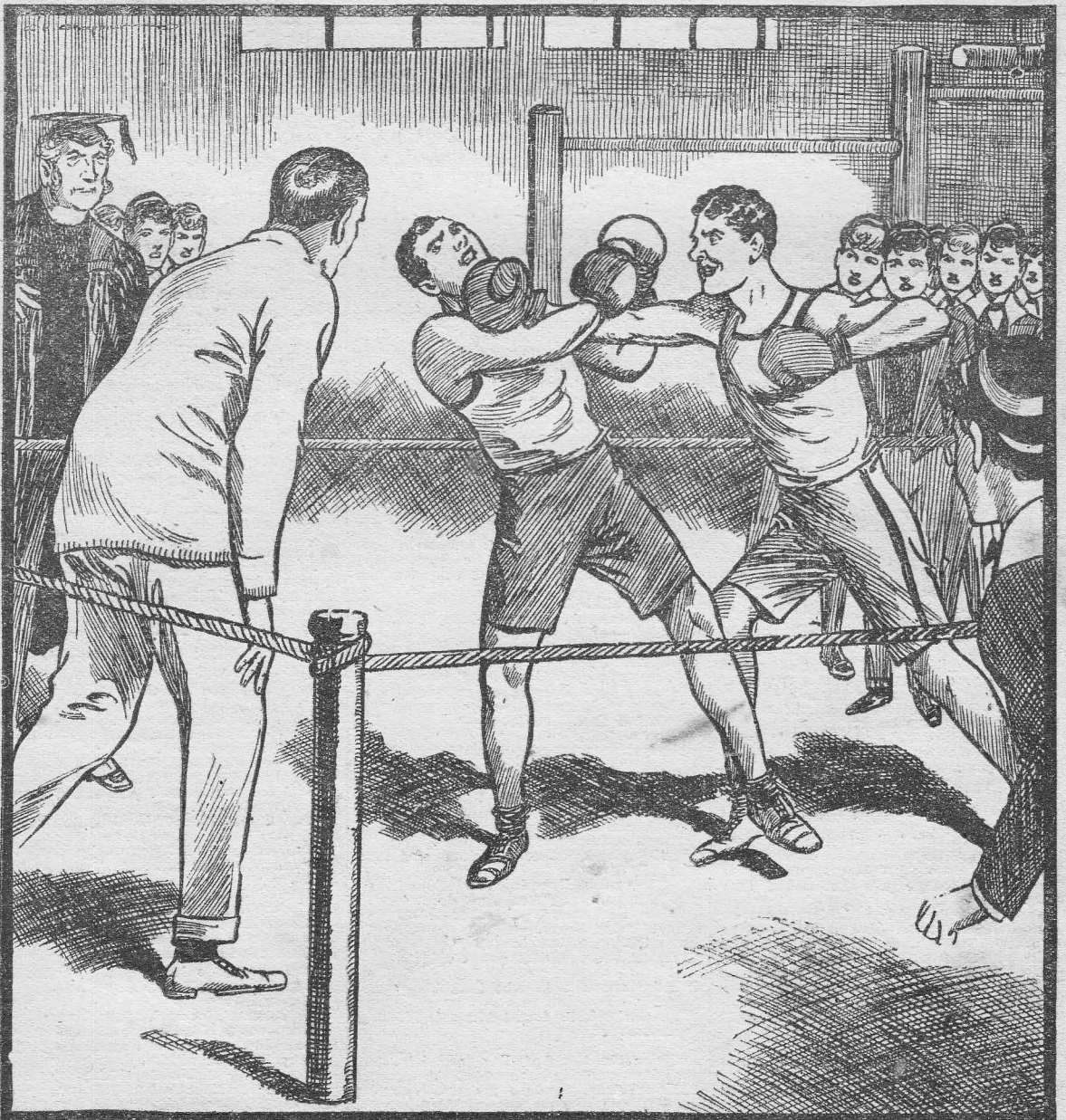


"HIS WORD OF HONOUR!" ONE OF OUR TOPPING SCHOOL STORIES INSIDE!

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THE BLOW THAT WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE FIFTH!

(A Thrilling Moment in the Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

A SPLENDID STORY OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL!



HIS WORD OF HONOUR

A Magnificent, Long
Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co.

By

Frank Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Coker's Promise!

"MY only aunt!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Coker's aunt, you mean?" said Harry Wharton.

"Stand clear of the gates!" muttered Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five of the Remove were standing in the old gateway of Greyfriars, when Coker of the Fifth came into view. Beside him, struggling to keep pace with his tremendous stride, was his Aunt Judy.

The juniors made way for these two celebrities to pass.

Neither Coker nor his aunt—who had paid a surprise visit to Greyfriars that afternoon—deigned to recognise Harry Wharton & Co.

Coker's face wore a hangdog expression, and his eyes were downcast; whilst his aunt, clasping her umbrella as if she meant to do someone an injury, was frowning.

"Looks like trouble in the family," remarked Frank Nugent, when the couple had passed.

"Coker's going to see his aunt off at the station, I suppose," said Wharton.

"But why should he look so jolly gum?"

"Ask me another!"

"Perhaps he's afraid that the tipfulness will not be terrific," suggested Hurree Singh, in his quaint English.

"That's about it," said Bob Cherry. "He's afraid that his Aunt Judy won't give him a substantial tip on parting."

"I've never seen Coker look so sick," said Johnny Bull. "Wonder what the trouble is? Still, it's no business of ours, I suppose. Let's go and change for footer."

And the Famous Five strolled away towards the building.

They were quite correct in assuming that there was trouble in the family, so far as Coker of the Fifth was concerned.

Aunt Judy had arrived at Greyfriars at a decidedly awkward moment.

On entering Coker's study, she had found her hopeful nephew grovelling on the floor, engaged in a fierce wrestling match with Potter.

There had been an exchange of compliments between Coker and his study-mate, and words had led to blows.

Eventually, Coker had seized Potter round the middle, and borne him to the floor. And he had been endeavouring to thrust Potter's head into the coal-scuttle, when he walked Aunt Judy.

Explanations had followed. But those explanations had, in American parlance, cut no ice with Coker's aunt. Levelling her umbrella at the two Fifth-Formers, she had ordered them to go and cleanse themselves. On their return to the study, she had lectured them severely on the subject of brawling. And she had wound up with the words of one of her favourite poets:

"Your lives should be as sweet and fair as fragrant summer roses;
Your hands weren't fashioned, I declare, to punch each other's noses!"

No further reference had been made to the affair. But Coker felt that he hadn't heard the last of it yet. On the way to the

station, he reflected, his aunt was bound to return to the unpleasant topic. And she did—but not until they had reached the little platform of Friardale.

"Horace!" said Aunt Judy, in a rasping voice.

"Yes, aunt!"

"I want to extract a solemn promise from you."

"Great pip!"

Aunt Judy frowned.

"I wish you would refrain from using such vulgar and opprobrious expressions!" she said.

"You are not the gentle, sweet-tempered boy I used to know. Now, when you were a tiny little cherub of four—"

"Stow it!" muttered Coker. "I—I mean, go ahead, aunt! What's this solemn promise you want me to make?"

"I want you to promise me faithfully that there shall be no repetition of the disgraceful occurrence I witnessed this afternoon."

"You—you mean—"

"I mean that you will never again indulge in fisticuffs!"

Coker's face fell.

"But—but that's impossible, aunt!"

"I fail to understand you, Horace!"

"You can't expect me to go right through the term without scrapping—"

"I have no objection to friendly bouts with the gloves," said Aunt Judy. "But I strongly object to brawling and fighting. Come, Horace! It is not much that I ask of you. I merely wish you to refrain from taking part in such exhibitions as I witnessed this afternoon!"

Coker hesitated.

"But there, are times when fighting is justifiable—" he protested.

"Fighting, in the sense you mean, is never justifiable."

"Are you a pacifist, aunt?"

"I am a lover of peace and quietness."

"But supposing a fellow came up to me and dotted me on the boko—"

"Horace!"

"I—I mean, smacked me on the face?"

"Then you should turn the other cheek."

"Ahem!"

Coker did not hold with this view at all. He believed in an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a thick ear for a thick ear. A fellow who turned the other cheek was, in Coker's opinion, either a white-livered funk or a silly ass.

"Shakespeare tells us to cherish those hearts that hate us," continued Aunt Judy.

"Was Shakespeare a conscientious objector?" asked Coker.

"He did not believe in strife."

"But wasn't he the chap who said:

"Twice armed is he who hath his quarrel just;

But thrice is he armed who gets his blow in fust?"

"He wrote the first line, certainly, but some irresponsible person added the second," said Aunt Judy. "But see, my train is coming in. Will you give me your word of honour, Horace, that you will indulge in no further bouts of fisticuffs?"

Again Coker hesitated. He knew that he would find a promise of that sort very difficult of performance.

But the Fifth-Former had a strong affection for his aunt. He knew that she would be deeply hurt if he refused to make the promise. And so, little dreaming how much that promise was likely to cost him, he made it.

"I'll promise you what you ask, aunt," he said. "I'll take part in no fights, barring friendly bouts with the gloves."

Aunt Judy's face brightened.

"You give me your word, Horace?" she said eagerly.

"I give you my word of honour," was the solemn reply.

"Thank you, Horace! I am so glad you are going to be a gentle and peaceable boy again!"

Coker gave an almost inaudible grunt.

The train was in by this time, but Aunt Judy opened her purse and drew out a five-pound note, which she handed to her nephew.

"Kindly accept this, Horace," she said, "with my love and good wishes!"

Then she pecked Coker on the cheek, and hurriedly boarded the train.

"Jest in time, ma'am!" said the guard, as he waved his flag.

The train moved out of the little station.

Aunt Judy leaned from the carriage-window, her fluttering handkerchief greeting Coker's gaze until the train disappeared round a curve.

"No more scrapping!" muttered Coker, as he turned away. "It's going to be jolly hard to turn the other cheek, but I'll do it. I've given my word of honour."

And he walked slowly and thoughtfully out of the station.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Coker's Curious Conduct!

WHEN the Famous Five reached the football-ground, they found that a calamity had occurred. The ball with which a number of juniors had been playing had burst.

"It's the third ball that's gone west this week," explained Peter Todd.

"And the club doesn't possess any more," added Dennis Carr.

"How did it happen?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Did Billy Bunter sit on it?"

"Ha, ha! No! Bolsover major booted it rather harder than necessary," said Vernon-Smith.

"Then Bolsover ought to pay for a new ball," said Harry Wharton.

Bolsover major's refusal to do this was more emphatic than polite.

"Bust the ball!" he growled.

"You appear to have done that already, with great success!" said Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five exchanged glances.

"I suppose we'd better nip down to the village and buy another ball?" said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"The footer club's flourishing," he said.

"But if we continue to bust balls at the rate of three a week we shall find ourselves in the cart."

Having obtained the necessary funds for the purchase of a new ball, the Famous Five set out on foot for Friardale.

At the little sports outfitter's shop, which

was kept by a retired professional footballer; they obtained a splendid match-ball.

"The price is thirty bob," explained the shopman, "but as you young genies are good customers you can have it for twenty-five."

"Thank you, Charles," said Bob Cherry blandly. "Your generosity is only exceeded by your personal beauty, which isn't apparent except under a powerful microscope!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The man called Charles, whose face resembled a hatchet, glared at the humorous Bob, who, quite unmoved by the glare, strolled out of the shop with his chums.

"This is a ripping ball!" said Harry Wharton, fondling it affectionately.

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Bull. "If Bolsover busts this one, we'll jolly well bust Bolsover!"

The juniors had not proceeded very far along the village street when half a dozen hulking louts bore down upon them. They were led by a hooligan named Jarvis, with whom the Greyfriars juniors had had a great deal of trouble in the past.

Bob Cherry was the first to catch sight of the village roughs.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Looks as if we're in for it!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton clenched his hands as he observed the advancing foe.

"The rotters!" he exclaimed. "They mean mischief!"

"Afraid so!" murmured Nugent.

Had the Famous-Five chosen to take to their heels, they could easily have outstripped their would-be assailants.

But that was not their way. They lined up, shoulder to shoulder, on the pavement, and waited until the party came up to them.

"Look here, what's the little game?" demanded Wharton.

Jarvis chuckled.

"Jolly nice ball you've got there!" he said. "What of it?"

"I was just thinkin' it'd come in very handy for us to practise with on the village green. Hand it over!"

Wharton looked grim.

"We're not parting with this ball!" he said.

"Your mistake—you are!"

And with the words Jarvis made a rush at the captain of the Remove.

But he never reached his objective.

Bob Cherry's fist shot out straight from the shoulder, and the leader of the village gang staggered back. He would have fallen had he not clutched at the lamp-post for support.

"At 'em!" he snarled. "Give 'em beans!"

And the next moment a wild and whirling fight was in progress.

The Famous Five fought with pluck and resolution. But they were no match for the hefty village louts, who gradually wore down their attack.

Frank Nugent was lifted clean off his feet by a powerful drive, and Hurree Singh was badly tripped, and he rolled over on top of his chum.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull continued to offer a stout resistance, although the first-named was handicapped by having to hold the football. He dared not get rid of it, for it would be pounced upon instantly by one of the roughs.

Outnumbered though they were, the three juniors fought on gamely. But their defeat seemed inevitable.

Suddenly the portly form of P.-c. Tozer hove into view.

Frank Nugent, who was sitting up on the pavement, caressing his injured jaw, shouted to the constable.

"Help! This way, Tozey!"

Mr. Tozer took in the situation at a glance. He knew that he was powerless to deal with half a dozen hooligans of the Jarvis calibre, so, deeming discretion the better part of valour, he promptly disappeared down a side-tunnelling.

"Help!" repeated Frank Nugent, at the top of his lungs.

But P.-c. Tozer was out of earshot.

Nugent gave a snort of wrath and scrambled to his feet, only to be sent down again by another smashing drive.

When he was able to sort himself out and struggle into a sitting posture, he saw that his chums were on the verge of exhaustion.

Harry Wharton still clung tightly to the ball, but it was only too obvious that he would soon have to relinquish it.

Nugent looked eagerly up and down the street, and then, to his joy, he caught sight of Coker of the Fifth. He was evidently returning from the railway-station.

"Help! Rescue, Greyfriars!" yelled Nugent.

Coker was almost on the scene by this time. He clenched his big fists, and looked as if he was going to hurl himself into the fray. Then he stopped short, as if suddenly remembering something, and his hands fell to his sides.

"Don't stand there looking on!" shouted Nugent. "Give these fellows a hand!"

The request was perfectly reasonable. Coker was not a member of the Remove, but he was a Greyfriars fellow, and it was up to him to lend his assistance against the common foe.

But he hung back, and Frank Nugent could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Quick, Coker!" panted Harry Wharton. "We can't hold out much longer!"

"Yah! He's a funk!" sneered Jarvis. And so it seemed.

For Coker passed on down the street without raising a finger to help the Famous Five.

"The coward—the awful coward!" muttered Frank Nugent indignantly.

"He has left us lurchfully in the cart!" gasped Hurree Singh.

"And he's heftily enough to wipe up the ground with Jarvis! The cad! We'll let all Greyfriars know about this!"

Meanwhile, the unequal battle continued.

Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh rejoined the fray, but all the fight had been knocked out of them, and they were merely passengers.

Things would have gone hard for Harry Wharton & Co. had not help arrived at an opportune moment.

About a dozen Highlife fellows, headed by Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar, came hurrying to the spot. They had little love for the village louts, and without standing on ceremony they rushed to the attack.

Jarvis & Co. were taken completely by surprise. They scattered like chaff before the reaper, and presently they took to their heels without having achieved their object—that of relieving Harry Wharton of the football.

The captain of the Remove looked anything but presentable as he turned to thank his benefactors. His lip was bleeding, one of his eyes was discoloured, and his collar had slipped its moorings. As for Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, they looked as if they had been trying conclusions with a steam-roller or an earthquake.

"It was awfully good of you fellows to chip in!" said Wharton.

"Rot, dear boy!" replied the Caterpillar. "We don't like the village bobble-de-hoys any more than you do, begad!"

"They're cowards as well as curs!" said Frank Courtenay contemptuously. "Directly they found themselves up against it they scooted. By the way, how did the trouble begin?"

"They wanted to bag our ball," explained Bob Cherry. "Thought we'd calmly hand it over, without protest."

"My hat!"

"Goodness knows what would have happened if you fellows hadn't come on the scene!" said Johnny Bull.

"We should all have been knocked out by now," said Harry Wharton.

"And our footer would have been like the young lady in the song—lost and gone for ever!" said Nugent. "But what beats me is the way Coker behaved."

"Coker?" queried Frank Courtenay.

"Yes—Coker of the Fifth. He saw what was going on, and he heard me yelling for help, but he turned and walked away."

"You don't mean to say he showed the white feather?"

"That's what it amounts to."

"Didn't think Coker was that sort," murmured the Caterpillar.

"Neither did we," said Harry Wharton. "It's extraordinary! But the fact remains that he refused to give us a hand. And he'll hear more about it when we get back to Greyfriars!"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "By the way, where are you fellows going?"

"Cliff House, to tea," said Frank Courtenay.

"Lucky dogs! Give my salaams to Phyllis Howell."

"Right you are!"

"And tell the esteemed damsel that we'd come to tea ourselves but for the state of our worthy chivvies," said Hurree Singh.

"My dear old chap, you can't help your face!" said the Caterpillar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After exchanging further friendly banter

with the Greyfriars fellows, Frank Courtenay & Co. went on their way.

The Famous Five limped back to Greyfriars with mixed feelings. They were delighted at having retained possession of the football; at the same time they were furious with Coker of the Fifth for not having attempted to deliver them from the hands of the Philistines. And they determined, on getting back to the school, to demand an explanation from the fellow who had left them in the lurch.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Branded as a Funk!

HORACE COKER tramped back to Greyfriars in a melancholy frame of mind.

Coker was by instinct a fighting-man—a fellow who in the ordinary way joined in a scrap without the slightest hesitation.

He had clearly seen that his services were wanted by the Famous Five of the Remove, but, being bound in honour not to fight, he had been unable to go to the juniors' assistance.

Coker felt the situation acutely, and he began to regret having made that promise to his aunt. It would have given him the greatest pleasure in the world to have fought and knocked out Jarvis. But his hands had been tied, and he walked away, leaving the Famous Five to get out of the scrape as best they could.

When Coker entered his study he found Potter and Greene preparing tea.

Potter had forgiven and forgotten Coker's treatment of him earlier in the afternoon. He frequently quarrelled with Coker, but the quarrel rarely lasted long.

"Wherefore that worried brow, old man?" inquired Potter.

Coker said nothing.

"Has that fiery dragon gone?"

"Eh? What fiery dragon?"

"Your Aunt Judy."

Coker frowned.

"Be careful, George Potter, or you'll get it in the neck! I don't allow any fellow to speak disrespectfully of my aunt! She's one of the best!"

"Oh, of course!" said Potter hastily. "Has she gone?"

"Yes."

"Did she forget to tip you?"

"She gave me a fiver."

"Then why look so upset?"

"It was on the tip of Coker's tongue to explain, but he hesitated. He was afraid that his study-mates might laugh at him for having made such a promise to his Aunt Judy. So he evaded Potter's question, and urged his study-mates to buck up with the tea.

After a while the conversation drifted into other channels.

The Fifth Form boxing final was to take place on the morrow, and Coker was one of the finalists, Blundell being the other.

Coker had fought his way to the final by dogged pluck and perseverance. Several of his opponents had been better boxers than he, but they had lacked his staying-power.

"Think you'll lick Blundell, old man?" asked Greene.

"I don't think—I know!" was the reply.

"You're mighty confident!"

"I've got reason to be."

"Blundell's a ripping boxer!" said Potter.

"He's got heaps of science."

"Science!" snorted Coker. "Bah! What use will science be against my pile-drivers? It will be a case of brawn versus brain!"

"And who's got the brain?"

"Blundell, of course!"

"Ah, I thought it couldn't be you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" sniggered Greene.

Coker sprang to his feet, as if with the intention of knocking his study-mates' heads together. Then he sat down suddenly, remembering his promise to his aunt.

"Wish you fellows wouldn't talk silly rot!" he growled. "Wait till to-morrow, and then you'll see that brains will be no match for brawn. Blundell's going through the mill!"

There was a tramping of feet in the passage. Then the door of the study was thrown open, and the Famous Five of the Remove came in. Their eyes were blazing angrily, and they took no notice of the glares of the Fifth-Formers.

Harry Wharton went forward, and tapped Coker on the shoulder.

"We want an explanation!" he demanded.

"Eh? An explanation of what?" asked Coker, though he could guess what was coming.

"You left us in the lurch this afternoon

when you saw us scrapping with the village roughts. What do you mean by it?"

"I—I—" stammered Coker uneasily.
"You acted like a chicken-hearted funk!" said Bob Cherry scornfully. "You saw that we were having the worst of the argument, and, instead of giving us a hand, you turned tail!"

Potter and Greene turned quickly towards Coker.

"Surely that's not true?" said Potter.
Coker nodded his head.

"He can't deny it!" said Frank Nugent. "He's a funk! Why, even my minor wouldn't have acted as Coker did!"

"Look here," said Coker, "you kids don't understand."

"We understand that you're a beastly funk!" said Harry Wharton. "You saw that we were outnumbered, so you slunk away!"

"And if it hadn't been for the Highcliffe fellows who turned up a little later, we should have been licked!" said Johnny Bull.

Coker opened his mouth to speak, but before he could utter a couple of words Harry Wharton rapped out a sharp command.

"Bump the rotter!"
"Here, steady on!" said Potter, as the indignant juniors advanced upon Coker. "I can guess, why Coker didn't chip in. He was saving himself for his scrap with Blundell to-morrow."

"Then he'd no right to!" growled Bob Cherry. "He saw that we were in a fix and needed his help, and he should have given it!"

"Bump him!" said Nugent impatiently.
Coker was swung out of his chair and bumped on to the floor with no uncertain force.

"Yaroooooh!"

Potter and Greene made no movement to interfere. They saw that the juniors' blood was up, and that they were not to be turned from their purpose. Besides, although Coker was their chum and study-mate, his conduct struck them as having been despicable. They themselves would gladly have gone to the Famous Five's assistance against a common foe, and they considered that Coker should have done so.

"Bump!"
Once again Coker's burly form crashed upon the floor, and once again a yell of anguish rang through the study.

"And again!" panted Bob Cherry.
"Bump!"

By the time the avengers had finished with him, Coker scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He sat up dazedly, and the Famous Five looked down at him with expressions of withering contempt. Then, having dealt with the Fifth-Former to their satisfaction—but not to Coker's—they quitted the study.

Potter and Greene followed suit. Tea was on the table, but they didn't stop to finish it.

"Hi! Where are you fellows going?" demanded Coker.

But there was no reply from his study-mates. It was only too obvious that they were disgusted with him, and glad to be rid of his society.

"Confound them!" growled Coker, staggering to his feet. "Pr'aps I ought to have explained about my promise to Aunt Judy. But I won't explain now! They can go their way, and be hanged!"

Coker finished his tea in solitary state, and then he sat in the armchair for upwards of an hour, scowling fiercely the while.

Dusk had descended, and the study was in darkness, but Coker didn't trouble to turn on the light.

After a time he rose to his feet, and went out into the Close. He passed several Fifth-Formers on the way, and they seemed to stare right through him. Evidently they had heard all about the incident in Friardale.

Coker didn't stop to reason with those who scorned him. He passed on, with burning cheeks, and a moment later he was pacing up and down the Close.

Presently he turned his head, and saw the figure of a girl coming towards the school building.

"Miss Phyllis!" he exclaimed, stepping quickly towards her.

But Phyllis Howell walked on, without deigning to notice the Fifth-Former.

"I—I say, Miss Phyllis, won't you stop and speak to me?"

The girl's reply stung Coker to the quick.
"I don't hold conversation with cowards!" she said scornfully.

THE POPULAR—No. 99.

In an instant Coker was beside her.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked hoarsely.

"The Highcliffe fellows have told me all about your exhibition of cowardice this afternoon! It was disgraceful!"

"But—but—"

"Not a word, please!" said Phyllis Howell disdainfully.

And she passed on into the building.

Coker clenched his hands hard, and continued to pace up and down.

So it had come to this!

Not only was he branded as a funk by his Form-fellows and by the Removites, but he had forfeited the friendship of Phyllis Howell, with whom he had lately been on the best of terms.

A word of explanation might have saved him, but Phyllis had not given him a chance to say what he wanted to say.

Coker's thoughts grew very bitter. He hardened his heart, and resolved that no word of explanation should pass his lips, even if he were given a chance to explain.

It was getting on for bed-time when Coker went back to his study.

Neither Potter nor Green was there. But on the mantelpiece was a large placard, and the message it bore consisted of one word—a word to which Coker was rapidly getting accustomed:

"FUNK!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Fight—And the Sequel!

NEXT day fresh details of Coker's supposed cowardice came to light.

It was reported that Loder of the Sixth had been bullying Nugent minor in a shameful manner, and that Coker had passed by without attempting to rescue the fag from Loder's clutches.

It was reported, too, that Fitzgerald of the Fifth had called Coker a funk and a rank outsider to his face, and that Coker had swallowed the insult, and permitted it to pass unavenged.

As a result of these things, Coker's popularity was at a very low ebb, and he was shunned on every side.

It was thought that he would back out of the boxing final at the last moment. But Coker had no intention of doing that. He meant to meet Blundell and defeat him, for his aunt had raised no objection to bouts with the gloves.

After dinner the gym was crowded. Fellows of all Forms had turned up to see Coker knocked out, for it was the general opinion that he would not last a couple of rounds against George Blundell.

A mighty roar greeted Blundell's appearance. But when Coker stepped into the ring there was a chilling silence.

The Head, who was present, inquired the reason for this. But nobody enlightened him.

Coker's face was pale, and the majority of the fellows mistook his pallor as a sign of fear.

As a matter of fact, Coker had never felt in better trim. He was very keen on winning the gold medal which was being presented to the best boxer in the Form, and he was even more keen on proving to his school-fellows that he was no coward.

Jack Harper, who was to referee, took out his watch, and signed to the seconds to leave the ring.

"Time!"

Blundell made as if to shake hands. But Coker did not reciprocate. He remembered that only the night before Blundell had called him a coward.

"Go it, Blundell!"

"Give him beans!"

Blundell led off in a free-and-easy style, as if he did not anticipate that his opponent would prove a stiff nut to crack.

His nonchalance soon vanished, however, when Coker's left crashed on to his nose with an impact which brought a rush of water to his eyes.

"Ow!" gasped Blundell.

And he retreated a couple of paces.

Coker followed up his advantage, and Blundell had a very bad time of it in the first round. He was repeatedly driven against the ropes, and his skill and science availed him nothing, for Coker broke through his defence again and again. When the welcome call of "Time!" came Blundell scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He was a big fellow, and he was not accustomed to being knocked about in this way.

"You'll have to buck up in the next round, old man!" muttered Bland, who acted as Blundell's second. "There's only one man in it so far, and that man isn't you!"

Blundell muttered something unintelligible, and Bland set a gale blowing with his towel. After a brief respite the boxers came together again.

Coker continued to hold the upper hand in the second round. And the onlookers—particularly Harry Wharton & Co.—were staggered. Coker's present display did not square with his conduct of the previous afternoon.

"The fellow's fighting like a giddy Trojan!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Dashed if I can make it out!"

"Wonder if there's anything in Potter's suggestion that Coker has been saving himself for this fight?" said Nugent.

"Maybe. But that doesn't excuse Coker's action of yesterday," said Harry Wharton.

"Just look at the fellow!" said Johnny Bull excitedly. "He's making old Blundell see stars, and no mistake!"

Blundell had hoped to redeem himself in the second round. Instead of which, he was getting deeper in the mire. He rocked and swayed like a tree in a hurricane as Coker's gloved fists thudded against his ribs.

Nobody cheered Coker on. But he needed no encouragement. He fought like a fellow possessed of demons, and at the end of that round he put Blundell on his back. It was only the call of "Time" that saved the captain of the Fifth from an early defeat.

"Blundell seems quite off-colour," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Pr'aps he'll pull himself together in the next round," suggested Nugent.

But Harry Wharton shook his head.
"He'll be licked," he said. "It's only a matter of time."

The third round was suggestive of fireworks. Coker hammered his man without mercy. Naturally, no fellow could have survived such treatment for long; and when, a moment later, Coker sent in a half-arm jolt to the jaw, it was the finishing touch.

Blundell went down like a log, and lay prone. And Jack Harper, in calm, dispassionate tones, counted him out.

A cheer greeted Coker's victory. But it was a faint and feeble cheer, very different from that which would have greeted Blundell had he proved the victor.

The fellows could not readily forget Coker's offence of the day before. And the fact that he had won the Fifth Form gold medal was not hailed with joy.

Coker gazed around him in a surprised sort of way, as if astonished at having scored such an easy victory. He had anticipated a grim and grueling contest, extending over many rounds, and he marvelled that Blundell had thrown up the sponge so easily. He did not seem to realise that he—Coker—had fought with the strength of three fellows.

Coker waited while Bland assisted Blundell to his feet. Then he pulled off his gloves, donned his coat, and strode out of the gym.

The half-hearted cheering had died away by this time. And a stony silence prevailed as Horace Coker quitted the scene of his triumph.

Coker had won, and yet he had lost. He had won the boxing final, but he had lost his popularity.

Would he ever regain it? he reflected. And he told himself that he wouldn't much care if he didn't.

When the fight was over the Famous Five of the Remove strolled out of gates together. They were bound for the railway-station, where a tuck-hammer was awaiting collection. The hamper had been sent to Johnny Bull by his uncle, and Johnny's chums were going to help him convey it to the school, and then assist him in disposing of the contents.

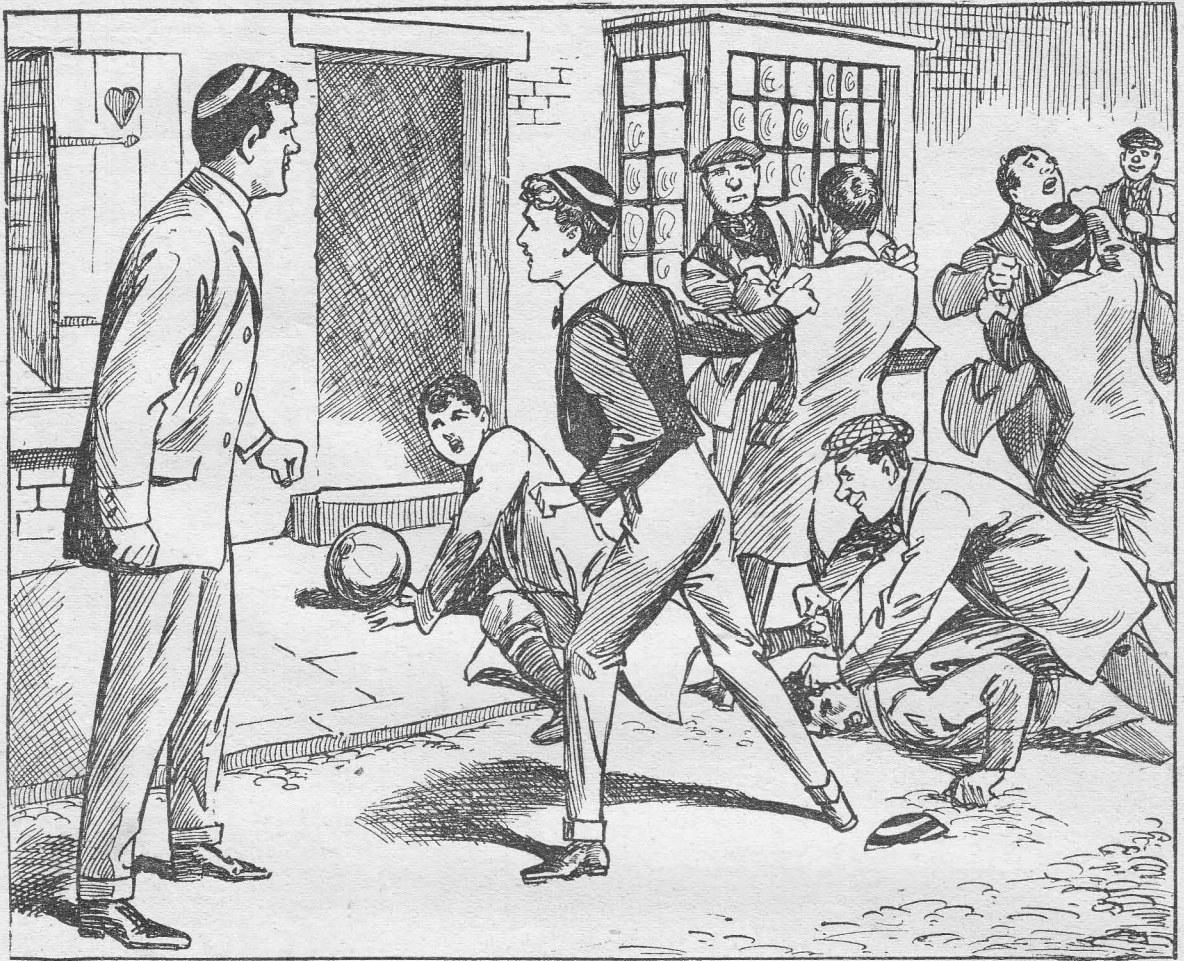
"What did you think of the scrap, Harry?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Coker deserved to win," replied Wharton. "There's no question about that. All the same, I was disappointed at the result. I wanted to see Coker licked. It would have been a sort of poetic justice."

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "I say, doesn't it strike you fellows as jolly curious that Coker showed the white feather yesterday, and yet fought like a Trojan this afternoon?"

"It's a giddy mystery," said Bob Cherry. "and I don't pretend to understand it. Here we are!"

They had reached the station by this time,



Coker clenched his fists and looked as if he was going to hurl himself into the fray. Then he stopped short and his hands fell to his side. "Don't stand there looking on!" shouted Nugent. "Quick! Give us a hand!" (See chapter 2.)

and they at once made their way into the parcels office.

The tuck-hammer was there all right. On it was seated a stolid-looking porter, smoking a pipe.

"Arternoon, young gents!" he said, lumbering to his feet. "Nice weather for November."

The juniors said nothing. They were busy inspecting the hamper, noting the size of it, and guessing at the probable contents.

The porter, however, was in a talkative mood. For upwards of two hours he had seen nobody to speak to.

"Rather rough on Master Coker, young gents?" he observed.

"Eh? What's rough on Coker?" demanded Harry Wharton, looking up.

"Why, that 'is aunt should 'ave dragged that promise out of 'im."

"You're talking in riddles, man!" said Bob Cherry. "Explain yourself!"

"I'm s'prised that you young gents ain't 'eard about it," said the porter. "But p'r'aps Master Coker didn't tell you for fear of bein' larfed at. Yesterday arternoon 'e came 'ere to see 'is aunt off, an' she says to 'im, 'Orris, says she, 'I want you to give me your solum promise that you won't never indulge in no fightin' or brawlin.'"

The Famous Five looked thunderstruck.

"You mean to say that Coker promised his aunt that he'd never take part in any more scrapings?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"That's so, Master Wharton. An' wot I says is this 'ere—it's rather rough on Master Coker. Don't you agree?"

The juniors exchanged quick glances. In their astonishment they had almost forgotten the tuck-hammer.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Now we know! Now we know why Coker didn't chip in when we were scrapping with the village roughs. He'd given his word of honour."

"And—and we called him a funk!" said Nugent.

"And showed him up before all the school!" added Wharton. "By Jove! It's jolly lucky we made this discovery, or Coker's life wouldn't have been worth living for weeks to come!"

"We must hurry back and apologise to the esteemed Coker," said Hurree Singh.

"We simply must!" said Bob Cherry. "Give me a hand with this giddy hamper, you fellows!"

The hamper was duly conveyed to the school, and deposited in Johnny Bull's study. Then the Famous Five went in quest of Coker.

They found him in his study. Potter and Greene were there, but it was easy to see that the trio were not on good terms.

"What do you kids want?" demanded Coker.

"We've found out why you didn't come to our rescue yesterday arternoon," said Harry Wharton. "Why didn't you explain, you duffer, that your Aunt Judy had made you promise not to fight?"

Potter and Greene started violently at Wharton's words.

"Did you really promise your aunt that?" gasped Potter.

Coker nodded.

"Well, I'm jiggered! And we—we thought you had shown the white feather!"

"You should have known me better than that, George Potter."

"Yes, I should," admitted Potter, looking very shamefaced.

"And so should we," chimed in Bob Cherry. "We're awfully sorry this has happened, Coker; but you ought to have explained, you

know, and then we should have understood. Look here, I should like to congratulate you on licking Blundell this arternoon!"

"Same here!" said the others, in chorus.

Coker's rugged countenance broke into a smile. He shook hands all round, and assured the Famous Five and his study-mates that he bore no malice.

That evening the true facts of the case were revealed to all Greyfriars.

Coker received numerous visitors and numerous apologies. And on the following arternoon Phyllis Howell came over and had tea with him. And Phyllis was kinder to him than she had ever been before.

"I think your aunt's request was most unreasonable," she said. "She had no right to bind you to a promise of that sort. If I were you I should write and ask her to release me from it."

And Coker did. He pointed out to Aunt Judy that it would be impossible for him to go through the term without scrapping, but he undertook not to take part in any fights unless the cause was a good one.

Somewhat reluctantly Aunt Judy released her nephew from his promise. And Coker celebrated the occasion by giving Jarvis, the leader of the village roughs, the licking of his life.

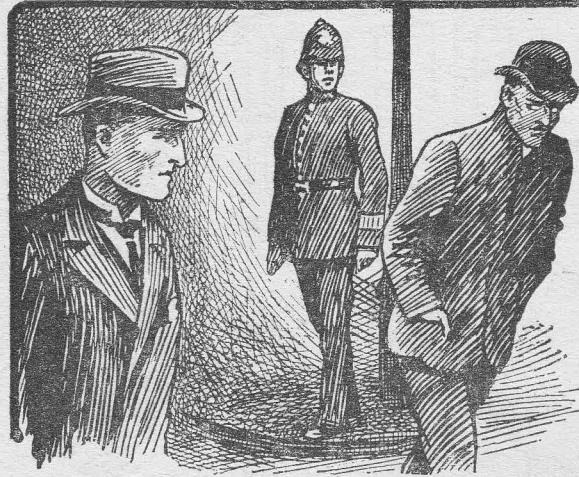
And thus the clouds rolled by, and there was no happier fellow at Greyfriars than Horace Coker, the winner of the gold medal, and—for a time, at all events—the champion boxer of the Fifth!

THE END.

(Another splendid story of Harry Wharton & Co. next Friday, entitled: "Champion of the Third!" by Frank Richards.)

THE POPULAR.—No. 99

A POWERFUL NEW DETECTIVE SERIAL YOU WILL ENJOY READING



A MARKED MAN.

A Grand New Story,
dealing with the Adven-
tures of Ferrers Locke, the
World-Famous Detective.

THREADS OF THE STORY.

Adrian Vaughan, after having served five years, leaves Dartmoor prison, bent on regaining his old position in the world, but he finds that all of his old acquaintances had joined the great army against him, including a very old chum, Harry Leigh, and he vows to get his revenge on those who were once his friends. He visits a prosperous City man, one Raymond Marconnon, who had, six years ago, borrowed money from him.

But Marconnon refuses to acknowledge such a debt. Vaughan threatens him with a revolver just as the door opens and Ferrers Locke and another detective rush in. Again in the hands of the police, Vaughan is taken back to prison, but in the train he manages to overpower the detective and jump from the express, fortunately escaping injury in the fall.

He falls in with an old conner named Demottsen, and the two decide to join hands. Owing to the lack of funds, Vaughan, by means of a ruse, tries to obtain money from Harry's father, but Ferrers Locke appears at the critical moment, and the ex-convict is handed over to the police again on a charge of attempting to murder the famous detective and blackmail.

(Now read on.)

A Great Venture!

A CLOSED car panted by the kerb. Dawe, the Scotland Yard detective, became even more swiftly alert.

"Jump in!"

The motor rolled swiftly away. Vaughan blinked through the gloom at his companion. Where were the others—the police that he had spoken of, waiting to assist in the convict's safe custody—and the one who was to be sent post-haste for the doctor? He glanced at the double line of chains crossing his wrists, and cursed impotently. Ferrers Locke and one small man had outwitted him.

"You represent the law and order against which I have pitted myself!" he muttered venomously. "You and I will have a settling day, too!"

"I should think so, especially as I noticed you came away with the notes all right!"

Barton Dawe flashed a beam from an electric hand-torch across the inside of the cab, and Vaughan leaned back stupefied with amazement, for the other had lifted the moustache and eyebrows from his face.

"Good heavens, Demottsen, that was smart of you!"

"I've pulled you through when you couldn't help yourself!" Demottsen laughed. A key snapped back, and the wristlets vanished noisily into a bag which the little man drew from under the seat.

"It was my brain against Locke's, and I won—see? London will swallow us up long before Ferrers Locke will be able to leave poor Justin Leigh!"

The funny little man laughed merrily as he raised both blinds.

In five minutes we shall be in the Vauxhall Bridge Road, and out of the danger-

THE POPULAR.—No. 93.

zone. This leaves even you a bit flat, doesn't it, Vaughan?"

"I've never heard of a smarter thing! How did you carry it through?"

"I knew that if I stuck close enough to you and Justin Leigh, with his pots of money, I was on a good thing. Smoke, man, while I tell the tale."

Vaughan leaned back and puffed contentedly at a cigarette.

"You were quite right in your surmise that old Mr. Leigh would pay handsomely."

Vaughan's hands closed with a thrill of satisfaction on the bundle of notes.

"A good job Locke left me these!"

"Of course! They wanted them to be found on you as evidence against you. Their failure is our gain. The sooner we put them in circulation the better."

"Within forty-eight hours we'll have the lot in gold."

Demottsen drew a slip of paper from a pocket-book, and deliberately set it alight.

"These are the numbers. I stole them from Justin Leigh's desk. We're safe on that score, anyway."

"But Barton Dawe—how did you manage to get over him?"

"Simplicity itself, my boy! As soon as you said you were going to Justin Leigh to discuss terms with him, I lay like a shadow in the background. Your warning that Ferrers Locke might come into the deal proved too true. I watched Leigh, and I shadowed Locke. Yesterday Locke returned in frantic haste to Northampton. I followed him to Leigh's house. Fortunately, I was able to hear almost every word that transpired between them."

Vaughan's steely dark eyes widened.

"How?"

"From the end of Justin Leigh's beautifully sheltered garden."

"Impossible!"

"Absolutely simple. My apparatus was a long line of wire, a battery, and a very powerful receiver. By attaching one end of the wire to the telephone cable that runs into the house, and earthing the other, I was able to learn everything. The fun was when Locke telephoned to Scotland Yard and got on to Inspector Dawe, and told him just what was going to happen. It was arranged that Barton Dawe should come with six picked men to the house at Clapham, wait in hiding, and when Locke blew a whistle effect your arrest. As I happened to know Dawe, and just how he dresses, I merely made myself up to look like him, and carried, out the arrest."

"But, Dawe, how did you get him out of the way?"

"By merely telephoning him that the meeting-place had been altered to a house in Sawbridgeworth. Dawe is now fooling round somewhere in Hertfordshire."

Vaughan rocked with silent laughter.

"This is the life, Demottsen! I feel myself getting under its spell already. And we haven't done badly, either. The real difficulty now seems in changing these notes into cash."

"H'm! It might have, been easier. It

would have been if only I hadn't upset poor Leigh so badly. I reckon he'll take a day or two to get over that heart attack. That look of mine properly put the lid on him. He and I won't do business over this deal, at any rate."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Simply that I've made a discovery which may be worth a fortune to us."

"And that?"

"That Justin Leigh, the reputed millionaire, the great philanthropist, who presents Midland towns with free libraries, swimming-baths, endows hospitals and sanatoria, and generally spends a large portion of his wealth in the service of suffering humanity, is a villain, an impostor, a hypocrite, a man with a double life."

"You can't mean that!"

Vaughan's thoughts flew back to Harry. "I do, though! To-night he'll take a day or two to get over that heart attack. That look of mine properly put the lid on him. He and I won't do business over this deal, at any rate."

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Adrian Vaughan listened like one in a dream. Into what vortex of amazing mystery and thrilling surprises was he not being drawn by his contact with this strange little man?

"Bah! It's true that one-half the world doesn't know how the other lives," Demottsen continued. "Only we fellows who dive beneath the surface and see trickery and roguery working everywhere, see men as they really are. In their crooked dealings they touch us at every turn; in their masked lives we don't meet them. Where and how did Justin Leigh make his huge fortune? When you, Vaughan, and he were living like princes in Northampton, six years ago, what did you know of him?"

"Nothing, except that he was Harry's father, and"—his mind suddenly reverting—"it was indirectly on his advice that I put money into a company which got me a term of penal servitude. I do know this, though, that when the time came for my defence there wasn't a word I could say to attribute my downfall directly to Mr. Leigh."

"Which only shows what a clever old rascal he is! Had I been in your shoes I could have told how I have sold the proceeds of a diamond haul worth sixteen thousand to Leigh for five thousand in cash; of men like Barraclay, who got an advance of £2,000 on long-firm frauds, and had to pay Leishman twenty thousand to square the deal. 'The crooks' Shylock,' that's what he is—a blood-sucker, a parasite, battenning on the sins and wrongdoings of others."

"And a very useful thing for us to know!" laughed Vaughan. "All the same, now I've got this little bit"—tapping his pocket where the banknotes reposed—"I don't know that

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I'm inclined to fall back on blackmail as a means of livelihood."

"It won't last you long. You can't go back on the honest, genteel game now!"—flashing a sinister glance from the seemingly kind eyes. "Adrian Vaughan has put himself outside the pale of the law for ever!"

"Adrian Vaughan has been put outside the pale of the law!" replied the other. "Man, do you think I'd go back now? Not for anything! What I am going to be I've been forced into, and, by Jove, I see dream-pictures unfolding which leave me entranced. I see myself the king, the emperor of all the crooks who ever lived, able to win my way to the front rank by sheer ability. I'm not swanking, Demottsen, but when a man of education and refinement and brains cares to pit himself against the law, there's no saying how high he can't fly. Do you think I'd be satisfied to go back to prison, or to live a humdrum life as a casual worker, hounded from pillar to post by police-officers and plain-clothes men, always wanting to inspect my licence? Not much! The money is going to carry me to the top of the tree!"

"Here we are. Let's make ourselves comfortable, and talk things over," Demottsen said, as the car stopped before an old-fashion house in a quiet little square. "Give me some of the notes. A friend of mine will set one or two of them moving."

Vaughan disgorged the plunder, and followed the other into a quietly, but comfortably-furnished room. Demottsen switched on the light.

"When not posing as a general practitioner, or busy making flash notes and coin, this is where I spend my leisure, thinking things out," he said. "You see, I have a man who looks after my creature comforts."

He vanished into an inner room, and emerged without his disguise.

A tall, dark fellow, evidently a foreigner, was busy laying the covers for two.

"Jules—my friend, Mr. Rutherford. Mr. Paul Rutherford, will use these rooms when and how he likes. You will serve him as you would me."

Jules bowed, and his hawk-like eyes made a swift study of Vaughan. The meal he brought in was a triumph of art. For the first time these many years Vaughan knew what it was to eat deliciously-cooked food, to drink choice wine and liqueur, and to smoke the most fragrant of cigars.

"I've been thinking what's going to happen over this affair," he said, blowing smoke-rings thoughtfully.

"A two days' wonder, that's all. Then everyone save Ferrers Locke will forget. Tomorrow the police will chronicle your exploits. Barton Dawe won't have much to say, for fear of being laughed at, and you—well, you will be free to take just what line you like. The greatest difficulty a convict has to overcome is his fear of coming out into the open; yet, efficiently disguised, and with a good part to play, the more he gets into the public eye the safer he is. What do you think of doing?"

"Anything I choose. Stop at nothing if it pleases me. Why shouldn't I consider myself? You tell me that Justin Leigh has built up a fortune out of crime and enterprise. Why shouldn't I do the same in a different line?"

For a few moments he was silent. When he spoke his handsome face was flushed with excitement.

"Demottsen, I've got an idea. Have you sufficient confidence in me to chuck what you are doing on your own, and come with me, lock, stock, and barrel? I promise you that in three months coming, 'sweating' and 'smashing' will be a back number with you."

"Certainly, if the prizes are great."

"The prizes, doctor, will be big and many. The greatest danger will be Ferrers Locke, but we've fought him twice successfully already. As you know, I've a supreme contempt for small things—petty thefts, low-down tricks like blackmail; but when the world has turned against me, I have no hesitation in victimising the world for my own pleasure and profit!" He took another drink of wine. "I have tastes and love of everything that appeals to a cultured man. Why not indulge them? Come, Demottsen, what's your answer?"

"I'm with you through everything!"

"Very well, then. Get all these notes in hard cash. A week from now a new star will descend from the firmament of pleasure, and London will flock to it. Paul Rutherford, singer, pianist, 'cellist, violinist, will appear from—never mind where. His suite of rooms in London will be the rendezvous of actors, musicians, playwrights, and, above all, the upper ten. They will come to be entertained

by Paul Rutherford, and Paul Rutherford, choosing his path carefully, will make a name for himself in the social world, but a bigger name in the underworld of crime. My dear doctor, drink to the success of me in my new role!"

Their glasses clinked, and their glowing eyes met. Vaughan had revealed himself at last. With a little cry, Demottsen shrank back from the look on the other's face.

"Are you devil or man, Vaughan?" he whispered.

"The devil in man, that's all!" Vaughan laughed recklessly. "From this hour, that is how you'll always think of me! Here's luck once more—good luck!"

And, raising his glass, he emptied it and set it down, vibrating to the sound of his own inhuman laughter.

The New Star!

"MY dear doctor, I've never lived before!"

Vaughan broke off from the task of reading a whole column devoted to himself and his wonderful recital of the previous night at the Bechstein Hall. He tossed the copy of the "Telegraph" on the table, and complacently lit a cigarette.

"D'ye hear, doctor? I've never known what real life was till now!"

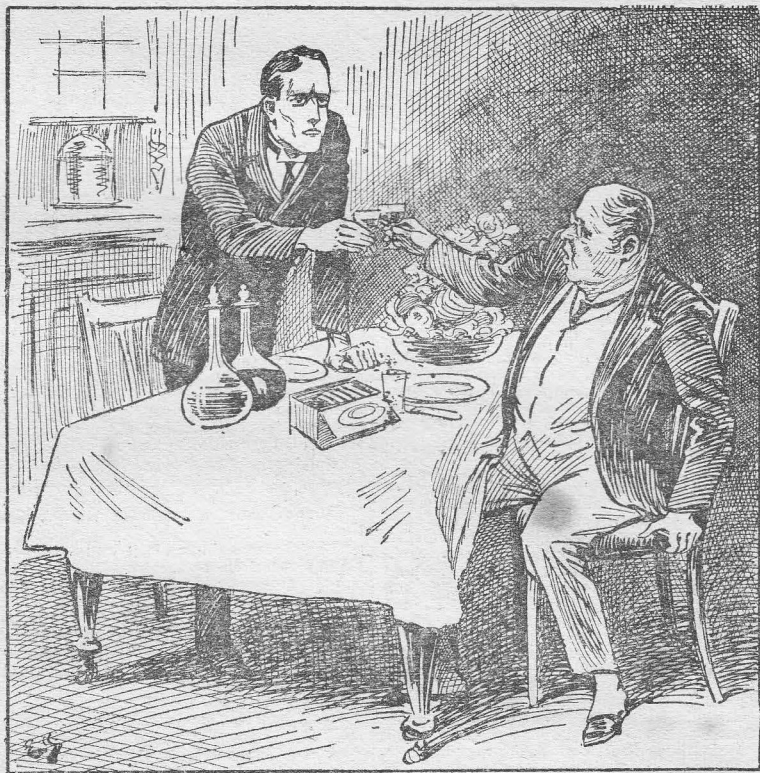
destitution! I was Adrian Vaughan then. Supposing I'd gone to Carl Krager then, and told him I could sing and could draw half London to hear me play—would he have given me a job? No fear, not even as drinks' attendant, for fear I should steal the electro-plate off the tray! But Rutherford's a different name to conjure with. 'Rutherford, besides the power of exquisite expression, has the magnetism of a potent and pleasing personality, so says the 'Evening Looking-Glass.' For a decade London has known no one who could charm it into instant admiration for the man and his work as Mr. Rutherford has done. We welcome him as a brilliant addition to artistes of the first rank,' says the 'Epoch.' What's that lot, anyway?"—glancing at the bundle of correspondence in the other's hand.

"His Grace the Duke of Banford would be glad if Mr. Paul Rutherford could arrange to give a recital at Clavis Castle on Thursday evening, July 29th next. How shall I reply?"

"A hundred guineas, doctor. Make a note of the date. Who else?"

Early though it was, Demottsen looked tired; the work of press agent and secretary to Paul Rutherford was not light. He ran through a list of a dozen or more names.

"Who's Sir Jacob van Straney?" the new star asked.



"Here's to the success of our new venture!" said Vaughan. Their glasses clinked—then Demottsen shrank back from the look on the other's face and the sound of his inhuman laughter. (See this page.)

Demottsen looked up from the exquisite Louis writing-table, and his round eyes beamed.

"You've every cause to be gratified," he said, and came towards the deep bay window, which commanded a magnificent stretch of the Park. The morning life of what was left of social London throbbed beneath him to and fro.

"The music-hall managers are mad after you!" Demottsen went on. "Here's Modderith, of the Thespian Halls, offering a thousand pounds a week for six months' circuit, and Krager Vaudevilles put forward a suggestion of eight hundred and ten per cent. of gross takings. What shall I say to them?"

The singer-musician tossed the end of his cigarette into the grate.

"Tell 'em I'm too busy. Bah! As if money ground out in that way is the only thing a man wants! Funny, Motty, isn't it? A few weeks ago I was turned out of Bleakmoor with three pounds ten between me and

"He was in the last honours' list. I believe he made his money out of buying old masters cheap from hard-up monasteries in France just before the Government stepped in and commandeered their goods and chattels; then he sold them at fabulous prices to rich Americans."

"Tell him the same as Modderith and Krager—too busy. The next three I'll accept. We might do business there, especially at Lord Kombarton's. He's got a set of Charles I. gold plate, which we could easily arrange to lift. Fee? Well, a hundred guinea—No, eighty! The plate, when we get it, will more than balance the difference."

He joined Demottsen at the window, and idly watched the traffic ebbing and flowing behind.

"Strange, isn't it, what a man can do nowadays with a touch of originality? That's all there is in my performance—originality. AS THE POPULAR.—No 99.

a musician, well, I suppose, I'm fair. I've a passable voice, which, on an ordinary concert platform, would bring me perhaps a fiver a week. I play well, just about as well as the average player in a good orchestra, but because my manner, the treatment of my subjects, the nerve and dash and passion I put into everything, appeals to every pleasure-loving sense, people rush at me, and think I'm a marvel. Their judgment and power of discernment, doctor, are rotten—absolutely rotten!"

"What's it matter, Vaughan? You please them—and people nowadays, especially rich people, are eager to pay for being entertained when every other show in town ceases to give them the slightest satisfaction."

"Of course. I'm only a rogue. About the time when the prison authorities gave me permission to grow hair on my chin, the aristocracy were paying fabulous sums for ragtime bands. When Raymond Marconnon stigmatised me as a would-be thief in Leicester, the world was mad on tango dancing and tango teas and 'I Didn't Want To Do It.' Now London is recovering its breath, and recognises that there is something in a few bars of music, a gesture on the keyboard, an intonation of the voice, and a lingering sob on the 'cello, which doesn't leave them cold. Hence a mediocre exponent of the entertaining art finds himself fawned upon and singled out for a golden shower of appreciation."

He turned, and was about to leave the room, but in the doorway he paused.

"By the way, Demottsen, accept Lady Scaring, and turn down the Marquis de Ranguy and Guinocourt. Once we were bosom pals. I'm afraid his dinner-party at Kingsweare will be thronged with old familiar faces. Tell Jules I shall be back to lunch at one-thirty."

He crossed the magnificently-furnished room, his patent boots making no sound on the thick pile. A more perfectly turned-out man had never walked down Bond Street than Paul Rutherford, the popular idol of London Society. A fortnight in public had made him famous. Women of rank and fashion greeted him with courtly bows and smiles as their equipages dashed by him that morning. A dozen men who counted in the social world stopped him in the space of a few hundred yards.

Vaughan grew retrospective. The situation was certainly amusing. He could imagine the thrill of horror that would sweep over these people should he for one moment draw aside the perfect disguise, and reveal himself as the ticket-of-leave man, long overdue on Scotland Yard's list of "wanted."

Of Ferrers Locke he had heard nothing since their last meeting, save that a murder mystery, involving the strange death of a wealthy young Englishman, had taken the detective to New York. At any rate, with Locke safely across the water, he felt he could trick the world with impunity.

It was pleasant to be able to walk about a free man—to enjoy all that money and social popularity gave without taking life too seriously. To-day Vaughan felt particularly buoyant and care-free. Slowly he was beginning to regain his former interest in life. He had started out, allowing himself to be swayed by an idea that he had brains enough to do just what he pleased. Only a fool would let inevitable circumstances interfere.

A dazzling display of flashing gems in a Court jeweller's drew together his wandering reflections. He lounged towards the window, and the expressive eyes unfolded an idea. How absurdly easy it would be to gather the whole lot into his store—so easy that, after trying a moment with the notion, he dismissed it.

On the other side of the doorway a little group of people craned about the inscription beneath an exquisite and massive goblet of gold. Rutherford, the musician, the artiste, became absorbed in the personality of Adrian Vaughan.

"A perfect reproduction in silver gilt of an exquisite specimen of Spanish goldsmith's art—late sixteenth century. The original, weighing 186 ounces, was recently recovered from the sunken Armada galleon in Tobermory Bay, and is now in the possession of the Marquis de Ranguy and Guinocourt, by whose kind permission this copy has been made."

Underneath was the price, one hundred and ten guineas.

"That appeals to me—I'll have it!" Vaughan mused, and with a curious smile returned to his rooms. He found Demottsen still battling with the correspondence at his desk.

THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

"Motty, there's a beautiful reproduction of exceedingly valuable medieval gold goblet in Page & Runemeiker's window in Bond Street. Step along and buy it; bring it away with you. No, not as you are. Put on a fresh disguise—a musty old collector's or professor's rig-out would be the thing, and don't be any too anxious about coming the direct route home."

Lunch was all ready by the time the doctor returned.

"An exquisite piece of work," he mused, planting the goblet in the middle of the table. "The original must represent a fortune."

"Sixteen or eighteen thousand pounds, at least," Vaughan replied, thoughtfully caressing his dark moustache, the while his eyes never left the golden cup. "By the by, the letters you wrote this morning, Motty, have they gone yet?"

"The Marquis de Ranguy and Guinocourt. You beg leave to thank him and to say that Mr. Rutherford was unfortunately engaged on the evening he mentioned, didn't you?"

"That is so."

"Then tear the letter up and accept the engagement. I've changed my mind about the marquis, and feel I really shouldn't mind meeting him and his friends after all."

Demottsen laughed as Vaughan expatiated on the defects of a system which permitted of such a beautiful and valuable work of art as this Spanish goblet being wasted on a man whose country house was already overloaded with more treasures than graced the Wallace collection.

After which the glittering vessel was packed away to await its turn in the scheme of things.

Making a Bargain!

THE cigar fell suddenly from Adrian Vaughan's lips, marring the spotless expanse of his dress shirt, and burning a big patch on his evening coat. He sprang up from the Bedford-lined cushions of the gorgeously-appointed limousine, and, letting down the window, stared curiously out.

The lull in the traffic gave Demottsen time to search for the cause of his companion's sudden excitement. Vaughan was looking over and beyond the inner line of halted taxicabs and omnibuses, to where a solitary figure stood out, strangely arresting, against the long queue of patient playgoers, waiting for admission to the Lyceum.

"Good gracious, doctor, I shouldn't have thought there would be two of us alike in the world!"

Vaughan sank back, and pointed through the window.

"Can't you see him—that tall, dark chap playing the violin to the crowd! There, now, he's turning—see his face? It's the image of what mine is now—thick, black, curling hair about a white forehead; eyes of the same colour, and, yes, the same dark moustache, and a replica of my false chin. Demottsen, I sha'n't go to the theatre to-night."

"No?"

"Opportunity knocks. I'll open to it. Slip out and ask the musician to come across to me."

In less than a minute the itinerant player stood in the doorway of Vaughan's palatial car. The strong, handsome face, a trifle weary and nervous-looking, Vaughan thought, broke into a smile of gratitude as the other put his hand into his pocket.

"Get inside," Vaughan said laconically.

The other jerked his head towards the waiting throng.

"My living for to-night and to-morrow will be gone if I miss them," he answered rapidly.

"Leave that to me. You sha'n't lose anything. On the contrary—"

The door slammed, the great car leapt forward, and Vaughan picked up the speaking-tube.

"Home," he said, and in a few minutes the crowded hub of London's pleasure-wheel lay beyond the dignified peace of Park Lane.

All this time Vaughan and the stranger sat eyeing each other narrowly.

"We're both thinking the same thing," the former laughed.

"That you and I are doubles, sir?" the musician answered. "Do you wish me to play for you? I believe I could entertain you or your guests if only my clothes weren't so bad. Perhaps—"

"You're open to earn money, I suppose?" Vaughan's steely, dark eyes shone with sup-

pressed excitement. Here was a way over a thousand obstacles.

"Certainly, sir."

Long before the stranger had recovered from the first shock of surprise, Vaughan had his future mapped out for him.

"Follow me."

Vaughan led the way into the magnificent library, and ordered Jules to bring whisky and cigars.

"Let's get to business quickly, Mr.—er—"

"John Firth."

"Well, then, Mr. John Firth, without mincing matters, your likeness to me can prove a very valuable asset to you. Are you willing, for a consideration, to put yourself in my hands?"

"I have only one interest in life, sir. Your consideration, as you call it, might see that aim accomplished. If it will, then I am yours."

"I see. You need money badly. Forgive me, I do not mean to be personal, but we're discussing business, I understand."

"Certainly, sir."

"You realise how extraordinarily like me you are—my counterpart, in fact?"

"I saw that directly you called me to your car."

"Very well. You've heard of Paul Rutherford?"

"Of course."

"I am he."

John Firth gasped.

"You—you Paul Rutherford?"

"The very same. My name is, I think, sufficient guarantee. Have you any objection to merging your identity into mine, provided I pay you well to do so?"

"None whatever. Money is all I want. I'd sell my soul to get a sum sufficient to—"

"Would you sell yourself body and soul to me?"

"If the price were high enough."

"You would become my double, my shadow my second self?"

"Again, yes, for a price."

"I can pay anything if you will serve me well."

The blazing excitement in John Firth's face momentarily startled him.

"You could keep your mouth shut, make your life a sealed book to everyone?"

"To the whole world, till the time comes when you have paid me sufficient money to find a certain man and wring from him something that is not his, but mine—mine!"

"Would two thousand pounds within two years tempt you?"

"Yes!"

Vaughan stretched his long legs across the marble fender.

"We've both gone too far to be otherwise than frank with each other. You want a certain sum of money to find a certain man, for a purpose which does not interest me. I want you because you are my double. For the services I shall ask of you I can afford to pay you handsomely. But before we go any farther I am curious to know whether your part of the bargain would gain for you the end you have in view?"

The other sprang up, and the veins stood out in clustered knots against his forehead.

"Two thousand pounds would more than do everything, if only I could trace the man. But, first of all, it's the man I want. Once find him, the rest is easy. Ah, Heaven would then see justice done! Someone in the underworld of London must know where to find him."

His agitation aroused Vaughan's latent curiosity.

"You interest me, Mr. Firth. Should I be out of order in asking the name of the man you so much wish to find, and why the money would be of so much use to you?"

John Firth became all eagerness. He had never ceased in his endeavours to track his enemy down.

"If you could help me to discover the villain, I should be more than repaid for any service I can render you, Mr. Rutherford," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "The man I want, on whose head for fifteen long, weary years I have called down the judgment of Heaven, is—Judas Leishman!"

There will be another grand instalment of
"A MARKED MAN!"
 in next week's issue of THE POPULAR.
 Order to-day!

TOO CLEVER BY HALF!

A Splendid, Long Complete School Tale, dealing with the Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST (Author of the Splendid School Stories appearing each week in the "Boys' Friend").

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Uncle James Takes a Hand!

"WHAT'S the trouble, kid?" Flynn of the Fourth was coming away from Bulkeley's study when Jimmy Silver stopped him in the passage with that question. Patrick O'Donovan Flynn was looking down in the mouth.

Flynn of the Fourth was generally one of the cheeriest juniors in Rookwood. Now he looked as if all the troubles within the school walls had been piled upon his youthful shoulders.

Hence Jimmy Silver's kind question. "Sure, he's a baste!" said Flynn lugubriously.

"Who?"

"Bulkeley!" growled Flynn.

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"Bulkeley isn't a beast. What's the row?"

"He is a baste!"

"Licked?" asked Jimmy.

"No, ye omadhaun!"

"Lines?"

"Nunno!"

"Then what are you grousing about?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Get it off your chest. Confide in your Uncle James."

"The baste won't give me a pass out of gates!" grunted Flynn.

Jimmy Silver stared. As it was seven o'clock, on a foggy winter evening, it was not surprising that the captain of Rookwood had refused a pass out of gates to a junior in the Fourth Form.

"Like your cheek to ask for one," said Jimmy.

"Oh, rats to you, Jimmy Silver! I'm going out all the same."

Flynn, with a dogged look, tramped down the passage. Jimmy Silver hurried after him. As captain of the Fourth and benevolent Uncle James, it was up to Jimmy Silver to chip in. He linked his arm in that of Patrick O'Donovan Flynn.

"Come up to the study, old chap," he said.

"Chuck it!"

"Lovell's roasting chestnuts—"

"Go and help him scuff them, then. I'm going down to Coombe, and blow Bulkeley and all the prefects!"

"No, you're not; you're coming up to the study to scuff chestnuts," said Jimmy Silver.

"Let go, you gossoon!"

"Raby, old chap—"

"Hallo!" said Raby.

"Take Flynn's arm, will you? He wants to be helped up to the study."

"I don't!" roared Flynn.

"Yes, you do," said Jimmy Silver. "Hang on, Raby! Now, then, march!"

Raby grinned and hung on. Flynn struggled. But his arms were safely held, and he had to go. There was a struggle on the stairs, and Newcome of the Fourth kindly came and lent a hand. He bunked Flynn up from behind, and the Irish junior was propelled upstairs at a great rate.

"Ye silly asses!" roared Flynn, as he was bumped along the Fourth Form passage.

"Will ye let go?"

"Not this evening," said Jimmy Silver.

"Kim on!"

"Look here—"

"This way!"

With a rush Flynn of the Fourth was brought along the passage to the end study. Jimmy Silver kicked the door open, and Flynn was rushed in. Arthur Edward Lovell, at the fire, was baking chestnuts, and he turned a ruddy face round.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?"

"No trouble at all," said Jimmy Silver.

"Flynn's going to help us scuff the chestnuts. He's a guest of honour; but he's so modest

he took a lot of persuading to come. Sit down, Flynn, old son!"

"I won't sit down!" roared Flynn.

"Your mistake. You will."

Bump! Flynn sat down in the armchair with considerable force.

"Ye howlin' omadhauns!" he yelled. "Will you lemme go?"

"No fear!"

"What the dickens is the little game?" demanded Lovell, in astonishment. "What's Flynn going to scuff chestnuts for if he don't want to?"

"For his good," explained Jimmy Silver. "Flynn's thinking of breaking bounds after dark. Very naughty! Flynn's looking for a licking, and his Uncle James isn't going to let him find it!"

"Ye burblin' ass—"

"Sh!" chided Jimmy Silver. "You duffer, you'll be spotted, as safe as houses, if you break bounds. Now, what's the trouble? You can tell your kind uncles. What do you want to go down to Coombe for? If it's tuck, you can feed in this study."

"Tain't tuck!"

"Then what is it, you ass?" asked Raby.

"Lemme go!"

"Rats!"

The door was pushed open, and an eyeglass gleamed in. It belonged to Smythe of the Shell. Adolphus Smythe looked surprised at the sight of Flynn seated in the armchair, with three juniors holding him there.

"By gad!" said Adolphus.

"Buzz off, Smythe!" yelled Flynn.

Smythe of the Shell hesitated. He had no desire whatever to tackle the Fistical Four of the Fourth.

"Ahem! Oswald said you were here, Flynn," he said. "I've been lookin' for you. Have you got that evenin' paper?"

"No; these silly asses won't let me go, and Bulkeley wouldn't give me a pass out," growled Flynn.

"Oh, gad! Look here, you fags, you mind your own business, and let Flynn do as he likes!" said Smythe.

"Gentlemen," said Jimmy Silver, "you hear Adolphus. The flat has gone forth. To hear is to obey—I don't think! Now the flat has gone forth, it's time for Adolphus to go forth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver picked up a cushion and made a rush at the dandy of the Shell. Adolphus jumped back into the passage, just eluding the cushion.

"Oh, gad! You cheeky fag! Yaroooh!"

The cushion flew through the air. It caught Adolphus under the chin. Adolphus sat down.

"Yowp!" roared Smythe of the Shell. "I—I'll slaughter you! I'll— Yarooop!"

Jimmy Silver fielded the cushion, and it smote the elegant Adolphus on his well-fitting Eton jacket. Smythe scrambled to his feet and fed. Jimmy Silver smiled serenely as he returned to the study.

"So much for Adolphus!" he remarked.

"Here, hold that duffer!"

Flynn was on his feet, struggling. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were grasping him. Jimmy Silver lent a hand, and Flynn was plumped into the chair again, gasping for breath.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Also Ran!

Flynn gasped, and the Fistical Four grinned. They were saving Flynn from playing the "giddy ox" and getting severe punishment for a breach of the school rules. They felt that it was kind of them to take the trouble. But Flynn did not

look in the least appreciative of their kindness. He looked daggers.

"So it's an evening paper you were going for, kid?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you say so, fathead? I suppose it's the football news you're after?"

"Tain't the football news!"

Jimmy Silver's face became very grave.

"If it isn't the footer news, what can you possibly want an evening paper for in such a hurry?" he asked.

Flynn did not answer.

"Smythe was interested in your evening paper," went on Jimmy. "We know Smythe; he backs gee-gees, and he snucks evening papers into the school to see the Newmarket results. Flynn, old kid, you haven't been ass enough to let Smythe get you into that kind of thing, have you?"

Flynn's face was crimson now. It was clear enough that Jimmy Silver had hit the mark.

"Dash it all, Flynn," said Lovell warmly, "you might leave that kind of thing to Smythe! I never thought you were that kind of chap!"

"Sure, I wish I had let it alone," mumbled Flynn. "But—but Smythe told me it was a dead cert, and—and he said it was sporting, and—and—"

"And you've been betting on horses?" said Raby.

"Only this once—just for a little flutter!" said Flynn. "You—you see, I—I wouldn't have betted with a bookmaker. I told Smythe I wouldn't see Joey Hook. I drew the line at that. But—but just among ourselves, you know. Howard was willing to make a bet against Eye-opener, and—and it was a dead cert, too. But—but the paper this morning said that Eye-opener wasn't in good form, and—and I think perhaps she has been beaten."

"Well, you'll see the morning paper, and you'll know then."

"I—I can't wait till the morning!" gasped Flynn. "You don't understand! Sure, I've been on tenterhooks all day! I've laid three to one on Eye-opener in quids—"

"Three quids?" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"Yis!"

"You've got to pay Howard three quids if Eye-opener's beaten?"

"Yis!" groaned Flynn.

"And Smythe put you up to it?"

"Nunno! Smythe said it was the chance of a lifetime!"

"Oh, you fathead!" said Lovell. "You can bet your Sunday socks that your precious gee-gee is beaten, and that Howard will share the plunder with Smythe!"

"Howly Moses!" ejaculated Flynn, in dismay.

"And that's what you want the evening paper for?" said Jimmy Silver. "You young ass! You can't even wait till the morning to know that you've lost your money!"

"I—I can't have lost it! Smythe said Eye-opener was a dead cert for the Two Hundred Sovs! But—but look here, let me go!"

shouted Flynn. "I tell ye I'm goin' out to get that paper! I sha'n't slape to-night if I don't know! If—if I've lost, I don't know how I shall settle up with Howard! I shall have to borrow off the chaps, and hand 'em my allowance for the next month! I've only got to pay Howard if I've lost! And I've got to know!"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver. "You ought to be jolly well ragged, as well as losing your money! But I can see well enough that that rotter Smythe talked you over and fooled you! I shouldn't wonder if it's a put-up job between him and Howard to welsh you! They're capable of it!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rough Justice!

ADOLPHUS SMYTHE was in high feather.

He reclined gracefully in the easy-chair in his study, with one elegantly-trousered leg crossed over the other, puffing lazily at a cigarette.

Howard of the Shell was sitting on the table lighting a cigarette.

The two Shell fellows looked particularly "chippy." They were the richer by three pounds that did not belong to them.

Acting on Smythe's kind advice, Flynn of the Fourth had made his bet with Howard. But there was a complete understanding between the two young rascals of the Shell. Flynn had paid up his loss, and the precious pair had halved it. Each of them jingled thirty shillings in his pocket, and the fact that it was not their own money did not trouble them in the least.

The money, too, came in very useful, for Smythe had had back luck lately on the "gees." Smythe had plenty of pocket-money, but he had so many roads for it that he was sometimes "stony." Joey Hook, the seedy bookmaker, who was generally to be found at the Bird-in-Hand, in Coombe, accounted for a good deal of Adolphus' spare cash.

"This sets us up again a bit!" Smythe remarked. "I was down to my last half-quad, by gad! What's your fancy for tomorrow, old sport?"

Before Howard could reply the study door opened, without a knock. Smythe glanced round quickly, concealing his cigarette in the palm of his hand. But his visitors were only juniors, and the cigarette came into view again at once. Jimmy Silver & Co. marched into the study.

"You fags always come into a room without knockin'!" yawned Smythe.

"Shut the door!" said Jimmy Silver.

Raby closed the door.

Smythe rose to his feet.

He was on the worst of terms with the Fistical Four, and that visit and their grim looks alarmed him a little.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "You know I don't want you in my study, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy nodded.

"We're here on business," he explained. "You've been swindling young Flynn, and getting him to gamble on gee-gees."

"Flynn made a bet with Howard," said Smythe. "It's his own business, I suppose."

"Ours, too," said Jimmy Silver.

"You meddin' cad—"

"You can play the giddy ox in this study as much as you like," said Jimmy Silver. "We're not out as censors of morals. You can keep on your precious blackguardism till you're found out and sacked, for anything we care. But you're not going to rope in innocent kids, Smythe, and put them up to backing gee-gees!"

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

"And more than that, you're not going to swindle the kids you tempt away from the giddy paths of virtue."

"You dare to insinuate—," began Smythe hotly.

Jimmy Silver interrupted him without ceremony.

"I don't insinuate anything. You talked and fooled Flynn into making a bet with Howard, knowing he would lose. I haven't the least doubt you've shared the loot; you're dishonourable enough."

The Co. chuckled; they enjoyed Jimmy Silver's plain speaking. Jimmy always called a spade a spade.

"Get out of my study, you insultin' hound!" shouted Smythe.

"But it isn't only the swindling, it's the gambling I object to," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "Keep it in your own set, and we keep off the grass. But you're not going to rope in any of our pals, Smythe."

"I suppose Flynn can look after himself, without you chippin' in!" said Howard sarcastically.

"Never mind that. We're chipping in."

"If you don't get out of this study sharp, you'll be put out," said Smythe.

"Flynn's paid you three quids," said Jimmy, unheeding. "You're not going to keep his money."

"What!"

"Flynn's paid up. It serves him right to lose the money, as far as that goes, and he doesn't want it back. But you rotters are not going to make a penny profit out of it!"

"Who's going to stop us?" sneered Smythe.

"Little me!" said Jimmy Silver. "Downstairs there's a hospital collecting-box. You are going to put three pounds in it."

"What!" gasped Smythe.

"The three quids you've swindled out of Flynn," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to see that you do it!"

Smythe of the Shell burst into a laugh.

"Yaas, I can see us doing it," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't!"

"No!"

Jimmy Silver raised his hand.

"Go for 'em!" he commanded.

"Why—what— You young ruffian!"

Yarrah!"

"Keep off!" shrieked Howard. "Oh, my hat! Yah!"

Bump! Bump!

The Fistical Four were fairly on the war-path. They collared the two sportsmen of the Shell, and Smythe and Howard came down on the floor.

The Nuts of the Shell were not fighting-men. But they put up a fight now.

For several minutes the scene in the study was terrific.

The table went over with a crash. Chairs were knocked right and left; the mantelpiece was swept clean. Smythe and Howard were fighting to escape, but there was no escape for them.

The door opened, and Selwyn of the Shell looked in.

"What's the thumpin' row?" he exclaimed. "You'll have the prefects here! Why—what— Grooh!"

Jimmy Silver ran to the door. He did not speak to Selwyn; he shoved him out of the doorway, and Selwyn staggered along the passage and fell. Jimmy Silver slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Smythe of the Shell was down on the hearthrug now, and Lovell was sitting on his chest and Raby was standing on his legs—with direful results to Adolphus' elegant trousers. Howard was still struggling with Newcome; but Jimmy Silver joined in again, and Howard bumped on the floor. Newcome promptly planted a knee on his chest.

"Groo-hoo!" mumbled Smythe. "Ow-wow-yow! I'll slaughter you! Yoo-hoo! Oh crumbs!"

"Keep 'em pinned!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Are you going to put that tin in the hospital box, Smythe?"

"Ow! Yaas!" groaned Smythe. "Anything you like! Oh dear! Oh!"

"What about you, Howard?"

"Yow-ow! Yes."

"Let the rotters get up!"

Smythe and Howard, dusty, dishevelled, and furious, staggered to their feet. They gave the chums of the Fourth almost homicidal looks. But all the fight had been taken out of them.

"Come on," said Jimmy Silver. "No time like the present."

"I—I'll put it in presently!" stammered Smythe.

"You'll put it in now," said Lovell, with a chuckle. "Lay 'em across the table."

"Stoppit!" shrieked Smythe. "We're comin'!"

"Come on, then!"

Jimmy Silver and Raby took an arm each of Smythe. Lovell and Newcome performed the same office for Howard. The door was unlocked, and the six marched out of the study. There was a buzzing crowd outside.

"What the merry dickens is the game?" shouted Chesney of the Shell.

Smythe thought of calling upon the Shell fellows for rescue. Jimmy Silver easily divined his thought.

"We're sticking to you, Smythe!" he said pleasantly. "If you want another rough-and-tumble on the stairs, you're welcome!"

Smythe ground his teeth with helpless rage. He dared not begin a struggle on the stairs. He was in too mortal a terror of the whole transaction coming to light.

Down the stairs went the two Nuts, escorted by the Fistical Four, leaving the amazed crowd in a buzz of excitement. In the lower hall was the collecting-box clamped to the wall. The juniors halted before it.

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

Smythe, with a suppressed groan, extracted thirty shillings from his pocket, and the money clinked into the box, counted as it went in by Jimmy Silver's sharp eyes. Howard hesitated, looked round wildly, and he spotted Mr. Bootles at the end of the passage.

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Like another serap, with Bootles as a witness?" he asked.

Howard gritted his teeth, and clinked the ill-gotten money into the collecting-box. Mr. Bootles was approaching the spot, and he looked on as the last coins clinked in.

"Dear me! You look very untidy, Smythe and Howard," he said chidingly. "You should

"Let me go!"

"You're not going to break bounds, my infant! No good getting a licking and a gating as well as losing your quids!"

"I tell you I've got to know!" wailed Flynn. "I sha'n't slape to-night—"

"Serve you right!" growled Lovell.

"Well, it would serve him right!" said Jimmy Silver. "But Flynn's only an ass, and we'll put him out of his misery! I can get you an evening paper, you duffer, without breaking bounds for it."

"You can!" gasped Flynn.

"Yes. Mr. Bootles has one. Wait here while I get it."

Flynn gasped with relief.

"Sure, it's a broth of a bhoy ye are, Jimmy Silver! Hurry up!"

"Fathead!" said Jimmy.

He quitted the study and hurried downstairs. Jimmy Silver was feeling wrathful; but his wrath was directed against Smythe of the Shell, not Flynn. Flynn was a careless and thoughtless fellow, too good-natured to say "No" to anybody; and the cad of the Shell had found an easy victim for the happy-go-lucky Irish junior, and to see him caught in Adolphus' unscrupulous clutches in this way made him furious.

He inwardly resolved that Adolphus should hear mere about it shortly. Meanwhile, he hurried for the evening paper, to put the unhappy Flynn out of his misery, as he expressed it.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, always had an evening paper sent to the school. He kindly consented to let Jimmy Silver borrow it.

Jimmy Silver hurried back to the end study with the paper. Flynn jumped up eagerly as he came in, and almost snatched it from him. He was trembling with eagerness, between hope and fear. Flynn was experiencing for the first time some of the joys—or otherwise—of a gambler.

He tore the paper open, and blinked at the racing reports in the stop-press column.

"Oh!"

That was all Flynn said as he saw the report. The paper fluttered from his hand, and he sank into the armchair, his face white as a sheet.

Jimmy Silver picked up the paper silently. Lovell and Raby and Newcome glanced compassionately at Flynn. Jimmy glanced at the report:

"Plate of 200 Sovs.—Hercules, Mammon II., Quicksilver."

"Also Ran: Pumpkin, Walker's Pride, Eye-opener."

That was the report. Eye-opener, the "dead cert" upon which the unfortunate Flynn had staked three pounds, was not even "placed."

"Also ran!" groaned Flynn. "Also ran!"

He staggered to his feet.

"I—I've got to pay Howard!" he mumbled.

"I—I've got a quid! Oswald will lend me another—I know he will! Can you fellows lend me a pound? I—I'll settle in a fortnight!"

If anybody had told Jimmy Silver an hour before that he would be lending anybody a pound to pay a gambling debt he would have laughed. But the misery and dismay in Flynn's face were too much for him. Silently he glanced at his chums, and went through his pockets. Lovell and Raby and Newcome followed his example, also in silence.

A pound, made up of shillings and half-crowns and sixpences and a few coppers, was handed to Flynn. He mumbled incoherent thanks, and stumbled from the study.

"Who wouldn't be a sporting blade?" said Raby, with a faint grin. "Flynn looks as if he enjoys it, doesn't he? Poor beggar!"

Jimmy Silver's brows contracted grimly.

"Flynn's been an ass!" he said. "He oughtn't really to pay Howard, but he feels bound to. Let him rip! But this is where we chip in!"

"I don't quite see—"

Jimmy Silver made a fierce gesture.

"So long as Smythe keeps his blackguardism among his own set, it's no business of ours. But he's not going to spring it on our friends! It would serve him right if we told Bulkeley. But the cad knows we can't sneak about him! Well, we're not going to sneak. We're going to take the matter into our own hands, and by the time we've done with Smythe he'll be fed-up with getting kids in the Fourth to gamble with him!"

To which the Co. responded heartily:

"Hear, hear!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

not go about in so extremely slovenly a state. What are you doing here?"

"They came down in rather a hurry, sir, to put in some money for the hospital," said Jimmy Silver blandly. "They're standing thirty shillings each!"

"What—what!" said Mr. Bootles, in surprise. "That is a great deal of money for juniors to contribute! I must say that this is very right and proper, and very unselfish—very! But pray go and make yourselves more tidy, my dear boys. I am sure your Form-master would be displeased to see you looking so very slovenly!"

Smythe and Howard, with feelings too deep for words, limped back to their study. The profit on their precious transaction was gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream. It had gone for a good purpose, but that was no comfort to the disappointed and furious Nuts. What they felt towards Jimmy Silver could not be expressed in mere words.

The Fistical Four went to their study for prep in cheery spirits. They felt that they deserved well of Rockwood and of their country.

"I fancy," Jimmy Silver remarked, "that Smythe won't be in a hurry to get kids in the Fourth to gamble with him again. I fancy we've put a spoke in his wheel—what!"

"You bet!" chuckled Lovell.

In the end study complete satisfaction reigned, but in Adolphus Smythe's study there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Jobson is not Taking Any!

THE next day there were three fellows in Rockwood School who looked as if they were not enjoying life.

One was Patrick O'Donovan Flynn, of the Fourth, whose usual good spirits were dashed by the fact that he was stony, and that his pocket-money for several weeks to come was booked to repay the two "quids" he had borrowed.

The other two were Smythe and Howard of the Shell.

They were feeling sore in mind and body.

The noble Adolphus had a solitary half-quid in his pocket; and that afternoon he was meeting Mr. Hook, the bookmaker, and how far would a miserable half-quid go in tempting Fortune?

But, as a matter of fact, the great Adolphus was thinking more of vengeance than of playing the "giddy goat" just now.

Licking Jimmy Silver for his high-handed interference was out of the question.

Adolphus had tried that once. Once was enough. He would as soon have tried to lick Sergeant O'Leary as Jimmy Silver of the Fourth.

But to take that ragging and the loss of his ill-gotten gains lying down was not to be thought of. Adolphus brooded over it gloomily.

Then a sudden and illuminating idea flashed into Adolphus' powerful brain as he discussed the matter with Howard over a cigarette.

"Jobson!" he ejaculated.
 "Jobson!" repeated Howard.
 "Yes, Jobson of the Fifth!"
 "What the dickens—"
 "You know Jobby doesn't like those cheeky fags," said Smythe, his eyes gleaming. "He

thinks the end study ought to be licked regularly every day! I've heard him say so."

"Jobby won't fight our battles for us, you ass!" said Howard sourly.

"He's as poor as a church mouse," said Smythe. "He's always borrowing tin, and getting fellows to stand him feeds and things. He never has any money. I'll make it a half-quid if Jobson thrashes that young scoundrel within an inch of his life!"

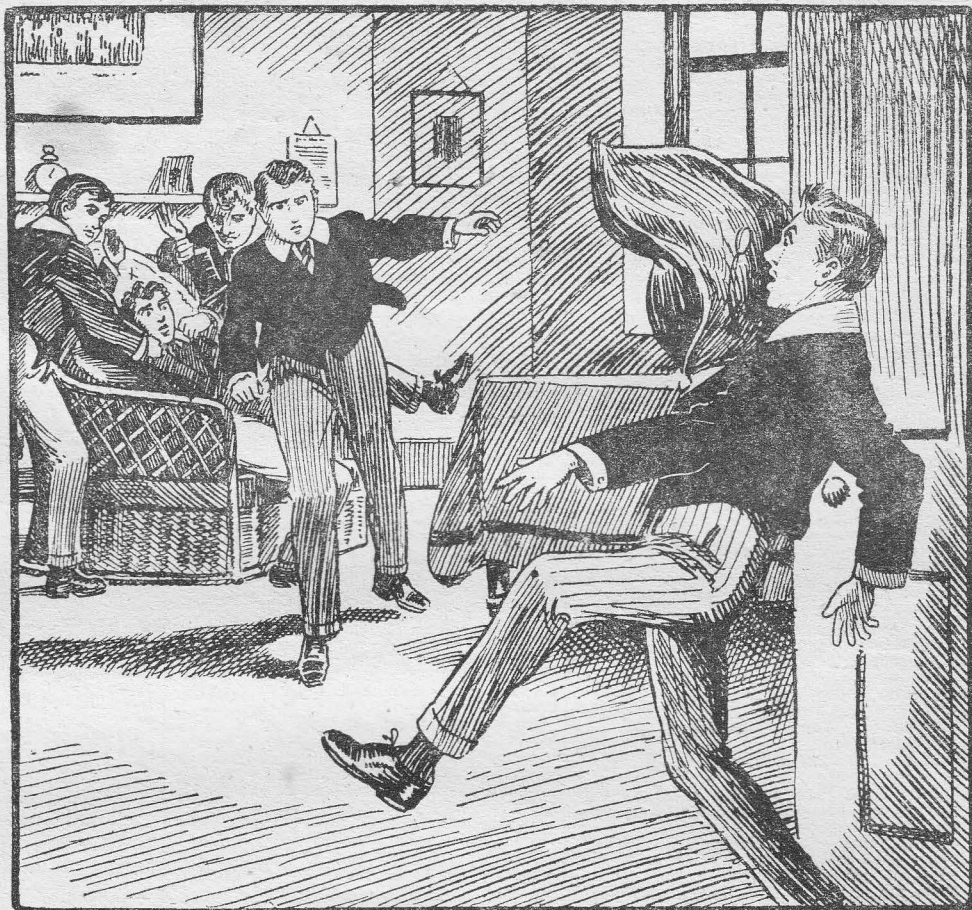
"They'd all pile on him. Jobby can't handle the four of them!"

"I wondered whether a little loan would be any good to you?" he remarked.

Jobson was genial at once. Jobby even borrowed of juniors—a dreadfully undignified thing for a senior to do. But all the Rockwood fellows agreed that poor old Jobby hadn't an atom of dignity.

"Right-ho!" he said. "As it happens, I want a half-crown particularly this afternoon. I'll settle out of the Governor's Prize. I'm sure to get that!"

"Settle when you like," said Smythe.



The cushion flew through the air and caught Smythe under the chin. "Ow! yowp!" he roared. "You cheeky fag—I'll slaughter you! Yow!" (See page 9.)

"He'd have to catch Silver alone, of course. Easy enough. I know he's going over to Latham to-morrow afternoon; it's a half-holiday. He's got some relation or other there, and he's chucking the footer for the afternoon. Lovell and Raby and Newcome are playing, so Jobby can follow Silver out and wallop him!"

"Good egg! Let's go and see Jobby."

Somewhat cheered up by the prospect of heavy punishment falling upon the iniquitous Jimmy Silver, the two badly-used Nuts made their way to the Fifth-Form passage to interview the great Jobson.

They found the Fifth-Former at home. Jobson of the Fifth was a tall, lanky, powerful fellow, generally supposed to be every sort of an ass, but a dreadfully hard hitter in a "scrap."

He was poor, and did not dress so well as the other fellows—a fact that was much remarked on on the Classical side of Rockwood. Classics prided themselves on dressing better than the Moderns; but Jobson out-Moderned the Moderns, so to speak, by his general slovenliness.

Jobson was lounging by the window. He turned and looked at the Nuts of the Shell as they came in.

"Hallo! What do you fags want?" was his greeting. Smythe coughed.

"Only the fact is, I want you to lick Jimmy Silver!"

"What!"

"He's a cheeky little beast, you know, and he wants it. Give him the licking of his life," said Smythe eagerly. "Pile into him! Whack him black and blue, so that the young cad'll crawl home, and the half-quid's yours! What do you say?"

Jobson did not say anything.

He stared at Adolphus Smythe for some moments, as if dwelling on the meaning of his words. Then he made a sudden rush at the two Nuts.

"Here, I say—" gasped Smythe.

"Hands off, you shabby idiot!" roared Howard.

"You young rascals!"

Jobson of the Fifth grasped Smythe by the collar and Howard by his carefully parted hair, and the heads of the two Nuts came together with a resounding concussion.

Crack!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Yah!"

"You cheeky young scoundrels!" said Jobson. "Offering me money to lick a kid you're afraid of yourselves, though you're bigger than he is! What do you take me for, you blessed young hooligans?"

Crack!

"Ow! Yow! Oh!"

"Help!"

"Out you go! Get out, you miserable little cads!"

Jobson swung the two unhappy Nuts out of his study. Smythe sprawled along the passage, roaring, and Howard went spinning across him, and bumped down. But Jobson was not finished yet. He started on the two juniors with his boots. They were shabby boots, not at all like the elegant footwear of Adolphus Smythe, but they were quite useful for kicking purposes.

Biff—biff—biff!

"Oh crumbs! Run for it!" gasped Howard. Smythe did not speak; he was already running. The two Shell fellows disappeared down the passage at record speed. Jobson went back into his study grinning.

Adolphus and his chum did not stop running till they reached their study. There they sank down, gasping for breath.

"Ow-ow-ow!" moaned Adolphus. "The low beast!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" groaned Howard. "The shabby ruffian! Wow-ow!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Jobson of the Fifth was not troubled by any more calls from Adolphus. Adolphus was fed up with him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Very Clever Scheme!

"**E**RE you are, Master Smythe!"

Afternoon lessons were over at Rookwood, and the winter dusk was falling as Adolphus Smythe stopped at the stile in the lane. A fat and greasy gentleman was leaning on the stile, smoking a rank cigar. He touched his shabby bowler-hat to the dandy of the Shell. Joey Hook was always very civil to Adolphus Smythe. He could afford to be, as he made a regular income out of the sportive Adolphus.

Adolphus nodded to him.

"Wot's the business, Master Smythe?" said Mr. Hook. "If you've got a fancy for to-morrow's races—"

"It isn't that, Joey," said Smythe. "I want you to help me in quite another matter. I've been done out of three quids I was going to lay with you."

"That's 'ard lines, Master Smythe!" Adolphus gritted his teeth.

"I want to pay out the cad who's done me. You've seen Jimmy Silver?"

"I've seen the young 'ound."

Adolphus glanced cautiously round, and lowered his voice.

"I want him thrashed, Joey."

"Eh?"

Joey Hook had performed many little services for Adolphus. But this came as a surprise to him.

"The young cad has interfered with me, and spoiled my game!" muttered Adolphus. "I'm not going to lick him myself; it's beneath my dignity to enter into a scuffle with a grubby fag."

"'Course it is, Master Smythe!" said Joey Hook, a smile hovering round his stubbly mouth, however. "You wouldn't soil your 'ands on 'im."

"Exactly! But I'd stand half-a-quid to anyone who would give him the licking of his life."

"Oh!" said Mr. Hook.

"If you like to take it on, Joey—"

"Leave me hout!" said Mr. Hook promptly. "The young codger knows me by sight; I can't afford a case of assault and battery. But if you mean business, Master Smythe, I can put you on to the right man. Ever 'eard of Pug Wilson?"

Smythe shook his head.

"He's a 'oly terror!" said Mr. Hook impressively. "He's jest out from six months' stretch for breakin' a man's jaw when he was in drink. Bless your 'eart, he'd scalp his own dad for 'arf-a-quid! You 'and me the money, and I'll fix it. I shall see 'im to-night at the Ship!"

"I—I don't want the kid damaged, you know," said Adolphus, rather alarmed by Mr. Hook's description of the Pug. "Only a jolly good hiding, you know."

"That's all right. I remember Master Silver; he's chipped in more than once agin me!" said Mr. Hook viciously. "Spoiling a gentleman's game! Wot business is it of 'is if a cove lays a bet with a young gentleman, I'd like to know? I'll tell the Pug; he'll take a rope's-end and lather 'im—what!"

"Good! A rope's-end will be simply ripping!" said Adolphus, his eyes gleaming.

"A thumping good hiding, so that the cad will simply crawl home. That's the idea!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

"Leave it to me. Where can the kid be found, though? 'Tain't much good the Pug comin' up to the school!" grinned Mr. Hook.

"No, no! Besides, I—I don't want to see the man," said Adolphus uneasily, with a half-formed thought in his mind of possible future blackmail on the part of the redoubtable Pug. "Fix it with him when you see him. Tell him to rope's-end Jimmy Silver till he howls for mercy. That'll do the trick. Silver is going over to Latcham to-morrow afternoon—alone. He'll walk; the road's too rotten for biking in this weather. He's bound to take the cut across the moor; I've noticed he does so. That's a lonely place, Joey."

Mr. Hook rubbed his hands.

"Prime!" he commented. "Couldn't be better. Nobody with 'im—wot!"

"No; his pals will be playin' footer. He's sure to leave Rookwood soon after dinner. If your friend waits on the short cut over the moor at two, he'll be sure to be early."

"But 'ow'll he know him?" said Mr. Hook.

"No good in asking a kid if he's Jimmy Silver, 'cause he wants to lick 'im, is it?"

Adolphus grinned.

"No, hardly. Let me see. Silver's a Classical chap, so he'll have a Classical cap—a red ribbon, you know, like mine."

"But that ain't 'ardly enough."

Adolphus reflected.

"S'pose you could put some mark on 'im?" suggested Mr. Hook. "Somethin' that the Pug would know him by?"

Smythe brightened up.

"Easy as fallin' off a form," he said. "I'll put a chalk mark on his back while he's watchin' the footer. He won't notice it. Tell Bilson to see that the kid's got a cross chalked on the back of his coat—or his jacket, if he's not wearing a coat."

"Good enough."

That precious scheme being arranged, the rest of Adolphus' conversation dealt with horses. When he parted with Mr. Hook, and sauntered back to Rookwood, Smythe of the Shell was grinning contentedly. Jobson of the Fifth had failed him, but the same idea had worked after all, Mr. Hook's friend the Pug being a little less particular.

On the morrow Jimmy Silver was to receive the thrashing of his life, and Adolphus looked forward to the prospect with great joy.

The Fistical Four were chatting in the hall when Smythe came in. They noted the expression on his face, and Jimmy hailed him cheerily.

"Hallo, Adolphus! Gee-gee got home at last?"

Adolphus took no notice of that humorous query. He walked away with his nose high in the air, leaving the chums of the Fourth smiling.

Smythe of the Shell smiled, too, in his study. He reflected that he laughs best who laughs last, and the deep and unscrupulous Adolphus felt that he was sure of the final laugh.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Luck!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. came out of the School House the following afternoon in a merry group. It was a fine, clear winter afternoon, ideal weather for footer.

The Classical juniors were playing the Moderns that afternoon, and Jimmy's place was at the head of his team. But for once Lovell was captaining the side.

Jimmy Silver's uncle was in Latcham, and Jimmy was going to see him there. He was loth to give up the footer, but he did not feel that he could put his uncle off. There had been a great deal of discussion about Jimmy Silver's missing the match, but it could not be helped.

"You've got to beat the Moderns, mind!" Jimmy Silver said impressively. "I wish I could stay and help you, but there you are. I'll see you start, anyway."

"Bless your uncle!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver went down to the footer-ground with his chums. Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side were there, looking very fit and well. Smythe of the Shell strolled down to the ground with the other fellows.

The teams lined up in the field. Tommy Dodd kicked off, and the match started. Jimmy Silver stood with his hands in his coat-pockets, looking on. He was keen to see his men get going before he left.

The Classics were starting well. Lovell led the forwards in a fine rush for the Modern goal, and there was a sharp tussle.

At such a moment Jimmy had no thoughts for anything but what was going on on the

football-ground. He watched eagerly. If the Classics scored before he started, it would comfort him during his long tramp across the moor.

"Go it, Classics!"

"Play up, Moderns!"

"On the ball!"

The juniors round the ground were shouting excitedly. Smythe of the Shell drew nearer to Jimmy Silver.

All eyes were on the footballers. There was no eye to observe Adolphus as, standing close behind Jimmy, he drew a stick of chalk down the back of his coat, and then drew it across.

A thick chalked cross marked Jimmy's coat on the back now. Smythe slipped the chalk back into his pocket and strolled away to the pavilion.

His work was done.

"Oh, what rotten luck!" said Jimmy Silver, as the ball rebounded again into play from one of the goalposts.

"A miss is as good as a mile!" grinned a Modern junior. "Go it, Moderns!"

Jimmy Silver glanced at his watch. He felt that he ought to be off, but the football enchainned him to the spot. The Moderns were attacking now, and Lovell & Co. were hard pressed. Half-past two rang out from the clock-tower, and Jimmy Silver started.

"Dash it all! I shall be late!"

He tore himself away from the ropes, and hurried down to the school gates. There he paused. At that hour the carrier's cart generally passed, on its way to Coombe, and it occurred to Jimmy Silver that he could get a lift as far as the village which would make up for lost time.

"Carrier passed yet?" he called out to old Mack, the porter.

"Not yet, Master Silver. Any minute now."

"Good!"

Jimmy Silver leaned on the gatepost, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled as he waited. He could not return to the football-ground without missing the carrier.

So he waited.

In a few minutes the carrier's cart came in sight, rumbling heavily along the slushy road.

"Here you are, William," said Jimmy Silver cheerily, detaching himself from the gatepost. "Will you give me a lift to Coombe?"

"Certainly, Master Silver! Jump in!"

Jimmy Silver jumped into the carrier's cart. Mack handed up a parcel, and old William drove on his old horse.

On the gate-post, where Jimmy Silver had been leaning, appeared a chalked cross, transferred from the back of his coat. Smythe of the Shell had been liberal with the chalk, in order that there should be no mistake.

It caught Jimmy Silver's eye, and he stared at it.

"What the merry dickens!" ejaculated Jimmy. "Some silly ass been playing tricks with my coat, William, old scout!"

Old William blinked round.

"Is there anything on my back, Willy?"

Jimmy Silver turned his back to the carrier, and old William blinked at him.

"There's a chalky mark, Master Silver."

"Rub it off, old chap!"

"Yessir!"

While the horse trotted on up the lane, old William's horny hand rubbed the back of Jimmy Silver's coat, and obliterated the cross to the very last vestige.

"You been leavin' on something, Master Silver," said William.

Jimmy frowned.

"Some silly ass chalked me for a joke, I suppose," he said. "It came off the gatepost. Thank you, William!"

The carrier's cart rumbled on, and reached Coombe. There Jimmy Silver alighted. He thanked the old carrier, and started on his long walk. By taking the short cut across the heath, he saved a mile or more on the road; and it was a long walk to Latcham.

In a few minutes he was out of sight of the village, and he soon passed the last farmhouse.

The lonely heath lay stretched before him, the footpath slushy and wet, and piled on either side by snow that had not yet melted.

Jimmy Silver stepped out briskly, invigorated by the keen breeze that came from the distant sea.

Suddenly, from a tree beside the lonely path, a figure detached itself—a short, thick-set man, with a square jaw and a beetling brow, in a fur cap, had been leaning on the tree watching the path.

He stepped out into the path as Jimmy Silver came along.

Jimmy glanced at him rather suspiciously. He had never seen the man before, but

he looked so thorough a ruffian that the junior was not pleased by the meeting in that lonely spot. He was more than a mile from any habitation.

Jimmy drew to the other side of the path, and kept a wary eye on the ruffian as he came by. The man looked like a tramp of the most dangerous character. Jimmy was not troubled by nerves, but he did not want to tackle a muscular footpad if he could help it.

The man, however, seemed to take no notice of him. He was fumbling with a pipe as he stood in the path.

Jimmy passed, and the man shambled after him. His eyes were scanning the back of Jimmy's coat.

Jimmy turned quickly as he heard the shambling footsteps behind him.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded. The Pug grinned. Had there been a chalked mark on Jimmy Silver's back the Pug would very quickly have made known what he wanted. But that chalk mark was no longer in existence.

"Pr'aps you could tell me the time, sir?" said the Pug, quite civilly.

Jimmy glanced at his watch, keeping one eye, however, on the tramp.

"Quarter-past three," he said.

"Thanky!" The man went back to the tree, and leaned on it, watching the path. Jimmy Silver strode on his way.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Pug Earns is Half-Quid!

"GOAL!" Adolphus Smythe yawned portentously.

It was the first goal in the match, and it was taken by the Classic side—from the foot of Arthur Edward Lovell. But it did not interest Smythe of the Shell.

Adolphus sauntered away from the football ground.

He was bored.

It was awkward to be stony. That afternoon might have been spent in congenial society at the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe—strictly under the rose, of course, if only money had not been so tight. The last half-quad had gone to pay the redoubtable Pug for his services, and the money extracted from Flynn of the Fourth was reposing in the hospital collecting-box, owing to the interference of the Fistical Four.

Adolphus' only consolation was the thought of the terrific rope-sending Jimmy Silver was to receive that afternoon—in fact, was probably receiving already.

Smythe of the Shell had to kill time that afternoon. But his thoughts dwelt with pleasure upon Jimmy Silver's probable state.

He glanced at his watch.

"Turned three," he murmured. "He's getting it already, I should say. Depends on where he meets the Pug. By gad, I'll be glad to see him when he comes crawling in."

Smythe reasoned it out that, after receiving the terrific thrashing now due, Jimmy Silver would not continue his journey to Latham. He would not be in a condition to do so. When Pug Wilson had finished with him, Jimmy would crawl home to Rookwood. Smythe of the Shell looked forward with great delight to seeing him come limping home.

That sight would compensate him for his many injuries.

Having yawned about the quadrangle for some time, Smythe of the Shell sauntered down to the gates.

It was getting near time for the badly-used Jimmy to come limping in, and Smythe did not want to miss him.

He looked out into the road.

No sign of Jimmy so far. Half-past three chimed out.

"Dash it all," murmured Adolphus, "he can't be long now!"

He leaned on the gatepost, with his hands in his coat-pockets, and watched the road.

A cyclist or two passed him—a cart rumbled by, and a motor-car came grinding up the mud.

But Jimmy Silver did not appear.

A quarter of an hour glided by, and Smythe of the Shell was still leaning on the gatepost, growing more and more impatient.

Why didn't Jimmy Silver come?

Had the Pug missed him after all—had Joey Hook failed to make the necessary arrangements? Or—Smythe shivered a little at this thought—had the brutal Pug done his work too well, and was Jimmy Silver lying disabled in some lonely spot on the moor?

Adolphus was growing uneasy as well as impatient. If that terrific thrashing had been bestowed on Jimmy Silver, it was impossible

that he could have gone on to Latham just the same. Where was he, then?

Smythe was too impatient at last to wait any longer. He stepped out into the road, and scolded away towards Coombe.

The chalky mark on the gatepost was fainter now. Smythe of the Shell had been leaning heavily against it, and most of it was transferred to the back of his elegant coat.

But as Adolphus had no eyes in the back of his head, he was quite unconscious of the fact.

He sauntered down to Coombe, but he did not pass Jimmy Silver on the road. He strolled out on the heath, and looked across the dim expanse.

"There was no one in sight. 'By gad!' muttered Adolphus. 'Either the fool's missed him, or—he's hurt him, and he can't get home. I—I didn't want anything of that kind. By gad, the kid can't stay out all night; it'd be his death!'"

Adolphus was a little pale now. If something really serious had happened to Jimmy Silver, the stern inquiry that would follow might have all sorts of results. The dandy of the Shell began to wish that he had not made that excellent arrangement with Mr. Hook and his friend, the Pug.

He started across the heath at last. He felt that he must know what had happened, or whether anything had happened at all.

He scanned the footpath, and the drifts of snow along it, as he walked on. But there was no sign of the Pug's victim.

He started a little as he came in sight of a ruffian-looking man leaning against a lonely tree by the path.

Adolphus had never seen the man before, but he could guess that it was most probably the Pug. The man was evidently waiting there.

The Pug took a black pipe out of his mouth, and came into the path. Adolphus paused. The man was there to do his work, doubtless; but the dandy of the Shell did not like his looks.

Adolphus hurried his steps a little. Whether this was the Pug or not, Adolphus felt that the sooner he gave him a wide berth the more comfortable he would feel.

The man glanced after him, and grinned. He ran down the path after Adolphus. The Shell fellow spun round in alarm, panting.

"Wha-at do you want?" he gasped. "I've been waitin' for you," said the Pug cheerfully.

He had spotted the chalky cross on Adolphus' back. It was the sign he was looking for.

"W-w-waiting for me!" stammered Smythe. "Wot?"

To Adolphus' great alarm, the Pug extracted a thick and knotted rope's-end from his pocket. Adolphus backed away.

"Don't!" shrieked Smythe. "Don't!"

But the Pug did not stop. He had waited over two hours in that cold and windy spot to earn his half-quad, and he was not inclined to waste any more time. He came for Adolphus with a rush, flourishing the rope's-end.

With a shriek of terror Smythe broke into a desperate run. But his legs felt like lead—he stumbled rather than ran. The Pug overtook him in two or three seconds.

Adolphus shrieked again, in mortal fear, as a heavy hand grasped his shoulder, and spun him round.

"Help! Mercy! Oh, help!" Lash, lash, lash!

The Pug, with a single twist of his powerful arm, turned Adolphus over on the slushy ground. Then the knotted rope's-end rose and fell with terrific lashes.

Whack, whack, whack! Shriek after shriek of anguish pealed from the unhappy Smythe. The chalk mark on his back was soon obliterated. The rope's-end lashed without ceasing.

Face downwards in the mud, smothered with slush, Adolphus wriggled like a worm under the terrible infliction.

And it was terrible. The brutal ruffian was earning his money, and he was enjoying the work. It was a pleasure to the savage rascal, and the cowardly fear of the wretched Smythe added to his enjoyment.

For ten minutes at least the heavy rope's-end rose and fell with cruel force, till Adolphus felt that his back was flayed and burning. A Rookwood flogging would have been a mild amusement compared with that terrible infliction.

Then the Pug left him. He grinned at the writhing, muddied figure in the slush, put the rope's-end into his pocket, and slouched away. Adolphus lay moaning in the mud.

He hardly knew that the ruffian had gone. He was aching and thrilling with pain, and his tears mingled with the slush on his face as he sobbed and groaned and moaned.

This was what he had intended for Jimmy Silver, though Jimmy would certainly not have fallen so tame a victim.

But Adolphus was not thinking of that; he was only thinking of the burning pain that racked him from head to foot.

He lay and moaned, and moaned, and moaned, incapable of movement, while the early winter dusk descended thicker and thicker over the lonely heath.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Nice for Adolphus!

"WHAT the dickens—" Jimmy Silver halted in astonishment.

He was tramping homeward cheerily across the dusky moor, after his visit to Latham. His thoughts were chiefly on the football match, wondering whether Lovell & Co. had beaten the Moderns. A low moan came to his ears, and he spotted a figure extended on the ground beside the path.

Jimmy Silver ran to it at once. "Hallo! What's the matter?" he exclaimed.

A muddy, miserable face turned towards him in the dusk.

"Smythe!" gasped Jimmy. "Oh, oh, oh!" moaned Adolphus. "What's the matter?"

"Hang you! Hang you!" muttered Smythe. "It's all your fault! You've tricked me somehow! I'll make you pay for it—"

"What on earth are you burbling about?" asked Jimmy, in wonder. "What's the matter with you? How on earth did you come in this state?"

Smythe pulled himself together. He remembered in time that it would not do to let Jimmy Silver know the facts. Somehow—how he did not know—the thrashing intended for Jimmy had fallen upon himself. But it was necessary to keep his agency in the matter strictly secret.

"I—I've been assaulted!" he stammered. "A beastly ruffian! Ow-ow! I—I can't walk! Oh dear!"

"By Jove, you've been through it!" said Jimmy. "Why, your coat's torn! My hat! Let me give you a hand, Smythe! Let me help you, old chap!"

The forlorn condition of the wretched Nut touched Jimmy's generous heart. He helped Adolphus to his feet. Smythe, moaning, moved on, leaning heavily upon Jimmy Silver's shoulder.

"I saw a hand-dog-looking brute hanging about here when I passed," said Jimmy. "The same chap, very likely, who pitched into you. What was he like?"

"I—I don't know! I—"

"We'd better call in at the police-station in Coombe, and give a description of him," said Jimmy.

Smythe trembled at the idea. The arrest of the Pug for assault meant the publication of the whole story, and disgrace and ruin for Smythe himself. He found himself under the stern necessity of shielding the ruffian who had so savagely used him. Certainly, if Smythe accused the Pug, the Pug, on his side, would not hesitate to counter-accuse Smythe of having planned the whole affair.

"He ought to be charged for this," said Jimmy.

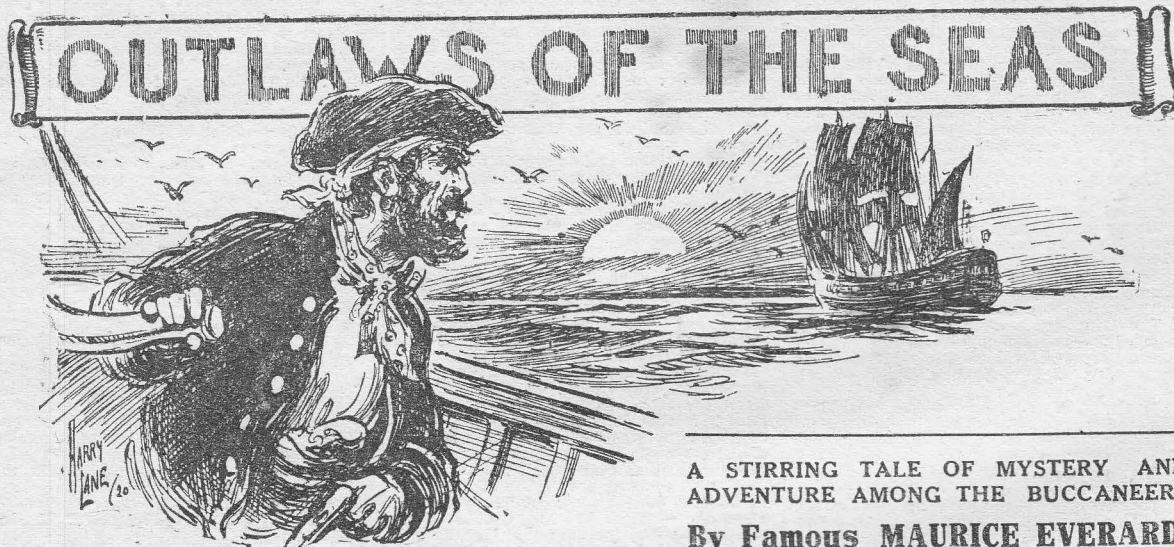
"I—I don't remember what he was like," mumbled Adolphus. "I—I'd rather not say anything!"

And Smythe of the Shell stumbled home painfully to Rookwood, leaning on Jimmy Silver's shoulder.

Adolphus had had the lesson of his life!

Why Smythe of the Shell took that flagrant case of assault and battery "lying down" was a puzzle to Jimmy Silver & Co. But he did. It was not their business, however, and Smythe had his own way without question. But for a long time afterwards Adolphus was sore in both mind and body, and he bitterly repented that exceedingly clever scheme—which had been too clever by half!

(Another grand story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next Friday, entitled: "A Cool Customer!" by Owen Conquest.)



A STIRRING TALE OF MYSTERY AND
ADVENTURE AMONG THE BUCCANEERS
By Famous MAURICE EVERARD.

INTRODUCTION.

BOB GREVILLE, and his cousin, JEFF HAWKINS, are returning to school when they are met by BLACK MICHAEL, a serving man of Bob's father, SIR JOHN GREVILLE. Mike gives them news of the baronet's ruin, and of his orders to take them back to Taland Hall, the home of the Grevilles.

During the journey to Exeter, the three rescue ALDERMAN CONYERS and his

charming daughter from the clutches of a notorious highwayman. To show his gratitude, Conyers invites them to his home. There, after a good meal, he tells them that he is a director of a certain big shipping company, and that he will replace the lost fortunes of the Grevilles on condition that they bring about the capture of Avery, a daring buccaneer, who had made the seas very bad for the merchants of the day.

They journey to Bristol and sign on as "hands" on the ship Duke, on which they encounter Avery in the guise of the first mate. During a night watch, the boys hear sounds of a fight in the forecabin, but on investigating, nothing is discovered. However, they suspect that something mysterious is afoot, and Bob suggests that they had better keep their eyes skinned.

(Now go on with the story.)

In His True Colours.

"GOOD for you!" said Jeff. "I believe we shall do good service for our master, after all. Still, I'd like to know what the firing of the pistol and that dark thing floating on the water meant."

Both questions were to be answered, but in a way neither expected. The clanging of the bell hung at the mainmast brought the hands tumbling from the rough quarters just as the first streaks of dawn were stealing over the grey waste of waters, and among the first to catch their eye was Black Michael, who looked for all the world as though he had been indulging in deep potations, for he stumbled and swayed about the deck like a drunken man.

The boatswain piping the hands to their several quarters kept all busy for a good hour or more, after which the decks were scrubbed and swabbed down, in which very cold and cheerless task the two boys had a very good turn.

It was not until after the first meal, which consisted of salt meat, black bread, and lumps of cheese washed down by weak ale, that they had a chance to exchange words with Black Michael. He sat by the lazaretto, repairing a length of torn sail, when Bob and Jeff came up with him. With the rest of the hands busy in other quarters of the ship, there was some opportunity to exchange confidences.

"Well, my young masters, and how have you fared through your first night on ship-board?" he asked heavily.

Jeff cast him a critical glance, for the nut-brown had gone out of the seaman's usually healthful face, and in its place was a curious sallowness under the skin.

"You look as though you've been seasick the night through," Jeff ventured.

"I dunno what's amiss wi' me," grunted Mike; "but this head o' mine do feel thrice its usual bigness, and as for my eyes, they're that heavy I scarce can keep them open. I went to my sleeping quarters wi' the rest, and after that I recall no more."

"Most like you drank too deeply of the strong ale last evening," suggested Jeff.

"Indeed, I did not," replied the sailor, shaking his black curls. "It was poor enough stuff, and sour at that. And others like me lay down and slept like dogs, so that none woke till the clanging of the bell. Methinks there was summat amiss."

"You heard nothing strange?" asked Bob. "Nary a thing," replied Mike. "Did you?"

THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

"Ay, that we did!" chimed in Jeff. "Neither Bob nor I took of the ale, and we slept alone in that dark hole in the fo'c's'le. But some hours since, before the light had come, we made for the deck and refreshed ourselves with a dip in a bucket of seawater. And suddenly there was a shout, and a pistol-shot, and the ball came near to taking my head off my shoulders."

Black Michael's lower jaw dropped. "Is that so, now? And you learned what the rumpus was?"

"Not at all," Jeff admitted. "We fancied—at least, Bob did—that he heard a splash soon after, and when we looked over the side there was something dark like a small boat being carried away from the ship."

"Being rowed off?"

"No. It was free to wind and wave, turned this way and that, and then disappeared."

"What brought that about?" the sailor asked, glancing at the lump on the boy's forehead.

Jeff drew the edge of his red woollen bonnet down to hide it.

"I was rushing forward to discover who fired the shot when I ran against the mainmast."

"A tidy sort of adventure. You've been dreaming!" laughed Mike.

"Indeed, it was no dream at all!" Jeff maintained stoutly. "We both heard the cry and the firing of the weapon. Now, what do you make of it?"

Before the sailor could answer there were loud cries of "Ay, ay, master!" and the noise of bare feet scuttling across the wet deck as the boatswain piped his call.

"We must come to quarters," said Mike, setting down his bone needle. "No doubt the commander is to have word with us."

By the time they reached the main deck almost all the hands were assembled, crowded together and staring curiously up to the poop, where in the grey light of early morning John Smith strode pompously and fro. He had exchanged his rough sea-stained jacket of yesterday for a square skirted coat with turned-back cuffs, and wore, too, a long-flapped waistcoat which reached down to mid-thigh, almost covering his breeches. Instead of heavy sea-boots, he had on stockings, which were gartered and ribboned below the knee, and his feet were encased in square-toed shoes on which metal buckles gleamed.

"By the powers, he's changed into a swaggering gentleman!" muttered Mike under his breath. "See, he carries a lace

three-cornered hat beneath his arm for all the world like a town gallant!"

Nothing more surprising than the transformation which the night had wrought could be imagined, for not only was the garb of the rough seafaring man gone, but the livid sear was gone, too, and in its place Smith showed a pleasant, bronzed face lit by a pair of merrily-twinkling eyes.

"Avery for a thousand guineas," whispered Jeff, nudging Bob in the side. "He's going to address us."

Surprise was writ large on the sea of up-turned faces who saw, instead of Captain Gibson, a typical sailorman, this counterfeit of a gentleman strutting the poop with mincing stride.

Instead of a telescope, he carried a cane, and, pausing by the poop-rail to survey the crowd below, he drew a silver snuff-box from his waistcoat-pocket, and, holding the brown powder to his nose, sniffed it up once or twice, and then dusted the tiny specks from the folds of the cravat about his throat.

This done, he handed his cane to the boatswain, who stood beside him, and, lifting the long flaps of his waistcoat, showed, stuck in a belt, two long-barrelled pistols upon which he set his hands.

"Now, my merry men of the Duke, I would have word with you all!" he cried, in a loud, swaggering voice. "Time changes all things, including ships at sea. But yesterday we left port, this stout vessel, well armed, and with ample ammunition on board, being then in the charge of Captain Gibson. Unfortunately, this worthy seaman was addicted to the bad habit—a most reprehensible one among good sailormen—of taking more punch than was good for him. When the rest of you retired to your boards or hammocks, he had perforce to be carried to his cabin dead drunk. I tell you of this as a warning."

There was a moment's silence while the words sank home.

"Finding him in this condition, and having resolved that he was no longer fit to command such a fine vessel, I thought it best to flash a signal to shore, and during the night a longboat drew out from the Duchess, which was our sister ship, having on board sixteen stout fellows willing to stand behind me in my design. These sixteen, my good men, you see now behind me, masters, under my charge, of this ship."

At this a roar went up which, however, was checked instantly as Avery drew both his weapons and pointed them at the press.

"This is mutiny!" someone cried.

Before the shout could be taken up, Avery had singled out the luckless one, and, level-

ling the weapon in his right hand, he discharged a shot which took the man full in the chest. With a shrill cry, he threw up his hands and toppled forward on his face.

"In such manner will failure to obey commands be treated!" Avery went on, joining in the laugh which broke out behind him. "From now on, understand, all of you, that I am captain of the Duke, and I brook interference from no man!"

A silence as deep as the grave, and unbroken save for the washing of the waves under the vessel's counter, fell upon the company.

Avery was speaking once more.

"With the aid of my sixteen friends, Captain Gibson and those who were loyal to him were seized in their bunks, gagged and bound, and lowered into the longboat. One alone resisted. He had perforce to be shot, and his body now rests in the deep. The remainder, with good Captain Gibson, were cut adrift, and without doubt in due time, the wind being set that way, they will come safely to shore. So, you see"—Avery's thick lips parted in a smile—"when the humour is upon me I can be as tender and considerate as any woman, but when I am thwarted—well, see there lies the mark of my vengeance!" And he pointed with his weapon to the unfortunate wretch coughing out his life-blood upon the deck.

"So far we have done well," Avery continued, taking the scared silence for approval of his red-handed work. "Overnight all the hatches were secured so that, had any of you recovered from the stupor which the drugged ale laid upon you it would have been impossible to come to your commander's rescue. Anchor, as you are aware, was leisurely weighed, and we put to sea without the smallest confusion, although several ships of war lay in the Channel, including a Dutchman of forty guns. Well, my man"—as a stout-hearted Somersetshire man raised a brawny arm—"what would you say?"

"Are we to understand this vessel is not bound for the Groine, master?"

"You are so to understand. Our course is set for Ushant, and afterwards for an island far to the south where alone my word is law."

"He means Madagascar," said Mike, in an undertone.

"Then we have no chance to leave the ship in North Spain?" said the same voice.

"None at all!" came from Avery. "But every man not wishing to serve under my flag will be given an opportunity to leave the ship!"

"When and where, master?" a dozen cried.

"Within an hour," said Avery, a smile playing about his not ill-looking face. "The ship's carpenter has instructions to run out a plank. Those who are not with me are against me, and can walk the plank into Davy Jones' locker. Those willing to take the shorter journey signify by a show of hands."

There were many murmurs of dissent, but no single arm rose, although both Jeff and Bob, acting on the impulse of the moment, made a move to lift theirs. With a warning glance, however, Black Michael stayed them, and once more silence fell on the ship's company.

How Avery Hoisted the Black Flag!

IT seemed terrible to both the boys that a man should die before their eyes, and they not be able to raise a finger to help him. An instant's reflection, however, showed them the futility of such action. The poor fellow was already beyond the power of human aid, and, at a sign from Avery, two of his companions lifted him up and reverently carried him away.

Then, the company being complete once more, the pirate thus addressed them.

"Seeing that those who are not against me are with me, I have to thank you all for your loyal support," he said, taking so much for granted. "I will, therefore, trouble each and every one of you who has arms of any nature whatsoever, even to an ordinary knife, to step on to the poop and deposit them there."

There was a general searching of pockets, and quite a number of comparatively harmless weapons came to view to be laid in a pile at Avery's feet. With Mike's eye upon them, counselling them to make no response, neither Jeff nor Bob moved, and both being boys but scant heed was paid to them. As it happened, too, Black Michael had left his hanger below overnight, and having the ordinary duties on board ship to attend to, had not brought it on deck with him.

The collection thus being completed, Avery continued his discourse.

"It is customary on such occasions to point out the advantages likely to accrue to those rendering faithful service," he said. "To begin with, know me, all of you, for a plain, blunt man, quick of action, merciless against those who offend me, but a good master to such as serve me well. We have under us a good vessel of thirty guns, well supplied with more than sufficient ammunition for our needs. Of food and water, too, we carry a goodly store, but what we all need is money enough to live the rest of our lives in comfort when this voyage is done."

Romish Inquisition. I call upon you all to bear witness."

The "witness" was a throaty roar of rage which went far beyond the ship out across the tumbling waters, now heaving and dancing in the sunshine of the short winter's day.

"More than this," said Avery, taking another pinch of snuff, and passing the silver box down to the men nearest him, "he has grown rich by plundering honest English merchantmen, by selling our brothers, your brothers and mine, into the hands of the Turk and the Algerine. Even now thousands



"Within an hour," said Avery, "the ship's carpenter has instructions to run out a plank. Those who are not with me can walk the plank into Davy Jones' locker——!" There was a murmur from the crowd of seamen. (See this page.)

"Ay, ay, sir! What about the Spaniard?" cried a lusty fellow from London.

In those days the Spaniard was looked upon by every right-thinking Englishman as legitimate prey, to be plundered, put to the sword, and broken without let or hindrance.

"The Spaniard, indeed," replied Avery, taking his cue. "We all of us know he is the enemy of our King and country. Was it not his sovereign lord who not so many years ago would have laid all England under dominion? Did he not send the great Armada to destroy our fleet under Lord Howard of Effingham—of blessed memory—and come in his thousands to put our land and our religion under the power of the

of them labour in the galleys of the Barbary pirates, and it is for us, as loyal Englishmen, to take revenge for their misfortunes."

The cheer which this announcement brought forth showed that the pirate had touched a tender chord in all their hearts.

"So once clear of the Azores, and well out into the Atlantic, we shall hold to account all such as come in our way. I would remind you," with a flourish of his jewelled hand, "that many treasure ships are constantly on their way home from New Spain, laden with the wealth of the Indies—gold from Peru, jewels taken from the temples of the Incas, spices from the West Indies, and

rich woods from the Bahamas and Honduras. All such are lawful to us, and are legitimate prize."

The alluring prospect, put in such terms, could not fail to appeal to the majority present, for scarce one there was who at some time or other had not suffered from the might and cruelty of Spain. For long years following the defeat of the Armada in Elizabeth's reign Spanish ships had held their supremacy on the Main, capturing every English vessel, and either putting their crews to the sword or condemning them to slave labour in the Indies. And such tales of barbaric cruelty were still rife, and the very name of Spaniard was enough to set the ordinary English sailorman itching to lay hands on his throat. And beyond all this was the lure of prize, in which connection Avery made the position quite clear.

"Before the day is out a record of every man and boy aboard will be taken. The duration of service is for the length of the voyage only. Within two years I promise the Duke shall return to England and hand over her fair portion of prize-money to the Crown. As for the rest, I calculate that during the voyage not less than a million—perhaps a million and a half—will be gathered from various sources. Of this amount every living soul will receive from forty to fifty thousand pounds, and the rest will belong to me."

Fifty thousand pounds! Of course, the amount was so huge as to baffle comprehension. Not one aboard, save the three friends, who did not already see himself in fancy a

rich man, returning to his home with such wealth as should make further buccaneering or adventuring unnecessary. Their crude minds painted pictures of what could be done with such a big amount of money—of workless days and idle comfort, such as they all loved.

"There will be jewels and fine dresses for the womenfolk at home," the pirate went on. "Silks from India, ornaments from the Arabias, dresses such as the Indians wear, tea in plenty from the new plantations of Virginia, and, of course, tobacco, too. And as for rum, well, each man shall take ashore with him when he is paid off—at least three casks full, and during the voyage, believe me, men, there will be no stint. Hallo, there, Jenkins, you who are now first mate of this vessel, broach a cask, and let all drink a right royal health to King and country, and the success of our adventure."

So a cask was brought and broached on the deck, the head being staved in by two stout fellows, who dipped in copper pannikins, and at a sign from the captain passed them round to the men. From hand to hand the pannikins travelled, most men not relinquishing them until the last drop was drained.

In the general excitement Jeff and Bob, with Black Michael, were able to pass the toast by. Three cheers were given for the new captain, and then, as a sign of his authority, orders were given for the black flags to be hoisted. These were two in number, both of some sable material, the smaller, which bore a picture of Avery himself, with skirted coat, breeches, and three-

cornered hat in white silk, being flown from the bows, the larger showing the same picture of the pirate, but beside him a full-length presentation of a dancing skeleton. Over the high poop at the stern the flag of St. George still floated to give an outward semblance of lawfulness to the dastardly work upon which the vessel was engaged.

"Well, we're in for a penny, in for a pound this time, and no mistake!" said Black Michael, as the company broke up and went back to their respective stations. "Avery has shown his real colours right soon. I wonder what the next move in the game will be!"

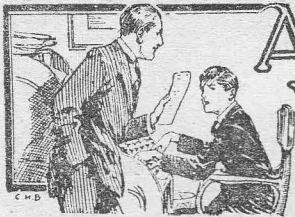
They were, however, given but scant time for conjecture, for soon after noon the black flags were hauled down, the ordinary pennant of the Duke hoisted, and, the Channel Islands lying far behind, a straight course was steered for Usant light.

"Methinks his tale about making for the open Atlantic was designed only to throw dust in our eyes," said Mike, as the day began to draw in. "I heard a whispering not so long since betwixt two of Avery's chosen men, and my own feeling is that very soon we shall drop anchor and lie in wait for a Frenchman."

The surmise indeed proved correct, for barely had dark fallen than all hands were piped to quarters and orders given to man the guns. And this in the black of night, with no prey as yet visible!

(Another splendid instalment of this grand serial next Friday. Order your copy of the POPULAR now.)

WRITE TO YOUR EDITOR ABOUT IT!



A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS PLEASSED TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS. ADDRESS: EDITOR, THE "POPULAR," THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON STREET, LONDON, E.C. 4.

FOR NEXT WEEK!

In our next issue of the POPULAR will be found another splendid budget of reading matter. We start off with a grand long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, entitled

"CHAMPION OF THE THIRD!"

By Frank Richards.

In this story we find that the boxing boom at Greyfriars has in no way diminished, and the diminutive but sturdy Third-Formers hold contests to prove which is the better man. Tubb, by sheer pluck, fights his way to the final, but an escapade very nearly deprives him of the chance to fight the last fight! You must read all about that in next week's story, my chums.

Then we have another splendid story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, entitled

"A COOL CUSTOMER!"

By Owen Conquest.

This yarn deals with a junior who very much earns the right to be dubbed a cool customer. Who that juniors is, and his little ways, can be learned in this story.

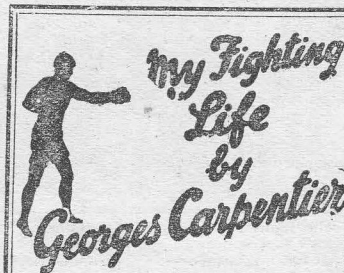
We continue our magnificent serials—surely three of the grandest stories ever penned! You all know the titles of these stories, so there is not any need for me to name them here. I am glad to say, however, that all the three instalments are particularly full of interest, and in "A Marked Man," some very startling developments are explained.

Altogether I have got together a grand number of the POPULAR, and I hope you THE POPULAR.—No. 99.

will all place an order for a copy to be saved—your newsgagent likes to know how many copies are required, you know.

CARPENTIER!

Carpentier! What a wonderful name! Georges, the fighting hero of many a tough "scrap," is relating his life story in this week's issue of "Young Britain," as indicated by the advertisement in this Chat. I do not suppose for a moment that readers will have a further opportunity of reading the true life story of this famous boxer, so get a copy of "Young Britain" to-day!



The true story of the famous boxer's career, from boyhood to the present day, written by himself—an enthralling real-life romance, as thrilling as the finest fiction. Do not miss the opening chapters in

YOUNG BRITAIN

The Famous Adventure Story Paper.

NOW ON SALE. PRICE 2d.

SPECIAL NEWS!

I am very glad to find that I have more space in which to chat to my chums in this issue, because I have some grand news to impart.

In the first place, the "Gem" Library Grand Christmas Number will be on sale at all newsgagents, bookstalls—everywhere where books are sold—on Wednesday next, the 15th of December, 1920. I have written out the

date in full in order to fully impress upon your memory the importance of being first at the newsgagent's! Never can it be said that the "Gem" Library Christmas Number remains on sale long—the boys are after it too quickly for that to happen!

There is one way in which you can be sure of your copy—order it now.

The story of Tom Merry & Co. is over 20,000 words in length, and is entitled

"A CHRISTMAS BOMBSHELL!"

By Martin Clifford.

Readers of the POPULAR know how splendidly Mr. Clifford writes a yarn, and this is one of his very best. I cannot say more than that.

NOW FOR SOME MORE NEWS!

I have been keeping a secret from readers of our companion paper, the "Magnet" Library—you may have seen some hint of what I mean if you are a reader of the "Magnet." Of course, I cannot let you into the secret immediately, but I will tell you this much. In next Monday's issue of the "Magnet" Library there will be found full details of this secret, and I guess my chums will be real sorry if they don't see that they read my Chat in that paper.

Besides the news, there is a grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled

"A SON'S DILEMMA!"

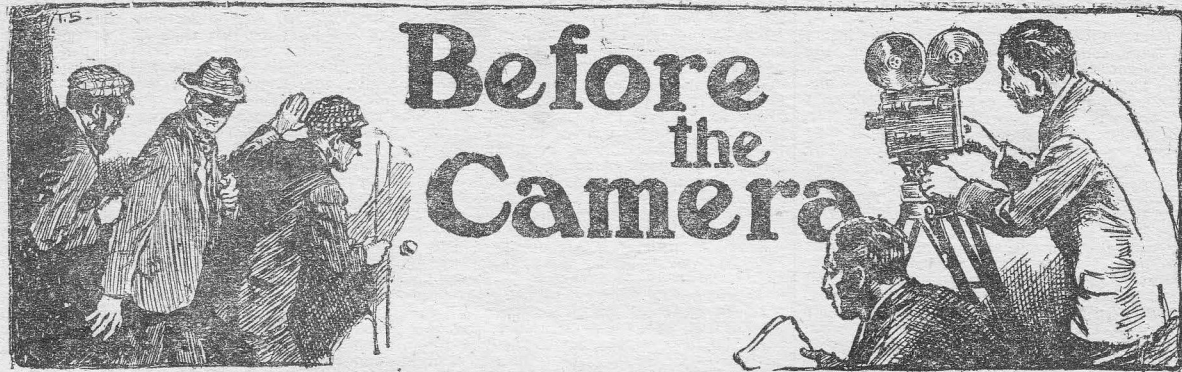
By Frank Richards,

in which our friend Ferrers Locke plays a prominent part.

Place your order now for next week's issues of the "Magnet" and the "Gem" Library Grand Christmas Number.

Your Editor

A GRAND STORY OF FAMOUS EDDIE POLO'S LIFE!



Before the Camera

A STIRRING STORY OF THE FAMOUS FILM STAR'S EARLY TRIUMPHS AND STRUGGLES.

INTRODUCTION.

Eddie Polo, ex-acrobat of the Busto Circus, commences his great career in the Eclair Film Company, under the management of Mr. Morrison. Here he meets an English actor, Dick Fordyce, with whom he becomes close friends, and a charming young star, Miss Stella Cleaver, sister of one of the girls he had previously rescued from the great fire in St. Louis. Later Eddie unfortunately makes a bad enemy of Tim Bobbin, of the same company.

During the working of a certain film, Bobbin attempts to kill the young actor, but Eddie saves himself from a terrible death by his quick action. Later in the day he is dining out with a few friends, when he witnesses a quarrel between a man and a young girl. Thinking that the girl is being hurt, he interrupts, only to find that it is a part of a film. As he discovers his mistake, his manager arrives on the scene.

(Now read on.)

Eddie Polo's Mistake!

EDDIE'S face registered sheer amazement as Morrison butted in. The fist raised to strike the man he had thought to be insulting the lady had dropped to his side, and half-mechanically he loosed his grip of the other's collar. The villainous-looking one staggered to his feet, glowering at the lad, as, bewildered, Eddie felt his face crimson to the ears.

"You've no business to butt in here, Polo!" Morrison commenced. "This is a scene being taken in this restaurant by the Excelsior film people, and they won't be any too pleased with you for spoiling a few hundred feet of negative film for them by rushing in just as this chap was working up to his climax. Nor does he seem to have any spare affection for you. But perhaps you know that it's being done by the Excelsior folks, and are playing in it, in which case you may bet I'll wash my hands of you right now."

Eddie looked at Morrison, and then at Stella, Mary, and Fordyce, who had all come up and joined the throng around the lad.

"I didn't know anything at all about it, I assure you, Mr. Morrison," he said. "Indeed, if I'd known it was all arranged I'd have stayed outside the place altogether. But I couldn't see any camera, and it looked from where I sat as though the chap was bullying the woman. No man could stand for seeing a glass of wine thrown in any woman's face, so I just sailed in and interfered. I'm sorry if I've done anything wrong!"

"That's all right, bo!" said a new voice; and Eddie looked up to see a tall, lean-faced man thrusting his way through the crowd. "I'm the camera man of this business, and, say, the way you sailed into this chap was a real eye-opener. It couldn't have been done better by the proper hero of the story, who was due to arrive just as you butted in. I wanted to yell out 'Hold it—play up to it!' but I was afraid if I butted in I'd spoil the whole thing. Say, from the fact that you're rowing with Morrison there, it strikes me that you've already had some acting experience—what about taking over a part in this new production, and letting my company boost you sky-high? We'll splash your name all across the Yewnted States from New Yawk to Frisco and back again, and you'll be a real film star, sure!"

Eddie thought that Mr. Morrison would

have burst with indignation at this cool, calm offer, for the latter's face had now assumed the colour of an overripe plum. So he hastened to reply.

"Nothing doing!" he said shortly. "I'm being trained in another stable altogether. Mr. Morrison here pays my salary and settles my parts, and if you want to use me for your films, you'd better fix things and sign articles with him. I'm his man, and he's mine, and till he says 'Go,' I'm staying with the Eclair!"

"Look here, Franklin!" interjected Morrison, "I like your infernal cheek! Just because one of my stars has butted in on one of your sticky love-films isn't any reason why you should try to hire him, though I know you'd give your ears to double-cross me. Just you leave Polo alone till he and I have done with each other, or you'll hear more about it. Why, I'll have you making advances to Miss Stella here next, if I don't watch you!"

The public laughed at the suggestion, and then, recognising the girl whose filmed features were already becoming familiar to "movie fans," they crowded round to shake hands with her, and with Fordyce, whom they also recognised. Franklin, the rival producer, and Morrison, still arguing fiercely, managed to extract themselves from the crowd, and had presently settled their differences so far as to foregather over cocktails, while the diners insisted on Eddie and his company joining them at one big table.

"I'd sure thought this was to be a quiet little affair!" muttered Mary Cleaver, with a sly smile. "But it seems to me as you three are getting more than your share of the lime-light, while poor little me is left in the shade. Say, Eddie, you seem to have developed the gift of attracting crowds—look at the one that you drew to the telephone exchange fire, and this you've gathered to-night!"

Eddie blushed at the girl's gentle rallery, and shook an admonitory finger.

"Let that matter drop, Mary," he said. "This isn't any mutual admiration society. Besides, have you noticed that it's not Eddie Polo they're feasting and toasting—it's the screen stars. Well, Mary, with a bit of luck and a lot of hard work, they'll treat me that way one of these fine days!"

But one of the diners at that moment recognised Eddie Polo as the hero of the fire, and drew the remainder's attention to him. Thereafter there was feasting and merriment and laughter and joy—and it was a very weary but happy quartette that drove to the Cleaver home in the cool of the morning and there deposited the ladies of the party before seeking their own repose.

Caught in the Quicksands!

IT is one of the features of the film actors' life that he must be prepared for anything, and that he must seize every possible opportunity to carry through his work. And weather is not the least of the things that he must study. These remarks are called forth by the fact that when Eddie and Fordyce reached the Eclair studio next morning they were called upon to perform a portion of the new story that represented almost the end of the film. Indeed, it was the final attempt of the villain, as played by Dick Fordyce, to end the life and interferences of the hero, as played by Eddie Polo, without regard to the safety or well-being of the heroine, who, of course, was

Stella Cleaver. And fine weather and smooth water on the river were essential for the taking of this part of the film.

The first part of the scene was laid up the river, and took place aboard a houseboat, to which, by dint of successful tracking, Eddie Polo, having discarded his work as a messenger-boy, had traced Fordyce and Stella. Here, after a fierce struggle, Fordyce had abandoned Stella, who, with Eddie as her rescuer, was to take to a boat and be rowed down the river, until, passing under a bridge, Fordyce, who had made his escape by motor-car, was to make one final attempt to end the party and the play by means of an ordinary explosive bomb cast over the edge of the bridge into the boat below—an action which was to prove abortive, and, in the play resulted in the villain's arrest by the police, and the ending of all the heroine's and hero's troubles in a final and very emotional close-up.

Eddie, studying the script, and accompanied by Miles, the second camera man, started off in the usual car, racing along the roads after having received a message smuggled out of the riverside bungalow by Stella. And presently he flung aside the typewritten sheets and applied himself properly to the part, urging his car onwards, and then occasionally slowing so that the camera could take close-ups of his set, tense expression. The part was so new to Eddie—so different from his circus work and acrobatic feats—that he presently forgot it was a part at all—he was for the time being actually the hot-footed avenger close on the heels of the villain.

"Good!" yelled Morrison, running alongside the car on his speedy motor-cycle. "Keep that up, Polo—you're registering great!"

Eddie nodded, and pressed down the accelerator, and the high-powered car leapt ahead in a cloud of dust. Meanwhile, aboard the houseboat, Fordyce and Stella were doing their parts with right good will, Terence presiding over the ceremony. They argued and struggled, the girl fighting like a tigress with the man who had lured her to death or dishonour, the acting and setting being perfect, since all there were old hands at the job. And all the time the car with Eddie Polo aboard came hurrying nearer and nearer.

Stella and Fordyce were resting when Eddie sounded his horn, and immediately, so that the scenes should run in proper sequence, they jumped to their feet and commenced the struggle again. Fordyce put his hand over the girl's mouth to prevent her from shouting, while Eddie thundered at the door, which, of course, was locked. Nobody admitted him, so while Miles turned the handle, Eddie drew back three yards, and then jammed his shoulder right against the panels. The door flew open, and revealed the strugglers within, just as Stella, recognising her cue, grew limp and lifeless in Fordyce's hands.

Eddie, disregarding him after that first long look in which their eyes met and measured each other like sword-blades, had rushed to Stella, while Fordyce, wasting no time in explanations, made for the open door, and, such as the incongruities of filmmaking, raced for safety and the scene of the next incident in the car which had brought Eddie to the rescue, while the baulked hero, seeing his enemy escape, wasted no time in useless lamenting, but

applied first-aid to Stella while the camera clicked, Miles, of course, having sped off with Fordyce.

No need to weary you with a description of what followed. You who have seen the film know that Eddie brought Stella round, and embarked with her in the frail cockleshell of a boat that apparently was rowed all the way down the river. You have seen Fordyce crouching on the bridge parapet with something bulky under his cloak—something that dropped as Eddie's boat emerged from under the bridge, and sent up a huge column of water as it exploded. Then the next picture on the screen has shown Eddie and Stella in the water, the latter supported by the lad, who, with a gash of blood across his head, is swimming towards the shore.

But that is that you see—what should have happened—all except the gashed head. There were things that happened that aren't shown on the screen—things that were exciting and dangerous, and which almost cost Stella and Eddie their lives.

When the steam-launch containing Terence and the camera cast off Eddie's skiff a little

the sheer horror of the thing. Eddie seized the starboard oar and commenced to frantically pull upon it, trying to swing the boat round so that the bomb should at least drop into the water instead of falling upon its bottom boards. And then, just as the beads of perspiration stood out upon his head and his heart missed a beat, just as Stella was about to jump and the steamboat with the camera man aboard was rushing to the rescue, the bomb landed. There flung up into the air a great spout of water as the roar of the explosion was heard. Then fell silence, pierced by a woman's shrill scream, and the hiss of escaping steam that told of the camera boat's ruptured boilers.

Down, apparently into the very depths of the river, went Eddie, flung backwards by the violence of the explosion, which had happened within five feet of the skiff.

As he went he dimly wondered whether he was still one piece. He knew, somehow, that the force of the concussion had blown away most of his clothing. He had a vivid memory of being suddenly wrapped in a sheet of flame and of hearing Stella scream,

talks about—and, with her hair twined around his hand, succeeded at length in dragging her to the surface. But the drift of the river by this time had carried them a long way below the bridge, upon which the grief-stricken Fordyce was still struggling with the proper police, who had arrested him as a maniac and a dangerous assassin, and thus prevented his diving to the assistance of his friends below.

Stella lay inert, like a log, her eyes closed, and Eddie could hardly tell whether she was breathing or not. But he did not give up hope, but struck out manfully for the nearer bank, towing his comrade of the studio. His face was set as that of one who strives for some great achievement, but his mind was working busily. Mentally, he felt himself all over, and, save for some dreadful pain that insisted on gnawing at the small of his back, he at last concluded that he had escaped serious injury to his body, though his hair and eyebrows and clothing were all burned and scorched and tattered.

How he managed to cover the distance he never knew; his remembrance of that long swim, that must have been like a nightmare of horror, are vague in the extreme. But one can picture the desperation on his face, the doggedness of his swimming, the muscles that, lately shocked and outraged, now protested against every movement, and threatened to strike work altogether.

For a full half-hour he struggled onward, allowing the current of the river to carry him and his helpless burden along, and once or twice his heart gave a great bound of joyful relief when Stella's eyelids flickered and she looked for a moment out upon a world she had expected never to see again. Then she closed them again; but the sight nerved Eddie to greater struggles and greater determination not to be cheated and tricked by the river in the end.

It seemed as though Fate was taking a hand in the fight against Eddie—as though Destiny were protesting against his robbing death of his prey. For not only did the current, sweeping down-stream, prevent Eddie from winning to one or other of the deserted wharves and piers that jutted out into the river—it was never a busy waterway at the most hurried of times—but outside factors entered into the situation and prevented his getting ashore.

The current carried him and Stella swiftly round a sharp bend in the pleasant river, and brought him face to face with fresh horror; for, approaching steadily, her bluff bows high out of water and her funnel puffing merrily, was a rakish-looking steam-tug, and astern of her half a dozen unladen barges being towed to some flour-mill well up-stream for re-loading, cavorted and slewed all over the fairway to their hearts' content.

"Hi! Hi! Tug ahoy!" yelled Eddie, striking out in an effort to get clear of the current in mid-stream. "Tug ahoy!"

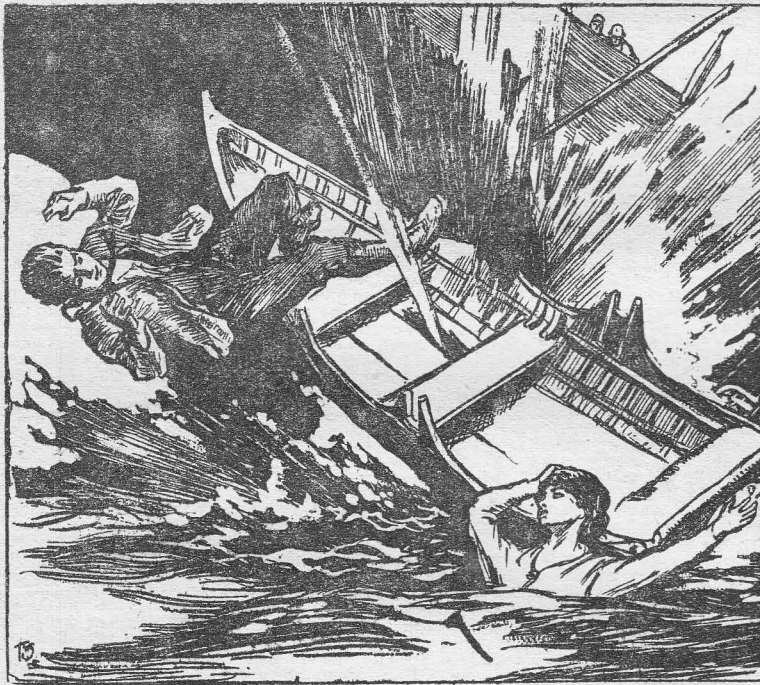
No head bobbed over the gunwale. Nobody seemed to take any notice. Had it not been for a bearded face, surmounted by a cap which Eddie could just see in the wheelhouse, he could have fancied the tug deserted for all the notice that was taken of his cry. He shouted again as he tried to steer wide, but it was the river that had played him and Stella such a dirty trick which really saved them from being run down by the cumbersome craft, for the tide flicked her bow aside just in the very nick of time.

But if it saved them from the bows, the tide tried to cut the pair up with the tug's screws, for as her bow went out her stern came in.

"Heavens," said Eddie, "that threshing propeller will chop us into gull's food in two ticks! Stella, if you could only swim just for ten seconds I'd be able to save us both. As it is—"

He never completed the sentence. The propeller was far too close for time wasting. With a mighty heave and a kick of his heels, Eddie executed a duck dive, dragging the still unconscious girl down with him. The swirling water buffeted him this way and that, and tried to drag him down; but when, still swimming, Eddie judged that he had cleared the danger-zone, he curved his body again and swam upwards, still dragging Stella by the hair.

When he broke surface the barges were a clean dozen yards away, while the dangerous tug was well ahead, steaming against the current. Eddie still struck out manfully to get clear of the suction of the passing barges, for he knew that each one could easily drag and hold him and Stella down till both were exhausted and drowned, and presently he won to stiller water. But his dive had



There flung up into the air a great spout of water as the roar of an explosion was heard. Eddie Polo was flung sideways into the river, and as he went he caught a glimpse of Miss Stella struggling in the swift-running water.

(See this page.)

way above the bridge—for the row would have tired out even so fine an oarsman as Polo with its very length—the skiff plugged onwards under the arch of the bridge pointed out for it, and above which crouched Fordyce and the mock policemen who were to arrest him. All went well until it got exactly underneath the English actor, and then, at the very moment he appeared on the coping of the structure, a tide rip seized the frail craft as it eddied from the bridge buttresses, and whirled it round and round. And the dangerous part about it was that it was exactly underneath the bomb—a real bomb—instead of being to the right of it.

"Hold on!" yelled Eddie, as he saw what had happened. "Don't drop that! We're caught!"

Terence, quick-witted, saw the danger, and yelled in turn. But Fordyce, perched high on the bridge, could not rightly make out what was happening. He took the words as a signal for him to do his part, and accordingly he leaned over the parapet and let go his missile.

And, straight as a rifle shot, the black ball, charged with nitro-glycerine, dropped clean towards the centre of the frantically-swaying boat.

"Jump, Stella—jump for your life!" yelled Eddie.

The girl, with wide-open eyes and drawn face, rose to her feet, almost paralysed by

then the waterspout had fallen upon him with all its weight, crushing him below the surface with the splintered planks and woodwork of the destroyed skiff.

His lungs felt as though they would burst, and his heart laboured heavily, when, quite suddenly, he shot to the surface, and, instinctively striking out—for he was as much at home in the water as upon it—he looked round to see Terence, still clutching the all-precious camera, clambering back into the half-wrecked steam-launch, and the crew also intent upon rescuing themselves. But nowhere could he see Stella.

A shout from the parapet attracted him—the shout of a proper policeman, not a film one.

"Over there! Look, she's rising again, for the third time!" he yelled, pointing.

Eddie's eyes followed the indicating finger, and there, on the surface, he saw Stella's hair. With a swift side-stroke, he turned and darted off in the required direction, but when he reached the spot the surface of the river was clear, only a few ripples showing where the girl star had disappeared into its depths. With a movement that was like a flash of lightning, Eddie kicked up his heels and dived, and once again he felt the grip of the river upon him as he went, this time voluntarily, into its depths.

He found Stella—how, Eddie alone knows, and the experience is not a thing he ever

brought him nearer the opposite shore, where he could see green fields and waving trees, and all the usual upholstery of the countryside.

There was no current here. It seemed as though he had stumbled into a rather wideish backwater, while the stream swept resistlessly and remorselessly on at its very edge. Eddie gave one more yell to try and attract the tug's attention with a view to being rescued by the craft, but with no more success than before. Then, seeing the beach within a few hundred yards, and no longer feeling the dreadful tug of the current, he set out to tow Stella the intervening distance.

Hard ground underfoot at last—hard ground that spelt safety. Eddie heaved a deep breath of relief, and then, picking up Stella in his muscular arms, waded ashore. He stood for a moment on the soft, yielding bank of the beach, and looked up stream and down. Up, the tug and barges, with their somnolent crews, were the only things in sight; down, there wasn't even this much to reward the eye's search. It seemed as though Eddie and Stella were the only two people alive on the planet.

"Not much hope of speedy help here," mused Eddie, as he laid the girl down on the sand. "And we want help badly! My back feels as if it were broken. Crumbs, it has carried away altogether now!"

This last remark was called forth by the sudden collapse of his powers and strength, for, with an awful spasm of pain contorting his back muscles—he had severely strained it—he fell face downwards upon the sand. For a moment he writhed in agony, his teeth set to hold back the moan of pain forced to his lips. Then, with a queerly drawn face, he drew himself to his knees, and commenced to see what could be done for Stella.

"Thank the stars she's still alive, anyhow!" said Eddie, as he felt her heart beating under his hand. "And while there's life there's hope. I wonder where they're looking for us? They must have seen us drift off down-stream, and perhaps they're searching the river banks miles farther up. Let's hope, Stella, my girl, that they don't forget to look this way. Hello! What's happening now?"

He suddenly looked down, and saw that, instead of lying on the surface of the sand, he and Stella had apparently scooped out places to lie in. In other words, the sand was slowly swallowing them. It was not the ordinary sand it purported to be, but a quicksand. Small wonder, therefore, that this part of the shore was absolutely deserted by either human beings or cattle!

"Quicksand!" exclaimed Eddie, in horror. "Heavens, we must get out of this, and get out quickly, or we'll be smothered! We've missed death by drowning and being run down twice this afternoon; the third time may prove fatal!"

He bent and put his arms around Stella Cleaver, and tried to haul her to his shoulder; but as he did so he found his knees had sunk beneath the sand, and that the girl's added weight only drove them the deeper. He tried to withdraw his legs one at a time, but, cumbered with Stella as he was, and almost exhausted from his long swim, he could not muster strength to do so. And even when he laid Stella down again and tugged with both hands at his own legs, he only found himself able to wrench one knee at a time out of the all-embracing sand.

"I must try to roll you out of this place, Stella," he told himself. "Maybe it's only this patch of it that is dangerous and treacherous."

He pushed at the girl, and then with great difficulty drew himself after her the six-inch distance. But as he pushed a second time he found that instead of taking her out of danger he was placing her into it, for the further they went the softer became the sand.

One wrench left behind his shoe, the clutch of the sand being more than equal to the pull of his arms, so that his laces burst. And Stella was now rapidly sinking.

"Heavens," said Eddie, "this seems like the end! We've known each other only a few days, Stella, and we've had a few adventures and a couple of thrills or so already. We might have had more had we had any luck, but this looks like putting the kybosh on everything! If you'd only open your eyes and understand the danger—if you could only

manage to drag yourself towards the green and solid land, there might be a chance; but now, as things are—well, it only seems a waste of time struggling! And the day's wearing on, and the night coming, and I suppose they'll print something about us both in the papers to-morrow, and come to look for us when it's too late, and never know where we're buried. If it wasn't so serious it would be comic. We play our little parts for the pictures, and all the time the real facts of life are so much bigger; the dangers so much more numerous. Here, to-day, I've rescued you from a villain in a houseboat, as might have happened in real life. That villain has destroyed our boat with a bomb, as we knew he would, but by rescuing you I've brought you to this—to death in a quicksand! The only good thing about it is that you're unconscious. Good-bye, Stella!"

He shook his head, gulped hard, and then, with the sand at his thighs, bent and lifted Stella into his arms, holding her as a mother holds a child. Then, with his eyes clear and unflinching, and the sand slowly dragging him down inch by inch, he stood bravely and steadfastly waiting for the end.

(Make a point of reading next week's long instalment of this thrilling yarn.)

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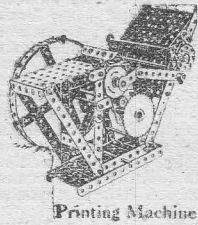
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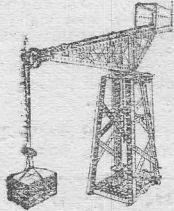
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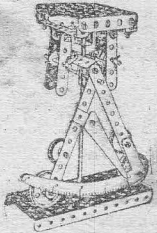
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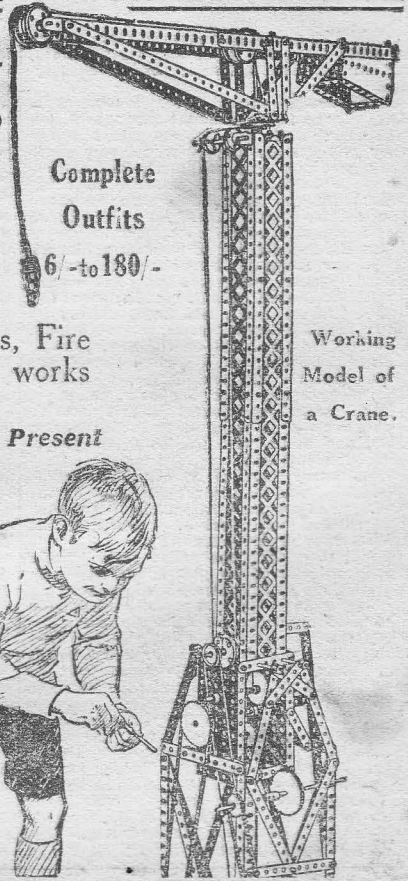
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