

# DRAMATIC SCENE BETWEEN THE KAISER AND THREE BRITISH BOYS!



"We leave murder to you!" said Dick Dorrington, facing the Kaiser unflinchingly. "We are Britishers, and Britishers are not murderers! We do not sink helpless women and children at sea; neither do we fire on boats of unarmed men, nor starve our prisoners!"



(SEE INSIDE.)

# The BOYS' FRIEND 1 1/2d

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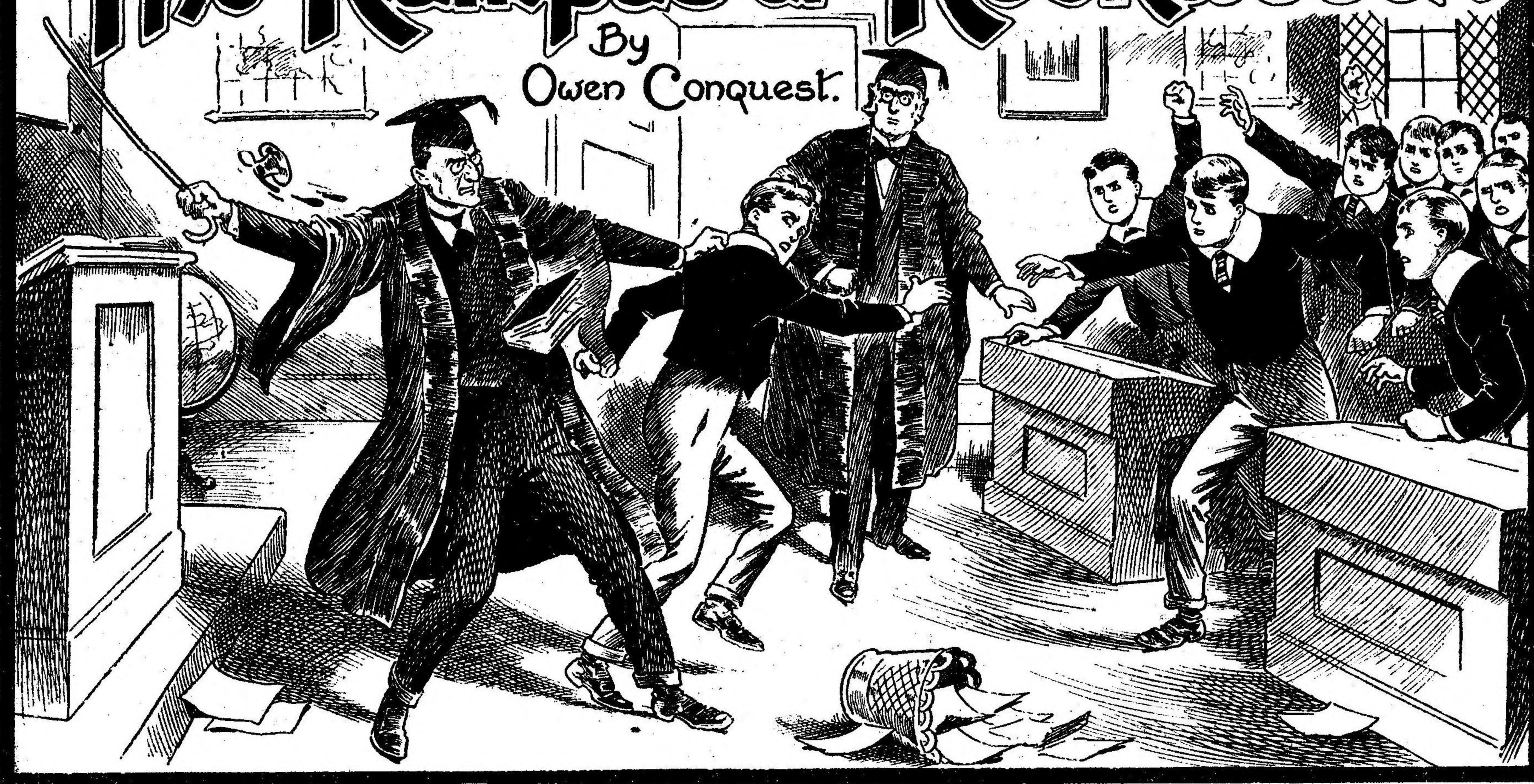
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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending February 22nd, 1919.]

## The Rumpus at Rookwood!

By Owen Conquest.



### THE NEW MASTER'S BRUTAL ACTION! (See the Grand Long Complete Story of Jimmy Silver & Co. below.)

#### The 1st Chapter.

##### Picket Duty.

"Greely, by Jove!" said Jimmy Silver. The Fistical Four paused. Jimmy Silver & Co. were entering the platform at Coombe Station—the station for Rookwood School—when they caught sight of the portly figure of Mr. Greely.

The Fifth Form-master of Rookwood was standing on the platform, facing the line, where the train from Latham Junction was almost due to arrive.

His arms were folded upon his buttoned frock-coat, his silk hat pushed a little back from his bald forehead.

His brows were grimly contracted, and his fat face wore an expression of the grimest determination.

Mr. Greely's attitude at that moment was almost Napoleonic.

The juniors looked at him, but he did not look at them; he did not even see them.

Mr. Greely had no eyes for the juniors of the Fourth Form.

He was evidently there on business—stern business.

"Waiting for the train, I suppose," murmured Lovell. "I say, Greely can't be here for the same reason as little us, can he?"

"My hat!" murmured Raby. "I

shouldn't wonder."

Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle.

"I've got it! He's a picket!"

"A which?" ejaculated Newcome.

"A picket—a strikers' picket, you know! He's here to speak to the giddy blacklegs when they arrive."

"Great Scott!"

"Look at his chivvy!" argued Jimmy Silver. "He looks like Ajax defying the lightning. Depend on it, he's here to jaw the new masters."

The Fistical Four chuckled.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had strolled down to the station to see the new staff arrive. They were due at Rookwood that afternoon.

Jimmy Silver had heard from Tubby Muffin that they were coming by that train. Tubby had his own means of acquiring information.

The chums of the Fourth were naturally rather curious to see the new masters.

With the exception of two or three on the Modern side, the whole staff of Rookwood School were on strike—not one of the Classical masters was on duty.

Even the French and German masters had joined in the strike.

For several days the school had been "run" by the Head and the prefects—not very successfully.

In fact, something like anarchy was

developing at Rookwood, and the Head was very anxious to see his new staff take up their duties.

Dr. Chisholm had been very busy with the telegraph and the telephone, but suitable masters for a school like Rookwood were not to be picked up at a moment's notice.

It was possible, in fact, that the Head had had to be satisfied with some masters who were not wholly suitable.

Arthur Edward Lovell declared that they were bound, under the circumstances, to be a rather scratch lot; and his chums agreed with him.

So the Fistical Four had walked down to the station to get an early view of the scratch lot.

And they found Mr. Greely, the leader of the masters' strike, on guard at the station!

Jimmy Silver's surmise was evidently correct. Mr. Greely was there to interview the arriving staff.

From the point of view of the old masters, the new masters were, in fact, "blacklegs," and Mr. Greely was, in fact, Jimmy Silver & Co. went quietly on to the platform, and took up their position a little way back from Mr. Greely, not caring to attract his attention.

They did not mean to miss the scene.

The sight of a Rookwood master acting

as a strikers' picket was unusual enough, and was likely to be entertaining.

"Look out for the circus!" murmured Lovell. "The train's signalled."

"Good luck to him!" murmured Raby. "After all, the Head's in the wrong. He oughtn't to have sacked Mr. Bootles."

"And it was decent of the rest to stand by Bootles," said Newcome. "They've lost their jobs."

"I'd go for 'em if I was Greely," commented Lovell. "I'd jolly well mop up the platform with the whole lot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The train was rumbling in.

Mr. Greely did not change his Napoleonic attitude.

He stood with stern brow and folded arms, watching the train as it stopped and disgorged its passengers.

From a first-class carriage five gentlemen alighted, evidently travelling-companions.

Mr. Greely's stern gaze fixed upon them. They were the only passengers who could be supposed to be the new masters for Rookwood; the rest were farmer-folk, women, and a few soldiers.

"There he goes!" murmured Jimmy Silver. Mr. Greely unbent from his Napoleonic attitude at last!

He strode towards the newly-arrived quintette.

Five frock-coated gentlemen, three of them in spectacles, blinked at him, evidently wondering who he was and what he wanted.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Mr. Greely, in his deep, rich voice. "May I inquire if you are the new masters for Rookwood School?"

"That is correct," said a tall, thin gentleman with a hooked nose cruelly pinched by a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez. "You are here to meet us, I suppose?"

"Quite so!" said Mr. Greely. "Dr. Chisholm has sent—"

"I have not come from Dr. Chisholm," said Mr. Greely. "My relations with the Head are, unfortunately, strained at the present time. Gentlemen, I am here to speak to you on my own account, and on account of the rest of the staff of Rookwood School."

"Indeed!" said the hook-nosed gentleman, blinking at him.

"You are doubtless aware of the state of affairs at Rookwood?"

"I am aware that Dr. Chisholm's staff has suddenly left the school," said the hook-nosed gentleman. "I am aware of nothing further."

(Continued on next page.)

# THE RUMPUS AT ROOKWOOD!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Then you are not informed that there is a strike?"

"A—a—a what?"

"A masters' strike."

"Absurd!"

"Not at all absurd!" said Mr. Greely warmly. "It is the fact! I am here, sir, to acquaint you with the circumstances—"

The hook-nosed gentleman looked at his watch.

"Thank you very much!" he said, in a thin, acid voice. "I am afraid I have no time to spare, as I understand that I am required to take the Fourth Form this very afternoon!"

"So that's our new Form-master!" murmured Jimmy Silver to his chums. "Looks a beaky bouncer—what?"

"Horrid!" said Lovell. "We sha'n't get on with him. Not that we want to."

"Sir!" Mr. Greely's deep voice grew deeper. "Sir, I beg you to listen to my explanation—"

"I fear that I cannot spare the time, sir."

And the beaky gentleman walked away to the platform exit, bag in hand.

Mr. Greely gave a snort.

"Gentlemen—" he began, appealing to the other four.

One of them followed the beaky gentleman—then another.

Mr. Greely stepped in the way of the last two as they were about to move on.

The big, portly master towered over them, and they stopped.

The last pair were small men, and they seemed overawed by Mr. Greely.

"I insist upon your hearing me!" exclaimed the Rookwood master.

"Ah! Ahem! Certainly!"

"Pray proceed!"

The two little gentlemen blinked nervously at Mr. Greely, who proceeded.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth Form, was unjustly dismissed by Dr. Chisholm."

"Indeed?"

"The rest of the staff, with very few exceptions, took up his cause, and supported him."

"Ah! H'm!"

"As the Head proved obdurate they all tendered their resignations, under my advice."

"H'm! Ah!"

"With the result," pursued Mr. Greely, "that the masters of Rookwood have taken up their quarters at the Coombe Inn, and the school is without masters."

"H'm!"

"I have come here, gentlemen, to protest against your taking the positions offered to you over the heads of the staff by Dr. Chisholm. Among trade unionists such a proceeding is known as blacklegging."

"H'm!"

"Now that you are acquainted with the facts, I am sure that you will not accept positions that rightfully belong to other gentlemen," said Mr. Greely.

"Ahem!"

"Such an act is unworthy, sir, of the high traditions of our common profession!"

"Oh!"

"I beg of you, therefore, not to proceed to Rookwood School, but to take the next train back to town!" pursued Mr. Greely.

"H'm!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

They could see that all Mr. Greely's eloquence was wasted on the new masters.

They were only anxious to dodge the eloquent gentleman and get out of the station.

"What is your answer, gentlemen?" asked Mr. Greely, with a great deal of dignity.

"Ah! Ahem! H'm!"

"You will not, I am convinced, act in so underhand a way?" suggested Mr. Greely. "You will not take up your positions at Rookwood?"

The two small gentlemen did not reply in words.

They suddenly parted, and ran quickly past Mr. Greely, one on either side.

The Fifth-Form master spun round in surprise.

It was quite an undignified proceeding on the part of the new masters, but really there seemed no other way of escaping Mr. Greely's eloquence.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Greely. But they did not look round.

"Gentlemen! I insist—"

Mr. Greely strode after the fleeing gentlemen.

"Blacklegs!" he exclaimed. And then they were gone.

## The 2nd Chapter.

### Nice for the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. roared.

They could not help it.

The sudden flight of Mr. Greely's victims was too much for them.

The Fifth-Form master looked round, frowned, and then strode out of the station, with knitted brows.

He had done his best, but certainly he had been a hopeless failure as a strikers' picket.

Probably the five gentlemen, who had been in such a hurry to secure posts at Rookwood, were too much in need of "jobs" to care much whose jobs they were.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Poor old Greely. I say, that gang looked an awfully scratch lot! Not the style of Rookwood masters at all."

"What did you expect?" said Raby.

"The Head had to bag them in a terrific hurry, and that gang have been sent down by some blessed agency without much inquiry, I should say."

"That beaky bouncer looks a cough-drop," remarked Lovell. "We shall have

trouble with him. He's got a jaw like a vice."

"We're ready for trouble," observed Jimmy.

"Hear, hear!"

The Fistical Four strolled from the station.

Outside the Head's car was waiting, ready to take the new arrivals to Rookwood.

Mr. Greely was striding away in the distance.

The new staff packed themselves into the car, and it glided away up Coombe High Street.

As it passed the Coombe Arms a number of gentlemen could be seen looking down from the inn balcony—Messrs. Bootles, Wiggins, Bohun, and Mooney—masters of Rookwood at present on strike.

Mr. Greely joined them there, and pointed to the car, as it passed, with a fat forefinger, that trembled with indignation and scorn.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the car, and they raised their caps very respectfully to Mr. Bootles, their old Form-master.

Mr. Bootles gave them rather a worried smile.

The master of the Fourth was not a truculent gentleman like Mr. Greely, and he was greatly distressed by the turn affairs had taken at Rookwood.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" Jimmy Silver called up to the Form-master.

Mr. Bootles leaned over the balcony.

"Good-afternoon, my boys! Have you leave from lessons this afternoon?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Then surely it is time you were in the Form-room?"

"Ahem! We've taken time off, sir."

Mr. Bootles looked more worried.

"That is not right, Silver. Of course, I have no right to give you orders now. But I hope, my boys, that you will do your best to maintain order in the Form under these—these very trying circumstances."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Jimmy.

"There hasn't been much order in the Fourth, though, since you left, Mr. Bootles."

"I am sorry to hear it, Silver."

"We don't like being run by blessed prefects, sir!" said Lovell. "We want our own Form-master!"

"That is for the Head to decide, Lovell. I must not give you commands, but I am sure you will remember my wishes."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said the Fistical Four together.

They walked on, looking very thoughtful.

"Bootles is a good little ass," remarked Lovell, as they came into the lane. "His Form is the apple of his merry eye, and he doesn't want us to break out. All the same—"

"I think he's right," said Jimmy Silver. "After all, I suppose we needn't get mixed up in a row between the Head and the masters. Suppose we give our new man a chance. It would please Bootles."

"Oh, all right!"

"We're sure to have trouble, by the look of him," added Jimmy Silver. "Let's give him a run, and let him begin it."

"Ha, ha! Done!"

"Hallo, there's the car!" said Lovell. The Head's car had stopped in the lane, and the chauffeur was on his hands and knees.

"Trouble with the Central Powers!" remarked Raby, with a grin.

The five gentlemen were blinking out at the busy chauffeur.

The beaky master addressed him as the juniors came up.

"Are we likely to be long delayed, my man?"

Grunt!

"Kindly tell me—"

Grunt!

"We are in a hurry to reach the school!" exclaimed the beaky gentleman. "How long shall we remain here?"

The chauffeur turned up a red and somewhat excited face.

"Pr'aps ten minutes!" he snapped.

"Pr'aps an hour! Pr'aps two! Who knows? I don't!" Grunt!

"I shall walk!" said the beaky gentleman decidedly.

He stepped out of the car, and, catching sight of the Fistical Four, beckoned to Jimmy Silver.

"Can you tell me how far it is to walk to Rookwood School?" he asked. Then, looking more closely at the juniors, he added: "Perhaps you belong to Rookwood?"

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy.

"Your Form?" The beaky gentleman's manner was quite authoritative now, and the juniors did not like it.

"Fourth!" said Jimmy curtly.

"Then you are in my Form!" said the beaky gentleman. "I am Mr. Stange, your new Form-master."

The Fistical Four felt it incumbent upon them to raise their caps.

Mr. Stange looked at his watch.

"It is three o'clock," he said. "Surely you boys ought to be at classes. Is it a half-holiday to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Then why are you out of school?"

"Fourth Form's taken by a prefect this afternoon," explained Jimmy Silver.

"We thought we'd have a walk."

"Without permission?"

"Ahem! Yes."

"That is not the kind of discipline I shall maintain in my Form," said the beaky gentleman, his thin lips coming together like a trap. "Mr. Mobsby will you kindly lend me your cane?"

One of the small gentlemen handed Mr. Stange a walking-stick.

The chums of the Fourth blinked at their new master.

"Your name?" snapped the beaky gentleman.

"Silver!"

"Very well! Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"What for?" asked Jimmy Silver quietly, but with a glitter in his eyes.

"Don't hand words with me, boy! I am about to punish you for absenting yourself from school without leave."

"Are you?" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Certainly. Hold out your hand!"

Jimmy Silver put his hands into his pockets.

"Do you hear me, Silver?" thundered the beaky gentleman.

"I hear you," answered Jimmy.

"Obey me at once!"

"You're not our Form-master yet," said the captain of the Fourth coolly.

"We'll obey you when you are, Mr. Stange. Come on, you chaps!"

Jimmy Silver walked away with that towards Rookwood, and his chums followed him.

"Boy!" shouted Mr. Stange, growing purple.

The other four gentlemen were smiling. It was rather a setback for the beaky gentleman.

The Fistical Four walked on, without a glance back.

"Silver! Come back at once!" shouted Mr. Stange.

Jimmy Silver whistled a merry tune, and walked on.

Mr. Stange was left to swallow his wrath as best he might.

## The 3rd Chapter.

### Beginning Well.

"Seen the gang?"

Mornington, of the Classical Fourth, asked that question, as Jimmy Silver & Co. came into the Form-room at Rookwood.

The Fourth were in class, but it was not a very orderly class.

Lonsdale of the Sixth, a prefect, was in charge.

Lonsdale was a good-natured and easy-going fellow, and he certainly did not worry the Fourth very much.

They rewarded him by not worrying him.

They did about as much work as they pleased, which was not a staggering amount.

It was probably fortunate for all concerned that Lonsdale let them do very nearly as they liked.

There had been severe trouble when Carthew of the Sixth had tried other methods.

So long as the juniors were not actually rioting in the Form-room Lonsdale seemed content, and probably showed his wisdom thereby.

"Seen the new crowd?" continued Mornington. "Tubby was right about the train?"

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy.

"What are they like?"

"A pretty dusty lot," answered Jimmy Silver. "Three of 'em look like tame rabbits, one like a walrus, and the other like a Hun."

"Oh, grad!" ejaculated Mornington. "What a zoological collection! And which one is goin' to honour us?"

"The Hun!"

Mornington grinned.

"We'll give him as good as he sends!" he remarked. "He won't find this Form easy to handle."

"No fear!" said Flynn emphatically. "Sure we're going to kick up a shindy if we don't get our Form-master back."

"Had any trouble with the man, Jimmy?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver explained.

"So that's the sort of worm he is, is it?" said Tommy. "He will have a high old time in the Fourth if he tries that game."

"And he can bet his socks on that!" said Cook.

"Hear, hear!"

Lonsdale of the Sixth looked round.

"Not quite so much row there, please!" he called out.

"Right-ho, old top!" said Mornington affably.

Lonsdale coughed, and turned his attention elsewhere.

There was a merry buzz of voices in the Form-room, the prefect letting it go on, glad that it was no worse.

Two or three of the fellows strolled out presently to see whether the new masters had come in.

There was a call from the passage at last.

"Here they come!" howled Higgs.

Then there was a rush into the passage, but there was another rush back in a few moments.

The Head had come in, sight.

"Keep your places, you young sweeps!" exclaimed the distressed Lonsdale. "I shall have to call the Head to you—I really shall, you know."

"All serene, old infant!" said Lovell.

"Better sit down, you chaps; we may have the Head in soon."

And there was a semblance of order for some time.

A scout came in from the passage with the news that the new masters had all gone into the Head's study.

"That means a long jaw!" yawned Lovell. "Mayn't see 'em this afternoon, after all."

And Lovell changed his seat from the form to the desk.

He was still in that elegant position, about a quarter of an hour later, when the door suddenly opened, and Dr. Chisholm came in, accompanied by the tall, hook-nosed gentleman.

There was a sudden hush.

The Head's keen, sharp glance swept over the class.

"Lovell!" he thundered.

Arthur Edward Lovell slid off the desk as if it had suddenly become red-hot.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes upon the confused Lovell, and seemed about to begin on him, but he changed his mind, and let the matter pass, much to Arthur Edward's relief.

"Boys," he said quietly, "this is Mr. Stange, your new master!"

Grim silence from the Fourth.

They were not prepared to welcome any new master. They wanted their old master, as the Head was well aware.

"I fear Mr. Stange, that you will find order somewhat relaxed in this Form," said the Head. "Doubtless you will soon effect a change for the better in that respect."

"You may rely upon me for that, sir," answered Mr. Stange, in his thin, acid voice.

"Boys! Mr. Stange now takes charge of this Form, and you will treat him with every respect and obedience. Lonsdale, you may return to the Sixth Form-room."

Lonsdale left the Form-room gladly enough.

He had not enjoyed his dealings with the Fourth.

"I shall now leave Mr. Stange in charge," continued the Head, with a grim look at the silent class. "I trust there will be no occasion for me to return here."

And after a few words in a low voice to the new master the Head rustled out.

Mr. Stange stared over the class, his glance meeting with a good many sulky faces.

His eyes rested upon the Fistical Four, and a glitter came into them as he recognized the juniors.

He beckoned to them with a bony forefinger.

"You four boys will stand out here," he said. "Silver and the three who were with you in the road this afternoon."

The Fistical Four walked out of their places, with grim looks.

Mr. Stange took a cane from the master's desk.

Evidently he intended to lose no time in putting his foot down.

"Hold out your hand!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

But the new Form-master was armed with authority now, and the Rookwooders were not yet provoked to the point of resisting constituted authority.

Jimmy held out his hand.

Swish!

"Now the other hand!"

Swish!

Jimmy's face was quite pale as he received the sharp cuts—much harder and sharper than any Mr. Bootles had ever administered.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome went through the same punishment in their turn.

They went back to their seats with set faces.

Mr. Stange's glittering eye rested on Tubby Muffin, and he beckoned to him.

"Your name?"

"M-m-m-muffin, sir!" stammered Muffin.

"What are you eating?"

"A tut-tut-tut-tart, sir!" gasped Tubby.

"Come here!"

Swish, swish!

"Oh!" groaned Tubby Muffin.

Tubby Muffin crawled back to his place quite limply.

Mr. Stange laid down the cane with





## The FLOUR-BAG GANG!

A Splendid Long Complete Story,  
dealing with the Adventures of  
FRANK RICHARDS & Co., the  
Chums of the School in the  
Backwoods.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### The 1st Chapter.

#### Bob Lawless is Wanted!

Thud, thud!  
Frank Richards & Co. were in class at Cedar Creek School when the beat of horse's hoofs was heard in the playground without.

They heard the horseman halt with a clatter and a jingle at the porch of the lumber schoolhouse.

Miss Meadows glanced round—as did her class also—as the school-room door opened and the ebony face of Black Sally appeared.

"Well, Sally?"  
Miss Meadows spoke rather sharply. The headmistress of Cedar Creek did not like interruptions during lessons.

"Mass' Henderson he want speak to missy," announced Sally.

"Very well! Tell him I will come."

Black Sally withdrew.

Miss Meadows turned to her class. "Kindly continue your work while I am absent for a few minutes," she said. And she quitted the school-room, to return in less than five minutes, looking very serious.

"Lawless!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, ma'am?" exclaimed Bob, starting up.

"The sheriff wishes to speak to you. Please step out here."

"Yes, Miss Meadows."

Bob Lawless hurried out of the school-room, greatly wondering what the Sheriff of Thompson could want with him.

Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc exchanged a glance.

They, too, were wondering what their chum was wanted for.

"What on airth has Bob been up to?" murmured Eben Hacke.

"Nothing!" said Frank Richards warmly. "Do you think the sheriff's after him, you duffer?"

"Well, it looks like it!" grinned Chunky Todgers. "I say, Richards, your cousin hasn't been horse-stealing, has he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Slimmey looked round from his class.

"Silence, please!" he said mildly. The class ceased to chuckle, and Frank Richards gave the fat and egregious Chunky a withering glare.

From the open doorway into the hall came a murmur of voices.

What the Sheriff of Thompson could want with Rancher Lawless' son in lesson hours at Cedar Creek was a mystery.

Miss Meadows came back into the school-room.

"Richards! Beauclerc!"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"You will go out with Lawless!"

"Oh!"

"Yes, Miss Meadows!"

Greatly wondering, the chums of Cedar Creek left the school-room.

Miss Meadows resumed the lesson, apparently not expecting the three chums to rejoin the class.

Bob Lawless was waiting for the two in the hall with a grin of delight on his rugged, cheery face. Sheriff Henderson was outside now with his horse.

"What's the game, Bob?" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"Come on!" answered Bob. "No time for chinwag now; the sheriff's waiting for us."

"Where are we to come?"

"To the corral, of course!"

"The corral? What for?" demanded Beauclerc.

"For our horses."

"Are we going out, then?" asked Frank Richards, in astonishment.

"My dear galoot," said Bob Lawless, "do you think we're fetching the horses to ride round the school-room?"

"No, ass! But—"

"Well, then, it stands to reason we're going out."

"With the sheriff?" asked Beauclerc.

"Yep."

"But why—"

"Cherub, old scout, don't chew the rag. Come and get out the gee-gees."

Bob Lawless led the way across the playground to the corral, followed by his surprised chums.

Mr. Henderson had mounted and ridden down to the gates, where he was waiting, evidently for the three schoolboys to join him.

Frank Richards & Co. led out their horses from the corral, and mounted and rode down to the gates.

The burly sheriff saluted them cheerily as they came up.

"I suppose Lawless has told you—" he began.

"He hasn't told us anything, sir," answered Frank.

"You young jay, Lawless!" growled the sheriff. "How do you know the boys want to come with you, if you haven't told them?"

"I guess that's a cinch, Mr. Henderson!" answered Bob, with a chuckle. "They'd rather mosey over the prairie than sit in class this morning."

"Yes, rather!" said Frank and Beauclerc together.

"There is a possibility of danger," said the sheriff.

"That doesn't matter, sir," said Beauclerc quietly.

"Well," said the sheriff, "you'd better know what's wanted before you start. You know Kern Gunten, I believe—he used to be at this school. The son of the post-master in Thompson."

"Oh, we know him well, sir!" said Frank, in wonder.

"You know he drives the post-waggon on Wednesday afternoons from Thompson to Silver Creek?"

"Yes."

"He was stopped on the trail by road-agents one day," said Mr. Henderson, "and there is a chance that the waggon may be stopped again to-day. For reasons best known to himself, Gunten does not care to drive it to-day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank.

"I have therefore asked Lawless to take his place," continued the sheriff. "I met Mr. Lawless in Thompson this morning, and asked his consent. Lawless is going to drive the post-waggon this afternoon."

"Good!" said Frank.

"And, of course, I thought of you chaps," said Bob, with a grin. "I knew you'd like to come, so I asked Miss Meadows to let you."

"Good man!" said Frank Richards gratefully. "You're a brack, Bob! Of course we'd like to come!"

"You must remember," said the sheriff, "that the post-waggon may be stopped by the Flour-Bag Gang—the rascals who have lately taken to robbing on the trails in the Thompson Valley."

"We ought to take our rifles, then."

"Nothing of the sort. Lawless is wanted simply to drive the waggon; and if he is stopped he is forbidden to attempt any resistance. The same applies to you."

"Oh!" said Frank.

"You are not wanted to enter into a fight with armed robbers," said the sheriff, smiling. "I should hardly have cared to ask Miss Meadows to let Lawless out of school for such a reason; and she would certainly have refused. But someone must drive the waggon."

"I—I see!" murmured Frank.

As a matter of fact, he did not quite see.

Why the sheriff could not send one of his own men, or hire a man in Thompson, to drive the waggon was rather a puzzle.

Kern Gunten was a schoolboy, certainly, but he had the regular job of driving the post-waggon because he was the postmaster's son.

Why it was necessary to have a schoolboy for the job was a deep mystery to Frank Richards & Co.

But they were glad enough of it. A trip on the post-waggon to Silver Creek was a welcome change from the classroom.

The sheriff wheeled his horse into the trail.

"There is no harm in you two boys going with Lawless," he said. "But it is understood that you do not attempt to resist the road-agents if they should show up."

"Very well, sir."

"But is there any special reason for expecting the road-agents to show up this afternoon—if I may ask?" said Vere Beauclerc.

"Well," said the sheriff, "there's a big consignment of gold dust going in the post-waggon to-day, and it seems to be pretty well known."

"And the Flour-Bag ratters may have heard of it?" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"I guess so."

The sheriff rode on up the trail towards Thompson with that, and the three schoolboys followed at a trot, and in a state of utter wonder.

### The 2nd Chapter.

#### Gold Aboard!

"What do you make of that, Franky?" murmured Bob Lawless, as the chums of Cedar Creek trotted along in a row, a little distance behind the sheriff.

Frank shook his head in utter perplexity.

"I can't make it out at all," he said. "If Mr. Henderson wasn't such a serious man I should think he was pulling our leg."

"I feel the same," remarked Vere Beauclerc. "There's been a lot of talk lately about the Flour-Bag Gang, and it's well known the sheriff is keen after them. But if he thinks it's likely they may stop the post-waggon on the plains, I should think he would send his men to protect it."

"I guess so," assented Bob.

"And if he's not going to do that, it seems to me crass idiocy to let it get out that there's a big consignment of gold on the waggon," said Frank. "If all Thompson knows that the road-agents know it, for a cert, and they're sure to stop the waggon if it's not guarded."

"Dead sure!" said Bob.

"Well, it beats me," said Frank. "It looks as if we're practically certain to be stopped on the trail, and the sheriff must see that, as matters stand."

"Unless he's blind," agreed Bob; "and he's not blind."

"A couple of men with rifles in the waggon would keep the ratters at a distance, and he goes out of his way to put the waggon in charge of unarmed school-boys," said Frank. "It's a riddle to me."

"And to me," said Bob. "Never mind; we've got a day off from school, and that's all to the good. Miss Meadows is an angel, but I like the plains better than the school-room."

"What-ho!" said Frank and Beauclerc together.

The sheriff rode ahead, and did not speak to his youthful companions during the ride to Thompson.

So far as the schoolboys could see the consignment of gold in the post-waggon was very likely to fall into the hands of the Flour-Bag Gang, and they were not surprised that Gunten, the Swiss, refused to drive the waggon, in the circumstances.

But why the sheriff should wish to replace the usual driver with another schoolboy, instead of an armed man, was a perplexing puzzle.

Mr. Henderson's manner did not encourage inquiry, however, and the chums of Cedar Creek did not think of making any.

They reached Gunten's store in Thompson, which was also the post-office, where the waggon was to start early in the afternoon.

The waggon was standing in Main Street, outside the store, but the horses were not yet hitched.

The sheriff dismounted, and the schoolboys followed his example.

"You'll get some dinner in the store," said Mr. Henderson. "Mr. Gunten will tell you when to start. I'd take you to my house for dinner, my boys, but I'm called away on business. Good-bye!"

He turned away before the schoolboys could answer, and, after speaking a few words to Mr. Gunten in the doorway, he led his horse up the street, and disappeared.

Mr. Gompers Gunten greeted the chums of Cedar Creek civilly enough, though the time was not far back when they had been on exceedingly bad terms.

The storekeeper seemed to have forgotten that now, however, and Frank Richards & Co. were quite willing to forget it, too.

Two or three idlers were lounging about outside the store, staring at the waggon, as the schoolboys went on.

The story of the gold consignment accounted for their curiosity.

It was nearly dinner-time now, and Frank Richards & Co., leaving their horses hitched outside, went into the dining-room attached to the store, where a good many of the citizens of Thompson came for the midday meal.

They sat down to a good dinner, and Kern Gunten came in while they were thus engaged, and gave them a rather surly nod.

The storekeeper's son came up to them, not with a very agreeable expression on his face.

"Hallo!" said Bob Lawless cheerily. "How are you getting on at Hillcrest, Gunten? Like it better than Cedar Creek?"

"I guess so," answered Gunten. "I guess it's a better-class place, Bob Lawless."

"Your presence there makes it so, dear kid," answered Bob Lawless solemnly. "I hear you're not driving the post-waggon this afternoon."

"And I hear you're going to do it," answered Gunten.

"Correct."

"More fool you!" said Kern Gunten.

"Thanks."

"I'd rather drive the waggon than go to school, anyway," continued the Swiss. "But I told them flat I wasn't taking it on this afternoon, and my father upheld me, too. Why, the way it's leaked out about the gold consignment, the waggon is dead sure to be stopped by the Flour-Bag Gang. At least, I think so."

"Well, it looks like that to me," agreed Bob.

"Yet you're going to drive?"

"Well, the road-agents won't eat us," said Bob, laughing. "We've got orders not to resist, and the most rampagous rustler this side of the Rockies won't burn powder for nothing."

"It's risky, all the same. Rifles go off sometimes," said Gunten. "I don't care to risk it. Why should I?"

"No reason why you should, if you don't choose," said Bob. "I do choose, and that makes the difference."

"Well, I think you're a jay."

"Same to you, old scout. But the sheriff can't think the waggon is going to be stopped, or he'd send a guard."

"He's a jay, too."

"I don't think so, though I don't quite catch on to this," said Bob Lawless. "Anyway, we're going. You're going to school instead, I suppose?"

"Yes; and glad to," answered Gunten. And the Swiss schoolboy went to his own dinner, evidently with the fixed belief that he was acting with considerable wisdom, and that Bob Lawless was a fool for taking his place.

Frank Richards & Co. finished their dinner in cheery spirits, notwithstanding the chance of a meeting with the road-agents later in the day.

There was an element of danger, of course, but the robbers were not likely to shoot unless they were resisted, and the Cedar Creek chums had orders not to resist.

As Bob Lawless remarked, the Flour-Bag Gang, if they turned up, would be after the gold, not after nooses for their necks.

Indeed, if the danger had been of an alarming extent, it was pretty certain that the sheriff would not have come to Cedar Creek School for a driver.

The chums left the store, as the jingle of harness and the tramping of horses warned them that the team was being put in.

Three good horses were traced to the heavy waggon, which was pretty well filled with goods of one sort and another, and the post-sacks from the office.

Bob Lawless climbed into the driver's seat, and took the reins and the whip, his chums following him into the waggon.

By this time a considerable crowd had collected in the street to watch the departure of the vehicle.

There was a buzz as Mr. Gunten came out of the store with an assistant, carrying between them a heavy sack.

Some of the looks cast on that sack, which was tightly roped up and sealed, were greedy.

"That's the gold, I suppose?" Frank Richards murmured to Beauclerc.

The Cherub nodded.

The sack was placed in the waggon, and carefully stacked away under several other packages.

Then Mr. Gunten came along to the step to speak to the schoolboy driver.

"You know what you've got to do, Lawless," he said. "You call at Cedar Camp for the letters, at the Continental, and then drive right on to Silver Creek, and hand the waggon over to the postmaster there. The Silver Creek driver takes it on in the morning. They'll lend you horses to ride home on. I'll take care of your mounts here."

"Right-ho, Mr. Gunten!" answered Bob cheerily.

"If there should be any trouble on the trail you're not to kick up a shindy. That's the sheriff's order, strict. Not to resist under any circumstances whatever."

"We understand, Mr. Gunten."

"Off you go, then."

Old Man Gunten stepped back, and Bob gathered up the reins, cracked the whip, and the post-waggon rumbled away down Main Street.

The crowd broke up.

And as the waggon rumbled out of the town on to the open trail a horseman rode out of Thompson at a different point, riding at full gallop over the prairie.

Had Frank Richards & Co. observed the movements of that galloping rider they might have guessed that news was going to the Flour-Bag Gang that the post-waggon had started with the gold aboard.

But they did not see him, and they started off merrily on the rough trail, Bob Lawless handling his team of three like one to the manner born.

### The 3rd Chapter.

#### The Road - Agents.

"Cedar Camp!"

"Safe so far!" said Frank Richards, smiling.

The post-waggon drove down the rugged street of the camp, and stopped before the log-built inn which was dignified with the title of Hotel Continental.

The landlord came out, with a pipe in his mouth and his sleeves rolled up, to greet the post-waggon.

"Hallo! You driving, young Lawless?" he asked.

"Looks like it, Pete!" answered Bob.

"What's become of Gunten—ill?"

"Cold feet!" explained Bob, laughing. And Pete grinned.

"Hyer's your letters!" he said, tossing a sack into the waggon. "That's the whole truck! Pleasant journey!"

And the waggon rolled on, the landlord of the Continental filing his pipe and blinking after it meditatively.

Cedar Camp was left behind, and beyond it the plains stretched before the team, marked by a trail cut in the soil by many wheels and countless hoofs.

There was still snow in many of the ruts, but the day was fine and clear, and the drive across the plains was enjoyable.

"Beats the class-room hollow!" remarked Frank Richards.

"I guess so!" said Bob, cracking his whip.

"Ripping!" said Beauclerc heartily. "I wonder if the Flour-Bag Gang are out on the trail?"

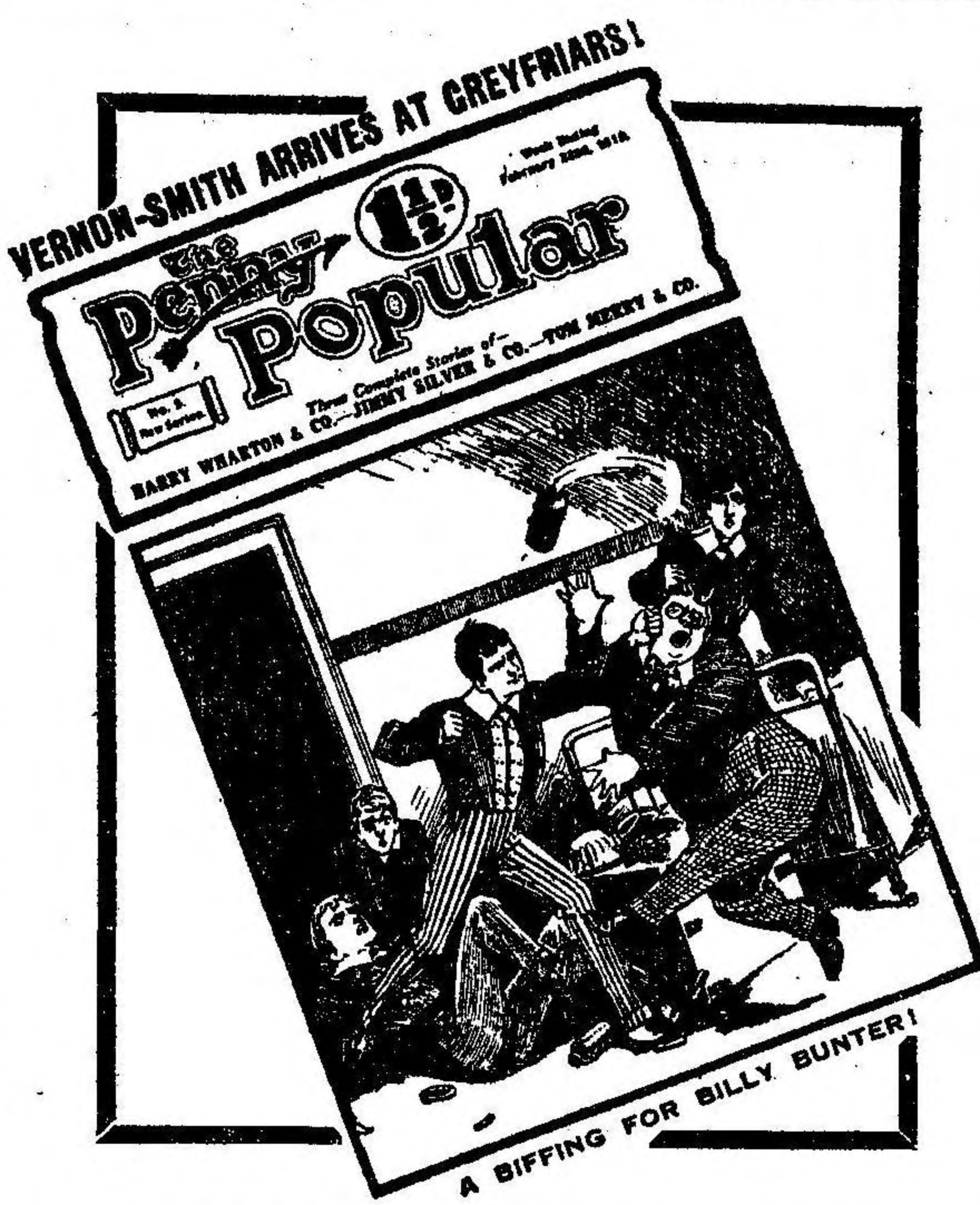
"We shall soon see now."

Vere Beauclerc nodded, and fell into silence.

He was thinking of his father, of the fact that Mr. Beauclerc had been a "pard" of Poker Pete, the sport of Thompson, who was more than suspected of being the leader of the Flour-Bag Gang.

It was the boy's influence that had made Mr. Beauclerc break with the rascally

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# 3

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gang, and at this moment Beauclerc could not feel too thankful for it.

If the post-wagon was stopped by masked robbers on the trail, he was sure now that his father was clear of the business. He knew that the remittance-man would keep his word, and that he was done with Poker Pete and his gang.

Cedar Camp lay miles behind, and the post-wagon rumbled on over a trail that lay amid scattered patches of timber on the plain.

As the team trotted cheerily on the three schoolboys watched each patch of timber as they passed.

Every clump of trees, they knew, might hide the road-agents, if they were on the trail that clear afternoon.

And they could not help thinking that a "hold-up" was probable.

The secret of the gold consignment had leaked out. It was no secret in the town of Thompson, and therefore it was pretty certain that the Flour-Bag Gang knew of it.

They were not likely to let such a chance slip, unless the post-wagon was accompanied by armed men as an escort—and it was not.

Bob Lawless' cheery face grew suddenly grave.

"Look out!" he muttered.

"Bob! What—"

"Mind your eye!" said Bob. He jerked his whip towards a clump of timber a score of yards ahead of the rumbling wagon. "Somebody's there—and I guess—"

He broke off as a horseman suddenly pushed out of the timber into the trail. The schoolboys' hearts bounded.

The horseman halted in the centre of the trail, and held up his hand—with a revolver in it.

The man's face was covered by a flour-bag, inverted over his head, and tied loosely about his neck.

Slits were cut in it for eyes and mouth, but not a glimpse of the rider's features could be seen.

It was as complete a disguise as could have been desired.

The raised hand and the revolver were enough for Bob Lawless and his comrades. But for the sheriff's instructions Bob would have whipped on his team and made a desperate effort to rush down the robber and get clear.

But his instructions had been precise, and he had promised to obey.

He slackened rein.

"Halt!"

The sharp call came from the slit in the flour-bag that disguised the road-agent.

Bob drew in his team.

As the wagon stopped, with the leader only a few yards from the halted horseman, two other riders appeared from the clump of timber.

They rode up to the wagon.

Frank Richards & Co. watched them in silence.

The post-wagon was at the mercy of the Flour-Bag Gang, and resistance was now impossible, if the schoolboys had thought of it.

The man in the trail made a gesture with his revolver.

"Put up your hands!"

"Up with them!" murmured Bob.

Three pairs of hands went up obediently. Then the horseman rode nearer.

"You're not the usual driver!" he snapped.

"Nope!" agreed Bob.

"What are you doing here, then?"

"Gunten got cold feet, and wouldn't come."

There was a faint chuckle under the flour-bag.

"So you took his place?"

"Correct! Gunten reckoned this might happen!" explained Bob.

"And you weren't afraid?"

"Not a bit!" said Bob Lawless cheerily.

"I guess you're after the dust, not after a loop in a lasso for your neck!"

The three road-agents looked at one another and chuckled hoarsely. Bob's coolness seemed to entertain them.

"I guess you're right," said the leader.

"Keep your hands up, and mind your own business, and you won't be hurt."

"I guess I'm going to be as quiet as a tame lamb," answered Bob Lawless. "It looks to me as if they've made you a present of the dust, and I'm blessed if I understand it. But it's no business of mine!"

"Go through the wagon!" rapped out the leader.

His followers were in the wagon in a few seconds.

They dragged the packages and the post-sacks roughly about, evidently looking for the "dust" which they knew to be in the wagon.

"Hyer it is!"

"Good! Drop it in the trail!"

The sealed sack which Old Man Gunten had placed in the wagon with so much care crashed down into the trail.

The two robbers jumped down after it.

"Cut it open!" ordered the leader. "It's a bit too hefty for one hoss!"

A knife slashed the sack open.

Frank Richards & Co., with their hands up, watched the proceedings in silence.

From the slashed sack a number of smaller bags rolled, each of them securely tied and sealed.

There were exclamations of delight from the three road-agents at the sight.

For the buckskin bags were of the kind usually containing gold-dust, and each of them was crammed full, and evidently heavy.

"By gum! What luck!" muttered the leader. "What thundering luck! I guess they'll be sorry they opened their mouths so wide about this consignment."

The three road-agents eagerly collected up the bags, dividing them into three lots—of four bags each.

These they crammed into their saddle-bags.

Through the slits in the masks their eyes could be seen, gleaming with greed and satisfaction.

"By thunder! What a haul!" muttered the leader.

"I guess there's more to be had in

the post-sacks," muttered one of the others.

"But this is a regular bonanza! Thunder! What's that?"

There was a sudden streak of light against the clouds at a distance over the wide plain.

The three schoolboys in the wagon and the road-agents in the trail stared at it, startled, for a second or two.

The flash faded.

"A rocket!" muttered Bob Lawless, in wonder.

"It's a signal!" shouted the leader of the Flour-Bag Gang. "Thunder! Get on your hosses!"

"But the post-sacks—"

"Fool! I tell you it's a signal! Isn't ten thousand dollars in dust enough for you, without a rope as well? Ride, I tell you—ride!"

The leader was already in the saddle, putting spurs to his horse.

His followers mounted in hot haste, and rode after him.

"Was that a signal?" ejaculated Frank Richards blankly.

Bob Lawless nodded.

"It couldn't be anything else," he said.

"But—but what—"

"I give it up," said Bob. "I can't guess—My word! Look!" He pointed with his whip.

From a patch of trees on the plain four horsemen had emerged.

A few moments later five or six riders appeared over the crest of a roll in the prairie.

And, to the amazement of the schoolboys, riders started into view in six or seven different directions.

"What does it mean?" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"There's Sheriff Henderson!"

"And Billy Cook!" yelled Bob Lawless.

"My hat!"

There was a thunder of hoofs on the prairie.

Frank Richards & Co. stood up in the

"It was a signal?" asked Frank.

"Yep."

"And the sheriff—"

"I guess the sheriff was out with his men," chuckled the ranchman. "And Mr. Lawless is out, too, with nearly all the cowboys from the ranch, as well as some galoots from Cedar Camp, and the cattlemen from Silver Creek way. I reckon, sonnies, that the sheriff laid this little game out well. There's thirty men looking for those fresh galoots, and if they get clear you can call me a John Chinaman!"

"Oh!" said Frank. "So the secret about the gold consignment was allowed to leak out on purpose?"

"Yep!" grinned Billy Cook.

"And that's why the wagon wasn't guarded?"

"Yep. Nearly spoiled the game, when that young idiot Gunten refused to drive," said Billy Cook. "The kid couldn't be trusted with the secret, of course, and he was skcered. He reckoned the road-agents would hear of the dust, and would be arter it, and he wasn't risking his precious skin, not if he knew it. And if a man had been put in to drive, the sheriff reckoned that the Flour-Bag Gang might be oneasy, and hold off; they mightn't have stopped the post-wagon with a sheriff's man in charge. And they was wanted to stop it—see?"

"I see," said Frank.

"And there was a galoot sticking on top of the biggest tree hereabouts with a telescope," said Billy Cook, chuckling explosively. "Why, siree, that galoot was able to see nearly all the trail between Cedar Camp and Silver Creek with his pesky spy-glass, and as soon as the wagon was stopped he sent off the signal. He'd been watching you since you were half a mile out of Cedar Camp, and you never knowed it."

"And the road-agents didn't!" grinned Bob Lawless.

"Nary a know!" chuckled the ranchman. "And I guess if those galoots ride like thunder it won't help them any,

His harsh, bearded face was ghastly pale, and he groaned as he was moved, one of his arms hanging useless by his side.

He was placed in the wagon beside the other prisoner, and Billy Cook knelt beside him there, rendering him some rough aid.

"That's two!" said Bob Lawless, in a low voice.

Neither of the two was the man who had evidently been the leader of the outlaws.

That rascal, whom the schoolboys more than suspected was Poker Pete, of Thompson, was still at large, and it began to look as though he had got clear.

Horsemen arrived on the trail from various directions, breathless, with steaming steeds.

But they came empty-handed.

They called out inquiries to Billy Cook as they came up, and the ranchman shook his head.

"Only two, so far," he said. "Where's the sheriff?"

"Arter the other galoot, I reckon."

More than an hour passed, and there was no sign of the sheriff, or of the leader of the Flour-Bag Gang.

"I reckon he's got clear, Billy," Bob Lawless remarked at last.

"I guess it looks like it," admitted the ranchman. "But the sheriff's still in the saddle. I guess he won't let up easy."

"They divided the bags of gold-dust among them," said Frank. "If he gets clear he'll take a third part of the gold consignment with him."

"By gum, yes!" said Bob Lawless.

"You never thought of that, Billy."

The ranchman laughed.

"He's welcome to a third of the dust, or all of it fur that matter," he said.

"What?"

"Sonnies, this hyer little game was laid careful, but the sheriff knowed it was possible something might go awry," explained the ranchman. "There wasn't

"Two, so far as we know—one wounded.

"Then there's one more. One got through, with the sheriff close on his heels," said Mr. Lawless. "I'm rather anxious to see Mr. Henderson. There's been shooting, and—"

He broke off, with a rather clouded brow.

The schoolboys fell silent as they rode on with the rancher.

There had been shooting on the plains, and it was quite likely that all the damage had not been upon one side.

It was clear that Mr. Lawless was a little anxious as to what had happened to the sheriff, and the schoolboys shared his anxiety.

Thompson came in sight at last, and they rode into the town, and stopped at Gunten's Store in Main Street as the dusk was falling.

There was a crowd in the store and in the street outside, and a ceaseless buzz of voices.

Some of the sheriff's men had returned to the town, and all Thompson knew by this time of the trick that had been played upon the road-agents, and the grim chase that had followed.

"Has the sheriff come back?" called out Mr. Lawless, as he rode up to the store.

"Not yet, boss," answered Billy Cook, who was in the crowd. "Nobody's seed him."

"And the other road-agent, Billy?" asked Bob.

"Not roped in, so far as I know."

"They won't get him if he's not roped in before dark," said Mr. Lawless, knitting his brows. "He must have had extraordinary luck to get through our men. He must have—"

The rancher broke off, but Frank Richards & Co. guessed his unspoken thought, and they exchanged glances.

The plan had been so well-laid, and the horsemen in cover on the plain had been so numerous, that the road-agents had no chance of getting clear, unless—there was only one way in which the leader of the Flour-Bag Gang could have got through, and that was by shooting down those who sought to stop him.

From the talk of the crowd the schoolboys learned that two of the sheriff's men had come in on foot, and that their horses had been shot, and another had ridden home with a broken arm.

But where was the sheriff?

A roar of voices down the street drew the attention of the chums of Cedar Creek and the rest of the crowd.

Three horsemen were riding into Main Street—and the flare of the naphthalene-lamps—from the dusk of the plain.

Mr. Todgers and Mr. Lawrence—the schoolboys knew them—were supporting the horseman who rode in the middle, and he rode with bowed head and bandaged breast.

It was the sheriff of Thompson!

Around the three surged the eager crowd as they halted outside the sheriff's house.

Mr. Henderson was lifted from his saddle, quickly but gently.

His face was deadly-white, his eyes almost closed, but he uttered no sound as he was carried into his house.

A hush fell on the crowd outside.

Mr. Todgers—Chunky's father—came out of the sheriff's house with a grave face. Frank Richards caught his sleeve.

"He's wounded, Mr. Todgers?" gasped Frank.

"A bullet in the chest," said the farmer quietly. "Has someone fetched the doctor?"

"Poppa's gone for him," said Bob. "Here he comes."

Dr. Jones passed into the sheriff's house, and the door closed behind him.

The crowd still lingered.

They were waiting for news.

It was some time before Dr. Jones came out, and then there were eager inquiries, though in low tones.

"I guess it's serious enough," was the doctor's reply. "But the sheriff's a good man, and he don't touch the tanglefoot, and I reckon he's got a good chance of pulling through. That's all."

That was the verdict.

Frank Richards & Co. rode homeward with Mr. Lawless with grave faces.

One of the road-agents had escaped, after all, and in his house at Thompson the sheriff lay between life and death.

As Frank and his companions rode out on the trail they left the frontier town in a roar behind them.

The sheriff was popular, and he had been struck down in doing his duty, and if the man who had fired the shot had been brought in a prisoner there is little doubt what would have happened to him.

It was fortunate for the captured outlaws that they were at Silver Creek, with many long miles of prairie between them and the enraged crowd at Thompson.

"If the galoot had been caught it would have been a case of Judge Lynch, I reckon," muttered Bob Lawless. "Serve him right, but—"

"And if he is caught he may be," said Frank.

"I wouldn't give ten cents for his neck if the Thompson crowd get hands on him," said Bob.

Frank shivered a little.

Vere Beauclerc's face was pale. He was thinking of what might have been if his father had not broken with Poker Pete and his associates.

He little dreamed of what was threatening, and how soon those dreaded words "Judge Lynch" were to ring in his ears like a death-knell.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

UNDER ARREST!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD. DON'T MISS IT!



THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNAL! WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

wagon, standing on the packages to get a better view.

The plain that had seemed utterly deserted seemed now alive with furious riders.

The three masked men were riding hard—riding for their lives.

But, ahead of them, other horsemen had appeared, and they drew rein in desperation.

The chums saw them separate, each taking a different direction, riding frantically, with lashing whip and stabbing spur.

Bob Lawless gave a shout.

"Oh, thunder! I can see it now! It's a trap!"

"A trap!" repeated Frank Richards blankly.

"A trap—and the Flour-Bag Gang have fallen into it!" yelled Bob. "Hurrah!"

And Frank and Beauclerc, understanding at last how matters stood, joined in his shout.

"Hurrah!"

The 4th Chapter. Hunted Down!

"Hallo, youngsters!"

Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless ranch, came riding up to the post-wagon, with a grin on his bronzed face.

He swept off his Stetson hat in salute to the schoolboys.

"Safe and sound?" he grinned.

"You bet!" answered Bob, laughing.

The plains were clear now to the sight.

The horsemen had vanished on the rolling prairie, pursuers and pursued riding with frantic speed.

Billy Cook chuckled.

"S'prised you some, hay?" he asked.

"Rather a surprise," said Frank Richards. "What the thump are you doing here, Billy?"

Another chuckle from the big cattleman.

"I guess we're all in the game, to round up the Flour-Bag Gang," he explained. "You saw the rocket?"

for there's men dotted over the prairie in all directions, ready to cut them off.

This hyer trail is watched so that a fly couldn't crawl away without being spotted. Ha, ha, ha!"

Crack! Crack!

Billy Cook's laugh suddenly broke off at the sound of shots in the distance.

Crack!

"Shootin'," remarked the ranchman coolly.

"Yep, I reckoned there would be shootin' before they was rounded up."

Frank Richards and his chums stared away across the plains, their faces suddenly grave and set.

"Hyer come some of the boys," said Billy Cook.

Two horsemen came in sight, leading a third horse between them, on the back of which a man sat, bound to his saddle with a lasso.

It was one of the road-agents, and the flour-bag had been dragged from his face, disclosing a rough, savage, bearded countenance.

"I guess that's number one," remarked Billy Cook. "The others won't be fur off, I reckon."

The sullen prisoner was brought up to the post-wagon, taken from his horse, and pitched into the wagon, bound hand and foot.

The schoolboys continued to watch the plain.

It was bare to the sight, but from the distance there came again and again the cracking of rifles.

From behind a ridge a bunch of horsemen appeared at last, several of them supporting a body in their arms as they rode.

Frank Richards & Co. looked at one another, their faces pale now.

The horsemen came up to the wagon, and, with intense relief, the chums saw that the man they carried still lived.

A flour-bag hung loosely round his neck, showing that he was one of the gang of road-agents.

gold-dust in the buckskin-bags, only powdered quartz, and I reckon the hull bilin' wasn't worth ten cents!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"Then," said Beauclerc, "if the man gets clear with his plunder he will find—"

"When he opens them bags he'll find powdered quartz in them, and he's welcome to it!" answered Billy Cook.

"It was only a dummy consignment, then?"

"Yep."

"Oh, my hat!" said Frank Richards, laughing. "This was a bad break for the Flour-Bag Gang! They've been done all along the line!"

"I calculate that's so!" said Billy Cook. "But, by thunder, where is the sheriff? I guess I'm going on, and you youngsters had better drive on to Silver Creek. You won't see any more road-agents this journey, and you can bet on that."

And Bob Lawless drove on with his chums, the post-wagon being accompanied by several of the horsemen in charge of the prisoners.

The 5th Chapter. Struck Down!

Frank Richards & Co. left the post-wagon at Silver Creek.

There it was handed over to the post-master, and the prisoners were taken out and lodged in the lumber gaol.

The three schoolboys borrowed horses, and rode on rapidly towards Thompson, anxious to hear how the chase of the Flour-Bag Gang had ended.

Bob uttered an exclamation as a horseman appeared on the trail from among the patches of timber.

"Poppa!"

It was Mr. Lawless, and he greeted the schoolboys with a smile.

"Going to Thompson, poppa?" asked Bob.

"Yes. Do you know how many of the gang were taken?" asked the rancher.