

Grand Christmas School Stories in this issue!

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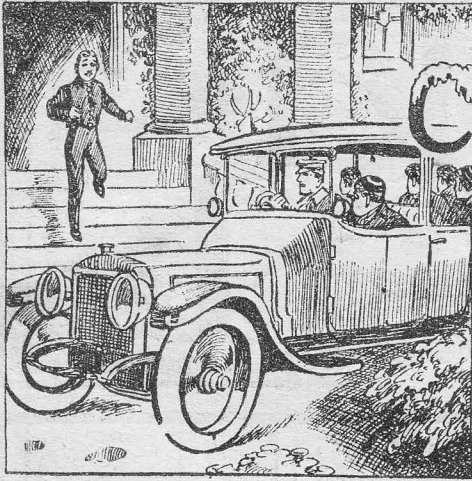
TWO COMPLETE STORIES.



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS AT BUNTER COURT!

(Billy Bunter entertains Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.)

A HIGHLY AMUSING CHRISTMAS STORY THAT WILL INTEREST YOU ALL!



Christmas at Bunter Court

A Magnificent Long Complete Yuletide
Story of HARRY WHARTON & Co. and
BILLY BUNTER of Greyfriars.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. An Amazing Invitation!

"STILL they come!" said Bob Cherry, as Trotter the page came into Study No. 1 with a batch of letters.

"We seem to be jolly popular all of a sudden!" said Harry Wharton.

And Hurree Singh remarked that the popularity was terrific.

The Famous Five were snowed up. Not with contributions to the "Greyfriars Herald"—the Christmas Number of that bright little journal had already been issued—but with invitations from all sources, requesting the honour of their company at Christmastide.

There was a cheery note from Colonel Wharton to the effect that he hoped to have the pleasure of entertaining the chums of the Remove at Wharton Lodge. There was a similar cordial message from Major Cherry and from Johnny Bull's uncle.

And the invitations didn't end there.

Lord Maulverer, who was feeling too tired to quit the sumptuous couch in his study, had forwarded a note by a fag, saying that he hoped Harry Wharton & Co. would spend the Christmas vacation with him.

Dennis Carr, on behalf of his Uncle Dick, had also weighed in with an invitation, and so had Vernon-Smith and others.

"It's jolly nice to feel that we're in such demand, you fellows," said Frank Nugent. "The question is, which of all these invitations are we going to accept?"

Harry Wharton stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"We haven't much time to decide," he said. "It's the last night of the term. Personally, I've a strong leaning towards my pater's place. We've spent a good many holidays there."

"What's the matter with my uncle's place?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Nothing," said Wharton. "But then, what's the matter with Mauly's, or Smithy's, or Dennis Carr's?"

"We shall have a topping time wherever we go," said Nugent. "Now, which is it to be?"

"Better put it to the vote," said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows—"

A fat face, adorned by a pair of spectacles, bobbed round the door of the study. And five voices exclaimed in unison:

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

But Billy Bunter did not buzz off. Instead, he advanced into the study. There was a seraphic smile on his plump face, and he seemed very pleased with himself.

"I say, you fellows, I'm going to make you a generous offer—"

"Help!" panted Bob Cherry, falling back in his chair. "Fan me, somebody! Bunter's going to be generous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Generosity was certainly not one of Bunter's strong points. Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at the fat junior in amazement, and waited for him to proceed.

"There's a well-known proverb, you fellows, which tells us that one good turn deserves another—"

"And a stitch in time saves nine," said Nugent.

"And a bird in the handfulness is worth two in the bushfulness!" said Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave a snort.

"Don't talk rot, you chaps!—As I was saying, one good turn deserves another—"

"And evil communications corrupt good manners," said Bob Cherry.

"Dry up, Cherry! One good turn—"

"And then quick march, and we shall be rid of our tame porpoise!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's exasperation grew. But he was determined to get a hearing.

"You've often invited me to your place, Wharton, for the vac—"

"And more often than not you've turned up without waiting for an invitation!" growled the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton! You've invited me several times, and I've been waiting for a chance to reciprocate—"

"Good word that," said Bob Cherry. "I'll back it both ways!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"One good turn—" Billy Bunter paused as five glares were directed upon him. "I-I mean, my chance to reciprocate has now come."

"You're going to take us to Bunter Court!" chuckled Nugent.

"Exactly!"

Nugent had asked the question in jest, but Billy Bunter answered it in earnest.

There was no mistaking the fat junior's tone. His schoolfellows could see that he wasn't "rotting."

"You—you really want us to come to Bunter Court!" stuttered Harry Wharton.

Bunter nodded.

"You simply must come, you fellows," he said. "My Christmas will be a wash-out if you don't. My pater's going away to stay with some of our titled relations, and my sister Bessie's going with the Cliff House girls—if she gets half a chance! And Sammy's spending Christmas with Aunt Prudence. So if you fellows don't come with me, I shall be the only person at Bunter Court—barring the large staff of servants!"

added Bunter hastily.

The Famous Five said nothing. For the moment they were speechless!

"We shall have a topping time amid the—the ancestral halls," Bunter went on.

"I think I've already told you fellows that Bunter Court's a fine old mansion. It was built in the time of the Druids!"

"Must be something like Stonehenge, then!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's an ideal spot," continued Bunter. "It stands in its own grounds—"

"Must be a triumph of architecture, if it was built in the time of the Druids and is still standing!" said Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it's been altered and added to since those days," said Bunter. "William the Conqueror had a new wing built, and Baron de Bunturre, in the fifteenth century, had a bathroom added—"

"You don't mean to say your ancestors

were in the habit of washing their necks?" ejaculated Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Well, I think I've given you fellows some idea of the place. It's a goodly pile, and it cost a goodly pile, too. My pater gave ten thousand quids for it in 1907, when it was brand-new."

"Didn't know the Druids flourished in 1907," murmured Johnny Bull. "Still, I'm very weak on history."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I consider your fellows are jolly rude!" said Bunter warmly. "I'm making you a princely offer, and you sit there and cackle. If you're not careful, I shall withdraw my invitation!"

"Look here, porpoise," said Harry Wharton seriously, "you know jolly well there's no such place as Bunter Court—unless there's a back alley of that name in the London slums! And yet you're inviting us to spend Christmas with you at—"

"At Bunter Court!" said the fat junior firmly. "Bunter Court, Loamshire, the seat of the Bunters for generations!"

"Oh, come off! You honestly want us to spend the vac with you?"

"Yes."

The Famous Five were almost overcome. They could see that Billy Bunter was not indulging in the gentle art of leg-pulling. At the same time, it was passing strange that he should desire their company. He had always boasted that his home was a palatial sort of place staffed by quite an army of servants. And the juniors suspected that in reality it was just an ordinary house, with possibly a parlour-maid kept.

Why, then, should Bunter want to take them home, and expose the whole miserable deception?

"You'll come, of course!" said Bunter. "I know you've had other invitations, but you can let 'em slide. None of the other places are half so magnificent as Bunter Court."

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Can I count on you fellows coming?" asked Bunter.

It was on the tip of Wharton's tongue to decline the invitation without more ado, but he hesitated. As a matter of fact, he was very curious—and so were his chums—to see what manner of place Bunter's home really was. And, as Frank Nugent explained to the others in an undertone, if the place was too terrible for words, they could easily clear out, and go on to Wharton Lodge.

At that moment there was the snort of an automobile in the Close.

Bob Cherry went to the window, and, like Good King Wenceslas of old, looked out.

A finely-upholstered car was approaching from the school gates, making furrows in the snow as it came.

"Who is it, Bob?" asked Wharton.

"There's only the chauffeur," was the reply.

"Ah, that's Benson, I expect," said Billy Bunter.

"Benson?" echoed Johnny Bull, in wonder.

"Yes; my pater's chauffeur, you know."

"First time I knew your pater owned a car, Bunter," said Wharton.

"Oh, he's got several," said Bunter airily.

"Some are cars, and some are Fords."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A moment later there was a tap on the floor of the study.

"Come in, fathead!" sang out Bob Cherry. A chauffeur in smart livery came into the apartment. He saluted Billy Bunter with respect.

"You're rather premature, Benson," said the fat junior. "We don't leave for home till the morning."

"Just so, Master William. But I was asked by Mr. Billington, the butler, to pop over to Greyfriars an' find out how many young gentlemen was comin'."

"So that he'll know how much grub to get in, I suppose?" said Bunter.

"Yes, Master William."

The Famous Five fairly gasped. They were not accustomed to hearing Billy Bunter addressed with such profound respect.

"Hang on a minute, Benson!" said the fat junior.

Then, turning to Harry Wharton & Co., he added:

"Are you fellows coming, or not?"

The Famous Five glanced at the chauffeur, who stood politely at attention. Then they looked at Bunter, who was awaiting their reply. And, finally, they exchanged glances.

"Shall we go, kidlets?" murmured Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull looked rather doubtful, but there was assent written on the faces of the others. They decided to take the plunge.

"Yes, we'll go!" said Wharton. "At any rate, we'll go until Christmas Eve!"

Billy Bunter's face was wreathed in smiles. "That's the style!" he said. "I knew you couldn't refuse. Tell Billington it will be a party of six, Benson."

"Very good, Master William!"

"And see that the car is brought round at ten o'clock in the morning."

The chauffeur nodded.

"Any more instructions, Master William?"

"No; that's all, I think."

Benson touched his hat, and withdrew.

As for the Famous Five, they sank down again in their chairs, completely flabbergasted.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I always thought that Bunter Court existed only in Bunter's imagination, but it seems that it really does exist."

"Of course it does!" said Bunter. "And we're going to have a real, good, slap-up Christmas!"

Harry Wharton looked grim.

"If we find that you've been having us on foat, Bunter," he said, "your life won't be worth living!"

"I feel sure there's a catch in it somewhere," said Johnny Bull.

But Billy Bunter assured the Famous Five that everything was square and above-board. And then he hurried away to pack his not very extensive wardrobe.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Court!

PRECISELY at ten o'clock next morning a big limousine swung into view through the school gateway.

Benson was at the steering-wheel, and he saluted Billy Bunter respectfully as the vehicle slowed up.

The Close was thronged with fellows at the time, and they looked on in amazement. "Jump in, you fellows!" said Billy Bunter loftily.

The Famous Five clambered into the limousine.

Billy Bunter got in after them, and they drew one of the large rugs over their knees.

"Now they're off!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "Well, this fairly beats the band! Fancy Bunter's pater having a car!"

"And a stately old mansion!" said Dennis Carr.

"There's a trick somewhere," said Mark Linley.

"Of course!"

Neither Vernon-Smith nor Dennis Carr was looking very pleased. They had invited the Famous Five to their respective homes, but Harry Wharton & Co. had exploded a bombshell by electing to go to Bunter Court.

"Au revoir, you fellows!" sang out Peter Todd. "Give our best respects to Baron Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And tell us all about it next term!" said Squiff.

"Yes, rather!"

The limousine bounded forward, and glided away through the snow.

The Famous Five were looking very merry

and bright. They didn't know what sort of a time they were in for, but they had an idea that there would be some exciting developments.

Billy Bunter sat sandwiched between Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry. His face was beaming like a full moon, and he seemed to have no qualms as to what would happen when his schoolfellows got to Bunter Court.

"How far is it to your place, Bunty?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"About a dozen miles."

"What! I've often heard you say that Bunter Court was near London!"

"Ahem! That—that was merely a figure of speech, you know!"

"But if it's so near Greyfriars, I wonder you don't go home more often," said Harry Wharton.

"Twelve miles is a jolly long way to walk," said Bunter.

"But Benson could bring the car over to fetch you," protested Nugent.

"No, he couldn't. You see, in normal times he has to take my pater up to the City every day."

"Oh!"

The juniors felt convinced that Billy Bunter was fibbing. For if it was true that Bunter Court was only a dozen miles from Greyfriars, the fat junior would have visited it much more frequently than he did.

"There's something fishy about this," whispered Johnny Bull in Wharton's ear. "Bunter's playing some deep game. He's having us on a string."

"If he is," answered Wharton grimly, "a dead porpoise will be found lying in the snow!"

"Wish you fellows wouldn't keep muttering among yourselves," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "It's bad form, you know. I say, isn't this ripping?"

The car sped through Courtfield at a spanking pace, and it was enviously eyed by the throngs of Christmas shoppers.

"Top-hole!" said Bob Cherry. "But you ought to be quite used to this sort of thing, Bunty."

"I am!" said the fat junior. "Let her rip, Benson!"

"Very good, Master William!"

Twenty minutes later Billy Bunter stirred suddenly in his seat.

"We're nearly there now," he said. "The country's getting familiar."

The car swung into a side turning, and presently a tall, gabled house came into view. Not all of it was visible, owing to the surrounding trees. But from what they saw of it the Famous Five judged it to be a fine old mansion. It probably dated back to the Georgian period.

"Is—is that Bunter Court?" asked Frank Nugent breathlessly.

Billy Bunter nodded.

"You fellows must admit that it licks Wharton Lodge into a cocked hat!" he said.

"It's certainly a jolly imposing place," said Wharton, as the car passed through the snow-covered drive.

"Imposing isn't the word for it," said Bob Cherry. "It—it's wonderful!"

The Famous Five wondered if they were dreaming.

Over and over again the glories of Bunter Court had been described to them, and they had regarded Billy Bunter's talk as moonshine.

Bob Cherry had often playfully suggested that Bunter's father kept a fried-fish shop, or a hostelry known as the Bunter Arms. He had never imagined for one moment that Bunter Court really existed. And neither had his chums. Yet here they were, confronted by a charming, old-world mansion—Bunter Court itself!

Billy Bunter noticed the impression the place made upon his schoolfellows, and he chuckled.

"I knew it would make you sit up and take notice!" he said. "Glorious edifice, isn't it?"

"Those Druids were wonderful architects!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The limousine halted at the foot of the steps, down which a page-boy came hurrying.

He was a very smart-looking page, and he compared very favourably with Trotter of Greyfriars. His tunic buttons gleamed and glistened in the winter sunshine.

"Merry Christmas, Jeremy!" said Billy Bunter.

"Same to you, Master William."

Jeremy heaved the juniors' luggage out

of the car, and carried the bags into the house. His attitude towards Billy Bunter had been very deferential and respectful, and the Famous Five became more and more impressed. It was astonishing that Mr. Bunter should possess a real limousine, a real chauffeur, and a real page-boy. But there were more surprises to come.

A very portly, dignified person met the party as they trooped into the hall. The juniors thought at first that it was Billy Bunter's father. But they were informed by their host that it was Billington, the butler.

Billington bowed stiffly to the juniors, and Bob Cherry salaamed by way of exchanging compliments.

The butler frowned.

"Lunch is served, Master William," he said, in a deep, booming voice.

"Thank you, Billington!"

Billy Bunter led the way to the dining-room, which was typical of the whole place—old-fashioned, but sumptuous in the extreme.

A log fire crackled and sputtered in the grate, and the table was laid for six.

"Make yourselves at home, you fellows!" said Billy Bunter. "This is Liberty Hall, you know."

"Ah, I thought it couldn't be Bunter Court!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors ranged themselves down one side of the table and awaited developments. They expected to be served with a cold collation, but their expectations were exceeded.

A maid brought in the soup, and Billington, the butler, followed, bearing an enormous turkey on a dish.

"Hold me up, somebody!" gasped Nugent. "Tain't Christmas Day yet!"

"Oh, we have turkey at any old time," said Bunter airily. "We don't reserve our birds for special festivals—do we, Billington?"

"No, Master William."

"Go ahead with the carving, Billington! And mind you give me the breast and plenty of stuffing."

"Your wishes, Master William, shall be diligently and punctiliously observed!" said the butler solemnly.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Has he swallowed a dictionary?"

Billington glared at the speaker, and started to carve.

"Wonderful fellow this butler of yours!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter nodded.

"Oh, yes, Billington's worth his weight in mince-pies!" he replied. "He's strictly honest and truthful, and all the rest of it. I expect it's the influence of the Bunter traditions. He's been with us, man and boy, for twenty-five years."

Billington looked up as if astonished, but he made no comment.

Lunch was a great success. The juniors were hungry after their car-ride, and they fell to with avidity—especially Billy Bunter, who frequently called upon Billington to administer extra helpings.

The Famous Five were still half-dazed by their surroundings. They had always regarded Bunter Court as a myth—a place which existed in Billy Bunter's fertile imagination. Yet here they were, in this fine old English mansion, being waited on hand and foot. They expected to wake up at any moment and discover that it was all a dream.

One of the things which impressed the juniors most was the fact that the Bunter household boasted a tremendous staff of servants.

The girl who had brought in the soup did not reappear. Another girl came in with the pudding, and yet another with the cheese and coffee. With Billington, Benson, and Jeremy, the page, included, this made a staff of six; then there was probably a cook and a pantrymaid below stairs.

After lunch, Billy Bunter volunteered to show his guests round. He took them first of all to the drawing-room. It was a luxurious apartment, and the juniors took stock of it with interest.

Several oil-paintings, evidently of great value, were hung upon the walls, and over the mantelpiece was a photograph of a distinguished-looking man of about sixty.

"Surely that isn't your pater, Bunty?" said Bob Cherry.

"Nunno!"

"Who is it, then?" asked Johnny Bull curiously.

"Ahem! It—it happens to be one of my titled relations!" stammered Bunter.

And he led the way rather hastily from the drawing-room.

The Famous Five were escorted all over the great house. And they were forced to admit, after their tour of inspection, that it was the most attractive residence they had ever seen. They couldn't understand why Billy Bunter, who had always boasted such a lot about his place and his people, had never brought them here before.

"There's only one drawback to this show," said Bunter. "It's miles away from civilisation. There isn't a railway-station within six miles. Not that that matters, when we've a couple of touring-cars and a limousine."

"Isn't there a village close by?" asked Wharton.

"Lower Mudford is the nearest, and that's three miles across the fields."

"My hat!"
"You won't see a soul to talk to beyond the domestic staff," Bunter went on. "And I shall expect you fellows to hold yourselves aloof from the servants. It doesn't pay to be familiar with servants. They take advantage of it."

"But I should like a friendly jaw with old Billington," protested Bob Cherry.

"Keep clear of him!" said Bunter warningly. "Whatever you do, don't take Billington into your confidence. He's an awful rogue, and he's not to be trusted an inch!"

"But you told us just now that he was strictly honest and truthful, and that he'd been in the service of your family for twenty-five years!" said Wharton in astonishment.

"Eh? Did I? I—I must have meant Benson, the chauffeur, or Jeremy, the page. Yes, it was Jeremy."

"But how on earth could Jeremy have been here twenty-five years when he's only a kid of fifteen?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Ahem! I—I meant Martha, the cook—"
The Famous Five exchanged grim glances. It was only too obvious that Billy Bunter was deceiving them; but they did not know, as yet, the full extent of his deception.

"What's the programme for this afternoon?" asked Johnny Bull.

"The lake's frozen over," said Billy Bunter, who was heartily glad that the subject had been changed. "Have you fellows brought your skates with you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Come along, then! I shall be pleased to give you a few lessons in skating."

"My hat!"

"I'll show you how to do the Bunter glide, and how to describe a figure of eight."

"You've got the figure of eight yourself!" said Bob Cherry, surveying Bunter's ponderous bulk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors fetched their skates, and were soon skimming over the ice. They needed no tuition from Billy Bunter, whose antics resembled those of a rhinoceros.

After spending a couple of hours on the ice the party tramped back through the snow to Bunter Court. Their faces glowed with the healthy exercise, and they were enjoying themselves immensely.

A sumptuous tea was served, and Billy Bunter ate more than the rest of the juniors put together. He explained that the only occasions on which he felt really hungry was when he was on vacation.

The servants maintained their attitude of

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deference and respect. They could not do enough for Billy Bunter. When the fat junior said come, they came; when he said go, they went. They seemed to find it a joy and a delight to do the bidding of "Master William."

The juniors spent the evening in the drawing-room. They sat round a roaring fire, roasting chestnuts, and telling ghost stories. And the hour was late when they turned in.

"I've reserved the State bed-room for you and Bob Cherry," Bunter announced to Harry Wharton. "It's a gorgeous room! Charles the First slept there, you know, the night before his execution."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors went upstairs. But it was a long time before sleep visited the eyes of the Famous Five. Their novel experiences that day afforded them much food for thought.

Bunter Court was, indeed, a paradise. Its glories seemed altogether too good to be true. And the juniors half expected to wake up and find themselves in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry Makes a Discovery!

CHRISTMAS EVE!
The lawns and fields which surrounded Bunter Court were carpeted with snow.

Iceicles sparkled and scintillated on the branches of the trees, and the whole atmosphere suggested Christmas, the grandest festival of the year.

The Famous Five of Greyfriars were resting in the drawing-room after a hearty lunch. Billy Bunter was curled up on the couch like a fat dormouse, sleeping soundly.

Down in the kitchen, Martha, the cook, and Sophie, the scullerymaid, were washing the dishes. And during this unromantic operation they chanted a duet to the effect that

"Brightly shone the moon that night,

Though the frost was croo-el;

When a poor man came in sight,

Gathering winter few-oo-el!"

"I've got a suggestion to make, you fellows," said Bob Cherry.

"Fire away!" said Wharton.

"What do you say to walking over to Lower Mudford and challenging the villagers to a snow-fight?"

"Ripping!"

"We'll leave Bunter where he is," said Johnny Bull. "He's eaten so much that he can't even roll, let alone walk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five put on their scarves and gloves and went out into the hall.

Billington, the butler, was standing by the front door, surveying the snowy landscape with a jaundiced eye. Billington had sat up late overnight, imbibing quantities of old tawny port, and he was feeling sleepy and irritable. But he pulled himself together when the Famous Five appeared.

Bob Cherry gave the butler a sounding slap on the back.

"Ow!" gasped Billington.

"Which is the way to the village, old top?" inquired Bob cheerfully.

With a great effort, Billington saved himself from toppling backwards down the steps.

"Which village might you mean, Master Cherry?"

"Lower Mudford, of course!"

"You proceed in a westerly direction until you come to a copse," said Billington. "Then you branch off to the right, and when you come to the Harcourt Arms you turn to the left. Then you take the second turning on the right, and the second on the right again. I trust I have made myself clear, sir?"

"Clear as mud!" said Bob. "Still, I dare say we shall find the way all right. Care to come along with us, Billington, and join in a downright snowfight?"

"I have neither the inclination nor the energy to participate in such unseemly frivolity, Master Cherry!" said Billington.

"All serene, Dr. Johnson!" said Bob. "We won't press you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors found their way to the village without much difficulty.

There was no need for them to challenge the inhabitants of Lower Mudford to a snowfight, for no sooner did they enter the place than they were bombarded with snowballs by the lads of the village.

Whizz-z-z! Crash! Biff!

"Yaroooooh!"

Harry Wharton staggered back with a yell as a snowball smote him under the chin. His chums were in the wars, too, for the air was thick with flying missiles and wild lamentations.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared the village youths, in chorus.

"They'll pipe to another tune in a jiffy!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yes, rather!"

And the Famous Five dropped on their knees in the snow, and scooped up ammunition.

The Greyfriars juniors were at a tremendous disadvantage. The odds against them were two to one, and the villagers had constructed a large fort, behind which they were able to screen themselves from enemy missiles.

But Harry Wharton & Co. did not falter. Heedless of the volley of snowballs which smashed and spattered in their midst, they set up a fierce bombardment.

The villagers were safe, so long as they did not expose themselves. But presently they had to do this, for the Famous Five were rushing their fort.

"Keep 'em out, lads!" cried the leader of the villagers—a tall giant of a fellow, who was a host in himself.

"Rush them!" cried Harry Wharton.

The juniors attacked with a will; but, try as they would, they could not get within a dozen yards of their opponents' fort.

Again and again they dashed forward, only to be repulsed by a fusillade of snowballs. It seemed as if the villagers would succeed in keeping their lines intact until further orders.

The early winter dusk descended over the countryside. But still the battle raged, and still the villagers held the upper hand, though the Famous Five had advanced three or four yards nearer to their objective.

"Adn't you better chuck it, you kids?" said the leader of the villagers at length. "You'll never capture our fort—not in a thousand years!"

Harry Wharton's reply rang out through the gathering dusk:

"No surrender!"

"We'll capture that giddy fort or perish in the attempt!" panted Bob Cherry. "Buck up with that ammunition, Inky!"

Hurree Singh handed up a number of snowballs, and then the Famous Five launched a last desperate offensive. It was successful, too, and it took the enemy by storm.

The villagers began to retreat, leaving their fort to the mercy of the advancing foe.

"Hurrah! We've won the day!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

And he sank down, utterly exhausted, beside the fort.

The enemy was in full flight now. And Bob Cherry, with the light of battle still gleaming in his eyes, followed them up until they were lost sight of in the darkness.

Then Bob retraced his steps to the fort, but he saw no sign of his chums.

"They've packed up and gone home!" he muttered. "The silly duffers! Why couldn't they have waited for me?"

He shouted into the darkness, but no reply came.

He had trudged about a couple of miles when he heard the thudding of approaching footsteps.

A postman came into view, swinging a lantern. Bob hailed him.

"Could you tell me the way to Bunter Court?" he asked.

The man shook his head.

"There ain't no such place 'ereabouts," he said.

"Then what do you call that big gabled house standing in its own grounds, about three miles east of Lower Mudford?"

"Why, that's 'Arcourt Towers!'"

"My hat! Do you mean to say it doesn't belong to Mr. Bunter?"

"Certainly not! It belongs to Mr. Percival 'Arcourt, the big shippin' magnate. I 'ear that 'e's gone to the South of France for Christmas."

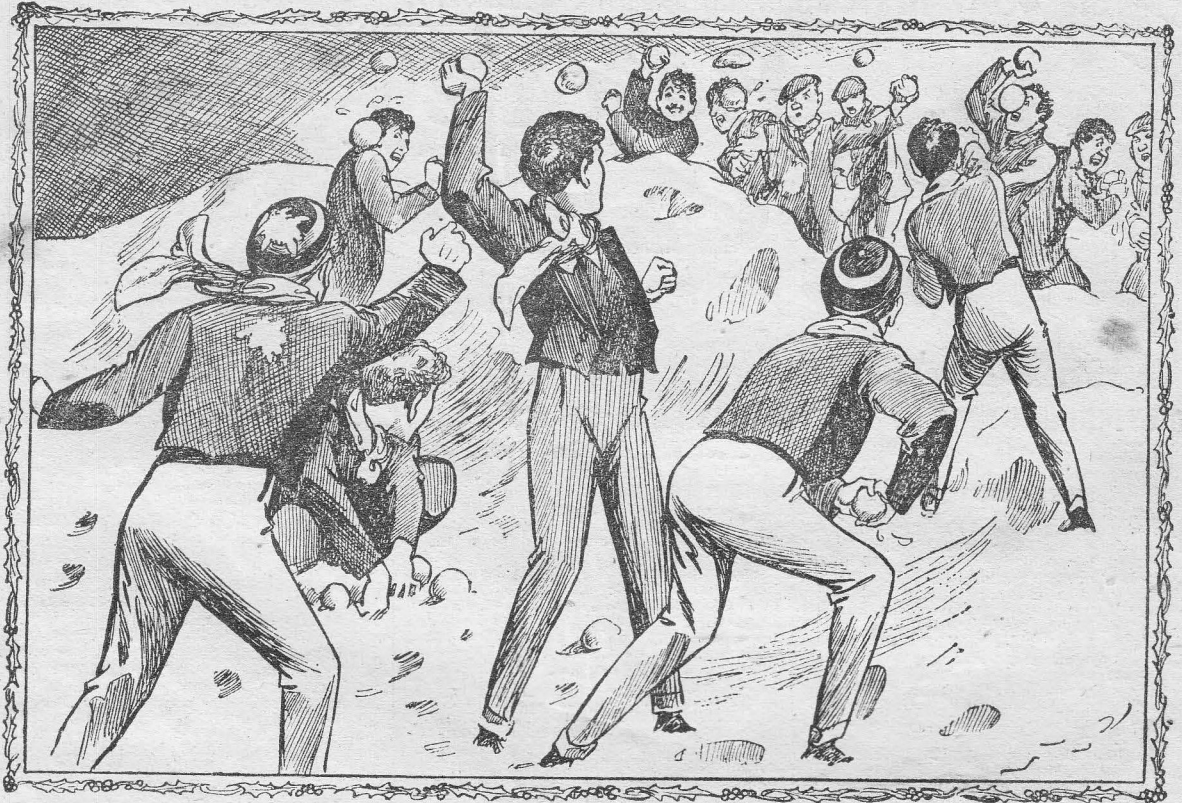
"And there's no such place as Bunter Court?"

"Not in the whole of Loamshire," was the reply. "I've travelled about a good bit, an' I know the country like a book. But there's no places of that name. If you want 'Arcourt Towers, sir, you keep straight on, an' take the first turnin' to the right."

"Thanks!" said Bob. "Merry Christmas!"

The postman returned his salutation, and they went their separate ways.

Now that he had been put wise as to the



The Famous Five launched their final attack on the villagers, and drove them right out of their fort. "Hurrah! We've won the day!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. (See chapter 3.)

route, Bob Cherry lost no time in getting back to the house.

He found his chums in the hall awaiting his arrival.

"We thought you'd catch us up, old man," explained Harry Wharton.

"How could I, when I didn't know the way back?" growled Bob. "It was so dark that I couldn't see a hand's turn. But I met a postman, and he put me on the right track. I managed to make a very interesting discovery, too."

"Well?"

"This place isn't Bunter Court!"

"What!"

There was a shout of amazement from the juniors.

"Not—not Bunter Court!" gasped Nugent. "No; it's Harcourt Towers. It belongs to Mr. Percival Harcourt, a shipping magnate."

"My only aunt!"

"I thought all along that Bunter was playing some deep game or other," said Bob, "and this proves it!"

"Let's go and tackle the fat bouncer!" said Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry brushed the snow from his garments, and the Famous Five went into the drawing-room. Billy Bunter was still reclining on the couch, but he was wide-awake now.

"Has the dinner-gong gone, you fellows?" he asked.

"Blow the dinner-gong!" said Harry Wharton. "Look here, Bunter, we want to know what the little game is!"

"Eh?"

"We've got reason to believe that you've been deceiving us all along the line!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I—"

"This place isn't Bunter Court!" Bunter started as if he had been struck.

"How—how do you know that?" he stammered. "Have you been talking to Billington?"

"Never mind how we found out. What do you mean by trying to spoof us that this place belonged to your pater?"

Billy Bunter's countenance turned a sickly yellow.

"I—I— There's no spoof about it, you fellows!" he faltered. "This place has been the seat of the Bunter family for—for generations! Every stick and stone of it belongs to—"

"Me!" said a quiet voice.

All eyes were turned towards the doorway. A tall, distinguished-looking man stood on the threshold. His appearance tallied with the photograph over the mantelpiece. Beside him was a charming, good-looking girl of about fifteen—evidently his daughter.

"Pardon our sudden intrusion," he said, coming into the room. "I am Mr. Percival Harcourt, and this is my daughter Doris. I trust you are having a good time, Master Bunter!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Explanations—And a Move!

MASTER BUNTER groaned. "I—I thought you had gone to the South of France, sir!" he stammered.

Mr. Harcourt smiled.

"Unfortunately," he said, "trouble arose in connection with our passports. So, after spending a day or two in Folkestone, we came back. I am glad to see you are all happy and comfortable, my boys!"

The Famous Five were half-stunned by the dramatic turn events had taken.

"We—we don't understand, sir!" stammered Harry Wharton. "We were led to believe by Bunter that this was his pater's place—"

Doris Harcourt laughed outright.

"That is Bunter's idea of a jape!" she said. "But—but what—"

"Since you seem to be in the dark about everything," said Mr. Harcourt, "I will explain. It was my intention to go to the South of France for Christmas, and rather than let my house stand idle I decided to loan it to a party of public schoolboys—preferably from Greyfriars, which is my old school. I put an advertisement in the paper, and in response to it Bunter came to see me. He said that he would be delighted to take advantage of my offer, and to bring a party of friends with him. I arranged that the whole of the domestic staff should remain, and I trust you are having an enjoyable time, my boys!"

"Top-hole, sir!" said Bob Cherry. "But we—we didn't dream that this was your place. We thought it was Bunter Court!"

"The seat of the Bunter family for genera-

tions!" added Nugent, glaring at the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter was looking thoroughly uncomfortable. He longed for the floor to open and swallow him up.

The fat junior had laid his plans very carefully, and he had intended that the Famous Five should go back to Greyfriars full of their experiences at Bunter Court. And now the sudden and unexpected return of Mr. Harcourt had exposed his precious scheme, and spoiled everything.

"You fat fraud!" said Harry Wharton, in contempt. "You deserve to be kicked out on your neck!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"What beats me," said Johnny Bull, "is why the servants kept mum about it all. They must have known that Bunter was spoofing us!"

"Pardon me," interposed the voice of Billington, who had come in unobserved, "but when Master Bunter came here on his advance visit, he informed us that he was Mr. Harcourt's nephew."

"Great Scott!"

Doris Harcourt burst out laughing. "He has led you a fine old dance!" she exclaimed.

"And we'll make him sit up for it, too!" said Bob Cherry grimly.

By the time the ordeal was over the victim scarcely knew whether he was on his head or on his heels; and he bitterly repented having carried out his amazing deception.

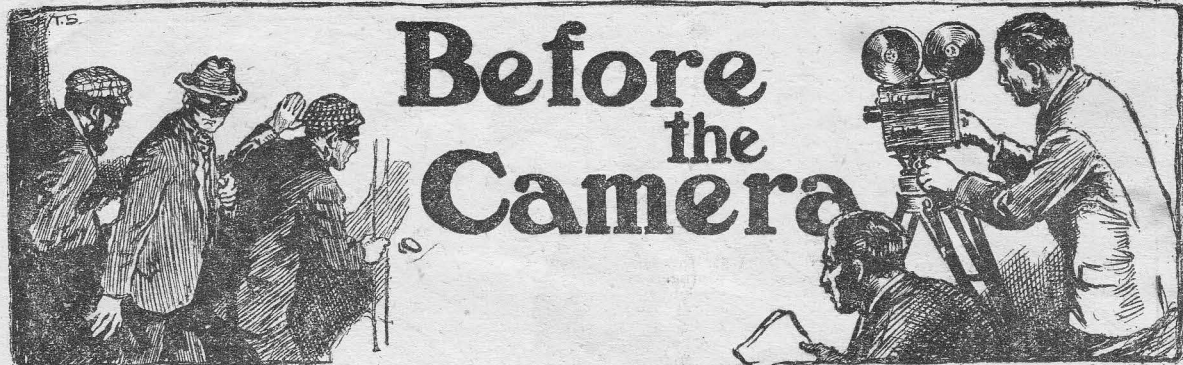
Harry Wharton & Co. expressed their intention of proceeding to Wharton Lodge for the remainder of the vacation, and in spite of Mr. Harcourt's pressing invitation to remain, they felt they could not possibly stop. Bunter's deception had placed them in too uncomfortable a position.

So the juniors left for Wharton Lodge, never dreaming of the adventure that was to befall them ere they saw Harry Wharton's home.

THE END.

(You should read the "Magnet Library" Christmas Number, now on sale at all newsagents, for Harry Wharton's amazing Christmas adventure.)

A GRAND STORY OF FAMOUS EDDIE POLO'S LIFE



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.

The film story develops in which Eddie takes a prominent part.

In the scene taken outside the city, it is necessary that Eddie, in the role of the hero of the film story, should be tied to the track of a railway to await the coming of the train. He is dismayed when he hears that Tim Bobbin is to drive the train that is, according to the plans, to "run over" him.

(Now read on.)

The Mysterious Assailant.

"Here's a move on!" cried Morrison at that moment. "Here's Bobbin coming along with the train. Move slick, Fordyce, or you'll hang up the whole show!"

Fordyce bent and picked up Eddie, who, relapsing into his part again, glared unutterably at his chum, while the Indians, holding Stella, fell back to give him clearance in front of the all-registering camera. And as Eddie twisted his head from side to side he saw out of the corner of his eye the plume of smoke from the far-off locomotive now rising above a slight dip in the plain. A screech from the whistle told the actors that Bobbin was on the job, and Fordyce broke into a little run to the rails. Here, while the camera came along and made a semi close-up, the cords were passed around the still struggling Eddie and the rails, and at almost the last minute the lad managed very realistically to break free.

Then followed a thing not provided for by the author who had composed the scenario. Quite oblivious of the way the play had been planned to run, Eddie Polo's quick brain saw a way in which it could be improved. He suddenly scrambled to his feet, and, with a mighty heave, rent asunder the cords which bound him, though had they been knotted he could hardly have hoped to perform this feat, strong as he was. Then, with a swift heave, he crashed his shoulder in Fordyce's body, throwing that astounded actor clean off his feet, and, with a wild whoop, his hands still bound, Eddie rushed across the plain towards where Stella was still struggling with the mob of supposed Indians.

"Get back, Polo!" shouted Morrison. "You're spoiling the picture!"

"Carry on, Eddie!" yelled Terence, the camera man. "This is the part that's going to put the punch into this film; it's the real reel stuff. Let be, Morrison—the lad's registering wonderfully!"

And Morrison, resigning himself to the judgment of his more than skilled cameraman, dropped back in the race, while Terence signalled to Miles to be ready to carry on "shooting" when Eddie should connect with the Indian band. The Indians, seeing Eddie

coming, hastily formed up in serried ranks, their blunt tomahawks and spears held at the ready. But, with his hands still bound and his head down, Eddie Polo charged on through their ranks as though the opposition was mere brown paper. Stella, carried away with the enthusiasm engendered by Eddie's final attempt to rescue her, renewed her struggles, and managed to win free. With a bound she regained the back of her horse, and, spurring him through the mob that would have hampered her, won to Eddie's side. She pulled the horse on its haunches and bent to assist her supposed hero to the crupper of the saddle behind her, but Eddie's hands still being bound he could hardly mount. And this slight delay gave Fordyce and his band of Indians the chance they would have been seeking had the capture been actual fact and not acting.

With a yell Fordyce charged down upon the pair, wrested Eddie from the girl's grip, and threw him aside. Then he grabbed the head of Stella's horse, and, with a swift urge, threw the animal by means of an old trick known to all horse-trainers. He caught Stella nimbly as she fell from the saddle, and handed her, with instructions to hold her securely, to the bystanders, while Miles and Terence registered the whole of the scene on their cameras.

After that it was child's play to bind Eddie Polo again, and this time they carried him back to the railway-track and laid him down thereupon. Bobbin, seeing that things were not in readiness, had stopped his train a little way up the incline, and the engine hooted warning as Fordyce stepped back, and, as laid down in the script, shook his fist in Eddie's face and finally cursed him.

Then the camera registered Stella holding out her hands appealingly, and, burying her face in them to shut out the horrid sight, just as the engine tooted warningly.

"Right-ho!" yelled Morrison.

"Don't forget what I've told you!" called Fordyce to Tim Bobbin, whose head could be seen through the glass look-out of the engine.

Bobbin nodded, and Eddie stewed his head to watch the train approaching in the distance, while Terence calmly proceeded to take close-ups and semi close-ups of the writhing victim in a most callous manner.

And then, for the second time that day, the scenario received drastic alterations. A man armed with a rifle suddenly appeared from the other side of the track, gazed for a moment with wild eyes at the bound Eddie, the fist-shaking Fordyce, and the oncoming train. Then, with a jerk, the rifle went up to his shoulder and spoke, and Fordyce dropped as Eddie heard the whistle of the bullet over his own head. Crack! The rifle spoke a second time, and the horrified onlookers suddenly saw Bobbin whirl round on the engine footplate, stagger as he clapped his hand to his shoulder, and then fall back off the engine to the ground, leaving the uncontrolled, unguided train to charge down at thirty miles an hour upon the helpless Eddie Polo, lying securely bound across the railway-track not more than fifty yards away.

A Daring Ride!

"GOOD heavens!" yelled Morrison, breaking into a run and racing towards where the helpless Eddie lay bound across the rails. "The man's mad!"

The women in the party screamed, and most of the men lost their heads. Fordyce raised his head from where he lay, and there was a red gash across his forehead. He looked first at the recumbent form of the erstwhile engine-driver, and then at the great locomotive thundering on. Eddie closed his eyes, every second expecting to feel the cold steel wheels on his neck.

It was Terence who acted—Terence, who was wont to swear that in order to obtain a great picture he would willingly have sacrificed his grandmother. The handle of the camera stopped as though the Irishman had himself received a bullet, and, with a couple of swift steps forward, he reached down and dragged Eddie clear of the track just as the uncontrolled locomotive and its crowded passenger-cars thundered past without a driver.

Eddie opened his eyes at the sound, and gave a swift sigh of relief.

"What's happened? Where's Bobbin?" he asked swiftly.

"Shot! That cuckoo shot him, I guess!" said Terence. "And the train's shy a driver, too. Gee! I'm thinking I'd better get the car and follow it along till the crash comes. It'll be a great picture, and a scoop for the Eclair."

"Cut me loose—quick!" cried Eddie. "That train's got to be stopped, or else there'll be a terrible loss of life! A knife, somebody—and hurry!"

Morrison arriving that moment on the scene, bent, and, drawing his pocket-knife, severed the lad's bonds with its keen blade. And the moment he was free Eddie Polo rose to his feet and raced towards where the two horses stood which had brought him and Stella across the desert for the first portion of the film. The inhabitants of Alkali Springs, thinking this some new stunt, and not quite aware of what he intended to do, drew up to bar his passage.

"Back, you fools!" cried Eddie. "This is no play—but serious business! Back, out of my way!"

They fell back, and with a rush Eddie raced to where his own horse stood champing its bit. He bounded into the saddle, snatched a spear from one of the adjacent players, and brought the shaft down upon the animal's flank. Then, as it broke into a swift gallop, he bent forward and whispered into its ear, and the noble animal, as though understanding the urgency of its mission, laid its ears back and streaked out like a flash of lightning after the swiftly-moving train.

"Hooray for Polo!" yelled somebody, and then the whole camp surged forward, moving, of course, at a much slower pace than either train or horsemen. Stella herself, after the first panic had gone, moved swiftly, and now she, too, drove her heels into her animal's side and bounded after Eddie, while Terence, having swiftly appropriated the motor-car, raced after them to film the whole of the proceedings.

Morrison called to three or four of the men, and these remained behind to attend to Fordyce's hurts, while three others went up the track to pick up the injured Bobbin. Fordyce, it was found, had escaped with a graze across the forehead, which would leave a mark that would require careful erasion in any future make-up, while Bobbin, though stunned by his fall from the engine to the

track, had got clear with a bullet through the fleshy part of his shoulder. But of the man who had fired the rifle there was no trace. He had disappeared in a cloud of dust, streaking on his horse across the Alkali Plains as suddenly as he had appeared from the belt of trees. Nor did any of those who remained behind with Morrison know the man. He was a mystery entirely.

Meanwhile, Eddie, on the bay mare, was chasing after the train as fast as his horse could put foot to the ground. And, interested by all that was happening, the passengers in the train crowded to the windows and waved their handkerchiefs at the lad and at the girl who so nobly strove to overtake him, at Terence in the motor-car, and at the crowd running far behind, and every second becoming more and more lost in the distance. Eddie's face was drawn and grim, and under his breath he apostrophised the passengers for thinking this was some part of a game, when death was really staring them in the face. But onward he pounded, having neither time nor breath to spare to explain to them the true position, and reluctant to frighten them by telling them the train was minus guide and driver. And then, calling on the bay for a great effort, he drew abreast the brake-van at the rear of the train, and the guard perched there shouted something and waved his hand, that Eddie, though he could not catch the words, thought was some jocular greeting.

The lad shook his head and applied the haft of the spear to the horse's side again, and, with raking strides, the bay dashed onward. And then, quite suddenly, it seemed to Eddie that the train was slowing down, and before he could draw the bay on to her haunches it stopped. Without properly checking his way, the lad dashed on to the engine, and as he drew alongside a grimy face showed itself.

"Hallo!" said the owner of the face. "Youse in some hurry, sure, the way yew're burnin' up the trail! 'Tain't many folks as come a-hossback to catch the Limited."

He grinned as Eddie's jaw fell, and, reining in his horse, the lad jumped to the ground.

"But—but I thought there wasn't anybody on this engine," he commenced. "I saw Bobbin shot off the train by that hoodlum on the horse, and, naturally, fancied the blessed thing was out of control!"

"You would! Ain't you the guy that was supposed to be trying the suicide stunt?" was the man's cool reply. "Well, buddy, there ain't no picture actor in the world that isn't survised by Stiff Jim Connolly—that's me—when he's running my train. The feller never had hold of the throttle at all, 'cept just in that part where I turned round, and went into the tender to see how my mate, the fireman, was getting on. He was taking a sleep in the nubbles, while I was doing his bit of work. And then when I gets back here, bless me if I don't find my line actor chap gone, and I didn't know where to find him! Anyway, as we'd lost time waiting for yew silly people, we've just pushed on, till, chancing to put my head out of the window just now, I caught sight of you racing along, and hauled up for yew. That's all. But I thought as you was dead, or supposed to be. Trains like this don't run over folks and leave 'em in a fit state of health to go hoss-racing afterwards, as I'm aware."

"Then you were here all the time?" cried Eddie. "Well, when you found that Bobbin had gone, why didn't you pull up? I might have been killed!"

"Not on the movies, cully!" was the man's response. "The herowine 'ud have turned up in time to save yew, or something, that's why I didn't stop!"

"Well, of all the—" began Eddie. "Ain't got time to stop and cag-mag with yew all day!" cried the driver, slipping his clutch in once more. "So long! I'll come and see the picture when I'm off dooty!"

It was the arrival of Stella on the grey at that juncture which saved Eddie from expressing himself in suitable terms; and on her heels came Terence in the motor-car, doubled up with laughter.

"Eddie, old son," he cried, rocking with hilarity, "won't old man Morrison be mad when he finds I've wasted a few thousand feet taking a gallant attempt to stop a runaway train that wasn't a runaway at all—a tragedy that finished in a farce. Shouldn't wonder if he doesn't stop the price of the film from your screw and mine. Say, Polo, if you could only see your face! It's so downcast that it'd make a cat laugh! Wait a minute till I get a close-up!"

"If you point that blamed camera at me

again to-day, Terence," said Eddie, "I'll brain you with the thing! I've been made a proper fool of, and nearly killed in the bargain. Now we'll just travel back, without any camera play, in a quiet and dignified manner, and assist at the lynching of the hoodlum who started shooting. That chap isn't fit to be trusted with a rifle any more than you are with a railway accident or a sudden, unexpected death, or anything else that'd make a good picture. Terence, here, move up, and make room for me and Stella in that car! We've had enough riding for one day."

Terence moved up, and the horses having been hitched astern of the car, the automobile went ahead dead slow, and presently made its way back to camp. The assembled Alkali Springers and the studio crowd, still in the Indian garbs, and with the bandaged Fordyce and Bobbin in their midst, raised a small cheer as the party drew up—a cheer that Eddie silenced with a few explanatory words to Morrison. And then, as the crowd saw the joke a great wave of relief and of merriment swept over them, and they laughed at Eddie's comical face till the tears streamed down their cheeks, and they had to lean against each other for support. They had expected to cheer the hero of a clever

in these wild regions, and there must be some village or other where he's known. Seems to me, too, that I've seen the chap before, though maybe it's the beard he sported that stopped me from recognising him. Anyway, the whole thing was no fault of Tim Bobbin's, though I was afraid he might be tempted to have an accident with the train and put 'paid' to the little account he and I have between us. Well, Stella, it's been an exciting and strenuous morning, and it's nearly lunch-time. We've earned our grub to-day; suppose we take a little walk into Alkali Springs and see if we can't find something really decent to eat?"

And Stella assenting, the pair set off, and, after being fed, rested for an hour or so before they were again called upon to start work before the camera.

The wounds which had laid low both Dick Fordyce and Tim Bobbin were not serious—at least, not serious enough to prevent their attending a little concert which the cinema artistes gave in the saloon of Alkali Springs that same night, just by way of varying the monotony of existence for the "rubes" who lived, moved, and had their continual being within the confines of its three narrow streets and half-score tin and packing-case timber huts. And, as it hap-



Urging his horse forward, Eddie at last drew abreast of the rear van of the runaway train. Several hundred yards behind came Terence in the motor-car, shouting encouragement to the reckless rider. Would he be able to stop the train in time? (See this page.)

train stunt—a hero who had stopped a runaway by overhauling it on a horse and then clambering, while the engine moved at high speed, to the footboard—and here they were treated to a farce. It was too comical.

"Glad to think those chaps find it funny, Miss Stella," said Eddie. "If they'd made themselves sore riding a horse in the affair they wouldn't laugh so much."

"Never mind, Eddie," said the girl. "I understand—and they will, too, when they think it out—that it was a very brave thing for you to do. Your own escape was miraculous, too, and you haven't thanked Terence for pulling you from the track in time. By the way, isn't it strange that nobody knows who the armed horseman was—where he came from and where he's gone to. Did you see his face at all, and would you know him again?"

"I saw him all right," replied Eddie; "and some day I shall meet and know him again, and then I hope to give him as big a fright as he gave me. Some lunatic or other, I expect, who thought the thing was real, and got windy, and who, when he saw the real harm he'd done, bolted like the wind. But he'll hear more of it. There's police still

opened, the concert, while unusual in places, was a great success.

It originated in a nasty little quarrel that might have had serious consequences had it not been for Eddie Polo's presence of mind. Two of the ranchers among the crowd which had ridden in from the estancia out among the alkali and sage were feeling somewhat sore with each other. It appears that Red Rufus had played a more or less silly jape on his messmate, Black Benson, and Black Benson had resented having to unpick several hundred minute stitches out of his best trousers before riding in to the township that night. And after the first couple of drams of firewater had coursed their way down his throat, Black Benson's memory of his trifling wrongs became aroused once more, and his anger with it, so that he presently pulled a gun, and was about to draw a bead upon the laughing Red Rufus—then engaged in chatting cheerily with Stella Cleaver at an adjacent table—when Eddie Polo stepped in, and with a dexterous movement struck up the cowboy's arm, so that the bullet went through the ceiling.

(Another fine instalment of this serial next week.)

ROUGH ON JIMMY SILVER!

An Amusing Long, Complete Story of the Chums of Rookwood School, and Their Old Rivals of Bagshot.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Hopping it!

"**H**A, ha, ha!" Jimmy Silver was chatting with his chums—Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—under the old beeches in the quad at Rookwood. He looked round towards the school gates in surprise as he heard that sudden outburst of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A crowd was gathering in the old gateway; fellows were running from all quarters to join it. Loud shouts of laughter rang across the quad.

"Something going on, it seems," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four hurried down to the gates. Something evidently was going on in the road outside—something that tickled the Rookwood fellows immensely, to judge by the roars of laughter.

"What's the row?" asked Lovell, as they came up, breathless.

"Ha, ha!" roared Oswald of the Fourth. "Look at the duffers! Look at them! Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. elbowed their way through the thickening crowd in the gateway. Then they had a view of the road, and they joined in the yell of merriment.

They could not help it.

Three juniors were coming up the road. They were Rookwood juniors, and they belonged to the Modern side at the school, as the blue badge on their caps testified. But their features were quite unrecognisable, having been thickly daubed with whitewash. Their hands were tied down to their sides, and their right legs were bent, and tied up, so that they could only progress by hopping on their left legs. The sight of the three whitewashed juniors hopping on their left legs was too much for the Fistical Four. They shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are they?" gasped Lovell. "Moderns, of course! Classical chaps wouldn't let themselves be japed like that!"

"Who are you?" roared Raby.

"Silly asses!" came a panting voice from one of the whitewashed trio. "Gerront of the way!"

"Tommy Dodd!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The three Tommies!" chuckled Lovell. "What a giddy sight! Anybody got a camera?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you bring a camera near me, and I'll bust it over your silly head!" bellowed Tommy Dodd.

"Hook it, Newcome, and get your camera!" Newcome bolted for the School House.

The three whitewashed juniors hopped painfully up to the gate. They were panting for breath. Such a mode of progress was decidedly laborious. Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the heroes of the Modern side at Rookwood, had never been seen in such a parlous strait before. Evidently they had been in the hands of the enemy, and had had the worst of it. They leaned against the gate, and panted.

"You thumping chumps!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "There's nothing to cackle at! This ain't funny!"

"It looks funny!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my hat! Who tied you up like this?"

"The Bagshot beasts—"

"And you let 'em?" howled Lovell.

"How could we help it, when there were a dozen of them?" roared Tommy Dodd, in great exasperation. "There were Pankley and Poole and a dozen more. They collared us, and did this—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up with that camera, Newcome!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 101.

yelled Lovell. "We'll hang a picture of them in our Common-room."

"You—you Classical rotter!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Let us loose, you beasts! We can't hop into the place like this. There'll be a row if old Manders spots us!"

"Oh, get on as you are!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly. "You look simply ripping—a little pale, perhaps! Hop it!"

"Ha, ha! Hop it!" yelled the Classical juniors.

But several of the Modern fellows rushed to the aid of Tommy Dodd & Co. They were laughing, too; they couldn't help it. But they lent a willing hand. Jimmy Silver & Co. were almost in hysterics. There was always warfare between the Rookwood juniors and the fellows of Bagshot School, and Rookwood prided itself upon more than keeping its end up. But Bagshot had scored this time—there was no doubt about that.

"The awful duffers!" chuckled Lovell. "To let Bagshot bouncers handle them like that, and—"

"I tell you they were three or four to one!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, rats! Why couldn't you lick 'em? Classical chaps would have licked 'em!" said Lovell.

"You silly ass—"

"Here comes Newcome! Got the camera?"

"Buck up, Towle!" howled Tommy Dodd, to the Modern junior who was cutting his bonds. "Some of you bump that idiot Newcome, and smash his camera!"

The Modern juniors loyally rushed to screen the unfortunate Tommies from the amateur photographer. The Classics rushed to clear them out of the way. That photograph would have been highly prized on the Classical side of Rookwood.

There was a scuffle in the gateway, and in the midst of it the three Tommies were cut loose at last. They bolted for the Modern side.

"Snap 'em, Newcome!" shouted Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Snap!

Newcome chanced it, and he snapped the heels of the trio as they vanished through the bushes. He shook his head regretfully.

"No go!" he said. "There's a jolly good picture wasted, all through these Modern asses!"

The Fistical Four sauntered away, chuckling. They were as much "up against" Bagshot as the Moderns were, but the downfall of the great Tommy Dodd made them chuckle. But Jimmy Silver soon ceased to chuckle, and looked very serious.

"It won't do," he said. "It won't do at all, my infants! Of course, those Modern bouncers can't keep their end up; but we can't let Bagshot crow over Rookwood. It's up to us!"

"What's the game?" asked Lovell.

"We're going to down the Bagshot bouncers, and then perhaps those Modern worms will own up that we're top side of Rookwood."

"Bet you they won't!"

"Well, whether they do or not, it will be a fact, all the same. Pankley & Co. have got to die a giddy death!" said Jimmy Silver seriously. "Let's hold a pow-wow!"

And the Fistical Four held a pow-wow, debating the plan of campaign against their ancient rivals.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Great Wheeze!

"**L**ETTER for you, Jimmy!" Dick Oswald called to Jimmy Silver as the Fistical Four came into the School House. The Classical chums had held the pow-wow. They had held it in the tuckshop, and stimulated their mental efforts with ginger-beer the while. But the outcome had not been satisfactory.

They were quite agreed that Bagshot had to be downed. About that there could be only one opinion. The Moderns couldn't tackle Pankley & Co., but the Classics could, and would. Thus declared Jimmy Silver and his chums cordially agreed. But further than that they did not seem able to proceed. Exactly how Bagshot was to be downed remained a problem.

Jimmy Silver took the letter Oswald tossed to him carelessly enough. He wasn't much interested in letters from anywhere at that moment. But his expression changed as he noted the postmark.

"This is from Bagshot!" he exclaimed.

"Chuck it into the fire! It's only some cheek from those bouncers!"

"Most likely. But we'll see what particular kind of cheek it is."

Jimmy opened the letter.

"Cheeky ass!" he exclaimed, as he read it.

"What did I tell you?" said Lovell.

"Listen to this," said Jimmy wrathfully. And he read out:

"Dear Silver,—Having been amused very often by watching Rookwood footer, I feel that one good turn deserves another. If you Rookwood kids would like to see a good game, and pick up some tips how footer should be played, you can't do better than come over to Latham to-morrow afternoon. We're playing Latham Ramblers. I dare say you're aware that beginners can learn a lot by watching really good play. Our brake leaves here at two, and we'll pick you up on the Latham road if you like.—Always yours,
"CECIL PANKLEY."

The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"Swank!" growled Raby.

"We can beat 'em at footer!" snorted Newcome.

"Watch 'em, and pick up tips!" howled Lovell. "The cheeky ass! Of course, he knows we won't do anything of the kind."

"Fancy going over to Latham to watch those duffers play!" exclaimed Oswald. "It's only swank, of course. Just one of Pankley's digs."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"We've only got footer practice on for to-morrow," he remarked. "We can get out in the afternoon."

"Why, you fathead," almost shouted Lovell, "are you thinking of going to Latham to see those idiots play? If you do, you can jolly well go alone!"

"Pankley doesn't expect us to go," said Raby. "It's only one of his fatheaded jokes. I'm not going."

"Listen to your Uncle Jimmy!"

"Rats!" said Lovell. "I tell you we're not going, and if you go, Jimmy Silver, we'll jolly well scrag you!"

"Will you dry up?" roared Jimmy Silver, exasperated. "I tell you we're going out to-morrow afternoon!"

"We're not!"

"We're going to meet their brake on the Latham road."

"Rot!"

"And mop them up!"

"Oh!"

"Now do you understand?" said Jimmy Silver, with great severity. "Pankley's written this as a dig at us. Well, he's put the wheeze into my head with his blessed swank! We're going to ambush that brake on the Latham road!"

"Good!"

"We'll take about twenty chaps, so that they won't have an earthly."

"Hurrah!"

"And if the Latham chaps don't laugh 'em to death—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical juniors. Lovell thumped Jimmy Silver ecstatically on the back. It was a "wheeze" after his own heart.

Pankley of Bagshot had fairly played it to

their hands by sending that "swanky" letter to Jimmy Silver. The chopper was to come down upon the self-satisfied bounders of Bagshot at last.

Jimmy Silver & Co. discussed their plans that evening in the end study with great hilarity. They made all their preparations. They laid in a supply of cord for tying up the Bagshot "Bounders"; they laid in a supply of green and yellow paint for the faces of Pankley & Co.; they decided upon the exact spot where the ambush should be laid. They took their comrades of the Classical Fourth into their confidence, and formed the party that was to waylay Bagshot on the morrow. Flynn and Hooker and Jones minor and the rest entered into the scheme with great heartiness. Even Townsend and Topham, the slackers of the Fourth, joined in. A strong force was required to deal with Pankley & Co., and Jimmy Silver meant the odds to be on the Rookwood side.

The triumph would be a double one—over Bagshot and over the Rookwood Moderns, who would have to hide their diminished heads when they saw how easily Jimmy Silver & Co. dealt with the enemy.

The next morning the Classical Fourth were full of suppressed excitement on the subject. Even in the Form-room Mr. Bootles noticed an unusual restiveness in his class. Glad were the Fourth-Formers when lessons were over, and they were free for the remainder of the day.

After dinner Jimmy Silver & Co. came out, with nearly all the Classical members of the Fourth Form, and some of the Third and the Shell.

The party numbered thirty in all. As they marched down to the gates they encountered the three Tommies, who were on their way to the footer-ground.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "You Classical bounders slacking, as usual? What about footer practice?"

"Something else on, my infant," said Jimmy Silver. "You run away and play footer, while we give Bagshot socks!"

"Bagshot will eat you!" said Tommy Dodd disdainfully.

"Well, they ate you!" grinned Lovell. "It's up to us to wipe out that defeat. You Modern bounders can't do it!"

"You Classical ass—"

"You Modern duffer—"

"Come on!" rapped out Jimmy Silver. "No time to rag Modern duffers now. Follow your uncle!"

The Classical army marched off, and Tommy Dodd & Co. glared after them.

"Sure they'll make a muck of it!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Bound to!" said Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd growled.

"Lot of good those duffers tackling Bagshot!" he said. "They'll come home licked, you can bet your hat!"

The three Tommies went down to the footer. Jimmy Silver & Co. marched out of the gates of Rookwood, on the war-path!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Caught!

"HALT!" said Jimmy Silver. "Halt it is!" said Lovell. "This is the place."

The Rookwood crowd halted on the Latham road. It was a country lane, between high banks clothed with grass and shaded by trees. The road made a deep dip, and even in the early afternoon it was a shadowy spot. On the rise following the dip in the road the Rookwooders stationed themselves.

The rise was a steep one, and, as Jimmy Silver sagely foresaw, the Bagshot brake would have to slow down there to a walking pace. Escape would be impossible when the Rookwooders attacked. The Bagshot Bounders would have to "scrap," and the Rookwooders had no doubt of the result. Even without the odds on their side, they would have had no doubt on that point.

Jimmy Silver looked at his watch.

"Quarter-past two!" he announced. "They'll be along here in about a quarter of an hour. Get into cover. You take the other side of the road, Lovell, with fifteen chaps. We'll stay on this side. When I whistle, go for the bounders!"

"Right-ho!"

"You collar the horse, Raby, to make sure, though they won't have much chance of bolting on this rise!"

"You bet!"

In the thick hedges on either side of the road the Rookwooders took cover, and watched eagerly for the Bagshot brake.

There was a rumble of wheels in the distance at last.

Jimmy Silver peered out eagerly from behind the trunk of a big tree.

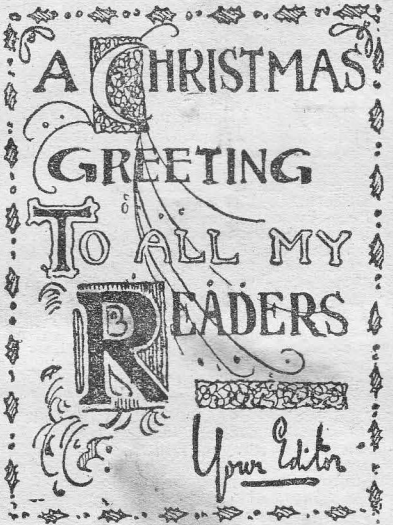
Only a couple of cyclists had passed so far. The road was a solitary one. But the rumble of wheels told of a large vehicle. Round a bend in the lane a big brake came in sight. It was crowded with Bagshot fellows.

Jimmy Silver recognised Pankley and Putter and Poole, of the Fourth Form at Bagshot. They were chatting cheerily in the front of the brake. There were ten other fellows, making thirteen in all. The brake came rumbling down into the dip in the road at a good speed, and slowed down as it took the rise on the opposite side of the dip. It was going very slowly as it approached the Rookwood ambush.

"Wait till they're right up to us," said Jimmy Silver, watching from behind the tree. "No hurry; we've got 'em safe enough. What the dickens is Pankley doing with that bugle?"

"We'll bugle him!"

Pankley of Bagshot had a bugle on his knee, apparently for the purpose of cheering the journey with sweet music. But he was not blowing it; he was chatting with Putter and Poole, and seemed to have no eyes for



the road or a possible enemy. As a rule, Pankley was as hard to catch napping as a weasel, but on this occasion he seemed to be falling blindly into the trap.

Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden, sharp whistle.

As it rang out over the road, the Rookwooders rushed out from their cover, on both sides of the brake. Raby ran to the head of the leading horse, and held on. The brake came to a sudden halt, surrounded by Rookwooders.

"My hat!" said Pankley.

"Caught!" roared Lovell.

"Fairly nailed!" chirruped Jimmy Silver.

"Now, then, jump out of that brake, you duffers!"

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra!

Pankley put the bugle to his lips, and blew a cheery blast. It rang sharply through the frosty air.

"Chuck that!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"What are you up to?"

"Only celebrating the occasion," said Pankley. "It's such a pleasure to see your innocent faces!"

"Are you coming down?"

"No fear!"

"Then we'll jolly soon have you out!"

"Go for 'em!" roared Lovell.

With a rush on both sides and in the rear, the Rookwooders assailed the brake. The driver sat in his seat, blinking. He could not drive on, and he did not feel inclined to share in the scrap. He shrugged his shoulders, and sat tight.

The Rookwooders were over two to one, and the tussle was not in doubt from the start, determined as the resistance was.

In five minutes the Bagshot fellows were all down, and the victorious Rookwooders were sitting on them, panting.

"Got the rotters!" chirruped Jimmy Silver.

"You ain't dealing with Moderns this time, Panky! We've done you brown! Why, what—Hallo! Look out! Great Christopher Columbus!"

It was a yell of dismay from the Rookwood junior captain.

There was a whir in the road—a whir and rattle of many bicycles. Down the road came a swarm of cyclists on the track of the brake—Bagshot fellows, and apparently in myriads.

Jimmy Silver stared at them dumbfounded.

There were thirty fellows, at least, riding like the wind, and they swept up from the dip in the road in a yelling swarm, and jumped off their machines round the brake.

And there was a yell from Pankley: "Rescue! Pile in, Bagshot!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Turning the Tables!

"GREAT Scott!"

"Back up!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Dismay had fallen upon the Rookwood raiders.

How on earth had thirty Bagshot cyclists arrived on the scene at that critical moment? It was the last thing the raiders had expected. But there they were, evidently ready for business.

The machines spun anywhere as the rescuers rufed on the brake from all sides.

Pankley & Co. were down, and sat upon. But the Rookwooders had to face the new enemy, and then Cecil Pankley and the rest "bucked up" with renewed vim. Jimmy Silver & Co. were attacked front and rear.

The odds were so tremendous that the Rookwooders had not the ghost of a chance from beginning to end.

But they fought hard.

Heavy as were the odds, and hopeless the struggle, they fought to a finish, and of all the party only Townsend and Topham jumped out of the brake and fled. And they did not flee far. Three or four Bagshot fellows rushed after them, and dragged them back.

In less than ten minutes it was all over.

The tables had been turned with a vengeance.

The Rookwood party were all on their backs, in the brake or in the road, with Bagshot juniors sitting on them.

The triumphant enemy were chortling with glee.

"Take it calmly, Silver, old chap!" advised Pankley, as Jimmy struggled wildly under Putter and Poole. "Keep smiling, you know!"

"Ow! You rotter!" gasped Jimmy.

"It was so jolly good of you to walk into a trap like this!" grinned Pankley. "This is what I like about you Rookwood chaps; you're so jolly innocent and unsuspecting! Such beautiful, childlike innocence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bagshot, with one voice.

"You see, we anticipated this!" yawned Pankley. "That's why I wrote to you yesterday, Silver, dear boy. I thought it would put this idea into your head—I knew you wouldn't miss such a chance. I would have bet ten to one in jam-tarts that we should meet a Rookwood crowd on the road!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver simply writhed.

"Oh, you deep rotter!" he gasped.

Pankley chuckled.

"We knew we could depend on your delightfully simple nature, Silver, old scout, so we arranged for the bicycle brigade to follow us about a quarter of a mile behind, and to come on like steam if I blew the bugle. You didn't guess why I was bugling, dear boy? You wouldn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver would have been glad to sink through the bottom of the brake and into the earth. He was quite overwhelmed. He understood now how the astute Pankley had taken him in.

The letter had been written for the special purpose of putting it into his head to ambush the Bagshot brake.

And a crowd of Bagshot fellows, who had doubtless intended to cycle over to Latham anyway to see the match, had biked a quarter of a mile behind the brake, instead of accompanying it, for the especial purpose of letting Rookwood make the attack, if they were indeed on the road.

Then Pankley's bugle had brought them swarming up.

It was very deep of Pankley; but Jimmy Silver could have kicked himself for not guessing the ulterior motive of that letter. But

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it was rather too late to think about that now. The Rookwooders were in the hands of the Philistines.

Jimmy Silver relapsed into grim silence. He had to go through it now.

Pankley took a coil of rope from under a seat in the brake. Jimmy gritted his teeth as he saw that the Bagshot bouncers were quite prepared. They had anticipated the attack—and the victory.

It was useless for the Rookwooders to resist. Two or three Bagshot fellows had hold of each of them.

Wriggling and gasping, the Rookwooders were planted in the road, in a long file, one behind the other.

Pankley did not need to give directions to his followers. The plan was evidently cut and dried already.

The Rookwooders' hands were tied to their sides, and then the rope was run along the file, knotted on each junior in turn. Jimmy Silver was placed at the head of that peculiar column. Lovell was behind him, then Raby, then Newcome, then Oswald, and so on till the whole party was secured.

The Rookwood party looked like a very queer kind of centipede when their triumphant foes had finished. Their looks were almost homicidal, their remarks almost Hunnish. But there was no help for it.

Jimmy Silver was thankful that the green and yellow paint had not come to light. Had Pankley suspected that, he would certainly have used it to decorate the faces of the Rookwood prisoners. Fortunately, he did not.

"There!" said Pankley, when the work was finished. "I think that's all right. Feel all right, Silver?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"You comfy, Lovell?"

"Go and eat coke, you rotter!"

"Anything more I can do for you, Raby?"

Snort!

"They seem satisfied," said Pankley. "Get into the brake, you chaps! We've got to get to Latcham by three."

Jimmy Silver writhed with rage. Pankley had even allowed time for this on the journey. They would not have needed to start at two o'clock—excepting to allow time for this. It was the last straw.

"Oh, you spoofing rotter!" gasped Jimmy. "We'll make you sit up for this!"

"My dear kid, you couldn't make a white rabbit sit up," said Pankley. "Now, goodbye! Wriggle off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're not going to leave us like this!" gasped Lovell.

"Why not? You can wriggle home to Rookwood, I suppose. It's only about a mile. Now wriggle away, you worms!"

"We won't! We—"

"Anybody got a squirt?" said Pankley. "There's some water in the ditch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver did not wait for Poole to fill his squirt. He started. The rest of the file followed. Stumbling and kicking one another's heels, the Rookwood juniors limped up the road. Pankley & Co. and the brake rolled away. The cyclists, gurgling with merriment, followed it. The Bagshot Bouncers departed in great glee for their football match at Latcham. Jimmy Silver & Co. wriggled away painfully in the direction of Rookwood.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Painful Predicament!

"O H dear!"

"Jimmy Silver, you ass—"

"Jimmy, you fathead!"

"Oh, you burbling duffer!"

"You frabjous ass!"

Every fellow in the unhappy file had some remark to make to Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was feeling very bad himself. His followers were furious. They had been caught in a trap, and they put it all down to their leader. Jimmy was the leader, and he had led them into this.

Naturally they were wrathful. From behind Jimmy, as he led the way, came remarks that ought to have made his hair curl.

Jimmy halted at last. The Bagshot brake was out of sight, rolling merrily away to Latcham. The long column wriggled to a stumbling halt.

"We can't go back to Rookwood like this," gasped Jimmy; "we shall be laughed to death. The Modern asses will cackle themselves blind."

"Oh, you fathead!" gasped Hooker.

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"We won't dare to show our faces in the quad after this, by gad!" mumbled Towns- end.

"It's no good ragging me!" growled Jimmy. "I couldn't help it. How was I to know they—"

"Sure, you're leader, ain't you?" howled Flynn. "'Taint a leader's business to lead us into this, is it intoirly?"

"We want a new captain!" howled Top- ham.

"Cheese it!" roared Jimmy Silver, ex- asperated. "What's the good of ragging now? We've got to get out of this. Some- body will pass along the road soon, and we'll get them to untie us."

"Pretty idiots we shall look!" groaned Oswald.

"Better than wriggling home to Rookwood like a centipede."

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, you fathead!"

The whole party seemed unanimously agreed that it was all Jimmy Silver's fault. That was one of the pleasures of captaincy.

"Here comes a giddy cyclist," said Lovell hopefully. "Call to him—any chap would help us out of this."

"Let's hope it isn't a Rookwood chap," said Jimmy. "Oh, what rotten luck—it's Towle!"

"A rotten Modern! Oh dear!"

Towle of the Fourth was pedalling cheerily along the road from Rookwood. Towle nearly fell off his machine as he caught sight of the human centipede. His bike wobbled, and he jumped down just in time—gasping.

"What the merry thunder—" gasped Towle.

"Towle, old chap—"

"Come and help us! We—we're tied up."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Towle.

"What are you cackling at, you Modern idiot?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver ferociously. "Come and get us loose, you owl!"

Towle held on to his machine and roared. He almost doubled up over the bicycle. He laughed till the tears ran down his face, while the Classical juniors glared at him as if they would eat him. The situation did not strike them as in the smallest degree comic. But the Modern junior evidently saw something funny in it.

"When you've finished, perhaps you'll come and let us loose, Towle," said Lovell, in tones of concentrated fury.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Towle.

"You cackling fathead—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've been tackling Bagshot!" shrieked Towle; "and this is what it's come to! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, you Classical mugs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you let us loose?" bellowed Lovell.

"No jolly fear!" gasped Towle. "This is too good a joke to be spoiled. I'm jolly well going to fetch the chaps to see you!"

"Towle—"

"I say, Towle, be a good chap—"

"Towle—Towle, old fellow—"

Towle was deaf to entreaties. He jumped on his machine, and tore away towards Rookwood, gasping with laughter. He vanished in a moment or two round the bend in the lane. Jimmy Silver looked quite sickly.

"Now we'll have a crowd of Modern rotters coming to look at us!" groaned Lovell. "Oh, dear! Jimmy Silver, if ever you propose a jape on Bagshot again—"

"Oh, dry up!" Jimmy Silver scanned the road wildly in search of help. He would have given a term's pocket-money to be released from the ridiculous position before Towle could return with a crowd of mocking Moderns.

"There's a chap in the fields yonder," Lovell said. "Yell to him!"

The Classics peered through a gap in the hedge. On the other side of the field a labourer was digging. He was at a good distance, but the juniors united their voices in a desperate yell.

"Hi!"

They yelled "Hi!" a dozen times with the full force of their lungs before the labourer glanced round.

"Hi! Hi! Help!"

The man laid down his fork at last, and came in a leisurely way across the field. He blinked through the hedge, and gave a jump at the sight of the human centipede.

"Law!" he gasped.

"We—we're tied up!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Come and cut us loose, and I'll stand you half-a-crown."

"Oh laws!"

The countryman came out into the road, his eyes open like saucers with astonishment. "Cut us loose!" snorted Lovell.

"I beant got no knife."

"There's one in my jacket pocket," said Jimmy Silver. "For goodness' sake buck up and get it out!"

"You be in a fix, zur."

"Yes, yes. Buck up!"

"Wot moight be the reason of this yere, zur?"

"It's a lark—a lark of some beasts. Get a move on!"

"Oh, law!"

The juniors were trembling with impatience. But the movements of the countryman were very leisurely. He was not in the habit of hurrying, and apparently he saw no reason for changing his habits now. However, he opened Jimmy Silver's knife at last, and sawed through the cord. As soon as he was free, Jimmy snatched the knife and cut rapidly through the rest of the bonds. The Rookwooders gasped with relief as they stood among fragments of rope. Towle and his friends were not in sight yet. It was a relief they were very thankful for.

"Thanks!" said Jimmy Silver. "Here's your half-crown! Come on, you chaps!"

In a disconsolate crowd, the juniors walked away to Rookwood. Half-way to the school they came upon a crowd of cyclists—all Moderns. Tommy Dodd & Co. had turned out in great force, to behold the wondrous sight described by Towle.

"Here they are!" shouted Towle. "Hallo! They've got loose!"

"Had a good time?" asked Tommy Dodd blandly. "Lemme see! You went out to lick the Bagshot bouncers, didn't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What did you get loose for?" demanded Cook indignantly. "I've taken the trouble to bring a camera, and now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not even answer. They were too dispirited for an argument with the Moderns. They marched on glumly, and the Moderns followed them, chuckling. Never had the Fistical Four been so glad to get out of sight into their own study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Enemy's Camp!

JIMMY SILVER snorted.

It was not a sniff; it was a snort—an emphatic snort, like unto that of an angry war-horse.

Jimmy was tied-up.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome had been telling him what they thought of him and of his generalship. That was not the worst. It was not so bad to be slanged by his own pals. But the Modern juniors were persistently shrieking over the ludicrous ending of the raid on Bagshot. Even after Jimmy Silver justly considered that the fun was worn threadbare, the Moderns persisted in shrieking with delight over it.

Then the Classics, too, howled over it. All the fellows who had joined the raiding-party were furious. But all the rest howled with merriment over the story.

Jimmy Silver stood it with patience for some time. At last he gave that emphatic snort, a warning that his patience was running out.

"Nuff said!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you must admit you are an ass," said Lovell.

"And a howling duffer!" said Raby.

"And a silly goat!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver rose, and crossed to the door, with a determined expression on his face.

"Where are you going, fathead?" asked Lovell.

"To Bagshot."

"Bagshot!" howled the three together.

"Yes."

"Wha-a-at for?"

"Never mind what for," said Jimmy Silver coldly. "You stay here and grouse."

"You're jolly well not going to Bagshot!" said Lovell warmly. "They'll scalp you."

"Well, that won't worry you, will it?" said Jimmy Silver, with crushing irony.

"You can cackle over it, if they do."

"Look here, Jimmy, don't be an ass."

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver walked out of the study. Lovell and Raby and Newcome hurried after him at once. Critical as they were of their unfortunate leader, they did not mean to let him tackle the enemy without backing him up.

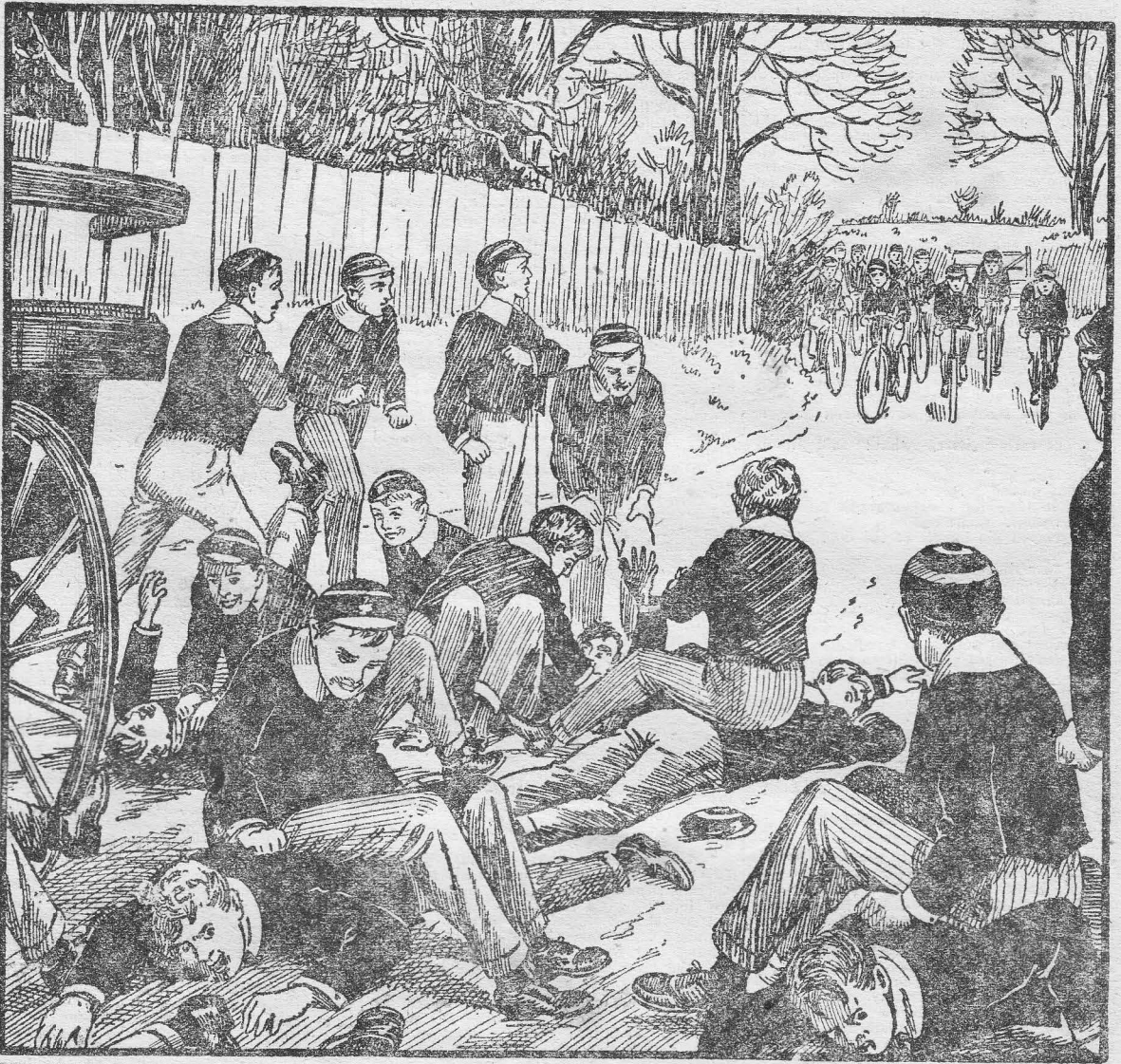
"Jimmy, old man!" said Raby.

"Jimmy walked on morosely."

"I say, Jimmy!" murmured Newcome.

Jimmy strode out of the School House.

His anxious chums followed him to the bike-shed. Jimmy wheeled out his machine.



There was a whirr in the road, and a rattle of many bicycles. "My hat!" cried Jimmy Silver. "Bagshot bounders!" (See Chapter 3.)

Lovell grabbed him by the shoulder as he was wheeling it away.

"Look here, you chump!" roared Lovell. "Tell us what the little game is, and we'll back you up, if there's anything in it."

"Now you're talking," said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm going to Bagshot."

"But they'll slaughter you!"

"They're at Latcham, fathead! That worm Pankley said they were to kick off at three. So they can't finish the match at the earliest till half-past four. Then they've got to get home from Latcham. It's a long drive. I don't suppose they'll hurry, either. Well, it's barely half-past four yet. They're still playing at Latcham, and most of the Fourth are there watching them. See? We shall find the coast clear."

"There will be lots of Bagshot fellows at home."

"We will chance them, as Pankley & Co. are away. We're going to ride over, hide our bikes outside, and sneak in—"

"My hat!"

"And rag their show," said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "That's a thing they could never do to us. We'll rag their studies, rag their dorm, rag everything we can lay our hands on, and leave a written notice telling 'em who's done it, for them to see when they come home. That'll level up a bit."

"It's too jolly risky, you duffer!"

"We shall be spotted, and—"

"You're a fathead, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders and wheeled his bike away. Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances, and then wheeled out their machines. Jimmy Silver had made up his mind, and they were not going to leave him in the lurch.

The four juniors mounted in the road and pedaled away for Bagshot.

"So you're coming!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, we're coming!" grunted Lovell. "But we think you're an ass, all the same. We shall be spotted and ragged."

"Bow-wow!"

"Oh, let's chance it," said Raby. "The fellows can't cackle at us more than they are doing already, that's one comfort."

"Bow-wow!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four covered the ground quickly. They soon arrived in sight of Bagshot School. Four bicycles were concealed behind a hedge, and the Rookwood four strolled in coolly at the gates.

A senior match was going on on the football-ground, and a crowd of fellows were watching it. The quadrangle was almost deserted. The Fistical Four sauntered across to the big red-brick School House, a modern structure which they compared very unfavourably with the grey old pile of Rookwood. With as much coolness as if the place belonged to them, they sauntered in at the big doorway. A Bagshot junior was in the hall, and he stared at them.

"Hallo, Rookwood bounders!" he exclaimed.

"Pankley at home?" asked Jimmy Silver calmly.

"No; he's over at Latcham with the team," said the Bagshot fellow, Higgs of the Fourth.

"Thanks! We'll wait."

Jimmy Silver sat down on a settee in the hall, with a grave and patient expression. The Co. followed his example. The Bagshot junior stared at them and strolled away after a few minutes. A master passed through the hall and glanced at the four waiting juniors, but passed on without remark. Higgs had disappeared.

Then Jimmy Silver rose quickly to his feet, beckoned to his chums, and ran lightly up the stairs, taking advantage of the moment when the coast was clear. In a minute or less the juniors were among the Fourth Form studies. Nearly all the Fourth were at Latcham with Pankley, and the passage was quite deserted.

"What price this?" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Coast's clear," agreed Lovell. "That fellow Higgs looked rather suspicious, I thought."

"He's gone out, anyway. Don't imagine trouble, old chap."

"Oh, rats! Where's Panky's study? We'll start there."

The Fistical Four had been to Bagshot THE POPULAR.—No. 101.

before, and they knew their whereabouts. Jimmy Silver opened the door of Cecil Pankley's study, and the four hurried in, and the door was closed again. The room was empty, as they expected. The quarters of the Bagshot junior captain were at their mercy.

With methodical care they ragged the study. The table was overturned, the study carpet yanked up and draped over the up-ended legs of the table, and the rest of the furniture was piled upon it in a heap. Fender and fireirons were added, and as much ashes as they could collect from the grate and all the soot they could persuade down the chimney. Then the study cupboard was opened, and Pankley's provisions dragged out. Jam and marmalade streamed liberally round the study, followed by pickles and ginger-beer. Pankley had a large supply of good things—probably intending a good spread when the footballers came home. It was a spread of a very different kind that was taking place.

The Fistical Four chuckled as they surveyed the havoc they had wrought. They had made a considerable amount of noise, but no one seemed to have taken note of it.

"Looks rather cheery—what!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy looked at his watch.

"We've time for another study before we have to clear. Come on!"

He grasped the handle of the door to open it.

The door did not open.

Jimmy pulled at it.

Still it did not budge.

A queer expression came over Jimmy Silver's face. He grasped the handle with both hands and pulled, and pulled.

The door did not yield half an inch.

"Why don't you open it?" exclaimed Lovell.

"I—I can't!"

"But—"

"It's fastened!"

"Fastened!" yelled the three.

Jimmy Silver gasped.

"Yes—fastened outside!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"Black—But Not Comely!"

FASTENED outside!" breathed Lovell. The Fistical Four looked at one another with sickly expressions.

While they had been busy wrecking the study somebody—probably the iniquitous Higgs—had stolen a march on them. The door was fastened on the outside, and they were prisoners!

Jimmy Silver threw open the window and looked out almost desperately.

There was a yell below as his head appeared. There was the iniquitous Higgs of the Fourth, and half a dozen Bagshot juniors were with him.

"Here he is!" yelled Higgs.

"Ha, ha, ha! Caught again!"

Jimmy Silver glared down at the merry Bagshot fellows. He shook his fist at Higgs, who yelled with laughter.

"Wanted to wait for Panky!" chuckled Higgs. "And never expected me to smell a rat—oh, no! Sneaked upstairs to Panky's study, and never guessed that I had an eye open—oh, no! Ragged the study like thunder, and never heard me come up—oh, no! Never knew I'd fastened a dog-chain to the door-handle—oh, no! Never heard me screw it to the doorpost—oh, no! No! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed the crowd.

Jimmy Silver drew his head in and looked at his chums.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome gave him eloquent looks, but they said no word.

"There's a—dog-chain fastening the door outside—screwed in!" said Jimmy Silver faintly. "We—we can't break that!"

"Oh, no!" said Lovell, in imitation of the humorous Higgs. "And you never expected anything of the kind—oh, no!"

Jimmy Silver stood dumb. For once even his fertile brain was at a loss. He cudgelled his brains, but without result.

There was a shout in the quad a little later, and Jimmy looked from the window.

A brake had arrived, and he saw Pankley & Co. descend in coats and mufflers. Higgs rushed away to join them, and the roar of laughter from the footballers told that Higgs had explained the predicament of Jimmy Silver & Co.

Pankley and his comrades disappeared into the House. There were swarming footsteps in the passage, loud voices and laughter. Then a thump on the door.

THE POPULAR.—No. 101.

"Hallo, you Rookwood bouncers! Caught again!" yelled Pankley.

The Fistical Four were silent.

"Get that screw out, young Higgs! Let's get at the cheeky rotters! We'll soot 'em from head to foot, and put glue in their hair! We'll teach 'em a lesson about ragging chaps' studies! Buck up with that screw-driver!"

"Soot!" murmured Lovell. "Glue! Oh, Jimmy, you chump, you've landed us this time!"

Jimmy Silver sprang to the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Click!

"Locking themselves in, by gum!" came Pankley's voice. "Hallo, you Rookwood duffers! Do you want to stay there all night?"

"What's the good, Jimmy?" mumbled Raby. "We can't stay here! We've got to get back to Rookwood for call-over!"

"Let's rush 'em!" said Lovell desperately.

"Rush fifty chaps!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Don't be an ass! We couldn't get two yards! I've got an idea!"

"More ideas!" snorted Lovell.

"Do you know a way out?" demanded Jimmy.

"Of course I don't, fathead! There isn't any way out!"

"Then follow your uncle!"

Jimmy Silver stooped, put his head over the grate, and squinted up the chimney. He withdrew his head quickly as a fragment of soot landed in his eye.

"Yow!"

"The—the chimney!" gasped Lovell.

"Shush! They'll hear you!"

"But—but what about our clothes?"

"Hang your clothes! What will your clothes be like, anyway, when they've sooted and glued us?"

"But—but we can't—"

"We can—and we're going to!" whispered Jimmy. "It's a wide chimney; and I know there is a box-room over this study, with the same chimney and a big grate. We can get out there and hook it."

"But—but think of the state we shall be in!" spluttered Lovell. "We—we couldn't go back to Rookwood in such a state—"

"What state shall we be in if they collar us? And we can't stay here, can we?"

"Oh, my hat! What a raid!" groaned Lovell. "I suppose you were born to catch Tartars, Jimmy Silver! Shall we chance it, you fellows? It's about the only thing we can do. They'll simply mop us up when they see what we've done to the study!"

Raby and Newcome assented grimly. It was the only way—though a decidedly disagreeable way.

Jimmy Silver led. He squeezed himself into the chimney. Once inside, there was plenty of room. Judging by the amount of soot there, it was a considerable time since the chimney-sweep had visited Pankley's study. Jimmy wedged himself desperately against the bricks, and climbed. It was not a difficult climb to an active junior; but the atmosphere in the chimney was simply awful as Jimmy's movements stirred up the soot.

It descended round him in clouds. Lovell, looking up to see how he was progressing, received a shower in his eyes and nose and mouth, and Lovell's remarks were positively Hunnish.

It seemed about a century to Jimmy Silver before he clambered out into the open, wide grate in the box-room above. He was simply reeking with soot. Face and hands and clothes were as black as the ace of spades. He coughed and sneezed as if for a wager.

Lovell came next. In about ten minutes he emerged from the chimney gasping and sneezing, and black as a Hottentot.

Jimmy Silver could not help grinning at the sight of him.

"Wow, wow, wow!" gasped Lovell.

Raby came next, and then Newcome. They stood in a sea of soot in the box-room, smothered, swamped with soot, utterly unrecognisable.

"Groooh!"

"Yooogh!"

"Gurrtrrg!"

Such were their remarks.

"When you've finished, we'll bunk!" said Jimmy Silver politely. "Keep smiling, you know."

"Oh, slaughter him!" mumbled Raby.

Jimmy Silver opened the box-room door, and crept out into the passage.

Quite unexpectedly the four Rookwooders found the passage clear.

"Come on!" panted Jimmy Silver.

Like lightning the Fistical Four rushed down the lower stairs. In the hall below

they passed several fellows who yelled and dodged as they came near. In a few seconds they were in the quad, and streaked for their bicycles. In a few moments they were mounted and pedalling away desperately for Rookwood.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Nice for Jimmy Silver.

OLD Mack, the porter at Rookwood, had the shock of his life when he went down to lock the school gates.

Just as he was about to close the gates, four black and unrecognisable cyclists shot up, and dashed in. Old Mack staggered back with a yell of alarm.

"My hey! Wot the—"

Four bikes were pitched against the lodge and four sooty juniors streaked through the dusk across the quad, leaving old Mack rubbing his eyes.

"Get round the back," panted Jimmy Silver. "We can get a scrape down under the pump before we go in. We can't be seen like this—"

"Hallo, hallo!" roared a voice. "What the merry thunder— Here, what are you sweeps doing here?"

It was Tommy Dodd. He stopped, and stared at the four. For the moment he did not recognise them.

"Bump the modern worm!" howled Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was longing to bump somebody.

"Jimmy Silver!" shrieked Tommy Dodd, recognising the voice. "Oh crumbs! Another raid on Bagshot—what! Ha, ha, ha!"

The sooty four rushed at him, and Tommy Dodd dodged and fled, yelling.

"After him!" roared Lovell.

"Fathead! Let's go and get clean; it's call-over in ten minutes!"

The Classical Four rushed for the pump. But Tommy Dodd had spread the news. Fellows came pouring out from all sides—Classicals and Moderns. There was a roar of laughter as they sighted the Fistical Four. Fifty fellows at least crowded round them, shrieking.

"Black, but not comely!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Look at their complexions!"

"By gad, am't they shockin'!" chuckled Smythe of the Shell. "Oh, by gad, what a sight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear off, you silly asses!" bellowed Lovell. "We—we've had rather bad luck, but there's nothing to cackle at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver swished on the pump. Hurriedly the Fistical Four cleansed themselves under the streaming water. It was the best they could do. The water, blackened by the soot, ran round them in inky streams. As they performed those hurried ablutions they were surrounded by a yelling crowd, almost in hysterics. Classicals and Moderns were almost doubled up with merriment.

"There goes the bell!" gasped Lovell. "Oh, what a state we're in!"

"Bootles will like you like that!" shrieked Flynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no help for it; the Fistical Four had to go in to call-over. They were about half-cleansed, but still decidedly grimy. Mr. Bootles' eye fixed upon them very severely when they answered their names.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "You are—in a disgusting condition, Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome! Dear me! What is the meaning of this? What—what!"

"We—we've had rather an accident, sir!" mumbled Jimmy Silver. "We—we—"

"Go and change your clothes at once, and take two hundred lines each," said Mr. Bootles majestically. "Boys, there is nothing to laugh at in this occurrence! Pray cease this untimely merriment immediately."

But it was very difficult for the Rookwood fellows to cease that untimely merriment.

The Fistical Four crawled disconsolately away. In Jimmy Silver's breast burned a fierce desire for vengeance on the Bagshot Bouncers. He vowed inwardly that he would "make them sit up" in the near future—somehow! But in the meantime he had to hide his diminished head, and bear the reproaches of his chums as best he could. It was undoubtedly very Rough on Jimmy Silver!

(Next week's story of the Rookwood chums is entitled "Jimmy Silver's Revenge!" Don't miss it!)

THE END.

Christmas Fun for All!

A Page of Tricks, Games, and Jokes that will Help to
:- :- Brighten Up the Christmas Parties. :- :-

THE INEVITABLE GHOST.

Ghosts have a peculiar fascination for most people. Even those who stoutly deny their belief in the reality of apparitions are apt to experience a creeping feeling about the spine when confronted by any unexplainable phenomenon.

An effective "ghost" can be easily rigged up if a little luminous paint can be obtained. A small quantity of phosphorescing calcium sulphide, in a fine powder, mixed with thin gum-water, makes a satisfactory paint. The ghost should be painted on white paper or calico and placed in a very dark corner of the room.

This should be arranged some time beforehand, and a few inches of magnesium ribbon must be burnt in front of the ghost immediately before your guests assemble. The luminous paint will continue to glow with a faint bluish light for several minutes.

The best way to arrange a ghost scare on these lines is to place the "spirit" in a room, and ask the

guests one by one if they would like to have a glimpse of the family ghost, which comes out every Christmas. Naturally, the majority will at once agree, and you can take them singly or in pairs into the prepared darkened room.

Lots of fun can be got out of this. Fig. 1 gives a very good idea of a "spirit" which can be made of a long broom-handle, some screwed-up paper for the head, a length of calico and paper, and turkey or chicken claws, painted with the luminous paint, tied to the pole. —oo—

THE MAGIC SHILLING.

This is an interesting example of some strange agency at work amongst us.

Make a running noose at the end of a piece of fine thread, and pass it securely round a shilling, as shown in Fig. 2. Taking care that the thread passes over the tip of the thumb, support

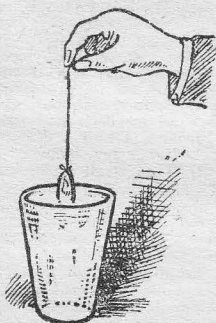


Fig. 2.

the thread from your hand in such a way that the shilling is hanging within a tumbler. Be sure you keep the hand steady. For several moments the shilling will oscillate, but it will soon become quite still. Then, actually by no motion of your hand, it will commence to swing to and fro like a pendulum, and finally strike one of the sides of the glass. Count the number of times it makes the glass ring, and you will find that the number corresponds exactly with the nearest hour of the day.

For example, at 9.30 there would be nine rings, whilst at ten minutes to ten there would be ten.

The excuse of this phenomenon can be left to scientists to decide. —oo—

THE GAME OF CABBAGES.

Any number of players can take part in this game. They kneel in a circle on the floor, with fingers stretched out before them and thumbs tucked in. The game is started by the leader's query to his neighbour:

"Can you play cabbages?"

As the latter has not been initiated into the mysteries of the game he or she at once replies:

"No."

The question is asked by each player, and is always answered in the negative until the circle is completed, when the leader again queries:

"Can you play cabbages?"

Neighbour: "No."

Leader (suddenly): "Then why on earth are we sitting here?"

The blank expressions which result to this query are ludicrous in the extreme, and are followed by bursts of merriment. —oo—

THE WILL POWER TEST.

This is scarcely a trick, as it really serves to prove which of two persons has the stronger will-power.

Place a door-key between the pages in the middle of a book in such a way that the handle projects an inch or two, as in Fig. 3. Pass a piece of string round the book and draw into a tight knot, so that the key is held firmly in its place.

Now let the persons who desire to test the strength of the wills support the book by the ring of the key resting on their

extended fore-fingers, as in the illustration. If one person wills the book to turn from right to left, and the other wills it to turn in the opposite direction, it will be found that the book obeys whichever party is possessed of the stronger will. —oo—

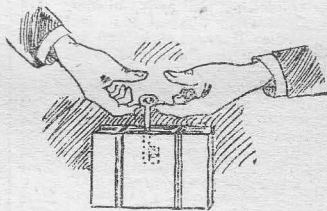


Fig. 3.

THE GINGER-POP BOTTLE JOKE.

Many ingenious surprises can be arranged to make the Christmas dinner brighter. One of many is the bottle joke, described below.

Get several empty ginger-pop bottles, the labels of which have not been damaged, find a strong spiral spring, rather longer than the bottle, and drop this in. You require a tiny india-rubber doll, or some other soft object, that can be dropped in without fear of its sticking in the neck. Push this in so that it compresses the spring, and then put in a strong cork.

Arrange that the bottles should be brought unopened with the Christmas-pudding, and then tell those whom you give the joke bottles to open them all together; nobody will think of querying this.

The taking out of the corks will release the springs, and will send the rubber dolls some distance over the table, and the spring itself will come flying out to add to the surprise.

It's a trick worth trying—don't forget it. —oo—

WIZARD PHOTOGRAPHY.

The wizard, who possesses a confederate, is banished from the room. During his absence the latter produces a piece of paper, and declares his intention of taking a photograph of any individual amongst the company upon it in such a manner that it shall be visible to the wizard alone, who, upon examining it closely, will call out the name of the original.

Naturally, everyone considers that this must be quite an impossible proceeding, and for that reason everyone becomes very curious and watchful.

The confederate fixes upon one of the company, poses him to his satisfaction, and, when he is quite ready and gazing at the sheet of paper, which is held out in his left hand, he passes his right over it, snaps his fingers, and tells him he is finished.

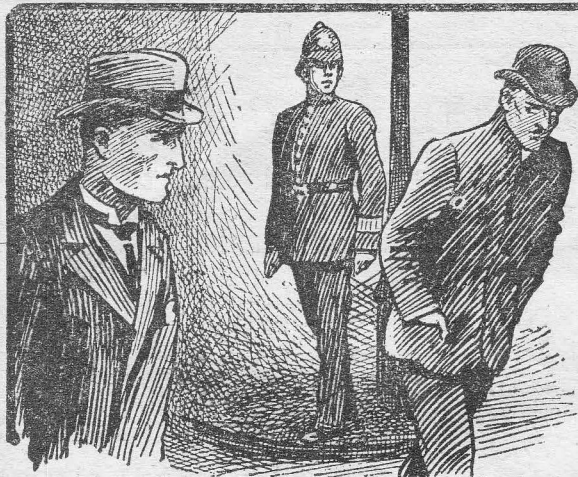
He then calls the wizard and hands him the "plate," retiring then to a seat where the latter can observe him without appearing to do so.

The wizard, looking grave and wise, examines the "plate" closely.

His confederate, meanwhile, imitates as near as possible the position of the original of the photograph.

Should he cross his legs, toss back his hair, rest his chin on his hand, or perform any other trivial action, the confederate does the same quite naturally, so that not to arouse suspicion. All attention being concentrated on the wizard, his actions will not be observed by anyone save the manipulator, who is led by the position he assumes to guess the individual whose likeness on the "plate" is supposed to be visible to him alone.

THE FINEST SERIAL OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE EVER WRITTEN!



A MARKED MAN.

-:- A Grand Story, -:-
dealing with the Adventures 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 falls in with an old acquaintance of the prison, by name of Demottsen, and secures a suite of splendidly furnished rooms, where they intend to plan a great scheme. Later Vaughan appears before the public as a singer and musician, and makes a great name for himself as Paul Rutherford.

Later, Demottsen informs his partner that he has discovered that Leishman is really Mr. Leigh, the criminal's moneylender, a man who leads a double life.

They employ the services of John Firth, who is the double of the ex-convict, and it is arranged that the latter helps Firth to discover the whereabouts of Judas Leishman, a man who had wronged him in the past.

Firth pays a visit to the Marquis of Ranguvy to entertain the guests as a musician using the name of Rutherford, whilst the real man burgles the house of the most valuable possession, the Golden Cup. Harry Leigh interrupts Vaughan, who is in the act of annexing the goblet from the safe. But when Harry informs the marquis of his discovery, he catches sight of the musician still playing to the guests. He is surprised and bewildered.

(Now read on.)

The Cry!

"Of course, it's your fancy entirely!" the marquis went on. "Mr. Rutherford came here almost straight from the dining-room, and we have been listening to his music for quite ten minutes. Isn't he positively delightful?"

A great tumult of handclapping greeted the close of the song.

The musician rose and bowed his thanks. "That's the man I saw. I would swear to it again anywhere!" cried Harry. "His eyes—I would know them among a million. The marquis, he will bear me out!"

Ranguvy joined them, obviously perturbed. "My dear, Harry is right. A most dastardly attempt has been made to steal the Spanish Goblet. My dear Harry, I can never express my thanks sufficiently"—turning to the young man. "Your arrival on the scene put an end to the projected theft. The cup is there, safe and sound, but the thief—he must be found!"

He ran on excitedly, only regaining his composure when his wife repeated Harry's story. "Impossible—impossible! No, that could not be, my dear. And now summon Henry and Britton and Long. We must get to the end of this!"

The marquis slipped quietly away to his own room, put a pistol in his pocket, and commenced the search himself. There could be no question that a very daring attempt had been made to steal one of his choicest treasures.

The window of the curio-room was still open, and footprints on the soft ground out-

side showed the intruder's way of egress and exit.

By this time a group of excited men were gathered about the marquis. In the clear cold light of the newly-risen moon it was easy to trace the course of the man's flight. Whoever he might be, that it was not Paul Rutherford was quite certain. Harry, hanging on the fringe of the little group, hated himself for the appalling error he had made.

At a rapid rate the men crossed the grass, traversed the lower terrace, and vanished from view among the trees. Harry was tempted to follow them but wavered and drew back. Then a cry, a man's cry of horror, rising above the soft strains of the band, shattered his indecision; he dashed across the lawn towards the shrubbery.

A light gleamed and moved among the bushes. He heard voices, hushed in awed whispers. Someone lay upon the ground; the marquis held a sputtering match above the death-like face. Harry, rigid and tense, could only look on, slow horror and recognition in his eyes. The man was Raymond Marcecon, and in his temple a dark hole yawned, while about his head and outflung arm a brilliant stain widened. A little way off a pistol lay on the ground.

Then someone screamed, flung out across the stilly night the most awful cry that can fall on human ears.

"Murder! Murder!"

A Blank Wall!

WHITE, scared faces stared blankly at one another across the little circle of yellow light, and lips that were grown cold, as though themselves touched by the hand of death, mumbled the dreadful words through chattering teeth: "Murder! Who killed him?"

The match in the Marquis de Ranguvy's frail hand died into a red glow, and they crowded closer upon him, as he bent his head over Marcecon's heart.

"Yes, he's dead—stone dead! One of you run into the house and fetch a lamp. You, Graves, perhaps you wouldn't mind telephoning for Dr. Marvin. Leicester 69704. Be as quick but as quiet and cautious as possible. And the rest of you, ladies and gentlemen, may I ask you to return as unconcernedly as possible to the house and say nothing of this terrible catastrophe? Harry, I should like to speak to you a moment."

As the amazed throng silently withdrew, each to prepare for a speedy but unobtrusive departure, Harry came to the side of the stricken man, where Ranguvy stood.

"Harry, will you break the news to the marquis alone?" he said. "A police inquiry is inevitable. And then there is that mysterious happening concerning the gold cup. I fear they must be connected. You are sure you saw nothing of Mr. Marcecon when you came upon the thief in the curio-room?"

"Absolutely certain—unless he and the thief met somewhere in the grounds. Except for the man whom I thought was Mr. Rutherford, and myself, the room was empty, but the window was open. I could swear to that."

"H'm! I must put men out to search the grounds. He cannot have been long dead."

As Harry disappeared among the trees the

marquis knelt down by the body and loosened the collar and shirt-front. Marcecon's flesh was still warm, but no pulsing beat of life throbbed in the heart. He lay, stark and motionless, with no breath stirring, under the dark roof of night—a man, cut out of the living in a moment of time.

Ranguvy bent closer, and stared fascinated at the blue-rimmed, clear-cut hole in the forehead.

"This is terrible!" he muttered, wiping the beads of moisture from his face. "I wonder if it is murder, after all; supposing he shot himself?"

"We shall soon find an answer to that question."

A deep, rich voice, quietly grave, came out of the darkness. As Ranguvy sprang up the bushes parted, and a tall man in a long, light-brown coat stepped softly forward.

A wide-brimmed soft felt hat hid his face, but he removed it in the presence of death.

"Locke! Ah, thank Heaven you've come!" the marquis whispered in awed tones.

"I've been here for some minutes now," Locke answered quietly. "You did well to send your guests away as you did. Now, tell me, what was the first you heard of this affair?"

As he spoke he drew an electric pocket-lamp from his coat, and, setting it upon a stone, so that its white rays lit up every detail of the tragic scene, commenced work in his calm, business-like way.

"Your friend, Harry Leigh, was the indirect cause of the discovery," said the marquis. "He put us into a state of alarm with a story about an attempt being made to steal a valuable gold bowl from the curio-room. We hurried to the spot, found his fears happily unfounded; but, as the window was open, and someone had evidently been prowling around, I and a few others began a search. After a few minutes we stumbled across this. That is all I can tell you."

"I see. There is more in this than meets the eye. Now, marquis, will you pardon me if I intertere with your plans?"

"My dear Locke, you, as a detective, know what had best be done."

"Then would you mind hastening back to the Hall and bind everyone who is cognisant of this affair to the strictest secrecy? Let nothing more be said. Of the men who were here a few minutes ago, send four or five to search the grounds. Next telephone to the police yourself, and ask to have all stations within a radius of ten miles watched. Fortunately, I know the culprit hasn't got away by car, because I left my own at the lodge gate and walked along to the house. A car must have passed me had one been used."

"But supposing one had passed the lodge before you started to walk?"

"Your drive, marquis, is close on a mile long. The walk took me just over twelve minutes. This man has not been dead more than six or seven. See, the blood has not yet started to congeal. Now, please attend to all these things, and keep Harry Leigh apart. Let no one question him till I come. Lock up the curio-room, and send one of your servants to fetch Mr. Baker, my assistant. He's waiting in the car. You will keep everything going, I hope—the dancing

and the band; and, mind, secrecy everywhere."

With the departure of the marquis the detective's cool deliberation fell away. He worked swiftly, feverishly, first removing his dress-shoes and encasing his feet in thin rubber coverings. Next he cut a few stout pieces of stick and pegged out thirty feet square round the body, railing it off with stout twine. Within that enclosure none but he and Baker would come.

It was an eerie scene—the night cold and brilliantly clear, the sky a vault of blue, deepening almost to black, and unbroken save where a few specks of dancing fire scintillated. With the uprising of the moon the wind had fallen, and now the great park and sleeping woods were hushed into weird silence. Only the grim, white-faced dead remained—mute witness to a tragedy.

Marconnon lay just where he had sunk down in his long, last sleep. He had turned slightly on his left side with his left arm outflung, and his right trailing limply behind him.

Locke stood back behind the source of light and noted everything. The dead man's shirt front was crumpled, but not otherwise marked; the black dress bow hung suspended from the open collar. From the bluish disc where the bullet had cut its way to the brain a trickle of blood had stained the right cheek and widened across the throat, near which a dark pool deepened. Close to the nerveless left hand was the weapon that had caused death.

Carefully measuring its exact position, the detective picked it up and examined it. The barrel and the five revolving chambers were brightly plated, the hammer, self-ejector, trigger, and guard nickelled, the handle of black vulcanite. He copied the engraving behind the sight—'Herrington & Richards Arms Company, Worcester, Mass., U.S.A.'—and the letters on the left side of the barrel—'Premier 32 S & W. Ctge.'

"A Smith & Webley firing a .32 cartridge, I suppose," he said, and looked up as footsteps came nearer.

"Ah, Baker!" he muttered, as a keen-faced young man halted, perplexed, at the boundary. "A nasty case here. Looks like suicide or murder. We want a flashlight picture of this before the police arrive."

Baker silently removed his boots. "Other people have been near," he said briskly, his dark eyes searching the soft ground.

"Unfortunately, yes; but no one came close to the body except a friend of mine—the Marquis de Ranguvy, myself, and—that." He pointed to a pair of human footprints, very clearly defined. "As soon as you've taken a photograph, run to the house, get some hot glue, and take an impression of those footmarks."

Baker slipped away. Locke followed the track for a score of yards or more to a natural arbour of trees, only a few feet from one of the hard-rolled gravel paths.

"Here we shall lose the trail," he told himself. "Marconnon probably came out of the house alone and met someone here, either by accident or appointment. It is inconceivable he committed suicide, as it would have been most difficult for him to have held the pistol in his left hand and have shot himself on the far side of the right temple. It looks as if murder is the only possible solution."

The next few minutes strengthened this impression, for on every side were signs of a struggle having taken place. The soft earth had been beaten up by swiftly-moving feet; the closely-clipped shrubs were disturbed and broken.

Locke's boyish face became determined and eager. It was here, in this sheltered spot, that the life and death contest had been fought out, for a spent cartridge-case peeped out from a mass of earth.

"Light in the dark places at last," he murmured, with a grim smile. "Poor Marconnon was shot at this spot and carried to the place where we found him. That explains the absence of a second set of footmarks. Now, he met someone, either by accident or design, a quarrel or an encounter took place, he was mortally wounded in the struggle, and his assailant, to convey the impression of suicide, carried the body some fifty or sixty yards distant and laid it down, leaving the weapon beside the corpse."

Baker had returned, and was busy pouring a hot, viscous liquid into the earthen mould. Instructing him to keep guard until the police came, Ferrers Locke hastened to the house. In the vestibule Ranguvy awaited him, his clear-cut, aristocratic face set in deeply anxious lines.

"I have done everything, Locke," he said. "Those who know about the affair have

quietly withdrawn, leaving their names for the information of the police. The rest are still keeping on, in blissful ignorance of the shadow that has fallen upon our house."

"Good! Your wife, does she know?" "Ah, my wife, she shows remarkable self-possession! It would be fatal were she to break down."

Locke divested himself of his coat, and put on a pair of dancing-pumps.

"Would you mind telling Harry Leigh I should like to see him later on, privately?" he said. "Perhaps I may go to the ball-room now?"

The marquis bowed acquiescence, but Locke noticed that he whitened perceptibly. "Surely you cannot possibly suspect—"

"My dear marquis, I suspect no one. All the same, I want to see everybody."

The strains of the blue-and-gold band came to him down the passage. He strolled leisurely towards the wide-open door, from which point of vantage his keen eyes took in every detail of the glittering spectacle.

"Of course you've heard all about this business," he said, placing a cold hand in the detective's. "Pretty dreadful for the marquis and marquise. When did you come, Ferrers?"

Locke took a chair beside him. "I was on the scene a few moments after Marconnon was found."

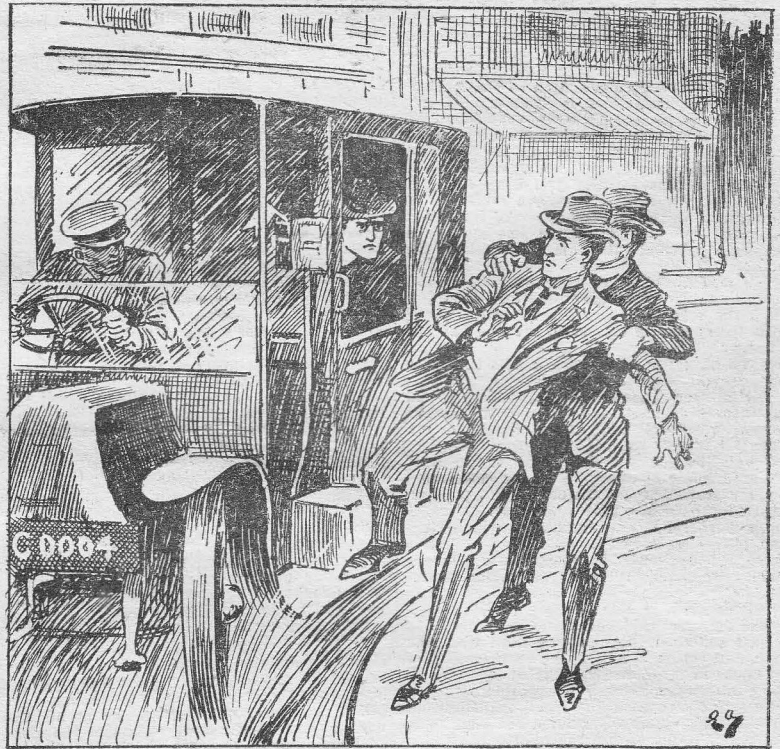
"Was it suicide, or murder, do you think?" "Murder, I fear."

Harry sighed. "The whole business is enshrouded in mystery," Locke went on. "This affair in the curio-room—tell me just what happened."

"It was all over so quickly, Ferrers. I went into the wrong room by mistake. A man stood by the big glass case—"

"All right. Ranguvy has given me the key of the room. We'll discuss it there. Come along!"

Harry followed him into the curio-room. "I was there," the young fellow explained. "The man—a tall, handsome man—rather pale-looking, with black, curly hair, stood



Ferrers Locke was on the point of leaving the kerb, when a taxi-cab dashed round the corner, and he had barely time to spring out of the way as it passed. The detective caught a glimpse of the occupant, and he recognised Adrian Vaughan! (See page 16.)

Beautiful women, in low-cut evening gowns, with long, sweeping trains, and costly jewels gleaming at their throats, and well-dressed aristocratic men swirled past in seemingly never-ending procession. Locke observed them all, but no single pair of shoes, man's or woman's, bore the slightest mark of muddiness or of walking out of doors.

He turned to the marquis, who just then joined him.

"Your guests who have gone, Ranguvy—who were they?"

"Six altogether, and all of them were with me in the drawing-room up to the time Harry Leigh informed me of his strange experience. I trust there is no one whom you suspect—"

"My dear marquis," Locke replied easily, "it would seem that all your guests are above suspicion. Have you explained poor Marconnon's absence?"

"No one has inquired. I'm afraid he wasn't popular socially. Captain Davitt apparently was the last to see him alive. He was then standing near the dining-room door."

Locke's lips tightened. "Where is Harry?"

"In the library. Would you care to see him?"

"Thank you, yes!" The detective found Harry Leigh alone. He rose as Locke came in.

over there. An electric hand torch, alight, was on the table. He took out that big gold cup, put it back, then, after a moment, picked it up again. Suddenly he saw me. I thought I recognised him as Rutherford, the musician, and shouted out. There was a pistol in his hand. I rushed to the door and along the corridor to the drawing-room, where I told the marquis what I had seen."

"Can you describe the pistol?"

"Oh, yes; it was silver-plated. The light was strong; I saw part of the handle. It was black."

Locke gave an almost imperceptible start. "After that—"

"I followed the marquis to this room. The window was open, and the cup had been replaced."

"That is interesting. Now this Mr. Rutherford. Is he the Paul Rutherford who has made such a stir in London lately?"

"Yes. You will find him still in the drawing-room, playing to some of the guests. He is a Society entertainer."

"I have heard of him. Do you mind if we go for a minute to the drawing-room?"

He re-locked the door, and took the other's arm.

A throng, overflowing to a crowd, that trailed beyond the threshold, was listening breathlessly as Rutherford played and sang.

Harry's eyes fastened themselves on the face of the singer.

"I am still sure he is the man I saw," he whispered in Locke's ear. "But the marquis swears he has never even left this room, and that I must suffer from hallucinations."

Locke smiled, and took stock of Rutherford's patent shoes, clearly visible as he sat at the piano.

"Whether Paul Rutherford tried to steal the gold bowl or not I cannot say," he decided, "but certainly he was not the man who carried the murdered Marconnon from the thicket to where he was found. With every passing moment this case grows more complex."

He left Harry, and went in search of the marquis, whom he found awaiting him outside the curio-room door. The two men entered together. The detective drew down the blind and switched on the light. Then he borrowed a brush, and swept over the carpet. The matter which he took up he put into the palm of his hand and examined under a strong glass.

"I can tell you one thing, marquis," he said, with a quiet sigh of satisfaction. "The man who entered this room to steal your bowl entered not from within, but from without. Your contention that not the slightest breath of suspicion can attach to Mr. Rutherford is absolutely correct. The man Harry Leigh saw was another man—very like him, perhaps—a man who came in stockinged feet across the grass and through the window. These tiny specks of dust are grains of grass fertiliser similar to that you have had put on the lawn outside. You have asked me to do my best to get to the bottom of the affair. Let me say quite frankly it has already a personal interest for me. Naturally, the police will take up the matter of Marconnon's death. Whether they succeed or fail remains to be proved; but my own theory is that the man who slew Marconnon and the man Harry saw in this room are one and the same."

"And have you any suspicion who that man is?"

For answer Locke gave expression to an inscrutable smile.

"For Heaven's sake, man, speak if you have!" Ranguvy implored.

"Well, to tell you the truth, marquis, I have. I know of one man who was Marconnon's sworn enemy, a man who, in my hearing, threatened him with vengeance. Marconnon's murderer left behind him one single clue, and that clue links him up with the man I suspect, though why he should have tried to steal your silver-gilt goblet, I cannot understand."

"Silver-gilt? It is gold—pure gold!"

The marquis' thin voice rose in amazement. He almost snatched the gleaming bowl from the case, and thrust it into Locke's hands.

"Look, man, gold, every bit of it! One of the choicest specimens in the world!"

Ferrers Locke took the bowl, turned it on its side, and vigorously rubbed one edge with the rough fringe of the tablecloth.

"I'm sorry to have to deceive you, marquis," he said, fixing a small lens to his eye

and examining the metal closely. "This bowl is undoubtedly silver—pure silver, washed with gold. Either you were 'had' when you bought it, or some scoundrel, the same who murdered Marconnon, has wrung the changes on you, and left you a very clever imitation."

"Mystery upon mystery!" gasped Ranguvy. "Heavens, man! Where will it all end?"

"It will all end, my dear marquis, on the day the man I am setting out to find swings in the noose of a length of prison-made rope. Till then mystery will, as you say, follow on mystery, and a name that as yet is hardly known will be on the lips of everyone."

A Glimmer of Daylight!

TO Ferrers Locke's rooms in Baker Street no one was ever admitted on business after eight o'clock. A strange rule, surely, for a man whose life work was the detection of crime. And equally strange the manner in which the hours between eight and midnight were passed by the famous detective. When at home, a quarter-past eight usually found him in a dinner-jacket, and in readiness for a meal which few could have served as his private chef would do; nine o'clock, still in the dinner-jacket, but with a big pipe between the thin, mobile lips, and the gleaming keys of a grand piano beneath the supple, white hands.

And so the hours would pass—hours that filled the beautiful room with blue tobacco-smoke and sweet music; hours in which Locke's brain worked at lightning rate, and every case in hand came for review under his pitiless microscopic mental eye. At eleven Baker usually dropped in; between ten and twelve things usually came to light, and the dawning found Locke once more, alert and eager, on the trail.

He swung round on the music-stool and relit his pipe as Baker—lean, tall, and cadaverous—came silently in. Locke pushed over an arm-chair, and threw a pouch of tobacco into the other's lap. For nearly a quarter of an hour they smoked in silence.

At last Ferrers Locke rose, and paced the room with quick strides.

"You've discovered something, Baker—is it?"

Baker's sombre eyes stared dreamily at the thin filaments of blue smoke.

"The trail has come to an end, sir."

"How?"

"I went to the shop in Bond Street where the silver-gilt bowl was made and offered for sale. Page & Runemeiker's could give neither the name nor the address of the customer who bought it. The thing was paid for in gold and taken immediately away."

"A clever move! Go on!"

"The assistant who sold the bowl had a clear recollection of the gentleman who bought it—an old man with dim-looking, blue eyes, a man who always smiled. He has seen him twice since, but not dressed as he was when he bought the bowl. The last time was on Monday of this week. He passed the shop, still smiling, looked in, and then hurried away. For three days I haunted Bond Street. Yesterday—"

"You saw him?"

"Yes. Page & Runemeiker's assistant was with me. 'That's the man! I'd swear to him among a million by the way he walks!' he said. After that I shadowed him to a house in Shadwell—to Louis Poltniron's."

"The Hungarian Jew fence and receiver? Ah, this grows interesting, Baker. What happened?"

"The little man had a parcel. He entered Poltniron's, but, to my knowledge, he never came out again. I saw Poltniron later, but when I began to question him he told me to go and chase myself!"

"Is that all, Baker?"

"That is all, sir. My clue took me into a cul-de-sac, and left me stranded against a brick wall."

Locke stepped into the hall and lifted down his long, light coat. Baker, the "never-tired" man, knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Where to, sir?" he asked laconically.

"To Louis Poltniron's, to solve the mystery of the little man who went in with a parcel and never came out again. Take this if you haven't got one."

Locke drew a couple of heavy-calibre pistols from the drawer of his desk, and threw one over to Baker, who caught it dexterously.

"Now, come along, and between here and Shadwell let me tell you just how the case against the man who murdered Marconnon stands."

The great detective was silent as the two descended the stairs. Baker glanced at his

grim-set face, and wondered what thoughts were passing through the cute brain of his companion. On the kerb outside the door Ferrers Locke halted, glanced towards the row of waiting taxicabs, and raised his stick. Immediately the foremost glided over to the couple. But something unforeseen happened before the motor had gone a few yards.

As the detective stepped into the road there was the sound of the throbbing of quick-running engines, and a moment later a cab dashed recklessly round the corner, and was almost on top of Locke before he realised his danger. But the ever-watchful Baker sprang forward. At the same moment the detective, with amazing agility, leaped backward. The taxi grazed his right leg as it sped past, and was fully twenty yards down the road before either men recovered themselves.

"Reckless chump!" growled Baker, staring at the fast-disappearing cab.

"Did you notice the occupant?" flashed Locke, as he opened the door of the taxi, which had drawn up at the kerb. "I believe—nay, I'm positive—it was Vaughan inside, but whether he meant to run me down, or whether it was an accident, I can't say. But, at any rate, we know that Vaughan is in London, and alive!"

The door closed with a bang, and a moment later the two were whirling down the street in the same direction in which Vaughan had disappeared.

Locke leaned back in his seat, and pulled at his pipe. Though his penetrating glance lost nothing of the street life of London, ebbing and flowing without, he made no pause in the marshalling of his facts.

"It was a pity, Baker, for all parties concerned, that the ex-convict Vaughan chose to think himself wronged because his one-time bosom pal, Harry Leigh, turned him down. There is the fulcrum of all this trouble."

"You mean that Adrian Vaughan is at the bottom of everything?"

"Circumstances point that way. You remember he has never been seen or heard of since he relieved Justin Leigh of twenty thousand pounds. All the same, I clearly see his hand in the murder of Marconnon. I have looked pretty closely into Marconnon's life—a none too good one, by the way; but, all the same, no one stood to benefit by his death—and I can't forget that the only time I ever saw Marconnon and Vaughan face to face the latter swore to be revenged on Marconnon. Revenge is very often a strong motive for murder, though in this case I regard it as only a secondary one."

Baker's gloomy manner became suddenly brisk.

"You are thinking that the two men met coincidentally in the curio-room of Kingswear Hall?"

"Exactly! It was pure chance that Vaughan and Marconnon both happened to be at Kingswear on the fatal night."

"But why do you say that Vaughan was there at all, sir?"

"Evidence points that way. The spent cartridge-case found in the arbour where the crime was committed is exactly similar to the one which Vaughan left behind when he fired at my car and succeeded in overturning it."

"You imagine he went to Kingswear half-hoping to meet Marconnon?"

"On the contrary. When the two met I imagine Vaughan was the most surprised man in all the world. So far as I have been able to build up a theory by the process of induction, it amounts to this: Adrian Vaughan, finding the police determined to hunt him down, knowing already several warrants were out for his arrest, decided to take up a career of crime, more to satisfy his own desire to exact restitution for the imaginary wrongs done him than for a love of evil. The case with which he acquired Mr. Leigh's twenty thousand pounds has fired him to attempt more daring exploits; he saw the beautiful reproduction of the Marquis de Ranguvy's valuable bowl, and it started a new notion in his head. He would steal the original, and replace it with the imitation."

"I don't see how you identify the Kingswear thief with Vaughan at all."

"The little man with the dim-looking blue eyes—the man with the round, happy face, always smiling—there is the connecting link. I saw such a man once before in Vaughan's company—the doctor who disappeared from Brackley coincident with Vaughan's going away."

(There will be another long instalment of "A Marked Man!" in next week's issue.)



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A GRAND ADVENTURE STORY BY A FAVOURITE AUTHOR!

OUTLAWS OF THE SEAS



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 Talland 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 grati-

tude, 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.

Their journey to Bristol and sign on as "hands" on the ship Duke, on which they encounter Avery in the guise of the firstmate.

During the night, Avery, with a dozen

chosen men, seize the captain of the Duke and the ship. The hands, unable to resist, are made to obey the pirate, and the ship alters her course.

In a fight with a French ship they are successful and are able to equip themselves with guns and ammunition, etc., afresh before setting sail for the West African coast to a town which Avery hopes to capture and make his headquarters.

(Now go on with the story.)

How Avery Planned a Very Daring Project!

THE two boys and Mike thoroughly enjoyed the week that followed. For five days they sailed with a following wind, by which time the chill and fog of the home waters had been left far behind, and they basked in genial sunshine. Blue waters dancing under a swaying keel, a cloudless sky and warm air, were most acceptable after the bitterness of an English winter, and any regrets which either of them may have had about embarking on such a perilous adventure, were soon dispelled by the pleasure and novelty of their new surroundings.

True, there was a good deal of work to be done—piped to quarters soon after five o'clock—but then only after quite a substantial meal, certainly better than Bob and Jeff had enjoyed at school, and more satisfying than the faithful Mike had received at Talland from his impoverished master.

Each morning decks were swabbed down, the brass-work polished, the cannon cleaned till they gleamed like massive golden ingots in the sun, cutlasses rubbed till they shone like silver, and weapons constantly overhauled. More than this, there was constant practice in the use of all weapons, the deck being cleared and broadsword and cutlass play taking place under the superintendence of Avery or one of his appointed officers. In addition—and this was a part which the boys very much liked—targets and canvas dummies were set up, and, one after another, the crew were summoned without warning to discharge their pieces from both right and left hand, and those whose marksmanship was good were rewarded by some special favour.

At cutlass-play and swordsmanship, Black Mike, with his terrible blade, was easily the most successful, bringing opponent after opponent to his knees, and even after a terrific bout which lasted nearly three-quarters of an hour, inflicting defeat on the pirate chief himself.

Avery took the beating in very good spirit, congratulating Mike on his prowess, and as a particular mark of favour including him in his special bodyguard. Later on this so-called privilege was to produce very valuable results—at least, so far as the three adventurers were concerned.

One very warm and sunny afternoon—it was a Saturday—two days before the coast-

line of Africa showed up through a golden haze—a derelict sloop was sighted, heeled half over on a sandbank, with her blistered sides showing above the water. After watching her for several minutes through his glass, Avery descended from the poop, and, summoning the chief armourer, gave orders that all the big pieces were to be loaded with ball, and cannon practice indulged in, he having more than once complained since leaving the bay that several broadsides fired at the Frenchman had gone wide.

For Jeff and Bob, particularly, the experience was an interesting one. The gunners stripped naked to the waist, the primers busy with black powder and fuses, the cleaners working energetically with their long rods, and the air, meanwhile, thunderous with the deafening explosions. Some very good hits were made, the side of the sloop being blown in, the stumps of the masts shot away, and very little of her left above high water.

Avery now began to feel that he had under him a company of men to be relied upon in any emergency. Well-fed and well-cared for, thoroughly enjoying the warm sunshine and the comparatively easy life, and fired with the desire for quick gain, they were ready at a moment to embark upon any adventure.

Certainly the boys found a good many of the crew far different from the bloodthirsty ruffians about whom they had read in the numerous chap-books and pamphlets which crept into the school. Quite a number were simple seafaring men, who had joined the Duke either being in want of employment, or for the natural desire which existed in those days to engage in reprisals upon the Spaniard and the Frenchman. For every Englishman looked upon the Seven Seas as his birthright, and upon the subjects of France and Spain as natural enemies, to be despoiled and harried on every conceivable occasion, the more gain to be got thereby the better.

It seemed as though already Jeff and Bob had made strides beyond all recognition. The hot sun had browned their skins to a coffee hue. The work and exercise in the open air—for more often than not they laboured at their several tasks in nothing more than breeches, being without hose and walking about barefooted to preserve the spotted condition of the decks—had broadened their chests and strengthened their muscles so that they looked very

different from the rather pinched and underfed schoolboys who had worked under the usual hard conditions customary in an eighteenth century English school.

Black Mike watched them with a proud eye. Day by day he saw them growing more self-reliant, learning skilfully the wonderful trade of the sea, and absorbing unconsciously those traits of courage and self-dependence which made the Englishman of that time prominent among the sailors of the world.

On the Monday morning, in very fine weather, land was sighted on the port quarter, and as they drew closer in there was a general move to the deckrail. The foreshore was low and sandy, gleaming golden-brown in the sun. Beyond the ground shelved to verdant green, topped with palms, and beyond that, many miles distant, densely wooded country stood out clear against the skyline. They saw no sign of habitation, either native or European, and towards noon passed the mouth of a wide river, whose sluggish waters bore neither canoe nor sailing-ship down to the sea.

But the word went round that twenty miles inland, beyond the hills, was a fair-sized town where Spanish and Portuguese settlers did a thriving trade with the natives in palm-oil, coconuts, and ivory. The general hope was all for an attack with a view to plunder, but Avery soon corrected the impression, sending word that business of a sterner nature was on hand.

"It's plain to me," said Mike that night, when they sat together in a little detached group under the stars with the warm spice-laden wind blowing from the shore, "that Mr. Avery is a very clever fellow, and that a good deal which these poor fellows are expecting very soon won't come their way for quite a long time yet."

"What do you mean by that?" Jeff asked, in a cautious whisper, for in so small a compass every word had jealously to be guarded.

Mike looked about him. In groups of eight and ten the hands sprawled about the deck, playing with card or dice in the white light of the moon, while a number were below in the foc'sle drinking and singing songs.

"I caught a few words which passed between the bo'sun and the chief gunner this forenoon," said the big bearded fellow, taking his pipe from his mouth and bending towards them. "You see, lads, since Avery was so took with my sword-play I'm able



With Avery at their head, the buccaneers dashed across the clearing in the woods and poured a quick volley into the bush where the Spaniards were lying. "Forward!" cried the pirate, waving his great sword. (See page 19.)

to keep pretty close up with those about him, and the gunner, he was saying something about this attack on a fortified town which is to make Avery master of the seas."

Jeff looked serious.

"I see, Mike. It's a case of the French sloop over again—more powder, guns, and stores—"

"To say nothing of a ship or two like to be standing out in the roads. We're bound for St. Principe, which has three fortresses, garrisoned by seven hundred Spaniards, under the command of a governor, Don Suarez Almanzo. Perhaps you've heard tell of him."

The boys shook their heads.

"Well, Don Almanzo is one of the cruellest Spaniards who ever set foot in West Africa," Mike continued. "He has built this town of St. Principe at the mouth of four rivers, and has fortified it. At this season, perhaps hundreds of his men will be away up-country, pillaging and burning the native villages in their search for gold-dust, rubber, and ivory. All they get they bring down to the coast, and Avery's information is that Almanzo has three ships waiting to carry the spoil back to Spain."

"In which case we ought to make a rich haul!" laughed Bob, rubbing his hands.

Mike pursed his lips.

"That's not Avery's notion at all. He's flying for bigger game as soon as he feels himself strong enow. What he hopes is that the up-country Spaniards won't have returned yet, so that the forts won't be too strongly held to attack. Once reduce them, and the ships he wants so badly will fall into his hands."

Jeff looked surprised.

"What good would ships be without men, Mike?"

The Cornishman laughed.

"You don't understand, laddie. Buccaneers are like a lot of sheep. Only provide 'em with a fresh leader and they'll follow 'un. Suppose, now, our leader attacks the fortresses and reduces 'un. All the Spaniards won't be killed; them as are left Avery'll sign on under the Jolly Roger. Then he'll take the ships, man 'em with crews from among the prisoners under the command of officers from this ship, and sail for Madagascar, which he means to make his head-
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quarters. Afterwards—well, anything may happen."

Altogether it seemed a pretty desperate piece of business in which, willy-nilly, they must take a hand. A very big surprise, however, awaited them. Three days later, after a night spent in loading and running out the cannon, in arming every man and preparing him for the fight, a quantity of strong liquor being passed round, of which neither the boys nor Black Michael partook, they came in sight of the main island, which stretched like a bar across the mouth of a very wide and sluggish river. Beyond, some three miles distant, was the mainland, and between this and St. Principe were several smaller islands. In the roads between a number of vessels swung at anchor, the ships which Avery was anxious to secure.

To the surprise of Jeff and Bob, the Duke did not draw close in, nor did she fire a single shot, but, with sails set, stood out again to sea and made off in a southerly direction. That night, however, she changed her course, heading westward, then turned to the north, and a little before daybreak stood east again, with the consequence that, after nearly twenty hours' sailing, she had come to a point some sixteen miles due north of the island.

Avery's strategy now became clear—to make the Spaniards think that if he returned to attack them at all he would draw in from the south, in which direction the defending force would naturally be collected. The next step after spying out the ground was to launch an attack from the north, and this was embarked upon in a very skilful manner.

Finding his arrival unnoticed from the shore, the pirate despatched a fast-sailing vessel containing ten men to reconnoitre a small tributary which formed part of the main delta. The spies returned towards noon with the information that the garrisons had been evacuated from the two smaller island forts to the north and despatched to St. Principe, and that a body of troops was in ambush on the heights some two miles south of the town.

The information pleased Avery mightily. He summoned the crew together, calling for sixty volunteers. Bob and Jeff's hands went up at once, but Black Mike, by a preconcerted arrangement, hung back.

The pirate's keen glance singled him out immediately.

"Not so, my stout Cornishman!" he said cheerily. "I have need of that big blade of yours. Come, now, throw in your lot for the land adventure. The sea fighting can well be left to those who remain on ship-board."

So Mike, in order that it should not appear as though he and the boys always wanted to be together, agreed somewhat unwillingly; and about two o'clock several small boats were lowered, and the fifty fighting men, armed to the teeth, were rowed, under the command of Avery, to the shore. A landing-place had been selected, where densely-wooded ground ran almost down to the water's edge. The boats drew in, with deep water below them, but by catching hold of the mangoroots each man, gripping his cutlass between his teeth, was able to hoist himself up and so gain terra firma.

The forest was thick and luxuriant, affording splendid cover, through which penetration was difficult, but safe. A journey of an hour brought them to a large house in a clearing, obviously the temporary residence of the Governor, for the Spanish colours drooped from a flagstaff in the steaming-hot air. The house, however, was deserted, so at a sign from the buccaneer the men entered and quietly took possession.

A Feat of Wonderful Endurance!

IT is not surprising that the name of the buccaneers was held in awe and respect, for no one, even to-day, looking back on the record of their amazing exploits, can deny that the bulk of them were very brave, patient, and daring men.

Avery's action in planning the attack on St. Principe; which was to stand out as one of the most amazing events in his extraordinary career, was proof of this. On taking possession of Don Almanzo's house, from the top story of which a view was obtained of several miles of the winding river, of the European town with the native settlement behind it, and of the several ships lying safe and snug under the shelter of the fortified islands, Avery called a council of war, at which three of his officers and Black Michael were invited to be present.

"I propose," he said, drawing from one of his big flap-pockets a large scale map of the hinterland, "to leave a guard here who shall be able to communicate with us by smoke signals, and then to push on through the forest to St. Christophe, some forty miles up the river. Here, I have information, a fleet of small boats is lying, in which, when we have taken them at the point of the sword, we can strike down the river towards the mouth and assault the town of St. Principe from the landward side. There are many non-combatants in the town—men, women, and children—which will render it difficult for the Governor to train the guns of the forts on us, for fear of hurting his own countrymen. At the first sounds of gunfire a second party will put off from the Duke, and assault the two smaller forts, which, when taken, will then have their guns turned on the larger one."

Said Mike, when an opportunity came to turn this information over to the boys: "There's going to be a lot of devil's work hereabouts, and we shall be lucky if we come out alive."

Neither Bob nor Jeff, however, had much time to think of their own safety, for Avery, putting himself at the head of his forty-eight men, each of whom fairly bristled with weapons, ordered a stealthy advance through the dense undergrowth. They had gone little more than a mile when something untoward happened. From out a thicket an immense negro jumped, and after uttering loud guttural cries and throwing his spear harmlessly at the pirate nearest him, made off with remarkable agility, jumping the great fallen trunks with the ease of a monkey, and running so fast that though several blunderbusses were discharged, none of the shots took effect.

Avery swore loudly at this unexpected stroke of ill-fortune, for he could not doubt that in a marvellously short time the knowledge of their landing would be conveyed to the Spaniards, which, indeed, proved the case. For less than an hour afterwards—by which time they had travelled a good two miles of forest, and were breaking into the open—a sharp fusillade of gunfire broke out from the top of a ridge some few hundreds of yards away, and at the first volley several men fell.

Avery happened to be standing close to Black Michael when this misfortune came upon them. He turned, with a savage look on his sun-burned face.

"Well, my good man, what do you suggest had best be done?" he asked, running

the sharp edge of his blade between his thumb and fingers.

Mike looked serious. "But one thing, master—to go straight ahead, and attack the enemy," he said. "Maybe by now a number of them have worked round to our rear, and at any moment—"

Before Mike could get the words out, the silence of the forest was broken by the tramping down of the undergrowth, the shouts of men, and a burst of gunfire, which brought a hail of small shot ripping through the foliage overhead.

"Forward!" cried Avery.

And Bob and Jeff, with a pistol in each hand, ran clear of cover in the wake of Black Mike.

The countryside, so quiet and uneventful but a minute before, now became a scene of the wildest excitement. The buccaners, in their picturesque dresses, with red silk wound about their heads, steadied at the sound of Avery's voice, and, stopping to kneel at the end of twenty yards, poured a volley into the brushwood ahead.

The cries and groans which went up showed that a number of the shots had told; then, as firing broke out behind them, they doubled on again, at Black Michael's suggestion, breaking into small groups, to offer a less target to the enemy.

With Jeff and Bob panting beside him, the big fellow cautioned them under what was really their first baptism of fire at close quarters.

"Remember, the Spaniards are the enemies of all honest men in the world, and our duty is to beat them! But fire only to wound, unless your own lives be in danger, when, for King and country, no foe can be spared!"

This was good enough for both of them, and, steadying their pieces, they took aim at the figures who seemed to rise out of the ground to bar their further progress.

A tall, sallow-skinned fellow, with a terribly-scarred face, went down at Bob's first shot, after aiming a blow at Jeff with a short-handled axe, which must have put an end to the boy's life, had not Bob's ball put him out of action.

Others of the pirates, however, were not faring so well, for the edge of the wood seemed alive with Spaniards, many of them traders, who had been hastily armed by the Governor, and supplied with natives to load and hand them the guns.

Matters already looked serious, for, as Michael had prophesied, a considerable number of the enemy had worked round be-

hind them, so that now they found themselves between two devastating fires.

The clearing was scarce four hundred yards wide, and into the middle of it Avery had to recall his men by two sharp blasts on a horn. They retreated, firing steadily, and putting more out of action than they lost; but, plainly outnumbered by more than three to one, it was obvious the unequal contest could not be prolonged.

"There is nothing for it," said Black Mike to the pirate, as he wiped the blood out of his eyes, for a ball had grazed his forehead, laying open the flesh to the bone, "but to make across those fields towards open country."

"Indeed, your judgment is sound," Avery cried, and, brandishing his cutlass, he went down the slope at a run.

Several bodies lay in the long grass, and Bob and Jeff were all for staying to tend or fight over them to the last; but a muttered warning from Mike altered their view.

"Our lives be of more value to the King than theirs," he said, tugging at Jeff's arm. "Now, come you on, for he will be lucky who saves his skin out of this business!"

At this they dashed forward, followed by the fire of the flanking parties, who, however, frightened to expose themselves in the open, owing to the superior accuracy of the buccaners' aim, were forced to keep to the trees, their progress being much impeded thereby.

The running fight went on for about ten minutes longer, during which Avery lost three more of his followers, but succeeded in putting at least a dozen of the Spaniards out of action. Then, being out of range, cutlasses and pistols were slipped into belts, and they went away as fast as they could run in the direction of the open country.

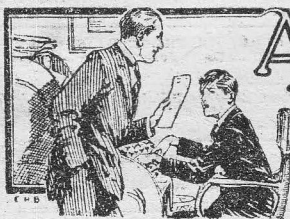
In a little while a shout came from Black Mike, who was leading.

"I cannot obey your orders, sir," he said, facing Avery. "This direction will take us away from St. Principe, which we have sworn to attack and capture. I vote for striking north till we are safe from our enemies, and then return towards the town under cover of nightfall."

Avery looked Mike over from head to foot. "Indeed, you are a cunning and plucky fellow," he said. "From now onwards, I leave the choice of route to you."

(There will be another splendid instalment of this serial next Friday. In the meantime you will enjoy reading the Christmas Number of the "Magnet Library." Now on sale!)

OUR WEEKLY FEATURE!



A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS PLEASED TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS. ADDRESS: EDITOR, THE "POPULAR," THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

FOR NEXT WEEK!

We shall start off next week's grand programme with another grand long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled:

"THE HEAD'S SECRET!"
By Frank Richards.

This story deals with a hidden page in the life of the highly-respected and esteemed headmaster of Greyfriars—Dr. Locke. George Wingate, the captain of the school, finds a chum outside the school, and this ultimately leads him into serious trouble with Dr. Locke. The amazing result of Harry Wharton's interference in the affair makes very good reading, and

"THE HEAD'S SECRET!"

is a story which you will much enjoy. There will, of course, be another splendid complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood, and it is entitled:

"JIMMY SILVER'S REVENGE!"
By Owen Conquest.

My chums have always shown a partiality towards "Uncle James," and in this story we find the leader of the Fistical Four in a great mood. You'll be sorry if you miss this story, my chums!

There will be further long instalments of our grand serials. I have had some very nice letters from chums who are delighted with the grand, new detective serial, "A Marked Man," and hopes are expressed that it will follow the example of the brook—and go on for ever! But, of course, when Ferrers Locke finishes a case, it is no good filling up the story with incidents that have nothing whatever to do with it.

I need say no more about the serials, for you are as well acquainted with the theme of each, that it would be doing you little service to occupy this space by enlarging upon them.

"BILLY BUNTER'S WEEKLY."

My readers will have seen in my Chat, a few weeks ago, that there was to be a supplement in our companion paper, the

"Magnet" Library, entitled "Billy Bunter's Weekly."

Well, that supplement is included in this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library, and I can honestly say that nothing funnier has been published for many a long day. The mere fact that Billy Bunter, whom the Remove form at Greyfriars considers the biggest ass ever born, edits the supplement, is really sufficient to tell you that something quite out of the ordinary will be seen in "Billy Bunter's Weekly."

There is, of course, a magnificent long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. in the same issue, and here again we have something really great. The story is entitled:

"PONSONBY'S VICTIM!"

and is written by Mr. Frank Richards.

In my Chat will be found details of an amazing affair which occurred in my office between Billy Bunter and Harry Wharton over the "Weekly."

I strongly advise my chums to get a copy of this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library. You'll know it all right—there's a picture of William George Bunter on the cover. He has also inscribed his name on the cover—in his own handwriting.

Get it to-day, boys, and let me know what you think of Billy now!

Your Editor



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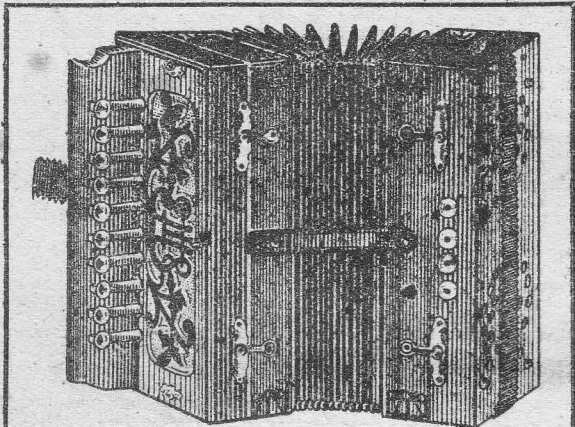


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