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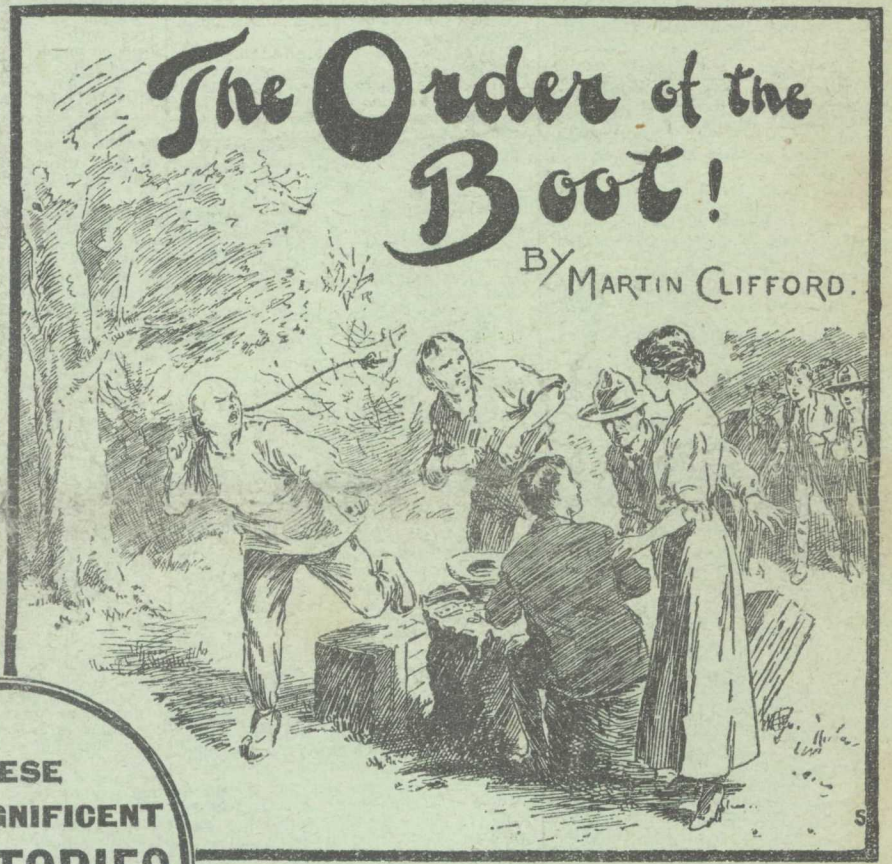
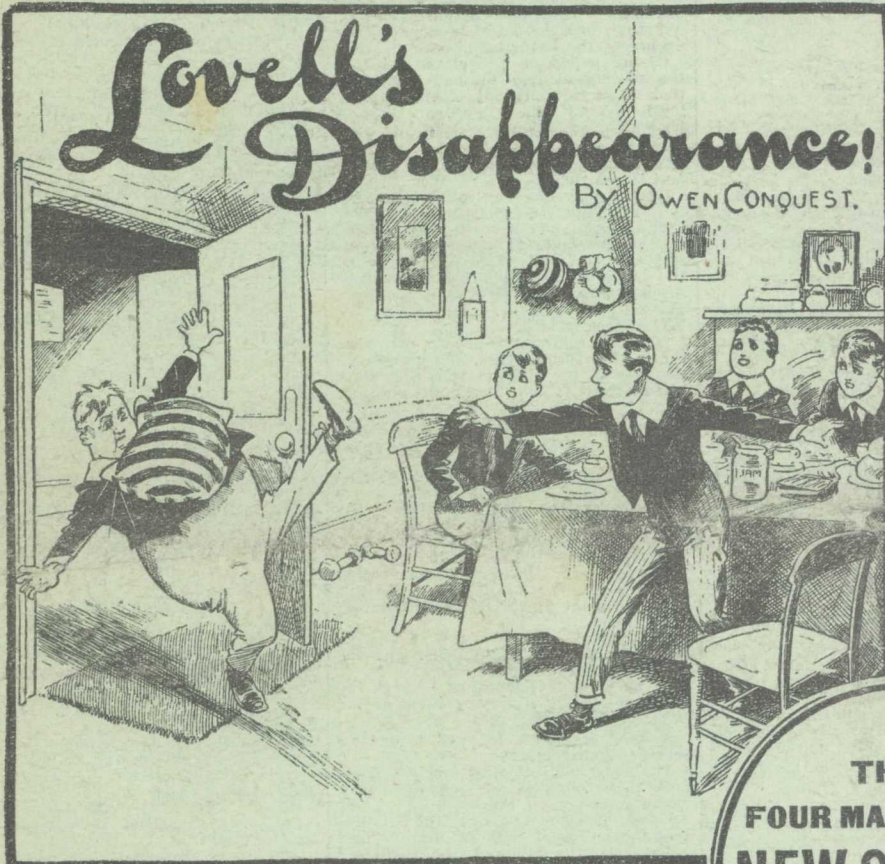
The BOYS' FRIEND 1^{1d}/₂

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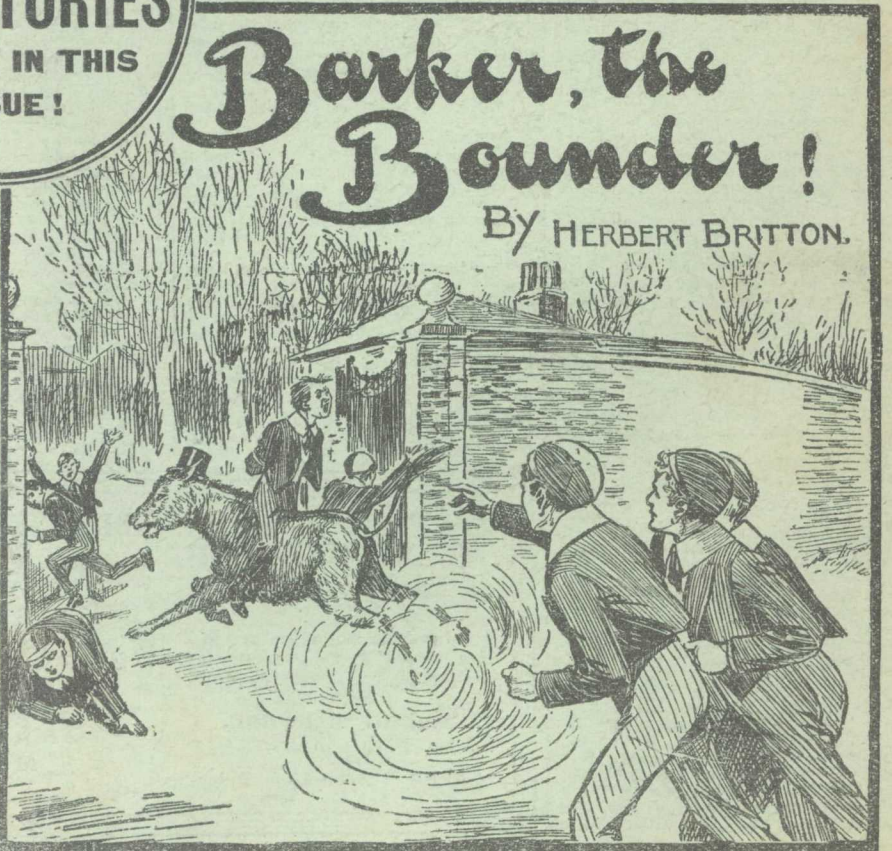
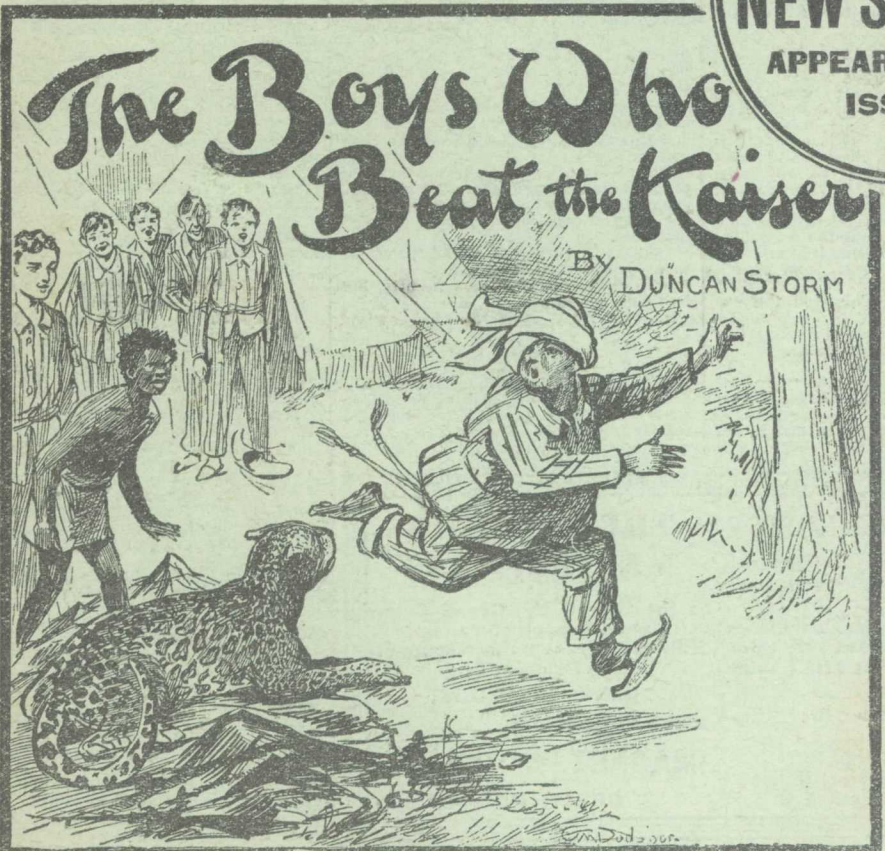
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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending October 19th, 1918.



THESE
FOUR MAGNIFICENT
NEW STORIES
APPEAR IN THIS
ISSUE!



DUNCAN STORM'S AMAZING NEW SERIAL!



FOR NEW READERS.

THE KAISER is determined to obtain possession of the Mahdi's huge treasure which is hidden in the heart of the continent of Africa, and to do so, he employs three desperate Germans named BARON VON SLYDEN, CAPTAIN STOOM, and VON SNEEK.

The papers, however, containing the secret of the whereabouts of the treasure are in the possession of CAPTAIN HANDYMAN and CY SPRAGUE, who decide to go in quest of the treasure, and to take with them the boys of the Bombay Castle, chief among whom are DICK DORRINGTON, CHIP, ARTY DOVE, SKELETON, PORKIS, and PONGO WALKER.

LAL TATA, a cheery Hindu, TOOKUM EL KOOS, a native wrestler, FLINT PASHA, a member of the Sudan Police, are also amongst the party, as well as the boys' pets, CECIL, the orang-outang, HORACE, the goat, and GUS, the crocodile.

So far Baron von Slyden and his confederates have made several endeavours to secure the papers containing the secret of the Mahdi's treasure, and on each occasion have met with defeat. Even their efforts to obtain their revenge on the boys failed.

In last week's instalment, whilst the boys were camping on the banks of the Nile, Robbler, a wild boy, appeared on the scene, with his pet leopard named Tiddles. That night Lal Tata had an amusing adventure with Horace and Cecil, and made his way to the boys' tent in order to chastise the animals. In searching for the latter, Lal pulled aside a rug, quite unaware that Tiddles, the leopard, was sleeping peacefully underneath.

(Read on from here.)

Robbler on the Track!

"Come out, Horace, you had fellow! Come out, Cecil, you naughty one, and receive your just punishments!" shouted Lal Tata triumphantly, as, brandishing his battered white umbrella, he pulled the rug from the massive speckled head of the leopard.

Tiddles did not like having the blanket snatched from his head in this fashion, and Lal's sudden movement scared him. He lay back, his ears flat to his head, and snarled, showing a huge row of white, gleaming teeth.

Lal staggered back, dropping his umbrella as though it had turned to a red-hot poker in his hand.

He had expected to find Cecil and Horace amongst the heap of blankets in which the boys were crouching and laughing, not a leopard of full growth.

"Ha!" began Lal, with a gasp. "What does these apparatus mean? What—?" "Mor-row!" replied Tiddles, licking his curling lips with a huge red tongue.

At the warning snarl Lal retreated farther.

Tiddles had said as plainly as possible, in leopard language:

"You hit me, and I'll see you about it!"

The boys sat up, grinning.

Lal's face had dropped, and he stood petrified, staring at the leopard and his young master as though he were unable to believe his eyes.

"There are some mistakes here!" he stammered. "Do I not see a black boy of wild aspects and a leopard—a ferocious leopard? Are my eyes making deceptions, or am I making dreams?"

"It's all right, sir," said Dick Dorrington cheerfully. "You aren't walking in your sleep. This is Tiddles. He is a tame leopard—if you don't whack him over the head. We're using him for a bolster!"

"Come away at once, boys, or you shall be torn to mincemeats!" stammered Lal. "I have heard of many foolish things, but I have never met boys so silly as to play Little Red Riding Hoods with leopards. That is most dangerous animals. He bites!"

"Wouldn't bite anything but his supper, sir, if you don't bash him over the head with your broolly!" said Chip, grinning cheerfully.

Robbler quieted his charge with a low whisper, and Tiddles dropped his great head again, keeping a watchful green eye turned on Lal.

"Who is this boy?" demanded Lal, with a return to his schoolmaster manner.

"What does he do in camps at this time of night, accompanied by wild beasts?"

"He is a Somali, sir," explained Dick Dorrington. "And the leopard is Tiddles. Don't send Robbler away, please, sir. He's an awfully interesting chap!"

Mr. Lal Tata shook his head disapprovingly.

He was still cautiously backing away from the leopard and his young master.

"It is time that you boys shall be in bed and fast asleep," he said. "I am disturbed by disgraceful fightings between Horace and Cecil. I come out of my tent in chase of those rascal fellows, and I find you fellows making chums with wild beasts. You are all painted with the same

tars. Go to bed at once, and you shall do some tremendous impots in the morning. You shall all write me one thousand times: 'It is not good to play the goat with fierce leopards.'"

Robbler seemed to understand, as much by instinct as by Lal's words, that his presence with his strange pet in the camp was unwelcome.

"Tell the black man that I go," he whispered to Chip in Arabic. "But have a care, Ingliz boy. The moon is setting, and there is danger about the camp. I and Tiddles will keep good watch."

He gave a low whistle, and Tiddles rose, scattering the blankets with which the boys had covered him right and left.

"This was too much for Lal's courage. At the sight of Tiddles standing, tall and speckled, in the moonlight, he gave a yell, and turned and fled.

"Hi, sir! Come back!" called out Porkis. "It's all right! He's a nice leopard! He's as quiet as a lamb! Come back and stroke him!"

But Lal was not stopping to stroke any wild leopards.

He ran like a hare for the nearest tree, which was a stumpy little palm with a head like a sweep's brush. And up the straight stem of this refuge he shinned as quick as a lamplighter.

Tiddles, whose curiosity was aroused by this sudden flight, rose and stretched himself lazily.

Then he stalked slowly over to the tree where Lal was perched, and, rising, dug his huge claws into the bark, sharpening them just as a cat sharpens its talons on the leg of a kitchen table.

Lal shouted wildly.

"Hi, boys! Tell your black boy to call off this ferocious beast! He shakes me out of the tree! I shall tumble off my perch, and he will devour me!"

Robbler gave a whistle, and stalked away out of the camp.

"The black man, he is afraid of my possee cat!" he said to the boys, as he glided away into the shadows beyond the fire.

At the sound of his master's whistle the leopard withdrew his talons from the bark of the palm, and, dropping to his feet, scampered off to heel like a well-trained fox-terrier.

"Well, if that doesn't beat the band!" exclaimed Dick Dorrington, peering after the strange couple. "He's got that leopard as tame as a pet canary. But where have they sloped to?"

The boy and the leopard had disappeared like shadowy ghosts into the adjacent thickets, making no sound.

"He won't go far," said Chip. "He told me that there is danger round the camp, and that he is going to keep cave for us—him and Tiddles. Now, I wonder where Mr. Lal Tata has got to?" added Chip innocently.

"Here I am, you bad boy!" said a muffled voice from the crest of the stumpy palm. "Where is that horrid boy and that most dangerous wild beast?"

"It's all right, sir!" said Porkis. "The coast is clear. Quite safe. You can come down quite safely."

Lal was hanging in the top of the palm like a great bear who has gone up the pole in search of a penny bun.

"Are you sure they have gone?" he asked.

"Quite sure, sir," answered Dick. "And we are all going to bed now, sir," he added.

Lal climbed slowly out of his perch in the palm-tree, and dropped to the ground with a heavy thump.

He was a little bit ashamed of himself for having run away from Tiddles.

"I am not afraid of wild elephants or tigers," he said. "I am not, as a rule, a timorous man of animals. But leopard is a most dangerous and ill-tempered beast. It gave me great wambings of the stomach when I made discovery of that terrible animal under blankets. Are you sure he's gone?"

"He's hopped it, sir," said Pongo Walker, grinning. "I expect it's coming out all over in spots that makes the leopard so jolly wild!" he added.

"Good!" said Lal, his broad face beaming again as his natural good temper

overcame his temporary irritation. "That is most excellent jest, Pongo Walker. I shall tell you all of that impot!"

"Thank you, sir!" said all the boys gratefully.

"But you shall build up my tent again," added Lal Tata.

The boys speedily fished out a spare tent-pole from the stores, and erected Lal's fallen tent once more.

Then they slipped back to their own domicile, and were soon fast asleep.

Not one of them had noticed, as they passed to and fro, the lurking, snake-like shape of Cassim, the spy, who lay hidden behind a few tussocks of coarse jungle grass not fifty yards from their tent.

The moon was getting low now, and casting long shadows along the ground.

Even these humps of rough grass cast their shadow, and in this long shadow Cassim lay hidden.

Cassim was biding his time with the true patience of the Oriental who is bent on murder.

The boys passed so close to him that he could have struck at any one of them with the razor edge of the sharp blade, which he held ready in his sinewy grip.

He watched them as they made for their tent by the smouldering embers of their dying camp-fire.

He heard them moving about, laughing and talking as they slipped into their pyjamas, and made ready for the night.

Then, when they had settled down, without rising or even showing his head above the rough grass, he ripped off, crawling on his stomach, making off for all the world like a snake.

A watchful sentinel would have seen nothing of the lean, brown shape as it crawled through the rough grass in that uncertain light.

Not a blade of the dry stuff rustled on the well-oiled skin of the spy.

But two pairs of eyes, more trained and more watchful than those of any sentinel that the camp could have posted, watched the spy and saw him go.

Robbler laid his hand lightly on the bristling neck of the leopard.

Otherwise those few seconds of watching would have been Cassim's last.

But he was allowed to gain the shelter of the thickets safely, and here he set off running.

Cassim's earlier adventures of the night had made him stiff and sore, and every muscle and sinew in his body was aching.

Perhaps this was the reason that, run as he might, he did not pass beyond eyesight of the two shadowy figures that dogged his steps through the thickets.

But more probably Robbler and his pet, masters in woodcraft, and expert in using the wild-beast paths of the jungle, travelled more directly than the spy, as he twisted and turned through the bushes and scrubby trees.

At any rate, when, after a run of three miles, Cassim, clearing the bush, made towards a newly-pitched camp, these two watchers came to a halt at the edge of the thickets, and held him under observation as he came to a standstill outside a closed tent.

The nose of the leopard was twitching as he scented men and the smoke of the newly-lighted camp-fires.

The wind was bearing down from the camp, and the camels that were hobbled within the lines were quiet enough.

They could not scent the leopard, otherwise they might have given the alarm.

The watchers could hear the spy as he scratched lightly with his finger-nail on the canvas of the tent.

The night dews had tightened the canvas and picket-ropes, and the scratching of the nail was sufficient to rouse the watchful Baron von Slyden from his uneasy slumbers.

"It is I—Cassim!" whispered the spy in guttural Arabic.

Baron von Slyden growled as he rolled heavily from his camp-bedstead.

"Enter!" he said.

Cassim slid into the tent, and stood with folded hands in the darkness, waiting his master's pleasure.

Baron von Slyden struck a match and lit a cigar.

Cassim watched the red end of the cigar glowing and fading as the baron puffed luxuriously at the smoke.

"Why so long? Are the English on the watch?" demanded the baron.

"They sleep not, those English boys!" replied Cassim. "They laugh, and they talk half the night. The black man pulls his tent down, and the goat and the ape quarrel, and only now have they gone to their beds."

"The baron grunted. "That is the way of the English," he muttered. "They laugh and they talk and they make sport, but they never sleep!"

He seemed to forget Cassim's presence for a moment, and puffed at his cigar, sighing heavily.

Perhaps in this moment Baron von Slyden realised that the task of breaking up this expedition of British boys, which had at first seemed such a simple business, was a tougher job than he or his master, the Kaiser, had dreamed of.

"In two hours," he said, "it will be dawn. There is yet time for our work."

There was a click in the darkness, and a small electric lamp glowed.

It showed the baron's evil, heavy face as he bent over a box of polished wood.

This he unlocked carefully, revealing a lining of blue velvet.

Carefully packed within the box lay a dozen red shapes, which were like nothing else but the trouser-clips which cyclists wear.

These were covered with purple silk, and before he touched them the baron carefully took some gloves which lay in the lid of the box.

One of these gloves he pulled on. The other he handed to Cassim.

"Take this glove," he said, "else thou canst not handle these weapons without harm. They look harmless enough, but they are the latest wonder of the science of the Fatherland."

Cassim pulled on the glove and took the objects as one by one the baron took them carefully out of their velvet-lined case.

"We will recover these stranglers when they have done their work," he said. "They will serve us again. Thou knowest how to use them."

Cassim took the twelve objects carefully in his gloved hand.

"I understand how to use them, master," he said. "I approach the tents and slip these under the canvas close by the heads of the English, who will be sleeping with their feet to the tent-pole. The rest the killers do for themselves."

The baron nodded.

"Go," he said; "and have a care that they do not turn on thee. They are more deadly than the python. It is that glove of asbestos that saves thee now from their grip."

Cassim salaamed, but was careful not to raise the hand which held the weapons close to his face.

Then, turning, he slipped from the tent like a shadow.

The two watchers at the edge of the thickets saw him advancing towards them as he made for the cover of the bush.

They did not move as the spy approached, and though Cassim passed within a few yards of them he did not see the shapes which had taken cover in the shadows.

His furtive, shifty eyes were casting from side to side, but Robbler and the leopard were hidden from him.

Off he went, travelling fast through the woods towards the sleeping camp of the boys.

And on his track followed those two relentless pursuers.

The moon had set now, and the darkness that comes before the dawn had cast its shadow on the bush.

It was in these two hours of darkness that Cassim meant to do his deadly work.

The two who followed him could see as well by night as by day.

Cassim blundered and faltered as he passed through the dark woods, but Robbler and his pet did not swerve a hair's breadth from the line by which they had advanced towards the camp of the Germans.

As they had come out so they went back, halting slightly in their pace now and then, lest they should overtake their quarry.

They followed him to the verge of the camping-ground, and there they halted again, the boy's hand resting lightly on the scruff of the leopard's collar of bristling hair.

Tiddles seemed to understand that there was something evil in the wind.

His sinewy frame quivered slightly, but he made no sound.

A word from Robbler, and he would have launched himself on that slinking figure that was making towards the tent occupied by the boys.

Cassim did not go right up to the tent. He paused within six feet of the picket-ropes and passed round it, dropping at regular intervals those queer-shaped weapons of the Kaiser's spies.

Then he moved away towards the tent which was occupied by Cy Sprague, Captain Handyman, and Flint Pasha.

Outside this tent he dropped three more of the strange horseshoe-shaped objects. A moment later he disappeared into the tent.

In Deadly Peril!

In the tent the boys were sleeping peacefully.

Their adventures had excited them, and in the case of the Skeleton the tin of lobster he had eaten for supper was disturbing him.

Skeleton was a restless sleeper in any case. With a tin of lobster walking about inside him he was a waking nightmare.

He groaned and bumbled.

Then he shot out a bony fist in his troubled slumbers and hit Dick Dorrington in the eye.

Dick was sitting up in a second.

"What's the game, Skeleton, you idiot?" he demanded. "If you punch my eye again I'll chuck you out of the tent!"

But Skeleton only groaned in his sleep, and shot out a bony leg and foot into the gloom of the tent.

This time it was Porkis who sat up and mumbled.

"Steady on, Skeleton, old chap!" he said in a low voice. "I don't mind you punching Dick in the eye, but I wish you'd take your foot out of my mouth!"

Skeleton groaned again and woke up.

"I am awfully sorry, you chaps," he said. "I was dreaming; that was all. I had a rotten dream. I forget what it was about, but it was a fair rotter."

"You'll have a more rotten dream still if you start hitting out like that!" exclaimed Dick Dorrington, nursing his eye.

"You ought to sleep in handcuffs!" "Or leg-irons!" put in Porkis.

The boys settled themselves for sleep again.

They had been sleeping with their feet to the pole of the tent, but they all agreed that it would be better to turn their heads that way.

"Then they would not have a chance of getting kicked in the ear by the restless Skeleton."

They were barely asleep again when outside the tent the silence of the night was broken by a hullabaloo, such as they had never heard before in their lives.

The boys shot up in bed immediately.

"Crums!" exclaimed Porkis in awestricken tones. "What's that row?"

"I'm going out to see what it is," said Dick Dorrington.

Dick's legs were tangled up by his blankets, and for a moment he could not get out of his bed.

And in that moment a yell went up from Skeleton.

"Ow! Yow-ow!" yelled Skeleton. "Something has got hold of my ankle!"

"Rot! You're dreaming again!" exclaimed Dick as he struggled to free his legs from the blankets which encumbered his movements. "Let me off, you fellows! Someone grope around in the dark and find the electric lamp! It's somewhere by the tent-pole! Skeleton's off his chump! He's dreaming, that's all!"

But Skeleton let loose a howl that showed that he was by no means dreaming. It was a real howl of pain and anguish.

"Help!" he yelled. "Help! There's something grabbing hold of my ankle! It's crushing into the bone! Yow-ow!"

The boys' hearts stood still. This was no nightmare of Skeleton's.

He had shoved his feet out of the tent under the fly, which was slightly raised to ventilate the interior, and it was plain that something had laid hold of him.

"Quick! The light—a lamp or a match—anything!" exclaimed Dick in an awestricken voice.

The boys groped about hurriedly in the gloom of the tent, but the electric lamp which had been placed at the foot of the tent-pole with the matches and candle had been shifted.

It could not be found, and in the meantime Skeleton was howling with anguish, and that terrible hullabaloo was going on outside with unabated vigour.

It was Arty Dove who reached out in the darkness to the agonised Skeleton and ran his hand down his leg to see what was biting him.

"Yow! I feel as if my foot was in a man-trap!" moaned Skeleton.

Arty Dove could feel something as near as possible like a trouser-clip caught about Skeleton's leg.

But no trouser-clip ever fitted as tight as this thing, which had cut through the leg of the boy's pyjamas, and was wringing blood where it closed about the ankle.

Arty seized the bit of steel, or wire, or whatever it was.

He tried to force its springy jaws apart. But even his herculean strength was jut to the test.

Arty's hands were tremendously powerful. But it took all his strength to shift this thing which had seized on Skeleton's bony ankle.

At last he tore it asunder, and hurled it out at the door of the tent.

All he could feel of it was that it was in the shape of a horseshoe of comparatively slender spring or wire, and covered with silk.

As it ran through his hands it seemed like something alive, and moved as though it would close on him and grip him.

But he did not hold it long enough to give it a chance.

Away it went into the night, and fell on the grass far outside the tent door, whilst Skeleton sat groaning and nursing his crushed ankle.

The boys, satisfied that Skeleton was not killed, rushed out at the door.

All they could see was the dim shape of Horace dancing in the gloom, whilst Cecil danced round Horace, banging his great chest with his hairy fist, making the booming noise that he always set up when alarmed or angry.

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THE BOYS WHO BEAT THE KAISER

(Continued from the previous page.)

Horace was bleating piteously, and the boys saw that he was dancing and rolling over with only three legs to spare. One of his hind-legs was apparently bound up to his horns. "Jiminy!" exclaimed Arty Dove. "The same beastly thing as got hold of Skeleton has nabbed poor old Horace. No wonder he's so jolly mad!"

"Poor old Gus!" exclaimed Porkis sorrowfully. "He's done in!" "S-s-s-s-s-s!" breathed Gus, as much as to say: "That's about it! It's me for the Golden West!" In the meantime Arty had watched his chance with the bounding Horace, who, being more or less white in colour, showed up in the darkness. The first thing to do before trying to get the thing unfastened which was tying up Horace was to get Horace down and quiet. This was easier said than done. But Arty watched his chance, and, catching Horace when he was standing for a moment on three legs, he gave him a punch in the ribs and rolled him over. Horace replied by kicking Arty in the face with the only leg he had to spare. But Arty's hands were already on the silken-covered spring. He heaved with all his strength, and opened its jaws a fraction of an inch. Arty pulled the spring, and Horace did the rest in a desperate wriggle which filled the air with flying arms and legs and hoofs and horns. With a queer metallic ring, the murderous loop which had bound Horace's leg so mysteriously to his horn flew through the air, and was lost in the darkness. Horace butted Arty once in the stomach by way of showing his gratitude at being freed. Then all the fight went out of him. He hobbled round in a circle holding up his injured hind-leg. Then he sat down in the grass and bleated. Arty examined the goat's leg. There was a nasty deep, bruised impression where the band had attached itself. "Whatever can those beastly things be?" he demanded.

No answer came to his question. But Captain Handyman, Cy Sprague, and Flint Pasha, awakened from their slumbers by the noise, came rushing up, hastily dressing as they ran. They listened wonderingly to the disjointed story of the boys, who told them of the mysterious springs, or bands, which had nearly broken Skeleton's leg, and which had nearly throttled Gus. Cy Sprague cast about cautiously. "Be careful where you step, boys," he said. "I've a notion of the game they are playing on us. I had heard of these Strangers, as they call them. Some were smuggled out of Germany, and figured in one or two queer murder cases in New York. Ah, I thought so!" Cy Sprague had stooped and picked up a glove from the ground. It was a heavy, rough-made glove of asbestos cloth. He slipped it on his hand, and groped about in the grass at the spots where the boys indicated. Presently he came upon one of the mysterious weapons of the Kaiser's spies, and, handling it cautiously, brought it to the light which Skeleton had managed to find at last in the tent. "It's just what I thought it was," he muttered. "Those scoundrels are up in everything. Look, Handyman! This is one of the latest inventions of German science. It is a highly contractile plate of metal, which closes at the slightest rise of temperature. You see the game? One of these silken-covered springs is introduced anywhere near a sleeping person. It opens and closes and travels like a living thing to the exposed part of that person, attracted by the heat. So it will close about a victim's throat as slowly, softly, and as surely as a murderer's fingers!" Captain Handyman whistled as he stood and watched the horseshoe of silken-covered metal which Cy held in his hand. "You see the object of the asbestos glove?" said Cy Sprague. "Asbestos is a non-conductor of heat. Otherwise, one

of the beastly things would turn and get a grip on the wrist of the chap who was carrying it, and once it got its grip, would bite till it bit his hand off. It is powerful enough to crush through sinew and bone in time!" "The Huns!" muttered Captain Handyman, in awed tones. "D'you mean to say that they have been scattering this sort of stuff round our camp?" "That's plain," replied Cy Sprague. "I expect they put a native on to the job—a fellow who was not used to wearing gloves. As soon as he had got rid of his load he dropped the glove as he made off." Soon lights and electric-lamps were playing all round the camp. The twelve stranglers which had been dropped about the tents were recovered, and the traces of Cecil's and Horace's and Gus' tracks were taken up by Cy Sprague. The detective read the story as plainly as a printed book. A man had come from the wood, a man who wore native sandals. He had approached to the tent. He had walked round the tent occupied by the boys, and had dropped the murderous weapons one by one. The mist, which had swept up from the river at midnight, had left a dew upon the grass which made all tracks plainly visible, and Cy even pointed out how the strangers, attracted by the slightly greater warmth of the tents over that of the atmosphere, had crawled, almost like living things, opening and closing, till one had finally found its way to Skeleton's ankle. Those murderous snares which had been cast down by the tent occupied by the captain and Cy and Flint Pasha had never done their work. One had fastened on to Gus, who was crawling round the camp on his own, another had attached itself to Horace's hind leg, whilst the third had been kicked far away in Horace's wild struggles. Gus had suffered most from the squeeze. The metal band had not squeezed Gus

so hard, for Gus' temperature was lower than that of a human being. Gus could not have been described as a warm-hearted chap, and the strangler which had fastened itself to his neck had taken a longer time to squeeze. So Gus was still pretty sick. When Skeleton's leg had been tied up and his bruises had been doctored, and when Horace, much against his will, had been bandaged all the way up his damaged hind leg, the little group gathered about Gus. Gus was lying on his back still, showing a sort of dirty-yellow crocodile waist-coat. His eyes were wide open, and his formidable row of teeth were tightly closed. His breath came and went in short hisses. Cy Sprague surveyed the crocodile grimly. "I'm afraid you have got to make up your minds to it, boys," said Cy. "That croc is pretty sick. I've never seen a croc die, but I should say that Gus is about to hand in his ticket. That rascally thing has strangled him. Still, it is better Gus goes than that it should have been one of you boys." "Can't we do anything for him, sir?" asked Dick mournfully. "Cy shook his head. "I don't know anything about crocodile medicine," he replied. Then Porkis, who was squatting mournfully by the medicine-chest, was taken with a happy thought. "I have it, sir!" he cried. "Let's give him a dose out of every bottle. If it doesn't cure him, it may put him out of pain." And taking the largest measuring-glass, Porky commenced to mix up the famous dose which ever after was known in the annals of the expedition as "Gus' Mixture." (Another magnificent long instalment of this amazing serial in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. I should be glad if readers would write and let me know what they think of this new story.)

LOVELL'S DISAPPEARANCE!



A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of JIMMY SILVER & CO., the Chums of Rookwood. By OWEN CONQUEST.



The 1st Chapter. A Very Near Relation! "Cut!" The Fistical Four, of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, uttered that expressive monosyllable together, in a sort of chorus. Jimmy Silver & Co. were at tea in the end study—a war tea. Supplies were short, and cash was shorter. Therefore, when Tubby Muffin put his podgy face in at the doorway they greeted him as aforesaid. "Hook it!" added Lovell, with emphasis. Tubby Muffin did not "hook" it; he rolled in. "Bunk!" said Raby. "Disappear!" commanded Newcome. But Tubby only grinned. "I haven't come to tea!" he said disdainfully. "I know you've only got war-bread and some mouldy old sardines. I say, I want you fellows to back me up to-morrow, when he comes." "He!" repeated Jimmy Silver. "What he?" "Haven't you heard?" said Tubby. "Chap named Lagden—"

Lovell looked round for something to throw at Reginald Muffin. That cheery youth rattled on: "He's a first-rate chap, you know—lost his right arm at the Front. Hard lines on a young fellow, don't you think so?" "Jolly hard lines!" said Jimmy Silver. "And he's an old Rookwood boy," said Tubby. "If you fellows kept your eye on the Roll of Honour downstairs you'd have seen his name there. He was reported killed; but he seems to have got off with the loss of his arm. He's coming here to stay." "What the dickens is an Old Boy coming here to stay for?" asked Newcome. "The Head's given him a job," explained Tubby. "Being an old Rookwooder, it seems that he got into communication with the Head when he left the Army, and excepting his pension, whatever it is, he hasn't a leg to stand on. He's going to coach the seniors at football—football coach, you know." "Good old Head!" said Jimmy Silver. "But how the thump do you know all this, Tubby? I suppose the Head hasn't consulted you about it?" "He might have done worse," answered Tubby. "But, as a matter of fact, he hasn't." "How do you know anything about Captain Lagden?" "I happened to hear the Head speaking to Mr. Bootles," explained Tubby. "He was in old Bootles' study, and I was coming in with my lines. But it ain't a secret; lots of the fellows know that Captain Lagden is coming to stay here. You fellows are behind the times; you never know anything." "Perhaps our ears are not quite so long as yours," grunted Lovell. "Well, he's coming to-morrow," resumed Tubby. "Now, that chap has been fighting the Germans, and he's lost his arm, and been wounded in the chivvy—quite spoils his good looks. I heard the Head say—he was a good-looking chap once. Now, that chap's a hero, ain't he?" "Hear, hear!" "Well, then," said Tubby, "my idea is to give him a reception."

surprise and wrath, it made the Fistical Four yell. "What are you sacking at?" roared Tubby. "Ha, ha, ha! That ought to cheer him up, if he's got any sense of humour!" chuckled Raby. "But it may make him think he's dropped into a lunatic asylum by mistake, Tubby." "Look here—"

tion, and I believe they lived in the North. It was a sort of cousinship between our grandfathers, I believe." "My hat! That's distant enough!" "Well, after all it's not so jolly distant," said Lovell, who seemed to have a desire to make the relationship a little nearer now. "It's a blood-relationship, anyway. My grandfather was the son of Lagden's grandfather's aunt, or cousin, or something. I remember hearing my pater mention the name once or twice at home, and that's why it struck me when I saw it in the Roll of Honour. I remember my pater said something about looking up that branch of the family, and that he believed Basil Lagden was an orphan. That was when the chap was first wounded, a good time back. I believe he's a good sort." "You'd better give him a reception instead of Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile. Lovell snorted. "If that fat idiot plays the goat when my relation comes I'll squash him!" he said. "I shall certainly speak to Lagden when he comes. Chap ought to know his own cousin."

chums to finish the sardines and the war-bread, which they did to the last crumb. The 2nd Chapter. Reflected Glory! Arthur Edward Lovell was looking very pleased with himself that evening and the next morning. Most of the Rookwood fellows, having heard of the forthcoming visit of Captain Lagden, discussed him and his coming with considerable interest. A man who had been through the fighting in Flanders, and had lost an arm there, was certain to be popular at Rookwood. The fact that he was an old Rookwooder, and had been a footballer of some distinction, added to the interest with which he was regarded. It was very agreeable for Lovell to be able to remark in an offhand way, when Captain Lagden was mentioned, "A relation of mine, you know." It was undoubtedly a distinction. Indeed, as soon as it was generally known that Captain Lagden was a relation of Lovell's, Arthur Edward was called upon to tell all he knew about him, even Bulkeley of the Sixth asking him about the gallant captain. But Lovell had little to tell. Lagden was a distant connection, and the relationship was so distant that the Lovells and the Lagdens were not personally acquainted; but he believed that the captain was an orphan, and had lived somewhere in the North before the war. That was all Lovell could say with certainty about his distinguished relation, and certainly it did not amount to much. But Lovell was very emphatic upon the point that it was a blood relationship, and not merely a connection by marriage. During the morning Lovell was thinking a good deal about his military relation, and after dinner he confided the result of his reflections to his chums. "I ought to meet my cousin at the station," said Lovell. "Your what! Got a relation coming here?" asked Raby. "Captain Lagden!" said Lovell, frowning. "Oh! I forgot! Yes, quite so!" "Look here, Raby—"

(Continued on the next page.)

LOVELL'S DISAPPEARANCE!



(Continued from the previous page.)

so very old. I believe the captain isn't over thirty. "Good egg! Let's ask him!" said Jimmy Silver. And the Fistical Four walked into the school shop, which Sergeant Kettle kept in the ground-floor of the ancient clock-tower of Rookwood. Sergeant Kettle smiled as soon as Captain Lagden was mentioned. It was evident that he had been asked questions on that subject already. "Yes, I remember him," said the sergeant, with a nod. "Remember him well, Master Silver. Fine tall young feller he was. I was 'ere when he came, and when he left. He was in the Second Form when I first saw him. Cheeky little beggar, too! No end of pluck, too!" The sergeant was clearly an admirer of the former Rookwooder. "What was he like?" asked Lovell. "Good-looking," said the sergeant. "I hear his looks have been spoiled by his wound in the face, more's the pity. He was always a beggar for fighting. When he was in the Fourth Form I remember his fight with Johnson of the Fifth. I saw it from my window." The sergeant grinned at the recollection. "Then there was the time he got lost in the abbey vaults—" "Did he?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, with great interest. "He went exploring the vaults, and the boy who was with him shut him in for a joke," said the sergeant. "Rotten joke!" grunted Lovell. "I don't call that a joke. He might have been scared to death!" "He wasn't scared; he tried to find another way out, and got lost," said Sergeant Kettle. "He was lost for twenty-four hours. And Baumann owned up that he had shut him in, getting frightened, and he was hunted for and found. Not a bit scared, either, though he'd been in the dark all the time." "Good man!" said Jimmy Silver. "Who was Baumann? Sounds like a Hun name." "That was years afore the war, of course," said Sergeant Kettle. "We didn't think so much about Hun names in them days. That Baumann was a bad egg. He ended up by being expelled from the school. He took to gambling, and stole from a Form-master's desk. A bad egg, if you like. I heard that he went quite to the bad afterwards, but he was never seen at Rookwood again." "Nice sort of chap to have been at Rookwood!" grunted Lovell. "But about Basil Lagden. Was he great at games?" "I should say so!" answered the sergeant. "Good at football, good at cricket, good at rowing and swimming. Fine fellow, if you like, every way." "He's a relation of mine," said Lovell carelessly. "Then you ought to be proud of him, Master Lovell!" said Mr. Kettle. The sergeant went on with reminiscences of Basil Lagden, who seemed to have filled a good space of the horizon while he was a Rookwooder. When the chums of the Fourth left the tuckshop Lovell headed for Mr. Bootles' study. Mr. Bootles was not there, however, and Lovell did not see him till the Fourth Form turned up for afternoon classes. Lovell rose in his place before lessons commenced to prefer his request. Mr. Bootles blinked at him over his glasses. "What is it, Lovell?" "If you please, sir, I should like to be excused lessons this afternoon." "Lovell!" "I'd like to meet Captain Lagden at the station, sir. He's a relation of mine," said Lovell hastily. "Indeed! I was not aware that Captain Lagden had a relative in the school," said Mr. Bootles. "He's my cousin, sir—I mean second cousin—that is to say, a sort of second cousin—" "Indeed! However, Lovell, you will remain where you are. Dr. Chisholm is going to meet Captain Lagden at the station, and I doubt very much whether he would care for your company!" said Mr. Bootles drily. "Oh!" said Lovell. And he sat down. That finished it for Lovell. He realised that a Fourth-Former was not wanted on the scene, when the majestic Head of Rookwood himself was to be there.

certainly did not improve it so far as beauty went. But the scars of battle ranked higher than good looks in the estimation of the Rookwood juniors. The juniors were interested and impressed, but perhaps a little vaguely disappointed. The one-armed gentleman was not exactly the upstanding, stalwart figure they had imagined. But they were determined to be pleased with him, as was natural; and they would not admit, even in their thoughts, that he fell short of what they had expected. Captain Lagden was walking with the Head, apparently viewing once more his boyhood's haunts with great interest. "I suppose a chap can't speak to him now, while he's with the Head," murmured Lovell. "Don't want to seem pushing. I'll nuzzle him afterwards." "And you can introduce your pals," said Jimmy, with a smile. "I say, you chaps—" "Hallo, Tubby!" "That's Captain Lagden," said Tubby Muffin, with a jerk of the head towards Dr. Chisholm and his companion. "I say, are you going to back me up? I've finished my speech. Do you fellows think I could tackle him while he's with the Head?" "Oh, my hat!" "Perhaps it would be all the more impressive!" suggested Tubby. "You young ass!" "Splendid idea!" exclaimed Mornington of the Fourth, joining the juniors with Erroll. "Go it, Tubby! We'll follow you!" "Morny!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. Mornington closed one eye. "Let Tubby go ahead!" he answered. "He won't be happy till he gets it! You lead the way, Tubby!" "Go it!" grunted Raby. "Strike the iron while it's hot!" chuckled Lovell, entering into the joke. "Don't lose time." Tubby Muffin swelled with importance. With the support of the Fistical Four and Mornington and Erroll he felt that the reception would be sufficiently imposing. "They're coming back this way," said Jimmy Silver, grinning. "Now's your chance, Muffin!" "You fellows follow me," said Tubby. "We're after you," said Mornington. "Lead on!" "Right-ho!" Tubby Muffin turned, and marched off towards the Head and the captain, who were returning towards the School House. The Fourth-Formers marched after him, and Tubby, glancing round, saw that they were following. But as he neared the two gentlemen his supporters swerved off, and disappeared under the beeches. Tubby, quite unaware of that defection, marched on, regarded with considerable surprise by the Head and Captain Lagden. In the full belief that his faithless followers were still close behind him, ready to back him up, Tubby Muffin halted within a few steps of the Head and the captain, who stopped, too, in sheer astonishment. Tubby swept off his cap. "On this auspicious occasion—" he began, shaking a little as the Head's eye fastened on him with a steely look. "Muffin!" said the Head, in a deep voice. "Oh, gad!" murmured the captain. "On this auspicious—I mean, auspicious occasion," stammered Tubby. "It gives me enormous—I mean, transcendent pleasure—" "Muffin!" thundered the Head. "Ow! Oh! Yes, sir?" "Are you out of your senses?" "Numno, sir! I—I—" "Go away at once!" "I—I—" "Go at once to your Form-master, Muffin, and tell him that I request him to cane you severely!" "Oh!" gasped Tubby. "I—I say, you chaps—" He blinked round, and jumped as he discovered that he was alone. "Oh dear! The rotters! They were only pulling my leg! Oh, dear!" "Go!" thundered the Head. And Tubby went at a run. The Head and his companion walked on to the House, and went indoors. And Tubby Muffin joined the juniors under the beeches with a rueful countenance. "How did the captain like the reception?" asked Mornington. "Oh, dear! You rotters were only spoofing me!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "I'm going to be caned!" wailed Tubby. "Serve you jolly well right for playing the goat!" answered Lovell. "The captain didn't seem at all pleased—in fact, he didn't seem to understand. I don't think so much of him, after all!" said Tubby. "He ought to have put in a word for me." "Rats!" "I shan't go to Bootles and ask to be caned, anyhow; the Head's not likely to ask Bootles about it," said Tubby. "I think you're a set of spoofing rotters, and I don't believe the captain's your relation at all, Lovell. He's too decent. Yah!" And, with that Partisan shot, Tubby Muffin rolled away—not to visit Mr. Bootles. Fortunately for him, the Head did not inquire of the Fourth Form-master whether the caning had been administered.

much discouraged by the cold, chilling expression on the captain's scarred face. "You have a message for me?" "N-no." "Then what do you want?" Lovell's colour deepened. At that moment he fervently wished that he had not known that Basil Lagden was his relation, and had never spoken of him in the school. But as matters stood he was in for it, and he had to go on. "I—I thought I'd come, sir," he stammered. "I'm a relation of yours, sir, and—and I thought you'd like to know. Excuse me!" Captain Lagden started. "A relation of mine!" he exclaimed, in a loud, sharp voice, which showed how startled he was by the information. "Yes, Captain Lagden." "What is your name?" "Lovell—Arthur Edward Lovell." The captain drew a deep breath. "Oh! Not Lagden?" he said, as if involuntarily. "No, Lovell. You've heard of your relations, the Lovells?" said the junior. "There was an instant's pause. "Naturally," was the captain's reply, when he spoke. "So you are Arthur Edward Lovell, and you claim to be related to me." It was not a pleasant way of putting it, and it made Lovell feel more and more uncomfortable. When he had first thought of telling the captain of his relationship, he had supposed that he would be met in a cheery, friendly way; but there was certainly nothing cheery or friendly about the captain just then. His looks told, as plainly as words could have done, that he was not in the least gratified by the discovery that he had a relative in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. Lovell wished himself well out of the room, and he stood with a flushed face, in great discomfort. "What is the precise relationship between us, then?" asked the captain, as the confused junior did not speak. "Sort of cousin," stammered Lovell. "Have you ever seen me before?" "Oh, no!" Again the captain drew a deep breath. "It's only a distant relationship, sir," said Lovell. "I believe my grandfather was cousin to your grandfather or grandmother, or something like that?" "Oh!" said the captain. "Something like that?" "Ye-es." "And you call that a relationship?" "I—I—" "Your father, perhaps, has told you to make acquaintance with me?" asked the captain, eyeing Lovell narrowly. "My father doesn't even know you're here," said Lovell. "I dare say he would have told me to speak to you. I've heard him speak of you at home, and he was saying once that he would like to meet you." "Indeed!" Lovell stood silent. He wondered whether it would do to retire at that point. He would have given a week's pocket-money to be out of the room. "And you have come here to tell me you are my relation, because of the remote connection you refer to?" said the captain coldly. "Ye-es. I—I thought—" "Such a distant connection does not constitute relationship in my opinion," said the captain. "As for meeting your father, I am not conscious of the slightest desire to do anything of the kind. Neither have I any wish to claim you as a relative. Arthur Edward Lovell, if that is your name. In fact, to be frank, I look upon your conduct as rank impertinence!" Lovell was as crimson as a beetroot. "You needn't!" he blurted out. "I—I thought you'd like to know, that's all. I don't see why you should be ratty. I don't want to claim you as a relation! Why should I? I'm sorry I came here!" "Shut the door after you." Lovell walked out of the room, his face

The 4th Chapter. Not Wanted.

Tap! "Come in!" Arthur Edward Lovell opened the door and entered. It was after tea, and Lovell had found an opportunity to introduce himself to the captain. Captain Lagden had been assigned two rooms in the School House—a bedroom and a private sitting-room. The latter was a very pleasant apartment, with a little balcony outside the window, with iron steps leading down, amid clusters of ancient ivy, into a secluded corner of the quadrangle. It was at the door of the latter room that Lovell tapped, rather timidly. He entered in response to the captain's "Come in!" his face colouring a little. Somehow, the captain had not the frank, soldierly bearing the juniors had expected him to have, and though Lovell had seen him several times that day, he had not felt encouraged to speak to him. Indeed, but for the fact that he had told all Rookwood that Captain Lagden was related to him, it is probable that Lovell would not have claimed acquaintance at all. It was, perhaps, owing to the scars on his face, but in spite of himself, Lovell felt that the captain had a forbidding look. But, after all his talk, and—to be candid—his "swank," on the subject of his relationship, Lovell had no choice left, and he was bound to present himself to the captain as a relation. After all, he argued in his mind, Basil Lagden could not fail to be pleased to find a relation in the school; and, at all events, there was no reason why he should be displeased. So Lovell presented himself in the captain's quarters, though with a secret feeling of uneasy timidity. Captain Lagden was seated by the window, smoking a cigarette, and looking over a newspaper. He glanced inquiringly at Lovell, plainly surprised to see a junior schoolboy presenting himself there. "Well?" he said. "I—I've come in—" stammered Lovell,

on fire, and closed the door after him, with more force than was actually necessary. A little winding staircase led from the landing outside down into the big staircase, and on the lower stairs several juniors were waiting. They looked very curiously at Lovell's crimson face as he came down. "Well, was your merry cousin glad to see you?" asked Jimmy Silver. "He's not my cousin." "What?" "It's only a distant relationship—second or third or fourth cousin, at the very nearest," said Lovell. Jimmy stared at him. "My hat! It's further off than it was yesterday, then," he said. "He was jolly nearly your twin brother yesterday!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, don't be an ass!" said Lovell irritably. "Haven't you got on with him?" asked Mornington. "How could a chap get on with an ill-mannered cad like that?" demanded Lovell. "A—a what?" "What are you calling him?" exclaimed Raby. "I call him an ill-mannered cad!" said Lovell, breathing hard. "That's what he is—a rotten, mean cad! He treated me like—like—just as if I was a pushing sort of bounder, trying to claim acquaintance with him for some purpose of my own. I only wanted to speak in a friendly way, and he treated me like that. Why couldn't he be civil?" "Wasn't he civil?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in wonder. "No, he wasn't." "Well, I don't see why he couldn't be civil," remarked Mornington. "Perhaps his old wounds are bothering him, though. Old soldiers sometimes get a bit rusty for that reason." "It's not that!" snapped Lovell. "For some reason he's ratty at finding that he's got a relation here; why, I don't know. He doesn't want to have anything to do with me. As if I want to have anything to do with him, the cad! He can go and eat coke." And Lovell marched off, in great wrath and indignation. Jimmy Silver & Co. could not help wondering. There was no reason, so far as they could see, why the captain should be displeased at finding that he had a relative at Rookwood. Poor Lovell had been bitterly wounded, all the more because his rebuff, owing to his own indignant remarks, became generally known, and some of the juniors chortled over it as a good joke. But it was agreed that the captain had been, to say the least, extremely ungracious, and that, added to many other little circumstances during the next few days, had the effect of making Basil Lagden much less popular with the Rookwooders than they had expected he would be.

The 5th Chapter. Caught!

"It's odd!" said Bulkeley. "More than odd I call it!" said Knowles. "Jolly queer, in my opinion." Jimmy Silver was sitting on a bench under the beeches, when the voices came to his ears—those of Knowles, the Modern prefect, and Bulkeley, captain of Rookwood. He had not heard the two Sixth-Formers approaching, the fallen leaves deadening their footsteps. Jimmy was "mugging up" "Virgil," his acquaintance with P. Vergilius Maro having failed to come up to Mr. Bootles' requirements that day. He did not look round, but went on with "Virgil," not being in the least interested in words not intended for his ears. But he started a little, as Knowles spoke again. "He's come here as football coach, but if ever there was a man not well up in footer, it's he. He can't coach for toffee." "Must make allowances," said Bulkeley. "After all, he was a long time in the Army, and may have forgotten his old skill." "Looks to me as if he never knew much of the game." "Well, he must have. He was a great footballer when he was here, and captained the Rookwood team a good many times." "He's forgotten all he knew, then. Jolly odd the Head taking him on as football coach for the Upper School; and jolly odd his accepting the post, under the circumstances. I tell you he's no good." "He had a big reputation once." "That's what I can't understand. Judging from appearances, I should say he had always been a fumbler at the game." The two seniors passed on, and their voices went beyond Jimmy Silver's hearing. Jimmy laid his book on his knee. This was not the first hint he had heard on that subject, though it was the first time he had heard Bulkeley's opinion. It was strange enough that a man who had come to the school as football coach should impress the Rookwood seniors as being anything but an expert at the game. Lagden of the Sixth, in the old days, had been one of Rookwood's crack players, as Sergeant Kettle remembered very well, and often said. That was not the only curious circumstance about Basil Lagden. Jimmy Silver had noticed that Sergeant Kettle, who had looked forward very keenly to seeing Captain Lagden, had lost all his enthusiasm on the subject. The sergeant never mentioned Lagden now, unless he was questioned, and then his answers were short and dry. It was pretty clear that Lagden had frozen off the sergeant, as he had frozen off Arthur Edward Lovell. Why the man should be so coldly ungracious to persons who were prepared

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN! Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of the BOYS' FRIEND. All readers who write to me, and enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply by post. All letters should be addressed: "The Editor, the BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4."

FOR NEXT MONDAY!

Before I begin to give you particulars of the stories in our next issue I feel that I must say a few words concerning our magnificent presentation plate. What is your opinion of it? Does it come up to your expectations? Do you consider it good enough to have framed and hung up on the walls of your house? I shall be pleased to learn your candid opinions. Drop me a line, my chums; a postcard will do. I expect the majority of my readers will be very surprised by the strange happenings in this week's tale of the Rookwood chums, in which Lovell disappears. But in next Monday's magnificent long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., entitled "A BAFFLING MYSTERY!" By Owen Conquest, you will be still more surprised. Naturally, there is considerable consternation over Lovell's disappearance. The juniors search high and low for him without success, and the behaviour of Captain Lagden is very puzzling to them. When Raby mysteriously vanishes the juniors are thoroughly bewildered. I wonder whether you will be as perplexed as the Rookwood

"THE SCHOOL ON STRIKE!"

By Martin Clifford. There are any number of exciting happenings in next Monday's splendid yarn of Frank Richards & Co. The chums remain staunch to their schoolmistress, and, in spite of the threats of Old Man Gunten, they determine to remain out on strike until Miss Meadows is reinstated. Mr. Peckover, the new master, has every appearance of being a tyrant, but even he fails to deter the juniors. They are resolved to gain their end, but a good deal is to happen ere they succeed in doing this. I should advise every reader to follow this series very carefully. There are some splendid tales to come.

"THE BOYS WHO BEAT THE KAISER!"

By Duncan Storm. There is not a dull line in the next instalment of our amazing adventure serial. The boys have some rare fun in making a mixture to cure Gus, the crocodile; and there is still more amusement when Skeleton unearths an old silk topper

and places it on Horace's head. But this old hat leads to a very thrilling incident. Baron von Slyden, the rascally Hun, follows in the track of the boys, determined to obtain his revenge on them. As things turn out, it is very fortunate for the boys that Skeleton put his old topper on Horace's head, as you will see when you read this grand instalment.

"BARKER, THE BOUNDER!"

By Herbert Britton. Next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND will contain the second long instalment of our great new serial of Bob Travers & Co. The bouncer turns out to be a very tough hand, and once again falls foul of Bob Travers & Co. Barker comes off worst, and resolves to obtain his revenge on the chums. But something goes wrong with the bouncer's scheme, and he has great cause to wish he had left Bob Travers & Co. alone.

Your Editor

to like and respect him was a mystery. With the juniors Captain Lagden had little or nothing to do; but most of the juniors had remarked by this time that they did not like him.

And it was a perplexity to all of them that that cold, forbidding man was the same man who had gone through a career of gallantry at the Front.

Certainly the Rookwooders were very disappointed in Basil Lagden.

Jimmy was thinking over that perplexing matter, instead of "Virgil," when Lovell and Raby and Newcome joined him under the beeches.

"Finished?" asked Lovell.

"Well, no," admitted Jimmy.

"Chuck it, all the same; you've had time," said Arthur Edward. "If we're going to explore the vaults before tea, we've got to get a move on. I've got the lantern."

"Well, I ought to dig into this rot a bit more," said Jimmy, rising and slipping his book into his pocket as he spoke. "But I'll risk it with Bootles. Come on, my infants."

The Fistical Four sauntered away in the direction of the abbey ruins, which, although enclosed within the school walls, were at a considerable distance from the school buildings.

It was a half-holiday, and as there was nothing special on that afternoon, the chums of the Fourth had planned to explore the ruins.

Although, as a matter of fact, the vaults under the old abbey were out of bounds, adventurous fellows often ventured into them, to explore their dusky recesses.

It was not a very safe amusement, for the ruins were in a very "rocky" condition, and the vaults were so extensive that it was quite possible to lose one's way in them, and they had not been used for any purpose within the memory of man.

A legend well known to the Rookwooders told that there existed, or had once existed, a secret passage between the abbey vaults and the more ancient part of the School House, dating from the time when all Rookwood had been a monastic establishment.

Generations of schoolboys had explored the subterranean recesses in search of that secret passage; but it had ever been found the discoverer had kept his knowledge to himself.

There was a legend, too, that the old monks of Rookwood had concealed a treasure somewhere in those dusky depths, and nearly every new boy at Rookwood, sooner or later, was certain to have a look for that treasure.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were joined by Mornington and Erroll and Oswald, as they walked to the abbey ruins.

The seven juniors entered the dismantled abbey, of which little remained but the massive walls and fragments of old windows and stone stairs.

They had been in the vaults before, many a time, and they descended at once the stone steps which led to the door giving admittance to them.

That door was of a modern construction, and had been placed there to keep enterprising schoolboys from risking their necks in the dusky recesses.

It was supposed to be kept locked, but, as a matter of fact, it was generally unfastened, left so by the latest explorer.

It was not necessary, therefore, for the party to abstract the key from Mack's lodge, where it hung on a well-known nail.

The door was ajar, and Jimmy Silver opened it wide.

"Light up!" he said.

Lovell lighted the lantern.

"Groogh! Beastly chilly in here!" said Newcome, with a shiver.

"Oh, never mind that," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "I've got a compass here; I got it on purpose. This time we're going to have a really good try for that secret passage."

"If there is one," said Erroll, with a smile.

"Well, the yarn is that there is," said Jimmy; "and if there is, it must lie to the east, as these ruins are west of the School House. There's so many blessed vaults branching off, that it's not easy to keep the direction; but with the compass we can manage it. This way!"

With Lovell holding up the lantern, and Jimmy Silver the compass, the explorers set off.

Dark and forbidding enough the damp old stone vaults looked, and in spite of themselves the juniors fell silent as they advanced into the depths.

Jimmy Silver's bright idea of bringing a compass proved very useful, so far as keeping the right direction went.

The vaults certainly extended a good deal in the direction of the School House, and Jimmy judged that they were half-way to that ancient building, when he was brought up against a solid wall of stone.

Mornington burst into a chuckle.

"That rather stops us," he remarked, "unless there's a giddy secret door. Knock your napper against the wall, Jimmy, and see if it opens."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's possible enough," said Jimmy, surveying the great blocks of stone of which the wall was formed. "One of those dashed blocks might move, if we had the secret."

"Jolly cold here," remarked Newcome, possibly as a hint that he had had enough exploring for the afternoon.

"Hallo! Here comes somebody else!" exclaimed Oswald.

There was a footstep in the dark vaults behind them.

"Tubby Muffin, I'll bet my hat!" grinned Lovell. "He thinks we've come down here for a secret feed, and he's after us!" He hastily extinguished the lantern. "Give him a fright. When I groan, you all groan, and he'll think it's the ghost of Rookwood."

There was a soft chuckle among the juniors, and they waited in silence for the footsteps to come nearer.

The chorus of groans was about to break forth, when a sharp voice rang and echoed in the vaults.

"Who is there?"

The juniors started, in utter astonishment.

For the voice from the darkness was the voice of Captain Lagden!

The 6th Chapter. Called Over the Coals

"Lagden!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "My hat!"

"What the thump is he doing here?" muttered Lovell.

"Who are you?" The captain's voice was sharp and angry. "You had a light—I saw it! I am quite aware that you are there!"

Lovell scratched a match and relighted the lantern.

The juniors did not think of playing ghost now that they knew the identity of the new-comer.

Captain Lagden advanced into the radius of the light.

His scarred face was stern and angry. He gave the surprised juniors an angry stare.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed.

"Exploring the vaults," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Are not these vaults placed out of bounds by order of the Head?"

Jimmy was silent.

It was the fact, but that was no business of Captain Lagden's.

"How dare you come here?"

Lovell gave his "cousin"—of whom he was not proud now—a glare.

"I suppose we needn't ask your permission!" he blurted out.

"What?"

"It's nothing to do with you," said Lovell independently. "We're not under your orders!"

"Not in the least," said Mornington coolly. "May I suggest, sir, with all respect, that you should mind your own business?"

The captain's eyes glittered.

claimed contemptuously. "He's no right to report us to the Head; it's not his business. It's sneaking, just the same as if one of the fellows did it."

"Better get out," said Erroll. "We don't want to be here if the Head sends a prefect to look for us."

Jimmy Silver nodded, and the explorers, in rather an uneasy frame of mind, returned to the upper regions.

Captain Lagden was not in sight when they emerged from the vaults, and they surmised that he had gone directly to the Head.

As they came away from the abbey they met Bulkeley of the Sixth, evidently looking for them.

"Oh, here you are!" said Bulkeley.

"Here we are, dear boy," answered Mornington.

"You're all to go to the Head at once," said Bulkeley. "You've been reported for going down into the abbey vaults."

"That rotter Lagden—what?"

"Don't speak of Captain Lagden like that, Lovell. Give me the key!"

"Haven't any key," answered Jimmy Silver. "The door was open, Bulkeley."

"I'll speak to Mack about it, then," said Bulkeley. "He ought to keep that key in a safe place."

The captain of Rookwood turned off in the direction of the porter's lodge, while Jimmy Silver & Co. headed for the School House.

"That means that old Mack is goin' to have a wigin' for not lookin' after the key," grumbled Mornington. "He'll look after it in future, and there won't be any more explorin' for us."

Lovell clenched his hands.

"If we get into a row with the Head I'll make that man Lagden sit up for it somehow!" he said, between his teeth. "He's no right to interfere with us!"

In rather cheerless spirits the seven juniors presented themselves in the Head's study.

Dr. Chisholm looked at them sternly as they came in. A cane lay near at hand upon his writing-table.

The juniors could guess that it was

It could not be helped, however, and the unhappy victims had to make the best of it.

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver, at last. "Let's have tea. Feel very bad now, Lovell, old chap?"

Lovell's eyes gleamed.

"I don't mind the licking," he said. "I can stand a licking. I'm not made of putty, I suppose. But that cad—that sneak—" Lovell choked.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Jimmy Silver. "He don't get on with us. He don't seem to remember Rookwood ways, in fact, but he's a good sort in his own way. He had a splendid record at the Front, from what we've heard."

"I don't believe it," said Lovell.

"What?"

"A man who'd been a good soldier wouldn't be such a cad," said Arthur Edward obstinately. "I've never spoken to a soldier, officer or private, who wasn't a decent chap. This man isn't a decent chap, or he wouldn't act as he's done. I don't believe a word about his record at the Front. It's spoof, somehow. That man never was a good soldier."

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "Somehow Lovell's words found an echo in his breast in spite of his reply."

Strange as it was, considering Basil Lagden's reputation, he did not impress the Rookwood fellows exactly as a soldier should have done.

If they had known nothing about him the juniors certainly would not have taken him for a man who had been bravely through the fighting in Flanders.

"You're a bit excited, Lovell, old chap," said Raby soothingly. "Everybody knows that he did well at the Front."

"He got the credit of it," said Lovell. "There's some spoof about it somewhere. I don't like him."

"Well, the fact that you don't like a chap isn't evidence enough to hang him," suggested Newcome.

"Rot! Wasn't I prepared to like him and admire him no end?" said Lovell. "He simply insulted me when I mentioned our relationship. A decent man wouldn't

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Lovell—"

There was no reply, but there was a sound of the door closing softly.

Arthur Edward Lovell was gone.

Jimmy Silver sat in bed, troubled and uneasy.

With Lovell in that reckless and obstinate mood he knew that it was useless to attempt to reason with him, even if he followed him to the captain's room.

He waited in great anxiety for his chum to return.

He heard two strokes from the clock's tower, and realised how late it was.

It was cold sitting up in bed, and Jimmy laid down at last and pulled the bedclothes over him.

Lovell had not returned when Jimmy fell into a doze, from which he glided into slumber.

He awoke again as the clock was striking three.

"You there, Lovell?" he asked drowsily.

There was no reply, and Jimmy concluded that Lovell had returned while he dozed, and was in bed and asleep.

He soon fell asleep himself again, and did not reopen his eyes till the rising-bell was clanging out over Rookwood School.

Clang, clang!

Jimmy Silver sat up in bed and yawned.

He remembered at once Lovell's expedition of the night, and glanced towards his chum's bed.

"Lovell—" he began, and then he stopped in sheer astonishment.

Lovell was not there!

Jimmy Silver gazed in blank amazement at the empty bed, of which the blankets were thrown back, evidently as Lovell had left them the previous night.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

"Hallo! Where's Lovell?" exclaimed Raby. "Gone down already?"

"He's not come back!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"What?"

"The utter ass went down in the night, about two o'clock," said Jimmy Silver. "He can't have come back."

"Great pip!"

"Spotted out of the dorm by a merry prefect," said Mornington. "That's queer, though. They ought to have brought him back."

"Locked in the punishment-room, perhaps," said Oswald.

"It's jolly odd!" said Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver dressed himself very quickly to go down.

In the hall downstairs he found Mr. Bootles in conversation with Mr. Bohun, both the masters looking grave.

Mr. Bootles signed to the junior to approach.

"Silver, is any boy absent from your dormitory?" he asked.

"Wha-at, sir?"

"The hall window was found open this morning by the housemaid," said Mr. Bootles. "It appears clear that it was opened from the inside, and left so. Someone has gone out, and apparently has not returned, as the window remained open. It is extraordinary."

"Good heavens!" muttered Jimmy. He almost staggered.

Lovell had told him that he was going to Captain Lagden's room to punish the captain for his interference.

Apparently he had changed his intentions, and had left the School House.

It was a mystery:

"Do you know anything of this, Silver?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, noting the disturbance in Jimmy's face. "Has any member of the Fourth Form gone out?"

Jimmy hesitated.

But Lovell's absence could not fail to be discovered ere long, as he realised.

"Lovell isn't in the dorm, sir," he said at last.

"Lovell is missing?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Very well. I shall inform the Head at once!"

At the Fourth-Form table that morning one place was empty.

Arthur Edward Lovell had not returned, and all Rookwood, from the captain of the school to the smallest fag, was wondering and perplexed.

Where was Lovell?

The Fourth Form went into lessons that morning without Lovell.

After lessons it became known that the Head had telephoned to Lovell's home, supposing that the boy had run away from school, and that he had been informed that nothing was known of Lovell at his home.

Jimmy Silver was feeling stunned.

Why should Lovell run away from Rookwood? And if he had, where could he go but home? What did it mean?

Rookwood School throbbled with excitement.

The disappearance of Lovell of the Fourth was the one topic.

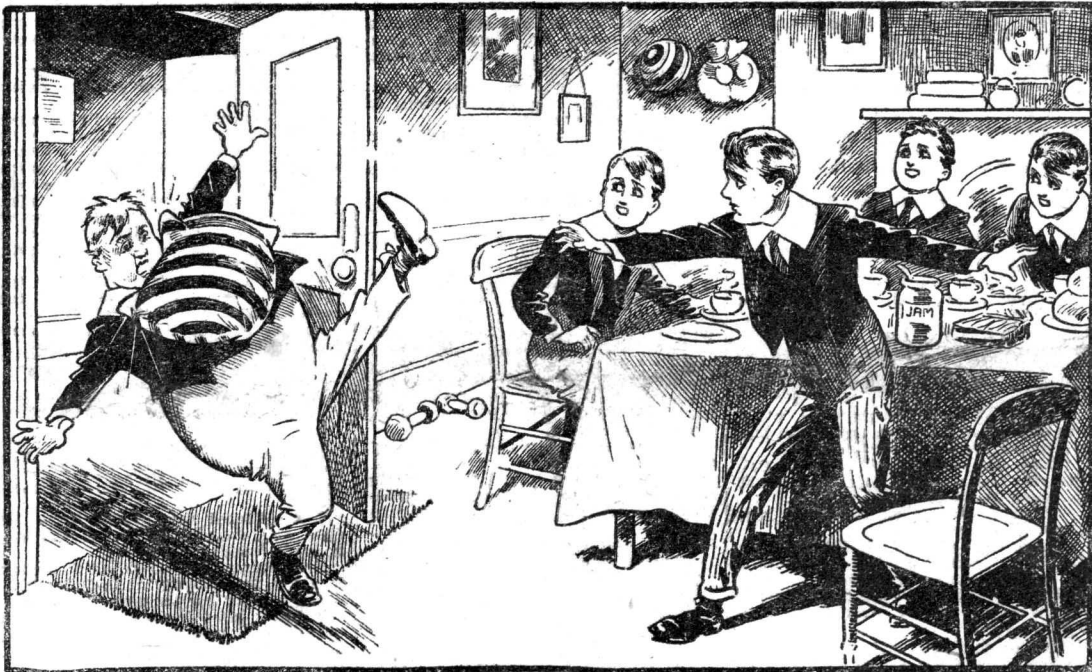
And when in the afternoon Lovell's father was seen to arrive at Rookwood the excitement increased.

Where was Lovell?

From the moment he had left the Classical Fourth dormitory the junior had vanished from human ken, without leaving a trace behind.

Jimmy Silver & Co., with pale and troubled faces, tried to think it out, till their heads whirled. The mystery staggered them.

Lovell of the Fourth had vanished from all who knew him as if he had disappeared into thin air. Rookwood School, from end to end, buzzed with the question, to which no answer could be found: "Where was Lovell?"



Whiz! A cushion hurtled across the study and caught Tubby Muffin just under his fat chin.

"Leave these vaults at once!" he rapped out harshly.

"Rats!" said Lovell.

"What?"

"We'll suit ourselves about that," said Arthur Edward deliberately. "You've no right to interfere with us. A football coach's duty isn't to spy on the Fourth Form, is it?"

"Lovell!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Let him let us alone, then," snapped Lovell. "I've had enough check from him, I can tell him!"

The captain's face was almost convulsed for a moment, and he made a stride towards Lovell as if he would strike him.

Lovell faced him grimly, grasping the lantern and raising it, with the evident intention of using it as a weapon if necessary.

The captain halted.

"Nobody there wanted trouble with him, but their looks showed that they would back up Lovell if trouble came."

"I shall report this to the Head!" said the captain, between his teeth.

"Report and be hanged!" said Lovell recklessly.

Captain Lagden turned away, and his heavy footsteps rang down the vaults as he strode off into the darkness.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Do you think he will report us?" asked Oswald uneasily.

"Jolly certain to, I think," said Lovell drily. "He's as mad as a hatter with me, at least. I don't care!"

"It means a licking."

"Let it!"

"What the thump was the man doin' here?" said Mornington, in wonder. "He can't have a taste for exploring the vaults, surely?"

"He was shut up here once, when he was a kid at Rookwood, according to old Kettle," said Jimmy. "That might make him let us alone, I should think. I suppose the place was out of bounds in his time."

Lovell gave a snort.

"Oh, he spotted us coming here, and came after us to bowl us out!" he ex-

placed there ready for use, and they prepared for the ordeal.

"It appears that you have been exploring the vaults under the abbey!" said the Head severely.

Silence!

"Captain Lagden has reported to me that he found you there," said the Head.

"It wasn't his business!" muttered Lovell resentfully.

"What! You know very well that boys are prohibited from entering the vaults, for their safety's sake, and Captain Lagden was alarmed for your safety when he saw you enter," said the Head. "He acted very properly in reporting the matter to me. You, Lovell, it appears, were guilty of personal rudeness and impertinence to Captain Lagden."

"I told him to mind his own business."

"That is enough. All of you," said the Head, "will be detained on Saturday afternoon, as a punishment. You, Lovell, I shall punish more severely, as a warning to be more careful in what you say to a distinguished and gallant gentleman, who has brought honour upon his old school."

He picked up the cane.

"Hold out your hand, Lovell!"

Swish, swish!

The Head made a gesture of dismissal, and the juniors fled from the study.

In the corridor without, Arthur Edward Lovell squeezed his aching hands in silent fury.

"I'll make the cad sorry for it!" he muttered.

"No good being ratty, Lovell," said Erroll, in his quiet way. "I dare say the captain thought he was doing his duty as he looked at it."

"Rot! He's an interfering cad!"

Lovell strode away to the end study, his chums following him.

The Fistical Four were not feeling happy.

Detention on Saturday afternoon was rather serious, especially for Jimmy Silver, who was junior football captain.

As Jimmy remarked, it would play the dickens with the trial match he had arranged for that afternoon.

have done that. He's a cad, and he's acted like a sneak, and got me a licking, and I'm going to get even with him!"

Lovell's chums prepared tea and let the subject drop, feeling that it was not judicious to argue with Arthur Edward in his present state of mind.

Lovell said nothing further on the topic, but his grim look that evening showed that he had not forgotten.

The 7th Chapter. Missing!

Jimmy Silver awoke suddenly.

It was a late hour, and the Classical Fourth had long been in their dormitory. Jimmy had slept rather uneasily, for he was aware that Lovell had some scheme in his head for "getting even" with the interfering captain.

Jimmy resented Lagden's interference and officiousness keenly enough, but he wanted the matter to drop. He felt that no good could come of carrying on a feud with the man.

Perhaps his view was partly dictated by the fact that it was Lovell who had had the licking. Arthur Edward, naturally, was not in such a placable mood.

Jimmy Silver sat up in bed, blinking round him in the darkness.

Someone was moving in the dormitory, and the sound had awakened Jimmy Silver from his uneasy slumber.

"Is that you, Lovell?" he called out in a low voice.

There was a grunt.

"Yes."

"What are you up to?"

"Nothing for you to worry about," came Lovell's voice from the darkness. "I'm going down, that's all. I'm going to call on the captain, if you want to know."

"He'll be gone to bed by this time, old chap."

"I know that; that's why I'm going," said Lovell coolly. "I'm jolly well going to swamp his napper with ink!"

"Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, utterly aghast. "You ass! You'll get a flogging!"

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.
"A BAFFLING MYSTERY!"
 By OWEN CONQUEST.
 DON'T MISS IT!

BARKER, THE BOUNDER!

The Opening Chapters of a Grand New Serial, dealing with the Adventures of Bob Travers & Co., the Chums of Redclyffe School.

By HERBERT BRITTON.



THE ARRIVAL OF BARKER,
THE BOUNDER!

A Regular Terror!

"Travers!" Bob Travers, the captain of the Fourth Form at Redclyffe, looked round as his name was called.

Bob had a football under his arm, and he and his chums, Dicky Turner and Jack Jackson, were bound for footer practice.

They stopped short, however, at the door leading into the quadrangle, as they observed Mr. Chambers, the master of the Fourth, striding towards them.

"Where are you boys going?" demanded Mr. Chambers sourly, in spite of the fact that the football under Bob Travers' arm supplied him with this information.

"To football practice, sir," replied Bob civilly.

"H'm!" Mr. Chambers frowned seriously. "You will have to postpone your practice then."

"Oh!"

"I want you to go to Meringham Station to meet a new junior," went on the master of the Fourth, quite unperturbed by the resentful expressions on the juniors' faces. "His name is Barker, and he is due to arrive by the three-thirty train. You will have to hurry to get there in time."

"But—but surely, sir, we can meet him at Mervale Station?" asked Bob slowly.

"It is much nearer, and—"

"No, you cannot!" snapped Mr. Chambers harshly. "I am given to understand that Barker is of a very nervous disposition, and in view of the fact that he has to change trains at Meringham, I consider it necessary that somebody should be there to direct him."

"But—" began Dicky Turner, a resentful expression on his face.

"Enough!" rapped out the master, with a wave of the hand. "There is no time to waste. Remember, if Barker should get into the wrong train, or lose himself in any way, I shall hold you responsible!"

Mr. Chambers turned on his heel, and strode majestically up the stairs, leaving the three chums seething with anger.

It was no joke to them to have to forfeit footer practice in order to meet a nervous new boy.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Dicky Turner wrathfully, as soon as the master had disappeared up the stairs. "Why the dickens couldn't he have sent somebody else to meet the new kid? He knew we were bound for footer practice, and yet he—"

"It's just like him," said Bob Travers, with a faint smile. "But it's no good upsetting the little tyrant. He'll come down on us like a ton of bricks if we don't obey his orders. Better buck up and change our clobber!"

Dicky Turner snorted, and Jack Jackson looked rather annoyed, but nevertheless they both followed Bob Travers up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

In very dismal moods they changed into their ordinary clothes.

Bob Travers had a way of looking on the bright side of things, and under his cheery influence both Dicky and Jack bucked up considerably.

And when at length they left the dormitory, Dicky had resigned himself to his fate, so to speak, and was looking quite cheerful.

All the same, the chums hardly enjoyed that five-mile walk to Meringham Station. They came within sight of the station at last, and found that they had very little time to spare. They put on a spurt, and arrived a few minutes after the main-line train was due to enter the station.

They rushed on to the platform, and made towards where the local train for Mervale was waiting.

A number of people were entering the train, whilst others were strolling aimlessly up and down the platform.

"Well, this is a nice go," remarked Bob Travers glumly. "I wonder where the silly duffer has got to?"

"Goodness knows!" sighed Dicky Turner. "Hallo! They're whistling up the local. It'll be off in a minute."

"Phew!" gasped Bob, gazing round in the hope of spotting the new boy. "Are you sure he's not in the train, Dicky?"

"Positive!"

"Well—" Bob paused, as there came the sound of rushing footsteps in his rear. "What ever—Who—My hat!"

Bob gasped at the sight that met his gaze.

For, rushing towards the local train, was a boy in Etons, with a silk hat set at a rakish angle on his head.

Following at his heels were two men—one of thin build, with a cadaverous expression on his thin face; the other fat and cumbersome, with a red, bloated face.

"Stand away there!" shouted the guard, blowing a piercing shriek on his whistle.

But the boy and his companions did not stand away.

They made a dart for the train, which was already on the move, and leaped into the nearest first-class compartment.

"Come on, you fellows!" sang out Bob Travers; and he, too, made a rush for the same compartment.

"Stand away!" yelled the guard once again.

But, in spite of the fact that the train was fast gathering speed, Bob Travers & Co. refused to heed the command.

They scrambled into the compartment, and, breathing heavily, sank down on to the seat.

The boy in Etons, and his adult companions, took little notice of the Redclyffe chums.

The former took off his silk hat, and wiped the perspiration off his forehead. Then he burst into a chuckle.

"Narrow shave that!" he remarked.

"Jolly narrow!" agreed the man with the red face, and he nodded approvingly at the boy. "But it was your fault, you know. You would insist upon having that last drink."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the boy loudly. "But why not? I must enjoy myself whilst I'm able. I sha'n't get much chance of being merry during the next few months. You'll think of me in my prison, won't you, grinding Latin verbs all day, and being called to account by a lot of potty masters."

The red-faced man shook his head at the boy.

"You're a fair coker, you are," he remarked. "I never struck such a boy in all my life! You're—"

"I've surprised you, eh?" chuckled the boy. "I expect I shall surprise a good many other people before I'm done. By gad! I believe in enjoying life while you can. Now, then, what about a game at banker? Trot out those cards, Bennett, old boy!"

The sallow-faced man looked questioningly at the boy, and hesitated.

"I'm not quite sure that I ought to give them to you," he said slowly. "You know what your father said, Master Cecil—"

"Oh, hang the gov'nor!" growled the boy disagreeably. "He talked a lot of rot about the evils of card-playing and drinking, and goodness knows what else! But what the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over. He must think I'm a fool if he believes I'm going to do all he tells me to. Cards, please, Bennett!"

enough to play with. You'll probably win, and—"

"B-b-but supposing I lose?" said the man, in halting tones.

"By gad!" drawled the boy. "What a rotten funk you are, Bennett! I've a jolly good mind to sack you on the spot for being such a fool!"

"Oh, Master Cecil," muttered the man dismally, "surely you wouldn't think of doing such a thing!"

"Well, play up, then," snapped the boy. "and don't be such a miserable funk! Let's cut for bank. Highest card takes it!"

The three cut, and held out their cards.

"You're the banker, Master Barker," said the red-faced man.

Bob Travers & Co. started at the mention of the name Barker.

All unconscious of the look of consternation on the faces of the Redclyffe juniors, the boy started to cut the cards.

"Now, then, gentlemen, place your stakes," said the junior. "Hallo! What the dickens do you want?"

The boy looked up as Bob Travers, his brows knitted in a determined frown, moved towards him.

"I understand your name is Barker," said Bob calmly.

"I believe that's correct," replied the boy carelessly; and then he added sarcastically: "At least, it was five minutes ago."

"You're going to Redclyffe?"

"Correct again!" said the boy cynically. "I don't know how you guess these things; but, all the same, if you've finished asking questions, perhaps you wouldn't mind sitting back so that we can get on with our game."

Bob Travers & Co. coloured with anger, whilst Dicky Turner had the utmost difficulty in restraining himself from hitting out at the boy.

"We came to Meringham to meet you," said Bob rather abruptly.

"Meet me?"

"Yes, Mr. Chambers, the master of the Fourth, told us that you were of a nervous disposition," went on Bob. "He seemed to think that you couldn't find your way alone, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the boy. "That's the gov'nor's doing! What a simple-minded old buffer he is! He seems to forget that I'm growing up. Nervous! Ha, ha, ha! Not much of that complaint about me! D'you think I look nervous?"

Bob Travers said nothing; he couldn't. He simply glared at the new boy.

"Well, I don't suppose you've seen enough of me to judge," said Barker. "Never mind. There's no reason why you shouldn't have the pleasure of making my acquaintance. Join us in a game of banker?"

"No, thanks!" said Bob.

"D'you mean to say you don't play banker?"

"No!" exclaimed Bob, in a ringing voice. "A chap who plays cards for money is a rotter, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Barker gleefully. "What a lot of good little corrupt you must be! But don't let me corrupt your innocent minds. If you decline to play, we'll get on with the game."

Very much against his will Bennett placed a sixpence on one of the piles of cards.

Barker prepared to turn up the cards, when Bob Travers knocked his hand aside. The new boy turned on Bob at once, and the colour shot to his face again.

"What the dickens—" he began.

"You're not going to play that rotten game and disgrace the school!" exclaimed Bob with emphasis. "If you won't stop of your own free will, we've got to make you!"

"What-ho!" said Dicky Turner. "Shove those blessed cards away, you cad!"

"I'll see you hanged first!" roared Barker.

"Biff!"

Dicky Turner brought his foot up underneath the newspaper on which the cards rested, sending the latter flying in all directions.

Barker was on his feet in an instant, his eyes blazing with indignation.

"Take that, you interfering puppy!" he roared, landing his fist full on Dicky's forehead.

Dicky staggered backwards, but next instant Bob Travers had flung himself on the new boy and borne him to the ground.

"You cad!" exclaimed Bob angrily.

"Let me get up!" raved Barker, struggling frantically. "I'll—I'll—Help, Bennett! Hit him on the head!"

"He'd better not!" said Jack Jackson. And, kneeling on the seat, he held his fist threateningly before the man.

Bennett saw it, and he declined to try conclusions with the junior.

"Dickson, you fool!" yelled the new boy, glaring savagely at the other man. "For goodness' sake send this beast flying! You ain't frightened of 'em, are you? Why—Ow! Yow! Yoooooop!"

Barker's head came into violent contact with the floor, and he roared.

But all the same, he continued to struggle and yell for assistance.

But neither of the men made any effort to help him. They sat on their seats like dumb images, whilst Dicky and Jack stood in determined attitudes at their sides.

"I'm done with you, Bennett!" yelled Barker. "You're a white-livered funk! You're sacked, and I won't pay you another penny! You—Ow! Yarough! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Dicky Turner, as there came the sound of grinding brakes. "We're pulling in!"

The red-faced man hurriedly gathered up the cards and slipped them into his pocket. He realised that if they were found in the carriage trouble might ensue.

"You wait until we get to the station!" exclaimed Barker, who, finding that his struggles were useless, had at last desisted. "I'll give everyone in charge! I'll charge you with brutal assault! I'll—"

"Shut up, you cad!" said Bob. And he held his hand tightly over the new boy's mouth.

And he kept it there until the train drew up in the station.

The 2nd Chapter.

A Disgrace to the School.

"All change!"

The doors of the compartments were flung open, and people poured out of the train on to the platform of Mervale Station.

The red-faced man pushed open the door, and, stepping on to the platform, he made a dart for the exit.

Mr. Dickson had no desire to remain longer in the company of Cecil Barker.

The new boy was the next to alight.

With his hat still set at a rakish angle on his head, and his hands shoved deep down into his pockets, he strolled along to the booking-office.

Bob Travers & Co. walked in the rear, expecting every moment that Barker would make a dart for the exit.

But Barker did nothing of the kind.

Although his face was contorted with rage, and he appeared to be in a really desperate mood, nothing happened to create a scene.

The new boy walked straight through the booking-office without turning round, and strode slowly up the road leading to Redclyffe.

Some two hundred yards from the station Bob Travers & Co. overtook him.

"So you've thought better of it, have you?" asked Dicky Turner. "I thought you were going to give us in charge?"

Barker turned round and glared savagely at the chums.

"You—you—" he muttered.

Dicky Turner wagged a warning finger at the new boy.

"Keep calm, my pippin!" he said, with a shake of the head. "You know what happens to little boys who lose their tempers!"

"You rotters! You—"

"You know you don't mean that," said Dicky Turner humorously. "You know you're feeling jolly grateful to us for rescuing you from the downward path. Think what might have happened if we'd allowed you to play that rotten game of cards!"

"Don't talk such beastly rot!" growled Barker. "In fact, I don't know what you want to talk to me at all for. I didn't ask for your company! And, what's more, I don't want it!"

"I'm hanged if it would worry me!" muttered Barker.

"Well, it would worry us," said Dicky, "and that's why we're sticking to you so tight. Just take his other arm, Bob, old son. We shall have to assist him along the merry road."

"Don't you dare to touch me!" exclaimed Barker, backing away.

"I'm afraid we shall have to," said Bob, as he caught hold of the new boy's arm. "Now then, best foot forward! You follow up behind, Jackson! If he's inclined to be obstreperous, just help him along with your boot!"

"Right-ho!"

"You cads! You beasts!" yelled Barker, struggling to withdraw his arms from the chums' grip. "I'll—Help, Bennett, you fool! Go for these rotters! Chuck something at them, for goodness' sake!"

Dicky Turner looked round at mention of the man's name.

There, not twenty yards distant, stood the sallow-faced man, looking decidedly nervous and dismal.

He was not in an aggressive mood—certainly not in a mood to tackle the three resolute Redclyffe chums.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Dicky Turner, as the man approached nearer to them. "What's your game in following this rotter?"

"I—I—I'm his valet, sir," faltered Bennett awkwardly. "I—"

"My giddy aunt!" gasped Bob. "This beats the giddy band. D'you mean to tell me that he's dragged you all this way to be his blessed valet?"

"Y-y-yes, sir."

"Well, you'd better bunk back to where you came from," said Bob. "Kids aren't allowed to have valets at Redclyffe."

"I told Master Cecil so," said Bennett slowly, "but he wouldn't believe me. I'd go back home, only—"

"Don't you dare to do anything of the kind!" yelled Barker. "Lend a hand, you fool! Send these cads flying! Hit 'em, kick 'em! Do anything you like!"

"Hee-haw! Hee-haw!"

At the strange sound the chums looked up, to see a donkey crossing the field at the side of the lane and making straight towards them.

"I wish you wouldn't make so much row, Barker!" said Dicky Turner blandly. "You're bringing up all the other donkeys! I suppose they look upon you as a sort of father ass!"

"Lemme go!" shrieked Barker. "I'll kick you! I'll—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" said Dicky Turner determinedly. "I'm going to give you one last chance. Are you coming to Redclyffe quietly, or are you going to persist in struggling?"

"I'll—I'll—"

"Very well," said Dicky Turner. "If you won't listen to reason we shall have to make you, Jackson, old scout, just pop over to that cottage across the field and see if you can borrow a pretty long rope."

"Right-ho!" said Jack Jackson; and, guessing that Dicky Turner had some wheeze in mind, he marched off to carry out the command.

Five minutes later he returned, having gained possession of a rope some ten yards in length.

"Good man!" said Dicky. "Now go and nab that donkey. I'm sure Farmer Meeks won't mind us borrowing Neddy for an hour or so."

Neddy was forthwith nabbed and brought forward.

"Now," said Dicky Turner, addressing the new boy, "I'm not going to waste my strength in dragging you to Redclyffe. If you won't go of your own free will we've got to make you. Forward, Neddy!"

The donkey was urged forward.

"Lift the cad up, Bob," said Dicky, "and place him on the donkey so that he looks towards its tail!"

"What's the game, Dicky?" asked Bob, perplexed.

"Lift the cad up and you'll see!" responded Dicky.

Barker was promptly lifted, in spite of his struggles, and placed on Neddy's back.

Neddy was a docile donkey, and he made no movement to get away.

"You beasts!" raved Barker. "I'll make you suffer for this! I'll get you expelled from the school! I'll put the police on your track! I'll—"

"My hat!" said Dicky Turner with a laugh. "We're going to get it with a vengeance, you fellows! But in for a penny in for a pound! Tie the cad's hands together, while I fasten his legs!"

Chuckling to themselves, Bob and Jack lent their assistance in tying the new boy to the donkey's back.

Barker continued to struggle furiously, but he was no match for Bob Travers & Co.

At last he was tied firmly to the donkey's back, and had no chance of making his escape.

Dicky Turner picked up the new boy's silk hat, which had fallen to the ground in the struggle.

"Neddy had better wear this," he remarked. "It'll suit him down to the ground. Keep still, old boy. Let's tuck your ears inside. That's right! Now," he added, turning to his chums, "I think everything's complete."

"Oh, rather!"

"Gee up, Neddy!" said Dicky, flicking the animal's back. "Don't go too fast, else dear old Barker might come a cropper."

"You cads!" yelled the new boy, as the donkey moved forward and he swayed unsteadily on the animal's back. "If you don't cut me free I'll—Ow-w-w-w!"

The donkey broke into a trot, and Barker lurched forward, only to be sent backwards an instant later.

"That's right, Neddy!" said Dicky Turner. "Hoof it, old boy!"

Neddy did as he was bid. From a trot he broke into a run, and the chums had to do the same to keep pace with him.

"Stop!" exclaimed Dicky Turner.

THE ORDER OF THE BOOT!

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale of FRANK RICHARDS & CO., the Chums of the School in the Backwoods.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

The 1st Chapter. Landed at Last!

"Richards!"
 "Yes, ma'am!"
 Frank Richards stopped, and raised his hat respectfully as Miss Meadows called to him from the porch of the Cedar Creek schoolhouse.

The Canadian schoolmistress' usually kind face was very severe and stern, and Frank wondered what was the matter.

So far as he was aware, he had not been guilty of any special delinquencies during the few days that had elapsed since Cedar Creek School had reassembled after the holidays.

But Miss Meadows' next words showed him that he was not the object of her anger.

"Do you know where Gunten is?"
 "Gunten!" repeated Frank.
 "Yes—Kern Gunten!" Miss Meadows' voice grew sharper in tone. "I see that you know, Richards! Answer me!"
 Frank Richards did not answer, in spite of that direct command.

His face grew troubled.

He knew well enough where was Kern Gunten, the Swiss schoolboy—the rogue of the lumber school.

He knew how the young rascal was occupied at that very moment in the old corral near the school.

He had passed that way only ten minutes before with Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc, and had seen the Swiss, with two or three companions, playing poker in the old corral.

It was evident that Miss Meadows had some suspicion of the same kind.

But it was not Frank's business to give away his schoolfellow, rascal as Gunten was, and much as he despised him.

His colour deepened as he faced the schoolmistress, silent and troubled.

"Do you hear me, Richards?" exclaimed Miss Meadows sharply.
 "Yes—yes!" stammered Frank.
 "Tell me where Gunten is!"
 No reply.

"I am sorry to see that you intend to be disrespectful, Richards," said Miss Meadows.
 "Not at all, ma'am!" stammered Frank.
 "But—but—but—"
 "That is enough, Richards!"
 Miss Meadows turned and walked away from the schoolhouse towards the gate of the school enclosure.

Frank Richards made a step after her, but stopped. There was nothing he could say.

If he told Miss Meadows where to find Gunten at that moment it was as much as betraying the Swiss to severe punishment; and that he could not do.

He was standing with a worried face when Bob and Beauclerc joined him.

Bob Lawless had an axe under his arm.

"Hallo, here you are!" said Bob, tapping Frank on the shoulder. "Ain't you coming to help split the logs for Mr. Shimmy?"

"Yes, I was coming; but—"
 "What's up?"
 Frank Richards explained, and his Canadian cousin gave a low whistle.
 "I couldn't tell about Gunten, could I?" said Frank.
 "Correct!"
 "I don't think Miss Meadows needed telling much," remarked Beauclerc. "She's heading for the old corral now."
 "Then she must guess," said Bob. "She caught Gunten in the same place once before with a merry little card-party—the time he was turned out of Cedar Creek, you remember. Pity Miss Meadows ever let him come back!"

"There'll be trouble if she finds him," said Beauclerc, "and it looks as if she will. Gunten has been going it too strong ever since we came back from the holidays. It's pretty well-known that he came back in debt, and he's been trying to raise the wind with poker and euchre. Succeeding, too."
 Chunky Todgers came running towards the three chums.
 "All U.P. with Gunten, you chaps!" he gasped breathlessly. "Miss Meadows is going into the corral. You know what's going on there!"
 "I guess it was bound to come out sooner or later," said Bob. "Gunten was getting a bit too reckless. Are we going to split those logs, you gals?"
 "I'd rather see what happens to Gunten," said Frank. "It will be rough on his people if he gets kicked out. Miss Meadows isn't likely to let him come back as she did before."
 "Come on, then!" said Bob.

The chums went down to the gates, where they found a good many other Cedar Creek fellows gathering.

The news was already spreading.

The sight of Miss Meadows, with a stern, set face, heading for the old corral, was



"Gunten!" exclaimed Miss Meadows angrily, "this is not the first time I have caught you gambling, and inducing your schoolfellows to gamble!"

enough to warn the fellows what was on the tapis.

The disused corral was the favourite haunt of the black sheep of Cedar Creek and his companions.

Keeping at a respectful distance from Miss Meadows the schoolboys kept her in sight as she walked quickly on.

The schoolmistress looked neither to the right nor to the left as she headed through the trees for the old clearing.

Apparently she was not aware of the keen interest felt in her movements by the Cedar Creek fellows.

Miss Meadows passed into the old clearing, and entered the corral through one of the gaps in the old, tumbling stakes.

As she did so a voice was audible—the voice of Kern Gunten:

"Draw any, Keller?"
 "Two!" was Keller's reply.
 "Me draw three cards?" came the soft, lisping tones of Yen Chin, the Chinese.
 "One for me, Gunten." This was Dick Dawson's voice.

Kern Gunten dealt the cards.

The four schoolboys were seated round a log, which was serving as a card-table. A hat on the log was used as a pool for the stakes.

The quartette were so engrossed in their game that they did not see the schoolmistress approaching or hear her footsteps.

On the edge of the clearing a crowd of Cedar Creek fellows looked on, without coming any nearer.

The four players were putting in their stakes now.

Dick Dawson was looking moody and disturbed, and his expression was enough to tell that he was losing more than he could afford to lose.

"Boys!"

Miss Meadows' quiet voice broke in.

"Oh!" gasped Dawson.

Gunten sprang to his feet in dismay.

Keller half rose, his face growing scared.

Dawson sat where he was, blinking up at the schoolmistress as if unable to move.

Yen Chin darted away like a rabbit, with a howl, and vanished round the hut at the corner of the corral.

"M-m-miss Meadows!" stammered Gunten.

The schoolmistress' eyes gleamed upon him.

"Gunten! This is not the first time I have caught you gambling and inducing your schoolfellows to gamble!"

"I—I—" stammered the Swiss.

"Go to the house at once!"

Gunten, with a pale face, walked away, the "hand" of cards still held in his fingers.

At a gesture from Miss Meadows Dawson and Keller followed him.

Yen Chin had vanished.

With hangdog looks the three culprits walked to the lumber school, Miss Meadows following them.

The Cedar Creek crowd brought up the rear.

"That puts the lid on for Gunten!" said Bob Lawless, in a low voice. "I guess he knows it, too!"

Frank Richards nodded.

"He fairly asked for it," he said. "But—but one can't help feeling a bit sorry for the poor brute."
 "Oh, rot!" answered Bob. "Cedar Creek will be a bit better off without him. He got Dawson into his rotten game, and we all know Dawson is a decent chap when he's not led by the nose by a rogue like Gunten. The sooner that foreign rotter goes the better for the school and everybody in it."
 And Bob Lawless' opinion was a very general one.

The 2nd Chapter. The Order of the Boot!

There was a good deal of suppressed excitement at Cedar Creek when the school reassembled for afternoon lessons.

Gunten & Co. came in with the rest.

That "something" was going to happen to the detected gamblers was certain; but so far it had not happened.

When Mr. Shimmy and Mr. Shepherd, the assistant masters, came into the big school-room, they were seen to be looking very grave.

All faces, in fact, were grave.

Gunten looked moody, apprehensive, and sullen; Keller was plainly scared and fearful.

Dick Dawson was red and ashamed. As for Yen Chin, he presented his usual smiling aspect, as if he had not a care in the world.

The little Chinese did not seem to realise the seriousness of the matter.

There was a sudden hush as Miss Meadows entered the school-room.

She stopped before her class, to which all four of the delinquents belonged.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the lumber school-room, as Miss Meadows regarded her class with a stern brow.

She spoke quietly at last.

"Gunten! Keller! Dawson! Yen Chin! Stand out before the class!"

The four came out—three of them with burning faces, and Yen Chin with a calm and placid smile.

"I think the whole school knows your fault," said Miss Meadows in a low, clear voice that was heard by all present.

"Gunten! This is not the first time, for the second that you have been found guilty of rascally conduct. On a previous occasion I sent you away from the school. I made a mistake in pardoning you afterwards, and allowing you to return."

"Silence."

"That you are chiefly to blame in this unhappy matter I am well aware," continued Miss Meadows. "I have been observing you for some time, Gunten. You have not profited by the chance I gave you; rather you have become worse and more unrepentant. You have led better boys than yourself into your own degraded pursuits."

"This innocent Chinese boy and Dawson," resumed Miss Meadows. "They are to blame; but I regard them rather as your victims than your confederates. Keller, also, I believe to have acted under your influence."

Gunten did not speak.

Miss Meadows was too well aware of the facts for falsehoods to be of much use to him.

As the schoolmistress said, it was not the first or the second time that his reckless rascality had come to light.

"These three boys," said Miss Meadows, "will be punished. I shall write to their fathers, explaining the matter."

Yen Chin and Keller looked relieved, but Dawson's look of utter misery seemed to intensify.

But not one of them spoke.

"You, Gunten, must leave the school!" said Miss Meadows. "I shall not inflict punishment; but I will not allow you to remain here to exercise a corrupting influence upon other boys better than yourself. I am sorry, but my duty is clear. You will leave Cedar Creek this afternoon, Gunten, and I shall write to your father, informing him that you cannot be allowed to return under any circumstances whatever."

Gunten bit his lip hard.

"It's not fair," he muttered. "I—I won't—"
 "You are worse than the others, Gunten, and you are the cause of their wrongdoing. You are a thoroughly bad boy, and I should fail in my duty if I allowed you to remain here as a corrupting influence. I hope that this will be a warning to you, and that you will do better elsewhere."

"I won't go!" muttered Gunten desperately. "You can't turn me out, Miss Meadows. You haven't the power to do it!"

"What?"

"My father won't stand it, either. He's got influence—"

"Leave this school-room at once, Gunten!" rapped out Miss Meadows.

Gunten stood where he was, with a savage look on his heavy face.

Mr. Shepherd came across to him, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Come!" he said briefly.

The Swiss gave him a bitter look, and seemed, for a moment, to be thinking of resistance.

But his courage failed, or he realised that it was useless.

With Mr. Shepherd's hand on his

shoulder he was marched out of the school-room, and disappeared from the view of Cedar Creek School.

Miss Meadows signed to the other three culprits to go back to their places, and the lesson commenced.

Mr. Shepherd returned quietly to the school-room, and as he came in, the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard in the distance.

It was the sound of Kern Gunten departing.

The Swiss was gone.

Well deserved as his expulsion from Cedar Creek was, some of the fellows felt a little compassion for the wretched young rascal.

But few considered that Miss Meadows could have acted in any other way.

It was not only that Gunten was a rascal himself, but that he led others into his own dark ways, and his presence was harmful to the school.

The excitement did not die down easily, and lessons that afternoon were rather desultory.

Most of the Cedar Creek fellows were in an expectant mood, fully looking for a speedy visit to the school from Mr. Gunten, the storekeeper of Thompson.

On the previous occasion when the rogue of Cedar Creek had been sent away, Mr. Gompers Gunten had visited the school in a towering rage—though that had had no effect whatever on the schoolmistress.

It was for quite other reasons that she had allowed Kern Gunten to return that time.

Mr. Gunten, the richest storekeeper in the Thompson Valley, was a personage of some importance, especially in his own eyes, and he was certain to be wrathful and indignant when his son came home in disgrace.

Somewhat to the disappointment of Cedar Creek, the podgy storekeeper did not come striding into the school-room during afternoon lessons.

The school was dismissed at the usual hour.

But as Cedar Creek came streaming out into the playground, a podgy figure came in sight, riding up from the Thompson trail to the gates.

It was Mr. Gunten.

The storekeeper's fat face was dark and angry.

He rode up to the schoolhouse porch, and jumped off his horse, throwing the reins over a post.

With heavy steps he strode into the house.

"Old Man Gunten's on the war-path!" grinned Bob Lawless. "I reckon he won't get much change out of Miss Meadows, though."

"He'll jolly well get chucked out on his neck, if he checks our schoolmistress!" exclaimed Tom Lawrence.

Mr. Gunten was shown in by Black Sally, and disappeared into Miss Meadows' private study.

What was said there was not known, but ten minutes later Mr. Gunten's loud and angry tones were heard, as he came away from the schoolmistress' room.

"I repeat, madam, that I will not allow my son to be sent away from this school! Mark my words, I will not allow it!"

"I am sorry that I cannot alter my decision, Mr. Gunten."

Miss Meadows' voice was calm and quiet.

"You will be compelled to alter it, then, madam."

"I think you had better go, sir!"

Mr. Gunten glared at the slim, graceful figure of the Canadian schoolmistress framed in the doorway.

"Madam! Miss Meadows, I warn you to have done with this! My son shall not leave Cedar Creek."

"He shall not return while I am headmistress, Mr. Gunten."

"You mean that?"

"I have said so."

"Very well!" The storekeeper spoke through his set teeth. "It remains to be seen, madam, how long you will remain headmistress of Cedar Creek School."

"That is a matter that does not concern you, Mr. Gunten. Good-evening!"

"You will find that it does concern me,

But the donkey refused to stop. He was well on the move now.

He raced along the quiet country lane at top speed, and so did Bob Travers & Co., but they could not catch up with the runaway.

"Oh, scissors!" exclaimed Bob Travers. "We've done it now! He's making straight for Redclyffe, and—"
 "Isn't that what we want him to do?" said Dicky, breathing hard.
 "Yes," agreed Bob; "but supposing old Chambers spots him?"
 "Phew!" gasped Dicky. "I hadn't thought of that. We shall have to collar him before he gets to the gates. Put on a spurt, you fellows!"

They put on a spurt, but Neddy was capable of putting on a spurt, too.

Bob Travers & Co. gained on the animal, but Neddy was the first to reach the gates with the unwilling rider.

Barker had ceased to rave and roar; he had all his work cut out to remain on the donkey's back.

Right through the gates dashed the animal, bowling over two or three juniors who were standing near the porter's lodge.

Other juniors were walking across the quadrangle, amongst them being Jimmy Wren & Co. of the New House.

Jimmy Wren gasped at the strange sight that met his gaze, but next instant he broke into a chuckle.

"Go it, Neddy!" he exclaimed. "Gee up, old boy!"

Next instant Bob Travers & Co. came rushing in at the gates, to see some half-dozen juniors chasing the animal across the quadrangle.

"Collar him, you fellows!" yelled Bob Travers.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jimmy Wren. "This your donkey, Travers? I thought there were enough asses in the School House already!"

"Oh, shut up, you New House duffer!" cried Bob breathlessly. "Nab him, for goodness' sake!"

"Certainly!" said Jimmy Wren. Then to his chums: "Back up, you chaps!"

Neddy had succeeded in eluding Bob Travers & Co., but he could not escape from a dozen juniors.

The juniors surrounded him, and he was soon held prisoner.

"Buck up and cut this rotter loose!" said Dicky Turner, withdrawing a pen-knife from his pocket. "If old Chambers sees him there'll be the very dickens to pay!"

Some half-dozen penknives were soon at work, and at last Barker slid off the animal's back.

At the same moment Mr. Chambers emerged from the School House and came striding forward.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "What is that donkey doing here? Who is this boy? What—?"

"The villains!" roared Barker, red with rage. "They've assaulted me! They tied me to that rotten animal! They—"

"Silence!" snapped Mr. Chambers. "I presume you are Barker, the new boy?"

"Yes!" yelled Barker. "Those beasts have followed me all the way from Meringham! They've tortured me, and I insist upon their being given in charge at once!"

"Be quiet!" ground out the master of the Fourth. And then he turned to Bob Travers & Co. "Have you had the audacity to act as this boy declares?" he demanded.

"Ahem!" said the chums.

"Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed Barker. "They'll only tell you lies if you ask them! They're cads—they're beasts—"

"Silence!"

"They're absolute scoundrels!" shrieked Barker. "I've been treated brutally, and I demand that they be given in charge! If you don't care to do so, I—"

"How dare you speak to me like that!" snapped Mr. Chambers. "Remain quiet, you disgraceful boy! Travers, Turner, Jackson, go to my study immediately! I will look into this matter!"

Bob Travers & Co. moved towards the School House.

"Are you going to call the police?" demanded Barker.

"Silence!"

"I insist that—"

"Follow me to my study!" exclaimed Mr. Chambers sternly.

"I sha'n't!" cried Barker. "I— Ow! Yow!"

Mr. Chambers did not argue the matter further. He was fast losing patience, and taking a firm grip of the new boy's collar, he urged him towards the House.

Barker dragged himself free, but at the same moment Harcourt, the captain of the school, entered the quadrangle, and Mr. Chambers called for his assistance.

Harcourt was quite capable of dealing with the new boy, and he almost carried him up to the master's study.

The next quarter of an hour was a painful one for Bob Travers & Co. They had to admit that they had tied Barker to the donkey, and Mr. Chambers gave them a thorough thrashing for their pish.

Barker came off no better. He was given three on each hand for insulting behaviour towards Mr. Chambers. He had made a bad start at Redclyffe, but he was to continue no better.

The new boy had caused Bob Travers & Co. a great deal of trouble and annoyance, but they were to have more trouble yet with Barker the Bounder!

(Another magnificent long instalment of this splendid new serial in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. I should be glad if readers would write and let me know what they think of this new story.)



THE ORDER OF THE BOOT!

(Continued from the previous page.)

madam!" roared the Swiss storekeeper. "You will learn, madam, that my influence counts for more than you suppose. I warn you that if my son does not return, you do not remain headmistress of this school!"

"Nonsense, sir!"
"You prefer to put it to the test?" sneered Mr. Gunten.

"I have nothing more to say to you, sir. Kindly go your way, and let this disturbance cease."
"Be it so, then!" gasped Mr. Gunten. "I give you a last chance, madam. Write to me during the next twenty-four hours to tell me that my son may return, and I will let bygones be bygones. Omit to do so, and you, madam, yourself, shall be turned out of Cedar Creek School, and a new headmaster appointed."

With that, the storekeeper strode to his horse, dragged the animal round, and threw himself into the saddle.

With a clatter of hoofs he dashed out of the gateway, and disappeared on the Thompson trail.

The 3rd Chapter. In Doubt.

Frank Richards & Co. rode homeward that evening discussing the affair of Kern Gunten and its possible outcome.

Gompers Gunten's threat to the schoolmistress had surprised them, and excited their contempt at first, but on reflection they wondered whether the storekeeper had the power to do as he threatened.

"The jay was talking out of the back of his neck!" Bob Lawless declared. "How could he edge Miss Meadows out of Cedar Creek? It isn't possible."

"He spoke as if he meant it," said Vere Beauclerc thoughtfully.

"Oh, he was as mad as a dago chock-full of pulque!" said Bob. "But he was only shooting off his mouth, I guess."

"Is Old Gunten anything beside a storekeeper in Thompson, Bob?" asked Frank Richards. "Any sort of a local official Johnny?"

"He's on the board of school trustees," answered Bob.

"Could he make trouble for a school-teacher there?"

Bob looked thoughtful.

"Well, he might," he admitted.

"That's what he means, then."

"But it wouldn't be easy," said Bob.

"There are three trustees for the district, and my popper is one of them. Grimm, the farmer, is the other."

"Grimm, the fruit-farmer?" asked Frank.

"He treated us rather decently once, but he is a crusty old card, Bob."

"I guess so. He's a Galician by descent, and very chummy with Gunten—Old Man Gunten, I mean."

"Of course, Old Man Gunten is a bit of a waster, and he had to do a lot of shoving to get on the board. I guess he thought it made him look a bit more respectable to be a school trustee, and helped to cover up his real character. Some galoots say that a faro game is run in his back parlour at times."

"Nice man to be a school trustee!"

"Well, he keeps it dark; that's the talk in Thompson, that's all. Anyhow, he's a close-fisted and over-reaching storekeeper, that's a cert. A man has to keep his eyes peeled in doing business with Old Man Gunten. Kern is a chip of the old block; perhaps that's why Old Man Gunten is backing him up. I guess Kern Gunten wouldn't be happy at home if he was a nice, dear boy like us, you know," said Bob, with a grin.

"Suppose he wants to go for Miss Meadows, what could he do, then?" asked Frank.

"You know, Bob—you were born here."

Bob wrinkled his brow in thought.

"Well, I suppose he would call a special meeting of the trustees, who pay the school salaries, and so on," he said.

"I suppose they could ask Miss Meadows for her resignation if they liked. But my father would have to be there, and he would be against it. He's got a great respect for Miss Meadows, and we'd jolly well jaw him if he let her be fired."

"Then it depends on whether Old Man Gunten could get Mr. Grimm to back him?"

"I guess so."

"I believe they do a lot of business together," said Beauclerc.

"Gunten senior buys no end of his stuff at Grimm's farm. I don't know whether Grimm could afford to quarrel with him—or would care to, for the sake of a school-teacher he doesn't even know."

Bob Lawless looked rather troubled.

"Still, Grimm is an honest man," he said. "He's known to be hard-fisted, but he's honest enough. I can't think that he would let Old Man Gunten rush him into playing a dirty trick."

"Isn't there anything above the Board of Trustees?" asked Frank Richards thoughtfully.

"Lots; right up to the Minister of Education," said Bob. "But—but I don't think a dismissed teacher could carry the matter further up."

"Oh!" said Frank.

"You see, we're not a city district, or even a town district," said Bob. "We're what they call a rural district, in their tingo, but in plain Canadian we're a backwoods district, a bit off the main

track, you know. The trustees are not paid, and they have to be solid citizens of the district, and things are left to them. Old Man Gunten is a bit of a queer bird to squeeze in; my popper and Old Man Grimm are fair specimens of the regular sort. If Old Man Gunten can twist Mr. Grimm round his finger, I'm afraid—"

Bob whistled.

"I'll jolly well speak to the dad when we get in," he said. "If Old Man Gunten is up to his tricks the popper ought to be warned."

"Good egg!" said Frank. "We stand by Miss Meadows."

"You bet!"

"And if she has to go—"

Bob knitted his brows.

"If Miss Meadows has to go for turning that gambler and thief out of the school, there will be trouble at Cedar Creek, and don't you forget it!" he exclaimed emphatically. "I guess they won't plant a new master on us in Miss Meadows' place without some galoots kicking up a dickens of a shindy. We'll give the new master the time of his life, by gad; if we let him come into the school at all!"

"If!" said Frank. "My dear chap you—"

"I said if, and I mean if!" said Bob deliberately. "We're not in New Westminster or Vancouver, Franky, or even in Kamloops. We're in the backwoods, and in the backwoods a galoot can stand up and talk plain. And I tell you our schoolmistress isn't going to be edged out of Cedar Creek by Old Man Gunten!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank, with a smile. "If there's anything to be done, we're backing up for Miss Meadows, Bob!"

And Beauclerc nodded assent.

As soon as the cousins arrived at the Lawless Ranch Bob sought his father, with the intention of explaining the matter to him, to put Mr. Lawless on his guard.

Rancher Lawless was inspecting horses in the corral when his son and nephew joined him, and he listened to what they had to say with serious attention.

"I guess you did right to tell me of this, Bob," he commented. "I fancy Mr. Gunten was only blowing off steam; I hope so, anyhow. Young Gunten is the fellow who robbed you on your holiday in the North-West—eh?"

"The same scallywag, dad!"

"Miss Meadows did quite right to send him away. I've heard talk about that lad in Thompson," said the rancher, frowning. "Mr. Gunten can send him to the new school across the valley, if he likes, and give him another chance, if they'll take him in there. I shall certainly uphold Miss Meadows in keeping him shut out of Cedar Creek."

Which was good news to the chums.

Frank and Bob were anxious for news on the morrow, and they found Vere Beauclerc in the same mood when they joined him on the way to school.

They found Cedar Creek in a rather excited state.

Old Man Gunten's threat, uttered in the hearing of half the school, had not been forgotten, and boys and girls were curious to know whether anything would come of it.

The possibility of losing their popular schoolmistress made them all realise how much they liked Miss Meadows, and there was deep indignation at the mere suggestion that the schoolmistress might be "fired" for having done what the whole school knew it was her plain duty to do.

Lessons passed off as usual that day, but with that day passed the period of grace the angry storekeeper had allowed to Miss Meadows to change her mind.

It was certain that Miss Meadows had not changed her mind, and that Kern Gunten would not return to Cedar Creek so long as she was headmistress there.

Whether the Canadian girl was troubled by Mr. Gunten's threat was not to be discovered; her quiet, impassive face expressed nothing of her thoughts.

Even when Chunky Todgers, in an excess of devotion, induced a dozen fellows to give a loud cheer after lessons under Miss Meadows' window, there was no sign from the schoolmistress.

Perhaps she was not aware that all Cedar Creek had already taken sides in the expected dispute, and was blissfully ignorant of the devotion to her cause that burned in nearly every breast.

There was news that night when Frank and Bob reached home.

They found Rancher Lawless with a letter in his hand, and a frown upon his bronzed face.

"There's a special meeting of the school trustees to-morrow, my lads," he said. "It's called by Mr. Gunten."

"Oh!" said Bob. "Popper, you'll stand by Miss Meadows?"

"Rely upon me, my boy; and I think Mr. Grimm will be of my opinion, too."

The chums of Cedar Creek could only hope so. But, remembering the bitter anger and malice of the Swiss storekeeper, they could not help feeling uneasy.

The 4th Chapter. Fired!

The post-wagon stopped at Cedar Creek School on the following afternoon, and Black Sally took in a letter for Miss Meadows.

The schoolmistress was attending to her class in last lesson when the letter was brought to the school-room.

Miss Meadows went to her desk, and opened the letter there.

The eyes of the whole class were upon her.

Immediately the class jumped to the conclusion that the letter might have something to do with Old Man Gunten and the special meeting of the trustees.

As a matter of fact, they were right.

Miss Meadows' colour deepened as she read the brief, but very expressive, communication, which ran:

"Miss Ethel Meadows, Cedar Creek School.

"The Trustees of the Cedar Creek School-District regret that they do not find themselves satisfied with the present management of Cedar Creek School. They therefore request the resignation by Miss E. Meadows of the post of headmistress. Instructions have been sent to Mr. Slimmey, assistant-master, to carry on temporarily until a new headmaster is appointed.

"Signed, for the Board,
"G. GUNTEN."

Miss Meadows looked at Black Sally inquiringly.

"Is there a letter also for Mr. Slimmey?" she asked.

"Yes, missy."

"Kindly take it to him."

Mr. Slimmey adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses, and read the letter as soon as it was handed to him.

His kind, if somewhat weak, face flushed deeply as he read, and crushing the letter in his hand, he walked over to Miss Meadows' desk.

"Miss Meadows!" he exclaimed, in a tremulous voice. "You are aware—"

"I am informed here that you have been requested to take my place, Mr. Slimmey, until a new Head is appointed," said Miss Meadows quietly.

"Is it possible that you are dismissed, madam?"

"I am asked to resign."

"It is infamous!" said Mr. Slimmey, in agitated tones. "I shall, of course, refuse to do as is asked, and shall resign my post here if you leave!"

"I am not leaving yet, Mr. Slimmey. I shall refuse to resign," said Miss Meadows quietly. "I shall not go unless dismissed; and, in that case, shall carry an appeal to higher quarters."

"I am glad to hear that, Miss Meadows. Surely they will not dare—"

"I hope not. We shall see."

Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey spoke in low tones, and not a word was heard by the hushed school; but the excitement was growing intense.

Miss Meadows took up her pen and

indited a brief reply to the letter she had received.

Brief as it was, it was very much to the point.

"Sir,—I refuse to resign.

"Yours faithfully,
"E. MEADOWS."

Mr. Slimmey scribbled a rather longer letter, pointing out to the Board that under no circumstances whatever would he consent to supplant Miss Meadows, even for one hour.

The two letters were handed to Black Sally, to take out to the post-wagon, which was awaiting to collect correspondence from the school.

Then lessons were resumed.

That the incident of the letters had something to do with Old Man Gunten and the meeting of the trustees all Cedar Creek felt assured, but they knew no more than that.

But when Frank Richards and Bob arrived at the Lawless Ranch that evening they learned more.

Rancher Lawless had been out-voted at the meeting, Mr. Grimm, for reasons of his own, supporting Old Man Gunten all along the line.

The angry storekeeper, therefore, had had his way.

Frank and Bob received the news with dismay and concern.

The refusal of her resignation by Miss Meadows only postponed matters.

It was in the power of the Board to dismiss her from her post, and there was no doubt that that was what Old Man Gunten intended.

His threat, after all, had not been an idle one.

"And we shall get a new headmaster or mistress, instead of Miss Meadows," said Bob gloomily. "You can bet that Old Man Gunten will have a finger in appointing him, and he will make it a condition that Gunten is taken back into the school."

Frank Richards' eyes gleamed.

"It's too rotten, Bob!" he said hotly. "Old Man Gunten has worked this with Mr. Grimm. It's not fair! And—and we're not going to stand it!"

Bob Lawless nodded.

"We're not!" he agreed. "We'll have a jolly good talk to the fellows to-morrow, and they'll find that they've got Cedar Creek to deal with, as well as Miss Meadows."

The chums were in a grim and angry mood when they rode to school the next day.

Any compassion they might have felt for Kern Gunten was quite forgotten now.

They were backing up Miss Meadows against the Gunten, father and son, and all along the line.

Injun Dick, the tattered vagrant of Thompson, was entering the school gates when Frank Richards & Co. arrived.

He had a letter in his hand.

The chums saw him speak to Miss Meadows in the porch and hand her the letter.

Miss Meadows opened it as the Red-skin stalked away.

It was brief.

"Miss Ethel Meadows.

"Madam.—As you decline to tender your resignation, as requested, the Board have no option but to dismiss you from your present post. You will therefore consider your engagement at an end on Saturday, and will inform your assistants that a new headmaster will arrive on Monday to take charge of the school.

"For the Board,
"G. GUNTEN."

Miss Meadows set her lips.

It was the dismissal.

The schoolmistress glanced out over the playground, crowded with boys and girls waiting for the morning bell.

Then she went back into her room.

The bell rang at the usual time, and Cedar Creek crowded into the school-room. Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd were looking unusually grave and thoughtful.

Miss Meadows had her usual aspect, save that a bright spot of colour was burning in either cheek.

It was a bitter blow to the schoolmistress to be dismissed from her post so curtly and cruelly, and although she intended to appeal to authorities over the heads of the Board, she had no choice but to obey the order for the present, and leave Cedar Creek.

In her appeal against the decision of the board she would have the support of one member—Mr. Lawless. She knew that—but the result was a doubtful matter, as she was well aware.

Her heart was heavy that morning.

She was aware, too, that if she had chosen to submit to the dictation of the storekeeper of Thompson, and take his rascally son back into the school, the dismissal might have been rescinded yet.

That she had no intention of doing. Her duty was clear, and while she remained at Cedar Creek it would be done.

Whatever her thoughts and feelings might be, she had no thought of taking Cedar Creek into her confidence, and it would probably have surprised her to discover that the school had a pretty clear idea of what was happening, and had already decided to "back up" in her support.

Under such suppressed excitement, there was naturally some little inattention during lessons that day, and several fellows were called over the coals rather sharply by Miss Meadows—without in the least diminishing their loyal determination to stand by her.

After school there was a crowded meeting in the corner of the playground, headed by Frank Richards & Co.

From the distance Miss Meadows heard the sound of shouting and cheering, but she little guessed what it portended.

She was soon to learn, however.

The 5th Chapter. Frank Richards & Co. e Resolve.

The next day was Friday, when the lumber school broke up for the week-end, Saturday being a holiday.

After last lesson on Friday the school was not immediately dismissed, as usual.

After that day Miss Meadows was not to see her pupils any more, and she could not leave them without a word of farewell.

She was a little pale as she stood before the class to say the last few words before they parted, little dreaming of what it was to be the signal.

"My dear boys and girls," said Miss Meadows, her voice faltering a little in spite of herself, "before you go I have something to tell you. I am leaving Cedar Creek to-morrow, and when you come back on Monday I shall not be here."

She paused, and there was a dead silence.

"I am very, very sorry to be leaving you," went on the schoolmistress, steadying her voice. "I have been very happy here, and have tried to do my duty by the school. I hope you will remember me with affection. That is all. Now we must say good-bye!"

Bob Lawless jumped up.

"Miss Meadows!"

The schoolmistress was turning away. She turned back in surprise.

Bob's rugged face was flushed, his eyes sparkling.

"Miss Meadows! We're not going to stand it!"

"Lawless!"

"Hear, hear!" came from Frank Richards.

"We won't stand it, ma'am!" shouted Bob Lawless. "We know all about it, Miss Meadows! Old Man Gunten has got you fired because you turned out that thief and sharper, Kern Gunten!"

"Lawless!" gasped Miss Meadows.

"We won't let you go, ma'am! We won't have a new headmaster!"

"Never!" roared Frank Richards.

"I guess not!" hooted Eben Hacke.

"We'll lynch him!"

"Hurrah!"

Miss Meadows stood dumb, petrified by that amazing outbreak from her class.

Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd looked on in sheer amazement, but not with disapproval in their looks.

Miss Meadows found her voice at last.

"Lawless! Richards! You must not say—"

"We won't have a new headmaster, Miss Meadows!" said Frank Richards resolutely. "It's not fair play, and we won't stand it!"

"Never!"

"We'll fire him out if he comes here!" roared Chunky Todgers.

"My boys," gasped Miss Meadows, "I—I suppose this extraordinary scene shows your attachment to me; but—but I must forbid you to show anything like disrespect to your new master when he arrives to take over the school."

"Never!"

"I am leaving to-morrow. You will find your new master here on Monday. You will treat him with the same respect you have always shown me."

"No fear!"

"We won't have him!"

"We'll keep him out!" roared Chunky Todgers belligerently. "We'll hold Cedar Creek against him, and the Board of Trustees, too!"

"Hurrah!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Miss Meadows severely. "How dare you suggest anything of the kind?"

"Oh!"

"You must keep discipline for the good name of the school. Now, please, dismiss quietly."

Miss Meadows walked out of the school-room.

Then the school dismissed, but not quietly.

There was a buzz of excited voices as the boys and girls trooped out into the playground.

Bob Lawless jumped on a bench.

"Ladies and gentlemen—" he roared. "Bravo!"

"Go it, Bob!"

"Our schoolmistress has been fired by a sneaking foreign galoot and his dirty tricks—"

Groan!

"We're not going to have it!"

Cheers!

"New man hops in on Monday," continued Bob. "Well, we're going to be here early on Monday, and when that new man hops in we'll make him hop out pretty quick!"

"Hurrah!"

"If he tries to stick we'll tar and feather him, and ride him on a rail out of the school."

"Bravo!"

"And then we'll bar the gate, and hold Cedar Creek against them all till they agree to send Miss Meadows back!" roared Bob.

"A-barring-out!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "And no surrender till our schoolmistress comes back! Is it a go?"

The roar of cheering that followed showed that it was a "go." The roar rang through Cedar Creek, and reached Miss Meadows in her room.

The Canadian girl looked out of her window, and started as she saw Bob Lawless and Frank Richards being carried shoulder-high round the playground.

Keller, who ventured to sneer, or was suspected of sneering, was ducked headlong into the horse