

# The BOYS' FRIEND

TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR!

No. 1,010. Vol. XX. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending October 15th, 1920.]

## CORNERED BY CATTLE LIFTERS!



BY  
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### IN A TIGHT CORNER!

Another huge boulder hurtled down from above. It hit the ledge, and then bounced off and rushed on into space. At the same moment the face of Mexican Jo peered round the bend, only to be drawn back, with a howl of pain from the rustler, as a bullet from Bob's rifle grazed his nose!

#### The 1st Chapter. The Horse-Hunters!

"I guess we're after getting left!" said Bob Lawless, with a dissatisfied grunt.

There was a trampling of hoofs outside the Lawless Ranch in the morning sunlight.

The sheriff of Thompson was there, with nearly a score of ranchers and cowboys from up and down the Thompson Valley. Mr. Lawless, with a rifle under his arm, and a bandolier over his shoulder, came out of the ranch-house to join them.

Bob Lawless stood looking from the doorway, with a frowning brow. His chums, Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc, were by his side.

Rancher Lawless mounted his horse, and then glanced back at his son in the doorway, with a slight smile on his bronzed face.

"We're off now, Bob!"

"Can't we come, dad?"

The rancher shook his head.

"This isn't going to be work for schoolboys, sonny," he answered.

"Besides, you've got plenty to do, in

helping Billy Cook round up the horses."

"We'd rather—" began Frank Richards.

But the rancher smiled, and shook his head again.

"I know you'd rather, Frank, and I'm sorry; but you'll be useful in the round-up. Good-bye!"

The sheriff and his men were already in motion, and Mr. Lawless cantered after them.

At a gallop, the horsemen pushed across the plain towards the Thompson River.

Bob Lawless gave an expressive grunt.

"Left!" he growled.

"Never mind. We're going to make ourselves useful," said Frank Richards, with a smile.

"I'd rather mosey along with the sheriff's men after the cattle-lifters!"

"Same here!" remarked Beauclerc.

"But it can't be helped. I dare say the sheriff thinks schoolboys would only be in the way."

Another grunt from Bob.

"Now, then, sonnies!" shouted

Billy Cook, the foreman of the ranch.

"Are you ready to saddle up?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I'm starting in two ticks."

"We'll be ready," said Bob.

"No school to-day, anyhow," he added, as the chums of Cedar Creek started for their horses. "That's something. But I reckon I'd like to get on the trail of Handsome Alf and his rustlers."

"Where are we going now?" asked Beauclerc.

"You see, we stampeded the horses when the rustlers attacked the ranch the other night," explained Bob.

"Some of them have been brought in, but there's thirty or forty head of horseflesh still loose on the plains, somewhere between the river and the Wapiti Hills. The raiders would have bagged the critters if they hadn't been stampeded; but it's going to be no end of a circus rounding them up again. I guess we shall be more useful here than at Cedar Creek school, if it comes to that; but I'd rather go after the raiders with the sheriff."

It did not take the chums of Cedar Creek long to saddle up.

They did not forget to sling their rifles when they mounted to join Billy Cook and the cowboys.

Matters had changed the usually peaceful Thompson Valley during the past week. The presence of a gang of rustlers from over the border had stirred the quiet valley from end to end.

Three ranches had been raided, and cattle driven off, and the Lawless Ranch had been attacked, though, in that case, the ranch-raiders had been defeated.

The whole section was up in arms now, and the cattle-lifters were being hunted far and wide.

Frank Richards & Co. were keen enough to join in the hunt, but the sheriff, for reasons best known to himself, did not want the help of schoolboys from Cedar Creek. But they were very useful in helping to round up the strayed horses and cattle. At that more pacific task, it was quite possible that they might fall in with some of the rustlers, and they looked to their firearms very carefully before starting.

Billy Cook rode westward through

the thick grass, followed by a couple of cowboys and the three chums of the backwoods school.

There was a long day's work of hard riding before them, and it was not likely that all the strayed animals would be rounded up in one day.

The ranch-house disappeared from sight behind, and the smoke from the chimney was lost in the prairie haze.

On top of a knoll, five or six miles from the ranch-house, Billy Cook halted, and swept the surrounding plain with his keen eyes.

"I guess I spot some of the critters," he said. "They're scattered, of course. I guessed they would be. We separate here. You've got your ropes with you, sonnies?"

"Sure!" answered Bob.

"Off you go, then!"

Billy Cook waved his hand to the west, where the Wapiti Hills loomed up blue in the distance, and the chums of Cedar Creek rode down the knoll. Billy Cook and the cowboys separated, going north and south. Frank Richards & Co. rode on by themselves at an easy gallop.

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc



had their lassoes in hand. Frank Richards was not yet expert with the "rope," though he had put in a good deal of practice. But lassoing a quiet old cow on the ranch for practice, was quite different from roping in a half-wild horse on the plains.

Three horses could be seen in the distance ahead, grazing on the rich grass. They took no notice of the riders until the latter were close at hand; but as the galloping hoofs came closer they tossed up their manes and fled.

With a thudding of hoofs and a tossing of manes, they galloped off towards the hills, with the three schoolboys in hot pursuit.

"Now ride for it!" said Bob Lawless.

The three fugitives separated, dashing off in different directions, one, a powerful grey, keeping on towards the hills.

The schoolboys separated in turn, Frank Richards following the grey. The foothills were not far distant now, and he hoped to close in on the horse in one of the canyons, from which there would be no escape for the fugitive. In a few minutes his comrades were lost to his sight on the rolling prairie.

Frank Richards had his lasso ready now. If he could get near enough, he hoped to "rope in" the grey, though he had never attained his Canadian cousin's skill with the riata. Gallop, gallop!

The grey slowed down again, and seemed inclined to resume grazing, and Frank came closer and closer. He ventured at last on a cast of the rope, but at the same moment the grey tore off again, and the noose fell half a dozen yards short.

"Bother!" murmured Frank. He coiled in the rope, and galloped in pursuit.

Under the hoofs now the grass was thin and sparse, and stones cropped out of the soil. They were close to the foothills, and ahead of them a wide, shallow canyon opened in the hills, and it was for the canyon that the galloping grey was heading. It disappeared from Frank's sight among the rocks and stunted firs, but he could hear the echo of the fleeing hoof-beats from the distance.

He rode on cheerfully, feeling sure of his capture now. His face was streaming with perspiration now, and his horse was steaming. It was early "fall" in Canada, but the sun was still hot. The canyon was wide and shallow, and there was no shelter in it. The hoofs rang on hard rocks as Frank Richards rode into the hills. There was an acclivity under him, and the pace had to slacken. Among the big boulders farther up he was confident of cornering the grey, as the ground ascended and the canyon walls narrowed.

The hoof-beats ahead died into silence, and it seemed that the grey had stopped. But suddenly there came a crash of hoofs, and from the upper canyon the grey came thundering back at top speed. Something evidently, had scared the fleeing animal ahead—perhaps a lynx creeping on the rocks, or a wolf peering from a thicket. Frank Richards was not an experienced cowboy, and the sudden charge back of the fugitive took him by surprise.

He made a hasty cast with his lasso and missed, and before he could draw in the rope again the grey had gone thundering past him, and vanished down the canyon on its way to the open plains.

"Bother!" And Frank Richards wheeled his horse, to take up the pursuit again, riding back the way he had come.

## The 2nd Chapter.

### The Track of the Rustler!

Squeal! A clatter of hoofs on the rocky floor of the canyon.

"Well done, Bob!"

It was Beauclerc's voice. Frank Richards rode round a stack of boulders crowded with firs, and came in sight of his chums.

Vere Beauclerc was leading two captured horses, roped in, and the grey was struggling at the end of Bob Lawless' lasso.

Frank pulled in his horse. "Hallo! You've got him!" he called out.

"I guess so!" grinned Bob. "Did you send him back for me?"

Frank laughed. The angry grey was still struggling with the rope, but Bob soon subdued him. He was added to Beauclerc's "string."

"Got all three!" said Bob Lawless, with satisfaction. "We soon roped in our two, Frank, and came after you. I guess there's very likely some more of the critters in these hills.

Did you see any sign of them farther up the canyon?"

Frank shook his head. "You were following the critter up," said Bob. "How did he come back past you?"

"Something turned him back higher up," answered Frank. "He seemed scared, and came thundering back suddenly. And—and I missed him with the rope."

"I guess you've got a lot to learn about the rope yet, kid," said Bob, laughing. "I wonder what scared him back?"

"A lynx, perhaps," said Frank. "I guess that's possible, but it ain't likely. I'd like to know why that critter turned back," said Bob, staring thoughtfully up the rocky canyon.

"He came back straight to be caught, if you'd been a bit more handy with the rope. I guess I want to know what scared him back, when he had a free run into the hills."

"What does it matter?" asked Frank.

"I reckon it might matter a good deal," answered the rancher's son thoughtfully. "There may be some galoots in the hills who tried to rope him in, frinstance."

Frank Richards started.

"The rustlers, you mean?"

"Why not?" said Bob. "That gang is hidden somewhere, and these foothills are as lonely as any spot between here and the Fraser river."

"Tain't natural for a hoss to run right back to the galoot that's trying to rope him in. I guess we're looking a bit farther before we quit."

"You saw nothing, Frank?" asked Beauclerc.

"Nothing."

"P'raps we'll see something if we look," said Bob. "Anyhow, there might be some of the strays up the canyon, so it won't be time wasted. Tether your string, Cherub, and come on."

"Right-ho!"

The three captured horses were tethered in a thicket among the boulders, and then the chums of Cedar Creek rode on together.

They had their rifles in their hands now instead of their lassoes, and their eyes were very keenly on the lookout. The bare possibility that some of Handsome Alf's gang might be in the hills was enough to make them cautious and vigilant.

The canyon wound into the hills, narrowing, and clumps of fir and larch shadowed the path of the horsemen. There was a tinkle of falling water, and Bob Lawless drew in his horse beside a tiny spring that bubbled up and leaped among the rocks. He dismounted, and examined the ground carefully by the spring.

"I guessed so," he said.

"What?"

"Hoofprints," said Bob. "Some galoot stopped to water his horse here, not so long ago, and I guess it was that galoot that frightened the grey back. Light down and look at these prints, Cherub."

Bob Lawless' tone was significant, and Beauclerc alighted at once, and examined the tracks in the soft earth by the spring. Then he uttered a sudden exclamation.

"It's my horse!"

"I reckoned I knew the track," said Bob.

Beauclerc leaped to his feet, his face excited and his eyes gleaming. "It's Demon!" he said. "You know the rustlers got him from me the night the ranch was raided. A fellow the others called Mexican Jo had him. And he's here. I'd know Demon's track anywhere, in a hundred others."

Frank Richards whistled. "Then the rustlers—"

"One of them's here, at least," said Bob quietly. "Maybe a chap on his own, looking for strays; or maybe the whole gang is cached hereabouts. I guess we're going to know."

"Yes, rather!"

Bob rubbed his hands gleefully. "I reckon this is a joke on popper," he said. "He's gone east with the sheriff's party, looking for the rustlers, and here we are getting on their trail. I reckon we'll have surprising news for popper when we get home. Never mind looking for hosses now. I guess we're going to look for rustlers. Keep your guns handy."

"You bet!"

"Can you pick up Demon's trail from here?" asked Frank. "The man's gone, whoever he is."

"I guess I'm going to try."

"Bob Lawless examined the ground with a skilled eye, his chums watching him breathlessly. Their hearts were beating with excitement now.

The trail of the stolen horse was a clue that could not be mistaken, and they knew that they were not far

from at least one member of Handsome Alf's gang of rustlers.

On the hard, rocky soil no trail could be picked up; but Bob Lawless made his calculations from the direction of the hoof-prints in the soft soil close to the spring.

On his hands and knees he examined the soil, and a dozen yards from the spring he rose to his feet with a satisfied look.

"This way," he said. "You've got it?" asked Frank.

"Sure enough. There's damp mud on the rock here. I guess the man was giving his horse a drink when the grey came galloping up, and I reckon he would sling his lasso at him. The grey dodged back. Why didn't the man follow on and rope him? Because he knew the grey was being run after, and so he lit out, and he went this way."

"And may be watching for us now," said Beauclerc.

"I guess so," said Bob coolly. "But that won't stop this outfit. Keep your guns handy, and come on."

The three riders pushed on, Bob in the lead.

A broken bush was a further guide, where a ledge on the canyon wall rose above the level of the soil.

The horseman, whoever he was, had ridden upon the ledge, which was not more than four feet wide, and nearly level.

The ledge rose higher and higher, with an abrupt slant, following the windings of the wall of rock, and the three chums rode in file. There was not room for three, or two, to ride abreast.

In a quarter of an hour they were looking down a precipitous cliff on their left, where the rocky ledge dropped to a depth of a hundred feet to the bottom of the canyon.

It was a perilous path to follow, but it had the advantage that there was no mistaking the trail. The man mounted on Demon could not have left it, once started upon it, without jumping his horse down the canyon, which was instant death.

Bob Lawless threw up his hand as a sign for his comrades behind to stop, and they pulled in their horses.

Ahead, the rocky wall of the canyon made an abrupt turn, the level ledge following it, so that all the chums could see of it was where it ended in sheer cliff.

"What's on, Bob?" called out Frank Richards.

Bob glanced back and grinned. "I guess I'm not going to be blind," he answered. "That galoot knows there is somebody after him, and he's not far ahead of it. That's just the place where he would stop to burn powder, I reckon."

Bob slipped from his horse. The sure-footed animal stood still on the narrow ledge, while Bob moved on cautiously towards the turn.

He did not pass the corner of the bulging rock.

Instead of doing so he jammed his Stetson hat on the muzzle of his rifle, and projected it beyond the bend.

Crack!

From round the cliff came the sharp ring of a rifle, and a bullet smashed through the hat, and whistled away across the canyon.

Bob laughed softly. The rifle-shot had told him what he wanted to know. Round the bend of the cliff the rustler had stopped, to face those who were tracking him and shoot them down as they showed themselves. Bob's simple ruse had drawn his fire and betrayed him.

"He's there!" said Bob Lawless tersely.

Frank and Beauclerc slipped from their horses and joined Bob. The three chums stopped on the hither side of the cliff where it turned. Out of their sight, but not a dozen yards away, a desperate man lurked with ready rifle, and the chums of Cedar Creek had to stop.

## The 3rd Chapter.

### Cornered!

"Senores!"

It was a mocking voice round the sharp bend of the cliff, so near that it startled the schoolboys.

"I've heard that voice before!" said Beauclerc in a whisper. "It's Mexican Jo, the man who stole my black horse!"

"Senores!"

"Hallo!" called back Bob. "Why do you stop?" chuckled the Mexican. "Come on! I am ready for you, senores! One of you I have killed already!"

Bob chuckled. "You've killed nothing but my Stetson so far, greaser!" he replied. "Ha, ha, ha!"

A Spanish oath rang out. "Ah! You were tricking me, then?"

"Sure!" chuckled Bob. "I reckoned if you were there you'd blaze away at a hat on a rifle-muzzle, and you did! Catch on?"

"Carambo!"

There was a minute's silence. The Cedar Creek chums held their rifles ready, in case the Mexican should make a rush; but it was evidently not the rustler's intention to take the risk of showing himself. He held an impregnable position against attack, and he did not mean to leave it.

"We can't go on!" muttered Frank. "He could pot us like pigeons if we showed our noses round the corner, long before we could draw a bead on him!"

Bob Lawless nodded. "You can come out and surrender, greaser, if you like!" the rancher's son called out.

A mocking laugh was the only reply.

"I guess we'll wait for you, then."

"You will not wait long, senores," answered the unseen Mexican. "In fifteen minutes the crows will be feeding on what is left of you. My comrades will have heard the shot."

Bob set his lips, and cast an anxious glance down from the ledge into the open canyon, which yawned like a gulf to the left of the schoolboys. As he looked there came the sound of a rifle-shot from the depths below. A bullet splattered on the rock within a foot of his head.

The report was followed by another laugh from the unseen Mexican.

"Vaya, senior! You see?"

"Cover!" muttered Bob.

The three schoolboys threw themselves down on the ledge, as close to the rise of the cliff as they could. Hidden among the rocks and pines of the canyon below were the rustlers, and five or six shots followed the first. But the jutting of the ledge hid the schoolboys from the fire from below now, and the bullets passed over them harmlessly.

"I guess we've run into a hornet's nest," muttered Bob Lawless grimly. "We're fixed on this pesky ledge now, and if we get on our feet they'll sure get us."

Frank Richards whistled softly. In following on the trail of the horse-thief they had taken little heed of the fact that his comrades might be at hand, and apparently a good number of the rustler gang were in the canyon below.

Evidently the retreat of Handsome Alf was in the rocky recesses of the Wapiti foot-hills, and the Cedar Creek chums had tracked the outlaws, guided partly by chance, very closely to their lair.

They had news for the sheriff of Thompson now, if they were extricated alive from their present position. But that was growing a very doubtful point.

Bob Lawless moved his head and looked back along the slanting ledge. It wound back along the cliff behind them, irregularly, for a great distance, sloping down. In the distance he caught sight of a Stetson hat among the boulders and bushes.

"I reckoned so," muttered Bob. "What is it, Bob?"

"There's a gang of rustlers in the canyon, and they're going to follow us along the ledge."

"Then it will be a fight," said Beauclerc.

"I guess so—us three against a dozen rustlers," muttered Bob. "With a big cliff on one side of us and a hundred-foot drop on the other! Gee! I guess we're in for trouble this time!"

"If we round the bend we could hold them off, same as the greaser is doing us."

"But we ain't round the bend, Cherub, and we can't get round without being potted by the Mexican."

"Don't be in a hurry, old chap," said Beauclerc quietly. "That Mexican's got my black horse, Demon, with him."

"What about it?"

"Demon knows my voice, and if I call to him—"

Bob's eyes gleamed. "By gum! It's a chance, Cherub. If Demon cuts up rusty, and gives the greaser trouble, we may rush him while he's busy with the horse."

"That's the idea."

"Try it on," said Frank. "In ten minutes those rotters below will be coming along the ledge close on us. It looks to me like our only chance."

"It is that, I guess," said Bob. "Go it, Cherub!"

Beauclerc called softly to his horse, a "coo-oo-oo" in a caressing tone, that Demon knew well and always answered.

A whinny sounded from behind the bend of the canyon wall. The black horse knew his master's voice, and responded at once. Vere Beauclerc called again.

There was a trampling of hoofs on

rock and a loud oath in Spanish, and the sounds of a startled man trying to soothe and control a horse. A loud and angry squeal followed, and a louder dashing of hoofs, and shrill curses from the Mexican, and then a yell of agony.

"Come on!" panted Beauclerc. It was clear that the Mexican was busy at that moment.

Beauclerc ran on swiftly ahead and passed round the bend of the canyon, his chums close at his heels.

A startling scene fell on their gaze. Demon, the black horse, was tethered to a point of rocks by the reins, and he was struggling to tear himself loose.

The Mexican was reeling against the cliff, his swarthy face pale with pain, clasping his leg with both hands, where the angry horse had kicked him. He was almost doubled up with pain, and hardly moved as the three schoolboys came running round the bend.

Beauclerc ran to his horse at once; Bob Lawless covered the Mexican with his rifle.

"Hands up!" he rapped out. A groan was the only answer.

The Mexican's leg was badly hurt by the kick he had received by the stolen horse, and he clasped it and groaned, heedless of the levelled rifle. Bob Lawless grinned.

"I guess he's our mutton," he said. "Take away his popgun and his sticker, Frank. I'll strew his silly brains along the rock if he resists."

The Mexican did not resist as Frank Richards disarmed him; Frank grabbed his rifle and revolver, and the long, sharp Mexican cuchillo from his belt. Mexican Jo only groaned.

Beauclerc was soothing his horse, which was quiet now and rubbing its muzzle affectionately under his arm.

"Get the critters round, Frank, while I keep an eye on that skunk," said Bob Lawless.

Frank ran back and led the three horses round the bend of the ledge. He caught sight of three or four Stetson hats in the distance as he did so.

"They're coming, Bob!"

"Let them come!" grinned Bob Lawless. "I reckon we could hold an army off at that corner. We'll get rid of the greaser first, I reckon. It would serve the pesky horse-thief right to sling him over into the canyon."

"No, no!"

Bob chuckled. "All O.K., Frank; I'm not going to do it!" He gave the Mexican a jab with his rifle-muzzle. "Get out of this, greaser, while you're safe; and tell your pardners we're ready for them here, and will be glad to see them."

The Mexican groaned again, and gave the rancher's son a glare of deadly hate. Another jab from the rifle moved him, and he limped away round the cliff and disappeared.

"Now for the circus!" said Bob Lawless.

And with their rifles before them, covering the ledge where it came round the bend of the canyon wall, the chums of Cedar Creek waited for the attack, which was not long in coming.

## The 4th Chapter. In the Shadow of Death!

A heavy trampling of boots resounded on the rocky path, and stopped just out of sight behind the cliff.

Fingers on triggers, the Cedar Creek chums waited.

It was for life or death now, for they knew they had no mercy to expect from Handsome Alf and his gang. They meant to pull trigger the moment an enemy showed himself.

"Come on!" called out Bob Lawless recklessly. "Is that you, Handsome Alf? We're waiting for you!"

An oath rang out. "You're comered, you pesky little cuss!" came the voice of the Californian. "I reckon you'd better put up your hands and surrender."

"Not this time," answered Bob. "I'm waiting to see your face, Handsome Alf. I've got a bullet ready."

"If you fire a shot, we won't leave one of you alive!"

"Come on, and see!"

There was a pause. The schoolboys could hear an excited discussion going on among the ranch-raiders, though they could not catch the words. It appeared pretty certain that none of the gang was anxious to charge round the corner of the cliff, with the abyss to fall into if a bullet struck him. Braver men than the gang of Californian rustlers might have hesitated there.

But there as a sudden rush of feet



at last, and a reckless desperado came rushing round the bend of the cliff.

Crack-ack-ack!

The three chums fired together.

So close was the rush, that the ruffian was almost upon them when the bullets struck him, and he was blazing away with his revolver blindly as he fell.

But his bullets went wide, as he staggered back under the fire, and reeled on the verge of the rocky ledge.

The schoolboys hardly looked at him.

Their rifles were ready for another foe; but another foe did not come. On the edge of the rocky shelf, the desperado reeled helplessly, and sank over.

A terrible cry rang from his lips as he hurtled downwards from the ledge.

Frank Richards' face was white.

It was to save their own lives that the chums of Cedar Creek had pulled trigger; but the tragedy chilled them to the heart.

Down below, in the canyon, they heard a tearing and rending, as the falling man crashed through a clump of firs growing on the canyon-side.

Then fainter, almost inaudible, came a dull thud on the rocks far below.

Then silence.

The silence was broken by a furious yell from the ranch-raiders on the ledge, but they did not advance. They kept well back beyond the bulge of the cliff, out of fire. The fate of the reckless ruffian who had chanced it was a warning to the rest.

Bob Lawless set his lips hard.

"He asked for it!" he muttered.

"It was him or us," said Beauclerc quietly. "Our lives hang on a thread, as it is."

"You shall die for that!" yelled Handsome Alf.

"Come on, then; we're waiting for you!" retorted Bob.

A curse was the only response.

But the rustlers did not come on. It was certain death to pass the bend of the cliff in the face of three levelled rifles, and they knew it.

"They're stopped," whispered Bob Lawless. "We could hold this corner against a hundred men, sure. But I reckon this ain't a healthy place to hang up our hats in, all the same, and I'm going to look for a way out. Keep your eyes peeled, and burn powder if you see so much as an eyelash."

"You bet!" said Frank.

Leaving his comrades on guard, Bob Lawless strode away along the ledge to reconnoitre.

He had hopes that it might lead into some open ravine, where the chums could trust for safety to their horses.

But only a score of yards from the corner he stopped, setting his teeth. The ledge ended there—narrowing away to the cliff, till it was so narrow that a mountain goat could have found no footing.

There was no outlet, save by the way the chums of Cedar Creek had come; the way that was blocked by Handsome Alf and his gang.

Bob Lawless rejoined his chums with a sombre face.

"Well?" said Frank Richards, glancing up from where he lay behind his extended rifle.

"We're at a dead end," said Bob. "The ledge ends yonder, in a drop. I reckoned that the Mexican was going somewhere when he came this way; but I guess he came along here

just to lead us into a trap after him. He did it, too; it was Demon that saved us. We're cornered, kids; there's no outlet this way, and I guess we can't go back."

Frank whistled. "And they'll know it, I guess," continued Bob. "We can hold the bend against them till doomsday; but they can hold it against us, too. We can't go back. We're stuck."

Beauclerc gave a glance upward at the cliff towering over them. It rose almost perpendicular, split here and there with fissures and ridges, with little clumps of sassafras and moss. Bob followed his glance, and shook his head.

"If you're thinking of climbing, Cherub, I reckon it's N.G.," he said. "We couldn't climb that cliff to save our lives."

"I suppose not," agreed the Cherub. "But there's the other way." He waved his hand towards the yawning gulf beside the ledge. "It's a hundred feet down or more, but the trail-ropes joined up would see us through."

Bob nodded slowly.

"I guess we might chance it, after

"They can't get at us, anyhow."

"Sure not."

It was well past noon now, and the sunshine fell hot into the rocky canyon, and upon the ledge where the schoolboys lay.

They ate a hurried lunch from the supply in their saddle-bags, while they watched and waited.

There was no sign of an attack from the rustlers; but they knew that the enemy were not gone. Sounds of boots scraping on the rocks came to their ears, and an occasional murmur of voices. Once they distinguished the tones Mexican Jo, swearing in Spanish. Some of the rustlers, at least, were camping there on the ledge, just round the bend, to cut off their escape. Knowing the ground, Handsome Alf was certain to be aware of the fact that there was no escape for the besieged schoolboys onward.

It was weary waiting on the sunlit ledge, with the danger of a rush at every moment, but the chums bore it stoically. The prospect of escape after dark cheered them, by sliding down the joined trail-ropes into the canyon below. Bob Lawless joined

Clink!

Bob started, as a stone fell from the cliff above, and tinkled on the rocky ledge beside him.

He glanced up, startled.

The next moment he gave a yell of warning.

"Quick—close to the cliff—quick!" He grasped his comrades and dragged them.

"What?" panted Frank.

His glance shot upward, and his very heart sickened as he saw a huge boulder whirling down towards the ledge from the cliff-top. No man was to be seen on the cliff; but he knew that it was the work of Handsome Alf. The Californian had not been wasting his time. While some of the rustlers watched the bend, the others had climbed over the hillside to the top of the cliff overlooking the ledge where the chums of Cedar Creek lay.

The stone that had startled Bob had been knocked away as the big boulder was rolled over the cliff.

Down came the huge mass of rock—weighing a ton or more—whizzing downward through the sunlit air.

Fortunately, it fell a little away

Another boulder rolled down the cliff.

This time it whizzed closer, and fell on the ledge. There as a terrible cry from one of the horses as it was struck by the fearful missile, and hurled over the edge. Boulder and horse together went whirling down the abyss.

Crack, crack!

Bob Lawless, though his face was white, was not off his guard, and he fired twice as a swarthy face came peering round the bend. And Mexican Jo sprang back with a howl of pain, his dark nose gashed by a bullet.

"Here comes another!" breathed Frank, his eyes upward.

Beauclerc sprang to his black horse, and dragged the animal close to the cliff. The intelligent animal crouched quietly there, as if he understood his danger. The other two horses, frightened and excited, were tearing furiously at their tethers, lashing with their hoofs, fortunately out of reach of the schoolboys.

Whizz! Crash!

Another boulder dropped on the ledge, smashing into a thousand rocky splinters. The tethers parted as the horses plunged madly in terror, and they raced up the ledge; and loud, shrill squeals told that the hapless animals had plunged over the verge into the canyon. Vere Beauclerc held Demon tightly by the bridle, but the black horse did not move; he was passive under his master's hand.

Frank Richards drew a panting breath. The terrible fate of the horses thrilled him with horror; and there was no telling how soon it might be their own. He scanned the cliff-face with his eye, and signed to his comrades, and they moved along to where the rock bulged a little over their heads, sheltering them. Another boulder came whizzing down from the cliff-top, and another and another, and another.

Crash, crash, crash!

Splinters of rock flew on all sides; but the chums of Cedar Creek, crouching close to the cliff, escaped the falling rocks. And meanwhile they had to watch for an attack; twice a hat was projected round the bend, and Bob Lawless sent a bullet through it.

Crash, crash, crash!

Boulder after boulder hurtled down, and rocky splinters rained on the schoolboys as they fell and smashed, though some of them missed the ledge entirely. But the fearful attack slackened at last, though it was not till dusk was falling that the last boulder came whizzing down from above.

Frank Richards wiped the perspiration from his brow.

His face glimmered white as chalk in the gathering gloom of night.

"I guess we've got to get out of this!" muttered Bob, licking his dry lips. "I reckon I couldn't stand much more of that! It'll be dark soon; and then—"

There was silence in the darkening canyon, save for an occasional sound from the unseen rustlers, on the watch round the bend. Frank Richards & Co., with throbbing hearts, waited for the last ray of light to disappear before they made their desperate venture to escape.

THE END.

(Be sure you read "The Cavern of Death" in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)



### ROUNDING UP A CRITTER!

Frank made a hasty cast with his lasso. It fell short of the horse which, with a loud squeal, thundered past him, making for the open country.

dark!" he muttered. "Not in the daylight; they'd see us and pick us off with their rifles. They're not all on the ledge yonder; there's some of them down below in the canyon, I reckon, and they'd spot us at once."

"After dark, then."

"I guess it's the only way," said Bob. "We should have to leave the horses. But we'll get them back sooner or later—when the sheriff gets hold of Handsome Alf, and puts a rope round his neck, confound him! We've got to stick it here till dark."

up the ropes, end to end, in readiness for the venture, when the time should come.

"I guess, if we get out of this alive, the sheriff will be glad to see us," he said. "It's clear we've run pretty close to Handsome Alf's stamping-ground; I reckon the lifted cattle are hidden in these foothills, not far away from us. That's why the hound is so keen to make sure that we don't get away and tell tales. But we'll get a cinch on him yet."

from the cliff, and barely struck the ledge as it passed, and then went thundering down the canyon-side, smashing into the fir-trees below.

But where it struck it tore away a mass from the ledge, and scattered a hundred splinters of rock.

There was a shrill neighing and squealing from the frightened horses. "Good heavens!" panted Frank Richards, white to the lips. "Good heavens!"

"That's only the first!" muttered Bob. "Look!"

### THE SCOUTS' POW-WOW CORNER.

By "Scoutmaster."

Foxes are, perhaps, the greatest criminals of wild life. A hungry fox will break into a chicken-run for food. He will taste blood in the first kill, and will then continue his bloodshed solely for the sport of killing. It is one of the exceptions which prove the rule; there are very few others.

For this reason, it is always the duty of the scout who sees a fox to warn the nearest farm-house. He may not even be thanked for doing so; but it is his duty, and it may be the means of saving a farmer from a heavy loss. Even if the fox has already paid one visit to the farm, and has left with only killing one or two birds, he is fairly sure to return, and when less hungry he will do far greater damage.

A chicken or hare killed by a fox is not spoilt for eating purposes. Many people will spurn anything that has been killed in a raid by a fox; but in reality it makes just as good food as a hare killed by a greyhound.

To the untrained, a massacre in a chicken-yard may convey nothing as to the criminal. It may be a stray dog; it may be a fox. There is nothing in their mind which points to one or the other. Yet really there is a difference, as clear as black from white. A dog will seize its prey anywhere; its teeth-marks may be found in any part of the bird's body. Not so with the fox. He is of the cunning, precise breed of the dog tribe. He only springs once, and that spring is straight and true, meant to kill, and seldom fails.

There is dead silence everywhere; everything is peace and quietude, the unsuspecting chicken is strolling peacefully about, searching the undergrowth for food, then—a sudden, quick movement of the bushes, a flash of teeth, a bounding, soft body, one stifled cry, and the lifeless bird is being carried away. Two seconds later neither bird nor fox are visible.

A fox springs so that it can seize the bird between the thigh and wings, thus crippling it; then follows a quick, sure snap at its head. During a massacre the fox will often bite its prey's head right off—a headless body always signifies the quick work of a fox. A massacre of fifty chickens may only take a few minutes.

A dog-fox is a lover of eggs. It will

frequently attack a nest, and although it will kill the mother, it will leave its body, and eagerly devour its eggs. The vixen is just as fond of eggs, and will enjoy a meal from them, but she will carry away the bird's body to supply food for her youngsters.

A fox, like a dog, will sometimes bury its kill during the winter-months. But, cunning that he is, he will be only able to return to it very cautiously. An old gamekeeper's trap for a fox is often to lay wait for a fox who has buried its kill, but it is very seldom that the fox who buries is the fox who is caught.

Besides burying for the sake of storage of food, the fox buries because it has a very great weakness for his food obtaining a gamey flavour. With this object he allows it to stay several days before eating it.

If you should come across the half-buried body of a hare, or the tail of a bird sticking out from an incompletely grave, you may be sure that it is the work of a fox, and not of a dog or a cat. Cunning as the fox is in all other matters, he is rather after the fashion of an ostrich with regard to burying its prey. A dog or a cat is more thorough, and a cat will sometimes bury a large body, returning to it day after day, enjoying a leisure meal, and afterwards burying it with

the greatest of care and caution. Not so Mr. Reynard. He takes the greatest possible trouble to bury the head and the body, but will leave the tail or the hind legs sticking out for all the world to see, and probably then, after all his trouble, will not deem it safe to return to it for a feed.

Snow is one of the worst natural enemies of the animals and birds of the wilds. They can hide from their fellows and their enemies, they can seek food in other pastures when they know their usual ground to be watched by enemies; but when King Snow drops a heavy mantle over their play-fields and hunting-grounds, it is then that the weaker animals have small chances against the strong.

The snow leaves tell-tale tracks upon the ground that even a tender-foot may follow; it covers up their food; it betrays their nests, and with the lack of food, they begin to feel the cold, and weaken, and are either killed or die off. It is very seldom that creatures covered with fur or feathers feel the cold; they are provided with the warmest coats in the world, yet when hunger sets in, it defeats these natural defences against the weather, and within three days of a fall of snow a rabbit's weight will be reduced by half.

THE END.



## AN EXCEEDINGLY FUNNY TALE OF JIMMY SILVER &amp; Co.



# Muffin the Mischief-Maker!

A Splendid Complete  
Story of the Chums of  
Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

## The 1st Chapter. The Fat of the Land!

Rasp, rasp!  
Putty Grace halted outside Study No. 2 on the Classical Side at Rookwood as the sound of a file in use came to his ears.  
The junior flung the study door open, revealing to his astonished gaze the fat figure of Reginald Muffin, who was diligently engaged in filing a piece of metal screwed up in a miniature clamp attached to the corner of the table. A little pile of metal filings strewed the table, and the sudden rush of air caused by the fan of the door as it was unceremoniously flung open, wafted them about the fat person of Tubby Muffin, who looked up in surprise.  
Putty Grace stared in astonishment.

"What's the little game?" he asked.

A guilty flush surmounted the cheeks of the fat junior.

"G-game! I'm making a key," he replied.

"A which?"  
"A key. You see, I've lost the key of my locker, so I thought I would try and make one myself."

"Oh!"  
Rasp, rasp!  
Tubby Muffin picked up the file and then resumed his task.

"Look here," ventured Putty Grace, "how am I to do my prep with that blessed row going on?"

Rasp, rasp!  
"Stop it!" roared Grace, with some heat. "That row sets my teeth on edge."

"It's nearly finished now," said Muffin. "Another five minutes and you can get on with your rotten prep."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Grace laconically. "I'll trot along and see Jimmy Silver for five minutes. If you're not finished by that time, you'll have to do it in the passage—savvy?"

Tubby did not answer. Instead, he bent over the clamp, and the file commenced to move forwards and backwards with renewed vigour, turning up a pile of shavings as it went.

Rasp, rasp, rasp!  
Putty Grace, with his fingers in his ears, left the study to have a chat with Jimmy Silver.

The next five minutes were very busy ones for Reginald Muffin, but the key was finished in the time, and he surveyed it with a look of pride.

"The only thing to do now is to see if it fits," he mused. "I'll try that to-night, though I don't want the beasts to spot me."

"Finished, porpoise?"  
It was the voice of Putty Grace, who had returned at the expiration of the five minutes.

"Yes, old chap," grinned Tubby Muffin.

"Don't 'old chap' me," said Grace darkly, "or I shall dot you one!"

And he drew out his books for preparation as Jones minor and Higgs strolled in.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jones minor. "Opening a workshop?"

"It's a new stunt of Tubby's; he's cutting a key," said Grace.

"What?"  
"That's it," broke in Tubby Muffin. "I've lost my locker key, and I've cut another."

"Hum!" grunted Higgs. "About the only thing you could cut is a jam-roll!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Beally, Higgs—"

"You had better clear up that rubbish. I want to do my prep," said Jones minor.

And Reginald Muffin unscrewed the clamp from the table and swept the metal shavings into the dustpan. This done, the occupants of Study No. 2 settled down to the uncongenial task of preparation, and silence reigned in that apartment save for the busy scratch of pens.

"Bedtime, kids."  
George Bulkeley, the good-natured captain of the school, put his head into the study and issued that command.

"Right-ho, old scout!" said Putty Grace cheerfully.

And the juniors tramped up to the Fourth Form dormitory, where, after the usual hum of conversation had died down, the Fourth Form tumbled in between the clean white sheets, and were soon in the land of dreams.

There was one junior who did not fall asleep, and that was Reginald Muffin. As a rule, the egregious Tubby was the first to fill the dormitory with his snores, and the last to awaken in the morning. But on this occasion he tossed restlessly in his bed as the old clock in the tower chimed out the hours of ten, eleven, and twelve. As the last stroke of twelve died away, Tubby Muffin scrambled out of bed, and began to hastily pull on his trousers over his pyjamas. With many a cautious glance he stealthily made his way over to the door, and his heart came into his mouth as it creaked under his touch. He stood still, trembling, but no sound came to his ears save the steady breathing of the occupants of the two rows of beds.

"Good!" he muttered.  
Tubby Muffin crept silently down the stairs to the domestic quarters. He passed the kitchen with bated breath, and tiptoed down the stairs to the cellar, which did duty as a store-room.

Fumbling in his pocket, the fat Classical withdrew a key—the key which was supposed to fit his locker—and, with many a nervous glance, he applied it to the lock.

Click!  
The door flew open, and, with excitement which nearly caused him to whoop with triumph, Tubby Muffin stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. A match flared up, and the end of a candle was produced from his capacious pockets, which, when its rays penetrated the gloom, revealed to the fat junior a vast quantity of food.

"My hat!" he murmured. "This is prime!"

And he smacked his lips in anticipation as he gazed upon the boxes of biscuits, tins of preserves, jars of jam the store-room held.

For the next half-hour the fat junior's jaws were busy as he sampled everything that took his fancy. Crumbs strewed the floor, and several open tins of preserves were lying at his feet, but even his voracious appetite had its limit, and he closed his innings, so to speak, with a refreshing bottle of ginger-beer. His fat face was smiling, and streaks of jam smeared his mouth, as he rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Better shove those empties out of the way," he muttered to himself, "or Mrs. Maloney might get suspicious."

And the fat Classical proceeded to conceal the empty tins and ginger-beer bottles behind the packing-cases. This done, he rolled to the doorway, blew out the candle, and was about to

close the door, when his gaze became riveted upon two points of light that were turned in his direction.

Tubby Muffin seemed rooted to the spot as those two points of light assumed the shape of a huge rat, which crawled towards him. Then the fat Classical's power of movement returned to him, and, with a terrified yell, he bolted down the passage as fast as his little legs could carry him. Up the stairs he went, regardless of the noise he was making, and only paused for breath as he halted outside the Fourth Form dormitory, shivering in every limb.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "It was awful!"

Footsteps sounded along the passage, and he suddenly realised that things would go hard with him if he was discovered outside his dormitory at that hour of the night. With a bound he sprang into the dormitory, and, without stopping to remove his trousers, crawled in between the sheets, where, two seconds later, to all appearances, he was fast asleep.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the figure of Mr. Bootles, clad in a dressing-gown and holding a lighted candle, peer in at the open door of the dormitory. He, seemingly satisfied that every member of the Fourth Form was asleep, silently withdrew a moment later.

Tubby Muffin breathed a sigh of relief as Mr. Bootles' footsteps died away, and, with a satisfied grunt, turned over, and was very soon snoring in earnest. But his sleep was troubled by dreams, in which the rat figured prominently, so that when morning broke, Tubby Muffin, for once in a way, was thankful, and Jimmy Silver & Co. rubbed their eyes in amazement as they beheld his ample figure before the wash-basin on the first stroke of the rising-bell.

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Who said that the age of miracles had passed?"

## The 2nd Chapter. Scrivvens is Sacked!

"Scrivvens, what are you doing here?"

Mrs. Maloney, the house-dame, addressed that question to Joseph Scrivvens, a young man who had recently been engaged as cook. Scrivvens was standing in the open doorway of the store-room, holding several empty ginger-beer bottles and preserve-tins in his arms. Mrs. Maloney's tone was not gracious. The store-room was her responsibility, and it was forbidden for any other member of the domestic staff to enter that apartment.

"What are you doing here?" she repeated severely.  
Scrivvens turned and confronted her.

"I found the door open—" he began.

"Indeed!"  
Mrs. Maloney's tone was very expressive, and the cook blushed hotly.

"So I entered to investigate," he resumed. "Someone has been here and helped themselves. Look at these!"

And he motioned to the empty bottles and tins that he held.

Mrs. Maloney's eyes nearly started from her head as she beheld the remains of Tubby Muffin's feed.

"You rascal!" she exclaimed heatedly. "Pilfering! Thank heavens I've found you out!"

"What!" exclaimed Scrivvens, with equal heat. "Mrs. Maloney, ma'am, how dare you accuse me of

pilfering! I'm as honest as the day, I am!"

"Don't tell untruths!" said Mrs. Maloney severely. "You will only make your case worse than it already is!"

"But, I tell you, ma'am, I found the door open as I was passing. I've only been here two minutes!" exclaimed the cook excitedly.

"I don't believe you!" said the house-dame decidedly. "How could anyone else open the door? There's only one key, and you know where I keep it—the rest of the staff don't!"

"I don't know anything about it, ma'am!" pleaded Scrivvens. "You are wrongfully accusing me—honest, you are!"

"Then what are you doing with these empty bottles and things?" demanded Mrs. Maloney, with asperity.

"I was going to bring them along to you, ma'am," replied Scrivvens. "Nothing of the sort, sir! You were going to conceal the evidence of your guilt!" exclaimed the house-dame.

"I tell you—" began Scrivvens, crimson with wrath.

"Come with me to the Head," said Mrs. Maloney heatedly, "and we'll see what he has to say! I'm responsible for those stores, Scrivvens, and don't forget it!"

"But, ma'am—" "Follow me!"  
And the house-dame, with the unfortunate Scrivvens in her wake, made her way over to Dr. Chisholm's study.

Tap!  
"Come in!" came the kindly voice of the head.

Mrs. Maloney and Scrivvens marched in, and Dr. Chisholm looked up in surprise at his visitors.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Dear me! What is it, Mrs. Maloney?"

"I have a complaint to make, sir!" began the house-dame tartly.

"Indeed! What is it?" asked Dr. Chisholm.

"I found Scrivvens in the store-room this morning, and numerous articles of food are missing!" said Mrs. Maloney.

"What?" exclaimed the Head severely.

"Scrivvens must be the thief, sir! He was—" "It's a lie!" broke in the temporary cook. "A downright lie!"

"Silence, Scrivvens!" commanded the Head. "I'll hear what you have to say in a moment! Pray proceed, Mrs. Maloney!"

"Scrivvens is the only member of the staff who knows where I keep the key of the store-room," went on the house-dame. "I found him with his arms loaded with empty preserve-tins!"

"Hum!" ejaculated Dr. Chisholm. "What have you to say, Scrivvens?"

"I deny the charge, sir!" exclaimed the cook.

"What were you doing at the store-room?" asked the Head. "You are aware that it is forbidden for any member of the staff, other than Mrs. Maloney, to enter the store-room, I presume?"

"I am fully aware of the fact, sir. I happened to be passing this morning, and, seeing the door open, I naturally looked in."

"If what you state is correct, Scrivvens, why didn't you refer the matter to Mrs. Maloney?" asked the Head.

"I was about to do so, sir, when she came in—" faltered the cook.

"Hum!"  
"He's not telling the truth, sir!" exclaimed the house-dame wrathfully. "He was hiding the evidence of his guilt—or, rather, he attempted to!"

"It's a lie!" burst out Scrivvens. "Mrs. Maloney does me a great wrong! Besides, sir," he added, "how could I have eaten all those things in the time?"

Mrs. Maloney snorted.  
"He must have visited the store-room in the night, sir," she said.

"Ah!" said Dr. Chisholm. "That reminds me! Mr. Bootles was awakened during the night by some disturbance originating from the domestic quarters. He visited each dormitory in turn, but all the boys were in their beds and asleep, and I can only conclude, Scrivvens, that you were responsible for that disturbance."

"What?"  
Words failed the unfortunate Scrivvens. He almost staggered.

"Enough!" commanded the Head. "Mrs. Maloney caught you in the act of transferring the evidence of your guilt to some place of secrecy. I must ask you to leave the school!"

"But this is rank injustice, sir!" burst out the cook. "Never before in the whole of my life have I been accused of stealing, and, as my references will testify, I've been beyond suspicion!"

"I'm sorry, Scrivvens," said the Head, "but you'll have to leave my employ!"

"Won't you reconsider your decision, sir?" pleaded the cook. "I'm innocent!"

"I have given my decision, my good man, and I abide by it!" exclaimed the Head, a little testily. "Go!"

"B-b-b-but—" "Silence! Leave my study!"  
And Scrivvens, with a heart as heavy as lead, and wearing an injured expression left Dr. Chisholm's study, followed by the house-dame.

"You can think yourself lucky, Scrivvens," said Mrs. Maloney. "that Dr. Chisholm didn't give you in charge as well!"

That was like putting a red flag before a bull, to the cook. He told her what he thought of her, and by the time he had finished, Mrs. Maloney had assumed the colour of a lobster.

"You scoundrel!" she exclaimed. "How dare you talk to me like that—you, a thief, too!"

But Scrivvens, feeling much better now that his pent-up emotions had found a vent, was striding away, and he neither heard the house-dame's words, nor saw the fist that she shook after his retreating figure. He was going to seek solace with Sergeant Kettle, with whom he was on very friendly terms. To be sacked from the school for an offence which he hadn't committed had absolutely taken the wind out of his sails, and his bitterness towards the Head, and Mrs. Maloney especially, increased as he strode towards the school tuckshop.

Two juniors were coming out of that establishment as the cook walked in with a face a picture of despair.

"What's up?" asked Jimmy Silver. "I've been sacked, Master Silver!" groaned Scrivvens. "Sacked for an offence I haven't committed!"

"What?"  
The discharged cook there and then confided his trouble to the junior captain, and as Jimmy Silver learned the facts, his face grew troubled. He liked Scrivvens, and he believed his version of the story.

"I—I say, I'm awfully sorry, Scrivvens," he faltered. "But perhaps something will turn up to prove your innocence!"

"I don't think so, Master Silver," said the miserable cook. "But, still, I hope so, too!"

And he entered the tuckshop, leaving Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell in a thoughtful mood.

## The 3rd Chapter.

### A Deputation to the Head!

"Which I think you've been treated very unfair, Scrivvens," was Sergeant Kettle's opinion, when Scrivvens had related to him his grievance. "Very unfair!"

Mr. Scrivvens wrung his hand warmly.

"I'm glad you believe in me," he said gratefully. "But what am I to do? No one will take me into their employ with the character of a thief?"

Sergeant Kettle did not answer for a moment. He was deep in thought.

"I've been reading a lot lately about strikes," he said, at length. "My hey—I'm going to emulate the deeds of these 'ere people I've been reading about."

Scrivvens stared in astonishment. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Why," exclaimed the old soldier, drawing himself up to his full height, "I'm going to call a meeting—I'm going to champion the oppressed!"

"But—" "It's all right, my boy, leave it to me. I'll close my shop and we'll call a meeting of the domestic staff. Justice is justice!"

And with that wise remark, Sergeant Kettle commenced to close his shop, whilst the discharged cook regarded him in astonishment.

"Come on!" ordered the old soldier, when the shop was neat and tidy. "We'll hold the meeting in the kitchen."

And he marched off with his arm linked in that of the bewildered Scrivvens. Arrived at the kitchen, Sergeant Kettle sent Tupper, the page-boy, to gather together the remainder of the domestic staff at Rookwood. In five minutes they were all present, most of them wearing expressions of inquiry.

The old soldier mounted a chair and



surveyed his audience like a general reviewing his troops.

"Comrades," he began, "I have called this meeting to point out to you the injustice wot's been done in this school!"

"Good old sergeant!"

"Ear, 'ear!"

Sergeant Kettle beamed upon his fellow-workers and cleared his throat. "Our respected friend Mr. Scrivvens," he resumed, "has been wrongfully accused of stealing from the store-room, and—"

"Shame, shame!"

"Good old Scrivvy!"

The domestic staff instantly sympathised with the discharged cook. He was very popular with them all, and he reddened with pleasure as he bowed acknowledgment.

"Thank you very much!" he faltered.

"As I was sayin'," went on Sergeant Kettle, "our respected comrade has been fired out for an act which he h'aint done, and I think it's up to us to march in a body to the 'Ead and make him see reason."

"Ear, 'ear!"

"Go it, Kettle!"

"If 'e don't," roared Sergeant Kettle, "we all 'and in our resignations until our friend 'ere is reinstated!"

"That's the idea!"

"Every time."

"Britons never shall be slaves!"

Scrivvens had to tell the story of his grievance over again, and the domestic staff overwhelmed him with sympathy.

"The first move," bellowed the old soldier, in his authoritative voice, "is to form a deputation to the 'Ead, and I offers to be leader and spokesman. Do you agree?"

The domestic staff replied in unison:

"Yes!"

"I thank you, my comrades! Then we'll start now. Fall in behind me, and we'll see that fair play is done!"

The domestic staff formed up in twos behind the old soldier, and at a given word, marched off in the direction of the Head's study.

The Fistical Four, who were passing, stared in astonishment as the deputation came along.

"What's the giddy game?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"We're seeing the 'Ead. Master Silver!" grunted Sergeant Kettle.

"Oh, my hat!"

"He will be pleased!"

The deputation tramped along the passage. Dr. Chisholm's study was reached, and the old soldier rapped boldly on the door.

"Come in!"

The deputation marched in.

"What does this mean? Bless my soul! Dear me!" spluttered Dr. Chisholm, in amazement. "What are you all doing here away from your duties at this time of day? Explain yourselves."

The majority of the staff began to feel nervous, and edged towards the door, but old Sergeant Kettle put his back to it and glared at them as though they were a lot of raw recruits on their first parade.

"Steady, boys!" he whispered hoarsely. "Stand fast!"

"You appear to be the leader, sergeant," exclaimed the Head, turning to the old soldier. "State your business as quickly as possible; I am very busy!"

"Well, sir, it's like this 'ere," began Sergeant Kettle. "We want our comrade, Scrivvens, reinstated."

Now that the old soldier had broken the ice, his followers gathered courage.

"Hear, hear!"

"That's it, sir!"

Dr. Chisholm's brows contracted in a frown, and his eyes gleamed.

"It is out of the question!" he said firmly. "I have already made my decision, and I am not prepared to alter it!"

"But Scrivvens is innocent, sir. I've known Scrivvens a long time now, sir," said the old soldier. "And a more honest fellow I've never met!"

"Be that as it may," said the Head.

"He's no longer in my employ!"

"But he must be reinstated!" exclaimed Sergeant Kettle, raising his voice in his growing excitement. "We've agreed to stand by him, ain't we?"

And the deputation chorused an assent:

Dr. Chisholm was getting angry.

"I will hear no more of what you have to say, Sergeant Kettle! You will go back to your duties!"

"Beggin' your pardon, we do nothing of the sort, sir!" exclaimed the old soldier. "We don't leave 'ere until our comrade is taken back to your employ!"

"What?" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm

testily. "Am I to be threatened by my own staff? Go at once!"

"We stays 'ere, sir!" roared the old soldier. "If you don't take Scrivvens back we'll all come out on strike!"

"What—what?" exclaimed the Head. "How dare you, Kettle? You are discharged!"

"If I goes, the whole lot of us goes, don't we?" said Sergeant Kettle to his following.

"We does!"

"Then you are all discharged!" shouted Dr. Chisholm, crimson with anger. "My decision with regard to Scrivvens is irrevocable!"

"We don't consider ourselves discharged!" said Sergeant Kettle. "We are out on strike—strike! Do you hear, sir?"

"Kindly leave my study at once!" rapped out the Head. "I give you twenty-four hours to collect your baggage and leave the school premises!"

"Very good, sir!" said Sergeant Kettle grimly.

And, with many a warlike glance hurled in the Head's direction, the deputation left the study.

"Oh, 'e'll come round later on!" confided Sergeant Kettle to his "union." "Meanwhile, we does no work! You hear?"

"Right-ho!"

And the crowd of servants dispersed to their quarters to wait for the Head to "come round."

#### The 4th Chapter.

##### All Hands to the Wheel!

"On strike! Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"Great snakes!"

"Oh, my hat!"

These remarks greeted Dr. Chisholm's

"Hear, hear!"

"Hope the new servants don't arrive for a day or two!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "I rather like this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The kitchen presented a busy spectacle. A score of juniors with coats off and sleeves rolled back, were wiring in. Very soon the pleasant odour of cooking food began to assail the nostrils of the willing juniors.

Conroy, the Colonial junior, came staggering into the kitchen with a huge pile of plates stacked one on top of the other. Arthur Edward Lovell, who was about to lift the lid of the giant saucepan in which the cabbage was boiling, leaped backwards with a well of anguish, as the burning steam caught his wrist.

"Ow-yow!" he yelled.

Crash!

Conroy tried to avoid Lovell's backward leap, but without success, and the pile of plates rocked uncertainly, and finally crashed to the ground, where they reposed in a thousand little pieces.

"You dangerous maniac!" roared Conroy. "Look at those plates!"

"Blow the blessed plates!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Why didn't you look where you were going?"

"You howling ass, how was I to know you were going to leap backwards?" roared Conroy.

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

"Good old Lovell!"

"I've burnt my blessed wrist!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Blow the servants, blow the cabbage, and blow the blessed plates!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the morning passed off without a hitch, and when lunch-time came round the temporary cooks

came the high-pitched voice of the fat Classical.

"Jolly good idea!" mumbled Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver sat up in his bed, and was about to throw a slipper at the talking junior when Muffin's voice increased in volume.

"Key fitted the store-room a treat! He, he, he!"

Jimmy Silver was all attention now, and he returned the slipper to its accustomed place beside the bed. He was on the verge of a discovery, he felt sure.

"That beast Mrs. Maloney didn't suspect me!" rambled on the fat Classical junior.

The rest of the sentence was unintelligible, but what Jimmy Silver had already heard gave him an idea.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

"The fat rogue! I—"

The words froze on his lips as Tubby Muffin flung out his arms, yawned, glanced cautiously around, and scrambled out of bed. He had wakened up.

"Wonder what he's up to now?" mused Jimmy Silver, as he watched the fat junior pull on his trousers and make for the door.

Tubby Muffin stealthily opened the door and disappeared on the other side. His disappearance was a signal for action from the junior captain, who scrambled out of his bed and crept over to that occupied by Lovell. He shook that junior, and placed his hand over his mouth to smother the exclamations that Arthur Edward tried to utter when he awoke.

"S'sh!"

"Wharrer—marrer? 'Tain't rising-bell yet!" gurgled Arthur Edward Lovell, yawning.

jelly, and his fat little legs trembled visibly.

"You're the thief, after all!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "It wasn't poor old Scrivvens!"

"Really, you chaps, I—" stammered the fat Classical. "I—I heard a noise, so I came down to investigate, and I—"

"Don't tell any more whoppers!" hooted Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, really, Silver!" said Tubby Muffin, with an attempt at injured innocence. "I tell you I heard a noise, and came down to investigate!"

"And this is how you investigate, is it?" asked Raby, pointing to the pork-pie the fat Classical was still grasping in his podgy hand.

"That's 'it—I mean—I— Oh dear!"

Tubby Muffin's inventive mind failed him at that moment. He was fairly in the toils, and he realised it.

"You're a worm!" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "A chap that will let another fellow—and innocent at that—get the sack for an offence he never committed ought to be drawn, slaughtered, and boiled in oil!"

"Really, Silver, you do me an injustice! A fellow with my principles would scorn to stoop so low!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly.

"Where is the key of this room?" growled the leader of the Fistical Four.

"K-k-key?" stammered the fat Classical. "W-w-what key?"

"You know what I mean, you fat rotter! You gave the whole show away talking in your sleep!" said Jimmy Silver.

Muffin's face was a study.

"Oh, collar him!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell, who was beginning to shiver with the cold.

The fat junior backed away hastily, and in doing so dislodged a pile of biscuit-tins that were stacked behind him.

Crash, crash!

"That's done it!" said Jimmy Silver. "The whole blessed school will be awake now!"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Tubby Muffin. "What shall I do?"

Before the question could be answered there was the sound of hurrying feet, and a second later Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, appeared with a lamp in his hand. He nearly jumped clear of the floor when he saw Muffin and Jimmy Silver & Co. grouped in the store-room in semi-night attire.

"Bless my soul! Silver, Muffin, what does this mean?"

"It means, sir, that Muffin has a confession to make!" said the leader of the Fistical Four.

"A confession—what do you mean? Why are you out of your dormitory?" gasped Mr. Bootles, in astonishment.

"Own up!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell, giving Muffin a prod in the back which pushed him to the front. Tubby Muffin was so frightened that he still clasped the pork-pie he had been about to demolish when the Fistical Four had interrupted his orgy.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he spluttered, in his confusion. "But Scrivvens did not pinch the grub from here!"

"What?"

"You see, sir, it was me!" confessed Tubby Muffin miserably. "I—I made a key to fit the store-room lock and thought it would be a ripping idea to have a proper feed now and again."

"You wretched boy! Then all this trouble with the staff has been caused by your unnatural desire to fill your stomach with eatables?"

"That's it, sir! You see, I'm under-fed and require a lot of nourishment!" mumbled Tubby Muffin.

"Bless my soul! You will appear before Dr. Chisholm in the morning, and meanwhile you had better all go back to your beds."

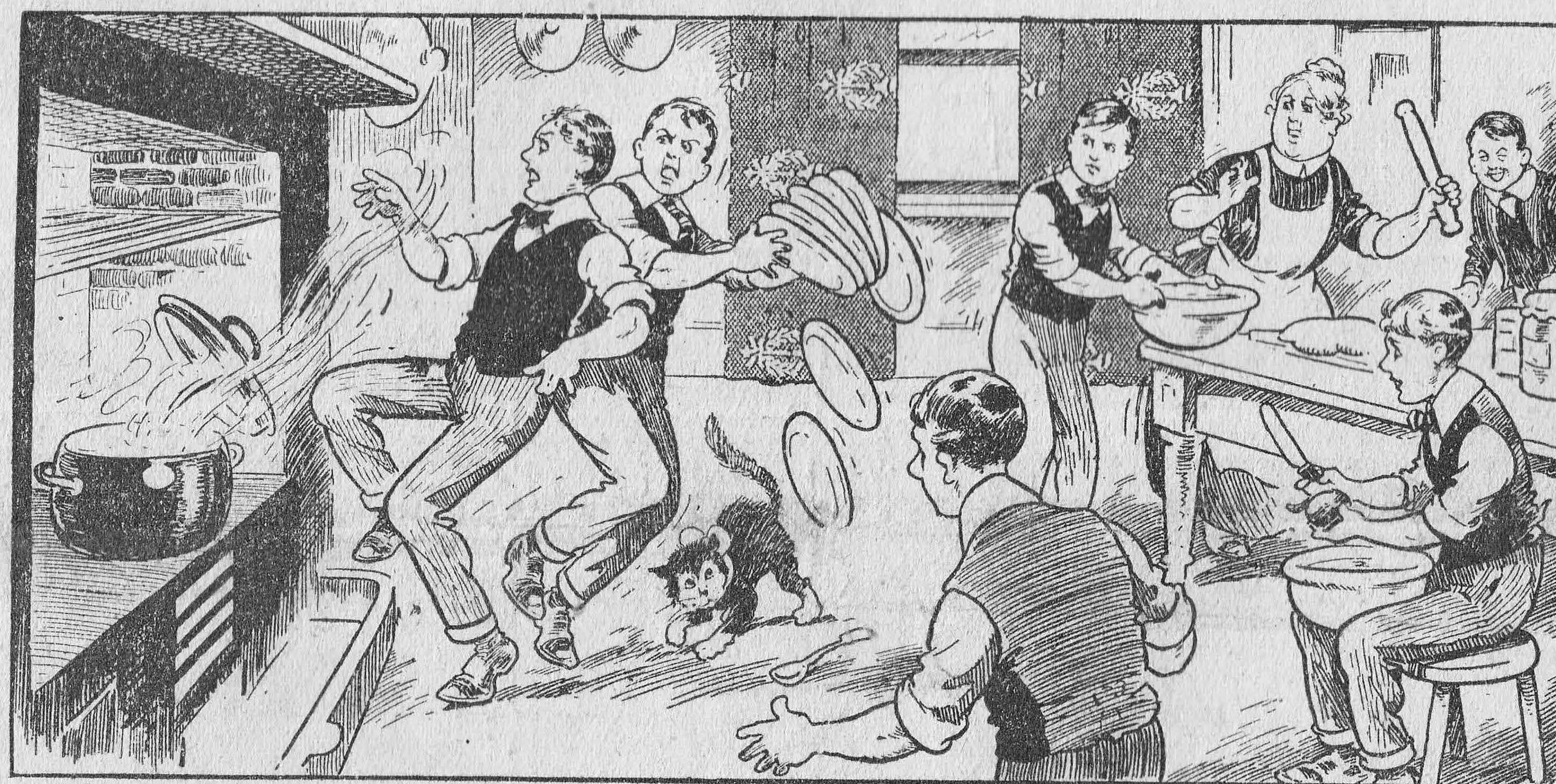
"Good-night, sir!"

The juniors returned to their dormitory, where the Fistical Four tumbled into bed and slept the sleep of the just. Not so Tubby Muffin; his sleep was attended by dreams in plenty, and expulsion from Rookwood loomed prominently in all of them.

A forlorn figure crawled away from Dr. Chisholm's study the next morning, and that figure was Tubby Muffin. The fat junior had received a severe wigg from the Head, followed by a more severe caning. The servants came back to their duties, and Sergeant Kettle's role as Champion of the Oppressed was short-lived. As Arthur Edward Lovell expressed it, everything in the garden was lovely—thanks to Silver's timely discovery of Muffin the Mischief Maker.

THE END.

(Be sure you read "The Rookwood Secret Society" in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)



#### DOMESTIC TROUBLES!

Lovell leaped backwards as the scalding steam from the saucepan caught his wrist. Conroy tried to avoid him, but with no success. The pile of plates came crashing down, to break on the floor into a thousand pieces!

holm's announcement to the effect that all the domestic staff except Mrs. Maloney had struck.

"I want all of you, my boys, to put up with this sudden inconvenience. This movement on the part of the staff will necessitate any of you with a knowledge of cookery reporting to the house-dame. Lunch will be served as usual, but you'll have to wait on yourselves. Kindly keep the building as clean as you can until I can engage a new staff," said Dr. Chisholm.

Quite a hubbub of conversation ran the round. The situation appealed to the younger members of the school, who saw a chance of missing lessons if they were engaged on domestic duties.

"There will be no lessons this afternoon, under the circumstances," went on Dr. Chisholm. "And none of you are to molest or annoy the discharged servants. I have given them twenty-four hours to collect their things together and leave the school. You may go!"

The juniors streamed out at a rush, and the seniors followed at a more leisurely pace.

Mrs. Maloney was surrounded by willing helpers in a moment, and the foremost amongst them were the Fistical Four. Tubby Muffin, for reasons of his own, was keeping well in the background.

"I'll peel the potatoes!" said Jimmy Silver, rolling back his sleeves.

"And I'll do the cabbages."

"And I'll help, too."

Mrs. Maloney beamed upon her youthful helpmates, and each was given a job towards the preparation of lunch.

"This is better than swotting at mouldy lessons!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

lined up with their dishes, and marched into the dining-hall, where they were received with cheers from their hungry fellows.

After the meal came the washing-up, and, after a few breakages, this passed off satisfactorily. The volunteer cooks felt that they deserved well of their country, and, after a few words from Dr. Chisholm, thanking them for their services, the juniors departed from the kitchen in high humour.

Most of the school had their tea in their studies, so that the absence of the domestic staff was not missed at that meal.

"I wonder how long this state of affairs is going to last?" said Jimmy Silver to his chums, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, who were seated at the table in their study doing their prep.

"All this bother over that chap Scrivvens!" said Jimmy Silver. "I believe the chap is innocent, though!"

The chums were still discussing the servants' strike when Bulkeley, the captain of the school, put his head in at the study, and announced that it was time for bed.

And the juniors trooped up the staircase to the Fourth Form dormitory.

After the usual chatter the juniors settled down to sleep, but Jimmy Silver, try as he might, could not sleep for more than half an hour at a stretch.

Every time the clock in the old tower chimed out the hour, its ringing peal awoke the junior captain.

"Oh, hang it!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "Blowed if I can sleep—Hullo! Tubby's talking in his sleep!"

To the ears of the junior captain

"Get up!" whispered Jimmy Silver. "Muffin's just gone out—to the store-room, I believe!"

"What?"

"He's been talking in his sleep, and I heard him," said Jimmy Silver. "I believe it's he who's been scoffing the grub!"

Lovell was out of bed in an instant, and began to pull on his trousers as Jimmy Silver awoke Raby and Newcome.

Five minutes later the Fistical Four crept down the staircase, and made their way over to the domestic quarters. They stepped silently down the passage where the store-room was situated. They nudged each other when they saw a flickering light from underneath the store-room door.

"We've got him!" whispered Arthur Edward Lovell.

"S'sh!" cautioned Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four crept towards the door, which appeared to be ajar.

#### The 5th Chapter.

##### All's Well that Ends Well!

"Altogether, you chaps!" said Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four pushed open the door of the store-room with a bound.

"Oh dear!"

Tubby Muffin, perched upon a biscuit-tin, and with a pork-pie half-way to his mouth, seemed paralysed for the moment. His eyes started from their sockets as he beheld the angry faces of the Fistical Four.

"So we've caught you, you fat rotter!" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Oh crumbs!"

The quick changes that passed over the face of Tubby Muffin would have done credit to a contortionist at that moment. He sat quivering like a