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The POPULAR

Complete
Story Weekly

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EVERY
TUESDAY.

Week Ending
April 6th, 1929.
New Series.
No. 532.



IN THE
GRIP OF A
SANDSTORM!

*A Thrilling Story
of Schoolboys' Peril in the Desert!*

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This week's list of birthday dates, and special claims coupon, appear on page 17.

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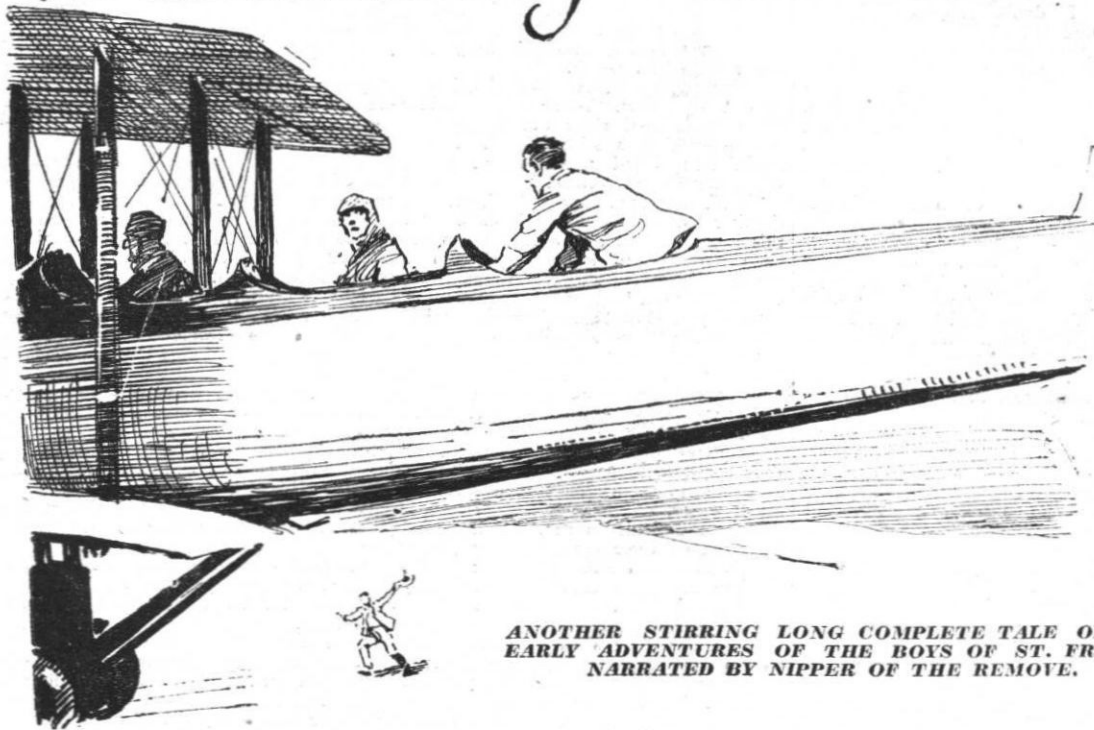
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THIS COUPON IS ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL APRIL 13th, 1929.
POPULAR. **APRIL 6th, 1929.**

SCHOOLBOYS IN THE DESERT!

Across the burning desert rages the simoom, tearing up the sand into gigantic, overpowering clouds, and lashing and whipping at the little caravan that crouches fearfully near the ground in its path. In that caravan are the St. Frank's, Adventurers—experiencing yet another peril on their eventful African journey!

The TERROR of the DESERT!



ANOTHER STIRRING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S, NARRATED BY NIPPER OF THE REMOVE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Fearful Ordeal!

"PERHAPS they're all dead by this time!" said Handforth gloomily.

"Oh, don't be so jolly gloomy!" growled Watson.

"How can I be jolly, you ass, if I'm gloomy?" demanded Handforth, who was always ready for an argument. "I wish you'd speak decent English!"

The truth was that the whole party was in a state of nerves. They were trekking across the African desert on camelback—Handforth and five other juniors, two seniors, and Dr. Brett, Umlosi and Simon Grell.

Their destination was the oasis of El Safra, and their object was to find the treasure which, according to the mysterious gold locket belonging to Sir Crawford Grey, was lying buried there.

Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore and myself had gone on in advance, by aeroplane; and, had Dr. Brett's party but known it, we had already "lifted" the treasure. The camel-riders, however, did not know this, but they knew that our enemy, Captain Nixon, had tampered with the controls of our aeroplane before we left! They had had word of this dastardly deed from Nixon's own confederate, Jake Starkey, who stopped short of murder, and so had managed to convey a secret warning. Thanks to Handforth's forgetfulness, however, the warning reached them after we had started on the flight. Hence their terrible anxiety regarding our fate!

If they had only known that the gov'nor had detected Nixon's villainy! But they didn't know, and their greatest wish was to arrive at the oasis as quickly as possible. Therefore the

camels were urged to go their fastest—and this was not a very easy task. For camels are obstinate brutes, and will only go if the fit takes them.

The march was quite successful during the greater part of the first day. Brett reckoned to be at El Safra by the following morning if all went well. It seemed, however, that all would not go well.

For the sky began to look ominous soon after midday had passed.

"Wau! I like not the appearance of the sun, my master!" exclaimed Umlosi, who was riding next to Dr. Brett at the head of the expedition. "Methinks there is trouble not far distant. I am sorely disturbed in mind."

"There's a sandstorm brewing somewhere, Umlosi," said Brett. "But it will very probably miss us altogether. Let's hope so, at all events."

Through the afternoon the party continued its trek across the endless sands. And the air became hotter and more humid. Everybody was in a state of discomfort, but the water supply was plentiful. And this eased matters a lot.

When the sun was getting low in the heavens the first real sign of the approaching trouble became manifest. The camels were irritable and restless—although, of course, there was nothing very remarkable in this. Camels are never particular about their manners.

But just at present they were more obstinate than usual, and it was quite clear that they knew more about the weather signs than we did. The Arabs with us, who had been plodding along calmly all the afternoon, advised a halt.

"What's up now?" demanded Handforth, who was with the other juniors. "What the dickens do we want to stop here for? We're not going to camp now—there's hours of daylight left."

Simon Grell, who was near by, looked at the sky.

"I reckon there's something bad on the way, sir," he remarked. "I don't like the look of the sky at all. We're going to have a change for the worse—an' I reckon it'll be a mighty quick change."

"Oh, it's nothing, surely?" said Grey.

But the Arabs knew more about it than the St. Frank's juniors. The horizon on all sides had vanished into a thick, coppery haze, and it was difficult to say where the sky ended and where the desert began. They seemed to be merged.

And the sun, low down in the heavens, had taken on an ominous, bronze hue. The sky itself was dull yellow.

"I fear that disaster will overtake us if we do not make all haste to afford ourselves protection," said Umlosi solemnly. "It is not my wish to cast gloom over all, but these signs in the heavens are too plain to be ignored. We are in a strange country, and I like it not."

"It isn't very pleasant, I'll agree," said Fenton.

"Ere long this dreadful calm will vanish, and then a wind, even as the breath of a dragon, will come sweeping down upon us," said Umlosi. "Thou art wise, my master, in making preparations."

"It'll be a sandstorm, I'm afraid," said Brett. "And they are ugly cus-

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tomers in this region. We shall be lucky if we come out of it unhurt."

"Wise words, O man of medicine," said the Kutana chief. "Even as thou sayest, the luck will be great if we all live to see another dawn."

"Cheerful boulder, isn't he?" grunted Morrow.

"Well, I don't suppose he's far wrong," said Handforth.

"My father once told me about a sandstorm, my dear friends," put in Nicodemus Trotwood. "He was travelling in the Libyan Desert—which is a long way from here—and he nearly lost his life."

"Let's hope you don't lose yours, Nicky," said Handforth.

He was to remember those words not very long afterwards.

The juniors tried to appear careless and unconcerned. But, of course, they were all rather scared. And the signs in the sky were really enough to scare anybody. And they had been in Africa long enough to know that a simoom is a dreadful phenomenon—an awful experience to pass through.

It was a comfort to know that sandstorms are, as a rule, of short duration. They are frequently quite long enough, however, to kill every member—animal and human being—of a large caravan.

The terrible heat, and the suffocation caused by the fine sand, is always the reason for death. The fine sand is driven with appalling force by the high winds—and there is no shelter in the open desert.

Great hills of sand are moved completely during a simoom. And woe betide a party which happens to be near—for the sand will come and bury them many feet below the surface. And death, in that case, is inevitable.

The preparations were swift. Each member of the party was provided with a huge, closely-woven canvas bag, the top of which could be sealed. Air was admitted through a specially constructed filter. And in each bag, near where the head would lie, was a flask of pure water, with a valve-cap. The water was quite intact, but by simply sucking at the mouthpiece one could obtain the precious fluid.

And the party only just got into their bags in time. If the sand came in huge quantities they would all be buried alive—but that would have to be changed. They were far safer protected from the blinding sands.

The sun had disappeared completely, and premature twilight had fallen—a deep, dense gloom. And the heat was almost suffocating, even before the storm struck the party.

The roar of the storm became louder and louder—and then, all in a second, it seemed, the terrible simoom was upon the adventurers. It took them by surprise, even though they had been expecting it.

It seemed to rage for hour upon hour. The heat had increased almost twenty-fold, and life seemed impossible. And the wind—like the blast of a dynamite charge—was absolutely scorching. The air was filled with clouds of fine, choking sand. The clear atmosphere of the desert was changed into a nightmare of fog—a fog caused by the sand.

Nobody really knew what happened, for nearly every member of the party became dazed and bewildered. But for those flasks of water, placed so handily, it is probable that several members of the expedition would have choked to death.

But the storm was over at last.

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And it had not really been one of the worst of its type. The Arabs, who were well accustomed to such delightful episodes, were not particularly worried. They seemed little the worse for their adventure.

But the boys and Simon Grell were nearly unconscious when the storm had passed. Brett was dazed, but he had all his wits about him. As for Umlosi, he was disgusted with the whole thing—and really none the worse.

Everybody's clothing was filled and choked with sand. Their hair, ears and noses were filled right up. Everybody and everything was smothered. If the storm had lasted much longer death would have been certain.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Handforth, shaking the sand out of his ears. "If this is a sandstorm, then that storm the chap wrote about in the book was a giddy picnic! He didn't know anything about simooms."

"Are you keen to go through another one, Handy?" asked Morrow.

"No jolly fear!" said the redoubtable leader of Study D. "Not me! Once is enough for anybody, I should think. It's a wonder we ain't all dead! Can't we have a bath somewhere?"

They really needed a bath; but all they could do, under the circumstances, was to strip themselves and drink their fill of water.

It was difficult to see, for the sand had entered their eyes, and everything was blurred and indistinct. But it was glorious to know that the storm had passed, and that the danger was over.

Grey and Watson declared that they saw curious flashes of lightning near the ground before the storm actually commenced—they saw the flashes in the distance. That lightning had probably been caused by the friction of the sand on the air.

"It lasted about two hours, didn't it?" gasped Watson chokily.

"Two hours!" exclaimed Dr. Brett. "You may be surprised to know, Watson, that the storm only commenced twelve minutes ago!"

"Oh, you must be mistaken, sir!"

"The actual simoom was not longer than five minutes in duration" said the doctor. "It seemed like hours, didn't it? But now that it is all over we can soon get on the march again—and I judge that we shall have a cool, clear evening."

"That's comforting, anyhow, sir" said Watson.

It was really surprising how quickly the storm had passed. The sky had become clear again, and the evening sun was shining with much brilliance. The spirits of the party rose greatly.

And then came a dreadful shock.

"I don't see Trotwood," said Brett, a few minutes later, looking round him. "Do you know where he is, boys?"

"Trotwood!" echoed Handforth.

"Why, I'd forgotten all about him! He was here when the storm started—"

"You need not tell us that, Handforth," interrupted the doctor. "Perhaps the poor lad was overcome by the heat, and he might still be in his bag. We must look for him."

"Begad!" exclaimed Montie, with much concern. "I hope nothin' has happened to the dear fellow. It would be shockin' if—"

But Tregellis-West did not finish his sentence—he was really afraid to.

And an immediate search was made for Nicodemus Trotwood. Everybody was quite certain that he would be found within a few minutes. But the minutes

passed, and still there was no sign of the missing junior.

And then the anxiety gave place to real concern. Search as they would, they could find no trace whatever of the junior! It was surmised that he had become partially buried in the sand.

And the immediate neighbourhood of the caravan was searched closely and diligently. All to no purpose.

A great deal of excitement was caused by the appearance of the huge biplane. Nelson Lee, Dorrie and I were in that. But, owing to the curious atmospheric conditions, we did not see the caravan.

But they saw us—and they also saw us dip down and disappear behind a great hill of sand a mile or two away. Before any determined effort could be made to reach the spot, the aeroplane soared up again, and made off in the opposite direction.

It was mysterious, but the party was greatly relieved in one sense. For they knew that the aeroplane was in perfect working order, and that Captain Nixon's vile plot had failed.

But Nicodemus Trotwood had gone. The sandstorm had not passed without claiming a victim. The only possible explanation was that he had been buried deep in the sand, and that death had come swiftly.

Until darkness descended the search was continued, although everybody knew that it was hopeless. The very fact that Trotwood was not visible proved beyond question that he had perished—for he could not live under the sand.

And when the caravan moved onwards once more they were a downcast collection of human beings. All the spirit had been taken out of them. One member of the party had been claimed by the desert, and the shock was terrible.

Dr. Brett scarcely knew how he could break the awful news to Nelson Lee. But he had done his best to protect the lives of all those in his charge. And no man could do more than his best.

But it was a ghastly affair, and Dr. Brett was looking years older as he led the party onwards towards El Safra.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Out of the Frying Pan—

NELSON LEE turned his head.

"Ready?" he shouted.

"Go ahead, gov'nor!" I roared. "Everything's O.K.!"

The engines roared with all their enormous power, and the great biplane moved swiftly across the somewhat uneven ground, and then took off beautifully—far better than we had hoped for.

"Excellent!" shouted the gov'nor.

There were still a few hours of daylight left, and our idea was to fly over the desert, searching for a sign of Brett's party, which, we believed, had walked right into the arms of the simoom.

It was a glorious sensation to be flying over that grim plain of sands. Modern civilisation had conquered, and the deserts were no longer impassable. And it exhilarated one to feel that the great sand plains were no longer places of slow and tedious travel.

The sky was not so clear as we should have liked it, and from above a rather curious phenomenon was apparent. There was a kind of haze over the ground, and objects were rendered dull and well-nigh invisible—unless we were passing immediately overhead.

Yet the haze was only visible in patches.

And we found that at a thousand feet a stiff wind was blowing, although all was now calm on the ground. So Nelson Lee descended fairly low, for we didn't wish to be blown out of our course.

We searched for a considerable time, the engines running at half-power. But we saw nothing; there was no sign of any human beings on those baking plains. And we were almost beginning to think of going back.

We had travelled a good distance from the oasis, and we should be in a fine way if we were compelled to descend now.

Lee was wondering if it would be safe to land. It did not seem that it would be—until we all three noticed that the boy below was walking without his feet sinking in.

There was a considerable stretch of smooth surface, and Nelson Lee shut off the engines and glided down. As it turned out, we landed perfectly. It was as though we had descended upon a specially prepared lawn.

And then we saw that the boy was Nicodemus Trotwood!

"Thank Heaven you have come, sir!" he panted huskily.

"How is this, Trotwood?" asked Nelson Lee, as he looked down. "Where are all the others?"

hollow. The storm went over me after that, and I was saved."

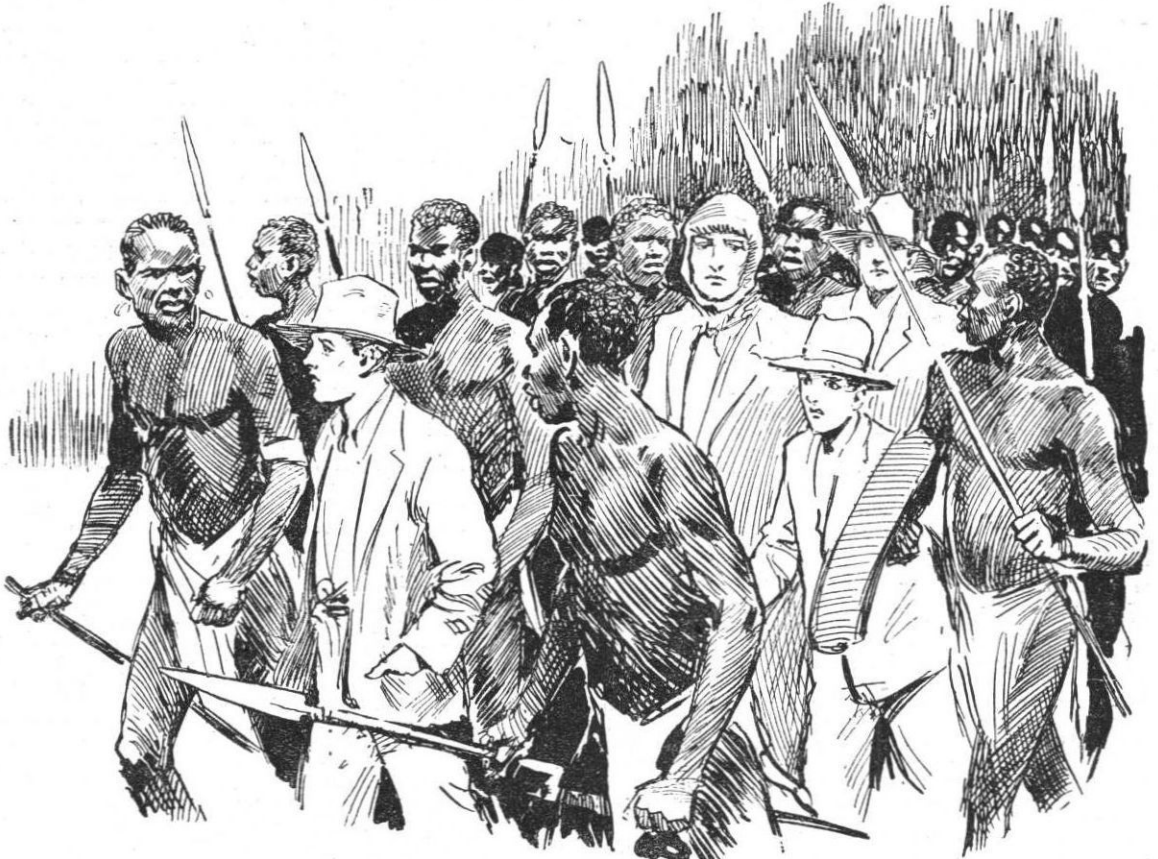
"But what did you do when the simoom had passed?"

"I wandered about, sir, and I was still wandering when I saw you," said Trotwood. "That's all I know, Mr. Lee. I—I must have lost myself; but the others can't be far off, unless—unless—"

"They're all buried?" asked Lee quietly. "Well, I don't think that has happened; but we must make certain."

"How, sir?" I asked huskily.

"We shall ascend to a great height, wind or no wind, and it will be possible for us to see the desert in every direction—and far more satisfactorily than



IN THE HANDS OF CANNIBALS! The blacks charged up to the party, but as soon as they saw that the white men were unarmed, they did not attack. Instead, the cannibals surrounded Nelson Lee & Co. and hustled them over the rough ground to the camp. "Make no attempt to resist, boys!" called out Nelson Lee. (See Chapter 2.)

"In order to get back, I shall have to climb high, so that we may see our objective," said Nelson Lee. "It will be quite visible from here, Nipper, if we get up to five thousand feet."

"But we must search for—"

I paused, and caught my breath. The ground beneath me was hazy, and everything looked drab. But, as we were flying over a kind of sand valley, the floor of which was perfectly plain and smooth, I saw a human figure!

"Stop!" I yelled. "Stop, sir! There's somebody down there!"

"Yes, I saw him, my lad," said Lee.

He banked the machine over, and we swung round. Then, dipping lower into the sand valley, we recognised the figure as that of a schoolboy. He was certainly one of Dr. Brett's party.

"Great Scott!" I yelled. "Where are the others?"

I was filled with concern; but Nelson

Trotwood was certainly looking bad. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was sickly in hue. But he managed to climb up the chassis, and scrambled into the passenger seat where Dorrie was lounging.

"Out with it, young man!" said his lordship, with a queer note in his voice. "What has happened to Umlosi? Where is Brett? Where are the others?"

"I—I don't know, sir," said Trotwood, terror in his eyes. "A sand-storm came upon us, and we got into bags for protection. But mine didn't close properly, and in the thick of the storm I was nearly suffocated."

"What did you do?" asked Lee.

"I staggered about for some time, sir," said the junior. "I don't remember much. The air was so thick that I didn't know anything. I just dragged myself along, helped by the wind. Then I tripped, and rolled deep down into a

aimlessly flying about near the ground," said the gov'nor. "We are fortunate in having such a fine stretch of sand just here."

"There are plenty of stretches the same, sir," I said. "We needn't have been scared about being forced to come down in the desert. This old bus is capable of anything—she's a ripper!"

The engines were still ticking over, and after opening the throttle, Lee taxied the machine for some distance, turned, and then opened right out. We took the air without trouble and soared aloft.

Trotwood was almost beaten, and he had collapsed beside Dorrie, who was busily administering brandy and water. Meanwhile, the gov'nor and I were eagerly searching the ground beneath us.

We found that the haze was not so apparent when we got high up. But after reaching an altitude of a thousand feet the wind was really bad. Not particularly strong, but gusty.

I sent the aeroplane reeling over from side to side, and Nelson Lee had all he could do to keep us on an even keel. Higher and higher we rose, and then our terrible fears were allayed.

For, right away in the west, the haze was clearer, and through it we could see many tiny dots in the desert. Quivering with excitement, I seized the binoculars, and applied them to my eyes.

The little dots sprang into camels and human beings. I could even distinguish the white people from the Arabs.

"I can see Brett!" I jerked out. "Yes, and there's Grell, and old Umlosi, and Fenton, and Morrow!"

"Good!" said the gov'nor. "But what about the boys?"

"There are five, sir—that's all of them," I ejaculated, with great relief. "That means to say they're all O.K. Thank goodness! Steer over in that direction, sir, and let 'em see us."

"It sounds easier than it actually is," said Lee grimly.

For the wind was getting more gusty with every minute that passed. And we now began to experience a new sensation. Clouds seemed to be forming, for we continually passed through masses of mist.

In order to avoid these, Nelson Lee rose higher. And by the time we had attained another two thousand feet the desert was lost. All we could see was thick masses of misty cloud banks a thousand feet beneath us. But we were flying in comparatively calm air.

"I'm afraid we've got ourselves into a fix, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "We can only steer by compass now—and it is certainly hopeless for us to find the caravan. However, we know that all are safe, so it does not matter much. Our main concern is to locate the oasis."

"Perhaps these clouds will disperse soon, sir," I said hopefully. "Anyhow, wouldn't it be as well to dive through them?"

"Perhaps you are right, young 'un," agreed the gov'nor.

And so we dived down rather steeply. But before we actually reached the cloud banks something seemed to take hold of our machine underneath, and to pitch it over sideways.

Dorrie and Trotwood were nearly flung out, and I only just managed to save myself in the nick of time.

The aeroplane tipped over, rolled on its wing tips in a most sickening manner, performed a nose dive, and then Nelson Lee managed to get her back on an even keel—with the wind behind us.

And what a wind!

It pushed us along at a speed of about two hundred miles an hour—and I am not exaggerating. It was a roaring gale, and none of us had been ready for it. I suppose it was an after-effect of the simoom, but only affecting the upper air. On the desert a dead calm reigned, probably.

We swayed terribly, dipped this way and that, and bumped about in the most terrifying manner. Lee attempted to climb the machine higher, but the wind was altogether too violent.

To descend into the cloud during that gale would have been madness, so we could only continue as we were going. And we were travelling away from the oasis all the time.

Once Nelson Lee tried to turn, so that

we should fight against the wind—and so get back to El Safra. But that once was quite enough. Before the turn was half made the wind took hold of us.

The giant machine was lifted like a straw, in spite of the fact that the engines were running "all out." Over we went, and we should have performed something like a loop if the gov'nor had not been smart; and looping on such a machine is not exactly a safe game. A twin-engined biplane is not made for "stunting," like a bantam scout.

We got back to our proper position with difficulty, and then continued our headlong flight.

"Where the dickens shall we get to, sir?" I asked at last.

"Heaven alone knows, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "But we shall have plenty of petrol, in any case. We are using very little now—I have throttled down considerably—and two of the tanks are still quite full. No matter where we get, we can easily fly back to Zambi, or direct to the coast. The great difficulty will be in landing—and darkness will soon be on us."

"We're in an unholy mess!" I declared. "Who on earth dreamed that this little tornado was raging up here?"

Another ten minutes elapsed, during which time the speedometer indicated that we were travelling at one hundred and eighty miles an hour. It was the wind which was carrying us along.

But, while there was still a fair amount of daylight, we noticed that the gale was losing its strength. And the clouds looked thinner, and more filmy.

"We'll chance it again!" said Lee grimly.

He was anxious—and this was not surprising. Our height was about eight thousand feet, and the clouds were only two thousand feet below us. And once more we dived downwards.

This time all went well.

The wind was now merely a high breeze, and not very bumpy. We dived down rapidly, and struck the clouds. Through them we plunged, and for a while we were flying through dense fog.

Then, as quickly as we had entered, we emerged on the under side. And now I could tell that the air was almost dead calm. The wind was only blowing above the cloud-bank.

But a tremendous surprise awaited us. "Great goodness!" I yelled, staring downwards.

For, as far as the eye could reach, there stretched mile upon mile of dense forest country! A river, looking like a silver band, lay almost beneath us, and here and there were patches of clear grassland.

Of the desert there was not the faintest sign!

"By gad!" shouted Dorrie. "That oasis has grown, ain't it?"

Nelson Lee turned to me and smiled. There was really no reason for us to be alarmed. We were safe, the others were safe—and Lee had left a message at El Safra for Dr. Brett.

"It is easy enough to realise what has happened," shouted the gov'nor. "That wind carried us along at an appalling pace, and we have left the desert behind, and are now over the dense forest. Owing to the clouds, we could not see where we were being taken; and our instruments have not been on their best behaviour, owing to the atmospheric conditions."

"But what shall we do, sir?" I gasped.

"Land, of course—and make an attempt to discover our location," replied Lee. "We must also make camp

for the night. The short twilight will soon be here—and we must not be slow. I dread to think of our predicament if we do not land in the daylight!"

"We should come down into these trees, sir," I said. "My hat! We'd better get down as soon as we can—it's getting dark already!"

And so, after flying along for a mile or two further, we sighted something which pleased us immensely.

A river flowed serenely along, and upon one bank stood a large native kraal. The other side of the river was bare—a beautiful stretch of smooth grassland.

"As good as Brooklands, sir!" I shouted. "And a village handy, too! We can dig with the giddy chief to-night, and ask directions."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "And there will probably be a few white men in a large settlement of this kind."

We saw numbers of excited blacks running backwards and forwards. And Nelson Lee lost no time in making his landing. For we did not want the grassy meadow to become filled with humanity. If that happened, we should have to seek another landing-place.

But it didn't.

We swept down, and touched the grass lightly. A short run forward, and we were at a standstill.

"Rippin'!" said Dorrie admiringly. "You're a top-hole pilot, Lee. But where the dooce have we got to? I'd be awfully obliged if you'd tell me."

"Perhaps we shall know before long," said Nelson Lee, as he descended to the ground. "We must be thankful that we are safe, and that the aeroplane is unharmed. We have been very lucky."

"Rather, sir," I agreed. "And the others are all right, too. They'll find your message on the oasis, and they'll return to Zambi. So there's no need to worry at all."

But I spoke rather too soon!

Even as we were about to move away from the biplane a swarming crowd of nearly naked blacks came rushing towards us. They certainly did not look as though they had been in very close contact with civilisation.

Trotwood was close to me, and he was quite calm. He had recovered from the effects of his terrible experience to a certain extent. His simple-looking face was showing colour again.

"Quite a handsome throng, my dear Nipper!" he murmured.

"They're not so bad as they look," I said reassuringly.

But the blacks charged at us, yelling like fury. They all carried spears, and for a moment I thought that it was all up. The savages did not use their weapons, however. They saw that we were unarmed, and they simply flooded round us. The next moment we were parted, and each of us was held by a jabbering, excited mob. And then Nelson Lee's voice came to my ears.

"Make no attempt to resist them, boys," he shouted. "I'm afraid we have fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire. These blacks are known as the Beejee tribe, and they have never been subdued. They are hostile, and we must be careful. I recognise their lingo. Keep your heads, and trust to me!"

Almost immediately afterwards we were hustled away towards the kraal. And I cannot say that we were very cheerful. For I knew that our position was bad. The Beejees were known to me by repute, and I had heard all sorts of blood-curdling stories concerning them.

They were cannibals, and their favourite recreation was to sacrifice every white man they could lay hands on. So it did not seem that the gale had blown us to a very healthy spot!

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Attack Which Failed!**

MEANWHILE gloom had settled upon Dr. Brett's party. The caravan, struggling on, reached the oasis of El Safra just before noon on the day following the terrible sandstorm. And now another anxiety was added to their troubles.

For the night had passed, and also many further hours of daylight, and yet we had not returned in the aeroplane. What did it look like to them at El Safra? The party half believed that we had been compelled to descend in the desert, owing to the darkness, and that we had crashed.

"The whole position is bad, boys," said Dr. Brett gravely. "We saw the aeroplane last night, and it went into the distance. Shortly after that the sky became overcast with thick clouds; and it seems only too certain that Mr. Lee lost his bearings, and was compelled to descend."

"It's—it's awful, sir," said Watson miserably. "What's happened to poor old Nipper? If the machine was all right it would have been here before now—the weather's been glorious all day!"

"And we were growling about our luck; because we didn't go in the aeroplane!" said Handforth, his voice husky. "It seems to me we're the lucky ones to be here—safe and sound."

Everybody believed, in fact, that some terrible disaster had occurred. And, apart from the fate of the aeroplane, there was Nicodemus Trotwood to remember. Nobody in Brett's party knew that Trotwood had been picked up. And he had been given up as dead long since. Not a shadow of a doubt remained regarding his fate. Dr. Brett was absolutely positive that Trotwood was buried beneath the sand—and everybody else was positive, too.

"Yes, poor old Nicky has paid dearly for his trip," said Watson sadly. "Poor old son! He was one of the best, too! I can't make out how he was buried. All the rest of us were all right."

"Things do happen like that, dear old boy," said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "You read of boatin' accidents, where five or six people—all rippin' swimmers—are thrown into the water. An' all of them get saved except one. An' that one, as likely as not, is the best swimmer of all. It's fate, begad!"

"Well, it's terribly cruel," said Handforth soberly. "It's ghastly—that's what it is! I—I feel like blubbing—and I ain't ashamed to say so, either! I shall be thankful when we get back to the yacht. Heaven knows, this rotten treasure has cost enough lives—four at least!"

"Including Mr. Lee and Nipper!" said Grey, with a gulp.

"I—I don't believe it!" burst out Watson. "I don't believe that Nipper's dead! It's—it's too awful! I say, let's ask Umlosi! He seems to know a lot about what's happening in other places."

So the Kutana chief was consulted. "Thou hast asked me strange questions, O white youths," he said gravely. "I am not permitted to know what is passing beyond the reach of my vision. But my snake tells me that—"

"Your snake, Umlosi?" asked Grey curiously.

"He means his instinct," said Watson.

"My snake tells me that all is not lost," went on Umlosi, unperturbed. "I see my master, Umtagati—I see N'Kose, my father—I see Manzie, the nimble one. And I see them living and active. I do not see them lying cold in death. Nay, it is early to despair. Be thou of good heart, and all may yet be well."

"Good-old Umlosi!" said Handforth huskily.

And the Kutana chief's words had undoubtedly cheered the juniors up considerably—although it was rather a false cheer which inspired them. For in their hearts they were ready to fear the worst.

They wanted to get back to Zambé, and back to the yacht. They felt lost—isolated—out in this dreadful desert. Dr. Brett's plan was to start the homeward journey at daybreak on the following morning. Everybody needed a rest, and Brett would not hear of returning earlier.

Nelson Lee's chalked message had been read. And it was understood clearly that the treasure was on the aeroplane. Thus, there was no object in Brett's party remaining. If disaster had befallen the machine, Brett argued, its occupants would make straight for Zambé, and not for El Safra. So the doctor refused to give up hope until Zambé had been again reached.

Some further excitement was brewing, however, quite unknown to the party.

For Captain Nixon was not quite beaten yet. He fondly imagined that the aeroplane had gone to disaster, and that he only had Brett's party to deal with. As it had turned out, his calculation was right. Dr. Brett was not likely to get any support from Nelson Lee!

The journey across the desert had not been difficult. Nixon and Starkey had undertaken the trip, accompanied by two dozen outcasts of the desert—a mixed lot, including Arabs and Bedouins.

Nixon's plan was to attack Brett after the treasure had been recovered from the sand. It was quite a simple idea, and Nixon saw no reason why it should not work. He had gone so far in the matter now that he could not abandon the treasure without making a last final attempt to seize it.

And so it came about that the encampment on the oasis of El Safra was disturbed that night. The plan was to surprise Brett and his party, to seize them, and to overpower them before they could offer resistance.

Then the treasure could be taken, and the rest would be easy. Nixon would certainly make sure that his victims would not reach Zambé again until he himself had had time to get away.

Dr. Brett had been warned by Nelson Lee to keep strict watch and guard. But Brett was careless in his worry—and he could hardly be blamed. He considered the possibility of an attack to be very remote, and did not even trouble to post a man on the watch.

Why should he? How was it possible for anybody to come out of that bare desert with hostile

intentions? Truth to tell, the doctor was so concerned in mind that all else seemed of little or no importance. Had he remembered, he would have posted a watchman. But Brett sat in his tent, smoking and thinking. He wondered how he could return to the yacht; he wondered how he could break the terrible news to Sir Crawford Grey.

And, meanwhile, the hostile party was preparing to act.

On the outskirts of the oasis they hovered. The lights of the encampment were visible, and everything was peaceful and quiet. Nixon had already given his orders, and he was highly pleased with himself.

"We're going to win to-night, Jake," he said, rubbing his horny palms together. "There can't be no bloomer—it's a dead cert! All we've got to do is to overpower the whole crowd and lift the booty!"

Jake Starkey grunted. "Without any killin'?" he asked.

"You fair make me sick!" snapped Nixon. "What difference does it make now? Lee an' them others are finished, an' it don't matter to me if these heathens settle the other crowd. They've got their orders, an' it ain't likely that they'll ask questions fust. They'll use their blades, Jake—an' be polite arterwards."

"Yes, I s'pose it's the best way," said Jake slowly.

"Glad to find you're learnin' a bit of sense," said the skipper. "What we've got to do is to creep for'ard, and then, at the right moment, we'll spring."

"Fine!" said Starkey.

Shortly afterwards the attack commenced. From all sides the Arabs crept forward towards the encampment. Jake went forward with them. But now his chance had come. Alone, he did not stick to the general plan.

He moved forward swiftly, like a snake wriggling through the grass. And he succeeded in reaching the only tent where a light showed. A moment later he crawled in beneath the canvas—fearful of opening the flap.

"For 'eaven's sake, sir, listen to me!" he gasped, in a husky whisper.

Dr. Brett started up out of his chair, startled by the face which had suddenly appeared under the canvas. And the doctor's hand flew to his revolver, and he remembered, abruptly, Nelson Lee's warning.

"What the thunder—" he began.

"Not so loud, sir—not so loud!" hissed Starkey. "I ain't an enemy, sir—I'm

(Continued on page 12.)



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THROUGH *the* ENEMY'S LINES!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Message!

"HOW many 'missin'?" asked Cardew, of the Fourth.

"Ten!" said Tom Merry.

"Poor old Clive's one of them!" said Levison of the Fourth. "It's rotten!"

Tom Merry, the leader of the St. Jim's Rebels, had just called the roll in the garrison in the barricaded School House, and ten members did not answer their names. Those ten had been captured by the enemy whilst on an expedition for food.

"Can't be helped!" said Monty Lowther. "There's lots of us left to hold the fort; and they haven't got Tommy, that's the main thing."

"They've got my minor!" said Manners.

"I wish them joy of him, old chap!"

Manners grunted.

"I wonder what they'll do with Blake & Co.?" mused Monty Lowther. "Send them home, as they did Figgins and his men."

"That's what Railton said would happen to anyone caught," replied Tom Merry anxiously. "I feel I'm the cause of a lot of pain and trouble."

"Rats!" said Cardew. "Don't bother your little head about that. We're standing by you, Tommy, because the Head wants to sack you from St. Jim's for theft. We know you didn't pinch old Ratchiff's money, and this is the only way we can show the powers that be our humble opinions."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry.

"I admit we've had a few knocks in this barring-out. But we've also had a fine time," continued Cardew. "We have also lost the lower part of the House, and we are also short of grub. But are we downhearted?"

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"No!" came the yell from the rebels.

"That's the stuff!"

"I'm with you to the end," said Fatty Wynn. "But I wish there was more grub. Anyone feel inclined for a light lunch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lunch was decidedly light in the besieged School House. Rations had been growing stricter and stricter for some time; but though some of the garrison indulged in the ancient British privilege of grousing they did not think of giving in on that account. Fatty Wynn, chief of the commissariat, did wonders with what resources there were; but Fatty's soups were growing thinner and thinner, and Fatty's plump face was growing longer and longer.

Tom Merry & Co. were quite cheerful, however.

It was agreed on all hands that the barring-out was a tremendous "lark"—an episode that would not be soon forgotten in the history of St. Jim's. And the rebels were confident that the Head would have to "come round."

It was as clear as daylight to Tom Merry's friends that Tom was innocent of what was laid to his charge, and they expected the Head to see it in the same light sooner or later.

And they felt, too, that matters must come to a head before long, for the opening day of the new term was now close at hand. St. Jim's could not open the term with the School House in the hands of rebellious juniors, and the masters barred out. The Sixth and Fifth Forms could not return to the school at all until the rebellion was at an end. Lessons could scarcely begin in the Form-rooms downstairs while the upper part of the House was held by the rebels.

Evidently the Head would have to come to some decision, and the rebels

The St. Jim's Rebels are almost starving—something must be done to relieve the painful situation! And it is Jack Blake who comes to the rescue when things are looking black for the weary garrison!

By

Martin Clifford

(Author of the well-known stories of TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S, appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday.)

hoped that he would decide that he had made a mistake, and rescind the sentence of expulsion passed on Tom Merry.

Unless he did so they were prepared to hold out—all through the new term, if necessary. Only the pressing question of the food supply had to be settled somehow—and somehow or other that would be settled.

So the St. Jim's rebels kept up their spirits, and played leapfrog in the upper passages, and exchanged chaff with Sergeant Stuckey & Co., the old soldiers whom Mr. Railton had recruited to quell the rising, over the barricaded stairs, and waited for the Head to "come round." Indeed, there were few of them that were anxious for the barring-out to end before the new term began.

There was more entertainment in a barring-out than in grinding Latin and maths in the Form-rooms.

All day the rebels watched for an attack, but it did not come. The enemy seemed to be at a loss.

"Goin' to starve us out, perhaps!" Cardew suggested. "That will take some time. Fatty Wynn will last us a week—if we come down to that!"

Fatty Wynn did not smile.

Fatty Wynn was as determined as ever; but the shortage of tuck led him to be very, very serious. With the diminution of the food supply, Fatty felt that the glory had departed from the house of Israel, as it were.

Tom Merry was thinking deeply over that pressing question. He had no expectation of seeing Blake & Co. again. His belief was that those cheery youths, along with the other prisoners, had already been caned and sent to their homes. He was in blissful ignorance, so far, of the fact that Jack Blake & Co. had escaped and were now outside the school.

Half a dozen of the enemy could be seen in the corridor at the foot of the dormitory staircase. When the dusk came on, they lighted lamps there. Gas and electricity had been cut off from the School House, on the rebels' account, and Sergeant Stuckey & Co., in the lower region of the House, were reduced to oil and candle like the schoolboys above. Oil for bike lamps had run out in the schoolboy stronghold, but there were still candles, which shed a dim glimmer over the stairs and the long passages.

Occasionally a missile whizzed down the barred staircase, or the pea-shooters came into play; and the enemy had learned to keep at a respectful distance.

The juniors would not have been sorry to see them attempt to rush the stairs.

But for the present the attack was holding off. Probably Mr. Railton was puzzled to know what step to take next. His position was full of difficulties, as the rebels cheerily realised. Mr. Ratcliff was quite useless in such a posture of affairs, and the Head could do little but deplore the sad pass things had come to at St. Jim's.

All the warlike operations depended upon Victor Railton, and for the present it was obvious that Mr. Railton was at a loss.

Crash!

There was a sudden sound of splintering glass, and a pane flew from a window in fragments.

"Great pip!"

"What the dickens—"

"Some silly ass throwing stones!" exclaimed Manners.

A jagged hole showed in a window at the end of the dormitory passage, at a distance from the stairs.

A stone had come through, thrown up from somewhere in the darkness outside, and rolled along the floor after smashing through the window.

"Silly asses!" commented Lumley-Lumley. "They won't hurt us by chucking silly stones through the windows!"

"I guess I'll look at that stone!" remarked Wildrake.

The Canadian junior strolled along the passage, with an electric torch in his hand. He turned the light hither and thither till he found the stone that had come through the window.

"Don't throw it back," said Tom Merry. "Throwing stones is a rotten trick. Might have caught some fellow on the napper."

Wildrake grinned.

"This giddy stone didn't come from the enemy," he said.

"Must have," said Manners. "There's not likely to be any stranger within gates chucking stones at the windows, I suppose?"

Wildrake came back into the light of the candles on the landing. He held up the stone, and there was a general exclamation from the juniors as they saw that a paper was wrapped round it.

"What the thump—" said Levison.

"I reckoned somebody might have had a reason for heaving that rock in at the window," remarked Wildrake. "It's a message, of course."

"A message! My hat!"

"But who—" said Tom Merry.

"I guess we'll see soon enough."

Kit Wildrake unwrapped the paper from the stone. It had been wrapped very carefully, and tied with twine. As it was unrolled, the juniors could see that it was scribbled on in pencil.

"Blake's fist!" exclaimed Levison.

"Blake! Then he's not gone!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Good old Blake! What does he say?"

The rebels gathered round eagerly to read the missive. It was in Jack Blake's "fist," and was a sufficient proof that Blake was not far away. It ran:

"From J. Blake, Chief of Convoy, to T. Merry,

"Commander-in-Chief of the St. Jim's Garrison.

"Dear Tommy,—Study No. 6 are getting on with it, as per contract. We've got the goods."

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn at this point.

"Shurrup, Wynn!"

"Get on with it, Tom!"

The juniors were eager to hear the rest. Tom Merry proceeded with reading out the letter:

"We've got the goods. No end of stuff. All of us loaded up to the chin."

Fatty Wynn's plump face beamed. He looked quite his old self again.

"There's ten of us. We took your missing duffers along to help us carry the stuff."

"Oh, good!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "I hope they haven't forgotten the sausages."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shurrup!"

"We're coming back by the trapdoor in the roof," the letter went on. "Never mind how we're going to manage it; leave that to Study No. 6. You fellows had better be on the look-out for us. Show a light in the window to let me know you catch on. Same window where the stone came in.—Yours with the tuck,

"J. BLAKE."

Levison picked up a candle and hurried to the window where the jagged hole showed in the pane. He held the light steadily to the window. Somewhere in the darkness without, it was evident, Blake of the Fourth was watching for the signal.

"I guess that's O.K.," remarked Wildrake.

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry heartily. "If they get through with it we'll let Study No. 6 call themselves top study as long as they like! They seem to have been jolly lucky!"

"Good old Blake!"

Leaving Talbot of the Shell in command of the barricade, Tom Merry hurried up the upper stairs with a dozen fellows. There was a ladder to the trapdoor in the roof, which was supposed to be used only in case of fire. In a very few minutes the trapdoor was open, and Tom Merry & Co. were out on the leads, in the dim glimmer of the stars. There they waited for the arrival of J. Blake, Chief of Convoy.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Gussy Takes a Hand!

JACK BLAKE crouched in the gloom under the leafless old elms, watching the windows of the School House. Blake was in a mood of considerable satisfaction. So far, Study No. 6 had done well. They had deserved well of their country, so to speak. Certainly, luck had befriended Study No. 6 to a great extent, but Blake was not inclined to attribute his success to luck. He put it down to his own masterly strategy. Outside the walls of the school the "convoy" was waiting, while Blake crept within the precincts of St. Jim's to convey a message to the garrison. From under the dark elms he watched for the answering light signal.

From the glimmering doorway of the School House a tall, angular figure came into view, and Blake recognised Sergeant Stuckey. Private Brown followed him out into the quad.

Blake could guess that they had heard the crash of breaking glass, and had come out to investigate. He kept close in cover.

"Only some of them young ribs breaking a window!" he heard the voice of the sergeant.

And the two men went back into the House. Blake grinned quietly in the darkness.

From a window in the School House, previously dark, a light began to shine. It glimmered out into the dim winter evening.

"They've got it!" murmured Blake.

The candle in the window was his answer. He was prepared to cut back to the school wall, when there was a sound of footsteps close at hand. Blake made himself as small as possible, hugging the trunk of a tree as the footsteps came along the gravel path under the elms.

Two figures came dimly along, pacing in a slow and stately manner. To Blake's horror, he heard the voice of the Head.

"The new term is so close at hand now, Mr Railton—"

Blake scarcely breathed.

Evidently the two masters were taking a stately promenade along the path under the elms in the quad, discussing the unprecedented state of affairs now obtaining at St. Jim's, and little dreaming that one of the rebels was hidden by the gloom within sound of their voices.

"I have done my best, sir." It was Mr. Railton's voice.

"I know—I know! It is most distressing, Mr. Railton. The boy Merry has much to answer for! I should never have dreamed that such a lad could exercise so much influence over his schoolfellows. It is a very painful discovery to me."

"Nevertheless, sir, it shows a fine spirit in the boys, to take such risks in support of a schoolfellow whom they believe to be innocent!" said Mr. Railton.

"No doubt! But this belief in Merry's innocence is sheer wilful obstinacy, after the conclusive proof of his guilt."

"I cannot help saying, sir, that from the first I could not help having some doubt on the subject. The faith of Merry's schoolfellows in his honour is, in its way, evidence in his favour."

"I do not see it in that light, Mr. Railton!" said the Head dryly. "We must—"

The Head broke off suddenly.

"Who is that?"

Blake's heart almost stopped beating for a moment. The two masters had stopped quite near to him; and for the moment he supposed that he had been observed.

But the Head was standing with his back to the junior, and peering over his glasses on the other side of the path.

There was an exclamation from Mr. Railton.

"It is one of the boys! I will secure him."

"Bai Jove!" came a sudden exclamation.

Blake breathed hard, as he recognised the voice of his noble chum, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus had been left outside the walls, with the convoy, with strict orders to remain there. Obviously, Arthur Augustus had seen fit to disregard those strict orders.

Mr. Railton made a sudden stride, and then came back into the path, with his grip on a collar, and Arthur Augustus wriggling in his clutch.

"Yow-ow! Leggo! Bai Jove, you are wumplin' my collah! Pway leggo!" wailed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, the awful ass!" breathed Blake, in silent wrath.

Dr. Holmes peered at the captive.
"Bless my soul! Who is it, Mr. Railton?"

"D'Arcy of the Fourth Form, sir!" said the Housemaster, still keeping his grip on Gussy's collar.

"D'Arcy! What are you doing here?" exclaimed the Head.

"I must wefuse to answah that question, sir!"

"What?"

"Sowwy, sir, but I twust you will wecognise that, undah the circs, I cannot wewy well give information to the enemy."

"Bless my soul!"

"You absurd young rascal!" exclaimed Mr Railton, bestowing a powerful shake upon the swell of the Fourth.

"Gwoooooogh!"

"No doubt D'Arcy was seeking to communicate with the boys in the House yonder," said the Head. "You will secure him, Mr. Railton."

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be secured! If you do not wefuse my collah, sir, I shall be undah the painful necessity of heekin' your shins!"

Mr. Railton tightened his grip.
"Are you alone here, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Eh? Certainly not!"

"Who is with you, then?"

"You, sir, and Dr. Holmes," answered Arthur Augustus innocently.

"You absurd boy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I mean, are any of your schoolfellows with you here?"

"I must wefuse to wefly to that question, Mr. Wailton. I uttably wefuse to give Blake away."

"Blake! Is Blake here?"

"Pway do not ask me questions, sir. I cannot wefly to them!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "You can lick me if you like, but I certainly shall not acquaint you with the fact that I came in to look for Blake."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head again. Probably the old gentleman was somewhat struck by Gussy's method of refusing to impart information. "Take him to the New House, Mr. Railton. Blake can be looked for afterwards."

"Certainly, sir."

Dr. Holmes continued his stately peregrinations, and Mr. Railton started for the New House, hooking the reluctant junior along by the collar. Jack Blake turned out from under the tree. He was strongly inclined to leave Arthur Augustus to his fate, as a lesson to that noble youth on the subject of "butting in" against orders. But friendship came first; and Blake determined upon punching Gussy's noble head later on.

Blake was quick to act.

Exactly what happened, Mr. Railton did not know. There was a sudden rush in the darkness, and something hard butted him, and he sat down on the gravel with a gasp. Involuntarily he released Arthur Augustus as he sat down.

Blake grabbed the swell of St. Jim's by the arm, and dragged him away.

"Hook it!" he whispered fiercely.

"Bai Jove! Blake—"

"Run, you ass!" howled Blake.

Mr. Railton, with a wrathful expression, was jumping up. Blake fairly dragged the swell of St. Jim's away among the elms.

"It's all wight, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Don't dwag at a fellow like that. I came in to look for you—"

"Come on!" hissed Blake.

"I'm comin', deah boy. You see, I was wathah alarmed at your bein' so long—"

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"Stop!" shouted Mr. Railton.

"Hurry up, you fathead!"

The two juniors raced for the wall, even Arthur Augustus appearing to realise the necessity of speed, as Mr. Railton's heavy steps rang in pursuit. Blake and Gussy reached the wall, and Blake bunched his chum up desperately. Arthur Augustus clutched the coping and climbed on the wall, and Blake clambered after him.

"You young rascals!" Mr. Railton loomed up in the gloom below. "Descend from that wall, at once! I—"

Apparently Mr. Railton realised that the juniors were not likely to descend at his command, for he rushed away, with the evident intention of getting out at the gates, and cutting off the retreat of the fugitives outside the walls.

"Come on!" breathed Blake. "We've got time to get clear. What are you up to, you frabjous chump?"

He clutched at Arthur Augustus, as that aristocratic youth was preparing to drop back within the wall.

"It's all wight, Blake!"

"You dummy! What—"

"I've dwooped my eyeglass!"

"What!" shrieked Blake.

"My eyeglass, deah boy. I'm goin' back for it. What are you holdin' on to my arm for, Blake?"

"I—I—I—" babbled Blake. "I—I'll smash you! Come on, you chump! Come on, you frabjous cuckoo! Railton will be round under the wall in a tick! Get a move on! Jump!"

"But my eyeglass!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Blake fairly swung him off the wall, and Arthur Augustus had to jump. He landed in the road with a thud.

Blake jumped after him.

"Hook it, you dummy!" he gasped.

"My eyeglass—"

Blake grabbed his arm, and rushed him away, as Mr. Railton came pounding up through the gloom.

Arthur Augustus had to run—in spite of his anxiety for his eyeglass. Blake had an iron grip on his arm; and his arm had to go; and Arthur Augustus had to go where his arm went.

The two juniors vanished in the gloom. Blake plunged through a gap in a hedge, dragging Arthur Augustus recklessly behind him. The swell of St. Jim's stumbled and fell on his hands and knees; and a fearful yell indicated that he had discovered the locality of a bed of nettles.

"Come on!" hissed Blake.

"Yawwooh! Leggo! Oh cwumbs!"

"This way, dummy!"

"Yow-ow! You are dwaggin' out my arm—"

"Hurry up!"

Blake raced across the field, dragging at his chum, and Arthur Augustus accompanied him in a series of kangaroo-like jumps. Sight and sound of Mr. Railton died away behind, and Blake stopped at last. In a narrow lane at the farther side of the field several shadowy figures rose to view.

"All serene?" asked Dig.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy put his foot in it, as usual?" asked Wally of the Third.

"Gwoogh! Weally, Wally—"

"Why didn't you fellows sit on his head?" demanded Blake wrathfully. "You know he oughtn't to be allowed to wander."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weward that wemark as offensive and idiotic, Blake. I should like to know what would have happened if I

had not come to look for you!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"You—you—you—" gasped Blake.

"Howevah, it is all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "I've got my eyeglass. It did not dwop, aftah all—it is still on the stwing. So it's all wight."

"Don't put it in your eye for a minute!" breathed Blake.

"Eh! Why not?"

"Because I'm going to punch you in the eye."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus dodged away. For some reason unknown to Arthur Augustus' noble brain, Blake seemed to be rather excited just then, and not amenable to reason. So Arthur Augustus retired from his immediate neighbourhood rather hastily.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Blake Delivers the Goods!

"READY, you fellows!"

"You bet!"

"Waiting!" said Wally.

Blake & Co. had allowed an hour to elapse, Blake considering that judicious, after the alarm that Arthur Augustus had given by his ill-timed intervention. It was not agreeable to wait in the shadowy lane, swept by a keen winter wind. But Blake was inexorable. So far, Study No. 6 had been successful in their enterprise; and Blake was not taking unnecessary chances.

The "convoy" was well supplied, if only they could succeed in getting the supplies within the walls of the beleaguered School House. Every one of the ten juniors had a rucksack strapped over his shoulder, crammed with comestibles, and every pocket was filled to its fullest capacity. Blake & Co. had done shopping in Wayland on quite a considerable scale; and there was a supply of good things that Fatty Wynn would have contemplated with beatific ecstasy. It only remained to convey the goods to the School House garrison, the most difficult part of the enterprise. But the chief of Study No. 6 had his plans cut and dried.

He gave the word at last to start, and the shivering juniors were glad to get going. They crossed the field, and entered the road, and with great caution approached the school walls. There was a faint glimmer of stars in the cloudy sky, barely sufficient to show them their way. They stopped outside the wall.

"Bunk me up!" whispered Blake.

"Pewwaps I had bettah go first, Blake—"

"Dry up!"

"You wemembah we came wathah a muckah last night, Blake, though you goin' first!" said Arthur Augustus mildly.

"Kill him, somebody!" hissed Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

Julian and Reilly "bunked" Blake up the wall. He sat astride of it, and peered into the shadows within. From the distant Houses there came glimmers of light; and from the School House, Blake could catch the sound of a chorus. Apparently Mr. Railton's old comrades-in-arms were making merry there.

"All serene!" whispered Blake.

"Come up, you fellows, and don't make a sound."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway wemembah not to uttah a word, deah boys. If any fellow begins talkin', it may give the whole show away."

"Will you shut up, Gussy?" asked Blake, in concentrated tones.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dry up, old chap," said Clive. "Up you go!"

One by one the juniors climbed the wall, and one by one they dropped down on the inner side. They were within the precincts of the school again. There was a sudden clink on the frosty ground.

"Bai Jove! One of you fellows has dropped somethin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "You may give the alarm if you are clumsy, you know."

"You've dropped it, you duffer!" grunted Herries.

"Bai Jove! It must be that tin of corned beef. Pway don't growse, Blake. I did not drop it intentionally, you know. Show a light heah, somebody."

"A light!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas; my electwic torch is played out."

"Do you want to announce our visit to Mr. Railton, Gussy?" asked Julian, with sarcastic politeness.

"Certainly not, deah boy. I want to look for that tin of corned beef."

"Come on, you born idiot!" gasped Blake. "Never mind the tin." And he grasped Arthur Augustus' noble arm and jerked him onward.

The "convoy" did not approach the School House. They had had plenty of experience of the vigilance of the enemy. Blake led the way cautiously through the gloom towards the Head's house. That building, which adjoined the School House on one side, was dark and deserted.

In term time it was the residence of the doctor and Mrs. Holmes. But it was vacant now; Mrs. Holmes was away for the vacation, as the Head would have been, but for the barring-out which had followed the sentence of expulsion upon Tom Merry.

At the beginning of the barring-out the Head's residence had been used as a base of operations by the attacking party, as it had a door into the School House. Dr. Holmes had taken up his quarters in the New House, across the quad.

"Safe as houses!" murmured Blake, as he halted in the shadow of the building.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Don't you begin, Gussy!" murmured Wally.

"Nobody here," said Blake, peering in at a dark window. "You see, in cutting off the gas and electricity from the School House, they cut it off here as well; so the jolly old Head had to stick in the New House over the way."

"Good for us!" murmured Clive.

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"You remember those blighters got out on the roof, and got to the School House roof, and tried to invade us that way!" chuckled Blake. "That's the idea now; what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

"Yaas; but——"

"Fifteen minutes' interval, while Gussy exercises his chin!" said Levison minor; and there was a chuckle from Wally and Reggie Manners.

"Weally, you young wascals——"

"Shurrup!" whispered Julian.

"Yaas; but——"

"Will you dry up?" breathed Blake.

"You'll have the whole gang down on us with your blessed chinning!"

"Yaas; but I was goin' to say that the place is locked up, you know. How are we goin' to get in, deah boy? We cannot get out on the woof unti' we get inside the house, you know."

"Did you work that out in your head, Gussy?" asked D'Arcy minor, with great admiration.

"Follow on, and don't jaw!" said Blake.

"If you wufer to my wemarks as jawin', Blake——"



Jack Blake & Co. came up to the top landing with a breathless rush. Blake jammed the steps into position, and one by one the juniors swarmed up and scrambled through the trap out on to the roof. Before the last of them went, the stairs were crowded with pursuers. (See Chapter 3.)

"Br-r-r-r!" Blake led the way round the house to the rear. He stopped under the kitchen window.

There he inserted the blade of his pocket-knife between the sashes, to push back the catch.

Blake had laid his plans carefully; he was rather proud of the way he had mapped this out.

All was plain sailing—as Blake had mapped it out. Forcing the catch of the window gave admission to the Head's deserted residence—the trap in the roof gave access to the leads, and thence it was only a step to the leads of the School House. That was the way the assailants had come, on an occasion

only remark that we are waitin' for you, and that it is vevy cold; and that pprobably, soonah or latah, the enemy will drop on us, and—yow-ow-ow!"

Arthur Augustus' remarks were cut short by an elbow jamming suddenly in his noble ribs. Blake appeared to have lost patience.

"Ow! Wow! You uttah wuffian!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Quiet!" breathed Clive.

"Yaas, but——"

Snap!

"All right!" said Herries. "There goes the catch!"

"That isn't the catch!" breathed Blake. "That's the blade of my pocket-knife."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Let me try," said Reilly. "I dare say I can do it."

"I dare say!" said Blake in concentrated tones. "I dare say you're a wonderfully clever sort of idiot, and I dare say I'll give you one in the eye if you shove near this window!"

Snap!

"Is that the catch?" asked Julian.

"No, you frabjous ass! It isn't the catch—it's the other blade of my knife! Any more fool questions to ask?"

Julian was discreetly silent. Blake really seemed to be approaching a dangerous state of exasperation.

"Well, what is the pwogwamme?" asked Arthur Augustus, after a painful pause. "I am quite willin' to stand heah, Blake, though it is vewy cold; but I cannot see that we are gettin' any neawah the wof."

"Hush!" breathed Julian. "Somebody's coming!"

There was a footstep, and a muttering voice.

"Oh, rot!" It was Sergeant Stuckey speaking. "I never 'card nothing. You fancied it, Brown."

"You wouldn't 'ear anything, sergeant, not with that old wooden 'ead of yourn," said Private Brown pleasantly. "I tell you—"

The juniors stood still as mice. Blake set his teeth. His plan had been so beautifully mapped out, that it was simply cruel to be stopped at the last moment like this, by an unexpected trifle. Private Brown broke off suddenly at the sight of shadowy figures huddled by the window.

"What did I tell you? There they are—"

Crash!

Exasperated, Blake found a victim in the too-watchful Private Brown. Before Mr. Brown could finish, Blake smote him, and Mr. Brown sat down with a suddenness that knocked all the breath out of him. The next moment the sergeant was struggling in the grasp of half a dozen pairs of hands.

He reeled back in the clutch of the juniors, and crashed on the window.

Crash! Smash!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Clive. "He's done it!"

"Yoooop!" roared the sergeant.

The sergeant's head had done it. There was no more need of Blake's pocket-knife. Sergeant Stuckey's head had crashed on a pane, and sent it flying in fragments into the room within.

The alarm was given now with a vengeance. There were shouts in the distance, and the sound of running feet.

Blake thrust his hand through the broken pane, and grasped the catch and forced it back. A second later, the window was open.

"Quick!" he panted.

Sergeant Stuckey went with a bump to the ground, crashing down on Private Brown, who emitted a breathless grunt. While the two hapless old soldiers were sorting themselves out, the juniors clambered into the window with desperate haste.

They rolled and stumbled inside. Blake flashed on the light of his electric torch, and led the way. Like rabbits, the juniors scampered up the stairs.

Loud shouts rang out behind them; some of the enemy were clambering in at the window, others dashing round to the doors. But Blake & Co. had a start.

They came up to the top, landing with

a breathless rush. Blake jammed the steps into position, swarmed up them, and hurled open the trap in the roof. One after another the juniors scrambled up, and out on the leads.

"All out?" gasped Blake. "Good!"

He slammed the trapdoor shut—almost upon the head of a pursuer. There was a shout from the adjoining roof of the School House—the voice of Tom Merry.

"That you, Blake?"

"What do you think?" chuckled Blake. "Get going, you fellows—I'll sit on this trap till you're all clear."

The juniors scudded away. Tom Merry & Co. were ready for them on the School House roof—ready for the enemy, too, if the enemy followed. But the enemy were thumping on the underside of the trapdoor on which Blake was calmly sitting—his weight keeping it from opening.

"Sing out when you're all clear!" called out Blake. "They'll be after me a tick after I leave this cosy corner."

"Right-ho!" sang back Tom Merry.

He hurried the juniors down into the School House, remaining to the last himself.

"All clear, Blake."

"Good!"

Tom Merry descended last. Blake rose from the trap, and scudded across to the School House leads, and clambered in. A moment after he was gone, the trap flew up, and a head appeared. But the pursuers came too late. Blake was safe in the School House. Tom Merry dragged the trap shut, and it was bolted underneath. And the disappointed pursuers, after thumping on it a little to express their feelings, retired the way they had come.

Fatty Wynn's face beamed like unto a full moon.

That night, there was a supper of the goods in the besieged School House.

Fatty Wynn was master of the ceremonies; and the supper he turned out was a feast that beat all records.

"Going to starve us out, you know!" grinned Blake, as he helped himself for the fifth time. "Think we're bound to give in when the tuck's gone. I heard the Head tell Railton so. They reckoned without Study No. 6, what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't want to swank—" said Blake, looking round.

"You don't?" asked Monty Lowther in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" roared Blake.

"All right; my mistake! Go on."

"But what I say is this—Study No. 6 is the goods," said Blake. "You see, you fellows, I had the whole thing mapped out from start to finish—"

"This is what comes of having a strategic brain," said Monty Lowther.

"You planned that bit about falling into the enemy's hands last night?"

"N-n-no—not that bit," said Blake hastily. "That was a—a—merely an incident—"

"Merely that and nothin' more!" grinned Cardew.

"We got out of that!" said Blake warmly, "and the whole thing went like clockwork—planned from start to finish—"

"Wonderful brain!" said Cardew.

"No other fellow could have planned it out for Sergeant Stuckey to bust a window just in time with his head—"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "There was—were slight incidents—but we've delivered the goods."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"We've delivahed the goods, deah

boys—there's no gettin' out of that!

What do you think, Wynn, old chap?"

"Splendid!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh! You think it was splendid, old fellow?" asked Blake cordially.

"Certainly," said Fatty Wynn.

"Simply splendid! I'm going to have another."

"Eh! Another what?"

"Another soss."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently it was the sausages that Fatty Wynn was alluding to with such enthusiasm. But it was agreed on all hands that Study No. 6 had done remarkably well, and that they had a right to swank, which they did just a little, perhaps more than a little. The barring-out was still going strong, and Tom Merry & Co. were full of cheery confidence—and still unconquered.

THE END.

(Look out for another topping long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, next week, entitled: "THE TRIUMPH OF THE REBELS!")

THE TERROR OF THE DESERT!

(Continued from page 7.)

betrayin' my own side, an' you've got to listen!"

"Speak up, then—quick!"

"Nixon and two dozen cut-throats are creepin' towards the camp at this moment, sir," gasped Starkey. "They mean—murder! That ain't my game, an' if I can save you an' the boys I don't mind if I die for it—I ain't much use, anyhow! I was a fool ever to leave old Simon Grell!"

"Starkey, you're a man!" said Dr. Brett warmly. "You have come forward, at the risk of your own life to give me a warning. I know that you are speaking, sincerely, and you will never regret this night's work!"

Solely owing to Jake Starkey's timely information, Dr. Brett was able to get his forces together.

Then, at the right moment, six great flares were ignited—roaring magnesium things which turned the night into day. Each flare was made to burn for half an hour, and they had been especially brought for use in the event of a night attack.

Every one of the attackers was revealed with startling distinctness. There was no cover, and the whole murderous force was exposed.

"Fire!" roared Brett.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

Five or six revolvers spat out their venom, and the shots were continued. All the bullets were aimed high, and they flew harmlessly into the night. But the attacking Arabs were scared out of their wits—and they flew, without even attempting to make the attack.

Captain Nixon fled, too—and knew the worst. Starkey had betrayed him! It would be useless making any further attack—even if he could get the Arabs to do so. For the party was now on its guard, and would not be caught napping again. Captain Nixon, in spite of his blind fury, had sense enough to know when he was beaten.

His last card had failed—and he was almost mad with a lust for revenge.

THE END.

("IN MERCILESS HANDS!" is the title of next week's rousing story of the St. Frank's Boys in Africa.)

THRILLS GALORE!

With everyone against him, and ready to shoot on sight, the Rio Kid risks his all in an attempt to prove to the men of Gunsight that he is not the Unknown Raider for whom they are looking!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Hands Up!

DON FELIPE SANTANDER dropped the black Mexican cheroot from his lips, slid his dusky hand under the folds of his serape, and grasped a revolver. His swarthy face set, and his black eyes glittered at the horseman who had pushed out of the timber into the trail ahead of him. Don Felipe had come into Texas to buy cattle, and was heading for Gunsight, but he was ten miles from the cow-town, and his way lay across a wide prairie dotted with timber islands. In the Mexican buyer's saddle-bags was a sum that might well have tempted the raider, who for months past, had haunted the trails within a wide radius of Gunsight. And in the horseman who suddenly appeared ahead of him the man from Mexico had no doubt that he recognised the raider. He slackened speed and rode his pinto on at a walk, the revolver gripped in his hand under the ample folds of the serape.

The Rio Kid glanced at him and pulled in his mustang.

The Kid was not hoping to meet up with strangers on the trails. It was better for his health to keep out of sight while he was riding the Gunsight country. But the timber had hidden the Mexican, and the Kid was almost upon him before he saw him. But there was nothing to alarm the boy outlaw in the sight of a Mexican cattleman, and he drew in his horse beside the trail and saluted the stranger civilly as he came up. The Kid did not think much of "Greasers," as a rule, but his manners were always polite.

Don Felipe halted within a few paces of the Kid. Over his pinto's head his revolver suddenly leaped into view, aimed at the surprised face of the Rio Kid.

"Thunder!" said the Kid.

"Not this time, *senor* bandit!"

grinned Santander, over his levelled gun. "Put up your hands, *ladronc*."

The Kid's handsome face flushed at the word.

But the Mexican's finger was on the trigger, and the gun looked him full in the face. Slowly, with a glint in his eyes, the Kid elevated his hands over his Stetson hat. For once the Kid had been taken off his guard. He had not looked for danger from a fat, swarthy Mexican cattleman.

"Say, feller, what's this game?" drawled the Kid. "You sure don't look like a hold-up man."

Don Felipe laughed, showing his white teeth through his black beard.

"You know me?" he asked.

"Not from Adam," answered the Kid, "and I'm sure honing to know why you're pulling a gun on me."

"But you were watching this trail for me?"

"Guess again," said the Kid.

"*Todos los Santos!*" said Don Felipe. "You cannot deceive me, *senorito*. You are the Rio Kid."

"Right in once," agreed the Kid cheerfully. "You figure on earning the thousand dollars they're offering for me at Frio?"

"No, *senor*. I figure on saving the dollars in my saddle-bags," answered the Mexican. "I have heard of you—they talk of nobody else at Gunsight. To-day you are riding without a mask on your face, but I know your horse, and I have been warned to watch out for you. Your description is well known, *amigo*."

The Kid knitted his brows.

He understood now.

Once more he was being called to account for the desperate reputation of the secret bandit who was riding the Gunsight trails under his name.

"Keep your hands up, *senor*," said Don Felipe. "I am giving you time to say your prayers before I fire."

"Shucks!" said the Kid. "You

FRIEND or FOE?

OUR ROARING LONG COMPLETE
YARN OF THE WILD WEST,
STARRING THE RIO KID,
BOY OUTLAW!

reckon you're going to shoot me up, you durned greaser?"

"Si, *senor*," answered the cattleman with perfect coolness. "I am not riding on to be shot in the back after I leave you. I know your ways, *amigo*. You have shot six men in this country in the last few months; but—*por los Santos*—you will not add another notch to your gun on my account."

The Kid breathed hard.

The revolver was steady; the Mexican's eyes glittered over it. He was ready to pull trigger at the first movement of the Kid to reach for a gun. The Rio Kid had been in many a tight corner, but he realised now that he was in one of the tightest corners of his life. But he was quite cool as he watched the cattleman's swarthy, determined face over the levelled gun.

"Say, feller," drawled the Kid, "you've sure got the drop on me, and it's your say-so. But I guess you want to let me put you wise before you begin burning powder. I'm telling you that I ain't the galoot that's been shooting-up the guys around Gunsight. That galoot is a rancher, who's borrowed my name to ride under. That's sure why he covers his face with a mask."

Don Felipe shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm giving you the straight goods, dog-gone you!" said the Kid. "That *hombre* paints his horse to look like mine, and sports goatskin chaps, and calls himself the Rio Kid; but if you saw him with his mask off you wouldn't see me."

Another shrug from the cattleman.

"You ain't taking that in?" asked the Kid.

"No, *senor*," grinned the Mexican.

"Dog-gone you," said the Kid angrily, "if I was here to hold you up, do you figure that I'd have let you get the drop on me like that-a-way?"

The Mexican looked perplexed for a moment. It was not like the desperate rider who had been raising Cain in the Gunsight country to ride into a trap as the Kid had done.

But Don Felipe shook his head.

He was not taking risks. He had ten thousand dollars in his saddle-bags and only one life to lose. And the masked man who robbed on the Gunsight trails was ruthless, and few men in the section doubted that if he was seen without his mask it was the face of the Rio Kid that would be revealed. If the Mexican was dealing with the desperate bandit there was only one thing that could save him and his dollars, and that was to shoot while he held the drop. And that was what Don Felipe

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fully intended to do. If there was a doubt, he could not afford to give the Kid the benefit of it.

Neither could he afford to make an attempt to take the outlaw prisoner. The Rio Kid was known to be lightning on the draw, and half a chance would be enough for him.

"I am sorry, señor," said the Mexican with ironical politeness. "If, as you say, another ladrone has been riding under your name, you will suffer for his sins. I cannot take chances. I have but one life, and, carambo, it is dear to me! If you have a prayer to say, lose no time."

The Kid's eyes gleamed. The man meant to shoot, and the levelled gun was only six feet from the Kid. To reach for a gun was futile; there was no time, even for the lightning-like Kid. The Kid did not reach for a gun.

"I guess it's your say-so," he drawled. "You've sure got the goods on me, greaser. Shoot, and be darned to you!" Crack!

But even as the Mexican was pulling the trigger the Kid flung himself backwards over his horse's tail and went with a crash to the earth, and the bullet that had been intended to crash through his brain tore a lock of hair from his head and spun his hat across the trail. It grazed the skin, and a trickle of blood ran down the Kid's face.

"Carambo!" A swift leap saved the Kid from a second bullet that crashed into the sun-baked earth an inch from him as he leaped.

The Mexican had no time to fire again; for the Kid's fist crashed into his ribs like a lump of iron, and hurled him from the saddle with a stunning crash to the earth.

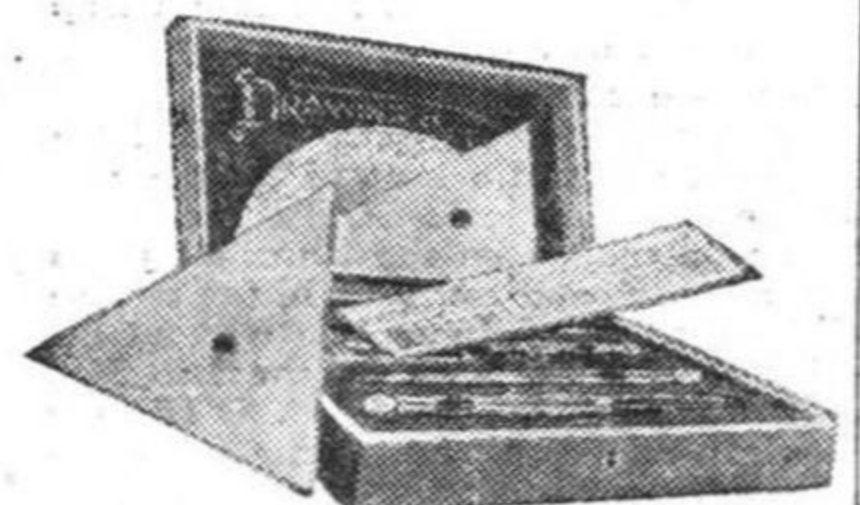
The pinto flung up its head and dashed away down the trail with empty stirrups swinging.

The dazed Mexican raised himself on his elbow, his right hand still gripping his revolver. But the Kid's gun was in his hand now, aimed at the furious, swarthy face.

"Drop it!" And Don Felipe Santander let his revolver fall into the grass.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Not a Hold Up!

"CARAMBO!" "Aw, cut it out!" snapped the Kid. "Swearing won't buy you anything, you dog-goned greaser. Thunder, I guess I've a hunch to spill your juice. Get on your feet and, if you touch a gun, you sure get yours so sudden you'll never know what hit you."



Here's one of the FREE GIFTS—a drawing set—offered to members of the Birthday Club. THE POPULAR.—No. 532.

Don Felipe scrambled up. "Put up your paws, feller." The Mexican shrugged, and lifted his hands above his head. He was at the Kid's mercy now, and still dazed by the sudden turn of Fortune's wheel. The Kid dabbed at the trickle of crimson on his face. His eyes gleamed at the man from Mexico.

"You dog-goned greaser!" he growled. "I guess there ain't a Mexican born yet that could put it over on me. But it sure was a close call. And now, why shouldn't I fill you full of holes, you goldarned geek?"

"Señor—" faltered the Mexican, his swarthy face growing white.

"Aw, forget it!" growled the Kid. "I ain't shooting, you durned locoed mosshead! Now, you figure that I'm that fire-bug that rides this section with a rag over his face, and calls himself by my name?"

The cattleman nodded. "Well, I guess I'll prove up that I ain't, clear enough even for a bonehead like you," said the Kid, his good humour returning. "You was hitting for Gunsight?"

"Si, señor." "To buy cattle, I guess?" "Si, señor."

"And you got a good-sized roll in your rags?" Santander nodded.

"Well, you goldarned gink, you can ride on to Gunsight, and take your roll with you," growled the Kid. "Pick up your gun, and get to your cayuse, and hit the trail."

The Mexican stared at him blankly. "Señor—" he faltered.

The Kid picked up the cattle-buyer's revolver by the butt, and shoved it back into the holster under Santander's serape.

"I guess you'll want that, if you meet up with the galoot that's been riding under my name," he said.

The Mexican could only gasp. "And I'll put you wise to this," added the Kid. "If Poker Poindexter, of Gunsight, knows that you're riding this trail with a big roll, you'll meet up with that fire-bug sure enough. I'm telling you that Poker Poindexter, of the Poindexter ranch, is the galoot who rides in a mask. You get me?"

Don Felipe stared. "It is to the Poindexter ranch that I go, señor, to buy cattle," he said.

The Kid laughed grimly. "Poindexter's expecting you to-day?" he demanded.

"Si, señor." "Then you want to watch out, between here and Gunsight," grinned the Kid. "I guess if Poindexter's wise to it that you're riding the trail to-day with a fat roll, you'll want all your luck to get that roll safe into town."

The Mexican could only stare. "But, señor—" he stuttered.

"Oh, quit chewing the rag, and beat it," interrupted the Kid. "I'm through with you."

The astonishment in the cattle-buyer's face was almost ludicrous. He could not doubt that his life and his roll were to be spared, as the Kid waved him away; but he did not understand. Poindexter he knew as a rancher who had sold him cattle more than once, and the Kid's accusation seemed wild to him. And though the Kid spared him,

and spared his dollars, he did not believe that the outlaw of Frio was not the masked rider of the Rio Claro. He did not know what to think; and he could only stare at the Kid blankly.

The Kid made an impatient gesture. "Beat it," he repeated. "There's your cayuse—beat it—and you can sure tell them jaspers in Gunsight that the Kid ain't the all-fired fire-bug they think he is."

"Si, señor," gasped the Mexican. His pinto had stopped at a distance on the plain, and was cropping the grass. The Mexican started towards the horse, but with more than one backward glance.

Plainly the fear was in his mind that the outlaw was somehow fooling him, and he more than half-expected a shot to ring out.



A TRICKY CUSTOMER! "Shoot, and be darned to you!" drawled the Kid. Crack! But even as the Mexican was pulling the trigger, the Kid flung himself backwards over his horse's tail, and went with a crash to the ground. (See Chapter 1.)

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The Kid remounted his mustang. He knew—and he alone—that Poindexter was the secret bandit. And his chance had come at last for getting the goods on the desperado who had used his name and blackened it in the sight of all men. He rode at a gallop in the direction the Mexican cattle-buyer had taken.

It was impossible to keep the man in sight. The country was one of high grass and rolling ridges, broken by timber islands and bunches of post-oaks. But the track of the Mexican's horse in the grass was more than enough for the Kid. Once or twice he had a glimpse of the cattle-buyer's big sombrero bobbing over the grass a good distance ahead. The Mexican was heading for Gunsight as fast as his pinto could stride, perplexed by his escape, but keen to give the outlaw no second chance.

That he would reach Gunsight safe the Kid did not believe for a moment. The Kid would have laid a hundred dollars to a red cent that the masked rider was laying for him on the trail. The dollars

instantly he set spurs to the animal and dashed away at top speed.

The Kid smiled a grim smile. The man was not giving him a chance to change his mind. The Mexican rode hard, and took a course that placed the timber island between himself and the boy puncher of Frio.

"The pesky gink!" growled the Kid.

in the cattle-buyer's saddle-bags were a prize that the desperado would never miss, if he knew—and he knew, since Poker Poindexter knew.

Suddenly, from the rolling plain ahead, came the loud bark of a revolver.

The Kid laughed grimly. The Mexican's trail, before him, ran into a timber island, shadowed by big cottonwoods. And the bark of the revolver told the Kid that that clump of timber was the cover the masked outlaw had picked for holding up the buyer, who was going to Poindexter's ranch with dollars in his saddle-bags. A gun leaped into the Kid's hand, and he gave his horse the spur.

"Old hoss, I guess we've got a cinch on that fire-bug!" said the Kid, and he dashed on at full gallop.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Man in the Mask!

"NUESTRA SENORA!" stammered Don Felipe Santander. He was taken

utterly by surprise. Danger, he believed, was behind him; and he was riding through the timber at a gallop, where the trail wound under the vast branches of tall cottonwoods, anxious only to put a greater distance between himself and the outlaw he had escaped.

Danger ahead he did not dream of. But it was ahead the danger lay.

From an opening in the timber a horseman with a mask on his face emerged into view, with revolver raised.

Santander stared at him. The levelled revolver was a warning; but the Mexican did not halt. He drove the long Mexican spurs into the pinto's flanks, and dashed on desperately, risking his life to save his roll. The revolver rang, and the pinto made a convulsive leap, and crashed down in the grass. Santander was hurled half-stunned from the saddle.

"You durned greaser!" came a savage voice from under the mask, as the horseman rode closer, his eyes glittering at Don Felipe through the holes in the mask. "Put up your paws, you geek, afore I drive a bullet through your cabeza!"

The Mexican struggled dazedly to his feet. He lifted his hands over his head. His horse lay dead in the trail, killed instantly by the bullet that had crashed into its brain. The gleam in the masked rider's eyes told that he was inclined to send a second bullet crashing through the Mexican's head, and Felipe Santander knew that his life hung by a thread.

He made no effort to reach the gun, which the Kid had replaced in his belt under the serape. His dusky hands went promptly over his sombrero.

"Señor! Hold your hand!" he gasped. "I will not resist."

The masked man laughed scoffingly. "I guess you're wise, you gold-darned greaser! I reckon you wouldn't live long, if you aimed to pull on the Rio Kid!"

The Mexican started convulsively. "The Rio Kid!" he gasped. "Sure!"

"You—you—yon, señor, you are the Rio Kid!" stammered the Mexican.

"I guess that's what they call me, to home in the Frio country, and if you've heard of me, you sure know that you better not play any tricks!" snapped the masked man.

"Por todos los Santos!" gasped the Mexican. He stared at the man. He was of slim build, not unlike the Kid. The mark of his grey mustang was black; the animal looked a twin to the Kid's steed. He wore goatskin chaps, like the Frio puncher. There was a band of silver nuggets round his Stetson hat, the well-known sign of the Rio Kid. But for his late meeting with the Kid, a few miles back on the prairie trail, Don Felipe would have had no doubt. But he knew now that the masked man was lying; he knew that this could not be the Rio Kid, whom he had left behind him on the trail.

The Kid had told him the truth; that a secret bandit was riding in his name. Felipe Santander knew that now.

The masked man eyed him grimly. "I guess I ain't no time to waste!" he snapped. "Jud Blake is riding the prairie to-day, I reckon, and I ain't no hunch to meet up with the marshal of Gunsight. I reckon I know you, greaser—you're Felipe Santander from Chihuahua, and I guess you've got a good-sized roll. Where you stacked it, say?"

The Mexican made a gesture towards the fallen horse. "In them saddle-bags?" demanded the outlaw.

"Si, señor." "I guess you want to sort it out, and you want to do it quick!" snapped the man in the black mask. "Pronto, hombre!"

"Si, señor!" faltered Don Felipe. "Keep in mind that I've got you covered," growled the trail-robber. "You try any tricks, greaser, and you get yours sudden."

"I am at your mercy, señor," said Santander. "Sort out that roll, pronto."

The Mexican stepped to the body of the horse, and knelt in the grass beside it. The revolver in the outlaw's hand bore full upon him, a ready finger on the trigger. The Mexican's manner was all obedience; but there was a glint in his black eyes. The loss of the dollars in his saddle-bags meant ruin to the cattle-buyer; and with all his submissive look, he was prepared to take the most desperate of chances.

He fumbled at the saddle-bags. The horseman rapped out an impatient oath. "Pronto, I'm telling you!"

"Si, señor."

"The jolly useful present—a combined magnifying-glass and compass, which is included in the list of Gifts for POPULAR readers. (See page 2.)

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Through the holes in the mask, the horseman's eyes glittered to and fro. The trail, winding through the timber, allowed little view in either direction. It was a good spot for a hold-up, hidden from all eyes. At the same time, any rider on the trail could not have been seen till he was close at hand. And the outlaw knew that the marshal of Gunsight was riding the prairie that day—there was little that went on in the cow-town that he did not know.

He was almost feverishly impatient. "Pronto!" he snarled. "By the big thunder, you waste one second, greaser, and I'll lay you in the trail as dead as Abe Lincoln."

The Mexican submissively opened the saddle-bags. From one of them he drew a thick wad of notes, and the eyes through the mask glittered at the sight of it. He stepped to the horseman and held it up—and at the same instant he reached for the gun hidden under his serape and flashed it out.

The masked man fired instantly. It was a desperate attempt—and it failed. Before the Mexican could pull trigger, the masked man's bullet struck him down.

With a loud cry, Felipe Santander fell, his revolver dropping from one hand, the wad of notes from the other, into the grass.

The horseman glared at him over the smoking gun.

"I guess you would have it!" he snarled.

The Mexican sank back, with a deep groan. A crimson stream reddened the fold of the serape over his breast, and his dusky face was white.

With a curse, the horseman sprang to the ground, to help himself to the loot. At the same moment there came the thunder of horse's hoofs on the trail through the timber.

The masked man started, and spun round towards the sound.

The approaching rider was not yet in sight, but was close at hand, screened, so far, by the trees along the winding trail. A fierce oath dropped from the masked man.

A second more, and the Rio Kid was riding down on him, and the gun in his hand was rattling. But the masked man had already leaped back into the saddle, and dashed his spurs into the flanks of his mustang. Even as the Kid burst into sight and began to fire, the masked man rode desperately in the opposite direction, and vanished round the winding turn of the trail.

In the grass lay the wad of notes, unheeded, close by the nerveless hand of the man he had shot down. A second's delay would have sealed the outlaw's fate, but he did not delay the fraction of a second. He rode madly, plying whip and spur, and vanished from the sight of the Rio Kid round the winding trail, though, swift as he was, the rapid shots of the boy puncher went very close.

The Kid's glance turned on the man who lay in his blood in the grass of the trail. His impulse was to ride on, in hot pursuit of the outlaw, to ride him down and force him to stop and fight for his life. It was the chance he had long sought, and swift as the masked man's steed was, the Kid would have relied on his mustang to win the desperate race. But as he reached the spot where the cattle-buyer lay, the Kid drew rein.

The outlaw had shot down the hapless man, and to leave him weltering in his blood, unaided, was not the Kid's way. Reluctantly he drew rein, and with the

fleeing hoof-beats of the outlaw still in his ears, bent over the Mexican. If the man was dead, it was but a moment lost—a moment that would be swiftly regained by the fleet-footed mustang. But a groan from the Mexican told that he lived.

"Dog-gone it!" growled the Kid. He stood for a moment undecided. The hoof-beats of the masked trail-robber were faint in the distance now. He was riding madly to escape, and beyond the timber lay the open plain. A few minutes, and he would be riding the prairie, screened by the dotted timber and the clumps of mesquite. The Kid made a movement to remount his horse, but he turned back to the Mexican. Santander's eyes were fixed on him. The Kid could not resist that appeal.

"Dog-gone the luck!" he snapped. "Senor," came a faint whisper from the Mexican.

The Kid sighed. To let his enemy escape was bitter, but the Kid would not stand for deserting a wounded man—perhaps dying. He dropped on his knees in the grass beside the cattle-buyer.

Santander tried to speak again, but his voice failed. He sank back heavily in the grass, and his eyes closed. The Kid, whose life had taught him something of rough surgery, stripped aside the serape and the velvet jacket under it, and examined the wound in the cattle-buyer's breast. That the Mexican would live, with care, was likely, but it was plain that only prompt care could save him. With his own neck-scarf, torn in strips, the Kid stanchied the flow of blood, and bound up the wound. He worked swiftly and carefully, and all that he could do for the wounded man was methodically done; and while he tended the outlaw's victim the hoof-beats of the masked man died away in the distance and were lost.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. A Close Call!

THE Rio Kid rose to his feet. He had done all he could, and he had saved the life of the Mexican cattle-buyer. But Don Felipe Santander lay senseless in the grass, and the Kid was perplexed. To lift him on a horse was to reopen the wound; all that could save him now was to be carried in a litter to Gunsight, where the cowboy doctor could tend him. But that was not in the Kid's power, and to ride into Gunsight to bring help for him was to ride into a hornets' nest.

"I guess this has got me beat!" growled the Kid.

But the Kid was not given time to think out that problem. There was a sudden shout from the timber.

"Put 'em up!"

"Oh, shucks!" ejaculated the Kid.

Three men had leaped out from the cottonwoods, and three levelled revolvers covered the Kid. Half-way to his gun his hand stopped, just in time to save his life. With a grim face the Rio Kid put up his hands and faced the marshal of Gunsight and his men.

"You sure win, Jud Blake," he said coolly.

"Keep 'em up!" said the marshal, finger on trigger. "We've got you now, by the great horned toad!"

"You sure have," said the Kid bitterly, "and you've sure got the big bonehead of Texas, marshal."

The three Gunsight men gathered round him—Jud Blake, the marshal, and Tex Clew and Mohave, of the Poin-

dexter Ranch. While the marshal held his gun almost jammed in the Kid's face, Tex and Mohave disarmed him. And Tex ran a trail-robe round him, and bound his arms to his sides. The Kid made no resistance. The marshal's finger was on the trigger, and a bullet through the head would have been the answer. The marshal of Gunsight was taking no chances with the Rio Kid. Not till the Kid's arms were bound did Jud Blake shove his revolver back into its holster.

"Cinched!" he said, with a deep breath. "You durned coyote, you're cinched good, with the man you've shot up at your feet! You sure ain't showed your hoss-sense this time, Kid. I guess you might have figured that that shooting might be heard, but I reckon you never knew we was riding the prairie so close. Cinched at last, Kid."

"You dog-goned galoot!" said the Kid. "You've sure sneaked through the timber like a pesky gang of Apaches, but you wouldn't have got me if I hadn't been the prize bonehead. You figure that I shot up that Greaser? You god-darned loosed gink, he was shot up by the man that's riding under my name, and I sure was here to help him."

The marshal grinned. "You won't get away with a yarn like that, Kid," he said. "Durn my boots, you made me near believe that you was square when you talked turkey to me the other day, and allowed that you wasn't the firebug that's raised Cain round Gunsight. You sure did! Now I've rope you in good, and enough evidence to hang every rustler in Texas."

"It sure is a cinch," said Tex. "That galoot allowed that it was our boss, Jim Poindexter, who was riding the trails with a mask on his face, and here we've got him dead to rights, with the man he's shot up lying at his feet. I guess there ain't any more doubt, marshal."

"There sure ain't," said Mohave. "and I guess a rope and a branch is what the guy wants, and wants bad."

The marshal nodded. "Git your riata, Tex," he said briefly.

"Sure!"

Tex went back through the timber. The Kid smiled bitterly. While he had cared for the wounded man, he had been caught in this deadly trap. The marshal and his men had left their horses, and crept on the scene, guessing from the sound of shooting that there was a hold-up in the timber. And now they had him! The senseless cattle-buyer could not speak, and nothing that the Kid could say would save him.

"Jud Blake, you're a durned loosed mosshhead," said the Kid. "I'm telling you that I never shot up that Greaser, and if you look at him you'll sure see that I've bandaged him good."

"That won't let you out," answered Jud Blake. "If you've bandaged the guy, you sure shot him up first, and that's a cinch. Why, there's his dollars lying in the grass this minute."

"I tell you—"

"Forget it!" interrupted the marshal. Tex came back through the trees with the lasso. He threw one end over a high branch.

The Kid's face paled a little. "You ain't totting me into Gunsight?" he asked.

"I sure ain't," answered the marshal emphatically. "It wouldn't help you any if I did; the boys would lynch you on sight. But you're too dog-goned slippery for me to take chances with

you, Kid. You've been roped in before, and you've got clear—more'n once, I reckon. You're caught in the act, and you're going up, pronto."

"I guess you're in a powerful hurry, marshal," said the Kid quietly. "Wait till that galoot's able to speak, and he'll sure tell you that I saved him from the man who shot him up."

Jud glanced at the insensible Mexican. "We ain't wasting time on you, Kid," he answered. "You've shot six galoots in this country, and you've tried to put it on that rancher Poindexter—and I guess you talked so well, you near made me believe you was giving me the straight goods. You got the gall to stand for the same story, with that guy Santander lying at your feet? Sho! You sure take me for some soft Rube, you sure do!"

"Let him speak—"
"You make me tired, Kid," said the marshal. "I guess you get yours here and now, pronto. Put that rope on him, Tex."

"You bet!" grinned Tex.
"Oh, search me," said the Kid. "It sure gets my goat to go up at the hands of a bunch of prize boobs, it sure does! Go ahead with the funeral, marshal, and be darned to you!"

There was a groan from the wounded Mexican. His black eyes opened, and stared wildly on the scene.

A flush of hope came into the Kid's

face. His eyes fixed anxiously on the wounded man.

"You sure seem hard hit, Santander," said the marshal. "But I guess we'll get you to a doc when we're through with this galoot. You're going to see him strung up."

The Mexican started.
"Senor! He saved my life!" he gasped

"You mean to say it wasn't this galoot shot you up?" roared the marshal of Gunsight.

"No, senor!"
"Waal, carry me home to die!"

"It was a masked man—who called himself the Rio Kid," said the Mexican faintly. "He shot me—and this hombre came to my aid! He bound up my wound—he saved me—"

"Dog-gone my cats!" said Jud. He scratched his head, perplexed. "This here galoot is the Rio Kid, Santander."

"I know! The man who shot me up called himself by the same name!" said the cattle-buyer. "He was masked—he rode for his life when this hombre came up—"

The Mexican had half-raised himself in his eagerness.

"He is the Rio Kid, but he saved me from the outlaw!" he said faintly. "If I live I owe him my life."

There was a long silence. The marshal of Gunsight looked at the Kid, and then slowly threw aside the riata. He made a sign to Tex, who released

the boy puncher's arms. The marshal pointed to the Kid's horse.

"Beat it!" he said laconically. The Kid smiled.

"I reckon you're wise to it now, marshal, that I ain't the pesky fire-bug that's called himself by my name," he said.

"I guess that's proved," answered the marshal. "There's your sheriffs in Texas that want to rope you in, Kid, but I guess that ain't my funeral. You ain't the fire-bug we want, and you've got into this cinch by helping a man what was shot up by that fire-bug. I reckon I ain't got no grouch agin you. There's your hoss, and there's your guns—and you want to hit the trail." Jud Blake hesitated a moment, and then held out his hand. "Shake, and beat it!"

While the marshal and his men were making a litter of branches to carry, the wounded Mexican to the cow-town, the Rio Kid rode out of the timber. That night, all Gunsight heard the news, and knew, beyond doubt, that the masked outlaw who had made himself the terror of the section was not the Rio Kid. But who he was still unknown—though the Kid was resolved that it should be known, before he rode out of the Gunsight country.

THE END.

(Don't miss—"THE RAIDER'S LAST TRAIL!" next week's roaring long complete story of the Rio Kid. It's full of thrills.)

This Week's List of Birthday Dates!

Claim one of our topping gifts if you were born on any of the dates published below!

Readers who were registered in the POPULAR Birthday Gift Club before March 30th, 1929, may claim one of the following gifts:

- Fountain Pen.
- Penknife.
- Table Tennis Set.
- Combined Compass and Magnifying glass.
- Conjuring Outfit.
- Drawing Set.
- Electric Torch and Battery.
- Leather Pocket Wallet.
- Hobby Annual.
- Holiday Annual.

—if the date of their birth is the same as a date in the following list—

- November 13th, 1914.
- January 4th, 1914.
- May 1st, 1915.
- March 10th, 1912.
- September 9th, 1909.
- December 5th, 1918.
- June 26th, 1913.
- February 20th, 1916.
- July 30th, 1915.
- August 23rd, 1917.
- October 31st, 1911.

If you were BORN on any of these dates, fill in the CLAIMS COUPON provided on this page and send it to:

The Editor,
POPULAR Birthday Gift Club,
5, Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4.

so as to reach this address not later than April 11th, 1929. Please write the word "CLAIM" in the top left hand corner of your envelope.

No reader may claim a Gift unless he or she has already been registered as a member of our Birthday Gift Club.

A published date must be exactly the same in day, month, and year as that given on your registration coupon.

You CANNOT claim and register AT THE SAME TIME. Should your birth date happen to be published in this list, and you are not already registered, YOU WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR A GIFT.

ANOTHER LIST OF BIRTHDAY DATES WILL APPEAR IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE.

BIRTHDAY GIFT

CLAIM COUPON

(For the use of REGISTERED READERS ONLY.)

Name.....

Full Address (please write plainly)

I declare myself to have registered in your Birthday Gift Club, before Saturday, March 30th, 1929, and as the date given above (here state date)..... is the date of my birth, I wish to claim a (state name of the Gift you would like)..... in accordance with the rules of the club.

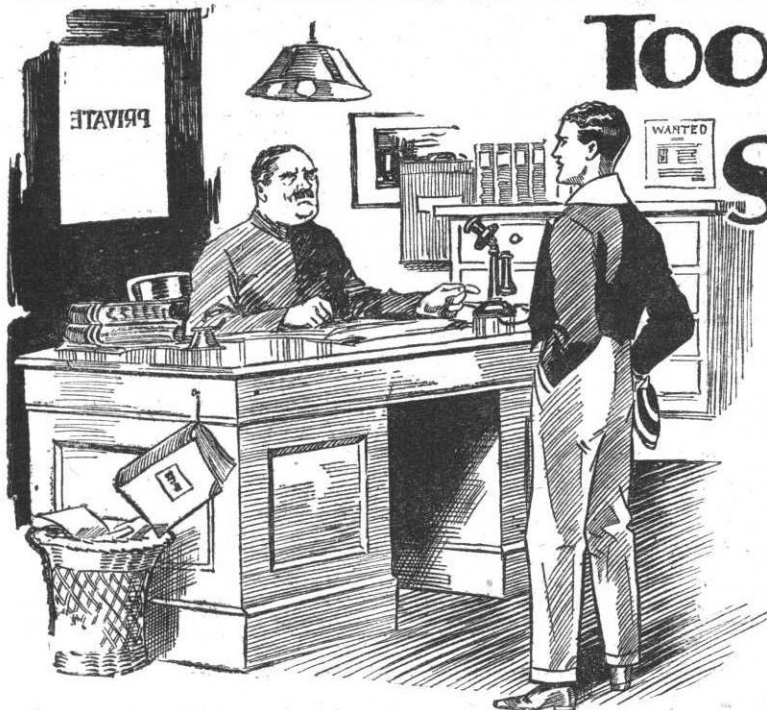
THIS COUPON IS ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL APRIL 11th, 1929.

POPULAR.

APRIL 6th.

THE BOY WHO TRIED TO MAKE MONEY!

Money makes money thinks Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove, and forthwith proceeds to put into action a scheme on those lines. But there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip, as Skinner soon discovers!



TOO CLEVER of SKINNER!

By
Frank
Richards

(Author of the famous stories of
HARRY WHARTON & CO. OF
GREYFRIARS, appearing in the
"Magnet" every Saturday).

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Skinner, the Business Man!

SOVEREIGN for Sale!
Study No. 11, Remove."

That rather unusual notice, written in the thin, clear hand of Skinner of the Remove, was pinned on the wall of the junior Common-room at Greyfriars.

A good many fellows stared at it.

Sovereigns were few and far between at Greyfriars. Sometimes a fellow had a sovereign, or a half-sovereign, and would show it about to other fellows quite as a curiosity. But nobody remembered a sovereign being offered for sale before.

"Now, I wonder what that means?" Bob Cherry remarked, as Harry Wharton & Co. looked at Skinner's little notice. "Why the thump does Skinner want to sell a sovereign? He could change it at any shop. Shops are glad to get hold of genuine quids."

"It's an odd thing," remarked Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "If you take a half-sovereign to a shop and spend it, you never get it back in change for a pound note afterwards. People seem to stick to them."

"I don't see why," said Nugent. "A quid's a quid, whether it's paper or gold. You can only buy the same stuff with it."

"It's simple enough, though," said Monty Newland, who was looking at the paper on the wall. The Famous Five all turned to Newland. Monty was supposed to know all about finances, his father, Sir Montague Newland, being a great man in the City, and director of innumerable companies.

"How's that, Newland?" asked Harry Wharton.

"You've probably never heard of 'Gresham's Law,'" said Newland, with a smile.

"Never! What is it?"

"It's the rule that a bad currency will drive out a good one," said Newland. "In the old times, when kings were short of money, they used to falsify the coin, putting in alloy instead of gold. In modern times they print paper money instead. It comes to much the same thing. When a man got hold of the good currency, he kept it, when he got the bad currency he passed it on to the next man. So the bad currency drove out the good."

"But you can buy the same stuff for a paper quid that you can get for a gold sovereign," said Nugent.

"That's so. But the gold in a sovereign is worth five or six shillings more than a paper pound, which means that printing paper money has reduced the value of the pound to fifteen shillings or so. Gold is a commodity itself; paper isn't. Gold always keeps its value. Taking a sovereign as a lump of gold, it's worth twenty-five shillings or more in our modern paper money."

Bob Cherry rubbed his nose.

"But a shopkeeper won't give you twenty-five shillings' worth of tuck for it," he said.

"No; but a goldsmith would give you twenty-five shillings—if he were allowed to."

"Oh!" said Bob.

"So they've passed a law that you must not sell a sovereign above its face value," said Newland. "I suppose Skinner doesn't know that. Lots of people don't. Anybody who sells a sovereign for as much as twenty shillings and sixpence is breaking the law, and liable to be fined or sent to chokey!"

"I—I see," said Bob slowly. "But for that, people would be grabbing up the genuine quids right and left, and melting them down to use as gold."

Monty Newland nodded.

"But why shouldn't they, if they're their own sovereigns?" asked Johnny Bull.

"You mustn't always do as you like with your own," said Newland, smiling. "You have to think of the country. A man who owns a house can't charge any rent he likes, you know—the law stops him. The man who owns a sovereign can't charge any price he likes—the law steps in again."

"The country needs a gold reserve. As a matter of fact, there are a good many shady people going about trying to get hold of sovereigns, and offering a premium for them. But it's illegal."

"Any chap who has golden quids ought to pay them into a bank or a post office—then they go into the national gold reserve. But lots of people have real quids put away—Gresham's Law, you know; the worse currency driving out the better one. Some day the gold currency will come back, and then, I rather fancy, some millions of sovereigns will come out of their hiding-places."

"It's rather fatheaded to lock up quids," said Bob. "If you put them into Savings Certificates you get interest on them."

"But nervous people do it, all the same," said Newland. "Nobody knows how many sovereigns have been locked away, but there must be some millions, at least. And people who don't object to breaking the law sell them at a profit."

Wharton gave a start, and looked at Skinner's notice again.

"You don't think that that's Skinner's game?" he exclaimed.

"Of course it is. If he wanted twenty shillings for his quid, he could take it to Mrs. Mumble at the tuckshop."

Wharton frowned.

"It's rather mean, even if it wasn't illegal," he said. "Skinner ought not to do anything of the kind."

"He had better not let the Head hear of it, at any rate," said Newland. "It would mean trouble for him."

"It ought to mean trouble for him, if matters are as you say," said Bob Cherry. "The law ought to be observed—that's only playing the game. It's as fair for one chap as another. Let's go and see Skinner, you fellows, and ask him what he wants for his quid."

"Let's," assented Wharton.

And the Famous Five repaired to Study No. 11 in the Remove. They found Skinner there, engaged in discus-

union with Fisher T. Fish, the Transatlantic ornament of the Lower Fourth. "I guess I can go you twenty-two-and-six," Fisher T. Fish was saying.

"Twenty-five!" said Skinner. "Oh, come off!" growled Fisher T. Fish. "Twenty-five is the outside limit, and I couldn't get more than that myself by going round Courtfield looking for a galoot to buy it."

"That depends," said Skinner. "I heard of a chap who got twenty-seven. Twenty-five's my price."

"Oh, guff!" said Fisher T. Fish; and he walked out of the study as the Famous Five came in.

Skinner gave the chums of the Remove a cheery nod.

"Looking for bargains in quids?" he asked.

"No," said Harry Wharton. "Are you asking more than a pound for that sovereign, Skinner?"

"More than a paper pound, yes. I want twenty-five bob. You see," explained Skinner, "my uncle gave me a sovereign last holidays, and I've kept it ever since. But I'm hard up, so I'm going to sell it. What offers?"

"None from this little party," said Bob Cherry. "Newland says it is against the law."

"Dear me!" said Skinner. "Oh! You knew that, did you?"

"My dear man, there are so many laws," drawled Skinner. "Six hundred busybodies gather together at Westminster and keep on passing laws so fast that it makes a fellow's head swim. They really can't expect me to keep pace with their jolly old antics."

"So that's how you look at the laws of the country you live in?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Just like that," assented Skinner. "Twenty-five bob if you want the quid. There's the door, if you don't."

"The Head would be down on this, Skinner," said Harry.

"Are you going to sneak to the Head?" sneered Skinner.

"You know I'm not—but you know jolly well that you ought not to be doing this."

Skinner smiled genially.

"You always do exactly as you ought?" he asked.

"Well, I—I suppose not; but—"

"You see, even a perfect character—a model for the school—doesn't always keep up to the very pitch of perfection," smiled Skinner. "So what can you expect of an imperfect character like little me?"

Harry Wharton & Co. left the study. It was not of much use arguing with Harold Skinner. A little later Sidney James Snoop came in, with a frowning brow.

"You're selling a quid, Skinner?" he exclaimed.

"Just so."

"Fishy says you're asking twenty-five shillings for it?"

"It's worth it, dear boy. Worth more, as a matter of fact—but I never was close with money."

"So that's why you took my gold quids the other day and gave me currency notes for them!" exclaimed Snoop.

Skinner nodded coolly.

"That's why," he assented. "You were glad to get the money for them, Snoopey. I asked you if you were sure, and you said yes. You've got nothing to grouse about."

"I never thought about the quids being worth more than paper money."

"I did," said Skinner.

"You've done me, I'd jolly well

make you give me the quids back, only I've spent your notes," growled Snoop.

Skinner laughed.

"You ought to stand me something extra, Skinner."

"Even his Magnificence, the great Wharton, doesn't always do just as he ought—he's just owned up to it," grinned Skinner. "And I never do."

"Well, you're a mean rotter," said Snoop.

"Thanks!"

"Newland says what you're doing is illegal."

"I'm not askin' Newland to buy the quid."

"You spun a yarn about your uncle giving you the sovereign. You know that's a rotten lie."

"Go hon!" sneered Skinner.

"You know jolly well that some fishy-looking johnny wanted us to row him across the river the other day," said Snoop, "and that you bargained with him."

"And he gave us five giddy sovereigns for the job," drawled Skinner. "And Queen Anne's dead."

Snoop glared.

"Oh, don't rot!" he snapped. "Why the silly idiot wanted to get across in such a hurry, I don't know. But he paid us handsomely for it. And you, you rotter, took my share of the quids and gave me paper money for 'em."

"Quite true," said Skinner mockingly. "And you're sayin' nothin' to the fellows. You've had your half, and you can shut up. If there was anythin' fishy about that fat johnny, you're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire."

"I'm not saying anything. All the same, it's rotten!" grumbled Snoop. "I suppose your game is to sell the quids one after another, at intervals—making out they were tips from relations."

"Just that."

"You'll make an extra twenty-five shillings on the five of them, at that rate."

"That's what comes of havin' a business head," said Skinner coolly. "The reward of ability, you know."

Bolsover major came into the study.

"Trot it out, Skinner," he said.

"You're after the sovereign, Bolsover?"

"Yes; I'd like it as a curiosity," said Bolsover major. "I'm going to wear it on my watch-chain. I don't mind giving you a guinea for it, if you like."

"I'm asking twenty-five shillings."

"Well, you're a blessed Shylock!" said Bolsover major, in disgust. "It's only worth a pound, isn't it?"

"If you buy the same amount of gold from a goldsmith, old man, you'll have to give at least twenty-six shillings," said Skinner. "You're making a profit in getting this one for twenty-five."

"Is that so?" asked Bolsover dubiously.

"You can ask Newland—he knows all about money values. His father's a rich sheeny in the City."

"Well, I'll have it," said Bolsover. "I'll take it down to Courtfield tomorrow and have it bored to put on my chain. There's your money."

Bolsover major laid a pound-note and two half-crowns on the table, and left the study with Skinner's sovereign in his possession. Skinner smiled cheerily, and Sidney James Snoop scowled.

It was soon known in the Remove that Bolsover major had bought Skinner's sovereign. But Skinner's notice remained pinned on the wall in the Common-room.

In answer to inquiries, Skinner explained that he had another sovereign,

given him as a tip by a kind aunt. One sovereign had been sold; but there was still a sovereign for sale in Study No. 11 in the Remove.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

"FRANKY, old man—" Harry Wharton's brows were knitted in thought; Nugent looked at him inquiringly.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"This game of Skinner's—" "No bizney of ours, Harry," said Frank Nugent. "Skinner's a toad, if you like—a regular tick—but it takes all sorts to make a Lower Fourth Form in any school."

"It isn't that, Frank," said Wharton gravely. "But where did he get the gold coins from?"

"He says his uncle gave him the quid last holidays. Nothing surprising in that."

"No; but he's sold one, and he's got another for sale, and says that his aunt gave it him."

"Well, what about it?" asked Nugent.

"It's too thick, Frank. Skinner never got those quids from his relations. You remember that fat johnny the other day offered us sovereigns to row him across the river. We asked Skinner whether he had rowed the man across, and he said 'No.' But it looks to me now—" Harry Wharton paused.

Frank Nugent gave a whistle.

"I hadn't thought of it," he said.

"But it's clear enough, now you mention it. Of course, the man came on Skinner and Snoop in their boat, after we turned them down and gave them money to row him across. That's where Skinner's quids came from."

"It seems likely, Frank."

"It seems jolly certain. Still, it's not our bizney if Skinner chooses to take tips from strangers."

"The man was a rogue, Frank; we thought at the time that he must have robbed a bank."

"I know; but we've watched the papers since then, and there's been nothing about a bank being held up in this part of the country."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's so; and if it had happened, it would be in the papers, of course. I can't quite make it out; but the man was a rogue. It occurred to me that he might be a coiner."

"Not likely. I fancy coiners of gold must have gone out of business since paper money came in," said Nugent. "There are spoof half-crowns and florins about. And I've read in the papers that there are forged currency notes. But it stands to reason that a coiner wouldn't turn out sovereigns. You can't change a sovereign in a shop without getting some attention; and a coiner doesn't go round trying to attract notice to his goods."

Wharton laughed.

"No. Anybody getting a sovereign now looks at it twice, at least. I saw a man change a sovereign at Chunkley's the other day, and the shopman rang it three times on the counter. I suppose the merchants in spoof quids must have gone out of business."

"Pretty certain," said Nugent.

"Then what the dickens was that man, Frank? He was escaping from something, and he seemed to have a pocketful of sovereigns."

"Might have been only an eccentric character—perhaps a little bit off the

top. Anyhow, he wasn't a bank-robber, or the matter would be in the papers."

"I can't help feeling bothered about it, Frank. It would be a frightful disgrace for Greyfriars if—if—"

"Well, Skinner's bound to disgrace his school sooner or later," said Frank. "Still, it would be rather thick for a Greyfriars chap to be had up as a receiver of stolen goods. Grooh!"

"It's beastly of Skinner; but, of course, we can't give a chap away," said Harry. "But it's on my mind, Frank. If that man was a thief of some sort, and it looks like it, it must have been the police he was scouting from, and they must want to know where he was seen last. If there'd been a report in the paper of a bank-robbery in this part of Kent we should have known what to do. But look here, Frank, we know Inspector Grimes, at Courtfield. Suppose we ask him about it—without mentioning Skinner, of course. If that man is wanted by the police, it's pretty certain that they have his description at the police station in Courtfield. We can ask Mr. Grimes about it, and set the matter at rest."

Nugent made a grimace.

It was Wednesday and a half-holiday, and the Famous Five had intended to go for a long cycle spin that afternoon. But as he saw that the matter was troubling his chum, Frank assented at once.

"We can take in Courtfield on our way, Frank," said Harry.

"Right-ho! I don't mind."

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry being agreeable, when consulted, the Famous Five wheeled out their bicycles to ride to Courtfield.

They found Bolsover major of the Remove, starting in the same direction.

"Seen my quid?" asked Bolsover genially. "I'm going down to old Lazarus to have it put on my chain."

"Let's see it," said Harry.

"Here you are."

Bolsover major handed over the sovereign. Harry examined it very keenly; certainly it looked like a genuine coin.

"Sure it's a good one?" he asked, as he handed it back to Bolsover major.

The latter gave a start.

"Eh! Why shouldn't it be? Skinner got it as a tip from his uncle last hols."

"If he did, it's all right, of course."

"Well, he says he did. It seems to ring all right," said Bolsover major. "Anyhow, I'll ask old Lazarus; he will know."

And Bolsover major tucked the sovereign into his waistcoat-pocket and pedalled off. The Famous Five rode in the same direction. Bolsover major stopped at Mr. Lazarus' shop, Harry Wharton & Co. riding on till they came to the police station.

Leaving his chums to wait for him, the captain of the Remove entered the station, and asked the constable on duty for Inspector Grimes. He was shown into the inspector's room, where the stout and florid Mr. Grimes greeted him with a genial nod.

"Good-afternoon, Master Wharton! What can I do for you?"

Wharton coloured a little.

"I'm afraid I may be wasting your time, Mr. Grimes," he said. "But there's something I think I ought to tell you—or ask you, rather. If there's nothing in it, you'll excuse me."

"Certainly," said Mr. Grimes, with a rather curious look.

And Harry Wharton gave a succinct

account of the meeting with the running man on the river the previous week.

Inspector Grimes listened rather carelessly at first, but as Harry proceeded his attention became concentrated. He did not interrupt the schoolboy; but his look became graver and grimmer as Harry Wharton proceeded with his tale.

"I'm glad you've come to me, Master Wharton," he said. "I wish you'd come earlier. When did this happen exactly?"

"Last Wednesday."

"A week ago," said the inspector. He sorted out a bundle of papers from a pigeon-hole. "Now, give me his description carefully. A stoutish man of about fifty—"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Wearing glasses," said the inspector. "Horn-rimmed."

"No; gold-rimmed!" said Harry.

"He would change them, of course—a second pair in his pocket," assented the inspector. "Light brown eyes—"

"I never noticed the colour of his eyes."

"Well, you wouldn't, I suppose. Five-foot-six high—"

"About that."

"Running hard up the river from the direction of Friardale."

"Yes," said Harry.

"And he badly wanted you to row him across?"

"He offered us money—gold sovereigns."

Inspector Grimes chuckled.

"No doubt; they came cheaper to him than half-crowns to another man. I don't suppose he had many currency notes about him—but he may have had hundreds of sovereigns. Well, Master Wharton, it's pretty clear that the man you saw last Wednesday was John Smith, alias George Robinson, alias Peter Williams, alias Gilded Jim!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated the captain of the Remove. "Then he was a rogue of some kind, as we thought!"

"He was—and is. Gilded Jim was traced last week on the railway from Canterbury to Lantham," said the inspector. "He was traced from Lantham on the local line to Friardale. The detective's hand was nearly on his shoulder at Friardale, when he dodged down a back street and got away."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"He was seen running on the tow-path; and the London detective was hot on his track," went on Mr. Grimes. "But the rogue was cunning—he crossed the stream by a plank bridge, and threw the plank into the water. That got him clear. The man behind him lost half an hour, and lost the track into the bargain. Afterwards the river-bank was searched, but it seemed pretty clear that he got across the river somehow. It's known that he cannot swim, and every boatman between Courtfield and Friardale has been questioned; but nobody knows anything of the man. He got clear away on the other side, and I had guessed long ago that he had spotted some pleasure boat on the river, and asked for a passage across."

"He asked us," said Harry. "But we were suspicious; it seemed so jolly fishy that—"

"You were right; but somebody else did not have so much sense, I imagine," said the inspector. "When you go back to your school you might ask whether any other lad had a boat up the river that day, and saw anything of the man."

Wharton was silent.

"Any information you can send us would be useful, of course," said the

inspector. "Of course, any Greyfriars boy would be glad to come forward and tell anything he knew, in a case like this. The man is a professional swindler, and has been wanted for two years."

"Then—then it really was stolen money that the rascal offered us!" exclaimed Harry.

The inspector smiled.

"Oh, no! It was his own. You see, he made it himself!"

"Then he was a coiner!"

"Yes, and the most skilful coiner in the country; that's why his associates call him Gilded Jim."

"And the sovereigns were—"

"Duds!" said the inspector.

"But—I thought of that," said Harry. "But surely a coiner would not try to pass spoof sovereigns in these days, when you get so much attention if you hand out gold in any place."

"You don't know the wicked ways of the world in your school, my boy," said the inspector, with a smile. "That was Gilded Jim's game in the old days before the War. It wouldn't pay him now—the first spoof sovereign he changed in a shop would most likely give him away. But there are people who buy up sovereigns to melt down; they give more than twenty shillings each for them. It's illegal, but it's done to a very considerable extent. Of course, it has to be kept very dark; a shady merchant buying sovereigns over face value knows that he is breaking the law. Gilded Jim's game in these days is to get himself up as a country shopkeeper or farmer who has a dozen sovereigns that he's been keeping in a stocking or a locked box; he gets into touch with one of the gold grabbers, and sells the quids at twenty-two or three shillings each."

"Pshaw!"

"You see, he's a skilful coiner, and he puts good value into the stuff—ten shillings' worth of gold at least in each quid. He can afford to be on the safe side, as he sells them at a premium." The inspector laughed. "There are a good many gold-grabbing merchants in the country who have dealt with Gilded Jim, and have had reason to be sorry for it!"

"So—so that was it?" exclaimed Wharton. "I—I never thought of anything of that kind, of course!"

"Naturally you wouldn't," said Mr. Grimes. "But that's the game. Gilded Jim used to swindle the general public before the War. The introduction of paper money spoiled his business, till he worked out this new stunt. Now he swindles people who are something like swindlers themselves; at least, what they do is illegal. I dare say it serves them right when they get landed with his dud sovereigns; all the same, the law wants to get hold of Gilded Jim. We want him very bad!"

"I understand," said Harry.

"He would have been nailed last Wednesday, if some unthinking ass had not helped him across the river," said Mr. Grimes. "That gave him a fresh start, and he got clear. But it would be useful to know for a fact that he did get across. It would narrow down the search to some extent. Let me know anything you may hear."

Harry Wharton rejoined his chums, who were waiting in the street. The Famous Five had plenty of food for thought as they pedalled away in the sunny afternoon.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Bombshell for Skinner!

SKINNER of the Remove was in high feather.

In Study No. 11 in the Remove he had gathered a select little party of friends.

It was but seldom that Skinner "stood" a spread; generally he was careful to limit his expenditure to himself. But there were occasions when Skinner appeared as the hospitable host—rare occasions, perhaps once in a term. And on this special occasion Skinner was "doing" himself and his friends uncommonly well. Having received twenty-five shillings from Bolsover major for a sovereign that had cost him nothing, Skinner felt that he could safely spread himself a little. And he did.

There was a heavy footstep in the Remove passage, and the sound of a panting breath. Somebody had come

"You—you—you thief!"
"Oh, my hat!" murmured Hazeldene.
"What's the trouble now? I'm not staying for this show!" And Hazel slipped quietly out of the study behind Bolsover major. And Fisher T. Fish backed out after him.

Skinner rose to his feet, his thin face pale with rage.

"What do you mean, Bolsover, you bullyin' cad? What do you mean by callin' me names, you rotter?"

Bolsover shook a huge fist at Harold

it was a bad one when you bunged it on me?"

"A—a—a bad one!" stuttered Skinner.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Snoop.

This was news—startling news—to Snoop, as well as to Skinner. But Sidney James grinned. Skinner had "done" him in the deal over the gold coins; and it looked now as if Skinner had done himself still more completely. And Sidney James was glad that he had already spent the currency notes



A LESSON FOR A RASCAL! "Are you handing me back my money, or shall I wallop you first, and then go to the police-station with your false money?" demanded Bolsover. Skinner shuddered. "I-I tell you I never knew! I'll make it up later—I'll— Oh crumbs! Yarooop!" Skinner broke off as Bolsover grasped him, and got his head into chancery. (See Chapter 3.)

upstairs, apparently, at a great rate of speed. The heavy footsteps came along to Study No. 11.

"That's Bolsover," grinned Snoop. "I'd know his fairy footsteps anywhere."

Crash!

The door of Study No. 11 flew wide open. With so many guests in the study, No 11 was rather overcrowded, and Billy Bunter was within radius of the opening door. As it flew open, it collided with Bunter, and there was a yell from the fat junior.

"Whoop!"

Bolsover major strode into the study. Billy Bunter was staggering in his way, and the burly Removite shoved him roughly aside, and Bunter collapsed in a corner.

Bolsover major's face was red with rage and fury. He glared over the table at Skinner.

"You swindler!" he roared.

"What?" howled Skinner.

Skinner over the tea-table. The remaining members of the party backed their chairs hastily.

"You spoofing rotter!" bellowed Bolsover, and his bull voice drew curious fellows along the passage. "I'm having it back! See? I'm having my money back, or I'll make you squirm!"

And Bolsover major crashed a sovereign on the table. It rang there and spun round, and rolled to the carpet. Skinner glanced at it.

"What are you driving at?" he said, between his teeth. "I'd take the sovereign back, only I've spent the money. You bought it of your own accord, you rotter, didn't you?"

"I thought it was a good one!" roared Bolsover.

"It's good enough."

"If it's good enough, take it to the tuckshop and change it, and I'll take the twenty shillings you get for it, and say no more about it!" scoffed Bolsover major. "Mean to say you didn't know

he had received in exchange for his half of the bribe.

Skinner stood stuttering. The surprise and rage and dismay in his face calmed Bolsover major a little.

"You didn't know?" he demanded.

"You rotter!" hissed Skinner savagely. "Do you think I'm a passer of counterfeit money?"

"Well, you passed it on to me," said Bolsover major. "And you're such a deceiving blighter, Skinner, that I don't believe you didn't know it. It's just one of your tricks. Anyway, it's all right if you give me my money back. There's your precious quid on the floor."

"I can't give you the money back when I've spent nearly all of it already!" hissed Skinner. "And the sovereign's a good one. Who's told you it's bad?"

"Mr. Lazarus at Courtfield!" roared Bolsover. "I took it to him to have it put on my chain. He fairly grinned

at me, blow him! He told me at once it was a dud."

"He's an old fool—"

"He said it was an unusually well-made one, with an unusual amount of genuine gold in it," said Bolsover major. "He says there may be nine or ten shillings' worth of gold in it. He advised me to take it to the police station and tell them where I got it—and so I jolly well will if you don't give me my money back."

"He, he, he!" came from Snoop.

Skinner's face was white. He realised that Bolsover major must be stating the facts; old Mr. Lazarus, at Courtfield, knew what he was talking about. He was a dealer in coins of long experience. It was a terrible blow to the hapless Skinner.

He had parted with two pounds ten shillings to Snoop in exchange for sovereigns that turned out to be "duds"—coins that he could not pass without risk of arrest.

For some moments Skinner's brain was in a whirl.

Bolsover major had come round the table now, and was towering over the wretched Skinner.

"There's your dud quid on the floor. Give me the twenty-five bob."

"I—I don't believe it's a dud—"

"You knew it was!" roared Bolsover.

"You said you got it from your uncle—and you've got another from your blessed aunt—I don't think! Are your relations a gang of coiners, then? They must be if they can hand you out spoof quids for tips."

Skinner panted as a laugh came from the passage. He seemed caught at every point now. Vernon-Smith looked into the doorway with a grin on his face.

"Nabbed at last, old man," he remarked. "But I say, Skinny, this is rather thick, even for you."

"You rotter! I never knew—"

"Own up, old nut!" said Smithy. "You bought those quids cheap somewhere to palm off among the fellows."

"I didn't!" shrieked Skinner.

He fairly quivered with terror as he realised the fearful suspicion his conduct had laid him open to.

"Are you going to give me back my twenty-five bob?" roared Bolsover major.

"I—I've spent it!" gasped Skinner desperately. "I—I'll make it up. I'll let you have the money some time."

"This year, next year, some time, never!" chuckled the Bounder. And there was a laugh from the gathering crowd in the Remove passage.

"That's not good enough!" shouted Bolsover. "Are you handing back my money, or shall I wallop you first and then go to the police station with your false money?"

Skinner shuddered.

"I—I tell you I never knew. I'll make it up later. I—I'll— Oh, crumbs! Oh, dear! Yooop! Gerroff! Yaroooooooogh!"

Bolsover major had grasped him. Skinner struggled fiercely. But the bully of the Remove was not to be denied. Skinner's head went into chancery, and Bolsover punched at his features with terrific vim.

The hapless Skinner's yells rang along the Remove passage.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Skinner Pays the Piper!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Is that murder, or only manslaughter?" inquired Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton & Co. came up the THE POPULAR.—No. 532.

Remove staircase. They had ridden home at once from Courtfield, instead of going on the intended spin. Wharton was anxious to see Skinner and warn him of the peril he had placed himself in and recommend him to go to Inspector Grimes and tell the whole story. But Bolsover major was back first, as the Famous Five guessed when they heard the fearful yelling from Skinner's study.

"Bolsover's found out it was a spoof quid!" grinned Johnny Bull. "He's taking it out of Skinner."

"Serve him jolly well right!" said Nugent.

"The rightfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "But we must not let him manslaughter the esteemed and detestable Skinner!"

And the Famous Five ran along the passage to Study No. 11. There was a crowd round the door, buzzing with excitement. Inside the study Bolsover was hammering Skinner without mercy.

"Hold on, Bolsover!" The captain of the Remove ran into the study and caught Bolsover's powerful arm and dragged it back.

"Let go, Wharton! He's sold me a spoof quid, and he won't give me the money back! Palming false money on the fellows—pah!"

"I—I—I," babbled Skinner—"I—I never did!"

Wharton gavo the wretched fellow a compassionate glance. It was well for him that Wharton was able—and willing—to bear out his statement to that extent.

"You know how he came by the money, Wharton?" asked the Bounder.

"Yes," said Harry. "He ought never to have taken it, and he ought never to have sold it; but I'm sure he had no idea that it was counterfeit money. He wouldn't have taken it from the man if he'd known that, I'm certain. The silly fool thought he was being very clever when he was being spoofed by that awful rascal!"

"The too-cleverfulness was terrific!"

"That's all very well!" snorted Bolsover major. "But if Skinner doesn't hand back my cash I'm going to Mr. Quelch, if not to the police!"

"You need not go to Mr. Quelch!" said an icy voice at the door. "Mr. Quelch is here!"

The Remove master looked in at the doorway. The crowd of juniors had fallen back as he came up the passage. The din in Skinner's study had reached official cars.

Skinner looked at his Form master and groaned in utter misery.

"It's all up now!"

"You're bound to make a clean breast of it now, Skinner!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "We found out the facts from Mr. Grimes, and I was going to advise you to go to him. Tell Mr. Quelch all about it, and we can witness that you never knew it was counterfeit money. And that's the main point."

"I understand nothing of this, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch. "Kindly explain."

Skinner stood dabbing his nose, with his wretched knees knocking together, while the captain of the Remove made his explanation. Even Skinner realised now that his only hope lay in frankness and in the witnessing in his favour by the Famous Five. The fellows at whom he had gibed and sneered, whose decent ways he had made a subject of mockery, whose integrity he had regarded with cynical disdain as "softness"—these were the fellows who stood by him now and made the best they could of the dingy affair for him.

"Give me the sovereigns, Skinner!" said Mr. Quelch when he had heard all.

The five sovereigns were placed in Mr. Quelch's hand.

"Skinner, I shall now take you to Inspector Grimes, at Courtfield, and you will tell him everything. What steps he may take I do not know; but you must take your chance of that. I cannot believe that in helping the fugitive to escape you had no suspicion of his character; but I am willing to believe that you did not know that he gave you false money. But in selling a gold coin above its face value you have broken the law, and you must answer for it! Come with me!"

There was a hush in the Remove as Mr. Quelch led the wretched Skinner away.

Harry Wharton & Co. spent an anxious couple of hours while Skinner was away with his Form master. What those hours were like to Skinner they could hardly imagine. What was going to happen to Skinner the Remove fellows could not guess. It was a great relief when a taxicab brought the Remove master home with Skinner, and they saw that at least he had been allowed to return to the school.

Skinner came into Study No. 1 a little later, where the Famous Five were waiting. His face was white, and there was not a sign of his usual cynical impudence about him.

"I—I'm obliged to you fellows!" stammered Skinner. "I know you did your best for me."

"How's it ended?" asked Harry.

"It's all right. Old Grimes isn't a bad sort! I—I owned up to everything," said Skinner. "Of course, I never knew anything about Gilded Jim, as they call him; but I knew he wasn't simply wanting to get across the river to see a sick relative—I admitted that. As it happens, the man has been arrested at Brighton; the news has just come through by telephone. I was jolly glad to hear it, I can tell you! Mr. Grimes heard all I'd got to say, and said that I'd better be dealt with by my own headmaster."

"You're lucky," said Bob Cherry.

"I know I am. Snoop was in it, too. But I was fool enough to take the sovereigns off him for currency-notes; I shall never see the money again."

I've got to pay Bolsover back, of course. I'm to be flogged to-morrow morning for selling Bolsover the quid above value, and Bolsover's got five hundred lines for having bought it. Serve him right! But I know I'm lucky!" Skinner shivered. "It might have been much worse! But for you fellows, the whole Form would have believed that I was passing counterfeit money. I couldn't have stayed on at Greyfriars. Quelch might have believed that, too—and the Head. I'm sorry I've been rather a cad to you chaps, and—and you've played up like real bricks!"

And Skinner white and shaken, went his way.

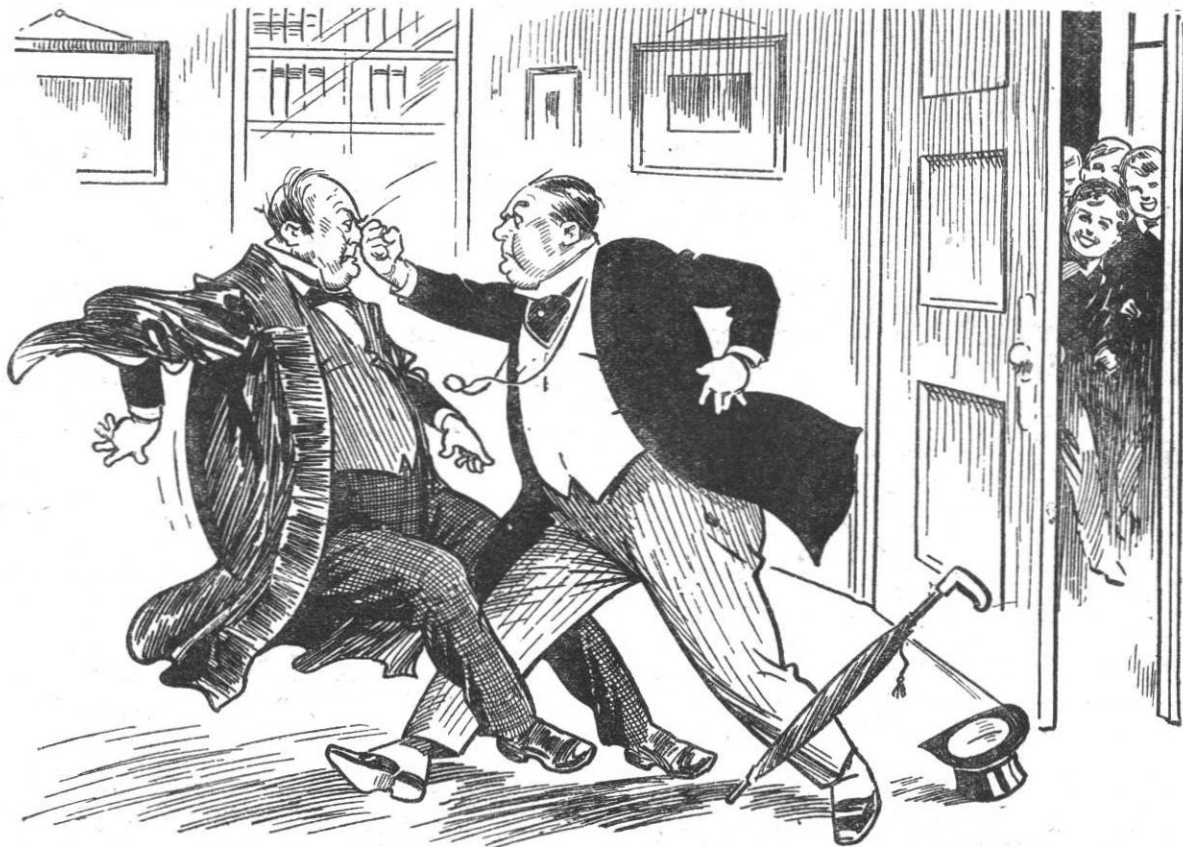
"I'm glad he's pulled through!" said Harry Wharton; and his comrades nodded assent. They did not, and could not, like Skinner; but they were glad he had pulled through all right, after all.

THE END.

(You'll get a long laugh over next Tuesday's rollicking long story of the Greyfriars Chums, entitled: "BUNTER, THE RAIDER!")

ROOKWOOD MASTER IN TROUBLE!

Mr. Greely certainly asks for trouble when he interferes with a fellow outside his Form. And trouble he does get, of a nature that sends Rookwood into roars of laughter—but Mr. Greely into roars of wrath!

GOING for Mr. GREELY!**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

Just Like Mr. Greely!

LOVELL!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Hold up your shoulders, my boy."

"What?"

"And take your hands out of your pockets."

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, simply stared at Mr. Greely. Really, he could scarcely believe his ears.

Had his own Form master addressed him in those words, it would have been Lovell's duty to sit up and take notice, so to speak, though it would not have been pleasant.

But Mr. Greely was not his Form master. Horace Greely was master of the Fifth Form. Portly and ponderous, Mr. Greely was rolling across Big Quad like a galleon under full sail, and he had heaved to, as it were, to fix his lofty glance on Lovell, of the Fourth, and admonish him in his deep, rich, fruity voice.

"You should not slack, my boy!" he continued. "Slacking is a bad thing for men and boys alike. Slacking undermines the—ah—character; it is the beginning of a general—ah—deterioration."

This was a sample of Mr. Greely's trite wisdom, which he rolled out as impressively as if it were a new discovery, the fruit of long meditation.

"I'm not slacking!" shouted Lovell.

"What! Moderate your tone, Lovell, moderate your tone! You should not

A ROLLICKING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE MERRY CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD

By Owen Conquest.

raise your voice in addressing a master."

Repetition of his remarks was one of Mr. Greely's ponderous and exasperating ways.

The general opinion at Rookwood was, that Mr. Greely's remarks were not really worth hearing once. Hearing them twice was altogether too thick.

"I am speaking to you for your own good, Lovell—entirely for your own good," said Mr. Greely severely. "It is shocking to see a boy slacking and loafing—yes, loafing! Hold yourself up, my boy; take your hands out of your pockets!"

And Mr. Greely, with a severe shake of the head, rolled on, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell rooted to the gravel path, and in a state of wrath that would have done credit to a Hun.

"The—the ass!" gasped Lovell. "The cheeky ass! The fat old duffer! Talking to me as if I were a fag of the Second! The—the—the priceless old ass!"

Luckily Mr. Greely was out of hearing.

Still like a galleon under full sail, he was pursuing his lofty course along the gravel path towards Little Quad—stately and solemn and slow. It was fortunate that he had passed out of hearing. Certainly it would have been

a blow to his dignity to learn that a junior of the Fourth Form regarded him as a priceless ass.

"Priceless old ass!" repeated Lovell, finding solace in saying to himself what he could not venture to say to the Fifth Form master.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell stared round.

That burst of merriment apprised him of the fact that the little scene had had witnesses and hearers.

Three juniors of the Modern Side were grinning at him: Tommy Dodd, and Cook, and Doyle. That they had heard Mr. Greely's ponderous admonitions, and thoroughly enjoyed them, was clear. If anything could have added to Lovell's exasperation, and put the lid on his wrath, that would have done it, to be grinned at by Moderns after being slanged by a priceless ass. He glared at the three Modern juniors.

"Don't slack, my boy!" said Tommy Dodd, with a cheery imitation of Mr. Greely's fruity voice that made his comrades yell with laughter.

"Hold up your shoulders!" gasped Tommy Cook.

"Take your hands out of your pockets!" shrieked Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies yelled.

THE POPULAR.—No. 532.

"Funny, isn't it?" snorted Lovell furiously.

"Slacking undermines the—ah—general character!" howled Tommy Dodd.

"It is the beginning of a—ah—general deterioration!" hooted Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky Modern frumps!" roared Lovell.

Tommy Dodd held up an admonitory hand, quite in the style of Mr. Greely.

"Moderate your tone, Lovell—"

"What?"

"It is—ah—exceedingly bad form to raise your voice—"

Tommy Dodd got no further than that.

Arthur Edward Lovell, in a state of blind fury, rushed on the three Modern juniors, hitting out right and left. The roars of laughter changed to roars of quite another kind.

"Oh, my hat! Whoop!"

"Oh! Ow! Oh, crumbs!"

"Yaroh!"

Lovell, in his wrath, did not count odds. But he soon discovered that the odds were there. The three Tommies reeled right and left under his doughty punches, roaring; but they recovered, and hurled themselves upon him as one man.

And then Arthur Edward Lovell found himself collared, and swept off his feet, struggling and wriggling unavailingly in the grasp of three wrathful men of Manders' House.

"Duck him!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

They were quite near the fountain in the quad. Lovell, struggling wildly, was rushed to the fountain.

Splash!

His head went in, and Lovell gave a suffocated howl. It came out again drenched and dripping.

Splash!

In it went again, and out it came once more, streaming. Then, with a heavy bump, the Moderns set him down on the ground, and walked away, laughing. And Arthur Edward Lovell sat and streamed, and gasped, and spluttered, in a state of wild wrath, compared with which the celebrated wrath of Achilles was a mild joke.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Vials of Wrath!

JIMMY SILVER came out of the school shop with Raby and Newcome, and glanced round for Lovell. Arthur Edward Lovell had left his chums in "quarter" to take a book back to the school library in Little Quad; and they had expected him to join them afterwards in the tuckshop. But he had not turned up.

"Seen Lovell, Morny?" asked Jimmy Silver, as Valentine Mornington of the Fourth came along.

Morny grinned.

"Yes—he's been taking a wash in the fountain. He looked quite cross when I spoke to him, though I only offered to fetch him some soap if he wanted it." And Morny went into the tuckshop, grinning.

"Something's happened to old Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, you chaps!"

The three juniors hurried away towards the fountain.

There they discovered Arthur Edward Lovell.

Arthur Edward was dabbing at his face and hair with a crumpled handkerchief, and his wet face was crimson, and his eyes sparkled. His cap was floating in the big granite basin.

THE POPULAR.—No. 532.

"What on earth—" began Jimmy Silver.

"Where have you fellows been?" hooted Lovell. "Leaving a chap on his own to be ragged by a gang of Modern chumps."

"Oh, you've been ragging with Moderns, have you?" said Raby. "I say, it's rather thick, ducking a chap's head in the fountain."

"Too thick!" agreed Newcome.

"Well, I jolly well punched them," said Lovell. "I fancy Tommy Dodd will have a prize nose to take into his dashed science class, and Cook and Doyle got some knocks."

"But what did you tackle those three Modern cads for?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"What had they done all of a sudden?"

"They cackled."

"Mustn't a fellow cackle?" asked Raby, with an air of polite inquiry.

"Look here, Raby—"

"Well, look here, Lovell—"

"Shush! We'll look for them after class, and rag them," said Jimmy Silver.

"Moderns mustn't cackle at Classicals."

"It was that old ass, Greely—"

Lovell dabbed his face, and panted.

"That priceless ass, Greely."

"Old Greely butting in again?"

yawned Newcome. "Well, he's always fussing somehow. What did Greely do?"

Lovell, in tones of thrilling indignation, explained. To his surprise and wrath, the three Classicals grinned. Apparently they, as well as the Modern trio, saw something funny in the episode.

"Oh, you think it's funny, of course!" snorted Lovell. "But I can tell you I'm fed-up with Greely—fed right up to the chin! Can't Dicky Dalton manage his own Form without Greely's help? He's always gassing and butting in. He told Selwyn of the Shell the other day to give more attention to deportment—deportment, you know! Who but a priceless old ass like Greely ever used such a word? I wouldn't even put it into a cross word puzzle. And now to talk to me about slacking—me! Am I a slacker, I'd like to know?" hooted Lovell, with a challenging glare at his comrades.

"Nothing of the kind, old fellow," said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Anyhow, it's no business of Greely's."

"Well, he can jaw the Fifth as much as he likes, but he's not going to jaw me," said Lovell. "Next time he butts in, I shall jolly well tell him what I think of him. Who the thump is Greely? Priceless old ass!"

"What?"

It was a deep, fruity voice behind Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

Lovell spun round.

Mr. Greely, purple and indignant, stood there, within a yard of him, fairly glaring.

"Lovell!" he gasped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

"You were—ah!—alluding to me?"

Lovell wriggled. Certainly he would not have told an untruth; equally certainly an untruth would have been futile.

"Yes, sir!" he gasped.

"Follow me, Lovell!"

With a lofty gesture of command, Horace Greely sailed towards the House.

Lovell looked at his chums.

"For it, now!" he murmured.

"Better go, old chap," said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

"He's not my Form master."

"Better go, all the same."

Lovell nodded; he realised that he had better go. Reluctantly he followed Mr. Greely towards the House, like a little skiff in the wake of a stately galleon.

Mr. Greely did not head for his own Form-room; he sailed ponderously into the Fourth-room, where Mr. Dalton was busy with papers at his desk.

"Mr. Dalton!"

The Fifth Form master's deep, fruity voice echoed through the room, and along the corridor outside. The fellows in the corridor grinned, and even winked at one another. Disrespectfully, Hansom of the Fifth remarked to 1a1boys that old Greely had his rag out. In such terms did Edward Hansom allude to his Form-master's stately wrath.

Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth, glanced round from his desk and his papers. He looked surprised.

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

"This boy"—Mr. Greely indicated Lovell with a plump forefinger—"this boy of your Form, Mr. Dalton—this junior—"

"Dear me! What has Lovell done?" inquired Mr. Dalton, with just the slightest trace of impatience.

"I regret, sir, to have to make a serious complaint," said Mr. Greely. "I regret it very much. You will remember, Mr. Dalton, that as an older master, more—ah—experienced than yourself, I have sometimes advised you to—"

"Please come to the point, Mr. Greely. My class will be waiting for me in a few minutes."

"Very well, sir—very well!" said Mr. Greely with dignity. "I am not here, sir, on this occasion to offer you advice, much as I may think it needed. This boy Lovell alluded to me, sir, in my hearing, by an opprobrious epithet."

"Surely not!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"I heard him, Mr. Dalton," said the Fifth Form-master. "I have not taken his punishment into my own hands. I am reporting him to his own Form-master. But I consider—"

"Lovell, have you been impertinent to Mr. Greely?"

"Hem!"

"What expression did you use, Lovell?"

"I—I—"

"Answer me at once!"

"Priceless old ass, sir!" gasped Lovell.

Mr. Dalton jumped, and Mr. Greely turned more purple than ever. From the corridor came the distinct sound of a chuckle.

"You—you applied such an expression to a Form-master at Rookwood?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"You—you see, sir—"

"How dare you, Lovell?"

"Mr. Greely was butting in, sir."

"Upon my word! Silence! Mr. Greely, I apologise most profoundly for this insolence on the part of a member of my Form," exclaimed Mr. Dalton, looking more perturbed and annoyed than he had ever been seen to look before.

Mr. Greely waved a gracious fat hand.

"I accept your apology, Mr. Dalton. I leave the matter in your hands with confidence—with full confidence."

"Remain a few moments, Mr. Greely, while this impertinent junior receives his punishment," said Mr. Dalton, taking up a cane. "Lovell, bend over that desk!"

Mr. Greely looked on with plump approval, while the Fourth Form-master laid on the cane.

Six successive whacks sounded like pistol-shots through the Fourth Form-room.

Lovell wriggled and writhed and gasped.

"Now, Lovell—"

"Ow!"

"You will apologise to Mr. Greely."

"Yow!"

"You hear me, Lovell?"

"I—I—I apologise, sir!" stuttered Lovell.

"I trust, Mr. Greely, that you are now satisfied?" said the master of the Fourth.

"Quite, sir!" Mr. Greely was gracious. "Oh, quite! I approve, sir—I fully approve! I do not always approve, as you know, of—"

"Exactly! Good-morning, Mr. Greely!"

"Good-morning, sir!" said Mr. Greely rather stiffly. And he rolled out of the Fourth Form-room.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Lovell on the Warpath!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were sympathetic.

Most of the Classical Fourth were sympathetic.

So far as sympathy went, Lovell was comforted in his affliction.

Unfortunately, any amount of sympathy, however sincere, did not make it possible for Arthur Edward Lovell to sit down that morning with any degree of comfort.

Like the young man of Hythe, who was shaved with a scythe, he did nothing but wriggle and writhe.

Third lesson seemed almost endless to Lovell that morning.

He had always liked Dicky Dalton. Now he felt that he quite disliked him. Towards Mr. Greely his feelings could only be described as Hunnish.

Lovell was quite a placable fellow by nature. It was very seldom that he let the sun go down upon his wrath. Perhaps he was sometimes rather quick to take offence, but he was equally quick in forgetting all about offences. Now he did not forget. That hefty "six" helped him to remember, of course. When the Classical Fourth came out after third lesson Lovell was walking quite painfully. Indeed, Smythe of the Shell, passing him in the corridor, stared at him, and asked him if this was a new thing in cake-walks.

In the quad, the Fistical Four came on some Modern fellows—Towle and Lacy, and Leggett, and some more. They all grinned at Lovell and told him to hold his shoulders up, and take his hands out of his pockets, and warned him that slacking and loafing deteriorated the character. Evidently Tommy Dodd & Co. had told the story all over Manders' House.

Lovell breathed fury.

"I'm fed-up with that ass Greely!" he told his chums. "Fed-up to the chin! I shall never hear the end of this."

Jimmy Silver smiled cheerily.

"Keep smiling," he said. "The fellows will forget about it in a day or two—a jest never lasts long."

"I've had six from Dalton, bother him, and I've had to cough up an apology to that-priceless old ass Greely. And now I'm going to be chipped to death by those asses from Manders' House!" hissed Lovell. "I'm jolly well going to take it out of Greely somehow."

"Better let it drop," advised Raby.

"You can't really take it out of a Form-master, you know."

"I'm going to!"

"You don't want another six from Dicky Dalton?"

"Blow Dicky Dalton!"

"He was bound to come down heavy," said Jimmy Silver. "This has really given old Greely a pull over him, you know, and he doesn't like it."

"The old ass will be giving him advice about managing his Form," said Newcome. "He will trot you out as an awful example, Lovell."

Lovell gritted his teeth.

"Meddling old ass!" he said.

"Yes, but—"

"I'm jolly well going to make him sit up."

That seemed to be a fixed determination with Arthur Edward Lovell, and his comrades wisely did not argue the point.

By the following morning Lovell had given the matter so much concentrated thought that he had evolved a plan of campaign. Jimmy Silver noticed him grinning in second lesson, and he was glad to see it. For a whole day Lovell had been understudying that ancient king who never smiled again.

In "quarter" Lovell strolled out into the quad with his comrades, with quite a cheery expression on his face.

"You fellows on?" he asked.

"What, how, and which?" inquired Raby.

"Dicky Dalton's gone to speak to the Head," said Lovell. "A fellow can nip into his study and use his telephone."

"What the thump do you want to use his telephone for?"

"Greely!"

"Oh!"

"That old ass is jolly keen on department and things," said Lovell. "It hasn't occurred to him that he's in need of any instruction himself. Well, he's going to have some."

Lovell's chums looked mystified.

"What—" began Jimmy Silver.

"Come along," said Lovell. "Dicky Dalton will be with the Head now, and you know the old boy won't let him off under a quarter of an hour. We've got the whole quarter. Come on!"

Lovell led the way, and his comrades followed him in rather a gingerly manner. Lovell marched into Mr. Dalton's study, and with some hesitation his friends followed him in. It was probable that Mr. Dalton was safe with the Head for a time, but— Lovell did not allow for "buts." He took a slip of paper from his pocket and sat down to the telephone. On the slip of paper were a number of names and addresses, with the telephone numbers opposite them, apparently selected and copied out of the local telephone directory.

Lovell rang up the exchange, while his chums stood in considerable uneasiness and watched him. Jimmy Silver kept the door ajar, with one eye on the corridor.

"Latham, 101," said Lovell into the transmitter. A few moments later: "Is that Latham, 101—Purkiss' Academy of Dancing and Department? Can I speak to Mr. Purkiss? It's rather important."

The Co. gazed at him in wonder. What business Lovell could possibly have with Purkiss' Dancing and Department Academy at Latham was a deep mystery to them.

"Good-morning, Mr. Purkiss!" Lovell, to the further surprise of his chums, was speaking now in a deep bass voice, obviously to give Mr. Purkiss the impression that a man, not a schoolboy, was speaking to him. "I understand, from your advertisement in the 'Coombe Times,' that you are prepared to call and give personal instruction in depart-

ment. Could you make it convenient to call this afternoon? Mr. Greely—Horace Greely—Rookwood School."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver blankly.

"The fact is, Mr. Purkiss, your instruction will—ah—be very valuable to me," went on Lovell in his deep voice. "My training has been—ah—somewhat neglected in this—ah—direction. No doubt we could arrange terms quite satisfactorily if you could call this afternoon. Would three o'clock suit you? Thank you very much! You will ask for Mr. Greely, in the School House. Thank you very much!"

Lovell rang off and grinned at his chums.

"What price that?" he asked.

"You awful ass!" breathed Raby.

"Can it!" grinned Lovell, and he rang up another number.

"Mr. Montgomery Smith? Good-morning, Mr. Smith. I understand from your notice in the 'Coombe Times' that you give careful instruction in manners to backward boys. No, dancing lessons will not be required. But the personal training you allude to in your advertisement—exactly! Can you undertake to give the same instruction to a man of middle age? Yes, yes; Mr. Greely, Fifth Form-master, at Rookwood School. No doubt you are surprised, Mr. Smith, but you will allow that I know my own business, and it unfortunately happens that my training has been very much neglected in this direction. It is never too late for improvement, you will agree—"

"Lovell!" gasped Newcome.

"Shut up, you ass!"

"But, you dummy—"

Lovell gave his chums a glare and went on:

"This afternoon, at half-past three, if you can arrange it, Mr. Smith. If you will give me this afternoon some instruction, we can then discuss terms for a whole course. Thank you very much! Half-past three. You will ask for Mr. Greely, in the School House."

Lovell rang off again.

He looked at his paper, evidently for another telephone number. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome fairly hurled themselves upon him and dragged him away from the telephone.

"Let go!" howled Lovell.

"You frabjous ass! You've done enough already to get you bunked from Rookwood," gasped Jimmy.

"I don't care. I—"

"Well, we do! 'Nuff's as good as a feast, or better. This way!"

"Leggo!"

"Bring him along!"

Three determined youths fairly hooked Lovell out of Mr. Dalton's study. Arthur Edward resisted all the way down the passage, but he had to go. The opinion of his comrades was that he had done enough, if not too much.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Department!

MR. GREELY, master of the Rookwood Fifth, took his accustomed stroll in Big Quad after dinner that day.

That day was Wednesday, a half-holiday, and after his stroll in the quad Mr. Greely settled down in a deep arm-chair in his study, with a newspaper, to enjoy his leisure. From his seat by the window of his study, he naturally could not see into the corridor upon which

masters' studies opened and he was quite unaware that a number of the Classical Fourth were gathering in the big bay window in the corridor, nearly opposite his door.

The Fistical Four came first, and annexed the window-seat; and then Morny arrived, and Oswald, and Towny and Toppy, and several more fellows. Quite a little crowd had gathered there before three o'clock. And they were all smiling.

Arthur Edward Lovell had started by telling two or three fellows about his little rag. The news had spread. By that time nearly all the Form knew that Mr. Greely was to receive unexpected visitors that afternoon, and they were deeply interested. They wondered what would happen.

From the bay window in the corridor they had a partial view of the quad, and just before three they sighted a tall, lean gentleman, in a tight-fitting frock-coat and silk hat, advancing towards the House.

"That will be Purkiss!" said Lovell. "He's really come!" murmured Raby. "Of course he's come! Rather a catch for him to get a Rookwood master as a pupil for his giddy deportment."

"What on earth will Greely say?" murmured Mornington.

"I wonder!" said Lovell. "Anyhow, we shall hear from this place—Greely's too carries like a megaphone."

The juniors chuckled. A minute or two later Timothy Tupper, the House page, appeared in the corridor, conducting the tall, lean gentleman. He conducted him to Mr. Greely's door, tapped, and opened the door.

"Mr. Purkiss, sir!" Mr. Greely glanced up from his paper. He glanced in surprise at the lean gentleman, in his tight black coat, with his silk hat in his hand, and an aggressive smile upon his rather cadaverous features.

"Mr. Greely—" The gentleman from Latcham stepped in, and Tupper closed the door and retired.

Mr. Greely rose politely; he was always polite in a ponderous way, though he was surprised and not very pleased by this visit.

"My card, sir!" said Mr. Purkiss.

The Fifth Form master glanced at the card, which informed him that Mr. Purkiss' academy at Latcham gave instruction in dancing, deportment, and drill. Not being, so far as he was aware, in need of instruction in those branches of knowledge, Mr. Greely was very puzzled.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Purkiss, but I do not quite understand—"

"Naturally, sir—naturally," agreed Mr. Purkiss. "A little instruction will make all the difference."

"But I do not see—" recommenced the puzzled Form-master.

"My dear sir, we will begin at once, if you wish. Not a moment shall be lost," said Mr. Purkiss. "Do not be discouraged by the fact that you are—hem!—perhaps a little elderly."

"What?" "Age is no bar, sir, to improvement, provided that the pupil be keen and painstaking."

"The—the pupil?"

"Exactly, sir," said Mr. Purkiss, with an agreeable smile. "Even at your time of life, sir, deportment can be studied with the greatest advantage."

"Deportment!" said Mr. Greely dazedly.

"Deportment, sir!" assented Mr. Purkiss. "A very important subject,

—sir—very important! Now, sir, since you have asked me to lose no time, your present attitude—"

"Eh?" "Defective, sir—very defective," said Mr. Purkiss. "Not a word, sir—without instruction, no one can be expected to master the important art of deportment. Now, sir, the chin up a little bit—"

"Wha-a-at?" "The right leg a little forward."

"Sir!" "Your hands, at the present moment, hang at your sides in the most ungraceful way. Not a word, sir. Of course, you have not observed anything of the kind. How should you? It is my business, sir, to enlighten you—"

"What? What?" stammered Mr. Greely, wondering dizzily whether he had a lunatic to deal with.

"Now, sir, the left hand—" Mr. Purkiss advanced with the bowing grace of a dancing-master, and took hold of Mr. Greely's left hand.

The next moment Mr. Greely's right hand came into action.

With a violent shove, he sent Mr. Purkiss toppling back; and in his surprise the dancing-master of Latcham sat down on the study carpet with a heavy bump.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Purkiss.

Mr. Greely glared down at him.

"Are you mad, sir?" he shouted.

"What?"

"If you are not insane or intoxicated, what do you mean?" roared Mr. Greely.

"How dare you come here, sir, and play such antics in my study?"

Mr. Purkiss stared up at him.

"What? What? What?" he stammered. "Antics? Sir, I was instructing you—I was, upon my word!"

Mr. Purkiss picked himself up and backed away from Mr. Greely. He was feeling alarmed. This was not the reception he had expected from a middle-aged pupil who was anxious to study that important branch of knowledge, deportment.

Mr. Greely pointed to the door.

"Go, sir!" he hooted.

"Mr. Greely! I presume there is no mistake? You are Mr. Greely—"

"I am Mr. Greely! Go!"

"Then there is no mistake! Am I to understand, Mr. Greely, that you do not desire to receive instruction from me in deportment, in spite of your very evident need of it?"

"You are to understand, sir, that you are to leave my study this instant and take your absurd insolence elsewhere!" roared Mr. Greely.

"I will leave your study with pleasure, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Purkiss, quite enraged now. "I have no desire whatever, sir, to waste my instruction upon a man with the manners of a Hun, sir—the manners of a particularly savage bear, sir. But I have no intention, sir, of coming here from Latcham for nothing, sir. I shall charge you, sir, with my taxi fare, sir, and if you do not settle the account, sir, I shall bring a summons in the County Court, sir!"

And with that Mr. Purkiss flung out of the study, slamming the door behind him, jammed on his silk hat, and departed.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Alarming!

"OH, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Every word in Mr. Greely's booming voice had been heard by the merry group in the corridor.

"I say, it's rather a shame on Purkiss," gasped Newcome. "He's had his trip over here for nothing."

"That's all right, if he summons old Greely in the County Court—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. waited quite anxiously for half-past three, when Mr. Montgomery Smith was due to call.

Mr. Greely, in his study, was quite unaware that another visitor was almost due. He had almost collapsed into his armchair, in a state of wrath and astonishment, to which no words could have done justice. Unless this man Purkiss was a lunatic or wildly intoxicated, Mr. Greely could not comprehend this amazing episode at all.

Mr. Greely breathed wrath; and it was quite a long time before he was able to settle down with his newspaper again.

He settled down at last, however, though occasionally he gave expression to an angry snort, indicating that all was not quite calm within.

He looked up angrily at a knock on his study door.

"Come in!" he snapped.

Tupper opened the door.

"Mr. Smith, sir!"

"Mr. Smith!" repeated Mr. Greely.

"Kindly inquire his business before showing him in, Tupper. I do not—"

"He said it was an appointment, sir," said Tupper. "He's 'ere, sir."

Mr. Montgomery Smith bowed himself into the room.

He was a large, plump, portly gentleman, not unlike Mr. Greely himself in figure. He had a happy smile and a jocular manner.

Tupper retired, and was closing the door when a foot stopped it. He stared round at Lovell.

"That's all right!" whispered Lovell.

And the page departed, leaving Mr. Greely's door ajar.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Montgomery Smith, bowing. "Mr. Greely, I presume?"

"Quite so, sir!" said the Fifth Form master. "But to what—"

"I was afraid at first, sir, that I should have to telephone and defer this interview," said Mr. Montgomery Smith. "Nevertheless, I am quite at your service, Mr. Greely. Dancing, I understand, you do not wish to study."

"Dancing?"

"But general deportment—"

"Deportment?"

"Quite so. Reassure yourself, sir," said Mr. Montgomery Smith, with a wide wave of a large hand. "It is never too late to mend. I have had one pupil, sir, of a more advanced age than your own—a war-profiteer, sir, whose manners were, I regret to say, unspeakable, infinitely inferior to your own, my dear sir—but in a single term at my establishment the change was amazing. I made him, sir, into a gentleman. I have not the slightest doubt that I shall be able to do as much for you, Mr. Greely!"

Mr. Greely gasped.

From the corridor there came a suppressed sound.

"Are you a madman?" roared Mr. Greely.

Mr. Montgomery Smith jumped.

"Eh? What? What did you say, Mr. Greely? I—I do not quite follow—"

"Or are you drunk?"

"What!"

Mr. Smith backed away.

"Calm yourself, sir, calm yourself!" he urged. "My intention is to help

you, to help you in every way. No man ever more needed my help, if I may say so. Sit down a few minutes, sir. Perhaps I can get you a glass of water to— Calmness, sir—calmness, I beg.”

Mr. Greely spluttered. “I am bound to mention, sir, that you gave me no hint of this,” said Mr. Montgomery Smith, rather warmly. “I was led to believe that your defective manners were simply due to neglect—to want of training. No hint was given me that I had an inebriated man to deal with.”

“In-in-inebriated!” stuttered Mr. Greely.

“I should have been told so; it would have been more frank on your part, Mr. Greely, to warn me that I had to deal with a man unfortunately a slave to drink—”

“Yaroooooh!” Mr. Greely suddenly interrupted him. This man, whom he had never seen before, had not only butted into his study unasked and insulted him, but he was actually accusing Mr. Greely of being intoxicated!

He sprang at Mr. Smith, and with a mighty swipe sent Mr. Smith spinning as far as the door.

“Whoop!” roared Mr. Montgomery Smith as he landed.

“Now, sir, take yourself off!” boomed Mr. Greely. “If you do not desire me, sir, to kick you out of this building, take yourself off and play your foolish pranks, sir, upon someone who is in a humour for ridiculous fooling! I am not, sir—I am not!”

“Oh dear! Oh! Wow!” Mr. Smith felt his nose, to ascertain that it was still there. It felt as if it was not.

He limped to his feet, and Mr. Greely rushed forward to hurl the door open and, doubtless, to help Mr. Smith into the passage. But that terrific punch on the nose was rather more than Mr. Montgomery Smith was disposed to take patiently. As Mr. Greely crowded him Mr. Smith in his turn hit out, and the Fifth Form master of Rookwood came down unexpectedly on his own carpet.

“Oh! Ow!” Mr. Montgomery Smith tore the door open and hurried into the corridor. Mr. Greely was up in a second, blazing with wrath, and he fairly bounded after Mr. Smith.

“Rascal! Ruffian!” he spluttered. “Scoundrel! I—I—I—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” Jimmy Silver & Co. were almost in hysterics now.

The sight of Mr. Greely chasing the astonished and alarmed visitor into the corridor was too much for them.

They shrieked, “Ha, ha, ha!”

“Help!” panted Mr. Smith, as he rushed down the corridor with the infuriated Mr. Greely on his track.

Fortunately, fear spurred on Mr. Montgomery Smith faster than wrath spurred on Mr. Greely. What would have happened had the enraged Fifth Form master overtaken him cannot be said. Fortunately, Mr. Montgomery Smith won that exciting race.

He left the House, with his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other, and ran for the gates.

Mr. Greely, perhaps recalled to a sense of propriety by the yells of laughter that echoed down the corridors, halted at last, and strode back to

his study. Jimmy Silver & Co. melted away before his approach.

Mr. Greely strode into his study, and slammed the door with a terrific slam.

In amazement and wrath, he paced his study, utterly perplexed by these strange happenings, utterly shaken out of his usual ponderous composure. And when, later on, he rolled into Masters' Common-room to tea, he was conscious of lurking smiles on the faces of his colleagues—smiles that broadened when Mr. Greely excitedly described the weird happenings of the afternoon, and asked his colleagues what it could all possibly mean?

In the Fourth Form passage the Classical Fourth fairly rocked with laughter.

Putty of the Fourth, past-master in the art of leg-pulling, freely admitted that Arthur Edward Lovell was a great man.

It was agreed on all hands that Mr. Greely had had just what he had asked for; and Lovell was no longer chipped—the great jest on Mr. Greely succeeding him as a general topic.

Which was very satisfactory to Arthur Edward Lovell; and it was still more satisfactory that Mr. Greely, much as he puzzled over the affair, never dreamed of suspecting that it was a Fourth Form rag. That was a relief to the end study; for undoubtedly Arthur Edward Lovell had risked a Head's flogging in Going for Mr. Greely.

THE END.

(Another topping long tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. next week, chums, entitled, “TRICKING THE FOURTH!”)

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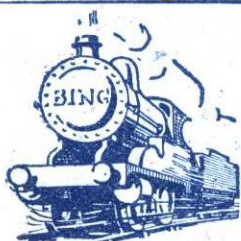
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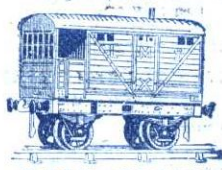
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