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# The BOYS' FRIEND <sup>1d</sup>/<sub>2</sub>

TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending February 5th, 1921.

THRILLING ADVENTURE & SCHOOLBOY FUN—"THE BOY WITH FIFTY MILLIONS!"



**FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH!**

Amid a positive deluge of splintered timber, broken slates, and choking dust, Don Darrel and Derrick Brent hit the surface. The shock of the explosion had dazed them, but the icy chill of the water revived them, and they instinctively struck out for the safety of the opposite bank. "Jove, that was a near shave!" commented the Boy with Fifty Millions, as cool as if in the Form-room at Eaglehurst School.



A FINE LONG COMPLETE YARN OF JIMMY SILVER &amp; Co.

# The Mystery of Mr. Bootles!



A STORY OF THE  
CHUMS OF  
ROOKWOOD SCHOOL.

BY  
OWEN CONQUEST.

## The 1st Chapter. A Sudden Attack!

"Hold on!" rapped out Jimmy Silver.

"What the—?"

"It's Bootles!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Arthur Edward Lovell, in dismay.

The lane that ran from the village of Coombe, past the gates of Rookwood School, was powdered with snow, that glimmered in the light of the rising moon. Four juniors of the Fourth Form were trudging home to Rookwood, when Jimmy Silver suddenly gave the alarm.

The Fistical Four of the Fourth were out of bounds—which made the sudden sight of their Form-master extremely unwelcome.

Fortunately, it was only the back of Mr. Bootles that they saw.

Here and there the heavy shadows of the trees lay across the lane, and between the shadows were patches of clear moonlight. And in a clear patch of moonlight, not twenty yards distant, Jimmy Silver had suddenly spotted the well-known figure of Mr. Bootles, proceeding towards Rookwood School at a slow and stately pace.

"Phew!" murmured Raby. "Might have run into him!"

"What a surprise!" chuckled Newcome.

"Hush!"

The Fistical Four had stopped, and they watched the little plump figure of their Form-master with anxiety. They wondered whether the shadow they stood in was deep enough to conceal them if Mr. Bootles looked round.

But he gave no sign of looking round. Probably he was in a hurry to get out of wind and snow, and into his warm study. He trudged on at his best pace—which was about that of a fairly active tortoise.

"This is nice—I don't think!" grumbled Lovell. "We can't pass him without being spotted! And if we follow at the rate he's going, we shan't be home till morning!"

"We were rather asses to come out after lock-up!" remarked Newcome, in a reflective sort of way. "It's jolly cold, and the wind's icy, and the snow's beastly, and—and—"

"And anything else?" inquired Jimmy Silver, in a tone of sarcastic patience.

"Well, it was your idea, Jimmy, and your ideas are generally rotten!" said Newcome. "Now we seem to be landed!"

"Oh, come on!" said Lovell. "He's nearly out of sight now. We shall have to crawl, that's all!"

"After all, he's nearly as blind as a bat," said Raby. "If he did look round and see us, he mightn't know us. Naturally, he thinks we're in the end study, at prep. Come on; I'm shivering!"

"Go slow, though," said Jimmy Silver, as the Fistical Four started again; "and don't jaw! He may hear!"

"I know who does most of the jawing in this Co!" remarked Newcome.

"Dry up, old chap!"

The four juniors trudged on, very cautiously now. It was really important not to be discovered outside the school walls after lock-up.

Dropping over the wall, and going for a ramble by moonlight, was quite a harmless escapade, from the point of view of the juniors themselves. But it was quite certain that their Form-master would not look on it in the same light. School rules were made to be obeyed—at least, that was Mr. Bootles' view.

The juniors' footsteps were inaudible in the snow, and they took

advantage of the shadows of the trees beside the lane, in case Mr. Bootles should glance round.

Every now and then the Form-master disappeared from sight in a black bar of shadow, but he reappeared in the moonlight beyond in a few minutes.

The juniors chafed at the delay as they suited their pace to that of Mr. Bootles—which was not rapid.

Lovell began to hum the "Dead March in Saul," with sardonic humour. Jimmy gave him a forcible dig in the ribs.

"Shut up, you owl!"

"Ow!"

"Do you want to be spotted, you ass?" exclaimed Jimmy warmly.

"This means two hundred lines each, if not a licking!"

Lovell grunted.

"Look here, can't we take to the fields, and dodge round him?" he demanded. "I shall get rooted here, at this pace!"

"Well, perhaps—" Jimmy Silver considered.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Raby suddenly.

"What the merry thunder—"

There was a sudden sharp cry ahead.

To the blank amazement of the juniors two dark figures suddenly rushed from the shadows of the lane, and hurled themselves upon Mr. Bootles.

That gentleman was at the moment in clear moonlight, just beyond a deep patch of shadow, which still hid the following juniors.

The scene, not twenty yards away, was perfectly clear to the eyes of Jimmy Silver & Co., and for a moment they stared at it, transfixed, in utter astonishment.

Mr. Bootles, assailed on either side, gave a sharp cry as he was seized; a moment more, and he was down in the snow, with one of his assailants kneeling on him. The other bent over him, with something in his hand.

"Footpads!" gasped Lovell.

"Come on!" said Jimmy.

There was no thought of further concealment now. The sight of little Mr. Bootles in the grasp of a couple of ruffians was enough for the Fistical Four. They thought only of helping him.

They broke into a tearing run, and dashed towards the scene. Mr. Bootles was spluttering wildly. He was alarmed, and still more surprised than alarmed at this sudden attack.

"Release me!" he panted. "What, what! Bless my soul! Police! Help! Yow-ow-ow! Dear me! Help!"

"Silence!"

"Help! Police! Groooooogh!"

Mr. Bootles, like the juniors, supposed his assailants to be footpads. To his amazement, a loop of cord was slipped over his plump wrists, and drawn tight. Then he was dragged to his feet.

"Quick with him, Gadger!"

Each grasping an arm of the astounded Form-master, the two assailants hurried him to the side of the road.

Mr. Bootles wondered whether he was dreaming.

It was not robbery that was intended; it was kidnapping. That was clear enough, though the reason for it was a deep mystery.

Kidnapped Mr. Bootles undoubtedly would have been, whatever the reason, but for the presence of the Fistical Four. They were running up fast. Their feet made no sound on the snow, and their arrival was as great a surprise to the kidnapers as to Mr. Bootles.

They came on the scene with a sudden rush, and, without stopping, hurled themselves on the two ruffians. It was a complete surprise.

Jimmy Silver drove his clenched

fist under the ear of the man called Gadger, and that individual rolled in the snow with a gasp. The other fellow sprang clear of the rush; but in a second Lovell and Raby had hold of him, and he was dragged down. Mr. Bootles reeled against a tree, his hands bound, and spluttered:

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Help! Police!"

## The 2nd Chapter. At Close Quarters!

There was a desperate struggle proceeding in the road. The man Gadger had scrambled up, darted through the trees, and vanished from sight. But the man Lovell and Raby had dragged down was fighting like a wildcat. Newcome ran to his chums' aid, and collared him, and in a moment more Jimmy Silver had a grasp on the man's collar.

Four to one was too heavy odds for the rascal, though he seemed a powerful fellow. He was crushed down in the snow, panting, under the weight and grip of the Fistical Four.

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

"All right now, sir!" panted Jimmy Silver.

"Silver!" exclaimed the Form-master.

"Yes, sir! We've got him!"

"Bless my soul! You—you juniors here at this hour! But hold him securely, my boys! Bless my soul, my hands are tied, and I cannot help you! Hold him securely!"

"We've got him, sir!" said Lovell.

"The—the other atrocious rascal has—has escaped!" spluttered Mr. Bootles. "But this—this villain shall be handed over to the police! He shall receive hard labour for this! Bless my soul, what—what—Will one of you boys kindly unfasten my hands? Dear me!"

Raby let go the ruffian to perform that service for Mr. Bootles. He cut through the cord with his pocket-knife.

The man was still resisting feebly, but the three juniors had him fast. Jimmy Silver jerked him over, so that his face came visible in the moonlight. It was not a pleasant face.

It was that of a man about forty, clean-shaven, a hard face with lines in it which told of an evil life. A beard was hanging by a wire to one ear. The rascal had evidently been disguised in a false beard, which had been torn off in the struggle with the juniors.

His eyes, sunken and glittering, blazed at the Fourth-Formers like those of a captured wild animal. His chin, which was sharp and bony, was marked with a red scar, as if it had been long ago slashed with a knife.

"A pretty customer!" said Jimmy Silver. "The rotter doesn't look like a tramp, though. He's jolly well-dressed for a tramp."

"Let me go!" panted the man breathlessly.

"That's likely, you rotter!"

"Hold him!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "Hold him!"

"Safe as houses, sir!"

"He shall be sent to prison for this!" said Mr. Bootles, blinking down upon the rascal, after setting his glasses straight upon his plump little nose. "Dear me! What a horrid-looking scoundrel!"

Crack!

The sudden report of a revolver made the juniors start. The man with the scarred chin had his hand under him, and he had evidently succeeded in getting it into his hip-pocket for a weapon.

He fired at random, and the bullet whizzed into the trees; but the sudden report startled the juniors, and their grasp relaxed.

In an instant the rascal tore himself free and bounded to his feet.

"At him!" roared Lovell.

The juniors were springing on again, when the levelled revolver looked them in the face.

"Stand back, or—"

The trigger was rising.

Jimmy Silver & Co. paused. The man was evidently desperate, and ready to fire.

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "Stand back! I forbid you to risk your lives! Stand back at once!"

Reluctantly the juniors held back. The scarred man, panting, savage, backed to the other side of the road. Arthur Edward Lovell made a movement, but Mr. Bootles grasped his shoulder.

"Stop, I tell you!"

Held off by the revolver, the Rookwood juniors watched the rascal back into the woods, and then, with a sudden turn, he disappeared. They heard his footsteps for a few moments crashing among the frozen underbrush.

He was gone.

The first man, whom they had heard addressed as "Gadger," had long vanished; and there came to the ears of the Rookwooders across the intervening wood the whir of an automobile.

Whether it belonged to the rascals or not, they did not know, but they suspected that the intended kidnapers had had a car at hand.

Mr. Bootles, still breathless and deeply agitated, made a sign to the juniors to hurry on to Rookwood, and he set himself at a quick little trot, puffing and blowing.

Evidently he was not wholly without uneasiness that the ruffians might return, though they had been thinking only of escape after the arrival of the rescuers.

"Hadn't we better cut down to the police-station, sir, some of us?" asked Jimmy Silver, as he trotted by the Form-master's side.

"No, no!"

"But the police, sir—"

"I will telephone from Rookwood," said Mr. Bootles. "Let us get to the school as quickly as possible. You are in danger, my boys!"

"Oh, they've cleared right off, sir!" said Lovell.

"Possibly. But hurry."

Mr. Bootles was sadly winded, but he kept up gamely, trotting with a speed really creditable in a gentleman of his age and plumpness.

The gates of Rookwood loomed up before them at last.

There they halted, and Mr. Bootles groped for his key to the wicket-gate. He blinked nervously back along the road as he did so.

But it lay calm and clear in the moonlight. There was no trace of pursuit by the scarred man and his confederate.

Jimmy Silver, indeed, was pretty certain that the ruffians were miles away by that time. But poor Mr. Bootles had been thrown into a terrible flutter by the startling adventure.

He unlocked the side-gate, and the juniors passed in with him. With a sigh of relief, the little gentleman locked the gate again.

"Thank goodness!" he breathed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another in the dimness. Mr. Bootles had not asked them yet how they came to be out of gates at that hour. But now that the last shadow of danger was past, that thought occurred to the Fourth Form-master's agitated mind. He turned his glimmering spectacles upon the four juniors.

"I have not yet—ah!—thanked you for coming to my aid. Ah, hem!" he said. "It was very—ah!—brave of you! Very timely—very timely indeed! For some reason those dreadful persons—ah!—intended to make me a prisoner. Why, I cannot fathom. You saved me; but what were you doing on the spot, Silver? It is—ah!—past lock-up by an hour, at least!"

"We—we—"

"You were out of bounds!" said Mr. Bootles sternly.

"We—we went for a ramble in the moonlight, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

Mr. Bootles gave him a rather searching blink. But he was satisfied that the Fistical Four had had no ill object in slipping out of school bounds that evening.

And in the circumstances he could hardly condemn them very severely for having been on the spot to aid when in the hour of need.

"This must not occur again," he said. "I will—ah!—excuse you on this occasion—hem!—as your—your escapade has had—ah!—such happy results—what?—what?—for me personally. Hem! But—ah!—it must not occur again. You may—er—go!"

And the Fistical Four went.

Mr. Bootles, still in a flutter of

agitation, trotted into the School House, where he sank down in his study armchair and gasped for a good five minutes before he felt equal to getting on the telephone and calling up the police at Rookham to listen to a long, detailed, and rather confused account of his most extraordinary adventure.

## The 3rd Chapter. A Startling Story!

"Lagged?"

Valentine Mornington asked that question, as the Fistical Four came up into the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood.

"Licked?" asked Putty Grace.

"Walloped?" chortled Tubby Muffin. "I saw Bootles come in, looking in no end of a bait. Bootles nabbed you? He, he, he!"

"Bootles nabbed us, right enough," said Jimmy Silver. "But it's all serene. Somebody else nabbed Bootles—"

"What?"

"And we rushed to the rescue like giddy Paladins!" chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell. "In us you behold the heroes returned from the wars!"

"What on earth's happened, then?" asked Mornington, puzzled.

A dozen of the Fourth gathered round to hear the tale. There were exclamations of surprise on all sides.

"Kidnapping Bootles!" howled Townsend. "What on earth would anybody want to kidnap Bootles for?"

"Couldn't be to hold him to ransom!" chortled Conroy. "A Form-master's screw wouldn't be worth their while."

"Give us an easier one, Jimmy!" suggested Tubby Muffin.

"I've told you what happened," answered the captain of the Fourth curtly. "Make the best of it. I know it's jolly queer."

"They must have wanted to rob him!" said Erroll.

"Well, they didn't try to rob him," answered Jimmy. "They tied his hands together with a cord, and they were yanking him into the woods when we came up."

"Came and saw and conquered, you know," grinned Raby. "Like giddy old Julius in Asia, or wherever it was."

"I believe they had a motor-car in the lane t'other side of the woods," said Lovell. "We heard one soon after they'd bunked."

Mornington whistled.

"But who on earth could want Bootles, and what the merry thump could they want him for?" he asked.

"I'll give that one up!" said Jimmy. And the Fistical Four went on to the end study, to begin their somewhat belated prep.

Prep in the end study was subject to a good many interruptions that evening.

The story of the strange attack on Mr. Bootles spread through the school in a very short time, and all the Classical Fourth, who had not yet heard the story, looked into the end study for details. When they were satisfied there were more to come. The Shell heard of it, and Smythe and Howard and Tracy came in for the story, and when they had heard it they smiled. Adolphus Smythe was pleased to believe that the Fistical Four were romancing.

"I'd write that down and put it in a magazine, dear boys," said Smythe of the Shell. "Quite an exciting story."

"What about copyright?" said Tracy. "They must have read it in a magazine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Jimmy Silver jumped up in great wrath.

"You silly asses, clear off, or—"

Smythe & Co. backed out of the study, still grinning.

"Keep your wool on, old bean!" said Adolphus. "You didn't expect us to swallow a yarn like that, did you? Kidnappin' Bootles! Oh dear, no!"

Adolphus withdrew his nose from the doorway just in time to escape a slamming door. Jimmy turned the key in the lock.

Then the Fistical Four settled down to prep again.

The door-handle was tried a dozen times. Wegg of the Third howled through the keyhole. Snooks of the Second, athirst for information, kicked the door for a steady five minutes before he retired baffled. Hansom of the Fifth thumped the door a little later, and demanded entrance, and retired with dire threats on receiving no reply.

Prep had to be done, and the chums of the Classical Fourth did it, heedless of the thirst for news on the part of their schoolfellows.

But prep was over at last, and Jimmy Silver & Co. came down to



the Common-room, where they were at once surrounded by an inquiring crowd. Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern side, had heard the news, and had come over for further details from the fountain-head. A number of the Fifth wanted to know, and even some of the Sixth Form prefects looked in to hear the story. Never had the Fistical Four been in such demand as they were that evening.

Carthew of the Sixth sneered at the story, and remarked "Gammon" in his unpleasant way. But Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, listened with grave interest.

"You can ask Mr. Bootles, if you like, Bulkeley," added Jimmy Silver,

life secluded in the scholastic shades of Rookwood, could have possessed personal enemies of a bitter and lawless nature. But if the two ruffians were not his personal enemies, who and what were they, and what had their object been?

Inspector Sharpe of Rookham did not often have the good fortune to drop upon a deep mystery; the cases he handled were generally of the simplest nature. Here was a mystery that might have puzzled Scotland Yard, but the portly inspector was not very happy over it. Even the Fourth-Formers could see that he was perplexed and nonplussed.

True, cases of kidnapping for

you, sir, it may be watched for you again, and there will be other watchers on the scene," said the inspector comfortably. "I strongly recommend you not to proceed beyond the school walls until we have some definite information, at least."

"Most certainly I shall not, sir. I—I am no coward, I trust," faltered Mr. Bootles. "But an affair of this dreadful and lawless kind to a man of my age, sir, is no light matter. I—I fear I shall not sleep soundly to-night. It is—the most unnerving."

"Rely upon us to deal with the matter, sir," said Inspector Sharpe, and he rose and took his leave. And he departed from Rookwood as puzzled and perplexed as Mr. Bootles, though certainly not so flustered or alarmed.

#### The 4th Chapter.

##### Under Jimmy Silver's Protection!

"L'Affaire Bootles!" as Mornington entitled it, was almost the sole topic at Rookwood the next day.

It was so strange and mysterious an affair that it could not fail to become a nine-days' wonder in the old school.

When Mr. Bootles appeared in the Fourth Form-room in the morning to take his Form he showed signs of trouble and unrest.

All the Fourth sympathised with him sincerely enough.

This morning he was still aching from the rough encounter, and in a state of unusual absent-mindedness—of which his pupils mercifully forbore to take any advantage.

When Peele of the Fourth showed a disposition to pull the flustered little gentleman's leg in class, Jimmy Silver gave him a look which, as plainly as words could have spoken, warned Peele off the course, as it were. Jimmy's look meant a hammering after lessons, if Peele persisted; and Cyril Peele decided wisely to be good.

Seeing Mr. Bootles in such a troubled and flustered state, the end study had determined that the Fourth should be on their best behaviour; and when the fiat had gone forth from the end study it had to be obeyed. Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern division of the Fourth, generally opposed Jimmy Silver on principle; but in this instance they were quite at one with him. Tommy Dodd was as ready to hammer a Modern as Jimmy Silver was to hammer a Classical who bothered Mr. Bootles that day.

But lessons in the Fourth that morning were very desultory, in spite of the unusual good behaviour of the Form.

Even when Tubby Muffin, whose Classical attainments furnished his Form-fellows with much food for merriment, construed "jam nox umida caelo praecipitat" into "noxious wet jam falling from the sky," Mr. Bootles did not seize his pointer and slay him. Tubby Muffin was allowed to "rip," and his construe was fearfully and wonderfully made.

After morning lessons Mr. Bootles was observed to take his usual "trot" in the quadrangle, but he did not go near the gates. He glanced at the gates, and, seeing old Mack, the porter, there, beckoned to him. Old Mack came along slowly, probably wondering why Mr. Bootles could not walk the intervening distance if he had anything to say.

"Have you seen—er—anyone—any person—any suspicious character—lurking about the school this morning, Mack?" asked Mr. Bootles.

Mack opened his ancient eyes very wide.

"Suspicious pusson?" he repeated. "Yes, any ruffian—any desperado or—"

"My heve!" said Mack. "No, sir. I ain't seed any sich pusson!" And old Mack returned to his lodge, wondering whether the master of the Fourth had been drinking.

#### The 5th Chapter.

##### Caught in the Act!

"It's up to us!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark on Saturday afternoon, with an air of profound reflection, after being buried for some time in thought.

There was snow on the ground, and there was no football that afternoon. The Fistical Four were at rather a loose end for the half-holiday.

"What's up to us?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"About poor old Bootles."

"What's the matter with Bootles?"

"Those rotters tried to bag him once," said Lovell. "They had some reason, though we don't know what

it was, and Bootles don't, and Mr. Sharpe hasn't found anything out. But they had a reason. Owing to us, they had to hike off without Bootles. But if they want him, won't they try again?"

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Jimmy. "Yes, it's most likely!"

"And suppose they're still watching it for a chance at him?" continued Lovell.

"I—I suppose it's possible. But their faces would be known—at least, one of them—"

"Not if they were disguised."

"Oh!"

"One of the rotters had a false beard the other night. Now, I've been keeping my eyes open," said Lovell, in rather a lofty way. "Yesterday, coming in, I noticed a fellow with his overcoat collar turned up, and a jolly thick beard, leaning against a tree not a hundred yards from the gates."

"I believe I've seen such things!" murmured Raby.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave his humorous chum a glance of rebuke. This was not a matter for jesting.

"This morning," he went on, "I loafed out of gates, and there was the same johnny walking in the road. He pretended to be lighting a pipe as I came by."

"Perhaps he really was lighting it?" suggested Newcome.

"After dinner," continued Lovell, unheeding, "I took a squint out of gates, and the same johnny, in the same beard and overcoat, was sitting on a stile across the field."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure! Now, doesn't that look suspicious?"

"Well, it looks as if the fellow is hanging round the school," said Jimmy Silver. "It's a bit queer, now you speak of it. Let's take a walk round and see if he's on the scene now. If there's a rotten spy looking for chances at old Bootles, we'll jolly well come down on him heavy!"

"Good!"

In quite a triumphant mood Arthur Edward Lovell led his chums towards the gates.

Lovell looked this way and that way, like Moses of old, and fairly gasped:

"There he is—right under our noses!"

Across the road was a park fence, and against that fence a rather burly man was leaning. He was muffled up to his ears in a big overcoat, and he wore a cap pulled low down over his face—most of which was hidden

The bearded man drew back as close as he could to the fence as the four came racing by, but he was not to escape so easily. Quite artistically, Arthur Edward Lovell stumbled just in front of him, and reeled headlong against his chest.

Crash!

"Oh!" spluttered the bearded man breathlessly. "You young fool—"

Lovell clutched at the beard and dragged.

To his own amazement—for he was hardly prepared for such a dramatic confirmation of his suspicions—the beard came off in his grasp.

A clean-shaven, though rather mottled, chin was revealed. There was a howl from the juniors—and with one accord they leaped upon the man, like hounds upon a stag. He came down into the road with a crash in the clutches.

"Pin him!" roared Lovell. "Got the scoundrel! Mind he doesn't get at his revolver!"

"Down him!"

"Hold his hands—"

"Let me up!" roared the struggling man. "You young rascals, I'll complain to your headmaster about this! How dare you touch a policeman in the execution of his duty!"

"Wha-a-at—"

"Eh?"

The man's cap had fallen off, and his beardless face was quite revealed now. Jimmy Silver & Co. let him go as suddenly as if he had become red-hot to touch. They blinked, almost frozen with horror, at the rugged and well-known features of Inspector Sharpe, of Rookham!

"Old Sharpe!" stuttered Lovell.

"Great Scott!"

The hapless inspector sat up breathlessly, and groped for his beard and his cap.

"You young rascals—"

"Oh dear!"

"If—if you say a word about this I'll ask your headmaster to flog you!" gasped the inspector, and he struggled to his feet and fairly bolted, beard and cap still in hand.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at each other speechlessly. Evidently the inspector had been on the watch for the mysterious foes of Mr. Bootles, whom he—as well as the Fistical Four—suspected might be spying on the school.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" stuttered Jimmy Silver at last. "We—we—we seem to have—to have put our foot in it this time!"

"You ass, Lovell—"



**TAKE COVER!** "It's Bootles!" suddenly ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Cover—quickly!" The Fistical Four immediately sought the shadows of the hedge at the side of the road.

when he had concluded the story for the twentieth time for Bulkeley's benefit. "I don't understand it any more than you do, but that's what happened."

"It's queer enough," said Bulkeley. "I suppose that's what Inspector Sharpe has come to see Mr. Bootles about."

"Has he come?" exclaimed Lovell. "Yes; he came on his motor-bike, and he's with Mr. Bootles now," said the captain of Rookwood. "I hope he'll get the rascals."

Lovell minor, of the Third, looked into the Common-room.

"You kids are wanted," he said, to the Fistical Four.

"Kids!" exclaimed Lovell, with a wrathful glare at his hopeful young brother. "If you—"

"Don't jaw, old chap," said Teddy Lovell. "Bootles wants you to speak to the giddy inspector. Get a move on, and give your chin a rest!"

And Teddy Lovell departed just in time to escape a brotherly boot.

"I suppose they want us to give a description of the rotters," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, you fellows!"

There was no doubt now among the juniors as to the truth of the amazing story. The presence of the inspector from Rookham was evidence enough of that. Quite a little army followed the Fistical Four to the study of Mr. Bootles; but the door was closed on them when Jimmy Silver & Co. had entered.

The Co. found Inspector Sharpe with Mr. Bootles. The portly gentleman eyed them very keenly, and questioned them very closely, and took down their description of the scarred man in his pocket-book. Of the other man they could tell him little, excepting that he was of burly build, and had been addressed by his companion as "Gadger."

The inspector was evidently puzzled.

An attempt at robbery he could have understood easily enough, but it was clear that robbery had not been the object of the mysterious pair. They had bound Mr. Bootles' hands, and striven to force him away into the woods, and it appeared that there had been a motor-car in waiting near at hand. Why anyone should seek to kidnap the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood was a simply unfathomable mystery. Mr. Bootles could not let the slightest ray of light in upon the matter. He had, so far as he knew, no enemies, and, indeed, it was absurd to suppose that the plump, good-natured little gentleman, who for many years had spent his

ransom were not unknown; but such an explanation in this case was ludicrous. Adequate as the salary of a Form-master at Rookwood was, it certainly did not suffice to make him a worthy object of so desperate a scheme. Kidnappers with a view to ransom could easily have found much wealthier game within a few miles of Rookwood School or at Rookwood School itself, for that matter.

But any other motive for the kidnapping was unfathomable, and the inspector questioned the juniors closely, with a lurking suspicion that the excited little gentleman had—unintentionally, of course—exaggerated the matter.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. corroborated Mr. Bootles' story in every particular. They had found him with his hands bound; they had seen the ruffians attempting to drag him into the wood. They bore witness to the chief rascal's false beard and revolver.

The juniors were dismissed after the inspector had made careful notes of their statements, and he turned to the agitated Form-master again.

"A very curious affair, sir," he said. "It shall, of course, be most closely investigated. The descriptions of the ruffians shall be circulated. We shall do our best. But if you could give me the slightest hint as to why the attempt may have been made—"

Mr. Bootles shook his flustered head.

"Impossible, Mr. Sharpe! I cannot imagine—"

"You may, of course, have been mistaken for some other person, against whom these men have a grudge," the inspector said musingly.

"I—I trust that is the case," said Mr. Bootles, much relieved by the suggestion. "I sincerely hope so! But they saw me in the clearest moonlight, as plainly as I see you now!"

"You think they were lying in wait?"

"I am sure of it. They had been watching from the trees, and rushed out on me as I came by—"

"How could they have known that you were passing at that hour?"

Mr. Bootles started.

"Bless my soul! I never thought of that, sir! Undoubtedly they must have gained information as to my movements. Perhaps I was watched leaving Rookwood, and they laid this dreadful ambush on the way I had to return." Mr. Bootles shuddered. "In—in that case, the—the school must have been watched on my account! It is terrible!"

"If the school has been watched for



#### JIMMY SILVER & CO. TO THE RESCUE!

"Footpads!" yelled Lovell. "After 'em!" yelled Jimmy. And the Fistical Four dashed towards their Form-master, who was in dire peril at the hands of his unknown assailants.

by a thick, brown beard—save a nose blue with cold.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Dash it all, he seems to be watching the place!" he said. "If you've really seen that same chap hanging about before, Lovell—"

"Three times!"

"Then we'll jolly well put it to the test!"

The juniors consulted in whispers for a few moments, and then strolled along the road. They turned at a little distance, and came racing back—on the further side of the road now, so that they would pass close by the man leaning on the fence.

"You chump, Lovell—"

"You fathead, Lovell—"

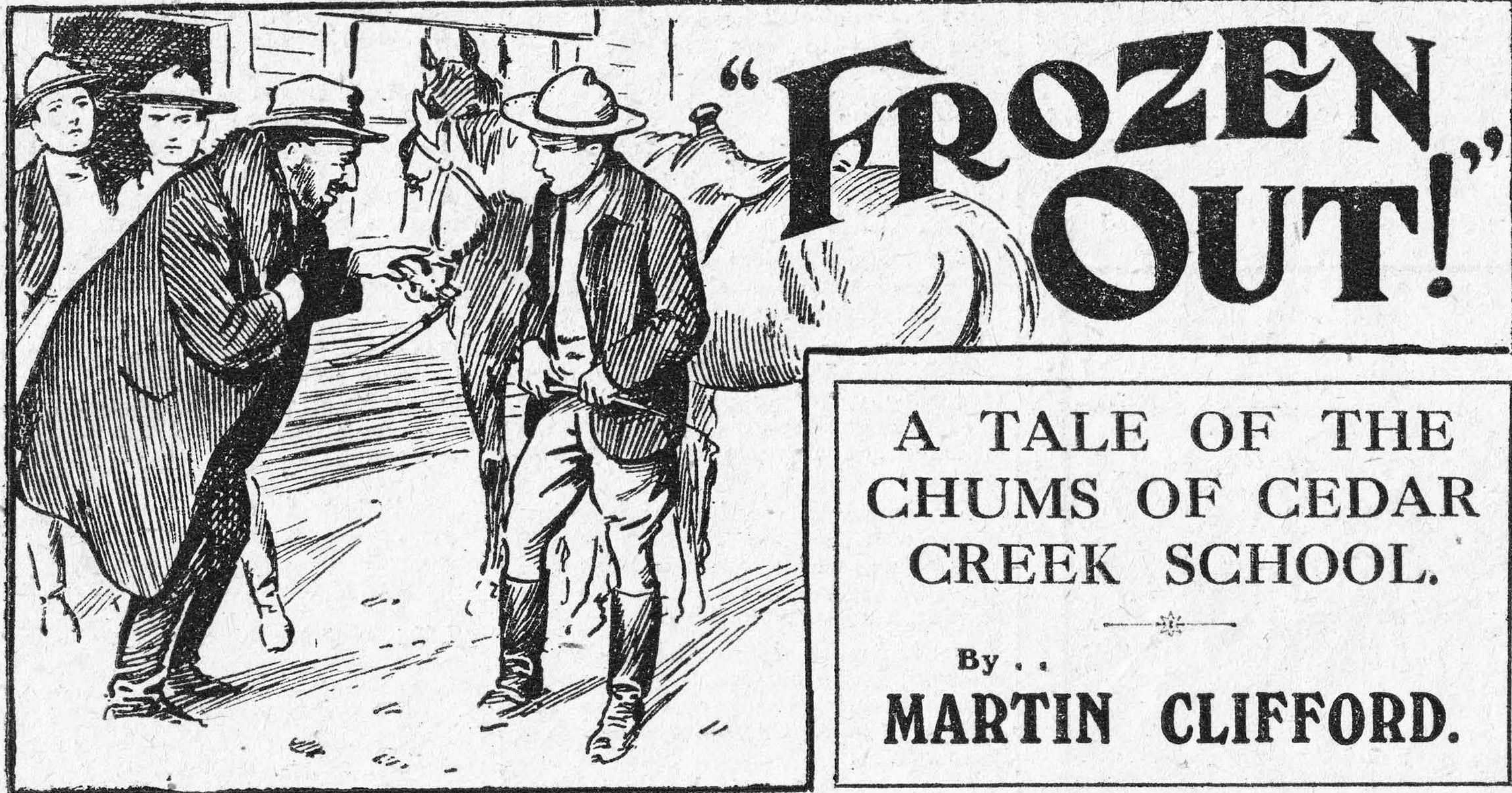
Arthur Edward Lovell received these three friendly tributes in abashed silence. He was dumb-founded. And the Fistical Four trod in again at the school gates, sadder if not wiser Fourth-Formers. On this occasion, at least, they had not succeeded in solving the mystery of Mr. Bootles.

THE END.

(Now, don't you miss "The Rookwood Millionaire," a fine, long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next Monday's BOYS FRIEND.)



A Fine Long Complete Yarn of Frank Richards &amp; Co.!



## A TALE OF THE CHUMS OF CEDAR CREEK SCHOOL.

By . .  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

### The 1st Chapter.

#### Difficulties of a Schoolboy Author!

"Richards!"  
Frank Richards did not hear. Not that Frank was getting deaf, but he was very busily occupied at that moment.

Miss Meadows' eyes fixed upon him, and he did not observe it. Just then the schoolboy author of Cedar Creek was exactly six thousand miles away from the school in the backwoods—mentally, of course. Physically, there he was under the eyes of the Canadian schoolmistress. Three thousand miles of ocean and three thousand miles of continent separated Frank's thoughts from the backwoods school in the Thompson Valley of British Columbia.

Miss Meadows was conducting her class through the mazes of irregular verbs. At such moments she expected her pupils to give attention. Her pupils did not always come up to her expectation.

But Frank Richards was generally quite a good and reliable pupil. Now he was guilty of inattention to an unheard-of extent. Not only was he evidently not paying the slightest attention to verbs, regular or irregular, but he did not even hear Miss Meadows when she called to him by name.

He had a writing-pad on his knees, under cover of the pinewood desk, and was scribbling away at a great rate.

He had started surreptitiously, hoping to escape notice while he scribbled down these valuable lucubrations; but, getting interested in his task, he forgot Miss Meadows and the backwoods school. His thoughts were with his old school in England, about which he was writing a story for the "Thompson Press."

"Richards!"  
Miss Meadows advanced towards the class. She spoke so sharply and so near that Frank gave a jump.

He started up, his face crimsoning. Chunky Todgers gave a fat chuckle, and some of the fellows grinned. Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc looked serious enough. They were concerned for their chum.

"Oh—ah—yes?" gasped Frank.  
"Yes, ma'am?"  
"What are you doing, Richards?"  
"D-d-doing, ma'am?" stammered Frank.

"Yes!"  
"I—I—I—"  
"Kindly show me at once what you were writing under your desk, Richards!" exclaimed Miss Meadows, with asperity.

"Oh!"  
Miss Meadows held out her hand, and Frank, after a brief hesitation, passed the writing-pad to her.

Then he stood, with a crimson face, awaiting her comments. Miss Meadows looked at the close, fine writing that covered the uppermost page, and then she stared at it, and then she uttered an ejaculation. For this is what she read:

#### "BULLIVANT'S SCHOOLDAYS! Chapter I.

Bullivant of the Fifth came along the passage, with his hands in his pockets, walking with the slight swagger that always distinguished the progress of Bullivant of the Fifth. At the corner of the corridor he cuffed a fag of the Third Form who ventured to grin. Bullivant was a good-natured fellow, but he was not to be grinned at with impunity, especially by fags. He was——"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Miss Meadows. "What does this mean, Richards?"

"It—it—it's a story," stammered Frank.

"A what?"  
"A story, ma'am. A—a story about my old school, St. Christopher's, in—in the Old Country, ma'am."

"Oh!"  
"It—it's for the 'Thompson Press,' ma'am," murmured Frank. "I—I'm awfully sorry, but—but time presses, and—and——"

"Do you think you should be writing this in class, Richards?" asked Miss Meadows, with unexpected mildness.

"Nunno!"  
"I am glad you see that. Dear me! There are half a dozen pages! I fear, Richards, that I must place this in the stove——"

"Oh!" gasped Frank.  
"As a warning for the future," said Miss Meadows. "I am sorry, Richards, but there is such a thing as discipline, as you are, perhaps, aware. The school-room is not the place for amateur literary work."

"It—it isn't exactly amateur, ma'am," submitted Frank Richards. "I've done a lot of it when Mr. Penrose was running the paper. Now we're running it ourselves, and—and——"

"And you think that your lessons may be set aside——"

"Oh, no! But——"  
"Todgers!"  
"Yes, ma'am?" said Chunky.

"Take this writing-pad and place it in the stove!"  
"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh dear!" mumbled Frank Richards.  
"You will now attend to lessons, Richards!" said Miss Meadows severely.

"Yes, Miss Meadows," groaned Frank.

Chunky Todgers grinned a wide grin as he crossed to the big stove with the schoolboy author's writing-pad in his fat paw and shoved it in. He stirred up the logs in the stove very industriously.

It was some minutes before he came back to his place in the class, and he gave Frank Richards a fat wink in passing.

Frank glared at him.  
His valuable manuscript was gone—gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream—and he had his work to do over again.

He could have kicked Todgers with pleasure at that moment, though really it was not Chunky's fault.

He couldn't have kicked Miss Meadows, because she belonged to the gentle sex, and kicks and Miss Meadows were not to be considered in the same breath; but if Miss Meadows had been Mr. Meadows, Frank could have kicked Mr. Meadows with considerable enjoyment.

His face was glum till lessons were over.

Strive as he would, he could not take the slightest interest in irregular verbs that afternoon, were they ever so irregular.

Neither could he work up any enthusiasm over the transitivity or intransitivity of a verb; and conjugations left him cold.

Like the bereaved Rachel of ancient times, he mourned for that which was lost, and there was no comfort for him.

There were certain difficulties in combining the occupations of a school-

boy and an author, with the occupation of an editor added.

He was glad when the school was dismissed, and he did not even notice that Miss Meadows gave him a severe glance as he filed out with the rest of Cedar Creek.

### The 2nd Chapter.

#### "No" to Mr. Isaacs!

"Poor old Franky!"  
"Hard cheese, old chap!"

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc made those sympathetic remarks simultaneously, as they came out into the snow in the playground.

"I guess it was rather tough," went on Bob. "How much had you done, Franky?"

"Nearly the whole instalment," said Frank. "And there was all I'd done yesterday, as well as what I did in class to-day. Of course, I oughtn't to have done it in class. But——"

"Never mind! You can do it over again," said Bob. "You'll knock it off quicker on the typewriter at the ranch."

"We've got to get to the office before we go home," said Frank. "Come for the horses."

The three chums hurried towards the school corral.

Chunky Todgers hailed them as they led their horses out.

"I say, Richards——"  
"Scat!"

"Hold on a minute," shouted Chunky. "It's important——"  
"Rats!"  
"But I tell you——"  
"Bosh!"

Frank Richards & Co. mounted their horses, and rode away in the gathering dusk, leaving Chunky Todgers gesticulating wildly in the gateway of the lumber school.

The chums of Cedar Creek took the trail towards Thompson, instead of their usual homeward way through the timber.

They were wanted at the "Thompson Press" office.

Since Bob Lawless, bidding at the auction by way of a joke, had had the newspaper "knocked down" to him in deadly earnest, Frank Richards & Co. had been very busy.

They had determined to "run" the local paper, as it had been run in Mr. Penrose's time—Mr. Penrose having shaken the dust of the Thompson Valley from his boots. And there was no denying that they had made a success of it.

The hand-press in the office turned out a larger number of copies than Mr. Penrose had ever sold in his best days.

Frank Richards did all the literary work for the paper, and Beauclerc did an article or two; and Bob Lawless had learned to set up type quite usefully. And the Cherub, too, had had some success as a commercial traveller, "roping in" advertisements for the paper.

Citizens of Thompson agreed that the "Press" had never been better, or indeed as good, and although the population was not numerous enough to make it a very profitable undertaking, the chums of Cedar Creek certainly made it pay.

But there was one drawback. It took up all their leisure time—and a little over!

For the first few weeks, while the novelty lasted, that did not matter so much. But it began to matter very seriously.

True, Chunky Todgers offered to relieve Frank of the task of turning out literature. Franky to turn it

out in ample quantities, of a much better quality. But his offer was not accepted—it was, indeed, declined in a rather gruff manner.

Every day after lessons, and all day Saturday, the three chums found themselves hard at work; and all Frank's spare time was spent in scribbling, or in clicking on the typewriter in his room at the ranch.

Dances at the Mission were out of the question now—sleighting and sledging there was no time for. For two or three weeks, the chums had hardly had their skates on.

But they were determined not to give up the venture; for Bob's unfortunate bid at the auction had cost them two hundred dollars, which was a sum they certainly could not afford to lose.

Bob, indeed, had suggested rather vaguely "taking on a man," but there were no compositors to be hired in Thompson, and authors were few; and to have a man from Vancouver was beyond the financial resources of the company.

So Frank, with a great pressure of work on his hands, had been driven to encroach on lesson-time, with disastrous results.

The chums reached the office in Main Street, hitched their horses in the lean-to shed, and Frank unlocked the door. The lamp was lighted, and the chums prepared to put in an hour's work before riding home. They had just started when a plump face with an aquiline nose looked in on them, and Mr. Isaacs gave them a cheery nod.

"My cootness!" said Mr. Isaacs. "Making the fur fly, young shentlemen?"

"I guess we'll make it fly faster without visitors dropping in while we're at work," said Bob Lawless bluntly.

"Mr. Isaacs laughed.  
"I have offered you feefy dollar for your property," he remarked. "But I am a generous man. I offer you a hundred dollar."

"Go and chop chips."  
"We gave two hundred for the business," said Frank Richards. "We've worked it up since then. Five hundred dollars wouldn't buy this paper now."

Mr. Isaacs shrugged his shoulders. "I tell you vat I will do," he said. "I will give you the two hundred, Master Richards."

"Good-evening, Mr. Isaacs."  
"Now, listen to me and be reasonable," said Mr. Isaacs patiently. "Zere is an opening for a paper in this valley—it is growing. I have money to run ze puziness. I should have bought it, but zat young donkey Lawless bid against me at the auction, and ran ze price too high. But I will go up to two hundred dollar, and I give you shob to write stories for me, Richards, same as you did for Mr. Penrose."

"Shut the door after you, Mr. Isaacs."  
"Look here," exclaimed Mr. Isaacs, much annoyed. "How much you take for zis puziness?"

"Five hundred dollars."  
"My cootness!"

Mr. Isaacs threw up his hands, as if he had received a great shock, and retired.

"Cheeky jay!" growled Bob Lawless. "All the same, I guess——"  
He paused.

"We should get our money back!" remarked Beauclerc. "That's something—to get out of the scrape that ass Bob landed us all in——"

"But we've worked up the paper," said Frank. "The circulation's increased since we took it over——"

"Never say die!" said Frank. "If we could find a man to take on the printing, at reasonable rates, we should be all right. All sorts of galoots come to the Thompson Valley, and we may drop on some busted compositor some day."

"Right-ho!" said Bob.  
He was thinking of the snowy plains, and of his unused sleigh at the ranch. But he stood loyally by his chum; and as the chief editor worked, there was no word of complaint from his staff.

### The 3rd Chapter. Taking on a Man!

Saturday was a busy day at the office of the "Thompson Press."

As there was no school that day, the youthful journalists rode over to Thompson immediately after breakfast, and put in a whole day's work. And it was a heavy day, too. Frank and Bob had been accustomed to helping on the ranch on Saturdays; and Beauclerc had generally worked on his father's clearing that day. But Mr. Lawless and Mr. Beauclerc—

whatever they thought of the editorial stunt—were kind and considerate, and the schoolboys had their Saturdays free for the office now. It troubled Beauclerc a little, for he knew that his father needed his aid, having no other assistance; but Mr. Beauclerc had told him to help his chums in their new enterprise—so long as it lasted. He did not seem to think, somehow, that it was likely to last very long!

Bright and early on Saturday morning, therefore, the chums of Cedar Creek hitched their horses in the shed, and entered the office for work on the forthcoming number of the "Press." Frank had a story to finish; Beauclerc an article to write and advertisements to arrange; and Bob Lawless, already getting expert at type-setting, laboured as a compositor—without giving a thought to such things as an eight-hour day. The chums were very busy when the door opened, and a coppery face, surmounted by a ragged Stetson hat, blinked in.

It was the face of Mr. William Bowers, otherwise known as Dry Billy, a gentleman who was reputed to have the deepest and most unshakeable thirst between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific.

When Mr. Bowers was not in the "calaboose," he was generally to be seen supporting a post outside the Red Dog saloon. He had an instinctive hatred for work of all kinds; he had tried his hand at many things, but never for long periods. Work and Mr. Bowers did not agree. But at times, when he failed to draw sustenance from a hard-hearted world without it, Mr. Bowers turned to work as a last and desperate resource. Then he worked just long enough to earn the cost of a "bender" at the Red Dog.

Frank Richards & Co. were not glad to see him. Frank took his fingers from the keyboard of the typewriter, and pointed to the street.

"Travel!" he said laconically.  
"Get!" snapped Bob Lawless.  
"Gentlemen——" began Mr. Bowers, taking off his rag of a hat.

"Shut the door after you," said Beauclerc.  
Mr. Bowers shut the door, but not after him. He remained inside.

"Gentlemen——" he repeated.  
"No hoboes wanted here," said Bob Lawless. "Get out!"  
"Gentlemen, I'm looking for a job."

"Rats!"  
"Cut it out!"

"I mean it," said Mr. Bowers sadly. "I'm up against it, gent! Boss-Eye, at the Red Dog, won't allow an old pard a single drink without spot cash on the counter. I'm on the rocks, gent—fairly up against it—and I guess I'm looking for a job. Reg'ler work!" said Mr. Bowers.

"Good-morning!"  
"What you gents want," continued Dry Billy, "is a galoot about my size. I've worked in a printing-office in the States."

"Oh!" said Frank.  
Mr. Bowers waved a dirty hand towards Bob at the type-case.

"That there work," he said, "I could do on my head. Gents, you can't do better than take me on—at reasonable wages."

Frank Richards & Co. exchanged a glance. Was this a chance at last of getting the man they needed so sorely? True, Mr. Bowers was a gentleman of the shadiest character. Anyone who left a watch, or a gun, or a horse near Mr. Bowers was extremely unlikely to see watch, or gun, or horse again. But the hand-press in the office was not a prize for a shady gentleman, and the supply of paper was not likely to tempt even Mr. Bowers.

"Let's see what you can do," said Frank, after a long pause. "Take this page and set it up."

"Done!" said Mr. Bowers, at once.  
He stepped quite briskly into Bob Lawless' place. Setting type with a hand that shook like Dry Billy's was not a facile task. But the "hoboe" soon showed that he knew the trade at least. Evidently his statement was true that he had worked in a printer's office at some stage in his shady and dilapidated career.

He set up the page briskly, and pulled off a sheet and handed it to Frank Richards.

Frank's face brightened a little. Undoubtedly Mr. Bowers knew his work—if he could keep sober enough to do it. That was a rather delicate question.

All three of the chums looked more satisfied. If the printing were taken off their hands they felt themselves able to deal with the rest of the business.

The "Thompson Press" would become quite a valuable property at



that rate, and without bagging all their leisure time from school. They were very much disposed to give Mr. Bowers a chance.

"We'll give you a trial to-day," said Frank, at length. "Then we'll see. But if you ever turn up here tipsy you go out on your neck first shot. That's understood!"

Mr. Bowers smiled in a deprecating manner.

"Gents, if Saturday is pay-day I shall be sober from Monday to Friday," he said. "I guess you're going to give me good pay. You're generous young gents, but—"

"But you'll blue it all at the Red Dog on Saturday night," said Bob Lawless, with a nod. "I savvy! I guess he will be sober through the week, Frank."

"We'll give him a trial, anyhow," decided Frank. "If we take you on, Bowers, what do you want in the way of wages?"

"A mere trifle—ten dollars a day," said Mr. Bowers.

"Make it ten dollars a week, and we'll see."

Mr. Bowers sighed.

"I never was a man to haggle for money," he said. "Ten dollars a week!"

"If you're worth more you'll get more," said Frank. "Now pile in. There's no end to do!"

Dry Billy piled in.

It transpired that the Thomson loafer really knew more about the business than Frank Richards & Co. did, which was all to the good. And he worked industriously till midday. Then he was given half-a-dollar to get his lunch, and he came back and worked in the afternoon. It was the easiest day the chums had had since they had started in their career as editors and publishers. Mr. Bowers was an acquisition. There was no doubt at all about that.

Instead of keeping on till long after dark, Frank Richards & Co. were able to get away before dusk, thanks to the assistance of Mr. Bowers. During the afternoon Dry Billy gave a series of pressing hints that he would work harder and better if there was "something in the jug." But his hints were ruthlessly disregarded.

Not till Frank Richards locked up the office did he hand Mr. Bowers four dollars for his day's work. And then Dry Billy made an instantaneous bee-line for the Red Dog across the street.

He had disappeared into the saloon before Frank Richards & Co. were on their horses. By the time they rode down Main Street to the trail, Mr. Bowers had slaked his troublesome thirst to the extent of exactly four dollars' worth of fire-water.

"He's all right, I guess," said Bob Lawless confidently. "He won't have a cent left on Monday. He will turn up safe and sober."

"I think so," agreed Frank. "Hallo, there's old Isaacs! Good-evening, Mr. Isaacs!"

"Coot-evening!" said Mr. Isaacs, smiling. "You have taken on assistance in ze office—yes?"

"Oh, yes, we've taken on a compositor," said Frank carelessly.

Mr. Isaacs grinned as the chums rode away.

"He seems to be rather tickled," remarked Beauclerc, glancing back at Mr. Isaacs. "The monied man of Thompson was grinning widely."

"Bother him!" said Frank. "He wanted to scoop in the paper, but he wanted it on the cheap. Now he's lost his chance. We're keeping on the 'Thompson Press.'"

"Yes, rather!"

The chums of Cedar Creek were quite agreed on that.

#### The 4th Chapter.

##### Mr. Bowers on a Bender!

Frank Richards & Co. rode over to Thompson on Monday morning very early, to call in at the office before going to school. Dry Billy Bowers had instructions to be there at half-past eight sharp. Dry Billy was very much unaccustomed to turning out at such unearthly hours, and Frank wondered a little whether he would be on the scene. If he was there, and if he was sober, Frank intended to put him to his duties in the office, and leave him at work, and ride over from Cedar Creek after lessons to see how he had progressed. All the "copy" for that number of the Press was now ready, and the last advertisement had been arranged. Most of the type was already set. Little remained to be done but pulling the copies and folding them, and making them up in bundles. That was an easy day's work for Mr. Bowers, and Frank hoped to find it done by the time he arrived at the

office after school. But he had a lingering doubt that Mr. Bowers might have repented of his new and startling scheme of getting money by earning it. Mr. Bowers' fits of industry were never of long duration.

But Frank's doubts were soon relieved. Mr. Bowers was there, bright and early, leaning against the window of Mr. Isaacs' office, a few doors from the "Thompson Press" headquarters. Mr. Isaacs was already at his office. He was an energetic gentleman, and made a great deal of his money while less enterprising men were sleeping. He was at his window, talking to the Thompson loafer, and apparently engaged in an interesting conversation with him. But he disappeared as the chums rode up, and Dry Billy turned from the window and swept off his ragged hat in polite salute to his young employers.

"Top of the mornin', gents!" said Dry Billy. "Here you see me agin, ready and eager to work!"

"No spondulices left?" asked Bob Lawless.

Mr. Bowers shook his head sadly.

"Good!" said Frank Richards. "There's a day's pay waiting for you when your work is done, you know."

"Hyer I am, ready and willin'," answered Mr. Bowers, but he seemed to speak rather sadly. Doubtless the prospect of a day's work had a depressing effect upon him.

Frank opened the office door, and Mr. Bowers followed him in. With

it would only be a question of distributing the bundles. Half the issue was to go to Gunten's Store, the rest to be despatched by the post waggon to Cedar Camp, Silver Creek, and the other settlements in the vicinity of Thompson Town. That was ever so much better than finding a day's work confronting them after lessons.

As Bob pointed out, with Dry Billy's aid they could easily get through the work in their spare time during the week for the next number, and on Saturday they need not miss the sleighing or the Mission dance, which was very comforting.

Lessons seemed long to the Co. that day; they were anxious to get to the office.

But everything comes to an end at last, and so did the day's school at Cedar Creek. Frank Richards & Co. rode away for Thompson in great spirits.

They trotted down Main Street towards the office in the winter dusk. "He's there!" said Bob, as he caught the flare of light from the office window.

"Folk seem to be interested in our office," remarked Beauclerc. From a distance the chums saw a number of Thompson citizens gathered in front of the building.

"Surprised to see Dry Billy at work, perhaps," said Bob.

"Perhaps!" said Frank uneasily. He accelerated his pace. There

A startling scene met their gaze.

Dry Billy, no longer dry, was dancing spasmodically round the hapless office. The type-case was overthrown, the types were scattered far and wide. A huge fire roared in the stove, and out of every opening of the stove stuck smoking bundles of the "Thompson Press." The bench was over, the typewriter lay on its side on the floor, and looked as if it would need extensive repairs before it typed again. The roll-top desk was in several pieces. The office and its furniture looked as if they had been struck by a severe cyclone. Amid the wreck rolled a number of bottles—empty—some broken. And in the midst of the ruin he had wrought Dry Billy Bowers tripped the light fantastic toe, with a flowing bottle under his arm and his rusty husky voice raised in triumphant song!

#### The 5th Chapter. Sold!

Frank Richards & Co. gazed at the scene spellbound. A loud chuckle followed them in from the cattlemen gathered outside.

"Oh!" gasped Frank at last.

Dry Billy ceased his gyrations and leaned heavily against the wall and blinked at them. Apparently he did not recognise his employers. When the wine is in the wit is out. And Dry Billy was not well-provided with wit at any time and a very great deal



#### DRY BILLY ON A BENDER!

Dry Billy, no longer dry, was dancing round the editorial sanctum of the "Thompson Press" spasmodically. The proprietors, Frank Richards & Co., entered after a well-earned rest, to find their office looking as if it had been struck by a particularly large-sized tornado.

great meekness he received his instructions from the schoolboy editor. He promised implicit obedience, and hinted that he would work better if he "whetted his whistle" to begin with. Frank Richards thought otherwise.

Once Mr. Bowers had access to the potent fire-water there was no telling what Mr. Bowers might or might not do. If a few dollars had come into his possession during the day, the schoolboy editors might have found him doing a war-dance in the office when they arrived after lessons. They knew Dry Billy very well.

So he was left, sad-eyed and athirst, when the chums rode off to school.

In morning classes Miss Meadows turned a rather severe eye upon Frank Richards.

But there was no literary work done in class that day. Frank Richards did not want to see any more of his "Bullivant's Schooldays" engulfed in the school stove and stirred in by Chunky Todgers. Moreover, since the advent of Dry Billy he was not so pressed for time. Dry Billy had really solved the problem for the schoolboy editors—if he only lasted!

Frank Richards felt very cheery and contented that day at Cedar Creek.

While they were at lessons the work was going on at the office and that was a very comforting thought.

They were going to arrive there and find the "Thompson Press" finished to the last bundle, and then

was an uneasy feeling in his breast. Dry Billy had been left sober and at work, but—All was safe with Mr. Bowers so long as he hadn't any money. And where could he have got any money? Still, Frank was feeling uneasy.

As they rode up to the office the schoolboy editors discovered that they had grounds for uneasiness.

A shadow was moving actively across the lighted window within, a shadow that had strange motions. It looked like the shadow of a Red Indian engaged in a wild, fantastic dance.

A voice smote upon their ears—the voice of William Bowers, hoarse and rusty, raised in song:

"Let it flow; that's the stuff!  
I'm going on a bender!  
I'll tell you when I've had enough!  
I'm going on a bender!"

Frank Richards & Co. had heard that touching refrain before, howled by a crowd in the Red Dog. Now they heard it barked from the office of the "Thompson Press."

Crash!

A chair came flying through the window and dropped in the street. Buster Bill, in the crowd outside, gave a loud chuckle.

"I guess Dry Billy is up to the chin!" he remarked.

Frank Richards jumped from his horse and tore open the office door. His chums were close behind him.

of whisky was evidently "in." Where the rascal had obtained the money for such an extensive supply of fire-water was a deep mystery. But clearly he had obtained it somewhere, and he had chosen the office of the "Thompson Press" for the scene of a jamboree.

"Hyer, you galoots, git out!" he stammered. "Wharrer you mean interrupting a gentleman in his private office! Groogh! You vamoose the ranch afore I git after you! You hear me yaup?"

"You boozy villain!" roared Bob Lawless.

"Wharrer you call me?"

"You—you—you horrid ruffian!" yelled Frank Richards. "Oh dear! Everything wrecked and ruined—"

"The 'Thompson Press' won't come out this week, I guess!" muttered Bob ruefully.

"Collar him!" said Beauclerc savagely. "There's a pond down the street, with ice on it. We'll sober him there!"

"Good!"

The havoc Dry Billy had wrought was not to be undone. But at least there was punishment for Mr. Bowers.

The three rushed at him.

Dry Billy staggered in their grasp, resisting manfully.

"Wharrer you mean—handling a gentleman in his own office! I'll send for the sheriff, I guess—groogh—oh—ar—yoooooop!"

He was not in a state to put up much of a fight; but if he had been, the three enraged editors were not to be denied. He came down on the floor with a bump and a yell, and then he was whipped out of the office. The cattlemen gave a roar of applause as the chums of Cedar Creek brought him out in a struggling, spluttering heap.

"Go it!" roared Buster Bill in great delight.

"Bring him along!" gasped Frank Richards.

"Yow-ow-wooop! Help!" roared Dry Billy.

But there was no help for him.

After the feast came the reckoning, and Mr. William Bowers had to pay for his merry jamboree in the office of the "Thompson Press."

He was rushed down the rugged street to the pond.

Crash!

There was a thin sheet of ice over the pond. Dry Billy broke it as he went in headlong.

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

The hapless Mr. Bowers came up spluttering and gasping and half-sobered by the shock. He crawled out dripping.

"Ow! Let up, gents!" he gasped.

"Ow! I'm wet! Ow! I'm c-c-cold! Let up, gents—let up!"

Frank Richards & Co. nobly forbore to send Mr. Bowers in again, and the dripping rascal was allowed to crawl away, chivvied along the Main Street by the uproarious cattlemen.

The schoolboys returned to the office.

The scene of desolation there was dismaying. They looked at it, but they did not feel equal to dealing with it then. They locked the door and returned to their horses.

"Goot-efening!" said a fat and oily voice. "You have had vun shock, I zink. Yes?"

It was Mr. Isaacs.

He rubbed his hands and smiled at the clouded faces of the editorial trio.

"I am so shorry!" he said benignantly. "It is too bad! Zat man, he is one ruffian! The calaboose is too good for him! I am so shorry, that I make my offer again. I give you ze two hundred dollars for ze puziness!"

"Oh!" said Frank Richards.

Mr. Isaacs nodded his head several times benevolently.

"I mean it!" he said. "You zink it is all right, and you steps into my office and signs a leetle paper—yes?"

"Let you know in five minutes!" said Bob.

"Coot!"

Mr. Isaacs returned into his office, still smiling. Frank Richards & Co. consulted, but the result of their consultation was a foregone conclusion. They were fed up with editing newspapers. To have that wreck taken off their hands was attractive, and without Mr. Bowers' aid their old troubles would begin again, and with his aid—that was not to be thought of. Mr. Isaacs' kind offer came, indeed, like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. Before the five minutes had elapsed Frank Richards & Co. walked into Mr. Isaacs' office to conclude negotiations.

Frank Richards & Co. had retired from the business of newspaper proprietors, printers, and publishers.

And it was not for some weeks—not till Mr. Isaacs had the paper going again, in a much extended style—that the true inwardness, so to speak, of the happenings at the "Press" office dawned upon their minds.

They had wondered where Dry Billy obtained that large quantity of fire-water, which had caused so much disaster. It dawned upon them, at last, that Mr. Isaacs had had a hand in it.

"I guess he's played us!" said Bob Lawless. "Played us for suckers all along the line! He meant to have the paper all along, and as we wouldn't sell he put that rascal Dry Billy on to us, and froze us out! I guess that was the game—shenanigan—all the time."

And Frank Richards had to admit that it was only too probable.

But there was no proof; and when Mr. Isaacs met the schoolboys in Main Street he smiled at them benignantly and effusively. Perhaps the astute gentleman felt that he had reason to smile.

THE END.

(Mind you read "The Cedar Creek Ventriloquist," a topping long, complete yarn of Frank Richards & Co., in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)