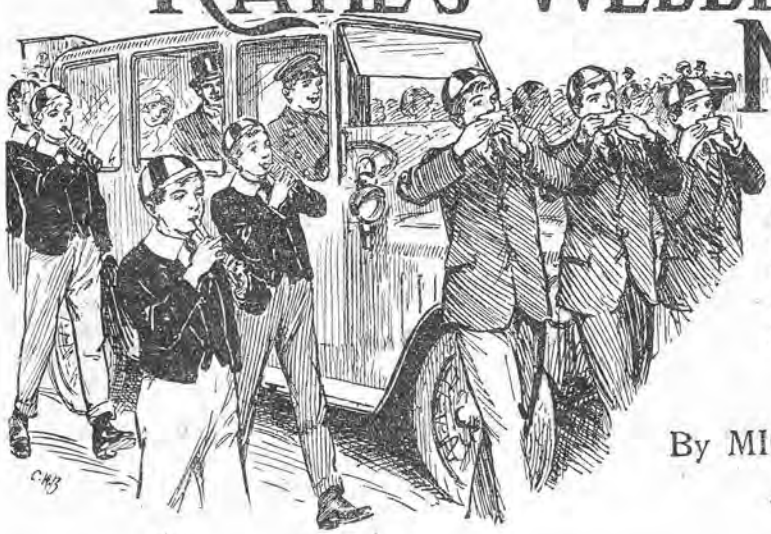
"KATIE'S" WEDDING MARCH



A Magnificent, Long Complete Story of the Boys of St. Katie's, and of their form-master, "Jolly Roger"

By MICHAEL POOLE

THE FIRST CHAPTER
Jolly Roger Takes Tea

IMAGINE for a moment that you are a visitor to St. Katherine's School on a certain summer afternoon. Walking down the corridor which is known as the Trans corridor, because it is here that the boys of the Transitus Form have their studies, you would have observed quite a lot of interesting things.

Most of the study-doors were open, and you could see in each room two or three fellows, aged about fifteen or sixteen, making a brew of tea or arranging cups and saucers, or opening tins of fruit, or any old thing of that sort. And you would probably have noted the fact that the studies were not particularly neat and tidy, nor were the occupants quiet and orderly. The Transitus Form never had a reputation for anything of that sort, being happy lads of the "boys will be boys" breed, who liked to kick up a bit of a row round about tea-time.

At the end of the corridor was Study Ten. The door was closed, and if you had opened it your first idea would have been that you had made a mistake and struck the prize sitting-room at a Model Homes Exhibition. The books were carefully arranged on their shelves, the pictures hung dead straight on the walls, and everything about the show was wondrous neat and clean, as it says in the poem.

The table in the centre of the room was set for a meal—a gentle, polite sort of meal, and not a giddy feast. Carefully arranged on chairs about the room were four boys, and each of them held a book, nicely bound and with gilt edges, showing that it was a great work, and one that would improve the mind.

They were nice boys, too, and not like the rowdy fellows in the other rooms. Their hair was properly brushed, and their faces bright and clean. You would have said at once that these were good boys, who always did as they were told, and won all the prizes for good conduct and steady work.

And you would have been hopelessly wrong. The big fellow who sat in the far corner pretending to read "The Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson," was Bill Strong, the best full-back and one of the steadiest bats Katie's had ever known. Bill didn't know much about

poetry, but when it came to captaining the Transitus team, everyone knew that Bill was a marvel.

Near him sat another athlete, just as tall as Bill, but a bit more on the willowy side. Jimmy Curtis, commonly known as the "Kangaroo" because he came from Australia, wasn't reading "Essays on Education" because he really liked it better than the "Book of Cricket," but just because he wanted to look as good as the rest of them.

Then there was the quiet-looking lad in spectacles, whose name was Dobbin. Old Dobbie was an expert with the camera, and with the aid of his friend, the Kid——

But you want to meet the Kid personally. He was the kind little boy who sat near the table and kept looking up anxiously towards the door. His full name was Richard Dexter, and when people first saw him they said what a dear, sweet child he was; and when they saw his big blue eyes and his little rosebud mouth, they always hoped that the big boys didn't hurt him, or make him unhappy.

But you can take it from me that the big boys didn't try any games of that sort with Richard. The Transitus Form considered that they were the rightful leaders of the school, because a fellow didn't get into the Transitus unless he had become something of a nuisance in every other form. And whenever there was any complicated sort of trouble knocking round the Transitus, or even in the school, it was fairly safe to reckon that Dickie Dexter was right in the centre of it. It was he who, with the aid of Jimmy Curtis, fixed up the great rag which resulted in the wrecking of all the Transitus and the Fifth studies. It was Dexter, again aided by Curtis, who led their dear form-master into a trap, so that he believed everybody in the school was gambling, and—but why go on? Everybody knew that the Kid was the brainiest little rag-inventor who had ever adorned St. Katie's.

At four-thirty there came a tap at the door, and a moment later there stepped into the room a tall, soldierly man, whose face was glowing and whose eyes simply beamed with joy. He seemed to be bursting with cheerfulness.

"Ah, ah!" he said. "Ah! This is very pleasant! This is splendid! I feel an absolute longing to-day for bright society. I feel confident that I have come to the right address, Strong. I am sure I have."

They smiled. Dobbin dashed to the "Primus" stove and began to make the brew. Strong put a chair in the right position for their visitor, while the Kid pushed the cake a little nearer the centre.

Mr. Roger Blunt, form-master of the Transitus, sat down. When you come to think of the fact that he had under him the thirty most difficult and unmanageable boys at Katie's, you might wonder why he felt so cheerful. But Jolly Roger had come to the school for the express purpose of reforming the Transitus, and he was the sort of man who simply revelled in hard work.

They had done their best to cure him. They had tried all the old stunts and the Kid had invented several new ones, all with the express purpose of making Jolly Roger wish he'd never seen St. Katie's. But Roger smiled through it all. He never lost his temper, never threatened them with expulsion, or talked of reporting them to the Head. He simply said he was going to make them work—and in the end the Transitus did work.

Other masters before Jolly Roger had simply told the Transitus that they were a set of young scoundrels, and left it at that. Roger invited himself to tea with one or other members of his form. Sometimes, too, he invited one or more of his gentle pupils to take tea with him. And he always did everything with such an air of cheerful vim that you couldn't help feeling rather jolly about the whole business.

You've got to put that down to Roger's credit, just as you've got to admit that if he talked about school matters and learned one or two things that he wasn't intended to know, he never took advantage of it. The Transitus got to the stage where they bragged about Jolly Roger; they said he was a brute and a glutton for work, that he had an eagle eye which sent cold shivers down your spine, and that if the Fifth or any ordinary form had him they would all be pulverised. Jolly Roger said that he liked the Transitus; and the Transitus were really rather proud of Roger.

Generally, when Roger announced his intention of coming to tea he had something up his sleeve, so to speak. To-day he talked of cricket and boating, and of everything under the sun except the Transitus and work, which were usually his pet subjects. And Study Ten knew they'd been good lads just lately, so it couldn't be that he wanted to give them a gentle hint about their past misdeeds.

It came at last. Roger beamed upon them as he took the last piece of cake, and into his eyes came a little twinkle of joy.

"Excellent cake, Dexter! Splendid!" he said. "Let me see! What was I about to remark? Yes, I remember. Do you think, Dexter, that if I were away for a whole fortnight or so, the Transitus would still maintain the high standard of conduct which it has shown of late?"

Into Dexter's eyes came a sudden gleam of gladness. In a flash he realised what it would be like to have a whole fortnight without Jolly Roger's eagle eye upon them. Wouldn't they have a giddy time!

"Oh, yes, sir," he said cheerfully. "The Transitus would be all right, sir."

Margery was waiting for the juniors in the woods, and they could see at once that she had some tremendous news. (See page 96.)

Jolly Roger looked at the four of them and noted the little light of eagerness on their faces. Then he smiled more broadly and more cheerfully than ever.

"No, no, Dexter," he said pleasantly. "I know precisely and exactly what is in your mind. For months and months I have been trying to impress upon you the great advantage of having a brain which will rotate swiftly, and will observe all details. My brain rotates now, and I observe the thoughts which are in your mind. You propose to have what is commonly called a giddy time during my absence?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Dexter plaintively.

"Oh, yes, Dexter," mocked Roger genially. "That is your idea. I can see it. But that is why I am telling you my little secret beforehand. In two or three days, my boys, I am going away. An important appointment, you understand. Mr. Steed will take the form while I am away, and it has occurred to me that I ought to beg you four to use your utmost endeavours to keep the standard of the form up to the level which we have now attained. I would like you to do that."

"Yes, sir," they murmured.

"Because, of course, when I come back I shall be bound to discover any little escapades or anything of that sort, even though you may have deceived Mr. Steed. You don't think that any of you could keep a secret from me?"

He glanced quickly at each in turn, and they murmured, "No, sir."

Jolly Roger beamed upon them. "That is why I mention it now," he said kindly. "Sometime, when I think you are to be trusted, I will speak to you on the subject of keeping a secret, just as I have spoken to you

on the question of keeping your brains bright."

He talked to them for some time after that, and it was all on the same idea. He wished them to deal gently with Mr. Sammy Steed, who would take the Transitus form during the absence of its master for a fortnight or so. He relied upon them to do so, and just in case there was any misunderstanding on the matter, he assured them again that they couldn't keep a secret from him. His brain rotated too swiftly, and they were far too young to deceive him.

"But I trust you," Jolly Roger remarked as he rose to leave them. "I shall tell Mr. Steed that he need not have one moment's anxiety regarding the Transitus during my absence on important business. When he knows that Dexter and Strong, Curtis and Dobbin are going to be shining examples to the rest of the form, he will be pleased. Good-bye, boys! I have enjoyed our pleasant chat very much indeed."

"My giddy aunt!" Bill Strong said when Roger had gone. "Old Roger's got everything weighed up. He knows we'd want to have a little rag with Sammy Steed, so he comes along and warns us in his own polite way. Mean to say—but what's the use? You can't keep anything from Roger."

"I'm with you," sighed the Kid sadly. "He's marked us again. We've just got to be good. Even if Sammy didn't tell him, Roger would come along and look right through you with his eagle eye, and then say, "Ah, I perceive your conscience is worrying you, Dexter," and we'd be telling him the whole stunt before we'd finished. I wish—he's a good sort, really, but I do wish I could do him in the eye just for once! But it can't be done, children. Even your Uncle Richard can't mislead the noble Roger. I'm going to be the good boy of Transitus this next fortnight. Make a note of it, Bill!"

But Bill Strong merely smiled.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Revealing a Secret

On the following afternoon the four chums from Study Ten wandered out to Marshall's Woods. Margery Frayne had sent them a message to say that she wanted to see them as early as she could.

All the four decided to go. You see, Margery wasn't an ordinary sort of girl. She was one of the best ever, and in the days gone by they had had some ripping picnics in the woods.

The Fraynes' house was quite near the woods, and everybody knew that Mr. Frayne—Margery's father, was a big friend of the head, master of Katie's. Likewise it was well known that Jolly Roger often went to see them, but it wasn't because of Mr. Frayne, though Roger liked Mr. Frayne. Only, Margery had a sister whose name was Nancy, and fellows like Big Hallam, who was captain of the school, and Dickie Dexter and Jimmy Curtis, and other chaps who could put two and two together, reckoned that one bright day Nancy Frayne was going to be Mrs. Roger Blunt.

Margery was waiting for them when they reached their usual meeting-place in the woods, and she greeted them gladly. They could see at once that she had some tremendous news.

"I've made up my mind!" Margery began straight away. "I'm going to tell you! It's the biggest secret that ever was—at least, it's a secret so far as you are concerned, because Roger says it's got to be. Roger is awfully nice and all that, but he really is a silly ass about some things. Don't you think so?"

"Of course!" they agreed. "But what's it all about, Margery?"

"Listen!" Margery was frightfully excited and seemed to hold her breath for nearly a minute. Then she blurted it out. "Mr. Roger Blunt and Nancy are being married at Devenham Church at two o'clock on Thursday!"

"But—why? I mean to say—why is it a secret?" Bill Strong was the first to recover from the shock and start asking questions.

"It isn't a secret really," Margery began again. "We all know, of course, and it's going to be quite a nice wedding; but Roger didn't want it to be known at the school, except among the masters. He thought—— Oh, he thought a lot of silly things, you know!

Roger laughed, and Mrs. Roger laughed. Together they went forward and under the archway of cricket-bats which never flickered or moved. (See page 102.)

He doesn't want any fuss or noise, and, of course, Nancy is bound to agree with him, though I know that she would really like him to ask some of the boys to come. But Mr. Blunt said it would be much better not to, and dad said it was entirely a question for him to decide. Dad himself thought it would be rather nice if just a few of the boys came, but now they've definitely decided not to let the boys know, and it's to be kept quite secret."

When you come to think of it, there were quite a lot of complications about this wedding. Margery explained to them some of the complications, but, of course, she didn't say anything about the fact that she would be frightfully disappointed if Dickie Dexter and Jimmy Curtis and Bill Strong and old Dobbie weren't there to see her do the bridesmaid act in a gown that would simply stagger them. But you'll probably have guessed a long time ago that this was one of the reasons why Margery didn't think much of Mr. Blunt's scheme of keeping it all so secret.

Roger's idea was quite a sound one. Getting

married was one of the things he preferred to have all on his own, and, anyhow, he didn't want half the Transitus knocking round and probably trying some giddy little stunt of their own. Wherefore Roger arranged that not a whisper should reach the boys of St. Katie's.

The masters knew, of course, and several of them were going to turn out in their best clothes and see old Roger safely through.

You may think Margery was a bit of a sneak to go and give away Roger's secret in this way. But was she? She knew the other side of the question, and knew that really quite a lot of people would have liked to see some of the bright and smiling faces of Katie's lads cheering their noble form-master on to his doom. It would just show what a popular sort of fellow Roger Blunt was, whereas if there weren't any boys from Katie's it would look—well, you know; not quite the thing.

"But you mustn't breathe a word that I've told you!" Margery begged. "If you do, I'll never speak to you again! Never! But don't you think it would be nice if just a few of you came and—you know—threw confetti and all that sort of thing, and made it look as though Roger really was a popular master?"

"Margery," said the Kid slowly, "you've done the right thing. You leave it to us. We've got to think about it, but nobody will ever know that you told us. Honour bright! We'll never, never tell!"

They talked quite a lot about the wedding after that, and then they said good-bye to Margery and told her to look out for them on the wedding-day, because it was quite certain they would be there.

"I wonder!" said Bill Strong, when they had left Margery. "I mean to say, we shall have to go very carefully, and, in any case, I'm not keen on weddings. But if Margery thinks——"

"I'd like to get a photograph of Roger doing the blushing bridegroom act," said Dobbie reflectively. "But he mightn't like it."

"He oughtn't to try and keep a thing of that sort secret," Curtis said. "Still, I suppose we'll have to be good little boys and just crawl in at the back and try to dodge Roger's eagle eye. Better not tell any of the others, or else we should get a crowd there. What do you think, Kid?"

For Richard Dexter was striding ahead of them, and he had made no comment since leaving Margery. You could see that he was lost in thought, and brooding over some secret sorrow of his own.

But he turned and faced them now, and they suddenly perceived that the Kid had got that bright look in his eye which meant that life was once again a glad, sweet song so far as he was concerned.

"You shut up!" said the Kid politely. "I'm running this show. Roger's going to keep his little secret all to himself, is he? Who is Roger? What is he? I mean to say, do you chaps know anything at all about a wedding? Roger's only the figure-head in the business, and he doesn't count. What we've got to think about is the Frayne family and the honour of Katie's. Think about it! Let your brains rotate! Do you think Katie's are going to let him slink into a thing of that sort just because he wants to do the modest violet business? Not likely! You listen to your Uncle Richard!"

"But if he doesn't want any fuss——" began Bill Strong.

"My giddy aunt!" cried the Kid. "When I had a little secret about that last rag, and didn't want any fuss kicked up, did Roger keep quiet and consider my feelings? He did not! When you didn't do your prep. a week or two ago, and wanted that kept quite secret, did Roger lie low? Not a bit! He talked to the whole form about it, and said it was for your own good. And now I'm thinking what's going to do Jolly Roger a bit of good. Be a man, Bill, and use your giddy intellect!"

"You mean that we ought to show everybody that Katie's really think a lot of Jolly Roger?" Curtis said reflectively. "That's what Margery wants, too. Come to think of it, I reckon it would be a miserable business for a chap like Roger to get married without Katie's taking a hand in it."

"Of course it would!" the Kid retorted.

"You leave it to me. Listen! We'll form a committee as soon as we get back. We'll have Smithy in this, and probably Big Hallam, if we can get him. It's all going to be kept secret, and Jolly Roger won't hear a word or see a sign—not even with his eagle eye. Dobbin, get your camera ready. You're going to get some snaps of historic events in the next day or two. But leave me; I must think!"

The Kid really did think, and the more he thought, the more he realised the truth of the situation. The Fraynes wanted the boys to be there. Miss Nancy Frayne wanted them, Margery wanted them, everybody except Roger wanted them. And Roger didn't count in this act!

At the school, the Kid sought out Smithy of the Fifth and confided to him the secret. For many reasons, Smithy of the Fifth had a tremendous respect for Jolly Roger, and he gasped when he heard the news.

"Great Jupiter!" he said. "Jumping snakes! Jolly Roger getting married! We simply must be there, Kid!"

The Kid explained to him quite fairly and clearly that it was a secret, and that Roger didn't want any of the boys from the school to be there.

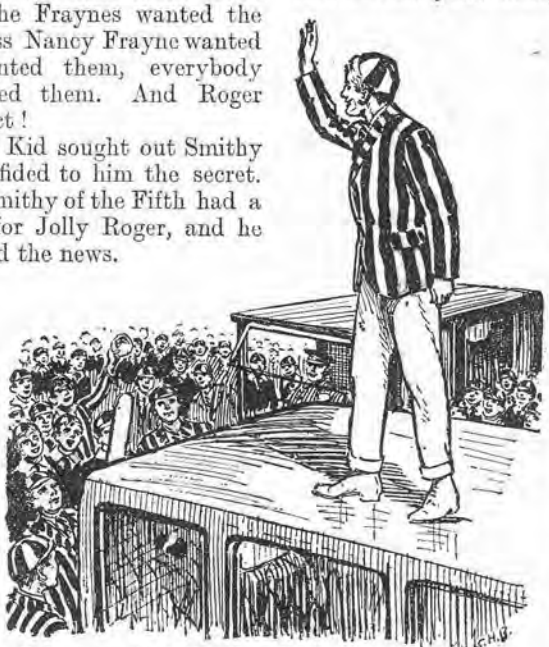
"Of course not!" said Smithy. "He's that sort! But we're not going to let him get out of it in that way! We'll give him a regal send-off! We must talk about this, my dear Babe!"

"Smithy," said the Kid—and you might have thought he was just going to break into tears—"you're a brick! You've got the right idea! I feel sure we'll have a little surprise packet for Roger! We must make him glad on Thursday!"

"We will!" said Smithy. "I'll go and see Hallam. I won't forget to tell him it's a secret, Kid!"

Now, Big Hallam was another fellow who had right ideas. He was an ideal captain of Katie's, because, while he wouldn't stand any nonsense, he wasn't the sort of fellow to put his foot down when it came to welcoming heroes, or cheering the chairman of the Governors, or any little thing of that sort.

He listened to Smithy's story with interest. He saw, even more clearly than either the Kid or Smithy had done, that it was absolutely essential for Katie's to be strongly represented on such a memorable occasion. Being a big, broad-minded fellow, he fully appreciated Roger's point of view, and didn't blame him a bit. All bridegrooms were like that, he said, but nobody took any notice of them.



Hallam saw that the time had come to cut out the cheering part of the business, and he hopped up on to the car and held up his hand. (See page 104.)

"And, of course, we mustn't give him an inkling that we know," Big Hallam pointed out. "But on Thursday—we shall be there! If Roger never knew it before, he will know on Thursday that Katie's regard him kindly. Yes! You mentioned Dexter and Curtis? Tell them to come and see me at once. You come, too, Smithy, and tell Bellinger and Graydon I want them!"

A few minutes later the Special Committee for the Celebration of Jolly Roger's Wedding was sitting! In another half-hour they had the whole thing fixed up and all arrangements cut and dried.

They really do know how to do this sort of thing at Katie's!

THE THIRD CHAPTER
A Great Day!

At twenty minutes past twelve on Wednesday Mr. Roger Blunt finished the morning's lessons and spoke a few words of wisdom to the Transitus.

What he said had nothing to do with weddings or anything of that sort. He referred to the fact that he was going away for a fortnight or so, as though it were just a little business trip, and then passed on to his hopes regarding their conduct in his absence.

"I shall not see you again for a fortnight," he said, in conclusion, and then waved his hand gently as a sign that the class was dismissed. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!" they murmured discreetly, but Roger fancied that one or two of them smiled.

"Young rascals!" he told himself, because he thought they were smiling at the prospect of not seeing him, whereas they were smiling because they jolly well knew they would see him! This just shows how clever fellows like Roger can form wrong impressions at times.

Later in the afternoon Roger Blunt shook hands with quite a number of his fellow-masters, and they all said nice things to him. Some of them said that they would see him on the morrow, and warned him not to be late, and everybody thought that was a frightfully funny joke.

Sammy Steed made a joke all on his own. He said that he'd thought of bringing along a little detachment from the Fifth and Transitus just to liven things up. And again everybody laughed.

"No, no!" said Roger, smiling gladly. "Not to-morrow, Steed! I am very fond of boys, but to-morrow is one of the days I can do without them. I may possibly think of them about two o'clock to-morrow, as I have arranged about half-a-dozen form matches for them. On the other hand, I may forget all about them! Ah, ah!"

Then Mr. Roger Blunt, after a good many more hand-shakes, went out. He reminded Mr. Gladridge about the cricket matches again before he went, and said that Hallam was fixing up the umpires and all that part of the business. And Mr. Gladridge said that he would stroll round and keep a watchful eye on all the matches, because, of course, Mr. Gladridge hadn't the faintest idea that Hallam had already cancelled all the matches.

So that when, about five minutes to two on the Thursday, Mr. Gladridge strolled down to the playing-fields he was positively amazed to find them deserted. The wickets were there and the creases were bright and white, but even the groundsman seemed to have got lost.

All of which is a testimony to the organising powers of Big Hallam. There wasn't a detail he had overlooked. Most of the fellows didn't know until Thursday noon anything about the afternoon's stunt, but at one-thirty practically every fellow at St. Katie's was wending his way towards Devenham, which lay about a couple of miles from Katie's.

They didn't go in a bunch, and they didn't make a row about it. The first job was to get near the church and then take cover. Those were Big Hallam's instructions.

At two minutes past two a taxi-cab dashed past the church. Hallam and Curtis were in this particular conveyance, and they simply flew down a side-lane until out of sight of the church.

Then they descended and dragged out dozens and dozens of small boxes labelled "Confetti." A whistle from Hallam had a wonderful effect. From the fields, the hedges, ditches, from behind trees and from all manner of hiding-places swarmed the bright lads of St. Katie's.

Their captain's instructions had been strictly obeyed. They had not betrayed their presence by the flicker of an eyelid!

From the end of the lane two fellows came running swiftly. They represented the scouting department of the organisation, and you can bet that Richard Dexter and old Dobbie hadn't made a mess of the job!

"It's all right, Hallam!" the Kid called out, even before he reached the captain. "Everybody's inside now! Beginning to think you were never coming!"

"Had a bit of trouble to get all we wanted," Hallam said. "Now, then, you fellows! Distribute it as evenly as you can! Fall in the cricketers!"

The members of the First Eleven and the Second had come dressed up in their best flannels and blazers, and they were all armed with bats. Somebody handed Hallam his willow blade, and the captain spoke swiftly.

"You fix yourselves up!" he ordered. "No row! Everybody understands? There isn't to be a whisper. Mustn't give the game away at this stage. Form captains, keep in charge of forms! steady!"

You ought to have seen Big Hallam! He was great. He did everything swiftly, and yet he was never in a hurry; but Dickie Dexter and Curtis, who were now in attendance on him, had their work cut out to keep pace with him.

In front of the church six or seven fine cars were drawn up. Others were lying a little way off, but Hallam interviewed the driver of the nearest car first of all.

The chauffeur wanted to argue the matter, but when he saw the crowd streaming across the green in front of the church he realised that this wasn't the time for argument.

In about twenty seconds his car was retiring gracefully to the spot indicated by Katie's captain. Other cars were informed that their place was in the rear of the leader and they obeyed.

Two reporters from the local papers cycled up just about that time. They had had brief notes warning them that if they didn't want to miss one of the greatest spectacles ever seen in the neighbourhood of Dulchester they ought to be outside Devenham Church about two o'clock on Thursday, and they had come to inquire into the mystery.

They stood and watched in wonder. When you see a great crowd of schoolboys you expect a row, but everything in this act was being done with barely more than a soft whisper.

"Well, Dexter! Well, Curtis!" said Roger, "I want to know exactly who is responsible for this? Someone has got to take the blame" (See page 104.)

Lined right up by the porch were four-and-twenty big fellows, twelve on each side, and all of them armed with bats. Anyone could guess what the idea was because from time to time they just practised the scheme by holding up their bats above their heads and making an archway. It was under this that Jolly Roger and his blushing bride had to pass in the fulness of time!

Old Dobbin was hopping round like a young gazelle, trying to find the ideal spot for the first photograph of this great event. The Kid was acting as a sort of messenger between Hallam and the captains of the different forms, for Hallam himself had already taken his place at the head of the cricketers' section.

After the cricketers came the first detachment of the confetti brigade. Chiefly they were Transitus and Fifth fellows who could be relied upon to do the thing properly, but with discretion and discrimination.

The two Fourth forms had been converted into what might be called the musical item on the programme. Willard had brought his mandolin and Maynard his flute; two fellows had managed to dig out toy bagpipes which had been used in the long, long ago and forgotten until to-day. Ellams and Cumley, who had acted as buglers to the Cadet Corps, had brought along their bugles. All the other musicians had supplied themselves with that well-known but highly effective instrument known as the comb-and-paper.

Two Sixth fellows, assisted by Jimmy Curtis, were in charge of operations by the cars. There was quite a big crowd here of the younger boys, and most of them had secured a fair amount of confetti; others had managed to get hold of little flags.

It says a great deal for everybody concerned in the business that the people who were taking part in the more important business never heard a murmur through the open windows of the church. Everything went just as it ought to do on these occasions, and as Jolly Roger came down the aisle with the new Mrs. Roger Blunt he felt very pleased with the whole world. But to be quite truthful he wasn't thinking a little bit about St. Katie's, even though Mr. Bird, headmaster of the school, had been among the first to whisper his discreet congratulations and good wishes.

And then—Mr. and Mrs. Roger Blunt stepped from the dim, subdued light into the porch and caught a glimpse of the bright picture beyond. Roger was just in the act of jerking his hat up to his head when he realised that the world had changed since he first drove up to the church this morning!

"The boys!" It was Mrs. Roger who grasped the stupendous truth first of all. "I thought—they must have found out!"

She was right! They had found out! And when you come to think of it you'll probably agree that it was quite a good idea for Mrs. Blunt to realise in the first few moments of her wedded life that boys will be boys—and sometimes just a bit more!

Just for a moment Roger halted. A gleam of extra-brightness came into his eyes, and the soft smile of joy on his lips hardened into a firm line.

"We must go through, dear," he whispered. "You will not be afraid?"

That's how most men start talking when they've been through the same ceremony as Roger. They have an idea that a girl's a poor shrinking sort of creature, and it isn't a bad thing if they get undeceived pretty swiftly. So you can see that the Special Committee's scheme was doing a bit of good already!

"Good gracious, no!" said Mrs. Roger. "I—I think it's lovely, don't you?"

And she laughed—and Roger laughed. Together they went forward and under the archway of cricket-bats which never flickered or moved. Roger caught Big Hallam's eye, and smiled gladly upon him, but Hallam never moved a muscle.

Then, as they came from under the archway of bats and passed through the little gate the confetti merchants gave them the time of their lives! They did it artistically and well, for Hallam had told them so. They didn't just bang it at the couple, which is a poor way of doing the job, but threw it gently in the air, flung it over them, or sent it ahead and high above them, so that Roger and his bride were in a sort of perpetual snowstorm of confetti.

Margery Frayne, who was coming along with the best man just behind her sister and Jolly Roger, said afterwards that she had never enjoyed anything so much in all her life before. She hadn't seen Dickie Dexter or Curtis yet, but she had seen Bill Strong holding up his bat with the best of them, and she had caught a glimpse of old Dobbie hopping about like an animated eel with his camera, and she was quite sure that he had taken two snaps of her, which was really very nice of old Dobbie.

Then the band struck up! The showers of confetti grew less and Roger began to put a spurt on, wondering whether he would ever get to the car and hoping to goodness that it hadn't got lost or been hidden away by young Dexter or somebody else with a keen sense of humour.

Mr. Frayne had made all arrangements regarding the procedure after the wedding ceremony. But as soon as ever he came out of the church he also realised with a gasp of surprise that his arrangements had gone west.

He began to wish he could catch up with Roger and have a word with him. You want to grasp the idea right away that Mr. Frayne's surprise was a pleasant one, and he began to wonder whether——

But the band rather drowned his thoughts, and, anyhow, he couldn't do anything except go straight ahead. He tried to make out what the band was playing, but it was a bit difficult to identify it just at first, because the bugles were going ahead with every call they could play, from *reveille* to "Lights out," while the little bagpipes were just squealing out any old thing, and so was the flute and the mandolin, but the comb brigade were sticking fairly steadily to "MacPherson swore a feud against the clan MacTavish," because Big Hallam had chosen that as the opening item, as he thought it had a bit of a military touch about it.

Curtis and two or three others were hanging on to the door of the car which was awaiting the bride and bridegroom. If Roger thought that the programme was very near the end, he made a mistake, because it had only just started! There was another confetti storm, and the band seemed to get its second wind. In a perfect hurricane of confetti and band Roger helped his bride to step into the car, and he himself jumped in quickly after her.

He tried to lean through the window and wave good-bye to them, but already Katie's boys were lining up in front, at the sides, and behind the car. Big Hallam had handed his bat over to someone else, and had come down as quickly as he could to superintend arrangements. Through the drifting and dazzling confetti Roger saw him speak to a small boy who was pointing with both arms at once, and was evidently acting as a kind of super-man on the job.

And Roger sank back as he recognised the youth.

"It's young Dexter!" he gasped to his brand-new wife. "I thought—I felt quite certain—— Of course, he was bound to be in it! And there's Curtis—and Strong! And Dobbin with his camera! I'm—I'm afraid we haven't finished yet!"

Mrs. Roger Blunt was laughing. This was the great day of her life, and it was rather nice to feel that it was also going to be a memorable one.

"You seem to be very popular, Roger," she told him.

"Popular!" gasped Roger, because he hadn't appreciated it in that light so far. "Then if this is popularity, may I—— Oh! I don't know! It is rather amusing, isn't it? And I thought we were going to have a quiet wedding!"

But the car was moving now—at the rate of two miles an hour! And that was the rate it kept up for the next half-hour, until, in fact, they reached the Fraynes' residence. Behind the car, and in front of it and alongside it, marched St. Katie's lads.

It was a great march! They spread themselves over the job, and every car, whether it contained a relative or a bridesmaid, or just a plain guest, had its proper contingent of marchers.

Mr. Frayne had managed to send a message to Hallam, and the captain of the school went to speak to him. It was an eminently satisfactory interview, though at first the captain said he needn't trouble at all, as they were going to clear off within about ten minutes of landing at the Fraynes' house. All they were concerned with was giving old Roger a proper send-off.

What Mr. Bird, who was one of the guests, thought about the wedding march nobody knows, because he didn't say much. In the car with him was Lord Velwood, a governor of the school and a great admirer of Mr. Roger Blunt, and he was enthusiastic about the whole business, but the Beak was content to smile in his well-known manner, and refused to give any opinion.

When, at last, the car drew up at the main entrance to the house, everyone made a rush to get round in time.

Jolly Roger at this juncture thought the time had come to do the daring escape business, and he and Mrs. Roger hopped out of the car quickly and ran up the steps.

And it was just then that Roger came face to face with an old friend. Richard Dexter had taken charge of this part of the programme, and with Jimmy Curtis to aid him

and three or four others to support them, they had closed the door and barred the way.

"You young scoundrel!" said Roger. "I've a great mind——"

"Dobbin is very anxious to get your photograph, sir," said the Kid in his best plaintive and child-like manner, and Curtis pointed out to Mrs. Roger the fact that Dobbin was trying to get through the crowd.

And by that time Big Hallam had started the first vocal item of the proceedings.

"For he's a jolly good fellow," boomed out Big Hallam, and the crowd made no mistake! Roger couldn't run away now; Mrs. Roger could only stand and smile gladly from the top step (with Dexter and Curtis in the background clinging to the door); the bridesmaids and the groomsmen stood and smiled; Mr. Bird and Lord Velwood and Sammy Steed, and two or three other masters from Katie's stood quite still and smiled; everybody just smiled because there wasn't anything else to do, and, anyhow, they couldn't help smiling.

"Roger! Jolly Roger!" someone yelled out at the end, and everybody took it up and roared and yelled, "Jolly Roger!"

And then they cheered! Someone yelled out, "One for Mrs. Roger!" and they cheered again. Somebody else called something else (it sounded like "bridesmaids," but nobody cared), and they all cheered again. One of the Sixth fellows happened to catch sight of the Beak, and he called out, "One for the Beak!"

They gave Sammy a cheer, too, and they would have gone on cheering, but Hallam saw that the time had come to cut out the cheering part of the business. Before you could say "Boo," he had hopped up on to the top of the car and held up his hand.

Instantly everybody cut the cheering, and in the background Lord Velwood touched the Head and murmured, "Splendid! Oh, splendid, my dear Bird! Discipline, you know——"

Hallam had caught Roger's eye, and in the silence they heard the Transitus form-master cough. Then, in a voice that could have been heard at the far end of the drive, he called out:

"On behalf of my wife and myself—thank you all very much!"

The Kid and Jimmy Curtis promptly swung open the big hall-door, and a moment later Jolly Roger and Mrs. Roger disappeared inside. The guests followed them swiftly.

Katie's great Wedding March was over. And, as Hallam wisely said, it had been carried out in a proper and efficient manner, and no one could ever say that Katie's lads didn't know how to handle a job.

But the business wasn't completely finished. There were two details that deserve mention. The first is that Mr. Frayne had made swift arrangements and Dulchester had done its best to supply all the ginger-beer and other mixtures he begged them to send swiftly. Katie's boys remained on the premises and drank to Mr. and Mrs. Roger before they disappeared!

Also, Roger himself braved everything and strolled out among them. Accompanying him were Lord Velwood and another distinguished-looking person. With his eagle-eye Roger spotted the two boys he wanted and, despite the fact that they tried to dodge him, he tracked them down.

"Well, Dexter! Well, Curtis!" Roger tried his best to get the real old icicle touch into his voice, but it's a difficult thing to do on your wedding-day, and Roger made a pretty hopeless mess of it. "I want to know who is responsible for this? Someone has got to take the blame. It is impossible to overlook——"

"Please, sir," Dexter said apologetically, "if there is anyone to blame, it's all my fault" But I thought, sir, that we oughtn't to let you go quietly away——"

"Yes!" Roger said. "Thank you, Dexter! I merely wanted to know! Good-bye!"

They turned away, but Dexter and Curtis didn't forget to call out, "Good luck, sir!"

And that, bar the last little glimpse they had of him as he climbed into the car which was to take him and his wife away, was the last they saw of Jolly Roger for a full fortnight. A fortnight is a long time, but it wasn't nearly long enough for either Roger or the Transitus, or anyone else at Katie's, to forget the gorgeous success they made of the Great March on Jolly Roger's wedding-day.

THE END