

The BOYS' FRIEND 1^d 1/2

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED THE "PENNY POPULAR." WAR TIME PRICE

No. 884. Vol. XVIII. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending May 18th, 1918.

RIVALS FOR THE CAPTAINCY!

A MAGNIFICENT NEW LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. AT ROOKWOOD SCHOOL

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

The Eve of the Election.

"Give him a yell!" said Lovell. Jimmy Silver shook his head. "Shurrup, old chap! Mustn't yell at a prefect, even if he's only a Modern!"

Lovell grunted. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not "give him a yell," but they looked grim as Cecil Knowles of the Modern Sixth came into the School House.

They had never liked Knowles, and they liked him less than ever now. It was no secret that Knowles hoped to step into the shoes of Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, now that Rookwood's old captain was gone.

A change from Bulkeley to Knowles would be, as Jimmy had expressed it, a step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

However, Knowles was a Modern; and the Classics, at least, did not want a captain of Rookwood selected from the Modern side.

But it could not be denied that Cecil Knowles had an excellent chance of success in the election which was shortly to take place.

The Moderns were certain to vote for him as one man; and a great many of the Classical seniors looked on Knowles as the best man to succeed Bulkeley.

With grim looks, the Fistical Four of the Fourth fixed their eyes upon Knowles as he came in.

They wanted to express their scornful aversion, with due regard to the limits within which juniors were allowed to express their personal feelings towards the high and mighty Sixth.

To their astonishment, Knowles did not bestow on them the scowl with which he usually greeted the Fistical Four when he came across them.

He nodded quite genially.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were so surprised that they left off looking grim, and stared at Knowles open-mouthed.

Knowles was in a good temper—and with them!

It was amazing.

And that was not all!

Knowles paused, and spoke to the astounded juniors in a cheery, chatty tone.

"Neville in his quarters, do you know, Silver?" he asked.

"I think so," answered Jimmy.

"Thanks! I hear you've got the cricket-match coming off soon with the juniors on my side," said Knowles.

"Yes; we're beating Tommy Dodd's lot next week."

Knowles smiled.

"Well, good luck to the best team!" he said. "I shall come and see how you shape."

"Will you?" gasped Jimmy.

"Yes. I think the Rookwood Second Eleven ought to get a bit more of the limelight this season," said Knowles. "If I become Head of

the Games I shall see to that. My idea is that junior cricket ought to come more to the fore."

"My hat!"

"Rookwood First has made a pretty good reputation," said Knowles.

"But I'd like to see Rookwood Juniors going great guns, too. I want the School to be heard of in cricket this season. I'm glad to see you youngsters so keen about it!"

And with another genial nod, Knowles walked on to Neville's study.

He left the Fistical Four almost gasping.

Was this Knowles, the bully of the Sixth—the fellow who had always had a "down" on them, partly because they were Classics, partly because they were themselves?

"Well, my hat!" said George Raby, in wonder.

"This is another change, isn't it?" murmured Newcome.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose.

Either he had very seriously misjudged Cecil Knowles in the past, or the bully of the Sixth had changed very considerably in a few days.

"I say, if that's Knowles' tack, he won't be such a rotten failure as captain of the school," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell thoughtfully. "Bulkeley always used to back up junior cricket; but Knowles seems to want to go the whole hog. No reason why junior cricket shouldn't make a show this season."

"Blessed if I ever expected to see Knowles keen about junior cricket!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, of course, he'll have more responsibility on his hands if he becomes captain of the school and Head of the Games. He will have to act for Rookwood, not only for the Modern side."

"That's so!"

"I must say he's showing up better than I expected," conceded Lovell.

"Charmin' chap, Knowles?" said a voice at their elbow.

Mornington of the Fourth had been lounging near at hand, and he had listened to them, with a smile on his handsome, somewhat cynical face.

"I don't know about charming," said Jimmy Silver, looking at the dandy of the Fourth. "But he seems to have become a lot more civilised all of a sudden."

"Charmin', I call him!" answered Mornington, with a grin. "I don't think he's parted with his dose of original sin, though. I can't help suspectin' that he's got an eye on the election."

"Oh!" said Jimmy Silver slowly. Mornington chuckled.

"You see, you four merchants are workin' your hardest to keep him out, and to get Neville into Bulkeley's place," he remarked. "Knowles seems to have hit on soft sawder as a dodge. Disarmin' the enemy with sweet words, you know!"

"Oh!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

He had not suspected it. He was not, perhaps, so keen as Valentine



SHORT SHRIFT FOR SMYTHE & CO.!

Mornington, and certainly he was not so suspicious.

But now that Morny pointed it out, it was plain enough.

"I can't help feelin'," chuckled Morny, "that after he's elected captain, if he ever is, dear old Knowles will drop his charmin' ways an' proceed to make his old enemies sit up."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"So don't be bamboozled, dear boys," yawned Mornington. "We want a Classical captain of Rookwood, an' Neville's the man. I don't say he's a patch on Bulkeley, but he's the next best; and we don't want a Modern cad in the job at any price."

"No fear!"

"I—I suppose it was soft sawder," said Lovell at last. "Fancy a Sixth-Form prefect coming down to that!"

"He won't bag our votes, at any rate," said Newcome. "He can be as cheery as he likes, but the Classical Fourth are solid against him. I don't know about the Shell."

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"Neville's the man," he said. "And, as the election takes place tomorrow, we've got plenty to do. Electioneering's the word! I've been thinking that even the Modern chaps would rather have a decent fellow as captain if they only thought it out. I'm going to speak to Tommy Dodd about it."

"Moderns will vote Modern," said Raby.

"Not if they're made to understand that it will be a bad thing for Rookwood!" argued Jimmy. "Even the Moderns are patriotic."

"It won't be easy to make them understand that!" grinned Morny.

"I'm going to try," said Jimmy Silver. "Tommy Dodd's a sensible chap for a Modern. If we talk him round, half the Modern juniors will follow his lead. Let's go and see him, and put it to him plain."

"No harm in that," agreed Lovell.

"We'll promise 'em a hiding all round if Knowles gets in."

"Fathhead!" howled Jimmy.

"That isn't the way to get a chap's vote. We've got to talk to them nicely."

"Same as Knowles to us?" grinned Raby.

"Well, no harm in being a bit tactful," said the captain of the Fourth. "You come along and back me up, but don't talk too much. Leave the talking to your Uncle Jimmy."

"Well, you can do any amount in that line," assented Lovell. "If talking would win the election, you'd do it hands down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Come along, and dry up; and, for goodness' sake, don't put your foot in it, Lovell!"

And Jimmy Silver & Co. started for Mr. Manders' House, with the somewhat difficult task before them of convincing Tommy Dodd & Co. that the higher patriotism required them to vote Classical in the captain's election.

The 2nd Chapter.

The Rival Candidates.

"Come in!" said Neville of the Sixth.

Knowles stepped into the study.

Jones major of the Classical Sixth was there with Neville.

The two seniors had been discussing the election when Knowles arrived.

They did not give the Modern prefect welcoming looks.

Bulkeley had left Rookwood under a cloud, much to the dismay of his friends.

Knowles had not very successfully concealed his satisfaction at the fall, and the departure, of his old rival.

His keenness to step into Bulke-

ley's shoes did not endear him to Bulkeley's friends.

However, the Classical seniors were civil.

"I've just looked in," remarked Knowles. "I hear that you've put in your name as a candidate, Neville."

"I'm standing at the election," assented Neville.

"Some of the fellows expected that the election would be a formal matter," observed Knowles. "They didn't suppose that anyone would seriously dispute my claim to succeed Bulkeley."

"What rot!" said Jones major warmly. "We don't feel inclined to select the new captain from the Modern side, I can tell you!"

Knowles looked unpleasant.

"Bulkeley used to say that the two Houses ought to pull together for the good of the school," he said. "In such a question, the matter of Classical or Modern ought to be dropped out of sight."

"Well, yes! But—"

"But you fellows don't mean to give the Modern side fair play on any account—is that it?"

"That's not it!" said Neville. "I think I should make a pretty good skipper, Knowles. I wasn't keen on coming forward, but the fellows asked me."

"Simply to keep a Modern out?" Neville coloured a little.

"Not exactly that, either," he answered. "If you want it plain, it was to keep you out, personally, Knowles. On this side, we don't think you would make a good captain of the school."

"Thanks! So you are going to wedge in, in the hope of dishin' the Modern side, without caring a rap whether you're fit for the job or not?"

"Oh, rot!" said Neville sharply.

(Continued on the next page.)



RIVALRY FOR THE CAPTAINCY!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Anyway, I'm standing. If Rookwood wants you, Rookwood can elect you, I suppose."

"As head prefect, now Bulkeley's gone, as vice-captain, and as captain of the Modern side, I have a natural claim to take the top place," said Knowles. "This putting up a Classical candidate is simply a trick!"

"You're welcome to think so!" grunted Jones major.

Knowles' eyes gleamed. "I came to tell you, Neville, that if it's true that you've put in your name you ought to withdraw," he said.

"I call that cheek!" answered Neville. "You're going to start a contest between Classic and Modern by putting up, and a lot of fellows will vote according to sides, without thinking about the merits of the candidate," said Knowles.

"As there are a good many more Classics than Moderns you may wedge in, by spitting the school, and causing bad blood. I call it a rotten trick!"

"You won't call it that here, Knowles!" said Neville, rising to his feet. "I don't take that sort of talk from anyone. You'd better go."

Knowles looked at him savagely and grimly.

There was, to a certain extent, something in Knowles' contention.

Neville was a good-tempered and popular fellow, but it was a question whether he had the firmness of character required for Bulkeley's post.

Knowles certainly had more of the gifts of a captain, and had been a more popular fellow personally he would have stepped into Bulkeley's place without opposition.

But he was not popular with the Classics, at all events.

And probably there was a feeling among the latter that it was desirable to keep the captaincy on their own side.

The candidates measured one another with their eyes, and for a moment or two it looked as if there would be trouble in Neville's study.

But both of them felt that it would not do; and Knowles, with a shrug of the shoulders, turned on his heel and walked out of the study.

His brow was clouded as he crossed back to Mr. Manders' House.

He had looked upon his election as a certainty, but he feared Neville's popularity on his own side, and he knew that it would be a struggle now.

His feelings were bitter. His chums, Frampton and Catesby, were waiting for him in his study.

They gave him inquiring looks as he came in.

"It's true!" said Knowles. "Neville is standing!"

"That ass!" said Catesby.

"It's a trick, of course, to keep the captaincy in their hands!" said Knowles savagely. "They know jolly well that Neville is no good as captain of Rookwood!"

"It may be his idea to keep the place warm for Bulkeley," remarked Frampton. "They hope Bulkeley will come back, some of them."

"That's not likely. But if he comes back, and I'm in the post, Bulkeley won't find it easy to get the captaincy back!" said Knowles grimly. "I've got to get in, you fellows, by hook or by crook! It can't be done without some of the Classical vote on my side, and we've got to nobble the Classical vote."

"Not so jolly easy," said Catesby. "It's got to be done. I think we can depend on Smythe and his friends in the Shell," said Knowles. "Some of the Fourth, too—Townsend and Peele, and some others. I'm rather afraid of Silver and his gang. Mind how you treat those young sweeps for a bit. Be civil to them."

"Civil to those cheeky little cads!" exclaimed Catesby. "Yes, till after the election."

"Oh!"

"When I'm captain of Rookwood I'll make Jimmy Silver sorry for some of his cheek!" said Knowles, setting his lips. "I'll see that he's kicked out of junior cricket, and some things. I've got a long score against him. But for the present be civil. Every vote counts."

Catesby laughed.

"I'll ask him to tea, if you like!" he said.

"That would be a bit too palpable," said Knowles, laughing. "Mustn't be too sudden. But I fancy, all things considered, that I shall get in all right. I've got a list here of the Classics I can depend on for votes, and we can do some electioneering. Luckily I've plenty of money."

"Money!" said Frampton.

"Money talks!" said Knowles. "Any fellow who's hard up, and in want of a loan, can have it—if he votes the right way. There's a good many fellows in that way. You fellows will keep your eyes open. And a few bets wouldn't hurt."

"How do you mean?"

"You may lay bets, two to one, among the sporting fellows, that I sha'n't get in," said Knowles coolly. "I'll find the tin to pay up if you lose. I hope you'll lose. A fellow who's betted on my winning will vote for me."

"My hat! You've got a head on you, Knowles!" said Catesby.

"I flatter myself that I have!" said Knowles complacently.

And the three Moderns settled down to a discussion of the pros and cons of the case. And if the Head of Rookwood could have heard their discussion of election methods, Knowles would never have become captain of Rookwood, if he had remained at Rookwood at all!

Fortunately for Knowles the Head could not hear.

The 3rd Chapter. Different Points of View.

"Trot in, chappies!" Tommy Dodd smiled a welcome as the Fistical Four presented themselves in his study.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle grinned effusively.

The three Tommies, who seldom met the Classics without mutual slanging, were overflowing with sweet cordiality.

"Jolly glad to see yez, bedad!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Sit down, old tops!" said Cook.

The Fistical Four were equally genial. This kind reception encouraged them to hope that Tommy Dodd & Co. had seen reason, and realised that it was needful to elect a Classical captain of Rookwood.

"You chaps thinking about the election?" asked Jimmy.

"Well, we were just turning it over in our minds," answered Tommy Dodd. "I suppose jolly nearly all Rookwood will be voting to-morrow."

"Every man jack, I should think!"

"I was thinking of coming over to see you," said Tommy. "You're a rather sensible chap, Silver, I will say that. I rather think you will agree with me in what I am going to say."

"Go ahead, old scout!"

"At a time like this," said Tommy, coughing a little, "my idea is that we ought to forget any little differences we've had, and back up together."

"I quite agree."

"You see, on such an occasion we ought to forget that we're Classics or Moderns, and remember that we're Rookwooders, and think only of the good of the school as a whole."

"Tommy, old man, you're a regular orator!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's just what I was going to say to you!"

"Good! Well, then," said Tommy Dodd, "let's make it a go—vote for the best candidate, and hang what side he belongs to!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, Duddy, that's really ripping!" said Lovell. "I dare say most of the Moderns will follow your lead in voting—juniors, I mean."

"If they don't I'll know the reason why!" said Tommy Dodd grimly.

"Topping!" said Jimmy Silver heartily. "If the Fourth stand together in this it will practically decide the election. We can count on getting Neville in as captain of the school."

Tommy Dodd jumped.

"What? You mean Knowles?"

"Knowles!"

"Of course."

"Don't be an ass, Tommy! This isn't a time for little jokes."

"Why, a minute ago you agreed to vote for Knowles!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd hotly.

"You're dreaming!"

"Didn't you agree with me to vote for the best candidate, irrespective of the side he belonged to?" demanded Dodd.

"Yes; that's Neville."

"Knowles, you ass!"

"Neville, you fathead!"

There was evidently a misunderstanding.

The sweet geniality faded from the manner of both Classics and Moderns as they realised it.

"Look here," said Tommy Dodd, "if you've come here to talk silly rot—"

"I seem to have come here to listen to it!" retorted Jimmy Silver. "I was going to put it to you sensibly—"

"You couldn't! You've no sense!"

"So you're going to vote Modern, after all, you dummies?" exclaimed Raby wrathfully.

"We're going to vote for the only possible captain of Rookwood!" snorted Tommy Dodd scornfully. "You'd do the same if you had any sense. Any reasonable chap will admit that the school will be better off under a Modern skipper."

"If that's meant for a joke—"

"I'm serious, you silly ass!"

"Then there's something wrong with your roof," said Lovell. "I should advise you to see a doctor."

That was too much for Tommy Dodd. He grabbed at a cushion, and the cushion whizzed through the air, and caught Arthur Edward Lovell under the chin.

Lovell gave a howl as he staggered back, and sat down heavily on the study carpet.

"Kick thim out, intirely!" shouted Tommy Doyle.

"Mop up the study!" yelled Lovell.

The Fistical Four had come there for a friendly talk. But the subsequent proceedings did not seem very friendly. Classics and Moderns closed in strife. The study table reeled into the fender, and the study chairs rolled in all directions.

Lovell had Tommy Dodd's head in clancery, and he seemed to mistake Tommy's features for a carpet he had to beat in record time.

Raby and Doyle were wrestling in a corner, and in the middle of the room Jimmy Silver was hotly engaged with Cook.

Newcome was not left idle, for the uproar brought four or five Modern juniors to the study, and Newcome was promptly collared, fighting valiantly.

"Down with the Classics!" roared Towle of the Fourth.

"Mop them up!"

The Fistical Four put up a tussle that fully justified their reputation.

But the odds were too great.

In the midst of a Modern crowd they were hauled out of the study, and sent rolling down the staircase.

At the bottom, they sorted themselves out, and sat up, gasping. From the top of the staircase a yell followed them.

"Come back again!" roared Lacy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knowles of the Sixth came striding out of his study, and the Moderns vanished from the staircase as if by magic.

The prefect gave the breathless Classics a savage look.

"You young rascals!" he exclaimed. "I'll—"

Knowles paused suddenly.

As a prefect, it was certainly his duty to intervene in such a riot.

But he thought of the coming election in time.

The scowl disappeared from his face, and was replaced by a smile.

He even gave Jimmy Silver a hand up. "Now, then, not so much row, you know," said Knowles quite genially. "Ragging with Modern kids, what?"

"Ye-es," gasped Jimmy.

"Well, don't make such a row, or you'll have Mr. Manders after you," smiled Knowles, and he went back to the study.

The Fistical Four limped out into the quadrangle, dusty and dishevelled.

The 4th Chapter.

Jimmy Silver Means Business.

Electioneering was the order of the day at Rookwood now.

Even the fags of the Second Form took a keen interest in the great question.

To the Sixth and the Fifth it was a very serious matter.

But the Fourth seemed keenest of all. Jimmy Silver and his friends were men of push and go, and when they took up anything they took it up in a strenuous way.

Everybody, nearly, was counting votes in advance, making calculations as to how the election would go.

The Classics being numerically the stronger side, the election ought to have been a sure thing for the Classical candidate.

But there was division in the ranks. Neville was popular, he was good at games, and he was old Bulkeley's best pal.

All this told in his favour. It was more than enough to make Jimmy Silver & Co. enthusiastic.

But among the more thoughtful of the seniors there were doubts.

Knowles was not liked personally as Neville was, even on his own side, but popularity was not everything in a school captain.

More important than that was the show Rookwood was likely to make in the coming cricket season.

Knowles, perhaps, would unduly favour his own side in that connection.

But as a cricket captain he was far and away ahead of Neville, who was by no means one of those fellows who are born to command.

Knowles could be very unpleasant sometimes, but he was a good skipper in the main.

Under his lead, the Moderns had kept their end up fairly well against the Classical side, and under his lead there was no doubt that Rookwood would go ahead.

So, in spite of their natural desire to have a Classical as skipper, many of the Classical seniors meant to vote for Knowles, as evidently the best man for the job.

There was division among the juniors, too.

Townsend and Peele & Co. of the Fourth were supporters of Knowles, simply because Jimmy Silver & Co. backed Neville.

In the Classical Shell, the Knowles party was strong.

Adolphus Smythe, who gave the law to the Shell, openly announced that he was for Knowles.

Smythe's motives were not very creditable.

Adolphus was a "blade," and blades had found no encouragement under Bulkeley's rule—quite the reverse.

But it was more than suspected that Knowles himself was given to "going the pace," strictly under the rose.

Under Knowles' reign, the Classical nuts expected a much easier time.

"Knowles is our man!" Adolphus Smythe told his friends. "You see, Knowles himself isn't above puttin' a sov. on a geegee occasionally—on the Q.T., of course; but fellows know it. Leggett says they have bridge-parties in Knowles' study—an' I believe it. It stands to reason that Knowles, as skipper, can't be down on such games as Bulkeley was. Neville would follow Bulkeley's example. Knowles is our man!"

And Tracy and Howard and Selwyn and the rest heartily concurred.

In the end study that evening Jimmy Silver made an anxious calculation, with the aid of a sheet of impot paper and a stump of pencil.

The result was not encouraging.

"It won't be a walk-over for Neville," Jimmy announced.

"Do you mean that he'll be licked?" asked Raby.

"Well, it looks doubtful. I've got a list of all the fellows in the lower Forms who have promised to vote for Neville."

"What's the figure?" asked Lovell.

"Sixty."

"All Classics?"

"Yes, of course."

"The Moderns are sticking together like a lot of thieves!" growled Lovell.

"They've got the cheek to think that Knowles is the man for the job! Lacy—the Modern Lacy, I mean—actually told me he liked Neville as a prefect, but was going to vote for Knowles because Neville's an ass!"

"Neville isn't an ass," said Jimmy. "He's very easy-going and good-tempered—everybody likes him."

"I don't say he's a first-class skipper," said Lovell thoughtfully. "Knowles would be the better man actually for the job, if he wasn't such a beast."

"And if he wasn't a Modern!" said Raby.

"Yes, that's the great point."

"Well, we can't expect the Moderns to look at it in that light," said Jimmy. "They back their man, same as we back ours. The worry is, that a lot of Classics are backing him, too."

"Traitors!" snorted Lovell.

"Carthew of the Sixth is on his side—because he's a bully, and Carthew's another," said Jimmy. "Bulkeley used to keep Carthew in check; but Knowles won't. Carthew knows that."

"Rotter!"

"Ledbury and his friends are backing Knowles, too. They seem to think Rookwood will get on better at cricket under Knowles."

"Well, that's possible. Knowles is sure to favour his own side, though. Neville's a bit too easy-going, I think."

"Then those Shell rotters—"

"I know why Smythe's backing Knowles!" snorted Lovell. "He thinks he's going to be allowed to smoke, and play cards in his study, because that Modern cad does the same kind of thing over the way."

"I'm afraid so."

"Taking one thing with another, it's rather a bad look-out for our man," said Newcome dimly. "The pro-Moderns seem to have a lot of mixed motives, but it comes to the same thing—they'll get their man in."

Jimmy knitted his brows.

"I'm afraid the Classical vote is split about equal," he said; "and then the Modern vote will turn the scale. Knowles has talked over Ledbury of the Sixth."

"I hear that he's going to write to Bulkeley, asking his advice about making up the First Eleven."

"Well, that's good, if he does it!"

"He won't do it!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "It's camouflage. Just an election dodge, because most of the Classics are backing up old Bulkeley. Bet you that if he gets in as captain Knowles will be a regular Tsar!"

"It's a rotten look-out!"

"It's up to us," said Jimmy firmly. "We can't do anything but vote for Neville."

"We can, and we must."

"What else, fathead?"

"It comes to this, that it's a tussle between Classical and Modern," said Jimmy Silver. "The Classical man's got to get in. He's Bulkeley's pal, and Bulkeley would like it, and that's enough for us."

"It's enough for Smythe and Townsend and that lot—only the other way round!" growled Lovell.

"Smythe & Co. are not going to be allowed to back up against their own side. We've got to persuade them to vote Classical."

"You'll only make 'em cackle if you ask them."

"I'll ask them, all the same. And if they won't agree, we've got to keep the cads out of the election."

"Pshaw!"

"All voters have got to be in Big Hall at seven sharp to-morrow. Chaps who are not there when the doors are closed can't vote."

"But—but—"

"Smythe & Co. won't be there," said Jimmy Silver.

And the Classical Fourth rose to the occasion!

The 5th Chapter. Drastic Measures.

Cecil Knowles the next day was observed to be displaying a considerable amount of confidence, not to say swank.

Things were looking up for the Modern candidate.

For one reason or another many Classics were on his side—with bad motives or good, according to the kind of fellows they were.

And the Modern vote was solid behind him.

Knowles was calculating on getting in with a majority of at least a dozen—possibly twenty, thirty, or forty.

But for the rivalry between Classical and Modern, there was no doubt that he would have polled three-quarters of the votes.

Classical loyalty influenced many fellows who would otherwise have agreed that Knowles was the best man for the job.

Knowles' election methods were not very creditable, but they seemed successful enough.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were more than suspicious of Knowles' methods, and they felt that they were fully justified in counter-plotting.

They were well aware that Townsend, Topham, Peele, Gower, and others had been betting with Leggett.

Why was Leggett laying money against his own man?

"Plain enough!" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "They'll vote for Knowles, to win their measly bets. Where is Leggett getting the money he will have to pay out?"

"Knowles!" said Mornington.

"That's it; simply bribery and corruption."

"It ought to be shown up!" exclaimed Eroll.

"Well, we can't sneak about the cads to Bootles, that's certain—and there's no proof, anyway."

"Proof enough for us!" said Lovell.

"Quite. And we're going to put a spoke in their wheel," said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "Knowles can spend his money on votes, and we'll jolly well see that the voters don't turn up! That's a Roland for an Oliver!"

Lessons that day were generally considered an unnecessary evil. All thoughts were upon the election.

All Rookwood was glad when the day's work was over, and they could turn all their thoughts to the great question that was to be decided at seven o'clock.

Over tea in the end study the Fistical Four arranged the final details of their little scheme.

After tea Jimmy Silver & Co. visited Townsend and Topham in their study.

The two nuts had finished tea, and as Tom Rawson was not there just then they had put on cigarettes afterwards.

Jimmy Silver took no heed of the cigarettes.

"Shall I put your names down on my list?" he asked.

"For Knowles?" grinned Towny.

"No; for Neville."

"Thanks, no."

"You're voting Modern?"

"You know we are," said Topham.

"Yah! Pro-Huns!" howled Lovell.

"Yes, we know it," said Jimmy. "Come for a walk with us, will you?"

"No fear! We're goin' down to Hall."

"I asked you to come for a walk, Towny."

"Well, I won't come."

"Your mistake, you will. Collar them!" said Jimmy tersely.

Townsend and Topham jumped up furiously.

But they were collared in a moment, and in spite of their fierce protests, they were marched away to the box-room at the end of the passage.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT!

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any newsagent to get it from:

Conroy & Co. remained within the box-room on guard.

The door was locked, and the key was in the Australian junior's pocket.

And though the odds against the three were heavy, Smythe & Co. made no attempt to get hold of the key.

The three sturdy Colonials were dreadfully hard hitters, and the Classical nuts were not fond of hard hitting.

Moreover, each of them had a bat in his hand, and those bats were not to be argued with.

There was a knock at the door soon afterwards, and Conroy opened it.

Tubby Muffin was hurled in, grunting.

He collided with Adolphus Smythe, and threw his arms round Smythe's neck to save himself from falling.

Smythe shoved him off angrily, and the fat Classical rolled on the floor and yelled dismally.

Tracy minor of the Second was "chucked" in after him, and several more fags of the Third and Second Forms followed.

The box-room was growing quite crowded.

"Better keep guard outside now," said Jimmy Silver. "If they make a row, open the door and lay into them."

"Do you think we're goin' to stand this?" shrieked Smythe, in helpless wrath. "You can sit down if you like, dear boy."

The door was closed on them.

Outside, the Colonial Co. remained on guard.

There was really danger of a revolt if they had stayed inside, the crowd of prisoners was growing so numerous.

During the next half-hour the door was opened again, and junior after junior, fag after fag, was pitched into the box-room.

All the nuts of the Classical side, all the fellows who, for one reason or another, good or bad, had determined to vote Modern, came hurtling into the box-room in twos or threes.

Large as the room was, it was getting swarmed.

There were nearly thirty fellows there when the door was finally closed and locked on the outside.

And it was past half-past six.

"That's about the lot," said Jimmy Silver, in the passage. "I'd have liked a few more, but some of the cads are out of doors, but we can't collar them in the quad; might attract attention."

"Ha, ha! It might!" chortled Mornington.

"And some have gone into Hall already, and we can't noble them under the noses of the prefects," said Jimmy Silver regretfully. "I suppose Neville wouldn't really approve of this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But as we're not going to tell him, that doesn't matter. One of us had better stay here."

"It's losing a vote," said Lovell. "We can't afford to chuck votes away, even now."

"Up to the last moment," said Jimmy.

"You stick here, Conroy, and cut down to Hall at the last minute."

"Right you are!"

And as seven o'clock drew near, Jimmy Silver & Co. marched into Hall, in good time for the election.

The 6th Chapter. The Captain's Election.

"We've got to keep our eyes peeled," remarked Tommy Dodd oracularly, as he and his chums left Mr. Manders' House on that fateful evening.

"It's all serene," answered Cook. "Every fellow will come up to the scratch. They know what they'd get if they didn't."

"Bedad, an' they do!" said Doyle emphatically.

"I know the Moderns will turn up, duffer," answered Tommy Dodd. "They're mostly in Hall already—they've got orders. It's our Classical backers I'm thinking of. Some of the Fourth have been threatening to scalp Smythe for backing our man. Smythe's a bit of a funk, and may be scared off. He's got to have protection if he needs it."

"Faith, an' a hiding wouldn't do him any harm, Tommy darling! Sure you know why he's votin' for our man?"

"A vote's a vote, and we're not going to risk losing Smythe's," answered his leader. "We've got to keep a special eye on Smythe & Co., in case those bounders try to threaten them. Then there's Muffin—"

"That fat baste!"

"A fat beast can vote as well as a thin beast!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "We've let Muffin scoff two-thirds of our rations, and everything else we could get for him, for his vote. Well, if somebody else fed him at the last minute he would go back on us. The election may turn on a single vote; there's no telling. You keep Muffin under your eye, Cook."

"Right-ho!"

From which it will be seen that the three Tommies were very much on their guard, and were not running any risks with their voters.

Knowles had no keener backers than the Tommies, though they disliked him exceedingly.

But he was "their man," and they were going to get him in.

There was nothing pro-Classical about Tommy Dodd & Co.

They had been very busy, and it was about a quarter to seven when they entered Big Hall in the School House.

Big Hall was getting crowded.

The candidates had not yet appeared, but a large number of seniors of the Fifth and Sixth were present, and Mr. Bootles had just come in.

Mr. Bootles and Mr. Wiggins were the tellers in the election.

Tommy Dodd looked round him keenly, to make sure that all the Modern supporters were present.

Catesby and Frampton were looking after senior voters very sharply, but the junior element was under Tommy's special eye.

Cecil Knowles had been rather surprised by Tommy Dodd's keenness.

He had had many rubs with Tommy, and there was no love lost between them.

In point of fact, if Knowles was successful, he was likely to owe it in great part to Tommy Dodd's faithful backing.

Tommy's word was law among the Modern juniors, and fags who might have remembered cuffs and canings from Knowles at an awkward moment for him were all following Tommy's loyal lead.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came in, and sheered from the quarter where Tommy Dodd was looking about him.

They did not want anything to say to Tommy just then.

But Tommy joined them, with a knitted brow.

He had noted the absence of the Classical nuts, and of Tubby Muffin and some of the fags who had gone over to the Modern party.

"Don't your blessed Classics know it's ten to seven?" asked Tommy, with sarcasm. "Or are they going to hop in at the last minute?"

"Oh, we're turning up in pretty good force!" said Jimmy carelessly.

"Seen Smythe?"

"Yes."

"Where is the duffer, then?"

"I saw him at dinner."

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" said Tommy Dodd crossly. "Smythe's voting Modern. None of your tricks, you know!"

"Tricks!" said Jimmy Silver, opening his eyes in astonishment at the bare suggestion.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Lovell. "As for tricks, what about fellows betting to lose money if Knowles gets in? I call it bribery!"

Tommy Dodd coloured a little.

He knew something of Knowles' methods, and in some respects he was not proud of his candidate.

"I've had no hand in anything of that kind!" he said hotly.

He compared notes with Cook and Doyle, who shared his anxiety.

"The silly idiots will miss the vote if they don't come in!" said Dodd. "Cut out and warn them, Cook! They must be in their studies."

"Don't let those Classical cads shut me out, then!"

"We'll watch 'em!"

Cook hurried out of the Hall, but he came back in a few minutes.

He was alone.

"Can't find 'em!" he announced. "All the studies are empty, and I couldn't see a soul in the quad!"

"Where the thump can they be?" exclaimed Doyle.

Tommy Dodd set his teeth.

"It's a dodge of some sort!" he muttered. "They're being kept away. Why, there's more than twenty of our backers missing!"

"Three minutes to seven!" said Cook, with a glance at the big clock. "Not much time left for 'em."

"It's a dodge!" repeated Tommy Dodd.

"My hat! They're closing the door!"

He raised his voice, and bawled: "Leave that door alone, you Classical cads!"

Mr. Bootles looked round.

"Silver!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"It is not yet time to close the door."

"Ahem! All right, sir!"

Jimmy gave Tommy Dodd a glare, and Tommy grinned.

"That shows they're keeping them out!" whispered Cook. "They've got all their men here, and they want to keep ours out. Hallo! There's Conroy."

Conroy of the Fourth came quietly into the Hall and joined the Classical group just inside the door.

It wanted one minute to seven.

Tommy Dodd was wild with impatience.

There was no sign of Smythe & Co., or Tubby Muffin or the rest, and the last minute was slipping away in rapid seconds.

But for Tommy Dodd's wariness Smythe would have hoped in vain.

But, as it happened, Tommy was there to hear.

Tommy Dodd knocked at the door.

"Who's in there?" he called out.

"By gad! Is that you, Dodd?"

"Yes. That you, Smythe?"

"You bet! That cad Silver's shut us up here to keep us out of the election!" yelled Smythe, through the keyhole. "Unlock the door!"

"There's no key here."

"Oh, gad, then we're done, after all! Get a key from somewhere, Dodd—there's nearly thirty fellows here."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

Tommy was a fellow of resource, but he was dismayed.

It was past seven, and he was shut out of Hall.

It was doubtful if he would regain an entrance, with his rescued voters, if he rescued them.

And the door was locked between. "Get us out somehow, man!" yelled Townsend. "We've got to beat that beast Silver!"

"I'll get you out somehow," said Tommy Dodd. "Wait a minute!"

Tommy was desperate.

The election trembled in the balance.

He knew that the Modern candidate could not win on a count without those thirty votes.

He rushed into the nearest study, in search of an instrument for breaking the lock, leaving the consequences of such a reckless proceeding to take care of themselves.

He dragged open Lovell's tool-chest in the end study, and seized a hammer and a cold chisel.

In a twinkling he was back at the door of the box-room.

"Pull at the door!" he called out.

"Right-ho!"



Tommy Doyle was caught by the collar by Carthew and swung round. But the door was open now, and Tommy Dodd and his merry men swarmed in.

"I know that; but some Moderns have, and it's a dirty trick!"

"Well, if anybody's bribed, it's a Classical! A Modern would hit you in the eye if you tried it on him!" retorted Tommy.

"The thief's as bad as the receiver," said Raby.

"All very well. But where's Tubby Muffin?"

"Ask me another."

"Have you chaps been feeding him?" asked Tommy Dodd suspiciously.

"In war-time?" said Jimmy. "Rations are too short, old scout."

"Hallo! Here comes the merry candidates," said Oswald.

Knowles came in with Stephen Catesby. A few moments later Neville entered, with Jones major and Lonsdale.

Their entrance was the signal for a burst of cheering, in which Modern vied with Classical in apparently attempting to raise the ancient roof from its rafters.

Other fellows crowded in after them. Big Hall was filling. It was close on seven.

Mr. Wiggins came in, and joined Mr. Bootles.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled at one another.

They took up a strategic position close to the big door.

That door would be closed at seven o'clock, and all who were not within the Hall at that hour would be shut out of the election.

Jimmy Silver meant to see that the door was closed as soon as Conroy had darted in at the last moment.

Knowles' majority, largely gained by shady methods, would remain shut up in the box-room, out of the proceedings.

Meanwhile, Tommy Dodd was getting anxious.

"I'm going out!" whispered Tommy.

"You'll miss the voting!"

"I tell you our men are being kept away somehow. If that's so, we'll make 'em open the door if I can find 'em. If you hear me at the door, tell Knowles I've fetched 'em along, and he'll make 'em open the door!"

"But—"

Tommy Dodd slipped out of the Hall, and Jimmy Silver grinned as he went.

It was another voter gone.

The clock indicated seven, and the Classical juniors shut the big door with a bang.

"Our game!" grinned Lovell.

And the Fistical Four smiled with satisfaction.

The 7th Chapter. Captain of Rookwood.

Tommy Dodd hurried up the staircase, deserted now.

No one was in sight in the passages. It was certain enough that voters were being kept away, and Tommy Dodd did not grumble at the "dodge."

It was no more than just retaliation for Knowles' many dodges.

But he did not mean to let it succeed if he could help it.

He hurried along, and looked into some of the Classical studies. But they were empty.

Bang, bang, bang!

Tommy Dodd jumped as he heard that sudden commotion from the direction of the box-room.

He fairly raced towards it.

Thump, thump!

Smythe had started thumping, in the hope that someone might hear and let the prisoners out.

Clang, clang! Bang!

Tommy jammed the chisel between the door and jamb, and hammered it fiercely.

With a rain of blows he drove it in, and the lock strained and creaked and groaned under the steady pressure.

Then, with three or four fellows dragging at the handle of the door within, and Tommy Dodd wrenching at the embedded chisel without, the lock parted.

There was a loud crack, and the door flew open.

"Hurrah!" gasped Townsend.

"Come in!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

He threw down the chisel, and ran for the staircase; and after him ran Adolphus Smythe and Peele and Tubby Muffin and the rest.

They were only too keen on avenging their imprisonment by defeating Jimmy Silver at the last moment.

In a breathless crowd, they arrived at the door of Big Hall.

It was closed and locked.

Inside, Jimmy Silver & Co. had their backs against it.

The election in the hall was proceeding.

Catesby had proposed Knowles, seconded by Frampton, and Jones major and Lonsdale had done the same for Neville.

Tommy Dodd hammered fiercely outside, but the roar of cheering that greeted the nominations drowned the noise.

"Too late!" chuckled Jimmy Silver, through the keyhole. "You can keep out now, Duddy."

"Let us in, blow you!" shouted Smythe. Jimmy Silver jumped at that voice.

"My hat! They've got out!" he whispered to his comrades. "Dodd's got the whole gang there!"

"They're not coming in!" said Lovell grimly.

The shut-out voters kicked and hammered and thumped.

Within, the cheering had died down, and the uproar outside was quite audible.

"Cheer!" whispered Jimmy. "Kick up a row, or—"

"Hurrah!" roared Lovell. "Neville for ever! Hooray!"

"Silence, please," said Mr. Bootles, looking round.

"Hurrah! Hip-pip!"

"Silence!" shouted Knowles.

"Open that door!" yelled Tommy Cook, easily guessing the state of affairs. "Get away from that door, you Classical cads!"

"Shift thim, bedad!" howled Doyle.

"Order!"

"Stop that shuffling, there, you fags!" shouted Neville.

"Silly ass! He don't know we're making him captain of Rookwood!" growled Lovell. "Keep those Modern cads off!"

"We shall now proceed to take the count," said Mr. Bootles. "Hands up for Neville, please. Quiet there!"

"Order!"

"They're keeping out our voters!" yelled Cook.

"Silence! Anyone not in Hall by seven cannot come in," said Mr. Bootles. "The time of the election was perfectly well-known."

Tommy Cook did not heed.

He called on his comrades to the attack, and there was a terrific charge of the Moderns.

The election could not proceed while that uproar was going on.

Three or four prefects strode among the pommelling juniors, laying about them right and left to restore order.

The belligerents were scattered by those drastic measures.

But Tommy Doyle made a spring for the door, and seized the key and turned it back.

He was caught by the collar by Carthew the next moment, and swung away.

But the door was open now, and Tommy Dodd and his merry men swarmed in.

"Keep them out!" roared Lovell.

"Tain't fair—it's past seven!"

"Turn those cads out—it's too late!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"We've been locked in a box-room!" howled Smythe. "Stand by us, Knowles; we're voting for you, and we've been kept away by force."

"Sneak!" yelled Lovell.

But Knowles had heard enough, and he strode on the scene.

"What's that? Kept away by force?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas!" gasped Adolphus.

"Then you can come in. Mr. Bootles, these juniors were kept away by force. Under the circumstances, they must be allowed in."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "Yes, certainly. I am shocked at such a thing. I trust it was only a joke. Let them enter, by all means!"

The door clanged shut again. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another with sickly expressions.

A few minutes more, and Neville would have been elected captain of Rookwood, but it was not to be.

Tommy Dodd had been one too many for his old rivals.

Tommy grinned serenely at the Fistical Four.

"Sold again!" he chortled.

And Jimmy Silver could only glare. There was nothing else to be done.

The counting proceeded. Jimmy Silver & Co. held up their hands for Neville, and yelled applause; but their hopes were not high.

They howled with derision when the vote was taken for Knowles, but that, though it was a personal satisfaction, did not affect the result.

There was a breathless hush when Mr. Bootles, after comparing notes with Mr. Wiggins, announced the result of the count.

"Cecil Knowles, one hundred and thirty votes."

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Lawrence Neville, one hundred and five votes."

"Oh!"

"Cecil Knowles is duly elected captain of Rookwood!"

There was a roar of cheering from the



FRANK RICHARDS & CO.'S CRUISE!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story, dealing with the Schooldays of Frank Richards, the Famous Author of the Tales of Harry Wharton & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter. Carried Away!

"You fellows seen it?" Chunky Todgers asked that question eagerly, as Frank Richards & Co. jumped off their horses at the gate of Cedar Creek School.

"Seen what?" asked Frank.

"It, of course."

"But what is 'it'?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Then you haven't seen it," said Chunky. "I haven't either. But Lawrence has, and Hopkins. They say it's coming this way."

"What is it? What's coming this way?" asked Vere Beauclerc.

"The balloon."

"The what?" exclaimed Frank Richards, in astonishment.

"The balloon," answered Chunky. "Tom and Molly Lawrence saw it when they started for school this morning. A man from the Thompson Ranch saw it last evening—he was saying so in Gunten's store. Jolly queer, ain't it?"

Frank Richards glanced up at the sky. Fleecy clouds dotted the wide expanse of blue in the bright spring sunshine.

But there was nothing else to be seen, save a distant eagle winging its flight towards the mountains.

In the Cedar Creek playground a good many of the fellows were standing with their heads thrown back, looking up at the sky.

"But it's rot!" said Bob Lawless. "Where could a balloon come from in this section? No gas for it, I guess, if there was a balloon. You've been eating too much maple-sugar, and dreaming, Chunky."

"Must have come from somewhere," said Todgers. "Over the line, perhaps."

"That's a jolly long way!" said Frank.

"Well, Lawrence has seen it," said Chunky Todgers. "I say, Molly, you've seen the balloon, haven't you?"

Molly Lawrence nodded.

"We saw it over the timber, as we came up the trail," she answered. "It was just drifting with the wind. About a hundred yards up, I guess."

"Who was in it?" asked Bob.

"I couldn't see anyone."

There was a sudden shout from Dick Dawson, who had climbed to the top of Mr. Slimmey's cabin to obtain a better view.

"Here she comes!"

There was a rush for Mr. Slimmey's cabin at once.

Dawson, astride the ridge at the top, pointed excitedly.

There she comes—over the timber by the creek! Nobody in it, that I can see!"

"Look!" exclaimed Frank.

All the Cedar Creek fellows could see it now.

It was the first time a balloon had been seen in the Thompson Valley.

It was the first time, in fact, that most of the Cedar Creek fellows had seen such a thing at all.

The balloon was drifting low over the timber, and a rope, dangling from the ear, brushed in the tree-tops.

There was a large hook at the end of the rope, which caught occasionally in a bough, and gave the balloon a jerk; but it broke loose again.

It was catching only in the twigs at the summit of the trees, which gave little hold.

The great gas envelope, drifting on the wind, loomed larger and clearer.

It was coming directly towards Cedar Creek School, over the trees.

There were exclamations on all sides.

Miss Meadows, the school-mistress, came out of the schoolhouse to gaze upward. Mr. Slimmey stepped from his cabin.

Even the black stableman came out, his eyes rolling white at the strange spectacle above.

"It must be adrift," said Frank Richards. "Can you see anybody in the ear, Bob?"

"Nix!" answered Bob.

"May be somebody down in the car, out of sight," said Vere Beauclerc. "It's jolly odd! That grapnel must have been thrown out to catch it possible; the man wants to descend."

"The galoot may be ill, if there's anybody in the car at all," said Eben Hacke. "And I guess there must be. The balloon can't have started on its travels all on its lonesome."

Every eye was fixed on the oncoming balloon.

It was drifting lower now, but it still kept clear of the trees.

It was so strange and novel a sight at the Backwoods school, that nobody at Cedar Creek was thinking of morning lessons just then.

Even Miss Meadows forgot that it was the hour for the school-bell to ring.

"It's going to pass right over us," said Kern Gunten, the Swiss. "I guess if that balloon's astray, it's worth roping in!"

"Findings keepings!" remarked Keller.

"If it's astray, a galoot would have a claim to salvage for roping it in," remarked Eben Hacke thoughtfully. "It's a bit too high up for a lasso, though, I reckon."

"Just a trifle!" grinned Bob Lawless.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Slimmey. "This is very remarkable! Lawless, you have very good eyes. Cannot you see anyone in the car?"

"Not a sign, sir."

"It is very odd! Perhaps the voyagers have landed, and the balloon has broken away," remarked Mr. Slimmey thoughtfully.

"I guess that's it," said Bob, with a nod.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

"Hallo! Here comes somebody in a hurry!" exclaimed Lawrence.

A horseman came dashing up the trail past the school gates.

He rode with his eyes glancing upward, evidently watching the floating balloon.

Somewhat to the surprise of the schoolboys, he turned in at the gateway, and jumped off his horse.

The man was a stranger at Cedar Creek.

He was a tall, thin man, with a goatee beard, a sharp nose, and gold-rimmed glasses.

It was easy to see that he belonged to the other side of the "line"—that is to say, the border between Canada and the United States.

He stood with his head thrown back, watching the balloon as it came slowly on, drifting on the soft breeze of spring.

"Oh, thunder!" the schoolboys heard him exclaim. "Hyer she is, and out of reach! I guess this is no cinch!"

"Looks like the owner," grinned Bob Lawless.

"Is that your balloon, sir?" asked Frank Richards.

The big American looked at him.

"Yep!" he answered tersely.

"Anybody in it?"

"Nope!"

"Left you stranded?" asked Kern Gunten.

"Correct!"

The American gentleman was evidently a man of few words.

He looked up at the balloon again, and then looked at the lumber schoolhouse.

He seemed to be calculating.

"She'll pass over the shebang," he was heard to mutter. "There's the hook hanging loose, and a good hand with a riata might rope it in. There's a chance, by gum!"

He looked at the schoolboys again. "Youngsters, is there a boy here who knows how to handle a lasso?"

"You bet!" answered Bob Lawless.

"Lots," said Frank Richards, with a smile.

"Boys, I reckon there's a chance of roping in that balloon, if a younker here has the nerve to get on the roof yonder, and try for it as it passes over. I calculate I'll stand a hundred dollars, spot cash, to the fellow that does it!" said the big American. "Who's the best hand with a lasso here?"

"Bob's the man," said Frank, at once.

"There's a chance, Bob. Go in, and win!"

"I guess I'll try, if Miss Meadows will let me," said Bob Lawless. "I don't want any dollars, though. I'll do it to oblige you."

"So long as you do it, never mind the rest."

"I'll ask Miss Meadows."

"Schoolmistress—hay?" asked the American gentleman, looking round. "I guess I'll ask that lady!"

He strode across to the porch of the lumber schoolhouse, where Miss Meadows was standing, and raised his hat.

"Madam," he said, in his brisk way, "Hiram K. Chowder, at your service. You see that balloon yonder? That is my property. I guess I've been chasing that balloon, madam, for twenty-four hours."

"Indeed!" said Miss Meadows, with a smile. "I hope you will succeed in catching it."

"I guess I hope so, madam. That balloon's worth well over a thousand dollars!" said Mr. Chowder impressively. "I've had bad luck with that balloon. I've made twenty ascents, more or less, in that balloon, and never had such bad luck. But what can a galoot do when he's caught in a sudden gale of wind? I calculate I got off cheap in being blown northward to this hyer section, instead of being smashed up, as I might have been."

"You were fortunate," said Miss Meadows.

"In a way, yep," said Mr. Chowder ruefully. "When I got the hook to hold on to a tree yesterday morning I reckoned it was all O.K., and I clumb out, to ask where I was, and whether there was anything in the grub line going. And, hang my boots, madam, if that rope didn't drag loose, and the contraption float away before my eyes! I guess I was mad. It was hours before I could get hold of a boss and follow that balloon; and a dozen times I've lost the track of it when the blessed wind changed, and up and down this hyer valley I've been inquiring after it."

Mr. Chowder paused for breath.

Miss Meadows was sympathetic.

She understood that Mr. Chowder had some request to make, and that this explanation was a preliminary to it.

Mr. Chowder pointed at the approaching balloon with a long, thin finger.

"You watch it, madam," he said. "That balloon is goin' to pass right over your schoolhouse hyer!"

"It seems so," assented Miss Meadows.

"A good hand with a lasso might rope it in; you see the big hook's floating," said Mr. Chowder. "I don't say it's easy; I say it's possible. Will you let that young galoot get on the roof and try, madam?"

Miss Meadows hesitated.

Bob Lawless had already got hold of his trail-rope, and was forming a noose to turn it into a lariat.

Bob was evidently quite ready for the venture, risky as it was.

"I guess, madam, that kid looks hefty, and he won't break his neck," said Mr. Chowder persuasively. "That balloon's worth a lot to me, madam. I earn my bread, I guess, with making balloon ascents in the States, and if that shebang goes off on her ear, and I don't get her back, I calculate I'm a busted man!"

"Lawless!"

"Yes, Miss Meadows."

"Do you wish to try to oblige this gentleman?"

"Yes, Miss Meadows," said Bob eagerly. "I think I might be able to do it, too."

"Very well," said the schoolmistress. "You may try, Lawless; but take every care, and do not run too much risk."

"I'll be careful, ma'am," said Bob.

"I guess I'm much obliged to you, madam," said Mr. Chowder. "Youn'ger, if you rope in that balloon for me I'm your debtor for life!"

Black Sam brought a ladder from the stable, and Bob, with his lasso over his arm, clambered up to the high ridge of the schoolhouse roof.

All eyes were on him as he stood perched there, lasso in hand.

The balloon, drifting low, was past the timber now, and rolling on towards the school.

In a few minutes it would be over the playground, and then, from its direction, it would evidently pass over the schoolhouse roof.

The iron hook would dangle a few yards above Bob's head.

A clear eye and a skilful hand were required for such a "catch"; and, even so, the chances were ten to one against success.

But there was a chance, at least; and a chance was worth trying for the sake of the stranded American gentleman.

Bob Lawless intended to do his best.

There was a breathless silence in the crowd as the balloon drifted closer and closer.

The great gas envelope towered above the upturned faces, the car swaying

under it, and the loose rope dangling to and fro.

Bob, astride the roof ridge, had his clear eyes fixed on the floating hook as it swung nearer and nearer.

Mr. Hiram K. Chowder stood motionless, scarcely breathing, so keen was his anxiety that this faint chance of catching the truant should materialise.

Closer and closer.

Bob's arm moved at last, with an elastic swing, and the rope flew.

There was a gasp of anxious eagerness in the crowd below as the noose of the lasso smote the floating iron hook in the air.

"Caught!" yelled Frank Richards.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Lawless!"

The balloon was floating on, and it could be seen that the lasso noose was looped on the iron hook.

The noose closed up at once as the hook dragged.

Bob, on the ridge, paid out the rope, or he would have been dragged away.

He threw the loose end of his lasso downward to his chums.

"Catch hold!" he shouted.

Frank Richards and Beauclerc rushed to catch the rope, Mr. Chowder with them.

For Bob alone could never have dragged the great monster downward.

But almost as they reached the rope it was suddenly whisked away under their eyes, and vanished into the air.

A strong gust of wind had caught the balloon, and it shot suddenly upward.

The trailing lasso vanished above their heads.

And then, as they looked up, Frank Richards & Co. uttered a cry of horror.

For Bob Lawless was holding on to the rope, with both hands in a strong grip, and as the balloon shot up in the windy gust Bob was dragged bodily from the roof and swept away into space.

The 2nd Chapter. Captured!

"Bob!" shouted Frank Richards.

"Good heavens!" panted Beauclerc.

Miss Meadows' face was white.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" gasped Mr. Chowder.

Up and up went the balloon, with horrified eyes watching it from the playground. Below, on the lasso attached to the iron hook, swung Bob Lawless.

So sudden had been the ascent that Bob had been snatched, as it were, from the schoolhouse roof, as if by a giant hand.

He had only time to close his grasp tighter on the rope as he was whirled away, swinging to and fro in the air.

In a few seconds the earth was a hundred yards below him.

It was rather by instinct, than by thought, that he tightened his grasp on the rope as he swung into space.

Now his teeth were set, and his face, though white, was cool and steady.

He was holding on to the lasso for his life!

"Bob!" groaned Frank.

Vere Beauclerc caught his chum's arm.

"Frank! After him! The balloon must come down again! It's only the wind that drove it up! It was floating low before. After him! Get to the horses!"

Frank nodded.

They ran together to the corral, and led out their horses without another word.

It was no time to think of school, or even to ask leave of Miss Meadows.

They mounted in the gateway, and dashed away in pursuit of the floating balloon.

Three or four more of the Cedar Creek fellows followed them.

Past the buildings, the chums rode across country in pursuit of the balloon.

"He's holding on!" breathed Frank.

"Thank Heaven for that!" muttered Beauclerc. "Bob's got plenty of nerve, and if he holds on he's safe!"

"It must come down!" muttered Frank.

They rode hard after the balloon, keeping pace with the floating monster.

Cedar Creek School was left far behind them.

It was certain that the balloon must descend again to its former level, and then the lasso would trail on the ground.



Bob Lawless was holding on to the rope with both hands, and, as the balloon shot up in the windy gust, he was dragged bodily from the roof and swept away into space.

But if it descended further or too suddenly, what would happen to Bob then? And if he lost his hold—

But Bob Lawless was keeping his hold. Both his hands were strong in their grasp on the rope, and he had succeeded in twisting it round one arm to make his hold more secure.

The earth was fifty yards below him, and a fall meant death, sudden and terrible. But Bob Lawless' nerve was good.

So long as he held on he was safe; and he was holding on.

His arms were beginning to ache, but he was by no means at the end of his strength.

Below him the rope trailed among the tree-tops as the balloon drifted on. It was settling downward again.

"Hold on, Bob!"

Frank Richards' shout floated up to him from below, and he knew that his chums were following him.

The balloon was floating now over a thick belt of timber, and Frank and Beauclerc had been compelled to come to a halt.

The timber was too thick for the horses.

There was nothing for it but to dismount.

The horses were sent trotting back to the school alone, and the two chums plunged into the timber.

Here and there, through openings in the trees, they caught sight of the balloon again, drifting slowly on the gentle breeze, and settling lower and lower.

Bob Lawless, hanging between earth and sky, felt his boots brush against high branches in the timber.

The wind was so light now that the balloon drifted more and more slowly, and once or twice came almost to a stop over the trees.

Bob Lawless looked downward as he swung over an open glade.

"Bob!" came in a shout from below.

Frank and Beauclerc were running across the glade beneath him.

It was easy to keep pace with the scarcely-moving balloon.

Lower and lower it settled, and the end of the long trail-rope was almost within reach of the schoolboys.

Bob Lawless, setting his teeth hard, began to slide down the rope, hand below hand.

Frank and Beauclerc kept pace below, watching for a chance to catch the end of the lasso.

It came within reach at last.

Frank made a spring upward, and caught it in both hands, and held on.

The jerk tautened the rope, and the balloon surged down a little.

Vere Beauclerc seized the rope the next moment.

"Come on, Bob!"

It was safe enough for Bob to slide down now, with the end of the rope on the earth.

He came down fast, and Frank Richards grasped him, and helped him to the ground.

He did not let go the rope.

Bob Lawless stood panting, his cheeks white.

In spite of his nerve, he had been through an experience that had told heavily on him.

"Bob, old chap!" gasped Frank.

Bob smiled faintly.

"That was a close call!" he muttered.

"I—I thought I was a gone coon when I was whisked off the roof."

"I—I thought so, too, Bob. You're not hurt?"

"Only a bit dizzy."

"Take a turn of the rope round a stump," said Beauclerc. "The wind may catch the balloon again, and all three of us might be dragged up."

"Oh, by gum! Yes, get a move on!" exclaimed Bob.

The rope was hastily passed round a tree twice, and tied.

The balloon settled lower, and the iron hook was almost within reach now.

"There! The dashed thing can't float away again!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"We've caught it for Mr. Chowder; you're entitled to the hundred dollars, after all, Bob."

The rancher's son laughed.

"Old Chowder can keep his dollars," he said. "But I'm glad we've bagged his blessed contraption for him. How far are we from the school, kids?"

"Six miles at least," said Frank.

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

"And we had to send our gees back at the timber," said Beauclerc. "Still, we've got the balloon. Hallo, here comes Gunten!"

Kern Gunten, the Swiss, came hurrying across the glade.

Half a dozen of the Cedar Creek fellows had followed in pursuit, but they had turned back at the timber, losing sight of the balloon there.

Gunten had kept on, however—not because he wished to be of any service to Mr. Hiram Chowder, but for less-unselfish reasons.

His eyes glistened as he came up, and found the balloon secured.

"We've got it!" he exclaimed.

"We!" repeated Bob.

"Well, you've got it," said Gunten. "I reckoned you were done for when you were carried off, Lawless. You had a nerve to hang on to that rope as you did."

"It was that or a broken neck," said Bob.

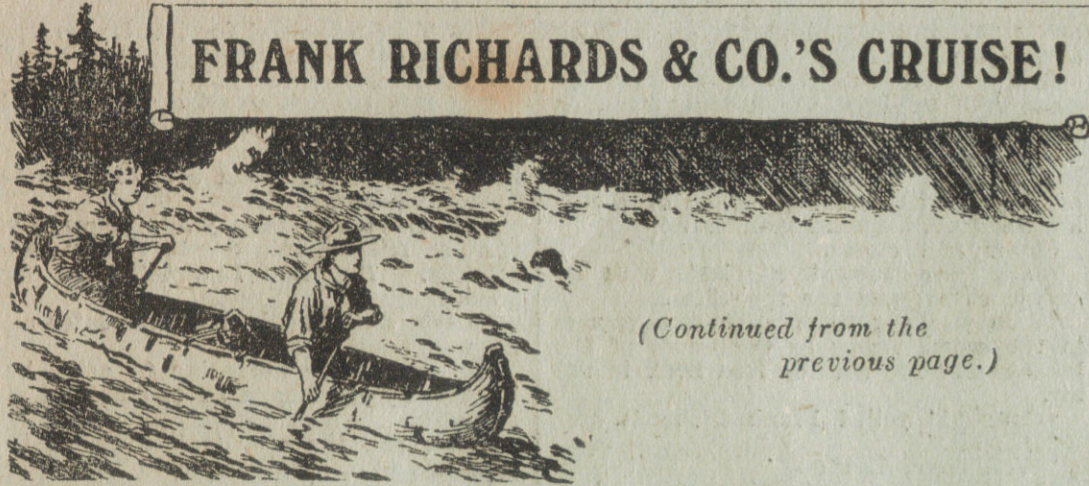
"Old Chowder was nearly weeping when I came away," grinned Gunten. "His horse was spent, and we left him miles behind. I say, this looks like being a good thing, you fellows. Chowder offered a hundred dollars for bagging his balloon."

"I don't want his dollars," said Bob curtly.

"You mean it's worth more?"

"I mean I don't want anything."

"Look here, that's rot," said Gunten. "We can stick him for three hundred at least; it's worth that for salvage. You



(Continued from the previous page.)

follows follow my lead in this; I've got a business head."

Frank Richards & Co. looked at Gunten.

The eyes of the Swiss were glistening with eager greed.

Evidently he thought he saw the opportunity of a profitable transaction at the expense of the unlucky American aeronaut.

"It's a regular cinch," went on Gunten. "The man himself said the balloon was worth over a thousand dollars. We're entitled to something per cent. for saving it for him."

"You had no hand in it, Gunten." "I'll stand in with you, and get you more than you could get for yourselves," said the Swiss. "Look here, we make a claim—a legal claim, before the sheriff. If Chowder don't agree to pay, the balloon can be detained until the matter's settled in court."

"My hat!" "You see, Chowder's in a foreign country here," grinned Gunten. "He's left the United States over the line. He's in Canada now. Why, my popper could work it like a charm, and put him to no end of expense before he could get his balloon back. He knows the law. Look here, you fellows stand in with me, and I'll undertake to screw a hundred dollars each for us out of the man."

"Do you think we want to screw money out of a stranger in distress?" roared Bob Lawless.

"Oh, don't be a fool, Lawless! I tell you, it's a regular cinch!"

"Not good enough," said Frank Richards, laughing. "We are going to hand Mr. Chowder his balloon free of charge, Gunten."

"What do you get out of the business, then?" demanded Gunten.

"Nothing."

"Strange as it may appear to you, Gunten, we don't want anything," remarked Vere Beauclerc.

Gunten gave a snort of disgust.

"You can't fool me!" he answered.

"You want to stick the pilgrim for the dollars, and leave me out. That's your game."

"Oh, shut up!" said Bob Lawless roughly. "You're a worm, Gunten, and you don't understand a decent chap!"

"I think we can pull it in now," said Frank. "It seems to be settling down."

"Good! All together," said Bob.

The three chums pulled on the rope.

The balloon watching them with a savage scowl.

The balloon settled lower in the glade, clear of the trees, and the grapnel came in reach.

Lower it came, and lower.

"Stand clear!" shouted Bob.

And the chums of Cedar Creek jumped back, as the great wicker basket bumped into the grass.

The 3rd Chapter.

Sent Adrift!

Frank Richards drew the rope in, and wound it about the tree. Then he jumped into the car, to be followed by his chums.

The great gas envelope bumped on the branches of the tree, and the wicker basket hopped on the ground; but the balloon was a captive now.

"I suppose the chap will sail this home if he gets a good wind," said Frank Richards. "We've only got to fetch him here."

"By gum! I'd like to go up in it," said Bob. "I reckon we couldn't sail back to Cedar Creek—eh?"

Frank Richards laughed.

"Not unless you can guide the balloon," he said. "It depends on the wind, and the wind's blowing away from Cedar Creek."

"Well, after we've had a bit of a rest, we'll go and tell Chowder it's here, safe and sound," said Bob.

"Listen to me, you fellows," urged Gunten. "There's no need to say a word to Chowder till he agrees to our terms. He'd never find the balloon in this timber; it can't be seen over the trees."

"Will you stop chewing the rag, Gunten?" exclaimed Bob Lawless impatiently. "I tell you, we don't want to make anything out of the galoot."

"And I tell you you're a liar!" said Gunten angrily. "Don't tell me silly yarns like that!"

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"You cringin' foreign worm!" he exclaimed. "You think everybody's as big a rotter as you are yourself. But you can't call me a liar, Gunten."

"You're lying, and you know it!" said Gunten savagely. "You want to make a bargain with Chowder, and leave me out—Hands off, you fool!"

Bob Lawless, with gleaming eyes, grasped the Swiss.

Gunten struck at him savagely, and Bob uttered a sharp cry, as Gunten's knuckles crashed into his face.

"By gum!" panted Bob.

He grasped the Swiss by the back of

the collar, and swung him over the rim of the car.

Gunten hung there, his heels kicking against the wicker-work, yelling.

"You rotter!" shouted Bob wrathfully.

"Get out! If you don't vamoose instantan, I guess I'll come after you, and lay the trail-rope about your carcass."

With a swing of his arm, he tossed the yelling Swiss into the grass.

Gunten sprawled at full length.

He sat up dazedly.

Bob Lawless shook his fist at him over the edge of the car.

"Vamoose!" he rapped out.

"You rotter!" hissed Gunten. "You—you—"

"Vamoose, I tell you!"

Gunten staggered to his feet.

His face was white with rage and hatred as he glared at the three schoolboys in the car.

Bob Lawless picked up an empty meat-tin from the bottom of the car, and it whizzed through the air, as Gunten stood panting and shaking a furious fist at him.

The Swiss yelled as the missile caught him on the chest.

He dodged back into the thickets.

"Good riddance!" said Bob, rubbing his nose, where Gunten's knuckles had landed. "By the great gophers, I've a jolly good mind to give him a taste of the trail-rope. I will if he comes back."

"He won't come back," said Frank, laughing.

But Frank Richards was mistaken on that point.

The Swiss had not gone far.

The three chums sat on the inside seat of the car, resting before they started on the long tramp back to Cedar Creek, and chatting carelessly.

They did not guess for a moment that Kern Gunten was still close at hand.

The Swiss, with a savage gleam in his eyes, had crept back through the thicket

on his hands and knees, and was now close behind the tree round which the rope was secured.

Keeping well out of sight behind the tree, he opened his clasp-knife, and sawed through the rope.

In a minute, or less, it was cut through.

Gunten tied the loose ends together with a length of twine, to keep the rope in position.

The balloon was no longer secured.

At the first motion the twine would snap like thread, and the rope would whisk away from the trunk.

But, with the weight of the three schoolboys, the car was planted firmly on the grass now, and the great gas-envelope towered over them, almost motionless.

Gunten was not finished yet.

He put away his knife, and came round the tree. Frank Richards & Co. did not see him till he caught the rim of the car and clambered in again.

Bob Lawless started to his feet angrily as the Swiss jumped into the car.

"You've come back, you coyote!" he shouted. "By gum, I'll give you something that will keep you away!"

Gunten did not even look at him.

He grasped one of the sacks of sand, and before Bob could seize him, or even understand what he was at, he raised it over the rim of the car with a great effort.

The sack went over the rim, and crashed on the ground, and Gunten leaped after it, just escaping Bob's fist.

He rolled in the grass beside the sack.

"What on earth—" ejaculated Beauclerc.

"Is he mad?" exclaimed Frank Richards, in wonder.

Gunten's action astounded all three.

Why the Swiss should leap into the car and pitch out a bag of sand and himself was a mystery.

But the next minute they understood.

"Great Scott! She's going up!" shouted Bob Lawless, as the car rocked under their feet.

Frank rushed to the side.

To his amazement and horror, the grass, and Gunten sprawling in it, were six or seven yards below.

The rope, whisking away from the tree, dangled loose.

It had been cut short, and the iron

hook and the lasso lay on the ground, only a few yards of rope hanging from the car.

"It's going up!" gasped Beauclerc.

"He's cut the rope!" yelled Bob.

Below, Kern Gunten scrambled to his feet.

He looked up after the rising car with savage exultation in his face, and shook his fist at the three schoolboys peering over the rim in utter dismay.

"Good-bye!" he shouted mockingly. "I hope you'll come down this side of the Pacific. Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunten's yell of mocking laughter died away below.

The balloon was rising rapidly above the tree-tops.

"Hold on!" gasped Frank.

The car rocked wildly.

Bob had given a wild glance down, wondering whether the distance could be jumped, but the rise was too sudden.

Already the loose rope was brushing the highest branches of the tree.

And the balloon was rising higher.

The heavy sack of sand had made all the difference.

As it rose above the timber a gust of wind caught it, and the great balloon went spinning away across the forest.

Kern Gunten watched it go till the tree-tops hid it from his sight.

His mocking laugh died away.

As the balloon vanished a change came over the face of the Swiss.

He had intended to give the chums of Cedar Creek a fright and a shock, and he did not care much if they were hurt.

But it was borne in upon his mind now that the matter was probably more serious than he had thought.

It was quite possible that a serious accident might be the result of his rascally trick, and that he might have serious consequences to answer for.

At that thought the rogue of the lumber school changed colour.

"Mein Gott!" he muttered uneasily. "Suppose—suppose they were killed!"

He glanced round quickly.

He was alone in the wood.

No eyes had seen him, save those of the schoolboys carried away in the

Mr. Chowder sat his horse, motionless, watching the balloon, growing now to a speck in the distance over the timber.

He was still gazing after it hopelessly when Gunten looked back again.

The Swiss shrugged his shoulders, and tramped on to Cedar Creek.

The 4th Chapter. Between Earth and Sky!

"I—I say, this is no cinch!" groaned Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards was a little pale.

The balloon, so far, was clearing the tree-tops, but now and again the car rocked against a very high branch, and it spun and oscillated, and the schoolboys were flung down.

How to make the balloon descend was beyond their knowledge; they had never been in one before, and knew nothing of such things.

They held on desperately as the car rocked and bumped.

Ahead of them the ground was rising towards the Thompson hills, and the thick tree-tops were at a higher level.

Frank pointed in front of him.

"We've got to go higher, Bob!" he gasped. "If we crash into that, the whole thing may be smashed up, and then—"

Bob Lawless understood.

"I guess that's so, Franky. Pitch out a sack, and we shall float clear, at any rate."

"Better," agreed Vere Beauclerc. "If the gasbag should bump into the trees it would burst, to a cert, and that would be the finish."

It was pretty clear that only by rising could they stave off a catastrophe.

Frank Richards grasped one of the sand-bags, and Bob lent him a hand.

It was heaved over the side, and disappeared, crashing through the tree-tops.

The result was startling.

Relieved of the weight, the balloon shot up almost like a rocket.

The three chums held on tenaciously, dazed and giddy.

The balloon, heeling over a little before the wind, floated on; but the car was steady now.

Frank Richards ventured to look over the side again.

There was no danger now from the tree-tops.

For the highest of the trees on the acclivity was more than three hundred yards below the car.

The woods looked one shapeless dark blur.

The car floated level, and there was no need to hold on now.

The chums sank into the seats, and looked at one another.

"Well, this is a go!" said Frank Richards at last.

could be allowed to escape, to make the balloon descend.

But the mechanism was quite unknown to him, and if too much was allowed to escape at once it meant a sudden rush down to death.

He hesitated.

"Better try, Frank," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "If we keep up much longer, goodness knows how we shall get home, if we land at all. We're a good twenty miles from the school now."

"All that!" said Bob Lawless. "Twenty miles on Shanks' pony isn't like the same distance on horseback. If we get stranded in the hills—"

"Better try it," agreed Frank.

He grasped the cord, and the three schoolboys breathed hard as he pulled it.

What the result would be they could not tell, but they had to take the risk.

But there was no result.

Frank pulled the cord, and pulled again, but nothing came of it.

"Let me try!" said Bob.

Bob Lawless tried, with the same result.

"I—I suppose there's a valve, or something, isn't there?" muttered the rancher's son, a little pale now.

"There must be. But—"

"It's jammed, I guess!"

Frank Richards drew a deep breath.

"Either it's jammed or it's fastened, and—and we don't know how to open it," he said. "We—we can't go down."

Vere Beauclerc jerked at the cord.

But the result was the same as before.

The three schoolboys were grave and silent as the balloon drifted on.

Ahead of them loomed a bare, rocky range of hills, and they watched them drawing nearer and nearer, in grim silence.

"We sha'n't clear them, Frank," said Bob at last, in a low voice. "We—we can't let ourselves be dashed on those rocks."

Frank nodded.

There was no possible landing-place on the rocky, precipitous hills ahead, and it was necessary to rise higher.

The schoolboys grasped another sand-bag, and emptied it into space.

This time they had learned by experience, and emptied out the sand a little at a time, so that the balloon rose gradually, instead of shooting up suddenly to a higher altitude.

High over the rocky range the balloon floated on, rocky ridges and deep clefts and gullies blurred below.

In spite of the bright sunshine it was cold now.

It was past the dinner-hour at Cedar Creek, and the chums remembered that they were hungry.

But there was no food in the car.

Bob Lawless produced a packet of maple-sugar, and handed it round to his chums.

They ate it in silence.

Cool and courageous as they were, Frank Richards & Co. were dismayed by the strange position in which they found themselves, and as the balloon sailed on, driven by the wind, they could not help wondering whether they would ever see Cedar Creek again and the kind faces at home.

Miss Meadows came out of the lumber schoolhouse, after lessons that day, with a troubled face.

Cedar Creek School dispersed in unusual silence and gravity.

Kern Gunten had told his tale at the school, and, naturally, he had been believed.

That the rascally Swiss had deliberately sent his schoolfellows into terrible danger was not a suspicion that was likely to occur to Miss Meadows.

She believed that Frank Richards & Co. had recklessly attempted an ascent in the balloon, and she was too alarmed for their safety to feel angry with them.

News of what had happened had to be sent to the Lawless ranch and to the remittance-man's shack, where Vere Beauclerc was expected home.

Mr. Slimmey, the assistant master, mounted his horse, and rode away to take the news; there was nothing else to be done.

Soon after Mr. Slimmey had departed Hiram K. Chowder rode up to the lumber school in the gathering dusk.

The big American was tired, and his horse was spent.

Miss Meadows called to him hastily. "Have you any news, Mr. Chowder?"

Mr. Chowder shook his head.

"Nope!"

"Those unhappy boys—"

"Pesky young varmints!" said Mr. Chowder wrathfully. "Why couldn't they let my balloon alone? But I'm going after that balloon, Miss Meadows. Hiram K. Chowder never says die—not Hiram K.!"

"I guess I never say my property, if I have to trail it down as far as the Pacific Ocean, madam! Can you lend me a horse? I'll leave my critter here."

"Certainly," said Miss Meadows. "I only hope you may get some news of those unfortunate boys."

Hiram K. Chowder nearly snorted; but he suppressed it, from consideration of Miss Meadows' feelings.

Miss Meadows was thinking of the three schoolboys, but Hiram K.'s thoughts, not unnaturally perhaps, were for his property.

Mounted upon a fresh horse, the big American took the trail, in a chase that even Hiram K. sanguine as he was, could hardly avoid looking upon as hopeless.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"ADRIFT IN THE AIR!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

DON'T MISS IT!

BUY WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATES

WATCH IT RISE WAR SAVINGS CERTIFICATE 5 YEAR £1 4 YEAR 18/9 3 YEAR 17/9 2 YEAR 16/9 1 YEAR 15/9

—AND HELP TO CARRY ON THE WAR!

on his hands and knees, and was now close behind the tree round which the rope was secured.

Keeping well out of sight behind the tree, he opened his clasp-knife, and sawed through the rope.

In a minute, or less, it was cut through.

Gunten tied the loose ends together with a length of twine, to keep the rope in position.

The balloon was no longer secured.

At the first motion the twine would snap like thread, and the rope would whisk away from the trunk.

But, with the weight of the three schoolboys, the car was planted firmly on the grass now, and the great gas-envelope towered over them, almost motionless.

Gunten was not finished yet.

He put away his knife, and came round the tree. Frank Richards & Co. did not see him till he caught the rim of the car and clambered in again.

Bob Lawless started to his feet angrily as the Swiss jumped into the car.

"You've come back, you coyote!" he shouted. "By gum, I'll give you something that will keep you away!"

Gunten did not even look at him.

He grasped one of the sacks of sand, and before Bob could seize him, or even understand what he was at, he raised it over the rim of the car with a great effort.

The sack went over the rim, and crashed on the ground, and Gunten leaped after it, just escaping Bob's fist.

He rolled in the grass beside the sack.

"What on earth—" ejaculated Beauclerc.

"Is he mad?" exclaimed Frank Richards, in wonder.

Gunten's action astounded all three.

Why the Swiss should leap into the car and pitch out a bag of sand and himself was a mystery.

But the next minute they understood.

"Great Scott! She's going up!" shouted Bob Lawless, as the car rocked under their feet.

Frank rushed to the side.

To his amazement and horror, the grass, and Gunten sprawling in it, were six or seven yards below.

The rope, whisking away from the tree, dangled loose.

It had been cut short, and the iron

balloon, and if they did not return alive—

He shuddered at the thought, but his thoughts were all for himself.

He turned quickly, and strode away through the timber.

It was a long tramp back to the plain. As he came out of the timber he caught sight of a horseman on the trail.