

FOR THE "EMPIRE" LIBRARY NEXT WEEK: "THE NEW MASTER."

Every
Wednesday.



One
Halfpenny.

THE COMPLETE STORY-BOOK THAT IS READ ALL OVER THE WORLD.



Gordon Gay's Play

A Splendid, Long, Complete
Tale of Gordon Gay & Co., at
Rylcombe Grammar School.

By
PROSPER HOWARD.

CHAPTER I.

Gordon Gay's Latest Idea.

"TADDY!"

"Did you speak, Gay?"

"Taddy, you ass!"

"Really, Gay, I'm aw—"

"You dummy! Why don't you look?"

In Study No. 13, at Rylcombe Grammar School, Horace Tadpole, the amateur artist and champion arguer, sat with his huge sketchbook upon his lap, sketching a group of "property" fruits which was piled up on the table. He had been alone in the study, and, being very much engrossed in his work, he had not noticed the entrance of Gordon Gay. The latter had now been in some time, and had, further, been very busy behind Taddy.

"If you'd stop spoiling those beautiful pages of cartridge-paper, old son, and look round at me, you'd see something that might—I can't promise it as a certainty in your ease—but it might do you a bit of good."

"I really think, Gay, that you should have more consideration for an artist busy with his work."

Horace Tadpole still stared at his sketch.

"Ha, ha! The consideration shall be supplied if you supply the artist. Once more, will you look?"

"I must just finish this line, Gay. Its exquisite contour is—"

Horace Tadpole broke off abruptly, for Gordon Gay had given him a sudden thwack on his back with the right hand that had made him jump, whilst he jerked his chair away with his left.

"Ow—ow—Gay—you—ugh!"

Tadpole was suddenly precipitated on to the floor. He kicked the table as he fell, and the "property" fruit went flying in all directions.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gay, I consider this conduct of yours repre— Oh!"

Having glanced at Gay for the first time since he had been requested to do so, Tadpole saw something that caused him to break off his flowery speech and exclaim:

"Good gracious, Gay! What have you got on?"

"This, my son, is what I have been wanting you to observe since the moment I entered the room. It is a suit of blue satin—in fact, it is a suit such as knights of old wore at court."

"Good gracious! What are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to write a play!"

"Really, Gay, I—"

"Takes your breath away, eh?"

"Well, not when I come to remember that I shall be here to suggest ideas to you."

"You! Ha, ha!"

"But, Gay, I fail to see the purpose of the blue suit!"

"I saw it advertised, Taddy, and sent for it on appro. I am now trying it on, and I don't think much of it."

"No, Gay. Now that I come to look at it with a critical and artistic eye, I am bound to confess that you look better in your ordinary clothes. I think blue, and especially bright blue, is a colour so glaring as to be certain to confound the senses of a fellow with any clear sense of the beautiful. 'The beautiful is not necessarily the true,' said Mr. Ruskin, and it stands to reason that if—"

"Ring off, Taddy! You mean you're not struck with this beautiful costume, eh?"

"No, Gay, it really does not inspire me. It stands to reason, if you come to look at it, that—"

"Shut up!"

"Really, Gay, you ought to pay attention to me when—"

"Rats! Ha, here comes someone!"

A clatter of feet sounded along the passage, and Gordon Gay, standing with his left hand on his hip and his right hand levelling a harmless "property" pistol, struck an attitude which would have realised the popular conception of the appearance of Dick Turpin, and waited.

The next moment the door opened, and Jack Wootton, the new lad from Australia, appeared; close upon his heels came his young brother Harry, who was in Jack's care.

These two, with Gordon Gay, occupying Study No. 13, were known as the Wallabies.

"I say, Gordon, I've got something— Oh! My hat!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

Jack had begun to speak before he saw Gordon Gay's remarkable get-up.

"Stand and deliver!" cried Gordon theatrically.

"I'm not a blessed postman!" laughed Jack Wootton.

"He looks as though he's got the blues, don't he?" grinned Wootton minor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the wheeze?"

"I'm going to write a play, and—"

"A what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh at your elders, my son!"

"But you said you were going—"

"Going to write a play. That's not a joke, is it?"

"It will be—when written!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Duffers! Listen to me! I want to write a play called 'A Knight of Old,' and I've sent for this costume to see whether there was any inspiration to be got out of it. You see, as I stand here I am the knight of old. This is my make-up!"

"My hat!"

"And has it given you any ideas?" asked Jack.

"I can't say it has," admitted Gordon Gay, and he proceeded to divest himself of the gaudy raiment. "I think I'll chuck the idea of the 'Knight of Old.'"

"If you really want an idea for a play," said Tadpole, restoring the last piece of "property" fruit to the table, "I think I could give you one that would just meet with your requirements."

Jack Wootton flung his cap on to a bookshelf and poked the fire vigorously to make room for the kettle.

Harry sat himself on the table and swung his legs, looking quizzically at Taddy, as though prepared to see the funny side of anything he might say.

"What's the idea?" asked Gordon Gay, tugging at his blue knee-breeches in a rather vain endeavour to get them off quickly.

"It's an idea which combines all that is artistic with all that is practical and romantic, and it stands to reason that anything which in itself and alone combines—"

"Oh, ring off, Taddy!"

"What's the idea?"

"The idea? That's what we want."

"Really, this method of interrupting is very reprehensible, and if I am to give you the benefit of my—"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Come to the point!"

The Wallabies' long-winded chum, thus urged, made a serious effort to get to the point forthwith.

"Suppose you have a man—a fine, tall, well-set-up, handsome fellow, who—"

"Something like yourself, eh?" asked Gordon, winking at Jack Wootton.

"Well, I shouldn't mind taking the part, of course—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought not! Anyway, what does this magnificent character of yours do?"

"Well, he gets up one morning, and—"

"My hat!"

"Fancy a fellow like that doing such a thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows would abandon this annoying habit of interrupting me I should feel much more able to explain the

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

For The
Empire Library

Next Week: "THE NEW MASTER."

idea in my mind. I don't suggest that this is the first time my character had got up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three chums were now roaring at their study-mate.

"But, anyhow, as soon as he gets out of bed he rings the bell and his servant comes running in, pale as death, with short pants—"

"Oh dear, no!" laughed Jack.

"My hat!" grinned Gordon. "Fancy death with short pants!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You irresponsible asses! What I mean is that the servant is gasping, giving short pants—giving—"

"Who to?"

"The hero?"

"No, you asses! It means that he's breathing fast!"

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Oh!"

"Very well, then! Now for the moment when true dramatic instinct shows itself. In his hand the servant carries a box, and in that box there is, lo, a five-pound note!"

"My hat!"

"It's breathless!"

"Is it a tin box?" asked Harry, his eyes twinkling.

"Yes—no! You ass, what has that got to do with it? Anyway, the servant's master says, 'Charles, come hither! Do you see?'"

"Well?" asked Gordon Gay, now free of his theatrical garb.

"What next?" queried Jack, handling the teapot.

"And then?" asked the junior Wallaby, with a breathlessness that was undoubtedly a little overdone.

There was a pause, during which Horace Tadpole stared dreamily before him.

"Hum! Then—well, really, I shall have to think the plot out a little further. You see its depth, the strength with which it strikes the most vital chords of the gamut of human emotion, the—"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Ring off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And while the Wallabies completed their preparation for a private tea in the study they roared with laughter at Tadpole's effort at devising a plot for a play.

Tadpole, indeed, was still thinking about his plot when Jack threw a couple of hot toasted muffins on the table and asked him to butter them.

"Get on with the washing, Taddy!" said Harry. "They're ever so much nicer buttered hot."

"Yes. What are you dreaming about, Taddy?" asked Gordon Gay.

"Really, Gay, I was thinking about my plot. You see—"

"Oh, hang your plot!"

"Butter the muffins!"

Taddy buttered the muffins accordingly, and placed them one on the other on a plate that they might stand in the fender whilst the rest were toasted.

As he was about to put them down, Jack, his face scorched by the fire, handed up two more.

"There you are, Taddy! Butter them quick before they get cold!"

Taddy, not thinking in the least of what he was doing, put the two unbuttered ones in the fender to keep hot and proceeded to butter the others all over again.

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Harry. "Look at him! The chump!"

"Harry, I do not see any cause for your going on thus in the presence of your seniors! I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack and Gordon Gay, realising suddenly the cause of Wootton minor's laughter.

"You chump!"

"Look at you!"

"Really, I fail to see anything—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jack! Gay! Why this ridiculous exhibition of mirth?"

"Oh, my hat! You mug! You're buttering the same ones again!"

"Oh, so I am, Gay! How curious! That shows how my mind is centred upon this plot—"

"Oh, hang your plot!"

"Never mind, Gay, I'll eat these that I've buttered twice."

"Ha, ha!"

"Really, I will! I don't mind a bit!"

"Ha, ha! He doesn't mind, Jack!"

"No. That's his over-consideration, Gay!"

While Taddy was watching his two friends, and wondering why they found his slight mistake so amusing, Harry snatched one of the twice buttered muffins from the plate.

"I'll help you out of your trouble!" he mumbled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the others, seating themselves at the table, and attacking the muffins and tea with a vigour that testified to the existence of healthy appetites in Study No. 13.

"What I say is," said Gordon Gay, reverting, in between bites of muffin and drinks of tea, to the subject that was uppermost in his mind, "the next play we do ought to be one of our own composition."

"Pray don't hurry me," observed Tadpole. "I am thinking out a plot as quickly as I can. No great mental effort, I would remind you, was ever exercised in a hurry. If you will leave the matter in my hands, I will write you a play that will establish the company among the front rank performers for all—"

"Taddy, shut up!"

"Really, Gay, I—"

"Shut up, I say! You have lost sight of the main fact in the present business!"

"I cannot conceive that to be possible, Gay. To which fact do you allude?"

"To the simple fact, my son, that it is I who will write the play, and not you! Now pass the jam."

"You, Gay? Why—"

"Yes, duffer, me! The jam, please!"

Tadpole passed the jam mechanically, and took no pains to conceal his astonishment.

"What's it going to be about?" asked Jack.

"Are you going to put me in it?" queried Harry.

"I'll put you under the table, kid, if you sit there and twist your face about in that frightful fashion!"

"I wasn't twisting my face; I was laughing!"

"Same thing, my son, so don't do it!" answered Gordon Gay smiling; and then he proceeded to answer the elder Wootton's question.

"I haven't quite got the idea yet, to tell you the truth; but we want a good mixture of humour and pathos."

"If you would only leave it to me," put in Taddy, who had been so busy thinking that he had eaten little more than half a muffin, "I would do exactly the thing—"

"It's very good of you, Taddy," returned Gordon Gay.

"But you forget that no audience we are likely to get together would be likely to have sufficient intelligence to enable them to appreciate the marvellous depths to which you would descend. That idea of finding a fiver in a sardine-tin, for instance—why, you ass, it's miles over our heads!"

"And who'd provide the fiver?" asked Harry. "And supposing it got lost during the play?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, Taddy, it won't do."

They were silent for a while, thinking.

"I've got it!" suddenly shrieked Gordon Gay, banging his fist on the table so hard that the crockery rattled. "We'll have a play about a convict. A chap in an office gets falsely accused of stealing a hundred pounds. He is arrested, tried, and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. When he comes out, he finds that he is shunned by everybody whom he knew before his conviction. He vows that he will find out what became of the hundred pounds, and sets to work."

"Disguised, he again gets a job in the old firm, discovers that it is the governor's nephew who stole the money. The nephew has also penetrated the chap's disguise, so that when the chap goes to accuse the nephew, the latter accuses him again of a further theft carried out that very day. This time he is charged with stealing £50. A search is made, and the money found in the ex-convict's office jacket-pocket."

"The ex-convict has now to clear himself of a second charge. He is about to be arrested again, when, seeing everything is against him, he slopes—runs away. In a lodging-house near the docks he meets a man who has got a huge snake for sale. The man tells him a tale of how this snake has a charmed effect over criminals—that no man who has committed a crime can remain in a room with it alone for five minutes without confessing."

"The ex-convict buys the snake, brings it to the lodgings of the governor's nephew, and lets it loose in his sitting-room after bribing the landlady. The landlady listens at the door with her husband, who is a bobby, so as to witness to the confession when it comes. The nephew confesses, the bobby hiding outside writes it down, and then the snake sets about the man and kills him, and there you are!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Tadpole. "That's all really very good, but you'll have to let me work it out for you—it really wants an artistic chap to work out a thing like that."

"You shall give a hand!" said Gordon Gay good-humouredly. "What do you think about it, Jack?"

"Ripping, except for the snake!"

"What's the matter with the snake?"

"How are you going to work it on the stage?"

"Easy enough, my son! My gov'nor will get me one—a beauty, with green eyes—one that goes by clockwork!"

"Ripping!" said Harry.

"You'd better get it all written out, and let us have our parts."

"We'll set about it now."

And for the next couple of days Gordon Gay's spare moments were entirely monopolised in writing out the play which he had suggested, and which he called "The Convict's Return."

CHAPTER 2.

Miss Phil and Miss Vera make a Proposal.

THE chums of Study No. 1 at Rylcombe Grammar School, Frank Monk, the rather lanky captain of the Fourth, Lane and Carboy, were walking across the quad, the first two doing their best to deaden their sense of hearing against the family history of the last.

Carboy was a member of an aristocratic family, and he chose his words carefully, and spoke with that air of ease that ever distinguishes those of good breeding. But he had a fault—at least, his chums considered it a fault, and that was his love of talking about his family tree.

"The record-searcher, whom my pater employs, has discovered the missing link," he was saying, "and it is now proved beyond all question that—"

"I didn't know he'd lost it!" said Monk.

"Ha, ha! Where did he find it?" asked Lane.

Carboy looked in amazement at his chums.

"Whatever are you talking about?"

"The missing link!"

"Yes. You said it was discovered."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really think I should be doing only my duty if I refused to tell you any more about it. But—"

"Oh, do your duty, please!"

"Don't mind us, Carboy."

"You speak thus because you do not know what it is—"

"It's about that link, isn't it?"

"Yes—the missing link discovered by the record-searcher. Ha—"

"Very well, do your duty, ass!" grinned Frank Monk.

"I am telling you as fast as I can."

"But you said that if you did your duty, you would not tell us anything about it!"

"Anyway, get it over quick!" said Lane, impatiently kicking a stone. "What link was it—a gold one?"

"No, you ass!"

"Oh, silver?"

"No, you foolish—"

"I say, Lane, fancy Carboy's father wearing any other than gold or silver watchchains! A steel one, was it, Carboy?"

"If I were given to vulgar speaking, I should say you two kids were looking for thick ears!" said Carboy severely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shouldn't be so fortunate in our search as your record-searcher was with your father's link."

"Oh, I see!" broke in Lane. "How silly of me!"

"What?"

"I've been misunderstanding you. It wasn't a chain link at all—it was—"

"Of course not, Lane!"

"It was a cuff link!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Monk.

This was almost more than the aristocratic Carboy could stand. He had been endeavouring to explain that a new link had been found in his family history, of which he was proud. The other two, of course, knew that well enough also. Only it formed such a good idea for "rotting" that they preferred to misunderstand everything their chum said.

"I am talking about my family tree, you rotters!"

"Oh!"

"Ah, I see!"

"We've found the missing link, and it shows—"

"But you said a record-searcher found it," interrupted Frank Monk.

"Of course you did!" grinned Lane.

"I utterly refuse to discuss the matter with you any further."

"Go hon!"

"Thanks!"

Just then a vision came before Frank Monk's eyes that sent his thoughts into other channels.

"There's my cousin Phil!" he cried, starting forward.

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 2.

"And her friend Miss Vera Stanhope," said Carboy, following him.

Lane also hurried along, for Miss Phil and Miss Vera were universal favourites with the fellows of the Fourth Form at the Grammar School.

"Oh, there you are, Frank!" said his cousin. "How are you?"

The three juniors raised their caps and exchanged greetings.

"Have you been looking for us long?" asked Frank Monk.

"No—er—really, we were not looking for you at all, but for Gordon Gay."

"Oh!"

"You see, we want him to arrange to give an entertainment at Wayland's Hall for the benefit of the orphanage. The doctor has given his permission through us!"

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

"My word!"

The two girls did not quite understand the ejaculations of Frank Monk and Carboy and the whistle of Lane.

"It was Vera's suggestion," went on Miss Phil. "She said she was sure the good old Grammar School would be delighted."

"And Miss Vera is quite right. We shall be delighted—only, you see—"

"Well?"

"You see, I was thinking it was a pity there was only Gordon Gay to take it up," concluded Frank Monk.

"Quite so, Miss Vera," added Lane.

"That is precisely the thought that was in my mind," said Carboy.

"Now, couldn't we—er—"

"Yes, that's just what I was—"

"Could we not form a company and carry out this excellent work for you, Miss Vera?"

"Exactly."

"Quite so."

"Precisely."

"Oh, I think Gordon Gay's company is very good! Don't you, Vera?"

"Oh, yes, splendid!"

"Wouldn't it be better, Frank, if you joined forces with him and so have one strong company instead of two weak separate ones?"

"Of course, there's no doubt that we should make it stronger," answered Frank Monk readily. "Not a—"

"Not a doubt!"

"Not a shadow of a doubt, Miss Phil!"

"But you see—er—"

"It's rather difficult to explain," put in Lane, coming to Frank Monk's aid. "You see, they—er—are—well—"

"Rather against innovations, don't you know," concluded Carboy.

"Oh, I see!" murmured Miss Phil.

"You mean they don't—I understand!" added Miss Vera.

"Yes, that's it!" said Frank Monk, blushing hopelessly. He had not meant to tell his cousin and her friend that Gordon Gay did not want them in the company, but he had let it cut to the two keen girls as successfully as though it had been the one thing in the world which he had lived to do.

"Then look here—I've got a splendid idea!"

Monk & Co. were instantly all attention.

"This entertainment is to last three hours. Instead of having one play to last all the time, we'll have a nigger entertainment in the first hour, and the play to begin at the second hour, and to last to the end."

"Ripping!" said Monk.

"And you will supply the nigger entertainment, Frank?"

"Rather!" replied Frank Monk.

"With my help, of course," added Lane.

"And my assistance," concluded Carboy.

"Thank you all so much! And now we must go. You'll give my message to Gordon Gay, won't you, Frank? It's next Wednesday evening!"

"Yes. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-afternoon!"

The three juniors raised their caps and walked back towards the school, remaining silent, though chucking inwardly, until the girls were safely out of earshot.

"By Jove!" grinned Frank Monk at last. "This'll be a bit of a smack in the eye for the Wallabies. We'll arrange our entertainment without letting them know anything about what we're going to do."

"Yes, that's the ticket! And I can just see their faces on the night when we're announced to give the first show."

"Splendid!"

"Come on; we'll give the kids their message, and then go and set to work at once."

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

For The
Empire Library

Next Week: "THE NEW MASTER."

CHAPTER 3.

Visitors to Study 13.

"THE proper way is to divide it up into scenes, first," said Tadpole, who was sketching Gordon Gay's head, whilst the latter was writing the "Convict's Return."

Gordon Gay did not reply.

"That, of course, Gay, is the way to get a really artistic result."

Still Gordon Gay was silent.

"I think you had better let me write it for you, Gay."

The schoolboy actor continued to drive his pen, quite oblivious of Tadpole's remarks.

"A play that is not arranged before it is written with due regard to the artistic standpoint, Gay, can never really be a success. I should really much rather write it for you, than have you make a fearful exhibition of yourself."

Gordon Gay scratched his head and thought deeply.

"Where have you got to, Gay?" asked Tadpole.

Still no reply.

"Gay! Gay! Gay!"

"Hallo!"

"Are you aware that I have been speaking to you for the past ten minutes without getting the slightest acknowledgment?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Really, Gay, I must protest ag—"

"Rats!"

"But it stands to—"

"Oh, you ass!" cried Gordon Gay wrathfully. "How can I write a play if—"

"That's just it, Gay. And if you would only listen to my arguments you would realise—"

"Bosh! You're always chin-wagging!"

"Very well, Gay. Of course, if you don't want the play to be a success—why, go on your own way. But I have no hesitation in saying that you're an ass!"

With that, much to Gordon Gay's satisfaction, Tadpole relapsed into silence, and the young playwright was enabled to proceed with his work.

But Tadpole sketched in silence only for a very short while.

Experiencing some difficulty in drawing the curve of Gordon Gay's forehead, he said:

"You know, Gay, your head it not shaped like that of a playwright. So how can you expect to write a play? It really stands to reason that you—"

"You dummy! Why don't you shut up?"

"Because I want to point out to you that your head is—"

"My head's all right. Shut—"

"But really, Gay, it isn't! There's a lump—"

"Look here, I'll give you a thick ear on each side of your head, you ass! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"It is really useless to try and persuade an inartistic ass like you that—"

"That's it, my son. Useless—quite! But if you'll stop chin-wagging for another five minutes I'll read out what I've done, and you can make any suggestions you please."

"Thanks, Gay! I am glad to have made you perceive the necessity of that, anyway."

And so, once more, Gordon Gay was permitted to return to his work. But it was not for long.

For in a few moments Jack Wootton, fresh from the footer-field, came in.

"Hallo, kids! How goes it?" he asked, hurling a football into a box in the corner. "Still on the play?"

"Don't interrupt Gay, Wootton; he is busy," said Tadpole.

Gordon Gay heard this, for he had looked up from his work when Jack Wootton entered.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared.

"What's the joke?"

"Yes, why are you laughing, Gay?"

"At you, you ass!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"What for, Gay?"

"What for? Oh, my hat! Ha, ha! Hold me, Jack!"

"I really do not see any occasion for this mirth. He was quite all right before you came in, Wootton!"

"Look here, Jack," said Gordon Gay, recovering from his outburst, "Taddy has been chin-wagging incessantly all the time you've been out, and then when you come in he tells you not to talk because I'm busy. Oh dear!"

"You're a dummy, Taddy!"

"Really, Jack Wootton, I—"

Bang—crash!

"Hallo! What's the rumpus?"

A loud banging had come suddenly on the door.

"Come in!"

The door opened with a jerk, and Frank Monk & Co. entered with as much noise as they could make.

"Now then, Monkey, who asked you to come here? And you, too, Vanboy, what do you want?" laughed Gordon Gay.

"I'll jolly well punch your head!" said Carboy, who, possessing one of the oldest names in the country, did not like liberties being taken with it.

"Pax!" cried Frank Monk. "We have a message for you asses!"

"Be civil, or you won't live to deliver it!" said Jack Wootton.

"Pax, I say! I have a message from Miss Phil for Gordon Gay. Of course it's all rot, but—"

"For me?"

"From Miss Phil?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"If Jack Wootton will hold your head so that it doesn't swell beyond recognition, I'll tell you."

"Ass! Get it off your chest!"

"Tell the kid," said Lane, "or else we shall have him in tears."

Gordon Gay flushed with a momentary access of anger, and clenched his fists.

"I'll give you a—"

"Let him tell you the message first, Gay. It stands to reason that if you adopt a course which—"

"Quite right, Taddy!"

Monk & Co. looked so pleased with themselves that Gordon Gay felt more like rushing them out of the study than practically begging them to give the message.

However, here was a clear case where discretion would be the better part of valour, and so Gordon Gay possessed himself with what patience he could until Frank Monk & Co. had got all the enjoyment they wanted out of delaying the delivery of Miss Phil's message.

A message from Miss Phil must be he thought, something of importance; it must, he imagined, have something to do with his theatrical company in which she had taken such great interest, and in which she and her friend had acted.

"Miss Phil says that—"

"That if you are very good—"

"That if you've got enough sense to carry it out—"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy all spoke together, and made an inconceivable jumble, out of which the Wallabies could make nothing.

"Asses!" cried Gordon Gay.

"Why don't you try all speaking together for a change?" asked Jack Wootton.

"Really, I think that's what they were doing," remarked Tadpole, who missed the note of sarcasm underlying Jack Wootton's observations.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wouldn't they like to hear the message—eh, Lane?"

"Rather, Monkey! Ha, ha!"

"They are extremely anxious, you can tell that," said Carboy.

"Well, we can't stay around here all day," said Frank Monk at length. "Fact is, kids, Miss Phil is arranging an entertainment at the Wayland Hall in support of a charity, and as she couldn't at the moment think of anyone better, she sends to ask you whether you will give a play. It must take no more than two hours, because your precious company of first-class fatheads will get horribly stale!"

"When did you get this message?" asked Gordon Gay suspiciously.

It seemed too pleasing to be true, and at first he half suspected Frank Monk of some joke.

"Just now—in the fives court."

"It's genuine!" said Lane.

"Oh, quite!" added Carboy, in his superior tones.

"Thank you for bringing it. When is it to be?"

"Next Wednesday."

"Does the doctor know?"

"Yes; my cousin, with her usual kindness and forethought, got permission from him before sending the message."

"She's a brick!" declared Jack Wootton.

"Anything else?" asked Gordon Gay, seeing that Monk & Co. did not seem inclined to go.

"I think we'll stay to tea with you now."

"We've had it."

"Well, we'll stay to keep you company."

"Clear out; we're busy!"

"What's Taddy doing there?" asked Monk.

"Why, it's the head of a monkey, surely!"

"That, Lane, you inartistic ass, is Gordon Gay's head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No wonder I was deceived."

"It's a remarkable drawing. It really makes the head look quite intelligent, whereas the original is— Ow—oo—garooch!"

Gordon Gay had suddenly seized Carboy by the nose, and was leading him in a painful fashion to the door.

"Rescue!" cried Carboy, with a peculiar twang.

Thereat, Lane sprang upon Gordon Gay, charging him off his feet and into the fireplace in one movement.

"Ugh, you beast! I'll jolly well—"

"Up you get, Gay!" cried Jack Wootton, dragging his chum up by a grasp on the collar, and at the same time striking out with his left hand, he caught Lane on the point of the nose.

Study No. 13 was now the scene of the wildest confusion.

The next moment Frank Monk was rolling under the table with Tadpole, locked in an embrace that was anything but affectionate.

"Ugh—oo—garooch!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Leggo my nose!"

"You rotter!"

"Take that!"

Biff!

Bang!

Slosh!

The din was indescribable. The table moved about the room like a living thing, supported on the back of Tadpole or Monk, whichever happened to be uppermost at a given moment, bumping into the other combatants as it went.

It was indeed a set-to worthy of the best traditions of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School.

At last the victory lay with the Wallabies, and Lane and Carboy were shot through the door into the passage by Gordon Gay and Jack Wootton.

With an eye glimmering between two legs of the table to his own safety, Frank Monk suddenly abandoned the fight, although he was certainly getting the best of it.

Scrambling out on all fours, his collar broken, and hanging by one buttonhole, whilst his clothes were all dishevelled and dusty, Frank Monk sprang to his feet and made a dash for the door, just as his two chums had been ejected.

"Yah, kids!" he yelled, jerking Gordon Gay and Jack Wootton by their collars, one in each hand, as he attempted to pass between them.

"Yah!"

He put out all his strength, and bumped their heads soundly together.

"Ow—oo—ugh!"

"Ugh—you beast!"

Frank Monk made a dash for it.

"Hold the rotter!" cried Gordon Gay, who was then holding his own head as a result of the collision it had just suffered with Jack's.

But a yell came suddenly along the passage.

"Ow—I say—oo!"

"It's Lawson!" gasped Jack, pushing the study door to.

"And he's captured Monkey!"

"Yes! Hark!"

Swish! Swish!

"Ow—oo—oh!"

These sounds proved beyond doubt that Lawson, the captain of the school, having heard the din, had come upstairs to quell the disturbance. Seeing Frank Monk rushing from Study No. 13 with his collar broken and his clothes covered in dust, he had seized him as an obvious part of the disturbance, and used his cane—the sounds heard by the Wallabies being the result.

"Fasten my collar for me quick, before Lawson comes along!" said Jack Wootton, hastily pushing his hair into something like order. "And look here, I've torn my bags at the knees!"

"You must stand with your back to him!" grinned Gordon Gay, as he did his best to make his chum's collar appear as though nothing worse than a visit to the laundry had happened to it.

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to see myself!"

"Look out! Here he comes!"

The next moment the door opened wide, and the face of the irate Sixth-Former appeared.

"Now, then, what's all the row about?"

"Row, Lawson?" queried Gordon Gay blandly.

"Yes, you cheeky young sweep!"

Lawson accompanied his words with a forward movement, the cane upraised.

"Do you mean along the passage just now, Lawson?"

Lawson looked at the junior critically for a moment. It was difficult for him to tell what lay behind Gordon Gay's bland smile, and it is more difficult still to say what would have been the upshot of that interview had his eyes not just at that critical moment wandered to the floor beneath the table.

"What—what's that?" he gasped.

"That?" repeated Gordon Gay.

"Which?" asked Jack Wootton, apparently anxious to be of any assistance he could to the Grammar School skipper.

The two chums had, in the excitement of the moment, forgotten that Tadpole had remained under the table since his fight with Frank Monk.

"Yes, that! Why—?"

"Oh, that!" said Gay blandly.

"It's Taddy!" murmured Jack Wootton.

"Come out of it, Tadpole!" roared Lawson, seizing the amateur artist by the ankle, and dragging him out.

"I say, Lawson, really you are hurting me! I—"

"What, in the name of fortune, has happened to you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

Had it meant writing lines for the rest of their lives, Gordon Gay and Jack Wootton could not have resisted that laugh.

Even Lawson's stern features relaxed as he surveyed the slowly rising form of the artistic junior.

It was to Tadpole's face and head that the eye was attracted, and the laugh raised.

His face was blue-black all over, save for a few streaks here and there, and the whites of his eyes seemed to dance at those who looked into his face as he stood blinking.

His long, artistic bow was untied, one end being jammed in the side of his crumpled collar, and the other hanging loosely down the front. His rather long hair had been so combed with fingers that it stood on end and crowned a picture it would have been hard to beat.

"Ha, ha! Look at his hair!" roared Gordon Gay.

"His face!" chuckled Jack Wootton.

"What have you been doing?" demanded Lawson, in manner as severe as he possibly could make it.

"Really, Lawson, I rather think the ink—"

"I can see it's ink! But how did it get on your face?"

"Well, you see, Lawson, I—er—that is, the ink—er—"

It became immediately obvious to Lawson that someone had rubbed the ink on Taddy's face, and that Taddy was sufficiently high-minded to wish not to disclose who had done it.

Lawson could not have been captain of the Grammar School unless he had admired this spirit, and the moment he realised what the position was he turned off on to another track.

"There's been a big row here," he said, "and I shall give you a hundred lines apiece. Monk has had a thrashing, so he'll get no lines."

And with that, Lawson went out of the room, and, although the juniors did not know it, he chuckled heartily over the appearance which Tadpole had presented.

"Monkey gets all the luck!" said Gordon Gay.

"Yes. Why couldn't he have licked us instead of setting us beastly lines to swot over?" agreed Jack Wootton.

Then the two looked suddenly at Taddy.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take that face away!"

"How the dickens did you get in that mess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You do look a chump!"

"Really, you chaps, I think it is quite asinine to go on like that. What you can see in a little ink to laugh over I really cannot understand!"

"A little ink—oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, there is nothing, that I am aware of, to make you so mirthful! To laugh at misfortune is reprehensible—to laugh at nothing is positively stupid! My condition is easily explained. I was on the floor in a horizontal position, fighting valiantly with Monkey—"

"Fighting—how!"

"Valiantly! That is, with courage."

"Oh!"

"Go hon!"

"Well, we disturbed the table—the inkwell must have fallen from its position on the table. Then the rest is simple. Monkey, who is an inartistic ass, rubbed his hands in the pool of ink which was on the floor, and then he rubbed my face. It stands to reason that the result would be—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really see no cause for this laughter, you asses!"

"But why didn't you come from under the table before?"

"Really, Gay, I was not particularly anxious to meet Lawson like this!"

"Ha, ha! Go and clean up—we must get on with this play!"

"Yes, kids, we must work this play of ours up for Miss Phil's show. It was ripping of her to ask us!"

"It was, my son! And wasn't Monkey sick?"

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

For The
Empire Library

Next Week: "THE NEW MASTER."

"Rather!"

"Now that Miss Phil has asked for a performance of a play at the public hall, I'm sure you will require me to write the play for you—won't you, Gay?"

"Rats! Go and clean up your face!"

"Yes, it worries us!"

"But really, you must see, Gay, that—"

"Travel!"

"Gay, I must object to this high-handed method you adopt in addressing me. Don't you see, you ass, that as Miss Phil has honoured us with this invitation, it is absolutely essential that the 'Convict's Return' should be properly written? And that is tantamount to saying that I must write it! Now, it really stands to reason—"

"Shut up, Taddy!"

"Travel!"

"But don't you see that if—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Hop it!"

"Gay, as long as you live you will regret that you—"

Gordon Gay picked up a book and prepared to take aim.

"Are you going to travel?"

"Well, in face of that—" He pointed at the book. "I can only protest that it is really no argument, and—"

Crash!

The book struck the door an inch away from Taddy's head, and then fell to the floor with a crash.

But Tadpole had not waited to receive the blow. Discretion told him that he had better go.

CHAPTER 4.

Criticising the Play.

"NOW then, you chaps, listen to this!" said Gordon Gay later, to his study chums. "And listen carefully, because we want this play performed so that it will do credit to Miss Phil."

"Fire away!"

"I'm listening, Gay."

"Let her rip!"

Jack Wootton, Tadpole, and Wootton minor had disposed themselves comfortably about the room. The first-named sat on the table, Tadpole blinked from a full cricket-bag upon which he squatted, whilst young Harry Wootton sat on the end of the fender.

Gordon Gay, manuscript in hand, occupied the only arm-chair the study possessed.

"First of all," he went on, "I'll read out the list of characters."

"The dramatis personæ," put in Tadpole. "You must have those words on the programme, Gay! It gives it a sort of finish."

"The whatter?" asked young Harry.

"Dram—"

"Shut up! Let Gay get on with the characters," said Jack.

"Here you are, then," said Gay. "First comes Vinolia Gottov, a Russian impostor."

"Good gracious, Gay, I—"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Why, I thought Vinolia was the name of a—"

"Rats! Coupled with Gottov it looks—"

"Call him Soapy and done with it!" laughed Jack,

"Look here, you chaps—"

"Really, Gay, Vinolia does not sound a bit Russian. I'll do you the justice to say that it's artistic, but Russian—never."

"I think Taddy's right, Gay," said Jack.

"Well, what—"

"I think I had better suggest something, Gay!"

"Well, get on with it!"

"Get it off your chest!"

"I think Vinovski sounds more like Russian."

"Good for you, Taddy!" agreed Jack.

"Good old Vinovski!" yelled Harry.

"That name will do—I'll alter my notes!"

After a pause Gordon Gay proceeded.

"Next comes Vinovski's nephew, the villain. I've called him Thurman Gottov. How does that go?"

"It scarcely seems to me to rhyme!" murmured Tadpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not making rhymes, ass!"

"Really, Gay, you should be able to see what I mean!"

"But I can't, unless you say it!"

"Thurman sounds to me more like German!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack.

"Thurman German! Ha, ha!" exclaimed Harry.

"Look here, you chaps, if you're going to rot we shall never get the beastly thing fixed up!"

"Really, Gay, I'm not rotting. May I suggest that instead of Thurman, however, we have—Blottovski Gottov?"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

"I think you're right, Taddy. You seem to be hot on Russian names. The villain and nephew of Vinovski is Blottovski Gottov!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Next we come to the hero—the chap who is a book-keeper in Vinovski's office in London, and gets accused of stealing the money. I thought his name should be Guy Mannering."

"Guy Fawkes!" grinned Wootton minor.

"Shut up, kid!"

"Guy Mannering sounds good," said Jack. "I knew a chap named that in Australia."

"It's the name of a famous novel, I believe," said Tadpole.

"Yes, I really see nothing to question about that name."

"Then we come to the office-boy. I thought of calling him Nobby Flappleton."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's a funny character, you know," explained Gordon Gay. And Nobby Flappleton was agreed to.

"Next I've got down 'Oppy'."

"Hoppy who, Gay?"

"It isn't Hoppy; it's 'Oppy! He's a tough, in gaol, and he shaves the prisoners. That'll make a good scene shaving the prisoners."

"It will that."

"Oh, I say, Gay, he's a sort of humorous blackguard, eh?" asked Tadpole thoughtfully.

"He's not altogether a bad chap," explained Gay. "But he's funny, and having been a barber by profession, he is selected to shave the convicts."

"Let it go."

"Rather. I like 'Oppy. It sounds high-class," said Wootton minor, who seemed to be getting no end of amusement out of the proceedings.

"Right-ho! The next, my sons, is Mrs. Makepeace, the landlady, and Copper Makepeace. They hear the confession of the villain when he's in the room with the snake alone."

"That's good," agreed Jack.

"I should like to point out that the word 'copper,' as applied to a policeman, will not look very dignified on the programme," said Tadpole.

"Ass!" said Gordon Gay. "I'm only talking that way. We shall put 'P.c.' on the programme."

"Oh, yes, of course—'post-card!'" chuckled Harry.

"No, you young duffer, police-constable!"

"Oh!"

"In that case, Gay, I should be inclined to pass the name 'Makepeace' without further comment."

"Hear, hear!"

"Right-ho! Now we come to the judge who sentences Guy Mannering to seven years. I've called him Lord Justice Stern."

"Capital!"

"Ripping!"

"Really, Gay, I must congratulate you on that name. I have actually no improvement to suggest. Stern. Ah—"

"Hear, hear! Get on, Gay."

"There is Lady Stern, his wife, and Miss Muriel Stern, his daughter, who falls in love with the hero after he has got through all his misfortunes."

"Who is going to take Miss Muriel's part, Gay?" asked Taddy.

"Miss Phil!"

"Then I'll be the hero," he replied readily. "I have just the artistic temperament."

"Ass! Wait till you're asked. We'll see about—"

"Of course, I shall take that part," said Jack Wootton.

"Will you, my son? That's got to be settled later, when we've fixed the names of the characters. Are all these agreed?"

"Yes."

"Rather!"

"They'll be ripping!"

"Right-ho! Now we come to the last one, and that is Tusizer Mahibba. He is—"

"Two sizes. Ha ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Gay. Two sizes is rather—"

"Asses! It's T-U-S-I-Z-E-R, a Turkish name!"

"Oh!"

"It isn't a description of the size of his shirt?" asked Harry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you chaps, don't rot! This is serious. I—"

"I should think it was!" grinned Jack.

"Really, Gay, I—"

"Rats! Do you agree with Tusizer Mahibba?"

"Oh, it's all right, Gay, if you print it very plainly on the programme," assented Jack Wootton.

"As you are foolishly insisting on writing the play, it will do," agreed Tadpole rather reluctantly.

"Why couldn't you have agreed before? There, that's the lot, except the snake, and some clerks, jurymen, and a few coppers, who won't have to speak, but only fill up the stage."

"What's the next step then?" asked Jack.

"Well, now we'll run through the acts as I've arranged them, and if you duffers have got anything to say, say it, and don't make a lot of fuss about it."

"Get on with the washing!"

"Not so much 'gag'!"

"Yes, Gay, I really think you might proceed without pausing to cast aspersions—"

"Yes, cast the characters instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you chaps, stop rotting. I'm going to get—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Now, listen. There'll be four actual scenes, and two of them will be used twice. First, there Vinovski's office, in which Guy is arrested; then the court scene, where he is sentenced; next, the gaol scene, where the prisoners are being shaved. That will be followed by Vinovski's office again, the second arrest and escape of Guy in disguise, and after that Guy will appear before the curtain, talking aloud his thoughts. Tusizer will come along and sell him the snake. Then comes the last grand scene in Blottovski's lodging, where the snake makes him confess, and after the copper and Mrs. Makepeace have witnessed the confession, kills him. The curtain goes down for a few minutes whilst the remains of Blottovski are removed, and when it goes up again, the lodgings are Guy's, and he receives news that he has a free pardon, and the judge calls upon him with his wife and daughter to express his sorrow for the part he played in it all. That's all."

"All?" cried Jack Wootton. "Why, you'll never get through it in two hours."

"Yes we shall."

"Really, Gay, having listened with the closest possible attention, I have come to the conclusion that there are too many scenes. It stands to reason that—"

"Cut it short, my son, and make your suggestion."

"Well, you see, Gay, at the rate you're going on, you'll want more scene-shifters than you could get in the whole of the hall, and, therefore—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're an ass, Taddy!"

"There's something in what Taddy says," observed Jack. "Now, look here, they're as simple as can be. The office can be made up of a table and a couple of chairs, all the rest being on canvas—"

"I could paint that for you, Gay."

"Then, the court scene can be much the same."

"I could paint that for you, too, Gay."

"The gaol scene only requires painted canvas and chairs, and—"

"I could pain—"

"Rats! Then there's the office again, and after that the sitting-room. If I couldn't change all the scenes single-handed I'd eat the lot."

"Not if Taddy painted them," said Jack Wootton.

"Ha, ha! I admit that might make a difference."

"You're irresponsible asses!" said Tadpole. "However, we can cut some of the scenes out later if I come to the conclusion—"

"Rats!"

"Shut up!"

"Really, I consider—"

"Go and eat cake!" yelled Gordon Gay. "Is there anything else before we pass on?"

"There is another point, Gay, which I should like to raise!"

"Well, get on with it."

"I should like to know, Gay, how the judge's daughter comes into it. What makes her so interested that she should come with her father and mother to visit Guy Mannering?"

"Ah! I hadn't worked that out," admitted Gay.

"Well, Gay, I think my sense of poetic justice will show us the way out of the present—"

"Oh, make your suggestion, if you've got one."

"Hear, hear!"

"If you chaps would endeavour to overcome this habit of inter—"

"Oh, get on with it!"

"You make me tired."

"You're inartistic asses! What I suggest is that the money which Guy is supposed to steal in the first place is interest on a share of Vinovski's business which is owned by Lady Stern. It's supposed to be given to Guy to post to her and he steals it, or somebody does. That would make them interested in the case from the start."

"That's a ripping idea, Taddy," said Jack.

"He's copied it out of a book!" grinned Harry.

Tadpole sniffed, and proceeded.

"Then, being interested in the case, Lady Stern and her daughter are present in court at the trial on the bench with the judge. From the general appearance of the prisoner, the judge's daughter believes him innocent, and falls secretly in love with him. This love she keeps to herself for seven years."

"He talks like a picture-book!" chuckled Harry.

"I must say, Taddy, you have surpassed yourself. Your idea is a very good one for you," agreed Gordon Gay.

"You see, Gay, I told you that what you want to write a play is—"

"Shut up, ass! We adopt your idea, but if we've got to listen to you while you preach as well, we won't have it!"

"Really—"

"Hear, hear!"

"What's the next thing, kids?" asked Jack Wootton.

"The next thing, my sons, is to fix the actors with their respective parts."

"Hear, hear!"

"First of all, to deal with the ladies, I propose Miss Phil for Miss Stern, and Miss Vera for Lady Stern—that is, unless Taddy would like to play both those parts."

"You ass!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Agreed."

"Right-ho! Then—"

"It might save a good deal of time, Gay, if I were to say at the start that I'll play Guy Mannering."

"Oh!"

"It will save a great deal more time if I tell you, old son, that you won't do anything of the sort. I'm fixed for that."

"Really, Gay, it wants a chap with—"

"Shut up! You make me tired. Guy Mannering's part is mine!"

Jack Wootton, being in agreement with this, Taddy blinked considerably, but said no more.

"Now, we'll take Nobby Flappleton, the office-boy, and as we want a dirty, inky kid for that, I suggest Harry."

"Look here, Gay—" exclaimed Harry, red in the face.

"You don't want it? Very well, we'll—"

"Oh, I'll do it!"

"Right-ho! Jack, I want you to take the part of the villain, Blottovski Gottov."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Harry, rolling from side to side till it seemed he must fall off the fender. "He'll need no make-up for the villain's part."

"I'll give you a licking, Harry," said Jack wrathfully.

"Will you do that part, Jack? It's an important one."

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Next, we'll take the judge. Well, that's a very important part also, which wants playing with artistic taste," said Gordon Gay blandly, "and, therefore, we'll ask Taddy to do it."

"I am glad to see that you recognise—"

"Oh, ring off, Taddy, if you don't want—"

"Oh, yes, Gay, I'll do it! I was only going to say—"

"Well, don't, old son."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, we come to 'Oppy. Nicky will have to do that."

"Hear, hear!"

"Then the copper—that'll fit Donald."

"Hear, hear!"

"David Morgan will have to make up as Mrs. Makepeace, eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that makes a place for each of the members of the Triple Alliance. Now, there are two others. First Vinovski, and I think Jimmy Preston will play him to a T. Last of all, there's Tusizer Mahibba, and Carpenter will have to take that. Snipe and Larking and some more kids can fill up the stage as jurymen, policemen, and clerks, &c."

"Hear, hear!"

"It ought to be ripping."

"Can't you imagine Monk & Co. squirming when they see our great success?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 5.

Frank Monk & Co.'s Scheme.

MONK & CO. had never been in such high spirits before.

The opportunity to give a show in competition with the Wallabies was a splendid thing; to give their show first was a distinct triumph; and to be in a position of preserving the matter a secret until the moment to go on the stage was a consummation which invested Study No. 1 at the Grammar School with untold joy.

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

Frank Monk's pleasant face was beaming, as, standing with his back to the fire, he stretched his long, lanky figure to its full height, and glanced from Lane to Carboy with delight.

"This will take some of their beastly blessed cheek out of them," he said.

"Rather!" agreed Lane.

"I have got a good idea to suggest for the entertainment," said Carboy—"a splendid idea. Something which will positively eliminate the gloss from anything those kids can attempt!"

"Ha, ha! Eliminate the gloss, Carboy, is good! How will you do it?" asked Monk.

"I shall learn by heart and render deliberately and with precision the whole of my family tree, Monk! That ought—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You ass!"

"You duffer!"

"You chump!"

"What is the matter with you both? You want the entertainment to be a success, don't you?"

"Ha, ha! That's just it!"

"That is just what?"

"Why, just why we think you're an ass, to suggest giving an account of your family tree to an audience that has come to see a minstrel troupe!"

"I don't follow you."

"Oh, you're the limit! Just because you're interested in your family tree you suppose everyone else is."

"They ought to be."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"I certainly think they ought—"

"Shut up! Shall I tell you why your family tree is of no interest whatever to anyone but yourself?"

"I will certainly listen—"

"Because the best fruit it could bear is yourself."

"I'd chop it down if it were in my back yard," added Lane, grinning.

"I tell you this," retorted Carboy hotly, "you two chaps are only jealous because you haven't got any ancestors who can be traced. My family name can be traced a thousand years back, and if—"

"Shut up! Our ancestors were too honest to want tracing."

"Look here, we've got to get to business!"

"Go and hang yourself on your family tree!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was difficult to get Carboy off his hobby horse once he had mounted it, but on this occasion Frank Monk and Lane tabooed it forthwith and proceeded eagerly to discuss the entertainment they had to prepare.

For a little while Carboy sniffed with considerable dignity, but presently his injured feelings became cured by the interest he felt forced to take in the proceedings.

"The first question is, you chaps, are we going to do this all on our own, or get some other kids to make up a bigger troupe?"

"What! Carpenter & Co., do you mean?" asked Lane.

"No. That means Snipe as well—and he's not to be trusted. He's a sneak!"

"Who could we get, then?"

"The Triple Alliance."

"By Jove, that's a good wheeze!"

"Splendid!"

"That's agreed, then," said Monk. "It's a good wheeze, because if we get them they won't be able to take part in the Wallaby kids' show!"

"Sure?"

"Oh, yes! They couldn't learn up two lots by Wednesday!"

"Of course not. Good for you, Monkey."

"The next thing is to settle what instruments we'll have."

"I'll play the piano for you," said Carboy, who was really a very good pianist.

"Good!"

"I'll take the bones—I've got a set," said Lane.

"Right-ho! I'll get out that old concertina of mine and do it up a bit. That fixes the music."

"Good!"

"Now, about songs," went on Monk. "There's 'Polly Wolly Doodle'—that's a good old minstrel song. I'll do that for one."

"It's certainly old—as old as Carboy's family tree," laughed Lane.

"Speaking about family trees—" began Lane.

"Oh, shut up! What did you say that for, Lane? You've nearly set him going again."

"I'll do the 'Ooperzootick'."

"The what, Lane?"

"'Ooperzootick!' Don't you know it? It's a real good



"Come out of it, Tadpole!" roared Lawson, seizing the ink-stained amateur artist by the ankle and dragging him from under the table.

song that used to be sung by Little Thomas, in the Mohawk Minstrels. I'll look up the words, but it's something like this:

"I've got the cooperzootick;
I don't know where I am.
I've got the——"

"All right, Lane, we'll put you down for that. It's got a good title, even if you can't sing it. Now, Carboy, what's yours?"

"I'll sing the 'Blind Boy,' 'The Minstrel Boy,' 'Take Me Home Again, Kathleen,' 'We Parted on the Shore,' 'The Girl I Left My Happy Home For,' 'The Blind Girl to Her Harp,' 'The——'"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Steady on, Carboy, we've only got an hour, you know!"

"I could sing them quickly, Monkey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

"I don't see why I should not sing all I know. There's quite another dozen. There's 'The Tin Gee-Gee,' 'The——'"

"Shut up! You've got more than enough already. You'll have to play an overture, too."

"Oh, certainly, Monkey! I'll give them half an hour at the piano, with pleasure. I'll play the 'Battle March,' 'Whisper——'"

"Half a what?"

"Half an hour."

"Hold me up, Lane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Carboy, you'll have to be suppressed. Lane and I will take on half the songs you've mentioned, and that will equalise matters."

"Oh, all right! I'll play the accompaniments very loud when you break down, so that the audience won't——"

"Ass, shut up!" grinned Lane.

"Now, then, for the Triple Alliance kids! Let's get along to see them."

"Right-ho! We'll 'troupe' off, so to speak."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monk & Co. thereupon made their way to the study occupied by the Triple Alliance—as O'Donnell, Morgan and Donaldson were called by the fellows of the Fourth.

"How are ye, me darlins?" quoth Nicky O'Donnell, the lad from Dublin, as Monk & Co. entered.

"What's the meaning of this interruption, whatever?" asked David Morgan, more usually known as "Taffy," as he hurled his boxing-gloves into the corner.

"What's up the noo?"

Donald Donaldson started to his feet, the native shrewdness which he had got from his Scotch birth making him suspicious of this sudden intrusion on the part of Monk & Co.

"Pax, kids—peace!" cried Monk. "We want you to help us in a little wheeze."

"Sure! An' what is it?"

"Ay, mon?"

"Any help whatever, we're willing!"

"You're bricks," said Monk.

"You are," echoed Lane.

"Splendid!" agreed Carboy.

"First of all," resumed the captain of the Fourth, "we must bind you to secrecy. It's something we're doing for Miss Phil, and we want it to be a pleasant surprise for all the kids, including Gordon Gay & Co."

"That's it!"

"The very idea!"

"Sure, an' if it's for Miss Phil, we should like to be in it!"

"Ay, mon, that we should!"

"There's no doubt whatever about that!"

"Right-ho!" And Frank Monk explained the object of the present visit.

A wink passed round the chums of the Triple Alliance when they heard, but no significance was attached to that by Frank Monk & Co.

"Sure, we're with you!"

"Ay, mon! It'll be real grand!"

"And such a surprise for Gordon Gay, whatever!"

"Rather!" agreed Monk. "And now it only remains to fix up your songs and arrange for rehearsal."

"Put me down, sure, for 'The Dear Little Shamrock,' 'The Bells of Shandon,' 'Sovourneen Deelish,' 'Dark Rosa-leen,' 'Barney Brallaghan's Courtship,' 'Shule, Agra,' 'A Sprig of Shillaleh,' 'Rory O'M—'"

"My only Aunt Jane! You're not going to sing all the songs, Nicky. We've all got to do a turn—"

"Sure, but I know a score more of 'em!"

"Well, you've named enough already. If you jot the names down on a bit of paper we shall have them ready for the programme."

"I can do as many as Nicky, whatever!" said David Morgan. "There's—"

"Right-ho! Give us the names of three."

"There's 'Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn,' 'Cyweiried y Cerdor,' 'Ar Hyd y Nos,' and then there's 'Gogoniant i Gymon,' and 'Ton y Mel—'"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Monk, leaning against the wall as though he had fainted.

"My giddy aunt," murmured Lane, holding his head between his hands and emitting a groan.

"Oh dear! I wonder if Welsh families are old—"

"Sure the Welsh language is—"

"Ay, mon; but it's a terrable language. It's that awful like swearin' ye ken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at."

"No, you're right," said Monk, recovering. "It's a matter for tears, Taffy—tears, nothing less."

"I don't understand you, whatever."

"Neither do we understand you, Taffy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I can't sing in the beautiful language of my native country, then I won't sing at all."

"Right-ho, Taffy! Of course we admire Welsh singing. It's the way you twist your tongue about when you're saying the names of the songs that knocks me sideways."

"That's because you don't understand, whatever."

"Anyway, let's have the names written down with the English translation—I think we ought to put both on the programme."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll tell you the English distortion for 'em now, in the order I've said 'em in my native tongue. They're 'Watching the Wheat,' 'Oh, Let the Kind Minstrel,' 'All Through the Night,' and 'All Hail to the Cambria.' The last one which you didn't let me finish was 'Ton y Melnydd'—'The Miller's Song.'"

"Good!"

"Ay, it's a good thing the mon's finished," said Donald. "Now, I'll just give ye mine. I'll sing 'A Highland Lad,' 'Roy's Wife of Aldwalloch,' 'The Braes o' Balquither,' 'Wha Wadna Fecht for Charlie?' 'The Lass o'—'"

"My hat, Donald, that'll do!"

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

"Well, if it's suffeasent, it'll do; but I'm aquent with a score or more of the ither's."

"Well, that'll do for now, at any rate!" said Monk.

"We'll make a good show between us—eh?"

"Rather!" said Lane.

"Sure!"

"We will, whatever."

"Splendid!"

"Ay, it'll be a grand necht!"

"Mind, not a word to the Wallabies!" said Monk as he opened the door.

"Not a syllable!" echoed Lane passing out.

"No, it will be better to preserve silence," agreed Carboy.

And so Frank Monk & Co. passed out, satisfied that they had robbed the Wallabies of the services of the Triple Alliance, as well as gaining the advantages of those services for themselves.

Monk and his chums would, indeed, have been surprised had they heard the conversation which took place in Study No. 10 after they had departed.

CHAPTER 6.

Practising!

"OH, and it's the grandest joke that ever was!" chuckled Donald.

"Haw, haw, haw!" chuckled Taffy. "There's never been anything like it before, whatever!"

"Sure, and by faith, it's ticklin' me it is! Ha, ha, ha!"

Then for a few minutes the Triple Alliance abandoned itself to the wildest mirth.

From side to side of their study they staggered, their bodies and limbs suffering indescribable contortion from the vehemence of their laughter.

"Oh, mon, but it's grand!" gurgled Donald presently.

"To think that Gordon Gay—"

"That Gordon Gay had only—"

"Sure that's just the point—to think—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To think that Gordon Gay," resumed Donald, getting the lead again, "should only just that verra minute have gone, after giving us parts in his play, the nature of which is to be kept a secret from Monkey & Co."

"Sure, while Monk & Co. are keepin' a secret from the Wallabies, the very same Wallabies are keeping a secret from Monk & Co., and, sure, too, it is we are keeping a secret from the two of them."

"We'll have all the triumph, whatever, because we shall be in both their shows, and neither will expect that we're goin' to be in the other!"

"It's verra grand, mon! An' to think there'll be some Scotch songs for the necht!"

"They'd be nowhere without the Welsh songs, whatever!"

"Sure, ye loonies, neither of ye will be listened to when the audience discover that they're to have some ballads from the Isle of Erin! Which reminds me, too, I must sing 'Come back to Erin,' as well as those already in the programme. That'll go—"

"Ay, and I must gie 'em 'D'ye ken John Peel?' That's a braw song, and always—"

"I have not put the half of mine down, whatever. I must make a list of a dozen more."

"I think I'll just practise a wee bit, laddie!"

"It's a good idea, whatever! I'll run over one of mine, too."

"Sure, an' I'll sing 'Come back to Erin'!"

It certainly was a good idea to practise—all three chums of Study 10 were agreed upon that. But whether it was a good idea that they should all practise together, each a different song, in the small space of their study, is another question—a question, as they afterwards were convinced, open to doubt.

Donald Donaldson got away first with a line of 'D'ye ken John Peel?'. Whilst he was still on that, Taffy let 'Cyweiried y Cerdor' have all that his voice and native talent could give it.

And at the same time Nicky smote his chest with his left hand, and in a fine rich brogue sang "A Sprig of Shillaleh."

Presently Donald found it difficult to keep to his own tune while Taffy was saying words that to him were so "verra much like swearin'." But, at the same time, Donald did not want to interfere with his chums, so he just pressed his hands hard over his ears, and raised his voice to its loudest.

Taffy observed him, and, realising real merit in the notion, did the same.

The two were now singing so loudly that Nicky could scarcely hear his own voice, so he, too, followed the example of the other two.

The Triple Alliance was now carried away with enthusiasm.

It forgot that sounds penetrate walls, run through corridors, and up and down stairs.

It forgot everything but its native songs.

Outside, at the other end of the corridor, Gordon Gay and his chums stood, their faces moulded in expressions of absolute amazement.

"Somebody's got an old cow in his study," said Wootton minor.

"A cow? A whole blessed herd couldn't make such a din," replied Jack Wootton. "Where the dickens is it coming from?"

"My only aunt! It seems to be in the air—everywhere!"

The door of Study No. 1 opened just then.

"What's the row, Gay?" yelled Monk.

But Gay could not hear the question.

"It sounds as if a live elephant had got into a sausage-machine!" grinned Harry.

"My hat! Here comes Lawson!"

"What's all this row?" roared Lawson.

Nobody heard what he said.

But, seeing his lips move, the juniors imagined what he was talking about, and shook their heads violently.

The passage was rapidly filling with fellows who came crowding up the staircases at both ends.

Lawson was red with wrath, and he beat the air with his cane, and glared eagerly up and down the corridor.

Suddenly a peculiar foot struck Lawson.

It was that all the doors along the passage were now open, save that of Study No. 2.

In a moment he sprang to the door.

A thrill went through the juniors who were looking on.

They saw Lawson stand as though struck dumb on the threshold of the newly-opened study, and the noise that came from it seemed to increase in awful mixture and volume as he watched.

"My hat, what can it be?" asked Gordon Gay, crowding along in the van of the crush to peep in.

He just reached the door before Lawson made his onslaught.

The Triple Alliance were standing with their backs to the door so that they had not seen it open.

And, of course, they could hear nothing.

"Oh, my hat!" chuckled Gordon Gay.

"They've gone mad!" grinned Harry Wootton.

"An extraordinary performance!" observed Carboy.

"Enough to make a cat laugh!" put in Monk.

Lawson, recovering from the shock which the unusual spectacle gave him, sprang forward.

Swish!

Swish!

Swish!

"Och! Aw! Garooch!" exclaimed Donald, releasing his ears to take hold of another part of his body, as he leapt into the air.

"Ow—aw—ugh!" cried Taffy, suddenly pulling up in the midst of his song.

"Faith! Sure—oo-oo-oh!" roared Nicky, sitting suddenly on the floor, in a mechanical effort to prevent further outs with the cane.

"You young rascals!" exclaimed Lawson. "Take that—that—and that!"

"Och!"

"Oh!"

"Ow—oo!"

"And now do a hundred lines apiece!"

With that the captain of Rylecombe Grammar School departed, and, fearful of increasing his wrath, the rest of the juniors disappeared into their studies.

"Mon, but I was gettin' on grand!" muttered Donald ruefully, rubbing the places where the cane had struck him.

"Lawson's got no ear for music, whatever," groaned Taffy.

"Sure, mine was one of the finest songs he could wish to hear!" said Nicky, getting up from the floor very gingerly.

"I don't think we'll practise any mair the noo!" said Donald Donaldson gravely.

And the other two nodded assent.

CHAPTER 7.

A Fearsome Apparition.

IF the enthusiasm of those taking part in the coming entertainment at Wayland Hall could make for the success of the performance, then the promoters were indeed lucky.

Gordon Gay quickly wrote in the dialogue around the skeleton he had outlined, and with which the reader is acquainted.

In the gym, every evening after tea, the company spent a couple of hours rehearsing, and rehearsing Gordon Gay's own play under Gordon Gay was a serious business.

His company supported him well, and the progress they made did all the members credit.

The Triple Alliance, preserving the secret that they were working for Monk & Co. as well, entered as enthusiastically as the rest into their work connected with "The Convict's Return," making capital parts out of the characters of 'Oppy, P.-c. Makepeace, and Mrs. Makepeace.

Their one difficulty was fitting in two distinct rehearsals, and on most occasions they hurried away from the gym, as soon as they had finished their parts, and scuttled to the fields to run over the business of the troupe with Monk & Co.

In short, all the members of the Wallabies, the Triple Alliance, and Monk & Co., had become suddenly so engrossed in work, the nature of which was more or less a mystery to many fellows outside the magic circles, that they pursued their various ways with thoughtful brows instead of "making things hum" with the pranks they usually played.

There was only one discordant note among the members of Gordon Gay's Company, and that was sounded by Carpenter & Co., and particularly by Snipe.

Carpenter, Larking, and Snipe, who comprised the "Co.," were dissatisfied with the parts they were allotted.

"A nice sort of part I've got," growled Snipe sullenly, as they returned from rehearsal the day before the performance. "Just walking on as a convict, and not a blessed word to say."

"I reckon this study has been badly treated," agreed Larking, an unprepossessing youth, "and we ought to take steps to get our own back."

"And we should if we had a decent leader," agreed Snipe.

"What's the matter with you, grouser?" asked Carpenter, the leader referred to. "They might have given me a better part; but you—what could you do?"

"Oh, shut up! You're no sort of leader at all. Ow!"

Carpenter, capable of spiteful action when roused, took Snipe's wrist and twisted it behind him.

"You'll break my arm. Oh! Ow!"

"Shut up, then!"

"All right! I only meant—"

"You worm!"

With these words flung contemptuously after him, Snipe went out of the study, which they had reached and entered during the conversation.

He wandered along the passage, and, coming to Study No. 13, the door of which was slightly ajar, he paused and listened.

No sound reached his ear; he cautiously entered.

He had no precise idea of what he wanted to do, except it was to play off some mean trick upon the Wallabies because he had not got a good part in "The Convict's Return."

The study was empty, but on the table lay something that arrested his attention.

It was the mechanical property snake which Gordon Gay had obtained through his father, and which had just a few moments before been used for rehearsal in the gym.

It was one of the most gruesome-looking things that could possibly be imagined, having green glass eyes, which were lighted by small electric lamps in the head. It moved by clockwork, the direction or action it would take being regulated by the position in which it was placed upon the floor.

"I'll wind the beastly thing up and let it loose!" growled Snipe. "And I hope it will frighten somebody—one of the masters, p'r'aps, and get 'em in a row."

He had seen Gordon Gay work the mechanism at rehearsal, and knew quite well how it was done.

"They'll never know who did it!" he muttered, as he turned the key that tightened up the spring inside.

In a few moments he had it on the floor in such a position that when he let it go it would squirm through the doorway and wriggle along the passage.

He gave an evil chuckle as he saw it go, and hurriedly took himself off to watch from a safe distance.

The thing was a triumph of "property" craft, not so much because it resembled a snake, as because it produced altogether a terrifying and ugly appearance; just, in fact, what was wanted for the purpose of dragging a confession from the lips of the villainous nephew of the merchant in "The Convict's Return."

Along the floor crawled the snake, its green eyes glowering in the semi-darkness of the passage.

Young Wilkins of the Third, with two of his chums, Gray and Allan, were the first to see it.

"Wha-what's that?" gasped Gray, clutching Allan's arm.

"Which—what?"

"Th-th-th-ugh—loo-oo-ok!"

"My hat! It's a zebra!" cried Wilkins, who really meant cobra.

And as the three—who had not been permitted to attend any of the rehearsals—saw the thing approaching, they turned and fled, yelling as they went.

At the head of the staircase Wilkins collided with Herr Stroompaul, the new German master, who had recently arrived at Rylcombe Grammar School.

"Ach! Vhat you poys not look before you haf gone?" panted Herr Stroompaul, whose obesity made climbing upstairs tiring work for him.

"Look, sir!" yelled Wilkins and his chums.

And without waiting, the three youngsters fled headlong down the stairs.

"Where should I look? I shall bunish you poys! You make hilarious of me!"

Because Herr Stroompaul had not looked in the right direction he had seen nothing to cause the excitement under which the Third-Formers were labouring, and consequently he supposed they were joking with him.

But the snake had come nearer, and now suddenly bumped against Herr Stroompaul's foot, where for the moment it became lodged.

"Ach! Himmel!" gasped the German master, leaping suddenly back against the wall, his face changing its expression from anger to alarm.

He paused for a moment, and then he fled in the direction from which the snake had come.

But when he had sprung away from it, he had turned the snake's head with his foot, so that now the thing came after him.

"Ach! Hi! Himmel! Here is a what-you-call—ach!—a what-you-call—"

Herr Stroompaul's English failed him.

Bellowing in a loud, guttural voice, he dashed along the corridor.

Tadpole, coming in the opposite direction, stood amazed at the extraordinary sight.

"Sir, what is—"

"Himmel! A what-you-call!" cried the master, and being unable to pass Taddy in the passage, he bumped into him, and sent him sprawling, dashing on himself towards the staircase at the other end, and disappearing down it with a speed that, for one so portly, was nothing short of miraculous.

"This is extremely reprehensible for a master," muttered Taddy, as he picked himself up.

Then his eye fell upon the cause of the trouble.

"My hat! It's that beastly snake!"

Crawling on his hands and knees, Tadpole grasped it firmly in his hands, and hurried with it into Study No. 15 before anyone should be attracted to the scene.

Gordon Gay and Frank Wootton, however, came dashing up just in time to see what was afoot, and entering the study, locked the door.

"Who has let that out?" asked Gordon Gay.

"Really I don't know, Gay. I have only just found it. But it appears to have terrified Herr Stroompaul very considerably."

"Let's put it away before there is any inquiry," said Gordon Gay, letting the snake's spring down, and placing it in the box.

"We shall get impots. for this," observed Wootton.

"Herr Stroompaul doesn't know it's ours."

"No, that's true, and after seeing it at the Hall to-morrow he'll not feel inclined to shout about running away from a mechanical toy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's really very true, and very well reasoned out," said Tadpole, opening his huge sketchbook and beginning to work.

"Look here!" suddenly ejaculated Wootton. "What did Snipe want when he came in here a few minutes ago?"

"Snipe!"

"Snipe! Has he been in here?"

"Then neither of you were here when he came?"

"No!"

"I wasn't!"

"Then, sure enough, he let the snake out. I was down the other end of the corridor, and I saw him come in. I didn't take any notice because I thought you fellows were here."

"The rotter!" said Gordon Gay, an expression of contempt upon his handsome, sunny face.

"He's a cad! This might have got us into fearful trouble, Gay!"

"You're right, Taddy! But we'll pay him out for it, my sons. There's a way we can punish him well, and make him look an ass in public without telling him in so many words why we are doing it."

"How?"

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

For The
Empire Library

Next Week: "THE NEW MASTER."

"What's the wheeze?"

"In the convict scene to-morrow night, when Nicky is shaving the convicts, we'll have Snipe lathered a bit extra. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Splendid!"

"I'll go along and see Nicky about it now."

"Right-ho!"

CHAPTER 8.

A Brilliant Success.

ON Wednesday evening, at five o'clock exactly, Gordon Gay and his company left Rylcombe Grammar School, armed with special permission from the Head to be out until eleven.

The entertainment did not begin until seven o'clock, but it was necessary that the boy actors should arrive early, in order to give final touches to the scenery, much of which had been delivered, free of all cost, by Gordon Gay's father, who was a famous actor.

They reached the Hall without adventure, and set to work, a particular part of which was to run hurriedly through the play so as to accustom the members of the company to the stage, and their positions, entrances, and exits upon it.

When Gordon Gay had finished with Tadpole for this purpose, the latter busied himself with paint and brush, touching up the scenery where it had become damaged in transit.

They had been at work for about half an hour when the stage door rattled, and, before a final push from somebody outside, opened.

"I wonder who that is?" said Gordon Gay.

The next moment the Wallabies ejaculated in a breath:

"Monk & Co.!"

"Hallo, kids!" exclaimed Frank Monk genially.

"You can't come in here, my son!" said Gordon Gay, who was now engaged in dressing himself up as a City clerk.

"Of course you can't, Monkey!" agreed Taddy, placing a huge blot of paint on the canvas.

"How so, my sons?" asked Monkey, climbing up on to the stage.

"It's ridiculous!" said Jack Wootton, who was rapidly turning himself into Blottovski, the villainous nephew of the Russian merchant.

"The audience should enter by the other doors, and not by the stage door," said Taddy.

"And the other doors won't be open for another hour, so you asses had better travel," added Gordon Gay.

Monk, ignoring this, addressed himself to the Triple Alliance, who were assisting in arranging the furniture upon the stage.

They had purposely refrained from getting on with their make-ups, because of the part they had to play with Monk & Co. first.

"Come on, Taffy, Nicky, and you, Donald. We thought we'd lost you!"

Gordon Gay looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"What's the wheeze, Monkey?" he asked quickly.

"We're giving the first show to-night," replied Monk, whilst Carboy and Lane stood by grinning.

"Ass! You evidently haven't seen the programme," answered Gordon Gay, producing a copy, which announced that Gordon Gay & Co. were giving a play, entitled "The Convict's Return."

"We haven't seen yours, it's true," agreed Monk.

"And you haven't seen ours," put in Lane.

"Here it is, Gordon Gay," added Carboy, pulling one out of his pocket.

"You rotters!" exclaimed Gordon Gay and Jack Wootton in a breath, as they looked at Monk's programme, and saw that their own entertainment was to be preceded by the minstrels' show.

"And you, Donald, Taffy—"

"And Nicky, in it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monk & Co.

"Didn't it ever occur to you to wonder what was going to happen in the first hour?" grinned Monk.

Gordon Gay was a splendid loser.

"Candidly it didn't, ass! Or if it did, I must have thought some local celebrities were going to make speeches."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a grand joke!" observed Donald.

"The best whatever," agreed Taffy.

"Sure, it tickles me!" yelled Nicky.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monk & Co. roared. Gordon Gay & Co. grinned.

"Well, you kids," observed Gordon Gay seriously, "I hope you're going to do something good, for, from the moment we're all on this platform, it's no longer a private matter between us, but—"

"But a matter of the honour and credit of the good old Grammar School at Rylcombe," added Monk.

A POPULAR FEATURE!

"THE EMPIRE LIBRARY" forms a link between all readers who owe kinship to the Mother Country, by means of the—

WORLD-WIDE POSTCARD EXCHANGE.

All desiring to exchange postcards should fill in the form below and address:

EDITOR, "EMPIRE LIBRARY,"

23-29, Bouverie Street,
London, England.

Name

Address

Desires to exchange postcards with a reader in

(ONLY ONE TOWN OR PLACE SHOULD BE WRITTEN HERE. See Footnote.)

Please write very clearly.

A further list of those desiring to correspond will be published in next Wednesday's issue of "THE EMPIRE LIBRARY."

4th List.

NAME.	ADDRESS.	COUNTRY OF EXCHANGE.
S. Penney ...	...120, Thornbury Drive, Thornbury, Bradford, England ...	... .. France.
W. J. Summerfield	...68, Werburgh Street, Derby, England ...	... .. Australia.
H. Angus ...	...153, Major Road, Stratford, England ...	... .. Quebec, Canada.
G. Crane ...	...123, Angel Road, Edmonton, London, N., England ...	... .. India.
B. F. Sewell ...	...40, Hamilton Street, Leicester, England...	... .. America.
J. W. Fish ...	...24, Waterworks Street, Gainsborough, England ...	... .. S. England.
P. Hughs ...	...34A, James Street, Weston-super-Mare, England ...	... .. Canada.
R. J. Barnes...	...1, Ashdale Terrace, London Road, Sittingbourne, Kent, England ...	... .. Australia.
Miss I. Miller	...Millhall Cottages, nr. Stirling, Scotland ...	... .. Cumberland.
J. Grainger ...	...9, Sixhills Street, Great Grimsby, England ...	... .. British South Africa.
A. M. Jagget	...31, Belvoir Street, Prince Avenue, Hull, England ...	... .. Queensland.
H. Groom ...	...9, Gill Street, Hanley, Staffs, England ...	... .. America.
E. C. Watson	...Post Office, Addleston, Surrey, England ...	... .. Africa.
Miss E. Prance	...12, Porteus Road, Maida Vale, London, England ...	... .. Godalming, England.
M. McKay ...	...141, Corporation Road, Worthington, Cumberland, England ...	... .. Germany.
C. T. Pocock	...46, Hartington Road, Southall, Middlesex, England ...	... .. Australia.
L. Nordmam	...Ellison Road, Dunston-on-Tyne, England ...	... .. Australia.
Miss A. Keenan	...87, Scotland Street, Belfast, Ireland ...	... .. Australia.
J. Robson ...	...72, Southwick Road, Sunderland, England ...	... .. Australia.
Miss G. Denson	...Elm Croft, Wilmslow, Cheshire, England ...	... .. Australia.
J. Gold ...	...Red Lion, 196-7, St. George's Street, St. George's, London, E., England ...	... .. Paris.
W. Turner ...	...35, Oxford Grove, Bolton, Lancs, England ...	... .. Australia.
W. W. Mann...	...2, Seaforth Buildings, Inverness, Scotland ...	... .. Malta.
Private T. F. Greenstock...	...Officers' Mess, 1st Somerset Light Infantry, The Verne, Portland, Dorset, England ...	... .. France.
Miss M. Gainer	...44, Burton Street, Cheltenham, England ...	... .. Canada.
H. H. N. Dennett	...25, Wood Street, Swindon, Wilts, England ...	... .. Jamaica.
Miss I. G. Briggs	...Unicorn, Huddersfield, Yorks, England ...	... .. Japan.
Miss E. Fletcher	...3, Colville Terrace, Colville Street, Nottingham, England ...	... .. Australia.
A. Dent ...	...162, Welholme Road, Grimsby, Lincs, England ...	... .. India.
E. R. Yendall	...34, Winchester Street, Priory, Taunton, Somerset, England ...	... .. Australia.
J. J. May ...	...13, Halstead Street, Newport, Mon, England ...	... .. Australia.

N.B.—Readers desiring to exchange postcards with readers resident in different places must fill in separate coupons.

"Hear, hear!"

The hall echoed with that "Hear, hear!" And from that moment each party made its preparations without interfering with the other, and it might be added that neither was too busy to assist the other in the common cause whenever necessity arose.

And so the work proceeded until the audience began to arrive, and at last Monk & Co. and the Triple Alliance took their seats in a half-circle, and the curtain went up.

The hall was half filled with fellows from the Grammar School, and the Doctor had found it possible to attend with some of the House-masters, among the latter being Herr Stroompaul.

Monk & Co. received a royal welcome from their school-fellows, who intended that if applause could make the Grammar School effort a success, then a success it should be forthwith.

Miss Phil and Miss Vera watched the minstrel entertainment from the wings, and their faces beamed with satisfaction as the different items found favour with the audience.

The concertina was a bit rocky, but if at times it was a little recalcitrant in the matter of tune, Carboy kept the fact from the audience by skilfully applying the loud pedal to the piano on every such occasion.

The members of Monk & Co.'s troupe, indeed, had every reason to be proud of themselves when their entertainment was over, and the Wallabies knew they had to make their play run very smoothly if they were to score in point of quality of production.

"The Convict's Return," opening in Venovski's office, went with a run from the commencement, Gordon Gay enlisting the sympathy of the audience in his rendering of the part of Guy Mannering, the wrongly-accused clerk, whilst Jack Wootton played the villain so well that he was roundly hissed in the court scene, where he gave evidence against his father's employee. The court scene was not very long, the barristers—nominal parts filled by juniors of the Fourth—pretending their work was practically all done when the curtain went up.

But it was the gaol scene that took the house by storm. Nicky O'Donnell, as 'Oppy, the barber convict, brought the house down when, bearing Gordon Gay's instructions in

mind, he shaved Snipe, who, in convict garb, was held in a chair by Larking and another junior acting as warders.

"Bah—boof!" spluttered Snipe. "You're put—putting the beastly stuff in my mouth!"

"An' to be sure," answered Nicky, "it's in your mouth all the 'air' goes!"

There were roars of laughter as Nicky daubed the lather on Snipe's face, up his nose, in his mouth and ears, round his neck, all over his head, and down his collar.

The more Snipe struggled and grumbled, the more the audience roared, because they thought it was part of the play.

At last Snipe, losing his temper, began to kick violently.

"Sure, men, take him away and put him in the padded-room!" said Nicky.

And accordingly Snipe was bundled off the stage, and held down on the floor in the dressing-room until he recovered his temper sufficiently to be allowed to go free.

From that moment the play was an assured triumph, and everything went splendidly right to the end.

One uncommon incident, however, must be recorded.

It took place when the snake appeared to terrify the villain in his lodgings.

Herr Stroompaul suddenly leapt to his feet, and muttered something, which even Dr. Monk, who was a German scholar, was unable to understand.

With an effort, however, Herr Stroompaul sat down again, and what resolves for vengeance he made against Gordon Gay & Co., whom he now knew to possess the "what-you-call," only he himself knew or cared just then.

For shortly afterwards a splendid evening closed for Gordon Gay & Co. and Monk & Co., with the congratulations of the Head and many celebrities among the audience.

And Gordon Gay's cup of joy was full when Miss Phil and Miss Vera told him that "The Convict's Return" was the best play they had seen for years.

"I am very glad you liked it," returned Gordon Gay. "But it wouldn't have been half the success it has been without you two ladies in it, nor without the great help Taddy and the rest have given me."

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"THE NEW MASTER."

Another splendid tale of

GORDON GAY & CO.

By Prosper Howard.

Order in advance!

Price One Halfpenny.

Specially written for "The Empire Library."



A Thrilling Tale of London's
Lights and Shadows.
By LAURENCE MILLER.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS SPECIALLY RE-WRITTEN.

Dick Hardy, an ex-messenger boy, is wandering the streets of London, homeless and workless, when he attracts the attention of a distinguished-looking stranger, whose name, he learns, is Morton Steele, by his promptness and pluck in stopping a runaway motor-car.

Steele employs Dick on certain strange but well-paid errands, and the lad's fortunes improve until he is able to live in a small room in a little coffee-house in Holborn kept by a certain Sam Webb. Sam is a simple-minded fellow, with a great horror of being mixed up in any sort of scandal, and he views the late hours that Dick Hardy keeps in the service of Morton Steele with disapproval and dismay.

(Now go on with the story.)

Blimber's Bluff!

Sam Webb settled in his own mind that "this 'ere Morton Steele was a fishy card, and the sooner young Dick Hardy dropped him, and found a reg'lar, decent job, the better! If he didn't, than he'd have to go and look for lodgings somewhere else, that's all. He wasn't going to have any boy about his place who went out at night, and got up to games, not he!"

And these things smouldered in the breast of Sam Webb. It was about ten o'clock when Dick, who had taken a long walk round, thinking over his perplexities, arrived back at Red Lion Street. The coffee-shop was shut, for they did not serve late suppers there, and closed early.

But this did not trouble Dick, for there was a private door, and Nell, who had perfect faith in the boy, had provided him with a spare latchkey.

Dick let himself in, and passed quietly up to his room. Neither Sam Webb nor Nell were visible, so he supposed that both had retired for the night. Sam and his wife—a lady who passed all her waking hours cooking in the basement—had a room over the shop where they slept. Nell's room was on the upper floor, just under Dick's modest attic.

The doors of both these rooms were shut, Dick noticed as he passed, and he took it for granted that the inmates were sound asleep.

Dick was rather relieved at this. He did not want to encounter Sam Webb, the respectable, and have to explain that he had only just come in, and was going out again to keep a midnight appointment of a dark and mysterious nature!

Sam would probably make trouble about it, and Dick did not want any trouble with his landlord. It would cause delay, and he had very little time to spare.

He had had the forethought to drop in at a late ham-and-beef shop on his way home, and get some substantial sandwiches. These he ate as he prepared for his coming expedition. Strangely enough, considering his rebellious vows of an hour ago, he carried out Morton Steele's instructions with scrupulous exactness.

His face was certainly grimy. A glance at the small looking-glass convinced him of that, and he left it so—a sore trial to him, for he loved soap and water.

He put on the shabbiest clothes he could rout out of his small stock, and a tattered cap that happened to be lying at the bottom of his box. A scarf he did not possess. He

had never worn one, but he knotted a red-and-black check cotton handkerchief around his neck, in place of the neat collar and tie he delighted in, and then his "make-up" was complete, so far as he could manage it.

In fact, it was rather more complete than he liked. He shuddered as he took a second glance at the mirror, and saw the change in his appearance; then hastily put on his overcoat, and turned the collar up.

By then it was time to think of making a start. He turned out the gas, opened his door quietly, and crept to the head of the stairs. Before he had descended a single step, a door in the passage below—the door of the parlour at the back of the shop—was partly opened, and he caught the sound of voices.

One voice was Sam Webb's. The other brought with it a thrill of unpleasant recollection, though he could not for the moment recall where he had heard it before.

Then it came to him in a flash. It was Blimber, his uncle's so-called "assistant," the shady-looking fellow who had helped in the attempt to detain him that morning at the house in Johnson's Court!

So they had found out his retreat! But what had brought the fellow here at this time of night?

He was not left long in doubt.

It was difficult to catch Sam Webb's exact words, but Blimber's louder voice was more distinct. Dick heard him say:

"Well, we have had a lot of trouble to trace the young vagabond, and we only found out this evenin' that he was living here, and I came at once, intending to take him back to his uncle by force, if necessary."

"Oh, did you?" muttered Dick, between his teeth. "I'd like to see you try it!"

"But I can't wait any longer," continued Blimber. "Has he been out as late as this before?"

"Out till after midnight first day he came here!" Dick heard Sam Webb say.

"Oh, that's just what Mr. Markell feared!" said Blimber. "The boy has been a great source of anxiety to his uncle, who is also his legal guardian. A wild lad, and none too honest. No doubt he has got into bad company since he ran away from his proper home."

"I'd have been in worse company if I'd stayed there!" muttered the listening boy.

"I may tell you," resumed Blimber, who seemed to be standing just inside the parlour doorway, as if about to come out—"I may tell you I am a lawyer, Mr. Markell's legal adviser, and I ought to warn you that, in harbouring this boy here, you are running a grave risk. It is actionable, Mr. Webb, although you may not be aware of the fact."

"I'm sure I don't want to keep him here!" said Sam Webb, in a tone of alarm. "I'd be glad to get rid of him! I'm a respectable man—a public character, as I may say, and—"

"Well, as I was saying, I cannot wait any longer here," interrupted Blimber. "But when the boy does come in, I authorise you, as Mr. Markell's legal representative, to detain him, by force if necessary, and to communicate at once with me."

"I will—I will!" declared Sam Webb, evidently immensely scared by the "lawyer's" warning.

Dick could not help smiling, in spite of his awkward fix.

THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 8.

The idea of fat little Sam Webb detaining him by force rather tickled him.

"I should advise you to do so, for your own sake," said Blimber impressively. "And I will now bid you good-night, Mr. Webb."

"Thank goodness the beast is going!" muttered Dick. "I shall be hard put to get to Stamford Street in time, as it is!"

But the worthy Blimber did not go just yet. Dick drew back out of sight, as he heard the pair of them step into the passage. Then Blimber seemed to stop, and suddenly exclaimed:

"By the way, you have a private entrance here. How do I know that the boy has not already come in, and is now in his room upstairs?"

"I—I don't think so," faltered Sam Webb. "I'm sure he is still out."

"After all my trouble I will ascertain that before I go!" said Blimber. And Dick heard him mounting the stairs.

The boy drew farther back upon the landing, biting his lip in bitter vexation. He was in a maddening fix. He would get away somehow. He vowed that Blimber should never drag him back. But they would try to detain him, and the delay—the delay!

He would be too late for Stamford Street, and—and Morton Steele would think he was afraid to come!

A Near Thing

Dick had no intention of being caught upon the staircase in the undignified position of an eavesdropper. He meant to carry off this affair with a bold front. It would be the best course with a man like Blimber.

He went back into his room quietly and relit the gas. Then he closed the door gently and waited.

In a moment or two the door was thrown open, and Blimber appeared with Sam Webb behind him; the latter puffing with the exertion of mounting the stairs, and looking extremely scared.

"Ha!" ejaculated Blimber, with a grin; "so I was not mistaken. Our young friend is here."

"Yes, I am here. What do you want?" said Dick, staring him squarely in the eyes.

Blimber grinned again without speaking, standing so that his squat, bulky figure filled the doorway.

He had evidently dressed for his part as a lawyer to impress Sam Webb, for he was wearing a seedy frockcoat and a top-hat that obviously owed its unnatural lustre to hair-oil. But the make-up was not quite a success, for in spite of it he looked just the same shifty type of waster in Dick's eyes—at least, as he had done when lounging in shirt and trousers in the dirty top room at Johnson's Court that day when he first encountered him.

"You see, our young friend is here," he repeated over his shoulder to Sam Webb, whose alarmed eyes and shiny bald head were just visible behind him.

"Must have just come in, then," said the coffee-shop-keeper. "See, he's still got his overcoat and cap on."

"On the contrary, I am just going out," said Dick coolly. "That's why I've got them on."

"Going out! Going out! A boy of your age, at this time of night. Not with my permission you won't!" exclaimed Sam Webb, making an effort to assert himself in the eyes of the "lawyer."

"I'm afraid I sha'n't trouble to ask it," was Dick's response. "I am your lodger, Mr. Webb, not your son or apprentice. My going or coming is no concern of yours as long as I pay my rent."

"Oh, isn't it!" blustered the little man, working himself up for a brave show of authority. "We'll see about that. I'm a respectable man, I am, and I'm not going to allow a boy of your age to go out at midnight getting up to games!"

"Sorry, because I'm going out all the same," observed Dick. "You won't!"

"Yes he will, Mr. Webb," said Blimber. "He is going out with me. I am about to take him back to his kind uncle and guardian. Will you kindly go and call a taxi-cab? There is a stand close by. I do not want to have to carry our young friend. And there is his box as well."

"You need not

trouble, Mr. Webb," said Dick. "If my kind uncle and guardian wants me, let him come and fetch me himself. As for this man, if he lays a finger on me he'll be sorry for it, that's all."

"Oblige me by fetching that cab, Mr. Webb," repeated Blimber. And the little man actually hurried off to obey him. Blimber's clumsy "bluff" had so impressed his simple mind.

There had been no great amount of noise over the affair so far, or Nell, whose room was the nearest, might have been awakened, and possibly have appeared upon the scene. In which case Dick would have had a valuable ally. For that shrewd girl was not likely to be deceived by the bogus lawyer for a single moment, and would probably have spiked his guns by threatening to send for a policeman.

Of course, Dick never dreamt of calling to her. He wouldn't have called for a girl's help if there had been fifty Blimbers all threatening him with death.

No; he'd fight it out alone.

Blimber said nothing after Sam Webb was gone. He contented himself with blocking the doorway and grinning evilly. He felt that the game was in his hands. And Dick was also silent, for he was thinking with lightning speed.

Already it was too late, he knew, to reach Stamford Street on foot, but the cab had put a bold idea into his head. It all depended upon adroitness and dash, with a bit of acting thrown in; but it was his only chance.

Sam Webb was not long gone. They heard him open the street-door again, and come puffing along the passage. Then Blimber, with a complete change of manner, said:

"Now, look here, I'm not going to have any rotten trouble over this. You'll come quietly, or I'll pick you up and carry you downstairs like a kid. And I'll put a pinch on your wind-pipe, too, if you start to howl out!"

He accompanied this threat with a glare which seemed more natural upon his coarse, brutal features than his former oily grin.

Dick knew that he meant it, and knew that he could do it, too; for although stumpy of build, he was broad-shouldered, and plainly possessed immense strength. In a struggle with him, Dick would stand no better chance than a child.

He had no intention of risking it; he had a better plan. Putting on an altered tone, as though he was beginning to get scared, he said:

"Look here, Mr. Blimber, if my uncle really sent for me, I'll go with you quietly if you'll promise not to touch me."

Blimber could hardly conceal a grin of triumph.

"Thought the bantam would climb down!" he muttered. Then to Dick: "All right. Only mind, if you try any dodges, I'll not only touch you, but I'll leave a mark where I touch, see? Now, come on, and look sharp. Old Webb can send the box on to-morrow."

He turned, and strutted out of the doorway to the head of the stairs.

Then was Dick's moment.

There was no chance of slipping past Blimber, for his broad figure completely filled the space between the banister and the wall. But Dick did not attempt that.

He waited until Blimber was upon the top stairs, with one foot lifted to step down; then he backed a pace or two, lowered his head, and charged him in the small of his back. The result was very effective. Blimber made a snatch at the banister-rail, missed it, and tobogganned his way downstairs in the form of a hoop.

Sam Webb was on his way up, and they encountered in the middle of the flight.

Blimber, of course, took Sam with him down to the mat at the bottom of the stairs, where they formed a complicated, writhing knot, in which Sam's bald head and Blimber's scabby black one were alternately uppermost.

Dick did not wait for them to sort out. He came down the stairs three at a stride, leapt over them, and had got outside the street-door, and shut it behind him before either had probably realised what had happened.

The taxi was waiting at the kerb. He jumped in, giving the order in the most manlike voice he could assume:

"Pratt's Commercial Hotel, south side Blackfriars Bridge, Sharp!"

(Another instalment next week.)

Next Wednesday!

No. 9

EMPIRE

LIBRARY

"THE NEW MASTER."

Some fun and some consternation follows the arrival at Rydcombe of a New Master, and while this new arrival has his little peculiarities he is voted by the chums a decent sort.

THE EDITOR.