

COUNT  
CARLAC

C. MARSDEN  
PLUMMER

JOHN  
MARSH

SEXTON  
BLAKE

TINKER &  
PEDRO

DETECTIVE  
SPEARING

# The Dreadnought.

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## THE GREAT CONSPIRACY.

Introducing  
the Famous Trio, Sexton Blake, Tinker & Spearing, & the three  
Master Rogues, Plummer, Marsh & Count Ivor Carlac.

Sexton Blake at the Mercy of Carlac; Pedro to the Rescue.

(This Great New Serial Starts To-Day.)

THIS—THE GREATEST DETECTIVE SERIAL OF THE YEAR—STARTS TO-DAY.

# THE GREAT CONSPIRACY.



A TALE OF  
ALL THE TALENTS.

### CHIEF CHARACTERS IN THIS BAFFLING MYSTERY SERIAL.

SEXTON BLAKE	.....	Detective.
TINKER and FEDDO	.....	His Assistants.
DETECTIVE APPEARING	.....	Late of the Year.
COUNT CARLAC	.....	The Master Spy.
GEORGE HANSEN (PLUMBER)	.....	
JOHN MARSH	.....	

#### The Offer that was Refused—Count Ivor Carlac Accepts a Commission.

The smoking-room of the London Criterion Club was occupied by three men.

Two men engaged in conversation, while the other was seated a little distance away, apparently asleep in his chair.

Of the two conversationalists, one was a distinguished member of the club, for he was Sir Henry Lovelace, a very wealthy gentleman and an enthusiastic collector of precious stones.

Just now he appeared to be a trifle angry, and his fine old face wore a look of something very like contempt.

On the other hand, his companion was perfectly calm and collected, and he puffed at his cigar unconcernedly.

The latter was a man of some fifty years of age, and judging by his manner of speech, was undoubtedly of American origin.

He was dressed rather fashionably, and his eyes were adorned by several rings. He was rather stoutly built, and his air was that of a man of property.

And indeed, the world had smiled upon him, for he was one of America's richest men. The man upon the chair he had addressed to Sir Henry was Silas F. Fendlyke, which proclaimed him to be a renowned old king and a multi-millionaire.

"Then I reckon you won't take my offer, Sir Henry?" he queried, with a distinct nasal twang. "But I've offered you fifty thousand pounds over the value of the stones."

Sir Henry Lovelace rose sharply in his seat, and there was no mistaking his anger now.

"I have told you I have no wish to sell," he replied irritably. "You have offered me one hundred and fifty thousand pounds for my collection of jewels, and although you are here stated their market value is not more than a hundred thousand pounds, I will tell you emphatically that were you to offer me five, or three times that amount, I would not part with the collection."

"I have no wish for more money than I already possess, Mr. Fendlyke, so you will see that you are only wasting your own time and mine by prolonging this conversation. For my part, I do not wish to continue the interview, as it is distasteful to me, so I will wish you good-bye, sir!"

"Star!" Fendlyke exclaimed sharply, and his air was that of a man accustomed to command. "I particularly wish to get hold of those stones. I will increase my offer to two hundred thousand pounds. You'll take me, I reckon?"

Just for a moment the seemingly sleeping man in the chair opened his eyes, and there was a terrible gleam glittering in their black depths; then he closed them again as the baronet replied with determination:

"Why, no, Mr. Fendlyke. You appear to imagine that money can buy anything; but in this case you are mistaken. None, as I have an important engagement, I must refuse to discuss the matter further. Good-bye, sir!"

The baronet rose to his feet, and with a stiff bow to the American, he walked quickly out of the room. The attendant having helped him on with his coat and adjusted a hat, he passed out into the street.

Back in the smoking-room, the millionaire remained seated, and his face wore an angry expression.

All his life he had been accustomed to obtaining his every desire, no matter how costly or trivial. His millions, the golden key, had opened every door before him, and he was now possessed with an unmeasurable anger against this degraded English nobleman who had refused to grant his whim.

"Case him, the cosmopolitan old idiot!" he opaculated, as he lit a fresh cigar. "I'd give a fortune to get those 'shiners.' Guess I'd give double what I've offered, though I don't think he'd part. For two jins I'd get hold of some crack to steal 'em, if only for the satisfaction of giving 'em myself and thinking how he'd been done!"

"You mean that?" a deep voice arose from behind the millionaire.

"I think I could do what you require—of a piece."

The American started badly, for he had forgotten the apparently sleeping man in the chair. He recovered himself with an effort, and regarded the other with a penetrating stare.

He saw a broad-shouldered man, whose figure spoke of immense strength. His hair, beard, and moustache were grey, although he did not appear to be of a very great age. It was his eyes, black eyes that held the gaze of the all-king. Somehow, they did not strike him as being the eyes of an old man, and just

now there was a gleam in them that there was an instilling.

"You overheard our confab, I reckon?" Silas F. Fendlyke said at last. "I offered the old fool two hundred thousand pounds for a collection of jewels worth, it's said, one hundred thousand pounds. Guess I'd not my heart on 'em. In the ordinary way I ain't a man to chuck money away."

"I should imagine not," the other rejoined, with a dry smile. "If the jewels were stolen, however, they would be of little use to you. Of course, they could be resold, but that would considerably lessen their value."

The millionaire litbed the ash from his cigar carefully on to the expensive carpet, and he appeared to be endeavoring to read the other's thoughts. Then he seemed to be satisfied with his smiting, and said:

"I guess I don't want to make a poppy-head of 'em. I require them for my private collection. I've wanted them for a long time, sure, and the knowledge that I possess 'em is all I want. Never in my career have I let anything stand between me and my desires, and now that coveted old man has hung my precious offer back in my teeth I calculate I want 'em more than ever I've wanted a thing before."

"Then you shall have them, my friend," said the other, with correction. "If you will agree to pay me the two hundred thousand pounds you agreed to pay Sir Henry, I will place them in your hands within a week from to-day."

The old king stared at the other in blank amazement.

"Dah!" he sneered. "What is the use of boasting? Who are you that you can promise this thing with such charming assurance?"

The other leaned forward in his chair, and the old king felt a curious repulsion as he saw the will depicted upon the heavy face.

"I am Count Ivor Carlac!" the man who had made the startling promise sneered, in a low voice. "To me no things are possible. I thought that I had proved that in America."

The American drew his breath in sharply and gazed at the other with something very akin to awe. He hesitated for a moment before replying. Then he exclaimed:

"You are sure you could do this

thing without suspicion resting upon me?"

"I am as positive of that as I was of being able to foot the New York Building Corporation's strong room!" Carter replied, with assurance.

"You did that?" the American gasped, referring to a bank robbery that had made New York wild with excitement for weeks.

Carles nodded grimly, and carefully lit a cigar.

"You will trust the little affair to me?" he queried; and although he asked the question, he already knew what the answer would be.

"Why, yes, count," the old king replied. "It won't come to my hotel, I reckon I'll be matters up right now."

"Good!" Count Carles said calmly, with the air of a man contemplating a good business deal. "Within a week the jewels shall be placed in your hands, and I shall be richer by two hundred thousand pounds. But there is one thing that I would say to you, Mr. Forsyth. You are known for a sharp-looking man in America. When I have done my work I shall expect my price. Remember that, and do not play me false. Men have a habit of mysteriously disappearing who do not do right by me. Perhaps they have died violently. Who knows?"

#### Carter at Work—The Flat—Marjorie Lovelace is Kidnapped.

The stately mansion situated on Streatham Common, known as the Furze House, was bathed in the early sunlight of the autumn morning, and the owner, a lieutenant, grey-headed, old gentleman, sat in his study, a thoughtful expression upon his face.

Sometimes, his aspect was curiously youthful, despite his grey hair, as he rose to his feet and commenced patting the room.

His neighbours would have told you that this kindly-looking old man was a Mr. Herbert Higness, a retired Royal merchant, and there was not one of them that so much as questioned his respectability. Yet, beneath the grey hair and apparent age, lay the cool, cool features of Count Ivor Carles, rubber, retailer, and connoisseur in general, to whom no crime was too diabolical, too brutal, the man who was a master of a hundred disguises, the man who was wanted by the police in Berlin, Paris, St. Petersburg, New York, and finally in London.

Until a short time since Carles had laughed to scorn the efforts of the police and detectives of all these cities to track him down. Then Benton Blake, the famous detective of Baker Street, had crossed his path. Time after time the brain of the master rogue had been pitted against that of the master detective, and upon each occasion Carles had tested the gall of defeat.

Now, however, the master villain was at work again, planning to secure Sir Henry Lovelace's collection of jewels with a view to disposing of them in the American millionaire at a price of two hundred thousand pounds.

Carles had already summoned his most trusted agent to assist him in carrying the matter through, and was now awaiting his arrival to discuss a plan of action.

The man he had ordered to come to him was one of the smartest criminals under his control, port Count Carles told himself that even this man lacked the master brain required to be pos-

sessed by a partner in his daring coup. He had from time to time heard and read of the audacious robberies and swindles in which George Marston Plummer, ex-detective-sergeant of Scotland Yard, had been engaged, and as the hint of his criminal brain was a desire to meet this Plummer and induce him to work in co-operation with him. He knew that it was a man like the ex-detective that he required as a partner for the absolute success of his nefarious work.

"Bah!" he muttered almost fiercely. "They are all without intellect and reasoning powers. One day, perhaps, I shall meet a man after my own heart."

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. James Carter, alias James Pendleton, alias a dozen other names, alias a former bank clerk, forger, retailer, and ex-convict, was ushered into the presence of the master rogue.

"You sent for me, chief?" he said, as soon as they were alone.

"Yes," Carles agreed, in his deep tones, as he regarded the tall, rather over-dressed man before him. "Turn the key in the lock so that we shall not be disturbed. Now I will give you my instructions."

Carter obeyed, and at a sign from Carles he dropped into a chair. It was curious to note the respect with which the rogue treated the greater scoundrel.

Carles selected a cigar from the box upon the table, and lit it carefully before he spoke.

"I wish to get hold of Sir Henry Lovelace's collection of precious stones," he said at last calmly, as though the matter of which he was speaking was the most ordinary piece of business in the world.

Carter whistled shrilly.

"We have a job on this time, chief!" he exclaimed, and there was a glinting tone in his voice. "You know, of course, that Sir Henry keeps the jewels at his banker's except upon special occasions. I think the scheme is an impossibility. Even when he has them at his house in Berkeley Square, you can't get them as closely guarded!"

Carles tilted the ash from his cigar carefully into the grate, and he smiled grimly at the other.

"My dear Carter," he replied protestingly, "surely you know by this time that practically anything I desire is possible for me to accomplish. Have I not proved that to you in the past? Have I not outwitted the police and detectives in every city I have worked?"

"Yes, count," Carter said, "with no exception. There is always that accursed middle, Benton Blake. You know that he—"

Carles rose to his feet angrily, and his face was not good to look upon.

For a moment it looked as if he would strike the villain, and Carles covered back in his chair. Then the master criminal dropped back in his chair, and there was a touch of something very like weakness in his voice when he spoke.

"You are right," he agreed. "Until that man crossed my path, there was not one instance of failure; but since we have come to grips my plans have all gone wrong. This time, however, there must be no mistake. Now, listen to my plans! You probably know that Sir Henry has a daughter, and it is through her that I intend to gain possession of the stones."

"You mean?" Carter queried; and it

was plain that, so far, he could not see through Carles's plans.

"That we shall kidnap Miss Lovelace, and hold her to ransom," Carles answered, in his cold, matter-of-fact tone. "And the price of her ransom will be—"

"The jewels," Carter finished admiringly.

"Vendibly," Carles agreed. "Now, listen carefully to my instructions."

Carter leaned forward in his chair, and there was an unmistakable air of interest.

"Miss Lovelace," Carles commenced, "is engaged to be married to the Honourable Vincent Trebourn. Disguised as a chauffeur, I shall drive you up to her house in Berkeley Square in my motor-brougham. You will be dressed in the style of a man-about-town. You will talk to me Miss Lovelace, and tell her that Vincent Trebourn has met with a serious accident, and is lying in the Charing Cross Hospital at present, and that you are waiting with her name and asking to see her before he dies. I have little doubt that she will fall into the trap at once, and accompany you in the brougham without question.

With the aid of this hypodermic syringe you will drug her, and, as soon as I know this is done, I shall drive to the cottage at Beckenham, where I shall leave her in your charge. Is this clear to you?"

"Perfectly, count," Carter replied.

"What happens then?"

"I shall let you write a polite note to Sir Henry, acquainting him with the facts of the matter, and requesting the jewels as the price of his daughter's life and freedom."

"There is one thing, count," Carter said dubiously. "Supposing by any chance young Trebourn should be at Sir Henry's place at Berkeley Square when we drive up with the accident van? It would make things badly awkward."

"I have thought of that," Carles replied. "At the moment Vincent Trebourn is very interested in rubber shares. I shall send him a wire at the right time, purporting to come from his brokers in Threadneedle Street, asking him to call on them personally on a most urgent matter, and I have little doubt he will go."

Sir Henry Lovelace is away all this week on a visit to Scotland, so we shall have no trouble from him. First up my van at ten to-morrow morning in Trafalgar Square."

"You are a rare old, guv'nor," Carter said, "and so mistake. You are V.I.S. when you are after the splendide!"

"V.I.S.," Carles queried, wonderingly. "What does that stand for, guv'?"

"Very hot stuff, guv'nor!" Carter grinned, as he rose to his feet to depart; and the master rogue smiled grimly, in appreciation of what he considered an excellent compliment.

A motor-brougham whizzed up Berkeley Square, and as it drew abreast the house occupied by Sir Henry Lovelace, a golden up with a shuffling of feet, and a man sprang out and ran quickly up the steps.

In response to his vigorous pull at the bell, a footman appeared, and the man gripped at the footman's arm in uncontrollable excitement.

"Is Miss Lovelace within?" he queried breathlessly. "My business is of the most urgent nature!"

The footman stared thoughtfully at the fashionably attired caller, who was so obviously labouring under the stress of some great excitement.

"I'll see, sir," he replied doubtfully.

"What name shall I say?"

"Miss Lovelace does not know my name, and there is no time for formalities," the other explained sternly. "It is a matter of life or death!"

The footman gasped, and, startled now, he hastened within, and almost immediately returned with a request for the officer to step within.

James Carter—oh, of course, it was he—followed the footman into a comparatively furnished drawing room, and presently Marjorie Lovelace entered, a look of anxiety upon her girlish face.

Carter caught his breath in sharply as he gazed upon her extreme beauty.

She was a tall, slim girl, very dark, and very graceful in appearance; and somehow Carter felt mean as he thought of the trick he was about to play her.

He was half inclined to back out. Then he thought of the vengeance Carter would surely take if he spoilt his plans, and he observed slightly, for he had seen in the past the terrible fate that the master rogue meted out to traitors.

"You wished to see me, sir?" she asked, in a low, sweet voice.

"Miss Lovelace, you must prepare yourself for bad news," he replied, with just the right touch of sympathy in his tones. "My name is Tanqueray—Sexton Tanqueray—and I am a friend of Vincent's—Mr. Trebourn's, I—"

The girl turned deathly pale, and clasped her hands tightly together in her agitation.

"Vincent!" she gasped. "He is not—"

"No, he is not dead," Carter replied gravely; "but he has run with a serious accident in Oxford Street, and is now in the Charing Cross Hospital asking to see you?"

"Oh, tell me!" she cried anxiously. "He is not likely to die? If I thought that, I think—"

"My poor girl!" Carter replied. "I do not wish to add to your pain, but I feel it right that you should know the truth at once. I should advise you to hurry on your things, and come along immediately, as I fear his injuries will prove fatal!"

Marjorie averted, and for a moment Carter thought she was about to weep. With an effort, however, she recovered herself, and said bravely:

"I will go to him at once! Would you kindly ask the footman to call a taxi?"

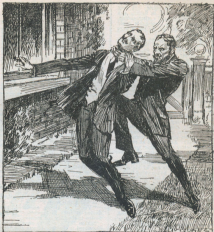
"I have the brougham I came in waiting outside," Carter replied quickly. "I kept it waiting, as I am going back to the hospital, and thought it probable you would accompany me."

"You are very kind, sir," Marjorie replied. "I will not keep you waiting more than a few minutes."

There was no triangle on Carter's face as she left the room to get on to a hat and cloak. He felt curiously mean at the thing he was about to do, yet he knew that were he to back out—

"I am ready, Mr. Tanqueray," Marjorie said, as she stood waiting in the hall. "Let us hurry along at once, please!"

Had the girl stopped to think clearly, she certainly would not have accompanied this strange man in his cab without at least making for her inquiries; but she was overwhelmed by the news he had brought her, and her one desire was to be by her lover's side without a moment's delay.



Blake felt an iron clutch around his neck, while a knee was firmly planted in his back. The assailant, hissing execrations beneath his breath, tried for dear life to pull the detective backwards.

Uncomprehending, she stepped into the brougham, Carter following closely; Carter threw in the cloak, and it started away with a jerk.

Then Marjorie noticed that the blinds were drawn at her end of the cab; and, feeling she was on the verge of ascending, she endeavored to raise them, with a view to obtaining air.

To her surprise, she found they resisted her efforts.

"Let me help you," Carter said, leaning forward. "They are a little stubborn at times."

"They appear to be fastened in some way," she answered. "Can you— Ah!"

Marjorie felt a sharp pain in her arm, and now for the first time she felt that something was wrong.

She swung round upon Carter, and saw the springs in his hand.

"You wounded!" she cried, as she felt her senses reeling. "You are an impostor! I do not believe what you—"

She dropped in a heap on to the floor of the cab, and her voice trailed off into silence.

With a sigh of relief Carter raised her unconscious form, and propped it up upon the seat. He then lowered the blinds on the other side of the cab to prevent the suspicious of passers-by being aroused.

This done, he informed Carter through the speaking-tube that all was well, and the master villain swung the cab round in the opposite direction. So far, his plans had worked out entirely to his satisfaction.

**Sexton Blake Called In — Spearing Helps—The One that Led to Trebourn—Sexton Blake's Fight for Life—Carter's Narrow Escape.**

**STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF DAUGHTER OF WELL-KNOWN BARONET. POLICE BAFFLED. IS IT AN ELOPEMENT?**

As Sexton Blake opened the morning paper, the above heading caught his eye.

"He had just breakfasted, and, being a trifle sick—his liver—had for once decided to have an idle day. Attired in dressing-gown and slippers, he sat back in an easy-chair, and settled down to read the paper with his accustomed thoroughness.

Fedro lay stretched at full length upon the rug, while Tinker was going through the morning correspondence.

The detective commenced reading the contents of the paragraph beneath the above heading casually at first; then, as he caught sight of the name of Sir Henry Lovelace, who was an old friend of his, his interest deepened.

The contents of the paragraph were brief enough. They simply stated that an unknown gentleman had called on Miss Lovelace two days previously, and had told the footman his business was a matter of life or death. Miss Lovelace had accompanied him to his mother-in-law's, and had not been seen or heard of since.

When she had not reappeared, her father had been hastily accompanied from Scotland, where he was paying a visit. He had, immediately upon his

Write to The Editor and give him your opinion of our splendid new serial novel.

return, called in the police; but they had not yet succeeded in finding any clue to the missing girl's whereabouts. The number of the brougham could not be ascertained, and the police were at a standstill.

The paper hinted at an abductee, but that subtle hint was that Section Blake possessed means to tell him that the affair was of a more serious nature. Section Blake felt that—

"The telephone bell rang sharply, and Tinker answered on the instrument.

"Yes; this is Mr. Blake's assistant speaking. You wish to see him urgently? Just a moment, sir; I'll see. It is Sir Henry Lovelace, of Berkeley Square, sir," Tinker said, turning to his master. "He wants to know if you can see him if he comes along now?"

"He'll knock the receiver.

"Good-morning, Sir Henry!" he said. "Yes, this is Blake speaking. It is, of course, about your daughter's disappearance. You wish to consult me. What's that? An attempt at ransom? You had better come along now. We can go into matters better than ever the police. Right! Good-bye!"

Blake hung up the receiver, and, having filed and lit one of his old-fashioned black-top pipes, he sprawled back in his chair, and layed into a deep train of thought. The tips of his long, sensitive fingers were pressed together, and the lids were drooping low over his eyes.

"It sounds like something big," he murmured.

"What does, sir?" Tinker ventured. "For he could see by his master's manner that some unusual case had come along."

Blake's only reply was a frown, and Tinker, knowing his master's mood, wisely held his peace.

It was not until Mrs. Bardell answered Sir Henry Lovelace that the detective roused himself.

The baronet, who had followed close at the lady's heels, rushed into the room. His face was very, and his haggard face told of the mental agony he was enduring.

"This is terrible, Blake!" he burst out. "I fear my little girl is in grave peril. Ever since I received that letter—"

"Take yourself, old friend!" Section Blake protested scoldingly, gently pushing him down into a chair. "Start from the beginning, and remember that the slightest details may be of the utmost importance."

"I was away in Scotland at the time," Sir Henry commenced, growing more calm under the soothing influence of the detective, "and I can tell you no more than the papers have already informed you. A gentleman my friend had never seen before called in a most excited state, and asked to see my daughter on a matter of life and death. After the lad spoke with her a few moments, they both went off in the fellow's motor-brougham. My servant became alarmed when she did not return, or send word by the following morning, and wired to Scotland for me. On my return, I immediately called in the police, Detective-Inspector Lurgan, of Scotland Yard, has the matter in hand, but so far he has obtained no clue to my daughter's whereabouts.

"Then this morning I received this letter, demanding my collection of jewels as the price for my daughter's freedom."

Section Blake took the sheet of paper

from the baronet, and smoothed it out on his knee.

"Dear Sir"—it ran—"Your daughter is quite safe at the moment, and shall be returned to you as soon as you grant my request. I intend holding your daughter to ransom, and the price I ask for her freedom is your collection of precious stones. If you agree to my terms, please insert your reply in the alternative in the Agency Column of the 'Daily Mail' to-morrow. I will then instruct you how to act to obtain your daughter's safe return. In the event of any treachery upon your part, I may add that your daughter's life will pay the forfeit!"

The letter was typewritten, and bore no signature. It was written on a sheet of ordinary newspaper obtainable at any good class stationer's in London.

Section Blake filed and refold his paper, and for a moment he lay back in his chair, the lids low over his eyes, while the baronet departed impatiently.

The detective was turning over the contents of the letter in his brain, endeavoring to connect a phrase or sentence with some other criminal with whom he had come into contact in the past, before submitting it to other tests; but he could not trace the writer's identity by this method.

He roused himself sharply, and turned to Sir Henry.

"You have the envelope," he asked, "in which this came?"

"Yes," Sir Henry answered, producing it from his pocket. "It was posted in the City last evening."

Section Blake took the envelope and examined it closely. It was also typewritten, and for the moment told him nothing, except that the letter had been posted in the E.C. district the preceding evening.

The detective peered by the window. He examined both the letter and the envelope under a lens, and his eyes narrowed, while a little shudder of satisfaction escaped his lips.

"You have discovered a clue, sir?" Tinker queried curiously.

"Why, you, lad?" Section Blake replied. "Our friend is not quite so clever as I at first thought him. He leaves certain thumb-marks on both the letter and its covering. I already feel certain of his identity."

"Impossible, Blake!" Sir Henry gasped.

"Let us verify it," the detective said, with a smile. "Give me 'D'ile of our Thumb Index, Tinker! Stay! You can lock this gentleman up while you are at it. Turn up Puddleton, James, who absconded from Myers' Banking Syndicate ten years ago. I was the cause of his getting seven years' holiday at the expense of the Government. Perhaps I can arrange another for him, with lock, although I feel some misgiving with a far greater brain than he is gifted with in all the land of this little A. As I thought so, I should know that possibly several thousand amongst a hundred."

"You are a wonderful man, Blake!" Sir Henry exclaimed with conviction. "You have discovered the writer of the letter without even leaving your counting-room."

"Precisely," Section Blake agreed, as he laid aside his pipe, and carefully lit a cigar; "but we have yet to discover this man's and your daughter's whereabouts, also who is the cunning criminal behind it all—for I am positive that James Puddleton hasn't the

nerve nor the intellect to carry out such a daring scheme as this.

"Tinker," he continued, "ring up Mr. Spearling, and ask him to get out all his allies to discover the whereabouts of James Puddleton, ex-bank clerk, ex-convict, and absconded in general. Spearling will know him, as he arrested him for me when he was at the Yard for the other little affair."

"And you can ring me up, Mr. Blake?" Sir Henry asked anxiously.

Section Blake examined his cigar, to see that it was burning evenly.

"Why, yes?" he replied. "Spearling's men—a formidable array of Scotland Yard detectives—will dog London from end to end for him, and he ought to be on his track by to-morrow morning at the latest."

"And do you advise me to insert a copy in the 'Mail,' Mr. Blake?"

"Most certainly not, Sir Henry!"

Section Blake replied sharply, and his jaw set grimly, while there was the faintest glimmer in his eyes. "Trust them with the contempt they deserve. Later, we will treat them with a dose of Blanket, with a little lock!"

Mr. William Spearling, late chief detective inspector, of Scotland Yard, now a private inquiry agent, swaggered into Section Blake's consulting-room the morning following Sir Henry's call upon the detective.

Before Spearling spoke Section Blake knew that the quest for James Puddleton had been successful, for the red face of the worthy ex-official wore a very pleased expression.

It was not from necessity that Mr. Spearling had become a private detective. His had retired from Scotland Yard on an excellent pension, and, in addition to this, he had been able, during his career to build up a well-stocked fortune. It was pure luck of adventure that had caused him to start on his own account in Victoria Street, and he was never more pleased than when working with his old friend and colleague Section Blake.

"As we have said, he looked distinctly pleased with himself just now.

His little bald hat, which always had the appearance of being a size too small for him, was cocked rakishly over one eye, and a large cigar, which had burnt all down one side with never a puff, protruded from the corner of his mouth.

"You have found our man?" Section Blake suggested; and, although he asked the question, he knew full well what the answer would be.

"Yes," William Spearling jerked. "Hed looking after him. Arranged who here when get a chance."

"Good!" Section Blake replied. "We had better wait to hear from him. We can do nothing until then. Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes; was up early?" Spearling grinned. "Early bird catches worms, you know?"

"My aunt, sir," Tinker, who had just entered the room in time to hear the remark, grinned, "you look as though you're been feeding on something more substantial than worms, too!"

Mr. Spearling's always red face turned a beautiful shade of purple, as he swung round on the lad, for his countenance was always a rather sore point with him.

"What mean?" he asked sternly. "Feeding on worms? Don't understand."

"Listen!" Section Blake said, interrupting the little pleasantries. "That

is the boy at the door with our wire now. He'll come and bring it up at once, Tinker!"

Tinker disappeared, shortly to return with the telegram in his hand, and behind him followed a tall, handsome young fellow, of about twenty-five years of age. His features were regular and good to see; but just now he was haggard, and bore traces of several sleepless nights.

"The Honourable Vincent Trebourn to see you, sir," Tinker announced. "As he has called in connection with the case, I showed him straight up."

"You, of course, know why I have come, Mr. Blake," the young fellow

said. "I understand you are to be married to the lady, are you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake," replied Vincent.

"We were to have been married next month. By heavens, if so much as a hair of my poor darling's head is injured, I'll not be answerable for my actions! She is the sweetest girl in the world, and—"

"They all are," Sexton Blake remarked; "but calm yourself, Mr. Trebourn. We shall have to hurry to catch the train from Charing Cross. I take it you will accompany us?"

"Of a certainty, Mr. Blake!" the young fellow answered. "You will

at 11:20 a.m. did arrive to time, and as Sexton Blake, accompanied by his companions, stopped from the station, they were met by Steel.

Mr. Spearling stopped forward, and glared officially at his assistant.

"Report!" he jerked shortly. Mr. Spearling could never quite forget his old Scotland Yard maxim.

"Followed Pendleton here from London, sir," Steel said, waiting. "He stopped to buy provisions on arrival here, which made me think I was on the right track; then he went straight to a cottage in May Tree Lane. The windows of a room at the back are all closely shuttered, which



Spearling lay upon the ground, knocked there by a savage blow; Blake was in full pursuit. A desperado at bay, Carfax lifted the nimble form of Tinker high above his head and held him there, ready to hurl him at Vincent Trebourn.

said. "This suspense is killing me! Can you give me any good news?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Trebourn!" Sexton Blake replied. "Mr. Spearling here has succeeded in finding the man who wrote the letter to Sir Henry demanding the jewels. I expect this telegram contains his exact whereabouts."

Blake tore open the buff-colored envelope, and, sure enough, it was from Steel, Mr. Spearling's assistant.

"P. at Beckenham"—it ran. "Think lady prisoner in cottage here. Meet me Junction Station 11:20 train.—Steel."

Blake read the message aloud. "We shall soon rescue Miss Lovelace

arrest the wretch whenever I require!"

"That all depends upon circumstances, my friend," Sexton Blake said. "I am certain some far greater scandal is at the back of it all. We may bring Pendleton into giving his employer away if we give him his liberty. Tinker, whistle a taxi. We shall just do it comfortably."

"Do I come, sir?" Tinker asked eagerly.

"Yes, lad," the detective answered. "And bring Pedro with you; there is a chance we may want him."

For once in a way the taxis due to arrive at Beckenham Junction Station

looks as though Miss Lovelace is there."

"Likely, very," Mr. Spearling granted. "Though you'll be sure, soon make certain. Lead way!"

"Standy, my friend!" Sexton Blake interrupted. "I want to take Pendleton by surprise, if possible. Besides, there is just a chance that we may be on the wrong track, and we must not risk making fools of ourselves."

"What do, then?" Mr. Spearling asked discontentedly.

"Wait here while I go forward and reconnoitre," the detective answered readily. "We must not alarm our man."

"Silly arrangement!" Spearling scolded. "Pretty certain girl there.

Shall take Steel with me and track him. Have got warrant to pocket for abduction. Got it from Ward this morning. Arrive at once!" Blake certain?"

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the kind, my friend," the detective said drily.

"Mr. Spearling glared at his friend, and cocked his little hat more aggressively over his left eye.

"Can't stop me!" he snarled. "Do as you think best!"

"As you will, my friend," Sexton Blake replied carelessly. "Though I thought you were rather anxious to recover the Duchess of W—'s necklace. There is quite a nice reward offered, you know."

The worthy official hesitated.

"Don't know where to find it," he said, though without conviction.

"There you are wrong, my friend," the detective replied. "I discovered the 'lones' who has it yesterday."

"Who is it?" Spearling asked eagerly, his thoughts straying to a certain five hundred pounds reward that was offered.

"That I will tell you to-night," the detective replied, with a dry smile. "Now, wait here, and I will join you again in about twenty minutes."

Sexton Blake made his way in the direction of the quiet, comfortable thoroughfare known as May Tree Lane.

It divided a couple of ploughed fields, and was little more than a foot-path with a tall hedge on either side. Remembering that in all probability Penfenten would know him well by sight, the detective stepped behind the hedge for a moment, and quickly altered his appearance with the aid of his pocket make-up case. When he stepped out into the road again, his upper lip was adorned by a carefully waxed moustache, and several touches of an eyebrow pencil made an effective disguise.

He found the cottage easily enough, and apparently all was quiet within.

Boldly he approached and knocked upon the door, a plausible excuse ready should Penfenten appear. No notice was taken of his knock, however, and the detective concluded that the man must be out.

Then he stepped round to the back of the cottage, and found, as Steel had said, the windows there were all closely shuttered.

He could find no means of seeing within, and, retracing his steps to the front of the cottage, he peered through one of the windows there.

Then Sexton Blake knew that he was upon the right scent, for lying upon a sofa was a woman's hat.

Even from where he stood the detective could see that it was of a West End shape and style, and certainly beyond the means of a cottage dweller.

Sexton Blake was on the point of rejoining his friends, when his throat was seized from behind by a pair of powerful hands, which held him in a deathlike embrace, and he was violently jerked to his knees.

"You scoundrel spy!" a voice that was strangely familiar hissed. "I'll put you out of mischief, or know the reason why!"

The detective struggled gamely to free himself, but he had been taken at a disadvantage, and the powerful fingers were swiftly chafing the life out of him.

His senses began to reel, while red lights danced before his eyes.

With a sudden, superhuman effort the detective struggled to his feet and kicked out backwards with all the force he could command.

His head crashed against his adversary's shin, and with a howl of pain the latter released his hold.

Swiftly seizing his advantage, the detective flung himself at the other, and they fell heavily to the ground, locked in each other's arms.

Sexton Blake found himself struggling with a thick-set, black-bearded man. But suddenly in the struggle, as the combatants rolled over and over upon the ground, both the beard, which was a false one, and Blake's moustache were knocked off, and almost simultaneously each gazed out the other's face in amazement.

"Glad!" Blake cried. "You scoundrel!"

"Blake!" the other gasped. "By Jove, it's your life or mine this time, you scoundrel cur!"

The detective made no reply, but redoubled his efforts to overpower his adversary.

The detective's muscles were like steel, and he was exerting every ounce of strength.

He knew that he must defeat the other or die, for Carlos had sworn to kill him at the first opportunity.

Over and over they rolled, fighting desperately, until, the great strength of the master ropie pitted against that of the master detective, they—

Suddenly, Carlos struck Blake a tremendous blow between the eyes, well-nigh stunning the detective. Then he was up on top, kneeling upon his enemy's chest.

With lightning-like rapidity Count Carlos drew a moustache-looking knife from his belt, and his knees blade flashed wickedly in the morning sunlight.

The detective was powerless to move, and as he saw the speared weapon he told himself that his last hour had come.

From the commencement of his career he had fully realized that his end would be something like this, and as he looked up into Carlos's gleaming eyes, reading the awful hatred they held, he did not flinch.

"Come on, Sexton Blake!" the count hissed. "Say your prayer, if you know any, you scoundrel, meddling spy! This is your end!"

No sooner had Sexton Blake left his companions outside the station, than Pedro, his faithful bloodhound, crossed a lane desire to follow his master.

Blake sternly ordered him to "lie down, and Pedro, being as a rule a most obedient dog, duly "laid down."

He watched Tracker out of the corner of his little eye, and no sooner had his young master taken his gaze away from him than Pedro quietly sneaked off after the detective.

As soon as Pedro had turned the first corner he quickened his pace, and if ever a dog laughed, it was he.

When he was not a great distance behind Blake.

For a time Pedro trotted along contentedly enough; then, as he approached the cottage, his sharp ears caught the sound of a struggle, and that strange instinct which dogs possess told the faithful Pedro that his beloved master was in danger.

Like an arrow from a bow Pedro

darted forward, and he saw his master upon the ground and the flashing knife in Carlos's upraised hand, his little eyes gleamed red with anger.

With a back of bary, he gave one mighty spring, landed on the shoulders of the master villain, and buried his powerful teeth in the upraised arm.

Uttering a yell of pain, Count Carlos sprang to his feet, and struck down at the maddened animal.

His huge hat crashed down three times in quick succession upon Pedro's snout, but the plucky dog hung on like grim death till.

Almost unconsciously with the pain, the ropes drew a short life-preserver from his pocket, and brought it down with all the force of his disengaged arm upon Pedro's skull. Pedro dropped stunned to the ground.

At that moment, however, Sexton Blake sprang sharply to his feet, and rushed once more to his enemy.

Carlos aimed a vicious blow with the life-preserver at Blake's head, and although the detective dodged nimbly, he caught the full force of the blow upon the shoulder.

Before he could recover himself, Carlos, fearing Pedro would regain his senses, was tearing down the lane as fast as his legs would carry him.

The detective started in hot pursuit, and inch by inch he gained on his opponent.

As Carlos drew near to the end of the lane a distressed cathy bared from his lip, for he saw Spearling, Timber, and Vincent Trebman coming towards him.

Having become alarmed at the detective's long absence, and missing Pedro, they had come in search of him.

"Stop, here! Stop, here!" Blake yelled. "It's Carlos!"

Spearling dashed forward to meet the master criminal, and endeavored to trap him up; but Carlos's powerful fist landed with a thud in the worthy official's chest, and he dropped to the ground in a heap.

Timber pluckily tried to intercept the rogue; but the latter seized him by his powerful arms, and raising the figure of the porch above his head, he dashed him at Vincent Trebman, and they too, went down in the road.

Springing over his fallen foes, Carlos dashed on.

He had only one hope of escape now, and that was to reach a quiet lane a little distance away, where he had left his motor-car, its engine still throbbing.

Already Sexton Blake, closely followed by the others, was within a few yards, and a feeling of despair took possession of him. Then he came in sight of his car, and made one last supreme effort to reach it. Sexton Blake was only a few yards away, and he gained the car and threw in the clutch, and as it started off the detective leapt.

Has Carlos escaped? Is he once again free to pursue his evil quest for ill-gotten riches, or will Sexton Blake succeed in his task.

Next week look out for a long thrilling instalment. George Marsden Plummer and John Marsh are characters soon to be introduced to you.



## CLIVEDEN'S "JULIUS CAESAR"

### Disappointed Sightseers.

"Come on!"

"What's up?"

"There's going to be a show in No. 4!"

"Good! This way, you claps!"

And a crowd of fellows, with eager looks, followed Gatty and Greene along the Fourth Form passage at Cliveden.

Packham and Price, the advanced-class boys of the Fourth, were strolling along the passage with linked arms and covered No. 4 Study.

The others waited.

But the door of No. 4 Study did not swing, and the Old Firm did not come out, "as their seats," as the waiting juniors expected. There was no sound of disturbance within No. 4.

The watchers were puzzled.

They gave them a chance for two more minutes, long minutes to the impatient Fourth-Formers. Still there were no sounds of strife, still the study door was not thrown open, still the Old Firm were not thrown out.

And then several of the juniors, openly declaring their belief that the whole thing was a swindle, walked away in defiance. Greene, looking considerably disappointed, looked open the study door and looked in.

His face grew decidedly wonderful as what he saw.

Packham and Price were seated at the table, leaving anything but warlike. Dick Neville and Lincoln G. Poindester were *vis-à-vis* with them. Micky Flynn was pouring out tea, having just risen to lift the teapot from the grate. The tea-party, in the glow of the bright fire, looked very cozy and cheerful. They all looked round at Greene, and Greene asserted:

"Hello!" said Poindester. "What do you want?"

"Well, you fellows," said the disappointed Greene. "Here we've been waiting five minutes waiting for you to begin."

"Begin! What are you waiting about?" asked Packham pleasantly.

"I thought there was going to be a row."

"My dear am—"

"I guess there is a row," said Poindester. "But do you leave off talking it will stop. Go away. Shut the door after you."

And Greene made a hasty exit.

The slight disturbance in the study did not much affect the cheerfulness of

the tea-party. They discussed tea and scones, ham and eggs and toast, and the cricket prospects for the coming matches and the training schemes for the Officers' Training Corps, cheerily and amiably.

Tea was over at last, and the juniors, that usual having been disposed of, cleared the table and drew their chairs round. It was then that Lincoln G. Poindester came to business.

"I've got something to say to you claps," he remarked.

Packham grinned.

"I didn't think you had asked us in here solely for the pleasure of our company," he remarked.

"Quite so!" said Price.

"Now, my idea," said Poindester impressively, "is that we should go right ahead, and give a dramatic performance."

"A—a—what?"

"A dramatic performance," said Poindester calmly; "and devote the gate-money to the box-office receipts—a hand for the Boy Scouts for the year-end."

"My hat!"

"I guess it's a ripping idea! The Fourth Form Dramatic Society might be able to give a good entertainment. We're all in it, and we're jolly clever fellows—some of us."

"Fah, and it's a jinxing ye are, Poindester. It's a ripping Hamlet I can do myself!"

"Yes," said Packham earnestly; "I can imagine Hamlet with an Irish brogue!"

"Quite so!" grinned Price. "It would make it a comedy instead of a tragedy, but that's only a detail."

"Ye ginger duffers—"

"Order!"

"Sure, Poindester darling—"

"Order! Shut up! Ring off! What do you think of the scheme, Fanny?"

"It's all right," said Packham thoughtfully. "Till Scotland starts we shall have lots of time to devote to the drama. There's no reason why we shouldn't turn out a really good entertainment, if you claps will realize that there are fellows in the Fourth who can get miles ahead of you on the boards!"

"We'll discuss the parts later," said Poindester hurriedly, just in time to prevent some emphatic remarks being

made by Neville and Flynn. "If the idea's agreed on—"

"That's agreed on. But I don't quite see how we shall raise the wind by it. It's hard enough to get an audience to an amateur performance when it's admission free, if you charge three for coming in—"

"They'll all stay outside," said Price.

"Oh, I don't know! You see, there will be all the talent of the Fourth Form, and I suppose all the juniors will come to see a really ripping representation of Hamlet!"

"We might let it be known, too, that fellows who don't come will get scolded the most hot," suggested Neville.

"Well, that's one way of getting an audience," grinned Packham. "That would influence the Lower Form, but we can't start scolding the Sixth."

"We'll put it straight to Travelpack, and ask him to put it to the seniors, for the good of the cause," said Poindester. "I wasn't exactly thinking of a regular charge for admission. You see, some of the kids couldn't afford even a tanner, and we don't want to

put them in. On the other hand, some of the seniors could afford a bob, or even a half-crown, and we don't want to stop 'em being generous. My idea was to have a money-box just inside the door, and every fellow he expected to get something into it, according to his means. Then the poor won't be ashamed to shove in pennies, while the rich fellows can put in what they like."

"That's a good idea. But the performance?"

"Yes, the play's the thing," agreed Poindester, in the words of Hamlet.

"If the thing's settled, we may as well decide on the play now. Of course, we must consider the dignity of the Fourth Form Dramatic Society."

"Of course."

"So I don't see how we can give anything lower than Shakespeare. What do you fellows say to 'Hamlet'?"

"Fah, and I can do Hamlet—"

"Agreed!" said Packham. "You see, I can do Hamlet—"

"I was just thinking," said Price, "that Hamlet's part would suit me down to the ground."

"Oh, come off!" exclaimed Neville warmly. "If you've got any eyes to good effect, you must see that I—"

"I guess I had marked down Ham-



let's part for myself?" grinned Linada G. Poindester. "An originator of the idea!"

"Oh, that's not of course! It ought to be given to the best actor," said Pankhurst.

"Quite so; so it comes to—"

"No, hejakes!"

"Now, look here—"

"Bring all I tell you—"

"Faith, and I—"

"I guess there's too many Hamlets," said Poindester; "Hamlet's queer. What do you say to Julius Caesar?"

"Well, yes," said Pankhurst thoughtfully; "I can take the part of Brutus quite as well as that of Hamlet."

"Faith, if you have Brutus, I'll have Julius Caesar."

"Cassius is mine!" said Dick Neville.

"Great shakes, and what do I take?"

"Oh, you can be stage-manager, Pankhurst!"

"I'm jolly well going to be Brutus or Caesar—"

"You can be the ghost of Caesar, if you like, Pankhurst darling!"

"Why not Portia?" said Price.

"We shall have to have a Portia—we can't make Brutus a bachelor, even in an amateur performance."

"If you think I'm going to play a giddy girl's part—"

"Portia wasn't a giddy girl. She was a solemn Roman matron."

"Ha, ha! Look here, Pankhurst, you can't stage-manage and be one of the leading characters, too! You can be a conspirator!"

"Mark Antony's mine, then," said Poindester. "I can stage-manage and act as well. Price can be a giddy conspirator, anybody he likes. As it happens, I have studied Mark Antony's part, and know it pretty well. I shall only have to polish up the lines a bit. I'll give the action now—"

"No you jolly well won't!" said Pankhurst. "I'll give you the speech after the assassination as a sample of Brutus—"

"Kidd! We don't want any free samples now! We'd better make up a list of the fellows we want to take the characters, and get them to learn up the parts, and then for a rehearsal!"

"Quite so!"

And the leading parts of the drama having been assigned to the five juniors themselves, and as only just, they proceeded to make a list of the smaller parts, and the fellows next suited to fill them, and then the meeting in No. 4 Study broke up, and the Fourth Form Amateur Dramatic Society proceeded to take the rest of the Form into their confidence on the subject.

### Fitting the Parts.

On the few occasions when the Combine and the Old Firm joined forces they had no difficulty in carrying the rest of the Fourth Form at Ciroden with them.

There was no lack of histrionic talent in the Fourth Form, in judge by the offers the committee received.

The number of fellows who could play Brutus or Mark Antony was amazing. Fellows would stop Poindester in the passage, and begin reciting the famous oration at him, to show him that they were just the chaps he wanted.

Poindester, as stage-manager and president of the dramatic society, had plenty of work on his hands, and heaps of worry on his mind; but perhaps the hardest task of all was to dodge—or to listen to—the remorseless wailers who

upbraid him in the most unexpected places.

Otherwise, all seemed to be going well for the Ciroden dramatists.

Mr. Langton, the master of the Fourth, obtained permission for them to use No. 3 Room for the representation on a certain evening; and Poindester had fixed the date over a week ahead in order to allow time for rehearsals. It did not occur to the enthusiastic young dramatists that a week might not be enough.

The chief difficulty was to persuade the fellows that the small parts were just meant to show, and that there couldn't be a choice. Bruttus and Cassius or sixteen Mark Antonyms in a single play.

Then there was a slight difficulty about the size of the stage. The room was a fair size, and it had a raised dais that served very well as a stage; but there was hardly room for a full company. Besides, if nearly all the Form were on the stage, where was the audience to come from?

So Poindester sternly limited the number of his assistants. King, the fattest boy in the Fourth, was assigned the parts of all the citizens of Rome—he was the Crowd. And Fish was assigned the part of the Roman Senate. Poindester said that they could leave something to the imagination of the audience.

"We've getting on swimmingly," Poindester confided in his chance a day or two later. "I guess I've got all the fellows to take their parts, and not ask for more, at last. It's amazing, the cheek of some of these youngsters!"

"Amazing!" agreed Neville. "They think they can take parts which would have made Irving grow pale. By the way, I'm getting on splendidly with Cassius."

"Faith, and you're right!" agreed Mickie Flynn. "The cheek of them is astonishing. Whop, young Trimble actually offered to take Julius Caesar of my hand! He couldn't get within miles of the part. It takes a jolly clever fellow to play Julius Caesar. I'm getting on rippingly!"

One thing was certain. The play had taken firm hold of the junior's minds; and for some days they lived, thought, spoke, and breathed Shakespeare.

### The First Rehearsal.

Linada G. Poindester looked round the apartment. It was on the ground floor of the old house, and was spacious enough. The windows, ornaments gave views of the playing-field, and the Fifth Form fellows could be seen playing cricket; and their shouts, and the merry clack of bat and ball came clearly to the ears of the amateur dramatic society.

But the Ciroden dramatists were not thinking of cricket now. They had their parts in their heads, and were looking properly solemn.

The play had, of course, been mercifully cut for representation. Poindester had charge of that department, and he had not spared the blue pencil. The juniors were to turn on the whole performance in a couple of hours, and there might be delays. Unimportant scenes had been taken out bodily. Long speeches had been cut down in two or three lines—a step heartily concurred in by everybody but the fellow who was to speak the lines. The Poindester version of the play might have made the Bard of Avon weep if he

had seen it. But Poindester was a businesslike fellow. What he gave, he wanted to be a success, and it was no use giving too much.

"We're all here, except a few citizens," said Dick Neville. "What a row they're making at school!"

"There's a lesson looking in at the window!" said Pankhurst.

"I guess that doesn't matter. It'll improve his mind. Now, look at your parts; and then speak from memory when your term comes. I'm prompter on this occasion; but you won't always have me to help you, so do your best."

"Quite so!"

"And I—"

"And of course going to do Julius Caesar, Mickie, drop that wretched Tupperary anecdote. Cassius with a legless would be rotten?"

"Look here, Pankhurst—"

"Order! Now, then, Brutus—"

"Right—oh!" said Pankhurst.

"What means this shouting! I do hear the people."

"Choose Caesar for their king!"

"Go ahead, Cassius!"

"Ay, do you fear it?"

said Dick Neville.

"Then I must think you would not have it so!"

"I would not, Cassius, yet I love him—"

"You ever so!" said Poindester.

"Whose did you get that line from? It doesn't make sense."

"Oh!"

"If you're going to move like a cat, Pankhurst—"

"Something stung me!" howled Pankhurst. "It stung me on the mouth!"

"Oh, cut! Get on with the washing."

Pankhurst glared, but he rubbed his mouth, and got on with the washing. The scene progressed, and, excepting for the unfortunate circumstances that rent of the actors' faces most of their time, all went very well. With a colony that would have amazed a professional company, the actors got into the heart of the play, owing to the stage-manager's energetic aid.

Greene, in a wonderful robe, took the part of Portia, and he was reciting that lady's love when he gave a sudden jump, and broke off.

"Oh!"

"You, now!" said Poindester.

"What are you owing for?"

"Something stung me!"

"Bain!"

"It wasn't rats; it felt like wasps!"

"Bain! Why—"

Greene groaned.

"Ha, ha! You've got it now!"

Poindester rubbed his ear wearily.

He looked round in wrath. Through one of the open windows came a glimpse of roof, and Chuffy of the Fifth was discovered in the very act of using a pen-knife.

"Look there!" roared Poindester.

"The—the best!"

"Collar him!"

Some of the dramatists made a rush to the window, some to the door. But before they could reach him Chuffy had fled, laughing so heartily that he could hardly see.

The disappointed juniors returned wearily to the rehearsal.

"Rotter!" said Neville. "They don't understand the drama. Let's get on!"

"Here they come again!"

A dozen Fifth-Formers, as well as a crowd of lads belonging to the Lower Form, blocked the windows in the re-

heated went on. But there was no more protesting, and the dramatists endured the staring and grinning as well as they could.

The Cliverton fellows did not take the drama as seriously as they ought to have done. Perhaps they did not consider that the Fourth Form actors were quite up to the necessary form for Shakespeare.

All at once, they persisted in regarding "Julius Cæsar," as received by Pointonator & Co., rather in the light of a comedy than of tragedy.

When Pointonator declaimed, with great force, the oration of Mark Antony, and told the awe-struck company that if they had tears they must shed them now, the lookers-on from without only shed a mighty gust of laughter.

In the face of want of appreciation like this, it showed a great determination on the part of the amateurs that they stick it out.

But they did stick it out. They went through the rehearsal in the latter end, and before the fields came they were left in peace.

### The Programme.

On the evening before the performance, the programme was placed on the notice-board that all Cliverton might read.

Cress and Cuffy, of the Fifth, were the first to discover it there, and their chattering brought a crowd of fellows to the spot to read the programme. Cress read it out in an interested voice.

"The Cliverton Amateur Dramatic Society will give a performance of Shakespeare's tragedy, 'Julius Cæsar,' on Saturday evening, commencing at 7 p.m."

"All Cliverton fellows, juniors and seniors, admitted free; but a collection-box will be placed inside the door, into which the audience are invited to put such contributions as they are inclined to offer."

"It is hoped that the collection will be wholly of silver, but copper will not be barred."

"Trevilgan, our honored captain, has promised to come. Follow his good example, and roll up in your thousands!"

"The cast is subdivided, and any alterations may be made at the discretion of the management. The latter do not guarantee the appearance of any particular artists."

**JULIUS CÆSAR**..... Michael Murphy (Flynn)  
**OCTAVIUS CÆSAR**..... G. Simpson  
**MARCUS ANTONIUS**..... Laurence G. (Pointonator)  
**BRUTUS**..... G. Guffy  
**BRUTUS**..... H. Pankhurst  
**CASSIUS**..... Sidney North  
**CASSIUS**..... Richard North  
**A SOUTHWILLYER**..... E. Twigg  
**CÆSAR'S WIFE**..... Smith minor  
**FORTIA**..... K. Greene  
**ROMAN SENATE**..... Herbert Fish  
**CROWD**..... Lawrence King

All Cliverton printed over that notice, though why, the Fourth Form dramatists could not make out.

And the next day Fish conscientiously found himself addressed as the Roman Senate, while King was abused to an equal, and Smith minor was called upon to lag under the name of Mrs. Cress.

"Nerve mind," said Lincoln G. Pointonator, "let 'em snigger! We'll knock spite off 'em when we give the performance. All I've doubted about is Brutus and Cassus."

The great night came.

Needless to say, the Fourth Form dramatists were in a state of nervous tension. They were looking forward to seven o'clock with mingled pleasure and dread.

But, on the score of the size of the audience, they had nothing to fear. Nearly all Cliverton had decided to come and see the Shakespearean amateurs, as they had derisively named the amateur actors.

Polite invitations had been sent to the Form-masters, and even to the Head, but, for some reason—unknown—these had not been accepted. But the rooms were to turn up in strong lanes, and, of course, the Lower Forms would follow out.

The Sixth persisted in regarding the affair humorously, and more than that one declared that it was worth while coming for a good laugh.

Such remarks were treated by the amateur dramatists with lolly wags.

But, anyway, whether they laughed or wept, the contributions in the money-box would be the same; and so Pointonator remarked, that was an important point.

As the time drew near, the room began to fill, fellows pushing for good places as eagerly as a first-night crowd at a London Theatre.

Pointonator had placed a metal money-box, of ample dimensions, just inside the door on a chair. It was too prominent to be overlooked, and every fellow who did not stop and slide something in at the slit in the lid would be conspicuous.

But, to do their justice, very few of the fellows overlooked the money-box.

Pointonator, looking out from behind the scenes, saw fellow after fellow stop, and heard the clink of metal as it dropped inside.

The contributions were mostly laughing as they made their contributions. But it did not matter very much if they laughed so long as they paid.

"My word," said Pankhurst, who was in the green-room—somewhat dimly, constrained at attention—during the part of Brutus, "I can hear the money-box tinkling from here. This means a harvest for the young Senate!"

The sounds of the room filling up did not inspire the dramatists with more confidence. When they looked out from behind the scenes they saw a sea of faces, mostly wearing anticipatory grins.

When seven rang out, of course, the curtains was not ready to go up. But the audience were ready and impatient. They commenced stamping on the floor, and out-calling, and shrieking out encouragement to the players.

"We shall have to begin, or there'll be disaster," said Pointonator hurriedly. "We really ought to have been ready to time!"

"We've got such a jolly ripping stage-manager," Pankhurst remarked, in a casual way.

"Oh, don't jaw! Back up, Dick—old man, Cassius!"

"Nearly ready."

"I'm waiting," remarked Brutus—old Pankhurst.

"Wait quietly, then!"

"Certainly. But the audience wasn't."

Pankhurst was certainly right there. A real theatre crowd could not have been more impatient for the raising of the curtains than were the Cliverton fellows.

"Oh, wait with her!"

"Share yourselves!"

"Nerve mind the green-paint!"

"Kick-off, ain't you?"

"I'm ready," said Neville hastily. "I think this legs will keep fastened. I'll hold it just here in my hand. It's a short score, after the way you've cut it, Pandy. Come on, all of you!"

The curtain rose.

According to the programme, the scene was "Romæ—a public place," and, with the aid of stretched paper scenes, painted by the dramatists themselves, the stage-manager had done his best to produce an illusion to that effect.

But the illusion was not perfect, for several voices were heard to mutter questions as to what was intended.

"It's Romæ," said Cress, of the Fifth, in a stage whisper. "Romæ—a public-house!"

And there was a general chuckle.

The little joke and the chuckle reached the ears of the amateur dramatists, and they turned red under their green-paint. But they went on gallantly.

Trevilgan, the captain of Cliverton, drew out from on the chucks.

"Give them a chance!" he said.

And the audience quieted down. The first scenes went off pretty well, and as the play progressed the actors gained more confidence. Pointonator had cut out all that seemed, to his judgment, superfluous, and the result was that the players got to business very quickly. When the main position was presented to Cress, and Cassius and Brutus were on their knees, there was enthusiasm in the audience.

"Don't be a rotter, Julius!" called out someone. And there was a roar.

"Fudge," said Julius Cress, looking towards the audience, "and if you interrupt me, Philpot, it's a think or I'll be giving ye!"

And the audience stopped.

"Man up, you snuff!" whispered Pointonator softly. And Julius Cress turned to him with exaggerated dignity.

"Nave, and shut up, ye-ild. Mark Antony darling!"

"Will you get on with the wadding, you rotter!"

"Fudge, and I'm getting on! Sure, you've made me forget me part."

And Micky Flynn, forgetting where he was, went on with some lines that belonged to an earlier part of the play:

"Let me have about me men that are fat,  
 Black-headed men, and such as deep  
 o' nights."

Only in his confusion the Irish junior missed the lines, and delivered them as follows:

"Here, let me have about me men that are sleek,  
 Fat-headed men, and such as deep  
 o' nights."

The rest was drowned in a yell of laughter from the audience, and Trevilgan could make no attempt to suppress it now, for he was laughing himself all the time he saw down his cheeks.

"Oh, you Irishman are!" muttered Pankhurst.

"He, he, he!" roared the audience.

"Let him have fat-headed men about him! And let's get 'em, too!"

"He, he, he!"

"Order!" said Trevilgan, almost weeping with laughter. "Order!"

And at last the movement was halted, and it was possible to hear again what was going on on the stage. Cress, having declared his intention of keeping Marcus Cæsar in exile, he was stabbed by the conspirators, and made his celebrated dying soliloquy, but not quite according to order.

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THE CLIVEDEN COMBINE

(Continued.)

Some of the conspirators, in the excitement of the moment, had struck with more force than was necessary, and Micky Flynn let out a yell.

"Eh, ha, ha," shrieked the audience. "Shut up!" whispered Penderster. "Shut up!" whispered Penderster. "Fall down dead!"

"That's all very well, but—"  
"Fall down, you idiot!"  
"Don't I say something here?"  
"Say 'Eh, ha, ha!'"  
"If you call me a brute, Penderster—"

The whole dialogue was audible to those who sat near the stage, and the effect may be imagined. The audience rolled and gasped, and some of them looked as if they were going into St. Micky Flynn fell with a loud bang, and gasped.

"Eh, ha, Panky—I mean, of it, Brutus!"  
"Oh, you tribune dummy!"  
"Feh, and I—"  
"Shut up! You're dead!"  
"Wasn't I got you behind the scenes?" murmured Julius Cesar. "I'll jolly well show you whether I'm dead or not!"

It was some minutes before the audience were quiet enough to hear any more. Then Penderster had re-entered as Mark Antony, and was speaking.

"Oh, mighty Cesar, dost thou lie on low?"  
"Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, shrunk to this little measure? Fare you well!"  
"Eh, ha, ha!"

How the rest of the scene went the actors hardly know. The audience were gasping, and they had hardly recovered their breath when so much laughter when the next scene was announced. In the next scene Brutus addressed the crowd, composed of Lawrence King-King listened with exemplary patience,

and answered for the citizens of Rome, and then in came Mark Antony and the rest with Cesar's body. Cesar's body was laid to great expressivity as it was dumped down on the floor.

"Go it, Penderster!"  
"We'll lead you our ears!"  
"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!"  
I came to bury Cesar, not to praise him.

"I guess the evil that men do—"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Come again!"  
"Oh, you responsible third-foot man!" murmured Penderster, behind the scenes. "And you had the cheek to criticize my Brutus!"

"Feh, shut up, you glazer merchant!" said the body of Cesar, raising its head thoughtlessly. "What do you mean by it?"  
"Let down, you dummy!"  
"Feh, and I—"  
"Let him go on!" roared the audience. "Order! Go it, Julius!"

"Eh, ha, ha!"  
"Silence, ye scoundrels—"  
"Shut up, you ass!"  
"Rate to you, Panky! I—"  
"You come off!" grunted Penderster. "We're not going to leave the whole show marked up. You can speak without the copias, Penderster."

And Penderster, reaching out from behind the scenes, seized Micky Flynn by the armpit, and dragged him out of sight. If Micky had taken that lying down all might have gone well yet, but Micky's blood was up. Mark Antony went on with his speech, but his voice was drowned by a fierce outburst proceeding from behind the scenes. It was followed by a sound of struggling, and then fighting forms banged against the screen, which toppled over on the stage. It was made of stretched paper on a frame, and as it fell on Mark Antony, the latter's head went through it like a clown's head through a paper hoop at the circus.

That was the last straw.

As Brutus and Julius Cesar staggered on the stage, fighting desperately, and Mark Antony was battered by the waves, the audience jumped up, convulsed with excitement. They stood on the seats, yelling and cheering, and roaring with laughter, and saying the complimentary to Julius Cesar was soon echoed by Brutus, then Sextus, and Penderster. Penderster rushed to his aid, and, of course, Price, dashed to assist his chums. In a few seconds the cast were all fighting, amid a hail of

yells from the audience that came through Cliveden.

Exactly how the unorchestrated scene on the stage would have ended, we cannot say; but the entrance into the room of two or three masters and prelates put a finish to it. The audience, gasping with excitement, dispersed, and the amateur dramatists were cleared out, with lightning, and the light turned out in the room. For hours afterwards fellows were still bursting into yells of laughter at all moments.

Penderster had secured the money-box. There was no doubt that the representation of Julius Cesar had been a ghastly failure as far as the drama was concerned. But the collection was still intact, and when the dramatists met together, and peace was restored, and reminiscences ceased, the money-box was produced. It weighed very heavy, and gave forth a musical clink as Penderster shook it.

Penderster felt in his pockets for the key, and unlocked the box. He opened the lid, and peered out the contents clinging on the table.

The judges were looking on eagerly. But as they looked at the contents of the money-box, the anticipatory eagerness died out of their faces, and was replaced by looks of blank dismay.

"My only hat!" said Penderster.  
"Great-stakes!" gasped Lincoln G. Penderster. "I know, now, why the coppers were grinning when they put the stuff in."

There were three coins in the box. One was a halfpenny, one was a penny, and one was a threepenny-piece. The rest of the collection consisted of buttons!

There were buttons in all shapes and sizes, all designs and colours, of sorts and conditions of buttons—trowsers buttons, waistcoat buttons, coat buttons, shirt buttons, hatpins and buttons, and all more buttons!

The amateur dramatists looked at the heap of buttons, and looked at one another weakly.

Penderster was the first to recover himself.

"So that's the collection," he remarked sarcastically. "I move that a vote of thanks be passed to Lincoln G. Penderster, Esquire, for his wonderful and successful scheme to raise the wind."

And Lincoln G. Penderster, for once in his life, made a word to say.

The audience had bought their laugh cheaply, after all. The sum total realized was fourpence-halfpenny—and sixpence buttons! All things considered, it is not surprising that the fellows were a long time before they left off laughing at the sad case of the Cliveden Dramatists.

THE END.

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