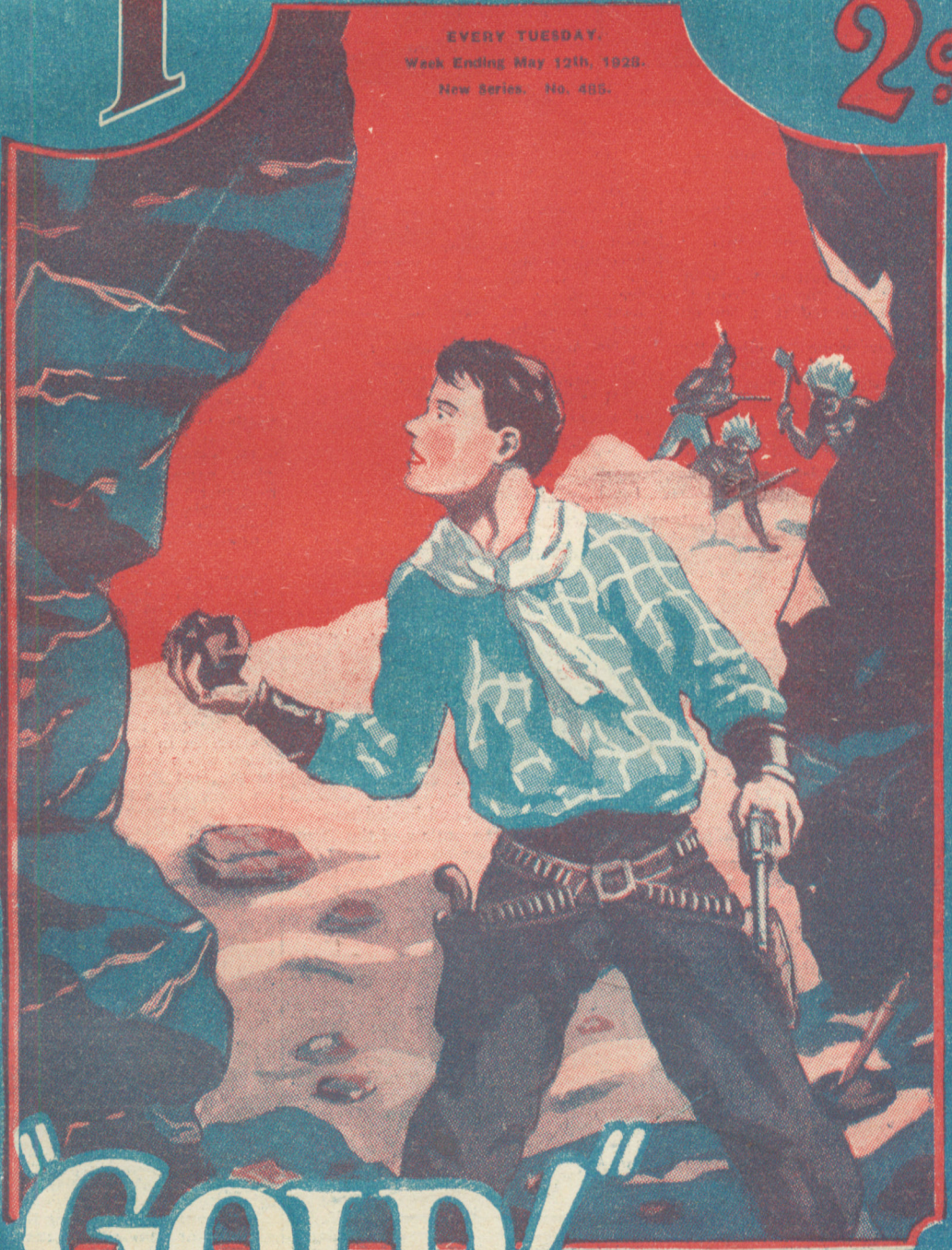


Thrilling Tales of the **GOLDEN WEST!**

# The POPULAR

EVERY TUESDAY  
Week Ending May 12th, 1928.  
New Series. No. 485.

2¢



"GOLD!"

**A DUFFER'S TRIUMPH!** Peter Cuthbert Gunner is considered the biggest duffer at Rookwood. So naturally there are many chuckles when Gunner announces his intention of "taking up literary work." But strange to relate he makes a "hit" in his new departure!

# GUNNER AGAIN!

By  
**OWEN CONQUEST**

A ROLLICKING LONG COMPLETE  
STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO.,  
THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Literary Man!

"Go away!"  
"Eh?"  
"Go away!" repeated  
Gunner.

Dickinson minor did not go away. He stood in the doorway of Study No. 7 and stared at Gunner.

It was time for prep, and Dickinson minor had arrived at his study for prep. He saw no reason whatever why he should go away. In fact, he couldn't go away—he had his prep to do.

Gunner seemed busy.

Gunner was seated at the study table, which was covered with scribbled sheets of impot paper. More sheets lay on the carpet, where they had fluttered from the table.

Gunner's face was serious, not to say solemn. He looked as if he had found out, like the gentleman in the poem, that life is real, life is earnest. His rugged brows were deeply corrugated, his lips were set. There was a daub of ink on his prominent nose, there were many daubs on his fingers and cuffs. Ink had been shed in the study apparently in great quantities.

"What is it—lines?" asked the puzzled Dickinson.

"No!"

"Well, what—"

"Don't interrupt!"

"Prep," said Dickinson minor patiently.

Gunner looked up wrathfully.

"I've told you to go away!" he said.

"I want the study to myself. Don't talk any more—you'll break the thread."

"The—the what?"

"The thread, you ass!"

Dickinson looked round the study. He could not see any thread.

"I don't see it," he said.

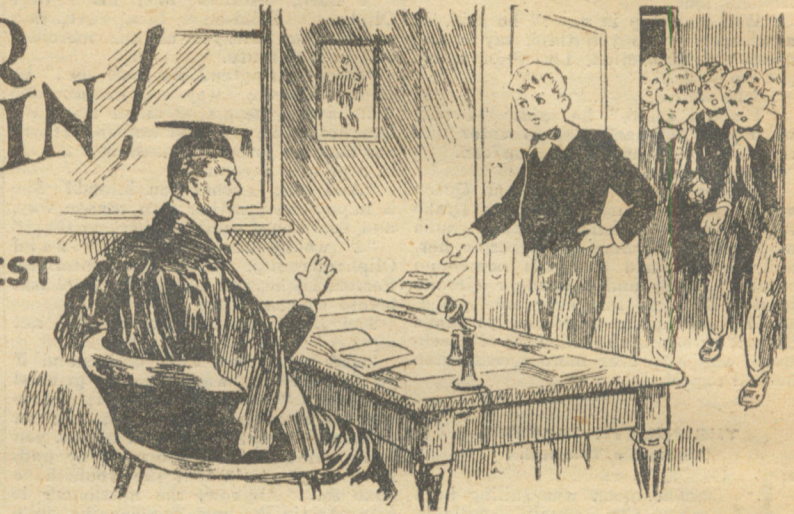
"Don't see what?" snapped Gunner.

"The thread! Have you been sewing on buttons?" asked the perplexed Dickinson.

"You silly owl! I mean the thread of my thoughts. Haven't you sense enough not to jaw when literary work is going on?"

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Dickinson.

Gunner made an impatient gesture of dismissal, and dipped his pen into the ink again. Dickinson, in sheer amazement, stepped in and glanced at the paper over Gunner's shoulder. But for the information Gunner had given him, THE POPULAR.—No. 485.



he would not have taken it for literary work. What he read was as follows:

"By this time the sunn had sett, and a kloke of darkness kuvered the erth. In the dedly stilness not a sownd was herd saive the howl of the wind in the trees, the roar of the kataract, and the rumble of distant thunder."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Dickinson minor involuntarily. "Is—is—is that literary work, Gunner?"

"Of course it is."

Dickinson felt that if Gunner was right, he would have to revise all his previous ideas about literary work.

"Now go away!" continued Gunner. "I'm just in the vein. I never realised before what a gift I had for descriptive writing. It fairly flows off my pen. I'm doing this story—"

"Oh, it's a story!" gasped Dickinson.

"What the thump did you think it was?"

"I—I couldn't imagine what it was," confessed Dickinson.

"You silly ass! I'm writing this for the 'Pictorial Popular,'" said Gunner.

"They're offering twenty pounds for the best complete story. I'm not hard up, but I may as well bag the quids. They'll come in useful."

"You—you think you'll bag 'em?" stuttered Dickinson.

"Well, others may put in something as good as this, of course," admitted Gunner. "It's not likely, but it might happen. But I'm practically sure of the prize. It says plainly that the prize will be given for the best story. That makes it fairly a cert."

"Oh!"

"Now go away!" said Gunner, settling down to literary work again. "I can't be bothered while I'm in the throes of composition."

"But prep—"

"I'm leaving my prep. Leave yours."

"But Mr. Dalton—"

"Bother Mr. Dalton!"

"Look here, Gunner, I've got to do my prep."

Gunner glared.

"You've got to shut up!" he said. "That's what you've got to do, Dickinson, and the sooner you do it the better it will be for your nose!"

Dickinson minor breathed hard. Peter Cuthbert Gunner was accustomed to carrying matters with a high hand in his study. He was always ready to introduce a formidable set of knuckles into any argument. Argumentatively, Dickinson minor could have walked all over Gunner. Fistically, Gunner could have walked over two or three Dickinsons. So Gunner generally had his way.

But it is said proverbially that the worm will turn. Dickinson minor had his prep to do, and he did not see being turned out of his study and left to face the wrath of his Form master in the morning. Gunner could risk it if he liked. Dickinson minor didn't see risking it.

So instead of going away and leaving Gunner in peace to his descriptive writing, Dickinson minor slammed the door, remaining inside the study.

"Now, I want some of that table," he said.

"What?"

"Make room for a chap."

"Haven't I told you to go away?" roared Gunner.

"I've got my prep to do."

Gunner eyed him in wrathful amazement for a moment or two. He was so unaccustomed to contradiction in his study that he did not realise at once that Dickinson minor was rebelling. When he did realise it he jumped up.

"You cheeky young ass! Get out!" roared Gunner.

"Look here—"

Gunner strode to the door and hurled it open.

"Outside!"

"I won't!" yelled Dickinson. "It's my study, ain't it? I've got my prep to do, and I can tell you— Yoop!"

Gunner grasped his study-mate in hefty hands. Dickinson struggled, but he was propelled to the doorway.

In the doorway he put up a brief resistance. Then he went whirling into the passage.

Crash!

Dickinson's roar echoed the length of the Fourth Form passage.

"Now are you clearing?" roared Gunner.

"Yow-ow!"

Slam! The door closed on Dickinson minor. Gunner returned to his literary work. Slowly and painfully Dickinson picked himself up. He shook his fist at the study door, but he did not venture to open it. He had a good allowance of aches and pains already, and he did not wish to add to the number.

Dismally Dickinson minor limped along the passage and looked into the end study. Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were at work there.

"I—I say, can you make room for a fellow?" mumbled Dickinson.

Jimmy Silver looked up.

"We're four here," he said. "What's the matter with your own study?"

"That ass Gunner has turned me out."

"More duffer you to let him," sniffed Lovell.

"Well, you see—"

"We'll come along and talk to Gunner, if you like," said Jimmy Silver.

Dickinson minor shook his head hastily.

"No, no! He's not a bad sort, only a thumping ass! I don't want to row with him. He's doing literary work, he says—"

"What?" yelled the Fistical Four.

"Writing a story for the 'Pictorial Popular.'"

"Great Scott!"

"He's expecting to win a big prize and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's turned me out," mumbled Dickinson. "I say, can I do my prep in this study?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We'll make room," he said. "Trot in!"

And Dickinson minor enconced himself in the end study, and gave his attention to prep. In his own study that evening there was no prep. Peter Cuthbert Gunner, in his new role of literary man, was going strong. Sheet after sheet of paper was added to the stack on the table, or fluttered to the litter on the carpet. More and more corrugated grew the brows of Peter Cuthbert—in krier and inkier his fingers and his cuffs.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Gunner Causes Gaiety!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. regarded Gunner of the Fourth with some interest that night, when they saw him in the Fourth Form dormitory. Gunner had been glued to his study all the evening, and was not seen by any of the Classical Fourth till dorm.

Gunner looked tired, but pleased with himself. There were a good many traces of ink about him.

The chums of the Fourth could not help smiling. Gunner was popularly supposed to be every imaginable kind of an ass. But apparently he had found a new way to display his asinine characteristics. Gunner as a footballer was a good joke; Gunner as a cricketer was a standing jest; Gunner in class was a scream; Gunner in an exam was a shriek! But Gunner as a literary aspirant was really better than all the rest put together. This really put the lid on. A fellow who spelt like a fag in the Second—a particularly backward fag—and whose grammar would have made Quintilian stare and gasp, was not the fellow Jimmy would have expected to "commence author." The Classical

Fourth had supposed—erroniously—that they knew every kind of duffer Gunner was. Now he was startling them with a new variation.

Gunner was by no means indisposed to talk about this new feat. Indeed, he was more than willing to talk about it.

It seemed that P. C. Gunner had discovered, quite by chance, that he possessed literary gifts. He confessed that he had never given much thought to such things. True, he had never really doubted that he could write if he had time. But he had never had time. Only the time, it appeared, had been wanting.

The offer of a handsome prize in the "Pictorial Popular" had caught his eye. He had determined to find time.

That was how it was—quite simple. Having set his mind to the task, he found the task unexpectedly easy. Descriptive writing flowed from his pen, almost like water from a pump. His literary output, it seemed, was limited only by the quantity of ink and paper at his disposal.

Gunner seemed surprised when the Classical juniors greeted his remarks with chuckling and chortling. He did not see anything to chuckle or chortle at. Gunner took himself quite seriously as a literary man, just as he took himself quite seriously as a great man at games. He was the only fellow at Rookwood who did.

"And you're really going to send that stuff to a real live editor, Gunner?" asked Dickinson minor.

"Of course! It goes to-morrow."

"You've really got that much neck?" inquired Arthur, Edward Lovell incredulously.

Snort from Gunner! He did not deign to answer such a frivolous question by anything but a snort.

"Don't forget to put some stamps in, old bean," said Mornington, with a laugh.

"Eh? Why should I put stamps in?" asked Gunner.

"They'll send the stuff back if you do. And it's got some value. Waste-paper fetches something."

"You silly ass!" said Gunner. "I don't want them to send it back. I want them to print it!"

"You're quite sure it will be taken on?" inquired Putty of the Fourth sarcastically.

"Yes, I believe they're quite straight," said Gunner.

"Straight! I dare say they are. But what's that got to do with it?"

"Well, if they're straight, they're bound to give the prize to the best man. That's me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"So you're not going to put in the return postage?" chuckled Peel.

"Certainly not! What's the need?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner stared round the dormitory. He found a grin on every face.

"I don't see anything to cackle at," he said. "I know what I can do. 'Tain't as if I was an ass like Lovell or—"

"Eh?" ejaculated Arthur Edward.

"Or a nincompoop like Newcome or—"

"What?" howled Newcome.

"Or a dummy like Raby, or a duffer like Silver, or a tailor's dummy like Mornington, or a grubby swot like Rawson," continued Gunner. "You see, I've got brains. That's where it is. I don't brag of it. It just happens. I've got literary gifts, just the same as I've got unusual powers as a footballer and cricketer and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Brains does it," said Gunner. "You fellows wouldn't understand, naturally. You see, they left you out when the brains were handed round."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Anyhow, you'll see," said Gunner confidently. "You'll see what you will see."

That much, at least, was undeniable, and nobody denied it. Bulkeley came in to put out the lights, and the Classical Fourth turned in, most of them chuckling. Gunner went off to sleep cheerily—to dream of literary triumphs, which would silence the voice of detraction in his Form.

The next morning Gunner turned out cheerily at the sound of the rising-bell. He dodged into his study before breakfast to pin together the sheets of his literary work, and jam the bundle into a packet and seal it, with a letter inside in his own original and startling orthography. He had the packet in an inside pocket when he came in to breakfast, bulging his jacket a little.

Fellows who saw that bulge grinned and winked at one another. At breakfast Gunner was very bright and cheery. After breakfast Dickinson minor, who really felt friendly to Gunner, in spite of Peter Cuthbert's high-handed ways, attempted gently to reason with him.

"You're really going to post that stuff, Gunner?" he asked.

Gunner stared at him.

"Do you mean my literary work?" he asked.

"Oh! Ah! Yes!"

"Don't call it stuff, then," said Gunner, frowning. "You should speak more respectfully of literary productions, Dickinson. A common sort of fellow like you should respect his intellectual superiors."

Dickinson gasped.

"Of course I'm going to post it!" went on Gunner. "You see, the office is in London, so I can't call in personally with it. I don't suppose Mr. Dalton would give me an exeat for the day."

"I—I don't suppose he would!" gasped Dickinson. "Nunno, it's not likely! But, I say, Gunner, old man, hadn't—hadn't you better get some other chap to copy it out for you?"

"Copy it out? Why?"

"Well, the spelling, you know—"

"What's the matter with the spelling?"

"And the—the fist, you know—"

"What's the matter with the fist?"

"And—and the grammar!" hinted Dickinson.

"I'm sorry to see this, Dickinson!" said Gunner, more in sorrow than in anger. "Very sorry, indeed! I didn't expect my own studymate to give way to jealousy and envy in this manner."

"Eh?"

"Be a man, old fellow," urged Gunner—"be a man! Try to be pleased by your pal's success. Remember that it brings credit on the study, and you can never bring any credit on it yourself, you know, being such a fool! Try to be pleased. But if you can't be pleased, at least don't shout out your envy and jealousy!"

And Gunner, shaking his head solemnly at the dazed Dickinson, turned and stalked away.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Dickinson. "Oh, my only hat!"

That was all he could say. He did not venture to give Peter Cuthbert Gunner any further good advice.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

## "The Pirate's Secret."

**M**R. DALTON, the master of the Fourth Form, had never known till that morning that there was a literary genius in his class.

Had he suspected the existence of such a genius in the Fourth he never would have suspected that the name of the said genius was P. C. Gunner.

That morning he made both discoveries. For P. C. Gunner was called on to construe, upon which it transpired that Gunner had not, the previous evening, prepared the passage for translation. Mr. Dalton was a kind and patient man, who made every allowance for a dunce. So he had often been very easy with Gunner. But he was not accustomed to making any allowances for laziness or carelessness, it being in a fellow's own powers to correct those faults. A fellow who muffed his Latin exercise because he was too dense to understand it was sure of Mr. Dalton's kind sympathy. A fellow who neglected his work was pretty certain to have the vials of wrath poured upon his devoted head. And so it was with Gunner.

"You have not prepared this!" said Mr. Dalton, when Gunner had caused a smile to extend from one end of the Classical Fourth to the other.

"No, sir!" said Gunner.

"And why have you not prepared your lesson, Gunner?" inquired the master of the Fourth.

"I hadn't time, sir."

"What?"

"I'm sure you'll understand, sir," said Gunner brightly. "Last evening I was very busy on literary work."

"On what?" stammered Mr. Dalton.

"Literary work. I've written a splendid story for a prize—"

"Gunner!"

"I'm sure you'll be pleased, sir, to see a Fourth Form fellow bring literary glory and distinction on his Form," said Gunner modestly.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Dalton, while the Classical Fourth grinned.

"So you'll excuse me, sir, for not having done any prep," said Gunner.

"I was sure you'd understand."

"You foolish, conceited boy—"

"Sir!"

"With any nonsense you may have written I have no concern," said Mr. Dalton. "But it is my concern to see that you do not neglect your work, Gunner. You will take three hundred lines of Virgil!"

"But I've explained—"

"That will do!"

"But I tell you, sir—"

"Silence!"

"Shurrup, Gunner, you ass!" whispered Jimmy Silver anxiously.

But it was one of Gunner's distinguishing characteristics that he opened his mouth too often and too wide. He never seemed to realise that it ever was time to shut up.

"You don't seem to catch on quite, sir," Gunner persisted. "I haven't been slacking! I worked hard last evening. It isn't every fellow who could have written the 'Pirate's Secret' at a single sitting. I fairly fagged at it, sir, all the time, except for a few moments when I was chucking Dickinson out for interrupting me. I thought that prep didn't matter in the special circumstances, sir. Don't you agree with me?"

"I do not agree with you, Gunner. Now be silent."

"But, sir—"

"You will go on now, Silver."

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"But I say, sir—" exclaimed Gunner.

"Silence!"

"I don't think you ought to give me three hundred lines, sir, for trying to bring credit on the Form. It's not much encouragement to a clever chap to use his unusual intellectual powers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the Form!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "This boy's obtuseness is not a laughing matter. Gunner, you will write out five hundred lines of Virgil instead of three hundred and—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And if you utter another word I shall cane you!"

Any other fellow in the Fourth would have dropped it at that. But it was said of old that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Peter Cuthbert Gunner did not drop it.

"I really think, sir—" he persisted.

"You are speaking again, Gunner."

"Yes, sir. I think I ought to point out to you—"

Mr. Dalton stepped to his desk, and picked up a cane.

"Hold out your hand, Gunner."

Swish!

"Now be silent!"

"Ow!"

After that, even Gunner was silent. As he said afterwards to sympathising but grinning juniors, a fellow couldn't argue with a beast who yanked a cane into the argument. The cane being at Mr. Dalton's disposal, Gunner realised that he had to drop it, and he did.

"That's the worst of having an ignoramus for a Form master," he told Jimmy Silver & Co. after lessons. "Of course, Dalton doesn't know anything about literature, and doesn't care. But even Dalton will come round, I think, when he sees my work in print."

"When!" chortled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"It's only a matter of a couple of weeks," explained Gunner. "I'm posting it to-day. You can cackle if you like—"

"Thanks, we will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" said Gunner scornfully.

"You're as jolly ignorant as Dalton himself, which is saying a lot. You don't deserve to have a literary chap in your Form, any more than he does. Still, when it comes off I expect to hear you bragging that you know a chap who writes."

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

And Gunner snorted and stalked away. Dickinson minor walked down to the village with him, and saw the precious packet duly registered at Coombe post-office.

"You won't get it back, as you haven't put in any stamps," Dickinson remarked, as they walked home to Rookwood.

"I don't want it back. The printed copy will be good enough for me," said Gunner.

"You—you really think it will be printed?" murmured Dickinson.

Gunner shook a warning finger at him. "Envy again!" he said. "Drop it, old chap. You can't imagine how small it makes you look! Drop it!"

Dickinson minor dropped it. He told the Rookwood fellows that Gunner really had posted that "piffle"—that unspeakable "tripe." Out of Gunner's hearing, of course, Dickinson actually described Gunner's literary work as piffle and tripe. In Gunner's hearing, it was more than his life was worth to give that description of it. That Gunner actually had posted it really dazed the Rookwood fellows. They had felt that even Gunner ought, somehow, to have sense

enough to stop short of that. They wondered dizzily what effect it would have upon the unfortunate editor of "Pictorial Popular."

"It won't hurt him!" said Jimmy Silver. "He won't be able to read it! Nobody can read Gunner's fist. And if he could read it he couldn't understand it—nobody can understand Gunner's spelling. Poor old Gunner!"

Jimmy Silver really felt quite a kind consideration for Gunner, doomed to disappointment. But Gunner did not commiserate himself. He was very merry and bright, and his anticipations were rosy. Other fellows in Gunner's situation might have hoped for the best, and yet been troubled with slight doubts of success. Not so Gunner. He had no doubts. The thing, he explained, was not a swindle. If it was "straight," the prize had to go to the



There was a roar of cheering and laughter occasion for Rookwood. This school has turned to achieve distinction in the literary line while

best man. Gunner was the best man. So there you were!

During the next few days Gunner was the object of much hilarious interest. But the matter was soon forgotten—by all but Gunner. While the Classical Fourth, in the stress of other interests, forgot that they had a literary man in their midst, Peter Cuthbert Gunner was counting the days that had to elapse before the announcement of his success should cause the sensation of the term at Rookwood School.

Cuthbert Gunner  
celebrates his  
Literary Triumph!



The Great Author  
at work on his  
"Masterpiece."



rose to his feet to make his speech. "Gentlemen," he began, "this is a great  
at men in his time. Now it has turned out another. It has been reserved for me  
or at school!" "Oh, my hat!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "Go it, Gunner!" (See Chapter 5.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Money Talks I

"MY cheque, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gunner made the remark  
with studied carelessness.

He did not choose to appear to be  
excited about it.

There was a letter for Gunner, and  
the sight of that letter reminded the  
Classical Fourth of Gunner, the literary  
man. For on the envelope was printed,  
in large letters:

"THE PICTORIAL POPULAR."

Tubby Muffin had seen that letter in  
the rack. He had raced away with  
the news to Gunner. Gunner had de-  
liberately left it on view for a good  
quarter of an hour—controlling his own  
impatience to see the contents. So when  
he arrived to take his letter he found  
quite a crowd of his Form-fellows  
assembled. All of them were curious to  
know what was in the letter—though  
nobody but P. C. Gunner supposed that  
it contained a cheque.

Gunner took the letter with a care-  
less air. He seemed in no hurry to open  
it. Undoubtedly he was enjoying the  
keen interest which the Fourth were at  
last displaying.

"Well, let's see what's in it," said  
Arthur Edward Lovell. "'Tain't the  
tripe sent home, anyhow. The envelope  
isn't big enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some of these editorial johnnies are  
jolly polite," said Putty. "They may  
have written to say that they'll send  
Gunner's tosh back if he sends stamps  
for postage."

"Very likely," agreed Jimmy Silver.  
"I don't see what else they should be  
writing to Gunner for."

"You wouldn't," said Gunner con-  
temptuously. "I fancy there's a cheque  
in the letter—though, of course, it may  
only be the announcement that I get  
the prize!"

"Let's see it, old chap!" said Dickin-  
son.

Gunner opened the envelope at last.  
He drew out a slip of paper, which he  
calmly unfolded, under a score of pairs  
of interested eyes. From inside the slip  
of paper he drew another—which, as  
he opened it, was seen to be engraved.

It was a cheque!

There was a buzz of astonishment  
among the juniors. They could see the  
words "Bank of England" on the  
cheque! Putty of the Fourth broke the  
amazed silence.

"Queer that they should post some-  
body else's cheque to Gunner by mis-  
take! Very careless to put it in the  
wrong envelope."

"Oh!" gasped Raby. "That's it, of  
course!"

Gunner smiled, and held up the  
cheque.

"Look at it!" he said calmly.

The juniors looked. Obviously,  
Putty's explanation was not the right  
one. For the cheque was payable to  
Gunner.

Plain as plain English could make it,  
there it was: "Pay P.C. Gunner, Esq.,  
the sum of twenty pounds."

Peter Cuthbert Gunner smiled  
cheerily and serenely.

"You fellows seem surprised!" he  
remarked.

"Surprised!" gasped Jimmy Silver.  
"Surprised isn't the word for it!  
Knocked right out!"

"We're dreamin' this!" said Morn-  
ington.

"Let's see the letter!" gasped Lovell.

Gunner showed the letter. It was  
merely a printed form stating that pay-  
ment was enclosed, and that a receipt  
for the same would oblige.

Gunner was the only fellow present  
who was not astounded. The rest of  
the fellows could scarcely believe their  
eyes.

"Well, congratters, old chap!" gasped  
Jimmy Silver. "I'm jolly glad! But it  
beats me hollow!"

"Beats me to the wide!" said Lovell.  
"But I'm glad!"

"Gunner's got it—got the twenty  
quid!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Fancy  
that, you fellows!"

"Didn't I tell you I should get it?"  
said Gunner.

"You did, old chap—you did!" said  
Dickinson minor. "You were right all  
along the line, old fellow. Good old  
Gunner!"

"I—I say, I—I really thought Gunner  
would bag it, you know," said Tubby  
Muffin. "You remember my saying so,  
Jimmy—"

"I don't!" said Jimmy Silver.

"The fact is," said Gunner severely,  
"nobody here believed that I should bag  
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it. A lot of doubting Thomases. I don't put it down to envy—I put it down to sheer stupidity. You've got a clever chap among you, and you haven't the brains to recognise plain facts. That's how it is."

"Go it!" grinned Mornington.

"I'm not a fellow to brag—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But facts speak for themselves." Gunner held up the cheque. "I'm paid twenty pounds for literary work that I knocked off in a single evening. There's the money."

"No getting out of that," concurred Jimmy Silver. "Gunner can't be such a howling ass as we've always supposed."

"After all, even a born idiot like Gunner may be able to do just one thing!" remarked Newcome thoughtfully.

"Must be a mistake somewhere," said Mornington.

"Blessed if I can see where the mistake could come in," said Jimmy Silver. "The cheque's payable to Gunner—P. C. Gunner! That settles it."

"It does—it do!" agreed Lovell.

There was a natural revulsion of feeling in the Classical Fourth. Gunner's enterprise had been the subject of nothing but hilarity. Yet it had been a success. Money talks—and there was no gainsaying a cheque for twenty pounds payable to P. C. Gunner. The juniors felt that they must have misjudged Gunner somehow. Nobody had supposed for a moment that Gunner had any brains—yet surely only a brainy fellow could have walked in and bagged a literary prize first shot. Like Cæsar of old, he had come, and seen, and conquered. Gunner, for once, was the centre of the limelight, the admired of all admirers.

It was glory for Gunner at last.

He basked in the sunshine of fame. Suddenly he had jumped into prominence, and now he was very prominent indeed. And the Classical Fourth remembered that Gunner had arranged to stand a record feed with his cheque when he got it. They found that Gunner was keeping to his programme. Dickinson minor was seen giving magnificent orders in the tuckshop on behalf of Gunner. The great spread which was to celebrate Gunner's success as an author was coming off, and just then there was no doubt that Gunner was popular.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Gunner the Great!

"DICKY DALTON!"

"We'll come with you, Gunner!"

"Come on!" said the great man.

Sergeant Kettle, in the school shop, smiled and shook his head when offered a cheque for twenty pounds to cash. The sergeant's till did not contain any such sum.

It was Tubby Muffin who suggested Dicky Dalton, and Gunner adopted the suggestion. Mr. Dalton sometimes kindly cashed a postal-order for a member of his Form, and Gunner saw no reason why he should not cash a cheque. Indeed, somebody had to cash it for Gunner, as it was drawn on a London bank and crossed. And Gunner was rather pleased by the thought of presenting it to Mr. Dalton. Mr. Dalton had characterised his literary work as nonsense. He had contemptuously applied that expression to the "Pirate's Secret." Gunner bore no malice, but he did contemplate with pleasure showing Mr. Dalton the cheque.

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he had received for the "Pirate's Secret." It would be an eye-opener for Dicky Dalton. Perhaps he would comprehend at last what a genius he had in his Form?

Quite a little crowd of fellows walked to Mr. Dalton's study with Gunner. They were rather curious to see the effect of the news on Dicky Dalton.

Peter Cuthbert was a great man now. Fellows felt rather remorseful for having written him down an ass, so to speak. And some fellows realised that it would be rather a good thing to be on pally terms with a chap who could bag twenty-pound cheques whenever he liked. Tubby Muffin already loved Gunner like a long-lost brother. Dickinson minor realised that he had always—or almost always—looked on Gunner as somebody very much out of the common. Peele and Gower and their set were already handing out flattery in great chunks. But the chunks could never be too large for Gunner. He swallowed them whole and asked for more.

Other fellows felt that somehow they must have misjudged Gunner, and they owned up that it was rather a distinction for the Classical Fourth to have a literary fellow in it—a fellow who had simply to dash off something, send it along to London, and then cash a cheque. Such things seemed almost too good to be true.

So an admiring crowd accompanied Gunner wherever he went, and they accompanied him to see Mr. Dalton. That gentleman was rather surprised when Gunner presented himself, with half a dozen friends, in the study, and with a dozen more friends hanging about the doorway and the passage.

"What is all this?" asked Mr. Dalton.

Gunner laid the cheque on the table.

"Would you mind cashing this little cheque for me, sir?" asked Gunner, with elaborate carelessness.

"What?"

"A little cheque, I've had for some literary work, sir," said Gunner casually.

Mr. Dalton picked up the cheque with blank astonishment in his face. He looked at the cheque, he looked at Gunner.

Never in his life had the master of the Fourth been so astonished.

"Is it possible, Gunner, that you have received a cheque for twenty pounds, for—for something that you have written?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Looks like it, sir," said Gunner, with a smile. "There's the cheque."

"There it is, sir!" grinned Tubby Muffin. "Twenty pounds, sir. Gunner's an awfully clever chap, sir."

Mr. Dalton seemed utterly perplexed. "Are you sure there is no mistake in the matter, Gunner?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"If you have gifts of this kind it is extremely odd that you should have displayed no sign of them, to my knowledge," said the puzzled Form master. "I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake."

Gunner smiled rather bitterly. Even his Form master envied him! It was rather rotten of Dicky Dalton, he felt.

"There can't be any mistake, sir," said Dickinson minor. "The cheque's payable to Gunner, and it came in a letter from the 'Pictorial Popular.' Gunner's got the letter."

"Show me the letter, Gunner."

Gunner handed over the letter and the envelope, which bore the style and title of the "Pictorial Popular," and was addressed to P. C. Gunner, at Rookwood School.

Mr. Dalton looked as he felt—more and more perplexed.

There was no denying the evidence of his eyes, but he could not understand it.

For he did not merely think that P. C. Gunner was a dunce and a duffer—he knew it!

There was a long silence. Gunner was smiling, rather ironically. He wondered how long Mr. Dalton was going to take to admit self-evident facts.

"Well, Gunner," said the Form master, at last, "if this is quite in order I congratulate you."

"Oh, thanks!" said Gunner. "I assure you that it's in order, sir."

"I cannot cash a cheque for this sum," said Mr. Dalton. "Neither should I care to do so without passing it through the bank. If you like, I will pay it into my bank to-day, and when it has been honoured I will hand you the money."

The juniors' faces fell. The cash was wanted at once for the great celebration. But Gunner did not turn a hair.

"Very well, sir," he assented. "I am much obliged."

"You must endorse the cheque, Gunner."

"Certainly!"

Gunner endorsed the cheque, and left the study with his little army. Mr. Dalton was left staring blankly at the cheque in a state of amazement, from which he did not soon recover.

"I—I say, Gunner," stammered Tubby Muffin, in the passage. "I—I say, what about the spread?" The spread, in Reginald Muffin's estimation, was the most important incident in the transaction—the brightest jewel in the great man's crown.

"That's all right," said Gunner. "I've got a fiver in my pocket—that will see us through. Dalton can take as long as he likes over the cheque."

"Bravo!"

"Good old Gunner!"

"Every chap in the Fourth is invited, Classical and Modern," said Gunner.

"We'll have it in the Form-room. No room in the study. I want all my friends round me now."

"Bravo!"

Gunner was gratified by having all his friends round him at the spread in the Form-room, and the name of his friends was legion. No fellow at Rookwood, indeed, had so many friends as Gunner had on this particular afternoon.

A dozen fellows helped to carry in the supplies. Sergeant Kettle had seldom or never had such a rush of custom.

Jimmy Silver & Co. honoured the occasion with their presence. They were as perplexed as Mr. Dalton; but they were pleased, and they congratulated Gunner sincerely. How on earth he had done it they did not understand; but he had done it, and they were glad. And there was no doubt that Gunner was celebrating his success in a hearty and open-handed way. Gunner might be every known kind of ass, but he had his good points.

The Fourth Form of Rookwood turned up to a man. All the Classics were there, and the Moderns came over led by Tommy Dodd. Gunner's generous hospitality was not confined to the Fourth, either. Smythe & Co. of the Shell drifted in, and were welcomed. Algy Silver and Teddy Lovell brought a gang of the Third. Even Snooks of the Second was allowed to wedge in with some of his ink-fingered compatriots.

It was a glorious occasion. Gunner did the honours, loftily but

graciously. He was, of course, called upon for a speech. There was really no need to call upon him—he intended to make a speech anyhow. But it was universally felt that a fellow who was standing such a spread had a right to talk as much as he liked, and fellows were not bound to listen.

"Gentlemen—" said Gunner.

"Hear, hear!"

"This is a great occasion."

"Bravo!"

"Pass the cake!" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"Shut up, Muffin!"

"A great occasion for the Fourth, and a great occasion for Rookwood," resumed Gunner. "Rookwood has turned out great men in its time—great generals, and great diplomats, and great artists and literary men. Now it has turned out another."

"You're not turned out yet, Gunner," said Dickinson minor, misunderstanding.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be a silly ass, Dickinson. Old Boys of Rookwood have covered themselves and their school with glory, in all the corners of the earth," said Gunner eloquently. "In fact, Rookwood's cup of glory is overflowing. But it is not full yet."

"Go it, Gunner!"

"It was reserved for me to achieve distinction in the literary line while still a junior in the school," went on Gunner. "Properly speaking, of course, I shouldn't be a junior. I ought to be in the Shell, or the Fifth, but the Head doesn't see it. The Head's rather dense."

"Oh!"

"Owing to the Head being dense, and not seeing that he's got a fellow of uncommon intellect here, I'm in the Fourth," said Gunner. "I'm treated just as if I were an ordinary fellow like you fellows."

"Oh!"

"But I don't mind," said Gunner magnanimously. "Genius will out! Genius can't be kept down."

"Bravo!"

"It's not my way to brag—"

"Oh!"

"I state facts. What I've done, I've done. The Rookwood Fourth has produced a literary genius. It's me. I've pointed out to you fellows, lots of times, that I'm the only chap in the Form with any brains to speak of. You've never believed me."

"Oh! Nunno!"

"Now you see it for yourselves," said Gunner. "This is only a beginning. I'm going on. I don't boast. I don't swank! I only say that in time to come Rookwood will be known as the school where Peter Cuthbert Gunner was educated. That will be its greatest title to fame."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner sat down amid cheers and roars of laughter.

"Rather a neat speech, what?" he whispered to Dickinson minor.

"Oh, great!" gasped Dickinson.

Gunner was satisfied with his speech. The other fellows were satisfied with the spread. So there was general satisfaction; and the great celebration ended with satisfaction all round.

#### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

##### Quite a Surprise!

"BLESSED if I understand this!" It was the following day.

For twenty-four hours the glory of Gunner had been undimmed.

It was known that he had started a

new literary work; and Dickinson minor, so far from thinking of butting into the study when Gunner was in the throes of composition, not only kept outside, but warned other fellows, in a deep whisper, to tread lightly as they passed the door.

The great man's meditations were not to be disturbed. His literary work was not to be interrupted. Dickinson minor was quite enthusiastic about it. Indeed, he realised that it would be rather a good thing for him to be the studymate of a fellow who could bag twenty-pound cheques almost without effort, and who handed out his literary gains in so open-hearted a manner.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had grinned when first they heard of Gunner as a literary man, but they did not grin now. Money talks; and if there was money in Gunner's scribbling, it was not a matter for grinning. That day, at least, Gunner, the literary man, was taken quite seriously in the Rookwood Fourth. He had gone up like a rocket, and the juniors did not yet know that he was destined to come down like the stick.

But when a letter came for Gunner, with the style and title of the "Pictorial Popular" on the envelope, even Dickinson minor admitted that Gunner might be interrupted. There might be another cheque in the letter. It might contain a request for more literary works. It was a matter of intense interest in the Classical Fourth.

So Dickinson minor carried the letter up to the study, with a crowd of the Fourth at his heels.

Gunner looked up, and passed his hand across his brow with a gesture of a literary man interrupted in the midst of deep intellectual efforts.

Dickinson, with great respect, handed him the letter.

"Oh! Another letter from my editor!" said Gunner carelessly.

The juniors were properly impressed.

"Open it, old bean!" said Lovell.

"We're awfully keen, you know!"

"Oh, all right!"

Gunner opened the letter, watched by eager eyes. It was then that he remarked that he was blessed if he understood it.

"No cheque?" asked Dickinson minor.

"Eh—no!"

"Let a chap see it."

"Blessed if I catch on to it!" said Gunner. "The man seems to be a fool! You can read it."

Jimmy Silver held up the letter, and the juniors crowded round to read it. It ran:

"Dear Sir,—Owing to a clerical error, caused by the similarity of names, a cheque which should have been sent to one of our authors, Mr. P. C. Gunter, was dispatched to you yesterday.

"We shall be obliged if you will return this cheque in the enclosed stamped envelope.

"Apologising for any inconvenience to which you may have been put, we are, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"THE 'PICTORIAL POPULAR,' LTD."

There was a moment of silence in the study when that letter had been perused. The juniors looked at one another. Gunner, whose powerful intellect did not work rapidly, still seemed puzzled. But the meaning of the letter was clear enough to everybody but Gunner.

"I think I remember mentionin' that there was a mistake somewhere," murmured Mornington.

There was a postscript to the letter.

Jimmy Silver could not help feeling sorry for Gunner. But also he could not help grinning as he read the postscript.

"P.S.—Your manuscript, entitled the 'Pirate's Secret,' which we regret to say we cannot use, will be returned to you on receipt of stamps to cover the postage."

"The sting's in the tail!" murmured Putty of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The powerful brain of P. C. Gunner worked slowly. But it worked. He grasped the terrible truth at last. By a clerical error, such as occurs now and then in a busy office, a cheque had been sent to him which should have been sent to P. C. Gunter, and the return of that payment was now required. And his own literary masterpiece—

"All your own fault, Gunner!" said Dickinson minor. "I told you you'd better put stamps in!"

"You're a silly ass, Dickinson! It seems they've turned it down!" said Gunner. "The man's a fool! A dummy! In fact, a blithering idiot! What did they make him an editor for, when he doesn't know a good thing when he sees it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall send the stamps," said Gunner. "I shall demand the return of the manuscript. I shall refuse to let him have it now if he begs for it!"

"I—I would!" gasped Dickinson.

"And I shall tell him what I think of him!" said Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As for the cheque," said Gunner, "that's nothing; I don't care about that. But the man's cheek—his colossal ignorance—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle in my study!" snapped Gunner. "I don't see anything to cackle at myself! What are you cackling about, you dummies?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

They crowded out of Gunner's study, still cackling. Gunner did not see anything to cackle at, but it was evident that the Classical Fourth did, for the Fourth Form passage was in a cackle from end to end.

Mr. Dalton did not smile when Gunner, showing him the new communication from the "Pictorial Popular," reclaimed the cheque to be returned. It was rather difficult not to smile; but Mr. Dalton contrived not to do so. He did not smile till after Gunner had left his study.

But in the Classical Fourth there were many smiles.

For twenty-four hours there had been glory for Gunner, but now the glory was gone. Having gone up like the rocket, he had descended like the stick. Gunner, the literary man, was now a subject only for hilarity. Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, he had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof.

Gunner was now down-hearted. His excellent opinion of himself was unabated. He explained that there was nothing to be surprised at in the occurrence; it was simply that he had been dealing with a crass ass!

And the Classical Fourth agreed that there was undoubtedly a crass ass in the affair. But according to the Classical Fourth, the name of the crass ass was Peter Cuthbert Gunner.

THE END.

(You'll enjoy reading "THE PERFECT'S PUNISHMENT" next week's splendid long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.)

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