

The BOYS' FRIEND

TWELVE PAGES!

TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending April 17th, 1920.



AUNT SARAH!

Arthur Beresford-Baggs detached himself from the gateway to greet the striking-looking lady who came into view. Her dress was of a rusty black; but to compensate for that, she wore a shawl of brilliant hue. Her bonnet was, in itself, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever—in size and in colour. The good lady's face was somewhat plump with red cheeks and it expressed good nature. "My, Arty! What a swell you are!" she exclaimed admiringly. "All in new clothes and a silk 'at! Oh my!"

The 1st Chapter.

Tubby Muffin Hears Too Much.

"Thick as thieves!" growled Peele. Cyril Peele, of the Classical Fourth, was standing at his study window, looking down into the quadrangle of Rookwood. Lattrey and Gower were lounging near him, also looking out.

They seemed interested in a group of juniors chatting under the beeches. There were five juniors in the group—Jimmy Silver & Co. and Arthur Beresford-Baggs, the new fellow in the Fourth.

Peele eyed them morosely.

It was clear that Arthur Beresford-Baggs was on the best of terms with the Fiscal Four, even if they were not precisely as "thick" as thieves, as Peele described it.

Peele was evidently not pleased by the sight of the cheery cordiality reigning between the Co. and the schoolboy millionaire.

"Silver seems to have taken him up!" remarked Gower.

"After his money, like the rest!" said Lattrey.

Peele grunted. "That's rot! Jimmy Silver doesn't care for his money, and wouldn't borrow a bob of him at any price. What's the good of rottin'? We all know that."

"Well, you were after his cash, anyhow, Peele, old scout," said Lattrey tartly, "and it wasn't much use. You were going to teach him banker and poker. Has he learned yet?"

Gower grinned, and Peele grunted again angrily. Peele's grunt indicated that the gilt-edged youth had not, so far, been initiated into the delights of banker and poker.

"He won't even come into the study," continued Lattrey. "He won't even come to tea. He's no fool. He knows what we want."

"Hang him!"

"We haven't made a quid out of him yet, and it looks to me as if we sha'n't, either. I'm not goin' to worry about him any more. After all, he's a rotten parvenu, and not fit for a fellow to speak to."

"Most fellows seem pleased enough to know him," grinned Gower. "Towny and Toppo are his best pals. Jimmy Silver's taken him up. Mornington is friendly to him. Even that scholarship cad Rawson likes him, and pulls with him. Not much good us settin' up to look down on him. The fellows would only think it was a case of sour grapes. So it would be."

Another grunt from Peele.

"I'm done with him," he said.

"You haven't begun with him yet," said Lattrey agreeably. "He won't have anythin' to do with you, old top. He's told you so, in fact."

Cyril Peele's eyes glittered. "In fact, it's quite a joke in the Fourth," grinned Lattrey. "Every-

body knew what you were after, and the way Baggs has turned you down makes the fellows chortle no end."

"I know," said Peele quietly, his eyes still on the chatting group in the quadrangle. "And I'm going to make the cheeky cad pay for it. If he won't have me for a friend, he will have me for an enemy."

"You can't hurt him. He's licked Morny, and Morny could make rings round you. Better let him alone."

"I'm not thinkin' of pitchin' into the cad. I'm goin' to show him up," said Peele. "You remember Tubby Muffin's yarn last week about some awful uncle of his who came down to Rookwood—some terrific character accordin' to Muffin. Baggs contrived somehow to keep him away from the school, and only Muffin knows—"

"Muffin's gas!" said Gower. "Nobody believes Muffin."

"I believe him," answered Peele. "It stands to reason. This fellow Baggs is a rotten upstart. When

he's off his guard he speaks like a slum bouncer. He's no class, and his pater's no class. Everybody knows that they made their money out of the war. It stands to reason that they've got awful relations they wouldn't dare to have seen—"

"Very likely. But Baggs is pretty sure to be careful to keep his relations dark. If his uncle was really a fearful outsider, he took care to keep the old johnny away from Rookwood."

"Jimmy Silver helped him," grinned Gower. "Blessed if I know why he should, but he did."

"It was only Muffin's yarn—"

"I believe Muffin's yarn," said Peele, "and my belief is that Baggs has plenty more such relations, and if they came to Rookwood it would show the cad up all right. Smythe and Townsend and Topham and the rest would soon give him the go-by if he was visited by relations like the character Muffin described."



ARTHUR'S AUNT!

(Continued from previous page.)

"No doubt; but if he's got 'em they won't come here. He'll take jolly good care that they don't." Peele did not reply for a moment. The group under the beeches had been joined by Mornington and Conroy and Erroll, and several other fellows, and they were all very cheery towards Arthur Beresford-Baggs. Lovell glanced up at the study window, and grinned, and several other of the juniors followed his glance, and grinned, too. Cyril Peele stepped hastily back from the window. "They're grinnin' at you, old top!" remarked Gower pleasantly. "They'll be grinnin' at Baggs soon!" said Peele between his teeth. "Wait till his relation comes here!" "His relations won't come here to please you, I suppose." "That's my idea. The cad has an Aunt Sarah. Muffin's heard him speak of her—" "I dare say; but Aunt Sarah won't show up at Rookwood." "She will—on Saturday afternoon." "Eh? How do you know?" "Because I'm going to fix it," said Peele coolly. His chum stared at him. "You're goin' to get the old girl to come here?" ejaculated Gower. "Do you know where she lives?" "Of course I don't!" "Then how the thump—" "Oh, you're dense!" said Peele. "You remember when we did the play last term—'Charley's Aunt'—I did the Aunt." "I remember. What about it?" "Didn't I do it well?" demanded Peele. "Yes. We all know you're the best actor in the club, and even Jimmy Silver can't do without you in the plays, though I fancy he'd be glad to if he could!" grinned Lattrey. "Well, if I can do Charley's Aunt, I can do Arthur's aunt," said Peele coolly. "I'm going to the costumier at Rookham to make up as Charley's Aunt—I mean, as Arthur's aunt. I'm coming here as his Aunt Sarah." "Wha-a-at?" "My hat! You wouldn't have the nerve." Peele smiled contemptuously. "I've got the nerve. Besides, what's there to be afraid of? Even if it comes out, it's only a practical joke." "But—but that chap will know whether you're his Aunt Sarah or not!" exclaimed Gower. "The other chaps won't." "But he'll tell them." "And they'll think he's ashamed of his aunt, and denying the relationship for that reason," said Peele coolly. "Oh, my hat!" "I've thought it out," said Peele. "I had an appointment on Saturday with Joey Hook at the Bird-in-Hand, but I'm going to work this stunt instead. I'm coming here got up as Arthur's aunt; and you can bet it will be a terrific old lady who won't do him credit—terrific clothes and a gamp and a bottle of gin—" "Ha, ha, ha!" "And when he says I'm not his aunt, I'll put on the pathetic about his bein' ashamed of his relations now he's well off—" "Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Gower and Lattrey. "I fancy that will bring him down!" chuckled Peele. "On the face of it, his denials won't be any use. Why should an old lady come here claiming him as her nephew, if he isn't her nephew?" "Ha, ha, ha!" "And you can bet— Oh!" Peele broke off suddenly and made a spring to the study door, and dragged it open. "Muffin, you spyin' cad!" "Oh!" gasped Tubby Muffin. The fat Classical almost pitched into the study as the door was dragged open.

"You fat rotter!" roared Peele, utterly enraged by the discovery that the Peeping Tom of Rookwood had overheard his precious scheme. "You've been listening—" "I—I haven't!" stammered Tubby. "I—I was just passing—" "You heard me!" "I—I didn't! I didn't even know you knew Baggs had an Aunt Sarah, and—and I don't believe you could make up— Yarooooooh!" Peele fairly jumped at the fat Classical. His beautiful scheme for humiliating Arthur, which he had thought of with such care, was evidently useless now. It was not of much use for a pretended aunt of Beresford-Baggs to turn up at Rookwood on Saturday when the tattling Tubby knew all about it in advance. Thump, thump, thump! "Yow-ow-ow-ow!" Thump, thump! Tubby Muffin had suffered many a time for his prying proclivities. But never had he received so terrific a thrashing as he received now. Peele was so enraged by the "dishing" of his clever scheme, that he did not care how hard he smote; and he smote very hard indeed. Tubby Muffin's frantic yells rang the whole length of the Fourth Form passage. It was not till Peele was breathless that he desisted, and sent the fat Classical whirling into the passage. Tubby Muffin collapsed there, howling. Peele slammed the study door, with a black brow. Lattrey and Gower grinned at one another. They seemed to find something entertaining in their chum's furious disappointment. Cyril Peele's brow was still dark when the bell rang for classes, and he came into the Fourth Form room. He gave Arthur Beresford-Baggs a black look, which the heir of Baggs, Limited, did not even notice. Arthur Beresford-Baggs was too happy at Rookwood School for Peele's morose enmity to make any difference to him.

The 2nd Chapter. A Telegram for Arthur.

"Beresford-Baggs!" "Baggs!" "Where's Baggy?" After dinner on Saturday several voices were inquiring for the new junior. Townsend and Topham, his nutty study-mates were among the inquirers, also Tubby Muffin, and Smythe of the Shell. "Anybody seen Baggs?" called out Towny. "Beresford-Baggs!" said Adolphus Smythe. "Anybody seen Beresford-Baggs?" "Seen him, Putty?" asked Topham. "Baggs is in the quad, and I think Beresford is with him," answered Putty Grace humorously. "Fathead!" And the inquirers hurried out in search of Beresford-Baggs. That wealthy youth was in conversation with Jimmy Silver & Co. Jimmy was speaking as Smythe and his companions came up. "We're holding a rehearsal this afternoon," he said. "You haven't seen the Classical Players at work yet, and you can come along if you like. If you want to join the dramatic club, Newcome's sec." "I'd like to," said Arthur. "Right you are. Hallo, you seem to be wanted!" said Jimmy, as Adolphus & Co. came up. Arthur glanced round. "Telegram for you, Beresford-Baggs!" said Smythe. "The kid's waitin' in the hall, old top," said Townsend. "Right-ho!" said Arthur; and with a nod to Jimmy Silver & Co., he went towards the School House, Smythe and the rest keeping him company. Jimmy Silver smiled. It was but seldom that Arthur Beresford-Baggs moved anywhere without the company of one or another of the nuts of Rookwood. The aristocratic Adolphus delighted in his society, though he was in a lower Form than Smythe. Townsend and Topham seemed to love him like

brothers. Tubby Muffin was his faithful shadow. Arthur took it all good-humouredly. Flattery did not seem to affect him in any way; he never showed any sign of "swank." He simply enjoyed the good things that fortune had so kindly bestowed upon him. Towards Peele & Co., the black sheep of the Fourth, he was distant enough; good-natured as he was he was no fool, and he seemed to have no vices; ample as was his cash; he had no desire whatever to throw it away on "little games" in Peele's study. But the advances of the other fellows he met in the most cordial spirit, and he was friendly with nearly every junior at Rookwood. He tolerated even Tubby Muffin, and was a horn of plenty to that impunctuous youth. Tubby had ceased to count the half-crowns he had extracted from Beresford-Baggs. "The dear boy is still as popular as ever!" Lovell remarked, with a grin. "I wonder what would have happened if his merry uncle had set foot inside Rookwood last week?" "I wonder!" chuckled Raby. "Even Tubby turned up his nose at the poor old gentleman!" remarked Newcome. "He seems to have got over it now, though. He's been cadging regularly from Baggs since." "Well, Baggs' uncle was a good old sort, though a bit rough-and-ready," said Jimmy Silver; "and the fellows have agreed that Tubby's description was all gas. Baggs is all right, unless Aunt Maria or Aunt Sarah or Cousin 'Erb should turn up." "Ha, ha, ha!" "Hallo, there goes Peele!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We want that boulder this afternoon. Hallo, Peele!" Cyril Peele was heading for the gates, when the captain of the Fourth bore down upon him. He paused and looked round as Jimmy Silver called. "Where are you off to?" asked Jimmy. "I'm goin' out of gates," answered Peele sourly. "There's a rehearsal on in the box-room this afternoon," said Jimmy. "The Classical Players, you know—" "I've got an engagement." "Well, you know you're wanted in the play, when it comes off," said Jimmy. "I don't want to have to fill your place—" "I can't stay in this afternoon, anyhow; I tell you I've got an engagement!" said Peele sourly. "Come where the booze is cheaper; come where the pots hold more!" sang Arthur Edward Lovell softly; and there was a chuckle from Newcome and Raby. Peele's little habit of dropping in at the Bird-in-Hand on a half-holiday was pretty well known. But Jimmy Silver looked at Peele rather suspiciously. "Muffin was saying something the other 'day—" he began. "Hang Muffin!" "About some jape you were planning against Baggs—making yourself up as a relation, or something, to come here and worry him—" "Oh, rot!" "Well, don't do it," said Jimmy. "Baggs knows what to expect, and he will most likely pitch into you. That game's no good, you know, now that Muffin's spread it all over the Form—" "I'm not thinking of anythin' of the kind!" exclaimed Peele savagely. "If you particularly want to know, I'm goin' out for a game of billiards.

So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Jimmy Silver!" And with that, Cyril Peele swung out of the gates, and started along the road to Coombe. "Silly ass!" commented Lovell. "A prefect ought to have heard that. Peele's game of billiards would be nipped in the bud!" "Well, he's his own master, I suppose," said Jimmy Silver. "No bizney of ours if he plays the goat. If he doesn't attend rehearsal, though, I shall cut him out of the cast, though I admit he's our best man. Bother him, anyhow—let's call the fellows together." And the Fistical Four headed for the School House to prepare for the important business that was to take place in the box-room.

The 3rd Chapter. A Pleasant Prospect.

"Oh erikey!" That emphatic, if inelegant ejaculation escaped from Arthur Beresford-Baggs, in tones of dismay. He had opened the telegram. The youth from the post-office stood waiting, cap in hand, while Arthur looked at his telegram. Round the son of the millionaire were grouped the nuts of Rookwood, with expressions of friendly interest. Tubby Muffin was looking not only interested, but eager. Tubby had heard of money being sent by telegram, and he was wondering whether this was a handsome tip for Arthur from his pater, the baronet. If it was Tubby Muffin intended to have his "whack" somehow, by hook or by crook. Half-crowns were all very well, but in the case of a handsome remittance from the millionaire, Reginald Muffin meant to "put in" for a quid. But Arthur's expression did not indicate that it was a handsome remittance, or good news of any sort. He looked blankly dismayed. "Any news, old top?" asked Smythe rather curiously. "Er—yes—no!" "Nobody ill, I hope!" murmured Townsend politely. "N-no!" "Any answer, sir?" asked the telegraph youth. "No, no! All right," said Arthur. He dropped a half-crown into the boy's hand; Arthur was always liberal with his tips. Then he moved away to the staircase. The telegram was crumpled in his hand, and it was evident that he did not intend to show it to any of his nutty friends. "Aren't you comin' out this afternoon, old fellow?" asked Townsend. "N-no!" "Come into my study for a little chat," said Smythe. "I'll see you later." With that, and no further explanation, Arthur Beresford-Baggs mounted the stairs rather hurriedly. Smythe & Co. exchanged rather curious glances. However, it was clear enough that the millionaire's son did not desire their honourable company just then, and the nuts strolled away. Even Tubby Muffin realised that there was "nothing doing," and he rolled away in the direction of the tuckshop, there to feast his eyes upon the good things, which, at present, were out of his reach. Arthur hurried to his study in the Fourth-Form passage, the telegram crumpled in his hand, and a deep wrinkle in his brow.

Rawson was in the study, and he glanced in some surprise at the troubled face of the wealthy youth. "Hallo! You in?" said Arthur. "Yes, I am here. You're not doing any swotting this afternoon, I suppose?" said Rawson, with a smile. "No fear!" "Then I sha'n't be in your way. I'm having another go at Greek." "Oh!" said Arthur. He crossed to the window and looked at the telegram again. He wanted to be alone just then, though Rawson's company was less irksome than Towny's or Toppo's would have been. Arthur was a good deal more confidential with Tom Rawson than with any other fellow at Rookwood, though they were not exactly chums. There were sterling qualities in Rawson that Arthur understood and liked, and he could be trusted, too, to keep silent if Arthur talked to him more freely than was really prudent. Arthur had confided things to Rawson that he would never have dreamed of whispering to any of his nutty pals. Rawson glanced at him once or twice, as he stood in the light of the window, but Arthur's eyes were fixed on the telegram. The message it conveyed was dismaying enough to the millionaire's son—whose father had not always been a millionaire or a baronet.

"Beresford-Baggs, Rookwood School, Coombe. Expect me, early this afternoon.—AUNT SARAH."

That was the cheering message. Arthur stared at it. Only a week before his Uncle William, the cheery old fish merchant, had arrived on an affectionate visit, and with the kind help of the Fistical Four, Arthur had warded him off so to speak.

Tubby Muffin had seen the old gentleman, and had been very lofty and scornful about it, though he had recovered from that since, and did not disdain to raise small loans from the nephew of the old gentleman whom he looked down upon so scornfully. Jimmy Silver & Co. had kept their own counsel upon the subject, and so the danger had passed, as it were; Arthur's noble pals refused to credit Tubby's lurid description of the fishy old gentleman, and, indeed, ragged him for spinning such yarns about their wealthy pal's relations.

But now— Uncle Bill had been warded off successfully, but it was clear that Aunt Sarah could not be warded off. She was coming! Early that afternoon—and it was already getting on for three! The good lady might arrive any moment, and he did not even know which way she was coming.

"Oh lor!" groaned Arthur. Rawson looked at him again. Rawson was rather interested in the peculiar fortunes of his new study-mate. "Anything up?" he asked. "Oh dear, yes!" "If I can do anything—" "Real that!" mumbled Arthur, tossing the telegram on the table. Tom Rawson read it. "You don't want your aunt to come?" he asked quietly. Arthur flushed. "Don't you think I'm looking down on my Aunt Sarah, Rawson?" he exclaimed. "It ain't that! She's a good old sort, as good as my Uncle Bill that I told you about. But—but I—"

Rawson nodded. "I understand! Not exactly the thing for Rookwood, do you mean?" "I've told you what we was afore dad got on," said Arthur, dropping unconsciously into old ways of speaking. "Father was a bit different from his brothers and sisters. They're good sorts, and they are always very fond of me. I wrote them all from 'ere, and told them about Rookwood, and you see, I mentioned that I was sorry I never 'ad a chance of saying good-bye to them afore I came to school. I'm jest as fond of 'em as ever I was, and I ain't lookin' down on them, but—" He broke off. "It's a rather difficult position," said Rawson. "You don't want to hurt the old lady's feelings?" "I'd die first," said Arthur earnestly. "All the same, I don't see wot's to 'appen if she comes 'ere. I don't know what the 'Ead would think of 'er, or Mr. Bootles—or—or the blokes—I mean the fellers—" "You can't stop her now. Look here," said Rawson quietly. "You meet her at the gates and bring her in and get her into the study. I'll get some tea ready. You can treat her nicely here, and put her at her ease; and most likely nobody will even

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know she's here. She won't want to see the Head, I suppose. Most of the fellows are out this afternoon, and there won't be many about—"

Arthur looked thoughtful. He was undoubtedly in a difficult position, between his horror of acting snobbishly towards his affectionate relations, and the impossibility of producing those extraordinary persons at a school like Rookwood.

"If she'd give me more notice, I could 'ave managed same as with Uncle Bill!" he muttered. "But, but—I desay she never knowed till the last minute that she could 'ave the day off!"

"The day off!" repeated Rawson. "She'll 'ave 'ad to get somebody to mind the shop, you know."

"The shop! Oh!"

"In the greengrocery line!" explained Arthur.

"I—I see."

"Father's wanted 'er to give it up, and let 'im provide for 'er," said Arthur; "but she's independent. He wanted to make 'er a 'andsome allowance to live at the seaside, but p'raps she guessed he wanted to shift 'er off to a good distance. 'Sides, she's independent. But she was always fond of me, and so was I of 'er, too, and so I am now. But—but—"

Poor Arthur broke off again. There was an incongruity between his former and his present surroundings that could hardly be reconciled. Between Arthur Beresford-Baggs, of Rookwood, and Arty Baggs of former times, there was a great gulf fixed, of which the kind-hearted and affectionate Aunt Sarah was not aware.

"You're a good sort, Rawson," he went on, at last. "I ain't ashamed of my old aunt, but, of course, I don't want all the blokes to see 'er 'ere. I—I think I'll get down to the gates."

"That's right!"

Arthur left the study. He scouted down the stairs very cautiously. He did not want to fall in with any of his nutty friends just then.

But he escaped easily enough. The merry nuts were gathered in a little party in Adolphus Smythe's study, and he did not encounter any of them on the stairs or in the passages.

He left the School House, and scudded down to the gates.

There he took up his stand to wait for the arrival of Aunt Sarah, only hoping that he would be able to get that good dame quietly into his study without attracting general attention, where she could be "kept dark" during her visit. It was an unhappy expedient, and he was not pleased with it; but it really seemed that it was his only resource, in the remarkable circumstances.

The 4th Chapter.

Tubby Muffin Sees It All!

"Arty!"

"Auntie!"

Aunt Sarah had arrived!

Arthur Beresford-Baggs detached himself from the gateway to greet the striking-looking lady who came rather breathlessly up the dusty road.

There was no doubt that Aunt Sarah was striking to the view.

Her dress was of a rusty black. But to compensate for that she wore a shawl of brilliant blue. Her bonnet was, in itself, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever—in size, in design, and in colour. The amount of floral decoration crowded upon the bonnet was really remarkable. Bright flowers nodded and waved as Aunt Sarah moved.

The good lady's face was somewhat plump, with red cheeks, and a slight moustache. It expressed great good-nature. It was plain that in Aunt Sarah's disposition there was no shortage of the milk of human kindness.

About the good lady hung a faint aroma of spirituous liquor, with which she had doubtless refreshed herself during the journey to Rookwood.

"My, Arty! What a swell you are!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah admiringly. "All in new clothes, too! And a silk 'at! Oh my!"

"I—I—"

"You 'ad my telegram, Arty?"

"Yes, auntie; only a little while ago—"

"I spent ninnepence on that there telegram," said Miss Baggs impressively. "I wouldn't take you by surprise. Your Uncle Bill took you by surprise last week, but he's so thoughtless, and so I told 'im. Soon as I found Mrs. Gudge would look after the shop for the day, Arty, I sent off that there telegram to you."

"It was—was very kind—"

"And this 'ere," said Miss Baggs, "is Rookwood, is it?"

"Yes, auntie."

"Ow do you the young gentlemen treat you, Art?"

"Oh, jolly well!"

"They don't look down on you because you was poor afore your father made 'is money?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, that's very nice of them," said Aunt Sarah, with an approving nod, which made a whole botanical garden of flowers nod on her bonnet.

"Werry nice, indeed, and shows they're real gents. Fancy you, Art, feelin' quite at 'ome in a big place like this here, with real swells. 'Oo's that cove?" asked Miss Baggs, breaking off.

The "cove" alluded to was Mack, the porter.

Miss Baggs' voice was a powerful one, and it had reached to the porter's lodge inside. Naturally, old Mack had looked out to see what was going on.

He looked at Miss Sarah Baggs, and looked again, and his eyes remained glued upon her, as if fascinated.

Old Mack had never seen anybody quite like Miss Baggs before.

"That—that's our porter," stammered Arthur.

"Porter—eh? Don't he know better than to stare at a lady?" said Miss Baggs warmly.

"Oh, he's rather an old ass, auntie!" said Arthur, in a low voice.

"Never mind him."

"Right! I won't!" said Miss Baggs, with another nod, to a horticultural accompaniment.

"Let's get in, Art. I s'pose you're goin' to offer

Two or three fellows in the quadrangle glanced at Arthur and his companion without concealing their smiles.

Arthur's flush deepened.

But a gleam came into his eye. He was not ashamed of his affable relative, though he would gladly have concealed her from public view. He raised his head proudly as he walked on. Lattrey and Gower were lounging about the School House door, and they stared blankly at Miss Baggs as she drew nearer.

"Who—who—who is it?" stammered Lattrey.

"A relation of Baggs."

"He wouldn't be idiot enough to bring her here if she was!"

"Then who is it?"

There was a fat chortle from Tubby Muffin, who looked out of the doorway just then.

"Oh, my word! What a nerve! Peele's done it!"

"Peele!" exclaimed Lattrey and Gower together.

"He, he, he! Who'd have thought it was Peele?" giggled Tubby Muffin.

"I don't think I should have been taken in, but I reckon you fellows would. Of course, I can see it's Peele."

"It—it can't be—"

"He's doing it jolly well if it's Peele," said Gower, staring. "Young Baggs can't know it's Peele."

Two or three more fellows gathered round, all interested in the oncoming visitor.

The word ran round the group that

Arthur breathed freely when they were in the Fourth-Form passage.

There, they were likely to be seen only by juniors, and juniors did not matter.

He felt that there was a load off his mind when Miss Baggs was safely escorted into Study No. 5, where Tom Rawson was waiting with his politest smile to greet her.

The 5th Chapter.

Tea for Auntie!

"Who—what—what—"

Mr. Bootles came along to the grinning crowd in the doorway, with great astonishment in his face.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "Oh, my hat! What a neck, you know! I'll bet none of you fellows would have known it was Peele, if I hadn't told you. He, he, he!"

"What—what—"

"He's got up jolly well, if it's Peele!" said Jones minor. "Baggs seems to be playing up. I don't see why he should!"

"He, he! You see, he's been over to the costumier's in Rookham to be made up," explained Tubby. "I heard him—"

"Muffin!"

"Oh, yes! Yes, sir! I—I didn't see you, sir!"

"Who is that—that—that extraordinary-looking female who came in with Beresford-Baggs?" demanded Mr. Bootles.

"Oh! It's only a joke, sir—a joke of Peele's!" gasped Tubby. "Peele's

Peele had given up the idea, now that his intended victim was put on his guard; but now it appeared that Master Cyril was carrying out the scheme after all.

Quite a crowd gathered round Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage, greatly interested in the visitor. What puzzled the juniors was Arthur's action in the matter.

Having been forewarned by Tubby Muffin, Arthur certainly ought to have known that his visitor was Cyril Peele—if it was Peele. In any case, he could scarcely suppose that it was a relation of his own—unless it really was a relation of his own.

So the juniors were perplexed.

Tubby Muffin came wedging through the crowd in the passage, and thumped at the door of Study No. 5, and threw it open.

"Peele, old bean—"

"Scat!" exclaimed Rawson.

"I've got a message for Peele—"

"Peele isn't here, you fat ass!" growled Arthur.

Tubby Muffin winked.

Miss Sarah Baggs was seated in the study armchair, evidently pleased to rest after her walk; and Rawson was making tea at the fireplace. Tubby jerked a fat thumb towards Miss Baggs.

"You may as well own up, old top!" he said. "Bootles says you're not to go into the quad again in that rig-out!"

Miss Baggs blinked at the fat Classical.

"Are you addressing me, young man?" she inquired.

"Of course I am! Where on earth did you dig up that hat?" asked Tubby, with a fat chuckle. "Did you get it at Rookham?"

"Clear off!" shouted Arthur, while his astonished aunt stared at Reginald Muffin in speechless indignation.

"Oh, all right!" said Tubby. "I say, are you standing Peele tea? I thought you'd have punched his nose for pretending to come here as your Aunt Sarah. Blessed if I know what you're in the game for, Baggy. Are you pulling the fellows' legs?"

Arthur looked at him.

He was so worried just then that he had not taken Tubby's drift at first; but now he comprehended.

He remembered what he had heard of Peele's scheme, overheard and duly reported upon by Reginald Muffin.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "You fat duffer! That isn't Peele, you chump. It—"

Tubby winked again.

"Keeping it up?" he asked. "He, he, he! But what's the joke—I don't see why you should keep it up. Baggs. Besides, you can't take me in. Do you think I believe anybody's really got a face like that?"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah. "Arty, who is that rude boy?"

"Don't he do it well?" chuckled Muffin. "All the fellows would have been taken in, if I hadn't told them it was Peele!"

"Get out, Muffin!" roared Arthur. He enforced the command with a lunge of his boot, and Reginald Muffin went headlong out of the study with a yell.

Arthur closed the door after him quickly. One glimpse of the array of grinning faces in the passage was enough for him.

"Ow, ow, ow! The awful rotter kicked me!" gasped Tubby Muffin, as he scrambled up in the passage.

"He wants to keep it dark that it's Peele—I'm blessed if I know why! Ow!"

Tubby Muffin hurried off to spread the news. Jimmy Silver & Co. were declaiming Shakespeare in the box-room when Muffin arrived there, breathless with excitement.

"A horse—a horse—my kingdom for a horse!" Lovell was spouting, as Tubby rolled in.

"Here's a donkey, if that will do!" remarked Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you chaps—"

"Get out!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "We're rehearsing. Buzz along, Tubby!"

"Peele's come!" shouted Muffin.

"Bother Peele! Travel along."

"He's got up—"

"What?"

"Got up as Aunt Sarah, you know," spluttered Tubby Muffin. "Just as I heard him telling Lattrey and Gower the other day, you know. Old Bootles was waxy about his going out into the quad like that, I can tell you. Baggs is keeping it up that it's not Peele, blessed if I know why!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Do you mean to say that Peele has had the nerve to come here in that rig after all?"

"He's in Baggs' study now!"

"Perhaps it isn't Peele—"

"Oh, I know him—knew his voice, too, though he tried to disguise it,"



MUFFIN'S MISTAKE! "You can't take me in," said Muffin. "Think I don't know it's Peele dressed up. Who'd have a face like that, anyway!" "Upon my word!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah, "Arty, who is that rude boy?" "Don't he do it well!" chuckled the fat junior. "Get out, Muffin!" roared Arthur. And he enforced the command with a lunge of his boot that sent Tubby headlong out of the study.

your old aunt a cup o' tea arter her journey?"

"Of—of course! This way, auntie!"

Arthur, with a beating heart, led his aunt in at the gates.

He had hoped to act upon Rawson's suggestion, and slip the good old lady quietly into his study unseen by the general eye.

But it seemed improbable that the horticultural hat would cross the quadrangle unnoticed. It seemed to be calling aloud for notice.

Old Mack continued to blink at it.

Miss Baggs paused as she passed him, and eyed him with a severe eye. She did not seem satisfied with the Rookwood porter's manners.

"Oo you staring at?" she inquired.

"Oh!" stammered Mack. "Master Beresford-Baggs, you—you're not allowed to take this—this pussen into the school, as you well know!"

"Person!" ejaculated Aunt Sarah.

Arthur flushed red, but he gave Mack a savage look.

"What the thump do you mean?" he demanded. "This lady is my aunt."

Mack almost collapsed.

Such an aunt had certainly never been produced before by any Rookwooder. Old Mack stood dumbfounded as Arthur walked on with Miss Baggs, and the botanical hat nodded its way onward.

"My heye!" murmured Mack, at last.

Peele was "at it," and there were many comments and chuckles.

Arthur's face was very pink, as he came up to the grinning group in the doorway. He was only too glad to see, however, that there was no Rookwood master in sight. A master would certainly have required him to explain who his surprising companion was.

"Is that your mater, Baggs?" sang out Jones minor.

"No; it isn't!" snapped Arthur.

"Introduce us, old chap!" giggled Gower.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Oh, do!" said Lattrey.

"This way!" murmured Arthur, striving to get his excellent relative into the house as quickly as possible.

But Miss Baggs was in no hurry.

"Interdooce the young gent, if he wishes, Art!" she said.

"Later! Tea's ready now in the study—"

"Oh, all right, Art!"

Arthur hurried the good lady to the staircase. He had caught a glimpse of Mr. Bootles at his study window as he passed, and he was in momentary dread of seeing the Fourth Form-master come out to make inquiries. What on earth Mr. Bootles would think of Aunt Sarah was a question Arthur simply dared not ask himself.

Fortunately, Aunt Sarah allowed her nephew to guide her onward without loss of time.

got up as Charley's Aunt, sir, for a joke on Baggs."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Bootles. "Do you mean to tell me that that person was Peele of the Fourth in an extraordinary disguise?"

"Yes, sir; only a joke—private theatricals, you know, sir—"

"Private theatricals are all very well," said Mr. Bootles severely. "But boys are not allowed to appear in the open quadrangle in theatrical costumes, as Peele is very well aware. Go to Peele at once, Muffin, and tell him he must confine his theatrical pranks to the House."

"Ye-es, sir!"

"If he appears in the open again, dressed in that ridiculous manner, I shall cane him!" said Mr. Bootles.

"Tell him so."

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Bootles whisked back to his study, very annoyed. Tubby Muffin made his way up the big staircase to carry the message to the supposed Peele. Many of the juniors were heading in the same direction.

The impression was general now that the lady in the botanical bonnet was in reality Peele of the Fourth in a clever disguise.

Peele's skill in that line was well known; and Tubby Muffin had confided to all the Fourth the little scheme he had overheard Peele explaining to his chums a few days before.

The juniors had supposed that

ARTHUR'S . . . AUNT!

(Continued from previous page.)



said Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to tell Smythe!"

And the fat Classical rolled away. "Let's go and see," suggested Lovell.

"Come on," said Jimmy.

The Shakespearian rehearsal was postponed; all the juniors were curious to see Peele in his extraordinary escapade. Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried along to Study No. 5, and Lovell threw open the door.

Aunt Sarah was raising a cup of tea to her lips, under the podding adornment of her bonnet, as the juniors looked in.

"Is it—is it Peele?" ejaculated Lovell.

"No. Cut!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Fistical Four promptly retreated. Smythe & Co. came along the passage, with excited looks. Adolphus caught Jimmy Silver by the sleeve.

"Is it true?" he ejaculated. "Is that old Peele playing a trick on Beresford-Baggs?"

"Blessed if I know!" confessed Jimmy Silver. "There's somebody in the study. She—or he—doesn't look much like Peele—"

"Oh, you can't mistake Peele's nose!" said Tubby Muffin. "He's got it painted red, but you can't mistake it."

"I'm goin' to see," said Adolphus. He opened the door and looked in.

Aunt Sarah was disposing of cakes and buns, with a good appetite. Tom Rawson and Arthur were waiting on her assiduously. Adolphus gazed on the scene in great surprise.

"I say, Beresford-Baggs—" he began.

"Sorry—engaged now, old fellow," said Arthur calmly. "I'll see you later. Shut the door after you."

"But is it—is it—"

Arthur closed the door, almost on Adolphus' aristocratic nose.

In the passage Adolphus rubbed his nose, in deep reflection, and in great perplexity.

"If it's Peele, he's got up awfully well," he said. "But we know what a clever beast Peele is at make-up."

"He's got the colour on a bit too thick," remarked Townsend, with a shake of the head. "Not quite natural, that."

"No, you're right! I don't think I should have been taken in, even if Muffin hadn't warned us," said Smythe sagely. "But I'm blessed if I can see why Beresford-Baggs is playin' up to him, instead of kickin' him out."

"Pullin' his leg, perhaps." "Tryin' to pull our leg, more likely," opined Topham. "I should say it's really a game between the two to see how we take it."

"Blessed if I quite catch on, all the same!" confessed Adolphus. "I should have expected Beresford-Baggs to pitch into the cad. Still, I dare say old Beresford-Baggs knows his own bizney best. Let's get back to our game."

And the nuts departed, considerably perplexed. They had not expected Peele to carry out his "stunt," and they certainly had not expected Beresford-Baggs to take it like this if he did. Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to the box-room and Shakespeare, also perplexed.

"Is it Peele, Jimmy?" murmured Lovell.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! The bounder told me he had an engagement this afternoon, and couldn't come to rehearsal; so—"

"And we know what Muffin heard—"

"I give it up," said Jimmy Silver. "I fancy it's the genuine article, and Peele is at the Bird-in-Hand all the time; but perhaps it will be better for Buggy if the fellows think it's Peele."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get on, anyhow."

"A horse—a horse—my kingdom for a horse—"

And the rehearsal proceeded in the box-room, whilst a happy tea-party proceeded in the study of Beresford-Baggs of the Fourth.

The 6th Chapter. Pleasant for Peele!

Aunt Sarah was enjoying herself at Rookwood.

Her nephew and Tom Rawson vied with one another in their attentions to the good old lady; and the tea was of the very best. Aunt Sarah talked freely over tea, and the time passed quickly to Aunt Sarah, at least. Arthur was a little thoughtful.

So far, only the juniors knew of his visitor, and they supposed that it was Peele carrying out a practical joke. But when the time came to go, and the departing visitor found herself in the midst of a crowd of Rookwooders coming in after the half-holiday—

After tea, Aunt Sarah mentioned her train.

"I'm very glad to 'ave seen you 'ere, Art, among so many 'igh-class friends," said Miss Baggs. "They'll be glad to 'ear at 'ome that you're comfortable and 'appy. But I shall 'ave to be going. It's a long way back. I s'pose I ought to call on the 'eadmaster while I'm 'ere."

Arthur trembled. "Not at all necessary," said Rawson, coming to the rescue.

"He—he's a very busy man!" stammered Arthur.

"I dossay—I dossay! But won't he think it's a bit rude of me, coming to the school and never speaking a word to 'im?"

"Not a bit of it! We—we often have visitors who don't call on the Head—"

"Well, you know best, Arty. I'll 'ave another cup of tea, and then I'll be movin'."

"Miss Baggs might care to look at the gardens before she goes," murmured Rawson. "We—we'll go out that way, I mean."

"Jest wot I should like," said Aunt Sarah. "I'm in the vegetable way myself; kep' the same shop for thirty year."

"Good idea!" said Arthur.

And when Aunt Sarah had disposed of her final cup of tea, the two juniors escorted her from the study. The Fourth-Form passage was fortunately empty by that time. They did not return to the big staircase, but descended by a staircase in the rear of the house, which gave access to quarters generally not visited by the juniors. By a back door they emerged into the kitchen garden.

Outside the School House, in front, a number of juniors were gathered, on the watch. They were waiting for Peele—if it was Peele—to reappear. But Tom Rawson's suggestion baffled them. Aunt Sarah was departing by a different route. Only Tupper, the page, beheld the good lady as she was taken out; and Arthur slipped five shillings into Tupper's hand. The astonished page held his peace—and the shillings.

Miss Baggs was very pleased with the extensive kitchen gardens. She knew the value of every cabbage there. It was some time before her escort could pilot her to a back gate, but at length the good old lady stood in the lane behind the school grounds. There Rawson shook hands with her and went in, while Arthur Beresford-Baggs walked with his affectionate aunt to the station.

He walked by the lanes and fields, and arrived in Coombe without meeting any Rookwood fellows.

There was an affectionate farewell on the platform. Diplomatic as Arthur was with Miss Sarah Baggs, he was fond of the old lady, and he was quite sincere when he told her he had been glad to see her. It is possible, however, that he was just as glad when the train at last bore the good old soul away, waving her hand from the carriage window, to a terrific nodding of flowers in her hat.

Arthur Beresford-Baggs walked back to Rookwood in a thoughtful mood, and entered as he had left. He found Rawson in the study—at Greek. Rawson looked up with a smile.

"All serene?" he asked.

"All serene. Thank you for seeing me through."

"Not a bit of it! I like your aunt—she's a good sort."

"She is a good sort," assented Arthur.

He was staring thoughtfully into the fire, when about half an hour later there was a tap at the door, and Smythe of the Shell looked in.

Adolphus glanced round the study in surprise.

"Hallo! Where's Peele?"

"Peele! Blessed if I know!"

"He's gone?"

Arthur grinned.

"Well, he isn't here!" he said.

"I knew it was Peele, of course," said Adolphus, with a smile. "But why didn't you boot him out, Beresford-Baggs?"

Arthur did not reply to that question. He had excellent reasons for not "booting" out his visitor, which he did not choose to explain to Adolphus.

"Well, come and have tea in our study," said Smythe.

"Thanks. I've had tea—"

"Come and have another, then! We want you!"

"Oh, all right!"

And Arthur Beresford-Baggs walked away cheerily with the dandy of the Shell.

A good many of the Rookwood fellows were anxious to see Peele of the Fourth again—especially when they learned that Arthur's visitor had departed unseen. But Peele was not seen again till calling-over, when he came in hurriedly, just in time to answer to his name. Peele was looking tired—probably from his exertions in the billiard-room at the Bird-in-Hand. He looked surprised, too, when a crowd of juniors surrounded him in the passage, after roll-call.

"So you've turned up again?" said Adolphus Smythe.

"How did you get out without our seeing you?" demanded Tubby Muffin. "I was going to jerk your wig off in the quad."

"My what?"

"Wig!"

"What the thump—"

"Where did you change your clobber?" demanded Townsend.

"My—my clobber! I haven't changed my clobber!"

"Oh, talk sense!" snapped Smythe. "You came here rigged up as an old woman—"

"In a screaming bonnet—"

"And a shawl—"

"And Baggs knew it was you—"

"And you—"

"You silly asses!" snapped Peele, utterly astounded. "I did nothing of the sort!"

"Gammon!"

"I gave up that idea after Muffin—"

"Rot! You came—"

"Got up—"

"Like Charley's Aunt, only more so—"

"Why we saw you—"

"I didn't!" shrieked Peele. "If any old bounder came here as Baggs' aunt, it was Baggs' aunt."

"Rats!"

"I tell you—"

"Gammon!"

Nobody believed Peele, which was not to be wondered at, considering how extremely that youth was opposed to the principles of the late G. Washington. When Peele learned the whole story, he was furious. Arthur's aunt had come and gone, and was supposed to have been Peele playing a practical joke—his plan to "show up" Beresford-Baggs had had the unexpected result of saving Beresford-Baggs from a "show-up." Peele could have kicked himself—hard!

Jimmy Silver & Co. refrained from asking Arthur for the facts. But the other fellows did not need to ask. They knew, or thought they knew. The nobby circle of Arthur's nutty friends had no doubt whatever that it was the hapless Peele who had played the part of Arthur's Aunt!

THE END.

Next Monday's LONG COMPLETE STORY

— OF —

Jimmy Silver & Co.

is entitled:

"ARTHUR'S COUSIN!"

— BY —

OWEN CONQUEST.

□ ■ □

DON'T MISS IT!

OUR SPECIAL FOOTBALL ARTICLE.



By G. W. ELLIOTT,

The Famous English International and Middlesbrough Centre-forward.

When we look back on this football season which is so rapidly drawing to an end, what will be the big lessons we have learnt, or ought to have learnt, from it? After all, this present season was more or less of a new experiment.

For nearly five years big football, as we knew it of old, was scarcely played at all, and I know quite a lot of people who seemed to imagine before the present season started, that after such a long period without football, the British public would have learnt that they could very well do without the game in the organised sense.

The people who were inclined to think thus, however, have had an eye-opener, and I should say that to-day there are more people playing football and more people watching football played than ever before in the history of the game.

Of course, some people will tell you it is all wrong for thousands of football enthusiasts to gather round a football-ground to watch twenty-two players kick "a bag of wind" about.

They say that these spectators should be players, not lookers on.

In theory this sounds all very fine, but it certainly does not work out in practice. I don't know how you boys find it in these days, but I well remember that when I was young, our great trouble was to find a bit of ground on which to play the game at all.

I might go further, and let you into a secret, by saying that we used to play on Farmer Jones' pasture-land—when Farmer Jones had gone off with the milk or to buy a new cow. When Farmer Jones came back, off we scooted as fast as our legs could carry us. I expect it is pretty much the same to-day, and, with the best will in the world, thousands of people have to watch, rather than play the game.

Moreover, it should not be overlooked that a fair proportion of the watchers of big professional football of to-day are past the age when they have the inclination to play, and, that being so, they might do many worse things than stand in the fresh air

watching a football-match on their half-day "off."

So that one of the lessons we have learnt this season is that enthusiasm for the game is as great, if no greater, than ever it was. From all directions have come reports of grounds not big enough to hold the crowds who wanted to see the big games, so the problem of the summer which faces most football directors is how to increase their accommodation.

Another lesson of the season, too, is that there are some fine young footballers coming along who will soon out the older players from their positions in the big clubs.

I know it has been the fashion to shout down the football of this season, and to declare that the general standard of play was not so high as it used to be before the war. Of course, the standard of play has fallen off. How could it be otherwise after five years without the real thing? Clubs have this season been compelled to experiment with the players at their command. So much so, that some of the teams we have come up against have been practically composed entirely of new players, as distinct from the men who wore their colours in the old days.

Under these circumstances, the surprising thing to me is that the football, generally speaking, has been so good. But the new men who have been drafted into the various teams have shown that there are still good, young footballers, who only need to be found, trained in the right way, and then will prove that they can play the game just as the real masters did in the old days—or perhaps even better.

It is my firm conviction that professional football is going to be better and better, and that steadily it ought to develop along scientific lines, until each match is won by skill, and the

triumph of brain over mere brawn will be general.

After all, football ought to be a game of skill, and if the young players of to-day will settle down to learn properly the finer points of the game then there should be no fear for the future.

I think this season has shown, too, that, provided a player looks after

G. W. ELLIOTT,



Who has written this chatty article specially for the BOYS' FRIEND.

himself, trains conscientiously and regularly, and has any luck at all, he ought to be able to keep going in the best class of football for quite a long time. We have had the case of Meredith as a striking example of this. Just recently this player celebrated his fiftieth International match, and this season, although he is forty-four years of age, he has been showing some of the younger ones how the game should be played.

It might be said that Meredith stands to-day as a monument of what

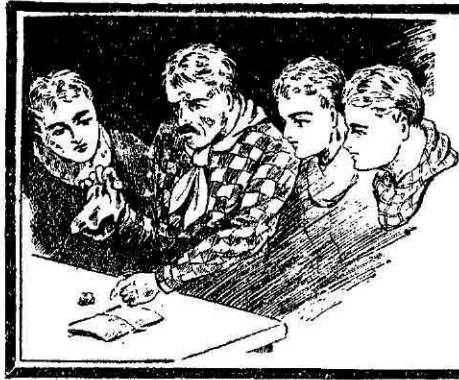
is possible in the way of retaining physical fitness. Probably the great outside-right is not quite so quick in these days as he used to be, but more speed can always be made subservient to skill with the ball, and that is where Meredith has always excelled. Mind you, he has probably been lucky in escaping serious injury, but here again, that has probably been due to the fact that he has made a habit of tricking his opponents, and beating them that way, rather than in trying to get the better of them by moving them out of the way by sheer force.

So far as the big clubs are concerned, the present season has proved once more that one of the biggest charms of the game is to be found in the surprise results. This season the fixtures of the club in the leading Leagues have been so arranged that the two meetings between the same clubs have usually taken place within eight days of each other. Thus there has been plenty of opportunity for noting the surprise reversals of results. One week we have beaten a team comfortably, the next week the same team has beaten us by a substantial margin. And practically every club has shared in the same experience.

If you ask me to explain the why and the wherefore of such happenings I simply state quite frankly that I don't know, unless it is that, as a wise old head once put it, most of the goals scored in football are the outcome of accidents.

Geoff Elliott

A COMPLETE STORY of the CHUMS OF THE SCHOOL in the BACKWOODS.



WELL WON!

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Frank Richards & Co., of Cedar Creek School.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st chapter. On the Shasta Trail.

"All aboard!"
The little two-horse hack that ran twice a week from Cinnamon Bar, on the rugged slopes of Mount Shasta, to the lower mining-camps, had stopped outside the Cinnamon Hotel. It was a sunny morning, and there was a busy clinking of picks, and creaking of cradles along the stream that flowed in the shadow of Shasta's mighty peak. Yreka Jim, the driver, had dived into the shanty hotel for his customary "three fingers" of tangle-foot; and now he cracked his whip with a report like a pistol, as he sang out:

"All aboard!"
There were four passengers that morning for the hack—a much larger number than usual.

They came out of the shanty hotel together. Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beauclerc, the chums of Cedar Creek School in far-off Canada, and Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, now travelling with the schoolboys as their guide, philosopher, and friend.

Frank Richards & Co. had succeeded in the quest that had brought them from Canada to the rocky sierra of northern California. In their wallets were stacked, in four equal divisions, the nuggets they had unearthed in the Golden Arroyo, far up the rugged side of Mount Shasta.

Now they were starting on their return journey. Yreka Jim's little hack was to carry them down to the lower valley, where the regular stage-coach would convey them to the railway.

Half a dozen of the Cinnamon Bar inhabitants were loafing about the hotel to see the hack start. Billy Cook glanced over them keenly as he came out with his young companions. Bob Lawless caught his glance, and grinned.

"Still thinking of the greasers, Billy?" he asked.

Billy Cook nodded. "I guess I ain't sure that we've done with that gang yet," he answered. "I sha'n't be sorry when we're out of the sierra, and on the railroad to Canada."

"We sha'n't see Carlos Cabrera again," said Bob.

"I guess not. I kinder reckon he never came out of that cataract alive. But there was the others—and, for all we know, they may be watching us at this very minute," said Billy Cook.

"All aboard!" shouted Yreka Jim, cracking his whip again, and climbing into his seat.

"Jump in, kids!"
The only faces to be seen in the rugged street were rough, bearded Anglo-Saxon faces—if any of the greasers who had followed Carlos Cabrera were in Cinnamon Bar, they were keeping out of sight.

Billy Cook and Bob and Beauclerc stepped into the little hack, and Frank Richards mounted to the seat beside the driver.

Crack, crack! rang the whip again, and the hack started.

Billy Cook watched from the window of the little vehicle as it rolled out of the Bar upon the rough mountain track to the lower valleys.

He was still suspicious.

Carlos Cabrera, their rival in the quest of the Golden Arroyo, had gone to his death in the mountain torrent, but it was probable that his comrades remained to be dealt with. And Billy Cook's suspicions were not without foundation.

From a log shanty in the straggling street a pair of glittering black eyes watched the hack through a shuttered window.

When the vehicle had passed, and was out of sight amidst rock and pine, the shanty door was thrown open, and a swarthy man emerged, and

hurriedly drew a saddled horse from a lean-to behind the shanty.

A minute more, and the Californian was mounted, and was riding away from the camp at a gallop.

But he did not follow the hack. His way lay into the sierra, and the passengers in Yreka Jim's little vehicle did not see him as he galloped away.

Billy Cook leaned back in his seat at last, with a more reassured expression on his rugged face.

"All serene now?" asked Vere Beauclerc, with a smile.

"Waal, I guess so," admitted Billy Cook. "But there was two or three greasers with Cabrera when he tackled us, and I guess they're somewhere about. I reckon it wouldn't be a joke to be laid for on the trail. But I ain't seed hide nor hair of 'em,

"By highwaymen, I mean—road-agents, you call them here, I think."

Yreka Jim grinned. "Britisher?" he asked.

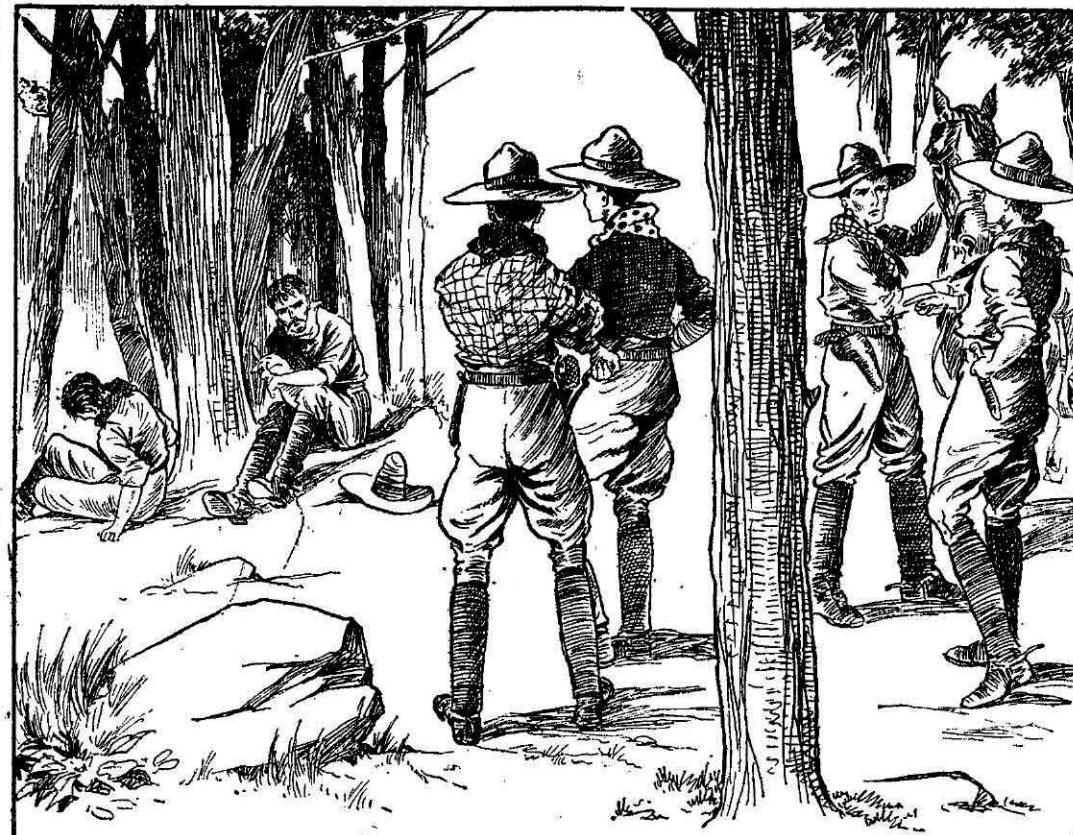
"Yes, from Canada," said Frank, with a smile.

"I reckoned so! Stopped by road-agents!" said the hack driver reflectively. "Waal, I should smile."

Frank Richards had been long enough in the West to be aware that that was an emphatic affirmative.

"Then it is a dangerous trail?" he asked.

"You bet your life!" answered Yreka Jim, ejecting a stream of tobacco-juice across the leaping backs of his horses. "I guess I've driven this hyer hearse, youngster, with the bullets flying as thick as fleas in a Dago's blanket. Search me! I



THE FORTUNE OF WAR! "I guess the nuggets are hyer," said Billy Cook, returning with the loose horse. "The hull caboodle in the wallets, just as those scallywags took them from the hack. We win on this game, sonnies!" Frank Richards made a gesture towards the wounded men, groaning under the trees. "Let them keep their horses," he said. "They would never get away alive on foot!"

and I guess we're clear of the gang now."

"With the nuggets in our bags," said Bob Lawless, "I guess we shall make the Cedar Creek fellows open their eyes when we spin them the yarn, Billy."

"We ain't at Cedar Creek yet!" was the ranchman's reply.

Bob and Beauclerc smiled a little. Billy Cook was evidently determined not to admit that all danger was over till they were safe on the distant railway.

On the seat beside the driver, Frank Richards was looking about him as the hack ran on.

He was thinking of the greasers, too.

Billy Cook had decided to travel by the stage instead of riding to the railway, for additional security against the enemies who might be lurking amid bush and boulder. The ranchman was in charge of the party, and he was not disposed to run risks that could be avoided with his charges.

"Has the hack ever been stopped, driver?" Frank Richards asked, after a few remarks from Yreka Jim. "Stopped?"

guess if this hyer hearse ain't held up six times afore we reach Shasta, it will be funny! Yep!"

Frank Richards looked serious for a moment, but only for a moment. The next, it dawned upon him that the stage-driver was gently pulling his leg.

"Held up!" repeated Yreka Jim. "Why, this hyer hearse is held up so often, sonny, that the hosses stop of their own accord now, when the road-agents show up. Just as soon as the galoots sing out 'Hands up!' you'll see them critters stop, they're so used to it."

"I don't think," murmured Frank.

"Eh?"

"I mean, it must be an awfully exciting life," said Frank, smiling.

"I believe you," said Yreka Jim. "There's a favourite place, about eight miles from the Bar, where there's generally a hold-up. I'll point it out to you when we come up. First thing you'll hear will be cold lead singing past your ears. I s'pose you made your will, sonny, before you came on this hyer trip."

Frank shook his head. "Nope? Waal, that was green,"

said Yreka Jim. "Passengers in this hyer hearse allers makes their wills afore they start. You see, there's mighty little chance of getting through to Shasta town alive. Mighty little! But you'll see when we get to the turn."

And the driver shook his head with portentous solemnity.

The hack rattled on, and Frank Richards was soon able to see that the trail was a dangerous one, whether or not it was haunted by road-agents.

The track lay along a rocky ledge, not more than a dozen feet wide, with a precipitous cliff on one side, and a yawning chasm on the other.

A single, reckless plunge of the horses, and the hack and its passengers would have gone over, whirling, to the waters of the Cinnamon River five hundred feet below.

Yreka Jim drove with the reins carelessly bunched in one hand, and a black Mexican cigar stuck in his teeth, evidently too accustomed to the dangerous trail to give its dangers much heed.

Once or twice he drew perilously close to the verge; so that to Frank's startled eyes it seemed that another inch would send the wheel over the cliff; and on those occasions Yreka Jim glanced out of the corner of his eye at the passenger by his side.

Frank Richards divined that the driver was trying to "rattle" him as a little joke on the "Britisher," and he smiled cheerfully as he met Yreka Jim's eye. As a matter of fact, he felt far from comfortable, but, for the credit of the Old Country, he was determined not to let that be seen.

The 2nd Chapter. Held up!

Frank Richards felt his heart thump.

Yreka Jim's expression was extraordinary. Never had a man been more astonished than was the driver of the Cinnamon Bar hack when his words were suddenly proved true.

It was, as a matter of fact, the first time in the history of Cinnamon Bar that the hack had been "held up" on the trail, and the driver was very far from contemplating such a possibility.

In his amazement, he let the reins hang loose, and the hack rushed on right at the three rustlers and their levelled rifles.

"Halt!"
"Stop, you fool!"
"Oh, Jehosaphat!" gasped Yreka Jim.

Frank Richards caught his shoulder to recall him to himself. A single shot at the horses would have sent them plunging over the gulf yawning within a few feet of the wheels.

"Stop!" muttered Frank.

Frank's heart was throbbing. The trio in the trail were swarthy ruffians, evidently of the half-Spanish race of Mexican or "native" Californian. And one of them at least he recognised—Diego Diaz, one of the followers of Carlos Cabrera. Evidently the "greasers" were not yet done with.

"Halt!" rang out the angry shout again. "Carambo! Halt, you fool, or we fire!"

Yreka Jim dragged in his horses at last. The hack clattered to a halt within a dozen feet of the muzzles of the rifles.

"Waal, I swear!" murmured the driver dazedly. "Diego Diaz, you yellow cuss, I know you! You'll hang on a branch for this!"

"Quien sabe!" answered the Californian, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Hands up!"

"Oh, I guess I know the rules!" grinned Yreka Jim. "But if I let go these hyer ribbons, I reckon this hearse will go over the bluff, and there won't be much pickings for you 'uns!"

"Look after your horses, then. Tell your passengers inside to put up their hands and step out."

Frank Richards put his hands over his head.

On the box, he was openly exposed to the rifle-fire, and he had no chance.

Yreka Jim looked down into the vehicle behind him.

"I guess it's a cinch, gents," he said. "You step out on the trail with your paws up, and keep quiet. I reckon the greasers are only arter your dust."

"The greasers!" muttered Bob. "Oh crumbs! You were right, after all, Billy."

Billy Cook's jaw set grimly.

He put his head out of the window and glanced along the trail.

His hand was on the big revolver holstered to his belt.

"They're after the nuggets," muttered Beauclerc.

"It's a cinch!" repeated the driver. "If they pull the trigger the lead will come right through this hyer hearse. Them boards won't stop lead. They can riddle you!"

The ranchman hesitated. It was clear enough now that the party had been watched leaving Cinnamon Bar by some member of the gang who had taken the news to his comrades in time to push on and lay this ambush.

"I guess if I was alone, I'd try my gun on them," muttered Billy Cook savagely. "But you young 'uns—"

"We're with you!" said Bob, between his teeth. "Let's make a fight for it, Billy!"

"Don't you be a jay!" said Yreka Jim, from above. "You young galoot, if the hosses is touched by a bullet they'll go plunging over! I couldn't hold them then. Where'd you be?"

"Wherever we went, the nuggets would go with us," said Bob Lawless. "Say the word, Billy!"

Billy Cook shook his head. "I guess they've got us by the short hairs," he said. "This isn't a trail to monkey around on."

Diego Diaz was advancing along the trail towards the halted hack. His swarthy face looked in at the window over his rifle.

He grinned at the ranchman. "Senores, it is our turn now!" he said. "Will you put up your hands, senores, or—"

Billy Cook looked at him grimly. He would have tried his luck with his revolver against the levelled rifle, but Frank Richards, up beside the driver, was too exposed to have a chance for his life. At the first



WELL WON!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Waal, I reckon I sha'n't let you go alone," said the ranchman. "And I kinder guess I'm anxious to get a chance at them. Yreka Jim, you can go on without this hyer party."

"You come on with the hack, while you're safe!" returned the driver.

"I guess not!"

And Billy Cook and his companions clambered over the rocks to the trail beyond.

The Californians were long out of sight. They had apparently left the trail and taken to the mountain. Probably their horses were concealed somewhere at hand, and it was certain they did not mean to linger in the locality.

"This way, I reckon!" said Billy Cook.

A hundred yards from the bend a ravine opened in the cliffs that shut in the trail. It was the only accessible spot, for a long distance, by which the thieves could have left the trail, and it was evidently the way they had gone.

Frank Richards & Co. followed the ranchman into the ravine.

With all Billy Cook's skill as a trapper, there was little "sign" on the hard rocks to guide him, but here and there a torn branch in the patches of mesquite gave him a clue.

Keeping their eyes well about them, the adventurers pushed on through the ragged ravine.

They halted at last.

The ravine ended in a broken stretch of rocky ground, where the Californians, fleeing with their booty, might have gone any of a dozen different ways.

Billy Cook examined the rocky soil with persistent patience, and Bob Lawless lent him his aid. But there was no sign to be discovered, and they arose from their fruitless task at last.

"I guess it's a cinch!" said Billy Cook dismally. "They knowed we hadn't a dog's chance of running them down; there's no trail on these hyer rocks. I guess we're done!"

"Oh, rotten!" muttered Frank Richards.

"Hark!"

From the stillness of the mountain there came a sudden, sharp report that echoed and rang a thousand times among the rocks and pines.

Crack-ack-ack!

"A pistol-shot!" said Bob eagerly.

Billy Cook's face flushed.

"By gum!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Kim on!"

The shot had been distant, carried far in the clear air of the mountain. Billy Cook's keen ears were his guide; he tramped on in the direction of the report without a pause and without a fault.

"If the shot came from that gang, I guess we'll run them down yet," he said.

"But did it?" said Frank Richards doubtfully. "Why should they be firing?"

"I guess there's precious few galoots out on this hyer mountain," answered Billy Cook. "It might be some hunter—but I reckon a hunter would be using a rifle, and that was only a gun. Kim on!"

The adventurers pushed on rapidly. The way led into a shadowy canyon, dark with pines. Billy Cook stopped suddenly.

"Look!"

On the rocks lay the body of a man.

The adventurers knew at once the dark, swarthy face, the black hair and gaudy clothes. It was one of the three greasers who had stopped the hack on the Shasta trail.

"Dead!" muttered Frank Richards with a shudder.

"I guess so."

Billy Cook stood looking thoughtfully at the body.

"But—but what has happened?" exclaimed Frank. "Why—"

"I guess it was a case of rogues fallin' out," said the ranchman. "They've got the plunder, and I reckon they thought it wasn't enough for three. Two of them turned on this galoot, I reckon—and left him hyer."

"The awful rascals! I suppose they quarrelled over the plunder and—"

"They ain't a nice gang," said Billy Cook, shrugging his shoulders. "If we hadn't follered, I guess this galoot would never have been seen again—the coyotes would have finished what was left of him in an

hour's time. Human critters don't come this way. Look, there's some of the beauties yonder."

The glittering eyes of a coyote looked out from the rocks, already attracted to the scene of death. The animal yelped and fled as Billy Cook made a gesture. But he did not go far. His mournful howl was heard at a short distance, answered by howls from various directions. The coyotes were gathering to the ghastly feast. "Kim on!" said Billy Cook abruptly.

Frank Richards & Co. pushed on along the bottom of the canyon. Here and there, where rain had gathered in the deep hollows, there was found "sign" of the men who had passed. The adventurers were on the track again.

Beyond the canyon they emerged upon the open hillside, covered with a thick wood of pines.

There, it was easy for Billy Cook to pick up the trail, amid the fallen cones.

To Frank Richards' eyes the trail was invisible, but Billy Cook was an experienced woodsman, and he did not fail.

The four adventurers pushed on through the wood, with the ranchman in the lead.

Billy Cook stopped by a thicket where even Frank's inexperienced eyes could discern the signs of hoofs. "This is where their critters was left, I reckon," said the ranchman.

Todgers the Speculator!

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD,

is the title of

NEXT MONDAY'S
LONG COMPLETE
STORY

of

FRANK
RICHARDS & Co.

of

CEDAR
CREEK
SCHOOL.

BE SURE AND READ IT!

"They've got their horses now."

"Then—"

"I reckon they couldn't ride in these pines. They've had to lead the critters out of the wood. Kim on!"

The trail was easy to follow now.

Three tramping horses had been led away by the two greasers as they tramped on, and Frank Richards could have followed the trail even without the ranchman's aid.

But the hope of success was faint now. Once beyond the tangled wood the ruffians would be mounted, and on foot pursuit would be hopeless. But the trackers did not give in. They tramped on swiftly and untiringly, till they emerged from the wood upon the barren mountain-side. The trees thinned round them, and rugged rock cropped up from the soil.

"I guess they mounted hyer," remarked Billy Cook, wrinkling his brows. "They wouldn't take the way back to Cinnamon Bar—I reckon they don't mean to show up there again. But—Jerusalem!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

The rapid beat of a horse's hoofs rang on the rocks, coming in the direction of Frank Richards & Co. from the hillside ahead. As yet, the irregular boulders hid the horseman from their sight; but in a few minutes he would be upon them. Billy Cook dragged his companions back into the cover of the trees.

"Kiver!" he muttered. "Quiet!"

"But what—"

"Kiver, I tell you!"

The four adventurers took cover in the trees; and a minute later a breathless horseman burst upon their view. It was Diego Diaz, the leader of the gang of Californians.

The 4th Chapter. Homeward Bound!

Frank Richards & Co. made no move. Silently, in their cover behind the trees, they watched the Californian.

Diaz leaped from his horse as he reached the wood.

It was evident that he had not the slightest suspicion that there were foes in the trees. He cast a rapid, almost haggard glance backward, as he stood for a moment panting by his horse. Then he led the animal rapidly into the wood.

He passed within a dozen feet of the watchers, without seeing them in the thick underbrush.

Clatter! Clatter!

From the distance, the direction from which Diaz had come, rang clattering hoofs.

Frank Richards & Co. did not need telling what it meant. Diaz was in flight from his comrade, and the latter was pursuing him. Evidently it was another quarrel over the booty; the ruffians were not willing to share fairly the treasure of the Golden Arroyo.

Diaz had stopped in the trees, throwing his reins over a stump. He turned back, his rifle in his hands, and a savage glitter in his black eyes. The watchers could see a trickle of red across his cheek, which showed that he had narrowly escaped the slash of a knife at close quarters.

He dropped on his knees amid the thickets, his rifle at a level, bearing in the direction of the clattering hoofbeats.

Clatter, clatter!

Frank Richards made a movement.

It was only too clear that Diaz was in wait for the pursuing ruffian, and that he intended to shoot as soon as the horseman was in sight.

He had turned at bay; and the pursuer was riding on to his death.

Billy Cook's grasp closed on Frank's shoulder as he moved, and restrained the movement. He gave the school-boy a grim, warning glance.

Frank remained still, though his heart was throbbing, and his face pale with horror.

To intervene was to draw the Californian's fire upon himself; there were two of the gold-bags slung on Diego Diaz's horse, and it was quite certain that the man would not yield his plunder without a struggle. Billy Cook's thought was to leave the rascals to fight it out, and deal with the victor.

Clatter, clatter!

Crack!

Diaz pulled trigger as the horseman came whirling into sight round the rugged boulders.

There was a sharp cry from the pursuer, and the adventurers saw him reel in the saddle.

But the galloping horse came tearing on into the trees.

The rider was reeling to and fro, and as the horse crashed into the thickets, he fell from the saddle. Diaz's bullet had gone home!

Crash!

With a clatter of hoofs, the horse dashed away again, and disappeared into the wood.

Diaz leaped from his ambush, and rushed forward towards the fallen man.

He had dropped his rifle now, and a long Mexican cuchillo gleamed in his dusky hand.

"Carambo!" he muttered, as he flung himself forward at the fallen man. "Muerte!"

The wounded man shrank from the savage thrust; but in another moment the cuchillo would have been plunged into his breast. But at that moment Billy Cook thrust forward his revolver and pulled trigger.

There was a scream from Diego Diaz, as he pitched forward helplessly upon his victim, the knife falling unstained to the earth.

"Our game, I guess!" said Billy Cook coolly.

He ran forward, his comrades at his heels.

Diaz struggled to his knees, his swarthy face ablaze with rage. His eyes dilated at the sight of Frank Richards & Co.

"Los Inglesos!" he muttered.

His right arm had been shattered by the ranchman's bullet. He sank back against a tree, groaning.

Billy Cook looked down upon the two Californians grimly.

Both of them were disabled; and the victory was with Frank Richards & Co., though they owed it chiefly to the treachery of their rivals. It was a case of honest men coming into their own through rogues falling out.

"I guess these galoots air sorry by this time they couldn't agree about the boodle," grinned Billy Cook.

"Sure!" chuckled Bob.

"Madre di Dios!" groaned Diaz.

"A thousand curses—"

"Chewing the rag won't help you, my greasy friend," chuckled the ranchman. "I guess you come out at the little end of the horn. We'll borrow your horse to carry the nuggets away, Diaz."

A savage oath was the only answer.

Billy Cook disarmed the two wounded ruffians. Then, leaving the chums of Cedar Creek to guard them, he plunged into the wood to recapture the fleeing horse, upon which were tied two of the goldbags. Two of them, fastened upon Diaz's horse, were already in the hands of their owners.

Frank Richards glanced at the wounded ruffian, with a touch of compassion. Rascals as they were, he could not see them suffer without helping them.

"Let me see to your hurt, Diaz," he said quietly.

A Spanish oath was the only answer; but Frank did not heed. He bound up the Californian's wound, and then that of the other ruffian, with the help of his comrades.

Billy Cook returned with the loose horse by the time he had finished.

"I guess the nuggets air hyer," said the ranchman. "The hull caboodle, in the wallets, jest as those scallywags took them from the hack. We win on this game, sonnies. And I calculate the horses belong to us as prize of war, eh?"

"I suppose so," said Frank. "But—but—"

"But what?"

Frank Richards made a gesture towards the wounded men, groaning under the trees.

"Let them keep their horses," he said. "They would never get away alive on foot; it's a long way to Cinnamon Bar."

Billy Cook gave a grunt.

"I guess it ain't necessary for sich scallywags to live," he said. "Let them go arter their friend that they laid out yonder; the coyotes will look arter the galoots!"

Frank shuddered.

The two ruffians were not cursing now. Their haggard eyes were fixed on the ranchman's rugged face. Wounded as they were, it was death for them to be left on foot on the barren mountain.

"Go easy, Billy!" said Bob Lawless. "We've got the gold bag; let the rotters escape! Go easy!"

Another grunt from Billy Cook.

"Waal, I reckon they won't do much damage agin, for a time," he remarked. "If Diaz ever uses his right arm again, I ain't the marksman I thought I was. And he's plugged his own pard pretty deep. Let 'em rip!"

"Good!" said Frank Richards.

Billy Cook looked on, still grunting, while the chums of Cedar Creek helped the two bandaged ruffians upon their horses.

Then the adventurers shouldered the wallets, and started on their return to the trail where they had left Yreka Jim and the hack.

It was fatiguing march; but their spirits were light. The nuggets of the Golden Arroyo were in their possession once more; and they had done for ever with the gang of greasers.

They came out on the trail at last, and found, as they expected, that Yreka Jim and the hack had long gone.

"I guess it's tramping down to the next camp," said Billy Cook; "and I calculate we've got four or five miles in front of us. Put it on."

"We'll do it before nightfall," said Bob.

"I reckon."

And the adventurers tramped on as cheerfully as they could. Night was falling on the sierra when they arrived in Shasta town.

But there, their troubles and dangers were over.

That night they slept soundly in good beds; and the next day the stage bore them on to the railroad, and it was with great relief that they found themselves in the speeding cars.

The rocky wastes of Northern California were left behind them swiftly now, and they looked their last upon the mighty peak of Mount Shasta, towering to the sky.

Five days later, Frank Richards & Co. were in Kamloops, where they had left their own horses, on their journey southward over the line. They mounted with light hearts to ride the homeward trail up the Thompson Valley. Their perilous expedition was over, and they were returning successful, with the nuggets of the Golden Arroyo in their wallets; and with cheery looks they set their faces towards Cedar Creek.

THE END.