

TUBBY MUFFIN MAKES AN AMAZING DISCOVERY!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending June 1st, 1918.

BROUGHT TO LIGHT!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

Catching It!

"Yow-ow-wooop!"
"Hallo, that's Tubby Muffin!" said Jimmy Silver.
"Yow-ow-ow! Help!"
"Sounds rather as if Tubby is getting hurt!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "I dare say he's asked for it. What's he doing on this side, anyway?"
"Yaroo! Leggo, Catesby, you beast! Yow-ow!"
"Come on, Jimmy!"
But Jimmy Silver did not "come on."

The chums of the Classical Fourth had come over to Mr. Manders' House to speak to Tommy Dodd about cricket.

They were on their way to the Modern junior's study when that sudden outburst of yells smote upon their ears.

The yelling came from Catesby's study—Stephen Catesby, of the Modern Sixth.

Catesby had evidently found Tubby Muffin in his study, where he certainly had no business, and the fat Classical was going through it.

"Better give them a look-in," said Jimmy.

"Oh, rot!" said Raby. "Tubby's no business there."

"Scouting after Catesby's grub, you bet!" said Newcome. "A licking will do him good, Jimmy."

"But Catesby is rather a beast," said Jimmy. "There's a limit, you know. Let's give them a look-in."

Jimmy Silver settled the matter by starting for Catesby's study.

His comrades followed him. There was no doubt that Muffin of the Fourth had been "nosing" where he had no concern.

But to judge by his howls, the Modern prefect was going too far.

Even Tubby Muffin did not deserve to be entirely slaughtered.

Jimmy Silver pushed the study door open.

Tubby Muffin was lying across a sofa, held down by a heavy hand on his collar.

With his other hand, Catesby was wielding a fives bat.

And the bat was making rapid play on Tubby's fat person.

Stephen Catesby's face was dark with rage.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yaroo! Help! Yooop! Yah! Leggo!" wailed Tubby Muffin. "I wasn't going to open your desk! Yow-ow! It's locked, ain't it, you beast! Yooop! I—I didn't expect to find any grub there! Yarooop!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Jimmy Silver stepped in, his brows knitted.

"That will do, Catesby!" he exclaimed.

Catesby glared round.

"Get out of my study!" he snapped.

"Let Muffin come, too," answered Jimmy.

"He's had enough," said Lovell. "Don't be such a beastly bully, Catesby! Let the kid alone!"

"I found him trying to open my desk!" roared Catesby.

"I wasn't!" shrieked Muffin. "And it wasn't your desk—it was only that old desk in the corner, the one you don't use. Rescue!"

Whack! Whack!

Jimmy Silver ran forward.

Catesby had a right to punish the prying Tubby, but there was a limit, and the Modern prefect was far exceeding it.

Jimmy caught his descending arm, and dragged it aside, and the fives bat descended on the sofa instead of upon Tubby Muffin.

The next moment Jimmy jerked it from the prefect's hand, and pitched it across the study.

"That's enough!" he said curtly.

Tubby Muffin squirmed off the sofa as Catesby turned furiously on the Classical junior.

With one rush Tubby was out of the study, and fleeing for his life.

It did not seem to occur to his fat brain to stand by his rescuer.

"You—you—cheeky cub!" shouted Catesby; and he fairly jumped at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy whirled in his grasp; he hadn't much chance against the big Sixth-Former.

It was fortunate that his chums were there.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome rushed into the conflict at once.

In the grasp of the Fistical Four of the Fourth, Stephen Catesby discovered that he was not to have matters all his own way, by any means.

He was dragged over, and bumped down on the floor, in a breathless condition.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood looking down at him, breathless and panting, ready for another attack.

It was a rather serious proceeding, bumping over a Sixth Form prefect; but the chums of the Fourth had not had much choice in the matter.

Catesby sat up and gasped.

"You—you—you—" he spluttered.

"Better cut!" murmured Raby. But it was too late to "cut."

In the open doorway appeared the form of Cecil Knowles of the Sixth, captain of Rookwood since the late election.

Behind him were Tresham and Hoke and Frampton.

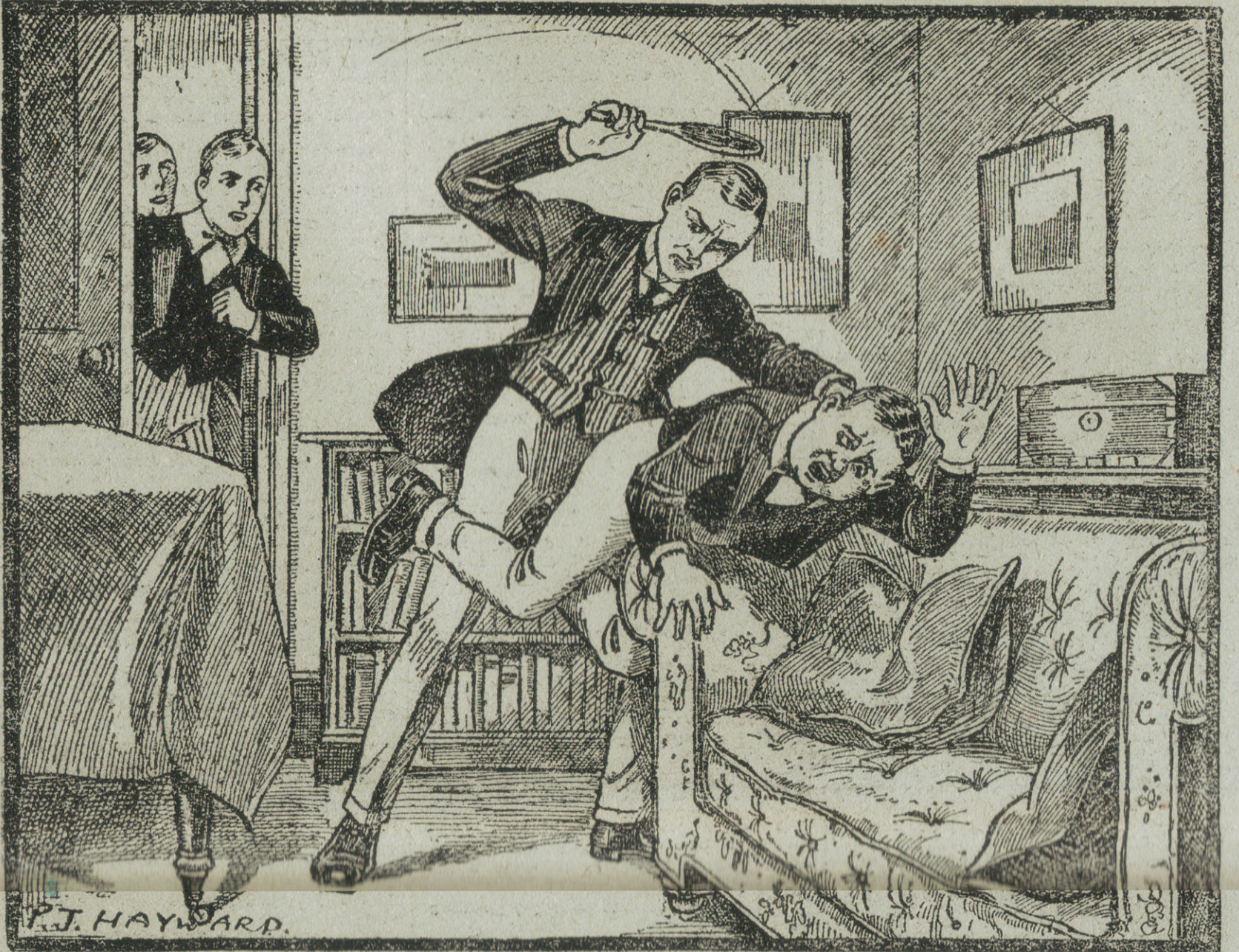
The uproar had been heard, and the Modern seniors had come to see what the row was about.

They had arrived at an unfortunate moment for the Fistical Four.

Catesby staggered to his feet.

"Don't let them get away!" he panted.

"Not likely," said Knowles, with a grim look at the juniors. "Handlin'



TUBBY MUFFIN CATCHES IT!

a prefect—what? This is the kind of thing you learned when Bulkeley was captain—eh? You'll learn different manners now, my pippins!"

The chums of the Fourth drew closer together, their fists clenched.

The rescue of Tubby Muffin had landed them in a serious scrape, that was only too clear.

Knowles was palpably glad of the chance.

His captaincy of Rookwood had not been a great success, so far—he had lost an important cricket match for the school, and the juniors, headed by Jimmy Silver, had held a demonstration in the quadrangle, calling upon him to resign his new position.

Knowles was not likely to forget or forgive that incident.

His eyes were glittering now.

"All serene, Catesby!" he said. "I'll make an example of the young rascals! Hand me a cane!"

Catesby tossed him a cane from the table.

Knowles swished it in the air. "You first, Silver!"

Jimmy set his teeth.

"You're not going to cane me, Knowles."

"No?" said Knowles, with a smile—not a pleasant smile.

"No. You can complain to my Form-master, or a Classical prefect, if you like. You can't cane Classics on this side."

"Anything else?" smiled Knowles. "That's all. Keep your distance," said Jimmy.

"Doesn't it occur to you that the captain of the school is a person in authority?" said Knowles smoothly.

"I admit that prefects can only punish fags on their own side; but the captain of the school has full authority, my boy, as you're going to find!"

Jimmy did not answer.

He was aware of that, as a matter of fact, though Bulkeley, in his time, had always been careful not to interfere on the Modern side if he could help it.

Knowles was not so particular.

"Oh, thrash the rascals, and not so much talk, old chap!" said Frampton.

"My dear man, it's the duty of the captain of the school to uphold the laws of Rookwood," answered Knowles. "It's my duty to observe the rules, and see them observed by others."

"Oh, my hat!" said Frampton.

It was news to him that Cecil Knowles had a sense of duty at all.

"They're going to be thrashed," added Knowles. "You see, Silver, I'm not going to lick you as a Modern prefect, but as captain of the school. If you're quite satisfied, I'm ready."

"Precious captain of Rookwood!" growled Lovell undauntedly. "Who chucks away cricket matches through playing Modern duds instead of Classical cricketers?"

Knowles' brow darkened.

"I'm waiting for you, Silver," he said. "If you don't hold out your hand at once, I'll take you to the Head."

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. There was no help for it.

Knowles was acting within his rights—his new rights as captain of the school, and certainly the Classical juniors had transgressed all the rules by bumping a Sixth Form prefect on the floor of his own study.

It was not much use being taken before the Head, when he hadn't a leg to stand on, so to speak.

Jimmy stepped forward, and held out his hand.

Swish!

It was a cruel cut, such as old Bulkeley would never have given a

junior, but Knowles had a cruel and cattish nature.

"The other hand!" he said.

Swish!

"Now you, Lovell!"

Lovell clenched his fists for a moment.

He still looked on Knowles as a Modern prefect, not as captain of Rookwood.

But he realised that there was no help for it.

Knowles was choosing to administer the punishment in a careful and lawful way; but, as a matter of fact, the juniors were hemmed in by the Modern seniors, and in any case they would not have escaped without a licking.

Swish! Swish!

Raby and Newcome next went through the infliction.

Then Knowles, smiling, pointed to the door with his cane.

"Cut!" he said briefly. "Help them out, you fellows!"

"What-ho!" grinned Frampton.

The seniors stood back for the four to pass. As the Classics retreated from the study they kicked.

Jimmy Silver & Co. fled ingloriously down the passage, with the Sixth-Formers behind them, shouting with laughter and landing out with their boots.

This was not by any means a lawful method of punishment, but it apparently suited the views of the new captain of Rookwood.

The four juniors scudded into the quadrangle, and escaped at last.

They gathered under the beeches in the quad, gasping.

Their visit to Tommy Dodd's study was indefinitely postponed.

(Continued on the next page.)



The 2nd Chapter.

Morny's Little Scheme.

"I say, Jimmy!" Jimmy Silver gave Tubby Muffin a grim look as he came into the School House. The fat Classical was there, still wriggling a little from his castigation at Catesby's hands. "You fat owl!" growled Lovell. "Did you get licked?" asked Tubby. "Yes, you worm, and all through you!" snorted Raby. "I'm sorry, you know," said Muffin. "It was ripping of you to come and rescue me. That beast Catesby was laying it on."

behind, and Mr. Bulkeley's stick was found on the premises. "Oh!" "Poor old Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver feelingly. "I'm blessed if I see how his father is to get away from evidence like that." "All the same, I believe he's not guilty," said Mornington. "Why?" "Knowledge of human nature, old scout. I've seen the old boy when he's been down here visiting Bulkeley; he looked thoroughly decent. I'd lay ten to one in quids on Bulkeley's pater—if I had any quids."

The Fistical Four chuckled softly. The juniors were approaching the abbey ruins, at some distance from the school buildings. Morny's remark was called forth by the sight of a black bowler hat showing above a pile of ancient masonry. Only the bowler hat could be seen, but it was evident that the owner was underneath it. "He hasn't heard us yet," murmured Mornington. "When he does he will take cover, ten to one on that! You see! Otherwise, he would expect to get a crowd round to find out what he's doin' here."

Behind them was black darkness, and through the darkness Mr. Screw followed the light of the electric torch, keeping close to the side of the vault to escape observation if the boys looked round. He did not intend to reveal his presence until the hiding-place of the Bonds was disclosed. Then it would be easy to step forward and take possession of the stolen goods under the eyes of the astonished juniors. But to show himself too soon would spoil it all, for it was very probable that Morny would refuse to reveal the hiding-place at his order.

was not their business, and they had almost forgotten it, when Tubby's keen interest in Catesby's desk brought it back to their minds. "There's that Modern worm!" grunted Lovell, as the juniors came in sight of the stile in Coombe Lane. Sitting on the stile, half-hidden by the willows, was Catesby of the Sixth. Jimmy Silver gave a sniff. "He's waiting for some of his precious sporting friends, you bet," he said. "I suppose he's got some money on the races. I know he plays that game, and Knowles, too."

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The 3rd Chapter. Bagged!

The 4th Chapter. Tubby in Luck!

In a few seconds the excited, struggling group had vanished from Tubby's startled eyes.

"Silly asses!" muttered Muffin discontentedly. "They might have had the key of him if they'd had any sense! They—Oh!"

Tubby fairly jumped, as a gleam of metal in the dust caught his eye.

A key lay in the road, with two or three silver links of a chain still attached to it.

Catesby's watchchain had broken when Lovell's sudden drag came on it.

The watch had been left in his pocket, but the other end of the chain had come loose and broken with the violence of the jerk, and the key attached to it had fallen into the dust.

Tubby Muffin knew that key!

He gave one glance in the direction of Mr. Bootles—the master was still twenty yards distant.

Then he pounced on the key!

In a twinkling the key was in Tubby Muffin's pocket, and the fat Classical was scudding back to Rookwood as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

Stephen Catesby's food-board was at his mercy now—if it was a food-board!

The 5th Chapter.

An Amazing Discovery!

Tubby Muffin strolled into Mr. Manders' House with an air of great carelessness, as if merely looking in to speak to a fellow.

But as soon as his saunter brought him past Catesby's study he whipped open the door and darted in.

He closed the door behind him, and listened breathlessly for a minute or two.

But nobody had observed him; the corridors were deserted, as were most of the studies.

As for Catesby himself, he was out of gates, and was not likely to return till after he had kept his postponed appointment with Mr. Hook.

Tubby felt that it was "all clear."

He stopped before the old mahogany desk in the corner of the room, and fumbled in his pocket for the key.

A moment more, and the key was in the lock, and Muffin had turned it.

The fat Classical was trembling now, partly with excitement and partly with nervousness.

It was a serious matter, unlocking a prefect's desk without his knowledge or permission.

But Tubby told himself that he was justified in raiding a food-hog—in fact, it was a patriotic duty!

He put back the heavy lid of the desk noiselessly.

His round eyes glistened as he looked into the desk, and then his face fell.

He had expected to find the space crammed with good things—ham and tongue, and sugar and cake, and the other things that food-hoarders put by for a rainy day.

Instead of which, all he saw in the almost empty desk was a bundle, which looked as if it contained bulky papers.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" mumbled Tubby.

He fairly blinked at the bundle.

Why on earth did Catesby keep that old unused desk so carefully locked, and wear a heavy key on his watchchain, if there was nothing in the desk but a bundle of papers?

In the faint hope that the bundle might, after all, contain something in the eatable line, Tubby Muffin picked it up and examined it.

It was fastened with string, and wrapped in thick paper, but it felt as if it only contained documents.

Tubby Muffin was as inquisitive as a daw, and his fat fingers were fairly trembling with eagerness now.

There was something so odd, so mysterious, in Catesby of the Sixth taking such extraordinary care of a bundle of papers, that even Tubby's fat brain realised that there must be something very unusual about those papers.

Tubby had very few scruples when his insatiable curiosity was aroused.

He wanted to know, and he meant to know.

Almost unconsciously his fat fingers unfastened the string that tied up the bundle of documents.

After all, he could leave them as he found them; locking the desk after him, and no one would ever know that he had been there—only he would know the secret, whatever it was.

That was his reflection.

Astonishment grew in his fat face as he brought the contents of the packet to light.

The papers were very thick and heavy, were printed in two colours, and were covered with small print.

In large type, at the head of the top paper, he read the words, "Government of Japan."

Tubby fairly blinked.

He did not need telling that this was an official paper of some kind.

What could an official paper, issued by the Japanese Government, be doing in Stephen Catesby's desk at Rookwood?

A lesser mystery than that would have made Tubby Muffin breathless with curiosity.

Lower down the document were the figures, "£1,000."

Almost stuttering with amazement and excitement, Tubby examined the remainder of the documents.

Some of them were in French, and one or two in Spanish.

All had figures marked on them, and sheets of coupons marked in smaller sums; and Tubby, reading them, found that the coupons entitled the holder of the documents to payments of interest at specified dates.

And there were twenty of the documents in all.

Tubby fairly gasped.

It made his brain whirl to realise that he was holding in his fat hands documents that represented a nominal value of twenty thousand pounds!

He knew what they were now.

He had heard of War Bonds, and he

knew that these must be bonds of some sort—bonds issued by foreign Governments.

Bonds!

Twenty thousand pounds!

In Catesby's desk!

If Tubby had never heard of the bank-robbery, he would have known that a Sixth-Former at Rookwood could not possibly have come honestly into the possession of twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds.

But he had heard of it, of course. He knew that Mr. Screw had visited Rookwood, searching Bulkeley's quarters for the twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds Mr. Bulkeley was suspected of stealing from the bank.

Tubby was not a bright youth, but he did not need telling that here were the bonds of which Mr. Screw had been in search.

In Catesby's desk—and Catesby was not a friend of Bulkeley's!

Mr. Screw had evidently searched in the wrong house at Rookwood.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tubby.

He let the bonds fall back into the desk.

They were not the kind of plunder he was looking for.

With trembling hands Tubby closed the desk, and locked it again.

His heart was thumping as he stole out of the study, almost bursting with excitement at the discovery he had made.

He rolled away to the gates, and gave a chirrup of relief as he sighted the Fistical Four in the lane.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were sauntering home.

The effects of their licking having worn off they were ready for cricket-practice.

Tubby Muffin rolled out to meet them.

"Jimmy!" he gasped.

"Hallo, porpoise!" answered Jimmy Silver. "Still hungry?"

true! I've seen the bonds! They're locked up in Catesby's desk. It wasn't a food-board, after all! It's the stolen bonds!"

"What!"

Tubby Muffin held up the key.

"Catesby dropped that when you were handling him," he explained. "I—"

"You've been to his desk!" exclaimed Newcome.

"Yes, I have."

"And was there any grub there, you fat burglar?"

"No, you ass! Don't I keep on telling you that the stolen bonds were there—twenty thousand pounds' worth!" spluttered Tubby.

Jimmy Silver looked at him fixedly.

Back into his mind came that mysterious meeting at Woodend, when Mr. James Catesby had handed a parcel of papers to Catesby of the Sixth, with injunctions to keep them safe and secret.

And Mr. Catesby was Mr. Bulkeley's partner at the bank!

The possibilities flashed into Jimmy's mind at once.

He dropped his hand on Tubby's shoulder.

"Quiet now, and tell us what you've seen," he said quietly.

Tubby, only too glad to have impressed Jimmy Silver at last, went on to relate with great circumspection what he had discovered.

The juniors listened without an interruption, their faces growing very grave.

It was evident that Tubby was telling the truth.

He could not possibly have invented that description of the foreign bonds, which he had never seen till he saw them in Catesby's desk.

"My only hat!" said Jimmy at last, when Tubby's tale was told. "That lets in some light on the subject, you fellows."

"Yes; we keep detectives bottled up in vaults, in case we want 'em!" he answered, an answer that made Tubby Muffin blink.

The Fistical Four hurried in at the gates, taking Tubby Muffin with them.

Knowles called to them in the quadrangle.

"Here, Silver!"

"Hallo?" answered Jimmy, not very respectfully.

"Take my bat in."

"Oh, find a Modern fag!" said Jimmy. Knowles' eyes glittered.

"You've still got to learn that I'm captain of Rookwood, you cheeky young cub—what?" he asked.

"You won't be long," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "Bulkeley's coming back, old scout, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

And the juniors dodged Knowles, and fled, leaving the new captain of Rookwood in a state of angry astonishment.

Having shaken off Knowles they hurried round the buildings, and made their way to the abbey ruins.

There was a faint sound of thumping from within the oaken door of the vaults as they descended the steps.

Mr. Screw was evidently still trying to attract attention—not a very hopeful prospect.

Jimmy knocked on the door.

"Hallo! Nobody in there?" he called out.

Bang, bang!

Jimmy kicked the wedge away, and pulled the door open.

Mr. Screw, with a furious face, strode out.

He shook a bony fist at Jimmy Silver.

"You young rascal!" he thundered.

"Hallo! Is that your thanks for being let out?" inquired Jimmy.

"You shut me in the vault!" raved Mr. Screw. "I can see now that you knew I

Mr. Screw's ill-humour was entirely gone when he realised that.

He even smiled, a rather hard and crusty smile, but a smile.

"Good!" he ejaculated at length.

"Does that clear Bulkeley's pater, Mr. Screw?" asked Lovell anxiously.

"If I find the bonds in Master Catesby's desk it certainly appears to do so," answered Mr. Screw guardedly. "Master Catesby certainly could not have received them from Mr. Bulkeley."

"We know whom he received them from," said Lovell. "Tell him, Jimmy."

Jimmy, in a few words, told of the meeting the chums had accidentally witnessed in Woodend, when James Catesby had handed the precious packet to his nephew.

Mr. Screw smiled again, a very pleased smile.

"You young gentlemen have performed a very great service," he said. "If you are attached to this lad Bulkeley, as I gather, you may rest satisfied that his father's name will be cleared when I have verified this information. Please show me the way to Master Catesby's study."

"Can you open his desk, though?" asked Lovell dubiously.

"I have a warrant to search for the bonds."

"That's all right, then."

The juniors left the abbey with Mr. Screw, who grinned to himself several times on the way to Mr. Manders' House.

It was plain that the gentleman from Scotland Yard was feeling in high feather.

Having been hopelessly on the wrong track, and having been set by sheer accident on the right track, he was doubtless calculating upon the credit his striking success would gain him.

He followed the juniors into Mr. Manders' House, to meet an inquiring stare from Mr. Manders.

Mr. Manders' stare did not disconcert him, however.

He spoke in a low tone to the Modern master, the juniors standing respectfully back.

Mr. Manders' face was very entertaining to watch as he listened to the detective.

"Good heavens!" the juniors heard him gasp. "Bless my soul! Impossible! Yes—yes, certainly! At once! Come with me!"

Mr. Manders whisked away with the detective to Catesby's study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed at a respectful distance.

They looked in quietly as the mahogany desk was opened in the presence of Mr. Manders, whose eyes seemed to be almost bulging through his spectacles.

Stephen Catesby, at that moment discussing geegoes and the odds with Jony Hook at Coombe, would probably have forgotten the very existence of geegoes if he had known what was going on in his study at Rookwood. But Catesby did not know—yet.

Mr. Screw threw back the lid of the desk and lifted out the bundle of papers. Quietly he examined them, comparing them with the list he produced from his pocket-book.

Mr. Manders watched him with a series of horrified gasps, the juniors in breathless silence.

"Correct!" said Mr. Screw at last.

"That—that—that is stolen property?" stammered Mr. Manders in horror.

"Yes, sir; the bonds Mr. Bulkeley was accused of purloining," answered the detective. "They are found in the possession of his partner's nephew. I think it probable that the boy did not know what his uncle was placing in his charge."

"I am sure of that, at least!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"But as for the uncle—" Mr. Screw's jaw squared. "May I request the use of your telephone for a few minutes, sir?"

"Yes, yes; certainly!" stammered Mr. Manders. "Please follow me."

He brushed the juniors aside, and Mr. Screw followed him, bestowing a really genial smile on the Fistical Four as he passed them.

He had quite forgiven his imprisonment in the abbey vault now.

Jimmy Silver & Co. left the House, walking out into the quad as if they were walking on air.

"My hat!" was all Lovell could say.

"Think what it means!" said Jimmy Silver, his eyes dancing. "Bulkeley's pater will be cleared. Bulkeley will come back. He'll be captain of Rookwood again, and Knowles will get the order of the merry sack! Let's go and tell the fellows! This is too good to keep!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I say, it was my doing, you know!" yelled Tubby Muffin.

But Tubby was not heeded.

Jimmy Silver & Co. fairly raced down to Little Side.

Their excited looks drew upon them the eyes of the junior cricketers.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mornington. "What's the news? The Kaiser hanged?"

"Better than that," chirruped Jimmy Silver. "Listen, you fellows! Lend me your ears. Friends, Romans, and countrymen, Bulkeley's coming back!"

"What!"

"The bonds have been found, and Bulkeley's pater is cleared!" chortled Arthur Edward Lovell. "So Bulkeley will come back, and be captain of Rookwood again! Hurrah!"

And then there was a roar from the Classical juniors that rang far beyond the limits of the cricket-ground.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"FOUL PLAY!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

DON'T MISS IT!



"I—I say, Jimmy, about Bulkeley—" "What about Bulkeley?" asked Lovell. "His father—his father's innocent!" spluttered Tubby.

Jimmy stared at him.

"I believe he is," he said. "But what do you know about it, fatty?"

"I know who robbed the bank."

"What?" yelled the Fistical Four.

"Honour!" gasped Tubby.

"You know who robbed the bank?" repeated Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"Yes."

"Who was it, then?"

"Catesby of the Sixth!"

The 6th Chapter.

Light at Last!

Tubby Muffin made that announcement impressively.

Apparently he expected the Fistical Four to be very astonished and impressed.

But they weren't!

As Tubby made that astounding statement the Co. naturally supposed that he was trying to pull their leg, and they laid hands on Tubby, and bumped him down in the lane.

It was not permissible to rull the leg of the end study.

"Yaroooh!" roared Muffin, in surprise and wrath. "Wharrer you at? What's that for, you beasts?"

"That's for departing from the strait and narrow path of veracity!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "Tell us an easier one next time!"

"A much easier one, please!" grinned Raby.

"Yow-ow-ow! It's true!"

"Fathead!" Jimmy Silver looked at his watch. "I think we may as well drop in at the abbey, you chaps, before we go down to cricket-practice. I shouldn't wonder if that detective chap has finished his explorations by this time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin scrambled up in great wrath.

"You silly asses!" he gasped. "It's

Lovell whistled.

"Then it was Mr. Bulkeley's partner!" he said.

"It looks like it."

"He was supposed to be in Scotland at the time, and he had left his key of the safe with Mr. Bulkeley," said Raby.

"Mornny said so."

"His journey to Scotland was spoof. If he did it, he came back secretly, of course," said Jimmy quietly. "As for leaving his key with Mr. Bulkeley, he could easily have had another made like it in advance. I dare say he could easily get hold of a stick belonging to his partner, to leave there after he had knocked the night watchman on the head. Anyway, if those papers he handed to Catesby to keep are the stolen bonds, that settles it."

"But, why—"

"Don't you remember the bobbies suspected that Mr. Bulkeley might have given the bonds to his son to hide?" said Jimmy. "As a matter of fact, that was exactly what Catesby's uncle did. He wouldn't want to keep them anywhere near him, in case of accidents or suspicion, and he wouldn't dare to deposit them in a bank or safe-deposit. He thought a schoolboy's desk would be quite safe; and so it would have been if Tubby hadn't been a sneaking, prying cad."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly. "I think I've done jolly well! Haven't I helped the innocent and denounced the guilty, and—"

"But you only meant to bag another fellow's grub!" growled Jimmy. "Still, I must say it's lucky for old Bulkeley that you are a food-hunting pig, Tubby."

"Look here—"

"You can come and spin this yarn to Mr. Screw," said Jimmy. "He's the proper person to hear it. He's after those bonds."

"But—but where is he?" gasped Tubby.

"Do you know where to find him?" Jimmy grinned.

was there, and you were leading me into a trap by pretending that there was a bundle hidden in the vault! Do you deny it?"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Don't that show what training in the police force will do for a man?" he exclaimed. "Fancy the chap guessing that, you fellows!"

Mr. Screw almost raved.

"I shall complain to your Headmaster!" he shouted.

"What about?" asked Jimmy sweetly.

"We're supposed to close that door after going into the vaults."

"You—you—you—"

"Easy does it, Mr. Screw!" grinned Jimmy, as the enraged man clenched his hands, as if about to make a frontal attack on the Fistical Four. "I've got news for you. How would you like to find those bonds after all?"

Mr. Screw's manner altered at once.

"If you know anything of stolen property you are bound to tell me!" he said. "If you can give me any information I will forgive you the trick you have played on me."

"I don't know that I'm worried about that," answered Jimmy calmly. "But I can tell you where the bonds are, if you like."

Mr. Screw gave him a very suspicious look.

"Go ahead, Tubby!" added Jimmy Silver. "Spin your yarn, old porpoise. I shouldn't wonder if Mr. Screw stood you a twopenny bun for it!"

Tubby Muffin rolled into the limelight at once.

With a wealth of detail, he narrated his startling discovery to Mr. Screw, who watched him almost like a hawk all the time he was speaking.

The detective rapped out two or three questions, evidently fearing that his leg was being pulled once more.

But Tubby soon satisfied him that he was relating facts.



DROPPED FROM THE CLOUDS!

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. Hunted Down!

Crack, crack! The rifle-shots rang out sharply on the sunlit prairie. Frank Richards, his heart thumping, looked over the rim of the car as the balloon shot up from the plain. The last bag of sand had been thrown out, and the balloon rose fast. The gang of rustlers, riding below, fired furiously after it as it sped upward. Whizzzzz! "That's through the balloon!" said Bob Lawless, looking up at the swelling gas envelope overhead. "Crack, crack!" Two or three of the hurried bullets struck the car, and glanced away. But in a couple of minutes the balloon was out of effective range. Frank Richards, looking downwards, could see Handsome Alf and his gang riding in pursuit, as the balloon rolled westward on the wind. A clump of timber hid them from sight at last. Frank turned to his companions. "We're well out of that!" he exclaimed. "I guess so!" said Bob Lawless grimly. "What do you think, Cherub?" Vere Beauclerc smiled. "It was a narrow escape," he said. "But we could have put up a fight, all the same." Frank regarded the swelling envelope above with an anxious eye. At least one of the flying bullets had gone through it, and it was certain that the gas was escaping from the slit, slowly but surely. So far, however, it had no effect on the balloon, which showed no sign of sinking. In fact, it was still rising. High over plain and forest it floated on westward, towards the rocky spurs of the Cascade Mountains. "Not much more danger from that gang," remarked Bob. "They'll never keep up with us, I guess!" "They're out of sight, anyway." "Good!" Bob Lawless was attending to Bill Lomax, the prospector, who was lying on the rugs in the bottom of the car. His bronzed face was white. His wound had begun to bleed again, and Bob Lawless was washing it carefully, preparatory to replacing the bandages. "How do you feel now, Mr. Lomax?" he asked at last. The man smiled faintly. "I guess I shall pull through O.K.," he replied. "But it would have been all up with me if that gang had roped me in, sonny. And I reckon Handsome Alf was surprised to see me vamoose in this hyer way. What beats me is how you kids came hyer in the North-West in such a contraption as this! I've never seen the like in Western Canada before!" "Same here!" answered Bob, laughing. "This isn't a holiday trip. We belong to Cedar Creek School, in the Thompson Valley, and a sneaking coyote cut us adrift in the balloon yesterday. It's a runaway balloon, and it belongs to an American, who is still hunting for it on the other side of the Fraser River." "By gum!" said Lomax. "The galeot was blown north in a windstorm, after an ascent down in the States," explained Bob. "The balloon came down near our school, and we caught it for him. And then a skunk named Gunten cut us adrift in it. And where we shall land is a rather interesting question—if we don't come down to rest in the Pacific Ocean." "I reckon it is lucky for me you came down in this section," said Lomax. "They would have had me, sure." He touched the wound. "I've got somethin' hyer to remind me of Handsome Alf Carson. I guess I'll let him have it back some day! That gang are after my strike in the Cascade Range; but I reckon they'll have to let up on it now." "A big strike?" asked Bob curiously. The prospector's eyes gleamed. "A regular bonanza!" he said. "There's been some big strikes in the Cascade Range, but I guess my bonanza lays over them!" "What on earth is a bonanza, Bob?" murmured Frank Richards. Bob laughed. "A rich gold strike," he answered. "You've still got some of our language to learn, Franky." "It's a regular sockdologer!" said Bill Lomax. "And if that gang had roped me in before I could stake out the claim, I guess that claim would have been staked by Alf Carson & Co." "But they can't find it without you?" asked Beauclerc. "Not without the map I've got inside my rags," said the miner; "and I guess

Handsome Alf won't touch that now. Can you see anything of them, sonny?" Frank Richards looked down from the car again. Far away, on the plain beneath, he could discern a number of moving dots. It was impossible to make out their form, but he did not need telling that they were horsemen in motion. Handsome Alf and his followers were still on the trail of the bonanza. The huge, swelling balloon was easily visible to them at the distance, small as they looked to the schoolboys in the car. "I can see them, Mr. Lomax," said Frank. "But they're almost out of sight." "I guess they'll follow so long as they can see the contraption," said Lomax. "But they can't reach us. Can this thing go higher?" "I think so." "All O.K. so long as it don't go down." Frank Richards did not reply to that. For by this time the balloon was showing signs of settling. The gas that had been lost in making a descent was compensated for by the throwing out of ballast. But in the great gas-envelope was the slit of a bullet, through which the gas slowly oozed and escaped. The loss told upon the balloon, slowly but surely. Frank would hardly have noticed the descent, so gradual was it, but he could not help observing that the earth was drawing nearer. Plains and woods and creeks had been spread out like a map below, but already he was able to distinguish them more clearly. He exchanged a glance with his companions. "She's settling!" muttered Bob. "And if those scoundrels come up—" "It will be a fight!" said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "Better look to the guns." The schoolboys' hearts were beating. But they were quite cool. If the balloon settled down, and was overtaken by the gang of rustlers, Frank Richards & Co. realised what was before them—a fight for their lives. Life itself was at stake, and they were prepared to defend themselves. Quietly they examined such weapons as they had. The rifle and revolver taken from Handsome Alf were in the car, with a good supply of cartridges. There was a revolver in Bill Lomax's belt. They were all the weapons; but the schoolboys were thankful that they had so much. Bob Lawless took the rifle, examined it carefully, and loaded it. His sunburnt face was a little pale. It was the first time he had thought of pulling trigger against a human being, but he did not shrink from it. In the wild North-West their lives were in their own hands. The wounded miner watched them. "We're going down?" he asked. "I'm afraid so," answered Frank reluctantly. "And they're coming on?" "Yes." "I guess—" Bill Lomax hesitated, and then went on, with a quick breath. "Boys, this ain't your funeral. I ain't no right to drag you into this. They're a bad gang, that lot. You'd better put me down, as soon as your contraption is low enough, an' leave me to take my chance." "Rot!" said Bob Lawless tersely. "Youngster, that gang would shoot the hull crowd of you as soon as look at you!" said Lomax seriously. "We shall do some shooting first!" said Bob determinedly. "We're standing by you, Mr. Lomax." "But I reckon—" "Bosh!" said Frank Richards warmly. "Do you think we could let you land among that gang, to be murdered?" "We sha'n't, anyway," said Vere Beauclerc. "If it's a fight, we're all in it, Mr. Lomax." "I guess you've no call to face that, for me," said the miner. "Well, I dare say Handsome Alf wouldn't let us get away to tell the yarn if we did let him have you, Mr. Lomax," said Bob. "I guess I wouldn't trust him." Lomax nodded. "That's so." "Anyway, it's a fight if they come up," said Beauclerc; "and we're in a good position. They'll be easier targets than we shall." "I guess I can still handle a shooter," said Bill Lomax, taking out his revolver. "Can you handle that rifle, young 'un?" Bob grinned. "Can a canoe float?" was his answer.

"Bob's the champion shot of Cedar Creek," said Frank Richards, laughing. "They won't be glad to get in range, I can tell you." Rifle in hand, Bob Lawless looked over the rim of the car. The balloon was settling slowly downward over a wide plain that rose in a gentle acclivity towards the distant mountains. Closer now, though still far away, the horsemen were riding in hot pursuit, and they were near enough for the schoolboys to discern the glitter of Handsome Alf's ear-rings in the sun. Bob set his lips. "That galeot gets the first bullet when the circus begins," he said grimly. And they waited and watched.

The 2nd Chapter. A Fight for Life!

Lower and lower the great balloon surged. The schoolboys waited quietly. Bill Lomax said no more, though evidently it weighed upon the honest Canadian's mind that he had brought the schoolboys into this deadly quarrel. It would have been easy to carry out his generous suggestion. He could have been landed before the enemy came up, and the balloon, lightened of his weight, would have risen swiftly into the clouds again. But not for a single instant did Frank Richards & Co. dream of such an expedient. The man was a stranger to them, but he was an honest man pursued by lawless ruffians, and they were bound to stand by him. The coming conflict caused them no fear. If their minds were troubled, it was rather by their repugnance to taking human life, than by the thought of their own terrible peril. But there was no choice in that matter, and they had made up their minds to it. Lower and lower, till the grassy plain below was close enough for them to discern the gophers, blinking out of their holes. At the lower level there was little wind, and the balloon drifted slowly, almost imperceptibly, westward. The rustlers, riding hard, were gaining fast now. In a dusty bunch the horsemen came on, and the schoolboys could see their faces, red with exertion, and could read

the anticipation of success and triumph in their looks. Handsome Alf's face was set and savage. As he came closer he raised his rifle, and took a shot at the balloon, which grazed the gas-envelope. The car was swinging less than fifty feet above the ground now, and the hard-riding horsemen were racing up. The voyagers seemed to be descending into the very jaws of death. Bob Lawless rested his rifle across the rim of the wicker car, and glanced through the sights steadily. The muzzle was bearing upon the man with the ear-rings, and Bob's hand did not tremble. His comrades watched him silently. Handsome Alf had fired the first shot, and of his intentions there was no doubt—murderous violence as soon as the schoolboys were at his mercy. It was no time for hesitation. "Let him have it!" muttered Lomax. The miner had dragged himself up, and was leaning on the wicker rim, revolver in hand. Bob still waited. "I guess I'm going to make sure!" he answered. There was a sudden burst of firing from the horsemen, and the bullets whistled round the balloon. They had spotted the rifle-muzzle gleaming over the rim of the car, and realised that danger threatened. But the rifle-shots, fired with the riders in rapid motion, flew wide of the mark. But as the horsemen came closer the bullets flew nearer. Bob set his teeth hard, and a glitter came into his eyes. It was time! With a hand that was as firm as iron he pulled trigger. Crack! Frank Richards caught his breath as he followed, with his eyes, the sudden shot. In the distance Handsome Alf and his horse rolled on the plain together. "A bulls-eye!" grinned Bill Lomax. The next moment, however, Carson was seen to leap to his feet from the grass. His horse lay where it had fallen. At the very moment that the bullet sped, the horse had tossed up its head, and received the bullet intended for the rider. Handsome Alf stood, thigh-deep in the thick grass, shaking his fist and raving curses as his companions galloped on, leaving him standing. "The gee-gee got it!" muttered Beauclerc. "Well, he's out of the race," said Frank. "I—I'm rather glad." Bob knitted his brows, as he reloaded the rifle. Five horsemen were tearing on towards the sinking balloon. "Fire!" muttered Lomax. "They're inside pistol-range now." His revolver rang out as he spoke. Crack! Crack! Crack! The rifle and two revolvers opened fire upon the gang of rustlers. Loud yells answered from the horsemen. Two of them were seen to reel, and though they did not fall, they stopped in the race, and dismounted. It was plain that they were hit. Three came tearing on furiously. The balloon was not a dozen feet above the ground now, and looked like bumping at any moment. A bullet whizzed over the car, and spun Frank Richards' hat from his head. It fell in the bottom of the car, and Frank, dazed, clapped his hand to his head. "Hurt?" cried Beauclerc. "No!" panted Frank. "I—I think not—no!" Splash! There was a sudden plashing of water, and the schoolboys stared down in astonishment. Unseen by the voyagers, whose eyes were turned on the pursuers, the balloon had drifted on over a wide river, and as it reached the level of the earth it was water that it touched instead of the solid prairie. Splash! Splash! "Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob. The three horsemen slowed down as the river rolled before them. If the balloon crossed it, the pursuit was stopped, but in the very middle of the wide stream the car was dragging through the water. "Throw something out!" panted Frank. "Anything!" He grasped a heavy bearskin rug from the bottom of the car, and tossed it overboard. Bob and Beauclerc pitched over two or three loose articles at the same moment. The balloon, relieved, rose six or seven feet, clearing the river. It drifted on, close over the shining water. Bump! Down it came again, striking the bank on the opposite side. The concussion sent it spinning upward again. Lomax sank down in the car, and the schoolboys held on as it rocked and swayed wildly. There was a shout of rage across the river, and spattering bullets followed the balloon, few of them coming close. Handsome Alf and his gang had been shaken off at last. One of the horsemen, bolder than the rest, dashed into the river to swim his steed across, but the swift current whirled him away, and he was glad to struggle back to the bank. Bump! In a series of looping runs the balloon rolled on, striking the earth again and again. It was a good two miles from the river when it collapsed at last, landing in the thick grass and remaining there. The gas-envelope sagged over. "I guess we're landed!" panted Bob Lawless.

He swept his eyes anxiously towards the now distant river. There was no sign of the rustlers. "I reckon it's O.K.," said Bill Lomax. "I know this hyer section. There ain't a crossing for five miles either way. I guess Handsome Alf has come out at the little end of the horn, arter all." "That was good news to Frank Richards & Co." Lomax leaned on the edge of the car and scanned the plain. Within a few miles rose the dark foothills to the west. "You see that clump of trees yonder, sonnies?" said the prospector. "Yes," said Frank. "That's on the trail to Last Chance. I guess that if we can hoof it fifteen miles we're all O.K." "I guess we'll try," said Bob. The balloon had landed on thick grass in the midst of clumps of timber. Here and there rocky spurs cropped out of the soil. Bob Lawless looked for a handy tree to fasten the grapnel, for, collapsed as the balloon looked, there was no doubt that it would rise when it was relieved of their weight. Whether Mr. Hiram K. Chowder, the American balloonist, would ever recover his property from that outlying region was a very great question, but the schoolboys naturally wished to do their best to secure it. "I guess that tree will answer," said Bob. "You fellows keep in the car till I've got it fixed." "Right-ho!" Bob took the rope and slipped from the car, which shifted a little, but did not rise. He ran to the tree to secure the rope, his chums watching him. To their astonishment Bob stopped suddenly as he reached the clump of timber, turned, and bolted back to the car. His face was white. "What's the matter?" shouted Frank in alarm. There was no need for Bob to answer. From the dark shadows of the timber a grizzly bear looped out in pursuit of the schoolboy, his savage jaws only a few yards behind Bob as he ran.

The 3rd Chapter. Dropped from the Clouds!

 Bob Lawless bounded frantically into the car. The fierce animal gained on him at every step; his red, open jaws were only a couple of feet behind as Bob bundled in over the wicker rim and rolled in the car head-foremost. There was a deep, savage growl from the grizzly. He reared on his hind legs, his paws catching at the car, and his little red eyes glared in over the edge. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Frank, almost frozen for the moment. The grizzly was gaunt, and evidently hungry. Doubtless he had been watching for prey in the timber when Bob Lawless almost walked into his jaws. Vere Beauclerc caught up the axe and made a fierce slash at the threatening muzzle over the car's edge. The huge animal growled savagely and backed away. "The rifle—quick!" panted Bob, as he struggled to his feet. Frank handed it to him. The grizzly was coming on again, and his paws were laid on the car, evidently to climb in. Bob thrust the rifle almost into the bear's jaws as he pulled the trigger. From the grizzly's deep throat came a howl that was almost a yell, and again the ferocious brute backed down. Bill Lomax was on his feet. He did not even draw his revolver; he knew how useless that weapon was against a grizzly bear. He was gazing upward at the strong, ample netting that held the car to the gas-envelope. "Climb for it, sonnies!" he jerked out. "He'll be in the car in the shake of a possum's tail, and then—" He did not finish, but caught at the ropes. The miner's advice was too good not to be taken. The three schoolboys swarmed into the ropes as the savage face looked again over the rim of the car. Blood was streaming down the bear's fur, but the wound had not disabled him. Bill Lomax struggled feebly to climb, without which he would never have cleared from the car in time. The grizzly bumped heavily into the car, growling with a sound that was blood-curdling so close at hand. Frank Richards & Co. helped the wounded miner as high as possible in the netting, and Bob ran a rope round him, and knotted it, to secure him there. It was easy enough for the three active boys to hold on. Below them, in the car, the grizzly was raging and growling. He raged round the car, clawing and snapping, and casting savage looks up at the victims above his head. "He's going to climb!" muttered Bob. "I guess the ropes won't stand him!" answered Lomax. The prospector was right. As the huge animal dragged himself upon the ropes they sagged and curled, and he bumped heavily into the car, screaming with rage. For a long time, minute following minute, the schoolboys hung on to the netting, while the savage brute raged in the car below. He did not essay to climb again. The schoolboys hoped that he would go; but the bear was hungry, and he showed no signs of going. When his fury was a little exhausted he laid down in the car, watching them, a good deal like a bulldog.



GET ONE OF THESE CARDS. It is mostly on the impulse of the moment that we fritter away our money. If we stopped to think we should remember that we are asked to save, so that our money may make things easier for the brave boys "out there." If you carry a War Savings Card in your pocket, it will be a very useam reminder. You won't mind going without your little pleasures when you remember for whom it is that you are saving. If you haven't one of these War Savings Cards, get one to-day from any post-office. Each card is divided up into thirty-one spaces. Whenever you have 6d. to spare, you just buy a stamp at the post-office and fix it on one of the spaces. As soon as all the spaces are filled up you can take the card to a post-office and exchange it for a 15s. 6d. War Savings Certificate. In five years' time that certificate will be worth £1. This is the best way for a patriotic boy to put money by. Won't you try it?

His red eyes never even winked as he watched.

The chums looked at one another in dismay.

"This looks like a cinch—for the grizzly!" muttered Bob.

"I'll try on him with the shooter," said Lomax.

He swung his right hand free, and his revolver barked out.

There was a deep growl from the bear as the bullet struck him.

Clinging to the rope, against the bellying gas-envelope, it was impossible to use the rifle.

The pistol was little more use than a popgun.

But two or three more stinging shots brought the grizzly to his feet again.

Snarling with rage, he made another attempt to climb into the netting.

The ropes sagged under him as before, but this time he did not fall back into the car.

He held on grimly with teeth and claws, and the netting to which the four were clinging was dragged down closer to him.

"Hold on!" gasped Frank.

The bear was climbing again.

With a sagacity amazing in so huge and clumsy an animal, he gathered up the netting in his claws, dragging the intended victims down closer and closer.

"Give me the axe, Beau!" muttered Frank.

He grasped the axe, and slashed at the ropes below.

Three of them parted, and the bear, thrown from his balance, tumbled back into the car.

The gas-envelope trembled, partly released by the severing of the ropes.

In the sides of the balloon great dents were appearing, as the gas escaped more and more from the holes in the cover.

It was only a question of time before it collapsed, and either buried the voyagers under its bulk or hurled them into the jaws of the bear.

"The game's up if we stick here!" muttered Bob Lawless. "Franky, the dashed thing would rise if we cut the car away. Shall we chance it?"

"I think so," said Frank, with a deep breath. "It couldn't rise high—very high, anyway. We're safe if we hold on."

"I agree," said Beauclerc. "What do you say, Mr. Lomax?"

The miner gave a shrug.

"I guess the b'ar will have us if we don't vamoose," he answered, "and if the b'ar don't Handsome Alf will! Look!"

He jerked his head towards the distant river.

Against the glimmer of the water, shining in the sun, a horseman appeared in sight, followed by another and another.

The delay caused by the grizzly had brought the enemy close again.

Frank set his teeth.

"It's the only chance now, Bob. Let's try."

"Go it!" said Bob tersely.

Frank slashed at the ropes.

With two or three loose ends the schoolboys tied themselves to the netting, to secure themselves against a fall.

There was no doubt that the lightened balloon would shoot up when the heavy weight of the car was gone.

Slash, slash!

The bear was seeking to climb again. Cut ropes rained down on him.

When at last only a single rope held the balloon captive there was a rifle-shot on the plain, and a sound of distant galloping.

Carson and his gang were close at hand. Slash!

With a loud twang the last rope parted.

The next moment the axe dropped from Frank Richards' hand, and he clung to the netting with all his strength.

The balloon, released and lightened, shot upwards almost like a bullet.

In an instant, as it seemed, the car and the bear vanished from sight below.

The plain fled away from sight, and the galloping of hoofs was lost in space.

Dizzy and breathless, the four clung on to the netting, while the balloon rose and rolled.

Higher and higher it sped, till the earth was a misty blur, plains and trees and hills losing all their outlines.

Misty clouds oozed round them as they clung on and panted for breath.

But it was only for a short time.

The gas was still oozing away, and ere long the balloon began to settle, carried along by the wind as it descended.

Once more the earth became clear to their dizzy eyes, but they were nowhere near the spot where they had left the grizzly bear in the car.

The wind was bearing the released envelope onward in the direction of the Last Chance trail.

Bill Lomax uttered a sudden exclamation.

"That's the camp!"

The schoolboys looked.

There were rugged spurs of rock about them now.

Pine-trees and rocky acclivities met their gaze.

In the distance smoke could be seen rising against the clear sky.

They were close to human habitations at last.

The balloon drifted on.

Lower it sank and lower, and they caught sight of a man with a pick in his hands, standing by a claim, and gazing upward with an expression of blank amazement upon his rugged face.

It was the first time a balloon had ever been seen in the broken foothills of the Cascade Mountains.

Sinking lower every moment now, the gas-envelope drifted on.

As they drew closer to the earth the schoolboys cut themselves loose from the securing ropes, and held on ready to jump.

Their feet dragged on the rough ground at last.

A hundred yards away they caught sight of a collection of ruddy-built cabins by a silvery creek.

They guessed that it was the mining-camp of Last Chance.

Three or four men in red shirts were standing and staring, in dumb astonishment.

Perilous as their position was, the schoolboys could scarcely help laughing at the amazement in the faces of the Last Chance miners.

"Mind!" said Bob. "The beastly thing will jump as soon as one of us lets go! You first, Lomax!"

"I guess—"

"You first; you're hurt. Let go when your boots are on the ground."

"Right!"

Lomax's heavy boots were already dragging.

He released his hold, and rolled on the ground, two or three red-shirted men running to his assistance.

As Bob Lawless anticipated, the balloon rose when his weight was gone.

But the gas was escaping fast now, the great envelope sagged and hollowed ominously.

As it swooped down again, Bob muttered:

"Now then, us three all together—when I say go!"

"Right you are, Bob!"

Their boots dragged on the ground.

"Go!" panted Bob.

At the word the three released their hold.

They reeled and bumped on the ground, and the balloon shot upward, and vanished in the distance on the wind.

It was the last the chums of Cedar Creek ever saw of Hiram K. Chowder's balloon!

Frank Richards rolled over, dazed and breathless. A horny hand grasped his shoulder, and helped him up, and a rugged, bearded face grinned at him.

"All O.K., sonny?"

"Yes," gasped Frank. "Thanks!"

"I guess this hyer beats the Dutch!" said the big miner. "Fust time I've ever seen a new pilgrim come to camp by droppin' from the clouds! Search me!"

Frank Richards had already learned that "Search me!" was a Western expression implying surprise, so he did not take the words literally.

"Thanks for helping me!" he panted.

"You all right, Bob? And you, Beau?"

"Right as rain!" said Beauclerc cheerfully.

"Same here, except for a bump the size of a walnut," said Bob Lawless. "I guess I wouldn't give Mr. Chowder much for his balloon, though."

Frank Richards laughed breathlessly.

Bill Lomax limped up and joined them.

And in a very short time the landed voyagers were partaking of the hospitality of the men of Last Chance, and never had they done more justice to a meal than they did now to corn-cake and antelope-steak.

The 4th Chapter.
Home Again.

Frank Richards & Co. remained till the next morning at Last Chance.

They were anxious to get home and assure their friends of their safety.

The next morning they took their leave of Bill Lomax, leaving the Canadian miner among his friends, and safe from further assaults of Handsome Alf and his gang.

The storekeeper of Last Chance was going south for supplies, and he gave the three schoolboys a lift in his buggy.

Glad enough were the three when they reached the nearest railway-town, and were able to use the telegraph.

A message was flashed away along the railway to Kamloops, then to be taken by rider up the Thompson Valley, to relieve the anxious hearts at the Lawless Ranch.

It was some days later that the chums of Cedar Creek rode, on borrowed horses, up the Thompson Valley for home.

Vere Beauclerc parted with his chums on the trail, and rode away for the shack by the creek, where his father awaited him.

Frank and Bob galloped on to the ranch.

Mr. Lawless met them at the porch, and there was a good deal of emotion in his bearded face as he greeted them.

"You young rascals!" he said.

"How's mopper, dad?" asked Bob anxiously.

"She was very anxious. She had given you up for lost," said Mr. Lawless gravely. "No, I don't blame you. I know you couldn't help it. Go in and see your mother, Bob."

Bob Lawless ran into the ranch.

"There's a gentleman here you'll like to see, Frank," said Mr. Lawless to his nephew. "You'd better report to him what's happened to his balloon."

It was Mr. Hiram K. Chowder.

He shook hands with Frank, with puckered brows.

"I guess I reckoned there was noos of that balloon when your wire came along, sonny," he said. "Mr. Lawless was kind enough to put me up byer while I was hunting for it. I guess I tracked it as far as the Fraser River, and then I calculated it was a goner. But I was real glad to hear that you were safe and sound, and it was better noos than getting the contraption back. I reckon but what's become of her?"

Frank Richards explained.

Mr. Chowder shook his head seriously as he listened.

"I guess I shan't go arter her," he remarked. "There won't be much left of her by this time, and how I'd get the rags home from the Cascade Mountains is a puzzle, sir. I can't find the answer to But I'm much obliged to you, boys. You did your best to catch her for me."

"I'm sorry we couldn't do better, Mr. Chowder," said Frank. "It's a heavy loss to you."

"I guess she was insured," answered the American gentleman. "But I'd rather have had my balloon back. I was making a good heap of dollars exhibiting in the

North-Western States. But now I know she's a goner, I guess I shall hump it home, and give my order in Chicago for a new contraption, you bet!"

Frank Richards reflected.

It was Kern Gunten, the Swiss school-boy at Cedar Creek, who had cut the balloon adrift with the chums in it, after they had captured the runaway for Mr. Chowder.

Frank wondered whether he ought to inform the American gentleman, so that he could lay a claim against Gunten's father for damages.

But there was little chance of that, for Gunten was certain to deny the whole story, and a legal action on the subject would have been extremely doubtful, even if Mr. Gunten had been legally liable for his son's action.

And Frank, wrathful as he was with Gunten for his unscrupulous trick, had a strong repugnance to the idea of informing against his schoolfellow.

"I guess," went on Mr. Chowder, oblivious of the schoolboy's thoughts—"I guess this hyer will be a good advertisement for my business, at any rate! Aeronaut blown away to the wild North-West—coming down among rustlers and grizzlies! By hokey! The papers will make a lot of that!"

And Mr. Chowder rubbed his hands at the idea.

"But you didn't come down among the rustlers or the grizzly!" said Frank, in surprise.

Mr. Chowder smiled.

"Yep. I'm glad Miss Meadows knows. I don't reckon Gunten will be glad to see us to-morrow morning," said Bob. "We'll go early, and meet him on the trail. Gunten's called the tune, and to-morrow morning he's going to pay the piper."

And the chums turned in.

The 5th Chapter.

Gunten Pays the Piper.

Bright and early in the morning, Frank Richards and his Canadian cousin started for Cedar Creek School.

Vere Beauclerc met them at the fork in the trail; he was early, as usual.

"What are we going to do about Gunten, you fellows?" asked Beauclerc, as they rode on together. "He risked our lives by sending us adrift; and it's cost Mr. Chowder his balloon. He oughtn't to get off scot-free."

"He's not going to," said Bob grimly. "We're going to meet him on the trail, Cherub."

"And?" asked Beauclerc.

"I've brought a special length of trail-rope for him."

Beauclerc smiled, and said no more.

The three chums rode at a gallop, and turned into the Thompson trail at some distance from the school.

They had covered the ground quickly, and were early on the scene.

It was some time later that Gunten and Keller, the two Swiss, came riding up the trail together from Thompson Town.

Gunten clenched his hands, cying the chums of Cedar Creek savagely.

"Now, what do you want?" he demanded, between his teeth. "I'm not going to fight you, Bob Lawless, if that's what you mean."

"I give you the chance, if you choose," said Bob quietly.

"I don't choose, then."

"Perhaps you'd prefer a fight with Franky!" suggested Bob. "I dare say Franky could make you sorry enough for your trick."

Gunten put his hands in his pockets.

"Or the Cherub," went on Bob. "You'll oblige Gunten, Cherub, if he prefers to take you on instead of my humble self?"

Beauclerc smiled.

"With pleasure!" he answered.

"Will you let me mount my horse?" said Gunten, through his set teeth. "I'm not going to fight any of you!"

"You want to crawl off unpunished, after risking our lives by a dirty trick!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

Gunten shrugged his shoulders.

"You can report me to Miss Meadows if you like," he answered.

"You know we shan't do that."

"Then let me get on, hang you!"

"You're going on," answered Bob. "Start his horse, Franky. Gunten's going on foot."

"I'm not going on foot!" roared Gunten furiously.

"Your mistake; you are."

Frank Richards started Gunten's horse up the trail, and the animal trotted on towards the school.

Gunten stood with clenched hands, breathing hard.

He had not expected to escape unpunished for his unscrupulous trick when he had heard the news that the chums of Cedar Creek were returning alive.

He was prepared to pile lie on lie if he was accused, but if the chums chose to take his punishment in their own hands there was little help for him.

And that was their intention.

"I guess I make you the offer again, Gunten," said Bob quietly. "You risked our lives, and you knew it. You can pick out your man, and stand up to him till you're lunked up, if you like."

"Oh, shut up!" was Gunten's answer.

"No, I won't!"

"Then you'll get the trail-rope. Lay him over!" said Bob.

Gunten struggled fiercely as Frank and Beauclerc grasped him.

He was pitched down on his face in the trail, still struggling.

Then Bob Lawless brought the trail-rope into play.

Lash, lash, lash!

Bob had a strong arm, and he laid the trail-rope on with a hearty goodwill.

Gunten yelled and struggled under the castigation.

But his struggles did not avail him, and the punishment was not spared for his yelling.

He wanted a fesson, and he had it.

Bob laid on the trail-rope till he had counted twenty, and every lash was, as Bob expressed it, a "sockdologer."

When twenty had been laid on he stepped back.

"I guess that does it," he remarked. "I'm satisfied, if Gunten is. Are you satisfied, you foreign rotter?"

Gunten sat up, white with rage.

"I'll make you suffer for this!" he hissed.

Bob laughed carelessly.

"Next time you think of a dirty trick, you'd better think, too, about what you'll get afterwards," he answered. "So long! Time we got off, you fellows."

The three schoolboys remounted their horses, and rode on towards Cedar Creek.

Gunten was left gasping and groaning in the trail.

He limped after them at last, white with fury, but severe as the infliction had been, the Swiss was well aware that he had escaped cheaply.

There was a shout at the gate of the lumber school, as Frank Richards & Co. rode up.

Chunky Todgers waved his hat.

"Here they are!" he yelled.

There was a rush of the Cedar Creek fellows to greet the three, and they had a forest of hands to shake as they rolled off their horses.

In a triumphant procession they were marched into the playground.

There was no doubt that Cedar Creek School was glad to see Frank Richards & Co. again.

Miss Meadows met them at the porch.

"My dear boys," she said, "I was so glad to hear that you were safe!"

And the Canadian schoolmistress shook hands with them in turn, and then Mr. Slimmey, and then Mr. Shepherd, the new master who had arrived during their absence.

It was quite a reception.

That morning was a cheery one at the lumber school—only Kern Gunten's face being dark.

The Swiss seemed to have some difficulty in keeping in a sitting position, and Miss Meadows chided him more than once for shifting about on his form, whereat the rogue of Cedar Creek scowled more darkly than ever.

But his dark looks did not matter to Frank Richards & Co., who did not even observe them.

A dozen times that day they were called upon to relate how they had voyaged to the wild North-West, and how they had been dropped from the clouds.



Slash! With a loud twang the last rope parted, and the balloon, released and lightened, shot upwards almost like a bullet.

"Sonny, you don't want to tell the public too many facts," he answered. "What does it matter whether it happened to you or to me. It was my balloon, wasn't it?"

"Yes; but—"

"I guess that's good enough. You'll give me the whole yarn, with all details, and I guess I'll get the paper-men to write it up in great style!" said Mr. Chowder, rubbing his hands again.

Evidently Mr. Chowder was a gentleman with a keen eye to the value of advertisement, and had not been brought up at the feet of his famous countryman, George Washington.

And that afternoon Frank and Bob had to give Mr. Chowder full details of their adventures, and the enterprising American gentleman seemed fully satisfied when he took his leave at the ranch.

"I suppose it was no use telling him about Gunten, Bob," Frank Richards remarked, when the cousins went to their room that night. "Of course, Gunten's responsible for the loss of the balloon."

Bob shook his head.

"Nix!" he answered. "He couldn't screw any shekels out of the Guntens—not much use trying, I reckon. Gunten would swear black and blue that he never touched the rope with his knife, and I guess it wouldn't be easy to prove; and we don't want to stand up as witnesses against a Cedar Creek ehap. That wouldn't be any use for Chowder; and as for ourselves, we've got our own way of dealing with the foreign trash."

"We shall see him to-morrow," said Frank. "Your pater sent word to the school that we were safe when he got the telegram."

Gunten started at the sight of Frank Richards & Co. sitting their horses in the middle of the trail.

"Hallo! You fellows back?" he called out.

"Looks like it. Halt!" answered Bob.

"I guess I'm going on."

"I guess you're not," answered Bob coolly, catching the reins of the Swiss.

"You can get on, Keller."

Keller looked at them.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I guess the trouble is that Gunten cut us adrift in the balloon, and now he's going to step up to the office and settle," answered Bob.

"It's a lie!" said Gunten, between his teeth. "Take that tale to my father, and see what he will say! I shall deny it, every word."

"I know that," answered Bob. "And I reckon I'm not going to your popper, Gunten. We're dealing with you."

"Let go my rein!" exclaimed Gunten fiercely.

"Not just yet!"

Gunten made a slash at Bob's wrist with his riding-whip.

The rancher's son let go the rein, and grasped him by the shoulder.

In a moment the Swiss was swung out of the saddle, and bumped in the grass of the trail.

"Help me, Keller!" yelled Gunten.

"You vamoose," said Frank Richards, giving Keller's pony a flick. "Now, then, off you go!"

Keller rode on up the trail to the school.

He would not have been of much use in putting up a fight, and apparently he was not inclined to try his luck.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"THE GENTLE SHEPHERD!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

DON'T MISS IT!