"CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE WORKHOUSE,"

Grand Recitation by GEORGE R. SIMS, included in this Splendid Number.

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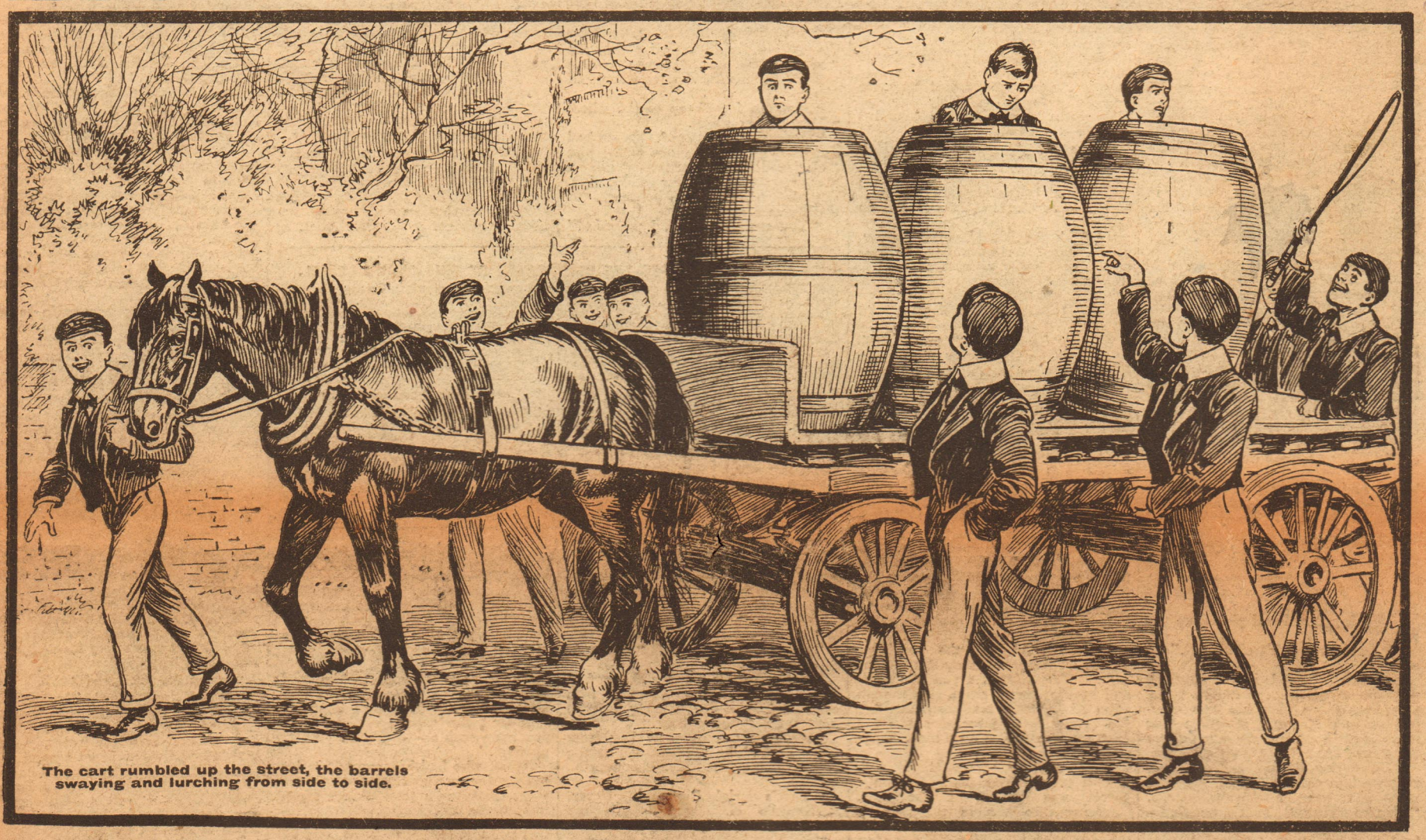
THE BOYS' FRIEND 1d.

EVERY TUESDAY.

The object of THE BOYS' FRIEND is to Amuse, to Instruct, and to Advise Boys.

No. 498.—Vol. X. New Series.] ONE PENNY. [Week Ending December 24, 1910.



The cart rumbled up the street, the barrels swaying and lurching from side to side.

An Introduction for the New Reader appears on the next page.

THE NEW BROOM

MAXWELL SCOTT'S New School Serial.

"Three Men in a Tub."

PRITCHARD, knowing nothing of what had happened at Barnby, thought that these various ejaculations were expressions of disgust at the new head-master's personal appearance.

"I told you he was an owl, didn't I?" he said. "Fancy havin' a scarecrow like that put over us. Rotten, I call it."

"You don't understand!" moaned Tubb.

"What don't I understand?" demanded Pritchard.

"We've met him!" said Card, in a hollow voice.

"Met Dr. Gandy?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the refreshment-room at Barnby station," said Rigden.

"And I socked him in the eye with a tomato!" groaned Tubb.

"After which," said Card, "I stuck out my foot and tripped him up."

Pritchard whistled.

"By Jove, I wouldn't be in your boots for a trifle!" he said. "How did it happen?"

"We were havin' some grub in the refreshment-room," said Tubb, "when Holcroft swaggered in. I shied a tomato at him, and just as I did so, the door opened, and that thing"—he pointed to the portrait in the shop window—"toddled into the room, spectacles and gamp and all complete."

"Of course, we didn't know it was Dr. Gandy," said Philip. "The man was a perfect stranger to us, and we'd no idea who he was till you showed us this portrait just now."

"And did the tomato miss Holcroft and hit the doctor?" asked Pritchard.

"Yes," said Card. "Bashed him in the face, and knocked his specs off."

"I apologised," said Tubb. "But he wasn't takin' any apologies, thank you! He went for me bald-headed, and tried to hit me with his gamp, but I dodged him, and then, as he made another rush at me, Card tripped him up, and he skated across the floor on his face."

"And then," said Philip, "we bolted out of the room, and scuttled back to the train."

"Didn't he follow you?" asked Pritchard.

"He tried to," said Rigden; "but by the time he'd picked himself up and collected his gamp and his specs and his hat, the train was on the move."

"So he was left behind at Barnby?"

"Yes," said Tubb; "but he'll come on by a later train, and then——" He rubbed the seat of his trousers, and gazed ruefully at Card. "We'll not be able to sit down for a week!" he sighed.

"What rotten luck!" said Pritchard sympathetically. "If I were you, I should——"

He broke off with a shout of alarm, for at that moment Holcroft and a score of Paulite juniors came pelting round an adjacent corner.

As the reader will remember, there was intense rivalry between the Paulites and the Walkerites, and no opportunity was lost by either faction of scoring off the other whenever a chance presented itself.

Tubb, as we have seen, had tried to score off Holcroft in the refreshment-room at Barnby station. The attempt had failed, but the fact that it had been made was a sufficient reason in Holcroft's eyes for taking immediate steps to avenge the affront. Accordingly, when the train had reached Rayton, Holcroft had hurriedly collected as many of his followers as he could find, and had then set out in pursuit of the offending Tubb.

"There he is!" he yelled, as he and his followers turned the corner and saw Tubb and his five companions standing outside the tuck-shop. "At 'em! Down 'em! Collar as many of 'em as you can, but whatever you do, make sure of Tubb."

"Into the shop!" roared Tubb. "It's our only chance. Into the shop, and lock the door."

Cyrus happened to be standing nearest the door, and in less time far than it takes to tell, he darted into the shop. But he was the only one who got inside. Old Jeremiah Wragg, the one-legged proprietor of the shop, had had his premises invaded before by contending bands of Walkerites and Paulites, and he had no desire to repeat the experience. He would have prevented Cyrus taking refuge in the shop if he could, but Cyrus was too quick for him. Before the others could follow Cyrus, however, Jerry slammed the door in their faces, and hastily turned the key.

"This is a respectable shop, and not a bear-garden!" he growled. "If they wants to fight, let 'em fight outside!"

Truth to tell, neither Tubb nor his companions were particularly anxious to fight just then. They were not averse from fighting, as a rule, but they preferred the odds to be slightly less than four to one. However, as they had no choice in the matter, and as they scorned to surrender without a struggle, they planted themselves with their backs to the wall, and prepared to sell their liberties as dearly as possible.

The fight which ensued was brief in duration, but what it lacked in length it made up for in fierceness.

Philip, off his own bat, so to speak, accounted for Rutherford and Carfax. Tubb toppled Holcroft into the gutter, and landed Pettigrew one on the jaw that sent him reeling halfway across the street. Rigden, Card, and Pritchard each performed prodigies of valour, but the issue of the fight was never in doubt, and at last, by sheer force of numbers, the Paulites won the day.

Card was the first to be dragged down and overpowered. Tubb was the next, and a few seconds later Philip was swept off his feet and pinned to the ground. Rigden and Pritchard were more fortunate, and, after fighting their way through the ranks of their assailants, they dashed off to the school in quest of reinforcements.

"After 'em! After 'em!" yelled Carfax excitedly.

"No, no!" cried Holcroft, as half a dozen of his followers rushed off in pursuit of Rigden and Pritchard. "Come back! We mustn't divide our forces. We've got Tubb and Card and the Blot. Let the others go."

(Continued on the next page.)

THE NEW BROOM.

(Continued from the previous page.)

"There's another of 'em inside the shop," said Rutherford, peering through the half-glass door. "A new bug, by the look of him. Shall I ask Jerry to fire him out?"

Cyrus heard the question, and plastered his face against the inside of the door.

"I shall write to my poppa if you dare to molest me!" he shouted. "He's a millionaire, and I guess he'll make it warm for you if you ill-treat me."

Rutherford gazed at him, and then at Holcroft.

"What a queer little beast it is!" he grinned. "What do they call it, and where does it come from?"

"Don't know and don't care," said Holcroft. "I've no use for insects like that. I've bigger fish to fry. What shall we do with these three chaps?"

"Make 'em run the gauntlet," suggested Carfax.

"Carry 'em down to the bridge and drop 'em into the river," advised Pettigrew.

"I know a better dodge than either of those," said Barker.

He pointed to a horse and cart which were standing, unattended, outside the public-house on the opposite side of the street. The cart was a low one, without sides or ends, and on it were three empty barrels, each of which was open at one end.

"Let's put 'em in those barrels," said Barker, "and drive 'em up to the school and roll 'em down the slope into the river."

"Toppin'!" cried Holcroft joyously.

"Gorgeous!" said Pettigrew, rubbing his hands.

"Whose cart is it?" asked Rutherford.

"Featherstone's," said Barker. "It's been standin' there for the last half-hour. The old chap is inside the pub drinkin'. As likely as not he'll stop there all the afternoon. We'll have heaps of time to drive these fellows up to the school, and bring the cart back before he misses it."

"Come along, then!" cried Holcroft. "That's what we'll do."

Kicking and struggling, Philip, Tubb, and Card were carried across the road, and each of them was thrust into a barrel, leaving only his head sticking out.

"Rub-a-dub-dub! Three men in a tub!" chanted Rutherford. "But, I say, we ought to get some rope from somewhere and tie 'em in, oughtn't we?"

Holcroft grinned and picked up the whip.

"I'll see they don't climb out," he said

The barrels stood in an upright position on the cart. Philip, being somewhat taller than his two companions in misfortune, showed rather more of his head and shoulders above the top of his barrel than they did.

"Down, dog, down!" said Holcroft, rapping him on the top of the head with the end of the whipstock. "Lower! There! That's better."

"We'll pay you out for this!" hooted Tubb. "Wait till——"

"No talkin' there!" commanded Holcroft, and he emphasised the order by bringing the end of the whipstock down on Tubb's head. "Ah, would you!"

Card's hand had appeared above the top of his barrel. With the swiftness of a lightning flash, the whipstock descended on his knuckles, and Card's hand disappeared to the accompaniment of a yell of pain.

"No, I don't think we shall need any rope!" chuckled Holcroft. "This whip'll keep 'em quiet enough. Now, Rutherford, you lead the giddy horse. The rest of you chaps line up on each side of the cart. I'll walk behind, and keep our prisoners in order. Are we ready? Right-ho! Off we go!"

The cart rumbled off up the narrow street. As it jolted over the rough, uneven coble-stones, the barrels swayed and lurched from side to side, and threatened on more than one occasion to fall off. However, all went well until the procession had nearly reached the top of the rather steep road which led from the village to the school. Then suddenly the near hind-wheel of the cart sank into a deep rut, the vehicle gave an ugly lurch, and in the twinkling of an eye the three barrels, with the three boys inside, slid off the cart and went rolling down the hill.

Luckily the cart was a low one, so that none of the boys was seriously hurt when the barrels fell off. Luckily, also, the hill was not a very steep one, so that the barrels did not travel at any great speed. For a moment, however, Holcroft and his chums were paralysed with terror, but as soon as they saw that nobody had been, or was likely to be seriously injured, their alarm gave place to hilarious delight.

"A race! A race!" cried Holcroft, as he and the others dashed off in pursuit of the spinning barrels. "Card leads! Bravo, Card! Keep it up! I back Card! Two to one on Card!"

"I back the Blot!" yelled Carfax, as Philip's barrel bounded forward and almost came abreast of Card's. "Oh, well run, sir!"

"Buck up, Tubb!" howled Rutherford. "You'll be last if you don't hurry."

"Spurt, Card, spurt!" roared Holcroft. "The Blot is on your track. He's nearly level with you. Oh, hard lines!"

Philip's barrel had collided with Card's, and the two barrels, after swerving across the road, rolled into the ditch, and came to a standstill. Bruised and shaken though they were, Philip and Card lost no time in scrambling out, and before their tormentors could recapture them, they crawled through a gap in the hedge and took to their heels.

Tubb's barrel still continued to roll merrily down the hill, and it had nearly reached the bottom, where the road turned sharply to the right, when the burly form of Enoch Blobbs, the village constable, strode round the corner.

At the sight of the revolving barrel, which was making straight for him, Blobbs uttered a yell of alarm, and hastily sprang aside. As though actuated by some malignant instinct, the barrel at that moment swerved from its course, and once more rolled towards him.

With another ear-splitting yell, Blobbs turned and fled. But the barrel was too quick for him. Charging into him in the rear, it swept his legs from under him, with the result that he first sat down on the barrel, and then fell backwards over it, with his head on the ground and his legs in the air; while the barrel, after rolling another yard or two, came to a standstill in the middle of the road.

As Tubb, more dead than alive, crawled out of the barrel, a man—a very angry man—came tearing round the corner. It was Featherstone, the owner of the horse and cart.

"That's my barrel!" he bellowed, glaring at Tubb. "Where's the others? Where's my 'oss an' cart?"

Then his eye fell on Blobbs, who was still lying on his back, feebly waving one hand.

"Wot—wot's 'appened?" gasped Featherstone.

"You'd better ask those chaps," said Tubb, pointing to Holcroft and his chums, who had pulled up in dismay at the sight of Featherstone. "They'll tell you all about it."

Then, leaving Holcroft to settle with Blobbs and Featherstone, Tubb limped round the corner, turned down the lane behind the church, and so made his way up to the school.

THE 6th CHAPTER.
The New Headmaster.

ALL this time Cyrus was shivering in the tuckshop, not daring to leave lest Holcroft and his chums should be lying in wait for him. Eventually, however, he saw Mr. Sopworth coming up from the station, and knowing that he would be safe in the company of a master, he hurried out, and accosted him.

"Say, can I walk up to the school with you?" he asked.

Mr. Sopworth frowned. Cyrus had not capped him, had not called him "sir," and had not addressed him in that respectful manner which Mr. Sopworth considered to be due to his dignity as a master.

"You are a new boy, I presume?" he said coldly.

"I say you are a new boy, I presume?"

"Yes," said Cyrus.

"Say 'Yes, sir!'" thundered Mr. Sopworth.

"Yes, sir," said Cyrus meekly.

"What is your name?"

"Sharpe," said Cyrus. "Cyrus A. Sharpe."

Mr. Sopworth's manner changed at once. He positively beamed with cordiality. Not for nothing was he nicknamed "Soapy Sam."

"Ah, you are the new boy from New York!" he purred. "The son of the distinguished Mr. Theodore K. Sharpe."

"That's right," said Cyrus. "Theodore K. Sharpe—that's my poppa's name. He's a millionaire."

"So I understand," said Mr. Sopworth, rubbing his hands, and gazing affectionately at Cyrus. "May you walk up to the school with me? Certainly! I shall be delighted to have your company. I say I shall be delighted to have your company. I trust you will always regard me as your friend and protector. Any service I can render you, I shall be only too proud to render. And how did you leave your dear papa?"

All this was very flattering to Cyrus—very different to the reception he had received from Tubb and the others.

In the meantime, Rigden and Pritchard had reached the school, had mustered a force of Walkerite juniors, and were just about to set out to rescue Tubb and Card and Philip, when Philip and Card arrived, to be followed a few minutes later by Tubb.

When the three boys had told their tale, and their chums had vowed revenge on Holcroft and his followers, they all adjourned to Big Room, where tea was spread, and the conversation had just veered round to the subject of their new head-master when Cyrus arrived.

"Ah, here you are at last!" said Philip. "You found your way all right, then?"

"Mr. Sopworth kindly brought me up to the school," said Cyrus.

"Oh, did he?" said Tubb. "Did you tell him your guv'nor was a millionaire?"

"I did," said Cyrus.

"Then I wonder he didn't carry you up to the school on his back," said Tubb. "He would have done if you had asked him. But help yourself to some grub, and remember little boys, especially new bugs, should be seen and not heard. Now, Card, go on with your yarn, and tell these chaps what you told us in the train."

Card repeated what his father had heard about their new head-master, Dr. Gandy—that he was a crank and a faddist, that his diet consisted of nuts and cheese, that he didn't much believe in outdoor games, and that, as Card expressed it, "he was always jawin' about cultivatin' your mind, and all that tommy-rot!"

"Oh, come off!" exclaimed Hepworth. "I'm not goin' to believe all that!"

"Have you seen the Gander?" demanded Tubb.

"No."

"Then wait till you see him," advised Tubb. "When you see him, you'll be ready to believe anything. Owl isn't the word for him. You never saw such a—— Hallo! What's up now?"

Atkin, who had been up to his dormitory for something, burst into the room, his face a picture of mingled indignation and dismay.

"Oh, I say, you chaps, what do you think?" he cried. "They've cut up our dormitory into cubicles."

"What!" roared Tubb, leaping to his feet.

"It's a fact!" said Atkin. "Come and see."

Every boy in the room, except Cyrus, dashed upstairs to Dormitory B—the dear old room which had been the scene of so many larks and midnight orgies in the past. They nearly wept when they saw how the room had been altered during the holidays. By means of wooden partitions, it had been divided into sixteen little cells, or cubicles, each of which contained a bed, a chair, and a wash-stand.

"Well, of all the rotten ideas, this is the very rottenest!" said Tubb. "It's more like a prison than a dormitory."

"No more pillow fights now!" sighed Rigden.

"No more secret feasts!" groaned Card.

"But that isn't the worst," said Atkin. "Look at the windows."

"What about 'em?" said Tubb. "They're open, that's all."

"Try to shut 'em," said Atkin.

Tubb walked over to one of the windows, and tried to close it.

"Why, it's fastened open!" he exclaimed. "Great Scott! Does this mean that we've got to sleep with the windows open all night?"

"It looks like it," said Rigden gloomily. "Another of Gandy's new-fangled health notions, I expect."

Tubb danced with rage.

"This is the limit!" he declared. "It's bad enough to be penned up every night like a convict in a cell, but I'll be hanged if I'll be frozen to death as well!"

He struck a theatrical attitude. As the president of the R.A.T.S. (Rayton Amateur Theatrical Society), he was rather fond of striking attitudes.

"Are we slaves?" he demanded. "Are we goin' to allow a cranky old idiot to try his ghastly experiments on us? It'll be nuts and cheese for dinner next! We must make a stand. We must raise the standard of rebellion. We must——"

Here Cruft, the new porter, put his head in at the door, and brought Tubb's speech to an abrupt termination.

"All boys is to hassemble in the big school-room at once," he said.

"What for?" inquired Tubb.

"To 'ear a speech from Dr. Gandy," said Cruft.

"Oh, he has arrived, has he?" asked Rigden.

"Yes. He missed the four o'clock train at Barnby, but he came on by the next. He's in the big school-room now, and all the boys is to hassemble there at once."

Cruft went off to summon the rest of the boys. Card glanced at Tubb.

"Now comes the giddy mug of tar," he said. "To be, or not to be! Will the Gander recognise us as the chaps that rotted him at Barnby?"

"Bound to," said Tubb lugubriously.

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," said Card. "I've been thinkin'. He wouldn't wear those enormous gig-lamps if he weren't very short-sighted, would he?"

"I suppose not," said Tubb.

"Well," said Card, "when the tomato biffed him in the face, it knocked his gig-lamps off. He'd only just walked into the room, so he hadn't had time to have a good look at us. Probably, after his specs had been knocked off, he could hardly see us at all; so it isn't a dead cert by any means that he'll know us again when he sees us."

Tubb nodded.

"There's something in what you say," he agreed. "Yes, there's just a sportin' chance that he may not recognise us. However, we've got to

(Continued on the next page.)

AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE NEW READER OF THIS GRAND SERIAL.

Philip Ashley, a brilliant young scholar, saves the life of Sir David Rendle's only daughter. In consequence of this action, Sir David adopts him, sends him to Rayton College, giving him all the benefits he intended for his unscrupulous nephew, who has deceived him, and who has now been packed off to Canada to make a fresh start in life.

The new term at Rayton College is to begin, and Phil starts on his journey to Rayton. He is accompanied by Cyrus A. Sharpe,

an American lad,

whom you will all like, and during the journey they meet Tubb, Card, and other friends. Reaching Barnby Junction, they fall in with more Raytonians, and entering a refreshment room they find a colleger of the rival house. One Raytonian, named Tubb, seizing a tomato from the counter, takes aim, but misses his mark and catches an elderly gentleman in the face.

The boys escape and re-enter the train. At the end of their journey they discover a portrait of

the new head-master

of Rayton College displayed in the window of a local tuck shop.

One glance at the portrait is enough for the boys. It is the physiognomy of Dr. Gandy, the new master, and the man whom Tubb hit with the tomato.

(Now read this week's splendid chapters commencing on the front page.)

A Mapmaker's Notebook.

An Article of Particular Interest to the Boy Scout.

What to Report.

A WEEK or two back I told you that there are lots of points which you should report about the roads, villages, etc., you draw on your sketch-maps.

So here's a rough list which will guide you in your map-making:

ROADS: Report whether in good condition, if they are level or hilly, where they go to, and how far it is; whether good broad roads or narrow lanes.

RAILWAYS: Name, number of lines, where they go to, and how far it is. Say how long and how deep the cuttings and tunnels shown on your map are, and how high the embankments are. Give names of stations, and say how many platforms, sidings, sheds, yards, signal-boxes, coal-stacks, etc.

RIVERS: Name, breadth, depth, whether steep banks or not, whether bottom is sandy, muddy, gravel, or what. If fordable, and, if so, where. Whether flow is rapid or slow. Show direction of flow by an arrow. If water is good for drinking or not.

BRIDGES: Material (stone, brick, iron, wood), span, height, breadth, condition.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES: Name, number of houses (roughly), material of buildings. If any churches, inns, stables, smithies, workshops, police-stations, post and telegraph-offices, etc.

FARMS: Name, amount of stabling, barns, haystacks, horses and cattle kept, and so on.

PONDS: Breadth, depth, if good drinking water for men or animals.

WOODS: Kind of trees, if dense or sparse, if passable for men and for waggons.

HILLS: Height, if you can estimate it fairly accurately. If not, don't guess at it. If steep or gentle slopes. If open, or wooded, etc.

COUNTRY GENERALLY: If open, or much fenced. If wooded or not. If marshy, flat, undulating, gorse-covered, and so on.

That list gives you a pretty good idea, I think, of the sort of thing you ought to report. Other points will occur to you at the time you make the map.

The real thing is to report just what will be useful to the man who sees your map, and to leave out everything that won't. But nobody on earth could teach you that. You must use your own discretion.

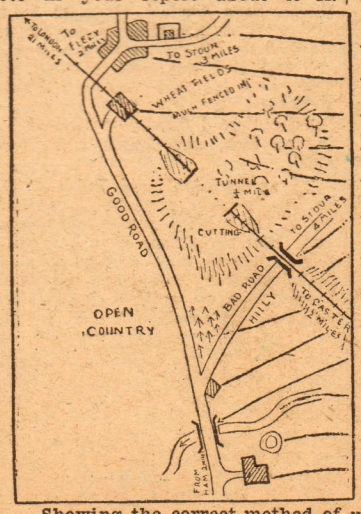
But whatever you report, you can't possibly shove it all down on the map itself. You wouldn't be able to see the map for writing.

So the best plan is to leave a good broad margin on one side, or both, and jot down all your facts there, running a dotted line to the spot on the map which the note refers to. The picture on this page shows you what I mean. If you can draw the map in black ink, and put in your notes and your dotted lines in red, it is a jolly good plan.

Or, if you like, you can write a report on a separate sheet of paper. Then label, say, the farm at the bottom of the map A, and head the note in your report about it A. Mark the pond B, and head your note about the pond B, and so on.

Both ways are good.

THE SCOUTMASTER.



..Smithy.

..Village of Thorpe—brick cottages; post-office.

..Railway station; telegraph office.

..Hill commanding railway and roads—slightly wooded.

..London and Midland Railway—double track.

..Bridge—iron girder 30 ft. span, 20 ft. above road.

..Embankment—18 ft. high.

..Clump of fir-trees.

..Forge.

..Bridge—stone arch, 6 ft. above water, 15 ft. wide.

..River Fleet—6 ft. deep, slow current, unfordable.

..Pond—good drinking-water.

..Farm—stabling for 10 horses; 2 haystacks

Showing the correct method of using the margin in Map-making.

put it to the test. We've got to face the music now. Come along!"

They trooped downstairs, and made their way to the big school-room. Somewhat to Tubb's and Card's dismay, Dr. Gandy was standing just inside the door, shaking hands with each boy as he entered, and addressing a few remarks to him.

"It's all up now!" groaned Tubb. "If we could have slipped in with the crowd, we might have escaped his notice. But he's bound to spot us now."

With a sinking heart he entered the room. But his fears were groundless. As Card had surmised, Dr. Gandy was extremely short-sighted. Without his spectacles, he was as blind as a bat. He was wearing his glasses now, of course, but although he peered through them at Tubb as he shook hands with him, he never for a moment suspected that this was the boy who had flung the tomato in his face.

"And what is your name, my boy?" he asked.

"Tubb, sir," answered Tubb.

"Well, Tubser——" began the doctor.

"Not Tubser, sir," corrected Tubb.

"I didn't say Tubserser," said the doctor. "I said Tubser."

"Yes, sir," said Tubb, growing red. "But my name isn't Tubser, sir."

"I never said it was," said the doctor irritably. "Your name is Tubser?"

"No, sir," said Tubb. "Tubb, sir, not Tubser."

The doctor glared at him.

"Are you trying to poke fun at me?" he demanded.

"Indeed no, sir," said Tubb earnestly.

"Then what is your name?"

"Tubb, sir."

"Well, that's what I said—Tubser."

"But it isn't Tubser, sir. It's Tubb, sir—Tubb."

"Tubsertub! What do you mean, boy?"

"He means, sir," said Philip, coming to the rescue, "that his name is Tubb."

"Then why didn't he say so?" snapped the doctor. "Go to your seat, boy; and the next time you are asked a straightforward question, answer it straightforwardly."

"Silly ass!" grunted Tubb, as he and his chums filed to their seats. "However, he didn't spot us, so that's all right. We got out of that hole very nicely, thank you!"

When all the boys had assembled, the doctor mounted the platform at the end of the room, where Mr. Walker and the other masters were already seated. In a brief speech Mr. Walker introduced their new head-master to the boys, expressed the hope that they would all work loyally together, and wound up by calling for three cheers for Dr. Gandy.

A very feeble and half-hearted cheer was given, after which the doctor rose, and addressed the boys.

It is no part of our purpose to reproduce the speech in full. It was one of the most depressing orations to which the Raytonians had ever listened, and long before it concluded consternation was depicted on every face.

After stating that he considered it a great honour to have been appointed head-master of such a famous school as Rayton College, the doctor proceeded to outline certain "reforms" which he had decided to introduce.

"Fagging will be abolished," he announced, amid approving cheers from the fags. "It is a degrading and pernicious system, and will henceforth find no place at Rayton College. Another system of which I strongly disapprove is the system of boys sleeping in open dormitories. As you have doubtless already discovered, cubicles have been constructed in all the dormitories throughout the school, and I have also made arrangements for the windows to be kept open day and night, so that you may enjoy to the full the inestimable advantages of a constant supply of pure fresh air."

After dilating at great length on the value of fresh air, he passed on to the subject of games.

"In the past," he declared, "too much importance has been attached to games. In the future this will be remedied. I do not propose—for the present, at any rate—to abolish games altogether, but I consider them decidedly brutalising, and I wish my boys to pay less attention to their muscles and more to their minds. For this purpose I intend to institute a series of scientific and literary lectures on half-holidays, and I hope you will all attend these lectures instead of wasting your time on football and hockey, and foolish pastimes of that kind.

"I am a great believer," he went on, "in the refining influence of music; and it is my earnest desire that every boy in the school should learn to play some musical instrument. Kindness to dumb animals is another virtue I wish to encourage, and I strongly urge each one of you to keep a pet of some kind."

"Pets!" muttered Tubb, in disgust. "Fancy me going about with a pet lamb at the end of a string!"

"And fancy me tootlin' a trombone!" sniggered Card.

But it was when the doctor went on to speak of his favourite fad—the subject of food—that the boys' despondency reached its lowest depth.

"Another and a most important reform which I propose to introduce," he said, "relates to your food. Modern science has conclusively proved that animal food—meat—so far from being necessary to the sustenance of life, is positively harmful. I myself have lived for years on a simple, natural diet of nuts and cheese." ("Yes, and a nice advertisement you are, I don't think!" growled Tubb.) "And it is my dearest ambition that you, the boys of Rayton College, should follow in my footsteps."

A long, deep, hollow groan reverberated through the room. Dr. Gandy looked up from his notes and peered and blinked at the assembled boys.

"I gather that some of you disagree with my remarks," he said. "But you will learn to appreciate their wisdom later. In the meantime, I do not propose to introduce my reformed diet all at once."

"Thank Heaven for that!" mumbled Tubb.

"I propose to proceed by easy stages," continued the doctor. "On six days of the week your diet will be the same as before. On the remaining day your dinner will be a vegetarian meal. When you have learned to like that"—("Which will be never!" said Tubb)—"we will have a vegetarian dinner twice a week; and ultimately, I hope, meat will be banished from our tables altogether.

"And now I have finished," he concluded. ("Quite time, too!" soliloquised Tubb.) "There will be no preparation to-night, but to-morrow school work will be resumed as usual. You are now dismissed!"

THE 7th CHAPTER.
"When the Stormy Winds Do Blow."

IT was a dismal and dispirited crowd which filed out of the big school-room. Actuated by a common impulse, the juniors clustered round Merrick, the popular captain of the school, and bombarded him with questions. Did he approve of the new head-master's proposed reforms, and, if he didn't, what did he advise them to do?

"I advise you to be good little boys, and do as you're told!" said Merrick. "I was a bit staggered, I confess, at some of the things Dr. Gandy said, but, after all, he's head-master here, you know, and it's for him to say how the school shall be run. He means well, I'm sure, and although I don't think his plan will succeed, it's only fair that we should give him a chance of trying it."

"That's all jolly fine!" growled Tubb. "But while we're givin' him his chance he'll reduce us all to frozen skeletons with his vegetarian meals and his open windows. I vote we mutiny!"

"Hear, hear!" said Holcroft. "I second that. I don't often agree with what Tubb says, but he's talkin' sense for once!"

"He's talking rot, and so are you," said Merrick. "If you try any game of that kind, you'll only make matters worse, for Dr. Gandy is not the sort of man to be turned from his purpose by a handful of boys."

"I shall write to my poppa," said Cyrus. "He's a millionaire, and I guess he won't——"

"Oh, shut up!" said the exasperated Tubb, and he gave Cyrus a push that sent him staggering back into Holcroft's arms.

"Confound you! Get off my toes, you clumsy brute!" howled Holcroft; and, twisting Cyrus round, he propelled him into Card, who shouldered him into Rigden and Carfax with so much force that all three boys went down in a heap.

"What does Mr. Walker think of Gander's schemes?" asked Rutherford, when Philip had rescued Cyrus and had threatened to fight anybody who molested him again.

Merrick knew what Mr. Walker thought, but wasn't going to tell what he knew.

"Mr. Walker thinks as I do," he said.

"But you haven't told us what you think," objected Rutherford.

"And I'm not going to!" said Merrick, with a laugh. "Now, run away and play, and if you can't be good, be as good as you can!"

But there was no "play" for the juniors that evening. Nobody had the heart to play. The doctor's speech had acted like a wet blanket on their spirits, and in Big Room the Walkerites' talk was all of the "good old days" of Dr. Paul, and the "ghastly time" (as Tubb described it) which they seemed likely to have under Dr. Gandy.

Further to damp the spirits of the boys, a chill north-easterly wind sprang up about eight o'clock and quickly developed into half a gale. Even in Big Room, with a blazing fire, and the door and window shut, it was none too warm. What would it be in Dormitory B, with no fire, and with all the windows open?

"Talk about cruelty to animals!" said Tubb. "Why isn't there a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Schoolboys? Listen to the wind. Think of those open windows! Gr-r-r-r! It's infamous! I've half a mind to write to the papers about it!"

"Do you think, if I were to write to my poppa——" began Cyrus.

Darting into the room, Tubb stumbled over Mr. Drummond's morning bath and then sat down in it with a crash, and sent showers of icy-cold water in all directions.

But he got no farther. Ere Philip could interfere, Tubb flew at Cyrus and thrust his fist into his face.

"Now, look here!" he hissed. "What with one thing and another, I'm just about ripe for trouble to-night. If you breathe another syllable about that blessed poppa of yours, I'll strangle the life out of you!"

Prayers were read at nine o'clock, and half an hour later the juniors trooped off to bed. As they had expected, Dormitory B was bitterly cold, the wind was whistling through the open windows, and rattling the wooden partitions, and when Philip opened the door of his cubicle the draught was so strong that it actually whisked the counterpane off the bed and whirled it round his head.

How different was all this from the old days! Then the boys had sat in groups on the edges of the beds and had chatted to each other while undressing. On cold nights like this they had had a game of leapfrog, or a steeplechase over the beds, or a friendly pillow-fight, to warm them up before they turned in. Now each boy marched into his cheerless little cubicle like a convict marching into his cell, and undressed in solitude and silence.

The silence, however, did not last very long. As already explained, the room had been divided up by means of wooden partitions in such a way that there was a long, straight passage down the middle of the room leading from the door, with eight cubicles on one side, and eight on the other. These wooden partitions, however, did not extend right up to the ceiling, so that, although the boys could not see each other, they could call to each other and carry on a disjointed conversation.

"Say, Ashley!" shouted Cyrus.

"Well, what is it?" asked Philip.

"I g-guess I c-c-can't stand this much longer!" wailed Cyrus, whose teeth were chattering with cold. "I'm f-f-freezing!"

"I'm frozen!" bawled Tubb. "My fingers have all turned to icicles."

"There's a draught in this cubicle," shouted Card, "that skins you like a razor. I'll be dead before mornin'."

Outside the storm increased in violence. Through the open windows the wind rushed in howling gusts. It was impossible for the boys to go to sleep. For an hour or more they tried, then Tubb announced that he was going to "put an end to this tommy-rot."

"What are you going to do?" shouted Philip.

"I'm goin' to shut the windows," said Tubb.

"You can't. They're screwed up."

"I'm goin' to unscrew 'em."

"But you can't without a screwdriver."

"There's one on the shelf in the buttery. I saw it this afternoon. I'm going down to fetch it."

In excited haste the boys scrambled out of their beds. Cubicle doors flew open. In the long, draughty passage which ran down the middle of the room a crowd of shivering boys gathered round Tubb.

Barefooted, and clad only in pyjamas, he stole to the head of the stairs and crept down to the landing below. Mr. Drummond's bed-room was on this landing, and just as Tubb was passing the door, which was slightly ajar, a door opened at the other end of the corridor, and Dr. Gandy and Mr. Walker came out!

Quick as thought, before the masters saw him, Tubb darted into Mr. Drummond's bed-room, intending to hide there until the doctor and Mr. Walker had passed.

Alas! in his haste, and in the darkness, he failed to perceive that a big, round, shallow bath, filled with cold water, was standing on the bed-room floor, ready for Mr. Drummond's "tub" next morning.

Darting into the room, and pushing the door to behind him, Tubb stumbled over this bath and sat down in it with a crash that shook the room, and which sent showers of ice-cold water flying in all directions.

"What was that?" exclaimed Dr. Gandy, hearing the crash.

"The sound came from Mr. Drummond's bed-room," said Mr. Walker. "Let us investigate."

They hurried to the bed-room door, and Mr. Walker pushed it open.

"Drummond—are you there—is anything wrong?" asked Mr. Walker, peering through the darkness.

Tubb neither spoke nor moved.

He fumbled for the switch, and turned on the electric light. Then he and the doctor staggered back, and gazed for a moment in stupefied silence at the forlorn-looking figure of Tubb, sitting and shivering in the bath, surrounded on all sides by pools of water on the bed-room floor!

Another grand, long instalment next Tuesday; Please tell all your friends about our 500th Number.

A Weights and Measures Inspector; and How to Become One.

THERE is plenty of uphill work before the lad who wants to become an inspector of weights and measures, but the securing of one of these official appointments is well worth trying for, inasmuch as, with other duties, which will be mentioned later on, it sometimes carries a salary of £300 a year, in addition to a nice, comfortable office, numerous expenses and perquisites.

Supposing that the aspirant has had a fairly good education at an elementary school, the first step he should take is to get into a first-class scale-maker's shop, where he will go through a thorough course of practical work in all the shops, getting a proper insight into how a weighing machine is made from start to finish.

This is very necessary, because later on he must be able to tell immediately where anything is wrong with the construction of a weighing instrument.

This stay in the scalemaker's shop will probably not extend over more than a year, and even if no wages are paid the time spent will be valuable. When the

course of instruction

is finished the lad must keep his eyes on the Local Government journals, and watch for advertisements for assistants, but a better plan is to try and secure a job in the office of the local inspector. Here much valuable information is obtained, particularly on those days which the inspector sets apart for people to come to the office to have their scales tested.

Meanwhile every spare moment should be devoted to study in readiness for the examination which must be passed before the youth can take up an appointment as an assistant and be recognised officially by the local authority. The heads of this examination can be found in a paper which can be obtained for twopence from Messrs. Wyman, Government Printers, Fetter Lane, London, E.C., and two failures are allowed, the points on which the candidate has failed to pass being distinctly specified.

Apart from the examination, he must make a careful study of the law relating to weights and measures, for he will probably have to give evidence before the magistrates in various prosecutions brought by his chief.

He will have to keep most of the books and forms, and assist in sending reports of the work done periodically to the Council employing him. The salary, of course, varies according to the locality and duties, but it may be taken for granted that an assistant-inspector of weights and measures under a public authority has a

fine start in life.

As stated, the duties differ according to the town, but supposing the young man has secured an appointment under an inspector who not only looks after weights and measures, but food and drugs as well, he will be sent out to purchase samples—sometimes, when he gets too well-known in a particular locality, he has to disguise himself—to assist in detecting cases of adulteration and perform numerous other duties.

He drops into the work automatically, because a county food and drugs inspector does not have to pass an examination, but picks up his knowledge while he is acting as assistant to the weights and measures inspector.

As time goes on the youth who commenced in a scalemaker's shop will find his experience growing, and watching the papers, he will see an advertisement for a full-blown county inspector at a good salary, and although the hours are irregular and the responsibilities heavy, he will derive some satisfaction from the fact that he is a terror to dishonest tradesmen.

THE END.

YOUR EDITOR (R.E.)

Controller of
THE BOYS' FRIEND—Tuesday.
THE BOYS' HERALD—Wednesday.
THE BOYS' REALM—Saturday.

YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

I want all my boys to look upon me as their firm friend and adviser. There are few men who know boys as well as I do, and there are no little trials and troubles, perplexities and anxieties, in which I cannot help and assist my readers.

Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of THE BOYS' FRIEND. All boys who write to me, and who enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply.

All Letters should be addressed: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.

A Christmas Wish.

BEFORE another number of THE BOYS' FRIEND will reach the hands of its many supporters the festive season will be upon us, and so, just on the eve of Christmas, I once more wish every one of my friends the best of everything. May they never know sorrow, care, or want, and may this Christmas be the happy forerunner of still happier ones to come.

It is easy to say these things, but if the sincerity of the wish can assist in bringing about its realisation, then I am sure that not one of my friends would ever in the future enjoy anything but prosperity and contentment. Again, a happy Christmas!

OUR 500th NUMBER.

THE week after next will bring with it the great 500th number of THE BOYS' FRIEND since it was converted into a penny paper. This issue will be an auspicious one in two senses, in that it celebrates the completion of the fifth century of THE BOYS' FRIEND as a penny paper, and also marks the opening of the New Year, which I hope will bring prosperity, wealth, and happiness to us all.

In this number THE BOYS' FRIEND will take a distinct step forward with a magnificent new programme of attractions. A good deal of attention in the New Year will be paid to articles likely to interest and help those readers who go in for sports and hobbies. A number of gentlemen who are experts in various hobbies have been engaged to write a special series of clear, easily-understood articles on the various subjects with which they are most familiar. Not only this, but my friends will find that every other department of a boys' paper will be catered for in THE BOYS' FRIEND. The instructive side of the "Green 'Un" will not be neglected, either.

But it must not for one moment be thought that the serials or the fiction in THE BOYS' FRIEND will fall away from the high standard which has been maintained in the past. On the contrary, I hope my friends will think the selection of stories arranged for the coming year even better than at any time past. One interesting feature will be a new serial story by Malcolm Dayle, the author of our popular stable-boy serial, "The Odds Against Him."

This new story by Mr. Dayle will be entitled "Chris of the Camera," and it deals with the adventures of a young photographer on an illustrated newspaper. It tells of the happenings which come to him in his quest for news, shows how all the while he is striving against time to get his photographs as soon as possible for the paper for which he works, how he is always trying to go one better than his rivals, and how, in his search for pictures, he is brought into many strange places, and undergoes many curious and exciting adventures.

BOXING.

So many of my friends are very keen about boxing that I have arranged with Mr. J. G. B. Lynch, the ex-captain of the University Boxing Club, who is writing the boxing articles for our paper, to make his articles longer. Boxing is a very healthy sport, and is one which every lad should take up, and by following the articles which Mr. Lynch will write for THE BOYS' FRIEND any lad can practise and become a skilful boxer, at the same time laying up for himself a fund of health and energy.

A GREETING FROM AUSTRALIA.

The following letter from a friend "Down Under" will, I am sure, be read with interest by every one of my chums. It is a matter for congratulation to know that on the other side of the universe, where there is an enormous colony of British people, THE BOYS' FRIEND is enjoyed, and is as popular as at home:

"George Street, Moonta,
"Yorke Peninsula,
"South Australia.

"Dear Editor,—I noticed by this week's BOYS' FRIEND that you wanted more letters, and as I am a constant reader of your papers, I thought it my duty to write you a letter. As this is the first time I have written you, you needn't expect anything very good from me.

"As you very seldom get any letters from your South Australian readers, or even Australian, I thought I would be one of the few. I take THE BOYS' FRIEND, 'Herald,' and 'Realm,' and also 'The Magnet.' Of the four, I like the 'Green 'Un.' I liked 'The Odds Against Him' very much.

"We get our papers when they are two months old out here. We receive the lot every Friday. I suppose when you receive this letter you will be having winter, while we here will be having summer. Our winter is like your autumn. I would be very pleased to correspond with any of your readers, as many of your boys do in England. If you receive this letter by Christmas. I wish you and the readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

"Well, I don't think I have anythink more to say, so I will close. Wishing yourself, your readers, and your good old papers every success,—Your constant reader,

"JAMES ROACH."

I thank James Roach for the good wishes which he sends; needless to say, I and every reader of THE BOYS' FRIEND at home reciprocate most heartily the kind thoughts of our Australian brother.

OTHER COLONIAL FRIENDS.

It must not be thought, however, that my friend, J. Roach, is the only correspondent who writes to me from the Colonies this week. Every mail brings me letters from friends from all parts of the earth—it is one of the wonderful signs of the enormous popularity of THE BOYS' FRIEND. I don't suppose that it dawns on the lad at home that thousands of copies of THE BOYS' FRIEND go out every week to Canada, South Africa, to India, to Australia, to the Straits Settlements, to China and Japan—in fact, wherever the English language is read and spoken there you will find THE BOYS' FRIEND. Is not this a wonderful testimony to its excellence and to its widespread and lasting popularity?

From P. R. Simpson, who is on the General Post Office staff at Barberton, in the Transvaal, and from A. J. S., jun., East Somerset, I get friendly letters. A. J. S., jun., wants to know how a man may know if a girl loves him. Well, I should say the best way is to mix in her society, and if she loves you, she will let you see it in a thousand and one ways very difficult to put on paper. She will show you that she prefers you, that she thinks a great deal more of you than of the rest; she will show by her interest in your welfare, by her interest in the things which you do that you are very largely in her thoughts, from her manner you will see that she puts you above all other men, and then you will know that she is in love with you.

A LETTER OF GOOD CHEER.

Most of my friends will remember my reply to a letter from W. R. H., which was published in THE BOYS' FRIEND late in November. The following missive is so full of pluck and spirit that, although it comes from a grown-up man, yet I publish it because it may serve to cheer W. R. H., and help him along the road which he thinks is going to end so gloomily and speedily for him.

"Dear Editor,—As an old reader of your papers, I have many times been tempted to write to you about my troubles; but have hesitated, feeling that I can scarcely be regarded as a boy, and that your younger readers ought to have the benefit of your invitation to make you their confidant and adviser. But, with your kind permission, I should really be glad to send a message of condolence to poor W. R. H., and by telling him something of my own life perhaps cause him to buck up, and set his mind on living rather than dying.

"'While there's life there's hope,' is my motto, and has been for the last nineteen years—just

half my lifetime.

"I have been a reader of the 'Green 'Un,' ever since No. 1, which came out just after I arrived home from Toronto, in 1894 I think it was. I was then suffering from heart disease, with frequent attacks of Angina Pectoris, the after-effects of two attacks of rheumatic fever, contracted through getting through the ice on Toronto Bay. After the second attack of fever, I left the hospital in Toronto an absolute wreck, and an object of pity to everyone. I was discharged from the Royal Grenadiers as unfit, and sent home to the care of a widowed mother. The contemplation of my sufferings make me shudder now. I got no relief from anything, and in sheer desperation I used to leave the house and wander about till relief came, when I would be so weary that I could sleep anywhere—a gate at the side of the road served for a sleeping place for me many a time.

"I am now writing in bed, where I am recovering from a physical collapse through standing in the market in the cold on Friday and Saturday last; but I don't despair, and hope to be up again before the week is out. Nor must our friend W. R. H. despair. Science has

made gigantic strides

in regard to medicines and surgery since I started walking the roads for relief. I have something now that stops that terrible pain instantly, and it is years ago since I have had to allow an attack to develop. I may tell my young friend that I could scarcely crawl when I landed at Liverpool, and for a long time never had a whole night in bed; but I stuck to it, and after two years was able to go to work again, but still had to suffer at times.

"Since then I have got married and brought up a family of five children that anyone might be proud of; in fact, we won a prize with the second daughter. But I have scarcely started my troubles yet. I have had a three months' and a four months' illness since then, with rheumatic fever again, and also eight or nine weeks in the heart hospital in between. When I recovered from the last attack of fever, the doctor said to me, 'Well, what do you mean by it? I suppose you know that according to the rules of the medical profession you ought to be dead?' But although I had had a bitter

fight for existence,

sometimes for hours in the long, long nights every breath being the result of a struggle kept up by sheer determination, if I had accepted the medical decree and given up, I should not have been here now offering hope to my young friend.

"Still, W. R. H., you and I have much to be thankful for. You say you enjoy the stories in the 'B. F.,' so do I, despite the fact that I have a daughter your age. During my many periods of inactivity I have got up to all sorts of dodges to kill time and care. I have read all the works of G. P. R. James, most of Sir Walter Scott's, and other odd books too numerous to mention. I learned shorthand while in the heart hospital, and am now attending a book-keeping class, so, you see, that although things are bad, one can get some good out of them.

"Now, my chum, buck up. Lord Nelson became the finest admiral in the world, and

earned undying fame,

and he, like you and I, had one foot in the grave. We can't all be Lord Nelsons, but we are Britishers, and they are proverbially hard to kill. Take our Editor's advice, dear chum, the possibilities of determination are phenomenal. Buck up; learn to set your jaw. It gives a doctor confidence when he sees his patient has not made up his mind to die. Don't think of it, but rather of getting better; take up some study or course of literature to occupy your mind, and keep it off your condition.

"As I told you, I am in bed myself to-day, but I hope to be up soon, and I expect to see my boys win the

London Football Shield

before the end of the season. You see, I have other things to worry me beside ill-health. My children, who don't get all the care they should because mother has to turn out; then mother, she is not so happy as she ought to be, and I don't like that, and if I dwelt on all these things I know I should either die or go mad.

"I am secretary of a football team, and also of another club, and hope when I have passed that book-keeping exam. to get a job somewhere out of the cold, to which I am very susceptible. Then when I have done that, and got mother home, the worry that kills will be gone, and I'll enter the Old Age Pension Stakes.

"I shall be thinking of you since I have read your letter, and hope soon to hear quite a different account of yourself; see that doctor again, or if you are within reach consult the physicians at the heart hospital in Soho Square. Some of the cleverest gentlemen in England attend there, specialists who will give you the benefit of

their undoubted skill;

and this, in addition to your own effort of will, ought to alter your view of things considerably. Don't think for a moment, my friend, that I wish you to forget or forsake your great source of consolation, far from it; the Great Physician tasted death for us. That rests between you and Him. I realise quite well that death must come, but for my part he must come all the way. I don't mean to go to meet him. Buck up!—Yours sincerely,

"R. J. L."

YOUR EDITOR (H. E.).

BOXING NOTES.

By J. G. B. LYNCH.

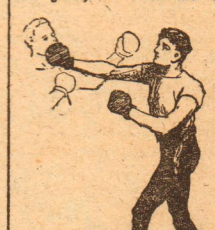
The Straight Right Lead.

TO lead off with a straight right is one of the most difficult blows in the whole of boxing. It is not difficult to practise it, especially when, as is generally the case with instructors, your opponent stands ready, and invites the blow just to show you how to do it.

But in the middle of a contest, when you have to take advantage of any opening that is offered you, it is a very hard blow to bring off successfully.

The opening in question is when your antagonist leads off with his left, and what you do then sounds simplicity itself. You just shift your left foot a little to the left, and strike out straight with the right, bringing your right arm just inside your opponent's left. In this way, his glove passes harmlessly over your right shoulder, and your right hits him on the face or jaw.

In a sharp "mix-up," however, with a fairly quick boxer in front of you, it will be found that it is extremely difficult to send in the right before he has recovered his left and thus made an efficient guard for it.



The Right Lead.

The only way to bring off this blow is to be very quick. Indeed, speed is most highly necessary in every part of boxing, whether leading, guard-countering, or stepping forwards or back.

It will generally be found better to use the right hook, or right to the body—straight or half-arm—when this same chance occurs for the straight right.

Generally, if your opponent is one of those who make a practice of trying to "rush" you, you will get an excellent opportunity for a straight right. He will most likely leave himself quite unguarded. Then you can hold your left arm bent, to guard against his right, and let him run on to your straight right. His own weight dashing against it will be quite enough to damage him severely, if not knock him out. I saw a couple of boys boxing once, and both rushed, and each caught the other's right full on the jaw. After that, the one who had charged heaviest fell to the ground, knocked out, whilst the other was just able to keep his feet with the aid of the rope. So he just managed to win.

THE END.

(Another grand boxing article next Tuesday.)

BIGGEST IN THE WORLD.

A Little Budget of Bright Facts.

THE tallest monument is the Washington obelisk, 555ft. high, but the largest monolith is in Karnak, Egypt, being 106ft. high. The highest chimney, measuring 474ft., is in Glasgow.

The largest aqueduct in use is the Croton of New York, which is 38 miles long, but the longest ever built is in Peru, 360 miles in length.

The deepest coal mine is near Lambert, Belgium, 3,500ft. deep; the biggest dock is at Cardiff, Wales, and the strongest electric light is at the Sydney Lighthouse, Australia, while the largest lighthouse is at Cape Henry, Virginia, being 165ft. high.

The greatest bank is the Bank of England in London; the oldest college is University College, Oxford, founded in 1050; the largest library, the National, in Paris, containing nearly 3,000,000 volumes.

The largest theatre is the Paris Opera House, covering three acres; the largest bronze statue, that of Peter the Great, in St. Petersburg, weighing 1,100 tons. The biggest stone statue is in Japan, 44ft. high; the largest college is in Cairo, with over 4,000 students and 310 teachers. Damascus has the honour of being the oldest city.

(More splendid articles next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND. Our New Year and 500th Number the week after next—1d. only. New serial by Malcolm Dayle.)

ANOTHER COMPLETE STORY IN OUR GRAND NEW SERIES.

THE LURING OF VISCOUNT "LARRY."

"WATERLOO! Waterloo!" The raucous voices of the porters at the great London railway terminus mingled with the crunch of the wheels on the iron roadway and the puffing of the engine as the train drew up at No. 11 platform, and discharged its stream of passengers.

Hardly had the train come to a standstill before the door of a first-class compartment was flung open, and from it sprang as fine a specimen of young British aristocracy as one could wish to see.

Square shoulders, muscles like whip-cords, a frank, open countenance, laughing blue eyes, a face that one would trust instinctively, were a few of the marked characteristics of Viscount Lorrimer Larrington—known to a wide circle of chums and acquaintances as "Larry"—heir to the Earldom of Kentwitch and a rent-roll of £50,000 a year, yet one of the most courteous, true-hearted, generous youngsters that ever trod shoe-leather.

It was his seventeenth birthday, and he had travelled up from Eton, where he was at school, to celebrate the occasion by a jolly run round London.

The programme was to include a good "tuck-in," a visit to the afternoon performance of a musical comedy, another "tuck-in"—by which it will be seen that Viscount Larry was a great believer in attending to the wants of the inner man—a seat at the production of a stirring melodrama, another "tuck-in" by way of supper, and a scurry back to Eton by the 12.40 train from Waterloo, this extension of time having been granted by Dr. Wortley, the headmaster, in honour of the young viscount's natal day.

In his pocket nestled ten golden sovereigns, representing the earl's birthday gift to his son—a gift accompanied by a hearty intimation from the fine old sporting nobleman to "run up to town and have a good time." And Viscount Larrington meant to carry out the earl's instructions to the letter.

The golden coins making merry music in the right-hand pocket of his perfectly-cut trousers, gave him pleasure for two reasons. One was because he could have one of those "good times" so beloved of the Etonian, and the other because he could afford to dispense numerous coins here and there to the flotsam and jetsam of humanity.

As Viscount Larrington crossed the wide sweep of platform a stifled exclamation broke from a young man who was hurrying to the booking-office from which tickets to Kempton Park Races are issued.

"Larry, by Jove! And alone!"

And, hiding behind the figure of a burly porter, the young man manœuvred himself so that he got to the rear of Larry, and could watch his every movement without being seen.

"Wonder what he's doing here?" he muttered. "I want to go to the races, but, hang it all, this is the hand of Fate, and I may do myself a better turn by watching Larry. How I hate him!"

And Julian Westenholme gritted his teeth together in a fury—his puffed, pasty face telling plainly the tale of a misspent life, with its small beady, watery eyes flushed with anger.

"The young cub!" he hissed. "If only something would happen to remove him from my path, I should one day be Earl of Kentwitch, with, perhaps, £50,000 a year. As it is, I'm desperately hard up, being dunned for money on every side, and have no prospect of getting out of the mess unless—unless I have a stroke of luck. And who knows? London is a big place, and accidents do happen to young gentlemen who come up from Eton by themselves. Perhaps, after all, my dear cousin, you may regret your journey."

With this venomous, half-spoken threat, Julian Westenholme decided to shadow his cousin, and trust to fate to play into his hands.

And when his taxi-cab, for which Larry had had to wait a little while, turned westwards, it was followed by another motor-cab, in which sat Julian Westenholme.

Apart from his loathing of Larry for standing between him and succession to an earldom, Westenholme hated his cousin because Larry was straight as a die, and because he would scorn to do any of those shady tricks by which Julian lived. No trouble would be too great for Westenholme, if he could do the lad an injury.

But as the taxi-cabs sped into Regent Street, no thought of the adventures he was to pass through that day troubled the mind of the young nobleman.

Hardly had the vehicle stopped in front of the world-famous Palatial Restaurant, when a six-foot commissionaire, in a resplendent uniform, sprang forward, his hand lifted to the salute, and opened the door.

Larry alighted, and entered the resort of fashion to the sound of bewitching music. He had reserved a table by wire, and thither an immaculately-garbed manager escorted him, and helped the high-spirited young nobleman to choose a lunch fit for a king.

Julian Westenholme allowed his chauffeur to drive a few yards past the Palatial, then stopped him, and dismissed the cab, making his way to the entrance to the restaurant.

From behind a huge palm, he saw Larry about to start on the good things he had ordered.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "I had forgotten! This is his birthday, and he's having a spree to celebrate it. Now it's certain he won't be finished his lunch for another hour. That will give me time to mature my little plot. So look to yourself, my pretty cousin!"

And with that he slunk hurriedly away.

. . . . . .

Ten minutes after seeing his cousin safely seated, Julian Westenholme was in the Tottenham Court Road.

"If only I can find Wisen," he muttered, "the thing's as good as done."

Turning down a narrow street, Westenholme pushed open the door of what appeared to be a suite of offices, mounted two flights of stairs, and gave a peculiar knock on a green-baize door. At the same time his left hand touched a hidden spring, and the door flew back noiselessly. His knock had struck an electric gong, which gave the signal to those inside that someone well acquainted with the secret of their haunt was approaching.

It was one of the many disreputable gambling-clubs that abound in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road, on which foreigners flourish. And it was pretty plain by the hilarious shouts which greeted him that Julian Westenholme was no stranger to the place.

He took no notice of the greetings, but, striding up to a dirty-looking German waiter, in a frayed evening-dress suit, he demanded:

"Billy the Badger here?"

The waiter jerked a grimy thumb over his shoulder with a laconic "In there," and, passing to the room indicated, Westenholme saw, stretched in a comfortable armchair in front of the fire, fast asleep, a well-groomed, lithe little man, whose once handsome face was now seared by the marks of dissipation.

"Now, Badger, wake up!" commanded Julian Westenholme, shaking the recumbent figure. "There's a job on hand; money in it, and revenge!"

William Wisen, known to a large circle of disreputable associates as "Billy the Badger," opened his eyes, and turned to the speaker.

For twenty minutes the two plotters talked together in low, earnest tones, Westenholme explaining that the cousin he hated so bitterly was up in town for a harmless spree, and adding that in some way he must be lured to a disreputable den and disgraced.

"Why not hold the young beggar for ransom?" suggested the Badger, with a cunning leer.

"Good idea!" agreed Westenholme. "Got any plan?"

Billy the Badger had once been a gentleman, and when it suited him no man could talk and act more correctly. He was acquainted with some of the cutest wrong-doers in London, and it was mere child's play to him to know where to lure a high-spirited youth on some lying pretext.

Having ascertained that Viscount Larry, whom he knew well by sight, but to whom he was unknown, was lunching at the Palatial, he gave minute instructions to Westenholme as to donning a moustache and wig, discussed several other details, stepped over to the telephone, and had a conversation in German with someone at the other end, which evidently gave him great satisfaction, and eventually left the Snooker Club with his accomplice. Westenholme was disguised, and carried a suit-case in his hand.

Walking swiftly towards Regent Street, the precious pair further matured their nefarious plans, and at the top of Sherwood Street Billy the Badger stopped, and engaged in a brief but earnest conversation with a lanky, evil-faced youth, who was selling the early editions of the evening papers.

Money passed from one to the other, and when the Badger and Westenholme continued their way the newsvendor slunk along in their rear. A hundred yards before reaching the Palatial, Westenholme, acting on the Badger's instructions, stopped and gazed into a jeweller's window. By looking through the mirror, he could command a view of the street at his back. The Badger and the newsboy passed on, the latter loitering about outside the Palatial, and the former crossing the street, and taking up his stand immediately opposite.

The scoundrels had plotted their scheme well. Westenholme's information about Larry's habits and character had enabled the Badger to perfect all the details. There was only one thing left to chance. If Larry took a taxi-cab outside the Palatial their plans would have to be altered.

But as though playing into the hands of his enemies, the young viscount did nothing of the kind. He had comfortable time in which to reach the theatre for which he was bound, and emerging from the Palatial, he commenced to wend his way in the direction of Leicester Square.

The Badger gave a quick signal to the newspaper seller, and a moment later Larry found an evening journal thrust under his nose, and a wheezy voice saying:

"'Ere y'are, sir! Piper! Fust winner from Kempton! Piper!"

For Viscount Larrington the result of the first race at Kempton had not the remotest interest, and he waved the paper aside.

But the newsvendor was suspiciously persistent. With his left hand he still forced the newspaper in front of Vicount Larry's face, and then, with a quick, deft movement, born of long practice, he slipped his right hand, under cover of the paper, forward towards the young nobleman's waistcoat.

Before Larry could realise what had happened, he felt a tug at his chain, and in a flash it dawned upon him that the evil-faced fellow had snatched his watch and chain.

Now Viscount Larry prized few things more highly than this watch and chain. He had won them for creating a record in the hundred yards sprint at the school sports, and although the thief had a couple of seconds' start, Larry was on his track like a flash of greased lightning.

The pair sped along Regent Street with incredible swiftness, Larry's arms pressed to his sides, his teeth gritted, his head flung well back. Inch by inch he was gaining on his quarry, when Julian Westenholme, disguised beyond all recognition, sauntered across the pavement from the jeweller's shop into which he had been gazing towards the kerb.

He made a half-hearted grab at the flying newsvendor, and then, as though overcome by excitement, he deftly dropped the suit-case he was carrying right at Larry's feet.

The young viscount, bowling along at a fine pace, had no time to avoid the obstruction. Over he pitched, landing full on his face, all the breath knocked out of his body.

He did not notice that from the opposite side of the street a well-dressed little man had darted and followed the flying figure down a side turning off Regent Street. And no sooner had Julian Westenholme assisted him to his feet than the little man—Billy the Badger—appeared, blowing like an engine.

"Ah, there you are, sir!" he puffed. "I believe this"—holding forth the watch, and part of the broken chain—"belongs to you! I saw the whole thing from the other side of the street. I caught the villain, and took the watch and chain from him; but he wriggled out of my grasp, and was off like a shot. Shall we tell the police?"

"Oh, no thank you!" replied Larry hurriedly. "For my own part, I am thankful that no constable happened to be about at the moment. I have the watch back, and that is all I care about. But you, sir—how can I thank you? I can never repay you for restoring that watch. I prize it very highly."

"Delighted to have done so small a service," replied the stranger easily. "Is this a friend of yours?" he went on, turning to Westenholme, who had stood by silently.

Westenholme himself supplied the answer. He explained how he had narrowly missed catching the thief himself, and how he had most carelessly dropped his suit-case.

For two or three minutes the little group stood talking. Larry had not had much to do with his disreputable cousin, and there was not the slightest fear of the disguise being penetrated.

"Now, look here," said the elder of the two, at length, "we all seem bent on pleasure. I propose we spend the rest of the day together, and have a jolly time."

"Agreed!" shouted Larry, who was deeply grateful to the stranger for restoring his watch.

"Nothing would suit me better," added Westenholme.

"Then off we go!" said the stranger.

. . . . . .

Some hours later, Viscount Larry awoke, and tried to press his hand to his throbbing temples. To his horror he found that he was bound hand and foot. Slowly it dawned on him that he was lying on a straw mattress in a bare garret, where the spluttering rays of a candle threw eerie shadows on the damp walls.

What had happened? Gradually the memory of it all come back to him. He recalled the happy journey from Eton to Waterloo, the ride in the taxi-cab to the Palatial, the substantial lunch, the watch-snatching episode, and the meeting with the polite strangers.

Surely, he thought, these two men must be responsible for his presence in that dingy garret. The elder one, he remembered, had suggested about six o'clock in the evening, after they had done the West End together, that they should all go down to the East End. He had promised to take them into places where even the police dared not enter, and, trusting the man implicitly, and fired with the spirit of adventure, Larry had consented.

He recalled having a cup of tea at a quaint little eating-house near the Minories—that was where the stranger said they were—and then his mind became a perfect blank.

For some reason the tea had been drugged. But why?

And further speculation was cut short by the entrance of the Badger and Julian Westenholme, the latter still wearing the false wig and moustache.

"Ah, my beauty, awake at last! How do you feel now? Wasn't the tea good? You came here like a lamb in a taxi-cab. When will you get out depends upon yourself."

"Why have you brought me here, you scoundrels?" demanded Larry, straining at his bonds.

"Well, now," drawled the Badger, "that's a straight question, and you shall have a straight answer. You can shout till you are black in the face, and no one will hear you. This place is kept by an old German who is in my pay. It is in the worst part of the East End, near the docks. At the rear of that window flows the Thames. Now, what we want you to do is to sign a cheque, made payable to bearer, for £200. We shall keep you here till the bank opens in the morning and we have cashed it, and then we shall see that you are allowed to go. Two hundred pounds is a very small sum for Viscount Lorrimer Larrington, heir to £50,000 a year, to part with. Oh, you see"—as he noticed Larry's start of surprise—"we know all about you! Refuse, and in a few days' time your body will be taken from the river. Then your Cousin Julian will have a chance!"

"Yes, hang you!" put in Westenholme.

And it was not until that moment that a half-formed suspicion that the young man with the moustache might be his cousin crossed Larry's mind. Keenly he fixed his eyes on the fellow, but Westenholme stepped back into the shadow.

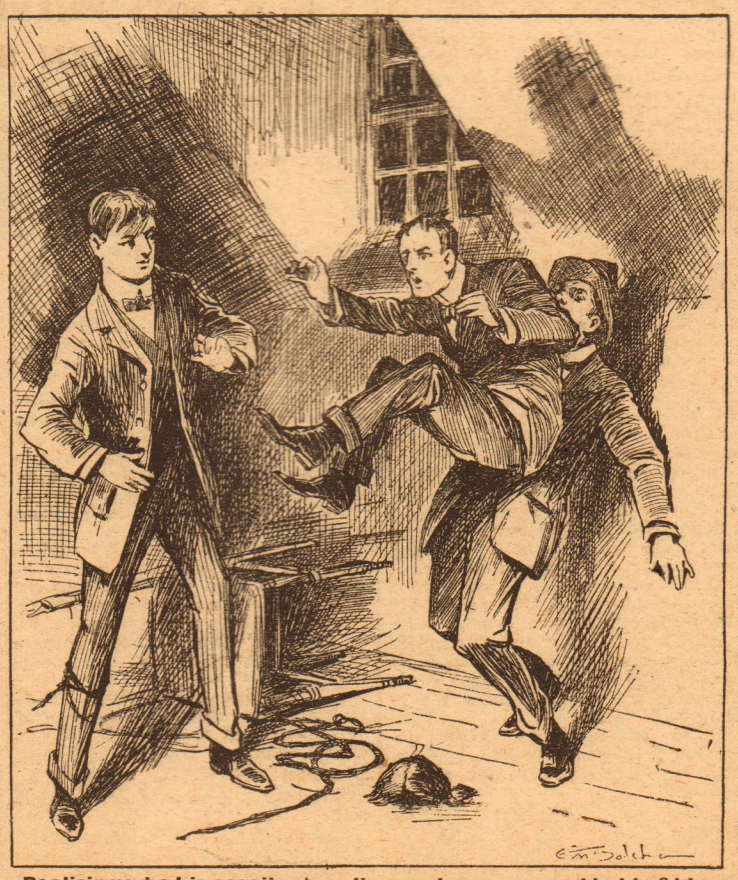
"Now look here, youngster," went on the Badger. "You can have half an hour to think it over. At the end of that time we will return. We took your cheque-book from your pocket while you were asleep—lucky you had it with you!—so all will be ready. And don't forget it's a cheque or the river!"

Left to himself, Larry did some hard thinking. He had no intention of signing the cheque, but he must be back at Eton by the last train, or there would be trouble.

Feverishly he worked at the cruel bonds which held him. Wriggling, straining, relaxing his muscles, and employing every dodge he knew, he managed to loosen the cords which bound his wrists together; but he could not work his hand free.

Then his eyes wandered towards the candle, and a desperate idea took possession of him.

(Continued at foot of the next page.)



Realising who his assailant really was, Larry grasped hold of him with all the strength he could muster and flung him at the other man. Body met body with a thud and the pair went down like logs.

CHRISTMAS DAY In the WORKHOUSE.

Written by GEORGE R. SIMS.

A GRAND RECITATION FOR OUR BOYS.

IT is Christmas Day in the workhouse,
And the cold, bare walls are bright
With garlands of green and holly,
And the place is a pleasant sight;
For with clean-washed hands and faces
In a long and hungry line
The paupers sit at the tables,
For this is the hour they dine.

And the guardians and their ladies,
Although the wind is east,
Have come in their furs and wrappers
To watch their charges feast;
To smile, and be condescending,
Put pudding on pauper plates,
To be hosts at the workhouse banquet
They've paid for—with the rates.

Oh, the paupers are meek and lowly,
With their "Thank 'ee kindly, mum's."
So long as they fill their stomachs,
What matter it whence it comes?
But one of the old men mutters,
And pushes his plate aside:
"Great God," he cries, "but it chokes me!
For this is the day she died!"

The guardians gazed in horror,
The master's face went white.
"Did a pauper refuse their pudding?"
"Could their ears believe aright?"
Then the ladies clutched their husbands,
Thinking the man would die,
Struck by a bolt or something
By the outraged One on high.

But the pauper sat for a moment,
Then rose, 'mid a silence grim,
For the others had ceased to chatter,
And trembled in every limb.
He looked at the guardians' ladies,
Then, eyeing their lords, he said:
"I eat not the food of villains
Whose hands are foul and red.

"Whose victims cry for vengeance
From their dank, unhallowed graves!"
"He's drunk!" said the workhouse-master,
"Or else he's mad, and raves."
"Not drunk or mad," cried the pauper;
"But only a hunted beast,
Who, torn by the hounds, and mangled,
Declines the vultures' feast.

"I care not a curse for the guardians,
And I won't be dragged away.
Just let me have the fit out,
It's only a Christmas Day
That the black past comes to goad me,
And prey on my burning brain;
I'll tell you the rest in a whisper—
I swear I won't shout again.

"Keep your hands off me, curse you!
Hear me right out to the end.
You come here to see how paupers
The season of Christmas spend.
You come here to watch us feeding,
As they watch the captured beast.
Hear why a penniless pauper
Spits on your paltry feast.

"Do you think I will take your bounty,
And let you smile, and think
You're doing a noble action
With the parish's meat and drink?
Where is my wife, you traitors—
The poor old wife you slew?
Yes, by the God above us,
My Nance was killed by you!

"Last winter my wife lay dying,
Starved in a filthy den;
I had never been to the parish—
I came to the parish then.
I swallowed my pride in coming,
For, ere the ruin came,
I held up my head as a trader,
And I bore a spotless name.

"I came to the parish, craving
Bread for a starving wife—
Bread for the woman who'd loved me
Through fifty years of life.
And what do you think they told me,
Mocking my awful grief?
That the 'house' was open to us,
But they wouldn't give 'out relief.'

"I slunk to the filthy alley—
'Twas a cold, raw Christmas Eve—
And the bakers' shops were open,
Tempting a man to thieve;
But I clenched my fists together,
Holding my head awry;
So I came to her empty-handed,
And mournfully told her why.

"Then I told her the 'house' was open;
She had heard of the ways of that,
For her bloodless cheeks went crimson,
And up in her rags she sat,
Crying: 'Bide the Christmas here, John,
We've never had one apart;
I think I can bear the hunger—
The other would break my heart.'

"All through that eve I watched her,
Holding her hand in mine,
Praying the Lord, and weeping
Till my lips were salt as brine.
I asked her once if she hungered,
And as she answered, 'No,'
The moon shone in at the window,
Set in a wreath of snow.

"Then the room was bathed in glory,
And I saw in my darling's eyes
The far-away look of wonder
That comes when the spirit flies;
And her lips were parched and parted,
And her reason came and went,
For she raved of our home in Devon,
Where our happiest days were spent.

"And the accents, long forgotten,
Came back to the tongue once more,
For she talked like the country lassie
I'd woo'd by the Devon shore.
Then she rose to her feet, and trembled,
And fell on the rags, and moaned,
And 'Give me a crust—I'm famished—
For the love of God!' she groaned.

"I rushed from the room like a madman,
And flew to the workhouse gate,
Crying: 'Food for a dying woman!'
And the answer came, 'Too late.'
They drove me away with curses;
Then I fought with a dog in the street,
And tore from the mongrel's clutches
A crust he was trying to eat.

"Back through the filthy by-lanes,
Back, through the trampled slush,
Up to the crazy garret,
Wrapped in an awful hush.
My heart sank down at the threshold,
And I paused with a sudden thrill,
For there, in the silv'ry moonlight,
My Nance lay, cold and still.

"Up to the blackened ceiling
The sunken eyes were cast—
I knew on those lips, all bloodless,
My name had been the last;
She'd called for her absent husband—
O God, had I but known!—
Had called in vain, and in anguish
Had died in that den—alone.

"Yes, there, in a land of plenty,
Lay a loving woman, dead—
Cruelly starved and murdered
For a loaf of the parish bread.
At yonder gate last Christmas
I craved for a human life.
You, who would feast us paupers,
What of my murdered wife?

. . . . . .

"There! Get ye gone to your dinners,
Don't mind me in the least;
Think of the happy paupers
Eating your Christmas feast.
And when you recount their blessings
In your snug, parochial way,
Say what you did for me, too,
Only last Christmas Day."

[Reproduced with the Publishers' permission, from "The Dagonet Ballads," George Routledge & Sons, Limited London.]

(Another splendid recitation next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

THE LADS O' LONDON.

(Continued from the previous page).

Rolling himself over painfully, he reached the spluttering flame, and, drawing himself up, he placed a portion of the rope in the light.

The agony was excruciating. The flame seared his flesh, and great beads of perspiration covered his brow. But, gritting his teeth, he held the rope in the flame, tugging at it desperately all the while.

A few soul-racking seconds served to answer his purpose. The charred rope gave, and one hand was free. To remove the remainder of the bonds was the work of less than three minutes.

Almost fainting, Larry staggered towards the mattress and sank down; but in an instant he was up again. So far as he could see there was no weapon in the room, except the water-jug, and, carrying this over to the door, Larry waited, every muscle taut, every sense on the alert, ready to battle for his life and liberty.

Presently he heard footsteps on the stairs. A key grated in the lock, the door was pushed open by the Badger, and the next moment that worthy received the surprise of his life.

With a sickening crash, the heavy water-jug descended on his head, and without a groan he went down, stunned.

Then, like a tiger, Larry flew at the rascally accomplice.

Thud! bang! crash! rained the blows on Julian Westenholme's face and body. The battle waxed fast and furious.

A brutal kick on Larry's shin from the Badger, who had partially recovered, brought the brave lad to the ground, but he was up again in a jiffy, and he gave Julian Westenholme the biggest thrashing he had ever had in his life.

Westenholme put up a defence of a sort, and Larry had his work cut out to keep him from kicking and biting and scratching. In the struggle Westenholme's wig and moustache fell off.

"I knew it was you, you scoundrel!" shouted Larry, landing another staggering blow between the eyes. "Take that for luck!"

But another danger faced the young viscount. The Badger had staggered to his feet, and Larry saw that to save himself he must act quickly. The breath had been knocked out of his cousin, and with a herculean effort Larry grasped hold of Westenholme in a manner he had learned from a renowned professor of physical culture, and flung him full at the Badger.

Body met body with a sickening crash, and the pair went down like logs, Westenholme's head striking a corner of the fireplace. Then, with a kick, Larry sent the candle flying, plunging the room in darkness, and in two minutes he was in the street.

His sole object was to catch the 12.10 train from Waterloo, and although he was in a strange part of London, he managed to do it in the nick of time.

Arriving at Eton, Larry gained the bath-room unobserved, and removed all traces of the terrible conflict through which he had gone. Then he lay awake for some time, thinking over the strange events of the day.

And, as the result, he came to a noble conclusion. He would say nothing about his cousin's perfidy.

And before Larry had decided on this magnanimous action, two sadly bruised and battered ruffians were drowning their sorrows in a Whitechapel gin palace.

"I'm off to South Africa to-morrow," hiccoughed the Badger. This will make London too hot to hold us."

"And I'm with you," replied Julian Westenholme. "And, Badger, I think we'll turn honest after this."

But whether they did or not is a matter of conjecture.

THE END.

HOW TO DEVELOP MUSCLE.

A Superb Series of Articles Specially Written for the BOYS' FRIEND by the World-Famed

EUGEN SANDOW.

NOW we have come to the last of our weekly lessons, I hope you have all obtained the benefits I promised you when we first met. By now the improvement in your physical condition should not only be felt by yourself, it should be apparent to your fellows.

Take out the measurement-form I advised you to keep at first, and, making the most of yourself, as you will be able to do now by the more perfect control you have over your muscles, get the tape run over you again.

I think you will be both pleased and proud with the improvement you have made. By the series of exercises I have given you, I have known boys increase the size of their chest by three inches, add an inch or more to their biceps, and almost double their lifting powers.

If you can show as good a record as this, you have every reason to congratulate yourself upon your success; but if your progress has not been quite so rapid you have no reason to be dissatisfied, and a little more perseverance will repay you a hundredfold.

Before going any farther, I will give you the final exercise—an arm movement—and then I will tell you what I want you to do in the future.

EXERCISE 15.—READY POSITION.

Stand erect, arms extended in front of the body.

MOVEMENT: Bring the arms slowly backward in a line with the shoulders, inhaling steadily all the time the hands are travelling. Make a momentary pause, brace up the chest, bring the arms forward again, exhaling to the utmost all the time that the hands are travelling. Breathing movement slow. Muscles: Deltoid, pectorals, rhomboids, and trapezius.

It must not be supposed that now you have the series of exercises complete, and have carried out my instructions regularly for three months, that you can drop your work and continue to increase the benefit you have already obtained.

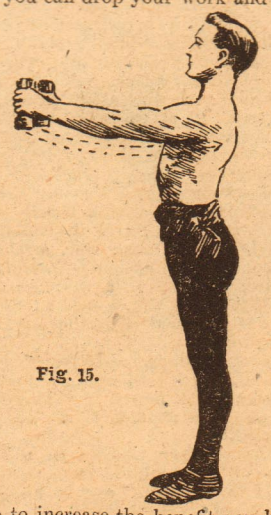


Fig. 15.

This is no more possible than pedalling a bicycle half-way up a steep hill and expecting the bicycle to do the remainder of the work.

The work you have already done has brought all your muscles into a condition of fitness, it has given your mind control over your muscular system, it has laid the foundation—a sure one—for strong and healthy manhood, but you must continue the exercises if you are to retain the beneficial effect.

Therefore, I want you to devote from twenty to thirty minutes each morning to the proper performance of these exercises. Go through each one as carefully as you did the first time you tried it, and every week you will find your improvement becoming more pronounced.

Get firmly in your mind the fact that this morning exercise is as necessary as your breakfast, that fresh air is as vital to health as good food.

Your health, too, will not give you any cause for anxiety. You will not have to pick and choose your food for fear you get indigestion, your eye will be clear and bright, your step firm but light, you will never get a liver complaint, and you will never get the blues.

Remember that the more you exercise your body, within reason, the longer it will wear; exercise lubricates the system, and makes it wear well, whilst the body, which is neglected soon rusts and becomes useless.

As long as you keep up these exercises, so long will your strength develop and your health remain perfect, and so long I hope will you remember with pleasure our weekly talks and your sincere friend,

EUGEN SANDOW.

ABBREVIATIONS.

And What They Mean.

A.B.—Able-bodied Seaman.
A.M.—Before noon. (Ante Meridien in the Latin.)
B.Mus.—Bachelor of Music.
C.O.—Commanding-Officer.
C.P.—Carriage paid.
D.S.O.—Distinguished Service Order.
H.I.H.—His or Her Imperial Highness.
J.P.—Justice of the Peace.
K.C.—King's Counsel.
LL.D.—Doctor of Laws.
R.I.P.—Rest in Peace.
SS—Steamship.

Sexton Blake: Spy.

A Superb New Serial of the Great Detective's Secret Service in Britain and Germany.

START READING IT NOW.

NEW READERS START HERE.

In the opening chapters of this grand new serial, we read how two Britishers are captured in the fortifications on the Island of Tarkum, off the German coast, while a couple of days later two Germans are seen making plans of Fort Ridley, in the East of England. One German is arrested, while the other escapes with his plans.

The news is abroad like wild-fire. The Britishers have lost their plans, while one of the Germans has succeeded in making an escape with plans of the British fortification in his possession.

Sexton Blake, the famous detective, is summoned to Lord Dorrington at the War Office, and is at length employed by the Secret Service. Now that Germany is in possession of one of Britain's

most valuable strongholds,

so must Britain be upon equal terms with Germany. Sexton Blake is aware that the one German who is captured is none other than Prince Gunther, son of the Kaiser. The famous detective, with his assistants, Tinker and Pedro, are to repair the unsuccessful attempt to obtain plans of the Tarkum fortification.

Disguised as Baron Rudolf Steiner, chief of the Prussian Secret Service, Sexton Blake gains an entrance to the Tarkum fortification, and lures Colonel Wenzel and his brother officers as guests to a dinner at the Hotel Kronprinz, and drugs them. While they are under the stupefying effects of the drug he dons the uniform of Colonel Wenzel, succeeds in securing the plans of Fort Tarkum, and is just about to return to the dress of Baron Steiner.

Major Wolff, recovering his senses at this point, sees Blake in the uniform of his superior officer.

"You scoundrel!" he roars, as he whips his sword from its scabbard.

(*Now read this week's splendid chapters.*)

THE 8th CHAPTER.
Sexton Blake Attempts Escape—Pedro's New Work.

THE fiery words, and the action that accompanied them, broke the spell that had for a brief interval petrified Tinker and the detective. And it was none too soon, for as they darted back they barely missed a blow aimed at them by the infuriated officer, who, brandishing his blade, pressed them into a corner, and there had them at his mercy. But as he was about to cut them ruthlessly down—they had not yet been able to draw the revolvers with which they were armed—his murderous intentions were frustrated by Pedro.

With a savage bay he sprang upon the major, who dropped his sword as he was borne heavily to the floor, where he lay while the dog snarled at his throat. By now the rest of the officers had been roused from sleep, and they were trying to shake off their stupor, and bawling at the tops of their voices, though they did not know what about.

"We must run for it!" exclaimed the lad.

"Come along!" bade Blake, who had, meanwhile, thrust the blue prints into his pocket. "Sharp!"

"Shall we fire, guv'nor?"

"No, no, certainly not! Use your fists, my boy!"

It looked as if they must either let fly with their revolvers or be taken, but, fortunately, by making an impetuous rush, and by dealing sledge-hammer blows that knocked down Captain Webber and Dr. Helwig, they reached the door and flung it open, and gained the hall. The detective had been calling to Pedro to follow, and he was still calling when, above his own voice, the frantic voice of Major Wolff was heard to shout:

"That is Sexton Blake's dog! Stop him! Don't let him get out! Somebody shut the——"

Bang! The door had been slammed shut, partly deadening the uproar within the room, and the thudding sounds that followed, mingled with loud barking and baying, told Blake and the lad that Pedro was a prisoner. They paused for an instant well-nigh sick with dread.

"They've got him!" cried Tinker, with a lump in his throat. "Shall we go back, and try to——"

"No, it would be madness," broke in the detective. "Moreover, our duty to our country comes first. We must leave Pedro behind. They may stun him, but they won't do him any serious harm. I can guess what Major Wolff wants with him!"

"So can I guv'nor! I can see through the game!"

"Never mind about that now, my boy. We must run for our lives, for our liberty. There will soon be a hornet's nest buzzing about our ears."

Just then the landlord reeled from a room to one side, rubbing his drowsy eyes; but he was too dazed to attempt to stop Blake and the lad, who hastened to the end of the hall, and tore the front door open, and dashed out into the night. Their plans had gone badly wrong, but though they had lost their faithful hound, and were in an extremely critical position, they were not in the least inclined to yield to despair.

They bore to the left, in the direction of the harbour, and before they had got far from the hotel a frenzied clamour was swelling in their rear, and spreading an alarm in front of them. Some of the enraged officers were in pursuit, their swords clanking as they came.

"I don't suppose it has occurred to them that we have made arrangements for getting away from the island," panted the lad. "They are counting on putting Pedro on our track, if we give them the slip at first."

"Yes, that is doubtless why they have trapped the dog," replied Sexton Blake. "We must give the major credit for a shrewd inspiration. We will have to go faster," he added. "Every second is precious."

"Lead on, guv'nor, and I'll follow. What a thick mist there is! But I suppose it is a good thing for us—eh?"

"Thank Heaven for it, my boy! Nothing could be more to our advantage! It will render useless the searchlight that will presently flash from the tower yonder, and it will also lessen the chances of our being intercepted out at sea by any German vessels that may be communicated with by wireless telegraphy, and instructed to look for us."

"Yes, that's true. I believe we shall escape."

"It depends on our getting off in the steamer without delay, Tinker. It is probably ready to leave, but that fellow Smols may give us trouble. He will know that there is something wrong, and his suspicions will fall on us when he sees me in this uniform."

"You should be able to bluff him," suggested Tinker, "if you put on the moustache that makes you look like the colonel."

"Ah, that's a good idea!" declared the detective.

As he spoke, he took from his pocket the false moustache in question, but as he was trying to adjust it to his lip a puff of wind snatched it out of his hand, and he dared not stop to search for it. He and the lad had by now covered half the distance to the harbour, and as they tore on down the narrow, cobble-paved street, with a tumult ringing in their rear, lights gleamed from the bed-rooms of cottages to right and left, and window-casements were thrown open; heads were poked out, and shouting voices joined in the din. A policeman ran from the mouth of an alley close ahead, and called a command to stop; but before he could draw the sword that he wore Sexton Blake's fist took him under the jaw, and he dropped as if struck by a stone from a catapult.

"I believe the officers are gaining on us!" gasped Tinker, as he jumped over the prostrate man. "What a row they are making!"

"Faster—faster!" urged Blake. "Do your best for Britain's sake, my boy! Ah, here we are! And now for the Charlotte! Where is it?"

"There it is, guv'nor. I see it."

"Yes, you are right. And there is the captain, if I am not mistaken."

THE 9th CHAPTER.
A Disappointment—The Last Hope—Clean Heels.

THE fugitives had left the houses behind, and had emerged on to an open space, roughly paved, that stretched along the edge of the harbour; and what there was to be seen here was dimly revealed by several lanterns, suspended from poles, that were burning with a sickly glow. Straight ahead, in the angle formed by the jutting out of the little quay, lay the steamer Charlotte, the small vessel that plied between Hemsden and Tarkum. And standing near it, with his hands in his pockets, was the thick-set figure of a man, who proved to be Captain Smols. But he was lurching like a mast buffeted by the wind, and the fact that he was intoxicated was at once perceived by Tinker and the detective, who saw at the same moment, to their dismay, that no smoke was issuing from the funnel of the vessel, and that there was nobody on board.

"What does this mean?" Blake hotly demanded, seizing the captain by the shoulder. "Why haven't you got steam up? Is this the way you keep your promise?"

Captain Smols stared for a couple of seconds, trying to collect his fuddled wits. He could not see clearly, and, therefore, he did not observe that the detective was in uniform, and that he had no moustache.

"Ah, you must be the herr baron!" he muttered thickly. "I'm very sorry—hope you'll overlook it. I've been drinking beer with a friend, and I forgot—about—the boat. But it won't take long to——"

"You drunken fool!" snapped Blake.

And in his anger he pushed the captain, who staggered backward, and fell, and lay on the stones without trying to rise.

"By heavens, what a misfortune!" said Tinker. "What are we to do?"

"I don't know," the detective answered bitterly. "I am afraid it is all up with us."

"We are cut off on three sides," declared Blake. "We might break through our pursuers, but it is hardly worth trying, since we should not be able to get away from the island. There is no hope. We will have to surrender, reluctant though I am to——"

"No, there is a chance for us!" the lad eagerly interrupted. "Look, guv'nor! Look out there! Do you see?"

"Yes, I see it. A sail, my boy, a sail!"

"Come along! We won't despair yet!"

And the next instant, with hopes revived, they were dashing side by side along the narrow, jutting quay, at the end of which they could distinguish, in spite of the mist, a flapping sheet of canvas.

"It is a boat that has just come in!" exclaimed Tinker.

"Or one that is just going out!" exclaimed Sexton Blake. "Be quick, or we shall miss it!"

But it was the lad who was right. The sheet of canvas was flapping over a small fishing-craft which belonged, as it happened, to the identical fisherman who had taken Prince Gunther of Prussia across to England. Having come back from that trip, without suspicion falling upon him, he had resumed his vocation. To-day old Hans and his son Karl, the latter a strapping youth, had been out after herring; and now, having failed to net any fish, they had just put into port. They had run their boat alongside of the wall, but had not yet made it fast. The noise in the village had attracted their attention, and as they were listening to the tumult, and wondering what it could mean, Tinker leapt down upon the deck, and was immediately followed by the detective.

"Shove off, and be quick about it!" bade Sexton Blake, in a tone of authority, as he held one hand before his mouth to hide the lack of a moustache. "We want your vessel and your assistance. You know me, don't you? I am Colonel Wenzel."

"Ay, ay, sir!" gasped the old fisherman, as he recovered from his surprise. "And what do you want with my boat?"

"A soldier has deserted from the fort, and he must be caught."

"Did he get away by water?"

"Yes, in a row-boat. But don't ask questions. Do as I tell you, my good fellow. I command you to——"

"I won't!" cried old Hans, as he peered closely at the detective. "You can't fool me with such a tale! You are not the herr colonel, though you are wearing his uniform!"

"No doubt they are both spies!" put in young Karl. "We must seize them, father! You take the one, while I——"

The youth paused abruptly as Tinker whipped out a revolver and levelled it at him, and at the same instant the old fisherman found himself staring into the muzzle of a similar weapon that had been drawn by Sexton Blake, who said fiercely:

"We are not to be trifled with. Put off at once, if you value your life. Obey me, or I will send a bullet through you!"

"And I will give you the same if you stand there gaping any longer!" threatened Tinker, as he thrust his pistol closer to the startled youth. "Get to work! Do you hear me?"

By now the harbour-side was black with people, and many more, led by some of the officers from the Hotel Kronprinz, had raced along the jutting quay and reached the end of it. Several of them carried lanterns, and the flickering light played on sword-scabbards and uniforms.

"Stop—stop!" loudly roared a voice that could be recognised as that of Major Wolff. "Come back, in the name of the Kaiser! Bring those men back! They are spies! They have stolen plans of the fort!"

In vain, however, the major and his comrades raved, and stormed, and danced about. The old fisherman and his son, still covered by the menacing weapons, dared not make a move to put back. In sullen silence, realising their helplessness, they accepted the situation. Half a dozen pistol-shots were fired, but they did no more than riddle the sail. The boat slid steadily on, and in a short time it was wrapped in a shroud of mist through which nothing could be seen. Harbour and quay had melted into the darkness, and presently the ebbing clamour of the pursuers could no longer be heard.

Sexton Blake and Tinker had much to be thankful for, since they had escaped from a grave peril, and had reason to believe that they would be able to elude capture. Moreover, they had succeeded in their object; they had the plans of the fort, which were of incalculable value to Great Britain. But their triumph had been won at a cost that marred the satisfaction they would otherwise have felt. Their hearts were heavy, for they had lost Pedro, and they knew not if they would ever see their faithful hound again.

"Where are we to put you ashore, herr?" coldly asked old Hans.

"At any British port," Blake told him. "Steer for the open sea, and the coast of England."

"Very good, herr."

"But we are not going in that direction now. Alter your course, at once."

"It shall be as you wish," growled the man; and as he bent to the tiller, swinging the craft to a different track, he threw a quick, furtive glance at his son.

"Have you a compass?" inquired Blake.

"I have none," was the answer, "nor do I need one. I shall not go wrong."

"You had better not, my good fellow! If you deceive us, you will pay dearly for it. On the other hand, if you carry us across the North Sea to England, you shall have twenty gold coins."

"Keep your dirty money!" cried old Hans. "You are a spy, and I am an honest man. If we were starving, dying for want of food, I would not take a penny from one who has stolen my country's secrets."

And his eyes blazed with hatred as he glared at Sexton Blake and the lad, who were not offended by his outspoken words. On the contrary, they admired his loyalty; and with their admiration mingled a vague sense of uneasiness, a fear that their pilot might prove untrustworthy.

"I wish I had a compass, my boy," whispered Blake.

"So do I," the lad replied, in a low tone. "The old chap may play us false. But he would hardly dare to, would he?"

"No, it is not likely. I feel that we can trust him, since he knows that he is at our mercy, and that if he were to—"

"Hark!" broke in Tinker. "What is that?"

As he spoke a dull, booming sound was heard, and it had no more than died away when a luminous streak appeared against the darkness of the night.

THE 10th CHAPTER.
Fast Aground—Treachery—The Peril of the Deep.

"BY heavens, the searchlight!" exclaimed Sexton Blake.

It could be nothing else. The booming sound was an alarm gun that had been fired at the fortress, and the luminous glow certainly came from the powerful searching-apparatus that had been installed on the lighthouse that stood on a reef off the island.

"They are looking for us," the lad said huskily. "Will they find us?"

"I hope not," Blake answered. "If they do"—he paused for an instant—"if they do," he went on, "they will send the steamer Charlotte after us, guiding it on its course by the light."

"This mist ought to hide us, guv'nor."

"It may do so, my boy. I can't be sure."

The streak of light was quivering, flashing brighter, moving slowly to the left. The fisherman and his son exchanged glances of satisfaction.

But the anxiety of the fugitives decreased as they continued to watch the luminous streak, which at first had so terrified them. Though it was uncomfortably bright, it was dim in comparison with what it would have been had the weather been clear. Like a mighty tentacle, or the glowing reflection from a gigantic eye, it swept right and left, hovering on sky and horizon. Again and again it played straight overhead, and lingered there, quivering balefully. But its evil, searching glare was dimmed by the mist, and it could not point out the fishing-craft to the guardians of the distant lighthouse.

"It has done its worst, and that amounts to nothing," Blake said at length. "It is not to be feared."

The searchlight presently ceased to play—its futility had evidently been realised—and the alarm-gun at the fort, which had been faintly booming at intervals, was no longer heard. More than an hour had now elapsed since the start, and for two or three hours more, while the night dragged by, the boat glided steadily on, rippling gently and swiftly through the water, cleaving the grey shroud of mist.

There was no conversation between the two fishermen, who nonchalantly attended to their duties, and seemed to be resigned to the distasteful situation; but nevertheless Blake and the lad, though they believed that they were holding a course for England, did not relax their vigilance, nor did they venture to put their revolvers into their pockets. They kept watch incessantly, and when they were not standing still they trod the deck with brisk steps, and thus fought off the frosty cold, which would otherwise have chilled their limbs.

"It was hours ago that we left Tarkum," said Tinker, after a long interval of silence. "It must be nearly morning now."

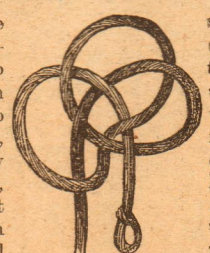
"It can't be far from it," replied Sexton Blake. "Yes, you are right," he added, as he glanced at his watch by the light of the lamp that hung from the mast. "It is nearly three o'clock."

"And we must be well out in the North Sea, guv'nor."

"A good distance out, my boy. I should say that we were twenty-five or thirty miles from the island, and therefore in the track of vessels. It is dangerous travelling in this mist,

A BUTTON MADE FROM A BOOTLACE.

It may interest us to know how we can make a coat-button from an ordinary leather bootlace. We take the bootlace and make a loop at one end, just as we should make a loop in a piece of string. The loop should not be too big, as it is to be used for attaching the button, when completed, to a coat. The plan to follow in making the button is to tie a series of knots, taking care to keep the button round and neat as we make it. It is sufficient to keep on tying simple knots, one on top of another, until the button is the required size. But if we want to make a really attractive button, we should loop the bootlace on the principle shown in the picture. We need not stop at three loops, but can continue the series on the same plan, and then pull the whole tight, when, if we have been careful, we shall have a neat, round button. A little practice will soon enable us to invent other designs for our bootlace buttons. The best plan is to practise for a time with a piece of thick string until we thoroughly understand how to tie the knots so that the button may be round, like a little ball. The final knot should be securely fixed.



How to Make the Button.

THE END.

and we may be run down. But I would rather take the chances of that by far than be exposed to——"

The detective did not finish the sentence, for he was interrupted by a terrific bump, which was followed by a jarring, scraping thud that smashed and extinguished the lantern and rattled the mast in its socket, and caused the sail to jib violently. The boat swerved with a jerk that flung Blake and the lad to the deck, and as they scrambled to their feet, half dazed, they found themselves threatened with a peril that they had barely time to avert.

Old Hans had let go of the tiller, and his son had dropped the sheet; and the two, their faces distorted with rage, were in crouching attitudes, about to spring upon their captors. But they darted back as the revolvers were levelled at their heads.

For a short, tense interval there was only the sound of heavy breathing and the gurgling wash of the surge against the little vessel, which had struck on some obstruction, and was held so tightly that not the slightest quiver could be felt.

"We have run aground," Blake said sharply to the fishermen. "How can that be? Are we on a shoal?"

"Ay, it is just that," declared old Hans, in a tone of triumph; "but the shoal is not where you think it is We are on the sandbank that lies off the coast of Hanover."

"The coast of Hanover?" echoed the detective.

"By heavens, we have been tricked!" gasped Tinker.

"Ay, tricked is the word for it!" old Hans shouted hoarsely. "You dirty spies! Did you expect to get the better of us? Fools that you were! We have been steering the boat towards the mainland all the time, hoping that, as soon as we struck, we should be able to seize and disarm you. That hope has failed, but you are none the less as good as caught, for the mist is rising, and daylight is not far off. There will be no escape for you, whether or not you get ashore. As for ourselves, we are at your mercy. But we do not fear you. Do your worst. Kill us if you will. We are not afraid to die for the sake of the Fatherland."

"That's the way to talk!" cried young Karl. "I, too, am no coward! I am willing to die for my country and my Kaiser!"

And father and son, drawing themselves stiffly erect, waited calmly, with the seal of heroism on their rugged, weatherbeaten faces, for the deadly shots which they did not doubt would be fired. They were ready for death, and they would have died then and there, perhaps, had their foe been any other than Sexton Blake.

At first, as was natural, his rage was most intense. He was sorely tempted to fire, it must be admitted, as he realised what this act of treachery would probably cost himself and the lad. But he was, of course, incapable of such a thing. His hot anger melted to admiration, and a flush of shame dyed his cheeks.

"You are brave men," he said to them, "and your Emperor may be proud of you. I admire your courage. You have nothing to fear. I give you your lives."

"They deserve your mercy, guv'nor," said the lad. "I feel just as you do about it."

"We should not have trusted them, my boy," Blake replied. "It was my fault. But it is too late to think of that now. We are in an ugly scrape, and it will take all our wits to get out of it."

"I don't see how we can. The boat is so deeply imbedded on the sand that we won't be able to push it off. We shall have to stop here, I suppose."

"I am afraid there is nothing else for it, Tinker."

But the situation was not as bad as they believed it to be, for the breeze had freshened a few moments before, and the mist had been rolling off the sea; and now, through a rift in the grey shroud, there was visible to one side, apparently at no great distance, a low, dark line that could be but one thing.

"Look, there is the shore!" the lad exclaimed eagerly. "I wonder if we can reach it?"

"We must make the attempt," said Blake, coming to a swift decision. "It is our only chance. To remain here will mean certain capture."

It promised to be a risky venture, but their courage was equal to it. Slowly and warily, still covering the two fishermen with their revolvers, they stepped backward to the bulwark, and then, turning quickly, they vaulted over and splashed into the sea. They touched bottom without being entirely submerged, the water coming only to their shoulders, but the sand beneath them was so soft that they dared not trust their weight to it lest it should take a sucking grip of their feet.

"We shall have to swim," said Blake.

"Right you are!" answered the lad. "Go ahead, guv'nor!"

And side by side, with lusty strokes, they cleft their way towards the dark line that was still visible.

THE 11th CHAPTER.
Saved—The Shadowing Danger—Inland.

As soon as the splash was heard old Hans and his son had hastened to the edge of the vessel, and for several seconds they had an opportunity, had they chosen to make use of a boathook that was within their reach, of stunning the fugitives and hauling them back. But they hesitated, appreciating the mercy that had been shown to them, and the chance was lost by the time they had grasped the importance of taking advantage of it.

"We have let the enemies of our country go," said the old fisherman, shaking his head. "It was a mistake."

"They will be caught later," replied young Karl.

"Ay, no doubt of it! And it will go hard with them then. They are fine fellows, for all that they are spies."

"We should be grateful to them, father. They spared our lives, and not many men would have done the same."

The two stood watching by the bulwark, and they were still there, motionless and silent, when they faded from the view of Sexton Blake and the lad, who had more than once glanced over their shoulders, half afraid that the vessel might be dislodged and driven in pursuit of them.

They made their way steadily on, despite the icy cold. The waves buffeted them, and they had to swim constantly, for their efforts to touch bottom again were futile. It was a hard fight, and at times they were almost discouraged; but at length, when they had gone three or four hundred yards, and were beginning to yield to exhaustion, they reached shallow water, and gained the shore without any further trouble.

"Thank Heaven," panted the detective, "that danger is over!"

"We have reason to be thankful," said Tinker. "I thought more than once that we were going to be drowned."

They had conquered the perils of the sea, and they were at first in fairly cheerful spirits, grateful for their preservation. But when they had recovered from their fatigue, and had looked about them, they were inclined to be disheartened by the situation that they had to face. Their plight was indeed pitiful. They were bare-headed, and soaked to the skin; cold and hungry, and without food. They had money, and plenty of it, but it was doubtful if it would be of any service to them. And finally, to crown all, they were on German soil.

"Things look pretty blue, don't they?" said the lad, trying to smile as he squeezed the water from his clothes with numbed fingers.

"They could not look much worse," Sexton Blake replied, in a bitter tone.

For a few seconds neither spoke. The wind had blown nearly all of the mist away, and overhead the pale stars were twinkling. There was no moon, nor was there as yet any sign of dawn, but the fugitives could dimly perceive the shape of the little vessel out at sea, and the desolate sand-dunes that stretched into the darkness to right and left, and inland as well.

"It is a cheerful prospect, I must say," grumbled Blake, as he beat his arms on his chest. "It is aggravating that my plans should have come such a cropper. We are in a bad way, and there is no use in trying to disguise the fact. Hours ago the news of our escape, and our descriptions, were flashed to Hemsden by telegraph, and in another two or three hours, when morning has dawned, one of the vessels that has been looking for us will run alongside of the fishing-boat yonder, and the old man and his son will tell their story. And then more messages will flash over the wires in all directions."

"It isn't like you to give way to despair," said the lad.

"I am not in despair, my boy, but I am very near to it."

"There is something to be thankful for, guv'nor. We have our liberty, and we have the plans of the fort, and we have plenty of money."

"And we are on German territory, and I am wearing the uniform of a German colonel. How long do you suppose we shall keep our freedom?"

"It is not certain that we shall lose it. We have at least a chance, so let us make the most of it. If we can get something to eat, and a change of clothes for both of us, we may be able to reach some seaport or inland town, and escape to England by steamer."

"That might be possible," replied the detective, "under more favourable circumstances. But there is one thing that you are forgetting to reckon with."

"What is that?" inquired Tinker.

"The danger that threatens us from Pedro."

"Danger from Pedro! What do you mean?"

"Can't you guess, my boy? Where are your wits? It was a cunning inspiration, a shrewd forethought that prompted Major Wolff to urge his comrades to prevent the dog from getting out of the room at the hotel. It had occurred to him that Pedro might be utilised for tracking us, and that is exactly what will be done. With all haste, as soon as the fishermen have told their story, the dog will be brought over from the island of Tarkum, and put on our scent.

"My word, you are right! I thought of that last night, but it slipped my mind afterwards. Fancy old Pedro trying hard to find us, while we are doing our best to get away from him! What a funny situation that would be!"

"There is nothing funny about it!" snapped Sexton Blake. "It is a very grave and serious peril."

"Of course it is," assented the lad. "I don't dispute that. It will be a race between us and the dog, for he will hang on to us like grim death. We must reach some big town before he can——"

"No, that is not the best plan. We must nip the danger in the bud, if we can. We must first bend our efforts to throwing Pedro off the scent."

"It won't be easy to fool the dog," said Tinker. "You know how clever he is, and what a wonderful scent he has. But we will do our level best. We had better be starting, hadn't we?"

"Yes, at once," Blake answered. "Every minute is precious to us."

For a mile they tramped over billowy sand-dunes and through coarse marrum-grass, and their pace was so rapid, and the going so heavy, that warmth had been restored to their chilled limbs by the time they had reached the edge of cultivated country. It was still dark, and they judged that it wanted a couple of hours yet to full daylight. They crossed half a dozen fields, seeing no sign of any habitation, and then came to a wide tract of marshy ground, where they covered their scent by keeping to pools of water, in which they were submerged to the knees.

Having got to the farther side of the marsh, they pushed blindly through woods for a quarter of a mile, and emerged again on open country which was not unlike parts of Holland and of Norfolk. Cattle and horses were grazing in pastures that were enclosed by dykes, and these miniature canals afforded to Blake and Tinker just such an opportunity as they were seeking for.

Heedless of the discomfort, they took to the water, and waded for more than a mile, working their way gradually to the left, from dyke to dyke; and then, finding that they could not go any farther in this fashion, they crept for fifty or sixty yards along a fence, keeping their feet on the lowermost rail.

This brought them to a hard and narrow road, and when they had plucked bunches of grass and tied them around the soles of their boots as tightly as they could—they could not tell what this precaution would be worth—they followed the road for some distance, and struck off from it into another belt of woods on coming within sight of a house. Deep, dark cover swallowed them up, and for two or three hundred yards they plodded on in silence, picking their way through the trees.

"That marsh ought to baffle Pedro," said the lad, "and if that doesn't do it, the dykes will. We have made a good beginning."

"Yes, and that's all it is," declared Blake. "Our work has only begun. The dog won't be long at fault. He will be led around to right and left and kept searching until he has picked up our scent again. And then——"

The detective paused abruptly, and in a whisper called Tinker's attention to a red glow that could be seen through the foliage.

They waited for a few seconds, and then, as all was quiet, they crept noiselessly forward to the edge of the woods, and stopped again.

"Ah, it is an iron foundry!" murmured Sexton Blake.

"And there doesn't appear to be any person about," said Tinker. "I believe it will be safe for us to dry our clothes."

"We're done for!" said Tinker huskily. "Look out, guv'nor!" From a building there had issued a dozen stalwart men in blue uniforms, who wore white metal helmets, and were armed with short swords. They were Prussian policemen, and the building was, of course, the police-station.

THE 12th CHAPTER
Baffling Pedro—Shelter—Tinker's Discovery.

Both Tinker and the detective were right. They had emerged on the side of a road, and close beyond it, within plain view of them, was a small foundry, from which came the red light that had attracted their attention. They went cautiously over to it, treading among heaps of ore and slag; and when they had made sure that the place was deserted—they had not expected to find it otherwise at this time of the night—they decided to avail themselves of the opportunity offered by a furnace that had been banked up on the previous evening, and was throwing out intense heat.

For half an hour they stood as near to the glowing coals as they could get without being scorched, and then, their wet garments having been thoroughly dried, they resumed their aimless journey, bearing across country; and when they had gone on for a couple of miles, without finding any further means of hiding their scent from the bloodhound, they came in the early dawn to a field in which was a scarecrow that had done duty during the spring and summer, and had suffered from the elements.

A dilapidated coat and pair of trousers, greasy and faded, hung loosely from a crossbar that was nailed to an upright post, on the top of which hung a straw hat that had a hole in the crown and lacked part of its rim.

"This is a bit of luck for me," said Sexton Blake, with a grim smile, as he observed that there was no house in sight. "Fair exchange is no robbery."

"You don't mean to put these old togs on?" gasped the lad.

"Why not? They are not very clean, but they might be worse. I would rather wear the filthiest rags than what I have on now. Yes, I shall rob the scarecrow, and leave Colonel Wenzel's uniform for the German farmer. But I will put it where he won't find it in a hurry."

As Blake spoke, he was stripping the framework of its hangings, and five minutes later the wreck of a straw hat was on his head, and he was attired in the ragged coat and trousers, which did not fit him badly. The discarded uniform having been rolled up, and dropped into the hollow stump of a tree that was near by, the fugitives went on again, and were soon climbing a low, wooded hill. As Tinker's clothes were caked with mud, and had been torn by briars, he was almost as disreputable an object as was his master.

"What a lark!" he said, with a grin. "I wish you could see yourself! What a sensation you would create if you were to walk down Baker Street in that rig! You look like Weary Willie!"

"It is nothing to jest about!" snapped the detective.

For hour after hour, mile after mile they pressed on with unfaltering courage, enduring the pangs of starvation and fighting against fatigue; and again and again, in different ways, they took measures to prevent Pedro from following them.

Thus they spent the greater part of the day, ever vigilant, and ever seeking for a chance to hide their trail; and towards the close of the afternoon, when a glimmer of sunshine was breaking through the leaden clouds, they happened to look back from the brow of a wooded hill, and perceived far behind them a mass of moving objects. They could distinguish horses, and the flash of steel, and the bright hue of uniforms.

"German cavalry!" muttered the lad, drawing a deep breath.

(Another grand instalment of this thrilling detective serial next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

A Superb New Serial, Specially Written for THE BOYS' FRIEND by that Well-known Globe-trotter and Author, STANLEY PORTAL HYATT.

JUST TO INTRODUCE TO YOU

Dudley and Marcus Scarfield, who are travelling northwards in Africa on the track of Mr. Douglas, a hunter, who is beyond the pale of civilisation, and who holds the papers referring to an invaluable invention their father has left to them.

By getting these papers they become immensely rich, whilst if they fail to recover them they will remain poor, so that they are straining every nerve to reach their father's old friend.

Joseph Scarfield is their cousin, who by fair means or foul is also trying to find Douglas. Up to the present he has mostly employed foul means—in fact he

leaves no stone unturned

to gain his ends.

Amous is a native who has attached himself to the brothers, and he is a friend indeed.

Travelling with a prospector, the boys are held up at Palapye, owing to the rising of the Matabeles against the British. They learn of an attack to be made upon Fort Busi, and with the intention of preventing any disturbance they proceed in the direction of the fort. Half-way through their journey, they learn that all communication has been cut off.

A party of trek-Boer raiders are making for the station at which the lads have halted.

"Be quick!" roars the prospector. "They will shoot us on sight!"

(Now read the splendid chapters below.)

Marcus and Dudley part company.

WHEN old Kerridge, the prospector, announced that he could already hear the Boer raiders, the police trooper looked ruefully at his Scotch cart.

"They'll have that lot, and all my personal kit is in it," he began. "I don't see——"

"They'll have you as well as your kit," Kerridge interrupted him impatiently. "Bring your horse and your rifle. That's all you'll save."

A couple of minutes later, the boys, Kerridge, Amous, and the trooper were riding away through the scrub, riding south, in the opposite direction to that in which they really wanted to go.

"Why south?" the trooper grumbled. "I should have thought we ought to have hit out for Fort Busi, and warned our fellows."

Kerridge nodded his head grimly.

"Exactly what one of you police would think. These raiders are bound to see where our spoor leaves the cart, and if they saw it heading north some of 'em would be after us; but they won't waste time on horsemen heading away from the fort. I can hear them now. They must be passing within six hundred yards of us; but, luckily, the wind is the right way, and they won't hear our horses even if they do neigh." He pulled up, and dismounted. "We can see them from the top of that little kopje. Hold my horse, Amous, whilst I go forward, will you?"

The boys dismounted too.

"Let us come," they said; but the police trooper merely pulled out his pipe, and began to fill it.

"I've lost no Boers," he said rudely.

The column was moving comparatively slowly. It had been on trek for several hours, and the mules drawing its transport waggons were already tired and hungry. Kerridge and the boys had plenty of time to climb the little kopje, and get a good view of it as it passed, a bare fifty yards away.

"There're well over a hundred—nearer two hundred," Kerridge whispered. "A regular tattered mob of border ruffians, aren't they? It's not like Boers to use such waggons, though. How many have they got? Five, six, seven—no, five in all. This is no mere amateur raid; it's too well organised. Ah, look there!" He clutched Dudley's arm. "See that well-dressed man at the head? He's Dr. Schultz, a German agent. That explains it all."

"I don't see Joseph anywhere," Marcus began; but Dudley interrupted.

"There he is, riding on the third waggon. I expect he's feeling a bit stiff and sore."

The younger brother snorted.

"I hope he is. I hope he'll be something worse than sore before this is over. He deserves to be shot."

"It's time we got on." It was Kerridge who spoke. "They will outspan now; and if we make a wide sweep we can come into the road again well ahead of them. We ought to be at the fort by sundown, if our horses don't crock up. These fellows probably mean to attack about dawn."

He turned to go back to where Amous and the trooper were waiting, but even as he did so, he caught sight of a couple of armed natives coming across a little olei on the other side of the kopje. At the same moment the natives saw him and the boys, hesitated a second, then dived back into the scrub. Kerridge had raised his rifle, then apparently remembered the Boers, and made no attempt to shoot, although there had been time for him to do so. Then he looked at the boys with a queer gleam in his eyes.

"Do you know who those were? No? Well, they're Matabele scouts. There must be an impi somewhere about. I hope we don't find it, or it doesn't find us. Those fellows will travel across the veldt on foot as quickly as we can on horseback."

They hurried back to their horses. Kerridge was looking very worried, and it must be admitted the boys were far from being easy in their minds. The Matabele might be anywhere; they might blunder into them without an instant's warning. And, in that case, the message to Fort Busi would never be delivered.

As they mounted, after telling the trooper and the Basuto their news, Marcus said, a little nervously:

"Mr. Kerridge, don't you think we ought to separate—that two of us ought to go one track, and the other three go another, keeping different sides of the road? Then some of us are sure to get in."

The prospector looked at him gravely.

"Good boy!" he answered. "I had thought of it, but I didn't like to suggest it. Amous had better go with one of you, and I will go with the other two."

The Basuto assented readily, and it was arranged that Dudley should be his companion; but the trooper did not fancy the idea at all. "If three of us run into those Matabele brutes, we shouldn't have a ghost of a show!" he protested.

"If five of us ran into the main body, we shouldn't have a ghost of a show, either," Kerridge retorted. "If you don't like the idea—well, the road to the south is open, and you'll find one of Khama's regiments at Ramguaban, thirty miles away. You might go and tell their leader that the Matabele are already here."

The trooper did not hesitate.

"All right," he said. "I'll bring 'em up to help. So-long." And he rode off towards the south.

The boys laughed, and Kerridge shrugged his shoulders.

"He would have hindered us," the prospector said. "He doesn't seem to know anything about the veldt, and he can't ride. It's better to send him into safety."

The boys shook hands in silence. It was quite a question whether they would ever see each other again. After a few instructions from Kerridge, the little party separated. Amous and Dudley were to go by the eastern side of the road, Kerridge and Marcus by the western.

Amous led the way across the spoor of the Boers, then struck right into the bush.

"We will give them plenty of room, baas," he said. "Probably, however, they will outspan by the Scotch cart, for there is good water there; then we shall be quite safe, unless, of course, we run into those Matabele dogs."

They went on steadily for a couple of miles, then suddenly Amous drew up.

"What is this coming?" he said.

A moment later, the answer came in the form of a score of zebra, galloping wildly across their front, and, lumbering along behind the zebra, moving swiftly, despite their bulk, were a dozen eland, the largest of all antelope, bigger than any bullock.

"Something has frightened them," Dudley began, but before he could get out another word, he knew the cause of their fright, for half a dozen Boers were in close pursuit, and amongst the Boers was Harry Collins, the traitor and partner of Joseph Scarfield.

"Ride, baas—ride for your life!" Amous shouted, as he drove his heels into his horse's sides.

The first four Boers were so excited with the chase, that they seemed not to notice the boy and the Basuto, but Collins saw them, and some inkling of the truth flashed on his mind.

"Here, Klaas," he cried to the nearest Boer, "come with me after these two! Hendrick, Jan, Corneyls!" he called after the others; but they had already swept on out of earshot.

Dudley and the Basuto had a start of some three hundred yards in all, and their horses were the fresher; moreover, both Collins and Klaas Geldenhius, his companion, were heavy men. On the other hand, the advantage is always with the pursuer, for the pursued has to choose his road, whilst the other has merely to follow him. For two miles or so, Dudley just maintained his lead; then, to his dismay, he found that Amous was drawing ahead of him, whilst the enemy were drawing closer. Another mile, and the three hundred yards had become a bare two hundred, whilst Amous was out of sight.

Dudley now began to ride forward wildly, blundering down the sides of dongas and spruits, losing yard after yard by going on the wrong side of clumps of bush. Amous had been able to give him the lead before, but now he realised what a very difficult matter it was for a comparatively new hand on the veldt to ride cross-country alone.

He was fast growing hopeless. He knew now that they must overtake him, and he knew, too, what measure of mercy he would get. He had been in Collins's power once before. A hundred and fifty yards lead, a hundred and twenty yards, a bare hundred. Should he jump off his horse, and try to make a fight for it? Yet that seemed useless, for whilst he was pulling up and dismounting, they would be right on him.

A crowd of thoughts flashed through his mind. He would never see Marcus again, never see old Kerridge, never square up accounts with that villain Joseph. Why had Amous left him in this cowardly way, securing his own safety at the cost of the boy's life—why—why?

He heard Collins give a shout—the traitor was a bare sixty yards behind him now. Then he heard the crack of a rifle, and instinctively ducked his head; but no bullet whistled past him. Instead, there was a hoarse cry—rage, astonishment, and fear mingled—from behind him, followed by a heavy crash; then came another rifle-shot.

This time the boy looked back over his shoulder, only for a second; but still in that second he saw Klaas Geldenhius reel from his saddle, dead, whilst Collins was already down, lying beneath his dead horse, very still. Twenty yards away Amous was calmly ejecting an empty cartridge-case from his smoking rifle.

Dudley pulled up quickly, and rode back to the now smiling Basuto.

"I rode round and waited for the schelm," Amous explained. "They had eyes only for you, baas."

He walked up to Geldenhius, picked up his rifle, and calmly smashed the stock on a boulder.

"The Matabele dogs sha'n't get that," he said. Then he did the same with Collins's rifle. "I missed him, and killed his horse," he remarked; "only the fall seems to have broken his neck. Now we will go on, baas. The other Boers may come after us. We have no time to lose. Probably they will hear my shots, and come to see who was shooting."

They mounted, and rode off northwards again, going slowly for a while, for their horses were winded.

An hour later they came to a running river.

"We will ride up this as far as the road itself," Amous said; "then, if they are following us, they will waste a long time in looking for our spoor."

When they reached the road Amous dismounted and scanned the dusty surface carefully.

"There is no spoor of horses," he said. "Baas Marcus and Baas Kerridge evidently are still riding through the scrub."

A little later on he dismounted again, with the same result; then again, and yet again.

The Basuto began to look anxious.

"They should have got back to the road long since," he muttered, "unless they have run into that Matabele impi, in which case——"

And he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Meanwhile, as soon as they were out of sight, Mr. Harry Collins had risen stiffly to his feet, and had begun to limp back to the Boer camp.

"I always make sure if a man is dead," he remarked grimly to himself. "And when the chance comes I'll make quite sure of those two."

(Continued on the next page.)

Marcus gripped his assegai, and Kerridge, battle axe in hand, stood beside the rescued girl. Suddenly the savages, who were unwounded, darted away to cover.

The Coming Attack on Fort Busi.

AFTER what seemed to him hours of riding over the most dusty, thirsty track in the world, Dudley called to Amous:

"How many miles are we from the fort now?"

"About eighteen, baas," the Basuto answered. "The Fifteen Mile Water is at that line of kopjes you see there. When we reach it we must off-saddle for a while, or our horses will not last out. They have come very many miles to-day already, and if they drop we shall be done."

Dudley dismounted stiffly at the Fifteen Mile Water; he was deadly tired, horribly anxious to know the fate of his brother and Kerridge; but, still, he could not sit down.

Amous hobbled the horses, and turned them out to feed in an olei near by, then settled down to smoke. But Dudley could only pace to and fro.

Once Amous called to him:

"Baas, anyone coming along the road could see you, and it is not wise. The horses are hidden, and I am hidden; but you——"

He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Dudley flushed.

He had forgotten that aspect of the affair—forgotten even the safety of Fort Busi—forgotten everything except his brother, whose spoor was not to be seen on the road.

He sat down at the foot of a mopani-tree, and quite unconsciously at once began to nod from sheer weariness.

Opposite him, a mile or so away, was a line of small kopjes of the type beloved by the local natives—the Makalanja. He was looking at them sleepily through half-closed eyes when suddenly he saw a wisp of smoke arising from one of them. A minute later, and the wisp had become a column, then there arose another column, and yet another—many of them.

He was fully awake now, and he called to Amous, who had strolled off to make sure that the horses were not straying.

The Basuto gave one glance towards the kopje, then sprang forward towards the horses.

"The Matabele, baas!" he cried. "They are burning the Makalanja kraals, as is their way. They may be here any moment!"

It did not take long to catch the horses, and it took even less time to saddle up, yet even as they were mounting, they heard cries and the sound of people running towards them through the scrub. Then a terrified little crowd came into view—a couple of score of Makalanja, of all ages and both sexes, racing through the scrub for all they were worth, whilst at their heels were half a dozen Matabele warriors, running also, and using their great, stabbing assegais as they ran.

"It's no use waiting, baas," Amous called out; "we can do nothing! A hundred may be here in a minute!"

Dudley fired one shot from the saddle at a huge warrior who was trying to stab a woman. The brute went down, a bullet through his shoulder; then the boy galloped on after the Basuto.

As they reached the road again he glanced back, and, to his intense surprise, saw half a dozen Boers halted on the other side of the little river from which the Fifteen Mile Water got its name; but between the Boers and himself were now the Matabele and their intended victims. Moreover, fresh Matabele, hot with the lust of slaughter, were arriving every moment.

Amous saw the Boers, too, and laughed.

"They will not trouble us, baas, with those Matabele in front of them. Now, I think, we can get on safely to Fort Busi."

His prophecy proved to be correct; and just before sundown they crossed the big drift—the only drift on that river for many miles—and rode up to the entrance of the fort.

To Dudley's surprise—for he had pictured something far more imposing—the fort proved to consist merely of a small earthwork enclosure, with some half-dozen thatched huts and a galvanised-iron stable inside. At one corner, on a small platform, was a Maxim-gun, and at the opposite corner a seven-pounder.

Captain Railton, the officer in command, a huge, slow-moving man with a jovial face, came forward to meet them.

"Hallo, young fellow!" he said, as he shook hands with Dudley. "Where did you spring from? We heard there was a Matabele impi down the road, on its way to fight Khama's people—or raid Khama's cattle, rather. You were lucky to get through."

"We were," Dudley answered grimly. "But there're more than Matabele on the road. There's a crowd of Boer raiders on their way up. They want to capture your fort, and get your guns."

The officer's face grew grave suddenly.

"Come inside," he said. "Now, tell me the whole story."

Dudley told it plainly and concisely, starting from the beginning.

Once only did the captain interrupt him.

"Yes," he said, "Dr. Schultz, the German whom you say is with them, was staying here a month ago, and saw everything there was to see."

When the boy had finished the captain lay back in his chair and stroked his heavy moustache reflectively. At last:

"We're between two fires," he said, "and the brutes know it. We've got to think about both the Matabele and the Boers. That party of raiders—you say there're nearly two hundred mounted men?—would simply walk through any Matabele impi, whilst it's even possible that they'll make friends with those savages, and get them to help. This rebellion, or war, is not white against black; it's just Matabele against British."

He got up and paced to and fro restlessly. After a while:

"This fort does not command the drift itself," he said. "I suppose you noticed that. Our guns would be no use until they had crossed the river. Yet if we shift out of the place, and take up a position on the bank, the Matabele may get the fort. What would you do, youngster?" And he turned to the boy with a smile.

Dudley flushed.

"Well, I should think that the Boers were the more important," he answered slowly. "We're sure that they are coming, and we're not sure of the Matabele. Their impi was certainly going south. Besides, if the Boers get through and capture your guns, it will mean a long war to get the country back."

The captain nodded.

"You're perfectly right. I'm going to forget the Matabele for the time being, and take my men and my guns down to the bank. I've only twelve men," he smiled grimly, "but I think they'll put up a good fight." He went to the door, and called the sergeant, to whom he gave a few curt orders.

Night had already fallen, and it was quite dark when they issued out of the fort, dragging their two guns. They took no lights, fearing that there might already be scouts on the other bank. But still the night was perfectly clear, and they were able to see what they were doing. They put the Maxim in the middle of the road, and the seven-pounder a little to one side, and in front of each they built up a rampart of provision-cases backed with sand. Then they brought down the whole of their available stock of ammunition, tied up the horses in a donga near by, and sat down to wait in the chilly night air.

"Our rear is quite unprotected," the captain remarked cheerfully; "and if any Matabele come on that side they will wipe us out, unless they stay to loot the fort first. But we must chance that. I wish I could spare a couple of men to go across the drift and scout. We don't want these fellows to come on us suddenly, but I dare not spare a trooper."

"I will go," Dudley answered quickly, "and the Basuto will go with me, I'm sure."

For answer, Amous, who was squatting near by, strolled off to fetch a couple of horses. He picked out the two best ones belonging to the police, but Captain Railton did not assent to the proposal so readily.

"I think you've done your share, Scarfield," he said. "It's a risky job, you know."

But Dudley insisted. He was half crazy with anxiety about Marcus, and it would be a relief to have something to do, no matter how dangerous the task might be. So in the end the captain gave way.

"Don't go far up the road," he said. "There's a rise about a quarter of a mile along, and in daylight you can see nearly a thousand yards from there. Even to-night, with the wind as it is, you will hear them coming pretty well that distance. When you're sure of them, ride back quietly to the drift, and strike a couple of matches, then cross to here. And now, good-luck to you! Take care of yourselves!"

The police were squatting behind their provision-case ramparts, where the glow of their pipes could not be seen, smoking philosophically. The captain had served out the whole of the remaining stock of Cape brandy, a very small stock, and had given them leave to help themselves from his own private store of provisions.

"The chances are I shall never use them," he muttered to himself.

The troopers, on the other hand, were quite confident and quite cheerful, although, as they knew well, artillery practice in the dark is not an easy task. Still, as one of them remarked, the river was three hundred yards wide, and for those three hundred yards the Boers would be under a fire which they could not return efficiently, as the water would be almost up to their horses' backs. So they sat down and smoked and ate and jested in undertones, whilst their commander walked restlessly backwards and forwards in front of his hastily-constructed fortifications. He alone seemed to remember that the Matabele might come in from the rear, whilst the Boers were attacking in front.

Dudley and Amous crossed the river for the second time that day, and rode as far as the rise, of which Captain Railton had spoken. Then they dismounted, and sat down with their backs to a huge boulder. It was a relief to the boy to be alone with the Basuto again, for he knew well that Amous shared his anxiety concerning the fate of Marcus and Kerridge. It seemed impossible now that these two would ever reappear. Had they escaped the dangers of the road, they would have been at Fort Busi long since. The only question was—to whom had they fallen victims, to the savages or to the raiders? Both would, as Dudley had had occasion to know, be equally merciless.

Hour after hour passed, and during that time they heard only the noises of the veldt—a lion growling on a distant line of kopjes, a hyena raising his hateful voice in the olei below them, the strange whistle of a reedbuck in the long grass by the riverside, a couple of jackals complaining to each other behind a patch of mopani-scrub.

About two o'clock the moon rose, and by four o'clock they could see a long way down the road in front of them. Very little had been said by either of them so far, for Amous could think of no reason to suggest for the absence of Marcus and Kerridge. But now the Basuto said:

"Baas, the trek-Boers will be here soon. They are certain to come, but the result of the fight is not certain. The Boers are many, and the police are few; moreover, the 'By-and-by'"—the seven-pounder, so called because its shells explode later—"and 'the Segwogwog'—the Maxim, called after the noise it makes—"may be all very well by day, but by night they are likely to miss. Therefore, I myself shall keep these two horses ready at the back of the fight, and if we see the Boers are going to win, we must mount and ride away in time."

Dudley turned on him fiercely.

"I shall never run away from my own people, Amous. You may, if you like—it's not your fight—but I shall stay to the end."

The Basuto smiled.

"Baas," he said, "what's the good in being killed uselessly? Who then would be left to look for your brother and Baas Kerridge, and, if necessary, to avenge them? Besides——" He broke off suddenly and stood up, listening.

"They are coming, baas; the Boers are coming! Lead your horse over the rise, then mount and ride quickly. Very soon now we shall know who is to be the conqueror."

Marcus in the Midst of Matabeles.

WHEN Kerridge and Marcus parted from their companions they rode forward cautiously. They had gone a mile, perhaps, when they came on a very frightened-looking Kaffir driving four oxen, hurrying them on as fast as their sluggish natures would allow.

The prospector reined up for a moment, and asked a question in the native language.

"It's the Boers, baas," the Kaffir answered. "Many Boers have outspanned at the Scotch cart belonging to the police-trooper who looks after the telegraphs. They have looted the cart already—I watched them from the mopani-scrub—and now, I fear, they will get the oxen also."

Kerridge shook his head.

"Better leave the oxen. There are Matabele about. We have seen two of their scouts this morning. Leave the oxen, or they will cost you your life, and go to the nearest of Khama's posts. Tell them there that the Matabele are coming, and that they must send word to Khama at once."

The native's jaw dropped. It was the first he had heard of the Matabele being actually on the warpath. He thought no more of the oxen, which had already strayed up an olei. But after one glance at the sun, to get his direction, started off at a jog-trot towards the south-west.

"He will get there ahead of that wretched police-trooper," the prospector remarked. "In fact, the trooper will probably lose his way, and blunder down to the wrong place. Still, we know now that the raiders have outspanned at the cart—I was pretty sure they would—and we can get in front of them easily."

They cantered on again, keeping a pretty straight course through the scrub, but they had not gone very far before Kerridge held up his hand.

"Listen," he said. "That was a rifle-shot!"

A moment later the sound of another shot was borne down faintly on the wind from the eastern side of the road. They were the reports of the two cartridges which Amous used in bringing down Harry Collins and Klaas Geldenhius.

The prospector shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no use worrying, boy," he said to Marcus. "We can only hope for the best. It may be simply the Boers shooting game. Our business is to get on, and warn Fort Busi."

"There are some Kaffirs ahead, in that olei." Marcus spoke suddenly, and reined up, keeping behind a clump of bush. Kerridge, who was a few yards to his right, also stopped and peered through the scrub.

"Matabele again," he whispered; then Marcus saw him stiffen up, whilst a terrible look came into his eyes. "Matabele! And they've got a white woman prisoner!"

Already he was nervously loosening the cartridges in his belt, making sure that he could get them out easily.

The savages, now some four hundred yards away, were coming so as to cross their track obliquely. There were a dozen or so of them, and, as Kerridge had said, they were dragging a white woman along with them.

"You clear off," Kerridge whispered to Marcus. "It's no use your being killed too, but I'm going at them; and if I can't rescue her, I shall kill her!" He was almost choking with passion now. "The fiends! They killed my own wife years ago, killed her slowly. Get away, boy—get away! Ride round to the left of the olei, then make for the road. Good-bye and good luck!"

But Marcus did not move.

"I will go with you," he answered very quietly. "I think we could shoot two or three from here, and then ride the rest down."

The prospector gave a queer, dry little sob, and held out his hand.

"I knew you were game, and it's the white man's duty." Then they both dismounted, and waited with their rifles ready.

Kerridge's Martini accounted for one of the Matabele, and got another through the right arm. But Marcus's magazine-rifle brought three down in such rapid succession that the enemy assumed there were at least four white men. They halted irresolutely, fired back a futile volley—they had six rifles in all—then, almost before they knew it, Marcus and Kerridge were riding down on them.

"Oh, if only I had a sabre or a lance!" The thought flashed through the boy's mind as he charged.

A big Matabele stood up to him, stabbing-assegai ready, but Marcus still had a cartridge in his magazine, and firing from his hip, at about three yards' range, got the savage through the shoulder. The warrior staggered, but before he actually fell, Marcus had wrenched the assegai from his hand. Now he was armed. Like a flash, he shifted the sling of his rifle on to his left arm, and got to work with his new weapon.

A throwing-assegai grazed his cheek, another gave his horse a nasty hit on the shoulder, but he never noticed these things. He and Kerridge were out to kill, and his big blade was jabbed into flesh time after time.

Suddenly it was all over. There was no more resistance. The dead and wounded were lying very still, and the survivors were racing to cover. Old Kerridge, with a blood-stained battle-axe in his hand, had dismounted, and was standing beside the rescued white woman, or, rather, girl, a pathetic figure in her draggled clothing. Her eyes were wide with terror, terror mingled with relief, and she was gasping out her thanks incoherently.

"Marcus, find my rifle, will you? I dropped it when I got this battle-axe," Kerridge said quickly. "It's over there—— Mind that wounded Kaffir; he's trying to stab you! Shoot him—shoot him, man! You've got the rifle! That's all right. Now"—to the girl—"I must take you up on my saddle, and the sooner we're out of this the better."

His words proved to be true, for even as they got into the cover of the bush, fifty more Matabele appeared at the top end of the olei. Half a dozen badly-aimed bullets—no native, except a Basuto, can shoot at long range—showed them that they had been seen.

Kerridge laughed scornfully; the lust of battle was still on him, and his right arm was red to the elbow with the blood of the Matabele.

Half an hour later he reined up, and his manner now was quite cool and collected.

"Marcus," he said, "you're much lighter than I am. You must take this lady on your horse for a time, or mine will crack up."

The boy coloured. So far, he had had very little to do with girls, and this one, despite her pallor, was extremely pretty. The transfer was quickly made, and then they went on again. After a while, as they were riding across a fine stretch of level veldt, Marcus's curiosity got the better of his shyness, and he began to ask her questions.

"They captured me early this morning," she said. "My father is a mining engineer, and we were on our way to Palapye, not knowing the Matabele had already risen, although, of course, we had been warned. My father had gone after some guinea-fowl he heard calling a little way off. I don't know whether those horrible savages found him or no"—she gave a little sob—"but they rushed down on the Cape cart, killed all our servants, and took me away. I was quite hopeless when you two dashed out of the bush in that splendid way, and rescued me. I shall never forget it—never—never!"

Marcus coloured again, this time with pleasure, but there was little more said, for the management of his horse took up most of this thoughts.

"I don't think we'll try and strike the road yet," Kerridge called out. "The Matabele were evidently making that way, and we don't want to run into them again. Luck won't last for ever."

The truth of his words came home to Marcus vividly before they had gone another half mile, for as they breasted a big rise, they came in full sight of the main body of the Matabele, a thousand or more strong, marching almost directly towards them.

Kerridge gave a cry of dismay, knowing how nearly done their horses were.

"To the left, Marcus—to the left! It is our only chance! Strike right out into the veldt. Follow me closely."

The Matabele had seen them, and immediately a hundred of their swiftest runners started in pursuit. It was a horrible chase. Mile after mile it lasted, for whilst the savages were fresh, the horses were exhausted, and one of them was carrying a double load. Not once, but several times, Marcus's beast stumbled badly, and all the while he could hear their swift-footed enemies shouting behind them.

Once only did the girl speak to him.

"Kill me sooner than let me fall into their hands!" she said.

And Marcus nodded in a way that showed he meant to obey her.

On and on, mile after mile, with those tireless savages still close behind, and the horses growing more exhausted with every stride. Kerridge kept but a little way ahead, giving the lead to the boy. They were in bad country now, mopani-scrub with a number of small sluits and dry dongas, country far more favourable to the runner than to the horse. They were going far from the road, the road which led to Fort Busi, but now they had forgotten that part of it. Their only thought was to save the girl whom they had already rescued once.

On and on, mile after mile. The horses were now slowing down perceptibly. On and on. Suddenly they saw the smoke of many fires, saw many little grass-shelters, out of which swarmed a multitude of armed natives. Then, before they could swerve to one side, Kerridge's horse put his foot in a hole, and fell heavily. A moment later, the natives were all round them.

(Another splendid instalment of this ripping serial next week in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

A Christmas Homecoming.

A Superb and Pathetic Story of a Young Emigrant's Return.

Written by S. S. GORDON.

THE 1st CHAPTER.
The Breaking-up at Bradleyfield.

"PORTER! I say, old chap, buck up with my traps! Get 'em in the van, or else this caboodle 'll slope out without 'em!"

"Porter, I left a jolly great handbag under this lamp a minute ago. It's gone now!" This statement was shouted in a very plaintive voice.

Another voice—not plaintive, but very angry—rose above the din that was filling Bradleyfield Railway Station:

"Porter! I say, here, come out of that, you beast! Porter! Come and turn this bounder out of my corner seat! I put a mag. there to keep it, and the bounder's bagged mag., seat, and all! Porter! Porter! Pitch him out!"

But the porter so much in demand refused to be drawn into this argument, but went on stolidly with his work of getting the luggage of this rackety crew of schoolboys into the train which was standing by the platform, even now long overdue. It was only six times a year such a scene took place at Bradleyfield; and that Porter Green had a lot to be thankful for. Those six times were—once at the beginning of each term, when the boys of Bradleyfield College returned from their holidays; and once per term when they went away again. Jerry Green had often been wont to wish there were either no holidays for them, or that they had nothing else.

He was sweatingly sticking labels on to the trunks and bags, which were littered all over the platform. After treating each thus, he hoisted it on to a huge truck. The latter conveyance was now loaded to groaning point.

"I say, porter, old chap!" yelled a voice suddenly, more excited than the majority of them. And a youngster of fourteen—Billy Keene, of the Fourth Form at Bradleyfield—sprang forward and snatched at a roomy box which Jerry was hoisting on high. He touched it just at the moment when Green had put out his best strength for the lift.

This was the cause of making it miss the spot where the porter had intended it to rest. There was a jerk, a grunt, and a yell. Keene dodged aside just in time; Green was nearly overbalanced by the falling box. It struck the platform with a crash. But, far from being offended at the rough usage of his property, or at the howled-out comments of Jerry, the boy stood there pointing an accusing finger at a large black-and-white label that, still damp, was adhering to the lid.

"Thought I'd better tell you," shouted Billy, "that I'm going to Yorkshire, if you don't mind! I'd like my box to go there, too. But you've put a London label on it."

Jerry Green, who was a bulky, red-faced person, seemed inclined to go out on strike at this point. He stood surveying the fallen box and its owner alternately. He scratched his head, mopped his brow with a red handkerchief, then, with a shout of rage, picked up the trunk in his brawny arms, hoisted it breast high, and tried to throw it on to the truck. He missed his aim, and for the second time it crashed down on the platform.

At this juncture Billy Keene considered it the better policy to take his property in hand himself. He signalled to his chum, Kenneth Carmichael, who came up at a trot. Each took a handle, and carried the box out of further harm's way. Soon they had it stowed away in the van, with this time a suitable label pasted over the mistake made by Jerry. Then, after a hunt, Carmichael's box was discovered—also wrongly labelled. And that, after being corrected, was rammed into its place. That done, the two Fourth-Formers had time to look around and enjoy the confusion.

Wilkins, the much-wronged youth who had suffered the loss of his magazine and corner-seat, was still arguing it out with the usurper—Turner, of the Fifth. A pretty little squabble was going on—Wilkins outside the carriage door; Turner, grimly hanging on to his ill-gotten possessions, valiantly holding his own against his enemy, who was trying his best to regain what he had lost. A small crowd of boys of all Forms were gathered about, cheering on their respective favourites. Keene and Carmichael immediately sided with the man who was in the wrong—Turner.

"You'll have to buck up!" yelled Keene into Wilkins' ears. "Train'll be starting soon!"

Wilkins tried all the harder to regain his property, but—perhaps it was because he wore spectacles, though that is open to question—he could not succeed in his purpose.

He got a hold on Turner's leg, which he pulled till he was almost black in the face. Turner, on the other hand, merely braced his free foot against the door-jamb, and so rendered himself impervious to the attack of his enemy. He merely grinned sublimely.

"Let her go!" he cried merrily.

And, to punctuate his remarks, he dealt Wilkins a ringing clout on the head with the "bagged" magazine. This made Wilkins's spectacles drop off, which, again, was enough to make him cease his exertions for the time being, while he stooped and examined the glasses, one lens of which was slightly chipped.

P-r-r-r-r! The guard's whistle rang out at this point. There was a great to-do of door-slamming. Many a scuffle took place amongst the boys to board the train in time. The result was that some carriages were badly overcrowded, whilst others were left empty.

Wilkins, though he realised his corner-seat—with the back to the engine—was not to be his, made a virtue of necessity, and scrambled into the same carriage, trusting to luck to give him a seat. Keene and Carmichael also entered that compartment. They dropped into seats without difficulty, as did ten others. This left but one boy standing, and that boy was poor Wilkins.

The train began to move out of the station. Wilkins, acting on the impulse of a sudden recollection, shoved his head outside, then broke into a yell. He waved both arms out of the window, and perhaps would have fallen headlong through, only Turner very kindly grabbed his legs and jerked him back.

"The silly ass!" yelled Wilkins. "That giddy porter's left my traps on the platform, after all! I can see the saratoga!"

He was shoved out of the way to make room for others who wanted to see. They saw that the one and only saratoga trunk that ever entered Bradleyfield College was indeed standing forlornly on the fast-receding platform. It was known that Wilkins was the only boy who possessed such an article of travel. But instead of sympathising, the compartmentful of boyhood stamped with delight at the Fifth-Former's distress.

"Beastly hard lines!" commented Turner, settling down into his captured seat and opening the purloined magazine—"The Red." "Never mind, old sport, you'll perhaps see it when we go back."

"Oh, dear!" wailed Wilkins, wiping his glasses. "And there's my Latin special prize in it, and a box of bird-seed which I was going to take to my Aunt Louisa, and my carpet-slippers that ought to have been mended these holidays. And it's your fault, hang you!" he ended suddenly, falling on Turner to rend him.

"What a beastly dangerous person!" said Turner, when he had managed to stave off the much-injured one. "We really must keep him quiet, you chaps. Better put him on the luggage-rack, as there's no room anywhere else."

The suggestion went down well. Wilkins, despite his yells, his struggles, and his protests that his glasses would get broken, was seized by four boys, all as big as himself, and, willy-nilly, was hoisted on high. He was seated on the luggage-rack, which was not guaranteed to carry heavy articles. There, under penalty of death and mutilation, he was left to look down upon his schoolfellows.

"You move!" said Turner threateningly. "If you do, we'll bung you under the giddy seat! Now, be a good boy; I want to read. Will you other children kindly keep quiet?"

But the other children seemed quite disinclined to oblige. Instead of keeping quiet, they made more noise still. They were in excellent spirits, as perhaps will have been guessed at before now by the intelligent reader. For, not merely were they going home after a hard term of work and play, they were going home to spend that glad season of the year when all differences are—or should be—forgotten, when men and women are at peace with the world, and all this planet holds. They were going home for Christmas. All other breakings-up are but mild things compared with the breaking-up for Christmas.

So, despite Turner's injunction to be quiet, the boys carried on like a lot of lunatics, until Turner had to throw his magazine at the head of one of them. He lost sight of it from that moment.

Billy Keene was having a warm argument with another boy on the merits of their respective parents' plum-puddings. This grew more heated as it progressed, until it came to scuffles. Billy, nothing loth, dashed at his chum, twined his arms about him, and as several boys rose from their seats to make room, rolled him flat on his back amidst the cushions, where he held him.

"Now," he panted, "will you say they don't know how to make pudding up in Yorkshire—eh?"

"Ow!" yelled the undermost boy, kicking frantically. "Dunno about Yorkshire puddin', but I know they make puddin'-heads up there. Yah!"

This aroused further resentment in the heart of Billy Keene. He was kneeling over his antagonist, but he suddenly sat down on his chest with a squelch, forcing all the breath out of that luckless youth's body. Then, satisfied that he had dealt sufficient punishment, he climbed off, leaving Jorrocks to recover his wind.

But before that could happen another boy stumbled as the train swerved, and inadvertently bore down on Jorrock's bread-basket with one hand to steady himself. As though worked by springs, Jorrocks's feet flew upwards. One of them caught in a small hole in the netting of the overhead rack, and remained fast.

"Leggo!" he shouted, struggling, confident that someone was holding his leg. "Leggo!"

"Stop it!" frantically shouted the bespectacled Wilkins, as, in response to one of Jorrocks's tugs, the rack creaked suggestively. "You'll have me down in a minute, you silly asses!"

They had him down in less than a minute. In fact, not two seconds after his shout of alarm there came an ominous crack from the rack. Wilkins struggled to get down before he fell down, but he did not struggle hard enough. Following the crack, there came the rending sound as of screws being torn from their hold in wood. Then, with a rush, rack and Wilkins came down. The boy flung out his arms and legs afar. He landed on the heads of three or four others who were too slow in getting out of the way. And so the floor of the compartment became alive with squirming figures. Those who were not down yelled and cheered. Turner was the only one who kept his composure.

"Very interesting — very," he laughed, and stooped down and lugged Wilkins to his feet. "So you can't keep out of trouble even on the rack—eh?" he demanded. "Then you'll have to go under the seat!"

But Wilkins's dishevelled appearance awoke a little pity in Turner's heart, with the result that Wilkins found a seat on the knees of two other boys, where he sat until the train drew up at Yarminster, which was the end of that local's journey. From that station the boys would take various trains, to bear them to their homes in all the four quarters of the British Isles.

The Yorkshire train was the first to go. Into this several lads got, but Billy Keene and Carmichael managed to secure a compartment to themselves, the door of which, with truly boyish cheek, they locked with a key long since obtained for the purpose. Thus, nice and comfortable, the chums settled down to enjoy their long journey. Carmichael, though his home was somewhere up in the Land o' Cakes, was going to spend the first fortnight of his Christmas holidays with Billy Keene, at the home of that youth's father for many generations. Their destination ultimately was Withington, not a hundred miles from Leeds, but far enough from that metropolis of the North not to be troubled with the smoke and noise and dirt of the busy city.

"Well," said Carmichael comfortably, when the train was bowling merrily northwards, "we've shaken off that rowdy crew, and we'll be pretty quiet for the next few weeks, I suppose. Still, I see nothing to stand in the way of our having a perfect Christmas—eh, my wee man?"

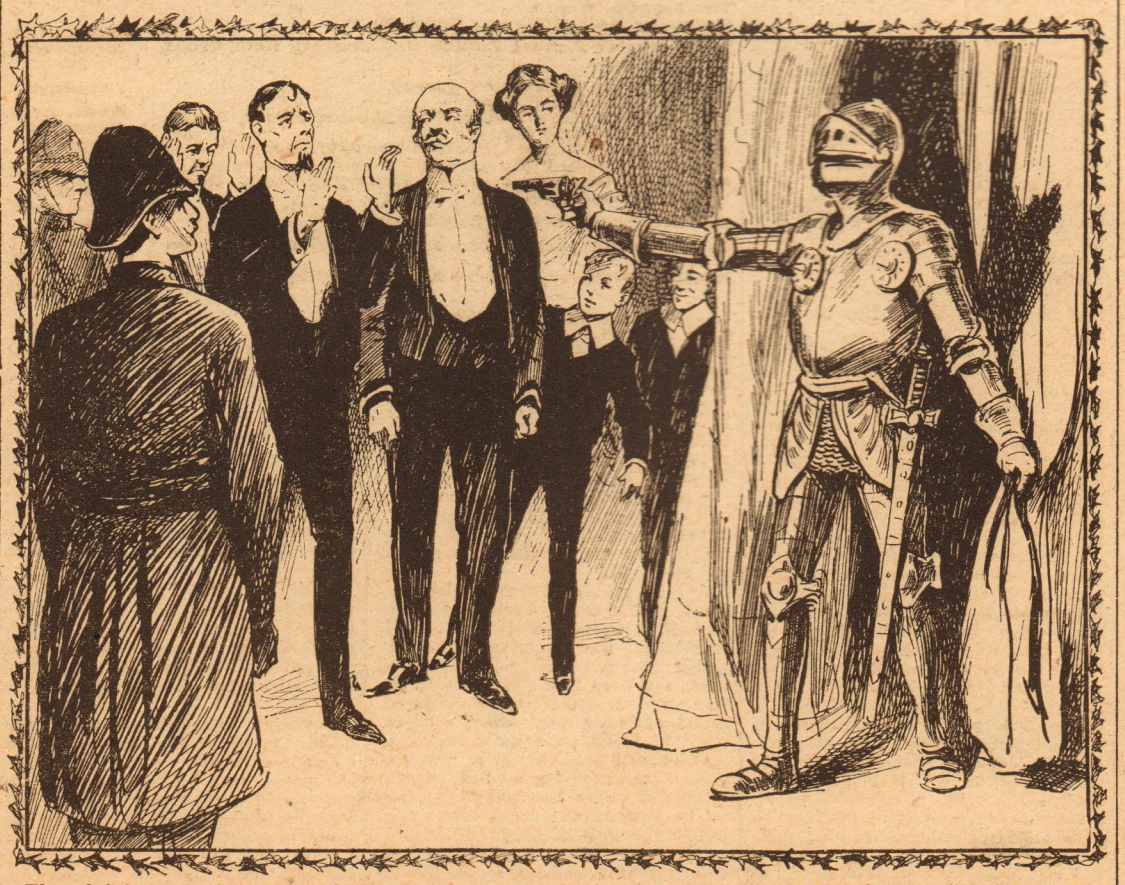
"N-nothing," said Billy.

But Carmichael was struck with his hesitant air, and lifted his eyebrows. He and Keene were close chums; had been so ever since his—Carmichael's—arrival at Bradleyfield College four terms back. Carmichael had long thought himself well acquainted with all his friend's secrets, but something—he did not know what—seemed to tell him that here was a secret unknown to him; and not a pleasant secret, to judge by Billy's eyes, which had suddenly darkened, looking wistful, whereas they had formerly been always merry and bright.

"Is there anything to stand in the way of a ripping time?" he asked.

But Billy pulled himself together, and, though it was by a noticeable effort, managed to resume his cheery manner.

"Nothing, old chap," he said. "What should there be? We're going home to one of the rippingest places in England. We're going to enjoy ourselves down to the ground. So let's begin now, and arrive home as jolly as little sandboys. Don't know what sandboys are, but let's be as happy as the best of 'em."



The pistol was pointed to the two Americans by the unknown armour-clad figure. "Hands up!" he demanded curtly, and both men obeyed, their eyes flashing and their lips pressed hard together.

THE 2nd CHAPTER.
The Shadow in the Home.

THE Woodlands was the name of Billy Keene's home; and, had the boys of Bradleyfield College been able to see it, Billy would have been envied by them. As it was, when Kenneth Carmichael arrived there he almost whistled with delight at the place. There is no need to go into any long description of the fine country house, standing in spacious grounds, or of the surrounding country—the most beautiful to be found in beautiful Yorkshire—which, from a Yorkshireman's point of view, can give points to, and beat, any other county in Old England.

To add to the beauty of his home, Billy had the good fortune to be the son of rich parents, a military father, and a sweet-faced mother, not to forget two stunning sisters, both grown up, but both young enough to wish they had not been compelled to put their hair up and let down their frocks.

Carmichael thought that surely no fellow in England could be more blessed than his chum. He could not see a thing to mar the happiness of the family into which he was immediately taken in royal Yorkshire fashion—with open arms. And none of the family showed by word or look that their happiness was not complete.

Yet there was a shadow hanging

over the lives of all the Keenes. It was a shadow that few knew about. It was jealously kept from outsiders—beyond a few who perforce must know; though it is likely that all but those immediately concerned had forgotten all about the matter.

Briefly, for the last two years there had been one vacant chair—to put it metaphorically—at the Woodlands Christmas dinner-table; and this year was going to be the same. Nearly three years before, when Billy had been but a shrimp of eleven or so, "Squire" Keene, as he was styled, had turned out to fend for himself his eldest son, Jack, then a strapping lad of seventeen, a prefect at a famous school—not Bradleyfield, of course—and next on the list for captaincy. But Jack had made a mistake, which his father had thought fit to deal with harshly. And many a time and oft, perhaps whilst awake at nights, Billy Keene would lie and think of the elder brother, who he loved passionately, with all the adoration of a child for a hero; thinking of him toiling away somewhere in the wilds of the far North-west of Canada.

Occasionally a letter had reached the boy at school, though Jack's name was forbidden to be mentioned in the house. These letters had told of the writer's desperate struggles against an unfavourable fortune, and had been replied to stumblingly by their recipient, who had striven to put cheeriness and comfort into the ill-spelt but heartfelt words.

And that was why Billy's eyes had darkened in the train. But, again, nothing showed Carmichael on his arrival at the Woodlands that such a tragedy was buried in the hearts of the Keene family.

By the time tea was over, Carmichael was feeling quite at home, and had got over his bashfulness towards Billy's sisters, who speedily proved themselves to be of the right sort in the visitor's eyes. And so Billy left his chum, whilst he left the room, not a minute after his mother. There was something Billy wanted to say, for it was months since he had had a heart-to-heart chat with her—his best friend. He found her in the hall, alone.

"The pater — has he — has he changed?" the lad asked wistfully. "Oh, mater! Why—why did he do it?"

She knew what he was referring to. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and looked fairly in his eyes.

"Do you miss him very much, Billy?" she asked gently, though he saw the tears were close to her eyes.

"Oh, mater! Jack and I were always such good chums. And—and——" He dived into his breast-pocket, and took out a dirty, crumpled letter. "It is the last I got from him, mater. And that was six weeks ago."

Mrs. Keene gave a half-sobbing little cry, and literally snatched the missive from her boy's hand. She devoured it eagerly, every word, and then pressed it, dirty as it was with Billy's pocket contact, to her lips a dozen times. Finally she sank into a chair, and began to cry. Billy went and laid an arm about her shoulders.

"Don't take on so, mater mine!" he said, though, had he not kept a good grip on himself, he, too, would have been mingling his tears with hers. "I—I'm sorry I spoke about it now. Poor old Jack!"

"I was speaking to your father about him, Billy, only a few weeks ago," she said, drying her tears at length "He wouldn't listen to me, Billy boy. But I got one statement from him. Oh, Jack—Jack!"

"What did the pater say?" asked Billy, for his mother halted, seeming likely to break down anew.

"If only Jack had done something!" she cried "Then it might have been different. Your father said he still was unforgiving, for Jack doesn't seem to have tried at all to lift himself out of his disgrace."

"He never did anything to call disgrace, anyway," said Billy warmly. "I know he made a mistake—let a sharp of a bookie get a grip on him; but if Jack had spoken in time to save himself, he would have got a lot of other chaps expelled, and so he kept mum, and got expelled himself. And you call that disgrace! Why, I think he's a hero!"

"But—I know that, Billy—but your father won't forgive him for letting himself sink out in Canada. He thinks a young fellow who's got anything about him ought to have got on by this time—three years nearly."

"That's because the pater don't know what Canada's like," said Billy stoutly. "And he won't let Jack write to him to tell him things. But he has written to me at the school a few times, and told me what an awful grind it is for a chap without any capital to make a fortune. I suppose the guv'nor won't forgive him till he's made one," he continued, growing irreverent in his eagerness to plead for his absent brother. "The pater ought to have a shot at that himself! By Jove! It's a wonder the dear old chap's kept his head above water, what with bad crops and awful blizzards that killed all the stock, so's the farmers couldn't pay him even his wages. By Jove! When I've passed into the Sixth, I'm going to chuck it, and go out to Canada, find Jack, and show him, at any rate, that there's one of his family cares for him. Yes I am!"

And the speaker puffed out his cheeks, and smote himself a resounding blow. His eyes were shining; and, far from hurting his mother, he found he had brought a glow of pride into her sweet face.

"And you mark my words, mater," he said, "old Jack'll find the chance to do something big yet, and will make the pater jolly well ashamed of himself! I know Jack!"

"You mustn't talk so about your father," she admonished. "Remember, he's your father; and, if he has been a little bit stern—well, he's a dear pater, isn't he?"

"Of course—none better," maintained Billy. "And it'll perhaps come out all right about Jack," he went on bravely. "You know, mater mine, to-morrow's Christmas-Eve, and the next day's Christmas. We mustn't all have faces as long as a wet week then, must we?"

He smote himself on the chest again, and, after an effort, managed to smile. He was a handsome lad when smiling was Billy Keene.

"I say, you know," he said merrily, looking about the hall, with its old-fashioned fireplace, "I hope you got a Yule log in. Did you?"

His mother smiled.

"I'm afraid we did not," she said, shaking her head. "You see, your father sold Low Wood, and he's nowhere to get any logs from now. We shall have to do without this year."

"What!" cried Billy aghast. "Christmas, and no Yule log? Why, you'll be saying we'll have to do without the pudding next! And I had a scrap with a London chap in the train because he said we didn't know anything about Christmas puddings up in Yorkshire. I hope there are some?"

"Oh, plenty!" she smiled. "But there's no log, Billy, I'm sorry to say."

"Oh, we'll see about that," said Billy mysteriously, and left her, returning to the room where he had left Carmichael. He found that youthful Fourth-Former in the midst of a thrilling account of the latest football match the Bradleyfield Juniors had played against the Langdale Second Eleven. His audience—Billy's sisters—were frankly interested.

"It was young—I mean, of course, Billy, your brother, who came nipping along the touch-line, with the ball at his feet, and with all five of the visitors' forwards hanging on to him. But Billy knew his A B C, you bet! He dodged 'em as sweetly as you please; then, after he'd made the half-backs look cock-eyed, got his dainty little boot to work in earnest. He plugged the leather into the net, and, by Jove, I almost thought the thing had torn it! Hallo! Oh, you ass! I didn't see you there!"

Carmichael, in spite of his Scottish birth and parentage, was a past-master in the use of English school-boy slang, as this part of his account showed. In fact, he got a little too thick in some of his expressions, and when he saw Billy grinning at him from the door, wondered if he had shocked his listeners. But a glance at the girls' enthusiastic faces told him that he had not committed any unpardonable breach in their eyes. He was glad, and it was with a sense of relief that he turned to his young host.

"But don't forget," Billy said, as though he were wishful to go on with the story where Carmichael had left off, "it was Ken who kicked the winning goal; and, by Jove!"—he mimicked his chum's tones—"it did go through the net this time, for the net was rotten—a second-hand thing that the Seniors had given us about half a century ago. Now, Carmichael, my beautiful boy, if you can tear yourself away, I've got a job on hand that I want you to help me with. Game?"

"Rather!" said Carmichael, rising at once.

And, for fear there should be any lurking suspicion in the girls' minds that he was rather uncouth in his speech, he turned to them with an elaborate bow.

"If the ladies will excuse me," he said very politely, "I will depart."

"Oh, stash it!" grinned Billy. "Come on out of that before you get too good."

And he grabbed Carmichael by the scruff of his neck. Carmichael gave himself a wrench, and tore himself free. At the same moment he thrust at his friend, who staggered back, right, as luck had it, on to the foot of an elderly, florid-faced, military-looking gentleman who entered by the door at the moment.

Colonel Keene gave a gasp of agony as the boy's full weight descended on to his toe, which, it is to be feared, was more often than not in the grip of gout.

"Whoa!" cried the colonel, recovering his composure, though he stood on one foot as he spoke, rubbing the other against his calf.

"Easy, the Buffs! You young rascal!" He grasped his son by the coat-collar and shook him playfully. "Is this the way you behave before your visitor?"

"Awfully sorry, sir!" said Billy, wriggling loose. "Hope the gout's better, sir?"

"What!" spluttered the colonel, exploding with terrific suddenness. And Billy wished he had not been quite so solicitous as to his parent's welfare; he remembered, when it was too late, that Colonel Keene was as sensitive about his gout as his toe was to the disease. "I'll teach you!"

He seized his son again, and, with a quick movement, turned him over his knee. Carmichael, grinning, stood by and watched his young host undergo the punishment the colonel deemed called for. And right heartily did the squire spank his son, until Billy howled for quarter, and apologised. Then, with another shake, the stern parent let him go.

"And remember, mind you," was the final admonition, as Billy slipped past him through the door, followed by Carmichael, and the laughter of his sisters, "in future, I'm not open to discuss my malady with a young scamp of your age. Perhaps the other scamp wants to know how it is?"

"Oh, no, sir! I'm really not interested—er—that is——" said Carmichael hastily. Then deemed it far more discreet to edge his way past the red-faced old gentleman, whose eyes were again beginning to glow wickedly.

Somehow, Carmichael could not quite understand this red-faced colonel of cavalry—as he had been. Of course, that wicked gleam in his eyes might have meant nothing; but Carmichael certainly didn't feel to know him well enough to trust him.

"Phew!" whistled Billy, rubbing himself, when the two chums were safely out in the hall, with the closed door between them and the drawing-room. "The pater's foot may be a bit gouty, but I'm blest if there's anything wrong with his hand! Those love-taps of his have a way of stinging. I'll bet I'm red underneath!"

Carmichael sighed sympathetically.

"But what did you want me for?"

"Oh, yes! I'd almost forgotten. Well, they've not got a Yule log in for Christmas Eve. The pater's sold the wood where we used to get 'em, it seems. But he promised me last holidays that I could have a certain tree—a dead one—which will make ripping logs. It's in the sold wood; but the tree's mine, for all that," said Billy, sticking out his jaw. "So we'll go and chop it down, cut off a ripping log, and drag it home. It's a mile away," he added warningly; "so you'll have to work."

"Right-ho!" said Carmichael, who liked this sort of an expedition. There was in it a spice of danger, for, though Billy evidently didn't seem to think about it, not a little excitement might be connected with the act of visiting someone else's woods and chopping down trees there for Yule logs. "I'm game to pull all night. It's a regular marauding expedition."

"But the tree's mine," said Billy. "The pater gave it to me on purpose for this Christmas. If he's sold the wood then he's sold my property, and that's not legal. So they can't stop us."

It wasn't very clear reasoning, but it was clear enough for Billy's conscience, and for Carmichael's.

"Then come on!" said Billy, after he had visited the servants' quarters, where he had secured an axe, a rope, and a double-runner sled. "We'll be able to haul it along on this thing better." He went to the door and opened it. No sooner had he looked out than he gave a whistle of delight. "I say, it's going to be a real Christmas, after all! I thought it would turn to snow before the night was out."

And it looked as though this were going to be a seasonable Christmas, for the snow was now coming down thickly, and staying where it fell, so that, though it was dark outside, they could see the ground was already covered with a heavy, pure-white mantle.

"And it's freezing a bit, too!" said Carmichael, turning up the collar of his coat. "And this snow'll help us when we're pulling the log home."

THE 3rd CHAPTER.
The Man of the Woods.

"WHEW! Ugh! H'm! Ugh! Chug!"

Many such sounds were coming from Carmichael's lips as he worked away like a little hero at the tree which, after an hour's hard work, taking turns with the axe, the two boys had got nearly down.

It was a respectable-sized tree, but being unused to the axe, they had made a sad mess of its felling; and still there was a lot of wood to be hewn through ere the pine would come toppling into the snow.

"Spell-ho!" panted Carmichael at last, tossing the axe down at his feet and pulling out his handkerchief, with which he mopped his streaming brow. "Take a turn, old chap."

Billy picked up the axe and swung it about his head. He hacked a few splinters out of the terrible gash made by Carmichael, but halted again, and craned his ears to listen.

"What's that?" he asked; and Carmichael bent his head also.

To the ears of both of them came a faint crackling.

"Better sneak behind these bushes and hide," said Billy at length.

"Thought you said it was your tree?" grunted Carmichael; but as he also thought the sounds might be made by a gamekeeper, he followed his chum, who led the way to a patch of shrubbery, behind which they crouched.

Billy had been very brave at home when talking about the rights he had to this tree; now, when they were surrounded by the stillness of the wood, he found himself wondering, when he heard sounds as of gamekeepers, how this act of trespass would be received. He decided not to risk meeting any such person if he could avoid it.

Soon they saw very dimly a tall figure, which stopped close by the tree they had been working on. They held their breath, but let it out again, almost in amazement, when they saw this dark figure stoop, pick up something, which they concluded was the dropped axe, and continue the work of tree-felling where they had left off.

Then they heard the steady chug-

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HOW TO VISIT THE CINEMATOGRAPH SHOW AT HALF-PRICE.

In these days when picture theatres are so popular, and when even the smallest of our towns has one or more cinematograph palaces, it is only natural that boys should flock in their thousands to such places of entertainment. A bright programme of serious, comic, and sentimental films is indeed an attraction, and Your Editor has decided to help his readers by securing them ADMISSION AT HALF-PRICE to a great many of the best picture theatres.

On the front page of this number you will find a coupon, and below there is a list of theatres: By presenting a BOYS' FRIEND Coupon at the booking-office of any theatre mentioned you will be admitted at Half-Price to any part of the house at the performances specified.

This week's coupon is available only until December 26th, but another coupon will appear in THE BOYS' FRIEND next Tuesday.

List of Theatres Where BOYS' FRIEND Half-Admission Coupons are Accepted.	When Accepted.
Palace Theatre, West Hartlepool Boro' Theatre, North Shields New Picture Palace, Gateshead Tivoli, Laygate Circus, South Shields Picture Hall, Sunderland Picture Hall, West Hartlepool	Saturday Afternoons.
Empire Theatre, Coventry	Tuesday Evening.
Cromwell Hall, Lancaster Picturedrome, Longridge Temperance Hall, Preston Picturedrome, Preston	Any performance excepting Saturdays and Bank Holidays.
West London Theatre, Church Street, Edgware Road, London, W. Grand Theatre, Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate, London, E. Central Hall, Peckham Arcadia and People's Picture Palace, Lewes Road, Brighton Theatre Royal, Darwen, Lancs. Appolonian Hall, Snargate Street, Dover Co-operative Hall, Sheerness The Empire, Wharf Street, Leicester People's Picture Palace, Penzance Electric Empire, Woking The Empire, Wigan Holloway Hall, Holloway Road, N.	Any day excepting Saturdays and Sundays.
The Universe Picture Palace and Skating Rink, Great Harwood	Wednesday Minimum 2d.
Electric Theatre, Sutton, Surrey Electric Theatre, Epsom	Tuesdays.
Brinkburn Picture Theatre, Brinkburn Street, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne Tyne Picture Theatre, Station Road, Wallsend Royal Animated Pictures, High Street, E. Wallsend	Weds. and Thurs. to boys not over 16 yrs.
Abington Picture Palace, Wellingborough Road, Northampton	Mon. and Thurs.
Electric Picturedrome, Scarborough	Tues. and Friday.
Jefferson's Imperial Picture Hall, Bill Quay, Durham	Wednesday
Fenton's Pictures, Central Palace, Darlington	Any evening excepting Bk. Holidays
Temperance Hall, Bradford, Yorks Central Hall, Nottingham Picturedrome, Huddersfield Cinema, Longroyd Bridge, Huddersfield Kinema Theatre, Horn Lane, Acton, W.	Any performance except Christmas Day. Tuesdays.

chugging of blows on timber, so well-timed and regular that they almost stepped out to watch. They had never seen or heard such axemanship in their lives. They saw the figure swinging rhythmically, breathing hissingly at every stroke. But ere they quite got used to it there was a cry of "Timber!" from the axeman, and the tree swayed, toppled, and came crashing down, humbled.

"By Jove," whispered Billy, gripping Carmichael's arm, "I don't believe that's a gamekeeper at all! If it had been, he'd have wondered at us beginning the job, and looked for us. Tell you what. I believe it's some chap come to sneak Yule logs for himself! What howling cheek!"

"Simply howling!" agreed Carmichael, who thought he saw an hour's hard work coming to nothing. "What shall we do?"

"Dunno!" said Billy doubtfully. "If the pater hadn't sold this wood I might have gone out to stop him. But we had better not now, for he might be a gamekeeper, and then there'd be ructions. Hallo! He's going at it again!"

The axeman was now hard at work chopping at the felled tree. He lopped off the branches skilfully, then, with swift, heavy strokes, soon had one log chopped off. He divided the tree-trunk into four logs, whilst the boys looked on, and wondered.

But finally the man straightened his back, piled up the lopped-off limbs, carefully wiped the axe, and gave a low call.

"All right, I guess! Come out of it!"

"Wonder who he's calling to?" said Carmichael.

But Billy did not answer.

Carmichael felt him start, saw him creep forward a pace, bending forward, as though trying to get a clearer view of the unknown man.

"You two youngsters behind the scrub, there, I mean," the man went on. "Don't be scared. I'm no keeper."

Carmichael felt Billy trembling slightly. What is more, Billy obeyed, striding up to the tall figure, which was now standing straight, with one hand resting lightly on the axe-handle. Billy seized him, and, jumping up, grasped his coat-collar, trying to pull his head down.

"Who're you?" he cried. And Carmichael was surprised. "Why—why—— Oh, it's Jack! Jack! Oh, hooray!"

The tall figure's arms closed round Billy's slight figure in a bear-like hug.

Carmichael, though he had not the remotest idea who "Jack" was, felt that he was intruding somehow, for Billy's voice had such a strange note in it—a note he had never heard before from him. He turned his back.

"Yes," cried Billy, "it's Jack! I was sure I recognised your voice! But—but—— Why, Jack, old chap, I can't understand!"

"Guess you can't," answered Jack, with a slight laugh. "Can't quite understand myself yet. Best thing'll be not to try to. But I saw you leave the house with your sled, and tracked you. Watched you at work on that tree for an hour, and at last took pity on you. Bless you, kid, I thought it a shame that I, who've been a lumberjack amongst other things, should stand by and let you break your heart. So I made a noise, and, as I thought, you dodged behind a bush. Then I did the job for you."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking about that!" said Billy. "I was thinking about you. I thought you were in Canada. But—but I say, you know"—Billy gulped something down in his throat—"I'm afraid——"

And then he came to a halt altogether, and felt like blubbering like a baby. But Jack Keene—for so this person really was—understood.

"I couldn't help it, young 'un," he said. "I simply had to be home in the Old Country this Christmas. And, even if the pater won't have me in his house, he can't stop me looking at the outside of it, can he?"

"This is my chum—Carmichael," Billy said, suddenly remembering his friend, who was feeling out of it. "Come here, Ken!"

Carmichael came up, and held out his hand. Jack Keene shook it.

"A brother of mine, from Canada," said Billy as indifferently as he could, knowing that Carmichael was wondering over many things. But he said nothing further; he left Jack to do the talking.

"A brother who hasn't any right to be back here, youngster," the exile said easily. "Might as well not say anything about me in the house. I see you're spending your holidays with my brother. Well, you're his chum, so keep mum, will you?"

"Yes," said Carmichael, in a mist.

Then, acting on impulse, he moved away again, instinctively guessing that these two brothers might want to say things which were not meant for his ears.

"I know the pater won't have me in," Jack said. "But—but—well, I wanted to see the mater and you and the girls so much—him, too. He's a jolly old boy, if a strict one. But I'm going to spend Christmas Eve with you, youngster, though you don't know it. Oh, all right! Don't get excited!"—for Billy had hugged him again. "I'll have to be incog. Say, will you help me? Fact is—well, you're having your usual party there to-morrow night? Well, I shall want you to let me in, without anyone else knowing anything about it. Also, can you manage to have a couple of policemen on the spot at the same time?"

"Jack, are you sure you're quite well?" asked Billy anxiously. But Jack only laughed silently. "What do you want bobbies for?"

"Never you mind; but have 'em there. Will you? And have 'em so that no one'll know. Surely you can smuggle 'em into the kitchen?"

"Oh, I dare say I can manage it! In fact, both the cook and the housemaid are sweet on a couple of cops," said Billy. "I'll probably get them to ask 'em in for the evening. But I'm hanged if I know what you're driving at!"

"That'll come out later—if my plan works out," said Jack. "I'm not going to trust even you, old man, for the simple reason that my future depends on my success. Probably something'll happen to-morrow night to bring me and the pater to understand each other," said Jack. "Frankly, I'm working for myself; I'm utterly selfish. Well, you'll smuggle me inside?"

"Rather!" said Billy. "If you and the pater can make things up, I'll do anything in the world, though I'm hanged if I understand it all!"

"Be patient, old man. I want to work a surprise. You're going to be at the party, of course?"

"Rather!" said Billy. "Everyone's coming, including two friends of the pater's from America—new friends, whom he got to know last August when shooting, or something."

"Good!" said Jack. And again Billy marvelled at the eagerness of his tones. "Sure they—the friends—have not been in the house before?"

"Don't think so. Oh, I say, Jack, do let me tell the mater and the girls!"

"Not a word!" said Jack sternly. "Remember that! Perhaps if you say anything there'll be serious consequences."

THE 4th CHAPTER.
The Knight in Armour.

CARMICHAEL understood a little of what was to him a mystery when, as they were dragging home a fine log on their sled, Billy told his chum all about Jack's banishment. Billy told that in self-defence, lest Carmichael should be offended. And Carmichael was quite satisfied to keep his mouth shut about the reappearance of the exile.

But that was almost more than Billy himself could do when he got home. And, though he said nothing, many a time his strange, tense actions set his mother and sisters inquiring curiously as to their cause. But Billy loyally kept his promise to Jack in mind.

So the hours crawled away until the next evening. Then the guests, who were annually invited to take part in the festivities which had been the custom at the Woodlands for a whole generation and more, began to arrive. With the guests came two gentlemen who were to spend the night beneath the colonel's roof and Christmas with the Keene family.

These two gentlemen were strangers to Billy; and, frankly, he didn't quite like them on being introduced. They were Americans—or seemed to be so from their speech. But Billy was too full of other things to give them much thought. After politely expressing Christmas good wishes, he drew his chum out of the gathering and into the frosty evening air.

"Soon be time," said Billy. "I've got the cops in the kitchen, though what they'll be wanted for is more than I can say. Next thing'll be to give Jack the signal. I'll bet he's hidden away in the grounds somewhere this very minute, looking at the lighted windows. Poor chap!"

"Ay, poor Jack!" said Carmichael, who knew enough of Billy's brother now to be able to say that in genuine sympathy.

And they went indoors again, to wait as patiently as they could for nine o'clock, when Jack would have to be smuggled in. They had long found a means of getting him inside. They had decided to drop a rope from a window which let light into the gallery of the old house, in which were kept many fine pictures of Billy's ancestors, besides other precious works of dead masters' brushes, not to mention suits and suits of complete armour. Jack would climb up the rope, then would hide just wherever he wanted. It was certain that Jack had decided on that point himself, as he knew the house as well as Billy did.

When the two boys got inside again they were just in time to hear the colonel speaking with the two American gentlemen.

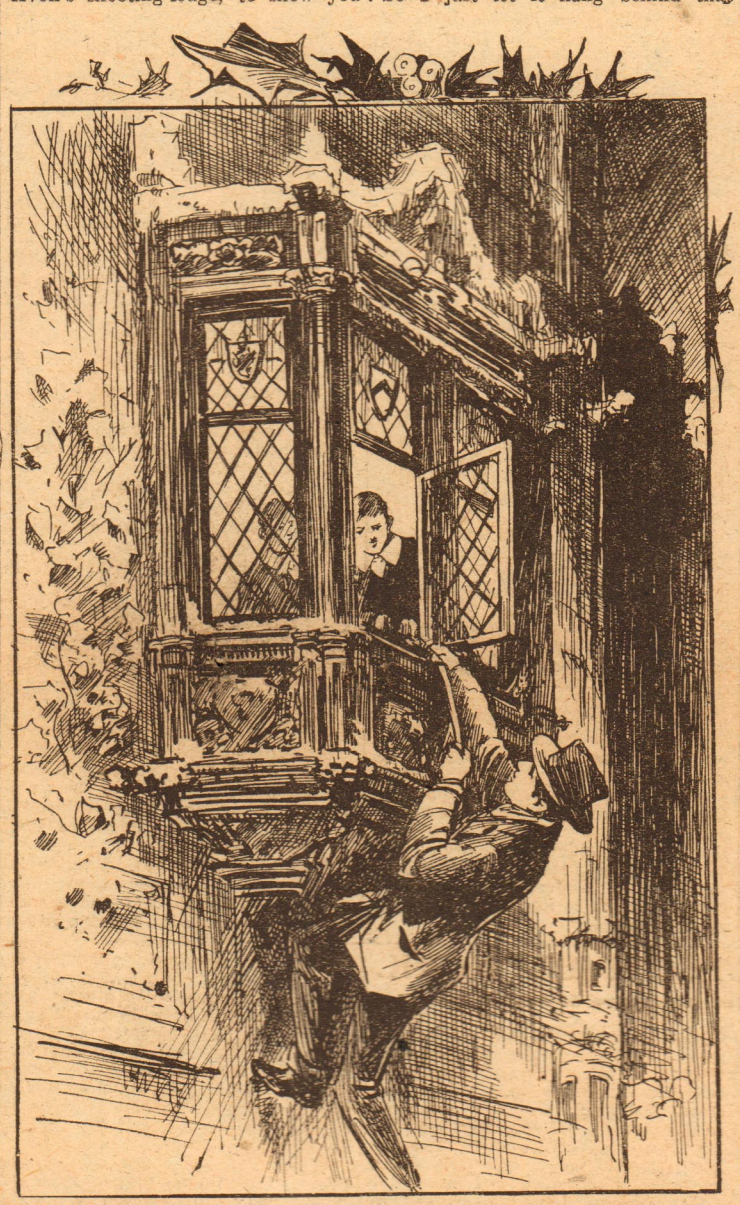
"Let me see. I promised you gentlemen, when we met at Lord Avon's shooting-lodge, to show you those chaps a picture that's supposed to be worth ten thousand pounds. Thought you'd like to look at it."

The mention of such a huge sum of money interested Carmichael, if the picture itself did not. He watched eagerly while the colonel, holding a candlestick in his hand, approached a curtain that was hanging against the wall of the gallery. This he pulled aside, and held the light so that it would fall fairly on an aged and, to Carmichael, uninteresting picture, over which the two Americans immediately began to rhapsodise.

"Wonderful!" said one, walking close to it to examine a signature painted at the bottom corner. "And genuine, too! Lucky man, colonel!"

"It is a very great treat, I guess, to even see it, sir," said the other American. "I guarantee you treasure it closely?"

"I love it!" said Colonel Keene. "But, believe me, gentlemen, I let weeks pass by often enough and never look at it. It seems to add a beauty to itself, after keeping away from it for a while, when I look at the wonderful work set down there. So I just let it hang behind that



With the agility of a monkey Jack climbed up the dangling rope, and the next minute was standing, panting, beside the two boys.

my famous Holbein, did I not—the picture I am afraid I bored you with describing so closely? If you will come with me I will show it to you now."

Billy's sharp eyes caught a glance that was swiftly exchanged between the Americans. Some vague suspicion entered his mind, and taking Carmichael's arm in his, he led that youth in the wake of the three men, who went straight up to the picture-gallery.

It was a ghostly-looking place, lighted only by a few candles. The armour that was standing there looked almost like human beings, members of a long-past age, but at this season—Christmas—seeming to take on life. The candlelight gleamed on the glistening mail, and, as a slight draught disturbed the air, flickers passed over it, seeming to make it move, and add to its lifelike effect.

"Interested in piccys?" asked Billy.

"Not very," said Carmichael. "Why?"

"Only the pater's going to show curtain. And," he continued jocosely, "I often get scolded by my wife, who vows it might very easily be stolen and not missed for weeks, for I won't let even a servant uncover it to dust it. A queer fellow, I am, Mr. Johnston, eh? But we old fogies are queer sometimes."

With which he began to lead the way out of the gallery back to the party. Billy and Carmichael stayed behind. The former looked at his watch.

"Nearly nine o'clock," he said. Then he went to the door which led into the main part of the house and listened. "Guess it'll be safe enough now," he added. "Everyone's enjoying 'emselves, and won't bother to come and look at musty old piccys and armour. Well, we'll give Jack the signal, shall we?"

They opened the window and leaned out. Billy whistled softly. Soon a figure appeared stealthily, and stood beneath them.

"All serene?" Jack Keene asked.

"All Sir Garnet!" replied Billy. "We'll let down a rope, and you can get through. Hold on a minute!"

He brought a rope which had been carefully stowed away inside a suit of armour. This he let down, after securing one end to a lance, which was then placed across the window-space. Like a monkey Jack climbed up, and the next minute was standing, panting, beside the boys.

"Now for a long vigil!" he said. And he led the way to a suit of Plantagenet armour. Billy noticed that it stood directly opposite the Holbein picture. This Jack coolly took apart; then, with the aid of his two assistants, quietly dressed himself in it. Next he stood on the pedestal, let down the front of the helmet, gripped a spear, and stood so still that the boys found it hard to believe that a man really was inside.

"Can't you let us into it a bit?" asked Billy wistfully. But Jack only shook his head, making the helmet clank.

"You'll find out before midnight," he said. "Sure the cops are at hand?"

"Rather! But the servants got a bit suspicious. I had to fake up all kinds of yarns to appease 'em. However, the bobbies have an idea that they are going to be wanted for catching burglars. By Jove!" Billy suddenly had a flash of understanding. "I say, Jack, do you think——"

"Shut up!" said Jack shortly. "I tell you this is my own game; I'm going to play it by myself. I'm selfish."

"Oh!" said Billy. But he was very thoughtful. "Well, so long! We'll have to get back to the others, or they'll be coming to look for us. Good luck, Jack! And I hope, whatever you've got up your sleeve, it will succeed, and make you friends with the pater."

Jack held out his mailed hand, and grasped Billy's till the tears came to his eyes. Then the youngsters left the gallery, and Jack to take up his vigil, as he called it.

But Billy—and Carmichael, too—were far too excited to throw themselves very heartily into the fun that was in progress downstairs. The delights of snap-dragon palled on them. Such old-fashioned games as blind man's buff, which the older folks played so merrily, struck them as being tame. Frankly, they grew quite bored, but so feverish with anticipation that they could not keep still a moment. The minutes seemed to drag. They tried to dance in the hall, specially cleared for the purpose. They made a mess of it. They tried to separate themselves, to enjoy the roasting of chestnuts over Billy's private den fire, but that soon sickened them. They returned to the party, and found that it was only nine-thirty. Finally, Billy voiced the sentiments of the two.

"If Jack's wheeze don't come off," he said to Carmichael, "this'll have been a pretty rotten Christmas Eve. For goodness' sake, let's do something, or I'll yell out that Jack's here!"

But the time did go on as steadily as usual. For the other guests it flew, so happy were they in the festivities. When they were tired of dancing and games—and "spooning," as Billy called what the younger portion were doing—they all gathered about the hall fire—where Billy's Yule log was burning so merrily—and began to tell the usual Christmas ghost stories. This form of amusement was barely commenced before two who had temporarily disappeared joined the group. They were the two Americans. Billy, who thought he knew something, watched them keenly, but their faces were those of guests thoroughly enjoying themselves. They immediately threw themselves into the fun, and when their turn came, offered to contribute a ghost story apiece. The offer was received with acclamation.

It was a creepy story the first gentleman told, and told in such a manner that his audience listened intently. The lights, specially lowered to add to the effect, left the hall dim, save immediately in front of the fire, where the flames sent a flickering light over the expectant faces of the gathering. The American, like the rest of his race, could speak well, and never halted for a word.

"It happened in Old Virginia," he said, in hushed tones. "It was in a house once inhabited by a family of English descent, which was rich in English treasures and relics of bygone times. The present master of the estate was a usurper, if you please, who every Christmas was haunted by the ghost of the man he had killed to step into his shoes. At eleven o'clock—it is just about that now, ladies and gentlemen—the house was filled with a dreadful

moaning. The master knew from whence it came, but he dared do nothing but sit there and listen. One of the ancient suits of armour—just like those in the gallery here—used, every Christmas Eve, to become imbued with life. It moaned agonisingly for ten minutes. Then, my dear ladies and gentlemen, it began to walk."

"To walk!" cried several ladies, and shuddered apprehensively, casting fearful glances over their shoulders.

"To walk!" said the reciter impressively. "It would walk straight up to the master of the house—who was a bachelor, living alone. He used to watch it as if paralysed. It would come straight up to him, with a gleaming dagger in its hand. This it held to the wretched man's breast for a minute. Then it drew it away, laughing fiendishly. As the terrified man would follow it with his eyes it walked away—not gliding, but with a steady clank, clank, clank!"

Clank, clank, clank!

Several ladies screamed. Men started violently, and looked over their shoulders. Billy and Carmichael drew closer together, for there was something weirdly mysterious in the air. Sure enough, this hall of the Woodlands was suddenly filled with just such a sound as the American had described with an eye to impressiveness. Not only that, but a figure, again like that described by the storyteller, slowly came into sight, looking very ghostlike, with one hand outstretched.

Billy and Carmichael, however, recovered their nerve instantly. Frankly, the others did not. Even the Americans were perturbed. They watched as if fascinated, while, making them thrill, the ghost spoke.

"Colonel Keene," it said, in a hollow, muffled voice, "look to your Holbein! Beware! A long-lost friend warns you!" With which the ghost turned and disappeared, leaving the party thunderstruck.

Billy saw both the Americans start and look at each other, but before he could comment on it to his chum the party awoke out of their semi-trance.

"Bless my soul!" cried the colonel, rising to his feet. "What does it mean?"

"Why, it's a ghost!" cried Billy, grinning. "Come on, pater! Let's lay the thing!"

"But—but," said the perplexed colonel, "what was that about my Holbein? Really, I can't understand it!"

"Better come, then, and see!" said Billy, darting towards the staircase which led to the picture-gallery. Carmichael followed him; and the colonel, after another ejaculation or two, came after, with the whole party, including the Americans, in his wake.

Billy and Carmichael were easily the first to reach the gallery. They stopped in front of the curtain which covered the Holbein. They saw that the suit of armour in which Jack Keene had disguised himself was standing stiffly on its pedestal. Billy at first could not swear whether Jack were inside or not. He did not trouble about it, either, but tugged at the curtain just as the party came excitedly up to him.

A yell of dismay broke from the lips of Billy. Behind the curtain was nothing but an empty frame. The Holbein was gone—cut out as cleanly as though by a razor. And the others saw the same thing simultaneously.

"What—what!" cried the colonel, dashing forward, his hands at his hair. "My picture! It's gone!"

"Seems that way," said one of the Americans, in tones of deep concern, and examining the empty frame. "It's been cut out, I guess!"

"It's gone—my most valuable possession!" cried the colonel. "There is a thief in the house! Fetch the police!"

"Scatter, and ransack the house," suggested an American. "He can't have got very far."

"He's nearer than you think!" said a sepulchral voice just then. "Beware! Beware!"

Everyone turned towards the sound. But there was nothing to show where it had come from. The dozen suits of armour stood there like statues. But Billy, who was standing grinning to himself—for he was sure he knew everything—beside Jack's disguise, felt a sharp dig in the shoulder from an armoured knee. He looked up, and thought he saw Jack wink through the bars of his vizor.

"Bless my soul!" cried the colonel, darting hither and thither. "The place must be haunted! Who spoke just then?"

"Who spoke!" repeated the two Americans in chorus; and Billy saw that their eyes had grown anxious-looking. "Come, sir! After that thief! Perhaps he's in hiding somewhere!"

He led the way, followed by the rest, all save Billy and Carmichael, who remained by Jack. When the three were alone in the dim gallery, the last-named raised the front of the helmet, and passed a mailed hand over his brow, whistling like a man who is almost overcome by the heat.

"These tin duds are pretty warm," he grinned. "Well, how do you fancy me as a ghost?"

"Was it those Americans who stole the picture?" asked Billy eagerly.

"Of course! Wasn't I there, only six feet away from 'em?" grinned Jack.

"Then what's the next move?"

"Find out where they've taken the piccy, of course. They grabbed it up and carried it out. I couldn't follow them like this. Well, old chap, can't you manage it? Get into their rooms and look about. I dare bet a copper you'll find it under the carpet of one of them. That's where they arranged to hide it. Go, and when you've found it, come to me, and we'll have some more fun!"

THE 5th CHAPTER.
A Happy Christmas After All.

"BY Jove!" cried Carmichael. "Jack was right! Wonder how he got to know!"

"Never mind," said Billy tensely. "It's enough to know that we've found the thing. Oh, my hat! That's what Jack wanted the policemen for?"

They were on their knees in the room allotted to one of the American guests. They had the carpet turned back near the door, and there, between it and the under-felt, was stretched the stolen Holbein.

"Well, put the carpet back," said Billy. Carmichael helped him; they left it straight, turned out the light, and returned to the picture gallery, where they told Jack of the success of their mission. Jack grinned.

"Very good!" he said. "Think the guv'nor and I will be able to make it up now? Do you think I'm a selfish chap, to study my own comfort at such a moment?"

"I think you're carrying on this case in a strange manner," said Billy. "But I suppose you know what you're up to."

"Course I do. Why, if I'd come along in my everyday clothes, and told the pater that two Yankees were going to sneak his Holbein this Christmas Eve, do you suppose he'd have believed me? Besides, he wouldn't have let me speak to him. Now, with you two as witnesses, it's going to be easy to explain things; and you bet I'll put a good word in for myself while I'm about it!"

"I should," said Billy. "Oh, the pater'll forgive you now, Jack! But what's the next move?"

"You go back to the hall. The folks'll soon get sick of hunting for the burglars. When I think they have all gathered there, I'll come along and explain things in my own way. I'm going to keep up the fun, too; I'm enjoying it."

"Right!" they said; and left him.

Jack was right. Soon the excited guests were back in the hall, bewildered, and some of them too flustered to talk coherently. The two Americans seemed to retain their wits the best of them all.

"It would perhaps be as well to get the police," said one of them.

"And there are two policemen down in the kitchen at this very moment," said Billy coolly, watching the speaker. That man started slightly, and perhaps blanched a little. "Shall I fetch them, pater?"

"Why, why, yes! I'd quite forgotten about fetching policemen!" answered the distraught colonel, biting his moustache nervously.

And Billy went, to return almost immediately with two constables in uniform, who did not even seem very keen on being brought up at this hour of night. Billy had disturbed them at their second supper.

Whilst everyone was trying to tell them what had happened, the same armour-clad figure that had startled them twenty minutes before appeared amongst them. He created another sensation, not so much this time by his ghostlike appearance as by the fact that he held out one hand to the two Americans, and in that hand was a strictly-modern revolver.

"Arrest those men!" said Jack, still keeping his helmet closed. The Americans started back—one muttered fiercely and placed his hand behind him; but Jack clicked the weapon suggestively. "Hands up!" he said curtly. And the men both obeyed, their eyes flashing, and their lips set tightly together.

They looked guilty at that moment, but the people could not realise the truth. They were too bewildered for anything. Ladies were sobbing hysterically. The only ones, it seemed, who were not upset were the two policeman, the unknown armour-clad figure, and the two youngsters.

"Arrest 'em!" said Jack again. And the policemen obeyed, laying hands on the Americans' shoulders.

"I have two witnesses to help to prove what I say," said Jack quietly. "But—but," stammered the colonel dazedly, "who are you?"

"That will come out later. In the meanwhile, you recognise this suit as that which stood opposite the Holbein? I was in that, and saw those two men cut out the picture. Now, youngsters, it's your turn."

"Yes, yes!" cried Billy and Carmichael together. "We've found the picture beneath the carpet of that man's room!" And both pointed to one of the accused men.

"It's an infamous lie!" they both cried together; but Jack's gun kept their hands up. "It's a scandal!"

"Go to his room, sir, and find out," said Jack quietly.

Two minutes later the colonel returned, with the precious picture in his hands and a blank expression on his face.

"Yes," he said, "it was there; but—but—are you a detective?"

"I'll tell you, if you will let me see you, Mrs. Keene, and the young ladies, without the others," said Jack. "Let the boys come, too; they're already in the know."

Dazedly, those mentioned followed the clanking figure into the library, leaving the others clustered together in the hall, the Americans safely handcuffed, and in the grip of the policemen.

"Well, sir," asked the colonel, "I'm anxious to see the face of the man I owe a great deal to. I'd like to know whom to thank!"

At this point Billy felt his heart beating madly. So much would depend on the next few minutes. Slowly the vizor was raised. Jack deliberately kept his back to the light as he uncovered his face. But suddenly he turned and faced them all.

The colonel started back, his face growing pale. Mrs. Keene gave a cry, and threw herself into her elder son's mail-clad arms. The girls screamed, then began to smother him with caresses. The boys stood by and anxiously watched the old gentleman as he slowly recovered his composure.

"You," he gasped—"Jack!"

Jack cleared himself of the arms of his mother and sisters.

"Yes, sir—Jack!" he said, with rather a grim mouth.

"But I told you never to show your face in this house again!"

"You just now asked me to show it, remember," said Jack. "It was covered up at the time. But, if I hadn't shown the rest of myself, where would your Holbein have been?"

"By George, you're right!" And Colonel Keene suddenly strode forward with both hands outstretched. "Jack! My boy! Oh, I'm glad of this!"

It was some time before explanations could be made. There was too much handshaking and kissing to do at first. But the explaining had to come. Jack told his story as briefly as possible.

"I'm afraid I was a bit selfish," he said. "But, you see, I couldn't stick another Christmas away from home, and determined I'd come, even if only to look at the old place from the outside. But I was broke, and couldn't pay my passage on the boat. So I shipped as a steward, and deserted at Liverpool. Well, I overheard those two gentleman planning this robbery as I was making a bed in one of the cabins. They were in the next, and there was a space above the partition. Then I heard something else, which convinces me that they are a pair of cracksmen who've made the States pretty hot lately. So—well, I thought I'd make the most of it, pater. I determined I'd both frustrate them and get myself into your favour again. And—and I'm sorry if I've been any trouble to you in the past! Those three years in Canada have pretty well knocked all the silliness out of me, I think. Will you call it quits, pater?"

"It's Christmas, John!" said Mrs. Keene softly, weeping.

"Thank God for bringing about this!" breathed the colonel, blowing his nose, and so breaking the spell. "And I'll see if those policemen can't be persuaded to let those men go. I'll warn them to clear out immediately. Jack, that was the only flaw in your scheme—to get policemen on the scene."

But that one thing which marred the reunion could not be brought about, for British policemen may not let two desperate criminals, such as these turned out to be, go free to work their evil trade on society generally. And, though the colonel wanted to prevent it, the Americans were taken away to receive their just deserts.

But their case was forgotten almost as soon as the last of them had been seen in the Woodlands. It takes a great deal to spoil a really happy party's Christmas. And, let us hope, nothing will happen to spoil the Christmas of the kind and indulgent reader.

THE END.

HOW PRIVATE DETECTIVES WORK.

Part II. of our Interesting Series for Lovers of Sexton Blake.

In Part I. of this article our author explained how few private detectives there are who have not first served their time as police-officers. He told of some of the unique experiences of private detectives, and briefly described their work.

IN my article in last Tuesday's number I told you how private detectives are frequently employed to go in search of missing people, and I explained to you that unless there are suspicious circumstances, the police are powerless to render assistance in such cases.

I have lately been chatting with a detective who conducts a vast and well-known business in London, and when I made it known to him that I was writing for a popular boys' paper, he undertook to tell me of a case in which a boy largely figured.

Very late one afternoon, just as the detective was closing his office, a gentleman drove up in a motor in frantic haste, and demanded an immediate interview. As soon as he had recovered his breath from his desperate rush up the detective's stairs, he blurted out his story.

It appeared that the gentleman was a solicitor, and that his ward, a boy of fourteen, had been at a certain well-known grammar school, from which he had mysteriously disappeared. He had chosen the usual Wednesday half-holiday as the opportunity for a long walk and had never been seen again.

That same evening

the hue and cry

was raised. The boy's schoolfellows turned out gallantly and searched far into the night; the police were warned by telegraph and telephone; the railway people were put on the alert. No stone was left unturned to discover the missing boy, and yet not a clue was forthcoming. The boy had vanished as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

The private detective listened to the solicitor's story in his usual calm, impassive way.

"And, if the boy dies, who inherits his money?" he asked abruptly.

Ascertaining that the boy was heir to considerable property, and that if he died it would pass to a cousin, the detective set about looking up the past records of this cousin. Finding them none too clean, he pursued his inquiries, and discovered that the cousin had been actually seen with a motor-car on the main road leading to the country town where the school was situated.

Piece by piece, with the aid of his watchers and scouts, the detective speedily discovered that the boy had been actually kidnapped by motor-car, hurried to the coast, rushed over to France, and that from that point the cousin with

his boy prisoner

had taken train south, crossed the Pyrenees, rushed across Spain, from the southern coast of which they had taken steamer to Tangier.

Now, Tangier is one of the most uncivilised spots in the world, and yet it is within a comparatively few hours of London. There people may mysteriously disappear, and never be heard of again, only some rascally sheik being aware of their ultimate fate, over which he will chuckle as he pockets his blood-money.

Hot on the heels of the fugitives went the detective over the entire journey, following unerringly a clue here and one there till eventually he tracked them down, and got the boy back into his charge.

What ultimately became of the cousin, there is no telling. The detective had neither the means nor the power to arrest him, and, glad to have achieved his purpose, he hurried the kidnapped boy back to his guardian, receiving in return a handsome fee.

This is the bald story of an actual case that befel a London detective, and there have been many more like it. In one instance a detective set out to find a boy, and after strenuous effort extending over many days and nights, he at last, so he thought, tracked him down. Keeping strict observation on the house where the boy was, he telegraphed to the mother, and on the arrival of that lady they approached the house and knocked. The door was opened by the very boy himself, and just as his mother was about to embrace him, she saw that he was

not her son at all,

but an exact double.

In the meantime the real boy had actually made his way home, sorry for his escapade, and repentant, like the Prodigal Son.

Quite often private detectives are called upon to mind babies—not in the sense that they have to nurse the infants, but that they have to take the responsibility for their safety day and night. Many a pampered heir or heiress is there who is continually liable to be kidnapped, and who, in consequence, must be watched all the time by reliable men.

Sometimes, though the occurrence is not a frequent one, private detectives are employed by our Government on missions of intricate character where the official detective would either be known or for some such reason unlikely to carry out the case as it should be done. Many times have these inquiry agents been sent on delicate missions to foreign capitals. They hold

no official badge

such as a police-officer or Secret Service man would do, and if they fail they must fully expect to be discredited at home.

There is no end to the list of queer cases in which private detectives are employed. One or two of them have been written of in scathing terms as being spies of the lowest type, and in many ways the calling is not one upon which I should advise boys to embark. At the same time, though one must admit there are black sheep in this profession as in any other, the vast majority of private detectives are able, honest, and clever men, doing a useful work. Of their pluck and resource, there can be no doubt whatever, and though there is glory in many of their cases, some of the tasks that fall to their lot are such as no one would envy.

THE END.

(A unique article programme will commence in our New Year and 500th Number the week after next; 1d. only.)

Superb New Year and 500th No. of THE BOYS' FRIEND the week after next. One Penny only. Hosts of Marvellous New Features.

SUPERB NEW SERIAL OF THE WEST RIDING.

New Readers Start Here.

This is a grand serial of Yorkshire life, written by a Yorkshireman, and whether you are a native of our largest county or not, you are certain to thoroughly enjoy reading it.

The chief character in the yarn—and you will like him at once—is Dick Allen. He has neither father nor mother, but lives in a tiny court in busy Bradford with his little sister Jessie, who is at present in the local infirmary recovering from the effects of an accident.

The difference between Dick Allen and any other mill-hand in Bradford is that he has an interest in the mill at which he works. In payment for great services rendered, the owner of the mill, Mr. Trimble, gives Dick a paper promising him a fourth share in the mill when he comes of age. Mr. Trimble dies, and his nephew, James Ackroyd, inherits the property.

It is now a duel between Dick Allen and James Ackroyd, and as the latter has money, power, and position, the odds are greatly in his favour. He has in Widdop

an underhanded working lad,

a faithful toady and supporter.

Scrimshaw, a money-lender's tout, has a great hold over Ackroyd, and is engaged by him to do an injury to Dick. In this nefarious task he joins hands with Widdop, and even now is giving this lad his instructions.

(*Now read this week's splendid chapters.*)

Dark Work.

WIDDOP listened. He listened with both ears. If he had possessed twenty ears he would have listened with them all, because the subject was to him the most interesting one in the world—how to get the better of Dick Allen.

"Of course, it all depends on 'ow far you'd like to go," said Scrimshaw, feeling his way, "but a smart young feller like you wouldn't be afraid of getting his own back properly—eh?"

"You try me!" snapped Widdop through his teeth.

"He has a little dog, a bit of a pup he's fond of—eh?"

"That's so. It's the one he snatched off me when I was going to drown it. I'm only waiting my chance. I'm going to give it a knock on t' back of t' head."

"Don't you do hanythink of the kind. I have a better idea. That dog will be useful. As a smart young feller, Mr. Widdop, I'm sure you are a sportsman, and therefore you know what a bait on an 'ook is. Very well. That pup shall be the bait."

"Bait—eh? What sort of bait? I can't see what you are getting at."

"No? Ha! You're sich a smart young feller, you want to get on too fast. Now, you come along to the mill. I'll show you somethink."

"To Trimble's—eh? But it's locked up."

"I can get into the yard. I wouldn't give anybody this tip but you. Now, you come along. I can explain better there."

The money-lender's tout, who had got an understanding with James Ackroyd, watched the big lad's evil face. He fancied here was a tool for his work, for it was not his way to run risk himself when he could put it on to somebody else.

In the big mill-gates, which once Dick Allen had defended, was a small door. This, after a look up and down the street, Scrimshaw opened with a key he had got from Ackroyd. They entered, and walked across the snowy yard towards where the new building was in progress.

Up alongside the old walls that were being reinforced stood a framing of scaffolding, with ladders rising to the high platform above, and narrow gangways of planks reaching from one part to another. They stopped at the bottom of a ladder, and Scrimshaw indicated the rising rungs with a lean hand.

"You're a hactive young feller," he said, "and you haven't got old bones like I have. Now, look here! Suppose somebody got that pup, took it up this ladder, along that scaffolding, and fastened it up, say, at the other end of a narrow plankway that would take a bit of getting at, what would happen? The pup would yelp, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, but the yells wouldn't reach Johnson's Fold, and if they did—well, the little rotter would soon come along and rescue t' pup. I can't see owt in that, even if we can get hold o' t' beast, which won't be very easy, because I've tried it before."

"What a young feller you are for getting ahead, Mr. Widdop. Now, listen here! I can get hold of the dog, I bet. I'll bet you a cigar I can! Ah, I expect you smoke cigars, you cunning one."

Widdop usually spoilt his complexion with cheap cigarettes, but he nodded, not unwilling to be thought a gay dog.

"Well, anyhow," he said, "what then? Suppose you get t' pup."

"When I've got it I give it to you, and when you've got it you just tuck it under your arm and go up that ladder with it. When you are at the top, you'll find a place where there's only a single plank or so to cross by. You'll go over that and fasten up the dog on the other side, and then you'll come back."

"I don't call that much of a champion idea," said Widdop. "That kid is a monkey at climbing. He'll have the pup down in no time."

"Stop a bit! When you come back across that plank, you don't leave it as you find it."

"By goy, I begin to taste! You mean saw a nick in it, or summat o' that kind?"

"My word, you are sharp, Mr. Widdop! You've got my ideas before they're out of my mouth. You've hit it absolutely bang. You could do it in one minute with a sharp saw, and the snow would cover it up."

"But where is it to be done? Which is the best place?"

"I dunno. You must go up and see. Look round well, and find out the best spot. There may be an open place where two planks cross. If so, saw 'em all but about half an inch. P'r'aps there might be a crossing somewhere with only one plank and an 'and-rail. Do the same there, only cut into the 'and-rail as well. But you mustn't cut now. Wait till the pup is on the other side."

"What about a saw?"

"I'll see about that, and the pup as well, with any luck. But it'll perhaps take me an hour to work it, so you can just be taking your bearings here and making up your mind where you'll work the conjuring-trick. It's only just eight. There are the town-hall chimes going. It'll be funny if I can't work something by nine. I'll come back here by then."

"I'll get fine cold feet by then," observed Widdop.

"Won't it be worth it?" said Scrimshaw. "You're a smart young feller of spirit, ain't you? Well, I'll bet you one of your favourite cigars that the thought of getting your own back will keep your feet warm! Look! Just take a good nip of this. It will warm your inside a bit."

He pulled out a flask, and Widdop took a giant's swig from it.

Scrimshaw smiled to himself as he slipped out cautiously into Vulcan Street. Things were shaping well with him, and he saw himself handling James Ackroyd's thousand pounds without any risk to himself.

He went along now to do what had been his intention when he met Widdop in Scotland Street. He went back there, made direct for Johnson's Fold, and knocked at Dick's door. The practice for carol-singing had ceased, but the boys were all there helping to clear up the kitchen after the snowballing mess.

"Ah, Christmas comes but once a year!" gurgled Scrimshaw, blinking in the light. "You have been 'aving some fun, my lads. Well, well; I can't blame you. But I have come to talk business with Dick Allen. Which is Dick Allen? Ah, there you are! I think we've met before, in—shall we put it?—circumstances not quite so happy as this."

"What do you want?" asked Dick suspiciously.

"May I come in, and I will tell you? No, these friends of yours needn't go out. It isn't private, and besides, I like company, especially young company. It keeps a feller young to be with young 'uns."

"I allus recommend porridge and laffin'," put in Bulgy Fry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good! That's right! But yon's a nice little pup. Sharp as a needle, he looks. What's his name?"

"Well, he hadn't a name," Dick said, pulling out a chair for the visitor to sit upon, "so we call him Tykey."

"Which is the Yorkshire diminutive for dog. Very good! Ha, ha, ha! Here, Tykey! Good dog!"

But the dog was not having any. Scrimshaw rubbed his hands raspingly together, and got to business.

"I was looking out for lodgings," he said, "and the fact is I am wanting 'em in an 'urry, owing to a few words I've had with my landlady. I'm clearing out of that 'appy 'ome to-night. In fact, I might say, I 'ave cleared out. I've paid my bill and packed up. Now, I've been wondering where I'd go, for I'm sick of lodging with old women, when all at once a thought struck me. I'm fond of young society, and there's that smart little lad, Dick Allen, who lives all alone with his little sister in a house that mebbe is a bit too big for them. Thinks I, I'll go and ask Dick Allen if he'd like to 'ave a lodger—one what won't want particular much doing for, and who'd be willin' to pay, say, five bob a week for the accommodation."

"You'd better steady on with the 'smart little lad,'" Dick put in. "My sister's in the infirmary, you know, but she'll be home to-morrow, and we're going to have a merry Christmas when she comes."

"Capital—capital! I hope you will indeed. And I should love to join in with you. My word, I used to go wesseling myself! And the spice-cake we used to get in those days! Why, and you've actually got a wessel-bob up there! I've made many a one like that with hoops and paper roses an' all. Well, what d'you think? If you don't care about a lodger, I'll be moving on."

"I dunno. There's another room," said Dick, turning over in his mind the fact that an extra five shillings a week would be uncommonly useful, "only it's perhaps a bit untidy for you to go in to-night."

"It can't be worse than the one I've had to put up with," said Scrimshaw. "Oh, that old woman was a terror! I'm used to tidying my own room and making my own bed. If you call it a deal, I'll pay my five shillings down now on the nail. Well, I can't see a nail, 'cept a finger-nail. He, he, he! But here it is on the table."

And he suited the action to the word, and banged down noisily on the table a five-shilling piece.

"Well, you'd better see the room first," Dick said, with the fascinating silver coin staring him in the face.

"Half a minute, you lads. We're going wesseling, you know, directly," he added to Scrimshaw, as he turned towards the staircase door. "We've been practising some carols."

"That's champion! I'd like to go myself, only my voice has got a bit rusty. This way? They're narrow stairs, but we don't sleep on the stairs. He, he, he!"

He declared himself highly satisfied with the room, so Dick picked up the five shillings as the first payment of rent in advance.

"I'll soon put that room all right," Scrimshaw said, sitting down by the fire. "But the first thing is to go and get my luggage—at least, a bit of it, enough to go to bed with, so to speak. Only I'll just sit down and have a smoke first. So you're going wesseling? Ay, lads, I'd like to go with you. You'll take the dog, won't you? A run in the snow will do him good."

"No; he's a bit too young yet," said Dick. "I'm afraid he'd get lost. He doesn't know his way about yet."

"P'r'aps not. Well, I hope he'll let me go in and out when you're gone. Here, Tykey, I'm a pal of yours. Come on! Won't you? Well, you'll get to know me soon. It's wonderful what I can do with animals. All kindness, you know."

Scrimshaw was left alone at last. He rubbed his lean hands raspingly together as he looked at the mongrel terrier pup, which seemed to regard him with some suspicion in its doggy brain.

"You silly little mongrel, you somehow don't like the look of me—eh?" he said humorously. "Well, I hope you've got a good voice. Anyhow, I want you to be able to yelp well, with a nice, piercing, carrying note. Eh, you animal?"

He caught the pup up as he spoke, and he fastened about its middle one end of a strong piece of string, which in Yorkshire fashion he called "band."

"We'll put the band round your middle instead of your neck, because round your neck might spoil your voice."

He crept out of the house, with the pup under his coat.

"Shivering, are you? You feel the cold. That's good! You'll feel it more on the top of that building, and that will make you yelp finely."

He reached Vulcan Street, looked carefully around, and then made for the gates of Trimble's mill-yard. He opened the small door, and went inside. A figure came out of the shadows within.

"Got him?"

"Rather! Don't frighten him yet, or he'll start to struggle. 'Ave you picked on your spot?"

"By goy, yes; a fair champion spot! It's a single plank, wi' nobbut a bit of a rail for t' hand to go on, and crossing from wall to wall, wi' a great hole underneath where two floors have been taken out. It's a gradely spot for t' job. Have you got t' saw?"

"Ay, it's in my pocket—a thin, sharp 'un, with a handle that clips on. If you'll get hold o' the dog, I'll put the saw in your pocket."

Widdop did his murderous work quickly. Within five minutes he was swarming down the ladder to where Scrimshaw waited for him.

"I've fastened him up grand. He'll start yelling directly. Hallo! There's the first note!"

There came to their ears a whimpering sound, followed a moment later by a little, short howl.

"That's it! He'll be fair on the howl directly, as soon as the cold gets hold of him. But look here! How are you going to attract t' lad?"

"You leave that to me. Gimme that saw back."

"Here it is. I say, but where do you come in over this? I mean, what's made you go to this trouble? What are you getting out of it?"

"I couldn't bear to see a smart young feller like you, Mr. Widdop, not get his own back, and so I comes in and gives you an 'int."

"Oh, chuck it! You aren't doing it to help me. You've got something at the back, I'll bet. Anyhow, we're both in this."

"What a smart young feller you are!" gurgled Scrimshaw, indulging at the same time in a wink to himself on the off side. "Well, now I must leave you. I've got to fetch some luggage to my new lodgings. So-long!"

Dick returned home cheery and red of face a few minutes after eleven. They had done well in their carol-singing. They had consumed much spice-cake, and had returned with enough jingling coppers to afford each singer fivepence apiece. When Dick got in, Scrimshaw was smoking a contemplative pipe over the fire.

"Have you seen the pup, lad?" asked the man.

"Tykey? No! Where is he?" asked Dick, suddenly alarmed.

"I thought you'd perhaps come across him in the street somewhere. I left him here when I went off to fetch my bag, and when I came back he'd gone. I left the door just as it was, because I did not know when you were coming back. I suppose someone must have opened the door, and the dog ran out."

"Oh, I ought to have told you!" cried Dick, in deep distress. "You ought to have locked up. There is a fellow named Widdop, and his pals. They bear me a grudge. They once got in here when the door was unlocked, and broke all the furniture up. Perhaps some of them have been here again to-night."

"Do you think so? Do you think that?" said Scrimshaw, in a sympathetic voice. "I am sorry, then. I believe I know that Widdop by sight. Big youth, isn't he? By goy, I'd have given him something if I'd been in! Look here, what are we to do? Shall we have a walk out, and whistle him a bit? Very like he might be hiding in some doorway. Pups are timid little creeturs."

Dick agreed. It seemed the only possible thing to do, though he was not very hopeful. They went out in the falling snow again, and Dick carefully locked the door after him.

They walked up to the Manchester Road corner, whistling as they went. They paused a moment by the Dusty Miller public-house, then went down Manchester Road, with many excursions into the side streets on both sides. Finally, Scrimshaw leading without pretending to lead, they reached the square in front of the town-hall, and then turned up deserted Nelson Street, and so naturally into Vulcan Street.

They walked quietly in the snow under the wall of Trimble's mill. There came to the man's ears the distinct sound of a dog's howl, because he was waiting for it, but he said nothing. He wanted Dick to hear it without being told. They paused a moment at the edge of the kerb thirty yards or so from Trimble's gateway, undecided whether to cross over or go farther on, when a decided whimpering howl reached their ears.

Dick swung round on his heels.

"Hear that?" he exclaimed. "That was a dog's howl."

"A poor beggar shut or fastened up in some backyard, I expect," said Scrimshaw.

"Very likely. Half a moment! Listen! There was something awfully familiar about the sound of it."

"I dunno. It might be the one, though he wasn't quite the sort of

THE RULES OF FOOTBALL.

Explained and Simplified for the Boy Player.

NOW we come to consider the rule as to time, and my friends must bear in mind that they can suit their own convenience so long as the other side is willing. Let us see what the official rule says:

RULE.—The duration of the game shall be 90 minutes, unless otherwise mutually agreed. The winners of the toss shall have the option of kick-off or choice of goals. The game shall be commenced by a place-kick from the centre of

the field of play

in the direction of the opponents' goal-line; the opponents shall not approach within ten yards of the ball until it is kicked off, nor shall any player on either side pass the centre of the ground in the direction of his opponents' goal until the ball is kicked off.

Comments: When a captain has won the toss he should always make choice of goals in preference to kicking off, because, as a rule, there is generally some little advantage to be gained either in wind or sun. Further, if he kicks with the wind in the first half it may drop in the second, and he thus gets

a double advantage.

Of course, all football and no rest "makes Jack a dull boy," and so the laws have very wisely allowed for a "refresher."

Ends (says the rule) shall only be changed at half-time. The interval at half-time shall not exceed five minutes, except by consent of the referee. After a goal is scored the losing side shall kick off, and after the change of ends at half-time the ball shall be kicked off by the opposite side from that which originally did so.

Comments: In many of the first-class matches the interval is usually extended to ten minutes, but for junior clubs no more than five is necessary. In junior matches the players need not leave the field, but care should be taken that pieces of lemon are handy for the players to suck during the "breather."

It seems a simple thing to define a goal, but we frequently hear of differences on the point, so we will refer once more to that book, which says:

Except as otherwise provided by these laws, a goal shall be scored when the ball has passed between the goalposts under the bar, not being thrown, knocked on, nor carried by any player of

the attacking side.

If from any cause during the game the bar is displaced, the referee shall have power to award a goal if in his opinion the ball would have passed under the bar if it had not been displaced. The ball is in play if it rebounds from a goalpost, crossbar, or a corner flagstaff into the field of play. The ball is in play if it touches the referee or a linesman when in the field of play. The ball is out of play when it has crossed the goal-line or touch-line, either on the ground or in the air.

Comments: Never argue with the referee. Even if he makes a mistake, don't interfere. Accept his ruling on all points.

Another of these grand articles next Tuesday.

dog anybody would steal, you'd think, unless——"

The howl was repeated. There was a swiftly-repeated bark, and then a crescendo of a mournful howl.

"It's Tykey, I'll bet my boots!" exclaimed Dick. "I'm sure it is! That's his voice. You don't know it, but I do."

"Are you sure? Don't you think you could be easily mistaken?"

"Not when you once know a dog's voice. It's as easy as recognising a man from his voice. But where does it come from?"

"I'm hanged if I know!" said Scrimshaw, who was not going to give any lead. "Do you think it was out of one of those cottage yards up that street?"

The yelping came again. Its direction was very plain. Dick swung round to the blank wall.

"It's over there," he said. And there was sudden agony in his voice. "Somebody has got Tykey and thrown him over the wall. Perhaps he's lying over there hurt—with a leg broken or something. Oh, I tell you, if anybody has hurt him I'll pay it back! I can't bear that. I could bear anything myself, but that little dog hasn't done anybody any harm."

He clenched his fists, his eyes shone with a new, fierce light; it was as though he had suddenly found a new manhood.

"Steady on! It's no good worrying before you know," advised Scrimshaw. "Where can we get the key of this yard—that is, if you think the pup is really over here?"

"I am sure. And I'm going over the wall. It will take twenty minutes to get the key. The timekeeper has it, and he lives in Lizard Street, off Hall Lane. If you will give me a leg up, I can get on the top of the wall and drop over the other side."

"But you can't get back—particularly if you've got a dog in your arms. Look here, I'll go and get this key while you go over the wall, and I can be back in time to let you out."

"All right. Give me a shove up here. Listen! The poor little beggar is just yelling his heart out."

Dick scrambled over the edge of the snow-topped wall. He looked down upon the other side for a moment, then he got his legs over and dropped.

"Are you all right?" asked Scrimshaw.

"Yes," came the answer back. "Are you going for the key now?"

"Yes, I'll be back in no time," answered Scrimshaw.

But he did not go. He waited under the wall, listening, with a face that slowly seemed to go as white as the snow. The minutes passed. He could still hear the whimpering and mournful howling of the animal, and occasionally he caught a sound of Dick's voice and whistle, which indicated that he was searching for the dog. He shivered when the howling rose drearily to a high note. It seemed like a mournful note of death. His heart beat curiously. He felt a sort of dread and fear for what might be the next sound.

And it came suddenly, freezing him to the very marrow.

From high up out of the darkness where the snowflakes whirled and made a grey curtain to hide the high mill buildings, came a sudden agonised shriek of a human voice. It sounded only for a moment, then ended, with a sharp silence chopping it off.

Scrimshaw put his hands to his eyes as though to blot out the sight of something visualised by a treacherous imagination. In his mind, he could see something that was happening, or had happened over the wall. On him came an overwhelming wave of horror at what he had done. Then he ran, with a great fear pursuing him.

The Weight of a Crime.

HE reached the timekeeper's house in Lizard Street with himself a little more under control, though yet afraid that every moment he might betray himself. He was not the first to find that crime brings with it so great a burden of terror as to take away almost the manhood of him whose hand is red. He made an effort to pull himself together. It was done. He could not go back. He would have done if it had been possible, and not all the money in the world would have tempted him. But it was done, and fear for himself made him fight down the panic that was filling him.

He knocked at the timekeeper's door, and when that stolid individual appeared he hurriedly told him his errand.

"I'm awful sorry to trouble you this time of night, but young Dick Allen has gone over the wall after his pup, and he'll certainly not be able to get back. It would be a cruel thing to leave him out there all night, so if you wouldn't mind coming and opening the gate."

"Suppose I lend you the key?" suggested the timekeeper.

"Very likely I shouldn't manage it. I'm a bit of a duffer over things I don't understand. I wish you'd come along."

There was in his pocket a key, only he dare not use it. Besides, he wanted someone else to enter the yard with him. Finally the timekeeper put on his boots and came along in the falling snow. The small door in one of the big gates was opened, and the pair entered. Inside Scrimshaw looked about him with assumed surprise.

"Not here," he said—"that's funny! Hallo, Dick!" he yelled in his gurgling voice. "Where are you?"

There came no answer, only the whining of a dog.

"There you are! That's the howling that fetched him over. He said it was his dog's voice, and he would have me push him on the top of the wall. You can see where he crawled over. Look, just there where the snow's brushed away! What the dickens do you make of it? If that's the howling of his dog, the animal is still there. But where's the lad?"

"I dunno. But the dog's here, anyhow?" said the timekeeper stolidly.

They went towards where the sound seemed to come from—from where, indeed, Scrimshaw knew it came.

"Seems up there," said the timekeeper, looking up the ladder. "Only it can't be. Dogs don't climb ladders, and they ain't got wings."

"No, no; but it's mighty funny! Where's the lad? That's what I want to know. Dick—Dick! Hallo! Where are you? Are you there, Dick? No answer. Well, it's queer. What are we to do?"

"You say you gave him a leg up over the wall. Well, he's gone back that way. He's a nippy lad, that Dick Allen, and he got tired of waiting, you bet."

"Except that the dog seems to be here, or there, or wherever it is. I dunno. I'll give him another shout, anyhow."

He cried out Dick's name again. There was no reply, save the mournful howl of the dog. He had done what seemed necessary to his own safety to subsequently prove that he was a friend of Dick's, and that he had done what he could to look after him. So he went back to the lonely cottage in Johnson's Fold. But he could not stop there long.

He buried his face in his hands and groaned from the depths of his soul. Then all at once an unreasoning panic seized him. He must get away. He could not stop in Bradford. He must go somewhere—out of the way. But how—without money? Money! There was that thousand pounds. He would go now to James Ackroyd—this very minute—to draw that blood-money.

The tuneful town-hall chimes were striking twelve as he went down into the square. He bore away up Darley Street in the blinding snow, and so to the wide thoroughfare of Manningham Lane. James Ackroyd was now occupying his uncle's house in Oak Avenue, the steep hill where in the winter-time the boys from far and near ran their sledges.

It was thither Scrimshaw directed his steps. The bell echoed noisily in the silent house. He would have gone away again, but that his terror, and the desperate circumstances he was in held him. There came no reply to his ring for some time. Evidently the servants had gone to bed. He rang again. The echoes had hardly died away when he heard steps in the tiled hall. Someone fumbled with the fastenings of the door. A moment later it was flung open, and James Ackroyd stood in the doorway.

"You, at this time of night! What the dickens do you want?"

"Get inside, and I'll tell you," gurgled Scrimshaw. "Here, gimme a drink!" was his first utterance when the room door was closed.

"You should wait to be invited," said Ackroyd, who had been drinking himself, and was inclined to be cantankerous.

"Oh, chuck it! There ain't no ceremony between us, Mr. Ackroyd. I've come for more than a drink. I've come for that thousand pounds."

"What thousand pounds?"

"I've been earning it to-night, and I wouldn't have done it for a million if I'd known."

"Known what?"

"His scream would foller me so. I can hear it all the time. And I seem to see it."

"See what? Have you got the jim-jams? Or are you going mad?"

"I'm talking about that lad, Dick Allen," said Scrimshaw, speaking slowly. "'E's 'ad that accident that you were going to pay a thousand pounds for. 'E's dead."

"Had an accident—eh? Do you mean you've murdered him?"

"Don't put it that way. I don't like the word. Look 'ere, gimme that thousand pounds! I'm in an 'urry to get out of this."

"Look here, my lad," said Ackroyd blusteringly, "if you've killed this lad for reasons of your own, it's your responsibility; but if you think I'm going to pay you a thousand pounds——"

"You traitor! Are you going back on your promise?" gasped Scrimshaw. "I could go and put the police on you in half an hour."

"And according to your own confession I could do the same for you, so we're both in the same boat," retorted Ackroyd coolly.

"Oh, you hound! You cunning fox! Are you going to do me out of that thousand pounds?"

"I'm not going to pay you a penny," said Ackroyd, who was pleased with himself and with the way circumstances were shaping. He saw he had the upper hand. At the same time his was not the brain to see very far. "You needn't think you are going to bleed me," he added.

Then the shabby man lost control of himself. He seemed to see himself tricked, betrayed, deserted. The other's mocking face roused him to fury. The withholding of the money seemed to be purposely meant so that he could not get away, and that justice would claim him. He thought half a dozen things at once.

"Are you going to give me that money?" he cried hoarsely.

"Not likely! What do you think?" returned Ackroyd, who believed he had got a weapon in his own hands now.

The other's reply was to lurch forward with his lean hands out. He made a grab at Ackroyd's throat, and got a blow on the cheek in return. The next moment the two were fighting like wild cats. Ackroyd had the advantage of youth, and so of activity, but Scrimshaw was slightly the stronger, and, moreover, he was in a desperate mood. They struggled backwards and forwards in the narrow space between the table and fireplace. They lurched back against the table. The decanters and glasses set upon it were thrown over, and fell with a clatter upon the floor.

Ackroyd made an attempt to get at the fire-irons, but Scrimshaw forestalled him. There was a mad struggle on the hearthrug, in which the mantelpiece was swept clean of clock and vases. The coalscuttle was kicked over, and a moment later, as the struggle veered towards the window, a plant-stand met a similar fate.

They fought like two savage animals, breathing wild, fiery words into each other's faces. In the end they fell, the younger man underneath. Scrimshaw got his hand on Ackroyd's throat. It was a long, skinny, sinewy hand. He began to press with one hand, and with the other he got hold of a piece of coal that had been flung out of the scuttle. He held it up.

Ackroyd gasped for mercy.

"I'll—give you—the money!" he cried in broken words.

"You will—you will—now?"

"Yes."

It was the end of the struggle. The pair of villains clambered to their feet. One of the decanters had rolled to the floor without breaking and the stopper held tight. Ackroyd seized it and put his lips to the mouth of it and gulped down the raw spirit it contained.

"But I don't keep money in the house," he said.

"But you have a cheque-book. The bank will be open at ten in the morning. Look here, you write out a cheque for a thousand payable to yourself, and endorse it at the back. I shall present that cheque for you. I guess your ways are known, and they will think it is to pay a betting debt. But in case there is any question about it, you will write a letter to the bank on your own note-paper saying the cheque is all right. And, look here, if there is any fiddling—any attempt to stop the cheque, and try-on to put me in the wrong corner, I'll give you away straight bang! And, dash me!" exclaimed Scrimshaw, with a new expression on his face. "I was a fool not to think of it before! If you make the slightest move to get me arrested—in fact, if you don't look after my interests as much as you'd look after yourself, and I get lagged in consequence, I'll give the whole show away, about how your uncle died. I'm not going into the dock alone, bear that in mind!"

Scrimshaw left the house in Oak Avenue with a cheque for a thousand pounds in his pocket. So far so good. He would get the money on the morrow, but what then? He had a wild desire to get away out of Bradford. But would it be safe to go? Might not a sudden going away create suspicion—the more so because he had taken lodgings with Dick in Johnson's Fold?

He reasoned it out. It seemed to him he would have to stay to face it out. He looked upon the prospect with ghastly fear. And his rags of a conscience were coming up and torturing him. Even with this money in his pocket, if he could have gone back he would, for he did not believe he would ever have a moment's peace in his life again.

He got back to Johnson's Fold, and with trembling hand opened the door of Dick's house, where Dick's Christmas decorations, done with a loving hand that was now dead, struck a garish note in the gloomy kitchen.

Then he had a shock. A sudden growl struck on his ears. He opened his eyes wide with amazement. The little mongrel pup with which he had lured Dick to his death scampered across the floor and hid fearfully under the dresser where it continued a hostile growling.

What did it mean? Had Dick escaped? Could it be that after all he had been saved from the crime of murder?

He stood for a moment weighing up in his brain what it might mean. Then the awful truth struck him—at least, what every probability showed must be truth, unless—unless——

He went to the staircase and shouted in a hoarse, broken voice:

"Dick! Dick! Are you there?"

There was no answer. He ran up the stairs and struck a match with trembling fingers. He shone the light into each of the bed-rooms. They were empty.

It was as he feared.

Someone else had rescued the dog. And someone else had discovered Dick. Perhaps even at this very moment they were bringing his body home—to this home he had decorated for Christmas!

He heard steps outside in the yard and a hand at the door.

He waited in an agony of fear.

(Another instalment of this grand serial next Tuesday in THE BOYS' FRIEND.)

A mad struggle was in progress, in which the mantelpiece was swept clean of clock and vases. Broken glass and dishevelled furniture strewed the floor, and then at last Scrimshaw succeeded in getting the winning grip over Ackroyd.

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