

FOILING THE FOURTH!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Tale of School Life in This Issue.

The Dreadnought 1^d

Published
Every Thursday

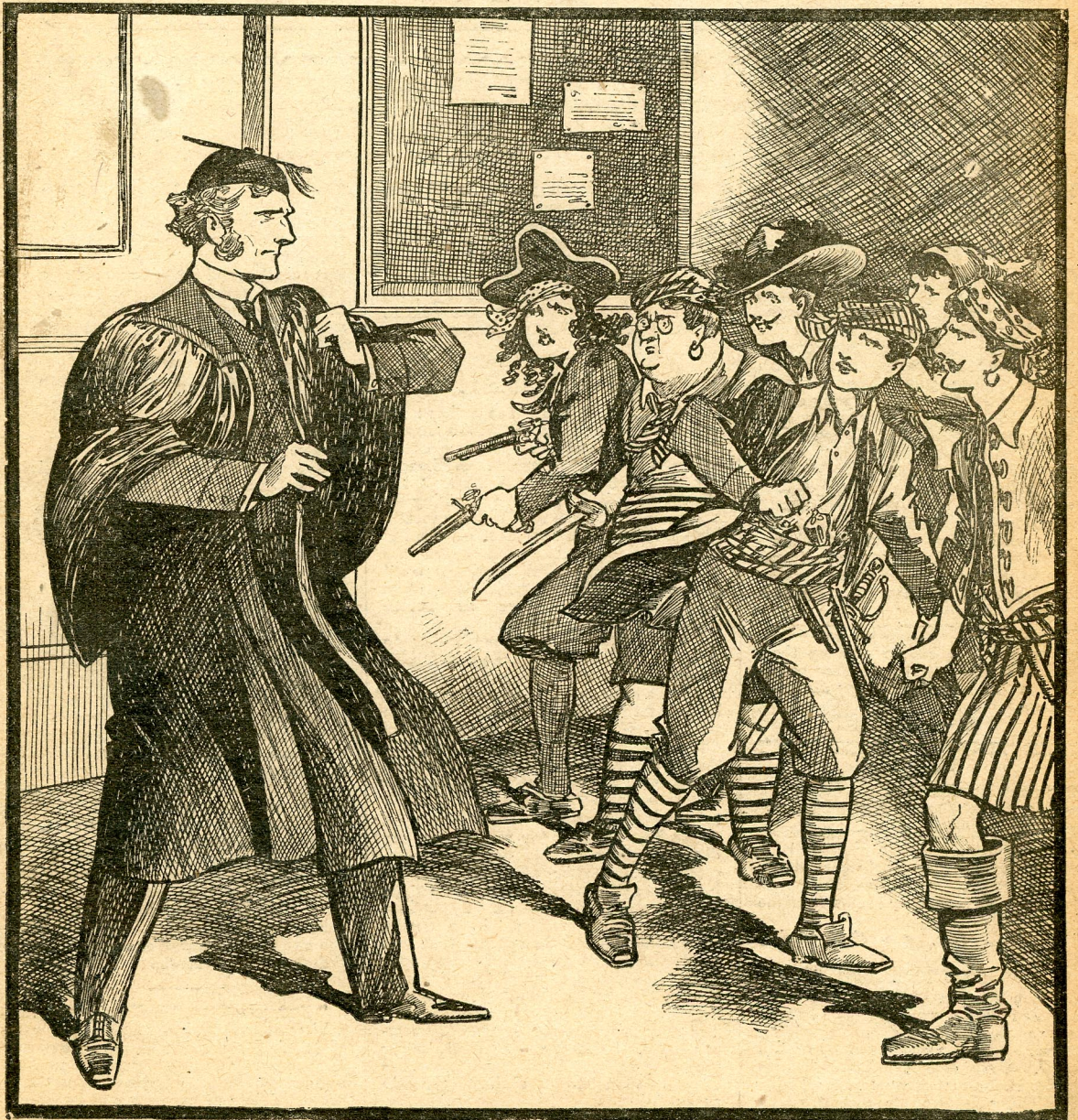
No. 146]

WITH WHICH IS AMALGAMATED

"THE BOYS' JOURNAL."

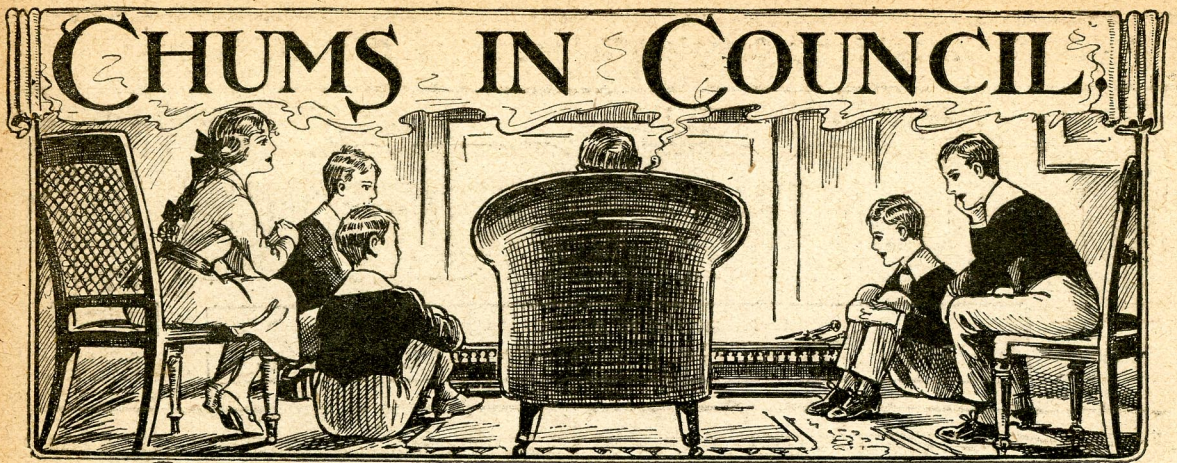
[Vol. 6

Week Ending
March 13^h, 1915.



A SURPRISE FOR THE HEAD!

(A Dramatic Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale Contained in this Issue.)



Whom to write to:
Editor,
"The Dreadnought"
The Fleetway House,
Farringdon St., London, E.C.

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**FOR NEXT THURSDAY:
"THE RIVAL PERFORMERS!"**

By Frank Richards.

Of late there has been a wave of enthusiasm for amateur theatricals passing over the Remove, and our next grand, long complete story of Wharton and his chums tells of the tremendous rivalry among the members of the Form for the leading part. The Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Company set to work with a will, and for some days little is heard in No. 1 Study save lines from "By Order of the Tyrant!" which is the title of the patriotic play intended to be performed shortly. Arrangements are made for the youthful Henry Irvings to visit Wharton Lodge, and great excitement prevails. Unfortunately, however, no one can be found who will willingly play the part of the villainous Hun, and, things being at a deadlock,

"THE RIVAL PERFORMERS"

have no recourse but to give up their grand idea and prepare another entertainment of an entirely different character.

OTHER FINE FEATURES NEXT WEEK.

Our next instalment of

"THE MERCHANT'S SECRET!"

will be read with absorbing interest by all my chums. Sexton Blake is a detective of whom the world never tires, and the clever manner in which he out-maneuvres Ezra Q. Maitland will make excellent reading.

Delightful, also, are the coming chapters of

"TWO OF THE BEST!"

a serial which has already brought me an influx of congratulatory letters. Perhaps the finest attraction of all, however, is the magnificent story of Bill Stubbs, the cockney hero, whose exploits at the seat of war are read with never-failing interest in almost every British household. I can heartily commend this yarn to the notice of all my loyal chums.

Our clever cartoonist has contributed

another fine drawing of the Kaiser, together with an applicable song for that much-detested tyrant.

Altogether, I consider that next Thursday's DREADNOUGHT will be one of the finest pennyworths on the market, and all who purchase it will be well repaid by experiencing many hours of really first-class entertainment.

Brothers and Rivals.

Bob R., of Balham, has written for my counsel and advice. Bob has a brother who works in the same office, and who is a year younger than himself.

"My brother," writes Bob, "has always been brilliant in everything he has undertaken, whereas I am generally known as 'The Duffer,' because I'm not half so clever. Although I am the elder, my brother has 'gone up one' at work, while I shall probably have to wait another year or so before promotion comes my way.

"Now, I don't mind confessing to you, Mr. Editor, that I find it frightfully hard not to be jealous of my brother's success. He is shooting ahead at every turn, and I have to bear the ridicule of being 'the same old duffer.' Mind you, my brother is a decent kid, and doesn't swank about his prospects; at the same time, the situation seems pretty galling. What is your advice to me?"

The best advice I can render you, my dear Bob, is to go plodding steadily on, still retaining your affection for your brother, and caring not one whit for the jeers of the populace. Yours is a position with which I sincerely sympathise; but I do not see that you need discourage yourself in any way. It is the old, old story of the hare and the tortoise, and although your brother may soar high in the regions of success, you may have the satisfaction of knowing that, being possessed of fewer talents, you have turned those you are blessed with to the best possible account.

Personally, I prefer the steady, resolute, "dogged-does-it" type of fellow to the lad who is fitted by Nature to rise without serious effort. "Be

good, friend Bob, and let who will be clever."

During my schooldays I was intimate with two boys who might well be compared to you and your brother. One was an all-round scholar and sportsman, excelling in many things, and failing in none. The other had few attainments. He floundered about on the footer-field in a truly ridiculous fashion, and the manner in which he wielded a cricket-bat would have made the angels weep. He was regarded as a hopeless yet harmless sort of fellow, and was more often than not a target for the arrows of several youthful wags.

Years have passed since then. These two fellows now belong to the same regiment, and the story was only recently told in the papers how this "duffer," this apparently useless fellow of whom I have just written, was instrumental in saving a whole garrison, including his old schoolfellow, and that he has been strongly recommended for the D.S.O.

And how did these things come to pass? Why, solely because this hero, presumably without talents, yet had the courage to volunteer for a most dangerous enterprise, calling for that most noble of all qualities—the spirit to dare and to do, regarding not the end, so long as that end be honourable.

That brave action breathed the very spirit of unselfishness. It was a situation where cleverness counted for nought, and where a fellow who was once universally derided proved himself a true hero in the eyes of the world.

You should take heart, then, Bob, from this gallant deed, and remember that there are races which are not to the swift, and triumphs to which even a "duffer" may attain.

"BOY AND GIRL" write a joint letter asking me whether I think a boy and girl of fourteen ought to be sweethearts. My answer is that young people of that age ought to be chums and nothing more. They are too young to be sweethearts. Let them put aside such sentimental ideas until they are a few years older.

THE EDITOR.

IF YOU ARE WANTING ADVICE WRITE TO YOUR EDITOR. HE WILL DO HIS BEST TO HELP YOU!

When finished with,
please hand this book
to a friend, and oblige.
The Editor.

THE DREADNOUGHT

To ensure getting
next week's copy
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mended to order in
advance.

FOILING THE FOURTH!

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's New Idea.

"Time Harry's train was in!" said Bob Cherry, looking at his watch; and his words were followed by the rumble of a train down the line.

The boys from Greyfriars, standing on the platform of the little station of Friardale, were on the alert at once. There were four of them there—Bob Cherry, with his cap on the back of his curly head as usual, Nugent, with his cheery, good-tempered smile, Billy Bunter, blinking through his big spectacles, and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Harry Wharton, the acknowledged chief of Study No. 1 in the Remove at Greyfriars, had been to London, and the chums of the Remove were waiting at the station to welcome him home.

"There she comes!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the steaming train came in sight down the line. "Now, be ready to give Harry a cheer the moment he puts his head out of the window!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Nugent. "Hallo, there's his chivvy! Hip, pip!" "Hurrah!"

Harry Wharton was looking out of the carriage window, in the expectation of seeing his chums on the platform. There was a smile upon the boy's handsome face, and he waved his hand in greeting as he caught sight of the Removites. The latter waved their caps and shouted.

Harry Wharton had been away only a couple of days, but his chums had missed him. His uncle had taken him for a "little run" to town, and he had had a good time, but his look showed how glad he was to see Greyfriars and his chums again. The train slowed down, and the juniors rushed to open the door of Harry's carriage. Harry jumped out lightly, and was shaken



"What the—now!" gasped Dr. Locke, staring at the smugglers. "I hope we did not startle you, sir," said Wharton. "Why, what do you mean by going about in this ridiculous garb, Wharton?" (See Chapter 7.)

hands with with great heartiness by the Removites two at a time.

"We're jolly glad to see your old chivvy again!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, shaking Harry's right hand.

"What-ho!" said Nugent emphatically, shaking his left. "Jolly glad!"

"The gladfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, in his beautiful Hindoo-English. "The hurrahfulness of the jollyful meeting is great."

And as Harry had no more hands to be shaken, the dusky junior slapped him heartily on the back

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "We're glad to see you, Wharton, we are really! I say, you fellows, let a chap shake hands with the fellow!"

And Billy Bunter rushed up to a gentleman who had just alighted from the train and grasped his hand, and began to shake it effusively. Billy Bunter was extremely short-sighted, and his big spectacles seemed rather for ornament than use, as they did not assist his vision much. The man whose hand he was shaking stared at him in utter amazement.

"Jolly glad to see you, Wharton!" said Billy. "I suppose you will be standing a feed in the study to celebrate—"

Nugent caught the effusive Bunter by the collar and swung him away from the amazed stranger.

"That isn't Wharton, you ass!"

"Isn't it?" exclaimed Bunter, blinking in the bright sun. "No; more it is! I beg you pardon, sir! I'm sincerely sorry! Where is Wharton? Oh, here you are! We're all jolly glad to see you, Wharton; and if you are going to stand a feed in honour of your return, I'll cut ahead and get the things from the tuckshop!"

"Oh, cheese it, Billy!" growled Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked at him indignantly.

"I only want to save time," he said. "If there's going to be a feed, I should like to have it ready for you fellows when you get to Greyfriars, that's all. I was thinking that it was very thoughtful of me. If that's all the thanks I get—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's a good idea, anyway," he said; "and I want to speak to you fellows, and I can't do it while Bunter's here, as he does all the talking—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"So he had better cut ahead and see to the grub. I'm getting peckish, too, as a matter of fact. My uncle tipped me a sovereign when he saw me into the train, and so I am in funds!"

"Good! Got any uncles like that to give away?" asked Nugent.

"There you are, Billy. Buzz off!"

"I'll buzz off fast enough, Wharton. Am I to spend all this?"

"No, you young villain; only half of it!"

"I thought you might like to have a really ripping feed to celebrate your return to Greyfriars!"

"I haven't been on an expedition to the North Pole," said Wharton, laughing. "And if you can't get up a decent feed for ten bob, you can leave the job to me."

"Oh, I can manage it, Wharton, first-rate, only—"

"Well, go and manage it. Mind, I shall want a half-sov. change."

"Right you are!"

And Billy Bunter darted off. He was not usually an active boy, but when he was making the arrangements for a study feed he could be as quick and alert as anybody.

"Come on!" said Nugent, linking his arm in Harry's. "We'll stroll down to Greyfriars and get in good time for the feed."

"Just a moment! Where's my bag?"

"I've got it," said Bob Cherry.

"I'm going to carry it for you."

"Where's my book?"

"Your book! What book?"

"It's on the seat in the carriage. Hand it out, Inky, will you?"

"Certainly!"

The Nabob of Bhanipur handed out Harry Wharton's book. The Removites glanced at it in some curiosity. They had expected to see a copy of "The Boys' Friend" or "The Gem," but Wharton's book was of far greater magnitude. It was of quarto size, and rather thick, in stiff covers, with a brown-paper wrapping outside.

"What on earth is that?" asked Nugent, as the nabob handed it to Wharton, who put it carefully under his arm.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"It's my score."

"Your what?"

"My score."

"Score! A cricket score?"

"Ha, ha! No; a vocal score. I'll explain later. I've got it in connection with a new idea I've thought of. Come on!"

The juniors left the station. Harry Wharton was in a thoughtful mood, and his chums looked at him, and at the volume under his arm in great curiosity.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Bob Cherry, as they strolled down the village street towards the leafy lane that led to Greyfriars.

"You know I've been for a run up to town with my uncle," said Wharton. "We had a run round—saw the Zoo, and the waxworks, and the Tower of London, and so on. And last evening we went to the opera."

"My hat!"

Wharton coloured a little.

"You know I am a little bit musical," he said modestly; "as a matter of fact, that night at the opera was a greater treat to me than anything else I saw in town. We saw 'Carmen'—and it was ripping, too. Maria Gay was Carmen, and Zematello was singing Don Jose's part—and I wish you had been there. And an idea struck me—"

"What's the idea?"

"Why shouldn't we do something of the sort at Greyfriars?"

His chums stared.

"Something of what sort?" asked Nugent.

"Something in the operatic line," said Harry Wharton boldly. "We can sing, all of us—I've heard Bob hacking away at the Toreador song—"

"Thank you!" said Bob Cherry.

"With a little practice you could do it," said Harry Wharton. "I was thinking of myself for the hero, Don Jose—the soldier chap, you know, who falls in love with Carmen and deserts. Billy Bunter would do for Remendado—he's a funny little beggar. We could get up a company and perform 'Carmen' in the common-room—"

"By Jove, that would take the shine out of the Upper Fourth Musical Society," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "They gave the 'Beggars' Opera' last term, you know, and the whole school voted it rotten. They've never dared to tackle Grand Opera."

"Nothing venture, nothing win."

"That's true enough. I don't see why we shouldn't learn up the parts and give a performance of 'Carmen,'" said Nugent thoughtfully. "It's a ripping opera, and everybody knows something from it, and that's an advantage, as it would come familiar to them. Is that the score you've got under your arm?"

"Yes," said Harry, opening the volume. "I bought it in Berners Street on purpose, when I thought of the idea. It's the vocal score."

"Why, it's in French!"

"Of course it is. The opera was written in French."

Nugent whistled.

"Are you thinking of performing it in French?"

"Of course."

"But—"

"It will make the fellows polish up their French a little, and will do them lots of good in that way."

"But what price the audience?"

"The audience will be admitted free of charge."

"I mean, how will they stand the French? They won't understand French—especially Lower Fourth French."

"They'll have to do the best they can," said Wharton. "Anyway, there will be the music for those who can't understand the words. Heaps of people go to Covent Garden and listen to operas they don't understand a word of. It's the music they want."

"Well, there's something in that; but where are you going to get an orchestra?" said Nugent dubiously.

Harry laughed.

"I'm not going to try to get up an orchestra. That would be rather too big an order even for the Greyfriars Remove. Mr. Quelch would let us have his piano. He offered to let me use it for practice."

"And who will play?"

"My dear kid, there are lots of fellows at Greyfriars who can rattle off a piano accompaniment to a song or two," said Harry. "But I was thinking that we might have a professional, to make sure of getting the thing done properly. We could get a chap from the music shop in Friardale to come for the whole evening for a guinea, and it's worth clubbing up for, to make the thing go."

"Something in that."

"We should have to stipulate that he knew the music, and rehearsed it or something," said Bob Cherry. "You know what these cheap accompanists

are, especially in the country. They give you a polka to the time of the 'Dead March in Saul,' and rattle you off a dirge at waltz time."

"We'll see that he's up to snuff. If he doesn't keep time we'll kill him and get a new one," said Harry Wharton. "But I say, what do you think of the wheeze?"

"It won't be easy."

"I don't expect it to be easy."

"Well, it's a jolly good one! Dabney, Temple & Co. of the Upper Fourth put on a lot of side over their musical society, and this will take the shine out of them. It's the first time Grand Opera has ever been performed at Greyfriars."

"That's so; and, if it's successful, we can go further, and perhaps later on give a performance of Wagner's 'Ring.'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Still, we'll be satisfied with 'Carmen,' so far. Wagner is a little bit above the Remove, I suppose."

"Ha, ha! I fancy so—a trifle. Anyway, 'Carmen' will do to go on with. But about doing it in French?"

"My dear chap, it was written in French by Bizet, and so there's no alternative."

"But there are translations."

"You know what translations are! All the spirit of the original is lost. I've seen two translations of 'Carmen,' and both very weak stuff. Besides, the Wharton Operatic Company—"

"The what?"

"The Wharton Operatic Company."

"Well, that's a jolly good title, anyway."

"The Wharton Operatic Company is not going to descend to the level of a travelling 'Grand-Opera-in-English' Company," said Harry, with an expressive sniff. "Grand Opera in English may be a good thing, but in the original it must naturally be better. People who don't know French and Italian can listen to the music. What's the good of spoiling a good song by sticking it into English words that don't suit it? Besides, the Upper Fourth fellows can only perform in English. Grand Opera in the original will knock them into a cocked hat."

"Well, there's something in that."

"I should say so. Anyway, I think you'll agree that we ought to go in for it?"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"There's one thing that's jolly certain," he remarked, "and that is that there will be some fun to be got out of it, and so I vote for 'Carmen.'"

"And my votefulness is coincident with that of the esteemed Cherry," said Hurreo Singh. "The idea is really ripping!"

And the chums of the Remove strode on towards Greyfriars, eagerly discussing the new idea.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Temple, Dabney, & Co. are Not Pleased

"Oh, so you're back?"

It was Temple, of the Upper Fourth Form at Greyfriars, who spoke, as the chums of the Remove came in at the ancient gate of Greyfriars. Temple was captain of the Upper Fourth, and between him and Wharton, who was captain of the Remove, there had been much warfare, generally ending to the advantage of the Remove.

Temple stopped in front of the chums, and stared at the score under Wharton's arm. He was rather musical, was Temple, and knew a score when he saw one.

Dabney and Fry were with him, and they stared at Wharton's score, too. They were the leading lights of the Upper Fourth Musical Society.

Harry Wharton nodded. "Yes," he said cheerfully, "I'm back."

"Did you go to the Zoo while you were in London?" asked Temple, with interest.

"Oh, yes!" "And they let you come away again?"

"Yes; and your relations in the monkey-house sent their kind regards." Temple turned red as the Removites chuckled.

"What's that you've got under your arm, kid?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Oh, something you wouldn't understand!" said Harry Wharton loftily.

"What the dickens do you mean?" "It's an operatic score."

"Well, you young ass, do you think I don't understand that a thousand times better than you do?" demanded Temple, rather excitedly. "I got up an opera here last term, you young rotter!"

"Yes; an old thing in English!" "Oh, I suppose you could do it in German or Italian?" said Temple.

"Yes, rather, if we liked. But, as it happens, 'Carmen' was written in French, and we're going to perform it in that language," said Harry Wharton calmly.

Temple gasped. "'Carmen?'" "Yes."

"You're going to perform 'Carmen?'" "Certainly!"

"In French?" "Yes, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You hear him, Dab?" "Oh, rather!" said Dabney. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's rather rich, isn't it?" "Oh, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha! How much French do you young worms know? You couldn't ask for your dinner in a French restaurant, let alone perform a French opera."

"I can speak Frenchfully!" "We're all pretty strong on that language," said Wharton. "Nothing like the ongs and dongs you chaps work off and call French!"

"But you have to sing in an opera. How are you going to sing?"

"With our throats, you know!" "Ass. I mean you can't sing. I remember hearing Cherry trying the 'Toreador' song once. It would have killed the Toreador if he had heard it!"

"Look here," began Bob Cherry wrathfully, "I've got a jolly good baritone—"

"Yes, sometimes it's a baritone, I know, and sometimes it's a bass, and at other times a high tenor!" sniggered Dabney. "I've heard it!"

"Well, that will add to the variety," said Harry Wharton. "Let's come by, kids! We've got to get to practice, you know!"

"And you're really going to perform an opera?"

"Of course we are!" "My hat! We'll come to see you do it. It will be a sight for the gods, and

men, and little fishes, and no mistake!" "You will be welcome to come, if you behave yourselves. We shall expect you to put on clean collars, and wash your hands!"

"Why, you—you—" "Come on, chaps; we can't waste any more time with these chumps!" said Harry Wharton. "But I'll tell you what, Temple. I believe you fellows have done something, and, with a little trouble, I might be able to knock you into shape—"

"You—you—" "And then if you rubbed up your French a bit—"

"You—you cheeky young—" "And then, perhaps, I could find you some small parts, if you like to join in the thing," said Harry Wharton genially. "We shall want a chorus, of course, and you fellows could do that all right, if you worked up to it! A dozen of the Upper Fourth could be used for the 'Chorus of Boys' in the first act—"

"You cheeky young villain!" roared Temple.

"Oh, if you don't like to accept the offer, don't! We can find plenty of kids in the Remove who'll do it better; but I thought we might do you a good turn! Come on, chaps!"

And the Removites walked on, leaving the Upper Fourth fellows almost speechless.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Temple, when he recovered his breath. "We're the Musical Society of the Upper Fourth—"

"And he offered us small parts!" "Chorus of Boys' in the first act!"

"The cheeky young rotter!" "I'll tell you what," said Temple. "If they gave this performance, and it was a success, it would take the shine out of anything we've done. But it can't be a success."

"Of course it can't." "Anyway, we'll keep an eye open, and see if we can get a chance to show the rotten, cheeky kids up!" said Temple. "If they don't muck up the opera themselves, we may get a chance to muck it up for them!"

"That's a good idea." "But I say," said Fry. "Very likely the chaps were only gassing to get our rag out."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dabney. Temple nodded.

"It's quite possible," he said. "But that chap Wharton's got cheek enough for anything!"

But when the chums of the Upper Fourth entered the School House a little later, they found that there was no doubt upon the point as to whether the Removites were in earnest or not.

A crowd was gathered round the notice-board in the hall, and Temple & Co. strolled up to see what the attraction was. A paper in Harry Wharton's hand was pinned up there among the school notices.

"NOTICE!"

"The Wharton Operatic Company will shortly be giving a representation of Bizet's opera, 'Carmen,' in the Remove-room at Greyfriars. Cast will be announced later. No charge will be made for admission, as the Wharton Operatic Company are working solely in the interests of Art, and not for reward. All lovers of Grand Opera are cordially invited to attend.

(Signed) H. WHARTON, Manager.

Temple stared. Dabney whistled. "They mean it!" said Fry.

There was a buzz of discussion before the notice-board over the startling announcement. The general opinion seemed to be that the kids in the Remove were growing a bigger nerve than ever; but, at the same time, there was little doubt that the programme announced would be carried out, in some fashion or other, by H. Wharton, Manager.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Wharton Operatic Company Get to Business

There was a cheering scent of hot tea in Study No. 1 at Greyfriars. Five juniors sat round the tea-table, looking very contented. The chums had arrived before Bunter had the tea ready, and Harry had filled up the interval by writing out the notice which had attracted so much attention downstairs. Now the tea was made, and Bob Cherry had filled the cups, and the plates were generously plished, and, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked, everything was gardenfully lovely.

Harry Wharton glanced round the cheerful tea-table with much satisfaction.

"It's good to be here again," he remarked. "I had a nice little run up to town, but I'm glad to see your old chivvies again. Pass the marmalade, Bob!"

"Right-ho, my lord! Here you are!" "The joyfulness of the occasion is only equalled by the excellentness of the grubful tommy!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "These bananas are toasted in really rippingful style, my esteemed Bunter."

"Glad you like them," said Billy Bunter modestly. "There are some things I can do, and cooking is one of them."

"It's a jolly good feed!" said Nugent. "So it ought to be for ten bob!"

"By the way, where's my change?" said Wharton.

Bunter blinked through his spectacles. "I'm sincerely sorry, Wharton—"

"Now then, Billy, I gave you particular instructions—"

"I carried them out, Wharton; but—"

"Well, where's the change?" "There isn't any!"

"How's that?" demanded Harry. "Out!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"You see," explained Bunter, "I have been expecting a postal-order for a rather considerable amount for some days past, and owing to some delay in the post it hasn't arrived. I had promised to settle Mrs. Mibble's account at the tuckshop to-day, thinking the postal-order was certain to come this morning—"

"You young Owl!" "But it didn't, and Mrs. Mibble kept my account out of the sovereign. It was mean, wasn't it? There was only eighteenpence change, and I thought it wasn't worth while bringing that to you, you know, and I might never have had another opportunity."

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Nugent.

"I don't see it, Nugent. It seems to me that I am very unfortunate. Of course, it's all right about Wharton's change; I am going to settle up with him when my postal-order comes."

"Somewhere about the Day of Judgment, I suppose?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I ought to have known better than to trust the Owl," said Harry, half-voiced and half-laughing. "Never mind."

"Of course, I am going to settle when—"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Harry Wharton.

The door opened and Hazeldene of the Remove came in. He coloured a little and took a backward step as he saw the feast.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I—"

"Come in," said Harry cordially.

"Come and have tea; there's plenty."

"I didn't know—"

"Of course you didn't," said Harry, rising and forcing Hazeldene into a seat at the table. "You haven't had your tea, have you?"

"No, but—"

"Then here you are! Another cup of tea, Bunty!"

"Certainly, Wharton."

"Oh, very well," said Hazeldene; "thank you very much! I didn't know you had a celebration on, or I'd have called later. I just looked in to speak to you as soon as I knew you were back, Wharton, that's all."

"I understand. Try these sausage-rolls."

"Thanks; I will."

"And the ham-pies, Vaseline," said Billy Bunter. "I can recommend the ham-pies; I selected them awfully carefully. You know Mrs. Mimble always works off some old, stale ones among the new ones if she gets a chance. I'll guarantee that all these are new and fresh. There's your tea."

"I hear you've got a new wheeze on," said Hazeldene, as he stirred his tea. "What's this about the Wharton Operatic Company?"

Harry laughed.

"It's a genuine thing, Hazeldene. We're going to give a performance of 'Carmen' in French, singing the parts, you know, in the proper style. And you are just the fellow I want to see, as a matter of fact. You can sing?"

"Well, I sing in the choir on a Sunday, as you know."

"Good! That's a bit different from operatic singing, but if you can sing, you can sing, anyway. We want you to take a part."

"Willingly. My French is a bit weak—"

"You will have to give it some physical culture, then; we're going to sing the whole thing in French. But what I wanted particularly to speak about was Miss Hazeldene. You told me your people were living near Greyfriars now?"

"Yes, that's so."

"Well, what do you say to asking Marjorie to take a part in the performance?" said Harry. "It would be quite possible for her to come over here on a half-holiday for a rehearsal, and she could get the score to learn up her part at home."

"Ripping idea!" exclaimed Bob Cherry and Nugent together. Marjorie Hazeldene was a great friend of the chums of Study No. 1.

Hazeldene nodded thoughtfully.

"Marjorie would willingly do anything to help," he said. "She knows French, too, better than I do. She was very good at amateur theatricals last

Christmas at home. But what part would you give her?"

Harry wrinkled his brows reflectively.

"Well, Carmen's part wouldn't be nice for Marjorie," he said. "She could do Micaela—you know, Don Jose's old sweetheart, who comes to find him in the smuggler's den in the Spanish mountains. We shall have to cut down the opera fearfully to make it short enough for performance here, and we can cut down Carmen's part and leave Micaela a bigger one in proportion, so as to give Marjorie a chance."

"That's a good idea."

"Good! Will you write to Marjorie and ask her, then? As for Carmen, we shall have to think about that; I don't know who can play that character yet. I suppose we shall have a boy for it. There's young Desmond; he's got a smooth face and a high voice, and he'd be glad to try, anyway. Finished your tea, chaps? We might as well get the parts allotted, and have the first rough rehearsal this evening."

"Good!"

"I say, Wharton, I haven't quite finished yet!"

"You never have, Billy. You can finish out in the passage, if you like. Shove the things into the cupboard now, kids, and let's get the table back."

The study was soon cleared. Harry Wharton opened the score at the first page.

"Now, as to the parts. I was thinking of myself for Don Jose—"

"Passed," said Nugent. "Go on."

"Bob Cherry as the Toreador."

"Hear, hear!" from Bob Cherry

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't bother now, Billy!"

"But it's important."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"But it's about the opera, and it's an important point."

"Go on, then; but buck up! What is it?"

"You're allotting the part of the Toreador to Bob Cherry—"

"Yes."

"I really think, Wharton, that I could do the part of the Toreador. I don't know the part, and I've never seen it performed, but I really think I could do it."

"Scat! Now, as to—"

"But, really, Wharton—"

"Ass! Did you ever hear of a bull-fighter in spectacles?"

"Well, I could leave the spectacles off for the performance."

"Yes, and blunder all over the stage and bump into everybody! This is going to be an operatic performance, not a bumping match."

"But really—"

"Cheese it, Billy! I'm going to give you a part; but you're not going to be the Toreador, so don't bother. Now, as to Nugent, I think he will make up very well as Le Dancaïro—a sort of smuggler chief."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent. "I rather fancy myself as a Spanish smuggler!"

"We want a funny little beggar for the part of Le Remendado," said Harry. "That will about suit Billy, and we can pass the spectacles."

"Really, Wharton, I think—"

"Remendado's your part, Billy, and you can take it or leave it."

"What does he do?" asked Bunter. "Is it a big part?"

"Oh, no; but it can be made funny, and you're funny enough to start with, so it will be a success in that way!"

"Funny enough to have a Spanish

smuggler with a full-moon face and a pair of spectacles big enough to eat your dinner off!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Bunter. "Is there any feeding in the play? If there is you ought to arrange to have me on in those scenes. I could do that very naturally."

"I've no doubt you could, but you won't get a chance. We can settle Morales and Zuniga and the other minor characters afterwards," said Harry Wharton. "Now, about the girls, Micaela is a nice part for any girl, and if Hazeldene can answer for his sister—"

"That's all right," said Hazeldene.

"I say," said Bob Cherry, grinning. "I've been looking through the score, and isn't Micaela the girl who kisses chaps for their mothers?"

Harry Wharton turned red.

"Well, Micaela has to kiss Don Jose," he admitted, "but that can be cut out. Let's get on with the washing. We shall have to dress up young Desmond as Carmen, that's all; and two Remove kids can take the parts of Frasquita and Mercedes in girls' clothes. We can get the costumes from the place in Friardale, and send them back when the performance is over. Now for the programme!"

"Here's a pencil"

"Thanks."

Harry Wharton wrote down a list of names of the dramatis personæ, and of the amateur operatic singers who were to play them.

"There you are!"

The list ran as follows:

"'CARMEN.' By Georges Bizet.
Performance by the Wharton Operatic Company.

Don Jose H. Wharton.
Escamillo, the Toreador Robert Cherry.

Le Dancaïro F. Nugent.
Le Remendado W. Bunter.
Zuniga Peter Hazeldene.
Carmen Micky Desmond.
Micaela Marjorie Hazeldene.
Frasquita & Mercedes ... Two Remove kids.

"What do you think of that, kids?"

"Goodful, indeed," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But where do I come in, my esteemed and chumful friends?"

Harry Wharton looked rather puzzled.

"That's the difficulty," he said. "We can't leave Inky out of it, but how are we to put him in?"

"The dustful complexion is hidden-fully concealed by the greasy paint," the nabob suggested.

"Oh, it's not your beautiful colour that's the difficulty, but your still more beautiful language!" said Harry. "You see, your English is remarkably—"

"And your French would probably be remarkable," said Cherry.

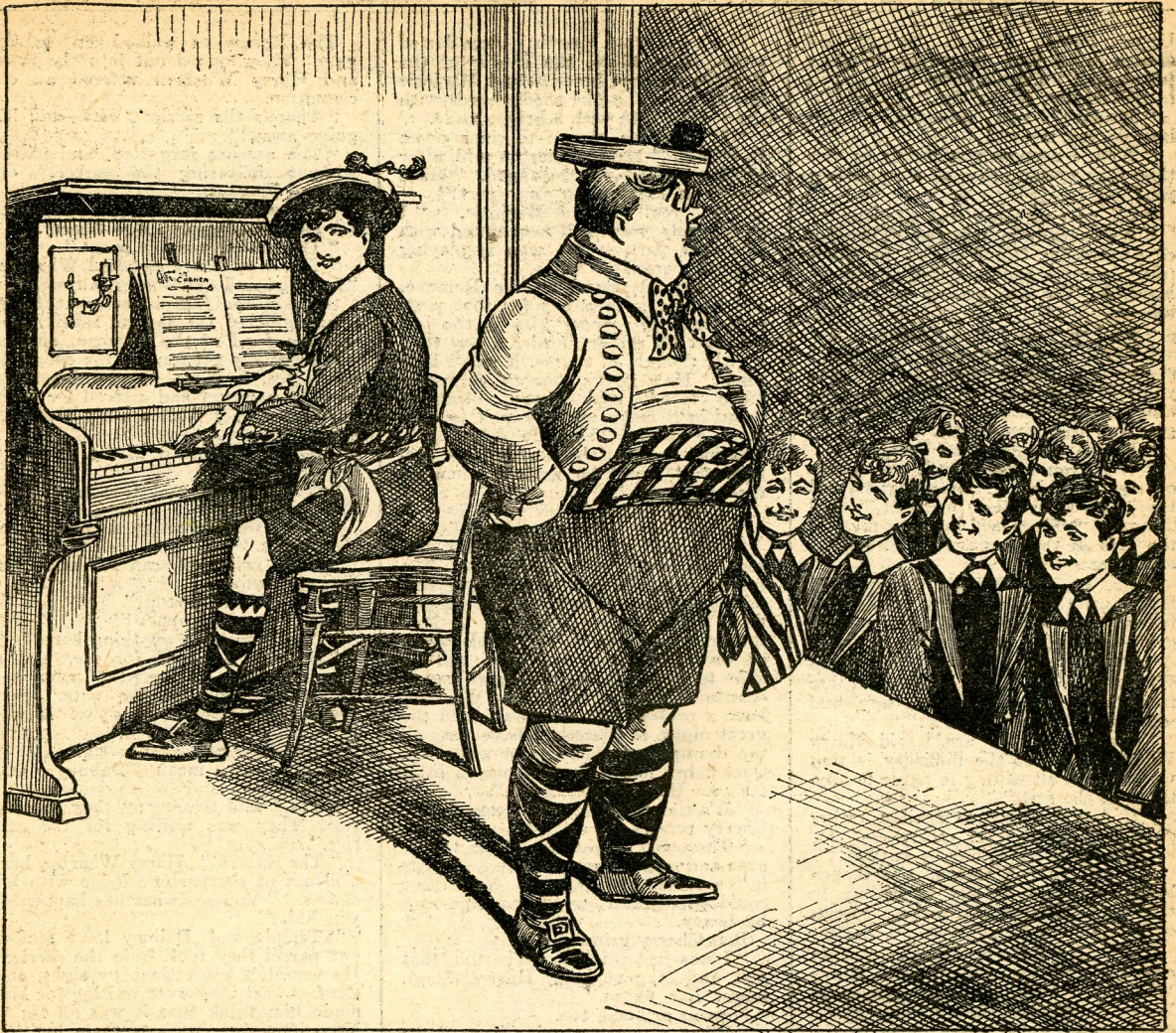
"I studied English under the best native master in Bengal."

"Yes, and the result does him credit; but French—"

"I do not wish to blow my own praises trumpetfully," said Hurreo Singh modestly, "but I speak the Frenchful tongue as excellently as I talk in the flowing language of this esteemed and respectable country."

The juniors chuckled.

"I don't know whether that's quite up to the mark. However, we'll give you the part of Morales, and perhaps



The audience began to giggle. The giggle became a roar as the Toreador came on the stage. A Toreador in spectacles struck the audience as comic. "Go it Bunter!" they shouted. "On the bawl!" (See Chapter II.)

we can make it a non-speaking part," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "We can't leave Inky out, anyway. That's settled, then."
 "And now for the first rehearsal!" said Bob Cherry.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Capturing the Costumes

The notice on the board had attracted general attention at Greyfriars, and the Wharton Operatic Company found themselves the centre of a great deal of attention.

Temple, Dabney, & Co. shrugged their shoulders at the whole business, without, however, any perceptible effect upon the Operatic Company.

The Removites went calmly on their way, in spite of the shrugging of Upper Fourth shoulders.

Fellows listened in the passage outside Study No. 1 to the rehearsals, and chuckled over them. They listened when the Removites were at the piano in Mr. Quelch's room, hard at practice, and chuckled again. Mr. Quelch was the master of the Remove, and something of a pianist, and he had given the

boys permission to use his instrument when he was not in his room—a permission of which they took full advantage. Harry Wharton played the piano very well, and on these occasions he "thumped the ivory," as Bob Cherry elegantly expressed it.

The swinging melodies of Bizet's music naturally caught among the juniors, and fellows went about the school humming them, and even hummed them in class, sometimes bringing down upon themselves the wrath of the Form-masters. Even Temple, Dabney, & Co. caught up the music, and hummed and whistled fragments of the "Habanera," and the "Seguidilla," and the Toreador Song, in season and out of season.

Meanwhile, Hazeldene had written to his sister, and Marjorie had replied that she would willingly do all she could to help the Wharton Operatic Company on with the good work.

The stage-managing was in the hands of Harry Wharton, and he bargained with the costumier in Friardale for the loan of the costumes, and obtained them at a reasonable figure, especially considering the fact that some had to be sent from London.

The costumes had seen service, certainly. But, after all, Spanish smugglers were not supposed to be dressed in Sunday best.

There was much excitement in Study No. 1 at Greyfriars on the day when the costumes were expected.

The local costumier had written to say that they were ready, and that they would be delivered by the carrier from Friardale, and the chums of the Remove were in a state of great expectancy during afternoon school.

When the Remove were dismissed that afternoon Harry Wharton met Temple, Dabney, & Co. in the hall as he came out of the Lower Fourth classroom.

Temple beckoned to him.
 "I say, Wharton, I want to speak to you."

"Fire away!" said Harry cheerfully.
 "You seem to be in earnest over this operatic business," the captain of the Upper Fourth remarked, in a careless sort of way.

"Only just found that out?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Don't you interrupt. I'm speaking to Wharton. I was going to say, Wharton, that we members of the

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "THE RIVAL PERFORMERS!"

Upper Fourth Musical Society are always willing to encourage budding talent, and we don't mind helping you in this matter, if you like."

"Thanks!" said Wharton. "But how do you mean?"

"Well, I suppose you realise by this time that you've taken on a rather big job?"

"Oh, yes; we knew that all along." "We're ready to help you. This idea of performing Grand Opera at Greyfriars is not a bad one, if it's properly handled. We are willing to take it up—"

"Go hon!" said Bob Cherry.

"Please don't interrupt, Cherry. I say we're willing to take it up, and give you kids some coaching. We should act the principal characters, but we could give you the minor parts."

"You're too generous, Temple."

"Well, you know there's the chorus of boys, the soldiers, the smugglers, and the crowd at the bullfight," said Temple. "There will be room for half the kids in the Remove to fill up the small parts—"

"Ha, ha, ha! What's the good of filling up the small parts, while you fellows make a muck of the big parts?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Shut up, Cherry! I'm talking to Wharton. We should save the thing from being a failure in this way, and we're quite willing to do it."

"I dare say you are," said Harry Wharton. "But the difficulty is that we're not at all willing to agree to anything of the sort."

"If you're going to spoil a rather good idea out of sheer vanity—"

"We are going to risk it, anyway."

"I tell you, Wharton, the Upper Fourth Musical Society is willing to take up the matter and make a success of it!"

"The Upper Fourth Musical Society can go and eat coke," said Harry Wharton. "No time to jaw now. We've got the costumes coming by the carrier, and we're going down to the gates to meet him. Come on, chaps!"

"But, I say—"

"Ta-ta!"

The chums of the Remove walked away. Temple and Dabney looked at one another in great disgust.

"Conceited asses!" growled Temple.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"They're really going it strong, though," said Temple. "The costumes coming down, are they? Wish we had a chance of—"

Dabney looked at him quickly.

"What are you thinking of, old chap?"

"Well, if we could get hold of the costumes, we could buy those young rotters—a sort of Guy Fawkes procession."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I suppose they'll be on the look-out," said Temple. "Hallo, what's that row?"

The chiefs of the Upper Fourth looked out into the Close. A trap had driven up, and Harry Wharton was assisting a charming girl to alight.

"Oh, it's Hazeldene's sister!"

Dabney pulled his friend by the arm. "I say, Temple, here's our chance!"

"What do you mean?"

"They're bound to stop talking to Marjorie Hazeldene a bit. Let's get down to the road and look for the carrier."

"Good idea! Come on!"

The two Upper Fourth juniors darted away. Meanwhile, the chums of the Remove were gathered round Marjorie Hazeldene. The girl shook hands with them all in turn with a bright smile.

"It's ripping of you to come down to help us!" Harry Wharton said, after greetings had been exchanged. "Have you been looking up your part?"

"Oh, yes!" smiled Marjorie. "I am already very well acquainted with Micaela's part. But who is playing Carmen herself?"

"Young Desmond, of the Remove. It's best to have a boy for that part, as I have to murder him in the last act, and I'd rather murder a boy than a girl; though, of course, it won't hurt him. He's got a smooth chivvy—I mean face," said Harry, blushing, "and he'll make up very well as Carmen, I think. The only difficulty is that he's got an Irish accent, only perhaps that won't be noticed when he speaks French."

The girl laughed.

"You have been rehearsing?"

"Oh, yes! That reminds me, the costumes are coming down now. The carrier may be here with them any minute now. Yours will be among them. Mr. Quelch allows us to hold the dress rehearsal to-day in his room, as we want the piano. You will be able to play for me and give me a chance of singing to music. We shall have a professional accompanist on the great night, of course. I have done all the thumping so far, except when Mr. Quelch has found time to play a little for us. He's awfully good."

"It's time for the carrier now," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Then you might run down to the gate and get the parcel when he brings it," said Harry Wharton. "You three could go together, as the package may be heavy."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"I was just thinking, Wharton, that you and Nugent and Harree Singh might like to go."

Nugent grinned, too.

"What a curious coincidence!" he remarked. "It had just crossed my mind that you three chaps were the ones who ought to go!"

"The coincidentfulness is remarkable," purred the nabob. "The same-fol thought crossed me mindfully, my esteemed chums."

Marjorie laughed.

"Suppose you all go?" she suggested.

"I must go in now and speak to Mrs. Locke. I have promised to have tea with her."

The juniors looked blank.

"What about tea in the study?" said Harry Wharton.

The girl smiled and shook her head.

"Mrs. Locke asked me. Au revoir."

And she entered the house.

"May as well go down for the costumes," said Harry Wharton rather glumly. "I was looking for a nice tea in the study same as we had last time. Never mind. Let's get the costumes. It will be a ripping rehearsal."

The Removites strolled down to the gate. They passed Temple and Dabney, and glanced at them rather curiously. The two Upper Fourth fellows were carrying a bulky parcel between them.

"Hallo!" said Harry. "What have you got there?"

"Oh, nothing in particular!" said Temple carelessly. "I say, if you decide to accept the offer I made you, it's still open for the present."

"Thank you for nothing!"

The Removites walked on to the gate. They looked out into the road, and Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"There's the carrier's cart—and it's going away!"

"The ass has forgotten, and passed without delivering the parcel!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Perhaps he's left it with Gosling at the lodge," suggested Bob Cherry.

"The probability is great."

"Yes, very likely assented Wharton. "Let's go and ask Goosey, anyway."

Gosling, the school porter at Greyfriars, greeted the juniors sourly. He was not fond of the Remove, and he was especially not fond of the chums of Study No. 1. To their question as to whether a parcel had arrived for them he replied only with a surly shake of the head.

"Nothing?" asked Harry Wharton blankly.

"No, nuffin!" said Gosling. "So there you har!"

"But I was expecting a parcel from the carrier."

"Can't help that, can I?" said Gosling aggressively.

"But didn't he stop?"

"Oh, yes; he stopped!"

"Didn't he leave anything here?"

"He left a parcel for me, and a parcel for the young gents who was waiting for him at the gate," said Gosling—"leastways, I s'pose it was for them as they took it."

Harry Wharton gave a start. "Do you mean Dabney and Temple?"

"Yes," said Gosling; "they are the two. They was waiting for the carrier."

"The rotters!" Harry Wharton hurried out of the porter's lodge with his chums. "You see what has happened, you kids?"

Temple and Dabney have scoffed our parcel they took from the carrier! He wouldn't know them by sight, and the fact that they were waiting for him made him think that it was all right. You remember, we saw them lugging a big parcel across the Close a few minutes ago."

"Our parcel, by Jove!"

Harry Wharton broke into a run. "Come on! We must get it back before they have time to damage it, if that's what they mean to do! Follow your leader!"

The chums of the Remove did not need bidding twice. They dashed away at top speed after Harry Wharton, their destination being the Upper Fourth study shared by Temple and Dabney.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Brought to Book.

"Got it!"

It was Temple who uttered the words, in tones of great satisfaction.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

Temple chuckled as he bent over the opened parcel on the table in the study. There were the costumes designed for the representation of "Carmen," all neatly folded up. The chiefs of the Upper Fourth had made the capture easily enough, in all conscience.

"Good!" chuckled Temple. "We'll rig up each costume with stuffing and sticks and things, like a guy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can get Guy Fawkes masks to make the faces."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then we'll stick them all up in the Close, labelled with the names of those asses!" grinned Temple.

"Good wheeze!"

"I say, better lock the door, in case they should suspect we've got the things, though."

"Yes, that's a good idea."

Dabney turned the key in the lock. The chums of the Upper Fourth began to unpack the costumes. They were still chuckling over the intended joke on the Remove, when a knock came at the door.

"Who's there?" called out Temple guardedly.

"It's I—Wharton."

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you."

"Speak from that side of the door, then," said Temple, with a chuckle. "I can hear you very well, Wharton."

"There was a thump on the door."

"Look here, you've got our parcel from the carrier."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've got our costumes for 'Car-men.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to give them up?"

"Not at present."

"Open this door!"

"Rats!"

"We're going to have our costumes."

"Go and eat coke!"

There was a thump at the door again that made it shake. Then a wrench at the handle, and another heavy bump. But the lock held firm.

"They won't get in that way," chuckled Temple. "I say, you kids out there, you may as well take a little run. We've collared the costumes, and we're not going to give them up till it suits us."

"You rotters, we'll bust the door in!" yelled the voice of Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha! I fancy you couldn't. You can go ahead and try if you like."

There was the sound of a whispered consultation outside the study. Temple and Dabney grinned, and went on unpacking. They felt that they were the masters of the situation.

There was silence for some minutes. Had the Removites given it up and gone away? It looked like it, but Temple did not unlock the door. He was suspicious of the Remove.

Creak! Bang! Crack! The sudden sounds after the silence made the Upper Fourth fellows jump. Temple looked round rather anxiously at the door.

"My hat! What are they up to?"

Bang! Creak! Crack! Bang!

"Phew!" gasped Dabney. "They're driving in a chisel or something between the door and the post, to prise it open."

Bang! Crack! Creak! Bang! Hammer, hammer, hammer! Bang!

"I say, that's serious!" muttered Temple. "I never dreamed that even Wharton would have nerve enough. They'll bust the lock in a jiffy, if they keep on. My 'only panama hat, they've done it!"

A wrench of the driven chisel, a terrific crack, and the lock parted. The door flew open, and the chums of the Remove rushed into the study. Temple and Dabney sprang to oppose them, but they had no chance against the famous four. They were bowled over, and hurled upon the carpet in a twinkling. Temple gave a roar.

"Rescue, Upper Fourth!"

"Not much chance of that," grinned

Wharton. "We've got help here, too."

Herring, Russell, Skinner, and half a dozen more of the Remove were crowding in. Temple and Dabney were seized by many hands, and jammed into the hearth. This afternoon the fire was not lighted. Bob Cherry jerked a cord from his pocket, and the two Upper Fourth fellows were quickly and efficiently tied to the bars of the grate by their wrists, in spite of their frantic struggles.

"Now get the costumes!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Here they are! Are you comfy like that, Temple? Anything more we can do?"

Temple wrenched furiously at the rope at his wrists.

"You rotters! Let us go!"

The Removites yelled with laughter. "Not much, my pippins," chuckled Bob Cherry. "You collared our parcel, and now you have got to pay the piper. I dare say somebody will come along presently and set you loose, if you yell long enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beasts—"

"Come along, kids," said Harry Wharton. "We've got our property, and those rotters are safe enough."

"The safeness is great."

"It will be a lesson to you about interfering with the Remove," said Bob Cherry, wagging a warning forefinger at the prisoners. "You know the Remove has always been a bit too weighty for you chaps. You should give it up."

"You rotters—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on!"

The Removites, carrying the recaptured costumes, crowded out of the study, and slammed the damaged door. Temple and Dabney dragged at the rope which fastened them to the bars of the grate, but they dragged in vain. The knots were too well made to come undone, and the rope was too strong to break.

"Well," gasped Dabney, "this is a bit of all right! What utter asses we shall look when somebody comes along and sees us!"

"Confound those cheeky young whelps! I never foresaw that they'd have the cheek to bust in our lock with a hammer and chisel!"

"It seems to me that you never foresee anything, Temple, as far as the Remove is concerned."

"Oh, don't talk rot, Dab!" said Temple crossly.

"I'm not talking rot," said Dabney warmly. "You're always getting into some row with the Remove, and getting the worst of it."

"You'll get the worst of something if you don't shut up!" growled Temple.

"Rats! Nice sort of a Form leader you are."

"How could I have helped this?"

"Don't ask me! You ought to have helped it. Look here, I'm going to yell. I'm not going to remain in this fire-grate till I grow old, I can tell you."

"We shall look silly asses—"

"Speak for yourself! Hallo! I can hear somebody coming. Hallo, there! Help!"

The study door opened, and Fry of the Upper Fourth looked in. He stared at the broken lock, and at the two juniors sitting in the fender.

"My—my hat!" he gasped. "Gone off your silly rockers? What have you busted your door lock for? And what

the dickens are you doing in the fire-grate?"

"Ass! Can't you see we're tied here to the beastly bars of the rotten grate?" howled Temple.

"By Jove, so you are! What have you tied yourselves up like that for?"

"Idiot! We didn't do it ourselves!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I see! This is a little jape, and I'll bet anything the Remove is at the bottom of it!" exclaimed Fry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop that cackling and come and loose us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you cut us loose?" yelled Temple.

"Certainly," said Fry, opening his pocket-knife. "But it's funny. If you two chaps know how funny you looked squirming there in the grate, you would laugh too, I assure you that you would."

"Cut this rope, you cackling idiot!" "There you are! I suppose it was the Study No. 1 lot that fixed you up. You're always rowing with Wharton's gang, you two, and getting done in. I think you might consider the dignity of the Upper Fourth. You shouldn't let yourselves be done like this, for the sake of the Form."

"Oh, shut up!" said Temple irritably, as he rubbed his chafed wrists.

"That's all very well, Temple, but I say what I think. What do you want to go and get yourselves done in for by a gang of youngsters in the Remove?" demanded Fry indignantly. "That's what I want to know, and what the fellows will want to know, I can tell you. I think myself—"

But what Fry thought himself will never be known; for Temple and Dabney, losing patience, let out at the same time, and two fists caught Fry, one on the nose and one on the chin, and he sat down with a bump. And Temple and Dabney walked away and left him sitting there, rubbing his nose.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Full Dress.

Harry Wharton and his chums carried off the recaptured costumes in triumph to Study No. 1. Hazeldene was waiting for them there, with Bunter.

"Marjorie is coming to the rehearsal in Mr. Quelch's room after tea," he said. "I say, what ripping costumes! It is to be a dress rehearsal this time, I suppose?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, we may as well get into the things after tea. Let's take just a snack and get it over—"

"I say, Wharton—"

"Well, what's the trouble now, Billy?"

"It's all very well for you to talk about taking a snack, but I'm jolly hungry. This operatic business is all very well in its way; but it oughtn't to be allowed to interfere with more important matters, such as meals."

"You can feed in a corner all on your lonesome, Billy," laughed Harry. "We're going to allow five minutes for tea, and not a second more."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "Buck up with that tea, Bunter."

"Oh, very well! I think you're idiots—"

"Buck up!"

A hasty tea was partaken of, and then the table was cleared back. Billy Bunter took advantage of Harry's per-

mission, however, and went on having tea by himself in the corner. The others unpacked the costumes.

"We want a glass here to dress by," Bob Cherry observed. "While Mr. Lowndes is away, we may as well borrow the big glass out of his bedroom. He won't be back for a few days."

"Good!" said Wharton. "Get it here, some of you."

Bob Cherry and Nugent soon had the glass there. It was big enough for the juniors to see themselves full length, and was a great advantage, of course, in dressing for the stage. The costumes were examined eagerly. The chief difficulty was in the matter of size. Most of them were too big, and would need taking in and altering. But, as Hazeldene remarked, Marjorie was very clever with scissors and needle, and she would come to the rescue in helping them to get a fit.

Harry Wharton's tall, handsome figure was set off to great advantage in the costume of Don Jose. If the costume would not have been passed as absolutely correct by an operatic stage-manager, it was quite good enough for Greyfriars. It was, at all events, a Spanish costume, and as "Carmen's" hero was a Spaniard, that was near enough.

Bob Cherry in the garb of Escamillo, made a really imposing Toreador, only Bunter looking on him with an unfavourable eye.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, having by this time finished his tea—"I say, I think I ought to point out to you—"

"What is it, Billy? Anything wrong with the costume?"

"No; only with the chap who's wearing it. I think I ought to be the Toreador."

"Rats!"

"I know there's a lot of jealousy in a thing of this kind," said Bunter, shaking his head. "But I don't think any feelings of that sort ought to be allowed to interfere with the success of the show."

"Don't be an ass, Billy!"

"Cherry is rather taller than I am, but I have more brains than he has, and you can't deny that I can sing better. You haven't heard me do the Toreador song yet. Listen!"

"Oh, don't!"

"Listen, I tell you!" And Billy started in a wheezy voice:

"Toreador, now gua-a-a-rd thee.
Toreador, Toreador!
Be-car, thou in mind when—"

"Ass! It's got to be sung in French."

"Well, I can sing it in French, I suppose? I'd back my French against Bob Cherry's any day in the week. Here goes!"

"Oh, cheese it, Billy!"

But Billy did not cheese it. He started on the Toreador chorus again, in the original language this time.

"Toreador, en ga-a-a-rde,
Toreador, Toreador!
Et songe bien, et songe ong cong-batong—"

"Ha, ha! You put in too many ongs and bonges, Billy!"

"That's the proper Parisian pronunciation."

"Let's hear you do it, Cherry."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry.

"Toreador, en garde,
Toreador, Toreador!
Et songe bien, et songe en combat-tant,

Qu'un œil noir te regarde,
Et que l'amour t'attend—"

"Good!" exclaimed Wharton.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I hope you don't compare Cherry's French with mine, Wharton. And then his voice. I don't want to say anything nasty about Cherry's voice, but you could burgle a flat with a voice like that."

"Cheese it, Billy! You can take the part of Remendado, or scot."

"Oh, I'll take the part," said Bunter; "but if the whole thing turns out to be a ghastly frost, mind, I warned you that I ought to have had the part of the Toreador."

"We'll mind, Billy; we'll mind anything if you'll only shut up. Get into your things, and let's see how we look tout ensemble."

Harry as Jose, Bob Cherry as Escamillo, Nugent as Dancairo, and Bunter as Remendado were soon complete. They had the copies of their parts in their hands as they stood in a row, and really looked very business-like. A row of bicycle lanterns shaded by books had been arranged to imitate the footlights they would have to face when the great night of the performance came.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "You'll do! Sing up!"

The quartette sang up. Each was singing his own part, and as each part had no reference to the others, the result could not be called pleasing to a musical ear. But, as Wharton said, it was only an experiment to see how they went together, and they went very well.

"Goodful!" said the nabob. "The excellentness of the singing is only equalled by its terrific noisefulness."

There was a knock at the door. A curly-headed, smooth-checked Irish junior looked in. It was Micky Desmond, who had undertaken the part of the immortal heroine of Bizet's famous opera.

"Hallo, Carmen!" said Bob Cherry. "Here are your togs, and you're late."

"Sure, and I'm sorry!" said Desmond. "Faith, and ye look ripping!"

"You'll have to leave the faiths and the sures out of Carmen's part."

"Sure, I shall be talking in French entirely, and that will be all right!" said Micky Desmond confidently. "I've been practising the Habanera. How does this go?"

And the junior started in a high and really somewhat agreeable treble voice:

"L'amour est enfant de Boheme,
Il ne jamais, jamais connu de loi.
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prends garde a toi!"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Harry Wharton heartily. "You'll do, Micky. I say, I think it's near time we got along to the rehearsal, so bundle into your clothes. There's a lovely wig for you to wear as Carmen. You get into Zuniga's duds, Hazeldene, and you into Morales's things, Inky. Buck up!"

The juniors were soon ready. And then Harry Wharton turned down the light in the study, and they sallied forth to go to Mr. Quelch's room.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Rehearsal.

"Why—what—how— Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke, the respected Head of Greyfriars, jumped nearly six inches off the linoleum. He was coming along the passage in the dusk, when six Spanish smugglers suddenly bore down upon him.

Spanish smugglers were rare in the corridors of Greyfriars, and it was no wonder that the Head was surprised and alarmed.

"What the—how—"

Dr. Locke stared blankly at the smugglers. He was inclined to take to his heels, but his dignity as the Head of Greyfriars prevented that. But certainly there was a tremor in his limbs as the Spanish smugglers came closer.

But the next moment the voice of Harry Wharton reassured him.

"I hope we did not startle you, sir."

"Why, Wharton, what—"

"I'm Wharton, sir."

"Er—what—who—what do you mean by going about in this ridiculous garb, Wharton?" exclaimed the Head, recovering himself.

"I am Don Jose, sir."

"Don Jose! What do you mean?"

"The hero in 'Carmen,' sir."

"The hero in 'Carmen'! What do you know about 'Carmen'?" asked the Head, who was a great opera-goer when he had opportunities of visiting town in the summer, and so knew at once what the junior was alluding to.

"We're going to give a performance in the Remove-room, sir," said Harry demurely. "A Grand Opera Performance in the original by the Wharton Operatic Company."

The Head gasped.

"Dear me! That is really a very ambitious project, Wharton."

"Yes, sir; but we hope to make a great success of it."

"I—I hope you will, my boy. I certainly have no objection to your making the attempt, though I cannot help thinking that the task will be somewhat beyond your powers."

"I hope not, sir."

"And these boys are—"

"I am Nugent, sir, also Le Dancairo," said Nugent.

"And I'm the Toreador," said Bob Cherry. "Would you care to hear me give you a specimen of the Toreador's song, sir?"

"Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre, Senors, senors, car avec les soldats, Oul, les Toreros—"

"Er—thank you, Cherry. I—er—think that will do!" gasped the Head.

"And I'm Remendado, sir," said Billy Bunter. "I ought to have been the Toreador, but there is a lot of jealousy in this sort of thing."

"Oh, cheese it, Billy!"

"Really, Wharton—"

"I hope you will come and see the performance, sir," said Harry Wharton respectfully. "We should give you the best seat, and there is no charge for admission."

The doctor smiled.

"Well, we will see, Wharton," he said; and with this non-committal reply the Head of Greyfriars rustled on down the passage.

"Jolly lucky he didn't cut up rusty," said Bob Cherry. "Some masters

would have got into a temper over a trifle like that. Hallo, here's Hoffy!"

Hoffmann, the German junior, was coming along, and he stopped to stare at the Spanish smugglers as they approached Mr. Quelch's room. He grinned affably.

"Is vun of you Vharton?" he asked.

"Here I am!" said Harry.

"Goot! I was tinkin' tat I should offer you mein services for te representation of te 'Carters.'"

"The what?"

"Te 'Carters.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"He means 'Carmen'?"

"Ach! Vat is te difference between 'Carters' and 'Carmen'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I not see vy for you cackle. But I tink tat I offer mein services. I tink tat I do te Toreador first-rate, ain't it? Would you care to see me do it pefore?"

"Toreador is booked," said Harry Wharton. "Bob Cherry represents Escamillo."

"Tat is all fery vell, but you would rader the opera vas a success, ain't it? I am quite villing to sing as Escamillo."

"Yes," growled Bob Cherry, "and a jolly thing you would make of it with your double Dutch accent."

"I sings te French almost as vell as I speaks te English."

"Then your French must be simply ripping."

"Ach! I can sing te Toreador song first rate, and I soon learns te rest of te part. I vill give you a specimen."

"Oh, don't! As you are strong, be merciful."

"Ach! I sings him finely pefore."

And Hoffmann opened his mouth, which was of a good size, and started upon the famous song of the Toreador, in French, with a strong German accent:

"Vot're doast, je peux four le rendre, Zenors, zenors, gar avec les zoldats, Oui, les Doreros—"

But the chums of the Remove had fled. Fritz Hoffmann gazed after them indignantly.

"Ach! Tey vas vools, and know not vot is goot ting ven tey see him!" he murmured. "I vill not sing te Toreador part for dem now if dey go down on knees and peg of me."

The Spanish smugglers reached the Form-master's sitting-room. It was a rather large room, and there was a piano in one corner, and there was plenty of room for the rehearsal. Mr. Quelch, who was of musical tastes himself, was glad to encourage a similar taste in his Form, and he had given Harry permission to use his piano whenever he was not using the room. He knew he could trust Wharton to see that there was no damage done in the room.

Marjorie Hazeldene had just arrived there, and she smiled as she saw the characters in "Carmen" come in in their stage attire. The sight of Le Remedado in spectacles perhaps seemed comical to her. Billy Bunter noticed the smile, and he hastened to explain.

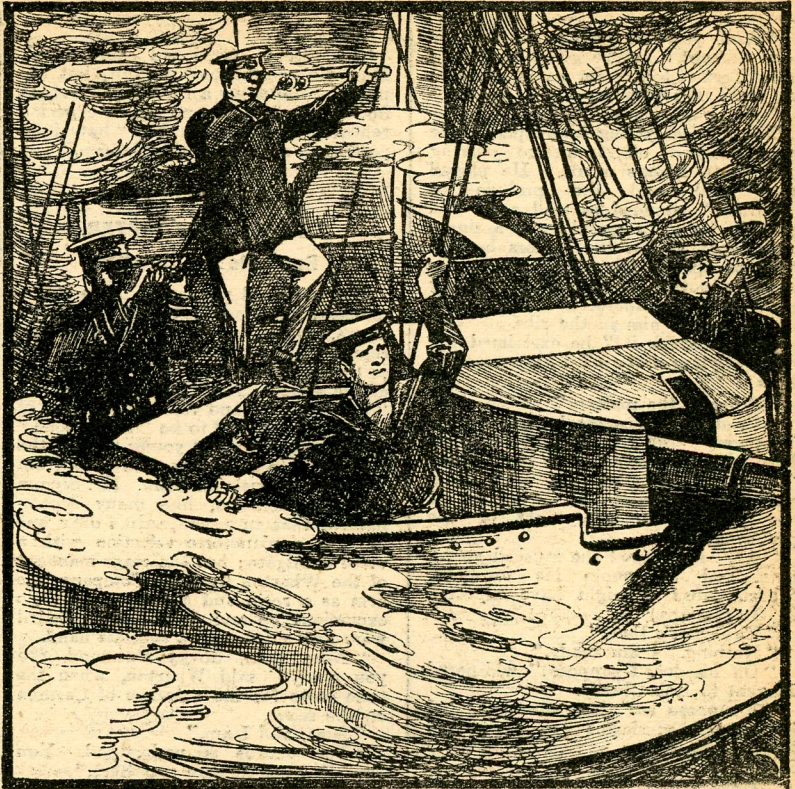
"I can see what you are thinking, Miss Hazeldene," he remarked.

"Can you?" said the girl, starting a little.

"Oh, yes, of course! You think as I do, that Bob Cherry is not much class as a Toreador."

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Oh, yes, you say that to spare



Although our gallant fighting dogs can seldom get to grips with the enemy, several stirring sea "scraps" have taken place from time to time, and on these momentous occasions the courage and valour of our jolly Jack Tars has been unwavering. The above picture is of one of our battleships in action off Helligoland.

Cherry's feelings. As a matter of fact, I ought to have had the part of the Toreador, which is especially suitable to my fine baritone voice. But really—"

"Oh, cheese it, Billy!" said Nugent. "You're stopping the procession. Is the ivory-puncher coming over this evening, Wharton?"

Harry nodded.

"Yes, I think so. I asked them to send him to rehearse with us, if possible. If he can't come I will play for you chaps, and Miss Marjorie will play for me."

"With pleasure!" said Marjorie.

"Now, I think we're ready."

There was a tap at the door.

"Oh, come in!" said Harry Wharton resignedly.

The door opened, and Temple, of the Upper Fourth, looked in. Temple was grinning. There was another figure behind him—that of a very slim young man, with a head of hair that would have done credit to an "after using" hair-restorer advertisement, and a long dreamy face that reminded one of Don Quixote.

"Hallo!" said Temple. "Thought I should find you here. I see it's a full-dress rehearsal this time. Regular Guy Fawkes show."

"Oh, clear out, Temple!"

"I've brought this merchant to you. He came in inquiring for Master Wharton, so I kindly brought him along," said Temple. "I thought he belonged to you."

"Oh, I suppose it's the accompanist," said Nugent.

Temple chuckled.

"Yes, rather! I say, may I stay and see the show?"

"No, you mayn't."

"Oh, very well. I should like to, as a good laugh does you good. This is the monkey-show, Mr. Slymm. Come in, and if you're good they'll give you twopence to get your hair cut."

Mr. Slymm, the musical young man, stared at Temple, who went chuckling down the passage. Then he entered the room.

"You're the chap from the music shop?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I am the accompanist," said Mr. Slymm. "I understand that I am required for a rehearsal this evening."

"Yes, we're all ready."

"There's the piano," said Bob Cherry. "There's the score on the desk. Thump away."

"Really—"

Harry Wharton led the young man to the piano. Mr. Slymm ran his fingers through his long hair, and sat down. He struck a few chords on the piano, and then dashed off into a medley of sounds.

"Hallo! hallo! hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What are you up to?"

Wharton shook the musical young man by the shoulder.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

Mr. Slymm seemed to start out of a reverie.

"Ah, I am sorry! It was a moment's forgetfulness. That was a small thing of my own," he said. "A mere trifle dashed off in an idle moment."

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "THE RIVAL PERFORMERS!"

"Well, you can keep it for another idle moment. You're going to thump out 'Carmen' now for us to rehearse to," said Bob Cherry.

"Ah, I am ready."

The musical young man opened the score, dashed off into the stirring prelude to Bizet's opera. He played very well, and the prelude to "Carmen" sounded as well as it was possible for it to sound upon a single instrument. But the juniors had no time to spare. They were there for business, not to hear the musical young man give a pianoforte recital. Bob Cherry poked him in the ribs.

"Here, chuck it!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Slymm broke off with a crash of keys.

"What is the matter?"

"Come to business," said Harry Wharton. "We want you to begin here." He turned the leaves of the score. "We haven't time for more than practising our parts. You can buzz off the prelude on the night of the performance."

"Ah," murmured the musical young man, and he smote his forehead. "barbarians! I might have expected it. Barbarians!"

"Eh—what's that?"

"Nothing. I am ready."

"Off his dot, I suppose?" whispered Nugent to Bob Cherry.

"I suppose so," Bob assented. "I believe all musicians are mad, you know, more or less, so that accounts for it."

"Here you are," said Harry, pointing in the score. "The soldiers are on guard. Morales—that's you, Inky—stands here."

The Nabob of Bhanipur came forward. His face was not made up, and very curious the dusky countenance looked in the Spanish military uniform.

"Now Micaela is going to enter. Are you ready, Miss Marjorie?"

"Quite," said Marjorie, with a smile.

"Now, then, Inky, you are talking to yourself?"

"I really am not, my esteemed chum. I was quite silently dumb."

"I mean, you are talking to yourself as Morales—that is to say, you are singing. Now start."

Hurree Singh looked at his part, and started.

"At the esteemed gate of the guard-house I smoke the respectable cigar to kill time—"

"Ass! Make it French."

"I beg your honourable pardon! It was the absence of the brain—I mean, the mind. A la porte de corps du garde—"

"Sing it, ass!"

"It was again the momentariful forgetfulness."

And Hurree Singh sang the opening remarks of Morales in a passable voice, and in passable French.

"We must leave out the chorus now," said Harry Wharton. "They come in later. This is where Micaela enters. All you fellows stand back; you're dead in this act."

Marjorie Hazeldene, as Micaela, entered.

"Now, then, Inky, you go on."

"The go-fulness is immediate."

And the nabob sang again.

"Que cherchez-vous?" (What seek you?)

"Moi, je cherche un brigadier," sang Marjorie. (I seek a brigadier.)

Harry Wharton rubbed his hands like a satisfied stage-manager.

"Good!"

The scene continued very well. Marjorie's part was excellent, but the nabob made many a little slip. But, as he remarked, it was no use to expect a rehearsing person to be "letterfully perfect at so early a stagefulness."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Not Satisfied.

The rehearsal proceeded. The stage-manager had made merciless cuts in the opera, to make it short enough for representation in the Remove room, and so the rehearsers were soon in the midst of the action. The Chorus of Boys was "understood," and then the Chorus of Cigarette-girls had to be "understood" also, and the musical young man at the piano had to be gently restrained from playing the music for them. Mr. Slymm evidently believed, like many accompanists, that an accompanist's duty was to give a pianoforte selection with a voice obligato; but the stage-manager of the Wharton Operatic Company was firm as a rock, and Mr. Slymm's little excursions up and down the keyboard were restrained with a ruthless hand.

"Now, then, Micky Desmond, are you ready?" said Wharton, when the time came for the entrance of Carmen on the scene.

"Sure, and I am."

"The chorus is understood. You have to come in here and start."

"Faith, and here goes."

"Look here, don't you start singing French with an Irish accent."

"Sure, and I'll be careful."

"Go ahead, then. The chorus has welcomed you—"

"Faith, and it hasn't done anything of the kind."

"Ass! That's understood."

"Howly smoke! There seems to be a lot understood in this rehearsal."

"Oh, don't waste time! So long as you understand your part you will be all right. Now, the chorus has finished—that's understood—and you've got to reply to them. They ask you when you will love them?"

"Faith, and sure they're very polite!"

"Ass! Get on with your part."

"Now, then, you ivory-pusher!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, tapping Mr. Slymm on the shoulder.

The musical young man had gone off into a reverie. Mr. Slymm started.

"Did you speak to me?"

"Yes, rather. It's time for you to thump the keys."

"Oh, certainly."

And Mr. Slymm's long fingers began to perform gymnastics up and down the keyboard, while the musical young man cast his eyes up towards the ceiling, and appeared to be lost in ecstasy. Harry Wharton glared at him.

"That isn't the music!" he exclaimed. "Give Carmen his note—I mean, give Desmond her note. What the dickens are you up to?"

Bob Cherry shook the musical young man. Mr. Slymm came back to earth with a start.

"Ah, what is it?"

"What are you playing, you ass?"

"I am sorry. It was a moment's forgetfulness. That was a small thing of my own. A mere trifle dashed off in an idle moment."

"You'll get dashed off in an idle moment if you don't attend to

business!" said Harry Wharton severely. "Give us the start, now."

"Oh, certainly. I will play the music for the Chorus of Cigarette-girls—"

"Shut up! We haven't got an evening to spend listening to you pushing the piano. Begin at the 'Habenera.'"

"Oh, very well. Barbarians!" murmured the musical young man.

He thumped his fingers down on the keys.

"Now, then, Desmond, that's your note."

"Oh, sure I'm all right."

"Get on with the washing, then!"

"We are all waiting with great eagerness for the washfulness to proceed," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Micky Desmond started upon Carmen's famous song:

*"L'amour est un oiseau rebelle,
Que nul ne peut apprivoiser.
Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle,
S'il lui convient de refuser."*

Micky's French had an Irish accent, but he sang passably well, and he ploughed on right through the "Habenera," gasping a little at the finish. He took a flower from his corsage, and threw it to Don Jose, and it caught Harry Wharton in the eye; Harry gave a yell.

"What the dickens did you do that for, Desmond?"

"Sure, and I had to throw ye the flower."

"Ass! Carmen doesn't chuck a flower in Don Jose's eye."

"Well, that was an accident."

"Don't I come on in this scene?" asked Billy Bunter, who had been a somewhat impatient spectator so far.

"Of course you don't," said Harry Wharton, rubbing his eye. "Dancairo and Remendado don't appear till the scene in the hostelry of Lillas Pastia."

"That's all very well, Wharton, but a fellow like me ought not to be given a small part like that."

"Now, then, it's—"

"Wait a minute, Wharton; I'm speaking to you. Don't you think that upon the whole it would be better for you to resign the part of Don Jose to me?"

"Oh, ring off, Billy! You make me tired."

"That's all very well—"

"Cheese it! Micaela enters here."

Marjorie re-entered. There was a slight colour on the girl face. In this scene Micaela renders Don Jose a kiss from his mother. Harry Wharton had considerably cut that part of the scene; but the song had not been altered, that being impossible without spoiling the whole thing.

Marjorie sang the part of Micaela very well, and Wharton sustained that of Don Jose creditably, and there was a murmur of applause as they finished.

"Jolly good!" said Bob Cherry.

"This will knock the Upper Fourth, and no mistake!"

"Rather!" said Nugent heartily. "I don't know what we should do without Miss Marjorie, though."

"Oh, you may be sure I shall not fail you," said the girl, laughing.

There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Quelch came in.

He nodded to the curiously-garbed juniors with a smile.

"I am sorry if I interrupt," he said. "Time is up, I think."

"Yes, sir," said Harry Wharton; "and we've had a jolly good rehearsal, sir. Thank you!"

"I say, Wharton——"

"Let's be off," said Harry.

"But I say, Wharton——"

"Oh, dear! What is it, Billy?"

"I haven't done any rehearsing yet."

"We hadn't got to your part."

"That's all very well, but I don't see why I should be left out of it like this. I think that the more valuable members of an operatic company ought to have more consideration shown them; I do, really."

"You'd better re-write the opera!" grunted Bob Cherry. "Hallo! There's the ivory-merchant started again!"

The rehearsal being over, it was time for Mr. Slymm to leave the piano-stool. But he showed no desire to do so. His long fingers were rambling over the keys again, producing music that sounded like a mixture of a Chopin polonaise with a Liszt Hungarian rhapsody. Mr. Quelch looked at him in astonishment.

Hazeldene thumped him on the back.

"Here, ring off, Slymm!"

"Barbarians!" murmured the musical young man.

And he went on playing with his eyes fixed ecstatically on the ceiling.

Mr. Quelch tapped him on the shoulder.

"I am afraid it is impossible for you to practise here," he remarked. "Nor should I, as a musician, recommend you to practise scales and presto exercises at one and the same time."

The musical young man looked at him dreamily, the sarcasm evidently quite lost on him. He rose slowly from the music-stool.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he murmured. "It was a moment's forgetfulness. A small thing of my own, dashed off in an idle moment."

And he ran his fingers through his long hair, and drifted out of the room. In the passage he put on a wide-brimmed Homburg hat.

"I say, ivory-merchant," exclaimed Bob Cherry, "can I lend you two-pence?"

"Thank you; but I am not requiring any small loans!" said the musical young man, looking at him in surprise.

"Quite sure?"

"Yes, certainly. What do you mean?"

"Oh, then, I suppose it's due to a moment's forgetfulness that you haven't got your hair cut for the past few years!" said Bob Cherry.

"Cheese it, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It's only a joke, Mr. Slymm. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Mr. Slymm. And he murmured "Barbarians!" as he walked away.

Gosling, the porter, came along the passage.

"Trap for Miss Hazeldene, sir!"

Marjorie looked at her watch.

"It is time I was gone. I must go and get my wraps."

And the girl hurried away to the Head's house.

"Come and get these things off, kids!" exclaimed Harry. "We can't go into the Close to see Miss Marjorie off in this rig."

"Ha, ha! I suppose not!"

The juniors made a record in quick changing. They were in their ordinary attire in time to see Marjorie mount into the trap, and they all stood, cap in

hand, as the girl was driven off. Then they returned to Study No. 1, in a mood of great satisfaction, to further learn up their parts.

The rehearsal, so far, had been a success, and they were looking forward to a really imposing representation of "Carmen" on the improvised stage to be put up in the Remove-room. If there was one in the number who was not quite satisfied, it was Billy Bunter. He still thought that he ought to have been selected as the Toreador.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

Temple, Dabney, and Co. Plot a Plot.

"It's rotten!"

Temple, of the Upper Fourth, delivered that opinion, with a decidedly gloomy expression upon his face.

Temple, Dabney, and Fry were standing before the notice-board in the hall at Greyfriars. They were reading a notice put up there, in the handwriting of Harry Wharton, of the Remove, general manager of the Wharton Operatic Company.

"NOTICE!"

"The date of the representation of Bizet's opera, 'Carmen,' by the Wharton Operatic Company, is now definitely fixed. The performance will take place on Wednesday evening, in the Remove-room, Greyfriars, commencing at seven precisely. The school is invited to attend. Upper Fourth fellows will be expected to behave themselves.

"HARRY WHARTON,
General Manager."

"So it's coming off," said Dabney.

"It's coming on, you mean!" remarked Fry, who was rather given to making feeble jokes.

"They're in dead earnest," said Dabney.

"Well, I said so all along," Temple remarked. "And we're getting chipped without end now!"

"Grand Opera in the original is, of course, a bit above anything the Upper Fourth Musical Society has ever done," said Dabney.

Temple nodded gloomily.

"Yes, it will take the shine out of us, and no mistake. The Remove will never let us hear the end of it if it is a success."

"But perhaps it won't be a success."

"Well, you see, the audience won't be too exacting for a schoolboy performance, and there is no denying that Wharton sings his part well, and Cherry is getting on well as the giddy Toreador. I've heard him practising, and he does it well."

"Then Nugent is pretty good, too."

"That's so; and even young Desmond, in a girl's part, plays up pretty well. It looks to me as if it will be a ripping success."

"Then they're going to have Marjorie Hazeldene to help them. That's not quite cricket, you know, as we sha'n't be able to hiss them when there's a girl on the stage."

"Oh, I dare say the rotters have counted on that."

And the Upper Fourth trio looked at one another glumly. A party of Removites came by, and spotted them as they stood before the notice-board.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "I hear that you chaps are giving up the

Musical Society in the Upper Fourth, and have taken up fretwork instead."

"Rats!" snapped Temple.

"Isn't it a fact? Well, if you haven't, it's time you did, that's all. The Remove is the coming force in the musical line."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I suppose you're coming to the opera?" said Bob Cherry. "We are letting youngsters in for nothing, for the sake of improving them."

"That's our object," said Nugent. "We want to improve the infants, and spread the knowledge of music in the lower Forms; that's really why we've taken up Grand Opera in the original."

"The improvement which would make the Upper Fourth sabbis really musical would be tremendous!" purred Hurree Singh. "The singfulness I have heard proceeding from the study of the respected Temple was really in the manner of the expiring cat!"

"But I'll tell you what," said Nugent. "If you like to come into the chorus, and learn your parts up quick, we'll make room for you."

"Oh, get off!"

"It's a liberal offer. You'll have speaking, or, rather, singing parts, if you can only learn to sing in tune."

Temple, Dabney, & Co. made restive movements. The Removites, chuckling, passed on, and left the Upper Fourth fellows glowering.

"That's the sort of chipping we've got to stand," said Temple.

"And if they pull the thing off, and it's a success, we shall have a heap more of it, and worse!" said Dabney.

Fry sniffed.

"You two chaps call yourselves the leaders of the Upper Fourth," he remarked disparagingly; "yet you can't think of a way to put those cheeky youngsters in their places. Yeh!"

"I don't see what we can do."

"Bust up the performance."

"We would if we could, and be jolly glad to!" said Temple. "But how are we to do it?"

"What's the matter with going there in a mob, and taking whistles and squeakers and things, and making such a fearful row that they can't hear themselves sing?" demanded Fry.

Temple shrugged his shoulders.

"Only—the masters will be present," he replied. "They'd jolly soon stop that sort of thing, Fry. Wharton is too jolly deep to give the performance without at least one master in the room—or, at least, some of the prefects."

"Well, that's right, I suppose. But I suppose we're free to hiss if we want to, aren't we? No law against that, even if the Head himself were present."

"Bad form. They would say we were jealous."

"Let 'em!"

"Besides, we can't hiss with a girl on the stage," said Dabney decidedly. "We don't want the Remove to crow over us, but we're not going to act like cads to stop 'em."

"Quite right!" said Temple. "If any fellow in my Form hisses Miss Hazeldene, he will get a prize thick ear, so bear that in mind, Fry."

"Suppose Miss Hazeldene didn't turn up?"

"She's bound to turn up; she's promised."

"She might be stopped. Look here," said Fry determinedly, "this giddy opera is going to be busted up some-

how. We may as well sink at once into a position equal to the Third Form, if we are going to let the Lower Fourth bring off a success like this. They busted up our debating society meeting once, and so it would only be tit for tat. We've got to put our heads together and bust up this performance." Temple wrinkled his brow thoughtfully.

"You're quite right there, Fry, if it can possibly be done. Come up to the study and talk it over."

The three adjourned to Temple's study, and the chief of the Upper Fourth carefully closed the door. Then Fry was called upon to explain himself.

"How could Miss Hazeldene be prevented from turning up for the performance, without any rudeness of any kind?" demanded Temple.

"Easily enough!" said Fry promptly. "Suppose Wharton decided for some reason at the last minute that the performance couldn't be given—"

"But he won't!"

"Ass! Suppose he did. If somebody were ill or something, and it had to be put off, what would he do—wire to Miss Hazeldene, of course."

"I suppose so."

"Well, then, the wire can go in any case."

"My hat! A wire in Wharton's name, do you mean?"

"No; he would probably only put his initials—H. W.—to the wire. Well, young Herbert Williams, of our Form, could send the wire, and put his initials to it. They're the same as Wharton's, and if Miss Hazeldene supposed Wharton had sent her the wire, that wouldn't be our fault."

Temple and Dabney grinned.

"By Jove, you're jolly sharp, Fry! You ought to be a company-promoter or a confidence-trick man, or something!" said Temple. "Lemme see. How would this do—Very sorry opera unavoidably postponed. Don't come this evening.—H. W."

Fry chuckled.

"Yes, something like that; that's what I mean. Now, without Marjorie Hazeldene to take Micaela's part, they would be short of their heroine, and that alone would be pretty nearly enough to bust up the performance."

"Good!"

"But that isn't all," went on the astute Fry. "There's the ivory-puncher from Friardale who is coming over to grind out the music."

"That music chap who doesn't get his hair cut?"

"Yes. He's coming for the evening. Now, it would be the easiest thing in the world for one of us to meet him en route, and stuff him up with some yarn that would keep him away."

"Of course, we couldn't tell an untruth."

"Who's proposing to tell an untruth?" demanded Fry. "If we bust up the show, the opera will be postponed. Therefore, if we tell him that the opera is postponed, we shall be telling the solid truth."

"Quite right!" said Temple.

"We can tell him the same as we wire to Miss Hazeldene. Now, if the music-grinder is absent, how are they to turn on the music?"

"Wharton is a good pianist."

"Yes, I know he is; but he can't play Don Jose in 'Carmen' and act the giddy orchestra at the same time, can he?"

"Well, no, I suppose not."

"They'll have to cut the part of Micaela, and then the part of Don Jose, and 'Carmen' without Micaela or Jose would be like 'Hamlet' with the Prince of Denmark left out."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"And then," pursued Fry, growing more brilliant as he proceeded, "I don't see why we shouldn't make a raid and collar all their parts? You know what amateur performers are; if they can't keep on nosing into their parts they forget their lines."

Temple thumped him on the back.

"Good lad! We'll have them on the hip this time."

Fry grinned.

"Well, I think we shall bust up the show," he said. "Of course, if they postpone it, and announce a new date, that won't save their face. The laugh will be up against them all the same. All Greyfriars will say that they had bitten off more than they could chew, and they would be chipped to death about it."

"Quite right. If we bust up this performance they're done in," said Temple. "And we're going to bust it, or bust something trying."

And Dabney and Fry chimed in cordially:

"Hear, hear!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Plot in Operation.

Harry Wharton looked round the Remove-room with an anxious eye.

It was the evening of the great performance!

Half-past five had struck, and the performance was timed to commence at seven o'clock, and so the operatic company had still an hour and a half.

But in that space of time there was much to be done.

The Remove-master had willingly given permission for the representation to be given in the Form-room, and he had promised to be present himself among the audience. Mr. Quelch knew very well the rivalry that existed between Upper and Lower Fourth, and he knew that the presence of a master might be necessary to keep order. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, and several of the prefects had also accepted invitations to attend. As for the Middle School and the Lower Forms, they were likely to cram themselves into the room to the verge of suffocation.

The operatic company were now arranging the room.

An improvised stage had been erected on the dais at the upper end, draped with dark curtains. The forms were arranged in rows for the audience, and were eked out with chairs and benches borrowed from all quarters. The room was a very large one, and there was seating accommodation for a very large audience, and it was pretty certain that a very large audience would turn up.

The piano was placed in front of the stage, just where the orchestra should have been if there had been one. Owing to lack of scenery, one scene had to suffice for the whole opera, but as Harry observed, it was always best to leave something to the imagination of the audience. They liked it.

"I think that looks all right now,"

said Harry, with a final glance round the room.

"The rightfulness is great," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Having spent a whole half-holiday on the work, it was boundful to turn out in the manner of satisfaction."

"It's all sereno," said Bob Cherry. "I only hope the thing will go off all right. I'm getting rather nervous now that it's close at hand."

"Well, there's really nothing to be nervous about. We all know our parts well."

"And we shall have the parts behind the scene, to consult whenever we go off," said Nugent.

"I don't see that anything could be seen to that we haven't taken care of," Hazeldene remarked.

"Oh, I say, Vaseline—"

"What's worrying you, Billy?"

"I don't want to throw cold water on the matter, you know, and I should be sincerely sorry to discourage anybody, but I must say that one important point has been overlooked."

"What is that, Billy?" asked Harry Wharton anxiously.

As stage-manager, he had many anxieties on his young shoulders.

"Why, it's about the Toreador's part. I don't deny that Cherry has improved, but the part of Escamillo ought really to have been allotted to me, and—"

"Oh, rats!" said Harry. "Let's go and snatch some tea now, kids! I don't feel much like eating, but it wouldn't do to get hungry in the middle of the performance."

"Not much," said Bunter emphatically. "Now you're talking! You can't do better than have a solid meal before undertaking anything. I feel rather in a flutter myself, but I must say that it hasn't affected my appetite. I'm jolly hungry."

The juniors went up to the study, where a solid and cheerful tea was soon in progress. Bunter had told the truth when he declared that stage fright could not affect his appetite. He distinguished himself on that occasion as upon all other similar ones, and consumed as much as all the others put together.

"Hallo, there goes six!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as the school clock boomed out the hour. "Your sister was coming at six, Hazeldene."

"Yes, she may be here any minute now. She's going to dress in old Nadesha's room, and Nadesha will help her."

"Good! It's getting near time for us to change, too. May as well go down to the door, though, and meet Miss Hazeldene."

"Yes, rather!" agreed the Removevites.

The juniors descended, leaving Billy Bunter to finish his tea—which meant finishing all the eatables left on the table. But there was no sign of the Hazeldene trap in the Close. The juniors hurried down to the gates. In the sunset, on the long, white road which ran past the gates of Greyfriars, no vehicle was visible.

The quarter past six chimed out from the clock tower. Harry Wharton's brow was wrinkled with a puzzled expression.

"Miss Marjorie is late, Hazeldene."

Hazeldene looked puzzled, too.

"Yes, and I can't understand it. She is never late for an appointment. I hope nothing has happened."

Two figures came in sight up the road from the village. They were

Temple and Dabney, and they stopped at the gate to look at the Removites. "Hallo! Looking for anything?" said Temple.

"We were expecting my sister," said Hazeldene. "She hasn't come." "Dear me! That will muck up your opera, won't it?"

Harry Wharton looked at him quickly and suspiciously. The Upper Fourth captain's derisive look roused a curious suspicion in his mind.

"Is it possible that Temple has had anything to do with Miss Marjorie staying away?" he said, in a low voice, as Temple and Dabney walked in at the gate.

Hazeldene stared. "How could he have anything to do with it, Wharton?"

"I don't know. But—" "It's curious," said Bob Cherry. "It's twenty past six, and the trap's not in sight. They were grinning like a couple of Cheshire cats."

"There may be some trick in it." "I don't see how," said Hazeldene. "But I think I'll get out my bike and ride over to home and see whether anything's the matter."

"But you'd never get back in time for the performance?"

"If the trap's on the road, I shall pass it. If Marjorie hasn't started, there's something the matter, though I don't understand why they don't wire." Hazeldene was looking troubled. His affection for his sister was well known to the boys of the Remove, and they understood his feelings at that moment. "I think I had better go." In five minutes the junior was scorching away on his cycle.

The others watched him disappear in a cloud of dust. They turned back rather gloomily into the Close, and entered the house.

"We shall be in a fix if Marjorie doesn't come," said Wharton. "The worst of it is that she's in the first scene. Of course, nothing can have happened, or they'd have let us know. But—"

"I wonder if the ivory merchant has come yet?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "He has to be here at six, to go over the music a bit first. We haven't seen him come in."

"He hasn't come," said Harry. "Confound the fellow! He'd better not worry us by being late, or there will be a row!"

"We may as well go and get changed into our things," said Nugent. "If anybody's missing when the show opens, we'd better have as many ready as possible."

"Ratherfully," said the nabob. "We have to dress and to make up the faces greasypainfully, and it will take up timefulness. It is only forty minutes now to the commencement of the operatic show."

"Come on," said Wharton. "Look yonder; the audience are already going into the Remove-room. If we're not in time there will be a row. Temple is packing the room with Upper Fourth fellows on purpose."

"I wonder if Temple is at the bottom of this. It looks queer."

"Well, it's not much good wondering now. Let's get into our things." They hurried up to the study. As he looked in at the door, Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, Harry, what's up now?" Wharton, in spite of his anxiety, was grinning.

"Look there!"

The Removites looked into the study, and burst into an irresistible laugh.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Change in the Programme.

Billy Bunter was the cause of the merriment of the Wharton Operatic Company. The Owl of the Remove, left alone with the costumes, had been unable to resist the temptation to don that of the Toreador. He was clad now in the garb of Escamillo, with the addition of spectacles. He had placed three huge volumes on the table, and was standing upon them, to get a full view of himself in the glass on the wall.

The Owl was evidently very pleased with himself. He turned slowly round, to see the effect of the clothes from all points of view. A back view was not easy to obtain, and Billy's position was rather perilous as he squirmed round looking over his shoulder. Billy did his best to obtain a good view, and he was giving utterance to a murmur of admiration, when the laughter of the Removites fell upon his ears.

Billy Bunter was startled. He gave a jump, and one of the volumes slid from under his feet, and he sat down on the table with a mighty bump.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. Bob Cherry caught him, and jerked him to the floor with another bump that made him yelp.

"Ow! What did you do that for, Cherry?"

"Why, you were going to fall off the table! I saved you just in time." "You—you—"

"What are you doing in my clothes, you young Owl?" demanded Bob Cherry. "The opera is booked to begin in thirty-five minutes, and here you are wasting time."

Bunter adjusted his spectacles. "I thought that perhaps when Wharton saw me in the Toreador's costume, he would change his mind about giving you the part," he explained. "Look at me, Wharton."

"Ha, ha! I'm looking." "Well, what do you think now?" "I think that if we were giving a comic music-hall sketch you would do ripping, Billy, but it's hardly the thing for grand opera."

"Well, I think you're an ass! If you—"

"No time for jaw, old chap. Get these things off, and get into your own. We've only got half an hour."

"Oh, very well!" "I wish the piano puncher would turn up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry anxiously. "I did want to have a squint at my part again, but there won't be time now."

"Perhaps he's stopping to have his hair cut," remarked Nugent. "It's queer, anyway, about his being so late."

"Where are the parts?" asked Harry Wharton, looking round. "I left the music on the desk here. Have you moved it, Billy?"

"Oh, no; certainly not, Wharton."

"Then where is it?" "I really don't know. Perhaps Bulstrode moved it when he came into the study."

"Eh! Has Bulstrode been in here?" "I think it was Bulstrode. I couldn't see because I had taken my glasses off to fit the black wig on, and—"

"Did he go near the desk, whoever he was?"

"Yes; and I heard something rustle; but I didn't pay much attention, as I was busy. I asked him to lend me a hand with the tunic; and he only laughed, and went out."

Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Somebody's raided the music, kids. All our separate parts gone, and the piano score, too. If the accompanist comes, he won't be able to play without music, unless we can find out where it's gone, and get it back."

"My hat! Do you think it was really Bulstrode?"

"No, it wasn't," said Nugent; "Bulstrode went out for the afternoon with Skinner to see a footer match, and he's not in yet."

"Bunter, you ass, who was it?" "I tell you I had my glasses off, Wharton, and if it wasn't Bulstrode, I'm blessed if I know who it was! It was a big chap, anyway."

Wharton snapped his teeth. "It's clear enough! It was one of the Upper Fourth—Temple, or Dabney, or one of that set. They've done it to muck up the opera."

The operatic company looked at one another in dismay. Micky Desmond came into the study.

"Faith, and I'm ready to dress! Sure, and what are ye looking down in the mouth about?"

"The Upper Fourth have raided the music."

"Holy smoke!" "The accompanist has been kept away by some trick, and so has Miss Hazeldene," said Harry Wharton.

"We're in a hole." "Begorra!"

"What's to be done?" said Bob Cherry desperately. "It would be idiotic to have an opera without music; and, besides, we could never keep in tune without the piano. What do you say to going on and speaking the parts?"

"We should be laughed off the stage!"

"Well, what's to be done?" "I say, Wharton—" began Bunter.

"Oh, don't bother now!" "But I've got an idea. You chaps probably wouldn't have made much of a show, anyway. Suppose I go on and give a series of solos as the Toreador?"

"Shut up, you ass!" "I don't see it. I could—"

"If I might make the suggestfulness—"

"What is it, Inky—" "The performfulness of the operatic show seems to be mucked up. Suppose, instead of a musical and operatic 'Carmen,' we give a comic entertainment? If our esteemed Bunterful chum went on as the Toreador, it would be screaming—"

"Oh, really, Inky—" Harry Wharton's face brightened.

"There's something in that!" he exclaimed. "The opera's mucked up; but if we don't give something, we shall be chipped to death. As a matter of fact, most of the fellows would prefer a comic entertainment. We'll go on in costumes, and give some comic scenes. Billy Bunter can sing the Toreador song, and if that doesn't make the audience shriek—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—" "I'll go on and make an announcement."

Harry Wharton was greeted with a cheer when he appeared on the stage in the Remove-room, entering from behind the scene. The room was

crammed with juniors, and there were a good many seniors present. Mr. Quelch, Wingate, and the prefects sat in a group, well to the front. Harry Wharton raised his hand for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!" roared Temple, Dabney, & Co. derisively. They guessed that Wharton had come forward to announce a postponement of the performance, and they were joyful at the success of their plot.

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch, looking round.

The ironical cheering died away. Harry Wharton went on calmly:

"Gentlemen, I have to announce a change in the programme. Owing to certain circumstances, over which we have no control, we are compelled to make a slight alteration. Instead of a serious representation of 'Carmen,' we are going to give on this occasion a comic version—"

"Hear, hear!" roared the audience.

What else Harry Wharton said was lost in the cheering. There was no doubt that his announcement was quite welcome to the audience, and Temple, Dabney, & Co. looked rather blank. It looked as if the Wharton Operatic Company's entertainment was to be more popular than ever, and all the wind was taken out of their sails.

Seven o'clock boomed out from the clock tower as Harry Wharton retired, and then something like silence was restored. Harry Wharton was seen to take his place at the piano, and then a voice was heard behind the scenes:

"All right, Cherry, I'm going on. Don't push me! You might make my spectacles fall off, and break them, and

then you would have to pay for them."

The audience began to giggle. The giggle became a roar as the Toreador came on the stage. A Toreador in spectacles, with clothes much too large for him, struck the audience as comic. Harry Wharton struck up a few bars on the piano.

"Go it, Bunter!"

"On the bawl!"

The shouts of encouragement did not seem to encourage Bunter much. He opened and shut his mouth several times, while Harry repeated his chord again and again. Then, suddenly taking his courage in both hands as it were, Billy Bunter plunged into his solo, the Toreador song from the second act of "Carmen."

"Toreador, ong ga-a-a-ardey.

Toreador, Toreador!

Et songe byong, when combat thee elates.

Qu'un oeil noir thee regards,

Et que l'amour awaits, Toreador,

And that l'amour t' attend!"

The audience shrieked when Billy Bunter finished. The encore was unanimous and hearty; and Billy Bunter gave the song over again, his voice making wilder excursions into various octaves, his French growing more mixed, and his tune wandering into all sorts of major and minor keys. It is safe to say that the audience had never laughed so much in their lives before. And the comic entertainment was certainly a greater success than real Grand Opera could possibly have been. Bunter's turn gave the thing a good start, and the rest of the entertainment went off on the same lines, with a swing. The evening was half

through when Hazeldene arrived with his sister, who explained to Wharton about the telegram she had received informing her of the postponement of the opera.

Harry mentally chalked it up against the Upper Fourth, but for the present nothing was said. The situation was explained to Marjorie, and she took her turn with a solo, giving the audience Micaela's song in the smuggler's lair, with great effect. Harry Wharton gave the famous Flower Song, Marjorie accompanying him at the piano, and then Bunter was put on again for comic effect. The evening was a great success, though not in the manner originally planned, and the audience departed at last highly satisfied, and with aching ribs.

"Well, it's a success, anyway," the stage-manager remarked, when it was all over. "It wasn't exactly what we intended, but it was a success; and next time we'll take more care those Upper Fourth bouncers don't take a finger in the pie."

"I say, you fellows, I suppose you'll admit that I can sing the Toreador's part now?" Billy Bunter remarked. "If you give the opera in proper form next time, Wharton, I suppose you'll cast me for the Toreador?"

"Well, Billy, I don't know about that," said Harry, laughing; "but we admit that you were the great hit of this evening, bar none."

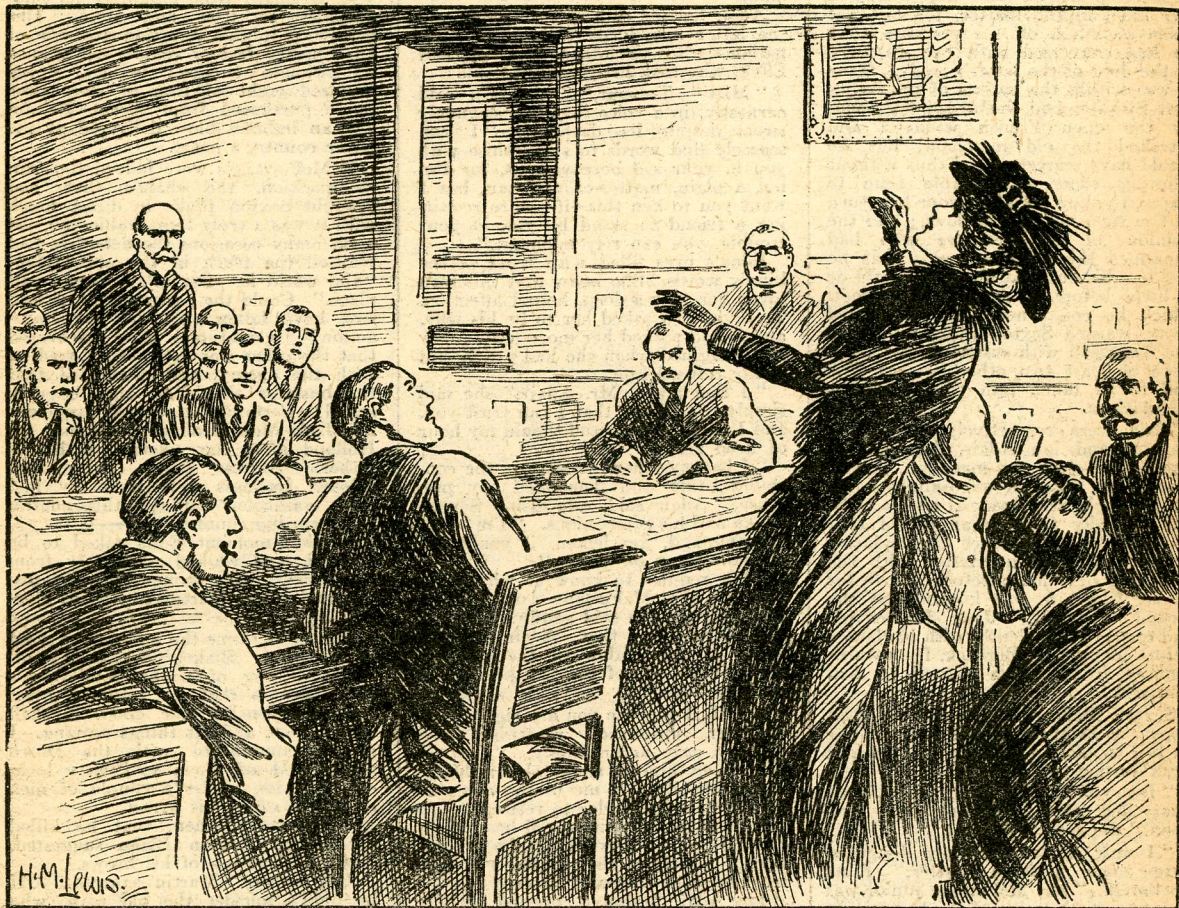
A verdict which was endorsed unanimously by the Wharton Operatic Company.

(Another fine School Story next week entitled "The Rival Performers.")



The Merchant's Secret!

The Opening Chapters of Our Powerful New Serial Story, Introducing **SEXTON BLAKE**, The World-Famous Detective, **EZRA Q. MAITLAND**, and **BROADWAY KATE**.



A piteous cry came from Edna Trevour, who had swayed to her feet. Her face was deathly pale, she shook tremulously, and for an instant it seemed that she would protest against the verdict. (See page 20.)

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

SEXTON BLAKE, the famous detective, is notified by Fenlock Fawn, of the New York Police, that Count Franz von Stoltz, a German Secret Service agent, is leaving America for England. Von Stoltz goes to Newcastle. Here he falls in with Ezra Q. Maitland, a notorious New York crook, and his wife, Broadway Kate. Owing to the war Germany is very short of iron and steel. Von Stoltz seeks Maitland's assistance with a scheme whereby British consignments of these metals can be transferred to Germany. Maitland falls in with the scheme in the hope of out-manceuvring von Stoltz, and effecting a big coup for himself.

Jack McFarlane, a partner in the engineering firm which is to assist the plotters in their shady work, tells his father that he cannot be a traitor and trade with the enemy, and tries to induce him to throw over the traitorous contract, but fails. They quarrel, and

the son is disowned. After his departure, however, the old merchant repents, and decides to cancel the contract. With this object in view, he telephones for his manager, Ian Adair, and for Silwater, who is really Maitland disguised. Silwater interviews the merchant, and his departure is witnessed by Edna Trevour, the merchant's ward, at midnight. In the morning the merchant is found dead. Sexton Blake is called in, and whilst the detective is there, Edna Trevour discovers a glove outside the window of the room which was the scene of the tragedy. The fact that it belongs to her lover, Jack McFarlane, the merchant's son, causes her to swoon. She afterwards asserts, in answer to a question asked by Sexton Blake, that she heard the merchant's voice bidding Silwater good-night at exactly twelve o'clock, midnight. The detective, however, owing to certain discoveries, maintains that the merchant was dead at ten minutes to twelve.

This assertion causes Martin, a Scotland Yard man, to exclaim:

"Why, man, you are insinuating that Mr. McFarlane was speaking ten minutes after he was dead!"

(Now Read On.)

A Dramatic Meeting.

"My dear Martin!" Sexton Blake protested, shrugging impatiently. "I was never more sane in my life. There is a possibility that the watch was slow."

"It was not, Mr. Blake," Edna put in, for she had been listening to the conversation. "A duty that I performed for my guardian every morning for years was to wind his watch and see that it was right. I carried out that duty yesterday. The watch was perfectly correct in the morning, and as it was an excellent timekeeper, I can see no reason why it should suddenly commence to lose."

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "THE RIVAL PERFORMERS!"

Sexton Blake pursed his lips and lapsed into one of his brown studies. What did it all mean? he asked himself. He had felt positive that the balance staff of Mr. McFarlane's watch had been snapped by the shock of his fall when he had been attacked, yet his ward was sure that she had heard him speaking as the clock in the hall had been striking the hour of midnight. Leaving the question of the broken watch, and placing it upon one side, the mysterious Mr. Silwater was cleared of any hand in the matter, for had not Edna seen him off the premises after he had conversed with her guardian at the door of the latter's study? True it was within the realms of possibility that Silwater had re-entered the house by the open French windows and attacked the old merchant, but he would have scarcely acted thus without allowing some considerable time to elapse, to allow Edna Treavour to return to her room and settle down; and the opinion of both doctors who had examined the dead man was that he had met his death at about midnight or a little before. A curious instinct, which he could not have explained away, warned Sexton Blake to regard the American with suspicion, yet there were at least two other persons who had to be taken into the detective's calculations.

They were respectively Jack McFarlane and Ian Adair, Mr. McFarlane's head clerk and manager. In the case of the latter, it was quite possible for his books and financial affairs to be out of order to such an extent that he had desired to silence his employer, or he may have quarrelled with the merchant over his unreturned love for Edna; whilst it was known that the second "suspect," Jack McFarlane, had quarrelled violently with his father before leaving for Berwick, from which journey it had been proved he had returned.

Sexton Blake roused himself with an impatient lifting of his shoulders. Even he had to admit that he was in a sea of mystification and puzzlement.

"Do you know why your fiancé quarrelled with his father, Miss Treavour?" the detective asked.

"I only know that they disagreed over some business matter," Edna answered. "Mr. McFarlane junior was about to speak to me of the transaction when I interrupted the quarrel, but his father made him give his word that he would not disclose to me its details. Whatever it was, the matter must have been of an important nature, for it was to have taken my fiancé to Holland."

"To Holland?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear Mr. McFarlane junior beseech his father to do his duty to his country and King?" Sexton Blake queried suddenly.

Edna started.

"Why, yes!" she exclaimed. "I had almost forgotten; but how did you know?"

"I was informed by the butler that he heard Mr. Jack McFarlane make use of the words," the detective explained. "By the way, Mr. Silwater is connected with some Holland firm, is he not?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake—with a Messrs. Swaan & Co., of Rotterdam. They are—or were—transacting some large piece of business with my guardian. Mr. Silwater has been to the house upon three occasions after the works were closed for the night. Yes, Symes,

what it is?" she asked, as the butler knocked and entered the room.

"Mr. Adair has arrived, miss," the butler returned, standing aside to allow a tall young Scotsman to enter.

Ian Adair came quickly forward into the room; and as Sexton Blake scrutinised his open face and took in the frankness of his grey eyes, the detective told himself that the young manager was one whom it was unlikely would savagely attack a feeble old man.

Adair nodded to Inspector Blair, and the latter introduced him to his companions; then the manager approached Edna, who took his proffered hand.

"Miss Treavour," Adair said earnestly, in a voice that was strangely sweet despite its deepness, "I can scarcely find words to sympathise with you in your sad bereavement, for I'm but a plain, matter-of-fact man, but I want you to ken this—if you're requiring a friend to stand by you in your trouble, you can rely upon me."

Edna's eyes filled with tears at the kindly words. She knew that this man loved her with a deep, honest affection. Twice he had asked her to be his wife, and it had pained her more than Adair had imagined when she had gently but firmly refused him.

"I thank you, Mr. Adair," she said simply. "I know that I can trust you, and I shall come to you should my hour of need arrive."

"I hastened here so soon as the constable came and demanded my presence," Adair said, addressing Sexton Blake and his companions. "I'm yours to command, gentlemen, if you'll tell me how I can serve you."

"We require to know at what time you left Mr. McFarlane last night," Inspector Martin said gruffly, his manner suggesting that Adair already stood in the shadow of the gallows. "You were one of the last persons to see him alive."

"Well, I suppose you are right," the manager answered, returning the official's gaze unflinchingly. "Let me see; I left him at about eleven-thirty. He personally saw me to the door, as he had told his butler to retire."

"Upon what business did he wish to consult you?" Sexton Blake asked, keenly watching the manager's face from beneath curiously lowered lids.

Ian Adair hesitated, opened his lips to speak, closed them again, and looked towards Edna.

"Did you hear Mr. Blake's question?" Inspector Martin asked sharply, glaring at the young man in a manner that ought to have taken all the wind out of his sails. "If so, please answer it."

Adair regarded him defiantly; then a little scornful smile curled his lips, and Martin flushed angrily.

"I was not aware that I was under cross-examination," the Scotsman retorted quietly; "but if you are anxious to know, my employer sent for me to discuss the shipment of an important consignment of motor-lorries destined for New York."

"For New York!" Sexton Blake peeped. "Not Holland?"

Adair hesitated again, although the pause was scarcely noticeable.

"They are certainly for the account of a Holland firm," he admitted, "but their destination is New York."

Sexton Blake's eyes narrowed, and his brain worked quickly.

Was it possible, he wondered, that the firm of John McFarlane & Co. was the Scottish company upon the verge

of bankruptcy of whom Tinker had heard the German spy Von Stoltz speaking in the house at Poplar?

If this were so, the great consignment of lorries was really destined for Germany, and—well, Sexton Blake made up his mind at once that if such was the case, the shipment must be stopped at all costs.

At all times the famous detective was a patriot to his finger-tips, and he realised how important it was to prevent Germany from gaining such commodities as iron and steel. Her deficiency in this direction was one of the greatest factors against her chance of ultimate success; besides, every hundredweight of iron or steel Germany purchased from Great Britain was an indirect blow delivered at the latter country's heart.

If McFarlane's were indeed the firm in question, the chance that had brought Sexton Blake in direct touch with it was a truly remarkable one, yet upon many occasions the detective had realised the truth in the old saying, "the world is, after all, a very small place." Could the partners, father and son, have fallen out over the transaction? Could one have discovered that the other was deliberately trading with the enemy, and demanded that the business should at once be cancelled? Certainly it seemed suspicious for Jack McFarlane to be bound for Holland after the quarrel with his father. Sexton Blake knew that colossal business with Germany had been transacted through this neutral neighbouring country, and—

At that moment Edna asked to be excused, and walked unsteadily from the room. No sooner had she disappeared than Martin turned to Sexton Blake.

"It seems to me the matter's as plain as daylight, Blake," he exclaimed. "The finding of young McFarlane's glove proves that he returned after leaving ostensibly for good. I shall act at once, and set things moving. I shall communicate with the Dutch police, and ask them to keep a lookout for him, whilst a couple of men cross and effect his arrest."

"You think, then, that he killed his father?" Sexton Blake suggested, with an elevating of his brows.

"Of course," Martin averred. "If he didn't murder the old man, who did?"

"Mr. Samuel P. Silwater!" Symes announced at that moment, flinging open the door to usher in Ezra Q. Maitland, who was still disguised by the smoked spectacles and the disfiguring hump between his shoulders.

It was with the trace of a swagger that the master-criminal stepped over the threshold, but as he caught sight of his old enemy of Baker Street all his confidence left him, and his face went ghastly under its paint.

He started so violently that an occasional table, upon which stood a dish of fruit, was overturned to a crash, and he made as if to swing round and dash madly from the house. Then, by a tremendous effort of will-power, Maitland recovered himself, and to hide his confusion he stopped to gather up the fruit. Meanwhile, the master-crook's brain was working with the rapidity of lightning. What was Sexton Blake doing here? he asked himself. Did he suspect his true identity. Did he believe or know him to be Ezra Q. Maitland, the man who had made two deliberate attempts upon his—Blake's—life? Was it possible that

the matter of the lorries which were to be shipped to help Germany had in some way leaked out, and—

No, Maitland decided. It was ridiculous! It must be purely chance that had brought Blake to the scene of his latest operations, and he would not abandon the gain he hoped to make without a fight.

He straightened his body, set the table upon its legs, and replaced the plate of fruit upon it, relying upon the fact that his disguise was excellent, and that the voice he was wont to assume with it was unrecognisable, even to such a man as the famous London detective.

"Guess I came right along when I heard of what had happened," Maitland said coolly, as he came forward. "The evidence I can give you may be of importance."

"You have accomplished the journey quickly, Mr. Silwater," Inspector Blair returned. "The constable could hardly have waited a moment for you."

"Constable?" Maitland's eyebrows went up questioningly. "What constable?" he asked.

"One was sent to request your presence here, sir," Blair answered, "as we knew that you were with Mr. McFarlane shortly before his death, and thought you could possibly throw some light upon the matter."

"I reckon I anticipated you," the master-criminal stated, and his voice was drawing and coolly confident. "The man had not arrived at my hotel when I left for here." He drew out his cigar-case, but hastily returned it to his pocket, for he knew that the aroma of the strong Indian weeds he smoked would be likely to disclose his identity to his arch-foe. "I read of the crime in an early edition of the papers," he explained calmly, "and, thinking you might like to question me, I came right here."

Sexton Blake regarded the criminal keenly, wishing that he could see his eyes. Maitland's agitation upon entering had been covered almost instantly by the cool manner in which he had stooped to pick up the articles he had overturned, but it had not been lost upon the detective. However, the American's demeanour was quite collected and fearless now, and if he had caused the death of the old merchant he must indeed be a cool hand to purposely thrust himself beneath the noses of the police, who were investigating upon the very scene of the tragedy.

"At what time did you leave Mr. McFarlane last night?" the detective asked.

"At exactly midnight," Maitland returned. "As a matter of fact, I can be sure to the minute, for the clock in the hall was striking as I paused upon the threshold of the next room to speak a few last words to my friend. Miss Trevour was in the hall, now I come to think of it, and she will confirm what I have said."

Sexton Blake nodded. "You came to see Mr. McFarlane upon a matter of business?"

"Upon the question of the shipment of a consignment of lorries on account of my firm in Holland," Maitland agreed.

"It is, of course, the same consignment that is destined for New York," Ian Adair cut in quickly, with a meaning glance at the criminal.

"I reckon that's so," Maitland admitted slowly; and behind his smoked spectacles his eyes were filled with mingled surprise and eagerness. "It

was, of course, about the shipment for New York."

"It is a large order to necessitate your presence in Scotland?" Sexton Blake suggested carelessly.

"Bet on it," Maitland drawled. "It involves fifty thousand pounds."

"There can be no doubt that the time was twelve o'clock when you left the deceased, Mr. Silwater?"

"Not the slightest, I reckon. I have told you that the clock was striking the hour. There is a fact I guess is worth mentioning in face of what has happened; indeed, it is the reason for my hastening here, for the knowledge of it may prove of the greatest importance to the police. I arrived just after half-past eleven to arrange the last few details of the shipment with the deceased, and during the time I was with him I thought several times that I heard someone moving in the next room."

"That, of course, would be the room in which we now stand?"

"Exactly."

"It looks as though my theory is going to prove right, Blake," Inspector Martin said meaningly.

"Possibly," the detective admitted. "Was not eleven-thirty a rather unusual hour to call upon business, Mr. Silwater?"

"Waal, perhaps it was, but we Americans like to hustle things, Mr. Blake. By the way, am I right in assuming that you are Mr. Sexton Blake of London?"

"I am he," the detective agreed. "I thank you for your promptness in communicating what you knew, Mr. Silwater. Of course, you will be available for the inquest?"

"Yes," the master-criminal rejoined. "Say, if there's nothing further you want of me, I guess I'll be getting right along. I'm a man who always has to hustle, but you may rely upon me if I can do anything to help you clear up the mystery of that poor old man's death."

He waved away the few formal words of thanks tendered him, then he bowed and quitted the room.

Once in the hall, he quickened his pace, and when the front door had closed behind him he heaved a sigh of relief and hurried down the drive.

"Ten thousand curses!" he hissed between his clenched teeth, and behind his spectacles his eyes blazed with an ugly light. "What demon of ill-fortune guided the steps of Sexton Blake in this direction? And why was Ian Adair so anxious to state that the lorries were for New York? By heavens, can it mean that he is open to be bought? What should I do? Is it worth my while to stay and see the matter out now that Blake is here, or should I make myself scarce? No, no! I'll play my cards to the last. I'll lay my hands upon the fortune for which I have worked and plotted, even if another life—the life of Sexton Blake—is forfeited!"

The Inquest and Verdict—Sexton Blake's Startling Statement

The murder of Mr. John McFarlane had caused a widespread excitement throughout the United Kingdom. For many years the sensation-loving public had not revelled in a case so deeply steeped in romance, pathos, and mystery.

The few brief details which had

found their way into the newspapers had whetted the appetites of the people of Berwick until they fairly hungered for further information.

It was for this reason that when the inquest upon the unfortunate merchant's body had been opened this morning that the stuffy Coroner's Court was packed to overflowing, every available seat being filled.

In the centre of the court sat Tinker. The full facts of the case had been communicated to the lad by his master, and Sexton Blake's assistant was as eager as any there to hear the verdict when it should be ultimately arrived at.

All through the morning the proceedings had dragged on. Immediately after the jury had been sworn, Doctor Carson, the surgeon attached to the Berwick Police, had stepped up to the table and given it his opinion that death had overtaken Mr. McFarlane at midnight upon the night before last—the 23rd—and that it had been caused by the old merchant's neck being forcibly broken, a view that Doctor Angus Dixon, who was called next, confirmed.

Next followed Detective-Inspector Martin, who swaggered into the court with all the official pomposness at his command. His air suggested that without him the inquiry could not have been proceeded with, but he merely gave evidence of the finding of the merchant upon the floor of his study after having been informed of the crime by his colleague, Inspector Blair, who followed him, and repeated almost word for word what he had already said. It was curious to note that neither of the officers mentioned the important clue of the thumb impression found by Sexton Blake.

Symes, the aged butler, again narrated the story of the quarrel between father and son—the quarrel which had resulted in Mr. Jack McFarlane leaving his home, ostensibly for good, expressing his intention of catching the last train to London.

A buzz of excitement welled through the crowded court as Edna Trevour made her appearance, and the air seemed heavy with tension as, under pressure of cross-examination, she confessed to having left open the windows of the room adjoining her guardian's study for her lover to return, and told of the finding of his glove the next morning. The next witness to be called upon was Ian Adair, and during his examination every eye was turned upon him questioningly, for was he not one of the last persons to see the merchant alive?

Once again a murmur of expectation filled the court as the coroner called upon Sexton Blake. The famous detective entered the court, stepped briskly into his place, and formally took the oath, and a dead silence fell upon the spectators, for they had all heard of the Baker Street detective, and it was rumoured that "he had got a clue!"

The coroner, a stout, pompous man, who was likely to strongly remind the observer of a retired publican, polished his pince-nez and regarded Sexton Blake scrutinisingly for a moment.

"You are Mr. Sexton Blake, of Baker Street, London?" he asked, although it was merely a matter of form, for he was perfectly well aware of the fact.

"That is so," the detective responded quietly.

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"By profession you are a detective, I believe?"

"I have been called one," Sexton Blake agreed blandly.

The coroner regarded the witness fixedly; he saw that his overbearing ways had failed to impress this quietly-dressed, pale-faced man before him. Ever so slightly his manner changed.

"I understand that you went with your colleagues, Inspectors Martin and Blair to the house of the deceased shortly after the police had learnt of the crime?" the coroner asked.

"Yes."
"You made certain discoveries, I learn. Will you be good enough to tell the jury what these discoveries amounted to?"

Excitement and suspense was apparent upon every face in court, but the spectators were not to have the thrill for which they craved.

"Beyond saying that I found the deceased dead upon the floor and confirmed that death had been caused by the breaking of the neck, I would prefer to reserve my statements until a later date," Sexton Blake returned coolly.

The coroner fairly gasped, and glared at the detective in a manner that ought to have confused him. Sexton Blake's cold, grey eyes looked back into his quite imperturbably, however.

"Really, Mr. Blake, this is most unusual," the coroner protested angrily. "I must demand that you make public all that you have learnt."

"Pardon me, sir," Blake replied, still quite unruffled, "but for reasons of my own I wish to withhold my theories and discoveries for the present, and I maintain that I have every right to remain silent upon matters which might interrupt or delay the satisfactory clearing up of the case were they made public. I will say this, however, I have reason to believe that death was really accidental."

The coroner's brows went up in undisguised amazement, and he stared at the detective as though he could not believe the evidence of his ears, whilst a dead silence fell upon all in court.

"Accidental!" he repeated blankly. "Impossible! What of the bruises upon the throat of the deceased?"

"I believe that a struggle certainly took place," Sexton Blake replied.

"Upon questioning the butler, whose evidence you have heard, I discovered that when he first entered the room a chair was overturned and the poker lay beside the dead man. The latter article had no trace of human blood

upon it, however, and I believe that the deceased snatched it up to defend himself against an attack that was made upon him. I found that one corner of the carpet had been turned up. It was the corner nearest to the feet of the dead man, and I believe that after his assailant had gripped him by the throat he tore himself away and in stepping backwards tripped over the carpet and broke his neck when he fell."

The coroner sniffed doubtfully, and it was evident that he placed little reliance upon the theory Blake had put forward.

"I understand that you discovered the watch of the deceased had stopped at ten minutes to twelve," he asked, fidgeting with the notes before him. "What did you gather from this?"

"At present—nothing," Blake answered.

"I was given to understand by a previous witness that you thought the watch had stopped when the deceased fell and met his death."

"That is a point upon which I am as yet unable to be certain," the detective replied. "I would prefer to keep my theory to myself until I have proved it to be a fact."

The coroner grunted discontentedly and disappointed murmurs ran through the court. There were many who whispered that Sexton Blake was not the wonderful detective they had believed him. Obviously, they concluded, as yet he had learnt very little from his investigations.

"Thank you, that will do, Mr. Blake," the coroner said icily. "I now call Mr. Samuel P. Silwater."

The witnesses' door opened, and Ezra Q. Maitland stepped briskly into the room. His eyes were, of course, still concealed by the smoked glasses, but the portion of his face that was visible was perfectly expressionless. None could guess from his appearance that every nerve in his body was tingling, that his pulses were racing, and that he was stealing himself for the ordeal that lay before him under the eyes of the one detective whom he feared.

Sexton Blake had stooped to adjust his bootlace, and as the master-criminal reached the table and the coroner's clerk proffered him the book to take the oath, the detective straightened his body and his shoulder, coming sharply into contact with the Bible, knocked it from the man's hand.

With a word of apology, Blake picked up the book and offered it to the

criminal. Unsuspectingly enough, Maitland stretched forth his right hand to accept it, and the action displayed to Sexton Blake that which he had half expected to see. A small, circular scar was apparent in the fleshy part of the criminal's thumb.

With his features perfectly under control, Sexton Blake turned away and seated himself beside Inspector Martin, whilst the coroner commenced his examination of the American.

Very clearly and concisely, Ezra Q. Maitland gave his evidence, frankly admitting that he was practically the last person to see the old merchant alive. He told how he had called at the house upon receipt of an urgent telephone message from the deceased to discuss the shipment of certain goods to New York—he was very careful to impress upon the coroner the fact that America was the destination of the lorries—and how he had believed that he heard someone moving about in the adjoining room during the conversation.

"You had no inkling of the identity of the person in the next apartment?" the coroner asked.

Maitland hesitated awkwardly. "Waal, guess I could put forward a theory," he drawled, "but as it might prejudice the jury and I can't be certain whether I'm correct, I'd better keep silent."

A murmur ran through the court. Everyone knew to whom the witness attributed the noise he had heard. He suspected that Jack McFarlane was waiting to renew the quarrel with his father when he—the witness—had taken his departure.

"You left at precisely twelve o'clock?" the coroner queried.

"Upon the stroke. Fortunately, Miss Trevour was in the hall as I left the study and heard her guardian conversing with me and saying 'Good-night.'"

"Why fortunately?"
"Because the fact of Miss Trevour hearing her guardian speaking proves that he was alive when I left, and otherwise my position might have been an unenviable one," Maitland returned frankly. "I might have been suspected of the crime if matters had not transpired as they did."

"True," the coroner admitted. "Thank you, Mr. Silwater. You may stand down. Gentlemen," he went on, addressing the jury, "I am not inclined to place a great deal of faith in the theory of accidental death that has been

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As the master-criminal caught sight of his old enemy, Sexton Blake, his confidence left him, and his face went ghastly. He started so violently that an occasional table was overturned with a crash.—(See page 18.)

put forward"—here he glanced a little contemptuously at Sexton Blake. "From the evidence given by Doctors Carson and Dixon there seems little doubt that the deceased was wilfully murdered. You have all heard the evidence of the butler Symes regarding the violent quarrel between the deceased and his son, and have learnt how Miss Trevour left open the French windows of the room adjoining Mr. McFarlane's study. You have heard, too, how Miss Trevour discovered Mr. McFarlane junior's glove by the windows upon the next morning. It now only remains for you to return your verdict after due and careful consideration."

For a few moments the jury whispered together, then their foreman rose to his feet.

"We wish to return a verdict of wilful murder against John McFarlane junior, sir," he said, in hushed, impressive tones.

A pitiful cry came from Edna Trevour, who had swayed to her feet. Her face was deathly pale, she shook tremulously, and for an instant it

seemed that she would protest against the verdict, then she appeared to realise that such a course of action would be useless, and she turned towards the exit.

Sexton Blake seized Tinker by the arm as the spectators and witnesses commenced to file from the court, and always he kept in close proximity to the man he knew as Samuel P. Silwater.

When the open air was reached the detective stooped and spoke quickly to Tinker.

"After him, my lad!" he ordered tensely. "Don't let him out of your sight upon any account. Report his actions to me at the earliest possible moment!"

"Do you mean the Yankee, gov'nor?" Tinker exclaimed in surprise. "Surely you can't think that he—"

"Do as I order you, Tinker!" Sexton Blake commanded sharply. "A good assistant should not ask questions!"

Tinker hesitated no longer. He started off after Maitland, casting a wondering glance at his master's grimly-set face as he went.

"What the dickens is that for?" Inspector Martin asked, for he had joined his friend and had watched Tinker depart. "Why is he following Silwater?"

"Because," Sexton Blake answered quietly, "my watch theory, as you termed it, is, after all, correct. John McFarlane met his death at ten minutes to twelve upon the fatal night!"

Inspector Martin swung round upon his colleague and stared at him as though he thought he had taken leave of his senses.

"Oh, rot!" he gasped blankly. "Why, old McFarlane was conversing with Silwater at midnight! Do you mean to tell me that he was speaking ten minutes after his death?"

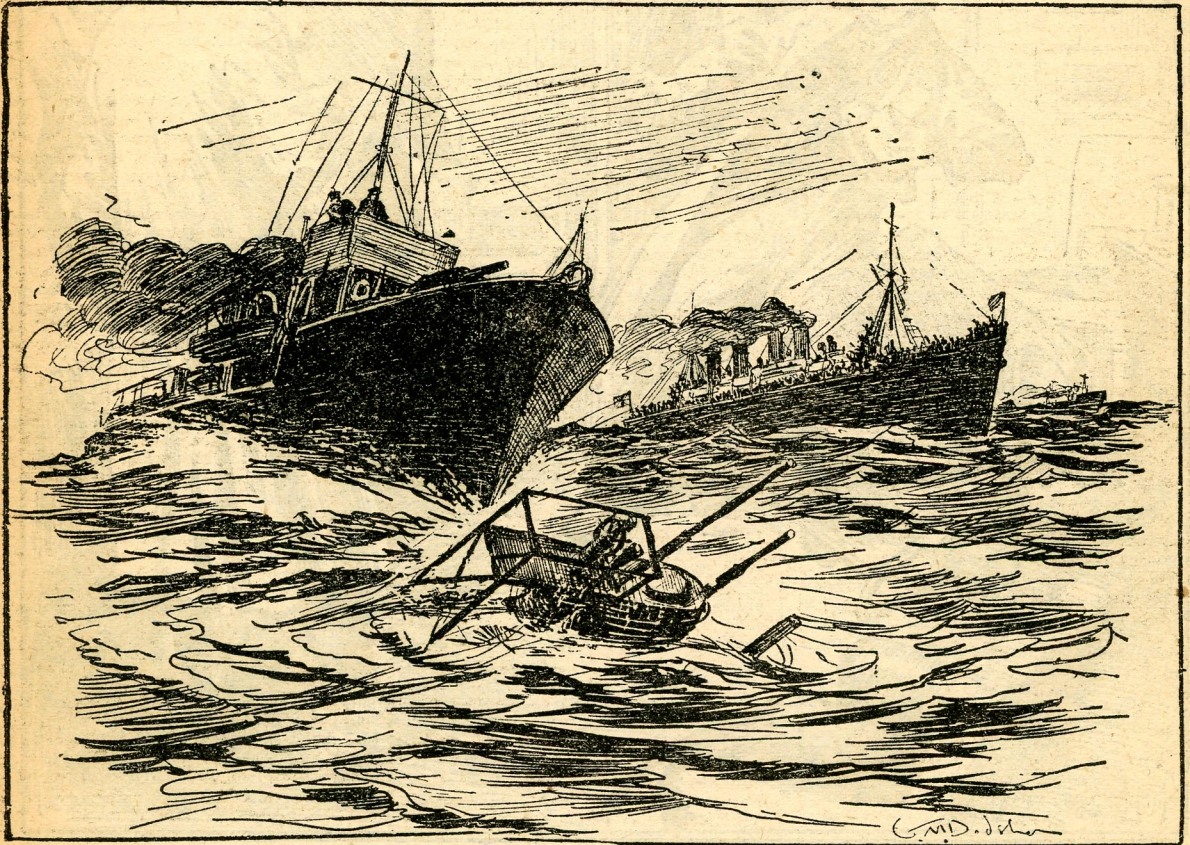
"That part of the affair I cannot as yet explain," Sexton Blake returned; "but I do know this. John McFarlane was dead before Silwater left the room, for it was Silwater's bloodstained thumb that made the impression on the wall!"

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Crash! With a terrific bump that shook the destroyer from stem to stern, the sharp bow of the vessel struck the German submarine whilst broadside on.—(See Chapter 5.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bill Says Good-bye to London.

"Well, Stubbs, I'm glad to see you looking fit once more."

Bill Stubbs, at one time motor-bus driver on the Lewisham to Marble Arch route, but more recently transport-driver with the Army Service Corps, cut a fine figure in the King's khaki as he faced the regimental doctor and swung his hand to his forehead in the salute.

"Fit as a fiddle, sound as a bell, sir—that's me!" he replied, in his perky cockney voice. "Ready to wallop anybody, sir—specially them bullying Germans!"

"That's the idea!" smiled the doctor. "And you've got rid of the pains in your back, and the rheumatism?"

"Gone like magic, doctor," declared Private Stubbs. "It's the good old smoky, foggy air o' London! There ain't nothing like it. It's bucked me up heaps since I've been invalided

home, sir. When I was out in the trenches, or driving a lorry over the blooming shell-holed roads round Wipers, I fair sighed for a good old whiff of the asphaltic, petroily smell o' London village. Talk about pick-me-ups! Give me a whiff o' the Strand on a damp, foggy day, an' it'll do me more good than a beano at Southend-on-the-Mud."

"I'm pleased to see you, Stubbs," the doctor remarked. "I was a bit tired when you came in, but you've cheered me up. Have a cigar, my lad. Of course, now you're fit, you'll have to get back to the Front again."

Bill took the proffered smoke and held it to his nose to draw in the aroma. His eyes twinkled. It was a sixpenny smoke, and such luxuries did not often come Bill's way.

"I'm ready, sir," he exclaimed. "Dooty is dooty, though, o' course, I've got a missus now to think about. I'll have to take more care o' myself,

for Lil's sake. She's outside waitin' for me now."

"Then I won't keep you from the charming Mrs. Stubbs," smiled the doctor, filling in his discharge-paper. "You'll have to take this to headquarters. I'm afraid they'll cut your honeymoon short, my lad."

"We're saving that up for after the war, sir," grinned Bill. "But we're having a sort of make-believe to-day. We're doing London on motor-buses. Good-day to you, sir."

"Good luck to you, Stubbs." Bill paused in the doorway to light his sixpenny smoke, and then sauntered out with a lordly air to where his young wife was awaiting him.

"Look at your hubby, lass!" he said, with a perky toss of his head. "Old Sawbones is a toff. Ain't it a nose-gay?"

Mrs. Stubbs's pretty face was a little drawn and anxious.

"Bill," she said, "did you get round

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him? Say he ain't passed you yet! You're not going back to—the Front?"

"O' course I am," replied her spouse, blowing out a cloud of fragrant smoke. "They won't let me wear my khaki threadbare over here. We ain't finished that there little job over there. We ain't been to Berlin yet, to pay our respects to Kaiser Bill."

There were tears in the young wife's tender eyes. She caught at Bill's shoulder and held him tight.

"Bill—Bill, must you go?" she sobbed. "So soon after our—"

"Steady on," interposed Bill huskily. "Mrs. Stubbs, you've got to remember as you've one of the King's soldiers for your better-half. Steady on, lass. I'll soon be home ag'in, and then won't we have a beano!"

In silence they stepped off, side by side. Bill was loth to leave his pretty bride, but duty was duty, he told himself, and he strode on, puffing at the fragrant cigar, and thinking hard all the time.

Reaching the A.S.C. headquarters, he told Lil to hold his half-smoked cigar while he went inside and interviewed the authorities.

"Ah, yes," said the official, glancing at Bill's discharge-paper. "The doctor was just telephoning about you, Private Stubbs. You're to go down to Hurlmere Camp. There's a big lot of Kitchener's new Army there, and they're leaving for the Front in a day or two. You're to leave with them and report yourself to your old company when you reach the base at the other side of the Channel."

"Very good, sir," said Bill.

He had to wait a few seconds while papers and vouchers were filled in.

"Here you are, my lad," said the official. "You're expected at Hurlmere first thing to-morrow morning."

Bill rejoined Lil. She was holding the glowing cigar in her gloved fingers, much to the amusement of passers-by, but the girl was too worried with her thoughts to heed them.

"Good on you, lass!" cried Bill cheerily. "A cigar's never so good when you have to light it up ag'in. Cheer up, my hearty! Your old man's not leaving you till to-morrow morning. We'll do that there motor-trip, and see the sights. Here's a General coming. Cheero, Sam!"

One of the big L. G. O. motor-buses lumbered along, and at the sound of Private Stubbs' voice the driver, a stout, rubicund-faced man, gave a snort of delight as he pulled up.

"Why, blow me if it ain't old Bill Stubbs!" he cried. "B'ess me if I hardly knowed yer! They have made a man of yer, what wi' that drill an' the khaki."

"It's old Sam Sloan, my dear," explained Bill to his wife. "One of the good old sort, is Sam. Me an' him have been on the Lewisham route for years."

"Come on the dickey, and let's chew the rag," invited the 'bus-driver. "Yer little turtle-dove can ride on the top."

"Here, you go slow about the turtle-dove!" cried Bill. "That's my missus, and don't you forget it!"

"Go on, Bill," said Lil unselfishly. "I know you like to see your old pals." She sprang on the step and mounted the stairs. Bill hesitated for a moment, then he moved to the seat beside the driver.

"This is life, this is!" said Private Stubbs. "This is a bit of oil right—

worth being in the trenches for, and waddling about in the mud up to your neck!"

To Lil their chatter was rather uninteresting, for they talked of their driver pals and the changes on the road, and about engines and petrol—the 'busmen's "shop," in fact—and then they got on to the war.

"Fancy you going to Hurlmere, an' all," cried Sam Sloan. "Yer'll see my brother Peter down there. He's in the Queen's Royal Rifles, what's been training there."

"I'll look him up," said Bill. "What sort of bloke is he?"

"Peter—oh, he's a wild 'un, if yer like!" exclaimed the driver. "Regular bad nut, he was. Allus in trouble at home wi' the old folk—wouldn't work, he was that lazy. The old man didn't half have a trouble to kick him out of doors and make him earn his own living."

"He don't take after his brother Sam," remarked Bill.

"That he don't, an' all," cried his friend. "We didn't know anything about him for months, until we heared as he'd enlisted in the Q.R.R.'s, and was at Hurlmere. O' course, he's there now."

"You bet he is," agreed Bill. "Once yer've joined the Army, they've got a sort of chain round your neck till you've done your little bit and your time's up. And quite right, too! Best thing as could happen to your brother Peter, if he was one of the waster sort!"

He broke off, to shout out with a ringing voice reminiscent of the days before the war:

"Here y'are, lady! Strand, Ludgit 'ill, Benk! Right-ho, Sam! Let her rip!"

When Bill and his pretty young wife got off the 'bus Sam Sloan called after them.

"Don't forget, Bill!" he cried. "Hunt out young Peter an' give him a helping hand, for old times' sake. Tell him as me an' the old folks is proud, as he's joined Kitchener's Army."

"You leave it to me," replied Bill. "I'll look after him."

But that promise, given in all cordiality, was to have far-reaching results not only for Bill Stubbs, but for several hundred of the gallant lads of Kitchener's Army.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Stubbs Gets Busy in Camp.

Bill Stubbs showed his voucher, and passed out of the little station at Hurlmere.

He was not the only passenger to alight. There had been a good number of Kitchener's Army men in the train. Bill had, in fact, regaled them with stories of his adventures in the war, from the first great onslaught of the Germans at Mons till he had left the British firmly entrenched along the French and Belgian frontier.

But they had stepped briskly away from the station, leaving him puzzled as to which road to take.

Hurlmere was not a great distance from the port through which most of Kitchener's Army were embarking to cross the Channel and "do their bit" for their King and the old country.

It was only a mere village—just a score of labourers' cottages. Beyond it, rising on a slope, was a huge stretch of gorse-covered moorland, on which, here and there, could be seen a num-

ber of huts, and to the extreme right a brave show of bell-tents.

"Fancy me, Bill Stubbs, being like a lost lamb in the country, and not knowin' which way to turn!" he grunted, fingering his chin. "Say, mate," he went on, turning to the gawky lad who had taken tickets, "I'm sort of up the pole down here. Where does Sergeant-major Hewitt, of the Q.R.R.'s, hang out about here?"

"Bean't y' know that, an' y'er wearing khaki?" asked the ticket-collector. "Ye'll find it easy if ye don't miss t' stile by Farmer Miller's duck-pond, an' don't go down t' lane to Blankenbury. See here, mister—ye goes straight till ye comes to t' third telegraph-pole; then ye crosses the stile, keep on across the meadow, but look out for the bull, until ye comes to a lane, when ye goes along that, and if ye take the third turning on the left and the second on the right, and ye ax t' first passon ye meet, y'er bound to come to it. There's a longer way round by—"

"Oh, ring off!" interrupted Bill. "Yer want a shorthand-writer to take down all that lot! I've got to get there to-day, not next week! Bless me, my lad, you'd make a fine London bobby, you would! Your directions are about as clear as mud. Oh, well, it's up this way somewhere, I suppose. Gee up, shanks's pony!"

Bill found it hard to have to leave his young wife at home in London. Lil was a brave lass. She had smiled affectionately and pluckily at him when the train had steamed out from Waterloo. She didn't utter a word of repining.

"I know it's your duty, dear Bill, and you've got to go," she had told him. "I'd like to have you at home here with me. I'd just love to come and meet you driving that old motor-'bus of yours, but we'll have to wait for them happy times till after the war. I'm proud to think as you're going to fight for old England—for me, Bill, and the rest of us what have to stay at home."

A tear trickled slowly down Bill Stubbs's rugged cheek. Plucky, good-hearted, easy-going Bill was just as human as everybody else.

He smote himself on the chest, and hallowed his back.

"This won't do, Bill," he said. "Pull yourself together, mate. If all goes well, you'll soon be back again. You an' the boys in khaki'll have to get to Berlin this trip."

He swung round a bend in the lane, and came to two forked roads. He stood perplexed here.

For two or three minutes he stood gazing about him across the deserted fields; then he gave a whoop of delight.

A well set-up figure in khaki was approaching. Bill hurried to meet the Tommy.

"Cheero, mate!" he cried cheerily. "I'm up a gum-tree. I'm after the Q.R.R. camp, and I'm like a lost sheep on the mount'ain."

Bill had everywhere found a remarkable comradeship amongst the men of Kitchener's Army, but this fellow never showed the sign of a smile.

He was tall and brawny, a bigger chap even than Bill, of sandy hair and complexion, had a pugnacious chin, and sullen little eyes.

"Straight on!" he growled. "I'm not out here to guide a lot of silly mugwumps to their destination!"

He glanced eagerly along the road as he spoke, for there had come the sound of rushing motor-wheels.

"Don't seem as if you're out here to keep a civil tongue in your head, either!" said Bill, setting his jaws together.

"I don't want anything to do with you," snarled the ungracious Tommy. "Cut ahead. You're only wasting your time here."

"All right, mate, keep your hair on," replied Bill. "I ain't sighing for your company. Yer ain't what yer might call cheerful. Yer look as if yer'd swallowed a bucketful of that there Germin sowerkrout!"

The man wheeled round and darted a venomous glance at Bill. His little pig's eyes gleamed murderously for a moment.

"That's got him!" grinned Bill. "He don't like bein' told as he ain't 'appy an' 'andsome."

He stepped off once more, but pulled up after going twenty yards. The motor-car had come to a standstill. As he looked back, the sullen Tommy was in a whispered conversation with a stout, florid man on the driving-seat.

The wind was blowing towards Bill, and it carried scraps of their talk to him, muttered low as it was. But Bill could not make head or tail of it. The language they spoke was certainly not English, he decided.

"Sort of double Dutch," murmured Bill. "Still, what do they want to gas in a forrin tongue to one another for, when there ain't nobody but me within a mile of 'em?"

The motorist handed out a couple of brown paper parcels, which the soldier laid carefully on the ground; then the man in the car put his arms about him and pressed his lips to the other's forehead.

"Lummy, they're like a couple o' slobberin' schoolgals!" thought Bill.

The next moment the motorist had released the clutch, turned the car round, and disappeared in the direction he had come.

And as Bill watched, he saw the man in khaki take the parcels in either hand and move cautiously towards him. They were evidently very heavy, by the gingerly way he carried them.

Bill waited till he came almost abreast, then he stepped out from behind the hedge. The fellow staggered; the colour left his cheeks, and his lips parted.

"Look 'ere, mate," said Bill, "there ain't no cause for us to be at logger-heads. You're a Q.R.R. man, and I'm going to your camp. I'll carry one of them parcels for you if you'll lead the way."

He made to take the package from the fellow's right hand, and was amazed to find it was far from heavy. The Tommy shouldered him roughly away.

"Hands off!" he snapped. "That's your road—straight ahead. I'm not going to camp."

He put his parcels carefully on the ground, and turned to face Bill with clenched fists, as if he was prepared to fight for the packages.

"Oh, all right, funny face!" said Bill, shrugging his shoulders. "I ain't got time for a scrap, else it'd please me to knock a bit o' good temper into you. We'll meet bimeby, I dare say."

Bill walked on and on, and yet no sign of the camp came into view. There was scarcely a cottage on the road, and not a single soul did he see anywhere.

At last he came to a tiny hamlet, where a lumbering farm-wagon stood outside the old, picturesque inn.

Bill had a thirst on him like a lime-

kiln, and he went in to ease it with a modest request for a bottle of ginger-beer.

"Say, squire," he said to the ruddy-cheeked farmer who was quaffing a tankard of foaming ale, "am I far from Hurlmere Camp?"

"Hurlmere—where the sojers are?" said the farmer slowly. "Only nigh on seven miles, mister. Ye've been coming away from it this five miles. Ye should have crossed the stile an' the fields close ag'in' the fork-roads by the church."

Bill let the ginger-beer go down the wrong way in his excitement, and coughed and spluttered till he grew purple-faced.

"The pig-dog!" he growled. "That's where old surly-face went—across the stile! What's he led me a pretty dance round 'ere for? He purposely put me on the wrong track!"

"I'm goin' along by the camp, mister," said the farmer. "I'll gi'e ye a lift, if ye like."

Bill cordially thanked him for the invitation. There and then they left the inn and mounted the waggon.

They eventually pulled up before a five-barred gate which led into a field, whose green turf was made-picturesque by the groups of bell-tents that were erected upon it in long lines.

"Thanks for the lift," cried Bill, springing to the ground. "Ye're a good old sport, an' no mistake."

There was a Tommy on sentry-go at the gate, and he told Bill where to find Sergeant-major Hewitt's quarters. Bill promptly presented himself.

"Sorry to be late, sir," explained Bill, coming to the salute. "You see, sir, I'm a stranger to these parts, an' some chawbacon of a lout what belongs to this company thought it funny to send me about five miles out of my way."

The non-com. handed Bill back his papers.

"That's all right, Stubbs," he smiled. "These things will happen, in the best of regulated camps. You've turned up all right, that's the principal thing. We've got to put you up and temporarily attach you to the Q.R.R. until we get to France, I understand."

"That's the idea, sir," said Bill. "You see, I'm in the A.S.C., and I've been driving motor-bus loads of troops to the firing-line, and officers' motors, and ammunition-waggons, and, in fact, every blessed thing what runs on wheels, sir."

"And driving 'em very well, from what I've heard, Stubbs," said Sergeant-major Hewitt. "There's room for one in Corporal Sloan's tent. It's No. 19. You'd better go along and make yourself at home."

"Corporal Sloan!" repeated Bill. "Not Peter Sloan, sir?"

"Aye, that's his name," said the officer, "and he's a very smart chap when he likes, and an obstinate brute when he don't. Do you know him?"

"I knows his brother," replied Stubbs. "Sam Sloan and me is what you might call bosom pals. We've been on the Lewisham road ever since motor-buses was first invented."

Bill left the marquee and made for tent No. 19. Just as he came in sight of it a man swaggered towards him.

It was the fellow who had misdirected him. At the sight of Bill he grinned.

"Enjoyed your nice little walk round the country?" he asked tauntingly.

"That I have, an' all," answered Bill, dropping his sack to the grass.

"Now it's your turn to enjoy yourself. What do you mean by sending me round on a wild-goose chase?"

A number of Tommies quickly gathered round. That the surly fellow was no favourite was evident by the glances they directed at him.

"Leave him alone, mate," advised one, putting his hand on Bill's arm. "He's like a bear wi' a sore head. He's allus got the rats."

"An' he's a scrapper, too," chimed in another. "Pick an' choose your words, if you don't want a walloping."

"And that's what he'll get if I have any of his cheek!" snorted the surly Tommy, seemingly pleased at mention of his pugilistic ability. "Out of my way, clodhopper!"

He drove his elbow into Bill's chest as he strode past. It is hard to say whether it was the blow or his being called a clodhopper that upset cockney Bill. Anyway, he caught the fellow by the shoulder.

"Here, what do yer mean by it?" he began.

His words were broken off with a gasp, for the fellow struck his fist sharply into Bill's mouth. That was enough. Bill's fists swung up. He stepped in and darted a left to the bully's jaw that sent him reeling into the arms of the Tommies standing round.

"You dog!" the corporal yelled, rushing at Bill. "I'll half kill you! You'll have to fight me now!"

"Right-ho!" replied the imperturbable Bill. "Stubbs is willing. Make a ring, lads!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Was It an Accident?

"Turn it up, chum," advised a big Tommy. "He's big enough to eat you. There ain't a chap in camp as can properly tackle him."

"Turn it up? Not me!" grunted Bill. "It's either him or me what's got to go through it."

Bill peeled off his tunic and rolled up his sleeves to show a pair of thick, muscular arms. Tommies came up from everywhere. Very soon a ring, three deep, was formed round the combatants.

"I only hope as he's got it in him to give the surly brute a jolly good hiding!" remarked a young lance-corporal.

And that was the feeling of the on-lookers. There wasn't a fellow more unpopular in the camp. Always sullen, a bully and a brute, the men of his platoon thoroughly detested him.

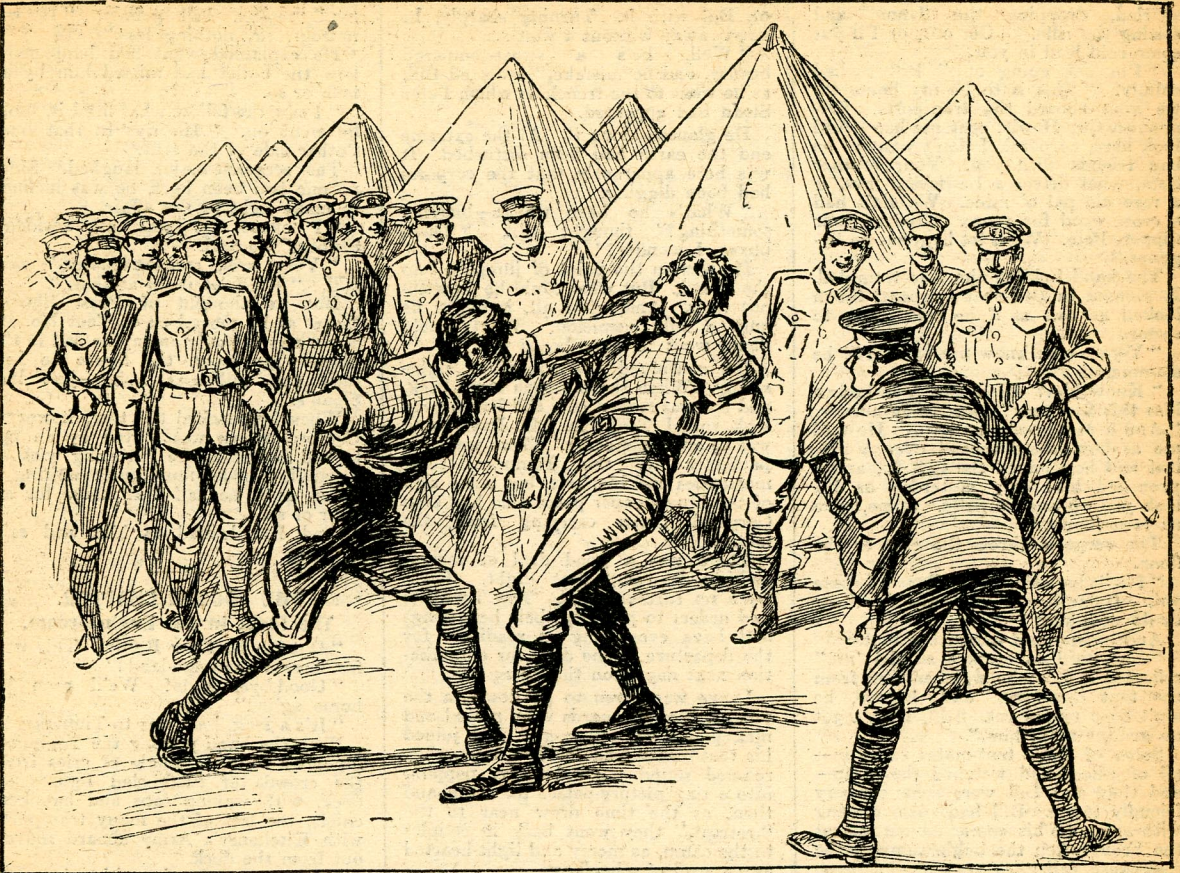
"Look here, corporal," cried a Tommy, forcing himself into the ring. "We're going to have fair play this time. No hitting with a metal buckle in your hand, what won you the last fight!"

There was a murmur of assent from the crowd. Bill's opponent scowled savagely about him. Then he moved into the middle of the ring, to where Bill was waiting.

"You've asked for it," he grunted. "Don't blame me if you get it. I'll wipe the earth with you."

"Fire ahead!" grinned Bill. "It's a game two can play at."

Voices became hushed as they sparred, each watching the other intently, each expecting the other to begin the attack. The sandy-haired man got first blow home. Fainting with his left, he caused Bill to drop his guard; then he banged home a



Stubbs's blow caught the bully full on the jawbone, and the man went down and rolled over on his face. "Good on you, lad," rose the cry, "that's the medicine for the bully!"—(See Chapter 3.)

right hook on the cockney's jaw. It twisted Bill round like a spinning-top. There was a murmur of surprise and disappointment.

The bully followed up his advantage. Bill was a little bit dazed. For one thing, it was hours since he had had a meal. At breakfast with Lil he had scarcely eaten a morsel. But he was all grit and pluck.

He took a severe drubbing on his ribs and head. The onlookers expected him every moment to go to earth, to see the fight end suddenly; but they didn't know Bill Stubbs.

He manoeuvred out of a difficult position, and backed round the ring, countering and eluding the hurricane of blows his opponent hurled at him.

Presently the sandy-haired man began to pant with his efforts. By this time Bill was getting his second wind.

Suddenly side-stepping, he assumed the offensive, and, before his man knew what was coming, planted a straight drive between his eyes that lifted him off his feet and felled him like a poleaxed ox.

"Bravo—bravo!" yelled the Tommies. "Stick it, lad! You'll do him yet!"

The bully leapt to his feet, whilst Bill stood back. Lights were still dazzling before his eyes as he rushed at the cockney 'bus-driver. His arms flew round like the sails of a windmill.

Bill was steady and confident now. He ducked, a terrific swipe going over his head. Up again, he swung round his left, all his weight behind it. It caught his man on the jawbone. The bully reeled, his hands held helplessly

in the air; then Bill leapt in. A quick one, two—heavy blows on the ribs that sounded like a drum being beaten—an upper-cut with the right, another swing to the side of the head with the left, and the sandy-haired man went down and rolled over on his face.

"Good on you, lad!" rose the cry.

"He's knocked him out!"

"My eye, that's the medicine for the bully!"

The Tommies waved their caps, and crowded in to watch Bill's prostrate opponent. The referee began to count.

"One—two—three—four—"

The form at Bill's feet groped itself painfully erect. His arms hung limply by his side. He made no attempt to continue the fight, and Bill, a good sportsman, did not dash in to finish off his man.

The bully glared sullenly at Bill. The claret was streaming from his nostrils. His forehead and face were marked red where Bill's knuckles had got home.

"I give in!" he growled. "I've had enough; but look out for yourself another time!"

"Right you are, mate!" cried Bill. "I'm ready for another go, whenever you feel like it."

He stood aside to allow his opponent to slink, huddled up, out of the ring. The Tommies crowded round, thrusting out eager hands to grip Bill's.

"Yer've done the camp a good turn, old son," the lance-corporal told him. "He's had his knife in every one of us, but we couldn't hold the candle to him in the scrapping line."

There were grinning faces all round him. They patted Bill on the shoulder.

They gripped his hand. That little scrap had made him popular with them at once. A fellow who could humble the bullying corporal of No. 7 platoon was one to be honoured and respected.

"But you heard what he said," remarked another. "Look out for yourself!"

"Bill Stubbs knows how to take care of himself, you take it from me!" said the 'bus-driver, licking his swollen knuckles before pulling on his tunic. "Now we'll do a quick march for the Hotel de Metropolitan, otherwise Tent No. 19."

"What!" gasped several voices. "You're drafted to 19!"

"That's it, my lad," grinned Bill. "Give us a call any time you're passing. My valet'll bring in your card—eh, what? Where's Corporal Sloan? Does he happen to be about?"

The Tommies looked puzzled, then they roared with amusement.

"Corporal Sloan!" said one. "That's him you've just give a jolly good hidin' to."

Bill's face lengthened. He had promised Sam Sloan, his 'bus-driving pal, to give his brother Peter a helping hand.

"Oh, law, that's done it!" he groaned. "What ever will old Sam say?"

He picked up his sack, and, finding Tent No. 19, stepped in through the flap.

Corporal Sloan had his head over a bucket of water, and was bathing his swollen face with a flannel. He glared viciously at Bill.

"What do you want in here?" he

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "THE RIVAL PERFORMERS!"

snarled, dropping the flannel and seizing the rifle. "Get out, or I'll put some cold lead in you!"

"I'm not going out," Bill replied calmly. "This is to be my home till we go aboard the transports. Sergeant-major Hewitt sent me here. And look here, corporal, I don't want to be bad friends with you. Your brother Sam, what drives a Lewisham 'bus, is a rare old pal o' mine. We ain't had a cross word for years. Give us your flipper, Pete. We'll let bygones be bygones."

The hand holding the rifle trembled. It seemed to Bill that Corporal Sloan looked as bad as if he was going to swoon.

"Y-you—you know my brother?" he stammered.

"Know him? Bless you, I've known him this five year!" was Bill's answer. "And a real good sort he is. He told me as how you'd turned over a new leaf and had joined the Q.R.R., and I promised him only yesterday as I'd look you up and be pally. Come, give us your flipper."

The corporal threw the rifle to the floor.

"No," he said doggedly; "I hate you. I don't want to have anything to do with you."

And he stamped out of the tent.

"Sam said as he was a wild 'un," reflected Bill, as he watched him from the tent opening, "and, lumme, he ain't been tamed yet. Still, I ain't got no grudge ag'in him."

Some of Bill's tent-mates came in—all of whom had watched the scrap—and they and Bill were soon on very friendly terms. Bill had them roaring with some of his comic adventures at the Front when the bugle sounded the cookhouse call.

Two of them hurried off to get the portions for their tent, but Peter Sloan did not put in an appearance. When the meal was over there was just time for a smoke and a chat before most of the Tommies were formed up in platoons and taken for extended order drill over the common.

There was no drill for Bill, so he just wandered about the camp, chatting with those left behind.

For want of anything better to do, he strolled across to where the Tommies had been practising the art of trench-digging. And as he walked he thought of Peter Sloan.

Then the scene he had witnessed before reaching the camp recurred to him.

"Didn't know the Sloans had swell pals," Bill thought, "and he was a tuff right enough in that swagger motor. And they was talking forrin, too. Peter Sloan don't know no langwidge except what they know in the Old Kent Road. And them parcels he was carrying so gingerly—what's the meaning of them?"

Bill felt there was something fishy on. What it was he could not define.

"I'll keep my eye on that corporal chap," he decided.

And then, as sometimes happens, the subject of his thoughts suddenly appeared before him. Peter Sloan sprang out of one of the trenches, a trench-spade in his hand.

He had evidently been digging, for his boots were covered with clay.

"Cheero, mate!" grinned Bill. "Just getting in a bit o' practice for readiness t'other side o' the Channel."

Corporal Sloan swung up the spade as if he thought of making an attack

on Bill with it. Turning sharply, he strode away without a word.

"Well, he's a sweet-tempered beauty, and no mistake," reflected Bill, as he went to the trench in which Peter Sloan had appeared.

He glanced along it. At the extreme end the earth had been disturbed. It was here, apparently, that the corporal had been digging.

"What's he been up to—burying something?" thought Bill. "Them boxes, I wonder?"

He was on the point of jumping into the trench. But what could he do without tools. And, after all, it might be only a silly suspicion. What would Sloan want to bury boxes for?

He continued his round of sight-seeing. When the platoons came back, and tea was served out, Bill had a good look round Tent No. 19. Everything was in apple-pie order. There were the pack-sacks of the Tommies, their mattresses and blankets, but not a sign of the brown-paper parcels he had seen Corporal Sloan carrying from the motor.

There was a good deal of merry-making in camp that night. There were no further drills. The Tommies had orders to pack up their belongings and have everything in readiness for the departure to the dock for embarkation next day upon the transports.

Leave was given to go down to the village, though guards were posted and men placed on sentry-go. Bill joined his tent-mates, and for two hours they roamed round the old place, popping into a tiny picture-palace for a bit, and then, as the time drew near to the "retreat," they went back in couples to the camp, as merry and light-hearted as a crowd of schoolboys.

Bill and a well-built lad formed one of the last couples to pass through the gates. It was a fine night, though dark. The stars twinkled in a vault of blue, being the only light to guide them through the avenue of tents.

"Look 'ere, my son," Bill was explaining, "I've had over six months of it with the Expeditionary Force, I have, and I've—"

Crack!

Without a word of warning, a rifle spat out a tongue of flame and a bullet swished past Bill's ear.

"Hallo, what's the game?" cried Bill, quite unperturbed.

There was no answer. A sudden thought occurred to him. He dived into a clump of bushes on the right of him. He gave a yell. The butt of a rifle was driven savagely into his face, and as he fell back, gasping, and seeing a myriad of lights, there came the pad of feet in hasty flight.

"What is it?" asked his companion. "What's the matter?"

He helped Bill to his feet. The Tommy on sentry-go near the gate came running up. Tommies gathered round as quickly as a London crowd about a fallen horse. Sergeant-major Hewitt strode out from the non-com's marquee.

"What's all the bother about?" he asked sharply. "What was the reason for that shot?"

"That's best known to him what fired it, sir," said Bill. "It was meant for me, there ain't no shadow of doubt about that."

"For you, Stubbs?" said the non-com. "What do you mean?"

"Only that somebody tried to bag

me," replied Bill grimly. "It was murder, sir, nothing less."

He explained what had happened—the bullet had missed him by an inch or so.

"I saw the fellow what fired it, too," he went on. "He was in that bush t'other side of the tent."

The sergeant-major laughed. Since no one had been hurt, he was inclined to make light of the affair.

"I expect it was an accident, Stubbs," he said.

"Very well, sergeant-major," said Bill. "We'll let it go at that."

But he thought of Peter Sloan's threat as he moved on to Tent No. 19. Sloan was the only enemy he had in the camp. Moreover, the figure he had seen was tall and bulky—just like Sloan's.

When he reached the tent, however, Corporal Sloan was seated by an up-turned box with the guttering wick of a candle beside him, busily writing a letter, as if he had been there for an hour or so.

And Bill looked at him and said nothing.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Fight in the Engine-room.

"Outside boat for Berlin! This way for German sausage-land!"

"Good-bye, girls! We'll soon be home ag'in!"

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary!"

With the band playing the Tommies' favourite song, a jangle of cries from the crowds of khaki-clad figures on deck, with waving caps and handkerchiefs, the last of the many transports with Kitchener's Army aboard moved out from the dock.

It was an emotional, an historic scene. On the dock-side stood groups of women—motherly women, young women—sweethearts, wives, and mothers, and crowds of men-folk. Most were white-faced and anxious-looking, many a girl wife had red-rimmed eyes, but all forced smiles to their lips.

Bill Stubbs hung over the taffrail and cheered and waved his cap with the best of them.

Lil was not amongst those on the dockside. The fare from London was too expensive, but she was in his thoughts all the same, and when the big liner with its precious cargo of human souls moved out of sight of those ashore, he turned with a gulp to his companions.

"Good-bye, Old England," he said. "Heaven knows if I'll ever see the old Lewisham Road ag'in."

"You're right there, mate," said the lance-corporal at his side. "Maybe as how we'll never set foot on France even. You can bet your shirt the Germans'll have a go at us."

"What-ho," remarked another. "Their spies are everywhere and know everything. They'll sure to have heard as we've got a fleet of transports going over to-day. We'll be lucky if they don't make at least a submarine raid on us."

Bill listened and said nothing. They were his views completely. The German Secret Service would be certain to know that one of the largest contingents of Kitchener's New Army—scores of thousands of men in all—were going across to France to do their "little bit," risk their lives, risk all, so that brave old Britain should be free from the heels of the Huns.

"It's their submarines—that's what we've got to fear," the lance-corporal went on. "They've been building them like billy-o since the war started in readiness for such a job as we've got in hand. Those new vessels, of the U15 type, which can stay under water for a fortnight if needed, are the scourge of the seas. I tell you straight, it takes a lot to upset me, but I sha'n't feel very jolly when I hear they're about."

Bill thought he ought to say something, if only to stick up for our gallant lads in the Navy.

"Cheero, mate," he laughed. "You're like a funeral on a wet day. What about old Churchill, an' the Admiralty, not to mention Jellicoe an' the boys in Navy blue. They won't be all asleep, you bet. They know what to expect from the German submarines same as we do. If they ain't got a few tricks up their sleeves in readiness for 'em my name ain't Bill Stubbs!"

"Good old Bill," grinned a Tommy. "That's the talk. Put your last bob on the Navy. They'll see us through."

"There they are! Give 'em a cheer!"

A destroyer, a choppy sea flying with white scud over her bows, drew near to them. Her decks were bare—cleared for action. The bluejackets were at the guns. They moved swiftly about the rocking vessel. The sight of them inspired confidence. Jellicoe's men were far from asleep.

"Hurrah! Cheero, messmates! Are we downhearted?"

A great shout in unison swelled from the Tommies on the transport's decks. The answer came emphatically from the decks of the destroyer:

"No! Shall we win?"

"Yes," came the mighty roar from the leather lungs of both Tommies and bluejackets.

The destroyer sheered away. Confidence was restored. The Tommies were laughing light-heartedly once more. Parties were formed to play deck quoits. Many more parties still—for it was an ideal, sunny day—squatted on deck, and, with newspapers over their knees, settled down to games of whist and nap.

Bill was soon left leaning over the taffrail alone. He was not downhearted, but his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

They had left Hurlmere Camp early that morning. Bill had been watching Corporal Sloan closely. He had seen him come from the trenches just after "reveille" had sounded out, with the mysterious brown-paper parcels under his arms. They were damp and smothered in parts with clay. Unmistakably they had been buried.

But why? Bill could not solve the riddle.

He went in search of Sergeant-major Hewitt. He felt it was his duty to tell his fears to someone with power to make inquiries.

"Well, Stubbs," smiled the non-com. when Bill came up. "Seen any more German hip-shooters lately?"

"Maybe yer think I'm pulling your leg, sir," said Bill, "but I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't have one aboard."

The sergeant-major laughed.

"Why, you're getting quite a gloomy chap, Stubbs," he said. "I heard you were one of the merriest chaps at the Front. How can there be a German amongst us? The authorities have seen to it that every man who's not a Tommy aboard is a Briton born."

"There may be a Germin spy-dog dressed in khaki for all that," ventured Bill. "That's my belief, sir. There's one of 'em aboard, an' it sort of worries me in case he does anythin' afore he's found out."

The non-com. saw how serious Bill was, and the merriment went out of his face.

"Let's hear what you've got to say, Stubbs," he exclaimed. "You wouldn't make grave statements like this if you didn't have strong reasons."

They were in a corner of the lower deck. There was no chance of being overheard.

Bill told his story from the moment he had first set eyes on Peter Sloan.

"He's got them two parcels aboard with him, sir," he concluded, "and I should just like you to have a squint at 'em and see they're all right. It was Sloan right enough who fired at me last night. It's my belief he only did it 'cause he knows I suspect him."

Sergeant-major Hewitt patted Bill on the shoulder.

"You've struck a mare's nest, Stubbs," he said, with a disbelieving smile. "Sloan's by no means a sweet-tempered chap, but he's been in the Q.R.R. since before Christmas and we've never had a breath of suspicion against him. He's a soldier to his finger-tips—knows his work, and is as clever as a professor. That's why the other chaps are jealous and can't get on with him."

"Then you won't do anything, sergeant-major?" asked Bill.

"There's nothing to be done, Stubbs. Here, have a cigar, and go and enjoy yourself."

Bill politely refused the smoke and sauntered along the deck. He was disappointed, but it made him more determined than ever.

"If he won't have a peep at them parcels, I will," he declared. "I'll take the law in my own hands even if they court-martial me."

He went off in search of Corporal Sloan. The Tommies he asked had not seen him since he had come aboard the transport. They did not know, either, where he kept his belongings.

At length, after twenty minutes had been spent in a fruitless search, and when they were well out in the Channel, and many an anxious pair of eyes were turned to the foam-crested waves, half expectant of seeing a submarine's periscope, Bill got news of his man.

"Corporal Bully," replied a Q.R.R. "I saw him going down the steps to the engine-room. He'd got a face on him like a whitewashed ghost, too."

Bill hesitated for a second, then he stepped briskly out in the direction of the engine-room.

The rattle and roar of the mighty engines drowned all sounds of Bill's footsteps as he clattered down the stairs.

Clankety-clank! Clankety-clank!

The great fly-wheels whizzed round like lightning. It was an amazing scene of whirling wheels and shooting piston-rods. At the far end a number of men in dark blue uniforms were bent over some part of the wonderful machinery.

But Bill only took a fleeting glimpse at the scene. Before him, only a few yards away, was the man for whom he had come in search. Behind him was an open port-hole, through which the wind whistled shrilly.

"Stop!"

Bill's voice rang out in a shriek as he leapt forward.

Corporal Sloan had his arms raised above his head. A sheet of brown paper was at his feet. In his hands he had a big black ball, much like the cistern of a water-tank, with a rubber tube and small metal box attached.

The fellow was in the act of hurling this black ball amidst the whirling machinery.

He couldn't have heard Bill's voice, but something made him half turn. In that fraction of time Bill undoubtedly saved the lives of all aboard the transport.

He threw himself on Sloan, and wrenched the black thing from his hands. An ominous ticking came from it, like as from a cheap alarm-clock.

Bill wheeled round. Sloan clutched at him, tearing him back by the shoulders, but Bill won his way to the porthole. A jab in the face with his elbow freed him momentarily from Sloan's fierce grip.

And in that time he hurled the bomb—for that is what it undoubtedly was—into the sea.

There was a splutter, a fizzle, then the thing disappeared. Bill still had his eyes on the water when he found himself lifted bodily from behind.

In vain he clutched at the wet and slippery woodwork.

"Tonner and blitzen!" bellowed Sloan. "But you shall suffer for it! Go, you dog; you'll not spoil my plan, after all."

Bill fought for his life. But the German—he knew he was that now—seemed possessed of superhuman strength. Bill's head and shoulders were irresistibly thrust through the porthole. His arms were useless now, as good as pinned to his sides.

He lashed out with his feet. Sloan was sent staggering back, almost stunned and blinded. The next instant he threw himself on the brave cockney Tommy with a mad fury.

Bill clutched at the air. He gave a yell, and then pitched head foremost amidst the leaping waves that were only a few feet below him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bill Saves the Transport.

Bill Stubbs was thankful that swimming was one of his many accomplishments.

As his head came above the icy water, he let out yell after yell, but several minutes passed before he discovered the vessel. He had been swimming away from it.

His anxious eyes scanned the tossing waters. No voice greeted his ears. No one seemed to heed his repeated cries. No boat's crew were coming to rescue him. The only sound was the ceaseless swish of the waves.

"They ain't heard me," Bill groaned. "They ain't missed me. I can't stick this long. Lil, lass, I'll never see yer ag'in. It's all up this journey!"

It was true enough. No one aboard the transport had seen Bill flung into the water. No one had as yet missed him. The foul work had taken scarcely more than a couple of minutes.

But Providence was watching over the plucky, noble-hearted 'bus-driver. A lynx-eyed bluejacket in the look-out

of one of the destroyers had espied his struggling efforts, and had communicated the news to his officer.

A peep through telescopes confirmed the news. A boat's crew were piped up. The destroyer's progress was checked momentarily. The boat was lowered, and half a dozen sturdy seamen swung the oars as their dinghy nosed its way through the choppy sea.

"Here he is!" cried a lusty voice. "Stick it on. We'll soon have you out o' that."

Bill heard the voices as if in a dream. He was fast relapsing into unconsciousness. It seemed to him as Lil was up in the blue sky calling to him with extended arms.

"Why, he's a Tommy!" the voice went on. "He's wearing khaki."

Bill felt hands gripping him, lifting him. He opened his eyes to gaze into a kindly, tanned face.

"Thank Heaven," he murmured, and then knew no more.

"That poor chap we brought aboard, sir, wishes to see you. He's pulled round and dressed again. He says it's of the utmost importance, sir. He hints at foul play on No. 7 transport, from which he declares he was flung into the sea."

The commander took a sweeping glance over the restless sea before he turned to the officer.

"H'm!" he said. "I'll come and see him."

He went below to the sick-bay to which Bill had been carried by his rescuers. Bill had been rubbed dry and placed between blankets. Warmth and life had soon returned to his limbs. Fit once again, he had insisted on dressing, and a marine's outfit had been found for him.

He rose and swung his hand to the salute as the keen-faced commander, a splendid man in every way, came to him.

"Glad to see you've recovered, my lad," said the officer. "How was it you came to be in the sea?"

He told Bill to sit down, and seated himself, offering his cigarette-case to him as he did so.

Bill explained everything.

The officer strode up and down a few times.

"Something must be done, Stubbs," he said, pausing before Bill. "If it wasn't war-time I'd think you were telling me a wild cock-and-bull story. Knowing what I do of the tricks of the enemy, I'm ready to believe anything. We'll get alongside Transport No. 7 and make inquiries about this friend of yours."

"Hooray!" Stubbs shouted. "Bravo! Good on yer, sir!" He sobered suddenly. "I mean I'm very glad to hear it, sir."

"Come on deck, Stubbs," smiled the gallant sailor. "This affair—"

He broke off short. There was a sough of feet. A couple of young officers appeared.

"Submarine on the port side, sir," said one of them quickly, without excitement. "Her periscope was distinctly seen before she submerged. Undoubtedly making for the transports!"

All was excitement and orderly confusion for the next few moments. Lithe figures in blue scampered across the decks. Men worked feverishly at the guns. Bells tinkled. Orders came sharply; then, everything in readiness,

a strange silence fell on the great, rushing vessel.

They were tearing through the water at terrific speed. The waves hurled themselves over the grey bows.

Bill Stubbs gripped the rail and stared across the expanse of sea. They were heading for No. 7 transport and gaining on her with every beat of her powerful engines. Bill could see the Tommies aboard. They had seen the submarine. Tremendous excitement reigned aboard.

"There's another!" cried a young lieutenant at Bill's side, pointing at the choppy waters. "And another! When will the old man let go?"

The answer was instantaneous. There were a series of sudden reverberations. As if the most tremendous thunderstorm ever known had suddenly burst overhead, the big guns of the destroyer belched out broadside. Great clouds of smoke hung in the air. The vessel seemed to shake with the explosions.

Again and again the big guns thundered out.

A roar came from the men in the look-out high above him. It was taken up by the bluejackets in the different parts of the deck.

"We've hit one of 'em!" cried a voice at Bill's elbow. "Bravo! She's done for."

"Bravo!" yelled Bill.

Voices were suddenly hushed. A long, revolving thing was seen threading its way through the water towards them. It was a torpedo.

Bill Stubbs gazed, fascinated, holding his breath.

But the cool commander in the conning-tower was prepared. The men far below in the engine-room responded instantly to his commands. The destroyer's speed was checked. Like a huge porpoise, she swerved round, and shot forward again.

The torpedo missed her by the matter of feet. Then, within a minute, came the sequel.

The periscope of one of Germany's latest submarines rose but a few score yards before the bow of the destroyer.

There was no sign of excitement aboard now. Bill, of course, was unable to hear the bell that commanded "Full speed ahead." The destroyer shot forward like a greyhound released from a leash. Great seas leapt over her and fell with a noisy crash over her decks.

Then the great act happened that elated Britain and thrilled the whole world and gained fresh laurels for our Navy and the men who had made her famous.

Crash!

With a terrific bump that shook the destroyer from stem to stern, the sharp bow of the vessel struck the German submarine whilst broadside on. It was cut in halves as clean as a knife goes through butter.

"Hurrah! Hu-rah! Well done, the destroyer!" shouted Stubbs. "Three cheers for our Navy, boys!"

It was a few minutes later. Two of the enemy submarines had been shattered by the destroyer. The third got away. But all peril had been averted.

The destroyer was slowing down alongside Transport No. 7 now, and the Tommies were giving vent to their heartfelt delight. The other conveying war-vessels were converging to give assistance, if required.

"Come on, Stubbs, we're going aboard the transport."

Bill followed the commander to the main deck. As in a dream, he took his place in the long boat. It was lowered from the davits. In the matter of moments they were alongside the transport. The Tommies yelled themselves hoarse in giving the commander a rousing welcome.

"And there's old Bill Stubbs, too!" shouted Bill's tent-mates. "Good old Bill!"

"What's he been doing on the destroyer?" asked another.

Bill's absence had not even been missed, though by now the shores of France were coming rapidly into view.

They crowded round Bill, asking him eager questions, to which Bill's only reply was a shake of the head. The destroyer's commander had disappeared.

He returned presently with the transport's chief officers, together with the leading officers of Kitchener's Army who were aboard. In their rear was Corporal Peter Sloan, a prisoner, in the grip of two powerful Tommies.

"You were right, Stubbs," cried the destroyer's commander, gripping Bill's hand. "An immediate search was made for the spy. He was found in the vicinity of the boilers with some diabolical instrument in his hands."

"There's no doubt he's a German spy," exclaimed the colonel in command of the Q.R.R. "What puzzles me is how he has remained undiscovered for so long."

The answer was given by the spy himself at the court-martial that followed. He had made the acquaintance of Sam Sloan's reckless brother soon after the war had broken out. Peter Sloan had quickly tired of life in the Army. The German—Hans Ludwig was his name—was a young Army officer who had been educated in England. He was prepared to sacrifice his life if by doing so he could render his country a great service such as he would have achieved had he succeeded in blowing up the transport. He had given Peter Sloan a few pounds for his Army papers, and had gone to the depot in his identity as a raw recruit, content to drill and wait the hour of his triumph.

Thanks to Bill Stubbs, that triumph was never achieved.

"Stubbs, you're a hero," said the Q.R.R.'s colonel, as he warmly shook Bill's hand when all the business was over. "You deserve another V.C. for what you've done to-day."

THE END.

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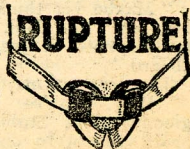
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He cheered up a little when he saw the effect in the glass. "Jim, my boy," he murmured, "you look thirty if you look a day." (See page 32.)

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

JIM CULVER and VIVVY STEVENS are fellow clerks in the employ of Crarper & Son, paper merchants. The junior partner in the concern is a despicable cur, with no notions of chivalry, and Jim has occasion to thrash him for insulting Vivvy. The sequel to this scene is that both Jim and Vivvy are sacked, and they find they have to face the world together. They make the acquaintance of Montague Beagle, a broken-down actor, and his wife, and with this strange couple they throw in their lot. Meanwhile, Jeremy Crarper conspires with Lavington Crooks, a theatrical agent, to get Jim out of the way, as they have reason to believe that Vivvy is an heiress. Accompanied by the Beagles, they decide to go to London. Whilst on their way there, they are befriended by a Mr. Donnell, proprietor of the Forum Music Hall, who, noting the abilities of Jim and Vivvy, offers them an engagement at that hall, which they accept. Jim receives an anonymous letter of warning. Recognising the handwriting—in spite of the fact that it is disguised—to be that of one of his late fellow clerks, he decides to interview him. He visits a bun-shop frequented by the man he is seeking, and eventually the man enters. Jim waved his hand to him, and Summers, when he saw him started.

(Now read on.)

Summers is Frightened.

"Hallo, Jim!" he cried.
 "Hallo, Summers. I've been waiting for you. Come along over here. You grub with me."
 Summers sat down beside him.
 "Thanks very much," he said.
 "How are you getting on? You look awfully fit and prosperous."
 "I'm fit enough, thanks. And Vivvy's all right, too. In fact, we're all all right. Coming to see us make our first appearance to-night?"

"Rather!" said Summers. "I got your tickets. Thanks very much."

"Mind you cheer hard!" said Jim.
 "Oh, and by the way, thanks very much for your letter."

He stared hard at Summers as he said this, and Summers started and looked uncomfortable.

"What letter?" he demanded.

"You know the one," Jim continued.
 "The one you wrote on a dirty scrap of paper and spelt half the words wrong to make me believe it was written by some chap who'd never been to school. You signed it a 'Wel-wisher' instead of putting your own name to it."

"I—I sent no such letter," Summers stammered.

Jim smiled at him broadly.

"Oh, Summers, Summers; and after I brought you up so nicely, too! How many times have I told you that it's very, very naughty to tell fibs?"

"But I haven't written to you—I haven't really."

"Not to tell me to keep an eye on Vivvy because she's in danger from certain enemies? My dear old chap, you didn't disguise your writing quite well enough. There's only one chap in the country that writes an 'e' like you, and that's yourself, and don't you forget it!"

"Ssh!" Summers begged. "Don't talk so loud. Somebody'll hear."

Jim sank his voice to a whisper.

"All right. But it was you, wasn't it, old man?"

"It—it wasn't really. I didn't know Miss Stevens was in any danger, and—I didn't write any such letter."

Jim looked away from him across the tables. He knew that Summers was weak and timid, also that he could not afford to lose his job. His father earned very little money, and he had to help to support a large family of younger brothers and sisters.

"That's all right," Jim said presently. "I know who Vivvy's

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enemies are, and I'll keep an eye on her. All right, you didn't send the letter, then, but thanks very much all the same. Now then, what about roast beef?"

"Mind you," Summers whispered fearfully, "I don't admit that I wrote that letter. Remember that! I don't admit I wrote it!"

"All right," said Jim. "But I think you might trust me, all the same."

Jim's Success—Vivvy is Missing.

The great evening came, and Jim, who was number four on the programme, had to be at the theatre as soon as the show started. Vivvy was number eight and had promised to be there in time to see Jim's turn from the wings. She was going to dress at her flat, and come down with Mrs. Beagle in a taxi-cab. As Mrs. Beagle would be with her Jim felt no anxiety.

Jim was dressed and made up before the orchestra had finished playing the selection that constituted the first turn. He came to the front, dodging between stage-hands, and peeped through a chink in the great curtain. The house was rapidly filling, and the sea of faces rather daunted him. It was not so pleasant to have to come on alone in the face of this huge crowd and sing to them. He had said that he would not be nervous, but now he rather doubted it. Still, Vivvy was going to dance, and surely if she were going to face these hundreds of people he could face them, too?

"Look out, sir!" a voice called.

He turned round. There was a drop-scene behind him, where a moment before there had been nothing. A comedienne stood in the wings, chatting with her dresser. Somebody moved a disc, and number two glowed in the frames in red electric light.

Jim hastened off the stage, as the orchestra struck up a bright tune, and the curtain went up. The comedienne danced on without a trace of nervousness, reached the middle of the stage, glanced down at her shoes, and then began to sing. Jim watched her curiously. She did not seem the least bit

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nervous. After all, people got used to it.

The girl sang her song, danced a few cellar-flap steps, and went off to the accompaniment of faint applause. The drop-curtain was pulled up, and disclosed a scene representing the vestibule of an hotel. Half a dozen jugglers bounded on, and did wonders with bottles, hoops, knives, and billiard balls.

Jim watched them anxiously, realising that his own time was coming nearer and nearer. And then he began to wonder where was Vivvy? She had promised to be there in time to see him.

He left the wings to look for her, and the manager, who met him, said that she had not yet arrived. He felt disappointed, and a little hurt. Then he heard roars of applause from the front, and knew that the turn was over.

The band struck up a tune that he would almost have recognised if they had played it backwards. It was the well-known tune of "Philadelphia," his first song.

He went round to the prompt side and waited, fidgeting. The drop-curtain came down, and the footlights glowed once more. In the opposite wings, perched about twelve feet in the air, sat a man who was waiting to focus a broad spot of white limelight on him. He drew a hard breath, and marched on, bundle on shoulder, swaying gently to the rhythm of the music.

The limelight blinded him for a moment. Behind him more limelight was being showered on him, and the two streams of light followed him down to the middle of the stage. Somebody in the audience recognised the tune and applauded. Then his friends joined in.

Jim took one hard look at the audience. They were hardly discernible. Just dim rows of faces seen through a haze of tobacco smoke. After all, they couldn't eat him. He began to sing, flinging the words at them with a sort of defiance:

"Oh, me name is Paddy Leary,
From a spot called Tipperary—"

He got through the first verse somehow, and before he had reached the end he could hear some of the audience humming the tune. He realised

suddenly that it was all right, that he and this crowd had a sort of mutual understanding. In other words, he was doing well.

He went on, gaining confidence every moment. At last he finished the song, bowed, and hurried off. A storm of applause brought him back. He nodded and smiled twice at the house, and then rushed into the wings to change for his second song.

It was as successful as the first. He was no great singer, and he knew it, but the public liked his way of singing, his smile, his whole manner.

After a while he had the whole house roaring "Uncle Tom Cobleigh" with him. When at last he went out a perfect storm arose. It was impossible to ring down the curtain on the applause and the cries for an encore that came from all parts of the house. He came back and sang another verse, but still they were loth to let him go; and when the big curtain was lowered he had to come out in front and stand bowing for a few moments.

In the wings he encountered the manager, who smiled and shook him by the hand.

"You're all right," he said. "You've got there. You're a friend of the public for life."

Jim smiled faintly and thanked him. Yes, he had scored a big success, but it seemed almost worthless to him because Vivvy had not been there to see it.

"Miss Stevens not here yet?" he asked.

The manager shook his head.

"No, she isn't. I'm beginning to wonder what's happened to her. I shall ring her up if she isn't here in another minute. It doesn't do to start being late on the night of her first appearance."

"Oh, I'm sure she can't help it!" Jim said quickly. "She said she'd be here in time to see my show. I'll ring her up myself if you like."

"Good!" was the answer. "I wish you would. I'm awfully busy. Excuse me one moment."

The dapper little manager hurried away, and Jim went off towards the

green-room, outside which was a telephone.

In a sense, now he came to think of it, he was glad that Vivvy had not been there to witness his triumph. Suppose she had been, and the public had afterwards treated her with less enthusiasm. He knew that she was a greater artiste than himself, but audiences are funny things, and it is not always the best performers that get the most applause. He would have hated Vivvy to score a smaller success than himself, and to be aware of it.

He went to the telephone, shouted the number of Vivvy's flat into the instrument, and presently heard the voice of the maid exclaim: "Hallo!"

"Hallo! Mr. Culver speaking. Has Miss Stevens started yet?"

"Yes, sir, some time ago."

"I'm at the Forum. She isn't here yet. How long ago did she start?"

"Nearly three-quarters of an hour, sir. She got a taxi just outside. She ought to be there by now."

Jim felt himself growing cold.

"Three-quarters of an hour ago! Is Mrs. Beagle with her?"

"No. Mrs. Beagle was taken suddenly ill. I offered to accompany Miss Stevens, but she said that it did not matter as you would be there."

"Good heavens! What's the matter with Mrs. Beagle?"

"I don't know, sir. The doctor's with her now. We shall know presently."

Jim tried to collect his scattered wits.

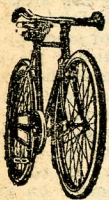
"Ring me up when the doctor's gone!" he shouted. "Tell me what's the matter with Mrs. Beagle and how she is. Perhaps you'll have heard some news of Miss Stevens by that time. Good-bye!"

He hung up the receiver, and strode back to find the manager, an awful fear gripping at his heart.

The manager was talking to another man in evening-dress when Jim found him. He recognised him at once as Donnell.

Donnell advanced and held out his hand.

"I've been watching you from the



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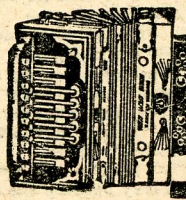
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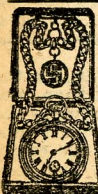
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front," he said. "Best congratulations. I must say that you did better than I ever dreamed you would. Why, what's the matter?"

"Vivvy!" Jim gasped. "Yes," said Donnell. "She isn't here yet. Cutting it pretty fine. She's due on at 9.15. I shall have to give her a good talking to when she arrives."

"She started three-quarters of an hour ago in a taxi. I've just rung up her flat."

"Great Scott!" Donnell exclaimed. "She must have met with an accident!"

"Accident! She's been kidnapped, sir!"

"What!" "Mrs. Beagle was taken ill, and couldn't accompany her. She went by herself. Found a taxi outside her flat and took it. I believe that taxi was waiting there for her on purpose. You know, she's got enemies, sir!"

"We must ring up the police and tell them at once!" Donnell cried.

Jim clenched his hands. "What a fool I was to trust her alone with Mrs. Beagle!" he jerked out. "I ought to have insisted on bringing her here myself. I ought to have known!"

Donnell laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You couldn't help it," he said kindly. "Perhaps, after all, she has only been delayed by something."

A boy wearing the livery of the Forum approached.

"Mr. Culver wanted on the telephone, please," he said.

"Excuse me, sir," Jim said, and hurried off to the green-room. Donnell followed at a more leisurely pace, stroking his chin, and looking very serious.

Jim took down the receiver and spoke. The call came from Vivvy's flat, and the maid was speaking.

"The doctor's just gone," she said. "Ah! How is Mrs. Beagle?"

"Better, sir, now, but the doctor says she's been poisoned."

"Poisoned!"

"Yes, sir. Somebody has sent a box of sweets, and the doctor thinks it's them. He's taken them off with him to analyse them."

Jim felt himself trembling like a leaf. "She's better now, you say?" he cried.

"Oh, yes, sir. The doctor says she'll be all right in a day or two. Has Miss Stevens arrived yet?"

"No. And we're getting very anxious about her. Good-bye!"

Jim hung up the receiver, and hastily told Donnell all that the maid had said. The proprietor of the Forum turned a little pale.

"I'm afraid you're right," he said. "There has been foul play. I hope—"

"I know who's at the bottom of it," Jim gasped. "But I can't prove anything. But I'll never rest until I find her. I swear I won't."

"We'll get on to the police at once," Donnell said.

"Look here, sir," Jim gasped. "I've been a bit of a success to-night. I'm bound to make money later on. But I

won't go on the stage again until I've found Vivvy. Will you finance me while I search for her, if it should take a long time?"

"That's all right—that's all right," Donnell said kindly. "I'll let you have anything you want. Now, to tell the police."

Twenty minutes later the manager went out on to the stage between two "turns," and told the people that owing to a sudden indisposition Miss Vivien Stevens would not be able to appear.

Meanwhile Jim was hurriedly getting into his outdoor clothes.

"I'll find her, if it takes me all my life!" he vowed to himself. "I'll find her, if I have to give my whole life to the task!"

Jim Makes Some Enquiries.

As soon as he had dressed, Jim took a taxi-cab, and went round to Vivvy's flat. The maid was in great distress, and Mrs. Beagle too ill to be seen.

"How did the sweets come from?" Jim asked. "Do you know?"

"I heard they were sent down from some village in Cambridgeshire. Mrs. Beagle didn't recognise the handwriting, but thought her husband had ordered them to be sent to her, knowing that she was fond of sweets."

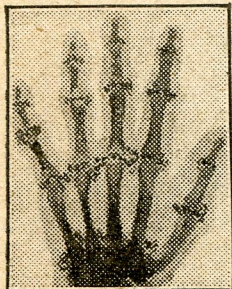
Jim nodded.

"Just so," he said. "Mr. Beagle is down there, in Mr. Donnell's house."

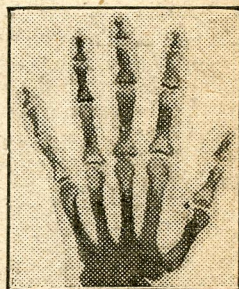
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I want everyone suffering from Rheumatism, Lumbago, Neuralgia, Sciatica or Gout to send me their name and address, so that I can send them **FREE a 4s. 6d. box** of the world-famous U.A.E. (Uric Acid Expeller). I want to convince every sufferer at my expense that U.A.E. does what thousands of so-called remedies have failed to accomplish—**ACTUALLY CURES RHEUMATISM, LUMBAGO, NEURALGIA, GOUT**, and all Uric Acid complaints. I know it does. I am sure of it, and I want you to know it and be sure of it.

You cannot coax Rheumatism out through the feet or skin with plasters or belts, you cannot tease it out with Liniments or Embrocations. **YOU MUST DRIVE THE URIC ACID—WHICH CAUSES THESE COMPLAINTS—OUT OF THE BLOOD.** This is just what this great Rheumatic Remedy U.A.E. does. It **EXPELS the CAUSE** and that is why it cures Rheumatism, Gout, Lumbago, Neuralgia, Sciatica, etc. It cures the sharp, shooting pains, aching muscles, swollen limbs, cramped and stiffened joints, and it cures quick y. **I CAN PROVE IT TO YOU.** It does not matter what form of Rheumatism you have or how long you have had it. It does not matter what remedies you have tried, U.A.E. and Uric Acid cannot exist together in the same blood. **READ OFFER BELOW AND WRITE AT ONCE.** If you do not suffer yourself draw the attention of someone who does to this announcement.

Do Not Suffer! There Is a Cure! I will Prove to You the Value of The U.A.E. Treatment.

Simply fill in the Coupon at the foot (or write, mentioning this paper), and post me to-day, and I will send you a **4/6 box** of U.A.E. to try, together with Analyst's certificate of purity, doctors' opinions, and a book entitled, "The Origin, Nature, and Treatment of Uric Acid Disorders," also a few extracts from the many thousands of testimonials received. Write at once; do not delay until your constitution is wrecked or your heart injured by Rheumatic poison.

FREE 4/6 TREATMENT COUPON.

The Secretary, The U.A.E. Laboratories, Princes House, Stonecutter Street, London, F.C.

Dear Sir,—Please send me a Free Treatment of U.A.E. also a book entitled "The Origin, Nature, and Treatment of Uric Acid Disorders." I enclose 2d. (stamps) for postage.

NAME.....

(J. E.) ADDRESS.....



A complete wreck—too crippled to work.



Result—the full vigour and healthy sprightliness of youth enjoyed once again.

Did Miss Stevens eat any of the sweets?"

"I think she had one, sir. She is not very fond of sweets, and one wasn't enough to have any effect." Mrs. Beagle ate a lot."

"Thanks," said Jim; "that's all I want to know about that. There was a taxi waiting outside, you say, when Miss Stevens went out to go to the theatre?"

"It was driving slowly past, sir, as if on the look-out for a fare. I hailed it."

"Ah!" Jim murmured. "I dare say it had been driving slowly up and down for a long time, if we only knew. You didn't see what the driver was like?"

"No, sir; I didn't take any notice of him, not knowing it was going to be important. I'm sure I shouldn't know him if I saw him again."

"All right," Jim said. "If there's any news, send round to my rooms, and if I'm not there leave a message."

He hurried out, and went to the end of the street. A taxi-cab was passing at a high rate of speed, and Jim hailed it. The man pulled up.

"Forum Music-Hall, stage door," said Jim.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the man answered, "but would you mind going a little further up the road and getting one off the rank? I'm just going to my garage."

"All right," Jim answered, and was about to move on, when he found a stranger at his elbow.

"Beastly nuisance, some of these taxi-drivers," the man observed. "One of them said almost the same to me about an hour and a half ago."

A sudden thought shot through Jim's head.

"Where did this happen?" he asked. "Just round the corner, opposite Rosszar Mansions."

"Great Scott!" Jim gasped beneath his breath. Rosszar Mansions was the name of the block of flats in which Vivvy lived.

"The man was cruising about quite slowly," the stranger continued. "I watched him, and presently he picked up a fare—a girl who came down out of the flats. Fearful cheek, I call it! I'd half a mind to take the fellow's number, and report him."

"I wish you had!" Jim exclaimed. "What was he like?"

"Oh, quite ordinary. Tall and dark, with eyes set rather close together, and—oh, yes, he had a gold tooth in front."

Jim started. Had he got on to the right track by some lucky chance? The driver's description answered exactly to that of Robert Ruff.

"Was he quite young?" he asked breathlessly. "About twenty-two?"

"Yes, that's right. Hallo, you seem very interested. What's the matter?"

"I want to get on to the track of that driver," Jim answered. "I'm afraid I can't explain. Thanks very much. Good-night."

He hurried away to the cab-rank, lugging his clue, and turning it over in his mind. Unfortunately, it would not be easy to find Robert Ruff. The police wanted him, too, for the burglary at Donnell's house.

The show was still proceeding when Jim reached the theatre. Donnell was anxiously awaiting him, and had with him a Scotland Yard inspector, to whom he had been telling what had happened. Jim told what he had since found out, and the inspector looked very wise, and agreed that it was a rummy business.

"Best keep it out of the papers for a bit," he said. "There's never any good in letting the public know. It only hampers the police in cases like this. The public thinks she's not well. Well, let them go on thinking it. We'll find her in a day or two, never fear. I'll call round at Miss Stevens's flat early to-morrow, and see the maid and Mrs. Beagle. By that time the doctor will have analysed the sweets, and I may get something out of him. We'll find the lady in no time, don't you fear."

He said good-night and went, leaving Jim and Donnell together.

Donnell shrugged his shoulders. "Well," said he "the matter's in the hands of the police now, and I don't see that we can do anything more. I should advise you to go home and go to bed."

"I couldn't!" Jim cried. "What chance do you think I should have of sleeping? I shall walk about all night. To-morrow I shall find something to do."

"You won't appear to-morrow night?"

"No; I shall start doing some detective work on my own. It may seem silly, seeing that the police are ever so much cleverer, and understand these things, but I have an idea that I shall beat them at their own game. I mean to find Vivvy somehow."

Donnell smiled kindly at him.

"At least," he said, "it'll give you something to do, and keep your mind occupied. I know what it's like in a case like this to have to sit down and do nothing. You'll go on with your contract, of course, directly Miss Stevens is found?"

"Oh, of course."

"Then I'll let you have some more money. Come into the manager's office with me, and I'll write you out a cheque."

Jim spent most of that night wandering about, and when he at last went to his rooms, he did not sleep, and, in fact, scarcely tried. He was out early in the morning, worn and haggard-looking, and went round to Vivvy's flat to inquire after Mrs. Beagle, and to get the address of the doctor who had attended her and taken away the chocolates.

The doctor lived quite near at hand, and Jim called to see him, finding him at breakfast.

At first the medico seemed disinclined to talk, but when Jim had convinced him that he was a very old friend of Vivvy and Mrs. Beagle, he became more communicative.

"I have analysed the sweets," he said, "and I find that most of them have been tampered with and poisoned. The poison is not of a very virulent kind, and there is not enough of it to cause death. I cannot think how anybody could play such a cowardly trick."

"There was just enough poison in them, I suppose, to make Mrs. Beagle ill, so that she could not accompany Miss Stevens to the theatre?"

"Just so," the medical man agreed. "That is what happened, I believe."

"And Miss Stevens was kidnapped on her way to the theatre?"

The good doctor jumped as if he had been stung.

"You don't tell me!" he exclaimed. "That's what happened. The police will be wanting to ask you questions later on. Well, good-morning, and thanks very much for seeing me."

Outside the house Jim felt a little weak. Suddenly it occurred to him that, apart from having been up all

night, he had had no breakfast. He had no appetite at all, but judged it better to try to eat something, since he did not know what the day might have in store for him.

He knew in his own heart that the Crappers and Lavington Crooks were at the bottom of Vivvy's disappearance.

While he struggled through breakfast at a restaurant he made his plans.

It was no use shadowing Jeremy Crapper. The latter knew him too well, and would probably see through any disguise. Lavington Crooks, however, had only seen him two or three times, and only once by daylight. Crooks, therefore, was the better man for him to try to shadow.

One of the first things he had learned when he intended to go on the stage was the art of making-up. He knew that it would be foolish to daub himself with a lot of paint, and so betray the fact that he was disguised to the most casual observer. But he knew several tricks that would alter the appearance successfully.

After breakfast he made himself look ten years older by applying faint lines to his forehead, between the eyes, and at the corners of the eyes. They were marked so faintly as to be scarcely noticeable, and yet they gave him an older look. Then he donned glasses—a pair of ordinary gold-rimmed pince-nez, with plain glass in the rims. There is nothing that alters the look of the upper part of a face more than a pair of glasses.

Then he donned a little, dark moustache, and that needed great care. A false moustache always looks false unless it is very skillfully made and still more skillfully applied. But Jim's did not look false by the time he had set it to his satisfaction.

He cheered up a little when he saw the effect in the glass.

"Jim, my boy," he murmured, "you look thirty if you look a day."

He reflected that he had been wearing a bowler hat on the few occasions when Crooks had seen him, and donned a soft felt one, of the kind that are favoured by men on the stage. But first he brushed his hair straight back from his forehead, instead of wearing it in a parting, as he usually did.

"I think that'll do," he said to himself, and, taking up a stick, went out.

Crooks's office was in a large building in Henrietta Street, which turns out of Bedford Street and runs parallel to the Strand, and touches a corner of Covent Garden Market. As has been mentioned before, Crooks was a theatrical and vaudeville agent.

Jim reached his office at half-past eleven. He did not wish to see Crooks, but he wanted to see who went in and out of his office. He hit on a plan which might enable him to stop there a little time.

Crooks's offices consisted of two rooms. There was an outer office, in which sat a young man at a desk, and beyond was a door with its upper half of granulated glass, with "Private" painted across it in black. This was the entrance to the inner office, or Crooks's private sanctum, where he interviewed his clients. The outer office was used as a sort of waiting-room.

As Jim entered the outer office the young man looked up.

"Want to see the boss?" he demanded.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand story next week. Order your copy now.)