

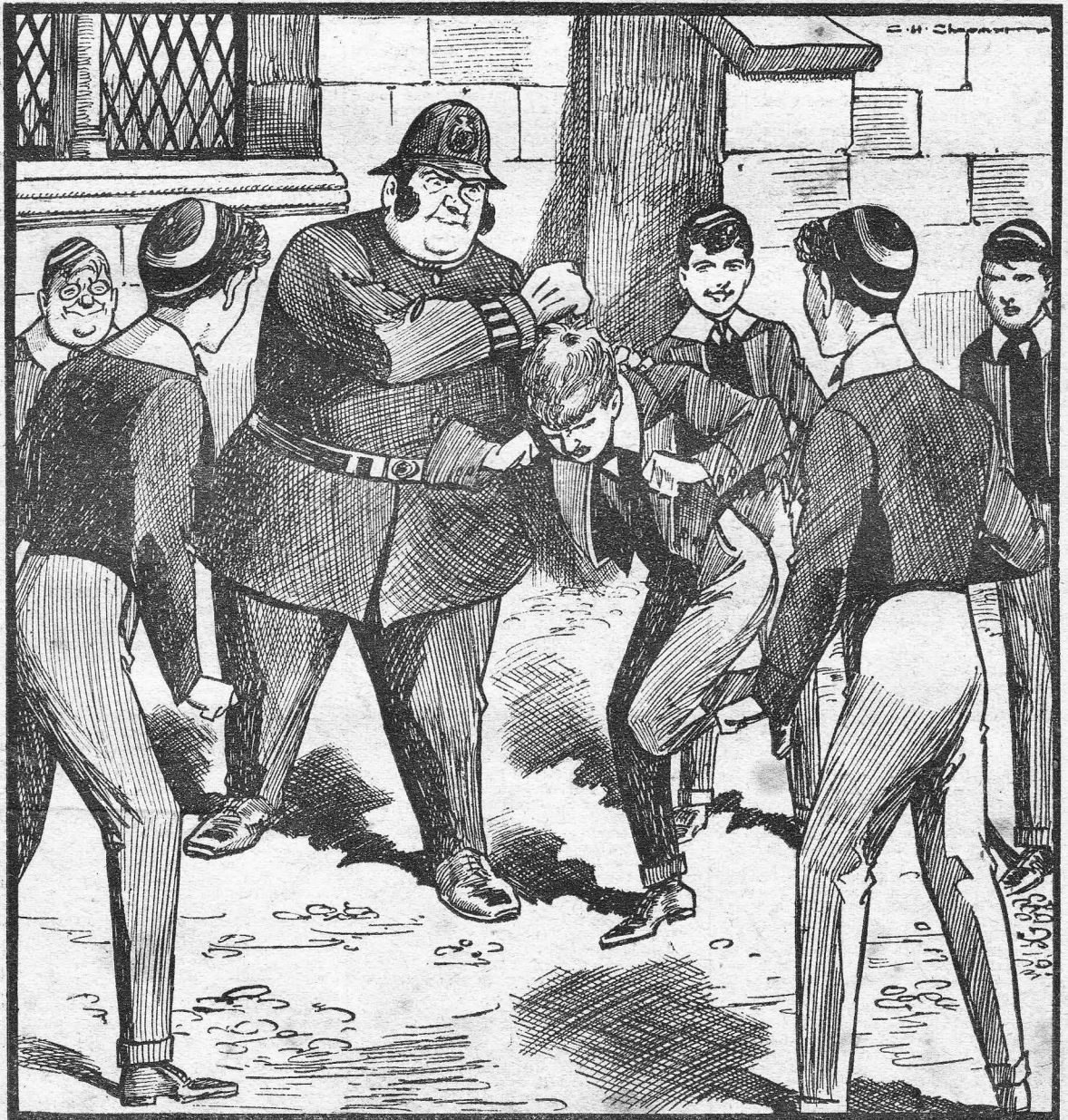
CONTRIBUTING SHORTLY— **BILLY BUNTER & HIS FOUR FAT SUBS!**

No. 105.
New Series.
Week Ending—
Jan. 22nd,
1921.

The Popular

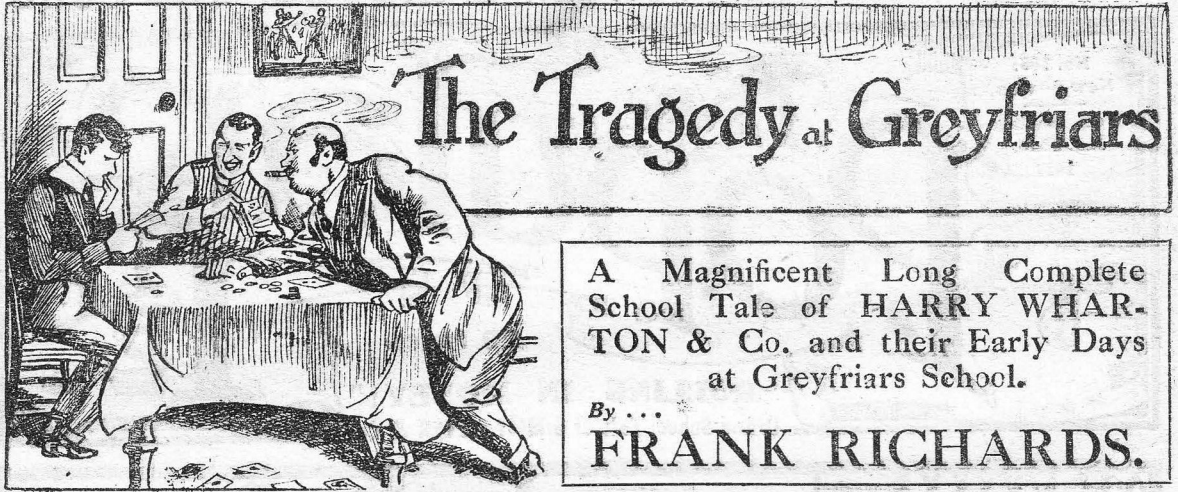
20 Pages.

"ROLLING IN MONEY!"
Grand School Tale of JIMMY SILVER & Co.



BULSTRODE MINOR IN THE HANDS OF THE LAW!

(A Dramatic Incident in the Long Complete Greyfriars School Tale Inside.)



A Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of HARRY WHARTON & Co. and their Early Days at Greyfriars School.
By ...
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
In Charge!

S“EEN my minor?” Bulstrode of the Remove asked the question.
It was Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at Greyfriars. Bulstrode minor had been at the school nearly a week now, and he had not won golden opinions.
He had settled down in the Second Form to have no friends, and few acquaintances even. The fellows did not like him, and he did not take any trouble to make them do so. As a matter of fact, his tastes were older than theirs.
Bulstrode minor was, in plain language, a precocious young rascal. His amusements were those of a man, not of a boy—and not of a high-minded man, either.
If his major had been the old reckless Bulstrode, he would hardly have been quite so hardy and reckless as Herbert wished to be.
As Bulstrode had changed, the brothers had little in common.
From a sense of duty and affection Bulstrode stood by his minor much as he could. But he was in a different Form—two Forms above his minor—and there was little he could do, beside give advice.
And advice was the last thing that Herbert Bulstrode wanted.
He wanted to neglect his lessons, do his prep in a slovenly, careless way, and find all sorts of forbidden amusements outside the school.
He had looked to his brother to help in that all; and at one time Bulstrode might have done so. But that time was past. He was willing to help Herbert, but only in the right path, and the bitterness of the younger brother against the elder grew and augmented every day.
Bulstrode generally went about with a gloomy expression upon his face in these days, and Harry Wharton & Co., who understood what his feelings were, did all they could to make things easy for him.
But they could not stand Herbert.
The best they could do with the new fag was to let him alone, and that they did.
Herbert's major had refused to introduce him to Mr. Cobb and the set of sporting gentlemen who met at the Cross Keys to make things lively, and sometimes to make night hideous.
But Herbert had no intention whatever of being left out of that select set. He knew all about it, from what Bulstrode had told him, and his intention was to join the company at the Cross Keys at the earliest possible moment. And, as he had plenty of pocket-money, he was certain to be a welcome guest there—at all events, so long as his pocket-money lasted.
On this special half-holiday the Remove was playing a practice-match, with two elevens from their own Form in the field. Bulstrode ought to have been thinking wholly of football, as captain of the Remove. As a matter of fact, he was thinking almost wholly of his minor.
After dinner, Bulstrode minor had disappeared. Bulstrode had intended to take him down to Little Side and instruct him in the

rudiments of football—a game for which the new junior showed the keenest dislike.
But Herbert was not to be found.
Bulstrode looked up and down and round about him, but he was not to be discovered: the Close and the cloisters were drawn blank, and he was not in the passages or in the Form-rooms.
Bulstrode asked everyone he met for news of him, and he received unsympathetic replies from most of the fellows.
“I haven't seen the cad, and I don't want to,” said Coker of the Fifth.
“Lost him?” asked Temple of the Fourth.
“Good thing, too! I hope you'll never find the young blighter again!”
Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were looking for Bulstrode, and they met him in the Close, heated and worried by his long search.
“Seen my minor?” Wharton shook his head.
“No. I suppose he's gone out.”
“We're waiting to begin,” added Bob Cherry. “Come on, Bulstrode!”
Bulstrode's brows contracted.
“I—I can't come,” he said. “I'm anxious about Herbert. You know what he is: I can't help thinking the young ass has got into trouble!”
“Why?”
“He's made the acquaintance of Cobb and his set,” said Bulstrode, with a worried look. “I heard it from Vernon-Smith. He saw Herbert at the Cross Keys.”
Wharton frowned.
“Vernon-Smith's not over-truthful,” he said. “I shouldn't take too much notice of what he says, if it's against anybody.”
Bulstrode shook his head.
“Oh, I asked Herbert!” he said.
“And what did Herbert say?”
“He told me to mind my own business.”
“H'm!”
“And now I suppose the young foot has gone down to the Cross Keys,” said Bulstrode.
“I shouldn't wonder.”
“But—” began Bob Cherry. “Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?”
There was a hubbub in the direction of the gates. A crowd of juniors could be seen there, and over the forest of Greyfriars caps appeared the helmet of a policeman.
“P.-c. Tozer!” exclaimed Bob Cherry.
“What's the row, I wonder?”
The three Removites walked down quickly towards the gates. The exclamations they heard as they approached quickly enlightened them.
“Tozer's got him!”
“It's Bulstrode's minor!”
“He's been caught!”
“Serve him right!”
“What are you going to do with him, Tozey?”
Bulstrode turned pale.
“It's my minor!” he exclaimed.
“Looks like it.”
Bulstrode pushed his way forcibly through the excited crowd. There were angry ejaculations as he shoved and elbowed; but when the fellows saw whom it was they let him pass.
Bulstrode's face was pale and set.
“Herbert!” he exclaimed, as he reached

the spot where the policeman stood, with his grasp upon the fag.
P.-c. Tozer, the constable of Friardale, had his grasp upon the scruff of Herbert's neck, and the black sheep of the Second Form was a helpless prisoner.
He was wriggling in the grasp of the fat policeman, but he had no chance of getting away.
“What's the matter?” demanded Bulstrode huskily. “What have you been doing, Bertie?”
“Which I've caught 'im!” said P.-c. Tozer loftily.
“Caught him! What was he doing?”
“Smoking!”
“Oh!”
“And I'm taking 'im to the 'Ead,” said P.-c. Tozer. “I'm taking 'im to Dr. Locke, as in dooty bound.”
“Serve him right!” said Dicky Nugent. “I warned him about his caddish tricks, and he won't take a warning!”
“A licking will do him good!” Sammy Bunter remarked. “You see, he's setting a horrible example to all us decent chaps!”
“First I've heard of your being decent!” said Dicky.
“Ha, ha, ha!”
Bulstrode gritted his teeth. P.-c. Tozer marched Bulstrode minor onward, and they disappeared into the House. Ten minutes later, anybody who had passed the Head's study could have heard mournful howls proceeding from it.
Bulstrode minor was paying for his sins.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
A Night "Out."

MR. COBB, the landlord of the Cross Keys, and the greatest rascal in Friardale—or in the whole county, for that matter—sat in his little parlour. The hour was late, but Mr. Cobb showed no signs of fatigue. Perhaps that was because he was accustomed to lie in bed until ten or eleven o'clock in the morning; or perhaps he derived support from the bottle that stood at his elbow, and from which he incessantly replenished his glass. Mr. Cobb had a very red face and a still redder nose, which showed that he was a frequent indulger in the cup that cheers, or, at all events, inebriates.
Mr. Cobb was not alone. Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, was sitting at the table opposite to him, also with a glass at his elbow and a fat cigar in his mouth.
There was no one else in the room, but the French window, opening upon the garden, was open, and it looked as if the two men were expecting someone.
There was a step in the garden.
“Good-evening, young gentlemen!” said Mr. Cobb blandly, rising to his feet.
But it was only one person that came through the open French window—Bulstrode minor, red with haste and dripping with rain.
Mr. Cobb looked past him into the darkness and pouring rain.
“Where is Master Vernon-Smith?” he asked.
Bulstrode minor gasped for breath.
“He can't come,” he said.

"Can't come!"
 "He's been prevented."
 "Oh! So you've come alone?" said Mr. Cobb surlily.
 Herbert flushed.
 "Yes. If I'm not welcome—"
 "Oh, you're right welcome!" said Mr. Banks, who, in his present state of stoniness, was eager to relieve the junior even of a few half-crowns. "Sit down and dry your boots. Better take your jacket off."
 "Thank you!"

Mr. Cobb had taken a new pack of cards out of a drawer for Herbert Bulstrode's benefit. They were conveniently marked on the backs so that the dealer could tell which cards he was giving out, and Mr. Cobb was an old and experienced dealer, and well accustomed to the marks on those cards.

The swishing of the cards as Mr. Cobb shuffled them was like music to the ears of the foolish lad from Greyfriars.

He turned towards the table with eager, gleaming eyes.

"I'm ready to play!" he exclaimed.
 "Better dry your boots—"
 "Oh, my boots are all right!"

"Just as you like," said Mr. Cobb. "What is the game to be—nap or banker?"
 "Nap," said Mr. Banks.

"Right-ho!"
 Herbert Bulstrode dropped into a chair by the table.

As a matter of fact his trousers and his jacket were both wet, and he felt a chill as he sat down, but he hardly noticed it in his excitement.

The unfortunate junior felt highly honoured at being allowed to play with old, experienced sportsmen like Mr. Cobb and Mr. Banks. He did not seem to have the least suspicion that he was as wax in their hands, and that their only use for him was to fleece him of his money.

"The luck was against you last time, young sir," said Mr. Banks. "I dare say you will clean us out this evening."
 "Oh, I hope so!" said Herbert.

An hour clicked away on the metal clock on Mr. Cobb's mantelpiece. The whole building was silent save for the movements and occasional muttered remarks of the gamblers in the inn parlour.

All the time the pile of silver before Herbert Bulstrode diminished more and more. At the end of the hour he was down to his last coin, and he lost again, and had to owe a balance to the others.

Then he paused, white and haggard. Luck, as he fancied it, had been against him, and he had lost; he was cleaned out. He had not a coin left in his pockets.

Mr. Cobb and Mr. Banks exchanged glances. Not a glimmer of pity for their unhappy victim was in their looks or in their hearts; only grim amusement, which they hardly troubled to conceal. They were too accustomed to fleecing the foolish and ignorant to have any tender feelings left on the subject.

Herbert gave them a haggard look.
 "I'm cleaned out!" he muttered.
 "Quite out?" asked Mr. Banks.

"Quite. Will you take my I O U?"
 Mr. Banks rose from the table.

"I'm afraid I must be off now," he remarked. "I've stayed too long, as it is. You'll excuse my hurrying off, Cobb?"
 "Certainly," said Mr. Cobb.

Mr. Banks went by way of the bar, and Mr. Cobb accompanied him. Herbert sat alone and miserable. He heard a clinking of glasses in the bar. Mr. Cobb came back into the little parlour alone.

Herbert looked at him gloomily.
 "So you won't play on my I O U?" he said.

Mr. Cobb smiled blandly.
 "I would with pleasure," he replied, "but it's so late. Do you know it's close on one o'clock? We've been closed here a long time. I must get to bed."

"You could stay up long enough to win all my money," said Herbert bitterly.

Mr. Cobb turned upon him.
 "Do you want me to give it you back?" he asked scornfully. "When we let you into this game, we took you for a sportsman."

"I don't want it back; but—"

"We'll give you your revenge at any time," said Mr. Cobb.

"Yes, but—"

"But just now you ought to be getting back to bed. Bless it all, you came an hour late, and you've been here over an hour," said the landlord of the Cross Keys. "I should get into trouble if it were known, anyway."

Herbert rose heavily to his feet.
 "I suppose I'd better go," he said dully.

"Yes. Good-night!"
 Herbert Bulstrode did not reply.
 He crossed to the door, put on his cap, and strode out into the darkness and the rain. Mr. Cobb meditatively mixed a fresh glass of whisky-and-water, with a smaller proportion of water than ever.

"Seven quid," he murmured. "Three-pun-ten for me, and three-pun-ten for Banks. And not so bad for an hour's work, neither."

He sipped his whisky-and-water with great enjoyment. When it was finished, he crossed to the window to close it. He started a little as a drench of rain came into his face.

"By gum!" murmured Mr. Cobb. "It's still raining."

He gazed out into the rainy night in some uneasiness.

The rain was descending in blinding torrents, and the Greyfriars lad had gone out into the heart of it, without even an umbrella, without even an overcoat.

"By gum!" murmured Mr. Cobb. "He'll get wet!"

He closed the window.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Way of the Transgressor!

HERBERT walked blindly away from the darkened inn.

There was not a single light gleaming from a window in the front of the Cross Keys as Herbert came out into the street. There was no light in the street save the glimmer of a street lamp far away.

The moon was hidden behind black clouds. The rain was coming down fast, thicker and thicker every moment.

Herbert Bulstrode hardly noticed it.

Or rather, the dash of the cold rain in his face had a reviving effect upon him. He did not think for the moment of the danger of getting wet, after the heated and stifling atmosphere of the inn parlour.

He tramped out blindly and doggedly into the rain.

The unfortunate lad turned his face towards the distant school. He was exhausted, tired out, depressed, utterly miserable.

His money was gone.

The luck he had hoped for had not been his—he had lost all his money, and now he had the prospect of the result of it to face.

For the money could not be lost without inquiry. His father had sent it to him to pay for his bicycle. If the machine was not paid for, his father would hear of it. How would he explain the loss of the money?

He could not even say that he had lost it, for the number of the note would then be sent to the police, and it would be stopped. And that note was in Mr. Cobb's possession.

Certainly, it would serve Mr. Cobb right to lose it if he had to give it up. But it would be only too clearly proved that Herbert had gone to the Cross Keys that night—and that meant expulsion from Greyfriars.

And he knew what kind of a reception his father would give him at home if he returned there expelled in disgrace from Greyfriars.

How was he to account for the loss of the money?

His brother might help him. He thought of that with a sudden sense of relief.

His brother, whom he had insulted and injured—would he help him? Could he help him to that extent?

But even that was not all! Even if the money were replaced, what then? The foolish lad was already thinking of further attempts to win back what he had lost. To win back one's losses—the mirage that has led so many gamblers on to their doom. That was the wild vision that Herbert could not drive from his mind.

He tramped on through the rain.

The water was soaking through his clothes. He was drenched to the skin, even his boots were soaked. But he did not notice it. Rapid motion kept him warm, and he did not care for the rain.

Herbert stopped at the school wall, out of breath.

He clambered over the wall. He was feeling sick and faint.

He rolled over the wall, missed his hold, and fell inside. He had not the strength to rise for the moment. He lay dazed in the rain.

When he staggered to his feet at last, he groped his way across the Close, the rain beating down upon him hard and fiercely.

The boy paused by the house wall, where a rope of sheets hung fluttering from the window of the Second Form dormitory.

He supported himself with his hand upon the stone wall, while he groped for the window-sill above him.

As a matter of fact, the unfortunate lad was almost in a fever by this time, although he did not realise it.

He climbed upon the window-sill, and groped and groped for the fluttering rope, which the wind carried out of his reach.

He grasped it at last, and began to climb. His head was swimming.

"I must get in!" he muttered fiercely. "I must get in!"

He clung desperately to the rope.

But he could not climb. Again and again he tried, but it was impossible. His strength was spent; his brain was reeling.

He made an effort to get upon the lower sill again, and missed it. The rope slid through his hands, and he fell.

Crash!

He hardly felt the shock as he fell—only a dull pain, and then oblivion.

He made one feeble movement, and lay still—silent—his white, set face turned to the pouring rain.

Heavier and heavier the rain beat down upon him—harder and heavier. It ran over him in little streamlets, it covered him and soaked him. He did not move.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. An Alarm in the Night!

M R. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, stirred in his bed and awoke.

A strange sound was echoing through his room, and several times he had stirred in his sleep, unconsciously disturbed by it, and now at last his eyes opened.

Swish, swish!

Mr. Quelch started as the sound came again at the window.

Something white fluttered through the darkness, and swished on the window-panes, and fluttered away again.

For some moments the Remove-master stood petrified. Then a swift thought flashed into his mind, and he threw the window up.

Swish!

He caught at the fluttering object with his hand, as the wind blew it nearer.

It was a rope of sheets, soaked and dripping with rain, blown about by the wind, which was rising and blowing more freshly from the sea every moment.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch.

He knew what the rope of sheets meant. It meant that someone had descended from a window above, and from the situation of the rope Mr. Quelch knew that it must be from the Second-Form dormitory.

A very grim look came over his face.

He turned on his electric light, dressed himself quickly, and quitted the bed-room.

With quiet steps he made his way up to the next floor, and entering the Second-Form dormitory, switched on the light.

The sound of the door opening, and the sudden glare of light, awakened many of the boys. Dicky Nugent sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes.

"Hallo!" he muttered.

"Groat!" said Gatty.

"Wharrer marrer?" murmured Sammy Bunter, half in his sleep.

Mr. Quelch strode into the room.

"Someone has broken bounds and gone out of this dormitory by means of a rope from the window," he exclaimed sternly.

"My hat!"

Mr. Quelch glanced up and down the dormitory. The bed next to Sammy Bunter's was empty.

"Bunter minor!"

"Groat! Yessir! Yaw-aw!"

"Whose bed was this, next to yours?"

"Bulstrode minor's, sir!"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. He had already observed something of the little ways of Bulstrode minor, although the new boy was not in his Form.

"Bulstrode minor!" he repeated. "Where is he now?"

Sammy Bunter groped under his pillow for his spectacles, put his glasses upon his fat round nose, and blinked at the empty bed.

"He seems to be gone, sir," he stammered.

"I know he is gone. He had evidently left the room by a rope from the window," said the master of the Remove.

"My hat!" ejaculated Sammy Bunter involuntarily.

"Do you know where he is gone?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know, Nugent minor?"

Dicky Nugent shook his head.

4 Billy Bunter and His Four Fat Subs Will be Giving the Readers of—

"No, sir. I had no idea that he was gone."
"Does anyone here know?"
There was no reply.

Most of the Second-Formers were awake by this time, but the few who had some suspicion of where the new boy was gone were not inclined to betray him to a Form-master. They might dislike Bulstrode minor, and they might rag him, but their code of honour forbade anything like sneaking to a master about a Form-fellow.

"Has Bulstrode minor ever been absent of a night before, Nugent?" asked Mr. Quelch.
"I don't know, sir."

"And you cannot tell me where he is gone?"
"I don't know, sir."

"Very well. I shall acquaint Mr. Pyle with this, and he will doubtless look into the matter," said the Remove-master quietly.
"What are you getting up for, Nugent minor?"

"I was thinking, sir—" Dicky Nugent hesitated a little.

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch sharply.

"It was a jolly risky bizney getting down from the window, sir," faltered Nugent minor.
"The silly young ass may have fallen, and—"

Mr. Quelch started.

"I will look in the Close at once," he said.

"You may go back to bed."

"Yes, sir!"

The Remove-master extinguished the light and left the dormitory, but the Second Form did not go to sleep in a hurry.

The novel occurrence had excited them too much for that. They sat up in bed, discussing it in low, excited tones.

Mr. Quelch hurried down to the bed-room of the Second Form master, and called Mr. Pyle. That gentleman, when he heard what the Remove-master had to tell him, dressed himself at once.

Mr. Pyle lighted a bicycle lantern, and the two masters descended the stairs. They put on macintoshes, and went out into the Close. The wind and rain drove forcefully into their faces, and they gasped for breath as they quitted the shelter of the doorway.

"Bless my soul! What a night for a lad to venture out!" Mr. Pyle gasped.

"I imagine he went out before the storm came on," Mr. Quelch said.

"Yes—yes, I suppose so."

"This is the way."

Keeping close to the wall, to avoid, as far as possible, the force of the wind, the two masters made their way to the spot directly beneath the window of the Second Form dormitory.

Mr. Pyle flashed the light through the rain. A sudden cry broke from him.

"Good heavens!"

"What is it?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, look!"

Then the Remove-master echoed the other's exclamation.

The light of the lantern gleamed upon a white face upturned in the rain—a white, set face, that seemed already to have the seal of death set upon it.

"Bulstrode minor!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in horror. "Then he had fallen!"

"Oh, heavens!"

Mr. Pyle looked at the white face in fascinated horror.

For the moment he could not find his voice. He trembled in every limb as he looked upon the ghastly countenance of Bulstrode minor.

"Is he—is he—" he faltered.

He could not finish the sentence. The terrible word that was in his mind seemed to refuse to pass his lips.

Mr. Quelch did not reply immediately.

He knelt beside the insensible junior, and felt his heart for a moment. A low exclamation of relief escaped him.

"No," he said quietly.

"He lives?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven!"

"He is insensible," said the Remove-master, in a low, agitated voice. "How much he is injured it is impossible to tell here. Help me to get him into the house."

"Yes, yes!"

They lifted the lad between them, and, drenched by the rain as they went, they bore him into the house.

"Bring him into my room," said Mr. Quelch.

"But—"

"He cannot be taken into the dormitory. It may be impossible to move him again, and he may need quiet. He shall be put into my bed."

"But you—"

"Never mind me."

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"Very well."

Bulstrode minor was carried into Mr. Quelch's room. He was laid upon a couch, and there the Form-master undressed him to examine his injuries. The junior was still insensible. Mr. Quelch glanced round at the agitated master of the Second.

"Will you wake Wingate?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, certainly! But—"

"Tell him a boy has had an accident, and ask him to cycle to Friardale for a doctor."

"In this weather—"

"It may be a case of life and death. Tell Wingate so, and he will not hesitate."

"Very well."

Mr. Pyle quitted the bed-room. The Remove-master stripped the unhappy fag and rubbed him dry with a towel. The fall from the rope had not caused any great injury—it had been too short—but the boy was evidently in a serious state. The Remove-master put him into the bed, and covered him warmly up.

Then Mr. Quelch sat by the bedside watching him, sleepless now, anxious only for the lad whose temerity and desperate hardihood had cost him so dear; and, meanwhile, Wingate of the Sixth was on his bicycle, riding furiously through wind and rain for the doctor from Friardale.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Under the Shadow!

THERE were hushed voices in Greyfriars that morning. Even the Second Form were quiet, and moved about on tiptoe.

Bulstrode minor was sick.

That was all the news at first, but it was known, and perfectly well understood, that the sickness was of a serious nature.

All kinds of rumours were afloat on the subject; but one thing seemed to be clear—that Bulstrode minor had broken bounds the previous night, that he had failed in his attempt to re-enter the school, and that he had lain for some time unprotected in the rain, in a faint of some sort.

Such an experience was likely to tell heavily upon the strongest constitution, and Bulstrode minor's constitution was far from being strong.

It might have been, but by his own ways and habits he had reduced himself to a frail and irritable condition, prone to break up utterly under any unusual strain.

And under this strain the weak and ill-conditioned body had failed him. He was awakened in a fever, and even yet he did not know the faces round him.

Dr. Payne had not left the school. That alone was a serious aspect of the case, for the local doctor was a busy man. And when Trotter, the page, was sent down to the village at breakfast-time, with a telegram for Bulstrode's father, an electric shock ran through the school.

Mr. Bulstrode had been telegraphed for.

Then there was no time even for a letter! The discovery gave the whole school a painful shock. It was realised that there was danger!

Bulstrode minor was in danger!

The Greyfriars fellows were very quiet when they went in to lessons that morning. There was a stony calmness in George Bulstrode's face.

He was thinking of his brother, and he could hardly realise the terrible truth of it. Bertie was in danger! Forgotten now was the sullen, obstinate nature, the fierce recklessness of the black sheep of the family, the cruel blow he had struck the previous night. All was forgotten, excepting that he was Bulstrode's brother, and in danger!

Bulstrode moved about like a fellow in a dream. And every other fellow in the Remove tried to show him some kindness. They felt for him—they understood.

Mr. Quelch looked grave and reserved as he took the class that morning. He purposely spared Bulstrode, giving the captain of the Remove little or nothing to do. But presently it came to Bulstrode's turn to construe, and he rose to his feet, book in hand.

His eyes wandered on the page wildly as he vainly strove to fix his attention upon his work.

The printed page danced before his eyes. Instead of the lines of the old Roman poet he saw a white face with the imprint of death upon it looking at him from the book.

"Go on from Est in conspectu Tenedos," said Mr. Quelch softly.

Bulstrode tried to go on.

But his voice broke.

He suddenly laid down the book and

covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

There was a strange thrill in the class. Such a scene had never been witnessed in the Remove Form-room before.

The burly Removite stood, his face hidden by his hands, his strong form shaken by a heavy sob, while the class sat silent, grim. Mr. Quelch came a step towards the captain of the Remove.

"You need not go on, Bulstrode," he said kindly. "If you do not feel fit for work this morning you shall be excused lessons."

"Thank you, sir," Bulstrode faltered.

"You may leave the classroom, if you prefer."

Bulstrode moved out of his place.

The Form-room door closed behind him, and the Remove were left with concerned faces. Few had ever dreamed of seeing Bulstrode, once the bully of the Remove, break down in public in this way.

Lessons were done that morning in a very desultory fashion, but the Form-master was not hard upon the Remove.

When the class was dismissed, they trod from the Form-room on tiptoe, and gathered in groups in the passages and the Close to talk in hushed whispers.

How was Bulstrode minor getting on?

That was the question that was in all minds.

He was in bed in Mr. Quelch's room—the Remove-master had given up his room to the invalid. He was not in a state to be removed to the school sanatorium. Dr. Payne was still at the school. He had driven away for a couple of hours in the morning, but he had returned—and remained.

Bulstrode's father and mother were expected every minute now.

Bulstrode was hanging about the gates to meet them. His face was colourless, and he was untidy in his appearance, his eyes haggard. The weight that had fallen upon his life seemed to have completely crushed the captain of the Remove. He had not the heart to go down to the station and meet his parents, but waited for them at the gates of the school, hanging about with drooping head and his hands in his pockets.

Even Gosling, the school porter, gave him a sympathetic look.

"You cheer hup, sir," said Gosling. "Wot I says is this 'ere, sir—you cheer hup, and ope for the best, Master Bulstrode."

Bulstrode nodded without replying.

He could not speak. Hardly a word had passed his lips since he left the Form-room that morning, after breaking down in his work.

There was a sound of wheels in the road, and Bulstrode's weary eyes raised themselves from the ground.

It was the hack from the station that was approaching, and Bulstrode could see his father and his mother in it.

Only lately they had visited Greyfriars, on the occasion of the cricket-match with St. Jim's College, and on that occasion there had been trouble between Bulstrode and his people. That was over now; but there was trouble of a more serious kind to greet Mr. and Mrs. Bulstrode on this visit to Greyfriars. The Head's telegram had naturally caused alarm, and Mrs. Bulstrode was crying softly in the hack, and the old gentleman, who prided himself upon being hard and self-contained, was sitting bolt upright, keeping his features composed, but with a great effort.

The hack stopped, and Bulstrode opened the door.

Mr. Bulstrode, forgetting for the moment the attitude of superhuman calmness he had assumed, grasped the hand of his elder son.

"George!" He broke off, gasping.

"George!"

"Yes, dad."

"George! He's all right—so far? For goodness' sake, tell me!"

"He's only a little worse, the doctor says."

"Only a little! Oh!"

They walked to the house together. Mrs. Bulstrode was leaning heavily upon her son's arm. Her veil was thick over her face to hide her tears, but it could not wholly hide them. The boys took off their caps respectfully as they passed.

"Mother," whispered Bulstrode, "it wasn't my fault—you know that. I looked after him all I could."

"I'm sure you did, my boy."

"How did it happen?" said Bulstrode's father.

Bulstrode told him. He made it as kind for Herbert as he could. The old gentleman listened with knitted brows.

"Poor old Bertie was only reckless; he



The light of the lantern gleamed upon a white face upturned in the rain. "Bulstrode minor!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in horror. "Then he has fallen from the window!" (See chapter 4.)

never meant any harm," said Bulstrode, with a break in his voice. "I—I wish I could have helped him more."

"I've no doubt you did all you could, George," said the old gentleman. "Take us to him—we must see him."

"This way, father!"

Mr. Quelch received them at the door of his room, and showed them in to the bedside where the sufferer lay.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Last Scene!

HERBERT lay in bed, and the pillow under his head was hardly whiter than the face that lay upon it.

His eyes were wide open, staring blankly at the ceiling overhead, and his white lips were never still for a moment.

From his moving lips poured an incessant babble of words, as the fever moved him—words that had a strange sound upon the lips of one so young—half-told, broken stories of reckless doings and wild experiences.

"Bertie," murmured his mother—"Bertie! Don't you know me?"

The wild eyes did not even turn upon her. "He is delirious," said Dr. Payne softly; and he drew the weeping mother aside, and she sank into a chair by the window.

Mr. Bulstrode stood looking down upon the delirious junior. He heard from his son's lips words he had never dreamed of hearing from them.

Mutterings of gambling, of night excursions, of smoking, and even of drinking—wild mutterings that were half true and half imaginary—the fevered images of a maddened, distorted brain.

"Good heavens!" muttered the unhappy father. "Good heavens!"

Bulstrode stood with frozen lips. He had expected all this. He had known more than

his father what his younger brother was like. But there was no condemnation now in Bulstrode's face. What Herbert was saying was only what he might himself have said a few months before. Herbert was no worse than he had been; but he had changed, and Herbert had not. That was the difference.

And the downward path had led the unhappy boy to this! Truly it was said from of old that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Mr. Quelch tapped Bulstrode lightly upon the shoulder.

The boy understood, and he left the bedroom silently, closing the door behind him.

He walked away miserably down the passage. At the end of the passage a group of Removites were waiting for him.

Harry Wharton squeezed his arm.

"How is he now, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode groaned.

"Worse!"

"I'm sorry! You're sure?"

"The doctor doesn't say so, but I can see it in his face," Bulstrode muttered. "Herbert is delirious now."

"Still delirious?"

"Yes, and when that goes—"

Bulstrode did not finish.

The tears started to his eyes, and he strode abruptly away, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

Without anything being said on the subject, the juniors came to understand gradually that there was little or no hope.

It had a stunning effect upon them.

Fellows moved about the school as if in a dream, and spoke only in whispers, or did not speak at all.

Bulstrode minor was dying!

Every heart went out to Bulstrode at this hour of anguish. Even fellows who had dis-

liked him tried to show what they felt, tried to do any little service for him.

The captain of the Remove noticed nothing.

He was like a fellow crushed and dazed by a cruel blow. He never spoke; he did not eat; he hardly raised his eyes from the ground.

When, in the cool of the evening, Bulstrode was called into the sick-room, all the fellows knew what it meant, and they gathered in a crowd at the end of the passage, very silent.

Bulstrode entered the room of death with white face and faltering steps.

He knew—yet he could hardly realise—that he was about to lose his brother!

Herbert lay back in the bed upon a heap of pillows, his face white and drawn, his eyes strangely large and seemingly luminous.

The delirium had passed, and he had been left at the point of utter exhaustion. The candle of life flickered very low; the flame, with nothing in reserve to draw upon, was about to expire. Life was spent in the frail and wasted frame.

Herbert's eyes turned upon his brother. Mrs. Bulstrode was sobbing silently in a chair by the window. Mr. Bulstrode stood grim and silent, stunned. Bulstrode drew slowly up to his brother's bedside.

Herbert's white lips twitched into a kind of smile.

"George!" he murmured, barely audible.

Bulstrode came closer.

"Oh, Bertie!"

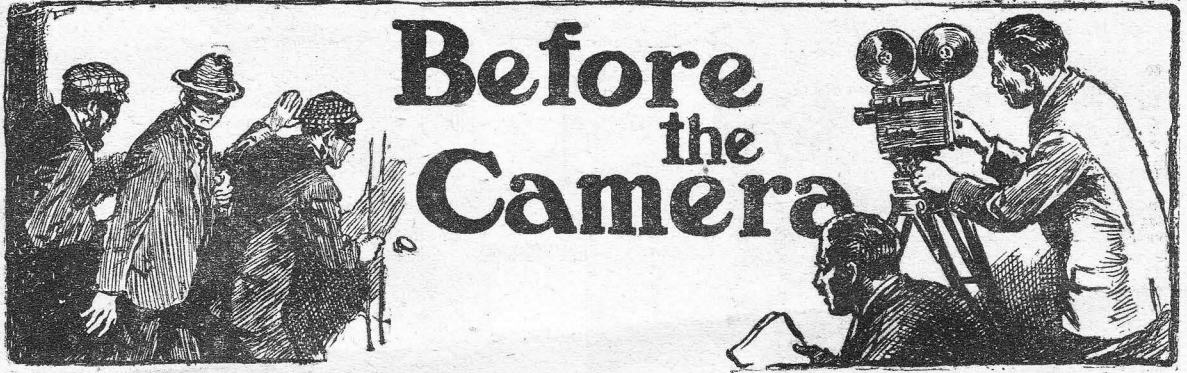
"I—I'm going!" muttered Herbert. "I know it! They won't say so, but I know it! I'm so sorry, George!"

"Bertie!"

"I've been rotten to you, and you've done all you could for me!" said Herbert hoarsely.

(Continued on page 8.)

SOME THRILLING INCIDENTS IN THIS GRAND LIFE STORY!



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 young actor hears later that the Eclair Company have lost much of their money in the production of several unsuccessful films, and the film in which Eddie Polo had taken second part had reduced the capital to such an extent that Morrison asks his leading men for new ideas. Eddie has an inspiration which he confides to his manager. It turns out to be a circus story, which Eddie writes himself, and, with the rest of the company, pays Busto's Circus a visit for the acting of the various scenes.

(Now read on.)

With the Circus Again!

TO say that the circus folk were glad to see him is understating the case. They met him at the station with the circus band and triumphal procession, and even the mules flicked their ears with pleasure when their old favourite came and rubbed their noses; the elephant trumpeted, and the camels looked a little less supercilious. Busto emitted a gruff "God bless me sowl!" and nearly crushed Eddie's hand to a pulp before trying to put the remainder of the film people out of action in a similar manner.

Eta, with her husband, Bud Truefit, standing by, flung her arms around Eddie's neck and kissed him, much to his embarrassment and Stella Cleaver's amusement, and then did the same to the screen star. And then came all the others in turn—Ginger, the clown, Red Cloud, Rex, the strong man, and even the men who set up and took down the big canvas top. There was no doubt about the place that Eddie had won in their hearts.

"Well, boys and girls," said Morrison, when Eddie managed at last to take up life on the normal again, "you do seem glad to see your old friend, and that's a thing I'm pleased to note. And, by way of showing my appreciation, I've got a little surprise for ye. After the performance this evening—I see you've billed the return of your famous acrobat all over the township—I'm going to rip up a screen in the big tent, and then show you your boy doing things to amuse bigger audiences than you could accommodate. How's that strike you for a treat?"

He got his answer in the cheering yell that went up, and everybody registered a mental note to be present when the picture was shown.

Eddie lost no time in getting into acrobat costume, and then, all alone in the big tent, save for Busto and Ginger Wiggles, the clown, he went through a full rehearsal of all his old tricks, just, as he said, to rub

the rust off his muscles. And he never made a false move nor step; never missed by so much as the eighth of an inch his calculations in gripping the swinging bars of the trapezes.

And afterwards he sought out Busto, Morrison, and Terence, the camera-man, and explained to them the plot of his story. It consisted, in the beginning, of an episode that should show how he came into the circus in the first place. The manager was to make an announcement that his regular acrobat was ill and unable to play, and that he would pay anybody who could give an acrobatic performance of the required type a hundred dollars. Eddie was to come forward and earn that hundred dollars. Had Del Rogerigo, the Mexican, been available, Busto might have employed him for the purpose this evening, but, as far as he and Eddie knew, that tarred and feathered gentleman had long since vanished over the border to his native land. The principal performers being in agreement, Morrison went off to see to his lighting, Terence to instruct his assistant, Miles, and Busto to fix up the gear for the stunt. Eddie, calling unto himself Bud Truefit and Dick Fordyce, went on a tour of inspection around the township, more to pass away the time than for any particular reason. Bud and Eddie swapped reminiscences, the cowboy telling of the show's vicissitudes since Eddie's departure, the acrobat confiding himself to yarns about the work of the film company. And in this pleasant fashion they strolled along, till, turning a corner suddenly, they came across a little crowd gathered upon a vacant plot, apparently highly interested and amused at something that was taking place in their midst.

"A dog fight," hazarded Dick Fordyce.

"More like a battle between a couple of Injun braves," supplemented Bud Truefit.

It wasn't. Neither of the three had guessed within a mile of it. And yet it was so simple. Two men, attired in the regulation singlet and tights of acrobats, were working a street show. They had no tent—they made no charge for admission. They performed hand-balances and back-rolls and springs, twisted and postured and turned, and even wrestled with each other. And with them was a fat-faced, leather-lunged individual, who seemed to be taking care of their clothes and acting as their manager at the same time. As Eddie Polo and his companions joined the crowd, the bigger acrobat of the two was just engaged in freeing himself from a rope tied around him by some member of the audience, encouraged to negotiate what were by no means difficult knots by the mutterings of his companion. It so chanced that when the trio arrived the two acrobats had their backs to Eddie, but presently they both turned round. That was the surprise—for both the performers were masked.

Eddie stood and watched the pair for a moment, and it seemed to him that the eyes behind the mask were regarding him intently. Then the man with the rope stepped out of its coils and bowed to the audience, as the coins rattled on to the spread out coat placed ready on the ground for use as a collecting-bag.

"Trying to queer your circus, Truefit," said Dick casually. "Why pay a dollar to see Eddie Polo when we can show you the

same tricks on the sidewalk for a dime, and you needn't pay us if you don't want to."

"Say, Mr. Dick yew ain't seen our Eddie in action, so ter speak, hev yew?" said Truefit. "Never seen him a-flyin' like a rocket from heaven to a plain, ornery trapeze—eh?"

"No, not exactly, though I have seen him do a few things in the air," was Fordyce's reply. "I dare say, with a bit of practice, he'll get to be quite good at that sort of thing in time."

Eddie grinned, for he recognised that Dick Fordyce was pulling Bud Truefit's leg. Therefore, it didn't need Dick's wink—shot past Bud when the latter wasn't quite on his guard—to put him wise.

"What?" Bud almost roared the question. "Yew don't reckon as Eddie's the best acrobat in ther hull world?"

Fordyce shrugged his shoulders and affected a drawl.

"Really, I don't," he said. "You see, I haven't had the honour of making the acquaintance of many of these travelling showmen, having always been in a respectable profession myself, and so I can't arrive at any conclusions backed by legitimate conclusions."

Bud drew himself up and regarded the immaculate Fordyce with quizzical eyes.

"Here, Mister Smart Alec!" said Truefit, his loyal and simple soul aflame at this questioning of his word. "Say that agin, slow, so's I kin get yew proper."

Fordyce obliged, word for word.

"Yew yaller dog!" snarled Bud suddenly. His hand dropped to his gun, and Fordyce heard the old familiar click of the trigger as its muzzle covered him. His hand went aloft mechanically. "Yew yaller dog!" repeated Bud. "Now yew'll jest eat them words of yourn, and yew'll admit that Eddie Polo ain't got no ekils on, through, or above ther trapeze-bars, and thet thar ain't no acrobat showin' under any big top in ther world as kin give thet lad points at his own game. And then yew'll drop on yewr knees—an' I don't care if it does bag yewr pants at ther knees—and beg ther lad's pardon fer ever doubtin' him."

Dick gave a short laugh—a laugh that was echoed from behind the cowboy. Eddie put out his hand and seized the gun, slowly pointing its muzzle into the air, while Bud wondered what was going to happen.

"You old cuckoo!" said the lad heartily. "Why, can't you see that Mr. Fordyce is pulling your leg—taking a rise out of you? You old pagan! I believe that he thinks as much of me as you do, and admires what little stunts I'm able to do no end. Anyhow, he's often said so. You are a gink to rise to a bait like that."

Bud's brows knitted together, and he regarded the laughing Easterner with questions in his eyes.

"Say, stranger," he emitted at last, "is thet so?"

"It is, sure," said Dick.

Bud dropped the gun and thrust out his hand, and he took full payment for the joke out of the handgrip that made Dick Fordyce writhe and yell under its pressure.

"I'm right glad ter know it, and I 'pologise fer pullin' a gun on an unarmed man!" said the cowboy.

"Our friends, the masked acrobats over there, seem to be very interested in our

little exhibition, Truefit," said Dick, nodding. "They halted on the other sidewalk when you covered me, and, really, if it's only to avoid disappointing them, I think you ought to shoot me out of hand."

"No, yew don't stretch my leg any more, Mister Dick," said the rugged man, with a grin. "I couldn't sit squar' in ther saddle if yew did."

"I want to have a chat with those chaps," said Eddie. "Let's go over."

The two men, still masked, and their manager, the red-faced individual, stood waiting till Eddie and his companions reached them.

"Say, brothers!" said Eddie genially. "I've been watching a bit of your show this afternoon, and, being in the acrobatic line myself, I'd like to say that your stunts and tricks were quite good. Now, look here, do you want a regular job or do you prefer to work the sidewalk business? If you're genuine artistes, you'll recognise that there's lots to be said in favour of taking the former when there's a chance, and I believe I can get you the chance. If you're just out doing this for a holiday—well, there's nothing more to be said about it."

One of the masked men opened his mouth to speak, and then suddenly seemed to change his mind. He nudged his companion, and both acrobats looked towards the red-faced one to speak for them.

"Waal, young sir," said this man, in the approved mendicant tone, "these young chaps 'as come to me an' wants to run over a few of the backspots of this free and enlightened kentry of ourn jest as they pleases. I'm their manager, publicity agent, impresario, secretary and treasurer, and, as they're under a vow never to speak a word to anybody except in the way of their work—you heard me doin' the chin-waggin' jest now—they can't explain to you here and now. But, maybe, some day they will—and if it so happens as you've got a job to offer 'em that includes a salary for me as well, maybe we'll consider it when made in the proper form. Do you own a show, by any chance?"

"No, not yet," said Eddie. "If I did I should do my own acrobatic stunts. But I've got a friend who does own one, and he's shy a really good acrobat. He's Busto, running the big top in the square a few streets away, and if you'd go and see him, and tell him Eddie Polo sent you, he'd be willing, I dare say, to give you a try out, and engage you if he thought you suitable. I'm deputising for him at present; but I've other work to do, and will soon have to leave him."

"Thank you kindly, young sir!" said the red-faced man. "And it may be as we shall act on yer advice. But, before takin' any definite steps, we'd like to see the big top and it's fittin's. They might not be what we want."

"Well, why not drop in to see the show to-night as ordinary visitors, and see the kind of thing Busto wants?" asked Eddie. "Here, I'll give you a note to the pay-box, so that it'll cost you nothing."

The upshot of the conversation was that the three should present the note to the pay-box and receive free seats, from which they should see Eddie do his performance. He omitted to tell them the form it would take, simply because he didn't think of it, and finally he sent them away with a promise to see Busto the next morning.

"Thar's somethin' about one o' them chaps as makes me think I've run across 'im somewheres, Eddie," said Truefit. "Ther tall, dark one, I means."

"The same thing with me, Polo," said Dick. "But, in my case, it's the thick-set chap that seems familiar. If they'd only spoken we might have recognised a voice."

"I'm sure I've run across both, so I'm worse than you," smiled Eddie. "But if they desire to preserve their incognito—well, it isn't for us to try and penetrate it. Maybe we'll see their faces early enough. I dare say they've been with some good show."

"It'll have to have bin a good 'un if they're a-goin' ter satisfy Busto!" returned Bud. "Yew've spoiled him fer any ornery acrobatics, Eddie. Yew've bin so far above ther ornery run o' tumblers that he ain't got patience with them chaps whose tricks are learned outer books, instead o' worked out in their own heads. He'll—"

"Oh, shut up, you old scyphant!" said Eddie. "It's dinner-time, and I'm hungry. Come along!"

Under the Big Top!

ONCE again Busto's Great Travelling Circus and Menagerie was full to the capacity of its seating and standing accommodation. The familiar smell of the sawdust and tan brought back the old times to Eddie Polo as, immediately under the eye of one of the Clair's concealed cinema-cameras, he sat in his seat as an ordinary fee-paying spectator. He watched the antics of Ginger, the clown, and applauded the funny bits as heartily as anybody else. He smiled when Esta kissed her hand in his direction, and grinned at the terrors of the man who had volunteered to act as target for Red Clout's skillfully-thrown knives and Bud Truefit's cowboy's revolvers. And then, when the major portion of the performance had been gone through, there fell a deep silence on the assembly as Busto, in his ringmaster's out-

"Suppose you cut ther cackle an' come to the hosses, guv'nor!" said a voice suddenly.

It was Eddie Polo, who adopting the rough tones of the typical Westerner, and looking more like a tramp than an acrobat in the most ragged suit he had been able to beg, borrow, or steal, had suddenly butted in. Busto turned and regarded him with a look that he fondly hoped expressed unlimited scorn.

"My young friend," said the showman, "I'll take your advice—I'll cut the cackle and get down to bedrock. Ladies and gentlemen, so that you sha'n't be deprived of your show, and having heard that there are many acrobats in this world, I now offer a prize of a hundred dollars and a chance of a permanent engagement to any young feller who can come forward and give you an entertainment as good as any



Ginger took two strides across the tent, flung out an arm, and snatched the mask from the stranger's face. "Rogeriguo—you! What are you doing here? Haven't you had enough hidings—haven't you made enough trouble?" cried Ginger in surprise. (See page 8.)

fit, advanced into the centre of the ampitheatre and held up his hand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the showman, and there was the veriest ghost of a smile playing about his eyes as he spoke. "I am sorry to have to disappoint you, but I've just received word that my acrobat has been called away to attend the wedding of his deceased wife's sister, and that he can't catch any train back in time to do the performance to-night. I may say, ladies and gentlemen, that my trapeze artiste is the best ever. Busto always gives his patrons the best of everything! But to-night that's got to be cut out. These beautiful trapezes you see hanging from the roof will receive safely no willow form flashing through the air like a long drink flashes down a dusty throat! To-night there will be no breath-stealing thrills that make you wonder if the performer is going to break his neck or bore a hole clean through the centre of the world; to-night, ladies and gentlemen, most as it goes to my heart to say it, you're going to be deprived of the greatest treat ever! I think you've had your money's worth already, but, just to show that this ain't no fake—ahem!—I mean, isn't a piece of bunco-steering—I beg your pardon, but I've lived in the West so long that I've forgotten all my polish, and I can't—"

you're likely to get in a travelling show! One hundred dollars for half an hour's work on the trapeze! Who wants to earn it?"

"I do!" said Eddie Polo, rising in his seat.

"I do!" said a tall, dark, thin masked stranger, rising also in his seat.

"I do!" said a short, thick-set man, also masked, and also rising in his seat.

Busto pretended to regard them with frightened eyes. Eddie Polo he could account for. But who were the other two? It looked as if there were going to be complications.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the showman, rising to the occasion nobly, "the earth is fuller of acrobats than I thought. Indeed, the half was never told me. Three of 'em—all eager to earn a cool hundred dollars—all saying they're acrobats and trapeze artistes! Well, ladies and gentlemen, it was never said that Busto wasn't as good as his word. Here's three gentlemen, all unknown to me, and, I hope, to you also, that want to earn that hundred. My friends, you shall compete for the prize. Mr. Wiggles, will you take these gentlemen to the dressing-tent, and provide them with attire suitable for the profession they desire to engage? And will you also please telephone the undertaker to bring

down three coffins at once, and ask the coroner of the township if he'll oblige me by getting ready to hold the necessary inquest?"

The crowd rose at the gruesome joke, and, amid the laughter, Ginger Wiggles led the three volunteers through the arch underneath the big band-wagon, and into the trapeze artistes' dressing-tent. He said never a word as he drew from a trunk three clean suits of tights and trunks and singlets, and handed one to each of the volunteers. He stood aside as they commenced to undress, and, for all the white powder and red paint of his face, he looked exceedingly grave as he scrutinised their every movement. Being in the plot, of course, he paid little attention to Eddie Polo. But he watched the others carefully, puzzled at some undercurrent he sensed rather than understood.

Then, very suddenly he took two quick strides across the ground, and seized the arm of the tall, dark man. The other tried to snatch it away with a little cry; but Ginger had confirmed his suspicions. He had seen that arm, and that strange crescent scar before, and with a swift jerk he wrenched away the mask—and disclosed the features of Garcia del Rogeriguo, Eddie Polo's bitterest enemy!

Eddie gave a start, and then grinned. He reached out in his turn, and ripped the mask from the features of the other man. And again he disclosed the face of an enemy—the face of Tim Bobbin, the one-time star acrobat of the Eclair Film Producing Company!

Three of Them.

DEL ROGERIGUO was the first to break the silence of surprise.

"Vel," he demanded suddenly, "vot do you do about eet?"

Ginger Wiggles turned back the cuffs of his clown's garb.

"Give you a darned good 'idin'," he said, "and then chuck you out of the circus and boot you out of the town!"

"Mebbe," put in Tim Bobbin; "an' what am I a-goin' ter be at while yew're 'andlin' me pal?"

"Trying to prevent my breaking your neck, that's all," said Eddie Polo quietly. "But look here, there's no need for any trouble whatever. Give me your word, both of you, that you'll try no tricks in the ring to-night, and afterwards I may have a proposition to make to both of you. You, Del Rogeriguo, want to get back into Busto's Circus, and you, Bobbin, want to get back on the films. Well, I suppose, in a way, I was responsible for you both losing your jobs; play square with me to-night, and I'll put you into fresh jobs to-morrow. Is it a go?"

"It's a go," said both of Eddie's rivals in a breath.

"Right-ho! Get your masks on again, then," said Eddie. "If the razorbacks of this show see you, Greaser, they'll lynch you, not tar and feather you this time. And Morrison is gunning for you, Bobbin, so it's as well you shouldn't be recognised. That's better. Now get into the rest of your togs, and we'll treat these native sons to the acrobatic treat of their lives. I watched your performance this afternoon. I'm going to show you what a circus trapeze artist should know if he's worth a rap of the fingers, and if you break your necks trying to follow my lead—well, don't blame me, that's all."

A perfect storm of applause greeted the three little figures in the all-revealing garb,

though Ginger Wiggles was mildly sarcastic at their expense. Busto and Morrison, standing in the ring together, and watching the antics of the jugglers who were the preceding turn, and had kept the audience amused during the wait for the acrobats, suddenly stared in surprise, and took a step forward; but Eddie frowned at them, and then took his place meekly by the side of the others.

"Well, you've got the clothes on," said Busto, so that all could hear throughout the big top. "Let's see if you know the work that goes with them."

"Right!" Eddie took a short run and threw a somersault as he caught the lower trapeze. A swing, and he was hurtling through the air like an arrow to the next higher, and thus up into the ventilator at the top of the roof. And close behind him was Del Rogeriguo, performing the same stunts; and at his heels was Bobbin showing that he, too, was an artiste of no mean order. The audience thrilled and craned their necks as they looked aloft, waiting to see what should be the next item, and they applauded and cheered all three performers impartially as they went through the preliminary tricks of the trapeze artistes' repertoire in quick succession.

Time and again they went through this performance, and then, with a wink to Busto, Eddie Polo started once more aloft. And as he gained the third trapeze, Esta the Excellent Equestrienne, rode in upon her horse, Nebo, a coal-black steed who showed up the white fluffiness of her skirts to the best advantage. She cantered round the ring, gravely kissing her hands, and attracted to herself no notice whatsoever, save from the small boys who inevitably worship such performers. The remainder were too intent upon watching the three flying forms aloft to heed her much; but, for all that, she was a preordained part of the show. She symbolised an idea which had come to Eddie, born of his previous feats under the big top and his experiences with Stella in the "Western Union Hero" film.

Suddenly as she cantered round and stood gracefully on the horse's bare back, Eddie swung himself on his trapeze. Then he dived with a suddenness that made every spectator hold his or her breath, straight down towards the ground. Esta just tapped the black's back with her foot, and the well-trained animal broke into a jog-trot, making the circle of the big ring once more. And as Eddie approached the earth the black horse approached the spot where, should nothing intervene, the lad must strike it. And then, swifter than anybody could grasp, the thing happened. The audience suddenly saw Esta standing on the tan, with Eddie Polo standing and bowing on the horse's broad back, as the unconcerned Nebo continued to canter round the ring. It looked—men would have sworn to it—that Nebo had casually trotted into the picture as the man descended, and that Eddie had flung Esta from her perch and taken it himself. Really the girl had stepped downwards lightly half a second before Eddie, turning a grand somersault, had arrived and dropped on his feet on the horse's back—in fact, the man and the girl had never touched each other.

Eddie bowed to the storm of cheering, nodded in friendly fashion to the ringmaster and Morrison, and then stood aside.

"The next competitor will attempt the same feat!" cried Busto.

The next competitor seated himself resolutely on the crossbar of his trapeze, and refused to attempt anything of the sort.

"Eet ees not ze zing I would care to do, Meestaire Busto," he said, forgetting in the excitement of the moment that he was not supposed to speak. Busto recognised the voice on the instant, and started.

"What!" he said. "Here, who—"

"Steady, boss," warned Eddie. "I've got him taped in case of monkey-tricks. Don't let on that you've recognised him; call on the other johnnie for a try."

"Then the third man will have a shot!" cried Busto. "Come, sir, the lady and the horse are waiting!"

Bobbin followed Del Rogeriguo's lead. "Nothin' doin'!" he announced. "How's this, though?"

He suddenly shot off his perch, caught Del Rogeriguo round the waist, and pulled him from his own trapeze, and then shot like a stone earthwards, catching at the bar of the lowest swinging trapeze as he fell, and pulling up with a jerk that jarred every muscle in his body. The audience got the thrill all right, and they cheered him every bit as much as they had cheered Eddie.

"Not bad," said Busto to Eddie. "Looks spectacular, too. Well, Eddie, what about it?"

"Wait," said Eddie: "I'll show you."

Like a cat he went aloft, and he whirled like a shooting star through space, turning somersaults the whole time, till he was in the roof.

By this time both Del Rogeriguo and Bobbin were aloft again, though they had no idea what the lad intended to present this time. They soon knew. For the second time the Mexican was dragged from his perch and taken through the air, but this time Eddie only had hold with one hand, and was turning somersaults in the most vivid fashion—somersaults that brought him in due course to where Bobbin sat with a sarcastic sneer because Eddie was copying him. But the sneer died as the whirling lad grabbed him by the belt with the other free hand, and the three dropped earthwards.

(Some thrilling incidents in next week's instalment.)

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THE TRAGEDY AT GREYFRIARS!

(Continued from page 5.)

"Good-bye, old George; and—and he good to mother—better than I've been! I've caused her worry enough. You must make it up!"

Bulstrode nodded, sobs choking his voice. The white lips did not move again. The light was fading from the face of Herbert Bulstrode.

The news had been expected in the school, but it came as a terrible shock, nevertheless. THE POPULAR.—No. 106.

The sympathy of all for Bulstrode was very keen.

That the captain of the Remove was fearfully cut up was easy to be seen.

Those who saw him stagger away from the sick-room, after the final scene, noted the haggard face, the sunken eyes, the terrible grief in every feature, and their hearts ached for the fellow who had once been called the bully of the Remove.

"Poor old chap!" Harry Wharton said. "I wish there was something a fellow could do—something he could say; but there's nothing."

"Nothing!" said Bob Cherry hopelessly. "Poor old Bulstrode!"

It was known that Bulstrode was to leave Greyfriars for a time, with his people. After what had happened, his life could not go on as before without a break.

When the time came for departure he

shook hands with Harry Wharton & Co., his face white and set, but composed.

"I'm going," he said. "I shall come back. I don't know when. And I want you to become captain of the Remove Wharton, while I'm gone, at any rate. It was your old place, and you ought to have it. I think the fellows will respect my wishes, as far as that goes; but if not there can be a new election. And now, good-bye, and thank you all for your kindness to me!"

"Good-bye, Bulstrode, old fellow—and buck up!"

And so Bulstrode went! The familiar face was missing from the whole school, but Bulstrode was to return.

THE END.

(There will be another splendid school story of Harry Wharton & Co. in next week's issue.)

ROLLING IN MONEY!

A Splendid Long Complete School Story of the Chums of Rookwood and Tubby Muffin, the fat Junior of the Fourth.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Astounding News!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

"JIMMY!"
Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, came into the junior Common-room, with a letter in his hand. There was an excited expression upon Tubby Muffin's podgy face as he called out to the captain of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver was talking football with Lovell and Raby and Newcome near the fire, and he turned a very deaf ear.

He could guess what Tubby Muffin wanted, without being told. Tubby was the best customer at the school shop, and high prices for tuck worried Tubby very considerably. He had the largest appetite at Rookwood, but one of the smallest allowances—and a large appetite and a small allowance did not "hit it off" together.

Hence Tubby had developed into a deadly borrower, and as Jimmy Silver was one of the best-natured fellows in the Fourth, Jimmy was a frequent victim.

Fellows who were better provided with money than Jimmy did not make Tubby half so many loans. Mornington, who rolled in money, would give him a cuff instead of a loan. Tubby would not have minded if he had received a loan along with the cuff, but the cuff by itself was no use to him. Townsend and Topham and Peele, and the other nuts, had plenty of "tin" to expend on secret cigarettes, but none whatever for Tubby.

But Jimmy was growing fed up. Lovell and Raby and Newcome had been fed up for some time. Tubby never by any chance repaid a loan—though he was always going to, when something turned up. Something never did turn up.

So Jimmy Silver continued to discuss the offside rule with his chums, and Tubby Muffin shouted unheeded:

"Jimmy—Jimmy—Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy did not turn his head.

"Where's that silly ass Silver?" exclaimed Tubby, looking round the Common-room. "I thought the silly fathead was here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that, you cheeky oyster?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, looking round at last. "Oh, I didn't see you, old chap!" said Tubby affably. "I was just asking where my old pal Jimmy was—"

"I'll old pal you!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Cut off! You had half my allowance last week, and this week I want it myself. Nothing doing!"

"I'm going to settle that, Jimmy."

"Has something turned up?" asked Jimmy sarcastically.

"Yes!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You're going to settle up a loan?" yelled Lovell. "Draw it mild, Tubby! Let's see the tin!"

"I haven't got it yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An' you never will have, you spongia' tub!" said Townsend. "You owe me two bob from last term!"

"And me half-a-crown!" said Topham.

"The fat bounder owes me nearly a quid," growled Lovell, "and all gone in grub! I'm done with him, for one!"

"I'm not after your rotten bobs, Lovell!" said Tubby Muffin disdainfully. "I want Jimmy Silver to read this letter for me, and give me his advice. It's an awfully surprising letter."

"Oh," said Jimmy Silver, quite taken aback, "I'll do that! But, really, Tubby, you must go easy, and leave a chap some of his tin for himself, you know."

"I'm going to settle up shortly all round," said the fat Classical. "You just read that letter, Jimmy. It's a big surprise. I always knew my Uncle Joshua was rich—I've told you chaps lots of times—"

"About a hundred times," said Rawson. "Begorra, it's nearly a million, I should say!" remarked Flynn.

"Has Uncle Josh died and left you a fortune?" queried Mornington, in tones of great sarcasm.

"Well, it looks like it," said Tubby. "That's what the letter means, if it means anything. It quite knocked me over."

"By gad!"

"You want me to read this?" asked Jimmy, as Tubby shoved the letter into his hand.

"Yes; and tell me what you think of it. Read it out. I don't mind the fellows hearing!" said Tubby.

"Right-ho!"

The Classical juniors gathered round with some interest.

If Tubby had been left a fortune, it was quite an interesting matter, for there was hardly a fellow in the Fourth to whom Tubby Muffin did not owe some amount, larger or smaller. He was supposed even to have extracted a loan from Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, the meanest fellow at Rookwood, such was his skill.

The impecunious Tubby as the possessor of a handsome fortune would be quite a remarkable Tubby—more especially as nobody had ever believed in his wealthy Uncle Joshua. Uncle Joshua certainly existed, for he had visited Tubby at Rookwood; but he did not look like a millionaire, and none of his fabled "quids" ever came Tubby's way.

"Go it, Jimmy!" said Van Ryn. Van Ryn, as Tubby's study-mate, was one of his chief victims, and he had quite a large financial interest in Tubby's inheritance—if it was a fact.

Jimmy, with growing surprise in his face, read out the letter. It was typed from beginning to end, and certainly looked very businesslike. It ran:

"Law Buildings,

"Chancery Lane, London.

"Sir,—We beg to inform you that our valued client, Mr. Joshua Muffin, died suddenly on Saturday morning. By his will you are left sole heir to his estate, amounting so far as can be at present ascertained, to approximately £600,000. The estate will remain in the hands of the appointed trustees until you reach the age of twenty-one; but, meanwhile, an allowance of £500 per annum will be paid to you, under our late client's instructions. Your presence will be required at a later stage in the proceedings, on what date we shall duly inform you.—Meanwhile, we remain, yours to command,

"H. HOOK,

"For Messrs. Hook & Crook,

"Solicitors.

"Master Reginald Muffin,

"Rookwood School."

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Very Popular!

"GREAT pip!"

"Six hundred thousand quids!"

"Five hundred a year!"

"Tubby! My hat!"

It was a regular chorus in the Common-room. Every eye was fixed upon Tubby Muffin. The startling news almost took away the breath of the Rookwood juniors. Tubby, the most impecunious fellow in the

school, the happy possessor of six hundred thousand pounds!

It was staggering!

The prices of tuck would not matter much to Tubby now. If prices soared up to the extent of the wildest dreams of the food-producers, it would not matter to Tubby Muffin.

And only that day Tubby had been seeking, in vain, to raise a loan of twopence or threepence from fellows he had tired out with his importunities.

Not even twopence had been forthcoming for Tubby, and he had been compelled to go without anything to eat between meals—an awful experience for Tubby.

He was not likely to ask in vain for twopences now.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "I congratulate you, Tubby!"

"Congratulations, old chap!" said Townsend, clapping Tubby on the shoulder in the heartiest possible manner.

It was wonderful to see the change in Towny. The good Towny was already thinking of initiating Tubby into the mysteries of nap and banker and bridge. Tubby would be able to afford it out of five hundred a year.

"Jolly glad to hear it, Tubby!" said Topham, with equal heartiness. "I remember seeing your old uncle, old Uncle Joshua, and I thought he looked like a—millionaire—"

"Why, you said he looked like an old-clothes man!" said Flynn, with a stare. "Sure I heard ye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Topham turned very red. He regretted that unfortunate remark now. Had he only known that Uncle Joshua Muffin would "cut up" like this he certainly wouldn't have said he looked like anything but a prince, or a duke, at the very least.

"By gad, you'll be able to settle up all round now, Tubby!" said Peele. "Don't worry about that trifle you owe me, though. That can wait."

"I say, Jimmy Silver, that means that I'm going to be rich, doesn't it?" asked Tubby anxiously.

Jimmy nodded, and smiled.

"It seems so, Tubby. According to that, you're going to be jolly rich!"

"That will be ripping, won't it?"

"It will, rather! You'll be the most popular fellow at Rookwood!" chuckled Lovell. "You're a nice chap, Tubby!"

"Eh?"

"I always loved you like a brother, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we mustn't call you Tubby any longer, either. Now I come to think of it, you are really a slim, elegant chap!"

"Graceful!" grinned Raby.

"Beau Brummell, only more so!" chuckled Newcome.

"I say, don't you make fun of me, you know!" said Tubby. "I'm not going to swank because I'm rich, like Mornington!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're richer than Mornington now!" grinned Rawson. "We shall have two of 'em."

Mornington scowled, and stalked out of the Common-room. Morny's wealth had been even more oppressive in the Fourth than Tubby's impecuniousness. Certainly, Tubby couldn't be very well be more proud of his cash than Mornington had been. But, to do Tubby justice, he showed no signs of "swank" so far.

"I say, don't you fellows think this will make any difference to me," said Tubby. "I'm going to settle up all round, as soon as I get my money."

"Hear, hear!"

"And anybody who's ever lent me any

money can come to me for a loan whenever he likes," said Tubby liberally.

"Bravo!"
"I'm going to subscribe to the sports club, and stand a new set of goal-posts and nets to the Form!"

"Hurrah!"
"And as soon as I get the first money from the lawyers there's going to be a tipping feed for all the Fourth!"

"Good old Tubby!"
There was no doubt that Tubby Muffin was going to be popular.

Jimmy Silver & Co., and all the decent fellows, had to admit that Tubby wasn't spoiled, so far, by great wealth. He offered a very striking and favourable contrast to Mornington. And fellows who were not quite so decent were certain to "make up" to Tubby for his money.

Five hundred a year was a stunning allowance for a junior schoolboy. Certainly the Head would probably have something to say about that; but, at all events, it was quite assured that Tubby would always have plenty of money—more than even Mornington.

Towny & Co. were quite affectionate to him already.

Mornington had stalked off; but his dear pals did not follow him. They saw no great necessity for flattering and conciliating Mornington now.

Tubby reigned in his stead.
Tubby was richer, and Tubby was a much easier fellow to get on with, much easier to make something out of. Towny & Co. were quite prepared to instal the fat Classical as leader of their aristocratic and elegant set, if it came to that.

After all, they considered, Tubby wasn't a bad chap, and in their select company he would tone down a little. Come to think of it, Tubby really was quite a little gentleman, in his way. Six hundred thousand pounds made a marvellous difference in Towny & Co.'s estimation of Tubby.

Leggett, of the Fourth came into the Common-room, and he glanced at the excited group inquiringly.

"Anything on?" he asked.
"Tubby's come into a fortune," said Rawson.

"My hat! Congratulations, Tubby, old chap!" said Leggett, with a rather peculiar look at the fat Classical.

"You can buzz off, Leggett," said Townsend, before Tubby could reply. "We don't want any Modern rotters here."

"Well, Muffin owes me six bob," said Leggett surlily. "If he's come into a fortune, he can square."

"He hasn't got the money yet, fathead! Might be weeks. It's only the lawyer's letter telling him about it," said Topham. "Tubby won't be hard up, though. Tubby's got friends."

"I dare say he has—now!" sneered Leggett. "If you mean to insinuate—" began Topham hotly.

"Oh, I haven't come here to rag," said Leggett. "I want my six bob, Tubby."

Tubby Muffin sniffed.
"I dare say I can borrow six bob, and settle with you, Leggett," he said. "Jimmy Silver, can you lend me six bob?"

"Nothing doing," said Jimmy. "Let Leggett wait."

"I say, Lovell—"
"Can't be done!"

"Never mind about those chaps, Tubby," said Townsend. "I'll lend you six bob with pleasure—half-a-quad, if you like."

"I say, you're awfully good," said Tubby.
"Not at all, old chap. I suppose a fellow can always borrow half-a-quad of a pal," said Townsend.

"Fals already!" murmured Lovell, with a grin.

Tubby Muffin's podgy fingers closed greedily on the ten-shilling note Townsend handed him. He seemed scarcely able to believe in his good luck.

"You'll have lots of those soon, Tubby," remarked Towny indulgently.

"Ye-es, of course. Come along to the tuck-shop."

"You haven't settled with me," said Leggett grimly.

"Oh, rats! Change that, then," said Tubby loftily.

Leggett took the ten-shilling note, and handed Tubby four shillings change. Then he walked away grinning, evidently in a very satisfied frame of mind. Townsend slipped his arm through Tubby's.

"Come up to my study to tea, old chap."

"Oh, do!" said Topham hospitably.
"I don't mind if I do, as you're so pres-

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ing," said Tubby cheerily. Only the previous day Tubby Muffin had been kicked out of Towny's study for presenting himself there at tea-time. But bygones were bygones.

Tubby Muffin walked out of the Common-room with his arms linked in Townsend's and Topham's, on either side of him. Jimmy Silver grinned. Tubby's inheritance was working wonders already, and there seemed to be no doubt that the Falstaff of Rookwood was booked for a very good time.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Quite Nutty!

RAWSON growled.
Rawson, the scholarship junior, had the honour of sharing a study with Townsend and Topham, the youths who were of the Nuts nutty. They did not pull very well together. Towny and Topy regarded Rawson with lofty disdain, because he didn't pay any fees, because his books were bought out of his scholarship allowance, because he was the son of a working carpenter, because he didn't wear expensive neckties, and didn't care twopence about neckties, anyway, and for many reasons of the same sort. Rawson reciprocated their feelings with a still more hearty contempt, because Towny and Topy were dandies, and slackers, and smokers, and dabblers in Turf matters, and fumbling footballers, anduffers generally, with a slight tincture of roguery.

With such feelings towards one another, naturally they did not pull well together in the study. But, as a rule, there was peace. Rawson was a burly fellow, and could knock Towny and Topy's heads together if he liked, Towny and Topy being quite helpless in the matter.

Rawson had laid down as a rule, that there wasn't to be any smoking in the study when he was there. He didn't like it. Moreover, if a master or prefect had found it going on, Rawson might have been punished along with the real delinquents, which, naturally, Rawson considered "not good enough."

Towny and Topy regarded that rule as a piece of sheer cheek on Rawson's part. But Rawson did not mind how they regarded it, so long as they did not transgress it. Whenever they did, Rawson acted promptly and drastically.

Hence Rawson's ominous growl as he came into his study this evening. For the room was quite hazy with smoke. Towny and Topy and Peele were there, with Tubby Muffin. All four of them had cigarettes going, and there were cards on the table. Tea was over, and Townsend & Co. were indulging in one of their little games with Tubby Muffin.

They looked up irritably as Rawson came in.

"Look here, you can't do your prep here," said Townsend. "Go into the end study for once, Rawson."

Rawson growled again.
He was annoyed and he was angry. Tubby Muffin was a fat little rascal, quite unscrupulous as a borrower, and much given to spoofing in one way and another. But he had never hitherto shown signs of joining the nutty brigade.

His pocket-money went in more tuck than was good for him, but never in cigarettes or nap or banker or on "gee-gees." His terrific inheritance, announced in the lawyer's letter, had made a great difference. He had been taken under the wing of the Nuts, and he was learning his new lesson—and he seemed an apt pupil.

Tubby, not yet being in possession of his fortune, was playing for I O U's. The previous day Townsend would have chortled at the idea of accepting an I O U from Tubby. But a fellow with five hundred a year pocket-money coming along shortly was evidently to be relied upon. Tubby would be able to settle up a few quids.

Indeed, Townsend & Co. had tacitly arranged that by the time Tubby's money came along he should have quite a large sum to settle in the way of I O U's.

Tubby gave Rawson a fat grin. The young rascal did not seem to be in the least ashamed of himself. He was enjoying it, really. His admission to the noble circle of the Nuts flattered him immensely.

"No, don't go, Rawson!" he said. "You come in and take a hand. Have a fag, old chap?"

Rawson snorted.
"We don't want Rawson!" muttered Topham.

"Well, he can take a hand if he likes,"

said Townsend, who did not quite like Rawson's look. "I don't mind bein' pally."

"Yes, come on, Rawson!" said Peele anxiously.

"You rotters!" roared Rawson.

"Oh, shut up!"

"What would you look like if a prefect came down on you?"

"Are you going to bring one here, you rotten sneak?" sneered Townsend.

Rawson clenched his big fists.

"I'm not, and you know I'm not! But I'm going to put a stop to this kind of thing in my study."

"Mind your own bizney!" snapped Topham.

"Muffin, you fat fool—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Tubby.

"How much have you lost?" asked Rawson.

"Only a couple of pounds," said Muffin quite cheerfully. "I don't mind."

"A couple of pounds!" ejaculated Rawson, agast.

"That's nothin' to Tubby!" said Peele.

"He's not a sneakin', poverty-stricken scholarship bounder!"

"Well, if you're going to welsh Tubby, you're not going to welsh him in my study!" growled Rawson.

"You rotten, insinuat' cad! We're not welshin' him!" exclaimed Townsend indignantly. "Do you think it isn't a fair game?"

"Yes, ring off, Rawson!" said Tubby Muffin. "I always was a bit of a sport, you know, and this is a jolly good game. I'm learning it!"

"Hands off, you cad!" roared Townsend.

Rawson did not trouble to say anything further. He strode to the table, grasped at the cards, and pitched them into the grate. A couple of packets of cigarettes followed.

Then he took Peele by the shoulders, jerked him out of his chair, and propelled him to the doorway.

"You're not wanted here," he said.
Peele stood in the passage quivering with rage.

Townsend and Topham jumped up, their eyes blazing. Tubby Muffin sat blinking in his chair.

"You interferin' bound!" yelled Topham. "Collar him!" shrieked Peele, from the doorway.

Towny & Co. weren't fighting-men, and they disliked the idea of a scrap with the burly Rawson. But they were three to one, and they were enraged to boiling-point.

They took their courage in both hands, so to speak, and closed in on the scholarship junior with clenched fists.

Rawson put up his hands at once.

"Come on!" he said grimly.

"Oh, my hat!" mumbled Tubby Muffin. His career as a "sport" was opening rather stormily.

"Down the cad!" panted Townsend.

Rawson hit out—hard. The three Nuts dodged him, and Rawson followed them up, still hitting. Peele slipped behind him and caught him round the neck while he was engaged with Townsend and Topham, and Rawson reeled back under his weight. Townsend and Topham hurled themselves on him at once, and Rawson went to the floor with the three juniors piling on him.

"Now we'll give the interferin' cad a lesson!" panted Topham.

"Hallo! Fair play, you chaps!" said a voice in the doorway, as Jimmy Silver looked in.

"Get out, hang you!"
Jimmy Silver did not get out—he got in. He caught Peele and Topham by their collars, and dragged them off Rawson.

Rawson pitched Townsend off into the fender, and staggered to his feet.

"Now come on!" he roared. "Two at a time, if you like."

But Townsend & Co. did not want any more.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tubby Goes the Pace!

JIMMY SILVER smiled serenely at the furious Nuts.

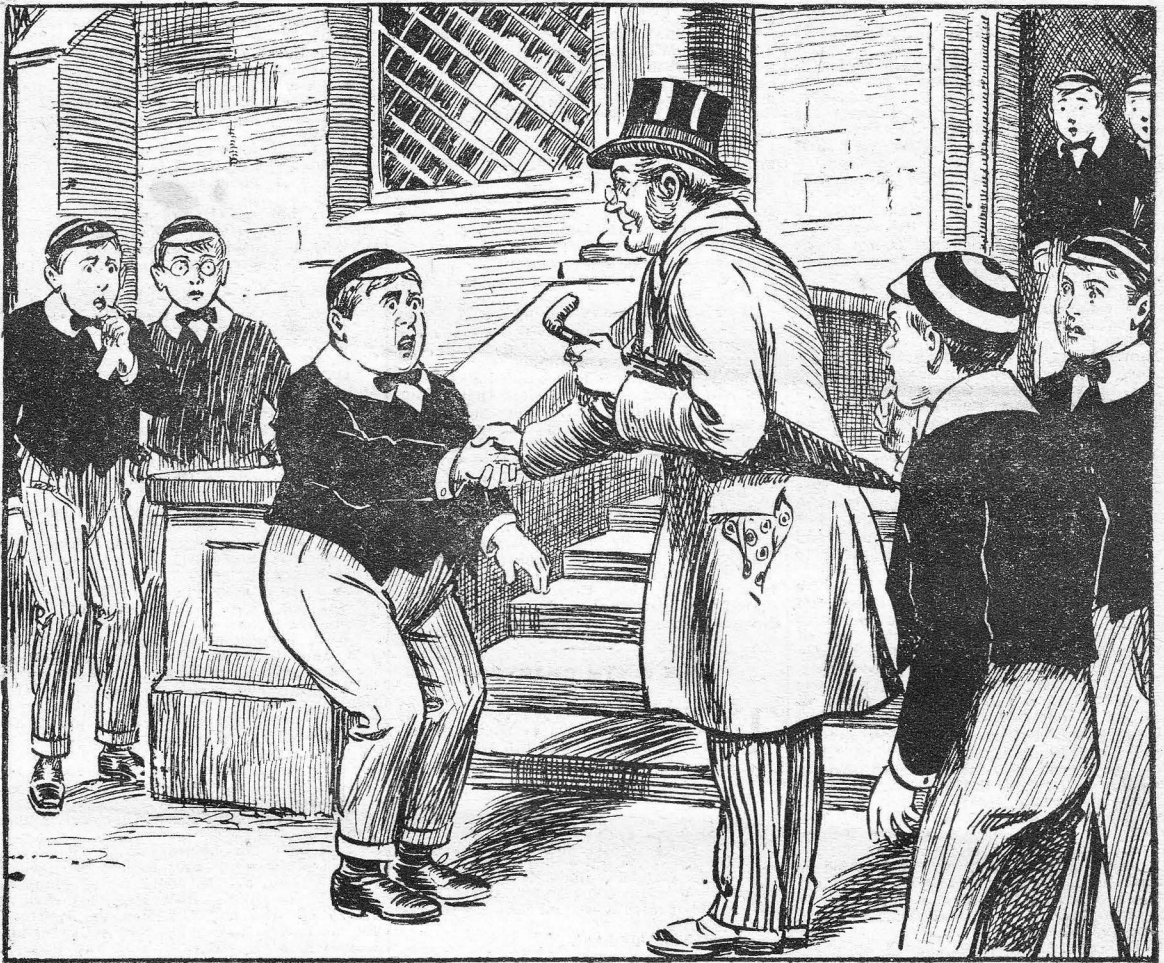
"What's the merry trouble?" he asked. "I'll hold anybody's jacket. Don't all speak at once!"

"I'm not goin' to fight the cad!" mumbled Townsend, crawling out of the fender. "I decline to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Not unless you're three to one!" snorted Rawson. "You can see what's on, Jimmy."

He pointed to the scattered cards in the grate. "They're teaching that fat fool to gamble, and it's not going on in my study!" Jimmy Silver's face became very grim.

He picked up what were left of the cards,



UNCLE JOSHUA TURNS UP!

"How are you, my boy?" asked Uncle Joshua. "Glad to see me—what?" Tubby Muffin could only gasp, whilst the juniors gaped in surprise.

and tossed them into the fire. The Nuts did not make any movement to stop him.

"You rotters!" said Jimmy. "Tubby, you fat duffer, haven't you any more sense than that?"

"Oh, you let me alone!" said Tubby independently. "I suppose I can do as I like, Jimmy Silver?"

"That's where you make a little mistake," said Jimmy. "You can't!"

"Look here—"

"Come along to my study, you chaps!" said Peele. "We can't stay here with these rowdy hooligans."

"Right-ho! Come on, Tubby!" Jimmy Silver took Muffin by the collar. "Tubby's coming with me!" he remarked. "Leggo!" howled Muffin.

"Let Tubby alone, you bully!" snarled Townsend.

Jimmy Silver made a step towards Townsend, still holding Tubby with one hand.

Towny stepped out into the passage.

Rawson opened the window, and waved a newspaper to clear off the smoke. The three Nuts, in a savage mood, went down the passage, leaving Tubby Muffin in the hands of the captain of the Fourth.

"Come on, Tubby!" said Jimmy. "I—I say—"

"Kim on!"

Jimmy Silver marched the fat Classical out of the room, and down the passage to Study No. 3. He tapped at the door, and led Tubby in.

Van Ryn and Pons, the two Colonial juniors, were there, and they looked up from their prep in surprise at the sight of Jimmy Muffin wriggling in the grasp of Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Pons. "I've brought this fat idiot home," ex-

plained Jimmy. "Have you got a cricket-stump in the study?"

"Yes," grinned Van Ryn.

"Now Tubby's come into his money he's starting as a giddy blade!" said Jimmy.

"Towny & Co. are teaching him to play nap. I recommend a good dose of cricket-stump, well laid on. There's your prize idiot!"

And Jimmy Silver sat Tubby Muffin down on the carpet with a bump, and left the study.

"Yow-ow-ow!" gasped Tubby.

"You fat duffer!" said Van Ryn severely. "So you're taking up that rot, are you?"

"Why shouldn't I?" gasped Muffin. "It doesn't cost me anything. I'm only paying for I O U's, you know."

"You'll have to square the I O U's when your money comes," said Pons.

"Eh? Oh, yes; that's all right!"

"Don't you know it's wrong?" demanded Van Ryn.

"Well, a chap must be a bit of a sport, you know!" said Tubby fatuously. "The fact is, I'm rather a goey chap, you know!"

"A—what?"

"Goey!" said Tubby, scrambling to his feet. "I'm all there, you know. A bit of a knowing blade—what?"

Van Ryn and Pons looked at him, almost dazedly. The idea of the fat, podgy glutton of the Fourth setting up as a goey chap and a knowing blade, took away their breath for a moment. Then there was a roar in the study.

"You can cackle," said Tubby loftily. "You're rather slow, you chaps. I suppose you don't see much life in the Colonies!"

"Oh, ye gods!"

"I'm going to have a jolly good time so long as it lasts!"

"Well, six hundred thousand pounds will

last a long time, even at nap and banker!" grinned the South African junior. "But you had better think of it, Tubby. Don't be such a silly ass, you know!"

"Oh, rats!" retorted Tubby.

Van Ryn rose to his feet, and Tubby whipped out of the study at once. The South African junior sat down again.

"Oughtn't we to lick him for his own good, Pong?" he asked.

The Canadian laughed.

"Might try it," he said. "But I fancy it's no good. His money won't do him much good at this rate. Fat duffer!"

The Colonial chums went on with their prep.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tubby the Nut!

TUBBY MUFFIN was an object of great interest in the Fourth Form the next day. In fact, all the Lower School at Rookwood took a great interest in Tubby.

The news of the letter from Messrs. Hook & Crook had spread. It was very soon clear that Tubby the greedy cadger, and Tubby the prospective possessor of six hundred thousand pounds, were quite different personages.

Fellows who had never wasted a word of civility upon him were remarkably civil now.

Even the great Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell, was quite pally.

Six hundred thousand pounds really made a tremendous difference. As Adolphus confided to his chums, Howard and Tracy, he was certainly a fat little boulder, but now he was gilt-edged, a fellow could stand him. Howard and Tracy heartily agreed, and they

not only stood Tubby, but became quite pally with him.

Tubby Muffin basked in the sunshine of prosperity.

Jimmy Silver & Co. regarded him with considerable amusement and some compassion. They did not want any of Tubby's money; but they felt a little concerned about the duffer, who was developing all the worst traits in his character at the very first opportunity.

In twenty-four hours Tubby Muffin had become a blade of the blades!

The mysteries of nap and banker were no longer mysteries to him, and the number of I O U's he had lost to Towny, Toppo, Peele, Gower, and other fellows of the same kidney could hardly be computed.

But Tubby had some winnings, too, and as his winnings were in cash there was an unaccustomed jingle of money in Tubby's pockets.

Moreover, as he was so soon to be in possession of more money than he could possibly spend, his kind friends were quite willing to make him small loans, and even large ones.

Tubby had always been the best customer at the tuckshop, but the amount he spent there now made old Sergeant Kettle open his eyes.

The old sergeant had never been very pleased to see Tubby, who generally tried to obtain credit for an uncertain period. But Tubby had plenty of ready money now, and besides, his new friends were prepared to stand treat.

He owed Townsend & Co. more than five pounds each already, between loans and losses at banker, and he did not seem to mind at all—neither did the Nuts. Out of his whacking allowance Tubby would be able to settle up without even missing the money.

It was a little odd that Leggett of the Modern Fourth did not join the circle of admiring friends round Tubby.

Leggett was the meanest fellow in the school, and he had any amount of "soft soap" to expend upon fellows better off than himself. He would flatter and toady to fellows he never expected to get anything from, simply because they were well off. Yet he did not trouble about flattering Tubby, and did not even seek his society at all.

Towny, Toppo & Co. were certainly better fellows than Leggett, yet what they did Leggett appeared to disdain to do. It was odd enough, and it caused some remarks among the juniors.

But while Tubby Muffin showed an unexpected predilection to vicious amusements, it could not be said that his new wealth caused him to "swank" in the least. It had to be admitted that he was not purse-proud, like Mornington; which was all the more to his credit, because he had not been accustomed to wealth like Morny.

Van Ryn and Pons, after some cogitation, decided that it was their duty to make an attempt to save Tubby from the downward path as a blade and a goer; and, having come to that decision, they gave him a licking in the study, as a warning. They felt that it was the least they could do for their study-mate.

But it did not cure Tubby.

He went on his own way regardless, and the Colonial chums gave up the matter in disgust.

Jimmy Silver gave him good advice, which had just as little effect. Even Tommy Dodd of the Modern side took the trouble to "jaw" Tubby; and Tubby only sniffed with contempt, and told Tommy Dodd he was "slow."

Meanwhile, Mornington was chaffing savagely.

His dear friends were delighted at the opportunity of putting him in his place, as they called it, and they ostentatiously made much of Tubby, and let Mornington like it or lump it, which he preferred.

On the next half-holiday, when Mornington proposed a little party out, his friends were otherwise engaged; they were going out with Tubby. They offered to take him along, on the strict understanding that he was civil to Reginald.

Mornington sniffed, and declined.

He went down to football practice instead, and undoubtedly was much the better for it.

Tubby Muffin, for the first time in his career, had the pleasure of an afternoon out with the Nuts, expenses paid, and learned the great game of billiards at the Bird-in-Hand, losing a fresh crop of I O U's in the process.

He was looking rather seedy when he came in with his pals. Jimmy Silver met him in the THE POPULAR.—No. 195.

Fourth Form passage, and gave him a grim look.

"Had a good time, Tubby?" he asked. "Oh, rippin'!" said Tubby. Being now a wealthy person of consequence, Tubby had begun to drop his final "g's" in the Nutty manner. "Toppin', in fact!" You should come, Silver! I wouldn't mind seein' you through."

"You fat duffer!" said Jimmy. "By the way, have you answered that letter?"

"Eh? What letter?"

"The lawyer's letter. It's three days since you had it."

"I—I'm going to!" said Tubby hastily. "I quite forgot! No hurry!"

Jimmy gave him a very curious look.

"You shouldn't let business matters slide, Tubby," he said.

"You see, my time's full up," said Tubby loftily. "When a fellow has so many engagements—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy.

Tubby Muffin snorted, and rolled away. He was not feeling very well after that rippin' and toppin' afternoon. The quality of pastry he had consumed did not quite agree with the cigarettes. He was looking quite pasty and yellow in the study that evening, and did not join Peele & Co. in No. 3.

"Hallo! Staying in this evening?" grinned Van Ryn, when Tubby sat down to prep.

"This is an unexpected honour."

"Grooh!" was all Tubby replied.

After prep, however, he lighted a cigarette. Van Ryn and Pons stared at him for a moment, and then they seized him, and shoved the cigarette down his back. Reginald did not smoke in that study again.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

TOMMY DODD dropped into the end study the following evening. Tommy Dodd was rubbing his hands, and there was a curious expression on his face.

"Hallo! Been through it?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yow! Yes."

"Never mind. Keep smiling."

Tommy Dodd did not smile; he snorted.

"It's old Manders," he growled. "I shall scalp old Manders one of these days. Have any of you Classical duffers been larking on the Modern side?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Not guilty, my lord. What's happened?"

"Manders says somebody's been meddling with his typewriter," growled Tommy Dodd.

"He says it's been used. He put it down to me, because he wanted to cane somebody, I suppose."

"Hard cheese!" said Lovell.

"As it happens, it wasn't me," grunted Tommy Dodd. "I have used his rotten old typer once or twice, but not this time. By the way, have you fellows heard anything more about Tubby's fortune?"

The Fistical Four chuckled.

"Only Tubby's painting the town red," said Raby. "He's no end of a nut now. Towny's introduced him to his tailor, and seems to have lent him enough to settle with him. Tubby's quite a dandy."

"And a goey blade!" grinned Newcome.

"Van Ryn says he was sick in the study last night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he hasn't even got the tin yet," said Jimmy Silver. "Goodness knows what he'll be like when he does get it. He's doing it all on borrowed money at present."

"When he gets it!" said Tommy Dodd thoughtfully.

"Well, I suppose it will come along in a few weeks," said Jimmy. "There's a lot for the lawyers to go through—probate and death duties, and all that."

"He will have a bill to settle when it does come," grinned Lovell.

"Half the Fourth have got his I O U's now. I hear he's lost ten pounds to Towny at banker."

"And he's put poor old Morny's nose out of joint. Morny is quite small beer, these days."

"I suppose the money will come," remarked Tommy Dodd.

"Eh? Why shouldn't it?"

"There'd be a howl in the Fourth if it didn't," grinned Lovell. "But it's bound to come all right, as his uncle left it to him."

"I saw his uncle once," said Tommy. "He didn't look like a rich man."

"No; appearances are deceptive sometimes."

"Perhaps."

"Look here, Doddy, what are you getting

at?" asked Jimmy Silver. "You don't think there's any doubt about Tubby's fortune, do you?"

"It's queer," said the Modern junior—"queer that his people haven't been to see him about it, or haven't sent for him to come home. An inheritance of over half a million doesn't generally pass off so quietly, does it?"

"Well, yes, it is rather queer."

"I didn't see the letter," said Tommy Dodd. "I understand that it was typewritten."

"Yes; business letters mostly are," said Jimmy, with a stare. "What about it?"

"Was it written on business paper?"

"Typing paper," said Jimmy. "Ordinary paper."

"Without a business heading?"

Jimmy thought for a moment.

"The address was on it," he said. "I remember, it was typed, like the rest."

Tommy Dodd grinned.

"Do solicitors write letters on plain paper, and type the address at the top?" he asked.

"Blessed if I know. I've never had a letter from a solicitor," said Jimmy. "I suppose they usually use business paper, with the name of the firm printed at the top, when I come to think of it."

"I fancy they do."

"But Tubby had the letter right enough," said Lovell.

"Yes, and Manders has been kicking up a row because somebody has been using his typer this week," said Tommy Dodd.

The Fistical Four jumped.

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"You—you think—"

"Well, I know what a spoofer Tubby is," said Tommy Dodd. "He was so hard up he was getting desperate. Somebody has been using Manders' typer, and you say that the letter wasn't on business paper, and Tubby's people don't seem to be taking any interest in his terrific inheritance—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "I shouldn't wonder. What a merry surprise for Towny & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Tubby isn't deep enough!" gasped Raby.

"Somebody else helped him, I should say. There's a fellow on our side deep enough and mean enough, and he could get at Manders' typer if he liked. He's the only cad at Rookwood who hasn't sucked up to Tubby for his money, too, and Tubby has paid him a debt with the money he's borrowed on the strength of that letter!"

"Looks like a trick, I must say!" said Jimmy Silver.

Leggett, of course, I wondered why he wasn't buttering Tubby. He butters Smythe no end; and Smythe wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole. I—

I say, if it's proof, it ought to be stopped!"

"No business of ours!" said Lovell.

"There's no proof, anyway, and very likely it's genuine enough. But if it's spoof, what a surprise for Tubby's pals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four roared at the idea.

When they came to think of it, there did

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seem to be some little irregularities in the matter, surprising enough when such a sum as six hundred thousand pounds was involved. Tommy Dodd returned to the Modern side in a thoughtful mood. He passed Tubby Muffin and Leggett in the quad, and Tubby was speaking in a loud, complaining voice:

"Look here, Leggett, you've had enough—two bob yesterday, and three to-day—"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Leggett fiercely, as he caught sight of Tommy Dodd. Tommy came up to them with a grim look.

"So you're getting money out of Tubby, Leggett?" he said.

"He owes me a trifle," said Leggett sullenly. "Tubby can afford to settle up now."

"Do you owe Leggett anything, Tubby?"

"No, I don't!" said Tubby Muffin promptly. "I—I mean, yes, I do! It's all right, Tommy Dodd. You needn't chip in!"

Tommy Dodd walked on. He was pretty certain about the matter now, and it looked as if Leggett was making a profit out of the transaction. But there was no proof, and Tommy did not see what he could do in the matter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Very Surprising Visitor!

MORNINGTON joined Townsend & Co. after dinner on Saturday. Mornington was looking very morose. His aristocratic nose had been put very much out of joint by Tubby's great popularity with the Nuts.

To be cut out by a fellow he despised thoroughly was a bitter blow to the conceit of the dandy of the Fourth, and his determination to have nothing to do with Tubby divided him from his friends, and he was beginning to feel lonely.

"You fellows comin' out?" he asked.

"Oh, we're goin' out!" said Townsend airily. "Takin' a little run into the country. Like to come? You can come if you like."

Mornington set his teeth hard.

Hitherto he had arranged such little excursions, and the other fellows had been glad to be included in his party. Now he could "come if he liked."

"That fat rotter comin'?" he asked.

"Reginald is comin', certainly!"

"Couldn't leave Reggie out!" said Topham blandly. "Reggie's a regular sport. We get on famously with Reggie!"

Mornington sneered.

"How much does he owe you?" he asked.

"Oh, he owes us a trifle!" said Townsend, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I've lent him a quid or two, an' he owes me about twelve pounds. I've got his I O U's, too!"

"He owes me ten for banker!" said Peele.

"What does it matter? He will be able to settle up without missin' it!"

"You seem to be doin' pretty well out of that fat fool!" sneered Mornington.

"Makin' hay while the sun shines!" said Topham. "Why shouldn't we?"

"No reason, why you shouldn't, if you're willin' to toady to a fat boulder like that!" said Mornington scornfully.

"Well, we're not goin' to toady to you, anyway, Morny!" said Townsend tartly.

"Reggie's a bit better bred than you, if you come to that. Not always sneerin' at a fellow, an' talkin' as if he's the lord of creation!"

"Well, I won't come if he does!" snapped Mornington.

"Don't then!" said Townsend.

Mornington walked away, pale with anger. He left the Nuts grinning. It was easy to "draw" the overbearing Mornington, and his friends found an undiminished pleasure and amusement in "drawing" him.

The Nuts of the Fourth were waiting for Tubby on the School House steps, when the telegraph-boy from the village came up.

"Master Muffin?" he said.

"Hallo! Telegram for Tubby!" remarked Peele. "Somethin' about the money, I expect. Where's Tubby? Seen Tubby, Jimmy Silver?"

Jimmy came out at that moment, with his overcoat on over his footer rig.

"Passed him on the stairs," said Jimmy.

"Hallo, Tubby! You're wanted!"

"Comin'!" called back Tubby.

"Telegram for you, Reginald!" said Townsend, as the fat Classical came out. "Let's hear if it's good news!"

"For me?" said Tubby, looking puzzled.

"Most likely from the lawyer johnnie!" remarked Peele. "Open it, an' let's see if it's good news, Tubby!"

"But it can't be—ahem—I mean, give it to me!" said Tubby Muffin hastily.

He took the telegram, and opened it slowly.

Jimmy Silver paused on the steps, and several fellows gathered round. All the Fourth were interested in Tubby's huge inheritance.

The fat Classical looked at the telegram, and his fat jaw dropped.

The expression that came over his face was simply extraordinary.

His eyes became glued on the telegram, and his podgy face became quite pale. His fat hands shook.

The juniors exchanged significant glances. It was evidently very bad news that Tubby had received.

There was terror in his fat face. There was no mistaking his expression. The telegram, whatever it contained, had scared Tubby Muffin.

"Anything wrong, Tubby?" Jimmy asked.

"Oh dear!"

"Mistake about the money, after all?" asked Townsend, quickly and suspiciously.

"Nunno!"

"Well, it can't be so bad!" said Topham.

"Buck up, Reggie! We're ready to start when you are!"

Tubby jumped.

"I—I—I can't go out this afternoon!" he stammered.

"Somebody coming to see you?" asked Gower.

"Ye-e-es!"

"What rotten luck!" said Townsend.

"Knocks our little run on the head. But it isn't so serious as all that, Tubby. No need to look as if a bomb was goin' to drop on your napper!"

Tubby Muffin groaned dismally.

"Oh dear! I—I never thought of this!" he groaned. "I—I hadn't any idea he would come down this term!"

"Never mind, Tubby! If it's some gargoyle of an uncle, with a face like a Hun, we'll help you to stand him!" said Townsend consolingly. "When is he comin'?"

Another dismal groan from Tubby.

"He says he'll be here soon after his telegram. No time to wire him not to come or anything! Oh dear!"

"We'll meet him at the station, if you like, and put him in a good temper," said Townsend encouragingly. "What train is he comin' by?"

"He—he—he says the two o'clock!"

"Why, that's in long ago! That telegram's taken some time getting here from the village. Might be here any minute."

"Hallo! Here's somebody!" murmured Lovell, glancing towards the gates.

An old gentleman in rusty black was coming very sedately across the quadrangle. The juniors looked at him fixedly. Some of them had seen him before. He came up to the School House steps, and gave the juniors a nod and a smile, and held out his hand to the dismayed Tubby, who took it mechanically.

"Got my telegram, Reggie? I found I could run down, and I wired so that you would not be going out. How are you, my boy? Glad to see your old uncle—what?"

And Tubby mumbled, in an expiring voice:

"Ye-e-e-es, Uncle Joshua!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Fall of Tubby Muffin!

UNCLE JOSHUA! The name was repeated in a buzz by the astonished juniors.

Townsend's face was a study.

Uncle Joshua! Mr. Muffin, quite unaware of the terrific sensation his arrival caused, smiled to Tubby, and passed on into the House.

"I will see you again after I have called upon the Head, Reggie," he said benignly.

And he disappeared into the House.

Tubby Muffin stood rooted to the steps. The moment Mr. Muffin had disappeared there was a roar. Townsend grasped the fat Classical by the arm.

"What does this mean?" he hissed.

"That's your Uncle Joshua!"

"Oh dear!"

"Then he's not dead?" said Topham dazedly.

"Don't look like it, does he?" grinned Jimmy Silver.

After his talk with Tommy Dodd, Jimmy was not so surprised as the other fellows to see Tubby's Uncle Joshua still in the flesh.

"You spoofin' villain!" yelled Peele.

"I—I say—"

"What does it mean?" shrieked Townsend. "If he ain't dead, he can't have left you a fortune in his will."

"Looks as if he could leave a fortune, doesn't he?" sneered Gower. "I should think he'd buy a new hat out of it first!"

"Have you been spoofing us?" roared Peele.

"Yow! Ow, ow! Leggo!" howled Tubby, as Townsend shook him fiercely. "It—it was only a j-j-joke, you know!"

"You wrote that letter yourself?" shrieked Townsend.

"Nunno! I—I didn't!"

"Who did, then?"

"It was only a j-joke! I—I read about a chap in the paper who had a fortune left him," groaned Tubby. "He had a letter from a solicitor about it, and—and I thought how ripping it would be—"

"You swindlin' rascal!"

"And—and I asked Leggett about it, and he offered to write the letter on old Manders' typewriter!" groaned Tubby. "It was only a j-j-joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fistical Four.

"Spoofed!" ejaculated Flynn. "Well, of all the thaves of the worruld!"

"You owe me two quids!" panted Townsend. "You thievin' young scoundrel, give me my quids back!"

"I—I can't! I've spent them—you know I have!"

"And your dashed I O U's!" howled Topham. "What are they worth?"

"Waste paper fetches something," remarked Lovell. "You can sell 'em by weight, Toppy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Scrag him!" yelled Townsend, almost beside himself with rage, as he realised how he had been taken in—taken in as much by his own greedy rascality as by Tubby Muffin's extraordinary scheme for raising the wind.

"Pulverise him! Jump on him!"

"Yow! Ow! Help!"

"Hands off!" Jimmy Silver chipped in at once. "Let Tubby alone—while his uncle's here, at any rate!"

"Stand back, hang you! He's swindled us!" choked Townsend.

Jimmy shoved the exasperated Townsend back, and his chums closed round the unfortunate Tubby.

"Serves you right!" said Jimmy. "You wanted to swindle him, and you've got what you deserved! If you hadn't been swindling rascals Tubby couldn't have had a red cent out of you!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"And it was Leggett more than Tubby. You can go for Leggett, if you like!"

"Go for him, and welcome!" chimed in Tommy Dodd. "He's been squeezing some of your money out of Tubby! Go and scalp him!"

"I—I say, it was only a j-joke!" wailed Tubby Muffin. "I—I thought the fellows would lend me a few bob, that was all! I—I didn't know Tony would become pally, and insist on lending me quids—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Townsend & Co. simply raged; but the Fistical Four stood by Tubby, and they had to leave the fat Classical alone.

They rushed off to the Modern side to interview Leggett. They simply had to wreak their vengeance upon somebody, and Leggett, after all, was the more culpable of the two young rascals.

They found Leggett in his study, and for a quarter of an hour pandemonium reigned in Leggett's study, and when Townsend & Co. departed they felt that they had their money's worth. Leggett, as he groaned over his injuries, felt that they had had a good deal more than their money's worth.

The Rookwood Fourth howled with laughter over the outcome of Tubby Muffin's great inheritance. It had been "spoo" from beginning to end, and Uncle Joshua's unexpected visit to the school had given it away; and Tubby, who had lived for a week like a pig in clover was in clover no longer, though in other respects he had not changed.

The fellows who had lent Tubby money in anticipation of future benefits, did not join in the merriment, but everybody else agreed that Townsend & Co. had received what they deserved.

THE END.

(See my Chat about next week's story of Rookwood.—Ed.)

CONCLUSION.

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 GRENVILLE. Mike gives them news of the baronet's ruin, and his orders to take them back to Halland Hall, the home of the Grevilles.

During the journey to Exeter the three rescue ALDERMAN CONYERS and his charming daughter from the clutches of a notorious highwayman. To show his gratitude, Conyers invites them to his home. There, after a good meal, he tells them that

he is a director of a certain big shipping company, and that he will replace the lost fortunes of the Grevilles on condition that they bring about the capture of Avery, a daring buccaneer, who has made the seas a very bad and dangerous highway for the merchants of the day.

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

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. With no fixed intentions, they turn south, and one day come upon a ship filled with an immense treasure. The captain comes on board the Duke, and explains to Avery that his men are suffering from thirst. Avery agrees to help them. Bob Greville overhears the pirate and two of his men plotting to transfer this treasure during the night. But his presence is found out, and Avery chains him in the hold to stop him from revealing the truth.

(Now read on.)

Mike's Suspicions!

"WHERE'S Bob?" asked Jeff the following morning, while he and Mike, with dozens of others, were busy swabbing down the deck.

Black Michael turned slowly, and ran his glance over the ship's crew.

"Down in the lazarette, mos' like, or perhaps bo'sun's piped him off to the galley. There'll be a heap to do down there, seein' the captain's got to feed them poor fellows."

And, shading his eyes, he stared across the stretch of sunlit water to where the schooner dipped gently to the swell.

For an hour Jeff kept on with his hoi-ating and rubbing, but at the end of that time he still felt vaguely uneasy.

"Look here, Mike," he said, drawing the Cornishman aside, "we've seen nothing of Bob for nigh on eight hours. He went to the skipper's cabin to do that ciphering."

"And there, mos' like, he is now," said Mike. "I'll go and see."

With this he strolled leisurely amidships, and the first thing he saw was the carpenter fitting a new sheet of rough glass to the cabin skylight.

"What's toward, master?" Mike asked, watching the carpenter interestedly.

"Blest if I know! Geary says a block dropped from the halliards and smashed the glazing."

"Oh!" said Mike, and, sailor-like, his glance went at once aloft.

A quick survey of ropes, spars, and tackle showed at once that nothing was missing. All the gear was in perfect order, and certainly there was no sign of a block missing.

"Had to find a new block, too, I reckon?" he mused.

The carpenter shook his head.

"Know nothin' about that, mate. Cap'en, he come along, and he say to me, 'Bower, I want you to mend the skylight to my cabin. Block fell on the glazing during the night and smashed it in.' And that's all I know."

By this time Mike was more than a little curious. He didn't for a moment believe the story, but there was a very simple way to test it still further. The block which takes running gear is a very heavy thing, and, falling from such a height, it would have crashed through the glass on to the table

beneath, possibly splintering the top of the latter, if not smashing it entirely. So Mike took his pipe from his trousers-pocket, and, lighting it, coolly sat down on the edge of the fanlight, from which vantage point he commanded a clear view of the captain's cabin. The table-top was certainly in good order, its polished mahogany top unmarred save by slight scratches caused by glasses and bottles. But there was something which attracted Mike's close attention—four lines of raised dust in the form of a square beyond the square of carpet covering the floor.

"Looks for all the world as though friend Avery keeps a secret store of his own below those boards," he told himself.

Then, wishing the carpenter "Good-morning!" he continued his quest further afield. Neither in the fo'c'sle, the galley, or the lazarette was there any sign of the missing boy, and word began to pass round after Bob Greville.

At the first muster he did not show up, nor did he put in an appearance when breakfast was served out. So the routine of the day went on its accustomed way, and, though here and there among the men there were strange wonderings—for Bob was very popular with the majority of his shipmates—it was generally concluded that he had hidden himself in some part of the ship.

Mike repeated the suggestion to Jeff.

"The boy shook his head."

"I don't think so, Mike. That isn't like Bob at all, to play a practical joke when there's such interesting doings afoot. See! Boatloads of our fellows are putting off in the small boats for the schooner!"

"Ah! There we have it!" laughed Jeff, feeling relieved. "He must have slipped off with the provisioning party which went in the early hours, and, under cover of darkness, no one saw him."

This idea naturally found favour with both, so later in the day, when an opportunity offered, Jeff and Mike obtained permission to board the schooner. The Eclipse was little better than a death ship, although luckily nothing worse than scurvy had broken out on board. Men lay about in little groups on the sun-blistered deck, their flesh shrunken, the sallow skin drawn tight over their bones, and their eyes staring glassily into the brassy dome of the sky.

The work of resuscitation was proceeding apace, and quite a number who had been given water and small portions of food were able to swarm into the return boats to take up fresh quarters in one or other ships of Avery's fleet.

Of course, neither Jeff nor Mike was aware of it, but the pirate had lost no time in putting his plan into execution, and every few hours more and more men were drafted from the Eclipse, their places being taken by trusty sailors from the Duke.

And then, soon after high noon, the quarter-master brought word that the interchange was to cease. Jeff looked at Mike in dull despair. Though they had searched the schooner from stern to bowsprit, nowhere was the slightest sign of the missing boy visible. He had vanished utterly.

So they returned to the Duke sad at heart. Mike resolved to question Avery himself.

"I can tell you nothing, my good man," the buccaneer said cheerily. "The young fellow came to my cabin in the early hours to take down a statement in writing from Captain Tew, and since then I have seen naught of him."

They were standing in the cabin when Avery said this. Mike could not tell why he did it, but suddenly he glanced up, and the swinging lamp riveted his attention. It was of brass, highly ornamented with projecting pieces of scroll-work, and from one of these fluttered a tiny strip of blue cloth.

Mike recognised it instantly—a shred torn from Bob Greville's coat—for, to the worth of the honour bestowed upon him by so important a personage on shipboard as Avery, he had hastily donned his best jacket as well as his shoes.

"I see," said Mike, staring down at the floor, where the broken line of dust still showed faintly. "Then what the men say is true. He must have tumbled overboard during the night."

"Possibly playing some fool trick on the deck rail," replied Avery, with a laugh.

"Possibly," mumbled Mike, and passed out.

He went in search of Jeff, and found him sitting disconsolately in the stern-sheets.

"There was black work aboard this craft in the night, Jeff," the sailor said.

Jeff looked up with moody eyes. "Something's happened to Bob. I believe he's dead."

"I don't," the other returned. "I think he's alive—and a prisoner of the captain." Jeff stared.

"What makes you think so?" he asked. "Little enough," was the answer. "But two or three things are suspicious, and point that way. To begin with, there's a tiny thread or two of Bob's jacket clinging to the swing-lamp in the captain's cabin. Then I see the skylight has been broken."

"But what has the skylight, broken or otherwise, got to do with a strip of cloth from Bob's coat?" Jeff questioned.

"Perhaps a good deal," was the grim answer. "Now, listen, you here, Master Jeffery. Supposin'—I only say supposin', mind you—but supposin', after he left Mr. Avery and Captain Tew, Bob hung back to find out a bit more nor they had told him. And supposin' he crawled on top of the skylight to do it, and the glass broke and in he went."

"Who said the glazing's broken?" "I did," said Mike, in a guarded whisper. "I've seen it with my own eyes. Captain's tale is a halliard-block broke loose and dropped on it from the mast. If it did, it would have marked the table underneath, besides smashing the glass. But the table's all right. I reckon Bob was listening from that skylight, and he fell through, and as he dropped his jacket caught a bit of the lamp and got tore."

"Good gracious! It sounds possible," Jeff agreed. "But where is he now?"

"My belief is—somewhere down below," was the answer.

Jeff shook his head. "We've searched every part of the ship except the hold, and we know the hatch-covers haven't been taken off."

"But there's a trap-door in the floor of the captain's cabin. Mebbe, he keeps spirits and things of his own—ship's papers and so forth, down there."

"That settles it. We must find out," vowed Jeff. Then, his tone changing: "You don't think he's dead?"

"Nary a bit," said Mike. "The captain's got him prisoner. He wouldn't fall over the side, 'cos the deck-rail's high. And he wouldn't take his life." No. I say agen—the captain's holding him."

"Which means we must make another search."

Mike's face was screwed up into serious lines.

"We've got to bide our time. Mr. Avery isn't giving chances away. When he left his cabin after me a minute or two ago, he locked the door after him and put the key in his pocket, a thing I've never knowed him do before. But, later on—"

Later on! It was a very wearying time for Jeff. The hours lengthened, the day passed, night came, and still another day dragged its weary course, and there was no sign of Bob or any chance of pursuing a line of investigation towards finding him. Avery scarcely left his cabin, sitting in conclave there with his officers, and through them issuing orders to the transfer of men and provisions from the ships of his fleet to the schooner.

All through the long two days the work went on, boatloads being sent away each hour, until the Eclipse was thoroughly well provisioned, and more than half the Duke's crew, all fully armed, had taken the place of the men drawn from the larger vessel. And then, about four in the afternoon, Avery himself, with the armourer, the bos'un, and the mate, were rowed across, and the feeling came to Black Michael that the pirate meant forcefully to take possession of the Eclipse.

"There's something aboard that ship he wants and he means to have it," vowed the Cornishman. "We shall soon learn what it is. But between now and then we're going to hunt the Duke from stem to stern and find out what's happened to our Bob Greville."

Which Proves Black Michael to be a Man of Resource!

THERE was nothing to hinder such a search. In the excitement which generally prevailed nobody took notice of what other people were doing, the hands remaining on the Duke being far too interested in the transference of crews from one ship to another to attend much to their customary duties.

One fact did not fail to attract Mike's attention. Most of the sick men from the

Eclipse had been transferred to Avery's own flagship, comparatively few being drafted to the captured sloops taken from St. Principe. The consequence was that, to all intents and purposes, the Eclipse was now manned with the pick of Avery's men, while the other ships' crews were made up of very inferior fighting material.

Black Michael was turning all this over in his mind while waiting a favourable opportunity to examine the captain's cabin.

It did not come until dusk began to fall, when, by common consent, a goodly number of the hands, being no longer under their master's strict discipline, made a general move to the fore-castle, where a small cask of spirits, which one of the sailors from the Eclipse had smuggled aboard unobserved, was broached.

Under ordinary circumstances, for the preservation of ship's discipline, Black Michael would have made an endeavour to

immediate clue. The grime and dust of the narrow passage was marked with footprints which led him to the stout door.

At the lifting of the bar a weak voice hailed him. A moment later he knew that the search was at an end, for lying doubled up in one corner was Bob Greville.

Too weak to rise, he stretched out a shaking hand, and begged Black Michael to lift him.

"I've been without food and water for more than sixty hours!" he muttered faintly. "I'd rather die at Avery's hands than stay another night down here!"

Mike picked up the boy, slung him, like a sack, over his shoulder, and, taking the lantern, staggered back into the captain's cabin.

As all was still on deck, he called Jeff in, and together they set to work with a will, bringing back Bob to a more comfortable condition.



Mike gave the order. There was a loud explosion, followed by billowing clouds of smoke. When the wind drove it clear the men saw that their first shot had cut the foremost of the boats clean in two, and the pirates were struggling in the water. (See page 16.)

put a stop to the orgy; but he took pains to ignore it, and, waiting until the deck was practically deserted, he made a sign for Jeff to join him.

"Come on now!" he whispered, moving off amidships. "I've got a lantern hidden away at the foot of the companion. We needn't light it till we're safe the other side of that trap. Then we shall see—well, what we shall see!"

He thrust a small pistol into Jeff's hand, and posted him on guard in the darkness of the passage-way.

Then, opening Avery's door, he crept in, and, passing his hands over the floorboards, found the edges of the trap, and, inserting a stout blade, lifted it.

In the semi-light a dark cavity yawned before him. Gripping the rungs of the short ladder, he lowered himself into the pit, let the flap sink into position, and waited a moment to recover his breath before lighting the hand-lantern.

Its yellow rays provided the sailor with an

A weak glass of brandy and water—taken from Avery's locker—was forced between his swollen lips; then a little cooked meat was pounded, and bread soaked in the liquid.

After ten minutes of this, the lustre began to creep back into Bob's eyes, and the warm blood to flow once again through his chilled veins.

"I'm glad you've come, because I've had news to break!" he said, turning to Black Michael.

The sailor laughed. "Both the bad news, lad! Let's know how you came to this plight first!"

Bob drained his glass, and felt stronger. "You know, I was fetched here to take down Captain Tew's statement?" he began.

Mike inclined his head. "Captain Tew died last night, and was buried under cover of darkness!"

"What!" exclaimed Jeff, amazed. "It's true," the sailor went on. "I heard it from Chater; but I wouldn't say anything,

because I knew you were upset over Bob's disappearance. Tew was a gentleman, if ever there was one!"

"Then, it's my belief Captain Avery murdered him!" interjected Bob.

"What makes you think so?" Mike asked.

"Listen!" replied the boy. "You shall have my story. Then you'll understand. The statement I took down concerned a vast amount of loot, taken by the Eclipse, under Captain Tew, in the Red Sea. This prize Avery calculates at more than two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. It was taken from an Indianman, and is in specie, bar gold, jewels, and silks. I heard Tew tell our captain that every man on board drew more than three thousand pounds apiece."

"Which money is still aboard her, I suppose?" Mike suggested.

"Every penny!"

"Then we're getting to the truth at last," was the sailor's reply. "I can see now what Avery had in mind in sending a picked crew to take over the Eclipse. He means to make himself master of Captain Tew's vessel!"

"That is so," agreed Bob. "I overheard a conversation between our captain, the bo'sun, and the first-mate, and they agreed upon a plan to seize the treasure on the Eclipse for themselves."

Suddenly Mike lifted his hand, and the colour ebbed from his cheeks. From afar off there came several dull thuds, which sounded faint and far away.

"Gunfire," he said, rising swiftly.

"Cannon?" asked Jeff, helping his cousin to his feet.

"No," said Mike, picking up his pistols, and moving towards the companion. "Small arms. Trouble has broken out on one of the other ships. Follow me?"

They made for the deck, which they found deserted. From below came the noise of singing and stamping, and now and again a burst of raucous laughter.

The darkness lay like a pall upon the sea, and for a little while only the riding-lights of the three other vessels were visible. But in a moment the gloom was broken by stabs of flame and the crackle of musketry, and across the waste of waters shouts and faint cries were borne to them.

"That pother is taking place on the Eclipse," said Mike. "Avery has already commenced his work. Some of Tew's crew are resisting, and he is shooting them down."

"We see him at last in his true colours—the bloodthirsty pirate which the alderman painted him!" said Jeff, breathing fast. "Can anything be done, Mike?"

"Anything be done!" scoffed the giant, moving away from the deck-rail. "It seems to me we've got the chance of our lives!"

"Of being put to death or committing murder under the black flag!" said Jeff. "Thanks all the same, but I should prefer to walk the plank!"

Mike laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "My lad, if there's any plank-walking to be done, Avery and the mob of ruffians around him will be the first to do it! As I see it,

by acting quick and daring-like, we can make ourselves masters of the situation."

"How?" the boy questioned.

"By rousing these fellows to put up a fight against Avery," was the answer. "Nearly a hundred of them are Tew's men, threatened with being robbed of the prize-money they won under their own captain. D'ye think they'll put up with it?"

"There's something else," interrupted Bob, speaking for the first time since they had come on deck. "The Eclipse is a big ship with lots of guns—more guns than the Duke possesses, but all her shot and powder are gone. They were thrown overboard in the storm which drove her South and round the Cape."

"Then we've got 'em!" cried Mike, smiting his palm with the back of his hand. "Without ammunition for their big pieces, they are at our mercy. In one hour we could blow the Eclipse out of the water. Now, what shall it be, lads—war to the knife, or dishonourable surrender?"

"War to the knife!" shouted Jeff and Bob together.

Jeff was despatched to find Chater, who had already given proof of his honesty of purpose and courage, and of his skill as a gunner.

Black Michael drew him apart and discussed the position, and having won him and three other stout fellows, the little party, all carrying loaded pistols, fell in behind the Cornishman, and made for the fo'c'sle.

Here nigh on eighty men were gathered together, crowded in a confined space, lit by the glow from three swinging lanterns.

Through the dense smoke haze they turned startled faces on the newcomers blocking the entrances with their pistols cocked.

Black Michael's manner, however, was genial and reassuring.

"Listen, brothers of the sea," he said, in a loud voice. "I have bad and yet good news to break to you at one and the same time. First of all, I would speak to all men who have recently come aboard from the Eclipse."

There was an immediate show of hands.

"Good!" said Mike. "Now the position is this. From the lips of your dead captain—"

"Is he dead?" came in a roar from more than a dozen lusty throats.

"Dead, and I believe murdered by Captain John Avery, late master of this vessel."

"Then death to Avery!" they shouted, leaping to their feet, and shaking their clenched hands in the air.

"Death to Avery it shall be!" replied Mike. "Treason to our master!" shouted a member of the Duke's crew.

The Cornishman singled the fellow out, and levelled a pistol at him.

"No, treason to the men of the Eclipse, and to most of us, Tom Butcher," Mike went on. "ear my story before you judge. Captain Tew was a Government privateer—man out for honest plunder, despatched by the Governor of the Bermudas. Some weeks ago he took as prize a Mogulman with nigh on a quarter of a million of treasure aboard, all told."

"That's right!" shouted several of the Eclipse men.

"So great was the haul," said Mike, "that every man under the good Tew's command was granted three thousand pounds in prize. This money is even now on the Eclipse, and Captain Avery, after putting Master Tew out of the way, has planned to rob you all of your due reward. At this moment firing is going on aboard yonder vessel, and your companions are being shot down like dogs!"

"Death to Avery, the butcher and traitor!" they cried again.

Mike signified his assent.

"He deserves death. He has played you all false, and would steal what rightfully belongs to you. I and those with me desire fairness all round. Who will join with me against this man?"

Every hand in the fo'c'sle was raised.

"Then let me break the good news," said Mike, smiling. "Captain Avery has made one mistake. With him he has taken many scores of good fighting men, all well armed, and ready to carry out his orders. At the moment they are masters of the Eclipse. But we are masters of them!"

"Indeed! How?" someone asked.

"They have cannon with them, but neither powder nor shot," was the reply. "We have goodly stores of both. We have but to train our guns on the Eclipse and open fire, and Avery's men are at our mercy."

"But suppose, master, they should send off parties to board us," was suggested.

"During the night we will set sail and draw away, keeping the enemy, however, within

range. Not until daybreak will we show our hand. Then we will call upon Captain Avery and his followers to throw down their arms and surrender. If they refuse, we shall blow them into kingdom come with the great shot. Should they send off boarding parties, then we have such good gunners as can sink the boats before they approach. And taking them unawares, with their sails furled, the battle will be ours before they have a chance to get clear."

The advantages of such a course was apparent to all, and thereafter all through the night the men of the Duke, under Black Michael's command, went forward with their preparations for the morrow.

A Great Fight and a Gallant Victory!

DAWN found the Duke cleared for action, every cannon loaded, and the guns' crews, stripped, at their stations. Every seaman was served out with a short-barrelled musket, a couple of pistols which he carried primed in his belt, and a short hangar.

Then, just as the sun came up and the night mists cleared, one of the pieces discharged a shot across the bows of the Eclipse, and Black Michael ordered a signal to be run up calling upon Avery to surrender.

No answer was vouchsafed immediately, and the first move on the part of the surprised pirates was the appearance of three boatloads of armed men, which pulled round the Eclipse's stern and began to row furiously towards the Duke.

Black Michael laughed.

"Our late master does not know when he is well off. We must teach him a lesson."

Whereupon he issued a sharp command. A six-pounder was carefully sighted and trained upon the foremost craft, and the order to fire given.

The terrific explosion was followed by billowing clouds of smoke, which the wind, however, took and blew away, and in the clear sunlight all that was seen was a mass of wreckage and several dark forms struggling in the water.

Again there was an appalling burst of flame and a thunderous explosion which shook the ship, and this time they had a goodly view of the Eclipse's long boat being blown out of the water. The few survivors were picked up by their companions in the third boat, which then turned and made at full speed for safety.

Once more Black Michael caused a signal to be made to the Eclipse, but the unfurling of the sails and the slow movement of the great vessel showed that Avery's intention was, by executing a clever feat of seamanship, to bring his ship close in and so come to quarters.

"We can't allow that!" cried Mike. "They are more numerous and better armed than us for a hand-to-hand contest. So let every gun be trained, master gunner, and a broadside be discharged."

By this time the Eclipse was less than half a mile away, making good speed, and overhauling the Duke rapidly. The discharge of the broadside, however, had a deadly effect, the enemy's mainmast being cut through, and the great sail crashing down to the deck, and thence over the side, carrying more than a dozen struggling men with it.

Avery must now have known that only defeat awaited him, but he kept on under reduced canvas, and two more broadsides had to be fired before the Eclipse lay rocking like a stricken bird upon the water.

Within a very few minutes Avery's black flag fluttered down from the peak, its place being taken by the white flag of surrender.

Preparations were now made for boarding, the long boat, the whaler, and the cutter being lowered and filled with armed men. As a token of submission, Avery, with those of his officers left, were instructed to put off in one of their own small craft and to board the Duke.

A rousing cheer went up from the men of the Duke, and the famous pirate, looking dejected, took his place in the stern-sheets and was pulled rapidly to the ship which once he had commanded. Black Michael had the carpenter waiting to receive his visitor, and as the buccaneer stepped on board he was immediately seized and put into irons.

The day had reversed the fortunes for all of them.

While Avery languished in his gloomy but well-deserved prison, Black Michael, making a careful selection of officers, took over command of the whole fleet, promising every man his due of lawful prize, and pardon for

(Concluded on page 20.)

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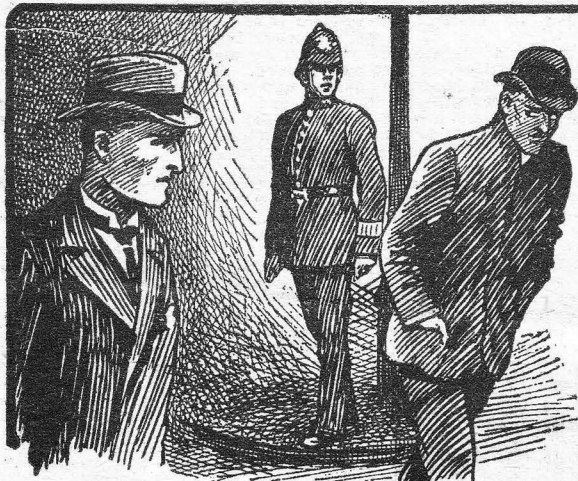
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THREADS OF THE STORY.

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 criminals' moneylender.

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.

When the alarm is given, the guests search the grounds, and the body of Raymond Marconnon is found, evidence points to the fact that Vaughan is the murderer.

Vaughan pays Leigh a visit, and threatens to reveal to the world his secret if Leigh does not hand over to his care, Harry, no longer the son of Leigh, but of John Firth. Leigh has to agree, and Harry is taken to Vaughan's house in Flatney. Harry discovers the plot, and is furious with his one-time friend.

(Now read on.)

Strange Revelations!

VAUGHAN crossed to the window and looked out over the sun-bathed park and the sleepily nodding trees.

"I am a young man, and life is as dear in its way to me, as to you," he said, speaking slowly, almost as though to himself. "I cannot forget that I am a ticket-of-leave man, wanted by the police for crimes I have not committed. When I came out of prison, even had I been guilty of sin, my punishment should have expired it. Instead the police hunted me down. Ferrers Locke, your friend, fastened on me another charge, for which, had I been taken, I should have gone back to a long term of penal servitude."

The hatred in his eyes when he mentioned the detective's name amazed Harry. "But you were guilty of trying to blackmail Mr. Marconnon!"

"You share the common attitude of the public towards an ex-convict. I was innocent. But wait, I haven't done yet. You shall see why I have brought you here, and why I must, of necessity, protect myself through you."

Harry stared at him in surprise.

"I don't understand."

"Listen! You are aware that your friend Locke has been working night and day to fasten on me the guilt of Marconnon's death?"

"Ferrers is justified in forming suspicions." "Precisely. But not in trying to prove an innocent man guilty of murder."

"He would do nothing unjust." "I mean to prevent him. At last I have turned. To one, at any rate, I shall reveal the truth. Thus only can I protect myself in case the man legally responsible for Marconnon's death were to die, and I be left alone under a cloud of suspicion. I did not slay Raymond Marconnon, but I saw him killed. Need I say more than that the disclosure of my knowledge will seriously jeopardise your father? I was there, and saw everything. I know how Marconnon died—why Marconnon died. The secret is shared by one man alone—Mr. Justin Leigh!"

"It is a lie! I cannot believe you! Bring father back and say this to his face!"

"It is useless to inflict unnecessary pain upon you both. Mr. Leigh knows I hold him in the hollow of my hand. I am saving his neck and his name, because he is a proud man. More, I am saving you public shame and degradation."

"My father is no murderer!"

"I did not say he was. Justin Leigh's hands are stained with blood, innocently perhaps, but my word alone could convict him of manslaughter or murder. I have bargained with him to hold my peace. He, in turn, agreed to hand you over to me."

"Then I am a pawn in the game?" "In the complex game of life. I must guard my safety as best I can," Vaughan went on. "To save your father, you will stay here with me?"

"Yes," he said slowly.

"More, you will make no attempt to seek the aid of Ferrers Locke. Your whereabouts will remain a secret for two whole years."

"Why two years?"

"I do not mean to keep you bound always."

"You promise not to reveal my father's secret?"

"That is so."

"Further, I am not to attempt to write or see Mr. Locke?"

"Except such letters as I may dictate. He will, later on, receive one from you in which you will inform him that you are quite safe and in no danger. Also, you will tell him that you know who shot Raymond Marconnon—that it was not I. Your father himself shall convince you of this truth before you write."

"I understand."

"You will answer no questions to anyone concerning me."

"Very well."

"At the end of two years, I shall set you free."

"By what name are you known in this house?"

"I am Paul Rutherford, the actor-musician—the Society entertainer—at your service!" he said, bowing ironically.

Harry was almost speechless with astonishment.

"Then you are a thief!" he said.

"My dear fellow, 'thief' is a very unpleasant expression to use to me. Why do you call me a thief?"

"Because I am convinced it was you who stole the Marquis de Ranguvy's golden bowl

from Kingsweare Hall," Harry answered coldly.

Vaughan leaned back, eyeing him good-naturally.

"Even supposing what you say be true—mind you, I admit nothing—but supposing it was I who possessed myself of one of the marquis' many superfluous gewgaws, you are swift to brand me a thief. But what have you to say, my dear chap, of those who have robbed me of my honour, my freedom, the most precious years of my life, and of my friends. Do I hear you, or anyone, stigmatise them as thieves? Of course not! It was just I should be torn from my friends, from my high position in the world, for the wrong committed; it was just I should be branded a felon for five long, weary years; it was just when I came out of prison, apparently a free man, I should be hounded down and again pounced on by the officers of the law!"

The strong voice shook with passion. Harry shrank before the vehement hatred in his face.

Like one in a dream, Harry looked steadily about him. Could it indeed be true he was a prisoner in this house?

A long silence fell between them. Harry turned suddenly as a heavy footstep sounded outside, and a man's strange voice fell upon his ears. With a crash the wide double doors were pushed inwards, and a tall form, sinister and arresting, appeared on the threshold.

Harry started back at sight of the pistols which glinted in each of the intruder's hands.

Vaughan had half-risen from his chair, the arms of which he gripped tightly, and, leaning forward, looked straight at the newcomer.

"My business is only with that man there," the stranger said, levelling a revolver at Vaughan's head. "Allow me, Mr. Vaughan, to introduce myself." He bowed again, this time with ironic extravagance, and a smile revealed his perfect white teeth. "My name, sir, is Count von Diehling."

Too Clever by Half!

DELIGHTED to meet you, count! As you say, we have had business together, you and I. But, first of all, permit me to allow my young friend to retire," replied Vaughan.

He spoke suavely, betraying not the slightest sign of chagrin or surprise, that the other, having taken him totally unawares, held him at his mercy. Rising, he bowed Harry out.

The count remained at his station by the open door. Then, with an angry look on his fair, flushed face, he strode imperiously into the room.

"My friend, I will trouble you to raise both your hands above your head!" he snarled. "You have seen fit to declare war on me. Needless to say, that means war to the knife!"

With colossal coolness, Vaughan walked towards the fireplace. His left hand touched something against the wall; with the other he picked up a cigarette and lit it with studied care.

"Do I understand you are addressing me?" he asked at length, swinging round and deftly flicking the glowing match in the German's face.

The count started back, and winced as the hot spark bit his cheek, but showed no disposition to lower either pistol arm.

"That is so, my friend. We have an account to settle—the account of the jewels taken at the Royal Edward Hall."

"Really, you surprise me." Vaughan leaned his broad back against the wide oak mantel and watched the other through half-closed lids.

"I have discovered the ingenious imposture which you are foisting on the British people, and with which you have so far deceived the English police."

"That is real smart of you, too! Go on!" If Vaughan thought his quietly veiled sarcasm would rouse the other into sudden passion and cause him to give an open-

"Dog, be quiet, or I shoot you now!" "Don't waste time, Von Diehling! I am getting desperately tired of hearing you talk!"

"You accompanied me in a taxi-cab to Liverpool Street Station, and there, at the pistol's point, relieved me of the booty. I now turn the tables on you, Paul Rutherford. I give you the choice between a quick death or returning to me the jewels or the equivalent in cash—that is, roughly, let us say, sixty thousand pounds."

A smile began to curve Vaughan's lips. "You rather interest me, count," he said, yawning pointedly. "May I ask, before saving my life on the terms you have proposed, how you came to trace me here?"

Von Diehling smiled knowingly. "Certainly. I have no wish not to enlighten you. As a member—a rather important member of an extremely successful crooks' association—I take a pride in our

anything rash. Do you know what will happen to you the moment one of your weapons is discharged?"

"I don't frighten me like that." "You have no wish but to warn you of your own position. If you turn round, you will quickly understand."

"Yes, and you would as quickly spring upon me. Do you take me for a fool?"

"I am afraid I regard you as a most incompetent person to embark upon a criminal career. As an associate of a gang of daring crooks, you are a dismal failure. Charles, tell the worthy German gentleman what will happen if he attempts to harm me."

He glanced across to the wide-open doorway, in which Demottsen stood smiling affably.

"I shall promptly blow a hole in him," Demottsen answered leisurely, balancing a heavy-calibre revolver in his hand. "Count von Diehling, I do not advise you to do anything rash, or my weapon will most certainly go off. If you are a sensible man you will lose no time in laying both your pistols gently on the table beside you, whence my master will pick them up. One—two! Thank you!"—as Count Otto, with a final oath, put down both his weapons, which Vaughan was prompt to snatch up.

His chubby, round face beaming with satisfaction, the doctor came smilingly into the centre of the room.

"Allow me also to introduce myself," he said, mocking the German's grandiloquent tones. "I am Charles Demottsen, Mr. Vaughan's right-hand man." And as he spoke his blue eyes danced behind the gold-rimmed spectacles.

Vaughan broke into a hearty laugh, and slapped the count on the shoulder.

"Don't take your beating too badly, Von Diehling," he said. "After all, you are a clever fellow, and, as man to man, let me assure you I shall make you a better friend than enemy. Now, what will you take? And, Charles—shut the door, please!"

With that he went to the buffet and poured out for Von Diehling the wine of his choice.

The Theft of the Van Dyck!

"MY dear count, I am charmed to think that our too brief acquaintanceship has had several all-round profitable results. You have the good sense to realise how much better it will be for all parties concerned—I refer to your colleagues in Paris and Berlin—to have you all working with me rather than against me," said Vaughan to Von Diehling some twelve hours later.

Von Diehling rose from the depths of the easy saddle-bag in which he had been reclining ever since breakfast, and walked the room thoughtfully.

"I know that," he answered somewhat sombrely. "You have more than convinced me it is of little use to us, or any other gentlemen crooks, entering into competition with you on this side of the Channel. All the same, you hardly appreciate my position—to return to Amsterdam and explain to my friends I have failed in my mission; that you have stepped in and taken the plunder completely out of our hands and refused to disgorge a pennyworth. Admitted, on behalf of them, I can undertake in future they shall have the benefit of your co-operation in any scheme they may see fit to launch upon in England, but that hardly erases the ignominy of my apparent failure."

He halted by the window and stared out with cloudy eyes. Undoubtedly this English crook was without compeer.

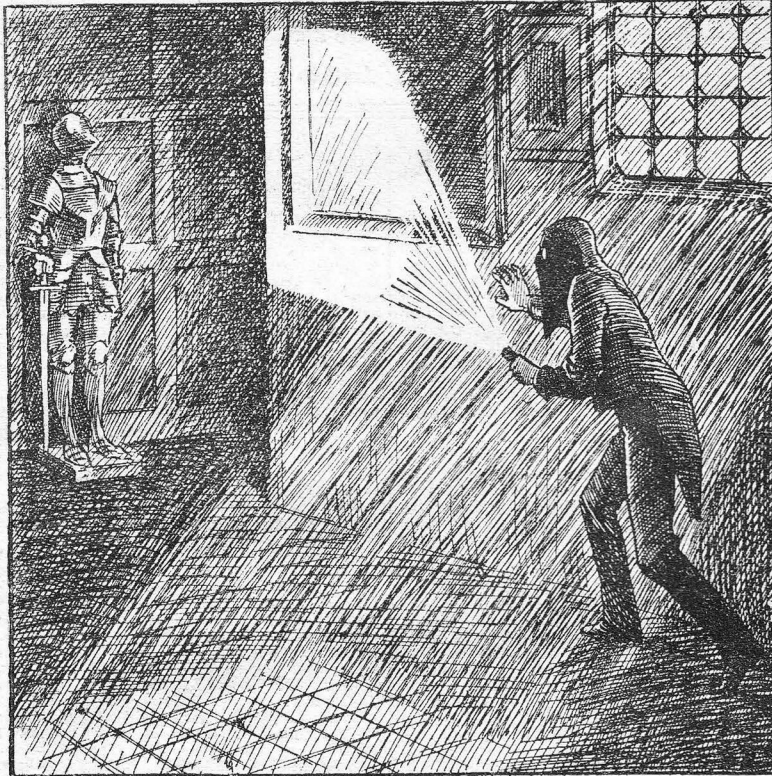
Vaughan tossed his half-burned cigarette into the grate, and rejoined Von Diehling in his unconscious survey of the park and grounds.

"I am sorry; I can't possibly undertake to restore the value of the Edward Hall jewels," he said, with slow deliberation. "You see, they have just put me nicely on my feet and provided me with—well, this house, the keeping up of which will act as a splendid incentive to further successful coups. Of course, if I could see my way to meet you in some other direction, to compensate you and your friends for your ill-luck and disappointment, I would readily do so."

Vaughan could not forget how important—nay, imperative—it was he should remain on fairly friendly terms with Von Diehling and his fellows; they, at any rate, probed pretty dangerously into his secret.

The German toyed with the upturned waxed ends of his moustache.

"There is something you could do," he



Vaughan felt along the wall of the second gallery. As he neared the end he flashed his pocket torch in front of him, and the thin streak of white light rested on the corner of the picture that he had taken so much trouble to secure. (See page 19.)

ing by a slip, he was certainly mistaken, for now that the first spasm of anger was gone, the count displayed extraordinary calm.

"I do not propose to hide my purpose in coming here, or to discuss the ethics of my interest in certain valuables, of which you have seen fit to deprive me and my associates," he explained. "Let me detail the facts; they will show you how completely I have you in my power, and, I hope, will not only induce you to disgorge the plunder so ill-gained, but act as a wholesome deterrent against such rash interference on your part in the future."

"Thank you! I am in need of a little moral suasion occasionally. All the same, I beg you to remember my time is valuable."

The German flushed. "On the 19th of last month you attended the charity ball at the Edward Hall."

"Go on! You talk like a cheap book with the lid off! And remember I am admitting nothing."

Von Diehling coloured at the insult. "You also became acquainted with the fact that certain jewels had passed into my possession."

"Let me see. My memory is not so good as it used to be," Vaughan jeered.

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successes. We were thunderstruck—that is, myself and my Continental friends—when a successful coup was turned against us by an utter outsider—yourself, to wit. Naturally, ever since you have been under strict observation. I was bold enough to dog you from London to Flatney, and here I am, demanding, insisting on, nothing less than a most abject apology and the return of the jewels or their cash equivalent."

With a quick gesture he pressed the muzzles of both pistols against Vaughan's chest, and thrust his baleful eyes close to the other's.

"My dear count, you positively overwhelm me," was Vaughan's ready response. "And, really, you place me in a most awkward position, because, in the first place, I haven't either the jewels or their money's worth; and, in the second, if I had, I shouldn't dream of parting with a single penny to you."

Von Diehling drew back, and his face became white with passion.

"Then I shall shoot you where you stand, and risk the consequences!" he hissed. "You have robbed me, insulted me; worse, you have jeered at me—"

Vaughan raised his hand imperiously to command the other's silence.

"Reflect for a moment before you do

muttered. "I wonder would it be wise to entrust you with any of our projects?"

"That rests with you. Either be with me or against me. If with me, you must trust me."

"Then, in this—what I am going to speak about—you would not play us false?"

"I will be as honest with you as you are with me. Folk laugh when they say 'Honour among thieves'; they little know how true the words are—when it pays rogues to be honest among themselves."

"You always joke, my friend. Has your calling no serious side for you?"

"I refuse to take life seriously, count. Once it nearly crushed me with its burden. Now I laugh at it, because its darkest side no longer has terrors for me. What is your idea?"

Count Otto settled himself comfortably once more.

"In a certain public gallery in London there is a certain picture. We have long tried to get hold of that picture. Its value is between seventy and eighty thousand pounds."

"You mean its value while it remains where it is. A stolen masterpiece is worth but little."

"No, my friends; I mean its value to us."

"Then you have an assured market for it?"

"Certainly. To be exact, a South American gentleman, whose conscience is as elastic as his purse, has agreed to pay us no less than eighty thousand pounds the day we place the canvas in his hands."

"What does he want with it?"

"He has a mansion, one of the largest in Buenos Aires. It is his passion to stock it with the world's choicest treasures of art, irrespective of how he comes by them. This particular picture he knows can never be sold, because it belongs to the British nation."

"Ah!"

Vaughan arched his shapely eyebrows in pleasurable surprise. Already he held the key to the situation.

"We have long had our eyes on it; in fact,

we have tried scheme after scheme to get it, but none has promised much chance of success."

"I judged that, by the fact that so far no suspicions have been aroused," the other intercepted. "Then your suggestion is I should get this picture for you?"

"Well, yes"—hesitatingly.

"I see. In return for beating you at your own game on another 'round-up,' I am to hand over a property worth nearly twice the amount. You must remember, count, I am first and foremost a business man."

Von Diehling lapsed into silent thought.

"Supposing you could get this picture for us—"

"I could get it; there's no 'supposing' about the matter."

"What makes you so sure of success?"

"Because I already know the picture, exactly how it is situated, and I am confident I could with ease possess myself of it."

The count rose abruptly.

"You are superhuman!" he gasped. "How do you know all these things?"

"Merely by putting two and two together. There is but one picture in London belonging to the nation, worth eighty thousand pounds. That picture, my dear friend, is quite a small one—a half-length portrait of Paola Adorno, Marchesa di Brignole-Sala, by Van Dyck."

"I cannot understand you," Von Diehling said perplexedly.

"The picture hangs on the south wall of the second room on the left, on the first floor of Norwich House, in Earl Street, off Bond Street, London. The house and its contents, known as the Norwich Collection, were bequeathed to the nation by the late Sir Erasmus Norwich, of Brampton, Northamptonshire. Now, count, on what terms do you propose I should acquire this picture for you? I am willing to concede something to balance our differences."

"Suppose we give you thirty thousand pounds. Would that tempt you?"

"Certainly! Thirty thousand pounds would

make it worth my while. I owe nothing to the British public!"

"Then can we call it a deal?"

"By all means. Take back that to your fellows over the Channel as some compensation. On receipt of a wire from me, bring the money, and I will hand over the picture."

"Then I will get an early train back." Von Diehling rose to go. "No purpose is served by my remaining here."

He looked up a time-table, and jotted down a few notes. By ten o'clock that night he was back in Amsterdam. It was close on midnight some five weeks later that Vaughan stepped cautiously out of his car a few blocks from the back entrance of Norwich House, and made his way down a narrow alley. There was no one in sight when he reached a small door in the wall. London was sleeping. After having drawn over his head a black crape hood with small eye-holes, the ex-convict inserted a key in the lock, opened the door, and passed swiftly inside.

To all appearances, it seemed that Vaughan was well acquainted with the place, for he did not trouble to switch on his electric torch until he had traversed several dark passages. Then the white beam of light pierced the darkness, and shone on a second door.

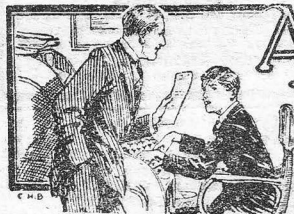
Through this, and he was in the basement of Norwich House.

Silence hung about the place as he ascended the stairs to the first floor, his patent rubber-soled shoes making no sound on the thick carpets over the floors. He was now on more dangerous ground, and deemed it necessary to switch off his light.

As he neared the end of the second gallery he felt along the wall and flashed the light. The thin streak rested on the corner of a large picture, at the sight of which he let out a soft exclamation of satisfaction. The great Van Dyck he had taken so much trouble to secure was at last within his reach! He had won!

(Another fine instalment of this grand serial next Friday.)

OUR WEEKLY FEATURE!



A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS PLEASED TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS. ADDRESS: EDITOR, THE "POPULAR," THE ELEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C. 4.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY:

"MARK LINLEY'S TEMPTATION!"

By Frank Richards.

That is the title of the grand long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co.'s early days at Greyfriars. As the title will tell you, Mark Linley, the popular scholarship boy in the Remove, finds himself greatly tempted. The fact of the matter is that Mark Linley's father suffers an accident, and it is indeed fortunate for Mark that the Founder's Prize Examination should take place at that time—or, at least, so Mark thinks. But he doesn't win the prize—and then comes the great temptation.

Mark Linley had not been long at the school—he had not at the time warmed his way so far into the hearts of the Removites—but he finds many friends at this critical period. The story of his temptation is very fine indeed, and I have no fear but that it will be read with great interest by his many friends.

There will be another magnificent complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., entitled:

"BARRED BY THE FORM!"

By Owen Conquest.

The stories of the chums of Rookwood have always been very popular with my chums, and I can assure you that this one is not going to be a blot on the landscape, as "Uncle James" would say. It's a rattling yarn, full of laughs and fun, and will raise Mr. Owen Conquest even higher in the estimation of his chums of the POPULAR.

"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

I have to thank many, many readers for the nice letters they have sent me in connection with the "Holiday Annual." I am afraid I cannot possibly write to every reader who has written without seriously interfering with my usual correspondence, so will every chum who has written to me about this wonderful book please accept my best thanks?

I must admit that it was very hard work compiling the great budget of stories, articles, and other items of interest, but the letters I have received have amply repaid my efforts.

There may be still a few copies of the "Holiday Annual" left in newsagents' shops, and as readers of the POPULAR will find all their old favourites in it, I advise them "not to miss the boat," but get a copy now. The "Holiday Annual," like Christmas, comes but once a year—nuff said!

OUR SERIALS.

My chums will have read the last instalment of "Outlaws of the Sea," a story which, I am sure, you have greatly enjoyed reading. I have had several letters from chums who want another story after the same style, but I have other plans in view. I shall have something to say about these later.

Next week you will find the last instalment of "Before the Camera," and this is not only going to be the longest instalment, but the best, too.

There will also be another long instalment of our fine detective serial, "A Marked Man," so next week's issue of the POPULAR will be crammed full of good things.

Order your copy now, boys, and be sure and have it!

GRAND NEWS!

Here I am going to give you all something to talk about to your chums. And I want you to talk about this news, too, for I want every boy and girl to know of the grand feature which is coming to the POPULAR in the first week of February.

In the first place, a fortnight will see the first supplement ever published in the POPULAR. Readers of the "Magnet" have had one for some time, but we are going to have something extra special. It is entitled:

"BILLY BUNTER'S WEEKLY!"

But Billy is not the only junior who has a hand in the writing of the supplement. He selects as his assistants Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble of St. Jim's, Tubby Muffin of Rookwood, and Sammy Bunter of Greyfriars.

Needless to say, the staff of "Billy Bunter's Weekly," when their names became known at the schools, caused a great amount of hilarious laughter. Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, promptly dubbed them

Billy Bunter and his Four Fat Subs,

a name which is going to stick to them. Readers who were fortunate enough to see the issue of "Billy Bunter's Weekly" in the "Magnet Library" will know what to expect. He gave them plenty of fun; but with four fat subs to help him—well, all I can say is, if you are not highly amused by

"BILLY BUNTER'S WEEKLY,"

you are hard to please. Remember, February 4th, and the POPULAR will be a bumper number!

Next week I shall have something to say about an easy competition for money prizes for readers of the POPULAR. In the meantime, please spread the news that

Billy Bunter and his Four Fat Subs

are preparing a treat for all "Popites."

Your Editor

Outlaws of the Seas!

(Concluded from page 16.)

those who had been forced to aid Avery in his design upon the Eclipse.

The next two days were spent in removing the treasure and the valuable cargo from the stricken vessel, which would never sail again.

At daybreak the Duke, with her consorts, set sail for the Cape of Good Hope, where Black Michael turned his charge over to the Governor, with a full account of all that had transpired since they left Bristol. Like the generous-hearted fellow he was, he made intercession on behalf of some of the pirates who had acquitted themselves courageously and had not resorted to butchery, with the result that the following document, which is now preserved among the national records, was despatched to England:

"To the Honourable President and Judges of the Court of Admiralty, for trying of pirates.

"The humble petition of John How, Samuel Fletcher, Robert Crow, Daniel Harding, Charles Bunce, Benjamin Jeffreys, Thomas Armstrong, John Jessop, Robert Johnson, James Phillips, William Davis, and those whose marks are appended hereto, humbly sheweth—

"That your petitioners being unhappily and unwarily drawn into that wretched and detestable crime of piracy, for which they now stand justly condemned, they most humbly pray the clemency of the court, in the mitigation of their sentence, that they may be permitted to serve the Royal African Company of England in this country for seven years, in such a manner as the court shall think proper; that by their just punishment, being made sensible of the error of their former ways, they will for the future become faithful subjects, good servants, and useful in their stations, if it please the Almighty to prolong their lives."

The King's clemency having been invoked, on the strong recommendation of Black Michael and two young gentlemen of high repute and great courage, Master Jeffery Hawkins and Master Robert Greville to wit, the plea for mercy was acceded to, and indentures were subsequently drawn up pledging these men for seven years service in the Royal African Company's settlements.

From the Duke, which was later brought back to England, Black Michael took the record of Avery's piracies and turned it over to Alderman Conyers. As a result of their endeavours the three were granted a Government reward of one hundred thousand pounds each, which certainly did more than restore the decayed fortunes of the famous house of Greville, for Bob's share enabled him only a few years later to offer his hand and heart to the pretty Devon girl who had won his affections on that memorable day when he said good-bye to schooling for ever.

THE END.

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