

POPULAR STORIES BY POPULAR AUTHORS!

# The Penny Popular

NUMBER 213.

3 Grand Complete Stories.



## THE STEAM MAN'S GREAT DEFENCE!

(A Thrilling Scene from the Grand Long Complete Tale of Jack, Sam, and Pete, the Famous Comrades, contained in this issue.)



# FLEECED OF A FORTUNE!

A Magnificent Long, Complete  
Story Dealing with the Further  
Amazing Adventures of

## SEXTON BLAKE, the World-Famous DETECTIVE.

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Sexton Blake Breaks the News — "The  
Greatest Blow of All."

"GOOD-MORNING, Mr. Blake. Did you sleep well?" asked Mr. James Gibson, the managing-director of Gibson's Great Stores, with whom the detective had spent the preceding night.

Mr. Gibson had just entered the breakfast-room to find the detective already downstairs. James Gibson was a remarkable man in many respects. His determination to overcome all obstacles was well known, for had he not made Gibson's Stores the biggest shop in London, from the ashes of his father's little grocery shop in Crompton Road, which had been gutted out by fire? He had set to work with only the insurance money for the fire as capital, until that little shop had become a massive row of imposing buildings.

This, then, was the man in whose house Sexton Blake had spent the night.

"I could hardly say that I slept," replied Blake. "But I had a good rest, spending a lot of time lying awake and thinking over this case of yours."

"Did you make much headway in joining the facts of the case together?" asked Gibson.

"I think I have the case fairly well in hand now. If you will excuse me talking shop over the breakfast-table, I would like to discuss certain points with you."

"Not a bit," replied Gibson. "Come on, sit down, while the food is warm."

The two men made themselves comfortable at the table. James Gibson helped his visitor plentifully to outlets and kidneys, and, with steaming hot coffee, the detective was soon doing justice to the excellent repast.

"The case is altogether peculiar," said the detective. "The start was peculiar. There I was in your stores, and right under my very nose, so to speak, eighty odd pounds were stolen from your cashier's desk."

"You don't think that the cashier, Miss O'Shea, stole it, do you?" asked Gibson anxiously.

Blake, who knew that the youthful managing-director had a secret affection for the lady in question, replied in the negative.

"Emphatically no," replied Blake. "She is innocent beyond doubt. No, the man who received that money was John Snyder, otherwise known as the Spider."

The young managing-director scarcely ate anything. He was looking pale and worried this morning, and the news he had just heard—of John Snyder's being the notorious Spider—had added to his apprehensions.

"Look here, Mr. Blake," he began, as soon as the detective had put down his knife and fork, "a remark of yours last night has worried me exceedingly. You said you



Sexton Blake seized the Spider. "Come along with me yourself," he cried, "I'm just anxious to get my grip on your carcass."

believed that the Spider's gang had got some individual at the stores in their power. Do you still maintain that belief?"

"I am more convinced than ever," the detective replied quietly.

"In spite of the fact that you know that the Spider is none other than John Snyder, who is my uncle's stepson?" asked James Gibson.

Sexton Blake nodded.

"And what is the weapon they use?"

"Blackmail!"

James Gibson began to pace the room restlessly.

"It's no good mincing matters," he said, at last, pausing before the detective with a white, set face, that was ghastly with mind agony. "Tell me if my suppositions are correct? You believe that John Snyder and his gang have been blackmailing my father? More than that, you think that my father is responsible for the packet of gold that was taken away from Miss O'Shea's desk?"

He asked the questions almost with fierceness.

"I very greatly regret to say that that is what I do think," replied Sexton Blake solemnly. "For some reason or other, your father has been paying these scoundrels large sums of money for many months past. As regards the bag of gold taken from Miss O'Shea's desk, I cannot speak positively, but all the indications point to your father's being in straitened financial circumstances. I won't say more than that."

"But my father is a wealthy man," protested the young managing-director. "He must have a fortune running into five figures. Why should he stoop to the paltry theft, comparatively, of a hundred pounds, well knowing that he will be casting suspicion upon an innocent girl?"

Sexton Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"I must admit it seems incredible," he said, "but I am only stating my theories. If it were possible for you to examine Mr. Thomas's bank pass-book, we should quickly discover whether the ideas have any value."

"My father used to keep the pass-book in the safe with my own," replied James Gibson, with a sigh. "I will see if it is there now."



With a listless step he passed out of the room, but in less than three minutes he returned in great excitement.

"Merciful heavens!" he cried, bursting in through the door with the pass-book open in his hand, "my father has only a few shillings standing to his credit, yet at the beginning of the year he had a balance of over ten thousand pounds. He has been drawing hundreds out almost every week. For the love of Heaven, Mr. Blake, tell me what it means?"

The bank-book fell from his fingers. The young man threw himself in an armchair, and covered his face with his hands.

Sexton Blake picked up the pass-book, and cursorily glanced through it. As James Gibson had stated, only a balance of about seventeen shillings remained.

"There's no possibility of your father having bought small lots of shares or of speculating on cover in the Stock markets?" he asked.

"No, no!" cried James Gibson, looking up with a haggard face. "My father has no shares other than those he holds in Gibson's Great Stores. I am positive the money has not gone in speculation on the Stock Exchange."

"Then the only thing we can do is to obtain your father's story," suggested Sexton Blake. "After all, there may be some explanation. It hardly seems likely that ten thousand pounds would be paid by your father as blackmail to Snyder's gang in the course of a single year."

"There's no reason why my father should pay the scoundrels a single penny!" thundered James Gibson, springing to his feet. "He has committed no crime! He has done nothing to be ashamed of!"

"Probably not," replied the detective quietly, "but the fact remains, all the same, that he has been paying away large sums of money to somebody whom there is good reason to suppose is John Snyder. Though your father is ill, surely that now we have discovered his financial position, he will consent to tell you what has become of his fortune. I was about to tell you of my convictions last night when your father interrupted us."

"Yes, I remember now," said James Gibson wearily. "I followed him to his room, and stayed with him for over an hour, yet he would not discuss the matter with me. All he would say was that he wanted you dismissed, but I was insistent on having the matter cleared up, and we parted after the first quarrel we have had for years."

"Have you noticed any change in your father's manner during the last few months?" asked Sexton Blake.

"He has certainly been a little morose and abstracted," answered James Gibson, "yet I have been so busy that I have scarcely given the matter a thought. But come with me to my father's room, Mr. Blake. Whatever has happened, father has no right to keep the truth from me."

They passed from the breakfast-room up several staircases to an upper floor. Pausing outside a door, James Gibson rapped loudly upon the panels with his knuckles.

"Father!" he called. "It is I, James! Let me in!"

There was no answer. Again he rapped and called.

With a sudden fear in his heart, the young managing-director seized the handle, and thrust the door open. The room was in disorder. The bedclothes had been thrown back; there was a litter of clothing about the floor.

But its occupant had vanished. Old Thomas Gibson had disappeared, without note or word to say where he had gone. Nor had any of the servants seen him leave the house.

"Merciful heavens!" panted James Gibson, his frame shaking with emotion. "My poor father! This is the greatest blow of all!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

James Gibson Tells of His Early Life—The Secret Out—Joe Garland—The Drugging of Pedro.

**S**EXTON BLAKE took the young managing-director by the arm, and led him downstairs to the breakfast-room. So great was James Gibson's affections for the old man, and so intense was his emotion, that the detective was unable to pacify him for some time.

"Come, be a business man again, Mr. James!" said Blake. "Let us reason out the matter on common-sense lines. There is no doubt that your father has been heavily blackmailed by John Snyder and his gang. We've got to find out what is their power over him. Can you throw your memory back, and recall any instance which may show any light on the present affair? Tell me all you know about John Snyder."

The words braced up the young man. When he spoke, it was in his customary, business-like manner.

"I must go back to the time when I was a boy at school," he began. "My father had had several grocery shops, but had failed to get a living out of any of them. My Uncle Robert, however, though in the same line of business, had

prospered exceedingly, and whilst my father was still struggling to keep out of debt, his brother retired with quite a comfortable fortune."

"This Uncle Robert is the one who eventually married John Snyder's mother, I take it?" asked Sexton Blake.

"Yes. And it was on the wedding-day that I first saw Mrs. Snyder and her son. There was a scene at the reception after the ceremony, I remember, when the bride took offence at some harmless words of my father's. Later on, John Snyder, who was about my own age, quarrelled with me, and I gave him a sound thrashing for the abuse he flung at me. Before we left the house that day, Uncle Robert gave my father a cheque for a large sum of money, to enable him to purchase another grocery and provision stores."

"Before we go any further," cut in the detective, "what was the impression you had of John Snyder and his mother—favourable or unfavourable?"

"Very unfavourable," replied the managing-director emphatically. "It appeared that Mr. Snyder had died in prison, and my father did his utmost to prevent the wedding taking place. As events proved, it was a most unfortunate wedding. But to resume my story. My father had taken a business in Crompton Road, on the very site, in fact, on which one of our departments at the stores now stands, and I left school in order to help him."

"And that brings me to the very next occasion when I met John Snyder and his mother. The business in Crompton Road had fared no better than its predecessors, and my father was once more in debt. It was arranged that I should call upon Uncle Robert, and ask for the loan of one hundred pounds. When I reached my uncle's house, I found him having a stormy scene with John Snyder, who was demanding money to pay some debts he had incurred. My uncle kicked the rogue out of the room as I entered, and, after telling me of his unhappy married life, he gave me the money in twenty five-pound banknotes, which I, of course, took home."

"From that day until this morning I never once saw John Snyder, though I have heard much about him. When Snyder's mother died, my Uncle Robert, a ruined man, disappeared, and no effort of ours could find him. That was over three years ago, when we heard of John Snyder being sent to prison for being concerned in a burglary."

"And your uncle is still missing?" inquired the detective.

"Yes. I am sure that father does not know where he is to be found," was the reply. "There is no likelihood of his going to my Uncle Robert's."

"And, to the best of your recollection, you and your father only came into contact with John Snyder on your uncle's wedding-day and on the day you obtained the loan of one hundred pounds?"

"That is so," replied James Gibson. "Curiously enough, not a penny of that hundred pounds found its way into my father's pockets, for on the very night that I brought home the money we had a fire that burned the shop and house down to the ground!"

"Ah, I remember that fire!" said Sexton Blake. "I was amongst the crowd when you and your father leapt from the window of the first floor into blankets held open for you by the rescuers below. If I remember rightly, there was an inquiry into the circumstance of that fire by the insurance company. Was there any justification for their suspicions? Understand, I only ask because it may have some bearing on the present case if there was."

James Gibson had flushed hotly and risen to his feet.

"I assure you, upon my honour, that neither my father nor myself had anything to do with the cause of that fire!" he exclaimed. "It was all straightforward. It was an accident we had no means of expecting or preventing. Is it likely that we should deliberately set fire to the shop, bolt and lock the front doors, and then go to bed immediately above it?"

"You don't remember suspicious circumstances of any kind?" pressed the detective.

"A cruel rumour went abroad—I had almost forgotten it till this instant—that my father had set fire to the place with paraffin," answered the young managing-director quickly, "but it was a vile lie. It is true that on the night of the fire my father purchased some gallons of paraffin, but I myself threw the oil away, and took back the empty can to the oilman's, rather than have the dangerous stuff in the house."

Sexton Blake drew in his breath sharply.

"That was bad—very bad," he murmured. "You'll admit that the rumour had more foundation than many of its kind, Mr. James? Was there any possibility of John Snyder's knowing that your father had the oil in the shop on the night of the fire?"

"None whatever, Mr. Blake. How could he? I left him in my uncle's house at Hampstead."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 213.

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"Excuse my asking an impertinent question," said Sexton Blake, fingering his chin thoughtfully. "But why did you pour the paraffin away? Why did you think it so extraordinarily dangerous?"

James Gibson's face flushed again, and he turned away from the detective.

"I should refuse to answer that question to any other man but you, Mr. Blake," he replied, with an effort. "But I've no desire to be other than honest and candid. It was because I knew my father, though one of the best men in the world, was subject to spasmodic outbursts of weakness. At times he was led entirely by the impulses of the moment to perform deeds which he was exceedingly sorry for a minute later. He was in desperate need of money at the time. I was afraid that he might be tempted to put the paraffin to wrongful purposes. But he never did, I assure you of that."

The detective did not speak for several moments. The case, complex and mysterious though it had been all along, had now a ray of sunlight thrown across it. Here was the reason for the blackmail. Snyder and his gang had got to hear of the purchase of the paraffin on the night of the fire. They thought that the fire had been deliberately planned, and old Mr. Gibson, though his conscience was clear, was paying hush-money rather than face a scandal which he could not satisfactorily clear up.

"I am quite prepared to believe that your father was innocent of the cause of the fire," he said aloud at last, whilst the young managing-director paced the floor restlessly, glancing every now and again at the detective's face. "Indeed, Snyder's action in trying to get back the five-pound note I obtained from Jerry Greggs, and, again, Snyder's subsequent visit to this house this morning—for no purpose other than to attempt to silence your father's tongue—convincing me that the scoundrels have not a very strong basis for their blackmail. They are as afraid of a scandal as your own father!"

"It's good news to hear you say so," murmured the young man, with a deep sigh.

"My obvious course now is to make an inquiry into the circumstances of the fire in Crompton Road," resumed Sexton Blake. "If Snyder did not obtain the particulars at first-hand from you, he must have done so from someone else, who was acquainted with the paraffin incident."

"But no one knew of it," protested James Gibson. "You are the first person to whom I have ever mentioned the matter."

"Yet it was unusual for your father to have purchased a large quantity of oil. From whom did he obtain it?"

The young man stood thoughtfully for some time.

"I can't remember now," he replied. "The proprietor of the shop was a foreigner; and he was a big, muscular man, who was said to be a great boxer and wrestler. I—"

"I've got him!" cried the detective, springing to his feet. "It's as plain as a pikestaff now. The name of the proprietor of that oilshop was Joe Garland, otherwise Dutch Joe."

"That is so. I remember now," said James Gibson. "But—Dutch Joe! Isn't that the nickname of the scoundrel who attacked you with John Snyder the other night?"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"Do you see the case clearly now, Mr. James?" he said briskly. "Dutch Joe and Snyder are blackmailing your father on the knowledge they have of that purchase of paraffin on the night of the fire. Your father, having come to the end of his resources, and, no doubt, being threatened by the scoundrels, on the impulse of the moment, has helped himself to the bag of gold from Miss O'Shea's desk, and to the supposed lost roll of banknotes. Fearful of an exposure by my appearance on the scene, he has sought refuge in flight."

A few moments later Sexton Blake was walking along the fashionable square in the direction of the busy High Street, bound for Baker Street.

In the meantime Tinker and Pedro had been mixed-up in an exciting adventure.

On reaching home after leaving Sexton Blake in Barber Court, Tinker had eaten his breakfast, filed some cuttings, and done some clerical work he had in hand, and then, with Pedro asleep on the hearthrug, he set about filling up his time until the detective should return by working at some problems from Euclid.

Whilst he was so occupied, the door bell rang loudly, and presently Mrs. Bardell hurried down the stairs.

"There's a taxi, Master Tinker, at the door," she exclaimed, "and two gents 'ave got out what says they've come from the Great Stores, and they wants to see Mr. Blake or his assistant as urgent as possible," she added.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 213.

**NEXT FRIDAY:** SHIELDED FROM SHAME! | THE LANCASHIRE JUNIOR'S LATEST! | BLINKER'S GHOST!  
A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake. | By Martin Clifford. | By S. Clarke Hook.

Tinker hurriedly raced up the stairs to Sexton Blake's office, into which the men had been shown.

Half-way up the staircase, his whole frame was thrilled with alarm. There had come a deep growl from Pedro; the walls seemed to shake as the great creature flung his body against them.

"Pedro's going for the strangers," he thought. Then he cried out aloud. "Quiet, Pedro, boy!"

He raced up the remaining stairs, and threw himself into the room. To his huge astonishment, Pedro was leaping at a bull-necked man whom the boy recognised immediately as Dutch Joe.

The scoundrel had in his hand what looked like a huge butterfly-net, and, as the dog leapt at him, he was endeavouring to thrust this net over the great creature's head.

"Go for him, Pedro!" shouted Tinker. "Go for—"

The rest of the sentence was choked back in his throat. The Spider had seized him by the neck, and thrust him back against the wainscoting, where he pressed the barrel of a revolver against the boy's temple.

"Keep quiet, you pup," threatened John Snyder, "or you'll find my finger twitching, do you hear?"

Tinker saw the uselessness of arguing with a man whose fingers clasped the trigger of a cocked revolver, and he was forced to look helplessly on at the fight between Dutch Joe and the great bloodhound.

The Dutchman was manipulating the net with his left hand whilst in the other he clasped a short life-preserver which he slashed across Pedro's muzzle when the big creature leapt at him.

Somehow, though the bloodhound was fighting with all his old tenacity and strength, and again and again sent Dutch Joe crashing against the wall, he seemed helpless to overcome his adversary. He kept looking towards Tinker with a puzzled expression in his intelligent face.

Yet Tinker knew what was worrying the dog, though unable to help him. There was a strong, sickly odour in the room that made his own eyes feel dizzy. In the net which the scoundrel was trying to thrust over Pedro's head was cotton-wool reeking with a powerful drug.

And at last, as Pedro's efforts grew feebler, Dutch Joe succeeded in fixing the net over the great creature's head. The dog sank to the floor, where it lay spasmodically kicking, whilst the big Dutchman, stepping quickly forward, ran the slip noose tightly round Pedro's neck and made it secure.

Within a few seconds Pedro's head fell with a thwack to the carpet, and his limbs became limp and still.

"You rotten curs and cowards!" cried Tinker, tears welling in his eyes. "When I tell Mr. Blake—"

"Keep quiet, you brat!" hissed John Snyder, digging the revolver-muzzle sharply into the boy's flesh.

"Ve vill now see to the poy," smiled Dutch Joe, "and then ve vill pe off, Johnnie—our vork done, eh? Lie down on the mat, poy!"

Tinker had no option but to obey. He scrambled down on his face beside the body of the drugged Pedro. With a coil of rope the two scoundrels proceeded to bind his wrists behind his back, and then, having encircled his ankles, to draw his feet back as far as they would go, and to tie wrists and ankles together.

When they had finished, Tinker was trussed up in the shape of a ball, unable to move, and only able to rest on his side or stomach.

Dutch Joe chuckled as he surveyed him, then he hoisted Pedro's limp, heavy body over his broad shoulders, and hurried down the staircase.

The Spider came back to plunge his toe sharply in Tinker's side, then he hastened downstairs to the waiting taxi-cab.

At once the boy tried to wriggle from his bonds, but he was unable to stretch them anywhere even a fraction of an inch. Yet he was determined to obtain his freedom as quickly as possible.

By dint of great effort, he managed at last to crawl to the top of the stairs, and though he was, of course, unable to open the door, he yelled with all the strength of his lungs, until at last, when his throat was dry and hoarse, he attracted the attention of Mrs. Bardell in the kitchen on the bottom floor of the house.

"Lor", Master Tinker, what ever have you been up to now?" exclaimed the landlady, with hands upraised in horror.

"My word, you don't think this is a new game, do you, Mrs. Bardell?" cried Tinker scornfully. "Those men you admitted up here were a couple of wrong 'uns. They've presented me with this length of rope, and they've drugged Pedro and taken him away. Quick, there's an old dear, get a knife and saw through these ropes as fast as you can. I must go after 'em before the gov'nor comes home."

Yet ten minutes had passed by, and twenty had elapsed since the scoundrels had left the house, before Tinker was once more upon his feet and stretching his cramped limbs.



Bidding Mrs. Bardell to return to the kitchen, and not to allow any other person, under any pretext whatever, to enter the detective's rooms during his absence, Tinker scribbled a note to Sexton Blake and placed it before the clock on the mantelpiece.

Pulling his cap well down over his eye, he hurried downstairs into the street.

A quarter of an hour after Tinker had left the house a taxicab pulled up at the house in Baker Street, and Sexton Blake paid the driver, and tore up the stairs to his rooms.

"Tinker!" he cried. "Where are you?"

He burst open the door and shot into the room. At once the detective noticed the peculiar odour of the drug in the air. With a terrible rage growing in his heart, he hurried into all the rooms, and then espied the note on the mantelpiece. He tore it open and read:

"Dear Guv'nor,—The Spider and Dutch Joe called this morning, drugged Pedro, and carried our old pal away. Trussed me up, too, like a Christmas turkey, but Mrs. Bardell cut me free. Am off to Barber Court. Sha'n't come back till I've found Pedro. TINKER."

"By George, he's a plucky lad!" murmured Blake. "But what can he do against two such crafty scoundrels as Garlan and Snyder? They think to force me out of the case by stealing Pedro. Never mind. I will pay all debts in full before long."

Sexton Blake passed into his dressing-room and changed into the disguise of a down-at-heel tramp, then he, too, hastened off in the direction of Barber Court.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

News of Mr. Thomas—A Warning from Snyder—Amongst the Outcasts—Tinker on the Track—The Finding of James Gibson's Father.

**M**OUNTING a motor-bus, Sexton Blake was quickly at the house from which he had seen Snyder come out that morning. A slatternly-looking Italian woman of middle age answered his knock. She stared at him suspiciously.

"Mornin', mother!" said Blake, twisting his mouth into a crafty smile. "Johnnie about, or maybe Dutchy? Tell 'em Billy the Super wants a word."

Simple as the words were, they roused a sudden fierceness in the woman. With a volubility that the detective had seldom heard excelled even by an Italian, she rated Blake in her native tongue with an abuse that she little thought he understood.

Yet he dare not, in keeping with his part, retaliate. He still continued to smile.

"Maybe very pretty," he murmured, with a puzzled face, "and you do it fine, but if you don't tell Dutchy and Johnnie I'm here, I'll tell 'em myself. No hank, mother. It's red-hot urgent!"

He made to pass her, but she pushed him back.

"Cross this threshold," she screamed, in English, with a furious face, "and my man will kill you! The men you seek are not here, you unclean pig! They have fled with bills owing this very morning, and my man would like to put his hands round the throat of even their friend! Get you gone from my house. We have had enough of your scum!"

Her passion was too wild to be assumed. Blake dived his hand into his pocket and produced half-a-sovereign. He pressed it into the woman's palm and whispered in Italian:

"A word in confidence, good mother. Let me enter for one moment. I am not what I seem."

The woman gasped, but backed into the passage, and Blake followed her.

"Tell me the truth!" he muttered, when the door was closed. "I am a British detective. I come to arrest them. Are the men I seek in the house?"

"They have gone," she replied, with a surprised stare and some timidity. "I swear it, sir. They have been with me but a week, and they left early this morning. Come, I will show you over the house. We are honest folk here, though poor. You are the fifth person to come for them this morning, therefore I was angry."

Blake followed her, and made a quick survey of the house. "Who were the persons who came?" he asked, watching the woman's face narrowly.

"The first was an old man, well dressed, who was very ill and worried," replied the woman, leading the way upstairs. "He begged of me to allow him to sit, for he had walked much and was fatigued. He was dazed, too, and his mind would wander."

Sexton Blake caught the woman by the shoulder.

"When was this?" he asked. "Did your lodgers see him?"

He had no doubt in his mind that the visitor was any other than old Thomas Gibson.

"It was just before nine," she replied. "Snyder, the man you call Johnnie, had gone out an hour before. When the Dutchman slipped out with their bags, I know not, yet he was gone before the old man came, for it was then that I discovered them to be fled. I gave the old man some water, and he wandered away, where I know not."

Blake pressed another half-sovereign into the woman's hand when they again reached the door. He was assured that the house was a bona-fide lodging-house, used principally by young Italians employed as waiters in restaurants in the neighbourhood.

"Should your lodgers return," he advised, "keep a silent tongue, and send me a telegram. You will be rewarded."

He hastened out into the street. As Tinker was engaged upon the search for Pedro, he determined to turn his attention to the recovery of old Thomas Gibson.

The visit to Barber Court had not been wasted time. It told him that the old man was ill and weak, with a dazed mind. In fear lest the scandal should be made public, he had naturally come to see Snyder, yet it was cause for congratulation that the scoundrel had not been at home to receive him.

"In his present condition, provided he does not fall into the hands of Snyder and his gang," argued the detective, as he stepped out into Holborn, "old Thomas Gibson will sooner or later collapse in the street, and consequently my best plan will be to inquire for him at the leading hospitals and police-stations in London."

He knew that the old man had little money. There was therefore little likelihood of his going out of London, or even of obtaining lodgings for more than a few days.

Having decided upon a plan of action, Sexton Blake at once began to carry it out. He called, first, at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and there found five old men, who in some respect answered his description, yet none of whom was Thomas Gibson. Thence he went to the London, and to St. Thomas', the Middlesex, Guy's, St. George's, and indeed all the principal metropolitan hospitals—without success.

It was discouraging work, and it was also monotonous and tedious.

The absence of any news from Tinker was also certainly disquieting.

"I hope the venturesome young rascal will not carry his investigations too far in his excess of zeal," murmured Blake, as he sat down to a chop Mrs. Bardell laid before him. "It will be as well to keep an eye lifting for him when I resume my inquiries. Poor old Pedro! If the scoundrels—"

A double rat-tat sounded upon the front door.

"My, there's the last post," exclaimed Mrs. Bardell, "and you ain't finished your meal! You are late to-night!"

She returned in a few moments with half a dozen letters. Sexton Blake scanned them through and laid them aside until he came to the last. This he read through several times. It ran:

"To Sexton Blake.—Take warning that unless you drop the case against us your dog will be poisoned.

"JOHN SNYDE."

The letter bore the Kensington postmark. Blake set no store by that. It was not proof that Snyder and Garlan had taken Pedro there. In fact, it suggested that the dog might be found at the farthest point from Kensington—i.e., the East End of London. And, of course, the writing may not have been John Snyder's. A member of his gang might have written and posted the letter at Snyder's instructions.

Yet the message filled the detective with renewed determination to recover Pedro, and to punish those who had kidnapped him. Not for a moment did he think of giving up the case. If the scoundrels carried out their threat—and he had no doubt that unless some means were quickly found to prevent them they would kill the dog—it would be one of the greatest blows he had ever had in his professional career.

Yet duty came before possible personal loss. He had set himself the task of finding old Thomas Gibson, and of removing from his shoulders the cloud of misery and pain with which Snyder and Garlan, by their blackmailing practices, had weighted him down, and if the performance of that task meant the loss of one of his dearest possessions, the death of his greatest pal, with the exception of Tinker, he meant to carry it through to the bitter end.

It had struck ten o'clock before he passed out into Baker Street again, and great leaden clouds were scudding along before a bitter east wind. Before he had gone far the rain began to fall, but he kept steadily on.

He was still in the tramp disguise. By dint of an hour's walking he came at last to the Thames Embankment. Along

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 213.

DELICIOUS FREE TUCK HAMPERS FOR READERS. SEE THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 1<sup>st</sup> TO-DAY.



this he briskly stepped, peering at each poor outcast of Society huddled up upon the seats or seeking shelter from the downpour under the trees or beneath the various bridges.

When he had gone from Westminster to Blackfriars without once espying an old man having Thomas Gibson's appearance, he retraced his steps, and, pausing at every little group, made inquiries about the missing man. When the poor wretches shook their heads and confessed to having seen no one resembling Thomas Gibson, he handed coins amongst them, and promised more if news were brought to him of the old man's whereabouts. And so, leaving a trail of gratitude behind him, Blake at last, when Big Ben was chiming the hour of three, wet to the skin, exhausted and footsore, yet as determined and as cheerful as ever, turned once more in the direction of Baker Street.

To Blake's surprise, on reaching his rooms, late though the hour was, he found Mrs. Bardell waiting up for him.

"Master Tinker rang up on the telephone soon after you went out, sir," she replied in answer to his inquiry, "and as I thought it might be important, I stopped up."

"I'm sure it's very good of you, Mrs. Bardell," said Sexton Blake. "What did Tinker say?"

"Only that he was on the track," was the good woman's reply, "and that you was not to worry. I understood him to say that he'd got definite news about Pedro, and was going to the East End to find out whether it was correct."

She was quite sure the voice she had heard over the wire was Tinker's, she added, and he had seemed in a hurry, as if he had little time to spare.

Sexton Blake felt more assured about his young assistant. After a hot bath he hastened into bed, for over thirty hours had elapsed since he had been between the sheets.

At eight o'clock, however, he was shaving when Mrs. Bardell announced that a desperate-looking ruffian was down at the door and anxious to see him. At the detective's instructions the man was brought up. He proved to be one of the poor wretches whom Sexton Blake had talked with on the Thames Embankment in the early hours.

"I've been down East, guv'nor, all the night long, a-makin' inquiries about that old johnnie you spoke of last night," the old tramp exclaimed. "I've been in all the haunts which us poor wretches are glad to get into for a bit o' shelter, an' I got news of him at last. An old chap such as you told me was picked up senseless in the Bethnal Green Road yesterday, and taken to the Bird Lane Infirmary. O' course, I don't know whether he's really the old johnnie you want, 'cause, as far as I could make out, he had no letters on him, and the only clue to his identity is the name Gibson etched on his linen. Do you think that may be him, guv'nor?"

Sexton Blake affected no surprise, though his heart leapt suddenly within him.

"I can't say till I see the man," he answered. "Anyway, you've taken great pains to help me, and deserve good pay."

Thrusting a sovereign into the old fellow's hand, he hurried him down the stairs, and before he had left the house the telephone-bell was ringing at Acacia House, Kensington.

"I believe your father is an inmate at Bethnal Green Infirmary," explained Sexton Blake to James Gibson when he came to the receiver. "At any rate, an old man answering to his description was taken there yesterday. I'm going there at once. Would you care to come with me?"

The managing-director of Gibson's Great Stores replied that he was leaving at once, and would be at Blake's house as soon as a taxicab would carry him. When he arrived the detective joined James Gibson in the cab, and the order was given the chauffeur to drive to Bethnal Green.

"The worry and strain of this business has been too great for your father's brain, I fear," said Sexton Blake. "I do not think personally that his action in running away can be greatly condemned. Snyder and Garland have so terrified him that he is scarcely responsible for his actions."

James Gibson's only reply was to shrug his shoulders as he sat gazing before him with anxiety terribly marked in his handsome face. He was looking ill and weak. The agony of mind he was suffering at the absence of his father was undermining his constitution.

They relapsed into silence. Through the busy City and around by Shoreditch Church the motor-cab threaded its way, and paused eventually at the doors of the Bird Lane Workhouse Infirmary.

James Gibson leapt out of the vehicle before it had come to a standstill, and ran up the stone steps to the main entrance. Blake, bidding the driver to wait for them, hurried in after him.

To an official James Gibson was already explaining their errand.

"Oh, yes, we have an old man here!" he replied. "He was picked up in a senseless condition in the street yesterday, and is apparently suffering from loss of memory. It's

obvious he comes of a very different class to our customary inmates, because of his clothing. Yes, yes; don't get impatient, sir! I'll take you to him!"

They followed the official to an upper floor. The matron of the ward-room, on hearing their request, led them between rows of beds to the end of a long room.

"I can't make the old gentleman out," the matron whispered as they hurried along. "He will not tell us his name or where he lives. All he keeps saying is, 'My poor boy! I've disgraced you! I'm a wretched old—'"

James Gibson did not wait to hear more. He had espied an old man raising himself wearily in the last bed of the row, and, with a little sob, he tore from them and threw himself on his knees beside the bed.

"Father," he panted, flinging his arms about the old man's shoulders, "don't you know me? I'm your son! I'm James!"

The old man looked puzzled, and gently pushed the young man's arms away.

"No, no!" he murmured. "My boy will never speak to me again! I have disgraced him! He will get on better without me. I will go right away, where neither John Snyder nor my own son will ever find me!"

"But I am your son!" pleaded James passionately, seizing the white hands and gazing with deep affection into the lined and pained face of the old man. "I'm James! I know everything about John Snyder and the money and all. You've not disgraced me, father. I love you as much as ever. I've come to take you home—back to Kensington Square!"

Sexton Blake and the matron stood some distance away watching the pathetic scene. There came a faint light of recognition in the old man's face. He sat bolt upright, and turned James Gibson round by the shoulders so that he could better peer into his face. For quite two minutes he stared at him—his will-power struggling to master the weakness of his body.

Suddenly he threw his arms about his son's neck and burst into a flood of tears.

"My son—my son!" he sobbed. "It is James! I've been a foolish old man, my boy. I've thrown away a for—"

"Hush, father!" said James Gibson softly. "I know all, and I understand and sympathise with you!"

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Old Thomas Gibson's Story—A Clue—How Sexton Blake Found Tinker and Pedro—The Tug-of-War—A Short, Sharp Fight—Out in Gun Row.

"NOW, father," said James Gibson, "tell me as much or as little as you like. Do not think I am blaming you. It is human to make mistakes, and a little slip sometimes has enormous results. Tell me as much as you choose. After to-day I shall dismiss the matter from my mind, and never again refer to it."

They were back again at Acacia House. After the return of old Thomas Gibson's memory, and the flood of emotion had spent itself, the infirmary doctor was called, and gave permission for James Gibson to take his father away.

"It is evident that the old gentleman's brain has been severely affected by worry and anxiety," said the medical man; "yet he seems much stronger now, and I do not fear a relapse unless he is greatly excited."

And so they had conveyed him home, clinging, as if for protection and strength, to James Gibson's arm.

"I mean to tell you everything, my boy," murmured Thomas Gibson sadly. "Perhaps you and Mr. Sexton Blake"—turning towards where the detective sat in an arm-chair—"will be able to help me out of the tangle and mess I have got myself into. I've been a fool not to have confided my trouble to you before."

He proceeded to relate the story, the details of which Sexton Blake had unfathomed, and with which the reader is already familiar.

"It was close on a year ago when John Snyder first came across my path," he went on. "He was in rags then, and had just been released from prison. He begged for money for food. I gave him all the spare cash I had upon me, but the next night he was outside the doors of the stores again, waiting for me with a man, Joe Garland, I remembered as the proprietor of a small oilshop years ago.

"I was persuaded to go in a cab with them to Garland's rooms," the old man resumed, mopping his forehead, "and from that hour my life became full of anxiety and bitterness. Garland accused me of setting fire to the grocery stores we had had in Crompton Road. He said he recalled how I had purchased several gallons of paraffin on the night of the fire, and he threatened to inform the police of what he knew unless I paid him and Snyder—the stepson of my brother Robert—the sum of one thousand pounds.

"I remembered the facts to which he referred. To my shame, I must confess that, being desperately poor at the



time, I had thought of putting an end to my troubles by burning the shop, but it was just a mad notion. Before James, my son here, had returned from my brother Robert's house, where he had gone to borrow some money to pay our debts, I had resolved to put the temptation from me."

"I remember quite well, father," interrupted James Gibson. "I poured the paraffin away, and took back the can to Garlan's shop."

"So you remember that, my son," said the old man, with a deep sigh; "then you must know that I had no hand in that terrible fire which unfortunately burned our premises to the ground."

"I never for a moment suspected you, father," said James Gibson.

"Well, when Garlan and Snyder taxed me with this, I strongly denied their accusations, but I felt that my foolish action in buying the paraffin on that night would be ascribed to very different motives. I thought of you, my boy. You had made your mark in the world by honest endeavour; you had won respect and a good name. A brilliant future was before you. If I refused to pay the rogues the money they demanded, I should bring disgrace upon you. For the sake of a paltry thousand pounds I should have ruined you! And so I paid their demands."

He paused to moisten his dry lips, and James Gibson stood over him, smoothing the old man's gray hair with a tenderness and an affection that deeply touched the keen-faced listener reclining in the armchair.

"That was my first plunge into misery," continued Thomas Gibson. "When I had paid the money I thought there was an end to the matter, but week after week since then the scoundrels have plundered me until at last my fortune was run dry."

"And now I come to the events of the last few days, and they are the bitterest and most shameful of my life."

"Hush, father!" murmured James Gibson. "You were hardly conscious of what you were doing!"

"The scoundrels demanded a thousand pounds within three days, or they declared they would inform the police!" said the old man bitterly. "I had less than five hundred pounds at my bank, then. Once again a mad impulse seized me. I converted a roll of banknotes to my use and when Miss O'Shea had turned her head, I seized the bag of gold from off her cashier's desk. I did not realise until the girl was accused with the theft of the money to what a depth I had descended. Oh, heavens, to think that I should bring disgrace upon that poor girl, honest and clever and beautiful, and the sole support of an invalid mother! Heaven forgive me for this black deed!"

He put his face in his hands and sobbed bitterly for several moments. His heart was over-running with the agony of his feelings.

"Kathleen—Miss O'Shea," said James Gibson gently, "has been assured of her innocence. She is not revengeful. She thinks that a mistake has occurred. I was talking with her last evening. She has promised to—"

He broke off in confusion, and his pale cheeks became pink. Sexton Blake smiled and nodded approvingly.

"We will recompense her, James," went on Thomas Gibson. "She shall not suffer for my sin. We will pay her a hundred-fold for the shame she has suffered."

"I hope so, father," said the young man fervently. "Now, tell me of what happened on the morning of your departure



"My heavens!" cried the old man. "It is John Snyder! It's my stepson who ruined me, and who kicked me out into the world to starve, three years ago. We're face to face again at last, John Snyder!"

from Kensington Square," he added, to change the subject of conversation.

The old man related how he had tossed about in his bed all night, unable to sleep, reviling himself for the theft, and had at last, yielding again to impulse, wandered out into the street, unobserved by the servants. On and on he had gone in the direction of East London, scarcely knowing what he was doing, until eventually he had collapsed in the street, and remembered no more until memory had returned to him in the Bethnal Green Workhouse Infirmary, and he had found his son with his arms round his shoulders, looking into his face.

Sexton Blake rose to his feet, glancing at the same time at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"Your story is very much what I anticipated it would be, Mr. Thomas!" he exclaimed. "Yet I am still convinced that Snyder and Garlan never intended to bring the affair into the police-courts. They are both known rogues. A magistrate would sooner have believed your word than theirs. Yet I have several other reasons for believing that they knew you were innocent of the cause of that fire years ago. I have explained these reasons to Mr. James, and cannot go into them now. Unless you desire me to stop, I intend to do my best to capture the scoundrels and to find out how much they really know. It will rest with you, when I have secured them, whether you prosecute them or not."

"I'm still afraid of a scandal!" murmured the old man, turning to glance at his son. "But I owe it to my dear boy to do what I can to clear up the mess. Have them arrested, Mr. Blake, if you think there is any means of forcing the truth from them."

"Very well," cried Sexton Blake, "there need be no scandal! If you will now excuse me, I should like to hurry away. I still have a lot of anxious work to perform. Yet, by the way, have you in your possession, Mr. Thomas, any addresses to which you have sent money to Snyder and Garlan?"

"I have destroyed most of their letters," replied the old man. "But I will see."

Leaning on James Gibson's arm, he passed out of the room.



and returned in a few moments with two addresses scribbled on paper. One was 8A, Barber Court, Hatton Garden. The other was 17, Gun Row, Spitalfields.

Sexton Blake took the paper, thrust it into his waistcoat-pocket, and bade James Gibson and his father good-bye. He returned at once to Baker Street. There was no news of Tinker, and the detective was now both alarmed and distressed.

"Something's happened to the boy," he mused, with a pained face, as he hurried into an outfit that would disguise him as a greasy and be-whiskered alien. "His courage has carried him too far. In all probability he is a victim with Pedro in the hands of the Spider's gang."

His face grew hard and terrible. It boded ill for Snyder and Garlan when he captured them, as he meant to do now, if the process took him months to accomplish.

Passing out through the back door of his house, the detective hastened towards the Metropolitan underground station in Baker Street, and purchased a ticket for Aldgate. That was the nearest point to Spitalfields, where he was determined to make his first inquiry.

Spitalfields, on the boundaries of Whitechapel and Bethnal Green, Sexton Blake knew quite well—indeed, there were few parts of London, especially in the East End, in which he could not have found his way blindfolded—and Gun Row, he remembered, was not very far from that narrow turning known as the "Fancy," where a market in pigeons and cage-birds and pets of all descriptions is held every Sunday morning throughout the year.

Arrived at Aldgate Station, Sexton Blake wended his way along the crowded thoroughfare, turned into Commercial Street, passed by the old Spitalfields vegetable market, and dived into a maze of narrow courts and alleys until he emerged at length into Gun Row.

No. 17 was a small house, and looked innocent enough; but even as his knock on the crazy door seemed to awaken the echoes inside, he knew at once that he was on the right track.

A deep bay—Pedro's note of defiance—had rung out, and the detective never doubted but that it was his own bloodhound for a single instant.

Without waiting for an answer to his knock, he moved a few yards back, and then threw his shoulders with all the strength and weight he could muster against the door. The bolt burst through the cover of the lock, the door flew open, and the detective pitched headlong into the chest of a stoutly-built, middle-aged man who was coming along the passage.

Blake and the man went down heavily. The next moment, however, the detective was on his feet, and leaping downstairs to the kitchen, from which he thought he had heard Pedro baying.

A man sprang out of a room and aimed a blow, with a heavy stick, at Sexton Blake as he reached the bottom of the stairs. Roused now to a fury that gave him a giant's strength and fearless of consequences, the detective rushed forward, at the same time driving at the fellow's head with a blow straight from the shoulder.

The man flopped flat on the ground like a poleaxed ox. So far, not a word had been spoken. The rogue whom Blake had met in the passage had bolted from the house.

"He has gone to fetch assistance," thought Blake, as he glanced quickly about him.

He stood in a kitchen which was apparently nothing less than a coining den, for over a huge fire there was a cauldron of metal and crucibles, and sand and chemicals were upon the table.

The other room in the front of the house was apparently a living-room, for the remains of a meal were still on the table. Yet Pedro's bay had sounded from this very house, and the kitchen portion of it.

"Pedro, where are you, boy!" he called, in the tone he used at Baker Street.

At once there came a reply—the deep note of Pedro's joy, followed by the rattle of an iron chain—from beneath the floor on which the detective stood. The bloodhound was, of course, secured in a cellar beneath the house, yet apparently there was no door leading down to it.

Sexton Blake made a rapid search. He realised that every moment was valuable. He tested the walls. They were of solid brick. Then he tore open the door beside the fireplace. It was a cupboard filled with bottles and pans and other articles. At the other side of the fireplace, however, the cupboard was empty, and before he even rapped his knuckles upon the wall, and so learned, by the hollow sound given out, that here was an entry into the underground chamber, he could feel a damp, cool air fanning his face.

About the centre of the cupboard wall there was a slit in the wood. Inserting his fingers in this, Blake pushed back a sliding-panel, revealing a short ladder resting against the floor. A damp, musty air rushed to the detective's face, but

the next moment he was clambering down the ladder into the dank, dark hole as light-heartedly as if he were merely descending to his breakfast at Baker Street.

"Pedro, Pedro! Where are you, boy?" he called, and then recoiled, almost losing his balance, as the great dog leapt joyfully upon him.

"Good old boy!" murmured Blake.

It was the work of a second to produce his electric-lamp and to flash it around him. He was in a small, whitewashed, smoke-grimed, brick chamber. Pedro, he saw, was fastened by means of a heavy chain to a staple in the wall. But even as he took a hurried glimpse round he saw something else which thrilled him through and through.

And that was Tinker, gagged and bound hand and foot, and reclining, helpless of movement, in the far corner of the cellar.

"Steady, old boy!" cried Blake, as the big bloodhound leapt and strained at his chain to get nearer to his master. "We'll have you free before long."

He darted away towards the spot where his assistant lay. Tinker was not unconscious, but very near that state. One flash of the lamp showed Blake the boy's bruised face, now ashen and drawn with pain.

"Cheer up, my boy!" called Blake heartily. "You've got the pluck of a dozen heroes. We'll soon be back home to tea now."

"Good on you, gov'nor!" murmured Tinker faintly.

The ropes about the boy's ankles and wrists were skilfully tied. They gave way at last under his keen-edged blade. Tinker climbed shakily to his feet and grasped his master's hand, which Blake pressed cordially.

There sounded a heavy thumping of feet on the floorboards above them. The sliding-panel, admitting to the cellar, was banged home with a resounding thud.

"I haven't much to tell you," explained Tinker. "I went first to the house in Barber Court, but the Italian woman sent me off with a flea in my ear. Then I found a driver on the nearest taxi rank who'd taken the beauties to Baker Street, and then, with Pedro, to Bethnal Green. I wandered about the alleys when I got there, and at last found myself in Gun Row, where Dutch Joe suddenly pounced on me and pitched me down here to keep old Pedro company."

"Well done, my boy!" murmured the detective. "Now we must give Pedro his freedom."

Sexton Blake bade Tinker take his flash-lamp, whilst he examined the chain that fastened Pedro's collar to the wall. It had been locked on the great animal's neck, and no effort of Blake's could remove it. He hastened to the wall and examined the staple. It was fastened into the brickwork, and, strain as he might, he could not loosen it.

A babel of voice was added to the thumping of feet overhead.

"Stand clear there, Tinker!" cried Blake, seizing the chain in his hands. "When I say 'Go!' Pedro, pull, old boy, with all your beef and sinew."

Sexton Blake took a grip of the chain and gritted his teeth. He gave the command to Pedro to pull. For a minute—two minutes—they retained their hold, whilst a hideous, grating noise told them, more than the slight movement of the chain, that they were succeeding. Then, with a rush that precipitated Blake to the ground and sent Pedro hurtling to the other side of the cellar, half the wall tumbled down with a great thud, amidst clouds of dust. Where the staple had been was now a great, black gap!

"Bravo, bravo!" yelled Tinker, carried away in the excitement of the moment. "Good for you, old Ped! Up you come, gov'nor! Not hurt, I hope?"

"Not a bit, my boy!" returned the detective, with a grin, springing to his feet. "Come along, both of you! It's a bit more healthy outside than in this dusty, smelling cellar!"

He led the way, climbing to the top of the ladder. As he had expected, the door was locked upon the other side, or, rather, it had been jammed tight with wedges. Yet Blake had no hesitation in throwing his great shoulders against it. The first blow shattered it, and Pedro dashed through the splintered pieces.

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**NEXT FRIDAY:** SHIELDED FROM SHAME! A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake.

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Blake and Tinker quickly followed the big bloodhound. The room was full with as villainous-looking a crew as Blake had seen together under one roof, but the appearance of Pedro had disconcerted them. The hound, darting amongst them in the joy of his freedom, and the consciousness that he was attacking his master's enemies and his own, bowled them over like skittles in an alley.

The men were routed without even a blow being struck by Blake, for those nearest the door scampered out in great confusion, and, laughing uproariously, as if the whole thing were a huge joke, the detective hastened after the retreating crew, as Pedro drove them up the stairs out into the narrow street.

"Keep close to me, my boy!" cried Blake, when they had gained the open air. "We shall be out of the frying-pan into the fire unless we're careful."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Scene in the Lodging-house—Robert Gibson Confronts His Stepson—Police to the Rescue—John Snyder's Confession—A Fresh Start.

IT seemed as if all the occupants of Gun Row had turned out into the narrow street. It was now about three o'clock in the afternoon. Out of their miserable little houses a villainous crew continued to pour, and each had armed himself with some stout weapon.

Pedro cared nothing for the sticks of his enemies. Growling with the delight of battle, he drove back the ruffianly gang, turning constantly to attack any man who happened to be pressing his master rather severely.

Tinker was too weak to do anything but make feeble attempts to hit out, but Sexton Blake's fists were more than a match for the weapons of his adversaries. Not one, but several, heavy blows reached his body, yet for every one he received he dealt out three, and his fists were at work like steam-hammers.

Yet, for all that, the situation was a desperate one. And presently, when two familiar figures burst into the narrow thoroughfare, and began to rally the ruffians, Blake looked about him for some means of escape.

The men were Snyder and Garlan. "Collar him, you skulking pigs!" roared John Snyder. "It's Sexton Blake, I tell you. He'll have the police down on you before long. Never mind the dog; seize the police-spy. There are quids for the man who captures him!"

Seizing Tinker by the arm, Blake broke into a run. "Don't let 'em escape!" yelled Snyder, now almost beside Sexton Blake. "It'll mean quad for most of you if you do. Come on; it's only a man, a boy, and a dog. There are enough of you to eat 'em. Come along!"

Sexton Blake leapt through the gang, and seized the Spider by the throat.

"Come along with me yourself!" he cried. "I'm just anxious to get my grip on you! Follow me, Tinker! Sharp, now!"

They had backed down the narrow alley in the fight, past a narrow plot of grass, and a big, barrack-like building had now loomed amongst the miserable hovels. Blake recognised it at once. It was a common lodging-house—a "doss-house," to use the familiar term.

Towards this he now hurried, his grip tightening around John Snyder's neck. Joe Garlan hurried after his accomplice, but Blake and Tinker, ably assisted by Pedro, gained the doorway before him. Down the steps Blake bundled with his capture, into a long, low-roofed kitchen, where a number of old and middle-aged men were squatting about on forms.

Into this room after them hurried Joe Garlan, at the head of a gang of ruffians. Blake pitched John Snyder headlong to the other end of the room, and, seizing a short form in his hands, rushed to the door.

"Keep 'em back, Pedro!" he shouted, swinging the form high above his head.

Those ruffians already in the lodging-house kitchen who were about to spring upon the detective fell hastily back as they saw that heavy form flying in the air as if it were a mere broomstick, and those hurrying down the stairs changed their minds and beat a speedy retreat.

Whilst Pedro kept Garlan and the others off, Sexton Blake slammed the door to, pushed home the bolts, and then jammed the form against the panels.

Pedro, though the length of iron chain and the staple still hung to his collar, was more than a match for the ruffians who had followed Garlan. With a face livid with fury, John Snyder tried to urge the old men to attack the detective, but none of them cared to tackle the bloodhound and his fearless master.

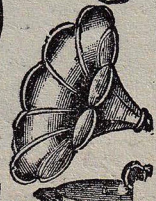
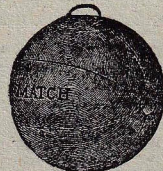
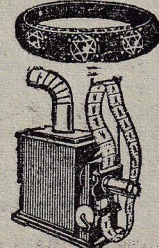
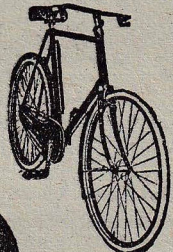
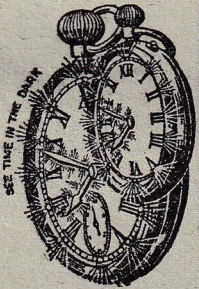
Dutch Joe, bruiser and champion middle-weight though he had been in his time, but who was now besotted with

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drink, made no attempt to attack Blake. He fell in a heap on the floor, and made no effort to rise.

"You're caught in a trap now, like the rat you are, John Snyder!" cried Sexton Blake, turning towards him. "I'm not going to leave this room till the police come. Your little game is up, and mine has just begun."

An old, white-haired, bent little man leapt up from the form on which he had been sitting.

"What's that?" he asked. "Did I hear you say John Snyder, sir? Who is the man who bears that name?"

Sexton Blake turned to the old man. The tone of the voice had surprised him.

"This man calls himself John Snyder," said the detective. "And I'll warrant you know nothing good about him."

The Spider recoiled before the keen glance the old man gave him. He had changed vastly during the past few years, but he knew quite well who was the owner of that worn, bent old body.

"My heavens!" cried the old man. "It is John Snyder! It's my stepson who ruined me, and who kicked me out into the world to starve three years ago. We're face to face again at last, John Snyder!"

The old man crept before the rogue with clenched fists and blazing eyes. The Spider shrank back from that fierce gaze. He was no longer the flamboyant bully. He was like a cur fearing the whip-lash.

He made no reply, and a tense silence fell upon those in the room. The old men on the forms sat puffing at their pipes, their eyes fixed upon the actors in that dramatic scene. The stepfather of John Snyder was a stranger to them. He had only wandered into the lodging-house on the previous night.

"You see him there—well dressed, well fed, healthy, and strong," went on the old man, dramatically extending his arms as he turned to the men on the forms. "You may think he's a gentleman, but he's one of the blackest-hearted rogues who ever breathed the air. He is the sort of man who'd take a crust out of a starving wretch's mouth. Listen to me. Ten years ago I had fifteen thousand pounds—the fortune I had gained by hard and honest work as a shopkeeper. In one way or another that wretch there robbed me of every penny of it. When I was spun dry he had no mercy. He and his gang of accomplices turned me out of my own house, which was sold above my head, and I was left in the gutter to starve."

"Ah!" came the angry hiss of sympathy from the men.

"For three years, my friends, I've been fighting against starvation and death, friendless and homeless. I've wandered from town to town, trying to get work, begging to maintain life—a vagrant, an outcast, the despised of all respectable men. And that cur there has the guilt of it all upon his soul!"

At that moment there came a thundering knock at the door, and a loud voice demanded:

"Open, in the name of the law!"

Sexton Blake flung open the door, and saw half a dozen constables standing without.

Sexton Blake, assisted by Robert Gibson and the old man, hauled John Snyder and Joe Garland into the narrow street, where they were promptly handcuffed by the officers. Then he turned to Robert Gibson.

"Will you come with me!" he cried. "I have good news for you. I will take you to friends."

The old man turned a puzzled face towards the detective, and then nodded his head affirmatively.

With Snyder and Garland marching in the midst of the constables, and with Blake, Tinker, old Robert Gibson, and Pedro bringing up the rear, they stepped out towards the main Bethnal Green Road.

"I don't want you to charge these men just now," explained Sexton Blake to the sergeant, when they had reached the main road, "for I must first obtain advice upon the matter for my clients. Can you spare an officer to accompany me in a cab with the rogues to Kensington?"

The sergeant making no demur, two taxicabs were called up, and Blake and the constables entered one, with Snyder and Garland, handcuffed to each other, whilst Tinker, Pedro, and old Robert Gibson followed in the other.

Less than an hour later, the constable and the scoundrels

having entered Acacia House, Sexton Blake came to the door of Tinker's cab, and assisted old Robert Gibson to get out.

"Come with me, Mr. Gibson!" he cried. "Your days of misery and suffering are over. Here you will find friends and a happy home to the end of your days."

A door opened, and the grey head of Thomas Gibson looked out. The next instant the two old brothers were locked in one another's arms.

"Now, then, make up your minds!" cried Sexton Blake sharply. "You have two minutes to decide! Both of you deserve to go to penal servitude for the rest of your lives, but the men you have injured and robbed have decided to offer you a chance of freedom and a new start in life. Which is it to be? Will you confess your crime, or do you prefer to go to prison?"

The two brothers and James Gibson were in the room, waiting anxiously for the verdict. John Snyder and Joe Garland, still handcuffed, were sitting upon a couch, crushed and ashamed, pitiful specimens of humanity.

Dutch Joe was still more or less in a stupor from the effects of intoxicants. His head hung limply on his chest, and he did not attempt to speak. As for John Snyder, his defiance had gone, and he shifted uneasily whenever his stepfather's gaze rested upon him.

"We'll give in," he murmured at last. "You've got us like rats in a trap. I've been a wrong 'un in my life. I couldn't help it. It seemed to be in my blood. I've blackmailed Mr. Thomas. Garland told me about the fire, and we saw a chance of making money. I knew it was all bunkum—that Mr. Thomas had no hand in the fire—but when we found he was frightened, we decided to make the most of our opportunity and run him dry."

"If they will sign the confession, and will stay abroad, we'll not prosecute them. We'll give them money to make a fresh start," said James Gibson.

Sexton Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"It's more than they deserve," he said.

"Upon my Sam!" grinned Tinker, as he fastened a gardenia in the buttonhole of his morning-coat. "I'm going to so many weddings lately that by the time my own happy event comes I shall be too bored to death, don'tcherknow, to go through with the ceremony."

"Girls are very particular nowadays," said Sexton Blake, with a smile. "You can't get a girl to marry you by merely putting your hand up."

"I'd put up both hands if there were any more girls about like Miss Kathleen O'Shea!" cried Tinker enthusiastically.

The Church of St. John's, Hanover Square, was packed with a fashionable throng who had come to see the wedding ceremony of the pretty cashier and the handsome young manager they had seen so often in the great stores.

The two old brothers were, of course, present at the ceremony. From that day Thomas had agreed to retire from business and to live in a beautiful little country home his son James had purchased for him. Nor was Robert without means, for Sexton Blake had compelled John Snyder to disgorge £5,000 of the money he had obtained by blackmail.

Sexton Blake and Tinker adjourned to Acacia House with the guests for the reception after the ceremony.

"I'm so happy!" cried Kathleen, as she clung affectionately to the detective's arm. "I'm almost beside myself with joy! I want to cry out and to dance with ecstasy! Was there ever a girl so fortunate as I? My poor mother was almost dying, now she is well and strong, and able, as you see, to come from Spain to my wedding. And I've got the dearest and best husband in all the world! And I owe everything to you!"

Sexton Blake turned and caught the bridegroom by the arm.

"My dear Mrs. Gibson," he said, with a smile, "you have made a little mistake. You owe me nothing. Here is the one to whom your gratitude is due. Love had joined your hearts before I came into your lives. My part only was to drive away the clouds that hovered over you."

And he walked away to chat with the two old brothers.

THE END.

NEXT FRIDAY'S GRAND LONG COMPLETE TALE OF SEXTON BLAKE IS ENTITLED

## SHIELDED FROM SHAME!

Please order your copy of the "PENNY POPULAR" in advance, and hand this number to a non-reader.







Crash!

"Oh!" gasped Brooke.

He rolled over on his back, and Mellish and Levison rolled over him. In another second or two Towser was on the scene, but fortunately Herries held the chain in his hand. Towser made a spring for Levison, and Herries dragged him back only in time, or the bulldog's teeth would have closed with a snap on the cad of the Fourth.

"Keep him off!" shrieked Levison, white with fear.

"Ow! Help! Murder!" screamed Mellish.

Gr-r-r-r!

Brooke of the Fourth leaped to his feet.

"What on earth's the matter!" he exclaimed. "Keep that dog off, Herries; he looks as if he'll tear them to pieces."

"Let him, then!" yelled Herries, keeping Towser back, however. "They've been tormenting him—biffing him with stable brooms while he was chained up and couldn't help himself."

Brooke knitted his brows.

"The cads!" he exclaimed. "But you can't let him bite them, Herries. It will mean a fearful row if you do."

Levison and Mellish had scrambled up. They backed away to the School House wall, and stood there, trembling and panting. They dared not run, for fear that the bulldog should leap upon them from behind, but it was almost equally impossible for them to stand there and face him. Towser was wildly excited, and he looked deadly dangerous. Herries seemed to be more than half inclined to let the chain loose. Towser was straining at it with all his strength.

"Keep him off!" shrieked Mellish.

"I—I'll complain to the Head!" yelled Levison. "I'll have you summoned for keeping a dangerous animal, you brute! Keep him off!"

"He wasn't dangerous, if you'd let him alone," said Herries fiercely, "and I don't see why I shouldn't let him have a bite."

He loosened the chain a little, and the bulldog came closer to the shrinking juniors, and they crouched back against the wall as close as they could, white with terror.

"Keep him off!" said Mellish faintly.

"Help!" shrieked Levison.

Brooke burst into a laugh.

"Make the cads beg Towser's pardon," he said, "and let them go! You can let them off with a fright, I should think. They've had a scare."

Herries grinned. If dire terror was a punishment, Levison and Mellish had been punished for their brutality. Herries' good nature was returning.

"Good wheeze!" he exclaimed. "Do you hear, you cads? You'll go down on your giddy knees to Towser and beg his pardon!"

"I won't!" yelled Levison.

But Mellish eagerly assented. He would have gone down on his knees to a dog or a cat or any other living thing, to get out of his present predicament.

"What on earth's the matter here?" exclaimed Jack

Blake, coming round the house, with a dozen more juniors at his heels. "What's the trouble?"

"It's Towser, deah boy! What has he been doin', Hewwies?"

Herries explained, in furious tones, and there was a yell of delight from the juniors as he stated his intention of making the culprits beg Towser's pardon. Levison and Mellish were not popular in the School House.

"Good egg!" shouted Blake. "Ha, ha, ha! Get on your knees, you cads!"

"To your knees!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! An apology ffrom one gentleman to another is always all wight!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy judicially. "Therefore, an apology ffrom one beast to another ought to settle the mattah here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You hear, you cads?" said Herries resolutely. "You'll go down on your knees and beg Towser's pardon, or I'll let him loose on you—honest Injun!"

And Herries meant it, and the two juniors could see that he meant it. Mellish was already on his knees, but Levison,

who had more pluck than the sneak of the Fourth, still hesitated.

"I give you one minute!" said Herries threateningly. The chain clinked as he let it out a little, and Towser's open jaws were within a foot of Levison's knees.

"All—all right!" panted Levison. "Keep it off!"

"Buck up, theg!"

The crowd was thickening, the noise was bringing fellows to the scene from all quarters. There was a formidable yell of laughter as the two cads of the Fourth dropped upon their knees, with Towser straining at the chain only a foot from them.

"You will say, 'Please, Towser, I beg your pardon, and I promise never to be such a beastly cad again!'" said Herries.

"I won't!" yelled Levison.

"I will!" mumbled Mellish. "Keep him off! Please, Towser—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Please, Towser, I beg your pardon, and I promise never to be such a beastly cad again!" yelled Mellish, in dire terror, as the chain clinked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good! You can crawl off!" said Herries contemptuously. "I'll hold Towser while you get away. Now, it's your turn, Levison!"

Mellish ran away, panting, and Levison made a movement to follow him. Brooke pushed him back with a strong hand.

"No, you don't!" he said. "You're not finished yet!"

"Let me pass, you cad!"

"No fear!"

"On your knees, Levison, or I'll let Towser loose!" shouted Herries.

"Keep him off!" screamed Levison, as the bulldog's nose for a moment brushed against his trousers.

"You'd better buck up, then! I'm tired of holding him in!"

Levison dropped on his knees. His face was white and twisted with terror and rage. The crowd burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then, you know what to say, Levison!" rapped out Herries.

"Hang you! Please, Towser—" mumbled Levison.

"Louder!"

"Please, Towser, I beg—" whispered Levison.

The chain clinked ominously.

"Louder, for all the fellows to hear!" said Herries.

"Please, Towser, I beg your pardon, and I promise never to be such a beastly cad again!" shrieked Levison desperately.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said Herries. "And if you ever are such a beastly cad again, I'll smash you, and let Towser get at you in good earnest! Crawl away, you cad!"

And Herries, not without difficulty, half-persuaded and half-dragged Towser back to his kennel, and fastened him up.

Levison and Mellish, followed by howls of laughter, fled into the School House, to hide their crimson faces in their own study. Mellish collapsed into a chair, panting. Levison strode about the study, breathing fury.

"I'll settle him! I'll settle him!" he said, between his teeth.

"Herries?" asked Mellish.

"No, you idiot! I'd be glad to. But I mean Towser. By George, I'll make 'em sit up for this! I'll settle him!"

"You won't get me going near Towser again!" gasped Mellish. "I've had enough of him! And that brute Herries meant what he said! He'll set the horrible beast on to us if we meddle with him again!"

"He won't be able to set him on to us when I'm done with him!" said Levison, grinding his teeth. "I'm going to get some rat poison from Rylcombe for Towser!"

Mellish turned quite pale.

"Levison! Better draw it mild!"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Levison. "You can keep out of it if you're afraid!"

# TUCK HAMPERS

FOR  
READERS OF

# THE BOYS' FRIEND—1d.

WIN ONE ON MONDAY.





"The—the meat was poisoned! We're as good as dead!" moaned Mellish. "Oh, help! Fetch a doctor! Get a stomach-pump! Quick!" "By jove!" gasped Tom Merry, "this looke serious!"

"I jolly well shall keep out of it!" said Mellish promptly. "Why, you might get expelled from the school for doing a thing like that!"

"I'll risk it! They won't make a fool of me for nothing. I'll get even with Herries, and that charity cad Brooke somehow! And I'll begin with Tower!"

"Better be careful—"

"Oh, shut up!"

And Mellish shut up. He was afraid of his study-mate when Levison was in this mood. Mellish was a cad and a coward, but Levison had the makings of a very considerable scoundrel in him—a fact which his schoolfellows were discovering gradually.

#### THE SECOND CHAPTER. Dick Brooke is Just in Time.

**D**ICK BROOKE rose from the study table in No. 6. Brooke was a day-boy at St. Jim's, and had no study, but when he stayed later than usual at the school, fellows in the Fourth were always willing to let him use their studies, and he naturally liked it better than working in the Form-room.

There were very few day-boys at St. Jim's, and the other fellows regarded them with a good-natured tolerance, as if they really were not quite St. Jim's fellows. Brooke did not mind. He was a quiet, grave fellow, and he got on very well with most fellows at St. Jim's. With Levison and Mellish, certainly, he did not pull very well; but there was nothing remarkable in that,

for the cads of the Fourth never quite agreed with anybody.

Brooke was on the best of terms with Study No. 6, and he frequently did his work there. He was entitled to leave the school with the other day-boys as soon as lessons were over; but he was working for a scholarship, and little Mr. Lathom, the kind-hearted master of the Fourth, was giving him what the juniors called "extra toct," and so Brooke frequently stayed later.

Brooke was not what the St. Jim's fellows would have called a "swot," but he certainly worked very hard, and some of the fellows knew that he had other work to do besides his school work.

He was very glad to get the extra tuition from Mr. Lathom, and was in great hopes of carrying off a scholarship, which would enable him to stay a year at St. Jim's without the expense of fees. Tom Merry & Co. knew that most, if not all, of Brooke's fees came out of his own earnings.

"Thank you fellows very much!" said Brooke, who had stayed on to tea in the study, and had just finished. "I think I'll be off now!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake cheerily. "I suppose your people don't mind your getting in after dark?"

"It's all right, once in a way," said Brooke. "My mother knows that I'm having extra lessons here. It's jolly decent of you to let me work in your study!"

"Oh, wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We are highly honahed, deah boy!"

Brooke smiled.

"By the way, what about the footer this term?" said



Jack Blake. "Tom Merry was talking about putting you in the eleven if you were up to it!"

Brooke shook his head.

"Can't be done!" he said. "I'm not up to it. I should be jolly glad, of course; but my sight isn't good enough. It's not getting any worse, but it's not good enough for footer. But I shall turn up and cheer you fellows—that's the next best thing. Good-night!"

"Good-night, old chap!"

Brooke left the study with his books under his arm. He walked away thoughtfully down the corridor, and left the School House. It was dark in the quadrangle, and Brooke peered before him, with his head slanting a little forward, in the manner that some short-sighted people have. As he left the House behind him, two dim shadows loomed for a moment in the darkness of the quadrangle, and he heard a faint whisper:

"Quiet, Mellish!"

Brooke paused. The thought came into his mind at once that his enemies in the Fourth were waiting for him in the quadrangle. But the next words showed that the speakers were not even aware that he was there.

"Look here, Levison, I won't have a hand in it!"

"Quiet, you fool!" came Levison's voice, in a fierce whisper. "I only want you to stand at the corner of the house and keep watch while I go round to the kennel. Whistle to me if anyone comes, that's all!"

"But—"

"That's enough!"

There was a sound of retreating footsteps. Brooke stood still, his eyes gleaming and his hands clenched. By the sheerest chance he had come upon the two young rascals, and he knew what was on now. It was a plot to revenge upon the unfortunate Towser their discomfiture of the afternoon. Brooke jammed his books into his jacket-pocket, and ran through the gloom towards Mellish. He ran right into the cad of the School House, and grasped him with both hands. Mellish gave a startled gasp.

"Who—who's that?"

"It's Brooke, you rotter! What is Levison going to do to Towser?"

"I—I—I don't know!" stammered Mellish.

Levison had told his confederate to whistle an alarm, but Mellish's dry lips were not capable of whistling just then.

"I don't know anything about it," he muttered huskily.

"He made me come here! You'd better go after him if you want to know! Let me alone!"

Brooke contemptuously hurled the cad of the Fourth from him, and Mellish staggered away. Without giving him even a glance, Dick Brooke dashed round the corner of the House. The stables in the rear seemed quite dark and deserted, but a gleam of light caught Dick Brooke's eye as he came near Towser's kennel. He caught sight of Levison kneeling beside the kennel with a lantern on the ground. Levison had a large slice of steak in his hand, and was coaxing Towser from his kennel to eat it.

Brooke paused in astonishment.

He had been certain that Levison intended some harm to the bulldog, and he had found the Fourth-Former trying to feed Towser with an unusually luxurious feed. Steaks did not often come in Towser's way. Did it mean that Levison was sorry for his brutality of the afternoon, and was trying to make it up to Towser by giving him a good feed? Brooke wondered, and he paused, a little repentant of his suspicions.

Towser had his head out of the kennel, and he was sniffing at the meat. It evidently attracted him, but he seemed to have his suspicions about it. Brooke caught sight of the face of Levison in the lantern light, and the savage expression upon it, the gleam of cold malice in the eyes struck him at once.

It was not ordinary meat that Levison was offering to the bulldog. A black suspicion darted into Brooke's mind, and he ran furiously forward.

"Stop, you cad!"

Levison gave a violent start.

He swung round from the kennel, dropping the meat. Towser made a movement as if to take it, and Brooke kicked it instantly out of the bulldog's reach. Levison rose to his feet, his face white with rage and hatred.

"You charity cad!" he muttered. "What are you doing here?"

"What were you doing?" said Brooke, leaving Levison's taunt unheeded and unanswered. "Is that meat poisoned?"

"No!" said Levison sullenly.

"Why were you giving it to Towser, then?"

"Can't I feed him if I like?"

"Does Herries know?"

"Mind your own business!"

Brooke's eyes gleamed, and he stooped and picked up the

meat. There was a peculiar white powder discernible on it, and then his suspicion became a certainty.

"You say this is not poisoned?" he said.

"No, it isn't!"

"Very well. I will take it to Herries, and let him see what you were offering to his bulldog. Will you come with me?"

Levison's face blanched.

"Don't say a word to Herries!" he breathed. "Look here, I—I'll own up! I—I hate that brute! Herries has no right to keep such a dangerous brute! I was going to rid the school of him! Don't say a word about it!"

Brooke's eyes blazed.

"You were going to poison Herries' dog, and you want me to keep it dark!" he exclaimed. "So that you can try it again another time, I suppose? I'm going to warn Herries to take care of his dog."

Levison uttered a cry.

"You sneak!"

Brooke paused.

"It's not sneaking!" he said. "I must warn Herries! It would be rotten to leave Towser in danger!"

"You sneak! If you mention my name—"

"I won't mention your name if you're afraid to let Herries know what you've done!" said Brooke scornfully. "But I shall take this to him, and tell him what I saw here. If he finds you out without my assistance, you can look after yourself."

"Look here, I—I—"

"Don't talk to me! You make me sick! Get away from here. I don't trust you near Towser. Walk in front of me back to the School House!"

Levison, gritting his teeth with rage, obeyed. At the steps of the School House Brooke left him, and hurried into the House.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Culprits.

JACK BLAKE & Co. were just about to sit down to tea when Dick Brooke entered their study. The juniors looked at him in surprise, which increased as he laid a powdery-looking lump of meat on the study table.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Blake.

"Brooke's contribution to a feed?" suggested Digby, with a grin.

"It's meat, and it's poisoned!" said Brooke quietly.

There was a startled exclamation from every fellow in the study.

"Poisoned!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I found a fellow giving it to Towser," said Brooke.

Herries jumped.

"Towser! Giving poisoned meat to Towser! Why, I—I—"

"It's all right," said Brooke. "I kicked it away before Towser could touch it. I don't know whether he would have eaten it, either; he seemed very suspicious about it. I've brought it here to you so that you can look after Towser."

"Thanks!" said Herries dazedly. "But—but who could be such a villain as to want to poison Towser?"

"Who was it, Brooke?"

The Fourth-Former shook his head.

"I've promised not to mention his name," he said. "He's afraid of Herries. But I felt bound to tell Herries, so that he could be on his guard."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It was Levison or Mellish," said Herries. "They've got a spite against my dog. Which of them was it, Brooke?"

"Pway remambah, Hewwies, that Bwooke has promised not to tell. He cannot possibly bweak his word. But you can keep your peepahs open."

"I'll find out!" said Herries sulphurously. "I'll go and look at Towser now, and make sure he's all right. Then I'll look into this. Thanks, Brooke; you're a jolly decent chap."

And Herries ran out of the study. Brooke said good-night to the chums of the School House for the second time, and left. As he walked across the quadrangle to the gates, he hoped that Herries would not discover the intended poisoner. Levison's punishment, if Herries knew of his guilt, was likely to be severe enough to get Herries into trouble afterwards. Brooke was thinking more of Herries than of the cad of the Fourth.

In Study No. 6 the juniors stood silent, looking at the meat on the table. Jack Blake broke the silence.

"Jolly lucky Brooke happened on the cad, whoever he was," he said, with a deep breath. "I believe Herries would go quite potty if he lost his dog. Of course, it must have



been either Levison or Mellish, after what happened this afternoon."

"No doubt about that," said Bernard Glynn; "and I don't think anybody else in the school is cur enough for such a thing."

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry, as he came into the study with Manners and Lowther. "Holding an inquest, or what?"

Blake explained. The Terrible Three looked serious enough when they heard what had happened. Tom Merry scanned the meat, and smelt it.

"It's poisoned right enough," he said. "What awful cad was it, I wonder?"

"Levison or Mellish—or both."

"Yes, it must have been."

"We'll have 'em in here and question them," said Glyn.

"Not much good," said Tom Merry. "They will deny it. Fellows who would poison a dog would tell lies, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, Herries won't rest till he's found them," said Blake. "We shall never hear the end of it. He's as likely as not to make them eat that blessed meat."

Tom Merry grinned.

"That would be rather thick," he said; "but— My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"A wheeze, my son—a giddy wheeze!" gasped Tom Merry. "My hat! We will punish the cads in a way that will make their hair curl! It's the giddiest wheeze of the season."

"Explain, you ass!"

Tom Merry cautiously closed the study door and explained in a whisper. A wild yell of laughter rang through the study. Tom Merry's wheeze, whatever it was, seemed to meet with universal approval.

"Oh, my hat!" almost sobbed Blake. "I want to see their faces! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall want a new steak, and you can shove it in your study cupboard, and mind you sprinkle it with flour," said Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"

"That's settled, then! Now we'll get out before you have Levison in."

"Right you are!"

The Terrible Three left the study. Herries, very red and breathless, entered it a few moments later.

"Towser's all right," he said. "Now we're going to find out who did this. I know it was either Levison or Mellish—or both the cads! I'm going to smash the chap who tried to poison Towser!"

"Better make sure first," hinted Blake.

"Well, let's make sure, then," said Herries. "Some of you fetch the cads in here, and make 'em see this poisoned meat, and see if they have the nerve to deny it."

"Yes, we'll do that."

Blake and Herries and D'Arcy and Glyn hurried out of the study. They returned in a few minutes with Levison and Mellish. The cads of the Fourth were looking angry and alarmed, but they had not been able to refuse to come to Study No. 6. Blake having stated blandly that if they didn't walk they would be carried, they decided to walk.

Herries glared at them as they came in. Blake insinuated himself between the burly Fourth-Former and the two visitors.

"Go easy, Herries, old man," he said.

"Easy be hanged!" growled Herries. "Look here, you cads, which of you gave this poisoned meat to Towser?"

"I didn't!" gasped Mellish.

"Poisoned meat!" said Levison, in great surprise. "What are you talking about? Is this a joke?"

"If it's a joke, it's a rotten bad one," said Mellish, taking his cue from his more courageous companion. "I don't see the fun myself."

"You don't know anything about it?" asked Blake.

"Certainly not. I suppose this is some plot that you fellows have got up against us," said Levison boldly. "We know how much fair play to expect from this study."

"Weally, Levison—"

"Brooke caught somebody trying to poison Towser with this meat, and he won't give his name," said Herries savagely. "I'm going to find out who it was. I know jolly well that it was one of you cads."

"I know nothing about it," said Levison.

"Same here," said Mellish.

"Very well. I'll inquire in the village whether either of you bought any poison there for animals," said Herries.

Levison's face paled for a moment.

"Ah! That's got you, has it?" exclaimed Digby.

Levison forced a laugh.

"I may have bought rat poison some time—I don't remember," he said. "You can make all the inquiries you like. I am going."

The cads of the Fourth were allowed to leave the study. The juniors felt quite certain enough of their guilt. But it was impossible to allow Herries to begin the smashing business, as Blake described it, without proof. Blake called to them as they turned to the door.

"I shall keep this poisoned meat for the present, and we'll see about it," he said. "Lock it up in the cupboard, Dig."

"Certainly!" said Digby.

Levison laughed sneeringly.

"You can keep it till it begins to talk, if you like," he said. "It's no business of mine. You can go and eat coke, all of you! Come on, Mellish!"

And he walked away.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. An Irish Stew.

MONTY LOWTHER looked into Levison's study in the Fourth-Form passage about an hour later. The three juniors who shared the study—Mellish, Levison, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley—were all there, engaged in doing their preparations. Monty Lowther nodded to the trio in the most friendly way.

"I thought I should find you here, Lumley-Lumley," he remarked. "We've got a stew going, and we want you to come. It's something rather special—a real Irish stew. Reilly has helped us to make it, and I can tell you it's prime!"

"I guess I'll come," said Lumley-Lumley, cheerfully enough. Lumley-Lumley was on very good terms with the Terrible Three, and he frequently dropped into Tom Merry's study. And he rose to his feet.

Monty Lowther turned to the door again. And then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he turned back. It was as if, asking Lumley-Lumley in the presence of his study-mates, he felt constrained by politeness to ask Levison and Mellish, too.

"You fellows like to come?" he asked. "It's a good feed, and we'll be glad to see you."

"Yes, rather," said Mellish promptly.

Levison hesitated.

"Blake and his lot are going to be there?" he asked.

"No. They've gone over to the New House to see Redfern."

"Good! I'll come with pleasure. Do you mind if I finish my prep first?"

"Not at all. Come in when you're ready!"

And Monty Lowther quitted the study with Lumley-Lumley. Mellish followed them. Mellish was always ready for a feed. He would have dined cheerfully with his worst enemy. Levison finished his preparation, and about ten minutes later came into Tom Merry's study.

He found the supper going on. There was a huge dish on the table, and it was half filled with a hot and smoking Irish stew. Pieces of beef floated in the stew, with carrot and onions and turnip and other ingredients, and certainly it smelt very savoury. Reilly of the Fourth, who had lent a master hand in making the stew, sat beaming at the table. Levison sniffed with appreciation. A hot Irish stew was better for supper than the bread and cheese in the Hall.

Tom Merry nodded to the cad of the Fourth, and Manners pulled out a chair for him, and Monty Lowther pushed a plate before him.

"Ladle it out, Reilly!" he said.

"Right ye are!" said Reilly. "Faith, and it's a stunning stew. Lucky for you chaps I helped you. It takes an Irishman to make an Irish stew. Would ye believe it, Levison, the spalpeens wanted to put suet dumplings in it. We don't do that!"

"It smells jolly nice," said Levison, sitting down.

"Faith, and it tastes jolly nice!" said Reilly.

"You're right; it does!"

Levison was right, and he wired into the Irish stew with a keenness worthy of the famous Fatty Wynn. Mellish was already going strong. The other fellows also had good helpings. Extensive as the stew was, it rapidly diminished as the six juniors made repeated onslaughts upon it.

"My hat!" said Levison. "This is jolly good! Where did you get your beef—at Dame Taggles, I suppose?"

To his surprise, the chums of the Shell burst into a laugh.

"Guess again!" said Tom Merry.

Levison looked surprised. So far as he could see, there was nothing to laugh at in his question as to where the amateur cooks had procured the beef.

"The butcher's in the village?" he asked.

"No; we haven't been out."

"Did the cook give it to you?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"No fear!"



"Oh, you've raided it, I suppose?" said Lumley-Lumley.  
 "Right!" said Tom Merry.  
 Levison laughed.  
 "Raided it from Figgins & Co.?" he asked.  
 "No; we haven't been over to the New House."  
 "Then, where the dickens—"  
 Monty Lowther winked mysteriously.  
 "Perhaps you can guess now why we didn't invite Blake & Co. to the feed?" he suggested.  
 Levison and Mellish started simultaneously.  
 "You don't mean to say—" began Mellish.  
 "Yes, we do!" said Tom Merry. "We raided it out of Blake's study! Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther.  
 Levison, who had a piece of meat upon his fork, gazed at it in horror, and lowered it into his plate again. Mellish turned white and then yellow.  
 "You raided this beef from Blake's study?" Levison repeated faintly.  
 "Yes, rather!"  
 "Faith, and it would have been a good joke to invite them to the feed!" chuckled Reilly. "You could have told them afterwards where the meat came from, bedad!"  
 "I guess that would have been the cream of the joke!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. Then he stared in surprise at Levison and Mellish. "What's the matter with you two chaps? You look ill!"  
 "Oh!" groaned Mellish.

Levison started to his feet, with the perspiration thick upon his brow.  
 "Did—did you get this meat out of Blake's cupboard?" he asked unsteadily.  
 "Yes, certainly!"  
 "Wasn't—wasn't the cupboard locked?"  
 "Yes; but we knew where the key was kept," explained Tom Merry, laughing. "We found the key under the clock on the mantelpiece."  
 "Oh, dear!"

"It will be a giddy surprise for Blake when he comes back from the New House!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "I guess he will get his hair off!"  
 "M-m-my heavens!" stammered Mellish.  
 "What's the matter?"  
 "Was—was there anything peculiar about the meat?" asked Levison, trying to speak calmly, in spite of the horrible uneasiness that had fastened upon him.

"Not that I noticed," said Tom Merry, in surprise.  
 "What's the matter? It's good enough, isn't it? It tastes all right."  
 "Faith, and it's a drame!" said Reilly.  
 "Was there any other meat in the cupboard?" asked Levison, clinging to a faint hope.

"No fear!"  
 "You—you looked!"  
 "You can bet we did!" said Monty Lowther. "If there had been any more we should have made a clean sweep of it!"

"I—I say—" Levison's voice was thick and husky. He remembered how he had seen Jack Blake put the poisoned beefsteak into the study cupboard in No. 6, saying that he would keep it locked up there. "I—I say, Merry, did—did you notice anything about the meat? Was—was it sprinkled with anything?"  
 "Yes; flour!"  
 "Flour!" panted Levison.  
 "Yes, certainly!"  
 "Are—are you sure it was flour?" said Levison, white as a ghost.  
 "Well, I didn't taste it," said Tom Merry, looking astonished. "It was sprinkled with a white powder, anyway, and I certainly took it for flour. It might have been salt, but I'm pretty certain it was flour. Anyway, whichever it was, it didn't hurt the beef. It tastes ripping, to my mind!"

"It's a drame!" repeated Reilly, helping himself again from the dish. "A rale drame! I've niver tasted a better stew even in Ireland!"

"Don't eat it!" shrieked Levison.  
 The Belfast boy stared at him amazement.  
 "Don't ate it?" he repeated. "Faith, and what do you mean, then? Why shouldn't I ate the most illigant Irish stew that ever was cooked at St. Jim's?"  
 "It's poisoned!" panted Levison, staggering away from the table.

Monty Lowther's left eye half-closed, so that Reilly and Lumley-Lumley could see it, and they understood. Reilly, in fact, had already had a hint of the matter. And Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was quick to catch on.

"Poisoned?" repeated Tom Merry.  
 "Yes. We—we're as good as dead!" moaned Mellish.  
 "Oh, help! Fetch a doctor! Get a stomach-pump! Quick!"  
 "It's no good!" said Levison, with a haggard face. "It's too late! We're done for! Oh, you mad fools! You've poisoned us!"

"But what do you mean?" asked Tom Merry, looking perplexed. "I don't feel poisoned! Do you other fellows?"  
 "Faith, and I'm as right as rain!" said Reilly cheerfully.  
 "I'm going to have some more, poisoned or not! May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, intirely!"

"I guess so," said Lumley-Lumley, helping himself again.  
 "It's all right, Levison, old man; you're only dreaming!"  
 "I tell you it's poisoned!" shrieked Levison. "It's rat poison! Blake had the poisoned meat in his cupboard, and—and it's certain death to taste it! Oh, heavens!"

Mellish collapsed upon the floor, groaning in sheer terror, without the strength even to make an effort to help himself. Levison staggered blindly to the door.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry, stepping quickly between the cad of the Fourth and the study door. "Where are you going?"

"To—to find a doctor!" panted Levison. "I'm poisoned!"  
 "Oh, rot! Don't play the giddy goat!"  
 "I tell you I'm poisoned!" shrieked Levison, struggling to pass Tom Merry. "Let me go! It may not be too late after all. Let me pass! I tell you the meat was poisoned!"

Tom Merry held him back with a grip of iron.  
 "Don't talk rot!" he said. "How could poisoned meat possibly come into Blake's study cupboard? You're talking out of your hat!"

"It—it was poisoned for Towser!" gasped Levison.  
 "Brooke found it, and brought it in to show Herries, and— and Blake locked it up in the study cupboard. I saw him."  
 "By Jove," said Manners, "that looks serious!"

"Jolly serious, if Levison isn't having a lark with us," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head.

"Do I look as if I were having a lark?" screamed Levison.  
 "Well, no; but you are such an awful whopper merchant."  
 "It's all rot!" said Tom Merry. "Perhaps Brooke was having a lark, if he said that the meat was poisoned. I suppose you didn't taste it?"

"I—I saw it."  
 "Well, I saw the meat we used in the stew, but it didn't look poisoned, or, of course, I shouldn't have used it."

"It was covered with white powder."  
 "Oh, that was flour!"  
 "It wasn't flour!" moaned Mellish, writhing on the floor.  
 "It was rat poison!"  
 "Stuff!"

"I know it was poison!" shouted Levison. "Let me pass! I must see a doctor! Let me pass! I tell you I know it was poison!"

"You couldn't possibly know without tasting it," said Tom Merry.

"I do know—I do know!"  
 "How?"  
 "Let me pass!"



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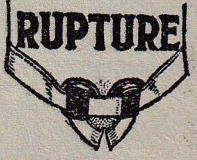
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"You're not going to spread a yarn that there's poison in my study unless you prove to me how you know the meat was poisoned," said Tom Merry.

"I poisoned it for Towser!" panted Levison. "Now are you satisfied? Let me pass!"

"Yes, I'm satisfied now," said Tom Merry sternly, "and you won't pass. Stay there, you cad! You're not poisoned, but you're found out!"

And he flung the cad of the Fourth into the corner of the study.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

#### Paying the Penalty!

**T**OM MERRY looked at the two juniors on the floor, and his face was half angry and half laughing. The terror of the would-be dog poisoners was comic enough to the fellows who knew that there was nothing the matter with them. There was a chuckle from Manners and Lowther and Reilly. Reilly was still eating stew, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley looked very much puzzled, but not at all alarmed. If the stew had really been poisoned, Lumley-Lumley would not have lost his nerve.

"I suppose there's nothing in all that, Tom Merry?" he asked.

"Nothing at all."

"What the dickens does it all mean, then?"

"I'll explain," said Tom Merry quietly. "Brooke found a cad giving poisoned meat to Towser, but he wouldn't tell his name. We got up this little game to find out, and to punish the cads for their dirty trick. Blake locked the poisoned meat up in his study cupboard, and afterwards he burnt it in the study fire-grate, to make sure of getting the beastly stuff out of the way."

Mellish suddenly left off groaning. Levison stared at the hero of the Shell with new hope in his eyes.

"W-what's that?" he gasped.

Tom Merry took no notice of him.

"Afterwards," he went on, "Blake bought some new beef-steak, and locked it in his study cupboard, and sprinkled it with flour."

"What on earth for?" demanded Lumley-Lumley.

"So that we could raid it, and make this Irish stew, and let Levison eat some of it," said Tom Merry coolly. "I wanted to be able to answer Levison's questions about the meat quite accurately, you know."

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison rose to his feet with a bitter smile on his face. Monty Lowther had crossed to the window, and was holding up a lamp there, evidently as a signal to someone over in the New House. A whistle was heard in the quadrangle. Levison understood, and he made a quick movement towards the door.

But Tom Merry was standing there, with his back to the door, and he did not move.

"You won't leave this study yet, Levison," he said quietly.

"Let me pass!"

"The Fourth Form chaps are coming back from the New

House," said Tom Merry. "You can repeat to them what you've said to us."

"Levison gave him a look of hatred.

"I won't!" he muttered. "I—I——"

"I will, then," said Tom Merry, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You've got to explain to Herries. If I kept a dog, and a fellow tried to poison it, I'd smash him into little pieces. Herries wants to see you very badly."

Mellish edged towards the door.

"I—I didn't have anything to do with it," he whined. "I told Levison I wouldn't have a hand in it when he proposed it, and he can't deny it. I was against it all the time. I—I don't want to stay in this study."

"I believe you," said Tom Merry scornfully. "You can go, but Levison stays here till Herries comes."

He stepped aside, and Mellish gladly slipped out of the study. Levison made a desperate rush to follow him. Tom Merry swung him back, and the desperate junior struck at him fiercely. Tom Merry knocked up his hand.

"If you want to fight me as well as Herries you've only got to say so," he said; "but I think you'll have enough on your hands with Herries."

Levison backed away.

"Let me go!" he said hoarsely. "I won't fight Herries! I—I——"

"I know you don't want to, but you should have thought of that before you tried to poison his dog. Stand where you are!"

There were hurried footsteps in the passage, and the chums of the Fourth came in, followed by Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn. They were all grinning with the exception of Herries. Herries looked grim and savage.

"Well, has the giddy culprit confessed!" asked Glyn.

"Yes. He has admitted that he poisoned the meat for Towser, under the impression that he had eaten some of it," said Tom Merry.

Herries pushed back his cuffs.

"Will you come into the gym, Levison, or will you have it here?" he asked, with ominous politeness.

Levison backed against the wall, his face white and his eyes gleaming. Always cunning and underhand, he never came out into the open if he could help it; but matters had been brought out into the open now with a vengeance. The cad of the Fourth was fairly caught, and there was no escape for him, whichever way he turned.

"I—I won't fight you, Herries," he muttered thickly. "I—I'll complain to Mr. Railton if you touch me. I—I won't be forced into this."

"You can explain to Mr. Railton at the same time how you tried to poison Towser, then," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison panted. He dared not let the story get to the ears of the School House master. He was fairly caught. Herries looked impatient.

"I'm fighting!" he said. "You can have it here or in the gym."

"Hang you!" snarled Levison passionately. "I'll fight you, then—here and now! Hang you all! Come on!"

"Bah Jove! Quite plucky, all of a sudden," remarked

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D'Arcy. "Take off your jacket, deah boy. I'll hold it for you if you like."

"Fair play," said Levison. "Don't all of you pile on me." Tom Merry frowned.

"You know you'll get fair play here, though you don't deserve it," he said. "If you say another word like that I'll lick you when Herries has finished."

"Yaas, watah!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "Upon the whole, Hewwies, deah boy, pewwaps you had bettah leave him to me. I will give him a feahful thwashin'—"

"Stand back, Gussy—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Give them room!"

Jack Blake drew Arthur Augustus back into a corner, and the juniors all stood back against the walls and the door to leave room for the combat.

It was not a long combat. Levison threw himself desperately upon Herries, and the owner of Towser wreaked his long-pent-up wrath upon the attempted poisoner of the bulldog. Levison was knocked right and left. In his desperation he inflicted a good deal of punishment upon Herries, but the indignant Fourth-Former seemed hardly to notice it. He hammered and hammered, and Levison, resorting to foul play as his brief courage waned, began to kick.

Herries gave a sharp cry as Levison's boot crashed upon his shin.

"You coward!" yelled Blake.

"Leave him to me to finish, Herries," said Tom Merry, white with anger.

Herries was staggering with the pain of that cruel kick, but he waved Tom Merry back.

"I'll finish him!" he said hoarsely.

He leaped upon Levison, and got his head into chancery. Then nothing was heard in the study save the trampling of feet and the muffled yells of Levison as Herries hammered him, and hammered and hammered.

The juniors dragged him off at last. Herries seemed inclined to go on until bed-time, though he was hopping with the pain in his damaged shin. Levison staggered against the wall as Herries was forced to release him, his face white save where it was blue with blows.

"Kick him out!" said Tom Merry.

He opened the door, and Levison staggered into the passage.

The door was closed upon him. Herries sank into a chair, gasping.

"I think he'll let Towser alone after this!" he panted.

"I should say so!" remarked Tom Merry. "I've got some embrocation here. You'd better rub your shin. That cad ought to be scalped."

Herries ruefully rubbed his shin with embrocation, and then the juniors sat down to the table to finish the Irish stew.

Levison reached his own quarters, feeling more dead than alive, and collapsed into a chair as he entered. Mellish was there, and he looked at his confederate with startled eyes.

"My word!" he murmured. "You've had a pasting!"

"I'll make them suffer for it!" groaned Levison. "All of them, and that charity cad Brooke, who was the cause of it all. Oh, oh, oh!"

"I advised you to let Towser alone!" said Mellish.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, I told you so."

Levison caught up a cricket-stump, and limped towards his study-mate. Mellish dodged out of the study just in time, and slammed the door. Levison was left alone to groan over his punishment, and to meditate upon his sins, if he chose!

He had played a cunning game, and had been badly beaten. But revenge was in the heart of the cad of St. Jim's when he went to bed that night, and he lay awake for some hours endeavouring to think of a scheme for getting his own back, as he termed it, on Herries and Dick Brooke. But his brain seemed incapable of thinking that night, and at length he fell asleep.

THE END.

## BETWEEN OURSELVES

A Weekly Chat between The Editor and His Readers.

### SATISFYING MY READERS.

During the last few months I have received hundreds of letters from my chums requesting me to reintroduce the Chat column in the PENNY POPULAR. My readers' requests being so insistent, I have at last decided to accede to them. The result is that this week my Chat column reappears in all its old glory, and I shall do my very utmost to make it a regular feature of the PENNY POPULAR.

### THE "PENNY POPULAR" IS BOOMING!

I have the greatest of pleasure in informing all my readers that just at present the PENNY POPULAR is selling as it has never sold before. Its circulation is increasing by leaps and bounds, and for this my thanks are due to the thousands of loyal friends who have made the PENNY POPULAR known amongst their chums and non-readers. I want the PENNY POPULAR to become more popular than ever, and those readers who pass on their copies, when finished with, to a non-reader, may rest assured that they earn their Editor's deep gratitude.

### FOR NEXT FRIDAY!

Next Friday's issue of the PENNY POPULAR will contain three magnificent stories of the famous characters—Sexton Blake, Tom Merry & Co., and Jack, Sam, and Pete. The tale of Sexton Blake, detective, is entitled

#### "Shielded From Shame!"

and it is a thriller from beginning to end. Next comes the story of Tom Merry & Co., the famous juniors of St. Jim's, which is entitled

#### "The Lancashire Junior's Latest!"

Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, makes a bulldog in exact imitation of Herries' Towser. This is a most humorous story, and you will laugh loud and long when you are reading of Knox's adventures with Glyn's mechanical bulldog, and also with the real live Towser. The yarn of Jack, Sam, and Pete, the famous comrades, is entitled

#### "Blinker's Ghost!"

and it is well up to Mr. S. Clarke Hook's usual standard. Order your copy of next Friday's PENNY POPULAR in advance to avoid disappointment.

### WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE STORY?

There are many readers who read all the stories in the PENNY POPULAR, and equally enjoy them. There are some, however, who prefer one story to another. I want these readers to write and let me know which story they like best, or which story they like least.

Don't forget, my chums, I want you to be candid. For instance, if you don't like the Sexton Blake story, then say so; I shall not be offended. I have asked for candid opinions, and I expect you all to be candid.

Every reader who writes to me may do so with the reliance that I shall give his criticism very careful consideration, and, if possible, send him a written reply.

### BRIEF REPLY.

Tommy F. (Birmingham).—Glad you think so highly of the Tom Merry and Jack, Sam, and Pete stories. But what's wrong with the Sexton Blake yarns? You do not say anything about them.

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Jack and Sam opened fire at the yelling savages, and with the steam man in front of them putting up a great defence, they battled desperately for their lives.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Under Fire—A Strange Reception in a Stranger Town—  
Attacked by Savages.

**J**ACK, Sam, and Pete were travelling through Central Africa. Rory was with them, so was Pete's steam man. The sun had set, but as the moon was nearly full, they had a good view of the surrounding country, which was very beautiful.

But what caused them considerable surprise was that on a wooded height appeared a town of considerable size. They could see scores of lights from the houses, and the place was surrounded by a high wall, while at the gates, which appeared to give entrance to the town, was a small fort.

There was a rough roadway up the height, but Pete had scarcely marched his steam man half-way up the height when a cannon-ball rattled past his head, so close that he could feel the windage, and the next moment the boom of a gun reached them.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Dat's a nice way to receive visitors, I must say! It's lucky you weren't standing behind me, Jack or Sammy, else you would hab just caught dat ball!"

"Perhaps your steam man is frightening 'em?" suggested Jack.

"I dunno 'bout dat, but I'm mighty certain dat deir firing is frightening me. Here come some rifle-balls now. Dat first shot came so close dat it seems to me it must hab been a fluke, judging by de way dey are aiming wid deir rifles!"

"There goes the gun again!" exclaimed Sam. "I reckon we had better get under cover of these trees!"

"I dunno, Sammy!" growled Pete. "But it seems to me dat de safest place to stop at is de one dey are aiming at. If dey were to start aiming at de moon, or anything like dat, dey might hit us. Hallo, you dere!" roared Pete. "What do you mean by firing at peaceful men?"

"Who are you?" came an answering shout.

"Jack, Sam, and Pete, you silly old scoundrel!" howled Pete. "We are travellers, and if you ain't an ignorant savage, you ought to know better dan to fire on strangers!"

"Are you armed?"

"Ob course we are, old dunderhead! Do you 'spect men

are going to travel frough de wilds ob Africa unarmed? You will mighty soon find out dat we are armed if you don't stop dat firing!"

"Are you trying to take the town?"

"Golly! What an idiot de man is! How do you suppose free men are going to take a town?"

"There may be more of you. You may be leading savages."

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm got some brilliant ideas, too, old chunk ob lubliness! Savages are more likely to drive us dan we are likely to lead dem; and why do you suppose should we want to lead savages against your town?"

"If you come as friends, advance; but if not, halt, or we fire!"

"Well, seeing dat we ain't foes, we will advance."

Pete marched boldly onward, although he let his steam man go first, so that if there were any more bullets, he might receive them. However, there was no more firing, although when the comrades approached the gates they found them closed, while about a score of men, dressed in khaki uniforms of rather a mixed description, were behind them.

Behind these men stood a very big one, who wore a rusty sword, and held two revolvers in his hands. He was evidently the commander of the force, and he appeared to consider that the commander's correct position was in the rear of his men. It was from this position that he questioned the comrades, and, being apparently satisfied with Jack's replies—for Pete's were not very complimentary—he ordered the gates to be opened, and admitted them to the town.

"I am Governor Gerald Gormly," explained the big man, throwing out his chest to its fullest dimensions. "It is my custom to disarm all strangers who enter this city, but in your case I shall make an exception. I may tell you that we are frequently attacked by savages, and as the lives of all the inhabitants of this city are in my charge, I have to take every precaution for their sakes!"

"Quite so, G. G. G.," answered Pete. "And for your own sake as well!"

"I am not in the habit of discussing matters with niggers, but if you choose to follow me to my hotel you are at liberty to do so."

"Now, what could be kinder dan dat?" exclaimed Pete, THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 213.

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starting his steam man with a suddenness that caused the great Gerald Gormly to utter a suppressed howl, and to leap into the air.

"It's all right, my dear old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Don't be frightened. He's only my steam man!"

"What do you mean, fellow?" demanded Gormly, gazing in wonder at the extraordinary-looking figure. "Do you mean to tell me that that is a figure propelled by—by steam?"

"Well, he's a sort ob double-action steam man. Some parts ob him work wid petrol, and de oders wid steam. Dere's rader a cleber combination. Jack says de cylinder heats de boiler. I don't quite understand all his parts myself, 'cos I hab only taken him to pieces once, and I ain't eber going to take him to pieces again. One ob his springs nearly knocked me into de middle ob next week. Still, de steam man is a bery cleber invention, and he's de only perfect steam man in de world—least, de only one I hab eber seen."

"Do you really mean to tell me that this is not some trick?" exclaimed Gormly, turning towards Jack, as the steam man went marching on in the moonlight. "That there is not a man inside that metal form?"

"That is so!" laughed Jack. "Pete's steam man is perfectly harmless, unless you get too near him when his arms are working, then I would not be responsible for him, because he is very strong."

"But where did you come across the—the thing?" inquired Gormly.

"Pete bought him from a very clever inventor."  
"But—why, it must have cost a very great deal of money. How could a nigger have that money?"

"Oh, Pete has plenty!" laughed Jack. "A few thousand pounds to him are nothing!"

Jack gave that information because he had an idea that it would raise Pete in Gormly's estimation; but he never expected it would make such a wonderful difference as it did.

"My good man," exclaimed Gormly, stepping to Pete's side, though he gave the steam man a wide berth, because the reckless way he was marching gave the impression that he was rather dangerous. "I am well skilled in mechanical matters, and I must compliment you on that wonderful model. I should like to examine your steam man!"

"All right, my dear old hoss," answered Pete cheerfully. "You can do all dat later on; but dis hotel ob yours—can we stop dere for a bit, and get plenty ob food?"

"Certainly; and you will find the charges most moderate. I am the chief magistrate of this town, and they would not dare to charge too much for anything. Everything is according to scale. A man named Jameson is the proprietor, and I will give you a recommendation to him. This is the building."

"Golly! It looks more like a winter palace dat has been turned into a tea-gardens!" exclaimed Pete, as they stopped at a very ancient-looking building. "Who built dis town?"

"I did," answered Gormly. "The whole of it is my design!"

Pete gazed at the great man, and then sighed deeply. He left his steam man in the spacious court of the building, and followed Gormly into an enormous apartment, which was furnished in the most luxurious style, and whose marble floor was spread with costly rugs.

Gormly motioned to the comrades to be seated, and then he struck a gong.

"Spect his beautiful slaves will come to obey his commands," murmured Pete. "I dunno weder Aladdin and his wonderful lamp will also turn up. Oh, golly, golly! Ain't dis spoilt de poetry ob de ting?"

A man in evening-dress entered the room. Had he been in any other dress, he would have looked exactly like a prizefighter. He had a low, receding forehead, short-cropped hair, and a broken nose. He was quite as big as Gormly—that is to say, six feet in height, and proportionately broad.

"This is Jameson, the proprietor of this hotel," said Gormly. "He is one of the most respected citizens that we have in Suane—that is the name of this town, and it was I who gave it that name. Everything here is done with the strictest order, and I, as chief magistrate and head of the police, see that justice is dealt to all. The wealth of the place is enormous, but I will show you more of that later on. I make this hotel my home, as it is more convenient than having a house. Jameson, you will understand that these gentlemen are to have whatever they like to order, provided, of course, that they pay you for it. They are accustomed to living in the very best style, and are not particular as to the amount of their bills!"

"Here, steady, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Jameson looks as dough he could pile up dose bills quite well enough widout your assistance."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 213.

"He will charge you according to a fixed scale. He dare not charge more. You had better take some money in advance, Jameson, and then serve up dinner. I will dine with them, as I have not had time to do so yet. Go!"

"Your orders shall be obeyed, your 'Ighness," said Jameson, bowing low to Gormly. "My shuff has got a thumping fine dinner prepared, and if he don't serve it up to your liking, I'll know the reason why. I'll take ten pound on account, mates."

Jack handed him the money, and he left the room, banging his knuckles against his low forehead by way of a salute to Gormly.

In five minutes the dinner was served, and the comrades sat down to the meal. The food was good, and the comrades did ample justice to it.

Gormly was most friendly towards the comrades, and talked a great deal. When dinner was finished he bid them good-night, and added that he hoped he would see more of them on the morrow.

The comrades were not long in turning in.

Pete was sound asleep when he was awoke by his door being thrown violently open, and Gormly, only partially dressed, rushing into his room with a light.

"Wake up—wake up immediately!" cried the great man. "The gun at the fort has been fired!"

"Well, it ain't at all likely to do any harm to anyone!" growled Pete, turning over and blinking at the candle.

"Fool! The savages are upon us, and we shall need every man to defend the town!"

"Golly! I wish dose savages would come in de daytime. Dey are a mighty nuisance coming dis time ob night, when I am fast asleep! Go away, and tell dem to come back tomorrow morning, and den I'll start fighting dem rader more dan dey like. Good-night, old hoss!"

"The man is worse than a raving maniac!" groaned Gormly. "Get up at once, or we shall be murdered in our beds!"

"I don't see how you'm going to get murdered in your bed, seeing dat you ain't in it. Still, just you buzz off and finish dressing."

"There goes the gun again!"

"Well, it is to be hoped dey are aiming at someone, 'cos he will be all safe den. If dey got aiming wild, dey might hit anoder party who was a mile or so from de spot dey are firing at. Just you go and finish your dressing while I get up."

The great man was satisfied with this. He left the room and went to arouse Jack and Sam, neither of whom believed much in the attack. They knew that the soldiers would fire on the slightest provocation, so, like Pete, they told Gormly to go away while they dressed, and both of them turned over and went to sleep again, while, by that time Pete had filled and lighted his pipe, and gone to sleep with it between his teeth.

Gormly finished his dressing as quickly as he could, and, having buckled on his old sword, and shoved his ancient revolvers in his belt, he went to Pete's room; then, when he found him snoring with a lighted pipe between his teeth, he commenced to rave in a manner that awoke Pete once more.

"What eber is de matter wid you, old hoss?" growled Pete. "Are you accustomed to walk in your sleep?"

"You reckless villain! Why don't you get up to defend the town?"

"Are Jack and Sammy up, old hoss?"

"I expect so. I have called them."

"M'yes! Dat's one ting; but deir getting up in de middle ob de night is quite anoder one. Howeber, you go and see, and if dey are up, I'll do de same."

Gormly found both Jack and Sam fast asleep again; but now a distant war-cry from the savages convinced them that an attack was really being made on the town, and they hurriedly dressed, Pete doing the same.

Gormly wanted Pete to take his steam man, but that worthy did not see the use of it.

"He's no good at a distant fight, old hoss," said Pete. "If de savages get into de town, den I will bring my steam man to help drive dem out; but, in de meantime, he's going to remain where he is. Now lead de way to your fort, and we will see if dere are really any savages dere."

The fort was a very ancient building, and although a few shells would have knocked it to pieces in a few minutes, it would be proof against the savages' bows and arrows.

It was surrounded by high walls, and the comrades gained entrance through an iron-barred gate.

All the soldiers were in the fort, and they were firing at a vast number of savages who were advancing on the town, seeking cover behind every bush they came to.

The soldiers' aim, however, appeared to be very wild, and they were all in a state of great excitement.



"Keep up the fire!" cried Gormly. "They cannot take this fort!"

"Perhaps not," said Pete; "but they could starve you out if they once got into the town. Does the wall surround the whole place?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, your one chance is to try to keep them out. If you stick in this fort they will enter the town, and then they are absolutely certain to fire it, and the probabilities are that not one of the inhabitants would escape."

"You can take a few of the soldiers!" gasped Gormly. "I shall remain in this fort to command the rest. I cannot spare you more than three men."

"Then you can keep your three men!" answered Sam. "I reckon they are no good to us. And I tell you what I believe, Gormly, and that is that you don't care much for the lives of the inhabitants so long as you escape yourself!"

"That is false! But my place of duty is at the head of my soldiers."

"In a place of safety, where neither you nor the soldiers are likely to get hurt!" retorted Sam. "That may be your place, but it is not the place a brave man would choose. For the sake of the inhabitants we shall do our best to keep the enemy out of the town, and if the inhabitants will only help us we may succeed. Come on, boys! It is useless speaking to the fellow. He is half mad with terror, and about as much use in defending the town as an infant."

At any other time Gormly would have been furious at Sam's words, but he was now so frightened that he could think of nothing but his own safety.

The comrades left the fort, and as they made their way along the narrow street they met many of the inhabitants, who had hurriedly dressed and rushed from their houses on hearing the savages' war-cry. To all they met they gave the advice to return to their own houses, and defend them to the death, also to fire on any savages who entered the town; and this advice was taken by most of them.

Spears and arrows, however, were falling thickly all over the place, and the comrades knew that the savages must have assembled in very large numbers.

An arrow whizzed past Sam's face. There was nothing strange in this, for they were falling thickly all around; but this arrow came from the town, and the next moment a second one pierced Jack's coat.

"Come out of the moonlight," said Jack quietly. "Get behind this house. The savages must have gained the town already. It would appear as though they had got into one of the buildings, and were trying to pick us off from there."

"Seems to me dat de best ting we can do is to kick dose savages out ob de town, and den explain to dem dat dey ain't got de right to be here," said Pete.

"I reckon we shall have to locate them first," said Sam. "I wouldn't be surprised if they have got into that tall house over there. It looks like an empty one. Shall we come and see?"

"Suttinly, Sammy," answered Pete, making a move in that direction. But he had scarcely stepped into the moonlight when half a dozen arrows sped towards him, and had he not leapt back the chances are he would have been struck.

"Stop a moment!" exclaimed Jack. "We will attack them in the rear! We should be an easy mark for them if we approached the house by the front. Come this way!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Besieged Town—The Combat—How the Steam Man Decided Matters.

JACK led the way along the street, keeping in the dark shadows thrown by the houses, and, turning down the first alley he came to, got into the street which ran at the back of the empty house from which the missiles had appeared to come from. There was a small yard at the back of the building, and the door had been forced open, as, also, had the door of the house, and now the comrades had no doubt that the savages were inside the building, although what their numbers were they had not the slightest notion.

"We must drive dem from de place, boys," whispered Pete. "It won't do to hab a lot ob savages in de town. Be quiet, Rory. You ain't to make de slightest sound. Shall we go up? Nunno, you don't, Jack! I'm going first. You see, I am black, so dat dey won't see me in de darkness. You stop dere, Rory!"

Rory did not care for that command, nevertheless he obeyed it, and the comrades crept up the stairs, Pete leading the way.

The few windows there were in the house were very small, and, in spite of the moonlight, Pete had no easy matter in groping his way up the narrow staircase.

Then he knew at any moment he might come in contact with a number of savages, and so he held his revolver in readiness.

Pete had gained the top floor of the building, which was a tall one, and he was standing near a small window, when an arrow passed beneath his arm, piercing his coat at the left side. It was very close to his heart.

"Come out of the moonlight, you silly owl," murmured Sam, drawing him aside. "Do you want to be killed, so that Jack and I can have the unusual sight of a dead donkey?"

"You ain't at all complimentary, Sammy, and I'm surprised at you. You ought to know dat I ain't anything like a donkey when I'm alive, and as I ain't anything like dead, I couldn't be anything like one den. Now, stop your noise, and let's find out where dose savages are, 'cos it's always best to know where your enemy is, in case you want to shoot him."

More arrows came in their direction, and as Pete had an idea that the savages' aim was only guided by the sound of their voices, it being quite dark at the spot where they now stood, he made his voice appear to come from some distance along the passage, and immediately they heard the sound of arrows striking into the woodwork.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete, still making use of his ventriloquism. "I hope dey ain't ghostly savages, 'cos I don't care to fight wid ghosts. I would whistle Rory up, only I'm afraid he would get shot."

"I reckon we shall be able to locate them directly!" exclaimed Sam. "Just do a little talking, and make your voice come from the middle of next week."

"What, sort ob faint? However I can do it bof ways. Listen to dis little lot. P'raps it will startle de savages."

It was enough to startle anyone, for Pete commenced in a low wail, which grew louder and louder until it rose to a howl that would have drowned the sweet melody of a pleasure steamer's siren. It really did not sound human.

Pete was glancing upwards, and through a trapdoor between the ceiling and the roof he saw the arm of a savage, in the hand of which was a spear.

"Got you first time!" cried Pete, leaping upwards, and gripping the savage's wrist. "Something has got to come dis time."

It did, and it was the savage. He fell to the floor in a heap, and with a thud that must have hurt him; but he was on his feet in an instant, although Pete had possession of the spear, and as the savage leapt down the stairs, Pete gave him a prod that caused him to utter a wild howl, and tumble down the remainder of the flight. But he did not stop even on that landing. Darting down the second flight of stairs, he disappeared in the darkness, and Pete remained listening with a grin on his face.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he roared, as some yells rang out. "I tought Rory would dispute dat passage. You can hear him disputing it if you listen. Dat savage didn't wear so many clothes, but he will wear less by de time he leaves dis building. Golly! Do you hear dat?"

It was the savages' war-cry, and it appeared to come from the direction of the hotel. That large numbers of the fierce foe had gained the town there could not be a doubt, and as the comrades had little faith in the powers of the inhabitants to drive them out, they determined to go to the rescue.

There was an open space in front of the hotel, and when the comrades reached it they saw a large number of savages fiercely attacking the front door of the building, while shots were being poured into their midst from the men inside.

"We must try the back entrance!" cried Jack. "Quick, this way! I hope we shall be in time!"

Darting round by a narrow turning, they gained the back of the building, and even before they knocked, the door was opened by Jameson.

"I was going to make a bolt of it," he explained. "I can't hold out agin that throng; still, as you have come, we may be able to make a better fight."

"Do you mean to say that you were going to leave the people in the place to their fate?" exclaimed Jack, in disgust.

"Well, it ain't no good all of us dying," growled Jameson, refasting the heavy door.

"Such cowardice is disgusting!" exclaimed Jack. "Come this way, boys! We will see what can be done!"

The comrades poured some shots from the windows, but, unfortunately, the savages who were bursting the door down were protected by the portico, and Jack saw at once that it would be impossible to prevent their gaining an entry.

"It's all right, Jack!" exclaimed Pete. "Dere are women in dis hotel, and we hab got to protect dem somehow. I dunno ob a man more likely to do dat wid satisfaction dan my steam man. Come along into de hall, old hoss, you'm got to do some fighting. Dis way to London, if you please! Yah, yah, yah! He walks like a well-bred pugdog—just as dough de ground was too hot for him."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 213.

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Having got his steam man in the hall, Pete placed him just in front of the door, and then he started his arms going, while Jack extinguished the lamp, knowing that when the door gave way there would be sufficient light from the moon for them to see their foes, while the savages would not be able to see them in the hall.

Now the door fell in with a crash, and Jack and Sam opened fire with their revolvers; but the steam man appeared to terrify the ignorant savages far more than the bullets.

The great form was visible in the moonlight, and as the savages tried to rush in they were struck down on every side by the swinging arms.

Pete drew his axe, and fought beside his steam man. He knew that it meant death, or worse, to all in the hotel if those savages once gained an entry, and he was determined that they never should while his own life lasted.

Twice the savages charged, and twice they were driven back, while many of their wounded lay on the ground.

There was a pause now, and this is where the savages made their mistake, for it gave the comrades time to reload.

The third rush was far from furious, and now the savages came in greater numbers.

Yelling at the top of their voices, they dashed into the place. Some of them tried to hurl the steam man aside, but he struck them down with every blow he dealt, and he was dealing them with remarkable rapidity. A few of the savages succeeded in getting past, but they were hurled back by the comrades, and at last the enemy appeared to be getting disheartened.

"Charge, boys!" roared Pete, making his steam man march from the place right into the very midst of the savage throng.

The effect was extraordinary. The savages scattered in all directions, while those who were not so lucky as to escape the swinging arms were hurled to the ground, and the steam man went marching over them, causing them to yell worse than ever, for he was no light weight, and his shoes were spiked.

And now the comrades dashed into the midst of the dismayed throng, and this completed the panic. The savages scattered in all directions, their one aim appearing to be to escape from the town.

It was now that Gormly and his men came on the scene. He saw that the victory was gained, and he gave orders to his men to chase the savages from the town, while he himself entered the hotel, for he did not want to risk the life of such an important personage as himself.

"Your steam man has done good work, Pete," he said. "Are you prepared to accept fifty pounds for him?"

"I ain't selling him for any price. You needn't boder to make any furdur offer, 'cos I sha'n't accept it."

"You know what will be the result. He will be confiscated. That is my law."

"All right, old hoss," answered Pete. "My law is dat de man who orders his confiscation gets hanged and buried, wid a nice-sized slab ob marble ober him, and he's to be stamped down like— Why, what's de old hoss jumping away for like dat?" added Pete, as Gormly sprang away from Pete's upraised foot. "He must hab got stung by a wapse, or someting. Ain't you feeling well, old chicken?"

"You stupid brute!" snarled Gormly. "I don't want you to smash my foot."

"Look at dat now! Still, it is getting late, or, rader, early, 'cos I believe day is just breaking. Now, it is mighty certain dat de savages won't attack de town in de daylight, and derefore I am going to bed to finish my night's rest."

Jack and Sam thought this was a good idea, and so they did the same, but Gormly felt far too anxious to go to bed. He was no earthly use up, but he felt he was, and so, seating himself in an easy-chair, he waited for his soldiers' return, and when they came in he let them have all the refreshments they required at Jameson's expense.

As they preferred liquid refreshment, they became very noisy, but the comrades managed to sleep through it all.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Last Fight—Through Fire—How Gormly was Not Hanged.

THERE was a good deal of commotion in the town again the next evening. The men could see the savages lurking in the bushes when they went to the upper storeys of their houses, and no one doubted that there would be a second attack that night. Although they were in a better position to defend the town now, there was a good deal of uneasiness, as the force of savages was a very large one.

The comrades, being far more accustomed to such perils, did not trouble themselves about the matter. They smoked their pipes and chatted as calmly as though no danger were

at hand, and about ten o'clock they actually went to their bed-rooms, although they did not undress.

At a little before midnight the ominous war-cry of the savages awoke them, and, hurrying from the building, in which Pete had now left Rory for safety, they reached the street just as the firing commenced.

The savages were attacking the town from every side, but now they were met with a heavy fire. Sam guessed by the rapidity of the firing that many of the bullets were going wide of the mark. However, it was evident that a great many men had been armed, and on this occasion the savages were likely to meet with a warm reception.

Presently the comrades, who appeared to be the only people in the street, met a party of savages darting along, and, opening fire on them, they drove them back.

"I tell you what it is, boys!" exclaimed Pete. "If we ain't speared by de savages, we are most bound to be shot by de inhabitants. You see, dey will easily mistake us for de foe in de light ob de moon. Suppose we get into dat empty house. It will be much more satisfactory fighting under cover dan in de open, and dat being an empty house is just de place de savages are likely to fire."

This appeared to be feasible enough, and the comrades made their way towards the empty house.

As far as they could tell, no one was in it, and they ascended to the upper floor, which commanded a view of the street.

The firing was as heavy as ever, and it was evident that the inhabitants were well provided with ammunition.

Above the din of the battle every now and then the yell of a savage told that a bullet had found its mark; but as the fierce war-cries rang out, the comrades knew that a very large force of savages must have gained the town.

The strange thing was that very few passed along the main street. Possibly they had found the firing too hot for them; and although Gormly had stationed a large force along the houses in the main street, he had taken no precaution of protecting the narrow alleys, of which there were a good many in the town.

This was an oversight that Jack would not have been guilty of, as it gave the savages opportunities of firing the buildings, which was the one thing that Jack dreaded.

"The man is an utter idiot!" exclaimed Jack, at last. "He is making no use of his soldiers. What he ought to do now is to sweep the yelling wretches from the town."

"I don't tink he has got anybody to lead dem," observed Pete.

"Then why doesn't he lead them himself?"

"Golly! You'm expecting a mighty lot more ob Gormly dan he's going to execute!" exclaimed Pete. "He might feel inclined to lead dem in a review, if he didn't hab to walk too far, but de man ain't going to lead dem in a real battle, where he might get speared. De savages ain't making much noise, eider. Neber could tell why dey always yell when dey are going into battle. Seems to me a stupid thing to do, 'cos it lets de enemy know dey are coming. Hi, golly! What's all dis?"

"All what?" inquired Sam.

"I dunno, Sammy, but dere's a sound mighty like de rush ob fire. Dis way to London!"

Pete opened the door, and as he did so a vast volume of smoke poured into the place.

Flames were leaping through it, and now the comrades could distinctly hear the angry crackle of the fire.

The savages had set fire to the building they were in, and the staircase was already a mass of flames, while the fire was spreading with awful rapidity.

To descend by the staircase was quite impossible, and even if they had been able to do so, it was nearly certain that there would have been savages at the bottom ready to cut them off.

"Seems to me dat our only way ob escape is frough dat trapdoor, boys!" cried Pete, hurrying to it.

It was open, and, seizing Sam round the body, he hoisted him up until he could catch hold of the edge of the opening. Directly Sam had got through, Pete hoisted Jack up. Then, taking a run, he gave a tremendous leap, and just caught the opening. The next moment he was in the loft.

"Spect we had better hab dis trapdoor closed," observed Pete, slamming it down. "Just strike a light, Sammy. Dere's bound to be an opening leading on to de roof, and if dere ain't we shall hab to make one."

Sam struck a match, and they found the opening of which Pete was in search close to the lower trapdoor. To gain the roof now was an easy matter, but ere they gained it the flames were pouring into the loft, and the comrades knew that the roof would soon be on fire.

The roof sloped so steeply that the greatest caution was needed to get along it, and it was pretty evident that the vindictive savages knew that some of their foes were in the



burning building, and were keeping watch for their escape, because the comrades had no sooner gained the roof than arrows commenced to fall on it.

Probably the arrows were shot straight into the air so as to drop on the roof. No savages were in sight, and as the comrades had not the slightest idea where they were concealed, they were unable to return the fire.

They crept along towards the adjoining house, but ere they reached it a mass of fire burst through the roof, a large portion of which now fell in behind them, and when they reached the end of the building, the comrades found to their dismay that an alley ran between it and the next building.

It is true that the width of the opening was not very great, and if the roof on which they stood had been flat, the leap would have been more dangerous than difficult. As it was, it appeared to be absolutely impossible to take such a leap, for both roofs sloped to the fronts of the houses, so that it was impossible to take any run to clear the leap; while even if it had been cleared, the landing was equally dangerous.

And the height of the houses was so great, that a fall from them into the street beneath would have been almost certain death.

Pete, who led the way, turned when he reached the edge of the roof; but he saw no hope in that direction, for the fire had already cut off their retreat.

"We'm got to jump, boys," he said, standing on the edge of the sloping roof, and preparing for the awful leap.

Both Jack and Sam believed his task was an impossible one; but they said nothing, as it was better than being burnt alive, and that was the only alternative.

Pete planted his feet as firmly as possible, his left one being considerably higher than his right, owing to the steep slope of the roof.

For a moment he swung his arms to and fro, then, bending his knees, he leapt into space, and the next moment he landed on the opposite roof, and flung himself sideways, so as to avoid sliding off it.

"Stop where you are, boys!" cried Pete. "I hab been an acrobat, you know, and am rader used to taking dose sorts ob leaps—more or less—generally less. Catch dis lasso, Sammy. Dat's right. I tink dere's time. Just smash de roof frough wid your axe, Jack, till you come to 'one ob de beams, and make de lasso fast to dat."

As Jack did as directed, Pete did the same, and fastened his end of the lasso to the beam which supported the roof.

"De lasso is bound to bear, boys," cried Pete. "All you hab got to make sure ob is dat you hab tied it securely."

"It is perfectly safe this end," answered Jack. "Den across you come. It makes no difference who comes first. Keeping one leg ober de rope is de easjest way."

Jack and Sam both got across in safety, and making their way to the trapdoor in the roof, Pete wrenched it open with his axe.

"In much de same place as next door," observed Pete, climbing through the opening; "and here's de inner trapdoor. Mind how you come, 'cos de inhabitant ob de house may shoot us in mistake for savages. Hallo, old boss, what's your name?" bawled Pete, shoving his head through the opening.

"Smiles is my name, you busted nigger! What do you mean by entering my house in this fashion?"

"His name is Smiles, Sammy," said Pete, pulling back his head. "He don't look much like smiles, eider. Seems to be vexed wid us for coming frough his roof. Let's hab anoder look at him. Golly! Here comes Mrs. Smiles, and she scales 'bout twenty stone. Good-evening, my dear! Got such a ting as a match?"

Pete had dropped to the floor, and stood facing the irate householders.

Smiles did not look a nice-tempered man at the best of times, and now he looked downright angry. He did not say very much, but, clenching his fist, he let drive at Pete's smiling face with all his strength; and Pete, who had got his pipe in his hand, just bobbed his head down and received the blow on the top of it, much to the damage of Smiles' knuckles.

"Give the villain some more!" yelled Mrs. Smiles. "Go and drownd yourself!" growled her better half. "I'd a sight rayther hit a block of wood. If you want his head hit, you can do it with that 'ere poker. I ain't doing it no more with my fist."

"Now, look here, my dear," exclaimed Pete, as Jack and Sam scrambled through, "don't you see dat de savages are nearly bound to attack dis house? And if dey do dat—I believe I can hear dem 'doing it now—we shall be able to help you and your husband defend it."

The lady saw the force of this argument at once. "So you will," she said. "Come down and do it. How did you get in?"

"Through the roof, my dear."  
"Very well, come down, all three of you, and help defend

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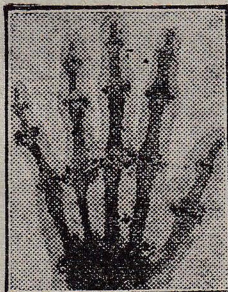
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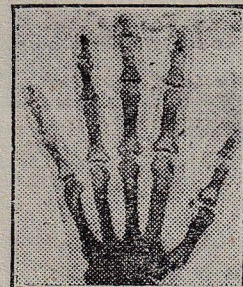
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Hand of a lady, showing the position of the grains of Uric Acid, which cause the excruciating agonies of Rheumatism. Note the distorted fingers.



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the place. You stay where you are, Smiles. I won't have you getting into danger."

"I must help 'em, missus."

"I tell you that you sha'n't!"

"Oh, go and drown yourself! I will."

"You'll do which?"

"Stay here, missus," growled Smiles. "As you say, a nigger more or less don't count, so if he gets shot it won't matter."

As Pete had surmised, the savages did attack the house, and they very quickly burst the front door open; but then they met with a reception that they had not bargained for.

The three comrades fought side by side, while Mrs. Smiles fought with her husband. To do him credit, he wanted to join the comrades, but she positively refused to allow him to do so; and as her portly form filled the passage, he could not get past her, although he struggled to do so.

The combat was not of long duration, for a number of savages came rushing along the street, and as they shouted out something to the combatants, they also fled.

The next moment a number of infuriated inhabitants came rushing along, shouting and firing as they came.

"Tell you what it is, boys," exclaimed Pete, "de combat is about ober. De savages are practically routed. I don't believe dat dey will try to attack dis town again. Dey must hab met wid heavy losses. Suppose we get back to de hotel. Day is breaking."

Gormly was in the hotel, and he appeared to know rather less about the fight than did the comrades. However, he pretended to know a good deal more, and he explained to them how the splendid victory was gained.

"You make me so tired, old hoss, dat I'm going to bed," said Pete, in the middle of the explanation.

"That is an example that I am going to follow," said Jack.

"And I reckon I am going to do the same," said Sam.

"In dat case, old hoss, you had better tell de rest ob de story to de footstool, unless you like to hab a smash at de gong, and tell it again to de waiter. I 'spect you hab told it to him once, but it would be an interesting story if you could only get anyone soft enough to believe it. I will tell you de true story 'bout de matter to-morrow morning."

These remarks made Gormly very savage. His soldiers were clearing the town of the savages, and he did not like to go to bed, as it would look so badly, and his soldiers would be sure to come there for refreshments when they had finished fighting.

Pete was first up the following morning, and he saw that Jameson prepared an ample breakfast for them.

"You will cart dat little lot upstairs, old hoss," said Pete, when the eggs and bacon were cooked, "and den you will take up de remains ob de roast beef, 'cos we may as well finish dat off before we go. We'm going dis morning."

"No, you ain't. Govenor Gormly says he ain't going to let you take that steam man out of the town, so if you go you will have to go without him."

"Well, you attend to de breakfast, and I will attend to Gormly. He ain't such a terrible man as you all seem to tink, and how you can let him fool you as he does is more dan I can understand. However, dat is a matter for your consideration, and as it ain't got anything to do wid me, I won't boder myself about it. I ought really to hab made you cook some fowls, 'cos dey wouldn't go badly wid de joint ob beef. Still, I dare say we shall be able to make dat enough."

"Bust me!" gasped Jameson. "Why, there was about sixteen pounds of beef there yesterday!"

"As much as dat? Still, we disconsumed some ob it for dinner last night. However, I can see dere's enough for breakfast, wid de eggs and bacon. Trot it up!"

When Gormly saw the style of breakfast they had got, he decided to join them; but his manner towards Pete was very cold.

"You don't seem to be as cheerful as you ought to be, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete, helping himself to some roast beef, when all the eggs and bacon had disappeared.

"I object to be insulted by a nigger!"

"Well, I don't wonder at dat. You ought to punch a nigger's head if he starts insulting you. A little more coffee, Sammy, and you had really better hab some ob dis beef.

It's mighty good. Now den, Gormly, we'm going to start from de town dis morning, 'cos we hab had enough ob your company. I dunno weder you want to confiscate de steam man, 'cos you'm quite welcome to do so if you like."

"I cannot alter the laws of the town. The thing is of general utility, and the public must benefit by it."

"Den am I to consider dat he's confiscated?"

"Certainly."

"All right. It's no good talking about what can't be helped. At de same time, I'm sorry to part wid de old hoss, 'cos he's been ob some service to us, one way and anoder. I suppose you could not make one like him, Jack?"

"I could not!" exclaimed Jack. "I found putting him together quite as much as I could do."

Gormly rose to strike the gong, but Pete stopped him.

"I can't hab de waiter brought into de room."

"I want a cigar."

"Den you can't hab it. I won't hab Jameson in de room, and I won't let you go out ob it."

"Your impertinence is beyond all bounds, fellow!"

"Well, I'm sorry for dat, my poor old hoss!" said Pete, shoving him into a chair. "Just guard him, Rory, and if he attempts to move, just you bite him, dough not too severely, because—"

"Oh, never mind because!" came a high-pitched voice from Rory's direction; and that sagacious animal at once commenced to move his jaws at a sign from his master, because he understood that he was expected to talk. "You are too long-winded, Pete."

"You do your duty, and shut up, Rory!" said Pete, in his natural voice, while Gormly's eyes dilated with surprise.

He rubbed his eyes as though to make sure that he was awake.

"I don't understand this foolery!" he growled. "If you are going to leave the town, you had better go!"

"Well, I tink we'm 'bout ready now, boys!" exclaimed Pete. "Funny ting how sorry I am to leabe de steam man behind. Still, I might hab got tired ob him, and p'r'aps it's better dat we part now."

Pete glanced round the room, and then he flung his lasso, which he had already shortened a little, over the cornice-pole, and made a noose in the end.

Gormly attempted to shift his position, but Rory approached him, and uttered such an angry growl that he quickly resumed his seat.

"My poor old hoss," exclaimed Pete, placing his hand on his shoulder, "I am going to hang you! Don't you see dat you hab confiscated my steam man, and my law was dat de man who did dat had got to be hanged? Step dis way. Nunno, you must come. I will do it as painlessly as possible."

"Jack," yelled Gormly, "I appeal to you!"

"It is perfectly useless doing that," said Jack calmly, and looking very serious. "I am sorry for you, Gormly; all the same, you have got to be hanged. Fire ahead, Pete! Put the poor creature out of his state of suspense."

"But I am going to put him into a state ob suspense, Jack!" exclaimed Pete, dragging the now terrified man towards what he foolishly imagined was the fatal noose.

"Of course, I—er—was only joking when I spoke about confiscating the steam man!" he cried.

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete, slipping the noose over his head. "Seems a pity now we hab got so far—eh?"

"No, no; no such thing. I am an honest man."

"Well, I am glad you told me dat, old hoss, 'cos I should neber hab noticed it. I will tell you what we will do. We will all go from de town togeder. You shall come wid us, and if you change your mind, I will change your sentence to shooting instead ob hanging. Dis way to London! Bring up de steam-man, Jack, 'cos I want to be ready to shoot Gormly in case he changes his mind!"

And thus they marched from the town, the steam-man leading the way, while Pete held a revolver in his right hand.

Needless to say, Gormly did not change his mind, and when they had got a couple of miles from the town, Pete released him, and told him to go back, an order that the great man promptly obeyed, while as he went he heard Pete's roars of laughter.

THE END.

A Grand Long, Complete Story of JACK, SAM, and PETE in Next Friday's issue, entitled:

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