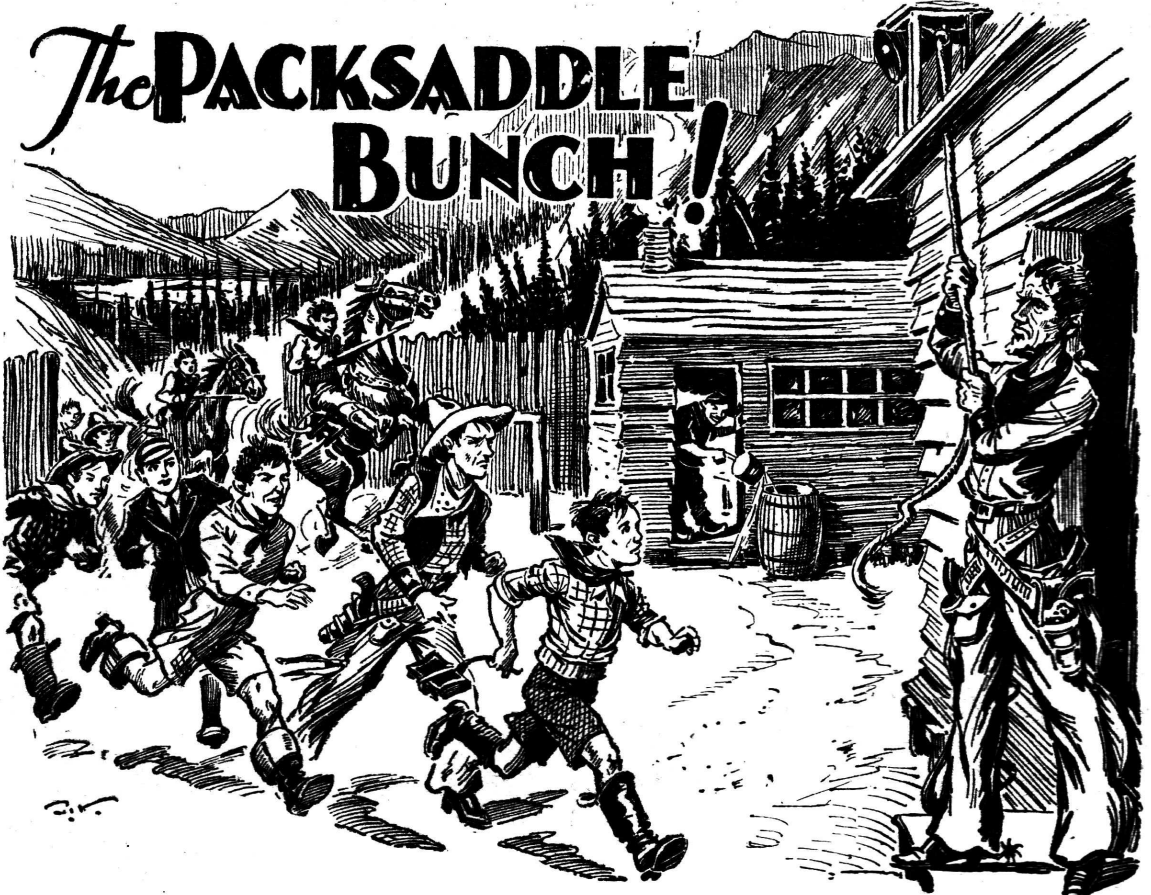


Great Wild West School Yarn—FRANK RICHARDS—*By*—Inside!

The **GEM** 2¢





THE TRUANT OF PACKSADDLE!

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

A Lesson in Lassoing!

BILL SAMPSON, headmaster of Packsaddle School, stood with his hands on his hips, his thumbs in his gumbelt, and roared.

He was talking to Dick Carr, the new boy at Packsaddle—and he was talking emphatically.

The Packsaddle bunch stood round, looking on and laughing. They liked to hear Bill talking to the tenderfoot.

"You pesky gink!" roared Bill. "You doggoned goob! Ain't you ever tetched a rope afore? Say!"

Dick Carr had a lasso in his hands. His face was red with vexation. Dick could ride—he had shown the bunch that he could ride as well as any fellow at Packsaddle—but the "rope" was a new thing to the English schoolboy. He had not been long in Texas, and he had never even thought of handling a lasso in the Old Country.

Any fellow in the bunch could rope a steer. They laughed loud and long at the clumsy efforts of the tenderfoot. Dick was not exactly clumsy—indeed, he was far from clumsy. But the lariat was a thing that had to be learned, and he had not learned yet. Bill—brought up on the rope, as it were—had little patience to waste on the tenderfoot. The cow town schoolmaster could hardly imagine a country where a guy was not taught to ride, shoot, and rope almost as soon as he could walk.

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"Carry me home to die!" went on Bill in a voice that echoed along the Rio Frio. "I'll say you get my goat! Say, don't you know a riata when you see one?"

"A riata?" repeated Dick. "What's that?"

There was another yell of laughter from the bunch. Bill spluttered.

"Jumping painters! Ain't that a

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Editor.

riata you got in your paws?" he roared. "Say, you loco?"

Dick gave an angry grunt. He had heard the looped rope called a lasso, a lariat, and a rope; now he heard it called a riata. Really a tenderfoot could not be expected to guess all these things.

"Aw, give the guy a chance, Bill!" said Slick Poindexter. "He sure is green to Texas."

"You can it—you, Poindexter!" hooted Bill.

"You're tough on him, Bill—and so you are!" declared Mick Kavanagh.

"Pack it up!" roared Bill.

He took the quirt from under his arm and swished it. The bunch backed away, grinning. Bill was getting his mad up.

"Now, you, Carr!" snorted Bill. "I'll tell a man you're the boob from Boobsville, but you come hyer to Packsaddle to larn! You get me? You got to larn to handle that rope! Got that?"

"I'm willing to learn! But—"

"Don't spill any more! You, Carson—you show the boob how to rope, and if he don't pick it up it's the quirt for him. Give him a show."

Steve Carson grinned and threw a leg over his pony. He rode round the playground swinging his lasso. The bully of Packsaddle was a good rider and a good man with the rope, and he was by no means averse from showing off what he could do—especially to the tenderfoot, against whom he had a grudge. Bill gave the new boy a lick from the quirt to draw his attention.

"You watch out!" he hooted. "Keep your eyes on Steve. See?"

"I'm watching him," grunted Dick.

Steve dashed round at a gallop, displaying his horsemanship. Some of the fellows had to dodge out of his way as he spurred recklessly. "Small" Brown, the Packsaddle teacher, who was crossing the playground, hopped and jumped as Steve thundered down on him, and

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dodged round the bunkhouse with a startled squeak. Then Steve whirled his pony and came riding straight at Dick Carr, swinging the rope.

Dick faced the charging rider with shut jaw and glinting eyes. He knew that Steve would not dare to ride over him; the bully of Packsaddle was trying to "rattle" him and make him jump as Small Brown had jumped. Not to save his life would Dick have shown a trace of funk. He stood like a rock, the rider thundering down on him.

Hardly a couple of yards away the snorting muzzle and crashing hoofs swerved, and the horseman dashed past the schoolboy. He circled round him, and the rope suddenly flew.

Before Dick Carr knew what was happening the loop was over his shoulders; it tightened as Steve rode on, and he was plucked from his feet, coming down on Texas with a terrific bump.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Packsaddle bunch.

There was a roar from Bill. "Let up, Carson, you gink! I guess I didn't tell you to rope him in! Let up!"

Steve dragged in his pony. He grinned down at the sprawling tenderfoot, struggling helplessly in the gripping rope.

"I guess you told me to show him how to rope, Bill!" he chuckled.

"Aw, can it!" snapped Bill. "Some of you guys get him loose."

Slick Poindexter and Mick Kavanagh rushed to Dick's aid. They unloosed the riata and helped him to his feet.

He stood gasping, panting. He had had a terrific wrench and a heavy bump. His eyes flashed at the bully of Packsaddle.

"Like me to show you some more?" chuckled Steve.

"Pack it up, you, Carson!" hooted Bill. "Poindexter, you lend the tenderfoot your cayuse. Now, you, Carr—you sit that critter and handle the rope, and if you don't make a cinch I'll sure quirt you till you can't sit on a cayuse or nothing else for a month of Sundays!"

Slick led up his pony, and Dick vaulted lightly into the saddle. He was ready to do his best, but he was very uncertain of his powers with the rope.

"What am I to lasso?" he gasped.

"Any old thing you want!" snorted Bill. "But I'm telling you if you don't make a cinch you get the quirt—and you get it hard! I guess you're here to larn, and I'll say I'm the guy to larn you—some!"

Dick rode round the playground on Slick's pony; he had no horse of his own at the school—almost the only fellow who hadn't. He swung the coiled rope, as he had seen the other fellows do, and hoped for the best. He had to make a catch with that rope, or take a hiding from Bill's quirt.

There were several horses running loose, any one of whom could have been roped in easily enough by any other fellow there. But the Texas ponies were very smart at dodging a rope in an unskilful hand, and Dick had little hope of being able to get one of them. He thought of retaliating on Steve Carson by getting him, but Steve was on the watch for that and there was no chance.

A sudden gleam came into Dick's eyes. Bill had told him to cinch any old thing he wanted. And the easiest thing in the playground to rope was the gigantic figure of the Packsaddle schoolmaster himself.

A fellow who could not have roped that could not have roped anything. Bill certainly had not meant that—and never dreamed of it. That gave the tenderfoot a chance. Had he been on his guard the most skilful puncher in Texas would hardly have roped him. But he was not on his guard.

Dick dashed at a gallop round the playground, handling the pony well.

"The pesky gink can ride!" grunted Bill. "And I'll larn him to rope, too, or take off his skin! Sure!"

With a thunder of hoofs Dick dashed past the schoolmaster. The coiled rope flew, uncoiling as it sped through the air. The open loop dropped over Bill's broad shoulders.

"Say—" gasped Bill. He said no more. The rope shut on him, and as Dick dashed on at a gallop the riata tautened, and Bill Sampson went over like an uprooted pine.

Crash! Bill's twelve stone hit the ground with a thumping crash. There was a shriek of delight from the bunch.

"Roped!" "The tenderfoot's roped Bill!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Say, Bill, you sure asked for it!"

"Whooo-hooo-hooo!" came in a suffocated roar from the cow town schoolmaster. "Yooo-hooo-hooo!"

Dick Carr was riding on. Head over heels the headmaster of Packsaddle rolled after him along the rough ground, bumping. Bill's strength was tremendous, but it did not avail him, dragged by a taut lasso with a strong-limbed Texas pony pulling. Bill rolled like a roped steer, struggling and kicking.

The headmaster of Packsaddle thanks his lucky stars when Dick Carr, the tenderfoot of the cow-town school, plays truant!

Howls of laughter from the bunch followed them. They shrieked and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You got yours, Bill!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Bump, bump, bump!" went Bill at the end of the rope. His long legs thrashed the air. His quirt flew from his hand. He rolled and roared and raved.

"Let up! Whoo-hoop! I'll say I'll—whooooop! Get him—cinch him—yooo-hooo!"

Dick Carr pulled in his pony. He rode to the sprawling, breathless schoolmaster and grinned down at him from the saddle.

"That all right?" he asked. Bill sat up, spluttering, grasping at the rope. It was as tight round his broad chest as an iron band.

"Urrg! You watch out till I get you!" he gurgled. "I'll say I'll take the hide off'n you! Gurrgh!"

"You told me to lasso anything I liked—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the bunch. "You wait till I get you!" spluttered Bill, staggering up and grabbing at the biting rope. "You watch out! Oh, jumping painters!"

Dick set the horse in motion. A jerk at the rope tumbled Bill off his feet, and he hit Texas again.

The bunch shrieked with merriment as he rolled headlong, helpless, after the tenderfoot.

"Aw! I'll say this is a sight for sore

eyes!" gasped Slick Poindexter, wiping his own, which were streaming. "Say, that greenhorn is some lad!"

"He's a broth av a boy, and so he is!" gasped Mick.

"Let up!" raved Bill. "Aw, great snakes! Howling coyotes! I'm telling you to can it! I'm saying—yoo—hoo—hooooooop!"

Bump, bump, bump! Bill sprawled and bumped till Dick Carr drew rein again. This time Bill did not gain his feet in a hurry. Tough as he was, the cow town schoolmaster was done; every ounce of breath had been knocked out of his brawny body. He sprawled and gurgled.

"I've done what you told me, Mr. Sampson!" said Dick Carr. "If I'm going to be quirted, sir, I'm going on doing it! What about it?"

"Gurrgh!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bill sat up. He found his voice. "Aw! You pie-faced boob! Let up! I guess I'll let you off the quirt! I'm telling you to can it!"

Dick dismounted and unloosed the lasso. Bill staggered to his feet. He gave the tenderfoot of Packsaddle a long, long look, and then strode away to the school-house. The lesson was over!

Trouble in Class!

A CLATTER of hoofs rang on the sun-baked prairie trail, and every fellow in the big timber school-room lifted his head and listened. It was a hot afternoon, and there were few, if any, of the Packsaddle bunch who wanted to spend it indoors with Small Brown and school books. But for the presence of Bill Sampson, who sat at his high desk with his quirt before him, Mr. Brown would probably have had trouble with the rather unruly class. Mr. Brown did not have an easy time, anyhow, at the cow town school. But Bill, who had been a puncher, was ready to handle the bunch, as he had been wont to handle a bunch of steers on the Kicking Mule Ranch.

So, though the fellows lifted their heads at the sound of hoof-beats, they did not rise from their places and rush to the windows, as certainly they would have done had not Bill been present.

There was a tramp of heavy boots in the porch, and Ezra Lick, town marshal of Packsaddle, looked into the school-room.

"Say, Bill!" he shouted. Mr. Sampson stared round at him.

"Aw, you Ezra!" he hooted. "Don't you know better'n to horn in while school's going on, and you town marshal of this hyer burg! Beat it!"

"Beat nothing!" retorted the marshal. "I'm telling you, Bill, that Red Ike's been seen down the Frio, and we're riding after him. You git on your bronco and mosey along with us."

Mr. Sampson jumped from his desk. That news was enough to make Bill forget that he was a schoolmaster. Red Ike, the rustler, had five hundred dollas that belonged to Bill.

"You got it sure?" he demanded. "Sure thing!" answered the marshal.

"Red Ike's on foot, and he's hunting for a cayuse to get away on. A Kicking Mule puncher has seen him."

"Why ain't he cinched him, if he seen him?" demanded Bill.

Ezra Lick chuckled. "I guess he burned the wind when he spotted Ike's red head," he answered.

"Ike wanted his horse, and was ready

to give him some lead for it—and I'll say that puncher didn't want any."

Bill snorted.

He followed the marshal from the school-room. A minute later he was mounted on his black bronco, and riding away with the marshal's outfit. The school-room was left in a buzz of excitement.

Red Ike, the rustler, was well known in the Frio country. His hold-ups and shootings were countless. His latest exploit had been to hold up Bill Sampson at the school. Many days had passed since then, and up and down the banks of the Rio Frio, as far as Squaw Mountain, the outlaw was hunted. On a horse, Red Ike would have disappeared long ago; but it was known that he was on foot, and had been unable, so far, to get hold of a cayuse. On foot, a man was helpless on the prairie. The rustler had been hiding while men rode and hunted for him, and so far he had kept free. Now he had been seen again, and the hunt was hot once more.

Small Brown was giving his class geography, but nobody in the bunch cared a red cent for geography, or Mr. Brown, just then. Every Packsaddle fellow was thinking of the outlaw, the marshal's men riding in quest of him, and Bill Sampson riding with the marshal's men. Some of them went to the windows and stared out. Small Brown squeaked at them in vain.

Big Steve even proposed to throw down school, mount, and ride. Likely enough the bunch would have done so, too, but for the fact that they would meet up with Bill on the prairie. And if Bill caught them riding the plains in school hours, they knew what Bill would do with the quirt.

"Sit down! Take your places! Will you keep order?" yapped Small Brown. "We are here to work!"

"Forget it!" drawled Big Steve.

In the buzz of excited voices, Mr. Brown's shrill yap passed almost unheeded. Half the fellows were at the windows, looking out through the gateway, across the playground, the way the riders had gone.

Unsupported by Bill, little Mr. Brown was nowhere. He was really afraid of fellows like Steve Carson, who could have pitched him across the school-room. He had an irritable temper, which he seldom or never ventured to let rip.

He waved a pointer, squeaked and yapped. Then he came across to a window where Dick Carr was staring out.

Certainly Dick ought to have been in his place, and no other fellow was in his place, and the new boy followed the crowd.

Whack!

Dick gave a yell as he caught the pointer across his pants. He spun round at Mr. Brown with blazing eyes.

"Go and sit down!" yapped Small Brown.

"You cheeky ass!" shouted Dick Carr. He knew that Small Brown was picking on him because he was new and "tender," and because he dared not pick on tougher fellows, like Carson or Parker, or Dixon, or Pie Sanders.

Whack, whack! Perhaps Small Brown hoped that punishing one member would have a disciplinary effect on the rest. If that was the idea, it was rather rough luck on a fellow who was, after all, the most orderly fellow in the whole bunch. The sight of Small Brown whacking with the pointer was new, and it interested and entertained the

bunch. They gathered round, cheering him on.

"Wade in, ol' man!" chirruped Poker Parker.

"Give him a few on the pants!" yelled Pie Sanders.

"Touch up the tenderfoot!" chuckled Big Steve. "Say, you 'uns, Small Brown surely has got his mad up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack! rang the pointer again, and Dick Carr, with flashing eyes, jumped at Small Brown and jerked it from his hand.

"Give Brown a few, big boy!" yelled Slick Poindexter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say, shall I hold him for you, Mr. Brown?" drawled Carson.

"Yes, yes!" gasped Small Brown.

"Leave him be, you Carson!" shouted Mick.

But Big Steve was not losing this chance of getting back on the tenderfoot who had knocked him out in a scrap, his first day at Packsaddle. Generally Big Steve was a leader of trouble in the school-room, and he had had many a wallop from Bill's quirt for that reason. Now it suited him to stand for law and order.

He jumped at Dick Carr and grasped him.

They struggled, and Small Brown, hopping round them like a rabbit, snatched the pointer back.

Whack! Whack!

It came ringing on Dick's shoulders as he struggled with the hefty Steve. He gave a howl of wrath and anguish. With a sudden effort, hooking big Steve's leg, he whirled him over, and Carson crashed down on the nearest desk.

He rolled to the floor with a hefty bump as Dick turned on Small Brown. That gentleman jumped back in alarm, his eyes almost bulging through his horn-rimmed glasses as Dick made a jump at him.

Dick grabbed the pointer from his hand. He turned on Steve, who was struggling up.

Grasping him by the back of the collar, he forced Big Steve down again, grinding his nose into the pine planks of the floor.

Then the pointer rose and fell.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

The dust rose from Steve's breeches and fearful yells from Steve. He struggled and wriggled, and roared and howled. Dick Carr, with gleaming eyes, laid on the pointer with all the force of his arm.

Poker Parker and Slim Dixon rushed forward to the help of their pal. A slash of the pointer, catching Dixon on the side of the head and Slim on the nose, drove them yelling back. Then the pointer lashed again and again on Big Steve's breeches, to an accompaniment of fearful howls.

The whole bunch were roaring with laughter. This was better fun than geography! Small Brown hopped, and almost danced, with angry excitement. Bill Sampson would have restored order in a moment. Small Brown could do nothing but squeal and yap.

Leaving Carson yelling on the floor, Dick Carr pitched the pointer out of the window and walked to the door.

"Take your place!" squealed Small Brown.

"Go and chop chips!" retorted the new boy at Packsaddle, and he walked out of the school-room and banged the door after him with a bang that rang along the Rio Frio.

The Rustler's Revenge!

"SEARCH me!" breathed Bill Sampson.

Bill's eyes gleamed under his rugged brows.

He pulled in the black bronco and jumped from the saddle. Far away on the prairie Stetson hats bobbed in the brilliant sunshine of Texas. The marshal's outfit, once clear of the cow town, had separated, to hunt for sign of the elusive Red Ike. Sign was not easy to find, but Bill Sampson figured that he had picked up some.

Stooping in the tough grass, the cow town schoolmaster examined the hard, sun-baked earth. Bill had forgotten he was a schoolmaster now. He was once more a puncher of the Kicking Mule, riding after a rustler!

"I guess I got him!" grinned Bill.

Bill was as good a man on the trail as any Apache or Comanche that wandered in the wastes of the Staked Plain. Red Ike had left little sign where he moved, but what little he had left Bill's keen eyes picked up.

Standing waist deep in the tough grass, Bill stared round him. Two or three Stetsons bobbed over the high grass in the far distance. But they were far out of hearing of a call. On his left, were the bluffs that hung over the deep channel of the Rio Frio. Wide and deep was that channel, cut by the river in flood. But the Frio ran low now, twenty feet below the level of the prairie.

With his reins hooked over his arm, Bill tramped towards the river. Unless Bill was mistaken—and he did not figure that he was—some guy had tramped down to the Frio on foot, and if that was so he did not need telling who the guy was. A man on foot on the plains was a very rare bird—no man in the cow country went afoot if he had a horse. And Red Ike, the rustler, had lost his horse. Bill's hand was very near the butt of his gun in his belt as he tramped out on the bluffs over the Frio.

The descent from the plain to the bed of the river was steep. Below was a wilderness of glimmering mud. Far across it the Frio flowed, shallow, and glimmering in the sun, with yards of quaking mud between it and the grassy bluff where Bill stood.

Scanning the mudbank, Bill failed to pick up the man he sought. He shook his head at the thought that the outlaw might have got across the Frio at that spot. Only utter desperation could have driven any man to trust himself to that quaking swamp of mud, where wandering steers from the ranches had sometimes sunk down to choking death.

Bill figured that the red-bearded outlaw was in cover in some hollow of the high bank. Red Ike knew only too well that he was closely hunted, and he was the kind of firebug to watch for a chance of turning on a pursuer and getting possession of a cayuse. Once in the saddle, Red Ike would know how to burn the wind. On foot, he could only skulk and hide like a scared prairie rabbit.

Bill Sampson pegged his bronco, loosened his Colt in the holster, and clambered down the rugged face of the bluff to the mudbank that stretched towards the river below.

It was not easy going. Several times he slipped, and saved himself by catching at the roots in the slope. But he noticed that in three or four places there was sign that the descent had already been made, and not long since. He was not far from Red Ike.



As the riata tautened, Bill Sampson went over like an uprooted pine, and bumped along in the dust after Dick on the galloping broncho. "Whoohoo-oo!" yelled the cow town schoolmaster. There was a shriek of delight from the bunch. "Ha, ha, ha! The tenderfoot's roped Bill!"

Any instant he might have heard the crack of the gunman's Colt. He was watchful and wary as a panther. But he figured that Red Ike would not be in haste to burn powder. A shot would carry wide on the wind, and bring other enemies upon him.

Suddenly, as a loose root pulled out under Bill's weight, he went plunging and rolling down the steep bank.

"Jumping painters!" gasped Bill, as he rolled.

He grabbed and clutched, but he could get no hold. He pitched helplessly till he brought up in a hollow of the bank that was screened by half-rotten branches, left there by the river when it was higher. Bill crashed through the rotten branches and rolled in the hollow, and at the same moment he felt something there that was not earth or mud—something that stirred, something that panted.

A hand grasped him. Half-buried in rotten branches and leaves, on his back, his gun snatched away, Bill glared up at a savage, fierce, red-bearded face, that glared down on him.

He panted.

He knew now where Red Ike had lain in cover—in that unseen hollow of the river bank, covered with driftwood. And he had rolled fairly down on top of the hidden outlaw. But it was Red Ike who was on top now.

Bill's gun was jammed to his face, Red Ike's finger was on the trigger, and the gunman's eyes blazing over it.

"By thunder!" said the rustler, between his teeth. "You got me, Bill—and I got you, by thunder!"

"Doggone my cats!" panted Bill.

"I'll say this is the bee's knee! Shoot, you skunk, and be durned. I guess Ezra will hear the gun, and you sure won't make a getaway arter. Shoot, you coyote!"

The outlaw did not pull trigger. He grinned at Bill savagely over the gun. Bill, crumpled on his back, a knee on his chest, was powerless. His eyes gleamed with rage at the ruffian.

"I guess Ezra ain't on hand—not a whole lot," said Red Ike. "I been watching you, Bill, and I sure hunted cover here when I saw you had picked up sign. Your side-kickers ain't on hand, Bill."

"I guess they'll hear that gun, all the same," snorted Bill. "I guess it's you for a limb and a rope, you dog-goned thief and rustler! Shoot, if you want!"

"I guess I'll shoot quick and sudden if you give me trouble," grinned Red Ike. "But I ain't honing to shoot, Bill. Stick your paws together."

With the gun jamming in his bearded face and the gunman's desperate eyes gleaming over it, Bill Sampson made no demur. His strong wrists were dragged together and tied with a cord from Red Ike's pocket. The rustler knotted the cord with cruel care.

"That's let you out, Bill!" he said, with a savage grin. "I guess I'm going to borrow that hoss of yours that you've staked out on the bluff. I guess I borrowed him once and lost him agin, but I sure ain't losing him this time. I figure on burning the wind out of the Frio country and hitting Mexico a piece. You goin' to stop me?"

"Doggone you!" gasped Bill.

"Get on your hind legs!" snapped the rustler.

Bill staggered to his feet.

He gritted his teeth with rage. He was powerless in the rustler's hands, and his horse, on the bluff, was at the gunman's mercy. Red Ike had found, at last, the chance he wanted of cinching a cayuse, and it was Bill's cayuse that he was going to cinch.

"Walk!" snapped the rustler.

He dragged on Bill's arm. The cow town schoolmaster had to walk. The rustler was forcing him in the direction of the water.

Something like pallor came on Bill's rugged, bronzed face. Red Ike was not going to spare his enemy, who had fallen into his hands. Hunted, desperate, worn with hunger, and hardship, and fatigue, Red Ike was a wild beast—a savage wild animal that had turned on his hunters. What was he going to do?

Bill soon knew.

As they drew nearer the Frio, their feet sank in the mud—deeper, and softer, and more insecure, close to the water. Red Ike was picking a spot—a spot he knew! He gave the schoolmaster a sudden shove, and sent him sprawling.

Bill crashed on quaking mud.

Struggling wildly, frantically, he righted himself, head up. But he was down to his gun-belt in soft mud by the time he was upright. As he tramped to keep his footing, he sank deeper.

"I guess that fixes you, Bill Sampson!" said Red Ike, between his teeth. "I'll say you won't ride on my

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trail no more, you doggoned geck! Say, that's where the steers from Kicking Mule was lost, last fall. I guess you'll hit their bones, when you go down deep enough. Howl, you dog, howl, and see if your side-kickers will hear you!"

"You goldarned cow-thief!" panted Bill.

Red Ike laughed savagely and tramped away. Bill, struggling wildly in the mud swamp, watched him go. He saw the active rustler clamber up the high bank and disappear over the edge of the bluff.

Bill groaned.

The way of escape was free for the rustler, and that troubled Bill more than his own peril, at the moment. Ezra and his outfit were far afield, and even if they spotted a horseman, at the distance, they would not figure that it was Red Ike. Now that he had a horse, every chance was in favour of the desperado riding clear and getting across the Rio Grande into Mexico.

There was a beat of hoofs on the prairie above.

Red Ike was riding!

Thud, thud, thud rang the galloping hoofs! Red Ike, in Bill's saddle, was riding the black bronco—for the Mexican border! In a few minutes the sound of galloping hoofs died away to the south.

"Jumping painters!" panted Bill.

He was down to his armpits in yielding, clinging, sticky mud. His struggles only drove him deeper. Even with his hands free, he could not have dragged himself out now. Indeed, even a strong man could not have dragged his bulky body from the deep bed of mud without firm ground to stand on—and there was only yielding mud round him. The sweat ran down Bill's bronzed face. He knew that this was the end of the trail.

He shouted—and shouted again! But he gave it up—there were no ears to hear. The mud was up to his

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shoulders, sucking at his neck. Thick and cold and clammy, it squeezed him and squelched round him as he moved. The rustler was gone—long gone—leaving Bill Sampson to a fearful fate, as terrible a revenge as even that savage heart could have desired. It was the end of the trail, and Bill Sampson, with the sweat thick on his forehead, looked up—looking his last on the blue sky of Texas.

A Tenderfoot and a Rope!

WHIZ!

It was the whiz of a lariat. "Rotten!" grunted Dick Carr. He had missed.

At Packsaddle School, the bunch were still in the school-room, with Small Brown. But Dick Carr was far from the cow town school. He had banged the school-room door behind him and cleared off, and that was that! But he did not want to hang about the playground by himself, and with an angry sense of injustice strong upon him, he did not intend to return to the class. He caught a pony in the corral, saddled him, took his lasso, and rode out of the gate.

Every day since his first instruction in the use of the "rope," Dick had put in some practice with it. He was naturally quick and intelligent, and he was making progress, but it was a thing that had to be learned, and he was more than tired of the bunch's grinning and gibing at the clumsiness of the tenderfoot. He could always borrow one of Bill's horses; and now, every day, he would ride out on the prairie, after class, to practice with the rope. On this occasion he was doing it during class.

Riding down the river, out of sight of school and town, he made cast after cast with the rope, at branches or lonely saplings—anything that gave him a chance. Sometimes the whirling loop settled on the object at which he aimed—more often it missed. He was getting on, but he was getting on slowly.

Having failed once more, missing a stump in the prairie, he coiled up the riata as he rode on and prepared it for another cast. Looking round for another object at which to aim, he spotted a bunch of tall sunflowers that grew on the grassy bluffs over the low-flowing Frio.

He rode within a dozen feet of the high edge of the bluff, and made his cast. Once more he failed to cinch, the coiled rope striking the sunflowers and crushing them down, instead of noosing them. The riata uncoiled to full length, the loop dropping over the edge of the bluff.

"Bother!" growled Dick.

He sat his pony, coiling in the rope, facing the river. From the saddle, high up on the grassy bluff, he could see far out across the river-bed, to where the Frio flowed between wide banks of mud. He started, and stared, at the sight of a Stetson hat on the mud.

He stared hard, unable to understand. It was not a hat that had blown away from some rider on the plains, for it was moving and stirring, and it was raised more than a foot above the level of the mudbank. Yet if it was on a man's head, where was the man? Even if he was sitting down, even if he was lying down, the hat would have been higher. Besides, Dick could see nothing of him, only the hat!

Then suddenly he grasped it. He had heard talk among the bunch of the danger of the swamp along the Frio. Bill, in fact, had warned him of that danger; a necessary warning to a

tenderfoot. And now he knew that some unwary guy had gone down to the water and sunk up to his neck in the mud! That was the meaning of a ten-gallon hat wagging a foot above the level.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Dick.

He jumped from the pony and hastily pegged it. Then he ran to the edge of the bluff, threw himself on his chest, and peered down. Twenty feet down that Stetson wagged and wobbled as the sunken man under it wriggled in the mud that enveloped him, twenty feet out from the bluff.

"Hi! Hallo! Hi!" shouted Dick Carr.

He saw a sudden movement of the Stetson. It slanted, and a bronzed face stared from under the immense brim. Dick's eyes almost started from his head. It was the face of Bill Sampson that he saw!

"Bill!" panted Dick.

He stared at the schoolmaster of Packsaddle blankly. He waved his hand, and Bill stared back, with hope lighting his rugged face. A hoarse, husky yell came from the cow town schoolmaster.

Dick jumped to his feet. His face was white. How Bill had got there, what it all meant, he did not know, and there was no time to think. But he knew that it was a matter of minutes to save the life of the schoolmaster of Packsaddle. That was enough for him to know.

He gave one glance at the end of the riata, to make sure that it was safely fastened to the pony's saddle. Then he threw the rope, uncoiling, over the bluff. He did not waste time climbing down—he slithered down the rope. The cow-pony, used to the strain of a lariat, braced his hoofs to take it. In a few seconds Dick was down on the mudbank.

He raced across it to Bill.

Bill shouted hoarsely:

"Watch out, you gink! You want to sink in?"

Dick did not heed. Soft mud squelched over his boots as he ran. But he was taking the lariat with him, over his arm.

With sticky mud to his knees, Dick stopped and pitched the noose at Bill. It tapped on the Stetson and fell beside it.

"Catch!" shouted Dick.

"You doggoned geck, I'm hog-tied!" panted Bill.

He made a wild effort, and forced his arms out of the mire. The effort sank him to his chin; but the hands came up, and Dick saw that they were bound together at the wrists.

He tore out his pocket-knife.

"Watch out!" panted Bill, as the tenderfoot came squelching recklessly out to him. "Go back—go back! You'll sure be sucked in!"

Dick was in to his waist as he reached Bill. He did not heed it. He sawed the keen edge of the knife across the cord that fastened Bill's wrists. It parted, and the schoolmaster of Packsaddle was free.

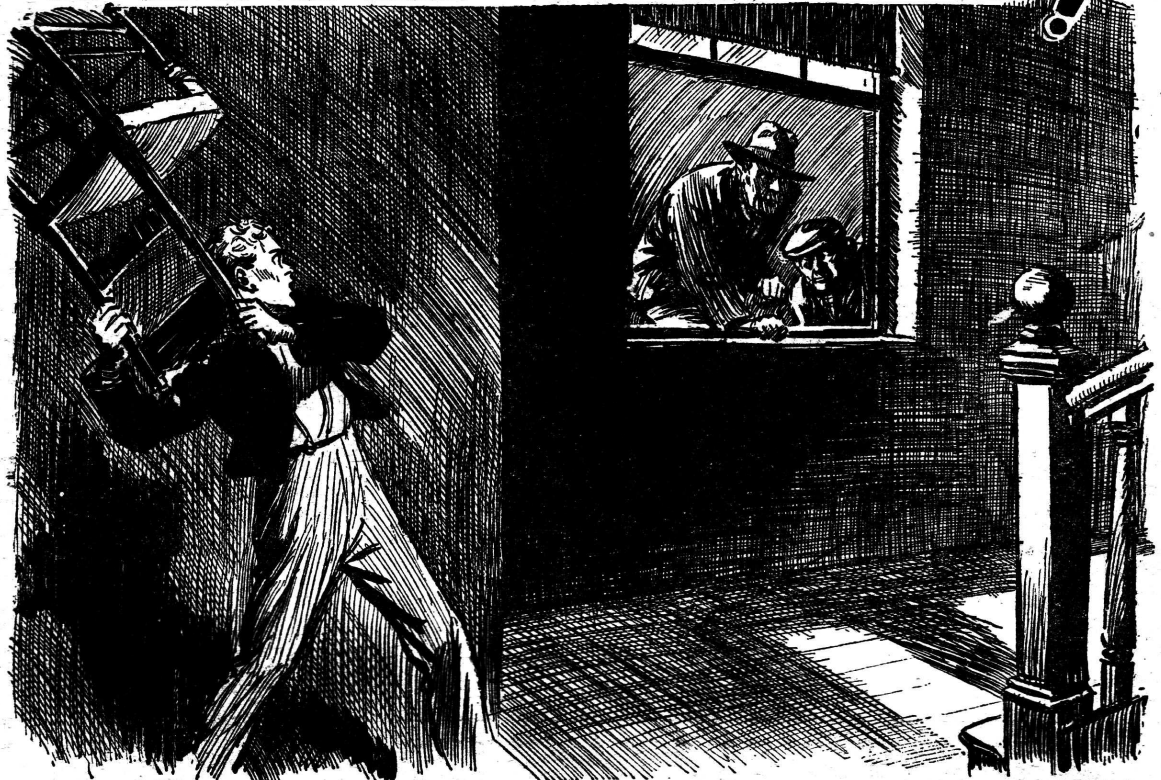
"Go back!" groaned Bill. "You doggoned geck, go back—afore you go under! You hear me shout!"

"Hang on, Bill!" said the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, unheeding. He shoved the loop of the lasso into Bill's strong fingers. They gripped.

Holding on to the rope, Dick dragged himself back along it. But for the rope stretching down from the saddle of the cow pony on the bluff, he would never have got out of the swamp alive.

(Continued on page 28.)

TRUE BLUE!



In the square of the Hall window a kneeling form was visible on the sill, and a second man was standing outside. Tom Merry raised the chair aloft and tensed himself ready to hurl it at the burglars breaking in!

CHAPTER 1.

The Interrupted Solo!

TOM MERRY laughed. The leader of the Shell Form at St. Jim's had a very pleasant laugh, but certainly just then the moment was not judiciously chosen for laughing.

The other fellows were grinning, but they looked surprised when Tom Merry laughed.

There were nearly a dozen of the St. Jim's fellows present. Bernard Glyn of the Shell had taken the little party home to tea. Glyn's father had a house near the school, and Glyn frequently took a little party of juniors home.

On the present occasion there were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell, and Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous "Co." of the New House at St. Jim's.

Tea was over, and the lights gleamed from the windows of Glyn House into the wide grounds.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the piano, a sheet of music in his hands, his head thrown back, and a tenor solo—or, at all events, a solo that was supposed to be tenor—proceeding from his aristocratic vocal organs. Glyn's sister Edith was at the piano, accompanying him, and keeping pace with the tenor solo in a really wonderful way.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tenor solo

was in full blast, so to speak, when Tom Merry laughed.

Of course, the fellows always grinned when D'Arcy started on a tenor solo. That was only to be expected. But when Tom Merry laughed the swell of St. Jim's paused in the tide of melody and looked round with an extremely indignant expression.

A sheet of music fluttered to the floor as he groped for his eyeglass, which he proceeded to jam into his eye in order to take a scornful survey of the hero of the Shell.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he began warmly.

Tom Merry turned pink.

"Sorry, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't laughing at the tenor solo. I'm so sorry I interrupted."

"Weally—"

"It's too bad!" said Jack Blake, with a shake of the head. "I'm surprised at you, Tom Merry."

"Look here, Blake—"

"There's no excuse!" said Blake. "You've interrupted D'Arcy's song."

It is when a gang of cracksmen start "working" the St. Jim's district that the new master at the school gets his chance to prove himself true blue!

Now it will be all the longer before he gets finished. It's too bad!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"If you are alludin' to my song, Lowthah—"

"Ahem!"

"I'm so sorry!" said Tom Merry penitently. "I know it's hard on you fellows—I mean, I know it's hard on you, Gussy—"

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy."

"But—but, you see, I couldn't help it. Begin again, Gussy, there's a good chap."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Figgins. "You ass!"

Miss Glyn looked round at them.

"Now begin again, Arthur," she said.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! Where's my music?"

Bernard Glyn picked up the music and handed it to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's turned back to the first verse with an air of great dignity.

Miss Glyn's slim fingers ran over the keys again. Miss Glyn was a good pianist, and, as Monty Lowther had remarked in a stage whisper, she needed to be, to accompany D'Arcy.

D'Arcy had a way of speeding up and slacking down at the most unexpected moment, and accompanying him was something in the nature of an acrobatic performance.

Once again the tenor voice of the

swell of St. Jim's rose upon the air. He was singing the song of Walter, in the "Meistersinger"—Arthur Augustus was nothing if not ambitious. And the juniors grinned cheerfully to one another as he restarted after the interval, so to put it.

It was certainly a beautiful song, but whether Arthur Augustus rendered it beautifully was another matter. But the juniors bore it manfully, and Tom Merry did not laugh again.

Tom Merry was sitting by the french windows, which were open. He was looking towards the shrubberies in the garden, and not at D'Arcy at all. It seemed as if something or other in the garden chained Tom Merry's attention, to the exclusion of that magnificent solo.

Outside, in the wide grounds of Glyn House, the moon was rising over the trees and a soft light fell upon the lawns and shrubberies. As Tom Merry looked from the open window a shadow moved in the shrubberies, and he nearly laughed again. But this time he managed to subdue the expression of his inward merriment to a soft chuckle.

Bernard Glyn glanced at him curiously, and came across to him.

"What's the joke?" whispered Glyn.

Tom Merry made a gesture towards the garden.

"He's there!" he murmured.

"Who is?"

"Romeo, of course—owney-owney, you know."

The words were mysterious to anyone not in the secret. But Bernard Glyn evidently understood, for he burst into a sudden roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus broke off at once and looked round indignantly.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Oh, sorry!" exclaimed Glyn. "I—I—I—"

"Bernard!" said Edith Glyn gently. "It is too bad to interrupt D'Arcy in this way. It is really not the way to treat a guest, you know."

Glyn turned red.

"I—I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I—I didn't mean it. But—but Tom Merry said something funny. I— Do begin again, Gussy! After all, the more we get of the song, you know, the better we like it, and the first verse is—is ripping!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled again. That was really a very nice way of putting it, and the clouds cleared from the amateur singer's brow at once.

"Vewy well, deah boy," he said graciously, "but I weally think you might wewerve your jokes for a more appropwiate time, Tom Mewwy."

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, it's all wright. I'll begin again. Would you mind turuin' back to the first page, Miss Glyn?"

"Not at all!" said Edith.

And once more the swell of St. Jim's started.

By this time the whole of the youthful company knew that something was "on." The juniors all gathered round Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn at the window. Even old Mr. Glyn, who had been dozing in his armchair, looked a little curious, and wondered what there could be in the moonlit garden to excite so much interest among the juniors.

Arthur Augustus, unconscious of everything but the Wagner solo, warbled on at full pitch.

"What is it out there?" whispered Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Never mind now. Quiet, or Gussy's solo will go on for ever!"

"There he is!" murmured Bernard Glyn.

The juniors all looked from the open window.

In the moonlight, half-hidden by the shadows of the deep shrubbery, a man's figure could be seen—a figure that stood motionless, regarding the house with a steady gaze.

CHAPTER 2

Struck Down!

TOM MERRY chuckled softly—he did not laugh this time.

The juniors grinned—they understood. Bernard Glyn glanced at his elder sister, sitting at the piano, and then, a little uneasily, at his father on the other side of the room.

"Quiet!" he murmured. "Don't let the pater guess."

Tom Merry became grave at once.

"Right-ho! Don't look out of the window, you chaps," he murmured. "We don't want to get Romeo into a row."

"Rather not," said Figgins.

"Why don't you bring up your House-master to be more sensible, Figg?" murmured Blake. "The Romeo and Juliet business is out of date."

Figgins chuckled.

Tom Merry glanced at the window again; the dim figure in the shrubbery had disappeared. He was glad of it, for old Mr. Glyn, his curiosity awakened, was coming over towards the window.

Mr. Glyn glanced out into the garden, but saw nothing but the lawns and the shrubberies.

He was looking inquiringly at the juniors, but their faces were quite solemn now; they seemed to be listening to D'Arcy's tenor solo.

They realised that they had come near to betraying a secret, and they were being very circumspect now, rather late in the day.

It was an open secret at St. Jim's that the new Housemaster of the New House was attached to Glyn's sister.

Mr. Wodyer had lately come to St. Jim's in the place of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, who had gone away on a holiday.

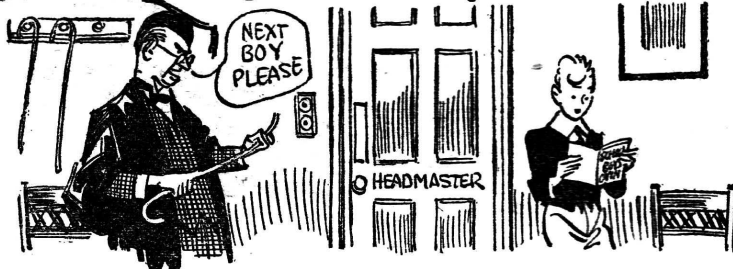
The New House master, who was also master of the Fourth Form, was very popular at St. Jim's. He was a young man to hold such a post, but he fulfilled his duties well, and he had shown that he was quite as much at home on the playing fields as in the Form-room. Figgins & Co. were very proud of their Housemaster—and they contrasted him with "old Ratty," very much to Mr. Ratcliff's disadvantage.

That Mr. Arthur Wodyer was in love with the sister of Bernard Glyn seemed a very pretty romance to the juniors. It amused them a little; being in love was not much in their line, and they were inclined to look upon it as a sort of youthful weakness on the part of the Housemaster.

The course of true love, the poet assures us, never did run smooth, and such was the case with Mr. Wodyer and Edith Glyn. For old Mr. Glyn was a millionaire, and was generally supposed to roll in money—and Arthur Wodyer, M.A., had nothing but an Oxford degree and his salary as a master at St. Jim's—and even his post there was only a temporary one.

The match was, therefore, very unequal, and Mr. Glyn was not likely to

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give his consent to an engagement—Bernard Glyn was willing to give his, because Mr Wodyer was a jolly good fellow and a real sport, but these qualities did not appeal to the millionaire as much as to his son.

It was "rotten for Wodyer," as the juniors agreed, and they took a very kindly interest in the matter.

And Glyn had discovered that, as Mr. Wodyer could not meet Edith except upon very rare occasions, he had developed a habit of strolling past Glyn House and watching her window—a little way common to lovers at all periods of the world's history. Glyn often went home to see his people, as his home was so near St. Jim's, and so he had come upon Mr. Wodyer more than once doing the "Romeo act," as he humorously termed it.

Therefore, when Tom Merry saw the silent figure in the shrubbery watching the window, he had no doubt that it was Mr. Wodyer playing the Romeo once more.

That was the cause of the sudden laugh which had had such a disastrous effect upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tenor solo.

Tom Merry was wishing now that he had not allowed his risible faculties full play; but he had been taken by surprise. It was evident that Mr. Glyn was suspicious. The old gentleman was a little crusty in temper, though extremely kind-hearted and very fond of his son's chums at St. Jim's. But it was known that he was very much "down" upon an almost penniless suitor for his daughter, and if he found that Mr. Wodyer was in the habit of haunting his grounds in this Romeo-like way, it was pretty certain that there would be trouble.

Tom Merry tried to avoid the old gentleman's eye as he dropped into a chair beside him with the evident intention of speaking. But before he said anything D'Arcy's solo ended.

Arthur Augustus looked round for applause. The juniors applauded him—whether for the solo or for getting it finished they did not state.

"Oh, ripping!"
"Very ripping—awfully like ripping canvas—very tough canvas!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Up with you, Blake!" said Bernard Glyn. "You're going to give us a song!"

Blake rose.
"I don't mind if I do," he said modestly.

"You chaps have all got to join in the chorus, you know," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"
Mr. Glyn leaned towards Tom Merry as Blake began singing a popular air.

"You were looking at something in the garden, weren't you, Merry?" he remarked, in a low tone.

Tom Merry nodded.
"Yes, sir," he said.
"Did you see someone there?"
"I—I—"

"I wish you to tell me."
Tom Merry hesitated.
"I—I thought I saw someone," he said reluctantly.

"Who was it?"
"Well, sir, you—you see, I couldn't possibly see his face in the dark," said Tom Merry. "I just caught a glimpse of him."

"Who was it?"
"I couldn't possibly recognise him at that distance, sir."

"But you know who it was?"
"As I couldn't recognise him, sir, it might have been anybody, and it

JUST MY FUN



Monty Lowther Calling

Hallo, everybody! A correspondent asks me to strike a moving note. Honk! How's that? 'Nother correspondent inquires what is a big black area? What about a 25-stone African chief? "Crime is a disease," asserts Skimpole. Yes, but "time" is the great healer. "I saw a magician vanish into thin air," said Gore. "What a pity you can't do that trick yourself," yawned Blake. A Wayland resident left £10,000 in six lines of verse. So there sometimes is money in poetry! A Wayland footballer has just taken over a shop. We hope he remembers the rule about unfair charging. I hear Taggles, the porter, hit his thumb while nailing up a lucky horseshoe. Hit the wrong nail on the head, as it were! Buck Finn says the pistol is becoming the dominant feature in American politics. "Automatically?" "What should a boilermaker do to celebrate his birthday?" asks a reader. What about a "burst"? D'Arcy thinks the best watches were made last century.

wouldn't be fair for me to mention any names."

Mr. Glyn compressed his lips.
"Very well!" he said.

He crossed the room to his armchair, sat down, and seemed to doze again; but Tom Merry knew that he was not dozing. The old gentleman's suspicions had been aroused, and Tom Merry's reticence had, of course, made things stronger.

"My hat," exclaimed Bernard Glyn, who had heard all that his father had said, "this is rotten! It was idiotic of Wodyer to come into the grounds; when I've seen him about here before he was in the road. It's a bit thick coming into the grounds when the pater is against him."

"Oh, chaps in love are always like that, I believe!" said Tom Merry. "You jolly well never know what they're going to do next!"

Glyn nodded thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid the pater may catch him at it, and then there will be a scene," he whispered; "that would be jolly unpleasant for everybody, especially for poor old Edie. I can't get out without the pater noticing, but—but could you slip out into the garden, Tommy, and warn him off? Tell him the pater's got his eye open?"

Tom Merry whistled softly.
"I—I say," he murmured, "that's rather thick! Wodyer doesn't suspect that we know anything about it."

Glyn grinned.
"I know; but it's better than risking having a scene—if you wouldn't mind. It was reckless of him to come into the grounds like this."

"Well, you're right. I'll go."
"Slip out while we're yelling Blake's chorus."

"All serene!"
As the chorus of Blake's song rang out, Tom Merry slipped quietly through the french windows into the garden. The Shell fellow remembered just where he had seen the dim figure, but he did not make straight for the spot. He

The "good old times"? Mr. Ratcliff is very fond of oysters, and likes them for breakfast. His "daily dozen"? As the very cool explorer remarked, when the cannibals popped him in the cooking-pot: "Well, where's the soap and towel?" Or, as the salesman put it: "Madam, this Oriental plant blooms once in every fifty years. If it fails to do so, bring it back, and we will gladly replace it!" "What is the best way to make a dog walk behind you?" asks Herries. Walk in front of him, old chap. Next: "Why do black sheep require less food than white ones?" asks Figgins. Because there aren't so many of them! "So you climb ze Matterhorn?" said the Frenchman. "Zat is a foot to be proud of." "You mean a feat," corrected the Englishman. "Ah!" exclaimed the Frenchman understandingly. "You climb him more than once?" I hear a well-known playwright is rewriting the end of his play. Critics complain it isn't near enough to the beginning. "Some say diet, and some say don't," says Fatty Wynn. So Fatty just takes the middle course—several helpings of it! Then there was the burglar caught by the lady of the house in the very act of stealing the silver. He said he was merely "at her service"! "Hey, Jarge!" yelled the motorist. "Which way to Marketham?" "How did you know my name was Jarge?" asked the yokel. "Guessed it!" grinned the motorist. "Then guess the way to Marketham!" replied the yokel. Hay, hay, boys!

knew that Mr. Wodyer would withdraw into cover if he imagined that he was discovered, and then the warning could not be given.

Tom Merry slipped quietly along the terrace, and dived into the shrubbery at some distance from the drawing-room window. He knew the grounds of Glyn House well, and he turned into a path among the rhododendrons that would bring him behind the spot where the dim figure had been standing. He strode very cautiously now; he did not want to alarm the solitary Romeo.

He paused abruptly; he had caught sight of the dim figure again. There it was, crouching in the cover of the shrubs, watching the house with a stealthiness that seemed strangely out of keeping with the character of a Housemaster.

Tom Merry felt an uneasy sensation. The man's attitude was more like that of a cracksmen watching a crib he intended to crack than of a lover looking for a glimpse of his lady. The junior came on softly and tapped the stooping figure on the shoulder.

"Mr. Wodyer—"
There was a hoarse, startled cry. The figure leaped up, and in a flash a savage blow was struck, and Tom Merry staggered and fell!

There was a faint rustle in the shrubbery as the dim form fled, and Tom Merry lay stretched upon the ground. The moonlight glimmered upon his face, upturned, white, his forehead streaked with red under the thick hair.

CHAPTER 3. A Mystery!

FROM the open lighted window came the ringing chorus of the juniors.

In the shrubbery all was silent. The dimly seen watcher had fled.

Tom Merry lay motionless upon the earth.

He was insensible. The minutes passed.

The lighted window in the distance was darkened for a moment by a form, as Bernard Glyn looked out anxiously, wondering what was keeping Tom Merry in the grounds so long.

It was ten minutes before the unfortunate junior moved.

Then he stirred and groaned.

Tom Merry's eyes opened, and he sat up, his hand going unconsciously to his head.

"What—what—"

His head was reeling. He stared about him blankly. The chorus in the house had died away, and there was silence.

Slowly recollection came, and Tom Merry staggered to his feet, dizzy and sick.

Who had struck him that cowardly blow?

It could not have been Mr. Wodyer, after all, who had been crouching there in the shrubbery. Surely the Housemaster, however angry and surprised, would never have struck out in that savage manner!

But if it was not Mr. Wodyer, whom had it been?

Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl. It could only have been Arthur Wodyer. He had been surprised, alarmed, at being found there, and he had supposed, perhaps, that someone had been spying on him, and he had not meant to hit so hard.

That must be the explanation.

Tom Merry looked at his hand where it had pressed his forehead, and started. There was a glimmer of red upon his fingers in the moonlight.

He could not go back to the house in that state. He knew what amazement and inquiries would follow.

He remembered that there was a fountain in the grounds, and he made his way slowly towards the sound of tinkling waters.

He stooped over the marble basin and dipped his handkerchief into the cool water and bathed his forehead.

"Tom Merry!"

He started and swung round as his name was uttered. It was Bernard Glyn. The Shell fellow came up quickly, anxious and amazed.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What's the matter, Tom?"

Tom Merry wiped his forehead.

"I was knocked down!"

"Knocked down!" ejaculated Glyn, in blank astonishment. "By whom—Wodyer?"

"I suppose so."

"Good heavens!"

"Don't say anything about this in the house," muttered Tom Merry quickly—"not a word! He must have been surprised—excited—and he couldn't have meant to hurt me like this. Don't say a word!"

Glyn stared at him blankly.

"Why, it's horrible!" he muttered. "He must have been a brute to hit you like that. It was not like old Wodyer. Are you sure it was Wodyer?"

"Who else could it have been?"

"Hanged if I know!"

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Don't say a word about it here. I'll be all right in a minute."

"Let me bathe your forehead."

There was a cut on Tom Merry's forehead under the hair, where the hard knuckles had struck cruelly. It had ceased to bleed now, and Glyn wiped away the traces of it.

Tom Merry was very pale, but he was himself again now.

"Better get back to the house," he said. "They will be wondering."

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Glyn nodded, and they went back to the house. Figgins was singing now. He was just finishing when the juniors came in, and Blake was looking at his watch.

"Time we were off, my sons," said Jack Blake. "We shall find the gates locked at St. Jim's if we don't buck up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Glyn looked curiously at Tom Merry as he shook hands for good-bye. Quiet old gentleman as he was, he was very keen, and he could see that something had happened in the garden which the junior did not care to allude to. But he asked no questions. Edith Glyn seemed to be the only one who had noticed nothing. She said good-night to the juniors in her sweet, kind way, and they went down the drive in a cheerful party to the gates.

It was not till they were outside the gates of Glyn House that the juniors asked questions.

"Did you see Wodyer in the garden?" asked Figgins.

"I think so."

Figgins stared.

"Don't you know?" he demanded.

Tom Merry explained.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kerr. "It couldn't have been Wodyer."

"Impossible!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If it wasn't Wodyer, I don't know who it could have been," said Tom Merry. "Who else would be hanging about in the shrubberies watching the window?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"We'll see when we get back to St. Jim's," said Figgins slowly. "If it was Wodyer, we'll jolly soon find out. If he's acted in that way, we've been mistaken in him."

The juniors were very thoughtful as they walked home to St. Jim's.

The matter was a puzzle. The action was utterly unlike anything that could have been expected of handsome, kind-hearted Arthur Wodyer.

"There used to be another chap who was moony in the same way—a naval chap," Bernard Glyn remarked. "Eddie was almost engaged to him once, but it came to an end. But that chap is at sea, and—wouldn't act like that, anyway. I'm blessed if I can understand the thing at all."

They reached St. Jim's, and Taggles, the porter, snorted as he opened the gates for them. Taggles would have been pleased to report them for coming in so late, only he knew that they had passed out, to visit Glyn House.

Figgins paused to speak to the porter as the other fellows went in.

"Has Mr. Wodyer just come in, Taggles?" he asked.

"Ow should I know?" said Taggles.

"Mr. Wodyer 'as a key to the private gate, Master Figgins. 'Ow should I know?"

There was evidently no information to be had from Taggles. The juniors separated in the quadrangle, going to their respective Houses.

As Figgins & Co. entered the New House they stopped and exchanged glances.

"We ought to find out if that was Wodyer," said Figgins.

Kerr and Wynn nodded assent.

"I'll go to his study," said Figgins.

"I've got some lines to take to him, and that will make a good reason for going."

"Good egg!"

Figgins fetched his lines down from his study and knocked at Mr. Wodyer's door. There was a light

under the door, showing that the New House master was at home.

"Come in!" called out Arthur Wodyer's cheery voice.

Figgins entered.

The young Housemaster was seated at his table with a pen in his hand, but he looked up kindly at Figgins. Figgins gave him a very keen look. Arthur Wodyer was a handsome fellow, well-built and athletic. He looked the picture of health and good nature.

"I've brought my lines, sir," said Figgins awkwardly.

"Put them on the table, Figgins." Mr. Wodyer looked sharply at Figgins as the junior lingered. "Is there anything else, Figgins?"

"No—yes!" stammered Figgins.

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"That is a very curious reply, Figgins," he said. "I can see that there is something on your mind—what is it?"

Figgins flushed. He was a very bad hand at keeping a secret. Whenever there was anything on Figgins' mind it was pretty certain to be reflected in his honest, rugged face.

"We've just come home from Glyn House, sir," said Figgins.

"Yes?"

"That's all, sir."

"I hope you had a pleasant evening there, Figgins," said the Housemaster genially.

"Oh, yes, sir! Gussy sang, but it was all right otherwise."

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"I hope all are well there!" he said casually.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very good!"

"We— we thought we saw you there, sir, that's all!" blurted out Figgins, his face growing as red as a beetroot.

Mr. Wodyer knitted his brows.

"You thought you saw me there!" he said casually.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Well, you were mistaken," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I was not there. I have not been out of the school since noon. But if you had seen me there, Figgins, it would have been no business of yours. It would not have been a matter for you to take any interest in at all. You must be careful, Figgins, not to take an interest in matters that do not concern you or any junior at St. Jim's. You may go."

"Ye-e-es, sir!" stammered Figgins.

And he went.

CHAPTER 4.

A Troublesome Invalid!

TOM MERRY sat in the armchair in his study in the Shell passage in the School House. His face was a little pale, and the cut on his forehead was bleeding again slightly.

Round the broken skin a big black bruise was formed, and it hurt the junior considerably. Manners and Lowther were very sympathetic, and they persisted in regarding him as an injured person who was not to do anything, somewhat to Tom Merry's exasperation. He had all the healthy lad's dislike of being considered an invalid. The role of "lame duck" was not agreeable to him. Manners had been lighting the fire and putting the kettle on to boil, and Lowther was laying the table.

The juniors had had tea at Glyn House, and a generous and ample tea it was. But they had had a walk since then, and they considered that supper was the best thing in the circumstances.

They had done their preparation, and Lowther and Manners insisted upon Tom resting while they prepared the supper.

Lowther cut up bread for toast, remarking that buttered toast was a jolly good thing for a fellow who was not well, a statement that elicited an indignant snort from the invalid.

"Look here, you ass!" said the invalid ungratefully. "I'm quite well. A bump on the napper is nothing to grouse about, I suppose?"

Lowther shook his head solemnly. "It's a bad bump," he said.

"Oh, rats! I'm not made of putty!" growled Tom Merry. "I suppose I can stand a bump, even a bad bump, without making a fuss."

"Yes, we're going to make the fuss,"

"Bandage, you ass!" said Tom Merry. "What is it for?"

"To tie up your napper!" "Fathead!"

"Well, I must say that's grateful," said Blake.

"Ass!" "He's like that," explained Lowther.

"He won't admit that there's anything the matter with him, and that he wants looking after. Of course, we're not going to stand any nonsense of that sort."

"I should say not!" said Manners emphatically. "The silly ass is not going to have brain fever for want of attention!"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Now let me bandage it up," said Blake persuasively. "I learned first-

the invalid. "There's nothing the matter with my eye!"

"I'm not finished yet."

"Or over my ear, you ass! My ear's all right!"

"Look here! Who's tying this bandage on, you or me?" demanded Blake warmly. "Just sit still, and I'll fix you up."

Tom Merry growled. Blake finished the bandaging. He was very liberal with the bandage, winding it several times about Tom Merry's head, but he spared the eye and ear.

Tom Merry certainly looked a great deal more seriously damaged by the time he was bandaged, but Blake seemed satisfied.

"There!" he said. "Now you're all right. You can't say that your friends



"Mr. Wodyer—" began Tom Merry. But before he could say more there was a hoarse, startled cry, and the figure leaped up. Next moment a savage blow was struck, and Tom staggered back and fell unconscious!

said Manners cheerfully. "Now don't get out of that chair, or we shall have to shove you back again!"

"Wait till I've made the toast," said Lowther. "It will do you good, and some nice hot tea."

"I'm all right!" howled Tom Merry.

"Yes—yes, of course!" said Manners soothingly. "Only don't shout, or you'll make it worse."

"You ass!"

"Quiet, old man! Don't excite yourself, or it will begin to throb."

"It's throbbing now, you silly cuckoo!"

"All the more reason why you should keep quiet."

Tom Merry settled back into his chair, and growled. His head was aching, and the bump was really throbbing very painfully.

The blow had been more severe than he had thought at first.

There was a tap at the door, and Blake of the Fourth came in. Blake had a little roll in his hand, and a very curious expression upon his face.

"I've got this from Mrs. Mimms," he explained.

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bandage!"

aid in the Boy Scouts, you know, and I know how to shove a bandage on a busted napper. Lech me—"

Tom Merry reached for the poker, and Blake stepped back hastily.

"Keep off, you chump!"

"But I say—"

"Now look here, Tommy—" began Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry snorted.

"I'm not going to be bandaged up like a giddy hospital case!" he roared.

"Look here!" said Blake. "It's rotten when a chap's studied how to give first-aid to a busted napper not to give him a chance. Be reasonable."

"I'm not going to be tied up like a turkey!"

"If you don't jolly well let me tie it up, I'll go to Mrs. Mimms about it," said Blake determinedly. "And very likely she'll report it to Railton, and you'll have to go into the sanatorium for a couple of days. You know what beggars the Housemasters are for sending a chap into sanatorium if they have half a chance."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Tom Merry.

And Jack Blake triumphantly bound up the cut.

"Don't put it over my eye!" roared

are not doing their best for you when you're laid up."

"I'm not laid up!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Hush! Don't get excited!"

"Yes, do take it calmly!" urged Blake.

"You might get brain fever, you know, if you've got any brains to get it with. We're going to take proper care of you, and keep you out of the sanatorium, if we can. Gussy's bringing you in something nice for supper."

"Blow Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" It was the voice of the swell of St. Jim's at the door. "Weally, you know, that is wathah ungwateful, you know. But I suppose a chap who's laid up would be wathah watty."

Arthur Augustus deposited a parcel on the table.

"I'm all right!" growled Tom Merry. "It's only these silly asses playing the giddy goat!"

"Yaas, keep your peckah up, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "It's only wight of you to make light of it, but, of course, it's the duty of your fwients to look

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,408.

afiah you. You fellows can come in, but tread lightly."

Herries and Digby of the Fourth, looking very sympathetic, came in on tiptoe. They might have been coming into a sick chamber by their manner. Tom Merry glared at them under the ample bandage.

"What are you toddling about like that for?" he demanded. "Are you practising walking like hens on hot bricks?"

"We don't want to disturb a chap who's ill," said Herries.

"I'm not ill!"

"Hush!" said Manners.

"Fathead!"

"Is he always cross like this when he's ill?" asked Digby, looking at Manners and Lowther. "I remember Miss Fawcett said that he was always good-tempered when he had the measles, or the mumps, or whatever it was."

"If you chaps are looking for thick ears, you're going the right way to work!" growled Tom Merry. "Is any other silly idiot coming in here to play the giddy goat?"

"Pway don't take any notice of his tantwums, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus gently. "I say, look here, Tom Mewwy! I've b'wrought you a nice wabbit pie."

"And some baked potatoes," said Digby.

"And a cake," said Herries.

"Br-r-r!"

"Bettah not talk, deah boy. It may make you fevewish," said D'Arcy. "Now don't move. We'll push the table up to your chair. That's wight! Make the tea, Mannahs!"

Tom Merry glowered; but the rabbit pie was tempting, and he was hungry. He allowed himself to be helped to a generous portion. As he began his supper there was another tap at the door, and it opened, to reveal Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Figgins & Co. were looking serious.

"Tom Merry all right?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, ass!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Oh, I say—"

"He's a little peevis, deah boys; but you must expect that of an invalid," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gently.

"Sit down and make yourselves at home," said Monty Lowther hospitably. "Tom Merry mustn't talk much, as he's ill; but we ought to talk and cheer him up."

"I'm not ill, you silly ass!"

"Have you seen Wodyer?" asked Manners.

Figgins nodded.

"Yes. It's all right. He said that he wasn't out of the school this evening, so it couldn't have been he who gave Tommy that biff on the topknot."

"I suppose we can take his word?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I should wefuse to doubt anybody's word, unless I knew him to be a wottah!" said D'Arcy.

"Quite right," said Figgins. "I believe him, for one. Besides, it wasn't like him to biff a fellow for nothing. He is as straight as a die."

"I quite agwee with you, Figgay deah boy!"

Tap!

Tom Merry sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Another of 'em, I suppose!" he growled.

"Come in!" sang out Monty Lowther.

Bernard Glyn came in. He glanced at Tom Merry, and his face grew serious as he saw the bandages.

"Just looked in to see how Merry is," he remarked.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,408.

"Pretty bad," said Lowther; "but we're looking after him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm not bad!" shouted Tom Merry, starting up from his chair. "I'm all right! I'm not an invalid, and I'm not going to be treated like one!"

"Hush!"

"Sit down!"

The juniors all gathered anxiously round Tom Merry. But Tom Merry declined to sit down. He was fed up, as he would have expressed it.

He jerked a cricket stump from a shelf.

"Buzz off, all of you!" he roared.

"I'm fed up! I've had enough! I'm not going to be oddled and sympathised with! Buzz off!"

"But, I say—"

"Weally, you know—"

"Outside!"

Tom Merry brandished the cricket stump recklessly. The juniors retreated in alarm to the door.

"Hold on!"

"Chuck it!"

"Ow! Yow!"

Tom Merry, in a state of great excitement, lashed out with the stump, and the juniors had to go.

They crowded into the passage in great alarm, and Tom Merry slammed the door and locked it on the inside. Then he pitched the stump into a corner and laughed.

"I say, Tommy!" came Lowther's voice through the keyhole. "Let us in, old chap!"

"Rats!"

"But you're ill, you know!"

"I'm not ill!" yelled Tom Merry.

"And if you say I'm ill again, I'll come out there and wipe up the passage with you!"

"But I say—"

"Rats!"

And Tom Merry, deaf to remonstrating voices in the passage, whipped off Blake's bandage and threw it into the fire, and then sat down at the table to finish his supper in solitary state.

Nor did he unlock the study door again till it was time for the Shell to go to bed.

By that time his chums had made up their minds that they weren't going to pay any more sympathetic attentions to the invalid.

CHAPTER 5.

Giving Woddy the Tip!

THE next morning Tom Merry's bump was still very much in evidence, although he arranged his thick hair to cover it as much as possible from view.

The juniors had thought a great deal about that peculiar happening at Glyn House, without being able to arrive at any solution of the mystery. They had to give it up as a puzzle, though they could not help thinking about it at times. But it seemed pretty clear to their minds that it could not have been Arthur Wodyer, M.A., who the Shell fellow had surprised in the shrubbery in the moonlight.

After morning school, Tom Merry came out into the quadrangle. He knocked off Arthur Augustus' silk hat in response to an inquiry how he felt, and left the swell of St. Jim's with the impression that the invalid was still very peevis—very peevis indeed.

Monty Lowther and Manners did not inquire how he was. They caught the gleam in his eye which warned them that they had better not.

Tom Merry did not want to be an invalid; but if they made him into one, he was likely to be a very trying one.

"I wonder—" Monty Lowther began.

Tom Merry looked at him quickly. But Lowther went on:

"I wonder whether Glyn's pater will have anything to say about last evening? I know he thought that Romeo Wodyer was in the grounds there."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"I shouldn't wonder!" he said. "Glyn says he cuts up very rusty about Wodyer knowing Edith. It's rough on poor old Woddy, and it will be rotten if Glyn senior should come here to see him about it."

"Yes, rather!"

"Here's Glyn! Perhaps he knows."

The Liverpool junior joined the Terrible Three. He was wearing a troubled look. He had been gazing out of the gates of St. Jim's—perhaps with the same uneasiness in his mind that the Terrible Three were feeling.

"The pater's coming!" he said gloomily.

"Coming!" repeated Tom Merry. Bernard Glyn nodded in a glum way.

"Yes; I've just sighted his car in the road. I was afraid he would; he's coming here to see Woddy!"

Monty Lowther gave a soft whistle. "Rotten for Woddy!" he said.

"Yes. The pater comes down heavy when he comes down!" said Glyn. "I've been there—I know!"

"Suppose we were to give Woddy the tip?" Manners suggested.

Tom Merry looked very grave.

"He might take it as interfering!" he remarked.

"Glyn could do it," said Monty Lowther, "as his prospective brother-in-law."

Glyn grinned rather ruefully.

"I don't know about that," he said. "But I might. I'm sorry for Woddy!"

You see, Edie and old Woddy seem to have come to an understanding when they were in Liverpool, before they thought anything about the pater. The pater thinks that Woddy is after the millions, you know, and I'm sure he's never given them a thought. It's rotten all round! I like Woddy!"

"Then go and give him the tip!" said Tom Merry.

"I will!" said Glyn, with a sudden resolve.

He walked away to the New House. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were standing in the doorway, and they made a movement as if to surround the School House fellow. But they remembered what an excellent tea Glyn had stood them the previous evening, and they relented and did not bump him.

"Woddy in?" asked Glyn.

"Yes; in his study," said Figgins. "Thanks!"

Glyn entered the house, and tapped at the Housemaster's door. That study had been a room the juniors dreaded to enter, in the reign of Mr. Ratcliff. Under Mr. Woddy's milder sway, its terrors had vanished. But Bernard Glyn of the Shell was feeling very uneasy as he tapped at the door. He did not quite know how he would be received.

Glyn had been willing to accept Mr. Wodyer as a future brother-in-law, and to take him under his wing, so to speak—and, in fact, to give him tips generally; but Mr. Wodyer had unexpectedly developed a reserve which kept his intended fiancée's brother quite at a distance.

It surprised Bernard a little, and perhaps exasperated him. The chap ought to have been glad to have a friend at court, the junior considered, and surely his approval was worth something. He

was all ready to approve, and the Housemaster unexpectedly acted as if he didn't care whether he approved or not. It was quite enough, as Glyn confided to his friends in the Shell, to make a chap turn against him, only he was sorry for Woddy, and meant to back him up.

"Come in!" Glyn opened the door and entered. Mr. Woddyer nodded to him kindly enough, but he treated him exactly as he treated any other junior at St. Jim's. Perhaps he was afraid of being suspected of favouritism.

"Yes, what do you want, Glyn?" he asked.

Glyn did not see why Mr. Woddyer couldn't call him Bernard, in the circumstances. He had several times debated in his mind whether to call Mr. Woddyer, Arthur; but somehow or other he had never been able to make his mind up to it.

It was really too bad to have to bottle up all his friendly sentiments in this way, the junior thought, with a considerable sense of injury.

"Well, Glyn?"

"Ahem!"

"Do you want to speak to me?" asked Mr. Woddyer, with a puzzled look.

"Ahem!"

"I must ask you to come to the point, Glyn," said Mr. Woddyer, with a glance at his papers. "My time is of value."

"Certainly, sir! You see—"

"Yes," said Mr. Woddyer, more and more puzzled.

Glyn grew very red.

"The pater's coming!" he blurted out at last.

Mr. Woddyer did not move a muscle. "Are you alluding to your father, Glyn?" he asked quietly.

"Ye-es, sir."

"He is coming to the school?"

"I've just seen the car in the road, sir."

"Indeed! What has that to do with me?"

"He—he's coming—"

"To see the Head, doubtless—perhaps about you," suggested Mr. Woddyer.

Bernard Glyn started, and his flush deepened to scarlet. That possibility had not occurred to him.

"I—I don't think so, sir," he stammered.

"Indeed!"

Mr. Woddyer did not seem to be at all interested in the matter. Bernard Glyn's exasperation grew. It was too bad to be kept at armslength in this way, when he had come there specially to do Woddy a favour.

"I think he's coming to see you, sir," he blurted out.

"Indeed! I shall be very happy to see your father, Glyn," said Mr. Woddyer, without, as Glyn described it afterwards, turning a hair.

"Oh!" said Glyn.

"Have you anything else to say to me, Glyn?"

"N-no, sir," stammered the junior.

"Very well; you may go."

Bernard Glyn quitted the study with a very red face. He closed the door behind him, and murmured something under his breath. Certainly Woddy was a kind of fellow whom it was very difficult to be chummy with. Bernard Glyn began to think that Arthur Woddyer would not be so very desirable as a brother-in-law after all.

He was feeling distinctly annoyed as he emerged into the quadrangle.

"Hallo! Had your hair combed?" asked Figgins affably.

"Oh rats!" replied Glyn.

He tramped away angrily. The big

motor-car of the Liverpool millionaire had come up the drive, and stopped before the New House. It was evidently for that House that Mr. Glyn's visit was intended. The millionaire was stepping out, when he caught sight of his son, and beckoned to him.

"Bernard."

"Hallo, dad!"

"I suppose I shall find Mr. Woddyer here?" said the millionaire, with a nod towards the New House.

Bernard Glyn grinned.

"Yes; he's in his study, dad."

"Very good!"

Mr. Glyn turned away to ascend the steps of the New House.

Bernard Glyn touched him upon the sleeve.

"I say, pater—"

"Yes, my boy," said Mr. Glyn.

"Give it to him hot, pater!"

"Eh!" ejaculated the old gentleman in astonishment. "What did you say, Bernard?"

"Give it to him hot!"

And Bernard Glyn vanished before his father could ask for an explanation. The old gentleman looked after him in surprise, and then mounted the steps and entered the New House.

CHAPTER 6.

Not a Pleasant Interview!

MR. WODYER did not preserve his impassive air after Bernard Glyn had left the study.

The moment the Liverpool lad was gone the Housemaster rose to his feet, and his look of cool indifference slid like a mask from his face. He had too keen a sense of propriety to show his feelings before the junior; but his feelings were very deep, and they were very much disturbed just now.

He stepped to the window, and a shadow crossed his handsome brow as he saw the Liverpool millionaire alighting from his car in front of the New House.

"Then the visit is for me!" he muttered.

He left the window, and paced to and fro in the study, a deep wrinkle on his brow.

He did not look like the Housemaster of the New House now; and the fellows of his House would hardly have known him. He looked like what he indeed was—a young man very much in love, and anticipating with disquieted feelings a probable painful interview with the gentleman he had selected for a father-in-law.

There was a heavy footstep in the passage—a step that sounded like Mr. Glyn. It was the firm unhesitating step of the man who had made his way in the world, chiefly by his own efforts, and who didn't mean to stand any nonsense from anybody.

Mr. Woddyer felt a little quiver within him. But his voice was calm and firm as he called out "Come in!" in reply to a knock at the study door.

The House page opened the door.

"Gentleman to see you, sir—Mr. Glyn, sir!"

"Kindly step in, Mr. Glyn!"

Mr. Glyn kindly stepped in.

The page drew the door shut and departed, leaving the millionaire and the Housemaster alone.

There was a moment's pause.

Mr. Woddyer remained standing. Mr. Glyn showed no desire to sit down.

The Housemaster did not offer to

(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.).

HE GOT TIME!

Magistrate: "As regards the ownership of the eight-day clock, my decision is that the plaintiff gets the clock."

Defendant: "And what about me, your honour?"

Magistrate: "You get the eight days!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Gladstone, 22, Oakfield Road, East Ham, London, E.6.

HIS OWN BACK.

Editor: "You should construct your sentences so that the most ignorant can understand what you mean."

Aspiring Writer: "Well, what part of my manuscript don't you understand?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Edwards, 1, The Bars, Haydon Place, Guildford, Surrey.

FISHY.

Jack: "My father caught a fish as big as this street."

Joe: "It must have been a whale."

Jack: "No; he was using whales as bait!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Richardson, 18, Glebe Road, Garlinge, Margate.

WEAK.

"Anything more, sir?" asked the waiter, placing a cup of tea before the customer.

"Yes," replied the customer, looking at the tea. "Go home and get my brush, razor, and soap!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Blunt, 25, King Street, Exeter.

BACK TO LIFE.

Old Man: "Mr. Brown, my grandson works at your office, I believe?"

Mr. Brown: "Yes; he went to your funeral last week!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Bush, 18, Westminster Drive, Westcliff-on-Sea.

THAT CHANGED HIS TUNE.

The Bore: "When I used to sing on the stage crowds would storm the pay-box."

The Bored: "Why—to get their money back?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Lloyd, 35, Austin Drive, Didsbury, Manchester.

shake hands; it was pretty clear that his hand would not have been shaken by the irate old gentleman.

Mr. Wodyer broke the silence, with a faint smile curving the corners of his lips in spite of his inward misgivings.

"Good-morning, Mr. Glyn!"

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"I did not come here for polite formalities, Mr. Wodyer," he replied gruffly.

"No," said Mr. Wodyer calmly. "May I offer you a chair, sir?"

"I prefer to stand."

"Very well; please yourself, Mr. Glyn, by all means," said the master of the New House pacifically.

"I intend to do so, sir, and in more matters than one," said the millionaire grimly.

Mr. Wodyer bowed, without replying. He did not seem to think that Mr. Glyn's remark called for any reply.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Glyn, "I am going to speak to you very seriously."

Mr. Wodyer bowed again.

"Thank you!" he said. "But won't you sit down?"

Mr. Glyn had deposited his silk hat and umbrella upon the table. Upon second thoughts, he decided to sit down. The calmness of the athletic young man before him seemed somehow to disconcert the portly gentleman.

"I suppose you know why I have called, sir?" he said, as he settled himself down at last upon a chair.

Mr. Wodyer looked at him steadily.

"I will not pretend to be ignorant of your reason, sir," he replied quietly. "I presume that it is in connection with my suit for your daughter's hand."

Mr. Glyn flushed with anger.

"I refuse to admit that there is anything of the sort in existence!" he exclaimed. "Suit for my daughter's hand, by Jove! What have you to offer my daughter?"

Mr. Wodyer did not reply.

"Yourself, I suppose?" said the old gentleman sarcastically.

"Yes."

"Anything else—of higher value?"

Mr. Wodyer coloured.

"I am honest, and I love your daughter," he said calmly; "that is all I have to say for myself."

Mr. Glyn seemed a little impressed.

"Well, that is straightforward at all events," he growled. "But I suppose you admit that a penniless schoolmaster is not a suitable match for a millionaire's daughter?"

"I hope to be able to support Edie if she chooses to marry me," said Mr. Wodyer. "And I do not think that riches bring happiness. I do not even think that I should care to be a rich man, and I am sure Edith does not care for wealth."

Mr. Glyn smiled grimly.

"She may think she does not," he said. "She spends in hats more than you get in a year as your salary here."

"Perhaps she might be content to wear old hats as my wife," Mr. Wodyer suggested.

The millionaire burst into a laugh.

"Well, you are a cool young rascal!" he exclaimed, half admiringly. "If you were fitted to be a match for my daughter, I don't think I should object to you. My son speaks of you very highly, too. But—but you must see, Mr. Wodyer, that since I have become a millionaire, a very large number of young men have thought it would be easier to live on my money than to make some for themselves. I have encountered quite a number of these superfluous

young men—but I have always known how to send them about their business."

"I am glad to hear it, sir."

"And I am quite equal to dealing with one more," said the millionaire significantly.

"Then you regard me as a fortune-hunter?"

"How am I to regard a young man who has nothing, who pays court to a young lady who is heiress to a millionaire?"

"I should think that Miss Glyn herself might be sufficient reason."

"Well put," said the millionaire, again half admiringly. "But it won't do! When I found how matters were going, I told Edith it wouldn't do—and I told you so. That settled it."

"Miss Glyn has told me that she could not think of marrying without your consent, sir," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I bow to her decision. I hope some day to have a position to offer that will not be unworthy of her—and I hope to convince you that I am not a mere fortune-hunter."

The millionaire made an impatient gesture.

"It is not only that you are poor," he said. "Edith will have money enough as far as that goes. But—well, I want a son-in-law who has the right stuff in him; a man with real grit in him, sir, who will be able to take care of my daughter and her money. Prove yourself to be that kind of man, and I might consider it. But what are you—what have you done? At your present age, you are filling a post temporarily—and after that, what are your prospects?"

Mr. Wodyer flushed.

"I hope—"

"Hopes are nothing. What definite prospects have you? None! You cannot look after yourself, and you expect to be allowed to look after my daughter! It won't do, Mr. Wodyer. You must prove that you have real grit in you if you want me to think of you, even as a son-in-law; not that I'm ever likely to look upon you in that light."

"In the meantime, I must remind you of what I said at our former meeting—you are not to see my daughter—not to see meet her, I mean."

"I think that is very hard upon me, sir, but I have obeyed you."

"You have—what?"

"I have obeyed you," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I repeat that I think your decision hard upon your daughter and myself, but it was Edith's wish that I should obey you, and I have done so."

Mr. Glyn flushed angrily. "You call coming into my grounds and hanging about under the windows obeying me!" he exclaimed. "Is that your idea of keeping your word?"

Mr. Wodyer looked at him in surprise. "Certainly not," he said. "I should not regard that as keeping my word. If I have, in passing Glyn House, some- times looked up to see Miss Glyn's

window, I do not regard that as a contravention of the agreement. I have done no more than that."

"You have entered my grounds."

"That is a mistake. I have done nothing of the sort."

Mr. Glyn shook a fat forefinger at the young man.

"Do you deny that you were in the grounds of Glyn House last evening, listening to my daughter playing, and watching the drawing-room window from the shrubbery?"

Mr. Wodyer looked astonished.

"Most decidedly!" he exclaimed.

"You were not there!"



In the stillness of the night, a faint sound came as the two men looked out. It was the sound of a diamond cutting its way through glass—the sound of the cracksmen. "An!"

"I could easily prove that I did not leave the school last evening, sir, if it were necessary, but I expect you to take my word," said Mr. Wodyer coldly.

The millionaire looked at him long and hard.

"I will take your word," he said. "I cannot think that you would lie. But it is very extraordinary. There was certainly someone there, and I am assured that the juniors, who were in the room, thought that it was you."

Mr. Wodyer coloured.

"The impertinent young rascals!"

"Oh, they did not say so. I questioned Merry, but he was very reticent—so reticent that it was clear that he

had something to conceal," said Mr. Glyn. "I was certain that it was you. But if you declare that it was not, the matter is at an end, and I have come over here this morning for nothing."

"Well, it certainly was not me." "It is very extraordinary!" Mr. Glyn rose to his feet. "I will say good-morning to you now, Mr. Wodyer, and I must ask you to excuse me for having doubted you; but I certainly thought it was you in the shrubberies last evening."

"One word more, sir," said the young Housemaster. "I take it that your only objection to me as a son-in-law is on the score of money."

"And the only way—" "You had better become a millionaire," said Mr. Glyn. "Good-morning!"

And he quitted the study. Mr. Wodyer remained staring at the door that had closed behind the millionaire. Then he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and paced up and down the study.

"Rotten!" he muttered. "But I suppose it was only what I might have expected!"

He threw himself into a chair, with a wrinkled and worried expression upon his brow. It was a deep problem that he had before him—a problem that seemed too deep for the superfluous young man.

CHAPTER 7.

Glyn's Latest Invention!

"BERNARD!" "Shurrup! Don't talk!"

Bernard Glyn was in his study.

Glyn was an inventive genius, and he had made many wonderful contrivances, which had sometimes got him into trouble with the school authorities.

He was busily engaged upon an object which seemed to be chiefly composed of twisted wires and little bells, when a tap came at his door, and his sister's pretty face looked into the study.

Miss Edith frequently visited St. Jim's. She was a friend of Mrs. Holmes, the Head's wife, and she generally gave her brother a look in when she came.

But Glyn was too busy with his invention just now to attend to visitors.

"Bernard!" repeated Miss Glyn.

"Shurrup a minute, Edie! I can't leave this!"

Miss Glyn looked at the weird contrivance on the table. A wire ran from it to an electric battery on the floor.

"What is it, Bernard?" she asked, with a smile.

"Electric burglar alarm."

"Dear me!"

"New invention of mine," said Glyn proudly. "It will make quite a revolution in burglar alarms, if it works. And I think it will."

"Put it away now."

"What?" roared the youthful inventor.

"I want to speak to you, Bernard."

The inventor of St. Jim's groaned and shut off the current.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Come in—there's a chair. What's the matter, Edie? Pater in one of his tantrums at home?"

"No, Bernard," said Miss Glyn severely. "You must not speak of your father like that!"

Glyn gave a grunt.

"Well, he looked rather tantrummy this morning when he came here to that ass, Wodyer."

"You must not call a Housemaster names."

"Oh, he's only Housemaster of the New House, you know. The New House

doesn't really count. School House is chief House at St. Jim's, you know."

"I thought you liked Mr. Wodyer, Bernard," said Edith, reproachfully.

"Too much cheek," said the junior. "Bernard!"

"Well, I do like him, then," said Glyn. "He's all right. What's the matter?"

"Father came over here this morning," said Edith, in a low voice. "I am sure that he came to see Arthur—Mr. Wodyer, I mean."

"Yes, he did."

"He has not spoken to me about it," said Edith, with a look of distress. "Do you know what was the matter, Bernard?"

"I suppose it was the Romeo act," said Glyn thoughtfully.

Miss Glyn looked astonished. "The—the what?" she exclaimed.

"The Romeo act—Woddy hanging about the show, looking up at the windows, and sighing to the moon, and that sort of thing," explained the junior. Miss Edith turned crimson.

"I shall box your ears, Bernard—"

"Well, you asked me," said Bernard, backing away round the table.

"Mr. Wodyer has done nothing of the sort."

"There was somebody in the grounds last night, watching the window while you were playing," said Bernard, with a grin. "We all thought it was Woddy—and I suppose the pater tumbled. That was all."

"I am sure it was not Mr. Wodyer."

"Well, I don't know. I know he's been in the habit of passing the house and looking up, and I thought he might have come into the gates for once. That's all. But if it wasn't Woddy it was somebody. I know what the pater thought. I went in to warn Woddy when the pater was coming to-day," went on Glyn indignantly, "and he was cheeky."

"He was what?"

"Cheeky!" said Glyn obstinately. "I'm not going to stand cheek from a Housemaster, especially a blessed New House master. Look here, Edie, I don't care for Woddy as much as I did. Better chuck him!"

"What?"

"Girls can't do better than listen to their brothers' advice," said Glyn sagely. "My advice is, chuck it! There's that sailor chap who used to come mooning round—he's worth two or three of Woddy. Now, my advice is—Where are you going, Edie?"

Slam!

Miss Glyn was gone, and the study door had been closed with quite unnecessary emphasts.

Glyn stared at the door in astonishment. He did not know what there was for his sister to be excited about.

"Blessed if I shall ever understand girls," murmured the junior, very much puzzled.

And, giving up girls as an insoluble problem, Bernard Glyn turned to his invention again, and was soon deep in it, forgetting Mr. Wodyer and Edie and his father and everybody else.

He was still busy when Tom Merry came in. The bump still showed under Tom Merry's thick hair.

Glyn did not look up.

"Busy?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully. Glyn grunted.

"I've got something to say to you, Glyn, special."

"B-r-r-r-r!"

"But look here—"

"Gerrou!"

"It's important, Glyn, old man!"

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Two boys crouched by the french windows of Glyn House. It was a simple job, Badger!" whispered one. "And it will be a big haul!"

Mr. Glyn grunted. "And what that implies," he said. "I made my way in the world. I expect my son-in-law to do the same. Money is the proof of it. That's all. Not that I would not be willing to accept any other proof that you have grit in you. If you were worthy of Edith you should have her. But I don't think you are."

Mr. Wodyer smiled. "And Miss Glyn's wishes count for nothing?" he asked.

"Oh, Edith will do as I tell her."

"H'm! And if I could convince you that I am worthy of being considered, you—"

The millionaire smiled grimly.

"Then I will consider you," he said.

"Rats! Can't you see I'm busy?"
 "What's that thing?" asked Tom Merry, undisturbed.

"New thing in burglar alarms."
 "Oh, might come in useful just now!" Tom Merry remarked. "I've just come in to talk to you about burglars."

"Don't! Gerrout!"
 "Bosh!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Now, you may as well listen, as I am going to talk. It's about what happened at Glyn House last evening."

"Oh, I'm fed-up with that! I've had that from Edith!"

"But it's important. I've just seen the paper," said Tom Merry. "There have been two burglaries in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe and Wayland the last week, and the police think there is a gang of cracksmen working in the vicinity."

"Let 'em work!"
 "But—don't you see—"
 "No, I don't!"

"Now, look here, Glyn, be serious. There was a chap in the grounds of Glyn House last night watching the place. When I disturbed him in the shrubbery he struck me down. It wasn't Wodyer—we know that now—and only a rotten brute would have hit a chap like that. What was that man watching the house for, Glyn—and who was he?"

"Blessed if I know!"
 "It wasn't Wodyer—and it was some ruffianly brute," said Tom Merry. "When I heard about these burglaries the idea came into my mind at once. It was one of the cracksmen, Glyn—he was watching the house, with the idea of burgling it, and we took him for Woddy."

Glyn looked up. His interest was roused at last.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "I shouldn't wonder. If the rotters are working this neighbourhood, they wouldn't be likely to miss my pater's house—everybody knows that he's a giddy millionaire."

"That's what I was thinking of," said Tom Merry. "I think you ought to give your pater the tip. There may be nothing in it, but there may be a lot—and you ought to let your pater know, in case of accidents."

"I'll run over on my bike this evening," said Glyn. "Now, buzz off, and let me get on with my work!"

And Tom Merry laughed and quitted the youthful inventor's study.

CHAPTER 8.

An Alarm in the Night!

SILENCE reigned over the great pile of the School House.

The Shell dormitory was buried in slumber.

One of the fellows was awake—it was Tom Merry.

Perhaps it was the throbbing of the bump upon his forehead that kept him awake; perhaps the thought of the burglaries in the vicinity of the school had worked upon his mind. It was a disturbing thought that perhaps the man who had struck him down in the grounds of Glyn House was a member of the desperate gang of cracksmen who were becoming the terror of the neighbourhood.

Who they were and whence they had come the police did not know; but it was certain that the robberies that had lately taken place were not the outcome of local talent, as the Wayland inspector humorously put it. Some expert cracksmen from London, in all probability, were "working" the neigh-

bourhood; and as it seemed impossible to detect them they were not likely to rest content with the two or three robberies they had successfully performed.

Glyn House would be a rich haul if they could make it. And St. Jim's, too; it was only too probable that the school might receive a visit.

Tom Merry could not help thinking so as he lay awake in the deep, still hours of the night. His mind was uneasy from the dull throbbing of the bump on his forehead; and at night the thought of burglars, like the thought of ghosts, seemed more probable than in the daytime.

Tom Merry unconsciously found himself listening.

Glyn was fast asleep. He had ridden over to his father's house that evening and conveyed Tom Merry's warning to the millionaire; but Mr. Glyn had scoffed at the idea of an emissary of the cracksmen having been watching his house. Probably, in spite of Mr. Wodyer's denial, some suspicion lingered in the old gentleman's mind that it had been the superfluous young man.

Tom Merry listened.

More than once it had seemed to his uneasy mind that he had heard sounds that could not be accounted for by the wind and the old elm-trees. He was in a state of nerves—a very unusual state for the healthy junior.

Midnight had tolled out from the clock tower of St. Jim's, and he was still awake. Now the hour of one boomed out dully upon the still air of the night.

Boom!
 The deep sound echoed and died away.

Tom Merry turned his head upon the pillow. But slumber refused to come. His eyes opened again and sought the glimmering square of the moonlit window.

Deep and steady breathing proceeded from the other beds in the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry was the only fellow who was awake, and he felt a strange sense of solitude.

Suddenly he started.

Amid the faint sounds of the night there had come another sound. He was sure of it this time.

He sat up in bed, every nerve in his body tingling with suppressed excitement, his ears strained to listen.

What was it that he had heard?

He could hardly tell; but he felt that it was something unusual—a dim sound that had come to his ears in the silence. He did not hear it again—or he could not be sure; but he stepped quietly out of bed and hastily drew on his clothes. He did not wake the other fellows. If he had been mistaken there was no need to disturb them, and he shrank from the possibility of being thought nervous.

He stepped softly to the door of the dormitory, and opened it without a sound.

A chill draught blew along the passage. Dim bars of moonlight fell into the passage from the high window at the end.

Tom Merry left the dormitory quietly and drew the door shut behind him. He moved along to the staircase on tiptoe. He paused there and listened again.

His heart was beating violently. From the darkness below came a low sound—a sound that he found it hard to recognise at first—a faint, grinding sound as of a hard instrument upon glass.

After a few moments' pause he stepped quietly down the stairs, listening intently as he went. He reached

the Lower Hall of the School House, and stopped before the window that looked out into the porch by the steps. The blind was down, and only a faint streak of moonlight came under it and formed a straggling bar on the floor.

The sound came from the window; and he knew now what it was. It was a diamond grinding a slow, sure passage through the glass—a diamond in a strong and steady hand without.

The junior shivered.

Someone, kneeling on the window-sill outside, was working away at the glass, to remove a fragment of it, to allow a hand to be inserted to unfasten the catch.

He knew that now; and he remained for a moment, undecided. As he stood, with tense ears and strained nerves, he heard a faint crack, and he knew that a piece of glass had been taken out.

The blind rustled faintly.

He heard a slight sound, and then the creaking of the moving catch. Thievish fingers had been inserted in the opening, and were holding the catch, and in a minute more the window would be open.

Tom Merry was standing close by a chair in the Hall, and his hand rested upon it to steady himself.

A sudden thought came into his mind, and he grasped the chair with both hands and raised it in the air.

His eyes were gleaming, and his nerves were steady now. He raised the chair above his head, and stood ready.

There was a slithering sound as the spring blind was gently raised by the hand from without, and a flood of moonlight fell into the Hall from the uncovered window.

In the square of the window a kneeling form was visible on the sill, and he could see the head of a second man standing without.

The burglar on the window-sill knelt there listening. Tom Merry could hear his low, hurried breathing.

In another moment he would have leaped down into the House.

But in that moment the junior acted. Whiz!

Right at the window the heavy oaken chair flew; and the next instant there was a heavy crash of breaking glass, a wild yell, and a heavy fall in the quadrangle without.

The window was clear, and the jagged glass showed up in the moonlight. The cracksmen had disappeared.

Outside savage muttering was heard, subdued curses.

"Help!"
 Tom Merry shouted at the top of his voice.

His shout rang through the silent School House, echoing along the empty passages with a sound like thunder.

"Help! Help!"

A face—white, furious, with a red splash across the cheek—glared in at the window. It was the face of the cracksmen who had been hurled from the window by the flying chair. It seemed as if the ruffian, in his rage, would clamber in, although the alarm was now given.

Tom Merry's heart turned cold within him.

But he did not retreat. He shouted again. And now doors were opening and voices were calling above stairs.

"Help!" shouted Tom Merry. "Burglars! Help!"

A hand from without fell upon the cracksmen's shoulder, and he was dragged away by his comrade.

Tom Merry heard a muttering voice. "Don't be a fool, Badger! Cut for it!"

The cracksmen disappeared again.

Tom Merry heard the hurried sound of retreating footsteps in the quadrangle. He shouted again:

"Help!"
"What is it? Who is it?"
It was Mr. Railton's voice on the stairs. The master of the School House was hurrying down, half-dressed.

"Is that you, Merry? What has happened?"

"Burglars, sir!" Tom muttered huskily.

"Good heavens!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Hero of the Hour!

LIGHTS were gleaming in the School House now; voices called and shouted.

Kildare of the Sixth came dashing downstairs.

Mr. Railton was already at the window, looking out. He caught a glimpse of two shadowy figures in the moonlight, but they vanished in a moment.

"What is it, sir?" asked Kildare.

Mr. Railton had turned on the electric light, and the Hall was flooded with it. It showed up Tom Merry's face, white and strained.

"Burglars!" said Mr. Railton quietly. "Open the door, Kildare. They have not got away yet, and there may be a chance—stay where you are, Merry!"

Mr. Railton and Kildare dashed into the quadrangle together. Taggles' voice could now be heard across the quad, and the barking of his mastiff. There was a loud, furious barking from the dog, and Mr. Railton ran up and found the mastiff dashing up and down excitedly by the school wall. It was easy to guess that that was the way the cracksmen had gone.

"They've gone, sir!" said Kildare.
"Yes!" said the Housemaster shortly.
"Nothing to be done, then?"
"No, not to-night!"

The whole school was in an uproar now. Half the fellows in the School House were down, half-dressed, and lights blazed in the windows of the New House across the quad. The door of the New House opened, and Mr. Wodyer came out in his shirt and trousers.

"What is the matter?" he called out.
"Burglars!" said Mr. Railton. "But they have escaped."

"By Jove! How was the alarm given?"

"Merry appears to have come down—I do not understand it yet."

Mr. Railton and Kildare returned to the School House, and the New House master accompanied them.

Tom Merry was the centre of a crowd of amazed and inquiring seniors and juniors.

"How did this happen, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry panted.

"I heard a noise, sir—I was awake—and I came down to see what it was. I had been reading about the cracksmen burgling near Wayland."

"And you found them getting in?"

"Yes, sir. They had cut out a piece of glass in the window, and got it open, and I buzzed the chair at them, sir, and knocked down the chap who was on the sill."

"It was very plucky of you, Merry. Bless my soul, the House might have been robbed without any of us waking up!" said the Housemaster.

"I suppose you are quite sure they were burglars, Merry?" said Kildare

doubtfully. "It wasn't a case of nerves? I saw nothing."

"Quite sure, Kildare. I saw them!"

"I saw two shadows in the quadrangle," said Mr. Railton. "And you can see that the window is open—it was wide open when the chair struck it. And there is blood on the sill."

There was no doubt about that. Either the chair or the broken glass had cut the cracksmen, and he had left the tell-tale stains on the stone of the window-sill. There could be no doubt on the subject.

The Head had appeared on the scene now. He heard the account of what had happened very gravely, and praised Tom Merry warmly.

"It is a pity the scoundrels were not caught," he said, "but I am only too glad that they have gone without doing damage. You might have been hurt, Merry. I wish you had given the alarm instead of coming down alone."

"I wasn't sure I heard anything, sir, till I came down and found them at the window," said Tom Merry. "Then—then I thought that anything was better than letting the brutes get into the House."

"Yes, yes, assuredly! I suppose you did not see them clearly enough to be able to give any description to the police?"

"No, sir; they were very shadowy. But one of them called the other by name, sir. I heard that. He called him Badger."

"Very good," said the Head. "That may be a clue for the police. Return to your dormitory now, Merry; you have done very well—very well indeed!"

Manners and Lowther linked arms with their chum to march him back to the dormitory.

Mr. Wodyer, who had been looking keenly at Tom Merry, made him a sign to pause.

"The burglars did not touch you, Merry?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"You have a bad bruise on your forehead. I thought, perhaps—"

Tom Merry's hand went to the bruise, and he coloured. He could not help thinking just then of his first impression that it was the hand of the New House master that had caused that bump.

"Oh, that was done yesterday evening, sir!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Wodyer. "An accident?"

"I had a knock, sir."

"It must have been a hard knock," said Mr. Wodyer. "You were at Glyn House yesterday evening. I understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

The New House master said no more. There was a sudden call from Darrell of the Sixth, who had gone outside the window with a torch in his hand to look for traces of the burglars. He had thought that in their confusion the ruffians might have left something behind them that would afford a clue, and he was right.

"Look here, sir!"

The Head and Mr. Railton hurried to the window.

"Have you found anything, Darrell?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Yes, sir, these!"

Darrell handed in two objects. "One was a burglar's diamond, evidently the one Tom Merry had heard grinding

through the pane. The other caused a start and thrill of excitement as it was seen. It was a six-chambered revolver, and Mr. Railton, as he took it and glanced at it, said quietly:

"Loaded!"

Tom Merry caught his breath.

He realised now what a fearful risk he had run, and as he remembered that the injured ruffian had been about to clamber into the window when his more prudent companion dragged him back, he shuddered.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "You've had a nawvwow escape, deah boy!"

Tom Merry was quite pale as he went up to the dormitory with the juniors.

Manners and Lowther glared at him in the Shell dorm.

"You ass!" said Lowther. "What do you mean by going down without waking us?"

"I wasn't sure—"

"Oh, rats!" said Manners. "Bosh! You ought to have woke us up, in any case."

"Of course!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "You boulder, keeping a thing like this to yourself! You might have got potted with that revolver!"

"You've had a jolly narrow escape," said Bernard Glyn.

Tom Merry shivered a little.

"I know I have," he said. "It makes me feel sick now. The chap who was cut was going to clamber in, and the other stopped him. I don't know what would have happened if he'd got inside—he seemed mad with temper."

"No wonder, after being biffed like that," said Gore. "Lucky for you he didn't pot you from the window, as it was."

"And you didn't recognise him in any way?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"No; but—but—"

"But what?"

"As I saw him kneeling by the window-sill it came into my mind that he looked like the man I saw kneeling in the shrubbery at Glyn's pater's place last evening."

"My hat!" said Glyn.

"Of course, it was only an impression," said Tom Merry slowly. "I suppose a man kneeling in the dark looks much like another chap in the same way. But the idea came into my head."

"Phew!" said Glyn. "I'll get my new burglar alarm fixed up at home to-morrow, if I can get the pater to agree to it. He doesn't seem to care much for my inventions about the house; he seems to consider they ought to be kept here in my study."

"No wonder!" grinned Lowther.

"Oh, rats!" said Glyn. "I'll jolly well jaw him into letting me fix this up at home, anyway."

The Shell fellows returned to bed, but it was a long time before they slept. Into the small hours of the morning they remained talking in subdued tones of the attempted burglary, and the dawn was creeping in at the windows of the dormitory before they were asleep.

(Continued on the next page.)

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CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Wodyer's Warning!

THERE was only one topic in St. Jim's the following morning—the attempted burglary of the previous night.

Tom Merry was the hero of the hour. The police visited St. Jim's early in the morning, and Tom Merry was interviewed by the inspector from Wayland—and a detective. He told them all he knew, and they made a note of the name he had heard, which appeared to interest them very much.

Tom Merry gathered that "Badger" was a nickname known to the police as that of a well-known cracksmen.

The inspector took the revolver and the burglar's diamond away with him, and both the visitors departed looking very wise and serious, expressing no doubt whatever that they would soon lay the two scoundrels by the heels. But no news came to St. Jim's during the day of any arrest, and the juniors took the liberty of doubting whether the police were as sure of making one as they supposed.

Figgins & Co., of course, came over to hear the whole story, along with a crowd of New House fellows.

Tom Merry had to relate his experience again and again, and after morning school he was called upon for fresh recitals, till he began to weary of the subject. There was only one fellow who was not talking about it, and that was Bernard Glyn.

The inventor of St. Jim's was spending every spare moment in his study, perfecting the wonderful invention which was to make burglaries impossible—or so he hoped. Glyn's inventions did not always turn out as the inventor intended.

After dinner, Redfern of the Fourth, the New House junior, came over to see Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three were chatting in the Hall, where a glazier was busy mending the window which had been shattered by the Shell leader in the night.

Redfern came in cheerily, and nodded to the chums of the Shell.

Tom Merry held up his hand warningly.

"Shut up!" he said, before Redfern had a chance to speak.

The junior looked astonished.

"Eh? What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"No more."

"No more what?"

"No more jaw about the burglary," said Tom Merry. "The subject's done in. I haven't any more items to give, and I'm tired to death of it. Keep off the grass!"

Redfern laughed.

"I wasn't going to ask you about your giddy exploit as a window-smasher," he said. "I've got a message for you."

"Oh! Some other ass wants to know about it—eh?"

"I don't know," grinned Redfern. "The ass who sent me over is our Housemaster, Woddy, and he wants to see you in his study."

Tom Merry grunted.

"Oh dear! It means the whole history again from the beginning, I suppose! Go back and say I'm ill!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better say he's dead," said Monty Lowther; "that will make sure."

"Oh, come, and don't play the giddy ox," said Redfern. "You are a giddy hero, and you are getting your laurels now."

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"Blow the laurels!" growled Tom Merry.

But he walked over to the New House with Redfern.

Bernard Glyn was just wheeling his bicycle down to the gates, and they stopped to speak to him. The inventor of the Shell was looking a little tired, but very well satisfied with himself.

"Finished?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," said Glyn. "I'm going over to see the pater now, and to get him to consent to having a burglar alarm fitted up at home. I shall get Mr. Linton to let me off lessons this afternoon to fix it up there, if the pater agrees."

And he mounted his bicycle and pedalled off to Glyn House.

Tom Merry went into the New House smiling. He knew that Glyn senior objected to his son's inventions on his own premises, and he did not think that Bernard Glyn would get the necessary permission to instal his fearful and marvellous contraption under the parental roof.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Wodyer, as Tom Merry knocked at his door.

The School House junior entered the study. The master of the New House greeted him very genially, but there was a troubled and thoughtful expression upon his face, which Tom Merry could not help noticing.

"Sit down, Merry," said Mr. Wodyer. "I want to speak to you about what happened last night."

Tom Merry tried not to make a grimace.

"Yes, sir," he said, as he sat down dutifully.

Mr. Wodyer looked at him curiously, and Tom Merry knew that he was scanning the bump on his forehead. It had gone down a little in size, but it was still quite visible.

"I want you to be quite frank with me, Merry," said Mr. Wodyer, after a pause. "The evening before last you were at Glyn's house with a party of juniors from here?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, in some trepidation.

"There was someone in the gardens watching the house, and you supposed, for some reason best known to yourself, that it was me."

Tom Merry coloured, and was silent.

"I'm not angry with you," said the Housemaster quietly; "but I learned this from Mr. Glyn, who called upon me yesterday."

"I did not tell him so, sir."

"No; he seems to have gathered it from you without your telling him," said Mr. Wodyer. "You saw someone in the grounds watching the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"You thought it was I?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Tom Merry.

"I will not ask your reason," said Mr. Wodyer, with a faint colour showing in his cheeks for a moment. "But it was about the same time that you received the blow that caused that very bad bruise, Merry. How did it happen? I want to know all about it."

There was no help for it, and Tom Merry explained.

Mr. Wodyer listened attentively. His brows were contracted a little when Tom Merry finished.

"Surely, Merry, you could not think that, if it had been myself, I would have acted in such a cruel and brutal way?" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Well, I know it wasn't you, sir," he said. "But—but I didn't know what to think. I had felt certain it was you, and I crept out to give you the tip, and—and then it happened. We talked it over, and we felt that it couldn't have

been you, sir, and when I heard about the burglars in the neighbourhood, sir, I thought it was very likely one of the cracksmen spying out before trying to rob the place."

Mr. Wodyer started.

"Ah! You suspected that, too?" he exclaimed.

"Then you thought of it?" asked Tom Merry.

"It came into my mind, certainly, after what had happened last night, and that is why I wished to know all about it from you," said the Housemaster.

"I told Glyn, sir, and he warned his father, but I don't think Mr. Glyn thinks anything about it," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Wodyer nodded.

"Do you think that the man you saw in the grounds of Glyn House, Merry, might have been one of the rascals who attempted to enter the School House last night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I feel sure that it was the man I saw on the window-sill."

"Very good. Thank you, Merry! You may go."

Tom Merry quitted the study.

Mr. Wodyer remained buried in deep thought. After some time, he moved to his table, dipped his pen in the ink, and wrote.

The letter he wrote was to Mr. Glyn, and it ran:

"Dear Sir,—There is every reason to believe that the man who was in your grounds the night before last was a confederate of a gang of cracksmen who have been disturbing this neighbourhood lately. In my mind there is no doubt upon the subject. You will have heard about the attempted burglary here last night, and that one of the villains dropped a loaded revolver in his flight. In the circumstances, I take the liberty of suggesting that you should take every precaution at Glyn House, as the gang are undoubtedly still in the neighbourhood; and in case of an attempt upon Glyn House, there might be danger for one whose safety must be as precious to you as to me."

Mr. Wodyer read over the letter, signed it, and enclosed it in an envelope. Then he called Redfern of the Fourth into the study.

"Will you take this note to Mr. Glyn, at Glyn House, for me, Redfern?" he asked. "I will excuse you if you are late for class in return."

"Certainly, sir!" said Redfern cheerfully.

He departed with the note. He had not returned by the time the bell rang for afternoon lessons, and the Fourth went into their Form-room minus Redfern.

Bernard Glyn came in just in time to go in with the Shell, and Tom Merry met him at the door of the Shell-room, and found him looking very discontented.

"Going to fix the alarm up at home?" he asked.

Glyn snorted.

"The pater won't have it at any price," he said.

"Hard cheese!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "I suppose he thinks it might go off at any minute, or explode, or something?"

"Oh, rats!" said Glyn. "It's simply a ripping invention. But the pater is obstinate. You know what these blessed paters are. They won't listen to reason. So I cleared!"

Meanwhile, Redfern returned from

Glyn House. He brought a letter for Mr. Wodyer, which he handed to him in the Fourth Form Room, and then went to his place.

Mr. Wodyer opened the letter and read it, and his brows came darkly together. The millionaire's reply to his warning note was very brief, and very much to the point.

"Sir,—I am quite capable of looking after my own property, and after my own family in every way. Yours truly.—R. GLYN."

The word "every" was underlined. Mr. Wodyer bit his lips. He thrust the letter into his pocket, and the lessons went on in the Fourth Form Room. But there was a cloud upon the master for the remainder of the afternoon.

CHAPTER 11.
Mysterious!

"POOR old Woddy!"

It was Tom Merry who made the remark, as the Shell fellows strolled out of the School House after morning lessons a day or two later.

Mr. Wodyer had come out of the Fourth Form Room and crossed the quadrangle to the New House.

The chums of the Shell, who felt very friendly towards the New House master, could not help noticing how pale and out of sorts he looked. He looked as if he had passed a very sleepless night.

"Yes, he does look seedy," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Poor old chap!" said Manners. "This is what comes of being in love. Keep off the grass, my young friends—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Gussy's the only one who's ever been in love. But he never looked so bad as Woddy about it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" began the swell of St. Jim's, who was standing on

the steps of the School House, and overheard the remark. "I must say—"

"I remember Gussy being off his feed," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "It used to keep him awake at night, as bad as—as tummy ache—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"That's all right, Gussy," said Glyn. "But Woddy does look bad, really. Upon the whole, I'm going to overlook his cheek, and take him up more carefully."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's your pater," said Monty Lowther.

"The pater's as hard as nails," said Glyn obstinately. "You should have seen him when I spoke about that burglar alarm—and he's more obstinate about poor old Woddy. And Woddy's true blue, you know, only the pater won't believe it, as he's got nothing to show for it."

"I am afraid your patah looks upon the mattah in a somewhat commercial spiwit, Glyn, deah boy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy observed. "I weally considah that it might do some good if I give him a talkin' to—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Woddy would jump on your neck if you interfered," said Glyn. "You should have seen how rusty he was to me when I tried to be nice to him, and I'm Edith's brother. But—"

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry, as the chums of the New House came out. "You're not looking after your giddy Housemaster. Woddy wants bucking up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins grinned ruefully.

"He does look off colour, doesn't he?" he remarked. "He seems quite to have gone off his feed, you know. He was awfully absent-minded in class this morning, and he fell asleep over the maths."

"No wonder! Mathematics make me sleepy," said Blake feelingly.

"But it shows he's queer," said

Figgins. "Fancy a Form-master falling asleep over a lesson, you know! Shows he's in a bad way."

"Yaas, wathah! He wants buckin' up somehow!"

They were all very much concerned about the popular young master, though it is extremely doubtful whether Arthur Wodyer, M.A., would have appreciated their sympathy if he had known about it.

"It's simply rotten," said Kerr thoughtfully. "Woddy is a ripping chap. He's such a change after old Ratty as a Housemaster, you know, that we can't help liking him. I don't like to see him going off colour like this."

"He hasn't much appetite, either," said Fatty Wynn, in a tone of deep feeling. "When a chap begins to go off his feed, you know, there's something radically wrong."

"We ought to back him up, somehow," said Redfern.

The juniors all agreed to that. School House and New House agreed cordially that Mr. Wodyer was a ripping chap, and that he ought to be backed up. But it was not quite clear what his friends in the Lower School of St. Jim's could do to help him.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn strolled away together. As New House fellows, they regarded Mr. Wodyer as being, to some extent, under their special protection.

Figgins & Co. had been on the worst of terms with their late Housemaster, Mr. Ratcliff, but Arthur Wodyer had been very kind to them from the beginning, and they liked him very much. It was much more comfortable for them to have him in the New House, in the place of the gentleman whom they generally alluded to disrespectfully as "old Ratty." And, taking such an interest in him, it was natural that they should be concerned about him.

"I wouldn't say anything about it before the School House chaps," said Figgins, in a low voice. "Least said soonest mended. But I'm afraid Woddy



As the cracksman grappled with Mr. Wodyer, his hand slid into his pocket and came out with a revolver in it. The schoolmaster grasped his opponent's wrist, but next moment there were two deafening reports. "Hang you!" exclaimed the Badger. "Take that!"

is taking this very much to heart; and he's not going the right way about it." "Missing his meals, do you mean?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No, something more serious than that!"

"But there isn't anything more serious than that!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in astonishment.

Figgins sniffed.

"Look here, I got it from Taggles," he said. "You know how Taggles jaws. Woddy goes out of a night."

"What!" ejaculated Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"It's a fact," he said. "You know the masters have keys to the side gate, and let themselves in. But Taggles hears them, if he's awake; and ever since the burglars came here, he's had his dog loose of a night. The mastiff always barks when the gate's opened, and Taggles has seen Woddy two or three times coming in in the early hours of the morning."

"Phew!"

"It's jolly serious," said Figgins. "A master has no right to go out every night, and stay away practically all night. The Head would be ratty about it if he knew. Of course, we shan't say a word; but Taggles is bound to jaw. It will get out, and it will get Woddy into trouble. As a matter of fact, it isn't quite respectable."

"But what does he do?" asked Fatty Wynn in amazement.

Figgins shook his head.

"Ask me another," he said. "It looks as if he's taking to a wild life, to drown his troubles, you know; but—"

"Woddy's not that kind of bounder," said Kerr decidedly.

"Well, no, I don't think he is," agreed Figgins. "But what the dickens does he go out every night, and all night for?"

"The giddy Romeo act, perhaps," said Fatty Wynn. "Watching the light in the lady's window, you know, and all that."

"But Miss Glyn can't keep a light burning all night, for a giddy ass to watch from the road," said Kerr, laughing.

"Ambling up and down the lanes, perhaps, making up poetry," said Wynn. "I remember Gussy used to make up poetry when he was in love—rot about moon and boon, and light and night, you know."

"Woddy isn't that sort of idiot, either," said Figgins. "I don't catch on to it myself, but I only hope that Woddy won't get into trouble."

And Figgins looked very serious and thoughtful as he went in to dinner. Dinner was served in the dining-room of the New House, and all the fellows came in, but one person was absent—the Housemaster.

Monteith, the prefect, called to Figgins.

"Go to Mr. Woddy's room and tell him dinner's ready, Figgins."

"Yes, Monteith."

Figgins hurried to the Housemaster's room. He knocked at the door, but there was no reply from within.

Figgins knocked again and opened the door. Mr. Woddy was sitting at his table, and his arms rested upon it. His head had fallen upon his arms, and he was fast asleep.

Figgins stood for some moments undecided, listening to the heavy, steady breathing of the Housemaster. But it would never do to return to Monteith and tell him that the Housemaster was asleep during the middle of the day; it would excite too much curiosity.

Figgins touched Mr. Woddy gently upon the shoulder.

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Mr. Woddy started at his touch, and lifted his head drowsily. He saw Figgins, and straightened up at once, frowning.

"Figgins! What—"

"Dinner's ready, sir!"

Mr. Woddy rose to his feet, flushing deeply.

"Dear me!" he said. "I—I must have fallen asleep. Thank you, Figgins!"

Figgins hurried away.

Mr. Woddy rubbed his eyes and looked into the glass, and rubbed them again, blinking in a tired way.

"This won't do!" he murmured. "Hang it! But—but there's no help for it. The old man is silly and obstinate. I shall have to be careful."

Mr. Woddy went very thoughtfully into the dining-room.

CHAPTER 12.

Grit!

"**N**ONSENSE!"

Mr. Glyn uttered that expressive word in a tone of finality.

Dinner was over at Glyn House. Dusk had fallen on the wide gardens and shrubberies, and was deepening into night.

Bernard Glyn of the Shell had dined at home that evening, having permission from his Housemaster; and he was sitting in a corner of the long drawing-room, wishing that some of his chums were with him, when his father's voice disturbed his reading.

He looked up from his book, and glanced across sympathetically at his sister.

Edith was silent and a little pale. She had been speaking in a low tone when her father silenced her with that remark.

Glyn rose and put his book down, and strolled out on to the terrace with his hands in his pockets. He was going to stay the night at his home, and return to St. Jim's in the morning, as he sometimes did.

He had a workshop in the house, and he often occupied himself there with contrivances that were too expensive for the study at St. Jim's. At his home his inventions had to be kept strictly within the limits of his workshop.

"Poor old Edie!" he murmured, as he strolled out upon the terrace. "Fancy trying to reason with the gov'nor! Only a girl would think it possible. I may as well leave them to fight it out."

Edith Glyn glanced round as her young brother disappeared through the french windows.

Mr. Glyn settled himself back in his chair, and selected a cigar from his case. When he was in a bad temper Mr. Glyn smoked cigars in the drawing-room as a sort of warning to the household generally that his anger was to be feared. He lighted his cigar and snorted.

Edith looked at him.

"Father—"

"Nonsense!"

The girl smiled a little.

"But won't you let me speak?" she said. "It is very hard of you not to let me see Arthur!"

"Nonsense! What's the use of seeing him, when it is impossible for anything to come of it? Why couldn't you be satisfied with a naval officer, for instance?"

Edith coloured.

"But I really care for Arthur," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"There is nothing against him—"
"And nothing in his favour!" growled the millionaire. "Impertinent young puppy, to think that he could marry a millionaire's daughter! Ugh!"

"He would care for me just as much if I were poor," said Edith.

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"Possibly," he said. "I don't doubt that he is very fond of you. Even your old father is fond of you, though you bother him to death with your nonsense. But—"

"And Arthur is not so very poor. He is in a very good position now," said Edith. "He will probably remain a Housemaster at St. Jim's."

"And you could become a Housemaster's wife and look after the House accounts, and see clean linen served out to the boys, and so forth, after what you've been used to," said Mr. Glyn sarcastically.

"Yes; I think I should be very happy. Arthur does not want your money, father, and he is able to look after a wife. I think it is very cruel that mere money should come between me and happiness!"

"Mere money! Wait till you can't afford to buy a new summer hat!" growled the millionaire. "Women are always ready to face poverty—till poverty comes! But it isn't the money. If there were anything in that young man, if he had any real grit, I shouldn't object. You have money enough, goodness knows! It isn't a question of money. You want a man for a husband—a man who can do things, not a popinjay in a Master-of-Arts gown, with no ideas in his head above Greek irregular verbs, and no courage for anything better than a game of football!"

"I am sure Arthur is quite able to distinguish himself if he had any opportunity," said Edith, "but—"

"He should make an opportunity, then. I did."

"But we cannot all be millionaires, father. There would not be enough money to go round," said Edith, smiling.

"I don't ask him to become a millionaire, but to do something to show that there's some quality in him. All he's done is to write me an idiotic note about danger from burglars. I'm an old man, but I'm not afraid of burglars. He's a young man, and he's as nervous as an old hen," growled the millionaire.

"But it would be only prudent to take precautions—"

"Prudence! When I was a young man I wasn't thinking of prudence. Young men in our days are too prudent; I prefer a little courage."

And Mr. Glyn tossed his half-smoked cigar into the fire and walked out of the room to cut short the argument.

Edith Glyn sighed.

"It's no good, Edie," said Bernard, looking in at the window. "The gov'nor's a giddy mule—simply a mule. I've tried to reason with him, and it won't work. I've had to give up my burglar alarm, and you'll have to give up Woddy."

"Don't be silly, Bernard; go to bed."

"All right. Good-night, old girl! But you'll see the gov'nor will never be reasonable. Unless," Glyn added thoughtfully, "I could make some invention for doing it by electricity."

Edith smiled.

"Good-night, Bernard!"

Glyn went to bed. Glyn House was an early household, and by half-past eleven there was not a light burning. Edith Glyn looked from her window

(Continued on page 22.)



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! A nice point about most of the letters of congratulation I am receiving from you is that you are all recommending the GEM to your pals. That's great! Personal recommendation, of course, is the best way to help your favourite paper. After that it rests with the paper to turn the non-reader into a regular reader. And I'm sure the new GEM can do this—once its splendid qualities have been made known to non-readers. If your friend has any doubt about this, just lend your copy of the GEM to him. That will convince him, sure enough.

Talking about recommending reminds me that next Wednesday's story programme is one that has my fullest praise. There's a bright and breezy St. Jim's yarn entitled:

"GLYN'S LINE-WRITER!"

It features the latest and most amazing invention of Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor. Glyn has made all sorts of weird and wonderful things since he came to St. Jim's, but his line-writer caps the lot. It can roll out impots by the thousand in exactly the handwriting of any junior! It's a boon and a blessing to the juniors of St. Jim's who are in the know. It is, of course, kept secret, for such an invention would have a short life indeed if the authorities learned of its existence! And don't Tom Merry & Co. enjoy themselves! Lines shower upon them, but what do they care so long as Glyn's line-writer can "do its stuff"? This lively long yarn will hold your interest from first line to last.

"THE SCHOOLBOY BRONCO-BUSTER!"

Frank Richards' great yarns of "The Packsaddle Bunch" are causing a big sensation among readers, and it was a grand scoop for the GEM when this popular but very busy author's splendid services were obtained. His next yarn of the cow town schoolboys is another winner. When Steve Carson, the bully, buys a handsome pinto pony he is the envy of all the Packsaddle boys, especially Dick Carr, the only one who doesn't possess a horse. But he is not so envied when the pinto turns out to be a fiery buck-jumper—a horse which obeys no one but the crooked horse-dealer who sold him to Steve. Yet that buck-jumper is to play a big part in the further adventures of Dick Carr in the Wild West.

For thrills it would be hard to beat the next gripping chapters of our best-loved St. Frank's serial, "The Secret World!" The popular Handforth is well in the limelight, and you can be sure of fireworks when he's to the fore! Lord Dorrmore's party are in an unhappy position as prisoners of the Northeistriens, but Handy can help them if he defeats a powerful foe in deadly combat with spiked clubs! You will simply revel in this big-thrill instalment, which, with our usual prize-winning jokes, and other bright

PEN PALS COUPON

9-2-35



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

B. Wilson, 302, West Derby Road, Tue-Brook, Liverpool 13, wants pen pals in New Zealand, South America, South Africa, and the Gold Coast.

Alan Beech, 21, Carlton Road, Salford 6, Lancs, wants correspondents in British Empire and Greece; stamps; age 13-16.

Hugh Brown, 98, Cumming Drive, Mt. Florida, Glasgow, wants correspondents.

George Eve, 366, Valence Avenue, Dagenham, Essex, wants a correspondent in the North of England; age 15-16; cricket, football.

Charles A. Moorrees, c/o J. F. Stadler, Lower Dorp Street, Stellenbosch, Cape Province, South Africa, wants correspondents; age 15-17.

Gordon Clark, 107, St. Philip Street, Battersea, London, S.W.8, wants a pen pal interested in music; violin preferred.

features, completes our next wonderful number. Don't forget to order early, chums.

THE WHITE FEATHER.

"Why is the white feather a symbol of cowardice?" asks Jack Boyne, of Peckham, in his letter to me. The white feather originated, as a matter of fact, in a brave action many years ago when the Redskins used to raid lonely settlements in North America. Many of the people of a settlement, hearing that the Redskins were on the warpath and likely to attack fled for safety. But the Quakers, members of a religious sect founded by George Fox in 1624, remained behind to face the foe. The Indians eventually did attack, but they were met bravely by the unarmed Quakers. It was a shock for the Redskins, but it undoubtedly saved the lives of those Quakers. Their leader explained to the Indians that their religion forbade them to fight. The Redskin chief thereupon handed the Quaker some white feathers, explaining that if one was placed in a prominent position on a house in which Quakers dwelt it would not be attacked. So the white feather became a symbol of safety, behind which, in later years, cowards also sought security, until now it has become accepted solely as a token of cowardice.

A CUTE CANINE.

A dog that is cute enough to go to the post office and fetch his own dog licence! Such is Gyp, of Calver, Derbyshire, who is "all there" when it comes to intelligence. His owner sent him to the post office with a ten-shilling note for a new licence, and he returned with the licence and the half-a-crown change. Gyp is a sheepdog, but he can look after chickens, too, and promptly separates two when they get "scrapping." He will also fetch any article that is required by his master. A useful dog to have about the house is Gyp.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Mrs. Bloggins: "How is your son getting on with the violin?"

Mrs. Sloggins: "Oh, we can tell now when he is playing and when he is tuning-up!"

THE EDITOR.

Miss Alice Hunt, 79, Gateford Road, Worksop, Notts, wants girl correspondents; age 15-17; films, books, sports.

Wilfred Turner, 12, Byron Street, Cambridge, via East London, South Africa, wants correspondents; age 10-14; stamps and the "Magnet."

B. van Raalte, Box 135, Bethlehem, Orange Free State, South Africa, wants pen pals in South America, Canada, Europe, India; age 11-14.

Bernard Haughey, 28, Craig Street, Miles Platting, Manchester 9, wants pen pals in the British Empire, U.S.A., South America, etc.; age 16-20; sport, films, cricket.

Jerry Ryan, 8, Lambeth Place, St. Kilda, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants a pen pal in India; age 12-14; adventure, swimming, reading.

The Magpie Correspondence Club (P. F. Owens, Sec.), Bunbury Road, Capel, S.W.D., Western Australia, wants members; age 14-17.

Arthur Oxley, 24, Rodger Lane, Squirrel Ditch, Huddersfield, Yorks, wants correspondents; age 17-19; fretwork, models, etc. France, Egypt, Gibraltar, India, South Africa.

Miss Gertrude Stephens, 71, Westminster Avenue, Montreal West, Pro. Quebec, Canada, wants girl correspondents; age 17-21.

Carlos F. Delgado, Plaza de Menjibar, 7, Seville, Spain, wants pen pals; England and British Empire; age 16-17. Stamps, postcards, Companion papers, etc.

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into the shadowy grounds ere she extinguished her light. The stars were in the sky and they glimmered over the wide shrubberies and the row of elm-trees that marked the road beyond the garden wall.

A shadow moved under the trees, and the girl's eyes caught it for a moment. Her heart beat quickly at the thought that it might be one she cared for.

The last light went out. Darkness lay upon the house—silence and slumber.

Silence in the wide, lonely grounds. But when the hour of one had passed, if anyone had been awake in the house he might have heard a faint sound at the french windows of the dark drawing-room.

In the deep shadows of the terrace outside there were crouching forms—and a faint, incessant sound came softly through the stillness.

It was a sound similar to that which Tom Merry had heard that exciting night at St. Jim's—the sound of a diamond eating its way slowly but surely through a pane of glass.

"This 'ere will be an easy job, Badger," whispered the man who was standing and leaning over the ruffian who handled the diamond. "Easier than the other."

Badger gritted his teeth. "I'll be even some time with the brat who chucked that chair at the window!" he muttered, stopping his work for a moment to pass his hand across his forehead, where a deep cut would have shown if there had been any light. "But this job is safe enough."

"An' it will be a big 'aul," whispered the other. "The old man's a millionaire, and the plate—"

"Thousand quid at least, Jerry."
"Mebbe twice that."
"Keep your ears open."

The man Jerry moved along the terrace a little and looked and listened, but the house and the grounds were silent and dark.

He returned to the window. There was a faint crack, and a section of glass came out in the hands of the burglar.

"Done it, Badger?"
"All serene!"
"A minute more and the french window was open. Two burly ruffians stepped into the dark and silent room."

"Show a glim for a tick, Jerry—just a glim."

An electric pocket-lamp glimmered out for a few moments sufficiently to allow the two ruffians to take their bearings, then all was dark again.

"Hark!" muttered Badger suddenly. The two ruffians listened. A sound as of a rustle in the shrubbery came wafted upon the night wind through the open window.

"Wot's that?"
"Only the wind, Badger."
They listened for a few moments. The sound died away and was not repeated.

"Come on!" muttered Jerry.
"The dining-room's on the left," said Badger. "I see 'em at dinner this evenin' from the garden; an' the plate's there, I reckon."

The Badger opened a door silently, and they stepped into a hall.

Across the hall was the door of the dining-room, and they opened it and passed in.

The Badger crossed to the windows and drew the blinds carefully, and then the electric torch was turned on again.

Jerry placed it upon the table. As he did so the Badger gave a violent start, and his hand went into his pocket for a weapon.

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"Wot's that?"
Jerry, the less desperate ruffian of the two, turned pale.

What the Badger had heard was a step in the passage, and the next moment there was a click, and then a glare of electric light.

The figure of an old man in a dressing-gown and slippers appeared at the open door.

"The old cove!" muttered Jerry.
Mr. Glyn stared into the room.
"You scoundrels!" he exclaimed.
"I thought I heard a noise! You scoundrels!"

The Badger's desperate face became murderous in its expression.

Mr. Glyn had awakened and come down—recklessly enough. But he did not seem to feel fear. The Badger's hand came up with a jemmy in it, and he leaped savagely towards the old man.

Mr. Glyn started back; but the cracksmen's grasp was upon him, and he was dragged into the room.

He felt the ruffian's knee upon his chest.

"Quiet!" hissed the Badger. "Give the alarm, and I'll smash yer 'ead in!"
"You scoundrel! Help—"

The jemmy descended. Mr. Glyn tore his head aside, and the blow almost missed; but it struck him a slanting blow, and blood appeared under the white hair.

The Badger's hand rose again, and Jerry called out hoarsely.

"Badger! Don't make it a 'angin' job, you fool!"

Mr. Glyn, half-stunned as he was, caught the ruffian's wrist and held back the blow.

"Help!" he cried faintly.
"Jerry, lend a 'and, you fool!"

The second ruffian seized upon the millionaire. There was a sound of rapid feet in the hall and a figure dashed in at the door of the dining-room.

It was a young man with a pale face and flashing eyes. He did not stop to speak. He sprang at the two ruffians like a tiger, and a crashing blow from his fist landing under Jerry's ear, sent him reeling to the floor.

The Badger sprang to his feet, releasing Mr. Glyn to face this new foe, while Jerry, recovering himself, grappled with the millionaire.

The Badger's calculations were out. The burglary had been planned after long and careful watching of the house, and he knew that this young man did not belong to the household. He had no time to wonder who he was. He leapt at him, with a curse.

The young man caught his wrist, and with a twist, sent the jemmy whirling away. Then his grasp was upon the ruffian.

They struggled furiously, and the cracksmen, burly as he was, found that he had met his match. His hand slid into his pocket, and came out with a revolver in it.

"Hang you! Take that!"
"Crack—crack!"
"Ah!"

There was blood upon the young man's face now. But he held on to the cracksmen, and he wrenched the pistol away.

There was a crash of breaking glass as Jerry leaped through the window and disappeared. The whole household was up now. Lights were flashing, and women's voices were shrieking. The Badger fell heavily, with his antagonist on top of him, and the back of his head crashed hard upon the floor.

A shiver ran through him, and he lay limp and still. He was stunned.

Startled servants were rushing in now. Bernard Glyn was first of the new-

comers, and he had a cricket stump in his hand. The young man, with his hand to his head, reeled away to a chair and sank down.

"Take care of that scoundrel!" he gasped. "Bind him! He will recover!"
The menservants threw themselves upon the stunned ruffian.

Bernard Glyn stared blankly at the young man, upon whose ghastly face the red streak showed up grimly.

"My hat! Mr. Wodyer!"
Mr. Glyn staggered to his feet. He was bleeding from his blow, but he was not seriously hurt. But the case of his rescuer seemed more serious.

"Wodyer," he muttered. "Arthur Wodyer!"

The young man smiled faintly.
"How did you come here?" gasped Mr. Glyn.

"He's wounded!" muttered Bernard Glyn. "Good heavens, somebody buzz off for a doctor! Let me tie it up, sir—"

"Arthur!"
It was Edith's voice. The girl, white as a ghost, came in.

Arthur Wodyer tried to sit upright as he heard her voice, but he sank back into the chair with a groan. His senses were reeling.

"Edith! Don't worry! I—I'm all right!" he smiled faintly again. "You will admit that I have a little grit now, sir?"

"Forgive me!" muttered Mr. Glyn brokenly.

But Arthur Wodyer could not hear. His eyes were closed.

CHAPTER 13.

All's Well!

ARTHUR WODYER was placed in Bernard Glyn's bed, and the Shell fellow dashed off at full-speed upon his bicycle to fetch a doctor and the police.

The Badger, tied hand and foot, was guarded by the servants until the police arrived, and then he was taken to the station.

Meanwhile, Arthur Wodyer's injuries were seen to.

The cracksmen had had no time to take aim when he fired, but the shots had gone terribly close. One of them had grazed Arthur Wodyer's head, tearing away a strip of skin under the hair. He would bear that scar to his grave; but it was not a dangerous hurt. The second bullet was buried in his shoulder, and it had to be extracted.

The surgeon shook his head over it. Mr. Glyn, with his head bound up, was in the room. And so was Edith—calm, but white as a statue.

It had all come out now, from what Arthur Wodyer had muttered when he was laid upon the bed. He had been fearful of harm coming to Edith, and every night he had left the school to keep watch and ward outside her house till the small hours of the morning. Every night had found him at his post, and so he intended to watch, either until the danger came, or he was sure that the danger existed no longer. And it had come, and it had found him ready.

It was not Edith upon whom the peril came, as the lover's uneasy fears had dreaded, but her father.

If the second blow of the cruel jemmy had reached the old man's head, he would never have risen in life again.

Arthur Wodyer had saved his life, but it was doubtful for a long time whether he had not given his own in exchange.

The millionaire's remorse was bitter.

(Continued on page 28.)

THROWN INTO DUNGEONS! THAT'S THE WELCOME THE ST. FRANK'S BOYS GET IN—

The SECRET WORLD!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

In a Strange Land!

WITH Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, and Umlosi, Dorrie's negro companion, a party of St. Frank's boys and Moor View School girls journey to the Arctic by airship in search of a missing explorer. But the Titan gets carried off its course by a violent storm, and swept on into an unexplored region. Eventually the storm abates, and the airship, in a crippled condition, gradually sinks lower and lower until it finally crashes in an unknown land, inhabited by a medieval race, in the Arctic Circle. But by good fortune no one aboard is hurt.

Nipper laughed rather ruefully. "Well, it's just one excitement after another!" he said. "I wonder what's going to happen next? We escaped the storm, we escaped being drowned in the lake, and we escaped death here. After this I shan't be surprised at anything!" "It's wonderful, Nipper," said Mary Summers, looking about her with wide-open eyes. "I—I can't believe that it's really true. Look at those trees over there! And this grass! It's not like our grass!" "No, it's not so green—it's more delicate," said Reggie Pitt, bending down and pulling up a handful of blades. "My hat! They're so tender, too! And look at the sky! The light

isn't coming from the sun, but from every part of the sky at once!"

They stared upwards. They knew, of course, that high above, at thirty thousand feet, there were dense masses of that luminous mist. They had come through it—and they knew! But from the ground the appearance was quite different. It didn't look like this—it seemed to be a pure golden sky, radiant from horizon to horizon. The light on the ground was soft and diffused, and practically no shadows were cast. And now and again it seemed to flicker slightly, but so imperceptibly as to be almost unnoticeable.

"Yes, this light is caused by those volcanic fires," said Nipper, nodding. "It's diffused over the entire basin from end to end. But how can they have rain? How can this vegetation grow and flourish? By Jove, it beats me!"

"I expect there'll be somebody along soon," said Handforth, unconsciously clenching his fists, as he looked over the hill towards the great castle they had so narrowly avoided. "But, hang it, there's nothing to fear! These people ought to make national heroes of us!"

"And so they will!" declared De Valerie. "We're from the outside world, and they'll probably fete us, and give us the time of our lives. But who are they? And how did they get here?"

Everybody was asking these questions. But there was one thing which needed no asking, and which needed no reply,

They were on solid ground again, and safe! As to getting out of this newly discovered country, and returning to normal civilisation—that was a point which had no importance at the moment. They were all thankful enough to be spared.

"The wireless?" Lord Dorrimore was asking. "Where's Sparks? Is there any chance of seeing if the wireless is still effective? By glory, it would be good if we could pick up the Wanderer, an' tell her—"

"The operator is just going in, sir, to have a try," put in one of the officers. "But I'm afraid the aerial is hopelessly damaged—"

"But the instruments?" demanded Lee sharply.

"Well, I think they're pretty well intact," said the officer. "And an aerial, after all, is a small matter. We can rig one up—"

A loud, concerted yell came from a group of juniors who had ventured up the slope, and everybody turned.

"Look out!" shouted somebody. "Here they come!"

The group of juniors came running back, having no wish to be cut off from the main party. For horsemen appeared—not a mere dozen or so, but hundreds of them. They came galloping over the hilltop in superb formation, and everybody stood there, staring in wonder and admiration.

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"By jingo!" breathed Nipper. "William the Conqueror's army!"

The horsemen came swooping down, and they were all glittering with chain-mail. The horses were dressed in the fashion of the twelfth or thirteenth century, and as the great body of men came thundering across the greensward, many of the horses shied, and were only held in check by the determined efforts of their riders.

It was noticed that the soldiers were entirely surrounding the wrecked airship. More and more came, forming a circle from which there could be no escape.

"This looks rather serious, Dorrie," murmured Lee.

"Serious?" said his lordship. "It is possible that these people—"

He broke off, for several of the natives were riding up, and they drew rein, and dismounted with a jingling of spurs and chain-mail. There were two of them, and they were obviously the officers in command. These men were very different from those on the other side of the lake.

Indeed, they seemed to be of different blood altogether. There was nothing severe in their presence, although they were stern enough. Two of them wore fair, well-trimmed beards, and the other was clean-shaven. They stood there, fine figures of men, looking more like Saxons than anything else. The adventurers watched breathlessly.

"We are peaceful!" said Nelson Lee, striding forward, with his hand upraised. "We enter your country—"

"It's no good, old man," muttered Dorrie. "They can't understand English."

But the foremost officer took a step forward, and made a gesture of stern anger.

"What lies are these?" he asked, in a grim voice, his words being in English, but with a peculiar accent, or brogue. "Thou art from Gothland! Ay, and what devil's work is this?" he added, indicating the wrecked airship with another gesture. "Is't possible that Kassker thinks to befool us?"

It was quaint, old-fashioned English the man used—such as one never heard nowadays, but of the type that one would imagine the people had used in the bygone centuries.

"You speak English?" asked Lee. "English?" repeated the other. "I know not the word! Enough! Thou art all prisoners, and will resist at thy peril—"

"Wait!" shouted Lord Dorrimore. "We are friends! We have come from the outer world—from over the endless snows. We only desire peace with you and your people. There's no need for any violence—"

"Fool!" thundered the officer. "Thinkest thou this pretence will avail thee aught? Thou art from Gothland! A knave's trick, of Kassker's, by my soul! Thou comest in this wondrous craft, and dressed in strange raiment. But Kassker shall suffer, the dog!"

"We've never heard of Kassker, and we don't know what on earth you're talking about," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Again let me assure you that we are anxious to be on friendly terms with you and your countrymen. We are amazed that you should speak our own language in—"

"'Twere better to be amazed that thou shouldst speak ours," interrupted the other curtly. "But enough! Thou art prisoners all! Thy words are strange, for it seemeth that by these wiles and tricks thou art pretending to be what

thou art not. We Northeistriens are not such poltroons, thou knave!"

He turned and shouted, holding up his hand.

The horsemen closed in, and Lee quickly turned to the boys.

"Don't resist!" he shouted. "We're prisoners, but I don't suppose this will last long. When we have an opportunity to give full explanations, we shall be safe. For the present, do everything that these men order."

The general surprise that this race spoke English was so great that hardly anybody had anything to say. They could only stare at the horsemen, and listen to their quaint words, with a dumb kind of wonder.

And almost before they knew it, they were being marched out of the valley.

The horsemen had closed in in two double columns, and there was no possible escape. In fact, it was out of the question to argue, for the thundering hoofs of the horses made conversation difficult.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were in the forefront, and then followed the Moor View girls, the St. Frank's fellows, and then the officers and crew of the airship. The captives made a long procession.

"What in the name of all that's marvellous does it mean, Lee?" asked Dorrie, as they marched.

But Nelson Lee was as mystified as the others.

Prisoners of the Castle!

LORD DORRIMORE nudged his companion.

"Beaten, Lee?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I am, Dorrie," replied Nelson Lee. "I've had a few surprises in my life, but when that man spoke to me in English, I was nearly bowled over. And he didn't seem to know it was English—that's the remarkable part of it!"

"He talked about Gothland," said Dorrie. "And didn't he make some reference to Northumbria?"

"I fancy he said Northestia," replied Lee. "Gothland!" he added thoughtfully. "H'm! That's infernally queer, Dorrie. Gothland implied the land of the Goths! But—but it's preposterous!"

"Goths!" breathed Dorrie. "My history's a bit creaky, but weren't they a tribe of blighters who hobnobbed with the Vandals and suchlike gentry about umpteen hundred years ago?"

"You're a bit vague, Dorrie, but you're not very far off the mark," replied Lee. "And, by all accounts of the Goths, they must have been a savage lot—something like those people we saw on the other side of this oasis. And this officer referred to Gothland! It's a puzzle, and no mistake!"

"An' they speak English!" said Dorrie. "That's a corker!"

"Of course, there's only one possible explanation," went on Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "This race must have come here, originally, in the eleventh or twelfth century—in the Middle Ages, at all events. And these present-day people are their descendants. They're pure descendants of old English stock. Anglo-Saxon, at all events."

"Then what's the idea of grabbin' us?"

"They distrust us—that's why," muttered Lee. "We've had no chance to give any explanation. They think we have come from just the other side of the lake—By Jove, I'll warrant that the two peoples are of different blood, and opposed to each other. And we are taken to be—"

But at this point Nelson Lee was cut off abruptly, for one of the horsemen jabbed him violently with his lance, and this was obviously a signal for him to stop talking.

Lee obeyed—not because he was afraid, but he had no desire to offend these strange people. His curiosity, indeed, was even greater than his apprehension. He could not believe that any real harm would come to them.

The juniors were forbidden to talk, too. Some had started, but they were soon silenced. The horsemen were all of the same type—fine, strong-looking men, with an Anglo-Saxon type of countenance. They were white, but their complexions were curiously transparent. There was hardly any colour in their cheeks—owing, no doubt, to their birth and rearing in the strange atmosphere of this valley with the false twilight.

By this time none of the captives was even anxious to speak, for there were many sights to witness. They were on a road now, with the horsemen making two continuous columns on either hand. And they passed a great Norman castle, with its drawbridge, and its quaint, picturesque towers. People were looking out—lackeys and other servants—quaintly dressed women, with startled, half-frightened eyes.

The farther they went, the more people they encountered. The road was crowded. Sightseers flocked, and it was more and more reminiscent of the old England of the history books.

They were now getting into the city—that quaint city they had scarcely noticed as they had passed over. Their own peril had been so great at the time that they had seen practically nothing.

They could view the scene now as it really was—and they had the impression that they had been suddenly thrown back for centuries, and thrust into the heart of medieval England.

The picturesque houses, the dress of the people—everything, in fact, tended to lend colour to this feeling.

It was obvious that the whole community was in a fever of excitement. The appearance of that airship had caused consternation and fright at first, but the capture of the entire party had restored a certain measure of calm. Now there was not one smile to greet the captives—nothing but angry, hostile stares—intermingled with overwhelming curiosity. They found themselves marching through packed streets, where there were inns, and curious shops—each with their signs hanging outside. It was a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

And then, over a cobbled open space, in the very centre of the town, where massive gates led into a wide, imposing courtyard, the captives were marched.

Beyond the courtyard stood another of those castles—with towers, turrets, and everything that reminded one of Norman times. Here, too, the people were crowding, watching with the same air of awed excitement.

And this was just one town. There were hundreds of miles of surrounding country, where, no doubt, there were other towns. This was no small community, but a veritable nation. From end to end, from one range of icy mountains to another, this vast oasis was half as big as England itself! That was the staggering fact which the newcomers could hardly grasp. It was a great country—with a live, virile race of people!

In fact, things had happened in such crowded succession that the adventurers



"By George!" bellowed Handforth. "Just try to shove me in a dungeon! Up with your fists, blow you!" Before the officer knew what was coming, Handy's fist crashed on the point of his jaw!

were almost too bewildered to appreciate all they saw. They were dimly aware of the reaction, too, due to lack of sleep during those tense hours in the airship. Many of them were bruised and hurt—hurt more than they would admit. Thirsty and hungry, and bodily weary, they were physically incapable of much resistance.

Not that any resistance would have been availing.

The horsemen now fell back, and foot soldiers took their place. The most surprising fact of all was that there was no air of general amazement. The newcomers were only treated to hostile looks—almost as though they had been expected. It really seemed that they were mistaken for some other hostile people.

"Look!" muttered Reggie Pitt, as he glanced at Jack Grey. "These soldiers, Jack! Archers, by jingo!"

"I've noticed it," said Grey, nodding. "It reminds me of Robin Hood and his merry men! But I'm past being surprised, Reggie. The whole affair is too amazing for words! We thought we were going to be dashed to pieces in the frozen wastes of the Arctic, and we get this!"

Immediately ahead of them a cumbersome drawbridge was in position, and after they had been marched over it, they passed under a great archway, and then into a low, dark doorway. And here they were hustled into single file, and forced to go down a flight of narrow, circular steps. And at intervals down these steps, men were standing, holding flaring torches.

"Great Scott!" muttered Lord Dorrmore. "Are we bein' taken down into the dungeons?"

"It seems like it," muttered Lee. Still they went down the stairs—deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth. There was no possibility of resisting. The soldiers were everywhere, escorting them down, and refusing to

speaking if they were spoken to. Evidently they had received stern orders.

And at last a tunnel was reached. Along this they went, and suddenly Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore, and several others were thrust through a low doorway. They found themselves in utter darkness. The door closed with a dull, heavy thud, and great bolts were shot home.

"That sounds cheerful!" said Lord Dorrmore, out of the darkness. "Are you there, Lee?"

"Yes!" muttered Lee. "Who else is here?"

He pulled an electric torch out of his pocket and flashed it on. Then he saw that they were alone, and they consisted of seven men—Lee, Dorrie, the wireless operator of the Titan, and four members of the engineer's crew. The dungeon was a grim, sinister place, similar to those which still exist beneath the Tower of London.

"Well, this is a go, sir!" said Sparks, in amazement.

"Never saw anything like it!" said one of the other men. "What does it mean, sir?" he asked, appealing to Lord Dorrmore. "I thought we were lucky to escape being killed, but I hardly expected to be flung into a dungeon, like a condemned schemer of the gunpowder plot!"

"Well, anyway, we're alive," said Lord Dorrmore philosophically. "An', by gad, that's more than I expected to be by this time."

Nelson Lee said nothing. He was thinking of the Remove fellows—of the other boys—and of the Moor View girls. What was happening to them all?

The Torture Chamber!

THE juniors, having seen Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the other men pushed into the dungeon, expected to be treated in the same way themselves, and they were filled with consternation.

Just ahead of them were the six girls, and the thought of Irene & Co. being flung into a noisome dungeon filled the juniors with indignation and anger. Handforth, indeed, wanted to take action on the spot.

"Why wait for these rotters to shove us behind bolted doors?" he hissed. "Let's make a fight for it now! We've got to get these girls out—"

"Shut up, Handy!" muttered Pitt. "What's the good of getting out? They'll only drag us back again. And don't forget they can understand what you're talking about—even if their English is different."

"But—but we can't stand this!" panted Handforth desperately.

One or two exclamations from the girls made him pause. They were not being thrown into dungeons, but had passed out of the stone passage into a great chamber—a vast apartment, with many men standing there with flaming torches.

And the reason for Irene & Co.'s gasps was apparent.

In some respects this underground chamber, was like something that the juniors had seen in the Tower of London. Again they were reminded of that grim old place.

"Oh goodness!" murmured Church. "The torture chamber! They're going to shove us into dungeons, and then bring us out and torture us!"

"Look!" said McClure huskily. "They're taking the girls away along another passage!"

Handforth had come to a halt. "By George!" he shouted thickly. "Are you going to stand this?"

Ahead of them stretched two tunnels, and while Irene & Co. were forced along one of them, the juniors were herded into the other.

"They've taken the girls away somewhere!" roared Handforth furiously. **THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,408.**

"Come on, you chaps! We've got to rescue 'em! Up, St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"
In a moment the fellows were on Handforth's side. And before the soldiers could be aware of any attack they were swept out of the way, and the St. Frank's juniors rushed pell-mell down the tunnel to rescue Irene & Co.

Handforth, in advance, reached a corner, and caught a glimpse of a slim leg just disappearing into an arched doorway. Then came a loud thud, and by the time Handforth arrived, the heavy door had closed, and they were shut off.

"Quick! They've gone through here!" yelled Handforth, throwing his weight against the heavy door. "All right, Irene! We're here, girls!"

A rush of feet came from another tunnel, and a dozen powerful men put in an appearance. One of them seized Handforth, and held him firmly.

"Thou puppy!" he growled menacingly. "Is't death thou seekest? The wenches will come to no harm yet awhile. 'Tis for the Princess Mercia to pass sentence—"

"The Princess Mercia!" shouted Nipper, pushing forward. "Who's she?"

"Yes, who's the Princess Mercia?" demanded Handforth.

"Silence!" thundered the man, who was evidently an officer. "What uncouth words are these? Thou speakest our language, and yet thou speakest it not! Away with them!" he added, turning to his followers. "Into the dungeons!"

Handforth clenched his fists. "You can shove the others in the dungeons—but not me!" he bellowed. "By George, just try it on, you fat-heads! Up with your fists, blow you!"

Crash!
Before the officer knew what was coming he received a crashing blow on the jaw. He staggered back, and three of his men fell upon Handforth, and the other juniors went almost sick when they saw that swords were flashing.

"Stay!" growled out the officer. "Kill not the hot-head—yet! 'Twas her majesty's order that none should

die. But yet I will remember this blow!" he added grimly.

Handforth, struggling violently, was dragged away.

Without any further talk the juniors were hustled into a great dungeon, and locked there. They did not worry so much about their own plight; but they were filled with apprehension for the six helpless girls.

A number of sombrely clad women had taken charge of the six schoolgirls, and they were promptly locked within a dungeon.

As for Handforth, he was untamed. He resisted every inch of the way, and he was placed in a dungeon entirely to himself.

"You rotters!" he panted, as his captors prepared to leave.

He saw that the men had paused in the doorway, and he made a rush. And out came his famous fists. Crash! Biff! In quick succession he landed two beauties, and the startled soldiers fell upon him, uttering strange oaths.

"'Tis the chains he needs!" snapped one.

In spite of Handforth's continued resistance he was forced back into the dungeon, and heavy chains were clamped round his ankles and arms.

And then the soldiers went out, slamming the door and thrusting the bolts home. Every member of the exploring party was a prisoner, but Handforth was specially honoured by being placed in chains!

Before the Princess!

"HALT!"
The order rang out at the head of the column of soldiers, in the midst of which was the St. Frank's party.

With a jangling of stirrups and jingling of chain-mail, the mounted horsemen pulled up their steeds. The heavy drawbridge, rumbling and creaking, descended slowly over the broad moat, and settled into position.

From the big courtyard beyond rode a knight in armour, bearing a great standard. On either side of him were

six mounted trumpeters, and they thundered across the drawbridge, and spread out fanwise on either side. The trumpets were in full blare.

Another rider appeared from the courtyard, and his horse was now prancing on the drawbridge.

He made a fine figure in his glittering armour, and with his horse decked out with all the accoutrements of military splendour. Particularly noticeable was the chamfron upon the animal's head, with its spike projecting from the front. The rider was a big man, with a great red beard. He sat his horse nobly.

It was two or three hours later, and the airship party had been brought out of those noisome prisons, and marched through the city again to the royal castle itself. And now they were on the point of entering the great courtyard, with its picturesque stone gateway, and with the quaint towers and turrets of the castle peeping up above the outer walls.

It was evident that something was to be done at once, and all the prisoners were glad of this. They had hardly known what to think after being cast down into the black depths of the underground cells.

But from snatches of conversation that had been heard, the airship party believed that they were to be taken before Princess Mercia—whoever she was. Whether she ruled over this people or not, no members of the party knew. But they had heard no mention of a king. What kind of woman would this princess prove to be?

Hopes were soaring, for if the party was being taken before the princess, it was generally felt that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrinore would soon explain the situation, and that a totally different treatment would be meted out to them all. It seemed that their captors suspected them of being enemies—from Gothland.

A new order came, and there was a movement among the armoured soldiers. He of the red beard had swung round, and was riding into the courtyard again. And the double column of soldiers, with the prisoners marching in their midst, entered upon the drawbridge, and went through the great stone archway to the thunder of hoofs and marching feet.

The prisoners found themselves in a vast courtyard, with the Royal castle as a background. There were many balconies to be seen, and upon these were standing the ladies and gentlemen of the Court—the ladies wearing rich, flowing silks and tall conical hats—almost exactly similar to the costumes that one associates with the medieval Courts of Europe.

The gentlemen were no less grand in their exterior, and most of them were full-bearded—and generally fair.

The captives forgot their unhappy plight in this new scene of enchantment. "What ever must they think of us?" murmured Irene Manners, as she glanced down at her neat costume, with its short skirt. "I'm afraid they must take us for terribly brazen girls, Winnie."

Winnie Pitt, who was beside her, glanced in turn at her own slim legs, encased in silk stockings.

"I expect we've horrified everybody," she murmured. "And I feel so frightfully out of place, Renie."

"Oh, well, we can't help it," said Irene philosophically. "How were we to know that we should be sent tumbling back through the centuries?"

Not only were the scenes and the people reminiscent of an age-old period, but the very manner of speech was almost identical.



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The prisoners were separated into three parties—the men together, the boys together, and the girls together. And all were ranged round a lower balcony, where some wide, sweeping steps led up to it. Behind was a low archway, with trumpeters standing at attention on either side.

"Yes, this is the Royal castle all right!" murmured Nipper. "The rumours we heard are true, I expect—we are going to be tried before the Princess Mercia. Let's hope she's the right sort."

"There's nothing to worry about," said Reggie Pitt. "As soon as she finds out who we are, and how we came here, she'll probably throw open the castle, and treat us as honoured guests—Hullo! What's this?"

"The princess is coming!" murmured Jack Grey.

The trumpeters were heralding the approach of a high personage, and a moment later the Princess Mercia had arrived.

William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth Form, smiled benevolently.

"We have no trouble, Brother Horace, in singling out the fair princess," he murmured. "Without making use of any superlatives, I think we can safely describe her as a peach."

"By Jove, she's lovely!" agreed Horace Stevens, nodding.

There was, indeed, no difficulty in recognising the Royal personage among the richly attired attendants. And the most surprising fact of all was that the princess appeared to be no more than a slip of a girl. Her age might have been seventeen, but certainly no more than eighteen.

She carried herself proudly, and with a stately dignity. Her fairness was remarkable, and her eyes were of the deepest blue.

Edward Oswald Handforth was fascinated—for he had a particular weakness for fair femininity. Irene Manners was his particular girl chum, and she was pretty, her eyes were blue, and her bobbed hair was fair. But the Princess Mercia's beauty was of a more delicate type. Indeed, she looked almost too dainty to be really alive.

That she was immensely popular there could be no doubt. Cheer after cheer greeted her appearance, and the prisoners could hear this cheer echoing and re-echoing from outside, where the masses of the populace were waiting. The whole community, indeed, seemed to be in a ferment over the coming of these strangers.

Lord Dorrimore unconsciously straightened his necktie.

"Old man, it's goin' to be easy!" he murmured, glancing at Lee's twinkling eyes. "Shall I do the talkin', or will you?"

"I think we had better share it, Dorrie," smiled Lee.

"That suits me!" said his lordship cheerfully.

A great deal of their uneasiness had gone. They hadn't had a chance to explain things yet, but this first glimpse of the Princess Mercia placed their doubts at rest. One glance at her was enough to show that she could not possibly be cruel or harsh. And the tumult from the populace proved that her heart was as kindly as her beauty. There was no mistaking that roar of welcome.

"We're all right now, Handy, old man," murmured McClure breathlessly. "By Jupiter, I'm glad to see you safe, old son! Church and I thought you were going to be put to death down in those dungeons!"

Handforth looked at him coldly.

House Shield Final.

PLAYED IN A DOWNPOUR—BUT NO "WASH-OUT."

By Philip Lefevre.

This match, the third of a series, of which one had been played in a snow-storm and the other on a ground resembling a skating rink, took place in an absolute deluge! Though these House matches have been dogged by inclement weather, both captains insisted on completing the series and deciding the fate of the House Shield. Goals? Yes, there were goals enough! Figgins netted for the New House, slithering full length in the mud. He added a second, and Pratt squealed through for the third. Getting the wind behind them after the change-over, School House turned the tables, Lowther charging Fatty Wynn while in possession, the ball shooting out of Wynn's hands into the net. Blake profited by a miskick to score another, and Merry put School House on terms. Just before time, a School House attack culminated in a drive by Lowther from twenty yards which flashed through Wynn's fingers! The best shot of a game which was fought by heroes under horrifying conditions. School House deservedly hold

"Wait!" he said curtly. "Wait until I get a word with the princess! I'll soon show her that she can't let her soldiers mess about with British subjects—"

"You ass, don't you say a word!" interrupted Church, in alarm. "Let Mr. Lee and Dorrie do the talking. I say, what a difference in these people!" he added. "They're all kindly looking and gentle."

Church's description was indeed apt. Very few of the Northeistriens bore any traces of harshness. While the ladies were mostly fair and gentle, the soldiers and the gentlemen of the Court were of a handsome, amiable type. There were one or two, perhaps, who might have been cast in a coarser mould, but the majority were of the same general type.

The man with the red beard had long since dismounted, and now he was standing at the top of the great steps on the balcony, talking earnestly with the young princess. She had taken her seat upon a carved chair, which lackeys had brought forward under the orders of the Court attendants. And now the lovely Mercia was even more charming—as she listened to what the man with the red beard was saying, and as she glanced occasionally at the prisoners ranged before her.

"The old boy seems to be somebody of importance," murmured Reggie Pitt. "Prime Minister, or Lord Chamberlain, or Chancellor, or something."

"Shush!" breathed Fullwood. "She's looking at us!"

The man with the red beard turned at this moment, and he faced the captives with a stern expression on his face. At close quarters, they could now see that he was a man of about fifty, well preserved, and as straight as a ramrod.

"Stand forward, he who commandeth this motley host!" he said coldly.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore glanced at one another, and both stepped out of the ranks together.

"I am responsible for my party being here, but Mr. Lee will do most of the talkin', I expect," said Lord Dorrimore easily. "Of course, Captain Waring is the actual commander of the airship, but he's a modest fellow, and hates public speakin'—"

the House Shield—and I believe I've caught a cold! A-tish-oo! Excuse me!

ST. FRANK'S IN GOAL-SCORING MOOD.

By Clarence Fellowe (The Rhyming Reporter).

Opposed to lowly Abbotsford, a score was quickly on the board. St. Frank's made hay—their sun shone bright—it seemed the "Abbots" did nought right. At half-time, five to nil, the score filled Abbotsford with lust for gore! Re-starting with a lightning dash, they got a brace—'twas, but a flash; for under Nipper's cool command St. Frank's regained the upper hand. At ten to two the total stood—it found St. Frank's in merry mood!

FULL RESULTS.

ST. FRANK'S	10	ABBOTSFORD	2
Nipper (4), Pitt (4), Travers, McClure		Fane (2)	
HIGHCLIFFE	3	CLAREMONT	1
GREYFRIARS	4	RIVER HOUSE	1
ROOKWOOD	4	BAGSHOT	2
ST. JUDE'S	6	REDCLYFFE	6

"Silence!" thundered the man with the red beard. "Dost dare to prattle in the presence of her Majesty? Thou art from Gothland, sent hither by Kassker the Grim. Isn't possible thou wilt attempt to deny this?"

"We do deny it," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "We have heard some of your soldiers talking of Kassker the Grim, but we do not know the gentleman—"

"Gentleman!" interrupted the other sharply. "By the soul of Sarus! Is not Kassker the knave of knaves—the surly brute who is overlord of all Gothland? Out upon thee, dog, for uttering such—"

"I crave your pardon!" interrupted Nelson Lee quickly. "If I have made a slip, I regret it. But let me insist that we know nothing of Kassker, and never set foot upon this land you call Gothland. Before proceeding further, we shall be honoured if you will let us know to whom we speak."

"Marry; but thy insolence is impressive!" said the man with the red beard grimly. "Thou art in the presence of her Majesty, Princess Mercia, and I am Ethelbert the Red, upon whom falls the honour of being her chief adviser."

"I thank you!" said Nelson Lee.

"Wait, good Ethelbert," said the princess, in a voice of singular sweetness. "I cannot believe that these people are of Gothlander blood. For are they not gentle to look upon?"

"A trick, Majesty!" declared Ethelbert the Red. "If not from Gothland, whence came these strangers? As thou knowest, there is no other living soul upon this earth."

"We come from England!" put in Lord Dorrimore, in astonishment. "Gad, Lee, they can't think that the rest of the earth is uninhabited, surely?"

Nelson Lee took a step forward.

"Let me assure you, with all sincerity, that we are friendly and peaceful," he said earnestly. "We are not from Gothland, but from the great world beyond the glaciers."

(Will the St. Frank's adventurers be able to convince their captors that they are not their enemies? Don't miss next week's big-thrill chapters.)

TRUE BLUE!

(Continued from page 22.)

"Can you forgive me, my boy?" the old man muttered, when Arthur came to himself the next day.

Arthur Wodyer smiled faintly. "I have nothing to forgive," he said. "How am I? The doctor won't tell me."

"Bad!" said Mr. Glyn. "I know I can tell the truth to a good plucked 'un like you. But we shall pull you through! And, Arthur"—Mr. Wodyer started. The millionaire had not called him by his Christian name before—"Arthur, my lad, you remember what I told you—if you showed that you had grit, I've no objections? And you've showed it plainly enough, Heaven knows! You've saved my life, my boy, and I'm not the man to forget that. You are a noble lad, and I was wrong. Get well, my boy, get well; and as soon as you're well enough, there's Edith!" The girl's hand slid into Arthur's. He pressed it.

"Thank you, sir!" he said. "I shall get well, never fear, and I'll try to be worthy of my happiness."

At St. Jim's the excitement was great. Bernard Glyn had gone back to the school and carried the news.

For days St. Jim's talked of nothing else.

"That's why old Woddy was out of a night," Figgins said to Wynn and Kerr. "I ought to have guessed it. He was watching Glyn House, in case the burglars came there. Of course, we ought to have known that!"

"I don't quite see how we should have known it," Kerr said. "But it was just like Woddy. He is a splendid chap!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn. "He's getting better," said Figgins. "The worst of the business is that he's going to be taken abroad for his health, and Edith Glyn's going to marry him and take him, and we shall lose our Housemaster! Old Ratty will come back!"

"Well, it's hard cheese," said Kerr, "but I think we ought to be glad that he's got what he wanted at last."

"Oh, yes, I'm jolly glad!" said Figgins heartily.

"Bai Jove, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I'll wish to my governor for a fivah, and we'll get up a subscription, and buy him a wippin' weddin' pwesent on his weddin' day, you know, inscribed with best wishes fwom all the juniahs of St. Jim's."

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Mr. Wodyer did recover, and he was not so long about it as had been expected, either.

A strong constitution and the habit of keeping fit had pulled him through. When he came back to St. Jim's for the first time the fellows—seniors and juniors—gave him a rousing reception. And, sorry as they were to lose him, the whole school wished joy to the man who had proved himself to be true blue and who had won a wife in doing it.

(Next Wednesday: "GLYN'S LINE-WRITER!"—a lively long yarn of the fun and frolic caused by the St. Jim's inventor's latest and most amazing invention! Look out for this story, chums.)

The Truant of Packsaddle!

(Continued from page 6.)

But his grip on it was strong, and he dragged himself along, and reached firm ground under the bluff.

Up the bluff he clambered at frantic speed. Bill, holding on with both brawny hands to the lasso, was keeping his head out of the swamp. But it was sucking him down, and the soft mud welled over his bearded chin, and squeezed in the corners of his shut mouth.

Dick scrambled to his feet. He waved a hand to Bill.

"Hold on!" he yelled. "Hold on for your life, Bill!"

Bill did not answer. He could not speak now, with mud welling at his mouth. But he held on with a grip of iron to the rope, as Dick Carr leaped into the saddle, and put the cow-pony in motion.

Away from the river went the cow-pony, dragging on the taut lasso. The pull on Bill's arms was terrible. But

he had got them through the loop, and the loop under his elbows, and he held on with fingers of steel. The mud held his bulky figure like a giant's grasp, and it seemed as if his brawny arms would be torn away by the pull of the cow-pony on the rope. Bill gritted his teeth and bore it.

Slowly he drew from the swamp.

Head and shoulders were clear, and his bulky body followed. Then the resistance was weaker, and the draw on the rope brought the rest of him whisking out, his long legs flying, caked with mud.

At the end of the lariat he went rolling along the mudbank towards the bluff, as he had rolled at the end of Dick's riata in the playground at Packsaddle. A minute more, and he was swinging against the bluff.

The cow-pony pulled on, and Bill came clambering and scrambling over the grassy edge.

As he rolled there, streaming yellow mud in the grass, Dick reined in, and dismounted. He ran back to Bill.

Bill lay exhausted, too exhausted even to free his arms from the lariat. Bill was as strong as a buffalo, but every ounce of his great strength was spent now. He lay and panted. Dick

unhooked the rope, coiled it, and slung it on his saddle.

Bill sat up at last.

"What you doing out of school? Brown give you a holiday?"

"I gave myself one."

"Howling coyotes! I'll sure quirt you!"

Dick grinned.

School was over at Packsaddle, and the bunch streaming out, when they had the sight of their lives—Bill, smothered with sticky mud, thick and evil-smelling, riding in on a cow-pony, with Dick Carr trotting by the pony's side. The bunch stared blankly. And as Bill rolled wearily from the cow-pony at the porch of the school-house, Small Brown hopped up to him and squeaked:

"Sir! Mr. Sampson, I have to complain of that boy Carr—a very serious complaint—"

"Forget it!" roared Bill.

And he trumped in.

That serious complaint was never made! And Bill quite forgot to quirt the truant of Packsaddle!

(Next week: "THE SCHOOLBOY BRONCO-BUSTER!"—another gripping tale of the Texas schoolboys. Don't miss it.)

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