



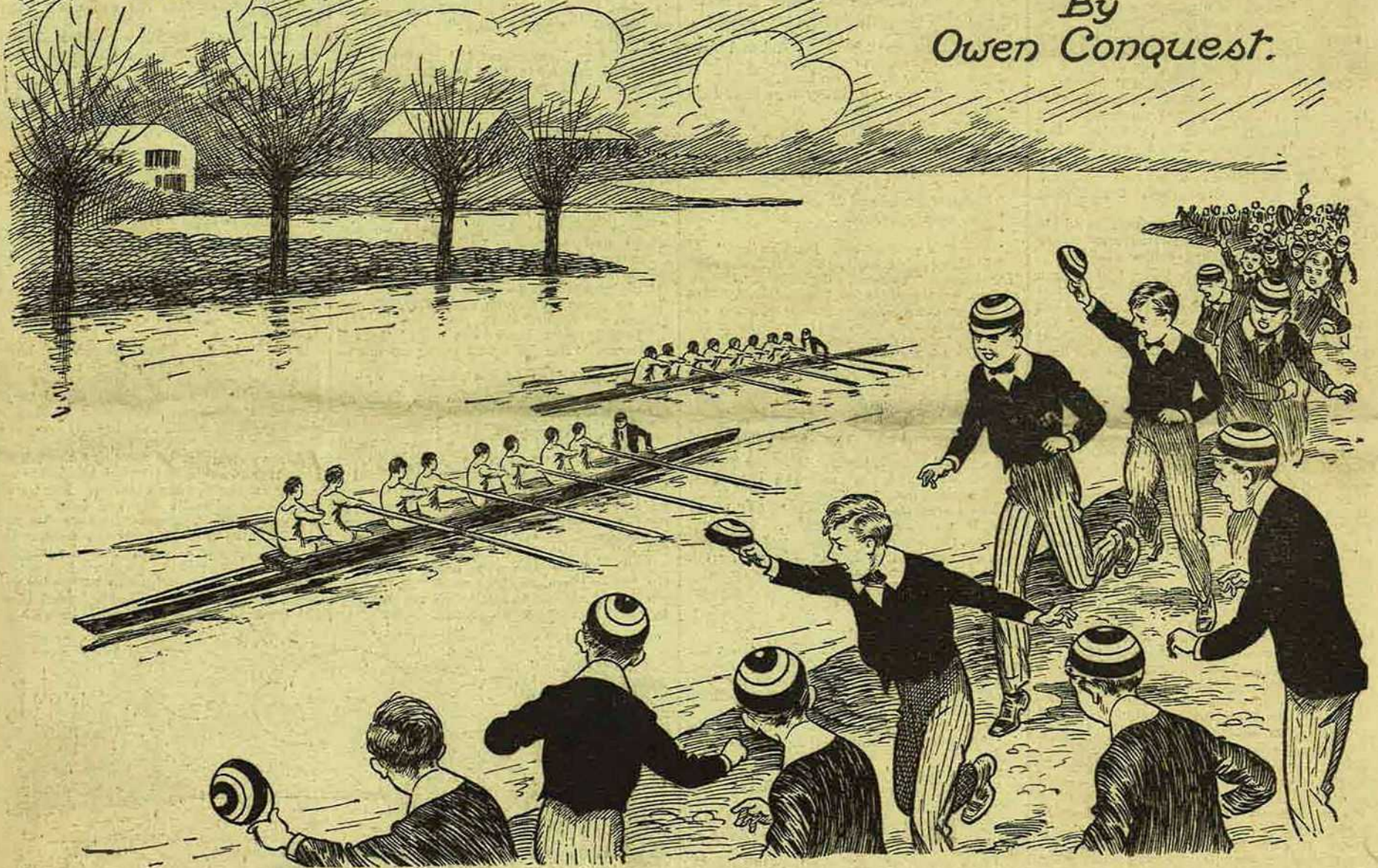
No. 1,294. Vol. XXVI.]

EVERY MONDAY.

[March 27th, 1926.

The Rookwood Boat Race!

By
Owen Conquest.



The Moderns yelled themselves hoarse as Tommy Dodd & Co. drew ahead.

**The 1st Chapter.
The High Hand!**

"STOP!"
A good many fellows on the Rookwood raft and the tow-path glanced round as Arthur Edward Lovell shouted. Mornington of the Classical Fourth was pushing off in a skiff, in which Erroll was seated. It was to Valentine Mornington that Lovell's shout was addressed. Certainly Morny must have heard it; every fellow within a very wide radius heard it. But possibly Morny did not know that the shout was addressed to him. At all events, he did not heed it. Lovell, with a red face, raced across towards the water. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, who were taking out a boat, exchanged glances.

"More trouble!" sighed Jimmy. A good deal of trouble had been gathered up by Arthur Edward Lovell since he had become junior captain of Rookwood School. Now it looked as if some more was coming along. "Stop!" shouted Lovell again. Still Valentine Mornington seemed deaf. "Hold on, Morny," murmured Erroll. "Lovell's shouting to you." "Is he?" said Morny. "Yes. Hold on—" "We're hold on the river, old bean." "Yes; but Lovell—" "Bother Lovell!" "Lovell's junior captain now, Morny. Do hold on and hear what he's got to say," urged Erroll. "Lovell may be junior captain now, but he isn't yet Emperor of Rookwood," drawled

Mornington. "He seems to fancy that he is, but he isn't—not a little bit. I'm goin' on." "Mornington, stop, I tell you!" shouted Lovell angrily, reaching the edge of the raft. The skiff danced a few feet away on the water. Morny looked at Lovell with impatient inquiry. "Well, what is it, then? We're just off up the river, and we're goin' as far as the island." Lovell knitted his brows. "You're doing nothing of the sort!" he snapped. "What?" "You're number four in the crew for next Saturday!" snapped Lovell. "You're

wanted for practice with the eight this afternoon!" "First I've heard of it," said Mornington, with a stare. "Well, you've heard of it now I've told you!" said Lovell sharply. "Bring that skiff in at once!" "Wait a bit," said Mornington coolly. "It's usual to let a fellow know when he's wanted for practice. Jimmy Silver used to post it up." "Jimmy Silver isn't junior captain now!" grunted Lovell. "No. But—" "Never mind 'butting'! Get out of that boat!" Mornington's eyes glittered. "You howl out at the last minute, when I'm startin' up the river, that I'm wanted (Continued overleaf.)

The Rookwood Boat Race!



(Continued from previous page.)

for practice with the eight," he said. "You've had all day to tell me, and you spring it on me at the last tick. I'm sorry I can't oblige."

"What?" shouted Lovell.

"You see, it's such a rippin' afternoon that we've arranged a picnic on the island," said Mornington coolly. "Oswald's gone already with the tuck. I suppose we can't leave Oswald hangin' up on the island all the afternoon, waitin' for us?"

"Oswald can go and eat coke!"

"Well, he's got somethin' nicer than that to eat, as it happens. But we really can't leave him hangin' about on the island. You should have mentioned this before, Lovell."

Lovell's face was crimson with wrath. Some of the fellows on the raft chuckled. Raby and Newcome grinned. But Jimmy Silver looked serious.

Matters were not going so well as of old in the Lower School at Rookwood since Lovell had been elected junior captain.

The captain's election itself had been a sort of comedy of errors. Only by a series of curious and unforeseen circumstances had Arthur Edward Lovell come out at the top of the poll. And Lovell's best friend—if he had had any friends left—could not have said that Arthur Edward was making a success of the job.

Lovell's own opinion was that he was one of those fellows who are born to command. He had that opinion entirely to himself.

Really it seemed difficult for any fellow—even Lovell—to cram so many mistakes into so short a time.

Even in so simple a matter as games practice he seemed fated to pile one blunder on another. Sometimes he forgot to post up notices at all. But if the Fourth were notified to turn up at a certain hour, they were as likely as not to find the ground already occupied by the Shell or the Third. Once Lovell had found himself entirely alone on Little Side, and returning, enraged, to the House to hunt up the slackers, he had found the whole school gathered in Hall for a Head's lecture. Lovell having omitted to take due cognizance of that function.

Jimmy Silver—unseen by Lovell, whose back was to him—made a sign to Mornington in the skiff.

The junior eights were a very important matter in the eyes of the ex-captain of the Lower School. Lovell, as usual, had been careless. It was not till this moment that Jimmy himself knew that the Classical eight were to practice together that afternoon. But the important point to Jimmy's mind was to beat the Modern boat when the Rookwood junior boat race came off, and all the other things had to yield to that.

But Mornington was in an obstinate mood. As a matter of fact, Lovell's manner was dictatorial and rather hard to bear, especially by a passionate-tempered fellow like Morny. It really seemed to be Lovell's system to attempt to make up for any shortcomings by assuming a more and more dogmatic and dictatorial manner. And although he was junior captain he was not in actual fact monarch of all he surveyed, as he seemed to fancy.

Mornington did not bring the boat back to the raft. He reached out with his oar to give another shove off. He saw Jimmy Silver's imploring sign without heeding it. "Morny!" called out Jimmy.

"Ta-ta, old son!" called back Mornington. "Chuck it, old man!" exclaimed Jimmy anxiously. "Oswald won't mind—at least, I—"

"Can't leave a chap in the lurch like that after tellin' him we'd join him on the island."

"But—"

Lovell stared round at Jimmy. "You needn't chip in, Silver!" he snapped. "You're not captain of the boats, by any chance, I suppose?"

"No. But—"

"Well, then, don't butt in! When I want assistance I'll ask for it!"

Jimmy Silver bit his lip hard.

"Now, Mornington, bring that boat in!" went on Lovell savagely.

"Sorry, can't be done."

"You cheeky ratter!" roared Lovell, his temper quite falling him. "Get out of that boat, or I'll jolly well jump in and pitch you out!"

"Lovell!" exclaimed Erroll.

"You shut up, Erroll."

"Oh!"

"Are you getting out, Mornington?"

"I think I've said I'm not," drawled Mornington. "You couldn't bully me, Lovell, if you were captain of the school—instead of junior captain, who got in because the other candidates were kept away from the election. Go an' eat coke!"

Lovell set his teeth.

"Then I'll jolly well handle you!" he exclaimed.

"Dear man, go ahead!"

Lovell made a spring at the skiff. Mornington watched him with a mocking light in his eyes.

As Lovell leaped, the dandy of the Fourth shoved with the oar and the skiff shot swiftly away into the river.

Lovell alighted where the skiff had been; but it was no longer there. The next instant the river had closed over the crimson, excited face of Arthur Edward Lovell.

The 2nd Chapter. Wet!

SPLASH!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter on the raft and the tow-path.

Even Jimmy Silver, anxious as he was, could not help grinning. The other fellows roared.

There was something rather entertaining in the sudden downfall of Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell's head came up in a moment. His cap was gone, his hair drenched, and water streamed down his face as he struck out for the raft. Mornington had sat down to his oar.

"Pull away, Erroll, old bean," he said, laughing.

The skiff glided away with both the juniors pulling. Arthur Edward Lovell grasped at the raft, and Jimmy Silver leaned down to give him a hand.

Lovell savagely rejected the proffered help and clambered on the raft, streaming with water. Grinning faces surrounded him as he stood there panting, with a pool of water forming at his feet.

"Is it wet, old man?" inquired Conroy.

"What a wheeze, you know, to dive in with one's clothes on!" remarked Gower. "I should prefer to strip first myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell's expression was one of concentrated rage. At the best of times Lovell's temper had been a little uncertain; and there was no doubt that it had deteriorated since his quarrel with his old chums, and since he had had the responsibilities of the junior captaincy on his shoulders. He had

made himself ridiculous once more, as had happened only too often since he had become invested with a little brief authority. Lovell was very sensitive on such occasions, though he seemed quite unable to avoid them.

He gave the grinning juniors a glare and tramped away up the bank. The most necessary thing for Lovell then was a rub down and a change of clothes. He squelched water from his shoes as he tramped away.

"What about the practice, Lovell?" called out Newcome.

No answer. Lovell did not turn his head.

"Dash it all, we've got to know whether the eight is rowing this afternoon or not!" exclaimed Conroy.

Jimmy Silver ran after Lovell.

"Lovell, just a word—"

"Shut up!"

"About the boat practice—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"But we have to know—"

"Mind your own business!" roared Lovell.

"I'm fed-up with you and your meddling, Jimmy Silver! Can't you get it into your head that you're not junior captain now? For two pins I'd turn you out of the crew!"

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Jimmy, his own temper giving way a little. "We want to know if—and when—we're to row—"

"Find out!"

With that answer, which could not be called a reasonable one in the circumstances, Lovell turned his back on Jimmy Silver and tramped back to the school.

"Some captain!" grinned Conroy. "Well, is there to be a trial spin or not—and, if so, when? Anybody know?"

Nobody knew.

"We're to hang about till it pleases our lord and master to give us the tip," said Newcome. "I must say I'm getting fed-up."

"I've got fed-up," said Raby. "If Lovell likes to fix the time I'll turn up to the second; but I'm not wasting the first fine afternoon of the term in hanging about waiting for him."

"No jolly fear!" said Newcome.

"Let's get the boat out," said Raby.

"Lovell's asked us to his spread on the island, and we may as well go."

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"But if there's a practice—"

"We're entitled to know the time of it. Are we going to dawdle about here all the afternoon?" bawled Raby.

"I jolly well know I'm not!" hooted Newcome. "I'm jolly well going up to the island."

"Hold on," said Jimmy uneasily. "Give Lovell ten minutes. If he's not back by then, we'll cut."

"Rot!"

"Oh, hold on for ten minutes," said Jimmy. "Keep smiling, you know."

Raby and Newcome grunted impatiently, but they agreed to hold on. Really it was an irritating state of affairs. The afternoon was bright and fine—a rare spring afternoon—and many fellows had been tempted to get a boat out on the river. All the fellows who were down to row in the junior Classical eight on Saturday were ready and willing to put in all the practice that their skipper demanded. But they

were not willing to cancel arrangements they had made simply because Lovell had forgotten to notify them that they were wanted—and they were not willing to be hectorred. And Lovell's "latest" really had put the lid on. Apparently he expected his men to hang about the raft kicking their heels till it pleased him to turn up, and in his present temper it was quite possible that he would leave them there an hour or so, or that he might even cut out the afternoon's practice altogether.

Raby kept an angry eye on the clock in the Rookwood tower, visible over the trees. "Time's up!" he said suddenly.

Jimmy Silver cast a final glance along the path from the boathouse. There was no sign of Lovell.

"Let's go!" said Newcome.

Jimmy nodded.

"Let's!" he assented.

And the chums of the end study were soon pulling up the river in the wake of Mornington and Erroll, heading for the island and the picnic. Conroy and Pons, two other members of the Classical eight, exchanged a glance and sauntered away along the tow-path. They also were fed-up.

Meanwhile, Arthur Edward Lovell, in a towering rage, tramped into the House in a hurry to change. Possibly he thought that the fellows on the raft would wait till it pleased him to reappear; probably he gave them no thought at all. Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, sighted him as he came in and called to him.

"What is the matter, Lovell? What has happened?"

"I—I pitched into the water, sir," muttered Lovell.

"You should be more careful, Lovell! Go and change at once, before you catch cold!"

Lovell's teeth were set as he tramped up the staircase. On the landing he came on Tubby Muffin, who blinked at him and burst into a chuckle.

"He, he, he!"

Lovell glared at him.

"He, he! Been taking a bath with your clothes on?" chortled Muffin.

Thump!

"Whoop!" roared Muffin.

He sat down with great suddenness.

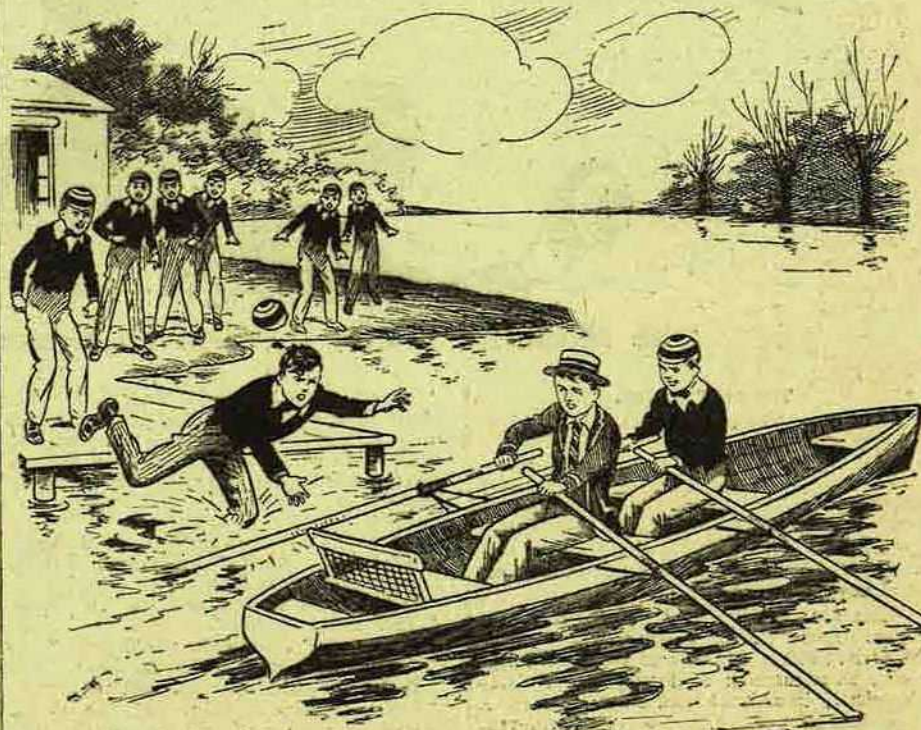
Arthur Edward Lovell was feeling fed-up; fed right up to the chin, as he would have expressed it. Derision from Tubby Muffin was the last straw.

He strode on his way, leaving Reginald Muffin roaring.

In the Classical Fourth dormitory, Lovell rubbed himself dry and changed, with gleaming eyes and a black brow. He sneezed several times, which added to his wrath. Catching a cold, with Boat Race day so near at hand, would really have been the limit.

After changing, he went down, with the intention of returning to the boathouse and fixing up the rowing practice. But he did not hurry himself. He had been treated rottenly, and disrespectfully—in his opinion, at least—and all the fellows had laughed at his mishap. Let the beggars wait!

Having sulkily decided to let the beggars wait, Arthur Edward Lovell loafed about the quadrangle for a little while, with his



Lovell alighted where the skiff had been—but it was no longer there!

hands in his pockets, smiling grimly. They had all cackled, blow them; but they were going to learn that Lovell was skipper, after all. After kicking their heels for half an hour or so, they might regret that they had not been a little more tactful with one who was, after all, in authority.

Indeed, Lovell would have made the wait longer still, but that he was himself keen on the Rookwood boat race, and wanted to get to work. So when about half an hour had elapsed, the junior captain of Rookwood sauntered down to the boathouse, still in a leisurely manner, however.

He stared when he arrived there. Peele and Gower were sitting on a bench there; but they were not rowing men, and of no use to Lovell. Nobody else was at hand.

"Where are the fellows?" Lovell called out.

Peele grinned. "Oh, they're all gone!" he said.

"Gone!" repeated Lovell.

"Yes," Peele winked at Gower. "We'll help you carry the boat out, if you want to practise all on your own."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Gower.

The idea of Lovell taking out an eight-oar to practise all on his own, struck Cuthbert Gower as comic.

Lovell breathed hard and deep. He had made the beggars wait; but apparently the beggars had not waited very long! Lovell had over-stepped the limit once more. Evidently, boat practice for that afternoon was off—very much off.

Peele and Gower seemed very entertained. But, in Lovell's present mood, it was not safe for fellows like Peele and Gower to chip in. Lovell was breathing wrath.

As the two slackers of the Fourth chortled, Lovell fairly swooped down on them and grasped them by their collars. Peele and Gower were jerked off the bench.

Crack!

Two frantic yells were blended into one, as two heads came together with a loud concussion.

Then Arthur Edward Lovell strode away. Peele and Gower rubbed their heads furiously, and glared after him.

"You cheeky rotter!" shrieked Peele.

"You bullyin' cad!" yelled Gower.

Lovell did not heed. He strode savagely away, leaving Peele and Gower to rub their damaged heads.

The 3rd Chapter.
Some Captain!

TOMMY DODD, of the Modern Fourth, wore a sunny smile as he stepped from a boat upon the Rookwood raft.

Eight Modern juniors followed him from the boat, and they all looked very cheery.

While the Classical rowing men were at sixes and sevens, that sunny spring afternoon, the Modern rowers had been taking a trial spin on the oar; and Tommy Dodd, the junior captain of Manders' House, was very satisfied with the results.

His crew were in good form; they pulled together well, and they had every hope of pulling off Saturday's race.

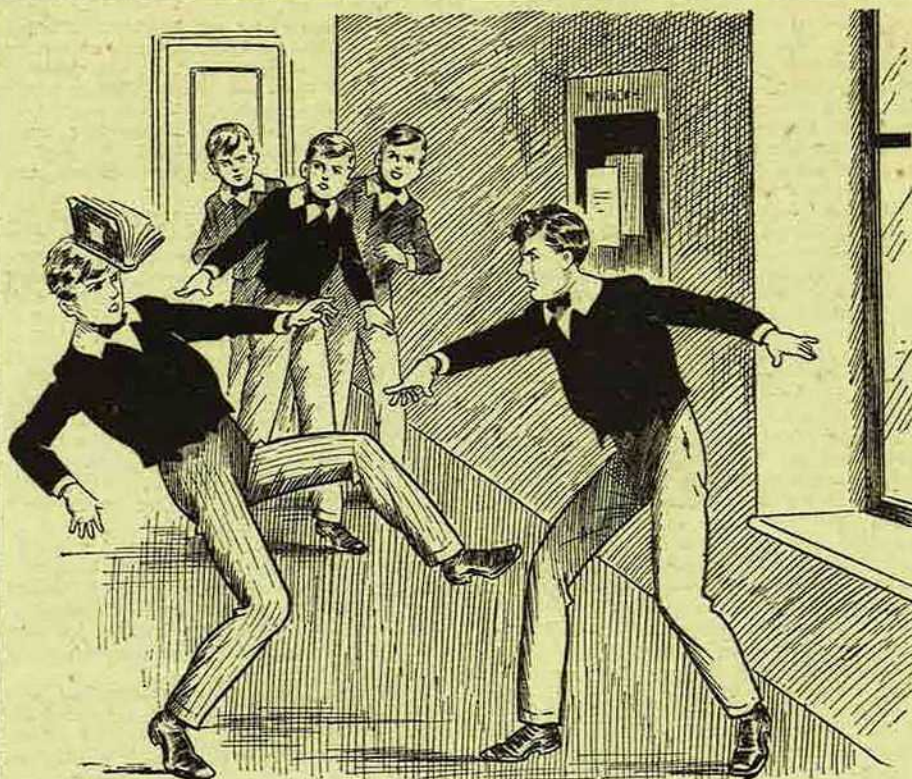
In all the sporting contests between the two Houses at Rookwood, Classical and Modern, Tommy Dodd & Co. were generally a little "up against" it. The Classical side being much more numerous, there were more men on that side to choose from, which gave the Classical skipper a big advantage; and that advantage was accentuated by the fact that a larger proportion of Classical men, than of Modern, were keen on games. The Modern side had, therefore, a hard row to hoe, in keeping their end up, at rowing, football, cricket, or anything else. It was greatly to Tommy Dodd's credit that in the junior contests he kept his end up so well.

Tommy Dodd had had lurking doubts about the junior eights. There were twice as many rowing men on the Classical side as on the Modern. Any fellow who went off colour could be replaced easily enough. But, in the present circumstances, the Modern skipper had great hopes; the recent change in the affairs of the Lower School inspired him with unusual confidence.

As he remarked to his chums, Cook and Doyle, the Classics had a wider selection of men, but the Moderns had a good skipper.

In which his chums, Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook, loyally concurred.

The three Tommies, in fact, drew great hope from Lovell's captaincy of the Classical side. Lovell was a good oar himself; as a member of Jimmy Silver's crew he would have done credit to his side. As captain, the matter was quite different. He had become thoroughly unpopular, for one thing; and his dictatorial manner put up the backs of his crew, for another. And



There was a bump as the volume smote Jimmy Silver on the forehead.

—though it was quite unknown to Lovell—his eye for a rowing man's form was not nearly so sure as Jimmy Silver's. It was quite probable that he would not select the best possible crew for the Classical boat; and it was quite probable that, having selected his men, he would quarrel with them. It was more than likely that there would be many changes in the Classical crew; quite probable that changes would be made at the last moment.

From these circumstances the Modern fellows derived hope of a crushing victory. Lovell was, as Tommy Dodd told his followers, their trump card in the boat race. If the Moderns were a little handicapped by paucity of numbers, the Classics were handicapped by their skipper—a point of view which would certainly have infuriated Arthur Edward Lovell had he been aware of it.

"Hallo, there they are!" said Tommy Dodd, glancing round after stepping out of the Modern boat. "But is that the crew?"

"What a crew!" grinned Cook.

"That can't be the crew," said Tommy Doyle, puzzled. "Even Lovell wouldn't leave out all his best men."

"Wouldn't he?" grinned Towle, coxswain of the Modern boat. "Can a fellow ever guess what Lovell will do? Believe me, some captain!"

The Moderns grinned.

They stood there, looking on, quite interested. Lovell & Co. were taking out the Classical boat, evidently for practice. If this crew was the boat race crew, it was enough to make the Modern stare. Jimmy Silver was not there, nor Mornington, nor Erroll, nor Raby, nor Newcome. Conroy was absent, and Pons. Rawson was there—the only man who ought to have been there, beside Lovell. There were Townsend and Topham, the nuts of the Fourth, and Smythe and Howard, the nuts of the Shell. These fellows could row, certainly—in fact, they rather fancied their rowing. But in a contest with Tommy Dodd's crew, they were absolutely certain to be left standing.

Lovell glanced at the grinning Moderns, and frowned.

"Is that your crew, Lovell?" called out Tommy Dodd, keenly interested.

"Find out!" said Lovell.

"Eh?"

"Find out!"

"My only hat! Lovell's manners have improved since he became skipper," remarked Tommy Cook. "Jevver see such polish?"

Lovell was about to make an angry exclamation when he was cut short by a sudden sneeze.

"Achooooo!"

"By gad, old bean, you're catchin' a cold, you know," remarked Smythe of the Shell.

"Don't be a silly ass, Smythe."

"What?"

"Shut up and get the boat out!" Adolphus Smythe looked at Lovell.

Smythe of the Shell had been immensely backed at being asked to row in the Classical boat. It was an opportunity, Smythe considered, for him to show all Rookwood what he really could do in that line. It made him consider that Lovell's

election as junior captain had not been such a ghastly mistake, after all.

But Smythe of the Shell was a lofty fellow, very important in his own eyes, and there was a limit to the amount of cheek that he was willing to take from a Fourth-Former, junior captain or not.

"That isn't the way to talk, Lovell!" he snapped.

"No fear!" said Howard emphatically. "Chuck it, Lovell!"

"Hold your silly tongues and get into the boat!" shouted Lovell angrily.

"Look here—"

"I don't want any jaw, Smythe! I've told you to shut up!"

The Moderns exchanged grinning glances. The Modern crew pulled together as one man; but if Tommy Dodd had talked to his crew in that style, undoubtedly there would have been trouble in the Modern boat.

Adolphus Smythe knitted his brows.

"Look here, Lovell!" he began hotly.

"Get into the boat!" Lovell choked back a rising sneeze. "You silly ass, get in before I chuck you in!"

The actual fact was that Lovell felt a cold coming on, and a cold, at such a time, was too overwhelming a disaster to be contemplated with equanimity. He refused to contemplate it; he disregarded it, and went on his way as if it was not! It was all very well to ignore it, but there it was; and the threat of it gave the finishing touch to Lovell's temper.

"Chuck me in!" repeated Adolphus Smythe, crimson with wrath. "Why, you cheeky cad, do you think that you can talk to a chap like that? I suppose you've rowed with your old crew, or you wouldn't have asked me at all. Go and eat coke!"

And with that the indignant Adolphus turned and walked away.

Lovell stared after him.

"Smythe!" he bawled.

"Rats!"

"Come here, you slacking cad."

"I'll row for you if you apologise, not otherwise!" retorted Smythe of the Shell.

"Get into the boat before I handle you!" roared Lovell.

"Poooff!"

Adolphus Smythe walked back to the House, with rather hurried steps. Lovell made a stride after him, and stopped. Rowing practice had been "chucked" once that afternoon, and Lovell had made drastic changes in his crew in consequence. Even Lovell realised that it had better not be chuckled again while he handled a recalcitrant member of his remodelled crew.

"Well, are we going out?" asked Rawson.

"Yes!" snapped Lovell.

He was about to add "you idiot," but checked himself in time. He did not want Rawson to walk off after Smythe.

"Well, we shall want a man."

"That fool, Smythe's no good, anyhow. Here, Jones!" bawled Lovell, catching sight of Jones minor lounging round the boathouse.

"Hallo, old bean!" said Jones minor.

"I shall want you—hurry up!"

"Oh, good!" said Jones minor in astonishment.

Tommy Dodd & Co. put up their boat and walked away to Manders' House with broad smiles on their faces.

"Some skipper!" murmured Cook.

"If that's the way Lovell picks out his men for a boat race—" said Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's hope the Classics will keep him on as captain!" said Tommy Doyle. "Sure, it won't be long before they have to swine up that we're cock-house at Rookwood!"

And the Moderns chuckled.

That evening there was only one opinion in Manders' House about the result of Saturday's race. Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, who had sporting proclivities, offered three to one on the Moderns; and in all Rookwood there were no takers.

The 4th Chapter.
Blow for Blow!

"NOT a word!"

"Not one?" asked Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

"No. Hook it!"

It was a day or two later, and Arthur Edward Lovell was seated in the window-seat of the Fourth Form passage, with a book on his knees and a wrinkle in his brow. Jimmy Silver came up to him with his politest manner on; but it booted not, as a poet would say.

Lovell was not to be placated; and he was in one of his most autocratic moods.

He was not really feeling well. His plunge in the river, between Morny's boat and the raft, had, in fact, given him a cold. But Lovell was struggling against that cold with grim determination. He was making superhuman efforts not to be knocked out of Saturday's race. And it almost seemed that by sheer will-power he would succeed.

He was, at least, keeping the cold at bay, though perhaps it was only receding to spring on him with greater force! He was drenched with eucalyptus and other useful disinfectants to such an extent that, though it really made it safer for other fellows to go near him, nobody liked being near him.

Lovell was leaving no stone unturned to keep fit. And yet everyone but Lovell could see that he was by no means fit, and that he would have acted more wisely in thinking about bed than about a boat race.

More than once Mr. Dalton's glance had rested on him keenly; but Lovell kept up appearances wonderfully well in the Form-room, and succeeded in hiding a good deal from the Form-master's eyes.

Feeling "rotten" displeased with his crew for Saturday, bitterly incensed by the comments of the Classics, and the jests of the Moderns, Lovell was getting into a state of temper that was almost dangerous at close quarters. It was practically inevitable that he should slack down in class, as matters stood, and had Mr. Dalton known how exceedingly "rotten" poor Lovell was feeling, undoubtedly he would have gone very easily with him. But Mr. Dalton did not know, so well did Arthur Edward keep up appearances.

Now Lovell was mugging up Latin, with dizzy eyes and an aching head. Life was hard on Lovell in these days—as it generally is on fellows who do not know their own limitations, and take on a job a size too large for them.

He was feeling rotten, and savage, and quarrelsome. He would gladly have hurled his Latin book at Mr. Dalton's head, had that been practicable. But he had to "mug" up this rotten stuff, or land into more trouble on the morrow. Mr. Dalton was aware that boat race day came along that week, and that the Rookwood boat race coincided with it; but in neither event did he see any reason for slacking down in class work.

Neither did Lovell—had he only been feeling his usual healthy self. But he was very far from being his usual self. He lifted his glance from the worrying Latin and fixed it upon Jimmy Silver with grim animosity, as Jimmy came up. He did not want any argument with the ex-captain of the Lower School, and he did not mean to have any. He was feeling more like punching Jimmy Silver's head than arguing with him. He would, willingly, indeed, have punched anybody's head that day, from Dr. Chisholm's down to the boot-boy's.

"Hook it!" he repeated, as Jimmy stood irresolute. "I don't want any chin-wag, and I don't want any advice. Just clear, before you get hold of trouble!"

"About the boat—"

"That's settled."

"You can't call it settled, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver patiently. "You really must be a bit reasonable, old chap."

"I'm 'old chap' to my friends!" snapped Lovell.

(Continued overleaf.)



(Continued from previous page.)

Jimmy was tempted for a moment to ask him who were his friends. He seemed to have made only enemies since he had thrown over his former comrades. But Jimmy checked that question. He had not come there to quarrel with his captain.

"Every fellow who cut practice against orders is scratched from the crew," said Lovell. "That includes you and Raby and Newcome and Mornington. It's definitely settled."

"You'll make the fellows think that you want the Moderns to beat this House."

"The fellows can think what they like." "Do have a little sense, Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "You yourself, for instance, are in no state to row. If Dicky Dalton knew how seedy you were he would order you into sunny."

"That's Mornington's fault," said Lovell, between his teeth.

"His fault or yours, there's the fact. Morny's one of our best oars—"

"That's enough."

"You know as well as I do that you'll crock up in a dozen yards if you row on Saturday, Lovell."

"I've decided not to row," said Lovell. "I'm going to cox the boat. Not that I'm under the necessity of telling you anything about it. Mind your own business!"

"It's the business of every fellow in the House, Lovell. We don't want a frost on Boat Race day."

"You should have thought of that sooner."

Jimmy's eyes gleamed.

"Then you don't care?" he exclaimed.

"Find out!"

"I can tell you that if you keep on like this—"

"You needn't tell me anything. Shut up!" exclaimed Lovell savagely. "I tell you I'm fed-up with you and your back-chat. Another word and I'll jolly well sby this book at your head!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

Whiz!

Lovell kept his word.

There was a bump as the volume smote Jimmy Silver on the forehead and completely bowled him over. He sat down in the passage.

Uncle James of Rookwood was noted for his patience and good temper. But the patience of Job himself might well have given out in these circumstances. Certainly Jimmy's gave out. For a moment he sat blinking in amazement and rage, and then he leapt up and rushed at Lovell.

Lovell met him half-way. In a moment they were fighting furiously.

There was a yell along the Fourth Form passage.

"A fight! A fight!"

"Roll up!"

"By gad! Silver and Lovell!" shouted Mornington. "It's come at last!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

There was a rush of the Classical Fourth to see the fight. Most of the fellows would have been distinctly pleased to see the junior captain soundly licked. But the fight ended as suddenly as it had begun.

The two juniors were grasping one another and punching fiercely, when Jimmy felt his adversary crumpling up, as it were, in his grasp. Lovell's first blows fell fiercely enough, then they weakened.

Jimmy's anger passed like magic.

He realised—as, indeed, he would have known had not Lovell's violence blinded him with anger—that the hapless Arthur Edward was in no condition for a fight. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Jimmy Silver tore himself loose and sprang back. Lovell made a movement after him and reeled a little, and then almost collapsed into the window-seat, gasping for breath.

"Go it!" roared Gunner of the Fourth.

"Pile in, Jimmy!" squeaked Tubby Muffin. "Punch him, old chap! He thumped me the other day. Now you thump him. I say, old fellow, I'll hold your jacket."

Lovell, with a dizzy brain, staggered to his feet.

B. F.—No. 1,294.—March 27th, 1926.

"Come on, you rotter!" he panted.

Jimmy Silver looked at him with a quiet, compassionate gaze. Nothing could have induced him to touch Lovell then. Indeed, his heart was full of pity for the fellow who had been his friend and who was so hopelessly down on his luck through his own obstinate folly.

"You hear him?" grinned Mornington.

"Go in and win, Silver."

Jimmy Silver shook his head and walked back to the end study.

"Call that a fight?" sneered Gunner.

"Funk!" roared Lovell, as Jimmy disappeared into the end study.

Jimmy heard him, but he did not heed. Lovell could have called him anything he pleased just then.

The Classical juniors dispersed, rather disappointed. Arthur Edward Lovell, breathing hard, tried to fasten his attention upon his Latin task again. But the print danced before his eyes.

He left the window-seat at last and went down the staircase and out into the quadrangle, hoping that the fresh air would pull him together a little. Indubitably he did feel very queer. Bulkeley of the Sixth glanced at him in the quad.

"Lovell, you're not looking well, kid."

"I'm well enough, Bulkeley."

"Well, you look ill!"

Lovell forced a laugh.

"Fit as a fiddle!" he said lightly.

And he walked on, Bulkeley glancing after him very doubtfully. Under the old

smile or seven; four or five was Towle's opinion. The number varied widely in different estimations. But all the Moderns were agreed upon one point—that it would be a matter of length. Not a case of winning by a nose or a neck this time, Tommy Dodd declared jubilantly. And as for losing, no man in Manders' House even thought of it.

That was a side of the question for the Classics to think about. And they were thinking about it—even Lovell! But Lovell found it difficult to think about anything clearly that morning. The neglected cold had fairly fastened upon him. He felt it all over him, as it were, from his head to his feet, and added to it was the stress of mind, the excitement, the anger, the worry, the sense of failure, the sense of savage resentment. Altogether Lovell was in about as unhappy and "rotten" a state as a fellow could well be in on boat race morning.

But his iron determination still held good. It was a case of "no surrender" with Arthur Edward Lovell.

He felt so excessively "queer" when he got out of bed in the morning that he almost fell, and several glances in the Classical Fourth dormitory turned on him curiously. But Lovell affected to have caught his foot in the bedclothes, and pulled himself sternly together.

At breakfast he ate hardly anything, and he felt Mr. Dalton's keen eyes on him from the head of the table. Under the Form-master's scrutiny Lovell affected a careless



"My poor boy! You are not well, Lovell. Lean on my arm."

beeches Lovell paced to and fro, the keen wind reviving him a little. Was he going to be ill, he wondered savagely—ill, with the Rookwood boat race coming off on Saturday? Why, if he was knocked out Jimmy Silver, as vice-captain, would take his place! Lovell gritted his teeth at the thought. He was not going to be ill. He would not, could not, should not be ill!

The 5th Chapter.
Poor Old Lovell!

BOAT Race day!

The historic contest between Oxford and Cambridge was no doubt a matter of great moment outside the Lower School of Rookwood.

But so far as the Rookwood juniors were concerned the boat race between Classics and Moderns was the "goods," so to speak.

From Putney to Mortlake cheering crowds might line the banks of the Thames and shout for Light Blue or Dark. But at Rookwood Classics and Moderns were thinking of their own more important affair.

Tommy Dodd & Co. wore cheery smiles that morning. Even Mr. Manders' snappy temper and acid tongue could not cast a cloud over their cheery faces. That afternoon they were going to beat the Classical boat by several lengths, and that was what they cared about. Oxford might beat Cambridge, or Cambridge might beat Oxford. What did that matter? What mattered was that Moderns were going to beat Classics at Rookwood. By how many lengths they were going to win Tommy Dodd & Co. had not decided. Tommy cautiously put it down at one length at least; Cook thought two or three; Doyle, with Celtic exuberance, placed it at

and smiling air, though his heart was sinking. After breakfast he walked out into the quad with quite a jaunty manner, whistling.

Valentine Mornington glanced after him. "Seems fit enough, after all," he remarked to Erroll. "I was in hopes that he was goin' to crock up in time to save the race."

Erroll shook his head.

"I think he's very far from fit," he answered. "I don't quite understand Lovell these days. He must know very well that he's not fit to sit in the boat."

"Sheer pig-headedness!" said Morny, shrugging his shoulders. "He's scratched nearly all the crowd and forgotten to scratch the worst of the lot—his giddy self!"

There were glum faces among the Classical juniors that morning. Never had they looked forward to a contest with their old rivals with so little hope. When the Classical Fourth went into their Form-room Lovell came in from the quad with slow and heavy steps, but as he came among the crowd of fellows in the Form-room passage he bucked up and strolled into the Form-room with an easy air.

He sat down in his place, smiling—the smile, as it were, frozen on his lips. He felt—he knew—that he was going to be ill, but he would not give in. His head was a little dizzy, and once or twice the maps on the Form-room walls seemed to him to be turning round. He took a grip upon himself, as it were, and sat tight. Still the mechanical smile was on his face.

"Lovell!"

He heard Mr. Dalton's voice as through a mist. He had not noticed that the Fourth Form-master had entered the room.

"Lovell!"

"Yes, sir."

"What is the matter with you, Lovell?" Lovell made an effort.

"Nothing, sir."

"You are looking quite ill, my boy."

Lovell felt a dizzy spasm of rage. Was even his Form-master joining up against him—making out that he was ill, making out that he wasn't fit for the Rookwood race?

"I—I'm quite all right, sir. In—in fact, I—I feel splendid this morning, sir—splendid!" he stammered.

"You do not look it, Lovell," said Mr. Dalton quietly, eyeing him. "Come out before the class."

Lovell moved out from his place. He knew now that he was ill—almost in a fever. He knew that his legs were unsteady under him. It was only by an heroic effort that he reached the spot where Mr. Dalton stood, and faced him. All the eyes in the Classical Fourth were on Lovell—some curiously, some mockingly, some compassionately. He stood unsteadily under Mr. Dalton's searching eyes.

"Come, come, Lovell," said the Form-master kindly. "You are very far from well, my boy. What is the matter?"

"I—I've got a slight cold, I think, sir, stammered Lovell. "But—but it's nothing. I—I'm all right. I—"

Lovell broke off dazedly. Mr. Dalton was swimming before his eyes, and the hapless junior felt that he was swimming, too. It was the strong grasp of Richard Dalton on his shoulder that saved him from falling.

"My poor boy!" said the master of the Fourth softly. "You are not well, Lovell. Lean on my arm—so. Silver, I leave you in charge of the Form-room for a few minutes."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

Mr. Dalton left the Form-room with Lovell leaning heavily on his arm, assisted by Mr. Dalton's strong grasp. A buzz broke out among the Classical Fourth when they had disappeared.

"Crocked, by gad!" said Mornington. "Poor old Lovell!" murmured Jimmy Silver; and Raby and Newcome nodded in silence.

Much as their former comrade had exasperated them, his old friends compassionated him at that moment. It was only too clear that it was not a "slight" cold that was the matter with Lovell. He was going to be ill, and he was being taken to the sanatorium, where he ought to have been days ago.

"Silver, old man," exclaimed Mornington eagerly, "Lovell's crocked!"

"Looks like it," muttered Jimmy.

"And the boat race—"

"Oh, blow the race!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. He was thinking of his estranged chum, not of the Rookwood race.

"All the same, you take control if Lovell's crocked, and—"

"And we'll beat the Moderns!" said Conroy.

"I fancy the House ought to pass me a vote of thanks!" grinned Mornington. "I helped Lovell to jump into the river the other day, and that's saved the situation!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver gruffly.

Mr. Dalton came back alone into the Form-room.

"Is Lovell coming back, sir?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"No, Silver. Lovell is being taken to the sanatorium, where the doctor will see him. He will have to remain there for a few days at least, I think. We will now proceed."

And Mr. Dalton proceeded, rather surprised to see his class looking so merry and bright all of a sudden. The Classical Fourth were thinking of the afternoon's boat race, now left in the capable hands of Jimmy Silver, and of the surprise that was in store for Tommy Dodd & Co. Even Jimmy Silver, sorry as he felt for Lovell, could not help feeling "bucked" when he thought of that.

The 6th Chapter.

The Winning Eight!

WHERE'S Lovell?"

Tommy Dodd asked that question quite anxiously when the rival oarsmen of Rookwood met on the raft that afternoon.

From Tommy Dodd's manner anyone might really have supposed that Lovell was his very best chum, whom he loved like a brother, so anxious was he at his absence.

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"In sunny," he answered.

The Modern skipper jumped.

"In—in sunny! Then—then he won't be in the race!"

"Not quite!" chuckled Mornington.

And there was a general chortle among

the Classical oarsmen. The expression on Tommy Dodd's face was quite entertaining.

"Then, you—you, Silver," stuttered the Modern junior—"you've taken over control—what?"

"Little me!" assented Jimmy, with a smile.

"You've made some changes in the crew?"

"Just a few."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tommy Dodd. "Well, I—I'm sorry Lovell's laid up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classics. They had no doubt whatever that Tommy Dodd was sorry that Lovell was laid up—from other reasons beside benevolence.

"Never mind, we'll beat you all the same!" said Tommy Dodd.

"All the same?" chuckled Mornington. "I'd like Lovell to hear that! It would buck him no end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd rejoined his men, with a serious face.

"You fellows will have to pull up your socks," he said. "We've got our work out to win. We're going to win, of course, but—"

"Of course!" murmured Tommy Cook, but there was no longer absolute confidence in his tone.

"After all, their practice has been mucked up all along the line owing to that ass Lovell," said Towle hopefully. "They've chopped and changed and changed and chopped, while we've been putting in steady practice, pulling together."

"Yes, rather! We're going to win," said Tommy Dodd. "Only, we'd better get it out of our heads that it's going to be the walk-over we fancied. It isn't. You've got to pull up your socks, my sons, and go all out."

The Moderns realised that clearly enough. Their prospects had, in fact, changed very considerably. But they were in great form and ready for the pull of their lives.

Mr. Dalton came down to the raft to start the race. Rookwood juniors thronged on the towpath, Classics and Moderns, ready to encourage their champions with all the

power of their lungs. There was a cheer that rang along the shining river as the rival crews carried out their boats. It was a great occasion. Bulkeley, the captain of the school, had come along with several more of the Sixth; Hansom & Co. of the Fifth honoured the scene with their presence. Almost all the juniors of both Houses were there. Tubby Muffin had turned up, with a packet of toffee in his fat paw; even Peale and Gower and Leggett had given up cigarettes in the study for once; and Cuffy of the Modern Fourth had for once forgotten the delights of noughts and crosses.

"Go it, Classics!"

"Play up, Manders' House!"

Jimmy Silver's face was cheery and bright. So were the faces of his men—Raby, Newcome, Mornington, Conroy, Erroll, and the rest. As the rival crews bent to their oars, at the crack of the pistol, a thunderous cheer rolled along the river, and it rolled as far as the junior buildings and reached the ears of a junior who lay in bed in the sanatorium, and Arthur Edward Lovell started and listened. But in all the thronging crowd by the sunny river there was no one who remembered Lovell then. Even Jimmy Silver at that moment did not remember him.

"Hurrah!"

"Pull, you beggars, pull!" roared Gunner of the Fourth. "Oh, my hat! Do you call that pulling?"

"Shut up, fathead!"

"Put it on, you fellows!"

"Manders' House! Manders! Manders! Manders!" roared the Moderns, racing along the tow-path and yelling themselves hoarse as Tommy Dodd & Co. drew ahead.

"Manders! Manders! Manders!"

"Pull, you dummies, pull!" roared Gunner.

"Play up, Classics!"

"Manders! Manders! Manders!" yelled the Moderns.

It was a hard race and an exciting one. In both Houses at Rookwood it was told later that day, many times over, how the

Modern boat got the lead and kept it and gained nearly a length, how the Classics crept on them foot by foot till they recovered that length and drew half a length ahead, how the Moderns won back that half-length inch by inch, how the rivals raced neck and neck till the Classics put on a foot or more, and then the Moderns shot ahead and the yelling Moderns crept on the tow-path yelled themselves almost into delirium, and then how, amid frantic Classical shouts and cheers, Jimmy Silver & Co. gained and gained, every man rowing as if for his life, till the Classical boat was half a length ahead, three-quarters of a length, a whole length, and then a length and a half at the finish.

And then the Classical crowd roared and yelled and raved, and tossed up their caps, careless where they came down—or, indeed,

whether they came down at all—and fairly hugged one another in their glee.

And later on, when the winning crew were carried back shoulder-high to their House, amid an uproarious crowd, the old quadrangle of Rookwood rang with cheers which the grey old walls echoed back like thunder.

And when that evening news came through the lesser one, so to speak—another Boat Race—the lesser one, so to speak—had won a man on the Classical side cared to hear whether Oxford or Cambridge had won. What did it matter, anyhow? The Classics had won that Rookwood boat race, and that was all that mattered.

THE END.

(You'll enjoy "Friends Again"—Owen Conquest's tip-top story of the chums of Rookwood School for Monday next. Don't miss it! Order your copy of the BOYS' FRIEND in advance and thus make certain of securing it!)

RESULT OF "FOOTBALL PERSONALITIES" COMPETITION No. 3.

In this competition no competitor sent in a correct solution. THE TWO "CYMREX" WATCHES have therefore been awarded to the following competitors, whose efforts each contained one error:

E. Bridger, 5, Salisbury Gardens, Wellsted Street, Hull.

F. Bridges, 8, Mornington Street, Leicester.

Owing to the number of competitors qualifying for the next grade of prizes a slight alteration has been necessary. The value of the six footballs offered has been compounded and divided among the following sixteen competitors, whose solutions each contained two errors:

Harry Baiden, The Lodge, Priors Court, Chieveley, Newbury.

E. J. Booker, 81, Crawley Road, Horsham, Sussex.

A. J. Brann, 8, Oldfield Road, Willesden, London, N.W. 10.

Thomas C. Bussey, 51, Kirby Road, Darnall, Sheffield.

James Channer, 326, East Street, Old Kent Road, London, S.E. 17.

Leslie Doorne, 54, Providence Street, South Ashford, Kent.

H. W. Doughty, c/o B. Perks, Esq., Green Lane, Sheffield, near Walsall.

John Hall, 16, Baldwin Street, Vauxhall Road, Wigan.

H. Holland, 53, St. Albans Avenue, East Ham, London, E. 6.

C. J. Newton, 22, Green Street, Gillingham, Kent.

George Orpin, 107, Dongola Road, London, E. 15.

John Patton, 12, Park View, Wideopen, Seaton Burn, Newcastle.

Wilfrid H. Potter, 22, Tredegar Street, Rhiwderin, Mon.

Harold Smith, 2, Hospital Block, Tower of London, London, E.C.

J. Sutherland, 66, Sussex Street, Glasgow.

Daniel Williams, 1, Panwell Road, Bitterne, Southampton.

The correct solution to the paragraph about Jimmy Seed was as follows:

Jimmy Seed, who plays at inside-right for the Spurs, can rightly be described as one of the greatest footballers to be found filling that position in London football. At one time he was understudy to the noted Charlie Buchan, when they were both with the Sunderland Football Club. He is what is termed a roving type of player, and one of the Spurs' finest goal-scorers.

A Hard-Shooting Forward.

Leeds United, like many other clubs in the First Division, have had a big struggle this season to keep themselves clear of the lowly places, but the club is blessed with some local supporters, and during the present season I have had more letters from my boy readers in Leeds than any other centre. This shows the right spirit, and I hope, for the sake of those readers, that it will not be Second Division fare which will be provided at the Elland Road ground next season. One of their men—right half-back Edwards—has been recognised by the members of English Selection Committee, and another player whom I regard as of high quality is Wilfred Chadwick, a fine marksman, who was secured from Everton some time ago. He comes from Bury, where he first started getting goals with the Y.M.C.A. team, and since he got into the first class I have seen him score goals with the sort of shot which must make the hair of opposing goalkeepers stand on end.

"Goalie"

(There will be another ripping football article by "Goalie" in our next issue. Be sure you read it, boys!)

Football News & Gossip "by Goalie"

("Goalie" will be pleased to answer any queries addressed to him c/o the BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped addressed envelope for a reply should accompany all communications.)

The Semi-Finals.

Once more all is in readiness to report progress in the Cup competition. On Saturday the four clubs which have fought their way through to the Semi-Finals will be called upon to take this step on the road to Wembley. For the sake of comparison I give the four clubs which got to the Semi-Final stage last season, and, as showing that consistency is not a strong feature of the Cup competition, it will be noticed that not one of the four has any direct interest in the trophy this time round. Indeed, not one of the four semi-finalists of last season got through the Fourth Round during the present campaign. Here are the four penultimate round clubs of last season:

Sheffield United Southampton. Cardiff City Blackburn Rovers.

Naturally, hopes will be running high among the players, officials, and supporters of the four clubs left in this season that they will eventually emerge victorious, with the silver bauble in their possession for a year. In the Semi-Finals the choice of ground no longer operates, and thus none of the competing teams can claim a real advantage. It will usually be found, too, that these Semi-Finals have a habit of produc-

ing extremely close fights, and I have a recollection of one season before the War when two Semi-Finals were played without a single goal being scored in either of them. When the replays took place a single goal was sufficient to win both the games.

What the Winners Get.

In view of the fact that goals are now a little bit easier to get—but not



F. TITMUSS (Plymouth Argyle).

too easy, according to some of the forwards with whom I have come in contact—there is scarcely likely to be a repetition of the before-mentioned state of affairs next Saturday. All the same, the struggle will be grim fighting for ninety minutes, with the winners fully deserving of the bonus which will come their way. As a reward of the BOYS' FRIEND wishes to know what the bonus amounts to for a win in the Semi-Final. I may say that each of the victorious players in this round gets an additional four pounds, and there is eight pounds each for the winners of the Final Tie. In view of the big crowds and the large money which is usually taken at these later stages of the Cup, the bonus doesn't seem too generous, but the players regard the honour as above mere Treasury notes.

A Football Tragedy.

That even twelve months bring big changes in football is shown by reference to Fred Titmuss, the English International full-back, who was recently transferred to Plymouth Argyle from Southampton. A year ago, when the Saints and Sheffield United fought a good fight in the Semi-Final at Stamford Bridge, Titmuss played a great game for the Southampton side at left full-back. He had the mortification of seeing his full-back partner, Parker, defect a hall through his own goal, and I shall never forget the disappointed look on Parker's face when he did this. To score against your side in such an important match as a Semi-Final may be regarded as the very essence of tragedy.

The "Crowded Out" Player.

Harking back to Titmuss, however, this player was injured in the early part of the present season while with Southampton, and a

young full-back named Keeping was pressed into service. So well did the substitute play that Titmuss found it impossible to get back his place in the team, and, not being



W. CHADWICK (Leeds United).

content to kick his heels in any reserve eleven, he was transferred to Plymouth. His case certainly illustrates the necessity for having some sort of transfer system, for if it were not possible for a player to leave one club for another, he might have to spend the greater part of his football career out of the limelight through no fault of his own, but merely because his particular club happened to find a specially efficient player for his position on the field. It is certainly a feather in the cap of the management of the Southampton club that they should so frequently have produced most efficient defenders, for Keeping is now recognised as a man right up to International standard, and both he and Parker, the other "Saints"

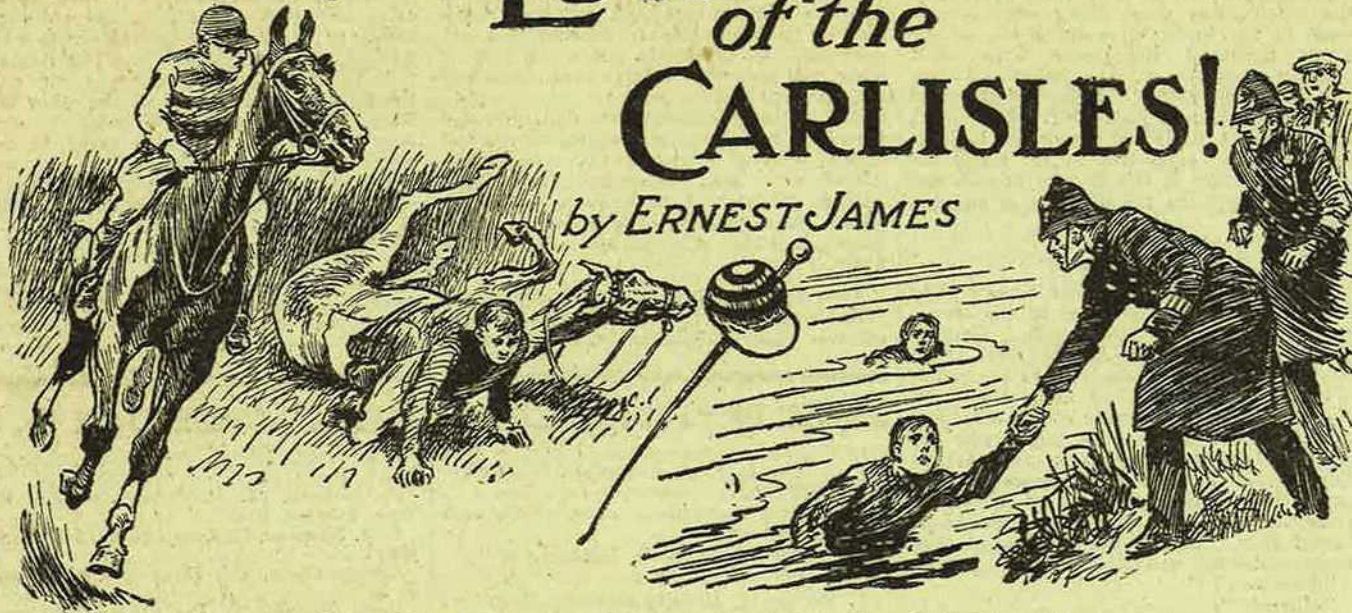
WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN ON SATURDAY.

Below will be found our expert's forecast of the probable results of the big games to be played on Saturday, March 27th, 1926. The likely winning side is printed in capitals. Where a draw is anticipated, both clubs are printed in smaller letters.

DIVISION I.	DIVISION II.	DIVISION III. (Southern Section).	DIVISION III. (Northern Section).	DIVISION I. Scottish League.
BLACKBURN R. v. West Ham United.	Barnsley v. Middlesbrough.	ABERDARE ATHLETIC v. Swindon T.	Ashington v. Bradford.	AIRDRIEONANS v. Hibernians.
CARDIFF CITY v. Leeds United.	BLACKPOOL v. Stoke City.	BRENTFORD v. Bournemouth.	BARROW v. Chesterfield.	DUNDEE UNITED v. Clydebank.
EVERTON v. Notts County.	BRADFORD CITY v. South Shields.	BRIGHTON & H.A. v. Exeter City.	COVENTRY CITY v. Tranmere Rovers.	HEARTS v. Dundee.
SHEFFIELD UNITED v. Burnley.	CHELSEA v. Wolverhampton Wan.	BRISTOL CITY v. Gillingham.	Crewe Alexandra v. Halifax Town.	Motherwell v. CELTIC.
Tottenham Hotspur v. Newcastle United.	Darlington v. The Wednesday.	Crystal Palace v. Charlton Athletic.	DONCASTER R. v. Hartlepool United.	PARTICK THISTLE v. Morton.
West Bromwich Albion v. Liverpool.	PORT VALE v. Preston North End.	MILLWALL v. Queen's Park Rangers.	LINCOLN CITY v. Accrington Stanley.	Queen's Park v. Kilmarnock.
	SOUTHAMPTON v. Oldham Athletic.	NORTHAMPTON v. Bristol Rovers.	NELSON v. Walsall.	RAITH ROVERS v. Falkirk.
		NORTHAMPTON v. Luton Town.	NEW BRIGHTON v. Rotherham United.	RANGERS v. Aberdeen.
		PLYMOUTH ARGYLE v. Merthyr T.	SOUTHPORT v. Durham City.	St. Johnstone v. Hamilton Acads.
		SOUTHEAST UNITED v. Newport C.	Wigan Borough v. GRIMSBY TOWN.	ST. MIRREN v. Cowdenbeath.
		WATFORD v. Reading.	Wrexham v. ROCHDALE.	

The LUCK of the CARLISLES!

by ERNEST JAMES



A thrilling long complete story of the Grand National!

The 1st Chapter. A Disastrous Race.

"YOU ought to win by a street, Clem!" Roy Carlisle was quite emphatic as he addressed the words to his brother Clement, as the two of them stood near the paddock at Bogside.

There was a one-day meeting at the racecourse in Ayrshire, and Clem Carlisle was due to ride Magic Circle, his chief horse, in the Ayrshire 'Chase, the chief event of the afternoon.

As Roy had implied, Clem should find small difficulty in winning the big race of the little Scottish meeting, for Magic Circle was by far and away the best class horse entered in the Ayrshire 'Chase. And if Clem had any pretensions, as indeed he had, of pulling off the greatest ambition of his young life, then he must certainly win with Magic Circle, for it was in that horse that he was pinning his faith to achieve the greatest honour that anyone can gain in steeplechasing the wide world over—victory in the Grand National.

Not only did Clem cast longing eyes upon the great prize attached to the winning of the Grand National, but to him, as well as to his younger brother Roy, there was something more—something even more valuable to be gained if he could only win the big Aintree event.

Some twelve months ago, Roy and Clem, who had never really known a mother's love, for Mrs. Carlisle had died when they were tiny mites, had lost their father. It was a bitter blow to the brothers, for John Carlisle had been everything a father could be. And it was he who, much to the satisfaction of Roy and Clem, had taken them in hand when they had left school and had taught them everything that there was to learn about a racing-stable; how to run one with the utmost measure of success, and all the tricks which go to make an efficient rider over the "sticks." For racing was in the blood of the Carlisles, and Roy and Clem were already wrapped up in it, as had been the case of their ancestors before them. Every member of the Carlisle family had been born in the saddle, so to speak, and their name ranked high in steeplechasing circles.

The Carlisles had always been extremely successful in racing. They had won every big race that was worth winning save for the Grand National, and the big Aintree event eluded them like a shadow; it was, in fact, their bogey race. So far as the National was concerned, the luck of the Carlisles had not held.

John Carlisle had possessed high hopes that he would change the family's fortune in the Grand National, but now he was dead, and it was left to Roy and Clem to carry on with the task. For the brothers, whilst as they were—Roy was just sixteen, young Clem was two years older—now owned the Nest and the extensive stabling accommodation adjoining it which had been their father's property and his ancestors' before him.

When John Carlisle's will had been read, Roy and Clem found that the Nest and the stables had been left to them, providing that they carried on as their father had done, training and running his own race-horses. For the Carlisles had never yet

trained a horse that did not belong to themselves. Further, the brothers found that Carlisle senior's horses, which numbered exactly a score, were divided between them—the thoroughbreds which, at the time of his death occupied boxes Nos. 1 to 10, went to Roy, whilst those in Nos. 11 to 20 became Clem's property. And then in a codicil to the will Roy and Clem had found, to their astonishment, that a family heirloom, in the shape of a handsome gold chalice, was to become the property of the Carlisle who first won the Grand National. This chalice, it appeared, had been specially made many years ago by a certain Simon Carlisle who had owned a horse which it was thought stood a chance second to none of winning the Grand National. But Simon Carlisle's hopes had been dashed to the ground, and he had had the chalice made to go to the Carlisle coming after him who won where he had failed.

As yet the trophy had not passed into the hands of the Carlisles, for until it was won it was held by the family solicitor.

Small wonder then that both Roy and Clem were keen to pull off the big Aintree event where others of the Carlisles had failed.

Since taking over the Nest and the adjoining stables, the brothers had met with a surprising measure of success in the little time they had been racing, and people were beginning to look upon them with great admiration, and to discuss the luck of the Carlisles which had descended upon them. And, in addition, racing folk discussed the possibilities that they held of breaking the family bogey—the ill-luck attending the Carlisles' efforts in the Grand National.

There was no doubt that the Nest harboured some excellent thoroughbreds, and whilst Clem relied upon Magic Circle in the brothers' first venture in the Grand National, Roy had two animals entered in the race, Neptune and First Time.

Roy and Clem were the best of pals and helped one another where they could, and they were generally liked by their stablehands, the majority of whom had served under their father. Each had his own little band of employees, and whilst Roy had taken over Larry Laird as his head lad, Clem had imported a new man to look after his affairs. And though Jake Jennings had only taken over his duties as Clem's head lad a week ago he was already unpopular with everyone else in the stable, although this was not known by either of the brothers.

The stable's opinion about the chances held by their candidates in the Grand National varied. Some believed that Roy's Neptune was a better horse than Clem's Magic Circle, some thought the other way about, whilst it was agreed on all sides that, despite his name, First Time was outclassed by every other animal entered for the big classic of the jumping season. And such was the opinion of Roy. Although the youngster had not scratched First Time from the race, he had almost come to a decision not to run the horse—to rely solely upon Neptune.

Neither of Roy's horses had seen a race-course for some time; but Clem was a believer that practice makes perfect, and so he had decided that Magic Circle should meet his engagement in the big race of the Ayrshire meeting. And, like his brother

Roy, who had accompanied him North to see how Magic Circle shaped in the Ayrshire 'Chase, Clem believed that he ought to win the event easily.

"If the luck of the Carlisles holds, Roy, then I shall certainly win it comfortably," said Clem, with a smile, as he took his brother's hand affectionately and squeezed it. "I'm not one to boast or brag, but Magic Circle's a good horse and the best in the race. Still, old boy, I'm a little doubtful whether he's as good as your Neptune for the National. But there, what does it matter so long as one of us pulls off that race? The odds are against us doing that, of course, but—gee!—wouldn't it be a feather in our caps if we did. And that gold chalice— But it's no good talking about it. Wait till Aintree, and we'll try our hardest. It'll be almost like a sporting contest—a match between you and I."

"It will," returned Roy, with enthusiasm. "Oh, how I wish the day of the National would hurry up and come round! I feel I can't stand the suspense much longer."

It was then the time for Clem to the saddling of Magic Circle in readiness for the Ayrshire 'Chase, which was the next race on the card. As his brother moved off Roy shot an encouraging word after him, then turned and leisurely wended his way towards the members' enclosure, from which point of vantage he intended to watch the big race. He had hardly taken up his stand at the back of the structure with Larry Laird, his head lad, who had accompanied the brothers to the Scottish meeting, when from the paddock the ten horses competing in the Ayrshire 'Chase made their appearance.

On all sides the layers were now doing a brisk business on the race. Magic Circle, as befits a National candidate, was a firm favourite, two to one against his chance being the best price obtainable about him.

All eyes were riveted on the horses as they got into line at the starting-post.

"They're off!" The cry suddenly welled up as the splendid thoroughbreds were seen to get away to a perfect start. The first jump safely negotiated, it was noticed that Starry Night showed the way, followed closely by Kempshott and Magic Circle. The others were lying hand, almost in a bunch, three lengths behind the leaders.

And then came the first big thrill of the race.

At the third obstacle, which was a hedge four foot six inches high with a rail on the take-off side and a ditch on the other four foot wide, Starry Night pecked badly on landing and slithered to his knees. Like lightning and with great skill, Sam Mellor, his jockey, had the animal righted, but Kempshott, who had been hot on the leader's heels, in trying to avoid him, slipped up and crashed to the ground, his rider shooting clear and tumbling into the ditch.

Away went Starry Night, but Magic Circle, clearing the jump with a magnificent bound, was after him in a twinkling.

"There's only two in it!" roared a voice in the stands when Starry Night and Magic Circle had completed the first circuit.

And the man was right, for the other eight competitors were down, and it was left to Starry Night and the favourite to fight out the issue.

Over one fence and then another they

went. And then Sam Mellor, firmly convinced that he had the race safe in hand, had the surprise of his life. He caught a sudden glimpse of Magic Circle drawing up level with him.

"Confound him!" muttered the jockey between clenched teeth. And out came his whip on the instant.

Now, Sam Mellor was a jockey who took defeat in a very bad spirit, especially if it were sustained at the hands of a rider of the younger school. He did not trouble to reflect that he could not hope to win every race he rode in. His only thought when in the saddle was that he would win at any cost if it were humanly possible. In his long career he had indulged in many doubtful tactics on the racecourse, but so clever was he in the way he set about things that, although he had often been suspected of foul riding, as yet nothing had been proved against him, and he went unpunished as a consequence.

And now with the knowledge that in all probability he had met his match in this slip of a lad who rode Magic Circle, all that was bad in the older jockey surged to the surface.

He touched up his mount with a vicious cut of the whip, and for a moment it drew away from the challenging Magic Circle. But not for long. Clem Carlisle was riding a clever race, and up to this point he had been nursing his animal.

As they cleared yet another obstacle Clem came with a dash, thundering along the rails which here divided the racecourse from the River Irvine that flowed alongside.

Up, up dashed Magic Circle, his heels beating a rapid tattoo on the hard ground. And as Sam Mellor caught sight of the scarlet-and-black jacket and white cap of Clem Carlisle beside him he was at last forced to realise that he was beaten, unless—

The rascally plan which had come to him a few seconds ago flashed into his head again. There was only one way of making sure that he was not beaten, and that was by deliberately fouling Magic Circle. But no sooner had he decided to act upon his scheme than for the moment the chance was lost to him. They went round the turn bearing away from the river, and Sam Mellor, trembling lest the opportunity of balking the favourite should be lost to him, used all the skill he knew to hold Magic Circle in check.

Around the course all was tense excitement. The bookmakers were even now laying against the two horses' chances, for there was still another circuit of the course to be made. It was three to one on Magic Circle, and there were plenty of takers.

In one part of the members' enclosure Roy Carlisle and Larry Laird were following the race intently, their glasses seeming to be glued to their eyes. On the other side of the structure Mark Martin, the owner of Starry Night, was as eagerly watching the two thoroughbreds as they thundered on and on, clearing first one jump and then another in masterly style.

"Confound the beastly luck!" muttered Martin suddenly. And he lowered his glasses. "Starry Night's beaten!"

And he certainly seemed right, for, having cleared the water jump with a fine leap, Magic Circle suddenly drew out from Starry Night.

"It's Magic Circle's race for a cert!" yelled a layer hoarsely. "A thousand to one bar one!"

There was a roar of laughter from those who were within hearing of the bookmaker. Most of the great crowd were on the favourite, and they were now on good terms with themselves, for it seemed likely that Magic Circle, barring a fall, would win by a distance. In another two hundred yards he was out by himself, fifteen lengths in the van.

But then the thing happened which made those who had supported Clem Carlisle's horse gasp in sheer dismay. Magic Circle refused at the jump before the stands!

"Get him going, boy!" came in a sudden hoarse roar on both sides of the rails. "Get him going!"

A look of consternation crossed Roy Carlisle's face at sight of Magic Circle pulling up at the jump. Never before had he known Clem's National candidate to refuse, and he was quite at a loss to understand the reason.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "What's wrong with him, Master Roy?" asked Larry Laird in amazed tones. "Why, in the name of all that's wonderful has he pulled up like this? It's inexplicable!"

For a moment Roy was unable to answer him, so taken aback was he.

Clem's National candidate refusing! If he was going to develop that habit, then Clem would not stand an earthly chance at Aintree.

"I can't understand it at all, Larry," he

replied at last. "Why, he's never shown the— Ah!"

A gasp of relief escaped him as Clem, having turned Magic Circle and retreated a few paces, put his mount at the obstacle again.

This time the favourite made no mistake. He went over the jump like a panther. But as he did so Starry Night came thundering up, Sam Mellor belabouring his mount with the whip.

The race had again developed into a struggle between the two thoroughbreds left in the chase, for in the brief space of time which Clem had unfortunately lost, Sam Mellor had drawn up level.

Amidst thunderous cheers that threatened to rend the skies, Magic Circle and Starry Night flashed past the stands and thudded into the stretch of the course which ran alongside the river.

On and on they went, neck and neck, with Clem keeping his mount close to the rails. And then, as the two animals tore down on the jump which loomed ahead, Sam Mellor contrived to swing in Starry Night to within a foot of his rival.

"My heavens!" roared an alarmed voice suddenly. "They'll be through the rails and in the river if they don't look out!"

Everybody in the stands sprang to their feet on the instant and stared in horror down the course. It was to see Magic Circle and Starry Night collide with each other as they leaped at the jump. The next moment the favourite staggered under the impact of the collision, and, toppling sideways, narrowly missed being impaled on the obstacle. Into the rails which here were almost rotten with age, the splendid thoroughbred crashed. There was a rending of wood, and next second Magic Circle tumbled into the river with a mighty splash, throwing his young jockey clear of the saddle. And, unable to do anything to recover his animal, the rascally Sam Mellor felt his mount hurtling towards the river also, and the next instant he, too, splashed into the water, with Starry Night under him.

The 2nd Chapter.

III—Luck Befalls the Carlises.

"HEAVENS above! They'll be drowned!"

Roy Carlisle gasped the words as, white-faced, he stood staring from the members' enclosure to where Magic Circle and Starry Night and their jockeys had disappeared beneath the waters of the River Irvine. Then, as the sudden shock of the catastrophe, which seemed for the moment to have riveted him to where he stood swept from him, he dashed down the steps of the stand, vaulted the barricade at the foot, and raced along the course.

On all sides excited racegoers were converging on the spot where the disaster had occurred. Bookmakers and their assistants had left their stands unattended; tipsters had forgotten the job on hand, stable-lads and trainers, and even the officials of the meeting, were all running towards the scene, and an ambulance, quickly summoned, was finding its way barred by the surging crowds.

"Stand back there!" Half a dozen burly policemen were striving valiantly to keep the mob away from the broken rails alongside the river. And so great was the crush that more than once it seemed that the plucky officers would be swept into the flood.

"Let me pass, please! Let me pass!" Roy Carlisle came frantically elbowing his way through the throng, and, panting breathlessly, he gained the rails. Then, as he gazed at the river, he gave a gasp of relief, for, apparently unhurt, both Clem and Sam Mellor were swimming towards the bank, and were even then only some few feet from it.

"Here you are!" called a policeman. And, stretching out a hand, he helped Clem Carlisle from the water, whilst a second constable did the same service for Sam Mellor.

"Bravo!" A mighty roar which told of relief went up as it was seen that the jockeys were safe. Then the crowd turned its attention to the river again, where Starry Night was at that moment scrambling ashore on the opposite bank. But Magic Circle was evidently in trouble, for the splendid creature was swimming about, seemingly terror-stricken, in the centre of the river.

"The horse can't get out, Master Roy!" exclaimed Larry Laird, who had followed his young master from the members' enclosure. "What can we do to help him?"

Roy, who had been watching the ambulance-men attending to his brother, swung round on his head lad. He, too, was at a loss.

"I hardly know—"

He broke off as a roughly-dressed man pushed his way forward and clutched his arm.

"Get me a rope, youngster, and I'll soon have him out of there!" the fellow exclaimed. "I'll lasso him!"

Roy looked at the man blankly. He did not believe that anyone could possibly be able to throw a rope from the bank and get it round Magic Circle's neck; that feat, the youngster knew, could only be accomplished by an expert with the lariat. "But—" he began.

"Get me a rope!" interrupted the other impatiently. "I can manage it; I've had experience on the ranches in the States."

That did it. Roy knew well enough that here was the only man who could get Magic Circle out of the water without delay. There was no boat on the river for miles, and to summon one would mean too much delay. In the time one was fetched Magic Circle might take great harm from being submerged in the water on that bitterly cold day. And Roy was anxious that his brother's horse should suffer no harm, for he knew what a bitter disappointment it would be to Clem if the thoroughbred was not fit to take his chance in the forthcoming Grand National.

"Larry!" exclaimed the youngster suddenly. "Get a rope from somewhere, quick!"

The head lad was away like a shot. As Roy turned to see how his brother was faring, Clem, who was looking very wet and bedraggled as he stood between the two ambulance-men, suddenly turned as white as ashes and fell back in the arms that supported him.

With a cry of alarm Roy sprang forward as the ambulance-men gently lowered his brother to the ground. Next instant he was upon his knees bending anxiously over Clem's still form.

"He's unconscious, sir," announced one of the ambulance-men. "Suffering from shock, I think. We had better get him along to the local hospital immediately."

He and his companion at once sprang to the motor-ambulance, dragged out a stretcher and placed it on the ground. Then, almost before Roy could realise what was happening, his brother had been gently put upon the stretcher, and it was lifted inside the van. The next instant, to the sound of its tinkling bell, the motor-ambulance was threading its way through the gaping, sympathetic crowd which watched its departure in silence.

No sooner was it gone than Larry Laird came back with a stout length of rope and handed it to the roughly-dressed man, who stood regarding Magic Circle as the splendid thoroughbred still struggled piteously in mid-stream.

By this time Sam Mellor had disappeared. Evidently the rascally jockey had taken no harm from his tumble, and had gone to the changing-room to seek dry clothes. On the opposite bank of the river a stable-lad, having secured Starry Night, was leading him away.

"Hurry up, my man!" said Roy Carlisle, impatiently addressing the stranger, who

was making a running noose in the rope. Roy was anxious for his brother now as well as for the safety of Clem's horse. He was in a hurry to get away and inquire about his brother's condition. "I'm afraid he'll—"

"All right, youngster!" cut in the other. "Leave it to me. Mike O'Dowell will see you through."

With that he began whirling the rope around his head, and the gaping crowd surged back to give him room.

Whiz! The lasso suddenly went snaking its way across the river straight for the sleek head of Magic Circle. True as a die it dropped about the racer's neck, and was drawn steadily together.

With anxious eyes Roy watched Mike O'Dowell as he gently pulled on the rope, for the youngster feared that the fellow might injure the animal—might even strangle it. But Roy's fears were ill-founded, for Mike, jerking carefully upon the lasso, gradually urged Magic Circle towards him till at last, reaching the bank, the thoroughbred gave a sudden leap and sprang ashore.

"Quick, Larry!" exclaimed Roy, as Mike O'Dowell took the lasso from about Magic Circle's neck. "Get him away and do him down. And you might get the vet to look at him."

On the instant Larry Laird vaulted over Magic Circle's back, and, as the crowd began to stream away, he rode off.

With care-lined face Roy turned round on Mike O'Dowell. As he did so he caught sight of the number-board near the grand stand. On it there now appeared the words "No Race," indicating that, as no horse had completed the course, no result had been arrived at in the Ayrshire Chase. A wry smile twisted the youngster's lips for an instant, then his gaze fell on Mike O'Dowell. Pulling out his pocket-wallet, Roy extracted two one-pound notes, which he slipped into the fellow's ready hand.

"Thanks for your help, my man!" he said; and before Mike O'Dowell could open his mouth to make a suitable reply he was hurrying away.

As he made his way towards the paddock Roy ran into the clerk of the course, who informed him that it was the stewards' wish that he should attend the inquiry into the accident which had befallen Magic Circle and Starry Night. This Roy did, but not before he had received reassuring news from the hospital concerning his brother. The youngster proceeded to the members' room, at the back of the grand stand, and, using the telephone there, he rang up the hospital. From the surgeon in charge Roy learned that whilst Clem was in no grave danger, and had already regained consciousness, it would be necessary that he should take things easy for a while. He was suffering from shock as a result of his tumble and the sudden immersion in the icy water of the River Irvine, and, as a consequence, he was a little lightheaded. Further, the house-surgeon informed Roy that Clem could be moved on the morrow, and the youngster

said that he would make arrangements to take him home next day.

Feeling somewhat cheered after his conversation with the doctor, Roy made his way to the stewards' room for the inquiry. Once again Sam Mellor's luck held. His cleverness pulled him through the stewards' rigid inquiry, and he was dismissed with nothing more than a severe reprimand and a caution to be careful as to his future riding.

Roy took little interest in the affair. On no account did he suspect Sam Mellor of deliberately fouling his brother in the Ayrshire Chase. He answered the stewards' questions politely if a little impatiently, and was glad when the inquiry came to an end.

As he came out of the stewards' room, Roy's thoughts instantly went to his brother lying in hospital. Poor old Clem! Supposing he were much worse than the hospital surgeon had led him to believe? Roy groaned at the thought. He must see him immediately—after he had seen Larry Laird and given him instructions as to returning to the Nest with Magic Circle. Roy quickened his pace and went in search of his head lad.

All head of the forthcoming race for the Grand National had gone from his mind. The hope that he or Clem would finish first in the great classic of the jumping season, and so break the ill-luck which had dogged the Carlises so long—all had vanished.

His one thought was for his brother—for Clem, who had always been his best pal. Nothing else mattered. His duty was at the bedside of his brother.

The 3rd Chapter.

Trouble in the Stables.

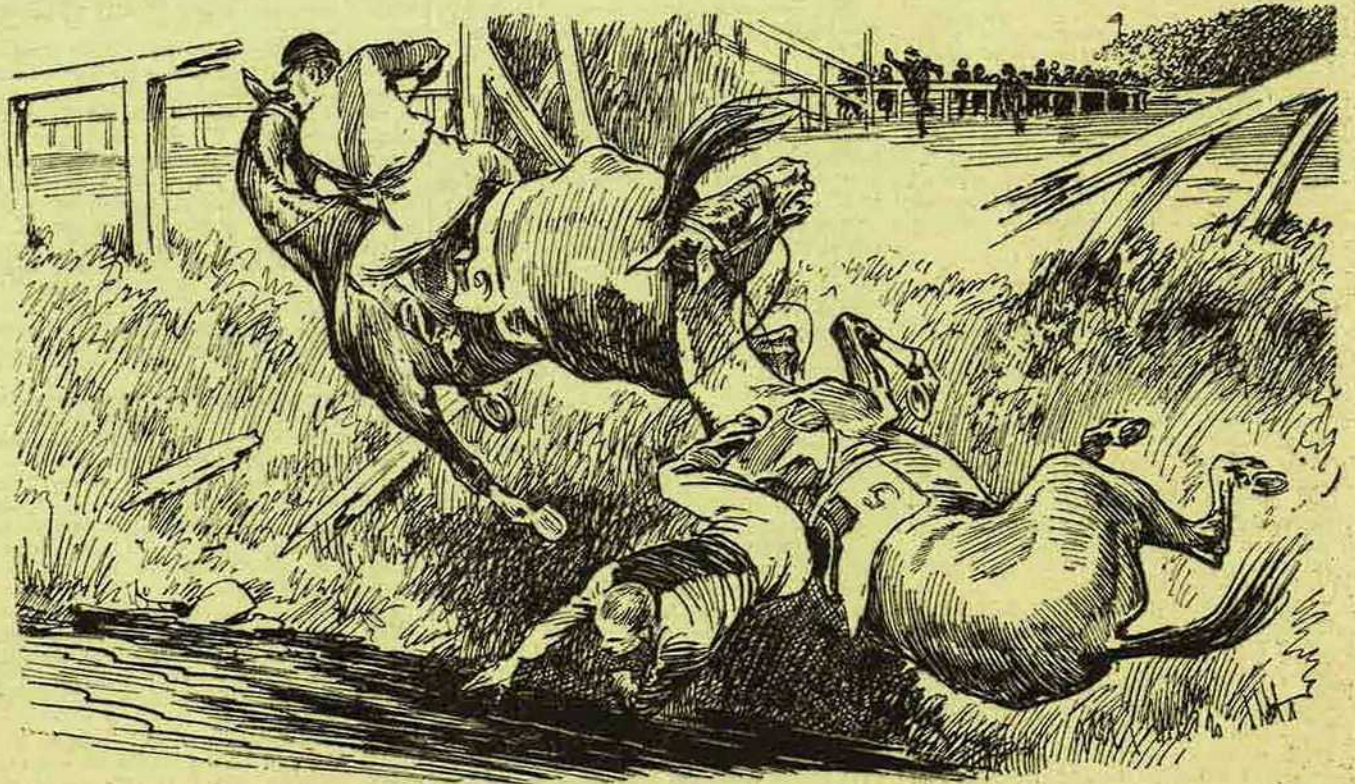
"I'll pay you better if you mind your own business, kid!"

With a strange look in his eyes, and fists clenched, Clem Carlisle swung round sharply on his young brother in a way which suggested he would strike him. Roy, in great alarm, backed round the table of the well-appointed drawing-room of the Nest.

"But, Clem—" he began anxiously. "Shut up, you little fool, and get out!" cried his brother angrily. "If you don't I'll kick you out!"

"But—" "Enough! I don't want you interfering with my horses! You needn't worry about them at all. If I can't attend to them myself, Jake Jennings can. He's my man, and has his instructions from me! And let me tell you this—if Magic Circle had taken any harm from that accident at the Bogside meeting I should have held you responsible! Fancy letting him hang in the river all that time! I suppose you thought he would crock up so badly that he'd have to be scratched from the Grand National, and that you would then have a clear field. You think you're going to pull off that family heirloom, but I'll tell you you're not! I'm going to—"

But Roy was gone—he had heard enough. (Continued overleaf.)



Sam Mellor felt his mount hurtling towards the river also, and the next instant he, too, splashed into the water with Starry Night under him!

In his wild ravings, Clem had not realised that his brother had slipped from the room.

These days were trying ones to the younger Carlisle. He went about hardly knowing what he was doing—went about almost in fear of his brother Clem. For Clem, upon returning to the Nest the day after he had met with his accident in the Ayrshire 'Chase, had suddenly turned upon his brother and accused him of plotting to ruin his chance in the Grand National by attempting to get at his horse, Magic Circle.

Instantly realising that Clem's mind must be somewhat unbalanced as a result of the shock which he had sustained, Roy had refrained from answering his brother's wild accusation and had immediately called in the local doctor. Dr. Seaforth, in spite of Clem's protests, had examined him, and had confirmed the statement of the hospital surgeon at Bogside that Clem's mind was affected through his tumble. Further, Dr. Seaforth had reassured Roy that there was nothing else wrong with his brother; his general health was good, and it was quite likely that he would get over his trouble as quickly as it had come to him. No; the doctor was sure Clem would not get worse, and be compelled to be put under restraint. As a matter of fact, he thought that it would be better if Clem carried on in the normal way; there was just a possibility that his mind might clear if it was kept fully occupied with his racehorses.

Roy's mind was much relieved by that visit of Dr. Seaforth's, but now— He felt distressed that Clem should threaten him and hurl such unpleasant remarks at his head. The younger Carlisle would have done anything for Clem, as Clem would have done anything for him in the old days. But that seemed impossible now. Roy was at last forced to realise the necessity for keeping out of his brother's way as much as possible.

He had gone to Clem to speak to him about the Grand National, now only a few days distant—to ask him to allow him to see to Magic Circle's final preparations for the big race. It had been an act of sheer goodwill, for Roy did not want his brother's chance at Aintree affected in any way; he wished him, if it were possible, to stand as much chance as he himself in the coming struggle for the family heirloom. And Clem had told him to "mind his own business."

Roy shrugged his shoulders as he passed through the front door of the Nest. How was it going to end? he wondered. In spite of the doctor's heartening words he feared that Clem was going to crock up altogether. And his fears were greatly added to by the knowledge that Clem had informed him a day or so ago, when he had pleaded with him, that nothing would stop him riding Magic Circle in the Grand National. What if Clem fell during the great steeplechase? He might be killed, for in his present state Roy did not think him strong enough to handle a horse in so stiff a race—a race that tests the muscle and brain of the crack jockeys of the day almost to breaking point.

As, with a riot of thoughts tormenting his brain, Roy made his way down a path towards a gate which gave access to the stable-yard, he caught the sound of voices. They were raised, and it seemed to him as though there was a quarrel going on in the direction of the loose-boxes which housed his and his brother's racers. As he passed into the yard, Roy distinctly recognised the voices of Larry Laird and Jake Jennings, and saw them standing before the loose-box of Neptune, his own champion steeple-chaser.

"I tell you it's none of your business to mess about with Master Roy's horses," Roy heard Larry Laird say.

"I'll do as I please, you confounded upstart!" came the angry reply of Jake Jennings. "Besides, I haven't seen Neptune since I came to these stables, and I want to see your young master's National horse."

As Roy came up Jake Jennings pushed roughly past his head lad and made to swing open the doors of Neptune's loose-box. With a quick spring, Larry Laird clutched Jake Jennings' shoulder and swung him back.

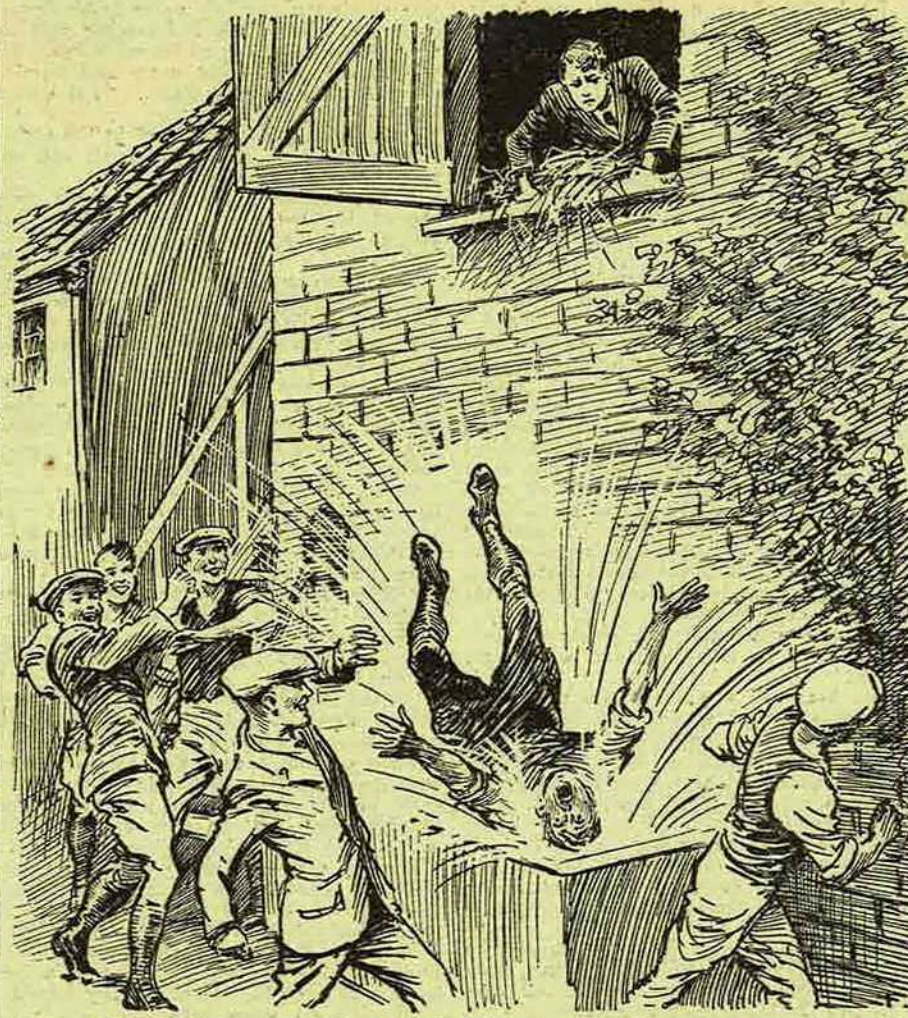
"No, you don't!" snapped Larry. "Mark you, I mean what I say, and—"

"Let me go!" shrieked Jake, his face crimson with rage. "I am going to see the brute if I jolly well want to!"

Larry Laird's lips set in a grim, straight line.

"You're not," he said firmly. "If you try I'll— Ow!"

With a sudden savage ejaculation Jake Jennings clenched his fist and crashed it full into the head lad's face. Larry Laird released his hold upon the rascal's shoulder, B. F.—No. 1,294.—March 27th, 1926.



Jake Jennings came hurtling down like a stone from a catapult; and landed in the horse-trough below.

staggered back, and went crashing on his back on the cobblestones of the yard.

"You'll stop me, will you?" howled the incensed Jake Jennings. "I'll—"

He raised his foot and was about to kick the prostrate head lad when, with a cry of indignation, Roy Carlisle leaped forward and, grasping Jake Jennings by the scruff of the neck, hauled him away.

"You brute!" cried the youngster furiously. "You out-and-out rotter! I've a good mind to call the lads and get them to duck you in the horse-trough!"

Roy was well-built and strong for his age. He had been one of the best fighting men at St. Cuthbert's School, and he found little difficulty in retaining his grasp upon his brother's rascally head lad.

Jake Jennings' eyes blazed dangerously as he suddenly swung round in Roy's powerful grip and faced him.

"What are you playing at?" he snarled. "You have no right to interfere with me! You ain't my boss that I know of, and—"

Roy, slow as a rule to be roused to anger, was by this time fast losing his temper.

"Stop it," he said, and shook Jake like a terrier shakes a rat until his teeth rattled.

It was then that Larry Laird, his nose streaming crimson, staggered to his feet. Dazed from the treacherous blow Jake had landed him, he stood looking on in bewilderment as Roy and the rascally head lad faced each other seething with rage.

"Let me go, confound you!" howled Jake, almost foaming at the mouth in his anger.

"Not before you've apologised to Laird for striking him," said Roy grimly.

Jake struggled furiously to set himself free from the youngster's grasp of iron.

"Let me go!" he roared.

"Will you apologise then?" demanded Roy.

"No, hang you!"

"Then I'll duck you in the horse-trough till you do."

The din going on in the stable-yard had by now attracted the attention of the stable-lads, and they came crowding upon the scene. With wide-open mouths they stood watching as Roy began to haul Jake Jennings towards the horse-trough which stood close to the blank wall next to Magic Circle's loose-box.

"Now, you skunk!" said Roy angrily. "You going to—"

He got no further. With a sudden twist Jake wrenched himself free and, aiming a savage kick at the youngster's shins, he darted up the stairs which ran between the wall where stood the horse-trough and the stall of Wheateroff to the stable-lads' quarters above.

"Ow!"

Roy clutched at his shin where Jake's vicious kick had landed. But the next moment, uttering a cry of rage, he sprang up the stairs after the rascally head lad. It was Roy's intention to take it out of Jake for that act of treachery.

All was excitement in the stable-yard now. The lads had gathered around Larry Laird demanding to know what had happened. They guessed that it was Jake Jennings who was responsible for the head lad's damaged face, and as a consequence they were hot with indignation.

"What the dickens is it all about, Larry?" asked Victor Watson, the head lad's great pal. "And why—"

It was at that moment that a cry from one of the stable-lads drew their attention to the loft immediately above the horse-trough.

"Look! They're going it!"

And sure enough up in the loft Roy and Jake Jennings were struggling furiously, with their arms wound tightly about each other's waists.

Suddenly the pair lost their footing, crashed to the floor, and were lost to sight of the watchers below.

"Great Scott, they'll be out in a moment!" exclaimed Vic Watson suddenly.

Still fighting fiercely, Roy and Jake rolled into sight again. There was a door to the loft in which the two struggled, but it was now wide open. It was the custom of the stable-lads to throw the hay for the horses into the yard from the loft itself, and it was a strict rule of the brothers that the door should be closed directly the place was finished with. Evidently some thoughtless youngster had left it unfastened when last he had been in the loft.

Thrilling with excitement and marvelling at Roy's pluck, the stable-lads watched as the younger Carlisle and Jake Jennings, pommelling each other, rolled over and over and came to the very edge of the eight foot drop to the stable-yard below.

"Go it, ye cripples!" yelled Bobby Brown, the youngest of the stable-lads, dancing in delight. "Ten to one on Roy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd in the yard. But the next moment it ceased abruptly as Jake Jennings, releasing his hold on Roy as he received a blow in the solar-plexus, came tumbling out of the loft. Splash!

He came hurtling down like a stone from a catapult, and landed in the horse-trough below, sousing water on all sides, and drenching the stable-lads who stood about it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wet though they were, the boys rocked with laughter as Jake Jennings, looking like a drowned rat, scrambled out of the horse-trough and glared at the grinning faces around him with deadly hatred.

Up in the loft Roy had by this time regained his feet, and, fearing that Jake Jennings might be hurt as a result of his tumble, he now came running into the yard. As he did so, his brother Clement came pushing a way through the excited stable-lads, and, with grim set face and eyes blazing, confronted him.

"You little bullying rascal!" howled Clem, tightening his grip on the whip he carried. "I had an idea you were going to meddle with my affairs, so I followed you to the yard. And from the gate I witnessed you fighting my head lad. You might have killed him, flinging him from the loft like you did!"

It was evident to all, as well as to Roy, that Clem did not realise what he was talking about. The stable-lads were aware of the fact that the elder Carlisle's mind was somewhat unhinged since his spill in the Ayrshire 'Chase at Bogside, and, in consequence, they made every allowance for him. And not wishing to overhear a heated argument between the two brothers, they now discreetly moved off with the exception of Jake Jennings. He stood a little distance away, red with wrath, and breathing vengeance upon the youngster who had handled him so roughly.

"But Jennings was interfering with my horses, and he struck Larry Laird, Clem," said Roy, somewhat nettled by his brother's sudden outburst.

Clem Carlisle burst into a bitter laugh. "I like that!" he scoffed. "You complaining about someone interfering with your horses when you are meddling with mine. I tell you I won't have it! And if I catch you laying a finger on Jennings again, I'll larrup you!"

"But Clem—" began Roy.

"Shut up!" interrupted his brother harshly. "I don't want to hear your excuses. Another word, and I'll lay my whip about you now."

"But—"

Like a flash, Clem Carlisle swung up his whip and brought it down viciously across his brother's shoulders. With a little cry of pain Roy recoiled under the lash. But, next instant, his face crimsoned with rage, he leaped forward, and, grasping the whip in his brother's hand, he wrenched it away with a lightning movement. It seemed, for a moment, as if the younger Carlisle would retaliate and lay the weapon about Clem's back, for, as it came away in his hand, Roy swung it up in businesslike fashion. But evidently thinking better of the matter, he suddenly lowered his arm, tossed the whip into the horse-trough, and, without so much as another look at Clem and the rascally Jake Jennings, he strode quickly away, making in the direction of the gate which led into the grounds of the Nest.

As he went, Roy's heart was beating painfully. He realised only too well that it was his duty to stand by his brother in his trouble, but Clem had made that utterly impossible now. Whatever he did or said, Clem found fault with him—it was unbearable. And now he had been humiliated in the presence of Jake Jennings, a stable hand. He had been struck with a whip, and had taken it lying down because he knew that his brother, in his present condition, was not responsible for his actions. But it was the last straw. After all, Roy was only human, and, as a consequence, he could stand Clem's threats no longer. And, in the hope of evading further trouble with his brother, he decided there and then to avoid him altogether in the future. It was a sickening thought, but the younger Carlisle could see no other way out of the difficulty.

The 4th Chapter. Against His Brother!

TAP! Clem Carlisle started to his feet as the sound fell upon his ears, and looked about him wildly.

It was some hours since his quarrel with his brother in the stable yard; in fact, the evening was now well advanced.

He had been seated in the depths of a luxurious saddlebag armchair in the drawing-room of the Nest, gazing surlily into the glowing embers of the fire, when he was disturbed by a faint tap which came from he knew not where.

He was alone in the Nest, although he did not know it, for both Roy and Mrs. Stiggs, who kept house for the brothers, were out.

Outside the rising moon was casting a faint glow over the countryside, and as Clem stood irresolute, not another sound

reached him. All seemed quiet as the grave.

He was about to drop into his chair again thinking that he was imagining things, when—

Tap!
The sound was repeated, and, with an involuntary start, Clem swung round. As, wide-eyed, he looked towards the french windows he made out a faint shadow upon them. With fast-beating heart, he moved noiselessly across the room and drew back the flimsy curtains which covered the windows. Who was on the other side he did not know; but, in spite of his nervous demeanour, he did not hesitate one moment to discover who it was. He drew back the fastenings and swung the windows wide. In the light streaming from the room he recognised his visitor instantly.

"What do you want, Jennings?" demanded Clem curtly.

"A word in private with you, if you don't mind, Master Clement," answered Jake, touching his cap in feigned respect.

A look of annoyance crossed the elder Carlisle's face. He resented being disturbed in this fashion by his head lad.

"Well, it'll have to keep till morning, whatever it is, Jennings," said Clem. "I'm not in the mood to discuss anything this evening with anyone."

"But it's about your brother," pursued the head lad. "He's planning to spoil your chance in the National, and—"

With a sharp cry Clem took a step forward and grasped Jake's shoulder in a grip of iron. For a moment the crafty head lad believed that his young master resented his words. The next instant, however, he was reassured.

"What's that?" exclaimed Clem, his eyes glinting with a dangerous light. "You know my brother intends to spoil my chance in the National? Here, come inside and tell me what you know!"

With that he dragged Jake Jennings into the room, and, after closing the french windows and fastening them, he crossed to the fire and dropped into his seat. He motioned Jake to sit opposite him.

There was a grin of triumph on the head lad's shifty face as he sank into the chair. Jake had every reason to be well satisfied with himself, for he had gained the interview he had sought.

Since the trouble in the stable yard he had been seeking a way in which to be revenged upon Roy Carlisle. And the knowledge that Roy and Clem were at loggerheads had given him food for thought. If he could convince Clem that Roy was out to spoil his prospects in the National, perhaps he could get the elder Carlisle to help him in his scheme.

That was how Jake looked at it. In his present mood, the head lad knew well enough that Clem was ready to think almost any evil of Roy; and was moreover likely to fall in with any project he might suggest to put paid to his young brother's National hopes. And Jake Jennings had his plan cut and dried.

"Well, what is it you know, Jennings?" demanded Clem tersely.

Jake eyed him through narrowed lids before he spoke. And in the eager look Clem gave him he read that the youngster was prepared, even as he had imagined, to believe that his brother was working against him.

"Your brother has arranged with Sam Mellor, who was responsible for your tumble in the Ayrshire 'Chase at Bogside, to bump you during the National," said Jake, in measured tones. "And—"

"He has?" cried Clem, springing to his feet. "Why, I'll—I'll—"

Words failed him. He stood, quivering with rage, before his rascally head lad, and Jake Jennings had difficulty in suppressing a triumphant grin.

Jake had heard how Clem had met with his accident at Bogside, although he was unaware that Sam Mellor had actually fouled the youngster in the Ayrshire 'Chase. But he knew Sam Mellor to be capable of indulging in doubtful tactics on the race-course, and it was on this knowledge and the fact that the jockey would be riding in the National that he based his cunning scheme to set Clem against his brother.

"Yes, I know that that is their intention," went on Jake glibly. "Your brother thinks he'll have a clear field if Sam Mellor brings you down. But, Master Clement, don't confront your brother with the charge. There's a better way. Play him at his own game. He wants to put Magic Circle out of the running; well, why not fix it so that he will be unable to run Neptune? Listen. I have a stunt that will do it a treat!"

For some little while Jake spoke in whispers. He unravelled his rascally

scheme, and in his present condition it was not surprising that Clem fell in with it. There was no doubt that there was something radically wrong with Clem's mind, or otherwise he would never have dreamed of believing Roy to be capable of anything so underhand as Jake made out.

"It's best to act right away," said Jake suddenly. "Your brother's out; I heard him tell Larry Laird that he would be going to the station this evening to fix up about the loose box in which Neptune is travelling to Aintree. As a matter of fact, I waited until he came out for the chance of seeing you in private. Do you know where he keeps his keys?"

"Yes," answered Clem, his eyes glinting in his eagerness to carry out Jake's scheme. "I'll get them at once. Here, slip outside and wait for me in the yard."

He crossed to the french windows, and a second later Jake Jennings had slipped out into the grounds of the Nest. Quickly Clem fastened the windows behind him, then, crossing the room, he switched off the electric light and went out into the passage.

It did not take him long to reach the room in which Roy did his business, and, taking the keys to his brother's loose boxes off the nail he hurried downstairs and out of the house.

There were two sets of keys to the boxes housing Roy's racers; one set the youngster kept himself, while the other was in the possession of Larry Laird, his head lad. Clem believed that after he and Jake had carried out their cunning scheme he could replace his brother's keys without anyone knowing that they had been removed since Roy placed them on the nail just prior to his leaving the Nest for the station.

Clem found Jake Jennings waiting him when he passed through the gate which led from the grounds of the Nest into the stable-yard.

"Got them?" asked the head lad eagerly.

"Yes."
"Then come on," said Jake. "Sharp's the word. The lads are all in their recreation room across the yard. One or two of them may come out at any moment or your brother might return."

Jake blessed the fact that the brothers' father had had a small building erected on the far side of the stable-yard for use as a recreation room by the hands. The building was divided into two; one half being used as a gymnasium, the other as a billiards-room. The fact that none of the lads were in the stable-yard or in their quarters above the loose boxes tended to reduce considerably the risk Jake and Clem were running in the carrying out of their plan.

Silently the two stole across the stable-yard towards Roy's loose boxes. The rising moon was now hidden behind a cluster of clouds, and they had to step warily in case they might run into some obstacle, for the hands had a happy knack of leaving pails cluttered about the yard.

Straight up to Box No. 1 which housed Neptune, Clem and his head lad went. Another minute and both the top half and the bottom half doors were swinging wide and, with opened penknife Jake Jennings was creeping cautiously into the stall.

One sweep of the head lad's knife sufficed

to sever the rope which tethered Neptune to a staple in the wall above his manger. In the pitch black of the box the splendid thoroughbred gave a frightened whinny; it seemed to scent something wrong. Next moment it moved restlessly, and Jake Jennings, thinking that the horse might lash out at him, beat a hurried retreat.

"Quick!" he exclaimed, joining Clem in the yard. "He'll be out in a jiffy. I'll go and open the gates!"

He went racing away in the direction of the gates which opened on to the road that led down to the village. It was part of Jake's plan that those gates should be opened, for if Neptune, when he was free, did not run into the wall of the stable-yard and so injure himself so badly that he would be unable to compete in the Grand National, there was just a chance that the thoroughbred would find its way out into open country and be lost for a time, at any rate. And even one night in the open was likely to affect the racer's condition; Jake knew that well enough.

It was just as the head lad swung open the gates of the stable-yard that Neptune came ambling from his box. At sight of the thoroughbred's shadowy shape, Clem broke into a run, making for the wicket which gave access to the grounds of the Nest. As he went through the gate he heard the sound of approaching footsteps on the drive which led up from the road. He gave a hurried glance to his right, and saw a dark form moving round a bend some little distance away. It came to him in a flash that it was his brother returning from the station, and, realising the necessity of avoiding recognition, he dived into a clump of rhododendrons at his side, and went creeping away towards the house.

And it was as well that he acted so promptly, for no sooner did Clem take cover than the clouds drifted from before the face of the moon and the whole countryside was bathed in a soft mellow radiance.

Suddenly there sounded away in the stable-yard the crash of an overturned pail, followed by a rapid tattoo of hoof-beats on cobbles, and the frightened whinny of a horse.

Roy Carlisle started as he swung up the drive towards the Nest. Then, realising that there was something amiss in the stable-yard, he darted forward, reached the wicket, and went tearing through.

It was to see Neptune, frightened by the noise of the pail he had kicked over, careering round the yard as if he were an unbroken mustang. Beyond, Roy glimpsed the figures of a crowd of excited stable lads who, disturbed by the sudden commotion outside, were now streaming from the recreation-room, shouting to one another as they came.

Straight towards his National candidate Roy raced. Borne in upon his mind was the urgent necessity for securing Neptune without delay, for he knew the grave danger the animal was running in the confined space of the stable-yard. He did not know, of course, how his thoroughbred came to be running loose about the place. Neither had he seen Clem come through the wicket, nor Jake Jennings at the gates. All he realised was that Neptune might run into the wall surrounding the yard and seriously injure himself.

With fast beating heart Roy tore on, and, as Neptune swung round at sight of the stable hands streaking across from the recreation-room and came bearing down on him, the youngster caught a glimpse of the wide-open gates.

"Boys," he cried, at the top of his voice, "the gates are open! Quick! Shut them at once, or he'll be out on the road!"

One or two of the lads went helter-skelter to obey Roy's command, then the youngster turned his attention to the fast approaching Neptune.

On and on came the splendid thoroughbred, eyes glinting, mouth foam-flecked, and nostrils distended. Roy caught a glimpse of the severed rope dangling from his halter, and then, as Neptune thundered up to him, he leaped. Like lightning his hand shot out and grasped the rope. Next instant he was swung off his feet and dragged along on the cobbles of the yard. With gritted teeth, he hung on tightly, and it seemed a miracle that he was not whirled under the thoroughbred's thundering hoofs and kicked to death.

Yells sounded on all sides as the alarmed stable lads came dashing up. Neptune's frantic pace slackened under the weight of Roy dragging on his head and then checked altogether. The new second Roy, his head reeling, felt himself grasped by strong hands and hauled to his feet.

"Are you all right, Master Roy?" asked an anxious voice.

The youngster grinned feebly as he looked into the serious face of Larry Laird.

"Yes," he gasped. "A bit shaken though, but it's nothing much. Have you got the horse safe?"

Roy's head lad nodded.

"Yes," he said, and his voice held a grim note. "But it beats me how he got out of his box. Why, Master Roy, you yourself locked the doors of his stall before leaving the yard this afternoon. It looks as if someone has been here and deliberately set him free."

"It does," agreed Roy, "and if—"

He broke off as he remembered that earlier in the day Clem had as good as told him that he was not going to win the National, and the family heirloom. What if Clem, to make good his threat, had let out Neptune in the hope that the animal would come to some harm, and, as a consequence, be unable to fulfil his Aintree engagement? Roy shuddered at the thought. He had no enemies that he knew of, no one who would wish to harm him—and then his tussle with Jake Jennings flashed into his mind. He knew that Jake could be suspected, for it was not likely that he would ever forget that fight in the yard. His brother, or Jake Jennings, or both? Roy was forced to believe that one or the other, or the two jointly were responsible for freeing Neptune from his box.

The youngster wondered what he should do about the whole wretched business. He did not want to make further trouble with his brother, and, without proof, he could not very well accuse either he or Jake Jennings. But knowing that there was a likelihood of some further attempt being made to injure him through Neptune, he determined to guard against such an occurrence.

(Continued overleaf.)



With gritted teeth, Roy hung on tightly.



(Continued from previous page.)

Larry Laird looked at Roy oddly, but did not speak. He was wondering what was in the youngster's mind.

"Larry," said Roy suddenly, "bring Neptune across to his box, and we'll see how he got out."

They moved across the yard, with the crowd of lads following them. A glance sufficed to show that the locks had been unfastened with a key, and not picked or broken. Larry Laird walked Neptune into his box, tethered him, and came out again swinging a bunch of keys.

"It's obvious that the locks have been opened with a key, Master Roy," said the head lad, closing the doors of the box behind him and making to secure them. "I can assure you that no one can get at my keys, for I always carry them upon me. How about yours? If they're not accessible, then how the dickens were the locks opened? They were made specially for us by the village locksmith, and he said that the keys could not be duplicated."

To Roy the sight of Larry Laird's keys confirmed his suspicions of his brother. The youngster had little doubt that it was with his own keys that Neptune's box had been opened. And who other than Clem could have obtained those keys without much trouble? Roy was now convinced that it was indeed his brother who had let out his National candidate that night.

But he did not give tongue to his suspicions. In spite of his failings, Clem was a Carlisle, and Roy, thoughtful youngster that he was, did not wish him to be degraded in the eyes of the stable lads. He passed the matter over.

"Well, whoever it was that let out Neptune, Larry, he'll not have another chance to tamper with the horse," said Roy grimly. "I want you to set a guard in his box until he leaves for Aintree."

And no sooner did the head lad nod his understanding than Roy tramped away towards the Nest. He was feeling more morose than ever at the knowledge of the treacherous act of his brother, and it needed a great effort on his part to suppress the desire to seek Clem out on the spot and to confront him with his perfidy.

The 5th Chapter.

Jake Jennings Plots Anew.

"I SAY, Larry!"

Larry Laird turned from grooming Neptune and touched his cap as Roy Carlisle came striding into the loose box.

It was early morning of the day preceding the Grand National, and Neptune had just come in from his pipe-opener on the Downs. It was Larry Laird's special job to see to the welfare of Roy's National candidate, and this the head lad did in a conscientious manner.

At that time in the morning all the racers in the Carlisles' establishment were usually to be found at their gallops on the Downs. To-day was no exception. Save that Larry Laird had returned with Neptune earlier than usual, the spacious yard was devoid of both horses and stable lads.

Since the night when Neptune had been loosed from his box and a guard set in his quarters no further attempt had been made to "get at" the thoroughbred. Roy had found his keys in their proper place after that nefarious incident, and nothing further was said about the matter.

"You want me, Master Roy?" asked Larry Laird, as the youngster placed an affectionate arm round Neptune's glossy neck.

It was at that moment that, unbeknown to both the head lad and Roy, a figure came creeping along the row of stalls and halted at the side of Box No. 1. It was Jake Jennings who, from the stable lads' quarters, had seen Roy enter the yard. With an evil smile upon his unpossessing countenance Jake flattened himself against the wall and strained his ears in an endeavour to catch what passed between the two inside Neptune's stall.

"I do," answered Roy in reply to Larry's query. "I've changed my plans and decided to travel to Aintree this morning; in fact, I am starting right away. I want to have a good look at the course before the race and acquaint myself with the nature of the obstacles. I don't think there'll be any further attempt made on Neptune, and I

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know I can safely leave things here in your hands. Now, don't forget to see that the horse is dispatched at five o'clock to-morrow morning. I made arrangements with young Bobby Brown yesterday that he should accompany him to the course."

"Very well, Master Roy," said the head lad. "I'll see that everything is O.K. I wish I were coming up to Aintree to see the race myself. Anyhow, good luck to you—the luck of the Carlisles, you know. I certainly believe you stand an excellent chance of victory on Neptune, for he jumps like a panther, and, after all, that is what counts in the National."

He held out his hand, and Roy gripped it warmly, for he had a high regard for his head lad. Without Larry Laird's assistance Roy knew that he would not have made the progress he had since taking to steeple-chasing.

"You can bet I'll do my utmost to break the wretched ill-luck the family has had in the race, old chap," said Roy cheerily. "But I'll tell you this secret. I wish it had been First Time that I was riding to-morrow, for ever since I was a mere kiddie I liked the horse for his name alone. I suppose it suggested to me that he won every race he competed in. So don't be surprised if I send you a wire to dispatch the old chap to Aintree in place of Neptune," he added in boyish fun.

Larry Laird chuckled at that, and Roy, after rubbing Neptune's nose, turned and made for the door of the loose box. As he did so Jake Jennings sprang to life, and, darting along the front of the stalls, he reached the stairs running up to the stable lads' quarters and took shelter there.

And he was only just in time, for no sooner did he disappear from sight than Roy came out into the yard and strode away in the direction of the Nest.

Half an hour later Jake Jennings, watching from a clump of evergreen shrub that bordered the drive of the Nest, saw him come out of the house again, clad in overcoat and cap and carrying a portmanteau. The rascally head lad grinned as the youngster swung past the spot where he was concealed, and no sooner did Roy disappear from view than Jake came out of his hiding-place and went walking up to the door of the Nest at a quick gait.

What he had heard in Neptune's loose box had given Jake Jennings an idea to get square with Roy for that hiding he had suffered some days ago, and the head lad was all eagerness to impart the gist of it to Clem. For Clem, disappointed and chagrined that Neptune had been uninjured when he was freed from his box, was prepared to go to any lengths if only he could make sure that Roy did not succeed in the National.

Clem's Magic Circle was fit and well for the great 'chase at Aintree, but the youngster knew well enough that he was inferior to Neptune. That much had been proved during the schooling of the two animals; for whereas Roy's horse was faultless in his jumping, Magic Circle was apt to catch his heels on the top of an obstacle which reared to the height of five feet, as did some of the National jumps.

Like Neptune, Magic Circle was travelling to Aintree early on the morning of the race, and Clem was going with his candidate. He was, of course, unaware of his brother's arrangements, and did not know that Roy had already left for the scene of the big race.

It therefore came as a surprise to him when, after Mrs. Stiggs had informed him that Jake Jennings wished to see him and the head lad had been shown into the drawing-room of the Nest, Jake told him that his brother had already left for Aintree.

"You say my brother has just this minute gone to Aintree," said Clem, a strange light dancing in his eyes. "Then, by jingo, now's our time to nobble his horse if we can. It was a great pity we failed the other night to injure Neptune. What we should have done was to doctor his feed; that would have made sure of things. But that kind of thing is out of the question now that he is guarded night and day. It's evident that they suspected someone opened Neptune's loose box the other night with intent to injure him, although apparently they don't know whom to lay the blame upon. It was fortunate you managed to get back to your quarters after you opened the gates without being seen. Have you anything to suggest that—"

"I have," cut in Jake Jennings. "That is why I'm here. I've got a real gilt-edged stunt, and it won't fail. Listen!"

And he went on to tell Clem what he had heard pass between Roy and Larry Laird in Neptune's box a while ago. Then followed the head lad's cunning scheme, and Clem's eyes lit up when he had heard it in all its detail.

"That's just the thing," he said in a tone that was strangely vindictive. "It'll teach that little beast of a brother of mine to plot to have me thrown in the National. I mustn't forget to keep a close watch on that chap Mellor to-morrow. I bet he won't get much chance to unshin me in the race."

Jake Jennings grinned at the bitterness of his tone, a bitterness which he himself had cleverly and unscrupulously brought into being by his lying tale about Roy and Sam Mellor. The head lad revelled in the knowledge that the two brothers were now almost bitter enemies, for he knew that while the state of affairs did not worry Clem in the least, Roy was simply eating his heart out, so to speak, over his brother's treatment of him.

"Then shall I go over to Hunstan and see that pal of mine, Master Clement?" asked Jake Jennings servilely.

"Yes," answered Clem promptly. "You say he's going up to Aintree at mid-day? If that's the case, you'd better get along at once or you may miss him. Don't forget to let me know whether it's all right directly you get back, Jake."

He let Jake Jennings out of the house, watched him disappear down the drive, and then went back to the drawing-room. Flinging himself into an armchair before the fire he gave vent to a shrill, hysterical laugh—a laugh which was unpleasant to hear.

"You think you're going to win the National and the family heirloom, do you, Roy, my fine fellow," he muttered. "I say you're not! Just you wait till to-morrow!"

And he laughed again that high, nervous laugh, and rubbed his hands in almost babyish delight.

The 5th Chapter.

"They're Off!"

ROY CARLISLE was in high spirits as he made his way towards the paddock at Aintree to saddle-up in readiness for the Grand National.

The youngster was feeling in no way nervous at the forthcoming ordeal; rather was he keen to be up on Neptune and riding his hardest in the race. The blood of the Carlisles was coursing warmly in his veins, and he was determined to do his utmost in an endeavour to achieve success in the biggest race of the jumping season—a success which was long overdue the Carlisles.

When he had been in the members' stand watching the races preceding the National, Roy had caught sight of his brother on the far side of the structure, and for a moment he was tempted to go to him and endeavour to make friends with him again. But it had suddenly dawned on the youngster that that was useless, for he knew that Clem was still suffering from the effects of that tumble at Bogside, and that while his brother's mind was in its present state he was likely to resent his very presence.

Now with the big race so near at hand Roy had forgotten all about his brother; his every thought was upon the event and what it was likely to bring for him. He knew every inch of the course by now—or thought he did—for no sooner had he arrived on the previous day than he had walked round the complete circuit and had studied the formidable obstacles thoroughly into the bargain. And he had repeated his self-allotted task again that morning.

It was with eager eyes that he looked about him as he went into the paddock for signs of Bobby Brown and Neptune. Some of the thirty-one horses competing in the big race were already saddled, with their jockeys standing by in readiness to go down to the starting-post.

Suddenly Roy's gaze fell upon his brother and Jake Jennings who, even then, were fixing Magic Circle's saddle-girths. His eyes roved away to the left, and, catching sight of little Bobby Brown standing by a heavily-clothed and blinkered animal, he hurried forward with quickened pace.

"Afternoon, Master Roy!" said Bobby cheerily as his young master came up to him. "And the best of luck!"

"Thanks, Bobby!" laughed Roy, and then added carelessly: "Perhaps I'll need all the luck that's going, for I'm number thirteen on the card!"

Bobby Brown's face fell, for he was a superstitious youngster. He had had high hopes of Roy succeeding in the big race, and he had come to Aintree prepared to yell his head off, so to speak, if the youngster should manage to pass the winning-post in the van. But the dread No. 13! That put the lid on it, so Bobby imagined.

"That's caused it, Master Roy!" groaned the stable-lad. "As if you hadn't lessened your chance yourself by—"

He broke off as Roy began unfastening the straps which secured the rugs about his racer, and jumped forward to assist.

"All right, Bobby, I can manage these rugs," said Roy. "Just you get his blinkers off!"

The stable-lad was busy the next moment. Roy, in his excitement, fumbled with the straps, but at last he got them unfastened and stretched out a hand and jerked off the rugs.

"Good heavens! First Time! What the dickens has happened? Why in thunder hasn't Neptune been sent?"

With the blood draining from his face, and jerking the words incoherently, Roy staggered back as his eyes fell upon the thoroughbred before him. And he had every reason to be dumbfounded, for it was indeed First Time and not Neptune that stood there!

In alarm Bobby Brown sprang forward and caught Roy as he reeled back.

"But the wire that you sent last night, Master Roy!" gasped Bobby, in bewilderment. "You distinctly told Larry that you had decided to run First Time and not Neptune!"

"The wire I sent, Larry!" cried Roy, his face white as chalk. "I told him to send First Time instead? I didn't do anything of the kind; I never sent a wire! Good heavens! First Time and not Neptune! So much for my National hopes!"

Dazed by the amazing discovery, Roy stood trembling in every limb. What should he do? What could he do?

It came to him suddenly as he contrived to pull his shattered wits together that he had been the victim of foul play—that somehow or other his brother must have had a telegram sent to Larry Laird informing him that First Time should be sent to Aintree in place of Neptune. If Roy had only cast a glance in the direction of his brother and the crafty Jake Jennings he would have seen from the triumphant looks they shot at him that they had indeed been responsible for First Time's presence.

But Roy was too wrapped up in his misfortune to give thought to Clem and his head lad. To the youngster all hopes that he had held of success in the big race were dashed to the ground. For the past few weeks he had built his hopes around Neptune, and now, at the eleventh hour, the horse was in its stable miles away. And in his place was First Time, a horse that had been entered in the National, but was not reckoned to be in the same class as his stable companion.

For a second or so Roy stood irresolute, then, suddenly, his jaw squared and a fighting light came into his eyes. He was a Carlisle, and the Carlisles had been fighting to attain success in the National for many years. It was his duty to keep up that fight, no matter how long the odds were against him.

"Bobby," he said abruptly. "First Time runs! He has not been scratched from the race, thank goodness! Get him ready at once, whilst I see the stewards and notify them of the change!"

He disappeared in an instant. When he returned Bobby Brown had First Time saddled.

All was now bustle in the paddock. There were certain preliminaries to go through before the horses went down to the post. Another ten minutes and all was ready.

Roy Carlisle smiled ruefully, as, taking off the coat which covered his racing-kit—the youngster's colours were pink jacket with white hoops and blue cap—his eyes rested upon the big figure fourteen which showed clear on First Time's glossy flank. After all, he was not going to ride under the dread figure thirteen, for whereas Neptune had been allotted that number, First Time was No. 14 on the card. But for all the chance he held Roy knew that First Time might just as well have carried that number which is shunned by all superstitious people.

Bobby Brown was very silent as he held First Time's bridle, whilst Roy swung himself into the saddle. And the young stable-lad found himself incapable of uttering the words of encouragement that half-formed on his lips. As the horses began to troop from the paddock, and Roy swung First Time into line with them, Bobby stood there gazing after them with dismay written large on his chubby face. And it was not until several seconds had passed that he managed to pull himself together and go in search of some point of vantage from which to witness the big race.

Meanwhile, Roy had recovered his composure on feeling horseflesh beneath him. The race was the thing now, win or lose, and, after all, if he failed—as assuredly he must—then he would only be yet another

Carlisle to have had his hopes dashed. But the fighting light was still in his eyes, and he was determined to do his best.

As he swung out of the paddock he saw the stretch of the turf sweeping away to right and left of him, with the formidable obstacles dotted here and there. On all sides rose the hoarse shouts of the bookmakers and tipsters. Everywhere Roy glanced it was to see a sea of white, expectant faces. The stands were full to capacity, and there did not appear to be an inch of room anywhere along the whole length of the rails. Never had the youngster seen such crowds as were at Aintree that day to watch the ding-dong struggle for the National.

His eyes swept the number-board as he drew near it. In the frame showed "No. 14, First Time—R. Carlisle," whilst a little above he caught a glimpse of "No. 9, Magic Circle—C. Carlisle." Then he was past, and he set to studying the horses and riders in front of him. He frowned a little as his gaze rested upon Clem, in his scarlet-and-black jacket and white cap, astride the quick-stepping Magic Circle. Then they were at the post.

The din around the course had now risen to crescendo. The fashionable folk in the stands raised their binoculars and focused them on the horses as they got into line. Excitement was at its highest when—

"They're off!"

The cry welled up above the monotonous chant of the bookmakers as the string of thoroughbreds got away to a fairly good start. Almost immediately the favourite, Sunny Rose, ridden by Sam Mellor, jumped into the lead and went bearing down on the first obstacle, with the others thundering behind, their jockeys manœuvring for a clear run.

The first two jumps safely negotiated, it was seen that Sam Mellor held his advantage with Magic Circle a length and a half away, lying second, and Great Guns, close behind, third. Some half a dozen lengths in the rear came the rest of the field, with Roy on First Time in the midst of them, endeavouring to pull clear.

Over the next fence went the leaders and away. But it was at that third jump that there came the first big thrill of the race. The Water Rat pecked badly on landing on the opposite side of the obstacle, and, slipping up, shot his jockey clean out of the saddle. A gasp of alarm welled up from the crowd gathered about the fence, for as the Water Rat fell First Time came leaping over the obstacle dead in his path.

"Good heavens! He'll be killed!"

It looked for a moment as though First Time must land on top of the fallen horse and his sprawling rider; but Roy Carlisle, cool as a veteran, had taken the situation in at a glance, and, tugging on the reins whilst First Time was still in mid-air, he contrived to divert his mount so that it landed inches clear of the obstruction.

Without turning so much as a hair at the narrowness of his escape, Roy had First Time into his stride in a twinkling, and as he dashed on the youngster marvelled at the way in which the thoroughbred was carrying him. From the way the despised horse had taken those first three fences Roy was forced to realise that First Time was not, after all, so very much behind Neptune in the matter of class.

Before he knew where he was Roy found himself but a matter of yards from Becher's Brook. The formidable obstacle loomed up like a solid wall, but Roy went at it as though it did not exist. He knew he was now lying fourth. How far from the leaders he could not tell, for Sunny Rose and Magic Circle and Great Guns had already safely negotiated Becher's Brook.

A tattoo of thudding hoofs sounded above those of First Time, and next second Roy found himself taking Becher's Brook in company with another horse.

Cheers sounded deafeningly in the youngster's ears as First Time landed safely over the brook; but he did not hear the startled gasps which accompanied the fall of Boy Blue, who had jumped the obstacle with him only to crash on the other side.

As he went thundering on, the fighting-light still gleaming in his eyes, Roy glimpsed a horse in front of him. Setting his teeth, he urged First Time on to greater speed. The gallant horse responded, and, clearing the next jump, Roy found himself rapidly overhauling Great Guns, who still held third place.

There were still no signs of Sunny Rose and Magic Circle. Roy knew he could hardly hope to catch them up and pass them. That was something beyond First Time's powers. But the youngster determined to keep on. So long as he finished the course he would be satisfied. That was something to achieve, at any rate.

Another jump was safely leaped, and then, with Valentine's Brook but a little distance ahead, Roy found himself level with Great Guns—past him!

Thrilling to the excitement of it all, Roy set First Time at the brook. With the leap of a panther the splendid thoroughbred rose in the air, cleared the jump, and—

As Roy felt the horse stagger under him as he came down, his hands took a firm grip of the reins and he pulled strongly. For an instant First Time wavered, but under the strong handling of his young jockey he righted himself and shot ahead again.

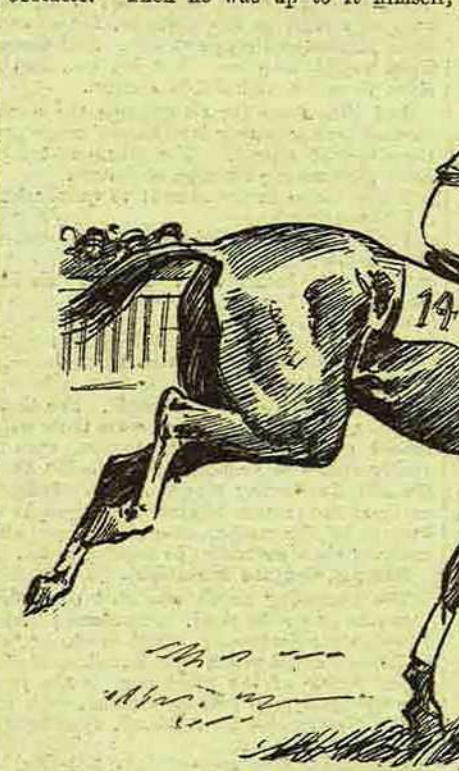
"Well jumped, young 'un!"

Roy just caught the shout of the crowd at the jump as he sped away. With chest thudding against his ribs at the nearness of his escape, he checked First Time's pace so that the animal should recover his legs, so to speak. And as he covered the ground to the next obstacle Roy groaned at the thought that Neptune would never have put a foot wrong at Valentine's Brook as First Time had done.

But he had no time to dwell on that reflection before he was at the next fence.

This time, to Roy's relief, his mount made no mistake. He cleared the jump neatly and landed safely on the other side.

To the cheers of the crowds lining the course on either side, Roy went over fence after fence, and then, as he neared the water-jump, he caught sight of both Sunny Rose and Magic Circle some little distance ahead. He glimpsed them as they took the obstacle. Then he was up to it himself,



Sunny Rose and Magic Circle took the obstacle.

and, to his amazement, First Time, responding gallantly to a pat of his glossy neck, cleared it as cleanly as Neptune would have done in his stead.

Roy's spirits brightened up again. The first circuit of the course was completed, and he was still in the race. And, what was more, First Time was showing a surprising turn of speed on the flat between the obstacles. If only he could negotiate the jumps again, he— But Roy could not bring himself to think of the possibility of success. He was still third, it was true, but what of Sunny Rose and Magic Circle? He had seen they were jumping superbly like the good horses they were.

On and on Roy went, with First Time keeping his feet in surprising fashion. And then, as he cleared the fence before Becher's Brook for a second time, he saw that he had lessened the distance between himself and the leaders.

His hopes rose again, and he urged First Time on to increased speed. Like lightning the splendid creature seemed to cover the ground, and as he saw Sunny Rose leap to Becher's Brook, with Magic Circle but a few inches in the rear, Roy knew he must be but a dozen lengths behind them.

"Come on, old beauty!"

The words broke between Roy's dry lips as Becher's Brook loomed high above him. As if in response to his young master's urging, First Time bunched and soared into the air with the grace of a swallow. Clear of the fence he sprang, and landed safely. And without seeming to check in his stride he shot away.

Roy had a glimpse of a sprawling horse and jockey on the ground as he got away

from Becher's Brook, and, with a feeling of alarm, he wondered whether it was Clem who had come a cropper. The next moment his eyes swept ahead of him, and, with a gasp of relief, he caught sight of the familiar scarlet-and-black jacket and white cap of his brother.

So it was Sam Mellor who had fallen, and Magic Circle was the only other animal in front of him now. The thought urged Roy on to renewed effort, and it was with a little thrill of pride that he realised that the Carlises were in the lead.

He was at loggerheads with Clem, it was true, but of what consequence was that now? Although he had cherished the hope that he himself might succeed in the greatest steeplechase of all, nothing mattered to Roy so long as a Carlisle passed the post in the van. If Clem succeeded, then he would be satisfied. But though he knew that Magic Circle was undoubtedly a better horse than First Time, the youngster was determined, nevertheless, to fight the race out to a finish if it were humanly possible.

And then, as First Time sped on and on, clearing first one obstacle and then another, the dread Valentine's Brook among them, Roy suddenly realised that there was something wrong with Clem's mount. The horse Clem rode was a grey, whereas Magic Circle was pure black.

How this could be accounted for Roy did not know. Little did the youngster dream that when Sam Mellor had taken his toss at Becher's Brook, Magic Circle had also come down, and in falling had shot Clem

excited crowd, but never for a moment did he check the mad rush of First Time.

"Number fourteen! First Time!"

"Come on, Carlisle! Lucky Carlisle!"

"First Time! Carlisle!"

"First Time gets it!"

And First Time did!

Amidst scenes of wild enthusiasm, the gallant horse flashed past the post an easy winner over Cakewalk, who finished second, fifteen lengths to the bad.

The 7th Chapter.

All's Well That Ends Well.

"OH, well done, Master Ends Well! Well done!"

As Roy, dazed and breathless, pulled First Time to a halt, an excited youngster came elbowing a way through the cheering crowds along the course.

With face beaming, little Bobby Brown grasped his young master's hand and squeezed it. Then slipping a length of rope through First Time's bridle and securing it, he led the splendid thoroughbred towards the paddock with jaunty tread. There was no doubt that the young stable lad was proud at the success that Roy had achieved, and he showed it in that chubby face of his.

It took them some little while to get through the press, but no sooner was he in the paddock than Roy dismounted and hurriedly unsaddled First Time. Then, with a quick instruction to Bobby Brown, he hastened to weigh in.

out of the saddle right on to the back of Sunny Rose, who at the time had been scrambling to his feet. And so swift did it happen that Clem, not grasping what had occurred, had righted Sunny Rose and had ridden on.

It was with mixed feelings that Roy realised that Clem was on the wrong horse—that, even so, his brother could still win the National providing his new mount was first past the post and that he himself could do the right weight on his return to the paddock. And then it came to Roy in a flash that in such circumstances Clem could not claim the family heirloom, for in the will it distinctly stated that the race must be won by a horse owned by a Carlisle.

A riot of thoughts surged into the youngster's brain. Would First Time keep his feet and retain his position? How many other competitors were behind his brother and himself, perhaps ready to challenge them?

As he rode on, eyes dancing with excitement, the roar of the crowds ringing in his ears, Roy determined to risk everything in a desperate endeavour to reach the winning-post first.

On and on First Time thundered, jumping superbly, and then, with but one obstacle to negotiate, he drew up level with Clem on the grey horse. Both went at the final fence together, and—

Out of the tail of his eye, Roy saw the grey horse stagger sideways, saw Clem shot clean out of the saddle, then he was away and riding his hardest over the remaining flat of the course.

The winning-post loomed up ahead. On all sides he heard the deafening roar of the

In the excitement of his great achievement—the luck which had at last befallen the Carlises in the Grand National, the youngster did not forget his brother for one moment. He was anxious to know if Clem had taken harm from his toss at the last fence of the race. What if his brother had sustained serious injury? Roy shuddered at the thought.

No sooner had he finished with the officials of the course, than he raced away, intent only on learning what had happened to Clem. As he came out on the course before the stands, and wondered in which direction to look for his brother, his gaze rested upon a figure in jockey's rig, who, supported by two ambulance men, came limping towards him.

"Clem!" he cried, with a gasp of relief.

The next second he went racing forward. Not for a moment did he wonder how his brother would receive him. As a matter of fact, he had clean forgotten that he had ever been other than friendly towards Clem. Straight up to his brother he ran.

"Clem!" he exclaimed anxiously. "Are you all right? You're not—"

He broke off as he saw the bright light in Clem's eyes. Then he remembered that he was estranged from his brother, and— Somehow Clem's expression seemed different—that half-dazed look which had sat his face since that fall at Bogside had vanished, and in its place was one of boyish delight and friendship.

Roy was dumbfounded. Had the shock of this second tumble righted Clem's mind? It must have done—Roy could not account for the remarkable metamorphosis in any

(Continued on page 622.)

Captain Moonlight!

By FRANCIS WARWICK

A powerful romance of the daring
Knights of the Road!



READ THIS FIRST.

DICK TREGELLIS, who narrates his adventures with the daring highwayman, CAPTAIN MOONLIGHT, has had a locket, which proves who he is, stolen from him by JACOB HOLLOW and his son PERCY, who live at Darksley Hall, which was the property of the late Michael Wing, Dick's grandfather. One night when Moonlight and Red Dick—as young Tregellis is called—are out riding on Darksley Moor, they come to a signpost upon which is pinned a sheet of paper offering a reward for the body, dead or alive, of each of them.

The Ambush of the Bristol Mail

A HUNDRED and fifty guineas reward," muttered Captain Moonlight, "for the two of us!"

I read and re-read that fluttering paper pinned to the signpost, and a grim light came into my eyes.

"Fifty guineas for the body, dead or alive, of the highwayman who goes by the name of Red Dick!"

The printed words seemed to stand out from the paper. They held my gaze as a frog is held by the eyes of a snake. Fifty guineas for me, Dick Tregellis! Red Dick! They had got my nickname; Lord Vallasyn had told them that, of course—my old nickname, advertised now about the countryside as the sobriquet of a highwayman! Fifty guineas! And a hundred for Captain Moonlight!

"See the name below, Red Dick?" murmured Moonlight.

"Jacob Hollow!" I breathed, staring at the scrawled signature in the dim light. "So he is the man responsible!"

"Remember, he's Chief Magistrate," put in Moonlight. He laughed dryly. "But I fancy that 'tis not but a sense of his duties that has aroused this fine zeal in Master Hollow! I'll make a guess, Dick, that Jacob Hollow would like nothing better than to see you caught and put safe out of the way."

"But what has he got against me?" I cried.

"Ah, that's just the riddle of it!" laughed Moonlight.

He sat there astride the big grey, running the fingers of his right hand through her splendid mane. His eyes had gone mighty thoughtful. But suddenly his face lit up.

"Powder me bones!" cried he. "What if that's the truth of it?"

"If what is the truth?" I asked.

He glanced at me sharply.

"You are a grandson of Michael Wing, Red Dick. The old man had no son alive when he died. If there had been no will, you would have been heir to Darksley Hall."

"But there was a will," I objected.

"Leaving the hall and all else to Jacob Hollow—so they told me."

Moonlight's dancing eyes seemed to glitter in the twilight.

"So they told you," said he. "But if that will were a true one, why should they have tried to murder you that night, and why should Jacob have stolen from you the locket that proves your identity? And why should Jacob now seem so vastly anxious that you should be captured and hanged for a highwayman? For he knows who you really are—Dick Tregellis, his uncle's grandson; knows that you are not a highwayman, despite that affair of Lord

B. F.—No. 1,294.—March 27th, 1926.

Vallasyn's money-bags! Aye, he knows that. Yet here he offers fifty guineas for you! The old villain! Dick, lad, I begin to smell a rat!"

"What do you mean?" I breathed excitedly. But I fancied I already understood his train of thought.

"The only reason he could have for being so anxious to have you out of his way, went on Moonlight, "would be—as I see it—that you are the rightful heir to Darksley Hall!"

I stared at him with bright, burning eyes.

"But the will?" I cried. "There must have been a will—"

"Wills have been forged before now, Red Dick!"

I drew a quick breath and gazed at him without speaking. My chestnut mare was cropping the grass at the foot of the post. My eyes wandered off again to that fluttering paper.

"The villain!" I breathed at last. "But I vow I'll get that locket back!"

"'Twill be difficult," murmured Moonlight. "But you must, if you are ever to prove your case." He leaned across and let fall a hand upon my shoulder. Steady and friendly it was, and it brought a warm feeling of comradeship. "And in the meantime, Dick?"

I made a bitter gesture towards the printed sheet and a hard laugh broke from me.

"Why, I'm a hunted outlaw now!" I cried. "There's no choice left for me! I'm branded as a highwayman, and a highwayman I must become, I suppose! Ay, let me take to the road with you, Moonlight—"

My words broke off shakily. Captain Moonlight's fingers tightened on my shoulder.

"You mean it?" he whispered. "'Tis a terrible step—as Captain Moonlight should know well!"

"I mean it!" I told him, and laughed in a reckless way.

Reaching out, I tore down the notice and ripped it into a hundred pieces and scattered them down the wind. Then I gripped Moonlight's hand. And so we sealed our pact.

We turned our horses' heads and rode away. The moon was rising now. I was filled with an odd sense of joyousness that quickened my breath and my blood.

A Knight of the Road!

Aye, that I would be! I had been driven to it; for sheer self-defence I would become in very truth the Tobyman for whom fifty guineas reward was offered—Red Dick the highwayman!

"Oh, merry games we'll have on the King's highway!" cried Moonlight gaily.

"The Bath Road shall know Red Dick as well as its old friend Captain Moonlight! We'll lead the Bow Street Runners a joyful dance between us! Heigho!"

And he broke into that wild song of his:

"The old moon shines,
The night wind whines,
The shadowy horsemen are riding by,
A far, faint shot—a distant cry!

Then away!
Merrily down the road,
Over the hills past the gallows dark,
Over the hills till dawn o' day,
Over the hills till we hear the lark!
Over the hills and away!"

I joined in with the song—that song which had ever power to thrill my heart! We broke into a gallop, and ere long we came out upon the broad Bath Road itself.

"Here we are!" laughed Moonlight. "We had meant to avoid it for a while, had we not? But now that you, too, have turned highwayman, we'll have our fling to-night! A fig for the Redbreasts; say I! We'll baptise Red Dick this very night!"

I nodded.

"I'm willing," I told him, with, I fear, an eager voice.

"This way, then," said he.

We turned to the right and rode off down the grass at the edge of the road. After a mile we came to a spot where a huge oak stood a little off the road, and in the shadow of it we halted.

"A favourite spot," whispered Moonlight.

Every inch of road he seemed to know of those twenty miles of it which wound across Darksley Moor. "See those gashes in the bark? That is where some coach's guard blazed at me with his blunderbuss. Stap me, the old oak's full o' lead! All of it lead that was meant to fill Captain Moonlight!"

A tense stillness seemed to have fallen. Silent as ghosts we waited there, and even the expectation of what was to come was not enough to rid my mind entirely of that thrilling idea which Moonlight had put into my head—that I might be the real heir to Darksley Hall, and Jacob Hollow but an impostor!

The idea might be false. But it might be true. It would explain, at any rate, the mystery of the attempt to kill me on the part of the bruiser, Sweet. It would explain, too, the mystery of the locket—why Jacob Hollow should have sought to rob me of it.

I had vowed to get that locket back.

If I could only prove that the Hollows, father and son, had no right to the Hall! What a triumph that would be! I all but hugged myself at the thought, far enough from fulfilment though it was. And Moonlight would help me. For he, too, had a score to settle with Jacob Hollow.

And then from far away came the sound we had been listening for—horses' hoofs and the whirl of wheels. The gleam of lamps came glimmering through the murk.

Every nerve in me seemed to quiver like a fiddle-string.

The voice of Moonlight came softly out of the shadow:

"We're in luck's way! I fancy 'tis the Bristol mail!"

Buck Molladaw.

THE Bristol mail!

I thrilled at the words. For those modern mail-coaches, with their well-armed guards and racing horses, were a vastly different proposition to tackle than the old, lumbering stage-coaches. Indeed, many of the smaller highwaymen thought it best to let the mail-coaches well alone, and confined their activities to smaller game.

But not Captain Moonlight.

The oncoming coach was still some distance away up the road. Thundering along through the darkness it came, horses at full gallop. I could picture the hunched, many-caped figure of the coachman on the box, the watchful guard seated behind, with his great blunderbuss at full-cock, eyes keenly

alert for the merest glimpse of any lurking figures such as us.

"Quick!" whispered Moonlight. "I have a plan! We don't want to be peppered full of lead like plums in a pudding!"

"What do you want me to do?" I muttered.

"Get out into the road," he said coolly. "Ride along and let the coach overtake you. Do nothing suspicious, or the guard will let fly at you in a moment; he'll have his eye on you as soon as you are noticed. Wait till you hear me cry out to you. Then turn and point your pistols at the coachman and make him halt."

I nodded. Just what his plan was I did not know, and there was no time to ask for more explanation. There was risk in plenty in my part of the task, but I knew I could trust Moonlight. In another moment I had urged my mare out into the road and was trotting off, with the coach drawing swiftly nearer at my back.

But Moonlight's plan was simple enough. The guard had seen me by the time the coach reached the oak, and so intent upon me were his suspicious eyes that he never noticed the shadowy figure of Moonlight lurking there. The moment the coach was by, Moonlight slipped out after it.

They were overtaking me swiftly; scarce a dozen yards separated me from the leading pair of horses. The guard, his blunderbuss half trained upon me, wondering if I was in reality the innocent traveller I appeared, nearly jumped from his skin a moment later at a cool voice from just behind him:

"Hands up! Quick, man!"

The guard gave a startled oath and swung round, with a white face. He cried out at sight of Moonlight cantering easily along behind him, a big pistol raised in one hand. In his excitement, he pressed the trigger of the blunderbuss, and, with a roar, it discharged into the sky. But with Moonlight close behind, the guard knew that he was powerless. The weapon crashed over into the road and the man raised his shaking arms above his head.

At the same moment I heard Moonlight's call, and round I swung in my saddle and presented the two great horse-pistols from my holsters full at the head of the coachman.

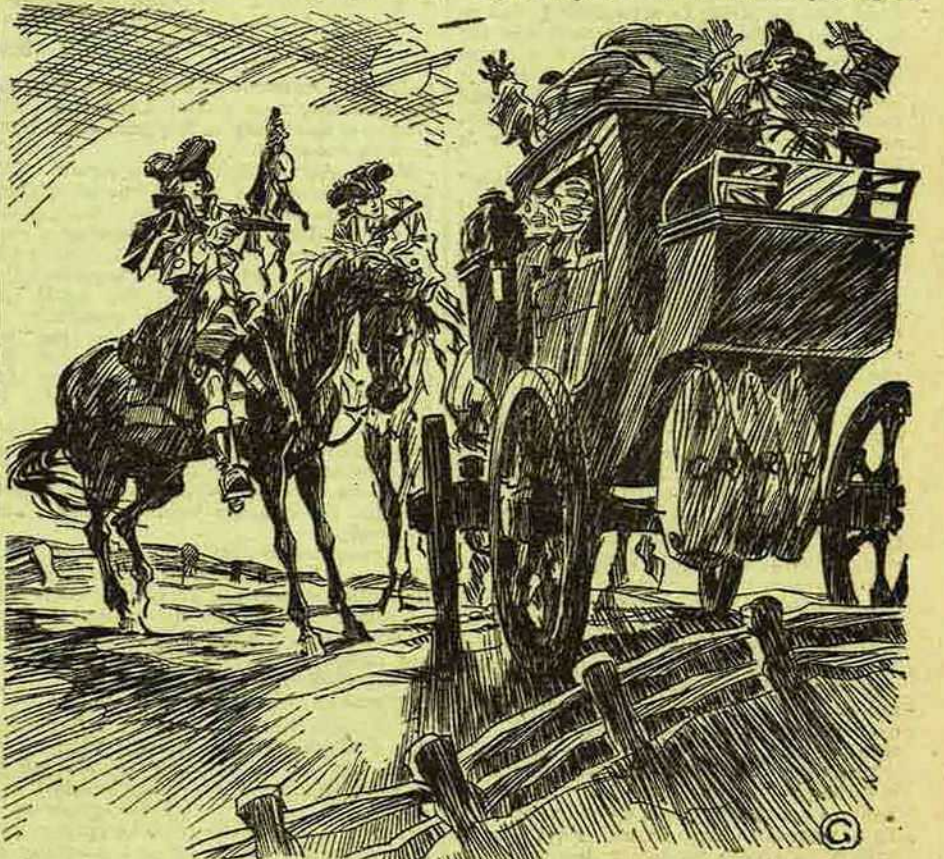
"Stand and deliver!"

For the first time I had uttered those dread words and the effect was startling.

The coachman, his muffled face gone grey and scared, dragged on the reins. The leading horses reared; the coach swayed alarmingly. In a moment the horses were in a tangle across the road and the coach had swung broadside on. Moonlight came riding into view from behind it.

"Splendid!" he laughed at me, as he halted by the coach's door, from which a couple of comical, startled faces were already protruding.

He dropped the reins, and Polly, the big grey, stood motionless as a statue. Moonlight swept off his hat to the passengers,



"Good-evening, gentlemen! I have but stopped you to ask if, by chance, any one of you would care to purchase this fine hare?"

who goggled at him, and then I saw that across his holsters he carried a fine hare.

He had snatched it out of the boot of the coach a moment before, and now he held it high for all to see, while in his right hand he gripped his pistol.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" cried Captain Moonlight. "Pardon this interruption of your journey, I beg! I have but stopped you to ask if, by chance, any one of you would care to purchase this fine hare?"

The coachman and the disarmed guard and the passengers within the coach—there were four passengers, all men—gaped at him as though he were mad.

"Come, come!" said Moonlight coaxingly. "'Tis a fine hare! How much d'ye offer?"

One of the men with his head at the window wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Sir," said he in a thick voice, "I am vastly obliged, but I—I—I cannot abide the flavour of game."

"Nor I," muttered a second shakily. "My doctor has forbidden me hare, I swear!"

The face of Captain Moonlight went mighty grim, though I could see that his eyes were dancing with amusement. And mighty comical it was to see those goggling faces and hear each of the four passengers vow that hare was poison to him.

"This will not do!" cried Moonlight angrily. "You shall buy my hare! The sooner we fix a price, gentlemen, the better!"

He waved his pistol, and I saw the four faces within the coach shrink back. Where I sat astride my chestnut at the edge of the road, pivoting the coachman and the guard with my pistols, I had a grand view of all that comical play.

The four passengers conferred a few moments, and then one held out a tiny purse.

"We'll buy your hare, sir," said he in a stammer. "Here's ten guineas for it."

Moonlight laughed.

"Ten guineas for so fine a hare? An insult—both to me and the hare!"

The passengers conferred again. Their spokesman at length held out a second purse beside the first.

"Twenty-five guineas," he bleated.

"I might as well give it you!" cried Captain Moonlight. "Come—a hundred guineas for the hare, and cheap at the price!"

Though that was only twenty-five guineas for each of them, and they must have known that we were letting them off lightly, it needed a further threatening wave of Moonlight's pistol ere they would hand out the money.

Moonlight tossed two of the purses across to me, pocketing the other two himself. Then he handed in the hare with great gravity, and, with a doffing of our hats, we glistered away and left them to shake their fists after us and disentangle the horses from the traces.

Dawn found us dismounting outside the Black Goose Inn.

And so I burnt my boats!

For a week we haunted the Bath Road, and many a thrill we had. By nights, the great highway. By day, the shelter of the Black Goose Inn. A life of thrills, if ever there was one.

My conscience scarce pricked me, despite it all. Had I—or Moonlight, either, for that matter—taken to the road wantonly, it would have been a very different state of things, with no jot of excuse to offer for our deeds. But, as it was, we had been driven to it, each in his different way. Outlaws both, we had to live thus by our wits or perish.

And of one thing we were particular—never did we relieve a man of more than it was obvious he could well afford to lose.

Ay, a life of thrills! And in the excitement of it I even forgot for a while my resolve to regain the locket that had been stolen from me at Darksley Hall.

But towards the end of the week something happened to remind me.

We had been lying, dismounted, in a little copse a hundred yards from the road, with the two mares cropping the grass close by. We had ridden many a mile that night, and were resting, talking in quiet tones of the rumour that had come to us at the Black Goose that the posse of Bow Street Runners had returned to Darksley Moor as a result of our wild doings during the week.

Suddenly Moonlight raised his head.

"What's that?" he murmured.

I listened.

"There's a carriage coming this way," I said quickly. "Shall we hold it?"

"Ay!" said he, springing to his feet and calling to his mare. "With all these tales of the Redbreasts coming to harry us off the road, let's make hay while the sun shines, Dick!"



"You would take the hand of Captain Moonlight, the highwayman?"

A vastly smart barouche we saw it to be as it drew nearer in the light of the moon that filtered down upon the road betwixt the trees. Painted light blue it was, and drawn by two snow-white horses. I laughed.

"Someone who should be well able to pay toll for his passage," I muttered, as we waited at the edge of the road, mounted and hidden in the trees.

"There's a man of fashion seated inside of it, I swear!" agreed Moonlight.

He drew his pistols and rode out coolly into the middle of the road. Presenting the pistols, he ordered the coachman to stand in pleasant tones enough.

I, too, rode out into the path of the light-blue barouche. The man on the box obeyed mighty promptly. Next moment the window of that smart carriage came down with a crash and a cold, haughty face appeared. The sight of two men, masked and armed, seemed in no whit to take away from the gentleman his self-possession. But from me there broke a startled gasp.

For 'twas none other than Sir Maurice Melladew, the Corinthian, the man whom I had seen at Darksley Hall.

And then I gave another gasp to see the effect Melladew's presence had upon my comrade.

Moonlight had seemed to lurch back in his saddle as from a blow.

"Great powers!" he cried hoarsely. He swung round upon me. "Away, away! Let him pass!"

As he spoke, he slipped his pistols into their holsters and turned the mare. Melladew started, and his eyes gleamed on Moonlight like a hawk's.

"Egad!" gasped he. "Surely I know that voice! It is! It is! I'll wager a fortune that it is! It's my old friend—"

And then, when he was just about to say the name that would tell me who Moonlight really was, my comrade swung round again upon the baronet and flung up his hand. His voice cut in upon Melladew's. There was a strange tremor in it.

"Stop!" he shouted. "No names, Maurice!"

He whipped off his mask, and jumped to earth. Sir Maurice Melladew flung open the door of the baronet and ran to meet him. The coachman and I watched the scene with amazed eyes. The hands of the two men gripped.

"So you recognised my voice!" breathed Moonlight. "I had hoped to get away unknown! You! Fate plays strange pranks upon us." And then his face flushed crimson, and he stepped back a pace. "You would take the hand of Captain Moonlight, the highwayman?" he muttered.

"What?" cried Sir Maurice. "Moonlight! You are Captain Moonlight?"

Suddenly he slapped his knee and broke into a peal of laughter. "Egad, it beats all! To think that you are Captain Moonlight! But I'd guessed you'd taken to the road. What else could you do? But, stop me, I never believed you cheated at cards! An' to think o' you holding up your old friend, Buck Melladew! Egad—"

And again he broke into a peal of rich laughter.

All this while I had been too amazed to stir a finger. But now Moonlight called to me, and I jumped from my mare and slipped off the mask. Sir Maurice uttered a sharp ejaculation when he saw my face.

"This is all very strange," said he.

He raised his glass to his eye.

"Egad," he drawled with laughing eyes, "'tis the youngster whom Hollow was badgering up at the Hall! If I'd only known at the time that he was a friend o' yours, C—"

"No names!" cried Moonlight, laughing. "I'm trying to forget the old days, Maurice," he went on gravely. "Remember, I'm Captain Moonlight now, and I have no other name."

"Buck" Melladew took my hand. Through the corner of my eye I saw his coachman rub his eyes. The fellow must have been wondering if 'twas all a dream to see his master chatting in the friendliest manner possible with the two highwaymen who a moment ago had ordered him to "stand and deliver!"

"'Twas rare, the way you escaped from the Hall!" drawled the baronet, producing a snuffbox, which he offered to us both before taking a pinch himself. "I vow I was never more amused in all my life than I was when young Percy Hollow was found trussed up in the place of your young friend here—er—Moonlight," he went on.

"But how was it you were at the Hall?" asked Moonlight.

I had not happened to mention Melladew's presence there to Moonlight after my escape from Darksley Hall. But now he had learnt of it, I could see it puzzled him.

"Not for friendship's sake!" drawled Buck Melladew. "I cannot stand the man, an' never could, as you know. But he had some smart bits of blood in his stables that I'd heard he was willing to part with, so I went there to do business. Bought a team of Cleveland bays, and let myself in for something else that I had not bargained for!"

"What was that?" asked Moonlight.

"A little wager with Jacob!" said Sir Maurice, in his lazy, drawling way. "A cool two thousand at stake for me. I've got to find some young fellow who knows how to use his fists some time during the next few weeks! It's two to one in thous, on my producing a boy under twenty to give that man of his, Sweet, the pugilist, a tousing."

I laughed.

"I know," I told them. "I heard the wager made. I was outside the door."

"The dickens you were!" cried Sir Maurice, and chuckled. "So that was when you were escaping, eh? Never heard a sound o' you!" His face, which in repose was somewhat cold and haughty, was now beaming like a schoolboy's. "I still can't believe my eyes!" he muttered. "It's like a miracle! We must have a long talk—"

"But we can't talk here!" put in Moonlight. He, on the other hand, seemed strangely sobered by this meeting with a friend from the past.

"Then where can we have privacy?" demanded Sir Maurice.

Moonlight nodded down the road.

"There lies a village yonder, a place called Letchly," said he. "Will you come there?"

"I'll come anywhere!" cried the Corinthian cheerily. "So long as I can feast my eyes on you again after all this deuced time! Lead the way, and I'll follow."

We mounted, and he went back to his sky-blue carriage.

"Follow these gentlemen, Charles," said he.

The man nodded and touched his hat. I saw that he was staring at Moonlight a trifle oddly.

"Can we trust that man? Is it safe to take the risk?" I muttered.

"What, the coachman?" answered Moonlight. "He's safe, evidently, or Sir Maurice would not be trusting him."

And so we set off at a brisk pace for Letchly. When we arrived there, we knocked up the landlord of the Stag Inn, and under an assumed name, Buck Melladew ordered a couple of rooms for the night—or what was left of it!

The advent of a patron so obviously distinguished, even in the middle of the night, worked wonders. Ere long, we three were seated round a roaring fire in an upper room at the back of the inn.

But after a while I felt that these two would like to be alone together, and, dog-weary as I was, I was not sorry to retire to the adjoining room and stretch myself upon the bed. Almost at once I was asleep.

But I did not sleep long. The sound of a great commotion below suddenly awakened me, and next thing I knew, Moonlight and Sir Maurice were in the room. I heard Melladew's voice, a furious mutter—

"The dog!" he kept repeating. "The cowardly dog! I'd have trusted that fellow Charles anywhere! But it's the blood-money he's after! The dog!"

Moonlight had gripped my shoulder in the darkness. I was on my feet in a moment. From somewhere below came the sound of tramping feet, and in the yard I could hear the sound of restless horses.

"What is it?" I stammered. "The coachman—has he betrayed us, d'you say?"

"Yes," came the murmuring voice of Moonlight. "And the Bow Street Runners are here!"

Tracked Down!

THE Stag Inn was echoing to the sound of booted feet as they came hurrying up the stairs. Captain Moonlight slipped across and shot the bolt of the door.

"We've got to get out of this!" exclaimed Sir Maurice grimly.

"You must get out of it, Maurice, anyway," muttered Moonlight. "I would never do to be found closeted with two notorious highwaymen—and if your true identity became known, it might be the ruin of you!"

"Twaddle!" answered Sir Maurice very decidedly. "D'you think I'd see my old friend taken, an' hang'd? I'm in with you to-night—egad, yes!"

(Continued overleaf.)



'Twas so obvious that he meant what he said that Moonlight wasted no time in arguing.

"Then do as I say," said he. "The window and the roof—that's our one hope if we are to save ourselves from being caught like rats in a trap. They'll be watching the yard, but we should be able to gain the roof safe enough in the darkness. But there's no time to lose!"

Even as he spoke a thunderous knock upon the door echoed through the low room.

'Twas followed by a bellowing voice, which I recognised as that of the man Harper, the captain of the Runners, who had been hunting Moonlight before—the man whom Tom Bayes had drubbed so magnificently at the forge.

"Open, in the name of King George!" Moonlight flung up the window.

The low eaves projected far over it, and 'twould be a simple matter to swing ourselves out and then scramble up on to the roof.

"You first, Dick," whispered Moonlight. I obeyed, and Sir Maurice followed me as I hauled myself up. Moonlight came last of all. A minute later the three of us were crouching in the shadowy side of the gable, listening to the beating on the door of the room below.

"How now, Moonlight?" drawled Buck Melladew.

I noticed how easily he had fallen into the way of calling my comrade by that name.

"We must get to earth," murmured Captain Moonlight. "They'll beat that door in, and then they'll search the roof. We

must get to earth—and then for a hiding-place! There's a splendid one close at hand—Martin's forge!"

"Lead the way," said Buck Melladew coolly. "Pon my soul, I'm sorry for that fellow Charles if ever I lay hands upon him! The treacherous rascal! I shall never forgive myself for this, Moonlight! 'Tis all my fault for trusting the rogue!"

"The best way to repay our little debt to Charles will be to ensure his not carrying that hundred and fifty guineas!" laughed Moonlight softly.

He rose into a crouching position, and with us at his heels he hurried along the edge of the roof.

An instinct he seemed to have for such things! Ere ten minutes were up he had led us safely over the dark gables of the Stag Inn, down a rough stone wall into a chicken-run, over what seemed nigh a dozen more walls, and so into the main village street three hundred yards from the inn.

"Now for the forge!" he whispered, with a low, merry laugh. All his high spirits seemed to have come back to him with a rush, now that the spice of danger had flavoured things. "Friend Martin and young Tom will be only too glad to hide us for a while."

"Good!" muttered Melladew, in his languid way. "He raised his glass elegantly to his eye and glanced from one to the other of us. "Egad! What scarecrows we appear after those infernal walls o' yours!"

I could not help but laugh at his comical dismay.

"You'll never make a Tobyman!" laughed Moonlight. "This is nothing, is it, Dick? But see here, Maurice—'tis better for you to hide alone! By making known your identity you could spin some tale to satisfy the Redbreasts easily enough, if by yourself. But with us, you are done for if discovered. We'll lead you to the forge, and then Dick and I will take to the moor—"

"You will not!" said Sir Maurice stubbornly. "Stick together we must. I tell you I am in this to the end!"

All this while we had been hurrying through the shadows, making for the forge. It was all in darkness when we reached it, but a pebble at a certain

window soon brought the bearded face of the smith peering down at us.

"Who's there?"

And at the answer, "Captain Moonlight!" a door was opened to us in another minute, and we were safe inside the forge.

"Come upstairs, masters," whispered the voice of Tom Bayes through the darkness. We groped our way after him.

'Twas not the first time that Moonlight had sought the shelter of old Martin and his nephew. They asked no questions, but led us straight to a little room under the roof, lit by a skylight only, so that the light of our candles could not be seen from outside. They brewed us hot drinks, which were mighty welcome. Buck Melladew clapped Tom upon the shoulder.

"Good lad!" said he. "I thank you!" He raised his glass to his eye and stared in an admiring way at the young smith's great shoulders and muscular frame. "Stap me, you ought to take to the prize-ring!"

Tom Bayes flushed.

"I'd like to, sir; but I cannot leave the forge!"

"Have you ever had a go with any of the fancy?" asked Sir Maurice.

"I sparred with Oak Oliver once, sir."

"An' how did ye fare?"

"Well enough, sir," he said.

"An' what does that mean?" demanded the Corinthian.

"Well, sir, I put him down twice, though I was down more times myself."

"You downed Oak Oliver twice?" cried Sir Maurice, with gleaming eyes. He swung round upon Moonlight and myself. "Egad, here's the man for my money! Properly trained, this lad should be able to give Sweet a hiding! If this boy were my nomination, my two thousand guineas should have a sporting chance!"

Tom Bayes was looking mystified.

"How do you mean, sir, if I may ask?" he inquired.

"'Tis a wager," explained Sir Maurice. "I've bet Master Jacob Hollow, of Darksley Hall, two to one in thous that I'll find a man—"

His words snapped off.

"What's that?" he muttered.

We all listened. Again it came—a heavy knocking on a door below.

Quick footsteps sounded outside the little room. The bearded face of Martin, the smith, appeared agitated.

"There's someone knocking below!" he cried.

"Hush!" said Moonlight. "Hark!"

Again the beating on the door and a muffled voice:

"Open, in the name of King George!"

Tom Bayes drew a deep breath.

Once again the command, muffled and indistinct:

"Open! Open, in the name of King George!"

"Tracked!" muttered Sir Maurice Melladew, and shrugged his big shoulders. He took out his gold snuffbox and took a pinch of snuff. "Tracked!"

"Ay!" I whispered hoarsely. "They've followed us! They've tracked us from the inn! Oh, they're more clever than we thought them to be!"

In silence we five stood listening—listening with set faces to the knocking on the outer door.

That the men below would by now have spread around the forge we all realised. Surrounded! Tracked down and surrounded by the Bow Street Runners!

(Will Captain Moonlight and his comrades be captured by the Bow Street Runners, or will they succeed in making their escape from the forge? Whatever you do, don't miss next Monday's long instalment of this powerful romance!)

THE LUCK OF THE CARLISLES!

(Continued from page 619.)

other way. And then he was assured, for, next second, he found Clem's hand outstretched towards him.

"Well done, Roy!" cried Clem delightedly. "I've heard you did the trick. Thank goodness the Carlises have bagged the National at last. And you've collared the giddy family heirloom into the bargain. Wonderful, old chap, isn't it?"

Roy was too amazed to speak. With a lump in his throat, he gripped his brother's hand warmly.

To the younger Carlisle there was no doubt that Clem was indeed his old self again; but Roy could not help wondering whether his brother remembered anything of what had happened since that day at the Bogside meeting. He decided to approach Clem on the matter at the first opportunity, and so set his mind at rest.

"But you haven't answered my question yet, Clem," said Roy, when he found his voice at last. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Right as rain, old scout," replied his brother.

Roy ascertained that, barring a strained leg, Clem felt fit enough. But to make sure, the youngster persuaded him to see the course doctor. This Clem did, and the medico announced that he had indeed suffered no other harm.

"So that's that, Roy, old boy," said Clem, as they left the doctor's room. "And now for home with the honours thick upon you!"

It was in high spirits that Roy and Clem returned south together some hour or so later. On the same train by which they travelled went First Time, winner of the National, and Magic Circle, in charge of Bobby Brown and Jake Jennings. The latter was in a towering rage at the success achieved by Roy, and he was already seeking another way in which to injure the youngster. But little did the rascal dream what was in store for him at the Nest, for, as yet, he was unaware of the sudden change which had come over Clem Carlisle.

It was whilst in the compartment of the train which had been reserved for the two brothers that Roy broached the subject of Clem's strange conduct of the last few days. For some little while Clem struggled to bring to mind what had occurred since his tumble in the Ayrshire Chase. Then, of a sudden, he remembered that Jake Jennings had had a telegram sent to Larry Laird the previous day informing him that First Time should be sent to Aintree in place of Neptune. And the thought that that wire had borne his brother's name caused him to redden.

Shame-faced, Clem told Roy of that scheme proposed by his head lad.

"Why, Roy," he said suddenly, "I'm certain First Time left the Nest for Aintree and not Neptune. Was it on that horse that you won?"

He did not know that his brother had ridden First Time in the National; all that the ambulance men had told him when they picked him up after his fall was that his brother had won the big event.

Roy smiled.

"Yes," he said quietly. "I won it on First Time. But don't distress yourself about what's happened, Clem. You've been jolly ill, and I'm sure you did not realise what you did to spoil my National prospects. It is Jennings who's to blame for that, for he obviously took advantage of your condition of health to set you against me."

Clem did not seem to remember anything about the night Neptune was freed from his box, for he did not mention the matter, and Roy decided not to bring it up. The younger Carlisle realised that the less said about the whole wretched affair, the better.

When they got back to the Nest, Clem, at Roy's suggestion, called Jake Jennings to the house, and, much to that rascal's astonishment, paid him a month's salary in lieu of notice, and politely informed him that he had no further use of his services. And Jake went away hurriedly, for by this time he had heard that Clem had completely recovered his normal senses and that the split between he and his brother was now healed. Perhaps the glinting light in Clem's eyes helped to hasten his departure.

The reason why Larry Laird was deceived by the spurious wire was easily accounted for. Roy had told his head lad just before he left for Aintree on the eve of the National not to be surprised if he sent him a wire to despatch First Time in place of Neptune, and although Larry had then believed him to be joking, when the telegram had arrived, he instantly thought that, after all, Roy had meant what he had said.

The family heirloom duly passed into Roy's hands, and, to commemorate the youngster's great success in the National, a dinner was given in the Nest to all hands.

After the sumptuous repast, Clem, his old bright self once more, stood up at the table where he sat next his brother, and toasted Roy in foaming ginger-beer.

"To my brother's grand achievement, boys," was all he said. "And to the luck of the Carlises!"

And the stable lads raised their glasses and drank long and deep.

THE END.

(Next Monday's Special Treat—"Goalkeeper and Acrobat!" A magnificent 15,000-word complete story of football and circus life. You'll enjoy it no end, chums!)

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers upon any subject. Address your letters to: Editor, "Boys' Friend," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

IN PRAISE OF "CAPTAIN MOONLIGHT!"

Letters reach me from all over the country singing the praises of Francis Warwick's grand romance of Captain Moonlight and Red Dick. But I know that there are still some of you who haven't as yet written and told me what you think of the yarn. Now, don't forget to drop me a line, and do this right away, for I am always anxious to know whether my chums like the stories I am giving them. And while you are about it, you might also let me know what you think of the other tales in this new number of your favourite paper.

FOR NEXT MONDAY.

There is bound to be a bigger rush than ever for the next issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. Why? Simply because the yarns in the forthcoming number go one better than this week's. First in the programme is another exciting instalment of "Captain Moonlight!" All is not well for the gallant Knight of the Road and his doughty companions. The Bow Street Runners have got them into a very tight corner, and, what is more, the Redbreasts are determined to get them at any cost. But whether they succeed in capturing Moonlight and his comrades, next Monday alone will tell. Many thousands of readers have been asking me for a story of the sawdust ring, and at last I have been able to grant this request. Next Monday's special 15,000-word story is entitled "Goalkeeper and Acrobat!" This tale of football and circus life is chock full of thrills and excitement, and, if I know anything, it is going to please you all. Another treat on the bill is "Garage Jim's Star Turn!" As you all know, Jim Fryer has always been a plucky youngster, but on Monday next he will be found doing a daring stunt that will positively make you catch your breath and grip the arms of your chair! You'll vote that Jim is indeed a lad of sterling worth when you have read Alfred Edgar's latest and best yarn. And what about Rookwood? Owen Conquest will be well to the fore next week with "Friends Again!" There is really no need for me to give you an idea of the theme of this tip-top story of Jimmy Silver & Co. The title speaks for itself, so I will leave it at that, chums.

GOOD ADVICE FROM "GOALIE."

In our next number, "Goalie" has another B. F.—No. 1,294.—March 27th, 1926.

chat of special interest to all footer "fans." His Football News and Gossip is a feature of the BOYS' FRIEND which is appreciated far and wide, and much useful advice has our expert been able to give to many of my readers. One youngster especially is indebted to "Goalie" for the tips he has given him. The lad in question is S. Moore, of Nottingham, who says that the reason why he has proved such a success at inside-right for his local team is because of the useful advice "Goalie" sent him through the post.

A SURPRISE!

It is this: Look out for a great new programme of stories in a few weeks' time. One tale especially which will delight all readers is a magnificent school serial written by a new author to the BOYS' FRIEND. It is simply great, chums; so much so that you will be telling all your pals to read it, too, by the time you have finished the first instalment. Don't forget! Keep on the watch for the special new programme of first-rate yarns in the BOYS' FRIEND.

A GOOD HOBBY!

Although the days are now beginning to draw out and most of you will favour an extra hour or so on the playing fields, there are many readers of the BOYS' FRIEND who wish to pursue some hobby which, besides keeping them busy, will interest them. Now, fretwork is a hobby that has a great appeal to boys, and, in addition, it is quite easy to do. A fretwork outfit is not very expensive and a lot of useful things can be made quite cheaply. You can get an outfit, together with the necessary 3-ply wood and designs of letter racks, match-box stands, and even bookcases at almost any toy or ironmongers' stores, and if you are keen on the hobby you will soon discover that you can turn out articles that your parents will be proud to put about the home. But don't overdo it—that is to say, don't wish to stay up late to finish off a certain pretty piece of work. It is far wiser to get up an hour earlier in the morning and carry on with the job before you go to school. You'll be much fresher then, and you will do the work better.

Your Editor.



FROM GARAGE HACK TO RACING CAR!

By
ALFRED EDGAR

Another fascinating tale of young Garage Jim!

The 1st Chapter. A Surprise for Jim.

"ANYBODY about?" Standing by the bench in the garage, Jim started as the call came to his ears from the wide doorway. He turned, to see a man silhouetted against the sunlit roadway behind.

"I say, can you spare a minute?" the man called as he saw Jim. The boy laid down the carburettor jet he had been cleaning, and as he crossed the concrete floor he caught sight of the car that stood outside the garage, from which the man had alighted. It was a racing Fiat, a low, streamlined machine with a body that blazed vivid red in the sunshine.

Jim looked at the owner curiously; he was tall and brown and lean. His eyebrows were bushy, and the eyes beneath them were a lightish blue, very straight-looking and keen. His hands, Jim saw, were grimed with oil; there were scars on his fingers—scars made by tools.

"I wondered if I might put my machine up here for a few nights," he said. Jim glanced at the Fiat.

"Jolly glad to have it!" he exclaimed. "Shove it in for as long as you like," and his eyes glowed at the thought of having that wonderful machine on his hands; it could do a hundred and twenty miles an hour!

"Thanks," said the man. "I'll want to work on her—tune her up a little, and so forth. I'm running in the races down at Sandy Beach next Saturday and—"

"I'll give you a hand, if I can be of any help," Jim said quickly.

"Good! My name is Norris and—"

"Norris!" Jim exclaimed. "Not Jordan Norris?"

The man smiled slowly, and nodded. Jim gasped. Jordan Norris was one of the most famous speedmen in England—and he was putting one of his machines up in Tinkler's Garage!

"I brought the Fiat over here because I didn't want to stop near Sandy Beach," Norris told him. "As a matter of fact, I'm having a little private speed duel with a man on Saturday, and I wanted to get somewhere where I could work quietly."

Jim's rugged face lit up as the speedman spoke.

"Proud to have your machine in here, sir!" Jim said. "I'll help you push it in!"

A minute later, and he was shoving on the wedge-shaped tail of the racing car, pushing it until it stood, red and glowing, in the centre of the shady garage. The speedman could see that Jim was interested; he lifted the engine cover and let Jim feast his eyes on the smooth lines of the high-speed power unit that was disclosed.

Before the car had been in the place ten minutes, Jim was sitting in the driver's seat and handling the controls—peering over the top of the cord-bound steering wheel and through the wire-mesh that guarded the windshield.

"I'll let you drive her before I go," Norris promised him. "That's if you can spare the time to come and—"

"I'll make time!" Jim assured him. The speedman glanced around the garage; suddenly he walked across to where Jim's old Renault stood in the corner, with its high, dented body and scratched paint work.

"This is an old stager, isn't it?" he exclaimed; he stepped back, and stood frowning at the machine. "She looks familiar to me, somehow," he said. "I'll—"

He lifted the engine cover, and stood peering at the machine. Jim heard him mutter half excitedly as he bent lower and thrust the bonnet higher. "Something wrong?" asked Jim, as he moved to his side. He tried to keep the old Renault in good condition, and he didn't like to think that the speedman might have found something wrong.

Mr. Norris swung round on him.

something very like pain showed in his eyes. "Hack work and towing! You don't know where the car came from originally, then?"

"No idea," answered Jim. "She hadn't a body when I bought her; the one that she's got now came off a Wolsey. But she's a good car, and I—"

"A good car—she ought to be!" Mr. Norris looked at Jim for a moment or so, then he added: "This Renault's a racing machine—I drove her in the Grand Prix at Lyons fifteen years ago!"

"Drove her—she's a racing machine!" Jim gasped. "My old Renault a racing machine!" He stared at the speedman in blank amazement. He knew that, even as she stood, the Renault would touch seventy miles an hour. With a bit of attention to the engine, there was no telling what she would do!

"The engine looks as though it's in pretty good condition," Mr. Norris said. "If she had a speed body on her, she could give a few of the best a good run for their money. How does she run?"

"Sound as a bell!" Jim answered. "A racing machine, eh? I can hardly believe it!"

He grinned as he gazed at the battered old car. What would Smarty and the rest say when they heard about it?

"You're not kidding me?" he asked Mr. Norris doubtfully.

"Kidding you? I should say not! You look at the off-side of the gear box and you'll find a deep scratch running from top to—"

"That's right!" Jim cut in. "It runs right down one side. I've often wondered what made it?"

"That was through an accident at the works," said Mr. Norris. "I could tell you a dozen marks like that on the car, and how she got 'em! It's my old bus all right! You must let me give her a run over the moor just for old time's sake!"

Jim said that he would be only too pleased, and as he spoke he noticed that a small group had gathered in the garage doorway. Bob Smart, Nobby Lee, and three or four others were there, all staring at the low, red shape of the speedman's Fiat. Jim went across to them.

"Smarty, what d'you think! The old Renault's really a racing car!"

"Get out!" said Smarty. "She can go all right—but she don't look a bit like this gent's Fiat!"

"I know she doesn't, but that's only because she's got the wrong body on!" Jim told him. "Come and look!"

They all swarmed over to the machine. Mr. Norris joined them, and in no time at all he was not only backing up what Jim had said, but he was telling them of the great race in which the old Renault had run. Presently, he left to book a room at the Rayley Hotel, leaving his Fiat in Jim's care. When he had gone, Smarty exclaimed:

"If the Renault's a racing car, you can't use it for messing about on and—"

"You'll have to race with it!" Nobby Lee cut in. "What about taking the old body off an' puttin' a new one on? And—"

He broke off; then caught Jim's arm. "What about them races over at Sandy Beach? Mr. Norris goin' in for 'em—why don't you race the old Renault? I'll come as your mechanic."

"You won't—I will!" Smarty exclaimed.

"Shut up, Smarty, you'd faint if the car went fast!" Nobby said sarcastically. "I thought of it first and—"

"Who'd faint?" asked Smarty angrily. "I've got more right in this garage than you have, anyway. An' if Jim races I'm going to be his—"

"Who said I was going to race?" Jim asked, as he shoved between the pair of them. "Have a bit of sense—what chance would the stand against cars like that Fiat? They're the sort that'll be running at Sandy Beach on Saturday!"

"I wouldn't mind havin' a cut at it!" Nobby told him. "I bet I could make a show and—"

"Probably break your neck!" Smarty chipped in. "Jim's right, anyway. The old Renault might have been hot-stuff in her time, but she wouldn't be fast enough now."

But Nobby wasn't satisfied. He was always ready for anything that was risky. He wanted Jim to start then and there to take off the old body and rig up one that was more

fitting to the car's great past, so that they could go for a speed-burst over the moor.

"Nothing doing!" Jim exclaimed. "Besides, I haven't got time; I've promised to help Mr. Norris to tune up his Fiat for Sandy Beach. But when he's gone, perhaps—"

He broke off and looked at the old Renault. How would she go if that clumsy, rattling old body were taken off and a trim, streamlined one like that on the Fiat were substituted?

Before he went home that night, Jim looked round the old Renault again, and then started up the engine. It purred smoothly; the exhaust seemed to have taken on a booming, roaring note—almost as though the car had heard what they had been saying, and was telling Jim that there was still a lot of her old speed left.

When he opened the throttle, the exhaust crashed out with a staccato note, bellowing and thundering back from the garage walls—like an echo of the speed-song she had sung in the Grand Prix long ago.

The 2nd Chapter. All Out on the Fiat!

THE next morning, Mr. Norris came to the garage. He donned an old pair of overalls, and then started work on his Fiat. Jim worked at his side, and that day he learned many things from the speedman.

Mr. Norris had patient, gifted hands—the hands of a born mechanic; it was plain to Jim that he loved the fierce-looking red car. While they worked, he told Jim something of the race in which he was to run on the following Saturday.

It was a speed duel between himself and an American driving a Warnock Special. The American was a well-known racing man—his name was Munroe—and he had boasted that there was not a car in Europe that could beat his machine on a sand track.

"This American is always boasting about his Warnock Special," said Mr. Norris. "So I took him up. I said I'd be at Sandy Beach with a car that would leave his machine behind; this is the one that's going to do it!"

And he patted the scuttle of the Fiat. "It's a ten miles' race, and I think I shall beat him. This Munroe is a nasty sort of chap, and I don't trust him. That's why I came alone to Rayley, where I can work in comfort."

"He wouldn't be above tampering with your machine—eh?" asked Jim.

"Well, I wouldn't say that," answered Mr. Norris, and he smiled a little. "But you never know!"

For two days they worked on the Fiat, bringing everything about the machine to perfection. In the afternoon of the second day, Mr. Norris took the car out alone to test different settings of the carburettor.

"If you like, we'll have a run in the morning," he said to Jim. "I suppose you couldn't dig out one or two of your pals to time us, could you?"

"They'll come!" Jim told him, and when he spoke to Smarty and Nobby, they said they were ready to do anything.

The following morning Jim drove Smarty and Nobby out in the old Renault, while Mr. Norris went ahead with the red Fiat. He selected a lonely stretch of road in the heart of the moors; he posted Smarty and his mate where they could watch the road and arrange for them to time the red machine over a half-mile stretch, and, after that, to time the car over a circuit which was about seven miles in length. He gave them a stopwatch with which to work, then he turned to Jim.

"Sure you want to come?" he asked. "I'd

like to have you just to watch the gauges, and—"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything!" Jim grinned, and he slipped into the narrow mechanic's seat beside the speedman.

Dials were spread out on the instrument-board before his eyes; ready to his hand was an oil-pump with a dial above it. Close by was a speedometer, with a revolution counter near it.

"Sit tight!" called Mr. Norris, above the roar of the engine; with a wave of the hand to Nobby and Smarty, he sent the machine away.

Crouched low in his seat, his fingers wrapped about the leather holds, Jim watched the white road sweep towards them. He saw the speedometer needle surging round the dial, and as the car leaped into its stride, it began to bucket and rock on the road.

Once round the circuit the speedman took the machine, warming up the engine. As they returned to the point from which they had started, he roared:

"I'm going—to—let her go!"

They had been going fast before, but now the squab pressed against Jim's back as he crouched lower still as the hurtling machine sent a gale of wind about his ears.

He saw the speedometer needle flat on the hundred mark. The ribbon of road flashed at them. He saw the speedman's hands white-knuckled on the shifting wheel. The car was bucking and leaping—his ears were filled with the tearing crash of the black-mouthed exhaust.

Oil-fumes swept to his face from the metal grid against which his feet were pressed. The screaming roar of the fiercely-revolving engine came at him, thrilling through his bones.

He saw the speedman's teeth gritted behind his parted lips, his eyes narrowed and gleaming, the muscles standing out on his jaw as he held the hurtling machine to the road.

A bend showed. They went round it with the rod tail wagging and the rear wheels flinging grit and dust high behind them. On the straight beyond the bend, the speedometer needle slid across the hundred mark, the big dial shifting and dithering under Jim's gaze so that he could no longer read the speed.

They streaked past the point from which Smarty was to time them for the half-mile. Ahead showed the clump of trees which marked the end of the stretch. His gaze glued to them, Jim watched the trees swoop down at them. The car leaped from side to side, rocking to the terrific speed.

The trees loomed up, the thunderous roar of the car slammed back from their mossy trunks, then—

Something brown moved on the far side of the trees. The fraction of a second later, and Jim saw a moorland pony aumble on to the road—dead in their path!

Instantly the shrill scream of brake-shoes in their drums struck above the roar of the car—and the pony stopped to look at them!

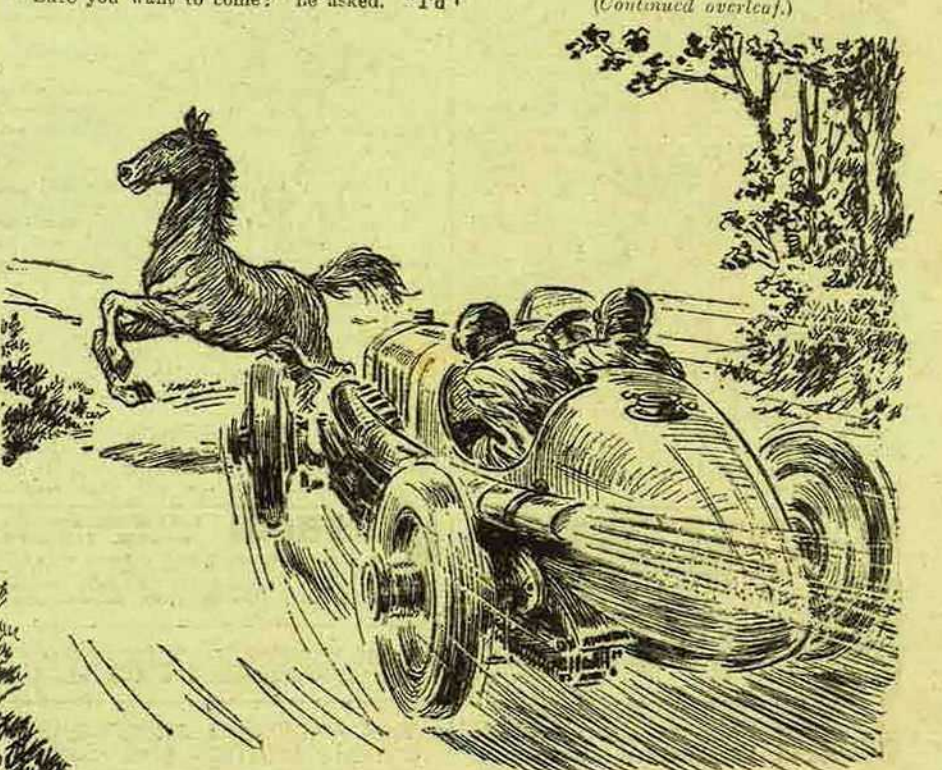
They were on it a moment later!

Jim saw the speedman's knotted hands on the wheel shifting as he pulled the car over. They skidded, the tail swerving round. The pony, scared now, darted forward—it seemed that they must hit it!

Abruptly, the pony vanished. Jim found himself staring at the trees. The car had swung completely round under the stress of the gripping brakes as the speedman strove to save the pony's life. A moment later and the machine left the road—leaping high as the wheels struck the grassy bank that edged it.

For an instant they hurtled through the air,

(Continued overleaf.)



The pony, scared now, darted forward—it seemed that they must hit it!



(Continued from previous page.)

engine screaming, wheels thrashing. Then they hit the grass, skidding and slithering. There came a terrific shock as the wheels dropped to a broad rut in the ground—the car heeled over.

Jim felt himself hurled headlong. He had a glimpse of the car crashing on its side, grass and earth flailing high; bushes whipped his face and hands; branches crashed, damp earth ploughed up all about him—then he came to rest, staring up through a tangle of prickly gorse to the blue sky!

The 3rd Chapter.

The Renault Fills the Breach.

JIM lay where he was for what seemed an age. The sound of crashing branches somewhere near roused him; he found himself staring up into the anxious, blood-streaked face of Mr. Norris.

"Are you hurt, Jim? Jim—are you—"
Jim sat up, thorns pricking the palms of his hands as he moved.
"No, I—I think I'm all right," he said slowly.

He felt the speedman's hand on his arm, helping him to rise, supporting him as he stepped out of the thick tangle of bushes. Standing there with Mr. Norris' arm about him, he felt strangely shaken, and he blinked about him.

The car was lying some distance away, a cloud of oily smoke wreathing towards the sky. Uproot tufts of grass and heather lay all about it, and there was a broad brown gash of newly-turned earth near the tail of the machine.

Neither of them was hurt. Mr. Norris had not been thrown out of the car; he had been jammed behind the steering-wheel, and the steel body had saved him from everything except a few bruises. He had cut his forehead a little, but that was all.

By the time that Smarty and Nobby came tearing up to them, they were calmly examining the wrecked machine—while the moorland pony that had caused the smash was disappearing over the brow of a hill, galloping madly.

"If we'd hit it, we should have killed it!" said Mr. Norris. "The crash would probably have turned the car over, and we might have been badly injured! I didn't want to run into the poor brute, anyway—he'dn't know what he was doing."

"He won't go within a mile of a car after this!" Jim said cheerfully; then he bent to the red bulk of the Fiat.

The two off-side wheels had snapped clean away, breaking at the stub-axles.

"We needn't look any further," said the speedman quietly. "That's done the machine in for Sandy Beach, at any rate! We can't repair that in the time."

Neither of the boys said anything; there was nothing much that they could say.

"This means that Munroe will crow like the dickens!" Mr. Norris exclaimed. "He'll say I funk'd the race, or something! And I can't get another car now—not one that I can rely on!"

Nobby glanced at him quickly. He started to say something, then checked himself. Nobby looked at Jim; he could see that the same thought was in Jim's mind as was in his own. Nobby stepped forward.

"Why not race with Jim's old Renault?" he asked quickly. "If this one can't run what about—"
He broke off as the speedman looked at him sharply, and then Nobby added: "The Renault can't then go, you know!"

"The old Renault!" exclaimed the speedman softly. The old Renault! The car he had driven in the Grand Prix fifteen years ago—why not? Why not let her run her last race? There might be just time to prepare her—and he knew what she could do. She was a match for the Warnock Special, old though she might be.

Jim guessed what he was thinking.
"The Fiat's body isn't much damaged, sir!" he exclaimed. "We might make it fit—and we'll all work with you, won't we, Smarty?"

"Not half we won't—all night if you like!" Smarty answered.

"If we tuned her up and lightened the frame," said Mr. Norris slowly, "she might—"

"Let's try, anyway!" Jim urged. "We'll bring out a trolley and get the Fiat home, then—"

He was off with a run, making for the Renault. Two hours later and the Fiat was back in the garage. Immediately they turned to getting the worn body off the old racing machine. On the stripped chassis, Mr. Norris took the Renault out for a trial run; he came back full of enthusiasm.

"You've kept the engine sweet as an apple!" he exclaimed to Jim. "We may not beat the American—but we'll give him a dashed good run!"

Half the night they worked on the old racing car, and the whole of the next day. By the Friday afternoon she was all but ready, with the red body from the Fiat bolted to her frame; they had to build the body up to make it fit, but it would serve, and when Jim stepped back to look at the car, he could hardly believe that it was his old machine.

The tapering, blunt-nosed engine cover lent the car a wickedly-eager appearance; it seemed to bulk high against the low-built body behind, making for strength. The big copper exhaust of the Fiat replaced the Renault's own, and when they started up the tuned engine the black mouth belled and roared a song of power and speed.

Early in the evening, they took her up to the moor and, with Jim at his side, Mr. Norris tried out his old racing machine.

"She'll be a bit slow at the start," was his verdict, "but once we get going, Jim—once we get going—"
He laughed then, and clapped the boy on the back. "You won't be scared to ride with me?" he asked, and Jim shook his head. "You're a good sport to lend me the car!" the speedman exclaimed. "And a better sport to let me drive it—but it's like old times to feel her pulling under me! She'll make Munroe's Warnock look pretty small to-morrow, if we have any luck!"

Lights were still burning at midnight in the garage, while Mr. Norris made final adjustments to the engine, with Jim and the others helping him enthusiastically. None of them had much sleep that night, and quite early the next morning they towed the Renault to Sandy Beach, a full fifty miles away.

The speedman did not want the Renault to run under her own power because it would spoil her tune; they reached the sea without mishap, and parked the car away from the crowd that was already assembling.

Mr. Norris went off to see the officials who were running the meeting. He was gone some time. While he was away a man approached the boys as they stood about the car.

"Is this Norris' speedster?" he asked; and they all guessed from his appearance and his accent that he was the boastful Munroe. He wore a square-cut suit and block-toed boots; between his thin lips was a cigar that was gripped by yellowed teeth; his head was crowned by a broad-brimmed hat—he was a typical picture-book American, and Jim couldn't repress a grin as he looked at him.

"Waal, I never hev seen such a heap o' junk!" Munroe growled as he looked the car over. "Renault, huh? Say, he don't think he c'n beat me with that! What's under th' hood?" and he made to lift the engine cover.

Jim jumped forward.
"Don't touch that, please!" he said.
"Waal, he must hev sumthin' stowed under there!" Munroe snarled at him. "I'm gonna take a look at it!" and he shoved Jim away.

Smarty and Nobby came up. Nobby edged his bony bulk between the American and the car.

"Keep your hands off Mr. Norris' machine," he said quietly. "We don't want—"

"Having any trouble? Do you want something, Munroe?" The British speedman's quiet voice sounded behind, and the American whirled round.

"Jest takin' a peek at your machine," he said hastily. "I guess you got 'sumthin' real special under th' hood, Norris, an—"

"Something very special," answered the speedman quietly. "And we don't want to see you anywhere near us until we meet on the course, Mr. Munroe!"

The American stared at him.
"Are you hintin' I might queer your car?" he snarled. "Say, I don't stand that kinda talk from nobody, Norris! Ef you like, I'll back my Warnock Special against this pile o' scrap for another five thousand dollars an—"

"I'll take you!" said Norris, in the same quiet way, and the boys gasped. Five thousand dollars was a thousand pounds; and it was evident from the way that Munroe

spoke that there was already a wager of a thousand pounds on the race.

The American glared at the speedman, then he looked at the old Renault, laughed sneeringly, and stalked off.

"I'll take your money after th' race!" he called as he went.

Mr. Norris turned to Jim.
"If we win," he said, "I'll send that thousand pounds to the Rayley Cottage Hospital, Jim. I hear they can do with funds."

Jim said nothing. This was the first that he had heard of there being money wagered on the speed duel. And if the Renault won, then the local hospital would get a thousand pounds. Wouldn't Squire Risdon, the chairman, be pleased?

"We'll win—or the old Renault'll bust!" Jim told the speedman.

The speed duel was to take place half-way through the meeting at Sandy Beach. The course was five miles long; which meant that the two cars would have to make a turn at the end opposite from the starting-point, the only turn in the race.

The time passed slowly. Fifteen minutes before they were to go to the starting-line they started the Renault's engine, to warm it up for the race. Presently Jim and Mr. Norris climbed aboard, and the old Grand Prix racer rolled down to the line.

The Warnock Special was already there. It was a very long, very low-built, white machine; its exhaust was spanging and chattering impatiently as the old Renault came up. Jim got a glimpse of the American at the wheel; now he was wearing a leather suit and a crash-helmet. He grinned sardonically, then turned to watch the starter as he took up his position with his flag.

To the right the sea stretched, rippling and blue; on the left ranks of spectators showed against the ropes that kept them from the course; ahead the sand was marked and striped by the wheels of cars that had run in previous races.

"All right?" came Mr. Norris' voice in Jim's ear; and the boy nodded.

They had bound the steering-wheel of the old Renault with insulation tape, and the speedman's hands showed white against it. The windscreen from the Fiat had been placed on the Renault's scuttle; but Jim had no protection as he squeezed himself down in his narrow seat.

He saw the starter's flag go up and twitch preparatory to coming down and sending them off. Above the Renault's thunder he heard the shrill bark of the Special; then the flag came down.

At Jim's side the white American machine leaped away, surging ahead, sand spuming high from the rear wheels, lashing back at them, showering him as the Renault jumped after the other car.

The old Renault was slower—much slower—the Special seemed to leave them standing as it got away. Then Jim could feel the old car picking up her speed. Back to him came the crackling of the American's exhaust; that sound was drowned as Mr. Norris opened the throttle wide.

They surged forward. The Warnock Special no longer gained from them. The yellow sand, packed board-hard, flung backwards from the American's wheels, slashing down on them as they leaped into the spume.

The crowd dropped away; sand-dunes came at the side, ripping past. The old Renault thundered into her stride, roaring at the white car the mighty challenge she had flung in the old Grand Prix.

The speedman's eyes were alight with the fire of the race; the car itself seemed to sense the challenge of the machine from across the Atlantic. But they did not gain on the Special.

Out from the yellow flatness ahead Jim saw a flag-topped pole jutting high. The turning-point. They seemed to be on it almost as soon as he saw it. The Warnock slowed, her brakes squealing; and the Renault roared up to him. Norris had not touched the brakes.

The American went round the pole, skidding madly. Sand fountained from the slithering wheels—a yellow wall that lifted up towards the sun. Then they were skidding with him.

Jim saw his driver's hands tense on the wheel, saw him drop a fist to the gear-lever as they got into the turn; as he was hauling with all his strength as he forced the car round.

They cleared the pole and roared on to the straight again, with the Renault's blunt, ugly nose level with the American's pointed tail. Jim saw the exhaust stabbing lurid flame; then sight of it was gone, as Norris pulled the Renault out and began to pass.

Now the old car was thundering and leaping and swaying on the sand, crashing her challenge as she forced her blunt nose level with the other's cowed radiator.

Jim saw Munroe, teeth gritted, face savage, as they smashed past him.

They left him behind! Kicking sand backwards like a skittish horse, the Renault plastered the Special's radiator.

Jim saw the finishing-flag leap up before them, white faces beside it.

"We've done it!" he yelled. "We've—"
His words choked in his throat. The roar of the Renault's engine died abruptly. They slowed.

He saw Norris' foot jabbing on the accelerator-pedal; through the bellow of the American machine, as it roared up to them, he caught the speedman's yell:

"Throttle-rod come adrift!"
The vibration of the straining machine had either snapped the connection between the pedal and the rod or a nut had worked loose.

Jim did the only thing possible. He dived forward in his seat, thrusting head under the dash, groping through the opening where the footboards had been for the rod that controlled the throttle.

He burnt himself on a hot exhaust-pipe; then found the rod, hanging loose, and pulled on it.

Instantly the Renault's engine roared to life again, and the car plunged forward. Humped there, his slack body banging the sides of the machine, the edge of the dash hitting his back, choked by the fumes of the engine, Jim set his teeth and hung on.

He held the throttle wide—as wide as it would go. He gritted his teeth until it hurt, and suppressed a cry as the back of his head crashed against unyielding wood. Deafened, choked, battered, fighting for breath, he stuck to it, while the old Renault watched his endurance with a spirit of her own and showed her breed as she swept on to the finish.

Sick with head reeling, burnt fingers wrapped vice-like about the rod, Jim was conscious that the thunder of the engine abruptly died. He heard the squeal of brakes, and felt the machine slowing swiftly. It stopped, and the speedman's hands came about him, to drag him back to his seat.

Jim's face was black, his hands were blistered and bruised; it seemed to him that the whole world reeled about him, then steadied a moment as he forced his eyes to the speedman's lean face.

"Did we win?" he gasped.

"By a yard!" answered Norris.

In half an hour Jim was fit again. But he felt the bruises for days afterwards; and it was a week before his damaged hands would let him handle tools.

But bandaged hands did not prevent him taking to the hospital the money that the old car had won. Mr. Norris drove him there; and after the gift was made the machine ran back to the garage, engine purring smoothly.

Later they put the old body back on her frame, and it seemed to settle down contentedly into place. The old Renault had run her greatest race and she was satisfied.

THE END.

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