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# THE BOYS' FRIEND

EASTER FICTION DOUBLE NO

## The King's Ransom

29



AN EASTER TALE OF ROBIN HOOD



# The King's Ransom!

or, Eastertide with Robin Hood and his Merry Men by Morton Pike

## THE 1st CHAPTER.

### King John's Plot.

"**H**EIGH-O!" said Allan-a-Dale, sitting up with a yawn and stretching his arms to their fullest extent. 'Tis a beautiful world, after all's said and done."

It was Eastertide, which fell early in April that year, and the woodland was looking its best.

The sun was just rising, and Allan-a-Dale sat on his bed of leaves watching the great red orb roll slowly above the distant tree-tops, turning gold and yellow as it cleared the thin mist that lay in the valley.

All round about him his brother outlaws lay stretched in slumber, each man with his bow beside him and his wallet for a pillow.

Allan groped among the leaves until he found one of last year's acorns, and taking careful aim, he flung it at Madcap, the jester, who was lying on his back, snoring loudly.

It fell into his mouth with a plop, and woke him up, spluttering.

"Come along, lazy one!" said Allan, springing to his feet. "Art for a swim this morning?"

"Ay, marry, that am I!" said Madcap, surreptitiously appropriating one of Geoffrey de Leicester's shoes, which that worthy had kicked off in his sleep.

Madcap suddenly bounded up like a ball, and flung the shoe with all his might, but, Allan dodging aside, it fell with a sounding thwack on Friar Tuck's shaven pate.

The good man murmured "Benedicite!" and snored louder than ever, and the two friends ran off laughing down the glade.

The earth was carpeted with yellow primroses, the grass was green as emerald, and all disannoyed with glittering dewdrops; and sitting down on a fallen log, they flung off their jerkins and untied their hose.

The clear brown streamlet widened into a deep pool as it swung round a knoll crowned with oak-trees, and the next minute its surface was broken by two heavy plunges, which threw up the silvery spray in a huge shower as Allan-a-Dale and Madcap dived in.

"Ah," said Allan, as he came to the surface and dashed the water out of his eyes, "what life so free as that of the bold forester! The baron in his castle knows no delight to equal this."

"No; it is well enough in the summer-time I grant you," said Madcap, climbing on to a boulder covered with velvet moss. "But hold, Allan, what is that smoke rising yonder? Methinks we have had neighbours in the night, and not known it."

Allan swam to the rock and stood upon it—a perfect model for the sculptor, as he shaded the sun from his eyes and followed the direction of the jester's finger.

"How now!" he muttered. "This must be seen into, and whoever they be they are right early astir. Let us dress quickly and take observation of them from the birch thicket."

They had soon drawn on their hose of Lincoln green, gartered it with the leathern thongs, and donned jerkin, and hood, and, taking up their bows, without which no true forester ever thought of moving, set out with long, lithe strides towards the birch wood.

The ground was blue with wild hyacinth, and underneath their shoes of untanned doerskin the dead leaves of yester-year crunched and crackled, so that as they approached the wreath of smoke they had to exercise the greatest caution.

They crept upward on hands and knees until they reached the top of the bank, which at that place was well screened by bushes, and peeping down they saw three armed men sitting beside a fire, which one of them was feeding from a pile of brushwood.

They had made their camp in a sandy hollow not twenty yards from the high-road, and tethered to the roots that protruded from the bank-side stood their horses with the girths unslacked.

"May the black death seize those piking pilgrims and measly merchants who have kept us out of bed all night!" said one of the men. "'Tis well enough for my lord to lie on his couch of down with no thought for us who rust our harness in the night dews to no purpose!"

"Peace, grumbler!" said one of his companions. "We should have had rich pickings if the cavalcade had come this way; but methinks they have taken the other road, fearing, no doubt, to fall in with Robin Hood and his rascals, of whom rumour hath it that he hath left the Yorkshire moors for Sherwood once more."

"Marry come up!" said the third speaker. "Bold Robin of Sherwood Forest would think twice did he but know the guest we have at Swanley-hurst."

The other two looked at him. "What mean you, Walter?" said one of them. "He cannot be of very great estate, since he came with but four attendants."

"If you had been in London town as I have, John of the Sword," said the third man, smiling contemptuously. "You would know the King of England when you see him!"

"How!" cried the other two. "Mean you that our guest is King John himself?"

"He is none other," said the soldier bluntly.

"But, man alive, do you not know that my lord means to pillage this train of merchants who have joined company with the pilgrims who go to the shrine of our Lady of Boverley this Eastertide, and would he do this if the king were here?"

"Sweet innocent!" replied Walter, with a contemptuous smile. "The thing most likely is John's own prompting. I was on guard two nights ago when the pair of them did walk in the garden, and this is what I heard as they went by in the dusk without seeing me. Our master was speaking."

"But, my liege," said he—by which I knew it was the king—'half of the band are pilgrims, and 'twill cause great scandal.' Pomfroy de Fortinbras, replied King John, 'if there be scandal, it will be your own making. There must be no bloodshed, and 'tis these rich Flemings' purses which must be bled. The whole thing will be laid at the door of Robin Fitzooth, the outlaw, whose colours your men will wear. But one thing is certain—money I must have!' They passed on out of earshot, and I heard no more."

"By my halidom, Walter, you heard enough to set the kingdom ring-

ing from one end to the other! I like not the business," said one of his companions.

"Nay, I," said the soldier; "but we are Pomfroy de Fortinbras' men, and must do his bidding. Since the rogues are not here, we shall see naught of them till noon; so let us back to the ambush at Longley Bottom, which were the instructions we received."

They rose to their feet, and leaving the fire to smoulder, mounted their horses and rode away.

"By our Lady of Charity," cried Allan-a-Dale, when they had gone, "here is strange news for Robin! Come, Madcap, we must run swiftly as a red buck!"

They sprang down the bank, and in ten minutes reached the glade where the outlaws were now astir and preparing to break their fast.

When Robin Hood heard their tale his frown became black as a thunder-cloud, and a murmur went through the listening band that was like the low roar of distant surf boiling on the sand of the seashore.

"Then has it come to this," he cried—"that the King of Merrie England has turned robber upon the highway? Gadsooks! I am in the mind to square accounts with him upon this business, for John and I have many an ancient score to settle!"

"The shame of it," cried Friar Tuck, his tremendous voice bellowing through the glade—"to attack pilgrims upon their way to our Lady's shrine! Robin, we cannot suffer this. Does anyone know how many ruffians ride under the banner of Pomfroy de Fortinbras?"

"Ay, that do I!" cried several voices. "Since he married the widow of Swanleyhurst he hath kept a troop of eighty, for the most part old retainers of Sir Humphrey de Brionne, who took service with Fortinbras after the baron's death."

Robin paced backwards and forwards thoughtfully for a few moments, and then he said:

"Go, Allan-a-Dale, swift foot to Bollingwood, and tell our old comrade Guy what you have heard. Say also that Fortinbras is out of his reckoning, since the pilgrims are not due to pass this way until to-morrow. I will meet him at the White Oak at the hour of noon to-day; meantime, we must lie concealed. Moreover, there are shoes to mend and many a thorn-vent jerkin that needs the needle after our long march from Barnsleydale. Heigh-o! for the good days of King Richard! His brother John is but a sorry knave!"

Before Robin had done speaking, Allan-a-Dale was speeding away through the forest, startling the deer from his covert and the wild boar from its lair.

It was a lovely April morning. Overhead was a bright blue sky, across which the south wind was rolling huge masses of cumulus cloud. The turf was springy beneath his feet, the bracken was unfolding its fronds, and the sweet scent of the spring woodland seemed to pervade the air.

Allan-a-Dale heard and saw and smelt all these things without realising them, for his mind was set on the coming adventure, which he knew would be a desperate one, and his thoughts went back to the old days, when he and Guy of the Greenwood had had such glorious times together, and to those more recent days but a year or two back when Basil Butterfly had been his comrade.

He had not gone very far when the note of a hunting horn came on the wind, followed soon after by the baying of hounds, and before he had accomplished another mile a magnificent stag broke without warning from a coppice of young beeches and went bounding down the green vista before him.

"Belike as not," said Allan-a-Dale to himself, "King John goes a-hunting to-day." And the thought had barely entered his mind when he heard the trample of hoofs and the voices of men speaking loudly close at hand.

He slipped into the centre of a hollow tree, and from thence he saw John,

attended by half a dozen companions, sweep past.

He marked the bad-tempered face with the cruel upper lip. The slight moustache and forked beard, and his fingers itched to fit an arrow to the string and feather a cloth-yard shaft in the tyrant's heart.

We have had several very bad kings during the long centuries of our history, but there is little doubt that King John was the worst of them all.

Instead of the finery in which he usually bedecked himself, the King was wearing a plain tunic of blue cloth, and might have passed for an ordinary gentleman.

"Ho, ho, Master King," thought Allan-a-Dale, "you little know what a rod lies in pickle for your shoulders, for I doubt not Robin Goodfellow has already devised a brave scheme."

When the cortege had disappeared among the trees Allan-a-Dale slipped forth from his concealment and once more sped upon his way.

Upon the battlements of Bollingwood Castle, Guy of the Greenwood, whom doubtless my readers have not forgotten, was walking with his arm resting on the shoulders of his gallant esquire, Basil Butterfly.

"Ha, lad," said the young baron, "'tis on a morn like this that I look forth over yonder waving woods in all their spring beauty and almost sigh that I am not a careless forester once more!"

"And I, too, my Lord Guy," said the lad. "I sometimes wonder whether you would not guess rightly whether I had gone if some-day you found that I was missing."

Guy laughed merrily. "You rogue," said he; "I should soon be after you to bring you back. But our talk minds me that we have heard naught of Robin since the oaks turned golden. He carries long in the North."

Basil started, and looked down the winding path that led to the little village and the forest beyond it, and there he spied a figure in Lincoln green footing it right deftly towards them.

"Why, marry, here cometh a forester!" he cried. "Ard hark he soundeth the old blast upon his bugle-horn!"

It was indeed Allan-a-Dale, and, quickly descending the steps that led to the green court of the outer bailey, Guy unhooked the wicket himself, and followed by Basil, went forth to meet his old companion.

The greetings over, Allan's tale was soon told, and then the red blood surged into the young baron's handsome cheeks and the veins stood out upon his temples.

"By the rod," he cried, "not only will I meet gallant Robin at the White Oak at mid-day, but old Robert of Rouen shall ride at my back with fifty mounted spears. I care not a snap of the finger for King John, and half the barons of England think with me. But come, old friend! We do but wait the summons to break our fast, and I will wager that no bread has passed your lips this morning."

As Guy led the way, and Basil linked his arm in that of Allan-a-Dale, more than one of the grooms and men-at-arms who were already astir about the stables cried "W-elcome!" to the young forester, remembering well the stirring scenes through which they had passed together.

They did not sit long at meat, for the news Allan-a-Dale had brought was too serious in all conscience.

"'Tis treason, my lord," said old Robert of Rouen, whose beard was now snow-white, but whose eyes were as keen and his grip as firm in the saddle as in the old days when he taught Guy all the secrets of the tilt-yard—"tis treason to take up arms against the King, yet my old head goes with your young one in this matter, and if this thing were known I doubt not John would lose his crown within a week."

"Alas!" said Guy, "there is no time to acquaint others of his fell purpose, but we must do our best to thwart this outrage, which is an offence against our Lady herself. I know

not what good Robin hath in his mind, but I doubt not that his counsel will be wise as ever. And now, friend Robert, get the lady under arms; and perhaps 'twere well that my colours did not appear in this business, at least for the present. So let them mount in plain armour, with no plumes or fallals of any sort."

The old man-at-arms strode away upon his mission, and about eleven o'clock of the forenoon a sober-looking cavalcade passed out of the great gates, the sun glittering on their hauberts and spear-points.

Guy rode at their head, wearing a quilted gambeson of black silk over his plastron de fer, or iron breast-plate.

The villagers flocked to their doors, crying: "Long live our good baron!" but for once the young lord took no notice, but broke into a fast trot as he took the road to the forest.

The roads in those days were at the very widest but eight feet from side to side, with no attempt at paving of any sort.

Luckily there was very little wheeled traffic, but even mounted travellers found it difficult enough to get along when a string of perhaps forty or fifty heavily-laden pack-horses had passed by, churning the mud up in wet weather, and the dust in dry.

The cavalcade soon left the highway, and plunged by a bridle-path through thorn and thicket; startling the bird-life in the branches and red deer in the fern; now crossing a patch of sunlit sward, now plunging into the deep shadow of the spreading boughs, until at last Guy waved his arm as Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, and Will Scarlet rose to their feet with a shout of welcome.

## THE 2nd CHAPTER.

### A Visit to the Monastery.

It was a picturesque sight, if one could only have peeped through the bramble and witnessed it unobserved.

Guy and Robert of Rouen, with the outlaw and his two followers, sat in a group at the foot of the White Oak, while at a little distance away Basil Butterfly and Allan-a-Dale lay on the green sward chattering gaily of old times, and farther away still, where the little brook went gurgling along the hollow at the bottom of the slope, the men-at-arms stood by their horses, which cropped the fresh young grass.

The council was a long one, but when at last they rose to their feet, it was evident to the onlookers that they had decided upon some plan, and, beckoning Allan-a-Dale, the outlaws strode away at a quick pace, and were soon lost in the tangled undergrowth.

Guy cast one lingering glance round the glade he knew so well, and, calling his men to horse, rode back to Bollingwood Castle, and silence once more reigned around the White Oak.

The squirrel gambolled along the branches, the blue jays flew screaming backwards and forwards, a wood pigeon was cooing loudly somewhere out of sight, and there was nothing on that bright spring day to denote that great happenings were on the eve of taking place.

Two brown-frocked monks, mounted upon sleek mules, rode into the little village of Bechoholm just about the time of sunset, and behind them, perhaps a hundred yards or more along the road, a wandering minstrel followed them, journeying in the same direction.

The village street was busy, for there had ridden into it not long before a company of twenty merchants, and with them a band of pilgrims, to the number of fully a hundred and fifty.

These latter had gone up to the monastery, which was built on rising ground above the village, and some of the merchants had gone with them, while the rest filled the little inn to overflowing.

Accommodation for travellers was scanty in those days, and there were

few inns, but the good monks opened their hospitable doors to all and sundry, saving rogues and vagabonds, and every one was welcome to enter, provided he was equally willing to take his departure on the third day.

If he made any demur, the sturdy brother who held the office of porter put him out by the shoulders, but that did not often happen.

One of the mounted monks, a very stout man, who had his cowl drawn well over his face, made some inquiry of the first person he met, who pointed to the monastery, whereupon the stout monk thanked him and rode with his companion up the hill.

The wandering minstrel went straightway to the inn, and long after sunset his instrument could be heard by the village churls who gathered round the door to listen while he played and sang for the amusement of the travellers within, who threw him money from time to time.

"Ah, welcome, brothers," said the porter at the monastery gates, "though, by St. Christopher, I hardly know where we can bestow these for the night. Our house is full of a goodly train of pilgrims, who go to pay their Easter vows to our Lady of Beverley."

"We shall take up but little space, good brother," said the stout monk, "since we stay not for the night; but tell me, who is the chiefest man in authority among the pilgrims, and"—he added, under his breath—"I pray he may prove a soldier rather than a churchman."

"Why, my Lord Abbot of Beaulieu is surely of the greatest consideration amongst them," said the porter; "and next, Sir Thomas le Breton, a pious knight, who was with King Richard in the Holy Land."

"Then Sir Thomas le Breton is our man," said the stout monk, dropping to the ground like a sack of flour, and towering a good head above the porter, who was of no small build. "Say that two brethren would have speech with him on a matter of great moment which will not brook delay, and oblige me, brother, by not peeping so curiously into my hood, my face is not to be seen for the present."

The porter laughed, for the strange monk's voice was mellow and good-humoured, and, bidding them enter, he clattered away in his sandalled slouch in search of Sir Thomas, whom, he said, was then at meat, leaving one of the lay-brothers to conduct the two mysterious visitors to a pleasant chamber that overlooked the garden.

Sir Thomas le Breton was not long in coming; he was a short, broad-shouldered man, who had laid aside his armour and wore a surcoat of yellow leather about which his sword was girt. That weapon Sir Thomas never abandoned.

His face was thin and burnt a curious dusky red by the sun of the East, and from temple to chin it was deeply furrowed by the scar of an old scimitar slash inflicted by the hand of Saladin himself.

"God rest you, brothers," said the Crusader; "it puzzled me mightily what you can want with me."

"I will puzzle you more, Sir Knight, when you have heard all," said the monk, who had not yet spoken; "we have come to warn you not to continue upon your way until another day has passed."

"Ah," said Sir Thomas, "if there is danger in the path that must not turn us aside; moreover, we have little enough time as it is to reach the shrine of our Lady on the blessed Easter Day."

"You have not heard all, Sir Knight," said the other monk, whose enormous bulk had already attracted the soldier's attention.

Sir Thomas smiled, and the setting sun which glowed full into the chamber gave a red sparkle to his eyes.

"I can hear no more," he said, "unless it be that Robin Hood the Outlaw hath been seen on the road we must traverse; and yet, if all accounts be true, he would scorn to molest pilgrims. His prey, the rogue, is more generally a rich baron riding scantly attended."

"You say well," said the silent monk; "but what if I tell you that Robin Hood himself now stands before you to warn you that the King of England is your enemy!"

Both monks flung back their cowls, and Sir Thomas le Breton, recoiling a step, laid his hands upon the hilt of his sword.

He saw before him a handsome, open-faced man, brown-haired and bearded, his ruddy cheek speaking of health and fresh air.

The face of Robin's companion you know almost too well to need its description; but the huge, good-natured features wore such an earnest expression, that, as the Crusader

looked from one to the other, he became convinced that danger there was, and that of no common sort.

"You are surely the holy man of Copmanhurst, whom the vulgar call Friar Tuck?" he said, admiring the enormous stature and brawny muscles that filled out the brown frock.

"I am indeed that unworthy man, Sir Knight," said the friar, with a twinkle in his eye, "though I fear me you have heard naught good of me but stout blows."

"And what better, friend, does a soldier wish to hear? True, thou art somewhat an indifferent churchman; but enough of that. What is this you tell me of King John?"

In a few words Robin made him acquainted with all they had learned, and at the name of Swanleyhurst the Crusader started.

"Tarry here for a moment's space," he said abruptly; "there is one who travelled with me who must hear this story, too. Nay, he is a good soldier, and you need not scruple to speak before him."

Sir Thomas le Breton presently returned with a thin, gaunt man, hollow of eye and cheek, and, like himself, bearing the imprint of the sun of Palestine.

"Now, Sir Outlaw," said he, resting his hands upon the cross-hilt of his sword, "tell me of Swanleyhurst, for that place concerns me more just now than any spot on the earth's surface."

"There is little to tell of Swanleyhurst, sir," replied the outlaw, "save

same tent, braving the same dangers, and fighting valiantly as became soldiers of the Cross, until he fell away from the path, lured by the wines of Damascus and the fever of gambling. In vain I reasoned with him; in vain, when he set forth to return alone, did I ride after him and exhort him to remain steadfast to the oath he had taken. He turned upon me like a lion, wounded me sadly, and left me for dead in the desert sand, to fall a prisoner in the hands of the Ethiopians, who nevertheless proved kinder than a false friend. Long have I deemed him dead, for few tried to cross the desert alone and survived; but now I learn the deeper blackness of his treachery, for I am Roger of Swanleyhurst!"

His listeners started with amazement, and then Robin spoke.

"Sir Knight," he said, "we are indeed well met, since I come to bring you the revenge that alone can release you from your vow. I am but a plain-spoken man and an outlaw, as all the world knows, yet have I at my back nigh upon fourscore stout bowmen of the best, and fifty mounted spears, whose leader for the present must be nameless. I pray you give heed to my counsels, and we will give those rogues so profitable a lesson that they shall never want for another one."

Robin Hood's plan was this: It was perfectly plain that the king and his wicked favourite, De Fortinbras, intended to ambush the train of pilgrims and merchants, and rob

Norman love song to the company in the inn when the hoot of an owl fell upon his ear.

In a moment one of the strings snapped between his fingers—perhaps he had given it too severe a pluck—and, looking ruefully at his instrument and then at the company, he got off his stool, saying:

"Tarry yet a little, my masters, and I will try to repair the damage." And going out of the room, as if in search of something, he slipped out into the roadway, where he was joined by his leader.

"Allan," said Robin Hood, as they turned their backs upon the village and walked away in the darkness side by side, "all goes well. Pay heed to my instructions, and get time back with them to our comrades in as short a time as fleet foot may carry thee. Let every man disguise himself so he resembleth anything rather than what he is. They are to play the part of pilgrims, yet must each one be well armed, and all who can do so let them hide their bows beneath their gowns. One hour before sunrise they must be yonder at the monastery gate; in the meantime, let word be carried to Hollingwood bidding friend Guy and his following lie beyond the thicket of whitethorn where the path winds out of Longley Bottom, there to wait for the sound of my horn. And now, away, Allan, and God speed thee and all of us, for there will be peril with the dawning of tomorrow's day."

The night had set in black as pitch



Robin sped a shaft under the neck of Pomfrey's horse, which pierced John's steed to the heart.

that its lord is concerned with our liege, the king, in this wanton attack upon your party."

"And who, pray, may the Lord of Swanleyhurst be?" said the gaunt man, grasping the guard of his sword with such a grip that his knuckles grew quite white. "I am but lately from abroad, and thought that Swanleyhurst had lost its master."

"Ay, that it had," said Robin, "until it found another one! 'Tis a rich estate, and such things do not lie long fallow in England. Sir Roger died during the last Crusade, and Dame Editha, his wife, married a Norman soldier of fortune, yclept Pomfrey de Fortinbras."

A curious sound, like the angry sigh of the wind in the branches on a winter's night, broke from the lips of the gaunt man, and his eyes flashed fire.

"And doth he use her well or ill?" he said, speaking very distinctly, and riveting Robin with his piercing gaze.

"If folks lie not," said the outlaw, "the poor lady hath cause to regret their union, for 'tis said he useth her most exceeding ill."

The gaunt man lifted his sword from the ground and kissed the cross fervently.

"Now, by this symbol," he exclaimed, "I do swear a solemn vow that wine shall not pass my lips, that sleep shall not close my eyelids, until this sword has severed that union in twain! Pomfrey de Fortinbras was my companion in arms, sharing the

them, allowing all the blame to fall on the outlaw.

Robin proposed that he and his band should disguise themselves as pilgrims and join the train, the women, and those too infirm to defend themselves remaining behind at the monastery.

At a little distance from the place of ambush the Baron of Hollingwood, with his fifty horsemen, would wait in readiness, should their help be needed, and the attack would give the injured Lord of Swanleyhurst an opportunity of confronting his false friend Fortinbras.

Friar Tuck was ready with weighty arguments to forward the plan, but they were not needed.

That King John would be there in person mattered not one whit in the eyes of the two knights; he would be certain to take himself off at the first discovery of the stratagem. And the red rim of the sun had scarcely disappeared below the horizon before Robin himself left the monastery gate, leaving the friar behind him.

Still wearing his monk's frock, with the cowl drawn well over his face, Robin swung down the hill, and as he made in the direction of the hostelry yet another scheme entered his active brain, a scheme so daring, and so fraught with possibilities, that he came to a stand in the gloaming, and smote his broad chest with clenched fists as if to chide the tumultuous beating of his heart.

Allan-a-Dale was singing a gay

but it was all one to Allan-a-Dale. He had gone almost before Robin missed him, slinging his instrument upon his back and striking straight across country for the outlaws' lair.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.  
Lady Editha's Resolve.

THE dawn broke grey and sullen round the old Saxon homestead of Swanleyhurst.

The house itself, long and low and built of sun-dried clay in a framework of oak beams, had been erected among its barns and outhouses upon an island of considerable extent.

The island owed its origin to an artificial moat, which, since the days of King Alfred, had served as a protection against an attack by an enemy, and upon its surface already, preening their white feathers, floated the graceful swans to which the place owed its name.

Beyond the moat, which was crossed by a wooden bridge, which could be raised or lowered at will, a dense belt of woodland shut in the view.

There the Saxon Thanes had lived and died, undisputed lords in their little kingdom, but now the simple villeins and happy serfs had been supplanted by the rude Norman followers of Pomfrey de Fortinbras.

How Dame Editha had come to give her hand to the bold soldier of fortune no one knew, but it was common gossip in the countryside that she had rued the day, and that already

her once well-filled coffers were draining low and that many of her broad acres had been mortgaged to the Lombard usurers.

Riot and revel were the order of the day under the rule of Pomfrey de Fortinbras, and more than once Dame Editha had bethought her of seeking the protection of the good Sisters of a nunnery some eight leagues away.

She was up betimes on this particular morning, the saddest Easter she had ever known, and stood looking sorrowfully through her lattice as the mists rose from the moat and the beams of the rising sun pierced the woods with shafts of fairy gold.

Her lord and master had not sought his couch that night, but had sat up in the hall beneath with four strange guests who had arrived the day before.

There was some mystery about their coming, and one who seemed to be the chiefest in rank among them had eyed her insolently with a bold glance that brought the hot blood to the cheek even of her brutal husband.

"Alack and foul fall the day that my good Roger departed on his hopeless quest! King Richard's zeal broke many a woman's heart, but he came back again, while my man—"

She looked down as a footstep sounded below, and Pomfrey de Fortinbras went forth from the door which was immediately beneath her chamber window.

His gait was a little unsteady as he pressed his hands to his brow like a man whose head is heavy with strong liquor.

"Ho, there!" he called. "Not yet awake, you lazy dogs! The sun is up, and we must be in the saddle in an hour! Come from your kennels, or I will whip you forth!"

This gentle adjuration brought several men running hastily from one of the outhouses, their hair dishevelled, and straw clinging to their jerkins, while at the same time innumerable dogs began to howl and bark.

"To horse, brutes, and that right soon, if ye would not be flogged till the blood spurts!" continued their amiable lord, as the fresh morning air revived him. "And do not forget that your faces must be covered for the work we have on hand. None must be able to swear to us when the Sheriff of Nottingham gets wind of the business."

The Lady Editha felt a tremor run through her limbs at these strange words.

What manner of work could this be that demanded concealment from the eyes of other men? Not honest work, she thought; and, bending forward, she leaned out of the window and spoke down to her husband beneath.

"What brings my lord abroad so early betimes when he has not sought his couch the night?" she said.

He started at the sound of her voice, and she fancied, and truly, that his face paled as he looked up at her. "Work for men's hands and not for pulling women to meddle with," he retorted, after a pause. "Get thee to bed again, Editha; this cool air will spoil thy beauty—though, by my troth, there is little left to spoil now."

"My lord knows best whose handiwork that may be," she replied sadly. "The neglected flower soon withers, and the wife who sobs half the night through must soon show grey hairs amid the gold."

"Hark ye," snarled Pomfrey de Fortinbras, coming directly under the window, "the wife that obeys not her lord must be treated like a disobedient hound and be well whipped. I bid thee to thy room, and there to stay, else—"

The savage said no more, but struck his thigh with the whip he carried, and his look was sufficient.

The Lady Editha left the window, just as John, whose step De Fortinbras had heard approaching, came to the door, and with blinding tears in her eyes she sought her own chamber with a growing resolve in her heart to leave the ruffian for good and all.

"I will wait until they be ridden forth," she murmured, "and then, if they have left no horse behind them, I will fare on foot to the nunnery and take sanctuary where he can never trouble me more."

She did not see the mustering and the mounting, the tightening of girths, the hasty quaffing of ale and mead in lieu of breakfast, the faces blackened with charcoal from the embers, and the defile out of the cleared space in front of the house.

The dull thud of their horses' hoofs sounded hollowly on the wooden bridge, the sunbeams shone upon helm and hauberk, spur, and sword boss; and then, with King John and the Norman soldier at their head, they broke into a trot, and disappeared down the aisles of the wood in the direction of Longley Bottom.



# YOUR EDITOR'S DEN.



YOUR EDITOR (H.E.).

Controller of  
**THE BOYS' FRIEND—Tuesday.**  
**THE BOYS' HERALD—Thursday.**  
**THE BOYS' REALM—Saturday.**

Your Editor is always glad to hear from you about yourself or your favourite paper. Your Editor will answer you by post if you send a stamped addressed postcard or envelope. Write to Your Editor if you are in trouble, if you want information, or if you have any ideas for our paper. All letters to be addressed to the Editor of THE BOYS' FRIEND, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C. If your letter is not replied to here, it may be answered in "The Boys' Herald" next Thursday, or "The Boys' Realm" next Saturday.

**"THE CAPTAIN OF ST. NINIAN'S."**  
Mr. Maxwell Scott is, of course, best known as the creator of Nelson Lee, detective; but I think my friends will find "The Captain of St. Ninian's" one of the most fascinating school yarns that have ever appeared in our paper. Certain of one thing I am, and this is that Maxwell Scott has never written a better story, and I know all my friends will enjoy it heartily.

FRIEND each week with as good stuff as I get from my regular professional contributors. Again, there are thousands of boys who do not care to read the work of other boys, no matter how meritorious it may be, and these other boys would rather read a good story by a regular author, and would resent my devoting a page of a paper like THE BOYS' FRIEND—in which space is so valuable—to the writings of their fellow-readers, even if they were good enough to be published.

So, A. C., much as I appreciate your suggestion, you will, I am sure, agree with me that, in the circumstances, it would not be a wise plan. Your fellow-readers would object.

### IS HE RIGHT OR WRONG?

One of my friends, whose initials are H. H., asks me to tell him whether it is correct when writing an address to put a comma after the number which indicates the number in the street. For instance, in writing the address, 2, Carmelite Street, would it be correct to put the comma after the 2.

It is evident that my young friend has either been having a discussion on this subject, or has probably been spoken to by a superior for neglecting to put this comma after the figure which indicates the number of the house in the street, and now he is anxious to get an authoritative decision on the question.

Personally my reader is against putting a comma after the number of the house, and he wants me to tell him whether he is right.

I am afraid my decision will be against my young friend. It is essential and proper punctuation to place a comma after the number of the house when the number is used in connection with the address. For instance, it is more correct to put 2, Carmelite Street, than 2 Carmelite Street.

### DOES HE READ TOO MUCH?

A friend of mine, who signs himself "Faithful Reader," and who lives at Crayke Heath, asks me whether I think he is reading too much. The list of papers which he reads is as follows: THE BOYS' FRIEND, "The Marvel," "The Boys' Herald," "The Union Jack," "The Sunday Companion," "The Pluck Library," and "The Girls' Friend."

It seems to me that here my friend has a pretty extensive list of literature of a good all-round sort, because my friend reads not only THE BOYS' FRIEND, "The Boys' Herald," "The Union Jack," "Marvel," and "Pluck" Libraries, and "The Girls' Friend," but also "The Sunday Companion," a very excellent journal indeed. I am afraid, however, that my young friend is reading too much, because I find that three days of the week he works until eight o'clock, on Thursday he gets a half-holiday, on Friday he works till 9.30 p.m., and on Saturday till eleven. In these circumstances, I think my friend is reading too much, and I would therefore advise him to drop one or two of the journals.

As my reader can see, this advice is against myself, because all the publications he mentions are published by the Amalgamated Press.

I think my correspondent can keep his "Sunday Companion" for Sunday reading, but perhaps if he were to drop

"The Union Jack" and "Pluck" he might ease up the amount of reading he is going in for; but this is a question I must leave him to decide for himself. Certainly I think he ought to knock at least two of the papers off the list.

### A FEW "DON'T'S" FOR RABBIT KEEPERS.

I think there must be a good many readers of THE BOYS' FRIEND who are rabbit-keepers. If there are not, I can assure all my boys that rabbit-keeping is a very interesting and amusing hobby, which can be carried on at quite a small cost.

One of my old readers, whose initials are "L. S.," and who lives at Chipping Norton, sends me a few "don'ts" for rabbit-keepers, which I am sure they will appreciate. As my reader has been a keeper of rabbits for ten years he knows something of the subject, and these few tips which he gives will be found well worth bearing in mind by every reader who keeps these very pretty pets:

"Don't breed with your does till they are six months old, or you may expect them to be careless mothers."

"Don't let a doe bring up more than four young in a litter, as they are then likely to be stronger and to grow quicker."

"Don't breed with your rabbits when their fur is coming off, or the young will always have rough coats."

"Don't overcrowd, especially during the warm weather, or you will have diseases such as scurvy and snuffles among your rabbits."

"Don't give green food wet, but dry and fresh."

"Don't feed your pots more than three times a day—morning, noon, and night."

"Don't give all dry food one meal and all green the next, but give equal quantities of each. Always keep regular hours for feeding."

"Don't part the young till they are at least six weeks old; then take the mother from them, and leave them in the old hutch."

"Don't be in a hurry to breed with the doe again, but give her time to get her strength back again."

"Don't keep your rabbits in small hutches. Have large and roomy ones, so that they may have plenty of exercise."

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

### OUR DOUBLE NUMBER.

WITH this issue I place in the hands of my supporters the promised Easter Double Number of THE BOYS' FRIEND. As they will see, it is packed from cover to cover with good stories; in fact, this Fiction Double Number of THE BOYS' FRIEND seems to be the best value for money that I have ever given.

It is certainly a new idea for THE BOYS' FRIEND to publish a double number consisting of fiction only—with hardly any articles or other features—so that those of my friends who like good yarns can show their appreciation of this double number by passing it on to their chums who are not at present readers of our paper.

Among the many interesting features to be found in this double number I would like to draw special attention to "Storm Island," by Allan Blair, a new serial chronicling the adventures of two boy Crusoes; and also "Circus Pete," being a new series of complete stories dealing with this famous character, whose jokes and adventures bring laughs to the lips of many hundreds of thousands of British boys each week.

Pete is the most popular character in boys' fiction at the present time, and the "Circus Pete" tales will be found not only as funny as the Pete stories that have appeared in THE BOYS' FRIEND, but I think a great deal funnier. If you know a boy who is fond of Pete and his adventures, tell him about this new series of stories starting in this number of THE BOYS' FRIEND.

### IN A FORTNIGHT'S TIME.

I have much pleasure in announcing that very shortly I shall commence in THE BOYS' FRIEND a splendid new school story by Maxwell Scott, entitled

I have several other new things in preparation for THE BOYS' FRIEND, but of these I shall give details shortly. Meantime, I think the old paper is keeping up its reputation for good stuff, and beats anything published on the market in imitation of or rival to it.

### A BOY WITH YELLOW TEETH.

League Member No. 40,556 lives at Henley, and he asks me to tell him of something that would improve the colour of his teeth, which have latterly gone very yellow.

The best plan I can suggest to my friend is the application of a tooth-brush and some carbolic or other tooth-powder regularly every night and morning. Let him give his teeth a good scrubbing, working the brush not only across his teeth from right to left and vice versa, but up and down, so that the brush gets into the little crevices and interstices between the teeth.

If he treats his teeth like this every night and morning, in a short time he will find their colour improve, and remain so as long as he practises this very cleanly habit.

### A PAGE FOR MY READERS BY MY READERS.

A. C. makes a suggestion, which he says he and his friends have decided ought to be carried out. He tells me that he thinks I ought to set aside a page of THE BOYS' FRIEND each week which shall be filled by the contributions of my readers, and that the writer of the best story on that page should be awarded a prize.

I am afraid that my friend is rather young—certainly too young to have realised that his suggestion, if it were carried out by a paper like THE BOYS' FRIEND, would not be a success, for this reason, that I do not suppose I could possibly fill a page of THE BOYS'

### HOW TO KEEP WATER OUT OF THE EARS WHILST SWIMMING.

A "Constant Reader" asks me to tell him how he can keep water out of his ears whilst he is swimming. The best plan is to plug both ears up with a little cottonwool dipped in sweet oil. If the ears are firmly plugged in this way they will probably be protected from the water during the time my friend is swimming. Care, however, must be exercised in plugging the ears, not to ram the cottonwool in too tightly, or, on the other hand, not to place it in too loosely, because in either case the result would be unsatisfactory.

But if, as I say, the plugs of wool are carefully placed in the ears, after having been steeped in a little sweet oil, they will remain in, and keep the water out.

### WHICH IS THE BEST PAPER?

John Kinsella is an Aston reader, who asks me to tell him which is the best paper, "The Boys' Realm," "THE BOYS' FRIEND," or "The Boys' Herald." He places them in this order because he thinks that "The Boys' Realm" is the most popular paper, THE BOYS' FRIEND next, and "The Boys' Herald" third.

I am very much obliged to John Kinsella for his opinion; but I am afraid that on the score of circulation, at any rate—and that is surely the best test of popularity?—THE BOYS' FRIEND is easily first, "The Realm" is second, and "The Boys' Herald" third.

**ANSWERS**  
ONE PENNY  
Every Tuesday.

Mercantile Marine Office, having nothing to do with anyone who has not B. T. on his cap, with a crown between. B. T. stands for Board of Trade. The utmost you will be called upon to pay would be five shillings. You should get at least 10s. a month as boy. Four years at sea, and then you can go in for second mate's certificate. I have known lots of fellows with only a Board School education who have got their master's ticket easily. Of course, after a voyage or two you would become an ordinary seaman, with from 30s. to 50s. a month. Your friend who wants to be a pilot should go with you. A pilot must have sea experience; that stands to reason.

"B. Rifkin" should write to the Secretary, Institute of Chartered Accountants, Moorgate Street, E.C. Also to the Secretary, Society of Accountants and Auditors, 4, King's Street, Cheapside, for their regulations. You will have to pass preliminary examination, serve an apprenticeship, and pass professional examinations.

"J. E. P." desires to become a prison warder. Age must be between 24 and 42. The physique should be that of a policeman or a matured soldier. Your letter shows you could pass the easy examination. Write to the Secretary, Prison Commission, Home Office, and you will learn what chance there is of an appointment. Use foolscap with a margin, and say

all you need in no few words as possible.

"Sidney Clark."—Of course you are not too old. There are schools in London, but don't go to one until you are sure it is a bona fide affair. My advice is, go to the nearest garage and ask for information. Most men are ready to answer a civil-spoken young fellow.

"Otto Gurnett."—It is your duty to cultivate any talent you have; start work at the evening classes of the nearest art school. Provisionally, you might set before yourself the idea of becoming an art teacher at a school of art, and work for the necessary certificates. Mixing with teachers and pupils at a school, you will find your feet, and perhaps hear of a better opening than that of art teacher.

"J. Sullivan" desires to become a bandmaster, and ultimately a professor of music. Bandmaster and professor of music strikes me as rather widely divergent branches of the musical profession. To become a bandmaster you should join a band first. To become a professor of music you will have to be proficient in other instruments than a cornet. In either case, you will also have to work hard at the bookwork and pass examinations for diplomas. Trinity College, London, holds examinations and grants diplomas. As a beginning, write to the secretary for prospectus, etc.

"A Derbyshire Reader."—You

should by all means use your spare-time to improve your mind. That is how the labour candidates got where they are now. Though you are not young enough for Civil Service, take Course I. in THE BOYS' FRIEND Correspondence Class. Afterwards Course III. They will teach you a great deal. Become a subscriber to "Harnsworth Self-Educator" (7d. fortnightly). Read all the articles, and see if there is not one or more courses of lessons you would like to take up—say a language or a science. If, for the sake of money and "someone," you go down the pit, you need not stop there always. You will not need if you study hard.

"R. B. Wave" should join the nearest art school, and work hard in his spare time. If he can do good work, the master will either be able to tell him what his next step should be, or direct him where to get information. Of course, he would take the first convenient opportunity of telling the master what his ambition is.

The readers of THE BOYS' FRIEND are cordially invited to send and ask any questions similar to those answered above. The letter should be addressed: "Starting Post,"

THE BOYS' FRIEND Office,  
2, Carmelite House,  
Carmelite Street,  
London, E.C.

Daily Mail.

### SPECIAL NEW SERIES OF ARTICLES.

## AT THE STARTING-POST.

### CAN WE HELP YOU IN THE RACE OF LIFE?

IT is a great pleasure to find so many young fellows really anxious to do the very best for themselves and not afraid of working to that end.

"League Member."—You are only 17. It is quite clear to me what you should do. Stick where you are, and work hard for the Civil Service. In private employment a clerk's post is insecure, and when lost it is hard to get another. At King's College, I believe, there are classes for Civil Service, but join at once THE BOYS' FRIEND Correspondence College. Mind, at once. Strike while the iron is hot. Take at least Course I. Also II. and III. if you have the time. I wish when I was your age I had had such advantages as these classes afford. Write to the Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Burlington Gardens, W., for regulations for Clerks, 2nd Division. It will be sent free. Writing good.

"Loyal Reader, L. F. G."—If you were younger I should say read pre-

vious answer. Do you know typewriting and shorthand? If not, learn. You have THE BOYS' FRIEND Correspondence College to help you to the self-improvement you realise you have neglected so long. Once I was almost exactly in your position. I studied. My senior by two years would not. When, ten or fifteen years later, we met in the street, he hurt my feelings by touching his hat and addressing me as "Sir." He was exactly where I had left him. The main topic of his conversation was his regret he had not taken my advice. Study, and do not, at least than twenty-one, talk about the "coward's way out." By the by, Excise Assistants may be not more than twenty-one. You might work for that.

"W. G. S."—Why, it is geometrical and mechanical drawing, not freehand, which is useful in an engineering office.

"Liverpool Reader" wants to go to sea. Nothing is easier for a fellow living there. Apply to the Government Superintendent at the

OUR WEEKLY CALENDAR:— TUESDAY. | WEDNESDAY. | THURSDAY. | FRIDAY. | SATURDAY.  
THE BOYS' FRIEND. | THE MARVEL LIBRARY. | THE BOYS' HERALD. | THE UNION JACK LIBRARY. | THE BOYS' REALM. PLUCK, AND JESTER.

# Detective-Warder NELSON LEE

Maxwell Scott's Stirring New Story of the Adventures of  
the Famous Detective and His Pupils.



## The First Chapters Re-written.

**A** CONVICT named Nathan Grimshaw, immured in Greystones Prison, had been concerned in the abduction of a child, and that fact had just recently come to light, after the lapse of fifteen years. Nelson Lee was engaged by the child's mother (Lady Arkle) to find out where her son was at the present time, and the great detective had entered the prison as a warder so that he might be able to hold converse with Grimshaw, and thus get at the truth of the matter as to where Lady Arkle's son was to be found.

Nelson Lee's investigations revealed many things. He found that Lady Arkle's son was at school at St. Ninian's, where his pupil Nipper was being educated; that the boy was known as Bob Unwin; that the man who had adopted him years before—Philip Unwin—was imprisoned in Greystones Prison through no fault of his own; that a man named Pringle—since deceased—was the guilty party; that Warder Kemp of Greystones was a wrong 'un; that a convict named Grimshaw had originally kidnapped Lady Arkle's boy; and that the crime had been instigated by Lady Arkle's brother-in-law, whose son was also a scholar at St. Ninian's, and who had stepped into his brother's shoes—there being no known heir.

Nelson Lee, having placed before the governor of Greystones Prison undeniable proof of Philip Unwin's innocence, went to tell that worthy the good news.

The detective hurried off to the infirmary, where Unwin was acting as "hospital orderly." On entering the "association ward" he perceived Unwin in the act of applying a bandage to a patient's head; and as he walked across the ward he was amazed to discover that the patient was Grimshaw.

## Nelson Lee Misses an Important Clue.

**H**ALLO You've not been long in coming back to hospital!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter now?"

"He was set on by the other convicts, as they came back from the quarry this morning," said Unwin.

"What for?"

"That's what I'd like to know," growled Grimshaw. "You'd better ask Warder Kemp!"

"He seems to think that Kemp was responsible, in some way, for the attack," said Unwin, with a smile.

"Of course, that's absurd! Kemp found some tobacco which the convicts had hidden in a sand-heap, and, so far as I can gather, the other convicts thought it was Grimshaw who had snooked. That's why they attacked him."

"And Kemp never blew his whistle till they'd knocked me over the edge of the quarry," said Grimshaw, with a vindictive gleam in his eyes. "And when he found as I wasn't dead he looked as pleased as if somebody 'ad hit 'im in the mouth! Oh, yes! I can see as far through a brick wall as most folks, and all I've got to say is that if Kemp didn't egg on the lags to attack me, he was mighty sorry as they didn't do for me. I saw 'is face when he found as I was alive, and faces sometimes speak louder than words!"

The detective started as a new thought occurred to him. As the reader will remember, Sir Edwin had boasted in the doctor's study that he had found Lady Arkle's boy.

"If he spoke the truth," muttered Nelson Lee to himself, "he has no further need of Grimshaw now. What more likely, then, that he and Kemp should conspire to get rid of Grimshaw?"

"Did you want anything?" asked

Unwin, when he had finished his bandaging.

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "I want a word with you in private. I've some good news for you."

"I think I know what your good news is," said Unwin, as he followed the detective to the other end of the ward. "In fact, I've known it for over a fortnight. The Home Secretary has decided to release me, on ticket-of-leave, at the end of the present month."

The detective smiled.

"You will be released before the end of the month," he said; "probably before the end of next week."

"How's that?" asked Unwin, in surprise.

"But you're not going to be released on ticket-of-leave," said Nelson Lee, ignoring the question. "You're going to be set free unconditionally."

"Why?" gasped Unwin, turning pale with excitement. "Has anything come to light—"

"Your innocence has been proved," said Nelson Lee; and he forthwith related the whole story of his visit to the Mariners' Rest, his discovery of the papers, the loss of the cash-box, and its subsequent recovery by Bob.

"The governor will send the papers up to London to-night," he concluded. "Unfortunately, to-morrow is Sunday, so I don't suppose the Home Secretary will see them until Monday. But on Tuesday, or Wednesday at the latest, the order will come for your release, and you will leave the prison a free man, without a stain on your name!"

Unwin broke down, and wept like a child.

"How can I ever thank you for what you have done for me, Mr. Lee?" he said; for the detective had revealed his identity to him.

"Don't thank me," said Nelson Lee, who, now that he had told his good news, was anxious to go back to Grimshaw and try an experiment on which he had decided. "The person you've got to thank is your own son!"

Unwin smiled through his tears, and a tender expression crossed his face.

"Heaven bless the lad!" he said softly. "It was a lucky day for me when I adopted him!"

"Adopted him?" repeated the detective. "He isn't your own son, then?"

"No," said Unwin. "My wife and I adopted him when he was a few days old. And who do you think is his father? You'd never guess!"

"No, I dare say not," said Nelson Lee, moving away. "That's the doctor in the next ward, isn't it? I want to have a word with Grimshaw before the doctor comes round, so I must ask you to excuse me now. You shall tell me the story of Bob's parentage some other day."

And, little dreaming that he was turning his back on the key to the mystery he was trying to solve, the detective walked rapidly across the ward and seated himself on the edge of Grimshaw's bed.

"Grimshaw, he said, fixing his eyes on the convict's face. "do you know who I am?"

"Yes," growled Grimshaw. "I've known it for some time. You're Nelson Lee!"

"Who told you?"

"Warder Kemp."

"And who told him?"

"He 'ard yer talkin' to the gu'nor one day, when yer thought he was unconscious."

"Ah! That would be after the outbreak in the stone-yard?"

"Yes."

"And Kemp told Sir Edwin, I suppose?"

"Yes; and me and Buster."

The detective pondered for a moment.

"I saw Sir Edwin this morning," he said; "and what do you think he told me?"

"Dunno!" growled Grimshaw. "He has found Lady Arkle's boy! He knows where he is!"

Grimshaw started up in bed. "It's a lie!" he said fiercely. "I've never told 'im where the lad is, and nobody knows but me."

"Well, that's what he told me," said Nelson Lee.

"He was bluffin' yer!" said Grimshaw. "He's no more idea where the youngster is than you ave."

"Suppose he was speaking the truth," said Nelson Lee. "If he knows where the boy is, he has no further need of you, has he? There is no longer any reason why he should help you to escape. In fact, you would be rather a nuisance to him if you escaped. He would be so much easier in his mind if you were safely dead and buried. And, if some of the convicts were to attack you, why should Kemp try to rescue you? In fact, I can quite imagine him being quite sorry if the convicts failed to make an end of you!"

Every word stung the convict like the lash of a whip. The suspicions which had been aroused in his mind by the sight of Kemp's scowling face in the quarry were now converted to certainties.

"By 'okey, I believe you've 'it the right nail on the 'ead!" he hissed.

"They're playin' fast and loose with me! They want to get rid of me! I'll—"

He paused. He remembered that Kemp had said that all arrangements had been made for his escape. If he revealed his secret to Nelson Lee all hope of escape would be gone for ever. And Nelson Lee might be wrong, after all. Kemp might not be playing him false. Before he burnt his boats behind him, he had better wait until he had had a chance of speaking to Kemp.

"Yes," said the detective eagerly. "You were going to say that, now you're convinced your so-called friends are playing fast and loose with you, you'll tell me what I want to know. What did you do with Lady Arkle's boy, and where is he now?"

Grimshaw opened his mouth and shut it again. Then a look of determination crossed his face.

"If something doesn't 'appen afore next Wednesday," he said, "I'll tell yer everything!"

And then the doctor entered the ward, and Nelson Lee was compelled to withdraw.

## The One-Eyed Tramp.

**W**ELL, Bob, my boy, you'll remember this afternoon as long as you live, I should think," said Nipper, when Nelson Lee had taken his departure from Deepwater Cove.

"You bet I will!" said Bob, whose face was radiant with happiness and triumph. "By Jove, it makes me go cold all over when I think how jolly near I came to missing it all!"

"Missing it all!" said Dick. "How?"

"I didn't want to come to Deepwater Cove a bit!" said Bob. "In fact, I'd made up my mind to walk over to Hampton Wingrave, and have tea at Plumtree Farm."

"And not a bad idea, either," said Wagstaffe, whose mouth began to water at the remembrance of the luscious honey and hot, buttered cakes and creamy milk which he and his chums had so often wolfed at Plumtree Farm.

"When you follows suggested coming to the Cove for a swim," continued Bob, "I'd half a mind to tell you that I wouldn't come with you."

"Good job for you you didn't!" said Dick.

"And a good job for your father, too!" said Wagstaffe. "If you hadn't come with us, you wouldn't have found the cash-box, and the proofs of your father's innocence would have remained at the bottom of the sea for ever and ever. Amen!"

"That's true enough," said Nipper. "At the same time, as Wag says, there's a lot to be said for tea at Plumtree Farm. What do you say. Shall we carry out Bob's idea now? It isn't four o'clock yet, so we'll have heaps of time to walk to Hampton Wingrave, have tea at the farm, and walk back to the school before call-over."

"I'm game!" said Wagstaffe.

"Ditto!" said Dick.

"Same here!" said Bob.

And, without any further ado, the four boys dressed themselves, climbed to the top of the cliff, and started out for Hampton Wingrave.

As previously mentioned, Deepwater Cove was a favourite resort of bathers; and about two hours after Nipper and his chums had taken their departure, the neatly-attired and dapper-looking figure of Monsieur Hachette, the French-master at St. Ninian's, came sauntering down the road, with a couple of towels over his shoulder.

On reaching the stile at the top of the patch which led down to the cove he paused for a moment to reconnoitre. Perceiving that the little cove was deserted, he vaulted over the stile, descended the path, undressed on the broad rocky ledge at the bottom, and plunged into the sea.

A few minutes later another figure came sauntering down the road—the figure of a ragged and disreputable-looking tramp, whose dirty, unshaven face was rendered still more unattractive by reason of the fact that he had lost one eye.

"Wot-to!" he murmured, halting at the stile, and fixing his solitary optic on the cove below. "This looks a bit of orlight! Gent in the water, clothes on the bank, me up 'ere! Snuffy, you're in luck!"

He clambered over the stile and crept down the narrow, winding path, hiding behind a bush whenever Monsieur Hachette turned his glance towards the shore.

At last he reached the rocky ledge on which the swimmer had left his clothes. To have rifled the Frenchman's pockets there, when at any moment Monsieur Hachette might have turned round and perceived him, would have been to have courted detection.

The one-eyed tramp had a better plan than that. Snatching up the Frenchman's coat and waistcoat and trousers, he spun round on his heel, darted up the path, and succeeded in reaching the stile without Monsieur Hachette having seen him.

"That was neatly done, though I sez it wot shouldn't!" he murmured, as he scrambled over the stile.

"Now, let's see—"

He paused and caught his breath, for at that moment he perceived a party of half a dozen warders coming up the road from the direction of Greystones.

Amongst them were Warder Kemp and Nelson Lee; and they were on their way to Clevedon Station to receive a batch of new convicts from London.

Dropping the Frenchman's clothes into the ditch, the one-eyed tramp sat down on the top of them, and pretended to be busily engaged in mending the string by which his dilapidated boots were laced.

When the warders had passed, he rose to his feet, and was about to rifle the Frenchman's pockets, when a couple of ladies hove in view round a turn in the road, about fifty yards away. They were lady artists, who were staying in Clevedon, and they were coming to sketch at Deepwater Cove.

"Drat 'em!" growled the tramp. "There's no peace for an honest bloke in this part of the world! I'd better take the clobber with me, and find some quiet spot farther along the road."

And, with this reflection, he gathered up the Frenchman's clothes, and walked rapidly away in the direction of Greystones and Hampton Wingrave.

In the meantime Monsieur Hachette had finished his swim; and almost at the same moment as the warders marched past the stile, at the top of the path, the Frenchman hauled himself out of the water, and discovered, to his dismay, that his coat and waistcoat and trousers had mysteriously disappeared.

For the moment he could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses. He gazed around him with a dull, bewildered stare, peered into the sea, glanced behind the neighbouring bushes, and explored the crevices of the rocky ledge. He picked up his shirt and vest and pants, his boots and socks, his Panama hat, and examined each separate article, one by one, as if he expected to find the missing garments concealed inside.

Then a wall of despair burst from his lips. At last the appalling truth dawned on him. Somebody had stolen his suit, and St. Ninian's was nearly three miles away.

Had it been dark there might have been a chance—a feeble chance, it is true—of his reaching the school without being seen. But it was broad daylight, and this was the eighth of July, and the sun did not set till a quarter-past eight.

To remain where he was till ten or eleven o'clock at night—by which time only would it be dark enough for his purpose—was obviously out of the question. To attempt to reach St. Ninian's half-dressed was equally out of the question. What should he do?

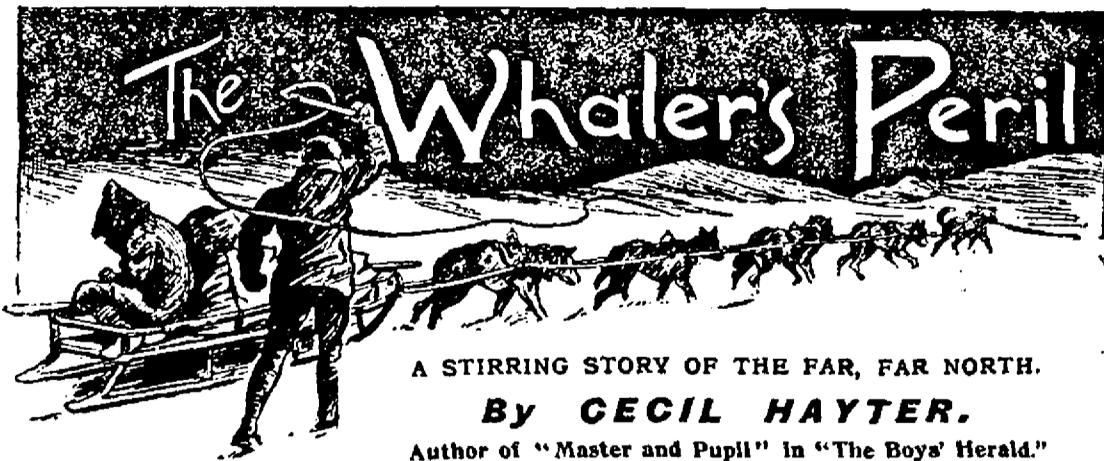
A moment's reflection supplied the answer. He would put on such of his things as remained, hide behind the hedge at the top of the cliff, wait until somebody came along the road, call to them, and ask them to go to St. Ninian's and fetch him a fresh suit of clothes.

In accordance with this plan, he hurriedly donned his under-garments and put on his boots and socks and hat. Then, having robed himself in the largest of his two towels, which completely enveloped him from his



Snatching up the Frenchman's coat and waistcoat and trousers, the tramp spun round on his heel, darted up the path, and succeeded in reaching the stile without Monsieur Hachette having seen him.





A STIRRING STORY OF THE FAR, FAR NORTH.

By GECIL HAYTER.

Author of "Master and Pupil" in "The Boys' Herald."

**The 1st CHAPTER.**  
**A Desperate Venture.**

THE Yeohants wore up, and the thermometer was down—down at fifty below freezing point—and over all the land lay the bitter darkness of the Arctic night.

That the Yeohant Indians should have been on the war-trail at such a season needs explanation. Two hundred miles to the north a whaling ship lay crushed and helpless on the edge of the Polar ice, with two-thirds of her crew in the grip of scurvy, the second mate with a smashed thigh, and the remainder frost-bitten and half starving—unless help could be got they were doomed men.

News of this had filtered southward by means of an outcast Eskimo, who had passed it on to a half-caste tribe in winter quarters, who, in turn, had passed it to the Yeohants. Also, the tale ran that three men, more daring than the rest, were pushing south through the darkness to seek aid from the big chief at the Hudson Bay Company's outpost; and that these three had sledges on which were steel axes, knives, and above all, rifles—beautiful rifles which would shoot incredible distances.

The great ambition in life of a young Yeohant brave is to possess a gun of his very own, and to this end he will make any sacrifice—for the owner of a gun is of necessity a better man than he who has to be content with the ancestral seal-lance and bow and arrow. Moreover, a Yeohant is by nature treacherous and a thief.

Twenty hours after the news had come in, a party of young bucks numbering close on fifty, all fully armed and wrapped to the eyes in furs, were stealing silently northward in the face of a wind that seared like hot iron. Each man on his webbed snowshoes, squat, stunted figures, shuffling and stumbling through the timber belt. Half a dozen of the swiftest and most enduring had been despatched ahead to find and cut the trail.

Precisely at that time, three worn, haggard men, their faces grey-black with oil and filth, were fighting their way inch by inch down the map. The leader, Captain Johnson, was the whaler's skipper. The second was a Finn called Marsen, a cheery, silent man of infinite endurance, but now far gone with frost-bite. The last was a youngster—the ship's boy—Billy Meers by name. He had been chosen for two reasons—his light weight, and his wonderful gift of managing the dog-teams.

They had left the ship seventeen days—seventeen interminable days of bitter struggle against darkness, cold, and privation.

At first over the ice they had managed fairly well. Then had come a terrible blizzard when the bare idea of travel had been impossible, and Marsen endeavouring to save a sledge from disaster, had slipped through rotten ice, and the frost had got him before they could build a fire and throw the ice from his mocassins and leggings.

By sheer stress of circumstance they had been compelled to abandon more than half their outfit, and were reduced to one sledge drawn by eight Husky dogs.

Captain Johnson was leading, breaking a trail. Billy Meers ploughed along beside the sledge, whip in hand; now cheering on the team with a shout of encouragement, now plying the whip fiercely across the Finn's back and shoulders as he lay huddled on the after end of the sledge, to prevent him being overcome by drowsiness and falling into a sleep from which there would be no awakening.

Captain Johnson halted for the hundredth time, utterly exhausted.

"Can't make much further of it without camping, Billy. How's the dogs?"

Meers shook his head doubtfully. "Played right out, sir. They're willing enough, but two of 'em have got sore feet, and the short rations are telling on them."

The captain sighed wearily, and suddenly grabbing a handful of snow, rubbed his nose furiously—just in time, for it had begun to deaden.

"How many miles d'ye reckon we've done to-day?"

Billy shook his head, and the Finn groaned with the pain of his open wounds.

They had been travelling for, as near as they could guess, fifteen hours without a break. On good, hard-packed, open snow they might have done nearly fifty miles in the time. As it was, they had been fighting, struggling, and dragging over the worst of bad going, and nearly all of it had been on a steep upward slope. Over and over again a specially impassable stretch had compelled them to make wearisome circuits, regaining the trail half a mile further away after hours of toil.

"I make it anywhere between twelve and fourteen," said the captain.

Less than a mile an hour; and there were three-and-twenty lives dependent on their speed.

"Come along, boys," he said at last, "drag her out again. If the chart's anywhere about right, we can't be more'n ten miles to the Mucklaw river, and then there's plain sailing ahead."

He turned on to the trail once more, and Billy Meers, with a crack of his whip and a "Hi! get up there, Mush!" restarted the worn-out dogs.

The leader, a big, tawny-coated fellow with thick fur and a bushy tail, sprang forward in the traces, snarling at the others to see that they didn't mangle; and, as Billy broke out the sledge which had frozen fast, they were off again—the Finn being prodded and beaten into wakefulness.

Two hours later they camped on the edge of a timber belt. The captain busied himself erecting their small explorer's tent, whilst Billy unhitched the tired dogs, and hacked them off their portions of dried fish and seal meat with an axe.

So utterly done up were they that they lay where they fell—he had to bring their food to them. The three men feasted riotously on the last of the cocoa, some ship's biscuit, and strips of seal meat thawed over the lamp, then they huddled together under the skins to sleep—the sleep of exhaustion.

**THE 2nd CHAPTER.**  
**Long Odds.**

IT was Sandy, the team leader, who saved them from being rushed unawares by the Yeohants. It was in the darkest hour of all the dark hours which come before the faint greyness of an Arctic dawn.

He had been sleeping, as all Husky dogs do sleep, in a nest which he had made for himself in the snow. Suddenly he cocked his ears, thrust up a black muzzle, and howled. The long-drawn, danger-signal howl of his

wolf father, ending in a sharp, snapping bark.

The captain and Billy Meers, dozing uneasily under the sodden skins heard it, and struggled instantly to their feet. Marsen heard it, and because he couldn't rise, crawled to the tent-flap on hands and knees. They knew Sandy, and knew that the wolf-howl meant that something was amiss.

"Moose!" whispered Marsen hoarsely, grinning, in spite of his pain, at the prospect of fresh meat.

The captain nodded, and grabbed his rifle, as Marsen sank back with a barbed arrowhead in his throat.

"Indians, by gum!" roared the captain, as a second arrow-shower came flickering out of the tree-belt.

Billy Meers sprang for his Winchester, kicked open a box of cartridges, which they had brought on the off-chance of finding game to shoot for the pot, and dragged Hans under cover of the canvas screen.

A dim shadow moved amongst the blacker shadows of the trees. The captain raised his rifle and fired.

stant travel and lack of food, and the cold and the darkness of the Arctic winter had laid hold of them, but they flung themselves down on the snow behind the cover of the sledge, and waited for what they were convinced must be the end.

"Marsen?" asked the captain laconically.

"Gone, poor chap!" answered Billy, jamming in another cartridge as best he could with frozen fingers and stiffened mittens.

"Good-bye, old man," said the captain again. "We'll try now to let 'em get us alive. I've heard—"

He broke off short. "My poor men! They'll be waiting for us—waiting till—the supplies give out."

The Yeohants were gathering in two parties—one on either side of the doomed camp. They were preparing to fight as their ancestors had fought before them for untold generations. The surprise having failed, a volley of arrows, another from the second party, and then a combined rush.

Billy watched his men closing in, then he raised his Winchester, rested the barrel on his near sledge runner, and fired. He had never fired at a man target before. The experience was new, and he mistrusted himself.

One of the leaders—a broad-shouldered fellow with a spear, spun round and dropped, writhing.

Flick, flick, flick came the arrows, pattering on the canvas coverings and woodwork. The captain wriggled uneasily, and gave a low cry of pain. Billy knew he was hit, but did not dare turn his head.

He fired again and again in rapid succession. Once he missed, and one cartridge was a blank, but the heavy bullet of the third drove clean through two men and wounded a third. The range was murderously short.

Again the captain winced and cried out, and an arrow seared Billy's upper arm, hanging limply by the barb from his thick furs.

He jerked it away impatiently, and fired again. They were on the run

It was Captain Johnson. Badly wounded though he was, he had managed to reload his magazine, but had no longer strength to shoulder the heavy weapon. Billy stooped and grabbed it, dropping his own. Then, standing astride the captain, he reopened fire just as the rush came; but this time the Yeohants had lost heart, and did not press the attack with anything like their former fierceness. Billy was growing sick and dizzy, but he managed to keep his feet, and they dwindled away on either side, and bolted for cover, leaving three more men dead.

The strain over for the moment, Billy Meers collapsed heavily on to the sledge, still clutching the rifle.

"How goes it, Billy?" asked the captain huskily, and fainted before he could get an answer.

**THE 3rd CHAPTER.**  
**A Dash for Safety.**

BILLY MEERS kicked with his mocassined feet against the sharp corners of the sledge to keep himself awake. In spite of his efforts, however, his eyelids drooped heavily, and the sudden silence and the cold were numbing him into insensibility. He was unutterably tired. A faint whine brought him to with a jerk, clutching his rifle nervously. Twenty paces away on the snow he could dimly make out a cowering form. It was Sandy, the team leader, coming cautiously back to camp with his fellows behind him, bristling with fear and sniffing at the blood-tainted air with inquiring noses.

Billy sat upright and called to him softly. Sandy raised his head, and advanced gingerly, one foot placed exactly before the other, leaving a single trail—the trail of the wolf in time of danger.

Again Billy called him and coaxed him, and Sandy with his six followers came in obediently, recognising his voice.

Slowly and painfully Billy rose and harnessed them in the traces. Sandy in front, as leader by right, and so on down to Spitz, a big, white dog with heavy shoulders, whom he put in the dead one's place as wheeler.

With an effort of which he would not have believed himself capable, he half dragged, half lifted the captain's senseless form on to the sledge, recklessly throwing away their scanty remaining equipment, and strapping the rugs in their places.

The tent he left standing. It was neck or nothing, and every ounce of weight would tell.

A final adjustment of the straps and buckles, then, revolver in one hand and the big, heavy-thonged whip in the other, he swayed his weight against the sledge, first to the right then to the left, and broke it free from the grip of the frost. The dogs, understanding, strained at the traces, and the light sledge slid forward on to smoother ground and gathered pace, Billy shoving from behind. He gave one glance round him, then the big whip cracked like a pistol-shot. "Mush!" he yelled, as the dogs leapt forward, and he flung himself on the after end of the framework.

There came an answering yell from the woods, and stunt, squat figures started out to intercept him. Two he dropped with the revolver, and one more, who rushed him at close quarters, he blinded with a slash of the whip over the face and eyes.

Flick, flick, flick whizzed the arrows, but the pace was too hot, and the dogs, terror-stricken, and going for every ounce left in them, raced headlong down a steep incline behind the tree belt, the sledge swaying wildly from side to side. Through a break in the trees he caught a momentary glimpse of a long, white streak far below, and breathed a prayer of thanksgiving as he clung on with both hands, for the streak was the smooth frozen ice of the Mucklaw, and the road to help and safety.

Twenty-five miles down from the point he struck it at lay the outpost of the Hudson Bay Trading Company, and he covered the distance in under four hours, for the ice was clean and smooth as glass.

It was the howling of the dogs that roused the factor from his bunk, and, going outside, he found one man wounded and insensible, strapped under the rugs, another huddled up beside the sledge, just as he had rolled off, fast asleep and in danger of freezing to death, and seven bone-weary, footsore, and ravenous dogs. Billy Meers had won through and saved four-and-twenty lives.

THE END.



Standing astride the captain, Billy reopened fire just as the rush came.

An answering shriek told that the bullet had gone home, and that the world was rid of one Yeohant marauder for good.

He was not a good shot—few sailors are—but for once, at any rate, he had hit what he aimed at. The crack of the rifle caused a series of subterranean explosions in the open space before the tent, as the startled Husky dogs sprang out of their snowbeds, and stood facing outward, growling and bristling.

Another volley of arrows stretched one of them on the ground, and the rest took to their heels in mad, terror-stricken flight.

Captain Johnson and Billy Meers were left alone with a dead comrade to face a couple of score Yeohant bucks intent on plunder and murder. They could see them now, dwarfed and stunted, stealing over the snow from their shelter, tough, wiry little men with slanting eyes and high cheek-bones. Each armed with spear, club, or bow, and evidently intent on a rush.

"Down with you, Billy!" said the captain. "Down with you, behind the sledge, and take 'em as they come. If they get into us, give 'em the butt!"

They were both weak from inces-

now, and he had only four shots left. To reload was an impossibility.

He emptied the magazine into the braver of them. The last two shots he fired standing, with the muzzle almost touching the skin coats of the leaders, singeing the fur in big brown patches.

The Yeohants, plucky as they were, gave back a little. These new weapons, which they desired so much, and which spoke many times, of which they had heard from the North, were indeed marvellous, but they were distinctly uncomfortable to face in open warfare. For all they knew, Billy might go on firing indefinitely, and many of their best men were already down.

They wavered perceptibly. Billy lunged fiercely at the face of the nearest with his full weight behind the blow, and the man fell back shrieking with a shattered jaw. It was a toss up, a matter of fractions of seconds whether they would break or stand their ground.

A heavy spear whizzed through the gloom, inflicting a nasty wound in Billy's side, causing him to stagger. The sight put fresh heart into them, and they gathered for the final rush.

Just at that instant Billy felt a plucking at his furred leggings, and a rifle was thrust upwards into his hand.

**OUT ON THURSDAY—The Mammoth Easter and Spring Fiction Double Number of "The Union Jack," containing Two Grand, Long Complete Novels. 2d.**



AN ENTRANCING LONG, COMPLETE STORY OF AN EASTER AT SCHOOL.

By Charles Hamilton.

**Easter at Chilcote—Left Behind.**  
DICK BROOKE stood at the door, looking out into the quadrangle at Chilcote. It was a bright, sunny April day, and the birds were twittering in the old oaks, but Dick Brooke's face wore a shade of gloom.

The school had broken up for the Easter holidays, and the boys were dispersed to the four corners of the kingdom. The class-rooms were empty, the old quad silent and deserted. No merry shout rung from the playing-fields. Of the multitude of boys who thronged Chilcote during term time, only two were left behind—Dick Brooke and his chum, Pat Gerald.

Even the doctor was gone, with his family; and of the masters, only Herr Bebel, the German master, remained. And, lonely as Chilcote was, Dick would have greatly preferred Herr Bebel's room to his company.

Dick Brooke never looked forward to the school vacations with the same pleasant anticipations as the other boys. There was no going home, no kind, welcoming face for him. His holidays were spent at the school, and, much as he loved Chilcote, he found it deadly dull while his school-fellows were away.

Now, as he stood watching the pigeons in the quad, he heartily wished that the holidays were over, and thought disconsolately of the fortnight yet to run. He little dreamed at that moment of the strange events that were to happen at Chilcote before the new term commenced.

A forcible slap on the back, which sent him at a run down the steps, interrupted his meditations.

"Arrah!" exclaimed a merry voice. "Ye look as if ye had the hump, Dick, my boy!"

Dick gasped, but he grinned as he looked at his chum. The veriest misanthrope could not have remained depressed in the presence of the merry Irish lad; and Dick was very far from a misanthrope, being a hearty, wholesome British boy, with no nonsense about him.

"It's a bit rotten without the fellows," he said. "But I'm glad to see your old mug about the place, Paddy. You've nearly dislocated my spinal column."

"You were looking down in the mouth, and I thought I'd liven you up a bit," grinned Pat. "Cheer-ho! I'll race you to the gates."

"Right-ho!"  
And away they went helter-skelter. The gates stood open, and Dick, reaching them first, went through the gateway with a rush. The next moment there was a collision and a yell. A man who was just turning in from the road met Dick coming full tilt, and had no time to get out of his way. The impact flung him back into the hedge on the other side, and Dick staggered back, but Pat caught him by the collar and saved him from falling.

"Oh, my Aunt Matilda!" gasped Dick. "I'm awfully sorry, sir. I didn't see you."

The man scrambled from the hedge with a scowl. He looked breathless and considerably ruffled. He was not a prepossessing individual. He was a tall, spare man, with a thin

face and sharp eyes of an uncertain hue. A scar, as of an old wound, crossed his left cheek, and it did not improve his looks.

"Confound you!" he shouted. "Can't you look where you are going? I've a good mind to wipe up the road with you!"

Dick grinned a little at that. He had an idea that the stranger would not find it an easy task. Perhaps the same thought struck the man himself, for his manner changed.

"I've told you I'm sorry," said Dick. "But if you hadn't been coming into the gateway it wouldn't have occurred, so it was really as much your fault as mine."

"Why shouldn't I come into the gateway? This is Chilcote Priory School, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got business 'ere."

Dick looked at him in astonishment. What business this shabby-looking individual could possibly have at Chilcote Priory passed his comprehension.

"There's no one here now," he said. "Don't you know the school's broken up? The doctor is away."

"But the masters," said the other, a little anxiously—"they ain't all away, are they?"

"All except the German master, Herr Bebel."

The other gave a chuckle. "That's the individual I want to see, young gentleman. Where is he?"

"Go up to that door and ring," said Dick, pointing. "If you really want to see him. But unless you really have business with him, I'd advise you to let him alone. He isn't a pleasant man to disturb."

"I reckon he won't mind an old friend like me," said the other, with a peculiar grin. "But, if you'll excuse me, young gent, will you tell me your name? I seem to know your face."

"My name's Dick Brooke, but I've never seen you before."

The man gave a great start.

"Dick Brooke! Look 'ere, was your father a master at this 'ere school once?"

"Yes," said Dick wonderingly. "He was master of the Fifth, but that was years ago. What do you know about him?"

"Oh, nothin'," said the man—"nothin' to interest you!"

And he turned away, and walked towards the door Dick had indicated. The chums watched him till he was admitted and the door closed behind him.

**The Ruined Priory—A Startling Encounter.**

PAT GERALD looked at Dick with a rather comical expression.

"I say, I should like to know what that means," he exclaimed. "A queer kind of visitor for old Babble."

"Yes; but there must be something in what he said about being the herr's friend, or he would be kicked out again," Dick remarked. "Seems to me something fishy about it. Lucky for the herr his visitor didn't come during the term, considering the kind of a specimen he is, and I fancy he won't be pleased at our having seen him."

"Your father could never have

known a blackguard of that fellow's stamp, Dick."

"No, certainly not; but the man may have seen him. He seemed to recognise me. I wonder—" He paused abruptly.

"Where is your governor, Dick?" said Pat. "You never speak of him."

"The fact is, I don't know much about him," Dick confessed. "He used to be a master at Chilcote, but he left when I was quite a kid, and I understood that he had an appointment of some kind out in Africa."

What it can be that prevents him from writing or ever coming to see me I can't imagine. He was very fond of me when I was a little chap. I don't talk about him, because there's something mysterious in it that I don't understand. I shouldn't like all the chaps making conjectures about it. But all I know for certain is that he is abroad, and that he left me in Dr. Mannering's charge. I should like to see him again. I suppose that will come some day."

Dick's face was somewhat downcast as he spoke. In his earlier years he had taken for granted all that was told him, but as he grew up he had begun to wonder a good deal about his father.

Where was Julian Brooke? Where had he been all these years? Why

did he never once write to the son he had left behind in England?

It never occurred to Dick's mind that there might be any motive for his father's conduct that would not bear the light. There was little suspicion in his nature, and his trust in his father was complete. But he was puzzled and distressed, though he said little of it.

"It's jolly mysterious," commented Pat. "Still, I suppose he has his motives, whatever they may be. Come along, Dick, let's have a run through the Priory Wood, and then we can explore the ruins."

"They're out of bounds,"  
"In term time. Ordinary rules don't apply to kids who are left behind during the vac. If you doubt me, you grinning gossamer, ask the Head when he comes back. Now, come along."

And Dick, nothing loth, started off with his chum, and in a few minutes they were in the shades of the Priory Wood.

In ancient times Chilcote Priory, as its name indicated, had been a religious establishment, and a great part of the old priory was still standing, and the more habitable portion was in use. Some of it was in ruins, and some so shaky that the doctor had placed it out of bounds, for the boys' own sakes. There were stories told among the Chilcote boys of hidden passages and secret chambers which roused keen curiosity, and made the more adventurous lads long for an opportunity of exploring the forbidden precincts. But the doctor's word was law.

A gate gave access to the ruins on the side of the school, but it was always kept locked. They could be reached from the opposite side by the path through the Priory Wood. The chums were soon following this path, having little fear of being "spotted" in their little adventure, for the German master showed not the slightest interest in their doings at any time. He was supposed, by the absent doctor, to exercise some supervision over them, but, as a matter of fact, he ignored them altogether.

As they passed through the wood, Dick several times glanced curiously among the trees, and at last he stopped.

"Look here, Pat," he exclaimed, "there's somebody following us through the wood. I haven't been able to see him, but I've heard him several times."

"I thought I heard something," agreed Pat. "Perhaps it was some animal."

Dick shook his head. He was convinced that someone was following them, and skulking through the trees instead of coming by the path. As he stood listening, there came a

rattle near at hand, and Dick sprang suddenly through a cluster of brambles, determined to know what it meant.

"Hallo! Who are you?"  
A man was springing away to elude him, but seeing that he was caught he stopped, and reluctantly turned to face the boy. He was a dapper little man, dressed in cycling clothes, which did not become him very well. He looked at Dick in some confusion.

"Hallo!" he said. "You startled me."

"What are you following us for?"

"Following you?"

"Yes. Don't you understand plain English?" snapped Dick. "Who are you, and what's your little game? Don't you know you're trespassing here?"

"What about yourself?"

"That's different. I belong to Chilcote. Look here, my opinion is that you're up to no good, and the sooner you get out the better!" said Dick bluntly.

The man looked at him in a doubtful sort of way, the ghost of a grin lurking about the corners of his mouth.

"Very well, my lord," he said, with exaggerated humility. "But I am looking for a friend of mine, and perhaps you'll tell me if you've seen him—a tallish sort of fellow, with a brown moustache. Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't," replied Dick shortly.

The man hesitated a few moments; then, with a short nod, turned and walked away towards the road.

Dick and Pat continued their way. There was a high fence to be crossed before the ruins could be entered, but that did not delay the boys long. In a few minutes more they were standing amongst the masses of crumbling masonry which were their destination.

"I say, look out!" said Pat. "The doctor's right in calling this place dangerous. That old wall, for instance, will come down if you breathe on it. Ah, here's the steps, and they look about the rottenest part of the whole shoot! But we are bound to look into the vault, if only to brag to the other chaps when they come back."

"All right," grinned Dick.

"Hallo! What's that?"  
It was a sound from the gloomy opening that yawned at the bottom of the crazy steps. There was someone in the vault!

For a moment the chums looked at each other in amazement. Then Dick made a gesture of comprehension, mingled with annoyance.

"It's that chap again! He must have doubled back after we left him in the wood, and dodged in first, somehow."

"Well, we'll soon have him out."

They ran down the steps rather recklessly. The fallen masonry had left the vault partly uncovered, and a sort of twilight reigned there. Dimly enough the boys made out a figure, but it was not the figure of the man they had seen in the wood.

"Show yourself!" exclaimed Dick. "What are you doing here, who ever you are?"

"There was a strange cry from the gloom."

"Dick!"  
Something in the voice thrilled Dick to the very core of his heart.

"Who are you?" he asked unsteadily.

A tall, stalwart form came swiftly forward. Two hands were placed on the boy's shoulders, and a haggard face looked into his own.

"Dick! My boy!"

And Dick understood, and, with a great gulp in his throat, he cried out the one word:

"Father!"

**Herr Bebel's Unwelcome Visitor.**

HERR BEBEL, the German master at Chilcote, sat in his study. The window of the room commanded a view of the quadrangle, and as he sat there and smoked a big pipe, the German saw the chums of Chilcote start their race to the gates. He scowled as his glance fell on Dick Brooke. He seldom saw Dick without scowling. The German master seemed to have an instinctive dislike for the lad who was liked by everyone else at Chilcote.

"Ah, that boy!" he muttered. "He becomes more like his father every day. Ah! perhaps some day I will drive him forth as I drove his father!"

And Herr Bebel's little piggy eyes glittered at the thought. A few



Detective Fix, lantern in hand, stood looking down at the three forms revealed in its rays.











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THE 1st CHAPTER.

Scuttling the Gaspard — The Two Stowaways — Lashed to the Mizzenmast — The Return of the Boat.

THE big sailing-ship Gaspard rolled gently in the long swell of the sea. She was outward bound from London to Callao, on the coast of Peru, with a mixed cargo of Birmingham, Sheffield, and other goods.

But the ill-fated vessel was never destined to arrive at Callao, for at the very moment our story opens she was in the hands of a merciless, murderous crew.

Two days before, the captain and first and second mates had been brutally murdered, and consigned unceremoniously to an ocean grave.

Just now her decks showed a confusion of men hurrying hither and thither laden with stores, which, placed close to the hullwarks hard by the davits by some, were transferred by others into two boats ready for lowering.

The vagabond crew were about to scuttle the ship.

Backwards and forwards, from stem to stern of the vessel, stood a huge, swarthy man, who seemed to be in command.

A man with a saturnine face he was, with red-rimmed eyes that shot forth evil glances wherever he went, a black moustache and goatee, and thick hair shining with oil.

In his ears glistened large, smooth rings of silver. Fierce words and savage threats came from his tongue; while now and again, with his eye to a telescope, he would scan the vast expanse of the Pacific, over which the dusk was now falling.

At length a scaman approached him.

"Frisco Jake," he said, "everything's ready."

The swarthy man growled out an answer, gave a final order, and moved quickly towards the fore-castle.

An auger had been placed there in readiness, and this Frisco Jake now took up, moving towards the scuttle. While these hasty preparations were going forward above decks, there were two persons down below who were quite oblivious of what was about to happen.

Two boys they were—Dick Farley and Alec Winter, Stowaways both, they were at this moment crouching in silence among the general cargo in the forepeak of the hold.

Dreary had been the voyage since, upon that fateful day which seemed as eternity ago, they had smuggled themselves aboard the Gaspard as she lay in the London Docks, bound they hardly knew whither.

How they had passed the time, how they had endured the darkness of the days and nights, they hardly knew. They had slept, of course, and they had talked in whispers lest an echoing tone should lead to their betrayal; but for the most part silence had attended their presence.

Fearful the hours they had sat, haggard and weary, listening as the storm-swept sea pounded the Gaspard's timbers, and caused every rih to groan and every plank to wheeze out weird sounds as if the ship were a living thing stung by a thousand stings.

Such nights and such days had been their lot, each as it came suggesting itself as the end of all things, so fearsome were the aspects of the terrible storm.

But now all was changed. Gradually the hurricane had abated its fury, weakened, and at length died down, to be succeeded by calmer weather.

Just now, as the boys rose to ease their cramped limbs, the ship was rolling but little, while the gurgling

lap, lap of the ocean against her sides seemed but as the laughter of the waters, and, though harsh, was not unmusical.

It was a luxury to stand up and stretch their limbs, and the two boys indulged in it for some minutes.

Suddenly Dick Farley gave vent to a hoarse whisper of alarm.

"Down, Alec—down and quiet for your life!"

Two begrimed faces ducked, and four begrimed hands pressed against the water-casks instantly, as they bobbed out of sight.

Only just in time, for at that moment a hurly figure swung himself down into the hold through the fore-scuttle, and, halting with his lantern aloft, stared forward.

It was Frisco Jake!

The rays split the darkness with a fan of light, and showed an auger in the seaman's other hand.

Breathlessly from their place of concealment Dick Farley and Alec Winter gazed at him. Never before had they witnessed such dastardly work as was now in progress.

But at the sight of this man's face they shivered where they crouched, for it was the face of a fiend bent on fiendish work.

Yet the young stowaways dare not cry out or interpose a hand to prevent the execution of the diabolical work.

They were aboard the Gaspard without a right, and well they knew that no mercy would be extended to them if their presence were detected.

Presently the man stepped to the outer wall of the vessel, hard by the bulkhead, and with his auger began to bore low down.

Dick Farley's hand jumped to his companion's arm.

"Look!" he said, in a horrified whisper. "Look, Alec!"

"What's he doing?"

Dick's face was white, and his heart beating wildly, as he whispered back:

"He is scuttling the ship, I think! I've read of such monstrous acts. See how the water's pouring in through that hole he's bored; and now he's at work on another!"

"What'll happen?" gasped Alec.

"Only one thing can happen," Dick answered, in an awed tone.

"In a few hours the hold will fill with water, and the ship will sink!"

"Heaven save us!"

In silence they watched the man for some minutes; then at length Dick whispered:

"See, he's finished his horrible task, and is going; and he's leaving his lantern. Thank Heaven for that! We may be able to do something to save ourselves. He's scrambled into the fo'c'sle again."

"What can we do, Dick? What do you think is happenin'?"

"Only one thing can be happenin'. Listen to that!"

Dick held up his hand. The two boys strained their ears. Above the ceaseless swish and gurgle of the water and the low growling of the vessel's timbers, another sound, muffled by distance, could be heard—the sound of oars rattling in rowlocks.

"It's as I thought!" Dick cried. "They've taken to the boats. They've scuttled the ship, and are deserting her. Quick, Alec, there's not a moment to lose! We must do what we can to stop the rush of water. Look about for something to plug these holes."

"How will this do?" exclaimed Alec, stooping after a few seconds' search and taking up a lump of oakum.

"It's caulking—the very thing!" cried Dick eagerly. "I'll see what we can do now!"

He hacked away with his heavy boot-heel at a thin lath of wood nailed to a packing-case, which split under his vigorous kicking.

"Now, Alec, lend a hand here!" he said, breaking the lath into several pieces across his knee. "Help whittle these things down as quick as you can!"

Alec whipped a clasp-knife from his pocket, and in desperato haste did the other's bidding.

Dick seized the first length of lath, as it was pared down to the necessary size, and wound around it some of the oakum; then, crossing to where the water was gushing in through the auger-holes, he inserted in one of them the thin end of his improvised wedge, screwing and pressing it with all his force till the caulking held tight.

Back to Alec with a staggering bound for another plug, which he dealt with similarly. So he worked with herculean strength and energy till all the holes were stopped.

Pausing at length then, he heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he swept the light of the lantern over his work.

"Bravo, Dick—bravo!" Alec cried, as he stood beside his abum. "There's no water comin' in now."

"No, there isn't," answered Dick; "and thank Heaven for that! But goodness only knows how long those plugs will hold. They're in as firmly as I could fix them. I could have driven them further home with a mallet; but we'll have to rest satisfied with them as they are, I s'pose. And now, Alec, we'll make a move."

"Where to, Dick?"

"Up on deck, maybe; anyway, we'll go from here."

"But—"

"Oh, you needn't worry, Alec. They've all sheered off, right enough. They're not likely to hang about on what they think is a sinking ship; but we'll be cautious, in case they're not clear yet. Come on!"

Dick Farley waded past the bulkhead through the water that had already rushed into the hold.

"There's nobody above in the fo'c'sle," he muttered. "I can't hear a sound. It ought to be safe enough for us to venture."

And up he clambered through the scuttle, followed by Alec.

No sign of life was there in the fore-castle. The hunks were empty, while a row of hammocks swung mournfully, with a weird, ghostly suggestion about them, as if they knew they would never be occupied again.

A snit of oilskins hanging from a peg made both boys shiver, so like a man upon a gibbet did it look.

"Not a soul about!" said Dick.

"We'll go on deck."

And cautiously, looking and listening with all their might, they passed through the hatchway.

Lifeless the main-deck. Coils of rope and odds and ends were littered about in confusion, pointing to the hasty departure of the crew.

All around them the ocean stretched away, terrifying in its calm intensity. The two boys turned and stumbled aft, the gathering dusk making progress to those unused to the rolling ship slow and uncertain.

Suddenly an exclamation of alarm burst from Dick.

"Crouch down, Alec—crouch down! I heard a voice. There's someone on board, after all!"

They dropped where they stood, listening hard. A sound, incoherent but startling, came towards them.

"It must be a man; and he seems to be groanin'!"

"Yes," assented Dick, "groaning as if he's in pain. Something must be wrong. I wonder—Alec, look

there, right against the mizenmast! Can't you make out a figure?"

Alec Winter scrowed up his face to pierce the gathering gloom.

"I see him!" he answered. "He keeps in one position, and his hands are close to his side."

"Yes, yes; I see that, too, Alec! The man's bound, and can't move. The others must have turned against him, and left him here to die. Come on, Alec; we need have no fear. He'll prove no enemy of ours; quite the opposite."

Dick Farley jumped erect, and hurried towards the spot.

"Hallo!" he sang out, boldly enough.

The man lashed to the mast rolled his eyes in a startled fashion. It was the only sort of movement he could make, for he was bound hand and foot, while over his mouth was fastened a gag of leather.

A great, bearded, massive man of mighty limbs he was, with face tanned like saddle-leather; a man of prodigious breadth of shoulder and depth of chest, whose enormous strength must have given infinite trouble to those who had ultimately bound him.

Dick leapt forward, and with his knife cut the cord that held the gag in place. The sailor—for such he plainly was—gave a groan of relief.

"Thankes, mate—thankes!" he burst out, in a voice that seemed to come up from his sea-boots, as Dick set to work to sever the bonds which secured him. "Whales and white-bait, but it's a treat to get that lump o' leather out o' my mouth! It's the first time as Solomon Grim's bin trussed up like a fowl wi' the athym!"

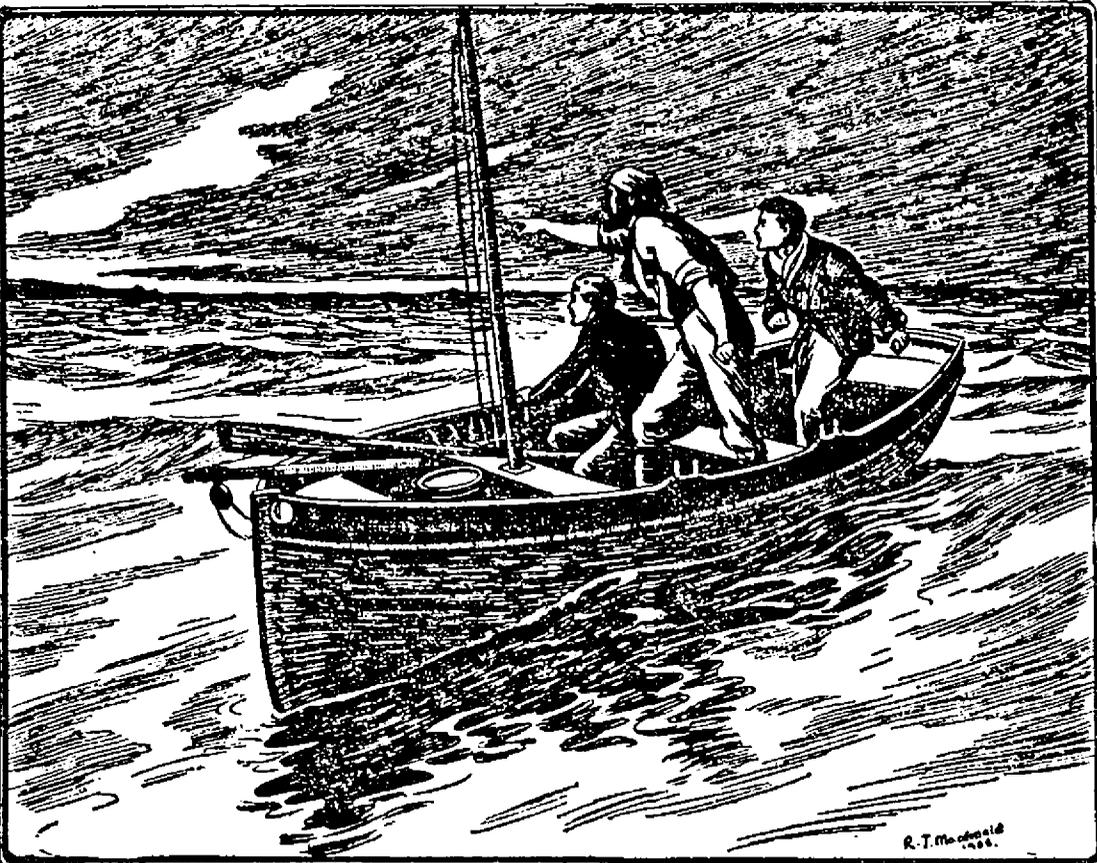
"What's happened? Who did this to you?" asked Dick, as he slashed through the last of the confining bonds.

Solomon Grim shut an angry glance to starboard, and shook his fist at the sea.

"Who done it? sez you. Why, them stunks aboard the long boat yonder! I dunne yo, mates—never clapped eyes on ye afore—and 'ow ye've come 'ere's beyond my reckonin' altogether. Stowaways, are ye?" he went on, as Alec Winter broke in with word of explanation.

"Well, then, ye've stowed yourselves away to some good end, anyways, and Solomon Grim's mortal grateful to ye!" He stretched out his cramped limbs as he spoke, and then shook himself. "But we ain't got no time fer chin-music!" he went on suddenly. "Dye know wet's appened to this ship? She's bin scuttled, and yonder goes the stunks as scuttled'er! But sho's fillin' fast, mates, all the time we're talkin', and—"

"Net fillin' as fast as you think, perhaps," burst in Dick Farley. "We've caulked the holes." And he



"Land! Land-o!" cried Sol Grim. "Heaven be praised, there's land in sight!"





"Then you're floored, sir," said the constable.  
 "Yah, yah, yah! You tink his chances ob recovering dose notes ain't good?"  
 "Well, I don't know about them being good; but, you see, he hasn't got any chances."  
 "Yah, yah, yah!"  
 "You seem glad."  
 "I'm downright, mighty glad, Bobby! Yah, yah, yah! I'm so glad dat I'll gib you dis sovereign for your trouble."  
 "I'm much obliged," said the man of law, slipping it into his pocket.  
 "But I'm not allowed to take anything like this, so you'll excuse me refusing it."  
 "Yah, yah, yah! Suttinly! You'd better buzz off home, Carter."  
 "How can I go home like this, you rilly rascal!"  
 "Dunno. But I don't see how you'm going any oder way."  
 "Lend me five pounds."  
 "Nunno!"  
 "I haven't got a penny. The hags have robbed me of every farthing!"  
 "Yah, yah, yah! It serves you right! How many hab you robbed? You hab turned starving women and children into de streets. Now, den, find your way home widout a penny in your pocket, for you'll get none from me."  
 "May my curse fall on your head!"  
 "Dunno, but seems to me your curse is a lot more likely to fall on your own head. Your curse, old hoss, is de lub ob money. Starving women and starving little children are a noting to you. You must hab your rents, and dey can go into de streets."  
 "There's the workhouse."  
 "Yes; but people willing to work should neber hab to go dere."  
 "You work a lot, don't you?"  
 "I don't work any. Still, I did, and hard, too, when I had to get my tiding. De Government ought to find work for ebery man and woman wanting it, and dey oughtn't to say dere shall be no sweating, den take contracts at a price dat dey know won't leabe room for fair wages. As for dose who can work and won't, dey ought to be sent abroad and made to work. Now buzz off! I hope de day ain't far distant when you hab to pull down ebery one ob dose slums you own and get de rents ob mansions for dem. I'm only a black nigger, and noting to be proud ob at dat; all de same, I wouldn't change places wid you, old hoss! Nunno, I wouldn't change places wid you. Golly! I'd rader change places wid Rory. Buzz off!"  
 "My friend," exclaimed a young curate, pushing through the crowd that had assembled, "I know that man, to my sorrow! I know his tenants, I have listened to your words."  
 "Eh?" exclaimed Pete, fixing his eyes on the stranger, whom the constable saluted.  
 He was a young man, with earnest grey eyes, with a sorrowful expression in them, which should not have been there at his time of life, except that his work amongst these starving poor was so very sad, and he so utterly helpless to relieve their awful poverty.  
 "I said I had listened to your words."  
 "Tink words am mighty cheap."  
 "Perhaps. But it occurred to me that yours were earnest words."  
 "I'd like to alter dis."  
 "So would I. Heaven knows that! A few men cannot alter it—cannot alter the poverty."  
 "Suppose dey can't," assented Pete, slipping his arm beneath the young clergyman's and marching him away. "I'm Pete. Jack and Sam are behind us."  
 "Well, I'm Charles!"  
 "Don't look here, Charlie boy, we free hab got de means ob doing a little help where you know it's deserved. You see, we don't know, and gibing two-free shillings away ain't much use."  
 "Indiscriminately, perhaps not. Still, two or three shillings help our work. Ah, if only all those who could afford it would help us with a shilling! How can the rich sit down to their sumptuous meals knowing little children are starving?"  
 "Don't see dat matters so long as dey gib away. 'Spect dey do gib."  
 "Some—many, perhaps; but not all."  
 "Well, it's a mighty difficult ting to know how to work it. Still, I'm going to gib you a hundred pounds for people in need."  
 "A hundred pounds!"  
 "Yes. I tink Jack and Sammy will do de same: See, boys, I'm gibing a hundred pounds to dis gentleman for de women and little children. Tink you would bof like to do de same?"  
 "Of course I would," said Jack.

"I reckon I'm the same way of thinking," said Sam, pulling some notes from his pocket. "Twenty fivers will do it. There you are, Pete."  
 "Here are mine," said Jack.  
 "Tink you'll find dat little lot correct, Charlie boy. Golly! Take dem. Dey won't burn you. We got dat money honestly."  
 "I'm sure of that, but—"  
 "Den stick to it. De ting ain't no benefit to you."  
 "It is. Ah, if you only knew how this will help my cause!"  
 "Den buzz off and help your cause."  
 "I want to find words—"  
 "Golly! What's de good ob words?"  
 "My dear boys, I want to think—"  
 "All right, Charlie, old hoss. If a man wants to tink, he's best left alone. Dis way, boys!"  
 Then Pete bolted, leaving Charlie standing on the pavement with a blank expression on his face and three hundred pounds in banknotes in his hand. However, he was perfectly safe. Those poor people knew him, and he knew them. They would never rob him.  
 About half an hour later Pete ascended the stairs to Maggie's lonely attic. He carried a two-shilling box of chocolates. Jack and Sam, who followed, carried an extraordinary lot of things, because Pete had landed them with his big parcels. Sam grumbled, but Pete only told him not to be lazy. "Hellup!" exclaimed Pete, entering the room. "Why, here is Charlie! How did you come here, old hoss?"

order. I remembered it by muscles. Come and help me unload dis little lot, Tom; but, mind, you ain't to eat a single mouthful ob pastry till you'm had some chicken."  
 As Pete chatted away he unloaded the good things.  
 Poor Maggie looked quite happy as she watched her little son eat; and had it not been for her visitors she would have paid little attention to her own meal, notwithstanding her late hardships.  
 As for Tom, he had never eaten such a dinner before in his life, and, being a sturdy, healthy lad, thanks to Maggie's tender care, he did ample justice.  
 "Mind smoking, my dear?" inquired Pete.  
 "If I did I would not tell you so," said Maggie, smiling. "But I do not."  
 "Bery well. Try one ob dese cigars, Charlie."  
 "Thank you!"  
 "Now, den, Maggie! Dat boy is a credit to you. Suppose I gib him a start in life?"  
 "Oh! Can you mean it?"  
 "Dere's only one ting I should feel inclined to start him in."  
 "What is that?"  
 "Should make him a sailor."  
 Maggie's face turned deathly white, and there was an expression of despair in her eyes as she gazed at Pete.  
 "He is all I have to love on earth, Pete," she said.  
 "Eh? You'm got to tink ob de boy. He ain't going to remain an ordinary sailor; he's going to hab facilities to

"Sure about dat?"  
 "Certain sure."  
 "Well, I want to see de captain."  
 "Then you can't."  
 "I ain't going off dis vessel till I do."  
 "Haw, haw, haw! You ain't?"  
 "Nunno!"  
 "Hi, Bill—Tom! Stop a bit, though. The captain is dead—died three days ago—and we buried him at sea. Sad, wasn't it?"  
 "Mighty sad. Did he die of low-drophobia?"  
 "He died of yaller fever, and its catching."  
 "Old hoss, put dat sovereign in your pocket, and lead me to de captain."  
 "Shiver my timbers! It's a good 'un, too! But you ain't going to harm the old man?"  
 "We'm mighty good friends. I'm tinkin of asking him to take a lad aboard his vessel."  
 "And I may have this thick 'un?"  
 "Dat's yours."  
 "This way, mate! You see, the old man don't care to be worried. You know him?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Ain't he splendid?"  
 "Dere's few better. Dat's why I'm asking dis favour. Hurry up! We hab only got two-free minutes."  
 "That's his cabin."  
 Pete entered it. "The old man" was certainly under thirty-five years of age, and he was a fine, handsome man, bronzed by tropical suns and a life on the ocean.  
 "Why, my dear old Pete," he cried, grasping that worthy's hand, "I'm

"A brave heart, Pete? You tink I keep a brave heart? Why, lad—you are a lad to me—at nights I sob in my cabin like a little child!"  
 "Now, ain't dat mighty ridiculous?"  
 "I suppose so."  
 "Suttinly it is. You can't alter bings dat hab occurred. Dey'm all for de best. We can't see it so at de time. Jack says dis is right, and, mind you, dat man is bound to be correct, dough I don't tell him so. Now, all dat has happened is de bery best for you. If you hadn't had any trouble in dis world you would hab ported your helm and, sent your vessel to port, hauled  
 "Here, you know more about the sea than that!" said the captain.  
 "How the thunder can you send your vessel to port when you port your helm? But is there no hope, Pete?"  
 "I dunno. Dat's for you to say.  
 "What's de time, old hoss?"  
 "Five minutes to eleven."  
 "Golly! I believe you are right, old hoss, I shall be back in five minutes."  
 "All right, old chap. I'll be here. You can bring the youngster."  
 Pete hurried up, and as he reached the vessel's side he saw Jack, Sam, and Maggie, with her little boy, who was playing with Rory, awaiting him.  
 "Dis way, my dear," said Pete, placing Maggie's arm within his. "Do inferior cattle follow on. I hab made arrangements for your boy to go to sea de next voyage ob dis vessel. Best for him, you know. Hallo, dere! Below! Braoe up your timbers and shiver your anchor chains!  
 "For Jack's come home from sea once more,  
 And bronzed and bronzed is he."  
 "How's dat, captain? What do you tink ob dat little lot, Tom Thornton? Dere's Maggie, your wife! Dere's Tom, your husband, my dear! Yah, yah, yah! And here's young Tom, de sailor!"  
 "Maggie!" gasped the young captain.  
 "Tom!" panted Maggie.  
 Then she was clasped to her husband's broad breast, and, as he pressed his lips to hers she could say nothing.  
 Pete turned away, and, pulling out his knife, carved "P E T E" in huge letters on the side of the captain's cabin. He appeared to be very much interested in his work.  
 "Maggie," cried Tom, "while this vessel floats that name shall appear there; and if she floats when I die, as I trust may be the case, that name shall be cut out and nailed upon my coffin lid!"  
 The captain had got his little son on his arm, while his other arm was round his wife's waist.  
 "Lassie," he exclaimed, "for all these weary years I have searched for you. No effort on my part has ever been spared, but all seemed hopeless till I met my old chum, Pete. He and his friends offered to go in search. I do not know how they found you. Until I clasped you to my breast I did not know that you were found. My step-mother told me you were dead, but I did not believe it."  
 "She thought I was dead, dear Tom," answered Maggie.  
 "I advertised in every paper," said Tom.  
 "Ah, Tom, I saw no papers! I could not spend money that way. It has been a hard struggle—a fight for bread."  
 "Maggie, what can I say? I would have given my life for you. You would not doubt it if you knew all I have done to find you, for I never believed my stepmother's assertion."  
 "She did not know my address. Tom. I thought that you were dead, and cared for nothing more, except our boy. But must we be parted again?"  
 "I'd leave the sea first! But there is no need for that. We sail a few days hence. Why not come with me, Maggie?"  
 "And little Tom?"  
 "Of course. Haven't I got to make a sailor of him? You will never want again, dear Maggie. I am captain of this vessel, and part owner. Will you come, little wife?"  
 "Of course I will, dear Tom! But what can we say to Pete and his friends?"  
 "Nothing—absolutely nothing, because words could never express our gratitude. But they shall give us a send-off, if they will."  
 "Golly! Ob course we will, Tom," said Pete. "Now, you and Maggie want to hab a long talk, so we are going; but we will come back for de send-off. And, mind, I neber got your letter. But dat don't matter now."  
 Thus Jack, Sam, and Pete's Quest was ended.



Pete shook his head and sighed as he gazed upon the sad scene. He read the tale of poverty in all its lurid light.

"Up the stairs, my dear fellow. And I have only just arrived. Knowing that Mrs. Thorn was in distress, I came here to help her, through you."  
 "Nunno! She don't need any help. I'm going to look after Maggie. You must do de helping somewhere else. I'm going to help dat girl off de face ob de earth, and shove her on de water."  
 "How?"  
 "Dere's two-free ways ob doing dat. Might chuck her ober London Bridge. Come here, you sah! Is your name Tom? My's! Well, dat's right. Now, try some ob dese chocolate-creams. We'm going to hab a late dinner. Romp down your parcels, boys. Dere's a chair for you, Charlie."  
 "I musn't stay."  
 "Eh? I dunno how you are going," said Pete, locking the door and putting the key in his pocket. "Yah, yah, yah, yah! You'm caught in a trap. You hab got to hab dinner wid us."  
 "Well, I should certainly like to do so."  
 "Don't matter weder you like or not. You'm got to hab it. Clergymen ain't allowed to fight; besides, you coudn't fight free men. I hab brought some knives and forks and glasses, in case Maggie was short ob dem. Cold fowls here. Ham here. I forget what dis shaky-looking ting is called. Oh, I disremember. Dat's muscles!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha! You mean brawn," said Jack.  
 "My remembering cistern again. Dat cistern is always getting out obwant any hands."

rise. Might command a vessel one day."  
 "Could you, do you think— If we were not parted."  
 "I'm talking 'bout de boy. We hab to consider him."  
 "What should I answer, sir?" murmured Maggie, turning to the young clergyman.  
 "That which your heart prompts."  
 "You can and will raise him from this misery, Pete!"  
 "Dat's so."  
 "Then I will never stand in his light."  
 "Dat's a brave girl. But see you dis, Maggie. Dere's no necessity to trouble ober what ain't happened in dis world. Maybe I may change my mind in de morning. He's too young to be a sailor yet; you know; and I ain't got de inclination to take all you lub from you. Nunno! Still, Jack and Sam will come here to-morrow, and you must go wid dem 'bout making Tom a sailor. Is dat settled?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Den good-night, my dear, and you keep a brave heart. Come along, boys!"  
 It was not at all a pleasant morning. In the first place it was raining, and in the next it was foggy. Pete growled at the weather as he made his way to the London Docks. A few inquiries enabled him to find the vessel he required—the Vista—which had come into dock two days previously.  
 "What is it, my man?" inquired a sailor, stepping forward. "We don't

downright glad to see you. I knew you would come when I wrote, but hardly expected you so soon. I see, lad—I see how it is."  
 "Where dere's life dere's hope."  
 "Yes. That's what makes us go on living."  
 "Talking 'bout anoder matter, do you tink you could place a likely lad aboard dis vessel for me? He's mighty young."  
 "It's a rough-and-tumble life, Pete."  
 "You've risen in it."  
 "Not as high as you've risen out of it."  
 "Dat was chance."  
 "So was mine, I expect. Still, I'll do my best for the youngster. How old is he?"  
 "Bout—well, he ain't struck ten."  
 "I say, that's too young to send a lad to sea!"  
 "Not if de captain looks after him."  
 "But what about his teaching?"  
 "He has been well taught. You could help him on."  
 "Why, so I could, old chap—so I could. Ay, and so I would! She's a staunch little craft, and I have some shares in her. Yes, I could help a lad on. A likely lad is he?"  
 "You'm guessed first time. Well built, and, like me, good-looking."  
 "So long as he has a heart like yours I don't care for his looks. Trot him aboard. But that will do later. Sit down, Pete."  
 "Fine ting to be captain and part owner ob a vessel like dis," observed Pete. "Fine ting to keep a brave heart above it all!"

"THE END."  
 (Another "Circus Pete" story next week.)



**THE 1st CHAPTER.**  
**The Two Clerks—Holiday Plans—Ben's Temptation.**

IT was six o'clock of an April evening, on the Thursday before Easter, and the rays of the sinking sun, shining over the towers of Westminster and across the curve of the Thames to the City, brightened even the dingy offices of Mr. Brook Ganthony, the weakly East India merchant of King William Street, E.C., and the Hawthorns, Hampstead. Mr. Ganthony was still in his private-room, busy with a pile of account-books; but most of his staff of clerks had finished their duties and gone home, only two remaining in the outer office.

At ten minutes past six, Alfred Nash, a youth of nineteen, flung his pen into a tray, and with a sigh of content climbed down from his stool. Having changed his coat, and picked up his hat and stick, he hesitated for a moment, stroking a budding moustache. Then he stepped over to the desk where sat the junior clerk, a lad of seventeen, with a frank and pleasing face that showed signs of worry. Ben Marker blotted an envelope, and glanced up at his companion.

"Are you off?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'm off," said Alfred.

"Good-bye to work till next Tuesday morning. I'm going to have a ripping time, if the weather holds good. But why are you looking so glum?"

"I didn't know I was, Alf."

"Well, you are. You ought to be cheerful, with four whole days to do nothing in. Look here, I'm fixed up for the next two days, but I haven't planned anything for Monday. What do you say to joining me in a trip to Hampton Court?"

"I only wish I could; but, you see—"

"I don't see. I mean to stand treat, old fellow, if you'll let me."

"That's awfully good of you," said Ben, flushing a little. "But I can't go, Alf, really I can't. That's straight. I—I have something else to do."

"Promised your best girl, eh?" said Alf. "Then I'm not in it." And with a laugh he took himself off.

Five minutes later Ben had finished his work, but he still sat at his desk, with a sad and wistful expression. He was thinking of all the pleasures that more fortunate people would enjoy between now and Tuesday, and he could not help envying them. He longed for a holiday himself, if it was only a trip to Hampstead Heath, or to Kew Gardens, but he felt that his spare time ought to be better employed.

He had nothing to do as yet—his statement to Alf had not been quite correct—but, if possible, he meant to find some employment, during Friday, Saturday, and Monday, by which he could earn a little extra money. And money was badly needed at his humble home in Clerkenwell, for his father, and his two elder brothers, Jerry and Herbert, had been out of work for weeks, and still had no prospects of getting any.

For a month nearly every penny of the young clerk's salary had gone to the support of the family, which included an invalid mother and a sister aged nine; but that had not sufficed to keep poverty from the door, and now, to make matters worse, Mrs. Marker's physician had prescribed certain things that Ben was unable to buy.

This state of affairs was not known at the office, or suspected by Mr. Ganthony, for the lad had pride of the right sort—not the false kind, as we shall see—and he had kept his worries to himself. He could have asked a stranger to give employment to his father and brothers, but he would not appeal to his employer. He knew, moreover, that the merchant had no vacancies at present.

"I can't waste those three days," he told himself. "I must get something to do, if I only earn a few shillings. But what is it to be?"

That was the question, and Ben

sat puzzling over it, growing more despondent as he realised that he had but a slim chance of making a profit out of his holidays. A telephone-bell rang, and for a moment Mr. Ganthony was heard talking at the instrument. Then he opened the door of his private-room and looked out.

"I thought you had gone, Marker," he said. "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, sir." And the lad obeyed the summons.

Mr. Brook Ganthony was a large, florid gentleman, with a benevolent face that did not belie his nature. Personal attention to business had been the secret of his success, and on his desk, strapped together, were three or four account-books which he meant to take home with him, as he was in the habit of doing at week-ends. He frowned slightly as he observed that the junior clerk's clothing was threadbare.

"You may call a hansom for me, Marker," he said. "My carriage will not be here to-day. And then I wish you would go to a registry-office, the address of which I will give you, and ask if they can supply a second footman. But I fear it will be useless to send you. It is not likely that I can get a man at such short notice, and for so short a time."

"Do you need one, sir?"

"I do, and at once. My wife has just telephoned to me that our second footman was taken suddenly ill and had to go home. He was under notice to leave, and a new man is to take his place next Tuesday morning. Meanwhile, I must have somebody else, for I am giving a dinner-party to-morrow, and on Monday evening we hold a reception."

"You want a man for only four days, sir?" inquired Ben, his face flushing as a bold idea occurred to him.

"That is all—until Monday evening."

"I suppose he would have to wear livery, sir?"

"Of course. That is understood."

"And what would his duties be, sir?"

"Anything that he was told to do. It is tight work. But why do you ask, Marker? Do you happen to know of any person who would suit me?"

"I do, sir," replied Ben, after a brief hesitation. "I know a man who would be glad to come. He is a young man, not much older than me."

"What is his name?"

"Tom Joicey, sir, and so can my father."

"Your father?" exclaimed Mr. Ganthony, with a look of surprise.

"Has the man ever worked for him?"

"No, sir; not exactly that," the lad answered. "But—my father knows him well, and can give him a good character."

"What experience has the man had?"

"Not much, sir; but he is honest and willing."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Ganthony. "I hardly know what to say. But I have no time to waste at registry-offices. You may tell Tom Joicey to present himself at my residence at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, Marker, and if he proves a capable person, I will pay him a couple of guineas, under the circumstances."

"Thank you, sir," Ben said eagerly. "I am very grateful to you, sir—I mean that Tom Joicey will be grateful," he added confusedly. "I am sure he will—"

"That will do," broke in Mr. Ganthony. "My cab, Marker."

"I will fetch it at once, sir," replied the lad. And he hurried off with his head full of his extraordinary project.

**THE 2nd CHAPTER.**  
**The Second Footman—The Suspicious Waiter—Ben's Reward.**

HERE'S a green hand at it, there's no denying that," declared Lobb, the butler; "but I find him quick to learn, and most obliging."

which the housemaid threw a dusting-cloth at the cook. The time was the morning of Easter Monday, the scene was the servants' hall in Mr. Brook Ganthony's big mansion at Hampstead, and the subject of the foregoing conversation was Ben Marker, alias Tom Joicey, who at the moment was polishing brass upstairs.

The young clerk's plan had begun well, and it promised to end well. Since Friday morning he had filled the post of second footman at the Hawthorns, doing all sorts of odd jobs, even the most menial, with an alacrity and willingness that had won good opinions for him.

Clad in a suit of livery, and disguised by a very slight moustache, he had more than once been face to face with Mr. Ganthony, who did not dream of the lad's identity.

It was a humiliating position for Ben, and he felt the sting of it; but he had stifled his pride for love of his mother.

His short term of service had now nearly expired. In a few more hours he could go home, with a couple of guineas in his pocket, and to-morrow morning he would be at his desk at the merchant's office in King William Street.

Mr. Ganthony had a large circle of friends and acquaintances, and at seven o'clock in the evening the Hawthorns was thrown open for the reception, which was to include music and dancing, and elaborate refreshments.

Guests arrived in a stream, some



Mr. Ganthony burst into the room, followed by the butler and footman. The combatants were quickly dragged apart.

on foot, some in cabs and carriages, and many in electric broughams and motor-cars.

Several waiters had been engaged, and one of these, a slim, clean-shaven man with grey eyes, had attracted Ben's attention from the first, for the man strongly reminded him of Stephen Fendall, who had been Mr. Ganthony's bookkeeper until a year ago, when he had been dismissed for dishonesty.

He might have turned waiter, and he could have come to the Hawthorns without much fear of recognition, since he had formerly worn a beard and moustache.

Ben was at the beck and call of the butler and the first footman, and during the evening he was kept constantly busy.

He often got a glimpse of the suspected man, and at length, finding an opportunity, he ventured to question the butler.

"Can you tell me who that waiter is, Mr. Lobb?" he inquired.

"His name is Rickett," replied the butler, "and that's all I know about him."

"Then he has never been here before?"

"No; this is the first time they've sent him. Queer eyes he's got, Joicey."

"That's just what struck me," said Ben.

He did not relax his vigilance, though he doubted if there was any need for it. Half an hour later, when most of the guests had crowded to the drawing-room to listen to a famous Italian tenor, Ben came up from the kitchen with a tray of glasses.

Looking into the dining-room as he came along the hall, he saw that Mr. Rickett had disappeared; and then, as he glanced up the wide staircase, he fancied that he saw a shadow flit round the landing.

"Could that have been Rickett?" the lad asked himself.

He was more than suspicious. For an instant he hesitated. No other servants were near, so he hastily placed the tray on a chair, and glided up the staircase to the first floor.

He stopped, seeing nobody, and then crept along the corridor. He heard the Italian singer below, and suddenly, above the rich notes that filled the house, he caught a sharp click and a grating noise.

The sound came from a door on his left, and there he paused for a moment. Then, noiselessly opening the door, he stepped over the threshold, and beheld a startling sight.

The room, a small apartment lined with books, was Mr. Ganthony's private study. A coal fire was burning in the grate—it was a chilly evening—and a shaded electric lamp showed a man standing by a roll-top desk, which he had just forced open.

"What are you doing here? Let me go, or I'll kill you!"

"I won't let you go, Stephen Fendall!" gasped the lad, who knew the truth now. "Help—help!"

With that, a muscular hand fastened on his throat, and he could make no further outcry. The two scuffled to and fro, fighting desperately, until they tripped and fell; when they rolled over the floor and collided with a table containing books, which was upset with a crash.

Alarmed by the noise, fearing that it would be heard above the singing, Stephen Fendall now thought only of escape; but he could not break away.

Ben pluckily held to his prisoner, though the grip on his throat was suffocating, and when the struggle had lasted another minute, and the lad was about exhausted, Mr. Ganthony burst into the room, followed by the butler and footman. The combatants were quickly dragged apart, and hauled to their feet.

"Why, surely this is young Marker!" exclaimed the astounded merchant.

"And this is Stephen Fendall, sir!" cried Ben. "Don't you recognise him? I've had my eye on him all the evening, and I followed him up here. I caught him in the act of tearing the leaves out of one of your account-books—"

"That's a lie!" raved the unmasked waiter. "It was the lad who—"

"I believe Marker!" broke in Mr. Ganthony. "Take this scoundrel downstairs, by the back way!" he added to the servants. "Look him up securely, and then fetch the police!"

The butler and footman left the room, with Stephen Fendall in their grasp, and when the door had been closed the merchant turned to Ben.

"Now for your explanation!" he said curtly. "So you are Tom Joicey, the second footman?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"And you have been employed in my house under false pretences. What does this masquerade mean? Why have you played such a trick?"

"I—I didn't mean any harm, sir," faltered Ben. "I will tell you all about it, and I hope you will forgive me. My father and two brothers have been out of work for weeks, and money was scarce at home, and—I wanted to earn some during the holidays; but I didn't know how, not until you spoke of wanting a second footman, and then—I told you about Tom Joicey. That was the only reason, sir. I've been a good servant. I wouldn't have dared to do it, sir, but, you see, my mother is—"

The lad's voice choked, and his eyes filled with tears.

"My mother has been ill for a long time," he continued, struggling with his emotion, "and she gets better very slowly, and the doctor said if we wanted her to be well and strong again she must have port-wine, and chicken, and things like that; but we couldn't afford it, sir, and that is why I was tempted to—"

"I forgive you freely!" exclaimed Mr. Ganthony, as he clasped the lad's hand. "You are a brave, courageous boy, with no false pride about you. I admire you for it, Marker. That's the way to rise in life. And you have done me a great service by frustrating Stephen Fendall's revenge, for those account-books are of priceless value."

Mr. Ganthony paused, took out a pocket-book, and handed two ten-pound notes to the lad.

"There you are," he said. "There's an Easter egg for you, and it has been well earned; and hereafter your salary will be increased by fifteen shillings a week. But why didn't you tell me that you were in such straits at home? I would gladly have helped you. Send your father and brothers to me to-morrow, and I will find employment for them in the warehouse."

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you?" cried the lad.

"Don't cry, Joicey," said Mr. Ganthony. "Joicey, eh? Ha, ha! A good joke. I've half a mind to keep you on as second footman!"

An hour later, after Stephen Fendall had been taken to the police-station and the guests had all gone, a hansom cab rattled away from the Hawthorns, bound for the humble little villa at Clerkenwell; and in the cab, no longer wearing the livery of menial servitude, was Ben Marker, the happiest lad in all London.

THE END.

(Two fine, complete stories on Tuesday next.)



Brief Summary of the Previous Chapters.

**D**OLLY REDCASTLE was a youth very fond of practical jokes. That was his only fault, for otherwise he was a staunch British lad of the type of which Britain is proud. But these practical jokes were so troublesome to his father that he sent him to a school kept by a certain Dr. Quilter, who was noted all over the land as a boy-tamer. On his way to this school—which went by the name of Austin Towers—Dolly met with two chums who had as great a love for mischief as he himself possessed.

The three determined to make things hum at Austin Towers. This determination was certainly carried out, and both boys and masters soon looked on the three as a type of boy with which they had never before met.

Dolly's stepbrother, a youth named Algernon, did all he could to get the lad into trouble. His latest plot was the bribing of a man named Marten to make Dolly drunk.

This Marten succeeded in doing, and Dolly was found helplessly drunk by Dr. Quilter and his father—Colonel Redcastle. But, thanks to the efforts of his two chums, Dolly was cleared of all guiltiness. But for reasons of his own the lad would not allow his friends to expose Algy. So Marten bore the brunt of Colonel Redcastle's wrath.

Later, Marten thought of a plan whereby he might get even with Dolly.

A sharp-faced, shifty-eyed stable-boy of about eighteen came to the door. He was as swarthy as an Italian, and evidently had gipsy blood in him. If so, it did little credit to his race, for he looked little better than an animal, if his low forehead and slack mouth were anything to go by.

"Aho, Mart!" he said, with a swift glance, "who's bin twistin' your tail? You looks fit to jeb a knife into a cove!"

"How do you know I've had trouble?" said Marten; for he was now outwardly calm, however much the fires of rage burned within.

"Don't you be too sharp, Jesse, or you'll get hurt!"

"Whatcher come for?" was all Jesse replied. "Never knew you to turn up without wantin' somethin'!"

"For a look at your handsome and engagin' features, and the pleasure of your polite conversation!" said Marten sarcastically. "Are you still-lookin' after Black Jack?"

"You bet I am!"

"How's he going?"

The stable-boy grinned, showing a row of yellow teeth.

"He as nigh as a touch had the guv'nor last week. The old 'un was lookin' at Jack, who was faced round in 'is stall, when suddenly out goes both Jack's fore-hoofs like a sledge-ammer. They missed by an inch or two, or the guv'nor 'd bin planked by now! Jeck tore the seat out of Tim Brown's breeches yest'day! If the cloth 'adn't given way, Tim 'd be in the mortuary! Law, I did lart!"

"His temper don't improve, then? How did he kill that groom last summer, d'you know?"

"Course I do; I was there! Jack grabbed him by the neck, an' started pile-drivin' him. 'E didn't look like a man when the 'oss 'ad done with 'im!"

Jesse related this anecdote of the famous man-killer as a great joke.

"That sounds promising," said Marten. "I wonder he doesn't do the same by you."

"Garn!" retorted the stable-boy. "I'm the only bloke alive can handle 'im; we're like brothers, Jack an' me. If I left, they'd 'ave to shoot 'im! I dessey they will some day. The old 'un only keeps him for a curiosity like."

"Is the horse savage to-day?"

"He's alters savage; don't I tell yer! Why, yesterday I ketchtd a stray dorg an' put it in his stall, an' Jack tore it to bits with 'is teeth an' 'oofs till you couldn't ha' toid wot it was! Haw, haw, haw!"

Marten's eyes glittered as he looked at the boy. He lowered his voice a little.

"Suppose a stranger went into his stall to-day? Suppose he were locked in?"

"He'd servo 'im like he did the dorg."

"The—the man wouldn't get out alive—eh?"

"Not his, that's a cert! You pop in, an' I'll lay 'a thousand' to three, he finishes you inside a minute!"

"Thanks, but it's no bet. But look here, Jesse. What if the stranger came here alone to see the horse? Could you find a way to get him into Black Jack's loose-box, and belt the door on him?"

Marten's eyes burned so hotly and his voice was so low, that Jesse stared at him curiously.

"What d'yar mean, Mart?"

"What I say. Just cast your eye over these."

Marten took out two crisp five-pound notes, and slowly opened them. The stable-boy's face lit up with an avaricious gleam. He had never owned the quarter of such a sum in his life.

"You can punch those, Jesse, if you de what I tell you."

The swarthy youth looked sideways at the notes.

"Jest tell us what the game is, an' bew you reckon it's to be done," he said, under his breath. "I'm game, but I don't want to swing for it!"

**M**ARTEN'S hands clenched till his knuckles were white. Then he pulled himself together again, and grow calm once more, and his eyes, that had been filled with rage, regained their usual cunning look. He looked all the more dangerous; the fury of the tiger had given way to the cunning of the ape.

"I've been making a fool of myself," he murmured. "There's a very good chance here, if that—that—" he could not find a word evil enough for Dalton—"don't change his mind. He'll see Black Jack before the day's out."

Marten stood and thought for some minutes, his eyes closing up to mere slits in his head. Then he nodded to himself.

"It'll come off; and it's safe for me, I reckon! Now this is a job that needs money."

He went round to the back of the stables and took out a greasy pocket-book. There were four banknotes in it, amounting to £20. The Orphanage had not acquired the whole, after all, for these remained from some other ventures of Marten's, including Algy's former payment, four days before.

"All that's left!" said Marten grimly. "He's robbed me of the others, but I don't grudge these to wipe the score out! I'll tear plenty more of 'em off Chilterlow, once that young hound's out of the way! It's worth payin' for, if anything evar was!"

Breathing heavily, Marten put the notes back, and walked out across the square.

Jesse Quorn still looks after the horse, an' I never knew him refusa a job with money in it. He's broke now, as usual. Besides I've got that bit of a hold over him yet, and he won't go back on me; he daren't!"

Marten, still thinking busily, turned up between two of the buildings that formed the big square where the auction-mart was held, and reached a long row of stables just beyond. There was scarcely anybody about there, and Marten went up to a door marked No. 19, and looked over the open top of it.

"Rot! Look, Jesse, between those buildings there, down in the square where the auctioneer is. D'ye see the old gant with the white moustacho? It's some way off, but you've got quick eyes. An' d'ye see that young"—Marten choked; he could not find a word to his tongue—"that brat beside him?"

"Ay, I do!" replied Jesse, who could just see Dalton standing beside his father, watching some colts that were being sold.

"You'd know him again?"

"Anywheres!"

"It's pretty suro he's coming here to see Black Jack later on. If he should happen to get locked in the horse's loose-box and left to take his chance, these bits of paper are yours, Jesse!"

"Ah," said the stable-boy, with an ugly grin, "hand 'em over to me, Mart! I'll manage it!"

"No fear! You'll be paid when the job's done! You know I always fork out straight, Jesse. Here's two quid for a sweetener, to show it's all square. It'll only be another victim of Black Jack's!"

Jesse nodded.

"You do nothing. All you need is to get him inside the horse 'l! do the rest! There won't be any evidence; he'd no business to go in Jack's stall! The only thing I'm afraid of is that two pals of the eub may come with him. If they do, you must manage to separate 'em, an' get him in alone."

"I'll do it some'ow!" replied Jesse, pouching the two sovereigns. "It'll be a bit o' spart for Black Jack!" he added, grinning.

"It will! How do you mean to get the boy into the stall? He may refuse to go."

"Easy! I'll swop the 'osses over; put old Simple Simon into Jack's loose-box, an' Jack into Simple Simon's. The name-plates are over the troughs. Tban I'll get 'im into the Simple's loose-box along with Jack. You leave it to me, Mart; I'll manage it!"

"You're sharp enough," said Marten, with an approving nod. "Take care you don't go back on me!" he added ominously. "No tricks, Jesse. Remember, I've got my thumb on you yet!"

"That's all right. You keep those two sovereigns ready; I shall want 'em afore the day's cut! And now you'd better clear off, an' not be seen talking to me."

The two rascals winked and parted.

"I wish," murmured Marten to himself, as he left the stables, "I dared take Chilterlow into the game an' touch him for it. He stands to win most when it's done; but he might shy at this, and it's not the sort of secret one can trust a fool with! I'll squeeze him afterwards. There's times when revenge tastes even better than cold cash!"

Portland fer 'ousebreakin'! Now then, where is it?"

The little tin cups were changed round dexterously on the wooden tray that served as a table, and the old, old game of thimble-rig was open to anybody who had a few shillings to lose.

The sharp-looking gentleman, with the ancient top-hat cocked over one eye, dropped a pea on the table, popped a thimble over it, moved it in and out among the other two thimbles, and challenged the world to say which thimble the pea was now under. A fair-sized crowd was before the table, which stood well outside the grounds where the horse sale was going on.

"It's under the left-hand one," murmured Tommy to Dalton, for the three chums were watching the business with their usual air of bland patronage. "My heagie boyo followed it!"

"You let it alone, dear boy," said Dalton. "We don't want our half-crowns to join those of the noble army of mugs!"

"I ain't goin' to!" replied Tommy.

A stout young miller, in a floury coat, who had been watching very keenly, put down his half-crown, and named the left-hand thimble. The gentleman in the top-hat lifted it, and showed there was no pea underneath.

"Then where is it?" said the miller, in a rage, as his half-crown was swept away.

"Ere it is, me lord," rejoined the thimble-rigger, raising the right-hand thimble, and showing the pea. "Them bonny blue blinkers o' yours weren't quite sharp enough! 'Ave another go, like a real sportsman!"

The miller tried again, and a third time, being in an obstinate mood, and each time his half-crown was annexed by the gentleman in the hat.

"The crowd fought shy after this, till a simple-looking countryman tried his luck, and won three half-crowns running, lost a fourth, won two more, and retired rejoicing. Then there was quite a rush of custom, and five or six rusties lost half-crowns, the thimble-rigger and some friends behind him meanwhile keeping a sharp look-out for the police.

"The unmitigated mugs!" murmured Montague. "Don't they see those fellows who won are confederates of the old bird whe's workin' the thimbles?"

"I thought this game was dyin' out," said Tommy. "Everybody must know it's a dud!"

"It flourishes in rural districts like this. The simple natives of the soil like to be doggish, an' risk their half-crowns."

"The beauty's taken about three quid!" said Montague. "It oughtn't to be allowed. D'you know how they do it?"

"Yes. The governor told me once," murmured Dalton. "There are several ways, but the usual one is like this. The pea is a bit of soft bread-crumbs rolled into a pill. When the chap pretends to put the thimble over it, he sticks his middle finger-nail into the pea an' lifts it away."



The stable-boy received a left-hander of the Redcastle brand that stretched him flat on his back.

"So it isn't under any of the thimbles?" said Tommy.

"That's it. They do it very neatly, and keep the pea hidden. Then, when he pretends to show it under one of the other thimbles, he brushes it off his nail as he raises the thimble, an' there it is. Heads I win, tails you lose!"

"Ho!" said Montague thoughtfully; "likewise ha! It's like that, is it? Stand by me, you chaps, an' support me if I faint. I'm goin' to have a half-crown's worth!"

"What for? Don't be an ass, Monty!" said Tommy anxiously.

But Montague pressed forward to the little table.

"Walk up, me noble young sportsman!" said the gentleman with the hat cocked over his eye. "Down with yer 'alf-dollar, an' win oho from poor old Billy Beach!"

"Put a good one alongside it," said Montague; "none of your snides! I'll make it five shillings if you'll let me lift the thimble I choose myself!"

"Wot-ho! Here's a young dook thinks he's caught us out without our mar!" rejoined the gentleman in the top-hat. "Five bob be it then. Ere you are. Lift the thimble, an' welcome!" He laid the little pill down. "Now, me lord, keep yer eye on the pea. Now it's covered. You know it's there, don't yer? One—two—three!" He moved the thimbles in and out. "Now, then, which does yer worship choose?"

There was dead silence among the crowd. Everybody craned their necks to see.

"This one," said Montague, placing his finger on the middle thimble. With a quick movement he knocked both the other two thimbles over. "It isn't under either of those, so this must be the one," said Montague blandly. "You can lift it yourself if you like."

There was a moment's surprised pause, and the thimble-rigger, looking very black, swore a great oath. But from the crowd came a sudden burst of applause and a roar of laughter.

"Well done, kiddy! Pipped him fairly! Show the pea an' pay up, old bottle-nose! Good for the young 'un!"

The thimble-rigger, angry as he was, dared not hesitate. To show no pea under the third thimble would be to give himself away, and probably be mobbed by the crowd. He lifted the thimble with a growl. The little pill lay there, sure enough, and Montague swept up the half-crowns.

As he did so and stepped back, he found himself surrounded by three shabby ruffians, one of whom thrust his face into the boy's with a savage gesture. They were the thimble-rigger's confederates.

"Bail out that five bob, or we'll put yer through it!" he snarled. "D'yer think you're goin' to play the funny business on us?"

"Here, come off here!" exclaimed Dalton and Tommy, hurrying to their chum's rescue. "Leave him alone, you brutes!"

Dalton forced his way between. The three rogues turned savagely on the boys, who would have come off badly but for a cry that was heard from the thimble-rigger's table.

"Nix! Here's the rozzers!"

Two constables were seen rapidly walking towards the crowd, and in a moment the thimbles and tray had vanished, and the gentleman in the top-hat was vanishing through the throng. Two of the boys' assailants followed suit. The third, who had first spoken, gripped Montague's arm with a growl, but Montague drove an elbow into the man's ribs with a force that left him doubled up and gasping, and darting under his arm, escaped with his oluns.

"Here you are, lads! Catch!" he cried, at the same moment jerking one of the half-crowns he had won to an old beggar who was bobbling past, and the other to a ragged urobin, who fled away whooping with joy, thrusting the unexpected gift into the pocket of his tattered breeches.

"An' that's all right!" observed Montague, strolling back to the square with his chums. "One can't stick to money made in that way, dear boys; but it worried the gentleman in the hat, an' pleased the old man an' the kid, so we're all happy."

"Very neat," agreed Dalton.

"One quite enjoyed seein' the thimble-rigger open his mouth so wide, only it was sort of lucky for us, I fancy, that the men in blue turned up jnst then. We might have had our physiognomies obliterated, so to speak."

"To tell the truth, I'd forgotten the chap might have some bullies to back him up," returned Montague;







# CIRCUS PETE

**A Grand New Series of Complete Stories. By S. CLARKE HOOK.**

**(S)** N Southampton landing-stage stood Pete, a negro lad. Although so young, his tall form was perfectly developed, and there was a sign of strength in his every movement.

"So dese are de Southampton Docks, are dey? Seems to me rader too much sloppiness 'bout dem. P'raps dat's de rain. I dunno how it is, but when a nigger lad works his passage ober, seems to me de captain might gib him someting to start wid, 'cos a bent halfpenny ain't much capital."

"Mind your pockets, Maria!" said a stout gentleman to a big lady who was standing near Pete, and had overheard his soliloquy. "Ah! Hang your box, fellow! I have damaged my shins against it!"

This latter was addressed to a clean-shaven, jovial-looking individual, who wore a tall hat very much on one side, an enormous gold watch-chain, and smoked a big cigar.

"Sorry, dear boy!" he said. "You should look before you leap."

"You have no right to leave your chest there."

"Just so. But, again, I have no strength to shift it. I am sorry the fact of your having barked your shins makes you growl and kick up a shindy; but I infinitely prefer your having done that to my lugging that chest about."

"Tink you would like dat chest carried, eh?" inquired Pete.

"That is what I am waiting for; but it wants a couple of men—Well!"

Pete seized the heavy chest by the handle, swung it on his shoulder, and crunched the big lady's bonnet, for she had got too close to the back of that box. She was evidently a lady of action and not words. Grasping her gamp more firmly, she smashed it over Pete's woolly pate.

"Hi, golly! Where's all dis coming from?" roared Pete, slewing round and catching Maria's husband a fearful crack over the head with the back corner of the box. "Ee a little less energetic, my dear. You'm hurting my noddle wid dat gamp."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the owner of the chest. "It's awfully funny!"

"I dunno!" growled Pete. "It don't feel so funny to me as it looks to you, old boss. I neber was much at arithmetic, but I tink dere's some fractions in my head now."

"What's your name, lad?"

"Pete!"

"Well, Pete, my name is James Travers, better known as Jimmy. Cart that chest this way."

"I have been assaulted, fellow!" roared the angry man, stepping in front of Jimmy.

"Well, dear boy," exclaimed that worthy, knocking the ash off his cigar. "I don't suppose it's the first time, and I'm thumping certain it won't be the last, if you don't get out of my way. Come along, Pete!"

"Dis road to London?" bawled Pete. "Mako way for de sea chest. By your leave, dere. Make way!"

And people made it, because Pete followed Jimmy, who went at a fairly good pace. Once or twice he turned to glance at Pete, who kept close behind him.

It was evident that Jimmy knew his way about the place. He turned down several back streets, until at last they arrived at the outskirts of the town, and here he stopped at an open space, with a high hoarding round it. Unlocking a door in the hoarding, he directed Pete to follow him.

"Put the chest down there," he said, placing three halfpence in Pete's hand as he obeyed.

"Thank you, old boss! Dat makes twopence capital. We'm getting on. Good-night!"

"Come here!" cried Jimmy.

"Eh?"

"I have given you a halfpenny too much. Give it back."

"Golly! No fear. Dis child don't mind working hard to earn money, but he ain't such a mighty idiot as to return any dat he has earned."

"I'm glad to see you ain't quite a fool. Do you mean to say you are satisfied with three-halfpence for carrying that thundering thing all this way?"

"Don't see why not. It ain't taken me so mighty long, Mr.— Let's see, what was dat name?"

"James Travers, Esquire. Call me Jimmy."

"Well, Jimmy, old boss, dis money is a lot to me; I ain't returning it."

"I'll punch your head if you don't!"

"Den start punching. I'd rader hab my noddle punched dan go to bed hungry, 'specially as I shall do a bit ob punching back."

"Well, will you carry that chest for another mile for a penny?"

"Now you'm talking!" cried Pete, swinging it on his shoulder once more. "Lead on, Jimmy, old boss! You'm a mighty good sort."

"I should be a mighty bad sort to pay a lad three-halfpence for the work you have done, lad. There is half-a-crown!"

"Eh?"

"Keep it."

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, placing the chest on the ground. "Yah, yah, yah! Scuse me!"

Then he took a run forward, turned a somersault without touching the ground, and landed on his feet.

"You'm a downright good sort, Jimmy! Good-night, old boss, and Pete's best wishes go wid you."

"Come back, boy! What are you going to do in England?"

"Dunno!"

"What have you done so far?"

"Circus work."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, this is a circus, and I'm its sole proprietor."

"Golly! Suppose you couldn't gib me some sort ob job?"

"What can you do, and how much do you ask?"

"Nuff for food to start wid; den what I'm worf. Best try me as to what I can do."

"Any references?"

"What's de good ob dem?"

"Come this way. Never mind the box."

The circus proprietor—for such he really was—led the way into a larger booth.

"That's the circus," observed Jimmy, with some pride. "Now, then, tumble about! If you can really do anytbing, I will employ you, lad. I like you. Come here. Phew! You have some muscle. Thunder! Why, you are made of steel!"

Jimmy prodded Pete about. He punched him in the chest, and seized him by the muscles at the back by his shoulder-blades; then caught hold of his biceps.

"Can you manage a bit, old boss?" inquired Pete.

"Used to."

"Take a run. Hands on my shoulders. I get you by de wrists and balance you."

"I'm too heavy."

"Nunno!"

"You couldn't bear it, and I'd hurt myself."

"Shouldn't tink so."

"I should. But here goes. Ready!"

"Guessed first time."

Jimmy dropped the stump of his cigar and stamped on it; then he carefully placed his hat on the floor, and, taking a run, leapt into the air as though to turn a somersault over Pete's head, on whose shoulders he placed his hands.

"Up we go!" cried Pete, grasping his wrists, and, raising him at arms-

length above his head, kept him balanced.

"Backward turn, old boss. Golly! You'm a good one at it, too. Yah, yah, yah! You'm landed on your hat!"

"Bust the hat!"

"Yah, yah, yah! Looks 'bout busted, too. I shouldn't wonder if—"

"Help—help! Oh, Jimmy, help me!"

"'Tis the fair Rosamond!" roared Jimmy. "I'm coming to your aid."

"Fire—fire!"

"Where are you girl?"

"Here! No, blockhead! Here! Help!"

"Where can the wench be?"

"Here! Can't you hear me?"

"Of course I can hear you," growled Jimmy, rushing across the circus, for the voice came from the other side now. Then it appeared to come from his damaged file.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he gasped, picking up the hat, which seemed to be shrieking at him.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete.

"What! You mean to say that's you—that you're a ventriloquist?"

"Golly, golly! You did look funny bolting across de ring after dat voice! I'm mighty sorry, Jimmy, old boss; but when I had started you running after dat voice, you looked so funny dat I hadn't got de heart to stop you. Yah, yah, yah! You dunno how sorry I am!"

"You look it! But dere's nothing to be sorry at. I can take you on, without a doubt. Let's see." Circus Pete, or the Black Diamond.

"Hadn't you best see what I can do first?"

"Fire ahead, Pete!"

"Tight-rope up dere, ain't it?"

"Yes. If you can do anything on that I'll have the nets stretched."

"Nunno! I'll show you a bit ob tumbling."

Then Pete went round the circus, which was a large one, and he finished

up by walking up to Jimmy on his hands.

"How's dat, old boss?" inquired a voice, which appeared to come from Pete's boots.

"In dat case, we will try anoder turn. Dis way to London."

Pete grasped a rope, and drew himself up, hand-over-hand, until he reached the tight-rope which was stretched across the circus.

"Here, come down!" shouted Jimmy, mopping his brow. "You'll fall."

"I don't tink so."

"Come down, I tell you!" he gasped, as Pete cautiously raised himself upon the rope, using his arms in place of a balancing-pole. It looked frightfully dangerous, and it was; but Pete was very anxious to get employment, so he was quite willing to take the risk.

Jimmy was a good-hearted man, and probably knew the awful risk far better than the daring lad.

"Will you come down?" bawled the excited showman, smashing out his crushed hat with his fist and placing it on one side of his head. "I won't employ you if you don't come down."

"See here, old boss, I'm mighty certain you ain't going to employ a lad—specially a nigger—if he can't do a good turn."

"Phow! The silly rascal is giving me a good turn this time," groaned Jimmy. "Come down!"

"Like so?" inquired Pete, pretending to fall, and catching the rope with the back of his knee. "Tink dat will please de spectators?"

"I don't know," groaned Jimmy. "But I'm thundering certain it does not please me. Come down, Pete lad!"

"Well, you see, it's dis way, Jimmy," shouted Pete, swinging to and fro by the back of his leg. "I dunno dat I can come down much funder widout hurting myself. Still, I can have a try. Soft music, please!"

Pete placed the back of his heel of

the free leg on the rope, then worked the other leg down until he hung over the awful height by the back of his heels, and his body swayed to and fro.

Jimmy did not dare to speak. His breath came in gasps.

"Tink dat will thrill deir little breasts, Jimmy?" bawled Pete.

"It's awful!" murmured Jimmy. "I wish I had never met the villain!"

"Cos if dey want something more exciting, I used to be able to hang by one heel," continued Pete. "I dunno weder I'm out ob practice, but we can easily see. Put de soft pedal ob de hand down. Might play do 'Dead March in Saul.' Observe de one-heel hang."

Then Pete hung by one heel.

Jimmy was speechless. His heart was throbbing fast, and his nerves tingled. His breath came with long gasps.

"I dunno dat I can do much more on de tight-rope," observed Pete. "Might swing a little—so; but you ought to hab proper shoes for dat work, 'cos you might slip. Now, den. We draw ourselves up—so, and de rest is easy!"

Pete caught the rope and swung himself up; then walked to the end, and, grasping the descending rope, slid to the ground.

"You young villain!" gasped Jimmy, shaking his fist in Pete's smiling face.

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat's just what de people like, Jimmy."

"It's not what they are going to have in my show."

"Eh? Don't you tink you can disengage me?"

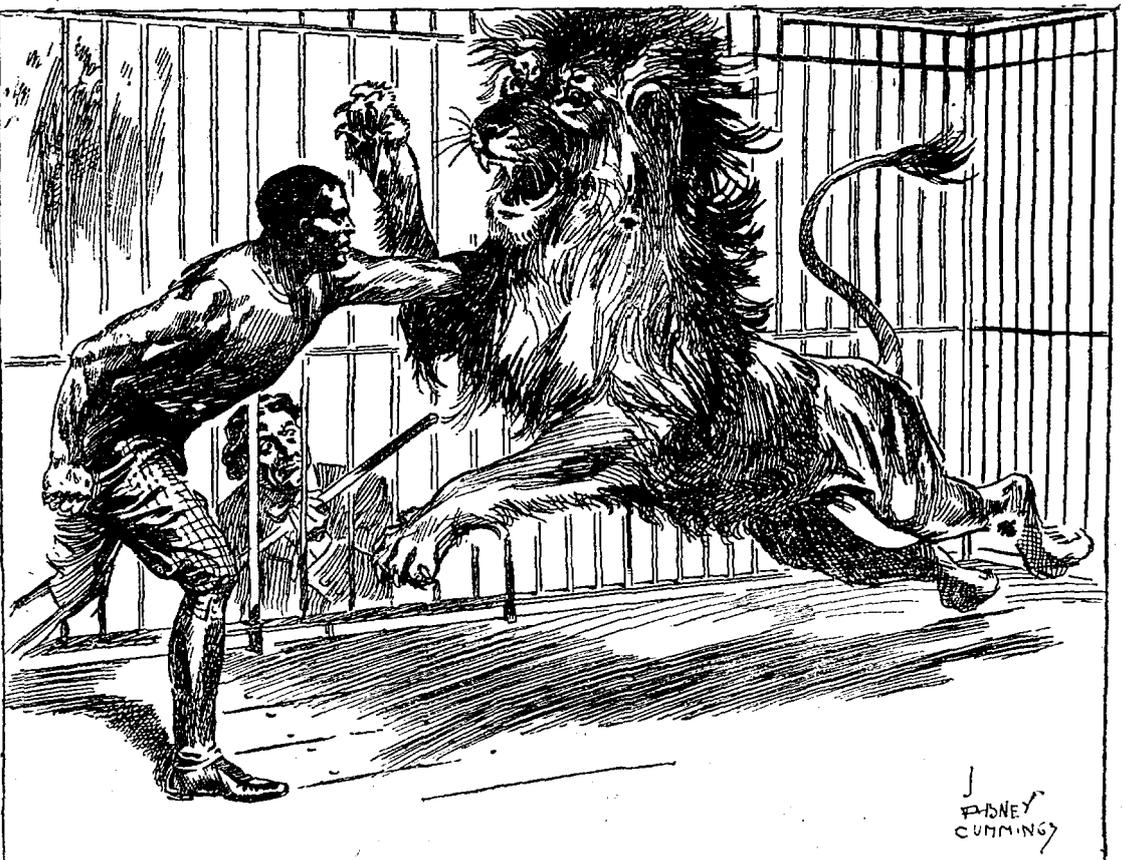
"Of course. I can take you on, but — Well, I don't like what you have done, lad. I try to get an honest living, and no man in my employ shall risk his life. If I can't please the public without that they will have to go unpleased. Now, see here, lad. If you want a start, I'll give it to you. I'm annoyed at your foolhardy work, but somehow I like you. You can have your grub and a quid a week on condition that when you get a better offer you let me know, and if I can see my way to spring the same you stay with me. We don't need that in black and white. You are the black and I'm the white. If we are going to rogue each other a piece of paper won't stop it."

"Golly! Dat's a mighty lot better start dan I expected, Jimmy!" exclaimed Pete. "Still, I tink I can earn it. If not, you hab de power to knock it off whenever you like. Dere's two-free tings I can do dat I ain't shown you yet."

"Well, we won't bother about that now," said Jimmy. "I am going to have a good, square feed; then I will introduce you to the company, and show you the other beasts."

"Yah, yah, yah! Don't you like de company, Jimmy?"

"I don't like them when I haven't got enough to pay their screws; and



With all his strength Pete dealt the lion a blow on the chest with his fist. At once the brute was cowed.

J. ADNEY CUMMING

**Circus Pete.**

*(Continued from previous page.)*

they don't like me, either, at times like that—at least, they don't judging by the things they call me. Now, there's a little hotel where I always stay when in this town. It's quiet and cheap; two things that are of importance. Then the cooking is good. Do you like good cooking?"

"I dunno dat I'm mighty particular on dat score, so long as dere's enough ob it."  
 "Ah! I play a pretty good knife and fork myself. We will have half-crown dinners, which means as much as you please."  
 "Golly! Dey won't get so mighty much profit out ob my little lot," said Pete, with conviction.

"Well, that's their look-out. They must consider they are playing to a bad house this evening."  
 "Oh, is that you, Jimmy?" inquired a young lady of decidedly prepossessing appearance.  
 "I have that honour, Rosamond."  
 "Honour, indeed!" exclaimed Rosamond, tossing her pretty head. "Where are you going?"

"I sha'n't be long. I am going to show this lad about the place."  
 "That means you are going to have dinner. Take me with you. I'm frightfully hungry!"  
 "You may be frightful, but you can't be hungry, seeing the delicious food you get here."  
 "About as good as the lions'. I'm coming with you."  
 "That you are not! Do you think I want to be landed with a breach of promise suit?"

"As though I'd ever marry you!" "I'll take particular care you don't, my dear! I have been a bachelor for forty years, and I am not going to be bothered with a wife at my time of life. Get out of my way!"

"I sha'n't!"  
 "Then take a week's notice."  
 "You'll take a box on the ears if you talk to me like that! I tell you I'm coming to dine with you!"  
 "Well, make haste and get ready, then. Come on, Pete! This way. Dodge down this street."  
 Jimmy went at a run, then he turned down another street, and, by a devious course, he made his way to his favourite hotel.

"I always come here for peace and quiet," murmured Jimmy, glancing around to make sure Rosamond was not following. "You must keep this place dark."  
 "Dat's all right, old hoss! Dey won't learn it from me. I can pay for my little lot."  
 "No; you are my guest. Two half-crown dinners, Richard, and look sharp about it, because we haven't much time!"

The waiter eyed Pete dubiously. He knew from past experience that Jimmy was not a very profitable customer; neither did Pete's appearance favourably impress him.  
 "Two heavies!" he bawled down the speaking-tube.  
 "De order sounds correct," observed Pete. "I like dese go-as-you-please sort ob dinners. Here comes de soup—and here it goes, too! Hab two-free plates in readiness to follow, Richard."  
 "There's codfish to follow."  
 "Let two-free plates ob soup follow first."  
 "Don't have too much soup," whispered Jimmy. "You won't be able to get through the rest of the dinner."  
 "Yah, yah, yah! Must be a mighty large dinner if dis child can't get frough it!"

"I shall be able to eat in earnest now."  
 "Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Richard. "P'raps Yorkshire pudding will finish him off. Two roasts, and piles of slabs and taters on one of 'em!"

"What comes next to de beef, Richard?" inquired Pete.  
 "Apple-tart."  
 "Pity to get off de meat so soon. Hitch me on two-free more plates. I like de pudding."  
 "I've noticed it. He ain't finished yet, mate."  
 "Well, see here, Dick," exclaimed the cook, "you'd best cut him off, 'cos there'll be a mighty row about this! The hoss is always growling, as these half-crown feeds don't pay. I yow this one hasn't!"

"Waiter, I'm Mr. Morgan!" exclaimed the stout party whose head Pete had bumped on the landing-stage, as he entered the room accompanied by his wife Maria. "What have you got to eat?"

"Beg pardon."  
 "Waiter!" came a voice, which appeared to be Maria's.  
 "Yes, ma'am."  
 "I did not call you."  
 Richard was not a good-tempered man, and he was inclined to get angry now.  
 He hurried back to the speaking-tube.  
 "Richard!" came a voice, apparently from the passage.  
 "That's the boss!" cried Richard, rushing from the room.

Then voices appeared to be coming from all over the place, and Richard had no sooner entered the room than he fondly imagined his master was calling him again.  
 It now occurred to Jimmy that Pete's ventriloquism was causing the extraordinary disturbance, and he burst into a roar of laughter, which did not tend to improve Morgan's temper. He expressed his opinion in pretty forcible language, too. At last, however, he got his dinner. Then he ordered apple-tart.

"You can't hab apple-tart, old hoss!" said Pete. "I hab just yaffled up de last ob it. You must hab breu-cheese."  
 "I won't have bread and cheese!" howled Morgan.  
 "Den bring de old hoss a dog-biscuit, waiter!"

if you had heard the character I had with him. The man I bought him from swore that chickens used to go in to feed with him."  
 "Yah, yah, yah! Did he feed dat lion on corn?"  
 "Blest if I know! But the fellow wasn't as truthful as he ought to be."  
 "Spect dat lion ain't been properly taught," said Pete.

"I don't know. But I never feel quite comfortable till Raja the tamer—he's a Spaniard—comes out of the cage. Between you and me, I believe the fellow is frightened of that lion."  
 "Dat's de worst ting possible. If a lion knows you'm frightened ob him, he gets nasty directly. De proper way is to make him frightened ob you. First of all, let him know you hab got plenty ob strength, and ain't de least bit afraid, den make friends wid him."

"Raja always says he can quell the fiercest brute with his eyes."  
 "Yah, yah, yah! Dat ain't at all safe. I hab had a good deal to do wid lions, Jimmy, and hab come to de conclusion dat your voice is a lot more likely to quell dem dan your eyes. You ain't got to shout at dem, but just talk ordinary words. So dis is Nero, is it? Well, he's a mighty fine beast. I'll show you what I mean 'bout training dem."

"Here! What are you going to do?" demanded Jimmy, as Pete entered the small guard-cage, and fastened the outer barred gate.  
 "Going to make friends wid Nero," answered Pete, unfastening the inner gate. "Spect you'll want me to perform wid him sometimes?"

"No, I sha'n't. You come out of — Bother the lad! He's going to make my hair stand on end again!"  
 "Hallo, Nero, old hoss!" cried Pete, entering the monster's cage with absolute fearlessness. "How are you dis evening? See here, if you start growling at me I shall clump you ober de head!"

Jimmy seized a long iron rod. He felt convinced a terrible tragedy was about to be enacted, for Nero growled ominously as he showed his terrible fangs.  
 "Now don't!" cried Pete in a deep voice, which seemed to come from above them. "Come dis way. Do you hear me, Nero?"

Pete stepped forward, and the great brute uttered an awful roar, while its body quivered as he prepared to spring upon the daring lad who had ventured to enter his den.  
 "Look here, I ain't standing dat, Nero!" cried Pete, striding forward. "Ah! Would you?"

As the terrible brute was in the very act of springing, Pete darted forwards, and gripped it by the throat, while Jimmy struck at it with the iron rod.  
 "Now, den, Nero," cried Pete, "just you behave yourself, else you'm going to get hurt! Just what I told you. Don't hurt him, Jimmy. You behave yourself, like a respectable lion, Nero, else dere'll be trouble in dis world. Don't you dare to growl at me, else I'll gib you a smash in de chest—so—dat you'll remember!"

With all his abnormal strength Pete dealt the infuriated brute a blow in the chest with his fist, and although it still lashed its tail, it ceased to growl.  
 "Walk round dis way, Nero!" cried Pete. "Do you hear me? Walk round. Golly! If you don't mind me I'll know de reason why! Dat's better. Yah, yah, yah! You'm walking as dough you were on hot bricks, Nero. What's dat? Anoder growl? Now, see here, old hoss, you had better be careful 'bout dese growls, 'cos I won't hab dem. Dat's better. I ain't going to teach you anyting to-night, 'cos you'm got to get friendly wid me first. Now you shall hab a chunk ob meat, 'cos you ain't behaved so badly."

Pete slipped out of the cage, much to Jimmy's relief. But he entered it once more with a huge piece of meat, which he threw to Nero.  
 "Here, come away!" gasped Jimmy. "You have frightened me to-night. All the same, I'm glad we met. Now I'll introduce you to the company, and I shall bill you as Circus Pete."

(Another of these fine complete stories next week.)

**CAMERA NOTES.**

**Getting Ready.**  
 NOW that the spring is once more with us thousands of the readers of **THE BOYS' FRIEND**, who make a hobby of the art of photography will doubtless be thinking of soon starting work for the season. Cameras, which have been stored away during the winter in dusty corners, will be looked up, developing dishes will be washed, bottles of chemicals will be prepared, and so on.

In order to assist my young friends to turn out good pictures, I am going to give them a few hints which will be of value to both novices and those who have had some experience.

**Overhauling.**  
 In the first place, the young photographer who already possesses a camera which has been laid aside during the winter, should give it a thorough overhauling before taking any pictures. If he has a hand-camera he should first of all give it a thorough cleaning with a white duster; then he should examine the interior, and carefully reblack any parts which may have worn white. The lens should be carefully cleaned, and the other mechanism, such as the shutter-changing apparatus, etc., should be thoroughly tested. Open the lens, and then look through the back of the camera and see that no speck of light can enter except through the lens.

**Stand Cameras.**  
 A stand-camera should also be thoroughly tested before being used. If you possess one, first thoroughly examine all the parts to see that they are in working order, and then fix it on to the tripod, after seeing that the latter is all right. Next rack out the bellows to their fullest extent and carefully examine it by putting your head under the focusing-cloth, and looking through the camera with the lens open. Very often a pin-point, through which the light can enter, will be found in the leather, and this must be at once stopped. Fix in the focussing-glass and thorough focus objects near and distant, and thus satisfy yourself that this is all right.

In the case of a stand-camera the dark slides should also be thoroughly tested. I remember some years ago at the commencement of the season thoroughly overhauling my camera and putting everything perfect, and then taking half a dozen pictures. Judge my astonishment when I found each of the negatives had an unsightly streak right across the plate. Of course I immediately knew that the light had in some way found the plates, but I could not discover for some time how the plates had become spoiled. I re-examined the camera and thoroughly overhauled the dark-room, and so on, until at last I speedily discovered that a tiny slip of wood had in some manner got loose.

In order to make sure that a dark-slide is absolutely light-tight, it is a good plan to fill it with unexposed plates, and then leave the slide about in daylight for an hour or two; then develop the plates. If any light gets in the plate will be fogged. On the other hand, if the slide is perfectly light-tight, the plate will be perfectly clear.

*(To be continued.)*



"Come down like so?" inquired Pete, pretending to fall.

"Boiled heef, carrots, and dump-lings is good, sir."  
 "Yes; that will do for me," said Maria.  
 "Same here. And look sharp about it!"  
 "Serve up de apple-pie, waiter!" ordered Pete. "I ain't much at apple-pie. Do you like it, Jimmy?"  
 "Never touch sweets," answered Jimmy. "A little cheese, Richard."  
 "P'raps you'll help the pie, sir?" said Richard, placing it before Jimmy. "Sorry, sir," he added, turning to Morgan. "Carrots and dumplings is off."  
 "I'm not eating boiled beef without. What else have you got?"  
 "Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding."  
 "That will do," said Morgan, glancing at his wife, who nodded. "Serve it up quickly."

In about a minute Richard returned.  
 "Sorry, sir, but Yorkshire pudding is off. That nigger has been and wolfed it all. He's enough to breed a famine wherever he goes!"  
 "Disgusting glutony!" snarled Morgan. "Bring up the beef."  
 Richard hurried to the speaking-tube.  
 "Waiter!"  
 "Yes, sir!" answered Richard, hurrying back.  
 "I didn't call you, fellow!" said Morgan.

"Ha, ha, ha! Here you are, waiter," said Jimmy, handing him two half-crowns, "and there's twopence for yourself. We will be back to-morrow."

"See here, if you bring that nigger again, half-crown dinners is off. I can take upon myself to tell you so much. He's eaten about four pounds of solid meat, to say nothing of pluggers, slabs, and a hole tart!"  
 "But, dear boy, you advertise these dinners for half-a-crown."  
 "That's meant for human beings. If you was to bring a boa-constrictor we should charge extra."  
 "Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete. "Must say de dinner was all right. I ain't got no complaints to make."  
 "No; but the boss will have a few when he comes in. Next time you come to this show, my lad, I'm putting you on piecework!"  
 "Dey don't seem to appreciate my appetite, Jimmy."

"Ha, ha, ha! No. But let's get back to the show. I generally like to have a look round to see that the animals are all comfortable for the night."  
 "Hab you got any performing lions, Jimmy?"  
 "Well, we've got Nero; but I have my doubts about the brute. He won't always do what he is told. In fact, the tamer sometimes daren't go in. He's a young lion. You would have thought he was a young lamb

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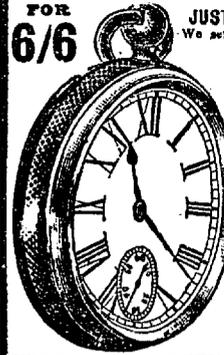
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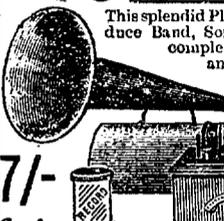


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BUT WHY SUFFER? When "LOOFITE" MEDICATED SOCK, which is IMPREGNATED with BORACIC ACID, PINE OIL, &c.

Kirkdale, 56, Chatsworth Rd., West Dulwich, February 19th, 1905. Dear Sirs,—Would you be good enough to forward me another pair of "Loofite" Socks, size 6?



