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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending July 24th, 1920.

THE GOLDEN TRAIL



By SIDNEY DREW

RETRIBUTION!

As Bennet Garvery fired his horse went down as if a bullet had crashed through its brain, flinging Garvery headlong from the saddle. With a smile on his bronzed face, Jack Darby pulled up his camel. "Our trick, I think, Garvery!" he said.

(For Opening Chapters Turn to the Next Page.)

The Eighth Shadow.

Instead of pitching Archelos into the well, where it is almost certain he must have been brained or have broken his spine on the floating plank, Tim Horridge swerved, and pitched him against the bank of sand erected by his friend Sandy Noakes. "Dear boys, dear boys!" cried Torvey. "Don't all you fellows lose your heads. I'm awfully sorry, Darby, really I am. 'Pon my honour I never expected this. There's no sense in it. And your chap did it. He was the aggressor, Mr. Darby, and started the shemozzle. I'm no fighter, but I warn you to keep that long-legged assassin of yours back. I've got a gun here, and if he starts to assault me I'll shoot! It's a disgraceful affair all round. I say, Mr. Darby, hold your chaps in order. We don't want murder, do we?"

Jack pushed Tim back with the butt-end of his rifle. The dawn was breaking, pale and grey, but it was a dawn that broke swiftly.

"No, I don't want any murder, Mr. Torvey," said Jack. "You've got sense enough, I hope, to see that sort of folly will beat us all. My man was in fault. I've no respect for your friend Mr. Archelos, but I confess that my man was in the wrong. Luckily, he has a pretty thick head. Keep away, Tim! A crack like that won't do Noakes much harm. He'll sit up in a minute and grin at us."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Noakes picked himself up, just as Davri Archelos picked himself up, both little the worse for it.

"Now keep quiet," said Jack Darby. "Let us understand how things go. There's nothing to fight about. If we could find the treasure in gold or notes or diamonds there might be a reason for having a scrap. This money is banked in England, and the lawyer, Mr. Brayburn, is quite aware that Dick and myself are in Egypt looking for the clue. Dick may win or you may win, Mr. Garvery, according to your luck. You can't hush up things nowadays. If anything nasty happens to any of us there'd be an inquiry, and before

John Garvery's fortune changes hands the courts of law will want to know all about it. This is a good game played straight."

"Just what I've been impressing on Ben all the time, dear boy," said Torvey. "Peaceful and quiet, that's what I've told Ben. There are no spondulicks in the ready. 'Pon my honour, let's be friendly, and let the lucky man win!"

Tim clenched his fist and glared at Davri Archelos, who was fondling his throat tenderly, and then at Sandy Noakes, who was touching a growing lump on his head with a very careful forefinger, for the lump was new and acutely painful.

"Now you're happy, I reckon!" said Tim. "You're always chipping in that the world is full of sorrow and woe, and now you've got a lump of it all your own. I ain't killed the chap who done it, 'cos I thought you'd like to shoot him at dawn, so I've saved him up for you."

"You ain't killed him, and you calls yourself a pal!" said Sandy Noakes. "Very good. That's one I've got up against you. What a

life! I can see stars and stripes, and noughts and crosses, and all the colours I won in the war mixed up together, and there's about fifty Jazz bands playin' inside my 'ead and forty dog-fights going on at once. Tim, get me a drink. When I've had that drink there'll be red murder done!"

The dawn blazed up as Dick hooked the water-bottle out of the well by its cord and handed it to Noakes. Bennet Garvery had not dismounted, but Torvey had. He gave his little red moustache a pull, and looked the plank up and down.

"Ben, dear boy," he said, "here's talent, here's intellect. They've got us standing still for brains. They've got the duplicate of your crazy old uncle's pillar shoved up here. And it's the dawn of the morn. Are you going ahead with it, Mr. Darby?"

Jack glanced at his watch. There was a sky flaming with crimson and gold, although the rim of the sun had not appeared above the horizon. Having brushed the sand off his clothes, Davri Archelos stood scowling as he rolled a cigarette, while

Sandy Noakes applied ice-cold water to the lump on his head. Jack Darby whispered to Dick, and Dick nodded.

"If you gentlemen will kindly get out of the light you'll oblige," said Jack. "We're doing our best, and if the laugh is yours, have it!"

He gave his rifle to Tim. All at once Mr. Noakes seemed to forget his pain and sorrow, for he dropped the water-bottle and obtained a rifle for himself. Jack looked at his watch. The rim of the sun lifted and flung the long shadows of the palms across the sand, and also the shadow of the plank. Bennet Garvery was nervous. He had pulled his horse back out of the way, but he was watching Jack uneasily.

"Count, Dick!" said Jack in a hushed voice. "How many are there? What do you make it?"

There were seven shadows within a dozen yards of each other, six thrown flatwise by the trunks of the palms, and one by the plank. On either side there were more shadows, but with wide gaps between. Seven instead of eight, Dick gave a whistle of despair; but Jack Darby, with his

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The 1st Chapter.

The Head is Not Pleased.

BZZZZ!
"Oh!"
Jimmy Silver gave quite a jump. The Head's study at Rookwood School was deserted just then; or rather, it ought to have been deserted. But it was not quite deserted, because Jimmy Silver, of the Fourth Form, had stepped quietly in. Jimmy had stepped in because the Head wasn't there. When the Head was there, nobody was anxious to visit that study.

The Head was in Mr. Bootles' room, engaged in a deep and serious confabulation with the master of the Fourth. Jimmy Silver had ascertained that fact, before he came along to the deserted study to use the telephone.

He was just about to lift the receiver, when the telephone bell rang, with a loud and aggressive buzz, which startled him very much.

BZZZZZZ!
It was just ill-luck. Jimmy could not possibly foresee that Dr. Chisholm would get a call, just when he, Jimmy, had dropped in to use the telephone. It really was a thing that no fellow could foresee.

BZZZZZZ!
The Fourth-Former beat a rapid retreat towards the door. He was not thinking of using the telephone now, but only of getting out of the study before the Head arrived. And the bell was ringing loudly, aggressively, and insistently.

Alas for Jimmy! He had not reached the study-door, when he heard quick footsteps in the passage outside.

The Head was coming.

As Jimmy said afterwards in the end study, how was he to know that the Head had asked for a trunk call, and had only dropped into Mr. Bootles' room to chat, while he waited for it to come through. Evidently, Jimmy couldn't know.

So he was caught.

With the Head's footsteps sounding in the corridor, and the telephone-bell ringing behind him, Jimmy Silver stood for a moment in dismay, not knowing what to do or what to say if the Head found him there.

He knew that Dr. Chisholm's temper was tart that day, owing to the affair of Mornington of the Fourth. The Head was not likely to be at all pleased to hear that a junior had dropped in to use his 'phone—though really meaning no harm thereby. Jimmy felt a tingling in his palms at the bare thought of it.

The next moment he had acted. With one spring he was behind a screen that stood near the door.

His hope was that the Head would leave the door open, and that he could thus slip out unseen, while the old gentleman had his back turned, taking his call.

Unfortunately, when the Head came rustling in, he closed the door behind him emphatically, almost with a bang.

He hurried across to the telephone, and took up the receiver.

Jimmy Silver peered out cautiously. The Head had his back turned, certainly; but the door was shut, and

there were several feet of open space to be passed to reach it—and then it had to be opened.

It was not likely that the junior would be able to execute that strategic movement without detection. Jimmy Silver sagely decided to remain where he was for the present. His position was neither safe nor agreeable; but he had it on Shakespeare's authority, that it is better to bear the ills we have, than fly to others that we know not of. So Jimmy stood fast.

"Hallo! Yes? Dr. Chisholm is speaking! Am I speaking to Sir Rupert Stacpoole? Oh! Yes! Very good!"

"Oh dear!" murmured Jimmy Silver. The Head was evidently "through" to Valentine Mornington's guardian.

Jimmy did not want to hear the Head's half of the conversation, by any means. But he really had no choice in the matter. It was that, or discovery and a caning; and it was better to be bored than to be caned. Jimmy Silver thought so, at least.

"The third time I have rung you up on this subject?" The Head was going on. "That is scarcely surprising, sir, considering the amount of trouble your nephew has given me. When I sent him away from Rookwood, sir, I supposed that I had done with him. I presumed, sir, that you had taken him home with you, as I had every right to expect."

Jimmy wondered what the baronet had to say to that. He deduced that Sir Rupert's temper was as tart as the Head's, at least.

"You are the boy's guardian," said the Head. "You can, I presume, use your authority. I tell you, sir, that Mornington, whom I have expelled from Rookwood, has taken a situation in a shop in Coombe—a shop kept by a grocer of the name of Bandy—a most insolent man. I have been treated with gross disrespect by this man, whom I desired to send the boy away. He refused."

A moment's silence.

"Absurd!" broke out the Head, angrily. "Utterly absurd! If you think, sir, that it will do the boy good to do some honest and laborious work, I think you are very likely right, but I suppose he need not do it practically at the gates of Rookwood. No harm! Certainly there is harm. His example of insubordination to the other boys—"

Pause!

"Certainly, I have authority over all the boys in my charge, and I have strictly forbidden them to hold communication with Mornington—most strictly. But undoubtedly there will be communication without my knowledge, so long as that young rascal remains in the vicinity of the school."

Jimmy Silver grinned. His mental remark was that the Head was right on the wicket there!

"The boy cannot possibly remain so near Rookwood. Tired?—not at all; he will not get tired of his present folly, so long as he knows that it is annoying to me. That is his object. As his guardian, it is your duty, sir, your duty, to remove him. I have no authority over him now that he has left Rookwood. Your authority re-

mains. I request you, sir, to take immediate steps to remove him from Coombe. What—what—what?"

Jimmy Silver fairly held his breath. Evidently Sir Rupert had made some extremely disconcerting reply, for the Head was almost stuttering with wrath.

"You wash your hands of him!" gasped the Head, at last. "If he chooses to return home, you will give him shelter, and that is all—otherwise you wash your hands of him! Do I hear aright? This is—is unparalleled—I protest—I repeat, sir, that I cannot have this boy left in the village, almost at the school gates—are you there, sir?" almost shouted the Head. "Answer me, please! Are you there! Bless my soul!"

The Head put the receiver back on the hooks, gasping.

Jimmy Silver stood very still. Discovery at that moment would have been appalling.

There was no doubt that the Head would have caned Sir Rupert Stacpoole, if it had been in his power to cane that gentleman; and not a shadow of a doubt that he would have taken it "out" of any impertinent junior he discovered in his study at that moment.

Scarcely breathing, Jimmy heard the Head rustling to and fro for some minutes, in a state of great agitation and wrath.

Then, to Jimmy's immense relief, Dr. Chisholm quitted the study, and strode away—doubtless to another consultation with Mr. Bootles.

When his footsteps had died away, Jimmy Silver crept from the study. He tiptoed down the corridor, and when he reached the corner, he bolted. He felt much better when he was safe in the end study in the Fourth-Form passage.

The 2nd Chapter. The Grocer's Boy.

"Well?"
"Phoned to Morny?"
"What's the matter?"
Lovell and Raby and Newcome asked those questions together, as

Jimmy Silver came into the study shared by the Fistical Four of Rookwood.

Jimmy sank into the armchair and gasped.

"I've had a merry time!"
"What's happened?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell. "Did the Head catch you using his 'phone?"
"Jolly nearly," answered Jimmy Silver. "Luckily, not quite! I haven't 'phoned to Morny, after all. I've had the pleasure of standing behind a screen while the Head was 'phoning to old Stacpoole."
"Phew!"
"The Head's in an awful wax because Stacpoole won't trot down to Coombe again to collect up his merry nephew. Stacpoole won't clear him out, and the Head can't, so Morny is going on."
"More power to his elbow!" grinned Raby. "Fancy old Morny as a grocer's boy! Topsy and Topsy and the rest are turning up their noses no end. I say, it shows Morny's got some grit!"
"If he sticks to it," said Lovell.
"If!" chuckled Newcome. "But he won't! He's doing it to make the Head waxy, I believe."
Jimmy Silver nodded.
"Partly that, I'm afraid," he said. "But partly Morny's in earnest. He's sacked from Rookwood, and he doesn't want to go home and be a poor relation in his uncle's house. The only alternative is to work, and he's not trained for any job. He used to do good Latin verses, when he took the trouble, but I don't fancy there's a living to be made at that."
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Fancy advertising Latin verses at a bob a time—the orders wouldn't roll in, I think!"
"Without any experience, he's lucky to get the job with Mr. Bandy," said Jimmy Silver judiciously. "Orders from Rookwood helped him, and orders from Rookwood will help him keep it. We've got to buy all the stuff we can at Bandy's."
"Hear, hear!"
"Only the Head's in such a wax, there'll be fearful trouble if anybody is seen there," said Jimmy. "It won't do to call at Bandy's again. I was going to 'phone an order, and ask him to leave the things for us near the gates; but the 'phone's cut off. I'm not chancing that again. I suppose a chap could write."
"Don't post in the school letter-box, then," grinned Lovell. "Somebody will be keeping an eye on that."
"Or we might send in a message to him," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "Smiley would do it. We've got to see young Smiley about the village match next week, and he's a good kid. What price a walk down to Coombe—not to see Morny, of course, but to see Smiley?"
"Won't he be at work? Smiley don't chuck it so early as we do, you know."
"We can see him at the shop," answered Jimmy Silver. "His governor won't mind; he makes up Rookwood prescriptions."
"Right-ho!"

The Fistical Four sallied forth, having come to the decision to interview Master Smiley, the chemist's boy of Coombe, who was also the skipper of the village junior eleven.

The chums of the Fourth could not help glancing at Mr. Bandy's grocery shop as they walked down the High Street of Coombe.

A slim and handsome youth, in a white apron, was standing in the low, narrow doorway of the old-fashioned shop.

He touched his cap to the juniors, across the street.

It was Valentine Mornington—once the dandy of the Fourth Form of Rookwood; now Mr. Bandy's new boy, and a very industrious and satisfactory boy.

The Fistical Four returned the salute, smiling.

It was extraordinary to see the once superb Mornington on duty in a little village grocery shop, and the juniors could not help regarding it rather as a "stunt" than as serious business.

Yet it was the fact that Mornington had not other resources, unless he chose to return to his uncle's house, a disliked dependent, and face the carping tongues of his Stacpoole cousins.

Morny's lofty pride "jibbed" at that more than at honest toil, however humble, and for the present, at least, he was quite determined to keep on in his new career.

As Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on, Morny disappeared from the doorway, apparently called back into the shop.

A couple of minutes later he issued from the shop, with his apron tucked up on one side, and a large basket on his arm. The basket was pretty well stacked with groceries.

"Morny's going his afternoon

rounds," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, glancing back from where the Fistical Four had stopped outside the chemist's shop.

"Hallo, there's Smythe!"
"They've seen Morny!" grinned Raby. "Watch Smythe's face! See the horror grow!"

The chums grinned as they looked on. Smythe and Tracy and Howard of the Shell, came up the street, and met Mornington face to face. The three nuts stared at him, and Adolphus Smythe fished an eyeglass out of his pocket, jammed it into his eye, and gave Morny a second scornful survey.

There were a good many fellows at Rookwood who regarded Morny's new "stunt" as no end of a lark, and others who looked upon him as a fellow down on his luck who ought to be stood by. Smythe & Co. were not among these. They regarded the fallen dandy of the Fourth with lofty contempt, and did not conceal their valuable opinion that he was disgracing Rookwood.

At Rookwood, Smythe & Co. had never felt quite easy under Morny's cool, mocking eyes; he had always, somehow, made them feel "small"; but now they felt that they had the upper hand, with a vengeance.

"Begad, it's Mornington!" said Smythe. "The dashed grocer's boy, begad. Here, young shaver!"

Mornington stopped.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" he asked, in a very respectful manner.

"Yes. Get out of the way with that dashed basket," said Smythe. "Don't brush your confounded basket against a gentleman's sleeve, do you hear?"

"I haven't, sir," said Mornington meekly. "I only brushed it against your sleeve."
Tracy and Howard grinned, and Adolphus reddened. Morny, the grocer's boy, evidently had the same bitter tongue as Morny the dandy of Rookwood.

"I don't want any dashed impertinence from a shop cad!" said Smythe, breathing hard. "For two pins I'd box your ears, you young loafer! Step off the pavement and let me pass!"

The three nuts were walking abreast, and certainly there wasn't room for them to pass Mornington on the narrow pavement, unless they were separated.

That they were not inclined to do on account of a grocer's boy. But Mornington stood fast.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Smythe angrily. "Here, hustle that lout into the road, you fellows!"

"Now, then, clear, you cad!" said Tracy.

The three Shell fellows hustled Mornington. Mr. Bandy's new boy had his right arm laden by the heavy basket; but he could use his left—and he used it quickly and effectively. He let it out with a lightning drive at Adolphus Smythe, and caught that elegant youth under the chin. Smythe staggered back across the pavement, and almost sat in a draper's window—fortunately, not quite.

"By gad!" gasped Smythe. "Go for him! Ow, my chin! Knock him over and his dashed groceries along with him!"

He rushed forward, and at the same time four figures came speeding across the street.

"This is where we chip in!" Jimmy Silver concisely remarked.

And the Co. agreed that it was.

Mornington and his grocery basket would have been pitched into the road, but for the prompt arrival of the Fistical Four.

They rushed straight at Smythe & Co., hitting out, and in a twinkling three elegant nuts were strewn on the pavement, dazedly wondering how they got there.

"Ow, ow! Wow, wow! Yow!"
"Cheer-ho, Morny, old top!" said Jimmy Silver. "You can leave these cads to us!"

Morny laughed.

"Thanks!" he said, and he walked on with his basket.

Smythe & Co. sat up.

"You rotten, interferin' cads!" began Adolphus. "Why, you beast, Silver, how dare you touch me with your boot! Yaroooh! Stop kickin' me, you rotter! Yow-ow-ow! Oh gad!"

Adolphus scrambled up and fled, and Tracy and Howard fled after him. They had intended to enjoy ragging Mr. Bandy's new boy; but apparently they had had enough ragging for that afternoon.

"And now we'll walk along and see young Smiley, and give him an order for Morny!" remarked Jimmy Silver. And they went.

The 3rd Chapter. A Startling Prospect!

"Young Smiley" was in sole charge of the establishment with the

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coloured bottles in the window. He grinned and nodded over the counter to Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came in.

"Good-afternoon, Smiley," said Jimmy Silver affably. "Can you spare a minute from the pestle and mortar?"

"Arf an hour, if you like, Master Silver, unless a customer comes in," answered Smiley.

"We won't take up so much of the time of a rising young business man," said Jimmy, shaking his head; a remark at which Master Smiley chortled. "You haven't let us know about the match next week? What about Wednesday?"

"Wednesday'll soot," answered Smiley. "Tain't so easy for us, Master Silver, seeing as we've to get the afternoon off for the game. But we've fixed it up all right, and I was going to let you know."

"We'll see you at Rookwood on Wednesday, then?"

"Two o'clock, if that'll soot."

"Done! Now there's another matter," said Jimmy. "Do you happen to know Mr. Bandy's new grocery boy?"

Another chortle from Smiley.

"Not 'arf!" he answered.

"He's an old pal of ours, of sorts," said Jimmy. "We're not allowed to call on him, and I've got a written message here for him. Will you hand it to him some time?"

"Wot to!" answered Smiley, taking Jimmy Silver's grocery order across the counter. "Pleased, sir, Mornington ain't 'arf a bad sort. When I used to see him about with the Rookwood young gents, I used to think he looked very uppish, but he's turned out quite different. He gets on all right with us."

"Oh! You know him well?" asked Lovell.

"Wot to! He's a member of our club."

"My hat! Your cricket club?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"That's it," said Smiley, with a nod. "First day he was at Mr. Bandy's I spoke to him, expecting cheek. But he wasn't cheeky! Not puttin' on airs, or nothing of that sort. Pally, in fact! We got friendly, and he asked me about the cricket. Course, I was glad to have him in my eleven. He could play the head off any man I've got. He said he didn't want to chuck cricket now he'd left school; and being as he was settling down to work in Coombe, he wanted to join the village club."

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"So he's joined?" asked Raby.

"I took him along to the next meeting," answered Smiley. "We hold our meetings in the big room over the fish-shop, you know. Some of the fellows was a bit edge-wise to Morny at first, but they soon came round. I never saw a feller more perlit and nice. There ain't a chap in our club that don't like him. Course, it's a good thing for the team. Morny's given us a lot of tips in our practice together on the green."

Jimmy Silver looked rather serious. He saw complications ahead.

"Will Morny be playing for you on Wednesday?" he asked.

"You bet your life!" answered Smiley emphatically. "I ain't leaving my best man out. We're going to beat you this time, Master Silver."

Which was a prospect that evidently pleased Smiley. The village team never had much of a chance with Rookwood juniors; indeed, Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on the village match in a more or less humorous light. But with Valentine Mornington in the team, it was quite possible that matters would shape differently.

After a few words with Smiley the Fistical Four quitted the chemist's shop.

In the street, they looked at one another expressively.

"This is a go!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I-I suppose it's natural that Morny doesn't want to chuck cricket," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "And there's nothing but the village club here for him. But-but—"

"But if he comes up to Rookwood again—"

"He must come if he's playing for Smiley," said Newcome. "I-I say, it looks to me as if Morny is thinking more about pulling the Head's leg than about cricket. The Head will be awfully waxy if he sees Morny there. Morny's like a red rag to a bull to the Head just now."

Jimmy Silver nodded, with a rather worried look.

"We can't ask Smiley to leave out his best man," he said.

"He wouldn't if we did!"

"No, of course he wouldn't. But if Morny comes to Rookwood—"

Jimmy Silver did not finish.

"Hallo, there's Carthew! Lucky we're not near Bandy's shop," said Lovell.

Carthew of the Sixth stared suspiciously at the Fistical Four, as he came along the village street.

The juniors were glad enough that they had kept clear of Mr. Bandy's establishment.

They were well aware that Carthew made it his business to keep a very active eye on Mr. Bandy's shop, to detect any fellow who visited Mornington there in spite of the Head's prohibition. Bulkeley and most of the other prefects gave the shop a wide berth; but not so Carthew. The bully of the Sixth was very anxious to get into the Head's good graces by reporting any delinquent he could lay his hands upon.

"What are you fags doing here?" demanded Carthew, stopping to address the chums of the Fourth.

"Walking," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Have you been to Bandy's?"

"My dear man, it's out of bounds," answered Jimmy Silver in a shocked tone. "Haven't you seen the Head's notice on the board?"

"Let me catch you, that's all," growled Carthew, and he walked on.

"Wouldn't he like to?" grinned Lovell. "We'll take jolly good care that he doesn't. Look at him now—srying!"

Carthew had stopped under a sun-blind outside a shop, and was watching Mr. Bandy's establishment across the street, half-hidden himself.

"Just as well we weren't caught at Bandy's!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Poor old Erroll's got it hot! Young 'Erbert was caught there yesterday and licked. I say, I'm sorry for old Morny, but I'm going to steer clear of the Bandy shop. I'll put off seeing Morny again till the cricket match next Wednesday."

Which Lovell's chums agreed was a wise decision.

The 4th Chapter. Nice for Adolphus!

"Better keep clear, Smythey!"

"Rot!"

"It's out of bounds, you know," urged Tracy.

"I'm riskin' that."

Adolphus Smythe's eye gleamed with determination through his eyeglass.

The great Adolphus was wrathily—exceedingly wrathily.

The great Adolphus had been kicked—by Jimmy Silver. That was a great humiliation for Adolphus. But Jimmy Silver was, after all, a Rookwood chap.

Adolphus' aristocratic face had been punished by Mornington, a mere grocer's boy! That was much worse. A kick from a public-school boot was not so humiliating as a punch from a grocer's fist. At least, that was how it seemed to Adolphus.

Besides, it wasn't possible to punish Jimmy Silver for the kick, and it was possible to punish the grocer's boy for the punch, and that was an important consideration.

He sailed into the little grocer's shop, his lofty head up, and his eyeglass gleaming.

Mornington, who had returned from his "round," was behind the counter, in charge of the shop. Mr. Bandy was having his tea, in the bosom of his family, in the little parlour behind.

Mornington smiled slightly at the sight of Adolphus. There was a mark on the Shell fellow's chin, where Morny's knuckles had smitten. But the shopboy's manner was quite respectful to a presumptive customer.

"Yes, sir; what can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

Adolphus stared at him haughtily. "Call your master!" he snapped.

"Mr. Bandy is at tea, sir. Cannot I serve you?"

"Call your master, and don't talk to me!" said Adolphus. "I'm not accustomed to bandyin' words with shop-cads."

Mornington, still meek, tapped on the parlour door, and opened it a few inches.

"Gentleman insists upon seein' you, sir," he said.

Mr. Bandy gave a grunt. He did not like being disturbed at his tea, especially as he was deep in the columns of the "Clarinet," his favourite paper, of a strong socialistic turn. Mr. Bandy was by way of being a Socialist. It helped him to find compensation for many faults and failures in the happy knowledge that he was, after all, as good as his betters. His Socialistic proclivities helped to provide the gentlemen of

Rookwood fellow, sir, and forbidden by the headmaster to deal here."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bandy.

His manner changed at once. If Smythe wasn't a customer, and couldn't become a customer, there was no reason to be civil to him, from Mr. Bandy's independent and democratic point of view. Mr. Bandy had just been reading a fiery article about well-dressed and expensive loafers, who batted upon the hard earnings of the Bandies of the world. He bristled up at once.

"Did you come in 'ere to give an order, sir?" he inquired.

"Certainly not! I came in to complain of that disrespectful rascal of a shopboy, of yours!" answered Adolphus haughtily.

Mr. Bandy sneered.

"And who are you?" he inquired. "Do you own the pavement in the High Street, and mustn't my boy walk on it as well as you?"

This was a rather startling change of front. Adolphus jammed in his eyeglass a little more firmly, and gave Mr. Bandy a supercilious stare, which ought to have reduced him to respectful submission at once. But it didn't. The democrat of Coombe was not to be awed by an eyeglass. Nothing but an order for goods, and a good order, would have reduced him to submission.

"If you ain't come 'ere on business," said Mr. Bandy, "get out! Can't a tradesman 'ave his tea without being worried by young loafers?"

"What?" ejaculated Adolphus.

"Boy," snapped Mr. Bandy, turning back to the parlour, and addressing Morny, "if that feller don't get out put him out!"

"Certainly, sir!" answered Mornington.

Mr. Bandy went back to his tea and the "Clarinet," closing the parlour door after him with a slam. Adolphus Smythe stood almost trembling with rage. Instead of seeing Morny severely reprimanded or discharged, he had been "cheeked" by a dashed tradesman. A fresh humiliation for the noble Adolphus.

Morny lifted the leaf of the counter and came through, evidently prepared to carry out his master's instructions. Smythe of the Shell retreated towards the door.

"Hands off, you shop cad!" he gasped.

Mornington came straight at him. He was not sorry for the chance to handle Smythe of the Shell once more.

Adolphus turned, and made a jump through the doorway into the street. As he went, Mornington's boot landed behind him.

The Shell fellow gave a howl, and plunged into the street headlong, and butted blindly into a passer-by.

"Oh!" ejaculated the latter, catching at Adolphus to steady himself. "Oh! Ow! You young ass! Where are you running to? Hallo, Smythe! What were you doing in there?"

It was Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood. Adolphus had run fairly into the arms of a Rookwood prefect!

Bulkeley grasped him by the shoulder sternly.

"You're out of bounds, Smythe!" he exclaimed.

"I—I—" gasped Adolphus.

"Go back to Rookwood at once! I have to report this to the Head."

"I—I—"

"Cut!" said Bulkeley concisely. Smythe of the Shell "cut" in a dismal mood.

An hour later he stood in the presence of the Head, who had received the prefect's report. Bulkeley, who was a good-natured fellow, avoided seeing any Rookwood junior near Mr. Bandy's shop, if he could. But he couldn't affect to be ignorant of Adolphus' visit there, as the Shell fellow had pitched into his arms on leaving the establishment. So he had had to make his report. The Head selected a cane. It was useless for Adolphus to attempt an explanation. He had to go through it.

His feelings as he left the Head's study were too deep for words. He had had a severe caning for visiting the expelled junior, and, considering his real motives for the visit, this was really rather hard. But perhaps it was just what Adolphus deserved.

The 5th Chapter.

The Coombe Match!

Jimmy Silver was feeling worried as Wednesday drew near.

On Wednesday afternoon Rookwood juniors were meeting the village cricket team, and in that team was included Valentine Mornington, the expelled junior of the Fourth Form at Rookwood. By that time, all the Lower School knew that Morny was a member of Smiley's team, and there had been much discussion and much chortling over the circumstance.



HUSTLING THE GROCER'S BOY! "Hustle the lout into the road, you fellows!" said Smythe. Mr. Bandy's new boy let out with a lightning drive, and caught Adolphus Smythe under the chin. "By gad!" gasped Smythe. At the same time four figures came speeding across the street.

Evidently he was on the look-out for any Rookwooder who was injudicious enough to visit the shop Dr. Chisholm had placed out of bounds for all Rookwood.

Kit Erroll, of the Fourth, came up the street from the direction of the school, glancing about him.

He saw the Fistical Four, but he did not see Carthew under the sun-blind, and his footsteps slackened outside Mr. Bandy's doorway.

Erroll was Morny's special chum at Rookwood, and Jimmy Silver & Co. did not need telling that he had come along to speak to Morny.

Jimmy waved his hand to Erroll across the street in warning.

The junior stopped, and stared across at him inquiringly. Carthew of the Sixth rushed out, like a wolf from its lair, triumphant. He darted across the street, and dropped his hand on the astonished Erroll's shoulder.

"You were going into Bandy's?" he demanded.

Erroll gave him a contemptuous look.

"Yes," he answered coldly.

"You know it's out of bounds?"

Erroll made no reply.

"You'll come along with me to Rookwood," said Carthew, with a grin. "The Head will be pleased to see you, you young sweep."

And the prefect marched his victim away.

When Jimmy Silver & Co. saw Erroll again, the hapless youth was rubbing his hands hard, after a visit to the Head's study. The Head's temper was not very equable just now, and he had not spared the rod.

So, some little time after the Fistical Four had cleared off, Adolphus & Co. hovered once more in the neighbourhood of Mr. Bandy's shop.

Adolphus' idea was to complain to the young cad's employer, as he expressed it to his chums.

A grocer would be bound to take notice of a complaint laid against his boy by a young gentleman from the big school, Adolphus considered. Smythe of the Shell had great hopes that Mr. Bandy, properly impressed by the lofty importance of Adolphus, would give his new boy the "sack." That would have been a great consolation.

"The coast's clear," said Smythe, blinking up and down the street through his eyeglass. "You saw that cad Carthew marchin' Erroll off. So we know he's not spyin' about, as usual. I'm goin' in. You fellows come in an' back me up."

"We'll wait for you at the tuckshop," answered Howard. "I'm not goin' out of bounds while the Head's so ratty."

"I tell you there's no risk."

"Well, you come along to Mrs. Wicks', and you'll find us," said Tracy.

Tracy and Howard walked on to the village tuckshop.

Adolphus gave a sniff, and another glance up and down the High Street, and then plunged into Mr. Bandy's.

He considered that there was little risk of detection, with Carthew safe out of the way. But with so much malice in his breast, Adolphus was prepared, even against his usual customs, to run a little risk.

the "Clarinet" with an easy living, and to save them from the painful necessity of turning to work.

Having grunted, Mr. Bandy laid down his paper, and came into the shop. He ducked his head respectfully to the well-dressed Adolphus. Socialism did not prevent Mr. Bandy from paying respect to wealth. It seldom does.

"Yes, sir," he said. "What can I—"

Adolphus pointed at Mornington.

"That boy of yours has assaulted me, Mr. Bandy!" he said.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bandy.

"He dared to lift his hand to me in the street!" said Adolphus.

Mr. Bandy frowned sternly at Mornington.

"What does this mean, boy?" he exclaimed. "How dare you insult this gentleman?"

"The gentleman wanted to push me off the pavement, sir," answered Mornington meekly, but with a glitter in his eyes.

"You should have stepped off the pavement if you were in the young gentleman's way," said Mr. Bandy irritably. "I don't pay you your wages to insult my customers."

Adolphus smiled.

Morny was beginning to "get it," and the Shell fellow fully expected Morny's passionate temper to break out at that rebuke. But Morny had apparently learned to govern his temper since he had left Rookwood. At all events, he was not inclined to play into his enemy's hands.

"The gentleman isn't a customer, sir," he answered suavely. "He's a

The match was to be played on the Rookwood ground; that had been settled long ago. Mornington, therefore, had to come to Rookwood to play.

The Head had forbidden the expelled junior to show himself near Rookwood again. The prohibition, of course, included the playing-fields, as well as the rest of the school precincts.

But Morny was coming, all the same, and it was difficult to see what could be done.

Smiley was gleeful at having secured such a player for his eleven. It was no exaggeration to say that Morny was worth most of the rest of the eleven put together. Certainly no earthly consideration would have induced Smiley to leave his new man out of the match, if Jimmy Silver had asked it—which Jimmy could not very well do.

But Jimmy was sorely troubled. He could not help suspecting that it was not so much the love of cricket, as a desire to defy the Head of Rookwood, that induced Morny to join the village team in time for the school match.

Mornington's continued presence in Coombe was, in plain words, a defiance of the headmaster who had expelled him; and Morny did not rest content with passive defiance. He liked action. And if the Head saw him on the Rookwood cricket-field he—

Jimmy Silver wondered what Dr. Chisholm would do and say.

He wondered, also, what he himself ought to do. Scratching the match was a drastic step; he felt that he could not do that. Smiley & Co. had given no cause of offence, and the half-holiday was open; there was no excuse for scratching. Jimmy thought of asking Smiley to change the ground, but there were objections to that. Playing on the village green was rather a game of patience than a game of cricket. The pitch left very much to be desired. Even that, as it turned out, was out of the question, for on inquiry Jimmy learned that the village pitch was booked for Wednesday by another crowd.

But if Morny came to Rookwood and—

The Co. held consultations on the subject in the end study, and the opinion of Jimmy Silver's chums was that it couldn't be helped.

"Perhaps the Head won't see him," suggested Arthur Edward Lovell. "I can't ever remember the old scout honouring a junior match with his presence."

"And his study window is a jolly long way off our pitch," remarked Raby.

"But the prefects—" said Jimmy. "They mayn't notice him, either—or, if they do, they may mind their own business."

"Carthew wouldn't."

"H'm! There's Carthew!" said Lovell thoughtfully. "He's bent on currying favour with the Head by spying on fellows who speak to Morny. I suppose if Carthew sees Morny he will blab at once."

"Sure to," said Newcome. "But, after all, what could happen? The Head couldn't interfere with a cricket-match. That wouldn't be playing the game."

"He's in a rare wax about Morny, though," said Jimmy Silver, remembering the telephone incident in Dr. Chisholm's study. "I—I rather think he will fly into a rage if—"

"My hat! If he stopped the game and—"

"He might."

The Fistical Four looked very serious. It was rather a serious business, in fact, considering all the circumstances.

"It can't be helped," said Arthur

Edward Lovell at last. "We can't scratch the match, Jimmy, and we can't play in the village. And we couldn't disappoint old Smiley, when he's so keen on the game, and thinks he has a chance of beating us for once. Let's hope for the best."

And as there was really nothing else to be done, Jimmy Silver had to let it go at that.

But he was feeling worried, all the same.

For once, "Uncle James," of Rookwood, was not looking forward to a cricket match with any pleasure.

Wednesday turned out a bright and sunny day, and if Jimmy had hoped that the weather would come to the rescue, and cut the Gorgian knot with a downpour, he was disappointed. It was an ideal day for cricket.

Jimmy was very thoughtful during morning lessons. It must be admitted that most of the other fellows regarded Morny's forthcoming visit to Rookwood rather as a "lark," and found great entertainment in wondering how the Head would take it if he saw the expelled junior there.

After dinner that day Tubby Muffin joined Jimmy, with a very serious expression on his fat face. The fat Classical had been thinking things out from his own particular point of view.

"I don't quite like this, Jimmy!" said Tubby Muffin, with portentous gravity.

"Eh, what?" asked Jimmy Silver, not very attentively.

"About Morny, you know."

"What has it to do with you, fat-head?" inquired the captain of the Fourth.

"It looks to me like disrespect to the Head."

"What?"

"I've been considering," continued Muffin, blinking at the astonished Jimmy, "whether I ought to allow it."

"Allow it?" howled Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. I think if the Head knew Morny was coming, he would stop it. Can I countenance such disrespect?" said Tubby Muffin seriously. "On the whole, I don't want to interfere. But I think I'd better be off the scene."

"No objection to that, you silly owl," answered Jimmy Silver. "In fact, the landscape will be greatly improved by your getting off the scene. It will be an act of kindness to everybody present."

"Don't you be a cheeky ass, Jimmy. I don't mind going out for the half-holiday, only I'm short of tin. I suppose you could lend me five bob?"

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

He comprehended now why Reginald Muffin had given the matter so much thought.

"So I'm to give you five bob not to peach?" he asked grimly.

"That's a rotten way of putting it, old chap," remonstrated Tubby Muffin. "I ask you to lend me five bob. Then I can keep clear for the afternoon, and my—my conscience will be satisfied."

"Well, I won't lend you five bob," said Jimmy. "I'll lend you my boot. And if you sneak to the Head, Tubby, I'll give you such a hiding that you won't be able to do anything but howl for a day afterwards."

And there and then Jimmy Silver took the fat Classical by the collar, and put in some effective work with his boot. There was a series of loud and dismal howls from Reginald Muffin.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Leggo! Leave off! Yooop! I—I say, I was only joking! Yow! Make it half-a-crown! Yooop! I'll take a bob! Yoooop! You awful beast, leave off kicking me! Oh crikey!"

Jimmy Silver walked away, leaving the fat Tubby squirming. Tubby

Muffin started for the Head's study, but he stopped. He reflected that if his fat conscience caused him to "peach," there would be more kickings to follow. So Tubby's conscience was allowed to sleep for that day.

Half an hour later Smiley & Co. arrived from Coombe, and with them came Mr. Bandy's new shop-boy.

The 6th Chapter. Morny Has His Way.

"Mornington!" Bulkeley of the Sixth uttered the name.

The Rookwood captain had come along to Little Side to give the junior cricketers a look-in when the match started, as he sometimes did. He was astonished to see Valentine Mornington there.

Morny nodded to him coolly.

"Hallo, Bulkeley!"

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Bulkeley sternly.

"I'm goin' to play cricket."

"You know that you are forbidden to enter Rookwood!"

"Couldn't be helped, old top," answered Mornington blandly.

"Smiley couldn't leave his best batsman at home. Could you, Smiley?"

"No blessed fear!" answered Smiley emphatically.

"Besides, I've got an afternoon off from my governor, for the match," continued Mornington.

"Sorry, Bulkeley, but I'm bound to play on any ground where my club fixes up a match."

"Your club?" repeated the Rookwood captain.

"Coombe juniors, you know."

"Oh!"

Bulkeley stared at the cool shop-boy, not knowing what to do. The Head's orders regarding Mornington were explicit enough, but certainly Dr. Chisholm had not foreseen that the expelled junior might visit Rookwood as a member of a cricket eleven. It went against the grain with Bulkeley, as a good sportsman, to interfere with a match, and he hardly knew what was his duty in the peculiar circumstances.

Jimmy Silver looked at him anxiously.

Bulkeley solved the matter by walking away. If Mornington's presence was to be reported to the Head, there were plenty of others to perform that unpleasing duty. Bulkeley let it go at that.

"Good old Bulkeley!" murmured Lovell. "Let's get going as soon as possible, Jimmy. I shouldn't wonder if this match was interrupted, sooner or later."

The cricketers lost no time in getting to work. Smiley won the toss, and went in with Mornington to open the innings for Coombe.

Round the field a large crowd had gathered. The presence of Valentine Mornington was quite enough to draw all the juniors of Rookwood to the spot, and some of the seniors, too. Morny was in his best form.

Smiley did not last very long against Jimmy Silver's bowling; but Morny was made of sterner stuff. Bowler after bowler pelted his wicket in vain.

The runs were piling up for Mornington, and the crowd, mindful of the fact that he had very recently been a Rookwooder, cheered him loudly.

"Bravo, Morny! Well hit, Mornington!"

"Go it, Morny!"

Mornington grinned as he heard the shouting. His name was ringing over the field, and he knew that long before the game was over the Head must know of his presence there. And that, in point of fact, was just what Valentine Mornington wanted.

The name that was shouted reached the ears of a Sixth-Former in the quad. Carthew came along to Little

Side to investigate, and he stared blankly at the sight of Mornington at the wickets.

"Silver!" he shouted.

"Hallo!" Jimmy Silver looked round from the field.

"Send Mornington away at once!"

"Can't interfere with Coombe's players, Carthew."

"Mornington," shouted Carthew, "get off this field instantly!"

Mornington glanced at him.

"Go and eat coke!" he retorted.

Carthew bit his lip, and swung away. He walked directly towards the School House, evidently to inform the Head.

"Now look out for squalls!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

The Coombe innings was very near its finish. The last wicket fell to Erroll; Morny "not out" with fifty runs to his credit. And there was only a brief delay before the Rookwood innings began.

Lovell and Kit Erroll were sent in to begin; and Mornington went on to bowl for Coombe. But only a single ball had gone down, when there was a buzz in the thronging crowd.

"The Head!"

Mornington, ball in hand, glanced round carelessly.

Dr. Chisholm was striding towards the cricket-field, his brows set in a deep, dark frown, his eyes gleaming.

The Head had been scarcely able to credit Carthew's report. But the sight of Mornington banished all doubt.

There was a hush on the crowded ground, and the game stopped of its own accord.

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand.

"Mornington!"

Morny raised his cricket-cap respectfully.

"Yes, Dr. Chisholm?"

"How dare you come here?"

"No choice in the matter, sir," answered Mornington. "I'm a member of the visiting eleven."

"This is a trick!" gasped the Head. "Your object, Mornington, is to defy my authority, as I am very well aware. Leave the precincts of this school at once—immediately, sir!" thundered the Head.

The cricketers looked at one another in silence. The storm had burst at last.

Mornington did not stir from his place. It was plain that he did not intend to obey.

"Do you hear me, Mornington?"

"I hear you, sir."

"Go!"

"Sorry, sir, it can't be done!"

"What—what?"

"I'm here to play cricket," said Mornington coolly. He was quite enjoying the situation. "You can't order me off this ground."

"Mornington, if you do not depart this instant, I will have you removed by force!" exclaimed the Head.

"Not while I can kick, anyhow!" said Mornington coolly.

"You audacious young rascal—"

Smiley came forward, with a very determined expression on his face.

"Look 'ere, sir—" he began.

"Silence! Who are you?"

"Who am I?" exclaimed Smiley warmly. "I'm the skipper of this 'ere eleven, sir—Coombe Juniors. You can't send one of my men off the field. If you didn't want the match played, you could 'ave stopped it sooner, I s'pose."

"I have no objection to the match," said the Head, rather perplexed. "None whatever. I object to a boy who has been expelled from his school returning hither in defiance of my commands."

"Morny's in my team, sir, and my best man. I'm not going to part with 'im," said Smiley doggedly. "We came 'ere to get fair play. Stop—"

pin' a match when we're winnin' ain't fair play."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. He was nonplussed.

Certainly he did not wish to take the severe step of stopping the match, with no offence given by the visiting team. But to allow Mornington to continue to play—

"Silver, you should not have allowed this!" said the Head.

"I haven't any control over members of a visiting team, sir," said Jimmy Silver meekly.

"Ahem! Perhaps not! I do not wish to stop the game," said the Head. "Your visitors have a right to play it out. But I object to that boy's presence at Rookwood."

"We can't play without 'im, sir," said Smiley. "He's the best man in the 'ole shoot."

The Head bit his lip.

He felt that Mornington had defeated him. Without committing an act of high-handed injustice, he could not drive the obnoxious Mornington hence.

There was a pause.

Then the Head turned to Carthew.

"Carthew, will you see that Mornington leaves Rookwood the moment this match is over?" he said. "Silver, understand that it is distinctly forbidden, in future, for you to play a match with any club of which Mornington is a member."

And with that the Head strode away, with a feeling of having been outwitted that was very disagreeable.

"Phew!" murmured Lovell. "I'm glad that's over! The Head's an old sport, after all!"

"Play!"

The game went on.

Mornington was in great spirits.

He had gained his point, and the Head had been beaten, and that was all the cheery Morny cared about.

His aid did not bring the villagers a victory, as Smiley had hoped, though they came within a measurable distance of it. But when the last ball had been bowled, Rookwood were ten runs ahead, and winners.

"Never mind!" said Smiley. "It was a close thing. We'll beat you next time, Master Silver."

Carthew came striding up as the cricketers left the field. He dropped his hand on Mornington's shoulder.

"Now, get out!" he snapped.

"Oh—ah! Yaroooooh!"

Morny had his bat in his hand. He let the weighty end drop on Carthew's toe with a bump. The bully of the Sixth released him suddenly, and hopped in anguish.

"Oh—ah—ow! Yoooop!" howled Carthew. "I'll—I'll—Ow—ow!"

The enraged prefect made a spring at Mornington. Three or four Coombe bats drove him back, and he was forced to beat a retreat, yelling.

Mornington walked cheerfully out in the midst of his new comrades.

"Ta-ta, old tops!" he called out.

"I mean, au revoir! I dare say I shall be coming along again soon. The Head is so pleased to see me, you know!"

And Mornington walked off airily with the Coombe cricketers, evidently in great spirits.

"Well," said Jimmy Silver, as he turned back from the gate—"well, Morny does take the biscuit, and no mistake! But—but this sort of thing can't go on, you know. I wonder how it will end?"

Jimmy Silver was not the only one at Rookwood who wondered; the Head was wondering, too. Even the august Head of Rookwood was beginning to feel that Mornington was a little too much for him.

THE END.

(Next Monday's long, complete story of Rookwood School is entitled "Hard Times!" By Owen Conquest. Don't miss it!)

don't know exactly what the row is about, but he hasn't kept some of his sweeps in hand, and the Government has stopped his pension till he promises to be good. He's been threatening to loot, so I was sent along to look after this rotten caravan. The sergeant may help you, Mr. Darby. He's knocked about this red-hot sandheap for a year or two. Let's have you along here sharp, sergeant."

The sergeant advanced, clicked his heels smartly together, and saluted.

"Oh, yes, sir, I know the oasis all right, sir," he said. "Bear along the next line of dunes to the left. You'll see a bit of the ruins of an old temple there if the ghastly sand ain't buried 'em since my last visit. Keep the ruins at your back till you come to the next ridge. The moon will be well up then, and you'll easily pick up the oasis. With that baggage humper, you won't do it under a couple of hours. It ain't my business,

(Continued on page 300.)

THE GOLDEN TRAIL!

By SIDNEY DREW.

(Continued from page 291.)

The Race for the Oasis.

Jack Darby and his party were not the only people abroad under the clear desert stars. A tiny fire showed close to the edge of the caravan track, and beside it sat an old man, smoking his pipe. Jack stopped his camel and hailed the lonely camper. He put the question he had put so often, and jingled some silver in his hand as a bait.

"Many people seem to seek Peter the Dervish," said the old man. "He camps in the oasis of Barju. How far? I cannot tell that. For a fast camel perhaps two hours. To the east, yes. He camps there. He is in

trouble with the English, I think, but it is not hard for Peter the Dervish to make peace if he so chooses. I thank your honourable nobility for the gift. May prosperity go with you."

"Just another second," said Jack, as the old man, after a salaam, was going back to his spark of fire.

"You said that a good many people were looking for Peter the Dervish. What did you mean by that? Who is seeking him beyond ourselves?"

"Three men on horseback who were following up the caravan. I told them he camped at Barju and they gave me money."

Jack's knowledge of the native dialect was not very extensive, but he understood.

"Here's a mess," he said.

"Garvery, Torvey, and Archelos are still chasing the dervish. Our discovery of the buried box hasn't frightened them. Perhaps they imagine we had buried the box ourselves, and that it was pure bluff. Peter is at the oasis of Barju, the old chap says, and Barju is due east. Pretty vague that. A two hours' lope for a fast camel. That's all I can get out of him."

"But what about their horses, Jack. Unless they have got hold of fresh ones the poor brutes must be pretty tired. They came out to the well and went back to Siwah, and that's a decent stretch. I don't think they're such a long way ahead of us."

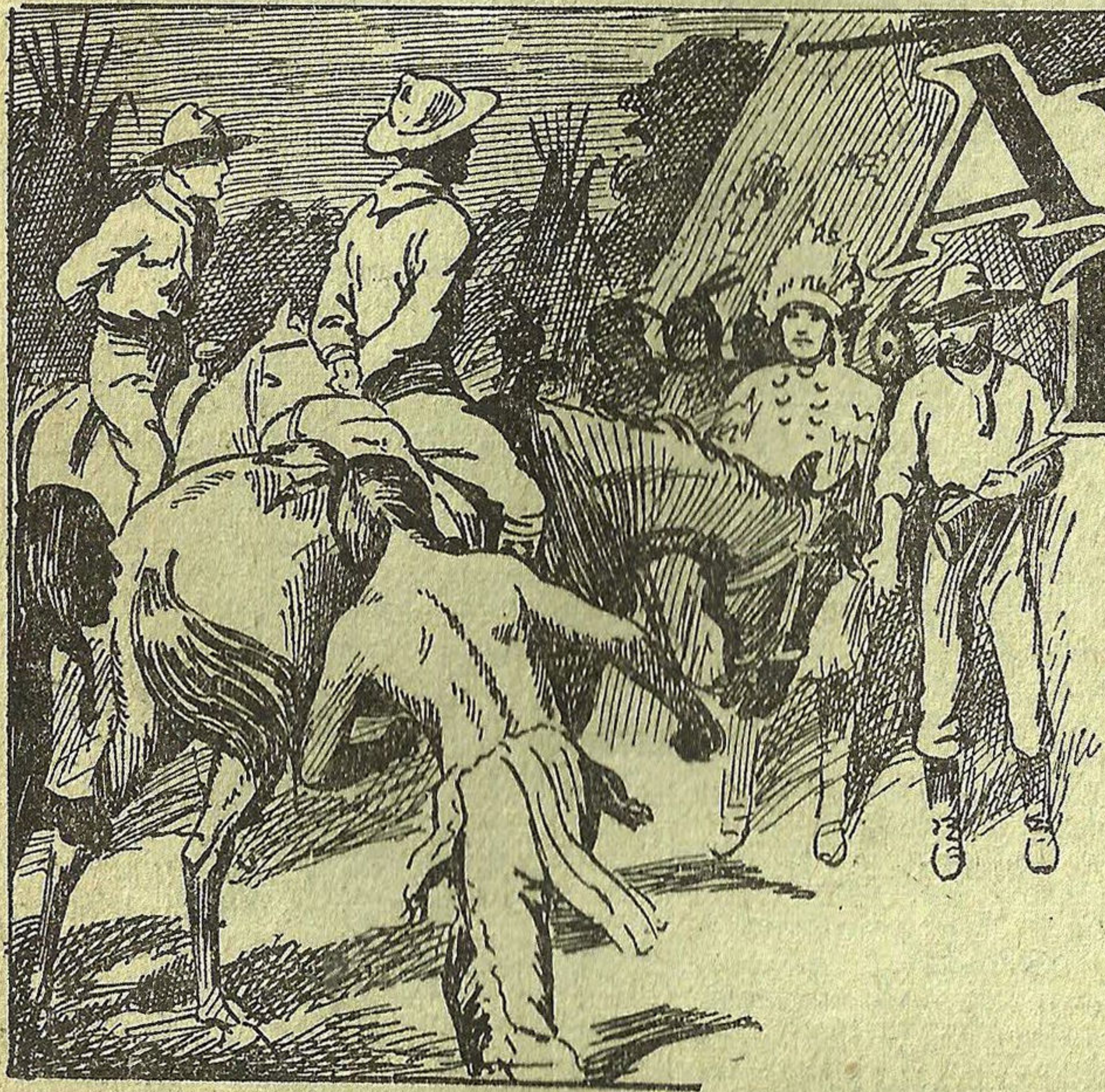
Presently they turned through the gap in the sand-dunes, and came upon the caravan. A sharp voice challenged them in English.

"Who goes there?"

"Who goes there?"

"Who goes there?"

A SPLENDID COMPLETE STORY OF THE CHUMS OF THE BACKWOODS SCHOOL!



AMONG THE REDSKINS!

A
Grand Complete Story
of
Frank Richards & Co.
By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

The North West M.P.'s.

"Hold on, sergeant!"

Six men in scarlet coats, with carbines at their saddles, were riding up the trail to Thompson.

Vere Beauclerc caught the glimmer of the red coats in the sunshine from the distance, as he came riding through the tall grass towards the trail.

The schoolboy of Cedar Creek put spurs to his horse at once, and came on at a gallop. He came out into the trail a dozen yards ahead of the troopers, and pulled in his horse, waving his hand to the scarlet-coated riders.

"Hold on!"

The bronzed sergeant checked his horse, his men following his example. Beauclerc rode closer.

"Well?" said the sergeant laconically.

"I've news for you," said Beauclerc. "You remember me, Sergeant Lasalle? I saw you when you came to Cedar Creek School to see Miss Meadows some time ago."

The sergeant nodded.

"I guess I remember you," he answered. "What's your news?"

"About the whisky smugglers—"

Sergeant Lasalle eyed the schoolboy keenly under his thick brows.

"How did you know we were after the boot-leggers?" he asked sharply.

Beauclerc smiled.

"I didn't know. I was riding to Thompson to tell the sheriff when I sighted you. So I'm going to tell you instead—see?"

"I see. Go ahead."

"We came on their trail this morning—"

"We! Who?"

"Frank Richards and Bob Lawless and myself. We came on their trail, and on a whisky-jar they had dropped from a loose pack. Bob guessed it was a gang of boot-leggers, and I came back to tell the sheriff about it. Bob and Frank are following their trail."

"Sure of what you say?"

"Quite. The whisky-jar is still lying there, about six miles west of this."

Sergeant Lasalle reflected for a few moments.

Then he wheeled his horse from the trail, with a word of command to his men.

"Guide me to the place, Beauclerc," he said.

"You bet!"

Beauclerc rode beside the Canadian sergeant as the Mounted Police headed westward.

"What are your friends following the gang for?" the sergeant asked.

"To look for their camp, and make sure that they are a boot-legging gang, though there isn't much doubt of it. We shall meet them on the plain," answered Beauclerc.

"A risky business," said the sergeant. "You schoolboys would have done better to keep clear of them. However, I'm glad of your information. There's been a report of boot-legging in this section, and we came up to look into it. It's lucky if we've struck the trail so soon."

The Mounted Police rode at a gallop, Vere Beauclerc leading the way without a fault to the spot where he had parted with his chums.

In that lonely quarter it was not likely that the trail had been disturbed. When the place was reached the whisky-jar was still lying in the grass, as the chums of Cedar Creek had left it.

Sergeant Lasalle dismounted and examined it.

It was evident that it had slid from a loose mule-pack, and the sergeant did not need any further evidence that a gang of liquor smugglers had passed that way.

He scanned the trampled grass, with the tracks of half a dozen animals leading away westward towards a low range of hills in the distance.

"Any homesteads in that direction, Beauclerc?" he asked. "You know this section?"

Beauclerc shook his head.

"No settlements till you come to the Fraser river," he answered, "and that's a good step."

"I guess so. Anything else?"

see some sign of his chums, but they did not appear.

He wondered uneasily whether they had come into close contact with the boot-leg gang.

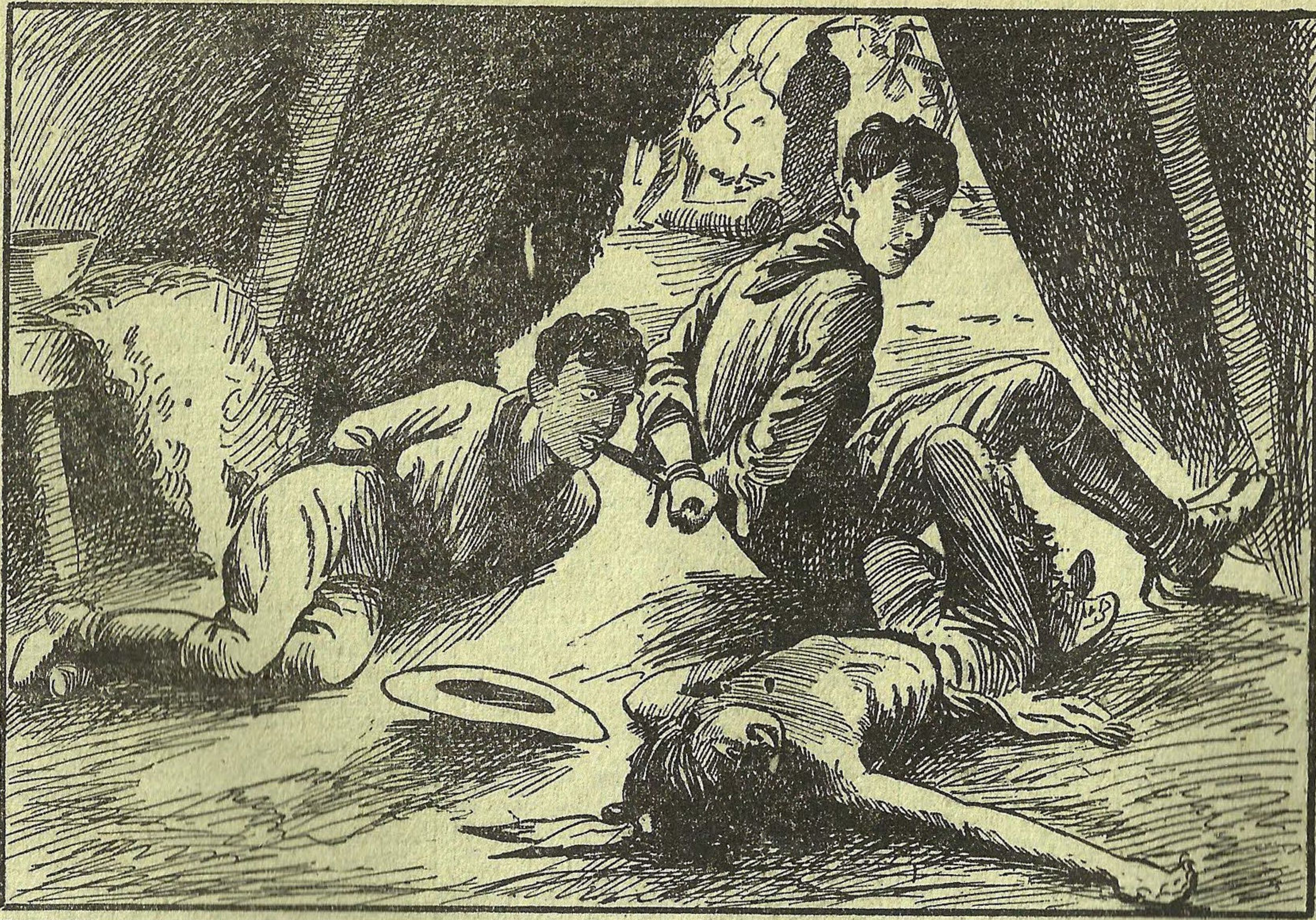
In the hills the trail was more difficult to follow, and the progress of the Mounted Police was slow.

Dusk was setting in when the sergeant gave the sign to halt, by a rill that tinkled down a rocky ridge.

There were evident signs of a camp there, and the burnt-out embers of a fire.

But the embers were cold, and the boot-leggers had evidently long been gone.

"I guess they travelled by night, and camped here in the heat of the day," the sergeant remarked. "Not



A BID FOR FREEDOM! "Quick!" breathed Bob Lawless. "Never mind my skin!" With the horn handle of the knife gripped between his teeth, Frank Richards sawed at his chum's bonds.

"An Indian village."

"Ah!"

"Bob's idea was that the boot-leggers were heading for the Kootenay village, to sell them the whisky."

"I guess Bob Lawless hit the right nail on the head," remarked the sergeant. "That young fellow has some hoss-sense. If we miss the trail, I guess we'll head for the village, if you can show us the way. Have you been there?"

"No. I only know it's the other side of the hills, in a valley."

"I reckon we'll find it. Ride on." The cavalcade proceeded at a gallop under the hot sunshine of the Canadian summer's day.

Vere Beauclerc scanned the plain as he rode for a sign of his chums.

But nothing was to be seen of Frank Richards or Bob Lawless.

The afternoon was growing old when Sergeant Lasalle and his party entered the low range of hills.

Beauclerc was getting a little anxious now.

At every moment he expected to

much doubt that they're boot-leggers—most likely the very gang we're looking for. But I don't see anything of your friends, Beauclerc."

"I'm afraid something must have happened to them," answered Beauclerc, his brow clouding. "We ought to have fallen in with them before this."

The sergeant made a careful examination of the trail which left the deserted camp, winding away into the hills.

On the stony soil it was not easy to read "sign," but the sergeant found enough for his purpose.

"I guess they came on the boot-leggers," he said at last. "And they've been roped in, to keep their mouths shut."

"You think so?"

"For sure. There were six tracks left by the party, and two fresh tracks over them, on the plain," said Lasalle. "That was the boot-leggers, and young Lawless and Richards after them. Here there are eight tracks going away together."

"Eight!" said Beauclerc. "Then they—"

"There was an addition of two to the party when they broke camp here," said the sergeant. "And as we don't see any signs of Richards or Lawless, I guess there isn't much doubt who the two were."

"Prisoners?" said Beauclerc.

"I guess so, unless—" Sergeant Lasalle paused. "Their horses went, at least. I guess they went on their horses. The boot-leggers wouldn't take the risk of shooting them out of hand."

Beauclerc shuddered.

"I guess they're prisoners," said Sergeant Lasalle. "Even a boot-legger wouldn't put his neck into a noose for nothing. I guess we'll find them all right when we find the whisky smugglers. But this trail is too thin to be followed after dark, and it's close on dark now. We're going to strike for the Kootenay village. You'd better ride back home, my boy."

"I'm not going home till I know what's become of Frank and Bob," answered Beauclerc, quietly. "If you don't want me, sergeant, I shall keep on alone."

The sergeant smiled.

"You'd better keep with us, then, I reckon," he said. "I wish you were a bit clearer about where the Indian village is, and you could guide. But we'll find it, never fear. But think a little, my lad—if the Redskins have got hold of the whisky, they'll be fighting mad, and there'll be trouble when we come up—bad trouble, perhaps."

"I'm going on."

"I guess I ought to send you back."

"I shall go on alone, if not with you, sergeant."

"You'll come on with me, then."

And after a brief rest, the Mounted Police pushed on again, in the deepening darkness.

The 2nd Chapter.

Among the Redskins.

"That's the show!" said Bob Lawless.

"There's work to be done," growled Bob Lawless.

Hook chuckled.

"I guess I've never tried that, and shouldn't care for it if I did," he answered. "The Injuns want the fire-water, and they're ready to pay out pelts and gold-dust for it, and I guess I'm open to trade. You young galoots have shoved your noses into what don't concern you, and I calculate you can take the consequences."

"And what are they going to be?" asked Frank Richards. He had been wondering for some time what the boot-leggers intended to do with them. Hiram Hook evidently shrank from bloodshed; not so much from scruples on the subject, as from concern for his precious neck.

Hook blew out a cloud of smoke from his black cheroot.

"I guess that depends on the reds," he answered. "I can't be lumbered up with you, and I ain't going to spill your vinegar. There's too much fuss made in this country over a galoot being wiped out. I'm going to hand you over to the reds, and let them settle. I ride back to-morrow, and it won't be any concern of mine."

"And they'll keep us here?" asked Bob.

Hook grinned.

"Mebbe," he answered. "But when they get the fire-water going, they may play their old games, and in that case, you won't have a very long time to worry. An Injun with fire-water aboard is jest the old Injun, and his mind runs to tomahawks and torture-stakes. That's something for you to chew over, my pippins. If you get out of this alive, it'll be a lesson to you to mind your own business, and leave a man to work at his trade without your chipping in."

Hiram Hook pushed on ahead of the party with that, leaving the chums of Cedar Creek to their reflections. They followed more slowly, surrounded by Black Henri and the other half-breeds, with the pack-mules.

Frank glanced at his Canadian cousin.

"A pretty prospect," he muttered. "While there's life there's hope," answered Bob. "But if the Redskins start their jamboree to-night—"

He was silent.

Both the chums were thinking of Vere Beauclerc, who—quite unknown to Hiram Hook and his gang—had ridden back to Thompson with the news of the boot-leggers.

Of Beauclerc's fortunate meeting with the Mounted Police they, of course, knew nothing.

They knew that however rapidly the sheriff of Thompson took the matter in hand, he could not reach the Indian village that night.

And if that night the "jamboree" took place, there was little hope for the prisoners.

Everywhere within the borders of Canada, the red man had long been taught respect for the white man, and even in a wild Indian village, there was little danger to be looked for, so long as the Redskins were sober.

But the smuggled whisky made all the difference.

With the fire-water burning in his veins, the Redskin forgot the white government, and the Mounted Police, and became once more the savage barbarian of old, and at such times he was capable of anything.

The potent liquor, which is the cause of half the sin and suffering in a civilised country, is still more destructive to the hapless savage, depriving him of all reason and self-control—never extensive at the best of times.

It was for that reason that the Canadian Government sternly prohibited the sale of liquor to Indian tribes—an infamous traffic which, since the prohibition, could only be carried on by lawless and unscrupulous smugglers in remote districts.

Once the fire-water began to flow among the Redskins, Bob Lawless was aware of what would follow—furious excitement and fighting, in the midst of which the prisoners were not likely to be left at peace. It was only too probable that they would be torn to pieces by the maddened savages.

It was a terrible prospect, enough to shake the strongest nerve; but the chums of Cedar Creek did not lose hope.

They entered the Indian village, in the wake of Hiram Hook, whom they found in conversation with a stately old Redskin, evidently the chief of the little community.

A crowd of Indians had gathered round, and on the outskirts of the crowd were a swarm of squaws and papooses.

All of them, evidently, were keenly interested in the arrival of the boot-leggers, with their contraband cargo.

As the pack-mules halted, there was

Night was falling, as the boot-leggers rode into the Indian village, with their two prisoners.

It had been a weary ride for Bob Lawless and Frank Richards.

They were riding with their feet tied under their horses, and their hands bound, and until sunset they had been tormented by insects; the fall of night was a blessing to them.

They were glad to see the Indian village; it was an end, at least, of their painful journey, though they could not guess what was to follow.

Hiram Hook glanced at them with a grin.

"I guess you're close on home now, my pippins," he said. "If you don't find your quarters comfortable, you've got yourselves to thank. I gave you a chance to clear off and mind your own business."

"It's everybody's business to stop such rascals as you," answered Frank Richards. "You know the harm you are doing with your poisonous rubbish to those wretched Redskins."

"I guess that cuts no ice with me," said Hiram Hook. "A galoot's got to live, in this byer world."

a rush of some of the braves towards them, as if they desired to unload the poisonous cargo on the spot.

Hiram Hook rapped out a word to his followers, and the three half-breeds handled their rifles significantly.

The rush stopped. "I guess your young men had better keep their hands off a bit, chief," said Hiram Hook. "We haven't traded yet."

The old chief grunted a few words in the Kootenay tongue, and the braves fell back, though still with eager looks fastened on the pack-mules.

Frank Richards noted that the half-breeds were looking uneasy, though they were quite prepared to use their rifles, if necessary.

The boot-leggers' trade is a dangerous one.

If a few of the jars had been raided, and had circulated among the Redskins, they would have been in a mood to massacre the whole party, without the formality of "making a trade."

"My brother need not be alarmed," said the chief, speaking in good English, though in the flowery style of the red man. "Thunder Cloud is ready to pay his white brother for the fire-water."

"I guess that's all I want," said Hiram Hook, with a grin.

The chief glanced at the two school-boys bound on their horses.

"My brother has brought prisoners to the tepees of Thunder Cloud," he said.

"Spies," said Hiram Hook. "I guess they wanted to chip in, and prevent the fire-water getting here, chief. I'm going to leave them in your hands; I'm taking the horses."

"Thunder Cloud does not wish for white prisoners," said the old chief. "The redcoats will come after them."

"I guess nobody knows they're here," answered Hiram Hook. "At any rate, keep them in your village till I've got clear. You can let them go after that, if you like."

Bob Lawless broke in: "You'd better let us go at once, Thunder Cloud," he said. "We shall be searched for, and the Mounted Police will be sent here."

"Stow the gab," said Hiram Hook. "There isn't a soul in British Columbia knows you're here, and you know it."

"That's not so!" exclaimed Bob, speaking quickly. "A friend who was with us has taken the news to Thompson, chief, and it's known that we are here."

"Lies!" said Hiram Hook. "There were only you two—"

"There were three before we came on you," said Bob. "Chief, it is as I say. By to-morrow the sheriff of Thompson will be here to look for us, and if we are harmed—"

"Close his mouth!" shouted Hook savagely. And Black Henry clapped his dirty hand over Bob Lawless' mouth, effectually stopping his explanation.

But Bob Lawless had said enough to make the old chief look very grave.

Thunder Cloud had lived among the white men, and he was well aware of the power of the white man's Government, compared with which that of the whole red race was but as a broken reed.

Frank Richards had opened his lips as Bob was silenced, but one of the half-breeds drew a knife from his belt and touched his breast with the point.

Hiram Hook scowled savagely at the Cedar Creek chums.

"Keep them quiet!" he growled.

"It's all lies, chief; nobody knows they're here, and if you burn and scalp them there's no danger."

"Thunder Cloud does not make war on boys," said the Kootenay, with great dignity. "Let them be thrown, bound, into a lodge, and they shall remain prisoners till my white brother is in safety."

"Good enough!" answered Hook.

It was plain enough that the boot-legger cared little what happened to the prisoners after he was once well out of the region himself.

His next smuggling expedition was to be in quite another quarter, and he did not mean to be seen again near the Thompson Valley.

Frank Richards and Bob were taken from their horses, and hustled by two or three Indians into an empty lodge.

They were hustled roughly enough, for the savages had gathered that the two white boys had been opposed to the whisky smuggling, which was quite enough to make them angry.

Frank and Bob rolled on the floor, with their hands still bound.

Bob struggled into a sitting position.

"This is a go, Frank!" he said lugubriously. "But I'm glad I got in a word with the chief. It may have some effect on the Redskins when we need it."

"I suppose Beauclerc's coming after us, with the sheriff's men, by this time," said Frank.

"You bet!"

"But—" Frank paused.

"They couldn't be here till to-morrow at the earliest," said Bob.

"The Cherub may guess what's happened to us, as he won't find us on the way. But by to-morrow—"

He did not complete the sentence.

Both the chums knew well enough what might have happened by the morrow, and they knew that the sun they had seen sinking towards the far Pacific was perhaps the last sun they were destined to see.

The 3rd Chapter. In Darkest Peril.

Frank Richards rolled to the opening of the lodge and looked out.

In the open space in the middle of the Indian village a number of squaws and papooses were piling wood and pine-cones, evidently for a big fire.

In the distance Frank could see Hiram Hook in talk with the chief, Thunder Cloud, and they seemed to be driving a hard bargain. The pack-mules were not as yet unloaded, and the half-breeds stood on guard over them with their rifles.

Preparations for a "jamboree" were evidently going on, and it was pretty certain that the fire-water would begin to flow as soon as it had changed hands.

Once it was in circulation it would not take long for the Redskins to reach the pitch of maddened intoxication.

The flame leaped up from the fire, amid shouts and yells from the Kootenay papooses.

Hiram Hook and the chief retired into a lodge and disappeared from Frank's sight.

"What's going on, Franky?" asked Bob Lawless.

"They're building a bonfire," answered Frank. "Hook and the chief don't seem to be agreeing on the price of the fire-water, from what I can make out."

"He will stick them for about six times what it's worth—if it's worth anything," said Bob. "The Redskins have to pay through the nose for that stuff. I shouldn't wonder if he takes away pelts and gold-dust worth a thousand dollars for a hundred dollars laid out in tanglefoot. It's a paying trade when they get through safe."

"The rotter looks like getting through safe this time," said Frank.

"Wouldn't I like to see the scarlet coats come along just now!" groaned Bob. "What would you give to see the Mounted Police, Franky?"

"Not much chance of that, I'm afraid."

"I guess not. Can you see Hook now?"

"He's gone into the chief's lodge."

"That means they're going to clinch the bargain. I say, Frank, roll over here, and let me try my teeth on that rope. I've got pretty strong teeth."

"Not much good, I'm afraid; but you can try."

Frank rolled towards his chum, and Bob Lawless groped for the knot in the rope that fastened Frank's hands behind him.

It was quite dark outside now, and very dark inside the wigwam where the prisoners lay. They seemed to have been forgotten; no one came to the lodge now. All the Indians seemed intent only on the preparations for the jamboree.

Bob caught the knot of the rope in his strong teeth and worried it, a good deal like a dog.

The rope was of raw hide, thick and strong, and the knot was tight; the task was enough to make even Bob despair.

But life itself, in all probability, depended on his efforts, and he kept grimly on.

"Getting loose, old chap?" asked Frank, when half an hour had elapsed.

"It's not so tight as it was," said Bob breathlessly. "By gum, my jaws are aching!"

"Take a rest, while I take a turn on your rope."

"Right-ho!"

The chums changed positions, and Frank started on Bob Lawless' bonds with his teeth.

But the half-breeds had done their work well, and in a quarter of an hour he had made scarcely any impression on the knot.

His jaws and his teeth ached with his efforts by that time.

"Hold on, Frank!" said Bob suddenly. "Somebody's coming!"

The ragged buffalo-robe at the entrance of the lodge was pulled aside, and a dark little face looked in.

It belonged to an Indian boy of about ten, who had evidently looked in out of curiosity to see the white prisoners.

His black eyes glinted at them in the dark.

As the opening of the lodge widened by the pulling aside of the buffalo-skin a red glow from the fire fell in upon the chums of Cedar Creek.

The Indian boy grinned at them.

He spoke in his own language, which Frank did not understand, but Bob had a smattering of the Kootenay dialect.

"What is he saying, Bob?" asked Frank.

"Oh, nothing much—only jabber!" said Bob hastily. He did not care to tell his chum that the young Redskin was describing the fate in store for them.

"Fathead!" said Frank. "He's threatening us, the little beast! Tell me what he says."

"He says we're going to be put to the stake," said Bob at length. "But it's only gas, I reckon. They wouldn't do it unless they were raving drunk. They wouldn't dare! And they have not broached the fire-water yet, from what I can see."

"The wish is father to the thought, I suppose," said Frank. "The little rotter would like to see us tortured! I suppose he hasn't sense enough to understand what a little beast he is. Hallo! What the thump is he up to now?"

"Here, keep off, you little scallywag!" panted Bob.

The Indian boy had taken a knife from his belt, and was circling Bob Lawless' head with it, as if he intended to "raise" his scalp.

With Bob's thick hair gripped in his left hand, he wielded the knife with his right, grinning like a little bronze demon.

Whether he was only seeking to scare the prisoners, or whether his impish mischief would have gone to the length of scalping the hapless prisoners, they could not tell; but if the latter was his intention, he was not given the chance of carrying it out.

Frank Richards' hands were still bound, but his feet were free, and the little ruffian's head was within the reach of his boots.

Frank drew back one leg, and crashed out his boot with all his strength; he was quite well aware that he would have no chance of a second kick.

The heavy boot crashed on the side of the young rascal's head, and hurled him across Bob Lawless.

Frank, panting with the effort he had made, lay breathless on the ground, fully expecting the young Kootenay to turn on him, knife in hand, like a wild cat.

But the little rascal did not move. He lay inert across Bob Lawless.

The thick leather soles of the boot, driven with all Frank's strength in a moment of desperation, had struck like a bludgeon, and the young Kootenay was stunned.

Bob Lawless struggled to pitch him aside.

"Frank!" he gasped.

"I—I think I've hurt him!" gasped Frank. "He must be stunned! If I'd cracked his skull I shouldn't mind."

"Frank—the knife!"

"What?"

"He had a knife. Look out for it, for mercy's sake! If we can get loose—"

breathed Bob.

"Oh!"

The buffalo robe was still drawn aside, and the red light glimmered into the lodge. But the darkness within prevented any of the Indians seeing what was passing, even if any glanced in that direction.

Frank was groping for the knife at once.

It was still grasped in the nerveless hand of the stunned Kootenay boy, and Frank found it and caught it with his teeth.

He jerked it away on the ground, and then got it in his teeth by the handle.

Bob Lawless threw off the Kootenay, and rolled with his back to Frank.

"Quick!" he breathed. "Saw through the rope, Frank—you can do it with the knife in your teeth. Never mind my skin!"

Frank could not answer; his teeth gripped the horn handle of the knife. In the dimness he could barely make out Bob's bound wrists. But he managed to insert the knife between them, with the edge on the rope, and by moving his head he sawed at the bonds. Not a sound escaped Bob Lawless as the skin of both his wrists was cruelly scored. It was for liberty, and perhaps life, that he suffered, and he suffered in stoic silence.

There was a sound and a movement from the Kootenay boy, sprawled on the ground beside them.

"He's coming to!" muttered Bob. "Are you nearly through, Frank?"

If not, I'll give him another on the skull."

He jerked at his bonds as he spoke. The rope was nearly sawn through, and the last strip of raw hide came apart as he tugged.

His hands were free!

In a twinkling Bob Lawless was on his knees, and was groping for the knife. In another moment it was in his hand, and he was kneeling on the young Kootenay.

The Indian's eyes had opened dizzily; but as his mouth opened, a hand was laid on it, and the point of the knife touched his throat.

Bob whispered two or three words in the Indian dialect, a command to be silent; but the words were not needed. The grinding knee on his chest and the sharp pressure of the knife were enough.

The Kootenay glared up at him in rage and terror, palpitating from head to foot, but silent.

Bob cast a glance through the narrow opening of the lodge.

Round the gathering fire the Indians were crowding, with many guttural growls in their own tongue, amid an excited screaming from the papooses. Even without the fire-water, the Redskins were beginning to work up into a state of excitement.

Hiram Hook and the chief were still in the latter's lodge, doubtless making the exchange of pelts for the fire-water.

Bob squeezed a chunk of the out rawhide into the Indian boy's mouth to gag him, and then, with the remainder of his own bonds, tied the dusky wrists together.

Then he turned to his chum, and cut Frank Richards loose.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Frank. "That pesky little beast is quiet now," muttered Bob. "We can cut through the back of the lodge, and try our luck among the tepees, Frank. We may be able to get at the horses, with luck."

"Hold on! Look!" muttered Frank.

In the firelight outside, the figure of Hiram Hook appeared in sight, striding directly towards the prisoners' lodge.

The 4th Chapter. A Fight for Liberty!

Bob Lawless drew a deep, hard breath.

Up to that moment fortune had seemed to favour the chums of Cedar Creek. The visit of the Indian boy, terrible as it might have been, had turned out their salvation. A few minutes more would have seen them creeping away among the deserted tepees, with a good chance of escaping into the darkness of the night outside the Indian village.

But the luck had turned. Hiram Hook was coming directly to the lodge, and was evidently going to enter. And if they were gone he would give the alarm at once, before they were six yards away.

Flight was impossible, and there was no time for thinking. The chums acted rather upon instinct than thought. Bob Lawless rolled the bound Indian boy into the darkest corner of the lodge, and sat by him, his hands behind, and the knife in one of them, touching the dusky skin of the Indian, to keep him in terrified stillness. And Frank Richards, realising what was in Bob's mind—as it was in his own—threw himself on the ground, his hands behind him.

In the dimness, Hiram Hook just made out the two forms of the Cedar Creek chums, but he did not see the Kootenay boy, half-concealed by Bob's sturdy form, and wrapped in darkness.

"Hallo, my pippin!" said the boot-legger, with a jeering laugh. "I guess you are finding yourselves in rough quarters!"

"Thanks to you!" snapped Bob.

"Thanks to your meddling in what don't concern you," said Hiram Hook. "You see what's going on yonder?"

"Well?"

"I guess there's going to be a first-class bender hyer to-night," said the ruffian. "I've sold my stock for pelts, and I guess I'm making tracks afore the fire-water is started. It won't be healthy for white men around hyer arter that."

"Is that what you've come to tell us?" growled Bob.

Hook laughed again. No doubt the rascal had driven a very profitable bargain with the Kootenay chief, for he seemed to be in high good-humour.

"Not quite," he said. "I've something else to say, I guess. It goes agin the grain to leave white men hyer to be tortured by the Redskins—and they'll torture you, you can bet your bottom dollar on that, once they're glorious! I'd like to let you loose, I guess."

"Nothing to stop you, is there?" asked Frank Richards, wondering what the boot-legger was driving at.

"I guess I'm ready to trade," explained Hiram Hook. "If you can make it worth my while to see you clear, I'm your mutton with the wool on. Savvy?"

"Not quite," said Bob. "Suppose you make it a little clearer?"

"Your popper is one of the wealthiest ranchers in the Thompson Valley, young Lawless. I reckon he'd pay up handsome to see his son safe home again. Suppose I find you pen and paper, and you give me a letter to him, asking him to pay bearer, say, two hundred dollars for information he can give as to your whereabouts. I guess your popper would jump at that with both feet!"

"I dare say he would," agreed Bob.

"Waal, is it a go?" asked Hiram Hook. "I'm open to trade. I'm done in this part of Canada, and after I've lit out you can talk all you know, from one end of the section to the other, for all I care. If your life's worth two hundred dollars, make it a trade!"

"And what's to become of us while you're gone to my father's ranch?" asked Bob Lawless.

"I guess I'll fix you up all right," said Hook reassuringly. "You leave that to me. It's your only chance, anyhow."

"I guess there's another chance, and a better one," answered Bob.

"You young scallywag, haven't you any hoss-sense? I tell you—Oh!" gasped Hook, as Bob, leaping up, made a sudden spring at him.

"Quick, Frank!"

Hook staggered back with Bob and Frank grasping him, and his hand went in a flash to his belt.

"Not a word!" panted Bob. "One shout, and—"

"Hyer—come hyer!" roared Hook, unheeding.

Bob Lawless struck as he shouted. It was no time for half-measures. It was life or death now, and the boot-legger deserved no mercy. The ruffian was unaware that Bob was armed, or he might have been silent; he did not know it till the Indian boy's knife was driven at him, and sank deep into his shoulder.

A wild yell left the boot-legger's lips.

He staggered away, and crashed on the ground.

"Come on, Frank!"

Bob did not give the ruffian a look after he fell; he was free of him, and that was all he cared about.

He sprang to the back of the lodge, and ripped down the skin wall with his knife.

In a second it was gaping open, and Bob plunged through, with Frank Richards at his heels.

From the Kootenays round the fire came loud shouts of surprise and alarm, and they crowded towards the prisoners' lodge, some of them bearing flaming brands for light.

"Arter them!" panted Hook. Wounded as he was, the boot-legger struggled to a sitting posture, and yelled to the astonished Indians: "Arter them! Don't let them get away! Find them—scalp them—burn them! Ah-h-h!" He gasped, and fell back in a dead faint.

The whole village was alarmed now, and deafening yells and howls arose on all sides. They rang in the ears of the chums of Cedar Creek as they ran on in the gloom, without knowing where they ran. In the cluster of tepees, built irregularly, and the darkness broken only by the fitful glare of the fire behind them, they had to trust to chance for their direction, and several times they had to turn and dodge as they sighted Redskins ahead among the lodges.

They came on the border of the village at last, with a dozen alarmed and savage dogs barking and snarling around them in a fearful uproar. But for the dogs they might have escaped into the outer night, but the snarling pack guided the Indians on their track. A spear flew by a foot from Frank Richards' head, showing that the pursuers were close behind. A guttural voice, in the Indian dialect, shouted to them to stop.

They ran on desperately. But moccasined feet ran still more swiftly behind, and dusky, brawny hands clutched at the comrades as they ran. Bob Lawless whirled desperately round, gripping the knife; but two or three spears were at his breast, and he flung down the useless weapon.

"The game's up, Frank!" he panted bitterly. Frank was already in the grasp of the Redskins; and in the midst of a howling mob of savages, the chums of Cedar Creek were dragged back into the Indian village.

THE END.