

THE BOYS WHO CAUGHT THE KAISER!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"By gum!" he muttered. "If I didn't think he was out to tomahawk the old hooker! Runs her into a reef—a death-trap—after dark, as cool as if he was driving a taxicab. Brings her up like a motor-boat, and drops his hook as calm as you please with twelve feet to spare between her bows and sudden death. He's a thunder and lightning skipper, that's what he is. My heart is still in my neck!"

Of course, the boys were eager to get ashore.

There was still an hour left to supper-time, and a huge moon was rising from the eastern horizon to light them.

Captain Handyman did not stop them. A plank was thrown from the hurricane-deck on to the ledge of rock.

"Come along, boys!" he said. "You can come with me and Mr. Sprague, but you've got to keep with me. I can't have you running loose all over this place. You are to stick to the rock, and not to step on any of the sand-drift that you will find a-top of this little island. I want to leave no trails."

The boys followed him, walking tight-rope fashion across the narrow plank.

They were thrilled at this adventure, and delighted to find themselves once more on terra-firma in this unexpected fashion.

Captain Handyman led the way along the broken, rocky ridge.

Sea-birds, as tame as barn-door fowls, flopped out of their way in the moonlight.

It was plain that they had had very little traffic with men.

Captain Handyman did not go far. He stepped carefully from black patch to black patch, where the black basalt rock cropped through the white drifts of sand.

Even in this savage spot there was vegetation, a few rough tussocks of marram-grass and fragile sea-poppies.

The boys followed in Indian file across the bare expanse, which looked weird as a lunar landscape in the white rays of the moon.

Jagged pinnacles of basalt, weather-worn and scoured to strange human shapes by the scouring of the wind and sand, cast long shadows.

These looked like hundreds of men standing silent, watching these intruders of the lonely islet.

Captain Handyman had come to a standstill.

He knelt down, looking at a wide expanse of the white sand.

The moonlight, casting its strong shadows across this, revealed recent footprints, the trail of three pairs of heavy sea-boots.

And where Captain Handyman had come to a standstill, and was carefully examining the sand, lay the print of two hands and two knees.

The sand had been kicked up where a point of basalt projected through the sand.

Cy Sprague knelt on the rock and examined these closely.

One handprint was firmly impressed, the other was light and indistinct.

"What do you make of it, captain?" asked Cy, in an undertone, as the boys listened with straining ears.

"The same as you do!" replied Captain Handyman grimly. "It's the mark of the Beast. The deep handprint is the sound arm. The shallow handprint is his withered arm. I'll bet all Lombard Street to a China orange that Kaiser Bill tripped over that bit of rock and tumbled on his hands and knees at this very spot since noon to-day! We are right on the track!"

Cy Sprague nodded.

"Our thoughts are the same," he said. "You are right in your conjectures, captain. This is one of the old German submarine bases, and this madman is using it on his way South. Hark! What is that?"

Far away to the eastward there sounded a dull, thundering report, entirely distinct from the sound of the surges that were breaking on the lonely rocks.

It was the deep boom of a gun!

The little group, hunched on the crest of the jagged, wind-swept reef, turned their eyes to the eastern horizon, and listened with straining ears for a repetition of the sinister sound.

But no further sounds were heard, only the deep booming of the long Atlantic rollers, which crashed on the windward side of the reef, and burst in thundering sprays.

"Sounded to me like a big gun," said Captain Handyman. "The wind has pulled round to the east now, and I make it out as being twenty miles away. I have a notion that we have just missed Kaiser Bill and his U-boat. He must have put to sea from here before sunset."

He knelt again for another look at the handprints in the sand.

"They are fresh and clear," he continued. "The fellow who tumbled on his nose here fell after the dew commenced to fall to-night. That would have given the pirate submarine just about time to have made an offing of twenty miles, and she's fallen in with some ship out yonder, and got to work on her in the old style."

"I am of your opinion, captain," said Cy Sprague. "But we will take a cast of these impressions before the wind obliterates them."

He turned to Chip, who was at the end of the Indian file, who stood upon the stepping-stones of basalt that cropped through the sand.

"Run back to the ship, Chip," he said. "In my cabin, under the bunk, you will find a tin of plaster-of-Paris. Bring it here with a pail of water and a bowl."

Chip darted off on his errand, whilst his companions stood wondering.

He was soon back again with the desired articles, and the boys watched Cy start to work with interest.

Emptying a quantity of plaster-of-Paris in the bowl, he wetted it, whipped it to the consistency of cream, then he poured it over the hand-prints and the knee-prints.

Whilst this was rapidly setting on the dry sand, he mixed another bowl of the plaster, and poured it into the footprints left by the heavy tread of sea-boots.

Then, drawing a steel measuring-tape from his pocket, he made a careful measurement of the distances between the prints, which he noted in his pocket-book.

The boys looked on with something

like awe as they saw the great detective thus going to work methodically at his old profession.

They had knocked about now for so long in Cy Sprague's company that they were beginning to forget that he had been chief of the New York Detective Bureau, and had been counted as one of the first three of the great sleuth-hounds of the world.

Not one of them noticed that, as he poured the plaster into the moulds of the sand-prints, Cy Sprague's left hand closed on a scarcely perceptible ridge of sand, from which projected a leaf of some substance that might have been seaweed.

This he carelessly slipped into his cigarette-case as, drawing a cigarette from the case, he lighted it with a tinder-lighter, whilst he waited for his plaster casts to set.

The sand soon drew the water out of the plaster, and in five minutes Cy carefully collected these.

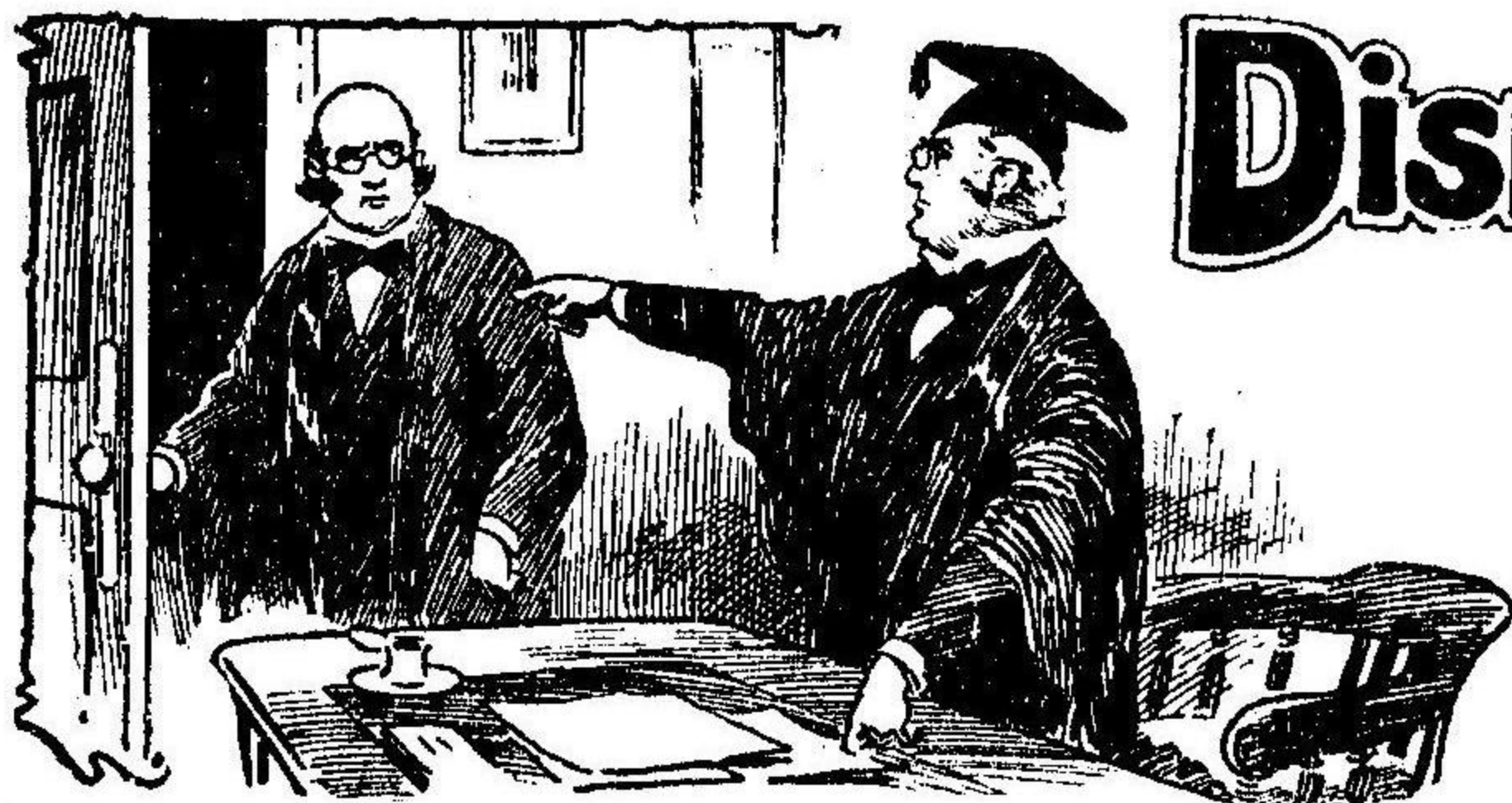
There were two footprints, two knee-prints, and two handprints.

"Now we will go back to the ship, boys," he said. "It is getting near supper-time."

There was a twinkle in Cy's eyes as he said this.

The famous American detective had made a most important discovery—a discovery that was to lead the boys on the track of that arch-villain the Kaiser!

(Another magnificent long instalment of this amazing 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.)



Dismissed From Rookwood!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

Under Sentence!

"I'm going to the Head!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that announcement in tones of determination. Raby and Newcome looked rather uncertainly at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy shook his head hopelessly. "It's no good, Lovell," he said.

"But the Head won't listen to you. He wouldn't listen to me. He's made up his mind. And— Jimmy's voice faltered. "And I'm to be flogged in the morning."

"You sha'n't, Jimmy!" exclaimed Lovell angrily. "I tell you I'll go to the Head—we'll all go! We can prove—"

"He mightn't believe us," said Raby. "He won't even listen to you," said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell snorted.

"I'll jolly well make him!" he said. "Hello, little ones, what's the trouble?" asked a cheery voice in the doorway of the end study.

It was Conroy, the Australian junior, who was looking in.

Pons, the Canadian, and Van Ryn, of South Africa, looked in over his shoulder. The Colonial Co. eyed Jimmy Silver and his chums in surprise.

It was but seldom that the Fistical Four were seen looking down on their luck.

But at the present moment the end study looked as if it had been gathering up all the troubles at Rookwood upon its own shoulders.

"Anything wrong?" asked Van Ryn.

"Yes," said Lovell shortly.

"Well, don't bite a chap's head off," said the South African good-humouredly. "What's the row? Anything about the footer?"

"No, ass."

"Thanks, fathead. We came along to speak to Jimmy Silver about footer."

"Oh, blow footer!" growled Lovell crossly.

"Well, my hat!"

The Colonials looked astonished, as well they might.

It was something new to hear Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth "blow" footer!

"Well," said Conroy. "if we've dropped in at the wrong moment, we'll travel along. But why not tell your Australian uncle all about it, and ask him nicely for his valuable advice?"

Lovell grunted.

"There's not much to tell," said Jimmy Silver, smiling faintly. "I've got landed in a scrape."

"That's nothing new."

"This one is. I'm to be flogged to-morrow morning in Big Hall before all Rookwood!" said Jimmy Silver bitterly.

"Ye gods! What for?"

"Nothing!"

The Colonial Co. became grave at once. It was a serious matter enough.

Floggings were very seldom administered at Rookwood, and only for very serious offences.

The disgrace of the punishment was worse in most fellows' eyes than the infliction itself—which was painful enough.

And for Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form, and the most popular junior in the Lower School, to be sentenced to a flogging, was a surprise, and it needed explaining.

"Tell us what's happened, Jimmy," said Conroy quietly.

"I hardly know," said Jimmy. "I was called down to the Head's study, and found that a trick had been played on Dr. Chisholm. Somebody had tied a cord across his study, and he went in in the dark, and took a tumble. He looked hurt."

"Phew!"

"You didn't play such an idiotic trick, surely!" exclaimed Van Ryn.

"No."

"But the Head thinks he did," growled Lovell.

"Why?"

"Because he's a silly ass!"

"Draw it mild, Lovell, old chap. The Head isn't a silly ass!" said Conroy.

"I say he is!" roared Lovell.

"Then you'd better tell him so, old scout; it's no good shouting at me. Why does the Head think you did it, Jimmy?"

"They found my silver pencil-case in the study. It was dropped there as if it had slipped from my pocket when I stooped down to tie the cord. It hadn't, of course, as I never did it. But it looks as—"

Jimmy paused and coloured, as he read the expressions on the faces of the juniors.

"I suppose you believe me?" he exclaimed hotly.

"Yes, of course," said Conroy, rather slowly. "But you must admit that it was pretty good evidence for the Head, Jimmy. How the merry thump did your pencil-case get there if you didn't drop it there?"

"I don't know."

"Ahem! Not much good telling the Head that!"

"I found that out," said Jimmy Silver bitterly. "But that isn't all. I was in the study a short time before, as it happens."

"Oh!"

"You remember I biffed into the Head when we were playing leap-frog in the quad; it was misty. He sent me in for his cane to lick me. I fetched the cane, and took it back afterwards. He's got it into his head that while I was there I rigged up that trap for him. Of—of course, I had the chance; I had an excuse all ready for being in the study, if I was spotted there. That's how he looks at it."

"Bliss if anybody wouldn't, Jimmy. It does look bad."

"I know it does," said Jimmy Silver savagely. "But that doesn't alter the fact that I didn't do it, and never even heard anything about it till Mr. Bootles fetched me to the Head's study."

"And your pencil-case—"

"I dropped it somewhere yesterday, or left it here in the study. I'm not quite clear which. I know it wasn't in my pocket when I felt for it this morning in class."

"Might have been in another pocket you didn't feel in, if you don't remember dropping it."

"It's possible, of course."

"And you might have dropped it in the Head's study when you were there."

"I don't see how I could, without stooping down— Jimmy Silver broke off. "Oh, you needn't tell me how it looks. Perhaps I dropped the pencil-case there, and perhaps the Head biffed his foot against it when he tumbled over, and knocked it along to where it was

found. I don't know. Or the chap who rigged up that trap may have found my pencil-case, and left it there to fix the thing on me. How can I tell?"

"That's rather thick."

"I know it is. But I know I had nothing to do with the jape on the Head, and it could be proved if he'd listen."

"That's better," said Conroy. "How could it be proved?"

Jimmy nodded towards his chums.

"Three witnesses," he said.

Lovell broke out angrily.

"Jimmy's been with us here—we've been fencing—ever since we were in the quad. He hadn't been out of our sight a minute before Bootles came to take him to the Head. We saw him take the cane back to the study; he hadn't any blessed cord with him. He didn't stay in the study three seconds. Then he came up here with us. Isn't that proof?"

"Plenty!" assented Conroy. "Then go to the Head and tell him."

"Jimmy thinks the Head won't give us a hearing," said Newcome.

"He's too wild," said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head. "I've never seen him in such a wax. He was hurt by his tumble."

"These fellows ought to go, all the same," said Conroy decidedly. "The Head's bound to listen."

"I'm jolly well going, anyhow!" said Lovell angrily. "I'll make him listen. I suppose the Head isn't a dashed Russian Tsar that's got to be approached in fear and trembling? I'm going. You fellows coming?"

He looked at Raby and Newcome, who in turn looked at Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy nodded at last.

"Try it, if you like," he said. "But you're risking a licking if the Head thinks it's a put-up job."

Snort from Arthur Edward Lovell.

"We'll chance that!" he said. "Come on!"

And Lovell & Co. left the study, the Colonial chums remaining with Jimmy Silver to await their return.

The 2nd Chapter.

A Friend in Need.

"Come in!"

The Head's voice was sharp and snapping.

Dr. Chisholm was alone in his study, seated at his writing-table, but he was not occupied.

He was feeling sore, disturbed, and angry.

The sudden fall over the stretched cord in the darkness had shaken up the old gentleman badly.

He had bruises on his knees and severe abrasions on his hands, and a bump on his head where it had knocked against a chair.

Such an outrage against the majestic person of the Head was unprecedented at Rookwood, and it was no wonder that he was bitterly angry.

Indeed, he was reflecting that he had been too lenient with Jimmy Silver, and that he should have expelled the culprit from the school, instead of sentencing him to a flogging, when the tap came at his door.

His tone did not make Lovell & Co. feel hopeful as they entered the study.

Neither did his look as he turned his grim brow upon them.

Seldom or never had they seen the brow of the doctor so thunderous.

The Head's face was severe at the best of times, but at present it was, as Lovell said afterwards, a good likeness of the fabled Gorgon.

His eyes gleamed at the juniors over his glasses.

"Well?" he rapped out.

"Please—" stammered Lovell.

"What do you want here?"

"About—about Jimmy Silver, sir—"

stuttered Lovell.

"What?"

"Jimmy, sir—I mean, Silver—"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand with a commanding gesture.

"I am aware that you boys are Silver's study-mates," he said. "Is it possible that you have had the astounding impertinence to come here to intercede for him?"

"N-no, sir; but—"

"You may go. You can have nothing to say to me on the subject. Silver will be flogged in the morning."

"But, sir—"

"And I trust," thundered the Head—"I trust it will be a warning to him, and to any other boys who may have been his accomplices!"

"Oh, sir!"

"You may go!"

"But—but we came to say—"

The Head pointed to the door.

"We—we happen to know, sir—we were with him—we—"

"You were with him when he fastened the cord here, over which I fell violently?" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Lovell. "Not at all! I didn't mean that. I mean, we were with him when he didn't do it."

"What! Are you daring to jest with me, Lovell?"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Lovell breathlessly. "I mean—"

"I repeat, Lovell, that you can have nothing to say to me on the subject that I care to hear. I have bidden you leave my study!"

"But, sir—"

"One word more and I will cane you!" said the Head, picking up his cane.

Raby caught Lovell's arm.

But Arthur Edward Lovell jerked himself free.

He did not mean to leave the study, if he could help it, without saying what he had come there to say.

"I want to explain, sir—" he jerked out.

Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet, and the cane swished in the air.

"I warned you, Lovell! You have chosen to disobey me. Hold out your hand!"

"Jimmy Silver never—"

"Hold out your hand, sir!" thundered the Head.

And as Lovell did not obey promptly enough the angry headmaster took him by the collar and laid the cane across his shoulders, with a loud swish.

Lovell yelled, as much with surprise as pain.

"Now go!" exclaimed the Head. "Go, before I punish you more severely for your unheard-of impertinence, Lovell!"

He pointed with his cane to the doorway.

Still Arthur Edward hesitated; but Raby and Newcome took hold of him and fairly forced him out of the study.

The door closed on them.

In the passage Lovell shook himself free, and looked at his chums, panting, his eyes ablaze.

"The rotter!" he gasped.

"Shush!" murmured Raby. "Don't be an ass, Lovell! He's rather wild now, but he's not a rotter, and you know it! Come along!"

"I'm going to tell him—"

"You silly ass!" breathed Newcome.

"Haven't you had enough yet? Do you want to be flogged in Hall along with Jimmy? Come on, I tell you!"

"Look here, I'm going—"

"Oh, rats!"

Lovell's chums seized him again, and walked him away forcibly down the passage.

The interview with the Head had been a failure, and in the opinion of Raby and Newcome it was time that Lovell "clucked" it.

Certainly he could not have re-entered the Head's study without risking the infliction of severe punishment.

On the staircase, however, Lovell halted again.

"Let me go!" he growled. "I'm going to—"

"You're not going to see the Head again, Lovell!" said Raby decidedly. "It's not good enough, old top!"

"I'm going to see Bootles. He's our Form-master, and he's bound to speak up for Jimmy when he knows the facts."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," assented Raby. "We'll come with you."

And the three juniors headed for Mr. Bootles's study.

They found the master of the Fourth looking very distressed.

He was in conversation with Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, who was also looking very grave and concerned.

The outrage on the Head had been a shock to the masters.

Mr. Bootles gave Jimmy Silver's chums a kindly glance.

"Well, what is it, Lovell?" he asked mildly.

Dismissed From Rookwood!

(Continued from the previous page.)



many minutes, at least. If you are sure of what you say, my boys, Silver could not have done this."

"We are quite sure, sir!"

"And afterwards—"

"Afterwards Jimmy came to the end study with us, and he was there all the time till you came for him, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Somebody else did it, sir!" said Lovell.

"But Silver's pencil-case—"

"He may have dropped it there, sir, or the other fellow may have put it there on purpose."

"That is a very serious statement to make, Lovell!"

"Well, sir, I know Jimmy Silver didn't put the cord there. He couldn't have, as he was only a few seconds in the study."

Mr. Bootles glanced at Mr. Mooney. That gentleman coughed.

"I will think over this, Lovell," said the master of the Fourth at last. "You may go now. I will speak to the Head this evening—ahem, to-morrow morning! To-morrow morning would perhaps be best."

Mr. Bootles did not say that he hoped to find the Head in a more reasonable frame of mind in the morning; but the juniors guessed that much.

"You may go now," added Mr. Bootles abruptly.

The three juniors left the study, their hearts lighter.

They could see that Mr. Bootles believed their story.

Indeed, it was scarcely possible for him to doubt it; he knew them far too well to suspect that they had concocted the tale to shield Jimmy Silver.

After the door had closed, Mr. Bootles blinked at Mr. Mooney over his glasses, and the master of the Shell coughed expressively.

"Your opinion, Mr. Mooney?" asked the master of the Fourth.

"The same as yours, I think," answered the master of the Shell. "Silver is evidently innocent. Those boys were speaking the truth."

"And if they are speaking the truth, it is impossible that Silver can be guilty." "Precisely!"

Mr. Bootles took off his glasses, and wiped them, and put them back again.

He was in a very agitated frame of mind.

"Under these circumstances, it is undoubtedly my duty to explain the matter to Dr. Chisholm," he said.

"Undoubtedly!"

"But—but—" murmured Mr. Bootles.

"It will not be a pleasant task," said the master of the Shell. "I respect Dr. Chisholm highly, as we all do, but I have not failed to recognise a strain of undue firmness in him—I might call it, even, obstinacy. If I may make a suggestion, I should certainly not raise the matter this evening. In the morning Dr. Chisholm will be—ahem!—somewhat calmer."

"My own opinion exactly," said Mr. Bootles. "It is my duty to protect a boy in my Form from an act of injustice."

"I should certainly do so if it were a boy in the Shell who was concerned," said Mr. Mooney. "After all, the Head is bound to accord you a civil hearing, and the matter will be set right."

Mr. Bootles nodded assent, but he was not feeling quite so sure of that.

In fact, he was looking forward to his interview with the Head with very much the same feelings as Jimmy Silver's.

But Mr. Bootles had a strong sense of duty, and he intended to do his duty, unpleasant as it was.

It only remained to see what would come of it.

The 3rd Chapter.
In Suspense.

Jimmy Silver was not looking happy when he came down on the following morning.

The flogging in Hall was to take place immediately before morning lessons, in the presence of all Rookwood; but it was not so certain now that it would take place.

Lovell & Co.'s visit to the Head had resulted a good deal as Jimmy had expected it to result; but the interview with the master of the Fourth had been more successful, and the Fiscal Four expected Mr. Bootles to intervene.

They had noted that he was looking very troubled and clouded at breakfast.

The previous evening, Jimmy Silver's sentence had been the one topic in the Lower School; and in the morning it was still being discussed with unabated interest.

The Modern juniors were as concerned as the Classics; and Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth, came over specially from Mr. Manders' House to speak to Jimmy after breakfast about it.

Tommy Dodd was sympathetic.

"It looks jolly bad, Silver, old man!" he commented. "I take your word, of course. But I hardly think the Head will."

"There's witnesses!" grunted Lovell.

"And Mr. Bootles has promised to put in a word with the Head."

"But if Jimmy didn't lay that little trap for the Head," said Tommy Dodd, "who did?"

"Some rotter," said Jimmy.

"The chap ought to own up," said the Modern junior. "It's up to him, if you are going to get the flogging for it."

"I don't suppose he will. He would get the flogging."

"A decent chap, would," said Tommy Dodd.

"Well, a decent chap wouldn't have played such a rotten trick on the Head—he might have hurt him badly," said Jimmy Silver. "It was a dangerous trick, and only a rotter would play a trick like that on a middle-aged man! The Head feels a tumble more at his age than we do at ours."

"That's so. It was too thick, even if the chap had had a licking. By the way, do you know any chap who'd just had a licking from the Head? That would be a clue."

"I had!" said Jimmy, with rather a wry face.

"Oh!"

Tommy Dodd was rather taken aback. "The Head had just licked you?" he said.

"Yes."

"Jolly unlucky!"

"All the same, I wouldn't have played that trick on him."

"I know, Jimmy; but it does look bad, and no mistake. Still, your pals' evidence ought to pull you through, if Bootles pitches it to the Head!"

"There he goes!" murmured Newcome.

Mr. Bootles was seen rustling away to the Head's study—where the Head was probably, just then, selecting a birch for the painful ceremony in Hall.

The master of the Fourth had a worried look.

Only his sense of duty urged him on to face what he knew would be a very disagreeable interview.

"Bootles is a good little goat," said Tommy Dodd. "He looks almost as if he was going to be flogged himself."

"He's a good sort!" said Jimmy.

And the juniors waited in considerable anxiety after the door had closed on Mr. Bootles, and he was shut up with the Head.

The Colonial Co. joined them, and Mornington and Erroll and Tubby Muffin and several other fellows; all were concerned about Jimmy.

It seemed reasonable to suppose that Jimmy's sentence would be rescinded, or at least postponed, after Mr. Bootles' explanation to the Head; but—

There was a "but."

The Rookwood fellows respected their headmaster, and were awed by him; but some of them were well aware of the streak of grim obstinacy in his character, which was rather beyond the limit of mere firmness.

"The Head looked awfully ratty this morning, Jimmy!" said Tubby Muffin, perhaps by way of comfort.

"Br-r-r!" said Jimmy.

"I saw him after he came out from brekker in his house," said the fat Classical. "He had a face like a gar-goyle. There's a bump on his napper, and I saw him rub it."

"Is this what you call cheery conversation, Muffin?" asked Mornington.

Tubby blinked at him.

"The prefects have been told to assemble the whole school in Hall," he went on. "I heard Bulkeley say so to Neville and Knowles."

"Give us a rest!" grunted Lovell.

"I wouldn't like to be Bootles!"

rattled on Tubby cheerfully. "I shouldn't wonder if the Head slings him no end for chipping in. You see, he's damaged and sore, so it stands to reason he wants to flog somebody. He won't want to let you off, Jimmy, unless there's another chap to flog. Well, Bootles can't produce the other chap, can he?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"I don't think that's quite the Head's view, Tubby," he said. "The Head wants to flog the right chap, not the wrong one."

Tubby Muffin shook his head knowingly.

"That's how he puts it to himself, of course," he agreed. "But I'll bet you, Jimmy, that what he really wants is to flog somebody because he feels sore. The masters are all the same, you know. They make out that they wallop a chap for his own good, but they never do it excepting when they're ratty."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" grinned Mornington.

"Talking of Daniels," said Tubby Muffin. "I think Bootles is a good bit like Daniel going into the lions' den. I wouldn't have Bootles' job for a term's pocket-money!"

Bulkeley came along with a grave face. "All you fags into Hall?" he said.

"I say, Bulkeley, is Jimmy Silver really going to be flogged?" sang out Tubby Muffin.

The captain of Rookwood walked on without answering.

"That looks bad," said Tubby, wagging his head sagely. "You'd better put some exercise-books in your bags, Jimmy."

"Br-r-r!" grunted Jimmy.

The juniors streamed away into Big Hall, where the school was assembling for the "execution," as some of the fellows called it.

Jimmy Silver received many sympathetic glances.

Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, was the only fellow who did not seem concerned about the matter at all; indeed, he looked very cheerful.

But the cad of the Fourth was on the worst of terms with Jimmy Silver, and probably he was looking forward to the entertainment.

Even Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell, said it was "hard cheese, begad, you know."

There was a murmur of voices in Hall, subdued but incessant.

All the Rookwood fellows were there, ranked in their Forms, with their masters and the prefects keeping order.

They waited for the arrival of the Head and Mr. Bootles.

But the hand of the big clock was creeping round, and there was still delay.

And with every minute of delay, Jimmy Silver's hopes strengthened that all would turn out well, after all.

The various bumps and bruises and abrasions he had collected in his tumble the previous evening seemed to ache more in the morning than the night before.

One glance at his face was enough to show that he was in no mood to listen to a plea for leniency.

It was not leniency Mr. Bootles was about to ask for, but justice; but he had an inward foreboding that his appeal would fall upon deaf and obstinate ears.

In fact, Tubby Muffin's simile was an accurate one; Mr. Bootles felt a great deal like Daniel entering the lions' den as he rustled into the Head's study.

"Well, Mr. Bootles?" The Head's voice was sharp and incisive.

"Ahem!" began Mr. Bootles.

"You have come to inform me that the school is assembled?"

Another cough from Mr. Bootles.

This was a deliberate misunderstanding on the part of the Head, and the Form-master knew it.

"Ahem! Not exactly, sir."

"I have given instructions—"

"The fact is, sir, I have something to lay before you."

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand.

"Kindly do not utter one word in favour of Silver, Mr. Bootles. I cannot listen to it."

"But, sir—"

"The subject is not one for discussion, Mr. Bootles."

The Fourth Form master drew a deep breath. His task was turning out harder than he had even anticipated.

"You will accompany me to Hall," added the Head.

"But, sir," murmured Mr. Bootles feebly.

"There is nothing to be said, Mr. Bootles!"

And the Head walked towards the door. Mr. Bootles gasped for breath.

Even upon the masters at Rookwood the Head had a rather terrifying effect, and Mr. Bootles was not a man of much force of character.

He was sorely tempted at that moment to hold his peace, with the feeling that he had done his best and failed.

But his heart was too good for that, and, though with great inward trepidation, Mr. Bootles dared to be a Daniel.

"Dr. Chisholm," he gasped, "I must speak! I must really request you to listen to me!"

"What?"

The Head turned back towards him majestically.

"Mr. Bootles, I think you forget yourself!"

"I do not forget myself, sir," said Mr. Bootles, with some spirit. "I have my duty to do."

"One moment, Mr. Bootles. Is it upon the subject of Silver, of your Form, that you desire to speak to me?"

"Yes."

"Then I decline to hear you. I am surprised, Mr. Bootles, that you should even think of speaking in favour of a boy who has been guilty of an unprecedented outrage upon his headmaster!"

"I am here to ask justice for Silver, sir!" said Mr. Bootles, with dignity.

"Justice!" exclaimed the Head angrily. "Strict justice requires, sir, that I should expel that boy from the school with every circumstance of ignominy. I have been lenient—too lenient—for the sake of his

fellows called it.

Jimmy Silver received many sympathetic glances.

Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, was the only fellow who did not seem concerned about the matter at all; indeed, he looked very cheerful.

But the cad of the Fourth was on the worst of terms with Jimmy Silver, and probably he was looking forward to the entertainment.

Even Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell, said it was "hard cheese, begad, you know."

There was a murmur of voices in Hall, subdued but incessant.

All the Rookwood fellows were there, ranked in their Forms, with their masters and the prefects keeping order.

They waited for the arrival of the Head and Mr. Bootles.

But the hand of the big clock was creeping round, and there was still delay.

And with every minute of delay, Jimmy Silver's hopes strengthened that all would turn out well, after all.

The 4th Chapter.
N.G.

Dr. Chisholm did not look pleased as Mr. Bootles entered his study.

There was a birch on the table before him, upon which Mr. Bootles' eyes rested for a moment uneasily.

The Head's expression was hard and uncompromising. Perhaps he guessed that the master of the Fourth had come there to intercede for the condemned junior.

As a matter of fact, the doctor was feeling very out of sorts that raw morning.

many minutes, at least. If you are sure of what you say, my boys, Silver could not have done this."

"We are quite sure, sir!"

"And afterwards—"

"Afterwards Jimmy came to the end study with us, and he was there all the time till you came for him, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Somebody else did it, sir!" said Lovell.

"But Silver's pencil-case—"

"He may have dropped it there, sir, or the other fellow may have put it there on purpose."

"That is a very serious statement to make, Lovell!"

"Well, sir, I know Jimmy Silver didn't put the cord there. He couldn't have, as he was only a few seconds in the study."

Mr. Bootles glanced at Mr. Mooney. That gentleman coughed.

"I will think over this, Lovell," said the master of the Fourth at last. "You may go now. I will speak to the Head this evening—ahem, to-morrow morning! To-morrow morning would perhaps be best."

Mr. Bootles did not say that he hoped to find the Head in a more reasonable frame of mind in the morning; but the juniors guessed that much.

"You may go now," added Mr. Bootles abruptly.

The three juniors left the study, their hearts lighter.

They could see that Mr. Bootles believed their story.

Indeed, it was scarcely possible for him to doubt it; he knew them far too well to suspect that they had concocted the tale to shield Jimmy Silver.

After the door had closed, Mr. Bootles blinked at Mr. Mooney over his glasses, and the master of the Shell coughed expressively.

"Your opinion, Mr. Mooney?" asked the master of the Fourth.

"The same as yours, I think," answered the master of the Shell. "Silver is evidently innocent. Those boys were speaking the truth."

"And if they are speaking the truth, it is impossible that Silver can be guilty." "Precisely!"

Mr. Bootles took off his glasses, and wiped them, and put them back again.

He was in a very agitated frame of mind.

"Under these circumstances, it is undoubtedly my duty to explain the matter to Dr. Chisholm," he said.

"Undoubtedly!"

"But—but—" murmured Mr. Bootles.

"It will not be a pleasant task," said the master of the Shell. "I respect Dr. Chisholm highly, as we all do, but I have not failed to recognise a strain of undue firmness in him—I might call it, even, obstinacy. If I may make a suggestion, I should certainly not raise the matter this evening. In the morning Dr. Chisholm will be—ahem!—somewhat calmer."

"My own opinion exactly," said Mr. Bootles. "It is my duty to protect a boy in my Form from an act of injustice."

"I should certainly do so if it were a boy in the Shell who was concerned," said Mr. Mooney. "After all, the Head is bound to accord you a civil hearing, and the matter will be set right."

Mr. Bootles nodded assent, but he was not feeling quite so sure of that.

In fact, he was looking forward to his interview with the Head with very much the same feelings as Jimmy Silver's.

But Mr. Bootles had a strong sense of duty, and he intended to do his duty, unpleasant as it was.

It only remained to see what would come of it.

OUT ON FRIDAY!

On Friday of this week the "Penny Popular" will make its reappearance. I hope every reader of the BOYS' FRIEND has taken my advice, and ordered his copy in advance. Nevertheless, in spite of my repeated utterances on this subject, I have no doubt that there are still a number of readers who have not placed an order for the "Penny Popular" with their newsagent. I would urge upon every one of these readers not to delay any longer if they wish to obtain a copy of the "Penny Popular" on Friday. Run round to your newsagent at once, and place your order in his hands.

No boy should miss the magnificent issue of the "Penny Popular" which appears this week. It is a ripping number, and the three stories which appear in it are excellent in every way. The tale that will perhaps appeal most to readers of the BOYS' FRIEND is that entitled

"THE RIVALS OF ROOKWOOD!"
By Owen Conquest.

This story deals with the arrival of Jimmy Silver at the school. On his first day at Rookwood Jimmy Silver makes things hum, and you are bound to enjoy reading of his exciting adventures.

The second story will deal with the chums of Greyfriars, and will be entitled

"BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL-ORDER!"
By Frank Richards.

You cannot mention Billy Bunter without thinking of his postal-order that never comes. But in this particular story four postal-orders arrive for the fat junior. The amusing incidents that occur when Bunter endeavours to cash the postal-orders will send you into roars of laughter.

The third tale introduces Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, and will be entitled

"D'ARCY'S DELUSION!"
By Martin Clifford.

Arthur Augustus falls in love with the girl at the tobacconist's. Gussy is always amusing when in love, and I am positive that you will all revel in this story.

On the cover of this week's BOYS' FRIEND you will find reproductions of

"GUNTEN ON THE WARPATH!"
By Martin Clifford.

deals to a great extent with Frank Richards and his chums dodging Gunten. They have promised not to fight the cad of Hillcrest, and they stick to their promise. But eventually Gunten receives a surprise, and by no means a pleasant one. The nature of this surprise you will learn next Monday.

In the next instalment of our amazing adventure serial,

"THE BOYS WHO CAUGHT THE KAISER!"
By Duncan Storm.

you will read of how the boys get on the Kaiser's track. You will be highly amused when you read of a little scheme the boys concoct to scare Nah Poo, the Chinese cook. Horace plays a very prominent part in this scheme, and—Well, it will send you into roars of laughter, my chums. Mind you don't miss it.

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"BARKER, THE BOUNDER!"
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A flogging, sir, is an inadequate punishment for the action he has been guilty of!"

"You mistake me, sir. The guilty person should be most severely punished, in my opinion, but I think that Silver is not guilty."

"Nonsense!"

"Really, sir—" ejaculated Mr. Bootles, colouring.

"Last evening," said the Head coldly, "you were present when the matter was inquired into. You then agreed absolutely with my opinion, that Silver was the guilty party. You regarded his denial as a barefaced falsehood, as I did. For some reason unknown to me, you appear to have changed your mind. I have not changed mine, Mr. Bootles."

"I have learned—"

"You have learned that someone else, and not Silver, was guilty of the outrage in my study?" exclaimed the Head, starting. "His name?"

"I do not mean that."

"Then what do you mean, Mr. Bootles, if you mean anything at all?" exclaimed the Head testily.

"I mean that fresh circumstances have come to my knowledge, which to my mind exonerate Silver."

Dr. Chisholm made an impatient gesture.

"If you insist, Mr. Bootles, I am bound to hear what you have to say. Kindly be brief."

It was not an encouraging opening, but Mr. Bootles made the best of it, and he went on hurriedly.

"Silver's study-mates came to me last evening—"

"They came to me, and were guilty of impertinence!" interrupted the Head. "I was forced to cane Lovell for sheer audacity."

"Ahem! However, they told me—"

"Well, what did they tell you?" snapped the Head. "Time is passing, Mr. Bootles, and the school is waiting in Hall."

"They told me, sir, that it was impossible that Silver did what was done in this study. They were with him when he came back here with your cane, and they bear witness that he was only in the study long enough to replace the cane on your desk, and then joined them outside. A few seconds, sir."

"He was here, at all events."

"The cord over which you fell, sir, was attached to two screws driven into the wainscot. That required the use of a gimlet and a screw-driver, and must have taken some time."

"Doubtless."

"Well, if Silver was in the room only a few seconds, evidently he had no time for all this."

"And what evidence, Mr. Bootles, is there that Silver was in the study only a few seconds?" exclaimed the Head, with an expression that was perilously like a sneer.

"The evidence of three junior boys, whom I know to be truthful and honourable," said Mr. Bootles warmly.

"Am I to understand that Lovell and his companions timed Silver with their watches?"

"Certainly not!"

"At the most, then, they have an impression that he was only a few seconds in the study—when he may have been here five or ten minutes, for all they can remember to the contrary."

"Certainly they can remember—"

"Moreover," said the Head, in a grinding voice, "I attach no importance whatever to the evidence of those three boys. I should not be surprised if they were Silver's accomplices."

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"I repeat, sir, that I consider it very probable that they had full knowledge of Silver's action at the time. I am decidedly of opinion that this story is concocted by them simply to save Silver from his just punishment."

Mr. Bootles flushed red. He was getting angry now as well as the headmaster.

"I disagree entirely, Dr. Chisholm!" he said tartly. "I have questioned the boys. You are at liberty to question them if you choose. I know them—I repeat, sir, that I know them to be boys with a high sense of honour, and I am convinced that they would not utter falsehoods to save Silver from punishment."

"Nonsense!"

"Sir!"

"I repeat—nonsense! You have allowed yourself to be deceived by a concocted tale, Mr. Bootles!"

"I am not so easily deceived, sir!" retorted Mr. Bootles. "And I am sure that if you were in a calmer mood you would admit—"

The Head's brows became thunderous.

The observation was not very tactful, perhaps; but Mr. Bootles was growing heated.

"Calmer, sir! Do you imply that I am capable of punishing an innocent boy from mere irritation, sir?"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "Certainly not! I—I merely meant—"

"Enough, sir! I am satisfied of Silver's guilt. If you hold a contrary opinion, you are at liberty to hold it. You have stated your opinion, and I have taken due note of it. The matter closes here."

With that the Head swept from the study.

Mr. Bootles stood rooted to the floor. He took off his spectacles, wiped them, and replaced them upon his agitated nose. "Bless my soul!" he murmured.

He moved to the door, and halted again. What to do was a problem to the unhappy Mr. Bootles.

He knew that Jimmy Silver was innocent. He believed that the Head himself, in a less exasperated mood, would have admitted the evidence in favour of the unfortunate junior.

Yet the punishment was to take place—an act of crying injustice from the Form-master's point of view.

His intervention had been brushed aside—he was treated as a child—and a boy of his Form, whom he was bound to protect, was to suffer an unjust and disgraceful punishment.

At that thought all Mr. Bootles' hesita-

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tion vanished, and a gleam came into his eyes.
 Irresolute and hesitating as he was, Mr. Bootles had plenty of courage when it was put to the test.
 "It shall not be!" he exclaimed aloud.
 And with a very red face Mr. Bootles rushed out of the study and hurried to Big Hall.

**The 5th Chapter.
 Mr. Bootles Dares To Be a Daniel.**

"Here comes the Head!" murmured Mornington.
 Jimmy Silver drew a quick breath as Dr. Chisholm entered Big Hall by the upper door.
 "Silence!" called out Bulkeley of the Sixth.
 The buzz of voices died away.
 "Buck up, Jimmy!" whispered Conroy. There was a dead silence.
 Jimmy gave the Australian junior a nod and a faint smile; but his heart was heavy.
 Why had not Mr. Bootles come in with the Head?
 And what was that in Dr. Chisholm's hand, half hidden by his gown?
 It was pretty clear that the Form-master's intervention had failed.
 All eyes were fixed upon the Head.
 His face was calm and severe, but there was an unusual flush in his cheeks and a glitter in his eyes.
 His voice came sharply through the dead stillness.
 "Silver of the Fourth Form will stand out!"
 Jimmy set his lips.
 "Get a move on, kid!" muttered Bulkeley.
 Lovell clenched his hands hard. Raby and Newcome looked utterly miserable.
 There was a slight murmur in the Classical Fourth.
 "Silence!"
 Jimmy Silver stepped out of the ranks of his Form, and walked up Big Hall with a crimson face but a steady step.
 It was inevitable now, and he could only go through it with all the fortitude he could muster.
 He halted before the Head, his glance meeting steadily the eyes that were fixed upon him.
 Old Mack, the porter, was present, ready to take up the condemned junior and "hoist" him for the flogging.
 Jimmy did not heed him.
 His eyes never wavered as they met the Head's grim glance.
 "Silver"—the Head's voice was low but deep, and it reached every ear in the crowded Hall—"you are about to be punished for an act unprecedented in the history of Rookwood. You have committed what amounts to an assault upon your headmaster. It was in my mind to expel you from the school; but I have spared you that extreme punishment, chiefly for the sake of your parents. Your punishment will, however, be severe, and I trust that it will be a warning to you—and to others who may have been your confederates."
 He paused.
 "I did not do it, sir!" said Jimmy Silver steadily. "My friends can prove—"
 "Silence!"
 "I protest!" said Jimmy, a little pale now, but still steady. "There is proof that I did not—"
 "Take up that boy, Mack!"
 "Yessir!"
 The porter came towards Jimmy Silver. At that moment there was a bustle at the lower end of the Hall.
 The big door swung open, and all eyes turned in that direction.
 Mr. Bootles, in a state of great flurry and excitement, bustled in.
 A buzz rose from the crowded ranks of schoolboys.
 The Head's face became thunderous as the little Form-master bustled up the Hall towards the platform.
 "My only hat!" murmured Conroy.
 "Bootles is going to chip in!"
 "Great pip!"
 "Give him a cheer!" muttered Lovell.
 "Shut up, you ass!" whispered Mornington, catching hold of Arthur Edward's arm. "You duffer! Shut up!"
 "Silence!" shouted Knowles.
 There was silence, broken only by the rustling of Mr. Bootles' gown as he whisked along.
 The expression on the Head's face could only be described as awful.
 The other masters looked thunderstruck.
 Mr. Mooney exchanged a helpless glance with Mr. Wiggins of the Second.
 Mr. Bohn gave the Fourth Form master an approving look.
 The sympathy of the staff was with Mr. Bootles, though they marvelled at his audacity.
 Mr. Bootles was gasping as he came to a halt.
 Old Mack blinked at him, wondering what this might mean.
 The Head's voice was heard at last, like the rumble of distant thunder.
 "Mr. Bootles! Kindly stand back!"
 "Sir!"
 "You are interrupting, Mr. Bootles!"
 "Sir, it is my intention to interrupt!" panted Mr. Bootles, his eyes gleaming over his spectacles.
 A thrill ran through the crowded Hall. Heads were craned forward to look.
 There was a sound of deep-drawn breath. The Head looked dumbfounded.
 His sway at Rookwood was unquestioned. For his lofty edicts to be disputed by any member of his staff was unheard of.
 And here was the little, plump Form-master, not at all heroic to look at, disputing his will, opposing his determination.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, sir?"
 "No, sir, I have not! I protest in public, since you will not hear me in private! I protest, sir, against this act of injustice!"
 A gasp ran through Big Hall.
 "Good man, Bootles!" murmured Lovell. "Right on the wicket! Oh, good man—good man!"
 "Silver belongs to my Form, sir!" pursued Mr. Bootles, gasping. "He is under his Form-master's protection, sir. I am convinced of Silver's innocence. I will go further, sir, and say that Silver's innocence is perfectly clear to anyone who chooses to consider the facts calmly. In these circumstances, sir, I cannot stand idly by while a boy of my Form is subjected to a humiliating and wholly unjust punishment!"
 The speech came out in gasps and jerks. Mr. Bootles was greatly excited, and almost lost his voice once or twice. But it came out, to the end.
 The Head's face had become a little pale now, and the look in his eyes was not pleasant to see.
 But he remained calm.
 "This scene, Mr. Bootles—" he began.
 "This scene, sir, is not to be laid to my charge. I am speaking from a sense of duty."
 "Your ideas of duty differ from mine, sir, and you must be aware that after this outrageous defiance of authority your connection with Rookwood must instantly cease!"
 "I am prepared for that, sir. But I will not remain silent while injustice is done to a boy entitled to my protection!"
 "Bravo!" came from somewhere in the Fourth.
 "Silence!" thundered the Head.
 "Silence!" cried the prefects.
 "Very well, Mr. Bootles," said the Head, with deadly quietness. "You have now uttered your protest. Now, sir, I beg of you to retire, and not prolong this scene, which is a disgraceful one."
 "Before I retire, sir, I desire to know whether Silver is to be flogged."
 "Most decidedly!"

**The 6th Chapter.
 Sacked!**
 Rookwood was in a ferment that morning.
 What had happened in Big Hall was amazing—almost incredible.
 Even yet the fellows felt that they could hardly believe their eyes and ears.
 In the Classical Fourth Mr. Bootles was at the zenith of popularity.
 He had stood up for a Fourth-Former against the Head himself, and that required a nerve the juniors had never believed him capable of.
 And he had succeeded, too. Jimmy Silver had not been flogged!
 Whether the flogging was only postponed remained to be seen; but so far, at all events, it had not been administered, owing to Mr. Bootles' courageous intervention.
 The Rookwooders were late in class that morning, but the prefects shepherded them into the Form-rooms at last.
 In the Fourth Form-room there was keen anxiety till Mr. Bootles appeared.
 That he would have to leave Rookwood School seemed certain, and the juniors wondered whether he would take the Fourth that morning.
 Doubts on that point were relieved by the appearance of Mr. Bootles, very troubled and agitated, in the Form-room.
 When he came in the Fourth, as if moved by a common instinct, rose to their feet and cheered.
 It was a spontaneous outburst, and it seemed to surprise Mr. Bootles.
 The little gentleman had only done what he conceived to be his duty, and he was sorely troubled by the thought that he had perhaps gone too far.
 He stood and blinked at the juniors over his spectacles as they cheered.
 "What—what?" he ejaculated.
 The cheers rang through the Form-room, and rolled out over Rookwood with a roar.
 "Bless my soul! Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, waving his hand. "My boys, silence! I beg you to be quiet! What will the Head think? Silence!"
 The cheering died down at last.

Jimmy, it could not be doubted that the Head would be inflexible with regard to the Fourth Form-master.
 Willingly enough Jimmy Silver would have taken his flogging to save his kind-hearted Form-master from what was a serious disaster to him.
 But Jimmy was helpless in the matter. He could only feel distressed and worried, which was not of much use to poor Mr. Bootles.
 That gentleman was feeling distressed enough himself.
 He shut himself up in his study after lessons, and was pacing to and fro, with a wrinkled brow, when a tap came at his door.
 It was Tupper, the page, who presented himself.
 "Yes, yes; what is it—what, what?" asked Mr. Bootles, much flurried.
 "The Head wishes to speak to you in his study, sir," said Tupper, with a curious eye on the Form-master.
 It was known "below stairs" that something very sensational had happened in Big Hall that morning.
 "Very well, Tupper! Thank you, Tupper! You may go, Tupper!" stammered Mr. Bootles.
 And Tupper went.
 The little Form-master pulled himself together for the dreaded interview.
 He whisked out of the room at last, and whisked along to the Head's study, more jerky than ever in his movements in his state of agitation.
 He found the Head cold and calm.
 Dr. Chisholm's eyes were like points of steel as they rested upon the plump little Form-master in the doorway of his study.
 "Pray step in, Mr. Bootles."
 His manner was studiously polite.
 But it was a steely, deadly politeness, and it told of an inflexible determination, as Mr. Bootles could see.
 Very red and uncomfortable, the master of the Fourth stepped into the study.
 The Head did not ask him to be seated.
 "After what has happened this morning, Mr. Bootles, doubtless you realise very clearly that you cannot remain at Rookwood!" said the Head in icy tones.

And, more jerky than ever, the little gentleman whisked out of the study.
**The 7th Chapter.
 The Last Chance!**
 "Rotten!"
 That was the verdict in the Fourth Form, and, indeed, in all Rookwood.
 It was known that afternoon that Mr. Bootles was definitely dismissed by the Head.
 He had done his duty.
 He had paid the price; and it was a heavy price for the Fourth Form-master to pay.
 The looks of the other masters were grave and concerned.
 It was not difficult for even the juniors to see that their sympathies were with Mr. Bootles.
 The blow that had fallen upon him was a very heavy one.
 He had been so long associated with Rookwood, that it was his home, the abiding-place in which all his thoughts and his feelings were centred.
 Leaving Rookwood was like the uprooting of a tree to Mr. Bootles.
 He was worried and flurried by the mere thought of the plunge into the great world outside, far from his old familiar associations.
 The quiet old study, with its precious books; the shady old beeches under which he had been wont to take his quiet walks; the dusky library where he had spent many a happy hour; the Masters' Room, the scene of many a pleasant conversation—he was to say good-bye to all, and the fact that it was for conscience sake did not make the parting any the less bitter.
 And the prospect afterwards—of seeking a new post at a time when all his habits had become set and fixed, and under the stigma of dismissal for insubordination—it was dismaying enough to the little gentleman.
 Jimmy Silver understood a good deal of what was passing in Mr. Bootles' breast and in his mind, and his usually sunny face was sombre that day.
 He would have chosen the flogging twice over rather than this, and he had a miserable feeling that he was, in part at least, the cause of the Form-master's misfortune.
 In spite of the Head's urgency, it was impossible for Mr. Bootles to leave at a moment's notice; but he was making his preparations in a gloomy and despondent mood.
 In the end study that evening the Fistical Four discussed the matter in somewhat dismal tones.
 There was nothing they could do, save to give Mr. Bootles a cheer when he left—if that was any use.
 "I'll let him know that we back him up, anyway," Lovell remarked.
 Jimmy Silver smiled faintly.
 There was a tap at the door, and Conroy, the Australian, came in. His face was clouded.
 "You fellows know about Bootles, of course?" he said.
 "Yes."
 "He's sacked!" said Conroy.
 "We know. It's rotten!"
 "Well," said the Australian junior, "can't something be done? I don't see sitting down and seeing old Bootles turned out like this."
 "I'd do anything," said Jimmy. "It was for my sake he's got it in the neck like this. I wish he had let the Head get on with the flogging."
 "Well, I've been thinking," said Conroy quietly. "Look here, Jimmy, you didn't play that trick in the Head's study."
 "No."
 "If you didn't, somebody else did."
 "That follows, of course."
 "Well, who was it?"
 "I can't even guess—if it mattered."
 "It does matter," said Conroy. "That's what I've been thinking of. Suppose the fellow was found out and made to own up."
 "Well?"
 "That would prove that Mr. Bootles was in the right in backing you up, Jimmy, and then the Head couldn't push him out like this. He would have to admit that Bootles had saved him from being unjust, wouldn't he?"
 "I—I suppose so," said Jimmy Silver slowly.
 "The Head's ratty now," said Conroy. "But he's a good sort in the main—we know that. Suppose it was proved to him that somebody else had done that trick, he would be in honour bound to let up on Bootles."
 "Yes, But—"
 "Well, then," said Conroy. "Bootles isn't gone yet. He can't go for a day or two, at least. In that time the fellow may be found. It's up to us; we've got to save Bootles by finding out the guilty party, and showing him up, or making him own up. That will see Bootles clear."
 "By Jove!" said Lovell.
 Jimmy Silver's face brightened.
 "But how?" said Raby.
 "We've got to find out how," answered Conroy. "It's up to us, and we've got to do it somehow. We'll all work together, and set our wits to work, and find out the truth, and save Bootles."
 "I'm on!" said Jimmy Silver, at once.
 And the Co. heartily concurred.
 It was a chance, at least, and the only chance.
 And from the moment that Jimmy Silver & Co. set themselves that task they lost no time.
 What would come of it—whether anything would come of it—remained to be seen.
 But if they failed, it would not be for want of striving.



MR. BOOTLES DEFIES THE HEAD!

"Then, sir," exclaimed Mr. Bootles, "I will not retire. I am aware, sir, that I shall forfeit my position in this school, and that is a serious matter for me; but so long as I remain here, sir, I am master of the Fourth Form, and I have my duty to do, which is to protect any member of my Form from injustice!"
 "Mr. Bootles!" gasped the Head.
 "Silver!" Mr. Bootles turned to the dismayed junior. "You belong to my Form, and you are under my orders."
 "Yes, sir!" stammered Jimmy.
 "I command you to leave this Hall at once!"
 "Hook it, Jimmy!" came the "voice" from the Fourth once more, which sounded a great deal like Lovell's.
 "Silence!"
 Jimmy Silver stood rooted to the floor. He was grateful to Mr. Bootles—more than grateful. He knew what it must cost the little gentleman to intervene like this.
 But for Mr. Bootles' own sake he would have preferred to let the Head proceed. But it was a question of now obeying his Form-master, who was sacrificing so much for his sake.
 He could not hesitate about that. And the Head did not speak.
 It was on his lips to order Mack to take up the junior for the flogging, regardless of Mr. Bootles, but the little Form-master was quivering with angry excitement, and there was no telling what he might have done.
 Bitterly angry as he was, the Head did not want a scuffle in Hall, and that was pretty clearly what it might have come to.
 So he was silent, biting his lip till it almost bled.
 "You hear me, Silver?" said Mr. Bootles.
 "Yes, sir!" said Jimmy quietly.
 He turned and walked out of Hall.

Mr. Bootles, very flustered and red, proceeded to business, but lessons were very desultory that morning.
 In the prevailing state of excitement the fellows had little attention to give to Latin grammar.
 Lessons that morning, in fact, were little more than pretence, and both masters and boys were relieved when the hour of dismissal came.
 Mr. Bootles whisked away to his study, still in a worried and troubled frame of mind, while the juniors streamed out into the quadrangle.
 "Well!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, expressing his feelings by that ejaculation. "Well!"
 Jimmy Silver was very quiet and grave. He had been saved, for the present, at least; but he was deeply distressed by the thought of what it meant to Mr. Bootles.
 "It's a shame!" said Jimmy in a low voice. "Bootles will have to go. I—I suppose he can't stay after chipping in like that against the Head."
 "I—I suppose not," said Lovell.
 "It's a shame!"
 "Perhaps the Head will come round," said Conroy hopefully. "After all, he's in the wrong, and he may come round when he's had time to think it over."
 Jimmy shook his head.
 The scene in Hall was fresh in his mind. Dr. Chisholm's authority had been deliberately set at naught, and a much more reasonable and calm man than the Head might have refused to pass that over.
 It was impossible that it would be forgotten or forgiven by the Head.
 After Mr. Bootles was gone, the Head might, or might not, deal with Jimmy Silver as he had originally intended.
 Perhaps he would take the more dignified course of letting the whole matter drop.
 But whatever happened with regard to

"Indeed, sir!" said Mr. Bootles.
 Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows.
 "That is surely apparent to you!" he said.
 "I did my duty, sir!" blurted out Mr. Bootles. "I was sorry—I am sorry now—to have acted with any apparent disrespect towards the Head of this school. But you had left me no choice in the matter."
 "I do not care to open a discussion, Mr. Bootles. I have only to say that I am prepared to receive your resignation and accept it."
 Mr. Bootles blew through his nose.
 "My resignation, sir!" he snapped.
 "Precisely."
 "Well, sir, I shall not place my resignation in your hands. To do so would be to acknowledge a fault—which I definitely refuse to acknowledge. I shall not, sir, under any circumstances whatever, resign my post in this school."
 "Then it only remains for me to dismiss you, Mr. Bootles."
 "You have the power in your hands, sir, to add one injustice to another," said the Form-master, with dignity. "But I shall certainly not make the path of injustice, sir, easy to you. I refuse to resign, and if you care to carry injustice to the length of depriving me of my position here, I leave it to your conscience, Dr. Chisholm."
 The Head set his lips hard.
 "Very well"—his voice was low and incisive—"Mr. Bootles, you are dismissed!"
 "So be it!" said Mr. Bootles.
 "I expect you, sir, to leave Rookwood School at the earliest possible moment convenient to you. The matter of salary will be arranged to your satisfaction."
 "I am not concerned about that, sir; that is a trifle to which I have given no consideration whatever," said poor Mr. Bootles. "I have the honour to bid you good morning, Dr. Chisholm."

THE END.
NEXT MONDAY.
"BACKING UP BOOTLES!"
 By OWEN CONQUEST.
 DON'T MISS IT!

BARKER, THE BOUNDER!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Chambers is confident I've done it, and he's gone to complain to the Head about it. He swears he'll get me expelled!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The bounder broke into a hearty laugh. "My dear chap," he said, "don't worry yourself about a trifle like that!"

"I'm not worrying," said Jack Jackson miserably. "It'll be a relief to get away from a cad like you!"

"Tut, tut!" said Barker, looking offended. "You mustn't talk like that, old fellow. I've done you a really good turn this morning, if you only knew it."

"A good turn!" gasped Jack Jackson. "You won't have to go before the Head," said Barker confidently. "I've arranged all that."

"You?"

"Little me!" chortled the bounder. "I

happened to know that Mason was going to muck up Harcourt's study, so—"

"How the dickens—"

"Never mind how I knew," said Barker. "And never mind how I've managed to inform Chambers. I've done it, and that's an end of the matter. You've no need to trouble in the least."

"But—"

Jack Jackson paused. He was completely baffled by the bounder's ways. Barker had tried again and again to disgrace him in the eyes of his schoolfellows, and had succeeded, apparently to his delight.

And now he had gone to the trouble of clearing him of suspicion in regard to the ragging of Harcourt's study.

No matter how much he thought about the affair, he could not fathom Barker's purpose.

The latter was chuckling to himself. Evidently the perplexed expression on Jack Jackson's face amused him.

Clang, clang!

The bell for morning lessons rang out at that moment.

"Come on, old fellow!" said Barker, linking his arm with Jack Jackson's. "Don't look so beastly downhearted! You'll be as happy as anything presently when you see Mason with his hands tucked under his arms."

"By Jove," muttered Jack Jackson between his teeth, "you're a deep villain! I wish I could understand what your game is."

"Don't try, old fellow," said the bounder cheerfully. "You'll never succeed. You're not the first one I've puzzled, by any means."

And as he strolled slowly in the direction of the class-room Jack Jackson was forced to believe that this was perfectly true.

Mr. Chambers was in a bad temper during lessons that morning.

Several of the juniors suffered in con-

sequence, but none suffered so much as Jack Jackson.

The latter was by no means inattentive, but nevertheless he failed to please the bad-tempered master of the Fourth.

By the time lessons finished Jack Jackson had received no less than three hundred lines.

When they left the class-room the bounder did his best to console him.

"Needn't worry about them," he said. "I'll give you a hand if you find them too much of a job."

"You needn't trouble," said Jack Jackson somewhat off-handedly.

"Oh, but I will!" said Barker. "I—Hallo, Travers!" he added, as Bob came up. "I suppose you've heard how Mason's got it in the neck for mucking up Harcourt's study?"

Bob Travers nodded his head in assent. "I wonder where the rotter's got to?" said Barker. "I reckon he's had it pretty badly. Come on downstairs. We might come across him."

The three juniors went downstairs, and came across a group of juniors in the Hall.

Mason was there, too, and the expression on his face showed only too plainly that he had recently received a sound thrashing.

Suddenly the bully of the Fourth caught sight of Jack Jackson, and he pointed an accusing finger at the latter.

"There's the rotter!" he exclaimed loudly. "There's the cad who sneaked to Chambers and told him that it was I who mucked up Harcourt's study!"

Next moment a chorus of hisses and groans filled the air, and Jack Jackson flushed to the roots of his hair.

Once again he was accused of something of which he was innocent—accused of acting like a cad and sneaking to the Form-master.

But how could he prove his innocence?

(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.)

FRANK RICHARDS & CO.'S PREDICAMENT!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of the Chums at the School in the Backwoods.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



GUNTEN—THE HAPLESS HERO!

The 1st Chapter.

Called Over the Coals.

"She's as mad as a hornet!" said Chunky Todgers impressively.

"Miss Meadows?" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"You bet!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

Frank stared at the podgy schoolboy of Cedar Creek in astonishment.

He had forgotten for the moment that "mad" in Western parlance does not imply insanity, its English equivalent being "waxy."

Bob Lawless indulged in a chuckle. "I reckoned she would be mad," he remarked. "Franky, you fathead, haven't you learned our language yet?"

"Wrathy, you know," said Vere Beauclere, with a laugh.

"Oh!" said Frank. "I—I see! So Miss Meadows is waxy, is she, Chunky?"

"Mad as a hornet!" repeated Chunky Todgers. "You fellows are booked. I guess I'm glad I didn't come over to Hillcrest with you yesterday afternoon. Old Peckover has sent Miss Meadows a note about it. I heard her say so to Mr. Slimmy. 'You've been kicking up a shindy at Hillcrest School!' added Chunky, wagging a podgy forefinger at Frank Richards & Co.

"Oh, gum!" groaned Bob Lawless. "We're in for it again! All through that rotter, Gunten!"

"I can't see that we were to blame," said Frank.

"We never are!" remarked Beauclere. "But schoolmasters never take the same view that schoolboys do. I've noticed that."

"A regular riot!" said Chunky Todgers. "That's what Peckover called it. I heard Miss Meadows say so. She said it was that thundering young rascal, Lawless, who was the worst of the lot."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.

"What's the snigger about?" demanded Chunky.

"I think I can hear Miss Meadows calling a chap a thundering rascal!" chortled Bob Lawless. "Go it, Chunky!"

"Well, perhaps she didn't use those words," admitted Chunky. "She said that unruly boy, now I come to think of it."

"That sounds more like Miss Meadows,"

remarked Frank. "As a matter of fact, Bob, you were a bit of an ass."

"What else could I do than what I did?" demanded Bob. "I suppose I couldn't hear Gunten claiming that he'd done what you did, could I, without putting in a word?"

"You put in such a thumping lot of words, you know, and such jolly emphatic ones!"

"Well—Hollo, Molly!"

Molly Lawrence came up, looking rather serious.

It still wanted some minutes to the time for morning lessons, and most of Cedar Creek were in the playground.

"Miss Meadows wants you," said Molly. "I'm afraid it's about the trouble at Hillcrest yesterday afternoon."

"How many does she want?" asked Frank, with a smile.

"You three."

"Three merry martyrs!" said Frank. "Well, come on, let's go in to execution and get it over!"

"It's really not quite fair," said Molly. "There were others there as well."

"But we're the worst—we always are!" said Bob with a deep sigh. "But I'm jolly well going to let Miss Meadows know the facts! She can't possibly blame us when she knows the facts!"

"H'm!" murmured Molly. She seemed rather doubtful on that point.

Frank Richards & Co. went into the schoolhouse, and Frank knocked at the door of Miss Meadows' sitting-room.

The schoolmistress's voice was stern as she bade them enter.

The trio entered, looking as meek and mild as they possibly could, and certainly they did not look like fellows who had recently kicked up a terrific shindy at the new school down the creek.

But Miss Meadows' face did not relax. "Richards, Lawless, Beauclere!" Her voice was very stern. "I have received a very serious complaint from Mr. Peckover, the headmaster of Hillcrest School."

"Not about us, ma'am!" ventured Bob. "About you, and several other boys, Lawless; you most of all."

"Oh, Miss Meadows!"

"I am ashamed of you, Lawless!"

"Oh!"

"You seem to have acted very badly indeed."

"B-b-but, ma'am—" stammered Bob, his cheeks crimsoning.

"There seems to be no excuse for your conduct," resumed Miss Meadows, her eyes sparkling, and a pink spot glowing in her cheeks. "It was an occasion that called for very special good behaviour. Mr. Peckover sent a special invitation to this school for some of my boys to visit Hillcrest and witness a public ceremony, in recognition of an act of great courage performed by a Hillcrest boy."

"But, ma'am—"

"Silence, Lawless! The boy concerned was Kern Gunten, who used to be at Cedar Creek, and I had no doubt that you would be pleased to join the Hillcrest School in honouring one who had formerly been your schoolfellow!"

"Yes; but—"

"And what did you do?" exclaimed Miss Meadows angrily. "You, Lawless, actually interrupted Mr. Peckover's speech rudely, and denied the truth of his statements! There was a disturbance, in which you were all concerned. I am more shocked than I can say."

The Co. exchanged very uncomfortable looks.

Certainly the matter seemed rather serious, and a little shocking, as it had been presented to Miss Meadows.

"May we explain, Miss Meadows?" asked Beauclere.

"I do not see how you can explain anything, but I am willing to listen to any excuse you have to offer."

"Well," said Bob Lawless. "It's true what Mr. Peckover says—I did interrupt him, and—"

"You admit that?"

"I felt bound to, Miss Meadows," said Bob undauntedly. "Mr. Peckover thought he was stating the facts, but he wasn't. Gunten had deceived him, and everybody, with a pack of lies! He hadn't done anything courageous at all, and he was getting all that limelight on false pretences!"

"Indeed!" said Miss Meadows. "Are you sure of that, Lawless?"

"I guess—I mean, quite, ma'am."

"But that is no excuse for your action. If Mr. Peckover was satisfied, that was his business, not yours."

"But it was our business, ma'am!" said Bob cagerly. "If you'll let me tell you all of—"

Miss Meadows interrupted him.

"I really do not see how you can know anything about Gunten's action, or supposed action, Lawless. Mr. Peckover has informed me what it was. Gunten, who was driving the post-wagon from Cedar Camp to Silver Creek, was stopped on the trail by two masked men, who attempted to rob the post-sacks. By great courage and resource he defeated their object, and brought the post-wagon safe to Silver Creek. This happened on Wednesday afternoon, when you were in school here, so I fail to see how you can know anything about it."

"Franky wasn't in school that afternoon, ma'am. You sent him home for getting a black eye in a fight with Dicky Bird of Hillcrest."

Frank Richards rubbed his eye.

"I remember that, Lawless. Do you mean to say that Richards was on the scene when the post-wagon was stopped?"

"Yes, ma'am!" said Frank.

"And it was Frank who chipped in and scared off the robbers, making them believe that he had the cowboys from the ranch with him!" exclaimed Bob. "It was Frank who did the whole business, while Gunten was cowering in the trail with his hands up!"

"What?" exclaimed Miss Meadows in amazement.

Frank coloured.

"It's true, Miss Meadows," he said quietly. "After the two robbers had cleared off I went nearly as far as Silver Creek with the wagon, to see Gunten safe through. I never dreamed that he would spin the yarn he did. I was simply knocked over when I heard it at Hillcrest yesterday."

"Bless my soul!"

Miss Meadows was silent for a moment. "Was anyone else present, Richards?"

"Only the two robbers, who cleared off, ma'am."

"Then there were no witnesses?"

"No."

"It is, then, your statement against Gunten's as to whom the credit is due?"

Frank Richards flushed.

"I'm not claiming any credit!" he exclaimed. "I never said a word about it, except to Bob and Vere, and to my uncle at the ranch. I shouldn't have said anything at Hillcrest, either, though I was surprised to hear that Gunten had told such awful whoppers. But—"

"But I did!" exclaimed Bob warmly. "It made me wild to hear that Swiss cad claiming to do what Franky had done. Besides, it was only fair to tell the truth. Gunten was getting a prize given to him for acting bravely, and all he did was to cower when the road-agents were on him. It was a rotten swindle, ma'am, and I thought it ought to be shown up!"

"This alters the case very considerably," said Miss Meadows. "I was not, of course, aware of this. I accept Richards' word, but I fear that Mr. Peckover will place his faith in Gunten."

"The Hillcrest boys don't," said Bob. "Dicky Bird told me he knew Gunten was lying; and the rest think the same."

"In the circumstances, there is great excuse for your action, Lawless. But I am sure Mr. Peckover will take the view that Richards is claiming the credit due to Gunten."

"Let him!" said Frank contemptuously. "And the fact remains that there was a disturbance at Hillcrest," said Miss Meadows. "Mr. Peckover has requested me to use my influence to stop these incessant troubles. I have told him I shall do so. It appears to me that this dispute between Gunten and Richards is likely to lead to further trouble, however."

The Co. were silent.

They thought that very probable themselves.

"Now," said Miss Meadows, with a return of severity in her manner, "I cannot permit this. According to your statements, Gunten is not a courageous lad."

"A pesky funk!" grunted Bob.

"Ahem! If your description of him is correct, Lawless, he is not likely to seek trouble with you. If there is trouble, therefore, it is likely to come from your side."

"Oh!"

"I require you three boys, therefore, to make me a promise," said Miss Meadows. "For a week from this date—I will not make it longer than that—you are to avoid Kern Gunten as much as possible."

"Willingly, ma'am."

"And if you meet him you are not to quarrel with him."

"Very well."

"And, above all, you are not to fight with him," said Miss Meadows. "You will all three make me a solemn promise to that effect. If you do so I shall be satisfied to let the matter drop."

Frank Richards & Co. brightened up. They could not help looking on that as a rather cheap way of extricating them-

selves from an affair which looked rather serious.

"We promise, Miss Meadows," said the three, with one voice.

"Very well! I know you will keep your word," said Miss Meadows. "You may go now."

Frank Richards & Co. looked much more cheery when they went in to morning lessons.

The trouble had blown over after all. They were bound by their word not to fight Kern Gunten, certainly; and perhaps they had been thinking of giving the impostor a licking, which he well deserved. But they could well afford to dispense with that satisfaction.

"After all, the pesky coyote don't matter," said Bob Lawless. "Let him tell all the crammers he likes, and be blowed! We won't fight him; and he's not likely to want to fight us. I'm glad it's all over!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank.

And the other fellows, when they heard what had happened, agreed that the chums of Cedar Creek were well out of their scrape.

But were they?

There was an unexpected development to follow, which Frank Richards & Co. did not foresee, and which certainly Miss Meadows never dreamed of.

The 2nd Chapter. Gunten—the Hero.

"Great Scott!"

"What the merry dickens—"

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless uttered those exclamations simultaneously, in tones of astonishment.

It was after lessons, and the cousins were riding away from Cedar Creek.

Vere Beauclere had gone home, but Bob had some purchases to make for his father at the store in Thompson, and Frank was riding up the trail to the town with him.

Near the town the trail branched off which led to Hillcrest School.

Frank and Bob halted at the fork, and looked up the Hillcrest trail as a din of shouting and laughter reached their ears.

A startling sight met their gaze.

"Gunten!" exclaimed Bob.

There were six or seven Hillcrest fellows in the trail, and among them the chums recognised Dicky Bird and Fisher and Blumpy.

But the centre of attraction was Kern Gunten, who on the previous day had been the hero of Hillcrest—more or less.

Probably, even before his story had been denied, the Hillcrest fellows had had their doubts about the heroism of Gunten.

If the heroism was there, it was certain that he had never displayed it when witnesses were present, and some fellows opined that Gunten was drawing the long-bow in his description of the affair with the road-agents.

Then the truth had come out, and though it was only Frank Richards' word against Gunten's, there was not a fellow at Hillcrest who doubted.

They knew Frank—and they knew Gunten even more thoroughly.

Even Gunten's own chum Keller no longer affected to believe that there was a word of truth in Gunten's story.

The Hillcrest fellows were now, apparently, making it unmistakable what they thought of the impostor.

Gunten was standing in the trail, his heavy face white with passion, and his eyes burning under his thick brows.

Fisher and Blumpy were holding his arms, and Dicky Bird was busy with a paint-brush, while the other fellows stood round grinning.

Frank and Bob rode nearer, wondering what was going on. They soon discovered. Dicky Bird was giving the finishing touches.

Large letters, in red paint, formed a word across Gunten's face, beginning at his right ear and finishing at his left.

The letters were rather irregular, as Gunten's features were in the way, as it were, but they were quite plain to read: "H E R O."

That was the word, and it was evidently not bestowed in admiration.

"Now, that's really artistic," Dicky Bird remarked. "Gunten being a merry hero, ought to be announced as one for all the section to see. You agree to that, Gunten?"

"The Swiss ground his teeth."

"He'll rub it off, you know," remarked Watson.

"Not before he gets into Thompson," answered Dicky Bird coolly. "He's going to have his paws tied so that he can't."

"Let me go!" yelled Gunten.

"No fear! You've got to have a lesson about lying and bragging," said Dicky Bird. "Mr. Peckover can believe your yarns if he likes, as you're his favourite; but we don't want braggarts and liars at Hillcrest!"

FRANK RICHARDS & CO.'S PREDICAMENT

(Continued from the previous page.)



"I told the truth!" muttered Gunten. "Oh, come off, old man! You told whoppers, you know. We know now that it was Richards who cleared off the road-agents."

"I—I— If Frank Richards claims to have done it, I'm ready to drive it back down his throat!" said Gunten.

"Easy enough to say, as he's not here!" grinned Dicky Bird.

There was a jingle as Frank Richards rode forward.

"But I am here!" he called out. The Hillcrest fellows had been too interested in their own business to observe the two riders on the trail.

But they looked round now, and Kern Gunten's eyes burned at the sight of the chums of Cedar Creek.

"Hallo, you galoots!" exclaimed Dicky Bird. "Here's our hero!"

"He looks it!" grinned Bob Lawless. "We'll take five cents for him!" chuckled Fisher.

"Too dear at the price, old scout!" "You've moseyed along just in the nick of time!" chuckled Dicky Bird. "Gunten is sticking to his yarn, and he's ready to mop up the earth with Frank Richards if he contradicts it—he says so, at least."

"Well, I do contradict it—every word!" said Frank. "Gunten was cowering like a rabbit when the road-agents were there, and he knows it. I don't blame him for not tackling them, of course; but there's no excuse for pretending that he did. It's spoofer from beginning to end."

"Oh, we know that, old chap! But I'll tell you what, Gunten! Here's Frank Richards! Stand up to him the same as you did to the road-agents, and we'll believe your yarn—lock, stock, and barrel, and let you off."

Gunten bit his lip hard. He had tried his fortune with Frank Richards before, with disastrous results to himself.

He was the bigger and older of the two; but the courage was lacking.

There was a loud laugh from the Hillcrest fellows.

"Go it, Gunten!" "Get down, Richards! Give him a chance."

Frank laughed, and shook his head. "Can't be done," he answered. "Miss Meadows has made us promise not to fight Gunten for a week to come. But I don't think Gunten minds."

"Ha, ha! No." Gunten started.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "You've promised Miss Meadows—"

"Yes, three of us; Beauclerc as well," said Bob Lawless. "You will have to bottle up your ferocious valour for a bit, Gunten. Next Friday is the earliest we can oblige you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Gunten drew a quick breath. "I don't believe that!" he said. "What?"

"I'm ready to tackle Frank Richards, or you, either, Bob Lawless, and I believe you're putting up a lying excuse because you're afraid!" said Gunten deliberately.

Bob's face was a study. "Why, you—you—you—" he stammered.

"You cad!" shouted Frank Richards. "If I hadn't promised Miss Meadows, I'd get down and wipe up the trail with you!"

Gunten sneered. "Any excuse is better than none!" he remarked.

"Why, I—"

"I say, is it straight goods about that promise?" asked Dicky Bird, eyeing the two chums cautiously.

"Of course it is!" said Bob angrily. "Do you think we tell lies like Gunten?"

"Let me go!" exclaimed Gunten. "Let me get at them—either of them; I don't care which!"

"Jolly plucky, all of a sudden!" grinned Dicky Bird. "You galoots were duffers to make that promise. Suppose you break it?"

"We should get into jolly bad trouble, I guess; but we're not going to break it," said Bob. "As for Gunten, we'll attend to him at the end of next week!"

"You'll attend to me before then!" answered Gunten. And he broke away from the Hillcrest fellows, and rushed at the two riders.

It was evidently his intention to attack.

Frank and Bob wheeled their horses away from him.

"Towards!" yelled Gunten. "Stop!" Bob set his teeth hard.

"We've got to stand that, Franky! Come on! My word, I'll make the rotter sit up for it later! Come on!"

Gunten was dashing at them again, as brave as a lion now.

There was no help for it, and the two chums set their horses to a gallop, leaving the Swiss panting in the trail.

If they were not to fight Gunten, it certainly would not have done to let Gunten fight them; and retreat was the only resource.

But it was a bitter pill to swallow. "Towards!" yelled Gunten after them. Bob Lawless slacked down.

"Franky! I—I guess I'm not going to stand that—"

"Come on, fathead!" answered Frank. "But—"

"We've given our word, Bob." Bob Lawless seemed to swallow something with difficulty. But he nodded, and the chums rode on to Thompson together, in a white heat.

The 3rd Chapter.
Dodging Gunten.

Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

It was the following day—Saturday—and as there was no school that day, Frank and his Canadian cousin were making themselves useful on the ranch.

There was always plenty of work to be done by willing hands, and the hands of Frank and Bob were willing enough; and they generally found plenty to do on Saturdays.

They had been in the saddle most of the morning, and were riding back to the ranch for a late lunch, when they met Billy Cook on the plains.

Billy Cook was coming from Thompson, and his expression became very thoughtful at the sight of his boss' son and nephew.

The two schoolboys came trotting out of the grass into the trail, and joined the ranchman, to ride on with him.

"Been on the ranges?" asked Billy. "Yep! You've been up to town?" asked Bob.

Billy Cook nodded. "Anything on in Thompson?" asked Frank Richards, noticing the ranchman's rather peculiar expression.

"Nope! But—"

"But what?" asked Bob. "I can see you've got something on your chest, Billy. Get it off!"

"I met young Gunten at the store." "Oh!" grunted Bob.

"He gave me a message for you," said Billy Cook. "I'd have laid my rope round him, only—"

He hesitated. "I reckon, Bob Lawless, you ain't afear'd of that chunk of foreign trash!"

Bob coloured. "I guess not," he replied. "What are you getting at, Billy?"

"Well, said the foreman, "Gunten told me you lit out yesterday from him, and that he'll wait for you in Thompson this afternoon, if you care to go. He'll be on the waste ground behind the store at four o'clock."

"Oh! Will he?" "Tain't my business to carry his dashed messages," said Billy Cook. "But I reckon I'd tell you, Bob, so that you could ride over and lambaste the impudent young jackanapes!"

Bob Lawless did not answer. He gave Frank a look, and Frank shrugged his shoulders in a hopeless sort of way.

Neither of the chums had expected this result from the promise they had made to Miss Meadows.

It never occurred to them that Gunten would take advantage of it in this extraordinary way.

They knew the Swiss pretty well; but they were not prepared for such an exhibition of unscrupulous cunning.

Gunten knew very well that their word was their bond, and that if they had made a promise to their schoolmistress, they would keep it at all costs.

He knew, too, that if the promise was broken, the penalty would be very severe; Miss Meadows was not likely to listen to any excuse.

Probably the Swiss would have been willing to take a licking, to be assured that Frank and Bob would be shown up to their schoolmistress as promise-breakers.

Whether they kept their promise or broke it, the Swiss stood to score under the peculiar circumstances.

The chums rode on in silence in a worried frame of mind.

Billy Cook glanced at them once or twice, manifestly in a state of surprise.

The ranch came in sight at last. "Waal, I told Gunten I'd give you his message," said Billy Cook, breaking the silence. "I told him, too, that I reckoned you'd take him at his word, Bob, and give him what he was asking for."

Bob's cheeks crimsoned. "I can't, Billy!" he answered. "Hay?"

Bob Lawless explained how the matter stood, and Billy Cook nodded thoughtfully.

"I reckon you shouldn't have let Gunten know you'd passed your word to the school-marm," he remarked.

"Perhaps not; but he would have heard of it sooner or later; he meets lots of the Cedar Creek chaps at the store. Anyway, he knows now."

Billy Cook grinned a little. "I guess you're in for a high old time, Bob!" he said. "If I know Gunten, he won't let you rest now. And though I take your word, of course, lots of folks will think you're only dodging the galoot. I guess you're going to have a lively time with that critter!"

The ranch foreman rode away to the corrals; and Frank and Bob went into the house with rather grim faces.

They realised that Billy Cook was right, and that Gunten would not let his opportunity pass, now that for a time he held the upper hand.

"We've got to avoid the cad, that's all, Bob," Frank remarked.

Bob made a restless movement. "That means dodging him—with the bragging rotter making out all the time

that we're afraid of him!" he muttered. "We shall look precious cowards. And Billy's right; lots of folks will think that promise is only a yarn. Gunten himself does, or pretends to. Why, the rotter will be fairly trailing us down, Franky, and we shall have to fight him, or run away from him."

"Or else let him thrash us!" said Frank, with a grimace. "My hat! Miss Meadows didn't mean it, but she has landed us in a precious scrape!"

"You're late for lunch," said Mr. Lawless, meeting them inside the ranch-house. "Your mother's had it kept hot for you, Bob. Go in."

"Yes, dad."

Frank and Bob went into the dining-room, thinking more about their peculiar predicament than about their dinner, though they were hungry.

They ate in silence for some time. Before the end of the meal, however, Bob Lawless started up, with a sudden exclamation.

"Frank, look!"

He pointed to the window.

From the window there was a wide view of the plains and the corrals in the distance, and the trail that ran across the grassland towards the timber.

Two riders had appeared on the trail, and Frank gave a start as he recognised Gunten and Keller, the two Swiss of Hillcrest.

Gunten was grinning as he rode towards the ranch.

Keller seemed to be rather amused, too.

"My hat!" exclaimed Frank, aghast. "Bob, they can't be coming here to kick up a row, surely!"

Bob set his teeth. "What are they coming for, then?" "But your father—"

"Well, I guess the poppa will shift Gunten fast enough if he makes himself unpleasant. But the cad wants to insult us before our people, Frank, and we can't touch him!" Bob clenched his hands.

"Fancy the worm playing such a game as that, because we've promised—"

The two Swiss disappeared from sight from the windows, riding on towards the big door of the ranch-house.

Bob caught his chum by the arm. "Come on, Frank!"

"Where?" asked Frank.

"We can't let him see us. Can't you see his game? He's going to ask to see us, and start on us when he's shown in. He's got no idea of decency. We can't stand up and be punched, I suppose. Let's get out before he comes in, and we'll ride over and see the Cherub. Gunten won't stay long."

Frank Richards drew a deep breath. It was humiliating and exasperating to be dodging a fellow like Gunten, whom he heartily despised, but there really seemed nothing else to be done.

The chums quitted the dining-room, and hurried out at the back of the house, and they heard Gunten dismounting at the front as they went.

Their unfinished meal remained on the table.

They ran out their horses hurriedly, and mounted and rode away from the ranch-house at a good speed.

"This way. We've got to get cover," said Bob, jerking his whip towards a belt of willows.

"Cover!" murmured Frank. "Cover—from Gunten! My word!"

"We don't want him to spot us, and give the whole ranch the sight of him chasing us, and us running away," said Bob bitterly.

Frank nodded.

They were soon on the further side of the willows, screened from the ranch-house, and there they let out their horses to a gallop, heading for the distant timber.

The 4th Chapter.
Enough for Keller!

Chop, chop!

Verc Beauclerc was splitting logs outside the shack by the creek when Frank and Bob rode up.

The Cherub glanced up, and nodded and smiled to his chums.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said cheerily. "You're just in time. I was just going in to brew some coffee."

"Good man!" said Bob. "We'll help you get rid of it. Like some help with the logs?"

"Nearly finished, old chap. But what are you doing here? I thought you were busy on the ranch to-day."

"Gunten's after us, on the war-path," explained Frank Richards. "We just dodged him at the ranch."

Beauclerc stared at them.

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"We are!"

"But—"

"He knows about our promising Miss Meadows, and so he's started in life as a ferocious fighting-man," said Bob ruefully. "You'll be in the same boat, Cherub, if the rotter comes across you!"

"My hat!"

"Poppa at home?" asked Bob.

"No; father's gone down to Kamloops," said Beauclerc. "I'm not expecting him back before dark. Come in and have some coffee. By the way, is Gunten likely to follow you here?"

"We didn't let him see us sneaking off."

"But he may guess—"

"I shouldn't wonder! We shall have to travel again if he moseys along," groaned Bob.

Beauclerc led the way into the shack, and the coffee was brewed.

The three chums chatted cheerily round the fire, while the wind sang without in the pine trees, and a few flakes of snow rustled round the building.

Bob Lawless kept one eye on the open doorway.

It was likely enough that, baffled at the ranch, Gunten would come on to the shack to see Beauclerc.

The Swiss was evidently on the war-path.

It was half an hour later that hoof-beats echoed in the timber, and two riders came out on the trail near the shack.

"Here they are!" said Bob, with a grunt.

Beauclerc rose to his feet.

"Are we going to run for it?" asked Frank, half laughing and half exasperated.

"We'd better," said Bob. "I'm not going to break my word to Miss Meadows, and I can't sit down and be licked by Gunten. Come on!"

They ran out to the horses, and Beauclerc, with a flush in his face, went to the shed for his own steed.

He brought his black horse out, and the three chums mounted.

Gunten touched his horse with the whip, and came on at a gallop.

"Stop, you cowards!" he shouted.

"Stop!" roared Keller. "Funks! Stop!"

The three rode out on the plain, with Gunten and Keller in hot pursuit.

Bob Lawless' eyes gleamed.

"We can't touch Gunten," he said. "But we can touch Keller—hard! I guess I'll make him sorry he's called."

He wheeled his horse.

"Charge them!" he said.

"Right-ho, Bob!"

The three riders, in a line, rode back at the pursuers, at full gallop.

They were well aware that the two Swiss would not have the nerve to stand against the charge.

As they came rushing on, Gunten dragged his horse to one side, and Keller to the other, leaving them room to pass.

They did not mean to risk being ridden down.

Bob Lawless spun round after Keller, his riding-whip in his hand.

The whip came across Keller's shoulders with a terrific slash, and there was a wild yell from the Swiss.

"Yaroo! Oh! Yoop!"

Lash, lash!

Keller, yelling with pain, put spurs to his horse, and dashed away in full flight, Bob riding as close as he could, easily keeping pace, and lashing out with the whip with great vigour.

Frank Richards and Beauclerc, laughing, rode behind Bob, and after them came Kern Gunten.

It was not till Keller had been soundly thrashed and was shrieking for mercy that Bob Lawless "let up."

Then the Swiss rode away, still howling with anguish, and Frank Richards & Co. galloped on across the prairie.

Gunten shouted to his comrade, but Keller, who had plainly had enough, did not even answer him.

He rode away towards Thompson, howling and gasping, leaving Kern Gunten to his own devices.

Bob Lawless looked back, and waved his hand to Gunten.

The Swiss shook his fist furiously in response, and wheeled his horse to ride after Keller.

The 5th Chapter.
Yen Chin Takes a Hand.

Frank Richards & Co. were looking—and feeling—unusually thoughtful as they rode to school on Monday morning.

They wondered whether they would see anything of Kern Gunten that day.

It seemed only too probable.

Their week of probation was not half over yet. For seven days their promise to Miss Meadows held good, and the cunning Swiss was well aware of it.

The advantage he was taking of their predicament nonplussed the chums of Cedar Creek. They simply did not know how to deal with the rascal.

As they came within sight of the lumber school they found a horseman waiting in the trail.

It was Gunten.

He grinned at the sight of the trio.

He was waiting in the middle of the trail, and they had to pass him to get to school—or be late for lessons.

Gunten, apparently, was risking being late at Hillcrest.

Frank Richards & Co. slackened speed.

"Well, there he is!" grunted Bob Lawless. "I reckoned we'd see him to-day. And he's started early. What's the programme?"

"We can't stand much more of this!" growled Beauclerc angrily. "And there's Chunks and Yen Chin grinning like a pair of Cheshire cats!"

"Blow them!"

Chunks Todgers and Yen Chin, the Chinese, were leaning against a big tree near Gunten, looking on. And certainly they were grinning.

They seemed to find something entertaining in Frank Richards & Co.'s predicament.

"Come on, you fellows!" shouted Chunks. "Are you going to be late?"

Gunten gripped his riding-whip.

"Yep! Come on!" he called out mockingly.

"Hang him!" said Bob savagely. "Jevver hear of such a mean, pesky cad? He's going to lay into us with that whip. And what are we going to do?"

"Gallop, and chance it!" said Frank. "He can't follow us into Cedar Creek, anyway. Plenty of fellows there to mop him up."

Yen Chin detached himself from the tree, still grinning, and moved out into the trail behind Gunten.

The Swiss did not heed the little Celestial; his eyes were fixed upon Frank Richards & Co.

Frank drew a quick breath.

"Look, you chaps! Yen Chin— My hat!"

The little Chinese made a sudden spring, and reached Gunten, and gripped his foot.

Before Gunten knew what was happening he was jerked up and over, and rolled off his horse on the other side.

Bump!

There was a fearful yell from the Swiss as he landed in the trail.

The fall had bruised him considerably, and dazed him, and he lay in the grass yelling.

His startled horse reared and dashed aside.

With a leap like a lynx Yen Chin landed on the fallen Swiss, and his knee was planted on Gunten's chest.

"Me gotee!" grinned Yen Chin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Richards & Co., as they rode up.

"Good old heathen!" chuckled Bob.

Yen Chin grinned up at them.

"Me tinkee watee Guntee!" he said cheerily. "Guntee volly bad boy. Me, Yen Chin, good boy! Oh, yes!"