

SPLENDID STORIES TO SUIT EVERY TASTE!

The

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Popular

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A FRESH BID FOR THE SWORD.

THE GREAT SIEGE OF TEMPLE CHASE!

(A Stirring Episode from Our Grand Adventure Serial, "THE SWORD OF THE TEMPLES!")

A ROMANTIC STORY OF CAVALIER AND ROUNDHEAD!



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 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 Royalist forces.

After a fight with the Roundheads they are forced to stay a night at the Chase until they are able to join their regiment again. Walter, cut off from his troop in the same neighbourhood, comes across them at the Hall. And he puts Cromwell on their track.

Walter accuses them of being spies, in an attempt to get rid of them, but Cromwell

hears of Harry's story of the sword and the robbery and believes him. Walter, fearing Cromwell's anger, flies from the house, pursued by his cousin and Will Howard.

Walter is cornered at last, and then enters another fight for possession of the sword, in which Harry is the victor.

Harry and Will join Lord Goring's forces, which are marching to deliver a surprise attack on Cromwell at the Chase. The Royalists attack the great house hotly.

(Now read on.)

The Siege of Temple Chase!

THE great door showed signs of weakening when several heavy missiles had crashed against it, and, perceiving this, my Lord Goring resolved to try and force an entrance without further delay. A stout tree was felled, and, borne by a score of sturdy arms, was rushed forward in the face of a withering fire from above.

Men fell fast, but others dashed forward to take their places. The heavy trunk crashed against the door, scattering a shower of splinters in all directions.

Again and again, now protected by the overhanging porch from the defenders' fire, they rushed their improvised battering-ram forward until the door-hinges gave with a rending sound, and only the stout lock and bolts held the thick oak barrier in position.

'Twas then that the remainder of the Roundhead forces, which had been held back till now, dashed from the rear of the house and engaged the besieging Royalists. Through the trees they charged, horse and foot, slashing and cutting, stabbing and thrusting, until so mixed up did the opposing hosts become that 'twas almost impossible to tell friend from foe.

But the greatest of us make mistakes sometimes, and so it was with Cromwell. Just too late he realised that he ought to have tried this plan earlier, and also that he should have ordered a more circuitous movement than that which had been performed, so that he could cut in between the attackers and the big cavalry force which Goring had ready waiting farther in the woods. But the presence of this latter body only became known when they galloped to the assistance of their comrades, and the two forces combined greatly outnumbered the Roundheads.

Yet 'twas a stubborn tussle withal. Giving ground scarce more than a foot at a time, Cromwell's men retreated in magnificent order, their main line as yet unbroken. But Noll himself, still watching from the upper windows, realised at once that Goring had dealt him a heavy stroke, and he was too good a leader to attempt to continue such a hopeless affair as the action was developing into.

Ay, Noll Cromwell was a firm believer in the old adage which commences, "He who fights and runs away—" and he followed it when absolutely forced to do so—a fact

which probably played no small part in the secret of his greatness.

Leaving with his staff by a narrow back entrance, he gave instructions for his men to make for a thick wood directly in the rear—a manoeuvre which was successfully accomplished, despite the ceaseless harassing of the opposing forces. The battle moved onwards, carried past the Chase, and was continued stubbornly amongst the numerous tree-trunks. Here a further clever piece of strategy by Cromwell succeeded in checking the enemy's advance whilst he and his main strength retired intact across a wide valley.

The pursuit was not enough, for the Royalists, flushed with victory, pressed the foe hard. But that wonderful brain of the great military genius seemed as clever in a retreat as an advance, and he punished his foes heavily, making them pay dearly for every small advantage they gained. Moreover, he was working towards a certain point for which he knew another Roundhead contingent was also making; and could they but join each other 'twas quite possible—nay, probable—that their combined strength would turn the tide. But that goal was many miles distant as yet, and 'twould take a deal of cunning to successfully retreat so far.

But my Lord Goring also feared the danger of Parliamentary reinforcements. He knew that a large body of Horse had defeated some Royalist cavalry, but they had not since been accounted for so far as he was aware. Indeed, that body might have formed a portion of this force he was now pursuing for aught he knew; but then, again, it might have been operating under some other commander than Cromwell.

Therefore, not desiring to lead his weary warriors into a deathtrap, in which they might be annihilated completely, he gave orders to relinquish the pursuit and to return to their base, leaving a sufficient number to hold Temple Chase against immediate re-occupation by the enemy.

Thus ended one of Colonel Cromwell's few defeats—defeats which were as nothing in the scales of victory when weighed against his successes.

Hors de Combat!

HARRY and Will had been busily engaged in that hard-fought action, and had rendered a rare good account of themselves. The big fellow's mighty arm had sent many a tough

Roundhead on his last journey, whilst the mysterious sword had behaved as though 'twere indeed endowed with some supernatural power.

After the relinquishing of the pursuit, the two comrades had been among those told off to reoccupy the Chase; and as Harry gazed on the war-scarred panelling and shattered windows a great lump rose in his throat. Then a sob burst unchecked from him as he and Howard passed along the Great Gallery.

"What is't, lad?" asked Will, looking at him questioningly, and the boy pointed with a quivering hand.

"See yonder, old friend," he replied, "my mother's picture!"

Howard looked in the same direction, his eyes growing misty. He, too, had loved "the good mistress," whom his young companion could only remember as having vaguely seen in the dim past. And now here was her portrait badly damaged by the storm of lead which had shattered the window immediately facing it—injured, alas, by the very men with whom they had fought side by side!

"'Tis the irony of Fate, lad," he murmured indistinctly, "but 'tis mighty hard to bear!"

"The possession of the sword does not seem to have brought me the good fortune it is credited with," said Harry, smiling bitterly. But Will clapped him encouragingly on the shoulder.

"Nay, lad! Cheer up and look yonder again, for methinks the canvas can be repaired, though the frame is badly chipped. And see, master, by a strange chance the face is almost untouched. Ay, the luck will hold if you have but patience. Remember, you have only regained the sword but a short time back."

Somewhat encouraged, Harry linked his arm through that of his comrade and passed on. A figure was ascending the broad staircase as they reached the top, and they paused with an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, 'tis Travers!" cried Harry. "Fancy you being still here, old friend! They treated you well?"

Travers finished tying a knot on a bandage round his head, which had been struck by a flying splinter of glass, ere he replied.

"Oh, well enough for such dogs!" he said contemptuously. "You did not suppose I should be speenfed, Master Harry, or attended on by a dozen of the rascals, did you? Ho, ho! Ay, I was well treated enough, because Noll Cromwell found me

useful. I knew the place better than he did!"

"A bitter pill, Master Travers, to one so loyal!" chuckled Will, suddenly recollecting the amusing interlude which had taken place that snowy evening when they had arrived at the Chase after their first escape. "Why did you not decoy Noll to the cellars, and lock him up, eh?"

Travers was rather old, and his sense of humour somewhat rusty. He took Howard's banter quite seriously.

"Lock him up!" he gasped. "Lock him up, and have the pig drink from the Temple wine-bins until he swelled to twice his fat size! Thou great oaf, thou wert always hare-brained!"

Will put his hands to his shaking sides, and roared with laughter.

"Ay!" he gasped, as soon as he could speak. "But 'twould have been worth it, Travers!"

"Worth what, fool?"

"Letting Noll drink until he grew big and round! You could then have rolled him out of one of the windows, and thus benefited the King's cause. Why, you might even be Sir John Travers ever after, for his Majesty would be mighty grateful—"

The old retainer gave a snort, and continued his way, shaking his head hopelessly; whilst Will and Harry passed on down the stairs, still chuckling at his simplicity.

For nearly two days the Royalist garrison occupied the Chase, but though 'twas almost hourly expected, no attempt was made by Cromwell to retake the place. For, had they but known it then, Noll had other fish to fry. Prince Rupert had collected his scattered forces, and was about to join hands with another Royalist commander somewhere in Gloucestershire. These two, in turn, were to be joined by yet a third, which would make an army worthy of any foe's steel.

Now, Cromwell had by this time become such a menace to King Charles' supporters, that one and all registered a vow to crush him out of existence, and this Noll knew right well. He also had learnt of the proposed amalgamation of the enemy forces, and determined to engage each one separately, ere this could take place; for, somewhat weakened as he was himself just then, he could never hope to conquer all three together.

So, having succeeded in meeting the body of Roundheads which he had hoped to fall in with on his retreat from Goring, he left Temple Chase severely alone, and marched into Gloucestershire, where he accomplished his desire and left himself in a much more favourable position than he would have been had he delayed.

But the garrison at Temple Chase knew naught of this, until word came from my Lord Goring commanding them to rejoin him at once. The trooper who carried the order told them that Prince Rupert had again been defeated with serious loss, that the second force had fared likewise, and that Goring was marching immediately to the aid of the third which was being threatened by Cromwell, who was now substantially reinforced—mainly by deserters from the Royalist armies.

The garrison thereupon evacuated the mansion, which was once more left to the affectionate care of Travers, and moved away through the trees. Then it was that a catastrophe occurred which was to prevent either Harry or Will from taking part in any action for some time to come.

As they passed beneath the spreading branches, a huge tree, evidently having been loosened by the recent storm, suddenly crashed down, tearing its way through the boughs of the others and falling straight upon the little force which had scarce time to spring clear.

Half a dozen horsemen, including the comrades, were struck to earth in a strange mixture of struggling men and lashing hoofs. Harry received a glancing blow from one of the latter, which rendered him insensible to what was going on around him. Will Howard, unfortunately, had fared much worse, his right arm having been snapped like a carrot. He lay where he had fallen, groaning in agony.

The others had had a miraculous escape, being but slightly injured, so there was nothing for it but to carry the twin back to the Chase, where they were left to the attention of Travers, whilst the rest pushed ahead. Sorry to lose them though their

colleagues were, duty is duty, and brooks no delays nor personal sympathies.

When Harry opened his eyes he found himself lying on a couch in one of the great bed-rooms, whilst Will, still suffering torture from his injury, occupied a bed opposite. The candles had been lighted, and the old retainer was moving softly about the apartment.

"I—Travers, is that you?" The boy raised himself on his elbows, putting his hand to his brow. "Why is my head bandaged? What has happened—Ah, the tree! I remember now!"

Travers came noiselessly towards the couch, bearing one of the candle-sconces in his hand.

"Ah, Master Harry," he said, holding the light close, "twas a painful blow, but not serious. You will soon be in the saddle again!"

"And Will?"

The old fellow looked more concerned, and nodded towards the bed.

"He is much worse, lad—a broken arm,

A Fresh Bid for the Sword!

WHEN Walter Temple had watched my Lord Goring's forces until they were lost to sight amid the trees, he turned with a strange smile to the three troopers who were still looking at him curiously.

"Ve guessed not the import of what I said just now," he remarked, showing his even white teeth, "nor need ye try, for 'tis no affair of yours. And now, some food, an' ye have it—I am half famished!"

Walter was a strange personality truly. There was something compelling—something curiously commanding—about him when he chose to voice his wishes; and now it seemed as though the others were his slaves rather than his gaolers, from the way in which his demand was complied with.

Conducting him to one of the smaller tents, yet keeping a sharp watch upon him whilst they set a meal before him, and he fell to immediately.

No word was spoken until he had finished every scrap and lay back, with a deep sigh



Harry, in desperation, cast the heavy lantern after the retreating figure of his cousin. It struck Walter full between the shoulder-blades, drawing a gasp from him and causing the horse to stumble dangerously.

which should keep him quiet for a time; but I know something of surgery, and have set it as well as I could."

"The others have gone, then?"

"Gone! Why, hours back, master! They carried the two of you here, but could not tarry. Now, lie still until I prepare ye both something for supper."

He shuffled from the chamber, and as his footsteps died away down the passage, Will glanced across from the bed, smiling grimly.

"A grievous pickle, lad!" he muttered, with a wince. "But, fortunately, you have come through it better than I. Yet, though Travers may be an oddity, he's mighty good at surgery, and I've hopes of again wielding a blade for his Majesty!"

Harry looked at the jewelled hilt which was still resting against his hip, and shook his head. Will, noticing the action, made a clicking noise with his tongue.

"Tut, tut!" he said. "Do not blame the blade for all our misfortunes! Recollect how well it served you in the field, and how much Roundhead blood it drank ere Cromwell retreated. Nay, lad, the sword will prove its loyalty yet! This is but the dark-

of contentment. All traces of his recent vindictive display had completely vanished—indeed, he seemed in quite an amiable humour now that the food had taken the keen edge off his appetite.

"Ye must be inwardly reviling me," he said, "for having caused ye to miss the fun yonder!"

The taller of the trio shook his head decidedly.

"Our personal feelings count for little, Sir Rebel! We have our orders, which are quite sufficient for us!"

"Ay, but think how 'twould be were I not here!"

The stolid trooper did not seem to grasp what Walter was hinting at. He shook his head again.

"But you are here, sirrah, and here you stay!" he retorted grimly.

Walter at once relapsed into silence, guessing that 'twould be useless to attempt to undermine the loyalty of these three. He had sounded them carefully, but found their sense of duty too deep for his cunning overtures.

"So be it, then!" he remarked presently. THE POPULAR—No. 91.

"Here I am, as you have just declared, and I warrant I'll give ye little trouble!"

And, truly, he seemed to have been quite sincere when he made that promise; for, as the best part of two days passed by without any untoward happening, his gaolers began to wish that every prisoner who should in future come beneath their care would prove as easy to manage as this one. In the meantime, the remainder of the force had returned to camp, after their triumphant attack on Temple Chase.

But Walter noticed that his cousin and Will Howard were not with them, and decided, naturally enough, that they had probably fallen in the fray. If so, was it not more than possible that the rapier he coveted was still buckled at Harry's waist?

As he turned these things over in his mind, Walter came to the conclusion that his time for action had arrived. If Harry had not been killed, where, then, was he? The Round-heads had retreated, and a retreating army takes few prisoners, as a rule.

Then came the sudden preparation for the advance on Cromwell's third ally, and in the bustle which ensued Walter saw his opportunity.

Left unguarded for a brief while, he slipped beneath the canvas at the back of the tent and out into the open, where he lay prostrate for a minute or two, listening breathlessly for any sign of his action having been observed.

'Tis said that Satan looks after his own, and he certainly did not desert this particular rascal on that occasion; for when Walter emerged he found himself in the centre of a group of tethered horses, who looked curiously at him, but showed no fear, whilst the nearest Royalist trooper was busily occupied more than two hundred yards away.

Unhitching the bridle of a wiry-looking steed, he led it cautiously round the tent and sprang into the saddle. A great buzz was going on not very far off; but he passed unnoticed, bidden by the expanse of canvas, and in a few minutes he was amongst the trees, riding like one possessed.

Ultimately reaching the outskirts of the Chase demesne, he drew rein and dismounted; then, securing his steed to a tree-trunk, he crept forward warily. 'Twas almost dark by this, causing him several times to stumble over strange things lying in the tangled undergrowth—strange, huddled objects which had lain there for close on two days now, and which would remain until someone came and committed them to the earth, or another heavy snowfall buried them for the time being.

He gave an involuntary shudder, stooping low every now and then, but at length gave up his task in despair.

'Tis too dark," he muttered, sinking down with his back against a tree. "I must wait till sunrise; but, marry, I've got plenty of company, though they'll not be over-talatable."

He suddenly paused, and gave a surprised start as a light appeared in one of the mansion's upper windows. 'Twas a flickering gleam, which moved about for a minute or so, and then became stationary.

"Zounds!" he muttered. "Who can be still inside the place? That old fool is surely not there now, and the force they left to hold it returned before I—"

He stole forward, fixing his gaze on the shattered casement and waited. But nothing save the light rewarded him; he did not see any sign of whoever had lit it.

Presently Walter's gaze travelled from the window to the ivy-covered wall beneath, and he drew his breath sharply inwards. Somehow, he felt keenly desirous of ascertaining the identity of the chamber's occupant, and—well, the ivy was old and tough enough to bear a greater weight than his.

Then, as he had just begun to steal towards the base of the wall, the brightness was suddenly blotted out, and the faint clang of closing shutters fell on his ears.

Walter breathed a savage malediction as he glanced upwards. Ay, there were still faint gleams shining through a couple of narrow chinks, and he gripped the thick lower tendrils of the ivy.

Up, up he climbed as nimbly and cautiously as a cat, testing each foothold ere he trusted his weight to it. Thirty feet from the ground he stepped on the broad sill, and applied his eye to a chink, nearly reeling from his precarious position at the sight which met his astonished gaze.

The remains of a meal lay on the table in

the centre of the apartment, whilst to the right someone was sound asleep in a great four-poster bed. But 'twas the couch against the opposite wall which riveted Walter's attention more than anything else; for lying there, his head swathed in a blood-stained bandage, was he whose body he had been vainly seeking over yonder in the woods—his cousin Harry! He also seemed deep in slumber, and still resting against his hip, was the mysterious rapier, its bejewelled hilt glistening in the candlelight.

With a mighty effort Walter collected his scattered wits, and gently thrust his hand through the shattered window-frame. He touched the shutters, which gave ever so slightly under the pressure, and he smothered a grunt of satisfaction. They had not been barred, merely closed over.

Next instant, however, he had swiftly withdrawn his hand as a faint sound of shuffling footsteps fell on his ear. Then Travers entered, gave a glance at his two sleeping charges, and crouched down by the great hearth, holding his wrinkled hands towards the warm blaze.

Walter was silently reviling the old fellow's intrusion, while the latter suddenly turned his head, shivering violently, and glanced inquiringly towards the window. Then he crossed the room, swinging the shutter open wider, and peered out into the darkness. The watcher had just time to step to the far end of the sill, or he would have been seen for a certainty.

"'Twas but the wind!" muttered Travers, after what, to Walter, seemed an eternity. "But, thou dismal whistler, I warrant this will baulk thee!"

He closed the shutter again, barring it securely, and, with the sound of the shooting bolt Walter Temple's hopes fell to zero. But presently they rose again with a bound as he heard the great door below—which had since been repaired by the temporary garrison—creak open, and saw Travers emerge with a lighted lantern in his hand. He disappeared round the end of the mansion, going whither Walter neither knew nor cared. All he realised was that a fresh opportunity to make his entrance had arisen, and, as speedily as he could perform it with safety, he descended to earth again.

Next moment he was groping his way through the great dark hall towards the staircase.

The Luck Holds!

HARRY TEMPLE pushed the scanty remains of his supper away, and glanced across towards Will.

"How feel you now, old friend?" he asked. But the only reply he received was a prolonged snore, and he shook his head. "'Tis small wonder, for I had almost begun to think he was superhuman! 'Twill do him a world of good!"

Presently a great drowsiness commenced to steal over him also, and his head sank on his chest. He saw nothing of the slight movement of the window-shutter, but looked up sleepily at the sound Travers made in closing it.

"Ah, Master Harry!" said the old fellow. "I see you have finished eating! Art cold?"

"Ay, just a trifle!"

"Then, marry, I shall bring some more wood, and make a blaze that could cook even fat Noll himself!"

He shuffled off, and Harry faintly heard the great door below creak open; then his head nodded forward again.

Presently he commenced to dream strange things. He was again in action with Lord Goring's forces, cutting down foemen like corn, the mysterious rapier seemingly invincible. They were besieging Temple Chase, and had forced an entrance, when he seemed to stumble, and lie full length upon the ground, whilst over him someone was stooping, endeavouring to wrest the weapon from his grasp. Gradually, the glittering blade appeared to leave his hand, and, startled by the meaning vividness of the dream, he suddenly awoke with a half-smothered cry.

But it had been no dream, after all, for a strange hand was really clasped round the jewelled hilt at his hip, whilst a dark, malevolent face was staring down into his own.

"Walter! By Heaven!"

His cousin's hand was swiftly pressed over his mouth, effectually choking further utterance, and, though he struggled desperately, the other held the most advantageous position.

"Ah, cousin! You thought you'd finished with me, did you? But there are some things you have yet to learn, my wise young friend!"

Harry was still rather weak and dizzy from his injury, but the knowledge of what was about to happen lent him borrowed strength. He twisted sideways, pressing both the sword and Walter's hands against the back of the couch, and closed his teeth sharply on the rascal's little finger.

Walter uttered a gasp of pain, and tore his hand away, leaving Harry's mouth free. The boy gave a cry which roused Will Howard, who sat up, blinking stupidly in the candle-light.

Then, swiftly taking in what was going on, the big fellow climbed from the bed, one arm strapped bound and useless to his side. Walter turned just in time to see the other raised menacingly above him, and sprang sideways.

The table wobbled on its legs, and went over with a loud crash, scattering the candle-souces in all directions, and plunging the room into comparative darkness, for the fire had by this time died down to a smouldering glow.

"Ho, ho, knave! So you've turned up again, like a bad coin?"

Will moved forward, brandishing his sword, which he had snatched up with his free hand, and Walter retreated round the overturned table. He was, of course, quite unarmed, and had naught wherewith to defend himself, so he at length began to realise that his covetousness had overruled his caution.

He dodged, and sprang towards the open door, Will, with teeth clenched to stifle the agony his broken arm was giving him, following him swiftly. Harry, who had bounded from the couch, was approaching the intruder from another direction, and, indeed, seized his sleeve even as he darted out into the corridor.

But Walter tore himself free, rushing like a frightened deer towards the dark staircase, down which he ran blindly. Then came another crash, a few breathless oaths, and the rumble of some falling substance.

When Harry reached the foot of the stairs Travers was lying on his back, gasping like a stuck pig, whilst his overturned lantern, still lighted, revealed half a dozen thick faggots which had fallen from his hands.

"Where is he—my cousin?"

"Cousin, Master Harry?" groaned Travers, rubbing his chest tenderly. "Nay, I recognised him not, or I might have bid him the time of night! He seemed in a mighty hurry—"

"But where is he? Has he—"

Travers pointed mutely towards the door, which had again been dragged open.

"Gone!" he said. "I could not stay him with—"

But Harry waited for no explanations. He rushed outside, lantern in hand, and saw the faint track of retreating footprints in the snow. They took the direction of a thick copse opposite, and, whipping out his rapier, he followed hotfoot.

Walter had given them far too much trouble in the past, and, though his last attempt on the sword had met with complete failure, so angry was Harry at that moment that he vowed the account between himself and his cousin should be settled at once, and for all time.

Walter, in the meantime, was sprinting like a hare through the trees, glancing behind him every now and then, until finally the bobbing light of the lantern revealed his pursuer.

"Only one!" he muttered savagely. "But armed—ay, doubly armed, since he carries that infernal blade! Truly, 'tis a sorry night's work for you, friend Walter!"

He hurried on, turning his eyes from right to left in search of his waiting horse, but 'twas not until the following lantern was close that he at length arrived at the desired spot. Harry, too, saw him as he sprang into the saddle, and made a frantic effort to catch up; but Walter had already turned, and was starting off into the darkness, a derisive laugh breaking from his lips.

"Nay, cousin! Once again, I bid you farewell—for the time being!"

Harry clenched his teeth, and in desperation cast the lantern after the retreating figure. The heavy article struck Walter full between the shoulder-blades, drawing a gasp from him, and causing him to sway forward. His horse stumbled, but recovered miraculously, and bore him onwards, cursing with the intense pain of the blow.

(Continued on page 19.)

SPECIAL LONG COMPLETE STORY OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Certain Liveliness!

"G R-R-R-R!" Mr. Quelch gave a jump. Morning lessons were in progress in the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars, and Mr. Quelch had been on the war-path—very much so. Impositions had been showered upon his pupils as thick and fast as leaves in Vallombrosa.

The master of the Remove was a martyr to indigestion, and it was a recognised fact that when his digestion suffered his pupils suffered too.

Scarcely a fellow in the class had escaped the vials of Mr. Quelch's wrath. Even such good scholars as Mark Linley and Dennis Carr and Dick Penfold had come under the ban of the Form-master's displeasure.

And now, just as Mr. Quelch was congratulating himself that he had his class in perfect control, the silence of the Form-room was rudely disturbed by the sound of a savage snarl.

"G-r-r-r!"

Mr. Quelch jumped again, and his hand clutched the folds of his gown.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated, in startled tones. "There appears to be a canine creature in the room! That snarl seemed to emanate from beneath my desk."

And the Remove-master stooped down to investigate.

Dennis Carr, however, was looking quite serious. He nudged Billy Bunter, who was seated next to him.

"Stop it, you fat idiot!" he muttered.

"Eh?"

"It's not a bit of use trying your ventriloquist stunts on Quelch. You'll be bowled out in next to no time."

Billy Bunter looked quite indignant.

"Oh, really, Carr! I've not been doing any ventriloquism."

"You're not trying to make Quelch think there's a dog in the room?"

"I'm not. I—"

The red and flushed face of the Form-master bobbed up from beneath the desk.

"Silence!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"G-r-r-r-r!"

Another snarl, louder and fiercer than the preceding ones, caused Mr. Quelch to leap back in alarm.

"Some boy—some unmitigated young rascal—has brought a dog into the Form-room!" he exclaimed.

There was another snarl, followed by a "zipping" sound, as of a garment being torn asunder.

Mr. Quelch hastily drew up his gown, expecting to find the nether portion of it in a dog's mouth.

But the gown was intact, and there was no sign of a dog.

"Extraordinary!" murmured Mr. Quelch. "I am confident that there is a beast in the Form-room! Can anybody see one?"

"There's only you, sir!" said Skinner blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

An irresistible ripple of laughter followed Skinner's statement.

Mr. Quelch did not laugh. His frown resembled that of Jove of old.

"Skinner!" he thundered. "How dare you

venture upon such a disrespectful remark! Stand out before the class!"

The cad of the Remove obeyed, and Mr. Quelch picked up a pointer. But before he could say "Hold out your hand!" there was a plaintive whine from the fireplace.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "The animal appears to be up the chimney!"

And, pointer in hand, the Form-master crossed over to the fireplace to investigate.

There was no fire burning in the grate. For economy's sake, the Head had decreed that no coal was to be used at Greyfriars until the first spell of really cold weather set in.

Mr. Quelch jerked back the fireguard, and, temporarily forgetful of his dignity, he stooped down and glanced up the chimney. He could see nothing, but the whining continued.

"I am convinced that a dog is lurking in one of the recesses of the chimney!" muttered the Remove-master.

And he groped upwards with his pointer.

"Swoooooosh!"

A perfect avalanche of soot descended from the chimney, and Mr. Quelch staggered back, choking and spluttering.

When the Remove-master turned his face towards the class it was impossible for the juniors to keep their own faces straight. They made weird contortions, and then broke into a peal of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch's countenance was as black as a Christy Minstrel's!

"Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered the Form-master, frantically gouging the soot from his eyes and hair. "How dare you! How dare you snigger at my unfortunate predicament!"

"Bow-wow!"

That cheerful bark came from the chimney. But Mr. Quelch did not return to continue his investigations. He had had quite enough soot—a surfeit of it, in fact—and he was not exactly pining for another dose.

There was a mirror hanging on the wall, near the mantelpiece. Mr. Quelch happened to catch sight of his reflection in it, and with a startled gasp he hurriedly quitted the Form-room. He could not very well go on conducting the lesson when his countenance resembled the ace of spades!

A buzz of excitement followed the Form-master's departure.

Skinner went back to his place, chuckling.

"Thanks awfully for coming to my rescue, Bunter!" he said, addressing the Owl of the Remove.

"Eh? I—I don't understand!" stammered Bunter.

"Why, if you hadn't caused that whining row to come from the chimney just when you did, I should have got it in the neck!"

"But it—it wasn't me!" protested Billy Bunter.

"Oh, come off!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not going to tell us that there's actually a dog in the room!"

"It wasn't my ventriloquism, anyway," answered the fat junior. "I haven't done any for months and months!"

But Billy Bunter was such a notorious fibber that nobody believed him.

There was no dog in the Remove Form-room; that was certain. And the snarling

and the whining could only be accounted for by the fact that Billy Bunter was a born ventriloquist.

So far, Mr. Quelch's suspicions had not fallen upon the Owl of the Remove. Bunter had abstained from ventriloquist tricks for such a long time that Mr. Quelch had almost forgotten the fat junior's singular powers in that respect.

It was the general opinion, however, that if Billy Bunter continued to play such antics in the Form-room he would be bowled out. Mr. Quelch had been deceived up to a point, but it would be impossible to deceive him much longer.

"If you take my advice, Bunter," said Dennis Carr, "you'll dry up! You've given us plenty of amusement—in fact, it's been better than a pantomime—but there's such a thing as going too far."

"Hear, hear!" said Harry Nugent. "If Quelch bowls you out, Bunter, you'll get it where the chicken got the chopper!"

Billy Bunter's little round eyes were glittering with indignation behind his big spectacles.

"I've not been doing any ventriloquism, I tell you!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Do you think I should be such a chump as to start that game in the Form-room, when Quelch knows that I'm a ventriloquist? Why, I should be simply asking for trouble!"

"Look here, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, "it's no use attempting to deny it. There isn't a dog here, and you're the only ventriloquist in the room; so it stands to reason that it was you who scared Quelch."

"Blest if I can understand why Bunter denies it!" said Johnny Bull. "He's got nothing to fear from us."

"To my way of thinking—" began Bob Cherry.

"Bow-wow!"

The sound came from the direction of the fireplace. And Bob Cherry turned swiftly upon Billy Bunter.

"You mean to say that wasn't you?" he exclaimed.

"It certainly wasn't!" was the reply.

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Bob. "As a purveyor of fibs, you lick Ananias and Baron Munchausen hollow!"

"Bow-wow!"

"There he goes again!" said Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

At this juncture Mr. Quelch reappeared in the Remove Form-room. His countenance looked as if it had been subjected to a severe rubbing and scrubbing.

During his absence Mr. Quelch had tried to fathom the mystery of the dog which could be heard but not seen. And he had eventually come to the conclusion that there was no dog at all, and that the snarling and whining were the work of a ventriloquist.

Having formed this conclusion, Mr. Quelch grimly decided to make things warm for the transgressor.

The Remove-master had barely reached his desk when the snarling broke out afresh, and it was again followed by a rending sound, as of a garment being ripped in twain.

On this occasion Mr. Quelch didn't jump. He stood perfectly still, and his keen eyes

alighted upon Billy Bunter. He fancied he saw the fat junior's lips move.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch's voice resembled the detonation of a bomb.

"Yessir?"

"Stand out immediately!"

"Eh? W-w-what for, sir?"

"I have not the slightest doubt that you are responsible for this outrage, Bunter!"

"Me, sir!" exclaimed the Owl of the Remove, wildly and ungrammatically. "Oh, really, sir! I assure you—"

"Your assurance carries no weight with me, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch. "Until a few moments ago the fact that you were a ventriloquist escaped my memory. But I can clearly see now that you are at the bottom of this business. Come here, sir, and I will punish you as you deserve!"

Billy Bunter rolled out before the class. He halted in front of the Form-master's desk, and threw out his arms in wild appeal.

"It wasn't me, sir!" he exclaimed. "I swear it wasn't! I give you my word of honour—"

But Bunter's word of honour wasn't good enough for Mr. Quelch.

"You cannot deny that you are a ventriloquist, Bunter—"

"No, sir. But I haven't been doing any stunts this morning—honour bright, sir!"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"I distinctly saw your lips move just now!"

"I was on the point of saying something to Carr, sir."

"It is quite useless for you to assume an attitude of innocence, Bunter. I am satisfied that you are responsible for what has occurred this morning. I should be quite justified in taking you before Dr. Locke and requesting him to administer condign punishment."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I shall not, however, take that step. I intend to punish you myself. Hold out your hand!"

Billy Bunter ventured on yet another appeal—an appeal which, needless to state, left Mr. Quelch cold.

"Obey me!" thundered the angry Form-master.

The fat junior gingerly extended his hand, palm upwards.

"Whack—whack—whack!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Now the other hand, Bunter!"

"Oh! Ah! Yow! I—I've had enough, sir!"

"I think I am the better judge of that," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "Come, Bunter!"

The Owl of the Remove extended his other hand, and the dose was repeated.

Mr. Quelch was in great form with the pointer, and the victim's yells of anguish rang through the Form-room.

"Reminds you of pig-killing, doesn't it?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The ludicrous Bunter is going through the hoopfulness!" muttered Hurree Singh.

"It's his own fault!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I haven't a spark of sympathy for the fat idiot. He was warned what would happen if he went too far, and he ignored our warning."

"Those screams are horrible!" said Frank Nugent, stopping his ears. "As Bunter's a giddy ventriloquist, I wish he'd make 'em come from Friarale or from Courtfield. We should be able to preserve our ear-drums then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" rapped out Mr. Quelch, laying aside the instrument of castigation. "You may go to your place, Bunter. And do not dare to transgress in this way again!"

Billy Bunter rolled dolorously back to his seat, groaning as he went.

And the burden of his plaint was:

"Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Unpleasant for Loder!

"FAG!"

The deep and unmusical voice of Gerald Loder boomed along the Sixth-Form passage.

Loder paused and listened, but instead of a brisk response the sound of scurrying feet came to his ears, and they were scurrying in the opposite direction.

Fagging for Loder was no catch. And all the Second and Third-Formers who happened to be within earshot promptly made themselves scarce.

"Fag!" repeated Loder, his voice rising to a roar.

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Silence.

Loder went back into his study. His eyes were glittering ominously. He picked up an ashplant, and strode out in quest of a member of the fag fraternity.

The prefect rounded the corner of the passage in a great hurry. And as he did so he cannoned into a junior—Hazeldene of the Remove, to wit.

"Ow!" gasped Hazel, reeling against the wall.

And then, forgetting the respect due to a prefect, he added:

"Why can't you look where you're going, you beast?"

"Beast, am I?" snarled Loder, grasping the Removeite by the collar. "Why didn't you come when you heard me calling for a fag?"

Hazeldene struggled to free himself, but in vain.

"You can't fag the Remove!" he panted. "You know you can't. We were exempted from fagging ages ago!"

"I want a fag!" said Loder grimly.

"Well, you won't get me!" flashed Hazel, with unusual spirit.

"Seems that I've got you already!" said the prefect, with a harsh laugh.

Hazeldene continued to struggle. And while he struggled he shouted:

"Rescue! Rescue, Remove!"

But, with few exceptions, the Removeites were out on the football field.

The building seemed to be deserted, and Loder was master of the situation.

"Look here, kid," said the Sixth-Former, with a sudden change of manner, "there's no sense in defying me. You'll get hurt that way. Now, I'm giving a little celebration in my study at five o'clock, and Carne and Walker are coming along, and I want you to get the grub ready."

"You can jolly well wait!" panted Hazel. Loder scowled.

"You refuse to obey orders?" he snarled.

"You've no right to order me to fag for you, and I'm not going to!"

"We'll see about that!"

So saying, Loder hauled his captive along the passage, and bundled him into his study.

Once inside, Loder locked the door and put his back to it.

"Pile in!" he said. "You can start right in and lay the table!"

Hazeldene realised that he was entirely at Loder's mercy.

The prefect was armed with an ashplant, which he would not scruple to use in the event of further defiance.

So Hazeldene gave way and started to do Loder's bidding, the rascally senior watching him with an amused and triumphant grin.

The cupboard was well stocked with supplies, and the unwilling fag set everything out on the table. Then, under Loder's supervision, he lighted the fire and put the kettle on.

"That'll do," said Loder at length. "Now you can quit!"

And he unlocked the door and allowed Hazeldene to depart.

Back in his own quarters, Hazel encountered Skinner. The cad of the Remove glanced at him curiously.

"What's biting you, Hazel?" he asked.

"That beast Loder has made me fag for him!" was the sullen reply.

"Rough luck!" said Skinner.

"Didn't you hear me yelling for help?"

"No, or I would have come at once."

"I don't think!" sniffed Hazel.

Skinner was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and it was highly improbable that he would have rushed to a schoolfellow's assistance.

"Loder's having a little flutter in his study at five o'clock," said Hazeldene. "Carne and Walker are going to join him. And I've had to lay the table and light the fire and goodness knows what!"

Skinner nodded sympathetically.

"I suppose they'll lock the door and smoke and play cards?" he said.

"You bet!"

"I should like to see 'em bowled out!" said Skinner maliciously.

Skinner could hardly be styled a paragon of all the virtues himself. He was cast in the same mould as Gerald Loder. But he happened to be feeling very bitter towards Loder just then, the prefect having boxed his ears that morning without any provocation.

"I quite agree with you, Skinner," said a voice. "The sooner Loder gets fired out of Greyfriars the better! It was downright beastly of him to make you fag for him, Hazel!"

Skinner and Hazeldene spun round sharply, to encounter Billy Bunter.

"You fat worm!" exclaimed Skinner. "You've been listening!"

"Oh, really?" protested the fat junior. "I was merely bending down in that doorway to tie my bootlace up, and I couldn't help hearing what was said."

"You—you—"

"There's nothing to get ratty about," said Bunter. "I'm on your side, absolutely! I should like to see Loder get it in the neck! I only wish I'd heard you yelling for help, Hazel. I'd have come like a shot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of the fat and flabby Owl of the Remove rescuing a schoolfellow from Loder's clutches caused both Skinner and Hazeldene to roar with laughter. Bunter was always a very heroic sort of fellow so far as words went. When it came to actions it was quite another matter.

After further conversation, in the course of which they abused Loder and all his works, the trio dispersed.

Meanwhile, the "little flutter" was in progress in Loder's study.

The door was locked, and cigarettes and cards were on the table.

Carne and Walker were seated at the table with Loder. Carne was looking quite happy, and in his element. But Walker was scowling. He had accepted Loder's invitation under the impression that there was to be no smoking and no gambling. For Walker had, to a certain extent, turned over a new leaf.

He was a member of the First Eleven, and he had sense enough to realise that these "little flutters" were not conducive to sparkling play on the football field.

It was Walker's intention, as soon as tea was over, and the cigarettes were handed round, to take his departure.

"I didn't come here for a gay time," he said to Loder. "I understand from you that it was to be a feed, pure and simple. And if you think I'm going to fool away the evening playing nap and smoking cheap and nasty cigarettes you're mistaken!"

Before Loder could reply, there was a sudden knocking on the door of the study.

"Who's there?" called the prefect.

He was alarmed, though he did not betray his alarm in his tone.

The reply fairly staggered the three occupants of the study.

"It is I—Dr. Locke!"

Loder turned quite pale. And Carne and Walker looked far from comfortable.

"I have reason to believe that smoking and gambling are going on within this study," continued the stern voice from without. "Am I correct, Loder?"

"Xummo, sir!" said the prefect, adding, in an undertone:

"Clear these smokes and things away—quick!"

The cigarettes and cards were promptly bundled into a drawer.

"The fact that you have locked the door," continued the voice from the passage, "leads me to believe that a disgusting orgy is in progress. I demand to know the names of your companions, Loder!"

"Carne and Walker, sir," said the prefect. "But I—I can assure you that there's no smoking or gambling going on, sir!"

"Then, why have you locked the door?"

"So that we can enjoy a little privacy, sir."

Your explanation, Loder, does not impress me in the least. The three of you will report to me at once in my study!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The seniors exchanged sickly glances.

"We're in for it now!" muttered Carne.

"Absolutely!" said Walker, who was wishing that he had given Loder's study a wide berth.

"Don't be a pair of fools!" snapped Loder. "The Head's got no evidence against us. We shall be able to brazen things out all right. Come on!"

The door was unlocked, and the seniors stepped out into the passage. They saw no sign of the Head.

"He's cleared off pretty suddenly!" said Carne.

"I can't understand why he didn't insist on coming into the study," said Walker.

As they rounded the bend in the passage the Sixth-Formers came upon Dr. Locke. He was chatting to Mr. Quelch.

A few yards farther on Hazeldene of the Remove was in conversation with the Famous Five. Those cheery youths had just returned from the football-field, and Hazel was telling them of his misfortunes—how he had been forced to fag for Loder.



A perfect avalanche of soot descended from the chimney, and Mr. Quelch staggered back, choking and spluttering. There was a roar of laughter from the boys as he turned his face towards the class. He was as black as a Christy minstrel! (See page 5).

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry softly. "Here's Loder himself!"

"Wonder what he wants?" said Wharton. Looking decidedly sheepish, the three seniors stepped up to the Head.

Dr. Locke did not seem best pleased at the intrusion. He spun round sharply.

"Well, Loder," he said, "what is it?"

The prefect licked his dry lips.

"We've come, sir!" he said.

"So I observe!" said the Head drily. "If you have anything to say to me, kindly defer it until I have finished speaking to Mr. Quelch!"

"But you—you told us to come along, sir; you—" stammered Loder.

"What?"

The astonishment in the Head's tone and manner made the seniors gasp.

"D-didn't you order us to come to your study, sir?" stuttered Walker.

"Certainly not!"

"My hat!"

"Whatever put such a notion into your head, Walker?"

"We—we could have sworn it was you, sir! We were having tea in Loder's study a few minutes back, and you rapped on the door, and said you suspected that we were smoking and gambling!"

"Bless my soul!"

"And you ordered us to come to your study, sir!" said Carne.

The Head frowned.

"I can only conclude," he said, "that you have been the victims of a practical joke. Some misguided boy must have imitated my voice in order to scare you."

"Great Scott!"

The seniors realised at last that they had been hoaxed. They clenched their hands angrily, and exchanged savage looks.

"I sincerely trust, Loder," said the Head, "that there is no foundation for the statement that you have been smoking and gambling?"

"None whatever, sir!" said Loder hastily.

"Very well! I will accept your assurance on that point. At the same time, I am not at all satisfied, Loder, that your conduct is all that it should be. You are a prefect, and it is your duty to set an example. But I fear that you have been very lax of late. Unless there is a marked improvement, I shall be compelled to deprive you of your prefectship."

"Oh crumbs!"

Loder was so completely taken aback that he scarcely knew what to say.

"I have warned you, Loder," said Dr. Locke, "and I trust you will take my warning to heart. I have nothing more to say!"

Loder and Carne and Walker strode away with furious faces. They were savage to think that they had been spoofed, and the fact that Harry Wharton & Co. were chucking at them did not improve their tempers.

"Wonder who it was played that trick on us?" muttered Carne.

"One of the young brats in the Remove, of course!" snarled Loder. "We were fools—priceless idiots—to think that it was the Head speaking!"

"And we jolly nearly landed ourselves into serious trouble!" growled Walker. "It'll be a long time before I agree to take part in any more of your little flutters, Loder!"

Loder gave a snort.

"Go your own way, and be hanged!" he said amiably.

And Walker went, leaving Loder and Carne faced with the baffling problem of discovering the identity of the practical joker.

"You must have mimicked the Head's voice to perfection to take those boundaries in like that!"

Billy Bunter stopped, and stared.

"Oh, really, Hazel, I don't know what you're talking about!" he exclaimed.

"Hazel's referring to the scare you gave Loder," said Harry Wharton.

"What? I haven't given Loder a scare!"

"You mean to say you didn't stand outside his study door just now, and imitate the Head's voice?" said Bob Cherry.

"Certainly not!"

"My hat!"

The juniors looked amazed.

Billy Bunter was not only a clever ventriloquist, but he was a good mimic. And Harry Wharton & Co. took it for granted that it was Bunter who had perpetrated the recent hoax. Hazeldene was absolutely positive on that score.

"Look here, Bunt," he said, "you jolly well know that it was you! Where's the sense in denying it?"

"It wasn't me, I tell you!"

"Oh, rats!"

"You tried to pretend that you were responsible for that ventriloquist stunt in class this morning!" said Johnny Bull.

"I wasn't, either."

"Don't be an ass, Bunter!" said Nugent impatiently. "It must have been you! You're the only ventriloquist in the Form, and the only decent mimic, too. You've got nothing to gain by hiding your light under a bushel. We all think it was a jolly smart wheeze of yours to make Loder think the Head was after him!"

"But I didn't!" protested Bunter.

The fat junior spoke with unusual earnestness, but neither the Famous Five nor Hazeldene believed him. They were convinced that it was Bunter who had performed the ventriloquist feat in the Form-room. And they were equally convinced that it was Bunter who had spoofed Loder. Why he should

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

More Ventriloquism!

THE Famous Five and Hazeldene were still chuckling over Loder's discomfiture, when Billy Bunter rolled up.

"Bravo, Billy!" said Hazeldene.

"The way you worked the oracle was fine!"

"Eh?"

deny all connection with either of the two incidents was a mystery.

Billy Bunter's eyes were glittering with wrath and indignation.

"I don't see why you fellows should doubt my word!" he said. "Have you ever found me out in a lie?"

"No, never!" said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't done any ventriloquism or mimicking for months, really—honest Injun!" declared Bunter.

"It beats me, how the fat worm can stand and tell such awful whoppers!" growled Johnny Bull. "Bump him!"

Billy Bunter backed away in alarm.

"Hold on—1-1 mean, leggo!" he panted.

But the juniors were "fed-up" with Bunter and his fabrications.

The fat junior was swept off his feet and dumped unceremoniously on to the stone floor of the passage.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Give him an encore!" panted Bob Cherry. Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow! Beasts! Rotters! Chuck it!" yelled the terrified Owl of the Remove.

"Once again!" sang out Harry Wharton. Bump!

Billy Bunter descended to the floor with an impact which shook every bone in his body. And the Famous Five and Hazeldene strolled away, leaving the fat junior to sort himself out.

The juniors could not understand Bunter's attitude in the least.

As a rule, the Owl of the Remove was quick to boast of his ventriloquial achievements. He knew that he was a clever ventriloquist, and he seldom lost an opportunity of letting others know it.

It was a real puzzle to understand why Billy Bunter had so emphatically denied his latest exploits.

There were further developments that evening in the Remove dormitory.

No sooner had Wingate of the Sixth extinguished the lights than a deep snore boomed through the darkened room.

The sound appeared to emanate from Peter Todd, who slept in the bed nearest the door. And there was a chorus of protest at once.

"Dry up, Toddy!"

"Chuck that row!"

"We want to get to sleep!"

Peter Todd sat up in bed in a state of great indignation.

"What are you fellows babbling about?" he demanded.

"You were snoring, Toddy!" said Wharton.

"Like a blessed foghorn!" added Bob Cherry.

"I wasn't!" howled Peter. "I've been awake all the time!"

"Well, you were snoring, anyway!" said Skinner. "You must have dropped into a doze."

"Didn't!"

"We'll give you the benefit of the doubt this time," said Dennis Carr.

And after a further growl of protest from Peter Todd, silence reigned in the Remove dormitory.

The silence, however, was of brief duration. At the end of five minutes a loud, trumpeting noise reverberated through the room.

"Snore-re!"

"There he goes again!" said Bob Cherry.

"Suffocate him, somebody!"

"Keep him quiet!"

Peter Todd sat up in bed once more.

"That wasn't me, you silly duffers!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't so much as closed my eyes yet!"

"But the snore came from the direction of your bed!" said Wharton.

"I tell you it wasn't me!" hooted Peter, fast losing his temper.

"Then who the dickens—"

There was a sudden exclamation from Bolsover major.

"My only aunt!"

"What's the matter with you, Bolsover?" demanded Dennis Carr.

"This is another of Bunter's ventriloquial stunts!" said the bully of the Remove.

"My hat!"

Bolsover's statement made a profound impression.

"I believe Bolsover's right!" said Bob Cherry excitedly.

"I'm jolly sure of it!" said Wharton. "Bunter!"

There was no reply from the fat junior.

"He's pretending to be asleep!" growled Johnny Bull.

Candle-ends were lighted up and down the

dormitory, and Harry Wharton & Co. stepped out of bed.

Billy Bunter was lying on his side, apparently fast asleep. He did not stir as his schoolfellows advanced towards him.

"Shamming, by Jove!" said Nugent. "And he's a much better actor than I thought!"

Bob Cherry bent over the bed and tweaked the nose of the occupant.

The effect was instantaneous.

Billy Bunter sat up with a yell, which rang through the dormitory.

"Yaroooooop!"

"Now, you fat worm!" said Wharton sternly. "What do you mean by it?"

Billy Bunter looked the picture of bewilderment and consternation.

"Eh? Mean by what?" he gasped.

"By carrying on with your silly ventriloquial twaddle?"

Bunter blinked indignantly at the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I can't make out why you keep accusing me of these things. I've been sound asleep!"

"You awful fibber! You made it appear that Toddy was snoring, and you can't deny it!"

But Billy Bunter did deny it—repeatedly and emphatically. He solemnly declared that he had not been putting his ventriloquial powers into practice.

But, as Bob Cherry remarked, solemn declarations from William George Bunter were not worth much.

"What shall we do with the horrible fat worm?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Better court-martial him in the morning," said Harry Wharton. "We can't be bothered to deal with him to-night."

"These ventriloquial turns of his are all right when the victim happens to be Lord of the Sixth," said Nugent. "But when Bunter starts making mischief in the Remove it's time we put a stop to his little game!"

"Hear, hear!"

Billy Bunter again protested his innocence. But his protestations went unheeded.

And it was unanimously resolved that the fat junior should be put through the mill in the morning.

This resolution having been passed, the Removees settled down to sleep, undisturbed by any further bouts of snoring.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Brought to Book!

NEXT morning, during the interval between breakfast and lessons, Harry Wharton & Co. sat in judgment on Billy Bunter in the junior Common-room.

The affair was in the nature of a police-court sitting, though the proceedings were not quite so solemn.

Harry Wharton, of course, presided.

"The prisoner at the bar," he announced, "is charged with performing ventriloquial stunts at the expense of Peter Todd, and with telling the most atrocious whoppers in connection therewith."

"Hear, hear!"

"Scrag him!"

"Pulverise him!"

Billy Bunter was guarded on one side by Bob Cherry, and on the other side by Johnny Bull.

The fat junior was quivering like a jelly, partly with funk, and partly with indignation.

"Now, it's not necessary to form a jury," Wharton went on. "I think we are all agreed that prisoner is guilty?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The guiltfulness of the ludicrous Bunter is terrific!"

"That being so," continued Wharton, "the only question we have to discuss is this: What form shall prisoner's punishment take?"

Those who had expressed themselves in favour of "scragging" and "pulverising" reiterated their bloodthirsty suggestions. And there were many more propositions put forward, the most popular of them being that Billy Bunter should be made to run the gauntlet.

This decidedly unpleasant form of punishment having been decided upon, the juniors commenced to knot their handkerchiefs, and to look round for other suitable weapons of chastisement.

As soon as all the fellows were armed, Harry Wharton lined them up in two rows.

Billy Bunter watched these preparations with his knees fairly knocking together, and a vehement outburst escaped him.

"It's not fair! I'm not guilty! I refuse to run the gauntlet! If you rotters ill-treat me, I'll tell Quelch! I'll tell the Head!"

"Run!" said Wharton tersely.

"I won't! I—"

"Then I shall have to make you!"

And Harry Wharton gave the fat junior a shove which sent him sprawling between the two lines of avengers.

But before the juniors could proceed with Billy Bunter's punishment there was a dramatic interruption.

The door of the Common-room was thrown open, and in came Mark Linley and Dick Penfold, looking very stern. And between them was the squirming figure of Skinner.

"Stop!"

Mark Linley's voice rang through the room. Instantly Harry Wharton & Co. lowered their knotted handkerchiefs.

"What the thump—" began Bob Cherry, in amazement.

"Bunter's innocent!" exclaimed Dick Penfold. "And this cad—this awful outsider—is the culprit!"

"Great Scott!"

"You—you mean to say it was Skinner who did the ventriloquism and the mimicking?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

Penfold nodded.

"If you fellows will repair the leakages in your memory-tanks," he said, "you'll recollect that some time ago Skinner took lessons in ventriloquism."

"So he did, by Jove!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"He made things unpleasant for Bunter on that occasion," said Penfold, "and we bumped all the silly nonsense out of him. He hasn't done any ventriloquism for ages, and now he's turned the tap on again."

"How do you know it was Skinner?" exclaimed Dennis Carr.

"We happened to be passing his study," said Mark Linley, "and the door was ajar. We could hear Skinner practising, throwing his voice, and imitating the snarl of a dog, just as he did in the Form-room yesterday."

"My hat!"

"So we promptly taxed him, and dragged a confession out of him," said Dick Penfold. "He admits that he's been responsible for all these recent stunts."

"And he sat still and said nothing while Quelch walloped Bunter in class!" said Frank Nugent angrily.

Harry Wharton was still glaring at Skinner.

"What shall we do with the worm, you fellows?" he inquired.

"He'll have to be reported to Quelch," said Dennis Carr.

"You sneak!" hissed Skinner.

"It's not a question of sneaking," said Dennis. "Billy Bunter was punished on your account, and he must be set right in Quelch's eyes. We're not going to let him remain in Quelch's black books because of your low-down tricks!"

"No jolly fear!"

"Bring him along to Quelch's study!"

Uttering shrill protests, Skinner was marched out of the Common-room. His base conduct was duly reported to Mr. Quelch, and Harry Wharton & Co. pleaded that they might be allowed to deal with Skinner themselves. After some hesitation, the Remove-master consented to this course.

Skinner was accordingly marched back to the Common-room, where he was sentenced by the Form to run the gauntlet.

It was a terrible ordeal, and the wretched victim was squirming and groaning on the floor when it was over. And it was likely to be a long, long time before he carried out any more ventriloquial "stunts" in the Remove.

As for Billy Bunter, he was treated to a substantial feed that afternoon, as some consolation for his unhappy experiences. The fat junior was fairly in his element, and his countenance beamed like a full moon.

"It was rather beastly of you fellows to doubt my word," he said, "but to prove that I'm not the sort of chap to bear malice, I'm going to shake hands all round, and swear internal friendship!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. allowed Billy Bunter to take this liberty, and the feed proceeded merrily.

Farther along the corridor, in Study No. 11, Harold Skinner was resting his aching limbs on the sofa, and reflecting on the truth of the old saying that the way of the transgressor is hard!

THE END.

(Look out for another grand long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "The Fighting Five!" by Frank Richards, in next week's number.)

WONDERFUL NEW TALES OF A FAMOUS DETECTIVE!



"The EXPLOITS OF FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE!"

A Grand New Story, dealing with the Adventures of FERRERS LOCKE, the Famous Detective.

By MAURICE EVERARD.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Ferrers Locke, the famous criminal investigator, is called in to help Scotland Yard to disentangle the mysterious murder of Paul Morale Rodriguez. The detective travels down to the World-Wide Club, and there he meets Harter and Sartoris, both of whom happened to have heard the shot that killed Rodriguez. Locke is looking through Rodriguez's belongings when he suddenly turns to his secretary, and, pointing to an old-fashioned small-bore horse-pistol, says: "There's the weapon that caused the death of Rodriguez!"

(Now read on.)

Further Clues!

"I DON'T quite follow the line of reasoning," Hay ventured boldly.

"Because, my young friend, all along you've had your mind fixed in the same groove as Calkett, Delkin, and Rogers, of the Yard. They couldn't get out of their heads the notion that the crime was committed with a revolver or a Browning automatic. They limited their line of reasoning to the shape and size of the bullet. But, my dear Hay, isn't it just as easy to fire a conical-shaped cartridge bullet from a hundred-and-twenty-year-old weapon as from a modern revolver?"

Hay shook his head.

"No, because a modern weapon fires a cartridge, a bullet fixed to a shell. The old one required powder—powder in the barrel, powder in the pan, and round the bullet."

An amused smile began to play about the corners of Locke's lips.

"But suppose, my friend, I deliberately set to work to shoot a man in such a way as not to be found out? I don't do the direct thing, if I'm a clever chap. Your astute murderer always endeavours to avoid the obvious. The same with me. I see this old horse-pistol on the wall, and I see my enemy—we will call him Rodriguez—sitting in that chair. How can I kill him in such a way that the whole affair will be shrouded in mystery? There is the weapon on the wall. It requires, as you say, powder for the charge, powder for the pan. The old flint is already fixed. Now I can get gunpowder anywhere, and not leave a link with my crime behind. But what about the bullet? That is a more difficult matter."

"It's the bullet which gets over me," Hay admitted.

"Wait! I'm coming to it. If I want a leaden ball to fit this barrel, I must go to the gunsmith's and ask for one of the exact size. But the gunsmith might remember me, and that would be dangerous. Stay, I get an idea! A conical-shaped piece of lead taken from a live cartridge-case will serve the purpose beautifully. I have plenty of cartridges. Now what more do I want?"

"A good many things," Hay responded briskly. "To begin with, the knowledge that the man you propose to kill sits in that chair on a line with the pistol on the wall."

"Admitted. But supposing I know that? I become acquainted with Paul Rodriguez's habits. I learn what is common knowledge to lots of people—that between the hours of three and four every afternoon he makes a point of coming to this room and of sitting at that desk to write out his report to the

foreign Government in whose pay he is. You will remember I have my pistol loaded with a modern cartridge bullet, with powder well wedged home, and more powder in the pan, and everything ready for the firing of the weapon. Rodriguez is here; the pistol is there. He sits on a line with death. My dear Hay, throw all your doubts away; we are coming fast on the matter of the man's end."

There was a silence in the room. Hay felt, as Locke so often unconsciously made him feel in the moment of some great discovery, that he was in the presence of one gifted with some subtly far-seeing power denied to other men. In all his quiet pronouncements there lurked the element of the unexpected.

"I follow you so far, but still I'm at a loss to see how the pistol could be fired. No one besides Rodriguez was in the room. Then the only possible way was by tying a cord to the trigger and by manipulating it from the outside."

The detective cocked the weapon for the third or fourth time.

"Not at all a bad suggestion, but, unfortunately, there is nothing to support it. For one thing, what Mauvell said was quite true; there isn't a hole in the floor, ceiling, or walls through which a cord could be or has been passed. Again, these weapons, everything in the room, is exactly as when the crime was discovered. I believe Mr. Harter and Mr. Sartoris to be beyond suspicion. They stayed here until the doctor came, followed a few minutes later by the police. Directly the body was removed to the mortuary the room was sealed up. The first lot of seals were only broken to admit the Scotland Yard chaps. They resealed the door and windows without leaving the room an instant. I have just broken the seals for the second time, which brings me to my second point; the murderer had no opportunity of removing a cord or wire from the trigger."

"Then how was it done?" Hay asked.

Locke moved his head slowly from side to side.

"At present I can't say. All I can tell you is that a bullet fired from this old horse-pistol struck Rodriguez down, that the weapon was fired from inside the room—witness the fact of the windows and doors being closed on the inside—and that, in all probability, the man responsible was one Rodriguez went in fear of, and against whom he had the small bolt fixed on the inside of the door. Put the pistols back on the wall, but give me the two champagne corks. They open up a fresh field of possibility."

With this strange remark Locke rose and left the room.

The Sleuth!

THE manager of the club, who had personally carried out most of the wall decorations when the place was first opened, was sure he did not place the corks behind the ancient pistols.

"On that point I can be absolutely positive, Mr. Locke," he replied, leaning back in his chair, with his hands crossed over his knees. "If you look through the various rooms you'll see quite a number of old weapons here and there. The big smoke-room has a good many, there are some over the fire-

place in the lounge, and the two you speak of in Mr. Rodriguez's writing-room."

Locke's face was expressionless. "If you remember fixing up the pistols, perhaps you can tell me just how you secured them to the wall?"

"Perfectly well. Each with two nails, one long, the other short. The long nail passed between the space made by the let-down trigger and the cap nipple; the short was driven into the wall, leaving about half an inch protruding to support the barrel."

"So that both weapons were flat against the wall?"

"Quite, with the barrels pointing downwards to the mantelshelf."

"Not outwards at all—into the room, I mean?"

"Oh dear no!"

"You are quite sure on that point?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Locke. Just come with me and inspect the other weapons. We've got quite a number of these old pistols about. You'll find them all hung in the same way, just as I've described, and, as you say, flat to the wall."

A tour of several rooms convinced Locke. His interest in the case began to deepen now that he found his pet theory bearing fruit. Someone had purposely stolen into Paul Rodriguez's writing-room in his absence, and had put the corks behind the pistols to ensure the barrels pointing outwards. One of them aimed in a direct line with the chair the Spaniard was accustomed to occupy at his work.

"That will do so far as the weapons are concerned," he coolly announced, when the door of Mr. Ribaud's office closed again.

"Now, can you tell me what champagnes you stock?"

Ribaud's left hand came out, and his fat fingers were outspread.

"Moet and Chandon, Bollinger, Fleury, Heimer's, Cordon Rouge. I think that is all."

"Not Charlemont Freres?"

"Oh, yes, and Charlemont Freres."

"This brand?" Locke said, and quietly tossed the corks on the desk.

Ribaud examined them critically.

"Yes, they are ours, the famous Fleur-de-Lys vintage 1903. This particular wine is bottled especially for us."

"Ah!"

For the first time since the case opened Locke expressed pleased surprise. At last the wide circle of possibility was narrowing to reasonable limits.

"Then you can tell me, by examining your books, to whom the 1903 vintage has been sold?"

"Every bottle—every bottle!" Ribaud exclaimed. "It is an expensive wine, of which we sell very little except at certain seasons. My cellerman will have his records, and the waiter, too. I should want time to go through them."

Locke laughed.

"I shan't give you much trouble. Only let me have the names of any members who have ordered Charlemont 1903 since the turn of the month. That is all I require."

In two minutes Mr. Ribaud was able to give the information.

"Two bottles were supplied to Mr. Henry Delgray in his room on the evening of the 10th."

Locke started.

"Delgray!" That was the name of the man Mauvell had mentioned as being with Sartoris and Harter on the balcony at the moment the fatal shot was fired.

"A complete alibi for Mr. Delgray," he reflected; "at least, on the face of it." Suddenly he turned to the manager. "Mr. Ribaud, what can you tell me about Mr. Delgray? I saw quite in confidence, you know, and with no desire to cast the slightest aspersion on Mr. Delgray's character. Only Scotland Yard has entrusted me with the conduct of this case, and for my own reputation as much as for the club's I should like to get to the bottom of it."

Ribaud leaned back and thoughtfully stroked his close-clipped beard.

"What can I tell you about Mr. Delgray?" he mused, pursing his lips and half closing his twinkling, bright eyes. "Let me see, now, He became a member of the club seven years ago, just after it was first opened. He stayed here two months after a long trip abroad—I believe to Australia. He came again in 1912, stayed three weeks, and returned to the Klondyke. I believe, left England in May for the Congo. The last I heard of him from fellow club members before he came to stay with us this time he was in South America."

"How long has he been here—this last time, I mean?"

Ribaud turned to a ledger.

"He arrived on July 27th."

"And he is still here?"

"Yes, still here."

"Good! Now, what sort of a man is he?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and showed the palms of his hands.

"Oh, comme ci, comme ça! Sometimes up, sometimes down. But all the men seem to like him. Widely travelled, well read, good shot, seen everything, and has done everything, but changed a lot when he lost his brother."

It was a good picture, though crudely sketched in.

"When and where did he lose this brother?"

"I couldn't say for certain, as he never spoke of it himself, but from what others have said I believe he died quite suddenly last year in South America. Anyway, when Mr. Delgray arrived here this time I noticed a very great change in him—that he scarcely spoke unless spoken to, that all his old gaiety was gone, and at times he would sit alone down by the water's edge watching the river for hours on end. For all that a very nice

gentleman, though, and I shouldn't like to hear a word spoken against him."

Locke was thoughtfully silent for quite a long time.

When at length he spoke the easiness of his manner had dropped away. Quite clearly he was alive to the very serious difficulty that confronted him—that of discovering Paul Rodriguez's slayer and of bringing him to book.

"One question more, Mr. Ribaud," he said, rising and moving to the door. "Can you tell me if Mr. Delgray and Rodriguez were acquainted?"

"Not in any way," Ribaud replied. "I never saw two men more complete strangers to each other. Their total disregard of one another was even noted among the other men, who, I believe, more than once remarked on it; in fact, I distinctly heard Mr. Harter say that everyone in the place at some time or other had a good word to say for Mr. Delgray, while, on the other hand, the poor, unfortunate gentleman who is dead was most cordially disliked."

"Can you explain the dislikes at all?" was Locke's next question.

The manager shook his head.

"I'm sure I cannot. Rodriguez was a wealthy man, and seemed quite prepared to be open-handed with his money; but, of course, that makes no difference in a club like this, where most of the members are well-to-do, and all the gold in the world couldn't buy a standing."

Locke was gradually coming out of the region of circles. A straight line stretched before him—to Henry Delgray. Of course, he had only reason to judge by. Instinct in a case like this was nothing.

"If you don't mind, I should like a word or two with either Mr. Harter or Mr. Sartoris," he said, glancing at the manager's clock.

Ribaud's glance swept the fair and smiling stretch of lawn as far as the glistening surface of the river.

"You'll find Mr. Harter most likely on the smoke-room balcony. He doesn't often go out in the heat of the day, as he had sunstroke once in India. But sometimes Mr. Sartoris punts him down to Berrington Reach. I believe Mr. Sartoris is in town to-day."

Locke thanked him, and went out. He found Harter in an Oxford chair on the veranda, and the big smoke-room empty. Harter greeted him cordially, despite the fact of having a particular aversion against detectives as a class.

"I take it you want to talk to me about this Rodriguez affair," he began, after Jeeves had brought iced drinks.

Locke leaned back and watched the cool expanse of grass and river through half-closed lids.

"Unfortunately, yes," he said, in low tones. "The police are baffled, at a complete standstill, unable to make the slightest headway. Sometimes fools will step in where angels—You know the rest. Well, there it is, I've had a look round, and I'm sorry to say, as between man and man, that suspicion points to a member of this club."

"Never! Every man connected with the show has been satisfactorily accounted for, unless I'm so unfortunate as to be the object of suspicion."

A laugh broke from Locke.

"I came to you, Mr. Harter, because I have an intense dislike of being unjust to any man. Confidences, I know, will be respected. I believe this crime was planned and executed by Henry Delgray."

Then of a sudden Harter leapt to his feet, his chair clashed backwards, and his arm swept the wine-glass, half-drained, off the table. The liquid dripped and splashed in little streams on the floor. For a moment he stared, open-mouthed, at the detective.

"Delgray! No, that can't be!" he muttered, passing his tongue over his lips, suddenly gone dry. "I've known him for years, and anyone less likely to shed blood I've never met. But stay—"

He checked himself suddenly, conscious of the duty he owed to his friend. Locke's steely eyes flashed into questioning.

"What were you going to say?" he asked, leaning forward and laying his hand on the other's knee.

Harter shivered.

"Your theory is absurd! Mr. Delgray was with us—Sartoris and me—when the shot was fired. My dear sir, if you really were serious in your suggestion you wouldn't tell me, in case I should warn Delgray and put him on his guard."

Locke was watching the other's face, not yet recovered from the sudden flush of confusion.

He felt it necessary, however, to play his man a little longer.

"From all I can gather, Delgray seems to be a very decent sort of chap. I shouldn't like to suggest anything unfair to him. At the same time, Mr. Harter, we detectives have to take note of circumstantial evidence, and circumstantial evidence in this case points almost conclusively to Mr. Delgray. Why do I take you into my confidence like this? you may very naturally ask. For a simple reason. If Mr. Delgray is innocent, you, as one of his friends, might be invaluable in helping to prove his innocence. On the other hand, you might be in a position to give me a deal of information. That information I seek with no desire unjustly to fasten suspicion on your friend."

"Well?" muttered Harter, sitting very tight.

"A moment ago you were going to tell me something. Then of a sudden you altered your mind. Unfortunately, I am bound to press my point. You were saying that anyone less likely to shed blood you never met, and yet just then you recalled something in direct contradiction to your expressed opinion. I regret I must ask you what was in your mind."

Harter's glance fell before the other's pitilessly insistent stare. Locke's were eyes of that kind that seem to read you through and through, and probe the very soul's secrets.

"Delgray showed himself in a new light that afternoon," he admitted in an undertone, after glancing round to see he was not overheard. "We happened to be talking of Rodriguez when the pistol which killed him was exploded. Delgray had just said that the man who brought such a brute to a quick end was to be commended. The sentiment is his, not mine."

"I see! Did Mr. Delgray support his conviction?"

"Yes. He told us several things Rodriguez had done—of men he had killed in cold blood in places beyond the law; of people he had ruined, and said something about the spirits of women and children appealing to heaven for vengeance on him. That is about all, because at that moment we heard the shot and the fall—"

"Can you fix the time with any certainty?"

"Not absolutely to the half-minute, but I believe it wanted very little time to half-past three, because as I told Delgray to

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summon Jeaves and fetch a doctor the clock in the hall downstairs chimed the half-hour."

For the first time since he had started the case the detective produced fountain-pen and paper.

"How long should you say elapsed between the firing of the weapon and the striking of the clock?"

"Possibly three minutes. I believe I am a fair judge of time, and I managed to keep my head cool, considering the unusual circumstances."

"Then that would make the exact time of Paul Rodriguez's death—as far as at present can be ascertained—twenty-six or twenty-seven minutes past three."

"I should say 3.27."

The pen wrote. An important link in the broken chain was established at last. Locke bound Harter to silence, and returned to Mr. Ribaud's room.

The Upper Room!

"WELL, Mr. Locke, what luck?" Ribaud asked, as the detective reappeared. "You look as though you've discovered something. Detectives, like other men, wear their thoughts on their face."

Locke laughed.

"Then my face at the moment looks none too pleasant. I'm feeling sorry for someone," he averred. "Mr. Ribaud, where is Mr. Delgray at this moment?"

"In town, I believe. He left by the 8.17, and said he wouldn't be back before dinner."

"Good! Then I have your permission to visit his room?"

"The responsibility is yours, not mine. You are, for the time being, I suppose, a police official. I have no power to prevent."

He drew from his desk a master-key.

"Nos. 34, 35, and 36, on the third floor," he remarked, turning to his papers.

The detective passed thoughtfully up the stairs. Delgray's apartments he found to be immediately over the dead man's. Delgray's sitting-room was on a straight line vertically with the room in which the murder had been committed. The young traveller evidently used it for business and general purposes. In one corner a roll-top desk, open, was littered with letters, maps, time-tables, and steamship guides. Generally speaking, the place was in disorder. No attempt had been made to keep it tidy, or, apparently, to clean it up, as the windows were closed, and dust had settled everywhere.

The detective drew to a halt in the middle of the carpet. He had come to a point in his investigations distasteful to him. To go through a decent man's papers was not much in his line. And yet something had to be done.

"Delgray killed Rodriguez," he mused, his keen glance flashing round the room. "He killed him partly in support of a principle, partly, perhaps, as satisfaction for a wrong. What the wrong was remains yet to be discovered; also the means by which the crime was committed. Henry Delgray is not a heartless man."

There was ample evidence of this. Scattered about the room, on the desk, the mantelpiece, hung against the wall, and even on the littered writing-table, were portraits—all of the same man, and each was signed, "Your affectionate brother, Arthur."

Who was Arthur? The question was answered by a purple-edged card over the fireplace, a simple thing surmounted by a cross, and underneath the place and death of Arthur Delgray's death the previous year:

"Died unexpectedly, at Mentoma, Province of La Paz, Peru, September 9th, 1914. 'I will repay.'"

That was all. Locke thought he understood, but the means, not the end, alone concerned him. Mauvell had asked him to discover the identity of the murderer, and how Rodriguez's death had been brought about.

"The first, I believe, I already know; the second will be more difficult," he muttered, moving rapidly from point to point. "No suggestion of another weapon, no stray cartridge-box, no empty shell-case, yet all kinds of things left in careless disorder."

Only two things Locke found it hard to explain. These he put in his pocket before opening the window and looking down. Below him was the closed window of Rodriguez's writing-room. It claimed a lot of attention, apparently needlessly so.

As soon as the scrutiny was finished, Locke set studiously to work examining every scrap of paper in the place. He might have spared himself the labour, save for one point which afterwards he had cause to recall with satisfaction.

From the upper room he passed to the place where the Spaniard met his death. Hay was still busy delving, probing, searching, and measuring. He rose with a weary sigh.

"I've drawn blank!" he murmured, sinking into a crushed leather chair, and wiping the streaming moisture from his forehead. "This place is like a hot-house, and yet I wanted to examine it with the windows closed—just as it was when Rodriguez sat at his desk. Have you any luck, sir?"

Locke's glance had wandered to the space of wall above the mantel.

"Perhaps—perhaps not," he answered mechanically. "I've found among Henry Delgray's belongings several little articles apparently having no connection among themselves, and yet I can't for the life of

"I believe I've stumbled upon Henry Delgray's secrets!" he exclaimed, reaching up. "The pistol must have been exploded by the burning rays of the sun passing through that pane of glass and falling on the powder in the pan. While I'm waiting to see what happens"—he quickly placed the dead man's chair back into position by the desk, and piled it high with cushions—"go and ask Mr. Ribaud if anyone in the club keeps a register of sunshine with thermometric readings."

Hay went regretfully, and was absent quite a long time. When he returned he found his master still staring ruefully at the pistol. For a quarter of an hour Ferrers Locke's glance never left that shaft of light pouring hotly on the charged weapon, but for all the heat it had not gone off.

"Well," he asked, a trifle irritably, "what does the manager say?"

"That to-day is the hottest day recorded this year," was the surprising answer.

The detective sighed.

"Then my theory is wrong. Had my suspicion been correct, the past half-hour



Harter leapt to his feet, his chair crashed backwards, and his arm swept the wine-glass clean off the table. "Delgray! No, that can't be!" he muttered. "Delgray was with us when the shot was fired!"

me understand why a young man like him should possess them."

"What are they?" Hay began, but stayed his words at sight of the detective's face, for, without warning or sound, Locke had half risen from the chair, and stood in a semi-crouching attitude with his keen eyes roving alternately from the right-hand pistol to the uppermost pane of the window, and back again.

"I wonder—I wonder!" he muttered, sinking back and breaking a tense silence. "Hay, slip on your hat and get down to Milehurst as quickly as you can. Go to the ironmonger's and buy an ounce of ordinary gunpowder; also get him to mould you a leaden ball about a third of an inch in diameter, not more. What time do you make it? I merely want to test your watch against mine."

"Twenty minutes to four," the secretary replied.

Locke made a few rapid calculations on a half-sheet of notepaper.

"Yes, that would be just about right, and bring the psychological moment to exactly 3.27," he muttered, his glance still passing from the wall to the window again. "And Harter says Rodriguez died at 3.27."

In half an hour's time Hay was back again. Locke seized upon the gunpowder eagerly, and, removing the right-hand pistol from its nail, fully charged it with a liberal allowance of powder, rammed the bullet home, filled the pan with the black, shining grains, and stood upon a chair.

corresponds exactly with the time Rodriguez was sitting at his desk up to the time the wall pistol exploded and killed him. It seemed a very likely idea that the heat of the sun would fire the weapon, but as to-day is hotter than the 10th of August, and the blessed thing hasn't gone off, I can only reckon I've backed the wrong horse."

Hay looked sympathetic. The theory was ingenious, and likely enough. But as it had failed in practice, he supposed it must be cast overboard.

"There's no doubt, I suppose, but that Mr. Rodriguez did meet his end from that particular pistol?" he ventured.

"Not in the least, or that Henry Delgray is the guilty party," Locke replied gruffly. "Every step in my reckoning is right up to the last one. Someone in the club planned to kill the chap. That someone is Delgray; and I feel almost sure I've probed the reason. Just how he did it is still the puzzle, unless—"

His right hand drove almost fiercely into his pocket, and he brought out a little lot of curious oddments. For several moments he stared at them thoughtfully before, with a low laugh, stuffing them out of view and reaching for his hat.

"You can stay here and watch that pistol, if you like. I'm going out. And, Hay, don't lean your head on the cushions, in case the blessed thing should go off."

(Another instalment of this splendid detective serial in next week's POPULAR.)

A STIRRING STORY OF THE ROOKWOOD SCOUTS!

THE ROOKWOOD DOG HUNT!

An Amusing, Long, Complete Story of JIMMY SILVER & CO. and TOMMY DODD & CO. of Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver to the Rescue.

MISS DOLLY was crying. Jimmy Silver could scarcely believe his eyes at first. He paused by the gate of the Head's private garden and looked over.

There was no doubt about it. The headmaster's daughter was crying. Jimmy Silver looked nonplussed. He did not see Miss Dolly very often, but, like all the juniors at Rookwood, he admired her very much. Miss Dolly was some few months younger than Jimmy Silver, and, as a rule, she was light-hearted and sunny-tempered. Jimmy wondered what was the matter, and whether he could do anything to help, or whether he had better sneak away quietly and pretend he hadn't seen anything.

He was greatly concerned. But though generally equal to any emergency, Jimmy was at a loss at this crisis. In a rag with the Bagshot bounders or a raid on the Modern Side at Rookwood, in a "jape" upon unpopular seniors, Jimmy Silver was "all there." But feminine tears constituted a problem he did not feel equal to solving.

Before he could decide what to do Miss Dolly caught sight of him. Then it was too late to retreat, so Jimmy Silver raised his cap and blushed.

"What's the matter, Miss Dolly?" he asked timidly.

Jimmy felt that it must exercise a depressing effect upon the girl to live in the same house as that awful personage, the Head. Perhaps the Head had spoken to her in what Lovell of the Fourth called his four-point-seven voice. If so, Jimmy could sympathise. He, too, had listened to the Head's four-point-seven, and quaked at the sound.

"Oh dear!" said Miss Dolly, dabbing at her eyes with a little lace handkerchief. "What ever shall I do?"

"I—I shouldn't mind, if I were you!" ventured Jimmy encouragingly. "He isn't as bad as he sounds, you know."

Miss Dolly stared.

"Who isn't?" she asked.

"The Head, you know."

"The Head! My father?"

"Yes. His bark's really worse than his bite, you know," encouraged Jimmy.

To his surprise Miss Dolly looked decidedly wrathful.

"How dare you speak of my father like that!" she exclaimed.

"Oh!" Jimmy Silver was taken aback. He had felt sure he was on the right track.

"Haven't—hasn't he been ragging you?"

"You ridiculous boy!"

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy, much discouraged. Apparently it was not the Head's four-point-seven voice after all, that was the cause of the trouble.

"Sorry! I—I say, is it your governess? If she's been jawing—"

"What?"

"Nagging, I mean!" said Jimmy hastily.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Dolly. If she jaws—I mean, nags—that is to say, talks—we'll put some crackers in her handbag—"

"You bad boy!"

"Oh, my hat!" Jimmy was on the wrong track again. "I—I say, Miss Dolly, will you have some of this toffee?"

He held up a chunk of toffee temptingly. There were two pen-nibs and a fragment of sealing-wax adhering to the toffee, but in the confusion of the moment Jimmy Silver did not observe that. Miss Dolly did.

"Thank you, I won't!" said Miss Dolly, her face dimpling for a moment into a smile.

"Toffee won't bring back Fido."

"Fido!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"He is lost!" The tears flowed afresh. "Or stolen. My poor little Fido!"

"That little fat, pink-eyed—"

"He wasn't fat!"

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"Ahem! I mean plump little, beautiful, white dog!" said Jimmy Silver hurriedly.

Miss Dolly nodded.

"Yes, and he is lost. Poor little Fido! I shall never see him again. And there is nobody to find him for me!"

"Oh, don't say that!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I—I'll find him!"

It was a generous offer, made on the spur of the moment. How on earth he was to find the missing Fido Jimmy Silver hadn't the faintest idea. But beauty in distress touched his heart. Jimmy had never been a squire of dames. But to dry Miss Dolly's tears he would have gone through fire and water.

Miss Dolly brightened up a little.

"Will you really?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"Tommy Dodd said he would find him," said Miss Dolly mournfully. "But he hasn't found him."

Jimmy Silver sniffed.

"That Modern bounder! You see, those Modern bounders can't do anything. Tommy Dodd couldn't find a lost elephant, even if it were under his nose. I'll tell you what, Miss Dolly. If you won't cry any more, I'll call out the Rookwood scouts this afternoon, and we'll have Fido in next to no time."

"Tommy Dodd's going to call out the scouts—"

"Tommy Dodd's an ass!"

"How funny!" said Miss Dolly, dimpling again.

"Eh! What's funny?"

"Jimmy Dodd said you were an ass!"

"Did he?" roared Jimmy Silver in a voice that strongly resembled the celebrated four-point-seven tones of the Head.

"And he said I was to leave it to him, because if I asked any Classical duffers to find Fido, he would get lost more than ever."

"The—the—the—" Jimmy Silver gasped.

"That was only Modern swank, Miss Dolly. All these Modern bounders ought to be sacked, from the head prefect to the smallest lag. If the Head had the brains of a bunny rabbit—"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean—that is—ahem!—you know—"

"Oh—yes—I—" Jimmy Silver grew quite a little incoherent. "I—I mean the Head has more brains than a ton of bunny rabbits. But about that dog—"

"I think—"

"We'll find him, Miss Dolly," said Jimmy confidently.

"We'll track him down this afternoon. Where did you lose him?"

"The gate was left open, and he ran into the quadrangle. Then he vanished, so he must have gone out into the road, I suppose. I have asked everybody, and nobody has seen him. I think he must have been stolen," said Miss Dolly tearfully. "And Leggett says—"

"Leggett!" growled Jimmy Silver.

Leggett was a youth in the Modern Fourth, and a thoroughpaced "rotter," and Jimmy did not like the idea of Leggett talking to Miss Dolly at all.

"Yes, Leggett. He said there was a wicked man near Coombe, who buys dogs for vivisection, and—he might have bought Fido from some horrid tramp—"

"I'll jolly well punch Leggett's head!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I don't believe there's any such beast in the neighbourhood."

"Leggett advised me to offer a reward," said Miss Dolly anxiously. "He said a reward of a pound would make any tramp bring him back who had stolen him. He said he would take the advertisement down to the newspaper office for me."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"It isn't a bad idea, Miss Dolly, if some tramp's got him. But a pound's a lot of money."

"I have a pound in the Post Office," said Miss Dolly loftily. "I would give it all to get Fido back safe. But I must ask my papa."

"You leave it to us, Miss Dolly!"

"But I've left it to Tommy Dodd."

"Blow Tommy Dodd—I—I mean, bless Tommy Dodd! Those Modern asses wouldn't be able to find him in a month of Sundays. You leave it to us, and we'll find Fido before he's an hour older," said Jimmy Silver recklessly.

"Thank you so much!" said Miss Dolly demurely.

"The end study never gets left," said Jimmy Silver impressively.

And Jimmy scuttled away. Miss Dolly looked after him thoughtfully.

Tommy Dodd, the great chief of the Modern juniors, had offered to find Fido. Jimmy Silver, his rival, on the Classical side, had also offered to find the missing how-wow—before that how-wow was an hour older, too. And Miss Dolly's conclusion on the subject was:

"I think I shall put that advertisement in."

Which showed that Miss Dolly did not share the complete confidence which those cheery young gentlemen felt in themselves.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Short Way with Slackers.

"FOOTER this afternoon?" asked Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd shook his head.

"Better stick to practice, bedad!" remarked Tommy Doyle.

"No time for footer."

"Phwat's on?"

"Scouting!"

The three Tommies of the Modern Fourth had just come out from dinner. It was Wednesday—a half-holiday at Rookwood. Tommy Dodd had been looking very thoughtful throughout dinner.

Footer occupied a great deal of Tommy's thoughts, as a rule; but just now he was not thinking of footer.

"Scouting," repeated Doyle. "We had a scout run last Saturday, Tommy darling."

"We'll have another this afternoon."

"What for?" demanded Cook.

"There's a dog lost."

"A—what?"

"Dog!"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle stared at their leader in amazement that was mingled with wrath and disdain.

"Phwat!" ejaculated Doyle. "You're thinking of chucking footer to look for a lost dog intirely!"

"Are you off your rocker?" demanded Tommy Cook, with equal warmth. "Bless the blessed lost dog!"

"It's Miss Dolly's little dog."

"Oh!"

"So, you see, it's important."

"Ye-es."

"Taint only the dog," said Tommy Dodd confidentially; "but it will be a score over the Classical rotters if we find him. It will show that the Modern scouts can knock the Classics into a cocked hat. It's an honour for a lady to call us in to help her in an emergency, ain't it?"

"Ye-es."

"And Boy Scouts are bound to do a good turn every day."

"Ye-es."

"So call up the fellows and tell 'em to change into scout rig, and we'll begin," said Tommy Dodd decidedly. "Fido wandered out of the quadrangle somewhere, and he's bound to have left some tracks. Every fellow's got to turn out—the more the merrier, you know. If any chap wants to slack, punch his head!"

"Right-ho!"

Tommy Dodd's word was law. Perhaps his chums would have preferred the footer, but the prospect of the score over the Classics

consoled them. There was keen rivalry between the Classics and Moderns at scouting, as at everything else. And Tommy Dodd was elated at the idea of getting on the track before the Classics even heard that Miss Dolly's dog was missing at all.

The Modern Fourth turned out at Tommy Dodd's autocratic order.

There were few slackers on the Modern side. Nearly all the Modern Fourth were scouts. They turned out in the quadrangle in scout garb, ready for business, and Tommy Dodd ran his eyes over them.

"Where's Leggett?" he demanded.

"Says he can't come," said Towle.

Tommy Dodd frowned.

"Can't come! Didn't you tell him it was a scout run, by order, Tommy Cook?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he said 'Rats!'"

"Where is he?" roared Tommy Dodd, as

"May have been turned into sausages by then!" said Dodd. "Come on; we're going to scout for it, and you're going to help."

"I won't!"

Tommy Dodd did not waste any more time in argument. The Modern leader had a short way with slackers. He brought his staff into the conversation.

"Prod, prod, prod!"

"Yarrah! Stop it! You're puncturing my ribs, you silly duffer! Yow! Ow, ow!"

"Prod, prod, prod!"

Leggett dodged wildly out of the study. After him went Tommy Dodd, lunging from behind with his staff. Leggett was not usually a good runner, but on this occasion he came very near breaking the record. He joined the scouts in the quad, panting for breath, and looking like a Hun.

"Here we are!" said Dodd cheerfully. "Now to pick up the trail. If this slacker tries to mizzle, you're to fetch him down with a clump! Savvy?"

Jimmy Silver was determined to succeed, not only to relieve the distress of the headmaster's daughter, but to show that Rookwood Classical scouts were miles ahead of any others, especially the unspeakable Moderns.

Besides, as Jimmy Silver had impressively told his comrades, Miss Dolly was crying over the loss of her faithful Fido. If that would not spur them on, nothing would.

The facts ascertained amounted to this—that Fido had strayed into the quadrangle that morning. Assuredly he was no longer in the quadrangle, and a search round the buildings had failed to discover him. It appeared conclusive that he had wandered out of the school gates, and a heartless wide world had swallowed him up.

Probably some unscrupulous tramp had snatched him up, or some kindly person might have taken him in to feed him, or he might have gone off on a voyage of discovery, to learn what new worlds lay beyond the



The tramp dashed on with the Modern scouts hot on his track. Slowly, but surely, they gained. "Faith, we've got him!" shouted Tommy Doyle, and the remainder gave a loud whoop as they realised the fugitive was almost run down.

a chuckle ran through the ranks. "In his study?"

"Wait here!"

Tommy Dodd ran into the House, and mounted to Leggett's study. He was wrathful. He kicked open the study door.

Leggett of the Fourth was sprawled in an armchair. He jumped as Tommy Dodd strode in.

Biff!

Tommy Dodd's Scout staff prodded Leggett on the chest with force. Leggett yelled.

"Yow! You rotter! Gerrout my study!"

"After you!" said Dodd politely.

"I'm not going!" yelled Leggett. "Blow your silly old scout runs!"

Prod!

"Yow! Ow! Keep that rotten staff away, you silly idiot!"

"Miss Dolly has lost her dog, and we're going to find it," said Tommy Dodd severely. "All hands to the mill on an occasion like this! Come on!"

"Hang the dog!"

"Are you coming?"

"You silly ass!" roared Leggett, dodging round the table. "You can't find the dog! You don't know where it is! Wait till there's a reward offered for it. It'll come back fast enough then."

"Yes, rather!"

"Follow your leader!" said Tommy Dodd.

"March!"

And the Modern scouts marched, and Leggett marched with them. He did not like scouting, but he liked still less the prospect of being "fetched down with a clump."

There was no choice for the slacker of the Fourth.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver on the Track.

"NOW for the trail!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Classical scouts were already on the war-path.

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Baby, and Newcome, the Fistical Four, were in the lead. Flynn, Grace, Oswald, and Conroy, and several others had joined them.

They were not such a numerous lot as the Moderns, for it must be confessed that there were more slackers on the Classical side at Rookwood. But what they lacked in quantity they made up in quality.

Some of the Classics certainly seemed to be regarding the dog hunt from a humorous point of view.

But Jimmy Silver was as serious as a judge.

gates of Rookwood. Whatever it was, Jimmy Silver & Co. were going to track him down.

So Jimmy Silver said, "Now for the trail!" in determined tones.

He scanned the road for a sign.

His chums stood round and watched him. Flynn, who had brought some humorous gifts from Ireland, suggested making a bee-line for the nearest shop that sold sausages. Flynn was frowned down.

"The next silly ass who makes practical jokes will get a prod in the ribs!" Jimmy Silver remarked, as a general warning.

And they sought industriously for a sign.

"The first thing," said Baby gravely, "is to discover what kind of boots Fido was wearing. Without that, we can't pick up the track—Yarrah! Keep that pole away, you silly ass! Yoop!"

"I warned you!" said Jimmy Silver severely.

"Groooh! You fathead!"

"Dry up!"

Baby dried up, and rubbed his ribs. Some of the Classical scouts were grinning, but they did not make any more jokes.

"Got it?" asked Lovell, as Jimmy uttered an exclamation.

Jimmy was considerably muddy, the road being muddy after the recent rain, but his face was bright.

"Look here!"

The scouts gathered round, and looked.

In the soft mud close by the side of the road there was a plain imprint of a dog's paw.

The track led away towards the village of Coombe, but a few steps farther on it was obliterated by the heavy rut of a market-cart.

"That's a dog, sure enough!" said Newcome.

"But Fido!" said Lovell dubiously. "Any dog might have made that mark!"

"Perhaps the porter's dog, intirely!" remarked Flynn.

Jimmy Silver smiled in a superior fashion. "You fellows call yourselves scouts?" he asked politely.

"Look here—"

"Mack's dog is twice too big to leave that small track!"

"True enough!"

"Besides, it's Fido's track!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I've measured it!"

"And how do you know the size of Fido's feet exactly?" demanded Conroy.

Jimmy Silver's reply was crushing.

"Because I looked for his tracks in the Head's garden before starting. He had left lots of them there, and he's the only dog allowed in the garden, so there wasn't any doubt!"

"Hurrah!"

"He came out of the gates," said Jimmy victoriously, "and started for Coombe. Follow your leader, and look out for tracks!"

"Lead on Macduff!"

Jimmy Silver led, his eyes scanning the ground. The Classical juniors spread out in a line across the road, scanning every inch as they advanced. Since Fido's adventure there had been traffic on the road. The mud showed the tracks of other dogs, but especially of boots and wheels. But here and there, by dint of careful searching, the juniors found the trail.

The initial success encouraged them.

All the scouts entered heartily into the adventures now. After all, it would be a triumph to recover Miss Dolly's favourite by sheer skill in scoutcraft.

There was a halt as the party reached the stile in the lane.

On the stile a gentleman of the road was resting—a stumpy, stubby, beery gentleman, who looked as if he had done no work for many long years, but had, nevertheless, found means very frequently to quench an abnormal thirst.

The stumpy gentleman blinked at the schoolboys, evidently wondering what they were searching the muddy road for.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver suddenly.

Close by the stile the track showed again in the soft mud where it had not been disturbed by a later tread.

"He went under the stile into the field!" said Lovell, with conviction.

"Hours ago, though," said Newcome doubtfully.

"What price that beery bouncer?" whispered Flynn. "Sure, he looks as though he wouldn't be above stealin' a dog!"

The same thought had occurred to several of the scouts, and they eyed the beery gentleman suspiciously. His shifty, beery eyes did not give a great impression of honesty. At his feet, as he rested on the stile, was a large bag of sacking, the top tied. The bag was well packed with something, and the juniors eyed it curiously.

"Good afternoon!" said Jimmy Silver politely.

The tramp stared.

"Afternoon!"

"Have you seen a dog?"

"A dawg?"

"Yes."

"Lois!" said the beery gentleman cheerfully.

"I mean, we've lost a dog—that is, we're looking for one. A little, fat, pink-eyed dog, looks a bit overfed, with a face like a rabbit," said Jimmy Silver. Miss Dolly certainly wouldn't have recognised her beautiful little white dog by that description. "It's the colour of a washy rag, and has a tail like a banana."

The tramp shook his head.

"Ain't seed it!" he said shortly.

Lovell gripped Jimmy Silver's arm suddenly. His eyes were on the sack that rested at the

tramp's feet, and he had distinctly seen a movement. There was something living in the sack.

"It's there!" whispered Lovell excitedly.

"He's got it!"

"But—"

"I saw the sack move!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed. His eyes were on the sack, and he noted that it stirred as something moved within.

The tramp saw his glance, and scowled.

"I reckon I'll be gettin' on!" he said.

"Wait a minute!" said Jimmy Silver.

"What's in that sack?"

"That's my business!"

"I'll give you a shilling to show me what's in that bag!" said Jimmy Silver, taking the shilling from his pocket.

Weary Willie scowled.

"Keep yer bob!" he snapped. And he put the sack on his shoulder, and started.

At a sign from Jimmy Silver, the Classical scouts gathered round him, and nine or ten staves barred the way.

"Halt!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You cheeky young 'ound—"

"Better language, please!" said Jimmy Silver sharply. "There's enough of us here to handle you, my man, and to pitch you into the ditch if you don't behave yourself!"

"Lemme pass, can't yer?"

"What have you got in that sack?"

"Me own property!"

"Then why can't you let us see it?"

"Because I don't choose, blow yer! Lemme pass!"

"We've lost a dog," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "And it's suspected that that dog's been stolen. We want to see into that sack. You've got something alive in it!" A sudden thought came into his head, and he called out "Fido, Fido! Good dog!"

A whine came from the sack.

That settled it. There was a dog in the sack beyond a shadow of doubt. The tramp made a rush to escape, but the scouts were round him, and half a dozen staves pushed him back.

"Collar him!" shouted Lovell. "He's got Fido!"

There was a yell down the lane.

"Go for the Classical rotters! They're after Fido!"

The Moderns had arrived.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tommy Dodd and Co. come up with a Rush.

TOMMY DODD'S idea had been to track down the missing Fido, and win the gratitude of Miss Dolly for the Modern scouts, and score a success over their old rivals. So his wrath may be imagined when he found the Classical scouts ahead of him on the track.

Argument, Tommy Dodd felt, was quite out of place.

His preserves were not to be poached upon in this flagrant manner.

"Go for 'em!" he roared. "Stick to them!"

"Down with the Classics!"

And the Moderns rushed to the attack.

"Hold on!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Pax, you duffers! We're looking for Fido!"

"So are we, you Classical fathead!"

"You couldn't find him in a month of Sundays, you Modern duffer!"

"Sack into him!" roared Tommy Doyle.

"Kick the spalpeens out!"

"I tell you—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Look here—"

"We'll give you a chance to clear off, and leave it to us," said Tommy Dodd considerably. "It's our business, and you Classical chumps would only make a muck of it, anyway! Are you going off?"

"No, fathead! We've found him!"

"Eh! Where is he?"

"That tramp's got it in his sack!"

"What tramp?"

"My hat! He's sneaking off! After him!"

The tramp had taken advantage of the altercation to make his escape. He had swung himself over the stile, and was hurrying along the muddy footpath across the field.

"He's got it, has he?" said Tommy Dodd. "Well, we can deal with him. You Classical duffers have to sheer off—savvy?"

"Fathead!"

"Are you going?"

"No!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Kick the bastards out!" roared Tommy Doyle.

"Go for the Classical rotters!"

"Back up!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

In a moment more a battle royal was in progress. The Rookwood scouts forgot that they were scouts, and that the duty of scouts was to help one another. They only remembered that they were Classics and Moderns, and the old rivalry found vent, as it often did, in a terrific encounter.

They dropped their staves, and closed in combat, trampling, and splashing mud to right and to left.

"Back up, Classics!"

"Go it, Moderns!"

The pen of a Homer or the typewriter of a Kipling would have been needed to do justice to that battle.

The old battle of Classical and Modern was fought out.

The odds were on the side of the Moderns, and Jimmy Silver & Co. resisted desperately, but were driven across the lane, and—still resisting—they were driven through a hedge of willows into a wet and muddy field.

There the Moderns left them.

Tommy Dodd's signal called the scouts back into the road.

"Those Classical duffers are licked enough," said Tommy Dodd, dabbing his crimson nose. "We've got to find Fido—that's what we really came out for!"

"Sure, and I'd forgotten him intirely!" said Tommy Doyle nursing an eye.

All the Modern youths showed signs of combat.

"After that tramp! He's got him!"

"Right-ho!"

"Where's Leggett?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Cook chuckled.

"Mizzled!" he said. "He boiled at the start. Leggett ain't a fighting man by long chalks!"

"The blessed junk!" said Tommy Dodd angrily. "The rotter! We'll warm him when we get back. Follow me!"

The Modern scouts clambered over the stile. The tramp was running. And he was already small in the distance, three fields away. The fact that he was running to escape was sufficient for the Modern scouts. They would have doubted whether the Classics had had the brains to discover the right man. But if this tramp was not guilty, what was he fleeing for? It was certain, at least, that the sack held a secret. Weary Willie did not wish to come to light.

"Put it on!" rapped out Tommy Dodd.

The scouts broke into a rapid run. They fairly streaked across the field on the track of the dog-stealer. The beery gentleman was not so good a runner as the active juniors, and, in spite of his good start, they gained.

"We'll have him!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "We've beaten the Classics, and we're going to lick that dog-stealing rotter, and rescue Fido! Miss Dolly will know what kind of a scout to trust after this!"

And the Modern scouts replied enthusiastically:

"What-ho!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Leggett's Luck.

"G ROOOOH!"

"Oh, my nose!"

"Oh, my eye! Oh dear!"

Thus the Classical scouts as they disentangled themselves from the grass and reeds and mud, and picked themselves up and sorted themselves out.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were much the worse for wear.

They had done their best, and there was no disgrace in being defeated by odds; but it was very painful.

As good scouts, Jimmy Silver & Co. always presented a clean and natty appearance. But alas! now for their cleanliness and nattiness.

They were muddy, they were damp, they were disordered, and their faces bore equal tokens of the fierceness of the combat.

"Well, this is a go!" mumbled Lovell. "I say, is my nose still there? It feels as if it is!"

"What a giddy afternoon!" groaned Oswald. "Are you fed up with dog hunting, Jimmy Silver, you goat?"

"Bless Fido!"

"Those beastly Moderns will bag him now!" groaned Jimmy Silver, for once finding it difficult to live up to his motto of "Keep smiling." "We tracked him, didn't we? But those Moderns will take him back to Miss Dolly, and she'll think the Classical scouts are N.G."

"Rotten!"

"We'd better get back and have a wash," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "We're not done yet."

"What's the good of tackling that gang again, fathead? They're two to one!"

"Keep smiling!"

"Oh, rats!"

"A true scout never says die!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "Those Modern worms will bag Fido, but they haven't got him home yet. What's to stop us from getting a regular army of Classical chaps, and ambushing them on their way home?"

The Classical juniors brightened up wonderfully at the suggestion. All was not lost.

"We'll bump them over, and have Fido off them before they can say 'Balbus builded a wall,'" said Jimmy Silver confidently. "And we'll take the little beast—I mean, the lovely little dog—back to Miss Dolly!"

"Hooray!"

Greatly cheered up by the prospect, the Classics crawled through the hedge, and set off towards Rookwood. Half-way to the school they caught sight of Leggett of the Fourth. He was sauntering along in a leisurely way, and grinning.

Leggett did not care for scouting, and he had taken the opportunity of making his escape while the rivals of Rookwood were at grips. He was grinning over his success when the Classics came by.

Leggett stared at them, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's the cackle about, you Modern worm?" demanded Jimmy Silver daskly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Leggett. "What a blessed set of scarecrows!"

"You cheeeky ass!"

"You'd better leave Fido alone," chorried Leggett. "He'll turn up all right when there's a reward offered. I'll take it in hand myself then."

"You!" said Jimmy Silver, in supreme contempt. "You couldn't find a bunny rabbit in a cage!"

"Well, you haven't had much luck!" grinned Leggett.

"We found him!" shouted Lovell indignantly.

Leggett started.

"You've found Fido!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"You meddling asses, why couldn't you mind your own business?" exclaimed Leggett furiously.

"It was our business—rather!" said Jimmy Silver. "You mean better, so you wanted to find him and get a reward! That was why you suggested it to Miss Dolly. Was it, and told her that yarn about the vivisector? You worm, you're not fit to wear a scout's clobber!"

"Where is he, if you've found him?" said Leggett sulkily.

"That tramp's got him in his sack," said Lovell. "And we'd have had him but for those Modern cads—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh? What are you cackling at?"

"Oh, my hat!" roared Leggett. "You Classical asses! So you were after that tramp! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I tell you that tramp had him in his sack, and we know it."

"Ha, ha, ha—Yaroooh!"

Leggett's laughter suddenly changed to a yell of wrath and dismay as the exasperated Classics seized him.

They were fed up with Leggett's merri-ment and with Moderns generally. Leggett had called them scarecrows, and it was only just that he should share their state—especially as he was a Modern.

"Bump him!" shouted Flynn.

"Leggo!" yelled Leggett. "Oh crumbs! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Leggett struggled wildly in the grasp of the Classics. His jacket came up over his ears, and his waistcoat-buttons went. Several articles tumbled out of his pockets into the muddy road.

He sat up in a puddle and roared.

"Yah! Ow! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Now, then, jump!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "All together, and come down on him at once!"

Jimmy Silver's command was meant in the strictly humorous sense, and was not meant at all to be carried out. But it was enough for Leggett. He bounded to his feet and fed at top speed. In about three seconds he had vanished down the lane, leaving the Classical juniors roaring with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! He's been dropping his property about," remarked Jimmy Silver. "There's

a book, and a pencil, and—and—and— My hat! Dog-biscuits!"

Jimmy Silver's face was a study as he picked up two large dog-biscuits, which had evidently fallen from Leggett's pockets.

"Dog-biscuits!" ejaculated Lovell. "What the merry dickens is Leggett carrying dog-biscuits for?"

"Even Leggett wouldn't eat them!" remarked Baby.

Jimmy Silver whistled softly.

"Fathead!" he exclaimed, addressing himself.

"Eh? What's the matter now?"

"Duffer!"

"Who's a duffer?"

"I am!"

"Well, that's no news, intaiely," remarked Flynn. "But phwat—"

"Gentlemen," said Jimmy Silver, "we're not going to lay that ambush for the Moderns. They can catch the tramp, and eat him if they like. We're going to lay it for somebody else."

"Whom?" demanded all the Classics together.

"The dog-stealer!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not a Success.

"FATTH, we've got him!" shouted Tommy Doyle.

"Don't let him get away!" The Moderns gave a whoop, and rushed on.

The tramp was running hard. He had crossed a dozen fields, he had dodged up and down muddy lanes, he had jumped over ditches and stumbled into them, but the Modern Scouts were not to be shaken off. They hang on his track like hounds on the track of a deer, and slowly, but surely, they gained.

The tramp was spent at last. He turned savagely on his pursuers.

With a whoop of triumph the crowd of Moderns closed round him.

"Got him!" chorried Tommy Dodd.

"Run down, bejehers!" grinned Doyle.

"Hand over that dog, you rascal!"

"I ain't got no dog," howled the tramp.

"Tain't yours, anyway!" he added, as a howl came from the sack he had dropped.

"We'll satisfy ourselves about that," said Tommy Dodd. "You ought to be run in, you rascal. Here, get out of the way!"

"Don't you touch that sack!"

"Rats!"

"Shove him out!"

It was evident that there was a dog in the sack, and equally evident that it was a stolen dog. The Scouts did not stand on ceremony with the thief.

The tramp hit out savagely, and the Rook-wooders promptly collared him on all sides, and he was rolled over and pitched into the wet grass.

"Now you cut off!" said Tommy Dodd severely. "Prod him till he goes, you chaps."

"What-ho?"

Prod, prod, prod!

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Weary Willie.

The prodding was efficacious. Weary Willie stood not upon the order of going, but went at once.

He streaked across the field, plunged through a hedge, and vanished.

The scouts chuckled gleefully.

"Now for poor old Fido!" said Tommy Dodd. "Won't Miss Dolly be pleased? Fancy those Classical duffers thinking they can beat us!"

"Awful asses!" said Cook.

Tommy Dodd bent over the sack, and began to unfasten the cord that secured the top.

A whine came from the inside, then a growl.

Tommy Dodd started a little.

"Poor old Fido! He must be awfully cut up to growl like that," he said. "I've never heard him growl before. It sounds like a blessed bellow."

He dragged the cord away, and tore open the mouth of the sack.

A bull-head, and two fiery eyes came through the opening, and Tommy jumped back with a gasp of horror.

There was a dog in the sack—a stolen dog.

But it was not fluffly little Fido.

It was a young bulldog, and it was evidently in a terrific temper. The animal struggled out of the sack, its jaws red and open. The array of teeth gave Tommy Dodd a cold feeling inside.

"A h-b-bulldog!" he gasped.

"Tain't Fido!"

"Look out!" shrieked Cook.

The bullpup had scrambled up, and he was dashing directly at Tommy Dodd, his eyes glowing and his teeth parted.

Tommy Dodd gave him one look and fled.

Gr-r-r-r-r!

That was what the bulldog said.

Doubtless he took the Rookwood juniors for the cause of his imprisonment in the sack. Certainly he was excited, and wanted vengeance, and equally certain his vengeance was going to fall upon them.

Gr-r-r-r-r!

Scout garb was very useful for scouting, but it afforded no protection whatever against the teeth of a bulldog. The scouts ran for it.

They ran their hardest.

Fortunately, they were good sprinters. They reached the wide ditch at the side of the field, and leaped across it.

Then they looked back.

The bulldog did not essay the jump. He showed his teeth ferociously on the other side.

Tommy Dodd gasped.

"Oh, my hat! It's somebody's dog that's been stolen, but 'tain't Fido!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"There's a plank farther along!" panted Towle. "He's making for it."

"B-b-better get back to tea, I think," murmured Tommy Dodd.

It was really getting near tea-time, and the Modern juniors agreed with their leader that it was a good idea to get back to tea at once. They made for Rookwood, and the speed with which they went home to tea might have indicated that they were very hungry indeed.

In the main road, however, they slackened down. The bulldog had disappeared from sight.

"What a sell!" said Tommy Dodd. "All the fault of those Classical asses, of course! We might have known that they couldn't get on the right track!"

"Of course, we might!" agreed Cook.

"We'll try again after tea—what!"

"Yes, in a different direction!" said Tommy Dodd hastily.

And the Modern scouts went home to tea. They were not aware that, from the cover of a jump of bushes near the school, nine or ten pairs of eyes watched them pass. The Moderns had given up the hunt for the present, but Jimmy Silver & Co. were still on the warpath.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

What Jimmy Silver Knew.

"LOOK here—" began Lovell restively.

"Yes, look here!" growled Flynn.

"What's the game?"

"Tell us what you're driving at, Jimmy Silver, you ass!"

Jimmy Silver smiled serenely.

He had called the Classical scouts to halt in cover. From their cover they had seen the disappointed Moderns tramping homeward. The Classics were puzzled and curious. That some idea was working in their leader's brain they knew. But they were quite in the dark as to what it was.

"What are we sticking here for, Jimmy Silver?"

The chief of the Fistical Four condescended to explain.

"We're on the track," he said. "At least, I'm on the track."

"Whose track?"

"Fido's!"

Lovell blinked round in amazement.

"Has Fido been in these bushes, then?" he asked.

"Not that I know of. That's not what I mean."

"What the merry thunder do you mean, then?"

"Listen, my infants, and don't interrupt your Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver sedately. "Fido was missed this morning. He wandered into the quad and out of the gates. A fellow might have happened to see him—"

"Well?"

"Leggett, that Modern worm, advised Miss Dolly to offer a reward of a pound for her dog, and I think she's going to do it."

"We don't want any reward, I suppose!" grunted Lovell.

"We don't; but Leggett does."

"What on earth's Leggett got to do with it?"

"Lots!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "You noticed that Leggett admitted that he was thinking of the reward, and even said he'd take a hand in finding Fido when one was offered."

"He's that kind of mean beast!" "Exactly!" And he was tickled to death at the idea of Fido being found in that tramp's sack. You noticed it!"

"That's why we bumped him." "Just so! And when Lovell first said we'd found Fido, Leggett was startled."

"He thought he'd lost his chance of getting the reward, I suppose." "Quite so! We've just seen the Moderns go home, and we know they didn't find Fido in the sack. They must have run down that beery boulder, but he hadn't got Fido. We thought he had, but Leggett knew he hadn't."

"He seemed to," said Lovell. "But I don't see how Leggett could have known all the same."

"He knew," said Jimmy Silver calmly, "because he knew where Fido was."

"Eh?" "We found that Leggett was carrying dog-biscuits in his pocket. What was he doing that for?"

"Blest if I know!" "Ask us another, old chap!" "What are dog-biscuits used for?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Eh? To feed dogs, of course!" "Does Leggett keep a dog?" "You know he doesn't! What are you driving at?"

"Then what dog was he going to feed?" "Give it up. It's a giddy puzzle!" "Not to a good scout," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "I work it out like this. Leggett knows where Fido is, and he was going to feed Fido."

"What!" "It's as clear as daylight!" said Jimmy Silver impatiently. "Leggett saw Fido wander out, and he followed. He may have thought at first of bringing the little beast back. But then second thoughts came. Leggett is mean enough for anything, as you know, and he's awfully keen after money. It all fits together. He followed Fido, and shut him up somewhere safe—"

"Great pip!" "Then he went to Miss Dolly, and found her worried over the loss of the little beast, and advised her to offer a reward—"

"Oh!" "And scared her with a yarn about a beastly vivisector who buys dogs from tramps, so that she'd be sure to do it—"

"The awful cad!" "So he knew Fido wasn't in that tramp's sack, because he knew where Fido really was. He was startled when Lovell said we'd found it, but he cackled when he found what we really thought."

"The rotter!" "But the biscuits!" exclaimed Ruby.

"That's a clincher!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's what showed me the whole game. Leggett had got those biscuits for a dog. What dog? He hasn't got a dog, and he wouldn't carry biscuits about to feed strange dogs, I suppose. But if he's got Fido shut up till the reward's offered, he can't let the little beast starve to death. He's bound to visit him at least once a day to feed him. That's what he had the biscuits in his pocket for. He couldn't have had dog-biscuits about him for anything else. Most likely he was going to the place when he came out with the scouts. I don't suppose he came out with them willingly, as he hates scouting; and he hadn't got into his clobber either. So that's why we're here, my sons, because from these bushes we can watch the gates of Rookwood and spot Leggett when he comes out."

"Great Scott!" "Like a giddy Herlock Sholmes!" said Ruby admiringly.

"Every scout ought to be able to beat Herlock Sholmes at his own game," said Jimmy modestly. "I may be wrong, but I think I'm right. Anyway, we shall soon see."

"Suppose Leggett don't go to feed Fido to-day?" remarked Oswald.

"He intends to."

"How do you know?"

"Because he wouldn't put biscuits into his pocket to-day intending to go to-morrow."

"Right on the wicket!" said Lovell. "But I should have thought a cad like Leggett wouldn't mind if a dog went hungry."

"Hungry dogs howl and whine," said Jimmy Silver sententiously. "Leggett doesn't want Fido to advertise the place he's shut up in."

"Right again!" exclaimed Lovell. "Don't he beat the giddy band!"

"It's right, you fellows! The end study never gets left!"

And the Classical scouts agreed that Jimmy Silver had at least strong probabilities on his side.

"But how the merry dickens long are we going to wait here?" said Hooker.

"Not very long."

"And how do you know that, Herlock Sholmes Baden-Powell Silver?"

"Because the gates are locked at dusk, and it will be dusk in half an hour."

"Right again, Jimmy!" said Lovell. "You shut up, young Hooker! Don't I keep on telling you the end study never gets left?"

"Well, when I see Leggett coming, I'll just—"

Jimmy Silver raised his hand and pointed through the bushes to the school gates.

"Look!" he said.

Leggett of the Fourth was coming out of the old gateway.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Scout's Victory.

"CAREFUL!" murmured Jimmy. But the Classical scouts hardly needed the caution.

Keeping under cover, they were tracking the cad of the Fourth. The winter dusk was gathering, and it was not difficult. Leggett was walking quickly down the lane. Under the high hedges and trees the scouts followed—silent, cautious, and determined.

Leggett stopped at the stile where Fido's track had ended. It was not surprising that it had ended there, in the light of Jimmy Silver's astute reasoning. At that spot the dog-thief probably picked him up.

Leggett glanced back, and the scouts flattened themselves in the hedges. That suspicious glance showed clearly enough that the cad of the Fourth was nervous. But he saw nothing to alarm him, and he crossed the stile and started along the inner side of the hedge. In the corner of the field there was a disused barn, a shabby old building that was never visited. Creeping in the cover of the hedge, the scouts followed. Again they sank out of sight as Leggett, at the door of the barn, cast another look backward.

Then the Modern junior disappeared into the building.

"Run to earth!" grinned Lovell. "That speaks plainly enough, you fellows! Come on!"

"Follow on!" said Jimmy Silver.

Silently in the wet grass the scouts stole on through the dusk. They reached the old barn. The lower apartment was open to all the four winds, but a creaky old ladder, led to a loft above. Leggett had disappeared. They could hear the crunching of boots over the old rafters and the whine of a dog.

Leggett's voice came in a whisper: "Good dog—doggie! Quiet, Fido!"

The scouts grinned.

There was a munching sound as the dog's teeth started on a biscuit. Then Leggett's form appeared in the opening of the loft, and he swung himself down the ladder. He gave a yell of startled fright as he fairly fell into the hands of the Boy Scouts.

"Caught!" grinned Lovell.

"Who—what—Jimmy Silver!" gasped Leggett.

"Yours truly!" smiled the captain of the Fourth.

"I—I was startled! I—I've been—er—exploring the loft!"

"Not seen a dog there?" asked Jimmy Silver blandly.

Leggett turned white.

"A dog? Certainly not!"

"Fido!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Fido! Fido!"

There was a whine from above. Jimmy Silver clambered up the ladder. In the dusty loft a little white, fluffy dog was secured by a chain fastened to one of the beams. Jimmy Silver patted the little animal, who rubbed his wet nose joyfully against the junior. He dragged the chain loose, and led Fido to the opening.

"Got him?" sang out Lovell.

"Here he is!"

"Hooray for us!"

Down the ladder came Jimmy, with the missing Fido in his arms. The dog was curling up comfortably on his chest. Leggett cast

a longing glance towards the door. It was evident that he feared a ragging from the disgusted juniors.

"Bring that cad along!" said Jimmy. Lovell and Ruby took either arm of the cad of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver carried Fido in his arms as the scouts marched back triumphantly to Rookwood. The dusk was thickening, and old Mack had come out to lock the gates as they arrived. Inside, Tommy Dodd & Co. were waiting, curious to discover what luck the Classics had had.

"Here they come!" said Doyle. "Bet they haven't—Why—what—My hat!"

"Fido!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"The end study never gets left!" said Jimmy Silver sweetly. "We've got him, and we've got Leggett for you!"

"Leggett!"

"Yes. Leggett had Fido hidden in the old barn, and he was keeping him there till Miss Dolly should offer a reward. As he's a Modern, we leave him to you, Tommy Dodd. We caught him there feeding Fido. Plenty of witnesses."

Jimmy Silver & Co. marched off towards the Head's house. The Modern juniors gathered round Leggett with deadly looks. The next ten minutes were decidedly painful for that enterprising youth, and by the time Tommy Dodd & Co. had considered him sufficiently punished Leggett had reason to repeat his little venture in dog-stealing.

Meanwhile Jimmy Silver rang an impressive peal at the door of the Head's house. The maid who answered it stared at the muddy, begrimed juniors in amazement.

"Please tell Miss Dolly we've found Fido," said Jimmy Silver loftily.

"Fido!" Miss Dolly rushed into the hall.

"Fido! And isn't he hurt? Old Fido! Jimmy Silver, you dear boy!"

Jimmy blushed.

"Alone we did it!" he murmured.

"But where was he? How did you find him? How clever of you!" said Miss Dolly, taking her favourite into her arms and caressing him.

"Ahem! A rotten beast had shut him up in an old barn to—claim a reward for finding him, you see!" said Jimmy Silver. "We spotted him. Scouts have to be able to spot things, you know, Miss Dolly. It's really nothing."

"Thank you so much!" said Miss Dolly.

"It was very, very clever of you! And please tell Dodd not to look for Fido any more, as he's found, won't you?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

And, with a great deal of pleasure, he delivered that message to Tommy Dodd. Tommy Dodd only snorted. Even the Moderns could not deny that Jimmy Silver & Co. had scored in the great Rookwood Dog-Hunt.

THE END.

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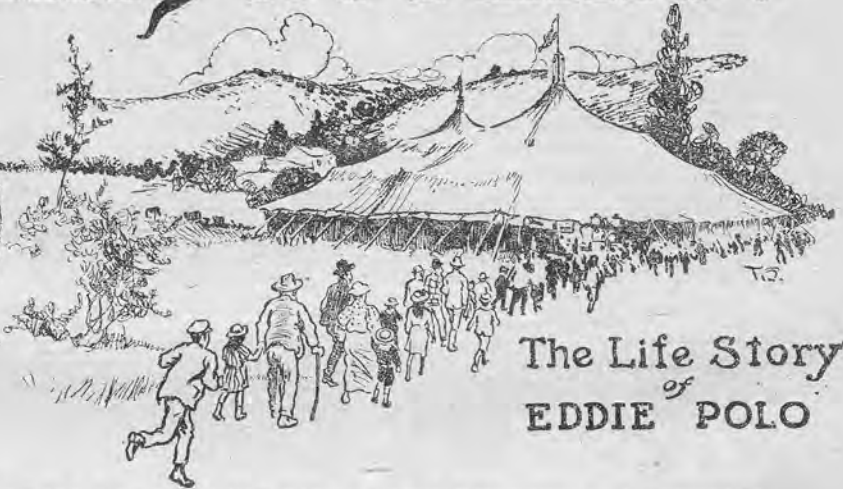
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The Life Story
of
EDDIE POLO

A Thrilling Story of the Famous Film Star's Early Struggles and Triumphs.

THE THREADS OF THE STORY.

Eddie Polo as an unknown boy acrobat joins Busto's World-Famed Menagerie and Circus in Western America. He quickly makes his mark, and becomes great friends with Ginger, the clown, and Esta, Mr. Busto's charming daughter. By his skill in the ring, he incurs the jealousy of Del Rogeriguo, the Spanish trapeze artiste, who makes several attempts to get rid of him by so-called "accidents." At the same time he makes it too hot for himself to stay, and leaves, breathing revenge on his late rival. A performance in the marquee is drawing to a close, when suddenly twelve bandits draw out revolvers and hold up the whole of the audience. Eddie, at the top of the tent, sees his opportunity, and at the risk of his own life saves the situation. He is injured rather badly, and is taken to Mr. Busto's caravan, where Esta takes charge of him.

(Now read on.)

Del Rogeriguo's Plan!

WHEN Eddie Polo had clambered out on to the top of the great circus tent, Lopez, who had dropped the knife from the roof at Del Rogeriguo's instigation, slid swiftly down to the edge of the canvas covering, and, with catlike agility, swarmed down to the ground beneath. Watching his time, and knowing that he had failed in his attempt on the boy acrobat's life, he peered through a slit in the canvas at the scene of the hold-up. Then, seeing everything going well, and rubbing his hands at the thought of the treasure he, Del Rogeriguo, and the bandits would divide among themselves in the near future, he slipped through the shadows across the deserted camp to where his master was skulking.

"All goes well, señor," he said, in that Spanish-Mexican patois. "The gunmen are holding up the audience, but that viper Polo he has escaped again! The knife I dropped from the roof struck the board a second after he had left it, and he is now working his way into the roof, where he will be imprisoned till we can capture or kill him, after our friends have held up the audience and emerged with the swag."

"That he should escape is not altogether incomprehensible, Lopez," said Garcia, with an evil grin. "He has as many lives as a cat. But next time—if he should secure safety from this attempt by some odd chance—see that your hand and eye err not, lest there be that said which shall be awkward for you! But, look, he is not trapped in the circus; even now he appears on the roof of the tent!"

"Doubtless he is searching for me, señor," said Lopez, as he turned to see Eddie on the canvas. "But if he has not seen my face, how can he suspect me? It is you he looks for."

"Not so, O fool!" said Del Rogeriguo. "Am I not many miles away, having been driven out of the camp before dawn this morning? Nay, it is not I. Of a truth, the boy knows not who to suspect!"

They retired farther into the shadow, and from there watched Eddie for a while, and chuckled with glee when the sound of shots came from inside the tent as the ringman blazed away at the bulge of Eddie's body in the canvas overhead. Then they saw Polo spring and catch the flag-pole, and disappear once more into the tent—that is, they guessed he had gone inside the tent, for they could no longer see his body as a black blotch against the white canvas.

"We will go and see what is happening," said Del Rogeriguo to his partner in crime. "Run, there is a shot! Caramba! What if this hold-up fails also, and my bandit friends desire of me the recompense? I have no money. I must see what happens, in case it shall be necessary for me to hide myself a while."

He and Lopez reached that tiny slit in the canvas, through which, in long past days, small boys had watched, free, gratis, and for nothing, many a hard-fought battle in the boxing-rings, and they glued their eyes thereto in astonishment and horror. For they had arrived just as the gunman emptied his weapon at the flying form of Eddie Polo—just in time to see the lad come into swift and sudden contact with the petrified leader, bearing him to the ground.

Del Rogeriguo cursed, ably seconded by Lopez, and then both hastily threw themselves flat on the earth, and hugged it, for the gunmen commenced to blaze away at the crowd, and the crowd at the gunmen, and bullets were tearing through the canvas about their ears. And then, quite suddenly, had fallen silence, and the two daggers had looked again—now having a bullet-hole each to spy through—and found the sole remaining bandit standing under guard of Rex the Strong Man.

"Madre de Dios!" snapped Del Rogeriguo. "They have captured Prairie Steve alive, and he will tell them, in exchange for his neck, that it was I planned the raid. Then there will be a hue-and-cry after me throughout Nevada, and the West will be too hot to hold me! I must silence his tongue before he talks too much."

He drew a gun, and looked along the sight, covering the man beside Rex the Strong Man. But Lopez was wiser than his master, and he put up a hand, obliterating the sights.

"Nay, señor, not yet!" he said. "A shot from you now will draw them to us like wolves after two lone sheep! Wait a while, till the crowd have looked upon Eddie Polo, and found him dead—for no man could perform his dive and live—then they will make a lynching bee, and I will hang around

on the outskirts of the mob, and it will go strange with me if I cannot manage to pick off Prairie Steve before he talks too freely!"

And so they had stood, undiscovered, and watching with a sigh of relief at the fact of Eddie's still being alive had given Prairie Steve his chance. But Del Rogeriguo's bullet had been as swift as that of any man inside the tent, and was in the bandit's body with the others when they counted the holes, though, of course, they could not recognise his trade-mark among so many.

"The bandits are all out of the way, now!" snarled the dago. "Lopez, we will make the getaway quickly. Go, you, and saddle the show's two best horses—Grey Wind for me and Red Lightning for yourself—and meet me at the top of the rise as swiftly as may be. Myself, I have a little monies to collect—expenses for the journey we will presently undertake. I go to the Busto caravan, Lopez. Keep an eye open for my coming, and be ready to mount and ride!"

The lesser villain nodded, and hurried off, while Del Rogeriguo, looking around apprehensively, and keeping well in the shadows, stole towards the red-painted caravan he had more or less successfully burgled once before. Reaching it, he knocked tentatively at the side, in case any camp follower had been detailed to keep guard within during Busto's absence; then, as nobody appeared in the doorway, he slung round to the steps.

Stealthily he mounted, and pushed open the door. The van was empty. A spare suit of ring garments lay in the nearest berth, which belonged to Mademoiselle Esta, while a top-hat and frock-coat worn by Busto during the day were splayed over a chair.

Boots, whips, and a few other sundry articles were scattered about the place; the general untidiness of which would have brought tears to a good housewife's eyes. But Del Rogeriguo had no eyes for these things. What he wanted was the old safe, in which, before he adopted the black biscuit-box, Busto had been accustomed to keep his takings. And there it stood, locked and secured, in the farther corner of the van.

"Ah!" sighed Del Rogeriguo. "Zat ole tin can of a zing! Vere ees a 'ammer or somezein' wiz vich I can bust eet open? For ze second time I veel relieve Señor Busto of ze necessity for payin' ze income-tax. Beside, 'e owe me much moneys—e 'ad not pay me for ze last month, and I must collect my vages!"

He smiled at his own quip, and bent on his knees before the safe. And as his hand touched the knob of the combination he heard a sound that made his heart stand still and his blood run cold—the sound of men's voices coming closer and closer.

He rose swiftly, and peered through the little curtained window of the door. In the moonlight he could make out the form of a

huge crowd, in the forefront of which men were bearing something that gleamed white in the moonlight—the form of the senseless Eddie Polo.

"Sancta Maria!" gasped the dago. "Eet ees Busto, an' ze men from ze ring! Zey weel come 'ere, and zen zey find me. zen eet ees all oop wif Garcia del Rogeriquo. Vat s'all I do? I must 'ide! But vere?"

He glanced wildly about him. There was only the upper and farther bunk possible, and there was more than a chance he would be discovered there if he took the risk. He dashed to a hook on which hung one of Esta's frocks, but the cover was too slight. Like a rat in a corner he glanced this way and that, and just as men's feet touched the steps outside he squeezed desperately underneath Esta's own berth.

And, a second later the door was flung open, and Eddie Polo, carried in the arms of four men, entered. He was laid on the berth underneath which crouched his most deadly enemy—not a foot separated the dirty, yellow dago and the clean, white boy. And as Garcia heard Eddie ask for him, his lips

and watched the feet walk to the door. Last of all went a pair of long moccasins he recognized as belonging to Bud Truefit, and these, to the dago's astonishment, stopped by the door.

"Er—Esta," said Bud shyly, "about what yewr dad said. If so be as yewr fingerin on fallin' in love with Eddie, why, it's yewrs trooly I'll allus be, an' I'll clean tergit as ever yew an' me stood an' 'eld 'ands in ther moonlight an' said lots of sweet things ter each other. 'Cos, Esta, it's yewr 'appiness as Bud Truefit's allus a-aimin' at, an' if I stands in ther way, all yew've got ter do is ter tell me of it, an' I'll stand aside fer Eddie Polo whenever yew ses ther word."

Esta got up from the campstool she had drawn to Eddie's bedside, and, walking to the big cowboy, threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Bud," she said smilingly, "yon're a real big man—millions of miles too big for me. But Eddie doesn't make any difference to us—he's just a big strong brother, and a pal to me, and he hasn't any ideas of loving me or that sort of nonsense. No, Bud, it's

money. And when I have them, ho, for Mexico again, where the law cannot reach me!"

He lay there, cramped, not daring to move, and gazed at Esta's slim ankles. Once or twice Eddie Polo moaned, and then, on some pretext, Bud Truefit came back and kissed Esta good-night. Also, though the dago did not know this, he handed the girl a six-shooter, for he little liked the thought of her being there alone all night, with the possibility of the leader of the bandits—whoever he might be—returning with the idea of completing his work.

And scarcely had the cowboy's footsteps died away when the end of the six-shooter suddenly appeared under the berth, its grim muzzle within three inches of Del Rogeriquo's surprise, open mouth.

"You can come out now, Del Rogeriquo," said Esta calmly. "And come out without fuss, or disturbing the man on the bed. Don't take too long to make up your mind, either, or I'll blow your brains out as you hide!"

Esta Takes a Hand!

GARCIA DEL ROGERIQUO gasped, and then made a grab at the gun. But Esta was expecting this, and drew it back.

"One chance!" she remarked crisply. "Oot you come—it's your last opportunity!"

The trigger clicked as the girl cocked it, and the dago, his terror showing in his face, scrambled out, Eddie moaning as he went. The girl swiftly slipped between the dago and the door and levelled the pistol at his heart.

"The next time you hide under a bed, keep your feet out of sight!" she counselled him. "Those fancy Mexican boots of yours gave you away five minutes ago. And I didn't tell Bud Truefit because I didn't want you killed here in front of my eyes. Now, what are you doing in this van?"

"Curse you!" snarled the Spaniard. "Ze troot, eh? Vell, I come to get your fazzer's cashbox, and zen to nip across ze border. Zat ees all!"

"I thought so!" snapped back Esta. "Now, what do you know about the business inside the show to-night? Don't try to swarm around me, my finger's trembling on this trigger as it is!"

"Ze show!" snarled Garcia. "Ah, zat was a good stroke for me, for it haf nearly keel your Eddie Polo, and haf made 'em mad, eh? So say ze doctor. Zat is my revenge. I vas ze brain behind ze bandits, zat vas all—ze planner of ze scheme, an' ze goos to haf gif me more moneys zan your fazzer take in ze week. But eet haf fail, and so I come to take your fazzer's coin."

"I thought so," repeated the girl. "And now, get out, and take your chance among the men still knocking about the camp, for, if one of them so much as sights you, greaser, your life is worth less than your vile carcass. Out you go while you can move of your own accord, and dare to put a finger near me, and I'll see you're carried out! Savvy? Git!"

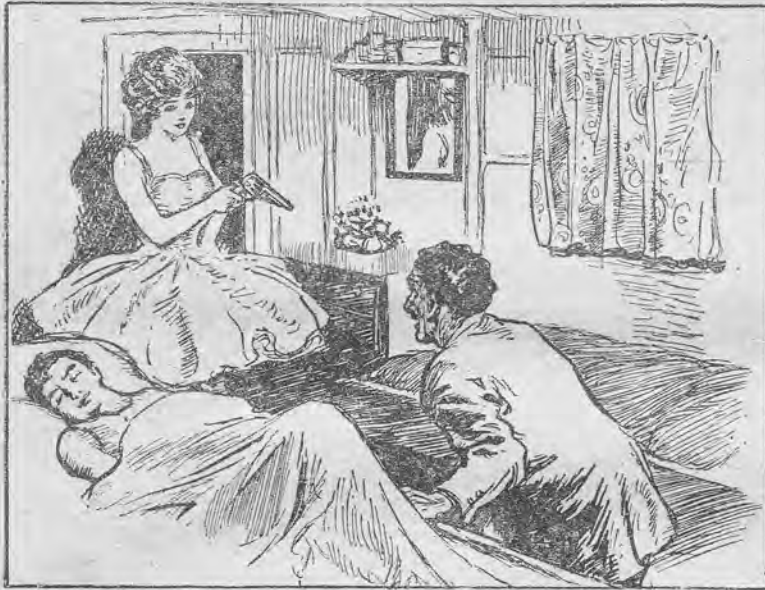
The dago snarled again, and, with the girl's pistol muzzle ever at his breast, sidled round, his back to Eddie's bed. His hands were still raised in the air, and there wasn't more than two feet between himself and the girl. He was almost round to the door when Eddie groaned again in his pain, and Esta's eyes left Del Rogeriquo for a second.

It was half a second too long for the greaser. He dodged swiftly, and grabbed the girl's hand in such a manner that she could not press the trigger. His other hand he shoved across her mouth so that she could not scream, and with a wild thrust he pushed her towards the inner part of the van.

She writhed and struggled and kicked, but she had on only the soft shoes she wore for bareback riding, and these made no impression on the Spaniard's well-guarded shins. She tried to bite, but that greasy yellow hand effectually closed her mouth.

To and fro rocked the fight, and Esta strove desperately to press the trigger of the pistol still in her hand. But she could not press—Del Rogeriquo's thumb was jammed in the trigger-guard and his fingers held down the hammer, so that she could neither use it to shoot him nor to summon help.

But the greaser wasn't having it all his own way, for Esta was a Western girl, strong and lithe and clean-limbed. Also she was fighting for her life, she knew, and her desperation lent her strength. There was that in the greaser's eyes which, under any other circumstances, would have frightened



The trigger clicked as Esta cocked it, and Rogeriquo, his terror showing in his face, scrambled out from under the bunk. "What are you doing in this van?" demanded the girl.

writhed back over his yellow teeth, and he grinned noiselessly at Esta's assurance that Del Rogeriquo was far away.

For a moment he experienced an insane longing to fix his teeth in the slim white ankle so close to his face, to shout out that he was here, and to fall upon Eddie Polo and crush out the slim spark of life before anybody could interfere. And then he remembered that his self-betrayal must mean his death at the hands of these angered men, and he had seen too many summary lynchings to desire to play the leading role in another. So he crouched farther back and lay perfectly still, counting the feet of the men in the place.

"Well, doc," said the voice of Bud Truefit, "we're mighty obleeged ter yew fer yewr kind assistance, and if there's a bill we'll be shure pleased ter settle it when yew sends it in. An' now, folks, I'm fingerin' as this 'ere van's a trifle crowded for a sick man, so if yew'll jest step outside we'll have a little talk together, an', maybe, atween us we'll be able ter finger out the skunk what's at ther back of ter-night's 'old-up, and if 'is name ain't Garcia del Rogeriquo, waal, I'm kinder mistook, that's all!"

"I'll stay and look after Eddie while you talk, Bud," said Esta. "Dad, you'll have to find another van to sleep in to-night."

"Right-ho, little girl!" said Busto, patting his daughter on the head. "Eddie's a favourite with us all, but, mind, no falling in love with the boy, and so smiling him!"

He wagged his finger admonishingly, and the girl blushed. Then Del Rogeriquo heard murmured "Good-nights!" from the citizens,

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you I love—and have loved from the first, so just get all those silly notions out of your head, and trust me!"

"Gawd bless yew, Esta!" said the cowboy. "Tain't no manner of use me a-sayin' as I ain't right glad ter hear yew say them words, but as fer bein' too good an' big fer yew, waal, ther ain't no man breathin' as is fit ter tie up yer dainty little shoes. And if ther's anybody wants ter argify about that, it's Bud Truefit as'll prove 'is words on 'is front teeth."

He blew a kiss to Esta, and the half-caste beneath the bunk ground his teeth. He had long ago cast eyes at Esta herself, and had even sounded her father to make sure that the showman would not be averse to him as a son-in-law. And the showman had laughed, and referred the dago to his daughter, well knowing what her answer would be, since he knew all about the romance that already existed between his star rider and his star cowboy.

"Ah!" thought Rogeriquo to himself craftily. "A little patience, Garcia, and then you shall score twice—you shall be revenged after all on the hulking cowboy, upon Eddie Polo, and upon Busto as well. For the showman shall lose not only his money, but he shall lose his daughter also. Bud Truefit shall lose his wife, and Eddie Polo I will smother. Wait but a little while till the camp is quiet, and ther will be the time for action. Lopez must wait with the horses—the little yellow devil dare not disobey my orders—and then he must look out for himself. I shall want both Grey Wind and Red Lightning to carry the double load of Busto's daughter—Truefit's sweetheart—and Busto's

her, but now it only made her all the more dogged and determined.

"Promise zat you weel not scream for 'elp," panted the dago, "an' I weel promise zat I weel not 'arm you! Ef you promise nod your 'ead—'ef you weel not promise, shake your 'ead!"

Esta almost shook her head off as she indignantly refused to parley, and, incidentally, almost shook her mouth free. But before the scream could issue from her lips Garcia's fist rose and fell, and it seemed to the girl as though a great weight had fallen upon her, as though she were falling through a deep, black, bottomless pit.

The revolver dropped from her nerveless hand, but Garcia, in his exultation at his easy victory—comparatively easy, at any rate, after the girl's advantage of surprise in the beginning—laid her down so that she sat, half lay across the camp stool by Eddie Polo's head.

Eddie opened his eyes, and again gazed uncomprehendingly into those of the rage-mad half-caste.

"Shout, Polo, and ze sound is ze last you make!" snarled Del Rogierguo. "Ze time is not yet for you—ze worse zan death is for you! Ze wanderin' around ze world, senseless, insane, nevaire more to do ze grand flying dive from ze lofty trapeze. Zat is ze fate of you, unless I decide to smother you."

"Ooooh!" Eddie Polo, utterly uncomprehending, and not even recognising Garcia del Rogierguo for the moment, closed his eyes and lay back again.

"E wanders," the Spaniard told himself. "E suffers from ze concussion of ze brain, an' 'e weel nevaire again be able to hector and to rob ze poor acrobat of ze well-paid job in ze circus. Eef I did not 'ate eem so, I would pity eem, ze poor boy!"

He laughed snarlingly, and bent to examine Esta. She was still unconscious, for his blow had been a terrible one, delivered with all his strength. That blow would have stunned a full-grown man, never mind a slim girl, and it is a matter of truth that Esta carried the mark of the dago's fist for many days afterwards.

"An' now," he went on, "now for ze moneys of ze great Busto. Hat a mineet, zo, I must tie up ze fair Esta—so zat she can easily be carried, and weel not sing out ze loud song and alarm ze camp."

He ripped the sheets from Busto's berth, and swathed the girl in these, twisting them into ropes, and knowing them so that the girl was deprived alike of the use of her legs and her arms. Her mouth he closed with a filthy handkerchief, and at last he stepped back to admire his handiwork. He cast another glance at Eddie, but that youth's eyes were fast closed.

"No interference from you, my friend!" snarled the dago, in his own language. "Now for the money, and then you can say Garcia del Rogierguo has departed out of your life for ever, as has also Esta, the Equestrienne. She will grace my hacienda in Mexico quite well, and I shall be the envy of every other senor in that country."

He bent and examined the safe again; then, picking up a hatchet which had been brought to light during his struggle with the girl, he struck the flimsy old-fashioned safe a few shrewd blows, nearly cutting the little door off its hinges.

He laughed joyfully as he stuffed his pockets with the silver and the notes, and then, with a last contemptuous glance at Eddie, took up a pillow. For a moment he poised this, then, with a sneer, dropped it at once, and picking up Esta, threw her across his shoulder. He took two steps forward and seized the handle of the door. Then, for the third time that night his heart missed a beat and his blood ran cold.

For once more he felt the muzzle of a gun jammed into his back, and heard a voice that astounded and frightened him. For it was the voice of Eddie Polo—Eddie Polo, he had thought dying, and certainly not in full possession of his senses.

"Steady, dago," said Eddie. "Don't go yet, till I've had a little chat with you. Or, if you must go, you'll take a leaden present from Eddie Polo with you—see?"

(A further instalment of this powerful story in next week's number. Order your copy to-day!

THE SWORD OF THE TEMPLES.

(Continued from page 4.)

And Harry, with an inward feeling that he had at least done something by way of retaliation, turned back towards the mansion.

"Ah, well," he muttered, slipping the rapier into its scabbard, "you are still intact, anyway, so there's not very much harm done. Cousin Walter, I think the victory to-night lies with me!"

The pain in his head, which the excitement of the chase had for the time being driven away, now returned with redoubled force, and he was staggering weak on his feet when he at length arrived at the door. Will, who was leaning against the portal, placed his sound arm about his young companion's shoulders, and led him upstairs.

"'Twas a drawn battle this time, lad," he said. "You still have the sword, but that rascal escaped without a scratch on his vile carcass!"

Harry laughed.

"And now, Will," he asked, "what plans have formed themselves in that cute old pate of yours?"

They had by this time regained the upper chamber, where Travers had already set the table upon its legs again and relit the candles.

"Plans, lad? Why, many; but I fear me they must wait to mature," replied Howard grimly, pointing to his injured arm. "To-night's work may have retarded my recovery, but you can leave as soon as you feel able. My right hand cannot strike again for the King for many days to come!"

"Then I shall stay, too, old friend," said the boy determinedly. "We started together, and so will we finish."

"As you like it, Master Harry! I shall not say nay, for I'll be main glad of your company. And, in any event, there's small chance of your finding our friends now, for we know not in what direction the battle-tide flows by this."

As he spoke, Will crawled awkwardly back between the sheets, whilst Harry returned to his position on the couch, and let his aching head sink down amongst the cushions.

Will Howard was quite right in his surmise when he said that the exertion of that eventful night would likely hinder his recovery, for the weeks passed slowly by without very much sign of his broken arm mending. Could he have obtained proper treatment, 'twould assuredly have been different, but with Britain in the throes of such a sanguinary struggle as then raged, all the available surgical skill was sorely needed elsewhere. Travers had done his best, which was well enough in its way, and had given some encouragement at first; but as the days lengthened into weeks, the big fellow's spirits suffered in consequence.

A born fighter, this dreary inaction was telling on him terribly, and his face was gradually growing quite gloomy, despite Harry's efforts to cheer him up.

"'Twill not be long now, old friend!" the boy said for the twentieth time, and Will smiled, encouraged for a while; but soon got mournful again as he glowered down at his injured limb.

"Ay, lad; but 'tis mighty slow," he replied. "How many weeks is it since that accursed oak fell upon us? Six—seven—"

"Nearer to eight, I should say," Harry was reluctantly forced to admit; "but 'tis improving. You can move it, you see, which you could not do a fortnight ago!"

"Ay, that I can—that I can! But I cannot grip a sword-hilt tightly, nor yet swing a blade. And, marry, is not that what my arm was made for?"

The lad smiled.

"You old fire-eater, have patience for yet another short while, and you will be as good as new!"

Will smiled in return, and then stared vacantly out of the open window, seeing in his mind's eye the rising dust-cloud of galloping horsemen, and hearing again the clash and din of battle.

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

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR.

Address:

The Editor, The "POPULAR,"
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FOR NEXT FRIDAY:

MORE RIPPING STORIES!

As a sign of the times, I must mention that just recently I have been receiving more and more letters from my readers. This has pleased me immensely, as I am always delighted to hear from my chums, and to have their opinion of the stories I am publishing. I am glad to say that each one of our splendid tales is extremely popular with all. This is as it should be, and I can only add that I have some very fine new stories now in preparation, particulars of which I shall be announcing shortly.

Next Friday there will be another grand instalment of

"THE SWORD OF THE TEMPLES!"

By Edmund Burton.

These chapters will deal with Harry Temple and his giant companion, Will Howard, during the time they are hunting through the country for the sadly-diminished forces of their once-brilliant company of cavalry, and of an incident which nearly costs them their lives.

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And, lastly, though by no means the least, comes a long complete school story of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood, entitled:

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By Owen Conquest.

The chums of Rookwood are characters that endure themselves to the hearts of all boys and girls the whole world over, and they are becoming more famous week by week.

MYSTERY SERIALS.

There is one rather amusing type of correspondent who grabs his trusty pen in hand, and dashes down that he does not like this or that feature in the Companion Papers, and will I please make away with the offending—
THE POPULAR.—No. 91.

ing detail at once! I should like to tell some Glasgow chums of mine that plenty of readers do like mystery and adventure stories. We cannot have all football, all cricket, or all anything. There must be variety.

THE RAILWAYS.

Evidently it is not everybody who means to pay big railway fares. A correspondent at a place called Mughampton—which I cannot find on the map—says that he is quite satisfied to do no travelling. Mughampton is good enough for him. So he says:

"He says it very loud and clear,
In fact he shouts it in your ear."

Of course, this worthy denizen of the village named—which is on a branch of a branch-line—can do as he lists. He says that a stroll down his own High Street is good enough for him. He can imagine the rest and be content. In a measure, of course, he is right. People who do not go rushing about the country in express trains manage to see a rare lot near at home, and it comes out just as well in the end.

THE LARGEST STATION.

A chum in Scotland, who says he likes reading the Chat, informs me that Waverley Station, Edinburgh, is the most extensive railway-station in the United Kingdom. He

encloses a neat little booklet to prove his case. He points out that the reader who stuck out for Waterloo Station, London, was incorrect. Well, I have no time to travel North with a tape-measure, but it certainly looks as though the Waverley had first honours with its area of twenty-three acres.

Your Editor



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