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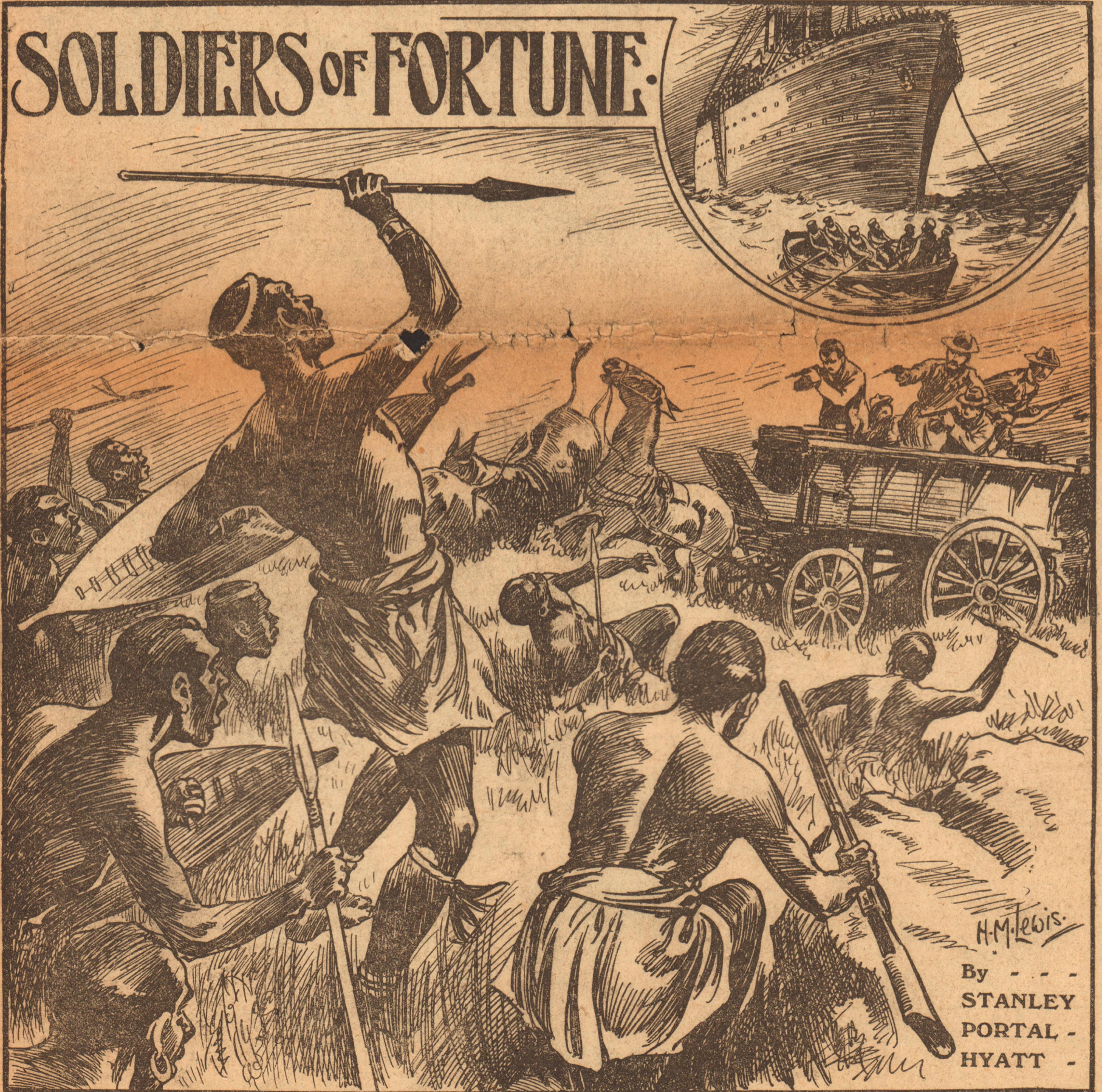
The object of THE BOYS' FRIEND is to Amuse, to Instruct, and to Advise Boys.

No. 493.—VOL. X. NEW SERIES.]

ONE PENNY.

[WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 19, 1910.

## SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

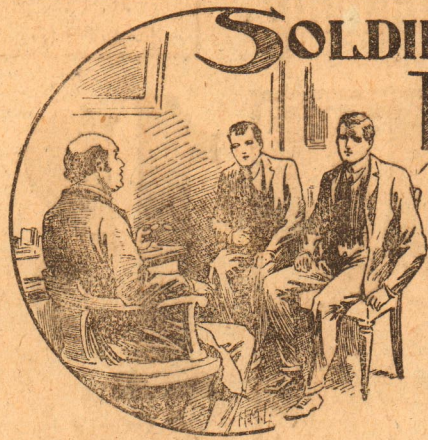


H.M. Lewis.

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Stirring Incidents from "Soldiers of Fortune." Our Superb New Adventure Serial, Just Starting. Don't Miss It.





# SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

Early Chapters of a Superb New Serial, Specially Written for THE BOYS' FRIEND by that Well-known Globe-trotter and Author, STANLEY PORTAL HYATT.

## TO INTRODUCE YOU TO:

DUDLEY AND MARCUS SCARFIELD, two jolly young British boys who are setting out to find Mr. Douglas, a hunter who is beyond civilisation in the wilds of Matabeleland. And they have strong motives in finding the hunter, for he was the friend of their dead father, and holds the rights of a wonderful new rifle the British War Office are taking up, and which their father invented. If they can find Douglas and prove their claim, they will share in the enormous profits from the rifle.

JOSEPH SCARFIELD is cousin to the two boys. He comes to hear of the plan to trace out Douglas, and resolves to reach the hunter first, and steal the rights. He is well provided with money, whilst his cousins, after paying their passage money, have little but their adjustable bicycles.

Motherless and fatherless, Dudley and Marcus have few friends to leave behind, and they sail cheerfully from Southampton third-class on their perilous quest. Their cousin is a first-class passenger on the same liner.

All goes well for a time, until Madeira is reached, when the two boys, going ashore to stretch their legs, are kidnapped by Portuguese at the instigation of Joseph, and

threatened with slavery on the cocoa plantations.

After miraculous adventures, they escape from their prison, and meet with Captain Batson, master of the tramp steamer Bulgaria, on which vessel they continue their journey to the Cape, their own ship in the meantime having proceeded on her voyage.

By the irony of fate, the liner breaks down, and the Bulgaria takes her in tow. A terrible storm sets in when the two vessels are within a couple of hundred miles of Cape Town, and the crew of the tramp beseech their skipper to abandon the tow. This he refuses to do. Indeed, he orders Dudley and Marcus to go aft, and to shoot down any man who approaches the towing hawser.

"Dudley," says Marcus, with alarm on his features, "there are four men in the alleyway, and two of them have axes. We must defend the rope. The lives of all those on the liner demand it."

(Now read this week's splendid chapters.)

## THE 7th CHAPTER.

### The Revolt Aboard Ship.

MARCUS gripped his brother's arm fiercely. "There's some men coming along the alleyway with axes! They're going to cut that hawser!"

"To try and cut it, you mean," Dudley answered grimly; then they crouched down side by side in the lee of the deckhouse and waited.

The Bulgaria was literally driving her nose into the sea now, butting at the waves, fighting her way forward savagely, whilst astern of her the mail steamer was rolling and lurching, wallowing like some vast paralysed sea monster.

If the tow-rope were to part or to be cut—and the crew, terrified at the risk which Captain Batson was running, intended to cut it—nothing could save the big steamer and the five hundred souls aboard her. Her propeller-shaft was gone, and the gale would drive her straight on to that pitiless South African coast, where she would go to pieces in a few minutes.

A big sea, a solid lump of ocean, leapt over the Bulgaria's starboard bow, carried away such few things as former seas had left, ripped the cover off the fore hatch, then went swirling aft, where it licked round one of the lurking men, and finally deposited him, bruised and bleeding, beside the after-hatch.

"There's three left of them still," Marcus shouted to his brother, as the steamer shook herself free of the mass of water. "They're coming now! Be ready for them, Dudley!" For the moment the Bulgaria was almost on an even keel, as though recovering her breath before the next plunge, and the sailors took advantage of the fact.

They believed—and they were not far wrong—that they were in deadly peril owing to the drag of the great

mail steamer astern, that whilst alone the Bulgaria could probably fight through the storm, she had little chance so long as she was towing the Leyte. They were not British seamen, so they cared nothing about the traditions of the Service. They wanted to secure their own safety, even at the cost of the five hundred lives on the mail-boat.

They came aft with a rush, axes in hand, never dreaming that the boys were on guard over the hawser. Captain Batson could not leave the bridge, the mate had been disabled by a big sea, and the second-mate was really on their side. A few blows with their axes, and the Bulgaria would be free.

Neither of the boys had ever fired revolvers before—that is, fired them in earnest—and they had that wholesome hatred of pistols which you find in every decent Britisher. At the same time, they had been trusted to guard the hawser, and they were not going to fail in their duty.

"Leave that alone!" Dudley's voice rang out above the gale, and the seamen found themselves looking into the muzzles of the revolvers, with the boys between themselves and the hawser.

The sailors halted abruptly, the two white men in front, the negro behind. Then the Bulgaria gave a sudden lurch, Marcus staggered, lost his balance, and rolled into the scuppers, whilst Dudley had to seize one of the winch levers to save himself.

It was the sailors' chance, and they took it. They were far more accustomed to bad weather than the boys, and they kept their feet. With a yell the negro rushed forward, straight for Dudley, and closed with him, whilst the others began to hack furiously at the great rope.

Dudley went down—his opponent had twice his weight and strength—and the revolver was wrested from him. A few seconds more and all would have been over so far as the mail steamer was concerned. Then:

Bang! Marcus had scrambled to his feet. His first shot took one of the seamen through the right wrist, and the shout of pain rose high above the gale.

Bang! A miss this time; then another miss, and yet another, but the fourth shot got home into the second white sailor's ankle, and he, too, fell yelling.

Then the negro saw red. He threw Dudley from him and fired at Marcus with Dudley's revolver—fired twice, missing each time by a few inches. Marcus in turn fired back, missing also; then, as the third shot grazed his face, he took the empty revolver by the muzzle and flung it at his opponent.

It was a heavy weapon, and it caught the negro square on the forehead. The man staggered, and Marcus leaped forward. A moment later both he and Dudley were on top of the negro, and Dudley had his own revolver back again. The other two men were lying jammed in between the winch and the hatch, moaning and shouting.

"Well done, boys!" Captain Batson had heard the shots, and leaving the bridge a moment, had run aft to the back of the upper deck. "Let that negro go now, and he can help the other scoundrels into the fo'c's'le. Badly wounded, are they? I don't mind that. They've got what they deserve. We shall have no more trouble with the crew after this. I believe, too, that the gale has about blown itself out."

The skipper proved to be right. The wind began to drop, and as they saw that the worst of the danger was over the men forgot their fears, and remembered only the share of

the salvage money which would come to them. Those who an hour before had been reviling Captain Batson for holding on to his tow, now declared, with many oaths, that he was the finest seaman afloat.

Still, it was not until the following morning that they were able to do anything towards repairing the damage done by the gale. All but one of the Bulgaria's boats had been smashed, all loose gear of every sort had gone, and she was short of her three largest ventilators.

Captain Batson shrugged his shoulders as he looked round.

"I wonder if those passengers astern realise the danger they were in?" he said to the boys. "The chief thing now is to get our injured men seen to. We'll heave-to for an hour or so, and go over for the mailboat's surgeon. You might as well come with me."

The passengers of the liner clustered along her side as the dirty little ship's boat, rowed by four dirty seamen, bobbed up to her side, and they gave a cheer—a cheer which meant a good deal—as Captain Batson mounted the swaying ladder.

The boys, too, were not forgotten. Whilst the two skippers went off together the passengers crowded round Dudley and Marcus, anxious for details. They could see for themselves what a fight the Bulgaria must have had, but they wanted the whole story, every word of it, and the boys told it to them, excepting the part about the fight with the crew.

As they talked the boys kept looking round, keenly on the alert for a glimpse of their cousin, but in that respect they were disappointed. Ever since the gale had sprung up Joseph had been hopelessly seasick, and was still in his cabin.

The bugle went for lunch, and almost before they knew how it had happened the boys found themselves at the head of the skipper's table next to Captain Batson.

At the end of the meal the skipper of the Leyte rose, and in a few words proposed the health of the man who had saved the lives of them all. He did not say much, but still he said enough to send most of his hearers cold at the thought of the deadly peril through which they had passed.

Then Captain Batson rose to reply. He was no speaker, and he halted and stumbled over his words until he came to tell them about what the boys had done; then at last he got a grip on his story, and the words came out easily.

The passengers leaned forward eagerly—this part of the story was new to them—and they cheered again and again when he sat down, whilst the boys flushed and stared at their plates, and wished they could get back to the battered old Bulgaria.

As the cheers died away Dudley happened to glance towards the saloon entrance. Joseph Scarfield had been aroused by the applause, and had come up from his cabin, livid and weak-kneed through seasickness, to find out what it all meant. He was now standing in the doorway glaring at the boys with mingled amazement and hatred.

## THE 8th CHAPTER.

### Capture of the Smuggled Ammunition.

TWO tugs took charge of the crippled liner as soon as she entered Table Bay, and the poor battered old Bulgaria, her splendid work done, went slowly to her own berth.

Captain Batson heaved a sigh of relief.

"It means a small fortune to me in salvage money, but it's not only that," he said to the boys. "We've saved those five hundred lives as well, and we shouldn't have saved them but for you. I don't want you to hurry away up country because you have earned a share in the honour and in the reward."

But the boys shook their heads. They had already talked the matter over.

"Joseph won't wait," Marcus said. "He will take the first train going, and we must not be behind him. We must get our baggage off the mail steamer and go on at once. If he finds Mr. Douglas first we shall probably lose everything. Isn't that so, Dudley?"

The elder brother nodded.

Captain Batson gave in reluctantly. "Well, you know your own business best, I suppose. Let me know how you get on and where you get to, for I am certain the owners of the Leyte will remember how splendidly you behaved. It was a

lucky day for me when I found you in Funchal!"

Cape Town is one of those places which the new-comer is always anxious to leave. Table Mountain, immense, flat-topped, bush-covered, seems to overhang and threaten the city at its foot. The mountain is always present in your thoughts, grim and terrible in its hugeness, making man and man's work seem pitifully small and insignificant.

True, you always know that behind it is the veldt, the land of romance and danger and excitement, but somehow Table Mountain seems to warn you not to go on—unless you are made of the right stuff.

"There is not another train to Vryburg, which is rail-head on the line to the north, for two days," the clerk in the station informed Dudley; then, in answer to another question, he added: "Yes, there was a train went an hour ago, taking first-class passengers only. It was a special for the Leyte's saloon passengers."

"Did a Mr. Scarfield go up on it?" Dudley asked.

The clerk consulted his list of sleeping-berth passengers for the two days' journey.

"Yes," he answered. "Mr. J. Scarfield booked a berth to Vryburg, and we wired to the coach agent that he wanted a seat in the coach from there to Palapye, Chief Khama's town. They won't book because the Matabele are a bit sticky, you know—ready to fight."

Dudley went back to his brother, who was still in the Custom-house getting the bicycles and rifles through.

"Joseph has gained a clear two days on us already, Marcus," he said. "There is not a passenger train up to Vryburg until Thursday."

Marcus knit his brows.

"Did you ask if there was a goods train?" he said. "Better go back and find out."

The station clerk yawned when he saw Dudley return.

"You make me feel tired with your questions," he remarked. "Yes, there's a goods going up to-night, and if you like to ride on a load of steel rails you can go by her. It'll be sold and will get you all to Vryburg."

"We'll go," Dudley answered curtly.

The boys got their luggage up to the station, and saw most of it into one of the covered vans, but they kept out their blankets and their rifles. They had heard some strange rumours of native risings—Cape Town was full of rumours then—and they did not want to be taken unawares.

Some said that the Matabele, the terrible warriors of the north, were going to start slaughtering the whites in their country. Others declared that the Boers were about to seize Bechuanaland, or that part of Bechuanaland ruled by the great Chief Khama, and so cut the British off from the north. At any rate, there was trouble in the air, and no man knew what the next few weeks—the next few hours, perhaps—might bring forth.

The guard of the goods train, a surly Afrikaner, grunted when he was told that the two boys were going up with him.

"There's no room in my van," he said. "You'll have to doss down in that truck of rails just behind the engine. Why can't you wait for the passenger train?" And then he went off growling about the ways of Britishers.

It was hot in Cape Town, but it was bitterly cold by the time the train had climbed on to the Karroo, that immense windswept plateau which forms the heart of South Africa, and the boys tried in vain to keep warm. They were travelling in a long, open truck, and the night air seemed to cut right through their blankets.

About midnight the train stopped at a wayside station, and Dudley got out of the truck, his teeth chattering.

"I'm going to see if we can't find a better place than this," he said. "We shall be frozen by the morning!"

It was very dark, and no one noticed him stumbling along the track. A couple of minutes later he was back.

"There's a covered van towards the end of the train, Marcus," he said. "The door is open, and it's nearly empty. They've taken the engine off—I think it has gone for water—so we shall have time to shift our blankets without that rotten guard knowing!"

They hurried out of their truck into the covered van. Dudley struck a match when they were inside, and, greatly to their satisfaction, they found that it was partially filled with sacks of flour, which were stacked so that there was a comfortable space behind them at the back end.

The boys wasted no time. It was merely a matter of a minute before they had scrambled into that space with their blankets and settled down.

"It'll be warm enough here," Dudley remarked, "and, after all, we have had to pay second-class fares. We've a right to get the best we can."

Someone came along, closed the door of the van with a savage bang. Then the train jolted off again, but before it had gone a couple of miles it came to a stop in a barren stretch of veldt.

A minute later the boys heard voices—the guard talking to two other men, evidently Germans by their speech. Then the door of their van was opened, and the guard passed in. They themselves were, however, hidden behind the sacks of flour, and the new-comers had no idea of their presence.

"I kept this pretty well empty on purpose," the guard said. "We can shove your cases in at once, and put them off just this side of Vryburg. There are two young rooineks (Britishers) on the train, but they won't see anything; they wouldn't understand it if they did."

Dudley gripped his brother's arm hard, and the two lay still whilst the heavy boxes were thrust into the van hurriedly. Then:

"Come into my van," the guard said. "I kept those boys out on purpose. These will be all right. There is another eighteen hours' run before we unload them."

The sliding door of the van was banged to again, bolted and locked, then, after a whistle from the guard, the train joggled on once more.

The boys were warm enough now, but all thought of sleep had vanished. "They're doing something wrong," Marcus said. "They're taking up something they ought not to be taking, smuggling it through. I wish we knew what it was."

For answer, Dudley struck a match and clambered over the sacks. A moment later:

"It's ammunition and rifles," he announced. "They must be gun-runners, taking these through for the natives to kill the white men with."

Marcus gave an exclamation of horror. "I've heard men say it's reckoned the biggest crime a man can commit in Africa. But what can we do? We're locked in here now, and if they knew we were in the van, they would cut our throats."

Dudley laughed a little harshly. "We're white men, and we've got to do our duty to our own colour. We can't do anything now, in the dark, and so we had better go to sleep; but as soon as it is light we'll get to work, and we'll stop their game."

"How are we going to do it?" Marcus demanded.

For answer, Dudley yawned.

"I'll show you in the morning." There were no windows of any sort in the van, but still enough light filtered in through cracks and chinks to allow the boys to see what they were doing. Dudley had been quite right. The long cases undoubtedly contained rifles, the small ones ammunition. There were a hundred rifles—Martini-Henrys—and ten thousand rounds of ammunition, screwed up in those boxes.

Marcus clambered over the flour-bags, and looked at the cases glumly. "I don't see that we can do anything at all," he said.

It was not often that he was in a despondent mood, but the cold and the lack of proper sleep seemed to have taken the heart out of him temporarily.

"The ammunition doesn't matter so much," Dudley answered. "It's the rifles we've got to consider. Your knife has got a good-sized screw-driver in it, hasn't it? Mine has, too. Well, get to work and open one of those cases. We'll see just what kind of rifles they are, then we can decide how to cripple them."

Marcus had the lid of his case off first.

"Martini-Henrys," he said. "That's good!" Dudley exclaimed. "We'll take the breech-blocks out. Just shove out that big split-pin, and then jerk the lever down. That's it! Capital! Martinis without breech-blocks aren't much use to anyone."

They worked hard, never slackening down for one instant until they

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had the hundred breech-blocks wrapped up amongst their own blankets, and the rifle-cases screwed down again.

Marcus drew a deep sigh of relief. "We've put those rifles out of action, and now I wish we were going to have some breakfast. I would give anything for a cup of hot coffee like that we used to get on the Bulgaria. My mouth is choked with dust."

Dudley held up the canvas water-bag. "It's nearly empty now," he said; "and it will be late to-night before we reach Vryburg. This has got to last us out, because we are locked in here."

Then began the worst day the boys had ever experienced. The truck had a galvanised iron roof, and as soon as the sun was really up, the heat inside became terrible, worse by comparison with the cold of the night. Their small supply of water was soon gone, and then came that horrible agony of thirst, the most dreadful thing there is, the most ghastly pain imaginable.

By midday they had ceased to care whether the guard and his friends the gun-runners found them in the van. Every time the train stopped they banged frenziedly on the door of the van, shouting for it to be opened, but all in vain. No one heard them; for the stoppages were only to allow the engine to get water, all the goods on the train being consigned right through to Vryburg.

It was the longest day they had ever known. They had food with them, but you cannot eat when you are thirsty, really thirsty. They just lay back on their blankets and gasped. After midday they did not exchange a word; their mouths would not even frame the words. By sunset Dudley was a little delirious, and Marcus was not much better. Another hour of it, and both would have been in a dangerous state. But the moment the sun had gone down, the bitter chill of the high veldt came to their relief, and the temperature of the van fell as quickly as it had risen.

"It must be about six o'clock now, Marcus," Dudley managed to whisper. "We are due at Vryburg at eight, and they are going to take the rifles out this side of the town. We must manage to slip out then. The engine-driver will give us some water, I expect."

An hour later, the train stopped, there were voices outside the van, the lock was undone, and the door flung open. Half a dozen natives scrambled in and took the cases of rifles and ammunition out, apparently to a waggon which was waiting beside the line. The guard and the gun-runners went with them.

"Now's our chance," Marcus said. They lost no time. They were at the back end of the train, but they tumbled out of the van unseen by the guard, leaving all their kit behind the bags of flour, and raced up to the engine, where the water was.

The furnace door was open, and the light from it showed the driver their drawn faces. That stretch of country is one of the most thirsty in the world; he had seen thirsty men before, and he understood. Without a word, he handed Dudley his own can of cold tea, whilst his fireman thrust out another to Marcus.

"Steady—steady, young fellows!" the fireman said. "Don't drink too fast." Then he glanced at the driver, who nodded meaningly. "Get up on the engine. We'll take you into Vryburg now. Have you been tramping far?" Evidently he and his mate had no idea that the boys had been passengers on the train.

The boys drank the cold tea down in great gulps—it seemed infinitely better than anything they had ever tasted before—then they climbed on to the footplate of the engine. A moment later the guard's whistle went, and the train started off.

The tea, combined with the warmth from the engine, revived the boys wonderfully, and when, an hour later, the train drew up in Vryburg Station they were fit and alert as ever.

Vryburg is marked large on the map, but when you actually reach it you find merely a collection of tin-roofed shanties, dumped down in a barren, dreary stretch of veldt. Yet, none the less, history has been made in Vryburg. It was once the capital of a great association of border ruffians, the Stellaland Freebooters—a gang of Boers and Germans, who had sworn to cut the British off from the North. The Government in Cape Town could, or would, do nothing—half the members of that Government were traitors to the British—and then

there came up an old Scotsman, with a grim, though kindly face—the Rev. John Mackenzie by name. He had no armed escort—the British Cabinet had appointed him its commissioner, but would not spend a farthing on upholding his dignity—so he rode alone into Vryburg, unarmed, and by sheer force of character he drove those border ruffians out, and secured the gate of Africa for the British. It was one of the greatest things ever done in our history; but because John Mackenzie was a simple-minded old Scots gentleman, who did not advertise himself and asked for no reward, his splendid services have been well-nigh forgotten now. Still, he is the great white hero of South Africa; the Bayard, without fear and without reproach.

There was a sergeant of the Mounted Police on the platform at Vryburg, and the boys went straight to him. He stared at them a moment in astonishment, then he made them repeat their story about the rifles. After that, he drew a deep breath.

"No permits for rifles have been issued this week," he said. "And we never issue them for a big lot like that. These men are gun-runners, sure enough. You've taken out the breech-blocks? Good lads! We'll get them out of the van now; and"—he beckoned to one of his troopers who had just come up—"arrest that guard of the train. Then tell them to get half a dozen horses saddled. We shall be going out at once. I suppose you boys can ride?"

It was not long before the party, consisting of the sergeant, the boys, and three troopers, had started out down the line for the place where the rifles had been off-loaded. Luckily, it was one of those brilliant moonlight nights such as you get only on the high veldt, and consequently there was no trouble in seeing the way. The Mounted Police had their Martini rifles, but the boys took their own.

"We learnt to shoot with these," Marcus explained; "and, of course, they're far better than the Martinis."

The sergeant glanced at the weapon in the boy's hand. "I've only seen one before. My old chum, John Douglas, the hunter, has it." Then, in reply to the youngster's eager questions, he shook his head. "There's no time to tell you about Douglas now. That will have to wait until we're through with this affair."

It did not take long to find the spoor of the waggon on which the guns and ammunition had been loaded.

"A mule-waggon," the sergeant remarked tersely. "Probably it's miles away by now. This means a long chase."

The boys were deadly tired, and it was months since they had been in the saddle, but still the excitement kept them going.

A mule-waggon, when lightly loaded, travels fast, and the men with that particular waggon had every reason for hurrying; consequently, it was almost dawn before the pursuers caught sight of the glimmer of a newly-lighted fire. The waggon was just out-spanned, to give the tired mules a rest, and, as it turned out later, to allow the sellers of the arms and ammunition a chance to obtain payment from the natives.

As soon as the sergeant saw the fire, he drew up suddenly.

"We'll leave the horses here in charge of Trooper Watts, and go forward on foot," he said. "It will be all right, so long as they've got no dogs with them."

There were no dogs, as it turned out, and they managed to get within fifty yards without being perceived. The two white men—the Germans who had travelled up on the train—were standing against the waggon, surrounded by a dozen almost naked savages.

"Matabele!" the sergeant whispered. "See the slits in the lobe of the ears. They evidently intended to rush it through to the border of the Kalahari Desert, where they probably have an impi waiting. We're only just in time."

They crouched down in the long, yellow grass, watching. The mules had been turned loose to feed, and there was no chance of their prey escaping them.

"We want our money now," the elder of the Germans said in English.

The leader of the natives, a hard-faced old man with the Induna's Ring—a circlet of beeswax and hair—on his head, nodded gravely.

"Yes," he answered, also in English. "The white men want their money, but we want just to see that the rifles are in order. We know the

ways of the whites who sell guns to the black people."

The watchers could hear every word, for there was a faint breeze blowing in their direction.

The elder of the two Germans made a gesture of impatience.

"The rifles are all right. Give us our money. We want to be gone."

But the induna shook his head. "You are not like Britishers. We must see the guns first."

Then, at a sign from him, three of his young men clambered on to the waggon, and began to open one of the cases.

The boys, knowing what was coming, clenched their hands in their excitement.

The lid of the first box was thrown off, the first rifle taken out, and a moment later flung angrily on the ground; then another, and another.

"They have no breech-blocks. They are of no use!" the man on the waggon cried, in the native language.

What happened next neither the boys nor the police really knew. The Germans shouted something, then there was a report from a revolver, and after that—chaos. Cries, yells, big stabbing assegais flashing in the moonlight, and then silence again. Later, they found from fifteen to twenty wounds in each of the Germans' bodies.

The sergeant stood up suddenly. "It is our turn now," he said, and ran forward, followed closely by the boys and the two troopers.

the waggon, and took the leading savage clean in the throat with a Martini bullet.

"Be quick—be quick!" he shouted to the troopers who were struggling with the now-frenzied mules.

But even as he spoke, both the leading animals began to plunge furiously, then one dropped dead, an assegai through its heart.

"Climb up on here!" the sergeant cried to the other men. "It's the last chance!"

THE 9th CHAPTER.

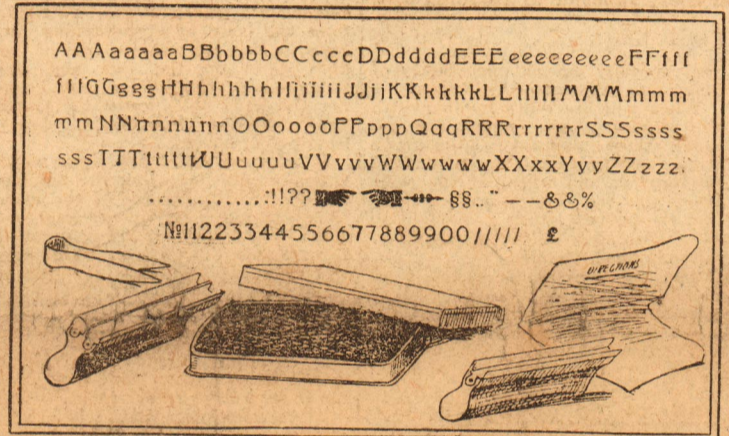
A Fight With the Natives.

THE Matabele came on with a rush. They had been sent south some five hundred miles to receive the arms and ammunition, and they dare not go back empty-handed. The three police and the two boys, standing on the waggon, fired rapidly. Two of the attackers went down; but a moment later a bullet got the sergeant in the left forearm. He was grit right through, so he merely dropped his rifle and drew his revolver.

It was then that the boys' rifles came in. The police handled their Martinis well, but the Scarfield rifle was capable of firing two shots to their one. It was Dudley and Marcus who really stayed the rush. There was just sufficient light now to see the sights, and every bullet got home; in fact, in two cases, the same bullet drilled through a couple of savages.

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The Matabele saw them coming, recognised the uniforms, and fled. No shots were fired on either side, but a throwing assegai grazed Dudley's cheek, laying it open, whilst one of the troopers had a similar weapon quivering in his foot. He came down heavily, pulled it out with an oath, then went on again.

By the time they reached the waggon—it was merely an affair of seconds—the natives were out of sight amongst a patch of scrub, and there was only the waggon and the ghastly bodies of the two Germans.

The sergeant heaved a sigh of relief.

"We've got off cheaply," he said. Then, being a man who knew his work, he turned to his unwounded troopers. "Round up the mules, and get them spanned. We've not a minute to lose."

Marcus bandaged his brother's cheek hastily, then, together, they tied up the trooper's foot. Unfortunately, the other troopers were not used to mules, and it took them some time to get the ten evil-tempered brutes up to the waggon. Dawn was just breaking as they began to inspan. They had seen no more of the induna and his men, who had apparently crawled away through the long grass. But just as they were getting the traces on the hind mules the Matabele came back, not ten, but five-and-twenty of them, all armed with assegais, whilst half a dozen had rifles as well.

The sergeant jumped up on top of

Half a dozen of the Matabele got right up to the waggon, and one of the police went down, a stabbing assegai thrust clean through his chest. It was a case of the butt-end of the rifles then, and the butt-ends told. The attack was repulsed for the moment, but for the moment only. There were fifteen of the assailants still left, fifteen able-bodied men, and there were only the two boys and one unwounded trooper left on the waggon.

The sergeant groaned, not with pain—he had merely wrapped a handkerchief round his wrist—but because he loathed the idea of defeat at the hands of savages like these. Then the Matabele changed their tactics. They crouched down on the grass and began to shoot. They were wretched marksmen, as are most South African natives, but they were bound to get home with a bullet sooner or later.

Dudley got one of them through the shoulder. The savage jumped up with a yell, spun round, and collapsed in a heap. Marcus shot another clean through the forehead; but still the bullets came, whilst the assegai-men were all the time crawling closer.

"It's not only that they're going to wipe us out, it's that they will get the ammunition as well," the sergeant muttered. "Fight right to the end, you boys; I ought never to have brought you into this!"

It was almost full daylight now, and as Marcus gave a hurried glance

round, he could see no sign of help. There was not a building of any sort in sight, and the waggon was not even on a regular road. Days might elapse before anyone even found their bodies. It was just a great barren stretch of rolling veldt, with a nearly dry watercourse a hundred yards away.

Out on the horizon, perhaps six miles off, a train was coughing its way up a gradient, its smoke clearly visible on the wonderfully still air of the high plateau.

The Matabele were crawling nearer every moment. It was now little more than a question of seconds. Then suddenly, from out of that same watercourse, a sturdy little pony scrambled, a lean, wiry Basuto pony, with a lean and wiry little Basuto on his back. Then came another and another and yet another, a dozen in all—armed men, clad in ragged old European clothes.

Between Basuto and Matabele there is a savage blood-feud, one of those things which are so bitter that the white man can never even grasp the idea of its bitterness. These Basuto were on their way to the North to join their kinsman, Linchwe, on the other side of the Crocodile River; and they had recognised the Matabele yells.

They rode down on the Matabele, shouting, firing as they rode, and the Matabele broke and fled. Eleven of the horsemen went after them, seeing red, thirsting for blood, but the twelfth, the leader, came up to the waggon, and raised his hand in salute.

"They were dogs," he said to the sergeant.

The latter nodded gravely. "Dogs indeed!" he replied.

The Basuto—he was a little wizened old man—jerked an empty cartridge-case out of his rifle, and proceeded to take snuff.

"We saw them nearly a mile off, and came along the watercourse. We were just in time." Then he looked critically at the boys. "The young chiefs saved you all," he remarked bluntly. "They are chiefs indeed." And he took snuff again.

A few minutes later the other Basuto rode up, apparently well satisfied, and without another word, began to get the terrified team of mules into order. When they were ready their leader dismounted, calmly tied his pony to the back of the waggon, and took the driver's seat.

"You other men may go on," he said to his companions. "I think I will stay with the white men for a while."

Then, without asking any sort of permission, he called to the mules, and started back towards Vryburg. Incidentally, he drove over the bodies of two dead Matabele, but he did not seem to notice the fact. From his point of view, they were merely dogs, who had met with their due reward.

Vryburg town was just awake when the waggon jolted up to the police barracks, and the population tumbled out quickly to hear the story. Within a quarter of an hour, a strong patrol had started out in the hope of cutting off the survivors of the party of Matabele, whilst the doctor set to work on the wounded.

The little old Basuto who had driven in the waggon strolled round to the back of the barracks, ordered one of the police messengers to feed his pony, then squatted down in the shade of a hut, and began to smoke a huge Boer pipe.

"I am working now for the two young chiefs," he remarked.

It was two hours later that the boys found an opportunity of asking the sergeant about John Douglas, the hunter.

The sergeant shook his head.

"You have no chance at all of finding him," he said. "He is right up in the Matabele country amongst the natives; and you have seen what sort of people they are, when they will come down all this way to get arms and ammunition. It is sheer madness to go on."

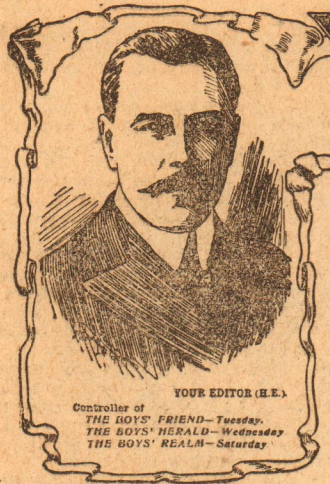
"We shall go on, all the same," Dudley remarked to his brother, when they left the barracks. "We've simply got to get through, Matabele or no Matabele."

A minute later the old Basuto trotted up to them.

"I am going North with you, chiefs," he said. "My name is Amous, and I've got a long score to settle with some of those people. Still, I hear that they have already begun to kill the white men, and we shall have a hard task to get through beyond Bulawayo. But I know a road across the veldt, if you will let me guide you."

(Another grand instalment of this powerful new serial in THE BOYS' FRIEND next Tuesday.)





## YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

I want all my boys to look upon me as their firm friend and advisor. There are few men who know boys as well as I do, and there are no little trials and troubles, perplexities and anxieties, in which I cannot help and assist my readers.

Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of **THE BOYS' FRIEND**. All boys who write to me, and who enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply.

All Letters should be addressed: **The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.**

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### OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

IN a month's time I shall have the pleasure of presenting to my friends our Sixteenth Christmas Number. It is almost sixteen long years since **THE BOYS' FRIEND** first appealed to the intelligent boy public of this country, and each succeeding Christmas Number I hope has been better than the last. The one which I shall have much pleasure in presenting to you in a few weeks' time I am sure will prove even more popular than those which have gone before.

Among the special attractions which will figure in this Christmas Number are two new serials, "Sexton Blake, Spy," and a new school story, to be called "The New Broom," which will prove an exciting and interesting sequel to our very popular school yarn now appearing—"The Blot."

But these two items do not exhaust the list of attractions. From the first page to the last the number will be crammed with interesting articles and attractive reading; in fact I am going to try to beat absolutely all records this year and make **THE BOYS' FRIEND** Christmas Number for 1910 far and away superior to anything else on the market.

#### A LOST CHUM.

B. F. is a Glasgow boy, who tells me his chum has stopped going about with him as he used to do. He says in his letter: "I often wondered what was the matter with him, but he wouldn't tell me. He has also stopped taking part in the manly sports he used to play. Now, I have discovered that his reason for deserting me is that he is going about with girls—taking them to music-halls—and he has also started smoking. He is a very good-looking chap, about sixteen years of age, and therefore it is easy for him to get girls to go about with him."

Personally, I think that B. F.'s chum is rather a silly boy. He is very foolish, at his age, to devote himself entirely to paying attentions to girls. Possibly—and I sincerely hope it will be so—he will tire of this new fascination after a little while, and come back to his old chum. It is towards this end that my friend B. F. must direct his endeavours. He must try to persuade his old chum that, although it is pleasant to know nice girls, yet no boy ought to employ the whole of his time in paying attentions to them, and that there are plenty of other pleasant and healthy things for a manly boy to do. Most certainly, he ought to impress upon him the foolishness of giving up manly exercises.

I know it will be very difficult for B. F. to persuade his chum that the course he is adopting is not altogether sensible, but he must try and stick to it, especially if he is fond of his friend, for the boy won't do himself much good by spending his life in the society of young ladies, visiting music-halls and smoking.

#### HOW TO BECOME A CHAUFFEUR.

J. McG. is a Scottish boy who lives in Glasgow, and he wants to become a chauffeur, so, like the sensible lad he is, he asks me to tell him what to do. He tells me he is nearly sixteen years of age.

Well, my boy, you should try to get employment in a motor-garage. Here you will learn through personal contact the construction and operation of those wonderful little engines which propel motor-cars. From almost any bookseller you can get a shilling hand-book on motor-car engines in which the working parts and their uses are explained.

Familiarise yourself with as many different models of motor-car engines as you can—in a motor-car garage it is quite possible that you will see a good many of these. It is quite possible, too, that there you may get an opportunity of driving a motor-car. After all, driving is very simple work, needing only a certain amount of practice. If you prove to be a bright, willing lad, always ready to take orders on the run, and do whatever you are told cheerfully, you will

very speedily get an opportunity of being taught how to drive a car.

When you are quite familiar with the running of the engine, and can make those necessary adjustments which help to smooth the running of the engine, and when, at the same time, you can drive a car carefully and competently, then you ought to be able to secure a post as chauffeur without much trouble.

The wage, as a rule, starts from about 30s. a week upwards. Many chauffeurs get from £2 10s. to £4 a week, in addition to livery and other advantages—such as the use of living-rooms over the garage, and so forth.

#### HOW TO GO TO SEA.

C. A. is a young friend of mine who sends me the following interesting letter on the subject of how to become a sailor. Here is his letter, which is so clear and excellent in its information that I have very much pleasure in publishing it, and, at the same time, in thanking C. A. for his kindness in sending these particulars to me for the benefit of his fellow-readers.

"Being a reader of **THE BOYS' FRIEND**, I have noticed two or three times lads writing to you to ask you how they can get away to sea as a sailor in the Merchant Service. Being a sailor myself, and knowing it to be a good profession for any lad who is not afraid of work, I will give them a few hints on how to set about it. First of all they should go to the docks and go aboard the ships, and try to see the chief officer—or if he is away, the second officer—and ask him if he has got any vacancies for boys or ordinary seamen.

"Very likely the first thing he will ask you is 'Have you got a discharge-book?' which you get when you have done your first trip to sea. If you tell him no, he might say, 'Well, I cannot take you, then,' or he might say, 'Come down and see me the day we sign'—which means the day they sign the crew on—and then if I am any short I will take you."

"I know it's very hard to get on ships nowadays, especially if you haven't been to sea before, and the way I have just told you is the only way that I know of, unless the friends or relations of the lads are connected with shipping. Then, of course, they could easily get him a position. Another way is for them to join one of the training ships in different ports of England, where they send you right into the Merchant Service or the Navy. A very good training ship is the *Warspite*, at Greenhithe, where I had my training. You do about a twelvemonth there, and then you are sent to sea."

#### PIGEON-CHESTED.

One of my young friends complains that he is pigeon-chested. Here is a little advice on the subject which may

help my reader and others who may be in the same condition.

Pigeon-chest is the result of either rickets or some obstruction in the nose or throat—such as adenoids—during early childhood.

If the bones are well-set and the boy is well on towards manhood, little can be done towards remedying the condition.

However, if the boy is under sixteen or seventeen, the common exercises for broadening the shoulders will sometimes reduce the pigeon-chest.

One of the best exercises is as follows:

Lie flat on the floor, face downwards, the hands palm downwards on the floor close to the shoulders. Then, keeping the body and the legs rigid, raise the body by straightening the arms, so that the whole weight of the body rests on the toes and the straightened arms. Then, still keeping the body stiff, lower the trunk gently to the floor again, slowly bending the elbows.

Do this exercise a few times night and morning, increasing the number as the forcing strength of the arm, shoulder, and chest muscles improve. Persisted in daily for a few months, this exercise will go far towards flattening out a pigeon chest, if begun in time.

#### "LIGHT-COLOUR" VOICES.

Two of my young friends have rather falsetto voices, and they want me to give them a cure for it.

All I can say is that it is a cure which comes with age, and as they get older their voices will deepen and get that resonant tone which indicates that they are fully-grown men.

#### "B.F." LIBRARY BOOKS WANTED.

I have just been looking over my collection of books published in **THE BOYS' FRIEND** Threepenny Library, and find that I have not got a complete set on my own bookshelves—no fewer than five of the books being missing.

In order to complete my set, I am in need of No. 19, "Nelson Lee's

Pupil"; No. 20, "Three British Boys"; No. 21, "Pete's Holiday"; No. 29, "Playing to Win," and No. 50, "Wings of Gold."

If you have either or any of these books, in clean condition, that you wish to dispose of, I should be glad if you would post them to me. For the books that I buy I shall be willing to pay sixpence a copy.

#### AN ASSISTANT OF CUSTOMS.

One of my young friends wants me to tell him how to become an assistant of Customs.

I am afraid that, at the moment, I am unable to give him much information, because the old regulations governing the examinations for this department of the Civil Service have been altered, and, so far, new ones have not been issued. My friend, "A New Reader," should write to the Secretary of the Civil Service Commission, Burlington Gardens, W., and ask him for information on the subject.

#### "ALEC'S" DIFFICULTY.

"Alec" is an apprentice to a grocer, but he dislikes the trade, and when he asks his parents if he may go into something else, they say "No!" Now, poor "Alec" is troubled about this, because he feels it is not right for him to stop at a trade he dislikes. His wish is to go in for physical culture; but, naturally, he does not want to do anything to annoy his parents.

I quite sympathise with "Alec," and I find myself in rather a difficulty in having to advise him in this matter. I think, however, that the very best plan he can follow is to have a good, serious talk with his parents, and tell them he has spent eighteen months in the grocer's shop, and finds that after that length of time he still does not care for the business. On the other hand, he is immensely enthusiastic about physical culture, and wants to go in for that.

On this point I would like to issue a little warning to my friends. Physical culture is all very well, but every physical culturist is not a Sandow, and there are many young men in this calling who would not be sorry to get out of it. Still, if "Alec" is really keen and enthusiastic about physical culture he should follow it, because, after all, it is from the thing in which we take a real big interest that success is obtained. My young friend should tell his parents his state of mind quite frankly, and ask them to think it over. Let him point out to them, too, that every lad apprenticed to a grocer does not necessarily make a good grocer himself, and that many of them, had they been apprenticed to other callings might have made success of their lives instead of failures. After all, the grocery trade is a very excellent business for those who like it, but a most uninteresting one to those who do not.

I am sure, if my friend's parents are reasonable people—and there is no earthly reason for their being otherwise—they will see his point of view, and allow him to take up some other and more congenial calling.

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.)

### BOXING NOTES.

#### How to Use Apparatus.

SOME time back we discussed the importance of putting boxing-gloves on properly, as otherwise, after a short time, they become useless. This applies equally to all the various things required for a boxer's outfit.

For instance, always remember that the ring you have put up in your club is for boxing only. Do not use it for general bear-fighting or the ropes for a tug-o'-war.

Especially, the punching-sack or ball should not be allowed out of its proper place. It is a great temptation when, as sometimes happens, the cord or strap which fastens it breaks to use the ball as a footer, or the sack as a convenient seat in the corner of the room.

Naturally the first is bad policy, as the leather of which punching-balls are made is not intended for such rough treatment. And if the sack is sat upon, it will, of course, lose its shape, and it will be found hard to press it back into the form best suited to its purpose.

Do not use new gloves for the sack or ball—rather use very old ones that have been discarded.

#### for sparring practice.

Remember also that the floor of the ring is an important part of it, and should always be kept beautifully level and smooth. Therefore, box always in rubber-soled boots or shoes. These are to be obtained very cheaply from any big outfitter, and wear quite well.

In order to get a good grip on the floor and not slip about, a little resin may be rubbed on the soles of your shoes with great advantage.

It is a good plan to have a little of the resin put at two opposite corners of the ring, so that each pair of boxers, either in practice or competition, may rub their feet in it before starting the fray.

Always keep your club-room, if you have one, tidy.

It is a good plan to keep a separate locker, if possible, for each member's belongings.

THE END.

### YOUR DOG, And How to Train It.

IN the final article of my series I wish to say a little upon the training or the education of your dumb companion. To teach a dog, you must persevere, be patient and determined, without undue harshness. An intelligent animal will soon understand what you wish it to do without bullying or thrashing.

The simplest way to train a dog to fetch things of different kinds is to take the animal with you to the spot where the article lays, then place the thing in its mouth and let it follow you back.

For instance, in the case of a letter being pushed through the letter-box, take the dog to the door with you, and make him carry the letter in. In this way you can train your pet to fetch your shoes, or anything else that is conveniently placed for the animal to get at.

There are quite a number of tricks you can teach a dog, such as begging, smoking a pipe, shaking hands, feigning dead, and walking upon its hind legs, etc.

#### To teach your dog to beg

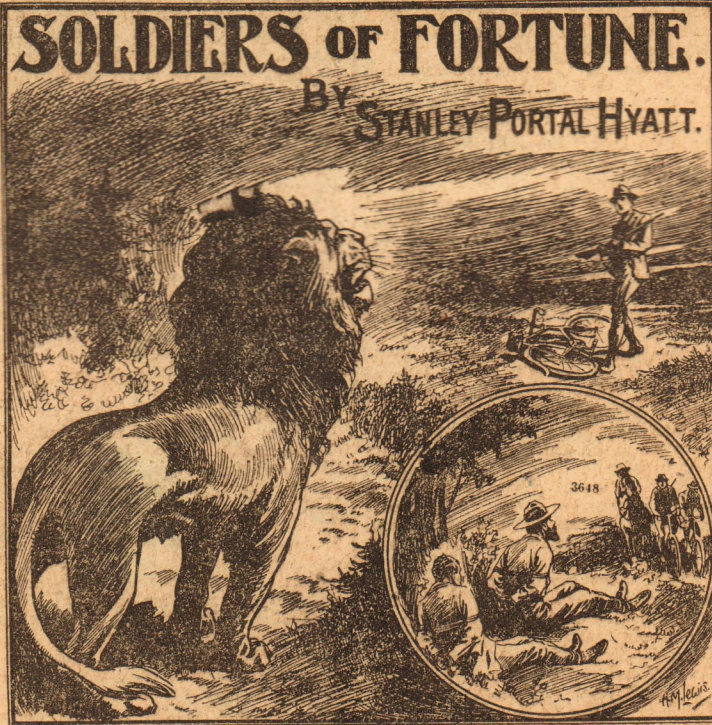
you should make him sit against the wall in the corner of the room, and encourage him to keep in this position by talking gently to him, and afterwards give him something for his trouble. When you have taught your pet this much, you can make him hold a pipe in his mouth.

You can train your dog to jump through hoops by holding a piece of meat at one side of the hoop and letting the animal leap through after it. Another trick is to place a piece of sugar, or anything the dog is fond of, upon its snout, and make the animal toss it into the air and catch it in his mouth as it descends. At first, touch him under the chin and send the morsel into the air, and then he will leap after it, and will soon learn what is wanted of him to do to earn his favourite delicacy.

You can even go so far as to dress him up in a soldier's uniform, and by tying a piece of wood to his fore-paw, you can make him beat a toy drum. A dog can be taught pretty well anything you care to teach him, but I would like to impress upon you that patience and encouragement is absolutely necessary.

THE END.

(More splendid articles next Tuesday.)



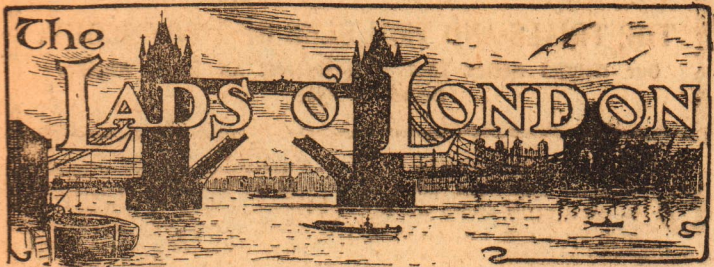
Two Splendid Incidents from Next Week's Chapters of our Grand New Serial.

Easy, Simple! Don't Fail to Read "CONJURING TRICKS FOR CHRISTMAS" "The Boys' Herald." Now on Sale.

in the Christmas Double Number of



No. 3 of Our Grand New Series of Complete Stories.



On Guard at His Majesty's Palace.

**L**EF,—right! Lef—right! Go on, Tug, you fathead! Chuck your chest out! Who knows the King himself aint watching us from one of them windows?"

Bugler Wilson, better known as "Tug," was already quite aware of that possibility, and told Bugler "Hoppy" Day therefore to go and fry his face.

They jerked these remarks at each other out of the corners of their mouths, of course; otherwise they marched stiffly—fiercely, in fact, as befitted the smartest buglers of the smartest battalion of his Majesty's regiment of Foot Guards.

To the right of them lay the Royal Palace, grim and grey in the wintry noontide; to the left the high railings and gilded gates, and beyond these the park through which the motor-cabs flitted in incessant streams. Before them was their goal, the guard-room, and, what was more to the point, a blazing fire and dinner.

Bugler Hoppy had seen the orderlies bringing over the steaming mess-kettles just as he was departing with a message from his sergeant to Captain the Hon. Tredway, the officer of the guard.

Three minutes later Bugler Tug had also been despatched on an errand, but not before he had claimed his mate's dinner and his own, and stowed them away in a store cupboard, which from time immemorial had been allotted strictly to the buglers of the guard.

No one else except the sergeant was supposed to go to it on any pretence whatever.

"By jing, I'm jolly hungry! What is the grub for to-day?" asked Hoppy, still marching straight as a ramrod.

"Roast mutton and baked spuds—all piping hot. At least, they was when I left 'em," answered Tug.

"Mutton and spuds! Think of it! No wonder their little noses glowed under the fringe of their bearskins, and their mouths watered with anticipation.

Yet to look at them strutting along, grim as veterans, eyes front, chins up, and chests out, anyone would have imagined that they were marching to the cannon's mouth, at least; certainly not to their dinners.

Two minutes later, though, a change came over the scene. The grub was gone! Stolen!

Some great hulking thief of a private must have waited until their backs were turned, and then sneaked into their cupboard and "scoffed" the lot.

The buglers looked at each other, white to the lips, chests heaving and eyes blazing. What a howling shame for a grown man to steal two kids' dinners and leave them to go hungry! What a howling, low shame!

"It ain't the first time it's happened, neither!" gulped Tug, under his breath, for they had at once decided that there was nothing to be gained by making a song about their loss.

They would only be told by the sergeant to keep a sharper eye on their property in future, and be laughed at by the privates for their pains. As for making a complaint to the officer when he came upon his rounds, such an idea was unspeakable.

"I wonder which particular pig of the lot went and done it!" whispered Hoppy, surveying the groups of privates in the great guard-room; some lounging at the long table by the fireplace, others already curled up the sloping plank guard-bed, "getting their eye down" against the weary hours of sentry-go which would fall to them during the night.

"That fat sponger, Slushy Evans, has got a greasy grin about his chops as if he had been up to something. I wonder if he snaffled it."

The private he nodded to—a big, beefy brute of a fellow—certainly seemed to be trying suspiciously hard to look as innocent as a saint.

He was sitting blinking at the fire

over his pipe, but every now and then shooting an uneasy glance in their direction, as if suspecting that he was the subject of their whisperings.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he was the very man," said Tug. "He's just the sort. What's more, he was on guard last Thursday, as I happen to know, and on Thursday the buglers' grub was sneaked in the very same way. Snuffy and Loder told me."

"Is that so? Well, we'll mark him now," said Hoppy, grinding his teeth.

"It ain't much good marking him now the grub's gone!" growled Tug, in a dismal whisper.

"No; but we might do something at tea-time," said Hoppy. "In fact, we've just got to do it, for the sake of the other kids what come after us. A hog like Slushy ought to be shown up and squashed!"

"Yes, but how?"

"Dunno. We might set a booby trap, perhaps," suggested Hoppy at a venture. "A thundering good booby trap that would bash his wicked head well in and spoil his uniform as well, so as he had to pay for a new one. That would be about the thing."

"By jing! Yes, it would be fine! You mean if we fixed it up over the door so that if he sneaked in again it would come clean down on top of him."

"That's the ticket. A pail of dirty water—what we've washed down the tables with—that would be the stuff," said Hoppy. "The only thing is the bait. It ain't likely he'll bother about our tea when it comes."

"I couldn't wait to give him the chance. I'm pretty well dead of hunger already!" groaned Tug.

"You'd have to if I said you must!" retorted Hoppy fiercely. "Still, it's risky, as you say," he admitted, "and not tempting enough for him. I wonder how faggots would fetch him?"

"Faggots!" groaned Tug, his stomach crying out at the mere thought of such succulent dainties.

"Yes, faggots, fathead!" snapped Hoppy impatiently. "I don't mean real ones. We couldn't get 'em here if we wanted to. But we could screw up a lump of something in a greasy paper, and spin a yarn how we'd been 'chewing the rag' with one of 'is Majesty's cooks round the back somewhere, and how she'd given them to us."

"But 'is Majesty ain't likely to eat faggots!" protested Tug.

"Ho, ain't he? Well, if he don't, he don't know what's good for him, that's all!" said Hoppy stoutly. "Anyway, a blubberheaded swab like Slushy won't know any better, and he's nuts on faggots. I've watched him wolfing them by the half-dozen round at the coffee-bar in barracks."

It was easy enough to save a piece of greasy paper from the wreck of the men's meal. The bugler's had to turn to in any case and sweep up the crumbs and wash down the guard-room table. But instead of carrying away the pail of greasy slops to the sink outside, they bided their opportunity and slipped it into the buglers' cupboard without anyone noticing.

No one except the sergeant ever looked in there, and only when he was taking over the quarters from the old guard and seeing that the place was cleaned up again ready for the new. So they were quite safe.

Besides, a pailful of greasy slops was the very thing for Mister Private Slushy. That emptied over his best review order tunic and trousers would give him something to think about for a month or two.

The trap could be so easily fixed up, too. They had only to stand the pail on the high shelf within, with some string arrangement to capsize it when the door was pushed open. Then let the miserable sneak-thief mind his eye.

The afternoon dragged away, and Hoppy, who had been sent out again on duty, came back breathless with suppressed excitement, as Tug could see.

Having reported his return to the sergeant, and made sure that Private

Slushy was watching them, he plumped down beside his bugler chum, and, fishing out a greasy package from under his tunic, held it to Tug's nose.

"What price this that one of the Palace skivvies give me just now?" he cried, with delight. "Sniff it, and guess what it is!"

"Faggots?" suggested Tug promptly.

"No; better than that!" replied Hoppy, who had been improving evidently on their prearranged plan. "Not faggots, but oyster tarts! Made fresh for the princess this morning, only she turned up her nose at 'em. Oyster tarts, old sport! Think of it!" he cried. "Come on—let's put 'em in the cupboard and keep them for tea!"

"Oyster tarts! What-ho!" breathed Private Evans to himself, his big mouth watering at the thought of such unheard-of dainties, and with hungry eyes he watched the boys disappear into the lobby where their cupboard stood.

His trouble was how to get them both out of the road at the same time. Fortune favoured him, however. Just as dusk was drawing in, and the lamps above the great gates had begun to twinkle, back came Hoppy, growling loud enough for a dozen grown men.

The sergeant was sending him again to the captain with some message or other. And just at tea-time, too! He might be kept kicking his heels for half an hour waiting for an answer.

"Well, never mind; cheer up, old hoss!" said Tug, reaching down his busby for him. "I'll wait for you. Besides, you can put in your time thinking of those oyster tarts."

He accompanied his chum out into the dusk as if to speed him on his way. But at the corner of the guard-room the pair came to a sudden halt, returning on tiptoe to a window which would give them a dim view of the lobby where their cupboard was and the brightly-lit guard-room beyond.

Sure enough, scarcely were they out of the room than Private Slushy rose, yawning, from his seat. The other men of the guard were deep in a game of "pokey die," while one or two were still snoring on the long plank bed.

No one lifted an eye to see what Slushy was about. Lounging carelessly to the entrance to the lobby, he slipped inside.

The buglers, with their noses just above the sill of the darkened window, wriggled with joyful anticipation. They could see the sneak's hand actually close upon the door-handle.

In another second he would have pushed it open and capsize the booby trap upon his guilty head.

But, no, their luck seemed altogether out that day, for just at the critical moment they heard the

slap, slap, slap as the sentry on the guard-room door came smartly to the slope, and then his hoarse cry:

"Guar-r-d, turn out!"

Great sealing-wax! What luck! There was nothing for it, of course, but to double back like hares and fall in. Out the men came tumbling, grabbing their rifles from the arm-rack by the door.

It was their captain, after all, come to inspect the guard and see that everything was correct. Up the ranks and down he passed, eyeing each man closely from his heels to his head.

"I'll just take a look at the guard-room, sergeant," he said, and passed through the doorway.

The boy buglers felt a little nervous, of course, but fairly safe, nevertheless, so far as their booby-trap was concerned. Never in the memory of man had an officer been known to do more than poke his nose round the corner of that lobby where the cupboard stood.

Then suddenly they heard something that made their blood turn to ice.

"Oh, by the way, sergeant," came the captain's voice from the guard-room, "what's in that cupboard at the end there? I have always meant to inquire."

"Nothing at all, as a rule, sir," replied the sergeant. "It belongs to the buglers, and they keep their food in it sometimes."

"Indeed! Well, I may as well have a look inside," said the officer.

Horror of horrors!

The two boys heard his quick step on the flagged floor. Their tongues clove to the roofs of their mouths. They dared not break ranks to rush in to save him.

Crash—splash—clatter—bump!

"Thunder and lightning!" gasped his furious voice. "What's this? Whatever's happened now? Who put this infernal pail in here—and tied it to the door-handle, too? It's a trap—a booby-trap!"

The guard, drawn up so stiff and grand outside, began to shake and chuckle, until they heard their officer come storming out again like a house on fire, and then they stood as rigid as rock.

Great Scott! What a sight he was, too! His tall bearskin was slattered in grease, his gold-laced tunic drenched with dirty slops—he was simply splattered from head to heel.

"Do you hear me?" he roared. "What man among you set that pail of filthy water inside that cupboard to capsize on to the head of the first man that opened the door?"

"Out with it! I'll give the guilty person five seconds in which to own up—otherwise I'll clap the whole guard under arrest!"

There was a moment's pause, and then for answer the two buglers

stepped one pace to their front like one man.

"I put it there, sir!" gulped Hoppy.

"And so did I, sir!" stammered Tug desperately.

Again there was a terrible pause.

"Oh," said the captain at last, "you did, did you—confound your impudence!"

"Yes, sir, I stuck it on the shelf!"

"And I helped!" chimed in Tug.

"It was all my idea, really!"

"Not altogether!" insisted Tug, beginning to feel weak in the knees.

The officer stood regarding them silently for a moment or two, then, suddenly realising that he was only catching his death of cold, he turned to the sergeant.

"Clap those young scoundrels under arrest, and send for two more buglers to take their places!" he said sternly, and strode away.

"You young limbs!" hissed the sergeant, taking them by the ears when the guard had been dismissed.

"What you played that trick for I'll find out in the morning! Meantime take off your belts, get into that lobby, and clean up that mess! And if I so much as catch you putting your noses out, I'll skin you alive! Do you hear?"

White and sick with hunger and disgust, the two youngsters surrendered their drummers' swords, of which they were so proud, and fell to their work like the common prisoners they were.

What made their disgrace the harder to bear was the sight of Private Slushy's grinning face for ever leering at them, and the supercilious airs of the two bugler brats sent from the barracks to take their duty.

Of tea they got none, and at last, worn out with misery, they curled themselves up on the freezing stone floor and fell asleep, to dream of breakfast.

"Now, then, you little wasters! Get up out of that! Do you hear?"

It was the corporal, who was standing over them, stirring them back to consciousness with his toe.

"You're to go over to Captain Tredway's quarters at once. He's sent for you," he growled, as they scrambled to their feet.

One of the guard was waiting to escort them to their destination. He was a surly fellow, just roused from sleep, so there was not much comfort to be got out of him.

When they had dragged their quaking limbs at last to the door of the apartments of the officer of the Palace Guard, the man left them to kick their heels in the ante-room for another quarter of an hour.

Whatever would the captain want with them at that hour of the night? demanded Tug, and then saw that it was still only a little past nine o'clock. It had seemed to them like one in the morning.

Hoppy's idea was that he meant to try them "on his own," in solemn state, and perhaps sentence them to be shot at dawn beneath the Palace walls. He guessed that captains of guards on Royal Palaces could do funny things if they chose.

Tug was scarcely less gloomy. One thing they were both determined upon, however. Captain Tredway might turn them inside out, and skin them alive, but they would never divulge the name of the thief they were trying to catch. No, they must get their own back on Slushy Evans another time—if they were spared—and in their own way.

At last they were ushered by a flunkey into the awful presence. Before them was a table littered with the remains of a royal spread—champagne-bottles, and silver baskets laden with fruit.

Behind it, surveying them through the blue haze of cigar-smoke, sat three persons in uniform—Captain the Honourable Tredway, another gentleman whose face they seemed to know but could not recall, and, most terrible of all, the colonel of their own regiment of Guards.

At sight of this fearful creature, Hoppy was sorry that he had not taken Tug's advice offered earlier in the evening, which was to burst from the guard-room and rush straight off to the lake in St. James's Park, and drown themselves.

"So these are the young imps who spoiled your best Sunday-go-to-meeting tunic, Captain Tredway!" said the stranger at last, with a kindly laugh.

"Come," thought Hoppy, "this doesn't sound much like being shot at daybreak, after all."

"Yes," replied the captain, "these are the young scoundrels! Still, I don't believe they meant the booby-trap for me."

"No, sir—honour bright, we didn't,



As soon as the officer pushed open the door, down came the pail of greasy water. His gold-laced tunic was drenched with dirty slops. He was simply splattered from head to heel.

"The Rival Apprentices," a Rousing, Long, Complete Tale of the Printing Works and the Football Field, Appears Next Week in THE BOYS' FRIEND.



# HOW TO DEVELOP MUSCLE.

A Superb Series of Articles Specially Written for the BOYS' FRIEND by the World-Famed

EUGEN SANDOW.

sir!" gasped Hoppy, snatching his chance. "We never expected you to poke your nose—I mean shove your head inside there, sir!"

"Then, realising that this was not behaving like a soldier, but more like a frightened schoolboy, he closed his lips with a snap. "Well, well! Come, now, my lad, you've told me your trap was not for me," said the captain kindly, after a pause, "now tell me who it was really for, and why it was set—Hullo!" he exclaimed, turning his gaze to Tug, who was looking as if he was about to forget his manners and sit down on the floor. "Your chum seems rather dicky! What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing, sir!" gasped Tug, pulling himself together with an effort. "It's nothing, sir, really!"

"Tug's hungry," explained Hoppy, steadying his mate with his hand. "It's the sight of food what's upsetting him, I expect. 'E ain't over-strong."

"But you've had your dinner and tea, haven't you?" demanded their colonel.

"No, sir. Somebody did, but we didn't. That's really why we set the booby-trap—to catch the thief, sir," blurted Hoppy, feeling that he would like to kick himself all the time.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the captain. "Then before we go any further into this matter you boys had better go outside, and I'll have some food sent out to you."

"I didn't mean that, sir," stammered Hoppy proudly; but the stranger had already cut him short.

"Why not let them sit down here?" he suggested. "Sit down here! Really, your Royal Highness, that is quite impossible!" protested the colonel. "I couldn't think of allowing two of my buglers—"

"My dear colonel, and why not?" laughed the other. "They'll enjoy their supper, and we shall enjoy their story, I am sure. Please, I entreat you, stretch a point this once."

And that is how Buglers Hoppy Day and Tug Wilson came to take a belated dinner with his Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of— But there! One must not mention names, perhaps.

The two young imps, of course, were too frightened at first to swallow even a mouthful, but when Hoppy came to blurt out that about the oyster-tarts, and when even their own terrible colonel nearly laughed himself into a fit at the notion of such delicacies, they took courage and tucked in like the true soldiers they were.

What is more, the colonel made it his business to see that there was no more pilfering of dinners of the buglers of the guard.

THE END.

Another Lads o' London story next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

**N**OW you have passed the half-way mark, I hope you are all performing the exercises as if to the manner born, and are becoming so expert at grasping the few fresh details given each week that new exercises are mastered "one time."

It often happens that fresh exercises are not quite understood for the first day or two, particularly when one is undergoing his first experience of physical culture, and in such cases practically no progress is made during the learning period.

That is why I want you to study each week's work carefully before the morning you are ready to start, to go through the movement several times and make yourself letter perfect, so that you will not lose a single day's progress during the whole course.

Remember this series of exercises is the concentrated essence of physical movement, and will give you more muscle-building exercise for the whole body than years of running, boxing, ball-punching, swimming, and half a dozen other sports combined.

Just as—so the posters tell us—we can obtain all the goodness and nutriment of an ox in a bottle of meat extract, with all the waste and useless matter eliminated, so these exercises contain all the useful movements, in a concentrated form, which occur in outdoor exercise and gym-training.

Therefore, you must not waste them!

To-day I am going to give you a couple of movements—one principally for the trunk muscles, and the other devoted to leg development.

In the first exercise, keep the body perfectly upright, and when bending from side to side do so from the waist, only keeping the legs stiff. Do not bend the body forward, and keep the eyes on the arm being stretched down.

READY POSITION. Arms at sides, body perfectly upright.



Exercise 9.

Movement:

Bend body to right side as far as possible, at the same time bringing left hand under left armpit, stretching the right arm down as far past the knee as possible. Reverse. Muscles: Abdominal, obliques, biceps, and deltoid.

This movement is chiefly devoted to exercising the obliquus abdominis, and—well, you will know it for the first day or so, as these muscles generally remain neglected from one year's end to another, and thus become weak.

The second exercise is the first of two whose object is to build up a sturdy pair of legs and banish all "spindle-shanks" and "sparrow-legs" from the land for ever.

READY POSITION. Feet twelve inches apart, heels on the floor, arms at sides.

Movement: Sink slowly down, knees apart, body upright. When the limit has been reached, return to first position. Muscles: Quadriceps, biceps and flexors of thigh, and extensors of foot.

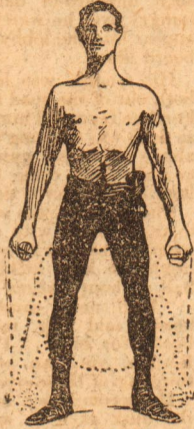
This one exercises the thighs, whilst the one I shall give you next week will strengthen and develop the calves.

When performing this exercise, keep the head up and the eyes fixed on some object six feet or more from the floor, so that the body is kept as upright as possible.

Each of these movements should be performed about a dozen times.

Don't forget to keep up the measurement-form I gave you in my first article, and put down all measurements. There will be only the slightest change for you to record, probably, but remember that "great oaks from little acorns grow," and that, by exercise, you will become many times more strong and muscular than you are at present.

EUGEN SANDOW.



Exercise 10.

## THE TRIALS AND TROUBLES OF A BOY SCOUT.

Our Helpful Series That Will Interest All Boys, Whether Scouts or Not.

### Starting a Club-room.

**O**NE most important point is to get a place where you can kick up a row without being a nuisance to anybody. Scouts never annoy anyone if they can help it, but all fellows like to make a noise sometimes. So try to get a club-room where you can make as much row as you like.

### Get it in Writing.

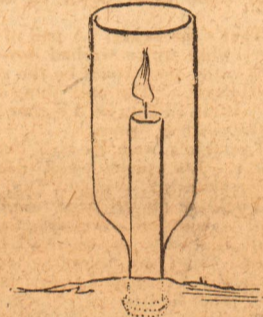
Whatever sort of a place you take, you should get a letter from the landlord saying in black and white that he is willing to let you have it for so long, or from week to week—which is the better arrangement—at such and such a rent.

You should also have a clear understanding with him at the very beginning what you may and may not do. This saves trouble later on. Of course, it is not necessary to tell scouts that when they undertake not to do a thing, they don't do it.

The rent you will have to pay, of course, depends upon what sort of place it is, and where it is situated, and how much you can afford, and a lot of other things. It is quite impossible to give you any clear idea. But I know one or two troops who got old workshops for half-a-crown a week.

Of course, you must pay for your own fires, lighting, etc.

If, for lighting, there is no gas or lamps, I would advise you to use candles. They are cheap, and not wasteful. You can collect the ends and waste grease and make fresh candles for yourselves.



Showing Candle in Neck of Bottle.

But never use candles naked. The flame blows about, or the candle gets knocked over, and the place is afire before you can say Jack Robinson. You can easily make safety candlesticks from old bottles.

### A Home-made Candlestick.

Take an ordinary bottle, and put about an inch and a half of water in it. Then stand it in the embers of the fire. In a little while it will get hot, and crack all round at the water-level.

Then turn the bottle upside down and stick the neck into the ground, or into an improvised stand. The candle, of course, is stuck in the neck, as in the illustration on this page.

You can save on your firing, too. I know some fellows who go out every Saturday and collect enough logs and dead branches to keep their club-room in fires all the week. They haven't any coal bills to pay.

You should, of course, do your own cleaning. A scouts' club-room should always look clean and neat and tidy. The best plan is to tell off one patrol or group each week, and make them responsible for the cleanliness of the room.

### How to Get the Money.

About finances, I think the best plan is to work out how much it will cost to run the club-room, and then make each man pay a penny or two-pence a week, or whatever is needed to make up that sum—with just a trifle over for emergencies.

This should be kept absolutely apart from the ordinary troop subscription. It should be paid in advance, and when a fellow gets in arrear, he should at once be suspended, and forbidden the use of the room till he pays up.

There's a lot more to be said about club-rooms, but I've no more room, so I must keep it till next week, when I'll tell you how to furnish the room, what games to play, and so on.

### A Breathless Scout.

J. J. is a keen young scout who complains that he very soon gets out of breath and finds himself lagging behind the other boys when proceeding at "the double."

Well, J.J., this is a sure sign that you do not indulge in sufficient exercise. You should go for a steady run every day. On the first day run a quarter or half a mile at an even pace, and do not give in until you have accomplished it. As time goes on you will find that your staying powers will improve wonderfully, and that you will be able to run a longer distance without the least sign of getting out of breath.

You should go in for the splendid exercises specially prescribed for "B. F." readers by Mr. Eugen Sandow in his helpful weekly article. THE SCOUTMASTER.

# THE BEST STORIES OF THE YEAR

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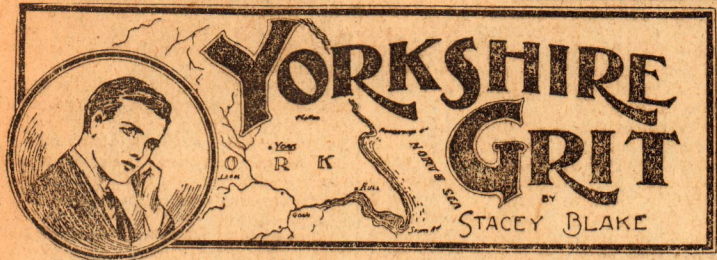
Don't Fail to Read "CONJURING TRICKS FOR CHRISTMAS" in the Christmas Double Number of

"The Boys' Herald." Now on Sale.



SUPERB NEW SERIAL.

START TO-DAY.



New Readers Start Here.

Mr. Trimble is the owner of a great cotton mill in Vulcan Street, Bradford, where all the employees are on strike. At Trimble's mills new machinery is being fitted up which will, when completed, turn out work with wonderful rapidity. The workers fail to see what advantage it will be to them, and they are under the impression that this machinery will cause the discharge of many hands.

Dick Allen, a plucky and determined thirteen-year-old Yorkshire lad, is left to fight the great battle of life, parentless and almost penniless. He resolves to get on in the world, to cheer up his young sister Jessie and to provide for her; he will live a life of poverty no longer.

In defiance of the strikers,

this plucky little fellow succeeds in getting employment to help fit up the machinery in Trimble's mills.

The strikers become furious, and in their rage they attempt to force a way into the mill and break up the machinery. In the fight between mill-owner and idle employees, Dick Allen saves the life of Mr. Trimble, and in recognition of this brave deed he is given a written document showing that he will be entitled to a one-fourth share in the mill when he attains the age of twenty-one.

Dick meets a great enemy when he is introduced to James Ackroyd, the unscrupulous nephew of Mr. Trimble. Ackroyd has a power in the management of the mill, and does all he can to get Dick from his uncle's favour.

Ackroyd owes a certain money-lender a large sum of money, and in order to clear this debt he forges a cheque for £150. Later, Mr. Trimble discovers this deliberate alteration, and so overwhelmed is he at finding his nephew to be a rogue and thief he is suddenly taken ill with heart-trouble.

Thinking of what will be left him at his uncle's death, James Ackroyd withholds Mr. Trimble's medicine, and so the great mill-owner passes away, death being caused by his nephew.

Dick Allen offers a wreath to be placed on the grave of his employer. Ackroyd pitches it disgustingly on to the fire.

"And now you are here," says Ackroyd, "it'll save my breath on Monday to tell you that you are not wanted any more at Trimble's."

(Now read this week's instalment.)

Trimble's on Fire.

DICK left the room in which Ackroyd sat, too choking to speak. He shut the front door after him, and went out under the bare trees, feeling too stunned and crushed to even order his thoughts. But by the time he got to the gates at the top of the hill he was himself again.

"After all," he said to himself, "it's part of the game. He's against me. It's his win this time. But I've got to keep playing up. Except that I don't know how to. I'm sacked. I think I'm about finished. I can't be in the game at all."

So his heart sank again, and he crept home, depressed and miserable. In Manchester Road he became aware that there was some excitement in the air. People were hurrying by him, clearly with some objective in view. At the corner of Portland Street he converged full-tilt into none other than his enemy Widdop and several of his pals. But at that moment the big youth appeared to be engaged with the current excitement. He only greeted Dick with a jeer. Then he cried out his news because it was too good to keep:

"Have you heard Trimble's is on fire?"

"Trimble's—the mill!" echoed Dick, in astonishment.

"Ay, rather! T' engine's sent for, anyhow."

Then it occurred to Dick that he didn't care whether Trimble's was on or off the earth.

"It's on fire, is it?" he said. "Well, let it burn. I don't care. I've got the sack."

"The sack—eh? Well, that's champion. And you'd like to see it burned down. Well, you are a spiteful little beauty. We can't stop to wallop you just now, but we've made a welcome for you in your own kitchen. I hope you'll like it. It'll learn thee to keep thi door locked."

They ran off, and Dick went towards home too utterly depressed to care much what had happened.

He opened the kitchen door and struck a match. What he saw there appalled him. There was not a shred of his humble furniture that was not smashed or injured. The cowards had practically wrecked his home.

He dropped the match with a groan, sank down upon the floor, and buried his face in his hands in an abandon of utter despair.

As he crouched there, something came and licked the back of his hands. It was the little dog he had rescued.

"What! You are there, doggy? They didn't get you, then? I'm glad of that. I expect that is what they were after. You smell of soot, and I expect you'll show black in the light. I expect you hid under the copper in the scullery. You aren't old enough to have got your fighting-teeth yet, are you? Poor little puppy! You're my pal, eh?"

And he felt comfort in the little creature's sympathy, for he was very troubled and very crushed, and this outrage, this blackguardly ruining of his home—of Jessie's home too—seemed more than he could bear.

But he got up on his feet, and forced himself to look on the appalling scene again. He struck another match, and put the flame to a fragment of candle that he found in the cupboard, for the glass of the lamp had been broken.

The ruin was very complete. The young ruffians had made real havoc in the little home. The table was overturned, though it did not seem to be broken, apparently having been too stout for their powers, but there was not a whole chair left. Legs and backs were broken off. A little dresser had been overturned, drawers smashed and their contents scattered.

He surveyed it all with mingled feelings, but in which the spirit of anger was growing uppermost. He would not submit to it any longer, for it was not only a blow at himself, but at Jessie. This was little Jessie's home, and the wanton villains had destroyed it. And then, all at once, he wondered if they had been upstairs as well. And there came a thrill of fear with the remembrance of the precious paper that was sewn up in his own mattress—the written promise of the man who was dead.

He ran upstairs. To his great relief, nothing there was disturbed. To assure himself, he put his hand under the mattress till his fingers could feel the shape of the paper inside the lining.

Then suddenly his thoughts jumped further. This paper was to make him sharer in Trimble's Mill in so many years' time. Even at that moment he could hear feet hurrying by on the pavement because Trimble's Mill was on fire! His mill—that is to say, partly his mill in the future, although at the moment he was dismissed from it with ignominy and insults.

There recurred to his mind his exclamation in the street a few minutes earlier:

"On fire, is it? Well, let it burn! I don't care!"

Of course he cared. It was his chance of future fortune that was on fire. Considerations of insurance he did not think of, or understand. The fact that hammered in his brain was that he must go out and take a hand, if that was possible, in saving Trimble's Mill.

He locked up the house, leaving the puppy, and started off with fleet footsteps down towards Vulcan Street. At present there was no sign of fire, though as he turned the corner, where the black block of the mill was visible, he detected the distinct odour of burning wool.

He reached the gateway, which was open, and ran into the yard, where a crowd had already assembled.

Who was in the yard he could not see, because it was very dark, for there was as yet no flame showing, so that he wondered where the fire was. He saw it himself a moment later. There was dense smoke coming out at a top window in the part that was called the old mill, because it ante-

dated in construction most of the other part. It was now a wing of the main building, but it was a peculiarly inflammable part by reason that it was cut up by wooden partitions.

With a start, Dick remembered that he was working there that morning, overhauling a lot of stored yarn. How a fire could have started there was beyond his wit to understand, for certainly on the top floor, whence the smoke seemed to be issuing, no one had been but himself, except for one visit by Billings, the silent foreman.

In this spirit of wonderment and inquiry, he squeezed round a narrow way where some packing-cases were piled up between two walls, and so got round to the other side of the building for the purpose of getting a view from a fresh quarter.

He saw nothing more of the fire, for the smoke seemed to be carried out at the other side, but his eyes caught on something that gave him cause for surprise. On the ground floor, almost within a few feet of him, was a window—open. He did not stay to argue in his mind the reason for this rather unusual occurrence—for lower windows were always carefully fastened at Trimble's—but he saw in it an opportunity for a closer look at the fire, and perhaps for a chance to do something useful towards averting its progress.

He did not stay to consider the danger to himself. There was only very strong in his mind the remembrance that he had an inheritance here to protect.

He was through the window quickly, groping his way among the machines, though in the dense blackness he quickly found himself at fault, and he had to strike a match to show himself the way. Evidently the light must have attracted attention out in the yard, for he heard a voice declaim loudly that somebody was moving about inside.

Dick smiled. "They'll be a bit surprised if I put it out before the engines arrive," he said to himself.

He reached the stairs, and ran up as fast as he could. On the top landing the smoke met him, though it was not too thick to breathe, but when he opened the door it came out in a thick cloud. He shut the door hastily. He could do nothing in that. But his ready mind hit on the only possible scheme. He unwrapped the scarf that was round his neck, dipped it in the water of one of the row of fire-buckets that stood on the landing, and then fastened the wet neck-cloth round his head so that mouth and nostrils were covered.

His eyes he had to leave uncovered, but at least the wet cloth would filter his breathing air for him. He entered again, and took a swift survey. It was hard to see where the burning was in that dense smoke, but he made out a dull glow at the other end of the room—little more than a faint luminosity through the fog of smoke.

He ran out again to the landing to get water. He knew why there was comparatively little light. It was a half-smouldering sort of fire among the close-packed wool yarns—for wool does not burn easily. But presently it would be among the skeps, which were filled with wood bobbins, and then there would be a quick outbreak of flame.

He bore back again through the choking smoke with a bucket of water in his hand. By the time he had reached where he could feel the heat on his face, he was almost blinded, but he went on still further, and flung the water on to the nearest edge of the smouldering heap.

He had the satisfaction of hearing it hiss. It was the first blow of the fight against the fire. He got out again upon the landing, which was as yet comparatively clear of smoke, suffering a horrible pain at his eyes, for the smoke seemed to bite into them like acid. But he did not pause. He seized another bucket, and hastened in with it. He reached the fire more by instinct than by any guidance of his eyes, for he had to keep them shut because of the pain the smoke caused them.

He forced his way in again with still another bucket. It was not only his eyes now, for the smoke, in spite of the wet cloth through which he breathed, began to get a grip on his lungs and throat, and when he groped his way out of the thick smother again he bent over and coughed while he pressed his hands to his agonised eyes.

He felt he could not go in again, and yet when he thought that it was his inheritance he was fighting for, he determined that he would not give up. He washed his eyes with water in the palm of his hand, and dipped afresh his neck-cloth to breathe through. Seizing another bucket, he faced the

dreadful smoke again. He reached the burning mass, and threw the water on it, but then he suddenly dropped the bucket as though life had gone out of his hands, and he staggered.

He felt a whirring noise in his head, and a hundred piners gripping at his lungs. He felt all the power of his legs going from him—a great weakness overcoming his whole body. Of a sudden he slipped to the floor. The shock stirred up his dazed senses to an appreciation of his danger, and so to further effort. He staggered up again, and made an attempt to get out.

But death was following very close on his heels now.

In his fogged condition he did not know which way he went. Instead of going to the door, he staggered towards the glowing mass of the fire itself.

Knowledge of his ghastly mistake only pierced his smoke-drunk brain when the pain of the fire smote on his cheek and hands. He had enough left in his mind to tell him what had happened, and what he must do. He turned round, and with a last effort, staggered off towards the door.

He got through, almost blinded, three parts suffocated. The spring-door shut on him, and he fell, as one lifeless, just outside, upon the landing at the top of the stairs. There he lay unconscious, with the smoke gradually thickening about him, and the fire at the other side of the door, despite all his efforts, slowly creeping towards him.

Accused and Discharged.

IT had been no great while after James Ackroyd's brutal dismissal of Dick that there came through the telephone to this dissipated youth, who was the new owner of Trimble's, the dire news that smoke was coming out of the mill, and that the fire-brigade had been sent for. Ackroyd was instantly moving, and he ran out of the house with anxiety whipping him into haste—for he was not sure how much the mill was covered by insurance.

At the top of Oak Avenue he hailed a taxi-cab, and frantically bade the driver to run him down into the town at the best pace he dared. It came about, therefore, that he ran into Vulcan Street a second or two after the arrival of the fire-brigade.

He sprang out into the light of the lamps.

"Where's the fire, lads—where is it?" he cried.

"It's t' young measter! It's Measter Ackroyd!"

"Sithe, t' fire's up there at t' top of t' old building, sir!"

"And not a soul among you trying to put it out! There's no flame yet! A few buckets of water—"

"T' place is locked up."

"Confound it! And I have not got the keys!"

"Look out! Shift away!" cried the stentorian voice of a fireman. "We'll have to smash the door in! Hey-oo! Clear out! We can't work if you get in the way!"

"But somebody's been inside," cried a voice after Ackroyd—"somebody with a light!"

But Ackroyd only half heard. He was on the heels of the firemen. He watched them smash at the door, and then ran back and glanced at the swift preparations of the engine. He was not naturally possessed of courage, but the fear of loss and ruin made him forget the fears that were natural to him, and when the door broke away under the firemen's attack he was through with the first of them; and, because he knew the way better than they, he got level with them, and ran up beside the foremost.

One of the firemen carried a lantern. The light of it showed up the haze of smoke that filled the stairway, and which grew thicker the higher they went.

"By jingo, there's someone lying at the top of the stairs!" cried Ackroyd.

"There is, too—a little lad. Eh, he's far gone, I'm thinking!"

"By gad, and he deserves to be!" cried Ackroyd, with sudden venom as he saw Dick's face. "What's this boy doing here, I should like to know? He's no right to be on the premises. I dismissed him only to-night."

"There isn't time to talk about that," said the fireman curtly. "Here, Bill, take him! Get him into the fresh air."

"Confoundedly suspicious!" protested Ackroyd, as one of the firemen

lifted up Dick and bore him away down to the open air.

They tumbled over the empty fire-buckets.

"See them?" cried Ackroyd. "See them? By jingo, they're empty when they ought to be full. The water has been poured away. There's been foul play here, I believe. I'll bet the other buckets have been emptied lower down. I tell you, this wants looking into."

The fireman glanced into the burning room.

"I think we'll manage it," he said, "wi' a bit of soaking. But it's a marvel it hasn't got hold hold more than this."

He did not know that it was only the efforts of the boy he had just sent down to the open air that had prevented its spreading.

When Dick came to himself he found he was lying on a sack in a far corner of the yard with a friendly policeman attending him. He felt very sick, and he had a headache, while his throat and chest hurt most atrociously.

But to his satisfaction he saw that there was a real onslaught upon the fire now. Ladders were reared up against the wall, and jets of water were being poured in at the upper windows. There was less smoke, too, and it was manifestly only a matter of time when the fire would be beaten.

"Feeling a bit better, sonny?" asked the policeman, as Dick staggered rather groggily to his feet.

"A bit. But I'm not very great. I think I'll get home and go to bed."

"I think you'd better stop here, lad, a minute or two," said the policeman hesitatingly.

"No, I'd rather go," said Dick, moving off.

The constable laid a restraining hand on Dick's sleeve.

"If you must have it, lad," he said, not unkindly, "I've had orders to look after you. I think you were going to be given in charge."

"In charge!" echoed Dick, in astonishment. "I don't understand. You are going to take me up? What for?"

"I don't altogether know. But here's Mr. Ackroyd. Ask him what the charge is."

"Yes, I'll soon tell you that," said Ackroyd, overhearing the last sentence. "I accuse you of setting this place on fire out of revenge, because you have been dismissed."

Dick literally staggered under the monstrous accusation. It seemed blow upon blow. He had toiled and suffered, and faced death in fighting this fire. Indeed, it was only his timely efforts that had prevented it getting hold at a critical moment. And then this.

"It's a lie!" he said, without mincing his words. "It is a wicked thing to say. You have made it up. There is no proof."

He stood there facing his enemy, no longer the quiet, submissive boy, with indignation flashing in his eyes, and his face flushed darkly.

"No proof!" sneered Ackroyd. "No one saw you come in. You must have crept in by some other way. But you were seen to be inside moving about with a light, and there is a window at the back open where evidently you entered. What were you doing inside? You had no right there."

"I went in to try to put the fire out."

"Who would believe that? You had just been dismissed. You would have no interest in the place."

"Yes, I had."

"What—what could you have?" asked Ackroyd quickly.

But Dick was silent. He must not talk about that. And his silence was misinterpreted.

"You don't speak. That lie won't serve. I tell you I know and have proof that so far from wishing to help in putting the fire out you were pleased that it was on fire. You were heard to express in the street, not very long ago, indifference whether it was on fire or not. 'Let it burn!' was your expression. 'I don't care!' you said. More than one pair of ears heard that. To my mind it gives you quite away."

"I might have said that," Dick answered, "but I felt sore about what you had said to me, and—"

"Yes, I believe it, so you wanted your revenge," cried Ackroyd triumphantly.

"No, no, it wasn't so. I have been trying to put the fire out."

"After boasting in the street that you did not care, that it could burn so far as you were concerned. Who would believe it? I will tell you what. I know why you crept back into the building. It was to empty the



fire-buckets, so that when anyone came they would be handicapped in the endeavour to put out the fire. Only the smoke overcame you. You miscalculated a bit. You'd have been dried and smoked there if we hadn't come up and rescued you, and I must say you deserved it."

"Yes, I emptied those buckets," Dick said, "but I emptied them on the fire. That's why it hasn't got any further hold."

"A very good excuse, you brave, virtuous little prig. But if you were sincere in wanting the fire put out—just after you had boasted that you didn't care—why did you skulk round to the back by yourself? Why didn't you ask someone else to go to help you? There were plenty here. But you wanted to do it by yourself—eh? What you had to do was not for other eyes to see. Another thing, you were working up there by yourself this morning. I guess you were up to mischief then."

"But I wasn't sacked then," retorted Dick, with spirit—"if you mean that I was very likely doing something then to set the place on fire."

"No; but you knew jolly well you would be the first moment I saw you. You knew what I thought of you."

"You turn about everything I say," answered Dick bitterly.

"Then say nothing, lad," said the policeman quietly. "You ain't making your defence just now. If you've got to do it, keep it."

He looked to Ackroyd for instructions.

"Yes," nodded Ackroyd, "I'm taking the responsibility. I charge him. Let him be taken away."

Dick could hardly believe his own ears. He swung his eyes from one to the other.

"Do you really mean it?" he gasped.

For answer the policeman put a hand on his arm—though a gentle one.

"All right," said Dick chokingly, "I'll go with you; you needn't hold me."

But he went with shame. What had happened seemed to be known. The crowd hung about his heels as he went out. He could hear comments and talk about him. He felt almost that he would die of shame. But then came the thought that he was innocent, that he had nothing to be ashamed of, and that he could hold his head high. But yet, it was an ordeal to go through this crowd accused of a dastardly act, knowing some of them might believe it, and fancying, even if it were not there, that black looks of suspicion and hate were directed against him from every face that turned his way.

The policeman was not officious. He allowed Dick to walk beside him as though they were a pair of friends. There was no suggestion in his manner that the boy was under arrest, but for all that there was a subtle knowledge of the thing conveyed to the people in the street, and a little group of hangers-on followed Dick and his captor down Vulcan Street, to Dick's everlasting shame.

Much as he dreaded entering, it was almost a relief when the walls of the town-hall hid him. Almost in a dream he heard the monstrous accusation put in words again. A stern superintendent looked Dick up and down. The constable could not say anything beyond the fact that Dick was undoubtedly found inside the mill. Anyhow, Mr. Ackroyd had promised to be along directly, when he would formally make the charge.

So it happened. Dick was left a while to his own devices in an office-sort of place, and he did not see his accuser; but presently he was fetched out and told that he would have to stay.

"Is there anybody you would like to communicate with?" asked the superintendent. "Anybody who would bail you out?"

"There is no one," said Dick sadly. "The only one who would have done so is dead. Mr. Trimble would have believed in me."

"Um! Ha! Well, is there nobody else, lad?"

He thought for a moment of Dr. Denis Moor. Then he hesitated. There was a certain amount of pride about him. He would rather give help any day than ask for it. He shook his head.

"No, there isn't anybody," he said. "Oh, there's just one boy I'd like to send word to about looking after my dog. His name's Fry. He lives in Clifford Street."

"All right, lad. Write the note. I'll see that it's delivered."

"The accused will be discharged." Dick leaned against the dock-side

wearily, but his heart leaped within him as he heard the words. He had spent there a dreadful hour, save when at his own initiative he went into the witness-box and told his own story. He had been mercilessly cross-examined, but he had held his own, he thought, until the opening solicitor made his summing-up and final plea, when it seemed that all the villainous chances and circumstances of a mischievous fate had combined to destroy him.

But his own solicitor—a young man who had volunteered in court to defend him—put a little different complexion upon matters, though he was by no means easy about the result.

"The accused will be discharged," said the presiding magistrate, "for there seems to us a lack of complete evidence against him. At the same time, there are elements of suspicion in the affair that we should have cleared up. The prosecution have emphasised the belief that the fire was not an accidental one, but the wilful act of somebody. That may be so. It is outside our province to decide. At least, the evidence against this boy is insufficient, in our minds, to convict him. At the same time, he is not clear. There attaches to him some suspicion, and though we are about to discharge him, it is only because we give him the benefit of the doubt."

So Dick went out with a stain on his character—a slur on his name, as

#### The Boy Mill-Owner.

THE sight was appalling. It shook him to anger. He had the impulse to go out and make complaint against Widdop, but if he did that it would be put down as spite for that youth's appearing against him in court, for Widdop had there testified that Dick had boasted in the street that he did not care whether Trimble's was on fire or not.

No; he would have to bear this, like he had borne other things. Then he had the sudden desire to go up and have a look at the document that was hidden away in his mattress, the one that was going to give him a share in Trimble's mill when he was twenty-one, for now misfortunes were crowding upon him, and his hopes dropping away, he had doubts even if that paper, from which he hoped so much, could be all he had believed.

He cut Jessie's neat stitches in the mattress, and took out the paper. He read with eyes that burned the words that seemed so good—the words that Henry Trimble, who was being put in the ground that day, had written on the night when they opposed the strikers.

"In consideration of the valuable services that I have this night received from Richard Allen, I do hereby give and bequeath one fourth

"Of course, I put my own signature on it as witness."

"Yes, it is here, sir. Will you read it? You will see why I wanted to save Trimble's. It was like saving my own—or what is going to be my own, I hope."

"By jingo, lad, so this is how Mr. Trimble paid you back! And I fancy you deserved it from what I saw. But look here, if you had produced this in court to-day, it would practically have proved your innocence, for it would have been quite clear that you would not have been fool enough to set fire to what was likely to be your own."

"I hoped I should get off without, sir. I wanted to keep this quiet. Jess thought it would be safer, and though Jess is only a little kid, sir, you'd be surprised what sense she has. You see, I've got a few years to put in before I can handle anything of my share. I shall be fourteen come Tuesday week. That's a long time to wait before I'm a fourth share mill-owner, and till then I've to get my living just like other mill-hands. Jess thought if it was known that I was looking forward to this, that I should have a rough time with the lads, with jealousy and spite and all that. Besides, sir, I'm afraid of Mr. Ackroyd."

"Afraid!"

"Not in the way of any hammering he might give me, but I mean

document. Don't let it slip out of your pocket."

"I'll grip hold of it all the time," Dick said. "There'll be no fear of losing it then."

So he sat on the top of the tram, grasping in one hand his precious paper, and in the other the bottles of medicine. It was just at the bottom of Manchester Road, as the tram eased up at the corner, that another one, coming in the opposite direction, also slowed down for the same reason. Dick took no notice of this oncoming tram, though he might have done with good reason if he could have anticipated events by a few seconds. He sat there absorbed in thought, and he cast no glance at the one figure that sat on the top of the tram that drew level. Nor did he see the head lean over the edge, nor the arm shoot out. But he awakened to a knowledge of things with a start, when all at once his long envelope was snatched out of his hand.

He looked up, and saw grinning evilly at him from the other tram that was now gliding away the malicious face of Widdop.

He was up on his feet instantly in an agony of apprehension. The bully hated him with a mischievous hate that would take delight in injuring him. He nearly fell down the steps in his hurry to descend, for the tram was moving quickly again, and he leaped into the road in such frantic haste, and with so little regard for where he was going, that only by inches did he miss being run over by a big motor-car. As it was, he missed his footing, rolled over, and smashed the two bottles with which Dr. Moor had entrusted him. But he was on his feet the next moment, racing wildly after the other tram that was now slipping quickly away.

He caught it up after a wild, desperate run that left him no breath for speech. He swung himself up on the step, and mounted the stairs to the roof. He could have crashed his fist into Widdop's grinning face. "Give me that!" he gasped. "Give it to me!"

"I ain't got it. What are you talking about? I've just come back from having a look at t' funeral. You ain't respectable. Clear off!"

"I'll throw you over if you don't give it to me!" cried Dick, seizing hold of the fellow's scarf, hardly knowing what he said or did.

Widdop threw him roughly off.

"That's just what I did with that blooming envelope o' thine!" he retorted. "I chucked it over. That should have picked it up."

"I don't believe you!" panted Dick desperately. "Give it to me!"

"Here, gerrout o' t' way! I'm getting off here."

Dick followed him off the tram. Nothing should make him lose sight of Widdop.

"You're not going to shake me off!" he cried. "I'm not afraid of you, you thief. Give me back my envelope!"

And then at that moment as they turned the corner they ran right into the friendly policeman who had arrested Dick on the night of the fire.

"He has stolen a paper from me," Dick said, appealing to the constable.

"Tisn't true, sir, not a word of it, sir! This lad is an awful liar. I wonder he isn't afraid to tell such lies. Search me, sir. Let him search me if you like. I don't like such things said. I've got a character to lose. Here, put your hands into all my pockets!"

Dick was nothing loth. He searched Widdop's garments up and down, in every pocket, under his waistcoat, in every place of concealment that he could think of, but what he sought was not there.

"Where is it?" gasped Dick. "I've told you once!"

"You said you threw it away when you took it."

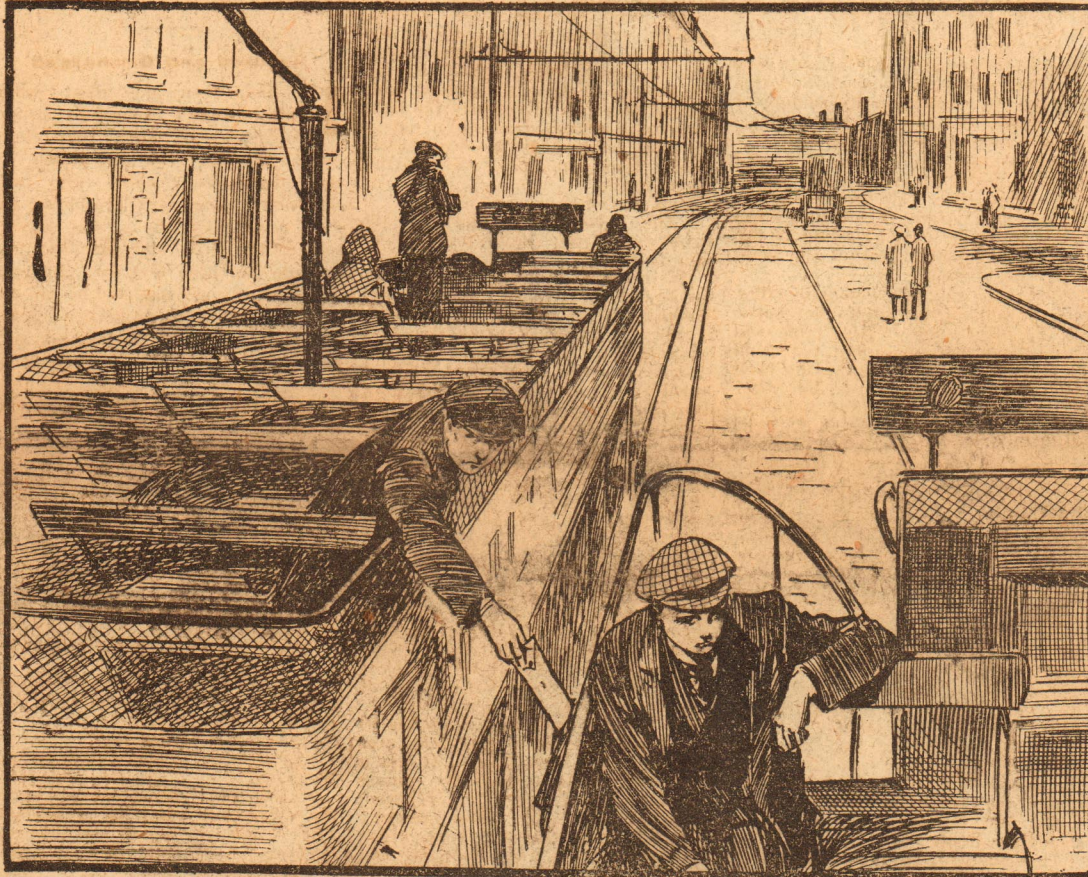
"Well, of all the lies! I said I'd never seen it. Look here, I'll have the law on you for taking my character away."

"You must have made a mistake, little 'un—eh?" said the policeman.

"A mistake on purpose!" rejoined Widdop, quick to seize advantage. "I tell you he's a real bad 'un. He's just trying to get me into trouble. It don't do me any good to be seen talking to a chap like him!"

Dick was left alone. He felt that the world was altogether too much for him.

(Another splendid instalment of this grand serial will appear next Tuesday in the Boys' Friend.)



Dick sat on the tram thoroughly absorbed in thought. He did not see the head lean over the edge, nor the arm shoot out. But suddenly his long envelope was snatched out of his hand.

if he had not got misfortune enough.

There was a dead mother, an injured sister, and a wrecked home. He was out of employment, and the man to whom he was looking for benefactions was being laid in the ground that day. He could see only starvation ahead of him, for who would employ him with this odium attached to his name? This seemed to be the very crowning blow of all his trouble—the loss of his good name.

He did not go without heartily thanking the young solicitor.

"That's all right, my boy," said the other. "It was a bit of practice for me. If you want any help you must come and see me. Here's my card. The office is in Cheapside. You see, it says Sylvester & Son on the card. I'm the Son part of the firm. By the way, we are executors—at least, my father is—to poor old Mr. Trimble. Fine old chap he was. Um! I suppose the will will be read this afternoon when the funeral is over. I don't know how things are left, because it was made before my time—I mean before I came into the office. Well, you must come and see me, because I believe you are innocent, lad," he concluded in Yorkshire fashion.

Dick thanked him, but went off with a heavy heart. Then he went on to Johnson's Fold to have a look by daylight at the melancholy spectacle of his ruined home.

share in the business and property known as Trimble's Mill, Vulcan Street, Bradford, upon the said Richard Allen reaching the age of twenty-one."

That was the main statement, and it seemed good. There was the old man's crabbed signature underneath, and also that of Denis Moor as a witness. The sight of that decided his action. He would go and see Dr. Moor.

That young practitioner with the grave face and silver-grey hair received him kindly.

"I've heard about your trouble, Dick, and I am quite sure you are innocent," he said, taking Dick by the hand.

"Thank you, sir," answered Dick, feeling no little gratitude in his heart for having at least one friend who believed in him. "I hoped you would not think that of me—I mean that I did what they said. I was there in the building right enough, but I was trying to put out the fire. I had good reasons for wanting to save Trimble's. I want to keep Trimble's going—for my own sake. Do you remember that first time I fetched you to Mr. Trimble?"

"And you threatened to put a brick through my window if I did not make haste?" smiled the doctor.

"Oh, yes, I remember!"

"And you saw Mr. Trimble sign a paper which he gave to me?"

he's got his knife into me in a way you'd hardly believe. This trumped-up charge about the fire was his doing. There's not very much he would stick at. Now, if he knew this paper was in existence he'd make my life pretty impossible."

"Um! Yes, there's something in what you say. You'll be all right when you're twenty-one, but between now and then you've got your way to make, and what is on that paper is not going to help you. I suppose he trusted his nephew to see you right, and did not make any provision for your employment or anything in the meantime."

"Not that I know of, sir. I think he trusted Mr. Ackroyd for that."

"Yes; well, I can give you information about human bodies, but not about documents. Only I know this ought to have a stamp on to make it legal. And you ought to see a lawyer. Let me see, young Sylvester defended you this morning?"

"I had half an idea of taking this paper to him, sir."

"You can't do better. But take care of it. It is a precious thing. Um! He'll be hardly back from lunch yet. Perhaps if you're going down, you'll do a bit of an errand for me. I want a couple of bottles of medicine taken into Leeds Road. You'd better take the tram outside. I'll give you an envelope for your



YOU CAN START READING BELOW.

# THE BLOT



## INTRODUCTION FOR THE NEW READER.

Philip Ashley is a brilliant lad at the Council School, but has declined an offer of a scholarship because of his mother, who is so poor that she has to char for her living. But one day comes Phil's opportunity.

Bravely he stops the maddened horses in Sir David Rendle's carriage, and saves the life of Elsie, his only child. It is the turning point in Philip's career, for by way of reward Sir David sends him to Rayton College, equipping him down to the smallest detail, and also engaging the lad's mother as a well-paid housekeeper.

Phil starts, light-hearted and jubilant, on the journey to Rayton; but on the way a terrible revelation

is made to him. Sir David's nephew, Godfrey Mortimer, who, in the presence of Phil's benefactor, has promised to shepherd him in his new surroundings, and show him every kindness possible between one schoolboy and another, turns out to be a humbug and a hypocrite.

No sooner is the train clear of Highfield than Mortimer stirs up trouble; but Phil sets upon him, and holds him in check till at the next station some more Raytonians enter the compartment.

The newcomers are friends of Mortimer, and when they hear Phil's story they christen him "The Blot."

After being treated with much snobbishness, Phil arrives at Rayton College, and is made Mortimer's tag.

From the time he enters the school plots of dishonesty, etc., are laid for him, and Mortimer does all he can to get Phil disgraced.

Mortimer tells his uncle that Ashley plays cards for money, and relates to him the case of the missing banknote which Phil is supposed to have stolen. Thus Sir David is most indifferent to Phil.

At last the long looked-for Beresford examination is to be held, and now everybody is anxiously awaiting the result. Is the Blot going to win the prize?

One day, some time after the examination, Mortimer pays a visit to the Blue Boar public-house, and just as he is departing from this strictly forbidden establishment a gentleman walks out of the post-office on the opposite side of the road.

It is Dr. Paul!

(Now read this week's fine chapters.)

### What the Doctor Saw and Heard.

JUST as Dr. Paul had decided on the spur of the moment to go up to London, and place his resignation in the hands of the governors of the school, so he decided, on an equally sudden impulse, to return to Rayton.

Nobody in Rayton, not even Mr. Walker, knew that he was coming back until he stepped out of the train in Rayton Station. Although he had practically recovered from his illness, he was still looking very pale and careworn; and there was something almost pathetic in the weary, listless air with which he picked up his bag and left the station.

Two or three fly-blown conveyances were drawn up in the station-yard. The driver of one of these, recognising the doctor, came forward, and touched his hat.

"Glad to see you back, sir," he said. "I hope you're better! Will you drive up to the school, sir?"

"No," replied the doctor. "The walk will do me good, and, besides, I want to call at the post-office, and send off a wire. But you can take my bag up to the school, and you can tell Mr. Walker that I am following you."

He handed his bag to the driver, and trudged off in the direction of the post-office. On his way he had to pass the village lock-up, and as he approached it he saw Enoch Blobs, with the assistance of a couple of farm-labourers, half-pushing and half-dragging a drunken man towards the door.

One glance at the man sent a rush of colour to the doctor's pallid face.

He recognised him instantly. It was Jim Cocker.

"So he is still here!" he muttered bitterly as he stepped into a neighbouring doorway lest Cocker should see him. "Waiting until I return, I suppose, in order that he may resume his blackmailing operations."

He waited until Blobs and his prisoner had disappeared into the lock-up; then he crossed the road, and questioned one of the labourers.

"Who is the man, and what has he done?" he asked.

"He's a bloke wot's been stayin' at the Blue Boar for the last three weeks," replied the man. "Cocker, I think, they calls 'im. He got drunk this afternoon, an' kicked up a row in the tap-room, an' when Blobs went in to arrest 'im, he knocked Blobs down. My word, but there was a scene! Blobs sez it means a month for 'im, without the opshun!"

"A month without the option!" repeated Dr. Paul to himself, as he resumed his walk. "Then I'm free from his persecutions for a month, at any rate!"

He made his way to the post-office, and sent off his wire. And at the same moment as he walked out of the post-office, on one side of the street, he saw a well-known figure walk out of the Blue Boar on the opposite side of the street.

It was Mortimer, of course. The doctor recognised him the moment he saw him, but ere he could call out to him, Mortimer, who had his back to the doctor, swung round a neighbouring corner, and disappeared from view.

Now, it is hardly necessary to remind the reader that to visit a public-house was one of the most serious offences a boy at Rayton College could commit. Consequently the reader will readily understand what a shock it was to Dr. Paul to see, not one of the junior boys, but a member of the Sixth and the head-monitor of his House, walk out of the lowest public-house in Rayton.

For a moment the doctor hesitated how to act, then he strode across the road, and walked into the public-house, with the intention of questioning the landlord and finding out if Mortimer was in the habit of visiting there.

Hodgson, the landlord, and Mytton, the village butcher, were still in the bar-parlour, where Mortimer had left them. The door was ajar, and as Dr. Paul strode into the passage he heard Hodgson say, apparently in answer to a question from the butcher:

"Yes; Mortimer's 'is name. He's the nephew of Sir David Rendle, of 'Ighfield."

Again the doctor hesitated. If he confronted Hodgson, and questioned him, the landlord would probably deny all knowledge of Mortimer. On the other hand, if he remained where he was, and kept his ears open, he would probably ascertain the truth. So, acting on the impulse of the moment again, he came to a halt, and listened.

"Does he come 'ere often?" he heard Mytton ask.

"Oh, yes!" said Hodgson. "He's one o' my best clients. The young fool thinks he knows something about 'oss-racing, an' he does all his bettin' with me."

"Then I'll wager he doesn't win much!" said Mytton, with a grin.

"You bet he doesn't!" said Hodgson. "He owes me nearly seven pun' already."

"By the way," said Mytton, "wot was you referrin' to when you reminded 'im 'ow you an' 'im 'ad spoofted one of the masters?"

"Oh, that was a great joke!" chuckled Hodgson. "It was like this. On the day that Cocker arrived 'ere he was goin' out for a walk when he met one of the school kids—a chap called Ashley—just outside the door. Wot possessed Cocker to do it, I don't know, but he grabbed the lad by the arm, an' dragged 'im into the passage."

"Mortimer was 'ere at the time," the landlord went on. "Me an' 'im was in this very room. 'Earin' the scuffle in the passage, we went to see wot was up, an' at that minute one of the masters, called Sopworth, an' another of the boys, called Heath, walked in! Heath, it seems, 'ad seen

Cocker drag Ashley into the 'ouse, an' he'd gone straight an' told Mr. Sopworth as Ashley was in the Blue Boar!

"Mortimer was flabbergasted, I can tell yer, when he saw Mr. Sopworth," continued Hodgson. "So was Heath, for Heath is one of Mortimer's bosom pals, an' in tryin' to get Ashley into trouble, he'd got Mortimer into trouble, too!"

"Heath didn't know as Mortimer was in the 'ouse at the time, I suppose?" said Mytton.

"Of course not!"

"Well, an' 'ow did you spooft Mr. Sopworth?"

"We lied, you bet!" said Hodgson. "Cocker swore as he'd never pulled Ashley into the 'ouse, an' I backed 'im up! Mortimer swore as he'd seen Ashley walk into the pub, and he'd follered 'im to fetch 'im out!"

"But didn't Ashley say as Mortimer was in the 'ouse when Cocker dragged 'im in?"

"Of course, he did! But I swore as he wasn't, an' so did Cocker, an' so did Heath, an' wot was one kid's word against the four of us? I laid it on thick, I can tell yer—swore as I'd never seen Mortimer afore in my life, an' dropped an' 'int as Ashley was quite a regular customer!"

"An' did Mr. Sopworth swallow all them lies?"

"Like a bird! He patted Heath on the back an' said as 'ow he'd done everything right an' proper. He said as Mortimer 'ad acted with a noble motive, but he didn't ougter 'ave gone into a pub, even to fetch another chap out. Then he ordered Ashley back to the school, an' told 'im as 'ow he'd be expelled!"

"That was rough on Ashley."

"Oh, well, I 'ad to save Mortimer, yer see. I couldn't but 'elp one of my best customers!"

"And was Ashley expelled?" asked Mytton.

"He 'asn't been expelled yet," said Hodgson. "But he will be when Dr. Paul comes back."

"Will he?" muttered the doctor to himself, in a grim voice. "Somebody will be expelled, that's a certainty, but I don't think it will be Ashley!"

Then, his face dark with anger and indignation, he retraced his steps into the street, and strode off in the direction of the school.

### More Trouble for Holcroft.

"YOU'RE as bad as my guv'nor," said Tubb. "He's the best shot in the county, and his drivin' at golf is a treat to see, and what he doesn't know about a horse isn't worth knowin', but he can't do a sum in simple addition to save his life!"

It was Wednesday afternoon—the same afternoon that Dr. Paul returned to Rayton. Tubb and a group of his especial chums were sprawling in various attitudes on the edge of the cricket-field. A second eleven match had just concluded, and it was a mistake made by Card in adding up the scores that led to Tubb's remark about his guv'nor.

"I wish my guv'nor was like that," said Pritchard. "He's a whale at figures. He gives me so much pocket-money at the beginnin' of the term, and I have to keep a giddy account of how I spend it, and if the totals don't balance, you can jolly well bet there's trouble for yours truly."

Tubb laughed.

"My guv'nor's just the very opposite to that," he said. "To show you what a duffer he is at sums, I wrote to him a few days ago, and told him we were breakin' up next week, and asked him to send me my railway-fare and half-a-crown extra for grub and tips and three-and-ninence I'd borrowed from Card. You'd think that was an easy sum, only three items to add together. But, bless your hearts, it was too stiff for the dear old guv'nor, and when I opened his letter this mornin' I found he'd sent me six-and-threepence too much!"

His seven chums leaped to their feet with shouts of joy.

"Come on!" cried Card, seizing Tubb by the arm.

"Where to?" asked Tubb innocently.

"To the tuckshop, of course!" said Card. "Great Scott! Fancy havin' six-and-threepence to spend at the fag-end of the term!"

"Ninence apiece and threepence for the waiter," said Hepworth. "Mine's a strawberry ice and three jam puffs!"

"Lemonade and tongue-sandwiches for me!" said Rigden, licking his lips.



When Tubb fell backwards, he crashed on to those beneath him, and in less time far than it takes to tell, all four boys were sprawling in a struggling heap on the stable floor.

"I thought of writin' to the guv'nor," said Tubb, "and tellin' him he'd made a mistake, and returnin' the six-and-three. That's what a good little boy would do!"

"Pr'aps!" said Card. "But you're not a good little boy. Come on!"

"All right," said Tubb. "If you insist on corruptin' my morals, I suppose I'll have to be corrupted!"

They started out for the tuckshop, but they never reached it, for about half-way between the school and the village they suddenly caught sight of Holcroft coming up the road alone.

At the sight of their arch-rival all thoughts of grub were instantly forgotten. Grub was sweet, but revenge was sweeter; and the memory of the "Two-headed What-is-it," still rankled in the breasts of Tubb and Card.

"Holcroft!" roared Tubb exultingly. "After him! After him!"

Holcroft had spun round, with a gasp of dismay, and was pelting back along the road as fast as he could run.

Suddenly, to his horror and despair, he saw four other Walkerites coming up the road from the direction of the village. These, on seeing Holcroft racing down the road, with Tubb and his seven companions in hot pursuit, instantly strung themselves out in a line across the road, and prepared to bar the fugitive's advance.

"Hurroo! Now we've got him!" yelled Tubb triumphantly.

But they hadn't got him yet! Finding his escape cut off both in front and behind Holcroft darted to the side of the road, vaulted over a gate, and took to his heels across the adjoining fields.

These fields, it should be stated, formed part of a farm that had been to let for several years. The farmhouse, which stood some distance from the road, and the out-buildings by which it was surrounded were all alike empty and deserted, and were rapidly falling into ruins.

Finding that his pursuers were gaining on him hand over fist, Holcroft darted into one of these half-ruined out-buildings, the door of which had rotted off. It had originally been a stable, with a hayloft overhead. The loft was reached by a ladder which stretched from a floor of the stable to a square hole in the wooden ceiling. There was no other way of getting into the loft except by this ladder, but there was a window in the end—the framework of which had long since disappeared—which overlooked a boggy swamp that had formerly been a cattle-pond.

Holcroft had barely time to swarm up this ladder and snatch up a stick which lay on the floor of the loft, when Tubb rushed into the stable, with his panting followers at his heels.

"He's gone into the loft," cried Tubb; "but he can't escape. We've got him safe as houses now. He's in a trap. Follow me."

Courageously, but foolishly, Tubb sprang up the ladder. Holcroft waited till his rival's head and shoulders appeared through the opening at the top of the ladder; then he brought the stick down with a resounding whack on Tubb's cranium.

With a howl of mingled rage and pain, Tubb toppled back into the arms of Card, who was behind him on the ladder. Rigden was behind Card, and Hepworth was behind Rigden. When Tubb fell backwards, he knocked Card off the ladder, and Card knocked Rigden off, and Rigden knocked Hepworth off, and in less time far than it takes to tell, all four boys were sprawling in a struggling heap on the stable floor.

"Oh, you brute!" howled Tubb. "Don't mention it!" said Holcroft sweetly.

"I'll pay you back for this!" hooted Card.

"Don't want payin' back, old chap," said Holcroft. "You're welcome to another dose of the same medicine whenever you like to come up for it. There will be no charge."

Tubb rubbed his head and gazed ruefully at his followers.

"What's to be done?" he asked. "You can't do anything!" jeered Holcroft, who overheard the question. "This is the only way into the loft. You can only come up one at a time, and I can knock you down as fast as you come up. If you don't believe me, try it."

Nobody accepted the invitation. Holcroft peered down through the opening, placed the tip of his thumb on the end of his nose, and spread out his fingers like a fan.

"Spoofted!" he chuckled. "You



thought you'd got me, didn't you? But you were mistaken, you see."

"I wonder if this is the only way into the loft," said Card. "If there's another way in, half of us could attack him that way, and the other half this way. He couldn't defend two places at once. Let's go outside and reconnoitre."

They went outside and walked round the building.

"There's only that window," said Card, pointing to the frameless window in the end wall of the loft. "We can't get in through there, but Holcroft can get out. It isn't more than eight feet from the ground."

"From the bog, you mean," said Tubb. "Holcroft won't try to escape in that way, for if he did he'd only jump into that muddy pond. Besides, why should he try to escape? He's all right where he is. He's only got to stop in the loft till it's time for us to go back to the school."

"Let's pretend to go away now," suggested Pritchard. "We can hide behind that hedge. When he thinks we've gone away he'll come down out of the loft, and then we can jolly well collar him."

Tubb shook his head. He had a higher opinion of his rival than that. "Holcroft isn't a fool," he said. "At least, he isn't fool enough to be caught in a simple trap like that. Unless we can find some way of gettin' into the loft, we may as well haul down the flag and give him best."

"Well, we can't get into the loft, that's certain," said Atkin gloomily. "One chap with a stick, posted on the other side of that trapdoor, could keep the whole school at bay."

It was Hepworth who came to the rescue with a really brilliant suggestion.

"I have it!" he cried. "As we can't get into the loft, let's drive him out."

"How?" demanded the others. "Smoke him out!" said Hepworth. "Light a fire in the stable just under the trapdoor, then the smoke'll fill the loft and he'll have to clear out by the window."

"Hepworth, my boy, you're a genius!" cried Tubb joyously. "I kiss your feet. You've more sense in your fat old head than all the rest of us put together. Light a fire and smoke him out—that's the ticket. To work, my merry men, to work!"

There was no lack of material handy, and in a very short space of time a dozen armfuls of dead leaves, withered grass, damp hay, and rotting straw had been collected and piled in a heap at the foot of the ladder.

Holcroft viewed these preparations with apprehension.

"I say, you chaps, you're not goin' to be such cads as to set the place on fire, are you?" he inquired anxiously. "Oh, dear no!" said Tubb cheerfully. "Don't be alarmed, dear child! We're merely goin' to kipper you, that's all."

He struck a match and applied it to the bottom of the heap. It was some time before he could coax the stuff to burn, but eventually a thin column of acrid smoke, which quickly increased in volume, rose out of the heap and curled up through the opening into the loft.

Presently the heap burst into flame. This, however, was not what Tubb and his chums desired. An armful of wet straw, thrown on the heap, quickly damped down the flames while at the same time it increased the amount of smoke.

Soon the stable was so full of the pungent, stifling smoke that Tubb and his comrades were glad to retreat into the open air. In the loft above, the conditions were, if possible, even worse. And when Holcroft, coughing and rubbing his smarting eyes, groped his way to the window for a breath of fresh air, he was instantly bombarded by a volley of clods of earth which compelled him to beat a hasty retreat.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere of the loft was growing more and more unbreathable every minute. Again Holcroft staggered to the window, but again he was driven back by a fusillade from Tubb & Co., who had stationed themselves on the far side of the muddy pond below the window.

At last Holcroft could bear it no longer. He was suffocating. Clenching his teeth, and gripping his stick, he sprang to the window and jumped out.

He landed on his feet in the middle of the swamp, his arrival being signalled by an eruption of liquid mud which flew in all directions. For a moment he swayed unsteadily, then he stumbled forward and fell flat on his face.

He was on his feet again in an instant, plastered with mud from sole to crown. Brandishing his stick, and yelling defiance, he charged into the ranks of his tormentors, but a neat trip-up by Rigden sent him sprawling on his hands and knees, and before he could pick himself up, Tubb and Rigden seized him by the ankles and Card and Hepworth by the wrists.

"Up with him!" cried Tubb gloatingly. "We can do nothing with him till we've given him a bath. There's a pump in the yard. Bring him along!"

Despite his struggles, the luckless Holcroft was frog-marched to the pump. Under the spout of the pump was a big stone trough, which had formerly been used for watering the cattle. This having been filled with water, Holcroft was dropped in, and while six of his captors held him down, Pritchard pumped more water over him.

"There! That's enough," said Tubb at last. "He's a clean boy now. Fish him out and truss him up, and then we'll drive him home in state."

"Drive him?" said Rigden. "What in?"

"In that," said Tubb. He pointed to a broken-down wheelbarrow which lay on a heap of rubbish on the other side of the yard. The bottom of the barrow, the wheel, and the two handles were all that remained, but they were enough for Tubb's purpose.

"Tie his hands behind his back," commanded Tubb when Holcroft, half-drowned, had been fished out of the trough. "With a handkerchief. That's the style! Now tie another handkerchief round his ankles. Hepworth, fetch the royal barrow! There's a loose board on there, with a piece of cord hangin' on to it. Bring that too."

When Holcroft had been dumped down in a sitting position on the rickety remains of the barrow, Tubb drew a piece of chalk from his pocket and wrote on the board "IDIOT FROM BIRTH." He slung the board round Holcroft's neck by means of the cord, and gazed at his handiwork with manifest pride.

"Isn't he a picture?" he said proudly. "Won't there be a giddy sensation when we trundle him up to the school and exhibit him to his admirin' schoolfellows?"

"Suppose we meet any of his pals on the way?" suggested Atkin nervously.

"I only hope we may!" said Tubb. "There are twelve of us, and twelve Walkerites are a match for all the Paulites in the school. But we're wastin' time. Attention! Card, you take first turn between the shafts. I'll relieve you at the gate. Ready? Right about face! Quick march!"

Five times between the farmyard and the gate the ramshackle barrow heeled over and tipped Holcroft out. Needless to say, this did not improve his personal appearance, and by the time the procession reached the gate which led into the road he was as sorry looking an object as could well be imagined.

At the gate a slight contretemps occurred. The gate was locked.

"We'll have to take him off the barrow and hoist him over," said Tubb. "Then we'll have to lift the barrow over after him."

It was not an easy matter to lift the pinnioned Holcroft over the five-barred gate, but they managed it at last, and dumped him down in the ditch by the roadside. Then they clambered back over the gate, and were about to hoist the barrow over, when Holcroft uttered a startled gasp of stupefied amazement.

"Here's the doctor!" he gasped. "Rats!" said Tubb mockingly. "Try again! The doctor's in London."

"He isn't!" said Holcroft earnestly. "He's comin' up the road." Tubb leaned over the gate and glanced down the road. Then he, too, gasped.

"By Jove, it's right!" he exclaimed. "The doctor's returned and is comin' up the road."

Needless to say, this put an end to any further practical joking at that moment. There was no time to lift Holcroft over the gate again and back into the field, and honour forbade them to leave him in the ditch, to be discovered by the doctor.

"We'll have to let him go," said Tubb hurriedly. "Then we'll hide behind this hedge till the doctor has gone past."

"Then we'll go down to the village and buy that six-and-threepence," said the practical Card.

Tubb withered him with a scornful glance. Then he vaulted over

the gate and hastily untied the handkerchiefs by which Holcroft was bound.

A moment later Holcroft was racing up the road, while Tubb and his chums were crouching behind the hedge, and lamenting this sudden termination of their afternoon's sport.

#### The Doctor's Homecoming.

THE man who had taken the doctor's bag up to the school had spread the news that Dr. Paul had returned. The result was that when the latter reached the school he was welcomed by a crowd of over forty boys, who greeted him with round after round of enthusiastic cheers.

A flush of pleasure mantled the doctor's cheeks at this spontaneous tribute to his popularity. But the flush soon died away, and his face resumed that hopeless and dejected expression which it had worn for so many weeks.

Mr. Walker was waiting for him at the end of the drive.

"This is a pleasant surprise," he said, shaking the doctor warmly by the hand. "I'm delighted to see you back again. But why didn't you let me know you were coming to-day?"

"I only decided to return this morning," replied the doctor, "and I didn't think it was worth while wiring."

"You are better, I hope?" said Mr. Walker, as they walked towards the doctor's house.

"Oh, yes, I'm all right now, thank you! Are all your family well?" "All except Gertie, who has had a sharp attack of pneumonia. She is still confined to her bed, but the doctor thinks she's out of danger now."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Dr. Paul. "And now I have a piece of news for you which will doubtless surprise you. I have resigned my appointment as head-master here."

"You have resigned!" gasped Mr. Walker.

"Yes. That's what I went up to London for. For certain reasons, which I need not enter into, I have decided to leave England and go abroad. The governors of the school, whom I interviewed in London, were very unwilling to accept my resignation; but when I had convinced them that my decision was irrevocable, they very kindly agreed to forgo the usual six months' notice and let me go at the end of this term."

"Then this will be your last week here?"

"Yes. In ten days from now I shall be on my way to Canada. My successor, I believe, has already been appointed, but who he is I do not know."

They had reached the doctor's house, and had entered his study

JUST OUT.

3

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before Mr. Walker had recovered from the shock of this startling news.

"By the way," said the doctor, "has the result of the Beresford exam. been announced yet?"

"No," said Mr. Walker. "I forwarded the papers to Professor Hardwick immediately after the exam., but he hasn't yet made his award."

"Ashley sat for the exam., of course?" "Yes," said Mr. Walker. "And that reminds me that I have a very unpleasant piece of news to tell you with regard to Ashley. I haven't told you before, because I didn't like to worry you while you were ill."

"I think I know what your news is," said Dr. Paul quietly. "Mr. Sopworth found Ashley in the Blue Boar."

"You have heard, then?" exclaimed Mr. Walker, in surprise.

"I have heard quite a lot of things since I returned," said the doctor grimly. "Heath, I understand, told Mr. Sopworth he had seen Ashley go into the Blue Boar. Mr. Sopworth went there, and found not only Ashley, but Mortimer, too."

"Mortimer had also seen Ashley go into the house," explained Mr. Walker. "He had followed him to fetch him out. That was why Mortimer was there, but Ashley aggravated his offence by falsely stating that Mortimer was in the house when he arrived."

"It was not a false statement," said the doctor sharply. "Ashley spoke the truth. Mortimer was already in the house when Ashley was dragged in. What is more, Mortimer was at the Blue Boar again this afternoon. I saw him come out."

Mr. Walker gazed at him in stupefied amazement.

"You saw Mortimer come out of the Blue Boar this afternoon?" he repeated.

"I did."

"Have you spoken to him?" "Not yet. But I'm going to talk to him presently. In the meantime I wish to question Ashley. Where is he?"

"In the isolation-room. I thought it best to separate him from the rest of the boys until you returned and decided his fate."

Dr. Paul rose to his feet. "I will now go up and see him," he said. "After I have questioned him, I will send for Mortimer and Heath and Mr. Sopworth, and then, in your presence, I will explain what I have seen and heard since my return."

Philip was writing a letter to his mother when Dr. Paul knocked at the door.

"Come in!" he called out, expecting it was one of the maids with his tea.

At the sight of Dr. Paul he sprang to his feet, and his face went white. At last Dr. Paul had returned. At last he was to be tried and sentenced. At last, if Mr. Sopworth and Mr. Walker were true prophets, he was to be expelled.

But the doctor's first words dispelled his fears.

"Sit down, my boy," he said, in a kindly voice. "I hear that you have been in trouble while I've been away. Let me say at once that I know you are innocent of the charge against you. For certain reasons, however, I wish to hear your version of what took place on the afternoon when Mr. Sopworth found you in the Blue Boar."

"I had been down to the post office," said Philip, "and was on my way back to the school when, just as I was passing the door of the Blue Boar a man came out whom I recognised as a Highfield bookmaker, named Cocker."

"You knew him?" "I knew his name was Cocker, and I knew he came from Highfield. But I had only seen him four times in my life—twice at Highfield and twice at Rayton."

"Where had you seen him at Rayton?"

"The first time was at the end of the lane behind your house. The second time was at the corner of the outbuildings at the back of the gym."

The doctor looked confused. "And I was with him on both occasions?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Go on," said the doctor, in a low, embarrassed voice. "You were passing the Blue Boar when Cocker came out. What happened?"

"Before I knew what he was doing he grabbed me by the arm and dragged me into the public-house. He said he had something to say to me. But I told him I didn't want to hear what he had to say, and while I was struggling to get away from him Mortimer and the landlord came

out of the bar-parlour. Then Heath and Mr. Sopworth appeared, and they said—"

"I know what they said," interrupted the doctor. "It was a vile conspiracy of falsehood, with which I shall deal later. Meanwhile, I'm anxious to hear all you can tell me about this man Cocker. Have you any idea what it was he wanted to say to you when he dragged you into the Blue Boar?"

"Well, sir," said Philip, "I've wondered since if he wanted to say something about a packet of letters which—"

"A packet of letters!" Dr. Paul almost shouted the words. "What do you know about a packet of letters?" he cried. And every muscle of his face twitched and quivered with excitement.

"Perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning, and tell you the whole story, sir," said Philip, marvelling at the doctor's excitement. "It happened on the day when I stopped Sir David's runaway horses. One of the horses kicked me on the head, and as I was walking down Frog Alley, on my way home, I suddenly turned faint and giddy."

"I knocked at the door of one of the houses," continued Philip, "intending to ask if I could sit down and rest for a few minutes. The only person in the house was a woman, whom I afterwards learned was Cocker's wife."

The doctor started.

"She was lying on a couch beside the window," said Philip. "She was dying of consumption when I saw her, but it was plain to be seen that she had once been a very pretty woman. I heard afterwards that she had formerly been on the stage."

Dr. Paul clenched and unclenched his hands in his agitation.

"Go on!" he said hoarsely. "You asked this woman if you could sit down for a few minutes."

"Presently," said Philip, "she asked me if I would do her a favour. She pointed to a box on the other side of the room, and asked me to drag it away from the wall. There was no carpet on the floor, and one of the boards, where the box had been standing, was loose. She asked me to prise it up, and when I did so I found a packet of letters, tied with ribbon, under the floor."

Dr. Paul could not keep his seat. He sprang to his feet, and paced the room with rapid, agitated strides.

"I gave the letters to the woman," continued Philip. "She pressed them to her lips, and then she thrust them into my hand and told me to put them on the fire."

"But you didn't," said the doctor quickly.

"No, sir," said Philip. "Just as I was going to do so, the door opened and Cocker came in. The woman shouted to me to burn the letters, but Cocker was too quick for me. I tossed the letters on to the fire, but he snatched them out again before they caught alight. Then he pushed me out into the street, and locked the door."

"Did you ever see the woman again?"

"No, sir. A few days later I happened to go down Frog Alley, and I saw a hearse standing outside the house. I asked one of the neighbours if the woman was dead, and he said she was. It was he who told me that her name was Cocker, and that Cocker was her husband. While we were talking, Cocker came to the house door, but he neither spoke to me nor I to him."

"Those are the only two occasions on which I ever saw Cocker in Highfield," concluded Philip. "I've already told you of the three times I saw him at Rayton. And that's all I know about him."

For some time after the conclusion of Philip's story Dr. Paul continued to pace the room. He had forgotten all about Heath and Mortimer and Mr. Sopworth now.

"If I could only get the letters before Cocker comes out of prison," he kept muttering to himself. "This boy knows where they are. Can I trust him? Shall I tell him?"

At last his mind was made up. He dropped into a chair by Philip's side and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Ashley," he said, in a low, earnest voice, "if I told you I was in trouble, and you could help me, would you help me?" "Only give me the chance, sir!" said Philip eagerly.

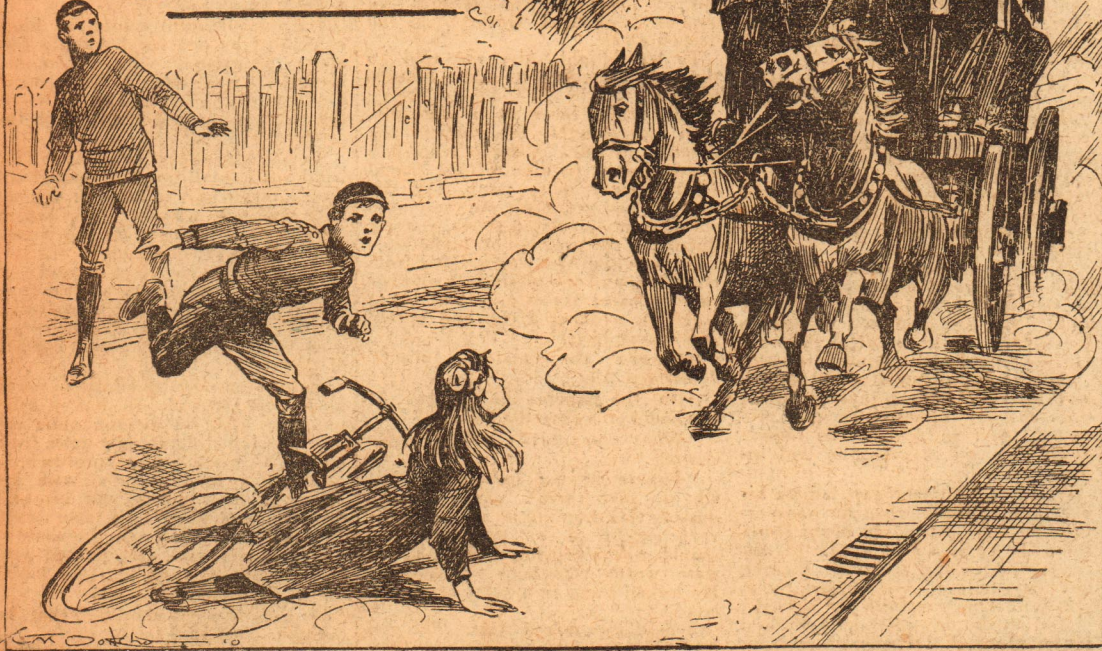
"Listen, then," said Dr. Paul, "and I'll tell you one of the strangest stories that ever a head-master told to one of his pupils."

(Another ripping instalment of this grand school serial next Tuesday.)



A Magnificent Complete, Long Story of a Boy Fire-fighter.

# THE IDOL OF THE STATION



Every stride brought the horses nearer, and then, to the horror of the few onlookers, the girl took her hands from the handles of the bicycle, and then girl and machine came with a crash to the earth. Alec darted forward like an arrow from a bow.

## THE 1st CHAPTER. A Brave Rescue.

"RAVO, Alec!"

"Well saved, goalie!"

"Good stop, laddie!"

These were some of the spontaneous shouts which arose on the September evening air of Glenburgh, a prosperous Scottish city, as Alec Guthrie, a fine open-faced youth of fifteen, darted forward with an electric-like rush, and diverted the course of the ball travelling at a terrific rate towards the goal he was keeping.

The lads were practising, in readiness for a stiff match they had to play on the forthcoming Saturday. Funds were not so plentiful that they could afford to rent a field to use every evening as well as on match days, and they were playing on one of the open spaces provided by the Corporation who, with true Scottish forethought, believed in giving the rising generation of the town facilities for indulging in those manly sports in which Scotland plays so prominent a part.

A short distance away from where the lads were enjoying themselves stood the Glenburgh Fire-station, where men were constantly on the watch, their vigilance unrelaxed day or night, for the signal which should send them forth to fight the devouring flames—to take a journey which would mean danger, and possibly death.

There was no more popular man in the Glenburgh Brigade than Tom Guthrie, Alec's father, who had been a fire-fighter since he gave up a life on the ocean wave, and who was as modest as he was brave. Tom Guthrie would face death in the flames without moving so much as an eyelid, and on those rare occasions when he talked quietly of how he had rescued a man from an upper storey, snatched a woman from a bed-room round which the flames were licking with terrific menacing tongues, or slid down an escape with a child clasped in his arms, Alec's whole being had become thrilled. And he registered a mental vow that he would leave no stone unturned to satisfy the crowning ambition of his life, and rise to the position of a fire-brigade chief.

Hardly had the shouts of approval which greeted Alec's fine performance of saving his goal died away, when from the adjacent fire-station came the sound of a whirring bell. In an instant the game of football was forgotten, and with one accord the players made for the big red-brick building, where men with the speed of lightning were adjusting

their equipment. A few brief seconds before the bell tingled out its stern call to duty, they had been indulging in various recreations in the spacious room above the place where the brightly-burnished engines stood ready to whirl their living load to the life and death battle with the flames. But in the fraction of a minute they had come sliding down poles, at the bottom of which gleamed various coloured lights, each light telling every man which vehicles were ordered out.

Quickly as the firemen had adjusted their helmets and tightened their last buckle, they yet found that much work had been done, even in the short space of time which had elapsed since the ringing of the bell. Seemingly from nowhere horses had appeared, and the beautifully-trained animals had moved swiftly to their positions in front of the engine, whilst the harness, suspended by an automatic device, fell naturally into position.

In a trice the traces had been hooked, a torch applied to the ready-laid fuel in the furnace at the back of the steamer, while the driver had sprung to his box with the agility of a monkey, grasped the reins with a firm hand, and said a few soothing words to the horses who were prancing on their hind legs, and pawing the air impatient for their dash through the streets of Glenburgh. The superintendent, who was in command during the captain's temporary absence, cast one keen glance round to see that everything was in position, and then snapped out the command, "Go!"

And as the gates of the fire-station rolled back on their wheels, worked by an automatic lever, the smartest brigade in Scotland, amidst a hearty cheer from the assembled crowd, dashed away on its mission.

But the cheers of Alec Guthrie did not mingle with the chorus. As he stood outside the station, the blood coursing through his veins at the thought of that whirlwind dash through the streets behind the galloping steeds, with their heavy flanks, the word had gone round that the fire was in the Low Town, the poorer quarter of the borough, where the buildings were very congested and overcrowded. With his bosom friend, Jock Hurley, whose shot he had so brilliantly saved in his recent game at football, he had made off towards the scene of the conflagration, dodging through courts and cutting through all the nearways until, almost breathless, he had again gained the main road along which the firemen must pass.

Indeed, as he ran he could hear the

shouts of the people behind him. The mad clatter of the horses over the hard ground mingled with the jingle of their bells and the shrill, piercing blast of the warning whistle.

And then, rounding a sharp corner, Alec Guthrie beheld a sight which nearly turned his blood to water. A short distance away, riding calmly along on a bicycle, seemingly quite oblivious to her surroundings, was a sixteen-year old girl. In another minute the horses, plunging along on their mad career, would turn into the narrow street, and unless she was warned of her peril, the pretty cyclist was in danger of being trampled under steel shoes.

"Look, Jock!" shouted Alec.

"She'll be killed!"

Alec darted forward like an arrow from a bow. The girl had not yet seen him.

"Look out! Get off!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "For Heaven's sake, miss, get off!"

But the girl took no heed. She seemed in a kind of trance. On and on came the thundering hoofs, the engine swaying to and fro in its course, the men shouting, the driver getting a firmer grip on the reins to swerve his steaming, straining steeds sharply round the corner, little knowing that a girl was in deadly danger a few yards away.

Madly Alec Guthrie shouted. But even when the rider saw the excited lad waving his arms, the terrible position she was in did not seem to dawn on her. At that moment, however, the horses and engine turned the bend, and the girl seemed to awaken from a kind of dream. Looking in front she realised the meaning of the excited lad's gesticulations. For an instant she seemed paralysed with fear. Every stride brought the horses nearer, and then, to the horror of the few onlookers, the girl, just as they were upon her, took her hands from the handles of the bicycle, which on being released from its control wobbled furiously, and then girl and machine came with a crash to the ground.

Alec, who had run ahead of the brigade gave a shriek of horror. Surely no power on earth could save the girl from being trampled to death! But without pausing to think, without a thought of the dreadful death he was risking, the brave lad darted towards the recumbent figure. And seeing her peril, and used to act promptly in such an emergency, the driver had thrown his full weight on the reins, pulling the horses back on their haunches. Then for one terrible second Alec Guthrie battled with death under those towering hoofs. No sooner had he reached the girl's side

than, slipping to his knees, he rolled her over and jerked himself clear by a few inches. Alec rolled over just as the fore feet of the frightened animals descended with a sickening crash on the spot the pair an instant before had occupied. They had escaped death by less than a foot, and as it was the bicycle was utterly ruined.

The brigade dashed on its way, the girl was safe, and with the flames roaring in the distance and getting a greater hold every minute there was no time to be spent in apologies or regrets.

The sharp hoot of a motor-horn brought Alec to his senses as he sat, dazed and shaking, by the side of the road, whilst Jock Hurley and two of the onlookers strove to bring the cyclist, who had fainted, back to consciousness. A man held up his hand to arrest the motorist's progress, thinking it better that the girl should be taken to the hospital.

Clapping on the brakes, the chauffeur brought the powerful car to a standstill, and a tall, military-looking man with kindly grey eyes leant over the side.

"This little girl has been injured," said the man who had stopped the motor, "and we thought you might take her to the hospital."

"But it is very awkward, my man," said the military-looking gentleman. "I happen to be Captain Angus Watson, Chief of the Scottish Fire Brigades, and I am motoring at full speed to yonder fire."

He broke off suddenly as his eyes fell on the unconscious figure of the girl. His bronzed cheeks turned a deathly white, and darting forward, he flung himself down with a bitter cry of: "Great heavens! It's my daughter Eileen!"

In a few seconds the excited onlookers had poured into his ears the story of Alec Guthrie's thrilling rescue. He started as he heard the name.

"Duty calls me to that fire," he said to the chauffeur, "and I must leave you to drive Miss Eileen home, while I go to my post. I will return as soon as possible. But where is the brave lad who saved my child's life? Let me see him, if only for an instant."

He looked round wonderingly, expecting the lad to step forward.

But Alec Guthrie had vanished.

## THE 2nd CHAPTER. In Favour of the Firemen.

THERE was no time then for Captain Watson to inquire

further for the boy who had so very bravely risked his life in saving Eileen from certain death. The captain's duty lay before him, and the crowd which had quickly gathered was almost as quickly dispersed.

Many of them had joined the throng hurrying to the Low Town to see the fire. And among them was Alec. Having rushed across the road and saved the girl from the horses' hoofs, he had done all required of him. No idea of his own bravery entered his mind. That anyone might wish to know his name, or that anyone had noticed him and would remember it was Alec Guthrie who had done this thing never entered his thoughts.

Quickly recovering from the effects of his fall, he ran back to his companions and joined them in the race to the scene of the fire.

"Near squeak that, Alec," panted Jock Hurley, as they trotted along in step.

"Ay, I'm thinking she'll be a bit frightened after it! And the bicycle. Losh, Jock, but it was a fair smash!" Alec gasped, for though his wind was good, he had expended it a little more than usual during these last few minutes.

Jock nodded.

"Ay!"—laconically. "There's the fire!" And he pointed suddenly ahead as he caught a glimpse of the smoke and flame.

They were on the spot within three minutes, and already the firemen had got their appliances to work. Great jets of water were spouting into the building, and above the cries of the people and the strange noise of the fire itself rose the short, sharp commands of the brigade-superintendent directing his men in their warfare on the flames.

It was a tenement building—one of those high, dull buildings which abound in Glenburgh; houses which in the old days were the mansions of wealthy merchants, but now, fallen into disgrace, sadly in need of repair, and lacking all suggestion of beauty,

hold a family and sometimes two on every floor.

Fortunately, every one had been warned in time, and had escaped safely from the place. But the danger lay in the fact that the flames might spread to the houses on either side, and then it would need more than firemen to extinguish it.

Even now it seemed for a time as if their efforts to check its progress would be of no avail. Great tongues of flame darted out, and as though furious to find there was nothing to attack, lashed sideways to the walls again, hungry for something to devour. Then, unsatisfied, would disappear for a moment, only to thrust themselves forth again in fresh places, with low, malignant roar, eager to satisfy their craving. And all the time the streams of water from below played steadily on the burning house. Now, where there had been a vivid mass of flame, there came a cloud of smoke and steam, telling that the water had won its victory over the foe.

Crash! Part of the roof fell in, and instantly huge tongues of flame leaped up, joyously mad it seemed as they devoured their prey. But still the streams played on, and the fire spurts grew less frequent. They flung themselves forth less savagely, more sulkily, as a tiger caught in a trap will fling itself at the bars of the cage from sheer temper, but with no hope of escape.

Presently the fire made its last bid for victory. One great sudden flash shot forth just for an instant, then quickly fell back, defeated. The devouring tongues had fought their fight, but the victory was not theirs. Only the smoke from the woodwork testified to their power. Still the great streams of water from below played ceaselessly on until not the faintest touch of glowing redness remained, nothing but the blackened beams and the piles of fallen debris were left to tell of the force of the beaten foe.

Alec, Jock, and a host of companions remained to the end. For them the fight was a glorious one.

"Man! It's grand! It's grand!" Alec had said to Jock, as a tongue of fire more spiteful than the rest had wrapped itself round a portion of the woodwork.

They waited for some little time after the fire had been extinguished, watching the firemen attending to their apparatus or entering the house to make certain their work was ended. Then, satisfied that there was nothing further to be seen, the boys slowly made their way homewards.

Darkness had now set in, and by the time Alec and his companions got back to the fire-station it was too late to begin any fresh game. The Guthries lived near the station, and with a hearty good-night to his chums, Alec turned in.

His mother was anxious to have a full account of the fire, a very natural desire considering the part her husband played.

"It was gran, mither!" was Alec's chief statement. "Wish I was like dad!"

Of his rescue of the girl Alec made no mention, and presently, tired out, he slipped up to bed, leaving his mother to wait for the return of her husband. He would, of course, have various duties to do at the station.

Presently, when Alec in his bed lay dreaming of the thrilling rescues he would make when the day came for him to don the fireman's uniform, Tom Guthrie came home.

"Whaur's Alec?" was his first question, after he had greeted his wife and expressed approval of the meal awaiting him. "My! But he's been showing himself off to-night!"

A gleam of pride came into his eyes, and Mrs. Guthrie, looking up quickly, knew her fears were unfounded. Whatever her boy had done, she was certain it was nothing of which she need be ashamed.

"Why, Tom? He's gone to bed, of course. But did you want him?"

"It'll wait," said Tom. "Only"—and his eyes twinkled again, spoiling the effect he tried to produce with his voice—"Captain Watson wants to see him in the morning. Alec stopped the engine to-night!"

"What! Tom, surely Alec—"

"Ah! And did I forget to tell you why? To be certain Alec did stop it, but it was to save the captain's girlie, Miss Eileen—ye ken her weel, mither—and oor Alec they say rushed under the horses' hoofs and saved the lassie from certain death! He did!"

If Tom Guthrie was proud of his son, what shall be said of Alec's



mother? The whole story had to be told her. Seated at the back of the engine, Tom had not been an actual eye-witness of the rescue, but others had told him every detail, possibly adding a little more. And now Tom told it all to his wife, while she sat and listened, proud to think that it was her boy who had done this! It was her boy that Captain Watson, chief of the Glenburgh Brigade, wished to see personally and most particularly on the morrow!

And Alec, lying asleep in his bed that night, never knew that when he raised his hand to his face, with the unconscious movement of the sleeper, it was to brush away the kiss of his mother and the few tears which fell from her eyes on to the face of the sleeping boy.

Nor did he quite understand what it meant when, as he was dressing in the morning, his father called to him:

"Gettin' up, Alec? Just pit on your Sunday claes to-day, my lad. An' mak' yourself look smart, for ye're going to see a gentleman to-day."

But he did as he was told, though he wondered what it could mean. He did hope they were not going to put him in an office. They had talked of it, for Alec was smart at figures and wrote a nice, clear round-hand. But he had fought against it, for if he went into an office what hope would there be of ever reaching his ambition and wearing the brass helmet? No; something which would make him strong of arm appealed more to Alec.

When he learned what the real meaning was, he was even more surprised. He seemed to have his breakfast in a dream. The unreality of it all—wearing his Sunday clothes on a weekday, his father's advice on how he must speak to Captain Watson, his mother's anxiety that his tie should be neat—impressed Alec. It was a red-letter day in his life.

His father had not to be on duty until nine o'clock, but this was rather too early for Captain Watson to be there. Alec therefore had to sit at home for an hour, and when at a quarter to ten his mother, anxious that he should not be late, bade him go, Alec could scarcely refrain from running to the station. But he succeeded by a great effort in walking as became one who had such important business on hand as an interview with the fire brigade chief.

He explained to the man in the office why he had come, and found that his father had already made the path smooth for him. For it was not always easy to get into the presence of Captain Watson.

"All right, Alec, me lad," said the man in charge. "I'll just see if the captain's busy." He went away for a few minutes, leaving Alec alone in the office. "Come on, Alec," he said, returning in a short time. "He's waiting for ye now."

Still with that queer feeling of unreality possessing his mind, Alec followed the man up a short flight of stairs, and was shown into a fairly large and comfortably-furnished room. To Alec it seemed a fine place. Seated at a large table, strewn with papers of all kinds, was the brigade chief.

"Here's the boy Alec Guthrie, as ye wished to see, sir," said Alec's guide; and he was gone, leaving the boy face to face with Captain Watson.

Alec trembled just a little. He had heard so much of the captain. Even his father always spoke of the chief in tones of awe as one who stood head and shoulders above ordinary men. And now Alec was alone with him—had to talk to him and answer his questions.

But he need not have feared. Captain Watson looked up suddenly from his writing, and smiled at him so pleasantly that Alec was forced to smile in response.

"Well, my young hero!" said the chief. "And you are Alec Guthrie, are you? I understand it was you who rescued my little girl from certain death last night?"

"I—I—no, sir. I only just got her out of the way. Ye ken—I mean, I didn't do anything but just that. The horses pulled up."

"Of course." There was a little twinkle in the captain's eye. He was enjoying this little scene immensely. "I understand exactly! You merely ran forward and took my little girl out of the way?"

"Yes—yes, sir! That was all!" said Alec, pleased that the captain had understood him.

The captain rose, and came to Alec. Putting his hands on the boy's shoulders, he looked him in the face,

staring straight into his frank blue eyes.

"You didn't do anything, did you, Alec? Only risked your own life! Only saved my little girlie from certain death! 'Just got her out of the way'—that's all! But you did more for me than, Alec Guthrie, than you can understand just yet. And I'm proud of you, my lad; and your father's proud of you, and I hope we'll both live to see you take as good a place in the world as you deserve."

He paused for a moment or two, his hand resting on Alec still, and his eyes looking into the boy's.

"You've just left school, Alec, your father tells me. And what do you want to be?"

"A fireman, sir!" Alec responded promptly.

"Ah! Want to follow in your father's footsteps. Well—"

The telephone bell rang, and the captain went to the instrument. When he had finished, he turned to Alec.

"I have to go away now, Alec. But I shall not forget. I'll talk to your father to-day. Good-bye for the present, my boy. I won't tell you again how proud I am of you, but I shall see you later. Good-bye, Alec!"

And Alec took the outstretched hand and said good-bye. Not until night did he know what that brief interview meant for him.

But when Tom Guthrie came home late that night he was delighted.

"Whaur's oor Alec?" he asked; and without waiting for an answer mither? The captain's pit ten pound—ten pound!—in the bank for Alec, and he says he'll pit mair in later.

And Alec's to start at the station to-morrow—five shillings a week—till the captain has looked round for something better. Fancy, oor Alec!"

And Alec, when he heard, was delighted. On the morrow he began his new work. For the time being he was the handy boy of the station, making himself generally useful, and picking up knowledge which would be of advantage to him later. Best of all, he was on the way to reach his ambition, and he was one of the fire-station men already!

THE 3rd CHAPTER.  
Mingled With the Flames.

IN his new capacity Alec proved immensely popular with the firemen. He went about his work whistling and singing, and his willingness to run errands and do any little job the fire-fighters asked him, quickly made him the idol of the station.

The lad was never out of hot water, but his pranks were harmless, and no one laughed more heartily in the end than those on whom he was everlastingly playing his practical jokes.

Old Joe Burton, the veteran of the brigade, was the special butt of Alec's pranks. One day Joe was devouring with great gusto a particularly tender piece of steak and some fried potatoes. He had spared his delicacies out on a board, and seated himself on a barrel near the bottom of the pole down which the firemen slid when there was an alarm.

"You beauty!" muttered the old fireman, gazing lovingly at a piece of juicy steak he was holding in front of his mouth on a fork. "If—"

The next instant, with a loud war-whoop, Alec, who had watched the veteran from above, vainly trying to bottle up his mirth at Joe's tender soliloquy, came sliding down the pole, landing plump on the fireman's shoulders. The barrel went one way, the board another, and Joe was hopelessly mixed up with the scattered dinner-table, pieces of steak, a basin of fried onions, and the condiments, whilst a foaming tankard of ale distributed itself over his neck and face.

"You young scaramouch!" he roared. "If I get hold of you I'll—"

But Alec had disappeared like a flash, and realising the futility of pursuit from past experience, Joe went back to recover the remains of his scattered meal, muttering threats of vengeance against the youngster when next he set eyes on him.

Alec's peashooter was the terror of the station. As the firemen were going about their daily work, a pea, driven with all the force of Alec's lusty lungs, would strike them on the tip of the nose or in the nape of the neck.

These peas are being wasted,

thought Alec, as he gazed at a bag containing about a quart of the little round missiles. In a moment of confidence, Harry Hardath, a smart young fellow standing six feet two, had told him that that night he was going to take the cook at the local vicarage for a walk. Harry spent quite a long time in making himself look smart in his civilian clothes.

"My! Don't you look a swell?" said Alec, with a merry twinkle in his eye, as the stalwart fireman emerged from the bed-room where he slept, as did all the single men, at the station.

The fireman made a dash for his boots, and hastily pushed in one brawny foot, only to draw it out again immediately, with a cry of rage, as his pedal extremity encountered about half a pint of hard peas.

"I'll attend to you for this later on," he said, glaring at Alec. "Ladies can't wait while I put a young terror who fills my boots with peas across my knee! Wait!"

But the next day all thoughts of revenge were driven out of his head by an incident which happened, and which was destined to have a great effect on Alec's future.

Hitherto the lad's entreaties to be allowed to attend a fire with the men of the brigade had fallen on deaf ears. He had promised to behave himself, and to keep out of the way, but his requests were always refused.

But the desire would not be stifled, and Alec determined that he would seize the first opportunity that presented itself to achieve his object. With this end in view, he laid his plans carefully.

Alec was a big, stalwart lad for his age, and one day when he was performing some little duty in the store-room, he came across a pile of discarded tunics and helmets. Picking out the smallest, Alec dusted them, and laid them carefully on one side.

And on the day after he had filled Harry Hardath's shoes with peas his chance came. About seven o'clock in the evening, when Alec had usually looked in at the station after enjoying a game of football, an urgent telephone message announced that a fire had broken out at the residence of Mr. Robert Allford, a well-to-do gentleman, who lived in the suburbs of Glenburgh.

Alec's entry into the station had been practically unnoticed, and when the news came the temptation was too strong to resist.

Slipping up to the store-room, he quickly donned the tunic and helmet, and in the hurry and bustle of preparation, he managed, just as the engine was starting, to secure a foothold on the little platform at the back, where old Joe Burton, the engineer, attended to the furnace. Joe was busy with his task at the

moment, and mistook Alec for one of the firemen who had arrived in answer to the call only just in the nick of time.

Indeed the engine was some distance on its way and the sides of the horses were flecked with foam before Joe discovered that the figure beside him, clinging to the swaying vehicle, was that of the idol of the station. And, like the dear old fellow he was, he decided to hold his tongue.

But no sooner had the men reached their destination than he was spotted by his own father.

"Oh, dad, I did so want to come to a real fire!" said the boy.

"I'll attend to ye later on! Keep out o' mischief, or there'll be trouble!" shouted Guthrie, as he dashed away.

To his delight, Alec was told by the superintendent to make himself useful.

The burning house was a large one, and had caught fire during the absence of Mr. Allford, who had motored over to dine with a friend about twenty miles away. All the servants had got safely out, and were standing in an excited group, eagerly discussing the progress of the flames.

It was while Alec was walking from one portion of the grounds to another that he came across a girl of about eighteen, wearing a cap and apron, and crying bitterly.

"What's the matter, miss?" demanded Alec.

"Oh, the papers—the papers! If you could only save the papers!"

"What papers?" asked Alec sharply.

"Papers in my master's study! Oh, do save them! When I was dusting this morning he told me to be very careful if by any chance I should see them lying about, as they were worth thousands of pounds! He locked them in a black despatch-box!"

A wild idea seized Alec. The girl had said the papers were valuable. If he could save them, he might escape the censure he would otherwise receive for daring to attend the fire without asking permission.

"Where is the study? Show me quickly!" he said to the girl.

She led the way to the side of the house, and pointed upwards to a bedroom on the second floor.

"That is my master's bedroom," she sobbed. "It leads into his study. The door may be unlocked, and the black despatch-box ought to be in the corner facing you as you enter."

While she had been talking Alec had cast off his fireman's tunic and helmet. The flames did not appear to have reached that portion of the building, and every man in the brigade was busy at the front.

Alec's keen eye soon detected a spout running close to the window.

Parts of it were plainly discernible through the ivy, and this spout, Alec decided, should be the means by which he must endeavour to reach the room in which the precious box lay.

With a muttered prayer for his success, Alec ran forward, and took a firm hold of the spout. Then, his lips set tight, he commenced to swarm upwards. The ivy assisted him greatly, but when he had climbed a few yards his arms commenced to ache terribly. The strain on his muscles was intense, for the foothold he could obtain was of the flimsiest character, and once, when he was near his goal, he clutched a little too excitedly at the clinging ivy, and a piece came away in his grip.

For one dreadful second he hung suspended by one hand, twenty feet above the ground. But in another instant he was pursuing his upward flight of peril, determined to rescue the black despatch-box or die in the attempt.

At last he drew level with the window-sill, and then commenced the most difficult part of his task, for not only was the window shut, but it proved to be fastened on the inside. With one hand Alec clung to the ivy, and bringing his foot round, as though he were shooting at goal from a difficult angle at football, he dashed it through the pane, so that he could, when safely on the sill, obtain a grasp of the sash.

Success crowned his efforts to perch himself on the wide sill, but in gripping the sash the broken glass cut his hand, inflicting an ugly gash, from which the blood poured profusely.

Smashing another pane with his elbow, he was able to put his arm through, and slide back the catch. To open the window was the work of a few seconds only, and, flushed with triumph, he jumped into the handsomely-furnished bed-room.

On his left was a door, and that, he decided, must lead to the study.

The door was of stout oak, and as he opened it Alec Guthrie was met with a rush of blinding smoke. He had just time to discern that he was in a room furnished as a study when a sheet of white flame sent him staggering backwards. The fire had progressed from the front of the house, and had gripped the study at the precise moment that Alec reached it.

Sick with pain and loss of blood, Alec groped blindly in every corner of the room. Tying his handkerchief round his mouth and nostrils, he searched on, but the box was not there. The flames were now making the place a regular inferno, and the confused shouts of the firemen, who had run round to the side of the house on which the lad had entered the bed-room window when they saw how the flames had spread, sounded but faintly in his ears. Evidently, thought Alec, the box had been removed.

He staggered towards the door, and then, on a cheffonier he had overlooked in his previous search, he saw the box he had risked so much to save. The sight put new life into him, and, gripping it under his arm, he made for the window through which he had climbed, but a strip of carpet, badly laid, sent him sprawling to the floor, and the box dropped from him, whilst a sharp, excruciating pain shot through his ankle.

Vainly he tried to rise. The flames were now close behind him, almost licking him with their hot breath, roaring like a mighty monster baffled of its prey. Was he to perish when success was within his grasp?

Gritting his teeth and stifling the cry of pain which rose to his lips, Alec struggled to his feet, regained possession of the box, and—how he never knew—reached the window, still clutching his precious burden.

The firemen below were amazed to see the face of the lad, grimed and blackened and streaked with blood, appear at the window, towards which the flames were licking their way. But in an instant they realised the position.

In the twinkling of an eye a canvas sheet, held by four pairs of stalwart arms, was spread out, and to the lad's rapidly-departing senses came the faint cry:

"Jump, Alec—jump!"

It was his one chance of life, and he took it. Still gripping the precious box, he dragged himself painfully on to the sill, stood for an instant poised in the lurid glow of the flames, and then flung himself through space.

Then came merciful oblivion.

(Continued on the next page.)

Berry Lane.  
Beer S. O.  
Devon.  
September 22nd. 1910

Dear Sir,

I received the nice printing outfit on Saturday last and am very pleased with it. Whoever I show it to admires it.

I remain,  
yours truly,  
Bertram Newton.

Exact reproduction of a letter from a reader, skilfully set in type from a BOYS' FRIEND printing outfit. To get one of these splendid outfits, see page 387.



**THE 4th CHAPTER.  
A Marvellous Invention.**

WHEN Alec came to himself he was lying on the ground, his father bending over him. For a minute he could not realise what had occurred, but as the recollection of his fight in the study flashed across his mind, a feeling of thankfulness came to him.

"The box—the papers?" he gasped.

"They're all right!" someone assured him.

And Alec, having recovered from the effects of his jump, rose from the ground. Just as he did so a powerful car came up the drive to the house. At the moment Alec took little notice, but suddenly he heard his own name.

"Yes, sir. 'Twas young Alec Guthrie—jumped from the window with the box in his arms! He's getting round now. Hallo, Alec! Are you better? This is the lad, sir."

The excited firemen turned from one to the other, trying to make explanations to both, but the newcomer took matters into his own hands.

"Ah! So you are the boy who has saved my precious box?" he asked, looking keenly at Alec.

Somehow Alec never remembered what happened that night. He knew Mr. Allford was speaking, and expressing gratitude for his prompt action in saving the box; that other firemen joined the group, and added their share to the conversation. But exactly what it was all about, and what replies he made, Alec never knew.

The journey home and the consternation of his mother when she saw his white face and wounded hand, were alike part of the strange dream. Only in the morning, when, refreshed and invigorated by a night's sound sleep, did he understand something of the part he had played.

It became more real when, during the course of the day, a message came to him from Captain Watson. He was required in the chief's-room immediately.

"Good-morning, Alec!" said the captain, as the boy entered. "This is the lad, Allford, who saved your papers—the boy who saved your daughter's life!" Then, turning to Alec: "Mr. Allford is more than grateful to you for your bravery last night, and he has made a suggestion to me, which I have already mentioned to your father."

Very briefly and tersely Captain Watson explained what the proposal was, Mr. Allford nodding his head as the various points were made clear.

It appeared that Mr. Allford had lately been experimenting with an improved form of airship, with the object of making use of it for extinguishing fires in the great high buildings of cities, or anywhere that it was difficult for an ordinary fire-engine to operate successfully. Cases had repeatedly come to his notice where a fire had broken out in one of the top storeys of a "sky-scraper," and great damage had been done simply because the ordinary fire-engine had been of little use.

It may be briefly explained here that in the machine Mr. Allford now used he had taken as his model the famous airship of Count Zeppelin, but he had kept in view the object for which it was to be used. The great cigar-shaped balloon had been specially treated to withstand the effects of heat, while additional precautions had been taken to ensure that, once filled with gas, the dirigible would not require further attention for several weeks. The car for the passengers was built in the shape of a small boat, some thirty feet long, and slightly more than four feet wide. At the front of this was fixed the seat where the one in command sat and operated the various levers, steering-gear, and the apparatus which enabled the ship to remain stationary at any moment, no matter what the strength of the wind might be. Right at the back of the car, or boat, were the two propellers which were capable of driving the airship, under favourable conditions, at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

Just behind the captain's seat was a large storage box, intended to hold the chief factor in the fight against the flames, for Mr. Allford was the inventor of "Kill-flame," a kind of glass bomb, which contained various chemicals so compounded that on coming into contact with the fire it exploded, and caused certain gases to be evolved, which acted as a wonderful and powerful extinguisher.

Mr. Allford's idea was that, by dropping these bombs from his airship into the centre of the fire, the

flames would be conquered far quicker than by the usual method. For three or four years he had worked night and day perfecting his various inventions, adapting his airship to the part it had to play, and making the Kill-flame bombs more powerful and more certain in their action.

At last, after countless difficulties had been overcome, he was confident of success, but he had yet to convince the world. To this end he had interviewed various authorities, asking that they would allow him to make experiments at an actual fire. Captain Watson was the first to accede to his request.

By the cruel irony of fate, almost the first fire which occurred after this permission had been obtained was at Mr. Allford's own house, and he had been absent!

But what part had Alec to play in these experiments? Simply this—Mr. Allford required an assistant, the younger the better, who would not be afraid to take his place in the airship when duty called them out. He had three mechanics, but they were not firemen, nor did they wish to act in that capacity, even if their duties would have allowed them. As a matter of fact, they would of necessity have to remain behind when the airship went out, as it required the three men to attend to the various details in getting the machine safely off from its moorings.

Would Alec come? If the invention were successful he would soon be occupying a position of great importance.

"It will be a good thing for you in every way, Alec," Captain Watson added. "What do you say? Will you have the position Mr. Allford offers you?"

Alec's heart beat rapidly. "I—I should like it very much, sir," he answered quietly, restraining his desire to jump into the air, in which he could already see himself flying.

"Good—good!" Mr. Allford was equally delighted. "I am very glad! I want a lad who has plenty of pluck. And, by Jove, I couldn't find a better man than you. Can you come at once, Alec?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent! I have told your father what I propose to give you as wages, and I don't think you'll complain. And now, Watson, what do you say if we all run over to my place? We can have lunch there, and I shall be certain of having my new assistant. I'll run you back again to-night, Alec, as I know you'll want to tell them at home all about it."

Mr. Allford was as good as his word, and it was a fine tale Alec had to tell them at home that night. On the morrow he was to take up his new duties, and would have to live in the house attached to the huge shed, only returning to his own home for an occasional week-end. But whatever natural sorrow his mother felt at the thought of losing her boy was covered by Tom Guthrie's enthusiasm.

"It's grand—grand!" he kept repeating, and that was the burden of his song throughout the whole night.

The following day Alec was initiated into his new work. With the three mechanics he quickly developed a warm friendship, and this was more useful to him than he realised at the time. The meaning of the various levers and the little buttons in the car of the airship were explained to him, until Alec knew almost as much as Mr. Allford himself about the wonderful ship he had perfected.

Three weeks—four weeks passed, and Allford began to wear a look of impatience on his face. Everything was ready and waiting. Yet no message came from the fire-station to give him his chance of proving the worth of his labours. In the papers various fires were reported, but it had been left to Captain Watson's discretion to give the order for the airship to be sent out. And he had promised that Mr. Allford's first battle with the fire fiend should be one that would fairly test the capacity of his invention.

But at last the call came. Mr. Allford was in his room one afternoon, when suddenly the telephone-bell called him.

"Is that you, Allford? This is Watson. Right! We've just had a call from Marchester—terrible blaze there, I believe. You'll have a good chance if you can get your machine out. Can you come? Good! South end of Marchester—you'll see it, of course. Right! Good-bye!"

"Thanks! Good-bye!" called Mr. Allford, and quickly hung up the receiver. There was no time to be lost. Now, if ever, the great opportunity for which he had worked and waited so long had actually arrived.

**THE 5th CHAPTER.  
Success or Failure?**

IN an instant Mr. Allford had issued his orders. At this, the greatest moment of his life, he did not intend to let anything go wrong through lack of attention to detail.

"Now, Alec," he said sharply, when the lad appeared almost before the bell which summoned him had ceased ringing, "our chance has come. Get her out quickly!"

Alec knew exactly what was required of him. Dashing to the airship shed, where everything was in readiness for an instant flight, he snapped out one or two orders, and the three mechanics, thinking of the reflected glory they would get if the trip proved a success, had the monster of the air prepared for ascent in an incredibly short space of time.

Each man had rehearsed his duty time after time, and no sooner had Alec's word gone forth than the touching of a lever caused the flat roof of the shed to part in the middle and slide open automatically. The airship had been constructed so that when the machinery was set in motion it forced the dirigible upwards perpendicularly, obviating the necessity of a preliminary run along the ground such as an aeroplane would want. A small but intensely powerful anchor



Still gripping the precious box, Alec dragged himself on to the sill, stood for an instant, and then flung himself through space.

was sufficient to hold it in check when the machinery was not working.

His face aglow with excitement, Mr. Allford dashed up, and he and Alec jumped together into the little boat-shaped car, in one portion of which the precious bombs were stored.

"Ready? Go!"

As the inventor snapped out this order, one of the mechanics placed his finger on a switch and gave a slight pressure. This simple movement served a dual purpose. Not only did it release the anchor, but it drove the machine upwards in a straight line through the already-opened roof, and hardly had the encouraging cheers of the mechanics died away, ere Mr. Allford, having taken one circle and found his bearings, was steering the dirigible in the direction of Marchester, ten miles away.

Alec swept the sky with a powerful glass, and it did not take him more than a few seconds to see the ruddy glow of the flames. With a steady hand on the helm, and his foot on the controlling lever of the electric battery which furnished the propelling power, Mr. Allford took his magnificent air craft along at a fine rate.

"Bombs all ready, Alec?" he shouted above the din of the machinery.

"All ready, sir!" returned Alec. Mile after mile of the sky flashed past them, the blood of each coursing madly through his veins at the glorious exhilaration of the momentous mission.

"Steady her now, sir!" shouted Alec about fifteen minutes after they had ascended.

They were now nearly over the flames, which rose in their mad fury. In a few minutes they would know their fate.

So great a hold had the fire obtained that Captain Angus Watson, who was personally superintending operations, and who was extremely anxious to see the result of Mr. Allford's experiment, had circulated a "brigade call" ordering all the members of the twenty brigades which he controlled to turn out.

Steamer after steamer had dashed up from various districts, and at last the whole of the fire-fighting force which Captain Watson controlled was working on the building. But it seemed as though their efforts were doomed to failure.

Madly they contested every inch in that noble battle for supremacy, but Captain Watson saw that the fire was surely gaining an ascendancy over its natural enemies. Snatching a few seconds from his work, the captain glanced anxiously at the sky, and a thrill ran through him as he beheld high up above the roaring flames Mr. Allford's airship. It was quite stationary, and Captain Watson's keen eyes detected the figure of the brave lad who had saved the life of his daughter Eileen frantically waving a flag.

"Great heavens!" shouted Captain Watson. "Mr. Allford has fainted, and lost his hold of the lever which keeps her stationary! They'll be hurled to death in the flames!"

But hardly had the words left his lips when the lithe figure of Alec Guthrie was seen climbing from one end of the boat-shaped car to the other. For a second or two he disappeared, and although they could not see him, the onlookers knew that he was lashing a rope round the stationary lever to keep the airship steady.

Then the lad's head reappeared over the side. In one hand he held a glass bomb about six inches in length. Years of training in the Navy had given the fireman a remarkable range of vision, and they could see what was happening.

Alec bent over the side of the car. Then he let the bomb slide from his hand. It cut through the air without a sound and disappeared, a tiny object, in the seething flames.

Another, aimed a few yards from its predecessor, was followed by a third, also dropped in a different part of the burning building, and no sooner had a fourth been delivered than a great shout of triumph arose from the throats of the assembled firemen, for the raging flames, which a moment before had seemed unconquerable, were now subdued, baffled—beaten!

What mystic power those silent messengers in six inches of glass contained was the priceless secret of the inventor, but the onlookers could see their effect. The roar ceased, and the flames suddenly disappeared as though they had never existed. For a moment a vast blinding volume of smoke rose in their place, but with marvellous rapidity the atmosphere cleared, leaving the inventor, lying in a faint, caused by the excitement coming after many sleepless nights, in the car of his airship hundreds of feet high in the sky, conqueror.

Touching a lever, Alec ran the dirigible to earth, where scores of willing hands made her fast, and assisted to lift Mr. Allford out of the car.

Alec flung himself on his knees by his master's side. It had been impossible to attend to him before—Mr. Allford would have never forgiven him if he had let this glorious chance of proving the invention's worth slip through his fingers—but now he was all anxiety.

But the faint was not a serious one. A pull from Captain Watson's flask and Mr. Allford was himself again, listening with bated breath to the captain's account of Alec's promptitude, and the wondrous success which had attended the boy's cleverness in seizing an opportunity at precisely the right moment.

"Your invention is a marvel, Allford!" said Captain Watson, grasping the inventor's hand.

There was a suspicious moisture in Mr. Allford's eyes as he strode forward and grasped Alec by the hand.

It was a glorious triumph that the lad's promptitude had achieved, and the rugged firemen waiting the word of dismissal from their captain could contain their feelings no longer.

"Speech, speech!" they yelled. Mr. Allford held up his hand for silence.

"My heart is almost too full for words!" he said, addressing the men. "This brave lad is known to you all, and you have seen the prompt way in which he acted when I fainted in the car, and although I can never fully repay him for what he has done for me to-day, I can yet do something towards assuring his future success. Men!—the inventor's voice rang out clear as a bell—"I intend to wait until he is twenty-one years old, and then take your little friend Alec Guthrie into partnership with me!"

Mr. Allford got no farther. Cheer after cheer rang out from the men who had made Alec Guthrie their pet. The boy's eyes were shining, and the fire-fighters broke rank and insisted on shaking him by the hand one by one.

As old Joe Burton, the last of the line, gripped Alec's fingers till the lad winced, the dainty little figure of Eileen Watson, whom he had snatched from death only a few weeks before, came tripping lightly from a motor-car.

And the few sentences she whispered into his ear made Alec Guthrie blush more furiously than all the words of praise which had been showered upon him in that the most triumphant hour of his life.

THE END.

("The Rival Apprentices," a rousing long, complete tale of the printing works and the football field, next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)



### SMART TRICKS FOR SMART BOYS.

**E**XPERIMENT will show that our sense of taste can deceive us just as our other senses have done. Prepare three solutions—one of sugar and water, one of salt and water, and one a mixture of sugar, salt, and water. Then give a taste of the sugar solution to one person, and the salt to another. Next give a taste of the mixed solution to both these, and ask them how it tastes. The one who has had the sugar will say it is salt, while the one who had the salt will say it tastes sweet.

The next trick should only be tried on those of a robust appetite, and certainly not on an enemy or one's dearest chum, unless he has been warned beforehand. Or one can perform it successfully on oneself. Procure a slice of a good strong onion, and a slice of anything else. Then after one has been securely blindfolded, the nose is held, and the onion and potato, or apple or whatever it is, is applied to the tongue, when it will be found impossible to say which is which.

Two other experiments prove that there is

#### a blind spot to the eye

and to the hearing. On a piece of paper or card make a small cross and a large dot on the same line about an inch apart. Then close the eye opposite the cross, and with the other eye look at it while holding the line on which is drawn level with the eye. If this is then moved slowly backwards and forwards a position will be found at which the dot is invisible. The deaf spot is not so easily found, and it is really not a deaf spot, but a place where a sound is produced which cannot be located by the hearer. Blindfold a person, and then think or click a couple of coins round his head. As a general rule he will be able to describe roughly the direction from which the sound proceeds, but there are one or two places which he cannot locate at all. The noise is made behind his head, and he says it is in front, or vice versa. It requires some little practice to find these places, but once you can estimate the spot you can do it again and again. To do this you must imagine that the blindfold person's head is cut in two equal halves from back to front by a thin sheet of glass. Then when the noise is made at a place which would be cut by that sheet of glass, he will be unable to tell whence the sound proceeds.

THE END.

## HOW TO MAKE A WHEELBARROW.

A Very Clever Article Written and Pictured by GEO. P. MOON.

**F**IG. 1 gives a side view of a simply-constructed wheelbarrow, Figs. 2 and 3 present front and back views of the same, and a plan is illustrated in Fig. 4.

It should be made of good, sound deal, though ash would be better for the framework and elm for the ends and sides, as such woods are stronger

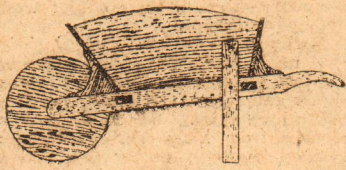


Fig. 1.

for the purpose, for naturally a wheelbarrow gets a good deal of knocking about.

I am supposing that our wheelbarrow is going to be of fair size—3ft. 6in. But you can, of course, suit your own tastes or requirements in this respect.

Let us first construct the frame, or that part which supports the sides and ends, forming the handles at the rear and taking the wheel-axle at the front. This is formed of four pieces of wood, two 3ft. long, joined by a couple of crossbars, one of which is 1ft. 1in. long, and the other 1ft. 4in. (Fig. 5). The first two lengths are 1 1/2 in. thick and 2 1/2 in. wide. Fig. 6

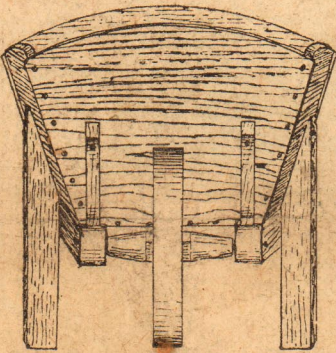


Fig. 2.

depicts one of them. The handle part is shaped as shown, it being about 6in. long. The shaping may be done with a keyhole-saw, and a spoke-shave will give it the necessary roundness to make it comfortable to the grip. The other end may be shaped as the diagram illustrates. At a distance of 9in. from the front, or

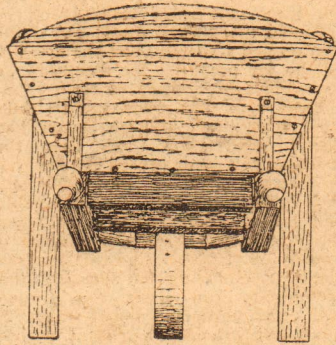


Fig. 3.

wheel end, make a mortise for the tenon of the front crossbar (Figs. 6 and 7), which is 2in. long and 1in. wide, and another similar at a distance from this of 1ft. 2in.

To construct the mortise, draw a couple of pencil-lines, 2in. apart, on

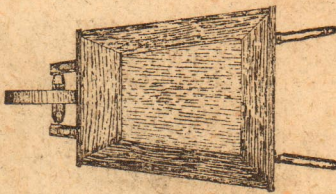


Fig. 4.

the four faces of the wood, making use of a square, if you possess one. Then connect those crossing the inside and outside faces with two others 1in. apart and at an equal distance from the edges. Fig. 8 shows the result. A chisel and mallet will then remove the wood from the oblong so marked. Or you can use a brace and large bit first, making a series of holes in connection with each other, and finally employ the

chisel to remove the waste stuff remaining.

The crossbars have a width of 2in. and a thickness of 1 1/2 in. The tenon is 1 1/2 in. long, 1in. thick, and 2in. wide. Two saw-cuts will produce it. The upper side of the bar is flush with that of the other part of the frame.

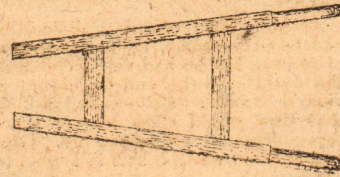


Fig. 5.

Glue the parts together, and add a nail to make the joints secure.

Make the sides and ends and bottom of the wheelbarrow of 3in. wood. You will notice that the former slope outwards so that the upper edges are farther apart than the lower. The lower edges must, therefore, be bevelled sufficiently to let them rest at all points upon the framework. The degree of this bevelling must be ascertained by experiment. It is, however, an easy task. The bottom piece has its edges also bevelled to make them conform to the shank of the ends and sides. Fig. 9 shows one of the sides, Fig. 10 an end, and Fig. 11 the bottom, traced upon the pieces of board out of which they are sawn. The side piece is 2ft. by 1 1/2 in.; the end piece for the back is 1ft. 10 1/2 in. by 10in.; that for the front 1ft. 7 1/2 in.



Fig. 6.

by 1ft. 1in.; and that for the bottom 1ft. 2 1/2 in. by 1ft. 4in. Cut out the curved edges with a keyhole-saw. Screw the bottom to the frame, and the sides and ends to the bottom edges, the end pieces projecting a trifle beyond the sides to which they are screwed. Strengthen the ends by adding the angle pieces of 3in. wood, as shown in Fig. 1. Cut a piece of paper as a guide first of all.

Next cut out the legs, which are about 1ft. 6in. long and 2in. square. Fig. 12 illustrates one of them. You will notice that a slant is given to the top 6in. on that face which is screwed to the wheelbarrow sides. The screw-

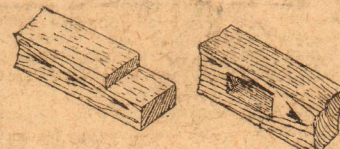


Fig. 7.

holes should be deeply countersunk, especially those which take the screw inserted into the frame. The holes



Fig. 8.

can be plugged with pieces of wood when the screws are inserted. (Fig. 13).



Fig. 9.

The wheel should be cut out of 1 1/2 in. wood; its diameter is 1ft. 1in. Make a hole in its centre 2in. square,



Fig. 10.

and drive in an axle of 2in. by 2in. wood, 8 1/2 in. long, having its ends rounded, as Fig. 14 depicts. Two



Fig. 11.

stout, round-shanked nails driven into the ends of the axle through holes in the front end of the frame will provide bearing-pins for the wheel. Give a couple of coats of paint, white inside, and, say, green outside.

(More splendid articles next Tuesday.)

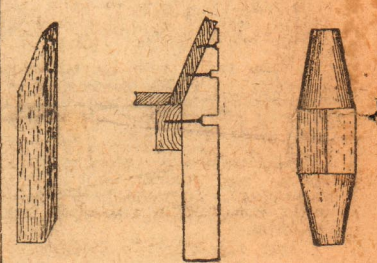


Fig. 12. Fig. 13. Fig. 14.

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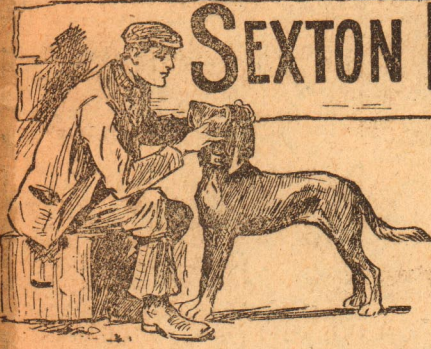
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### disguised as navvies,

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So far, Sexton Blake has not struck

**the slightest clue to the mystery** he has come to solve, and nothing but ruin stares Sidney Temple in the face.

The detective, now known as Bob Packer, is promoted to ganger, or sort of petty foreman, and by his strong personality assumes control whilst Temple is on the sick list.

A huge bridge is being constructed, and Tinker, with Dick Sparrow, are told to slip bolts on the massive girders as they are swung into position. A girder some forty feet in length is being swung round into its place. Suddenly there is a report like a pistol shot, and a loud rattling. The enormous girder drops as a thunderbolt falls from the clouds, threatening to shatter the side of the bridge.

(Now read this week's instalment.)

### "It's the Only Chance!"

**B**UT with no more than a handbreadth of daylight between its lower edge and the top of the great curve, the girder suddenly stopped, the chain giving out a resounding "twang!"

The paying-out gear had broken and let the drum fly round. It was the safety-clutch that had stopped the flying chain—acting not a moment too soon.

"Swing it clear!" shouted the foreman through his megaphone, thinking the girder would strike the bridge.

The giant arm of the crane began to swing round. The girder, which had come to rest at right angles to the line of the bridge, now commenced to turn round at the end of the chain.

It turned slowly at first, then rapidly gained speed. Tinker—his heart in his mouth—saw that it would sweep over the top girder of the cantilever like one blade of a pair of shears over the other.

He saw the peril, and backed away as fast as he could crawl. But Dick Sparrow—still at the extreme end of the curve—apparently did not see the deadly danger, for he made no effort to get clear.

Another moment, and he would be crushed between the two masses of iron, the moving and the still, or hurled off into the valley, a hundred and fifty feet below.

"Look out, Dick! Look out!" cried Tinker. "Back away! Back away!"

The boy realised his danger, but it was then too late. The girder was within a foot of where he knelt. Retreat was impossible, for its length extended far beyond him either way.

He gave a wild, despairing cry, and clutching the girder as it swooped upon him, swung out with it over the awful depth.

The foreman shouted for the crane to be stopped, for he saw that,

without the power of raising the chain, any attempt to swing the girder back, however carefully done, would cause it to strike the side of the bridge and jar the boy off into space.

The engineer stopped it. But the crane arm had already swung out twenty feet from the bridge. And there the girder came to rest in mid-air, the hopeless boy lying flat upon it at one end, clinging for dear life.

Every man or boy who saw it held his breath in horror. A great silence fell.

How long could he hold on before fear numbed his arms and made him lose his grip?

It was Tinker who broke that breathless hush.

Standing erect upon the summit of the great curve, he shouted in clear, ringing tones:

"Hold on, Dick! Hold on! For the love of Heaven, don't let go! I am going to save you somehow!"

Somehow! Even in Tinker's own ears it sounded but an empty boast.

Dick Sparrow heard Tinker's shout, for he raised his head, and his deathly-white face lighted up with a gleam of hope.

Feebly—very feebly—his answering cry came back:

"I'll try, I'll try! But be quick, be quick! My hands are numb!"

For a moment Tinker paused, and ventured a look down into the dizzy depths below, measuring the distance with his eye.

"If the other way fails, that's the only chance!" he muttered. "Ha! There's the giv'nor down there!"

For among a group of workmen who had speedily gathered in the valley below, and were looking up, spellbound with horror, he saw Sexton Blake, the detective-foreman having just chanced to arrive upon the scene on one of his frequent visits to inspect the progress of the work.

Blake had instantly grasped the whole situation in all its grim horror, and saw, too, with dismay, that little or nothing could be done to save the hapless boy.

He caught sight of Tinker, erect upon the summit of the cantilever, almost as soon as the boy saw him.

The instant he knew that Blake saw him, Tinker began to signal with his arms—both he and the detective knowing the code well.

His signalled message ran: "I am going to try and save Dick. Stay where you are. May want help."

Blake signalled back the one word: "Understood," and then stood watching with strained eyes; his heart now throbbing with suspense for Tinker as well as the other lad. For he well knew that the gallant boy would unhesitatingly sacrifice his own life to save another's.

"Heaven watch over him!" he muttered fervently. "Upon his skill and nerve depend the lives of both! It is but a slender hope, yet there is no other way. It is the only chance!"

The passing of the message and answer had not occupied many moments.

Tinker, the instant he knew that he was understood, set about carrying out the wild and desperate plan he had formed in his resourceful brain.

Dropping flat, he slid down the curve of the cantilever until he came to one of the cross girders that spanned the upper works of the vast viaduct.

This he actually ran along, although it was but ten inches in width and fully twenty feet above the roadway of the bridge; these incomplete, with many a yawning gap to be filled in, through which the grey-green of the valley showed far below.

But, steady at any time, his nerves were now braced like wires of steel. Heedless of all peril to himself, he thought only of the boy whose life depended solely upon his coolness and skill.

The girder brought him to the line of rails on which the mighty travelling-crane passed to and fro.

Jumping from tie to tie—for even his daring was not equal to walking along the narrow, slippery rails—he reached the crane itself and clambered upon the footplate.

The engineer—a youngish man—was white of face and trembling, as he leant against the side rail.

He started, and stared at Tinker as he clambered upon the plate beside him, as though the lad were a spectre.

"It wasn't my fault!" he cried. "I couldn't help it! The gear broke! Oh, if he's killed—if he's killed!"

And he broke out sobbing like a child.

"He isn't going to be killed!" panted Tinker. "I'm going to save him! And just you buck up and keep your wits about you, Tom Derrick! Don't touch the engine whatever orders you get. The slightest movement of the crane may be the death of both!"

For he feared that the foreman on the bridge, not understanding what he was about to attempt, might shout some luckless, hurried order to the crane-man.

"I won't, I won't!" declared Tom Derrick. "But how can you save him? What are you going to do?"

But Tinker had no breath to waste in explanations. He merely repeated his stern injunction not to touch the engine, and then began a feat as daring as ever boy or man attempted yet!

Watched in round-eyed amazement and awe by Tom Derrick, he climbed on the iron roof of the footplate, and thence over the boiler of the engine on to the winding-drum of the crane. Then, after a slight pause to recover breath, he began to swarm up the mighty arm of the crane itself.

It was a fearsome climb! The enormous arm stretched out full fifty feet in length, and canted upwards at a sharp angle.

It was broad at the commencement, and he could hardly span it with his legs and arms to get a grip. It tapered as he ascended, and he soon had a better hold. And well he needed it! For the chill iron soon numbed his fingers so that they began to lose their grasp of the edge. It was upon the grip of his knees that he chiefly depended.

Up and up, until he had now passed beyond the side of the bridge and was out over the awful depth below.

He shut his eyes, not daring to look down. A touch of giddiness then meant certain death!

Now he has reached the great pulley at the far end, and begins to clamber over it—the most perilous part of all that daring climb!

The links of the great chain, thick with black grease, hardly afford a hold for his fingers. Then he has to turn round, actually turn round on that narrow point, so that he may begin his descent of the pendant portion of the chain.

He has done it! He is safely over!

Now he begins to swarm down the chain itself; but slowly, for his hands are cruelly numbed, and the rough iron grinds through his clothing and chafes his bare skin. For here again he has to rely chiefly on the grip of his legs, the chain being too big for a firm hand grasp.

The chain comes to an end; his toes touch the girder at last!

To his dismay it begins to sway directly he moves from the middle, by which it is slung, and a new dread comes upon him, that his steps will set up an oscillation which, increasing as he nears the end of the great beam, will fling them both off into space—himself, and the boy he has come to save!

"But I've got to risk it!" he muttered. "It's the only chance!"

### I've Done It, Guv'nor!

**S**LOWLY, and with infinite caution—sliding his feet lightly, inch by inch, rather than daring to lift them in a regular step—he made his way along the girder towards the end where Dick Sparrow lay, clinging with a fast weakening hold.

Such a journey might well have appalled the stoutest heart.

He walked as it were in space, with that narrow and slippery beam of iron to set his feet upon, and nothing but the empty air to clutch at if he chanced to lose his balance. Beneath him lay the valley, nearly two hundred feet sheer down!

A horrible feeling of sickness came upon him, produced by the immense height and the swaying motion of the girder.

This, as he had feared, increased the further he went, until the huge mass of iron swayed with him, like a giant see-saw, up and down, and began, too, a side movement, making him dread that it would strike against the bridge and crush them or jar them off.

The boy at the end felt this swaying with redoubled force, and screamed out in terror:

"Don't make it swing! Don't make it swing! You'll throw me off!"

"Can't help it, Dick!" Tinker called to him. "Hold on just a tick longer and I'll be with you!"

He mastered the horrible sickness by an iron effort of self-control, and pushed on. But there was the wind to fight also, and that was cruel!

At that great height it blew with tremendous force, and threatened at each gust to sweep him off. And it was cold—bitterly cold!—numbing his limbs and stinging his eyes, until they filled with water and he was almost blinded.

But he reached the end of that awful journey at last, and stood beside the almost fainting boy.

Then like a thunderbolt came upon him the horrible thought that he had done all, dared all, in vain! How could he get back?

Alone, he doubted if he could manage it, so stiffened were his limbs, so sick and weak he felt with that dreadful swaying motion. Alone, he hardly dared hope to accomplish that frightful journey again, but burdened with Dick—for he knew the boy would be incapable of such a climb himself—the thing was utterly impossible!

What was to be done?

Despair tempted him, for his strength was almost gone. But his brave heart fought it off, and he tried to clear his brain and think out a plan.

One came to him at last; a bold and almost desperate plan, that he would have never dared to hope of carrying through but for the bracing thought that Sexton Blake was there below, watching with alert eyes for a chance to help him.

And again he muttered those desperate words:

"It's the only way!"

"Why did you come here, Ted?" moaned Dick Sparrow despairingly. "You can't help me by standing there! And I'm going! I'm going to drop! My arms are frozen! I can't hold on a moment longer!"

"You must—you must!" cried Tinker. "See, I will make you safe!"

He had thrown away the canvas bag for his nuts and bolts before he began his climb, but Dick still had his, nearly empty, and slung round his neck by a strong leather strap.

Knocking down, Tinker took the strap off, and, passing it through two bolt-holes, one on either side of the girder, secured Dick from any chance of falling by buckling it tightly around his middle.

"Now you're safe, old son!" he said cheerily. "Safe till I'm ready to get us both down!"

He then sat down astride upon the girder, holding on by his knees, and, with the aid of his knife, began to unpick the canvas bag.

It was a large bag, a small sack, in fact, and once he had undone the top hem he was soon able to pull out any number of stout hempen strands, each about four feet long.

These he knotted together, end to end, as fast as he got them out, winding the cord thus made around a loose bolt he found in the bag, until he judged that he had made it long enough for his purpose.

Then he tore a leaf out of the notebook he was never without, and scribbled the words:

"Tie on a stouter cord, then a rope that will bear two."

This done, he rolled the paper up

tightly, knotted a turn of the hempen string around it a few inches from one end, then tied on a heavy iron nut just below it.

Then, tightening the grip of his knees, he leant over and began to lower the nut, paying the string out carefully by letting the bolt upon which it was wound slowly revolve between his hands.

His great fear was that it would prove too short, and thus cause further delay whilst he unravelled more.

Down, down dropped the nut, until it was diminished to a mere speck, and looked like a tiny insect with white wings, the scrap of paper sticking out on each side of it.

He knew that Sexton Blake had seen it, for he moved out—only a larger insect himself—in a line with its descent.

Would it reach him?

No! Too short! And only a few more turns upon the bolt!

Yes, yes! He has it!

An electric thrill passed through Tinker's arms as he felt the gentle pull upon the string which told him that Sexton Blake was untying the note. See clearly he could not, for all beneath his eyes now swam in a red mist.

"Courage, Dick—courage!" he cried. "A little while longer and we'll be safely down on firm earth!"

But the boy did not answer. He had swooned. Only the stout strap now kept him from that fearful fall.

But Tinker was too busy even to glance at him, or the sight might have unsettled his nerve. A gentle pull upon the string and a greater weight warned him to pull in.

He did so with infinite care, keeping the frail, precious strands away from the sharp edge of the girder, which might have speedily chafed it through.

Foot by foot he wound it in, fearing that the increasing weight upon it might cause it to snap at some weak spot. But yard after yard came safely home, and at length, to his unspeakable joy, he held the end of a slender but much stronger cord in his hand.

This he hauled in much more boldly, for there was little fear of its snapping.

But the strain upon his arms became almost unbearable, increasing with every foot of the cord he pulled up. But he stood to it gallantly, knowing that the rope—their salvation—was coming nearer at every pull.

At last he held the end of it in his hand.

It was a new rope—there was always plenty kept among the stores—not very thick, but strong enough to bear the weight of two men.

Tinker knotted it through two bolt-holes near where Dick Sparrow lay, then, for the first time, noticed how still he was.

"Come, Dick!" he cried, shaking the boy gently by the shoulder. "Rouse up! We're all right now! I've got a rope here. Rouse up, and swarm down first!"

But Dick neither moved nor made any response.

"He's fainted," gasped Tinker—"fainted dead off! There is no help for it—I must try and carry him down. But what if the rope cuts at the sharp edges of those holes under the double weight?"

He tore the flaps off his jacket-pockets, and tucked them under the rope where the strain was likely to come.

Then he prepared for that fearsome descent!

It would have been grim trial enough to make it alone, numbed and exhausted as he was. But with such a burden!

(Continued on the next page.)

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He would not think about it. "Thinking is bad when a nerry thing has got to be done," he told himself pluckily. "Best done, done quickly!"

He dropped over the edge of the girder on to the rope, gripping it sailor-fashion with his legs, and one arm only around it.

Then he carefully unbuckled the strap from around Dick's body, and drew the unconscious boy gently towards him, until he had him off the girder and his weight resting upon the one free arm he had to support him with.

And thus he began to climb down.

For many a long day afterwards Tinker remembered every sensation of that fearful descent, and in many a dream by night went through it all again!

The constant dread that his strength would fail him, his arm weaken, and his burden drop; the fear that haunted him at every creak of the rope that the strands were parting at the girder above—all this made that journey seem ages long, though in reality it could not have taken many minutes.

And now, through the maddening singing and drumming in his ears, he thought he heard the sound of cheering from below, and Sexton Blake's voice shouting words of encouragement.

But he could not have made a whisper in response.

Then the cheering grew louder, until it swelled into a great roar close to his ears.

Then he felt Dick Sparrow slipping from his arms, with a great fear that he had dropped him, after all.

But a shout, "I've got him—I've got him!" told him the truth. He had reached the ground. It was all over.

He saw the dear face of Sexton Blake bending over him, and he whispered, faintly but proudly:

"I've done it, guv'nor!"

Then he dropped limply into Blake's arms, and never heard the mighty cheer that hailed his gallant deed.

**Tinker Gets an Invitation.**

A FEW days served to put Tinker quite in form again.

He was little the worse for his grim adventure, save for a set of slightly stiff arms and legs, and the absence of a good deal of skin from the palms of his hands.

But little Dick Sparrow, slighter of build, and by no means of Tinker's sturdy make, did not pull round so quickly.

The shock, the strain, and the exposure he had undergone told upon him, and although he was on the turn for the better, he still had to keep his bed when several days had passed and Saturday came round.

Saturday was a great day with Tinker.

Although the men worked on much later—for Blake was anxious to advance the work to a finish—the foreman-manager always insisted upon the boys taking a half-holiday on that day.

It was Tinker's custom to take a stroll over the hills or through the woods, always taking Pedro, the bloodhound, and generally accompanied by Dick Sparrow, with whom he was great chums.

But now, Dick being upon the sick-list, it looked as though Pedro would be his only companion that afternoon.

However, he had the offer of a new chum, and that from a quite unlooked-for quarter.

Just as they were knocking off work at noon, Sam Bleek, better known as "Slimy Sam," on account of his snakelike ways, came up to him with quite a friendly grin upon his rather unprepossessing face.

Tinker rather wondered at that, for he had very little to do with Slimy Sam, avoiding the fellow as much as he possibly could. He did not like him, his characteristic being an unsavoury mixture of bully and sneak.

He was a big fellow, and used his strength to bully unmercifully all the smaller boys—that is, when Blake or Tinker were not near; he dare not attempt it then!

To the few doubtful characters among the men—and there were a few black sheep, as there always are where men are employed in hundreds—to these Slimy Sam cringed and toadied.

He was always ready to smuggle in drink in working hours—a thing looked at askance by Sidney Temple, and strictly forbidden by Sexton Blake when he took up the reins of power.

But Slimy Sam was far too slimy to be caught at it.

As we have said, Tinker avoided him. And Tinker having once loked him soundly for bullying a poor half-witted fellow who came to the works selling cakes and ginger-beer, Slimy Sam just as carefully avoided Tinker. They had not exchanged a word for weeks.

But on this particular Saturday the slimy one came up to Tinker positively beaming with friendliness.

"What yer goin' to do this afternoon?" he asked. "Your chum the Spagger is laid up, ain't he? How'd yer like to come along o' me an' have a bit of sport?"

"That all depends," answered Tinker, who did not wish to repel his friendly advances too curtly; that was never Tinker's way. "Let bygones be bygones" was ever his motto. "What sort of sport?"

"Oh, it ain't nothing in the poaching line!" said Sam, who knew that was in Tinker's mind. "Nothing crooked at all. Only I know where there's a thumping big badger up in the woods, an' I thought if you was to bring your big dawg along, an' I brought my little tarrier, we might have a bit o' sport."

Tinker thought it over. Like most British boys, he was a sportsman at heart, and although he knew very well that Pedro—being a pure-bred bloodhound, and not trained to hunt any smaller game than men—would not be of the slightest use at drawing a badger. Still, it promised a bit of fun, and it was very doubtful if the badger would come to any harm.

"Yes; I'll come," he said. "I don't suppose we shall capture the badger, and I'm blest if I know what we'd do with it if we did; but it looks like a bit of a lark. Yes; I'll come. When are you going?"

Slimy Sam did not reply at once.

He stooped, as if to tie his boot-lace, but in reality to conceal the grin of satisfaction which he could not suppress.

"Oh, I'm going home to have a bit o' dinner an' a clean up first!" he at length replied. "Say in an hour's time. I'll be waiting at the corner by Oakley Copse. Don't forget to bring your dawg! It'll be a dead frost without him!"

"I'll bring him," said Tinker. "And I'll ask young Charley Mason if he'd like to come. His father's been an under-keeper, and Charley's great on sport. He'll know better how to nail that badger than we shall."

And he was about to signal to a lad who was passing at the time, but Slimy Sam caught hold of his arm.

"No," he said quickly; "don't tell him!"

"Why?" asked Tinker, in surprise. "He's a jolly good chap! I like Charley Mason. And there's young Peters and Bobby Hicks. They're all my chums, and I'd like 'em to come. The more the merrier!"

"No, no," exclaimed Slimy Sam, quite vehemently; "we don't want a crowd!" Then he added awkwardly: "The woods are preserved, you know; and if there're any keepers about, they might'n't notice just a couple of chaps, but they'd be down on us if there was a gang!"

"Something in that," said Tinker carelessly. "All right, then; I won't tell them. Meet you in an hour! So-long!"

And he strolled off home, whistling.

It did strike him that Slimy Sam was needlessly vehement about not increasing the number of the party, but his reason seemed plausible enough. And, anyway, Tinker, not being of a timid or suspicious nature, thought very little about it. But possibly, if he could have seen the slimy one's proceedings after leaving the works, he might have given a little more thought to the matter, and considered twice before he embarked upon that badger hunt.

For Sam Bleek did not go directly home to "have a bit o' dinner an' a clean up."

His home lay towards Slagford, but although he went a little way in that direction—so long, in fact, as he was within sight of the other boys trooping out of the works—he speedily turned off by a bypath, and made for a bit of waste land locked in by a belt of scrubby bushes and stunted fir-trees.

This spot—"Hangman's Hollow," as it was called; why, goodness only knows—had an unsavoury reputation in the district.

The villagers and townfolks avoided it, especially at night, for it had long been infested by a gang of gypsies, or low-class vagrants calling themselves such; and the men of the gang were not above stopping any unfortunate wayfarer who strayed

near their haunts alone, and extorting money by threats of violence, which they had been known to carry out when their demands were not complied with.

This, of course, led to frequent complaints, and many attempts had been made to clear them out.

But there were difficulties in the way.

Hangman's Hollow was private property, and the local authorities had no control over it. It happened to belong to the Hon. Ralph Ardoise—the "Gipsy Squire," as he was called—and for some reason best known to himself—or perhaps from sheer perverseness—he chose to tolerate these vagrants upon his land; and, being a magistrate, he managed very often to get their misdeeds very lightly punished, and frequently passed over altogether.

It was towards this spot of unsavoury repute that Slimy Sam now bent his steps.

The object of his visit was very peculiar, and would have made Tinker change his plans for that afternoon, if only he had but a hint of it.

various owners—he might have been anything, but not anything respectable.

If he had laid claim to respectability, his face would at once have given him the lie, for it was a most villainous sort of countenance.

Like all the men of his gang, he had been out in the recent rioting; not taking part in the actual fighting, but hanging on the fringe of the mob and looking for a chance of loot. This agreeable person was known as "Jan the Tinman," because he was supposed to do a little in the pot and kettle mending line. But it was very little, indeed, he having no great fancy for work of any kind.

"So you've come at last," he grunted, getting up from the tree-stump on which he had been seated, as Slimy Sam appeared.

"Yes, only just got away from work," answered the lout.

"Well, ave you managed it—is he comin'?" asked the Tinman.

"Yes, I've hooked him a treat," grinned Slimy Sam. "He's comin' right enough!"

"But the 'ound—the blood'ound—is he goin' to bring that?" asked

quite a handsome living by dog-stealing, it was probably no idle boast.

"Don't you trouble about that," he added again. "The squire ain't payin' yer to worry about me. All you've got to do is to get the boy to bring the 'ound. The rest is my job, an' 'Gudgers'."

"Jolly glad it is!" said Slimy Sam. "All right! We'll be up at the spinney in an hour."

And he went away. Jan the Tinman turned towards the tents, calling, "Gudger! Hi, you Gudger! Just show yer ugly mug will yer?"

The flap of one of the filthy tents was thrown back, and Gudger came forth, yawning. He was a man of similar stamp to the Tinman, except that he was a shade dirtier, if that were possible, and his eyes had not the foxy cunning of the other.

"Wot's up now?" he asked, with another yawn.

"Wot's up? Rot yer! 'Ave yer forgotten the little job we've got afore us this arternoon?" snapped the Tinman angrily.

"Oh, nabbin' the big dawg!" said Gudger sheepishly. "Blow me if I like that job at all! Wish we was well off it!"

"Wot's the matter with yer?" growled Jan. "What are yer afraid of? You won't 'ave to 'andle the dawg; that's my work. All you've got to do is to keep the boy off. He's a tough young beggar, an' he'll fight like mad when he sees wot we're arter. I couldn't manage the pair of 'em, dawg an' boy, or bust me if I'd take a funky waster like you with me!"

"I ain't afraid of the dawg or the boy neither," mumbled Gudger.

"Then wot are yer afraid of?" demanded the more truculent ruffian.

"I'm not afraid of nothin'," said the other; "only that 'ere 'ound belongs to the new foreman up at the works, an' he'd be an ugly chap to buck up agen, he would! Gosh! See him in the fight t'other night! I'd rather stir up a cage full o' famished tigers than be within range of his arm when he finds we've stole his dawg. An' find out who did it he will, for a dead cert! He ain't a 'uman bein', that chap! He's just a sort of Old Nick in cords, an' without a tail."

"I'm not afraid of nothin'," said the other; "only that 'ere 'ound belongs to the new foreman up at the works, an' he'd be an ugly chap to buck up agen, he would! Gosh! See him in the fight t'other night! I'd rather stir up a cage full o' famished tigers than be within range of his arm when he finds we've stole his dawg. An' find out who did it he will, for a dead cert! He ain't a 'uman bein', that chap! He's just a sort of Old Nick in cords, an' without a tail."

"Rot!" he ejaculated. "You've a sight more reason to be frightened of the Gipsy Squire if we don't do this 'ere little job for him."

"Wot's he want him stole for?" asked the other gipsy, who seemed by no means eager about the undertaking, and anxious to raise all the objections he could think of. "Wot's he want to thieve a poor man's dawg for when he could buy 'undreds for hisself? That's wot I want to know."

"Go an' ask him," snapped Jan; "an' get yer 'ead broke for yer pains. The Gipsy Squire don't tell the likes of us why he wants a job done, he just says 'Go and do it!' An' by jingo, it'll be a bad day for us if we don't get it done to his satisfaction!"

"Don't see it," mumbled Gudger.

"He can't do nothin' to us."

"Can't he? Can't he?" said Jan, with something between a sneer and a growl. "The squire's a good friend to us, but he'd make a bad enemy. There's hardly a man among us that he couldn't send to Slagford Gaol with 'arf a word. An' there's some—an' you among 'em, Taffy Gudger, who he could send farther than that—to end their days at Portland."

Taffy Gudger turned pale, as far as that was visible under the grime on his face.

"Well, I s'pose it's got to be done," he mumbled.

"Thought you'd come to see it that way," sneered the Tinman, with an ugly leer. "An' don't forgit there's twenty quid 'angin' to this, if we pull it off all right."

"Oh, that makes a lot o' difference!" said Gudger. "I'm allus willin' to earn a bit o' oof. I'll take it on, mate."

"Thought so; but it's quod an' not quids that makes yer," muttered Jan. Then aloud: "Well, git the sack an' the sponge, an' that bottle o' stuff; you know where I put 'em—in the yaller van. An' be sharp about it. You've lost sich a lot o' time in jaw. We shall 'ave to step it out sharp if we don't want to find they've catched the badger an' gone off 'ome with him."

And he laughed, an ugly, sinister laugh.

(Another grand, long instalment next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)



With constant dread that his strength would fail, Tinker started on the perilous journey downward, and the fear of a terrible drop haunted him at every creak of the rope.

**Mischief Plotting.**

THERE was a sort of camp in the middle of the Hollow—that is to say, two or three blackened and frowsy tents; a couple of rickety vans with which the gypsies went about the country selling basket-ware, clo'-props, clo'-pegs, etc., and stealing anything they could lay their hands on.

But Slimy Sam did not penetrate as far as the camp; indeed, few strangers were ever allowed to approach it.

He just passed through a small gap in the ring of thick-grown bushes and stunted trees, which formed a sort of wall around the Hollow, and was at once challenged by a man, who appeared to have been waiting for him near that entrance.

This gentleman was not at all a nice sort of person to look at.

By his dress—which was of a nondescript variety, arising probably from the fact that each article had been stolen at various times, and from

Jan eagerly. "Ang the boy! It's the dawg we want."

"Yes, he's goin' to bring him," said Sam. "That badger lay fetched him a treat!"

"Thought it would," said the Tinman. "Well, I've just found the properest sort o' sport. It's up at the back of the woods—the Sandbank Spinney. Know it?"

Slimy Sam nodded.

"There's a dry ditch under the sandbank, full of bracken an' stuff—just the place for a badger-hole," added the Tinman, with an evil grin. "You must get him to send the 'ound down in the ditch. I'll do the rest!"

"But he's an awful powerful dawg!" said Slimy Sam. "If he flies at your throat—"

"He's welcome to tear my wind-pipe out if he does," grinned the gipsy; "but I'll look arter that! I've 'andled a few dawgs in my time, an' there was never one as I couldn't manage yet."

And as he had at one period made