

MEET THE PALS of PACKSADDLE SCHOOL—*Inside!*

The GEM 2d



CAPTAIN GUSSY!

By

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CLIFFORD**



Wild with excitement at Arthur Augustus being elected captain of St. Jim's, the School House juniors burst into a roar of cheering that made the rafters shake, and carried D'Arcy shoulder-high from the Hall!



CHAPTER 1.

Down On His Luck!

"**B**EASTLY!" said Blake of the Fourth.

"Rotten!" exclaimed Tom Merry of the Shell.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a very sympathetic expression upon his aristocratic face, chimed in:

"Yaas, wathah!"

As a rule, Jack Blake's face was cheery and good-humoured, and Tom Merry's countenance was sunny as the day. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, too, generally looked fully satisfied with himself and with circumstances.

But undoubtedly there was a cast of gloom upon their faces now as they stood in a group in the Hall after dinner.

Not that there was anything wrong with Tom Merry & Co. themselves. It was all the result of their sympathetic feelings.

Kildare of the Sixth, head prefect and captain of the school, was down on his luck.

Anybody else in the Sixth Form might have been ever so much down on his luck, and the juniors would not have condescended to take any notice. But with Kildare it was different.

He was the idol of the school, the pride of St. Jim's, and when Kildare looked thoroughly miserable his gloom was reflected in other faces.

What was the matter with Kildare was not quite clear. His personal friends, Rushden and Darrell of the Sixth, doubtless knew. But he had not taken the juniors into his confidence.

Kildare was not the kind of fellow to look disturbed over a trifle; if he had to take a hard knock, he could take it without complaining. When he

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looked miserable, it was certain that there was something serious the matter. All the fellows felt that.

"He isn't seedy," said Tom Merry. "It's not that. He was playing up well in footer practice yesterday."

"He had a letter from home this morning," Kangaroo of the Shell remarked. "I remember seeing him take it from the postman."

"Something wrong under the family roof, perhaps," Blake suggested.

"Vewy pwob, deah boy." Tom Merry wrinkled his brows a little.

"His mater was ill a little while back," he said. "You remember the time he was called away by a telegram. She may be ill again."

"It might be anything," remarked Monty Lowther. "Anyway, I'm sorry to see old Kildare look like this!"

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors all agreed that it was rotten, and a common desire was in their hearts to help old Kildare out of his trouble, whatever it was, if they could.

"We ought to back old Kildare up," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, rather vaguely. "At a time like this, when a poor chap's down on his luck, we ought to back him up, you know."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

That was another point of agreement among the juniors of the School House. Old Kildare ought to be backed up, though it was not quite clear what good the backing up would do him—or, indeed, what form it was to take.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther suddenly, and in a subdued tone. "Here he is!"

Kildare was coming along the Hall towards the Sixth Form passage.

The usually keen and cheerful cap-

tain of St. Jim's was looking pale and troubled—so troubled that he had even forgotten to make any effort to conceal it.

His eyes were on the ground, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He passed the group of juniors without noticing them, and went into his study and closed the door.

The juniors looked at one another. "Poor old chap!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He looks like a chap who's been dunned by a tailor, you know, and hasn't any tin to settle up."

Tom Merry grinned.

"I think it's more serious than that!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas; pewwaps so. One nevah knows."

"Suppose we go and jaw to him?" Digby suggested. "It might cheer him up."

The other fellows looked very doubtful.

"We might ask him what's the matter," said Herries.

"Might get kicked out of the study for cheek," said Blake uneasily. "You never know how these blessed seniors are going to take things. A prefect is almost as uncertain a beast as a master!"

"Yaas; that's quite twue!"

Tom Merry & Co. strolled as far as the Sixth Form passage, and there they hesitated. They would have liked very much to express their sympathy with Kildare, but they were dubious about their reception. He might think their sympathy impertinent, and think they were bothering their heads about matters that did not concern them.

"There goes Darrell!" said Blake.

Darrell of the Sixth went into Kildare's study, and Rushden followed him

FULL-O'-PEP LONG YARN OF POPULAR TOM MERRY & CO.

in. The door closed behind them. A minute later North of the Sixth went in.

"Looks like a tea-party," said Blake. Tom Merry shook his head. "No tea there," he said. "It's a jaw of some sort."

"My hat, here's Monteith!" A somewhat slim but well-built senior came up the passage. It was Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House. Monteith hardly noticed the juniors. There was a peculiar expression upon his face that struck the juniors at once.

In earlier days Monteith of the New House had been on very bad terms with Kildare, and it was an open secret that he had tried to oust him from the captaincy of the school. But that was all over now. The two prefects were on the best of terms, and in all important matters connected with the school the St. Jim's skipper consulted the head prefect of the New House as a matter of course.

Monteith's coming made the affair look more like a council—or a "jaw," as Tom Merry called it—than ever.

The New House prefect went into Kildare's study and closed the door. A couple of minutes later Baker of the Sixth, another New House senior, came in, and also passed into the study and closed the door.

The juniors looked at one another. "I wathah think we ought to look into this," D'Arcy remarked.

"Fathead!"

"Keep off the grass!" said Blake. "You can't interrupt a Sixth Form jaw."

"But I feel weally anxious about Kildare," said Arthur Augustus. "Look here, you fellows! Back me up, and we will go and see Kildare, and get at the truth!"

The juniors thought it out. They were certainly curious, but they were more concerned than they were curious. Their regard for "old Kildare" was strong.

"Come on, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy settled the matter by leading the way.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him.

The swell of St. Jim's tapped at the door of Kildare's study, and opened it. All eyes in the study were turned upon him at once.

The seniors were there, looking very grave, and Kildare, who was standing by the window, was quite pale. The fellows had never seen his handsome, ruddy face so bereft of its healthy colour before.

"Pway excuse me, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the seniors looked at him grimly, and Monteith rapped out a sharp query as to what he wanted—"Pway excuse me—"

"Get out!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass for a moment upon Monteith, and then looked at Kildare. He did not intend to take any notice of the orders of a New House prefect.

"Pway excuse me, Kildare—"

"The fact is—" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It's like this—" began Blake.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake, and—"

"You see," said Kangaroo of the Shell, "we're anxious about you, Kildare. We want to know whether you're ill."

Kildare smiled faintly.

"I'm not ill, thank you," he said.

"Oh, good!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! But it appeals to us that somethin' is the mattah," explained Arthur Augustus. "We are all vevy sowwy that somethin' is the mattah, and we would like to back you up, Kildare, old man."

Monteith frowned.

"You cheeky young beggars—" he began.

Monteith never had the good feeling and tact in dealing with younger boys which Kildare invariably displayed. It was for that reason that Monteith, in spite of many undoubtedly good qualities, was not popular in the junior Forms, especially outside his own House.

Kildare made a gesture.

"It's all right, Monty," he said. "The kids don't mean any harm. I may as well tell them, too—the school will all know to-day."

"Oh, just as you like, of course!" said Monteith.

"Is something wrong?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

Kildare nodded.

"Yes," he said, "with me—I mean my people at home. My mother's illness has become worse, and I am going home."

"Going home?"

"Yes."

"But—but not for good?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"I don't know," replied Kildare. "If

When Arthur Augustus D'Arcy puts up as a candidate for the position of captain of St. Jim's it causes a big laugh in the school. But it's the one and only Gussy who gets the last laugh!

the mater pulls round all right I shall come back as soon as she is well. It might be only a few days—it might be a few weeks. But if she does not get better I shall stay at home. She wants me with her, and the doctor says I ought to be there. There isn't danger, you know—it's a question of an illness which may be long or short, according to the turn it takes. But as I may be kept away from St. Jim's for a whole term, I am going to make arrangements as if I were leaving for good. I resign the captaincy—"

"Oh!"

"I am leaving to-night," said Kildare, "and when I am gone a new captain must be elected. If I return to school soon I shall accept the new captain and stand by him."

"He would resign, and give you your place again, I should think," said Darrell.

"I should not expect that."

"Oh, that's understood!" said Monteith. "If I were elected, and you came back, Kildare, I should hand it over to you at once."

"Hear, hear!" said the other prefects. Kildare nodded.

"Thanks!" he said. "But we can leave that question in the air at present. There's more than one fellow present here who would make a good captain for St. Jim's."

"And you're leaving this evening, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, kid."

"I'm awfully sorry!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm feahfully sowwy, old boy!"

"It's rotten!"

"It's beastly!"

Kildare smiled faintly.

"Thank you!" he said.

The juniors quitted the study. They knew what was the matter now, and they were more sorry than ever for Eric Kildare. But it was evidently a matter in which they could do nothing to help the captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

Kildare's Farewell!

THE news that Kildare was leaving soon spread all over the school.

Many of the fellows could not believe it at first. St. Jim's without Kildare—St. Jim's with any other captain seemed incredible.

It was hard upon the school, hard upon Kildare himself. The sports would suffer in the absence of the best captain the school had ever had. There was a footer match fixed for next Wednesday afternoon, and without Kildare the chance of St. Jim's would be much lessened.

That was a matter which chiefly concerned the seniors. But the juniors had their own reason for missing Kildare.

A kinder captain, a more generous helper in all the little difficulties that beset the path of a young boy at a Public school had never existed than Eric Kildare.

He would help the juniors with their footer, he would sometimes referee for them, he would give a helping hand in a difficult exercise—there was no end to his kindness and patience and good temper.

Even the New House fellows, who had once felt a little sore at the captain of the school being selected from the School House, loyally backed up Kildare in every way, and never dreamed of setting up a rival from their own House.

But it was pretty certain that when Kildare was gone the question of where the new captain should be selected from, the School House or the New House, would become very keen. There was no other fellow in the school who had Kildare's influence with both parties.

It was generally felt that Monteith, who was head prefect of the New House and vice-captain, would succeed Kildare as the captain.

But that was a prospect that filled many of the fellows with dismay.

Monteith had good qualities; he was a good footballer and had a keen head for business, but he was not popular.

The New House fellows would probably back him up to a man, simply because he belonged to the New House, but he was not likely to get a strong following from the School House.

Although not a bully, Monteith had a sharp temper and a bitterly sarcastic tongue, neither of which endeared him to the Lower Forms, even in his own House.

The School House senior with the best chance of election was Darrell. But Darrell had been "crooked" in football practice some time before, and his ankle was still "rocky," barring him from footer. The school captain at St. Jim's was also footer captain, and a captain who could not play football would be quite out of place, and for that reason it was understood that Darrell would not put up for election.

It looked as if it would be a walk-over for Monteith.

But until Kildare was gone these questions did not occupy the general mind very much, only in the form of faint misgivings.

"It will be rotten when Kildare's gone!" Jack Blake said dolefully. "Knox and Sefton and those cads will get up on their hind legs at once."

"And the New House chaps will get their ears up if they get a New House man in as a captain!" said Manners of the Shell.

"Bai Jove!"

"Monteith's pretty certain to get in," said Kangaroo. "I hear that Rushden of our House is going to put up, as Darrell is crooked."

"Rushden will never pull it off," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "He's too easy-going and good-natured. And, as a matter of fact, he's far too easy for such a job as captain of St. Jim's."

"He's a School House man!"

"Yes, that's in his favour. But there's precious little else."

"We don't want Monteith!"

"Rather not!"

All the juniors were agreed upon that point. They did not want Monteith because he was a New House fellow and because he was Monteith!

"But if it's between Rushden and Monteith, Monteith's pretty certain to pull it off," said Glyn of the Shell.

"Wats!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "There is a middle course."

"What's that?"

"I've got an ideah!"

"You have?" asked Monty Lowther, in great astonishment. "My hat!"

The juniors chuckled.

"Pwaw don't be an ass, Lowthah! I've got a wippin' ideah, and I wathah think that it will save the school fwom goin' to the dogs, you know!"

"What's the ideah?" asked Blake.

D'Arcy smiled in an exceedingly knowing way.

"I won't tell you just yet," he replied.

"I don't want it to get out. But we'll have a meetin' in the study aftah Kildare's gone, and then I'll explain."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"We'll have a meeting, certainly, I guess," said Lumley of the Fourth. "We shall have to discuss the election. It seems that it's going to be held to-morrow, and so there's no time to lose."

"The study won't be big enough," said Tom Merry. "We'd better hold the meeting in the Hobby Club-room."

"Yaas, that will be all wright. I shall address the meetin'—"

"The meeting will have something to say about that, I expect."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, I don't know," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "On the occasion when Gussy has an idea something special ought to be done to celebrate it. You know it's a common opinion here that Gussy never had an idea in his head in his life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus walked away with his nose in the air.

The juniors were waiting in the passage to see Kildare come out. The station cab was in the quadrangle, and Kildare's box and bags were piled upon it. Very nearly the whole school had assembled to see him off. Figgins & Co. from the New House had come over, with a crowd of other fellows—Redfern & Co., and Pratt and French, and dozens more.

The masters as well as the boys had turned out to see Kildare go.

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Dr. Holmes—the Head himself—had left the school that afternoon to pass a couple of days with a friend at the seaside. But Mr. Raitton, the Housemaster of the School House, and even the sour-faced Mr. Ratcliff of the New House, shook hands most cordially with the captain of St. Jim's, and wished him good fortune.

Kildare bade his crowd of friends good-bye, and entered the cab. As it turned down the drive to the gates the fellows gathered round it in a dense throng, and it had to proceed at a walking pace.

At the gates they said farewell.

They cheered and waved their caps as the cab turned into the road and sped away towards the railway station at Rylcombe.

"Good-bye, Kildare!"

"Mind you come back!"

The last farewell died away on the dusky road, and the crowd turned back into the gateway of St. Jim's.

Taggles, the porter, closed the gates. The boys returned across the dusky quad to their Houses, and for a long time, the only subject under discussion in all the passages and studies was the departure of Kildare, and the probability, or otherwise, of his returning to the old school to become once more its captain.

CHAPTER 3.

The Eve of the Election!

UPON the notice-board in the Hall of either House later that evening, a paper was pinned, bearing a brief announcement that was intensely interesting to all the fellows at St. Jim's, seniors and juniors alike, and even fags in the Second Form.

The notice in the New House was in the handwriting of Monteith, that in the School House in the hand of Darrell, who was senior prefect now that Kildare was gone.

But the two announcements were identical in wording. They ran as follows:

"The post of captain of the school being vacant, owing to the regretted departure of Kildare of the Sixth, an election will be held to-morrow—Tuesday—at seven-thirty, p.m., in the School House to fill this post.

"The candidates for election are George Rushden of the Sixth and James Monteith of the Sixth. Votes will be taken at seven-thirty precisely."

The fellows in both Houses read the announcements with great interest. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn stood before the notice in the Hall of the New House, with a big crowd of seniors and juniors round them.

Figgins' eyes were glistening.

Figgins had the honour and glory of his House very much at heart. His dearest wish was to see a member of the New House fill the honoured post of captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare was gone, and the post was empty. To Figgins it seemed as if there could be no question about the matter now—a New House fellow simply had to be skipper.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn, his chums, fully agreed with him. So did the rest of the New House. There was no doubt that the New House to the last boy would vote for Monteith at seven-thirty precisely on the morrow.

What made the matter doubtful was that the School House, the older and

larger House at St. Jim's, had fully twice as many inhabitants as the New House.

If the School House stood by the School House candidate, there was not the slightest doubt that the School House candidate would get in.

But that was not really likely to happen.

Most of the seniors of both Houses were indifferent to the House rivalry—at least, to the extent of selecting the best man and voting for him, whichever House he belonged to.

There was little doubt—none at all in the New House minds—that Monteith would make a better captain than Rushden. Rushden was good-natured and good-tempered, and a fine fellow enough, but he certainly lacked the force of character necessary for the post.

Monteith, on the other hand, had, if anything, too much force of character. Undoubtedly he was a better football captain, and that was a great point. Rushden could play back with great success, but he had never even tried to captain a team, and Monteith had often captained an eleven with success. Circumstances of that kind weighed very much with the seniors.

The juniors were more likely to follow the House candidate blindly. But the seniors prided themselves upon weighing the matter sagely and sedately.

Upon the whole, Monteith had a first-class chance. He was certain of all his own House—a third part of St. Jim's in number—and he was certain of most of the Sixth Formers in the School House, and a large party of the Fifth. Unless something happened to split the vote, he was bound to get in.

A third candidate, true, would make matters extremely uncertain. But no third candidate was likely to be forthcoming. For it was generally agreed in the Sixth that Rushden and Monteith were to have it out between them, Darrell having declined nomination.

"We're pretty certain to pull it off," said Figgins, to a gathering of New House fellows in the Hall.

"I should say so!" Kerr said thoughtfully. "There's no denying that Monteith is the better man of the two. He's not so good-tempered as Rushden, perhaps—"

"No fear!" said Fatty Wynn, whose fat ear was still tingling from a recent application of Monteith's finger and thumb.

"But that's not the point," said Redfern of the Fourth. "What the school wants is a skipper who can run things, and Monteith can do that."

"Hear, hear!" said the crowd.

"Monteith's the man," said Figgins, "and pretty nearly all the Sixth and the Fifth of both Houses will vote for him, I believe."

"Yes, rather!"

"We are bound to stand by him, anyway, as a New House chap—"

"Hear, hear!"

There was no doubt about the unanimity of the New House fellows on that point.

"The trouble is, that the School House is bigger, not greater," went on Figgins.

"Bigger—more quantity and less quality," said Kerr.

"Hear, hear!"

"And they have about twice as many votes as we have," said Figgins. "That's the difficulty. A lot of the School House chaps will walk up to the poll like so many silly sheep, and vote for Rushden simply because he's a School House chap."

"Shame!"

"Yes, they're asses enough for anything," said Figgins. "It's no good arguing with most of them—they're simply asses!"

And there was a groan from the crowd expressive of wonder and scorn for the asinine qualities of the School House fellows.

"But isn't it a question of House loyalty with them the same as with us?" asked Fatty Wynn innocently.

There was a roar at once.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"That's quite different!"

"I did think you had more sense than that, Fatty!" said Figgins, more in sorrow than in anger. "I did, really."

mark the occasion by every means in his power."

"That means a whip round, I suppose, for a big feed?" said Fatty Wynn, finding his voice again. "That's certainly the best way of celebrating anything. I'm sure I should be willing to do the cooking—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Figgins. "Who's thinking about feeds?"

"But you said—"

"We've all got to do some electioneering," said Figgins. "We've got to point things out to the School House chaps, and try to make them see the matter in the proper light. Most of them are silly asses, but we might have a chance to make Tom Merry see reason—he's a sensible chap. And he's

Most of the juniors of the School House made up their minds to be present.

Wally—D'Arcy minor of the Third Form—considered that he had quite as much to do with the matter as any other fellow in the House, as indubitably he had, for every fellow in the School had a vote, and a fag's vote was just as valuable as a Sixth Former's in an election for the school captain. And Wally came along with a crowd of Third Formers, all ready to yell for the School House candidate, and to howl down any possible suggestion of voting for Monteith.

Tom Merry had put a notice on the board, fixing the meeting for eight



"Gentlemen," began Arthur Augustus, when he could make himself heard, "I have an idea!" "Silence for Gussy's idea!" shouted Lowther. "It's the first he ever had, and he wants to work it off!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "Go it, Gussy! Pile in!"

"Oh, Fatty always was an ass!" said Thompson of the Shell good-naturedly.

"Never mind, Fatty—"

"But—but I say—" stammered the unfortunate Fatty Wynn.

"Cheese it!"

"Yes, shut up, Fatty, old man!" said Figgins. "You're only making an ass of yourself, you know!"

"But I don't see—"

"Order!"

"If Wynn can't see the difference between House loyalty and sheer obstinacy, such as the School House chaps are going to show, it's no good arguing with him," said French. "But I think he ought to shut up."

"Oh, all right!" said Fatty.

"Now," went on Figgins, "this is a great occasion, and it behoves—"

"Well, that's a good word, anyway!" agreed Redfern.

"It behoves us," repeated Figgins, with emphasis, taking no notice of the humorous Redfern, "to leave no stone unturned to make this election a win for the New House—ahem!—I mean, for the superior candidate."

"Hear, hear!"

"On an occasion like this every chap is bound to do his best, and to help to

got a lot of influence in that old shanty they call a House."

"Good!"

"We'll go over," said Figgins. "I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle. When I've put it to him plainly he must see that Monteith is the only possible candidate."

And Figgins & Co. forthwith marched over to the School House to interview Tom Merry & Co., and try the effect of their persuasive powers upon the School House juniors. They had a difficult task before them.

CHAPTER 4.

A Slight Misunderstanding!

TOM MERRY & CO., in these same moments, were very busy.

After Kildare was gone, and the notices had been posted up about the new election, all thoughts were turned towards the coming struggle, in the School House as well as in the New House.

The meeting proposed by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, to consider his as yet unknown idea, was arranged, though the juniors had but slight intention of listening to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

o'clock, and towards that hour juniors began to stream into the large room on the ground floor, which was used as a meeting-place by the Hobby Club and the Junior Dramatic Society, and several other societies of the junior Forms.

Tom Merry & Co. were in the Hall of the School House, in busy discussion of the coming meeting, when Figgins & Co. looked in.

At the sight of the three New House juniors, who were followed in by Redfern & Co. of the Fourth, the discussion of the School House chums ceased.

Hostile glances were turned towards the six visitors by some of the fellows, but Tom Merry turned to them in hearty greeting.

"This is ripping of you, Figgy!" he exclaimed.

Figgins looked surprised.

"Is it?" he asked rather blankly.

"Yes. At a time like this, all House disputes should be buried in—"

"In the garden?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Don't be an ass, Lowther! In oblivion," said Tom Merry—"all rivalry should be buried in oblivion, and fellows of both Houses should rally together

and stand shoulder to shoulder, for the good of the old school."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins looked surprised and pleased.

"I'm jolly glad to hear you say that, Tom Merry, and jolly glad these chaps agree with you about it," he said. "It will make things much easier. I agree with every word you've said. It's just what I think myself, and what I've been saying to the chaps in the New House, Haven't I, Kerr?"

"You have," said Kerr.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily. "You agree with me, then, that fellows ought to vote for the candidate according to the fitness of things, and not stick blindly to a chap simply because he belongs to their House?"

"Exactly!" said the delighted Figgins. "Just what I said myself, only I really didn't put it quite so well."

"Then that's all plain sailing, and I move a vote of thanks to Figgins for coming over in this hearty way and assuring us of his support," said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins looked a little blank.

"Monteith's your man?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"You're voting for Monteith?"

"Voting for your grandmother!" said Blake. "Rushden is our man, of course!"

"Why, what rot!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "What's that Tom Merry was saying just now, then, about voting for the proper candidate, irrespective of the House he belonged to?"

"I mean that, every word. Rushden's the proper candidate, isn't he?" demanded Tom Merry warmly.

"Rats!"

"What!"

"Then you don't mean business about voting for the right man, without considering the House?" said Redfern.

"Yes, we do. It's you fellows who are refusing to do that. If you can't see that Rushden is the right man—"

"Bosh!"

"Now don't be a silly ass, Figgy! There is a time to be funny and a time not to be funny," said Blake severely.

"I don't think I could be so funny as you chaps, if I tried for dog's ages!" shouted Figgins. "I came over here to talk sense to you chaps—"

"Why don't you begin, then?" asked Monty Lowther innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—"

"Figgins, old man, I did think you were a more sensible chap than that," said Tom Merry. "I thought, of course, that you had come over to assure us that you were going to support our man."

"Why, you ass!" roared the exasperated Figgins.

"Look here!" said Kerr. "Monteith's far and away the best candidate. You fellows must admit that yourselves."

"Admit rats!"

"You don't mean to say—"

"Oh, 'nuff said!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "It's time for the meeting. Are you chaps going to support our man or not?"

"Not!" roared the New House juniors.

"Then buzz off!"

"Look here—"

"Yah! New House duffers!"

That was too much for Figgins. He lifted his right arm and smote the

mockers, and laid him upon the floor. It was the signal for a rush. A School House swarm poured all over Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co., and they were swept out of the House and down the steps into the quad almost in the twinkling of an eye.

Tom Merry came back into the House with his necktie awry, and panting for breath.

"Time for the meeting!" he said.

And the juniors crowded into the meeting-room.

CHAPTER 5.

Loyal to Their Candidate!

THE meeting was a crowded one, and decidedly noisy. Almost all the School House juniors were there, even to the "kids" in the Second Form, and the crowd was dense.

Tom Merry of the Shell had appointed himself chairman, but the chairman was not likely to be much regarded. On some occasions when meetings were held in that room, prefects would rush in with canes, and lay about them when the noise grew too deafening. But on the present occasion, for many reasons, the juniors felt that they could make as much noise as they liked. In the first place, there was no captain of the school; and in the second, Dr. Holmes had left the school for a short holiday.

And to some extent it was at St. Jim's like unto the state in the olden times, when there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

True, there were masters and prefects galore. But the Head was not there, and would not return till after the election of the new captain. And the other prefects were usually nice and civil to the juniors about this time, for every junior had a vote, to use as he liked, and at election times voters had to be gently dealt with.

Seniors and prefects who wanted their own candidate elected did not care about coming down heavily upon any fellow who had a vote; and some, indeed, were canvassing the "sweet voices" assiduously.

Juniors, for once in a way, felt their value and importance, and they revelled in the new sense of being fellows who mattered.

Tom Merry tapped on the table with a cricket stump, but he tapped in vain. For a long time there was a buzz of voices growing to a roar.

It was Kangaroo of the Shell who obtained the first hearing, perhaps because upon the Australian plains his lungs had grown more powerful, and enabled him on this occasion to raise his voice above the general din.

"Gentlemen—"

Buz-z-z!

"Gentlemen, Rushden's our candidate!"

Then there was a cheer.

"Rushden! Hurrah for the School House! Hurrah for the Cock House of St. Jim's!"

Kangaroo waved his hand.

"Gentlemen of the School House—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I take it that all present will vote for Rushden?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Stick to the old House!" roared Blake.

"Stand by the old firm!" yelled Lumley-Lumley.

"Hurrah!"

There was no doubt that the vast majority of the meeting, at all events, were in favour of the School House candidate.

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Tom Merry rapped upon the table.
 "Fellows—"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Do let me speak a word!"
 "Hurrah for North!"
 "North wants to speak to the meeting about the election."
 The door had opened, and North of the Sixth had looked in and made a sign to Tom Merry. The matter had been mentioned between them before. The yells and shouts and buzzes died away a little. North was a prefect of the Sixth and a chum of Kildare's, and he was very popular and much respected.
 "Go in, North, old man!" said Manners.
 "Come here!"
 "Stand on the chair!"
 "Pile in, old man!"
 "On the ball!"

North came in, with a dubious expression on his face, as if uncertain how his address would be received by the School House juniors.

The juniors observed it, but they did not understand it. There was no reason why North should be dubious, so long as he spoke in favour of the School House candidate. That he would do anything else never even crossed the minds of the juniors, as yet.

North stepped upon the chair Tom Merry placed for him, and surveyed the audience. The shouting died away to a murmur, and he had a chance to speak.

"I haven't got much to say," said the prefect, "but I think I ought to put it to you kids. There are two candidates for captain—one a New House fellow and the other belonging to our House."

"Bravo, School House!"
 "Bravo, Rushden!"
 North smiled a little awkwardly.

"But this isn't a House matter," he said. "It's a question of the good of the whole school. We want to elect the best captain we can get, and the election depends a great deal upon the way the juniors vote."

"Hear, hear!"
 "We ought to vote for the best man, irrespective of House ties," went on North.

"What-ho!" said Jack Blake, looking puzzled. "But surely you ought to be saying that to the New House chaps, not to us."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Ahem! The fact is," said North courageously, "I'm in favour of Monteith."

"Wh-wh-what!"
 A bombshell dropped in the midst of the meeting would hardly have surprised the juniors more.

"Eh?"
 "What!"
 "Monteith!"
 "Rats!"
 "Rot!"
 "Bosh!"
 "You're rotting, of course!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm not rotting," said North, flushing a little. "You can't think I'd say anything against Rushden. He's a chum of mine, and we're both chums of Kildare's—"

"Good old Kildare! Hurrah!"
 "But facts are facts," said North. "I've told Rushden my opinion."
 "And what did he say?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Well, he said I could go and eat coke!" said North, with a grin. "But look here—"
 "You'd better take Rushden's advice, then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" said North. "I want to put the facts before you kids."

"Who are you calling kids?" demanded Wally.

"Ahem! Before you juniors!" said North. "Monteith isn't of our House, but he's the better man for the skipper. I don't say he's a nicer chap than Rushden, or even so nice, but he's a football skipper, and a better manager in every way. Rushden's a splendid chap, as I know as well as anybody, but he's not built for a captain."

"Rats!"
 "Piffle!"
 "No New House bounders for us!"
 "Wathah not!"
 "I may as well tell you that nearly all the Sixth and practically all the Fifth are pledged to vote for Monteith."
 "Shame!"

Tom Merry jumped upon a form.
 "Fellows, if what North says is correct—and, of course, we don't doubt his word—the election will be much closer than we expected. But it rests with us to save St. Jim's. It depends on us to make sure that a School House captain gets in."

"Hurrah!"
 "The cause of the School House, deserted by the seniors, must be saved by the juniors," shouted Tom Merry. Frenzied cheering.

North tried to speak again. But lungs of brass would not have been equal to the task. He tried several times, but the cheering of Tom Merry's patriotic sentiments was too tremendous. North descended from the chair. His lips were moving, and he was probably speaking still, but not a syllable could be heard. He was hustled a little as he made his way to the door. Only the respect due to a prefect and senior, once popular, saved him from leaving the room on his neck.

Blake slammed the door after him.
 "Gentlemen," said Tom Merry. "I move the resolution that this meeting regrets to see that some seniors allow themselves to be led away from their allegiance to their own House, and determines to back up the School House through thick and thin."

And there was a roar of applause which showed that the motion was passed unanimously.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy's Great Idea!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stepped upon the chair vacated by North and adjusted his monocle to a nicety in his eye and surveyed the meeting.

The juniors were still cheering, not because there was anything special to cheer for, but apparently for the exercise of their lungs, and to show how much noise they could make when they really tried. If this latter was their object, they succeeded admirably.

Arthur Augustus swept the shouting crowd with his monocle for some minutes, waiting for an interval to make his voice heard.

But an interval seemed a long time coming.

Arthur Augustus' idea, which he had intended to communicate to his friends at this special meeting, had been forgotten by everyone but Arthur Augustus himself. And it really looked as if he would never have a chance to air it.

Even the lungs of schoolboys are not tireless. The yelling died down at last, and then Arthur Augustus made a modest attempt to make his voice heard.

"Gentlemen, I have an ideah—"
 Monty Lowther held up his hand.
 "Silence for Gussy's idea!" he exclaimed. "It's the first he ever had, and he wants to work it off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Lowthah—"

"Go it, Gussy!" said Tom Merry encouragingly. "Pile in! Is it a dodge for making the New House chaps vote for the right man, or for bringing the Sixth to their senses?"

"Hear, hear!"
 "Gentlemen, I think it is generally agreed here that it is quite impos for Monteith or any othah New House chap to be captain of St. Jim's!"

"Yes, rather!"
 "But there are many cires to be argued against Wushden's election," went on Arthur Augustus. "He's a splendid chap."

"Hurrah for Rushy!"
 "But there are fellows in the School House more suitable for the bisney."

"Darrell has refused to stand," said Blake.

"I was not thinkin' of Dawwell."
 "Who, then? Not North?"
 "Certainly not!"

"Lefevre of the Fifth?" hazarded Digby.

"Oh, wats! Look here, you fellows, my ideah is a wippin' one. I wegard it as wotten that the captain of the school should always be selected from the Sixth."

"Better than the Fifth!"
 "But why shouldn't a juniah be captain of St. Jim's?" demanded Arthur Augustus boldly.

It was out now!
 It was not easy to silence a numerous meeting of juniors. But Arthur Augustus had succeeded in doing it.

For a full five seconds sheer astonishment held the juniors dumb. Then there was a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, deah boys—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy jammed his monocle a little more tightly in his eye and surveyed the hilarious meeting indignantly. He did not see anything to excite mirth in

(Continued on the next page.)



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his suggestion. But the other fellows did, evidently. They roared.

"Look here, you silly asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors did not leave off laughing till they were hoarse.

"What juniors were you thinking of, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, as soon as the laughter had lulled a little.

"Myself, of course!"

"Of course!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Captain Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause whatever for this wibald laughah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It appears to me a ridiculous custom for the captain of the school always to be chosen from the Upper Forms."

"Well, there's something in that," Blake admitted. "I dare say a junior could run the show better if he had a chance."

"Quite likely!" grinned Tom Merry. "But he's not likely to have a chance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why not?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly. "If you fellows would all back me up I should get in as captain, and I pwomise you I should make things hum—wathah!"

"I've no doubt you would!" roared Kangaroo. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should see the juniahs had a chance in the First Eleven——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should put down fagging for the Sixth!"

"Good egg!"

"I expect the Sixth would jolly soon put you down," grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should uttably wefuse to be put down. Kildare was a wippin' captain, but Wushden will only be so-so, and Monteith will be wotten. I wegard it as a wippin' thing for St. Jim's to have a juniah as a skippah for a change."

"Well, if you had suggested me——" grinned Blake.

"Or me!" said Tom Merry.

"Or me!" said Wally.

"Pway don't talk out of your silly hats!" said D'Arcy. "There are juniahs and juniahs, of course. I do not say that every juniah is fitted to be captain of the school. Far fwom it. I was speakin' of myself."

"You generally are!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Captain Gussy!" murmured Blake. "Gussy, captain of St. Jim's! Oh, hold me, somebody!"

"I wegard it is a wippin' ideah, and I dare say you chaps will aftah you have had time to think it ovah," said Arthur Augustus. "What is wequered for captain of the school is a fellow of tact and judgment, a fellow who will always back up the School House and give the New House chaps the kybosh, and so on. There are othah points, too, such as havin' a decent taste in dweess, and doin' the school cweedit in that way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you what we'll do," said Tom Merry humorously. "If we vote for a junior at all, Gussy, we'll vote for you."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "You can have our votes if we vote for a junior at all."

And the meeting grinned assent.

"I fail to see why you should wegard the mattah in a humowous spiwit," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "At all events, I am goin' to put up for election, and I twust to the good sense

of the House, on reflection, to back me up."

"Great Scott!"

And Arthur Augustus walked to the door with his nose in the air.

He quitted the room, leaving the meeting almost in convulsions. The idea of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as captain of St. Jim's tickled the least humorous of the fellows. And they had further cause for merriment when the meeting broke up, and they went into the Hall.

For on the notice-board was pinned up a new notice, carefully written out in the most elegant handwriting of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Notice.

"A. A. D'Arcy, Esq., of the Fourth Form, having nominated himself as a candidate for the post of captain of St. Jim's, the juniors of the School House are invited to rally round him and vote for him on Tuesday, at 7.30 precisely.

"(Signed)

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

The juniors read the notice, and laughed till their sides ached. When, an hour or so later, D'Arcy passed the notice-board he glanced at it. There was a fresh paper pinned up over his notice, this one in the unmistakable handwriting of Monty Lowther of the Shell.

The new notice ran:

"A. A. D'Arcy, Esq., being a candidate for Colney Hatch, the juniors of the School House are invited to rally round and subscribe the cash to buy him a strait-jacket.

"(Signed) A FRIEND IN NEED."

CHAPTER 7.

A Question of Principle!

THE notice put on the board by D'Arcy had caused considerable mirth in the School House, and that added by Lowther of the Shell had caused still more.

But, curiously enough, the remarkable idea promulgated by Arthur Augustus caught the fancy of many of the School House juniors when they came to think it over.

True, the captain of the school being selected from the Fourth Form was a quite unheard-of thing. But for that reason it excited great interest among some of the fellows.

Wally D'Arcy propounded the question:

"Why not?"

There were dozens of reasons that would have convinced a senior at once, but hardly one had any weight with a junior.

A senior would have said that the necessary knowledge, gravity, sense of responsibility, and so forth, could only be found in the Upper Forms. But to that any junior in the School House would probably have replied with the ancient and monosyllabic expression:

"Rats!"

It was a matter of opinion. True enough the captain of the school had always been selected from the Sixth. But there certainly was no rule on the subject. The candidature of a junior had never been heard of, never been thought of, and even now that it was suggested, it was taken as a joke.

But before bed-time more and more of the fellows echoed D'Arcy minor's question—"Why not?"

Wally felt quite proud of his major.

Usually Wally treated his major with a most unminorlike disrespect, and yawned openly when Arthur Augustus gave him little lectures on carefulness in dress and neatness in personal appearance. But for once Wally was filled with a whole-hearted respect for his major. Certainly, Arthur Augustus had hit upon a new idea, whether it was practicable or not.

And to the Third Form, more than to any other, it appeared indeed practicable.

Wally was disposed to back up his major for once, and Jameson and Gibson said together, in tones of deep feeling:

"What larks!"

Truly, with a Fourth Former in the position of captain of the school, there would be "larks"—undoubtedly many larks.

"If it wasn't for old Rushden," said Wally, "I'd vote for my major, and I'd make all you beggars vote for him, too. But we've practically agreed to vote for Rushden, and we can't go back on a chap, even a Sixth Former."

"Right enough!" said Frayne.

And the Third Form all thought the same.

In the Fourth and the Shell, especially in Gussy's own study—Study No. 6—his candidature was the subject of merciless fun. All of which Arthur Augustus bore with stately dignity.

"I wegard you fellows as asses!"

That was all he said, and he let it go at that.

When the Shell and the Fourth went to bed, which they did at the same hour—half-past nine—Tom Merry spoke to D'Arcy on the point.

"About the election, old man——"

Tom Merry began pleasantly.

D'Arcy turned a glimmering eyeglass upon him.

"Goin' to vote for me?" he asked.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly," he replied. "Rushden's my man, and he ought to be yours."

"Wats!"

"I want to point out to you, Gussy, that if you get any of the fellows to vote for you, it's simply splitting the House vote. You see, with two School House candidates in the field, and only one New House man, the New House will be bound to pull it off, because all the New House voters will stick to Monteith like glue."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Well, now you've thought of it, you'll withdraw, of course?" said Tom Merry.

"Wathah not!"

"You don't want the New House man to get in, do you? He will, though, if you split the House vote," said Manners.

"It would be all wight if the fellows wallied wound me, and got me in," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"But they won't," said Tom Merry.

"Then the responsibility is theirs, and I wash my hands of it," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"But you'll withdraw?"

"Certainly not!"

"If you split the House vote——"

"That will be the fault of the splittahs."

"Look here, Gussy——"

D'Arcy made a gesture with his hands.

"It's useless to be obstinate, Tom Mewwy——"

"Obstinate!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated. "It's you who are being obstinate, you silly ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass!"
 "Look here, fathead—"
 "If you cannot make your remarks without the use of those opprobrious expressions, Tom Mewwy, this discuss had better cease!" D'Arcy said indignantly.

"Look here, Gussy! Are you going to withdraw?"
 "Certainly not! If I were merely thinkin' of myself in the mattah, I should withdraw at once, or wathah, I should nevah have put up my name at all. But I have to think of the school."
 "What!"
 "I am doin' this fwom a sense of duty!" said D'Arcy loftily. "I weally wegard it as a vevy good thing for a juniah to be captain of St. Jim's for a change, and I think that the new captain ought to be a fellow of tact and judgment. If this were a merely personal mattah, I should be the last fellow in the world to push myself forward in any way. But I cannot desert my pwinciples."

"Principles!" gasped Tom Merry.
 D'Arcy nodded.
 "Yaas," he said firmly, "pwinciples!"
 And he walked into the Fourth Form dormitory.
 The Terrible Three looked after him hopelessly. When D'Arcy mounted the high horse, there was no arguing with him, and the chums of the Shell gave it up.

CHAPTER 8.
The Thunderbolt!

THE next day the talk of St. Jim's was all upon the subject of the election.
 The election was to be held at seven-thirty that evening, and there were three candidates in the field—Rushden and Monteith of the Sixth, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

D'Arcy was not taken seriously at all, though by this time a number of irresponsible fags had announced their intention of voting for him. Two score of votes had been promised for Arthur Augustus by fags in the Second and Third, and D'Arcy had made careful notes of the names in his leather pocket-book. He hoped that the list would increase greatly during the day.

He was rather exasperated at his chums not taking his election more seriously, and not electioneering for him. But they didn't. All their electioneering was done for Rushden of the Sixth. It was in vain that D'Arcy appealed to their loyalty to their Form, their loyalty to their study. They only laughed.

Between Rushden and Monteith the contest was likely to be closer, and Monteith's chances certainly were enhanced by D'Arcy's action. For a couple of score of votes made a great difference.

But a good many of the seniors in the School House were not displeased at the prospect of the vote being split. For, although they would dearly have liked to see a School House man captain of St. Jim's, most of the Sixth realised that Rushden was not exactly the fellow for the position. He was a much pleasanter fellow than Monteith to get on with, but he had not the gift of ruling as captain.

That was evident to his best friend. If it had been Darrell, the Sixth would have plumped for him almost to a man. But Rushden, kind and good-natured, easy-going and easily led, was not the man to captain a school like St. Jim's,

and captain the First Eleven in tough footer matches. Most of the School House seniors backed up Monteith because they had no doubt whatever that he would make the better captain of the two.

That proceeding made the juniors extremely indignant; they were not disposed to listen to argument on the subject. To them it appeared clear that a School House fellow ought to be captain of St. Jim's, and they were prepared to fight tooth and nail to keep the New House candidate out.

That was as far as they looked in the matter.

Some of the fellows wondered whether a fourth candidate would present himself; but no one suspected the surprise that was coming.

It was after morning school that the thunderbolt fell upon the School House.

There was a meeting in Rushden's study after morning school; the juniors knew that. Tom Merry & Co. had seen Rushden go into his study with a very thoughtful expression upon his face, and had seen Sixth Formers drop in one by one. The study must have been pretty well crowded by the time they were all in. The juniors were very glad to see North go in among the others. They concluded that North had changed his ground, and decided to back up Rushden, after all. North was Rushden's best chum, and it was considered odd that he should be against him in the election. If the juniors had known the real purport of the meeting in Rushden's study, and the real intentions of North of the Sixth, they would probably have raided the Sixth Form passage, and testified their indignation by angry yells outside the room.

It was only too clear to them at the finish.

Rushden came out of his study, looking a little gloomy, but with an expression of resolve upon his good-natured face. He had a paper in his hand, which he proceeded to pin up on the notice-board. Then he retired.

There was a rush round the notice-board at once. The fellows who saw Rushden's action concluded that he had written out some stirring appeal to the patriotism of School House electors—some clarion call to crush the rival House.

But he hadn't.
 Stupefaction fell upon the juniors as they read the notice, which ran:

"NOTICE.

"The undersigned has withdrawn himself as a candidate for election.
 "GEORGE RUSHDEN."

The juniors stared at the paper.
 "It's impossible!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath.

"Rotten!"
 "Can't be true!"
 "He's dotty!"
 "He's a silly ass!"
 "North and the rest have ragged him into this!"
 "He shan't do it!"
 "We won't stand it!"
 "It's mean!"
 "Rotten! Caddish!"

The voices rose to a roar. Five minutes earlier George Rushden had been the popular candidate. Now—
 "Let's go and see him!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "He'll have to give us some explanation, anyhow."
 "My deah boys—"
 "Oh, shut up, Gussy!"
 "I refuse to shut up, Gore! I
 (Continued on the next page.)



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A CLEAN SWEEP.

Captain: "Have you scrubbed the deck and cleaned the brass?"
 Deckhand: "Yes, sir; and I've swept the horizon with my telescope!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Hopkins, 6, Oakland Terrace, Llanharan, Glamorgan.

SAFETY FIRST.

Circus Proprietor (interviewing applicant for job): "Are you used to looking after animals?"
 Applicant: "Yes, sir—been used to 'em all my life."
 Circus Proprietor: "What steps would you take if a lion got loose?"
 Applicant: "Good long 'uns, sir!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Tyson, Wilson Ward, the Infirmary, Workington.

GIVING HIM THE TIP.

The page-boy had carried the new hotel visitor's luggage to his room.
 "Now, my boy," said the man, "what is your name?"
 "John Smith," replied the page-boy; "but they call me 'Billiard Cue,' because I always work better with a tip!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Piper, 13, St. John's Avenue, Scarborough.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS.

A Cockney was amused at a notice-board which read: "This Farm for Sail." So he asked the farmer when it was "to sail." The farmer stared at him steadily for a few seconds, and then answered:
 "Just as soon as someone can raise the wind!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Willis, 11, Nursery Road, Fordsburg, Johannesburg, South Africa.

BROKE.

Doctor: "Can you feel any change since you came back from the seaside?"
 Patient: "Not a penny!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Baker, 114, Telephone Road, Southsea, Hants.

MONTY LOWTHER'S RIDDLE.

Monty Lowther: "Why is the wick of a candle like Athens?"
 Tom Merry: "Give it up, Monty."
 Monty Lowther: "Because it is in the middle of grease (Greece)."
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Jones, 28, Old Park Avenue, Balham, London, S.W.12.
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wegard it as extremely pwoob that it has occurred to Wushden that it is time a juniah was captain of St. Jim's, and he has therefore gwacefully withdwawn fwom the contest. I considah—"

But the fellows did not wait to hear what Gussy considered. They swarmed away towards George Rushden's study.

Rushden was doubtless expecting the visit. He was standing up, leaning on the mantelpiece, looking rather disturbed in his mind, when a dozen knocks sounded at once on his door. North and Darrell were with him.

"Come in!" said Rushden.

The door was flung open, and Tom Merry & Co. crowded in. Behind them the passage was seething with juniors—crowds of the Shell and the Third. Nearly all the juniors belonging to the School House seemed to be bent upon getting as near Rushden's study as they could.

"Hallo!" said Rushden. "What do you kids want?"

He knew well enough.

"We want an explanation!" roared Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"What do you mean by it?"

"You're not going to resign!"

"We won't let you!"

"It's going in to the enemy!"

"It's not playing the game!"

"It's mean!"

Rushden flushed, and held up his hand for silence.

"I'm sorry you chaps are disappointed," he said. "I've consulted all the Sixth fellows in the School House, and I thought it out carefully myself. I would like to be the skipper of St. Jim's, but it seems to be the general impression that Monteith is the best man after Kildare."

"Rot!"

"He's a New House chap!"

"His House doesn't matter," said Rushden. "We want the best captain we can get for St. Jim's. I'd rather it were a School House man; but if Monteith's the best man available, let him have it. We ought to think of the school."

"He's not the best!"

"It's rot!"

"Darrell agrees with me," said Rushden.

Darrell nodded.

"I've helped Rushden come to this decision," he said. "I think it's for the best. I think Rushden's done splendidly in standing out of the election for the good of the school."

Darrell was too much respected by the juniors for him to be interrupted. But the looks of the disappointed youngsters showed that for once one of the most popular seniors in the House failed to make the slightest impression upon them.

"So, you see, it's for the best," said Rushden, with rather an effort, for he was a little disappointed himself. "You kids had better stand up for Monteith."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Now, then, no cheek!" said Rushden.

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry. "We don't mean to cheek you, Rushden. You've been talked over into doing this. I don't blame you or the chaps who've talked you over, if you think they were acting for the good of the school. I suppose every chap has a right to his own opinion. But I'm not going to vote for a New House candidate, especially for Monteith. I'm going to vote for a School House man!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the juniors.

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Tom Merry's face flushed with excitement.

"Hurrah for the School House!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well, you kids can do your bellowing in the passage," suggested North. "We don't want the study windows broken."

"Rats!"

"Oh, buzz off, and be quiet."

The juniors obeyed the order to "buzz off," but they were far from quiet. In the Sixth Form passage the throng swelled and surged. Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Fellows—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Chaps, the Sixth have betrayed us!"

Groans for the Sixth!

"Even if we get another senior candidate, we can't tell whether he may not desert the cause at the last moment, and leave us dished."

Groans!

"Gussy was right!" shouted Tom Merry excitedly.

"Oh!"

"Gussy said it was time that a junior was captain of St. Jim's, and he was right. A junior wouldn't have been talked over into giving us away to the enemy like this."

"Bravo!"

"Gentlemen, I am going to vote for a junior captain of the school. I invite you all to follow my example."

There was a roar.

"Hurrah! Hurrah for Captain Gussy! Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 9. The Election!

ELECTION night!

There had been elections before at St. Jim's, and they had always caused excitement. But there had never been such singular issues at stake—never before had so much turned upon an election of a captain of the school.

With two candidates, one a senior and the other a junior, the election was a new thing in the annals of St. Jim's.

Hardly a single fellow was likely to stay away from the poll. Keen electioneers on both sides urged and drove the fellows into Big Hall at seven o'clock that evening.

Figgins & Co. and a compact phalanx of New House juniors marched in by one door, and School House fellows entered by another. This had been arranged, in order to prevent possible collisions while feeling ran so high. Not that there was any real ill-feeling on the subject between the juniors of the rival Houses. But they were highly excited, and somewhat in the state of a powder magazine, requiring only a match to be dropped into it.

If a row once started, there was no telling where and when it might end. The prefects, armed with canes, perambulated the Hall to keep order.

The rival juniors exchanged yells and catcalls of defiance across the Hall, undeterred by the prefects. They had many things to say to one another, chiefly of an uncomplimentary nature.

"Stick to your Form, you young cads!" sang out Blake, implying thereby that Figgins & Co. were morally bound to vote for the Fourth Form candidate.

"Stick to your tailor's dummy!" replied Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Yah! New House cads!"

"School House rotters!"

"Where did you get that pane in the eye, Gussy?"

"Where did you get those calves, Figg?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At which, Figgins, who was very sensitive on the subject of his slender calves, showed signs of charging, and was pushed back by a prefect.

The entrance of the masters put an end to the uproar.

When Mr. Railton took his seat at the dais, the juniors ceased to yell and catcall, and contented themselves with whispering and buzzing. Mr. Railton had no part in the proceedings, but he was there to keep order, and Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, joined him there. Two prefects, one of the School House, and one of the New House, had been appointed tellers.

When the votes had been counted, once by each teller, they were to compare notes, and the candidate who counted the greater number of votes would be declared duly elected captain of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had come into the Hall in the midst of his special chums. Blake, Digby, and Herries were round him, and he was also supported by the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Reilly. There was no doubt that the School House juniors were united on the point of getting D'Arcy in. They marched him up to the front of the Hall in a sort of triumphal procession.

"Here he is!" roared Tom Merry.

"Here he is!" echoed Wally.

"Hurrah for the People's Candidate!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Railton held up his hand for silence, and the cheering died away.

The School House master had risen to his feet. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped upon the dais, and Monteith passed up the Hall, and stood near him there. Monteith's expression was curious. If his adversary had been Rushden, he would have shaken hands with him; but a prefect could not acknowledge a junior so far as to shake hands with him before the assembled school. D'Arcy made a graceful bow, but Monteith barely nodded.

"No bad feelin', deah boy, I hope," said D'Arcy blandly.

Monteith frowned.

"You young ass!" he replied.

"Weally, Monteith—"

"Boys," said Mr. Railton, "the election of a new captain of the school, in the place of Eric Kildare, is about to take place. There are—ahem—two candidates, and I trust that the electors will use judgment in giving their votes."

"Hear, hear!" roared the whole school.

Mr. Railton sat down. Then Baker of the Sixth jumped up and proposed Monteith, a move to which Tom Merry rather precipitately responded by jumping up and proposing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was a yell.

"Order!"

But that yell was from the seniors. From the School House juniors came a roar that almost drowned it.

"Bravo!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Railton. "The votes will now be taken. Darrell and Baker, you will kindly take the votes for Monteith."

"Yes, sir."

"Hands up for Monteith!" called out Darrell.

Quite a forest of hands went up. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round



As D'Arcy passed the notice-board he glanced at it. There was a fresh paper pinned up over his notice, and it was written in the unmistakable handwriting of Monty Lowther. Arthur Augustus stopped and stared at it in amazement.

him with an eye that was gleaming rather anxiously through the eyeglass.

The New House to a man voted for Monteith. Every member of the Sixth of either House voted for him. Some of the Fifth who belonged to the School House did not vote at all. They did not want a New House captain, and they did not intend to vote for a junior, so they refrained from voting at all.

The tellers counted, and then compared notes. The result was announced by Baker, who demanded whether the other party wanted a show of hands. The hands for James Monteith numbered ninety-six.

"Want a show of hands?" roared Jack Blake indignantly. "I should say so! We could beat that total off our heads!"

"Silence!"

"Show up the School House!" roared Kangaroo.

"Hands up for Gussy!"

"Hands up for the People's Candidate!"

"D'Arcy and liberty!"

"Hurrah!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Count the votes for D'Arcy, please!"

Darrell and Baker proceeded to their task. It was noted that they were longer over the counting, and that argued well for the School House. Darrell's face was quite immovable when they finished, but Baker was looking decidedly glum. They compared notes and spoke to Mr. Railton, who looked very grave.

He rose to make the result known. There was a breathless hush.

"Boys, the total number of votes for D'Arcy of the Fourth is one hundred and seventeen!"

There was a buzz.

"D'Arcy of the Fourth has a majority of twenty-one votes, and I have, therefore, no alternative but to declare him duly elected captain of St. Jim's."

It was not an enthusiastic way of putting it. Mr. Railton evidently was not delighted with the result of the voting.

But the School House fellows did not notice or care for that. All they cared for was the announcement itself.

Captain of St. Jim's!
Duly elected!

There was no doubt of it. The impossible had happened. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, was captain.

And the School House juniors burst into a roar of cheering that made the old rafters shake, and carried D'Arcy shoulder-high from the Hall.

CHAPTER 10.

No Nonsense!

ST. JIM'S awoke the next morning in a state of astonishment. One or two fellows said they thought that they must have dreamed it. But they hadn't.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form was captain of St. Jim's.

Before the great man, mere ordinary

Fourth Formers and Sixth Formers had to bow low; to him even prefects, great and mighty as they were, had to yield to obedience.

There were fellows in the Upper Forms who said that they would see him hanged first. Indeed, that they would see all sorts of things, which they specified in very loud tones, happen before they would take notice of a Fourth Former.

But the juniors of St. Jim's were ready to back up the new captain wholeheartedly. And a curious situation arose. For if the junior portion of the school ever turned upon the senior portion, there was no doubt at all that numbers must carry the day. Authority in any school rests upon obedience. The habit of discipline should not be broken.

But now authority was on the side of D'Arcy. Junior he might be; tailor's dummy he might be, as his rivals asserted; silly ass he might be, as many declared with emphasis; but, whatever he might be or might not be, one fact stood out clear and undoubted above all others—he was captain of St. Jim's, and had the prescriptive rights to the obedience of all juniors and all seniors. He was captain of the school, captain of the football club, captain of the boats, and whoever resisted him was rebelling against constituted authority. It was easy for one prefect to keep a whole Form in order when he had authority on his side. But when he backed up against proper authority, he

was merely a fellow who wanted putting in his place—and there were scores of juniors ready and willing to put him there!

Upon one point Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins & Co., too, and nearly every junior at St. Jim's had resolved. The new captain should be obeyed. He should not be treated with disrespect because he was a junior. As juniors themselves, they would take that as a personal insult, and would avenge it.

The more sensible fellows in the Sixth realised that they were in a bad hole, and decided to make the best of it—hoping that the Head would annul D'Arcy's election when he returned to St. Jim's, or that Kildare would come back to the old school and resume his place. D'Arcy made no secret of his willingness to yield the place up to Kildare if the popular captain returned. But as yet no word had been heard from the captain of St. Jim's, and no one knew what his plans were.

Mr. Lathom looked very oddly at D'Arcy in class that morning. It was the first time little Mr. Lathom had had a captain of the school in his class. Arthur Augustus was comporting himself with a new dignity, which became him well. The other fellows treated him with a marked respect. They realised that if they did not do so, the seniors were not likely to; indeed, the seniors were not likely to in any case.

After morning lessons, Arthur Augustus lingered a few minutes behind the Fourth in the Form-room to write out a notice, which he pinned up on the board in the Hall with perfect gravity.

Seniors and juniors gathered round to read it, with great curiosity.

"NOTICE.

"The members of the First Eleven are requested to attend in Study No. 3, Sixth Form, to discuss the Topcliffe match.

"(Signed) A. A. D'ARCY,
"Captain."

Notices signed "KILDARE, Captain," had been common enough on the board. "D'ARCY, Captain," was something new. There was a growl from Knox.

"I shan't jolly well attend any blessed meeting of that blessed young ass!" he remarked.

"You needn't," said Tom Merry. "You're not in the First Eleven, or likely to be, unless you change your manners and customs."

There was a laugh, and Knox turned red with anger. He made a threatening movement towards the hero of the Shell. A cool, clear voice rang out:

"Knox, stand back!"

It was Captain D'Arcy.

The swell of the Fourth stepped in between Knox and Tom Merry, his form drawn up to its full height, and his eyeglass gleaming in his eye.

"I forbid you to touch Tom Mewwy, Knox! I am not goin' to have any bullyin' in the School House undah my wule!"

The fellows gasped.

D'Arcy did it to the life; there was no hesitation about him. Evidently he took himself seriously as captain of St. Jim's.

"You cheeky young cub!" roared Knox.

"Hold on, Knox," said Darrell quietly. "D'Arcy is captain of the school, for the present, at least. It's no good cutting up rusty about it."

"Do you think I'm going to take any

notice of a cub in the Fourth?" roared Knox, almost purple with rage.

"You must!"

"Rot! I won't, then!"

"Pway undahstand me," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I hope I shall tweek ewey fellow in the school with courtesy and fair play. But I shall not stand any nonsense. If I am cheeked, I shall call upon the pwefects to punish the offendah. If the pwefects wefuse to do their duty, I shall call upon the juniahs, and the juniahs will back me up."

"Yes, rather!" roared the juniors.

Some of the youngsters crowded round Knox in a very threatening way. The bully of the Sixth looked round for support. But the pwefects only shrugged their shoulders. They had no intention of backing up Knox. They did not care about submitting to the rule of the new captain, certainly; but they did not intend to begin a conflict with the juniors, themselves hopelessly in the wrong. The juniors were evidently only too ready for strife. Nothing could have pleased them better than ragging the pwefects under the orders of the captain of the school. Fags in the Second and Third might have been frowned into obedience. But sturdy fellows like Blake, Tom Merry, and Figgins were not likely to care for frowns.

"Look here, Darrell!" said Knox. "You're head perfect now that Kildare's gone. Do you mean to tell me that you're going to take orders from D'Arcy of the Fourth?"

Darrell nodded.

"Yes," he said. "He's been elected captain of St. Jim's."

"That's all rot!"

"It may be, but unless his election is annulled by the Head, it holds good. And I don't see how the Head can annul it either."

"He'll make the young cad resign, anyway."

"Perhaps; but for the present D'Arcy is captain of St. Jim's. Don't play the fool, Knox!" Darrell lowered his voice. "You wouldn't start a general row between seniors and juniors?"

Knox bit his lips hard. He saw that the Sixth would not back him up, especially as Darrell had sided against him, and he had no more to say.

"It's all wight," said D'Arcy, "leave him alone, Dawwell. I am obliged to you for havin' put the mattah so clearly. I shall expect all the pwefects in Study No. 3 in ten minutes."

And Arthur Augustus walked away with great dignity.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

D'Arcy went into Kildare's old study, which he had decided to occupy on occasions like this. It would certainly have been infra dig if the pwefects had been called upon to attend a meeting in a Fourth Form study. To Kildare's old room they could take no exception, and D'Arcy, firm as he was to maintain his rights as captain, was careful to be delicate and considerate upon all possible points.

One by one the pwefects and other Sixth Formers concerned in the Topcliffe match dropped in. Most of them hardly knew what to do, but they had followed Darrell's lead, and Darrell had accepted the peculiar situation like a sensible and cool-headed fellow.

Arthur Augustus nodded to the seniors as they came in, in turn. They nodded in reply. Some of them grinned, but their grins died away under the junior's look of chilling dignity.

"All the membahs of the team here?" asked D'Arcy, looking round through

his eyeglass, as he stood in an elegant attitude by the mantelpiece.

"Yes!" said Monteith shortly.

Monteith was feeling very sore about the result of the election, and he hardly took the trouble to conceal it.

"Vewy good! Pway be seated!"

"About the Topcliffe match——" began Rushden.

"I was just comin' to that, deah boy."

"Of course," said North, a little uneasy, "you are going to ask Monteith to captain the team for the match?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I twust I shall nevah ask anothah fellow to do my duty for me, when I am perfectly able to perform it myself," he replied.

"You—you don't mean——"

"Look here!"

"Who's going to captain the First Eleven?"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle carefully in his eye, and replied, in the coolest of tones, and without the flicker of a eye-lid:

"I am!"

CHAPTER 11.

Changes in the First Eleven!

"YOU are?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not see anything to be excited about. But the pwefects in Kildare's study looked excited and dismayed. Of course, Arthur Augustus was acting strictly within his rights as captain of St. Jim's. He had the right and the power to captain the First Eleven. And since he had full confidence in his ability to do so, why should he delegate the task to another?

Darrell, the senior pwefect, had made up his mind to take this queer situation in a businesslike way. But even Darrell was disturbed.

"D'Arcy," he exclaimed heatedly, "you can't mean it!"

"Why not, deah boy?"

"Come now! You can't captain a senior team!"

"My deah Dawwell, that is where you are quite mistaken. I have long been convinced that what the First Eleven wants is to be bucked up by havin' some juniahs in it."

"What?" yelled the seniors.

"The First Eleven ought to be wewpewsentative of the whole school in my opinion," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am thinkin' of puttin' in one fellow of the Shell, and two of the Fourth, besides myself."

"Oh!"

"That will make it a more wewpewsentative team."

"My hat!"

"Poor old St. Jim's!"

"Nice day for Topcliffe."

D'Arcy frowned.

"I have not the slightest doubt that we shall beat Topcliffe," he replied. "Look at this papah. I have sketched out the eleven already. Fatty Wynn of the Fourth in goal."

Darrell's face cleared a little.

"Wynn of the Fourth kept goal for the Sixth one before, and did it jolly well," he exclaimed. "I don't complain about that."

"Vewy good! I wewpect your judgment vewy much, Dawwell, and I am glad you agree," said D'Arcy. "Backs, Wushden and Pwice."

"That's all right."

"Halves, Bakah, North, and Jones of the Sixth."

"Good!"

"In the front line, Tom Mewwy of the Shell, Blake of the Fourth, myself, and Monteith, and anothah seniah. I leave him to you."

Darrell whistled.
"Well, it's a team that might win," he said. "Only your front line will be rushed all over the ground by Topcliffe seniors."

"Wats!"
"Eh?"
"Excuse me, Dawwell—I mean I don't agwee! I wathah think that a team with junaahs in it will do St. Jim's gweat cweedit."

"Rot!" said Monteith.
Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the head prefect of the New House.

"Weally, Monteith, that is not the way to address your captain."
"Rot!" repeated the head prefect. "The election was ridiculous, and if the fellows took my advice they'd take no notice of it."

"I don't see how that can be done without special orders from the Head," said Darrell. "And the Head won't be here till to-night or to-morrow."

"We are prefects," growled Monteith. "Pway listen to me, Monteith," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I am captain of St. Jim's, and I shall not allow my authority to be disputed. If the Sixth wufese to back me up as in duty bound, I shall call upon the juniors for assistance, and they will back me up. If there is any wesistance to pwopah authowity, I shall call upon the Lower Forms at once, and upon you will west the wesponsibility of pwovokin' a wov between Lowah and Upper School."

Monteith gritted his teeth.
"It won't come to that," said Darrell hastily. "You're elected, D'Arcy, and we shall treat you as captain, unless the Head annuls the election."

"I should submit to the Head's ordahs cheerfully," said D'Arcy. "At pwsent, howevah, I am skippah, and I have given ordahs for the Topcliffe match. I will now pwocceed to post this list up in the Hall."

And the swell of St. Jim's quitted the study.

He left the seniors looking at one another in silence.

"Well, this beats everything," said Baker, at last.

Monteith laughed angrily.
"Better give the young cub a hiding and end it," he said.

"It can't be done," said Darrell quietly. "He's captain of St. Jim's, and the juniors would back him up. We don't want a general riot between the Sixth and the Lower School, in which the Sixth would get the worst of it."

And all but Monteith agreed with Darrell. Monteith was still feeling sore over his defeat in the election.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pinned the paper up in the Hall, and the notice-board was immediately surrounded by a crowd of eager readers.

There was a chirrup of satisfaction from Jack Blake. He slapped the captain of St. Jim's on the shoulder very heartily.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed. "Your front line is splendid, Gussy. Bow to the great man's sensible choice, you chaps."

And all the juniors present solemnly bowed low.

"Don't be asses!" said D'Arcy. "But I'm glad you all agwee with my selection."

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! Do you know why there aren't any lunatic asylums in Arabia? Because there are nomad people there. Look it up! You heard of the coffee planter who hadn't a bean? He was badly off; but what about the perfumer who hadn't a cent? "I have heard many schoolboy howlers in my time," observes Mr. Selby. Doubtless he has been responsible for many of them! Gore gave up skating because the ice broke under him. He was "through with it"! "What would a man be doing sitting on a railway track reading a letter?" inquires Mellish. Why, reading between the lines, of course. Can you tell me how long boys should sleep? The same as short boys. "How much does it cost to go to Oxford?"

"I could suggest a slight improvement," said Kangaroo thoughtfully.

"What is that, Kangy, deah boy?"
"Put me in as centre-forward," grinned the Cornstalk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Kangy—"
"Nothing like selecting the best man available," suggested Kangaroo.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply. His own name was down as centre-forward. Upon the whole the list gave the Lower School great satisfaction. There were four juniors in the team. But it was unheard of for four juniors to have played in the First Eleven. The seniors, of course, were expecting a wholesale licking from Topcliffe, excepting Darrell, and one or two others. Darrell saw that D'Arcy had well selected his team, and he would not have been surprised at a victory. He thought that such a team might pull off a win once, but not twice.

But D'Arcy had no doubts.
Needless to say, there was a big crowd on the ground when the time approached for the Topcliffe match.

Topcliffe seniors were a strong team, and the St. Jim's fellows were very curious to see how D'Arcy's mixed eleven would face them.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was to referee the match, and there was a somewhat peculiar expression upon his face when he came down to the field.

His opinions on the subject of the remodelled First Eleven he kept to himself, but it was probable that he shared the views of the Sixth Form.

Topcliffe arrived in a motor-coach, and Yorke, their captain, expected to be greeted by Kildare.

He was somewhat surprised when an elegant Fourth Former came up to greet him politely.

"Hallo!" he said. "Where's Kildare?"

"Left, deah boy!"
"Oh! Sorry! Who's the skipper, then?" asked Yorke.

"I am."
Yorke laughed.

"Don't be funny, kid!" he replied.

"Where's the skipper?"

asks a reader. "Bus or train?" "What is the guillotine?" demanded Mr. Selby, in class. "A French cure for headaches," responded Wally D'Arcy. Wally soon "ached" elsewhere! A Scotsman and a Jew planned to start a bus service together. On the first morning they both turned up as conductors. "Does a tomato ever see red?" inquires Skimpole. Yes, it always has the pip! Shooting at the clouds is suggested as a method of producing rain. Centre-forwards, however, are to be discouraged from practising this! A Wayland business man is going to open a skating-rink that will make people sit up. It'll be a change—skating-rinks usually make you sit down! During the hearing of a case in New York, the prisoner calmly worked out a crossword puzzle. We understand the judge used "cross words" to him. By the way, the report that Manners is giving up chess is unfounded. It is merely his turn to move. Of course, you heard about the farm hand who refused to give a broadcast on sowing oats because he said he did enough "broadcasting" during the day! What, in a hurry? Take my advice and eat standing up. Yes, "bolt" upright!
I'm off!

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and gave Yorke a lofty glance.

"I am not bein' funnary!" he said, with dignity. "I wepeat that I am captain of St. Jim's. My team is quite weady."

"Is this a jape?" asked the Topcliffe captain, turning to Rushden.

Rushden coloured, and grinned uneasily.

"No!" he said.
"But that kid isn't your captain?"

"He's been elected captain."
"My hat!"

"My men are weady," repeated D'Arcy, with dignity.

"My only hat!" repeated the Topcliffe captain.

And he walked on the field apparently in a dazed state. St. Jim's won the toss, and elected to kick off. There was a breathless hush round the field as the whistle rang out and the match commenced.

CHAPTER 12.

The Match!

TOPCLIFFE seniors were grinning as they began that remarkable match.

Probably they regarded the remodelled First Eleven of St. Jim's as a comical light. But they soon woke up to the fact that the eleven, mixed as it was, was quite up to their form.

Tom Merry, and Blake, and D'Arcy certainly were rather light against the big Topcliffe fellows, but they were very nimble and very quick. And the St. Jim's goalkeeper was a marvel. With Fatty Wynn in goal it was never easy to score, and Fatty Wynn was in his best form now, and ready for anything.

Topcliffe made two or three attacks, and Yorke slammed the ball in twice, but each time Fatty Wynn saved with perfect ease, and the St. Jim's crowd roared approval.

"Well saved!"
"Bravo, Wynn!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bwavo, deah boy!" said the St. Jim's captain encouragingly.

Yorke wrinkled his brows.

"That kid in goal is mustard!" he remarked to one of his forwards. "We can walk over the team, I think, but it

won't be easy to beat that young porpoise."

But it was not so easy to walk over the team, either.

Tom Merry, who was playing outside-right for St. Jim's, captured the ball, and bore it along down the touchline, and as the Topcliffe left-back closed on him, he sent it in to Jack Blake, who passed to D'Arcy just as he was tackled.

Blake rolled over under a charge with a bump that shook every ounce of brawn out of his body. But D'Arcy had the ball, and was speeding on with only the goalkeeper to beat.

With his eyeglass jammed in his eye, and his cheeks glowing pink, the swell of St. Jim's sped on, and the Topcliffe goalie prepared to make a save.

D'Arcy's right foot whisked out, and the goalie got ready to dive to the right. But D'Arcy changed his feet with lightning quickness, caught the goalie on the wrong leg, and kicked into the farther corner of the net.

The ball whizzed into the net, and shook the rigging, and St. Jim's First Eleven was one up!

There was a frenzied yell from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Bravo, skipper!"

"My only hat!" said Yorke, as the Topcliffians lined up again, after the goalie had tossed out the leather. "We shall have to mark that young bounder."

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Hurrah!"

Then the ball was kicked off again.

Topcliffe fought hard to equalise during the remainder of the first half, and they succeeded just before the whistle went. Yorke put the ball in, and when Mr. Railton blew his whistle the score was equal.

"One to one," said Jack Blake, when the teams moved off the field for their brief rest. "I don't think the old eleven would have done any better."

"Wathah not!"

Rushden laughed.

"Very likely not," he said. "We've got off cheaply so far."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Rushden.

"Weally, Wushden—"

"I mean we've had a lucky escape!" Rushden exclaimed. "I only hope the second half will turn out as well for us."

"I wefuse to wegard it as a lucky escape," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as good play and good leadership."

"Rot!" said Monteith.

"Weally, Monteith—"

"Oh, cheese it, Monteith!" said Baker. "That's not the way to speak to a skipper."

"I'll speak as I like."

"You'll do nothin' of the sort!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If you uttah anothah impertinent remark, Monteith, I'll ordah you off the field!"

Monteith laughed mockingly.

The whistle was about to blow, and the altercation went no further. But Monteith was scowling as he lined up with the Saints.

Pheep!

The ball was rolling again, and the second half commenced with vigour. Topcliffe were trying kick-and-rush tactics, and they succeeded in breaking through the St. Jim's defence more than once, but Fatty Wynn in goal was always up to the mark.

Again and again the leather was slammed in upon the fat Fourth Former, but no matter how it came, he always sent it whizzing out again.

A good clearance by Fatty Wynn sent

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,410.

the ball out to midfield, and Arthur Augustus captured it and sped off down the centre.

Tackled by the Topcliffe centre-half, he passed to Monteith, who was at inside-left. Monteith kept the ball, and ran on, hoping to score, D'Arcy keeping pace with him down the centre.

The Topcliffe right-back closed on Monteith, and the smallest fag in the crowd round the ropes could see that Monteith should have passed to his winger or Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy scored once before from a similar pass, and he had every chance, while if Monteith kept the ball, the chance would probably be lost.

But Monteith did not pass; he dribbled the ball on.

"To me!" shouted D'Arcy.

The prefect did not heed.

"Pass!" roared the crowd.

But the New House prefect selfishly kept the ball. His lips set obstinately over his teeth, and he rushed on with the ball and shot from a distance, as the back rushed on him. The kick was hasty and ill-judged, and the goalkeeper easily saved the shot. The next moment the ball was booted into midfield.

D'Arcy was angry.

Monteith's direct selfishness had cost his side an almost certain goal; and, worse than that, it had given the foe a chance.

For the Topcliffians were rushing the ball on; the St. Jim's half-backs were beaten. And before the defence could rally, shots were being rained in on Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn was splendid, but he was not invincible. A shot found the net, and there was a yell from Topcliffe.

"Goal!"

Topcliffe were winning.

Monteith bit his lip hard. He knew that he was to blame, as undoubtedly he was.

St. Jim's lined up again. The Topcliffe fellows were feeling very confident now. They had not the slightest doubt of winning once they had taken the lead. They thought it was just a question of how many goals they got.

But the great game of football is full of surprises, and that game was more surprising than most.

Fatty Wynn in goal was a tower of strength. He saved times out of number, and every attack of the Topcliffians, however hard pressed, was stopped when it reached the citadel manned by the Welsh junior.

And when in a quick raid on the Topcliffe goal, Tom Merry scored, there was a roar of relief and delight from St. Jim's.

"Goal!"

"Equal now!" grinned Jack Blake. "Now for the odd goal!"

Both sides fought hard for that odd goal. Two to two was the score, and there were yet ten minutes to go.

A determined attack by Topcliffe put the St. Jim's goal in danger, but Fatty Wynn was not found wanting. The attack petered out, and then the Saints swept the leather goalwards in their turn. It was almost on the stroke of time when Tom Merry met a centre from the left wing and "hit" the ball first time. The goalie was beaten to the wide, and to the immense delight of

the Saints, on and off the field, the leather lodged in the net.

Pheep!

The shrill note of the whistle was almost drowned by the roar that broke from the crowd.

"Goal! Hurrah! St. Jim's wins!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

Captain D'Arcy's team had won!

CHAPTER 13.

Backing Up Captain Gussy!

THE enthusiasm of the juniors of St. Jim's, after the defeated Topcliffians had departed, knew no bounds.

A match which had been regarded as a tough one by Kildare, had been won, with a junior captain and three junior players in the team.



Red with anger, Knox made a threatening movement towards D'Arcy stepped between them, his form drawn up to its full height as he ordered. "I forbid you"

It was enough to make the juniors enthusiastic.

The seniors looked at the matter in a different light. They felt that St. Jim's had been very lucky not to be beaten crushingly, and though they were glad enough of the victory, they realised that it strengthened D'Arcy's position, and made all the more difficult the problem of getting rid of the Fourth Form captain.

But questions of this sort did not trouble the juniors. They had won. Their captain had been vindicated in the eyes of the whole school, and they rejoiced.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked as serene as ever. In the midst of the enthusiasm and excitement he was careful to preserve the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But he could not disguise the fact that he was very pleased. His captaincy of St. Jim's had started well; there was no doubt about that.

Needless to say, there was a celebration of the glorious victory.

Tom Merry & Co. pooled their funds for the purpose, and a big feed was held in Study No. 6, to which, of course, came Figgins & Co. from the New House.

Arthur Augustus was the hero of the hour.

Even Figgins & Co., by this time, were willing to overlook the fact that the swell of St. Jim's belonged to the School House, and to remember only that he was a junior in the Fourth Form like themselves.

It was a glory for the Fourth Form which they could fully understand and appreciate. They were ready to back him up all along the line. House rows were a thing of the past—just now, at all events.



wards Tom Merry, but before he could reach the junior, Captain's full height, and his eyes gleaming. "Knox, stand back!" "Did you touch Tom Merry?"

That there was a buzz of voices, and, in fact, a great deal of noise in Study No. 6, goes without saying. But a little tact on the part of Knox, the prefect, would have kept him from interfering. But doubtless he was glad of a chance of getting at the new captain of the school.

There was a sharp rap on the door while the merriment in Study No. 6 was at its height, and a fag of the Second Form put his head in, with a cheeky grin.

"Knox says you're to stop that row, or he'll come up to you!" said the fag, and vanished. He did not care to remain near Study No. 6 after delivering that message.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned red with wrath.

In olden times, certainly, Study No. 6 had received messages like that many a time, and they had found it expedient to obey the orders of a prefect.

But the case was changed now.

D'Arcy, at all events, was no longer under Knox's orders, but Knox was under his. The impertinence of the message was unbounded.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy at last.

"The cheek!" said Figgins indignantly. "Fancy sending a message like that to the captain of the school!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Make an example of him, Gussy!"

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye.

"I shall certainly speak to him vevy severely," he said. "Go and tell Knox to come to me at once, Lowthah!"

Monty Lowther hesitated.

The captain of St. Jim's certainly had a right to send a Shell fellow on messages if he liked, but that was an aspect of D'Arcy's captaincy which struck Lowther as less agreeable than the aspect he had hitherto observed. Besides, the bearer of such a message to Knox would be putting his head into the lion's den.

"Oh, I say—" began Lowther.

"Pway go at once, deah boy!"

"Yes, buzz off!" said Blake. "Mind he doesn't get a chance at you with a ruler, that's all!"

"But—"

Monty Lowther hesitated.

"Weally, Lowthah, I hope you are not goin' to begin settin' a bad example to the seni ahs!" said D'Arcy severely.

"Ahem!"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Digby.

Monty Lowther ceased to argue, and quitted the study. He made his way to the Sixth Form passage, and cautiously approached the door of Knox's study. Although he was backed up by all the authority of the captain of St. Jim's, Lowther knew better than to venture within reach of the bully of the Sixth when he delivered his message.

Knox's door was shut. Lowther tapped at it and opened it. There was a sound of voices in the study, and Lowther saw Knox in consultation with Sefton of the Sixth and North, Pelham, and another prefect.

Knox looked at him savagely.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I've got a message from the captain," said Lowther, keeping his hand upon the handle of the door, ready to slam it and bolt at a moment's notice.

"From that cub D'Arcy, do you mean?" asked Knox harshly.

"From the captain," said Monty Lowther firmly—"from Captain Gussy! You're to go to his study at once!"

"What!" yelled Knox.

"You're to go to his study immediately and report yourself!"

"My—my—my only aunt!" ejaculated North.

Knox made a spring towards the door. Slam!

Monty Lowther sped at top speed down the passage. Knox dragged the door open, but the active Shell fellow was already at the end of the passage. He fled for the Fourth Form quarters at top speed.

He burst breathlessly into Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was just raising a cup of tea to his lips, and as Lowther threw the door open and rushed in, he started, and spilt hot tea on his trousers.

"Ow!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"Sorry!" gasped Lowther. "You should be more careful. The captain of a Public school oughtn't to soil his trousers in that reckless way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus, mopping his trousers with his handkerchief. "I must say that I wegard you as a silly ass! But is Knox comin'?"

"He was when I lost sight of him!" gasped Lowther.

"Is he after you?" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yes, rather!"

D'Arcy put away his handkerchief. At such a moment as this, when his authority as captain of St. Jim's was assailed by a reckless rebel, he could forget even his soiled trousers.

"Very well!" he said. "We shall see!"

And Arthur Augustus stepped into the open doorway of the study and waited.

But Knox did not appear. He did not care to pursue Lowther as far as the junior passages.

D'Arcy waited in vain, with the light of battle gleaming behind his eyeglass.

"He isn't coming," said Kerr.

"Wathah not!"

"He wouldn't care to venture here, I expect," said Tom Merry.

"If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, deah boys, Mahomet must go to the mountain," said D'Arcy.

"Gussy—"

"Knox has wefused to obey his skippah's ordahs," said D'Arcy. "It is my duty to punish Knox!"

"Eh?"

"I am now goin' to his study. You fellows can follow and back me up if you like."

"But hold on—"

"When it is a question of my authority as captain of St. Jim's at stake, deah boys, I cannot hold on. I must cwush this impertinence on the part of the pwefects. This sort of thing must be nipped in the bud, you know!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked out of the study with a stately tread.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Well, Gussy's right," said Tom Merry.

"Of course he is!"

"And we're going to back him up!" declared Herries.

"Yes, rather!"

And the chums of St. Jim's followed D'Arcy.

Figgins & Co. were quite as keen as the School House fellows on backing up the school captain. And a crowd of other fellows, seeing them march and learning what was on, joined them.

A little army marched into the Sixth Form passage, and some of the more prudent and thoughtful of the juniors had caught up walking-sticks or cricket stumps or rulers, in case there was trouble.

D'Arcy knocked at the rebellious prefect's door. D'Arcy might be angry, but he was always polite.

"Come in!" roared Knox.

D'Arcy opened the door and walked in.

Knox glared at him.

Behind D'Arcy the juniors crammed themselves in the doorway and in the passage, which was simply a sea of heads.

"What!" yelled Knox. "You!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"You've got the cheek to come here—"

"I have come here to weceive an explanation of your impertinence, Knox, or else an apology!" said D'Arcy, with perfect calmness.

And he jammed his monocle a little more tightly in his eye and surveyed the half-dozen prefects in the study without turning a hair.

CHAPTER 14.

The Hand of Authority!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was as cool as a cucumber, but he was the only cool fellow in the study.

Knox and his companions were raging. Knox and Sefton were bullies at the best of times, and Pelham and Smith were furious at the way things were going. Both Pelham and Smith had been passed over for juniors in the choosing of the First Eleven. Monteith had come over to see Knox, to urge upon him the advisability of resistance to the new rule, and he was in the study, and his thin, hard face was very bitter.

The looks they cast upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were fierce.

D'Arcy met them with majestic calm.

"Did you hear me, Knox?"

"I—I heard you!" gasped Knox.

"You sent me—your captain—an insolent message. I ordahed you to come to my study, and you wefused. I expect an apology."

"Are you going to stand that, Knox?" said Monteith, with a sneer.

D'Arcy turned upon Monteith at once.

"No impertinence, Monteith!" he exclaimed. "Go back to your own House at once!"

"What?"

"I give you two minutes to leave the School House!" said D'Arcy.

Monteith sneered.

"And if I don't go?" he inquired.

"I shall ordah the pwefects to throw you out."

The half-dozen prefects burst into angry laughter.

"Do you think we shall do it?" asked North.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you're mistaken. We shan't do anything of the sort!" shouted Pelham.

"Will you wefuse to obey your skippah?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Vevy well. I call upon the school to back me up," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with stately dignity.

"The juniahs, at all events, are not lost to all sense of what is wight and pwopah. Chaps, please clear out this study, and put these fellows in their places."

"What-ho!" roared Blake. "Come on!"

The juniors needed no more.

Long had they been eager to try conclusions with Knox and Sefton, and they were by no means unwilling to come down heavily upon the other prefects. The time had come to show that a junior was as good as a senior, any day.

Tom Merry & Co. rushed into the study.

"Get out!" roared Knox.

"Hurrah! Down with the cads!" shrieked Wally of the Third.

"Biff the bounders!"

"Bump 'em over!"

The rebel prefects hit out desperately.

A dozen juniors were knocked sprawling, and others stumbled over them—but there were swarms of them. The prefects were overwhelmed, as by the tide. The juniors crowded into the study until there was no room to move, hardly room to breathe, certainly no space to struggle.

Seniors were dragged down, and upon each of the sprawling prefects three or four juniors rolled and clutched.

In five minutes the struggle was over, and the rebels were extended upon the floor, with several juniors sitting upon each senior and keeping him down.

Gasps and groans came in a kind of chorus from the fallen rebels.

There was no doubt that they were conquered.

"Hurrah!" roared Wally.

"Thank you vevy much, deah boys!"

said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass with one hand and dabbling red from his nose with his handkerchief, held in the other. "Blake, Tom Mewwy, Mannahs, take Monteith and dwop him out of the window."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hold on!"

It was Darrell's voice. The prefect had forced his way through the crowd, and his face was very excited.

"Kildare's come back!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

For a moment even the swell of St. Jim's was taken aback. From the passage rang a cheer, ringing loudly from D'Arcy's most ardent supporters.

"Hurrah, Kildare!"

A stalwart form came striding up the Sixth Form passage. Kildare's handsome face looked into Knox's study.

"Kildare!"

"Bai Jove!"

The old captain of St. Jim's nodded and smiled.

"Yes, here I am," he said. "I've come back."

"For good?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, for good."

"Hurrah!"

The dusty and dishevelled prefects were allowed to rise. They were so much relieved by the return of Kildare that they felt hardly angry.

"Kildare, deah boy, I am vevy glad you've been able to come back, aftah all!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "I twust your matah is bettah?"

"Thank you!" said Kildare. "She took such a turn for the better to-day that the doctors have every hope of a quick recovery. In the circumstances, and considering how things were going on here, according to a letter I had from—never mind whom—I've come back."

"Vevy good! You are aware that I am captain of St. Jim's now—"

"Yes," said Kildare grimly. "I am aware of that."

"I wesign the captaincy into your hands again with a gweat deal of pleasuah," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "I twust you will keep up the pwactice I have established in playin' juniahs in the First Eleven; and I shall be always glad to offah my services. I twust, also, that you will keep an eye on the pwefects, and not let them gwow cheekay. I have had quite a lot of twouble keepin' them in their place."

And, with that parting word of advice, the late captain of St. Jim's retired from the study and departed with his friends.

"Well," said Blake, as they crowded into Study No. 6 again, "you're not skipper any longer, Gussy. It was a short life, but a gay one."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's a lot of the feed left," Fatty Wynn remarked. "We may as well finish that."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good egg!"

And they did.

Kildare remained, and filled his old position; and even D'Arcy admitted that the school thrived under his sway. But for a long time the juniors recounted with great gusto the thrilling incidents that had occurred under the short but eventful rule of Captain

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "THE SCHOOL-BOY HYPNOTIST!" Look out for this magnificent long yarn of Tom Merry & Co., featuring an amazing new boy who comes to St. Jim's and causes the sensation of the term. Order your GEM early, chums.)



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HALLO, chums! Here we are again with the details of the next wonderful number of the Old Paper. "The Gem's present programmes are unbeatable," write many readers to me. And so say all of us!

How do you like this week's yarns? Tip-top, aren't they? Next Wednesday's are equally as good. Just take a look at the contents. First, there's another ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co., entitled:

"THE SCHOOLBOY HYPNOTIST!"

It's an unusual story, chums, of the amazing adventures of a new boy who comes to St. Jim's. Horace Barber is his name, and he's a strange character, possessing the power to make others obey his will. In short, he's a hypnotist, and he makes things hum with the help of his peculiar gift. Many fellows come under the "fluence" of the new junior, and St. Jim's, little knowing there is a hypnotist among them, think a wave of madness has spread over the school. You will enjoy immensely the fun and excitement Barber causes.

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There is great excitement at Packsaddle when the news comes in that the Judson gang, hold-up men and rustlers, who have long been a menace to the Frio Valley, are at last cornered in Squaw Mountain, but are making a fight for freedom. Bill Sampson, the headmaster of the cow town school, is away helping in the battle against the bandits, so the Packsaddle boys promptly leave their lessons and ride for the scene of fight, too! What happens then is one long thrill for Dick Carr and his chums.

With another exciting instalment of the St. Frank's serial, "The Secret World," and all the other popular GEM features, our next grand number is complete. Don't forget to tell all your pals about the super stories in the GEM. You'll do your Editor a favour, too, by passing on your copy to a non-reader.

PEN PALS COUPON

23-2-35



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.

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FOOTBALL REFEREEING.

"Is it true," asks Jack Passmore, of Bolton, "that football matches were played years ago with more than one referee?" Yes, it is so, Jack, and there's been a lot of talk in League circles this season on this particular subject. Many football authorities are advocating for two referees to be given control of the big League matches.

Round about 1870 the idea was tried out, each team providing their own ref, whose duty was to control the play in one half of the pitch. But each referee rather favoured his own team, and the idea was not a success.

Then someone suggested having three refs, two to be chosen by the opposing teams, and one to be chosen by the two refs. The third man was to decide all disputes. This scheme also fell through, but from it came the method of controlling the game as it is done to-day. For the two refs chosen by the teams eventually became linesmen, leaving one man in charge of the game.

SAVED FROM THE SEA!

An amazing experience befell a seaman on a trawler the other day. The boat was ploughing its passage through very rough seas when a big wave swept over the deck and carried the seaman overboard. To save the unfortunate man in such seas was impossible. But before anything could be done, the seaman was saved in an unique way. Another big wave swept him back on deck again, unhurt, except for a soaking and a shaking! But in the excitement of his experience he lost his false teeth.

HEARD THIS ONE?

First Actor: "I'm in a quandary. I've been offered engagements by two managers, and don't know how to act."

Second Actor: "Don't worry, old man. They'll soon find it out!"

THE EDITOR.

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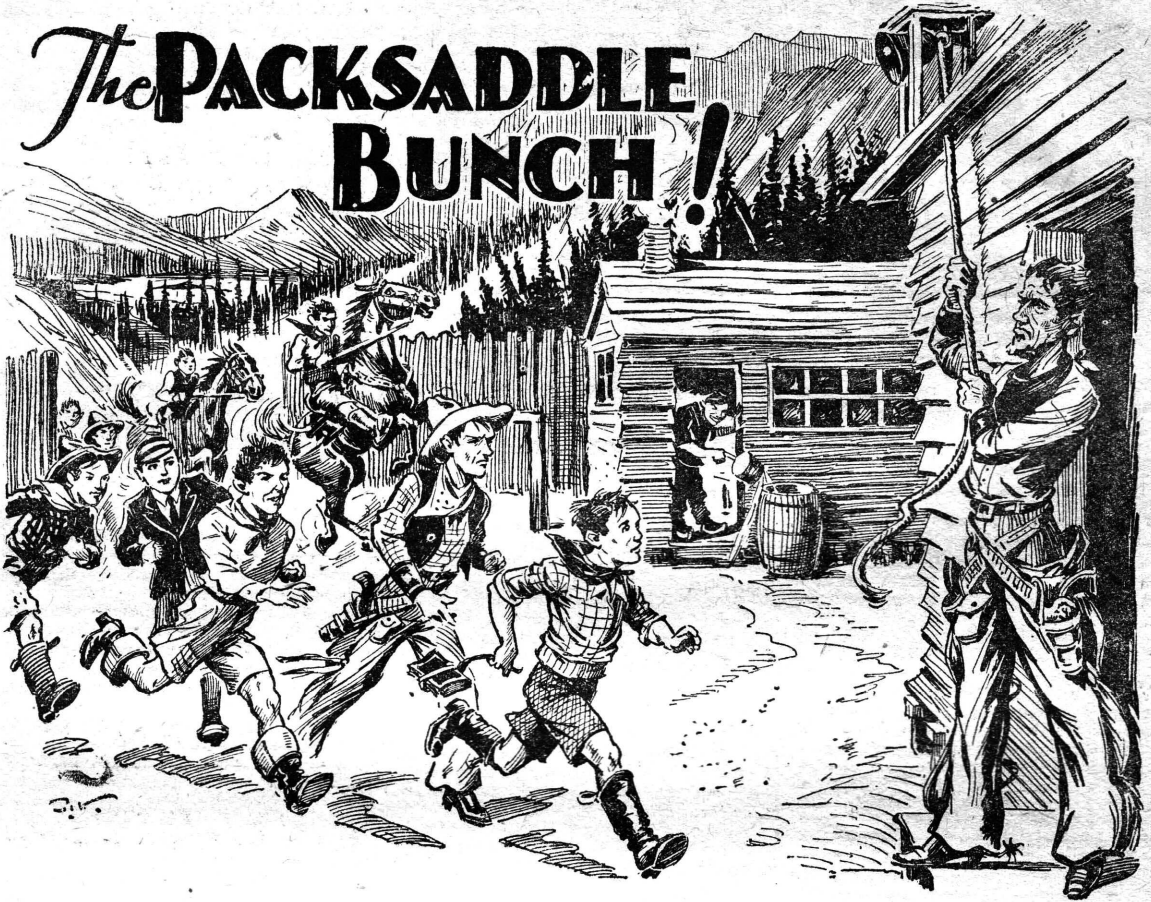
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The PACKSADDLE BUNCH!



Indians!

INJUNS!" yelled Slick Poindexter. "Beat it!" roared Mick Kavanagh.

Dick Carr jumped.

The tenderfoot of Packsaddle School was new to Texas. He had never even seen a Red Indian. He did not, indeed, suppose that there were any left in the valley of the Rio Frio. So that sudden alarm naturally made him jump.

Dick, Slick, and Mick were strolling on the trail between the school and the cow town of Packsaddle, ready to cut in as soon as they heard the bell for class. All of a sudden Slick and Mick yelled the alarm.

Dick stared round. After the first jump of surprise he rather suspected that his companions were pulling his leg. Plenty of rough jokes had been played on the tenderfoot at the cow town school.

But he started at the sight of a coppery face looking out from a clump of grass beside the trail.

It was a Red Indian!

The dark face, with its aquiline nose, was like copper; the thick black hair was adorned with several draggled feathers, the brawny form draped in a tattered blanket. It was the striped blanket of a Navajo, though Dick, of course, knew nothing of that; he could not have told the difference between Navajo and Comanche and Apache. It was his first Red Indian—and the sight of the coppery face and gleaming black eyes startled him.

Slick grabbed at one of his arms, Mick at the other. Their faces registered intense alarm and excitement.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,410.

"Beat it!" gasped Poindexter. "Warn Bill if you get in first! Run for your life!"

Slick and Mick started running for the school. Dick ran with them. Dick was active and fleet of foot and he forged ahead, but he slackened pace as he saw that his companions were falling behind.

"Hump it, you!" panted Poindexter. "Get in and warn Bill—tell him to get his gun!"

Dick tore on and shot ahead. He fairly raced to the school. Slick and

was before him. Three Packsaddle fellows—Steve Carson, Foker Parker, and Slim Dixon—were lounging in the gateway, and they stared blankly at Dick as he came racing up.

"Say, what's biting you, boob?" drawled Carson.

"Get in! Look out—Indians!" panted Dick.

"Injuns!" gasped Poker.

"Yes—yes, down the trail! Get in—quick!"

Dick panted those words in passing; there was no time for delay. He had to warn Bill Sampson, the cow town schoolmaster. He tore into the playground, leaving Steve and his friends blinking.

He raced across to the schoolhouse. A crowd of fellows in the playground stared at him, wondering what was the cause of his wild haste.

"Indians!" shouted Dick as he passed.

"Aw, can it!" gasped Pie Sanders. "What guff you giving us?"

Dick rushed on without further words. In the porch of the schoolhouse he spotted the gigantic figure of Bill Sampson in talk with Small Brown, the teacher of Packsaddle. He burst into the porch like a cyclone, colliding with Small Brown and sending him staggering.

"What—Who—" stuttered Small Brown, as he pitched against the wall, his horn-rimmed glasses slipping down his thin little nose. "What—"

Dick staggered back from the collision, and the strong, sinewy hand of Bill Sampson gripped the back of his neck and steadied him. Bill glared at him.

"Say, what's this game?" roared Bill.

THE FIGHTING SCHOOLMASTER!

By

FRANK RICHARDS.

Mick dropped still farther behind. A patch of mesquite hid them from Dick's eyes; had he looked back he could not have seen them. But had he seen them he would have been astonished at their proceedings. Once the tenderfoot was off the scene Slick and Mick stopped running; they threw themselves in the grass, kicked up their feet in a paroxysm of merriment, and yelled with glee. Evidently the peril was not so great as they had led the tenderfoot to believe.

Unaware of that, Dick Carr tore on. The open gateway of the school fence

—FRANK RICHARDS' BIG-THRILL YARN OF WILD WEST SCHOOL ADVENTURE.

"What you mean hornin in like you was a runaway steer from a herd? Spill it!"

"Indians!" gasped Dick. "Get your gun!"

"Injuns!" yelled Bill.

"Yes—yes, Indians—quick!"

Dick naturally expected Bill Sampson to jump to the alarm. If a Red Indian raid was on hand it was time for the cow town schoolmaster to act—and to act promptly. Dick expected him to roar an order for the gate to be shut and to rush for his rifle.

Bill did neither; he gripped the tenderfoot harder by the back of his neck and shook him.

"You doggoned, ornery gink," roared Bill, "what you mean? Say, you figure you can put that across me? I should smile!"

Shake, shake, shake!

Bill had a strong hand. The tenderfoot swung to and fro in his grip as he shook; he spluttered and gasped for breath.

"I'll say this is the bee's knee!" hooted Bill. "Injuns! You figure you can fool a galoot my size with Injuns? I'll sure give you Injuns!"

Bill's quirt, which he used as a cane, happened to be in the school-room—luckily for Dick. But Bill's hands were hard and heavy. He made a knee for the tenderfoot, hooked him across it, and spanked.

Whack, whack, whack!

Bill's heavy hand came down on the seat of Dick's riding breeches—whack on whack, almost like a flail. Dick roared and struggled.

"I tell you— Oh, my hat! I tell you—Indians!" he shrieked. Evidently Bill did not believe in the Indians, and figured that the tenderfoot was trying to pull his leg. He spanked and spanked.

A crowd of Packsaddle fellows gathered before the porch roaring with laughter. Steve, Poker, and Slim came in from the gate and joined them, yelling; and two fellows weeping with laughter followed in from the trail—Slick and Mick. But there was no sign of Indians.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Carson. "That tenderfoot figures that the Injuns are on the warpath! Injuns! Ha, ha, ha!"

Spank, spank, spank!

"That's for you!" gasped Bill, setting Dick Carr on his feet at last and glaring at him. "Now you got yours, you young gink, and I guess you won't try fooling me no more!"

Dick staggered against the porch, gasping.

"You fathead—" he gurgled.

"What?" roared Bill.

"The Indians are coming! I've seen one of them! Poindexter and Kavanagh saw him, too, and told me to warn you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a shriek from the playground.

"Howly saints! Sure, that tenderfoot will be the death of me, and so he will!" sobbed Mick.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Slick.

Bill's glare changed slowly to a grin as he stared at Dick Carr. He realised—rather late—that the tenderfoot had not been attempting to pull his leg. It was the tenderfoot's leg that had been pulled.

"Aw! If you ain't the big boob from Boobsville!" gasped Bill. "Injuns! Haw, haw, haw! You, Poindexter—you been fooling this kid?"

Dick stared round in amazement at seeing Slick and Mick howling with

laughter like the rest; his face crimsoned as he realised that it had been a false alarm.

"I guess the guy saw an Injun, Bill," answered Poindexter. "That Navajo hobo, Seven Horses, was on the trail; I guess he'd been sleeping off the hooch in the pecans, and he woke up and looked at us. I'll say the tenderfoot sort of got the wind up."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Bill.

"You—you silly ass!" gasped Dick Carr. "You said—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Packsaddle bunch yelled and roared. Seven Horses, the Navajo derelict, was a well-known character in the Frio valley. When he came in from the desert it was to touch good-natured punchers for tanglefoot; certainly not to carry on the ancient warfare of Red man against white. That was one of the many things that the Packsaddle tenderfoot had yet to learn.

Dick's face was burning as he stared at the yelling bunch. He made a sudden rush at Slick and Mick and grabbed them by their collars.

Bang!

Their heads came together suddenly, unexpectedly, and with a terrific shock.

The six-gun schoolmaster of Packsaddle is lightning on the draw—but it's his hefty punch that gets one of his pupils out of trouble!

They left off laughing on the spot. A simultaneous yell came from the two practical jokers.

"Yoooooooop!"

"Whooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clang, clang, clang! Tin Tung was ringing the school bell. The bunch went into school, still laughing, Slick and Mick rubbing their heads, but grinning as they did so, and Dick Carr, breathing hard, his face like in hue to a freshly boiled beetroot!

A Horse for a Life!

CRACK! Crack! Crack!
Dick Carr drew rein at the sound of the ringing pistol-shots.

It was after class, and Dick was getting a ride on his new pony, the handsome pinto that had been his only for a week.

Slick had suggested a name for him, which was "Pep"—the pony being crammed with that quality. Pep, when he got excited, was the wildest buck-jumper in Santanta County, if not in all Texas. But he was meek as a lamb with his new master, and already he would come at Dick's call, and hardly needed a trail-rope.

It was sheer joy to Dick to vault into the saddle after class, and scamper over the rolling prairie, with Pep's heels flying like lightning under him. And the bunch, when they saw him on the buck-jumper, had to admit that the tenderfoot could ride!

Outside the cow town of Packsaddle, at a little distance from the school, a crowd of punchers had gathered. Dick knew some of them by sight; he had seen them riding in from the

Kicking Mule Ranch. They were the Kicking Mule outfit—a rough-and-ready crowd, liable to "shoot up the town" when they came in from the ranges.

As he spotted them Dick remembered he had heard talk in the playground of the "Judson gang" having been seen in the Frio valley. The Judson gang were a bunch of desperadoes—cow-thieves, hold-up men, road-agents—badly wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas.

The news that they had been seen on the Rio Frio had started Town-Marshall Lick into activity, and men had ridden in from the ranches to help the marshal look for them.

As he heard the banging of Colts Dick's first impression was that the Kicking Mule punchers had got hold of some of the Judsons, and that a battle was going on.

But as he pulled in his bronco and looked and listened, he heard roars of laughter, punctuated by the shooting. It was not a pistol-fight that was going on, but some sort of a rough cowboy jest.

Popping six-guns are no respecters of persons, and Dick, though he was curious to see what was on, did not side up to the crowd of punchers. He pulled his pony to a ridge of high ground near the trail, whence he could look down on the scene over the ten-gallon hats of the crowd.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped as he stared.

In the midst of the rough circle of punchers was a figure in a tattered, striped blanket and ragged mocassins, hopping wildly. Barney Bailey, foreman of the Kicking Mule, was shooting at his feet, with a gun in either hand. The rest of the punchers were looking on, roaring with laughter.

Dick recognised the copper face of Chief Seven Horses, the Navajo, at once. It was the Indian outcast whom he had seen a day or two ago on the school trail. The Redskin's face was wildly excited now, his black eyes almost popping from his head, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a snarl of rage and fear, as he hopped wildly to Barney's shooting.

This was the game of "fanning," and Dick had once been through it himself. To the rough and tough punchers it was a lark; but it was no lark to the guy who was fanned by bullets. For a false step, a moment's hesitation, would have caused hot lead to crash through the Indian's ragged mocassins, and perhaps lame him for life. Barney was shooting at his feet, not round them, and the Redskin had to hop swiftly to dodge the rapid, raining shots.

Crack, crack, crack, crack!
"Dance, Injun, dance!" roared Barney.

Mr. Bailey had been refreshing himself at the Red Dog, in Packsaddle, and was a little excited, but his shooting was true as a die. He was having his rough joke with the Redskin, and the Kicking Mule outfit were enjoying the joke; but the coppery face of Seven Horses expressed the fiercest rage, mingled with terror.

Dick's face set darkly. There was a very strong element of brutal bullying in this kind of jest. But it was impossible for him to intervene. Apart from the guns they packed, which they certainly would not have pulled on a boy, the punchers were hefty men, and any one of them could have picked up

Dick Carr and pitched him through the air.

Crack, crack, crack!
"Jump, Injun, jump!" yelled Barney in great glee.

Chief Seven Horses jumped and jumped. He had to jump, to save his flesh and bone from crashing lead. Barney was burning powder with each six-gun alternately, and evidently he was going on till all his cartridges were expended.

The six-guns were emptied at last, and there was only a click as the Kicking Mule foreman pulled trigger again. Barney dropped his hands, the empty guns in them, to his sides, gasping with merriment. The Redskin ceased to jump and hop, and stood breathless, panting, snarling, an inferno of rage and hate in his glittering black eyes.

Then, suddenly, as he realised that the white man's guns were expended, he whipped a knife out of his ragged leggings. With sudden swiftness he leaped at Barney and slashed.

Dick gave a cry of horror. The punchers roared with wrath. For a second Dick dreaded to see the Kicking Mule foreman go down, slashed to death by the sharp, razor-like blade. But Barney, taken by surprise as he was—for he no more expected resistance from a Redskin than from a prairie rabbit—was quick to see his danger. He brought up one of his empty guns with a jerk, catching the Redskin's arm with the barrel as he struck.

The blow was deflected barely in time. As it was, the tip of the blade gashed along the cowman's cheek, laying it open and bringing a spurt of blood.

Barney leaped back, clapping a hand to the gash.

Chief Seven Horses did not delay for another slash. Already guns were whipping out of holsters. It would not have been "fanning" now; the punchers would have riddled with bullets a Redskin who handled a knife on a white man.

The Navajo bounded back, plunged from the crowd, and ran with the fleetness of a deer, his striped, tattered blanket trailing in the wind. He was heading directly for the spot where Dick Carr sat on his pony, where there was a belt of pecans and post-oaks.

Bang, bang, bang! came the roar of Colts behind him, fortunately too hurried for good aim. Then the punchers rushed for their horses, which were hitched to a rail at a little distance. Dick heard the angry roar of Barney Bailey.

"Get him! We'll sure string him up for pulling a knife!"

Dick's heart beat fast. The Indian was racing up the rough ground, his moccasined feet seeming scarcely to touch the earth as he raced. On foot no white man had a chance of running him down. But as soon as they got on their broncos it was a matter of only minutes. And already the outfit were dragging the horses loose from the rail.

In his haste the Redskin had not seen Dick, but he saw him suddenly, and stopped. The schoolboy was directly between him and his intended way of escape. He was swerving off to the right, when Dick shouted:

"Here! Take my horse!"

Chief Seven Horses stopped dead, staring at him blankly. From anyone with a white face he had not expected kindness or help.

But it was too much for the English schoolboy. The punchers, in their

present excited mood, would have lynched the Redskin on the nearest tree without a scruple. Life was cheap in the Valley of the Frio—especially a Redskin outcast's life. Barney, as he scrambled on his horse, shook loose his lariat—for what purpose was only too obvious.

Dick did not stop to think. It was a life that was at stake—only the life of a drunken Indian outcast, desert rat, and cattle-thief, perhaps, but a man's life. To part with his pony was a wrench. But he did it.

As he shouted to the Indian he jumped from the saddle and held out the reins, shouting again. There was not a second to lose.

"Quick! Take my horse! Here—quick!"

The Indian, amazed as he was, understood. He bounded on again and reached the schoolboy.

"Take him! Send him back to me at Packsaddle School—my name's Dick Carr! Send him back—I can't lose him! But take him now—ride!"

"Wah!" said Chief Seven Horses. With that ejaculation, he flung himself on the pinto, and dashed away at a fierce gallop.

Dick stood staring after him as he galloped across the prairie, with a heavy heart!

Surely the Redskin would send back his horse when he had lent Pep to save the man's life! But he knew how doubtful it was; he knew that most likely he was looking his last on the handsome pony's flying heels. And he almost forgot the probable wrath of the outfit he had prevented from lynching the Redskin.

He was reminded, as they came whooping up the rise on their broncos. They reined in round Dick, glaring at him in fierce anger. But only for a moment. Barney Bailey reached over, and gave the schoolboy a fierce cut with his quirt that sent Dick staggering to the ground. Then the whole outfit went off across the prairie, at a furious gallop, in pursuit of the fleeing Redskin.

Dick picked himself up, panting. He stared after the thundering outfit. Chief Seven Horses was a speck in the distance. Dick rubbed the place where Barney's savage cut had landed.

He did not fear for the Redskin now. Pep was the fastest pony in Texas, and the best-mounted man on Kicking Mule would never ride him down. But his face was clouded, and his heart heavy, as he walked back to the school. He hoped—but he knew how little chance there was that he would ever set eyes on his pinto again.

Bill Puts Paid to Barney!

"LOST your cayuse?" Slick Poindexter asked the question as Dick Carr came into the playground.

"Sure, it's hard luck, and so it is!" said Mick. "But I'll find you me own pony, begob, to go after him."

Dick smiled faintly. "I haven't lost him—I've lent him!" he said. He told Slick and Mick what had happened on the school trail. "You think that Indian is likely to let me have him back when he gets a chance?" he concluded.

"Not on your life!" grinned Slick. "You boob! What'd it matter to you if the boys lynched a pesky Redskin?"

"He'll sell that cayuse to get fire-water!" said Mick. "You sure are the softest jay from Jaysville."

That opinion was shared by the rest of the Packsaddle bunch when they learned what had happened. There was a ripple of laughter all through the cow town school. Steve Carson declared that this was a better joke than the tenderfoot's alarm of Redskins. And he warned Dick to watch out for Barney Bailey.

"If they don't get that Red, after he laid open Barney's face, you can bet that Barney will mosey in and talk turkey to you!" grinned Steve, evidently in happy anticipation.

"And he'll sure bring his quirt!" chuckled Poker Parker.

"Say, you hunt cover, quick, when Barney hits Packsaddle!" said Slim Dixon. "I guess you'll be sorry you horned in on the Kicking Mule outfit."

Which was not a happy prospect. But the loss of the pinto worried Dick a good deal more than any fear of the Kicking Mule foreman.

It was a couple of hours later, and in the sunset the bunch were heading for the chuckhouse for supper, when a clatter of hoofs was heard at the gate, and Steve yelled:

"Watch out, tenderfoot! Hyer comes Barney!"

It was the Kicking Mule foreman, with a stained bandage tied over his stubby cheek, a quirt in his hand, and a deep frown on his brow. Dick's heart beat faster as he saw him. He was glad to see the herculean figure of Bill Sampson coming out of the schoolhouse.

Barney stared round the playground, spotted Dick, and started towards him. Dick Carr promptly jumped behind the schoolmaster. And Bill lifted a large and commanding hand.

"What you happen to want, Barney?" he demanded. "You figure you can handle that quirt on any of my bunch? Forget it."

"I'll say I'm going to take the hide off'n that young boob!" roared the Kicking Mule foreman. "I've rid hell-for-leather arter that Injun, and he got clear, and that pesky jay helped him make his getaway! I'm sure going to quirt him a few, and then some."

Bill shook his head. He had already heard of what the tenderfoot had done, and had laughed, like the bunch, over it. But Bill Sampson was the only man who was going to handle a quirt at Packsaddle School.

"Aw, you forget it, Barney," he advised. "From what I hear, you was fanning the Red when he pulled a knife. You only got a scratch, and it sure can't make you no uglier than you was. That tenderfoot kid is a boob, but he's sure got a whole heap of grit, and you ain't touching him."

"They were going to hang him—"

anted Dick.

"Aw, can it, you!" said Bill. "What'll it matter if they string up every Redskin in Texas? You ain't no call to horn in on their fun. I got a good mind to quirt you myself, but I allow you're an all-fired tenderfoot, and don't know a thing."

"I guess I'm going to quirt him!" roared Barney. "I'll ask you to step on one side, Bill Sampson."

"Guess again!" said Bill.

"You letting me quirt that pesky young piccan?" bawled Barney.

"Not so's you'd notice it, old-timer!" answered Bill.

That was enough for Barney Bailey. He reached for his gun.

At the same moment Dick Carr had his first sight of a quick draw. Bill Sampson was so big, and so hefty, that few would have expected him to be lightning-like in his movements. But Bill was as quick on the draw as any man in the Frio valley. So swiftly that

the eye could not follow the movement, the big Colt was out of the holster at his belt and looking the Kicking Mule foreman full in the face.

Dick stared in wonder and amazement. There was a gasp of thrilling interest from the Packsaddle bunch.

They forgot chuck. Every eye was tensely on the two brawny men facing one another in the playground—Bill's gun at a level, his cool eyes gleaming over it, Barney still reaching.

"Don't!" said Bill quietly, and there was a world of significance in that quiet word.

Barney's fingers jerked away from his

had seen some scrapping, and he had done some scrapping himself, but never had he seen anything like this battle of giants.

Barney, already in a rage, enraged still further by being beaten to the draw, fairly hurled himself at Bill Sampson. He was a big and powerful man, twelve stone of bone and sinew.

But Bill met him like a rock. Bill's big fists came out like mallets. There was not a whole heap of boxing skill in that fight. But there was a heap of strength, determination, and fierce tenacity.

To and fro tramped the two big cow-

"Whipped to the wide!" grinned Poindexter.

Dick Carr breathed with relief.

"Say, old-timer, I guess we're calling it a day!" said Bill cheerfully, and he leaned over the Kicking Mule foreman and gave him a hand up. "I'll tell a man it was a good scrap. Say, you mosey along and put your head under the pump, and I guess I'll fix you with a square drink."

Barney Bailey grinned faintly as he staggered away, leaning on Bill's arm. He had been knocked out fair and square, and it seemed to have done him good!



There was the faintest of sounds behind the tree to which Dick was tied. Next moment someone was working at his bonds—it was Chief Seven Horses! Dick's heart beat faster, fearful of the sleeping bandits awakening before he could escape.

butt, as if it had become suddenly red-hot. He panted with rage.

"Doggone you, you was always quick on the draw!" he snapped. "Drop that gun, and I'll sure clean up this here school with your carcass, and chew up what's left of you."

Bill grinned. He had been a puncher in the Kicking Mule outfit himself, and he was still more of a puncher than a schoolmaster. As headmaster of Packsaddle School, Bill had to be an orderly guy, and set an example to the bunch. But he found it irksome sometimes, and he was not going to lose this chance.

"Old-timer, you've said it!" he answered. "Throw away your gun, Barney, and use your hands."

Barney Bailey unhooked his gun-belt, and threw it on a bench. Bill holstered his Colt at once, and did the same. They faced one another with their fists up.

"Wade in, Bill!" roared the bunch, gathering round in huge delight.

Dick Carr looked on breathlessly. He

men, hitting and hammering, without a pause for rounds, going it hammer and tongs all the time.

But strong as Barney was, Bill was stronger. And Bill was cool, while Barney was in a flurry of fury.

Hard knocks landed on Bill unnoticed. He took fierce punishment without seeming to feel it.

Crash! went Barney suddenly, under a terrific drive that landed on his stubbly jaw and swept him off his feet. Barney hit Texas with a concussion that seemed to shake the earth.

"Say! I'll call that a sockdolager!" gasped Slick.

"Barney's sure got his!" grinned Mick.

Barney Bailey tried to struggle up. Bill dashed a stream of blood from his nose, and blinked out of a blackened eye. He was ready to go on. But the Kicking Mule foreman strove in vain to rise. With spinning head he collapsed on the ground again.

Leaving him bathing his damaged face under the pump, the Packsaddle bunch went into the chuckhouse to supper, gleefully discussing the "rookus." Barney had more bandages on his face when he rode away from the school—and he did not look for Dick Carr before he went!

Bill had put paid to Barney, but Dick sagely resolved to give the Kicking Mule foreman a wide berth after that. He would have been sorry to meet up with Barney when Bill was not around.

The Redskin's Gratitude!

WHIZ!
Dick Carr dodged too late. He knew the whiz of a lasso as it flew, but the loop settled over his shoulders in the twinkling of an eye.

It was the following day after class.
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Dick had ridden a few miles on the homeward way with Pie Sanders, who lived at Squaw Mountain, on a borrowed bronco from the school corral. Three miles from the school he left Pie and turned to ride back, and his way lay by the trail through a belt of timber. As he came under the cottonwood-trees he noted a bunch of riders in Stetson hats. The sun was setting on the prairie, and under the thick branches it was deeply dusky. Taking the riders for punchers belonging to one of the ranches, Dick rode on without giving them any special heed—and the whiz of the lariat took him completely by surprise.

The rope grabbed him from the saddle like a giant's hand. The bronco, with a startled squeal, dashed on at a furious gallop. Dick Carr plumped in the grass behind with a jar that shook every bone in his body, and rolled over in the grip of the rope.

He sat up dizzily as the horsemen reined round him. There were five of them, and now that he saw them more closely he could see that they were a wild and tough-looking crew. Every one of them packed two guns at his belt and had a rifle in a case at his saddle. Dick blinked up at them, gasping for breath, and staggered to his feet.

"Cinch him, Hank!" rapped one of the riders, a brawny, black-bearded fellow with a scarred face, and the man with the lasso dismounted and grasped Dick by the shoulder.

The bronco, at a wild gallop, vanished from the timber and disappeared across the plains. Dick, shaken and startled, but more angry than anything else, stared at the bunch of riders with gleaming eyes.

"You silly fools!" he gasped. "What's this game? Now I shall have to walk back to Packsaddle!"

The black-bearded, scarred man gave a hoarse chuckle.

"I guess you won't be hitting Packsaddle in a hurry, bo!" he said. "I'll say your luck's good if you ever hit that burg agin!"

"You said it, Jud!" grinned another of the riders.

Dick started violently at the name of "Jud." He knew now who the black-bearded, scarred man was—Judson, the leader of the notorious Judson gang.

For days past it had been rumoured that that gang of hold-up men and cow thieves were in the Erio Valley. The tenderfoot of Packsaddle had run fairly into them by chance and ill-luck.

"You doggoned little gink!" said Judson, staring down at him. "I guess your cayuse won't tell no tales, and you won't, neither, now we got you cinched! You sure ain't shouting out at Packsaddle that the Judson gang are around!"

"I'll say nope!" agreed Hank, taking a turn of the lariat round Dick's arms and knotting the rope.

Dick struggled. The ruffian stared at him and half drew a bowie-knife from his belt. The boy ceased to resist at once.

"Aw, don't spill his juice, Hank!" grunted Judson. "I guess we ain't no baby-killers! Fix him with the rope!" He scowled at Dick. "What you doing here, bo?"

"I was riding back to school," panted Dick. "I never knew you were here—I took you for a bunch of punchers when I saw you, or—"

"Or I guess you'd have burned the wind!" grinned Judson. "Yep! Anybody else around along of you?"

"No!"

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Judson gave him a suspicious stare and rode to the edge of the timber. He scanned the rolling prairie on all sides. But there was no one in sight, and he rejoined his friends.

"It's O.K.!" he said. "I guess that little gink never knowed who we was, but they'd have knowed at Packsaddle fast enough if he chewed the rag there. Fix him to a tree, you Hank! It's O.K.!"

The gang dismounted and led their horses from the trail into the trees. Dick Carr was backed up against a sapling and the rope run round it and knotted. He stood leaning on the tree, unable to stir hand or foot, while the rustlers camped.

They hardly heeded him further. They camped in the timber, sorting food and drink out of their saddlebags, having pegged their horses. No fire was lighted; it was evident that they were keeping their presence so near to Packsaddle a secret. The sun sank lower on the prairie, and darkness deepened in the timber. The Judson gang, stretched in the grass, were resting—and waiting!

Snatches of their muttered talk came to Dick's ears. Several times the cow town bank was mentioned, and he gathered that a raid on the bank at Packsaddle was Judson's game. But it was not to take place till late at night, when Packsaddle was sleeping. Until the time came to act the gang were remaining in cover in the timber three miles from the town, unseen and unsuspected.

Dick wrenched at the lasso that held him to the tree. But he had to give it up. If he could only have escaped and given warning at the cow town! A hundred six-guns would have been ready for the Judson gang if the Packsaddle men had known.

The long minutes passed. Dick knew from their talk that they were to ride at midnight, and it was two hours to midnight yet. Sleep was impossible to him if he had thought of it, with the knotted rope cutting into his skin.

Darkness was dense under the cottonwoods. Only a glimmer of the stars came through here and there.

But suddenly it seemed to Dick that he caught a movement in the deep shadows. His heart thumped at the thought of a wild animal—a panther, perhaps, creeping on the sleepers. Or was it a human form that was creeping in the dark?

There was no sound, only the heavy breathing of the sleeping ruffians and a faint stirring of the tethered horses.

Suddenly through the gloom came the bright glitter of eyes. For a long moment they gleamed and glittered, and Dick caught his breath.

Then they vanished. It seemed to him that even in the darkness he had had a glimpse of a face—a dark, coppery face with tufted feathers in the hair. Was it some savage Indian who had crept on the camp of the rustlers?

He listened.

There was a faint sound, the faintest of sounds, behind the sapling to which he was tied. His heart beat almost to suffocation.

Dick felt a sudden loosening of the ropes that bound him. In sheer amazement he stood against the tree while the cut ropes slithered to the ground.

Was he dreaming?

He stood free! Fragments of the tough rope, severed by a keen blade, lay round him. An unseen hand reached from the darkness and grasped his arm.

He yielded to the pull on his arm.

Treading on tiptoe, fearful of awakening the ruffians sleeping only a few yards from him, he groped his way after the hand that was drawing him on. Vaguely, indistinctly, he made out a figure at his side, and glimpsed a striped blanket. In silence he was led on through the trees, his heart thumping, till he emerged with his guide into the trail through the timber.

There the starlight fell more clearly. Dick's staring eyes turned on the man who led him, still grasping his arm, and his heart gave a bound as he recognised Chief Seven Horses, the outcast Navajo.

The Navajo put a finger to his lips, and Dick understood. A sound would be followed by the roar of the rustlers' six-guns. The Navajo led the boy along the trail till they reached the edge of the timber towards the distant cow town.

There was a faint whinny, and a glossy muzzle nuzzled under Dick's arm. A pony was tethered in the grass outside the timber. With a beating heart, Dick stroked the smooth neck of his pinto. He began to understand now.

"Oh!" panted Dick in a whisper. "I was sure I could trust you—I was sure of it! You were bringing my horse back to the school—"

"Wah!" grunted Chief Seven Horses. "Little white chief save Chief Seven Horses! Injun steal plenty cayuse, no steal little white chief's cayuse!"

"And—and you saw them—"

Chief Seven Horses grinned. "Injun see! Bad white man no see Injun!"

Dick Carr breathed deep. He had hoped that the Indian outcast would bring back the pinto which he had lent him to save his life. He understood why the Indian had come under cover of night—it was not safe for him to be seen near Packsaddle after pulling his knife on the Kicking Mule foreman. And on his way to the school he had spotted the Judson gang.

"Injun watch bad white man!" murmured Chief Seven Horses. He made a gesture towards the cow town. "Little chief ride."

Dick grasped the Indian's brown hand and pressed it hard. Then he leaped into the saddle.

He dashed away through the thick grass in the starlight. When he looked back a few moments later Chief Seven Horses had vanished into the dark timber again.

Bill Sampson was waiting up for Dick at the cow town school with a quilt ready across his knees. But he forgot the quilt when he heard what the tenderfoot had to tell him.

In two minutes Bill was galloping down the trail to the cow town; in a few minutes more he was riding with a bunch of armed men for the timber on the prairie.

They did not find the Judson gang, but they found the trail of five men who had gone on foot—a silent-footed Red-skin having "cinched" their horses while they slept!

Far away on the rolling prairie Chief Seven Horses was riding with a bunch of broncos to sell to Mexicans on the Rio Grande. The Judson gang, wearily tramping, with horsemen spurring on their trail, repented from the bottom of their hearts that they had ever struck the Rio Frio.

(Next week: "THE TERROR OF TEXAS!" a thrilling yarn of the Packsaddle pals in a gun battle against bandits!)

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By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handforth the Hero!

WHEN the Titan, a super airship, is forced to land in Northestria—an unknown, old-world land in the Arctic—Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, and the party of St. Frank's boys and Moor View School girls accompanying them are all made prisoners by the Northestrians, who think they have come from Gothland, their enemy country. The airship party are being tried before Princess Mercia, the girl ruler of Northestria, when Edward Oswald Handforth saves the princess' life. For this he is made captain of the guard, but the deposed captain challenges Handforth to a combat with spiked clubs. The St. Frank's junior knocks his opponent out with his fists, and he becomes the hero of Northestria.

Handforth, much against his will, was triumphantly led up the steps to the open balcony. The princess bade him kneel before her again, and she held one hand on his head, while she faced the great crowds.

"List ye all!" she cried. "Handforth the Bold is henceforth the captain of my bodyguard! And who shall say that he is unfitted to protect me?"

"Nay!" went up a roar. "Let him be thy captain, sweet Majesty!"

"All honour to Handforth the Bold!"

The princess smiled into Handforth's startled face.

"Thou hast done wondrous well!" she said breathlessly. "I feared for thee, and yet thou dealt speedily with that scurvy knave by thy bare hands alone! Truly thou art the only captain for my bodyguard!"

"I—I haven't done anything to brag about!" muttered Handforth uncomfortably. "That rotter wanted to kill me, so I laid him out, that's all. By George! Am I really going to be the captain of your bodyguard?" he added eagerly. "It's a ripping idea, your Majesty—"

"Thou art in full command!" said the princess, her blue eyes full of admiration and tenderness. "Go thou with good Ethelbert, and he will take thee to thy noble quarters. Siegan the Slim is for ever banished, and thou art the captain of my bodyguard, with a full thousand men at thy command!"

Handforth staggered.

"Eh? A thousand men!" he gurgled. "I—I—"

She laughed, and gave him another smile. Then he found himself facing Ethelbert the Red, who was now looking much more friendly. Handforth's astonishment was so great that he could only stand there and gape. He had pictured the princess' bodyguard as a group of fifteen or twenty men. But, apparently, every soldier that he could see was a member of that noble corps.

And all these men in armour—all these valiant horsemen and skilled archers—all were under his command!

"By George!" he muttered breathlessly.

"Thou art to be placed in her Majesty's own household," said Ethelbert the Red, with a friendly grip on Handforth's arm. "Come with me, bold youth, for, by my halidom, thou art deserving of naught but praise!"

"But—but what about the others?" asked Handforth quickly.

"Ay, tarry a moment, good Ethelbert!" cried the princess. "Let Handforth the Bold be arrayed in the finest uniform! And let these other strangers be taken to the castle beyond the eastern gate! There they shall remain pending a decision."

"Does that mean that they're still prisoners?" asked Handforth.

"'Tis impossible to grant them freedom," replied Ethelbert the Red.

"Just a moment!" put in Lord Dorrimore, stepping forward. "Your Majesty, I beg leave to speak!"

The princess nodded.

"Speak!" she commanded.

"Among our number there are six maidens," continued Dorrie earnestly. "I urge you to take them into your household, where there are other ladies. Treat them well, for they are young and unprotected. Do not fear that they are filled with treachery. We others can

remain in captivity, if it is your order; but is it fair that these young girls should be treated with the same harshness?"

"Thou art well spoken, stranger!" said the young princess. "What suggestest thou, my Ethelbert?"

"Perchance the wenches can be used as serving-maids," replied the chief. "'Tis ill, I will grant, that they should be kept prisoners. For no danger can come from such maidens."

"Then see to it, Ethelbert—nay, I will take them myself," said Princess Mercia. "Let the maidens be brought within the castle. They can be well cared for, and, by my faith, they shall be arrayed in garments that are more pleasing to the eye!"

"Thank you!" said Lord Dorrimore quietly.

"Oh, but wait a minute!" put in Handforth, in alarm. "Why should anybody be kept in captivity? We're all friends, your Majesty! Can't you trust us now, after what's happened?"

Ethelbert the Red went to the young princess' side.

"This youth we can trust, but I doubt the others," he murmured. "Be advised by me, good Majesty. Let them be placed in captivity."

"But not harshly, Ethelbert," said the princess, with grave concern. "Let them not be thrust into the dungeons."

"Nay, they will be merely kept within the precincts of the Athelstane Castle," promised Ethelbert the Red. "Well shall they be looked to, and provided with every comfort. But 'twould be rash to grant them liberty—yet."

"As thou sayest, Ethelbert!" agreed the princess.

The chief adviser turned back to Handforth.

"Fear not, Handforth the Bold," he said. "Thy friends are to be removed to the Athelstane Castle, beyond the eastern gate. And there, by St. Attalus, they will be granted every consideration. 'Tis her Majesty's wish to consider yet awhile ere further steps are taken."

"We are quite agreeable, Handforth," said Nelson Lee, giving him a keen look. "Let the matter stand. I am thankful, indeed, that the affair has ended so satisfactorily."

But Handforth was not completely satisfied. He was fully aware that he was in a strong position; for, as captain of the royal bodyguard, he could command.

"At least, I insist upon three of my friends being placed in the bodyguard with me!" he said firmly. "I want more than three, really—in fact, all the chaps you see over there!" he added, pointing to the St. Frank's fellows. "I require them in the bodyguard!"

"Good old Handy!" said Reggie Pitt. "He hasn't forgotten us!"

"We shan't have any luck, though," murmured Fullwood.

In that remark he was right. But Handforth was so insistent that the princess gave way to him in one respect—he was allowed to select three companions from among the schoolboys.

"'Twill be strange for our brave Handforth to be alone among the soldiers," said the princess. "But with three of his own companions he will be more at home. Let them be chosen, Ethelbert. It is my wish."

It seemed, indeed, that she was ready enough to grant almost any wish of Handforth's, and the leader of Study D received permission to select his three companions.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,410.

Handforth Means Business!

Of course, everybody knew who the lucky ones would be—Church, McClure, and Willy. Handforth was always lost without his celebrated chums, and although he pretended to be contemptuous of his minor, he was ever ready to give him privileges. Besides, he had learned from experience that Willy was a very useful sort of chap to have about the place.

Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Napoleon Browne and the other unfortunates were compelled to form up into line, and they were marched off to Athelstane Castle, together with Nelson Lee and Dorrie and all the other men.

Ethelbert the Red, much to Handforth's satisfaction, did not remain with him long. He called a stoutish man to his side—a soldier with many glittering ornaments on his uniform. This individual was the soul of good nature, according to his beaming face, and he proved to be the second-in-command of the royal bodyguard. He was known, indeed, as Wynwed the Jovial.

"Take thou these goodly youths in charge, Wynwed!" said Ethelbert the Red. "'Tis thy duty to obey the orders of Handforth the Bold, since he is now thy superior officer. But 'twill be well, methinks, if thou wert to instruct him in the various methods of the bodyguard," he added dryly. "Haply, our good Handforth will be feeling strange at first. 'Tis for thee to make things easy."

"Ay, and right willingly will I do it!" declared Wynwed the Jovial in a hearty, approving voice. "Come thou with me, great and noble youth! 'Tis with pride that I accept thee as my captain!"

"That's all right!" said Handforth genially. "We'll go along to our quarters, and have a little chat to begin with. Come on, you chaps! And none of your larks, Willy, my lad! Don't forget—two words from me, and it'll be you for the dungeons!"

"Cheese it!" grinned Willy. They were all feeling happy.

The situation had changed tremendously during the last hour or two. And Handforth had already made up his mind to have a look at Athelstane Castle at the first opportunity. As captain of the bodyguard, he was going to make sure that all the other members of his party were well treated. The very least he could do was to make things as comfortable as possible for all concerned.

He wasn't worried about the girls, either. He had seen them pass into the castle, and they had been surrounded by a group of chattering Northestrian girls and women.

"They'll have heaps to jaw about; and they're safe, anyhow," said Handforth practically. "We've got work ahead of us, my lads!"

"Work?" said Church happily. "I thought a little sleep wouldn't do us much harm!"

"You ass! You'll get no sleep yet!" declared Edward Oswald.

"Some grub, then!" suggested McClure. "I don't know about you, Handy, but I'm half-starved! I haven't eaten a bite since the week before last—at least, it seems as long as that!"

"I've forgotten all about time!" remarked Willy. "There's no darkness in this queer country, and you can't tell night from day! Still, we can't expect the volcanoes to die down at regular intervals, can we? I wonder how they arrange things? Must be pretty hard for the Northestrian burglars!"

Handforth frowned.

"This is no time for being funny!" he said gruffly. "I'm not even sure that we shall have an opportunity for feeding. There's grim work to be done—as soon as we've got into our uniforms. And let me warn you—unless you chaps behave, I'll push you off to join the others!"

They didn't take much notice of him, particularly as they were just entering the officers' quarters of the bodyguard. This was a portion of the castle itself, and Wynwed the Jovial escorted them round. He was full of good nature, and his friendliness towards the boys was very obvious.

"By the bald scalp of Joseph, I never saw the like!" he declared. "Thou art truly a youth of much prowess, good Handforth! Thou didst beat Siegan the Slim in fair combat as no man hath been beaten. 'Twas a sight to quicken the beating of my old heart! Marry, but 'tis a great day!"

"By the way, how do you know when it's day or night?" asked Willy.

"'Tis but an expression with us, as thou shouldst know," replied Wynwed, looking at the boys curiously. "'Tis said, in the old legends, that in the past ages there were days and nights—periods when there was light and when there was darkness. 'Tis our custom to reckon by so many hours—"

"That's jolly interesting; but I want to ask you a lot of questions," interrupted Handforth. "First of all, what about our uniforms? Then we shall want some food. After that you'd better prepare a full parade of the bodyguard. I want to inspect my men."

Wynwed chuckled. "By my faith, her Majesty knoweth but little!" he said. "A thousand men, said she! 'Twere but a quarter, good Handforth! Methinks that Ethelbert the Red hath been telling her some fine tales!"

"Aren't there a thousand men in the bodyguard, then?"

"'Twould be difficult to muster a hundred, by St. Attalus!" replied the jovial one. "Another hundred could be fetched, perchance, from other districts. But here in the city we have but a hundred."

"Oh, well, it's a swindle!" said Handforth gruffly. "Still, I don't suppose it's your fault, so I won't say much. What about Siegan the Slim?"

They soon heard all they wanted to know about the deposed captain—who by this time, it seemed, had been cast adrift. The idea of banishment, it appeared, was to merely turn the man out.

While Handforth & Co. and Willy were changing into their new uniforms they learned many things. It turned out that the entire body of soldiery was wholeheartedly delighted at Siegan's downfall, for he had been heartily detested; and Handforth the Bold was already well on the way to popularity. He was a novelty—and his great victory in the combat had earned him the respect and honour of all his men.

It was no easy task fixing them up with the necessary uniforms, for none were in stock of the necessary size. However, by dint of a few deft alterations they were soon in their new clothing—Handforth gorgeous in chainmail and headdress and jingling spurs, and the other three juniors in a simpler form of garb.

And after that came food. In the officers' common-room they were provided with a splendid meal—roast beef, a brownish, coarse-looking bread, cheese, and numerous pastries. The bread was appetising, and the whole meal was served upon a great wooden



"Hast seen three horsemen?" asked Handforth of the innkeeper. "Three rotten spies they are!" " 'Twas several hours ago," replied the innkeeper, pointing down the street. "They rode straight through the town."

bench, the soldiers standing about and taking interest in their new captain and his young companions.

"Comest thou from Gothland?" asked Wynwed the Jovial, when the food was partially gone. "What manner of trickery doth Kassker attempt?"

"The sooner you get Kassker out of your mind the better!" interrupted Handforth. "We've never set foot in Gothland, and, by all that I can hear of Kasskar, we never want to! We're from England—beyond the snows—and if you don't like to believe it you needn't!"

"Beshrew me for a knave, but I am like to believe thee!" declared Wynwed. "For, i' faith, I have never seen such as thou, bold youth!"

"Lots of people say that," remarked Church. "In England, where we really live, Handforth is just as big a clown as he is here!"

Handforth glared across the table.

"Any more of that, my lad, and the dungeons!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure and Willy yelled, and the other members of the bodyguard laughed at them. Most of these men were unable to understand these youngsters, but they were perfectly satisfied that they were in no way connected with Kassker the Grim.

During the meal the chums of Study D learned quite a lot.

It seemed that the city was called Dunstane, and it was the capital of Northestria. There were other cities, too, and many villages. Most of the land in the country was owned by feudal barons, each with their own serfs and soldiery. But all were subject to the princess' rule.

Gothland, it appeared, was a place of no account whatever. Until a year or so back there had been a considerable amount of trading with Gothland; for the Gothlanders, although a despised race, were energetic enough, and there were many of their products which the

Northestrians desired. But more recently Kassker the Grim had displayed a great deal of hostility towards the Northestrian traders, and very little commerce was now indulged in. Indeed, in this land of medieval customs, with no modern means of communication, very little was known of Gothland's latest doings. There were rumours that Kassker's subjects were preparing for a war, but nobody in Northestria appeared to take any notice.

"It's about time somebody came along to wake you all up!" said Handforth firmly. "In fact, I'm going to start using the prod from this minute onwards!"

The Man of Action!

WYNWED THE JOVIAL shook his head.

"Thou art a wit, forsooth," he said, with a chuckle. "Thou art from the great world beyond the snows, so thou sayest. In truth, I believe thee! For I will grant that Gothland bred no such marrow as thine! And 'tis a fact that thou art new in Northestria."

"Ay, 'tis like to be as thou sayest, Wynwed!" said one of the other soldiers.

There was a murmur from some of the others.

"I wish old Ethelbert had as much sense as you fellows," said Handforth gruffly. "He thinks we're a lot of enemies come here to indulge in a sort of gunpowder plot, or something. And we simply dropped in for an afternoon call! I'm not grumbling now—because I'm captain of the bodyguard, and I mean to show the princess that we're made of the right stuff."

"What's the programme, Ted?" asked Willy. "By jingo, that grub was good! After all these excitements I think we ought to get a few hours' sleep."

"Hear, hear!" said McClure, yawning. "I suppose you do go to bed

here?" he asked, turning to Wynwed. "You sleep sometimes?"

"Thou art jesting," smiled Wynwed. "If thou wilt repair upstairs, goodly beds are awaiting thee. We have close shutters so that one may sleep in the peaceful darkness. Come, good sirs—"

"Nothing doing!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "You're my second-in-command, Wynwed, and I want a full parade of the bodyguard out in the courtyard at once. So just buzz round and give the orders."

Wynwed the Jovial looked puzzled.

"A parade?" he repeated. "Buzz? By my bones, but thou art full of strange sounding words, sirrah! What art thy wishes? Thou art here in place of Siegan, and well are we by the change."

"I want the bodyguard in the castle courtyard," said Handforth. "I suppose I'd better talk in your rummy lingo, and then you'll know what I'm getting at. Call thou the bodyguard, Wynwed, and have the full company lined up for inspection."

"What's the idea of it?" asked McClure. "You don't want to start any of your funny business, Handy; these men aren't cadets, or Boy Scouts, you know."

"I'll trouble you to obey orders, and ask no questions," interrupted Handforth coldly. "I'm in command, and I'm going to alter things in this country. They're half asleep. So it's up to me to put some pep into them!"

"But you can't go the pace too fast, Ted," warned Willy. "You ought to be jolly thankful that—"

"Enough!" thundered Handforth. "Out upon thee, blow you, for a silly knave! Clear off and get out into the courtyard! I've got an idea in my head, and I mean to start some action."

His chums and Willy made no further comment. They didn't quite know what he was up to, but the gleam in his eyes betokened some scheme. Willy felt rather glad that he had been chosen as

one of the guard. He might be able to help Church and McClure to keep a check on their impulsive leader.

Wynwed was soon convinced that Edward Oswald meant what he said. And in less than half an hour a full parade of the bodyguard was mustered. They were, as a matter of fact, a well-trained, splendid-looking body of men, and they all treated Handforth with respect, but at the same time it was clear enough that they regarded him as a joke. It had been the princess' whim to appoint him, and they, being loyal fellows, were willing enough to obey his orders. But everything in this land seemed to be free and easy and slow-going.

There were well over a hundred men, and they made a fine picture in the courtyard as they stood there at attention while Handforth made his inspection. Church and McClure and Willy were obliged to stand in the ranks at attention.

Handforth & Co. had learned that quite a number of the soldiers had gathered from various feudal estates—that is, the soldiers who had been on the scene earlier. Most of these had now returned to their overlords. And the only men of war left in the capital were the princess' bodyguard. In a way Handforth was pleased, for he had things very much his own way.

A hail came from one of the balconies as he was reviewing the troops, and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction when he looked up and recognised Irene Manners and two of the other girls.

"Any orders, captain?" called down Irene.

"By George, you're looking a bit different!" shouted Handforth.

"I think I can return the compliment," laughed Irene. "What's the full dress parade for, Ted?"

"I'm getting them ready for action," replied Handforth promptly. "But how are you getting on in there? Everything O.K. now?"

"We're having a lovely time," replied Doris Berkeley. "Everybody's ever so nice to us, and we're only worrying about Mr. Lee and all the rest. Can't you do something to bail them out, Ted?"

"I'm going to attend to them next," replied Handforth. "But there's something else to be done first—something important—"

He broke off with a little gasp. For at that moment the Princess Mercia herself appeared at one of the lower doorways. He was quite close, too, and she favoured him with a gracious smile. Hastily he pulled himself upright and saluted.

"It is said that the uniform maketh the man!" laughed the princess. "Thou art truly changed now, Handforth the Bold!"

"As the captain of your bodyguard, your Majesty, my only wish is to serve you," said Handforth, with dignity.

"But what meaneth this array of thy troops?" asked the princess.

"We're starting at once—on a spy hunt," replied Handforth calmly.

"A spy hunt!" echoed Church involuntarily. "By Jove, so that's his great wheeze, is it? I thought he had something up his sleeve!"

The princess was mildly astonished.

"What is thy plan, good Handforth?" she cried. "I' faith it seemeth that I chose well when I placed thee at the head of my bodyguard! So thou art intent upon hunting down the rascally knave who cast the arrow at me?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,410.

"Yes, your Majesty," replied Handforth firmly. "But not him alone—the whole gang of spies. I've heard that there's a crowd of the beggars knocking about, so I mean to round them up."

The princess was obviously delighted.

"I bid thee all speed in thy enterprise!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Here, indeed, is a youth of action!"

"Tis good to hear thy brave talk!"

Handforth regarded her in surprise.

"But those spies have got to be caught!" he protested. "We can't let them run loose, can we, your Majesty?"

"Hearken unto him!" said the princess, addressing all the soldiers. "I bid thee heed him well, my soldiers! For in Handforth the Bold thou hast a leader of strange and wondrous qualities!"

Handforth was more and more puzzled. But Willy wasn't. Their talk with Wynwed and the other soldiers made one fact very clear. The Northestrians were singularly apathetic. They were a peace-loving people—prosperous, easy-going, and blind to the peril from the Gothlanders.

Strangely enough, they all seemed to know that Kaasker the Grim, of Gothland, was preparing a war—and yet, at the same time, they all discussed the subject with a shrug of the shoulders, and with a smile on their faces.

They seemed to believe that there would be nothing to fear during their own life-time. For centuries the Gothlanders had been little better than serfs and slaves. They were not worthy of serious consideration. And so, when the danger was practically at their gates, they paid no heed.

This indifference to a very real peril was not born of cowardice. It was just a kind of national disease. Nobody ever thought of taking any action. Life in Northestria, it seemed, was a very peaceful, ambling sort of existence. It was small wonder that these people had made practically no progress throughout the centuries.

But Handforth was going to show these sleepyheads a thing or two!

On the Trail!

IT was rather a relief when the princess retired, and Handforth was able to devote his whole-hearted attention to the business in hand.

"Now then—attention!" roared Handforth, striding down the double column of troops. "Wynwed, old son, what about some horses?"

"Horses thou shalt have," replied Wynwed. "Art thinking of taking a journey, good Handforth?"

"I don't know whither—but we've got to get after those spies—those rotten traitors who tried to murder the princess!" retorted the new captain. "It's no good hanging about here and doing nothing! Haven't you got any police in this town?"

"Police?" repeated Wynwed helplessly.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "We shall never get anything done if we keep on jawing! How many horses have you got?"

"Full thirty are ready in the stables—"

"Then give orders for the full thirty to be saddled and harnessed and brought here without delay," interrupted Handforth. "In the meantime, I've got a few investigations to make. Willy, you'd better come with me—and you chaps, too," he added, looking at his chums.

"Hold!" said the stout Wynwed. "Thou art too fast for me, good Handforth. What of this journey? Meanest thou, in all faith, to hunt for the accursed spies. Marry, but thou art a strange captain!"

"Strange!" roared Handforth. "Aren't these traitors ever chased, or anything?"

"They come—and ere we can lay fingers upon them they go," replied Wynwed. "Twice have we nearly brought them down with arrows, but the elusive rascals win free."

"And haven't you chased them?" Wynwed smilingly shook his head.

"I know not of that point," he replied.

"It beats me!" said Handforth grimly. "A beastly traitor—probably a Gothlander—climbs to the top of the wall of the royal castle and nearly murders the princess, and nobody thinks of chasing the beggar!"

"But why?" asked Wynwed.

"Why?" yelled Handforth. "Why? Well, I'm jiggered!"

"I can see that Northestria needs a strong man! My only hat! What a crowd of helpless dummies! It ought to be as easy as pie to capture these traitors! They aren't expecting any pursuit, and we shall grab them in no time, once we get on the trail."

"I'm not sure that it's your duty, Handy—"

"Of course it's my duty!" snapped Handforth. "The princess relies upon old Ethelred the Bert—I mean, Ethelbert the Red—and he's just about as useful as a half-dead hippo! In my opinion, he's a doddering old chump! A fine chap to be Prime Minister!"

"He's chief adviser," said McClure.

"That's the same thing, isn't it?" retorted the energetic Handy. "If you ask me, he ought to be called the chief sluggard! His brain must work at about one mile in every thousand years! Look at the way he's pushed off our crowd into a moated castle! And any ordinary chap would know that they were friends! Thank goodness we're free, anyhow—and we're going to show the princess a bit of speed!"

"Ted, old son, you've got the right idea," said Willy approvingly. "This country needed a bomb, and she's got one. You've been exploding ever since you arrived!"

"Ass, I haven't started yet!" snapped Handforth. "Oh my goodness!" he added, glancing round, and looking at Wynwed the Jovial. "What about those horses? Didn't I just give some orders?"

The stout one looked rather confused. "I thought thou wert jesting—" he began.

"Jesting!" thundered Handforth. "I meant it! By the bones of St. Vitus! I'll make some of you chaps dance!"

Wynwed went off, decidedly scared, and there was something conical in the effect that this schoolboy produced on these lackadaisical warriors.

"Now, you chaps, come with me!" said Handforth briskly.

"Where are we going to?" asked Church.

"Never mind where we're going!" retorted Handforth. "You're here to obey orders—not to ask questions. There's the spot where the spy shot the arrow from," he went on, pointing to the top of the wall. "I'm going to have a look on the other side, to see what it's like out there—and we might be able to pick up some clues, too."

"Go ahead," said Willy.

They marched out through the imposing archway, and went across the drawbridge. Veering round to the left, they walked for some distance down a dusty road, where there were low-built houses on the other side, with curious townspeople watching them. But Handforth took no notice of them. His mind was fixed upon his mission.

At last they came upon the exact spot they were looking for—where a loose stone at the top of the wall marked the precise place.

The moat stretched across from them, and the sluggish water flowed flush with the castle wall on the other side. The wall itself was twenty feet high, but there were plenty of interstices and projections, by the help of which any active man could climb to the top of the wall.

Handforth stood there, scratching his head.

"Beats me!" he said helplessly. "Just imagine these sort of things happening in England! Before the fellow could have got down from that wall he would have been nabbed by a dozen people. Surely somebody must have been watching?"

He turned and looked at a bent old man who was standing in a doorway just opposite. He had a long white beard, and he was greatly interested in the boys.

"Were you here when that Gothlander spy tried to kill the Princess Mercia?" demanded Handforth, going up to him.

"Ay, noble sir!" replied the old fellow, nodding. "'Twas a dastard's deed and 'tis said that thou art the one who saved our sweet young princess from the death arrow—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Handforth hastily. "I'm trying to find out if that man was alone, or if he had any companions. What happened?"

The old man looked astonished.

"'Twas seen by many," he replied. "Three horsemen came up, and one dismounted and waded through the moat—"

"The moat's a fat lot of good, then!" grunted Handforth.

It did not take long to gather the rest. While the spy's two companions had waited with his horse the man had climbed to the top of the wall and had loosed his arrow—and all this in view of many people. But the rascals had acted so quickly that they had been gone before the sleepy Northestrians had had time to look round.

Almost at once it had been known that a daring attempt had been made on the princess' life—but even this had not influenced anybody to make an effort to give chase.

The trio of traitors had galloped off hard, passing through the east gate and taking the highway for the town of Ina, ten miles distant.

"And nobody followed them!" said Handforth, in amazement, as he hurried back into the castle courtyard. "Think of it, you chaps! By George! Isn't it just about time these snails were put into top gear?"

"It'll be great if we can only capture those spies and bring them back!" said Church, catching some of his leader's enthusiasm. "That'll show the princess that we're friendly, won't it?"

"Yes—if we can only capture them!" said McClure dubiously.

"If!" echoed Handforth tartly. "There's no 'if' about it, you chumps! We're going straight off now, and we're not coming back until those prisoners come with us!"

Eastwood League.

A BATTLE OF THE GIANTS.

SAINTS AND FRIARS IN DING-DONG GAME.

By George Herries.

If St. Jim's, with a game in hand, could beat Greyfriars in this home fixture, they would be "sitting pretty," as Wally D'Arcy would say, in the League Table. The ball rolled from Harry Wharton's foot but the Saints were soon on the attack. Hazeldene, deputising in the Greyfriars goal for Squiff, misunderstood a signal from Johnny Bull early on and let Tom Merry in to score an easy one. By the interval, Greyfriars were three goals down—mainly owing to Hazeldene's weak display in goal. The resumption, however, showed us a different Hazeldene. Evidently determined to make amends, he stopped shots from Merry, Lowther, and Blake in great style. Rallying, Friars swept down on our goal, and Wharton spread-eagled the defence before netting with a hot drive. Friars swarmed round Fatty Wynn, and added two more. Merry put us ahead again, but Wharton once more levelled the account. Two minutes later Wharton put Greyfriars ahead. Three minutes more and Blake had equalised. It was ding-dong right to the end. There were only a few seconds to go when Tom Merry, evading the ever-watchful Peter Todd, crashed home a grand goal which was in before Hazeldene could move! Saints 6, Friars 5.

FULL RESULTS.

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| ST. JIM'S ... 6 | GREYFRIARS ... 5 |
| Merry (5), Blake | Wharton (3) |
| RYLCOMBE GR. 1 | ST. FRANK'S ... 2 |
| Gay | Nipper, Travers |
| REDCLYFFE ... 2 | BAGSHOT ... 1 |
| RIVER HOUSE ... 4 | ST. JUDE'S ... 0 |
| CLAREMONT ... 3 | ROOKWOOD ... 3 |
| ABBOTSFORD ... 1 | HIGHCLIFFE ... 1 |

The Spy Hunters!

IT was an undoubted fact that Edward Oswald Handforth was "surprising the natives." Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and all the other members of the party were equally as anxious to shine in the same way, but it wasn't their turn yet. Sheer chance had placed the leader of Study D in his lucky position, and he was making every ounce of capital out of it that he could. It wasn't like him to let any grass grow under his feet.

Even the princess' bodyguard was no better than any other section of the community. Soldiering for them had been just a kind of a picnic, and the juniors were learning that the recent activity, and the great display of armed forces, had been mustered from all quarters—especially for their benefit.

The advent of the airship and its party had caused a far greater sensation than any of the fellows had realised. But by now the city was already dropping back into its former lethargy.

Wynwed the Jovial was just beginning to realise that his new captain meant business. He was also realising that business meant an expenditure of energy.

The horses were all ready, and most of them were splendid animals and quiet and docile. And Handforth & Co., who were not particularly famed for their horsemanship, experienced no difficulty in controlling their mounts.

THE ODD GOAL IN THREE GIVES ST. FRANK'S VICTORY.

By Clarence Fellowe (the Rhyming Reporter).

When visiting the Grammar School St. Frank's were confident and cool, but first to score was Gordon Gay, whose men proceeded to make hay. Great goal-keeping by Handforth, though, held them in check—a dazzling show. Then, rallying in impressive style, St. Frank's pressed grimly for a while. The Grammar School defence was stout, but cracked after a thrilling bout. A shot from Nipper found the net: at half-time 'twas a level set! Right from the re-start Nipper led his line with guile of foot and head. His swift-thought schemes soon made Gay's men feel they would ne'er be "gay" again. A quarter of an hour to go—a Rylcombe full-back, just too slow, let Travers in—thud!—there it spins. It's two to one—St. Frank's just wins!

LEAGUE TABLE.

| | P. | W. | D. | L. | F. | A. | Pts |
|---------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| St. Frank's | ... | 17 | 12 | 2 | 3 | 72 | 39 26 |
| St. Jim's | ... | 16 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 86 | 39 25 |
| Greyfriars | ... | 17 | 11 | 3 | 3 | 77 | 36 25 |
| Rylcombe G.S. | ... | 16 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 47 | 33 23 |
| Highcliffe | ... | 17 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 50 | 29 22 |
| Rookwood | ... | 17 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 59 | 45 22 |
| River House | ... | 16 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 42 | 42 16 |
| Abbotsford | ... | 16 | 4 | 2 | 10 | 22 | 56 10 |
| Redclyffe | ... | 16 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 30 | 70 9 |
| Bagshot | ... | 17 | 2 | 4 | 11 | 21 | 41 8 |
| Claremont | ... | 16 | 3 | 2 | 11 | 30 | 62 8 |
| St. Jude's | ... | 17 | 0 | 4 | 13 | 17 | 61 4 |

REPLIES TO READERS.

In answer to Joe Frayne we must point out that "mean rainfall" does not mean rain that falls on a half-holiday!

We have to thank George Gore for sending in a story called "The Boomerang." It's coming back to him!

"I sleep seventeen hours a day," writes "Morpheus." "What sort of job should I get?" What about becoming a spring-mattress tester?

Once in the saddle, Handforth dramatically drew his sword and raised it aloft.

"Forward!" he shouted. "Men, follow me! We don't return until we bring these spies with us!"

"Marry, but thou art a wondrous youth!" grumbled Wynwed, as he followed. "'Tis naught but running hither and thither! Perchance we shall not return during these twenty-four hours!"

"That doesn't matter!" replied Handforth, as they trotted over the drawbridge. "We've left half our men in the castle, and if I find any slackness when I get back there's going to be trouble!"

The inhabitants of the city were freshly astonished as the cavalcade of thirty soldiers, with Handforth at their head, clattered noisily through the cobbled streets. The eastern gate was reached within ten minutes, and although Handforth had no eyes for the sights of the town Church and McClure had missed little.

"Look at these quaint old houses and the shops with their signs outside!" said Church. "Just like London in the time of the Normans!"

"I don't wonder at it," said Willy. "These Northestrians are so jolly slow that they can go on for another thousand years and still be in the same spot. Of course, it makes a big difference,

their being so isolated. They can't copy anything from the rest of the world. They've just been carrying on, century after century, using the same methods and the same speech."

"All the same, it's a knock-out," remarked McClure.

They rattled through a great archway with battlements overhead—the eastern gateway. And beyond lay open country. The city was entirely enclosed in the high walls, and now a road stretched out before the cavalcade. It was a narrow road, ill-made, and with hedges on either side. But all the vegetation in this queer country was of a pale greenish tint—just as though it had been forced in a hothouse. The very air was mild and subtropical. Handforth and the other juniors were feeling hot and stuffy already.

Half a mile from the city walls a castle rose majestically on a neighbouring hilltop. Wynwed the Jovial pointed towards it as they were riding by.

"Athelstane Castle," he explained. "Tis there thy friends are held prisoners. The ancient home of Athelstane the Great. Thou needst have no concern, brave Handforth, regarding thy friends. Athelstane the Great will protect them well. For he is one of our finest overlords and loyal to her Majesty."

"Shall we go and have a look at them?" asked Church.

"It might cheer them up a bit to see us free like this, and—"

But McClure was interrupted by a snort from his leader.

"There'll be plenty of time to cheer them up later," said Handforth. "For the moment we've got to concentrate on these spies. And if these horses don't go a bit faster I shall get the pip! There must be something in the air of this place!"

"By Jupiter! That's about it!" said McClure.

"Rats!" said Willy. "What about the spies? They moved pretty quickly, didn't they? And how about Kassker and his Gothlanders? By everything we can hear they're overflowing with energy!"

The cavalcade passed through one or two tiny hamlets before they reached the little town of Ina, and in these hamlets the entire population turned out and watched them ride by—and the expressions on the faces of these people were of blank, dazed amazement. In all probability they had never even heard of the recent activities in Dunstane.

And it was almost the same in Ina itself.

Handforth hardly looked at the place; but Willy and Church and McClure were frankly fascinated. This little town was more like a glimpse of early Britain than anything the mind could picture. Picturesque old houses, cobbled streets, and quaint old shops, their painted signs swinging outside.

The people were simply dressed, for the most part, and Wynwed the Jovial had been right enough in his prediction.

The inhabitants of Ina were only half as much awake as the people of the capital. Everybody in the little community turned out in the utmost astonishment at the arrival of a large body of the princess' soldiers.

"Hi, innkeeper!" shouted Handforth, pulling up his horse, and beckoning a man with an apron, who stood in the doorway of a little hostelry. "We want to know if you've seen three horsemen going through the town. Three rotten spies, as a matter of fact. Buck up! We can't stay here all day!"

The innkeeper simply stared. The speed of Handforth's quickfire questions bewildered him as much as the junior's mode of speech.

And a big crowd of inhabitants gathered round, open-mouthed. The town of Ina hadn't been awakened for years, and an event of this kind would probably last them, as a subject of gossip, for a decade.

"Horsemen!" roared Handforth, exasperated. "Three men! Hast seen them, dunderhead? Where away, jackass!"

The innkeeper pointed vaguely down the long street of the town.

"Three horsemen, good sir!" he panted. "Twas several hours ago. They rode straight through the town, and—"

"That's good enough for us," interrupted Handforth, swinging his horse round. "Ready, everybody? Come on! Let's go through at the gallop!"

And the cavalcade thundered through the main street of Ina, to the consternation and amazement of the entire population. Indeed, it was generally believed that a crowd of madmen had descended upon the unfortunate community.

Activity of any brisk kind was simply an unknown quantity.

"Rummy!" remarked Willy Handforth thoughtfully.

They had ridden another five miles,

and the nature of the country was now changing. There were still little villages and hamlets, but the landscape was becoming hilly, and over on the left rose a craggy mass of mountainous rocks, obviously volcanic in their origin. And there were dense patches of woodland, too, with here and there another of those great moated castles, telling of the presence of some feudal lord.

Willy was gazing over towards the left, where a quaint old inn was perched on the side of the road. The road bore round in that direction, and before long the royal bodyguard would reach the building.

Willy was frowning. He had caught sight of a man at one of the upper windows at the rear of the inn. At first Willy thought he was merely shaking out a cloth of some kind, but a certain rhythmic movement caused Willy to come to a different conclusion. The man was obviously signalling. But it was impossible to say why, or to whom.

"Yes, jolly rummy," repeated Willy.

He looked into those craggy hills, half expecting to see some figures over there answering the signals. But there was no indication of life. He glanced at his major and grinned. Handforth, in spite of his unbounded energy, had not even noticed that man at the upper window of the inn.

As a matter of fact, Edward Oswald was beginning to feel tremendously tired. He hadn't noticed it much before, but the jogging motion of the horse had lulled him into a drowsy condition. He was aching a bit, too. And he was beginning to think that he ought to have taken a sleep before setting out on this mission.

Church and McClure had come to this conclusion long ago. They were interested in all they saw, but one's enthusiasm was inclined to wane when it was a sheer physical effort to keep awake on horseback.

Round the bend they came in full sight of the wayside inn, and Handforth brightened up again.

"We'll stop here and make inquiries," he declared. "And it wouldn't be a bad idea to have half an hour's rest, while we're about it. I'm not so sure, though," he added, pulling himself up. "We're getting hot on the trail now, and it won't do to lose any time."

(Don't miss the further adventures of Handforth & Co. on the trail of spies. There are exciting developments next week.)



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