I have," said Pat, with a pleased smile. "I'm glad you told me, sergeant, or I should have gone on parade without it."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss N. Quiney, 2, Smith Street, St. James's Road, Halifax, Yorkshire.

SUBTRACTION AND ADDITION.

Teacher: "If you had five apples, Smith, and Jones stole some which left you two, what would he have taken?"

Smith: "A big risk."

Teacher: "Don't be silly—he'd have taken three."

Smith: "Yuh—and a black eye!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Barr, L.C.C. Residential School, Banstead, Surrey.

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took it as a huge joke. The Shell, instead of being properly sympathetic, as the unhappy Fourth had a right to expect, only chuckled over it. The Fifth grinned hugely. Even the fags of the Third took occasion to be cheeky about it. D'Arcy minor—the celebrated Wally—congratulated his major on it, and Arthur Augustus, for once in his life, came very near boxing his minor's ears.

There were several fights on the subject in the Junior Common-room. The Fourth were exasperated, and they could not stand jokes about it. They walloped Third Form fags, and they fought with the Shell fellows. There was some satisfaction, certainly, in punching the heads of the fellows who joked on the subject. But that did not alter the awful facts. On the morrow morning they were to be taken by the vicar's sister, as if they were a Form in a girls' school!

"We won't stand it!" said Blake wildly.

"I've got an idea," said Mellish.

"Oh, you can go and eat coke!" said Blake unthankfully.

"Yaas, wathah! You can run away and play!"

"But it's a good wheeze!" persisted Mellish. "We can rag her, you know. Women can't stand being ragged, and she'd be too tender-hearted to get us licked. We could rag her baldheaded first morning and make her sick of it."

To Mellish's surprise, there was a roar of indignation from the Fourth. He regarded that as a good idea, and did not see any objection to it himself. The reception it met with showed that the other fellows did, however.

"You uttah wotah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Do you think that a decent chap could wag a woman?"

"Oh, he's a rotten end!" said Blake. "Don't you understand, you worm, that if she's too tender-hearted to have us punished, that puts us on our honour to behave well?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As for being rude to a woman, that may suit you," said Reilly, with a sniff. "But, faith, if I catch you at it, you'll have some lovely black eyes after it, bedad!"

"And thick ears!" said Herries.

"And swollen noses, bedad!"

"Ha, ha, ha! How many?"

"We'll scalp Mellish if he begins any of his caddish tricks!" said Macdonald.

"But it's rotten for us, all the same!"

And Mellish was hooted out of the Common-room for his valuable suggestion.

That way out of the difficulty was barred, and as there seemed to be no other way out it was clear that the Fourth Form were in for it.

The Terrible Three came into the Common-room smiling. The Fourth Formers glared at them. They thought they saw the reason for their smiles.

"Well, what are you monkeys grinning at?" was Blake's polite query.

"Yaas, wathah! I object to those Shell boundahs gwinnin' here."

"Congratulations!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"What for?" demanded Blake.

"Your good luck," said Tom Merry. "By the way, is it true that Miss Ponsonby is going to make you wear pinafores?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Shell fellows.

Blake snorted.

"Chuck them out!" he roared. "I'm not going to stand their cheek! Chuck them out!"

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here, hold on—I mean let go! Oh!"

But the Fourth Formers did not let go; they held on! The Terrible Three were seized by many hands and hurled forth into the passage, and they rolled along the linoleum there with wild yells.

"That's better!" said Blake, panting with his exertions. "We're not going to have any cheek from the Shell on the subject, anyway!"

"Wathah not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Noble of the Shell.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Blake, turning on the Cornstalk wrathfully.

"Oh, nothing! I was only thinking that you'll have to stop those rough games when you become Miss Ponsonby's pets."

That was enough! The Fourth Formers rushed upon Kangaroo, and he was sent flying through the doorway. "Any more Shellfish got anything funny to say?" roared Blake.

"Not at all," said Bernard Glyn, dodging towards the door. "I think it's a jolly good thing for you. You will have to wash your faces to-morrow morning—"

They rushed at him, but he was gone. The Fourth Form went up to bed that night in an excited frame of mind. Over in the New House, Figgins & Co. were as excited as Blake & Co. in the School House. The grins of the other Forms were wildly exasperating to all the Fourth.

As Blake and the rest were going to bed Wally of the Third put his head in at the dormitory door.

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"Weally, Wally—"

"I've come to give you a tip," said Wally. "This is a serious matter. I'm not going to have you falling in love with your lady teacher. I—"

Biff, biff!

Two pillows crashed on the door as Wally hurriedly closed it and withdrew.

Knox came to see lights-out for the Fourth. There was an unpleasant grin on the face of the prefect, which made the Fourth long to punch it, but it was rather a serious matter to punch a prefect.

"I hear that you young sweeps don't want me to take you while Lathom's away," said Knox. "I hope you'll like petticoat government instead."

"Well, anything's better than you, Knox," said Blake. "In the lowest deep there's still a greater depth, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Upon the whole, I'm vewy pleased that we're not goin' to have you, Knox!" said Arthur Augustus. "Nothin's so bad but what it might be worse."

Knox scowled.

"I hear that Miss Ponsonby snacks her pupils when they're naughty," he said, "and makes them stand in the corner with their faces to the wall. I shall look in at the Fourth Form Room to-morrow to see how you're getting on. Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz!

Prefect or no prefect, the Fourth were fed-up, and a pillow flew through the air and smote Knox on the nose, and the prefect sat down with startling and painful suddenness on the hard floor of the dormitory.

He was up again in a moment, red with rage.

"Who threw that pillow?" he roared.

"Yah!"

"Get out!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Knox made a rush at the shouting juniors. Five or six pillows and bolsters hurled upon him, and he rolled over again. He picked himself up more slowly this time and gave the juniors a glare, but he did not attempt to come to close quarters again.

"Take fifty lines each!" he exclaimed.

And the Fourth Form grinned and went to bed. That was Knox's way of getting out of a difficult position; he knew the juniors would not do the lines, but as he would not ask for them his dignity would be saved. It was just as well for him that he stopped short; for the juniors were quite exasperated, and Knox had come very near to being thoroughly ragged.

It was a long time before the Fourth Form slept.

For an hour or more there was a buzz of voices; and when the juniors slept at last some of them dreamed they were dressed in pinafores, walking two and two to church, with Miss Ponsonby in command.

CHAPTER 10.

Nice for the Fourth!

MISS PONSONBY arrived the next morning.

Miss Pon, as she was sometimes called in the village, was very healthy and wholesome and kind, if not exactly beautiful.

Miss Pon thought she understood boys. Perhaps she did not understand boys so well as they understood her. Boys are a problem; they do not understand themselves as a rule, and grown-up people are often sadly at a loss in attempting to grapple with the puzzle of boy nature.

Miss Ponsonby had not really solved that riddle, although she fully believed that she had done so.

Before taking command in the Fourth Form Room she had an interview with the Head, and she expressed views which left Dr. Holmes a little doubtful.

"All boys require a kindness and attention in minute details," Miss Pon declared. "I've always succeeded with my classes of girls. Why should boys be treated differently? Gentleness must be the watchword. Kindness is the thing, and affection. I shall rely upon their better natures, and appeal to that love of goodness which I am assured is born in every boy the same as in every girl."

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"I shall offer the head boy in class a pretty bow, which he will wear in the playground as a distinction," said Miss Pon.

"Dear me!" said the Head.

"And I shall call them by their Christian names, as I do my girls. Do you not think that that seems so much more sweet?"

"Ahem!"

And with these noble intentions in her mind Miss Ponsonby entered into the lion's den, so to speak.

The Fourth were not yet there.

Morning school began at St. Jim's at nine, but at nine o'clock none of the Fourth had turned up.

Miss Ponsonby was patient.

At five minutes past nine a few fellows straggled in. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence of the New House were the first. They were scholarship fellows, and supposed to be unnaturally keen about lessons—hence their arrival only five minutes late.

"Good-morning!" said Miss Ponsonby.

"Good-morning, miss!" said Redfern.

"Where are the other boys?"



As Crooke caught a glimpse through the shrubs of a moving figure, he turned on the hose. Sizz! Splash! The jet of water smote the victim fairly in the chest and bowled him over like a ninepin. "Oh! Ow! Help!" came a frantic yell. But it was not D'Arcy's voice—it was that of Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master!

"In the quad, I think, Miss Ponsonby."

"That is not right," said the vicar's sister gravely. "Nine o'clock is the time for first lessons. I hope you are not going to be careless, my dears."

The New Firm looked at one another in a sickly way. She had called them dears already; she would be kissing them next, as Owen whispered, in a disgusted undertone.

"We are sorry, miss," said Redfern politely. "We thought you wouldn't mind as it was first morning."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. Arthur Augustus had intended to be in the Form-room on the very stroke of nine, in order to show that, little as he liked feminine government in the Form-room, he understood what was due to a lady.

Punctuality, the politeness of princes, was a great point with Arthur Augustus. Unfortunately he had considered it only due to Miss Ponsonby to put on an extra-special necktie, and it had detained him ten minutes at the last moment.

"Pway excuse me, Miss Ponsonby," said D'Arcy, in his graceful way. "I trust you will overlook this unpunctuality on my part for once."

"Certainly, my dear!" said Miss Ponsonby.

D'Arcy jumped. The rest of the Form wandered in. The whole Form had rejected Mellish's suggestion of ragging the lady teacher with indignation. But they had felt that discipline in the Form-room would be slack in feminine hands, and so they had naturally allowed themselves a little rope, as it were, about coming in to lessons. They strolled in as if it

were a meeting of the Hobby Club, and sat at the desks in careless attitudes.

Arthur Augustus sat bolt upright as an example to the rest; but Arthur Augustus' example was not always followed, and it wasn't upon this occasion.

Miss Ponsonby greeted all her pupils kindly.

She had utilised the delay in sorting over Mr. Lathom's books in his desk, and she was prepared for war, so to speak.

"Until I grow a little used to this Form work, I shall have to depend upon you for some assistance, my dears," she said, beaming.

The Fourth Form grunted.

"Arthur!"

D'Arcy looked up; so did Digby; so did several other fellows who happened to bear that uncommon name.

"Yes, sir—miss."

"Yaas, Miss Pon."

"Adsum!"

"I mean D'Arcy," said Miss Ponsonby. "D'Arcy, will you kindly tell me what book you are now using?"

"De Bello Gallico," Miss Ponsonby.

"Which book?"

"Liber primus, Miss Ponsonby."

"Very good. You will commence, Percy."

Percy Mellish rose, colouring. Nobody ever called him Percy at St. Jim's—at all events, hitherto—though after that day he was "Percied" continually by humorous juniors.

Mellish was chiefly distinguished in the Form as a slacker, and for avoiding work at every possible opportunity. He was glad he had been called upon to construe first, as it enabled him to begin where he liked. The new Form-mistress, of course, did not know what the Fourth had been doing, and Mellish

had not done his preparation the preceding evening—a duty he frequently neglected. If Mr. Lathom had been taking the class that morning, there would have been trouble for Mellish; but in the circumstances he was able to avoid it by starting at a place that was perfectly familiar to him, and to everybody.

"Gallia est omnis diviso in partes tres," said Mellish solemnly.

The Fourth Form stared.

Then they grinned.

Miss Ponsonby could not help feeling a little surprised.

"Is that the right place, Mellish—Percy?" she asked.

"Yes, miss."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure, miss."

"Indeed!" Miss Ponsonby would never have suspected anybody of telling an untruth, so she was only surprised. "Very well, construe."

The Fourth Formers looked at Mellish in wonder and disgust. His faculty for telling lies was amazing. The Fourth Form were, of course, far advanced in the Gallic War. And Mellish, with perfect coolness, had started at the very beginning of the first book, and was going to construe lines which he had known by heart when he was a fag in the Third Form.

"The awful wottah!" said D'Arcy, in a whisper to Blake. "It's amazin' to me how that chap can tell those whoppahs! He ought to be shown up."

"Can't sneak," said Blake.

"I was not pwoposin' to sneak, deah boy; but it seems wotten to see him takin' in Miss Pon in that way."

"He's a rotter!" said Figgins. "But

it makes it easier for us. I only just looked at my prep last night."

"Yes; we shall have to go on where Percy leaves off," grinned Herries. "He's a cad, but it can't be helped. And it's all right for us."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Please be quiet while your schoolmate construes, my dears," said Miss Ponsonby.

"Bai Jove!"

And the Fourth Form were silent while their schoolmate construed.

Mellish went on with much fluency. As a rule, he was the worst in the class, but on the present occasion the veriest duffer at St. Jim's could hardly have faltered. There was not a fag in the Second or Third who could not have informed Miss Ponsonby that ancient Gaul was divided into three parts, and specified the inhabitants thereof.

Miss Ponsonby nodded with approval as Percy Mellish told her without a fault that all Gaul was divided in three parts, of which one was inhabited by the Belgæ, another by the Aquitani, and the third by those who in their own language are called Celts, and in ours, Gauls.

"Very good indeed, Percy," said Miss Ponsonby. "This shows that you have been very careful with your preparation."

"Yes, miss," said Mellish demurely. "I always make it a point to be very careful with my preparation, please. I look upon it as a duty that I owe to my parents and to my kind teachers."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake.

Miss Ponsonby beamed.

"You will take the head of the class for the present, Percy," she said.

Percy smirked.

He took the head of the class, the first time he had ever taken the lead of any class. Glares were bestowed upon him by fellows he displaced. Even fellows who were not keen on Form-room work felt insulted at being passed over by the biggest slacker and duffer in the Form.

"I am very pleased with you, Percy!" said Miss Ponsonby. "I hope your schoolmates will be equally deserving. I have decided to offer a little reward to the head boy of the Form."

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears. Perhaps the thought crossed his mind that the reward might take the form of a visit to the school tuckshop.

"I am going to give you a pretty bow to wear in the playground," said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Form gasped.

Mellish turned pale.

Miss Ponsonby fished in her bag—of course, as a woman, she could not possibly come even to a Form-room without a bag—and drew out a really pretty bow, which would have delighted the heart of a little girl of five, but did not have that effect upon the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

The Fourth Form looked quite sickly.

"There!" said Miss Ponsonby, holding it up. "I made it myself, and it will be a mark of distinction to the dear child who becomes head of the Form."

And the good lady placed the pretty bow in a prominent position on her desk, where it could be seen by all eyes, as an incentive to hard work.

The juniors looked at one another.

One thought was in every mind. Mellish had the head of the class, and Mellish could keep it. With that handsome reward in view, and the prospect of being made to look absurd to all

St. Jim's, no one was likely to struggle to displace Mellish. Percy, certainly, would be very glad to be displaced, but no one was likely to give him the chance.

"Jack!" said Miss Ponsonby.

Three or four Jacks rose, but Miss Ponsonby singled out Jack Blake, and Blake began to construe. He went on from where Mellish had left off, in lines as familiar to him as his own name, but he made a woeful mess of them.

There was a cackle from the Fourth.

Miss Ponsonby started.

"Jack!" she shrieked.

"Yes, sir—I mean miss."

"You have not prepared your lesson."

"N-not this, miss!" stammered Blake.

"That is very wrong, Jack!"

"I—I—"

"I fear I must place you at the bottom of the Form."

"Thank you, miss—I—I—I mean yes, sir!" stuttered Blake.

"You will go on—what is your name, my dear?" asked Miss Ponsonby, looking at Lumley-Lumley.

"Jerrold, miss."

"Please go on, Jerrold, and show Jack how that passage should be construed."

"I guess I can do it, miss."

"Pray go on."

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley construed.

"All these linger in institutions in different legs."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby, while the Form yelled. "You are a dreadful dunce, Jerrold. You will show him how it should be done, Patrick."

Reilly rose to the occasion.

"Hi omnes lingua—" he began.

"Yes, yes; construe," said Miss Ponsonby.

"Faith, all these lingoes are by institutions lawfully differentiated."

"Oh!" said Miss Ponsonby. "You have been neglecting your preparation. You seem not to be able to grasp the rudiments of Latin. I shall now take you through this instead of letting you construe."

And Miss Ponsonby spent the next half-hour drilling into the Fourth Form heads knowledge which they already possessed. They took it patiently. So long as they were not moved up to the top of the class the juniors were satisfied.

And it was not only in the Latin lesson, but in the other lessons that the Form-mistress found the Fourth woefully deficient. It seemed to be a Form full of duffers. It was not ragging, as Blake remarked; it was self-defence. Nobody intended to go out of the Form-room after morning lessons with that ridiculous bow pinned upon him if he could help it. Miss Ponsonby came to the conclusion when lessons were over that the Fourth Form of St. Jim's was a dreadfully stupid Form, and she did not wonder that Mr. Lathom was showing signs of baldness. Even Mellish showed himself as stupid as the rest, in the hope of being deprived of his honourable place, but it did not avail him. He had distinguished himself once, and nobody else had distinguished himself at all, excepting for stupidity.

"Dismiss!" said Miss Ponsonby at last.

And as the Fourth Form marched out, she made Mellish stop at her desk, and pinned the bow upon his jacket.

Mellish followed the rest of the Fourth out of the Form-room with a face as red as fire.

Tom Merry was waiting in the passage to greet the Fourth as they came out. Percy Mellish's pretty bow attracted general attention at once.

"What's that?"

"Where did you pick that up, Mellish?"

"How nice!"

"It's Percy's reward for being good," said Blake, with a grin. "Miss Pon gives a pretty bow to the top boy in the Form!"

"Eh—Mellish top boy!" exclaimed Tom Merry in amazement.

"Yes, he's wonderful to-day. He construed the first sentence in 'Cæsar' without a mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Doesn't it look nice?"

"Bravo, Percy!"

"If you call me Percy I'll punch your silly heads!" yelled Mellish, and he grabbed off the bow and threw it upon the floor, and jumped on it.

CHAPTER 11.

The Little Boy Who Was Good!

AFTERNOON lessons in the Fourth Form Room were not a pleasure to the Fourth.

During the morning Miss Ponsonby had followed the usual routine of lessons, but in the afternoon she introduced some improvements, on the lines of the girls' school in which she had been a teacher.

"I am going to give you children a pleasant change," she announced.

The juniors looked up eagerly. For a moment they hoped that Miss Ponsonby was going to excuse them from lessons. They would have been very pleased to play cricket instead. But Miss Ponsonby's next words dashed their hopes to the ground.

"I am sure you will all like a change from the class-room on a hot afternoon like this," said Miss Ponsonby. "I am going to take you out for half an hour, and we will sit in the grass and I will tell you a story."

"Thank you, ma'am!" said Figgins faintly, as somebody was apparently expected to answer.

The Fourth Form were not sorry to get out of the Form-room, so far as that went. But they followed Miss Ponsonby into the quadrangle with many misgivings.

Miss Ponsonby led them to the Head's lawn, where she told them to sit down and make themselves comfortable. Then she sat down on a camp-stool herself. The juniors sat or reclined in the grass round her.

"Percy," said Miss Ponsonby, "you shall hold my sunshade. I always used to let the best girl in my class hold my sunshade, and you have been a good boy."

Percy made a horrible grimace, which, fortunately, Miss Ponsonby did not see. He sat beside the Form-mistress and held the sunshade.

"Now, what story shall I tell you, my dears?" asked Miss Ponsonby, beaming round upon the unhappy circle.

"Football," said Figgins.

Miss Ponsonby smiled.

"I am afraid I should not be able to deal with that subject, dear."

"Cricket," suggested Redfern.

"Ahem!"

"Hockey," said Blake.

"I fear that that is also out of the question. Shall I tell you a story of a good little boy who was unexpectedly rewarded for his goodness?"

Now, if Miss Ponsonby had said to

her former class of girls, "Shall I tell you a story of a good little girl who was unexpectedly rewarded for her goodness?" the whole class would have responded immediately, "Do, dear Miss Ponsonby!" with great enthusiasm.

But the response of the unhappy juniors was not enthusiastic.

Some of them had caught sight of Taggles, the school porter, who was doing a little gardening, and had paused in his labours to look on at the scene. They would have given weeks and weeks of pocket-money to throw Taggles into the lake. And they were in dread of the scene lasting after the other fellows had come out of the Form-rooms. As it was last lesson, school would soon be over, and if the rest of St. Jim's came and saw them sitting on the grass round their teacher, the Fourth felt that they would expire of shame. And there was no escape.

"There was once a little girl named Alice," said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Form groaned. "She lived in a little cottage ever so pretty," said the Form-mistress. "Dear Percy, do not push the sunshade against my hat."

"I—I can't help it," muttered Mellish. "My arm aches."

"My dear child! If you are tired you must not hold my sunshade a moment longer," said Miss Ponsonby. "Jack, would you like to hold it for me instead of Percy?"

Blake complied.

"Alice was a good little girl," continued Miss Ponsonby. "She loved her mother and her dear aunt and her kind teacher. She—"

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Lumley-Lumley. "Wasn't this going to be a story about a good little boy?"

"Dear me!" said Miss Ponsonby. "Thank you so much for reminding me, Jerrold. You are quite right. There was once a good little boy named—"

"Percy," suggested Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes, named Percy," said Miss Ponsonby brightly. "Of course, any name would do, and it is very sweet of you to suggest the name of a playmate you are fond of, Jerrold. There was once a good little boy named Percy."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Miss Ponsonby looked round. That unseemly interruption had come from Taggles. Taggles blushed as he caught Miss Ponsonby's stern eye, and immediately retreated and became very busy in another part of the garden.

"This little boy," resumed Miss Ponsonby, with some dignity, "lived in a little cottage that was ever so pretty. She—I mean, he—had a teeny-weeny doll—I mean to say—H'm! Let me think a moment."

Miss Ponsonby thought a moment. Lumley-Lumley interjected a question.

"Was everybody fond of Percy, ma'am?"

"Yes; he was loved by all," said Miss Ponsonby.

"That reminds us of our Percy," said Lumley-Lumley.

Percy gave Lumley-Lumley a glance that was positively murderous. The Fourth Formers grinned, feeling a little more satisfied since Miss Ponsonby had named the hero of her story Percy. It was some consolation to see Mellish writhing with suppressed rage.

"Percy had a little cricket bat that he was very fond of," said Miss Ponsonby, giving the story a really boyish turn, as she fancied. "This cricket bat had been given to him by a kind uncle who loved him dearly. Percy was so fond of this little doll—I mean, cricket bat—that he used to take it to school with him. Now, the school that Percy

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling



Hallo, everybody! "How does it feel sitting on the beach the last day of the holiday?" asks Blake. "Stony"! Two stamps were sold for £2,200. By gum! "This bun's got a soapy taste!" said Jameson. "Well, it's a bathbun, isn't it?" said Wally D'Arcy. The story goes that when Gore's aunt came to see him play cricket, she heard the umpire shout: "Over!"—so she went away. Mr. Ratcliff went mountaineering one vac. "I suppose people often fall down here?" he asked, viewing a very steep precipice. "No; once is enough for most of them!" responded the guide. The tramp was sleeping on a golf green when the club secretary prodded him. "Who are you?" demanded the tramp.

went to was ever so big. Percy's teacher did not allow dolls—I mean foot-balls—that is to say, cricket bats, to be brought into the school, and Percy always had his cricket bat under his little coat."

The juniors grinned cheerfully. They could imagine Percy hiding a cricket bat under his little coat.

"But one day," resumed Miss Ponsonby, "when the teacher wasn't looking, Percy played with his cricket bat. He pressed it to make it squeak—that is to say—"

The juniors chuckled. The cricket bat was getting mixed with the doll of the original story again.

"That is to say, he allowed it to fall upon the floor," said Miss Ponsonby, with a really wonderful flow of invention. "The crash of the bat as it fell was ever so loud. The teacher looked round with a frown."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley.

"Shut up, you ass!" murmured Figgins.

"The teacher asked who had dropped the doll—that is to say, the bat. Percy was very much frightened. He thought that the teacher might slap him."

"Poor Percy!" said Lumley-Lumley. "That's different from our Percy, ma'am. He never has anything to do with cricket bats."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who dropped that doll—bat?" asked the teacher, in a loud voice," pursued Miss Ponsonby. "And Percy rose and said nobly: 'Please, I did!'"

"With my little hatchet!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"What did you say, Jerrold?"

"It was ripping of Percy, ma'am! Just like our Percy; he'd rise up and tell a teacher anything."

"If it wasn't true," murmured Herries.

"Now, my dear children, I should like to say that the teacher forgave Percy at once for being so truthful," continued the narrator. "But the teacher was cross, and she made Percy stand in the corner of the school-room for the whole afternoon. Percy was tired, and he had a big, big ache in his little leg. Don't you all feel sorry for poor Percy, my dears?"

"I'm the club secretary." "Well, that's not the way to get new members!" snapped the tramp. The storm raged fiercely, and the ship seemed lost. In desperation, the captain sent up a rocket. A solemn-faced passenger stepped up to the bridge. "Captain," he said, "I'm the last man to hinder harmless fun, but this is no time for letting off fireworks!" Fags recently raided the school larder. "Poaching" on the cook's "preserves." "The trouble with poets," said the harassed editor, "is that they think every pillar-box is a fresh opening for them!" An American chum tells me everybody in Kansas leaves off work during the lynch hour. Old films are being sold as junk, I read. But why only old ones? "I've never laid a bet since I lost sixpence," says young Hobbs. I bet! As the housebreaker said to the lorry-driver who crashed into the wall: "Who's doing this job?" "Do I know any Irish sea stories?" asks a reader. Listen! The raw recruit was being asked for his definition of strategy. "Well, sorr," he replied, "when you run out of ammunition, and you don't want the enemy to know it, you keep on firing at 'em, sorr! That's strategy!" All the best, lads!

The Fourth Formers, thus appealed to, looked simply idiotic.

"It was hard cheese!" gasped Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I should have wufused to stand in the cornah! I should have insisted that it was infwa dig."

"My dear Arthur!"

"Weally, Miss Ponsonby—"

"To resume. While poor Percy was standing in the corner, feeling very tired and very much ashamed, the rector came in. The rector immediately saw Percy, and—"

There was a whoop in the quadrangle, announcing that the school was out.

The juniors made a general movement.

They simply could not endure to be found where they were by the Shell fellows and the fags, and yet it would be somewhat discourteous to interrupt Miss Ponsonby in the midst of her thrilling story.

"The rector said—"

What the rector said to Percy was never known. Mellish rose from the grass with an ache in his legs from sitting in an uncomfortable position, which probably equalled that of the Percy of the story.

"Time's up, ma'am," said Mellish suddenly. "The school's dismissed!"

"Would you not like me to finish the story, my dears?" asked Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Formers wanted to be polite. But politeness carried to such an extent would really have verged upon hypocrisy. They did not reply.

There was a shout from the direction of the gate in the quadrangle. A row of faces belonging to Shell fellows looked over the gate, admiring the scene in the garden. Shell fellows and fags of the Third crowded there, greatly interested.

"Don't they look sweet?" came Monty Lowther's voice.

"Miss Ponsonby's pets been good little boys?" called Kangaroo.

The Fourth Formers were crimson, and they rose as one man.

"I will finish the story to-morrow," said Miss Ponsonby graciously. "You may go!"

"Thank you, ma'am!"

And the Fourth Form went. They

never learned how Percy was rewarded for his goodness. But they did not feel very curious upon the subject.

CHAPTER 12.

A Kiss for Mellish.

THE next day several of the Fourth Form inquired of Mr. Railton, with much solicitude, how Mr. Lathom was getting on.

Mr. Lathom was still at the vicarage, and Miss Ponsonby was still at St. Jim's.

It would have been very flattering to Mr. Lathom to hear how anxious his Form were about him. They were as eager to hear the latest bulletin as if he had been an emperor or a prince, at least.

Mr. Railton gave them what satisfaction he could. Mr. Lathom was mending, but he was mending slowly. That was all the Housemaster could tell them, excepting that the master of the Fourth was not expected to return to St. Jim's for a few days, anyway. The Fourth heard it, with long faces.

"Never mind!" said Blake, looking as if he minded very much, however. "We can stand it this morning. Thank goodness, it's a half-holiday this afternoon!"

"Yes; that's a giddy blessing!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll lick those Shell bounders at cricket, and make 'em sit up for their clock!" said Figgins vengefully.

Tom Merry & Co. watched the Fourth Formers go into morning lessons, and they grinned. They were sympathetic, but they could not help grinning.

Miss Ponsonby was there, sweet and calm and smiling, as usual.

There was no chance for Mellish to repeat his performance of the previous day, nor, indeed, was the end of the Fourth anxious to retain the top of the class. He did not want any more of the decorations that were so hard to get rid of.

Miss Ponsonby commenced with him, and the exceeding badness of his construing caused him to be moved down several places, which happened to bring Lumley-Lumley into his place.

Lumley-Lumley glared at Mellish for thrusting this unsought honour upon him. Mellish grinned gleefully.

"You'll have the bow to-day, you rotter!" he muttered along the desks.

Lumley-Lumley waited for some minutes before he replied, and then his reply took the form of a pellet of screwed-up paper, which caught Mellish with some force behind the ear.

Mellish clapped his hand to the affected spot and howled:

"Ow!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby. "What was that?"

"Yow! Some beast chucked something at me!" growled Mellish.

"Percy!"

"Ow!"

"How can you use such an expression in description of one of your dear playmates, my child?" asked Miss Ponsonby, very much shocked.

"Well, he is a beast!" said Mellish.

"I am surprised at you, Percy!"

"Which boy was it threw a pellet at Percy?" asked Miss Ponsonby, looking over the class. "I trust the delinquent will be frank enough to make himself known, when I undertake that he shall not be punished."

Lumley-Lumley made a grimace.

"It would be so painful to me to have

to keep the whole class in," said Miss Ponsonby.

Very expressive glances were cast upon Lumley-Lumley by his Form-fellows. They didn't want to be kept in.

"If you please, Miss Ponsonby, I know who did it!" said Lumley-Lumley meekly.

Miss Ponsonby looked at him coldly. She did not encourage tell-tales.

"Indeed!" she said. "I do not wish you to name another boy. I asked the boy himself to own up!"

"I guess I'm the boy!"

Miss Ponsonby's face cleared.

"Oh," she said, "I understand! Why did you do it, Jerrold?"

"Just to make Percy sit up," said Lumley-Lumley. "I just wished to remind Percy that I was here, you know, ma'am, because I'm so fond of him."

"My dear Jerrold, that is most creditable of you!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby.

"He's telling whoppers!" growled Mellish.

"Percy! What did you say?"

"He's stuffing you, ma'am."

"What an extraordinary expression!" said Miss Ponsonby. "What do you mean?"

"He's pulling your leg—ahem—I mean, he's fooling, spoofing, telling whoppers!" said Mellish. "He chuckled that thing at me to hurt me, and it hurt!"

"Sneak!" hissed half the Form.

Miss Ponsonby turned a very grave face upon Lumley-Lumley.

"My dear Jerrold, I am surprised and pained!" she said.

Lumley-Lumley turned very red.

"Come out before the class, Jerrold!"

The junior obeyed, wondering whether Miss Ponsonby was going to assume a Form-master's rights to the cane.

"Come here, Percy!"

Percy Mellish joined Lumley-Lumley very unwillingly before the class.

"Now," said Miss Ponsonby, "I am sure you two boys do not really feel any ill-feeling towards one another."

"H'm!" murmured Lumley-Lumley.

"Oh!" said Mellish.

"Now shake hands with one another, like good little boys, and I will kiss you both!" said Miss Ponsonby.

Mellish and Lumley-Lumley gasped.

Probably Miss Ponsonby had composed many little differences successfully in that way at her girls' school. But at St. Jim's such methods had never been tried.

"You'll—you'll what?" gasped Lumley-Lumley.

"I will kiss you both!" said Miss Ponsonby, beaming. "Now shake hands like dear little children!"

"Oh, my hat!" moaned Blake. "What next?"

Miss Ponsonby was waiting, in the evident expectation of being obeyed. Lumley-Lumley and Mellish, looking very shamefaced, shook hands.

"Dear children!" said Miss Ponsonby. She bent her head and kissed Mellish on the forehead. He jumped. Then she turned towards Lumley-Lumley. That cheerful youth was generally credited with possessing the coolness habitual to a cucumber, and with having the nerve to face anything. But there was certainly a limit even with Lumley-Lumley. He backed away.

"Oh, I say!" he gasped.

"Jerrold, my child!"

"If—if you please, I—I'd rather not!" said Lumley-Lumley, with a burning face.

"Jerrold!"

"I—I guess I ain't used to being kissed!" said Lumley-Lumley. "It serves Mellish right—I mean, it's all right for Mellish; but—"

Miss Ponsonby laughed.

"You are a silly boy!" she said.

"You may go back to your place."

"Thank you, ma'am."

And Lumley-Lumley thankfully went.

CHAPTER 13.

The Laugh of Rylcombe!

DISMISS!

It was a welcome word. The afternoon was a half-holiday, and the Fourth Form were looking forward to it with unusual keenness. They were going to play a



"Salute the rude boys before we turn back," said Grimes. obeyed. "Now fingers stretched out!" Thus the village they march

Form match with the Shell, and they wanted very much to lick Tom Merry & Co. on the cricket field. But their teacher was not done with them yet.

"One moment," she said, holding up her finger as the Form prepared to march out. "It is a half-holiday today, my dears, and I have planned a little excursion for you."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors could only look at their Form-mistress.

"I am going to take you for a little walk," said Miss Ponsonby sweetly. "Will you all be ready at three o'clock, and I will join you outside the House. We will have a little pleasant walk in the country, and I will give you some instructions in botanical subjects."

"Oh!" said the Fourth.

They did not thank Miss Ponsonby for her thoughtful kindness. They couldn't. They left the Form-room, and grouped themselves in the quadrangle to talk it over. The Terrible Three joined the unhappy juniors and they forbore from chipping as they saw how unhappy Blake & Co. looked.

"More trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake groaned.

"I think we shall be driven to running away!" he said. "The Form match is off for this afternoon."

"What!"

"We're ordered up for three o'clock. to be taken for a little walk."

"My hat!"

The rest of the Fourth talked it over. Some were inclined to rebel, and some to remonstrate, and some to bolt and not turn up again till calling-over. But upon the whole they felt that it would not do. Miss Ponsonby had to be treated with respect, and even if the juniors failed in respect, there was authority behind her. If their Form-master had ordered a little walk, they would have had no choice in the matter. Their Form-master had too much tact for that. But Miss Ponsonby did not know the distance in taste between feminine classes and masculine ones. It seemed to her a delightful pastime to take a gentle walk in the country and investigate some of the beauties of Nature. Blake & Co. thought of the chipping they would receive from the village boys if they marched two and two in charge of the vicar's sister, and groaned in spirit. Little matters like that did not even enter Miss Ponsonby's mind.

At three o'clock the Fourth, in a state of suppressed desperation, lined up outside the School House. Miss Ponsonby came out with her sunshade.

She greeted the juniors with a beaming smile.

"Well, we are all ready!" said Miss Ponsonby. "Come!"

The Fourth Form started.

Miss Ponsonby did not seem to observe their unhappy expressions. Dr. Holmes happened to be crossing the quadrangle as the juniors marched to the gates, and he paused. The long array of Fourth Formers lifted their caps.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head in surprise. "Are the boys going out, Miss Ponsonby?"

"Yes, I am taking the dear children for a little walk," said Miss Ponsonby, with a beaming smile. "I am going to give them some instruction in botany."

"Dear me!"

"We shall have such a pleasant afternoon."

"I—I hope you will, I am sure," said the Head.

But he looked on with a dubious expression upon his face as the unhappy procession wound on towards the gates, and after that the Head spent some time in serious consultation with Mr. Linton and Mr. Railton.

Meanwhile, the Fourth walked on.

They were arranged in twos, and made quite a long column, and Miss Ponsonby walked beside them in the sweetest possible temper.

It was a beautiful June afternoon, and the juniors would have enjoyed a cricket match, or a row on the river, or a picnic in the ruined castle, or simply a ramble in the woods. But to be walked out in charge

of a lady teacher was not enjoyment—very far from it.

The route lay through Rylcombe, and the juniors simply trembled as they came into the old High Street. They had many foes there, and they knew that the enemy would not fail to take advantage of their present helpless position. Fortunately, the fellows of Rylcombe Grammar School were playing a cricket match, so they had no attentions to fear from Gordon Gay & Co. But the village boys—Grimes, the grocer's boy, and Pilcher and Craggs, and the rest—where were they?

The juniors soon learned where they were. Almost the first person they beheld on entering the village was Grimes, the grocer's boy. Grimes had a basket on his arm, full of groceries, which he was conveying to various destinations. But Grimes was in no hurry to get them there. At the sight of the Fourth Form procession, Grimes stopped, and set his basket down, and stared at them.

"Well, my heye!" he gasped.

Miss Ponsonby did not appear to notice him. But the juniors of St. Jim's glared at him in the most deadly way.

"My 'at!" gasped Grimes. "Is it a Sunday school treat?"

"Weally, Gwines—"

"Cut off, you rotter!" growled Figgins.

"I'll punch your silly head if you don't travel," hissed Blake.

"Yaas wathah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grimes. "Going to a tea-fight, eh? One bun each, with one currant in each bun—I know. You there, too, Master Lumley-Lumley?"

"Yes, I guess I'm here, too, Master Grimes," said Lumley-Lumley cheerfully.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Grimes.

The juniors glared at him, and some of them stopped, strongly tempted to leave the ranks and bestow summary chastisement upon the humorous Grimes.

Miss Ponsonby looked back, frowning a little.

"Pray keep in order, my dear children," she said.

"Yaas, wathah, Miss Ponsonby, but we—"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Please run away, you rude boy," said Miss Ponsonby. "I am shocked at you. Please run away at once."

"No offence, ma'am," said Grimes.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Miss Ponsonby led them up and down lanes, and paused in meadows and woods, and explained to the juniors many of the cunning ways Nature has in the vegetable kingdom. But it is to be feared that most of that valuable information fell upon inattentive ears.

The juniors were thinking of the cricket field of St. Jim's, and botanical researches appealed to only a few of them.

They marched back towards the village.

As they entered Rylcombe they looked for their old enemies, and they saw them. Quite a crowd of Rylcombe boys had gathered to amuse themselves at the expense of the juniors of St. Jim's. It was not often that they had the Fourth Formers at their mercy in this way. Grimes was there, and he had a score or more of young rascals with him.

They did not interfere with the St. Jim's procession.

They flattered it—if, as the old saying avers, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

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"Hands up and right thumbs to noses!" The order was given by the St. Jim's juniors as, with crimson faces, they passed!

"Line up there!" said Grimes. And the village boys, chuckling and grinning, lined up.

Grimes, holding a very ancient umbrella above his head, led them along the street, marching abreast of the St. Jim's column.

The young rascals assumed most serious looks, and walked in step with the St. Jim's fellows; and Grimes, walking ahead of them and keeping them in order, gave an imitation of Miss Ponsonby's manner that was utterly absurd. Some of the juniors themselves could not help grinning.

Miss Ponsonby looked very pink. She shook her parasol at the village boys.

"Go away at once, you rude children!" she exclaimed.

"Whose road is it, ma'am?" inquired Grimes. "I s'pose we're free to walk on the public highway, ain't we?"

"Weally, Grimes, you wotah!"

"Hordah!" said Grimes. "Tention! Keep horder there, and don't look at them rude boys!"

"This is really intolerable!" murmured Miss Ponsonby.

"Shall we shift 'em, Miss Ponsonby?" asked Figgins eagerly.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway allow us—"

"No, no!" exclaimed Miss Ponsonby. "I forbid you to approach them! I will not have scenes of hoodiganism!"

"Weally, Miss Ponsonby—"

"We'll make 'em buzz off, you know!" said Blake pleadingly.

"I forbid you to do anything of the sort! Pray take no notice of those rude children!" said Miss Ponsonby.

The Fourth Formers marched on with gritting teeth. Grimes & Co. kept pace with them, Grimes imitating the juniors with great fidelity. The Saints were growing more and more restive every moment.

Grimes' remarks, too, were very hard to bear in silence. Grimes had quite a flow of humorous language.

"Horder!" he said. "Don't look at them rude boys! Don't you know that them boys are brought up in a school because they've got no 'omes, or else because their parents can't stand 'em about the 'ouse? You should feel sorry for them boys, my dears, but you should be careful not to mix with them or to imitate their bad manners."

The Co. chuckled.

"You must not laugh in the street, my dears!" exclaimed Grimes, in a shocked voice. "Leave that to them poor boys who are brought up without the advantage of a 'ome!"

"Oh, I shall go for him soon!" murmured Blake, in a choked voice.

"Cut off, you young sweeps!" roared Figgins.

"Don't answer them; they're rude boys!" said Grimes.

Figgins dropped out of the ranks. There would have been a combat in another moment, but Miss Ponsonby ran up in time. She pushed Figgins back into his place.

"You must not fight!" she exclaimed. "You must show your gentle and forgiving dispositions on an occasion like this."

"Oh!" said Figgins. He was feeling neither gentle nor forgiving at that moment.

Grimes & Co. accompanied the juniors half-way to St. Jim's. Then they stopped.

"We must go back now, my dears," said Grimes. "Salute them rude boys before you go. Hands up!"

"They put up their hands."

"Thumbs to noses!" said Grimes. The order was obeyed.

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"Fingers stretched out!" The young rascals stretched out their fingers.

And thus the young rascals saluted the St. Jim's juniors as they marched past. Blake & Co. marched on with crimson faces. Miss Ponsonby was watching them too carefully for them to get at the enemy, the good lady keeping herself carefully between the two parties.

Leaving Grimes & Co. performing that disrespectful salute, the juniors tramped on in a state of suppressed fury that was very near explosion point.

CHAPTER 14.

Saved!

"IT'S the limit!" "It's past the limit!" "Yaas, wathah!" "It's too thick!"

"We're not going to stand it!" Voices were raised in wrath in the Fourth Form Room at St. Jim's.

After that pleasant little walk the juniors had re-entered the school in a sulphurous state. The last straw had been added when Miss Ponsonby told them sweetly that, instead of having tea in their studies that afternoon, they should come out and picnic on the lawn, and she would continue the story of good little Percy, who was unexpectedly rewarded for his goodness.

As it was a half-holiday, and every fellow at St. Jim's was out of doors, the juniors would have a splendid audience this time, and they felt that they could not stand it. Miss Ponsonby had been the limit! This was considerably past the limit.

The Fourth Form met in the Form-room to discuss ways and means. Brooke, being a day boy, had gone home, but the rest of the Fourth felt that they were in for it. Tea-time was approaching, and Miss Ponsonby would expect them to be ready. The lady was at present in the Head's study, discussing something or other with the Head—the juniors did not care what. Probably, as Bishop remarked indignantly, it was some scheme for making them wear pinafores, or bows in their hats.

"We ain't going to stand it!" Jack Blake declared, jumping on a form and addressing the indignant meeting.

"It's too thick!"

"Altogether too thick!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think we've stood up well," said Blake indignantly. "We've stood more than most fellows would have stood."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's time we put our foot down!"

"Hurrah!"

"Who's going to back me up to refuse to have tea out on the lawn, with the whole giddy school grinning at us?"

There was a roar.

"All of us!" shouted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess the whole crowd's in that!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Something's got to be done," said Blake. "Lathom has no right to catch a silly cold. He shouldn't have planted Miss Pon on us, anyway. She's a good sort, but she can't handle the Fourth Form at St. Jim's!"

"No fear!"

"We'll tell her plainly we won't have it!"

"Bravo!" "Gussy had better be spokesman," said Blake hesitatingly. "He's more of a lady's man than I am, and—and it requires a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Good! Gussy's the man!"

The swell of St. Jim's shook his head in vigorous protest.

"I wefuse!" he exclaimed. "In ofthah cires, deah boys, I should be vevy pleased to take the lead, but I cannot speak in a diswespectful mannah to a lady. It's impos!"

"Look here, somebody's got to be spokesman!" said Blake, in exasperation. "If we're going to put an end to this school-marming in the Fourth somebody would have to explain it to Miss Ponsonby!"

All the Fourth Form were agreed that school-marming, as they called it, must end. They were all determined not to have tea on the lawn and to listen to the further adventures of good little Percy, with the rest of the school chuckling at the spectacle. What they desired could not be brought about without matters being explained to Miss Ponsonby. But at the idea of standing out before the Form-mistress and explaining, the boldest spirits felt their courage ooze out at their finger-ends.

"Look here, Blake's the man!"—said Pratt. "It's Blake's idea from the beginning. Blake ought to pitch it to Miss Pon!"

"But I—I—" stammered Blake.

"You're leader!" grinned Figgins. "You're the man! Go it!"

"Don't funk it, you know!" urged Kerr.

Blake stepped off the form.

"I—I—I'll do it!" he said desperately.

Footsteps were audible outside the Form-room passage. Blake turned pale. All the fellows had their eyes upon him, and there was no retreat now. He stepped to the door and turned the key quietly in the lock.

"Blake! Weally, deah boy—"

Blake held up his hand.

"Quiet! She mayn't know we're here."

The handle of the door was turned. The door remained closed, and then there was a knock.

The juniors looked at one another in a guilty way, and remained as still as mice in the neighbourhood of a cat.

Knock, knock, knock!

"My dear children, are you there?"

No answer.

"My dearest children, please open the door if you are there," said Miss Ponsonby from the passage. "I want to see you very particularly."

No reply.

Knock!

"Speak up, Blake, you ass!" whispered Digby.

But Blake was silent.

"My dear boys!" said Miss Ponsonby again. "I'm sure you must be able to hear me! I wish very much to say good-bye to you before I go!"

The juniors jumped.

They could scarcely believe their ears.

"Go!" murmured Blake.

"Gweat Scott!"

Jack Blake turned the key in the lock as silently as he could and threw the door open. He tried to work up an expression of surprise upon his features as he saw the Form-mistress standing there. Miss Ponsonby's face was grave.

"Oh, Miss Ponsonby!" said Blake.

"My dear children," said Miss Ponsonby, "I am sorry I shall not be able to take charge of you any longer. We have got on together so pleasantly, with so much satisfaction on both sides, that this is a great disappointment to me. I am sure you feel it as much as I do!"

The juniors gave a murmur that might have meant anything.

"Dr. Holmes thinks that the work is too much for me, and he is so kind and

(Continued on page 28.)



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

HALLO, chums! Our office-boy came in to me the other day and said: "What about another story of Redfern & Co.? They're great characters!" "It's all right, my lad," I replied. "Those cheery youths haven't been forgotten. I've got something extra-special up my sleeve."

Now, Redfern & Co. need no introduction to readers. I have had scores of letters just recently written in the same strain as our office-boy's request. The New Firm have caused a stir since they came to St. Jim's—and they certainly seem to have done the same among GEM readers.

All of you will be pleased to note, therefore, that these three wide-awake customers will be featured prominently in next week's ripping yarn, entitled:

"A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS!"

It's certainly an unusual title, but then, it's a school story that is different. I shall not tell you anything about the yarn, because I don't want to give the game away, but you can take my word for it, you'll thoroughly enjoy this sparkling story of House rivalry, ragging, and humorous adventure.

Continuing our ace-high series of the Packsaddle rebellion, next Wednesday's gripping yarn hits the high spots again. The rebels of the cow town school are having a hard fight to hold the fort against the roughnecks, but they are determined that there shall be

"NO SURRENDER!"

until Bill Sampson, their cowboy headmaster, is reinstated. But though the rebels have so far defeated the outside enemy, they find it difficult to combat with the inside enemy—hunger!

Thrills follow fast upon one another in the next stirring chapters of Mr. Brooks' best-ever serial, "The Secret World!" For the St. Frank's boys everything—their lives and escape from Northestria—depends upon the result of the great battle being waged between the Northestrians and the Gothlanders. So the impetuous Handforth doesn't see why he should be left out of the "scrap." Read how he goes into battle and engages Kassker, the leader of the Gothlanders, in a fight. It's all too thrilling, even for the one and only Handy!

Make certain that you don't miss next week's grand number. A regular order with your newsagent will ensure that your copy will be safe every week.

A FISH'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM.

Some while ago I told you about a fish that had been caught, placed alive in a glass tank of water, and then escaped by breaking the glass. For two hours that fish lived out of water. But here's the story of one that existed on dry land much longer than that. This particular fish was one known in South Africa as the barbel. Among others, it had been caught and put into a bath of water, so as to keep fresh until required for use. But the barbel, which was the pick of the catch, wasn't having any. It didn't relish providing someone with a meal! So it happened that when the angler looked into the bath later, the barbel had disappeared. The angler searched for it, but without success. Then, just

by chance, he found it again. He was going fishing the next day when he was astonished to see a fish wriggling along the ground in front of him! It was his prize barbel, and it had travelled two hundred yards from the house. How long it had lived out of water cannot be said, but it must have been many hours. If ever a fish deserved its freedom that one did!

THE SECOND TEST.

On Saturday the second Test match is due to start at Lord's, the headquarters of cricket, and London readers will be given the opportunity of seeing our South African visitors "on their toes," as the saying is. That they are one of the strongest teams sent over to England the Springboks have proved, and a thrilling match should be witnessed at Lord's. Cricket enthusiasts among my London readers should avail themselves of this chance of seeing the South Africans in action.

In the past there have been several close finishes between the two countries, and one of the closest was when, at Cape Town, in the 1922-3 season, England just scraped home by one wicket. That's the sort of exciting cricket one likes to see, and let's hope the second Test will provide an even more thrilling end.

MUCH ADO OVER A BIRD!

If you know how to keep away woodpeckers, write to the Chicago police. There is one in that city that is giving them the dickens of a lot of trouble—and they cannot get rid of it. The law forbids them to shoot the bird, so they have to adopt other ways.

The trouble all arose over the woodpecker taking a liking to a certain pipe. Every day it would turn up and peck at the pipe of a house. The racket of its beak against the metal annoyed the tenants, but they could find no means of stopping the woodpecker's game. So the aid of the police was enlisted. The pipe was given a coating of tar, for it was thought that the tar would stop the clatter. The woodpecker turned up as usual, and soon had pecked a hole through the tar, and the noise began all over again. Then the police started pelting it with stones, but the wily woodpecker escaped unhurt, and is still free to carry on its racket.

TAILPIECE.

Magistrate: "For two years you two men fished together peaceably, and yet you had to fight over this fish."

Prisoner: "You see, sir, it was the first one we ever caught!"

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON
29-6-35



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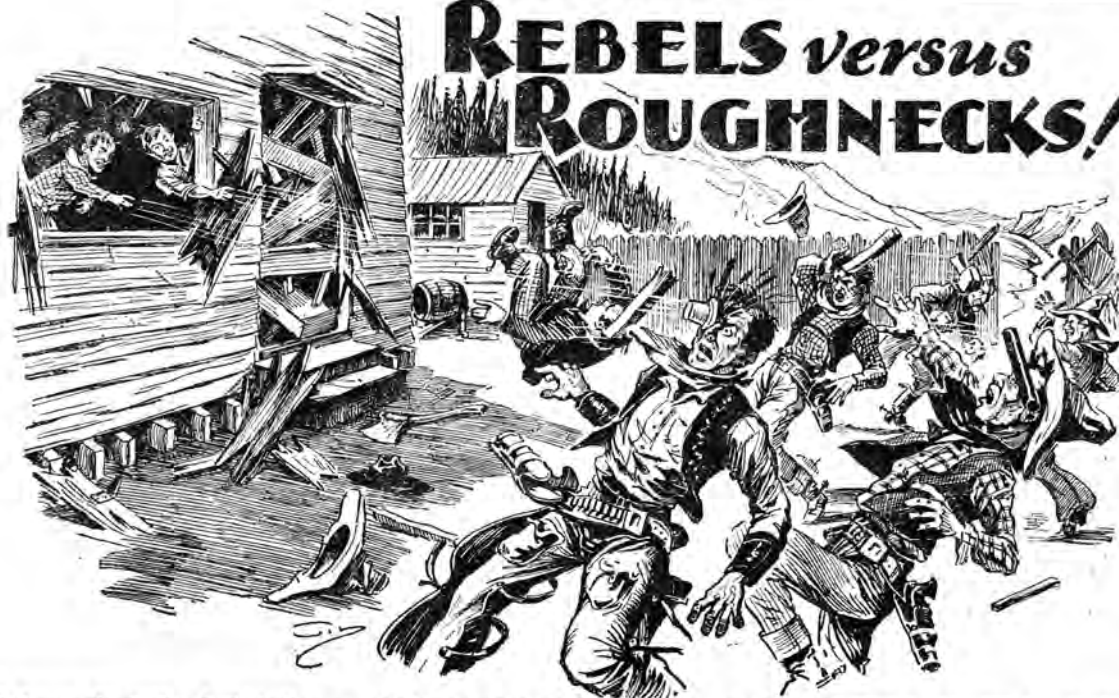
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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,423.

REBELS *versus* ROUGHNECKS!



A shower of missiles of all kinds came whizzing from the rebels, and the roughnecks, with yells of pain and fury as they were hit by inkpots, rulers, and legs of pinewood benches, retreated across the playground. "Sure, we've beaten them!" yelled Mick Kavanagh. "And so we have entirely!"

Job Wash on the Warpath.

JOB WASH stood in front of his store on Main Street, Packsaddle, and spluttered with rage. His fat face was red, his podgy hands clenched. He almost danced. The chairman of the Packsaddle school committee was as mad as a hornet—or madder!

It was early morning in the cow town. Job was not usually an early riser. The fattest and most important citizen of Packsaddle generally took things easy. But he had been drawn from his blankets betimes by the uproar in front of his store. Peering from a window, he had seen a gathering crowd—and every guy in the crowd was laughing. Which was so uncommon and surprising that Job had hastily jumped into shirt and trousers, and rolled out to see what the game was. Now he was seeing.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came a roar from the crowd as Job gurgled with wrath. Across the front of the store, in letters a foot high, daubed in whitewash, ran a message:

**WE WANT BILL!
NIX ON SCADDER!**

(Signed) THE PACKSADDLE BUNCH.

Evidently that message had been daubed on the store during the night, while the cow town slept. Some of the Packsaddle bunch had come down to the cow town and left it there to greet Job's eyes in the morning.

For some days now Packsaddle School had been without a headmaster. Bill Sampson, "fired" by the school committee, had gone back to punching cows on the Kicking Mule Ranch. Elias Scadder, the new headmaster, ridden on a rail out of the school, was only anxious to keep out of reach of the bunch. Job Wash was as obstinate a galoot as any in Santanta County; but so far he had not been able to handle the matter.

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Nothing would have made him surrender to the rebellious bunch. Somehow or other the school was going to be brought to order and forced to submit to the new headmaster.

But "how" was still unsettled. Scadder cut no ice with the bunch, and Job, important citizen as he was, and chairman of the school committee, cut no more than Scadder.

With a red and wrathful face, Job Wash turned and strode down Main Street to the marshal's office. Ezra Lick, town marshal of Packsaddle, sat on his step, picking his teeth with a

By FRANK RICHARDS.

jack-knife after breakfast. He grinned at the enraged Job. Apparently he had given the message from the school the once-over, and was amused thereby.

"You piefaced, sniggering geck!" roared Mr. Wash. "Say, you doggoned pesky piecan, you figure that a town marshal ain't got nothing to do but to sit on his hind legs and grin like he was a Mexican monkey? I'm telling you, you got to get busy, and you got to do it quick."

"Meaning?" asked the marshal.

"Ain't there any law and order in this hyer burg?" demanded Job. "Ain't I chairman of the school committee, and ain't the committee voted to fire that doggoned old cow-puncher, Bill Sampson, and stick in Scadder, a guy with his cabeza full of book-knowledge? And them young geeks rode him out on a rail, and ain't they making whoopee up at the school like they was a ranch outfit on a jamboree? Say!"

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Lick.

"Waal, then, you get busy!" roared

Job Wash. "You get your deputies, and you moscy along to the school, and you put that bunch in order! Got that?"

"You ornery old stiff!" retorted the marshal. "I'm telling you, I don't want no Packsaddle bunch on my plate! Ain't I been up to the school, and ain't them young ginks hid me on my pants with a quirt like I was a doggoned steer? You figure that I want some more? Forget it."

"I'm telling you!" roared Job.

"Aw, can it!" said the marshal. "You pack it up a piece, and I'll tell you! There ain't no man can run that bunch 'cept ol' Bill Sampson! I tell you I was agin firing ol' Bill, what's as good a man as any hombre between the Rio Frio and Squaw Mountain. I tell you, you want to send Bill back to ride herd at the school. I tell you—"

"You figure that I'm giving in to a bunch of schoolboys?" demanded Mr. Wash. "Not in your lifetime! I guess I'm going to have that bunch feeding from Scadder's hand."

"Wade in, then!" said the marshal. "But count me out! I ain't taking no hand in the game, and you can bank on that!"

"You pesky, doggoned—"

"Pack it up!" said the marshal.

Job Wash shook a fat fist at him, and turned away, leaving the official head of law and order in Packsaddle grinning and picking his teeth. The fat man rolled into the Red Dog Saloon, where he found Two-Gun Carson sitting at breakfast.

"Say, you, Carson—" began Job.

Two-Gun scowled. He guessed what was coming; but he did not want any more to do with the Packsaddle bunch any more than Mr. Lick. Two-Gun had tried his hand, and had been sent home by the bunch tied to his horse, with his face to the tail, and his face painted with green paint. Two-Gun was no

—FROM THE NO-SURRENDER REBELS OF PACKSADDLE SCHOOL!

hog, and he knew when he had had enough.

"That doggoned piecan Ezra is skeered of the bunch," said Job. "You're a member of the school committee, Two-Gun. It was you started the rookus, getting Bill fired! I'll say it's up to you—"

"I guess I got business down to Hard Tack!" said Two-Gun. "I sure got to hit the trail this morning."

"You skeered, too?" hooted Job. "Why, they've turned your boy Steve out of the school because he stood for Scadder! You standing for that?"

"I guess I got to hit the trail for Hard Tack—"

Job Wash gave a snort and tramped out of the Red Dog again. His next call was at Hanson's Hotel. Hanson, the Dane, was grinning.

"Say, you Hanson, you're on the school committee," said Job. "What you figure to do with that doggoned bunch?"

"I tink perhaps we let dem have Bill!" suggested Hanson. "I tink perhaps it was one mistake to fire Bill! What you tink?"

"Can it!" yelled Job Wash. "I'll tell all Texas. I'll bring that bunch to order and make them toe the line! Yep! You hear me whisper!"

He left Hanson grinning, and went back to his store. The crowd there was increasing in numbers, and yelling with laughter. The rebellion of the Packsaddle bunch seemed to strike most of the citizens of the cow town as funny. Moreover, there was general sympathy with the bunch, for Bill Sampson was one of the most popular guys in the valley of the Frio. The general verdict was "nix on Scadder"—but Job Wash was the last man in Texas to think of giving in. Opposition only made Job more obstinate, and he was going to have his own way—if he could get it. He was not going to leave a stone unturned, anyhow.

He hooted to the store assistants to wash out that message on the store front. Then he retired to his office to think it over. An hour later a notice appeared on the door:

**MEN WANTED!
FIVE DOLLARS A DAY.**

It was a busy morning for Mr. Wash. There was a regular procession in and out of the store. Man after man was signed on, and every one of them was a roughneck of the roughest and toughest description. Job was a wealthy man, the biggest storekeeper in the county. He was ready to spend money on having his own way. Perhaps, too, it was his idea to stick the school committee for the expenses. Anyhow, there he was, signing on men at five dollars a day, and in a few hours he had a list of a dozen of the toughest roughnecks in the Frio Valley—where the mildest galoot was no lamb. Hair-Trigger Pete, their leader, was a guy who had seen the inside of half the jails in Texas—a burly bullwhacker with a red beard, and an ear missing, bitten off in a scrap.

When Job Wash started up the school trail with that crowd behind him, Job figured that the Packsaddle rebellion was going to fizzle out pronto. Job flattered himself that he was the man to handle the rebellious bunch, and bring them to heel! And it was a cinch that, if the bunch put up a fight against Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang, there were wild times ahead of Packsaddle School.

The Attack!

TIN TUNG howled.
"You no cuttee pigtail b'long this Chine!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar in the playground at Packsaddle School. The Packsaddle bunch were rather enjoying life these days.

Since Bill had gone there had been no school. Small Brown, the teacher, only too glad that the bunch did not rag him, did not even think of suggesting school. Mr. Brown kept chiefly to his own cabin and longed for Bill to come back and ride herd.

The bunch were standing for Bill. They all agreed on that! But they were glad enough to get out of school—and perhaps not fearfully keen to hear the crack of Bill's quirt again. Dick Carr and Slick Poindexter wanted to keep some sort of order, and Mick Kavanagh backed them up more or less. But most of the bunch figured that, without a headmaster in charge, it was a time to make whoopee—and they never were an orderly bunch, at the best of times.

Now, Poker Parker and Slim Dixon had cornered Tin Tung, the Chinese cook, in the playground. Poker was flourishing his knife, while several

When a dozen of the toughest roughnecks in Texas tried to reduce the schoolboy rebels of Packsaddle to order, it was the roughnecks who were reduced—to disorder!

fellows held the wriggling, squeaking Chinese, in mortal terror of losing his pigtail. He wriggled, and struggled, and howled.

Dick Carr, standing on the bench placed inside the barred gate, was looking down the school trail. Few of the bunch cared about keeping an eye open for the enemy, though they were all ready to line up if an alarm was given. Dick turned his head at the howling of the Chinese, and frowned.

"Let Tin Tung go!" he shouted.
Poker stared round at him.

"Say, you figure you're running this hyer bunch, you pesky tenderfoot!" he snorted. "I'll tell a man I'm going to have his pigtail off'n him! You hold him, you guys!"

"Aw, can it, Poker!" said Slick Poindexter.

"Stop!" shouted Dick Carr, jumping down from the bench. He ran into the laughing crowd.

"No cuttee pigtail b'long this poor Chine!" howled Tin Tung.

Dick grasped Poker Parker's arm and dragged his hand back. As Poker strove to wrench it free he grasped the knife, jerked it away, and tossed it over the roof of the bunkhouse.

"Now chuck it!" snapped Dick Carr.

"We want Tin Tung to cook for us, same as when Bill was here. And—"

"You figure you're riding herd here?" roared Poker. "I'll say you got another guess coming."

And he hurled himself at Dick Carr, hitting out right and left.

Poker and Slim had been pals of Steve Carson's. Steve was gone, and they were backing up the bunch; but they did not pull with the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, and did not want to. There

had been a good many rows since Packsaddle had been a school without a master. Now there was one more!

"Get him, Poker!" yelled Slim.
"Aw, can it, you geeks!" exclaimed Poindexter. "We sure don't want to be scrapping hyer when the school committee get going agin."

"Nix on the school committee!" said Pie Sanders. "They can't do a thing. Snakes! That was a sockdolager!"

Poker Parker went over with a crash as Dick's fist landed fairly in his eye. He hit Texas hard with his back.

Slim Dixon jumped at the tenderfoot. And as they closed in combat Poker scrambled up and joined in. There was an indignant howl from Slick.

"Two to one, you geeks! Forget it!" And Slick Poindexter rushed into the fray.

It was a wild, scrambling scrap. The rest of the bunch stood round, laughing, and shouting, and cheering, while Small Brown blinked from his cabin window through his horn-rimmed spectacles, and Tin Tung, seizing his opportunity, darted away and escaped.

But the scrap was interrupted by a sudden yell from Mick Kavanagh. His eye had turned on the gate, and it had a view of a stetson hat, surmounting a red-bearded face, with a slanting nose and a missing ear.

It was the face of Hair-Trigger Pete, and the gate being bolted, the roughneck had pulled himself up outside to look over the high top.

"Watch out!" yelled Mick.

Hair-Trigger stared into the playground. Behind him were Job Wash and his "army." Hair-Trigger Pete swung a leg over the gate and sat on the top. He grinned down at the fat red face of Job Wash.

"I guess we won't be long rounding up this hyer bunch, Mr. Wash!" he remarked. "I'll say—whoop!"

Hair-Trigger broke off with a fearful yell as a lump of rock caught him under the ear.

It came from one of the bunch, and it sent him tumbling off the top of the gate to crash in the trail outside.

He landed almost at the feet of Job Wash, who jumped back with a startled yelp.

"Aw! Wake snakes!" roared Hair-Trigger! "Great howling gophers! O—oooo!"

"Watch out!" shrieked Mick.

"Line up!" shouted Dick Carr.

The scrap in the playground stopped instantly. There was a rush of the bunch to the gate, Poker and Slim dabbing crimson, streams from their noses as they ran.

Hair-Trigger was a well-known loafer of the saloons in Packsaddle, and most of the schoolboys knew him by sight. What he wanted at the school they did not yet know, but some of them guessed. And as they looked over the gate, from the bench placed inside, they knew that they had guessed correctly. There were a dozen of the roughnecks on the trail—and Mr. Job Wash was there, in command.

Hair-Trigger Pete sat up and roared, his hand to his head. He had a lump there, and it felt painful. He glared up at the row of faces over the gate.

"Say, which of you young ginks heaved that rock?" he bellowed.

"I guess it was this baby," said Hunky Tutt, with a grin, "and I'll say I got another."

Whiz! Bang!

Hunky heaved the rock, and it

knocked the stetson off Hair-Trigger's head. The one-eared man scrambled up, spluttering rage.

"Keep back!" shouted Dick Carr.

"Hold on, Tutt—" "Aw, can it!" said Hunky. "I guess you ain't king-pin, you Carr! I guess I got a rock for Wash!"

Whiz! Bump!

"Oooough!" spluttered Job Wash as a lump of rock hit him on the widest part of his circumference and he sat down with startling suddenness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dick, had he been in undisputed command, would have held the fire till the enemy attacked. But the bunch were full of beans, and not to be restrained. Five or six fellows had missiles, and they rained them on the enemy in the trail. There were loud and angry yells from the roughnecks as they received the fire.

"Foller me, boyees!" roared Hair-Trigger.

He rushed at the gate. He grasped the top to clamber up. The butt of Slick's quirt descended on his knuckles with a crash that numbed them, and the ruffian dropped back, roaring.

"Get on! Get on!" spluttered Mr. Wash. "Get on!"

Crash! Crash! Crash! came the butt-ends of quirts on hands and heads and shoulders. The whole bunch had gathered to defend the gate, and even a dozen husky bullwhackers did not find their task easy. Howls and yells rang in chorus on the trail.

Job, with one hand pressed to a pain in his fat waist, waved his army on with the other. Again Hair-Trigger charged the gate, and again he was knocked off, yelling. Five or six of his men sprawled in the trail.

Then Hair-Trigger yelled to them to scatter along the fence. There were a score of fellows inside, but it would have needed six times as many to man the length of the school fence. Some of the roughnecks went to the left of the gate, some to the right, and clambered and climbed. One, two, three of the gang jumped down inside and rushed along to the gate to take the defenders in the rear.

Dick Carr shouted:

"Get to the schoolhouse!"

There was no help for it. The gate could be defended no longer, and, husky as the bunch were, they had no chance in hand-to-hand scrapping with twelve of the roughest and toughest bullwhackers in the Frio Valley. They rushed for the shelter of the schoolhouse.

Hard Pressed!

"QUICK!" panted Dick Carr.

Three of the enemy were within the fence, another was dropping over; two or three more were coming over the gate. But there was time for a prompt retreat—and it was prompt! The whole bunch rushed across to the porch of the schoolhouse and scuttled in. After them, with brandished cow-whips, rushed the three or four of the enemy who had got into the playground.

Pie Sanders, last of the bunch, stumbled in the porch, and a hand grasped him from behind, and he struggled in the grasp of a pursuing enemy. Slick and Mick turned back, and two quirts lashed at that enemy at the same moment, and Yuma Dave yelled and let go. Pie darted in, Slick and Mick followed, and Dick Carr slammed the door.

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"The bars!" he panted.

"You said it!" gasped Mick.

Crash! came on the door. Yuma Dave hurled himself at it with all his weight, yelling to his comrades. The door surged open. The bunch packed behind it, and shoved it shut again.

But a heavy boot was jammed in, and they could not get it quite shut. They jammed at it in vain.

"Say, you guys, come on!" roared Yuma.

There was a rush of feet and a roar of voices. Across the playground came Hair-Trigger and his whole gang. Nearly every one of the rough gang had had a knock or two, some a good many, and tempers were up. Job Wash figured that the Packsaddle bunch wanted lambasting, and there was no doubt that if the roughnecks corralled them, they were going to get all the lambasting they needed, and a lot over.

"Keep the door shut!"

"Heave, you guys—heave!"

But Yuma's foot was in the way. His heavy cowboy's boot, and his brawny knee intervened between the door and the doorpost.

Mick Kavanagh opened his sheath-knife and pressed the point to that brawny knee.

There was a fearful yell from Yuma.

The leg was withdrawn in a hurry, and the door slammed shut. Slick jammed a bar into place, and it rattled into the iron sockets just as a terrific crash came outside.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Another bar was jammed in. The bunch gasped with relief. For the moment the enemy were barred out.

"The windows!" panted Dick.

"Pronto!" gasped Poindexter.

The bunch scattered swiftly through the building. Windows at Packsaddle School were innocent of glass, but were protected by thick, strong wooden shutters, which barred inside. Swiftly the schoolboys rushed to the windows, dragged the shutters tight, and crammed in the bars.

They were only in time, for already the roughnecks were spreading round the building, looking for other means of ingress.

The school-room windows were barred; the window of Bill's room, on the other side of the porch, secured at the same time. Bangs and yells rang outside the barred windows.

Dick Carr panted.

"We've stopped them! But that door won't last long if they try to break it in! It won't stop them!"

"It sure didn't stop us when we was after Scadder!" grinned Slick.

"Barricade it—quick!"

"You bet!"

"Wade in, you guys!"

Bang! Bang! Crash! came at the door on the porch. That door was only a brief defence. Already, a few days ago, it had been smashed in by the bunch to get Mr. Scadder. Hank, the hired man, had repaired it, but it was not likely to stand long against an attack.

Dick, Slick, and Mick started dragging the desks out of the school-room. The rest of the bunch piled in to help.

Heavy pinewood desks were stacked against the door. Heavy pinewood benches were stacked against them. Many hands made light work, and the barricade grew swiftly.

Job Wash had arrived on the scene now. He was shouting directions to his men:

"Get an axe! Break in the door!"

"You said it!" growled Hair-Trigger.

"You, Tanglefoot—you get an axe—

pronto! I guess that door won't stop this outfit!"

Crash! Crash! Crash! rang the axe on the door. It flew into fragments under Hair-Trigger's hefty smites.

The door was down. But the doorway was blocked, and Hair-Trigger glared at the stack of desks and benches. As he glared, a bully-beef can came whizzing through one of the interstices in the barricade, and landed on his bearded chin. Hair-Trigger Pete staggered back and sat down.

"Ow!" he roared. "Great jumping gophers! Wow!"

"Come on!" yelled Slick.

"This way, you pesky piecan!" bawled Mick Kavanagh.

Job Wash blinked at the barricade. Job had expected the way to be clear when the door was knocked in. But the way was far from clear.

"Boys," he squeaked, "remove those desks this instant!"

"Forget it, Job!"

"Go home, you Wash!"

"Can it, you cheap skate!"

The whole bunch yelled defiance. Hair-Trigger grabbed at the piled desks to attempt to drag the barricade down. Through one of the openings among the legs of the desks came a stream of ink from an inkpot. Hair-Trigger roared with rage as it spread over his face.

It was followed by the inkpot, which landed in his eye. Another fierce roar answered from the roughneck of Packsaddle. But he still dragged at the barricade.

Mick rushed into Bill's room and grasped the poker from the grate. He thrust his arm through an opening in the barricade, the poker in his hand. The end of it jammed into Hair-Trigger's red beard. The next lunge would have landed on his nose, but Pete jumped back just in time. He backed out of the porch, with a stream of remarks that almost turned the air blue. And the Packsaddle bunch roared:

"Come on, you piecans!"

"This way, you hooch-slingers!"

"Wade in, you roughnecks!"

"Come on, you geeks!"

But the enemy did not come on. For the moment the attack was stopped, and the bunch were still holding their own.

Hot Work!

"GUM!" said Slick Poindexter.

He pushed back his stetson, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"We've stopped them!" panted Dick Carr.

"You said it!" chuckled Mick. "I guess them Packsaddle roughnecks don't know how to handle this bunch!"

Through the openings of the barricade and from chinks in the shutters the bunch watched the enemy. The playground, the bunkhouse, and chuckhouse were in possession of the chairman of the school committee and his men. But the schoolhouse was held by the bunch, and Job was as far from success as ever.

Job's programme was to quell the rebellion, lambaste the bunch till they were reduced to submission, and leave Mr. Scadder in undisputed rule at Packsaddle. Job was determined on that; when it came to sheer obstinacy, a Mexican mule had nothing on Mr. Wash! The most important citizen of Packsaddle was not to be defied by a bunch of schoolboys. But even the obstinate Mr. Wash had to admit that his

programme was not easy to carry through.

His men were keen enough to earn their five dollars each. There was no doubt that the lambasting would be rough enough when it started. But it had not started yet. If the bunch had thought of surrender, the prospect of what would happen when that gang got at them would have stiffened their backs.

But the bunch were not thinking of it. They were only thinking of a fight to a finish. Scrapping came as naturally to that rough-and-tough bunch as breathing, and they were enjoying this jamboree. They would have been rather disappointed if Mr. Wash had called it off.

Crash! Crash! Crash! came suddenly from a window of the school-room. The enemy were coming again.

The heavy axe, in the powerful hands of Hair-Trigger Pete, crashed on the stout pinewood shutters. Splinters flew fast under the blows.

"Watch out!" yelled Mick.

"Come on!" shouted Dick Carr.

Slick Poindexter and three or four more stayed at the barricade. The rest rushed after Dick Carr into the school-room.

Already the sunlight gleamed through slits in the wooden shutter, split by the crashing axe from without.

The schoolboys packed at the window. Every fellow had a quirt or a stick or a poker in hand. They could not stop Hair-Trigger from smashing the shutter. But they figured that they could stop Hair-Trigger from getting in after he had smashed it.

The shutter flew open.

Hair-Trigger Pete's stetson showed under the window. On the crown of

that stetson the butt of a quirt descended, and Hair-Trigger sat down suddenly.

Job Wash waved encouraging fat hands.

"Get in!" he shouted. "Get in!"

"You show them the way, you Wash!" yelled Pie.

But that the fat storekeeper had no idea of doing. Like a prudent general, Job led his army from behind!

He waved and shouted to his men. But the Packsaddle roughnecks did not hesitate. They were eager to get at the bunch and start the lambasting!

Yuma Dave and Tanglefoot leaped at the window, and their heads and shoulders came through. Hefty blows rained on them. The bunch did not stand on ceremony. They knew what was coming to them if the enemy gained the upper hand. They hit hard and they hit often.

With frantic yells the two assailants tumbled back from the window. They sprawled on the ground, roaring.

There was no room at the window for more than two at a time. And more than a dozen fellows packed inside ready to hit. Two more stetsons came in—to meet a shower of hefty knocks, and disappear again. Then came Hair-Trigger Pete, his face flaming, his red beard bristling with rage. Blow after blow landed on him, but he took them and clambered on. Head and shoulders came through—and then the rest of Hair-Trigger Pete, rolling inside, and crashing down among the bunch.

"Get him!" yelled Dick Carr, and he lashed with his cudgel at the next head that appeared at the window.

"Cinch him!" roared Mick.

Six or seven schoolboys piled on the man who had got in. Hair-Trigger was a burly and powerful man, but he had

his hands full. He rolled on the floor, with hands grasping him on all sides. With a terrific effort, he gained his feet, the schoolboys clinging to him like cats. But he was dragged down again, roaring like a lassoed buffalo.

Two more of the enemy were scrambling at the window. But they were driven back by a rain of blows. Dick and Pie and Hunky and half a dozen more packed the window, and made the defence good. Mick Kavanagh and six or seven fellows had hold of Hair-Trigger. Had the brawny bull-whacker been told that any number of schoolboys could handle him, he would have laughed at the idea. But he found that they could!

Gasping and panting, Hair-Trigger was down on his back, with the Packsaddlers sitting or standing on him. Mick dragged his wrists together, and looped a rope over them. He knotted it hard.

"I guess that cinches you, Pete!" grinned Mick.

He knotted the rope round the roughneck's legs. Then Hair-Trigger was left to wriggle on the floor.

Mick jumped back to the window.

"I guess we got that guy hog-tied!" he chuckled. There was another rush from outside, and again heavy knocks descended on stetson hats. Again the assailants were driven off.

"Say, you young ginks!" roared Hair-Trigger. "Say, you pesky young pie-cans, I'm saying—gurrgrggghh!" Pie Saunders up-ended an inkpot over Hair-Trigger's open mouth, and he gurgled horribly as the ink went in.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" shouted Dick Carr, brandishing his cudgel at the window. But the enemy seemed no longer keen on coming on.



The Packsaddle bunch had no mercy on Hair-Trigger, and the roughneck bitterly regretted that he had penetrated the rebels' defence. "Oooch!" he gurgled, as he was up-ended and his head jammed into a pail of soot. "How do you like the taste of soot?" laughed Dick Carr.

They bunched before the window, glaring.

"Get in! Get in!" squeaked Mr. Wash. "Say, you figure I'm paying you five dollars to quit! Get in and handle them young geeks."

"Aw, can it!" growled Yuma Dave, rubbing his head where he had a bump as large as a duck's egg.

"Yep, you pack it up a piece!" howled Tanglefoot, feeling his nose to make sure that it was still there. It had had a fearful knock, and felt as if it wasn't!

"I tell you—!" yelled Mr. Wash. Whiz!

The leg of a bench came hurtling from the window. It caught Mr. Wash on the side of the head, and bowled him over like a ten-pin.

"Whoo-hooop!" roared Job.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aw, carry me home to die!" gasped Yuma, as an inkpot flew and caught him in the eye. He backed across the playground in a hurry.

A shower of missiles of all kinds came whizzing from the window. There was a general backward movement on the part of the roughneck crowd. Inkpots and rulers and legs of pinewood benches were unpleasant landing on a guy's features. Yells of rage and pain came from them as they retreated.

"Sure, we've beaten them!" yelled Mick Kavanagh. "I'm telling you 'uns that we've beaten them, and so we have, entirely."

And so they had! A crowd of the roughest and toughest bullwhackers in Santania County had backed off—beaten by the schoolboys of Packsaddle.

It was in vain that Job Wash, almost dancing with rage, yelled to them.

They had had enough for the present, at least, and did not want any more. They rubbed bruised heads and streaming noses, and darkened eyes, and growled and snarled—but they did not heed Mr. Wash, and they did not come on. And their leader, Hair-Trigger Pete, was left in the hands of the victorious bunch—and Hair-Trigger would have given twice or thrice Mr. Wash's promised five dollars to be safe back in the Red Dog Saloon at Packsaddle!

Hop It, Hair-Trigger!

THE bunch gathered round Hair-Trigger Pete, with grinning faces. The red-bearded bullwhacker eyed them apprehensively. Had Pete got the upper hand, he would have been busy just then in handing out terrific licks from a quirt. But it was the Packsaddle bunch that had the upper hand, and Pete was apprehensive of getting those licks himself. He wriggled with his arms and legs tied, but he could not break loose. "Gum!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "We sure got the king-pin of that outfit, and we're sure going to make him sorry he called!" "You said it!" chuckled Pie. "We're going to larn them roughnecks not to horn into Packsaddle School. You got it coming, Hair-Trigger."

Mick Kavanagh rushed into Bill's room, and came back with a bucket of soot, raked from the stove. A roar of laughter greeted him. Hair-Trigger Pete gave a howl.

"Say, you pesky geeks—don't you dare—"

"Stick his cabeza into it!" chortled Mick.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hair-Trigger wriggled wildly as a dozen of the bunch grasped him and swung him from the floor. He was lifted over the bucket and up-ended into it.

Horrid gurgles came from the bullwhacker as his head was buried in the soot. He wriggled frantically in the hands of the bunch.

Over he went with a crash, landing on the floor, and the bucket rolled from his head, leaving most of the soot mixed in Pete's hair and beard, in his eyes and nose and mouth.

Hair-Trigger Pete had been suddenly transformed into a coon of the deepest dye.

He wriggled and gurgled on the floor, black as the ace of spades. He spat out soot, and spluttered for breath.

"Gurrgh! I guess—gurrgh! You pesky young—gurrgh! Wurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the bunch. "Now get the ink!" roared Slick Poindexter.

A stone bottle of ink from Bill's office, containing a gallon of that useful fluid, was brought into the school-room.

Hair-Trigger Pete struggled into a sitting position, and spluttered soot. Slick drew the cork from the huge bottle and inverted the latter over the sooty head of the roughneck.

The ink came out in a flood, drenching the hapless bullwhacker from head to foot. Yells of laughter answered his gurgles.

"Now loose one of his laigs, and drop him out!" said Slick. "I guess he can hop on one laig back to his side-kickers, and I'll mention that we'll pelt him a few while he's doing it."

"You said it!"

"You got it coming, Pete!" chuckled Slick. "I'll whisper that your best guess is to beat it back to the Red Dog, and ride clear of this hyer school."

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Hair-Trigger. "Gurrgh!"

The bunch gathered at the open window, grinning with glee. Every fellow had a missile in his hand, and more ready. Hair-Trigger Pete's right leg was cut loose, leaving his left tied up, bent at the knee. He was dragged up on one leg and hustled to the window.

"Say, you young ginks—gurrgh—I'm telling you—gurrgh—Let up on a guy!" gurgled Pete.

"Heave him out!"

"Out you go, Pete!"

Hair-Trigger was heaved out over the sill. He landed on his free leg, rolled over, and crashed.

With a wild effort, he struggled up on his single available leg.

From across the playground his gang stared at him with wide-open eyes. Yuma Dave rushed across, to lend him a helping hand. The big ink-bottle whizzed from the window and caught Dave under the chin, and he went over as if he had been dropped by a six-gun. A whirling bench-leg followed the ink-bottle, and Dave scrambled up and fled. There was no help for Hair-Trigger.

Standing on one leg, he hopped wildly.

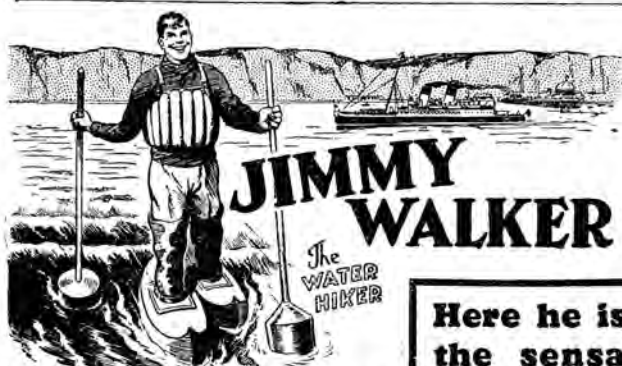
"Beat it!" roared the bunch, packing the window with grinning faces, and missiles flew in a shower. They landed on Hair-Trigger Pete, hard and fast.

Gasping and gurgling, the big bullwhacker hopped away. Twice he went over, but the rain of missiles from the window urged him up again. Hopping frantically and bellowing with rage, the roughneck got away at last.

Dick Carr closed the remnant of the shutter; Slick sorted out nails and a hammer, and planks, dragged from an interior wall, were jammed across the window and nailed fast.

Job Wash was evidently at a loss, and the attack still held off. With the schoolhouse as a stronghold, the rebels of Packsaddle were holding out, and they were going to hold out, as Slick declared, till the cows came home! How it was going to end, no fellow in the bunch could say; but one thing was a cinch—the Packsaddle bunch were going to kick, and keep on kicking, till Bill came back.

(The schoolboy rebels are up against it in the next thrilling yarn of this smashing series. Don't miss reading "NO SURRENDER!")



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The SECRET WORLD!



"By George!" exclaimed Handforth. "They're going into action!" The St. Frank's juniors watched tensely as the soldiers of Princess Mercia charged to the attack. The big struggle for supremacy between the Northestrians and the Gothlanders was about to begin, and on the result of the battle depended the lives of the St. Frank's adventurers!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Way to Freedom.

THE boys of St. Frank's, after many exciting adventures in a secret, almost impenetrable world, at last discover an outlet from the strange land, where, with Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and others, they were stranded when their airship crashed.

Unfortunately, their discovery comes at a time when the Northestrians, an old-world race with whom the St. Frank's party have become friendly, are at war with the Gothlanders. For their own safety, the adventurers fight for Northestria, and Nelson Lee is given command of their armies.

The enemy, however, cross the large lake which lies between Northestria and Gothland, and succeed in making a landing. The war is at its height when the St. Frank's juniors make their discovery—a huge cavern leading from the lake through the mountains. They convey the good news to Lord Dorrimore, who, with Sigbert, a Northestrian, investigates the cavern.

Meanwhile, the St. Frank's juniors hear that Princess Mercia of Northestria and their friends, the Moor View School girls, are in danger from the Gothlanders, and they dash to their help and rescue them.

In his powerful motor-boat, Lord Dorrimore penetrates farther and farther into the cavern, and eventually comes out into a region of the Arctic!

"Come on!" said his lordship. "We've done our work! At least, we've done

everything possible this trip. How long did you say before the freeze-up comes? Twelve days! Gad! They'll have to get a hustle on!" he added anxiously.

Sigbert did not know what Lord Dorrimore meant, but he asked no questions. Dorrie opened up the throttle, and the motor-boat spun round and headed from the great opening amid the ice. It was like a scene from fairyland—a mountain of ice, with a black opening in the midst of it—an opening which was encrusted with icicles. The motor-boat plunged in.

"Now we shan't be long," said Lord Dorrimore.

With the current to help them and with the engine roaring, the boat fairly tore back down the tunnel. In fact, Dorrie was compelled to half-close the throttle, for the speed was too great to be pleasant.

But it was a triumphant return, and as the little craft penetrated farther and farther, so the air became milder. The effect upon Sigbert was marked, for he began to talk—just as though he had become unfrozen. Lord Dorrimore listened like a man in a dream. He was busy with his own thoughts.

And then the engine gave a splutter and petered out.

"It's all right, I was expectin' it," said Dorrie lightly. "No more juice. But we can sail down on the current, and I've never used petrol to better advantage."

"But what of these wonders?" asked the Northestrian. "We are now returning into the land I know—where there

is light, where there is warmth. But what of these marvels—"

"I want you to swear to me, Sigbert, that you won't breathe a word of this," said Dorrie impressively. "As a personal favour, I want you to keep it dark until I give you the tip."

The bewildered Sigbert gave his word, and Dorrie believed him. All the same, the Northestrian was like a man in a trance.

"That looks like Dorrie's motor-boat," said Reggie Pitt, staring.

The galley was well out on the lake, proceeding leisurely towards the Spitfire, which could just be seen in the far distance. But in the opposite direction, at far range, a speck could be seen. Nipper used his telescope.

"Yes, it's Dorrie," he said, puzzled. "But he seems to be just drifting. It doesn't matter, anyhow, because one of the gondolas is coming along. The gov'nor, I'll bet."

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"Anxious to find out what mischief the infants have been up to," he said, with a chuckle. "Well, we shall be glad to see him because he can tell us how things are going ashore."

The gondola, with its skimming floats, approached like some monstrosity from another world. As Nipper and suspected, Nelson Lee was at the wheel, and he brought the queer craft to a standstill twenty feet or so from the drifting galley.

"No need to look worried, sir; we're all intact!" sang out Nipper.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,428.

"So I see," replied Nelson Lee. "I was anxious about you."

"We've been doing our share, sir," grinned Nipper. "We've chased two or three Gothlander boats, and we've rescued her Majesty and his Highness the Prince, and Irene & Co.—"

"Steady—steady!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "You seem to have been having a whole batch of excitements. Perhaps I'd better come on board, and hear—"

"Won't it do when we get to the Spitfire, sir?" asked Nipper. "We're as hungry as hunters, and we're pretty tired, too. We thought it would be safer to bring everybody along to the headquarters ship—"

"You did quite right, according to all that I can hear," replied Nelson Lee. "There are many startling rumours going the rounds, and I am thankful, indeed, to see her majesty alive and well."

"What of the invasion, sir?" "I can tell you little more than you know already," replied Lee. "The Northestrian forces have been hotly engaged for many hours, and nobody knows exactly how the position stands. Get along to the Spitfire at once."

"You might have a look at Dorrie, sir!" called out Handforth.

Nelson Lee promised to do so, and while the galley continued her way, the gondola sped down the lake, and, after a brief delay, took the motor-boat in tow. Dorrie had been quite vague—merely stating that he had run out of petrol.

His lordship was keeping his great discovery to himself.

An hour later Lee was standing on the deck of the headquarters ship.

"How on earth those boys managed to escape disaster, I don't know," Dorrie, he said. "But they're all on board now—and there they'll stay! There'll be no more escapades."

"All the same, they're a parcel of bright lads," grinned Dorrie.

"They've been wonderful," admitted Lee. "Have you heard all the details of their exploit at Westwold Castle? All the girls are with us now, and that is another cause for satisfaction. Our main party is intact, Dorrie—and all on this one craft."

"I expect we'll get in touch with the Government authorities soon," said his lordship dreamily.

"You seem pretty confident, old man," Lee observed.

"My dear fellow, I'm positive!" beamed Dorrie.

He strolled off and Nelson Lee did not care to press him. Boats were coming out, and these boats brought news. The enemy advance was checked, and the capital was safe. The Gothlanders had been unable to take Dunstane, and they were massing for a great battle in the open country beyond. Incidentally, the wreckage of the ill-fated airship was in the very heart of the invaded territory—proof enough that the removal of the precious wireless instruments had been warranted.

And white and tired St. Frank's fellows slept, and while Nelson Lee held consultations with the Northestrian generals, Lord Dorrmore haunted the wireless-room—waiting for definite news from home.

The Battlefield!

As far as the eye could reach the scene was an ever-changing panorama of movement. Columns of men, glittering in armour, were marching into position, with mounted officers in armour controlling the operations.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,423.

It was the Eve of Dunstane.

The great opposing armies were getting ready for battle. All knew that it would be decisive, that this coming clash would be a fight to the finish. And the fate of all Northestria hung in the balance.

Gazing down at that wonderful scene of colour and animation, one could not help being impressed by the vastness of the preparations. The impending battle looked like being a grim affair for both invaders and invaded.

A crowd of St. Frank's juniors were standing on a prominent hilltop, watching the great preliminaries on the plain below. Half a dozen girls from the Moor View School were there, too, to say nothing of Mr. Nelson Lee and the genial Lord Dorrmore.

"The battle hasn't started yet," said Handforth.

"No; but shall we be allowed to watch?" asked Tommy Watson. "Did you speak to Mr. Lee about it, Nipper?"

Nipper nodded.

"As long as the battle confines itself to the valleys below we can remain here," he replied. "That's the great advantage of this medieval warfare. No big guns, no preliminary barrage, no artillery of any kind. It'll be all hand-to-hand stuff when it actually starts. Even the bowmen can't do anything unless they're at close quarters."

Nipper was quite right in this statement. There was no danger to the airship party, for they were a full mile from the nearest flank of the Northestrian forces. The massed soldiers held the lower valley, and the city of Dunstane was protected. The Gothlanders—Kassker's invading hordes—were farther beyond. Right into the distance stretched the array of fighting units.

"Dear old boys, it's goin' to be a frightful affair," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, with a sober shake of his head. "Begad, everythin' will depend upon the result of this scrap."

"The fate of Northestria!" nodded Nipper.

His chums looked grave. If the Gothlanders took Dunstane, then Northestria would be a conquered land, and Kassker the Grim would reign supreme. There were no two ways about it. The fall of Dunstane would mean utter disaster, for the Princess Mercia would be deposed forthwith.

If, on the other hand, the invaders were well thrashed, Kassker's invading troops would have sacrificed themselves for nothing, and Northestria would be safe for all time.

This projected battle was not a mere step in the Gothlander war, but the vital turning-point of the campaign.

"Yes, it'll be an anxious time for us," declared Nipper. "If Kassker gets whacked, all well and good. We shall have the satisfaction of seeing the remnants of his battalions scuttling back across the lake. But if Kassker wins—"

"Good-night, nurse!" murmured Browne.

"We shall all go in a swift procession to the chopping-block," said Ralph Leslie Fullwood, with a grimace. "That'll be the end of us if Kassker wins the scrap. I fancy this affair will be interesting."

Such thoughts as these were calculated to make the St. Frank's fellows rather serious, and they stood there watching with anxious eyes.

After the fashion of medieval warfare, Kassker, the Grim—the overlord of all the Gothlanders—was leading his troops into action. Mounted on his great charger, Kassker was riding up and down, giving final instructions. Nelson

Lee, through powerful binoculars, could see all these details.

This battle had been in preparation two or three days—a very deliberate affair—and Nelson Lee was mainly responsible for the disposition of the Northestrian armies.

And now the fateful battle was on the point of being fought.

Lord Dorrmore lighted a cigarette and shook his head.

"This sort of stuff is all very well, Lee," he said, "but don't you think we ought to join in? I mean, it seems an infernal pity to leave our machine-guns idle. We've got 'em, so why not use 'em?"

"I quite understand your feelings, Dorrie, but I thought this out very carefully before I decided," replied Nelson Lee. "Indeed, I consulted all the Northestrian generals, and they preferred to fight their own battle in their own way."

"There's the aeroplane, too," went on Dorrie regretfully. "She's in first-class fettle, an' I could swoop over these Gothland rats an' put them to flight an'—"

"Without bombs, old man?" asked Lee quietly.

"H'm! I'll admit we've run short of bombs," said his lordship. "In fact, we haven't got a single one, have we?"

"Not even a smoke rocket."

"Yes; but the plane would scare—"

"Nobody!" interrupted Lee grimly. "The inhabitants of this oasis have grown accustomed to our modern appliances by now, Dorrie, and the aeroplane, I am afraid, would have no vital effect on the battle. Apart from all that, it is far better for us to keep right out of this affair."

"Leave them to fight their own war, eh?"

"Exactly!" agreed Nelson Lee. "It is, indeed, their own wish. Ethelbert the Red, who, after all, is the Regent of Northestria, was particularly anxious on that point. He feels that it would be no lasting victory if his soldiers beat the Gothlanders with our aid. He wants them to show Kassker the Grim that they are the better fighters, man for man. We have done our part, Dorrie, and now we can only watch."

Nelson Lee spoke gravely. For several weeks he had been working at high pressure, until, indeed, he was looking weary.

Handforth, of course, was totally opposed to this policy of standing by and watching. He couldn't understand it. He marvelled that Lee and Dorrie did not join the fighting and give permission for the boys to do likewise.

But Nelson Lee felt that he had done his part. It was he who had organised the Northestrian armies.

"A solid result, Dorrie, can only be gained by a genuine clash between the warring factions," commented Lee, as he lowered his binoculars. "It is up to them to settle this thing, and let us pray that the outcome is as we hope."

"So that we can still live, and get away from here, eh?" asked Dorrie.

"So that we can still live, at all events," said Lee. "As for getting away from here—" He broke off, and shrugged his shoulders. "A problem, I'm afraid, old man."

Lord Dorrmore gave a strange, inscrutable grin.

"Things may not be so bad, after all," he said lightly.

Lee gave him a sharp look. "What do you mean, Dorrie?" he asked.

"Oh, nothin'!"

"Look here—"

"Well, it may be somethin'," admitted his lordship reluctantly, "but

never mind about it now. Everything will depend upon the result of this blessed fight, so let's sit tight and watch."

Nelson Lee did not press him further. As a matter of fact, he concluded that Lord Dorrimore was merely displaying his usual optimism. It was a fact that the marooned adventurers were in wireless touch with the outer world, and Dorrie, perhaps, was counting on that. But Lee had grave doubts regarding any possible rescue.

He knew the insuperable difficulties of an expedition to the North Polar regions. There was some talk of the British Government sending out a fleet of powerful seaplanes. But what was the use? Lee knew that they could never conquer the perpetual storms which raged round this volcanic oasis—storms which possessed an unbelievable intensity, and which formed a barrier far more impregnable than solid rock. Tens of thousands of feet up, these blizzards held full sway.

Lee was sombre as he stood there. So far as he could see, the result of this coming engagement would make little or no difference to the fate of Lord Dorrimore's party. On the one hand, it would mean death by execution; or, on the other hand, imprisonment in this oasis for life.

"They're gettin' all keyed up now, old man," said Lord Dorrimore, as he watched. "The battle's on the point of—You're not listenin'," he added severely.

Nelson Lee started. "No, I was not," he admitted. "Sorry, Dorrie. What were you saying?"

"Still worryin' about us gettin' away?" pressed his lordship. "My dear old sportsman, you shouldn't let these things prey on your mind. Wipe that ghastly frown off your brow!"

Nelson Lee smiled rather wanly.

"I'm not thinking about myself, Dorrie—or of you," he replied quietly. "There are all these young people—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Dorrie, with a grin. "Look at 'em! They're worryin' a lot, aren't they? Gad! I've never seen a happier crowd!"

"They don't realise the real position—and that, of course, is all to the good," replied Lee. "They're irresponsible, Dorrie—and, upon my soul, you're just as bad as they are!"

"Worse!" admitted Dorrie, without shame.

"Yes, you overgrown schoolboy, you're worse!" said Nelson Lee. "Don't you understand that we're liable to be bottled up in this medieval world for the rest of our lives?"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"I realise that the British Navy is sendin' out a fleet of giant seaplanes to scour the Arctic," he replied lightly. "We've had it officially over the wireless—"

"I'm not denying it; but what's the use?"

"A lot of use," said Dorrie. "When those seaplanes arrive—"

"When!" interrupted Lee angrily. "I hope you haven't been putting these ideas into the heads of the youngsters! It will be a tragic disappointment to them when the days pass, and still there is no sign of rescue. Those seaplanes can't conquer Nature's barriers, Dorrie. These mountains rise for thirty thousand feet or more—north, south, east, and west. And you've had a taste of the blizzards that rage—"

"Exactly," said Lord Dorrimore. "I'm not denyin' that the seaplanes would have a bit of trouble to get over

the rim of this basin. But what if there's a crack down the bottom of the basin—a crack wide enough for us to get out?"

Nelson Lee stared. "Don't talk nonsense!" he said sharply.

"It's my natural form of speech, old man—"

"Hang it, you're an exasperating beggar!" snapped Lee. "You know as well as I do that there's no outlet, Dorrie! Why fool yourself? Those seaplanes will never—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted his lordship calmly. "Not so fast, professor! I've been hidin' somethin' back from you, but, in self-defence, I've got to cough it up. You were so busy on this battle stunt that I thought it advisable not to distract your attention. But the fact is, I've made a bit of a discovery."

"Oh!" said Lee, without emotion.

"You might, at least, appear decently surprised!" exclaimed Dorrie. "You just stand there and say 'Oh!' in a flabby sort of voice—"

"Sorry, Dorrie, but I haven't a great amount of faith in your discoveries," said Nelson Lee candidly. "In some ways, you're nearly as bad as Hand-forth. You're a hopeless optimist."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"I know it," he said calmly. "Optimism, dear old man, is one of the greatest gifts of the gods. It enables a fellow to view life with cheerful complacency. All the same, in this particular instance, I've got somethin' a bit more substantial than my fatal optimism to rely upon. We were talkin' about a crack in the basin, weren't we?"

"Yes."

"Anybody might think we were discussin' a tea-set!" went on Dorrie, with a chuckle. "But about that crack I've found it."

"You've found it?" repeated Lee, staring.

"Absolutely!" said his lordship. "You may think I'm several kinds of a liar, but two days ago I took a trip out to the Arctic, had a look at the trackless snow, and dodged back. Quite an excitin' little experience!"

A Chance of Deliverance!

NELSON LEE took hold of Dorrie's arm and gripped it.

"If you're just yarnin'—"

he began. "Good gad, no!" said his lordship. "I wouldn't fool about with a subject like this, Lee. It's an honest fact. Down at the far end of the lake there's a terrific tunnel, miles and miles long. It leads straight through the mountains to the outer world!"

"And is this—this channel free?"

"My dear man, it's a broad river!" declared Dorrie. "The tunnel itself is big enough to accommodate the old Wanderer throughout the whole length of it. I took the motor-boat up there, and nearly scared the life out of friend Sigbert to say nothin' of freezin' his ears half off. But he promised to say nothin', and he's kept his word."

"And this is true—really, honestly true!" breathed Lee.

"My word on it!" replied his lordship.

Nelson Lee was a changed man. His eyes took on a new sparkle, and even the haggard expression seemed to disappear magically from his face. "This is amazing!" he muttered.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner, Dorrie?"

"You were so infernally busy—"

"Busy!" snapped Lee. "What could be of more importance? The affairs of these Northerners may be vital—from their point of view—but they mean nothing to us. And we are responsible for these boys and girls—"

"You'll pardon me, but the affairs of these Northerners mean everything to us," pointed out Dorrie. "If they win, we shall still be safe. If they lose—good-bye heads! So I thought it just as well to let you carry on with the good work uninterrupted. I'm a selfish beggar, you know—one of my faults. I can't bear to think of such a shapely head as mine bein' carved off—"

"When did you make this discovery?" broke in Nelson Lee.

"Two days ago," replied Dorrie. "Although I said nothin' to you, I said reams and reams across the wireless. I got in touch with the naval people, and told them of the discovery, and everything! They're rushin' those seaplanes off at the earliest possible moment, and they'll drop us a postcard as soon as they start."

Lee was slightly relieved.

"Forgive me, Dorrie, but I didn't realise that you had been so thorough," he said. "We must wireless the exact position of the tunnel outlet."

"That I have already done," returned his lordship. "At any minute I expect a messenger from headquarters to come racin' up with the news that the seaplanes have started on their half-holiday. That'll be the signal for us to scoot."

"Scoot?"

"Absolutely!" said Dorrie firmly. "I'm interested in this battle, but I'm more interested in gettin' back to the outer world. An' once we hear that the rescuers are on their way, we'll take the headquarters ship, and make a bolt through that tunnel. We shall need to be outside, you know, with searchlights goin', and all that sort of thing. The Arctic night isn't over yet, an' it's pretty dim out there."

"The Spitfire!" muttered Lee. "By Jove, it's a lucky thing we've got our wireless and our stores on board this ship! If it came to the point, we could all be off with less than an hour's notice."

"Yes," said Lord Dorrimore, with a nod. "We can soon slip off once the news gets through. I've told Sparks to hang on to that wireless apparatus like a leech. In fact I thought about padlocking him to his seat, and nailin' the carphones to his head. Poor young beggar; he hasn't had any sleep for twenty-four hours, but he's game! An' that news might come through at any minute."

"I'll go and relieve him before long," declared Nelson Lee.

"That's what I was thinkin' about doin'," said Dorrie. "The last official message we had was to the effect that a dozen seaplanes were settin' off for a hastily prepared base in the north. Iceland, I believe. When they set out on the real flight, they'll give us the tip, and then we shall have to leave the rest to chance."

"This is great news, Dorrie—so great, indeed, that I cannot express my real feelings," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Perhaps you were right in keeping it from me till now—I should have been greatly distracted. Tell me of this tunnel. How did you find it?"

Lord Dorrmore went into details. He explained that the St. Frank's fellows had made the first discovery. But he, Dorrie, had ventured into the black tunnel in the motor-boat, and had pressed right on, hour after hour, until he had emerged into the freezing cold of the Arctic.

But if Nelson Lee expected the other members of the party to remain in blissful ignorance of the discovery, he was wrong. Somebody had overheard that conversation between Nelson Lee and Dorrie, and in a very short time a number of juniors were clamouring round, asking for details.

"Is it true, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly. "Is there a way of escape through the mountains?"

"Yes, boys, the story is true," said Nelson Lee. "Lord Dorrmore has found a way out—"

"Rot!" said Dorrie. "The boys found it first."

"Then—then that tunnel leads right outside?" asked Fullwood breathlessly. "My only hat! We thought there was something rummy about it, didn't we? You remember, you chaps! The water was like ice, and we guessed that it was flowing in from the Arctic."

"Hurrah!"

"A chance of getting out!"

In the sudden excitement, even the interest in the battle was waning. Until now, the young people had scarcely realised how anxious they actually were. But now that there was a positive hope, they knew the truth. They knew how homesick they were—how desperately anxious they were to get back to the old familiar scenes of England!

Handforth Means Business.

HANDFORTH pointed eagerly. "By George!" he ejaculated. "They're going into action!"

"Yes," muttered Church.

"The battle's beginning!"

They watched fascinatedly. Somehow they could scarcely believe that they were about to gaze down upon a life-and-death struggle—a grim, terrific battle for supremacy. It was more like a pageant—an affair of make-believe.

Scarcely a sound disturbed the tranquil air. No bombardment—no crashing of guns. Only a kind of subdued murmur rising up from that long stretch of country lower down.

And Handforth's statement was correct. The opposing forces were about to hurl themselves at one another. And the Northerners, apparently, were the first to take the offensive.

"Out with the invaders!"

That was the battle-cry which rang from thousands of throats as the soldiers of Princess Mercia charged to the attack. Handforth, standing on that hill-top, watched with gleaming eyes. His heart was beating rapidly.

"By George!" he murmured. "Come here, you chaps! Come aside!"

He dragged Church and McClure away from the others, and brought them to a halt against a clump of trees. He was looking flushed, but, for that matter, so were his companions.

"Now, listen to me!" said Handforth impressively. "I'm going to have a word with you chaps—"

"About the wonderful news, eh?" said Church eagerly. "I say, just think of it! Isn't it too gorgeous for words? A chance of getting back home!"

"Home!" murmured McClure, holding his breath. "By Jupiter! It sounds too good to be true! I think we've all

been fooling ourselves a bit, you know," he added. "We haven't actually said anything, but we've felt it was all up with us—that we should never escape from this prison."

Handforth glared.

"Dry up!" he commanded sternly. "I brought you here to tell you something in secret, and you start gassing about home! This thing is important—"

He broke off, and frowned. "Prison?" he went on, as McClure's final words occurred to him. "What do you mean—prison?"

"Why, this place, of course—this oasis!"

"It's not a prison, you ass!" said Handforth.

"Of course it isn't—not a place with barred windows, if that's what you mean?" growled McClure. "What a chap you are for taking everything literally! But isn't it a prison for us? Bottled up here with these rummy medieval people, hemmed in by mountains and glaciers, and with everlasting blizzards—"

"Rats!" interposed Handforth. "Bottled up be blowed! I knew we should get out all the time—I never had the slightest doubt."

"We're not out yet!" said Church quietly.

"Yes, but Dorrie has found a way through the mountains," put in McClure, with a little breathless chortle. "Besides, what about the British Navy?"

"Bother the British Navy!" roared Handforth.

"Why, you—you unpatriotic rotter!" gasped McClure.

"I didn't mean that!" said Handforth, fuming. "Jolly good luck to the British Navy! Those seaplanes will get through to us—so you needn't worry. I simply take the thing for granted, but there's no reason why you fatheads should keep interrupting me. I've brought you here to tell you a secret."

"Go ahead," said Church absently. "We're listening!"

"And you've got to pledge yourselves to silence!" continued Handforth grimly. "Understand? Unless you give me that pledge I shan't tell you the secret!"

Church and McClure were rather off their guard at the moment. Their minds were filled with wonderful thoughts of home. They were troubled by uneasy doubts. Would the tunnel still be open? Would they be able to get safely through in the Spitfire? Would the seaplanes conquer the difficulties of the Arctic, and rescue them? And then, what about this great battle that was just starting?

What if the Gothlanders won? With a prospect of rescue in sight, it would be hard lines, indeed, to be menaced by Kassker the Grim and his brutal soldiers!

"When you chaps have finished mooning into space, perhaps you'll give me some attention!" snorted Handforth, indignantly. "What's the idea of standing there, looking like a couple of puppets?"

"If you call us puppets—" began Church.

"I said puppets, but the other word's just as good!" rapped out Handforth curtly. "Haven't I told you that I've got a secret?"

"Blow the secret!" retorted McClure. "What?"

"I—I mean, let's hear it, then!" said Mac resignedly. "Anything for a quiet life, Handy! Shall we risk it, Church?"

"Might as well," said Church. "But get it over quickly!"

Handforth regarded them ferociously. "You—you unfaithful rotters!" he said, with withering scorn. "I drag you aside on purpose to give you the straight tip, and all you can do is to insult me! But I'm not going to be dished by you chaps! I've made up my mind, and there's an end of it!"

"There can't be an end without a beginning!" said Church tartly.

"A beginning of what?"

"Your mind!" retorted Church, with relish. "We're fed up with you, Handy! We want to talk about this discovery of Dorrie's—"

"You—you—" With a great effort,

Handforth pulled himself up, and his chums vaguely wondered why he refrained from lashing out. "All right!" he muttered. "I'll remember this—afterwards! But for the moment I'll overlook it—so pledge me your word that you'll keep my secret!"

"Oh, go ahead, then!" said Church.

"We give you our promise."

"Carried!" agreed McClure, nodding. Edward Oswald's eyes gleamed.

"That's a solemn pledge, then?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good!" said Handforth. "I wouldn't bother with you cuckoos, only I believe in taking precautions. There's just a faint possibility—a million-to-one chance—that something might happen to me."

"That's not a million-to-one chance—it's a certainty!" said Church, with conviction. "And unless you talk sense, something will happen to you!"

"It's only right that somebody should know the truth," continued Handforth.

"So I'm taking you into my confidence. The fact is, I'm going to sneak off, and join in the battle!"

His chums started.

"You're going to do what?" yelled Church.

"I'm going to join in the battle!"

"Join in the battle?" gasped McClure, horrified.

"That's what I said!"

"Then you're mad—crazy—scatty!" said Church, with great alarm. "You don't mean this, Handy! You ass, you're trying to spoof us—"

"You'll see whether I'm trying to spoof you!" interrupted their leader. "You chaps stay here, and keep on talking—and look towards this little group of trees, as though you are chatting with me. I'm going to buzz down, get into the valley, and have a swipe at old Kassker!"

Pledged to Secrecy!

A FULL minute elapsed before Church and McClure fully grasped the fact that Edward Oswald Handforth was in deadly earnest. And then, of course, their growing feelings of alarm changed to positive apprehension.

"Handy!" pleaded Church, all his thoughts of the rescuing seaplanes flown. "Handy, old man! You can't do a mad thing like that! For goodness' sake be reasonable!"

"I don't want to hear any silly objections—"

"But you'll be killed!" broke in McClure. "You can't join in a fight like this, Handy! These fellows are armed with pikes and lances and battle-axes, and things! They're in chain-mail armour—and heaps of them are mounted!"

"What of that?" asked Handforth coldly.

"What of it?" gasped Mac. "You won't last for more than five minutes, once you get into the battle! And

what shall we do after you're dead?" he added indignantly.

Handforth waved an airy hand. "Don't talk rot!" he growled. "My idea is to get straight into the thick of the fighting, and help these North-eastrians. I don't believe in being left out in the cold."

"But Mr. Lee expressly prohibited this—"

"Exactly!" agreed Handforth. "That's why I'm going to sneak off on the quiet without anybody seeing me."

"You—you crazy idiot!" burst out Church. "If you venture into this fight you'll go under within a minute. You'll be killed!"

"Rot!" retorted Handforth, in no way impressed. "I've made up my mind, as I've told you before, and the thing's settled." He gazed anxiously down the valley. "By George! They're getting on with it!" he added. "Look at those horsemen dashing into the fight! I shall have to be going!"

With one accord his chums seized him.

"Not yet!" gasped Church. "You'll have to reckon with us, you hopeless idiot! Mac, shout with me. We'll yell for help and bring the other chaps here; then we'll put this lunatic in chains, drag him back to the ship, and bolt him in one of the holds."

"All right!" said McClure. "I'm ready!"

As they clung to Handforth they prepared to raise their voices in a united yell, but their leader stopped them with a single sentence.

"What about your pledged word?" he asked swiftly.

They suddenly felt limp and relaxed their grip.

"Our pledged word?" babbled Church. "Didn't you give me your solemn word of honour—"

"But—but we didn't know!" interrupted McClure desperately. "You said something about a secret, but we didn't know you meant a dotty game like this!"

"That's not my fault; you should be more careful before you give your pledged word," said Handforth coolly. "Anyhow, you can't get out of it, unless you're a couple of dishonourable rotters!"

They looked at him, utterly aghast. They had certainly promised him to keep quiet, and it was totally against their code of honour to go back on a promise.

"You—you tricky rotter!" said Church indignantly. "You knew what we should do, so you prepared yourself in advance. In the circumstances we should be justified in going to Mr. Lee. It's to save your life, Handy—and we'd do anything for that!"

"I shan't be in any danger!" declared Handforth confidently. "Just leave this to me, and join the others after I've gone. If they want to know where I am, just give a hint that I shall be back soon."

"But you won't be!" said Church desperately. "You'll never come back! Look down there!" he added, pointing. "My only hat! The battle's in full swing—and the North-eastrians seem to be getting the worst of it!"

"All the more reason for me to go and help!" declared Handforth.

They stood watching. Some little distance away a crowd of other St. Frank's fellows were staring at the raging conflict, fascinated.

The Moor View girls had gone, for it seemed to them that this scene, after all, was not a nice spectacle for them to witness. The battle was some dis-

tance off, but, nevertheless, the falling of men could be easily seen, and by now the air was becoming filled with the confused tumult of the conflict. It came up from the lower ground like an ever-growing murmur.

"Handy, you mustn't go into that!" begged Church. "Don't forget Mr. Lee's strict orders!"

"Think of Willy and Ena!" added McClure. "What will they say to us when they find out?"

For a moment Handforth hesitated, then he squared his jaw.

"Never mind what they say," he replied gruffly. "They'll alter their tone when I come back with shields and things as trophies!"

"My stars!" breathed Church. "He means it!"

"Of course I mean it!" snapped Handforth. "What about Umlosi? Isn't he in the battle?"

"Umlosi's different; he's a warrior by nature—"

"So am I!" declared Handforth. "By George! Look at those soldiers in action! Isn't it enough to make you tingle? I can't waste any further time—I've got to get down to the battle-field!"

He was staring eagerly into the distance. As far as the juniors could see, the North-eastrian army was marshalled into three lines. In the first there were four or five thousand men-at-arms, and a similar number of archers. Behind them, inclining towards the flank, waited the second line—an army every bit as big. The rest were reserves—waiting to join in the battle when required.

The Gothlander troops were much farther distant, and only a confused array could be seen.

The North-eastrian archers were already in the thick of the fighting, and the enemy's infantry were falling back. But the Gothlanders had their archers, too, and the whole battle was developing on desperate lines.

"Don't you see, Handy?" asked Church, with a gulp. "Look at the cavalry! They're just getting ready to charge! What possible hope can there be for you? You haven't even got a sword—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Edward Oswald calmly. "It won't take me long to pick up a lance—and if it comes to it, I've got my fists, haven't I?"

"Fists?" repeated Mac, dazed. He and Church stood there, aghast at Handforth's insanity. But to argue with him was obviously out of the question. There was a gleam in his eye which denoted that he was determined.

No Holding Handy!

NELSON LEE had no suspicion that Handforth would even dream of going off on such a hare-brained adventure. And so the chums of Study D were left to themselves. The rest of the fellows were far too interested in the grim proceedings to give any attention to the trio near the clump of trees.

As for Nelson Lee, he had his own thoughts, too. For some little time he and Dorrie had watched the progress of the battle, and at last Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders and turned to his companion.

"We can't judge anything yet, Dorrie," he said quietly.

"No?" asked his lordship. "I rather thought the Gothlanders were gettin'—"



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the better of it. A frightful state of affairs, of course, but there's no sense in blinking the facts—"

"This battle will rage for hours," declared Lee. "We had better get back to the ship and relieve young Sparks. I am anxious about the wireless, Dorrie. Everything may depend on that message from the naval authorities—and we cannot take any chances."

"Let's get aboard, then, and see if there's anything fresh," said Dorrie. "We can come back and have another look at the battle later."

"I think I ought to order these boys to the ship, too," said Lee, frowning. "There might be danger here—"

"Have a heart, old man!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "Look at 'em! Eat'n' every movement! Let 'em stay here if they want to; there's no danger. They're naturally anxious to see how the fight goes."

Nelson Lee nodded. "Perhaps you are right," he said. "It'll keep them out of mischief, anyhow—and at this distance none of the dreadful details can be seen. I'll join you in a moment—after I've had a word with Waring."

Nelson Lee's word with Captain Waring was merely a brief warning. At the slightest sign of any danger Waring was to order everybody to the ship immediately. If the scene of battle surged nearer the order was to be given.

"We've got to be careful, Waring," said Lee. "For the first time since we arrived in the oasis, perhaps, our entire party is intact—and completely isolated from any of these natives. If there is any possibility of escape we must go—and go quickly, too."

"I agree with you, sir," declared Captain Waring grimly. "We can't bother with the formalities of saying good-bye at a time like this. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be a good idea to get through that tunnel straightaway—without seeing Princess Mercia, Ethelbert the Red, or anybody else. Let's clear while we've got the chance, sir."

But Nelson Lee shook his head.

"We shall still have the chance to-morrow, or even on the next day," he replied. "The Spitfire, you must remember, is capable of defying any of these Gothlander craft. The one precaution we must certainly take is to get our entire party aboard if danger threatens. On the lake, however, we can await official messages from home. It would be unwise for us to venture forth into the bitter cold of the Arctic before we had any certain news of the rescue party's start. Our ship is not equipped for below-zero weather, and we want to time our departure so that it synchronises as far as possible with the flight of the seaplanes."

Captain Waring looked dubious.

"I'm the last man to throw cold water on any hopes, but I'm infernally uncertain about this affair," he confessed. "We know what Arctic flying is like. Mr. Lee—and if those seaplanes start off into the unknown it'll be several kinds of a gamble whether they ever reach us or not."

"I know that," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "But we're in just that position, Waring, where a gamble is our only possible hope. I'm off to the Spitfire now to hear if any further news has come through. You won't forget what I said, will you?"

"You bet I won't!" said Captain Waring, glancing down at the battle zone. "I'll round up all the youngsters, sir, and bring them along if there's any hint of danger."

Lee nodded and joined Lord Dorrimore again.

"That was a pretty long word, wasn't it?" asked his lordship.

"Sorry; but we got discussing the general possibilities of rescue," smiled Nelson Lee. "Come along, Dorrie—let's hurry."

They went off; and Handforth, observing their departure from that distant clump of trees, gave a little chuckle of satisfaction.

Handforth had only feared Nelson Lee's watchful eyes; for, in spite of his burning enthusiasm for the battle, which consumed practically every other emotion, some instinct warned him that Nelson Lee would promptly veto the whole thing if he knew about it.

"Well, so long, you chaps!" he said briskly. "I might as well go off now."

They both held on to him.

"Handy, you rotter," said Church.

"You've got to release us from that pledge! If you don't, we'll break it!"

"Break it?" said Handforth, aghast.

"Your word of honour!"

"Anything to save your life?"

shouted McClure.

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "Piffle!"

My life's in no danger! Do you think I'm afraid of those beastly Gothlanders? Lemme go, blow you!"

He wrenched himself free, and dived into the trees.

(How will Handy fare in the big battle? More thrills in this great serial next week.)

MISSPONSONBY'S PETS!

(Continued from page 16.)

considerate that I have not been able to convince him that I am really quite equal to it," said Miss Ponsonby. "The Fourth Form will be taken by Mr. Linton along with the Shell until Mr. Lathom returns to St. Jim's. I shall not, therefore, have the pleasure of seeing you again, and I have come to say good-bye."

"Oh, Miss Ponsonby!"

"Bai Jove! I'm weally sorry!" said Arthur Augustus.

"No more pleasant little walks," murmured Lumley-Lumley.

And the whole Form said good-bye to Miss Ponsonby, and shook hands with her in turn with the most cordial feelings in the world; and they gave their Form-mistress a cheer. They could afford to cheer now.

Tom Merry & Co. had the pleasure of Fourth Form society in the Shell Form Room for several days, until Mr.

Lathom returned to St. Jim's. "It was as Blake cheerfully remarked to Tom Merry, rather rotten to have to dig in with the Shell, but they put up with it uncomplainingly in the circumstances. And Mr. Lathom was received on his return with a welcome that was really flattering, and a little surprising to him. He did not know the dreadful experiences his Form had gone through in his absence.

(Next Wednesday: "A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS!" Look out for this lively long yarn of St. Jim's rivalry, ragging and japing. It's much too good to miss.)

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