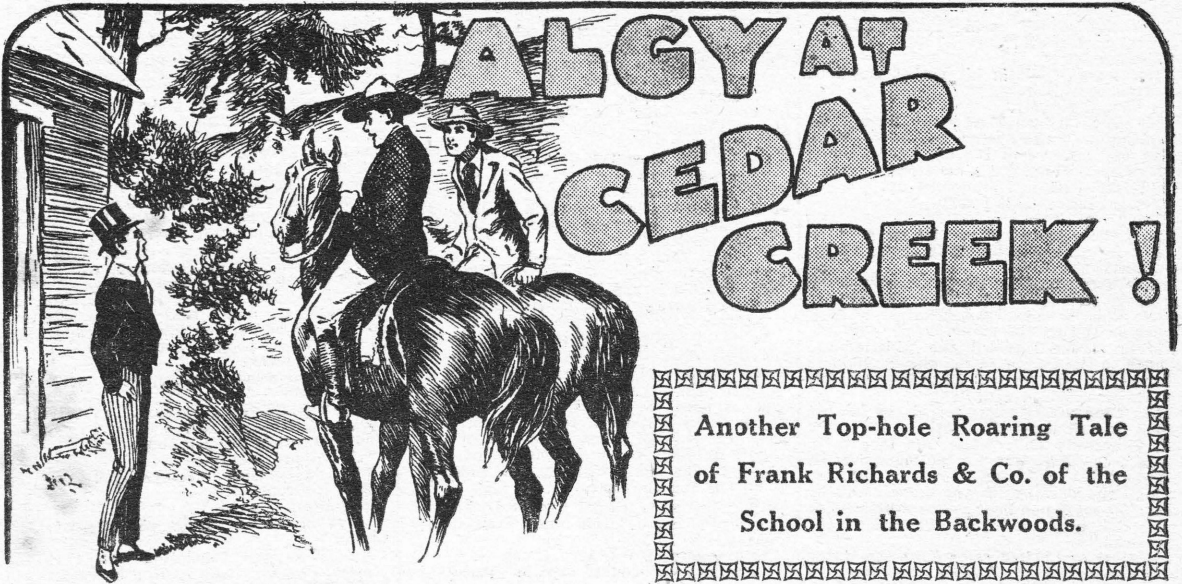


THE DUDE OF THE BACKWOODS SCHOOL!

Until Algernon Beauclerc came to the Backwoods, Cedar Creek had never beheld such wonderful things as eyeglasses and patent leather shoes. He dauns upon the boys of Cedar Creek like some beautiful dream. The lumber school is stupefied by the striking figure that enters its gates!



ALGY AT CEDAR CREEK!

Another Top-hole Roaring Tale
of Frank Richards & Co. of the
School in the Backwoods.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. In Style!

THEY'RE late!" Bob Lawless and Frank Richards dashed up along the trail through the timber, and reined in their horses at the fork of the trail.

It was school that morning after the holidays, and the chums were on their way to Cedar Creek.

But Vere Beauclerc was not waiting for them at the fork, as of old, and he was not in sight on the branch trail that ran through the trees towards the creek and the Beauclercs' clearing.

"I reckoned they'd be late!" said Bob, with a grunt. "The Cherub was always as punctual as a dago cowpuncher on pay-day. But that cousin of his—"

Frank Richards laughed.

"The Honourable Algernon may not be up yet!" he remarked.

"Then the Cherub's a jay to wait for him!"

"Well, as it's Algernon's first day at school I dare say Miss Meadows will go easy if he's a little late."

"More likely a lot than a little!" growled Bob Lawless. "What's it to be? Are we going on, or calling for the Cherub? That'll make us late."

"Let's chance it."

"Oh, all right!"

The two schoolboys turned into the branch trail, and rode at a gallop towards the Beauclercs' cabin.

They were wondering a little how Vere Beauclerc was getting on with his cousin from England that morning.

The Honourable Algernon Beauclerc was new, very new, to western ways, and Frank Richards opined that it would probably take him a long time to shake down into Canadian manners and customs.

They came in sight of the Beauclercs' cabin at last, without meeting their chum on the way.

Old Man Beauclerc could be seen at work on the clearing, a diminished figure in the distance. In the open doorway of the cabin Vere Beauclerc was standing, holding two horses. He was ready to start for school, but his cousin Algy,

invisible in the cabin, evidently was not ready.

"Hallo, Cherub!" shouted Bob Lawless, as he rode up with Frank.

Beauclerc looked round at the sound of horse-beats.

"Hallo, you fellows! You'll be late!"

"We've come for you."

Beauclerc made a grimace.

"I'm waiting for Algy!" he said.

"Isn't he ready?" asked Frank.

"Not yet."

"What's he up to, then?"

"Brushing his topper!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Brushing his topper!" said Beauclerc, in a tone of resignation. "I rather wish the post-wagon had tipped his baggage into the creek. But it didn't, and he's got no end of clothes here, and—and—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

Bob Lawless chortled.

"Oh, by gum! You're working off that stunt on him, then, same as I did on Franky when he first came to Canada. You're letting him go to school rigged up in Bond Street style. Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass! I've tried to persuade him not to—"

"Then it's his own idea?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"I'm blessed if I quite know what to do," said Vere Beauclerc, with a worried look. "As he's a guest I can't dictate to him. I've tried to give advice. But he knows best. He thinks he does, at least. Perhaps you fellows may be able to persuade him to—"

"Let him rip!" chuckled Bob. "Cedar Creek School will be no end delighted with a real dude."

"Dry up, Bob, you duffer!" said Frank. "We can't let Beau's cousin make an ass of himself, if it can be prevented. Let's speak to him."

"It's spoiling a good joke," grumbled Bob.

"Rats!"

"Here he comes!" said Beauclerc.

The Honourable Algernon came out of the cabin at last.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless blinked at him.

For the moment they could only blink.

The Honourable Algernon Beauclerc was rather a good-looking fellow, and he certainly looked very nice. At some really select scholastic establishment in the Old Country he would have looked quite the thing, perhaps a little remarkable for fastidious elegance, but no more than that.

But in the backwoods of Canada he was a vision to make the oldest inhabitant rub his eyes.

He was dressed in Etons—Etons of an exquisite cut and fit. His white collar, lately unpacked, was spotless. His tie was tied as only an expert in ties could tie a tie. His cuffs were things of beauty, and his bright boots were joys for ever. Handsomest of all was his tall silk hat. It was not the only topper ever seen in the Thompson Valley, for Frank Richards had brought one there with him, in his early blissful ignorance of the place. Frank's topper had long ago gone the way of all toppers. It was his cousin Bob's sense of humour that had caused Frank to sport it once, only once, at the backwoods school. But Algernon's topper was being sported, not as the result of a practical joke, but from Algernon's own sense of the fitness of things. And it was polished till it reflected back the sunshine.

Bob Lawless shaded his eyes with his hand, as if this vision dazzled him.

"Is it real?" he murmured.

Algernon extracted an eyeglass from his waistcoat pocket, and inserted it in his eye. That gave him the finishing touch.

"Help!" gasped Bob.

"Shurrup!" murmured Frank Richards.

Algernon turned his monocle upon the two riders, and nodded.

"Good-mornin'!" he remarked.

"Good-morning, old scout!" said Frank. "You'll have to hurry up and change for school, won't you?"

Algernon started.

"Change?" he said.

"Yes. You see—"

"I have changed for school."

"Oh!"

"Algy, old chap—" murmured Beauclerc helplessly.

"I'm ready!" said Algernon.
 "But, I say——"
 "This my gee?"
 "Yes. But——"
 "Do you always ride to school?" asked Algernon.
 "Yes. We——"
 "I'd rather drive. I'm not really dressed for ridin'."
 "Why not dress for riding, then?" asked Frank Richards.
 "My dear man, I'm goin' to school."
 "We—we—we don't dress in Etons at Cedar Creek, you know."
 "So Vere says. You ought to."
 "Eh?"
 "If you fellows don't do the right thing there's no reason why I shouldn't, is there?"
 "Nunno! B-b-but——"
 "Let's get goin'!" said Algernon.
 "We don't drop out final g's at Cedar Creek, if you don't mind my mentioning it," murmured Frank.
 Algernon stared again.
 "What a country!" he said.
 "But you see—ahem!"
 "It's time you learned, isn't it?" suggested Algernon.

"Ahem! Look here, if you're really coming to school like that——"
 "Like what?"
 "That!" gasped Frank.
 "I suppose you're jokin'!" said Algernon coldly. "Can't say I see the joke myself. Anythin' wrong with my clobber?"
 "Nunno. But—but in the backwoods, you know——"
 "You said I was keepin' you waiting, Vere. Now I'm ready, you don't seem ready to start," said Algernon severely. "I understand that your headmaster is a lady—I mean, headmistress. It's rather no class to keep a lady waitin', if you don't mind my sayin' so. Are you comin'?"

Algernon climbed on his horse. There was no help for it. With a hopeless glance at his chums, Vere Beauclerc followed Algy's example; and the four schoolboys started at a gallop for Cedar Creek School.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Algy at Cedar Creek!

"HERE they come!" said Chunky Todgers. The fat and cheerful Chunky was standing at the gateway of Cedar Creek. It was close on time for the bell to ring for classes, and Chunky had been wondering what had become of Frank Richards & Co. Four riders came in sight on the trail, riding very fast. Chunky looked at them and recognised his three old acquaintances, and saw one whom he did not recognise.

Chunky looked at him, and looked again, and then said, in emphatic tones: "Oh, Jerusalem!"
 "Great gophers!" ejaculated Tom Lawrence. "Who's that? What's that? Great jumping gophers!"
 "Vellee nicee, what you tinkee?" chuckled little Yen Chin, the Chinese.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's a dude!" roared Eben Hacke. "A dude from Dudesville! Ha, ha, ha!"

Hacke's roar of laughter brought a dozen fellows out of the playground to look.

Every eye was fixed upon the Honourable Algernon.

Some of the Cedar Creek fellows looked astonished; all of them looked amused. There was a grin on every face as Frank Richards & Co. rode up.

Three of the newcomers looked rather red, but the Honourable Algernon was calmness itself.

His garb was certainly distinctive, but Algernon did not mind that. He rather liked being distinctive.

"Well, here we are again, you fellows!" said Bob Lawless, as he jumped from his horse.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Hacke. "Is this another of your jokes, Bob? This is how you brought Richards to school his first day."

"Oh, dry up, Hacke!" answered Bob. "Bring your cousin in, Cherub, and let him see Miss Meadows."

"Jump down, Algy," said Beauclerc, as he dismounted.

Algernon alighted. He held out his rein to Eben Hacke. Hacke stared.

"Take my horse," said Algernon.

"What?"

"See he's properly looked after."

"Hay?"

"What are you dawdlin' for? Why don't you take it?" exclaimed Algernon sharply.

Hacke looked at the new boy as if he would eat him.

"Algy," exclaimed Beauclerc sharply, "what are you up to? Bring your horse into the corral."

"Can't the stable-boy take it in?"

"The—the what?"

"Stable-boy!" roared Eben Hacke.

"Who's the stable-boy?"

Algernon looked surprised.

"By gad! Am I makin' a mistake?" he asked, with perfect coolness. "Ain't you a stable-boy?"

"Why, I—I—I'll——"

Wrath overcame Master Hacke, and he could only splutter. Vere Beauclerc hastily took his cousin's arm and led him in.

Hacke stood spluttering. He was too taken aback and overcome to proceed to action just then. The fellows round him were roaring.

"Algy, you ass——" stuttered Beauclerc.

"Isn't he a stable-boy, then?"

"No, you fathead; he's a Cedar Creek chap!"

"Oh, he looked a horsey fellow—I thought he was, naturally. Never mind—only a mistake."

"I don't think Hacke enjoyed the mistake," said Bob Lawless, rather dryly. "He looks rather mad."

Algy started.

"Begad! Mad? Is this an asylum?"

"Mad is American for ratty," said Frank Richards, laughing.

"Oh, my hat! What a language!"

The horses were put up in the corral, and the four schoolboys turned towards the lumber school-house. A crowd of Cedar Creek fellows came round them—all interested in the Honourable Algernon. Eben Hacke had his big fists clenched, and was evidently meditating vengeance; but just then Mr. Slimmey, the second master of Cedar Creek, appeared on the scene. Mr. Slimmey's gold-rimmed glasses almost fell off at the sight of Algernon.

"My cousin, sir!" said Beauclerc, colouring.

"Oh, ah, yes!" stammered Mr. Slimmey.

He shook hands mechanically with the boy.

"Your name is Beauclerc, I think?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Algernon.

"Is your sight defective?"

"Eh? No!"

"Then why are you wearing a glass?"

"I always do, sir."

"Nonsense! Take it off immediately!"

"Begad!"

Algernon seemed indisposed to obey Mr. Slimmey's order, but Bob Lawless kindly jerked at the cord of the monocle, and it left Algy's eye quite suddenly.

"Beauclerc, you should have advised your cousin to dress himself differently here," said Mr. Slimmey severely.

"I—I——" stammered Beauclerc.

"This attire is quite suitable for an English school, but utterly unsuited to Cedar Creek. You must be well aware of that, Beauclerc."

"Ye-es, sir, but—but——"

"I am surprised at you, Beauclerc."

Mr. Slimmey, evidently under the belief that Beauclerc had been pulling the leg of his tenderfoot cousin, shook his head severely, and walked away.

"Queer old bird, that!" commented Algernon. And he replaced the monocle in his eye.

The quartette went on towards the School House, near which they encountered Mr. Shepherd. Mr. Shepherd blinked at Algernon.

"Is—is this your cousin, Beauclerc?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," groaned Vere.

"Oh! Ah! You—you had better take him in to see Miss Meadows, I think" stuttered Mr. Shepherd.

"Yes, sir."

Algernon was piloted into the lumber school-house, and Beauclerc tapped rather nervously at the door of Miss Meadows' sitting-room. He was wondering uneasily what the Canadian school-mistress would think of this exotic.

"Come in!" said Miss Meadows' low, pleasant voice.

Beauclerc marched his cousin in, Frank Richards and Bob remaining in the passage.

Algernon held his handsome silk topper in his hand as he walked in to be presented to his schoolmistress.

Miss Meadows looked at him.

A slight smile played round her lips for a moment, but it was replaced by a severe expression.

"My—my cousin, ma'am—Algernon Beauclerc!" stammered Vere.

"I am glad to see you, my boy!" said Miss Meadows.

"The pleasure is all on my side, ma'am!" replied Algernon politely.

There was a gurgle from the passage.

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Meadows.

"Beauclerc!"

"Yes, Miss Meadows."

"I am surprised at your not having informed your cousin that his school attire at home was not suitable here."

"I—I——"

"Kindly see that he is differently clad to-morrow, Beauclerc."

"Ye-es, ma'am!"

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Algernon politely. "If it is all the same to you, I should prefer to dress as I am."

"It is not all the same to me," said Miss Meadows sharply. "You may take your cousin to the school-room, Beauclerc!"

"But, I say——" began Algernon.

"Come on!" whispered Beauclerc.

He dragged the Honourable Algernon from the room.

In the passage, there were twenty or more Cedar Creek boys and girls, and they were all smiling—with the exception of Eben Hacke. That burly youth was in a towering rage.

He thrust a huge, clenched fist under the Honourable Algernon's startled nose.

"Where will you have it?" he demanded.

"Begad!"

"Hold on, Hacke!" exclaimed Beauclerc hastily.

"Stable-boy!" said Hacke sulphurously. "Giving me his critter to hold! Why, I'll smash him into a jelly! I guess I'll—I'll—I'll——"

"Hacke!"

It was Miss Meadows' quiet voice. Eben Hacke dropped his clenched fist suddenly, as Miss Meadows looked out of her doorway.

"Oh! Ah! Yes, ma'am!" he gasped. "Kindly behave yourself, Hacke!" said Miss Meadows sternly. "If I find you quarrelling with the new boy, Hacke, I shall punish you very severely! I shall keep an eye on you. Now go into the school-room!"

And Hacke, suppressing his feelings as well as he could, went. Algernon walked cheerfully into the school-room, leaving his hat hanging up on a peg, along with a crowd of caps and Stetsons, in the lobby.

Beaulerc found a place for him, and he sat down between his cousin and Frank Richards. Miss Meadows came in, followed by Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd, and classes began. But there was not very much attention given to lessons for some time. The attention was bestowed upon the Honourable Algernon, and Miss Meadows' class was in a state of semi-suppressed merriment all the morning.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Chunky is too Funny!

ALGERNON, under the peculiar circumstances, might have been expected to betray some sign of self-consciousness.

But he didn't.

Not a sign of it. If he noticed that he attracted unusual attention, he probably took it as his due. He was quite at his ease during the morning. Only once did he wake up, as it were, from his serene repose. Miss Meadows' back being turned for a moment, Eben Hacke took advantage of the opportunity to lean over his desk and give Algy a fierce whisper.

"You pesky dude! I'm going to smash you after lessons!"

Then Algernon looked round calmly. The big and burly Eben was almost twice as large as the slim Algernon, but Algy certainly was not afraid of him.

"Did you address me, my good fellow?" he asked.

Hacke choked.

"Good fellow! G-g-good fellow! Why, I—I guess I'll—I'll——"

"If you did, perhaps you wouldn't mind explainin' what a dude is?" suggested Algernon. "I've never heard the word before. Is it American or Canadian?"

"I—you—I—I'm going to break you up into little pieces!" said Hacke, between his teeth.

Algernon shook his head.

"I don't think you could, really," he answered.

"I calculate I'll show you!"

And, by way of a hint, Hacke reached over and grasped the Honourable Algernon by the shoulder.

Unfortunately for the bully of the lumber school, Miss Meadows turned back to her class at that moment. The schoolmistress' brows knitted at the scene that met her view.

"Hacke!" she rapped out.

Eben Hacke released Algy's shoulder as if it had suddenly become red-hot.

"This is the second time I have had to speak to you, Hacke!" said Miss Meadows coldly. "You will be detained an hour after lessons. If I find you quarrelling with the new boy again, your punishment will be more severe."

Hacke sat silent and furious.

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His little scheme of "smashing" Algernon after lessons had to be dropped now. Even for that pleasant experience he did not dare to face the wrath of Miss Meadows.

Algernon calmly brushed his shoulder with his handkerchief, as if Hacke's grasp had left a stain there, a proceeding that made the other fellows grin, and made Hacke almost foam.

When the school was dismissed after morning lessons, Hacke had the pleasure of remaining, kept in, till dinner-time. He cast a fierce glance after Algernon, as the latter went out; but Algy did not even notice it. He seemed to have forgotten Eben Hacke's unimportant existence already.

He walked cheerfully out of the lumber schoolhouse with Frank Richards & Co. in the midst of a smiling crowd.

His topper was still on the peg, which rather surprised Frank Richards & Co., for a number of the other fellows had been out before the leisurely Algy, and the chums rather expected to find the topper in use as a football in the passage.

But there it was, and Algernon put it on his head.

"He, he, he!" came from Chunky Todgers.

Chunky had been first out that morning, contrary to his usual custom. He was generally slow to move, but he had a reason for hurrying himself that morning. The reason transpired afterwards.

Algernon glanced at the fat Chunky as he heard the chortle.

But he disdained to take any further notice of Chunky, and he walked out into the playground with his friends.

Frank Richards and Bob went down to the creek with their canoe, and Algy was left with Vere Beaulerc. Beaulerc did not feel that he could desert his cousin, though the sensation Algy's appearance was making considerably disconcerted him.

"I don't dislike this place, after all, Vere," Algy remarked.

"I'm glad of that, Algy."

"The chaps seem to be rather ruffians, and——"

"Eh?"

"And the schoolmistress doesn't seem to have much sense——"

"What!"

"But I dare say I shall get on all right. The school work is easy enough, not like the stuff I had to cram with my tutor, old Toots. But I suppose Miss Fields——"

"Miss Who?"

"Fields. Isn't her name Fields?"

"Meadows——"

"Oh, yes; Meadows! I knew it was somethin' grassy. Miss Meadows, then. I suppose Miss Meadows was only spoofin' about my havin' to wear different clobber to-morrow——"

"No, of course not! You can't dress like this in the backwoods!"

"I'm goin' to."

"You heard what Miss Meadows said."

Algernon nodded.

"Yaas. I regard her as exceedin' her authority in the matter. I'm not goin' to take any notice of such rot."

"Algy!" exclaimed Beaulerc, in great distress. "Don't you understand that you're at school now? You have to do as your schoolmistress tells you. She can't indulge you as your tutor used to, even if she wanted to, and, of course, she doesn't!"

"There's a certain amount due to myself," said Algernon loftily. "I can't make myself look a guy—like you, for instance!"

"Wha-at!"

"You're dressed like a stable-hand, Vere. I can't dress like that. I don't criticise your taste, of course. Not my bizney. But I'm the best judge for myself. I shall come to-morrow just as I am to-day."

"Miss Meadows will be angry."

"I hope not!" said Algernon carelessly.

"But she will be!" exclaimed Beaulerc.

"Well, let her, then! Can't be helped. Where do we have lunch?"

"We have dinner here. All the fellows who live at a distance do. But, look here, Algy, suppose we ride home quick and change clothes—you, I mean——"

"Rot!"

"Can't you see that you're making every fellow in the school chuckle?" exclaimed Beaulerc, losing patience.

Algernon shrugged his slim shoulders.

"Let 'em chuckle!" he said.

And with that he swung away, apparently having had enough of his cousin's plain English.

Beaulerc compressed his lips, and went to join his chums by the creek. Algernon paraded the playground, quite satisfied with himself and the attention he was receiving. Chunky Todgers and some other fellows kept him in sight all the time, with grinning faces.

"I put it under the lining, you know," Chunky murmured to Dick Dawson.

"It will work 'out soon. There was plenty of it. Red ink, you know. He will be the colour of a Kootenay soon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon gave the chuckling school-boys a haughty glance, and turned away. Down his forehead several red streaks were already showing, but the superb Algernon was unconscious of them.

That was the reason why Chunky Todgers had scudded out so quickly after lessons that morning. The humorous Chunky had been unable to resist the temptation of the topper.

"By gad, it's rather warm!" murmured Algy. "I'm actually perspirin'!"

He felt the damp oozing out from under his hat upon his forehead. But it wasn't perspiration, if the Honourable Algernon had only known it. It was red ink. He brushed his forehead lightly with his hand, smudging the red across with a very striking effect.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar.

Algy's get-up had already provoked smiles, but now the Cedar Creek fellows seemed to be nearly going into convulsions when they looked at him. The sight of red streaks oozing down under the silk topper was irresistible.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon's haughty glance in reply to the laughter was crushing, but its effect was quite spoiled by the red streaks that marred his face.

The Cedar Creek fellows yelled.

Algernon walked away angrily.

He came upon Miss Meadows near the schoolhouse, and the schoolmistress stopped and stared at him blankly.

"Upon my word!" she ejaculated.

"Beaulerc, come here!"

Algernon stopped and raised his silk-hat to the schoolmistress very gracefully.

The raising of the hat revealed a forehead smothered with red ink, and the effect was extraordinary. There was a howl of laughter from all directions.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "What ever have you been doing?"

"Doin'?", repeated Algernon, in surprise.

"Your face is red——"

"That is not surprisin', madam, considerin' the dashed impertinence I've met with this mornin'!" said Algy.

"But—but what— Bless me, it is ink! Have you been silly enough to put ink into your hat?" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

Algernon jumped.

"Ink!" he stuttered.

He stared into his hat. The lining was dripping with red ink.

"Oh gad!" gasped Algernon.

"You utterly absurd boy!"

"I—I—I didn't do it!" shrieked Algernon. "Somebody has been playin' tricks with my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" Miss Meadows exclaimed, as severely as she could, though her lips were twitching. "Beaulerc, you had better go and wash your face! It is streaked with red ink."

"Oh gad!"

"Todgers, take Beaulerc into the house and show him where to wash!"

"Certainly, ma'am!" grinned Chunky. "This way, dude!"

Algernon, with a furious face—as furious as it was inky—followed the fat Chunky into the lumber schoolhouse, leaving the playground echoing with laughter. Eben Hacke was coming out of the school-room as he entered, and at the sight of Algernon he clenched his big fists. But he unclenched them again the next moment, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Until dinner-time Algernon was busy washing—washing hard. He found the red ink rather clinging. And his face was still very red—though the ink was gone—when he joined the Cedar Creek fellows at dinner.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Thrasing for Somebody!

THERE was a lofty frown upon Algernon's noble face when he came out after dinner. He came out into the playground bare-headed. His topper was not wearable in its present state. He joined Frank Richards & Co., who were smiling.

"Somebody's been playin' japes on my hat!" said Algernon, in tones of deep indignation and wrath. "It's ruined!"

"Go hon!" murmured Frank.

"I shall have to ride home hatless!" said Algernon. "Fortunately it will be near dusk, and I sha'n't risk my complexion. But I'm not goin' to stand this! I want to know who did it!"

"Are you going to scalp him?" chuckled Bob Lawless.

"I'm goin' to thrash him!" said Algernon angrily. "There's a limit! I've stood enough dashed cheek here already, but there's a limit, and this is it! I want to know who the cad was!"

"It was only a joke, old chap!" murmured Beaulerc soothingly.

"I don't call it a joke," answered Algernon loftily. "Ruinin' a fellow's topper isn't a joke—it's an outrage! I'm goin' to thrash the rotter, and I want to know who the rotter was!"

"I wonder?" grinned Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If the rotter is afraid to own up—" began Algy, with a wrathful and scornful glance round him.

"Oh, stow your chin-wag!" growled Eben Hacke. "If it wasn't for Miss Meadows, I'd give you more trouble than you want!"

"I was not addressin' you, my good fellow. I know you didn't do it. I want the cad who did it to put up his hands!"

Chunky Todgers coloured. Chunky was not exactly a fighting-man, but he did not like being called names. He rolled forward.

"I did it!" he announced.



A HAT FULL OF RED INK! Algernon stopped, and raised his silk hat to the schoolmistress as she came up. The raising of the hat revealed a forehead smothered with red ink, and the effect was extraordinary. There was a howl of laughter from all directions. "Bless my soul!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "What ever have you been doing?" (See Chapter 3.)

Algernon looked at him.

"You fat rascal!" he said.

"What?"

"I'm goin' to thrash you!" Algernon pushed back his spotless cuffs and advanced upon Todgers. "Now, then, put up your hands!"

"Algy!" exclaimed Beaulerc.

"Don't interfere! I'm goin' to thrash him!"

"You're jolly well not!" exclaimed Tom Lawrence, pushing before Chunky Todgers. "If you're looking for trouble, you silly jay, I'll give you all you want!"

"Yep, that's a good idea!" said Chunky Todgers placably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand aside!" commanded Algernon, frowning at Lawrence.

"Rats!"

"I shall thrash you instead of that fat fool—"

"Go ahead, then!" said Lawrence cheerfully.

"Algy!" exclaimed Beaulerc.

The Honourable Algernon did not heed his cousin's beseeching voice. He dropped his eyeglass and advanced upon Tom Lawrence. The sturdy Canadian schoolboy stood like a rock to meet him. In another second they were fighting.

The Cedar Creek fellows looked on with grinning faces.

They fully expected to see the "dude" crumple up under Lawrence's hefty blows, but there was a surprise in store for them. There was more in the Honourable Algernon than met the eye.

It was Lawrence who went to grass first.

He dropped on his back, greatly surprised, with a trickle of red flowing from his nose, and gasping for breath.

"Well hit!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

There was a roar.

"Go it, Lawrence!"

Tom Lawrence staggered to his feet. Algernon stood back politely to give him plenty of time. Tom dashed the crimson stream from his nose and put up his hands again, advancing upon Algernon with a rather grim expression on his sunburnt face.

Vere Beaulerc looked on uneasily, but it was impossible for him to interfere. No one else wanted to interfere.

Algernon had asked for trouble, and now he was in for it. For, though the dandy of Cedar Creek had plenty of pluck, and some knowledge of boxing, he was no match for the sturdy Canadian. Everybody but Algernon could see that he was booked for a licking, but Algernon was perfectly satisfied with his prospects so far.

Tom Lawrence piled in with all his strength, and Algernon had to give ground. He stood up courageously to his opponent, but he did not have a chance of flooring him again. It was Algernon who was floored, and he went down with a heavy bump.

Algernon sat and blinked at Lawrence, who seemed to tower over him. The Honourable Algernon was evidently in a state of great astonishment. Somehow he had supposed that, like Cæsar of old, he had only to come and see to conquer. He was discovering that that supposition was slightly mistaken. Tom Lawrence grinned down on him good-naturedly.

(Continued on page 27.)
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ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

HUNTED DOWN!

(Continued from page 7.)

Captain Mellish must devise some excuse for not keeping watch with us at Glyn House this night, as obviously he could not watch there and crack the safe here at the same time.

"And he—"

"He managed to get himself crooked in football practice here," said the detective, with a smile. "Exactly."

"Ah, we never dreamed—" said Mr. Railton.

"That is why I borrowed your study this afternoon, sir," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "I knew pretty accurately that Captain Mellish's ankle was as sound as ever, and I thought that he might venture upon cracking the safe while the school was busy at lessons. The afternoon would have been almost as safe as the night. I remained in here all the time you were in the Sixth Form room for that reason."

"Ah, I never guessed—"

"I should have done my work badly if you had guessed, sir."

"I suppose so," said the Head. "But he made no attempt—"

"He probably knew I was here. Having left it, he left it till the night, when he expected me to be keeping watch at Glyn House with Mr. Glyn and the rest, and so he had not the slightest doubt that I was safely out of the way."

"And you—"

"I introduced myself secretly into the house to watch. I had to allow him to go ahead with his work to obtain proof against him. There was no way of capturing him but by a trap. And so I trapped him. And I took him by surprise when he came out of your study, otherwise I might not be alive now to tell you what had happened."

The Head shuddered.

"Yet I do not see it all," he said. "The other night, when we were watching here, who was it then that came and took the picture?"

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"No one came," he said.

"No one!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "No one," said Ferrers Locke. "From the precautions that were taken, sir, it was practically impossible for anyone to enter the house. You will remember that it was Captain Mellish who gave the alarm, Captain Mellish was the only one who saw the intruder, Captain Mellish did all the shooting. As a matter of fact, he had sent you the telephone message with the intention of being one of the watching party here, otherwise he could not have been in the house at all, and would have had no opportunity of committing the robbery. He did not hear a noise in the passage; you remember, no one else heard it."

"I remember."

"He affected to hear it, and when he went into the passage, he himself fired at the light and extinguished it. He smashed through the window with the chair, but no one leaped out. He shot the lamp out in this study, and he, in the darkness, whipped out a knife and cut the picture from the frame."

"And afterwards, when you were searching for the picture and the cracksman, that picture was folded up, or rolled up and hidden on the person of the cracksman, under your eyes—Captain Mellish himself!"

Dr. Holmes gasped.

"I understand now," he said.

"Exactly."

"But I am still amazed!" cried the Head. "What of the telephone message to-day when Captain Mellish was himself in the study?"

"Ah, that was a master-stroke!" said Ferrers Locke.

"But the explanation was quite simple—the captain had a confederate, as many details in his robberies amply prove, and it was this confederate who rang you up while the captain was here to-day. You remember that the voice did not sound quite the same."

"Yes, I remember now. I suppose the telephone call was really on your account. He knew that you would be here, and instructed his confederate."

"Precisely."

"There was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle."

"Inspector Skeat!" said Ferrers Locke.

The inspector arrived in a state of almost dazed amazement.

"Well, you've got me," said Captain

Mellish. "Dr. Holmes, before I go, allow me to express my regret. I have treated you very badly, and I have no excuse to offer. I came home from India with expensive tastes and little to gratify them with. I had peculiar talents, and I made use of them. That is my history. But you shall have your picture back. It has not been disposed of, and it is uninjured. Forgive me if you can."

"I forgive you," said the Head sadly. "I am only sorry that such a man should have come to this. It is never too late to repent Captain Mellish."

It was a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's.

No one would ever have dreamed of suspecting Captain Mellish; but now the truth was known, Tom Merry & Co. remembered some little circumstances that had not engaged their attention before. They understood the meeting in the old barn on that rainy afternoon. It had probably been the plunder of a robbery that the captain was handing to Nat Perkins on that occasion; and doubtless, after the man had left the barn, Captain Mellish had met him again unseen by the juniors, and given him the instructions for that surprising telephone call to St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes recovered his picture, and Captain Mellish went to his proper punishment. And disgrace, too, fell upon one who had not earned it—Mellish of the Fourth. While Captain Mellish was honoured and popular, Percy Mellish had "swatted" considerably about his relation; but he would have been very glad to forget the connection now, and to have others forget it. It was not agreeable to a fellow to have a relation in Portland Prison, and to have the fact known to the whole school. But Mellish, somewhat to his surprise, found that Tom Merry & Co. stood by him, and their countenancing him enabled him to hold up his head.

Mellish of the Fourth hoped eagerly that the matter would be forgotten. But it was likely to be a long time before the St. Jim's fellows left off discussing, over and over again, the mystery of X.

THE END.

(There will be another topping complete story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, entitled, "The Fellow Who Lied!" by Martin Clifford, in next week's bumper issue.)

ALGY AT CEDAR CREEK!

(Continued from page 11.)

"Want any more?" he inquired.

Algernon scrambled up breathlessly.

"I'm goin' to thrash you!" he gasped.

"Go it, then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon went it.

He charged at his adversary with thumping fists, but the blows that fell on Lawrence did not seem to trouble him. Without troubling to defend, he hit out in return, and Algernon went spinning.

Crash!

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Slimmey was coming round the corner of the school-house as Algernon went flying, and Algy crashed on the ground at his feet. There was a gasp from the Cedar Creek crowd. Algy threw his arms out wildly, and clasped Mr. Slimmey's slim legs without even knowing what he was doing. It was the instinctive clutch at the nearest object to save himself. There was a splutter from Mr. Slimmey as he was dragged over and rolled on the ground with Algernon.

"Better vamoose!" gasped Bob Lawless.

And the crowd melted away, leaving Mr. Slimmey and Algernon sprawling on the ground together. Only Vere Beauclere remained to help his cousin. Algy was dragged, dazed, to his feet. Then Vere gave a hand to Mr. Slimmey.

"C-c-can I help you, sir?" he stammered.

"Bless my soul! Thank you! Oh dear!" gasped Mr. Slimmey.

He staggered up and fixed a grim look upon the gasping Algernon.

"Beauclere! You—"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Algernon. "I—I fell over!"

"You have been fighting!" exclaimed Mr. Slimmey.

"I was thrashin' a cheeky fellow, sir!"

Mr. Slimmey looked at Algernon. It was easy enough for him to see which way the thrashing had been going. Algernon certainly looked as if he had had punishment enough, and the master's face cleared.

"Don't let this occur again!" he said severely, and he walked away.

Algernon looked round.

"The fellow's cleared off!" he said.

"Just as well! I should have given him a terrific hidin', Vere!"

Vere Beauclere smiled.

"Better come and bathe your eye," he suggested.

"Oh yaas! It feels father queer!"

Algernon's eye not only felt queer, it looked queer when he turned up to afternoon lessons. So did his nose. But Algernon was comforted by the reflection that he had remained the victor on the hard-fought field—to his own belief, at least.

"I can't wear that dashed thing again!"

Algernon held up his inky topper after lessons. Frank Richards & Co. nodded assent, with grinning faces.

"Chuck it away!" suggested Bob Lawless. "Come to-morrow in a Stetson!"

Algernon shook his head.

"Oh, it's all right!" he said. "I've got several more at home. I'm rather wide, you know. I knew accidents might happen, and I brought half a dozen toppers with me!"

"But you won't come in a topper to-morrow?" murmured Frank Richards.

"Oh yaas!"

"Miss Meadows has told you—"

"Can't be helped! Something's due to a chap's self respect," said Algernon. "Let's get off, Vere. I'm goin' without a hat."

The quartette rode in thoughtful silence as far as the fork in the trail. There, as they drew rein, Bob Lawless addressed Algernon seriously.

"You know what Miss Meadows said, old scout. You're really coming in different clobber to-morrow?"

"Not at all!"

"But you must, you know!"

"Rot! Good-night!"

Algernon rode away with Vere Beauclere, and Frank Richards and Bob trotted on their homeward way. There was a twinkle in Bob's eyes.

"Franky, I guess that galoot wants a lesson," he said.

"He does!" agreed Frank.

"And he's going to get one on his way to school to-morrow morning," said Bob Lawless. "I've thought of a stunt! Listen!"

There was a surprise in store the following morning for the dandy of Cedar Creek.

THE END.

(Full particulars of next week's roaring tale of the School in the Backwoods will be found on page 2.)

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