

THE RETURN OF THE DUKE! — A Great New Story — by WALTER EDWARDS INSIDE!

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THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

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# CONVICT 379!

A STORY of "THE DUKE"



BY WALTER EDWARDS

**HOW THE DUKE ESCAPED FROM BLEAKMOOR!**

*(A sensational incident from the great new story of the Duke in this issue.)*

ANOTHER GRAND STORY OF THE NEW FRENCH MASTER OF ROOKWOOD!

# The Price of the Past!



By Owen Conquest.

Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular."

To save the life of an enemy, Victor Gaston betrays himself!

### The 1st Chapter.

#### Lovell Chips In!

"Je chante de ce heros qui regnait sur la France—"

"Eh?"  
"What?"  
"Which?"

"Et par droit de naissance et par droit de naissance—"

"Chuck it, Lovell!"  
Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth "chucked" it, not because he was bidden to do so, but because he couldn't remember what came next.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stared at him, surprised. The Fistical Four were sauntering in Big Quad, at Rookwood, in the morning break, and they were talking and thinking of cricket affairs—of anything or every thing, but French poetry. Arthur Edward Lovell had been silent for some minutes, which was a little unusual. He had broken his silence suddenly with that poetic outburst.

"What are you spouting the 'Henriade' for in quad, you ass?" demanded Raby. "Don't we get enough of it in French class?"

"Too much!" said Newcome.  
"Don't worry," said Lovell. "French comes next in a quarter of an hour, and I want to mug up that muck a bit. I've been trying to learn the rot by heart, but the piffle doesn't seem to stick somehow."

Lovell's opinion of Voltaire's celebrated poem evidently was not a flattering one.

"You see, we're backing up the new Froggy, ain't we?" said Lovell, in explanation. "Cads like Peele have made a set against Victor Gaston, and we're backing him up. Isn't he a good sort?"

"He is—he are!" agreed Jimmy Silver. All the Fistical Four were of opinion that Victor Gaston, the new French master at Rookwood, was a good sort. That opinion was shared by nearly all Rookwood.

"Well, there's lots of ways of backing up a master!" said Lovell. "I've punched Peele's head for slanging him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"But you know Peele. It doesn't do him much good to punch his head. Only seems to make him vicious, somehow. I've got another idea. I'm going to mug up French, and show Moscoo Gaston that we really value his jolly old instructions," said Lovell impressively.

"But we don't," said Newcome.  
Lovell coughed.

"Well, perhaps we don't, as a matter of absolute solid fact," he admitted. "But we ought to. There's no doubt that we ought to. After all, our people pay for it all, don't they? I'm going to be keen on French and surprise Froggy with it in class. That's why I'm learning the first book of the 'Henriade' by heart."

"My hat! That's a large order," said Jimmy Silver. "How far have you got?"

"Two lines so far."  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, everything must have a beginning," said Lovell. "I've got the first two lines all right. Listen!"

"Keep them for class, old man," urged Raby.

But Arthur Edward Lovell did not heed. He proceeded to spout:

"Je chante de ce heros qui regnait sur la France—"

"Give us a rest!"

"Et par droit de naissance et par droit de naissance—"

"Assez! Taisez-vous!" said Jimmy Silver. "There's some more French for you, Lovell. It means 'Enough! Shut up!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

memory, especially for poetry. You're a bit weak in French, Jimmy, if you don't mind my saying so."  
"I don't mind," said Jimmy, laughing. "You can talk any rot you like, old chap. It's a free country."



### TO SAVE AN ENEMY!

After working upon the lock of the safe for some time Victor Gaston at last succeeded in his task. He swung open the heavy iron door of the safe and Cyril Peele was revealed inside.

"Naissance," said Lovell, still unheeding. "That means birth or something, doesn't it, Jimmy?"

"Yes, ass."

"And 'droit' means right, or something of the sort?"

"Something of the sort," grinned Jimmy.

"Then there seems a lot of ditto repeats about that second line," said Lovell, wrinkling his brow in a mental effort. Mental efforts did not come easily to Arthur Edward Lovell. "It seems to mean 'Both by right of birth and by right of birth.' That doesn't seem to make sense."

"Well, poetry never does make sense," said Newcome. "Especially French poetry."

"That's so," agreed Raby, with a nod.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"You've got it wrong, fathead!"

"No, I haven't," said Lovell, with confidence. "I've got it right. I know that."

"Ass! The line is, 'Et par droit de conquete et par droit de naissance,'" said Jimmy Silver.

"Conquete! That's conquest, isn't it?"

"Yes, ass."

"You think that's right, Jimmy?"

"I know it is, ass."

"I hardly think so," said Lovell angrily. "You see, I've got a good

"I'll get the book, and jolly well prove that you're wrong!" said Lovell warmly.

And Arthur Edward Lovell stalked away towards the house, leaving his chums grinning.

Certainly it was quite noble of Lovell to determine to gratify the "new Froggy" by mugging up his language. But it was very doubtful whether Monsieur Victor Gaston would derive much gratification from Lovell's mastery of French. Lovell was a good man in many ways. He was worth much on the cricket field, and he was second to none in ragging the Moderns. But in class he was not brilliant, and in French it was absolutely certain that he never would shine.

Lovell entered the House, and made his way to No. 2 class-room, where Victor Gaston was to take the French class at eleven. His copy of the "Henriade" was there. As it was not yet ten minutes to eleven the room should have been vacant. But as Lovell came up to the door he heard a sound of a movement within.

Lovell looked in. Cyril Peele of the Classical Fourth was in the room.

He was bending over the chair behind the master's desk. Upon that chair Victor Gaston would be sitting presently. Peele was squeezing out the contents of a tube of secotine

on the chair, evidently a playful preparation for Victor Gaston's arrival.

Lovell grinned, and then he frowned.

Peele could play any tricks he liked on other masters, but the chums of the Fourth had taken the "new Froggy" under their special protection. As the end study were "backing him up," it was not for Peele to play japes on him. Peele had been warned, his head had been punched, he had been kicked several times, and still he was going on. Arthur Edward Lovell tread softly into the room.

Peele's back was to him, and he was unconscious of Lovell's soft approach. He squeezed out the last drop of secotine on the seat of the chair, and chuckled softly. The next moment he yelled with sudden alarm as a powerful grip was laid on the back of his neck.

"Oh! Ow! Who! What—!"  
Peele squirmed round in Lovell's grip. He was glad to see that it was not Victor Gaston or Mr. Dalton. He wriggled and glared at Lovell.

"Leggo, you beast!"

"That's for Froggy, what?" grinned Lovell.

"Mind your own business!"

"This is my bizney, old top! Haven't we told you, lots of times, that you're to let the new Froggy alone?"

"Leggo!"

"Old Greely can go for him as much as he likes, and we can't stop

On second thoughts Peele did not come on. He gritted his teeth and rushed from the class-room. There was not more than time for Cyril Peele to clean himself before the French lesson.

Lovell grinned cheerfully. Instead of seeking his "Henriade" he took a duster and finished cleaning the seat of the chair, and it was spotless by the time the juniors came in to class, and Monsieur Victor Gaston entered; and the "new Froggy" never knew how narrow an escape his trousers had had.

### The 2nd Chapter.

#### Mr. Greely's Last Word!

"Sir!"  
Mr. Greely, master of the Fifth, enunciated that syllable in his most stately and ponderous manner.

Dr. Chisholm, headmaster of Rookwood, frowned.

He did not want another interview with Mr. Greely; in fact, he objected to it very much. And he was due in ten minutes to take the Sixth Form in Greek.

"Really—" he said restively.

Mr. Greely had entered the Head's study with a firm tread. His manner, always ponderous, was unusually determined.

"Sir, I claim a few minutes of your time!"

"Mr. Greely, I am busy now," said the Head. "As you can see, I am occupied with accounts."

Mr. Greely could see that. Books and papers were on the Head's table, the door of the iron safe, behind the Head's chair, stood half-open. But accounts or no accounts, Horace Greely had come to the Head's study to say his say, and he intended to say it.

"A few minutes, sir, seem to me little to ask, when I am leaving Rookwood to-day," said Mr. Greely.

"There is nothing further to discuss—"

"I am bound, sir, to say a last word before I go. I have accused your new French master, Victor Gaston, of being a crackman and bank robber, whom I saw condemned in a Paris law court last year, under the name of Felix Lacroix. He denies it—you do not believe me."

"Nobody believes so wild and foolish an accusation, Mr. Greely," said the Head tartly. "Victor Gaston is a known man—his testimonials are quite in order. But we have gone into this before; I refuse to reopen the matter!"

"I desire to draw your attention, sir, to the fact that the man Lacroix is known to have escaped from prison in France."

"A matter of no moment, sir."

"A matter of great moment, to my mind, sir! My conviction remains unshaken that Victor Gaston and Felix Lacroix are one and the same."

"Nonsense!"

Mr. Greely breathed hard and deep.

Dr. Chisholm regarded him, over his pince-nez, coldly, icily.

"There is nothing more to be said, Mr. Greely. You accused Victor Gaston on the ground of some chance resemblance to a man you saw once or twice a year ago. Instead of speaking to me privately on the subject you allowed this to become the talk of the school. Later, on a tale told you by a junior boy, you accused him of having burglarious implements in his trunk. The trunk was examined—nothing of the kind was revealed. I warned you, seriously, that if your second accusation fell to the ground I should expect you to resign your position here—the situation had become intolerable. I was prepared to allow you to leave at the end of the term, but yesterday, sir, you allowed yourself to lose your temper, and actually to raise your hand against another master in the school. You struck Victor Gaston in the sight of a crowd of Rookwood boys—"

"I—"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Nothing can excuse such an outbreak—such a scandalous outbreak. It is imperative that you should leave Rookwood at once—to-day, in fact. I have nothing to add."

Mr. Greely's purple face became more purple.

"I did not come here, sir, to ask for consideration!" he boomed; "nothing was further from my thoughts. It will be a blow to me to leave Rookwood—a heavy blow. But I ask for no consideration."

"Then why this unnecessary interview?" snapped the Head.

"I feel it my duty, before I go, to warn you once more, sir, in the most solemn manner, that you are entertaining a dangerous character in

him, as he's a master," said Lovell.

"But we can stop you, Peele, and we're jolly well going to. You're going to wipe that stuff up!"

"I'm not!" yelled Peele.

"You are—with your face!"

"Oh—ow—groogh—yooogghh!" spluttered Peele, as Lovell's iron grip, on the back of his neck, forced his face down on the chair.

The next few minutes were horrid to Peele.

Secotine sticking Victor Gaston's trousers to the chair was one thing; secotine rubbed up by Peele's features was quite another.

Peele wriggled and squirmed and kicked and spluttered and howled. But his features rubbed up the sticky mess thoroughly, and by the time Lovell had finished, Peele's face was in a shocking state.

"Mmmmm! Grrrrghh! Mmmmm!"

Peele's remarks were inarticulate.

"There!" gasped Lovell. "There you are!" He released the cad of the Fourth, and Peele staggered away, crimson and sticky and furious.

"Oh, my hat! You look a picture! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell roared.

Peele clenched his hands convulsively, and made a spring at Lovell. Up went Arthur Edward's hands at once, and he grinned over them at Peele.

"Come on, old bean!"

Do all your pals read the BOYS' FRIEND? If not, introduce it to them to-day. They're bound to like our great stories!

this school—that you are nursing a viper, sir, who will sting you in return," said Mr. Greely, in his most impressive manner.

"Nonsense!" Mr. Greely made a gurgling sound. It was really hard to have his impressive warning characterised as nonsense.

"Is that all you have to say, sir?" he ejaculated.

"That is all." "You persist in trusting this man—this scoundrel who has led a double life—openly as a teacher of French, secretly as a skilful and dangerous cracksmen."

"Nonsense!" "Your own safe, sir, is the man's object here. I am convinced that he waits only till he can discover that there is plunder worth his trouble. Strong as your safe is, sir, Felix Lacroix will open it with ease. At his trial, sir, it was mentioned that he possesses a wonderful skill—that no safe, however cleverly constructed, presents any difficulty to him. Some night, sir, you will be robbed, and the man you know as Victor Gaston will disappear."

Dr. Chisholm made an angry gesture. "I have heard such tirades as this before from you, Mr. Greely, and I desire to hear no more," he said. "I shall be gratified, sir, if you will quit Rookwood at the earliest convenient moment."

"I have done my duty!" said Mr. Greely. "Some later day, sir, you will remember my warning!"

With that the master of the Fifth Form trod ponderously from the room.

Dr. Chisholm frowned impatiently. He glanced at his watch, and turned to his papers again; but there was another knock at the study door. It was Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form, who entered.

"Well, Mr. Dalton?" "You asked me to see you, sir, with regard to taking the Fifth Form, as Mr. Greely is leaving so suddenly," said Richard Dalton.

"Oh, yes, quite so—quite so. Mr. Greely has just been here, repeating once more his absurd statements concerning Monsieur Gaston. It seems to be quite an obsession."

"Quite an obsession, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "I am glad that he has not succeeded in shaking your faith in Victor Gaston."

"Not in the least," said the Head. "The story is too absurd for a moment's attention. Bless my soul! It is now time that I was in the Sixth Form room; but we must arrange about the Fifth! It is very awkward that Mr. Greely is leaving so suddenly; but after the scandalous scene in the quadrangle yesterday it would be impossible to allow him to remain after to-day. Please come with me to the Fifth Form room, Mr. Dalton; the Sixth must wait a few minutes."

"Very well, sir." Dr. Chisholm, a little perturbed, walked from the study with the Fourth Form master. The sudden loss of a member of the staff necessitated several changes in the school time-table, and the Head detested any departure from the normal. Fortunately, Mr. Dalton was able to take the Fifth; and the Fourth, his own Form, could be allotted to other masters for a time—"whacked out" among the staff, as Mornington had described it.

The Head was with Mr. Dalton in the Fifth Form-room for a few minutes, and when he left it he went direct to the Sixth, where he was already late. And for the time, in the stress of other occupations, he did not remember that Mr. Greely had interrupted him while the door of his safe stood open—that he had omitted to close and lock it before leaving the study. That little incident was destined to have far-reaching consequences.

The 3rd Chapter.

Peele Looks for Trouble—and Finds It.

Jimmy Silver & Co. greeted Monsieur Victor Gaston cheerily as he came into Class-room No. 2 to take his class.

"Good-morning, sir!" "Bonjour, monsieur!" added Lovell.

"Good-morning, my boys!" said Victor Gaston, with a pleasant smile. The young Frenchman had a very agreeable smile, and he had a way of making himself liked by his boys. Even Peele would have admitted that Victor Gaston was an improvement on old Monsieur Monceau. Most of the Fourth hoped that Monsieur Monceau, now away for his health, would remain permanently in "La belle

France," and leave his place to Victor Gaston. They liked old Mossoo in a way, but they liked and respected and admired the "new Froggy."

Jimmy Silver & Co. and the rest of the Fourth, Classical and Modern, were on their best behaviour. They knew that, in the present deranged state of the time-table they were "in" for extra French—many extra French classes were to fill up the time Mr. Dalton could not spend with his Form. But they resolved to bear it with fortitude.

There was only one fellow in the class who was bent on trouble, and that was Cyril Peele.

Peele was in his blackest temper. He detested Victor Gaston—partly because the French master expected him to work, and had little mercy on slackers, partly because he had expected to be able to "rag" the new Froggy as he had been used to rag the "old Froggy," and that expectation had been disappointed. Victor Gaston was not the man to allow rags in class, as Peele had discovered to his cost.

But, apart from malice, Peele had really some grounds for his bitterness. He had spied on the French master, and had seen the contents of

No one in the school believed a word of his story—his character for untruthfulness was too well known. No one doubted that Mr. Greely's accusation had put the idea into his head, and that he had invented his story from beginning to end. It was hard, perhaps, but Cyril Peele had only himself to thank. It was well known that he never hesitated to lie when a lie would serve his turn. He was, in fact, a dog with a bad name.

But Peele was feeling a sense of deep grievance and resentment against Victor Gaston, whom he believed to be a dangerous character; against the Fourth Form fellows, who laughed at his story of what he had seen; against the Head, who had administered the flogging. Peele, in fact, was feeling a good deal like Ishmael of old—his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him.

So Peele was in his blackest temper now; all the more so because his features still felt the effect of rubbing the secotine off the master's chair. Lovell had not handled him gently. Peele was in the mood for trouble, and trouble was not long in coming in the French class that morning.

Victor Gaston took no special note

"I had finished my exercise, sir, so I thought I would draw a little. I didn't want to waste time, sir."

Some of the Fourth grinned at the idea of Cyril Peele not wishing to waste time.

"I shall not deal with this incident myself, Peele," said Victor Gaston in the same quiet manner. "But there must be an end to this. You will take this paper, as it is, to the headmaster, and hand it to him. Tell him I have sent you. Dr. Chisholm will deal with you as he thinks fit."

Peele breathed hard. He had been unable to restrain his insolence, but he was not quite prepared for the consequences. Perhaps he had expected that Victor Gaston's conscience, or fear of causing discussion on the subject would make him pass over the insult in silence. But whether the man was Victor Gaston, French master, or Felix Lacroix, cracksmen and safe-robber, he was not the man to accept insolence from a fellow like Peele.

"You hear me, Peele." "You hear me, Peele!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

Peele came out sullenly before the class. He took the paper, and left

were unfastened and the papers mixed in a heap on the floor of the safe. He grinned at the thought.

He stepped to the door of the study and listened. The passage was deserted—silent, save for a distant hum from the Third Form-room.

There was no danger. He stepped back to the safe with a malevolent gleam in his eyes.

The Head was away till twelve. He had a quarter of an hour. He needed only a few minutes—a couple of minutes—to do almost irreparable damage to the Head's orderly collection of papers. Then he could march into the Sixth Form room to report himself, and return to the French class. Who was to know that he had ever been in the Head's study at all? "Safe as houses!" muttered Peele.

He remembered the flogging he had received in that study the day before and gritted his teeth. He reached into the safe and seized bundle after bundle of papers, tearing them loose and throwing them down in a heap. Among them he found a bundle of banknotes, and another bundle of currency notes, and he scattered them as recklessly as the rest.

In one minute he had done enough to give the Head hours and hours of laborious sorting. He jerked out the key of the safe, and added it to the heap, covering it with more and more papers. The lock closed with a spring, and if the Head had no second key he was likely to have some difficulty in getting the safe open, if Peele closed it. And he meant to close it when he had finished.

"Serve him right for leaving the safe open and the key in the lock!" murmured Peele. "Careless of him—jolly careless! I've been caned for carelessness myself—this is the Head's turn!"

And he threw down another scattering bundle of paper, with a chuckle, into the bottom of the safe.

His chuckle died away suddenly. There was a step in the corridor—immediately afterwards a hand on the doorknob.

Peele's heart stood still. He knew that step; and he knew, too, that no one but the Head was likely to come to the room.

He was caught! For a second he was sick with fear. What had he done?—Why had the Head come there—why, when he never left the Sixth till twelve, and it still wanted a quarter of an hour to noon?

The study door was opening. Peele, desperate, scared out of his wits, plunged into the ample space of the big safe. He drew the iron door close after him, not quite shutting it. He was safe from observation there; and if only the Head would go—

He heard footsteps in the study. They approached the safe. They stopped. Peele's heart beat quickly, almost to suffocation! If the Head drew the iron door open he was revealed, and the consequences of what he had done were inevitable. Flogging—expulsion—the end of all things for him at Rookwood School. Peele barely breathed. He heard muttered words.

"Bless my soul! I certainly thought that I had left the key in the lock; but it is not here!"

Click! Dr. Chisholm did not pull the iron door open. He clicked it shut!

The spring lock closed. Peele was in utter darkness. For some moments he rejoiced. He was undiscovered, and the Head would go!

And then— With a rush of terror Peele realised that he was locked in the safe, unventilated—in an iron prison from which there was no escape! That rush of terrified realisation overcame him; he reeled, and leaned weakly on the iron wall. Locked in—locked in, without light, without air—to die if he were not released in time!

Flogging, expulsion, anything mattered little now, in comparison with that! He had hoped that the Head would go; now he prayed that he had not gone. With desperate fists Peele beat furiously on the iron door and shrieked for help.

The 4th Chapter.

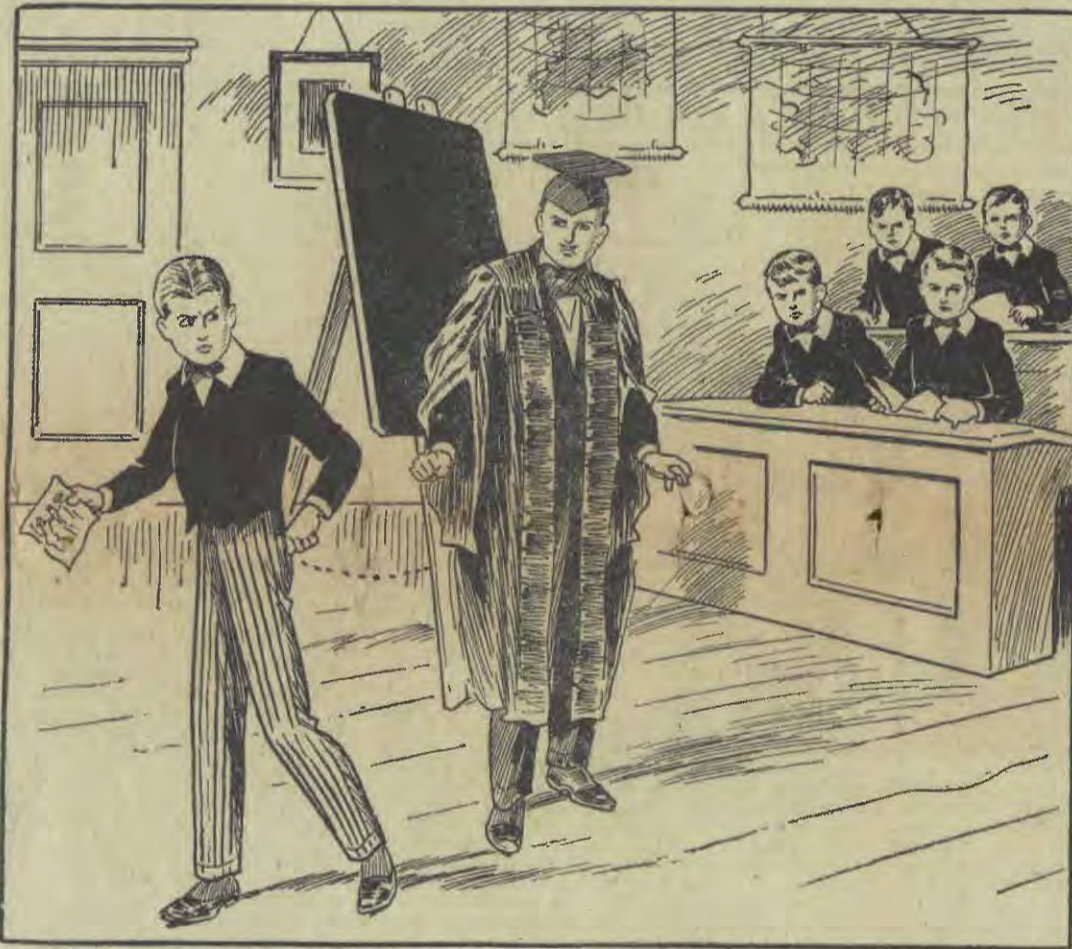
In the Shadow of Death!

"Dr. Chisholm—"

The Head frowned. He was at lunch; and when the Head was at lunch it was a service of some peril to disturb him.

Mr. Dalton stepped into the dining-room in the Head's house, his face somewhat pale, a very unusual agitation in his manner. He did not even notice the Head's frown.

(Continued overleaf.)



MORE TROUBLE FOR PEELE!

"Peele," said Monsieur Gaston quietly, "you will take this paper, as it is, to the Headmaster, and hand it to him. Tell him I have sent you. Dr. Chisholm will deal with you as he thinks fit." Peele came out sullenly before the class. He took the paper on which he had made his insulting drawing, and left the class-room with it in his hand.

the trunk in Victor Gaston's room. He knew, from the evidence of his own eyes, that in that trunk there had been a set of steel implements—though they had not come to light when the search was made. He had informed Mr. Greely; and Mr. Greely, nothing doubting, had taken the story to the Head. How the Frenchman had escaped the danger Peele did not know. It had dawned on him that perhaps there was a false bottom to the trunk; and in Gaston's absence he had taken the desperate step of smashing in the bottom of the trunk, hoping to find there the hidden cracksmen's tools. He had found, indeed, a cavity in the trunk, but it was empty. There was nothing there to cast suspicion on Victor Gaston—nothing.

Peele was puzzled, perplexed, enraged. It was not likely to occur to his mind that a man who had been a cracksmen, who had led a double life, might have repented—that repentance had led him to cast away the implements of his nefarious trade just in time to save himself from discovery.

But Peele knew—he knew that Mr. Greely's accusation was true—and yet the man had escaped. Peele had been flogged. He deserved his flogging for having played the spy. But that was no consolation to him.

of him. But when the juniors handed in their exercises the French master found that Peele had adorned his paper with a little drawing.

Peele was clever at drawing, as at many things. He could have made his mark in the Form easily enough had he not been an incorrigible slacker.

His little sketch represented a man being led away between two gendarmes. The French policemen were drawn with a comic touch—and the man who walked between them, with handcuffs on his wrists, bore a distinct likeness to Victor Gaston.

The French master looked at the paper, and a grim expression came over his handsome face.

"Peele!" "Hallo!" said Peele. Arthur Edward Lovell gave Peele a glare.

"You are not respectful, my boy," said Victor Gaston mildly. "You must not answer me in that manner, Peele."

Peele grunted. "You have drawn this?" said Victor Gaston, holding up the paper for all the class to see.

"Yes, sir!" said Peele. "It is intended, I suppose, as an insult to me, Peele," said Victor Gaston quietly.

"Oh, no, sir," said Peele airily.

the class-room with it in his hand. In the passage outside he shook his fist at the closed door, and tramped away savagely.

He knew that the Head would be in the Sixth Form-room at that time, but he did not choose to go there. He made his way to Dr. Chisholm's study.

He was in no hurry to take his licking. And by affecting to believe that he was to wait for the Head in his study, at least he would escape the rest of the French lesson.

He entered the Head's study with a sullen, scowling face. The Sixth did not come out till twelve, so he had at least twenty minutes to wait. Peele looked round the study with mischief in his look. He was quite ready to "rag" even the Head's study if he could do so without danger of being found out. He noticed that the big door of the iron safe was open, and the key in the lock, and crossed over to it to peer in. Peele had never seen that safe open before, and he was curious.

There was nothing in it, however, to interest him. Bundles of paper on the shelves, and two or three locked despatch-boxes and similar things.

Peele wondered viciously whether he should venture to disturb the papers; undoubtedly it would give the Head plenty of trouble if the bundles

The Price of the Past!



By Owen Conquest.

(Continued from previous page.)

"What is it, Mr. Dalton?" asked Dr. Chisholm icily.

"I am afraid it is very serious, sir. May I ask whether you left the door of your safe unlocked this morning?"

"I happened to do so for a short time. But I do not see—"

"I greatly fear, sir, that a foolish boy has, for some reason I cannot even guess, entered the safe and is shut up within it," said Mr. Dalton. "It is Peele of the Fourth—"

"A very troublesome boy," said the Head, frowning. "I had occasion to punish him yesterday, as you know. Is it possible that he has ventured to play tricks in my study? I can scarcely believe it."

"He has not come in to dinner, sir, and cannot be found," said Mr. Dalton; "and I hear from Monsieur Gaston that he was sent to you in third lesson—"

"He did not come to me," said the Head.

"He has not been seen since he left the class-room," said Mr. Dalton. "But something living is undoubtedly shut up in the safe in your study, sir. Sounds can be heard—"

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed the Head angrily, as he rose to his feet. "This is too much! Probably, however, it is some animal that crept into the safe while the door was left open this morning. The boy could have no reason for entering it."

"Only he seems to be missing, sir." "I will come, Mr. Dalton."

Dr. Chisholm followed the Fourth Form master. In Head's corridor there was a crowd of Rookwood fellows, in a buzz of excited talk. Most of the masters were already in the Head's study—the door stood wide open. The alarm had spread all over Rookwood School.

The Head frowned portentously as he swept through the crowd and entered his study. He could hear now the sounds that told of a prisoner in the iron safe—a dull beating, hammering sound, that came faint and muffled through thick metal. Amid the sound of beating other almost indistinguishable sounds could be heard—sounds of a voice deadened by the thick iron, but whether a human voice or not it was hard to say.

Mr. Mooney, the master of the Sixth, was tapping on the iron door, apparently as a message of hope to the individual shut up inside. He stepped back as the Head appeared.

Seldom had the Head looked so angry. This disturbance in the sacred precincts of his study roused his deepest ire.

"Really, gentlemen—" he almost barked.

"It seems that a junior is shut up in the safe, sir," said Bulkeley of the Sixth.

"Nonsense!"

"H'm!"

"Really, sir—" said Mr. Dalton.

"I do not suppose so for one moment!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm. "Why should a boy enter the safe?" "But you can hear, sir," murmured Mr. Mooney.

"It unfortunately happens that I left the safe door unlocked for a short time this morning." The Head was deeply annoyed at having his act of carelessness brought to light in this public way. "Doubtless some dog wandered in."

"The voice sounds to me human, sir," said Bulkeley. "And Peele of the Fourth certainly is missing!"

"Nonsense! He is a most troublesome boy, and is probably playing truant!" snapped the Head.

"At all events, sir, you have the key of the safe, and the matter may be speedily set at rest," said Mr. Dalton quietly.

"Undoubtedly! But I see no reason whatever for all this disturbance—I may say uproar!"

Silence followed the Head's remark. He took a bunch of keys from a pocket, and began to examine them, to pick out the key of the safe.

Having examined them, he frowned, and examined them again. Masters and boys waited in silent tension. The strange sounds from behind the iron door of the safe continued. But no one doubted—save, perhaps, the Head—that, vague as the sounds were, they came from a human being.

The dull beating on the iron door had given place to loud, sharp knocking, which could only mean that the fellow imprisoned in the safe had found something hard to use as a hammer.

"The lock closes with a spring," said the Head, in an agitated voice. "I found the door ajar, and closed it. Naturally, it never occurred to me for one moment that anyone might have entered the safe in my absence. How could I possibly dream of such a thing?"

Knock, knock, knock! "This—this is terrible, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "The boy—"

Dr. Chisholm shuddered.

"One moment, sir." The deep, portly voice of Mr. Horace Greely boomed at the study doorway. "May not the key have fallen to the floor—may it not be at hand?"

"It is possible," said Mr. Dalton,

Dalton, and I walked with you to the Fifth Form room. Afterwards, when taking the Sixth, I remembered leaving the safe unlocked, and hurried here to close it. To my surprise, the key was not in the lock; but I thought, at the moment, that I must have put it back on my key-ring and forgotten it. But—"

"But, sir—" breathed Richard Dalton.

"It is evident that the key was in the lock. That wretched boy came here, and must have taken it. Apparently it is in his possession—and he is locked in the safe!"

"Good heavens!"

"The lock closes with a spring," said the Head, in an agitated voice. "I found the door ajar, and closed it. Naturally, it never occurred to me for one moment that anyone might have entered the safe in my absence. How could I possibly dream of such a thing?"

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Mr. Greely, for the moment, was still there—and Mr. Greely's brain was working. His deep voice broke the horrified stillness in the Head's study:

"Dr. Chisholm!"

The Head did not look at him—did not seem to hear.

"Dr. Chisholm! The boy's life must be saved—by any means, the boy must be saved from death!"

"Have you a suggestion to make?" The Head looked up.

"Make it! Save the life of that wretched boy, Mr. Greely, and I am your debtor for life!"

"There is a man in this school, sir, who can save him."

"How—how?"

"By opening the safe."

"The safe cannot be opened by any man at Rookwood."

"By one man, sir, it can be opened—by an experienced crackman, sir, to whom the task of opening that safe, or any safe, is mere child's play, sir!" boomed Mr. Greely.

Richard Dalton turned passionately on the Fifth Form master.

"Mr. Greely! At this fearful moment do you dare to renew your foolish talk concerning Victor Gaston, my friend?"

"I dare, sir—to save that unhappy boy's life!" said Mr. Greely. "I shall go at once, sir, to Victor

Greely had been right all along the line, and Victor Gaston, French master, was one and the same man with Felix Lacroix, crackman and bank robber.

There was a whisper in the crowded passage, as an athletic form appeared there—a handsome face, now strangely pale, with dark, handsome eyes that had now a haunted look. Victor Gaston strode down the corridor, the crowd making respectful way for him, looking neither to the right nor the left. He saw none of the sea of faces round him—he saw nothing there—he was looking far beyond Rookwood; looking into the imagined distance where the prison gates yawned for him—unless he allowed this boy to die!

Behind the French master came Horace Greely, with ponderous tread; but no one looked at the portly Mr. Greely. Every eye was upon the handsome Frenchman—every eye noted the ghastly pallor of his face, his eyes haunted with despair. And Jimmy Silver, as he looked at him, knew that he was looking, not on Victor Gaston, French master, but on Felix Lacroix, bank robber, criminal, hunted by the French police, hidden from justice within the time-honoured walls of Rookwood. And he knew, too, that he was looking on a brave man going with unflinching steps to his doom.

Knock, knock, knock!

Fainter and fainter came the sound, the dying appeal for help from one now almost in the grip of strangulation. The Frenchman gave a convulsive start as he heard it.

He entered the study.

Quietly, with his old graceful manner, Victor Gaston bowed to the Head, and the pale-faced crowd of masters and seniors. He was calm—with the calmness of a man who knew that all was lost.

Richard Dalton touched him on the arm. They were friends, these two, and in Richard Dalton's heart there was no doubt.

"Victor! You cannot help here, old fellow!"

Victor Gaston's look, in reply, froze the words on Richard Dalton's tongue. It was a kind and affectionate look, and it was a confession. The Fourth Form master stood dumb.

In silence, Victor Gaston crossed to the safe. He stood before it, searching it with his eyes. From within came the faint, despairing knocking.

He turned to the Head.

"You have no key?"

"None."

"The key must have been taken by the boy now locked up in the safe." Mr. Mooney explained. "Dr. Chisholm closed the door without knowing that anyone was inside."

Gaston nodded.

"A locksmith!" muttered Bulkeley of the Sixth.

The Frenchman smiled.

"Inutile," he said. "Quite useless! You are absolutely certain, Dr. Chisholm, that there is no key?"

"Absolutely—only the one inside the safe with that wretched boy."

"And there is not a moment to spare."

The Head groaned.

In the doorway Mr. Greely stood, his eyes fixed on the French master. Victor Gaston did not look at him. If he gave the Fifth Form master his triumph at long last, that mattered little to him now. He stood before the iron safe, and all could see, in his working face, the terrible struggle that was taking place inwardly.

Knock, knock, knock!

"Victor!" said Richard Dalton hoarsely. "It is impossible—I cannot believe—"

"Mon pauvre ami!" Victor Gaston's voice was very soft. "My poor friend, you have trusted me, and it is because you have trusted me, that I have become worthy of your trust—that I have thrown behind me a double life; that Felix Lacroix has disappeared, leaving in his place only Victor Gaston. But fate is too strong for us, my friend—the price of the past has to be paid! Heaven knows I had repented—Heaven knows I meant to live a straight life—that never since I became your friend, has my hand been stained with crime—that never again should it have been so stained! You will believe that much of me—of Felix Lacroix!"

"Victor!" groaned Richard Dalton.

"I cannot leave this boy to die, when I can save him—and I can save him only by betraying myself! Helas! It is not easy for me, but even Felix Lacroix is not an abandoned villain. I must save the boy."

"You can save him?" breathed the Head.

"I can save him—and will! I can

(Continued on page 16.)

BOYS' FRIEND FAVOURITES!

THE DUKE.



One cannot help admiring the mystery man who calls himself the Duke, for the clever way in which he goes about his nefarious work, and the cool arrogance of his manner is fascinating in the extreme. The real name of the Duke is not known, neither is his age. The man is a complete mystery.

Coming to England from the Bowery, New York City, the Duke soon made his presence felt in the metropolis. Many were the cribs which he cracked, and though house-to-house searches were made for him in all the districts where criminals were known to hang out, the Duke was never caught. He was as elusive as a sparrow.

Then there came a time when the Duke, tiring of the ordinary round of crime, turned his misguided genius to sport and sportsmen with the sole purpose of bringing their fair names into disgrace. And in a certain measure the master-criminal succeeded in this direction, although a number of well-known sportsmen banded themselves together as Clean Sport Crusaders, their intention being to do battle with the master-criminal. Without doubt the Duke met a foe worthy of his steel when the Hon. Rollo Dayton, the leading light of the Crusaders, took it upon himself to leave no stone unturned to bring about the master-criminal's arrest. The Duke and Rollo Dayton had many tussles, but always the master-criminal escaped when he found himself in a tight corner. At last, however, the Duke vanished. All trace of him was lost for some time. Then, in the disguise of a

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French sportsman, he purchased Chelsea Villa Football Club, incidentally saving them from going into liquidation. But the Duke was soon "placed." It was Dayton, who played as an amateur for the Villa, who penetrated the master-criminal's disguise. Thus the Duke, who thought to strike at sport through Chelsea Villa, again found that his most bitter enemy had foiled his plans.

Even then the Duke avoided the arm of the law, and afterwards he made several unsuccessful attempts on Rollo Dayton's life. But the master-criminal's phenomenal luck in evading justice came to an end at last. He was captured through Dayton and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, but before he was put behind prison bars he contrived to send a message to Rollo Dayton to the effect that he would escape and be revenged. It had always been the Duke's boast that no prison had yet been built that could hold him for long.

And now the Duke is free again. He has fulfilled his vow that he would escape from prison, and the first thing he has set himself to do is to be revenged upon his sworn enemy. Whether he succeeds in this sinister business remains to be seen. Certain it is that it is no idle threat on the Duke's part, for once he has set his sinister mind upon a thing he will do his utmost to carry it out.

(Rollo Dayton is the BOYS' FRIEND Favourite for next Monday. Look out for it!)

though without much hope. "Let us search, at least."

In a moment a dozen masters and seniors were searching the floor for the key, while the Head stood leaning on the table, perspiration on his brow.

"Dr. Chisholm," went on the Fourth Form master, "is there no other means of opening the safe?"

"None!"

"Help must be brought immediately—a locksmith—"

"No locksmith could open that safe. The makers— But there is no time—the boy will be dead!"

There was a deep hush in the study. In the dead silence came the dull knocking from the interior of the iron safe—fainter now, as if the unhappy prisoner was already losing his strength.

The Head gave a groan. He had closed the iron door—he knew it now—on a human being—a young rascal, doubtless, who had taken the key from the safe, and so precluded all possibility of his own rescue; but in closing the iron door the Head had condemned that hapless boy to death! The knowledge of it shook him to very soul!

Knock, knock, knock!

A whisper of horror ran down the crowded corridor. There was no key. Peele had the key, and Peele was locked in the safe—to die!

The Rookwood fellows looked at one another with white faces.

Mr. Greely was breathing hard. A strange gleam was in his eyes. In an hour more the station cab would have been at the door to take him away from Rookwood for ever. But

# The Price of the Past!



By Owen Conquest.

(Continued from page 12.)

save him, because I am Felix Lacroix; and when I have saved him, I go hence to the prison that has waited for me too long."

The Frenchman said no more. The knocking had died away in the safe—all was silent.

Dr. Chisholm waved his hand in dismissal. The study was cleared. Only the Head remained, with Richard Dalton and Mr. Greely. Outside in the corridor the crowd was hushed.

Felix Lacroix was busy! Once or twice he spoke, to call quietly for some tool he needed. Richard Dalton hurried to obey. The cracksman's outfit was buried deep at the bottom of the river. The tools he was accustomed to use were no longer at hand. But Felix Lacroix was a past-master in his strange art. As the French police knew only too well, there was no safe that could have baffled him for long. He worked with a set white face, with perfect coolness—calm and steady. He was working for an enemy's life, and his own condemnation, and he worked coolly, steadily, without a pause.

While he worked, the Head stepped to the telephone, to call up the school doctor. That was all. By the time the Frenchman was finished, the doctor's car was heard on the drive. Victor Gaston, alias Felix Lacroix, stepped back from his task. The heavy iron door swung open.

He stooped into the interior of the safe, and lifted out Pele of the Fourth. His strong arm, and junior was white as chalk, and quite insensible.

"He lives!" said Victor Gaston simply.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed the Head.

Mr. Dalton took the senseless junior from Victor Gaston, and carried him from the study. Pele was handed over to the doctor's charge, still unconscious. But he was in no danger—he would live. A quarter of an hour more in the airless safe, probably, and only a dead body would have been taken out. But Pele had been saved—saved at a terrible cost to his rescuer.

Mr. Dalton, with a pale, set face, came back to the Head's study. Jimmy Silver caught him by the sleeve.

"Mr. Dalton! Is it true—is it true that—that—"

Jimmy's voice broke.

"It is true."

"I—I don't care," almost sobbed Lovell. "He's a splendid fellow—I don't care what he was! He's given himself away to save Pele—he's a splendid chap, and it's a rotten shame if they send him to prison—a rotten shame!"

Mr. Dalton entered the Head's

study again, and the door closed. And the hushed crowd broke up, discussing the strange affair in whispers, and wondering what was to happen to Victor Gaston—now known to all Rookwood as Felix Lacroix, cracksman and convict.

### The 6th Chapter. The Price of the Past.

"I am ready!" Victor Gaston spoke in low, quiet tones, breaking the silence that had reigned in the Head's study. Mr. Dalton looked at him, in miserable silence. Mr. Greely coughed. Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes on the man he had trusted.

"You are Felix Lacroix?" Even yet the Head seemed hardly able to believe it.

A weary smile crossed the Frenchman's pale, handsome face.

"I am Victor Gaston," he said. "In the hands of the police of Paris I gave the name of Felix Lacroix! That is all. All you know of Victor Gaston is true; but you did not know that he had led a double life—you know it now."

"But why—why—"

The Head stammered.

"Why? How can I say? I had a gift—a strange gift. I exercised it in sport at first. I was poor and ambitious. I found that my hands no longer were secure." Victor Gaston shrugged his shoulders. "Add to that, if you like, that I was a scoundrel—"

"Never!" said Richard Dalton.

"A scoundrel would not have betrayed himself to save a boy's life, as you have done," said the Head, strangely moved.

"Ah, monsieur, we all have our limit," said Victor Gaston. "But I fear that when first I came to Rookwood, I should not have been capable of this! If the boy's life is saved, it is Richard Dalton who has saved it. He made me his friend. He trusted me. I swore I would be worthy of his trust. The tools that that wretched boy saw in my trunk were buried deep in the river only yesterday. With them, I buried, as I hoped, all my past with its crimes. But it was not to be! I hoped that Felix Lacroix was gone for ever—that Victor Gaston, a man of honour, could look honourable men in the face while life should last! And it has ended thus!"

"In sacrificing yourself to save one who hated you," said Richard Dalton. "It was like you, Victor, and whatever your past may have been, you are still my friend, if you care to remain so."

Victor Gaston shook his head. "That is over," he said. "I shall not drag your name into shame with mine." He glanced at the Head. "Monsieur, Felix Lacroix, cracksman, convict, prison-breaker, stands before you! You have only to telephone to the police. I shall not resist."

The Head did not speak. "Sir!" Mr. Greely's portly voice boomed. "Sir! It is not the Head's duty—in the circumstances—to denounce you. Sir, I denounced you to the Head because it was my duty; but now, sir, after what you have done, I should be proud to shake you by the hand."

Dr. Chisholm nodded slowly. "Whatever you were, Victor Gaston," he said, "I only know what you have done. You could have kept your secret—you betrayed yourself to save a life! That at least was noble, and atones for much! You are free, Monsieur Gaston—free to go as you choose. It is not my duty to detain you. Seek safety while you can, before this is known outside the walls of Rookwood—and take my heartfelt wishes for your safety."

"And mine!" said Mr. Greely. Victor Gaston drew a deep breath. His eyes were on Richard Dalton. The master of the Fourth held out his hand.

"We part friends, Victor," he said. "I know what you will be in the future, whatever you may have been in the past. I trust you."

"I shall not fail," said Victor Gaston, in a low voice.

He pressed Richard Dalton's hand, bowed to the Head, and was gone.

Rookwood knew Victor Gaston no more.

Mr. Greely, of course, remained—the Fifth did not lose their Form master. Certainly they would not have missed him so much as the juniors missed Victor Gaston. Twenty-four hours after "Felix Lacroix" had left Rookwood, the police were

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seeking him; but he had vanished, and even Pele, when he emerged from the sanatorium after days of illness, hoped that the man who had saved him would escape with his freedom. And long after Monsieur Monceau had returned to his place at Rookwood, Jimmy Silver & Co. continued to talk of Victor Gaston, with a kind remembrance of him, forgetting the wrong he had done, in the remembrance of the noble stonement of the man who had been self-condemned.

THE END.

(Special next Monday—"The South African Match!" A stunning long story of the South African cricketers' visit to Rookwood. Don't miss it! Order your BOYS' FRIEND in advance and avoid disappointment!)

# The Pride of the County!

By Arthur S Hardy

(Continued from page 5.)



County "You're fit and able to work, I suppose? Why don't you work?"

"Can't get a job, sir. Spare me a copper, sir."

A whimsical smile played about the handsome captain's lips.

"It depends upon your answer!" he cried. "Tell me what you want the money for."

The down-at-heel loafer grinned, and, what was more, he spoke the truth.

"I want to see young Lyle bat for the County," he said, "and I haven't got the money to go in."

"By George!" The reply caused Nelson the greatest surprise of his life. His hand strayed to his pocket.

He drew out half-a-crown and gave it to the man.

"There you are. But let me see you pass the gate!" he cried. "You can buy yourself something to eat, and you look as if you need it."

The loafer murmured his thanks. Nelson led him to the turnstile entrance, saw him pay the money and pass in and then went back to his friend.

"Can you beat that, Wally?" he said. "That fellow wanted to see our new bowler perform. And he's in rags. Wonder what he was once? But let us hurry in, or else we shall keep the others waiting."

(Who is the strange loafer who seems so keen to see Jim Lyle in action? On no account must you miss next Monday's long instalment of this great cricket story. Or your BOYS' FRIEND in advance. Don't forget to introduce the "Gem" to all your pals. They're bound to like our great stories.)

mand, and to Jim's surprise, he found himself answering him.

"I'm playing for the County team," he answered.

Two bleared and glinting eyes seemed to pierce Jim's soul.

"What's your name?" the stranger asked.

Again Jim answered.

"Lyle," he returned.

Why should he answer? Why should he be bothered with this broken-down wretch who looked as if he had been on the tramp for years?

Jim swung in past the gate, and the groundsman on duty there closed it with a cheery "Good-morning, Jim, lad, and good luck to-day!"

The man who had questioned him leant against the wall of the cricket-ground for a bit, busy with his thoughts. He pulled out some coppers and a sixpenny-piece.

Ninepence was all he possessed. And it needed a shilling to gain him admission to the County ground.

As taxi-cabs and motor-cars began to pull up at the gates, he ran forward, opened the doors, and looked expectantly for tips.

In one of the cars came Harry Nelson, captain of the County, who had Walter Grogan seated next to him.

The loafer opened the door. Nelson and Grogan stepped down.

"Spare a copper, sir, please," whined the loafer, at whom Nelson looked in disgust.

"Why should I give you anything?" demanded the captain of the

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