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CROMWELL FROWNED DARKLY! "YOU REFUSE TO SPEAK? WELL, WE HAVE OTHER METHODS AT HAND TO USE IF NECESSARY!"

A Tense Moment in Our Grand New Serial, "The Sword of the Temples!"

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The Sword of the Temples

BY EDMUND BURTON ~

A TALE OF THE GREAT REBELLION

INTRODUCTION.

The story opens with the death of Sir John Temple, the old master of the Chase. Harry, his son, now becomes the new master. Walter Temple, his cousin, pays him a visit on the same night, and hears of a wonderful sword belonging to the Temples—a sword with a strange influence. It is supposed that when carried by any member of the family in battle it will guard him from hurt in the

fight, and seemingly make him invincible over his enemy. Walter has a great longing for the sword, and next morning vanishes suddenly, bearing it with him. A little later war is declared between the King and Parliament, and Harry Temple, with his friend Will Howard, join the Royalists' forces. Harry's troop are returning from an encounter with the Parliamentary troops

when young Temple sees Walter, with the stolen sword. He gives chase at once, and rides his cousin down on the outskirts of a wood. A fight ensues in a woodman's hut wherein Harry is unluckily wounded. Walter escapes, and joins his regiment with Cromwell. A little later King Charles visits the camp, and whilst he is there Harry Temple has occasion to save his life. (Now read on.)

A Starting Accusation!

WHEN Charles departed on his westward march the new bodyguard had been disbanded, its members remaining with Prince Rupert; but from that time until close upon the end of the year his Highness' followers saw little service of any great consequence, for the news of those large Parliamentary bodies to eastward proved to be unfounded, though there were, of course, almost ceaseless but undecided engagements in progress all over the country, and in Scotland, too, where the Presbyterians were showing unmistakable signs of throwing in their lot with the people. But to such men of dash and action as those under Rupert these things acted merely as appetisers to sharpen their desire for a bigger meal.

Since Harry had been struck down by his cousin on that memorable occasion in the woodman's hut neither he nor Will Howard had again set eyes on Walter Temple. Whither he went after his hurried flight from the scene of the encounter was something none could tell, but presumably he was still in the service of the enemy, and occupied elsewhere.

About this time there arose a new and brilliant star in the Parliamentary firmament. As Joan of Arc came seemingly from nowhere to stimulate the French soldiery, so did Oliver Cromwell emerge from the seclusion of his St. Ives farm and throw his invincible "Ironsides" into the scales against the Crown.

The coming of this seventeenth-century Napoleon did much to put the Parliamentary cause on a firmer footing, making its weight felt, as it did, from the very first. Drilled by such a strict disciplinarian, the Ironsides stood alone amongst the majority of their colleagues—who for the most part were little better than a huge armed mob—and soon proved their superiority over even the best picked of the Royalist cavalry.

A born fighter, though admittedly somewhat impetuous, Prince Rupert heard of Cromwell's entry into the field, and longed to try issues with him, a desire which was unanimously shared by his followers.

And, sooner than any of them expected, the opportunity came. Cromwell had gained a signal victory over a section of the Royalist forces, whom Rupert's Horse were hastening to support, and had driven them southwards with great losses. The King's cavalry met them as they retreated, and, rather encouraged by this promise of assistance, a firm stand was made, which for the time being

had the effect of staying the Ironsides' advance.

But Cromwell seemed to have prepared for all eventualities, for by a masterly encircling movement, of which the King's men guessed nothing until it was actually accomplished, he completely surrounded his opponents, and attacked them again with relentless vigour.

Unless that living ring could be broken nothing save absolute annihilation threatened the outwitted Royalists, and 'twas to Rupert's Horse that they looked to draw them out of the fire.

Nor were the latter found wanting when it came to making a final effort. Like a glittering wave of steel they swept across the intervening ground, crashing into the Ironside circle with such force that made even those stoic troopers give somewhat before the shock. But, quickly recovering themselves, Cromwell's men fought like veritable demons, gradually pressing back the Royalists, emptying saddles in twos and threes, until flesh and blood could stand no more of it.

"Hold fast, friends!" shouted Lovelace, whose face was streaming with blood from a deep gash in his cheek. "Remember for whom ye fight! God save the King!"

They were the last words he ever uttered, for a mighty stroke delivered by a huge Ironside tumbled him from his saddle to earth, where he was trampled beneath the hoofs of the combatants' horses.

Harry and Will, fighting knee to knee, strove like Trojans to help to turn the tide. But in Cromwell's troopers Rupert's followers had engaged a force of whose prowess they had hitherto understood little, though they had heard much. They had wished to come to grips with them, and that wish had been granted, but it had sped defeat for the hitherto invincible cavalry.

Scarcely half an hour later Harry and Will, bleeding from several painful but not serious hurts, were prisoners in Cromwell's hands, whilst Rupert's splendid Horse, for the time being broken and routed, were scattered to the four points of the compass.

"A day of deeds—for others, lad," said Howard gloomily, as he tightened the knot on a bandage round Harry's left wrist, which had received a glancing cut. "Methinks his Highness' sun is nigh its setting. Ah, well, 'tis but the fortune of war!"

"Ay, friend, but Fortune is a fickle dame!" was the cheerful reply. "We have been soundly trodden by good fighters, 'e'en though they be led by a farmer. So that is some consolation!"

A couple of Ironsides, who were watching

them closely, chuckled good-humouredly at Harry's remark.

"I faith, boy," said one, showing a set of glistening teeth, "that self-same farmer will do a good deal of hay-making before the harvest. I warrant you!"

The words were so pointed, and so full of grim humour, that both comrades could not help smiling. They seemed good enough fellows, these Roundhead riders, and so far were certainly not showing any ill-feeling towards those whom they had conquered.

As it turned out later, Harry and Will were the only prisoners who had not been taken without grievous injury. All the others were badly hurt—some, indeed, fatally so—and were quite incapable of looking after themselves. Yet the comrades almost wished they had been struck down in that terrific fight, rather than have faced the ordeal which they were presently obliged to go through.

A large tent had been erected some little distance off, and thither they were conducted after the lapse of about an hour or so. A group of officers were seated within, the central position being occupied by a sturdily-built man, whose rather plain face was relieved by a pair of keen, bright eyes and an expression which betrayed great strength of will—a man who looked as though once he had set his heart on any great achievement, nothing on earth could turn him back from either attaining it or proving such a feat impossible.

"My young fire-eater," whispered the trooper, who was walking on Harry's right as they passed inside, "I warn you to truthfully answer any questions Colonel Cromwell may put to you. He has a most unpleasant way with those who try to throw dust in his eyes!"

Harry made no reply, and next instant they were standing in front of the Ironsides' leader, giving him back look for look as he ran his keen eyes over them.

"These, you say, are the only two fit to move, Fairfax?" he asked presently.

"Ay, colonel! We dared not stir the others!"

"Quite right! There's no cause to have more blood on our hands than is absolutely necessary." Cromwell paused for a moment, drumming his fingers on the sword-hilt at his hip, and then stared straight at his captives. "Now, look ye here, sirs! Ye and your friends have fought well, and on that score I heartily compliment ye! 'Twas not your fault that your efforts failed. Nay,

"Twas but ill-luck, and mayhap, the somewhat poor generalship of a hare-brained leader."

Neither vouchsafed any reply, nor, indeed, did it seem as though Cromwell expected one just at that moment. Presently he continued, resting his elbows on his knees, and letting his chin sink into the palms of his hands:

"Now, I would put a proposition to ye, and it rests with yourselves whether ye accept it or not. 'Tis my firm belief that no man yet lives who counts not his liberty sweet, and that is the reward I would offer ye, in return for a small piece of information—that is, small to ye, but extremely valuable to us."

They were still silent, each standing there with tight-shut lips and unwavering eyes.

"This intelligence is of such importance to me that I am determined to obtain it at all costs!" continued Cromwell. "For the sake of our country—of our people—the tyrant Charles must be crushed! And, mark ye, we are going to win in this struggle! Sir Jacob Astley was lately working on many occasions hand-in-glove with Prince Rupert, and is reputed to have a large force of horse under his command. I wish to know the probable strength of that force, and their locality when ye last were with them."

Not a sound broke the stillness inside that tent as Cromwell waited for his answer. All eyes were fixed on the two erect figures in the centre, but no words came from either. Cromwell frowned darkly as he resumed:

"You refuse to speak? So! Well, we have other methods at hand, which I like not to make use of, but 'tis necessary, I fear! We must have this intelligence!"

He made a motion with his hand, and a man advanced, carrying several lengths of thin, stout cord and a couple of short, round sticks.

Harry looked, and then glanced towards Will, whose face had flushed with indignation. Then he had spoke for the first time since he had entered the tent, staring straight into the Ironside commander's eyes:

"Colonel Cromwell," he said quietly, "we are in your hands, to do with as you will, but I would remind you that we are not traitors! Prisoners taken in fair fight, I warrant, do not expect such treatment as you threaten from so excellent a soldier as you are reputed to be! We challenge you to do your worst, but we refuse to speak!"

A stir of expectancy ran through the assembly as Harry finished. The man with the cords advanced a couple of steps, but Cromwell waved him back sharply. The colonel's face had gone crimson.

"That is final, sirrah!"

"Quite!"

"Suppose I were to offer ye each, say, a captaincy in one of my best regiments, would that tempt ye?"

"I have already said we are not traitors!"

Cromwell's head sank again into his hands, and he remained silent for a minute or so, whilst his colleagues looked alternately from their leader to his captives. The colonel's clenched fist descended on his knee with a sharp smack.

"Od's fish!" he declared. "I fear I must either be getting tender-hearted, or that I'm as good a soldier as this stripling said I was! Beshrew me, if I can do it! Take those accursed things away out of my sight!"

He pointed to the cords dangling from the hands of the trooper, and the man retired into the background. Then he turned to his staff, with a grim smile playing about his lips.

"Ye see how a little straight speech affects Cromwell, who, being somewhat of a straight man himself, likes it well—even in his enemies," he said. "Take them away! We must seek elsewhere for our information—"

A sound of hurrying feet came from outside, and a figure appeared in the tent opening, stepping swiftly forward.

"Pray, stay a moment, colonel! These fellows are spies! I can prove it beyond all doubt!"

The familiar tones of the voice caused Harry and Will to swing round with a gasp of amazement, for the newcomer was none other than Walter Temple!

Singed, but Not Burned!

HAD the earth suddenly opened in the middle of that tent, the surprise it would have caused could scarcely have been greater. All eyes turned on Walter, who stood there coolly uttering an accusation which had no foundation whatsoever, save in his own vindictive mind. Harry and Will stared at him in outraged

amazement, whilst Cromwell, his face black as a thundercloud, had sprung to his feet, started for the time being out of his customary stolidity. Then, as though moved by some hidden mechanism, three or four of his staff quietly placed themselves across the entrance, effectually preventing anyone either entering or leaving.

"On my life, sirrah, you make a bold statement!" exclaimed the colonel, breaking the strained silence at last, "and, doubtless, you have your reasons for it! Pray, let me hear them!"

Ay, Walter had his reasons truly—and a fine piece of manufactured evidence with which to back them up also. When his sword had pierced Harry's body in the woodman's hut he had fondly imagined the only barrier which stood between him and the possession of Temple Chase removed for ever. For weeks past he had cherished and nursed the thought within him, until he almost saw himself as lord and master of the great pile and its broad acres.

After he had ridden from the scene of the encounter that memorable day, Walter scarce knew where to make for. He realised the utter futility of attempting to rejoin

in his prisoners, and truly the shock was a heavy one. But the great issues at stake demanded that Walter should keep his head, so he immediately put on his thinking-cap in order to discover some way of succeeding now in what he had failed before.

'Twas just as the captives were being led towards Cromwell's headquarters that the germ of an idea came into Walter's crafty brain, and scarce five minutes later he had the whole plot cut and dried.

Harry had drawn off his riding-glove, in order to let Will bandage his forearm, dropping it carelessly on the ground, and when Cromwell's summons came, the glove was quite overlooked. It lay there where it had fallen, until it attracted the attention of Walter, who left the place whence he had watched them, himself unnoticed, and picked it up. A couple of minutes later he was mightily busy in his own quarters, and then, swiftly hurrying towards Cromwell's tent, he passed inside, delivering his daring accusation, the startling effect of which we already know.

"Your evidence, sirrah!" said Cromwell again, in even sharper tones, as Walter hesitated slightly ere replying.



With a sudden agile movement Walter sprang sideways over the low sill, just avoiding Harry's blade. "Almost, but not quite, coz!" cried Walter mockingly.

Essex's forces, which might lie leagues off in any direction. Moreover, he had not the slightest idea of the locality in which he now found himself. The countryside was wild and quite unfamiliar, but by keeping as straight a course ahead as possible, he would, doubtless, eventually arrive at some town or village where he could take his bearings. Yet, on the other hand, he might also very easily blunder into the thick of some of the Royalist soldiery, which, of a surety, would be anything but a satisfactory finish to his day's work.

Whilst in a state of uncertainty as to what plan he should adopt, he suddenly discovered that his eyelids were growing uncomfortably heavy, and that he kept swaying wearily in the saddle, despite his utmost efforts to rouse himself. Then, realising that Nature would brook no refusal, he slid to the ground, threw himself down in the long grass, and slept like one dead.

'Twas some hours later that a party of Roundhead scouts found him, woke him up, and conducted him to a small village some miles farther on, where the rest of the troop of Cromwell's Ironsides were quartered.

Shortly after the rout of the Royalist Horse, he had seen Harry and Will brought

"Is ample, colonel! Pray examine this!"

He held out the glove, which Cromwell turned curiously over in his hands. Suddenly he started slightly, stared closely at the lacing along the back, and presently began to probe at the stitches with the point of a thin-bladed knife. Next moment something white and rustling showed between his fingers, and his frown grew even blacker than before as he gazed upon it.

"On my soul!" he cried presently. "Here are details of our numbers, as near as may be, and our present position to the half-mile! Sharp work, sirrahs! Methinks somewhat too sharp for your health! How long were these fellows out of your sight?" he added to the guard who had conducted the comrades in.

"Scarce a quarter of an hour, colonel—shortly before you sent for them."

"Then 'twas quarter of an hour too long!" snapped Cromwell. "I know not how they accomplished it in the time, but here is sufficient evidence to hang a score of such knaves! Take them away!"

"One moment, colonel, I pray you!" cried Harry, finding his voice at last. "That man lies, and I can tell you why. I am his

consin, and stand between him and something which he covets much, but which is mine by right of birth. There is the motive for this foul conspiracy, of which we have been made the victims!"

Walter gave a sarcastic laugh, which Cromwell instantly checked.

"This is no subject for mirth, sirrah! I am obliged to you for your assistance, but I like you not overmuch. Methinks you are too pleased with yourself to please me!"

Walter coloured up.

"Colonel, I swear—"

"Nay, do not swear—'tis ungodly! Rather keep a still tongue in your head, and allow me to deal with this matter personally!"

He was silent for a space, whilst Harry and Will waited as patiently as they could, well knowing that their fate was trembling in the balance.

Suddenly a wild commotion arose without—a thunderous drumming of hoofs, and a pandemonium of voices. Cromwell looked up with a start, as a breathless trooper burst unceremoniously into the tent, pushing through the crowd of officers gathered at the door, as though quite ignorant of their rank.

"Tis Astley, colonel, approaching from the west in great force! He is almost upon us!"

With a muttered malediction, Cromwell left the tent, followed by his staff. Walter also vanished, and only the two troopers remained to guard the prisoners. It seemed as though the sudden coming of Sir Jacob Astley had driven all else into the background; yet 'twas not so surprising, considering how very anxious Cromwell had been to know the strength and position of the old cavalier's forces. 'Twas quite evident that the thoughts of this had been causing him no little uneasiness.

Will Howard stole a look at Harry; then, as though felled by a sledgehammer, one of the Roundhead guard crashed to earth beneath a mighty blow from the big fellow's fist, which took him full in the teeth. The other spun sideways, and made a swift lunge at Will's chest; but heavy though he was, Howard was as agile as a mountain goat. He stepped aside, seized the inside's wrist in a grip of steel, and tore the weapon from his fingers. Then once more his knuckles crashed home, and the second trooper sprawled across his inert comrade.

"More deeds, Master Harry!" Will chuckled, wiping his bleeding hand on his coat. "Now, lad—this way! 'Tis the wisest course out, though I fear me 'twill damage Noll Cromwell's property somewhat!"

With a slash of the captured sword, he ripped the tough canvas wall from top to bottom. As they passed through the gap a clashing din behind them told that the two forces had engaged each other, but how the fight went neither knew until some time afterwards, when they learned that once again Cromwell's men had proved their sterling qualities, and had defeated Sir Jacob Astley's forces with considerable loss.

But for the present neither Harry nor Will needed anything so much as to get as far as possible from the Roundhead position. Recapture might mean death, for 'twas very doubtful if Cromwell would credit Harry's statement, and the presence of that damning paper in his glove would take a deal of explaining.

How Harry and Will Returned to Temple Chase!

THAT memorable winter of 1642 had been a mild one enough so far, as compared with others which had gone before. True, Scotland and the northern counties lay buried beneath a heavy mantle of white, but up to this the English Midlands had not surrendered to the chilly grip of Jack Frost.

But now, as the two fugitives rapidly drew away from the conflict which was still raging in the rear, a sudden darkness crept across the sky, whilst the low, moaning sigh of the rising wind supplied ample evidence that a change in the weather was about to take place. Heavy banks of sombre cloud rolled upwards from the horizon, and Will glanced round him somewhat anxiously.

"'Twill be a smother when it comes, Master Harry," he remarked, "and, as ill-luck would have it, there's not enough shelter here to cover a field-mouse. Hast any notion where we are?"

Harry looked round in his turn, seeming rather puzzled.

"Nay, I cannot be sure," he answered presently. "Somehow, I seem to recollect having been here—long ago, I think, but—"

THE POPULAR—No. 87.

life! That pool yonder looks main familiar from this point. Dost not recognise it, Will?"

The fleecy white flakes commenced to fall thickly round them as Howard followed the direction of the lad's outstretched finger; then he uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Recognise it! Ay, that I do—now that you show it to me! Why, Master Harry, we are scarce ten miles from the Chase!"

"So I thought! Then, let's push on; for, unless my memory plays tricks with me, there is scant cover 'twixt here and there."

With heads bent low, for by this time the snowstorm had greatly increased in fury, and was beating directly in their faces, they forged blindly ahead. Almost half the distance was covered in this fashion, when Will noticed that Harry did not seem to be travelling quite so well as heretofore; so placing his strong arm about his young companion's shoulders, he succoured him as best he could under the circumstances. The big fellow possessed a rich bass voice, and by cheerfully singing a few snatches of his favourite songs he managed to keep the boy from noticing how long and trying the journey was proving itself to be.

Presently the outer belt of trees which bounded the Chase loomed through the whirling smother, and Will clutched Harry's arm more tightly.

"'Tis nearly the end, lad! Look yonder!"

They entered the wood, where progress was much easier, owing to the comparative shelter afforded by the thickly-planted trunks, and in some twenty minutes' time they were pounding lustily at the great oaken door of the mansion; but for a while there was no answer.

"A blight upon it!" grunted Howard. "A fine caretaker Master John Travers is proving himself to be. Ho, within there! Wouldst keep us till we—"

"Who is it?"

A thin, piping voice sounded through the massive panels, but at Will's reply it quickly changed to a shrill cackle of laughter.

"Ho, ho! Dost think I was born yesterday? Nay, nay, Master Roundhead, I open no door of Temple Chase to the King's enemies!"

Howard shook his fist savagely at the unoffending oak, whilst an amused smile crept into Harry's weary face.

"A blight upon your suspicions, Travers; but a compliment to your loyalty!" retorted the big fellow. "Dost not recognise my voice, or has the snow choked it for all time?"

There was no reply, though next instant an upper window was opened, and someone looked out. Then, evidently satisfied as to the true identity of his callers, the caretaker admitted them.

"I ask your pardon for the delay, Master Harry, but in these days 'twere best to be cautious. This house would make good sacking."

"Quite right, Travers!" replied the boy. "Friend Will, here, is somewhat impetuous to-day; but a good meal is sure to cure him of that."

Old Travers grinned as he refastened the bolts, and turned the key in the heavy lock.

"Ye shall both have one, master, within ten minutes from now, I have a good fire blazing in the servants' hall. The compliments of the season to ye!"

"Eh?"

"The comp— Why, surely ye know what day this is? Christmas Eve!"

They looked at each other, and both burst out laughing. In the rush and excitement of that stupendous struggle they had had little time to note the days passing, and save for the fact that 'twas the winter season, neither of them could have told the exact date had the question suddenly been put to them.

"The same to you, friend!" said Harry, at length, and then added gravely: "But I fear there will be few festivities in Merrie England this time. That meal, and a change of clothes, Travers, an' you love us!"

Dry clad, their hunger appeased, and their toes toasting before the great log fire, they soon realised how good it was to gain even a brief respite from the whirlwind struggle in which they had played so active a part for the past few weeks. Both were silent—Harry gazing round the familiar apartment, his eyes shining in the ruddy blaze as he noted each separate object, and conjured up memories of the time when, as a child, he used to run in and out of this selfsame hall, at once the pest and pride of the servants. Will sat staring moodily into the heart of the fire, his great head nodding every now and then.

"A strange Christmas, lad!" he said presently, giving one of the crackling logs a

kick which sent up a shower of sparks. "A time of peace and good will, with supposed Christian men tearing at each other's throats like—Hark you! Someone without!"

The long window of the servants' hall, which was on the ground floor, commanded a good view of the front of the mansion, and, softly undoing the stout shutters, Will looked out cautiously. A snow-covered horseman was rapping on the door with his sword-hilt, and Howard uttered a half-stifled exclamation, quickly withdrawing his head.

"'Tis somewhat dark, Master Harry; but I know his build. 'Tis your cousin!"

"Walter, again—"

"Hist, lad! Stay Travers before he admits him, and warn him not to breathe aught of our presence; then bid him show him in here."

The elderly caretaker was shuffling from the back of the house towards the door when Harry intercepted him; then they waited in suspense for what was to follow. Had Walter looked through the chink in the shutters, and seen them? Nay, if so, he would scarcely have knocked—

A clink of spurs on the stone-flagged passage without, a well-known voice calling down maledictions on the weather, and then the door of the apartment was pushed open. Walter advanced into the fire-light and uttered a gasp of consternation. Will Howard, who had been standing behind the door, thrust it to, and placed his broad back against it, laughing grimly.

"So, oh, Master Walter! The slippery fox is in the snare this time—eh?"

The other made no reply—indeed, he could not, for surprise had struck him dumb for the time being. Harry was standing at the far side of the table, his sword already drawn in his injured hand, and, pulling himself together, Walter drew his also. Knave though he undoubtedly was, it seemed as though he was no coward.

"Ye are two to one," he snarled, "but 'twill finally prove the powers of this blade. Have at ye both!"

"Nay, nay, Master Walter," laughed back the big fellow. "Will Howard was ever a lover of fair play, and he'll see that 'tis respected now. I wager Master Harry against you, blade to blade, at any time, and despite any legend. I pit him against you now. You agree, lad?"

Harry nodded, and advanced a couple of paces. Will held up his riding-glove.

"Then I shall be umpire," he said. "Ready? Engage!"

The glove dropped, and the weapons crossed in the flickering firelight.

Walter Temple's Strategy!

ROUND and round each other circled the cousins, closely watched by Will, who made no comment save to give a chuckle of satisfaction at some masterly parry on Harry's part—ay, and even when Walter cleverly extricated himself from a difficult position, the big fellow's true love of good swordsmanship drowned his natural dislike for the rascal, and constrained him to thus acknowledge his prowess also.

Howard kicked the dying fire into a blaze with his heel, and the flames flickered on the swift-moving ribbons of steel until they seemed almost endowed with life. Lunge and parry, parry and lunge, neither opponent for a time gave or gained any advantage; but though he showed nothing of it, the furious fight with Sir Jacob Astley's men, coupled with his long ride through the blinding snowstorm, had weakened Walter more than he properly knew, until his cousin's slashing attack forced him to put forth all his remaining energy to defend himself.

The mysterious weapon proved its worth on those previous occasions. But then Walter had surely been favoured by a certain amount of good fortune. Now, however, 'twas rather the reverse. Harry was fresh from a good meal and a rest. He was tired and saddle-sore, and—well, his faith in the rapier was not so strong and unswerving as to expect it to fight this battle to a successful issue without his guidance.

Ah! Harry almost got through his guard, but he turned the opposing steel aside in the nick of time. A return thrust on his own part was alike deftly parried, and Will gave another of his delighted chuckles.

"Marry!" he exclaimed. "You have a good blade in front of you, Master Harry! 'Twere well to be more watchful!"

As Howard spoke Walter Temple's eye caught a glimpse of the window, which had not been refastened, and a swift plan flashed into his crafty brain. Feigning to be forced back, he gave ground inch by inch, and

(Continued on page 8.)

OUR FIRST COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.



The Wiles of William Wibley!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of HARRY WHARTON & Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Clever Ruse!

"HOW are you going to wangle it, Wib?"

It was Bob Cherry of the Remove who asked the question. The Famous Five were seated at tea in Study No. 1, and Wibley, who was chiefly renowned for his clever impersonations, had dropped in to speak to them.

A football match had been arranged between the Greyfriars Remove and Courtfield Crusaders. And the Mayor of Courtfield, who was also the chairman of the Crusaders' Club, had forbidden the match, on account of the alleged roughness of the Remove players.

There had been a meeting between the two teams a few days previously, and the match had been abandoned shortly before half-time, because of the hooliganism of the Courtfield supporters.

A free fight had ensued on the ground, and the mayor had arrived dramatically on the scene.

The worthy gentleman had been informed that the Greyfriars players were the offenders, inasmuch as they had employed unfair tactics. As a matter of fact, Harry Wharton & Co. had played a perfectly clean game, as they always did. There had certainly been a great deal of rough play, but the Crusaders were solely responsible.

Harry Wharton had arranged for the match to be replayed on the Greyfriars ground. But the Mayor of Courtfield would have none of it. He had issued a decree that no further fixtures were to be played between the Crusaders and the "rough and unsportsmanlike" Greyfriars Eleven.

A party of Renovites had gone in a deputation to the mayor, and urged him to cancel his unjust order. But the mayor had refused to listen to them.

It really looked as if the match would have to be cancelled. But Wibley of the Remove had hit upon a way out. And Harry Wharton & Co. hung eagerly upon his reply to Bob Cherry's question.

"There's a very simple way of putting things right, you fellows," said Wibley. "Who was the referee in that rag-time match the other day?"

"Mr. Blenkinsop," said Wharton.

"The new curate at Courtfield?"

"That's the chap!"

"And he can prove that you fellows played a clean game?"

"Of course!"

"Then, all we've got to do is to get him to go and see the mayor, and explain the facts."

"My hat! I hadn't thought of that!" said Wharton. "I'd almost forgotten Mr. Blenkinsop's existence until you asked me who was referee!"

"It old Blenky explains that we played cleanly and fairly," said Frank Nugent, "the mayor will allow the match to be replayed."

Wibley nodded.

"I'll pop over to Courtfield on my bike, and get Blenkinsop to go and see the Mayor at once!" he said.

"Good man!"

"Shall we come with you, Wib?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No; it won't be necessary. I hope to be

back in about half an hour, with the news that the mayor has climbed down and agreed to the match being replayed."

"Ripping!"

Wibley set off at once on his mission. It did not take him long to cycle into Courtfield. But when he reached the house where Blenkinsop lodged, he received a set-back. The maid informed him that the curate was away from home, and that he had left no information as to his movements.

"You've no idea when Mr. Blenkinsop will be back?" said Wibley.

The maid shook her head.

"That's jolly awkward! I wanted to see him on a very urgent matter."

Wibley cycled back to Greyfriars in a disappointed frame of mind. But he brightened up a little as he neared the school. A scheme had taken root in his brain—rather a desperate scheme, but a workable one, for all that.

"What luck?" asked Harry Wharton, as Wibley re-entered Study No. 1.

"Blenkinsop's not at home," said Wibley. "The servant doesn't know where he is, or when he'll return."

"Oh crumbs!"

The Famous Five looked quite crestfallen.

"Blenkinsop may be back in an hour's time. On the other hand, he may not be back for a month," said Wibley.

"In that case, it's not a bit of use waiting for his return," said Harry Wharton.

"Not a scrap," said Wibley. "But I've got an idea."

The juniors looked up hopefully.

"I'll disguise myself as Blenkinsop, and call on the mayor."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"You—you must be rotting, Wib!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I'm not," said Wibley.

"But you'll never be able to pass yourself off as Blenkinsop!" protested Frank Nugent.

"Why not? Blenky isn't a particularly difficult cove to impersonate. He's only a trifle taller than I am, and we're practically similar in build. He's got a fair moustache, and so have I—a false one! He's got bushy eyebrows, and so have I—false ones! And he's got a mop of hair that's almost identical with mine."

"My hat!"

"What's more, I can give a faithful imitation of Blenkinsop's voice. 'Now, my deah mayah, I desiah to say a few appropriate words!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter. Wibley's imitation of the curate's voice had been perfect.

"Of course, I shan't be able to wear a clerical collar," said Wibley. "That would be too thick. But Blenky doesn't always wear a collar. When he goes golfing he has a woollen scarf round his neck, and wears a knickerbocker suit. I've got one of those among my theatrical props. And when I put it on, together with the false moustache and the false eyebrows, and a pair of specs, I shall look the living image of Blenkinsop!"

"And you—you'll go and see the Mayor of Courtfield?" stammered Wharton.

"Of course! I shall tell him that I refer-

the match the other day, and that there was no suggestion of foul play on the part of the Greyfriars team. It will be an awful fib, of course, to say that I refereed the match; but I don't mind telling fibs in a good cause."

"But supposing the mayor twigs your disguise?" said Johnny Bull.

Wibley grinned.

"He'll never do that," he said, with conviction. "I'll go and put the disguise on right away, and see what you fellows think of it."

And Wibley quitted the study.

When he returned half an hour later, attired in a knickerbocker suit, with all the necessary embellishments, the Famous Five were astounded. They were almost prepared to swear that the individual who addressed them from the doorway was Mr. Blenkinsop himself.

"Now, my deah boys, what do you think of my appearance?"

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"That's Blenkinsop to the life!" said Johnny Bull.

Wibley gave a chuckle.

"Thought I should pass muster all serene," he said. "I'd better be getting along to Courtfield now."

"You—you wouldn't dare to go through the Close in that rig-out?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Why not? Nobody will guess it's me. They'll think it's Blenkinsop, returning from a visit to the Head."

"Well, you've got tons of nerve, Wib, and no mistake!" said Bob Cherry. "All I hope is that you won't be bowled out!"

"There's no fear of that!" said Wibley confidently.

And he set out on his daring mission.

As he cycled down to the school gates Wibley passed Mr. Quelch.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Blenkinsop!" said the master of the Remove.

"Good-attahnoon, my deah sir!" replied Wibley.

He spoke calmly enough, but his heart was thumping against his ribs.

Did Mr. Quelch suspect anything?

Apparently not, for the Remove-master passed on towards the building. And Wibley, with a deep breath of relief, continued on his way.

Several pedestrians saluted him on the road, under the impression that he was the curate. Nobody suspected his identity for a single instant, and Wibley took courage from this fact. If he could run the gauntlet in this way without his disguise being penetrated, it was extremely unlikely that the Mayor of Courtfield would smell a rat.

Wibley dismounted at length outside Courtfield Grange. He left his bicycle on the kerb, and walked boldly up to the front door.

"Is the—haw!—mayah at home?" he inquired of the maid who answered his ring.

"Yes, sir. Will you step inside, please?"

Wibley obeyed. And, after a brief absence, the girl returned, and ushered him into the mayor's drawing-room.

The crucial moment had arrived!

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Rough on Wibley!

AS he stepped into the drawing-room Wibley felt that the mayor's eyes were piercing him through and through. As a matter of fact, the mayor was not regarding his visitor at all closely.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Blenkinsop!" he said.

"Take a chair, pray. You have evidently come to discuss parochial matters with me?"

"No, sir."

"Then what—?"

"I undahstand, sir, that the Greyfriars boys desiah to replay the match with Courtfield Crusaders, and that you will not consent to such an arrangement?"

The mayor frowned.

"That is so," he said grimly. "As you are aware, Mr. Blenkinsop, I have the honour to be chairman of the Crusaders' club, and I refuse to allow my eleven to play a further match with those young hooligans at Greyfriars."

"Pardon me, Mr. Mayah, but they are not young hooligans!"

"Their conduct the other day," said the mayor, "was abominable. Instead of playing the game in a proper and sportsmanlike spirit, they descended to rough and brutal tactics."

"Nothing of the sort, sir. I regret to say that your own eleven were the offenders!"

The mayor's frown deepened.

"What do you know about it, Mr. Blenkinsop?" he demanded.

"I had the doubtful pleasure of officiating as referee on that regrettable occasion."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the mayor, in astonishment. "When I arrived on the ground I saw no sign of a referee!"

The mayor's visitor smiled ruefully.

"I was compelled to—how!—to take to my heels," he explained. "The Courtfield supporters were pelting me with lumps of mud and other unpleasant missiles. But I can assure you that the Greyfriars boys were in no way to blame for what took place. From the outset they played a clean and sportsmanlike game."

The mayor was visibly impressed by this statement.

"Is that really so, Mr. Blenkinsop?" he exclaimed.

Wibley nodded. He felt that everything was going swimmingly. He had almost succeeded in convincing the mayor that the Remove eleven were blameless.

"I respectfully suggest to you, sir," he said, in the drawing tones of Mr. Blenkinsop, "that you cancel your order about no further matches being played, and allow the Crusaders to go over to Greyfriars on Wednesday."

"You are certain that the Greyfriars boys played cleanly and fairly?"

"Positive, sir!"

The mayor bent his head over his writing-table in reflection. It was fortunate for Wibley that he did so, for at that moment one of Wibley's false eyebrows came unstuck. The junior was able to adjust it before the mayor looked up.

"Then you think, Mr. Blenkinsop, that I ought to allow the match to be replayed?"

"Most emphatically, sir!"

"It is rather strange that you should interest yourself so keenly in the Greyfriars boys."

"Not at all, sir. I am a lover of fair play, and I should not like Wharton's eleven to suffer through no fault of their own."

The mayor pondered the situation a little longer, and he was about to give his consent for the match to be replayed, when there was a tap on the door, and the maid appeared.

"Mr. Blenkinsop, sir!" she announced.

The mayor looked utterly flabbergasted. As for Wibley, he nearly fell through his chair.

"Why, what do you mean?" demanded the mayor, staring at the maid. "Mr. Blenkinsop is here already!"

"Then it must be his brother that's just come, sir," said the girl. "He's the living image of Mr. Blenkinsop, anyway."

"Show him in!" said the mayor.

And Wibley fervently wished that the door would open and swallow him up.

A moment later the real Mr. Blenkinsop stepped into the drawing-room.

The startled curate nearly fell down when he caught sight of his double. And the mayor rubbed his eyes, and wondered if he had taken too much port-wine after lunch.

"What—what does this mean?" he gasped.

Wibley sprang suddenly to his feet, and made a dash for liberty. But Mr. Blenkinsop intercepted him.

"Stay!" he exclaimed dramatically. "I can only conclude that you are an impostor!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the mayor.

And he rose to his feet and took a quick stride in Wibley's direction.

The Greyfriars junior saw that the game was up. Now that the genuine Mr. Blenkinsop had arrived on the scene, he could not hope to carry his deception any farther. So he removed the false moustache and the false eyebrows and the spectacles, and stuffed them into his pocket.

"Why," exclaimed the mayor, in amazement and wrath, "you are a Greyfriars boy!"

Wibley nodded.

"I await your explanation!" said the mayor grimly.

Wibley faced the angry old gentleman unflinchingly.

"It was like this, sir," he said. "I hoped to find Mr. Blenkinsop who refereed the match the other day, and so get him to tell you exactly what happened—that the Greyfriars fellows weren't to blame, and that all the fouling was done by the Crusaders."

"Nonsense!" snorted the mayor. "Fiddlesticks, sir!"

"I called at the house where Mr. Blenkinsop lodges," continued Wibley. "and the maid told me he was out, and she had no idea when he would be back. So, as the matter was urgent, I decided to disguise as Mr.

THE POPULAR.—No. 87.

Blenkinsop, and to come here and persuade you to allow the match to be replayed."

"And you very nearly succeeded, by Jove!" said the mayor. "Had not the genuine Mr. Blenkinsop come in when he did, I should probably have yielded to your request."

Wibley turned to Mr. Blenkinsop, who was still gasping like a fish out of water with the shock of having met his double.

"Our fellows are very anxious to meet the Crusaders again, on the Greyfriars ground, sir," said Wibley. "But the mayor here won't allow the match to be replayed."

"Certainly not!" barked the mayor.

"He says that Greyfriars played a rough and unsportsmanlike game," Wibley went on. "Would you mind assuring him that that wasn't the case, Mr. Blenkinsop?"

The curate obliged. He pointed out to the mayor that the Crusaders had been the offenders, and that Harry Wharton & Co. had played fairly and cleanly.

But the mayor was in a wrathful and unreasonable mood. He was furious at having been deceived by Wibley.

"Enough, sir!" he said, turning to Mr. Blenkinsop. "I will hear no more excuses for those young hooligans at Greyfriars. Their conduct is indefensible."

"Then you will not—how!—allow the match to be replayed, Mr. Mayor?"

"No!" shouted the mayor. "I have issued an order that there shall be no further fixtures between the Crusaders and the Greyfriars team, and my word is law, sir! As for you, boy—the speaker glared at Wibley—"you must surely be aware of the enormity of your offence?"

"There was no harm in it, sir," murmured the junior.

"No harm!" thundered the mayor. "You had the infernal audacity to impersonate Mr. Blenkinsop, and that, let me inform you, is a criminal offence!"

"My hat!"

"It is a case of false pretences," continued the mayor, "and I should be quite justified in handing you over to the police!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I shall not, however, take that step, having in mind the fact that you are too young and stupid to realise the seriousness of your conduct. Either I shall report this outrage to your headmaster or punish you myself. You may take your choice."

Wibley hesitated. He didn't like the look of the Mayor of Courtfield at that moment. The crusty old gentleman resembled a fiery dragon.

At the same time, if the Head came to hear of the affair he might take a very grave view of it. It would mean a flogging for Wibley, at least—and it might mean something worse. So the junior decided to throw himself upon the tender mercies of the mayor.

"I'd rather you punished me, sir, if you don't mind," he muttered.

"Very well," said the mayor.

And he stamped out of the drawing-room.

When he returned he carried a hunting-crop.

"Perhaps you would be good enough, Mr. Blenkinsop, to take this young rascal on your shoulders?" he said.

The curate flushed.

"I will do nothing of the sort, sir!" he replied, with spirit. "I do not consider that this lad's conduct amounts to anything more than a harmless practical joke."

"You uphold his action, sir?"

"No. I consider he has behaved very foolishly. At the same time, there is no necessity to thrash him."

"You would let him go unpunished?" snorted the mayor.

"Not exactly. I should administer a severe rebuke—"

"Bah! You are a soft-hearted nincompoop, sir!"

"Then I will remain one!" said Mr. Blenkinsop. "I shall certainly take no part in the punishment of this boy!"

And the curate jammed his clerical hat on his head, and quitted the room and the house.

The mayor turned to Wibley, who was not enjoying the suspense.

"Stand over there, sir!" he snapped, pointing to the hearthrug.

Wibley obeyed. And then the mayor got busy with the hunting-crop.

Lash, lash, lash!

The junior uttered no murmur as the thong lashed across his shoulders. But he could not help squirming a little. A public flogging at Greyfriars would have been preferable to this, he reflected.

The ordeal was over at last, and the mayor hurled the hunting-crop into a corner.

"I hope that will be a lesson to you!" he panted. "You may go!"

Wibley paused in the doorway.

"Won't you allow the match to be replayed, sir?" he asked.

"No."

"But you heard what Mr. Blenkinsop said, sir—that our fellows played a clean game the other day!"

"Blenkinsop is a fool!" snapped the mayor. "And he's as blind as a bat into the bargain! Fools could be committed under his very nose and he would not notice them!"

"I assure you, sir—"

"Enough!" said the mayor. "Jarvis, of the Crusaders, has given me his version of what took place—"

"And I've given you mine, sir."

"I prefer to believe Jarvis," said the mayor.

"But if Jarvis admits that his twin was to blame, sir—"

"Then I shall consent to the match being replayed. But Jarvis is not likely to make any such admission."

"We shall see!" muttered Wibley, under his breath.

And without bandying words any further with the mayor, he took his departure.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Forced to Confess I

"WHAT luck, Wib?"

"Did you work the oracle?"

The Famous Five of the Remove were waiting for Wibley in the gateway of Greyfriars.

There was no need to interrogate him, really, for they could tell by the expression on his face that his mission to Courtfield had proved a failure.

"It was no go," said Wibley.

"Did the mayor twig your disguise?" asked Wharton.

"No. Everything went swimmingly, and just as the old buffer was going to give his consent to the match being replayed, in walked Blenkinsop!"

"My hat!"

"So the fat was in the fire, and I had to admit that the game was up," said Wibley.

"And what happened then?" asked Nugent.

"I was lammed with a hunting-crop!"

"Pshaw!"

"Did the mayor lay it on?" inquired Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"I should say so! He gave me my choice of being punished or reported to the Head."

"And you chose the lesser of two evils?" said Johnny Bull.

"I'm not sure that it was the lesser," growled Wibley. "The mayor laid it on as if he was beating carpets!"

"And I suppose he won't allow the match to be replayed under any circumstances?" said Bob Cherry.

"He will if Jarvis confesses that the Crusaders were responsible for all the trouble the other day."

"But Jarvis will never do that," said Wharton.

"Oh, yes, he will!" said Wibley.

"Eh? What makes you think that?"

"Because I'm going to make him!"

"How?" inquired the Famous Five, in chorus.

"I haven't thought it out yet," said Wibley. "But I've no doubt that I shall hit upon a wheeze for making Jarvis own up."

"You'll have to look slippy," said Nugent.

"Time's short."

"Leave it to me," said Wibley.

And he nodded and strolled away.

All that evening Wibley racked his brains for a solution to the problem—the problem of how to get Jarvis to confess.

It would not be a bit of use appealing to the Courtfield skipper's sporting instincts. He had none. He would never confess unless somebody forced his hand. And this Wibley determined to do.

But how?

When bedtime came Wibley had not hit upon a scheme. For hours he remained propped up on the pillows, thinking furiously. But no brain-wave came. And at last Wibley fell asleep from sheer mental exhaustion.

He rose early next morning—before rising-bell, in fact—and went for a spin on his bicycle, hoping as he sped through the country lanes to get an inspiration. But none came.

"It's not a bit of use challenging Jarvis to a scrap," reflected Wibley. "I'm not up to his weight, and he'd simply make shavings of me. I should never be able to force his hand that way."

He cycled back to Greyfriars, and, leaving his machine against one of the elms in the Close, he went into the building in order to prevail upon the housekeeper to give him

a cup of coffee. And it was while he was in the school kitchen sipping the hot beverage that he caught sight of the fellow who had been constantly in his thoughts—S. H. Jarvis, of Courtfield.

Jarvis was engaged in his usual capacity of butcher's assistant. He carried a basket of meat on his arm as he crossed the Close.

Wibley heard the door-bell clang, and Mrs. Kebble went to answer it.

The meat was duly delivered, and a moment later Jarvis retraced his steps across the Close.

Through the kitchen window the Greyfriars junior watched him.

Jarvis caught sight of Wibley's bicycle leaning against one of the elms. The machine seemed to hypnotise him, for he halted, threw a cautious glance over his shoulder, and then crept stealthily towards the bicycle.

"My only aunt!" muttered Wibley. "He's going to bag it!"

Jarvis had evidently come to the conclusion that Wibley's machine would suit him down to the ground. It was practically new, and Jarvis decided that as soon as he had taken it home he would point it a different colour, thus preventing the bicycle from being recognised as Wibley's property.

The Courtfield skipper was not, in the natural order of things, a thief. But he could not resist the temptation which now assailed him.

The coast was absolutely clear so far as he knew. And it would be the work of a few seconds to mount the machine and ride away. For an instant Jarvis hesitated, and then he took the plunge.

Seizing the machine, he swung himself astride the saddle and rode through the school gateway.

"The bound!" muttered Wibley. "He's made off with my jigger!"

And, leaving his coffee unfinished, he hurried out into the Close and across to the bicycle-shed.

Wheeling out Micky Desmond's machine and mounting it, Wibley sped off in pursuit of Jarvis.

The Courtfield fellow was skimming along the road at a good pace. But Wibley rode like a whirlwind, and slowly, yard by yard, he gained on the cycle-thief.

For some time Jarvis did not know that he was being pursued. But presently he turned his head and saw Wibley scorching along in the rear as if his life depended upon it.

Jarvis quickened his pace. But the gap between pursuer and pursued was not very wide now. And in the High Street of Courtfield Wibley drew abreast of his quarry.

The Greyfriars fellow shot out his hand and clutched Jarvis by the arm, and the Courtfielder had no option but to dismount.

"You thief!" panted Wibley. "Hand over my bike!"

Jarvis began to bluster.

"It isn't yours," he said.

"It's got my name on the saddle-bag," said Wibley. "Hand it over!"

And then the Greyfriars junior noticed that P. C. Tozer was standing on the pavement chatting with Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield.

"Strikes me the best thing I can do," he said, "is to hand you into custody!"

Jarvis turned pale.

"There's no need to do that, kid," he said. "I only bagged your bike jest for a joke."

"Queer sense of humour some people have," said Wibley.

"Don't give me away!" pleaded Jarvis.

"Think what it'll mean! I shall lose my job an' p'raps 'ave to go to quod!"

Wibley hesitated.

"I'll say nothing to the police," he said, "on one condition."

"Name it!" said Jarvis eagerly.

"That you write a note here and now to the Mayor of Courtfield at my dictation."

Jarvis stared.

"That's a queer sort of condition!" he exclaimed.

"Never mind whether it's queer or not. Will you agree to it?"

"Look here—," began Jarvis.

And then he noticed that the inspector and the constable were glancing curiously in his direction.

"I'll agree," he muttered.

Wibley produced a notebook from his pocket, also a fountain-pen. He rested the book on the saddle of Micky Desmond's bicycle, and beckoned to Jarvis.

"Here you are," he said. "Take this down at my dictation."

"Go ahead," said Jarvis sullenly.

"To the Mayor of Courtfield.—Sir, I think it only right to inform you that the Greyfriars Eleven were not in the least to blame

for what occurred the other day on the football ground." Got that?"

"All a jiffy," growled Jarvis. "I'm not a blessed 'high-speed short' and writer!"

The fountain-pen travelled laboriously over the paper. And presently Jarvis said:

"Carry on!"

Wibley continued to dictate.

"I admit there was rough play, but my own team was responsible for it. I instructed them at the outset to play the man, and not the ball—"

"Steady on!" interposed Jarvis. "I'm not going to write that!"

"You'd better," said Wibley grimly, "unless you want to be handed over to the inspector on a charge of bike-stealing."

With a muttered imprecation Jarvis proceeded to write.

"The whole of the trouble was caused by my own team, and the Greyfriars fellows played a clean and sportsmanlike game throughout."

Jarvis scowled fiercely as he wrote. Never had he fulfilled a task so reluctantly. But Wibley had him in a cleft-stick, and he had no alternative but to comply with the wishes of the Greyfriars junior.

"Got that?" asked Wibley.

"Yes—hang you!"

"Then we'll proceed. The Greyfriars Eleven are anxious that the match should be

in quite a cheerful frame of mind, Wibley pushed the two bicycles—his own and Micky Desmond's—along the street in the direction of the mayor's residence. And a few moments later the written confession of S. H. Jarvis was lying on the mayor's hall mat.

Then, feeling very elated at the result of his early adventure, Wibley returned to Greyfriars, arriving just as the breakfast-gong boomed out its welcome summons.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Crushing the Crusaders!

THE Famous Five of the Remove were strolling in the Close when Wibley came in.

Wib's face was radiant.

"Wherefore that joyous look?" inquired Bob Cherry.

Wibley halted.

"I fancy I've worked the oracle," he said. "What!" exclaimed Wharton. "You've forced Jarvis to confess?"

"Yes. Whether the confession will cut any ice with the mayor remains to be seen."

"But—but how the dickens did you wangle it?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

Wibley related his early morning adventure. And the Famous Five listened in breathless astonishment.

"That was quite a brain-wave of yours, Wib, to wring that confession out of Jarvis."



Wingate had witnessed the foul, and he suspended the game at once. "Off you go, Jarvis!" he said grimly. "Get off the field before I have you chucked off!" For the moment it looked as if Jarvis would hurl himself at the captain of Greyfriars. (See page 8.)

replayed on their own ground, and so are we. And now that I have given you an explanation of the facts, I trust you will see your way to cancel the order you made recently, and to give your consent to the replay. I am, sir, your obedient servant—S. H. JARVIS."

Having completed the letter, Jarvis handed it over, with a very ill grace. It went very much against the grain for him to have to yield to Wibley's demands, but there was nothing else for it.

"You're a shocking writer," said Wibley, scanning the Courtfield fellow's spider-like scrawl. "And there's room for improvement in your spelling, too. But the letter's readable, and that's all that matters. I'll just tear this sheet out of the notebook, put it in an envelope, and drop it through the mayor's letter-box."

"Your fellows will suffer for this on Wednesday, when we bring our team over to Greyfriars," snarled Jarvis.

"I should advise you to go easy," said Wibley. "If you start any tripping or ankle-tapping, you'll be chucked off the field. We'll have Wingate of the Sixth as referee; and Wingate won't stand any nonsense."

Jarvis darted a bitter look at the speaker, and then he turned away without a word.

by threatening to hand him over to the police," said Frank Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"I made the boulder write at my dictation," said Wibley. "He simply hated having to do it. If looks could have killed, I should have expired on the pavement of Courtfield High Street."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's hope the mayor climbs down now that he's got Jarvis' confession," said Harry Wharton.

"Hear, hear!"

A couple of hours later, when morning lessons were well under way, a special messenger arrived at the Remove Form-room, with a letter for Wharton.

Mr. Quelch saw that on the back of the envelope was written, "From the Mayor of Courtfield. Important." And he allowed Wharton to read the letter in class.

The mayor was evidently a better sportsman than the Greyfriars' juniors had given him credit for being. His letter ran as follows:

"Dear Wharton,—I have just received a written explanation from the captain of the Courtfield Crusaders as to what actually hap-

pened on the occasion that your eleven came over to Courtfield.

"I now fully realise that you were in no way to blame for what transpired; and if you are really keen on the match being replayed, in spite of the rough tactics of the Crusaders, I shall not stand in your way."

"I must apologise for having done you an injustice."

"Yours faithfully,

"(Signed) TOBIAS TOMLYN,

Mayor of Courtfield, and Chairman of Courtfield Crusaders F.C."

"All serene, Harry?" murmured Bob Cherry. Wharton nodded.

"The mayor's not going to stand in our way any longer," he said.

"Hurrah!"

"Silence!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "We will now proceed with the lesson."

There was great rejoicing in the Remove when it became known that the match with Courtfield Crusaders was to be replayed.

The Renovites were not of a revengeful turn of mind; at the same time, they remembered the hard knocks they had received when they played at Courtfield, and they were grimly resolved to give the Crusaders a severe trouncing.

Wingate of the Sixth readily consented to act as referee, and after dinner on Wednesday Jarvis & Co. arrived. They brought with them about a score of hooligans, who were, however, refused admission to the ground.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been putting in plenty of practice, and they were in fine trim for the encounter. Many of them had received injuries in the previous match on the Courtfield ground; but they were as fit as fiddles again now.

Wingate blew a shrill blast on his whistle, and the teams lined up.

On the rugged face of Jarvis there was an expression of ferocity, which clearly showed that he intended to revert to his unfair tactics.

But the burly Courtfield skipper was not likely to be given much rope. Wingate had him under observation.

The ball was kicked off to the accompaniment of a roar from the touchline.

"Play up, Remove!"

"Put it across 'em!"

In the first minute of the game Vernon-Smith was in the limelight with a sparkling run down the wing.

When within shooting distance, the Bounder was challenged by one of the opposing backs, and he deftly passed the ball to Dennis Carr.

Dennis trapped the sphere, and was about to drive it into the net, when Jarvis lumbered up from the rear, and sent the junior sprawling. And whilst Dennis lay on the ground, half-dazed, the goalie rushed out and saved the situation.

Instantly Wingate blew his whistle, and strode up to Jarvis.

"Another foul of that sort, you cad," he said, "and you'll get marching orders!"

"It was a fair charge," said Jarvis sullenly.

"It was nothing of the sort. I'm going to award a penalty-kick."

Harry Wharton took the kick, and his low drive beat the goalie all ends up.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

Jarvis was scowling fiercely as he walked back to the centre of the field. He would have been wise to abandon his unfair tactics—to subdue the beast within, so to speak. But the fact that his side was a goal down goaded him to fury. And when, a few moments later, he saw Frank Nugent making tracks for goal, he promptly intervened with a sly ankle-tap which he thought the referee would fail to notice.

But Wingate seemed to have eyes in the back of his head. He witnessed the incident, and he suspended the game at once.

"Off you go, Jarvis!" he said grimly.

"Look 'ere—" began the Courtfield skipper.

"Don't argue! Get off the field, before I have you chucked off!"

For a moment it looked as if Jarvis would hurl himself at the captain of Greyfriars. But he thought better of it, and, turning on his heel, he slunk off the field, to the accompaniment of hoots and hisses from the crowd on the touchline. The Greyfriars spectators could never tolerate an unsportsmanlike player, and Jarvis was left in no doubt as to what they thought of him and his methods.

Handicapped by the loss of their leader, the Crusaders went all to pieces. They did not dare to play their usual rough game; for if any other players were given marching orders, the result would be tragic.

It was quite tragic enough as things stood. Dennis Carr scored a couple of great goals before the interval, which arrived with the Greyfriars Remove leading by three to nil.

Jarvis tried to persuade his men to abandon the game and return to Courtfield; and he very nearly succeeded.

The Crusaders knew that they had no earthly chance of winning, and they started to leave the ground. At the exit, however, they were met by a solid body of spectators, who refused to let them pass.

"Stand aside!" growled Jarvis.

"No jolly fear!" said Bolsover. "You're not going to slop off just yet. Go back and take your gruel!"

The Courtfielders had no alternative but to go back. They played up desperately in the second-half, but the superior skill and science of the Remove proved altogether too much for them.

Five minutes after the resumption, Vernon-Smith kicked a splendid goal, and he promptly followed it up with another.

Both goals were the result of clever passes from Dennis Carr. Dennis was playing the game of his life. And he was intent upon driving further nails into the coffin of the Crusaders.

Jarvis, who stood watching the proceedings from a remote part of the field, was choking with rage and chagrin.

The Courtfield players would have been only too thankful if the ground had opened and swallowed them up. They felt their humiliation keenly. They were giants by comparison with the Remove eleven, yet they were hopelessly outclassed at all points of the game.

Seldom had the Remove played so irresistibly.

Bulstrode, in goal, was not often troubled, but whenever the ball came his way he cleared it in masterly style.

Johnny Bull and Tom Brown, at back, set up a sturdy defence; and the halves—Bob Cherry, Peter Todd, and Mark Linley—were in great form.

Of the forwards it need only be said that every one of them had scored a goal, and some of them had scored two.

"Eight to nil!" chortled Vernon-Smith, when only five minutes remained for play. "Let's see if we can get into double figures, you fellows!"

Another goal from the foot of Harry Wharton, and another from Dennis Carr, and the Remove ran off easy winners by ten goals to nil.

The bombastic Crusaders had been utterly and completely put to rout; and it was likely to be a long, long time before they published another football challenge in the local paper.

Jarvis hurriedly led his men from the Greyfriars ground. The visiting eleven were only too glad to hide their diminished heads.

In the Remove quarters that evening there was a big celebration in honour of the victory—a victory which would never have been achieved, as everybody agreed, but for the Wiles of William Wibley!

(Another splendid complete story of the chums of Greyfriars next Friday, entitled: "For Old Times' Sake," by Frank Richards. Don't miss this great story.)

THE SWORD OF THE TEMPLES.

(Continued from page 4.)

Harry, believing the tide to be at last turning in his favour, followed him relentlessly. Back, back went Walter, fighting desperately all the time, whilst Will, chuckling with delight, kept level with them.

"Aha, lad, I knew it—I knew it! Now, now—"

Walter had almost reached the window, when, with a seemingly sudden rally, he held his ground for a moment. Then, with an agile movement, he sprang sideways over the low sill. But so close was Harry's blade upon him as he did so that the point ripped through the sleeve of his doublet, making a rent three inches long in the cloth.

"Almost, but not quite, coz!" cried Walter, as he darted noiselessly over the snowy ground. "Next time, perhaps, you will have better luck!"

Momentarily paralysed by the swiftness of the manoeuvre, they stood still, staring out into the night; then, with a cry of anger, they followed hotfoot. But even that short spell of inaction had given Walter ample time to reach his waiting horse, which Travers had not yet taken to the stables, and when they gained the front door both steed and rider had disappeared, blotted out from sight by the whirling flakes which were still falling as thickly as ever.

"The best chance you ever had, lad!" exclaimed Will gloomily. "I doubt you will ever get another like it."

"We must follow—"

"How, master? On foot?"

"Nay, of course not! Surely there are some horses—any kind—still here?"

"I doubt it. Where's that rascal, Travers? Ah, there he is yonder, protecting his precious hide behind the window-sill!"

But Travers could do nothing for them. All the horses at the Chase had long since been seized by the Royalist troops, and the stables were quite untenanted.

Back again in the servants' hall, Harry filled a glass, and raised it above his head.

"To our next meeting, Cousin Walter!" he said grimly. "And if I fail again, may my hip never support another blade!"

(There will be another grand instalment of this romantic adventure serial in next week's issue of THE POPULAR. Tell all your friends about this splendid new serial.)

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Charles Fox Quenaby, a well-known philanthropist, visits the flat of Ferrers Locke, to ask his assistance in a very baffling mystery surrounding his household. A precious document had been stolen from the safe, together with three hundred pounds—the document in question being an astounding confession of Quenaby's, which, in the hands of a blackmailer, would be very dangerous for the writer. His wife had also suffered at the hands of the burglars. She had been locked, bound and gagged, in the massive safe-room, and found next morning on the point of suffocation. Locke decides to take up the case, and travels to Brampton Hall to investigate. Locke suspects Mrs. Quenaby of knowing more about the case than she cares to say. He also discovers the man who had overheard Norton telling his fiancée the key-words of the combination lock. This man turns out to be Alec Hill Parsons, a notorious crook who is wanted by the police. Locke returns to the Hall and informs Mrs. Quenaby that he has discovered all that took place on the night of the robbery.

(Now read on.)

Mrs. Quenaby's Confession!

"YOU shall give me the satisfaction of saying whether or not my deductions are correct," Locke said, glancing across at his companion. But she did not answer him.

"Mrs. Quenaby, let us reconstruct all that has occurred," he continued. "When you came downstairs soon after retiring for the night, it was not because you had forgotten anything, but because you heard a suspicious sound in the hall below. Is that right?"

"Quite right," she admitted miserably. "You turned into the dining-room, and found yourself face to face with your scoundrelly son?"

"I am a disgraced woman!" she cried, and began to weep bitterly.

Locke's manner changed. "Mrs. Quenaby, if you will allow me, I will straighten out your difficulties," he said quietly.

"You mean to be kind, Mr. Locke. How did you guess I had a son?"

"Never mind. I know what your husband does not—that you had a son by your first marriage. Alec Hill Parsons, one of the biggest young reprobates in the underworld of crime. I recognised him by a certain likeness to you."

"He has always been thoroughly bad!"

"So I should judge. As soon as he came out of prison he heard you had married again—a very rich man. He looked you up, and as you had never told Mr. Quenaby of his existence—"

"Charles would not have married me had he thought I had such a boy."

"Obviously. So, instead of making a confession to your husband, you tried to keep young Parsons quiet by paying over to him large sum of hush-money, with the result that, despite your very handsome allowance, you speedily got into debt. At last you had no more ready money to pay him. This was the position of affairs when, knowing your husband was away from home, Parsons made his way into the house on the night in question."

"I cannot deny it."

"He had previously asked you for money. You told him you hadn't any. Then he inquired if any was kept in the house. In a moment of weakness you informed him of your husband's money—kept in the locked vault. Doubtless he asked you to tell him the code-word to the combination lock, and to your credit you refused."

"I cannot claim any credit for that," she replied penitently. "I knew I should be discovered. Mr. Norton alone shared with my husband and me the knowledge of the combination. It would not be difficult for him to prove his innocence. I should have stood convicted before Charles as the guilty one. That was why I refused."

"But, Mrs. Quenaby, when Parsons appeared that night he was in possession of the code-words. How he discovered them you will never know. He told you of his determination to open the vault. You remonstrated with him. What happened subsequently is just as I outlined before."

"Mr. Locke, I am very, very sorry. Don't judge me too harshly. My punishment will be heavy enough. I shall lose my husband's love, forfeit for ever my place in his esteem when he knows that Alec Parsons is my son."

She turned a pleading glance upon him, and Locke's fine face softened.

"When Mr. Quenaby returns you will make a full confession to him, just as you have done now. That confession will satisfy him. He will fully and freely forgive you. I can promise you that."

He took up his hat and went out into the brightness of the day, with a repentant woman's heartfelt blessings ringing in his ears.

The Final Move!

AT nine o'clock on the evening of June 6th Ferrers Locke knocked at the front door of Cassandra House, and handed in a note addressed to "X. Y. Z."

Two minutes later young Parsons and the detective stood face to face.

"You come from Mr. Quenaby, I presume?" Parsons said, with a greatly assured air.

"That's so. I am here as intermediary between you. I believe you have a certain document which Mr. Quenaby is anxious to regain. I have—well, certain bank-notes which—"

"You are prepared to tender in exchange for the document?"

"I suppose that's about how the matter stands. The only question is—"

Parsons' sallow face flushed with anger.

"Excuse me, if there's going to be any talk of beating me down; the deal is closed right now."

Locke grimaced.

"But don't you think you are asking rather a lot? My client appears to think—"

"Never mind what the old bird thinks. Two thousand is my price; not a penny less."

"I'm afraid we can't agree to that."

Locke shook his head, but Parsons remained adamant.

"I don't take less. You are aware that publication of this document means ruin to Mr. Quenaby—social ruin!"

"I am totally unaware of its nature. My client merely informed me that it contained things he would rather were not made known."

More than that I cannot say."

"I see," Parsons lit a cigarette. "Then what is Mr. Quenaby prepared to pay to buy my complete silence in this matter?"

Locke's hand went to his coat.

"I am here with banknotes representing one thousand six hundred pounds. Unless you are prepared to accept those, I am afraid I must leave you to do your worst. Mr. Quenaby is determined not to be made the object of continual blackmail. It is for you to decide."

Parsons cursed under his breath.

"Do you give me an undertaking that no attempt will be made by Mr. Quenaby to stop those notes?"

"Certainly—a written undertaking."

"Of course, I should want it in writing."

"And you, for your part, give your word that neither part nor the whole of the document has been copied or seen by anyone other than you?"

"Assuredly! I have read it; no one else. As for making a copy, frankly, I haven't had time."

"Very well. Please produce the paper!"

A packet crackled in the detective's hands, the unmistakable rustle of notes.

Parsons crossed to an escritoire, and, unlocking a drawer, brought out a long envelope, the wax seals of which were broken. He took out the paper and held it up. Locke read the first half-sheet. His face turned very white, but he said nothing.

"Now, is it cheap at sixteen hundred?"

Parsons' evil voice was vibrant with triumph.

"I should think so. There are the notes—thirty-two for fifty." He counted them out, and laid them in the middle of the table.

"Give me the paper!"

Parsons eyed him cunningly. Was there a chance of snatching up the notes and of retaining the confession, too? He did not think so, for Locke remained with the money close in his grasp.

"All right, take it, and the devil have Quenaby!" he cried, and with that the precious paper passed into safe hands.

Parsons moved to the table and picked up the notes. For a moment tense silence reigned, broken at last by a scream of rage from the crook.

"You scoundrel, you've tricked me!" he roared. "These notes are forgeries. Unless you give that paper back I'll brain you!"

He leapt towards the fireplace and bent down to seize the poker, but something black and sinister showed in the detective's right hand.

"Steady, Mr. Parsons—steady! This little popgun has a habit of going off when the trigger is pulled."

Parsons reeled back.

"Forgeries! They're rank forgeries!" he screamed.

"You ought to know, seeing they came out of your own safe. I made a quiet entry into this house in the early hours of this morning, and came across them while looking for the document, which at that time must have been in your room upstairs, or I should have had it. As I thought the notes might prove a useful bait, I took possession of them."

His back to the door now, and his left hand quietly withdrew the key from the lock.

Parsons remained stock still, cowering before the revolver, yet crouching like a lion at bay.

"I'll make you pay!" he shrieked, and with that he launched himself at the detective.

With the dexterity of long practice, Locke slipped through the door, drew it to with a bang, turned the key in the lock, and had the young scoundrel safely trapped. Once in the doorway a whistle screeched between his lips, and Scotland Yard closed in on their man.

Locke met Charles Fox Quenaby by special appointment in town the following morning. The millionaire read in the detective's glowing face the triumph he had won.

"I'm mighty glad to see this back in safety again," he said, as he took the document from the other's hand. "I don't know how you got it, and I don't suppose you'd tell me if I asked. All the same, my heart is full, and the fee I shall pay you won't half represent the gratitude I feel."

Locke smiled.

"There is one way in which you can repay me up to the hilt," he said. "When you return home, Mr. Quenaby, your wife will have a little confession to make to you, the confession of a woman's weakness. As you look for forgiveness in the great future, so grant it to her. She knows nothing of your past, or of how you have suffered because of that past; and you can know nothing of what she has been through in her endeavour

opera-hat back, drained off the spirit at a gulp.

"Ah, now I feel better!" he said, forcing a laugh and taking a proffered cigarette. "What's the sensation?"

Rolfie Curtis replied without looking up from his game.

"Jack pots. A couple of quid to come in and a couple to open."

Rixson drew a chair to the card-table and sat down.

"Lord, you look pretty battered!" Purvis grinned, glancing at the other's dark-shadowed eyes. "Finding the pace a bit too heavy—eh?"

"It isn't light," the young man answered, tossing a couple of scarlet chips into the heap, and drawing two cards for a flush and missing. "I'm thinking of chucking all this; it's killing me!"

A chorus of derisive laughter greeted him. Rixson's tired glance took in the wild disorder of the room, and a sigh broke from him. It would be hard to get away, hard to free himself from the shining shackles which so long had bound him to a wasted life.

The man next him bet two. Curtis saw it, raised it two, and Rixson's glance dropped to his hand, where he found he had bagged a second queen, so called. The fellow next him had opened out on aces, but had surrendered one in the hope of a flush, and had only scooped a second knave.

at my friend's house. Oh, Donnermore, is it? Well, Mr. Donnermore, what do you want?"

An even more pronounced whiteness crept up under his bloodless skin.

The man on the far end of the wire laughed.

"Want? What I always want from you, Mr. Rixson, and never can get—money. I've been after you all day; rung up your clubs, your flat, Mr. Harbut's house; but you're always out or gone on somewhere else. Don't swear or go away, because I mean real business this time!"

"Ring me up to-morrow. I'm engaged now—very important! Really, Donnermore, I'll pay! I've money falling in this month; quite a lot—more'n enough to square you. By the by, how much is your account?"

The bookmaker grinned.

"It isn't what you owe me, but the ring of us—me and my friends. Tops a couple of thou easily, and, as you've hedged so often, we've decided among us to straighten the tangle out. Unless I get a cheque by this time Thursday, or, rather, by second post three days from now, I go straight to your uncle, and up goes the donkey!"

"Don't be a fool, Donnermore! You wouldn't dare! Besides, you'd be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. If my uncle knew he'd simply cut me out, and you and your whole bally crew could go whistle for your money! Don't do it, man. You'd feel sorry afterwards!"

The other laughed contemptuously.

"It's your last chance, sir! You've doped us long enough! Promises aren't the same as payments. We're tired out—fair spun, that's what we are, and it's up to you to make good right now, or by Friday me and Sir Johnstone Sherlicker meet for a little mutual soul comforting. Good-night, Mr. Rixson, and, don't forget, the cheque on Thursday—eight o'clock post at the latest!"

Rixson banged the receiver down, and staggered away.

"The brute means it—every word!" he muttered, holding his hand to his forehead. "Once uncle knows, the whole blessed show goes phut! I wonder—I wonder if he'd do it!"

A fresh idea had come to him—an idea so bold that it almost took his breath away.

In a few quick strides he was in Harold Purvis' room, where the little party—gamblers all—sat impatiently waiting his return.

"Sorry, boys! I'm not playing any more to-night!" he said, bending over the settee for his coat, and jamming his hat well down on his head. "To-morrow you shall take your revenge. I've got to fly—"

"Not trouble, I hope?" Berrensen asked, shooting him a critical glance.

Rixson hid his feelings well.

"Rather not! Prince"—as that worthy appeared in answer to the bell—"you might get a taxi."

The man withdrew, and Rixson reached out for his glass; but Curtis seized the decanter.

"Better not, old sport, if you're meeting anyone!" he laughed. "Have a Sandorides instead. Anyway, you're looking better than when you popped in. If you're free early you'll find us at Monty Grainger's for 'splish.'"

Rixson shook his dark head.

"Thanks! I expect to be busy. I've rather important business on. Thank you, Prince! I'm coming! Night-night, boys! See you at the club in the morning!"

He tilted his hat back from his forehead as the keen night air bathed his face, and ran lightly down the wide steps.

"178G, Prince's Gate," he told the driver. And swung in.

Ten minutes later he stood in the portico of his uncle's town house. He did not stop to ring, but opened one leaf of the double doors and passed into the hall. Everything was very quiet and dignified, as befitting Sir Johnstone Sherlicker's old-world tastes.

"Ten past nine. In the library, for sure!" he decided, setting down his coat and hat. "Old buffer always reads after dinner for a couple of hours."

His quietly-restrained knock met with no answer, though a pencil of light streamed through the keyhole. His heart began to thump hard and the blood to run faster in his veins as he let himself softly in.

The interview would not be a pleasant one, to say the least. It promised to be thoroughly stormy, unless the tale he told was sufficiently water and hole proof not to arouse the old man's suspicions.

A sea of books and sombre shadows enfolded him. From one wall a sombre-hued



With a muttered oath, the young man started forward and touched the bowed form. It shifted over so slightly, slid a little in the chair, and dropped limply on to the ledge of the desk. "Heavens, he's dead!"

to preserve her place at your side. Be patient and kind, and if ever you should feel inclined to remind her of how she deceived you because of her great love, just cast your thoughts back to the long-dead years and recall your own sin, of which this paper is the written record."

The Man in the Chair!

"COME on, Ambrose! We've been waiting for you—someone to come in and make a bit of a splash. Berrensen is winning all the coin. How are you feeling to-night?"

As Curtis chipped the question at him half sarcastically, Rixson threw his light dust-coat on to an already overloaded settee, and leaned his arms on the back of the speaker's chair.

"Oh, rotten!" he muttered languidly. "Purvis, give me a drink."

Purvis leaned out and down, creasing the front of his dress-shirt, and came to view with a decanter of whisky, a siphon, and a spare glass which the ledge beneath the green baize table had yielded.

"You look it," he laughed, pouring out a stiff peg. "Better join in and relieve Berrensen of some of his ill-gotten gains."

The newcomer yawned, and, tilting his

"What's yours?" the other asked.

"Queens," was the swift reply.

Rixson sailed in.

"Same here!" he cried. "What's top?"

"Kings," was the answer.

"Ace," roared Rixson, and drained a second tumbler of whisky-and-soda just as Purvis' servant appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Rixson wanted on the telephone, please," he said, and held wide the door.

The young man swept his winnings into his pocket, and cursed impatiently.

"Just my luck when I looked like cooping the whole bagful up. Know who wants me, Prince?"

The man shook his grey head.

"I don't, sir. The gentleman simply asked for you; said he wanted you urgent like. I told him you were engaged, that you'd only just arrived, but he hung on."

Rixson crossed the wide vestibule to Howard Purvis' writing-room. Prince had switched on the light, and the single globe burned brightly in the electric chandelier.

As Rixson took up the telephone he caught sight of Prince still lingering in the doorway.

"I sha'n't want you, Prince. You can close the door," he said icily. "Well, who is it, and what do you want? Yes, I'm Mr. Rixson. I can't catch your name, and, anyway, I don't know why you want to ring me up

Titian looked down on a marble bust—a sculptured head of some Greek god which Ambrose had learned to loathe.

Then he stood quite still, save for his fingers, which twitched nervously.

"Uncle," he said, "are you free to spare me a few moments? I want to speak to you on rather—well—er—important business!"

The bowed figure, seated with his back to him, never stirred. The shaded lamp fell on the lowered head, and glinted on the flecks of silver in the hair.

"Uncle," said Rixson again; and advanced another step into the room.

Still no response from the man, whose right hand, outstretched, rested on an open desk, across which a pen had fallen, leaving a trail of ink.

Rixson drew in his breath, and glanced almost fearfully round. The stillness in the room, broken alone by the steady ticking of the bracket-clock, was appalling.

"I am very sorry to disturb you—to have come in unannounced, but Wardle seemed nowhere about!" he muttered apologetically. "And this business of mine, it's important, and can't wait. Of course, if you'd rather see me later, I'll wait in the smoke room, or—"

He had stepped on to the rug by the fireplace, the better to read the expression on his relative's face.

Like most young men of his stamp, he prided himself on being a judge of character. He believed that a lot depended on sizing up the other man first.

But Sir Johnstone betrayed no sign of comprehending. His lower jaw—that jaw which knew how to snap and snarl where his nephew's shortcomings were concerned—drooped limp and lifeless; the glazed eyes were fixed glassily on a propped-up work of reference close to his left hand.

With a muttered oath the young man started forward, and touched the bowed form. It shifted ever so slightly, slid a little in the chair, and dropped limply on to the ledge of the desk.

"What's wrong? Speak, uncle! I'm Ambrose!" he breathed, in a stifled whisper. And then started away, his hands falling to his side. "Heaven's, he's dead!"

For a few seconds, which seemed like an eternity, he stood irresolutely watching the inert form. Then something that glinted brightly and still swayed against the rose-wood of the desk drawers caught his eye—his uncle's private keys dangling from a gold chain.

On tiptoe he moved again to that still form, and placed his hand over Sir Johnstone's heart. No answering beat could he feel, although the outflung hand was still warm.

In a flash he went down on hands and knees, snapped back the swivel, and, taking the bunch in his shaking fingers, stole towards the green-painted safe door let into the wall.

To open it was but the work of a moment; to drag to view an envelope bearing the superscription, "Sir E. Johnstone Sherlicker's Last Will and Testament," and to scan the contents the labour of a minute only. Then he straightened up, wild-eyed and panting.

"The old beast! Everything to Rupert, and at his death to come to me. Good Heaven, I'm bunkered!"

"Yes, I'm afraid you are, if anything has happened to the master!" came in a purring voice from the doorway.

Rixson turned round, his teeth chattering. "Oh, Wardle, do you see what's happened? My uncle is dead!"

The valet stared wild-eyed. "Dead! He can't be dead! He was right enough when I left him half an hour ago. Rang for his barley-water, he did. There it is, half gone!"

"All the same, Wardle—he's dead as a stone. I came in less than two minutes ago, and found him in his chair. What the doctor so long predicted must have happened; he went out like the snuff of a candle with heart failure or something similar. But, man, this—this," tapping the fluttering sheets, "this makes a beggar of me."

Wardle stifled a grin.

"You've been a reckless young devil, Master Ambrose, that you have. You remember what the old gentleman always said, that unless you mended your wild ways he'd cut you right out, and leave the money, the estates, everything to Master Rupert."

"Confound Rupert!" Rixson snarled. "Am I to go poor all my days, dogged by debt, just because Morrison has posed as a twilight saint? It mustn't be, Wardle, it mustn't be.

Something must be done, this will destroyed. At any rate, I should share, then!"

The valet shook his head, and a cunning gleam shot little flecks of yellow light into his deep-set eyes.

"No go, sir! Wouldn't do at all. You see, the will there is only a copy. The solicitors have the original. If what you say is true, you don't touch a penny until Rupert Morrison dies, by which time, of course, in the event of ordinary things, you'd be an old man."

Rixson went a shade paler.

"In the event of ordinary things," he repeated mechanically.

Wardle laughed softly, and rubbed his hands.

"That's what I said. Master Rupert is young—younger than you by two years—and he hasn't gone the pace like you have. There's not much chance, unless—well, unless—he broke into an evil cackle—"something happened to put him out of court altogether. He's been here to-night."

"When?"

"Just after seven."

"What for?"



"You scoundrel, you've tricked me with those notes," he roared. He leapt towards the fireplace and bent down and seized the poker to fling at the detective.

"To see your uncle."

"Did he see him?"

"No; Sir Johnstone was out."

"Well, what of it?"

"He's coming again at the half-hour."

His cunning glance wandered from the shining clock face to the bowed form in the chair.

"How long's your uncle been dead?"

"Only a few moments. He's still warm."

"And Master Rupert coming here at the half-hour! It could be done."

"What could be done?"

Rixson's lips were quivering now.

"Something to put you in possession of that fortune. Let's see. Shut that door."

Like a shadow he glided over the worn carpet and placed his hand on the lined cheek of the dead man.

"Yes," he repeated, "still warm. Quick now! Put that document back where you found it, and replace those keys. Master Rupert was always one for punctuality. In five minutes at the outside, but not before, he'll be here. That's right. Now listen, for this is a deal, a straight, fair deal, between you and me."

His voice rattled on a cracked, harsh tone that seared the young man's soul. The

minutes passed slowly but surely, and the deadly work went on. The clock on the bracket chimed the half-hour musically. Then the loud reverberations of the front-door bell clanged through the house.

Wardle slipped from the room to the regions downstairs.

The Message that Came Over the Wire!

FERRERS LOCKE, like his brother official detectives, had a habit of dropping into the Empire when business was slack.

From one or other of the Scotland Yard or Bow Street men he was pretty sure to pick up some trifle of otherwise jealously-guarded information more or less useful. To-night barely had his keen glance swept the packed house than Charley Gartrell, of Branch Street, claimed him.

Gartrell was well on the way to a superintendentship, a popular fellow in the force, and a great friend of Locke.

"Just the fellow I'm looking for," he said, extending a huge paw in which even Locke's fair-sized hand vanished to nothingness. "You reckon to know a bit about jewellery?"

Locke smiled.

"Just a little, Charley. What d'you want?"

Gartrell drew him aside, and became confidential.

"Fact is, old man, I've a heap of stuff up at the station, just recovered from a fence's in Soho. A chap in Paris—a jeweller right enough—has put in a claim for a big bunch of it; says he made it in his own workshops, though he hasn't much in the way of proof. We don't quite know what to do. It's a miscellaneous lot, lifted from half the capitals of the Continent. I wish you'd just nip along with me and give me a hand at sorting it out."

The younger detective nodded.

"Sure, old man, I'm coming right now!"

"Good!"

Gartrell's big, pale face expanded in a smile for the uniformed attendant who knew him so well, and side by side the two men passed out of the music-hall.

Leicester Square throbbed and glittered with the gay night-life of London. Along Cranbourn Street the two detectives passed, talking confidentially. In a little while they turned away from the main thoroughfare with its blaze of lights and constant succession of pleasure-seekers, and mounted a flight of step leading to a small door in a high, red building, before which a uniformed constable kept guard.

The narrow vestibule, with its inquiry-box, opened to a maze of glass and wood-partitioned corridors.

Gartrell went up two flights of stairs with Locke at his heels. In a small room, furnished with a bookshelf and a desk on which was a telephone and a litter of papers, he found Locke a chair, and turned to the safe. From this he drew a wicker basket piled high with a heap of flashing gems and glittering ornaments.

"All nobbled from jewellery manufacturers," Gartrell remarked, spreading out a small fortune's worth on his blotting-pad. "Torini, of Milan, was robbed on February 6th; Pedro Rodriguez, of Lisbon, wired through early in May. Of course, it must all be the work of the same gang. Just how Pietro Vallioni came into possession we're somewhat at a loss to understand. Now sort a few things out if you can."

Ferrers Locke sat down, and screwed a lens into his left eye.

"That is Spanish, and so is that. These two are modern Italian," he said, running his fingers through the maze of chains and pendant, enamels, and set stones.

"Dash it, Locke, you appear to be a walking encyclopedia so far as jewellery is concerned. I guess—excuse me a moment"—as a bell over Gartrell's head whirled. He moved aside and picked up the telephone. "Yes, this is Branch Street. Inspector Gartrell speaking. What's that? Murder! Where? Oh, very well. We'll come along at once. Yes, I've got the address. Pierce," he called to a constable in the ante-room, the door of which was ajar, "ask Sergeant Brinnon to see me."

A second later Brinnon entered from the common-room in his shirt-sleeves.

"News of a murder just come through," Gartrell explained. "Sir Johnstone Sherlicker has been shot. Get your coat on; we'd better slip along."

(There will be another magnificent installment of this grand detective serial next week. Look out for it!)

AN AMUSING LONG SCHOOL YARN.



SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE!

A BAD EGG!

A SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE
TALE, DEALING WITH THE AD-
VENTURES OF JIMMY SILVER &
CO., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

-- By --

OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Head's Nephew!

"IT'S got to be did!" said Jimmy Silver. Jimmy Silver spoke determinedly. Lovell and Raby and Newcome nodded their heads emphatically. All the Fistical Four, in fact, were looking very determined.

They were gathered near the end study in the junior passage on the Classical side. The end study was their study. The door was partly ajar, and from the opening a strong scent of tobacco came to their noses.

It was not the smoke of a cigarette. There were certain "giddy goats" at Rookwood who smoked cigarettes—in strict privacy, of course. But the scent that came from the end study was not that of a cigarette; it was the powerful, pungent smell of a strong and very rank cigar.

If the Head of Rookwood had known that a junior in the Fourth Form smoked cigars he would have been in danger of an apoplectic fit. And if he had known that the smoker was his own nephew—well, in that case, his feelings could not possibly be imagined.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had been smoked out of their own study.

It was an extraordinary situation—simply extraordinary. That it had to come to an end the Fistical Four were fully agreed. As Jimmy Silver had remarked, it had got to be "did," and the sooner it was "did" the better.

Gunter of the Fourth was an amazing boy. When he arrived, there had been keen competition between Classics and Moderns over the Head's nephew. Each side had wanted to bag him. The choice had been left to the new boy himself, and Classics and Moderns had been very keen about securing him—before they knew him.

When they knew him they were equally keen to have nothing to do with him.

Jimmy Silver had succeeded in bagging him. Gunter was a Classical, and he now shared the end study with the Fistical Four. After they had bagged him he began to dawn upon them, so to speak. He came from a Western State of America, where his parents lived; and the Classical chums discovered that in the wild and woolly regions of Texas he had learned manners and customs that were extraordinary, not to say Hunnish.

The chums of the Fourth felt that they had themselves to blame, and they nobly tried to be patient with Gunter. But patience was not a virtue for which they were particularly distinguished. Their whole stock ran out in a remarkably short space of time.

Talking to the new boy was no use. He only grinned and chuckled, so they had come to a decision. Having talked to Gunter in vain, having argued till they were tired of arguing, they felt that they had done all they could, and that there was nothing left but to thrash him. A good thrashing, as Raby sapiently observed, was just what he wanted, and it would do him no end of good.

They were sorry to have to do it. The fellow was a regular Hun, but apparently he had been brought up like that. But there was no help for it, and Jimmy Silver had brought in a cricket-stump for the purpose.

THE POPULAR.—No. 87.

"Come on!" said Lovell. "It's got to be did—and it will do him good. But we'll give him his choice of going over to the Modern side if he likes. His uncle will let him."

"Otherwise—" said Newcome.

"Otherwise," said Jimmy Silver, "the licking of his life!"

"That's settled," said Lovell.

And Lovell kicked open the door of the study.

Gunter of the Fourth glanced carelessly at them.

He was seated in the armchair, which was tilted back. His boots rested on the study table. There was a black cheroot between his teeth, which were almost equally black from excessive smoking. His face was sallow from the same cause.

How a boy of Gunter's age could smoke such cigars without inward convulsions was a mystery. But Gunter had already told them that he had smoked as soon as he could walk, and chewed tobacco before he could walk. He said that that was not uncommon in Texas. But Jimmy Silver & Co. meant that it should be uncommon at Rookwood, at least in their study.

"Hallo!" said Gunter.

"Atichoo-choo-choo!" said Lovell.

Gunter chuckled.

"Don't you like the smoke?"

"No, you horrid rotter!"

"I reckon you'll get used to it."

"That's just what we're not going to do," said Jimmy Silver. "That's the last cigar you're going to smoke in this study. Gunter, and you're not going to finish it. See?"

"I guess—"

"We're fed up. See this cricket-stump?"

"Sure!"

"Do you want it laid about you?"

"Nope!"

"Then shove that cigar in the grate at once."

"Oh, come off!"

"Oh, collar him!" said Lovell impatiently. "I'm fed up with his cheek. Collar the smoky rotter!"

"Hyar, hands off!" roared Gunter, as the Fistical Four made a rush at him.

There was a terrific crash as the chair tilted over backwards, and Gunter went out of it over the back and sprawled on the floor with a yell. Before he could gather himself up he was in the grip of the four.

"Yow-ow! Yow, I swo!" gasped Gunter. "Let up, you galoots! Yow-ow-ow!"

But the Fistical Four were not thinking of "letting up." They grasped Gunter hard, and they turned him face downwards on the carpet and held him there. Then Jimmy Silver's cricket-stump came into play—to an accompaniment of wild yells from Gunter.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow! Oh, jumpin' Jerusalem! Yarooop!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Pistol Practice!

JIMMY SILVER wielded the stump with a powerful hand. Indeed, he seemed to be under the impression that he was beating a carpet.

The stump rose and fell with terrific vim.

The dust rose from Gunter's trousers. Terrific yells rose from Gunter. His yelling might have excited the envy of a Comanche Indian on the plains of his native Texas.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Gunter struggled frantically. His cigar had fallen on the carpet, and was burning a hole there. But the juniors did not heed it.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome held the Head's nephew pinned down. Jimmy Silver made rapid play with the stump. Gunter had long needed a lesson. Now he was getting it.

There was a crowding of juniors along the passage to look into the end study. Hooker and Jones minor and Oswald were the first, then came Townsend and Topham, and Flynn and Leunos, and a crowd more. They crowded round the doorway, shouting with laughter.

Nobody had any sympathy to waste upon Gunter. He richly deserved what he was getting; indeed, the juniors only wondered that Jimmy Silver had not taken him in the hand before.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, Jerusalem! Oh! Ow! Yow! Let up!" shrieked Gunter.

Jimmy Silver paused for breath.

"Have you had enough?" he gasped.

"Yaroo! Yep!"

"Will you promise not to smoke in the study any more?"

"Nope!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, crumbs! Chuck it! I mean yep!" howled Gunter.

"Honour bright?"

"Yep."

"Good!" said Jimmy Silver. "I thought we could bring you to reason. Mind, there's plenty more where that came from, and if you ask for it you'll get it. Let the beast get up."

The Co. released Gunter, and he scrambled to his feet. Certainly he had been hurt, though whether it had done him good was another matter. He stood gasping for breath, his sallow face red with rage.

"Now we'll make a clearance of his muck," said Jimmy Silver. "Where are your cigars, Gunter?"

"Yow! Find out, hang you!"

"He's got a box of them here somewhere," said Raby. "We'll jolly well find them and burn them."

"Here they are!" sang out Newcome. There was a yell from Gunter.

"I guess you'll let my cheroots alone, you galoots."

"Guess again!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to burn the lot, and we'll do the same with any more you bring into the study."

"That box cost me four dollars," howled Gunter.

"Then it'll be a lesson to you."

Jimmy Silver grabbed up a handful of the cheroots, and began breaking them in pieces in the grate.

Gunter made a rush for a little bag in the corner of the study. He had always kept that bag locked, and the juniors did not know what was in it. They discovered now. Gunter dragged it open and groped in it, and his hand came out—with something in it.

It was a revolver.

A revolver in a junior study at Rookwood

was about as surprising as a machine-gun there. The juniors stared at Gunter's weapon with wide-open eyes. It was another of his Wild Western customs that the new boy had brought to Rookwood—though hitherto the revolver had been kept out of sight.

The firearm came up to a level, the muzzle bearing on the Fistful Four.

"Let up!" rapped out Gunter.

"Why, you silly ass—" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"Let those cheroots alone!"

"Rats!"

"I guess I'll wing you if you don't," said Gunter, glaring along the barrel; and really at that moment he looked as if he would keep his word. "I guess you wouldn't be the first I've drilled. Let up, I say."

"You fathead! Do you think we believe it's loaded," growled Lovell.

Gunter grinned.

"Look!" he said.

He changed the direction of the revolver, and levelled it at the clock, and pulled the trigger.

Crack!

Smash!

The clock spun off the mantelpiece, and fell into the grate. The bullet had smashed in the face, and was embedded in the works.

There was a yell of alarm from the juniors in the passage, and a scuffling of feet. They did not want to be near a fellow with a loaded revolver, who was so reckless in its use.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at the new boy, dumbfounded.

There was no doubt that the revolver was loaded, and that the youth from Texas was a good shot. It was a weapon of a small calibre, and the report was not loud. But in the confined space of the study it rang like thunder.

"Turn that thing some other way, you dangerous idiot!" yelled Lovell, as the revolver bore upon the four again.

"I guess not. Put those cigars down."

Jimmy Silver held on to the box.

"You hear me, Jimmy Silver?"

"Yes. Go and eat coke."

"You see this shooter, you galoot?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "You don't dare to use it."

"It—it might go off by accident," mumbled Raby.

"I guess it might," grinned Gunter. "My finger's on the trigger—look!" The hammer half-rose, and Jimmy Silver started a little. There was death in that little tube that was looking at him, and it required only the slightest touch of Gunter's finger to send it speeding.

"Will you put that box down?" said Gunter.

Jimmy Silver's back stiffened. He would not have taken orders from Gunter to save his life if it had been really in danger.

"No, I won't!" he said.

"I reckon I'll shoot."

"Rats!"

Crack!

Jimmy Silver uttered a sharp cry, as the cigar-box went spinning out of his hand. The bullet had struck it, and carried it away from his grasp. His hand was numbed by the shock, and for a moment he thought it had been shot away as well as the cigar-box.

"You hound!" roared Lovell. "You—"

"I guess he isn't hurt," grinned Gunter.

"I'm a dead shot. I could clip off your eyelashes if I liked."

Jimmy Silver felt over his hand with the other hand. He was quivering with rage. The slightest deflection of the bullet might have cost him a finger.

"You—you savage!" gasped Jimmy. "Put that pistol down."

"Ha, ha, ha! I guess you're scared."

"I'm not scared, you rotten ruffian! I'm going to take that pistol away from you," said Jimmy Silver, advancing upon him.

"Hold on, Jimmy!" gasped Lovell.

"You keep off, you galoot, or I'll wing you sure," said Gunter, the revolver bearing full upon Jimmy's breast.

But Jimmy came on, his face white with anger. It was likely enough that the firearm might go off in the struggle, and that somebody might be hurt. But Jimmy Silver was reckless at that moment.

"Don't touch him, you ass!" shouted Raby.

"The dashed thing will go off by accident!"

"I don't care!"

"Well, we care for you," said Lovell, and Jimmy Silver's three chums collared him, and backed away to the door.

"Let go!" shouted Jimmy furiously.

"Rats! Come out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gunter. "Make tracks, you galoots! I guess I'm going to do some pistol practice."

Crack, crack!

There was a spatter of glass from the pictures on the wall. Lovell and Raby and Newcome rushed Jimmy Silver out of the study, and Gunter kicked the door shut after them. A few moments later a strong smell of tobacco was emanating from the end study. The new boy was at it again.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Nice for Adolphus!

THE RE was a buzz of wrath and amazement in the Fourth-Form passage.

The new boy was the subject of discussion.

His manners and customs had astonished and disgusted the Fourth, but the last scene in the end study put the lid on, as Hooker expressed it.

Townsend, indeed, had started for Bulkeley's study to inform the head prefect of the fact that Gunter had a firearm in his possession. But Townsend was stopped. The matter was serious enough, but Jimmy Silver & Co. were down on anything that savoured of sneaking.

"We've got to deal with the rotter ourselves, without dragging prefects into the row," was Jimmy Silver's verdict.

"But he will be blowing somebody's head off next!" howled Townsend.

"Well, if it's your head, it won't be much loss," said Jimmy comfortingly. "There's nothing in it, you know."

"You silly ass—"

"The Head ought to be told," said Topham.

"He's no right to dig up a nephew from an uncivilised country, and plant him on us."

"Anyway, he'll be bowled out soon," said Jones.

"A lot of fellows heard the pistol go off, and thought it was fireworks in the study. If Bulkeley hears it—"

"Wait till he hears it," said Jimmy Silver.

"We're not going to sneak about the beast, though he's a Hunnish beast."

"But we're not going to let him turn our study into a tap-room!"

"We're not," said Jimmy.

"Hallo, here he comes!"

Gunter came strolling along the passage. He walked with a swagger, his hands in his pockets. He had a stock-whip under his arm—one of the souvenirs of his former life which he had brought from Texas with him. It was a heavy and dangerous whip, and the new boy had been seen to perform many tricks with it. With a flick of the whip, he could lift a cap from a fellow's head at a dozen feet distance, without touching the head in the cap. He grinned at the crowd of Classical juniors, apparently quite unmoved by their looks of angry dislike.

He sauntered out into the quadrangle, and the buzz of angry discussion continued after he was gone.

The Fistful Four went into their study, and Jimmy Silver opened the window, and waved a paper to clear off the smoke. He was thus engaged when Bulkeley of the Sixth looked in.

The captain of Rookwood was frowning.

"Who's been smoking here?" he demanded.

"Smoking!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. The place reeks with it."

The Fistful Four were silent. Bulkeley scanned their faces angrily, and then his expression changed.

"The new kid, I suppose!" he said. "Hum! Well, that wasn't what I came about. Somebody has been letting off fireworks in the study, I hear. There's a smell of gunpowder here now. You know that's against the rules."

"Ahem!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I want to know who did it," said Bulkeley.

"Ahem!"

"Was it one of you?"

"No, Bulkeley."

"Then it was the new kid, I suppose?"

"Ahem!"

Bulkeley stared at them for a moment, and then turned away. The Fistful Four grinned a little. Bulkeley was in an awkward position. He felt that he could not deal drastically with the Head's nephew; and yet he could not be guilty of favouritism. The juniors wondered what he would do.

"Where is Gunter now?" demanded the captain of Rookwood, looking back from the passage.

"In the quad, I think."

Bulkeley strode away. Jimmy Silver & Co. strode after him. They were curious to see how the head prefect would deal with the remarkable new boy.

"Bulkeley doesn't like to report him to Bootles, as he's the Head's nephew," murmured Lovell. "But if he sees that shooter—"

"My hat!"

Bulkeley strode out into the quadrangle. There was the sound of a loud, sharp crack under the old beeches, and for a moment the Classical Four thought that Gunter was at his "pistol practice" in the quad. But it was only his stock-whip which rang like a pistol-shot when he cracked it.

"My word!" gasped Raby. "Look!"

"Smythe! My hat!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

Adolphus Smythe, the dandy of the Shell, had encountered the new boy under the beeches. The look on Smythe's face was, as Lovell observed, worth a guinea a box. Gunter was amusing himself with the dandy of the Shell, and Adolphus was clearly in a blue funk.

"Keep that whip away, you young ruffian!" yelled Adolphus. "By gad! I—I'll—"

Crack, crack, crack!

The long lash of the whip cracked round Adolphus' slim legs without touching them, and Smythe of the Shell hopped and danced in his frantic efforts to keep clear of the thong.

"Ha, ha, ha," roared Gunter, whose spirits were as exuberant as usual. Ha, ha! Dance, you beggar—dance!"

"Help!" shrieked Adolphus.

Crack, crack, crack!

Smythe of the Shell made a wild rush to escape. The lash curled round his waist, and he was jerked off his feet. He came down with a bump on the ground, yelling. His handsome topper flew away. The junior from Texas disengaged his whip with a twist of his wrist, and caught the flying topper with the lash, and tossed it through the air. It did not improve the topper.

Smythe sat up roaring.

"Yow-ow! Help! He's mad! Yow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha," roared Gunter.

Bulkeley strode upon the scene with an angry brow.

"Give me that whip, you young rascal!"

Gunter stared at him.

"I guess that's my whip," he replied.

"If you don't hand it to me at once, I'll give you the licking of your life!" shouted Bulkeley.

Gunter hesitated a moment, and then handed over the stock-whip.

"Get up, Smythe! You're not hurt!" growled Bulkeley.

"Yow! I am hurt!" roared Smythe. "And look at my hat!"

"Hang your hat! Gunter, you've got to understand that you can't play these tricks here!" said the captain of Rookwood. "If there's any more of it, you'll find yourself in trouble! I find that you've been smoking!"

"Correct!"

"Don't you know that it's not allowed here?"

"Yep!"

"And you smoke all the same—what?"

"I guess so. I'm used to it!"

"You'll stop it," said Bulkeley savagely.

"I'll let you off this time, as you're a new boy. But if there's any more of it, I'll take you into my study, and lick you till you howl! Understand that?"

Bulkeley strode away, taking the whip with him. Gunter stared after him very unpleasantly. Then he glared at Jimmy Silver & Co.

"You kinder reckon that I'm going to chuck it now, I guess?" he said, with a sneer.

"You'd better!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, you'll see!" growled Gunter.

The chums of the Fourth did see. When they came into the end study to tea the room was reeking with smoke again.

Bulkeley's warning had evidently been without effect. The Head's nephew was going on his own way, regardless of the captain of the school, and regardless of his exasperated study-mates.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Little Game!

"SIMPLY a savage!" said Adolphus Smythe.

"A regular heathen!" agreed Tracy.

"A wild animal!" said Howard.

Smythe & Co. were in their study, and they were discussing the Head's nephew.

THE POPULAR—No. 87.

Then he sat frozen. A figure stood within the doorway, and Tommy Dodd gazed at it, dumb and horrified. The figure was draped in a black coat, and the face was covered with a black mask, through the eyeholes of which a pair of eyes gleamed and glittered.

From under the loose coat the intruder's right hand appeared, and in that hand was grasped a revolver.

There was no doubt about it. The light gleamed on the barrel of the weapon.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Tommy Dodd. The figure was advancing towards the row of beds.

"Wake up!" came a deep, rumbling voice. "Oh crumbs!" came from Tommy Cook's bed.

"Howly Moses!" yelled Doyle. "Who—who are you?" panted Tommy Dodd.

"Howly Moses! It's a burglar!" "Help!"

"Silence!" hissed the masked visitor. And the revolver made a threatening motion. "Silence!"

All the Modern Fourth were wide awake now. They sat up in their beds shivering. Tommy Dodd & Co. were plucky enough, as they had often proved. But a midnight visit from a masked man, revolver in hand, was enough to shake any fellow's nerve.

And the revolver was raised to a level, and it seemed to every junior there that it seemed to be pointing specially at him.

"T-t-turn that another way, please!" said Tommy Dodd faintly.

"Get out of bed!" "What-at for?"

"I give you all three seconds. Out you get!"

The trigger moved a little. The Modern Fourth turned out of bed with one accord, and with a speed they had never shown in turning out at rising-bell.

They stood shivering by their beds, their dilated eyes fastening in terror on the masked intruder.

"That's better!" growled the ruffian. "Not a yelp, mind, or you get it in the neck! I'd wing you as soon as look at you!"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Doyle. "I'm going to tie you up," growled the masked man, "and any kid who lifts a finger will get a bullet! Mind that!"

"B-b-but—" "Hold your tongue!"

The masked ruffian advanced to Tommy Dodd. The chief of the Modern juniors looked desperate. But the sight of the revolver was too deadly, and the great Tommy Dodd did not care to tackle it.

The intruder drew a length of cord from his pocket with his left hand, and jerked the end into a loop.

"Put your hands together!" he commanded. Tommy Dodd hesitated.

"Do as he tells you, you gossamer!" whispered Doyle. "Don't be an ass!"

The muzzle of the revolver was thrust fairly against Tommy Dodd's chest. He gave a gasp and a shiver.

"I give you one second!" hissed the masked ruffian.

Tommy Dodd held out his hands. There was no help for it. The loop was placed over his wrists and drawn tight.

Doyle was tiptoeing towards the door. The masked man did not seem to observe him. Doyle's idea was to get outside and shout for help. He found the door locked and the key gone.

The masked man swung round suddenly, the revolver bore upon the junior fumbling with the door-handle.

"You've asked for it," he snarled, "now you're going to get it! Say your prayers!"

"Oh, howly Moses!" stuttered Doyle. "Ow! Don't! I—I—I'll be as quiet as a lamb! Oh jiminy!"

"Come here!"

Tommy Dodd, shaking in every limb under the grim revolver, approached. His wrists were looped together in the same way as Tommy Dodd's.

The masked ruffian had come well supplied with cord. One after another the Modern juniors were ordered to approach, and their wrists were tied. In ten minutes the whole of the Modern Fourth had their hands bound.

They blinked at one another in horror and dismay in the electric light. What was the ruffian going to do next?

The ruffian lost no time. He returned his revolver to his pocket, now that all the juniors had their hands secured, and took out a long cord from under his coat. He knotted it round the ankles of the group of juniors, tying the knots tightly, and in a few minutes

the Modern Fourth were all secured together by their feet. Then he collected handkerchiefs and pillow-cases, and gagged them one after another.

The Modern Fourth submitted like lambs. They were helpless, and they had to submit.

They blinked at the masked man, whose eyes gleamed through the holes in his mask at them. They expected that his next proceeding would be to go through the pockets of their clothes. His object, so far as they could see, could only be robbery. But that he did not proceed to do. He tied the end of the long cord to the leg of a bedstead, and then crossed to the door.

Was he going? What did it all mean? Tommy Dodd & Co. wondered whether they had to do with some lunatic.

They could not speak. They could hardly move. They could only gaze with dilated eyes at the masked intruder.

He turned at the door and burst into a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha! I guess you look a set of jays!"

Tommy Dodd jumped. The masked man's hand went up, and he jerked off the mask. The face that was revealed in the electric light was the face of Gunter of the Fourth—the Head's nephew.

The boy from Texas chuckled and grinned. "I guess you guys have been roped in. Ha, ha, ha! Good-night!"

He snapped off the light, and unlocked the door. The door closed behind him, Tommy

their toilet, without heeding Gunter. Jimmy Silver & Co. were the first down, but they did not see any of the Modern Fourth in the quad. And during the next ten minutes after they were down none of the Moderns put in an appearance, which was remarkable, for the three Tommies were always early risers.

"Where are the Modern bouncers, I wonder?" Baby remarked.

"I guess you'll find 'em in their dorm," said Gunter. "Didn't I tell you I'd dish them? Well, I've done it!"

"No reason why they shouldn't come down if you have," said Jimmy Silver, with a stare.

Gunter chuckled. "I reckon they can't."

"Why can't they?" "Because they're all tied up like turkeys! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gunter.

Jimmy Silver looked at him aghast. "You—you've done that?"

"Sure!" "How did they let you?" howled Lovell.

"I reckon they couldn't help it. I guess they couldn't argue with a revolver!" chuckled Gunter.

"A-a-a revolver!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "Yep!"

"Come on!" muttered Jimmy to his chums. And the Fiscal Four rushed into the House again, alarmed and anxious.

Gunter followed them, still chuckling. Evidently he regarded his night's work as a triumph. The Fiscal Four sped along the



The long lash of the whip cracked round Adolphus' slim legs without touching them, and Smythe of the Shell hopped and danced in his frantic efforts to keep clear of the thongs.

Dodd & Co. were left wriggling in their bonds, spluttering with their gags. It was a jape of Gunter's. He had kept his word, after all. But he couldn't intend to leave them like that! Before morning they would be chilled and cramped—he couldn't mean that!

But he did. Long the Modern juniors struggled with the cords, but they struggled in vain. They chewed at the gags, but they could make no impression upon them. Becoming quite reckless at last, they endeavoured to make noise enough to attract someone to the dormitory.

But they could scarcely move in their bonds, and their efforts were in vain. It was upon a cheerless and infuriated crowd that the first pale rays of the dawn looked in.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Something Like a Surprise!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. sat up in bed as the rising-bell clanged out. Gunter of the Fourth turned out with a chuckle.

"I guess I've done it," was his first remark.

"Eh? You've done what?" asked Hooker. "Dished the Moderns!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lovell. "Hop along to their dormitory and see!" chuckled Gunter.

"Oh, how-wow!" said Jimmy Silver. And the Classical Fourth proceeded with

passages to the Modern side, and rushed into Tommy Dodd's dormitory.

"Great Scott!" The sight that met their gaze rooted the four Classicals to the floor.

The Modern Fourth, bunched together, were seated on the floor, shivering with cold, in their pyjamas. They looked at the Classicals, but they could not speak. Not one of them had succeeded in getting rid of his gag. The new boy from Texas had done his work too thoroughly for that.

"My hat!" stuttered Lovell. "I say, cut them loose! They'll have a perfect after them if they're not down soon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gunter. "I guess I've dished them some!"

Jimmy Silver turned on him, his eyes blazing.

"You ead! You've left them tied like that all night! You rotter!"

"I guess—Yo-o-o-op!" Jimmy Silver's fist shot out, and Gunter rolled on the floor, groaning painfully.

The four Classicals rushed to the rescue. But as they began cutting the cords there was a heavy step in the passage, and Knowles of the Sixth strode in.

"Why aren't you young rascals down—" began the prefect harshly. Then he broke off as he caught sight of the Modern Fourth.

"Why—why—What—"

Words failed him.
The Fistical Four cut loose the prisoners as fast as they could. There were moans and howls from the Moderns as they stretched their cramped limbs. Knowles gazed at them as if mesmerised.

"What is the meaning of this?" he gasped at last. "Who tied those fellows up?"

"Groogh!" came from Tommy Dodd.

His numbed limbs were capable of no other response.

"Is this one of your larks, Jimmy Silver?"

"No," said Jimmy shortly.

"Then, who did it?"

"Groogh!"

"Oh dear! Ow!"

"How long have you been tied up there, Dodd?" demanded Knowles.

"Groogh! Half the night!" mumbled Tommy Dodd.

"Half the night!" shouted Knowles, in amazement. "And who did it?"

"Groogh!"

"Very well! You'll come with me to the Head, Silver!"

"It wasn't Silver!" said Tommy Dodd.

"It was that new cad!" shouted Leggett furiously. "He came in in the middle of the night, with a mask on, and we thought he was a burglar!"

"Shut up!" muttered Tommy Dodd.

Much as he had suffered at the hands of Gunter, Tommy Dodd would not have given him away if he could have helped it.

But it could hardly be helped, for Knowles certainly had to report the matter to the Head. Even if Leggett had not spoken, the truth must have come out. But the sneak of the Fourth did not wait for it to come out.

"Gunter!" repeated Knowles. "The Head's nephew!"

"Yes."

Knowles looked very queer. It was Knowles' system to keep in the good graces of the Head, and he could hardly do that by reporting his nephew to him for such an outrage. Knowles supposed that the Head would hardly be pleased by such zeal on the part of a prefect.

"So it was you did this, Gunter?" he snaped.

Gunter was nursing his nose, and looking daggers at Jimmy Silver.

"Yep!" he growled.

"You young rascal!"

"I reckon I said I'd dish the Modern galoots, and I reckon I've done it!" said Gunter.

"And all you fellows let one Classical junior tie you up like that?" exclaimed Knowles, in surprise and contempt.

Tommy Dodd flushed crimson.

"That cad knows why we let him do it!" he exclaimed.

"He had a pistol!" shrieked Leggett.

Knowles almost fell down.

"A-a-a what?" he stuttered.

"A revolver! He threatened to shoot us!" yelled Leggett. "I was afraid it would go off! And he had a mask on, and we thought he was a burglar! I'm going to tell the Head!"

"Gunter, have you firearms in your possession?" demanded Knowles.

"I guess so!"

"Hand it to me at once!"

"I reckon it's mine, and I'm keeping it!" said Gunter coolly. "You go and eat coke! You're only a Modern, and you can't order me!"

"You—you've got a pistol!" howled Knowles. "You desperate young scoundrel! Give it to me at once, and then come to the Head! By Jove, you'll be sacked from the school for this, if you were the Head's nephew ten times over! Do you hear me?"

"Yep."

"Give me that pistol at once!"

Knowles, gritting his teeth, strode up to the junior from Texas. Gunter's hand whipped behind him.

"Hands off!"

Knowles staggered back. A levelled revolver was looking him in the face, with the young ruffian scowling behind it. The prefect seemed transfixed. His eyes almost started from his head as he gazed at Gunter.

"G-g-g-good heavens!" he gasped.

Then there was a sudden rump from Gunter. Jimmy Silver had made a leap at him, and he caught the junior's right arm and forced it down. The dangerous weapon pointed to the floor.

"Let up!" shrieked Gunter.

"Lend a hand!" shouted Silver.

THE POPULAR.—No. 87.

Knowles sprang forward. He grasped the down-turned wrist and twisted it savagely till Gunter let go the weapon. Knowles almost panted with relief as he grasped the firearm and took it away.

"You young villain!" he said. "You'll be sacked for this! Come with me to the Head at once! I'll take your pistol and show him!"

"I guess I'm not coming! Yow-ow!"

Knowles did not stand on ceremony, even with the Head's nephew. The fright he had had had enraged him. He grasped Gunter by the collar, digging his knuckles into the junior's neck. Gunter struggled fiercely, but was swung away in the grasp of the powerful Sixth-Former.

With his boots clattering on the floor, he was dragged away to the Classical side, gasping and yelling.

"Hallo! What's up?" exclaimed Bulkeley, meeting them at the end of the passage, and stopping as he saw a Classical junior struggling in the grasp of a Modern prefect.

"I'm taking this young scoundrel to the Head!" panted Knowles. "He has been threatening the fags with a revolver—this revolver!"

"Great Scott! Give me his other arm!" said Bulkeley.

And between the two prefects the Head's nephew was marched forcibly into the Head's study and into the august presence of Dr. Chisbourn.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER, Gunter Goes Through It.

JIMMY SILVER & Co. wondered what was passing in the Head's study. So did Tommy Dodd and the Modern juniors.

That the Head must have noticed already that his nephew hadn't the manners which stamp the cast of Vere de Vere, the juniors knew. Doubtless the doctor made every allowance for his early training on a ranch in a wild country.

But the news of the boy's true character could not fail to come as a shock to the Head. Now that it was out it was pretty certain to be all out. The sack was what the juniors expected for him, and Classical and Modern agreed that that was the only thing that could meet the case. Keen as had been their rivalry for the Head's nephew before they knew him, both Classics and Moderns would have been glad to see him "booted" out of Rookwood.

There was a buzz of excitement in Rookwood that morning. The prefect's report to the Head was followed by a stern inquiry.

Gunter's belongings were searched, and there came to light, among other things, a box of cartridges, bowie-knife, several packs of cards, several boxes of cigars, and a set of loaded dice.

The Head was simply aghast.

Some of the fellows who caught sight of him while he was superintending the search of Gunter's boxes and bags declared that he looked as if he were on the verge of apoplexy.

Unusual as he had observed his nephew to be, the old gentleman had never dreamed that he had harboured a ruffian and a thorough blackguard within the classic walls of Rookwood. It was not only that he had cards—that was bad enough—but the cards were marked! It was not only that he had dice, but the dice were loaded. He was not only a gambler, but a cheat as well.

What the Head thought on the subject he kept to himself. The school waited for the announcement that Gunter was going. But there was no announcement. Gunter just disappeared, while the fellows were in the Form-room at morning lessons. The Head could not bring himself to expel his nephew publicly. He packed him off quietly, and Rookwood did not see him go. But it is safe to say that there was no one at the old school who was not relieved to hear he had gone. Rookwood was well rid of a Bad Egg!

THE END

There will be another grand long complete school story of JIMMY SILVER & CO. entitled:

"TRICKING HIGGS!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

in next week's issue of the "Popular."
Order a Copy to-day!

TALES TO TELL!

IN THE DARK.

Scene: A hayloft. Three of a country fire-brigade just arrived in answer to an alarm of fire.

First Fireman (in loft, searching for the fire): "I can't see anything of it, Bill."

Captain (standing on the ladder, boiling over with importance): "What did he say, Bill?"

Bill: "Well, why the blazes doesn't he strike a light and look for it, instead of poking about in the dark?"

STRANGERS YET.

Day-Constable (relieving night man): "How's the missus?"

Night-Constable: "I don't know. 'Aven't seen 'er this seven year."

Day-Constable: "But you live together, don't you?"

Night-Constable: "Yes. But she's a char-woman, and is out all day, an' I'm out on dooty all night, so we 'aven't met since we settled down after our honeymoon."

A PAYING GAME.

Jack: "Do you think poultry-keeping pays?"

John: "Well, it pays my boys."

Jack: "In what way?"

John: "Well, I bought the chickens for him, and I pay for their keep; I buy eggs from him, and he eats them."

ENCOURAGING.

It was the first time little James had been to church.

"And how did you like the service?" inquired the father, as they were going home.

"Oh, it was fine, dad! Let's go again next Sunday."

"Very well," said the father proudly. "But what part of the service did you like best?"

"Oh, when the man came round with a plate of money! I got a shilling. How much did you get, dad?"

BAD TIMES.

Visitor (in country churchyard): "How is the world using you, my man?"

Gravedigger: "Oh, rather bad, thankee, sir. I ain't a-buried a livin' soul this six weeks. I do wish the folks 'ud die more regular!"

FAMILIES SUPPLIED.

Two children, brother and sister, were one morning informed that they had a new baby brother. Curious to know who had brought it, the girl ventured to suggest that the milkman had brought it.

"Why the milkman?" asked the boy.

"Why, haven't you ever seen on the milkman's cart 'Families Supplied'?"

TOO RAPID!

Jack: "Yes, I had a little balance in the bank, but I got engaged two months ago, and now—"

Tom: "Ah! Love makes the world go round."

Jack: "Yes; but I didn't think it would make me lose my balance!"

SURE TO GET ON!

Smith major had just left school, and was just saying good-bye to his friends before going into business in the City.

"One thing," remarked one, "you're sure to get on; you're such a good bookkeeper!"

"How do you make that out?" asked Smith.

"Why," retorted his friend, "you've had my volume of THE POPULAR, haven't you?"

POETIC LANGUAGE!

A man entered a certain restaurant, and asked for two poached eggs.

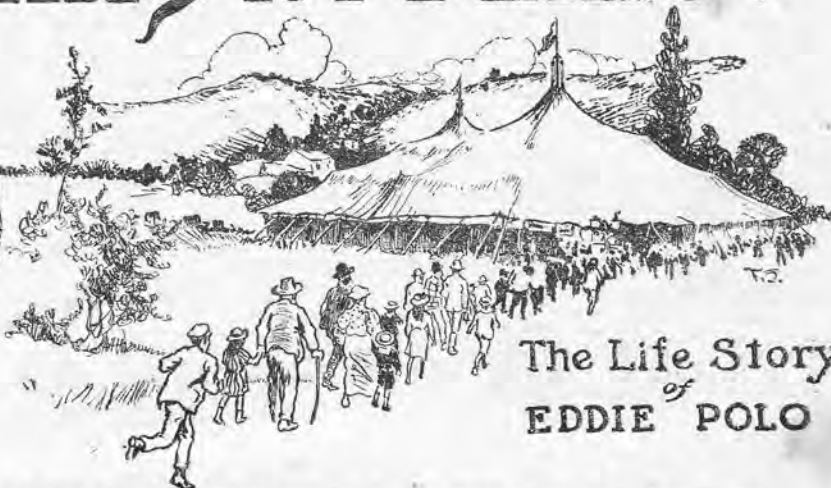
"Adam and Eve on a raft!" was the order given to the kitchen by the waiter.

Then the customer altered his mind, and desired the eggs scrambled. The waiter, as soon as he received the notice of the change, sprang to the tube, and yelled out:

"Wreck 'em!"

A HUMAN STORY THAT WILL HOLD YOUR INTEREST!

Fighting for Fame!



The Life Story
of
EDDIE POLO

A Thrilling Story of the Famous Film Star's Early Struggles and Triumphs.

THE THREADS OF THE STORY.

Eddie Polo, an unknown and apparently poor boy, obtains a position in Mr. Busto's World-Famous Menagerie and Circus, after being given the opportunity of proving himself a wonderful young acrobat, in the place of Del Rogeriguo, where he meets "Ginger," the circus clown, who warns him against the Spaniard's spiteful heart. An attempt is made by Del Rogeriguo to end Eddie's life, but the young acrobat manages to retain his presence of mind, and so save himself from a certain death. The next day he is out riding with Esta, the charming daughter of Mr. Busto, when his mount takes fright as he is passing over a narrow bridge, and, crashing into the rails, topples over into the ravine. "Although the fall is eighty feet, Eddie manages to escape with only a few bruises. He is pulled out of the ravine, and they return to the circus. In a combined performance with Rogeriguo, Eddie miscalculates a jump, and lands very badly in the centre of the ring. Ginger, his friend, sees at once that it is not an ordinary accident, and that it is another of the Spaniard's attempts to get rid of his young rival. Just before the evening performance Ginger visits the Spaniard's tent to warn him.

(Now read on.)

Warned Off!

WHILE the band was blaring and Busto, in picturesque "Buffalo Bill" costume, was inviting all and sundry to "Walk up! Walk up! See the great nerve-thrilling performance of the slickest trapeze acrobat that ever slipped into tights, ladies and gentlemen and children!" the clown made a point of calling once more upon the dago, and this time found Rogeriguo sprawling on his camp-bed, fully dressed, and evidently doing his best to sleep off the effects of the afternoon's "souse."

"Ah, my yeller-faced cuckoo!" said Ginger affably. "You're there, are you! Where have you been all the afternoon? There's been a couple of noblemen waiting on your doorstep for you!"

"Noblemen?" echoed the dago. "Vere are zey? Who are zey?"

"Me—for one!" said Ginger, with an impressive bow. "And Master Eddie Polo for the other! And now to drop fooling. Look here, dago, we've had just about enough of your dirty tricks in this show, and when I say 'we' I mean everybody. Get that? Well, if you've got it, get this as well, and don't forget it. You and Busto's Travelling Circus have henceforward not the slightest connection with each other. In plain English, you're through—sacked—hoofed—got the boot—whatever you like to call it! And it's me, Ginger Wiggles the Clown, that's telling you—handing it to you straight and without

frills! You've got till the end of the evening performance to put as many miles as possible between you and Busto's Great and Original Travelling Circus, 'cause if I find even so much as the smell of your cigarette hanging around the place after I've done my turn I'll take a boot and a horsewhip to you, and drive you forth into the cruel, cold world myself! And I mean it, so if you've any respect for your crawling, yeller hide, you'll hoof it, quick!"

The half-caste sat up, bewildered. "But vat wrong haf I done?" he demanded. "And who has gif you ze authority to sack me, ze famous acrobat of ze world?"

"Tain't what you've done, dago, so much as what you might do if you stop with the show much longer," was Ginger's cold reply. "You must think we're all blind, not to see the dirty tricks you've tried to put across, young Polo. And as for authority, you don't need to trouble about that. I'm speaking for the boss and everybody in the show when I give you orders to get. See? And I might add that Eddie's looking for you himself, and when he runs across you it'll be the biggest hiding of your life you'll get. So I'm really doing you a good turn by telling you in advance to make yourself as scarce as straw hats at the North Pole. And I have no time to stand here talking to you all night: I've got to work for my living. But, by gosh, if you're not gone by the time I'm through my regular job to-night, I'll put in a bit of overtime on your hide before I let Eddie Polo knock the stuffing out of you! Savvy, dago? Vamoose!"

Eddie Saves the Situation!

THE dazed Spaniard glared at Ginger's back as the clown walked out of the tent. He had never reckoned on such a happening as this—indeed, he had half planned out another "accident," which should not fail to kill young Polo this time. He sighed heavily, and flung out his hands in a gesture of great self-pity. He had not a friend in the world, he told himself, and no money. How was he going to live after he had taken Ginger's advice and left the show? And, equally puzzling, how was he going to live if he didn't take Ginger's warning, and leave the show at once?

"Ah, ze dogs!" he muttered to himself. "Zey haf no heart—no pity for ze man ven he ees down and out! I vill go—I cannot 'elp myself—but I vill have ze revenge! I, Garcia Del Rogeriguo, swear it by ze bones of my granfazzer!"

It was easy enough to swear revenge, but quite a different matter putting the vow into effect. How was he to wipe out his scores at one fell swoop—wipe out Busto and Ginger and, most of all, Eddie Polo—and at the same time obtain the money, without which he could not possibly escape from the scene

before the wing of the pendulum brought him within the reach of justice and due punishment?

"Money—zat is ze first zing!" he muttered. "How can I get ze money? Ah! If I could only get ze 'old of ze monies zat the fool peoples pay to ze boss for ze admission!"

He stopped short as a sudden idea struck him.

"And vy not?" he asked himself suddenly. "Ze monies he haf receive zis afternoon he haf not pay zem into ze bank yet. Ze takin's must be in zat leetle hiscuit-hox 'e calls 'ees safe in 'ees caravan. And vile everybody ees een ze great tent zere will surely be ze chance for Garcia Del Rogeriguo to 'elp 'eemself—eh?"

He laughed, and looked swiftly round the tent, as though afraid of being overheard. But he was alone, with only his own ears to hear his plans. He sat a little longer, still thinking, and all at once he slapped his leg, and gave a whinnying snigger of laughter. "Ah, zat is ze greatest idea I haf ever made!" he told himself, his eyes wide with admiration at his own craftiness. "And it vill give me ze revenge on Busto, that white-face fool-clown, an' Eddie Polo all at ze one time. By gar! I tak' zat chance, and to-morrow not only vill Garcia Del Rogeriguo be left Busto's Circus, but ze circus vill also haf left Busto! Ah, ah, ah!"

He laughed at his own feeble joke, and, stealing to the flap of the tent, looked out upon the camp. It was all but deserted, since most of the circus-hands were now at their various posts of action when a performance was taking place, and, by the music of the band—the programme never changed—the dago knew that Esta the Excellent Equestrienne was in the ring. That meant also the attendance of Busto and Ginger, the clown; while Eddie Polo was never far away when the dainty lady star of the circus was going through her feats.

"Ze coast et ees ver' clear," Del Rogeriguo told himself, with a grin. "Now to reap ze results of all ze plottin' and plannin'!"

Not a soul saw him as he walked up the steps of the caravan in which lived Mr. Busto and Esta, as was testified by a brass plate on the door. Del Rogeriguo walked up with the air of one who had business in the van, but once inside, he swiftly glanced around the place.

The old black-pointed tin box with an ordinary padlock, in which Busto had, to the Spaniard's knowledge, banked the day's takings from time immemorial, stood on top of the shelf in the corner, and, with a little run, the dago possessed himself of it.

"Locked—eh?" he snarled, as he tried to open it. "Ah, but ze little tinpot lock, 'e vill not keep Garcia Del Rogeriguo from 'elphin' 'eemself to zat vich he haf von by ze cunning' of 'ees brain and ze swiftness of 'ees eye—

THE POPULAR—No. 87.

eh? A bash wiz ze stone, an' the Senor Busto's notes and silver, and, mebbe, gold also, are een ze 'ands of 'em who know best ow to use zem."

He slipped furtively out of the caravan, and returned to his own tent. Here he wrapped the tin box—about the size of an ordinary biscuit-box—in a piece of blanket, and then stuffed the package into a saddle-bag.

As he left the tent the second time with the stolen cash under his arm, the band inside the great marquee suddenly struck up the soft, dreamy waltz tune to which Del Rogeriguio had always performed his feats on the trapeze; and by this token the Spaniard knew that Eddie Polo was entering the ring, and even now making his initial bow to the clapping audience.

For five minutes the athlete would perform minor feats, for this was a new arrangement of the programme settled on only that morning, and the exhibition of intrepid daring and skill would finish up with the sensational dive from the very apex of the great tent into the outstretched net close to the ground.

"Five meenit, zat is ali I want!" muttered the Dago. "Things vill move swift after zen, and Garcia del Rogeriguio, mounted on ze Grey Wind, vill be ze swiftest of zem all in ze movin' stunt! Ze boss, 'e weel lose 'ees best 'oss, and in ze end, 'ees circus also. Too, he weel lose also 'ees great acrobats, Eddie Polo and Garcia del Rogeriguio—ze first by ze death and ze ozzer by ze grey 'oss—and 'ees famous clown, Ginger, also by ze death. An' eef ze boss lose not also 'ees daughter Esta"—here the half-caste kissed the tips of his greasy tobacco-stained fingers towards the circus tent—" 'ee weel haf ze devil's own luck, zat ees all! An' eet ees Garcia del Rogeriguio who weel be ze cause of all ze cat—ze catatruppy, vich ees well!"

He turned and walked to the horse lines, where Grey Wind—a most ugly mare Busto had originally bought because she was as swift as her namesake, and afraid of leaping nothing short of a barn, but had been compelled to keep out of the ring because ribald audiences called her the "walking hat-rack"—was tied up by the head. This horse was the one creature who really loved the Spaniard, who, with no thought of her ever proving of use to him, had occasionally brought the horse an apple or a carrot, delicacies dearly beloved of the equine palate. She whinnied softly as Garcia approached, but when he held her muzzle she understood that the half-caste required her silence—utter and complete.

She stood like a rock while, fumbling in the semi-darkness, Del Rogeriguio put saddle and bridle into place, and flung over the former the bag containing the circus' cash-box. A round of mad applause from the great marquee, and the repetition by the band of the dreamy waltz made him start guiltily and then shake his fist at the huge canvas structure.

"Zey gif Eddie Polo ze encore!" he cried savagely. "Ze fools, zey know not by so doin' zey play into my 'ands, for eet ees steet anozer five meenit I desire to bring ze great vengeance into work. Ah, Mike, eet ees you I now want!"

This last remark was addressed to the mule who, harnessed to the great barrel containing the naphtha that fed the flaring lights for the illumination of the marquee and the tent front, was waiting to be led round when the oil in them should require to be replenished. Every night he waited in exactly the same place, and Rogeriguio was counting upon using him, and the highly-inflammable oil in the great barrel.

Del Rogeriguio possessed himself of Mike's reins, and, flinging himself across Grey Wind, led the mule and his waggon up the small hill at the foot of which Busto had pitched his camp. There ran up it a single, straight ribbon of road, as hard as rock through the sun and the beating of many feet, and as level as a billiard-table—an admirable chute for any liquid.

As the dago and his two steeds climbed the ribbon of road, Eddie Polo mounted swiftly into the very apex of the great tent, breathing the pure air that blew in through the ventilating-flaps of the cunningly-arranged blowpipe there fitted. Below him stretched the tan of the ring, and at the far end the band waggon, with its musicians in gaudy uniforms, the brass of their instruments glinting in the naphtha glares. By the waggon stood Esta and Ginger, watching for the Arrowy form to speed through the air, and to these Eddie waved his hand. He looked round on the sea of upturned faces below him, and

THE POPULAR—No. 87.

save for the soft murmur of the music, there wasn't a sound to be heard in the place.

"Cool up here," said Eddie to himself. "Better get a lungful of ozone while it's going cheap."

He pushed back one of the canvas flaps of the ventilators. Then he almost fell off his lofty perch with astonishment. For on the top of the hill road leading straight to the tent was a sheet of flame, roaring and leaping at full speed down upon the great marquee, and, silhouetted clear against it the unmistakable figure of Garcia del Rogeriguio, mounted on Grey Wind, and of Mike, the mule.

"Gee! The dirty hound!" gasped Eddie. "That fire'll be on this canvas show in about three minutes, and the whole place will blaze like tinder! The men and women and kids down there will be caught in a trap! Heavens, how I wish I could roast the dago over a slow fire!"

A great resolve suddenly swept through his mind, and he put his hand to his waistbelt to make sure the knife he intended using for his next feat was in place. Then he gave a great and sudden leap downwards, flying like a swallow for the trapeze. The audience were astounded, for they had expected him to repeat his previous high dive, and here he was attempting something neither they nor the circus staff had ever seen or heard of before.

He struck the trapeze with a thud that

of life don't ask silly questions, but puff like madmen!"

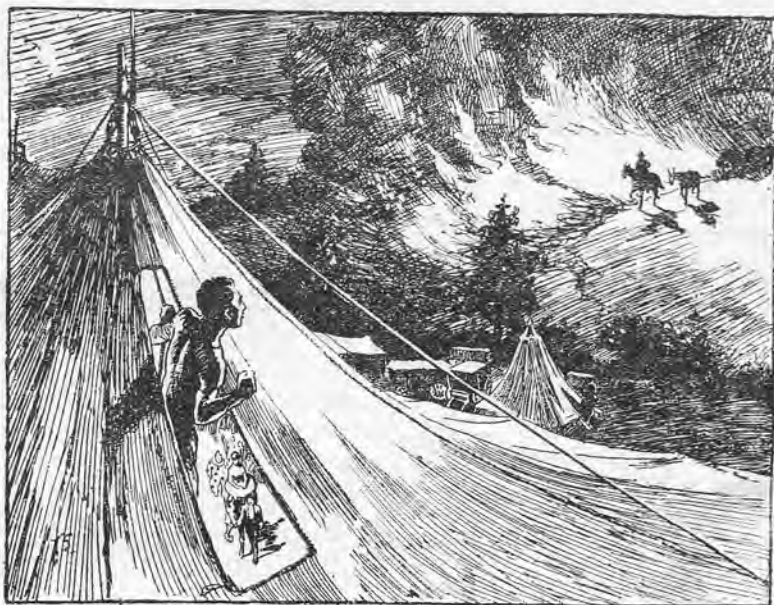
The men he had pressed into service wasted no further time in wondering what the lad was about, but pulled with a right good will—pulled so hard that the whole side of the canvas wall carried away, ripped from the cross-pole, leaving a door through which a thousand people could pass in a minute. Then Eddie sprang to the topmost seat of the row.

"Pass out, ladies and gentlemen, and pass out quick!" he cried. "The performance is finished, and the circus also. Look, the opposite wall to this is ablaze, and unless you all want to be roasted, you'd better jump mighty quick!"

And as the first ranks of the people, catching sight of the licking flames now seizing hold of the opposite side of the circus-tent, surged towards the great exit provided by Eddie's quick wit and daring risk, Eddie Polo himself dropped from his perch and sped like the wind towards the horse lines.

Garcia del Rogeriguio waited on the hill-top till he saw the trail of blazing oil bring up short against the canvas wall of the great circus tent. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Alia!" he exclaimed. "Unless ze miracle happen, zat ees ze end of ze Great Travellin' Circus of Mistaire Busto, and ze end of ze enemies I haf. And now, in case zere should happen to be zose who vill zink of zekin' me ow ze fire happen, I vill make myself scarce



"Cooler up here," said Eddie. "Better get a lungful of ozone while it's going cheap." He pushed back the flaps of the ventilators. Then he almost fell down off his perch. For, on the hill road, leading straight to the tent, was a sheet of flame, roaring and leaping at full speed down upon the great marquee! "Gee, that fire'll be on this canvas in three minutes and the whole place will be blazing away like tinder!" he gasped. (See this page.)

could be heard all over the show, and, swinging high till he touched the roof, gave himself a dreadful push off with both feet, using all his great strength of leg in the shove. Then he released his hold of the flying bar, and sped through the air like a human bullet, straight for the side of the great canvas tent, flying over the heads of the astounded people.

Smack! Polo's hands touched the cross-bar upon which was stretched the canvas walls, and for a moment he feared that the shock of concussion was going to wrench him from his hold. Then he let go with one hand, and, swiftly slashing with his knife into the canvas, fell, with a ripping, tearing sound, clean into the seats below him.

There went up a great shout as the wondering audience rose to see if he had hurt himself. But instead, they saw Eddie grab hold of half a dozen men standing near, into whose hands he hastily thrust one of the flaps of the ripped canvas. Then he grabbed three others, and, holding on himself, shouted:

"Pull! Tear the wall down! For the love

as ze snowflake in ze tropic. Farevell, Busto's Travellin' Circus! Garcia del Rogeriguio vins affaire all, and 'e vill now do some travellin' on 'ees own account!"

He kissed his hands gracefully to the now blazing marquee, gloating over the anticipation of his enemies being trapped in that sea of fire. He cared nothing for the fact that very likely the sea of fire would be no respecter of persons, and would just as doubtless overwhelm and consign to horrible death many of the thousand men, women, and children who had come to see the evening performance. All he wanted was vengeance, and he cared not who suffered so long as he gratified his insane desire, and wiped out Eddie Polo and the others who called themselves the lad's friends.

But Eddie Polo was already hot upon his trail. As he had seen the canvas walls of the tent ripped aside and the warned audience rushing to get out into the open before the danger enveloped them, he had dropped to the ground, and, wasting not a second, flung

himself headlong towards the nearest horse-lines.

Naturally, he looked first of all for Grey Wind, for she was far and away the fastest horse in the whole outfit. But when he saw her vacant place his lip curled, and he sprang aside to where stood Red Lightning, the horse used by the chief of the Texan cowboys in his great lasso and knife-throwing stunt.

This mare, sister to the mad chestnut Eddie had tamed, was a wonder for endurance, while her turn of speed, while not by any means to be compared with Grey Wind's, was little short of wonderful. Also, she was as surefooted as a deer, and that means a lot when the going is hard and sunbaked. At her saddle-horn hung the Texan's lariat, while a pair of pistols, which Eddie knew to be loaded, were thrust into the holsters on each side.

It took Eddie a second to spring clean into the saddle, another to dig his spurs into the mare's side, and another to wrench her head round. Then the lad was off at great speed in chase of the man who had set fire to Busto's Travelling Circus.

As he topped the rise down which the blazing oil had run, Polo caught sight of a cloud of alkali dust in the distance.

"There goes my man!" he said, between set teeth. "He's got a good lead, but he's in no hurry. I'll gain a bit before he sees me."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before the dago, turning in his saddle as though to make sure of his immunity from pursuit, caught sight of Red Lightning and her rider, and, with a muttered and very surprised curse, he called upon the grey for his best pace.

"So that's it," said Eddie to himself. "Well, all I hope is that he keeps forever. There's a mighty lot of rough ground hereabouts for a skunk like him to hide in if he takes to the sage, and finding him would be twice as hard as looking for an acorn in a pine forest. Gee, but Grey Wind's moving! Come up, Lightning, and let's see if they named you proper!"

The chestnut extended herself, but try as she would she could not gain on the grey streak scudding along ahead of her. Then Garcia lost his head a little, and suddenly swerved to the left. Immediately Eddie followed suit, cutting across the corner and gaining a full fifty yards on the quarry.

Eddie drew one of the loaded revolvers that Bud Truett, the chief cowboy, always kept in Red Lightning's holsters. Carefully he drew a bead on the fleeing figure, but the shot went wide, for it was no easy task shooting correctly from the back of a horse racing across rough ground. But the shot had another effect, almost as good as that of unseating Del Rogerigno. It caused that poor horseman to lose his head completely, and he sawed at Grey Wind's mouth as he pulled him back on his haunches, and again sped off in another direction. And again Eddie gained a lump on the fugitive.

"He can't ride for nuts!" said the lad. "Now I'll have some sport with him, and frighten him to death. I'll prepare him for the hammering that's coming to him, anyway!"

Again he fired, and again the dago altered his course, but now Eddie was close upon his heels, a matter of twenty-five yards showing between pursuer and pursued. Half a dozen rounds from both guns put the wind right up the half-caste, and he didn't know which way to turn, since Polo's bullets seemed to be flying all around him.

Suddenly, with a grin, Eddie dropped the guns into their holsters and unslung the plaited-hide lasso from the horn of Red Lightning's saddle. Thrice the coil flew round the lad's head, and then, like a great snake, it stretched out into the air.

Garcia gave a little scream of terror as the noose settled around his body, and dropped the bridle-reins with both hands to try to free himself from this new incubus. And this was exactly what Eddie Polo had reckoned on. He flung a word to Red Lightning, exactly as Bud Truett had taught him, and the chestnut, knowing her work, sat back swiftly on her haunches.

And, at the other end of the lariat, Garcia del Rogerigno felt himself torn from Grey Wind's back, felt himself flying through the air in an ungraceful semicircle, and then struck the earth with a dull thud. For a moment he lay stunned, since he had, unlike Eddie, never properly learned to fall, and then rose to his feet. As he tried to dash off the lariat was again hauled suddenly taut, and once more the half-caste found himself bumped on the hard, dust-covered ground.

"I'll be with you in two sniffs of a red ant's sniffer!" cried Eddie, bawling in on the lasso hand-over-hand, and dragging the dago along closer and closer. "That's right, dago!" he added, as the man ceased to struggle. "It only makes it hurt more if you kick about!"

Eddie jumped swiftly from the saddle, and, snatching an empty revolver from the holster, ran to the lassoed man. With a grim face he thrust the muzzle of the gun into the dago's ear, and cocked the weapon with an impressive click.

"Hear that, yaller skin?" asked the lad. "It means sudden death for you if you look as though you'd like to try any more hanky-panky tricks. Up on your hind-legs, smart now, and don't try to run away, or I'll shoot again—and shoot to hit you this time! That's better. Put your arms down, and don't forget this gun is simply aching to empty itself into your carcase, in spite of the fact that it'd be wasting good ammunition. Now stand still, and I'll have you all trussed up good and proper in less than no time!"

As he spoke he ran swiftly round and round the half-frightened dago, winding the lariat about his arms and body until he was well and truly plioneed. Then Eddie threw a couple of half-hitches into the loops, and stood back to admire his handiwork.

"If you can get out of that little lot, dago," he remarked, "you're welcome to your liberty. But as I don't think it's possible, I think you'd better set your face back towards the circus, and come for a heart-to-heart talk with a few people who're simply ready to eat you. One thing I'll promise you, though—the cow-punchers shan't get busy on you with their guns till I've had a rough house with you. It'll improve my sparring practice, and mark your dirty face so that your

mother won't recognise her blue-eyed boy after he's crossed the border. And, to finish off with, we'll roast you—roast you alive, too—over a slow fire, so that you can see for yourself what it feels like to be cooked!"

He suddenly bent forward and neatly tripped the dago.

"Second thought," he explained, "That hoss of yours is more valuable than you, though; I suppose I'd better catch him and lead you both back together. Hallo! Who's this?"

He suddenly stood erect and stared in the direction in which the startled Grey Wind had disappeared. The horse was coming back, led by another mounted man, Eddie, wishing that the revolver with which he had bluffed Del Rogerigno was really loaded, drew the weapon and held it in his hand, concealed behind his back, as the stranger drew near.

The man halted, and surveyed Eddie and the bound man.

"Howdy?" he ejaculated, with a grin.

"Howdy!" replied Eddie, in a cool tone.

"I'm figgerin' that yew've bin mighty busy in these parts lately," said the newcomer, with a nod towards Garcia. "Who's the guy takin' a sista?"

"Friend of mine I'm voting along to a little reunion," said Eddie. "And that's his horse yew've got there."

"The grey, eh?" replied the other. "Found her roamin' about a little ways back, lookin' for a good home, and I was a-goin' to show her one when I'd made a bit of investigation into this 'ere shootin' as I'd heard goin' on somewhere in this direction. Say, kid, did you see any gunmen in your travels this a-way?"

"Why, what's the shooting got to do with you?" asked Polo, still on the defensive.

"Nuttin' tall, reely," was the other's reply, every bit as cool. "Only the citizens of this 'ere place, they give me a star an' a few dollars now and then, and they tells me I'm sheriff. Here's the star—dinky one, ain't it?"

He pushed back the flap of his waistcoat as he spoke, and showed the badge of the western sheriff.

"And, ho," he added, as he dropped his hand to his gun sheath. "Them darned citizens sure gets het up under their collar when they hears permissus shootin' goin' on hereabouts. My orders is to shoot up the shooters, and, by gosh, you kin be sure that I'll get the funny feller that's been fireworkin' around here this evenin', and I'll 'ang 'im as 'igh as the tallest tree in the district."

Then came a scream from the dago on the ground.

"Eet ees he who vos shootin'—shootin' at me, to kiel!" he said, indicating with his head the boy. "Sheriff, I demand your protection from 'eem, as a citizen of ze United States!"

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A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS PLEASED TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS. Address: EDITOR, THE POPULAR, THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON STREET, LONDON, E.C. 4.

GOOD THINGS FOR NEXT FRIDAY.

There will be a great batch of good stories for my chums in next week's issue of the POPULAR.

Mr. Edmund Burton will start the ball rolling with his splendid serial of mystery and adventure. I want all my friends to follow this story with keen interest, as it is going to rank as one of the finest stories that have ever appeared in our pages. Mr. Burton has always been popular, and I think that this latest work of his will increase his number of enthusiastic supporters as no other story has.

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Eddie Polo and his triumphs and struggles in early manhood, will satisfy all my chums who are following this splendid life story. Do not miss

"FIGHTING FOR FAME!"

I am happy to say that our circulation is ever on the increase. Week by week it goes up steadily, and, while thanking my readers for this satisfactory state of affairs, I should like to express the hope that they will leave no stone unturned to raise the POPULAR still higher in the field of boys' literature.

THE SPIDER.

A reader writes to me to point out that a writer in the "Gem" was incorrect in speaking of the spider as an insect. It was the raft spider which was in question; but the fact remains the same. The patient animal which stood in so well with the late Robert Bruce during the troubles of the Scottish King is an animal, and no insect! It is just as well to know these things. I expect a lot of people will persist in their error all the same. The term "insect" is frequently employed wrongly. For instance, look how Jeff on the films gets called by the name!

NOTES FROM CANADA.

William F. Thomas, P.O. Box, 215, Revelstoke, British Columbia, Canada, writes to me about the "Boys' Friend." He would like to correspond particularly with someone living in Stoke-on-Trent. He comes from that town—Spencer Road—and, naturally, felt much interested in a recent article in the Green 'Un about the place. This reader tells me that in the parts he has visited there are plenty of black, grizzly, and brown bears, as well as heaps of other animals.

SCOUTS.

You get a notion of what Scouts do in a letter which comes to me from a splendid supporter at Redcar. "I must really," says the writer, "tell you about Ernest Gulliver. He is a Scout, and he sat just behind me at school. One day he surprised us by asking our French mistress to write something for his Scout paper. Soon after that he was wearing his interpreter's badge." The letter before

me is a model of its kind—a really newsworthy note. The correspondent finishes off because his father wanted him to go out fishing. He is a keen cricketer, and his father owns picture houses, so my chum sees all the new films. I hope he will write to me again after he has returned from his holiday in Yorks.

VIRGINIA WATER.

Doubtless any number of my chums know this beautiful place. It is looking its very best just now, and the famous waterfall is worth going many miles to see. But, luckily enough, Virginia Water is easily accessible from London, and if you are minded that way you can go by omnibus the whole distance in next to no time. When you are in this part of the country you should make a point of footing it to Chertsey, and on to Thorpe. The latter village is one of the most picturesque little places to be imagined, and, though only a few miles from the busy town of Staines, it might be a hundred. Time has not brought about many changes in Thorpe, with its common, where the frisky goat nibbles the grass, and the ancient houses take the mind back a few centuries.

SUGGESTIONS.

A Wallacey chum, who is looking out for the new volume of the "Holiday Annual"—it will be in his hands by now—asks for a comic yarn with Frank Nugent tumbling head over ears in love with Miss Peggy Preston, and being humorously japed—as he would be if he acted "so silly," as some say. I value such a note as this. My correspondent is right in so far as he asks for human nature and quaintness; but we do get a good deal of both these days. Naturally, in boys' stories the girls have to be left out on many occasions, but I shall not forget Wallacey's straight tip.

Your Editor

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