

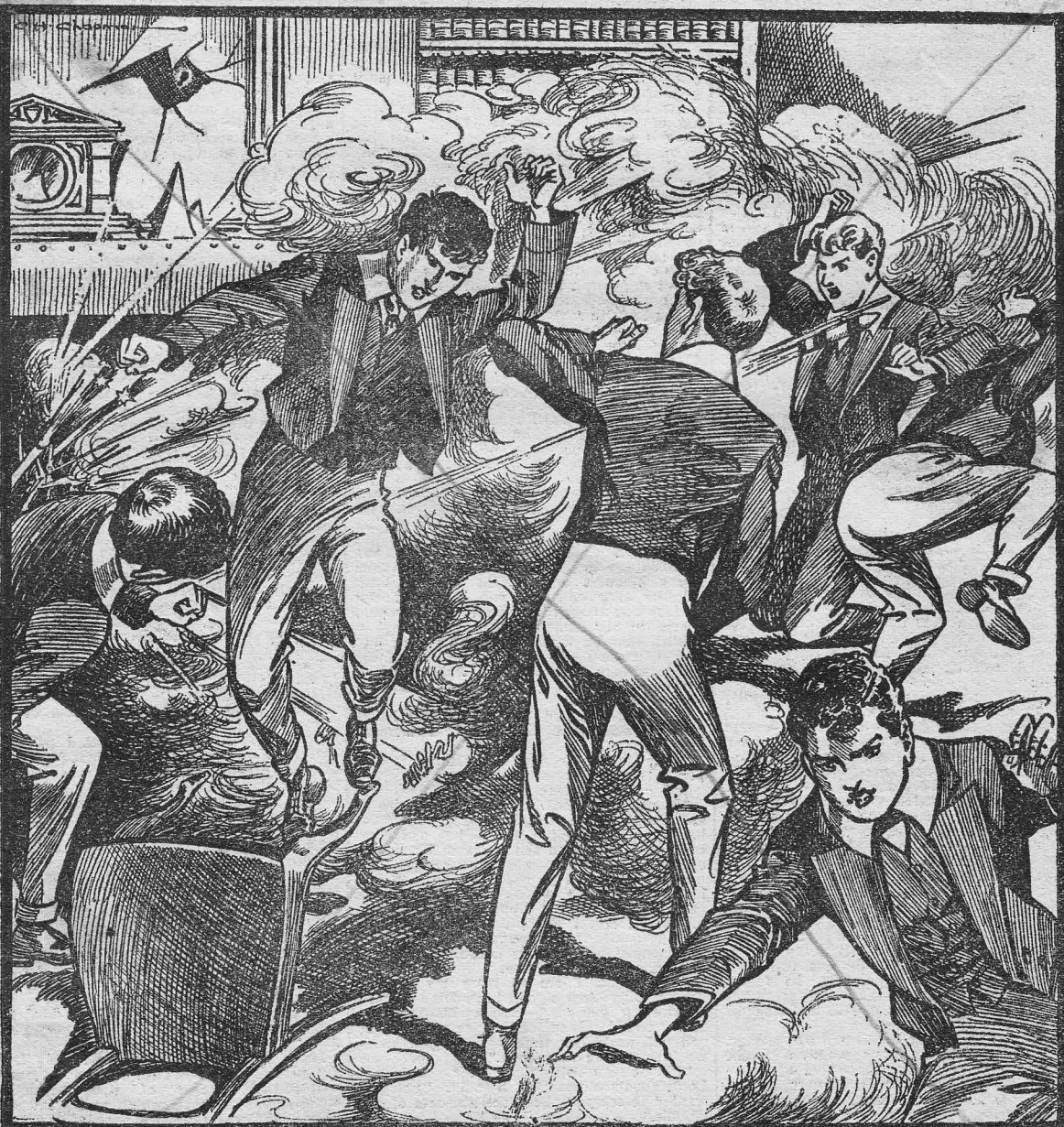
GRAND SCHOOL, ADVENTURE AND DETECTIVE STORIES!

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New Series.

Week Ending
October 30th,
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The $1\frac{1}{2}$ d Popular

20 PAGES.



AN UNEXPECTED FIREWORK DISPLAY IN THE FORM-MASTER'S STUDY!

(An incident from the splendid tale of Greyfriars School in this issue.)



The EXPLOITS OF FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE!"

A Grand New Story, dealing with the
Adventures of FERRERS LOCKE, the
Famous Detective.

By MAURICE EVERARD.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

FERRERS LOCKE is called up on the phone by Albert Spriggs, a valet to Mr. Shields, a wealthy manufacturer, who requires the famous detective's assistance. Locke promptly journeys to the house of Shields in Leinster Gardens. He finds the house empty, and suspecting a tragedy he breaks in. Whilst searching for the electric switch he is attacked and dragged by some unknown persons. He regains consciousness, and discovers the dead body of the manufacturer lying near him. The police arrive on the scene a little later, and from their investigations they believe Spriggs to be the culprit. But Locke has reasons to think otherwise, and he informs the Scotland Yard officials that he will try to prove that they are in the wrong. With his secretary, John Hay, he commences his investigations by trying to discover the whereabouts of the missing valet.

(Now go on with the story.)

"Albert Spriggs Did Not Commit the Crime!"

LOCKE was busy looking over his notes. "You've done splendidly, and though what you have discovered doesn't lead us very far at the moment, it is sure to come in later on. But what I can't understand is why the murderer left an extremely valuable gold watch on the body. Fox says he was disturbed, and in his fright made off without it. But I maintain, if robbery was the motive, the watch would have been taken. It wouldn't have meant a second's delay to give another sharp snatch to the chain—a very old and frail one. This would have brought the watch away, and, as it evidently cost a big sum of money and the case is a weighty one, its melting-down value would be considerable. Besides, why should Spriggs murder and rob his master after being with him all those years, during which he was very kindly treated, and, as you've just said, very well paid?"

"Then you don't regard him as the guilty one?"

"There seems little to suggest it, except his flight. You have to remember he deliberately rang me up, and asked me to come at once. Now this flat is only about twenty minutes' taxi ride from Leinster Gardens. According to the watch, which has been badly broken in the struggle and had stopped at four minutes past nine, Marcus Shields met his death about an hour after Spriggs was telephoning to me. At four minutes past eight I heard a cry in the house. Now, did that cry come from Spriggs or from Mr. Shields? If from Mr. Shields, Spriggs would hardly turn from the telephone when sending for me to murder his master; if from Spriggs, then it was evidently a cry of surprise over something which was just happening, and which, apparently, he feared would happen. Then comes a strange silence which I am utterly at a loss to understand."

"Why?"

"Because Spriggs had delivered his message. He must have known, as he had given me the address, and as he had impressed upon me the necessity of my coming at once, that I would lose no time. I called again, and got no answer.

"It is inconceivable he could have sent for me merely with the view to knocking me

down, drugging me, and having me found in the room with the dead body. No, Hay, although Spriggs' absence puzzles me, and his acquaintance with the crime seems very close, I can't think he did it."

Nor did Ferrers Locke alter his opinion, although weeks dragged by and nothing happened to throw further light on this most perplexing of mysteries.

But at length—to be precise, on the morning of November 17th—something came to Locke's notice which started him off hot foot on a new trail. This was the announcement in a leading London newspaper recording the proving of Marcus Shields' will.

Briefly, it was to this effect: The manufacturer had died leaving a fortune of close on sixty thousand pounds, which was to be equally divided "between my dear niece, Penelope Alice Grateley, of Roborough House, Tarkington-on-Sea, and my faithful friend and servant, Albert John Spriggs."

Ferrers Locke stared for several moments wide-eyed with stupefaction at this announcement. Then he read it aloud to John Hay.

"Light in the dark places after many days," he said, folding up the sheet. "Will you just pop down to Somerset House and run through the will? Particularly I want you to remember the names of the witnesses, the executors, and the names of the solicitors who have the administration of the estate."

Before noon Hay came back with the information. In every respect the newspaper report was correct.

"And what's more," remarked Hay astutely, "I have seen both those witnesses at the Witley Hotel."

Locke picked up his hat.

"Good! I want you to catch the first train to Dewsbury to see if you can find out from Agnes Manners and Harold Paul Webster whether they can tell you if the butler Spriggs was aware of the benefit which would accrue to him after his master's death."

With that he went out, and, jumping into a taxi, drove straight to the address of the murdered man's lawyers in St. Dunstan's Hill.

"I wish to see Mr. Tilburn," he said, presenting his card.

The clerk vanished through a green baize-covered door, but reappeared a moment later.

"I am sorry, sir, but Mr. Tilburn is out. Can I take any message from you?"

The detective stiffened.

"Thank you! Tell Mr. Tilburn I desire to see him myself. I happen to know he is in, because—well, because his silk-hat and overcoat are hanging on the inside of his door—or rather they were when you opened it a moment ago—and I happened to see him looking out of his window as I mounted the outside steps to the front door. And you might tell him I am a detective, and that my business is very important."

A moment later Ferrers Locke and the man of law stood face to face.

"Mr. Locke, I am so sorry my dunder-headed, silly clerk should have tried to send you away! You see—rubbing his hands together to hide his agitation—"so many people call and waste our time, and, as you know, we lawyers are busy men."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Tilburn! Locke's manner was most friendly. "I merely wanted to see you about the sad case of Mr. Shields."

Tilburn came a step nearer.

"I didn't look very closely at your card,

Mr. Locke, I presume, when you say you are a detective, you come officially from Scotland Yard?"

"On the contrary, I have nothing whatever to do with Scotland Yard. I am a private detective."

Tilburn went to the door with quick, nervous strides.

"Then you have nothing whatever to do with the case, and I wish you a very good-day!"

But Locke merely clasped his hands about his knees, and regarded the other with an amused smile.

"On the contrary, I have quite a lot to do with the case. I am interested in this man Spriggs. I want to see him taken. He has been at large quite a long time now. Scotland Yard's attempts to find him have failed ignobly. Sometimes, you know, fools will step in where angels fear to tread. I regard it as positively scandalous that all these weeks, months after the crime the authorities have taken no drastic steps towards running down and apprehending the murderer!"

Tilburn came back into the room, his manner wholly changed.

"I'm glad to hear you say that Mr. Locke, because it just expresses my views. Now, in what way can I assist you?"

Locke drew out the newspaper.

"I understand that had your client died a natural death his man would have come in for a very considerable sum of money?"

Tilburn nodded.

"That is so; but as he is outside the law he cannot, of course, benefit under the law. Foolish man! If only he had known what was in store for him, he wouldn't have killed his master for paltry loot worth—well, less—certainly less—than a hundred pounds."

Locke made a mental note of something. "I take it he hasn't come forward in an endeavour to establish his claim to this very handsome legacy?"

"No," the lawyer replied. "We have heard nothing. He has disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up."

"Then what becomes of his share of the money?"

"Ah, that I can't say! But I presume, as Mrs. Grateley is the only living relative, after an application to the courts, the entire fortune will be made over to her, which, of course, would only be right, seeing that the man Spriggs has no blood connection with my deceased client at all."

Locke gathered his things together.

"Then I'm afraid we can't get much farther," he said. "Evidently the culprit is still in hiding. I thought it quite possible, however, he might have made some sort of an application for part of the money and have tried to assure you of his innocence, in which case I might have got a line on him which would have resulted in swift justice being done."

Tilburn held the door wide.

"I am sorry that nothing of the kind has happened. Good-day, Mr. Locke, a very good-day!"

Locke passed out, but not remotely from the person of Mr. Walter Tilburn. From a well-screened corner of the churchyard opposite he kept close watch on the lawyer's offices, and was rewarded soon after six by seeing Tilburn emerge. The man seemed in a great hurry, for he almost collided with

a passer-by, and began signalling frantically for a taxi, in which he drove to his rooms in Pont Street, with Locke scarce a hundred yards behind.

At twenty past seven Tilburn again appeared, this time in evening-dress, and, chartering another cab, gave an address off Portland Road. When he reappeared it was in the company of a stylishly-dressed woman of about thirty-five and a tall, distinguished man with a neatly clipped, pointed beard. The three drove together to the Imperial Hotel, and left only a few minutes before ten.

Locke was in no hurry. He made no attempt to follow them, but merely waited until a very late hour, when the waiter who had charge of the table at which the trio had sat came down the road, his spare form muffled in a greatcoat several sizes too large for him.

Locke stepped quickly behind him, and touched him lightly on the arm.

"Walk alongside me, my friend. I want to talk to you," he said, in quiet but firm tones.

The man shot a frightened glance both up and down the street.

"You're a 'tec. I know you. I haven't done anything. You've got nothing against me."

It was a guilty party's invariable answer, and Locke felt pretty sure of his man.

"Of course I've got nothing against you. I want your help, that's all. A sovereign for you if you can use your memory and keep your lips shut."

"Well, what is it?"

Locke fell in at his side.

"Can you carry your mind back to the 17th of last September? It was a Wednesday, a dark, foggy night, with rain falling through a heavy mist—a night when you would most likely be pretty full of visitors. Perhaps you can recall it better when I remind you it was the night of the Leinster Gardens murder."

"When a man was strangled to death in an empty house?"

"Well, the house wasn't empty, but a man was killed there. Can you recall it now?"

"Oh, yes; I think I can!"

"Good! Now, can you tell me whether any of the three people who took dinner at your table to-night between half-past eight and ten were there on that particular night?"

"Yes, all of them. I recall it quite well. They drank a lot of wine. One of the men got very drunk, and I remember that the lady looked very ill."

Locke arched his brows in surprise.

"Can you recollect what time they came, and when they left?"

"They arrived soon after nine—about twenty past, I should say—and didn't leave till nearly eleven."

Here was indeed a puzzler, and any hopes he may have had of building up a case seemed likely to fall to the ground. Mr. Shields' watch had stopped soon after nine, the presumed time of the murder.

"You are quite sure of what you say? You're not making any mistake over the people—I mean, the tall, thin-faced man, the gentleman with the pointed beard, and the dark-haired lady?"

"I'm not making any mistake." was the answer. "I know 'em too well. They've been to my table two or three times a week for the last four months. Why, I even know their names. One of 'em's Tilburn—I believe he's something in the City; the other's Strudwick—the doctor, they call him; and the lady, she's called Grateley—Kitty, the man with the beard calls her."

Locke dropped his informant the promised sovereign, and left him after binding him to absolute silence.

The Leinster Gardens murder mystery was beginning to assume a new aspect. Was it possible, despite their untraversable alibi, one or other of the three knew more about the affair than they cared to admit? Certainly it was strange that not until after the inquest did the woman, who was to benefit so handsomely under the murdered man's will, come forward and identify Shields. Then, again, why had Tilburn refused to see him? Any reputable lawyer, for the sake of the duty he owed his client, would welcome any assistance towards clearing up the mystery shadowing Mr. Shields' death.

Locke returned to his rooms in a brown study. The skein was becoming more tangled than ever. Would Hay's investigations help to unravel them? He went into his room and switched on the light. His man entered with

a telegram on a silver tray. Locke tore it open. It was from his secretary, and was written in a cipher code:

"Have discovered that for long before his master's death Spriggs was aware of the fortune which would one day come to him."

The detective filed the wire with the other memoranda concerning the Leinster Gardens murder.

On a ruled card he wrote these words:

"Albert Spriggs did not commit the crime."

The Hunted Man!

HAVING made up his mind on the point of the butler's innocence or guilt, Locke's interest in the case rapidly increased. For one thing, it pleased his professional vanity to have confidence in taking a diametrically opposite line

"I mean that a hundred thousand policemen, spread over every part of the country, have eyes on the reward, and that the chances against me are enormous. But the annoying part is that if Fox gets hold of the butler first he will come a cropper, while if only I could nail him I believe I could lay my hands on the real murderer."

"And he is—"

"Either Walter Tilburn or Dr. Strudwick, or both in collusion, with the woman as an accomplice. And yet"—his mind went back to the night of the meeting in the Imperial Hotel—"here is the perplexing point: neither one of the three has the manner or appearance of guilt. You know my theory, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the murderer carries the secret of his crime about with him—in the restless glance of the eye, the nervous agitation, the desire constantly to be on the move and doing something fresh. And although I am convinced in my own mind that either Strudwick,



From the well-screened corner opposite the lawyer's offices Locke kept a close watch, and was rewarded soon after six by seeing Tilburn emerge in a great hurry. The detective smiled grimly as he saw the man disappear down the road.

from the one which Inspector Fox had pursued unceasingly, but unsuccessfully, since the night of the murder.

That the Scotland Yard man's belief in his theory was unbounded was evidenced by the persistence with which the newspapers and station hoardings throughout the country had been placarded with photographs and a description of the missing butler. But, although Locke was quite content to see Fox following what he regarded as a blind and purposeless trail, he writhed under his own inability to make headway in the case. He expressed his opinions as he walked back with John Hay to his lodgings three days after his return from Yorkshire.

"The facts, as I read them, point to the likelihood of Spriggs sooner or later becoming a victim of over-jealousness on Barkleigh Fox's part," he explained. "Certainly Spriggs is the key to the whole mystery, and the likelihood of my finding him is overborne by the wonderful machinery which the Yard can put in operation to get him."

"You mean—"

Tilburn, or the beautiful widow was responsible for the happening in the house in Leinster Gardens, what I've just said applies to all of them."

Hay nodded approval.

"Certainly they don't exhibit the slightest trace of nervousness. If you had been with me in Bond Street yesterday, you would have seen that Mrs. Grateley's one desire appeared to be to gratify her taste for adornment by buying precious stones, and her brother's—the doctor—in visiting various foreign exchanges."

Locke looked suddenly grave.

"That is all very interesting. I think I'll slip back home, dig out a fresh disguise, and shadow Dr. Strudwick. I'm glad you mentioned about the exchanges."

But Locke's plan was doomed to postponement. As he re-entered his flat his man Peters motioned him into the ante-room.

"I've been hoping you'd return, sir," he remarked. "There's such a queer cove upstairs. He was simply mad to see you,

and he pestered me so much that at last I showed him into the waiting-room, and carried the key on him.

Locke waited to hear no more, but went up the stairs three at a time. The wards of the lock clicked back, and he went in with a word of apology on his lips. But they were stopped by an exclamation of surprise as a wild-looking, dishevelled figure, white-faced, and labouring under the strain of tense excitement, bounded out of a chair and in a frightened sort of way edged as close as he could to the door.

"Mr. Locke, you'll not give me up?" he stammered. "I swear I'm innocent. But no one will believe me, and no one will help me. I've crept like a rat up here to London. Please give me a hearing!"

"I know you by your voice. You spoke to me over the telephone on the night of September 17th. Sit down, Spriggs. You can talk quite freely to me."

"Then you don't think I murdered my master?"

An expectant note crept into the weak, quavering voice.

Locke calmly lit a cigarette, and offered one to the man.

"I know you are innocent, Spriggs, but I couldn't do anything to prove it without your testimony to back me up. For once lucky coincidence has come to my aid. Why didn't you come to me before?"

The man wiped big beads of moisture from his forehead.

"Mr. Locke, I've had the very devil's own luck the last two months. When the master disappeared I thought he'd committed suicide. I didn't want to put the matter in the hands of the police, so I got on to you."

"How did you know of me?"

"Through reading the report in the newspapers of the way you handled the strange case of Mr. Marcus Hannaford. Mr. Shields' name also happened to be Marcus. That interested me. I rang through to you, and from that minute all my troubles began."

Locke passed into the inner room, where a table was laid for his evening meal. At the sideboard he poured out a stiff brandy-and-soda.

"Get that into you, Spriggs," he said sympathetically. "Ah, now you look better. Bless me, you're nothing but a bundle of nerves!"

Spriggs indeed looked the very picture of hopeless dejection.

"If there's a gehenna on earth, I've been through it," he mumbled almost incoherently. "I knew if once I was taken the police 'ud never let me go. I was the last seen with him alive."

Ferrers Locke settled himself into an easy position.

"Now just collect yourself, Spriggs. I'm out not only to protect you, but to prove your innocence. Let's begin at the start. A moment ago you spoke of your master's disappearance. What does that imply?"

The colour was fast coming back into the butler's sunken cheeks.

"I rang you up, sir, on the 17th."

"That's right."

"On the first Monday in September I came up to London to find a house."

"I know all about that from the people at the Witley Hotel."

Spriggs gave a start of surprise.

"Well, by the 14th everything was ready—the house in order, beautifully furnished. The master was to have arrived on the 15th. He didn't come. All the next day I spent in wiring to Dewsbury. No reply. On the 16th I tried to get through on the 'phone. It took me best part of the day, as the storm had broken down the wires. Even then I couldn't get through to the hotel. I telegraphed again, and again on the Wednesday. Still no answer. I was getting scared. At last, at five o'clock in the evening I got through to the manageress, and she told me Mr. Shields had left for London at midday on Monday. Since then, as God is my witness, I've never set eyes on him."

"Is that the truth?"

"God's truth. I dashed off to Euston, to King's Cross, to St. Pancras. No, couldn't hear of him anywhere. I rushed back to the flat, hoping he'd have turned up. He wasn't there, so I thought of you, and telephoned."

"Be very careful as to what happened next."

Spriggs passed his hand wearily across his brow.

"It's all like a bad dream. I remember standing by the instrument. Then something heavy struck me on the back of the head. I fell back and cried out. After that I remembered nothing for a long time."

THE POPULAR—No. 93.

Locke found it difficult to restrain his deepening excitement.

"What next?" he jerked out.

"When I came to I was shut in a small room—an underground room, with no window or light of any sort—and I was kept there for weeks without seeing a soul. I nearly went mad. Of course, at times I fell asleep, and each time when I awoke I found food and water had been put in the room."

"Good food or bad?"

"The very best. I had everything a man could want in that way, but I thought I'd go off my rocker with being kept there week after week. So I set to work to dig my way through the wall. At last it was done. I got out into the air. It was pitch-dark and raining, and mist was everywhere. I walked all through that night, and in the morning I got to a house where they gave me something to eat and dried my clothes."

The notes under the detective's hand lengthened visibly.

"Could you find the house again?" he asked.

"I'm certain I couldn't. The place was miles from anywhere."

"What was the first town you came to?"

"Ipswich, and there for the first time I heard about the murder. You could have knocked me down with a feather! I nearly fainted when I saw I was a wanted man. Again I thought of you, remembered your promise to come to the house. It's taken me four nights to get to London; I never moved through the day."

DON'T FORGET!

THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

IS

"POPULAR" DAY.

MAKE sure of your copy EARLY.

"You acted very wisely, Spriggs. But about the men who knocked you senseless—could you describe them?"

"I didn't see them at all. They must have put me to sleep."

"Ah, the same game," Locke murmured.

"You are aware your master was found strangled in the dining-room?"

"Lord help him, yes! Did you see him, sir?"

"I did. The finger-marks were almost purple on his throat, and there was a big red mark behind the ear. But wait a moment—I've told you wrong. The mark behind the ear was a port wine stain."

Spriggs leapt to his feet.

"You don't mean one of them marks which folks have from their birth?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"That's so. At first I took it for discoloration, a bruise. Now I remember it was only a birth-mark."

Spriggs put his wasted hand on Locke's shoulder.

"Then, Mr. Locke, there's a mistake somewhere. Mr. Shields he never had no such mark. I shaved him nearly every day for more'n ten years, and there wasn't any such place behind his ear."

Locke leaned back, his eyes closed.

"Don't speak for a minute, Spriggs. I want to think. This alters the whole case. The murder of your master takes on a different aspect altogether!"

Nearer Daylight!

LOCKE'S mind was probing back into his inner consciousness. He saw the man who had so mysteriously vanished, the faithful servant who must have known that to benefit so handsomely under his master's death, that death must be absolute and unequivocally beyond the region of suspicion; he pictured the hands that had struck Spriggs down and carried him off as the same hands that had struck and fastened upon him; he saw the body of the murdered man not as Mr.

Shields' body at all; and he saw all his own theory of three criminally interested persons, who, however, had not stained their hands with blood, a step nearer to the way to verification.

"Tell me," he said, turning on the butler suddenly, "what clothes was your master wearing when you saw him last?"

"A blue serge suit, which fitted him very tightly. Mr. Shields was a stout man."

"There would be no marked looseness about the waistcoat?"

"None at all. The master always had his suits made to fit him well. The blue suit, I know, was rather tight because, although he'd been unwell for several months, he had put on weight."

Locke went to the window.

"Mr. Spriggs," he said in those curiously level tones which he always employed when making a vitally important announcement, "you can relieve your mind on this point. The body found in the house at Leinster Gardens was not your master's at all."

"Thank goodness for that! Then what do you think has become of him?"

Locks shook his head.

"I've yet to find out. There's a big conspiracy on foot somewhere. Just what it is I can only for the moment conjecture. I have an idea, but it need not concern you. This is clear, however: you have been made the centre and the victim of it."

"And there's more to come if once the police get hold of me," was the frightened reply. "The papers don't make no bones about saying I did the murder, and when I'm caught it's all up with me."

"We shall see—" Locke began, but stopped and walked across the room as a little flap fell down and showed a quivering red disc against the wall.

"Well?" he asked, putting the receiver to his ear.

Peters' soft voice came from the other end of the wire.

"Mr. Barkleigh Fox to see you, sir. Shall I show him up?"

The detective was silent a moment. He thought of the wretched Spriggs and Spriggs' fear, and of Fox's determination to hound the man down at any price.

"Yes, Peters, in three minutes. I'm half-way through dressing for dinner. Tell Mr. Fox if he waits a moment he can feed with me."

He snapped down the receiver and swung round on Spriggs.

"Quick, man, into that room—Peters' room! Peters is my manservant. You'll find a suit of his clothes in the wardrobe. Put them on; they'll fit nicely. Run a safety-razor round your face. There's a Scotland Yard detective downstairs—your worst enemy. Carry your part through—wait at table. For Heaven's sake don't be nervous, or I shall never see this case through as I want to. And when the dinner is over and Peters brings up the coffee and cigars, slip round to this address with this note."

He scribbled something on a half-sheet of paper and put it into an envelope.

Four minutes later the message went down to Peters. Locke was sitting at the table toying with his dinner napkin, when Barkleigh Fox, all smiles, came into the room.

He shot a searching glance at Spriggs before taking Locke's hand. Then he, too, sat down.

The meal proceeded over enforced light talk on both sides. With the biscuits and cheese the detective dismissed Spriggs.

"New man, you know. Not quite up to his work yet. Albert, ask Peters to take the coffee up to the library."

He rose languidly and gripped the Scotland Yard man's arm.

"Well, Fox, how does your case stand?" he asked, as the door closed on them.

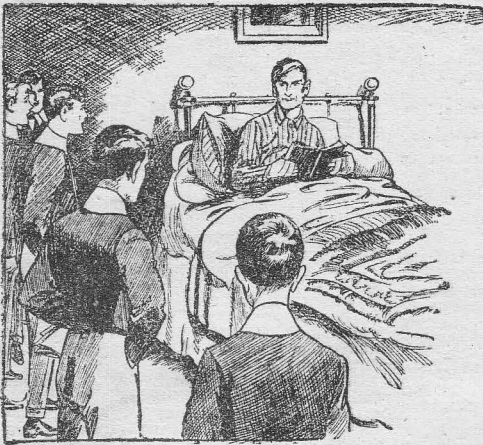
"Stand!" laughed Fox, the semblance of a sneer curving his thin lips. "It doesn't stand at all; it is almost finished."

"Oh!"

Locke raised his brows in evident surprise. Fox took a cigar from the cabinet.

"Of course, I'm sorry your little bluff hasn't taken, Locke, especially when I've just accepted your hospitality. Your new man Albert is just going down the stairs. Like a fool he dropped the note you had given him for Mr. Hay, your secretary. I hope you'll pardon my having read it, but it's only fair to tell you that long before Spriggs gets round the corner my men will have collared him."

(Another instalment of this grand detective serial next week. Make sure of your copy by ordering same RIGHT NOW!)



THE WORST FORM AT GREYFRIARS!

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story of
HARRY WHARTON & Co. at Greyfriars
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Firework Display!

QUELCH'S jolly late!" It was Dennis Carr, of the Remove who made that observation. The members of the Lower Fourth—which enjoyed the reputation of being the most unruly Form at Greyfriars—were in their places in the Form-room, waiting for morning lessons to commence; and Mr. Quelch, who was usually the soul of punctuality, had not yet put in an appearance.

The minutes passed, and the juniors became restive. Several of them started stamping on the floor, like an impatient audience waiting for a comedy to begin.

Not that morning lessons were ever a comedy. When Mr. Quelch ran amok with his pointer, and distributed impots with a liberal hand, there was grim drama, and sometimes tragedy, in the proceedings.

The hum of voices in the Remove Form-room grew louder.

"Where's Quelch?"
"What's keeping him?"
"Anybody seen the old Prussian?"
"He didn't turn up to brekker," said Bolsover major, adding, in a hopeful tone, "so p'raps he's ill!"
"Not likely!"

"Quelch's never ill," said Frank Nugent. "That is, he has to be jolly ill indeed before he thinks of chucking his duties. I've known him take morning lessons when he's been half choking with whooping-cough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Where's the old buffer got to?" asked Bob Cherry irreverently.

"If you're thinking of offering a prize for the best answer to that conundrum, Bob, I'm pretty sure of winning it," said Peter Todd.

"Why? What do you think has happened to Quelch?"

"I deduce," said Peter, who was by way of being an amateur detective, "that Quelch hacked his chin while shaving, and he's afraid to show up in public."
"Rats!"

"Trust Quelch to turn up, even if he had to hobble into the Form-room on a pair of crutches, with a bath-chair in attendance!" said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Five minutes passed—ten minutes, and the Removes no longer sat meekly and mildly in their places.

Bolsover major was on his feet, and his lips were glued to a peashooter. Small, hard peas spattered down like hail on to the heads of the fellows who were seated in the front row. There were many casualties, and many howls of anguish.

Frank Nugent, who rather prided himself as a cartoonist, was executing a true-to-life portrait of Mr. Quelch on the blackboard. Micky Desmond was playing an exciting and heated game of noughts and crosses with Ogilvy, and Hurree Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur, was in the act of applying a lighted match to a squib, for, although Guy Fawkes Day was a good way off, most of the juniors had laid in supplies of fireworks in advance.

"Remember rememberfully the Fifth of Novemberfully,

Gunpowder, treason, and plotfulness!"

quoted—or, rather, misquoted—Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha ha!"
Bang!
The squib went off perilously close to Bob Cherry's ear, and Bob gave a roar.
"Steady on, Inky, you ass! Fellows with nervous temperaments like me can't stand that sort of thing!"

"Ha, ha ha!"
Only one person had failed to hear the report of that squib. That person was Billy Bunter.

The fat junior's arms were resting on the desk in front of him, and his head was reposing on his arms. He was fast asleep.

"Bunter wants waking up," said Dick Penfold. "Anybody got a pin?"
"I've got something better than that!" said Dennis Carr, with a grin.

And he produced a jumping cracker from his pocket, while the rest of the juniors looked on, chuckling.

Dennis lighted the cracker, and hurled it at the slumbering Owl of the Remove.

Even as he did so there was a muttered "Cave!" from the fellows who sat nearest the door.

Bolsover major thrust his peashooter into his pocket, and sat down. Frank Nugent swiftly erased the portrait of Mr. Quelch, and sprang clear of the blackboard.

But Dennis Carr was too late to retrieve the jumping cracker. He had hurled it, and it pitched on Billy Bunter's chin, causing the fat junior to emit a fendish yell.

The cracker then dropped on to the floor, and continued its merry antics. It seemed to be making a bee-line for Mr. Quelch, who had just entered the Form-room. And the class sat spell-bound, wondering what was going to happen next.

"Bless my soul!"
Mr. Quelch skipped hastily to one side as the cracker leapt at him. It was an extra-special cracker, guaranteed to keep going for three minutes before fizzling out. And it kept going now, with a vengeance! Like Mary's little lamb, it followed Mr. Quelch wherever he went. If he jumped to the right, the cracker pursued him. If he jumped to the left, he could not evade it.

The Form-master resembled a cat on hot bricks as he grated to and fro, with the cracker bobbing about in the vicinity of his ankles.

The juniors could no longer keep straight faces. They felt that they must either laugh aloud or burst. And their pent-up merriment found expression in a loud roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ho, ho, ho!"

Mr. Quelch continued to dance to and fro, and there were storm-signals on his brow.

"Silence!" he panted. "How dare you guffaw at my unfortunate predicament! Oh, dear! I feel sure my trousers will be scorched! Ow!"

"Ha, ha ha!"
The jumping cracker, as if spent with its exertions, fizzled out at last. It collapsed on the floor, a lifeless, inanimate thing.

Mr. Quelch drew a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his heated brow. Then he turned upon the class with the glare of a basilisk.

"To whom did that firework belong?" he demanded.

Dennis Carr spoke up promptly.
"To me, sir!"
"Indeed! And you consider that the Form-

room is a fitting place in which to hold a pyrotechnic display, Carr?"

Dennis made no reply.
"Am I to understand that you hurled that firework at me with malice aforethought, Carr?"

"Nunno, sir! It wasn't meant for you at all. I threw it at Bunter, sir, to wake him up."

Mr. Quelch frowned.
"It is outrageous that you should bring these sulphurous compounds into the Form-room!" he thundered.

Then, as if struck by a sudden inspiration, he added:

"Is there any other boy here with fireworks in his possession?"

There was an astonishing sequel to this question.
Practically every fellow in the room held up his hand.

Mr. Quelch's frown deepened. He was in a far from amiable mood that morning. He had been consuming the midnight oil in large quantities, having been busy with his "History of Greyfriars," and lack of sleep had made him irritable and out of sorts. He was not feeling at all well that morning; hence his late arrival in the Form-room.

"Good gracious!" he gasped, as if scarcely able to believe the evidence of his ears. "Can it be possible that nearly every one of my pupils has come into the Form-room armed with fireworks!"

"We weren't going to explode 'em in here, sir," said Bob Cherry. "They were being held in reserve for the Fifth."

"That's so, sir!" chorused half a dozen voices.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.
"Every boy who is in possession of fireworks will place them on the desk in front of him!" he commanded.

The juniors reluctantly turned out their pockets.

Dennis Carr brought to light about a dozen more jumping crackers, which he proceeded to pile up in the form of a pyramid. And soon the desks were covered from end to end with crackers and squibs and golden-rains and starlights. Bolsover major, with the air of an expert conjurer, put his hand up his sleeve and dragged a lengthy sky-rocket into view.

Mr. Quelch's eyes nearly started from their sockets as he surveyed that miscellaneous collection.

"This—this is abominable!" he spluttered. "It is altogether unheard-of! I shall confiscate all these fireworks!"

"Oh!"
There was a groan of dismay from the class.

Quite a lot of pocket-money had been expended on those fireworks, and the knowledge that they were going to be confiscated was anything but pleasant.

"If—if you please, sir—" stammered Peter Todd.

"Well, Todd?"

"I assume you'll give us back our fireworks on the Fifth, sir?"

"Your assumption, Todd, is incorrect!"

"But we—we've blued all our tin on these fireworks, sir!" protested Johnny Bull.

"I fail to understand what is meant by such a vulgar expression as bluing one's tin, Bull!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"We've spent a small fortune on these, sir," said Harry Wharton, indicating the array of squibs and crackers and golden-rains on the desk in front of him.

"You should not have been so thoughtless as to bring fireworks into the Form-room, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch. "I can only conclude that you intended to let them off during the lesson, by way of a practical joke on your Form-master."

"Not at all, sir!" said the captain of the Remove indignantly.

"I am extremely angry!" said the Form-master, and he looked it. "For this outrageous and inexcusable conduct, the whole Form will be punished! Not only will the fireworks be confiscated, but no boy in my Form will be permitted to take part in the Fifth of November revels!"

Quite a storm of protest arose at this.

The juniors felt that Mr. Quelch was going altogether too far. It was bad enough that they should be deprived of their fireworks, but the knowledge that they were to be debarred from taking part in the celebrations on Guy Fawkes Day was maddening.

Had he been his normal self, Mr. Quelch might have been disposed to temper justice with mercy. But, as previously stated, he was tired and irritable, and he did not seem to realise that he had punished his pupils beyond reasonable limits.

The storm of protest grew louder.

"Shame!"

"It isn't fair!"

"It's altogether too thick!"

Mr. Quelch rapped angrily on the desk with his pointer.

"Silence!" he thundered.

But the Remove was living up to its reputation of being the most unruly Form at Greyfriars. They gave vent to their feelings in no uncertain manner; and some moments had elapsed before Mr. Quelch was able to restore some semblance of order.

There was a dangerous gleam in the Form-master's eyes.

"You are trying my patience altogether too far!" he exclaimed. "And if this disturbance continues I shall be compelled to report the matter to Dr. Locke!"

This threat subdued the juniors somewhat, and comparative silence reigned in the Form-room.

"You will bring those fireworks to me!" said Mr. Quelch.

And then, realising that the holding capacity of his desk was not sufficient to accommodate such a vast collection, he said:

"On second thoughts, you will convey them to my study. You will file out in an orderly procession, and carry out my commands as quietly and as speedily as possible."

The juniors collected up the fireworks, and streamed out of the Form-room.

Mr. Quelch would have been wise to accompany them to his study, and see that his instructions were properly carried out. But this did not seem to occur to him. He remained at his desk, while his pupil proceeded along the passage in a wrathful procession.

Dennis Carr led the way, with his arms full of jumping crackers, and Bolsover major brought up the rear, gazing longingly at the skyrocket with which he was doomed to part. And the remarks which were passed by the members of the procession would have made Mr. Quelch's ears tingle had he been at hand to hear them.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Guy Fawkes' Day in Advance!

"QUELCHY'S a beast!"

"And a tyrant!"

"And a giddy upstart!"

"He's absolutely put the kybosh on the Guy Fawkes' celebrations!"

"Shame!"

The popularity of Mr. Horace Henry Quelch, Master of Arts, was at a very low ebb at that moment. Indeed, the Removites were beginning to regard their Form-master as a modern Nero, under whose persecution they were compelled to writhe from the rising up of the sun to the going down thereof.

"Just think of it!" said Bob Cherry. "The Fifth will be an absolute wash-out, so far as we're concerned. There'll be no fireworks, no bonfires, no burning of effigies, no japes—no nothing!"

"And all through Quelch!" said Vernon-Smith savagely. "I'm beginning to understand why some people take up Bolshevism!"

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"Yes, rather!"

The procession had reached Mr. Quelch's study by this time.

Dennis Carr stopped short inside that sacred apartment with an expression of uncertainty on his face.

"Where are we to shove the fireworks?" he asked.

"Quelch didn't say," said Harry Wharton. "He simply said we were to take them to his study."

"Then I s'pose he means us to leave 'em on the table!"

"No room," said Nugent.

And there wasn't.

On the Form-master's table was a typewriter and an enormous pile of manuscript.

Mr. Quelch had been revising his celebrated "History of Greyfriars," and the whole of that momentous work—up to the point at which the author had arrived—lay on the table.

The history had no value whatever, so far as the juniors were concerned, but in Mr. Quelch's eyes it was priceless. It represented several years of toil and desk-work.

Mr. Quelch would rather have lost a hand, or even a limb, than his precious "History of Greyfriars," upon which he had been engaged ever since Harry Wharton & Co. could remember.

There was certainly no room for the fireworks on the table.

Dick Russell suggested the floor, but Mr. Quelch would hardly care to see his carpet littered with fireworks, so this was ruled out.

"What about the fireplace, you fellows?"

This bright suggestion emanated from Squiff, whose brain was quite a storehouse of bright suggestions.

"Good!" said Dennis Carr. "The grate's empty, and there's no fire, so we'll ram the whole jolly lot in. Here goes!"

And Dennis crammed his jumping crackers into the yawning grate.

The other fellows followed suit with their fireworks, until the grate was banked up with squibs and crackers and starlights and golden-rains.

The juniors surveyed their confiscated property with wistful eyes.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea," said Bob Cherry, "to set fire to the whole jolly lot!"

"My hat!"

The juniors exchanged breathless glances, and it was easy to see that everybody agreed with Bob's daring suggestion.

Nobody realised, least of all Bob Cherry himself, what the consequences of such a conflagration might be.

The Removites were in a reckless, defiant mood, and they had been much wrought upon.

"That's a rattling good wheeze, Cherry!" said Bolsover major. "We'll have our Guy Fawkes celebration in advance!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Anybody got a match?"

Several fellows had, and they hurriedly produced them.

"We shall have to look slippy, or Quelch will be coming along," said Dennis Carr.

The fellows who possessed matches promptly ignited them, and applied them to the heap of fireworks in the grate.

At the same time, Bolsover major, who had not added his beloved sky-rocket to the collection, decided to light it there and then. He stood the rocket on the floor, and lighted it at the top, and watched it while it gradually burnt downwards.

Nobody but Bolsover, however, had any eyes for the rocket.

The rest of the fellows were staring, in a fascinated sort of way, at the fire-grate, which presented an amazing spectacle.

The fireworks were spurting and fizzing and cracking, and the jumping crackers leapt out of the grate like live things.

Harry Wharton, who was a trifle more sober than the others, began to realise that Mr. Quelch's carpet and his furniture, and the study itself, were in jeopardy.

But it was too late to undo what had been done.

Sizzzzzz!

Crack, crack, crack!

Bang, bang, bang!

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" murmured Bob Cherry, amid the commotion. "We've fairly done it now!"

They had!

Yellow and blue tongues of flame now leapt out from the grate. And the explosions grew louder and more frequent.

The juniors were so startled by the uproar

that they were powerless to do anything save stand and gape.

For a moment they stood paralysed. And then—

Z-z-zip!

Crash!

Bolsover major's rocket went careering through the window.

There was a splintering of glass, and the juniors jumped back in alarm.

And then a dramatic exclamation burst from Dennis Carr.

"Good heavens, the—the place is on fire!"

Quite a number of fireworks had leapt out of the grate, with the result that the carpet was scorched and eventually set alight.

Those juniors whose presence of mind had not completely failed them rushed forward to stamp out the flames. They succeeded, so far as the carpet was concerned; but whilst they were stamping furiously on the spluttering fireworks, the waste-paper basket caught alight.

Great tongues of flame darted upwards, and the apartment became full of smoke.

The juniors coughed and spluttered, and they did their best to extinguish the conflagration.

But the atmosphere of the study proved too much for them, and they were compelled to retreat into the passage.

"The extinguishers—quick!" panted Bob Cherry.

"Where are they?"

"Hanging up in the hall!"

"And the hosepipe—where's that?"

"In the Close. Come on!"

The juniors, appalled by what they had done, rushed helter-skelter along the passage. They had scarcely proceeded a few yards when they were intercepted by Mr. Quelch.

The Remove-master had heard the report of Bolsover major's rocket, and he was on his way to his study to investigate.

"Boys, what does this mean?" demanded Mr. Quelch sternly.

"Your study's on fire, sir!"

"It's blazing like the dickens, sir!"

"We're going to fetch the extinguishers and the hose!"

And the juniors, realising that there was no time to be lost, rushed on.

For a moment Mr. Quelch stood as if spell-bound.

He could see a dense volume of smoke issuing from the doorway of his study into the passage. And then he remembered that his "History of Greyfriars"—that labour of love on which he had been engaged for years past—had been left on the table.

Probably the flames had destroyed the precious manuscript by this time. But there was just a chance that it might be saved; and, with this object in view, Mr. Quelch hastened towards his study.

The hot breath of the flames greeted him when he reached the threshold.

The apartment resembled a furnace, and it was madness to enter.

But Mr. Quelch had no thought for his own safety. His one object was to retrieve the pile of manuscript. The destruction of the "History of Greyfriars" would have been a terrible blow—a blow from which the Form-master would never fully recover.

Headless of the dense smoke, and of the greedy, devouring flames, Mr. Quelch rushed into the study.

He was half-choked and half-blinded by the fumes, but instinctively he groped his way towards the table.

Yes, the manuscript was still there. But it was in imminent danger of destruction, and Mr. Quelch swiftly gathered up the pages. As he did so, his gown caught fire, but he scarcely realised the fact so anxious was he to rescue his beloved "History."

There was a tramping of feet in the passage.

The amateur firemen of the Remove came rushing on the scene, armed with fire-extinguishers and with the hosepipe.

As they halted outside the study door they were startled to see their Form-master come staggering out of the blazing apartment.

"Take this!" gasped Mr. Quelch, in a choking voice.

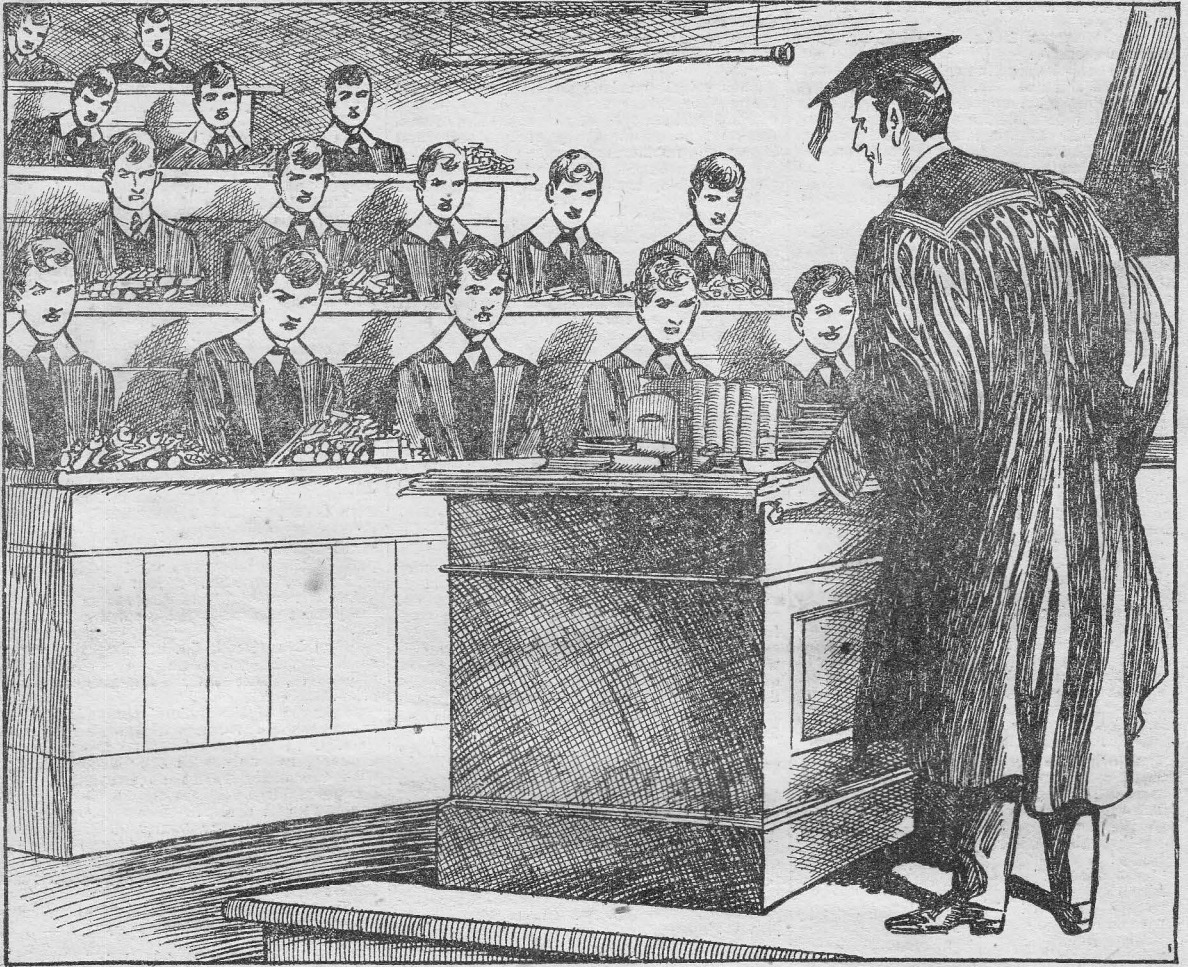
And he thrust into the hand of the nearest junior—who happened to be Dennis Carr—the batch of manuscript. Then he collapsed on the floor of the passage, with a groan.

"His clothes are on fire!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Hosepipe this way—quick!"

In normal circumstances the juniors would never have dreamed of turning the hosepipe on to their Form-master. But such a course was imperative now.

Swish! Swoosh!

The water descended in a deluge over Mr. Quelch's prostrate form. And the action was



"Every boy who has fireworks in his possession will kindly place them on the desk before him," commanded Mr. Quelch. Very soon the desks were covered with crackers, squibs, golden-rains, and starlights. The master's eyes nearly started out of his head as he surveyed the miscellaneous collection (See page 5.)

only just in time, for the Remove-master was already badly burnt about the hands and face.

Meanwhile, the fellows who possessed extinguishers promptly set to work to extinguish the conflagration inside the study. And whilst they were thus engaged, the Head and Mr. Prout, with a number of prefects at their heels, arrived on the scene.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Dr. Locke. "What—what does this mean?"

"It would appear that a fire has broken out in Quelch's study!" said Mr. Prout, who had a habit of stating the obvious.

"But how did it start—what was the cause of it? Why—goodness gracious!—Quelch is unconscious!"

"And injured, too, sir!" said Wingate of the Sixth, bending over the Remove-master's inanimate form.

"Dear me!" murmured the Head in great distress. "You had better convey him to his bed-room, and the doctor must be summoned from Friardale."

The prefects promptly did the Head's bidding. Gently they raised Mr. Quelch in their arms, and bore him away to his bed-room. Then Wingate obtained his bicycle and set off at a scorching speed for the village.

By this time the fire in Mr. Quelch's study had been practically extinguished.

The damage done was not so extensive as had been feared.

True, the hearthrug and the carpet were ruined, and the wastepaper basket was no more, but the table and the typewriter had escaped damage.

Harry Wharton & Co. were panting from their exertions. Their faces were smoke-begrimed, and in some cases their hair and eyebrows had been singed. On the whole, they resembled a troupe of Christy minstrels.

The Head stepped to the doorway of the study and glanced within. He noticed the

heap of sodden fireworks on the floor, and his brow grew stern.

"Wharton!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir!"

"You are the captain of the Remove Form. I call upon you for an explanation, in detail, of how this outbreak of fire occurred!"

"If you please, sir—"

"It was like this, sir—"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "I am speaking to Wharton! And I await his explanation!"

Harry Wharton at once decided to make a clean breast of what had happened.

"We were in the Form-room, sir, when Mr. Quelch discovered that we had fireworks in our pockets. We'd bought them in readiness for the Fifth, sir."

"Yes, yes! Go on!"

"And Quelch—I mean Mr. Quelch—ordered us to take the fireworks to his study. We brought them here, and rammed them into the grate, and then—"

Wharton hesitated.

"Proceed, Wharton!"

"We—we set them alight, sir!"

A horrified expression came over the Head's face.

"Am I to understand that you deliberately caused this conflagration?" he said sternly.

"Nunno, sir! We didn't dream we should set the place on fire. All we meant to do was to destroy the fireworks."

"But you must surely have known that such an action would result in a general blaze?"

"We—we didn't stop to think, sir—"

"Your failure to stop and think, Wharton," said the Head grimly, "has very nearly resulted in tragedy. Mr. Quelch has been badly injured—indeed, we do not yet know the full extent of his injuries."

"That wasn't our fault, sir!" said Bolsover major doggedly. "Mr. Quelch oughtn't to

have gone into the study when it was all ablaze!"

"Silence, Bolsover! This is a very serious matter—one of the most serious with which I have ever been called upon to deal. You will restore those fire-appliances to their proper places, and then, having cleansed yourselves, you will go to your Form-room and wait there till I come."

Looking decidedly sheepish, the juniors dispersed.

And when Bob Cherry announced that there were breakers ahead, his Form-fellows gloomily agreed with him.

It was certain that the Head would come down very heavily on the transgressors. And the feelings of the juniors, as they waited in the Form-room for Dr. Locke to arrive, resembled those of condemned felons.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rough On the Remove!

"I SAY, you fellows—"
 "Dry up, Bunter!"
 "You'll get it in the neck for this!"
 "Shurrup!"

"I shouldn't be surprised if the ringleaders were sacked from the school, and all the remainder flogged in Big Hall!"

Billy Bunter rubbed his plump hands together as he spoke, and he gave vent to an unmelodious chuckle.

The fat junior hated being punished himself, but he had no objection to seeing others squirm. Doubtless his forefathers, many year before, had shown the same spirit when they had flocked to witness public executions.

Billy Bunter was one of the few juniors who had not been concerned in the recent escapade. He had been in his usual state of stoniness, and had therefore been unable to purchase any fireworks.

For once in a way, being "stony" had its advantages.

Harry Wharton & Co. were looking glum and apprehensive.

Now that the excitement was over, and they could think clearly, they saw how grave their conduct must appear in the eyes of the Head, and, indeed, of the whole school. They had set their Form-master's study on fire, and they had caused injury to Mr. Quelch. Not intentional, of course. But the grim fact remained.

"Wonder what action the Head means to take?" muttered Johnny Bull.

"Goodness knows!" said Bolsover major.

"He can't lick us, that's one blessing. There's too many of us."

"He'll give us impots all round, I dare say," said Dennis Carr.

"All depends how bad Quelch is," said Harry Wharton. "If he's not badly hurt, the Head will be lenient. But if his injuries are really serious, it may mean the sack for some of us!"

"Oh!"

"Surely not?"

There was a chorus of uneasy protest from the others. Lickings or lines they could endure more or less cheerfully, but the "sack" was quite another matter.

"Do—do you think I should be accounted one of the ringleaders, Wharton?" asked Stott tremulously.

"Certain of it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter rubbed his fat hands with glee.

"There's going to be a wholesale execution when the Head comes in," he said. "You fellows will catch it hot!"

"And so will a certain fat porpoise!" growled Vernon-Smith, rising to his feet.

"You can stop gloating over other fellows' misfortunes, and start gloating over your own! You're going to get the bumping of your life! Lend a hand, chaps!"

The others cheerfully responded. Billy Bunter was dragged out in front of the class, and bumped with great vigour and heartiness. His spectacles leapt off his nose into the fireplace, and his yells of anguish rang through the Form-room.

Bump!

"Yaroooooooh!"

Bump!

"Help! Yoooop! Yaropski!"

"He fancies he's a giddy Bolshevik now!" chuckled Dennis Carr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

No sooner had Billy Bunter descended to the floor for the third time than there was a rustling of gowns, and the Head strode into the Remove Form-room. He was followed by Mr. Hacker and Mr. Prout; and the fact that each gentleman carried a cane boded ill for the Remove.

"To your places, all of you!" thundered the Head. "How dare you run amok in this manner?"

The juniors promptly scuttled to their seats. Billy Bunter was the last to arrive at his destination. He found progress very painful.

The Head took his stand in front of the Form-master's desk. Mr. Hacker stood on one side of him, and Mr. Prout on the other. And they looked like a trio of public executioners.

Dr. Locke's brow was very stern.

"This Form—which has long been the most unruly body at Greyfriars—now appears to have got completely out of control!" he exclaimed. "The consequences of this morning's outrage might have proved even more serious than they are already. As it is, Mr. Quelch is so badly injured that he will be confined to his bed-room for a week—perhaps ten days."

The juniors looked genuinely sorry. Despite the fact that Mr. Quelch was a hard taskmaster, and that he had sought to deprive them of their Guy Fawkes' celebrations, they were concerned to think that he would be hors de combat for some time.

"I am aware that you did not deliberately injure your Form-master," the Head went on. "At the same time, it is due to your reckless folly that he is now indisposed. In the first place, it was very wrong of you to bring fireworks into the Form-room; and, secondly, it was an act of madness to ignite them in Mr. Quelch's study!"

The juniors sat silent.

"Every boy concerned in this outrage will line up in front of the class!" commanded the Head.

The Removites obeyed. Only a sprinkling

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of them—including Billy Bunter—remained in their seats.

The Head then made a sign to Mr. Prout and Mr. Hacker, and the wholesale execution began.

Each culprit received six stinging cuts, and the weaker spirits acknowledged the receipt of them by loud yells of anguish. The others, however, possessed plenty of fortitude, and they made no murmur.

For upwards of ten minutes, sounds of steady swishing could be heard in the Remove Form-room.

The Head and his assistants were flushed and panting by the time the castigation was over.

"I trust that will be a lesson to you!" said Dr. Locke. "And, understand this, no member of the Remove Form will be allowed to participate in the celebrations on Guy Fawkes' Day!"

"Oh!"

"On the evening of the day in question you will all be kept under detention," continued the Head. "Moreover, no fireworks are to be imported into the Remove during the next few days. It will go hard with any boy who is discovered with fireworks in his possession!"

"But I—I've ordered a box of mixed fireworks from Chunkley's Stores, sir!" protested Lord Mauleverer.

"Then you will cancel the order forthwith!"

"Oh, begad!"

"I will make arrangements for a temporary master to take the Form until Mr. Quelch is fit for duty again," the Head went on.

"Until the deputy arrives, one of the prefects will be placed in charge."

And then, after warning the Removites what they might expect if they were guilty of further misdemeanours, the Head withdrew, followed by Messrs. Hacker and Prout.

A great deal of mumbling and grumbling followed their departure.

"There will be no fun for us on the Fifth!" growled Johnny Bull.

"That was only to be expected," said Harry Wharton. "Quelch had already put the kibosh on the Guy Fawkes' celebrations."

"But we're going to be put under detention!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We shall be shut up in this place like rats in a giddy trap! We shall see the bonfire in the Close—

we shall see and hear all the fellows enjoying themselves—and we shan't be able to join in!"

"Shame!"

"And, to cap it all, we've got a new master coming, and he'll probably be one of the biggest tyrants breathing!" said Bob.

There was another cry of "Shame!" louder than before.

The Removites felt their position keenly, and they were ripe for revolt.

When Gwynne of the Sixth stepped into the Form-room a few moments later, he realised that he would have all his work cut out to preserve order. But Gwynne, although easy-going at times, was not the sort of fellow to stand any nonsense, and he managed to keep the juniors in subjection.

Morning lessons passed without further incident.

When the word of dismissal came, and the juniors streamed out into the passage, they encountered Gosling, the porter.

Gosling was grunting and gasping beneath the burden of a heavy packing-case.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer. "Is that from Chunkley's, Gossy?"

"Yessir!"

"Good! My fireworks have arrived, dear boys. The Head told me to cancel the order, but it's too late to do that now."

"But you know what the Head said about importing fireworks into the Remove!" protested Nugent.

"Rats!"

Lord Mauleverer was evidently in a defiant mood. He instructed Gosling to convey the packing case to his study.

"We mightn't get a chance to let the fireworks off," he said. "On the other hand, we might. An' I don't see the fun of sendin' the whole box of tricks back to Chunkley's."

After dinner the juniors had recovered in some measure from their indignation. And Harry Wharton suggested that a deputation should call on Mr. Quelch to express regret at that gentleman's indisposition.

It was eventually decided that the Famous Five and Dennis Carr should form the deputation. And, not without trepidation, they went up to Mr. Quelch's bed-room.

Harry Wharton rapped on the door.

"Come in!"

The juniors entered somewhat sheepishly.

They found Mr. Quelch sitting up in bed reading a book.

The Remove-master presented an unusual spectacle. His face and hands were bandaged, but there was no anger in the glance he directed at his pupils.

"Carr!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Yes, sir?"

"Is my History of Greyfriars safe?"

Dennis nodded.

"I've got it here, sir," he said.

And he handed the manuscript to Mr. Quelch, who took it almost caressingly.

After this there was silence, until Harry Wharton contrived to blurt out:

"We—we're awfully sorry, sir, for what's happened! When we set the fireworks alight in your study we had no idea what it would lead to."

"And we hope you'll soon be fit again, sir," said Bob Cherry.

"We are sorry to see our honoured teacher sahib looking such a—"

Hurree Singh was going to say "guy," but Frank Nugent trod on his foot in the nick of time.

"Thank you, my boys!" said Mr. Quelch quietly. "Let us be thankful that the consequences were not more serious. I trust this will be a lesson to you not to indulge in such acts of waywardness in future. You have been punished, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny Bull. "We were caned by the Head, and forbidden to take part in the celebrations on the Fifth."

"Just so," said Mr. Quelch.

And the remainder of his conversation with the juniors was kind, and in no way reproachful.

Harry Wharton & Co. unanimously agreed, as they clattered down the stairs shortly afterwards, that their Form-master was a brick.

The news of the juniors' escapade had, of course, spread through the school by this time. And the Remove found themselves in disgrace, not only with the authorities, but with the other Forms at Greyfriars. The Sixth and Fifth-Formers regarded them with contempt and derision. The members of the Shell and the Upper Fourth described them as "an unruly mob of fags"; and even the fags themselves declared that it was a bit thick when fellows started trying to roast their own Form-master!

The Remove Form was in disgrace, and was practically sent to Coventry by the rest of the school.

Harry Wharton & Co. felt their humiliation keenly. And they realised that there were black times in store for them. A temporary master was coming to take charge of them, and the Head was pretty certain to select a man of the "mailed fist" variety.

Then, again, the Removites would not be able to take part in the Guy Fawkes' celebrations; and this rankled most of all. For Guy Fawkes' Day, like Christmas, came but once a year, and a weary wait of twelve months before the next celebration took place would be anything but pleasant.

"It makes me furious to see all the other fellows getting ready for the Fifth, when we shan't be able to let off so much as a single squib!" said Bob Cherry.

"Same here!"

"I'd made a ripping effigy of Loder of the Sixth, too!" said Nugent. "And now we shan't get a chance of feeding it to the flames!"

"Rotten!"

Dennis Carr was smiling. And the Famous Five, noting the smile, turned upon Dennis with some heat.

"Would you mind explaining where the joke comes in?" demanded Harry Wharton.

Dennis chuckled.

"I've got a sort of notion that we shall have a hand in the celebrations, after all," he said.

"But how?"

"We must think out ways and means."

"Are you thinking of defying the Head?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"That's putting it rather bluntly. But if the whole Form stands together, shoulder to shoulder, I don't see why we shouldn't enjoy ourselves when the Fifth comes round!"

Dennis Carr's remark gave the juniors food for thought. And, black though the outlook seemed, they were not without hope that they would be able to take part in the Guy Fawkes' celebrations.

Whether that hope would be realised or not remained to be seen!

(Another splendid long complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled: "Bonfire Night at Greyfriars!")

LOOK OUT for a New Adventure Serial **COMING SHORTLY!**



A TALE OF THE CIVIL WAR.

INTRODUCTION.

HARRY TEMPLE, master of the Chase, and possessor of a wonderful sword at the death of his father. When carried by any member of the family in battle the legend is that the sword will guard him from hurt in the fight, and make him invincible over his enemies. Walter Temple, his cousin, who is a Roundhead officer, also has a great longing for the sword, but there are many

fightings between the two for the ownership of it. Will Howard, Harry's particular friend, has several accounts to square with Walter. When war is declared between the King and Parliament, Harry and his friend join the Royalist forces. The two are in the thickest of the fighting, and many adventures befall them. One day a great tree falls on them during a march, and they are laid up at

Temple Chase. After a short spell of convalescence they are able to join their regiment again, which they find extremely diminished in numbers, many of their old comrades being missing. However, they throw in their lot with a small troop who are marching to join a much larger force on the borders of Gloucestershire.

(Now read on.)

"Uneasy Lies the Head—"

THIS story is not an English history, nor did I intend to make it one, knowing full well that the majority of my readers get quite sufficient of that class of lore in books expressly provided for the purpose; but when a tale happens to have an historical setting, 'tis necessary to dwell, however briefly, on the important happenings which link the scenes or incidents of the story together; and much took place within those six years—1643 to 1649—which I have passed over, ere commencing my next chapters. That is, much affecting the great issues at stake, though having little to do with the chief characters whose adventures you have so patiently followed till now.

The siege of Gloucester had been raised by Essex, the first battle of Newbury fought with dire consequences to the King, and a strong Scottish army under Alexander Leslie, Earl of Leven, had invaded England.

In the summer of 1644, the tide turned for the time being in favour of Charles, who defeated Waller at Cropredy Bridge; but shortly afterwards the Crown lost the whole of the North of England by the sterling victory of Cromwell over Prince Rupert and the Earl of Newcastle, at Marston Moor.

This was followed by two more crushing blows—at the second battle of Newbury, and at Naseby; and in May, 1646, Charles surrendered himself to the Scots at Newark, in the hope of gaining favour with the Presbyterians against the triumphant Independents. But this ruse proved utterly futile, for the Scots, in turn, surrendered him to the Parliament in 1647, on payment of expenses of the army, and Charles was arrested.

Negotiations then took place between Cromwell and himself, but the King, not yet having lost hope of acquiring help from the Scots, rejected all propositions put before him. He succeeded in escaping, getting as far as the Isle of Wight, but was there rearrested ere he could complete his journey to France, and confined in Carisbrooke Castle.

In January, 1648, Parliament ceased to offer terms for Charles' restoration to power, and just a year later, after the second Civil War had concluded, the King was put on his trial at Westminster Hall.

During all that time neither Harry Temple nor his cousin had encountered each other upon even a single occasion. It had truly been a parting of the ways; for whilst Walter had been busily occupied up North, fighting first under one Parliamentary commander, then under another, Harry had been likewise engaged on the other side in the Midlands and South.

But now, when the concluding stages of

that time of strife and struggle were in sight, all roads seemed to lead Londonwards, where the last acts of the grim drama were about to be played.

Harry and Will were there, waiting sad-eyed in the crowd congregated round the great public door of the hall; and though they knew it not just then, Walter Temple was also present, farther back in the crush, his eyes fixed gloatingly on the jewelled hilt at his cousin's hip.

Ay, and that sword had well lived up to its reputation. Wielded scores of times for a cause which was lost actually from the very first, the rapier had accounted for many a strapping Roundhead, though protecting its owner from even the slightest injury. It had seldom left Harry's side through all those long years; and the belief in its strange powers, judged by foregoing events, had now grown so strong upon him that he would not have parted with it for all the wealth of the universe.

Yet, the reader will say, was the sword really endowed with supernatural agency, or was this all pure coincidence? That I know not, nor can we hope to settle the matter conclusively either way. As Shakespeare says: "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy."

After what seemed to be an eternity of waiting, the great portals swung back and the crowd surged in, scrambling roughly for seats in that part of the building which had been reserved for the public. The two comrades were fortunate in securing a position well to the front, and stared round the hall with eyes in which interest and gloom were strangely mingled.

Mr. John Bradshaw, the Lord President, was seated in a chair of crimson velvet, whilst, below him, the Clerk of the House occupied a place at a table upon which lay the mace and sword. To right and left, on seats of scarlet cloth, were the members of the Court, the end of each row being flanked by a group of men-at-arms.

After silence had been restored, the King appeared under a guard of over thirty officers, advancing quietly towards the chair which had been reserved for him at the Bar. He frowned upon the tribunal, sat down—without, 'twas noticed, removing his hat—and then rose again, looking at the guard placed behind him, and the crowd of spectators across the hall.

Then, as he resumed his seat, Bradshaw immediately commenced his address, in which he accused "Charles Stuart, King of England, as the sole author of the sea of blood which had deluged the country," and this was

instantly followed by the reading of the several individual charges by the Solicitor-General, who stood up as Bradshaw sat down again.

'Twas during this latter recital that a strange occurrence took place—an occurrence which seemed to uncannily foreshadow the events of the future; for, as the Attorney-General commenced his speech, Charles touched him sharply on the shoulder with his cane, the head of which became detached and fell to the ground. The King's face betrayed curious emotion for a moment, and, none of his servants being near enough to pick up the article, he had perforce to do so himself.

During the reading of the charges Charles remained tranquil enough, looking alternately from his judges to the public, and only once did he show any departure from his stoical demeanour—and then he did something which one would scarce have expected of a man placed in his precarious position. For, when the words: "Charles Stuart, tyrant, traitor, and murderer," sounded through the packed court he smiled!

Then, being called upon by Bradshaw to plead either guilty or not guilty, he put up an able defence for the time being, appealing mainly to the assembled people with such good effect that the almost universal shout of "God, save the King!" arose from the packed masses.

The next sitting of the court witnessed a scene of like description, the King finding even more marked favour than heretofore, despite the ceaseless efforts of his enemies to turn the tide of opinion against him.

Seeing the direction in which affairs were leaning the fourth day of the trial, the Republicans resolved to cut short further debate, and that Charles should only appear before his judges on one more occasion. Two whole days were spent in collecting evidence from over thirty witnesses, and finally the King was voted a tyrant, a traitor, and an enemy of the country.

The big crowd filed out—some crestfallen, others jubilant—and dispersed in the snow outside. Harry and Will, each preoccupied with his own thoughts, turned their steps towards the narrow street where they were lodging. They had attended the court on each day of the trial, and had at first held high hopes that the King would win his case; but, as the weight of evidence, concocted or otherwise, grew heavier against him, the public opinion wavered in consequence, their hopes crumbled to the dust.

Harry was a good deal changed from the strapping lad he was when we last met him.

His figure had filled out considerably, and he looked a fine specimen of young British manhood as he swung along by the side of his silvery-haired companion. But little difference was noticeable in the appearance of Will Howard, save, perhaps, that he was not quite so erect as formerly, and some extra lines had engraved themselves on his ruddy countenance; yet his step was still firm and springy as of yore.

The next day they wended their way, as usual, towards Westminster Hall, only to meet with disappointment. A big crowd was clamouring for admission, but on this occasion the doors remained closed. The Court was meeting in private, to decide the sentence on the King.

Charles Stuart's Last March!

T WAS extraordinary that resigned bearing of Charles Stuart, both during his last hours at St. James' and on his way from that place to Whitehall. His great anxiety, too, that he should betray no sign of nervousness is a matter of historical comment; for, lest the severity of the weather should make him shiver with cold, he carefully chose a warmer shirt, so that his attitude might not be mistaken for one of fear.

The whole way to Whitehall was lined by a vast, silent throng, the great majority uncovering as the King appeared in sight behind the detachment of halberdiers, who marched ahead with banners flying. On Charles' right walked Bishop Juxon, and on his left Colonel Tomlinson, the officer in command of the guard, with both of whom he conversed animatedly on his way, his eyes bright and his step firm. Indeed, 'tis recorded that at times he walked faster than the surrounding soldiery, whom he blamed for their slowness.

Harry Temple and Will Howard had obtained places quite close to Whitehall, and were staring with the rest along the route by which the King was due to come. Neither of them had actually wished to be there, but the closing scene of the great drama had drawn them forcibly against their will, and they could not have stayed away had they tried.

Not a sound broke the intense stillness, save the occasional shuffle of feet in the crisp snow and the rattle of accoutrements from the soldiery lining the roadway.

Then suddenly Howard, who had been closely scanning the faces of the crowd on the opposite side, gripped Harry's arm like a vice, and pointed across.

"Once again, lad!" he whispered hoarsely. "Dost see? Master Walter!"

The young man looked in the same direction, and caught a fleeting glimpse of a dark, malignant face, ere it was swallowed up in the sea of bared heads. And that Walter had seen them also he had no doubt, for he had been staring straight in their direction when Harry glanced over.

"So he's still living," the latter muttered, "and by the look he gave me he still means mischief—Ah, Will, old friend, they are coming!"

Round a bend in the track swung the dismal procession, the three central figures being the objects of much interested scrutiny. Here and there amongst the crowd a fervent "God save your Majesty!" sounded as the King drew level, and he turned his head to right and left alternately, gravely acknowledging their salutations.

Then he ascended the stairs with a light step, disappearing into the interior of the building. And that was the last either Harry or Will ever saw of the Sovereign in whose cause they had risked so much and fought so well; for though they were quite close to the place of execution, only the foot of

the staircase was visible from where they stood, the rest being hidden by an angle of the wall.

They waited some time, until a sound which seemed like a great sob came from the multitude, and then turned mournfully away.

"And now, old friend," said Harry finally, after a long pause, "the fighting is over, and we have lost the day. What is it to be?"

"As you will, master. I have been far too upset to make any plans."

"And I also; but there is nothing to be gained by remaining here in London."

"Then 'tis back to Temple Chase you would go, lad, to make it your home for good?"

Harry's eyes brightened, and then clouded strangely.

"Ay, Will," he said; "back to the Chase again to try and make it something of a home, though I fear me 'twill be a difficult task to replace many of the things which have been destroyed. And—and then there is my cousin. He has seen us, and has likely noticed that I still carry this."

He stroked the hilt of the strange rapier affectionately, and Will nodded his head.

"You are right, lad," he replied. "The rascal saw us to-day, and who can tell how

Master Travers is not so steady on his pins as I—"

But the old retainer, cutting short Will's banter with one of his disdainful snorts, turned and led the way towards the great dining-room in the east wing, where a bright fire was burning cheerfully on the hearth.

This apartment, though it had been right in front of one of Lord Goring's attacking flanks on that memorable occasion years before, had, curiously enough, escaped with comparatively little damage. True, two of the beautiful diamond-paned windows were badly injured, but the massive oak panelling was still intact, as also were the full-length portraits which adorned the walls.

'Twas towards one of these latter, occupying the centre of a long row, that Harry instinctively looked as he and Will took their seats at the table. The picture was that of a soldier in armour, with a white rose fastened to his breastplate, and his hand resting on the jewelled hilt of a rapier at his hip; and the young man glanced down with a smile to his own, where hung the facsimile.

"So there's the bringer of our good fortune, Will," he said—"Sir Henry Temple, who found the sword on Bosworth Field. I have oft wondered who was the loser by the transaction."

Howard shook his white head. "Nay, that I cannot tell, Master Harry, for I have never heard," he replied. "Nor did your father know, either, I'll vow!"

"'Twas a strange thing altogether," pursued young Temple reflectively, "how the mere finding or losing of a weapon like this could so affect the fortunes of a whole family, and those who came after!"

"But it has, lad; it has, as we have proved! You remember that day at Newbury, when those three stout rebels attacked you together, and I was too busy to render assistance? Zounds, lad! But for the rapier then I firmly believe you would not be sitting there now! My last doubts of its power were swept away on that occasion."

"Ay, 'twas wonderful indeed! And the most curious part of it all was that I had so little trouble in defending myself. I never knew the blade so easy to handle or so deadly in its thrust. The three went down before it an' I recollect aright."

"Nay, lad, only two. The third, remember, thought better of it!"

"You are right. I had forgotten the fellow's stupefaction. But I did not see him again."

"I did, though, and had the pleasure of testing my own steel against him—much to his disgust. He came for me just afterwards, and—well, I know not what he may be doing now!"

They relapsed into silence, each one busy with the appetising meal before him. Travers had evidently believed in always keeping the Chase well provisioned, for there seemed to be no lack of eatables. Finally, Will lay back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"No matter how welcome a good fight may be, lad, one cannot live upon it alone. Dearly though I love devouring my enemies, I'll vow none ever tasted so savoury as this!"

Harry laughed heartily.

"Oh, Will—Will, I verily believe you'll have my 'death to answer for next!" he gasped. "To hear you talk one would think we were all put into this world for naught but fighting and eating! Dost never do anything else?"

"Ay, Master Harry, I smoke, as I shall soon show you!"

He took a long pipe from the mantel, and was presently staring contemplatively at the ceiling, puffing out great clouds of blue smoke with evident relish. The big fellow had had little time to gratify his tastes in this particular direction—peacefully, at any rate—and he found it doubly welcome now.

Finally he knocked out the ashes from the bowl, and, replacing the pipe, grew suddenly very grave.

"And now, lad, let's consider matters very carefully," he said. "We are here, so that is the main thing so far as lodging is concerned; but we must prepare for a further visitor, who will certainly pay us a call some time or other in the future."

"You mean Walter?"

"Of a surety! He saw us, and, if I read him aright, will give us no little trouble ere we finish with him for good—or evil!"

"Quite likely. But forewarned is forearmed."

"Ay, with anyone else than that cunning knave! Recollect how persevering he has been in the past—how unscrupulous in his



Will suddenly crashed across the table, and at the same moment Harry himself became conscious of a strange mist before his eyes. "Walter, you—you—" he choked.

many more times his eyes have been upon us since we arrived in London? Ay, we have not finished with Master Walter yet awhile, so we must needs be mighty watchful."

Next day, after some formalities had been gone through, they left the capital—the city which had just seen the overthrow of a kingdom, and was soon to witness the establishing of a republic.

Plans!

WITH the removal of the King, England began to settle down into a sort of lethargy—a reaction, as it were—until the inauguration of the Commonwealth again gave rise to much discussion and a good deal of subdued bitterness.

In the midst of this quietude two well-mounted horsemen rode up to the great door of Temple Chase, and were affectionately greeted by Travers—grown much older-looking and feebler of step in those years that had passed since he last beheld them.

"Ah, Master Harry," he wheezed, "'tis good to see that cheerful face of yours again—and you, too, thou great bull! Why, you must be nigh as old as I, yet one would never believe it!"

"Nay, Travers, not quite so old," laughed Will, "but blessed with a healthy body all my life. That's the secret of it—that, and taking mighty good care of myself."

"Ay, but I also took care," replied the other, who seemed always ready for an argument with Howard. "Good food and good red wine—"

"Oh, ho, lad! Hark at him!" interrupted the big fellow, with another laugh. "Good red wine, forsooth! That's how 'tis that

method of working; and as he has acted before he'll act again!"

"You are quite right, Will. We must be ready for all eventualities. Ah! I see you have something simmering in that old pate of yours. Out with it!"

Howard stroked his stubby chin thoughtfully ere replying.

"Ay, lad," he finally returned, "I have a plan, and, I think, a good one. Listen!"

He spoke rapidly for a few minutes, the interest on Harry's face deepening as he proceeded. Then, as he finished, the latter clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"Will," he said, "had I your brains I should be a Colonel of Horse by now! Od's life, 'tis a most excellent idea!"

The Reward of Hospitality.

THE comrades had not been very long in London ere Walter Temple had chanced to see them pass just beneath the window of the house wherein he was lodged, and with the sudden knowledge of their presence so close to him, the smouldering fire of his covetousness had flared up afresh.

From that moment, though neither was aware of it, scarce a step did they move in any direction without the wily rascal being somewhere not very far away; for since Charles was at last safely emmeshed, Walter's particular regiment had been more or less idle, and consequently his time was practically his own to do with as he pleased.

When the twain left the capital, he was amongst the first to know of their departure, and shrewdly guessed whether they were bound. Having decided this to his own satisfaction, his crafty brain immediately commenced working at top speed to form some plan whereby to deal them a stunning final blow and realise his great ambition.

But the events of the next couple of days prevented his doing very much in that direction, for certain important orders again tied his hands and detained him in London, much to his chagrin, thus giving his quarry a good start, and upsetting his careful calculations for the time being.

However, not very long afterwards a ragged vagrant might have been seen pursuing his way through the woods surrounding Temple Chase, shivering with the bitterness of the weather, and halting ever and anon to brush the driven snow from his half-blinded eyes. Indeed, so miserable and wretched-looking was he that if you had been told the horse which was tethered a few yards back belonged to him, you would have laughed at the informant in derision.

The vagrant arrived at the great door, knocking timorously, and after a moment's delay Travers swung the portal back.

"Your business, sirrah?" he inquired, staring hard at the wretched, trembling figure.

"Food!" gasped the caller. "Food and warmth, an' your heart has pity in it!"

Now, Travers had a sympathetic soul, and the extreme misery of the newcomer stirred it to its depths. He pulled the door open wider, and gruffly bade the other enter.

"You have come far?"

"Ay, many miles; twice as many as I can count on my fingers!"

"And in such weather! Zounds, I pity you. Ay, Master Harry!"

A voice was heard calling down the great staircase, and Travers looked up.

"Who is it?"

"A wanderer, master—half dead from the cold, and starving!"

"Bring him up here, friend!" continued the voice, and the vagrant's eyes gave a momentary flush, but then became lustreless again.

He was conducted into the great dining-room, and pushed into a chair by the blazing hearth, the three other occupants of the chamber looking at him curiously.

And truly he was a sorry sight. His face, or what could be seen of it beneath his broad hat-brim, was lashed into a ruddy glow by the cutting wind, and flanked by wisps of straggly, unkempt hair, which stuck out oddly from behind his ears, whilst his stubby chin and cheek-bones showed that he was not over-careful with his toilet. His clothes, too, were ragged and threadbare, whilst his footwear spoke of having seen better days.

"Od's life!" murmured Will, at length. "Many a scarecrow would seem a gentleman beside this one! Will you not remove your hat, sirrah?"

"Nay, 'tis not worth while. Just a little food and heat, and I'll be on my way again."

"You shall have them both, friend! Travers, some of that savoury mess we have just partaken of. A goodly plateful, now!"

Little was said whilst the visitor ate ravenously; then he pushed his plate away, and commenced searching for something in the folds of his threadbare garments. Presently he produced a small bottle, which he set on the table.

"There is one good woman in this world who'll well deserve her reward in the next," he said, nodding towards the bottle. "That wine is the most wonderful of any I ever tasted, and saved me from fainting more than once, I'll vow."

"Someone gave it to you?" asked Harry.

"Ay; a worthy dame at whose house I knocked some ten miles back. She had no food to spare, but said this was all that remained of her stock of liquor. 'Tis marvellous in its powers, truly!"

Will took up the bottle and smelt it.

"It has a strange odour," he remarked.

"Strongly spiced, I warrant, and should be mighty reviving."

He set it down again, but the wayfarer pushed it towards him.

though satisfied with his scrutiny, replied affably.

"Ay, that I do—that I do! The Temples bear a strange resemblance to each other. This is Temple Chase, is it not?"

"It is, though why you seem so interested in— Ho, Will! What ails you, old friend? You almost knocked me down!"

For Howard, who had been staring closely at the lower part of their visitor's face—which was just then brightly illuminated by a gleam from the hearth—suddenly swayed sideways, making a choking sound in his throat.

"Master Harry!" he gasped. "Dost not see? He would not remove his hat! He— Ah, I'm falling! The wine—the—"

Will suddenly crashed across the table, where Travers, by the way, was already sprawled limply, and at that moment Harry himself became conscious of a strange mist before his eyes, through which the vagrant's face loomed vindictively triumphant.

"Walter, you—!" he choked, groping blindly with his hands towards the other, who avoided him easily, and stepped aside, chuckling like the knave he was.



On the right of the King walked the bishop, and on his left Colonel Tomlinson. There was no sign of fear in the face of Charles, and his step never faltered. The whole way along Whitehall thousands watched him in breathless silence. (See page 10).

"Nay, taste a little, I pray you—and ye, too, good sir. You'll find it good!"

A small portion was measured out and handed in turn to each of them, who swallowed it down, Will smacking his lips in evident relish.

"You're a good judge, friend! 'Tis fine stuff, indeed!" he exclaimed. "We must call upon the dame, and see if she will give us the recipe."

"Doubtless she will, gladly," said the other, and then let his eyes wander round the panelling. "Ye have some fine pictures here. Why, on my soul, who is that yonder?"

He pointed towards the portrait of Sir Henry Temple, and turned interrogatively towards Harry, as though he knew that he was the proper person to address the question to.

"That is one of my ancestors," replied the latter. "A good man and true, who fought for King Richard at Bosworth. You recognise his face?"

The man shot a swift glance at the trio crouched beneath his broad hat-brim, and, as

"Ah, cousin! We meet again—for the last time, I think!"

But Harry did not hear him. Sprawling over Will's feet, he collapsed in a huddled heap, breathing heavily, and quite oblivious to everything going on around him.

Walter remained looking down at his enemy for a full minute, gloating over his easily-won victory, and then glanced at the half-empty bottle.

"'Tis strange how oft great events are pivoted on little things!" he muttered, with a smile. "The good dame—who, in truth, doesn't exist—has my best thanks for her assistance!"

He stooped down and fingered the buckle of Harry's sword-belt for an instant, then, loosening it, he fastened it round his own waist.

"'Twas a long game, but the last move is mine, coz!" he said, addressing the inanimate form at his feet. "I wish ye sound sleep, the three of ye, and a pleasant awakening!"

(Another grand instalment of this magnificent adventure serial next week.)

PEELE'S IMPERSONATION!

A SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE
STORY OF THE
CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL.

By . . .
OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Chopper Comes Down!

TROUBLE for somebody!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

It looked like it.

All the Fourth Form at Rookwood, both Classical and Modern, were in the Form-room when Mr. Bootles entered. There was a stern frown upon the brow of the Fourth Form-master.

A stern frown was so rare upon the kind face of the benevolent little Form-master that the Fourth were on the qui vive at once.

Somebody, evidently, had been "up" to something, and the "chopper" was about to come down.

There were quite a number of uneasy consciences in the Fourth Form.

Jimmy Silver & Co. and Tommy Dodd & Co. wondered whether their latest "scrap" was the cause of Mr. Bootles' frown. As a rule, the little rags between Moderns and Classicals were taken no notice of by the Form-master. But you never could tell. Form-masters were always an uncertain quantity.

Leggett, the cad of the Fourth, wondered whether any of his little money transactions had come to light, such as lending a shilling to a fellow who was hard up at an interest of twopence a week. Leggett kept his eyes on his desk and quaked. He was always in dread of being found out.

Townsend and Topham the dandies of the Fourth, surmised that perhaps Mr. Bootles had become aware of their snobbish persecution of Rawson, the scholarship junior, and they sat there looking very uneasy. They knew what opinion the Form-master would have of their conduct if he knew of it.

Then there was Peele, the pal of Tomy and Toppo, one of the "Nuts." Peele looked quite white as Mr. Bootles came in.

Mr. Bootles stood regarding his class with a grim look, little dreaming of the number of guilty consciences before him. In the innocence of his heart Mr. Bootles fancied there was only one guilty conscience in the Fourth—the one he had to deal with.

The juniors waited on tenterhooks. Mr. Bootles seemed in no hurry to begin. He coughed his little dry cough significantly. A pin might have been heard to drop in the Fourth Form-room.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd regarded each other with glances of eloquent sympathy. Classical and Modern ragged each other without mercy out of class, but if the chopper was to come down they could join in mutual sympathy.

"Peele!"

Mr. Bootles jerked out that name, and all the Fourth Form, with one exception, breathed more freely.

Peele was the delinquent.

The rest of the Fourth brightened up, and almost smiled. Peele did not smile, however.

"Peele, stand out before the class!"

With dragging steps Peele of the Fourth moved out, and stood before the grim, frowning Form-master.

"What on earth's the row?" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Peele hasn't been ragging Moderns; he's too slack."

"Betting on gee-gees, you bet!" murmured Lovell. "That's Peele's little game, and he's been spotted."

"Serve him right, if that's the case!" said Jimmy unsympathetically.

Mr. Bootles glanced round.

"Silence in the class!" he exclaimed.

There was dead silence. Mr. Bootles adjusted his glasses, and blinked at Peele.

"Peele!"

"Ye-e-es, sir?"

"I have received a report from a prefect concerning you."

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 93.

"Last evening," said Mr. Bootles, his voice growing deeper, "you were seen in conversation, Peele, with a man of the name of Hook—Joseph Hook—a person of the most disreputable character. This person, I understand, is a bookmaker, and is regarded as a man of bad character even among men of his own profession. You were seen in conversation with him by Dickinson major. You ran away immediately, doubtless to escape recognition. Walter Dickinson, however, recognised you. I have received his report. What have you to say, Peele?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Peele.

"I am willing to hear any explanation you have to make, Peele. Have you been engaged in any betting transaction with the man?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Has any money passed between you?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Then for what reason did you meet him?"

Townsend and Topham watched Peele with deep anxiety. They were in terror of their own transactions with Joey Hook coming to light if Peele blurted out too much.

Peele drew a deep breath.

"I—I didn't mean to, sir. He insisted on stopping to speak to me. I didn't want him to—"

"Peele! You were seen to speak with him for more than five minutes."

Peele gasped.

"I—I didn't mean to, sir, but—but he wouldn't leave me."

"Have you ever spoken to him before, Peele?"

"No, sir!" gasped Peele.

"You have never had any dealings with him?"

"Oh, certainly not, sir!"

Jimmy Silver's lip curled involuntarily. If expulsion had been hanging over his head Jimmy would not, and could not, have lied like that. But Peele was made of different stuff.

"I am glad of that, Peele. I accept your assurance," said Mr. Bootles, stroking his grey whiskers thoughtfully. "I trust you are speaking the truth. I cannot exonerate you, as you were greatly to blame for allowing such a character to enter into conversation with you. I shall cane you, Peele, but not severely. But, for your own sake, Peele, I shall keep you within gates for a considerable time. You will understand that you are not, for any reason whatever, to go out of the school bounds until further notice. Now hold out your hand!"

Swish!

"You may go to your place, Peele. I am glad the matter does not seem so serious as I had at first feared."

Peele went to his place without a word. His hand was tucked under his arm, and his eyes were burning.

"We will now proceed," said Mr. Bootles. And they proceeded.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Painful Duty Done!

JIMMY SILVER glanced at Peele when the Fourth Form came out of the classroom.

He was feeling a little sympathy now. To be "gated" indefinitely was a hard lot, though, certainly, the punishment was light enough and most judicious. While he remained within school bounds Peele was removed from all danger of further attentions from the disreputable Hook.

Peele was looking savage and morose.

"Cheer up, kid!" said Jimmy Silver, tapping him on the shoulder. "It's hard cheese, but it might have been worse, you know."

"Gated for the rest of the term!" muttered Peele.

"Oh, Bootles will come round," said Jimmy. "Just think what might have happened if he'd known the facts."

Peele scowled.

"And I'll tell you what," said Jimmy. "Why not chuck it and stick to games instead? Footer's better than slacking about betting on gee-gees, kid."

"Mind your own business!" growled Peele. "I'll do what I like, Bootles or no Bootles!" And he stalked away angrily.

Jimmy Silver looked after him, greatly inclined to take him by the scruff of the neck and mop up the passage with him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, who had listened, burst into a chuckle in chorus.

Jimmy Silver looked at them rather morosely.

"What's the cackle about?" he snapped.

"Naughty boy won't take the saintly advice of his Uncle James!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bow-wow! Rats!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "The silly ass ought to be licked! He was lying to Bootles like a Prussian! We know all about his little games with Joey Hook, and Tomy's and Toppo's, too!"

"Bootles will tumble some day, and make an example of them," said Lovell. "No need for you to get your wool off, Jimmy. Let's go and punt a ball about until dinner."

"What about our rehearsal for our play?" said Jimmy.

"Oh, bother the rehearsal! We can do that this evening. Come out!"

And the Fistical Four went out.

They punted a ball about in the keen air of the quadrangle, and soon forgot all about Cyril Peele. Meanwhile, Peele was surrounded by sympathetic friends. Townsend and Topham of the Fourth, and Smythe and Howard of the Shell, were full of commiseration. As Adolphus Smythe remarked, it might have happened to any one of them.

"But you should have been more careful, Peele," said Adolphus. "You shouldn't let yourself get spotted by a prefect. I never do, dear boy."

Peele grunted.

"I didn't know Dickinson was coming across that field," he said. "Confound him!"

"Yaas, confound him, certainly!" agreed Adolphus. "Like his cheek, meddlin' in a fellow's private affairs. But prefects will do these things."

"It's rotten!" said Townsend. "We shall have to go pretty careful for a bit!"

"Look here, you'll have to help me out," said Peele. "After what Bootles said, I can't meet Joey again for a bit—"

"By gad, old man, you'd better not!"

"But I've got an appointment with him for this evening," said Peele.

"You can't keep it," said Smythe, with a shake of his head. "Too risky!"

"I know I can't. One of you fellows must go for me."

The Nuts of Rookwood exchanged glances. They were not unaccustomed to meeting the bookmaker on account of their own little speculations on the Turf, but the incident in the Form-room had scared them.

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Not good enough," said Adolphus decidedly. "Better give it a few days to blow over. I'm goin' to."

And Smythe and Howard strolled away, their minds evidently made up.

"Look here, Tomy," said Peele angrily. "Joey Hook is comin' to meet me this evenin'. It's a special appointment. He'll get waxy if I don't go. He may wait an hour for nothin'."

"Tain't safe," said Townsend.

"I owe him money, too," said Peele; "that's what we were talkin' about when Dickinson spotted us. You know what an uncertain beast Hook is. If he's kept waitin' for nothin' he may cut up rusty."

"We'll have to chance it," said Townsend decidedly. "It's too risky. I'm not goin' out of gates this evenin'."

"Same here," said Topham, with equal

decision. "Don't be an ass, Peele! It's no good lookin' for trouble."

"If you fellows won't go for me, I shall have to go," said Peele. "It's more risky for me than for you."

"Well, it's your bisney, not ours," said Topham.

"And I—I can't go. I'm taking part' in that rotten Classical rehearsal."

"Bother the rehearsal!" said Townsend. "What do you take up such rot for, with those awful cads in the end study? I wouldn't waste my time on it."

"Well, they haven't asked you to play a leading part," said Peele unpleasantly.

"Oh, rats! I'm not goin' to meet Hook, anyway."

"If I cut off they'll miss me, and there'll be talk," said Peele. "It makes it all the more likely that I shall get spotted."

"Don't go, then!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Townsend crossly. "I tell you I'm not goin' to have a hand in it. I don't want to be sacked!"

"Same here!" said Topham.

Towny and Topy sauntered away to a void impertunity. Peele was left alone, scowling.

He had an uneasy fear of what his estimable friend Joey Hook might do if he were left kicking his heels at the stile the whole evening.

Mr. Hook was not wholly a reliable gentleman, and Peele owed him money.

"I've got to go!" muttered Peele savagely. "Those funky cads won't do it for me. I've got to go unless I could let Hook know, and I can't. Hang it all!"

And Peele walked away, alone with his meditations.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Interrupted Rehearsal.

"REHEARSAL after tea," said Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four came out of the Form-room after afternoon lessons.

Jimmy Silver was very keen about the rehearsal.

It was Jimmy who was the founder and moving spirit of the Rookwood Classical players, and it was Jimmy who had written the great comedy with which the players were shortly to stagger humanity.

Mr. Bootles had helped in that comedy quite unconsciously. Mr. Bootles was a kind little gentleman, and the Fourth-Formers liked and respected him greatly. But it could not be denied that the simple little gentleman simply lent himself to caricature. He was not much taller than the juniors, though considerably wider. His grey whiskers, and the glasses perched on his nose, were the easiest things in the world to imitate. And Jimmy—rather thoughtlessly, perhaps—had introduced a comic character into his comedy, who was the lifelike image of Mr. Bootles.

Peele of the Fourth was to play the part. Peele was a slacker in most things, but he had a taste for amateur theatricals, and he was clever at make-up. When he was in the "clobber" and make-up of the comic master in the play, he was as like Mr. Bootles as Mr. Bootles' twin brother would have been, if he had had one.

And he could very cleverly imitate Mr. Bootles' way of poking his head forward like a tortoise, and blinking over his glasses and saying "What—what!" in his high-pitched voice.

Peele did not get on well with the Fistical Four, but in making up a caste for a school comedy, entitled "Nice Boys at School," personal considerations of that kind were banished. Except for Putty Grace, who happened to be laid up with a sprained ankle, Peele was the cleverest fellow for the part, so he was selected; and as it was the "fattest" part in the piece Peele naturally had jumped at it.

When the play came off, Mr. Bootles was not likely to see it; but even if he did, he was not likely to recognise that caricature of himself. As Jimmy sagely remarked, Bootles hadn't the faintest idea what a funny merchant he really was. He would probably regard the character as exceedingly comical, never dreaming that it bore any resemblance to himself. Which was all to the good, for the merry juniors would have sacrificed the most effective character in the play rather

"Might have punted the ball about a little," said Lovell.

"Well, it's early, or not at all, so far as I'm concerned," said Peele. "And I'm keen on the play."

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy Silver proceeded to call together the other members of the caste of "Nice Boys at School." A box-room had been selected for the rehearsal—quiet and secluded, and not liable to interruption. Rehearsals in the Common-room were subject to interruptions from the merry Moderns.

The Fistical Four and Peele and Oswald and Conroy were all there, and Tubby Muffin joined them. Tubby had been offered a small part, which he refused with a fat sniff, but on second thoughts he had taken it.

Considering that they were only a junior club, the Rookwood players had quite a large stock of effects. There were quite a number of beards and moustaches, and wigs



Scra-a-atch! The match spluttered alight. Peele, struck by a sudden inspiration, stepped forward in the dim light. "Boys!" he exclaimed in his high-pitched tones, in imitation of Mr. Bootles. "Boys, what does this mean?"

than hurt the kind feelings of the little gentleman.

Amateur theatricals filled the long evenings very pleasantly, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were very keen about their play, though Lovell and Raby and Newcome agreed that Jimmy was an ass to assign the "fat" part to Peele. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were quite sure that each one of them could play it better, though they had their doubts about one another. Oswald, too, felt quite equal to the part, and so did Conroy and Tubby Muffin, and even Rawson. But Jimmy Silver's word was law.

Peele joined the Fistical Four in the hall, in a clouded mood.

"What about the rehearsal this evening? Is it coming off?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy Silver, with a stare. "Rehearsals every evening now. We've got to get into order, you know."

"That's all right," said Peele. "Suppose we have it early? I—I've got some extra French to do with Mossoo after tea."

"Well, I don't mind," said Jimmy. "What do you chaps say?"

"All serene!"

and spectacles, and coats and trousers, and other articles in the property-box. It was a dress rehearsal, and the juniors proceeded to make themselves up.

Peele's part was certainly the piece de resistance.

Clad in man's clothes, padded out to a suitable size, with elevators in his boots, he looked as big as Mr. Bootles. With his face made up, and artistic wrinkles added, and grey whiskers, and glasses perched on his nose, he looked wonderfully like the Fourth Form-master, and with an old mortar-board belonging to Mr. Bootles himself, the resemblance was complete.

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he watched him.

"It's jolly good, Peele!" he said. "Blest if I shouldn't almost take you for Bootles!"

"Yes, I must say it's rather good," Lovell had to admit. "Not exactly as I should do it, but good."

A remark which caused Peele to sniff. "Nice Boys at School!" was in full process of rehearsal, when steps were heard outside, and a whispering voice:

"This is where the fatheads are!"

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Modern cads!" he muttered. It was a Modern raid. Tommy Dodd & Co. had evidently "nosed out" the secret retreat of the Classical players, and were on the warpath.

"The rotters!" said Lovell. "If there's a rag here the props will be mucked up." Jimmy Silver turned out the gas. "Quiet!" he whispered. "We don't want a scrap now; we're in costume. Don't breathe!"

The Classical juniors remained quiet. The footsteps were still audible in the passage without, and the door suddenly opened.

"Not here!" came the voice of Tommy Cook. "There's no light here!"

"Faith! There was a light under the door a few moments ago, Tommy!"

"They've turned it out!" said Tommy Dodd. "Somebody's here, anyway. Strike a match!"

Scra-a-atch!

The match spluttered alight. The Moderns crowded into the doorway, and peered forward into the box-room. Peele, struck by a sudden inspiration, stepped forward into the dim light.

"Boys!" he exclaimed, in his high-pitched tones, in imitation of Mr. Bootles. "Boys, what does this mean? What—what?"

"Faith, it's Bootles!"

"Cave!"

The match went out instantly. There was a sound of gasping breath, and scurrying feet in the passage, and then silence. The Moderns were gone.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had vanished with remarkable suddenness.

Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle. "My hat! Peele, old man, that was a corking good idea! My aunt! They took you for Bootles! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele grinned. "Better shove a trunk against that door, as there's no key," he remarked. "They might come back!"

"Good egg!"

A big trunk was backed against the door, but the Moderns did not come back. Having discovered their Form-master, as they supposed, in a box-room, they were not likely to venture there again intent on a "rag." And the rehearsal of "Nice Boys at School" went through without a hitch to a successful conclusion.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Peele's Little Game.

"WHY don't you change, Peele?"

Townsend asked the question. The rehearsal being over, Jimmy Silver & Co. were gone, but Peele, in his disguise, lingered. He was seated on a trunk apparently in deep thought. Townsend remained with his chum after the others were gone.

Peele looked up, grinning. "Those Modern cads took me for Bootles," he said.

"Yaas, in a bad light," said Townsend. Townsend was of opinion that he was a more suitable person to play the comic master in the comedy. "They wouldn't have if the gas had been full on."

"Well, that's so. But—but Joey Hook will!" snapped Peele. "I'm almost his image in this rig."

"He lends himself to it with his looks," remarked Townsend pleasantly. "Anybody could make up as Bootles with a chivvy and whiskers like his."

"Oh rats! I'm not braggin', you ass!"

"What are you doin', then?"

"I'm thinkin'. I've got to get out this evenin' to meet Hook, and it's risky!"

"Too jolly risky for me," said Townsend, with a shrug of his shoulders. "You're a fool if you go."

"I've got to!"

"All the prefects will be keepin' an eye on you for days," said Townsend. "If you're seen out in the quad after dark, you'll be ordered back into the House."

"I know. But suppose I go like this?"

Townsend jumped.

"Like that!" he gasped.

"Why not?" said Peele argumentatively.

"Old Bootles has gone out this evening. He went out soon after lessons. It's his evening for whist in Coombe, you know. So he couldn't see me. Any chap who saw me would simply think I was Bootles."

"Not in a good light," said Townsend obstinately.

"Well, I'll keep out of a good light."

"Well, you might risk it," said Townsend.

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"Blest if I should like to go out of doors in that rig, though!"

"It's after dark," said Peele. "I don't see there's much risk—less than going in the ordinary way, too."

"Well, that's so. But—but Joey Hook will take you for Bootles if he sees you, and he'll clear off."

"That would be all right. He'd know then that it would be impossible for me to get out, if he thought Bootles was on the watch. What I'm afraid of is the beast thinkin' I'm leavin' him hangin' up and gettin' ratty."

Townsend burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Oh, my hat! Peele"—his voice sunk to an excited whisper—"Peele, old chap, if he takes you for Bootles—"

"Well," said Peele, "what are you cackling at? Suppose he does?"

"Don't you see?" whispered Townsend excitedly. "If he takes you for Bootles, you could keep up that you are Bootles—"

"Wha-a-at!"

"And make a bet with him as Bootles, and—and tell him to come up to Rookwood!" gasped Townsend. "It would make old Bootles' hair simply curl, and perhaps get him into a row with the Head."

"By gad!" ejaculated Peele.

"You owe him one for gatin' you," grinned Townsend, "and I owe him one for lickin' me, when I called Rawson a workhouse rotter. We both owe him one. You can pay off both."

Peele's eyes gleamed behind the spectacles.

"What a wheeze!" he ejaculated.

"Now I come to look at it, he's sure to take you for Bootles," said Townsend. "The Modern cads did with a match alight. Well, Hook will see you in the dark—there's only a moon, and there's trees over the stile, you know. I don't see why he should have the least doubt. Bootles supposed to be on the prowl there will be your excuse for not comin', and at the same time—"

Peele chuckled.

"Blest if I don't try it!" he said.

"Just walk out of the House, and see if the fellows don't take you for Bootles," said Townsend. "That'll be a test."

"Good! You go and sneak one of Bootles' coats for me—that giddy ulster with the big check that can be seen a mile away on a dark night," said Peele. "He went out in a mac, so it's in his room."

"Right-ho!"

Townsend hurried out of the box-room, and returned in a few minutes with the check ulster. Peele slipped it on, still keeping on the mortar-board. Then he went down the stairs.

His heart was beating a little faster. But he had to pass through the junior quarters first, and detection there would mean no serious consequences. If he passed muster there, he had no doubts about going farther.

He made his way through the Shell passage towards the big staircase. Adolphus Smythe and Tracy and Howard were chatting there, and they stepped respectfully aside for him to pass. There was no suspicion in their looks. Peele stopped to speak to them.

"Smythe!" he said, in a high-pitched voice.

"Yaas, sir?" said Smythe.

"Have you been smoking?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"What about that packet of gold-tipped, scented cigarettes you had in your study this afternoon, Smythe?"

Adolphus started. He had supposed that that packet of gold-tipped, scented cigarettes was known only to himself and his nutty friends.

"Oh, sir, I—I—" he stammered.

Peele chuckled and spoke in his natural voice.

"All serene, Smythe. I'm not Bootles!"

"By gad!" gasped Smythe.

"Peele!" exclaimed Tracy.

"Yes, rather! Bootles is out. I'm goin' to meet Joey. I think I shall pass now," said Peele, grinning. "Ta, ta!"

He walked on with Mr. Bootles' solemn walk. He left the Nuts of the Shell staring blankly.

"By gad!" said Adolphus. "What a nerve! Blest if I didn't think it was Bootles, and he'd bowled me out! Gave me quite a shock, by gad!"

Peele went down the big staircase and hurried into the quad. He did not wish to linger in a clear light. Outside, in the dusk, Bulkeley of the Sixth passed him, and saluted him unobtrusively.

Peele hurried to the gates. He had intended to clamber over the wall, but his confidence in his disguise was complete now. The gates had been locked since the real Mr. Bootles had gone out, and Peele called

the porter. Old Mack blinked at him. He had seen Mr. Bootles go out a couple of hours ago, but he had not seen him come in again.

"Kindly unlock the gates, Mack!" squeaked Peele. "I have mislaid my key to the side-gate."

"Yessir!" said Mack. He brought out his keys and unlocked the gates, and Peele passed into the road. The gates clanged shut after him.

Peele burst into a chuckle. After running the gauntlet in that way, he had no doubt whatever of passing off as Mr. Bootles to Joey Hook. And he walked cheerily down the lane to the stile.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Turf Transaction!

"MY HE!"

Joey Hook was leaning on the stile. He was smoking a big black cigar, the fiery end of which glowed through the gloom. He was waiting for Peele of the Fourth, and growing impatient and bad-tempered. Peele owed him a little bill of money lost on gee-gees, and Mr. Hook was anxious for a settlement. He was inwardly resolving to make matters warm for Master Peele if he did not turn up soon, when he spotted a gentleman in an ulster and a mortar-board bearing down upon him.

Mr. Hook had seen the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood many times, and he knew the little, portly figure, the gleaming spectacles, the little jerks of the head, and the check ulster.

He murmured "My heye!" and went on smoking his cigar. Joey Hook's connection with the sporting fellows at Rookwood, was, of course, a dead secret from the authorities, but it looked to Mr. Hook as if something had come out now, and the Form-master was coming to interview him—probably to threaten him. Mr. Hook's unprepossessing face set doggedly at the idea.

The newcomer halted, and peered over his spectacles at the scowling bookmaker in Mr. Bootles' well-known manner.

"Ah, you are Mr. Hook! What—what!" he asked.

"S'pose I am?" said Mr. Hook surlily.

"I have come to see you."

"Which I didn't know I'd asked you to, Mr. Bootles!"

"Pray do not misunderstand me, Mr. Hook. My visit is not of an unfriendly nature."

"Wot!" said Mr. Hook, in surprise.

"I have reason to believe that a boy in my Form had an appointment here, and he is forbidden to leave school bounds."

"Ho!" said Mr. Hook, surprised to receive that information from the master of the Fourth. He had fully expected a "slanging."

"I took this opportunity of seeing you, Mr. Hook. I am very pleased to make your acquaintance—what—what!"

"My heye!" said Joey Hook.

"The fact is," went on the supposed Form-master, sinking his voice. "I have a fancy for a certain horse in the Scrumper's Plate tomorrow. I understand that you are a bookmaker—what—what!"

"Yes, sir," said Joey Hook, astounded, but all civility now.

In an underhand way he had done business with Rookwood fellows of a sporty and shady character, but he had never dreamed of doing business with a Rookwood master. Naturally, the prospect delighted him. Mr. Bootles would probably be worth pounds where his youthful dupes were worth shillings; and with a Form-master on his books, his dealing with Smythe & Co. would be on a much more secure footing.

"You are open to take bets?"

"This ain't a place within the meanin' of the Act, sir," said Joey Hook, with a grin. "But bless yer 'eart, sir, I'm always ready to do business with a real good sportsman! What's your fancy for the Scrumper's Plate?"

"I really am not very well acquainted with racing matters," said the little gentleman. "But a friend has given me a tip—a very valuable tip, he said. Why should I not make a little money? What—what!"

"No reason at all, sir," said Joey Hook, "and very pleased and honoured, sir, to 'elp you in any way. Which I take this werry kindly, sir, and I'm intirely at your service."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Hook—werry kind! I understand that there is a horse

called Wood-Pigeon running in the Scrumper's Plate?"

Joey Hook suppressed a grin. Mr. Bootles was quite correct; but Joey was well aware that Wood-Pigeon was a rank outsider, and without the slightest chance of getting anywhere near the winning-post. He was willing to take Mr. Bootles' money up to any figure on Wood-Pigeon.

"Yes, sir, and a fine 'oss 'e is!" said Mr. Hook mendaciously. "Is that your fancy, sir? I see you know somethin'!"

"Really, I know very little of the matter; but I have received a tip from a racing friend. I desire to lay a bet on Wood-Pigeon."

"I'm your man, sir, though you'll rook me—I've no doubt about that. But Joey Hook never refused a sporting offer."

"What are the odds against Wood-Pigeon?"

Mr. Hook was well aware that the odds were seven to one against, but he replied with perfect composure:

"Three to one agin, sir."

"Dear me! I understood that the odds were larger."

"It's leaked out that 'e's a dark 'orse, sir," explained Joey Hook.

"What—what! Oh, I see! Very well. Are you prepared to take me at that figure?"

"Up to hany amount, sir."

"Ahem! My means do not allow me to make large bets!" said the little gentleman. "I desire to lay ten pounds!"

Joey Hook's eyes glistened. Ten pounds did not often come his way so easily as that.

"I'll take you, sir. 'And me the money, sir, and I'll book the bet!"

"Ah! Is it necessary for me to put the money down? I did not think of that. I have very little to do with racing matters."

"Bless yer 'eart, sir, I'll trust a gen'lman like you, Mr. Bootles!" said Joey Hook. "I'll make a note of the bet, and that'll be all right. If Wood-Pigeon loses you pay me ten quid, if e wins I 'and you thirty."

"Done!"

"I'll see you agin to-morrow arter the race," said Joey Hook. "Where shall I see you?"

"Oh, come up to the school! Come up as early as you can after the race. I shall be anxious to know the result."

Joey Hook started.

"Up to the school, sir?"

"Yes, yes; ask for me—Mr. Bootles."

"But—but—"

"Ah! Perhaps you will be too busy to-morrow; is that it?"

"Nunno, sir; but—but it won't do you no good for me to come a-visiting you at the school, will it, sir?"

"Ah! Ahem! But I shall explain the matter. Let me see, I shall explain that you have called to assure me that you have no connection whatever with any Rookwood boys."

Joey Hook chuckled. He had never suspected the master of the Fourth, who looked so simple and innocent, of being so ingenious a rascal.

"That's good, sir—that's prime!" he said. "He he, he! I'll come, sir, with pleasure. Wot time would suit you?"

"Shall we say five? Lessons would be over by then?"

"Rely on me, sir!"

"Thank you so much! And—and you will bring the money with you, the thirty pounds, if Wood-Pigeon wins. I am sure he will win!"

"Depend on it, sir!"

"Thank you! Good-night! I must hurry back!"

"Good-night to you, Mr. Bootles!"

The little gentleman hurried back towards the school, and Joey Hook blew out a cloud of smoke and grinned. If, by a wonderful chance, Wood-Pigeon should pull off the race, Mr. Bootles had as much chance of seeing Joey Hook at Rookwood as of seeing the Pope of Rome there.

But Mr. Hook was not doubtful about that. He was booked to visit Mr. Bootles to-morrow to collect ten pounds. It was a very pleasant prospect for Mr. Hook.

It was a very pleasant prospect for Peele of the Fourth, too. Mr. Bootles would certainly have a very uncomfortable time; and Joey Hook, in all probability, would be kicked out of the school—a just punishment for worrying Peele for his little debts, in Peele's opinion.

So both parties were satisfied.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Surprising Visit.

"H OLD on!" whispered Jimmy Silver. The Fistical Four were taking a sprint round the quadrangle before supper in their study. The sound of someone dropping in from the school wall caught Jimmy's keen ear. The chums halted.

"What is it?" asked Raby.

"Some giddy kipper been breaking bounds!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "One of the Giddy Goats, I expect. Collar him and bump him!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Fistical Four rushed to the wall. A dark figure had dropped in there, from the top of the wall, and was hurrying off. The four Classics closed round him.

"Not so fast!" said Jimmy Silver. "What—what—which, Mr. Bootles! I—I—I beg your pardon, sir!"

The figure had drawn back, panting with alarm. In the dusk the juniors recognised the Form-master, and they stood transfixed. For Mr. Bootles to enter the school by climbing over the wall like a truant fag was simply astounding.

"Jimmy Silver!" gasped the newcomer.

"Peele!" yelled Jimmy Silver, recognising the voice.

"Peele!" howled Lovell. "You've been out like that!"

"Let me pass!" panted Peele. "I want to get these things off before Bootles comes in!"

"Well, you silly ass, what have you been up to?"

"Only—only a lark!"

Peele hurried away, the Fistical Four allowing him to pass. He disappeared around the back of the house. Peele was uncertain whether Mr. Bootles had yet come in or not, so he did not venture to present himself at the gates. And he meant to get in by the box-room window, and leave his theatrical "clobber" there.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another in astonishment.

"The suffer's been out in his Bootles' 'rig,'" said Newcome. "What on earth's the little game?"

"Something fishy!" growled Jimmy Silver. The chum of the Fourth had little doubt about that, though they could not guess what was the "little game."

They resumed their sprint round the quadrangle very much puzzled.

When they came into the end study a little later they found Peele waiting for them there, in Etons, and with all traces of his disguise removed.

Peele gave them an anxious look.

"You needn't jaw about seein' me come in—" he began.

"We're not going to jaw about it!" said Jimmy Silver curtly. "But what rotten game have you been playing?"

"Nothing. I had to see somebody, and, as I was gated, I thought it safer to go out like that. That's all!"

And Peele quitted the study.

In the dormitory that night it was to be observed that Peele and Townsend were grinning at one another, seemingly enjoying a joke that was confined to their two selves.

"What's the giggle about?" Lovell asked them.

"Nothin'," said Townsend.

"Then what are you cackling like a pair of chattering monkeys for?"

"Just caught sight of your face, that's all!" said Peele cheerily. "It always has that effect upon me!"

And Lovell snorted, and dropped the subject.

The next morning the Nuts of the Fourth seemed still to be in a state of great hilarity. Topham was a sharer in the joke now, and Smythe & Co. of the Shell. But outside their circle nothing was said.

Never had the lessons seemed so long to the Nuts of Rookwood as they seemed that day. But everything comes to an end at last, and at last lessons were over.

Then the Nuts waited near the gate—waiting for Joey Hook. Jimmy Silver & Co. were punting a ball about near the gate, when a fat, red-faced man, with a bowler-hat cocked rakishly on his bullet head, came in. The chums of the Fourth forgot their footer in their astonishment at seeing Joey Hook within the walls of Rookwood.

"That boulder here?" ejaculated Lovell.

Old Mack ran out of his lodge.

"Here, stop, you!" he called out. "What-ter you want here?"

Joey Hook gave him a lofty glance.

"I've called to see Mr. Bootles, by appointment," he replied; "and jest you mind yer

manners, my man, or you can look for the sack!"

"My word!" murmured old Mack, quite overcome.

And Mr. Hook, with a strutting gait, walked on towards the School House.

Eyes were fixed on him from every side. The disreputable bookmaker was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood, and most of the Rookwood fellows knew him by sight. At the door of the School House Bulkeley of the Sixth met him.

"Here, hold on!" said Bulkeley. "What are you doing here?"

"Called to see Mr. Bootles, that's wot I'm doing here!" said Mr. Hook independently. "Gentleman's at 'ome, I suppose?"

"He's in his study."

"I'll take it kindly if you'll show me where the gentleman's study is, young 'opeful!" said Mr. Hook.

"I'll do that!" said Bulkeley.

The captain of the Sixth led the way in. Jimmy Silver stared at his chums, and gasped.

"Well, that beats the band!" he declared. "That awful blackguard calling on Bootles! Well, my hat!"

"Nice example to us!" chuckled Townsend.

"I'm shocked at Bootles!"

"Shockin', by gad!" said Adolphus Smythe.

"What's Rookwood coming to when masters do these things, dear boys?"

"There must be come mistake," said Jimmy Silver.

"He's gone in, anyway!" said Lovell. "I can't catch on! I dare say it's pure cheek! Let's hang round in case Bootles wants him kicked out!"

"Good egg! Come on Smythe!"

"I wouldn't touch such a person, for anything, dear boys!" said Adolphus.

But the Fistical Four and a crowd of other fellows were quite keen to touch Mr. Hook, if they had half a chance, and they crowded round the door joyously, sincerely hoping that there was some kicking out to be done.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Astounding Interview.

"W HAT—what!" gasped Mr. Bootles. Bulkeley had tapped at the Form-master's door, and opened it.

Mr. Hook stepped past him jauntily, and entered the room.

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet in blank astonishment. If the Kaiser Bill had stepped into his room, instead of a lesser rascal like Mr. Hook, it could hardly have astonished him more.

"What—what! Bless my soul! You are—er—Shook—I mean Hook? Your name is Hook, I believe! What—what!"

"That there's my name, sir," said Mr. Hook cheerfully. "I've called on business, sir."

"If you want that person shown out, Mr. Bootles, I am here," said Bulkeley.

"Bless my soul!"

"Which I've called to explain to Mr. Bootles that there ain't no grounds for supposit' that I got any dealings with his young gentlemen," said Mr. Hook, with dignity. "The gentleman's goin' to give me a 'carin', and you needn't wait, you young spadger!"

"Oh, I—I see!" said Mr. Bootles. "I comprehend! Thank you, Bulkeley; you may leave the man here!"

"Very well, sir," said Bulkeley, and he retired and closed the door after him.

Mr. Bootles blinked nervously at Mr. Hook over his spectacles. He felt decidedly uneasy at being left alone with such a character.

"You have—er—called—" he began.

He broke off in sheer amazement as Joey Hook winked at him.

Mr. Bootles could scarcely believe his eyes.

This frowsy, beery-looking, rakish ruffian was winking at the master of the Fourth in his own study. Mr. Bootles gazed at him open-mouthed.

"What—what!" he said feebly.

"Rely on Joey 'ook to play the game," said Mr. Hook affably. "I remember what you told me, sir, and I've stuffed up that young spadger."

"What—what I told you?" stammered Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir; the tip you gave me last night, sir. A nod's as good as a wink to Joey 'ook."

"I must be dreaming," said Mr. Bootles to himself.

"I got some rather bad news for you, sir," said Joey Hook. "I'm sorry to say as Wood-Pigeon 'ave lost!"

"Wood-Pigeon!"
 "Yes, sir."
 "You—you have lost a wood-pigeon?" said Mr. Bootles, unable to understand. "You have come here to look for a pigeon, do you mean? You—you suspect that some Rookwood boy has destroyed your pigeon with a catapult, perhaps. In that case, I am bound to hear your complaint."
 Joey Hook wondered whether the Form-master had been drinking.
 "I ain't talkin' about no blinkin' pigeons!" said Joey.
 "But—but you spoke of a pigeon—a wood-pigeon—lost, I think you said."
 "I mean the 'oss."
 "The—the horse?"
 "Yes, sutt'ingly."
 "The horse is lost! What horse? Your horse? I do not understand you, Mr. Hook," said the little gentleman, trying to pull himself together.
 "I trust you have not come here with a misdirected sense of humour."
 "Wot?" said Joey Hook, puzzled.
 "You have stated that a pigeon is lost, and now you state that a horse is lost. In either case, how does the matter concern me?"
 "Blest if I sorter ketches on!" said the puzzled Joey. "It's your 'orse that has lost."
 "My horse!"
 "Sutt'ingly!"
 "You are dreaming," said Mr. Bootles. "I do not possess a quadruped. It is many years since I was given to equestrian exercises."
 "Wot!"
 "If you have found a horse, and are under the impression that it belongs to me, I can only point out that it is a mistake. I do not possess a horse."

"What the 'oly smoke is 'e gettin' at?" said Mr. Hook. "Look 'ere, Mr. Bootles, there ain't nobody 'ere but our two selves. I come 'ere to tell you that your 'oss 'ave lost."
 "I must request you to retire from the study. I repeat that I have no such animal in my possession. I can only conclude that you are not sober."
 "Your 'orse, Wood-Pigeon!" howled the puzzled Mr. Hook. "He's lost! Have you forgotten? Wood-Pigeon is the 'orse!"
 "Pray do not be so absurd, sir! How can a wood-pigeon be a horse?"
 "The name of a 'orse!" roared Mr. Hook.
 "Oh, I—I see. Are you alluding to a race-horse?"
 "Course I am. Your 'orse!"
 "Nonsense!" said Mr. Bootles. "Do you think I am connected with racing? I should be ashamed to have any connection with any such pastime. I have never possessed a racehorse, and I should decline to do so if one were offered to me as a gift."
 "Orf 'is 'ead!" murmured Mr. Hook. "Fairly orf 'is bloomin' onion!"
 "And now, sir, as you seem to have made a mistake, I beg you to retire from this study."

"Not without the ten quid!" said Joey Hook promptly.
 "What—what!"
 "You owes me ten quid, sir."
 "Am I really dreaming?" said Mr. Bootles, addressing space. "This—this person states that I owe him money! I must be dreaming!"
 "Oh, come orf it!" said Mr. Hook angrily. He had been amazed at first, but he was growing suspicious now. It occurred to him that Mr. Bootles had already learned the result of the race, and intended to deny the whole transaction, and refuse to pay up. The bare idea made Mr. Hook tremble with wrath. He had done a good deal of welshing in his time, but it was not palatable to be welshed himself.
 "I must request you to go!" said Mr. Bootles, with a mild wave of his hand to indicate that the interview was at an end.
 "And as 'ow I requests you to pay hup!" said Joey Hook. "You owes me ten quid. You'd ha' took the thirty fast enough if the 'oss 'ad won."
 "What—what!"
 "Wood-Pigeon!" shrieked Mr. Hook.
 "I can only conclude that you are bady intoxicated. Unless you leave my study immediately, I shall have to call for assistance and have you ejected!"
 Joey Hook's red, beery face became purple. "Ave me ejected!" he roared. "Oh, yer would, would yer! Without payin' me the money—wot!"
 "I shall certainly pay you nothing, as I owe you nothing!" said Mr. Bootles with spirit. "I am astounded at your impudence!"
 "So you want to deny making the bet—is that it?" shouted Joey Hook. "That's why you 'adn't no money with you yesterday—hey?—so you could crawl out of it if the 'orse didn't get 'ome! Welsher!"
 "What—what!"
 "I'm 'ere for the ten quids, wot I 'ave won fair and square, a-riskin' of my hown 'ard-earned money," said Mr. Hook. "An', wot's more, you spadder, I ain't a-goin' without the spondulicks, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"
 "Are you mad?" shrieked Mr. Bootles. "Are you drunk, sir? Do you mean to accuse me, a master of Rookwood, of making a bet—of any concern whatever with so rascally a transaction as a bet?"
 "Oh, come orf it!" said Joey Hook. "That won't do for me. You laid the bet fair and square—one agin three on Wood-Pigeon for the Scrumper's Plate. I reckoned as 'ow you was a gentleman, and would pay up. I'm 'ere for the money, and I ain't a-goin' without it."
 "You must be mad! Dare you assert that I have laid a bet with you?" raved Mr. Bootles.
 "You know jolly well you 'ave, you bloomin' fat little spadder!"
 "Ruffian! Villain! Leave my study!"
 "Not without the spondulicks!" said Joey firmly.

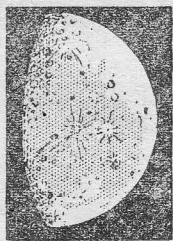
Mr. Bootles rose to his feet, almost trembling with wrath and indignation.
 "Insulting rascal! Go! Go at once, or I will have you thrown from the door!"
 Joey Hook jumped up, too, as enraged as Mr. Bootles. The Form-master backed away as a dirty paw was flourished in his face.
 "Ave me thrown out, would yer, you welshin' old spadder!" yelled Mr. Hook.
 "Why, I'll make mincemeat of yer in about two jiffies!"
 "Control yourself!" gasped Mr. Bootles, bounding round the table, as a murmur of voices was heard beneath his study window. Mr. Hook's furious voice rang across the quadrangle. "How dare you make a disturbance in my study! Go! I command you! Go!"
 "Har yer goin' to dub up, or har yer not?"
 "I will pay you nothing, as I owe you nothing!" said Mr. Bootles, banging his fist on his bell violently. "Go, before I have you thrown out, you vile scoundrel!"
 "Then I'm goin' to take it kouter yer 'ide till yer do!" roared the enraged Mr. Hook, and he rushed at the Form-master.
 "Help!" shrieked Mr. Bootles as he skipped round the table. "Help!"

At the first call from the alarmed Form-master Jimmy came scrambling headlong through the open window.
 He rolled into the study, head first, with a bump; but the captain of the Fourth did not care for a bump. He was on his feet again in a twinkling, and rushing to the rescue. After him, scrambling wildly through the window, came the chums, and half the Classical Fourth after them.
 Well was it for Mr. Bootles that his devoted Form were at hand.
 Joey Hook was almost blind with rage—for, naturally, nothing infuriates a swindler so much as being swindled, and Mr. Hook was fully convinced that Mr. Bootles had swindled him. Almost stuttering with fury, the book-maker chased Mr. Bootles round the study table, and caught him.
 Mr. Bootles was not built for contests of that sort. He had no chance whatever against Joey Hook.
 He fairly collapsed in the grasp of the infuriated bookmaker, and it would have gone hard for him had not rescue been at hand.
 But just as Joey Hook grasped the Form-master Jimmy Silver grasped Joey Hook.
 He threw his arms round Hook's neck from behind, and dragged him downwards with the sudden attack. The boy and man crashed to the floor together.
 "Rescue!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Pile in, the Fourth!"
 Jimmy and the furious rascal were rolling on the floor together, fighting furiously. But Lovell and Raby were in the study now, and they fairly jumped on Mr. Hook. Newcome was only a second later, and he piled in with both fists. Oswald and Conroy and Erol and Rawson came next, all struggling to get a hold on Mr. Hook. The unfortunate black-guard simply disappeared underneath the swarming juniors.
 Mr. Bootles stood looking on, dazed, and palpitating, almost thinking that the whole thing was some dreadful dream.
 Outside in the quad fellows were shouting. The study window was blocked with active juniors swarming to the rescue.
 The door was thrown open, and Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, strode in, and nearly trod on the struggling heap on the floor, and backed away just in time. The Head's face was like thunder.
 "What does this mean?" he thundered.
 "Mr. Bootles, this scene in your study—this disgraceful scene—that man, sir, whom I saw enter—his voice, sir, can be heard all over the school. What does it mean, Mr. Bootles?"
 "We've caught him, sir!" cried Silver.
 Mr. Bootles gasped spasmodically.
 "Dr. Chisholm, you cannot imagine that I asked that man to come here! He has forced himself into my study, insulted me most dreadfully, and attacked me—assaulted me, sir! I—I am astounded—stunned! I—I presume he is violently intoxicated! I shall send for the police for protection! I—I—I—" Mr. Bootles's voice failed him, and he sank, palpitating, into a chair.
 "Got him, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, looking up. He was seated on Mr. Hook's head, and the wretched Hook was gasping fearfully. "He insulted Mr. Bootles, sir, and we thought we ought to interfere!"
 "Quite so—quite so, Silver! You have acted very well," said the Head. "This scene is unparalleled. The audacity of the man to come here! Bless my soul! He must be ejected at once, and I will communicate with the police!"
 "Gerooooogh! Gerugggg!" came from Joey Hook. "Yooooooop! You dirty little villains! Yooop!"
 "What language!" gasped the Head. "Bulkeley, Neville, Jones, Dickinson"—the prefects came hurrying up—"to you—do you think you would be equal to removing this drunken ruffian from the premises?"
 "Certainly, sir!" said Bulkeley cheerfully. "Quite easily, sir! You leave him to us all right! Clear out of the way, you kids!"
 Somewhat reluctantly Jimmy Silver & Co. allowed the Sixth-Formers to deprive them of their prey. Mr. Hook, stuttering and gasping, completely winded, was bundled out of the study in the grasp of the big seniors, and yanked bodily out of the House. There were loud cheers as he was flung down the steps, whirled across the quadrangle, and pitched hard into the road.
 In the Form-master's study Mr. Bootles turned to Jimmy Silver & Co. with tears of gratitude in his eyes.
 "My dear boys," he said, "thank you—thank you! I am sorry to see your nose is swollen, Silver. I might have been seriously injured if you had not come to my rescue. My dear boys, I thank you!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
 A Little Liveliness.
 "RESCUE!" roared Jimmy Silver. Jimmy Silver's idea of hanging around in case there was any kicking-out to be done had been a happy thought.

(Concluded on page 20.)

A Wonderful
 FREE
 GIFT



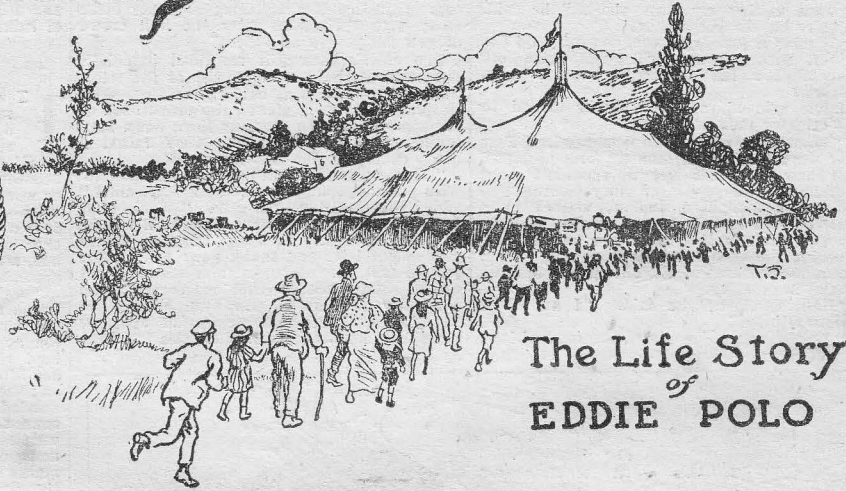
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THE THREADS OF THE STORY.

EDDIE POLO as an unknown boy acrobat joins Busto's World-Famed Menagerie and Circus in Western America. He quickly makes his mark, and becomes great friends with Ginger the clown, and Esta, Mr. Busto's charming daughter. By his skill in the ring he incurs the jealousy of Del Rogeriguo, the Spanish trapeze artiste, who makes several attempts to get rid of him by so-called "accidents." At the same time he makes it hot for himself to stay, and leaves, breathing revenge on his late rival. A performance in the great marquee is drawing to a close when suddenly twelve bandits draw out revolvers and hold up the audience. Eddie, at the top of the tent, sees his opportunity, and, at the risk of his own life, saves the situation. He is injured, and is taken into Mr. Busto's own caravan, where Esta takes charge of him. But they discover later that his hurts are not so serious as was supposed, and within a few days is almost himself again. One evening whilst several of the circus people were talking to the sheriff a horseman rides up and tells them that the Redskins have broken out of the reservation and were bearing down upon the town. A hurried defence is put up, and as the Indians are sighted Eddie Polo informs the sheriff he has a scheme that will prevent any bloodshed, and will be more effective than fighting.

(Now read on.)

Eddie Polo's Idea!

THE suggestion put forward by Eddie Polo in the crowded saloon was received at first with many loud laughs, and then, as the citizens of Texasville realised its effectiveness, they fell to work to carry it out without loss of time. First of all, to the horror of the bar-keeper, they commandeered every bottle of whisky, gin, and rum he had in the place, ransacking his shelves and cellars till both were equally bare. Then, carefully carrying armfuls of the fiery spirits, they wandered out into the Alkali desert, and carefully dropped the filled bottles here and there, so that, had an innocent observer happened that way, it would have appeared that the intoxicating spirits had accidentally been dropped from some passing van and overlooked.

Then the villagers retired within their barriers once more, and waited for the coming of the Redskins, who, by the way, would never have dared to attack the village had they not been previously inflamed by smuggled firewater. And, just before dawn, when the moon was really justifying her existence, they came in a mad, close-packed crowd, waving axes, scythes, billhooks—all the weapons of an undisciplined mob who desired nothing better or worse than to merely kill and slay.

And in front of them, driven on by their

impetuous attack, came a weird figure, which, when it reached eyeshot of the armed camp, immediately provoked a roar of laughter. For it was the figure of Garcia del Rogeriguo, caught between the deep sea of the marauding Indians and the devil of the village he had already outraged. But there was no anger in that village against the half-caste now, for every soul had been told of the punishment meted out to him at Eddie Polo's suggestion, and so the rough miners and cowboys only laughed at the ludicrous figure he cut as he fled for his life in front of the attackers.

"Don't fire at all," counselled Eddie Polo. "Let the Reds think we're all asleep, or they may rush on us so madly that they'll overlook the booze we've spread out for them, and it will come to bloodshed after all. Keep your guns handy, though, for you may require to use them."

By this time the first wave of the advancing Indians—the more sober outposts who had not, as yet, been able to obtain their fair share of firewater—were almost upon the scattered bottles. On they came, yelling and shouting so loudly that they must have awakened a village of the dead. And then suddenly one stumbled and fell. As he picked himself up the watchers could see he had a bottle in his hand—a bottle that he shook and then examined with wonderment.

"We oughter provided corkscrews," put in the bar-keeper. "They'll smash them bottles, somethin' crool, I know."

"Better lose a few bottles than your scalp," replied Eddie. "And they'll need no corkscrews. Hallo, they've taken the bait all right. Now for some fun!"

The man who had found the bottle had suddenly yelled, and held up his discovered treasure in full sight of his comrades.

Two or three of them gathered round him, and then commenced to search for treasures for themselves. And, in the twinkling of an eye, the marauding Indians forgot that they had started out with the intention of collecting a few white scalps, forgot everything save that here was a gift from the gods themselves—a more than liberal supply of firewater. They found the bottles, and they cracked the necks off and drank out of the broken vessels with the greatest gusto, sitting down on the sand and alkali for greater comfort after the first tentative sip.

"Heaven send the supply's big enough," said Eddie. "Or the only thing we'll gain is the greater desire to take life and shed blood. I've seen a few half-screwed Reds on the warpath before to-day, and they aren't nice things to meet, I can tell you."

"They'll screw themselves right home with that little lot, never fear," put in Ginger, the clown. "And won't they have heads on 'em in the morning!"

From every window, from between the wheels of the waggons and above the clumps of rock which served as cover, armed men

anxiously watched the Indians, who were in numbers sufficiently large to have eaten that village and all it contained. But the Indians paid no heed to the watchers—all they were anxious about was the preventing of others absorbing more than their due share of this Heaven-sent loot; all they desired was to get beautifully intoxicated, and then to lie down and sleep off the effects of the wonderful, free, gratis drink.

And so they sat and drank, till those with the weaker heads commenced to quarrel among themselves, and their friends took sides, and presently there was a free fight on top of the little bluff. But still there were those who kept themselves aloof from such unimportant matters as scrapping while there yet remained a drop in a bottle. The fighters, too, once down, never took the trouble to rouse themselves again, but pillowed their heads on the sand and promptly sailed off into a dreamland of their own, where the rivers flowed with firewater, and the mountains were stacks of whisky-bottles.

And, at long last, after what seemed to the weary watchers an eternity, but which was hardly two hours, the sun stole over the edge of the horizon, and revealed the forms of the prostrate Indians, lying about just where they had fallen.

"Look!" said Eddie suddenly. "There's one feathered chap sober, anyway!"

The circus people followed the direction of his pointing finger with their eyes, and made out Del Rogeriguo, still in his tar and feathers, helping himself to the blanket of a snoring brave, and then slipping away like a shadow into the desert itself. And as he went the villagers stole from their hiding-places with rifles resting on their arms, and revolvers loosened in their holsters, and rode boldly towards the sleeping Indians. Without a sound they made a round of the whole camp, and collected for themselves every bow and arrow, every old-fashioned and out-of-date rifle and shotgun, and even a couple of Colt revolvers, every hatchet, hammer, scythe, pluning-hook, or other weapon with which the red men had armed themselves. And, when all these were stacked together in a heap at the foot of the hill, the bar-keeper deluged them with paraffin and set a match to them, making a gigantic bonfire.

"Now for the circus," said Eddie. "Mount, everybody, and ride round the sleepers. Use your own alarm clocks to wake 'em up, and round 'em into a nice little mob ready for roping and branding."

He drew his revolver as he spoke, and thrust his heels into Grey Wind. Round and round, in a shouting, yelling line, with weapons cracking and barking, the citizens whirled, while the awakened Indians, roused, lifted their heavy heads and swollen eyelids, and wondered if by any chance the happy

hunting grounds into which they had strayed had suddenly become peopled with madmen. And as they looked the circling horses came nearer, so that those on the fringe had to step back lively to avoid getting their toes trodden upon, and presently, when all hands were awake, the Reds were completely corralled, then, and only then, did Eddie call a halt.

"That finishes my turn, sheriff," he said. "You're on the stage next."
"It's bin a star turn, too, sonny," said the sheriff, with a grin. "I guess these 'ere Reds ain't a-goin' ter fergit it in a 'urry, neither."

Eddie grinned, and the sheriff turned to the cowering mob of Indians.

"Whar's the chief?" he demanded. "Pass ther word fer 'im ter step up 'ere, prompto, and shew doo cause why we shouldn't shoot ther hull lot of yew inter glory one-time!"

A most dissipated Indian, attired in a blue-and-yellow blanket, and sporting a single drooping eagle feather in his hair, approached, brushing the sand from his face as he came. He halted in front of the sheriff and held up a hand in greeting.

"Hail, paleface!" he said. "I am Chief Yellow Horse!"

"Howdy, chief?" retorted the man of law.

firewater what's given yew yewr 'eadaches, a few of us mightier bin shy of our scalps this fine mornin'. Chief, there's no tellin' 'ow many laws yew've broken just recent—one agin collectin' in a body, another about leavin' ther reservation, a third about carryin' arms to ther detriment of yewr fellermen, an' a fourth about drinkin' firewater. Strikes me as it'll only be meetin' ther interests of justice if I tells my men ter blaze away with their guns inter the hull crowd of yew till yew're all killed."

The chief's face still remained immobile, but some of the more cowardly of the tribe, while brave enough at cutting the throats of sleeping white men, viewed the proposition of the same white men shooting them down with indifferent eyes. Therefore they raised a great outcry at the sheriff's words.

"Thet suggestion don't seem to be meetin' with ther popularity it deserves, chief," added the sheriff with a grin. "Waal, we'll let it go at thet, but next time we'll not be so easy on yew. Pick up the few things yew've got left, and thank yewr lucky stars yew've still got 'em! An' now march, right quick, right back to ther reservation, and don't let me 'ear of yew even thinkin' of payin' this village a surprise visit agin, or there'll be bullets instead o' bottles ter meet

'Sides, I don't suppose he'll care about seein' his name in the papers at all."

"Mebbe not—mebbe not!" came the sheriff's remark. "But, gee, he's shore some kid, an' 'e'll go fur—mark my word, 'e'll go fur!"

Which, all things considered, might be considered a token of the sheriff's farsightedness; but then, are not all guardians of law and order chosen for their exceptional powers of looking a long way ahead?

Kidnapped!

IT was three days later when Busto once more struck camp at Texasville, and set out upon the dusty trail to the next stopping-place—another one-eyed western location marked on the survey maps as Scooter's Drift. History does not state who or what "Scooter" was, nor how he came to drift—or even what there was for him to drift over, unless it was the little plank bridge that crossed the river a mile out of town—but, none the less, that was the name of the place, and it can't be helped, anyway, at this distant date.

The advent of the circus in the Drift was the usual national event—the usual excuse for an additional holiday. The dame who kept the tiny school grumbled loudly when her fifteen and a half pupils demanded a day off; and the shopkeepers put up their shutters and hurried out into the scrub just outside the town to help the remainder of the populace watch the tent-hands erecting the huge marquee, and to pass more or less acid remarks on the fitness of the horseflesh and the possibility of this man or that woman being "Eddie Polo, the Acrobat King," or "Esta, the Excellent Equestrienne" as per the flaring, many-coloured posters scattered over the one-horse town. Even the women forsook their hen-farms, and their baking-boards to come and stare, and when Busto decided to open in the afternoon as well as the evening, the whole of Scooter's Drift turned up like one soul to plank down its fifty cents and sit staring at Eddie Polo risking his life and neck, Esta performing wonderful tricks with her horses, Red Cloud sticking knives into a board around the form of Scooter's Drift's mayor, Bud Truefit and his outfit showing them how to use a lariat or a gun, and Ginger Wigglies saying saucy and witty things about them and their town and his colleagues and everything in general.

And they came for another section in the evening, and wondered what town would have the good fortune to experience the thrill when Eddie Polo did really break his neck. And, had Busto been anxious to stay, the population of the Drift would have filled his tent twice a day for a week, till the emptiness of pockets had driven the men back to work; the shortage of food had coaxed the women back to their hen-roosts and ovens, and Dame Mugar's cane had persuaded the youthful circus-fans to resume their studies of the intricacies of algebra and the twistiness of the real English language.

But Busto, after the first day, wasted no more time on the Drift. No sooner was the evening programme concluded than the men fell on the great canyans marquee—which Busto had bought outright from Professor Basham and his bruisers, under a threat to turn Eddie Polo loose on him if he refused to deal—and stacked it on the lorry reserved for its transportation. Everybody worked swiftly and noisily, for everybody knew his own and everybody else's work, and as the great naphtha flares were doused and piled in a truck before the last tent was down, they had to finish their work in the semi-darkness, for the moon had not yet fully risen behind the distant hills.

The procession formed up a little after dawn, and Busto, seated at the reins in his own caravan, took the lead, as they struck the trail for the next town—Sulphur Springs.

"Say, Eddie," remarked the showman, there's a little matter I'm wanting to discuss with you—a private matter. Hop up here alongside me, and we'll talk as we jog along!"

Eddie Polo, who usually rode the horse Grey Wind while the cavalcade marched from town to town, reined in with a smile, and, throwing his reins over to Busto to hold, dismounted. A moment later he had sprung to the riding-seat of the gaudy van, and hitched Grey Wind's reins to an empty lamp-bracket.

"Thanks, boss!" he said. "Though what you and me can have to discuss privately I've no idea. You aren't going to ask me to commit murder for you, by any chance?"

"When I want that sort of thing done, I'll



A dissipated looking Indian, attired in a blue-and-yellow blanket, and sporting a single eagle's feather, approached. He halted in front of the sheriff, and held up his hand in greeting. "Hail, paleface!" he said. "I am Chief Yellow Horse!"

"Well, what's ther meain', of this jamboree of yorn? What're yew all doin' so far away from yewr reservation so early in ther mornin', eh?"

The chief's face never moved a muscle.

"We have been walking in the moonlight," he said, lying with the greatest of ease and dignity, "and have slept on the bosom of the kind earth. But it has given us headaches, and we would fain return whence we came."

"'Eadaches—eh?" repeated the sheriff, while the others chuckled. "I kinder suspicion them empty bottles lyin' about ther place could say a word 'er two about ther 'eadaches, Yaller 'Orse. An', say, 'ow long 'as it bin necessary fer reds like yew ter tote all kind of deadly weppins about with yew when yew circumambulate in a peaceful fashion about ther desert, contrary ter all law an' custom? Me an' my posse 'ere 'ad no end of a big job a-collectin' them arms of yorn, and we've wasted quite a quart of good paraffin-oil in burnin' 'em. Chief, I've er kinda sneakin' suspicion as yew intended attackin' an' burnin' up this 'ere village last night as ever were, an' that if yew 'adn't a-stumbled, accidental, on them bottles of

yew next time. On yewr hind legs, ther lot of yew—march, prompto!"

And the Indians, mostly holding their heads and wishing they had never been born, marched back into the desert across which, a few hours before, they had scurried with hatred and murder in their hearts. A few cast looks of hatred upon the mounted white men, but the ready revolvers in their holsters were far too handy to permit of any successful attack, and, realising this, even the hottest-headed one as well, marched off in silence back to the reservation.

"Waal, thet's through, without anybody 'cept ther bar-keep bein' hurt one bit," remarked the sheriff. "And it's all thanks ter yewr boy Polo, boss. Say, I rather think we'd better confer ther freedom of this 'ere village on 'im as a token of our esteem an' gratitude, an' write ter ther Noo Yawk papers about his brainy wheeze fer stavin' 'er Indian attacks. Some Red fighter, thet kid!"

"I shouldn't advertise it too much," replied Busto, with a grin, "or Eddie Polo and a few of them Reds might be foregathering one of these days, and Eddie'll lose his scalp.

send for Del Rogeriguo," smiled Busto. "By the way, that reminds me that we haven't been troubled with the rascal since we left Texasville after the Indian stunt. Tar and feathers seem to have cured him of desiring your death."

"I hope so," replied Eddie. "He was getting a bit of a nuisance, because I could never guess what new trick he was going to play on me. I'm glad, too, that Lopez has gone—maybe the two of 'em are together. In any case, I'm not worrying, because I've always proved, up to the moment of writing, able to handle the dago, and though I believe he's not finished with yet, I hope to be equally ready in the future."

Busto nodded, and for a long minute regarded the tails of the greys jogging along under his control.

"It's that future I wanted to talk to you about, Eddie," he said quietly. "I've been thinking things over, and it strikes me you've done a mighty lot to keep this show together—more than anybody else. It was you fought that first battle for the marquee after the old one had been burned all up, and it was you stopped the dago from rushing away with the takings. If he'd got away with either of those things, we'd have been ruined. So, taking it big and large, it appears to me as you've got a big interest in this show, and so I'm going to offer you the chance of becoming a partner in it. Well, what do you say to that?"

Eddie's jaw dropped with astonishment. He had certainly never expected anything of the kind.

"Say?" he answered, when he at last found words. "Say? Well, I don't quite know what to say, except that it's just like a great, big man like you to make the offer! But there's others that you must think of before me—there's Esta, and Bud Truefit, who's presently going to become your son-in-law. He should be a partner. Then there's Ginger Wiggles."

who has been with you so long—surely he ought to be considered as worthy of more reward than me! They've all been with you as many years as I have months, and I think you ought to give any of them the chance rather than me. I'm sure that I should make you a rotten partner, anyway."

"Thinking of others again, eh—always thinking of others, and never of yourself?" remarked Busto kindly. "Well, lad, if I had to choose out of them all for a partner, it'd be you I choose. Say, couldn't you cut out Bud Truefit, and fix up with Esta yourself? The girl's mighty fond of you, I know!"

"That wouldn't be playing the game!" retorted Eddie. "Besides, Esta's only fond of me as a sister is fond of a brother. It's a feeling quite different from that she has for Bud. And I wouldn't try to rob Bud. If I took Esta from him, I'd feel as mean—as mean as Del Rogeriguo! You're only kidding when you suggest it, boss; you'd hate me if I said I'd do it! And it's Esta and Bud as must be your partners, and I'll stop along with the show and help 'em to make it a success as far as I can. Look here, Mr. Busto, if you really want to show your appreciation of the little I've been able to do, give me a rise in pay of, say, three dollars a week, and tell Esta she can marry Bud right away, and that you'll take her and him into partnership. Do it now, boss, as they say in the free sample advertisements—do it now!"

"Good lad, Polo!" said Busto, as he stretched out his hand and gripped that of the lad. "I'll do it! Your screw's raised from last week-end by ten dollars, not three, and I'll give Bud Truefit notice that he's to prepare to get hitched as soon as we reach Sulphur Springs. Here, let's hand the glad news to the girl!"

He half-turned round in his seat. "Esta!" he called, in a loud voice. "I've a word for you!"

Eddie smiled, expecting to hear the girl's

voice above his head as she leaned out of the half-door. But the little muslin curtain remained undisturbed, and no girl came out. Indeed, she could not have heard, for she never answered.

"Drat the girl!" exclaimed Busto, with mock testiness. "Why doesn't she answer? Just look through that curtain, Eddie, and see if you can spot her. I'll bet she's canoodling in there with Bud Truefit—that man hasn't been able to look after his outfit on the road this last month. Wake her up, will you?"

Eddie rose to his feet, and leaned over the half door.

"Esta!" he called. Again there was no answer.

He peered into the caravan, craning his neck to see if the girl was lying on her bunk. But the berth was empty. Then, even as Eddie looked, the rear door of the van swung gently back, and showed the empty open road behind the caravan. And as something small and white attached to this door caught his eye, Eddie Polo gave a sharp, involuntary exclamation.

With a quick spring he vaulted the half-door, crossed the floor of the van, and then re-emerged to the starting point.

Busto looked up from filling his pipe.

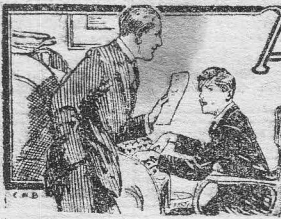
"Found her, Polo?" he asked.

"No," replied Eddie crisply. "The van's empty!" She isn't here at all, though her hat is lying on her berth. But I have found something—I've found this sticking to the door!"

And he held out to the thunderstruck showman a small white feather of the kind used for stuffing pillows, which bore, half-way up its underside, the unmistakable stain of sticky, black, strong tar.

(Another instalment of Eddie Polo's Life-story next week.)

WRITE TO YOUR EDITOR ABOUT IT!



A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS PLEASED TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS. ADDRESS: EDITOR, THE "POPULAR," THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

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Under this title Frank Richards has written for next week a story which will appeal irresistibly to every one of the many friends of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

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IMAGINATION.

There is real imagination in a letter which comes to me from a steadfast and loyal reader of the C.P.'s. He writes of a friend of his, and of the cheery times they had together. The best part of it all is that this correspondent is imaginative without knowing it. He appreciates friendship. You may say that is a common enough trait, but I am not so sure. It is the individual who gets hold of that kind of imagination, which is own brother to sympathy, who finds the best in life, for life with such becomes, what it is, a brilliant and romantic adventure all the time, notwithstanding the jars and sets back which are the common lot.

INSOMNIA.

I am tremendously obliged to a chum of mine whose name is Robert Livesey. He is

making his friends take up the Companion Papers, and he does this in true sporting style. For example, if Joe Beckett beats Tommy Burns this correspondent will give his mate copies of the "Gem" and "Magnet." Quite a neat notion! But this is nothing to do with insomnia, you will say, and you are right. My faithful supporter cannot sleep Tuesday nights through thinking of the next day's "Gem." Well, I don't want him to lose his rest, only to have a cheery time. I wish him the sleep of the just on those Tuesdays he mentions. He will be all the fresher for the Wednesday pleasure.

SOMETHING ABOUT EVERYBODY.

All the characters of note, pretty well, come in for mention, and the new "Who's Who" covers a lot of ground. Numbers of my chums write to me with questions about the life of the three schools, and so forth. They will find all they want to know in the new "Holiday Annual."

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Fellows who are interested in keeping rabbits, in music, in the cinema, in puzzles, and a dozen other interesting subjects, will find their wants specially catered for in the new volume of the "Holiday Annual." There is a paper by Clive Fenn, illustrated by Warwick Reynolds; and then you must not forget the Tangram.

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Perhaps you have never heard of the Tangram, perhaps you have; but whichever way it is you will, I know, admit that the Tangram is a cheery little amusement. You can carry it about in your waistcoat-pocket, and find it interesting at any time, just as the old Chinese who lived in the back ages realised. It will do for a wet day—one might think it had been specially designed for the British climate!—likewise for a fine one,

Your Editor

PEELE'S IMPERSONATION!

(Continued from page 16.)

"Not at all, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "You can always depend on the Classical Fourth, sir!"

And the heroes of the Fourth marched off, feeling very pleased with themselves, and leaving Mr. Bootles still palpitating.

The strange affair caused quite a sensation

at Rookwood. In Smythe's study the Classical Nuts yelled with laughter over it, till they howled themselves almost hoarse.

The other fellows were puzzled as to why Mr. Hook should have come. But Peele and his friends weren't puzzled—they knew. But after some reflection Jimmy Silver & Co. were no longer in the dark. From what they had heard the bookmaker say, they gathered that he had come under a mistaken impression—and they remembered Peele's expedition in disguise as Mr. Bootles—and they put two and two together correctly.

The result was that Peele and his friends did not find the affair so funny as they at

first supposed. For they were collared by the Fistical Four and taken to the end study, where judgment was passed on them. As it was not in the game to give them up to punishment, the Fisticals administered the punishment themselves—with the assistance of a cricket-stump—and then kicked Peele and his yelling chums out of the study and out of the Rookwood Players' Club at the same time. So the humorous Peele for quite a long time afterwards felt anything but humorous.

THE END.

(Another grand long story next week, entitled: "Leggett's Loot!")

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