

Bumper Christmas Number!

The BOYS' FRIEND 1 1/2

No. 1,020. Vol. XX. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending December 25th, 1920.

The Phantom Abbot of Rookwood!

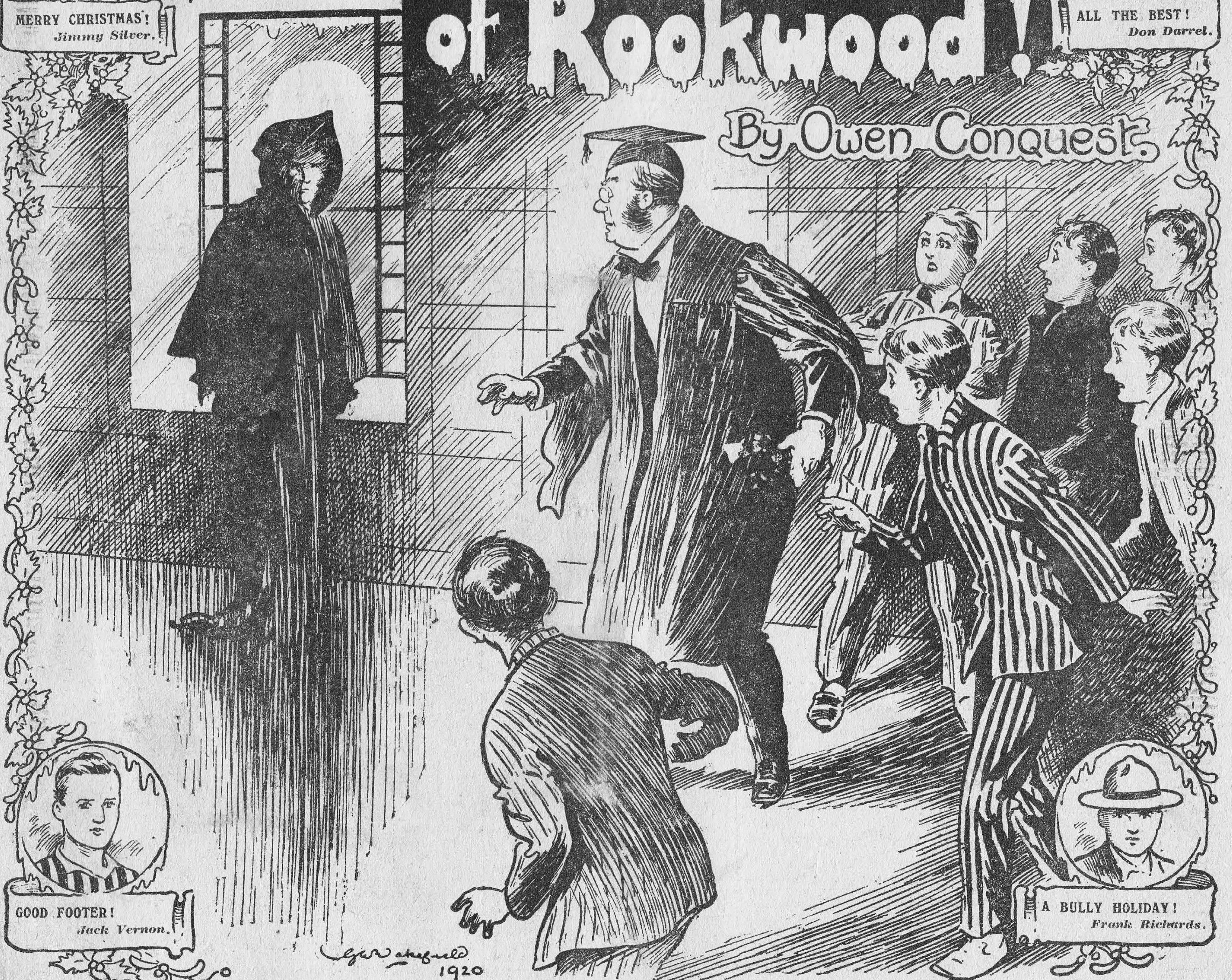
By Owen Conquest.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!
Jimmy Silver.



ALL THE BEST!
Don Darrel.



GOOD FOOTER!
Jack Vernon.



A BULLY HOLIDAY!
Frank Richards.

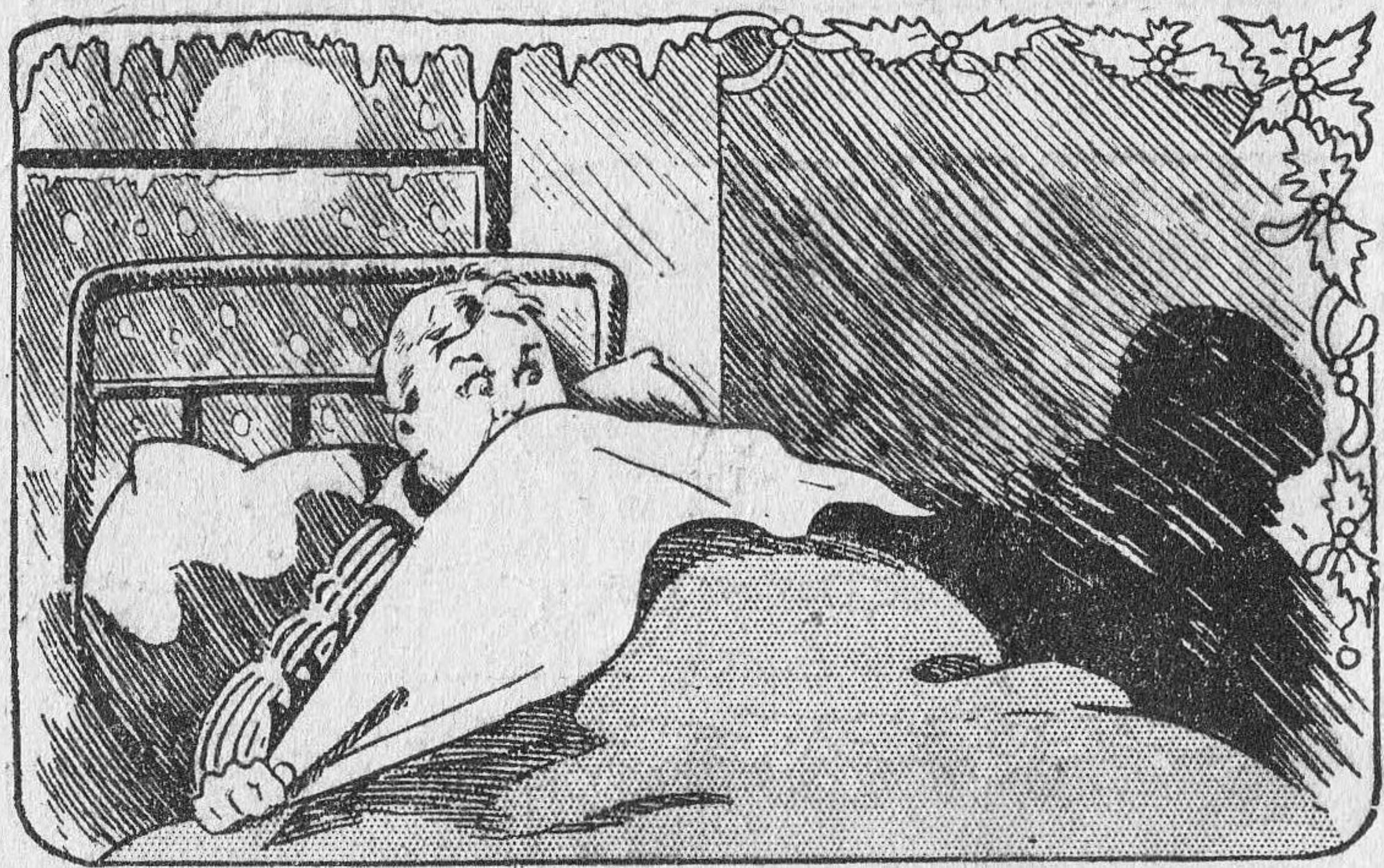
Owen Conquest
1920

THE GHOST WALKS! The juniors stood rooted to the spot, whilst the Phantom Abbot of Rookwood slowly approached them.

GREAT NEW COMPETITION! £10 in Prizes Weekly for Readers!

THE PHANTOM ABBOT OF ROOKWOOD!

By OWEN CONQUEST.



The 1st Chapter.

The Phantom Abbot!

"What's that?"

"Quiet!"

"But—but wha-a-at's that?"

It was close on midnight. Rookwood School was hushed in sleep—not a light glimmered from any of the windows. Outside, in the quadrangle, the snow was piled white and thick, drifting deep against the trunks of the old beeches. A hoarse wind whistled round the old roofs and red chimneys.

The door of the Fourth Form dormitory had opened softly, and half a dozen figures had stolen out with cautious footsteps. Jimmy Silver led the way, with a pillow in his hand. And each of the juniors who followed him grasped a pillow. Rookwood School was soon to break up for the Christmas holidays. And Jimmy Silver & Co. had decided unanimously to wind up the term with a raid on the Modern quarters.

In the dormitory of the Modern Fourth, Tommy Dodd & Co were sleeping the sleep of the just. They were to be awakened—quite suddenly—if Jimmy Silver's programme was carried out.

But as they emerged into the passage, there was a startled gasp from Arthur Edward Lovell.

The passage was flooded with moonlight, from the high window at the end—the shadow of the window-bars lay in black lines on a silvery floor. Save for the hoarse wind moaning round the chimneys, all was silent; and the moonlit passage, dim and shadowy in the corners, had a ghostly look. Lovell caught Jimmy Silver's arm, and stopped.

"I—I heard something!" he muttered.

"Only your teeth chattering, ass," answered Jimmy Silver. "Don't jaw, old chap. You don't want to wake up Bootles, I suppose?"

"But I heard—"

"I—I thought I heard something—" muttered Raby.

"Rot!"

"So did I," said Newcome, in a whisper. "A—a sort of sound like—"

"Like what?" grunted Jimmy Silver impatiently.

"Like—like a robe swishing."

"What rot!"

"Hold on a minute, though," said Lovell, in a low voice. "We don't want to run into anybody. There'd be a row about being out of dorm at this time of night."

"We sha'n't be home till morning, at this rate!" grunted Jimmy Silver. But he stopped and listened.

It was certainly rather a serious matter for Fourth-Formers to be out of their dormitory at the witching hour of midnight. Their Form-master, Mr. Bootles, or the Head, would not be likely to understand that it was necessary to rag the Moderns before Rookwood broke up for Christmas. If some master or prefect was still up, it behoved the heroes of the Classical Fourth to be very careful.

The juniors listened intently. The moonlight, streaming from the high window, fell upon them, and cast lengthy shadows behind them along the corridor.

In the silence there came a strange sound—an eerie sound. Jimmy Silver started as he heard it, and felt a thrill at his heart.

It was a sound like the swishing of a long robe upon the floor, and it came from a turn of the corridor ahead of the listening juniors.

Jimmy Silver & Co stared at one another.

Every one of them had heard it now, and even Jimmy was not in-

clined to move on towards the mysterious, eerie sound.

"Wha-a-at is it?" breathed Lovell.

"It—it can't be a g-g-ghost!" muttered Oswald.

"Shurrup!" whispered Jimmy.

The same startling thought had come into his own mind—and was not to be dismissed so easily in the moonlit corridor at midnight as in the daytime. In the dormitory that night, before going to sleep, the Fourth-Formers had been telling ghost stories from bed to bed; and they had been discussing the phantom abbot, who, so the story ran, haunted the shades of Rookwood when the snow was on the ground.

The thought came very unpleasantly into Jimmy Silver's mind just then. Of course, ghosts were all "rot," but—

Swish, swish!

The sound was faint and low, and it was coming nearer.

The juniors stood dumb.

Somebody or something was coming towards the moonlit window far in advance of where they stood—something that would emerge into the moonlight in a few seconds.

The juniors caught their breath.

They knew that that slow, swishing sound could not be made by master or prefect. It was made by a long robe sweeping the floor—such a robe as the phantom abbot was supposed to drape around his skeleton limbs.

They shivered.

Swiss-ssh!

The juniors stood rooted to the floor, their faces white in the moonlight. They had forgotten all about the intended raid upon the Moderns now. They stood, with parted lips, and staring eyes, their gaze fixed upon the pool of moonlight beneath the window, where the ghostly figure would emerge into view—

Without the sound of a tread, with only that low, faint swishing of ghostly garments, a tall, dark figure loomed up in the moonlight.

It stopped a moment under the window, and the ghostly light of the moon fell full upon it.

The long shadow it cast reached nearly to the spot where the horrified juniors stood.

For a moment it stood still, motionless, and the juniors stood rooted, staring at it. Then it moved on, slow and stately, towards them.

The movement broke the spell.

With a gasp of terror, the Fourth-Formers scrambled back into the dormitory, colliding with one another in their hurry. Jimmy Silver closed the door with a sharp snap, and instinctively turned the key.

"Good heavens!" gasped Lovell, through his chattering teeth.

"The—the ghost—"

"Hush!"

"Listen!"

Swish! came from the silence without.

The juniors held their breath.

The draping garment brushed the door of the dormitory, and their hearts stood still. Was it coming in—coming in through the locked door? At that fearful moment nothing seemed impossible.

They almost cried out in relief as the sound passed, and died away in the distance.

There was silence, deep and still.

The phantom—if phantom it was—had gone.

"The—the ghost!"

Raby muttered the words, his teeth chattering.

Jimmy Silver drew a long, deep breath. His heart was beating painfully. The affair had been so strange, so uncanny, that even "Uncle James," of Rookwood, had been robbed of his usual nerve.

What was it that had passed in the corridor?

A burglar? Jimmy knew it was not that. A burglar would not be parading the corridors at midnight with slow and solemn tread. A fellow playing ghost—that was impossible, too, for the dark figure was a head taller than any fellow at Rookwood.

What—what was it? There was no reply to that. Nobody in the Classical Fourth felt disposed to run the gauntlet in the haunted corridor.

It was nearly an hour before the startled juniors turned in again. But they turned into bed at last, though it was still longer before they slept. Never had the Classical Fourth been so glad to hear the rising-bell as they were when it clanged out, at last, in the cold December morning.

The 2nd Chapter.

Captain Digby Lends a Hand.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were down early in the morning. They were still feeling shaken by the strange adventure of the night, and they were glad to get out, and breathe the keen air in the quad, and tramp through the snow. Now that the day had come, ghostly fears were a thing of the past; but the effect of the phantom-like apparition in the corridor was still upon their nerves.

"We—we ought to tell somebody," muttered Arthur Edward Lovell. "The thing—whatever it was—may come again to-night." He shivered. "I wouldn't go through that again for anything. Oughtn't we to tell the Head or Mr. Bootles, Jimmy?"

Jimmy wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It sounds such rot, in the daylight," he said. "And—and we'd have to own up to being out of the dorm. That means a row with Bootles."

"But—"

"What do you think it was, Jimmy?" asked Raby. "Not a ghost?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"There isn't such a thing as a ghost," he answered. "We're not idiots enough to believe in spiritualism, I suppose?"

"But what was it, then?"

"I don't know," said Jimmy Silver frankly. "I simply can't make it out. I remember Peele played ghost once, and startled us; but this wasn't a chap playing ghost. I'd like to tell somebody, but I don't know about telling Bootles. He'd only think we'd been frightened by a shadow."

"It wasn't a shadow," said Newcome.

"Bootles would think it was—so would the Head. What's the good of telling a ghost story in the daytime?" growled Jimmy Silver. "The Moderns would cackle no end if they heard the story."

The Fistical Four tramped on in moody silence. They were perplexed and worried by the strange apparition, but they felt a natural reluctance to face ridicule on the subject; and it was certain that everyone outside the Classical Fourth would ridicule the story.

"Hallo! There's Digby!" said Raby, as a tall young man came striding through the snow from the direction of the gates.

The Fistical Four "capped" Captain Digby respectfully.

Mr. Bootles' nephew glanced at them and nodded.

Mr. Digby had been staying at Rookwood a week now, and he was the object of much sympathy and respect from the juniors. They knew that he was a victim of shell-shock, and his pale, lined, thin face told how the mysterious malady of the nerves wore him down.

His face was more than usually pale now, and there were dark hollows under his handsome eyes.

Somewhat to the juniors' surprise, the captain stopped to speak.

As a rule, he avoided society, and took many of his meals in the Oak Room, where he would sit silent for hours together. Even when he dined at the Head's table he found it difficult to talk, and the Head had ceased to look for conversation from his guest.

The captain was an old Rookwooder, which increased the juniors' interest in him; and Mr. Bootles had a rather touching belief that the scenes of his boyhood would help the invalid to combat the black care that hung heavy upon him. So far, the result had not seemed very successful.

Jimmy Silver, in the goodness of his youthful heart, had taken upon himself the task of cheering up the captain to the best of his ability; but that had not been a success, either.

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Digby, with a kind nod. "You youngsters are out early."

"Yes, sir. Hope you've had a nice walk," said Jimmy.

The captain's long rambles by himself were well known to the juniors. He looked very tired and worn now.

"Oh, yes, thanks!" said the captain.

He looked as if he had slept little, if at all. The juniors could not help seeing it. Often they remembered to have passed the Oak Room, and heard him pacing to and fro. They wondered whether he spent long hours of darkness in that weary pacing.

Lovell nudged Jimmy Silver.

"Tell him!" he whispered. "Ask him what he thinks—"

Jimmy nodded.

He wanted to hear the opinion of somebody older than a Fourth-Former on the subject of the phantom of Rookwood, and it occurred to him, too, that the strange tale might interest the captain.

"There was a queer happening last night in the school, sir," Jimmy said, falling into pace beside the captain, as the young man moved on towards the house.

Frank Digby glanced down at him.

"Was there?"

"Yes. We saw the ghost of Rookwood!"

Captain Digby smiled faintly.

"That's rather a new experience, isn't it?" he said. "What was the ghost like? Are you joking?"

"Not at all, sir!"

Jimmy Silver told the story, his chums chiming in with details.

Captain Digby was evidently interested, and Jimmy was glad to see it. It was something to interest the young man, who was usually wrapped in a grim mask of gloom and reserve.

They stopped by the School House steps, the light flakes that were still falling from the steely sky dropping round them.

"A queer thing!" said the captain. "You're quite sure you didn't dream it?"

"Well, twenty fellows couldn't have dreamed it, could they?" asked Jimmy.

"No, I suppose not. It must be somebody playing a trick," said Mr. Digby.

"We were wondering whether we ought to tell our Form-master," said Lovell. "But—but he would think us asses—"

"Or whether we'd watch for the ghost, sir, another night," said Jimmy Silver. "If—if you'd care, sir, to—to help—"

To his relief and surprise, the captain nodded.

"Quite a good idea!" he said.

"Somethin' to do, by Jove!" He looked quite interested for the moment. "Leave it to me. I'll speak to Mr. Bootles and explain to him, and get leave for some of you to remain up with me in the corridor to-night, and watch for this joker!"

"Oh, good!"

With a nod, the captain passed into the house.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another with great satisfaction.

"That's all right!" said Jimmy.

"I—I shouldn't care about waiting up for the ghost by ourselves, but with Captain Digby it will be all right. Of course, we're not afraid of—"

"Of course not!"

"And we don't believe in ghosts but—"

"No fear!"

"But—but—"

"Exactly. It will be all right watching for him with the captain—just the thing!" said Newcome.

"And perhaps it will cheer him up a bit," said Jimmy Silver considerably. "He came here to be cheered up, you know, and we tried—"

"Not a very cheery bizney, ghost-hunting!" grinned Lovell. "But it may be exciting. If it's a practical joker, he's too big for us, but the captain will handle him all right. We'll drop in on him after lessons and make the arrangements."

"What-ho!"

During lessons that day most of the Classical Fourth were thinking more about the ghost of Rookwood than about their lessons, for which reason Mr. Bootles found himself impelled to use the "pointer" several times.

And in spite of the fact that the Classical juniors had intended to say nothing about the matter outside their own house, it was soon known through the Lower School that they had been "scared" by an imaginary ghost.

Tubby Muffin was bound to talk, of course, and perhaps some of the other fellows talked.

Smythe & Co. of the Shell made quite merry on the subject; and Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth advised Jimmy Silver to lay in wait for the ghost and put some salt on its tail.

That, according to Thomas Dodd, was the approved method of catching ghosts. Tommy further inquired whether the Classical Fourth were suffering from "cold feet"—an inquiry which led to a scene of excitement that lasted several minutes, and from which both Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd emerged rumpled and ruffled.

After lessons the Fistical Four arrived discreetly at the door of the Oak Room, and Jimmy Silver tapped. The captain's voice was quite cheery as he bade them enter.

He was seated at his table, reading over a number of old manuscripts from the library. He laid them aside as the juniors came in.

"I've been reading about the old abbot," he said, with a smile. "Sit down. The story's here, in jolly bad Latin, how he was turned out in the snow in Henry the Eighth's time, and vowed to haunt the place for ever after. According to your yarn, he's keepin' his word."

He laughed.

"I was reading these old manuscripts, when I fell asleep in my chair last night," he said. "I woke up near morning, nearly frozen. They're as good as a sleeping-draught. Well, I've spoken to my uncle, and you four have permission to come out of your dormitory at eleven and watch with me till one, if you like. If you think better of it, stay in bed. It will be awfully cold."

"We'll turn out, right enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's awfully good of you to take the trouble, sir—"

"I'm quite interested," said the captain, with a smile. "But keep it dark about the watch that's going to be kept, or the practical joker will be put on his guard. Mr. Bootles is very anxious for him to be caught and punished."

"We'll punish him all right if we catch him!" said Jimmy.

And the captain laughed again.

The Fistical Four left the Oak Room in cheery spirits. They were very keen for that night's vigil to begin.

At bed-time, Jimmy confided the secret to Morny in a whisper, and Morny agreed to join the watch. Erroll joined, too; but the secret went no farther. The juniors went to bed as usual, and Bulkeley saw lights out in the dormitory; but at eleven o'clock six juniors were awake and dressing in dim moonlight.

Quietly enough, Jimmy Silver & Co. left the dormitory, their hearts beating a little. They found Captain Digby waiting for them in the corridor.

"So you've turned up!" said the captain, with a smile.

"Yes, sir; here we are!"

"And now for the ghost!"

They waited and watched.

It was a weary vigil; and the juniors thought more and more about their cosy beds, as the slow minutes passed on leaden wings.

Captain Digby waited in silent patience, leaning against the wall without uttering a word.

The juniors shifted and stirred uncomfortably from time to time.

Midnight chimed.

But there was no swish of a ghostly robe—no shadow of a dark figure by the moonlit window.

One!

The hour boomed out from the clock-tower of Rookwood. Jimmy Silver drew a breath of relief. There had been no ghost; and he was glad that the watch was over.

The captain detached himself from the wall.

"Nothing doing!" he said. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Digby disappeared in the darkness, and the juniors gladly turned into the dormitory, and into bed.

The ghost had not walked; the vigil had been for nothing. Had that dark figure been a trick of the imagination, after all? Jimmy Silver was perplexed and puzzled; and he was still in a state of worried perplexity when he fell asleep.

The 3rd Chapter.

Rival Raiders!

"Spoof, of course!"

Arthur Edward Lovell delivered that weighty opinion in the end study at tea on the following day.

"You see," Arthur Edward continued, "real ghosts—if there were any real ghosts, which isn't possible—real ghosts wouldn't stop walking because chaps were watching for them. They'd come jazzing along just the same. The bouncer who scared us—I mean, startled us the other night—was some spoofer, and he'd got on to it that he was being watched for."

And Arthur Edward Lovell cracked his second egg with the air of a

fellow who had settled the matter once and for all.

"But how could he have got on to it?" said Raby. "We kept it jolly dark—only Morny and Erroll knew as well as ourselves—"

"The captain told Bootles—he may have been overheard," said Lovell. "Or we may have been heard talking to Digby in the Oak Room. It's pretty clear that the spoiler was on his guard, because he didn't turn up."

"I—I suppose that may be so," remarked Jimmy Silver hesitatingly. "Of course it's so, old chap!"

"That theory doesn't seem to cover all the ground," said Jimmy, in a very thoughtful way.

"It covers enough for me," said Lovell carelessly. "Bother the old ghost! Now, about the Moderns you—"

"What about the Moderns?" yawned Raby.

"We were going to raid them the other night, when that dashed ghost turned up. We've agreed to give Tommy Dodd something to remember us by during the Christmas holidays—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And those Modern cads have been chipping us about that dashed ghost!" said Lovell, frowning.

"We'll give 'em ghosts! My idea is for the raid to come off to-night!"

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Silver. "And if we meet the ghost we'll give him a pillowing instead of Tommy Dodd!"

And the Fistical Four chuckled at the idea. "Pillowings" the ghost seemed quite a good wheeze—in the light and warmth of the end study at least. It was possible that it might seem a little different in a shadowy, moonlit corridor at midnight.

Quite unknown to the Classical chums, a little talk was also going on in Tommy Dodd's study, over in Mr. Manders' House. And the talk of Dodd and Cook and Doyle was also on the subject of pillow-raids.

"I've got the whole yarn out of that fat idiot Muffin," Tommy Dodd was saying. "Those cheeky bouncers were turning out to raid our quarters when they fancied they saw the phantom abbot—ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The door between the houses has been unlocked," continued Tommy Dodd. "I scoured along the passage and looked at it this afternoon. They got the key from old Mack somehow and unlocked it, and it's still unlocked. We're travelling that way to-night."

"Good man!"

"We want the Classics to have something to remember us by in the Christmas vac," grinned Tommy Dodd. "They can remember that we're top side of Rookwood."

"Hear, hear!"

And so it came to pass that two pillow-raids were planned for that eventful night—a night that was to be more eventful than either party of raiders dreamed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had planned to turn out at midnight for the raid. Tommy Dodd, on the principle that the early bird catches the worm, had fixed the hour of action at eleven-thirty. And so it happened that, in the Classical Fourth dormitory, Jimmy Silver & Co. were sleeping the sleep of healthy youth, when the Moderns stole out of their quarters on the war-path, and trod gently and softly through the long passage that connected the two sides of Rookwood.

The big door in the passage, which ought to have been locked but wasn't, was quietly opened by Tommy Dodd, who chuckled softly at the thought that it had been unfastened by the Classics—all unconsciously—to let in the enemy.

In darkness the dozen Modern juniors trod on their way, armed with pillows and bolsters.

Still more cautiously they trod, when they came into the passage upon which the Classical Fourth dormitory opened. From the high window at the end moonlight fell in a sea of white.

"Careful now!" murmured Tommy Dodd.

"I—I say—this—this is where they say they saw the ghost!" murmured Cook.

"Shurrup!" muttered Tommy uncomfortably.

He did not want to think about ghosts just then; the surroundings were altogether too ghostly for that. But Cook's words brought the phantom abbot into the minds of the raiders, and they looked about them peeringly, and listened with very intent ears.

"Sure if the baste is walking to-night—" murmured Tommy Doyle. "Dry up, you ass!"

"We're not afraid of ghosts," said Towle, with great courage. "If I see

him I'll jolly well swipe him with this bolster—ah!—ah!—wha-a-at was tha-a-at?"

Towle's voice trailed off in a quaver.

Tommy Dodd jumped, and the blood thrilled to his heart. From the surrounding silence came a faint sound, as of a long robe that swished on the floor or the wall.

"Mum-my hat!" gasped Tommy. "It—it can't be—"

"Of course it can't! Cheese it, you ass, Towle!" muttered Tommy Dodd fiercely. "You're like an old woman for nerves!"

"But—but I heard—"

"It's quiet now!" whispered Cook. "Only the wind!" said Tommy Dodd, with more assurance than he was feeling. "Come on!"

Tommy Dodd led the way resolutely onward, and the Moderns crept on towards the Classical dormitory. They cast lingering and fearful looks back over their shoulders as they went, however.

Tommy Dodd opened the dormitory door.

"Quick now!" he whispered. The raiders crowded in. As a matter of fact, they were glad to get out of the moonlit corridor.

"Hallo, what's that?"

It was Jimmy Silver's voice. Jimmy had intended to wake when twelve chimed out from the clock tower. But the entrance of the Moderns into the Classical dormitory had awakened him rather earlier. He sat up in bed, his heart thumping. It was the thought of the phantom abbot that was in his mind.

one. Nobody was thinking about ghosts now. In the light the Classics rallied, and the numbers were on their side. Jimmy Silver led the rally, and his pillow sent Tommy Dodd rolling on the floor.

Swipe! Crash! Bump! Whack! "Go for the cads!"

"Not so much row! You'll have Booties up here!"

"Blow Booties! Give 'em beans!" "Yaroo!"

The battle raged hotly. Sheets and blankets tangled on the floor, pillows rose and fell, swiped and whacked. In their excitement the combatants forgot that the din they were making echoed far beyond the confines of the dormitory. They were warning to their work, and the uproar was terrific.

In the midst of the din there came a sudden yell from Mornington.

"Cave! Somebody's coming!"

There was a sound in the passage. "Oh, my hat!" stuttered Tommy Dodd. "Lagged!"

"Fairly caught!" muttered Cook. "I—I thought we were making too much row!"

The pillow fight ceased as if by magic. All eyes turned on the door, expectation of beholding there the wrathful features of Mr. Bootles. There was a swishing sound in the corridor, and a figure loomed up across the light that shone out from the dormitory.

But it was not Mr. Bootles. Tubby Muffin gave a terrified howl, and dived into bed, burying his head under the bedclothes.

"We can turn it on in the passage!"

"Good! Come on!"

"Look out! Here's Booties!"

There were footfalls in the passage now—solid footfalls, that were not in the least ghostly. Mr. Bootles, in his dressing-gown, appeared in the doorway. Evidently the din of the pillow-fight had awakened the Form-master, after all.

"What is all this?" he exclaimed angrily. "Dodd, Cook, Towle—what are you Modern boys doing here?"

"The—the ghost, sir!"

"What?"

"The phantom abbot! It's just passed!"

"Nonsense!"

"Just where you are standing, sir," said Putty Grace. "It—it may be just behind you now, sir."

Mr. Bootles gave a jump.

Certainly, he did not believe in ghosts; but he gave a startled jump, just as if he did believe in them. His eyes swept out into the corridor in alarm, and he gasped with relief to see the corridor empty.

"You—you absurd boy, Grace!"

"But we saw it, sir!" exclaimed half a dozen voices. The juniors felt more reassured in the presence of their Form-master.

"Absurd! You have been making a dreadful noise! You might have awakened my nephew, who, as you know, is ill!"

"But the ghost, sir?"

"You Modern boys should not have come over here, even if you knew

him eagerly, but with thrilling hearts. They were not quite certain what they would do if the weird, dark figure suddenly appeared from behind a corner.

"Hark!" muttered Lovell suddenly.

From a side passage came a faint swishing sound, as of trailing garments.

Mr. Bootles stopped dead. The sound was approaching.

The juniors stood rooted, hardly breathing. The mysterious figure was turning back then, it was returning—

Two or three of the fellows made a retrograde movement. The terrible thrill of the moment was too much for their nerves. But Jimmy Silver stood firm, his eyes gleaming, and Mornington stood like a rock, his jaw set square. Man or phantom, Mornington was resolved not to flee from it, and Jimmy shared his resolve.

Swissssh!

From the corner, into the lighted corridor, came a tall, dark figure, with swishing robe.

Mr. Bootles gasped.

"Bless my soul—"

"The ghost—"

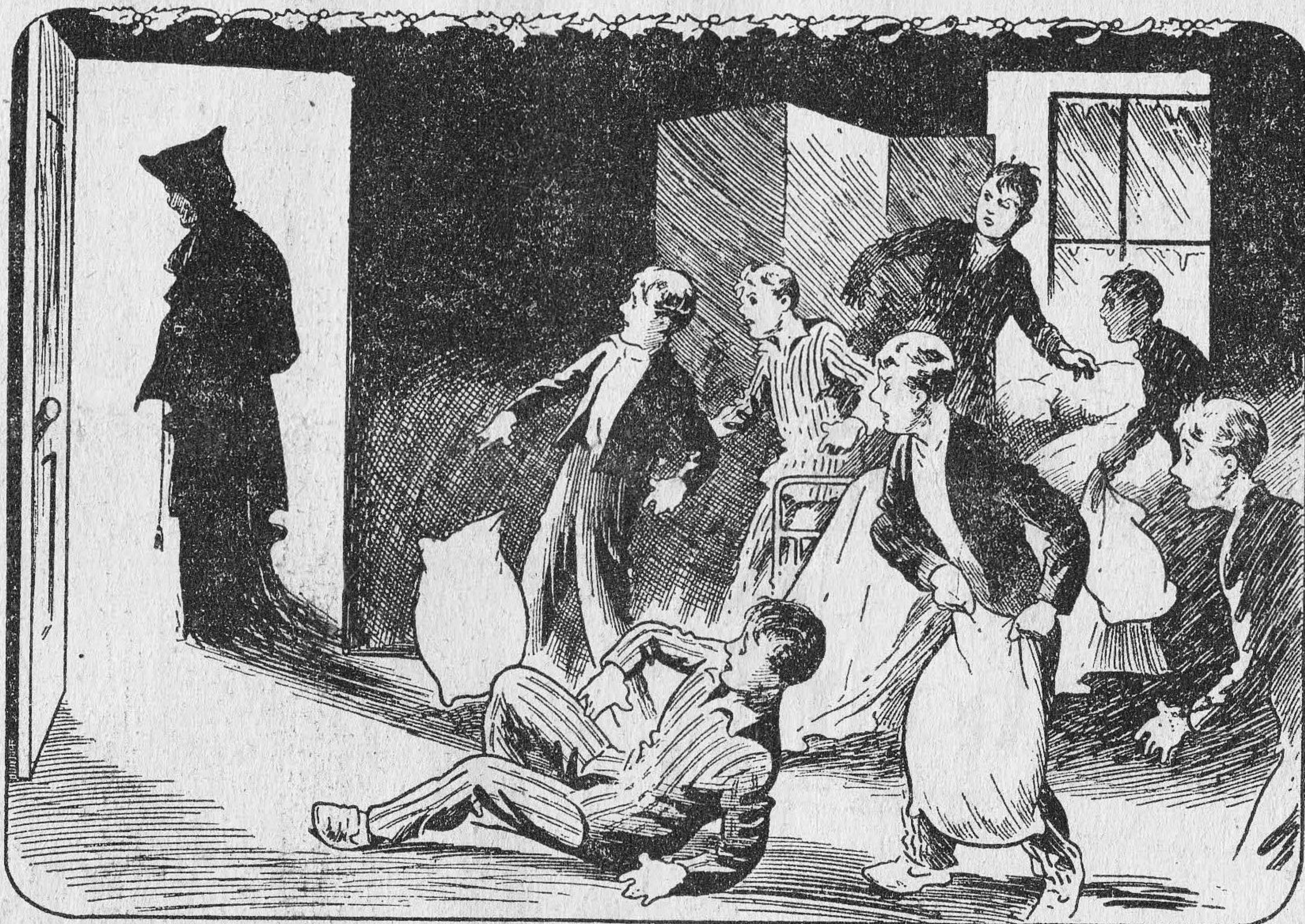
It came directly on towards the horrified group. As if unseeing, it came right on, and instinctively the juniors parted to right and left, to give the Thing room to pass.

But Mr. Bootles stood firm in the centre of the passage, his startled eyes gleaming over his spectacles. There was plenty of courage in the breast of the little, short-sighted Form-master. Phantom or flesh and blood, the strange apparition could not make him show the white feather before his boys.

"What—what—" stuttered Mr. Bootles.

The weird figure came on. The long black cloak draped it from head to foot; but as it came nearer in the light its face could be seen, a deathly-white face with closed eyes. And Mr. Bootles, giving that strange, white face a startled blink, gasped, almost inarticulately:

"Frank!"



THE PHANTOM ABBOT INTERVENES! The pillow fight ceased as if by magic. All eyes were turned upon the doorway in which stood the Rookwood "ghost."

"Who—what—what—" he stuttered.

"Go for 'em!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy gasped with relief to hear a human voice. It was only a Modern raid—not a phantom! He leaped out of bed.

"Wake up, you chaps! Yaroooh!" A whirling bolster swept him over. He came down with a bump on the floor.

"Look out!"

"Modern cads!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!" came in a terrified squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Yow-ow! Ghosts! Spooks! Help! Yarooop!"

Thump! Bump! Whack, whack! The raiders were getting to work without loss of time; pillows and bolsters smote on all sides.

Jimmy Silver scrambled up breathlessly.

"Back up, Classics!" he yelled. "Modern cads! Back up!"

The Classics, still half asleep, grabbed their pillows, and backed up. But the Moderns had the advantage of the surprise. They carried all before them as they spread through the dormitory, swiping with their pillows.

Someone scudded to the electric light switch, and turned it on. The lofty dormitory was suddenly flooded with illumination.

"Back up!"

"Down with the Moderns!"

"Give 'em beans!"

"Ow, ow!"

The scene was a wild and whirling

For it was a tall, dark figure that loomed up outside the lighted door, and passed on, with a soft swishing of a long black robe, and vanished.

The 4th Chapter. The Ghost Walks!

"The—the ghost of the abbot!"

"The phantom!"

"Oh!"

The juniors stood and stared, as it frozen.

Only for a moment had that dreadful figure been under their gaze—but all had seen it.

Silent, save for that faint swish of the trailing robe, it had passed on and disappeared into the darkness beyond the lighted doorway.

Tommy Dodd's pillow had dropped from his hand. He stared at the doorway as if mesmerised.

"The—the ghost!" he stuttered. "That—that was what we heard in the corridor, after all—the—the ghost!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" came in muffled tones from under Tubby Muffin's blankets. "Keep it off! Help! Murder! Wow-ow!"

Jimmy Silver set his teeth.

The blood had thrilled to his heart at the sight of the startling apparition, and he was pale. But he set his teeth determinedly.

"Who'll come after it?" he exclaimed. "It's a trick—some beastly trick! Who'll come with me?"

"I—I say—stammered Lovell.

"I will!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Come on! Anybody got a light?"

some foolish person is playing ghost!" said Mr. Bootles severely. It was a natural mistake for Mr. Bootles to make, and the Modern juniors did not think of setting him right. They had no desire whatever to explain that they had come over for a pillow-fight. "However, if you think you have seen some—something—"

"We have, sir!" said Mornington.

"We all saw it! We're going after it, sir—"

"You will remain here!" said Mr. Bootles crossly. "I will follow it, and expose the foolish practical joker!"

"Let us come with you, sir!"

"Nonsense!" Mr. Bootles turned back into the corridor. There he paused, and added—for reasons best known to himself: "Some of you may come, if you wish—not a crowd!"

The Fistical Four, and the three Tommies, and Morny and Erroll, hurried after Mr. Bootles at once. Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons followed them, and Rawson, and after a pause a few others. The rest preferred the lighted dormitory.

Mr. Bootles touched a switch, and the long, lofty corridor was flooded with light to the end.

"There is nothing here!" he said. "It went along towards the box-rooms, sir!"

"We shall see."

With his dressing-gown trailing, Mr. Bootles marched majestically, determined to probe the mystery to the bottom. The juniors followed

The 5th Chapter. Light at Last!

"Captain Digby!"

Mr. Bootles' startled ejaculation had given the juniors the clue.

With amazed eyes, no longer scared, they stared at the "phantom" of Rookwood.

Mr. Bootles laid his hand gently on the arm of the figure as it passed him. The closed eyes did not open. No sound came from the pale, set lips. The figure walked on, slow and stately, draped in the long black cloak.

"Frank! My poor boy—"

The silence was eerie.

"He's walking in his sleep!" whispered Lovell, in awe-stricken tones.

"He's ill, you know—"

"Poor old chap!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Bootles glanced at the juniors. "Go back to bed at once, quietly! My nephew is ill, as you know. I did not know his illness had taken this form. Go back to bed."

"Yes, sir."

With his arm through that of the sleeping figure, Mr. Bootles led his nephew away back to the Oak Room.

Jimmy Silver & Co. crowded back to their dormitory in a very subdued mood. The Moderns lost no time in getting back to Mr. Manders' house. Nobody was thinking of pillow-fighting after that strange and startling discovery.

They slept at last. But in the Oak Room, till far on in the small hours, Mr. Bootles was sitting beside a heavy sleeper, patiently watching, and waiting for him to wake.

Rookwood School broke up for the holidays the next day. Jimmy Silver & Co. were anxious to see the captain before they went, and they had their wish.

"I'm sorry I've given you such a scare," he said. "My—my nerves are not quite in order yet."

"You won't see the ghost again, anyhow!" he continued, with a faint smile. "You're breaking up to-day, I think."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy eagerly. "If—if you'd come to my place for Christmas, sir, we'd cheer you up no end. There's going to be a lot of fellows you'd like, and—nice girls—"

The captain laughed.

"Done!" he said simply.

And the Fistical Four gave a cheer.

THE END.

(Mind you read "Gentleman Jim's Christmas Visit," a topping Rookwood yarn in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

resplendent in shirts or jerseys. No thought had been given to uniformity of pattern, however, and the result was a splash of kaleidoscopic colour which positively dazzled the eyes.

The jerseys and shirts had one thing in common, for they were all worn and tattered.

Football clothes do not make the player, however, a fact which was brought home to Jack and Lake as they watched a stocky youngster snap up a pass from his winger and dart away towards the enemy's goal.

Time and again he was challenged, but he always managed to get the better of the grim tussle for possession. He did not play scientific football, maybe, but he was a strenuous, bustling performer, with an almost uncanny control of the leather.

Often a heavier opponent would charge him off the ball, but not once did the youngster lose possession.

He forged forward, his freckled face set and purposeful, and finished a magnificent run with a low drive which had the diminutive goalkeeper beaten to the wide world.

A sprinkling of spectators made the air hideous with their yells.

"Goal!"

"Good old Bunny!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em, Scrutton!"

The players swarmed round the freckled youngster, and shook him by the hand in the grave and dignified manner adopted by some professionals.

A flash of excitement showed on Jack Vernon's good-looking face as his eyes sought Laké's. The old trainer did not show much interest, however.

"The kid's got brains!" he muttered reluctantly.

"What's that?" asked Jack Vernon quickly.

"Nothing," answered Lake conversationally.

Again the youngster grinned to himself, feeling positive that Bunny Scrutton was making a favourable impression.

It seemed that the youngster knew that he was being watched, for he positively excelled himself in a run-through which culminated in his netting yet another goal.

His footwork was superb, and although he had good shoulders and a fair share of weight, he played with his head rather than with his body.

He positively made "rings" round the opposing half-backs, tricking them with what appeared to be ridiculous ease.

He pelted down the field with an easy, loping stride, and the two backs closed in upon him, their faces grim and set, meaning to stop him at all costs.

Bunny Scrutton read determination in their faces, and his jaw set like granite as a consequence.

Still keeping the leather at his toe, he waited till he ran the risk of being "sandwiched," and tapped the leather between the two defenders.

Then, moving with the speed of light, he slipped round the right-back, touched the leather away from the groping fingers of the goalkeeper, and walked calmly into the goal-mouth.

"Goal!"

Hoarse shouts and wild yells came from all sides, and Bunny's men closed with their skipper, wringing his hands and thumping his back in an ecstasy of delight.

"How about that, my lad?" demanded Jack Vernon, almost truculently. "What have you got to say to that?"

And Lake answered: "Might have been worse!"

"Pheep!"

Scarcely had the leather left the centre-forward's toe than Bunny Scrutton had pounced upon it, and slammed it out to his winger, who took the pass on the run, and sprinted away in masterly fashion.

The youngster relied upon a remarkable turn of speed rather than his dribbling ability, but his kick-and-run policy stood him in excellent stead.

Indeed, he made the corner-flag without mishap; but no sooner had he centred than he was sent flying with a hefty charge from the opposing right-half.

He had carried out his share of the attack, and it fell to Bunny Scrutton to complete the victorious movement. The ball fell at the youngster's toe, and he did not hesitate. Instead, kicking from an almost impossible angle, he slammed the leather into the corner of the goal, giving the bewildered custodian not a ghost of a chance.

A yell of applause went up at once—a yell to which Jack Vernon added a lusty shout of admiration.

The youngster turned excitedly to Lake.

"What about it now, old man?"

he asked, his eyes glinting. "Wasn't that shot just perfect? Scrutton's a born footballer!"

"Maybe," said the old professional, unwilling to commit himself. "Let's watch."

And watch Scrutton they did, and they were treated to a display of sparkling football which brought excited shouts from Jack Vernon and grunts of grudging approval from Harry Lake.

He watched another spell of play, and then the red-headed referee shrilled his whistle for full time, and a rush was made for the hero of the hour—Bunny Scrutton.

Both Jack and Lake watched the scrum which was taking place with grins upon their faces.

"These youngsters seem very proud of Mr. Bunny Scrutton," said Jack; "and, by Jove, they've reason to be! We've got to bag him, Lake, old man. Don't you think so?"

Lake nodded, and moved off towards the centre of the field, where a miniature free-fight was taking place.

"We might do worse," he grunted. "I think he's about the best centre-forward in Coalham—barring you. Still," he added quickly, "that ain't saying a lot!"

"Don't worry, old man!" said Jack Vernon, laughingly. "I sha'n't get a swelled head over any compliments you are likely to pay me."

"You're right there," returned Lake meaningly.

The two reached the outskirts of the violent demonstration just as Bunny Scrutton, minus half his shirt, had made a dash for liberty. And he dashed straight into Jack Vernon's strong arms.

"Ow!" grunted Jack, as Scrutton's red head caught him in the region of the waistline.

"Sorry, sir!" grinned Scrutton; and he did not look a little bit sorry. Jack Vernon returned the grin.

"You're just the fellow I want to talk to, Scrutton," he said. "Can you spare me a few minutes' chat?"

A slight frown corrugated the youngster's forehead.

"What's up?" he asked, falling into step with Lake and Jack Vernon.

"It's like this, Scrutton," began Jack. "I used to skipper Coalham Town—"

"I wondered where I'd seen your face," broke in Scrutton, with an admiring note in his voice. "You're Jack Vernon!"

"Exactly," returned Jack. "Now, as you know, the management have doubled the prices of admission—"

"The thugs!" interjected Scrutton tersely.

"Well, I'm going to start a rival team, Scrutton, and I want you to sign on."

Bunny Scrutton stopped in his stride and looked up at Jack Vernon. Surprise and incredulity showed plainly in his face.

"Do you mean to say—" he began.

"I do," smiled Jack quietly. "I want you to play for my new team."

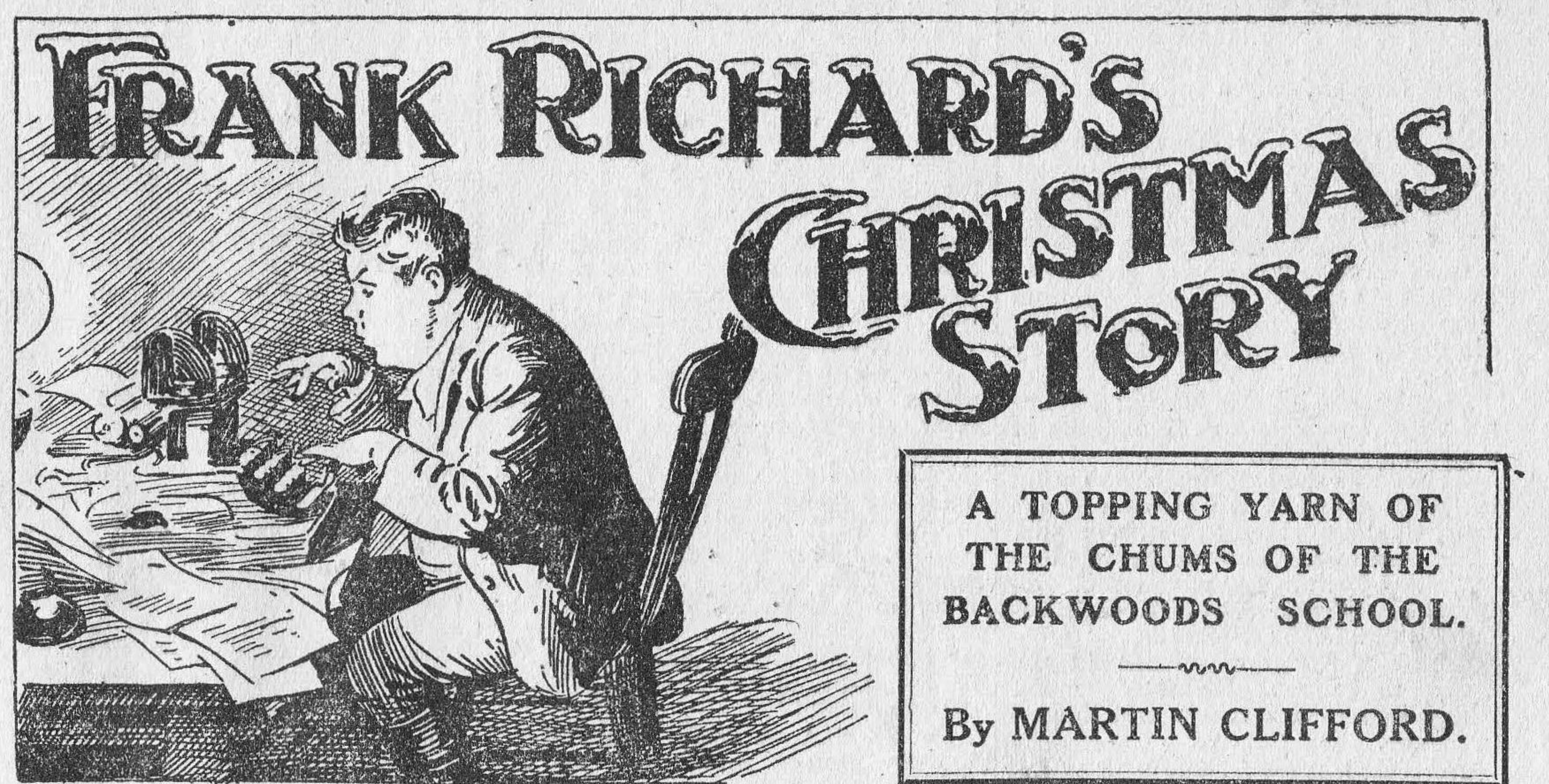
"Wot!" fairly gasped Scrutton. "And leave the Firside? Leave my pals in the lurch? Come off it, mister! Why, I wouldn't sign on for Aston Villa if the management went down on their bended knees!"

Jack Vernon stood open-mouthed, whilst the lugubrious Lake permitted himself the ghost of a smile.

Bunny Scrutton had turned them down!

(Another fine, long instalment of this grand yarn in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

A SPLENDID, COMPLETE STORY OF FRANK RICHARDS & Co.



A TOPPING YARN OF THE CHUMS OF THE BACKWOODS SCHOOL.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

Interrupted Threes!

"My dear chap—"
"You must come!"
"Can't be done!" said Frank Richards decidedly.

"Now, look here, old chap—" began Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc together.

"Can't be done, really!"

Cedar Creek School had broken up for Christmas. Frank Richards was in his room at the Lawless Ranch, seated at the table before the ancient and somewhat battered typewriter lent him by Mr. Penrose, of the "Thompson Press."

Frank had been leaning over that typewriter, with a wrinkle in his brow and a far-away look in his eyes, when his two chums came in.

He was, as a matter of fact, in the throes of composition, and the interruption was untimely. But he smiled and nodded cheerfully to Bob and Beauclerc as they came in.

The lamp on the table glimmered on the typewriter keys, and on a blank sheet of paper in the machine. So far Frank had written one line, "Bullivant's Christmas," which was evidently the title of the story hatching in the youthful author's brain. But the story was still incubating, so to speak, and the sheet of paper remained a beautiful blank so far.

"Shove that machine away!" continued Bob Lawless. "You've simply got to come! Chunky Todgers is waiting downstairs—"

"Bother Chunky Todgers!"

"Oh, I say, Richards—" came a voice at the doorway.

The fat and cheerful Chunky, muffled from head to foot against the weather, blinked in.

Frank Richards groaned inwardly. Attached as he was to his friends, he wished them anywhere else at the present moment.

"Molly Lawrence will be there," remarked Beauclerc casually.

Frank Richards did not say "Bother!" this time.

"Can't be helped," he said.

"Molly will expect you," said Bob severely. "She says you're the only good dancer at Cedar Creek."

Frank laughed.

"No time for dancing now," he said. "Look here, you chaps! You buzz off! There'll be no end of a crowd at the Mission dance, and I sha'n't be missed. I've simply got to get this done."

"What rot!" said Bob. "Can't you do it to-morrow?"

"Or the next day?" suggested Beauclerc.

"There's only one dance at the Mission before Christmas," said Bob Lawless reproachfully. "It's awfully kind of old Smiley to get it up, too. Can't give it a miss."

"But—"

"Better come, Richards," said Chunky Todgers. "Not that it matters about Molly. I'll dance with Molly—"

"You must come, if only to save Molly from that!" said Bob.

Chunky Todgers snorted at that remark.

"You see," said Frank, "this is for the Christmas number. You know Mr. Penrose is getting out a Christmas number of the 'Thompson Press.' I've got to do a Christmas story. And I ought to take it along to-morrow morning at the latest. In fact, it ought to be in Mr. Penrose's office this evening."

"Then why haven't you done it before?" demanded Bob. "Never put off till to-morrow—"

"Why, that's what you're asking me to do!"

"I—I mean, never put off till to-day what you ought to do yesterday," said Bob.

"But I hadn't any idea yesterday—"

"Oh gum!" said Bob. "Do you have to wait till you get an idea before you write a story?"

"Well, you see—"

"Have you got the idea now?"

"I was just getting it nicely when you fellows burst in," said Frank Richards ruefully.

"Keep it till to-morrow, then, and it will very likely improve with age," suggested Bob. "Like wine, you know!"

"Ass!"

"Perhaps I can help," said Chunky Todgers.

"Eh? How?"

"Well, you know, I can write a better story than you, old chap."

"Fathead!"

"Old Penrose doesn't think so, I know," said Chunky. "Penrose is rather a jay. But the fact remains. Now, if you like, Richards, I'll turn out the Christmas story, and you can go to the dance."

Chunky Todgers had quite a generous air as he made that offer. Frank Richards laughed.

Generous as the offer was, the schoolboy author did not seem especially grateful for it.

"What do you think of the stunt?" asked Todgers. "I mean it."

"You're too kind!" said Frank.

"The fact is, old chap, I mean to be kind—this is the season for kindness," said Chunky cheerily. "I can knock off a story in an hour or so; I don't have to stick at the typer for hours to do a story as you do. I've got the gift, you know—a sort of facility. I should think you'd be pleased—"

"I'm afraid Mr. Penrose wouldn't be—"

"Never mind Penrose; he can't help being an ignorant jay. You needn't mention it to him at all. He can think it's your stuff."

"You don't think he'd notice any difference?" asked Frank, with a touch of gentle sarcasm.

"He might. But if he thought it was better than usual, and sent you some extra dollars, you could keep the money," said Chunky Todgers, still generous. "I'm not after the cash. I want to oblige you. Besides, I'd rather like to have a story in Penrose's Christmas number. Probably there would be a rush, and he'd have to print a second edition. Then we'd tell him I did the story. No end of a joke on him, you know, after he's been ass enough to refuse all the stuff I've sent him. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see where the cackle comes in! Now, is it a go?"

Chunky Todgers meant to be generous, but he was very eager. As a matter of fact, the fat Chunky yearned to see his literary efforts in print. So far, Mr. Penrose had been willing to admit his contributions to the "Thompson Press" only if they were paid for at advertisement rates. On those lines Mr. Penrose would have published anybody's literary output, even if he had had to increase the size of his paper for it. But such an offer was no use to Chunky Todgers.

"Fathead!" said Frank Richards. "Now, if you fellows will buzz off to the Mission—"

"Not without you!" said Bob. "You've got to come!"

"But Mr. Penrose is expecting his copy—"

"Let him expect!"

"But—"

"You'll feel no end bucked by a dance," said Bob. "To-morrow morning the literary bizney will roll off the typer like—like boiled tallow! Come on!"

"Oh dear!"

Frank Richards had always found it difficult to say "No" to anybody. And certainly he wanted to go to the Mission dance; dances were rare enough in the Thompson Valley of British Columbia. Bob saw the signs of yielding in the hapless author's face, and jerked him from his chair.

"Kim on!" he said.

"If the copy's late for the paper, I—"

"Better than the author being late for the dance! Come on!"

And Frank Richards gave in.

The 2nd Chapter.

Chunky's Little Game.

"Oh dear!"

The buggy had been brought round, which was to carry the Cedar Creek chums to the Mission. That evening traps and buggies and waggonettes and carts were converging on the Mission from all directions through the falling flakes of snow.

The dance given by Mr. and Mrs. Smiley to the inhabitants of the Thompson Valley was well attended. Frank Richards, having made up his mind—or having had it made up for him—prepared to mount into the buggy with his chums, when a strange and lamentable howl came from Chunky Todgers.

Chunky sat down on the pinewood bench in the porch of the ranch-house, and his fat features were contorted.

"Hallo! What's the matter, boy?" exclaimed Rancher Lawless. The Rancher and his wife were going in the buggy.

"A—sudden pain."

"Too much maple-sugar?" asked Bob.

"Yow-ow!"

"Can I do anything for you, Todgers?" asked Mrs. Lawless, with concern.

"Ow! No, thanks, ma'am!" gasped Chunky. "I—I don't feel well enough to—to go to the dance, that's all!"

"Dear me!"

"That's bad!" said the rancher, looking at Chunky rather curiously. The fat youth's pains had come on very suddenly.

"Oh, buck up, Chunky!" said Bob Lawless. "We can't wait, you know. Bring your pains along with you!"

"Room in the buggy," said Frank, smiling.

"My dear boys!" murmured Mrs. Lawless.

"Chunky's such a blessed malingerer!" said Bob, with a grunt.

"Now, look here, Chunky. What's the game? Have you really got any pains?"

"I—I'm suffering fearfully!" said Chunky Todgers. "But don't you fellows worry. I'll sit here by the fire till I feel well enough to come on my pony. You get off."

"Well, if you will be all right—" said Mr. Lawless.

"Quite all right, thanks!" said Chunky eagerly. "I—I wouldn't spoil your pleasure for worlds, you fellows! Buzz off!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bob. As a matter of absolute fact, the journey in the buggy was likely to be more comfortable without Joseph

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Todgers' ample proportions being stowed in it. Chunky had ridden over from the Todgers' homestead to get a lift in the ranch buggy, when he might just as well have ridden on to the Mission, only a couple of miles further.

There were plenty of passengers in the buggy already, and certainly it was quite a good idea for Chunky to follow on his fat pony as soon as he felt well enough.

In a few minutes Mr. and Mrs. Lawless, their son and nephew, and Vere Beauclerc, were in the buggy, driving away through the falling flakes.

Chunky sat by the blazing log-fire till they were gone in the attitude of a suffering invalid.

As soon as the cracking of the whip had died away in the distance, however, Chunky ceased to be an invalid.

He rose to his feet and grinned. "Silly jays!" he murmured, apparently referring to the Lawless family and Frank Richards.

Chunky Todgers mounted the stairs to Frank Richards' room. There he struck a match and lighted the lamp.

He seated himself cheerfully at the table before the typewriter.

Frank Richards was safely disposed of for the evening; certainly the party were not likely to return to the ranch before midnight. Indeed, if the snow continued to fall, the return might be later than that. So Joe Todgers had plenty of time before him.

Having invented an attack of internal pain as an excuse for remaining behind, Chunky had the evening before him at the ranch, with no one to interrupt. There were only two Chinese servants left in the house, and they were not interested in Todgers' proceedings.

Click, click, click!
Chunky's fat fingers were soon busily at work on the typewriter keys.

He did not need to pause and reflect and cogitate, like Frank Richards.

Far from that. Chunky worked with the greatest facility. Literary composition fairly flowed from his fat fingertips.

As a literary producer, the quantity of his productions was limited only by the amount of paper in stock. The quality, perhaps, was another matter.

Chunky was satisfied about the quality, however.

Doubts on that point never entered his mind. His fat fingers clicked away on the keys almost without a pause.

Frank Richards had been prepared to spend the whole evening on a short story. Not so Joseph Todgers.

He covered sheet after sheet at a terrific rate.

In an hour his work was done.

He grinned with satisfaction as he drew the last sheet from the roller.

With great care, he pinned the sheets together at the corner.

Then he sat down to read them over, and make any little corrections that were necessary; not that many corrections were necessary in literary work turned out by Chunky Todgers!

His fat face beamed over the manuscript.

He had thought it good while he was clicking it off, but read over it seemed better than ever.

"Splendid!" murmured Chunky. "Ripping! Top-notch! Never been anything like this in the 'Thompson Press' before, you bet your life! It's a shame to let that old ass Penrose have it for nothing!"

Chunky paused to reflect.

That was his little scheme—to get his valuable productions into print, as if they belonged to Frank Richards. Mr. Penrose, he considered, would not notice any difference; he would receive the typed copy, and suppose that it was Frank's. If he noticed any difference, it would be a difference for the better—Chunky did not doubt that.

Once the story was in print, everything would go swimmingly.

The encomiums it would receive from Mr. Penrose's readers would open his eyes to Chunky's quality as an author—as soon as Chunky revealed the secret.

Of course, it was rather rotten to have to sneak into print, as it were, under the name of an inferior author. Chunky felt that. But he did not see what else was to be done, Mr. Penrose being so utterly asinine as to decline even to look at Chunky's own manuscripts. He had looked at the first, and that had seemed enough. Evidently he had a foolish prejudice on the subject, which was only to be overcome by a pardonable device like the present one.

Chunky had no doubt that it was pardonable.

But now he paused. It seemed really a sin and a shame to let that splendid story go for nothing, after all.

It occurred to Chunky that it would be wiser to send it to one of the well-known Canadian magazines, and rope in a handsome cheque for it.

But he couldn't help remembering that he had spent a considerable amount of pocket-money on postage to the Canadian magazines, and that the prejudice against his literary work seemed very widespread.

No editor had been intelligent enough to charm and dazzle his readers by publishing it.

Possibly the same thing would happen again. Indeed, Chunky had a sort of feeling that it would.

"No; I'll let Penrose have it," decided Chunky, with a shake of the head. "The old ass will shove it right in without noticing, and after it's scored a big success I'll tell him! And then I'll charge him pesky high for regular contributions. I guess he deserves that!"

So Chunky carefully wrapped up the manuscript, and typed the address of the "Thompson Press" on the wrapper.

He descended, and called up one of the Chinese servants. He held out the addressed packet to Hon Han.

"This ought to be taken into Thompson to-night," he said.

in crowding round him to beg for contributions, all of which was to date from the appearance of his masterpiece in the columns of the "Thompson Press."

The 3rd Chapter.

Better Late Than Never!

The mission-hall was crowded. Sweet strains of music echoed out into the snowy night.

In the glare of the swinging lamps, dozens of couples glided merrily over the pinewood floor to the strains of a piano, a fiddle, and a cello.

It was a great gathering! Nearly all the young people of the section were there for Mr. Smiley's Christmas dance, as well as a crowd of their elders.

Frank Richards & Co. enjoyed themselves. Dances were few and far between in the Thompson Valley. Frank was rather in request, being a good dancer. He danced with pretty Molly Lawrence, and several other of the Cedar Creek girls. But Frank was not thinking wholly of the dancing.

The Christmas Number of the "Thompson Press" haunted his thoughts.

He felt guilty.

Mr. Penrose relied upon him for the copy, and the copy was due at the office. And the idea for his story having come to him, it was rather like a burden on his mind until the story was written and done with.

He was no longer Frank Richards of the Backwoods School; he was living what he wrote; his spirit was in the typewriter, weaving sentence after sentence, page after page—more real to him than his actual surroundings.

He rose and sighed as he finished the last page.

He pinned the sheets together, wrote a little note to Mr. Penrose to put inside, and wrapped up the manuscript.

Little did he dream that, at the same moment, Joseph Todgers was similarly engaged in his room at the Lawless Ranch.

With the package in his pocket, Frank Richards quitted Mr. Smiley's study.

The dance was nearly over when he re-entered the mission-hall.

"Where on earth have you been?" demanded Bob Lawless, coming along with Molly Lawrence on one arm, and Kate Dawson on the other. Bob was taking the young ladies in to supper.

"Can't you give me one more dance, Molly?" asked Frank, parrying his Canadian cousin's question.

Molly found that she could.

After supper, when the guests were departing, Frank Richards stopped beside the Lawrences' wagonette. He had to say good-bye to Molly, and he had also to speak to her brother Tom.

"You drive home through Thompson?" Frank asked.

author Canada has ever produced belongs to this section."

"You flatter me," said Frank Richards demurely.

Chunky snorted. "I don't mean that, ass! I mean—never mind what I mean!" Chunky was quite mysterious.

"Never mind," agreed Bob. "Do you know how late it is, Chunky? Why didn't you come to the dance?"

"I—I forgot."

"You must have forgotten what a tiptop supper Mr. Smiley stands, or you'd have come!" said Bob, with a chuckle. "You off, Cherub?"

"Yes; good-night!"

Beauclerc rode away for his home through the falling flakes.

But Chunky Todgers did not follow his example.

"You chaps don't mind if I stop the night?" he asked.

"Not at all!" said Mr. Lawless.

"But your parents—"

"Oh, they know I'm here!" said Chunky. "That's all right!"

"Stay by all means, then!"

Chunky Todgers snored that night in the extra bed in the room belonging to Frank and Bob. Hospitality in the Canadian West is unbounded, and Chunky was quite welcome to take up his quarters at the ranch if he liked.

It proved that he did like.

At home there was wood-chopping and snow-sweeping and errand-running, and other occupations, beneath the dignity of a fellow of Chunky's literary abilities. But it was not only for the sake of slacking that he stayed on at the ranch.

Hon Han had delivered his precious manuscript at Mr. Penrose's office. That day would see it in type. But evidently something would be suspected if Frank Richards sent in his usual copy as well. That was what Chunky had to prevent, somehow.

It did not occur to the fat and fatuous youth that he was acting in a decidedly unscrupulous manner. That reflection never crossed his mind at all. Conceit had blinded Joseph Todgers to the moral aspect of his conduct.

In the morning he fully expected Frank Richards to set to work on the typewriter; not having the slightest suspicion that Frank's work had been done at the Mission overnight.

To his relief, Frank let the typewriter quite alone.

There was work to be done on the snowy range, and Frank and Bob joined the cattlemen. Chunky Todgers did not care for work on the range, and he remained hanging about the fire most of the day. If Frank was letting his literary work "slide," that suited Chunky quite well, and saved him trouble. But he remained at the ranch—on the watch, with his little, round eyes very much on the alert.

The 4th Chapter.

A Little Surprise!

"Young Richards!"

"Hallo, Billy!"

Frank and Bob were returning to the ranch-house in the early dusk of the winter evening, when Billy Cook rode up. The ranch foreman looked like a pillar of snow as he loomed up in the dusk—he had ridden home from Thompson Town.

"Something for you," said Billy Cook, fumbling under his fur coat. "I was jest ambling up Main Street when Mr. Penrose called me. He told me to ask you if you was drinking yesterday."

"What?" exclaimed Frank.

"That's what he said, and he give me this," said Billy Cook, and, passing a packet to the schoolboy author, he rode on.

Frank took the packet and stared at it.

He knew by the feel of it that it contained typed sheets.

Bob Lawless grinned.

"This is what comes of scribbling when you ought to be dancing, old scout," said Bob. "You've made a muck of it this time, and Penrose declines it with thanks."

"Rot!" said Frank warmly. "It's one of the best things I ever did."

"Penrose doesn't seem to think so."

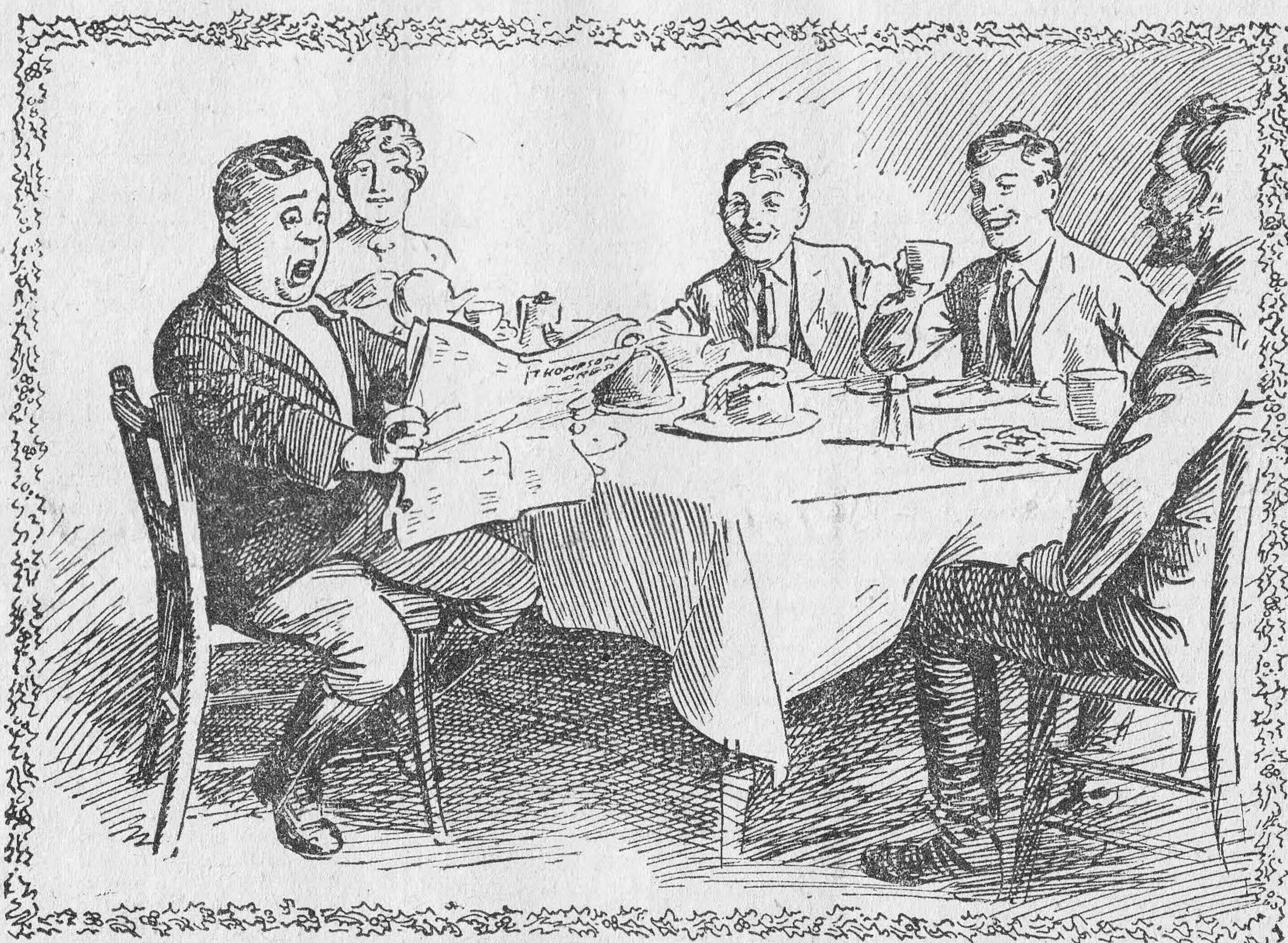
"Penrose is an ass!" growled Frank.

Bob chuckled.

"That sounds like Chunky!" he remarked. "Open it, anyhow, and see what the galoot has to say."

He led the way into a cattle-shelter close at hand, and lighted a lantern. Frank opened the packet with slow fingers, an extraordinary expression on his face.

Frank Richards had taken to "scribbling" at a very early age, almost as naturally as he took to walking or breathing. He had not gone through the painful experiences



A SURPRISE FOR CHUNKY! Todgers grabbed the copy of the "Thompson Press" eagerly, and the next moment gave a snort of rage and surprise as his eye fell upon Frank Richards' Christmas story! Despite all Chunky's efforts to the contrary, Mr. Penrose had accepted it.

The Chinaman blinked at it.

"Richards ought to have taken it, but he's gone to the dance," went on Chunky mendaciously. "I suppose you can ride over with it?"

"No thinkee," said the Chinese.

Hon Han had no desire for a long ride through the snow that bitter December night.

"I'll stand you a dollar," said Chunky generously.

Hon Han's almond eyes glistened. That made a difference.

"Me takee!" he said.

"Good! Get off at once!"

Chunky sat down in an armchair, and grinned at the fire, when the Chinaman rode away, muffled to the ears, and with the valuable packet stowed away under his coat.

"I guess that's O.K.," murmured Chunky. "I—I wonder if Richards will mind? Can't help it if he does! He's had a long run in the 'Thompson Press' with his rubbish, and it's time they printed something good. I guess I'll stay here over-night, and see that he doesn't send along any rubbish to-morrow—I'll offer to take it along to Thompson for him, and see that it's kept back a few days."

Chunky chuckled. "Sorry for poor old Richards—but he can't really write, so it doesn't make any difference. I can't afford to lose a chance like this!"

And, still chuckling, Chunky Todgers fell asleep before the fire, and dreamed golden dreams of the days to come, when he was to be famous as Canada's greatest author, and editors were to fall over one another

He was feeling more like scribbling than dancing that evening, and although his face was cheerful and bright, he would have given a great deal to be sitting at the typewriter in his room at the ranch.

Early in the evening, Frank Richards vanished from the sight of his chums.

There were several inquiries after him; but he did not reappear.

After the first half-dozen dances, Frank felt that he had done his duty, and he had quietly slipped away.

He spoke a few words to Mr. Smiley, who nodded and smiled, and then made his way into the reverend gentleman's house, which adjoined the pinewood mission-hall.

In Mr. Smiley's study was a typewriter, which Frank had sometimes used, doing typing for the reverend gentleman occasionally.

Frank turned up the lamp and sat down to the machine.

While his chums were wondering what had become of him, Frank Richards was busy.

The strains of the music came to his ears from the distance, but he did not heed them; in fact, he hardly heard them.

Neither did he hear nor heed the sounds of the dancers as they "tripped the light, fantastic toe."

Time and space had vanished for him, as he sat at the machine, clicking cheerily away on the keys.

Nothing short of an earthquake would have brought him back just then from the realms of imagination, where his fertile fancy was wandering.

"Right through Main Street!" answered Tom Lawrence.

"Will you drop this packet for me at Mr. Penrose's office?"

"Sure!"

"I'll see that he does, Frank!" said Molly, with a bright smile.

And they parted.

"Now for home!" said Bob Lawless, as Frank Richards rejoined his friends. "I suppose we shall find Chunky there. He never turned up at the dance, after all!"

"I hope he is not really ill," said Mrs. Lawless.

"Only an overdose of maple sugar, if he is!" answered Bob. "I expect we shall find him fast asleep!"

Bob's prediction was verified.

When Frank Richards & Co. arrived home, Chunky Todgers was still deep in the arms of Morpheus, and snoring with a resonant snore. Bob Lawless awakened him cheerily with a dig in the ribs.

"Ow!" Chunky woke, and blinked at the returned party. "I can't let you have it under ten thousand dollars!"

"What?" yelled Bob.

"Ten thousand—oh!—ah!—I—I've been dreaming!" gasped Chunky, rubbing his eyes. "I—I thought I was speaking to the editor of the 'Montreal Magazine.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What wouldn't you let him have under ten thousand dollars?" grinned Bob.

"Never mind!" said Chunky mysteriously. "You wait a bit, Bob, and you'll see. Perhaps the greatest

of most young authors—he had never had a rejected manuscript. Was this to be the first of his painful experiences in that line? If so, he could not help feeling that Chunky Todgers was right in describing Mr. Penrose as an ass. Frank was a healthy and cheery youth, but he had the sensitiveness of the literary nature. His first thought was that if this was a rejected manuscript he would never write another line.

Folded typewritten pages turned out, as he opened the packet. Bob Lawless ceased to grin; the expression on Frank's face showed him that it was not a time for grinning. There was a letter enclosed with the manuscript, and Frank glanced at it.

Then he gave a howl. "What on earth does the man mean? Has he been at the Red Dog—?"

"What does he say?" asked Bob.

"Look!" Bob Lawless read the letter, and whistled in astonishment.

"Dear Richards,—I received your manuscript 'Bullivant's Christmas,' which you sent by young Lawrence. Many thanks for the same, and thanks for sending it in good time.

"But what the thunder do you mean by sending another story with the same title by the Chinaman last night? And what the thunder do you mean by scribbling such idiotic rot?"

"If you're taking to drink at your age, I guess I'd better speak to your uncle about it. If you're not, what the thunder do you mean?"

"I enclose the stuff the Chinaman brought; no use to me. Put it in the fire. Yours,

H. PENROSE."

"Is he potty?" gasped Bob, "or are you potty, or what?"

"Blessed if I know," said Frank.

"Look at the stuff—"

Frank unfolded the manuscript. He blinked at it.

There was the title of "Bullivant's Christmas," which he had written just before Bob and Beaulerc dragged him away to the Mission dance. But the rest of the story—he blinked at it, and stared at it. It began:

"'Twas night! Not a sound broke the stillness save the roar of the fearful wind as it raigned throo the treeze, and the crash of falling timber, and the deafening boom of the raiging torrent."

That sample was enough for Frank Richards: He recognised the masterly literary style.

"Chunky Todgers!"

"Chunky, for a hundred dollars!" yelled Bob.

"The fat rascal!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's why he stayed back from the Mission dance," yelled Bob. "He did this on the typer—"

"The fat fraud!"

"And sent the Chine with it—"

"Why, I'll—I'll—I'll—"

Words failed Frank Richards.

"No wonder Penrose thought you'd been at the fire-water!" shrieked Bob. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter," roared Frank Richards wrathfully.

"I'll scalp him—I'll—I'll—I'll lynch him—I'll—"

Bob Lawless shrieked.

"Don't say a word," he gasped.

"I'll say a good many words—I'll—I'll—"

"Not a word!" gasped Bob.

"Don't you see, the fat idiot thinks Penrose will take this for your stuff, and print it. He doesn't know you did the story at the Mission last night and sent it by young Lawrence. He thinks this stuff will come out in the Christmas number under your name. Let him go on thinking so. Penrose is jolly late with his Christmas number. We don't get it till Christmas morning here. Let Chunky go on dreaming till it comes; and give him this stuff for a Christmas present—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Wrap it up again, and give it to him on Christmas morning as a present," chuckled Bob. "And—and watch his face!"

Frank Richards broke into a chuckle.

"Good egg!"

"Mind, not a word to the fat jay!" said Bob, as they left the cattle-shelter. "Not a pesky syllable! Let him run on!"

And Frank Richards assented.

As the chums entered the ranch-house ten minutes later, the fat and fatuous Chunky greeted them.

"You fellows tired?"

"I guess so, a bit," answered Bob.

"You won't feel up to scribbling to-night, Richards?"

"No!" said Frank grimly.

"Oh, good—I-I mean—ahem!" Todgers looked confused for a moment. "I—I say, I—I'll stay on

over to-morrow, if I'm not in your way, Bob."

"Right you are!"

"Anything you have to send to Thompson, Richards, I'll take charge of," said Chunky generously. "Anything for Penrose, you know."

"Good!" said Frank, with grim humour. "If I'm sending any manuscript to Mr. Penrose before Christmas, Chunky, I'll ask you to take it."

Chunky's eyes danced.

"Pleased, old scout!" he gasped.

"I—I say, you—you—you're bound to send in your Christmas number, ain't you?"

"Hallo, there's supper," said Frank. And Chunky Todgers' question remained unanswered.

The 5th Chapter.

Chunky Todgers' Christmas Present!

Chunky Todgers wore a fat and cheerful smile on Christmas Eve at the Lawless Ranch.

That evening he felt more than satisfied.

Owing to Mr. Penrose's frequent visits to the Red Dog and the Occidental, he was often late with the "Thompson Press," and the Christmas number was late. But Chunky knew that it must be printed on Christmas Eve at the very latest. And—so far as Chunky knew—Frank had not sent in his copy. Chunky had remained on guard at the ranch to intercept it; but it did not need intercepting. The schoolboy author apparently was neglecting his editor in the most culpable manner.

Chunky came down bright and cheery on Christmas morning. Breakfast was rather later than usual that morning, and on the table lay a copy of the "Thompson Press"—the Christmas number, which Mr. Penrose had produced to dazzle the section.

Frank Richards opened it, and glanced at the page devoted to the Christmas story. He nodded, and smiled over it, much to Chunky's astonishment.

"Is—is—is the story there, Richards?" stammered Chunky, at last, unable to control his impatience any longer.

"Oh, yes!"

"Does it—does it read better than usual?"

"I think so."

"Lemme see it."

Chunky was amazed. Surely Frank must have recognised by this time that the Christmas story was not his own work! He grabbed the paper from Frank, and blinked at it. Frank and Bob watched him with grinning glances.

Chunky blinked at the page, and his fat face fell. He could scarcely believe his eyes for a minute or so.

"I—I say, this—this isn't my story—"

"Your story?" said Frank.

"There—there's some mistake—"

What the thunder— You—you wrote this—"

"Of course I did!" said Frank in mild surprise.

"But—you—but—you—you never wrote it! I—I was watching—"

babbled Chunky, utterly confounded.

"I—I—I—"

"I wrote it at the mission, the night of the dance," said Frank cheerily. "Tom Lawrence took it along to the office for me."

"Wha-a-a-a-at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

Chunky gasped.

"Then—then—where—where's my story?"

"Your story! What story?"

"Oh—ah—u-n-nothing!" babbled Chunky.

"I—I—you—you—I—I mean— Oh dear!"

Chunky Todgers finished his breakfast in a dazed state. He was still dazed when, after breakfast, he mounted his fat pony to ride home. Frank and Bob came out to see him off, and Frank Richards pressed a packet into his hand.

"A little Christmas present for you, Chunky," he said. "Don't open it till you get home. Take care of it, though, it's worth thousands of dollars."

"Ten thousand at least," said Bob Lawless solemnly.

Chunky Todgers rode away, still in a dazed state. Before he was a hundred yards away he had opened that valuable packet. His little round eyes almost started from his head at the sight of his own valuable manuscript. He looked round. Two cheery youths were looking after him from the distance, grinning.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted Frank after him. And Bob Lawless bawled:

"And don't forget to read Frank Richards' Christmas story!"

(Make a point of reading "The Cedar Creek Pantomime!" next Monday's grand story of Frank Richards & Co., in the Boys' FRIEND.)

FROM YOUR GREETINGS EDITOR. Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. All letters should be addressed: "The Editor, the BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4."

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Well, this sees the publication of the twenty-fifth Christmas Number of the BOYS' FRIEND, and I think that you will all agree with me when I say that never has there been a better Bumper Christmas Number of any boys' paper ever published. But I suppose, having now devoured all there is in this number, you want to know what I have for you next week—n'est ce pas?

Well, here it is—or should I say—here they are?

An extra long instalment of that new serial of ours,

"THE MINERS' ELEVEN!"

By Walter Edwards,

which is creating so much noise among readers. And no wonder! Was there ever a finer footer yarn written? That's why you find it in the BOYS' FRIEND—the goal aimed at by all authors, and the resting-place of all the best stories for boys and girls.

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you that the Great Bumper Christmas Number of our companion paper, the "Magnet," comes out today, and it is something you must not miss! I have not the space here to tell you of all the topping features with which this grand publication is chock-full—just buy a copy RIGHT NOW, and if you are not already a regular reader I guarantee you soon will be!

I have much pleasure in announcing the following reader as the winner of the ten shilling cash prize for the Telephone Competition No. 2:

C. F. STUART, Esq.,

136, Attercliffe Common,

Sheffield.

SPLENDID NEW COMPETITION.

1st Prize, £5.

3 Prizes of Splendid Tuck Hampers.

8 Prizes of 5s. each.

On this page you will find a picture-puzzle, dealing with some famous

nal paragraph, the prize will be awarded to the competitor whose solution is the nearest.

The second and other prizes will be awarded to the readers whose solutions are next in order of merit.

In the event of ties, the right to add together and divide any or all of the prizes is reserved, but the full amount will be awarded. No competitor will be awarded more than one share of any prize.

No responsibility can be undertaken for any effort lost, delayed, or mislaid and proof of posting will not be accepted as proof of delivery or receipt.

The Editor reserves the right to disqualify any competitor's solution for reasons which he considers good and sufficient. The decision of the Editor must be accepted as final and legally binding in all matters concerning the competition, and entries are only accepted on this express condition. Correspondence must not be

The NY S 1760 yards of CR. NON THE. R TIER, 3E. T N. J.G. iii 3E. EMINENT General retires. 4 WA 4 HL. Probably.

B.F. I enter this competition and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final. Name..... Address..... Closing date of Competition—December 30th.

There will be long instalments of all the other fine serials, namely:

"THE LEAGUE OF THE STAR AND CRESCENT!"

By John S. Margerison,

"THE BOY WITH FIFTY MILLIONS!"

By Victor Nelson,

and

"THE MISSING SCOUTMASTER!"

By Ross Harvey.

The title of the next Rookwood story is:

"GENTLEMAN JIM'S CHRISTMAS VISIT!"

By Owen Conquest,

and it is great—simply great!

As for the Backwoods story,

"THE CEDAR CREEK PANTOMIME!"

By Martin Clifford,

does justice to this famous boys' author. This is one of the best Backwoods yarns I have been able to get hold of for some time, and it's going to make you, like Oliver Twist, ask for more!

There will be other items, such as articles on health and football, etc., and the whole will comprise next Monday's issue of your favourite paper—the BOYS' FRIEND.

By the way, I would like to remind

boys' heroes, which you are invited to solve. Bear in mind that each of the pictures may represent part of a word—one, two, or three words, but not more than three words.

There is nothing unusual about the wording, and the sense of the sentence will guide you. Solutions containing alternatives will be disqualified.

When you have solved the pictures to your satisfaction, write your solution in ink on one side of a clean sheet of paper, then sign the coupon beneath the picture. Cut out the picture and the coupon—do not sever the coupon from the picture—pin your solution to the picture, and post to:

"Boys' Heroes Competition No. 1,"

Gough House, Gough Square,

E.C. 4,

so as to reach that address not later than Wednesday, December 30th.

This competition is run in conjunction with the "Boys' Herald," and readers of that journal are invited to compete.

Read These Rules Carefully.

The First Prize of £5 will be awarded to the competitor who complies with the above conditions, and sends a solution exactly the same as the Editor's original paragraph. In the event of no competitor's solution

enclosed with efforts, neither will any be entered into in connection with this competition. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

CHRISTMAS.

Just a word in season about Christmas. There is the old wish about good will—the wish which has echoed softly through the centuries since our world of thought and action was young. I know my chums understand. The wise man might talk of Christmas, and all it means, and go on through all his days, and then not have done, for Christmas is a subject which, though old, is always new. To many of us it is charged with memories—memories fraught with inspiration as well as sadness. To look at Christmas from one angle-point is to see the dream-gardens of old romance, and the storied East. To one and all Christmas is a fresh start. It brings good cheer to all.

Your Editor

HOW TO PLAY FOOTBALL!

By AN INTERNATIONAL.

Scoring Goals.

Obviously the secret of all real success on the football-field rests in the ability of the forwards of the team to score goals. They may be ever so clever in mid-field, they may know all the tricks of the trade; but if they can't score goals in plenty then they won't come out on top.

To my mind, one of the chief reasons why more goals are not scored in every class of football is that forwards do not shoot often enough. The best of goalkeepers will stop some of the shots some of the time, but it takes a very good man, indeed, between the sticks to stop all the shots all the time. Hence, I should say that the first bit of advice to young forwards is to shoot hard and to shoot often.

Especially when you happen to have a fair breeze at your back does it pay to let fly at the goalkeeper on every possible occasion. Or, again when the ball is slippery and the surface of the ground treacherous a goalkeeper will often be beaten by a shot which he would stop if the conditions were normal.

Mind you, when I say shoot hard and shoot often, I don't necessarily mean that you should try to beat the goalkeeper from the centre-line, say. So long as you can get nearer to goal, or so long as there is a colleague of yours in a good position to whom you can pass, and who is more likely to get a goal than you are, then by all



The most difficult shot of all!

means pass the ball. But don't get into the habit of passing and re-passing the ball in front of goal.

I could tell you of several first-class teams of to-day who are not getting goals as frequently as their footballing skill merits, because they take up the parts of dilly and dally in front of the posts. They seem to keep on working for an opening which cannot be missed, and while they are tip-tapping the ball to each other the defenders are packing their goal, and thus barring the way to the net.

On the other hand, there are several first-class forwards of to-day whose names stand high in the list of goal-scorers because they never lose an opportunity of having a pop at the target. Mind you, the forward who does shoot on every conceivable occasion will be responsible for quite a lot of misses. Sometimes the ball will go amongst the spectators, or quite a long way from the target; but if a player can shoot at all, then he is much more likely to score one goal with six shots than he is to score one goal with two shots.

Shooting.

Especially, if there is no colleague to whom you can pass the ball with advantage, should you avail yourself of the opportunity to shoot. You may not score, but neither would you score by passing to a pal who was not in a good position. Shooting is, of course, an art which can only be perfected by practice; but, speaking from experience, I should say that about the most difficult shot of all for the goalkeeper to negotiate is the ball which is travelling away from him, and which enters the goal within a square yard of the angle made by the cross-bar and the upright. To this sort of shot the goalkeeper may get his fingers if he makes a super-human sort of effort, but even then he is not likely to stop it finding its billet if the ball has any considerable amount of speed behind it.

(More on How to Play England's Favourite Winter Game in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

THE BOY WITH FIFTY MILLIONS!

(Continued from previous page.)

These men are wicked swindlers, so is this 'ere woman!"

"Woman! Who are ye calling a woman, bejabbers?" Biddy screamed. "O'll ave ye know O'im a lady, ye flat-footed spalpeen! And if ye call me names O'll smash the face av ye, an' so I will!"

"Oh, hold yer screeching!" Briggs snarled, meaning to fight hard for the thousand. "You all know—Ow!"

Biddy's umbrella—the knob of it—had caught him a frightful crack over the head. It sent him head-over-heels from his donkey's back, and Mr. Woggle was indiscreet enough to indulge in an overwrought giggle, born of his anxiety as to whether he was to lose or gain the prize-money.

"Screeching, is it!" Biddy Malone yelled, dancing about and shaking her umbrella. "I'll 'ave ye know—A-r-r! That's roight, paste the spalpeen! He deserves ut, for tryin' to cheat a pore, lone widder!"

Mr. Woggle's laugh had driven Briggs to frenzy. He had jumped up and down at Mr. Woggle, whom he had pulled from off his donkey's back. They went at it tooth and nail, treading on a pet corn of Corporal Smith's, and bringing from him a yell of agony.

The ex-soldier made to strike at Briggs, missed him, and hit Mr. Spavis, who had just dismounted, on the nose. Spluttering with rage, Mr. Spavis hurled himself at Corporal Smith, and as they cannoned into Biddy, she lashed out at, first, one, then the other with her deadly green umbrella. It seemed, then, as though they were all mixed up and fighting like wild cats.

Don Darrel was never given to undue excitement, and he looked on for a few moments, thoughtfully rubbing his chin.

Crowds of boys broke through the rails, and were followed by as many villagers. The Head and Mr. Farmer left their seats, and made for the spot.

Snap, the cause of all the trouble, squatted near his master, his head on one side, and wearing an expression that suggested he was the most quiet and well-mannered dog in the world. He looked as though he might be wondering what all the commotion was about.

"Go it, Briggs!"

"That's right, Briggs! Bite him if you can't hit him!"

"Bravo, Biddy! Slip into them!"

Shrieks of laughter and cries of encouragement for all the combatants in turn came from the convulsed juniors, who had now formed a ring around the combat, which showed no signs of abating.

But the voices of the boys were silenced suddenly as Dr. Harding and Mr. Farmer pushed their way through the crowd.

"Bless my soul! This must be stopped, Darrel—stopped at once!" cried the doctor.

"Yes, sir," agreed Don, still rubbing reflectively at his chin.

"There will be bloodshed!" cried the Head, and, looking at the nose of Briggs, Don was of the opinion that there already had been. Mr. Woggle had made a set at it, and caught it several beautiful straight lefts.

"You see, it's all over who won the race, sir," Don explained. "I wish I could say who won, but I guess I can't!"

"What was the opinion of the judge, my boy?" the Head asked agitatedly. "Dear me, this must be stopped! My good people, pray cease! I beseech you to desist!"

None of them took the least notice. Briggs had got Mr. Woggle by the hair, whilst Corporal Smith had succeeded in bringing the head of Mr. Spavis into "chancery," and Biddy was getting in blows all round as the opportunity came.

"You see, sir, the judge—ha, ha!—was hardly in a position to give an opinion," Don said, a statement that, considering the judge was lying on his back with his legs waving in the air at the conclusion of the event, was decidedly true. "I think he's gone home in his motor-car. He seemed rather—er—upset. But I know! I'll settle it!"

"How, my boy—how?" the doctor demanded. "If you cannot find some way we must call for Grayson—ahem!—for the police! There will be something terrible happen, otherwise! Stop, I say—stop! Briggs, are you insane? You will kill the poor fellow!"

"Please—please," Don Darrel begged, moving towards the scrimmage, and raising his voice, "listen

to me! I am of the opinion that you all won!"

They stopped as if by magic, and stared at him. The Boy with Fifty Millions had produced his cheque-book and a fountain-pen.

All five hung upon his next words. "I think it was a dead-heat between the five of you," he went on, grinning at the terrible spectacle they presented. "And I think the only fair way to settle it is to increase the prize money to five thousand pounds and hand you one thousand pounds apiece!"

The Head almost collapsed. "Darrel, my dear lad, this is preposterous!" he objected. "Five thousand pounds! Think! It is an enormous amount, and—"

"It's not much out of fifty million sterling, sir," Don said, in a low voice, as he stepped aside with the kindly old master. "And, as near as possible, I think they did all come in together. It's impossible to settle the affair any other way, sir, unless I divided the original thousand offered into five, which would look mean with a guy—I mean, boy—with my means. Please let me do it, sir. I can't go back on my word now!"

"But five thousand pounds! Bless my soul!" the Head murmured, throwing up his hands. "Well, well, just this once, Darrel, I will give in to you. But in future I shall watch your expenditure, my boy. I feel it my duty."

"Thank you, sir!" Don said, moving quickly away, as he thought it unnecessary to argue further.

For the next few moments he was scribbling cheques and handing them to the delighted, if dishevelled, five.

They raised a cheer for him, which was taken up and echoed again and again on all sides.

Then there was a rush of juniors, and, in spite of his protests, Don Darrel was shouldered and borne away to the refrain of, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!" which, indeed, he was.

"You cost me an extra four thousand, you silly owl!" he said to Snap, when, in Chuta's quarters some time later, he laid his cheek against the shaggy head of the dog. "But, after all, old friend, you're worth fifty times that, and—well, it was worth a mighty lot of dollars to see that lovely scrap!"

Footer—A Surprise for All!

"Darrel, old chap!"

Some weeks after the extraordinary donkey-race, Heywood, the captain of the Fifth, buttonholed Don Darrel as he strolled into the quad after tea, in company with his inseparable chums, Philips, Losely, and South.

"Yep!" Don unconsciously fell into the twang of his earlier life at times.

"Did they ever play footer in Timbuctoo, or Mexico, or wherever your giddy ranch was?" Ned Heywood asked.

"Footer? Sure!" Don declared, nodding. "We used to play it with ten of the best sharp-shooting cowboys aside, and with trained buffaloes in the goals! If we couldn't beat a man by charging him, we used to lasso him—that was, if we weren't seriously annoyed with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Philips. "But supposing you were really angered?"

"Oh, then we used to shoot him, of course!" Don vowed gravely. "It used to get mighty exciting when all the twenty men started blazing away at each other, and we dealt out 'rough justice' to the referee!"

Ned Heywood, who was a tall, dark, serious lad, flushed and seemed a little angry. He was very much in earnest.

"Don't be a double-barrelled ass, if you can help it, Darrel!" he pleaded. "Can you play at all? Do you know anything about the game?"

"A little," Don admitted, serious now. "Why?"

"Because we badly want new talent in the school's team, and I am searching for it," Ned Heywood answered quickly. "You know that we played the first match of the season last Saturday against Eaglehurst Grammar School, and got hopelessly licked, six-one."

Don Darrel nodded.

"Well, we've got to do better than that," Ned Heywood said, with a shrug of disgust, "and as I am the captain of the team, it's up to me to find the right stuff to do it. Turn up at the practice match we've on this evening, Darrel, will you?"

"Sure, if you want me to," Don

agreed, "though I reckon I sha'n't shine."

"Never mind that—come and try. I'll soon know whether anything can be made of you. Put on a white shirt, please. Philips will fix you up with some shorts, if you've not provided yourself with any."

"Will you, my dear old guy?" Don asked.

"You bet!" Frank Philips agreed. "Come now and look them out. We'll have to start soon for the playing-fields."

It did not take them long to obtain the necessary footer rig, and they joined a little later the crowd of juniors who were bound for the footer field, which was situated at no great distance from the school.

As they came out of the school gates into the road, a carelessly-dressed man in a soft felt hat suppressed a start, and, with an almost silent whistle, started to follow.

If Don Darrel saw this individual at all, he paid little heed to him.

It was now quite two months since the Boy with Fifty Millions had been kidnapped and sent on his terrible flight in the monoplane, and during that time his enemies had not again shown their hand.

At the back of Don's brain was the recollection of that grim journey through the air that would have meant death but for Fate itself seeming to stand by him, and he felt fairly certain that it was by no means the last attempt that would be made to remove him from the path of Randolph Gurney.

He was, after all, however, just a light-hearted boy—if, perhaps, the richest person in the world—and, with all the fun and enjoyment of a boy's life at a big public school, he was to be forgiven if he sometimes forgot his peril and allowed himself to lapse into a false sense of security.

When Don and Philips arrived at the playing-fields, they found a crowd of juniors of all ages and from all Forms grouped about the touch-lines of the football field.

Don began to understand that it was to be quite a formal match, though only really for practice purposes and to give new players a chance to be "found."

Eleven lads from the Fourth and Fifth, in the red shirts of the school, would meet eleven similar juniors in white. The teams would include a picking from both the first team of the school and the reserves, and fellows who were being given a trial to see how they shaped, as in his own case.

Mr. Farmer had agreed to referee the match, and was already on the field, chatting with a couple of lads who were to act as linesmen.

In the dressing-room, Don Darrel was approached by Heywood.

"I want to give you every chance to show what you can do, Darrel," the captain said, with his somewhat patronising air. "Where do you think you'd do best?"

"Looking on!" Don assured him promptly.

"Don't be an idiot! I mean, what position?"

"Centre-forward," Don Darrel answered coolly.

"My hat! Oh, right-ho! If you can do well there, we sha'n't lose sight of you. Grierson, who has played centre—but it's not cricket to run a player down."

"Well if that's not as good as saying Grierson is rotten, what is?" Philips laughed.

"You shut up, Philips! By the way, I want you to captain the whites. You'll know most of the chaps who will be on your side. Put them where you think best, and give Darrel his chance in the centre of the forward line."

"Right-ho!" Philips agreed. "You go and coach your lot of cripples! They'll need putting up to a few things if they are to beat us!"

Grierson, a moment later, received something of a shock. He had been expecting to play as centre-forward, his position in the first eleven, on the side of the white-shirted eleven. He glared surlily at Don Darrel when he heard he was down to play there, and was himself asked, after all, to put on the school colours and play centre-forward on the other side.

Mr. Farmer's whistle sounded impatiently from the field, and, after a hurried completion of their football toilet, the twenty-two players trooped out on to the field.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling yarn in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

TUBBY MUFFIN'S CHRISTMAS EVE!

"Now, come along, do!" said Aunt Jane. "We'll just look at the Chamber of Horrors, and then we'll have tea."

Tubby brightened perceptibly. He had insisted on paying a visit to Madame Tussaud's; but, as he said, Aunt Jane would hang about a lot of stuffy old kings and suchlike folk, and tableaux, while all the giddy horrors were waiting.

But Tubby got his way at last, and then heaved a sigh of relief as the tea-room was sighted.

Aunt Jane forgot all about him, but sat down at another table and talked about jumpers and the price of wool to an old friend who had just entered. Tubby did not care. He ate his tea and his aunt's, and then rambled off, feeling thoughtful, and as if he liked to be alone to ruminate.



He landed on the pavement at the feet of a stalwart man in blue.

Tubby is ever so vague about what happened until a good bit later. He says he made a point of visiting the Chamber of Horrors.

"Well, will you believe it?" he says. "The hopeless duffers had gone and shut the place up, and left me alone in the dark with all those nasty objects. What I did care about was the awful damage done to my clothes in escaping. I got my coat ripped right up the back with a blessed nail, and—"

But there it is! You don't find a Muffin unprepared. There was a rum-looking joker, with a purple gown on him, and a lot of shining stuff on his sleeves; so I helped myself to his rig, and felt warmer, for it wasn't half chilly feeling my way round with my coat torn!"

At this stage Tubby gets horribly mixed again; but we see him a few minutes later stealing darkly through the galleries and climbing up to a window-sill. He contrived to swing the glass panel round, and then he peered down into the street.

"London," he says, "looked simply beautiful, for it was moonlight, and the bells—" But his foot slipped just as he was thinking of the bells, and he went whack on to the pavement right at the feet of a stalwart man in blue.

"Hallo! What's your little game?" roared the officer.

Tubby was up and away down Baker Street, running for his life, with his Plantagenet robes trailing after him. Luck had not deserted him. He says the constable was fat, and that a tortoise could have outrun him. Obviously, the representative of law and order never as much as tried to run, and Tubby dived into a hall.

A fair lady, who apparently was one of the hostesses, approached him.

"Perhaps you will dance with me?" she said graciously. "You seem lonely, and I want everybody to enjoy the evening."

"I am not very partial to the jazz," says Tubby; "but we performed the movements in wonderful style."

"And what character in history do you represent?" asked the lady, as they strolled out of the ball-room.

And then, for some unexplained reason, the lady burst out laughing, and turned herself into Aunt Jane. At her side stood one of the caretakers of the show place.

"Come back home at once," said Aunt Jane. "You shouldn't fall asleep like this."

So he went back home, and had his Christmas dinner; but he says that the dance was all right, and that if—

THE END.