

# THE AFFAIR OF THE GHOST AT ST. DUNSTAN'S.

By M. I. R. POLKINGHORNE.

## CHAPTER I.

### Ancient History.

**T**HERE were not two opinions about Royston minor at St. Dunstan's, for it was pretty well agreed that he was a "rum beggar"; but as his "rumness" included a pair of hard fists and a particularly quick way of hitting out with them and—be it breathed in a whisper—as he was also the recipient of particularly large hampers at remarkably short intervals of time, it did not excite so much derision among his fellows as might have been expected. In fact it was tolerated to a certain extent.

There had been almost a feeling of expectation among the juniors of Royston's house when the news went round that the sixth fellow's minor was coming after the holidays. It was rather strange that the coming of a new boy should excite any special interest beyond the ordinary curiosity that new arrivals aroused; but it happened in this way. One day Royston invited the Captain, Birkdale and a few others of the sixth to tea. As they were waiting for his fag Guiles to boil the kettle a letter was brought up for Royston from his people at home. He tore open the envelope and rapidly skimmed through the contents.

"Oh bother!" he groaned dismally as he reached the top of the last page. "My young rother is coming up next term."

"Well," said the Captain carelessly, "what's that to do with you? Only take my tip; on't have him for a fag."

"But you don't know him" went on Royston gloomily, "he is such an awful—"

"Pickle I suppose," interrupted Birkdale as Royston hesitated. "Well don't worry—e'll soon get licked into shape."

"But it isn't that," explained Royston, "he's so utterly queer, so—so—well—rum."

"All there?" asked the Captain with up-lifted eyebrows.

"Goodness only knows," answered Royston shrugging his shoulders dismally and putting the letter in his pocket. "He's a perfect worry to me in the holidays. You see everyone expects me to understand him because I have the misfortune to be his brother and—look sharp there young Guiles. Don't you see the kettle's boiling over—there's a beastly mess you've made, kid. Mop it up and then cut."

Guiles made haste to repair the damage that had resulted from his paying more attention to Royston's minor than to the boiling of the kettle and then departed to carry back to his fellow fags a rambling tale of Royston's half-witted brother. The tale was enlarged and rendered more interesting by additions from his own imagination.

"Cheek," was Ridley's exclamation when he heard the news, "to send his idiot of a brother here—St. Dunstan's isn't a lunatic asylum."

"Natural mistake if Royston's people have seen you," said Carr. He posed as the wit of the third form.

Ridley glared at the speaker but evidently considered the remark unworthy of his notice.

"They are sure to pack him in our den," he went on aggrievedly, "'cause we're only three. Why can't those chaps keep their rubbish at home?"

"Never mind," remarked Guiles cheerfully, "we can get some larks out of him; rather fun to have a lunny chap here."

"Well if he amuses us," said Ridley thoughtfully, "it won't be half bad."

"Rather not," chimed in Carr, "I vote we have a high old time."

So the juniors came back that term hoping the monotony of school life would be enlivened by the eccentricities of Royston's minor; but to their indignation and disgust he was a fraud. Ridley and Carr were inclined to be hostile to Guiles for what they called his deception and it was some time before amicable relations were restored between the three. But as Guiles carefully explained it wasn't really his fault that Royston's minor was not an idiot and after all he *was* "rum"; they couldn't deny that. And as diligently as a professional showman dwells on the good points of his stock Guiles kept this constantly before the eyes of his chums. It was the one thing that saved his reputation.

Royston was peculiar and his senior became heartily sick of hearing "Rum little beggar that brother of yours!" For one thing he always reminded a master if by any chance he forgot to give him a promised imposition or caning; he worked remarkably well in school time but outside he rivalled Ridley & Co. in mischief and proposed schemes that took even that hardened young man's breath away.

Royston became Birkdale's fag and no one envied the latter his new possession. Royal battles ensued where there was abuse and canings on the part of the senior, cheek and defiance on the part of the junior; and frequently Dirk, who occupied the next study would pop out to know what the "row" was. Birkdale's expressive "Young Royston again" sufficiently explained matters. That generally meant ink spilt, broken crockery, snails or frogs found loose in his study; for Royston had a natural though absorbing interest in "live things," which became a general nuisance to the fellows for his "live stock" seemed to have a rooted objection to their owner and a deep affection for other people—*vide* a frog in Parson's pocket, wierd black spiders among Birkdale's books, horrible slow-worms in Royston senior's slippers and so on. Royston's innocent delight at the recovery of his lost treasures ought to have exonerated him from any complicity in their different hiding places; but it did not, and we need not relate the events that followed their discovery. Royston never saw his property again. A new delight however was found in the possession of a mongrel dog. Brown, the school porter was induced to shelter this outcast for the modest sum of sixpence a week and Royston was wildly enthusiastic over Pompey as he called the animal. This last possession found favour in

the eyes of his fellow juniors. It was the regular thing after tea for Royston to run down to the lodge and smuggle Pompey up to their den where his presence interfered just a little with their preparation. Great ingenuity had to be exercised to prevent discovery but as the poor animal was still in a very cowed state it was fairly quiet and usually lay curled up in the bottom of the waste paper basket with what the boys thought a most natural heap of waste paper on top of him. He generally spent the night there as Royston had some doubts as to the quality of his bed at the porter's lodge, though probably Pompey thought a blanket a much more comfortable sleeping place than a ricketty paper basket. However his opinion was not asked. But to go back to Birkdale and Royston. Stormy as the relationship between them was, there seemed to be some mutual understanding for when the Captain offered Birkdale another fag and when Ridley & Co. advised Royston to strike, neither seemed inclined to act on the proffered advice.

About six months after Royston's arrival a tremendous "row" took place amongst the sixth. The details were not very clear, but it seems that Birkdale was suspected upon very strong evidence of cheating at an exam. A kind of court martial was held by the sixth (the affair did not go to the Doctor), with the result that Birkdale was sent to Coventry. In one way it was partly his own fault, for his intense pride being aroused at the first whisper of suspicion, he refused to say a word and treated the whole matter with silent indifference. This silence was naturally misunderstood by the boys, so Birkdale was left severely to himself. The sixth ignored him entirely, but the smaller boys openly expressed their contempt, and 'cheat' and 'cad' greeted his ears whenever he met a party of them. One alone refused to obey popular opinion and neither shunned Birkdale nor worried him with sentimental sympathy, and the big fellow often smiled as he thought of his solitary friend. It was Royston, his fag. This small boy went on the even, or rather one ought to say uneven tenour of his ways as if Birkdale's position was unaltered, banged in and out of his study, played his old pranks with the ink, and made his usual request to sometime do his prep, in the senior's study, worrying him with questions and a scratchy pen in the course of it.

His fellow fags were up in arms; that a 'young kid' like Royston should dare to fag for a fellow whom the sixth had made an outcast, and whom they would scorn to be seen backing up, passed their comprehension. Ridley tried all the power of his eloquence, Carr of his ridicule, and Guiles of his abuse;

but Royston was unmoved, and calmly answered all their remarks with his usual formula, "I shall jolly well do as I like." Only once did he lose his temper. It was at Ridley's words—

"Let the little idiot go!" he had said scornfully. "He's sweet on Birkdale and—"

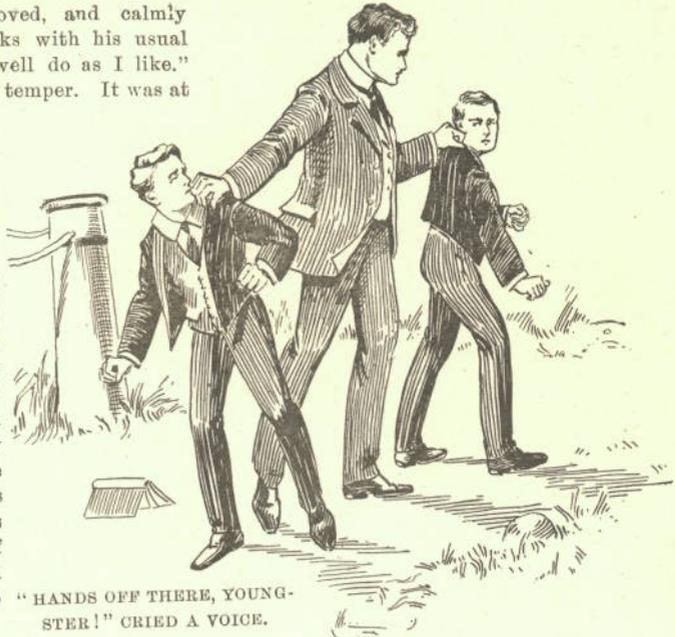
But he never finished his sentence for Royston was at him tooth and nail, and it needed all Carr's and Guiles' energy to keep the peace; but as these arguments disturbed their plans and interfered with Pompey's education (they were trying to teach the dog various tricks) it was generally voted that this was only another phase of Royston's "rumness," and might be "passed." So passed it was.

This state of things went on for some weeks, when one day by a lucky chance Birkdale's innocence was discovered. The sixth were in great doubt how Birkdale would take their overtures of reconciliation when they knew how wrongly they had judged him, but he was made of the right sort of stuff, and perhaps he recognised that his own pride was a little to blame. Anyway harmony was restored and Birkdale met with a hearty and enthusiastic reception on his return journey from Coventry, and became even a more popular fellow than he was before. The juniors when they heard the news prepared all sorts of defensive armour against the expected and natural justification, and "I told you so" delight of Royston. He had stuck to his man and they writhingly thought of his triumph over them, for even if they squashed him by force of numbers, the victory was his. But to their utter bewilderment and surprise he took no notice, not even an exultant grin. This was rumness indeed! but they would pass it, oh, most certainly it could be passed.

On one point the juniors and even the other fellows were very curious. How had Birkdale acknowledged young Royston's pluckiness in his defence?

They never knew, but we, with a writer's privilege, can satisfy your curiosity (if you have any).

In the evening of that eventful day Royston went to Birkdale's study as usual meeting the Captain and several of the sixth just coming out. When they had gone Birkdale began to



poke up the fire with unusual energy, then he turned round suddenly to his fag.

"Shake hands young Royston, will you?" he said, holding out his hand. And Royston put his grimy little paw into the big fellow's fist and—well, I'm sorry, but that's all. And after that? Well, things went on in the same way. But what has all this to do with the ghost you say? Only this, if it had not been for Royston, his rumness and his dog, the affair of the ghost might never have happened. Therefore it was necessary to go over a certain amount of ancient history.

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## CHAPTER II.

### Modern History.

When St. Dunstan's reassembled after the Midsummer holidays various small changes had taken place, and amongst these Royston found himself no longer Birkdale's fag. The juniors were quick to make him aware of the change.

"Hullo youngster," was Ridley's greeting on the first day; "so Birkdale's chucked you at last."

"What do you mean?" asked Royston, fiercely.

"Got a rummy new chap, called Kidd—ho! ho! he is a kid too—for his fag," explained Ridley, with a hideous grin of delight.

"Oh, is that all?" exclaimed Royston, indifferently, walking away.

But it might be noticed that he displayed a particular interest in the new boys; and when he found one answering to the name of Kidd,

a lanky pale faced youth with weak eyes, a head taller than Royston, he obligingly offered to show him the fives court, and when there surprised him greatly by saying, "Look here, youngster, will you fight?"

As Kidd however had a marked disinclination to fight and doubled up with a heart-rending howl at the first blow, Royston had little satisfaction and walked off in disgust. Now there had been a witness to this scene, namely Lawrence, a great over grown boy in the Fourth, who for some reason cherished a bitter hatred against Royston. He went over to the new boy.

"What's the row?" he asked sympathetically.

"That beast of a fellow hit me," whimpered Kidd, pointing to the departing figure of Royston.

"Cad," muttered Lawrence. "But he can't be so jolly cocky this term; he won't have Birkdale to back him up."

"How do you mean?" asked Kidd, curiously.

Lawrence's first impulse was to snub Kidd as a new boy, but the brilliant idea struck him that here might be the means of taking vengeance on Royston. He condescended to explain.

"It's this way you see. Royston's rather sweet on Birkdale, and used to be his fag; but things are changed this term, and he isn't any longer."

"Isn't any longer sweet on him?" asked Kidd, stupidly.

"You ass," thundered Lawrence. "Royston is no longer Birkdale's fag; you are his fag. Now do you understand?"

"Oh!" said Kidd.

"Well?" said Lawrence, looking at him meaningly.

"What?" asked Kidd whose brains worked slowly.

"Idiot," growled Lawrence, "don't you see as Birkdale's fag you'll have no end of ways of paying Royston out?"

"Ah!" and this time the malicious note in Kidd's voice amply repaid Lawrence for his patience.

The bell went at that moment, so they started arm-in-arm across the green, their common enmity making them mutual friends.

Of course, Royston was sorry at the change of fags, for in his own peculiar way he liked and admired Birkdale. Indeed, the sixth form fellow was a favourite hero among the junior boys, both on account of his strength and prowess in the cricket and football field and his unflinching good nature and sense of fair play.

If Birkdale regretted the change, he made no sign, and certainly his study improved

both in quietness and order, for Kidd trembled in his shoes at the big fellow; indeed, but for the fancied superiority his position gave him over Royston, he would gladly have resigned his duties.

One morning Royston was crossing the quadrangle to his house when he met Lawrence and Kidd. Kidd, strong in the support of Lawrence who *could* fight, began to jeer at Royston, but the latter ignored his taunts and went on his way. Kidd, vexed at getting no answer, tried a more effective shot.

"I'm not sweet on a cad who cribs," he cried.

Royston swung round.

"Who are you calling a cad," he asked quietly.

"Ho! ho! aren't we innocent," sneered Lawrence, contributing his share. "We don't know a sixth form chap who cheats. Oh, no. Rather not?"

"We don't know he's a howling sneak," echoed Kidd, executing a kind of war dance. He had been lately caned by Birkdale.

"You beastly little idiot," shouted Royston, now in one of his furious tempers, springing forward at his tormentor.

"La—La—Lawrence," gurgled Kidd in abject terror, as he felt Royston clutching him in the region of his collar. "La—Lawrence."

But Lawrence had bolted round the corner in answer to a junior's shout of "Farmer wants you."

Farmer was the fourth form master, and Lawrence found by woeful experience that it did not pay to keep him waiting, so Kidd was left to his fate.

"You howling little coward," went on Royston, shaking the miserable Kidd until his teeth chattered.

"Hullo! hands off there youngsters," cried a voice, and the two boys felt themselves seized by the collar and swung apart. The new comer was Birkdale.

"Why don't you pitch into a fellow who can fight you, Royston?" asked the senior in some disgust.

Royston did not answer; he was angered at Birkdale's words, for he felt the senior did not quite do justice to the situation. Kidd made the most of the opportunity.

"He's always bullying me and fighting me," he began with a whine and the air of a martyr. "I don't care if it is sneaking, and I won't stand it any more. He hit me the first day I came for nothing at all."

"Is this true?" asked Birkdale in some surprise, as he took his hand off Royston's collar.

"Oh, quite," said Royston very bitterly for a small boy. Birkdale looked at him sus-

piciously; as yet he had no experience of Royston's pride, which was more than equal to his own. Royston saw that Birkdale doubted him, and his pride was up in arms. He was not going to argue with a little beast like Kidd. Let Birkdale think what he liked.

"I was going to lick you for fighting," said Birkdale slowly, looking down at Royston, "but I don't think you're worth it now," and he swung round and walked away. If there was one thing Birkdale loathed, it was bullying.

"You little wretch," cried Royston, turning to Kidd, his voice trembling with passion, "I'll pay you out for this."

"Royston!" shouted Birkdale sternly, as he suddenly stopped, for he had overheard this remark.

But Royston could stand no more; turning round he raced across the quad, through the porch and down the road that led to the cliffs. He stumbled along over the short, slippery grass and stones, then tripping, fell headlong into a soft bank of heather, where he lay panting and sobbing, his small body trembling with passion and indignation.

Meanwhile, Birkdale walked slowly over to his house in no very good frame of mind, wondering how a "decent little chap" like Royston should degenerate into a mere bully, and marvelling not a little at the fierceness of his temper.

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CHAPTER III.  
The Ghost.

A week passed away since Royston's encounter with Birkdale during which time the junior kept severely out of the big fellow's way. But by now the latter had had opportunities of testing the truthfulness and reliability of his new fag and he found rather blankly that Kidd was sadly deficient in both these qualities. In fact Kidd was an expert in relating a story in which he figured as the suffering martyr and nothing delighted him more than playing the role of injured innocence. Injured he might be but there was considerable doubt about the innocence.

The more Birkdale recalled the affair with Royston the more convinced he became that he had been hasty and even unjust; and he had an uncomfortable feeling that Royston's "quite true" rang with as much irony and bitterness as was possible for a small boy. This thought bothered him not a little. Royston had been a plucky little chap in sticking to him and surely he ought to be the last person to judge anyone rashly. It was hardly consistent with a sixth form fellow's dignity to make a sort of apology to a little chap in the third, yet Birkdale, whose unwavering sense of justice made him the

popular fellow he was, saw that he ought to do something. For one thing, his hastiness had had an evil effect upon Royston, in that his pride and recklessness were aroused, and were the cause of many mad pranks and escapades. His name was constantly down for lines and detention; he was twice interviewed by the Head, and was steadily losing what little character he had. Birkdale, who many times before by a good natured laugh or friendly word had prevented him from carrying out wild plans or calmed down his fiery temper, felt uneasily that this marked change was his fault.

It was rather unusual for a senior to trouble his head to such an extent over a third form boy, but the circumstances were peculiar.

It was with his mind full of these reflections that Birkdale went to bed on the memorable (to the boys of St. Dunstan's) night of September 3rd, waxing quite eloquent within himself over the influence seniors have in a school, and fully determined to put things right between himself and Royston minor in the morning. He had not been asleep many hours when suddenly the stillness of the night was broken by a heart-rending and bloodcurdling scream. It awoke Birkdale. He sat up in bed listening, thinking at first it might be his fancy.

"B—Birkdale," squeaked the trembling voice of little Hatchet. "A—are you a-a-awake? What's that?"

"All right kid," whispered Birkdale, reassuringly; "it's only some chap got a nightmare."

"Hullo!"

For again and again the scream rang out. It came from the next dormitory, and by this time nearly all the fellows were awake clustering round Birkdale and edging away from the end of the dormitory, for as Tomkins said, "Supposing it came through into our dormitory."

It was taken for granted that the cause of the scream was a ghost.

As he opened the door Birkdale met Mr. Hurst, the House-master, coming along the corridor, fully dressed. He had been sitting up late reading in his room, and at once hurried out on hearing the screams.

"What is it, Birkdale?" he asked when he saw the prefect.

"I don't know sir," answered Birkdale. "I think it came from 'A' dormitory."

Now two of the large dormitories faced the stairs, but while the door of 'A' dormitory was just a little to the left of the stairs, that of 'B' was right round the corridor. There was a door of communication between the two rooms, but it was generally kept locked;

therefore to reach 'A' dormitory the master and the boys had to go along the corridor and turn to the right. No sooner had they turned the corner than, in the flood of moonlight that streamed through the great windows, they saw a small figure leaning against the banisters, clad only in trousers and shirt, while a large sheet lay on the floor before him.

"Royston," cried Mr. Hurst in surprise, as he put his hand on the boy's shoulder, and drew him round to the light. "What is the matter? Was it you who screamed?"

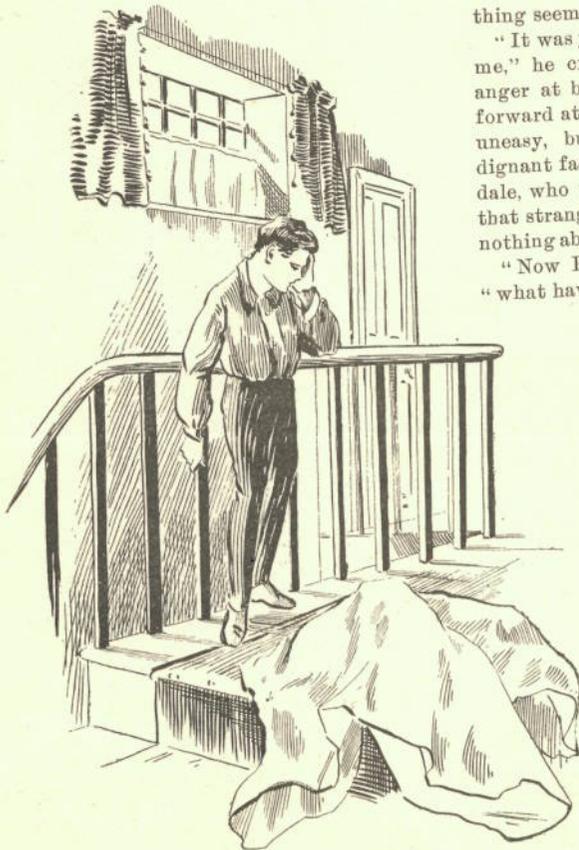
"No, sir," faltered Royston.

"More likely making someone scream," said Yeo, one of the prefects, grimly, as he picked up the sheet.

Meanwhile all the occupants of the two dormitories came flocking into the corridor pushing and shoving, chattering and shivering in terror or curiosity.

"It's Kidd who screamed, sir," shouted several voices; "he's in an awful fright, says it's a ghost, sir."

"Less noise, boys," cried the master; "go back to your beds. Where is Kidd?"



THEY SAW A SMALL FIGURE LEANING AGAINST THE BANISTERS.

"Here, sir," and several willing hands pushed forward the trembling and sobbing Kidd.

"Now what's the matter?" asked Mr. Hurst encouragingly, as he saw the terrified state of the boy.

"Oh! oh! I am so frightened," wailed Kidd. "Oh, please sir, don't let it come near me," and he clutched Mr. Hurst's arm in abject terror.

"What is it? what frightened you Kidd?" asked Mr. Hurst again.

"A—a—ghost," whimpered Kidd.

"Nonsense," cried the master. "Did you boys see anything?"

"No, sir," was the general shout, drowning a mild "Please sir," from young Hatchet.

No doubt existed in Mr. Hurst's mind but that Royston was at the bottom of this midnight fright, and ordering the boys back to bed he commanded Birkdale and Yeo to follow him to his room and bring Royston with them. Kidd was still in a shivering fit of terror, and clung frantically to Mr. Hurst, so it was not until they were inside the master's room that he caught sight of Royston. He gazed at him stupidly, then something seemed to dawn on him.

"It was you, you cad; you did it to frighten me," he cried, forgetting everything in his anger at being taken in and making a dart forward at Royston. Royston looked hot and uneasy, but it was an astonished and indignant face that he turned to Kidd, and Birkdale, who was watching him, felt convinced that strange as things looked, Royston knew nothing about the ghost that frightened Kidd.

"Now Royston," said Mr. Hurst, sternly, "what have you been doing?"

"Nothing, sir," said Royston, a little uneasily.

"Don't answer me like that, what were you doing out of bed?"

"No-thing much, sir," stammered Royston again.

Birkdale fidgetted a little at these replies. Why couldn't the little beggar speak out, he thought irritably.

"Nothing much," echoed the master angrily. "So you call frightening Kidd almost out of his mind, nothing much."

"But I didn't, sir; I don't know anything about the ghost," protested Royston eagerly.

"You do, you did it to frighten me," said the outraged Kidd. "He owes me a grudge, sir; I mean he thinks he does, and he said he would pay me out. Birkdale heard him—he can't deny it."

"That will do, Kidd," interrupted Mr. Hurst.

"Now Birkdale, what is this?"

But to Birkdale's relief Royston himself answered.

"I did say that, sir; I was fighting him and he sneaked to Birkdale, so I said I would pay him out, but I forgot all about it," he added in a tone just slightly regretful, that brought a smile to the prefects' faces.

"How dare you trifle with me," said Mr. Hurst, angrily. "If you did not frighten Kidd, what were you doing?"

Royston hesitated, and again looked uneasy.

"Please sir, I went down to our study," he said at length. This remark struck its hearers as a very feeble excuse.

"Your study," said Mr. Hurst in surprise. "What did you go there for?"

Royston's confusion was now unmistakable.

"For—for nothing much," he stammered with his favourite expression. But Mr. Hurst's patience was exhausted.

"I cannot stay here listening to your lame excuses; this must go to the Doctor, it is disgraceful. You, Royston, will remain in the dormitory to-morrow until sent for. Now boys go to bed."

"Oh, please sir," began Kidd, his teeth chattering, "I couldn't sleep in the dormitory."

"Rubbish, you knew it was no ghost," said Mr. Hurst, quickly. "It was only Royston."

"It wasn't me," broke in Royston, indignantly and a little rudely.

"Hold your tongue, sir," cried Mr. Hurst, giving him a quick box on the ear. "Your impudence is astounding."

"Now Kidd let us—but what is this," suddenly noticing the sheet in Yeo's hand.

"That was the ghost, sir," said Yeo, with a little grin.

But the master was examining each corner with critical eyes.

"Royston, this is yours," he said sternly. "You cannot explain this away."

"No, sir, I can't," said Royston, truthfully. Then seeing that this remark was ambiguous, he added, "I mean, I don't know how it got on the landing. I didn't take it with me."

"That will do," said Mr. Hurst, still more sternly, "You will go before the Doctor to-morrow."

The boys went back to bed. It needed all Birkdale's prefectorial authority to maintain order in the dormitory, for the boys were full of eager questions and talk. There was not a doubt amongst them about the ghost. It was Royston, and they received his protests with incredulous jeers. Royston went to bed with indignant and injured feelings; he saw things

were going badly with him this term, but he did not quite realise the extent of the scrape in which he now found himself.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

##### The End.

The boys awoke the next morning with the excited feeling that a "row was on." They comforted Royston by assuring him that he was dead certain to be expelled, as the Doctor was awfully down on that sort of thing, for a few years ago a similar trick had been played and the victim of it was turned quite foolish through fright. This much Royston gathered from the boys as they hastily dressed; then they clattered down stairs, and Birkdale with a curt "You're to remain here, youngster," to Royston, went away, locking the door behind him.

It happened that Dr. Stanford was away on a visit and not expected home until the evening, so the result of Royston's escapade could not yet be known, and a long and dreary day awaited him in the dormitory.

Birkdale's attention wandered frequently from his studies that morning. He was puzzled about the appearance of this ghost, and felt convinced that Royston had nothing to do with it, yet, as things were, suspicion was strong against him, for why on earth was the little beggar promenading about at midnight. The whole affair was a mystery, and as he was fond of unravelling mysteries, Birkdale was determined to unravel this one.

As soon as morning school was over he thought he would look up Royston senior. There was a book he wanted to borrow from him, so under this pretext he quickly strode over to his study. Royston was there doing a little quiet reading. Yes, he had the book Birkdale wanted, but the latter seemed in no hurry to depart, and sat down on the edge of the table absently turning over the leaves of the book.

"By the way, Royston," he said carelessly, "what about your minor?"

"My minor?" echoed Royston, looking up.

"Yes," repeated Birkdale, "about that row last night you know."

"Oh," said Royston with a frown, "it's a humbug altogether; I knew he would get into some scrape. Look at the mess he's made of things this term, and, with this in addition, he's sure to be expelled."

"You think he did it," remarked Birkdale, carefully examining the binding of his book.

"Of course. Much better he'd own up than stick to that wretched tale of his," said Royston wrathfully. "If he was up to no mischief why can't he explain?"

"Perhaps he'd tell you," began Birkdale.

"Tell me! Why man I've talked myself hoarse at him this morning trying to persuade him to own up. You see, being a small chap, and as no harm's done, the Doctor might let him off. But I can get nothing out of him. Never could," and Royston returned to his work as if the subject was dismissed from his mind.

Birkdale got up and went out feeling strangely indignant with Royston that he should leave his small minor in the lurch; and the fact that everyone whom he met was carelessly sure of Royston's guilt did not improve his temper.

Immediately after dinner he went to Mr. Hurst.

"May I speak to young Royston, sir?"

"Speak to young Royston," mused Mr. Hurst in some surprise.

"Yes, sir," said Birkdale. "You see I think there's something strange in the row last night and——"

"Well, I've no objection," interrupted Mr. Hurst thoughtfully. He was a very just master in spite of a rather hasty temper, and he knew if Royston was accused wrongly Birkdale would have more opportunities of discovering the truth than he had. "Here is the key. I need not tell you to be careful to let no other boys in. I can trust you Birkdale."

"Thank you, sir," said Birkdale, and in a few minutes he was bounding up the stairs and unlocking the door of B dormitory. Royston was looking out of the low window at the side of the dormitory, with his back to door. He turned when he heard the door open and flushed vividly at seeing Birkdale.

Birkdale closed and locked the door behind him and went over to the window.

"Now young shaver," he began cheerily, noting Royston's tired and weary look.

"You can cut," was the "young shaver's" polite interruption, and turning his back to the senior he looked out of the window.

Birkdale smiled; he knew what Royston was thinking of and came at once to the point.

"Now look here," he began quietly, sitting down on a bed near. "don't you be a little fool. Heaps of fellows can make mistakes, and if I thought you were a beastly little bully I shouldn't fag up here to help you out of a scrape. Do you see?"

Royston saw, and again a deep flush swept over his face.

"Thanks, awfully," he muttered rather unsteadily, still gazing out of the window. His brother had been up and stormed at him, getting only cheek and defiance, but Birkdale's words stirred him deeply, so the view from the window became very indistinct and misty.

"But if I am to help you," went on Birkdale, "you must tell me about your adventure last night. You see I take your word when you say you did not frighten young Kidd."

"No, I didn't," said Royston, recovering himself and turning to face Birkdale.

"Well," said Birkdale, putting his hands in his pockets and beginning to walk the dormitory, "if you didn't someone did, and I'll find him or—— but get on with your tale."

"I went down to our study," began Royston, with a little hesitation, for—for something, and when I got to the top of the stairs on my way back I heard that scream; it made me feel rather funky as the place looked so horrible in the moonlight"—and he shuddered slightly at the recollection. "The sheet was lying on the floor, and then I heard two more screams, and then you and the others came round, and that's all," finished Royston.

"So that's all," echoed Birkdale. "But what did you go down stairs for youngster," he asked, stopping suddenly in his walk.

Royston flushed a little. "For nothing much," he said, uneasily; then he seemed to pull himself up. "I went down stairs," he said steadily, "for something, but I'd rather not say, it's nothing to do with the ghost."

"But don't you see, the Doctor will think that very suspicious. It looks rummy to say the least of it."

"But they wouldn't believe me if I said why," persisted Royston, "and the chaps would laugh, too."

"Well, do as you like," said Birkdale, shrugging his shoulders. "What puzzles me is the sheet. It looks as if some one put it there to get you into a row, but who, that's the question. Well, I must be off, but I'll do my best to clear things up, youngster, for it bothers me."

"Thanks, awfully," breathed Royston, gratefully.

"Don't be too cock sure, mind," said Birkdale, warningly. "I mightn't be able to discover anything, but I'll have a jolly good try." And he went off leaving a very different boy to the one he had found there, for Royston had unlimited confidence in the other's capacity for solving mysteries. But Birkdale himself was rather doubtful. However, his first act was to interview Kidd and obtain as much information about the ghost as possible. The tale of that youngster set him thinking, and instead of going to the football he strolled thoughtfully up and down the path outside the gymnasium, turning over facts in his mind. Now Kidd's bed was near the door communicating between the two dormitories, so that as he lay in bed the door was on his right. Kidd had asserted positively

that the ghost had appeared on the right side of his bed, as if coming from the other side of the dormitory. If, for argument's sake, Royston had acted the ghost it would be much more natural for him to stand at the foot of the bed thus having the full length of the dormitory clear to bolt.

Birkdale questioned the boys of 'A' dormitory, but they had seen no signs of any ghost, and again he argued, if Royston had fled down the dormitory, as he must have done to reach the corridor, it was very strange that the boys who were awakened by Kidd's scream did not see him. It seemed clear to him that the ghost must have appeared to Kidd by means of this door. But who was the ghost, and how had he got through, as the door was locked? This question puzzled Birkdale not a little. As he stood for a moment thinking he became conscious that a junior was looking questioningly at him from the gymnasium steps. It was young Hatchet.

"Hullo, youngster," said Birkdale good naturedly. "Got over your fright?"

Hatchet looked shyly pleased at this notice, and was encouraged to give forth an opinion that so far had only met with ridicule from his companions.

"Please Birkdale," he began, "I think it was a real ghost last night."

"Why?" asked Birkdale, carelessly.

This was still more encouraging, and Hatchet beamed "Cause it was in our dormitory."

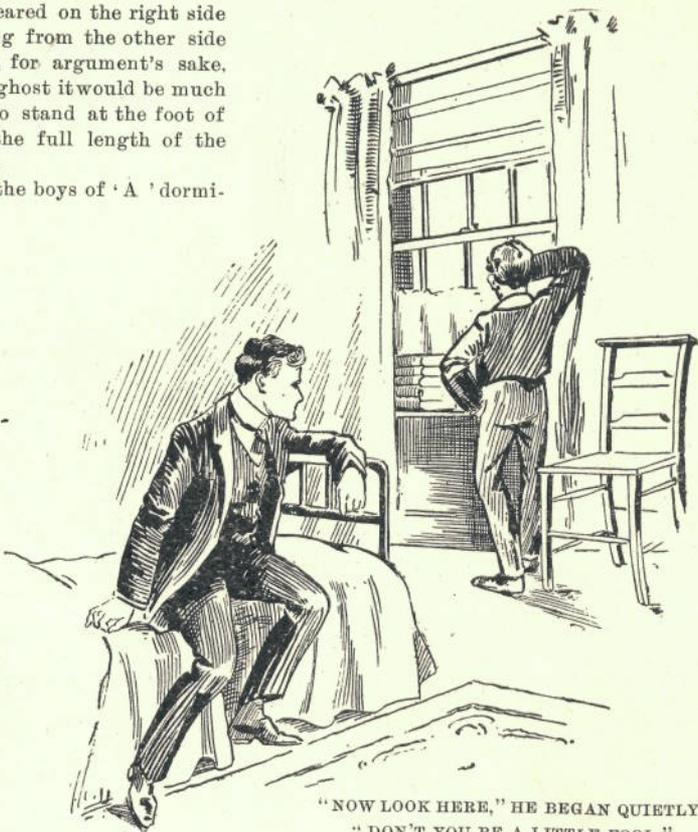
"Whatever do you mean?" asked the senior in surprise.

"I saw it near the door at the end, the locked door you know; it was awfully dark there, but I saw it, it must have glided thro' the door and frightened Kidd and then glided back, so it *was* a real ghost," concluded Hatchet triumphantly.

"But Lawrence ought to have seen it," said Birkdale, half to himself.

"Well he didn't, and told me it was all rot," said Hatchet, wishing he might also mention the fact that Lawrence punched his head on hearing his tale.

"Oh, so Lawrence was waxy about it, was he," asked Birkdale, making a shrewd guess.



"NOW LOOK HERE," HE BEGAN QUIETLY,  
"DON'T YOU BE A LITTLE FOOL."

"Rather," said the small boy, expressively, still thinking of his damaged head; but the other strolled off so Hatchet was left in ignorance of his opinion about the ghost.

Meanwhile Hatchet's words had given a new turn to Birkdale's thoughts, with the result that he spent a very busy afternoon and went to bed well pleased with his experiments in the amateur detective line. Royston had been interviewed by the Doctor—a most unsatisfactory interview in every way. The Doctor, having had experience in Royston's mad pranks and knowing his report that term was anything but what it should be, concluded that this latest escapade was quite consistent with the boy's character, and Royston's vague account of his mid-night visit to the study only confirmed his suspicions. But being tired after his long journey and unwilling to act hastily, he left the final decision for the morning. So poor Royston went back to the dormitory with a sinking heart, for he had fully expected Birkdale would be able to make things right at once, and his silence meant defeat. He lay in his bed after 'lights out,' looking at the stars twinkling through the windows, listening to the tranquil snores of

Ridley and Carr with a strange lump in his throat as he thought it might be his last night there. For though he pretended to hate school, as every boy does, yet he had been there just long enough for the old place to exercise its usual power of fascination over his mind, and to thrill with a kind of pride when he heard of 'old boys' whom he had not even seen, turning out heroes and becoming the doers of great deeds, for was he not too of "the same old school?" Of course he did not think all this, for he was only a small boy and not at all inclined to be sentimental; but if he had known it, it was what his strange feeling of unhappiness meant. But his wandering thoughts were startled by a light step near his bed.

"All right, youngster," whispered Birkdale's friendly voice. "Go to sleep and don't worry. I don't think St. Dunstan's will be rid of you yet," and the prefect passed on to his own bed, while Royston with these words ringing in his ears fell contentedly asleep.

The next morning a breathless air of excitement hung over the Third Form boys, and even spread to the ranks of the Fourth and Fifth, when the school bell rang out and the boys of Mr. Hurst's house were ordered to assemble in the big hall. They awaited the arrival of the Doctor in expectation and rather impatiently, the Third especially making themselves both seen and heard.

"Get out, Cottle, that's *my* foot you are standing on."

"Shut up, don't squash, this isn't a mangle."

"All right young Riggles, just wait till I get you outside."

These and sundry other similar remarks called forth stern cries of "silence there," from the prefects.

Then the Doctor, followed by Mr. Hurst, entered. The former gave a keen glance round, whispered something to Mr. Hurst, who summoned Birkdale. Birkdale quickly left the hall to return in a few minutes with Royston minor. With his big hand on the boy's shoulder he guided him across the room, and took up his position with the other prefects of his house. Royston looked a little flushed and nervous, but he met the curious eyes of the boys pluckily enough. The Doctor came forward a little and clasping his hands behind the folds of his gown, began his speech.

"Boys," he said in his stern clear tones, "you are aware that a contemptible trick was played the night before last on one of your companions, and you know how seriously I look upon such acts on account of the terrible consequences that followed an affair like this some years ago; I dare say many of the senior boys remember it well. It is a mean and

cowardly act, but still worse I think is the act of a boy who having played this trick deliberately tries to get another boy blamed for it. Thanks to the energy and chivalrous spirit of one of the senior boys, this matter has been cleared up. Lawrence"—in tones of thunder—"your deceit has been found out. There is the boy who played the ghost," went on the Doctor, pointing to the pale and guilt-stricken Lawrence. "by using the door between the two dormitories he was able to appear close to Kidd's bed, and in the confusion that followed to slip back to his own bed unobserved. I know the door is kept locked, but this," drawing one hand from behind his back and holding up a bright and much filed key, at the sight of which Lawrence again covered and shrank, "was found under a loose board near Lawrence's bed. Kirk, you will take Lawrence to my study and await me there."

"I am glad, Royston," said the Head turning to the small boy, "it has been proved that you have spoken the truth in this matter, and I hope it will be a lesson to you to avoid rambling over the house at mid-night. I shall not punish you for it as I think what you have experienced has been punishment enough. You have given me no adequate explanation why you were out of bed, so I sincerely trust that it was for no mischievous purpose. Your conduct for the last three weeks has not been at all satisfactory, but under the circumstances I am willing to overlook this escapade."

And the great man departed, his silk gown rustling majestically as he strode from the hall. Royston became crimson at thus being made the subject of a public (as it seemed to him) speech, and as the Third Form gathered round him Ridley and Co., by the hearty claps of congratulation that they gave him, showed that there was no ill feeling on their part and that they were even glad St. Dunstan's was not to be deprived of his society. Lawrence, the boys never saw again; and on account of other matters that were discovered, and the evil influence Lawrence was exercising on such boys as Kidd, the Doctor was not sorry to see the last of him.

How Birkdale discovered Lawrence's guilt will not take long to tell. The words of young Hatchet had given him the clue, and by a little judicious pumping of the most talkative juniors, he soon found that Lawrence was no friend of Royston's, and was the moving spirit in any opposition against him. Birkdale paid a visit to his own dormitory, examined the lock of the door and found it well oiled. By quite a fluke he discovered a loose board in the floor by the side of Lawrence's bed where he found an old sheet and a duplicate key. The first thing in the morning he

made known his discoveries to the Doctor. Lawrence in the face of this evidence confessed the truth. Some time ago he found the key and had succeeded in making it fit the door, for he thought it might be useful to be able to go from one dormitory to the other, the sheet was one he had brought back to school. On that night he had seen Royston slip out of bed and had longed to make his absence known when a brilliant idea struck him. He would play the ghost on some chap, slip into bed again and Royston would naturally be suspected; to make quite sure of this he flung Royston's sheet out on the landing. He feared to use his own sheet for the ghost as he might not be able to get it on his bed again, so he took the one he had hidden, then, seeing the duplicate key, it flashed through his mind that the safest plan was to softly unlock the door and frighten Kidd, whose bed was quite close to it. This he did, and was successful in getting safely back to his bed unnoticed in the confusion. Of course he could not calculate that Royston would be caught in such a damaging position as he actually was, but he felt certain that suspicion would fall on him as the only boy out of bed, and his conjecture was correct; but he did not count on Hatchet's sharp eyes, or on the fact that Royston might have an energetic and capable champion. As it was his schemes were frustrated and St. Dunstan's saw him no more.

"Well, youngster," said Birkdale a few days later, when Royston came with his rather rare request to do his prep. in the senior's study and sat down opposite to him. "I think you might tell me why you went gallivanting about at mid-night last week?"

"Promise you won't tell anyone?" asked Royston uneasily.

"Oh, I'm as safe as a gun."

"I expect you'll laugh, tho' I don't care much if *you* do; but I won't have the other chaps grinning." And Royston gave a vicious flick with his pen.

"Well?" said Birkdale, curiously.

"You see," said Royston, "I was in a beastly temper that evening, you know."

Birkdale nodded. He knew Royston's temper was very passionate.

"I was running out of the Gym., when Pompey came up and I fell over him. It made me jolly mad so I kicked him, I didn't mean to hurt him, but I did and he went off." Royston paused a minute. "He looked awfully miserable, and I was thinking about it in bed, about kicking you know, so I got up."

"Well, go on," said Birkdale, rather puzzled.

"That's all," said Royston, a little defiantly. "I got up and went down to see him."

"Pheew! you *are* a rum little beggar," said the senior slowly; but he did not laugh.



# WOLFGANG MOZART.

## A WONDERFUL MUSICIAN.

**O**F late years there have been many infant prodigies in the sphere of music, and many really wonderful performances by children have been witnessed, but after a time, when these children have become men and women, their names have gone into obscurity, and they have failed to reach any position of lasting fame.

This was not so in the case of Wolfgang Mozart, whose name is now a household word all the world over. He was born at Salzburg in Austria, in the year 1756, his father being sub-director of the Bishop of Salzburg's band. The first sign of the boy's musical genius was shown when his father was teaching his sister to play the piano. Wolfgang listened attentively to each of the exercises which his sister was being taught, and immediately played them himself without a fault. This was a great surprise and delight to his father, who had hoped and prayed that his son might be a great musician. This occurred in 1761, when the boy was five years old.

Soon after this, Leopold Mozart, the bandmaster, chanced to meet a patron of his called Count Herbenstein, and while telling him about his son and his wonderful musical talent, invited him to come and hear for himself whether it was not quite remarkable.

Count Herbenstein willingly consented to accompany the bandmaster, as he was curious to see this wonderful child.

"Very well, my good friend, I will go with you," he said. "Your little Wolfgang must be a wonder if all that you tell me of him is true."

They soon reached Mozart's house, and entered the sitting room. They had come just at the right time, for a great surprise awaited them. Little Wolfgang was seated at his father's writing table, busily engaged in scribbling on a sheet of music paper which was spread out in front of him. He still continued to write rapidly, being too much occupied to notice the entrance of his father and the visitor. When he had finished the sheet, not without many blots, he jumped up.

"What are you doing there, little Wolfgang?" asked his father. "You have spoiled a nice sheet of music-paper for me with your scribbling."

"No, indeed, father, I have not spoilt it,"

said the child, waving the sheet triumphantly in the air. "Just see, I have written a concert-piece on it, and half is already done. Just look for yourself."

"Why, you little goose, you will have written fine rubbish," replied his father, glancing over it. Gradually his face became grave, and a look of astonishment shone in his eyes. At length, turning to Count Herbenstein, he exclaimed, his voice trembling with joy, "It is really a perfectly correct piece. It is quite according to the rules of music, but, unfortunately, much too difficult to play."

"Ah, but then it is a concert piece, father," said little Wolfgang, "it wants a great deal of practising; but still it is not so difficult as you think. I will play it to you now, daddie!"

The little boy, not yet six years old, ran up to the piano and began to play the piece from the notes.

From this time the bandmaster planned and plotted to take his son to Vienna, so that he might have the advantage of thorough musical training. In the meantime, the boy acquired a considerable dexterity on the piano, and composed many pretty pieces which his father wrote down from his playing.

At last the time came for making the journey to Vienna, which was accomplished in a barge on the Danube. On reaching the town of Ips, where the vessel stopped for a short time, the Mozart family paid a visit to the church of the Monastery at that place, and little Wolfgang asked his father to show him how to use the pedals of the organ, and almost immediately began to play with as much self-possession as if he had been learning for months to play the organ. The monks hearing the sounds, and seeing no one on the organ seat, for the boy was so small that he could not be seen from below, believed that some supernatural agency was at work, to produce music so grand and yet so sweet. At last the prior ran upstairs to the organ loft and gazed with looks of amazement at the child, who was still so taken up with playing that he did not notice that he was being watched till his father roused him from his enraptured dream. Then he looked up merrily and smiled, as if by no means aware that he had done anything extraordinary.

The fame of the Mozart family had reached Vienna before them, so that before many months had passed after their arrival they were invited to go to court and perform before the Emperor and Empress.

On the day appointed, when the court was assembled in readiness, Wolfgang was asked what he would play, and who should judge. He replied that he would play a concert-piece by Herr Wagenseil, and that the composer himself should be judge. The Emperor therefore sent for the composer, and the performance began.

Great was the surprise of all. Whatever the audience had been led to expect of the little performer, he took care that their expectations should be more than fulfilled. He played with such spirit and certainty that everyone was forced to admire him. All were silent. The eyes of the Emperor and Empress, the Imperial family and the whole Court were fixed on the little artist, and even Wagenseil's countenance expressed the greatest astonishment. When the piece was finished, the boy approached the Empress, saying, "Well, your Majesty, have I not done my part pretty well?"

"You are, although still so young, a great musician, whom we must needs admire, and we hope sincerely that in years to come you may reach the highest possible perfection in your art," said the Empress.

"I hope so too, your Majesty," replied Wolfgang; "indeed, I shall do my very best to deserve your praise."

After this, the Mozarts were frequently invited to court, and Wolfgang was petted and admired by all.

Loaded with presents and honours, the bandmaster and his family returned to Salzburg, feeling that Wolfgang's first appearance in public was an earnest of future triumphs. Amongst his other presents was a small violin in a case, and this he set to work to learn in secret soon after the return from Vienna. The first his father knew of it was when two of his associates came to his house to play over a violin trio with him, and Wolfgang came to the summer-house where they were practising, and, producing his violin, asked to be allowed to play the second violin.

"What are you thinking of, you silly child," exclaimed his father, "you may try, and

fancy you are playing, if you like, but you must not really do so. Some day, perhaps, you can."

"I can now, father, really and truly," said Wolfgang, with glistening eyes.

"I suppose you learnt to play the violin in your sleep," answered his father, jokingly.

"No, not in my sleep, but when I was awake," returned the little lad.

"Get along! and don't make a fool of yourself. Because you can play the piano, you must not fancy you know the violin as well," said his father impatiently.

"But, father!" cried Wolfgang, with tears



WOLFGANG MOZART.

in his eyes, "it does not want much cleverness to play the second violin."

"Foolish lad, you must be off your head to talk such rubbish," said his father, now quite cross.

Poor little Wolfgang could hardly keep from sobbing aloud, and was about to slip away when the bandmaster's friends came to the rescue.

"Do let the little lad stay and play for a bit," said the second violin.

"Very well," said his father, "but mind you play very softly, so that we do not hear your strumming."

The trio began. The players were so taken

up with the composition that they forgot the boy for a time, but presently such sweet clear notes sounded out that they watched him in astonishment, and found that he was playing with marvellous precision and correctness. He played through six trios in this manner, without a mistake, and when the last note had died away the bandmaster cried, "You are a wonderful boy; where and when did you learn this?"

"When you were out, father," said the little one. This occurred when he was seven years of age.

Soon after this it was decided to send the boy to Paris, and he was again fortunate in attracting the notice of the Queen, who sent for him to Court.

His first performance at Court was not encouraging, the King playing cards all through the music, and the courtiers taking their cue from their Royal master, paid no attention. Wolfgang was so angry at this that he shut his music book and said to his father, "Come, father, you see very well that the people here do not understand music. Let us go."

It was with difficulty that he was persuaded to play again, but this time he was more successful, and all were astonished at his playing.

After a six months' stay in Paris, the bandmaster and his family left France and went first to England, then to Holland. At the Hague little Wolfgang became dangerously ill, but by the care and nursing of his mother and sister, he soon became restored to health. After this they returned to Paris, and it was not till 1766 that they once more reached their native village of Salzburg.

For some years they remained quietly at home, Wolfgang meanwhile being hard at work studying the theory of music. Europe

appeared to be united in admiring and praising the young artist, but there was yet one voice silent concerning him, namely, that of Italy. At that time Italy was held to be the real home of art; consequently Wolfgang longed to go there and receive the praise of the noblest masters of his profession. This he succeeded in doing in the year 1769, at the age of 15. At Bologna there existed a philharmonic Academy, which was held to be the highest authority on musical matters. Thither therefore young Mozart made his way and asked to be admitted as a member of their association. With this object in view he was subjected to the most difficult examination which the masters could devise, his age being taken into consideration against him rather than in his favour. He was given the test, and shut into a room by himself to work at it. In an incredibly short time word was brought to the judges that he was ready for them, and on glancing through his work they saw at once that he had succeeded. The members of the Academy had collected in the hall, and on his return greeted him with applause, crying,

"Long live the maestro; long live the Cavaliere Filarmonico! Evviva! evviva!"

Wolfgang turned pale with delight. He had won the most splendid victory, for his work had unanimously been pronounced worthy of the first prize.

After this he returned to Vienna, where he spent the greater part of the remainder of his life, composing the many works which have made his name immortal and being generally looked up to as one of the greatest musicians who ever lived. He died while still young, and thus his public life, begun at such an early age, was concluded while still in the prime of life.

S.E.H.

