

"THE STRAIGHT BAT"—Grand Cricket Article by Lee of Middlesex.

The BOYS' FRIEND 1^{1d}/₂

TWELVE PAGES!

TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR!

No. 1,042. Vol. XXI. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending May 28th, 1921.

The Adventures of JIM HANDYMAN

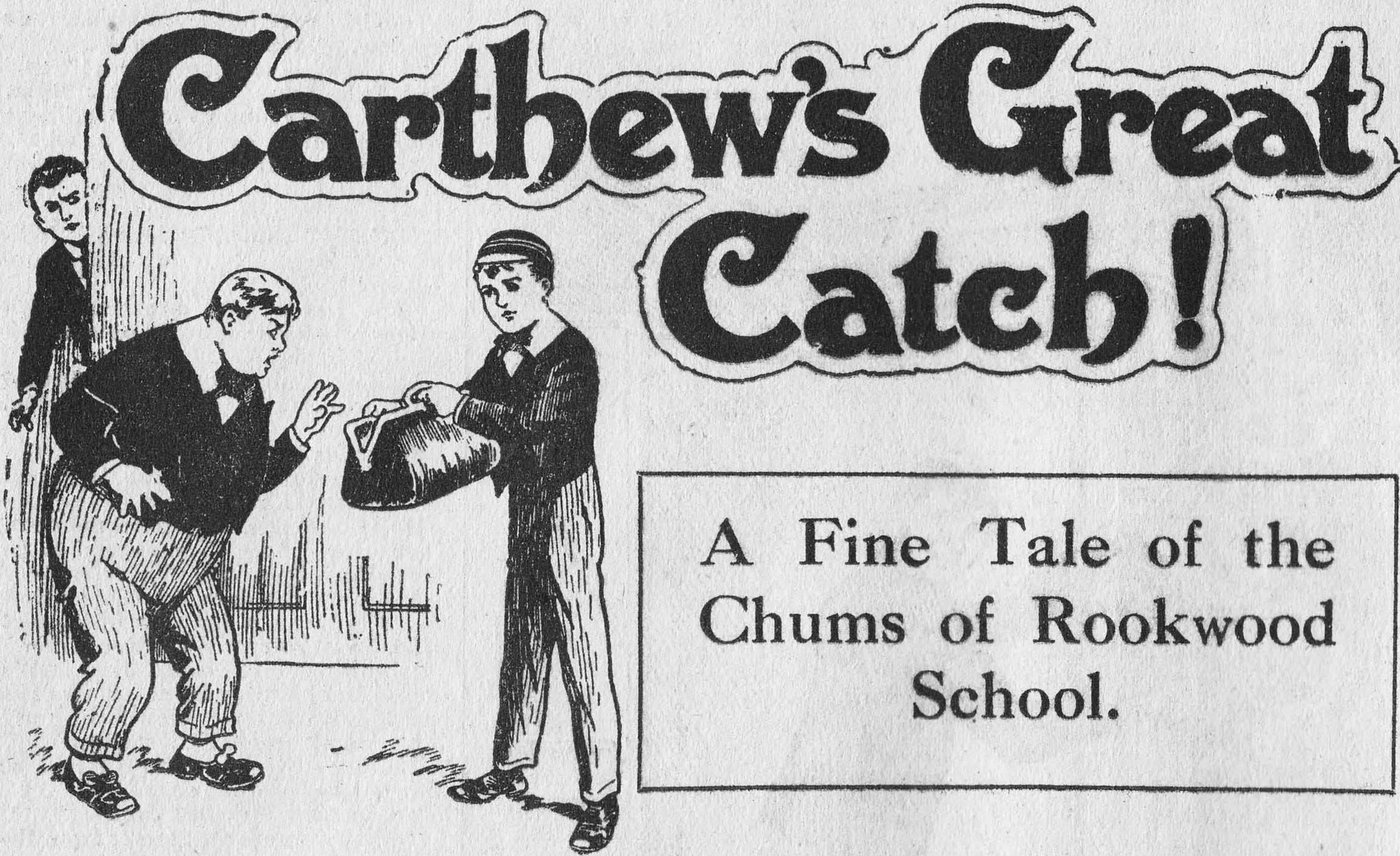
by Duncan Storm



FRENCH LESSON AND FROGS!

M. de Jolibois started back. Flop! A huge bull frog leaped out of the desk and landed with a heavy bump on the floor, where he sat and stared up at the French master with his gold-and-black eyes. "Honk!" said the frog. Then out of the desk poured a perfect army of frogs, croaking and flopping in all directions.

A GRAND COMPLETE YARN OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. By OWEN CONQUEST.



The 1st Chapter. A Non-Smoker!

"Jimmy!"
"You thumpin' ass!"
"What the dickens—"
Lovell and Raby and Newcome uttered those ejaculations in a sort of chorus.

They stared at Jimmy Silver. They were astounded.

The Fistical Four were strolling in the quadrangle at Rookwood. They were in full view of the study windows of Mr. Dalton, the master of their Form—the Fourth. And they were in full view of Carthew of the Sixth, who was coming along from the School House, and who scowled blackly at the sight of the cheery quartette.

And at that moment, in open quad, Jimmy Silver drew a cigar from his pocket and put it in his mouth.

It was really amazing. Certainly there were fellows at Rookwood who smoked in strict secrecy. Strict secrecy was needed, for the Head was very severe upon that subject. But a surreptitious cigarette in a study or a box-room was very different from a cigar in the quadrangle. Indeed, the most reckless of the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood never ventured on cigars. It would have led to too much trouble with the "central powers."

And Jimmy Silver never smoked at all, of course. And here he was with a big cigar in his mouth, as cool as a cucumber, in full view of his master's windows, of a prefect, and of a couple of score of fellows of various Forms.

"You shriekin' ass!" hissed Lovell. "Put that rubbish out of sight! Can't you see Carthew?"

"I see him!" assented Jimmy. "And he sees you!" ejaculated Raby. "You howlin' chump, Jimmy! You'll be landed now, and serve you jolly well right! What do you want muckin' about with a filthy cigar?"

"This cigar is all right," answered Jimmy Silver calmly. "Best cigar I've ever tasted."

"You silly owl!"

"You horrid fathead!"

"Chuck it away!" breathed Lovell. "No fear! This cigar cost fourpence!" said Jimmy Silver warmly. "Catch me, chucking away a fourpenny cigar! Got a match?"

Carthew of the Sixth came up almost breathless, in so great a hurry was he to catch Jimmy Silver in the act, as it were. His eyes were gleaming. Only a few days before, Carthew had reported the Fistical Four to their Form-master for smoking in their study, and it had turned out that they were not guilty. Carthew had been annoyed and exasperated, and ever since he had been looking for another chance. Now, evidently, he had found it.

"Silver!" he thundered.

Jimmy looked round innocently. The big cigar was still in his mouth, and fifty pairs of eyes had seen it. But as he met the prefect's glare Jimmy jerked it out, and put his hand behind him with the cigar in it.

"Yes, Carthew?" he said meekly. "You are smoking—here in the quad—smoking a cigar!" exclaimed Carthew, as much astonished as pleased.

It was a real pleasure to the bully of the Sixth to catch Jimmy Silver "out" like this, but he was astonished. The utter recklessness of Jimmy's proceeding was amazing.

"S-s-smoking?" stammered Jimmy. "I—I wasn't smoking, Carthew!" "You can tell the Head that!" grinned Carthew. "Come with me at once!"

"Silver!"

It was Mr. Dalton's voice. The master of the Fourth had thrown up his window, only a few yards from the spot, and was leaning out.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Is that a real cigar?"

"N-n-no, sir."

Carthew jumped.

"Hand it up to me, Silver."

Jimmy Silver cheerfully handed up the cigar to Mr. Dalton. The Form-master looked at it, and an involuntary smile crossed his lips. Carthew blinked at it.

Now that he saw it closely and more clearly, he became aware that the cigar was made of chocolate.

Jimmy Silver's amazing "recklessness" was explained now.

Lovell & Co. burst into a chortle. They realised that "Uncle James" of Rookwood had expended the sum of fourpence on a chocolate cigar for the especial purpose of pulling Carthew's leg. He had waited till Carthew came by to produce that cigar, and the bully of the Sixth had fallen blindly into the trap.

There was a loud chuckle from the crowd of juniors round the master's window. Carthew looked almost green.

"What were you going to do with this cigar, Silver?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Eat it, sir," answered Jimmy demurely.

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

"Oh!" gasped Carthew.

"Please may I have it, sir?" asked Jimmy, in his meekest manner. "I—I really wasn't going to smoke that cigar, sir. You—you can't smoke chocolate cigars, sir. They—they won't draw, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may certainly have it," said Mr. Dalton, handing it back. "Carthew, you will understand now, probably, that it was wiser not to take this matter before the Head. If you had exercised a little more intelligence, Carthew, you would have known that this junior was playing a prank. It occurred to me at once when I saw him from my window."

With that, Mr. Dalton shut down his window and retired from the scene. Carthew fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver with an expression in them that a Hun might have envied.

"You—you—you—" he stammered.

Jimmy Silver calmly bit off the end of the cigar under Carthew's furious eyes. The strictest non-smoker could not have objected to biting off the end of that cigar.

Carthew made a savage stride towards him. The Fistical Four drew together as if ready for battle.

"Stop that, now, Carthew!" said Bulkeley curtly. "The kid's done nothing."

Carthew gave an angry grunt, and strode savagely away. Bulkeley's advice was good, but the bully of the Sixth had no intention of heeding it. Judging others by himself, he did not believe in the decency of the Fistical Four, and he still hoped to "catch them out."

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away in a merry mood, and the famous cigar was divided into four equal

parts with the aid of a pocket-knife, and disposed of on the spot. It had served its purpose.

"But Carthew is a sticker!" said Jimmy. "He will try again. We'll give him another chance when I've thought it out. The dear boy believes we're black sheep of his own merry hue, and he won't be happy till he can report us to the Head for smoking, or boozing, or pub-haunting, or backing horses, or something. The smoke stunt is worked out, I think. Perhaps we'll give him a chance of catching us squiffy next."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fistical Four, as they sauntered cheerily in the sunny quad, discussed a plan of campaign; and from their explosive chuckles it might have been guessed that another plot was being plotted for the especial benefit of Carthew of the Sixth.

The 2nd Chapter.

Uncle James has a Big Idea!

Jimmy Silver & Co. went in cheerily to lessons that afternoon. They passed Carthew of the Sixth in the corridor, and the prefect scowled at them.

Jimmy answered his scowl with a sweet smile.

The feud between the Sixth Form bully and the end study was growing bitter on Carthew's side, though the Fistical Four managed to keep their good temper.

But they were wrothy, all the same. Carthew persisted in thinking, or in professing to think, that the end study was not above suspicion.

To be considered in the same light as fellows like Peele and Gower was very exasperating to the Co. Cyril Peele's dingy blackguardism was not in their line at all, and they did not like the suspicion.

The more Carthew's bitter dislike made him suspect them and yearn to catch them out, the more they were determined to make Carthew sorry for himself.

Mr. Dalton gave the Fistical Four a glance as they came in. The new master of the Fourth rather liked the cheery Co. He couldn't help liking them, and they liked him.

He was quite well aware that Carthew's suspicions were utterly without foundation, and that Jimmy Silver & Co. were exactly what they appeared to be—frank and healthy schoolboys, perhaps a little reckless and careless, but with no serious faults of character at all.

Lessons proceeded amicably in the Fourth Form room. Nearly all the Fourth pulled well with their new master. Only slackers like Peele and Gower and Tubby Muffin dreaded Mr. Dalton's eye.

After lessons, Jimmy Silver paused at the master's desk as he went out. Mr. Dalton looked up.

"If you please, sir—" began Jimmy.

"Well, Silver?"

"Our study's getting a bit shabby, sir," said Jimmy. "The paint's been a good bit knocked about, what with fencing and—other things—"

"Such as ragging and horse-play," suggested Mr. Dalton.

"Ahem! We—we think it's about time the study had a new coat of paint, sir."

"No doubt it will be seen to, as usual, during the vacation, Silver," said Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir; but we thought we'd like to try our hand ourselves," said Jimmy eagerly. "If there's no objection, sir, could we paint the wood-work in the study—out of lesson-time, of course?"

Mr. Dalton regarded him thoughtfully.

"Paint is very expensive now, Silver, and I doubt whether it would be provided—"

"We want to buy the paint ourselves, sir," said Jimmy. "We only need some paint and boiled oil and turpentine, and—and I've had a remittance from home, sir, which will cover it. I want the study to look nice when my father comes next week, sir."

"There is no objection, Silver," said Mr. Dalton kindly. "I am, indeed, glad to see you desire to make your study look nice. Certainly you have my permission."

"Thank you, sir!"

Jimmy Silver passed on, and rejoined his chums in the corridor.

"All serene, old beans!" he said gleefully. "Dicky's given his permission to paint the study."

"Paint the study!" exclaimed Mornington. "What the merry thump do you want to paint your study for?"

"Make it look nice," explained Jimmy.

Mornington looked at him suspiciously.

"Come off!" he remarked.

"What's the stunt? You're not looking out for work, I suppose, and it's jolly hard work."

"My dear chap," said Jimmy, "the end study is the place where fellows work. We're famous for it. Get a move on, you chaps. We've got to make up a list of the various mucks we shall want."

The Fistical Four proceeded to their study, leaving Valentine Mornington rather puzzled. Certainly junior studies generally showed signs of wear and tear towards the end of the term. But Morny had never heard of a fellow wanting to paint his own study before.

Any amount of shabbiness was preferable to that hefty job in the general opinion. The Rookwood fellows were quite content to leave the painting to the painters.

Arthur Edward Lovell seemed a little puzzled as Jimmy sat at the study table, with a pencil and paper, making out a list.

"I don't quite catch on!" Lovell remarked.

"You wouldn't, old chap."

"Look here, Jimmy, you cheeky owl!"

"One pound of paint," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "Timmings, in Coombe, charges eighteenpence a pound for paint, and eighteenpence is—is one-and-six, so we shall have to make a pound of it do."

"Waste, I call it!" said Lovell.

"The paint in this study will jolly well do for me. Besides, how far will a pound of paint go? It won't do even the window-sashes."

"We're only going to touch up the worst places," explained Jimmy.

"We can't paint the whole bag of tricks. Too expensive. But we must have some paint, to keep up appearances."

"I don't see—"

"Half a pint of boiled oil," said Jimmy, scribbling it down.

"What the thump's boiled oil?"

"I think it's linseed oil, boiled. I know that painter chaps use it, anyhow, and it sounds workmanlike."

"But—"

"Three pints of turpentine," said Jimmy.

"You owl!" roared Raby. "I don't know much about painting, but if you put three pints of turpentine to a pound of paint you'll just about drown it."

"It will be sticky," said Newcome, shaking his head, "or it'll come off on our clothes, or something."

Jimmy Silver gave his chums a pitying look.

"You don't catch on," he said compassionately. "We're going to paint the study—some of it—but that's camouflage. What we're really out for is to catch Carthew, or to let Carthew catch us, which comes to the same thing."

Lovell brightened up.

"Oh, I see! Make him sit in the paint, or something."

"Dear old bean, you wouldn't take a prize in a brain show," said Jimmy. "You want a job in the Intelligence Department of the War Office, Lovell. You would shine there. But in this study you'd better leave the thinking to your Uncle James."

"Look here—"

"The paint and the boiled oil," said Jimmy, with laboured patience, "are just to keep up appearances—camouflage, in fact. What we really

want is three pints of turpentine—or turps, I think painters call it—in three nice big bottles."

"What on earth for?" shrieked Lovell.

"Carthew."

"I don't see—"

"Naturally. I suppose you've looked in at Timmings', in Coombe, sometimes, as we pass the blessed shop a dozen times a week—more or less. Timmings sells paint and things—"

"I know that, ass!"

"The price of bottles," said Jimmy, "has risen."

"Bub-bub-bottles?" said Lovell dazedly.

"Yes, bottles."

"What on earth's that got to do with it?"

"Lots! Go to Timmings for a bottle of turpentine, and what do you think he will give it you in?"

"A—a bottle, I suppose."

"Exactly—any old bottle. Generally and old gin-bottle."

"A—a gin-bottle?"

"Yes. Sometimes a whisky-bottle, and sometimes a rum-bottle. But he mostly uses gin-bottles. I fancy Mr. Timmings has a taste for gin, and he uses them in his shop. Now, he might give us any old bottle; but when we go for our turpentine we are going to request specially to have it in gin-bottles, with the old labels left on."

"Oh!"

"If Timmings hasn't them in stock we'll wait. We're in no hurry. Jever notice the colour of turpentine?"

"Not specially."

"Jever notice the colour of gin?"

"I've seen old Mack's gin-bottle—the time we put gum into it."

"Well, my infant," said Jimmy Silver, "there's been serious accidents owing to people putting turps in gin-bottles and not taking the labels off. The colour's much the same. Anybody seeing a gin-bottle full of turps, and not knowing the facts, would take it for a bottle of gin. And if a spying cad—fellow like Carthew, for instance—saw such things in this study—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lovell, catching on suddenly.

There was a merry chorus of laughter in the end study. Tubby Muffin looked in inquisitively.

"I say, what's the joke, you fellows?" he inquired.

"You are, fat old bean!" said Jimmy Silver calmly. "Best cigar old top! Ha, ha, ha!"

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

Tubby Muffin sniffed and rolled away in disgust. In the end study the Fistical Four chortled joyously.

The 3rd Chapter.

At Last!

Carthew of the Sixth was suspicious.

It was several days since Jimmy Silver's talk with his chums in the end study, and during those few days Carthew had given a great deal of attention to the four. It was surprising, indeed, how much time Carthew found to devote to these youths that he did not like. His hope of catching them out sometimes grew faint, but it never quite failed.

Sometimes, indeed, he wondered whether he was quite on the wrong track, and whether Jimmy Silver & Co. were just what they appeared to be, and hadn't any shady secrets at all.

But he hoped for the best—or, rather, for the worst.

His opinions of others were coloured by his own shady nature, and he never really thought well of anybody. So he was not likely to think well, if he could help it, of fellows he disliked.

Sooner or later he was going to surprise the four in some serious infraction of the school laws—the more serious the better. Until that happened he could only live in hope.

And now he was not only suspicious, but he felt that he had the most reasonable and solid grounds for suspicion.

It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday. Jimmy Silver & Co. had walked down to Coombe, and Carthew's eyes had fallen on them when they returned. Jimmy was carrying a bag, which gave a clink as of glasses in Carthew's hearing as he passed. Then Jimmy had given Carthew a startled look, and hurried into the School House with an air of flurry.

Carthew was wasting his afternoon, as a matter of fact, in hunting the Fistical Four. Perhaps they knew it. But just now they seemed very anxious to get out of sight.

The bully of the Sixth strolled into the School House after them, and debated in his mind whether he should follow them to their study.

It was suspicious, in the first place, that the four should be in their study

at all on a glorious afternoon, when all the other fellows, or nearly all, were at cricket. And what was it that had clinked in the bag? A bottle of pickles might have clinked against a jar of jam, certainly. But pickles and jam could be bought at the sergeant's little shop behind the beeches. There was no need to carry such things up from Coombe on a hot afternoon. But—certainly it couldn't be smokes! Smokes didn't clink when they knocked together in a bag. But what was it? A hope, rather than a suspicion, dawned in Carthew's breast. Every step on the downward path was easier than the last. Was it possible that from cheating prefects, and smoking, these young rascals had fallen to darker vices—such as drinking?

That was too good to be true. For that meant the instant "sack" from Rookwood in case of discovery, and the prospect of getting the Fistical Four expelled was too entrancing a vision.

Still, there was no doubt that something—such as a bottle—had clinked; no doubt that Jimmy Silver had looked flurried, and scuttled away like one guilty!

Carthew ascended the staircase at last. As he came near the corner of the Fourth Form passage he heard Tubby Muffin's voice.

"What have you got in the bag, Jimmy? Tuck?"

"No, you fat guzzler!"

"Well, what is it? Can't a fellow look?"

"You can look, if you keep it awfully dark."

Carthew stopped. His tread was stealthy, and he was sure that the juniors had not heard him.

A moment later there was a startled exclamation from Muffin.

"Booze!"

"Shush!"

"I—I say, Jimmy, you're not going to drink that awful muck, are you?" gasped Muffin.

"Of course not, ass!"

"Then what have you got it for?"

"Never mind. Buzz off, fatty. You ask too many questions."

"I say, if the Head knew—"

"Shut up! Kick him, Lovell!"

"Yaroooh!"

Retreating footsteps were heard as Tubby Muffin came round the corner and almost ran into Carthew. The Fistical Four were going on cheerily to their study.

Carthew dropped his hand on Muffin's shoulder with a grip of iron, and the fat Classical squeaked.

"Wow!"

"What was in Silver's bag?" asked Carthew, in a low voice.

"I—I—"

"You saw it?"

"Ye-e-es!"

"Tell me what it was!"

"I—I'm not going to sneak, even if they are boozing beasts—I—I mean— Yow-ow-ow! Leggo my ear! Wow-wow—"

"What was it?" hissed Carthew.

"Yow-ow-ow! Only some bottles of gin! Yow-ow!"

"Cut off!" said Carthew.

Tubby Muffin cut off quickly enough, rubbing his fat ear. He was anxious to get out of the reach of Carthew's finger and thumb.

Carthew stepped round the corner, and glanced along the Fourth Form passage. The passage was empty; the weather had tempted everybody out of doors on that glorious afternoon.

It was exactly the opportunity for a set of young rascals with depraved tastes to indulge in an orgy. Carthew could have no doubt now, only—only— Not only was it too good to be true, but really seemed incredible in itself. The blackest of black sheep at Rookwood had surely never descended to the level of gin-drinking! Even Carthew could not believe it, without the clearest proof.

He heard a click at the other end of the passage. The door of the end study had been locked inside.

Carthew breathed quickly.

Why had those four young rascals locked themselves in their study, when summer skies and sunshine called them out of doors?

The suspicious prefect trod softly along the passage.

He had to make sure.

He had put his foot in it more than once; he had not forgotten the chocolate cigar! It was barely possible—more than barely, if Carthew had only known it—that the juniors had known he was watching them; that they had clinked two old ginger-beer bottles on purpose; that they had put Tubby Muffin up to giving him false information—anything, in fact, was more than probable than gin-drinking in a Rookwood study. Carthew had to be very careful; all the more because if he could bring a successful accusation against the four, their disgrace and

ruin was certain and inevitable. Nothing was to be left to chance.

With great caution, Mark Carthew trod along the passage, making scarcely a sound. He was not aware that at the keyhole of the end study a keen ear was listening very intently for precisely those faint, stealthy sounds of creeping feet.

He reached the door, and stopped. He stood listening.

There were sounds in the study—sounds that could only have been made by glasses clinking against a bottle.

Carthew's eyes glittered. Incredible as it was, too good to be true as it was, it was growing a certainty now. But he continued to listen.

"I—I say, isn't it a bit too strong, Jimmy?" That was the voice of Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Well, it's a bit strong," said Jimmy Silver. "But I suppose we want something stronger than water!"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"It will make the study smell a bit," said Raby. "A fellow coming in will niff it at once."

"Nobody will come in."

"Carthew might be spying about."

"We passed him in the quad. He's out of doors."

Carthew smiled. Every word uttered in the study was distinctly audible to him as he stood outside the door. The Fistical Four really seemed bent on betraying themselves into the hands of their old enemy.

"I'll spill some eucalyptus," con-

"Now, you young rascals—"

Jimmy Silver gazed at him dully, and sank into a chair. Lovell and Raby were sitting with their eyes closed; Newcome was curled up on the rug, without motion. On the table stood an empty bottle—a gin-bottle, with a label on it bearing the words "Best Gin." On the floor, in the corner, stood two other bottles, full of a pale liquid. Carthew did not need telling what that liquid was. The labels on the bottles were plain enough to read yards away.

His eyes fairly gloated over the chums of the Fourth.

"Caught!" he said.

"Eh?"

"This means the sack for you!" said Carthew gloatingly. "The merry sack! Do you understand, you filthy young rascals?"

"Wharrer say?"

"Just wait a bit!" grinned Carthew.

He put the key on the outside of the lock, left the study, and turned the key. His victims were safe now. Then Carthew hurried away to the Head's study. He was not going to Mr. Dalton. Mr. Dalton could learn what had happened to his favourites when he found that the Head had expelled them from Rookwood School. Carthew chuckled at the thought. That would be a "facer" for Mr. Richard Dalton, and a handsome repayment for his contemptuous manner towards the worthy Carthew! The bully of the Sixth seemed to be walking on air as he approached Dr. Chisholm's study.

Carthew turned the key, and threw the door open. His eyes gloated in. He fully expected to see the Fistical Four stretched about the study as he had left them.

He stared blankly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were gathered round the table, with absolutely no sign of intoxication about them. Jimmy was stirring paint in a pot, Lovell was softening a brush in turpentine, and Raby and Newcome were looking on cheerily.

The four juniors stood respectfully to attention as the Head swept in. Carthew blinked.

The recovery of the four "boozers" had been remarkable. But the three telltale bottles were there—all on the table now, and one that had been full was half-empty! And the telltale labels stared the Head in the face!

"Boys!" thundered the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

"What—what are you doing?"

"We're just going to paint the study, sir," said Jimmy Silver respectfully. "Mr. Dalton gave us permission, sir, and we've bought the paint ourselves."

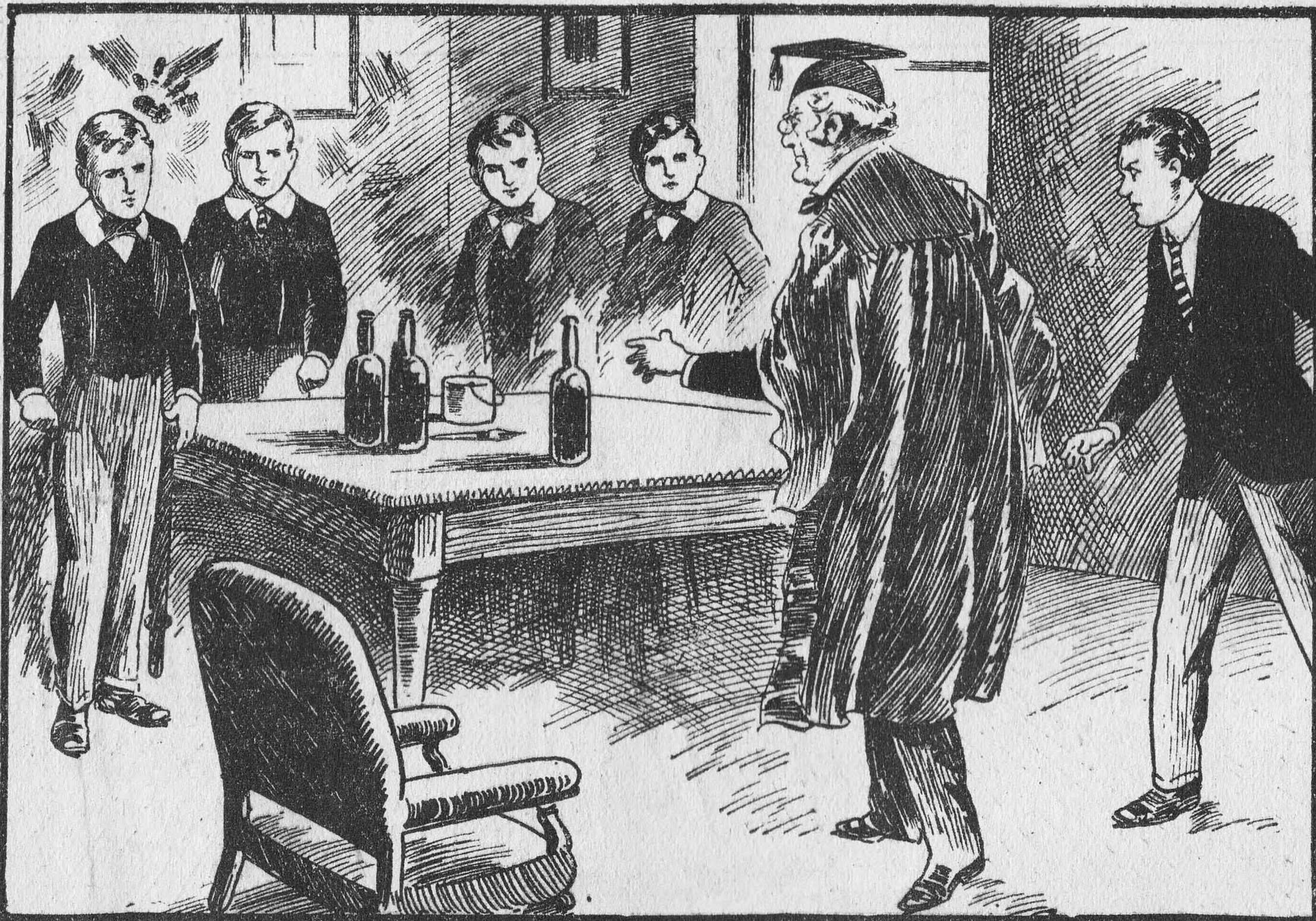
"Carthew informed me that—"

"There is the gin, sir," said Carthew. "They've been drinking more since I left. Both these bottles were full. They've got the paint here to drown the smell of spirits, I think, sir."

"Silver! Have you been drinking?"

"Not since dinner, sir."

"What! You drank at dinner—"



REDECORATIONS IN PROGRESS! The Head, followed by Carthew, bounded into the study. "Boy—what have you in those bottles?" thundered Dr. Chisholm. "Turpentine," answered Jimmy Silver. "We're just painting the study, sir!" Carthew's great catch seemed to have gone wrong somewhere.

tinued Jimmy Silver; "that will drown the smell, you know."

"Good egg!"

"Now, then, go it, you fellows!"

There was a gurgling sound.

Any other prefect at Rookwood who had supposed that juniors were drinking in a study, would have chipped in instantly. Not so Carthew. Carthew preferred to wait till some of the spirit had been consumed. Then the state of the juniors would be an incontrovertible proof of their guilt. Carthew felt that he held his old enemies in the hollow of his hand. He was not going to risk failure by being in a hurry.

"I—I say—hic!—it's awfully strong—"

"Don't fall over, you ass!"

"Grooh!"

There was a sound of someone falling heavily into a chair. Carthew's eyes glittered.

Bump! Another junior, apparently, had sprawled on the carpet. There was a sound of staggering feet to and fro, and a clink.

Carthew felt that it had gone far enough. He gave a sudden thump on the door.

"Let me in, Silver!"

"Hic!"

"Do you hear me?"

"Who' zat?" came in blurred tones.

"Carthew! Let me in at once!"

"Cert'nly, ole Fler!"

Staggering feet approached the door, and it was unlocked. Carthew strode into the study, his eyes blazing with triumph.

The 4th Chapter. Before the Beak!

"Nonsense!"

That was Dr. Chisholm's remark when Carthew made his amazing report.

Carthew flushed.

"I saw them with my own eyes, sir—"

"It is impossible!" exclaimed the Head. "Rookwood boys—addicted to drink! I cannot believe it, Carthew! You are under some strange delusion!"

"Will you step to the study, sir, and see them?" said Carthew. "All four seem to me to be under the influence of drink, and certainly there are three bottles of gin in the study—one empty and two full."

"Good heavens!" said the Head, aghast.

He rose hastily and followed Carthew out. Undoubtedly the matter needed full and instant investigation. With a very agitated manner, Dr. Chisholm rustled away to the Fourth Form passage. Dignified old gentleman as he was, he was almost running as he went towards the end study. Carthew found it hard to keep his face grave and composed; he had a strong impulse to grin. They arrived together at Jimmy Silver's door.

"It is locked!" said the Head.

"I have the key, sir! I thought it better to lock them in in their present state!"

"Yes, yes! Unlock the door at once!"

"Yes, sir. I always have a glass of water with my dinner—"

"I was not referring to water, Silver. You have bottles of—of intoxicating liquor in this study. What are these bottles, sir?" thundered the Head.

"Gin bottles, sir!"

"Silver! You dare to confess—though I can trust the evidence of my own eyes! When Carthew made his report, I was sure that he must have made some terrible mistake. But now, shameless that you are, you shall be sent away from Rookwood this very evening—"

"What for, sir?"

"Have we done anything wrong, sir?" asked Lovell.

"Boy!" gasped the Head.

"Mr. Dalton told us we might paint the study, sir," said Jimmy Silver, innocently. "We've got the turpentine to mix the paint and to clean the brushes, sir."

"T-t-turpentine!"

"Yes, sir."

The Head's face was a study for a moment.

"Is it turpentine in those bottles, Silver?" he asked in quite an altered voice.

Carthew felt quite sick.

"Yes, sir," answered Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Mr. Timmings always sells his oils in old gin bottles, sir. They're cheap."

The Head stood quite still and silent. Carthew would have fled, if he had dared to move.

Once more he realised that the

Fistical Four had pulled his egregious leg—and this time he had dragged the Head into it!

"Turpentine!" repeated the Head in a faint voice. "Take the corks out of the bottles, Silver, so that I can—can smell the liquid. It—it looks very much like an—an intoxicating fluid."

"Certainly, sir!"

Jimmy Silver dutifully removed the corks. He wondered whether the reverend Head of Rookwood knew the smell of gin! At all events, Dr. Chisholm knew the smell of turpentine, and one sniff satisfied him.

He turned a terrible eye upon Carthew.

"So, Carthew, you have accused these perfectly innocent boys of the disgusting vice of drinking, because, with their Form-master's permission, they had painter's materials here to paint their study."

His voice was like the rumble of thunder. The hapless Carthew's knees knocked together.

"I—I thought—" he mumbled faintly.

"You thought!" thundered the Head. "I scarcely believe that you are capable of thinking, Carthew. You have brought me here—you have wasted my time—you—you— And you stated—explicitly stated, sir, that you had seen these juniors under the influence of drink ten minutes ago in this study. Did you suppose that they had been drinking turpentine?"

"I—I thought they—they—I—" stuttered Carthew.

"Silver, I am sorry that for one moment I allowed Carthew's ridiculous mistake to influence me. Carthew, follow me! I have to speak to you very seriously, sir, in my study!"

"May we go on painting the study, sir?" asked Jimmy Silver demurely.

"Certainly, my boy—certainly! I am glad to see you so harmlessly and industriously occupied."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"Come, Carthew!" said the Head in a grinding voice.

Carthew limped away after the Head, with a dreadful sinking feeling. The juniors gravely watched him go. But their gravity only lasted till the Head was out of the Fourth Form passage. Then Jimmy Silver closed the study door, and looked at his chums. And a wild yell of laughter rang through the end study.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Carthew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And—abandoning paint and turpentine—Jimmy Silver & Co. fairly threw themselves on the carpet, and kicked up their heels, in a paroxysm of merriment. And by tea-time the whole Fourth Form had heard the story, and were roaring over it.

Carthew was quite pale when he limped out of the Head's study after the Head had had a "very serious talk" with him. It had been rather a lengthy talk, and rather an emphatic talk, and Carthew had not enjoyed it. He almost crawled away when it was over.

And it dawned upon Carthew that he would do wisely to let the end study alone after that. He was really quite afraid of making another catch. His catches were a little too unfortunate.

The end study did not, perhaps, look much better when the amateur painters had finished painting it. But the Fistical Four felt that their time and money had not been wasted. Carthew was giving them a much-needed rest; and nearly all Rookwood was chortling over the story of Carthew's great catch.

THE END.

("Montmorency of the Fourth!" is the title of the long, complete Rookwood School tale in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

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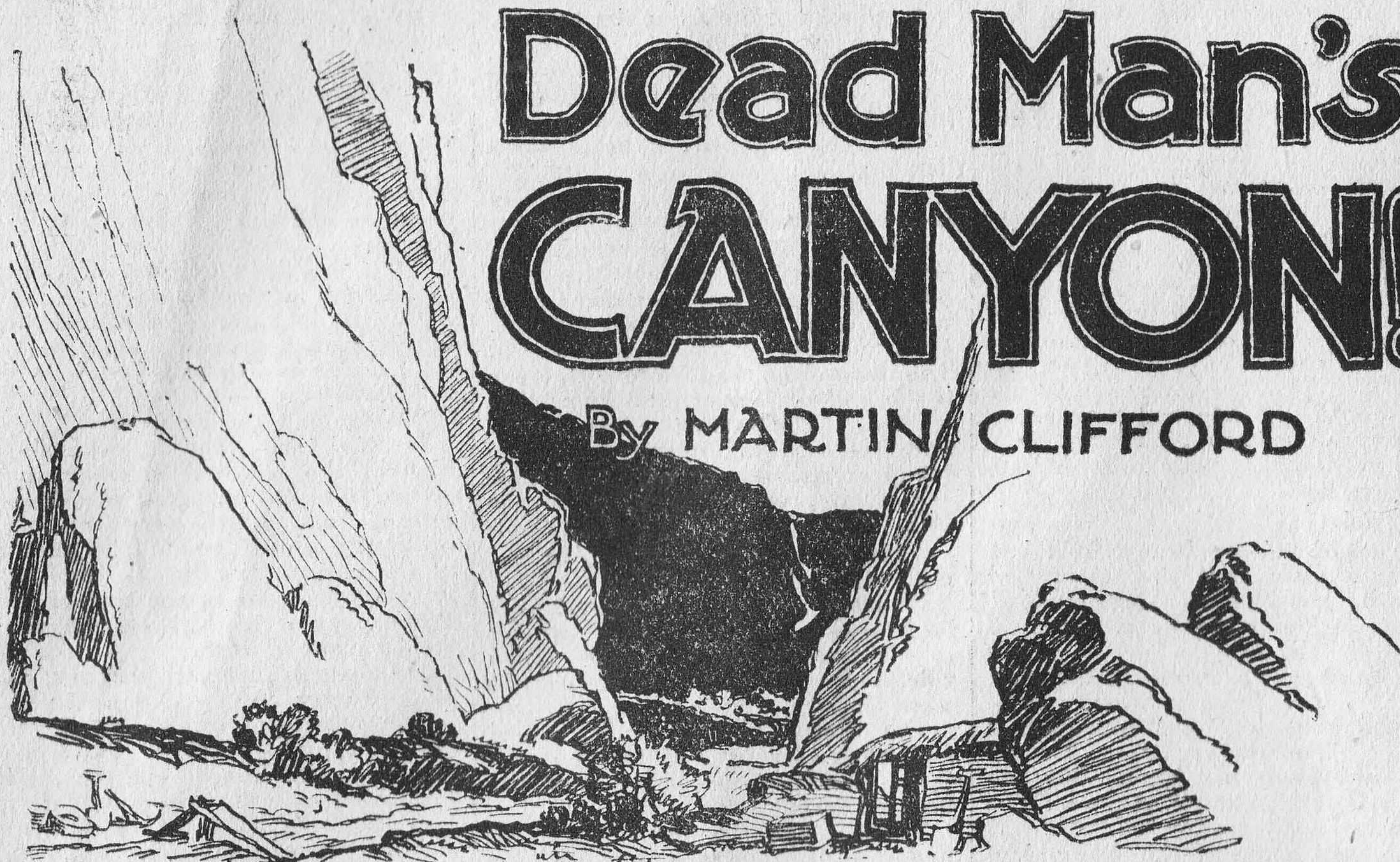
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Dead Man's CANYON!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



The 1st Chapter.

Hold Up!

"Halt!" Frank Richards stopped in his tracks. Over a rough boulder on the rocky trail ahead of him, a Stetson hat rose

into view, and a rifle-barrel glistened in the sun. A moment before that rocky trail, winding up the canyon from Hard Pan, had seemed utterly deserted and desolate, the silence broken only by the tramping feet of the wandering schoolboy.

Frank had left Hard Pan at sunrise, on his way to the placer diggings at Indian Creek, and he had begun to doubt whether he had missed the trail. But in the solitary foothills of the Cascade Mountains there was no indication of the route, and he could only push on and trust to luck. He did not look scared, though he was startled, as the rifle-barrel bore on him from the boulder in the trail. The outcast of Cedar Creek had nothing to lose; he was not worth the while of the hardest-up road-agent to be found between the Yukon and the American border.

"Put up your hands!" came the rapped order, as Frank Richards stopped. Frank put up his hands. There was no arguing with a levelled rifle, within a dozen feet of him, even if he had been inclined to desist. A slight smile came over his sunburnt face as he obeyed the order. The road-agent—if road-agent he was—was booked for a disappointment when he came to "go through" his victim. "Right-ho!" called back Frank. "Up they go!" The man rose further into view from behind the boulder. Frank gazed at him rather curiously.

He was a big, powerful man, with a face tanned by sun and wind almost to the hue of copper. But he was a white man; his features showed that. His face, though rugged, looked honest enough. As he looked at it, Frank wondered whether he was, after all, a rustler on the trail for plunder. He did not look the part; but what other object he could have in holding up a lonely traveller was a mystery.

The big man came down the rocky trail towards Frank. He had lowered the rifle now, but still held it ready for instant use. His deep-set, keen eyes scanned the schoolboy. "Keep 'em up!" he snapped. "Right!"

"Where are the others?" "What others?" asked Frank. "You're not alone here?" "Yes."

"I guess that's a lie!" The bronzed man looked past Frank, scanning the windings of the wide, rocky canyon below. A gopher was to be seen in the distance, sunning himself in a patch of scrub; that was the only living thing in view. "Are you heeled?" asked the bronzed man abruptly, his glance fixing on Frank Richards again. "Armed? No!"

"I guess I'm going to see." Dropping his rifle into the hollow of his arm, the bronzed man ran his hand through Frank's pockets. The schoolboy submitted quietly. There was nothing of value to steal; and besides, he had realised by this time that the bronzed man, whatever he was, was not a thief.

The man found no weapon about him, excepting a pocket-knife, which he left in Frank's pocket. He puckered his brows in a puzzled way as he stared at the schoolboy. "You're not heeled," he said, "and you're only a kid! I reckon you was sent up here as a spy!"

"What the thump is there to spy on in these foothills?" exclaimed Frank. "You've never heard of Bronze Bill?" "Never!" "Never heard that he's located a

rich strike in the foothills that a crowd of galoots are after?" "No." "I guess I can't afford to take that on trust," said the bronzed man. "You've come up here, and you'll stay. Get a move on, and walk in front of me. If you try any monkey-tricks, remember there's a loaded rifle just behind you!"

"But—" "Get a move on!" Bronze Bill made a motion with the rifle. There was nothing for it but to obey.

Frank Richards moved on, and the big man followed him—every now and then turning his head to scan the canyon behind him. But the wild rocks and scrubby larches were silent and deserted as ever, as he marched his prisoner away.

The 2nd Chapter Held in Bondage!

Frank Richards tramped on ahead of the big miner, wondering how the strange adventure was going to end. But he was not feeling particularly troubled by the scrape he had fallen into. Frank was down on his luck; there was hardly a cent remaining in his pockets, and his chance of making a "strike" at Indian Creek was very problematic. His old home was barred to him; Cedar Creek School seemed almost like a vision of a dream when he thought of it now. He did not mean to be kept a prisoner if he could help it. But at least, so long as Bronze Bill detained him, he would have to feed him—and Frank had been wondering where his next meal would come from. So his spirits were not dashed in any way as he tramped on in front of the broad-shouldered miner.

"Stop!" Frank yalded. Twenty yards or so along the rough canyon from the spot where he had been captured, Bronze Bill rapped out the order to stop. Frank looked round him. He had gathered that the big miner was working on some hidden claim in the foothills; but there was no sign of a claim to be seen here. He glanced back inquiringly at the bronzed man. In this spot the canyon wall rose in an almost perpendicular rock, to the height of several hundred feet. In the rocky wall was a narrow opening, not more than three feet across, and as black as a pit. Bronze Bill jerked his thumb towards the narrow cave. "That's the way!" "Into the cave?" asked Frank. "Sure!" "Oh, all right!"

Frank stepped out of the burning sunlight into the dark, cool shadow of the cave. The change from sunshine to shadow blinded him for some moments, and he stumbled and groped his way with his hands. Behind him, the miner's heavy boots rang on the rock. Frank felt the rocky wall on either side of him as he stumbled on, the big miner close behind. In a few minutes a glimmer of light came to his eyes. Light of the sun, and a breath of fresh air that fanned his cheeks. He realised that what he had taken for a cave was a kind of natural tunnel, looking into a deep and narrow gulch. On all sides the gulch was enclosed by high walls of rock, bare and desolate. But at the bottom there was a rippling spring, round which grew herbage and several stunted trees.

The spring bubbled and rippled away in a creek, and by the side of the creek Frank discerned the tools of the placer-miner—spades and picks, rough wooden cradles for washing the gold. This was the hidden claim that Bronze Bill was working, ten miles into the foothills from the camp of Hard Pan. "Oh!" exclaimed Frank. "Get on!" Frank Richards moved on into the open air of the locked gulch. "Is this where you camp?" he asked. "I reckon so."

"You've got a good claim here?" asked Frank. "I reckon you know it," said Bronze Bill drily. "I reckon them galoots sent you spying to nose it out!"

"You're mistaken about that—I'd never heard of you before," said Frank patiently. Bronze Bill shrugged his broad shoulders. "I reckon you're lying," he said coolly. "But lying or not, I ain't taking any chances with you, young 'un. You're hyer, and hyer you're goin' to stay, dead or alive!"

"Alive, if it's all the same to you," said Frank Richards. "I guess that depends on you. If you make a step to vamoose the ranch, you get winged instanter." There was no doubt that the bronzed man meant what he said. Frank made no reply, but his intention was not changed. He did not intend to remain a prisoner in the locked gulch if a chance of escape presented itself.

The big man bent to a boulder that lay beside the opening of the tunnel and rolled it. It blocked the tunnel sufficiently to make it impossible for anyone to pass without removing the boulder.

As that was the only precaution he took, Frank could guess that there was no other way out of the locked gulch.

And indeed a single glance round him revealed that the high walls of rocks shutting in the gulch were inaccessible to a climber.

Frank's heart sank a little. The gold-miner, who was watching his face, laughed grimly as he saw the schoolboy's expression change.

"I guess you're in for it, and you may as well make up your mind to it," he said. "It's your own funeral; you came up here of your own accord."

"You've no right to keep me a prisoner here," said Frank hotly.

"I guess safety comes first, young 'un. I found this hyer claim, and I'm workin' it, and I guess I ain't sharing it out with all the loafers of Hard Pan!"

"You could register the claim, and make it your own legally," said Frank. "Then no one could touch it."

Bronze Bill laughed. "I guess we're a bit too fur from the towns for that," he answered. "That gang wouldn't take much notice of a sheriff thirty miles away. Writs don't run in these foothills, sonny. Sides, the claim will peter out when I've worked it a few weeks. It's a rich placer, but it won't last. I guess I've taken out more'n half the dust already. I reckon I hoped I'd clean up and get clear before that gang got on my trail. But Le Couteau scented it out, the half-breed hound."

"Le Couteau?" exclaimed Frank. "The galoot that sent you up hyer spying," said Bronze Bill. "I reckon you know the name well enough."

Well enough indeed Frank remembered the name of the French-Indian half-breed whom he had encountered, many a long mile from Hard Pan, weeks before.

"I know the name," he said. "If it is the same man, I have seen him."

"A breed, nearly as dark as an Injun," said Bronze Bill.

"I stopped him from robbing a rancher near Kicking Mule Camp some weeks ago," said Frank. "That's all I know of him. I did not know that he was in Hard Pan."

"Mebbe, mebbe," said Bronze Bill. "But I'm not taking any chances. I know that Le Couteau was in Hard Pan last time I went down for tack, and I know he watched me changing dust at the hotel, and follered me into the hills arter, with three or four other breeds. I know I've sighted him on the foothills twice since, and that he's put a bullet through the rim of my hat at long distance. I guess I've been on the watch since, and I ain't taking any chances."

There was evidently no moving Bronze Bill from that determination, and Frank Richards had to make the best of it.

"Behave yourself hyer, and you won't hurt," continued the big miner. "Try to vamoose, and I'll rub you out like a mosquito. You'll be wise to make the best of it. I've got grub hyer for a month, and you won't starve; and you can help me with the cradles, as I'm not going to feed you for nothing. Savvy?"

Frank nodded. It was a curious situation, and not exactly a pleasant one; but Frank Richards felt no ill-will towards the mountain fossier.

If the half-breed, Le Couteau, was watching for a chance to jump his claim, the man was justified in keeping well on his guard, though it made matters awkward for Frank Richards. "Hungry?" asked the big miner, with a change of manner.

In spite of his suspicions, Frank's look and manner had impressed him a little, and he seemed prepared to treat his prisoner well.

"Yes, rather!" said Frank. "I guess you can feed with me."

Close by the rocky wall was a wooden shack, made of saplings and branches fastened together with withies. It was the rudest of shelters, and only of use in the summer

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DEAD MAN'S CANYON!

(Continued from previous page.)

months. Bronze Bill's camp in the locked gulch was evidently a very temporary one. From the shack he rolled out a rough box, which appeared to be his larder. Frank Richards sat on a boulder, and shared the rough and ready meal with his host or captor. There was hard corn-cake and cheese and bully beef, washed down by water from the spring, Bronze Bill adding something stronger from a keg in the shack.

When the dinner was over, Bronze Bill filled a black pipe, and began to smoke. Frank was glad to lean back against the rock and rest. He had tramped a good many miles that morning, and he was tired.

But the rest was not of long duration.

The miner finished his pipe and put it away, and rose and stretched himself.

"I guess we're working now," he remarked.

"You want me to help?"

"Don't you want to work for your grub?"

"Certainly."

"I guess you'll have to, anyway," said Bronze Bill. "You could have kept clear, if you'd liked. Now for it, and don't shirk!"

And Frank Richards set to work.

He was new to placer mining, though he had watched it sometimes in the Thompson Valley, and had a rough idea of the work. But under the directions of Bronze Bill he worked cheerfully enough. He was, after all, earning his keep, and that was something. The shovelling of sand and gravel, the creaking of the rough cradles, went on industriously, and Frank soon saw that the claim was a rich one, though evidently limited in extent.

For centuries probably the little creek had been washing out the golden grains from the rocks, and the precious metal had gathered and reposed in the sandy bed of the stream. From the sands, golden glimmers came through the purling water, showing how rich was the deposit. But it was a small one, though rich, and it was not likely to take an experienced placer-miner more than a few weeks to "clean up" all that was to be gathered.

After that, it was Bronze Bill's intention to "pull up stakes," and clear off with what he had gained, abandoning the worked-out claim.

It was not till sundown that the two workers "knocked off." The big miner was pleased to give Frank a word of approval.

"I reckon you don't slack," he remarked; "and I guess, sonny, that if you stick it, and don't play any gum game, I'll squeeze out a handful of dollars for you when we strike camp. You can figure it out that you're booked to work for me for a few weeks, and pay to come. If it's true that you was looking for work, that'll suit you."

"It's true," said Frank, "and I'm willing to accept the offer, but not as a prisoner."

"I guess you're a prisoner till I've cleaned up here, sonny. And there's a bullet ready for you if you try to skip," said Bronze Bill gruffly.

Frank made no reply to that.

While the burly miner was preparing his evening meal, Frank wandered along the creek to the end of the locked gulch, to survey his surroundings. The miner raised no objections. It was clear that there was no way out, excepting by the tunnel. Frank followed the creek to its end, where it flowed through a split in the rocky wall, over a sheer precipice. He could hear the sound of waters tumbling beyond, but he did not venture anywhere near the fall. There was no escape that way, excepting for a bird.

He had, in fact, satisfied himself that there was no chance of escape, unless on some occasion when Bronze Bill was absent from the gulch. From his meeting with the miner that morning, he knew that the lonely gold-seeker emerged sometimes into the open canyon, to scout for his expected enemies. On the next occasion Frank resolved to try his luck in getting through the tunnel; for the present, he could only make up his mind to yield to circumstances.

He rejoined Bronze Bill, who gave him a rather grim smile, no doubt guessing the cause of his exploration of the gulch. But he made no remark, and they ate their evening meal in silence. Then the miner tossed Frank a blanket from the shack; and he rolled himself in it,

under the stars, and slept soundly enough.

The 3rd Chapter. The Enemy!

"Wake up!"

The prod of a heavy boot in his ribs awakened Frank Richards from slumber.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes, throwing the blanket aside.

"No slackers here, sonny!" said Bronze Bill. "I reckon there's work to be done."

"I'm ready!" answered Frank.

He jumped up actively enough, and after a dip in the creek, was quite ready for breakfast. The fare in the lonely miner's camp was hard enough; but Frank Richards had roughed it too long to be fastidious. He ate with a hearty appetite, and turned out cheerfully to work at the placer.

Bronze Bill left him at work during the morning, rolled the big boulder aside, and disappeared into the tunnel.

Apparently he was going out to take a survey of the canyon again, now that the sun was well up.

Frank paused in his labours when he was gone.

He had resolved that he would make an attempt to escape as soon

He knew that the bronzed miner must be somewhere at hand; and, keeping back in the cover of the rock, he scanned the canyon for Bronze Bill.

He could not see the miner.

But far away down the canyon he caught sight of five or six moving figures that were advancing.

Distant as they were, Frank Richards could tell by their dark faces that they were half-breeds.

"Le Couteau and his gang!" he muttered, his heart beating faster.

If Le Couteau, the trail robber, was among the copper-skinned gang, he was too far off for recognition. But Frank could have no doubt that these men were the gang that Bronze Bill feared. If they had been hunting for the solitary goldseeker, they were getting very near to his hiding-place at last.

Crack!

He could not see Bronze Bill, but it was evident that the miner had seen the half-breeds, as the crack of a rifle suddenly awoke a thousand echoes in the canyon.

There was a yell from the distance.

Frank, with beating heart, watching the bunch of half-breeds, saw one of them stagger as a Stetson hat spun from his head. But the man recovered himself at once. The bullet had carried away his hat.

The next moment the gang had vanished from sight, burrowing into cover among the rocks like so many prairie rabbits.

Frank Richards heard a hearty curse near at hand.

burly figure was framed there in the sunlight.

Crack!

A rifle-shot rang from the canyon. To Frank Richards' horror, a hoarse cry burst from the bronzed miner, and he staggered forward into the cave, and fell heavily.

The rock dropped from Frank's hand.

Bronze Bill rolled on the rocky floor of the cave at his feet, groaning. This man, whom Frank had been prepared to fight for his freedom, lay at his feet, wounded by the bullet from behind, and helpless. From the canyon there came a yell. The man who had fired had seen the fall of the miner, and knew that his bullet had taken effect. Distant, but drawing nearer, came the sound of running feet on the rocks. A deep groan burst from Bronze Bill.

"They've got me! They've got me! The game's up!"

He made an effort to rise, and sank back again. Frank Richards sprang to his side, and seized the fallen rifle. The running feet in the canyon were close now.

The wounded man's eyes turned on Frank, seeing him for the first time. A bitter look came over the bronzed face.

"Shoot, you young villain!" he muttered. "I was a fool not to shoot you when I had the chance! Now it's your turn!"

Frank did not heed him. With the miner's rifle in his hands, he turned to the mouth of the cave.



THE LAST RESOURCE!

Frank Richards, trembling inwardly, picked up the deadly stick of dynamite and advanced towards the cave opening. He raised the explosive slowly above his head. In another minute the tunnel would be but a heap of broken stone and rock, and he and his wounded comrade would be safe from the knife of the gold thief.

as he was left unobserved. But doubts assailed him now.

Bronze Bill was not likely to be far from the egress of the tunnel, and he was certain to be on the watch. And he had made quite clear his determination to shoot if he saw his prisoner attempting to escape.

Frank Richards thought it out, standing idle, spade in hand.

He would have been willing to accept a fair offer from the fossicker, to work for him at a fair wage; but working under compulsion, and as a prisoner, was quite a different matter.

He came to a resolution at last.

Leaving the tools by the creek, he went to the shack for his wallet, and slung it on, and then stepped to the rocky tunnel.

He listened for a few minutes, with the suspicion in his mind that Bronze Bill might be in the tunnel watching for him.

But there was no sound, and the schoolboy determined to chance it at last.

Stepping softly, lest the watchful miner should be at hand in the shadows, Frank entered the tunnel.

With hardly a sound, he crept on through the shadowy passage till the daylight in the canyon beyond struck on his eyes.

A minute more, and Dead Man's Canyon lay wide and open before him, with the hot sun glistening down on rock and scrub.

Frank did not emerge at once from the cave.

"Missed him, by thunder! I reckoned I'd got Le Couteau that time, darn him!"

From a clump of larch and sassafras, Bronze Bill's burly form rose into view, not a dozen yards from the cave mouth.

He came hurrying back towards the cave.

Now that he had seen his enemies, and that his shot had put them on their guard, the miner evidently did not wish to encounter them in the open wide canyon, where their numbers gave them the advantage. If they tracked him to the narrow tunnel under the hillsides, it was a favourable place for defence.

Frank Richards stepped back in the darkness, his heart thumping.

Bronze Bill was running towards the cave, and in a minute or two more he would know that his prisoner had been attempting to escape.

Frank thought of darting back to the locked gulch; but he knew that his footsteps would be heard before he could get clear of the tunnel. There was no concealing the fact that he had sought to escape. A hard, angry look came into Frank's face. He had a right to his freedom—a right to fight for it. He crouched back in the darkness, with a lump of rock in his hand. If Bronze Bill raised the rifle against him—

The miner's heavy footsteps rang at the opening of the cave; his

Crack! Crack!
He fired twice, and there was a yell and a sound of rapid retreat. For the moment the attack was stopped.

The 4th Chapter. A Desperate Defence!

Frank Richards reloaded the rifle, panting. He kept well back in the narrow mouth of the cave, and it was well that he did so. From the canyon came the crackling of three or four rifles, and bullets struck on the rocky mouth of the tunnel. Two or three of them, glancing on the rock, whizzed into the tunnel and dropped. But the rush of the half-breeds was stopped. They knew that there was a ready rifle within, and they did not venture to show themselves in the open before the cave.

Bronze Bill raised himself on one elbow, staring blankly at the schoolboy. Frank's action had taken him utterly by surprise. Only the schoolboy's prompt defence had saved him from the knife of Le Couteau.

Frank glanced round at him as he heard him move.

"They've stopped!" he said.

"They reckoned I was alone here," mumbled Bronze Bill. "They knowed I hadn't a pard with me. I guessed as you was one of them, sonny—"

"You know better now!" grunted Frank.

"Sure!"

There was a sound without, and Frank Richards turned quickly to

the opening. A boot had scraped on the rocky ground.

"Stand back, there!" shouted Frank. "I shall fire if you show yourself!"

"Pardieu! He is not alone!" Frank heard a savage voice exclaim, and he thought he recognised the voice of Le Couteau.

"They'll rush us!" muttered Bronze Bill. "There's half a dozen of them, and if they find it's only a boy—"

"We've got to get out of this!" said Frank hurriedly.

"I can't move!" muttered the miner, with a groan.

"I shall have to help you."

"If they rush—"

"We've got to chance that."

It was clear that a determined rush of the half-breeds would have settled the matter. And Frank was aware that they were creeping cautiously closed round the mouth of the cavern, though as yet carefully keeping out of the line of fire. When they were near enough they would make a rush.

He slung his rifle on his back, and stepped over Bronze Bill.

The miner was wounded in the shoulder, and a pool of blood had formed beside him on the rock. His bronzed face was white under its tan. He was hard hit; but it was death to remain where he was.

"Help me, kid, and I'll do my best!" he gasped.

"It's not far," said Frank. "Once through, in the gulch, we can stall them off!"

"I guess I'll try."

Frank Richards bent all his strength to the task, and Bronze Bill exerted himself to the utmost, though the effort cost him dear. His face was like chalk, and beads of perspiration rolled down his skin as he struggled. But somehow he was got along the tunnel, and he sank down in the grass under the sunny sky in the locked gulch at last. Still, the rush of the half-breeds had not come. Probably they knew nothing of the tunnel through the rock, and only supposed that the hunted man had taken refuge in the cave, and believed that they had him cornered.

Leaving the wounded man in the grass, Frank turned to the big boulder with which Bronze Bill was accustomed to bar the tunnel.

He struggled to move it, but it was beyond his strength.

For several minutes, with sweating brow, he struggled at the task, but the mass of rock hardly shifted. Bronze Bill watched him hopelessly.

"I reckon you can't do it, bub," he muttered. "You ain't heftv enough for that. It was all I could do."

Frank Richards gave it up at last, panting for breath.

He seized his rifle again and looked into the dark tunnel.

There was blackness before him, with indistinguishable sounds from the distance.

He fired at random into the rocky tunnel.

There was a roar of echoing noise as the rifle-shot rang, and a clinking of falling fragments of rock. Through the din Frank thought he heard a yell of alarm.

He hastily put a fresh cartridge into the rifle.

The way was open for the half-breeds, if they had the nerve to make a rush through the dark tunnel; but it was natural enough that they should hesitate to rush into darkness and the unknown. But that the attack would not be long delayed (was certain). Frank fired another shot into the tunnel while he strove to think out a plan.

It was upon him, the prisoner of an hour ago, that the defence fell. Not that he had any more mercy to expect than Bronze Bill from Le Couteau and his gang. Frank had quite forgotten his rough treatment at the hands of the bronzed miner; his only thought now was to save the wounded man from the knives of the gold-robbers. The miner's faint voice made him turn his head, though he kept one eye on the tunnel and his rifle ready.

"Are they coming, sonny?"

"I think so," said Frank. "I fancy they're creeping through in the dark, but as soon as I see—"

"You can't stop them."

"I'm going to try."

"You're a good plucked kid," said Bronze Bill gratefully. "If I get outer this, I reckon it's you who've saved my life."

Frank smiled faintly. He did not see much chance for either of them to get out of the fearful extremity alive, though he was determined to fight to the last if the half-breeds came to close quarters. He listened for a sound in the tunnel under the rock, and he thought he detected the

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THE SCHOOLBOY MULTI-MILLIONAIRE!

(Continued from previous page.)

house no longer safe. We require you to hand us an open cheque for one million pounds, made payable to 'Self.'

"Guess again, senora," Don Darrel drawled, his grey eyes meeting hers unflinchingly. "Though I do happen to have more money than ever I can spend, I reckon I am not going to

payable to 'Self,' and for one million pounds, but scarcely had Inez Alvarez detached it from the cheque-book and examined it than she tore it across and threw the pieces contemptuously in the lad's face.

"No, thank you, Master Darrel!" she sneered. "We happen to have in our possession a cheque that has been passed through your bank, which you rather carelessly left lying in your study at the school. We know that you sign 'Donald Darrel,' and not 'Don Darrel,' as this one is signed. Come, be sensible, and do not try to play tricks upon us, if you value your life."

"So you tried to get me arrested, you little cur!" the disguised Sammy the Kid grated through his teeth, as he shook his fist at the lad. "No games this time! Write a cheque your bank won't question, unless you want to be sent headlong to kingdom come!"

(More of this gripping schoolboy adventure tale in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

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allow myself to be robbed by a pack of jackals like this little bunch of yours!"

One of the men who stood near the lad clapped a revolver to his temple. "You young fool, write and sign!" he said threateningly. "Do you value your life less than a fiftieth part of your fortune?"

"What guarantee have I that if I let you rob me of this million pounds, my life will be spared?" Don asked, though it was merely to gain time, for he had decided definitely in his own mind that, whether they contrived to rob him or otherwise, they would murder him in the end unless a miracle happened and rescue came.

"We give you our word that as soon as we have the million pounds, we demand, we will leave this house and send word to the police as to where to find you," Inez Alvarez declared. "You must accept that assurance in good faith. You are not in a position to do otherwise."

"Will you sign now?" the man with the revolver asked, lowering the weapon.

"Yes," Don Darrel returned, a plan flashing into his brain.

He swiftly wrote a cheque made

Dead Man's Canyon!

(Continued from page 250.)

faint noise of creeping boots. He could guess that the gold-robbers, on hands and knees, were creeping forward in the darkness, puzzling their way through, knife in hand for an encounter in the shadows. Ere long they would see the daylight at the inner end of the tunnel, and would know that there was an outlet. Then would come a rush—

Frank gritted his teeth, prepared to meet it.

"You can't stop them, kid. There's only one way—a way I reckoned on if I was ever cornered," muttered the miner faintly. "If you've got the nerve—"

Frank gave a rather harsh laugh. "I've got nerve enough if there's a way," he said. "I don't see a way. I shall drop one or two of them, and then—"

"You've seen the little chest in the shack, where I keep my cartridges?"

"Yes."

"Have you got the nerve to handle dynamite?"

"Dynamite?" repeated Frank, with a start.

"Sure!"

Frank breathed hard. "Yes," he said; "but—"

"There's a big stick of dynamite in the chest, same as they use in the quartz-mines," said Bronze Bill. "That was what I meant, if they hunted me out—to chuck it into the tunnel and close it up—"

It was on Frank's lips to say that the blocking of the tunnel meant their imprisonment in the locked gulch. But he did not speak. That was better than death under the knives of Le Couteau and his gang.

"If you've got the nerve, kid."

Frank did not stay to hear more. He ran into the shack and opened the chest. In a few seconds he came dashing back, with the stick of dynamite in his hand.

A false step, a stumble, and he would have been blown to atoms. But

it was no time for fears. The wings of the angel of death were hovering over him and over his comrade, and his nerve did not fail.

He looked into the opening of the tunnel again. He was framed there, with the sunlight behind him as he stood, and there came from the darkness of the tunnel a sudden ringing shot, and a bullet whizzed past him. The enemy was near.

Frank did not hesitate. He raised his hand, with the stick of dynamite in it, and with a tremor he hurled it with all his strength along the rock tunnel.

As it left his hand he sprang back and threw himself down in the grass. It seemed at the same instant that there came a blinding, deafening roar from the heart of the rocky hillside.

Crash, crash! The rush of air from the tunnel swept past the schoolboy as he lay. The roar of the explosion deafened, almost dazed him. He lay dizzy, with the crash of falling rocks in his ears. The din died down at last. Frank Richards staggered to his feet.

He had his rifle ready, in case any of the enemy should have escaped on the near side of the explosion. But there was little chance of that.

He peered into the tunnel. Only a few yards from him it was blocked with masses of blasted rock, not leaving a space that a prairie rabbit could have crept through.

And the half-breeds—

Frank shuddered. If the gang had been in the tunnel when the explosion came, nothing could have saved them. Such as were in the cave were undoubtedly buried, crushed out of all human semblance, under the fallen tons of rock from above.

Frank's face was white as he turned away.

There was no further danger of attack, by way of the tunnel, at all events. The gold-seekers were shut

in the locked gulch; but Le Couteau and his gang, if any survived, were shut out.

A grim of triumph came over Bronze Bill's grim face as he met Frank Richards' eyes.

"I guess that's stopped 'em!" he said.

"Yes," said Frank in a low voice.

"I reckon it was their lives or ours, pard," said Bronze Bill. "They'd have knifed us when they got near enough, you bet your boots. I hope Le Couteau went under with the rest. But he's as cunning as a fox; I guess he may have kept clear. But we're safe hyer now. I reckon you'd better do what you can for this hole in my shoulder, sonny."

Frank Richards nodded.

With a white face but steady hand he examined the miner's wound. The bullet had passed clean through, and Frank washed and bandaged the wound, which was serious enough, but not fatal, with care, and with the big miner's iron constitution to help him through. But it was certain that Bronze Bill would have to lie helpless for some time, cared for by the schoolboy he had driven into the locked gulch as a prisoner.

"We are both prisoners now!" Frank Richards remarked, with a faint smile.

Bronze Bill nodded.

"I guess while there's life there's hope, sonny," he said. "I reckon we'll find a way out, somehow, when it's time. You and me, kid, is pardners now in this hyer claim—share and share alike. When we've cleaned up the gold we'll get out of this hyer trap, somehow. Never say die!"

Beyond the rocky barrier, in the sunlight of Dead Man's Canyon, Le Couteau, the half-breed, brandished his fists and spat out curses. He had escaped the explosion, being well to the rear of his gang, but the force of it had hurled him out of the cave, half-stunned. He had recovered, to find himself alone, and an impenetrable barrier between him and the gold he sought. He shook his dusky fists, and cursed in mingled French and Indian and English, mocked by the hollow echoes among the rocks of Dead Man's Canyon.

THE END.

("The Gold Thief" is the title of the Frank Richards yarn in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. Order your copy TO-DAY!)

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