

THE BOYS WHO CAUGHT THE KAISER!

(Continued from the previous page.)

The boys got hold of the hoses with which the crew were washing the decks, and took their baths in the powerful, roaring jets of sea water that came pouring through them under the push of the steam pumps.

Horace, the goat, came trotting up to join in the sport.

But Porkis, who was handling the hose at the moment, gave Horace the full blast of the hose, washing him along the deck. Then, with a yell, Porkis dropped the hose and fled, as Horace, losing his temper, charged the sputtering hose branch, butting it all over the deck.

The more the hose squirted the less Horace liked it, for every time he butted it and lifted it on his angry horns he got the water full in his face.

He finally butted the objectionable nozzle into a ventilating cowl, which happened to open into Lal Tata's cabin, just above the spot where that worthy master's head reposed upon his pillows.

Lal Tata was taking his beauty sleep when, of a sudden, there was a thunder and a rattle above his head, and volumes of water came pouring through the roof of his cabin.

"Ai! Ai!" yelled Lal, sitting up in his bunk, gasping and sputtering. "Helps! Helps! All hands to the boats! The ship is going down!"

He leaped out of his bunk and rushed out of his cabin, flew along the corridor, yelling at the top of his voice that the ship was sinking.

He rushed up a companionway, and, throwing back the door, shot out on the port side of the hurricane-deck just as Dick Dorrington let fly with the most powerful hose on the ship.

The full force of the powerful jet caught

Lal in the neck, and sent him sliding a dozen yards along the deck in a whirl of spray and pink-striped pyjamas, just as Horace, in a very bad temper, and looking for trouble, trotted round a corner of the deckhouse.

The sight of Lal, sitting in a great lake of water, yelling at the top of his voice, was just enough to stir up Horace to full speed.

Lowering his head, he charged just as Lal staggered to his feet.

Lal seized him by the horns, and was shot backwards along the deck with the speed of an express train.

Then there was a mix-up of goat and pink pyjamas that was too swift to be followed by the eyes of the boys.

Lal had lost his temper as well as Horace. He retained his hold on Horace's spreading horns, and they leaped into the air together, bouncing backwards and forwards up and down the deck in a sort of wild turkey-trot.

It beat all the acrobatic entertainments the boys had ever seen.

Sometimes Horace was flying in the air, sometimes Lal was travelling round through space in a flash of pink pyjamas.

They bumped against the beams of the boat-deck, and they thumped on the planks of the deck.

Then Horace gave Lal a toss, and Lal, spinning in the air, descended astride of his enemy's back, riding him like a jockey.

Horace was horrified. He could never stand anything on his back. It drove him mad.

With a single bound he shot up the ladder on to the boat-deck, where the great funnel lay flat.

There was a thump and a yell from Lal,

and a burst of a flying black cloud of soot from the funnel.

Then Horace, black from head to foot, his eyes blazing like emeralds, leaped out on deck again.

With a magnificent bound he cleared the space between the ship and the shore, landing upon the rocks, and stirring up a cloud of gulls.

The boys saw the soot flying in a cloud from Horace's coat as the gulls gathered about him.

They saw him butt an old grey gull whose wing-spread was a good five feet, so that the angry bird crashed, and, forgetting to fly, ran for his life, screaming and squawking.

Then away went Horace, flying over the congenial rocks, leaping and bounding like a gazelle, till he was lost to sight far away across the island.

Then a heap of soot crawled out of the mouth of the funnel, where the astonished boys stood in a helpless, laughing group.

It was almost unrecognisable as a human being.

There was not a pink stripe anywhere in it, but it was Lal Tata right enough.

"Boys," said the soot-heap, in sepulchral tones, "that Horace fellow is a ferocious beast which is not fit for human societies. First he drowns your master in bed. Then he butts him into funnel of steamships. And you laugh! Ha! You shall do me some terrific impots! You shall each write for me fifteen thousand lines: 'Cave hircum—' 'Beware of the goat!'"

Lal coughed a cloud of soot.

"Where is Horace?" he wheezed.

"He's hopped it, sir!" said Chip. "He made a clean pierhead jump of it, and landed on the shore. Now he's toddled off across the island."

"It is my hopes that we shall never see his face again!" said Lal, as he stood up, a pillar of soot, and then marched off solemnly to the water-tub.

But Captain Handyman took another view of the matter as, roused out of his cabin by the hullabaloo, he leaped up on the boat-deck.

"We can't have that goat careering over the island," he said. "He'll give us away to the Germans for keeps! As soon as you young rips have had your breakfasts, you can start off and rope him in again. You will go, Dorrington, you, Porkis, and you, Pongo! I want you to be careful to leave no footprints on the top of the island, and don't drop any paper or anything that might give our presence away. I've been right round the island this morning before you were up, and I've seen nothing suspicious in any of the little crannies or bays. But I am sure this is a German submarine base; and for all I know there may be Germans hidden away on the island."

"But what about Horace, sir?" asked Porkis. "He'll leave footprints all over the shop on those big patches of sand."

"We can't help that," replied the captain. "Maybe it won't be spotted. The Portuguese fishermen use these islands sometimes to dry their nets, and they sometimes bring goats with them for fresh milk. But off you go after breakfast, you three chaps, and mind you don't come back without the goat. Footprints are one thing, but a goat covered with fresh soot is another!"

So it happened that immediately after breakfast Dick and Porkis and Pongo tripped gaily across the gang plank which was laid for them, and set off across the rocks in search of the truant.

They were in the highest spirits, for Captain Handyman had allowed them to draw a revolver each from the ship's armoury.

"If he hadn't forbidden us to use our guns unless we were in danger, I'd like to have a pop or two at some of these birds," said Porkis, as they leaped from rock to rock, passing amongst the nest-

ing birds, which seemed hardly to have sense enough to get out of their way.

Eggs were lying about all over the place, some in nests of seaweed, which were cleverly stuck on the face of the rocks; others merely lying haphazard in the shallower depressions.

"What a place for eggng!" exclaimed Porkis. "And look at those little yellow balls of fluff! Why, they are young gulls!"

Stooping down, Porkis thrust his little finger in the wide-open beaks of the nestling gulls, which were evidently awaiting their parents, who were away fishing for their breakfasts, far out at sea.

Crabs scuttled away from right and left as they clambered across the rocks, keeping roughly to the line of country they had seen the errant Horace take before he had disappeared over the skyline.

"We are keeping too close to the shore," said Dick, after a while. "Look at those beastly crabs scuttling away!" he added. "The place simply swarms with them. Skeleton says that he's going to have such a crab supper to-night as he's never had before in his life!"

Dick edged away inland, heading for the top of the island.

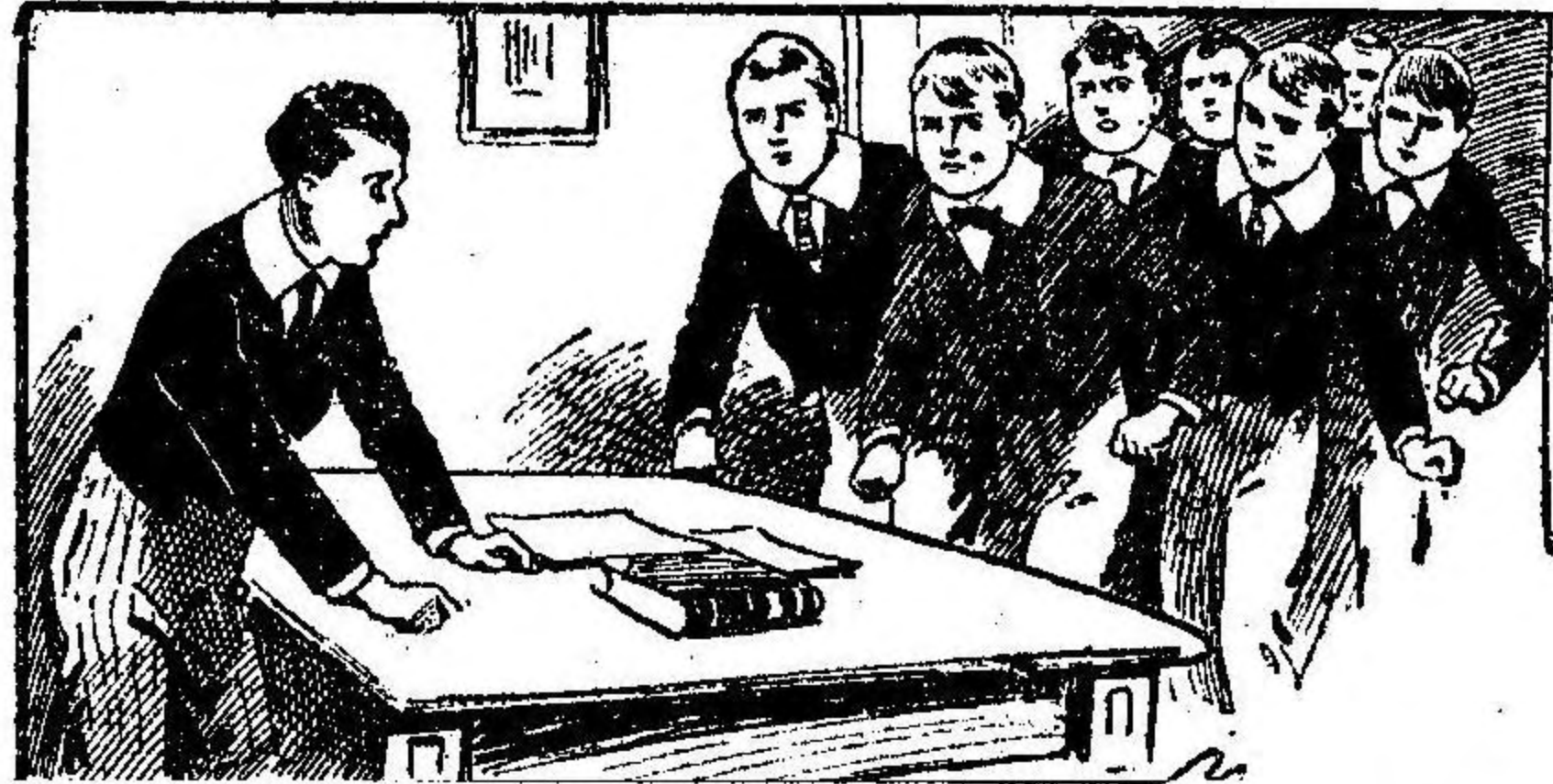
But Porkis pointed to a huge ridge of basaltic rocks which jutted up near the shore.

"Let's go over that ridge, Dick," he said. "I—I've got a feeling that there's something on the other side of that."

Dick Dorrington allowed himself to be persuaded.

Porkis was right enough in his instinct. But little did he dream of the surprise that awaited them on the other side of that savage, jagged pile of basalt rocks!

(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.)



The 1st Chapter.

The Heavy Hand.

"They—they're coming!" There was a tramp of feet in the passage outside the study, and Leggett of the Fourth shivered as he heard it.

Albert Leggett had been moving restlessly about his study, unable to settle down to work or anything else.

His ears had been on the alert, as he moved, for the sound of footsteps.

He knew that they would come. He stood still, breathing hard, as the door handle was turned.

The door did not open. "Locked!" It was the voice of Tommy Dodd, the chief of the Modern Fourth, outside.

"Bust it in, bedad!" "Speak to the rotter first!" That was the voice of Jimmy Silver, of the Classical Fourth.

Knock! "Are you there, Leggett?" Leggett made no reply.

"We know you're there," went on Jimmy Silver's quiet voice. "You can hear me, Leggett. Will you let us in?"

"What do you want?" panted Leggett, breaking silence at last.

"You know what we want. Will you open the door?"

"No." "Better!" said Tommy Dodd. "I—I won't! Keep out, hang you!" exclaimed Leggett. "I—I'll yell for a prefect if you try to open the door!"

"Go ahead! If you bring Knowles here, he will want to know what the row's about!" answered Tommy Dodd. "Cut off and get the coal-hammer, Cooky! We'll soon have this door open!"

"Right-ho!" Leggett's hands trembled. "I—I'll open the door!" he stammered. "Sharp, then!"

Leggett dragged himself to the door, and unlocked it.

The door was thrown open, disclosing a crowd of juniors in the passage.

There were Dodd and Cook and Doyle, the three Tommies of the Modern side; and Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, the Fistical Four Classics.

Both divisions of the Fourth Form at Rookwood were well represented.

The seven juniors came quietly into the study.

Leggett backed away round the table, eyeing them uneasily.

Tommy Dodd closed the door, and turned the key again, Leggett's sallow face paling as he watched him.

Tommy Doyle had a fives-bat under his arm.

Leggett looked at that bat, and he thought he could guess what it was for.

"Better put him on the table," remarked Doyle thoughtfully. "Some of yez would his paws, and some of yez would his hoofs!"

"I—I—I—" stammered Leggett. The threat to call for help died on his lips.

"You can howl, if you like," said Tommy Dodd, guessing his unspoken thought. "That will mean that the prefects will settle the matter—and we'd just as soon they did. Rather, in fact!"

Leggett did not speak. "Put him on the table, bedad!" "Hold on a minute!" said Jimmy Silver. "We'll speak to him first.

Leggett, you've still got a chance to do the decent thing."

No answer. "You know how the matter stands," said Jimmy quietly, almost persuasively.

"Mr. Bootles is dismissed, and has got to leave the school in the morning. He's your Form-master as well as mine, Leggett, and he's always treated us decently—you as well as us. You don't want him to be turned out of Rookwood, Leggett."

"It's nothing to do with me!" muttered Leggett.

"Why, you rotter—" began Lovell hotly.

"Shush!" murmured Raby. "Let Jimmy go ahead! We agreed to let Jimmy do the talking first."

Lovell grunted. He at least had no patience to waste on the cad of the Fourth, that was clear.

"Pile in, Uncle James!" said Newcome, with a grin.

Uncle James piled in. "It's a lot to do with you, Leggett," Jimmy Silver went on, in the same quiet tone. "You're the cause of the whole trouble."

"I—I—I—" "You fixed up a cord in the Head's study for Dr. Chisholm to tumble over. You left my pencil-case there to make out that I had done it. Bootles stood up for me, and wouldn't let the Head flog me, and the Head's dismissed him. It's come out that you played that trick in the Head's study. Well, if the Head knew that, you can see that he would have to admit that Mr. Bootles was right in stopping my flogging. You can see that?"

No answer from Leggett.

"As it stands, the flogging is still hanging over me," said Jimmy. "I'm not worrying about that, though. I could stand that, if that were all. But that's not all. Mr. Bootles is sacked for opposing the Head. He's awfully cut up about leaving Rookwood. You know what the poor old chap was looking like in the Form-room this morning."

"Like a giddy spectre!" said Raby. "I—I'm sorry for Bootles!" faltered Leggett. "But—but—"

"Then do the decent thing, and make it all right for him."

"I—I can't!" "You can! The Head would have to admit that Bootles did right, if he knew that I hadn't earned the flogging he was going to give me when Bootles chipped in. He'll know that, if you own up to what you did."

"I can't!" "Why not?" "You—you silly fool!" panted Leggett. "Own up to the Head that I fixed up a trap for him, and made him fall over and damage his dashed nose! He would flog me!"

"You've asked for it, haven't you?" growled Lovell.

"Look here, you cad—"

"Do you want Jimmy to have your flogging?"

"Of course he does!" said Tommy Dodd, with bitter contempt. "He tried to fix it for Jimmy Silver to get the flogging. He don't care a rap if poor old Bootles is sacked. But we're going to make him care!"

Leggett licked his dry lips. "You can't give me away!" he mut-

tered. "That's sneaking! You can't tell Bootles—you can't tell the Head!"

"You've got us there!" admitted Jimmy Silver. "Any decent chap would own up. You won't!"

"No, I won't!" said Leggett desperately. "And you can send me to Coventry, if you like! I don't care!"

"Quite so—and so we're not going to bother about Coventry. You won't own up to the truth because you're afraid of a flogging. Well, you're going to get the flogging!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's what we've come here for. Are you ready, Doyle?"

"Faith, I'm waiting while ye're exercising yer chin, Jimmy darling!" Leggett clenched his hands.

"You won't face the flogging you've asked for, from the Head," continued the captain of the Fourth. "Well, you'll get one from us, quite as bad—if not a bit worse. And that isn't all! You'll get another to-morrow—and another the next day."

"Every day till the end of the term!" said Tommy Dodd, nodding his head.

"Now, you're a business-like chap, Leggett," said Jimmy Silver. "A bit too business-like in some ways for a decent fellow. You can see whether it will pay you to sneak out of one flogging, and bag one for every day of the term in exchange. Think it over."

Leggett gritted his teeth. "You rotters! I—I'll yell for Knowles or Mr. Manders—"

"Just as you like! Take warning, though, that if the masters are brought in the whole affair comes out," said Jimmy Silver. "You won't be allowed to make out that this is a case of bullying, you rat! If we're called to account for flogging you, we shall have to state our reason. Now you can please yourself about howling for Mr. Manders."

"Howl away, you spalpeen!" said Tommy Doyle. "And sure I'm waitin' for yez to put him on the table!"

Leggett panted as the juniors closed in on him.

He struggled as he was grasped, but the grip of many hands was upon him, and he was swept off his feet.

There was a bump as he was landed on the table.

"Now, then, Doyle!" Leggett gave a howl.

There was no doubt that the juniors were in deadly earnest.

Leggett's last lingering hope vanished as Tommy Doyle raised the fives-bat.

"Stop!" he howled.

Whack! The howl came a little too late.

Whack! "Stop!" shrieked Leggett, struggling in the grasping hands. "I—I—I'll do as you want—I'll own up! Let me go!"

"Hold on, Tommy!" "Better give him a few more, or he may change his mind."

"Hold on! Leggett, do you mean that?" asked Jimmy Silver sternly. "Mind, if you break your word, you'll get the flogging, and harder. You've got to take it from the Head or a good many from us."

"I—I mean it!" panted Leggett. He was lifted off the table.

He stood gasping, his face convulsed with rage and fear.

The cad of the Fourth had been brought to order at last.

Masters on Strike!

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

By OWEN CONQUEST.

believed innocent of the charge laid against him.

But it was felt that Mr. Bootles had to go.

Whether Jimmy Silver had been innocent or guilty, he was condemned to punishment by the Head, and the Head's word was law in Rookwood School.

Dr. Chisholm expected his decision to be taken without question—and, in fact, only Mr. Bootles had questioned it.

He had done what he believed to be his duty, and now the penalty had to be paid.

The little gentleman blinked at Leggett over his glasses, as the cad of the Fourth presented himself in the study.

He did not observe that the door remained ajar, and he did not know that five or six juniors were quietly gathered just outside.

Leggett was aware of it, however. If he had hoped to trick the juniors at the last moment he abandoned that hope now.

"Well, Leggett?" said Mr. Bootles kindly. The worry on his mind did not make him any less gentle in his manner.

"What is it, my boy?" Albert Leggett drew a deep breath. He was in for it, and there was no escape, and his only thought now was to make the best he could of it for himself.

"If—if you please, sir—" he began. He blinked uneasily at Mr. Mooney and Mr. Bohun.

The presence of the other masters made his confession more difficult.

"Well, Leggett?"

"I—I—I've a confession to make, sir," gasped Leggett.

Mr. Bootles smiled faintly. "You have been guilty of some fault, Leggett?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"And you feel impelled to confess it because I am leaving Rookwood to-morrow?" said the little gentleman innocently. "That is a very right and proper feeling, Leggett. You may proceed."

"It's—it's a rather serious matter, sir," mumbled Leggett. "I—I—I feel I ought to tell you, sir, because—because—"

Leggett had a "brain-wave" while he was speaking, and he proceeded more confidently. "Because, sir, it's really my fault you are leaving, and it's on my conscience, sir."

It was the first that had been heard at Rookwood of Leggett's conscience.

The fellows outside the study looked at one another.

They had not expected even Leggett to put it like that.

Still, it did not matter much how he put it, so far as they were concerned—so long as he made full confession.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bootles, in surprise. "What ever have you done, Leggett?" His brow became sterner.

Leggett, if you have been guilty of practising usury again—of lending money among your Form fellows at interest—"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"I am glad to hear that, Leggett. Go on."

"I—I—I played that trick in the Head's study, sir," gasped Leggett. "What?"

Mr. Mooney and Mr. Bohun looked round quickly as the confession came out; they were as astonished as the Fourth Form-master.

"You?" ejaculated Mr. Mooney. "Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Bootles.

Leggett went on hastily. "I—I've come here to own up, sir, so that you can tell the Head, and—and then you won't have to leave, I hope, sir."

Which was very clever, though certainly not very truthful, of the astute Leggett!

"What—what?"

"I—I'm sorry I did it now, sir," said Leggett humbly. "I—I never meant any harm. It—it was just thoughtlessness. I never meant the Head to hurt his boko—I—I mean his nose, sir."

"Leggett," said Mr. Bootles sternly,

"We'll lose no time," said Tommy Dodd. "We'll come with you, Leggett."

"Hang you!" "Will you go to Mr. Bootles or to the Head?"

"Mr. Bootles!" gasped Leggett. The thought of confessing personally to the Head was terrifying.

"Very well; we'll see you as far as his study."

Tommy Dodd unlocked the door. Leggett, breathing hard, left the study with the seven juniors, and they walked out of Mr. Manders' House in a party, Leggett in the centre.

A good many Classical juniors eyed them as they came into the School House. All glances were turned on Leggett.

"Is the cad goin' to own up?" asked Mornington.

"That's what he's come for."

"Good!" Leggett gave them a glance of hatred, and tramped on to Mr. Bootles' study. Jimmy Silver & Co. went with him, and Jimmy tapped at the door.

"Come in!" Jimmy Silver opened the door.

Leggett hesitated a moment, but the black looks of the fellows round him decided him.

He tramped sullenly into the study, and Jimmy Silver drew the door shut.

But he did not latch it. The Fistical Four were leaving nothing to chance, and they meant to be witnesses of the confession.

The 2nd Chapter.

The Confession.

Mr. Bootles was not alone in the study. Mr. Mooney and Mr. Bohun, the masters of the Shell and the Third, were with the little gentleman, trying, perhaps, to cheer him up on his last evening at Rookwood.

The study had a rather dismantled look.

Mr. Bootles' books were packed, and his other personal belongings; the bookshelves were nearly empty, and the bust of Socrates was gone from the mantel-piece.

Mr. Bootles was keeping up a calm manner, but in spite of himself his face was troubled and worried.

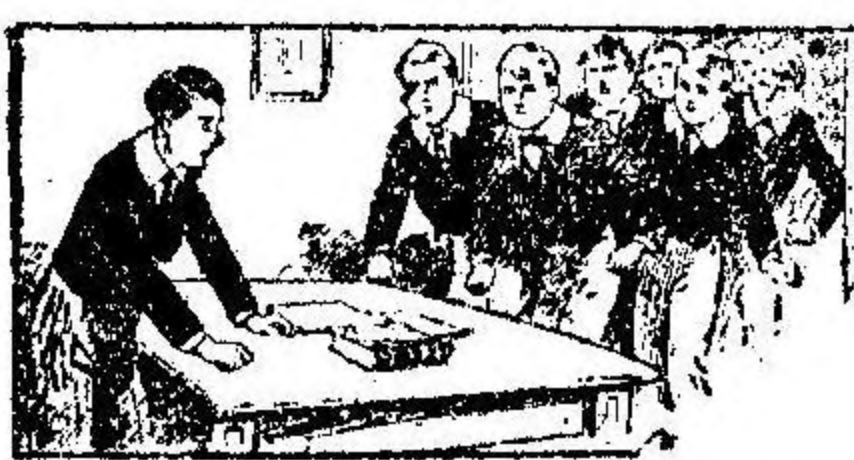
As the moment for leaving Rookwood School came nearer he felt the wrench more and more keenly.

The little gentleman was a "home bird."

Indeed, Mornington of the Fourth had once described him as a thoroughly domesticated animal.

His life was spent between his study and the Form-room, the library, and the Masters' Room; and when he took his walks abroad he generally had a Greek classic under his arm.

All his thoughts and feelings were bound up in R



Masters on Strike!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"you played this wicked and disrespectful prank on Dr. Chisholm, and you remained silent when Silver was sentenced to be flogged in your place!"

Leggett hung his head.

"That was very unmanly, Leggett."

"I—I know, sir."

"And since you did not confess to save Silver, your Form fellow, from unjust punishment, why have you come to confess now, Leggett?"

"To save you, sir," said Leggett boldly.

"Bless my soul!"

"When the Head knows that Silver didn't do it, sir, he will be glad you interfered to stop the flogging," said Leggett.

"Then he will ask you to stay on, sir."

Leggett had derived that idea from Jimmy Silver & Co.; and though he did not care a button whether the Head let Mr. Bootles stay on or not, he was well aware that it was an excellent plea to put before the dismissed Form-master.

Mr. Bootles' face became very kindly.

"That was a very worthy motive, Leggett," he said.

"Thank you, sir!"

Outside the study, Arthur Edward Lovell was brandishing a clenched fist in the air.

Arthur Edward's dearest wish, at that moment, was to plant that fist in Albert Leggett's face, and thus drive his falsehoods back where they came from.

But Lovell, fortunately, was invisible to the occupants of the study.

"You are aware, Leggett, that I must report this to the Head?" said Mr. Bootles.

"I—I want you to, sir."

"It is very honourable of you to make this confession, my boy, but I cannot hold out the slightest hope that you will thereby escape punishment. Dr. Chisholm is naturally very much incensed. You will certainly be flogged, Leggett."

Leggett shivered.

But he thought of the fives-bat, and the daily application thereof, which was the alternative.

"I—I'm ready, sir," he faltered.

Mr. Bootles looked very thoughtful.

"You may await me in the passage, Leggett," he said at last.

"Very well, sir."

Leggett left the study, and shut the door after him.

Mr. Bootles glanced at the other two masters.

"This is a very honourable proceeding on the part of the boy," he remarked.

Mr. Mooney shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly so; but I fancy there has been pressure brought to bear upon Leggett," he said.

"The other juniors may—"

"Ah! It is possible."

"At all events the truth is now known," remarked Mr. Bohun.

"Dr. Chisholm is bound to alter his views when he knows the facts, Mr. Bootles."

The master of the Fourth nodded.

His troubled face had brightened up wonderfully.

"I am sure of that," he said, very cheerfully.

"When the Head is aware that he has narrowly escaped administering a harsh and undeserved punishment I am sure he will feel exceedingly obliged to me."

"I hope so," said Mr. Mooney, with a slight cough.

He did not feel very sure about that; but he would not discourage his colleague.

Mr. Bootles rose to his feet quite briskly.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, I had better see the Head at once."

"Certainly!"

The master of the Fourth rustled to the door.

As he opened it, the voice of Arthur Edward Lovell was audible in the passage.

"You sneaking worm, Leggett!"

"Hang you!"

"Cave!" murmured Raby, as the door opened.

The juniors scudded away.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles, blinking after Jimmy Silver & Co., in surprise.

"What—what? Ah, you are here, Leggett! Kindly follow me to Dr. Chisholm's study!"

"Yes, sir," mumbled the Modern junior.

Mr. Bootles whisked away, with Leggett following in his wake.

From a distance Jimmy Silver & Co. watched them enter the Head's study.

"All serene now!" said Jimmy, with great satisfaction.

"Right as rain!" said Conroy, the Australian.

"The Head can't fail to play up."

"But that worm Leggett!" breathed Lovell.

"Why, he was lying like anything—taking credit to himself—"

"Never mind Leggett, so long as Bootles comes out all right," said Jimmy Silver.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, I think it's going to be all right. The tuckshop's not closed yet. Who's coming to drink Bootles' health in ginger-pop? My treat!"

"Hear, hear!"

Quite a large party proceeded to Sergeant Kettle's little shop to drink Mr. Bootles' health—Tubby Muffin, in fact, drinking it several times over.

The 3rd Chapter.

Nothing Doing.

"Really, Mr. Bootles—"

Dr. Chisholm's voice was cold and incisive.

The Head of Rookwood was rather respected than liked by the school staff; and there had been times when he was almost disliked.

Poor Mr. Bootles, who had come to the study full of hope and brightness, was chilled at once.

His confident manner disappeared, and he became ill-at-ease under the uncompromising glance of the headmaster.

There was nothing encouraging in Dr. Chisholm's look.

Apparently he concluded that Mr. Bootles had come to make some appeal against his dismissal, and he desired to cut the interview as short as possible.

"The—the fact is, sir—" began the Form-master.

The Head raised his eyebrows, further disconcerting the little gentleman, who faltered and ceased.

"Well?"

"The—the fact is, sir, this boy—Leggett—has made a very surprising confession. I have brought him to you—"

"Indeed!"

"It appears, sir, that Silver, as I supposed, was guiltless of the prank played in this study."

"That matter is closed, Mr. Bootles."

"I can now produce incontrovertible proof, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"Proof, sir, which you cannot refuse to credit."

"Nonsense!"

"Really, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, colouring.

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"The matter is closed, Mr. Bootles. I decline to hear one word on the subject! That is all I have to say!"

"Leggett, sir, has confessed—"

"What?"

"He has confessed that he was guilty."

"Oh!"

Mr. Bootles had the advantage at last. Cold and stern as he was, the Head was essentially a just man; he could not have been respected in a school like Rookwood had he been otherwise.

He had been firmly convinced of Jimmy Silver's guilt, though possibly, as Jimmy surmised, the damage to his august nose had—unconsciously—helped to convince him.

There was a short pause, during which Leggett's knees knocked together.

He felt a strong inclination to bolt from the study as the Head's terrifying glance turned upon him.

"Leggett!" Dr. Chisholm's voice was like the rumble of thunder.

"You confess—"

"Oh, sir! Yes, sir!" gasped Leggett.

"You were the author of the outrage in this study?" thundered the Head.

"Yes, sir, I'm sorry—"

"You fastened a cord in this room for me to stumble over in the dark!"

Leggett gasped.

"And why have you kept silent so long, Leggett, in order to confess the truth at this late hour?"

"I—I was afraid, sir!" stammered Leggett.

There was no doubt of the truth of that statement.

At the present moment, Albert Leggett was so terrified that his tongue almost clove to his mouth.

"I can well believe that, Leggett," said the Head grimly.

"Yes, I can believe that. But you are a Modern boy. How did you obtain admission here without being observed?"

"I—I borrowed the corridor key from Mr. Manders' study, sir."

"Then you had, apparently, planned this outrage very carefully, Leggett? It was not merely a foolish, boyish trick. And now, Leggett, did James Silver's pencil-case come here?"

"I—I dropped it, sir."

"Boy!"

"By—by accident, sir!" stammered Leggett.

His voice died away under the Head's grim look.

"Very well!" said Dr. Chisholm.

"I shall express my regret to Silver that he was unjustly suspected. You, Leggett, will be soundly flogged. You have acted disrespectfully towards me, and basely towards your schoolfellow. I would expel you from the school, Leggett, but for the fact that this confession is apparently made of your own free will. I shall flog you to-morrow morning, Leggett, most severely. You may go."

Leggett limped from the study.

Dr. Chisholm turned back to the papers on his table.

He seemed to have forgotten the presence of Mr. Bootles in his study.

The little Form-master coughed.

He coughed a second time, but the Head did not look up.

"Dr. Chisholm!" said Mr. Bootles at last nervously.

At that the doctor raised his head.

"Well, Mr. Bootles?"

"It is clear that Silver is innocent now—"

"Perfectly so."

"In that case, an act of great injustice would have taken place if he had been flogged, sir."

"Undoubtedly!"

"I was convinced at the time of his innocence from the evidence before me."

"You were wrong, Mr. Bootles," said the Head coldly.

"It is true that he was guiltless, but the evidence against him was, to my mind, conclusive. A judgment could only be formed on the known facts; and the facts, as then known, pointed to Silver's guilt. I do not blame myself for being deceived."

"But you are glad, sir, that you did not punish Silver unjustly!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles warmly.

"No doubt."

"You will allow me to point out, sir, that my interference, which you resented at the time—"

"Not only at the time, Mr. Bootles. My feelings on that subject have not changed."

"My interference, at least, sir, prevented an act of harsh injustice. I did my duty as Silver's Form-master."

"I do not see it in that light. However, there is no need to discuss the matter. We hold different opinions. I may mention that I am rather busy at the present moment, Mr. Bootles."

The Fourth Form master drew a deep breath.

His face was pink; his anger was rising, though he held it in check.

"Am I to understand, sir, that this discovery makes no difference to your decision as regards me?" he asked very quietly.

"None at all, Mr. Bootles. I cannot retain upon the school staff a master who opposes me in public."

"It was by your own act, sir, that the opposition was public. I tried to convince you in private."

The Head made a gesture.

"Mr. Bootles, I am headmaster of Rookwood School, and I do not brook opposition. Kindly do not reopen the subject."

"Then, sir, you desire me to leave Rookwood to-morrow morning, as arranged?" asked Mr. Bootles, with a tremble in his voice.

"Quite so."

"I am bound to say, sir, that in this matter you are acting with the same baseness and injustice you displayed towards Silver of the Fourth!" burst out Mr. Bootles indignantly.

The Head's eyes glittered for a moment over his glasses.

"Very well, Mr. Bootles," he said calmly.

"You have stated your opinion, and I have noted it. Will you oblige me by closing this interview?"

"Certainly, sir! You shall not have to ask me twice to leave your study!" spluttered the indignant Mr. Bootles.

And he whisked out in a great heat.

The 4th Chapter.

Friends in Need.

"Phew!"

"That doesn't look as if it's all right, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. came into the School House in time to see Mr. Bootles return to his study.

The agitation and distress in the little gentleman's face was visible to them, though Mr. Bootles whisked on without a glance at the juniors.

The door closed on him, and the juniors looked blankly at one another.

"My—my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Lovell rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"It hasn't worked!" he said.

"Bootles wouldn't look like that if it was all right. What the merry dickens does it mean?"

"I'm going to ask Bootles!" said Jimmy determinedly.

He tapped at the Form-master's door and opened it, and found Mr. Bootles in excited and indignant talk with Mr. Mooney and Bohun.

Mr. Bootles whisked round at him.

"Silver! What—what is it? Please do not disturb me now."

"I'm sorry sir," said Jimmy respectfully.

"But—but all the fellows are anxious, sir. Would you mind telling us, sir, whether you are staying on at Rookwood, Mr. Bootles?"

"I am leaving in the morning, Silver. Pray go!"

Mr. Bootles waved his hand impatiently towards the door, and Jimmy Silver got out at once.

The kind and patient temper of the Fourth Form master had evidently suffered from his interview with the Head.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

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

FOR NEXT MONDAY!

I am sure that the novel nature of the present Rookwood stories is making a strong appeal to all my readers, and therefore I have no doubt that our next story, which is entitled

"THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS!"

By Owen Conquest,

will meet with general approval. Such an unprecedented state of affairs has never before occurred at the school, and consternation reigns everywhere. All the masters are on strike save Mr. Manders. But even the Modern master is not capable of taking all the classes.

Dr. Chisholm endeavours to get over the difficulty by putting Sixth-Formers in charge. Carthew is given the task of taking the Fourth, with results that are extremely disastrous. There are ructions with a vengeance, but there is trouble elsewhere. The Third-Formers refuse to obey Knowles, who is put in charge of them. In fact, there is revolt on every side.

The juniors are in sympathy with their masters, and they are determined to back them up until Mr. Bootles is reinstated. But will such a thing happen? I should urge every reader of the BOYS' FRIEND to follow this series very closely; there are some magnificent stories to come.

"HUNTING THE ROAD-AGENTS!"

By Martin Clifford.

The above is the title of next Monday's splendid long complete tale of Frank Richards & Co. The latter see what appears to them an excellent opportunity of capturing the road-agents. They attack the "scoundrels" in a very bold manner, and receive the surprise of their lives. The nature of this surprise you will learn next Monday.

I might tell you, however, that the chums are unsuccessful in capturing the road-agents. However, they are not deterred, and they work out a little

scheme for getting the better of Dicky Bird & Co. Do they succeed? Of course they do, in a way that will amuse you immensely.

The next instalment of our amazing new adventure serial,

"THE BOYS WHO CAUGHT THE KAISER!"

By Duncan Storm,

will be full of excitement. Dick Dorrington, Pongo Walker, and Porkis come face to face with the Kaiser—and so does Horace, for that matter. Horace declines to show any respect to the Kaiser. In fact, he charges him in true British style, and the arch-villain has a very bad time. But that is as it should be, and I am confident you will think well of Horace for what he does. But, revengeful scoundrel that he is, the Kaiser resolves to wreak his vengeance on the boys. What he does you will learn next Monday.

You will all be pleased when you read next Monday's instalment of

"BARKER, THE BOUNDER!"

By Herbert Britton,

for some very surprising events take place. Jack Jackson begins to win favour amongst the juniors, and—Well, I do not think I need say more to prove to you that this instalment will be a most attractive one.

THE "PENNY POPULAR."

I hope that every reader of the BOYS' FRIEND has made himself acquainted with the "Penny Popular." Nos. 1 and 2 of which have already appeared. No. 3 will be published on Friday next, and if there are any readers who have not already seen our new companion paper, I would urge them to place an order for it with their newsagent at once.

Every issue of the "Penny Popular" contains three magnificent long complete stories. In next Friday's issue the most important tale from the point of view of

readers of the BOYS' FRIEND is that entitled

"HEALING THE BREACH!"

By Owen Conquest.

In it is described how, when Jimmy Silver first came to Rookwood, he did not get on at all well with Lovell, how the latter resolved to give Jimmy a good hiding, how his determination carried him into danger, and how Jimmy Silver came out in his true colours and performed a most heroic deed.

The second story will deal with Harry Wharton & Co., and will be entitled

"POOR OLD BUNTER!"

By Frank Richards.

Billy Bunter dives into an empty swimming-bath, the result being that he loses his memory. The Bunter we know so well is the Bunter who is always eating, borrowing, begging, and slacking. But in this story you will be introduced to an entirely different Bunter. The Bunter with a lost memory is a generous, considerate, thoughtful Bunter. It doesn't seem possible, does it? But it is so, as you will see if you read this fine yarn.

The third story introduces Tom Merry & Co., the chums of St. Jim's, and is entitled

"D'ARCY, THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

By Martin Clifford.

Bunter as a ventriloquist is very amusing, but Gussy, the ventriloquist, is even more amusing. The best of it is that the swell of St. Jim's has no ventriloquial powers. But he thinks he has—and that is where the fun lies.

Don't forget to order your copy of the "Penny Popular" in advance.

Your Editor

Jimmy Silver rejoined his chums with a gloomy brow.

"Still sacked?" asked Lovell.

"Yes."

"Rotten!" said Mornington.

"What does it mean? The Head ought to have taken it back."

"We thought he would," said Jimmy.

"He ought to. He ought to be glad Bootles chipped in, as it turns out. I suppose he's got his back up."

"It's a shame!" growled Lovell.

"The Head's a crusty old bird!" remarked Mornington.

"After all, Bootles stood up to him in Hall, and wouldn't let the flogging go ahead. I suppose it's made him a bit stiff."

Bulkeley of the Sixth came along to the group of juniors, and signed to Jimmy Silver.

"After all, they're right! The Head's in the wrong, and they all know it, and they oughtn't to let Bootles be sacked. If he were a plumber or a bricklayer his union wouldn't let him be sacked for nothing. They'd call a strike. Jolly good idea to protest, though I don't think it will do any good."

"Wiggins was going to say something," continued Tubby. "But just then Mooney saw me, and the beast cuffed me—just as if he thought I was listening, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Tubby rubbed his fat car.

"You wouldn't cackle if you'd got it!" he snapped. "I say Mooney is a beast, but I'm glad he's standing up for old Bootles! What do you think the Head will say, Jimmy?"

"Goodness knows!" Under such exciting circumstances, prep was evidently out of the question, and the Fistical Four "chucked it" unanimously. They went downstairs, where they found a good many of the Classical Fourth and some of the Third and the Shell gathered in a big window recess near the door of the Masters' Room.

The news had spread. Probably the gentlemen of the staff were quite unaware that the subject of their weighty deliberations was known outside the sacred apartment where they were met in council.

But it was well enough known, partly owing to Tubby Muffin's long ears, and partly to the portentous looks of the staff themselves.

"They're goin' it like anythin'!" remarked Smythe of the Shell. "If you listen, you can hear Bootles' pipe and old Mooney's deep bass. Looks like a merry indignation meetin'."

"Blowin' off steam!" said Townsend sagely. "They won't dare to face the Head! Two to one they don't, Smythey—in quidlets!"

Adolphus Smythe shook his head. "Not takin' any, dear boy. It would be givin' a quid away!"

"Hallo! Here they come!" exclaimed Lovell suddenly.

The door of the Masters' Room opened. In stately procession came forth the staff; almost all the masters of Rookwood School, with grave and serious faces.

There was a scudding of the juniors at once. But from corners and recesses they watched in breathless excitement, and the excitement reached almost fever pitch when it was seen that the staff marched directly to the Head's study.

"You'd have lost your quids, Towny!" gasped Topham. "They're goin' to beard the merry old lion in his den!"

"Good egg!" murmured Jimmy Silver. At a distance the juniors watched and waited with a thrill of excitement such as had not been known in Rookwood School for many a day.

The 5th Chapter. Turned Down!

Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows. The Head had returned to his study after dinner to attend to some business in connection with replacing Mr. Bootles.

He was deep in papers now, with a rather less severe expression on his face than of late.

A good dinner had doubtless had an ameliorating effect upon the old gentleman. But he raised his eyebrows very expressively when, after a tap at the door, the school staff presented themselves.

Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, led the way.

Mr. Greely was a stout, rather imposing gentleman, with a ruddy face and short breath.

After Mr. Greely came Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, and Mr. Bohun of the Third.

Then came Mr. Wiggins of the Second Form, and Mr. Bull, familiarly known as "Maths."

Monsieur Monceau, the French master, brought up the rear in a state of great agitation, but with resolution in his little, bearded face.

With Mossoo walked Mr. Flinders, the German master—Rookwood's German master being no longer a native of Germany.

It was nearly the whole staff. Mr. Bootles had discreetly remained in the Masters' Room, there to await the outcome of the deputation.

Mr. Manders, the senior master on the Modern side, had declined to take part in the proceedings.

Mr. Manders had, in fact, sought to keep Mr. Flinders, also a Modern master, out of the affair, but unavailingly.

The staff marched in under a steady stare from the Head, and there was a general remark of:

"H'm!" The Head's brows went up till they really looked as if they were trying to climb over his bald forehead.

"H'm!" repeated Mr. Greely. "H'm!" came from the other gentlemen.

"Mon Dieu!" whispered Monsieur Monceau.

It was pretty clear that the staff were feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

There was something very disconcerting in the steady, steely stare of the headmaster.

"To what," said Dr. Chisholm, in a voice that seemed to cut like a razor—"to what, gentlemen, do I owe this unexpected and extraordinary visit?"

"H'm!" "I presume that you have some business with me?"

Mr. Greely looked at Mr. Mooney, but Mr. Mooney was industriously studying the pattern of the carpet, and did not catch his eye.

He looked at Monsieur Monceau, but that gentleman only shrugged his shoulders almost up to his ears, and murmured:

"Mon Dieu!"

The master of the Fifth pulled himself together.

"Dr. Chisholm—" he began. "H'm!"

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

"We, the staff of Rookwood, sir, have just met in Masters' Session," said Mr. Greely.

"Indeed? I was not aware that this was the evening for the Masters' Session!"

"We have held an extraordinary meeting, sir."

"Yes? And you have something to communicate to me regarding your deliberations?" asked the Head.

"Exactly, sir! H'm!"

"I am occupied at the present moment," said the Head. "I am, in fact, in communication with several gentlemen regarding the appointment that is now vacant at Rookwood."

"Oh! H'm!"

"However, if you have a matter of any importance to communicate, pray be seated, gentlemen, and proceed," said the Head courteously. "As you know, it is always a pleasure to me to hear the views of my staff."

"H'm!" murmured the staff. Mr. Greely glanced round for a chair, decided to remain standing, and went on, after two or three more "H'm's" to clear his throat.

"The matter discussed at this meeting, Dr. Chisholm, is the dismissal of our colleague Mr. Bootles."

Dr. Chisholm's face hardened. "Indeed?" he said.

"Yes, sir, indeed."

"You have, perhaps, passed a vote of censure upon Mr. Bootles?" suggested the Head. "I agree with you, gentlemen, that his conduct was quite without excuse."

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"H'm!"

The discomfort of the unfortunate staff was intensifying.

But Mr. Greely came gallantly to the attack.

"The fact is, sir, we have not passed a vote of censure upon Mr. Bootles," he said. "Perhaps I had better explain."

"That would doubtless be judicious!" said the Head, with a faint infection of sarcasm.

It was pretty clear that the head-

Dr. Chisholm looked quietly and calmly at the somewhat flustered group of gentlemen before him.

His eyes glinted a little.

The remonstrance was very respectful, in fact humble, but it was a remonstrance, and it did not accord with the somewhat autocratic views of the headmaster of Rookwood.

"Is that all?" he asked, as the staff fell silent.

"H'm!" Yes. I—I think that is all, Dr. Chisholm, said Mr. Greely, rather taken aback.

"Very well, gentlemen, I will answer you. I regret exceedingly that it is not possible for me to reconsider my decision with regard to Mr. Bootles," said the Head icily.

"Sir!"

"I have considered the matter very carefully, and have come to the conclusion that, after an act of open insubordination, Mr. Bootles cannot remain at Rookwood. I said I am sorry, and I repeat it. Gentlemen, the matter closes here."

"H'm!"

"Hum!"

The staff looked at one another. This was a "facer," though they had not been unprepared for it.

"Allow me to further point out, sir, that—" began Mr. Greely rather hotly. Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Mr. Greely and gentlemen, discussion is futile. I shall be obliged if you will allow the matter to rest."

The Fifth Form master drew a deep breath.

"That, sir, we cannot do!" he answered.

"What!"

"We have requested, sir, in the most respectful manner, the reconsideration of Mr. Bootles' dismissal. We are now compelled, sir, to proceed further, and protest against that dismissal!"

"We protest, sir!" said Mr. Bull firmly. "An act of injustice to one is an act of injustice to all!" said Mr. Greely. "It is our duty to support our colleague, sir,

They were all looking very pink and very flustered as they whisked away from the Head's study.

They did not disperse to their own quarters and give the matter up, as the Head undoubtedly expected them to do.

They returned to the Masters' Room in a great heat.

The door closed on them, but juniors, gathering outside from near and far, heard an excited murmur of voices going on within.

Apparently the staff were still on the war-path.

"That's Mossoo's top note!" remarked Mornington, as a shrill, excitable voice came to the ears of the juniors, though they could not hear the words. "Old Mossoo's like a merry bantam!"

"I wonder what the game is?" said Jimmy Silver. "It's pretty plain that the Head's turned down their protest."

"Yes, rather!"

"I don't see what more they can do."

"Blest if I do, either!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "I suppose they're just gassing, to make out to one another that they're not afraid of the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They are, though!" said Tubby Muffin, with a chuckle. "I say, the Head's a terrific old coker, ain't he?"

"A bit too much of an old coker," growled Lovell. "I'd give him a bit of my mind if I were in Bootles' place!"

"Hark!"

The deep bass of Mr. Greely came booming from the Masters' Room.

The juniors were not there to listen, but they could not help hearing the Fifth Form master's powerful voice.

"Then I recommend placing our resignations in Dr. Chisholm's hands. There is no other course we can pursue consistent with our dignity. We have been treated, gentlemen, with disdain and contumely!"

"Fancy that!" murmured Tubby Muffin.

"Mais, mon cher Monsieur Greely—"

"Such is my opinion!" boomed the Fifth Form master. "Since it pleases the Head to disregard the views of his

ington, dodging into a window recess. "Keep out of sight; Greely looks rabid."

"On the giddy war-path, and no mistake," chuckled Conroy. "I wonder whether the Head will ring for the sergeant to chuck them out?"

There was a subdued chortle. Matters were getting quite thrilling now.

The door of the Masters' Room was left open, and Jimmy Silver, after the staff had gone, caught a glimpse of Mr. Bootles there.

The little gentleman was walking to and fro, in a state of great agitation.

"Come on, Jimmy!" breathed Lovell. At a safe distance, but with keen and eager eyes, a little army of juniors followed on the track of the staff to the Head's study.

Before Mr. Greely & Co. reached that apartment, however, the door opened, and the Head came out.

In the broad corridor, under the electric lights, the Head met the returning procession, in full career, as it were.

He halted.

The staff halted, too, little Monsieur Monceau making a hapless attempt to screen himself behind the broad shoulders of Mr. Bohun.

"There's the Head!" murmured Conroy. "Keep back, you chaps! If he spots us there'll be earthquakes!"

"Quiet!"

The staff clustered together in the corridor, flustered and confused; the Head as cold, calm, and stately as ever.

"Well, gentlemen," said Dr. Chisholm, in a tone of joy surprise, "were you coming to my study?"

"We—we were, sir!" gasped Mr. Greely. "Not, I hope, to reopen the matter of—"

"Yes, sir! Most decidedly, sir!"

"Then I regret that I cannot listen to you!" said Dr. Chisholm.

Mr. Greely drew a gasping breath. In the Masters' Room he had been the boldest of all, and he had brought his colleagues to his way of thinking.

But somehow his boldness seemed to ooze out at his finger-tips in the presence of the Head.

But there was no retreat now, and he took his courage in both hands, so to speak.

"Dr. Chisholm! You must listen!"

"What?"

"I repeat, sir, that you must listen to what we have to say!" said Mr. Greely. "In protest against the unjust dismissal of Mr. Bootles, sir, the whole staff begs to place its resignation in your hands."

"Mr. Greely!"

There was no doubt that the Head, for once, was taken aback.

He set his glasses straight, and blinked at his mutinous staff.

"That is our decision, sir!" said Mr. Greely more boldly. "An act of injustice to one is an act of injustice to all. We have agreed to support Mr. Bootles, sir, to the utmost limit of our power."

"Is it possible?" The Head almost gasped. "Is it possible, Mr. Greely, that the staff of Rookwood School contemplates a strike, like discontented hands in a factory?"

"It is not only possible, sir, but it is the fact!" retorted Mr. Greely. "We decline, sir, to decline absolutely to carry on our duties here until Mr. Bootles has been reinstated."

"I refuse to reinstate Mr. Bootles."

"Very well, sir; so long as that is your resolve, you will remain the head of a school without masters."

Mr. Greely turned to his colleagues. "Come, gentlemen!"

And the staff walked away, leaving the Head standing in the corridor, dumb-founded.

"Yarooooh!"

Again the dignity of Mr. Greely's departure was impaired, this time by his walking into Tubby Muffin, who dodged away too late.

"What—what? Boy! You—ah!—you— you young rascal!"

"Cuff, cuff, cuff!"

"Yooooop!"

Tubby Muffin fled, yelling.

Mr. Greely stalked on with his colleagues, and they disappeared.

Dr. Chisholm glanced along the corridor, and caught a glimpse of vanishing feet.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not want to interview the Head just then, and they bolted for the Fourth Form quarters.

In the Fourth Form passage there was an excited crowd, discussing the unprecedented state of affairs that had come to pass at Rookwood.

A strike of the masters!

It was unheard-of!

When Bulkeley of the Sixth came to shepherd the Classical Fourth off to their dormitory he found them still breathlessly discussing the subject.

The discussion went on long after lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory.

What would happen on the morrow in a school without masters was unknown, almost unimaginable, and intensely interesting.

"There won't be any lessons, you fellows!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "I say, that's ripping, ain't it? Can't be any lessons, can there? I say, I'm backing up old Greely's gang!"

"How on earth will it end?" said Jimmy Silver.

There was no answer to that question. The juniors could only wait for the morrow—and for their first experience of a school with the masters on strike!

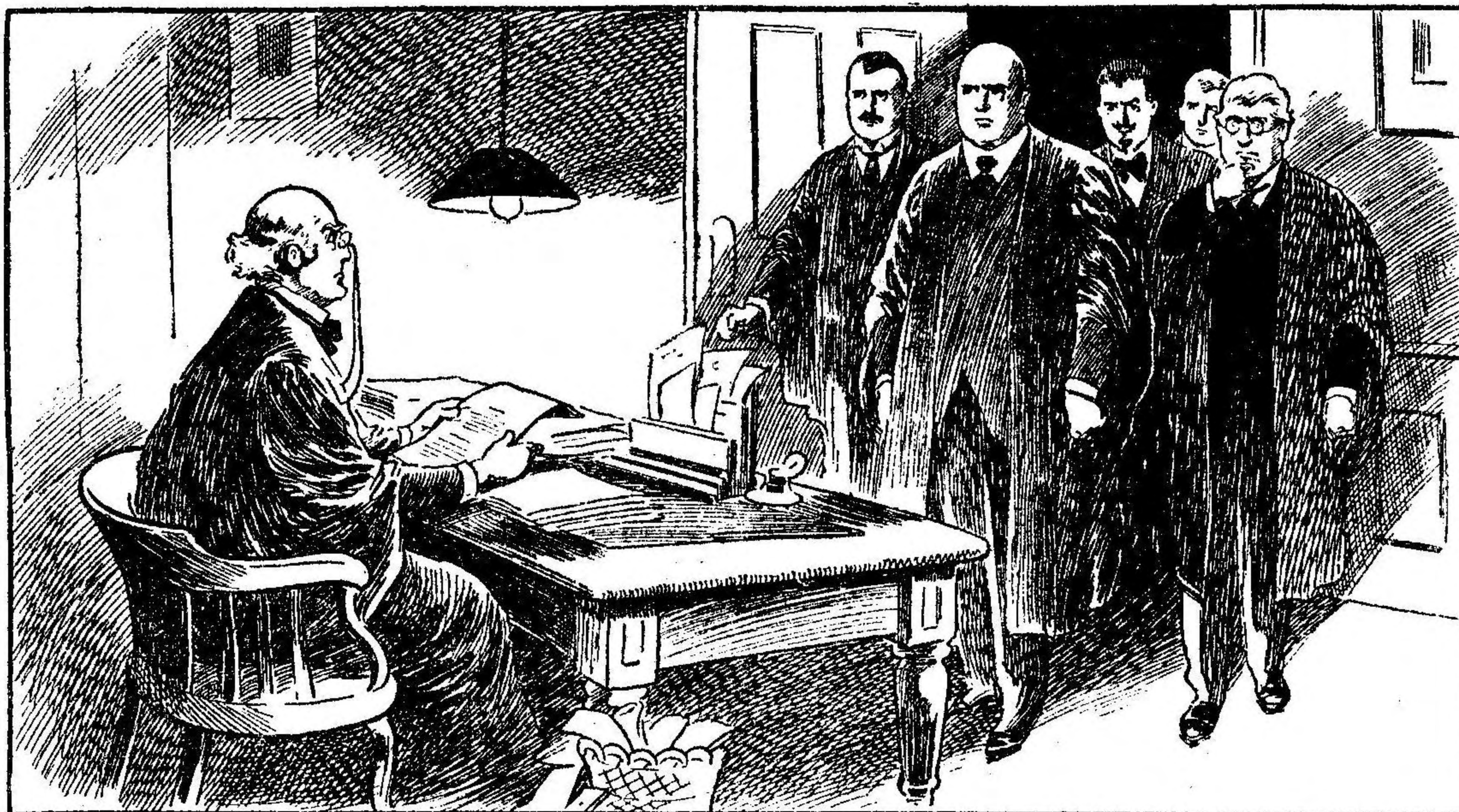
THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

THE SCHOOL WITHOUT MASTERS!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

DON'T MISS IT!



THE MASTERS' DEPUTATION!

master knew what was in the wind now, and his eyes were growing more steely.

"H'm!" When Mr. Bootles opposed your authority, sir, in the matter of the flogging of Silver of the Fourth, his action was condemned by the staff!"

"Very well," said the Head, with grim urbanity. "You protest, and I will duly make note of your protest. I regret that it cannot influence me to alter my decision with regard to Mr. Bootles. And now, gentlemen, I am compelled to remind you that my time is of value."

The unhappy deputation looked at one another.

Monsieur Monceau made a strategic movement towards the door. He backed out, and Mr. Flinders nearly backed into him.

But Mr. Greely maintained his firmness.

"Very well, sir!" he said. "Very well! Oh, very well!"

It was always a matter of regret with Mr. Greely afterwards that he could not on the spur of the moment think of anything more crushing than that.

With that he stalked out of the study, bumping into Mr. Bull, and thus rather spoiling the effect of his exit.

The staff crowded rather confusedly into the corridor.

Mr. Greely popped his head back the next moment.

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"Well, Mr. Greely?"

"The matter does not end here, sir!"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Greely; it does end here. Will you have the goodness to close the door after you?"

Slam!

The staff retired.

at this crisis. Therefore, sir, we protest!"

The Head's lips were hard set now. "You protest?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir; most emphatically!"

"Very well," said the Head, with grim urbanity. "You protest, and I will duly make note of your protest. I regret that it cannot influence me to alter my decision with regard to Mr. Bootles. And now, gentlemen, I am compelled to remind you that my time is of value."

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"You are mistaken, Mr. Greely; it does end here. Will you have the goodness to close the door after you?"

Slam!

The staff retired.

The 6th Chapter.

The Strike of the Masters.

"Like a giddy gang of moulting wild-fowl!"

That was how Mornington of the Fourth described it.

Perhaps it was not quite so bad as that, but assuredly the departure of the staff was nothing in the nature of a triumphant procession.

BARKER, THE BOUNDER!*(Continued from the previous page.)*

"By Jove!"
"We should have to give a brief account of Jackson's behaviour," said Mason. "We could tell him all about Jackson going to the Plough and Harrow, and having whisky sent up to the school."

"Oh, could we?" said Jimmy Wren, frowning portentously and clenching his fists.

"Quite easily," said Mason, unperturbed by the warlike expression on the New House junior's face. "If you fellows head the list—"

"Eh?"
"If you fellows care to head the list I'll go round and get the names of the other chaps."

Jimmy Wren fixed his eyes on the bully of the Fourth.

"We shall have to think about that," he said coolly.

"Oh, rot!" said Mason. "The sooner we get Jackson hounded out of Redclyffe the better! Decide now, and—"

"You want my answer?" asked Jimmy Wren, raising his fist.

"Of course I do!"

"You'll have it now?"

"Oh, rather!"

Smack!

Jimmy Wren swung his fist into the School House junior's face, sending the latter to the ground.

"There's my answer!" he said hotly.

"Look here—"

"You're an utter cad—worse than Jackson!" said Jimmy Wren, with emphasis.

"Jackson's been a rotter, I admit, but he saved Harris' life. There must be a spark of decency in him, otherwise—"

"Ow! That's rot!" mumbled Mason. "It isn't rot, you worm!" said Jimmy Wren disdainfully. "Jackson is what you aren't—he's a hero; and in spite of his faults, I think a jolly sight more of him than I do of you!"

Mason jumped to his feet.

"Look here, Wren—" he began.

Jimmy Wren pushed the bully aside.

"I'm not going to talk to you," he said. "You can carry out your scheme for getting Jackson expelled from Redclyffe, but don't ask me to support it."

"But—"

"I'd rather support a hero who drinks whisky and goes in for pub-haunting than I would a cad who can't say a good word for a fellow who saves another's life."

"By gad!" gasped Mason, his breath taken away. "Look here, Wren—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Jimmy Wren, moving away. "Come on, you fellows! That cad makes me sick!"

Lucas and Lane followed their chum into the quadrangle, leaving Mason gazing after them, flabbergasted.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you?"

Mason looked round to find Barker, the bouncer, standing at his side.

There was a sickly grin on Barker's face as he waited for the bully to answer his question.

"By gad!" said Mason. "Have you heard the news?"

"About Jackson saving Harris' life?"

"Oh, yes."

"Of course, it was nothing," said Mason promptly. "He only did what any other fellow would have done, but a lot of the fellows are going over to his side."

"Eh?"

"It's a fact," said Mason. "I just suggested to Wren & Co. that we sent a round-rob-in to the Head, demanding Jackson's expulsion."

"What did they say?"

"Wren punched my nose, and refused to support the scheme," said Mason, with an air of disappointment. "My opinion is that Jackson should be sacked, and—"

"He soon will be," said Barker, with a grin.

How can he be when the masters don't know how he's been behaving?"

Barker thrust his hands into his pockets, and surveyed Mason with a lofty air.

"My dear chap," he said jauntily, "you leave everything to me. I'll see that Jackson is found out, and I guarantee he won't remain another week at Redclyffe."

"But—"

"Now, don't ask any questions," said Barker.

"I say, Barker, I wish you'd tell me what you're going to do."

"It's impossible, my dear chap," said Barker, laughing. "I never take anybody into my confidence. You rely upon me to get Jackson kicked out of Redclyffe. I'll fix things up all right!"

And with that Barker strolled on up the stairs.

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

**THE . . .
REMITTANCE-
MAN'S PERIL!**

A Splendid Long Complete
Story of
FRANK RICHARDS & CO.,
the Chums of the School in
the Backwoods.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD**

The 1st Chapter.

Startling News!

"You chaps heard?"
Frank Richards & Co. had jumped off their horses outside the gate of Cedar Creek School, when Chunky Todgers roused up, his fat face ablaze with excitement.

"Heard?" he gasped.

"Heard what, Podgy?" asked Bob Lawless. "Another row with the Hillcrest chaps?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, what's the news?" asked Vere Beauclerc, with a smile. "It must be something terrifically exciting."

"I guess so—I jolly well guess so!" said Chunky breathlessly. "Then you haven't heard?"

Chunky Todgers was evidently pleased that the chums of Cedar Creek "hadn't heard."

It was a great satisfaction to him to break the thrilling news, whatever it was.

"Suppose you tell us what it is!" suggested Frank Richards.

"It's the limit!" said Chunky impressively. "The real limit! You'd never guess!"

"No need to guess if you can tell us, Chunky. Get it out before the bell rings," said Beauclerc.

"What do you think of road-agents in the Thompson Valley?" demanded Chunky, in a thrilling tone.

"Road-agents!" repeated Frank Richards.

"Robbers!" said Chunky triumphantly.

"Actually?"

"Highwaymen?"

"I suppose that's what you'd call them, Franky. We call 'em road-agents," said Chunky Todgers. "Precious few in Canada—but lots over the line. And there's a gang of road-agents at work in the Thompson Valley—just like the galoots in the Black Hills, you know, or down in California! What do you think of that?"

"Well, my hat!" said Frank.

Bob Lawless whistled.

"There were those two galoots who tried to rob the post-waggon a few weeks ago," he said, "when Franky chipped in, and Gunten of Hillcrest took all the credit. They didn't bring off the robbery, and they've never been seen since."

"I don't know whether it's the same lot," said Chunky Todgers. "But they're at work on the trails, I can tell you."

"How do you know?"

"Why, all Thompson's talking about it!" exclaimed Chunky breathlessly. "A rancher from Silver Creek was held up on the prairie—actually held up with a popgun at his nose, you know, and robbed of five hundred dollars!"

"Phew!"

"And a miner down from the range got stopped a mile out from Thompson by two horsemen with their faces covered with flour-bags," continued Chunky. "He came into Thompson ragging, and went to Sheriff Henderson. Two men each time, with flour-bags over their faces—nobody's seen their chivvies. Regular road-agents' style, you know—and in the Thompson Valley! We might fall in with them ourselves, you know!" added Chunky, by way of imparting an additional thrill to his exciting news.

"Better look out, Chunky!" said Bob Lawless solemnly. "They'll be after you."

Chunky jumped.

"After me? Why?"

"It's well known that you've always got ten tents about you," said Bob. "You've been trying to change that bad bit all the term. If the galoots hear of your wealth, they—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Chunky Todgers. "We might fall in with them,

**HAS THE JUNIOR JUMPED IN TIME?**

all the same. Frank came on them once—if it's the same pair of rotters. I dare say it is. I say, I don't feel scared, of course, but I shouldn't like to meet them."

"Any of the fellows scared?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"I guess so. Why, look at the Cherub—his face's scared," said Chunky.

"Fathead!"

"Well, he looks scared!" grinned Todgers.

Frank and Bob looked rather curiously at Vere Beauclerc.

Beauclerc's handsome face had become so pale that it was impossible to help observing it.

His lip was quivering.

"Cherub," exclaimed Bob, in astonishment, "you're not scared with a yarn about road-agents, are you?"

"Scared!" Beauclerc smiled—a strange and bitter smile that puzzled his chums.

"Scared? Oh, no!"

"You look it!" chuckled Chunky Todgers.

"Let's get in," said Frank Richards.

"The bell will go in a minute or two."

They led their horses in at the gateway.

In the playground of Cedar Creek boys and girls were gathered in excited groups, evidently discussing the news.

It was the first time there had been such a discussion at the school in the backwoods.

The Thompson Valley was an outlying region of British Columbia, and on the verge of vast unsettled regions; but though life there was rough and ready, the section, on the whole, was law-abiding.

Occasionally a "rustler" wandered in from over the American border; but such characters were few, and they did not find the Thompson Valley a healthy quarter.

The attempt to rob the post-waggon, which Frank Richards had frustrated, had caused a good deal of excitement, but nothing compared with the latest news.

Two robberies had actually taken place now, and the Flour-Bag Gang were still undiscovered, and might be at work again at any time.

The news had spread through all the section like wildfire already.

The Cedar Creek fellows were discussing whether the "road-agents" were likely to turn out to be local worthies, or whether they were rustlers from over the border.

The latter was the favourite theory.

There were a good many rough characters in Thompson, who forgathered at the Red Dog Saloon; but nobody was inclined to admit that there were road-agents in the section of native growth.

Chunky Todgers trotted along with the Co. as they walked their horses to the corral.

Chunky was almost bursting with excitement.

"I say, you may see them at the ranch, Bob!" he said. "Lots of pickings at the ranch. Your poppa has lots of dollars!"

Bob Lawless chuckled.

"I guess I'd like to see them visit the Lawless Ranch!" he said. "The cowboys would be glad to see them. I reckon they

would come to a sudden end on the branch of a tree."

"Well, perhaps they wouldn't risk it," said Chunky thoughtfully. "They might turn up at Beauclerc's place, though. That's lonely, and there's only the Cherub's poppa there. I say, Cherub, does your father keep any money at the shack?"

Beauclerc did not answer; he did not seem to hear.

"What rot!" said Frank sharply, and with a rather uneasy look at his chum. He could not understand the startled pallor and trouble in Beauclerc's face.

Well he knew that Vere Beauclerc was as brave as anyone could be; that fear was quite unknown to his nature.

Yet the effect of Chunky's news on him had been unmistakable.

His hand was trembling on the bridle as he led his horse.

"Well, they might go to the shack—it would be safe," said Todgers. "If the Cherub's poppa has any money there he ought to be warned. He mayn't have heard the news yet."

Beauclerc stopped suddenly at the opening in the corral fence.

"I—I think I shan't go in to lessons this morning, you chaps," he said haltingly. "I—I want to speak to my father."

"But you must come in, kid!" said Frank Richards anxiously. "Miss Meadows will be waxy."

"I can't help it! I'm going home."

Beauclerc drew his horse round.

"Cherub, old chap," exclaimed Bob Lawless, laying his hand on Beauclerc's arm, "you needn't be alarmed about your father. It's utter rot to think that the road-agents would go to the shack. Why should they?"

"I'm going home."

Without saying more Vere Beauclerc jumped on his black horse, and rode away, his chums staring after him in surprise and dismay.

He disappeared out of gates as the bell rang for classes.

"Well, great gophers!" ejaculated Bob Lawless. "What's the matter with the Cherub this morning, Franky?"

"He must be anxious about his father, I suppose," said Frank.

"But what rot! His poppa's in no danger—he keeps a gun at the shack—even if the road-agents did turn up there. And they won't. Why should they? There's nothing to steal there."

"I give it up," said Frank. "Miss Meadows will be waxy; I know that. We'd better explain to her."

The chums put their horses in the corral, and then headed for the lumber schoolhouse, with the rest of Cedar Creek.

Miss Meadows noted Beauclerc's absence at once when she came in to take her class.

"Richards!" she called out.

"Yes, ma'am?" said Frank.

"Has not Beauclerc come this morning?"

"He's gone home again, ma'am."

"Is he not well?"

"I—I think so."

"Then why has he gone away without permission?" exclaimed the schoolmistress.

"I think he's alarmed about his father, Miss Meadows," said Frank, rather uncomfortably. "Mr. Beauclerc lives in a very lonely place, and we have just heard about some rustlers—"

"Absurd!" said Miss Meadows. "Beauclerc should not have gone without permission—indeed, he should not have gone at all. Because there has been a robbery in the district, that is no reason why boys should stay away from school."

Frank Richards was silent.

He felt that the reason he had given for the Cherub's conduct was inadequate, but he could think of no other. Beauclerc's action perplexed him.

Lessons began without Beauclerc, and there was no doubt that Miss Meadows was "waxy," as Frank had expressed it, and that she would have something severe to say to Beauclerc when he reappeared at Cedar Creek School.

The 2nd Chapter.

Father and Son.

Thud, thud!

The hoofs of the black horse beat rapidly on the hard trail.

While his chums were in class at Cedar Creek, Vere Beauclerc had almost forgotten the existence of the school.

He rode fast on the timber trail for home.

His face was still pale, his brows knitted, and his heart was beating painfully.

Black and bitter thoughts were in his mind.

The story of the two road-agents had struck him like a blow in the face.

Back into his mind had come at once what he knew of his father's secret—the remittance-man's ride with Poker Pete of Thompson.

No word had passed his lips to his chums; neither Frank nor Bob had the remotest suspicion of the truth—that one of the masked men who had held up the post-waggon, weeks before, was Vere Beauclerc's father.

Confident that the repentant man was keeping his promise, Beauclerc had had no doubts, no anxiety. In spite of himself the remittance-man had been saved from crime, and he had broken with the sport of Thompson, who had so nearly led him into irretrievable shame.

But now—

There was a misery which words could not have expressed gnawing at Vere Beauclerc's heart as he galloped homeward.

He had to see his father at once—he had to know the truth.

Gallop, gallop!

The black horse was galloping at top speed, and a dozen times the schoolboy narrowly escaped branches that swept

over the trail, swaying in the winter wind.

The shack by the creek came in sight at last.

There was a sound of an axe upon hard logs.

Mr. Beauclerc was at work there, steadily wielding the axe, piling up the split logs for winter fuel.

It was hard work, and the remittance-man had never been given to hard work. Somehow, comfort stole into Beauclerc's heart as he saw his father thus engaged.

Lascelles Beauclerc looked up at the crash of hoof-strokes on the hard ground, and rested on his axe as his son dismounted.

Beauclerc ran towards him.

His face was flushed now, and his breath came thick and fast.

His eyes were upon his father's face, but there he read nothing but surprise.

There was no guilt, no consciousness of a dark secret, in the face of the remittance-man of Cedar Camp.

"You have not gone to school, Vere?" he exclaimed as his son came up.

"I've come back, father."

"Why? Has anything happened at Cedar Creek?"

Beauclerc shook his head.

Now that he was face to face with his father the eager, anxious questions died on his lips, and he hesitated.

"Then why have you come back?"

"Father! I—I heard some news at the school," Beauclerc's voice faltered, and his eyes did not meet his father's. "I—I— Have you heard, father?"

Mr. Beauclerc smiled faintly.

"I have not been to the camp for two days," he said. "I hear no news here, my boy. What is it?"

"There are road-agents in the section!" The remittance-man started.

"Two masked men—" stammered Beauclerc. "There have been two robberies near Thompson—a rancher and a miner—and they were committed by two men masked with flour-bags. You—you did not know?"

Mr. Beauclerc's worn face paled a little.

"I did not know, Vere," he answered quietly.

"I—I was sure of it!" panted the boy.

"You were so sure of it that you came back from school at once when you heard the news?" said the remittance-man with a touch of sarcasm.

Beauclerc crimsoned.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"You have a right to doubt me," said Mr. Beauclerc moodily. "You knew that I rode out with Poker Pete to rob the post-waggon—"

"Father!" muttered Beauclerc wretchedly.

"I was mad to do it—mad!" said the remittance-man. "Heaven knows how thankful I was that it was prevented. Vere, I told you so. I gave you my word that I would never allow such a thought to enter my mind again. When Poker Pete came here I drove him away. I have not seen him since. I have kept my word to you."

"Father! I—I was a brute, a fool to—to think—" muttered the schoolboy.

"But—but when Todgers said there were two of them, I—it was like a knife in my heart! Oh, father!"

"I knew nothing of it," said Mr. Beauclerc quietly. "I am not angry with you, my poor boy. You have the right to doubt me."

"I don't doubt you—not for a moment, father. I—I was startled. I was terrified. I knew that villain would draw you into his wickedness again if he could, and I—I—" Beauclerc's voice broke into a sob.

The remittance-man knitted his brows.

"Two robberies, you said, Vere?"

"Yes; a rancher on the prairie, and a miner coming back from the range. They were held up and robbed," muttered Beauclerc. "But it does not matter to us now."

"I think I can guess the name of one of them," said the remittance-man. "I was well aware that Poker Pete would find someone else to help him. He has had bad luck with the cards, and he is desperate. There is no doubt in my mind that one of them was Poker Pete. The other, probably, one of the Red Dog crowd."

Beauclerc nodded.

"It is not our business, father. We need not think about it."

"There is no proof in any case," said Mr. Beauclerc. "It is the sheriff's business, not ours. But—he knitted his brows—"I shall ride over to Thompson and see Poker Pete." He smiled grimly as the colour changed in his son's face.

"You shall come with me, my boy, as you are staying away from school this morning."

"Oh, father!" murmured Beauclerc, ashamed of the miserable pang that had



THE REMITTANCE-MAN'S PERL I

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Do you want me to call on the sheriff?"

"I guess it cuts no ice with me whether you do or not."

The remittance-man raised his hand. "You are one of the flour-bag gang, Poker Pete—the leader, too. It was you who robbed the rancher—"

"You think so?" smiled the sport. "I am sure of it."

"What's put the idea into your head, Beauclerc? I'm quite interested, I guess," said the sport coolly. "Any reason to think so, or is it simply the good opinion you have of me?"

"I know it, and that is enough," said Mr. Beauclerc. "I know it, because I know who stopped the post-wagon out of Cedar Camp a few weeks back."

"Yourself?" grinned Poker Pete. "And you?"

"That's for you to prove, if you mosey along to the sheriff's. And you think I'm one of the flour-bag gang, because of the Cedar Camp affair?"

"Yes."

"I might say the same to you." "But it would not be true," said the remittance-man quietly. "What I say is the truth, and you know it. And it's got to stop, Poker Pete."

"Even admitting it, how are you going to stop it?" asked Poker Pete quietly, though his black eyes were glittering. "You can prove nothing against me to the sheriff; you can give yourself away, if you like. That's the most you can do."

"I've come here to warn you that you shall not play that game in the Thompson Valley," said Mr. Beauclerc. "I am a man of my word, Poker Pete, and you know it. If there is another report of a robbery in this section, I shall take a hand in the game."

"And let all the section know that that lad's father attempted to rob the post-wagon!"

Vere Beauclerc crimsoned. "I shall take measures to stop you, and, if necessary, to bring you to justice," said Mr. Beauclerc. "You can prove no more against me than I against you, if you come to that. I shall stop you by other means than by calling on the sheriff. If I allow you to keep on I shall be as guilty as you. And, I repeat, if there is another robbery in this section, I shall deal with you."

"And how?"

"That you will discover when the time comes; but you know I am a man of my word," said Mr. Beauclerc. "For that matter, it would be easy enough for me to catch you in the act, as I know you are one of the gang."

The sport set his lips. "You mean you'll watch me, and catch me napping, with a mask on my face and a six-shooter in my hand, and proof enough to string me on a tree?" he said. "Perhaps! I've warned you."

The sport's slim hand slid under his velvet jacket. Mr. Beauclerc's lip curled. "You need not draw your revolver, Poker Pete," he said coldly. "You are not in the Black Hills now, or the Sierra Nevada. This is Canada, and there is a rope ready for you if you try that game."

Poker Pete's eyes glittered wickedly. But he did not draw the weapon. "You mean war?" he asked, after a pause.

"Unless you give up the road-agent game, certainly."

"I guess that means trouble for you, Beauclerc. It's dangerous to have too long a tongue in the Wild West," said Poker Pete. "I reckon you had better look out for squalls, pard."

"I've said what I came to say," said the remittance-man. "I mean it, every word. That's enough."

He strode out of the saloon parlour, and Vere Beauclerc, who had not spoken a word during the curious interview, followed him.

Poker Pete glanced after him with a black brow. Outside the Red Dog the father and son mounted their horses, and rode out of Thompson.

"You do not doubt me now, Vere?" asked the remittance-man, with a slight smile, as they left the town behind.

"Never, father! But—but—" Beauclerc's look was troubled. "That man means mischief, father."

"Let him!" said the remittance-man carelessly. "He may—he may attempt—"

"I can take care of myself, my boy. Now you had better ride on to school—and keep your own counsel."

Father and son parted on the trail, and Beauclerc trotted on towards Cedar Creek. His mind was troubled.

The wicked glitter in Poker Pete's eyes haunted him, and he was oppressed by the thought that danger might be hanging over his father.

Morning lessons had just ended when he reached the school, and Frank Richards and Bob Lawless ran to meet him as he came in.

"Here you are again!" exclaimed Frank. "All right at home?"

out of the schoolhouse with a wrinkle in his brow. "Had it bad?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"Eh? No. Miss Meadows is a brick!" said Beauclerc, with a faint smile. "Then what are you looking so thundery about?"

"Was I?" muttered Beauclerc. "You were—and are! Is anything the matter?" asked Bob. "You can tell your pals if there's anything wrong, can't you?"

"There—there's nothing. Only—"

Beauclerc paused, colouring. "You're not anxious about your father?" asked Frank, in wonder.

"Cherub, old chap, there's dozens of places as lonely as the shack, and there's no reason why road-agents should go that way—none at all!"

Beauclerc thought of Poker Pete, and the threatening glitter in the sport's wicked eyes.

It haunted him, and he could not drive it from his mind. He knew that the reckless rascal was capable of almost any crime; and the remittance-man's threat barred him from the new course of rascality he had marked out for himself. What was he likely to do?

Beauclerc thought of his father working on the lonely clearing, with the sombre woods round him; and it almost seemed to him that he could hear the ring of a rifle from the shadowy timber.

The thought made him shiver. "Cherub, old chap!" said Bob anxiously. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Beauclerc dully. "Nothing I can tell you, anyway. I—I mean, nothing!"

He walked away quickly, leaving his chums silent with surprise and dismay.

The 4th Chapter. The Shadow of Danger.

Frank Richards glanced at Beauclerc at the dinner-table at Cedar Creek, when the schoolboys came in to their midday meal.

Beauclerc had been in the timber till dinner, and his chums did not need telling that he was avoiding them.

They were puzzled and anxious. Beauclerc did not observe Frank's anxious glances—nor the curious looks of some of the other fellows.

His face was pale and sgt. Strive as he would, he could not drive from his mind the haunting fear that his father was in danger.

The remittance-man stood between Poker Pete and his lawless schemes, and so long as that threat lasted, the Flour-Bag Gang, or at least their leader, could hardly venture upon the trails again.

Would Poker Pete, the desperado, robber, and cardsharp, give up the game, in obedience to a threat?

It could only be because he was desperately in need of money that he had taken to such a dangerous game at all; and if that was so, was he likely to give it up at the word of the remittance-man?

Or—the terrible thought haunted Beauclerc—or would he seek to silence the man who knew his villainy?

The thought of the peril that might be hanging over his father filled the boy with an almost physical pain.

Miss Meadows glanced at him when the fellows were leaving the dining-room after dinner. "Beauclerc!" said the schoolmistress quietly.

"Yes, Miss Meadows."

"You do not look well, my boy."

"I—I'm quite well, thank you, ma'am!" stammered Beauclerc, flushing red.

"You do not look so, Beauclerc," said Miss Meadows kindly. "If you choose, you may go home this afternoon, and not remain for lessons."

Beauclerc's face brightened. "I should be very glad to, Miss Meadows!" he said.

"Then you may go, my boy!" "Thank you, ma'am!"

Frank and Bob joined him as he left the schoolhouse, and walked towards the corral for his horse.

They followed him into the corral, where they were out of hearing of the others. Then Bob Lawless clapped him on the shoulder.

"This won't do, Cherub!" he said quietly. "What do you mean, Bob?"

"There's something up," said Bob, "and you've got to tell your pals what it is!" Beauclerc stopped, with his hand on the neck of the black horse, and looked at his chums wistfully.

"I'd like to tell you," he said. "I—I can't! But—but—" He broke off. "Look here, I'm worried—you can see that! I—I'm in fear for my father! It's haunting me—I can't get it out of my mind!"

To the surprise and dismay of his comrades, Beauclerc's voice faltered, and there was a rush of tears to his eyes. He broke off abruptly.

"Beau, old chap!" exclaimed Frank. "What the dickens! For goodness' sake tell us what the trouble is! You know we'll stand by you!"

ask any questions. Only your father's found out one of the ratters—"

"That's it!" "He should go straight to the sheriff," said Bob.

"He can't! There's reasons—he's got no proof, for one thing. He knows it, but there's no evidence."

"How can he know it if there's no evidence?"

"He does know it. The man admitted it, if you come to that," said Beauclerc. "I was there, with my father, and heard him. And—and Poker Pete—"

"Oh, it's that rotter?" "Yes. Poker Pete dare not go on the trails again, because my father knows—and because my father will not let him keep on—without interfering, and—"

His voice died away. The chums' faces were very serious now. "You don't think Poker Pete could—could plan harm to your father, to—to keep him quiet?" muttered Frank, in a scared voice.

"Yes." "Oh!"

"That's why I want to go home," muttered Beauclerc. "There may be nothing in it—the rascal mayn't dare. But, think how easy it would be—a rifle-shot from the woods!" He shuddered. "It's haunted me. There would be no proof, and the Red Dog crowd would swear, if necessary, that Poker Pete was there when it happened. It would be safe for him—"

"I believe he's villain enough," said Bob. "There's queer tales told about Poker Pete, and why he left California. Cherub, old man, you're right to go home, and we're coming with you. Miss Meadows will let us off to see you safe home, and if she doesn't, we'll take French leave."

"But, Bob—" "Leave it to me, old chap!"

Bob ran back to the lumber schoolhouse. He returned in a few minutes with a cherry smile on his face.

"All O.K.," he said. "Miss Meadows has given us leave. She's anxious about you, Cherub, and glad for us to take you home, old chap. Let's get off, and ride like thunder for the shack. And—and I advise you to get your father to let you stay at home a few days—till—"

"I was thinking of that," said Beauclerc. "But it's to-day, or to-night, that I'm anxious about. Now that Poker Pete knows my father's intention, he won't let the grass grow under his feet, if he means mischief. Even already—"

"Don't think of that. Let's get off!" In a few minutes the chums were riding up the trail through the woods.

They dashed along at a good speed in the pale winter sunshine. As they turned into the branch trail that led to the lonely shack, Vere Beauclerc spoke.

"We can't go on to the shack! I—I can't tell my father we've come to—to guard him. He would send me back to school."

"I was thinking about that," said Bob. "But there's no need to go to the shack; we can keep watch from the timber till dark. Then we'll come in with you to supper."

Beauclerc nodded. The schoolboys rode on, and halted at last a good distance from the shack.

The horses were tethered in a thicket, and they proceeded on foot. The shack came in sight at last. A thin column of smoke rose from the chimney, showing that the remittance-man was at home. The door was open, and a gleam of the ruddy fire could be seen within.

As they looked from the cover of the timber they saw the figure of the remittance-man in the shack, for a moment, crossing before the fire.

Vere Beauclerc drew a deep breath. His father was safe so far at least; and all about the shack was so calm and peaceful that he was a little ashamed of his fears.

"All serene, Cherub," murmured Bob. "I—I may have been alarmed for nothing," muttered Beauclerc. "But—but—"

"But it's better to be on the safe side in dealing with a pesky coyote like Poker Pete," said Bob shrewdly. "If your poppa knew we were here he'd most likely think us three young jays, and tell us to go back to school. But I guess we're going to watch a bit."

Bob Lawless scanned the timber, and then swung himself into the branches of a huge tree on the edge of the clearing. His chums followed him. From the thick branches it was easy to keep watch upon all approaches to the clearing, and to give the alarm if danger came.

The 5th Chapter. Baffled!

The sun was sinking towards the distant Pacific, and shadows were lengthening over the clearing. In the timber the dusk was deepening into darkness.

From the shack there came the steady sound of the woodman's axe. The remittance-man was at work.

Little dreaming that his son was so near, Lascelles Beauclerc worked on steadily as the shadows began to lengthen. For two hours the chums had been watching in the thick branches of the tree, and nothing had stirred in the wood save the squirrels.

But suddenly Bob Lawless, who was squeezed comfortably in a fork of the tree, made a movement, and held up his hand.

His chums had heard a slight noise in the thickets below, but, thinking of the squirrels, they had hardly heeded it. But Bob's ears were keener.

Beauclerc's eyes met his questioningly. "Silence!" whispered Bob. "And watch!"

There was a faint rustle below in the dark spruce, and the chums waited and watched with beating hearts.

They knew now that somebody was approaching the clearing; and that he came not by the open trail, but creeping cautiously through the timber.

That was enough to tell them that the unseen man came as an enemy. Their vigil had not been in vain, after all.

The rustle was repeated. Below in the dusk of the thickets they caught sight of a Stetson hat that moved slowly.

From the shack the ringing of the axe on the logs still came clearly. The remittance-man, steadily at work, offered an easy and unsuspecting target; and Beauclerc felt a chill at his heart as he thought of the unsuspected peril that was drawing near his father.

For there was no doubt now. The creeping figure in the thickets stopped on the edge of the clearing, peering towards the shack from behind the trunk of the tree in the branches of which the three schoolboys watched.

As he peered he unslung the rifle that was hanging over his shoulder. His head was bent as he examined it.

The schoolboys' hearts were thumping now. The man below pushed back the broad hat from his brow, and for an instant they saw the swarthy features of Poker Pete.

The sport of Thompson dropped on his knees, and, holding the rifle before him, crawled forward closer to the clearing, till only a thin screen of osiers covered him.

There, stretched on the ground, he placed the butt of his rifle to his shoulder, his black eyes gleaming along the barrel. Vere Beauclerc's eyes were glittering.

He slid silently down the trunk, and reached the ground directly behind the man, who was lying with the rifle at his shoulder.

Poker Pete was only a few yards from the big tree, as oblivious of the presence of the schoolboys as Mr. Beauclerc was of him.

He was taking a slow and deadly aim when Vere Beauclerc, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him.

The schoolboy leaped fairly upon the back of the outstretched rifleman, and his boots crashed down upon Poker Pete's back, crushing him to the ground.

There was a sudden, fearful yell from the sport. Crack!

The rifle exploded as he dropped his grasp from it, the bullet burying itself in the ground.

He twisted round like a cat upon his assailant, and as he turned up his startled and furious face both Beauclerc's fists were dashed savagely into it with all his strength in the blows.

Poker Pete gasped, and rolled in the herbage. A second more, and Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were upon him—they had been close behind their chum.

Poker Pete's struggle was brief. The three schoolboys pinned him down with savage force.

"What is this?" exclaimed Mr. Beauclerc as he rushed up. "But the sight of Poker Pete and the smoking rifle lying in the herbage was sufficient answer."

A fatherly smile came over his face. "Father," panted Beauclerc, "he came to—to—"

"I understand! Let him get up!" The sport struggled to his feet. His swarthy face was bruised, and he was panting for breath.

Mr. Beauclerc picked up the rifle. "You meant this for me, Poker Pete?" he said. "You know what you deserve!"

Poker Pete turned deadly pale. "Father!" murmured Beauclerc. The remittance-man smiled grimly.

"I do not mean to shoot the rascal, Vere," he said. "The sheriff can deal with him. Or stay—" The remittance-man paused. "You know what this means for you, Poker Pete—five years at least."

"Do your worst!" muttered the sport. "I'm not asking anything at your hands!" "I give you a chance," said the remittance-man quietly. "Go back where you came from, and leave Canada for ever, and you can go free. To-morrow morning I lay this matter before the sheriff, and if you are then in the Thompson Valley you will be taken. You know the result. Make the most of the few hours I give you."

The ruffian drew a quick breath. "You mean that?" he muttered. "I mean it. Go!"

Without another word the baffled rascal turned, and disappeared into the timber. The schoolboys were silent, though Bob Lawless' face showed his disapproval. But it was not only mercy that moved Mr. Beauclerc, as Vere knew. It was better for Poker Pete to go.

"And how did you come here?" asked Mr. Beauclerc, when the ruffian's footsteps had died away.

"The Cherub was anxious about you on that jay's account, and we came along to keep an eye open," said Bob, with a grin.

"You have saved my life," said the remittance-man. "I don't know that it was worth it; but you have done it. I thank you, my boys." He swung Poker Pete's rifle in the air, and it disappeared with a splash into the creek. "Come! Your friends must stay to supper, Vere."

The chums followed him into the shack. It was a cheery party that gathered there in the ruddy glow of the fire. Far in the timber, with malice and fear in his heart, Poker Pete was tramping away in the darkness.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"HUNTING THE ROAD-AGENTS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD. DON'T MISS IT!