

"Fighting Jack Cresley!" by GILBERT L. JESSOP—IN THIS ISSUE!

The BOYS' FRIEND 1^{1d}/₂

TWELVE PAGES!

TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending July 16th, 1921.

The QUICK-CHANGE MILLIONAIRE!

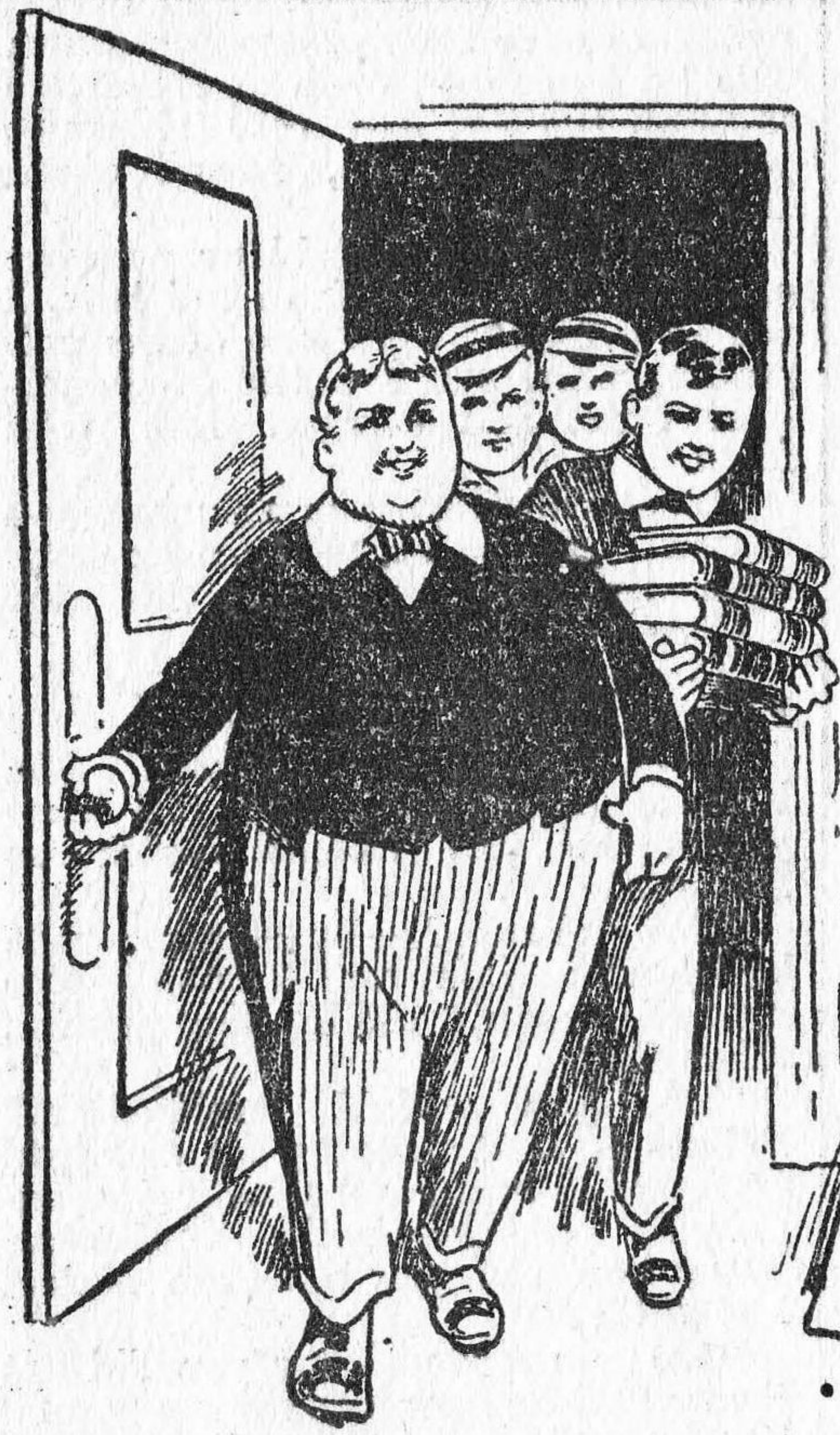
BY VICTOR NELSON.



DON DARREL'S BURGLAR TRAP!

The Boy with Fifty Millions was just admiring his handiwork when a step sounded outside the door. "Don't come in, you idiot!" yelled Don Darrel. But the warning was too late, for the door swung open and Mr. Philby, the science-master, stepped in—to receive one perfectly good pint of red ink from the patent "burglar-catcher"!

A GRAND COMPLETE YARN OF JIMMY SILVER & Co. BY OWEN CONQUEST.



Chumming With Monty!

A SPLENDID TALE
OF THE CHUMS OF
ROOKWOOD
..... SCHOOL.

The 1st Chapter. Beyond the Limit!

"Old man, it won't do!"
"Hardly!"
"It really won't, you know!"
"Not at all, Monty, old bird!"
Jimmy Silver glanced round, with a rather amused smile.

The speakers were Townsend and Topham, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, and they were addressing Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, of the same Form.

They did not heed Jimmy Silver, who was sitting on the stone balustrade by the steps of the School House, waiting for his chums to come out. The three Nuts were standing in a little group by the steps, quite regardless of the captain of the Fourth.

"If it was anybody else—" said Topham.

"Anybody but Muffin—" "But that fat boulder—" "That awful outsider—" "A fellow can't stand him—" "In fact, a fellow won't—" "You see, we don't see your object, Monty—" "Drop him, old chap!" "Or drop us!"

Towny and Topy were "going it" alternately, and Montmorency listened to their remarks, and polished his eyeglass, his face expressing nothing, but his eyes ever restless.

"Haven't you got anythin' to say, Monty?" demanded Townsend at last. "We've told you what we think."

"There's no sense in it," said Topham. "You're in the best set in the Lower School at Rookwood, and you must take up that fat outsider, Muffin, an' chum with him, and inflict the horrid boulder on your pals. It's too thick."

"It's the limit!" said Townsend. "The very outside edge!" said Topham.

Jimmy Silver smiled into space. As a matter of fact, he, as well as other fellows, had been surprised by the sudden friendship that had arisen between Montmorency and Tubby Muffin.

Up to a couple of days ago, Montmorency had treated Tubby with the utmost scornful indifference. Tubby had never ceased attempting to inflict himself upon the wealthy youth, and Montmorency had snubbed him mercilessly.

And now, all of a sudden, there was a change. Tubby Muffin was seen walking arm-in-arm with Monty. He dropped into his study to tea; he called him "Monty" and "Old bean," and now, on this special afternoon, he was going to join him in a motor run. The celebrated Montmorency Rolls-Royce was coming to Rookwood to fetch Monty and his friends, and Monty had announced to his chums that Tubby was to be one of the party.

And at that Towny and Topy struck.

They had endured their chum's new friendship in a very restive way, wondering about the why and the wherefore, and hoping that Monty would drop Muffin as suddenly as he had taken him up. Instead of which, Tubby was turning out a fixture.

It was amazing, and it was extremely exasperating; and Towny and Topy agreed between themselves that Monty could pal with Tubby Muffin if he liked, but that he couldn't expect them to follow his example. They weren't snobs, of course, but there was a limit, and Reginald Muffin was the limit.

"If it was anybody else," said Townsend, in a tone of thrilling indignation, "Peele, or Gower, or even Lattrey, or even Rawson—we could stand even Rawson at a pinch to please you, Monty—but that grabbin' rascal, Muffin—"

A fat figure loomed up in the doorway. Tubby Muffin rolled out of the School House, with a fat smile on his face, and his best silk hat on his bullet-head. He wore his brightest necktie, and a geranium in his coat, evidently having dressed for the occasion.

"Ready, Monty?" he asked. "The car's at the gates, I think."

"Yaas." "These fellows comin'?" asked Tubby, with a glance at Townsend and Topham.

They were eyeing the fat Classical with great disfavour, and Tubby returned their scornful looks with interest.

"Yaas." Tubby Muffin slipped a fat paw through Montmorency's arm.

"Come on, Monty!" he said. "Please yourselves, you two duffers. I don't want you, and I don't think Monty does. Come on, Monty!"

Montmorency hesitated a moment, and then, without looking at his nutty pals, he walked away with Tubby Muffin to the gates.

Townsend and Topham looked at one another, with feelings too deep for words. Lovell and Raby and Newcome came out of the School House with their bats, and joined Jimmy Silver, and they all glanced after the elegant, slim figure of Montmorency walking uneasily beside the fat and decidedly inelegant Muffin.

"Those two seem jolly pally the last day or two!" said Lovell.

"They do!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "Towny and Topy don't seem to enjoy it!" grinned Raby.

"They don't!" said Jimmy. "It's a bit queer!" Newcome remarked thoughtfully. "Montmorency wouldn't have touched Muffin with a barge-pole till the last day or two. Now they're always together, and he's always lending Muffin money. Muffin has been rolling in ten-bob notes."

"Jolly queer!" said Jimmy. Montmorency and his peculiar chum disappeared out of gates, and the hum of the big car was heard on the road.

"Did you ever?" said Towny to Topy, finding his voice at last.

"Never!" said Topy. And the two nuts walked away in great disgust. Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled down to Little Side for the cricket—Jimmy with a thoughtful shade on his brow.

He was thinking of that sudden, remarkable new friendship between the snob of the Fourth and the fat Tubby, which had astonished all the Lower School, and he could not help

wondering what it meant, and there was suspicion mingled with his wonder.

The 2nd Chapter. Tubby Has a Moving Job!

"Having tea?" Reginald Muffin asked that question as he rolled into Study No. 2 in the Fourth. He asked it in a very disparaging manner, with his fat little nose turned up, as if to convey his lofty contempt for the rather frugal feed that was going on in Study No. 2.

Putty Grace and Higgs and Jones minor were there at tea. Certainly they were not feeding on the fat of the land. But as Tubby Muffin seldom stood his "whack" in the study feeds, it really was not for him to turn up his fat little nose.

But he did turn it up—more emphatically than Nature had turned it up to start with, though Nature had done a good deal in that direction.

Higgs gave him a glare. "Yes, and there's none for you!" he grunted. "Grub's short, and you're not going to sponge this time, Muffin."

Muffin sniffed contemptuously. "Do you think I want any of your measly feed?" he inquired.

"You generally do!" remarked Jones minor, with a grin. "This time you're not going to have any."

"Bread and marger, and radishes, and a squeeze of jam!" said Tubby Muffin, surveying the tea-table scornfully. "Not much in my line!"

"Ass!" said Putty Grace good-humouredly. "You can have some of the radishes if you like along with your bread and marger."

Another emphatic sniff. "Catch me!" said Muffin. "No, thanks! The fact is, I've had a jolly good feed already."

"Whose study cupboard have you been robbing?" asked Higgs, with sarcasm.

"I've been out with my friend Monty—" "And sponged on him for a feed?" grinned Jones minor.

"Monty stood me a whacking feed at a first-class hotel," said Tubby Muffin loftily. "Monty would do anything for me."

"More fool Monty!" said Higgs. Putty Grace regarded the fat junior curiously.

"What does this mean between you and Montmorency?" he asked. "Why has he taken you up, and why does he lend you money?"

"I'm his pal, you know. Both of us being such highly-connected chaps, we naturally pull," explained Muffin.

"Highly-connected rats!" said Jones minor. "Half Rookwood believes that Montmorency's real name is Huggins."

"Pageboy at Goby Hall before his uncle came into money, according to what we hear!" sneered Higgs.

"Well, that yarn's been knocked on the head," said Putty Grace tolerantly. "Montmorency is entitled to the benefit of the doubt, anyhow. But I'm blessed if I can see what he wants to square Muffin for!"

"Square me!" ejaculated Tubby. Grace nodded.

"That's the word! He dislikes the

mere sight of you, and he doesn't lend you money expecting to see it again. You've got some sort of a hold over the fellow."

"Anybody could see that!" grunted Higgs.

"Oh, I say!" protested Tubby Muffin, greatly startled. "That—that's a rather rotten suspicion, Putty. If you think I've found out for certain that Montmorency's real name is Huggins—"

"Eh?" "If you think he's keeping me quiet about it," continued the fatuous Tubby, "you're making a big mistake—you are really."

"Well, my hat!" said Putty, with a whistle. "The fact is," said Tubby, "I pull with him—both of us being so highly connected, you know, and of the same aristocratic tastes. As for hearing him telephone home—I—I mean—"

"You heard him telephone home?" "Nothing of the kind—never heard a word."

"Whom was he telephoning to at home?" asked Jones minor, staring at the fat Classical.

"His uncle—I mean, nobody! He wasn't telephoning home at all, and I wasn't in the prefect's room," said Tubby Muffin. "I never heard a word, and I don't know anything about his affairs. See?"

Putty Grace and his study-mates did see—much more than the obtuse Tubby supposed.

That there must have been some powerful reason for the sudden friendship between Tubby and Montmorency, was obvious. Montmorency had never concealed his contempt and aversion for the fat Tubby—till lately. He had, indeed, treated Muffin with more contempt than he deserved—in his snobbish way.

And now they had become inseparable, and yet any fellow could see that Montmorency almost shuddered when the fat junior took his arm in the quad, or poked him in the ribs.

"So you've found out that he's really Huggins, and you're making him chum with you to keep you quiet about it!" grinned Higgs.

"Nothing of the sort! Just the opposite, in fact! Don't I keep on telling you it isn't so?" exclaimed Muffin.

"You fat rascal!" said Putty Grace. "You sha'n't have any tea now! Roll out of this study before I kick you!"

Sniff, again, from Tubby Muffin. "I'm jolly well going to leave this study," he answered scornfully. "I never was satisfied with you fellows—my father's often told me to be particular about the company I keep."

"What!" roared Higgs. "I'm going to change out!" said Tubby.

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Putty Grace. "Bravo!" said Jones minor. "I'll help you carry your things out, Muffin! My hat! I'd do anything to see the last of you!"

"Yes, rather!" grunted Higgs. "Only I don't believe it!" went on Jones. "We're landed with you, and can't help it; but no other chap would take you in, unless he was potty."

"I'm going into Study No. 5!" said Tubby loftily. "Montmorency's study!" exclaimed Putty.

"Yes—my pal Monty's." "Rats!" said Higgs. "You'll see. Just lend me a hand to carry these books along the passage," said Muffin.

"Pleased, old bean," said Jones, with alacrity. "I hope it's true, but I think it's too jolly good to be true. Monty's welcome to you."

Sniff once more. Putty and Higgs went on with their tea; but Jones minor obligingly lent Tubby a hand with his books and other portable possessions. They came out into the passage, laden, as Jimmy Silver & Co. came in ruddy and cheery from the cricket.

"Hallo! Anybody seen a moving job?" sang Lovell. "Breaking up the happy home?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Jones minor chuckled. "Muffin says he's moving into Study No. 5. I'm helping him. I've told him it's too good to be true."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, Jones!" snapped Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical and his companion moved on with their baggage. The Fistical Four followed them up the passage. They could not help being interested and astonished. Tubby Muffin's company never was yearned for; and it was really incredible that any fellow could want the fat Classical to move into his study. Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather

interested to see how the "moving job" would turn out.

Tubby threw open the door of Study No. 5 as if the room belonged to him. Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency was alone in the study. He was standing by the window, staring out into the quadrangle with a gloomy brow.

The elegant junior glanced round quickly as Tubby Muffin appeared in the doorway. He looked at Muffin, and Jones, and at the interested faces of the Fistical Four beyond. For one second his eyes glittered.

"What do you want, Muffin?" he asked.

"I've come!" "What?" "I told you I was going to move into this study, Monty."

Montmorency's lip twitched. "I—I said I—I should have to ask my study-mates!" he muttered.

"You can settle it with them," said Muffin. "Anyhow, here I am. Put the books on the table, Jonesy."

"Right-ho!" grinned Jones. He thumped the dog-eared volumes down on the table, and retired chuckling from Study No. 5. It really seemed to be true, after all, although it still seemed too good to be true.

"So Muffin's going to dig with you, Montmorency?" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"If—if my study-mates agree!" said Montmorency.

"They'll have to," said Tubby Muffin. "You can make them, Monty. Look here, do you want me, or don't you?" The fat Classical's voice took on almost a bullying tone.

"Yes or no, sharp!" "Yes!" gasped Montmorency.

"Good enough, then." Tubby Muffin closed the door in the faces of Jimmy Silver & Co. The Fistical Four stared at one another, and went on to the end study.

"Montmorency is under that fat rotter's thumb somehow," said Arthur Edward Lovell sapiently. "He'd have given quids to kick him out of the study."

"He looked like it!" said Jimmy. "Blessed if I see—" began Raby, puzzled.

"No business of ours," said Jimmy Silver shortly. "If Montmorency's got some shady secret, and that fat cad's got hold of it, it's his own lookout. Let's get along to tea."

The 3rd Chapter.

No Rest for the Wicked!

Townsend and Topham, of the Classical Fourth, came along the passage with frowning faces.

They were discontented and dissatisfied.

For the second or third time they had broken with their aristocratic study-mate, Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency; and this time it looked as if the breach would not be healed.

For they were determined not to stand Muffin; they would not stand him at any price. Fully they were agreed upon that. Almost any other fellow in the Fourth they could have stood with more equanimity. But the fat, the fatuous, the greedy and grabbing Muffin—not at any price should he be allowed to wedge into their select circle!

On the other hand, they did not want to break with Monty. He was flowing with wealth, he was lofty and snobbish, and expensively dressed, he had a Rolls-Royce car at his beck and call—in fact, he was in every way suited to be their very particular friend.

So they were worried and dissatisfied; but none the less determined. And when Towny opened the study door, and they came in and found Tubby Muffin sprawling in the most comfortable armchair, their looks were very expressive.

"Out of this, you fat cad!" snapped Towny. "Yah!" was Muffin's extremely elegant reply.

"Let him alone!" muttered Montmorency. "We don't want him here!" shouted Topham.

"Monty wants me!" grinned Tubby Muffin.

Townsend set his teeth. But he remembered that Montmorency, with all his dandy ways, was one of the heaviest fighting-men in the Rookwood Fourth. There really was no comprehending Monty; but Towny did not want to quarrel with him if he could help it.

Tubby blinked at the two disgusted nuts, and grinned.

"I may as well tell you fellows right out!" he said. "Monty wants me to change into this study, and I'm here for keeps."

"What?" yelled Townsend. "You fellows needn't mind him here," muttered the wretched Montmorency.

"Mind him!" said Townsend furiously. "You can pal with the fat cad if you like, and be hanged to you; but you can't plant him on us in our study."

"Look here—"

"Outside, Muffin!" exclaimed Topham. "Are these books yours? Well, there they go!"

Topham picked up an armful of books, and hurled them into the passage.

Tubby Muffin gave a roar of wrath.

"Monty, if you don't stop him—"

Townsend grasped the fat Classical by the collar.

"Get out!" he snapped.

Montmorency stood looking on moodily. Tubby struggled as Townsend jerked him towards the door.

"Rescue!" he howled. "Monty, if you don't help me, I'll—"

Montmorency strode forward.

"Let him alone!" he muttered thickly.

"Hands off, you rotter!" shouted Townsend, quite reckless now.

"He's going out on his neck!"

"Let him alone, I tell you!"

"I won't!"

There was a fight the next moment. Topham rushed to his comrade's aid.

But the two nuts of the Fourth together, were no match for Montmorency.

Whether he descended from the noble line of Montmorency, or whether he was a simple Huggins, there was no doubt that the elegant junior was a "good man with his hands."

Townsend found himself reposing on one corner of the study carpet; Topham discovered himself sitting in the doorway—both in a dazed condition.

Montmorency looked at them gloweringly. He was in a bitter and savage temper, though his inward rage was directed against the fat junior who held him under a merciless thumb. But he was not sorry to wreak his fury upon somebody.

"Do you want any more, dash you?" he snapped.

"Oh gad!" gasped Topham.

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Topham.

Tubby Muffin chuckled gleefully.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" he said. "Good old Monty! You stand by your pal, and your pal will stand by you!"

Townsend and Topham rose to their feet, blinking. They did not seek to renew the conflict, but they gave Muffin and his pal deadly looks.

It was just then that Tom Rawson came into the study.

He glanced round in surprise.

"You fellows rowing?" he asked.

As a rule, Topham and Topy did not deign to speak to the scholarship junior; but in their rage they forgot all about their snobbish dislike of the sturdy Rawson.

"Montmorency's asked that fat cad to dig in this study!" said Townsend, in a choking voice. "We're not standin' it!"

"You'll have to!" grinned Muffin.

Rawson gave Montmorency a quiet look. Rawson had been the only fellow at Rookwood who knew the hapless upstart's secret; he had learned it by chance, and his lips had been sealed on the subject. But Tubby's proceedings during the last few days had made Rawson realise that Tubby, too, had somehow discovered the facts of the case.

Rawson would never have dreamed of making any use of his knowledge that Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, the snob of Rookwood, had once been George Huggins, pageboy at Goby Hall. But Tubby evidently was not so particular. He had made a very good thing out of his knowledge, so far; and he was bent upon making more.

Rawson was silent for a minute or two, thinking the matter out in his slow, stolid way. Then he spoke.

"You can't ask a fellow to share the study without your study-mates agreeing, Montmorency," he said.

"Topham and Topy will agree," said Montmorency, with a sour smile.

"I don't agree," said Rawson quietly, "and you can't lick me as you can Topham and Topy. You can try it if you like; but Muffin isn't going to dig in this study."

"Look here—" blustered Tubby, rather dismayed.

He had not expected any opposition from the scholarship junior, to whom Tubby felt himself immensely superior. Tubby was of opinion that Rawson was highly honoured by having him, Reginald Muffin, for a study-mate. Apparently Tom Rawson was of a different opinion.

"Outside!" said Rawson tersely.

"Monty—"

"Montmorency can't help you," said Rawson quietly. "Townsend, kick that fat cad out, and I'll jolly

soon stop Montmorency if he chips in."

Townsend grinned.

"Rawson, old bean, you're a good sort, an' I haven't treated you well!" he said. "I'm sorry! Now, then, Muffin—"

"Monty!" yelled Muffin, as Topham laid ready hands on him.

Montmorency stepped irresolutely forward. Tom Rawson faced him, with his hands up.

"Rescue!" yelled Tubby.

But there was no rescue for Tubby Muffin; Rawson was a lion in the path. The fat Classical descended with a bump in the passage. Townsend and Topham followed him out. With vigour and enjoyment, they kicked Tubby Muffin along the passage to Study No. 2. Townsend threw open the door of Study No. 2, and a fresh series of kicks landed Tubby in his old study.

"We've brought your pig home, you fellows!" said Townsend politely. And he closed the door.

Tubby Muffin sat up and roared.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Yooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Higgs.

Putty Grace chortled.

"Yow-ow! I'll make Monty lick 'em! I-I-I'll—"

"Didn't I say it was too good to be true!" said Jones minor regretfully. "I say, Tubby, go and try it on again! Keep on trying it on! There's three fellows here who wish you luck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tubby Muffin was apparently not disposed to try it on again just then. For a considerable time

wretched upstart had built round himself at Rookwood. During those two days Montmorency was not happy.

Now Muffin had run him down in Little Quad, with the intention of "sicking" his dear pal for a pound note. If he could not share Monty's expensive study, he could at least share his spare cash; and Tubby had no scruples whatever about doing so.

"Can you lend me a quid?" he asked; and his tone was rather more threatening than polite.

"A fiver, if you like," said Montmorency.

Tubby's eyes almost bulged from his head as Montmorency jerked a crisp five-pound note from his pocket.

"A—a—a—fiver!"

The wealthy Montmorency had fivers, and even tenners; but Tubby, unscrupulous as he was, had not dreamed of bagging them. His fat thoughts did not run beyond pound-notes.

He clutched the fiver with greedy fingers.

"Thanks, old chap!" said Tubby affably. "I'll let you have this back out of—a remittance I'm expecting shortly."

Montmorency did not answer that. It pleased Master Muffin to keep up a thin pretence that he was only "borrowing" from his aristocratic pal. Even Tubby did not like to admit to himself that he was extorting money as the price of silence.

He rolled away with a gleeful face to the gates.

Obtuse as he was, Tubby realised that there had been too much talk

"All the fellows are sayin' that Muffin's got some hold over you, and you don't dare to offend him," said Townsend, with a sneer. "Some of 'em say that he's got proof that your name's really Huggins, same as Lattrey said it was."

Montmorency shrugged his shoulders.

"I've pulled your leg, and I've apologised for stuffin' you," he said. "If you want to know what I think of Muffin, wait till he puts his head into this study again. I undertake to kick him the length of the passage, if he does!"

"You mean that?" ejaculated Townsend.

"Don't I keep on tellin' you that I've only been stuffin' him, for a lark?" said Montmorency impatiently.

"Well, I can't say I see any fun in a lark like that," said Townsend. "But, if you mean it, I'm willin' to be friendly."

"Same here!" said Topham cordially.

And there was peace once more in Study No. 5; and when Tom Rawson came in he was surprised to see the three nuts apparently on the best of terms. After tea, Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency strolled down to the gates and out into the road. He paced slowly along the road, looking towards the village, evidently in expectation. A glimmer came into his eyes at the sight of Tubby Muffin's fat figure coming towards Rookwood.

"Hallo, old bean!" Tubby greeted him with a cheery grin. "Like some

steely tones. "It has been stolen. I've got the number."

Tubby Muffin stared at him.

There was a long, long silence.

Tubby's fat brain worked slowly. But Montmorency's meaning sank into it at last, and a scared, frightened look came over Tubby's face, and the colour died out of it.

"You—you mean—"

"You've changed a five-pound note at the village shop this afternoon," said Montmorency, with an icy smile. "Where did you get it?"

"You—you awful rotter!" panted Tubby. "You gave it to me—you know you did."

Montmorency raised his eyebrows.

"That's not a good yarn to spin," he said coolly. "Why should I give you five pounds?"

"Because—because—"

Tubby panted. "Because I know your name's Huggins, and you were a servant at Goby Hall, and you're afraid I shall tell the fellows; and if they knew you'd been employed in Sir Gilbert Goby's kitchen—"

"Can you tell the Head that?" smiled Montmorency. "Can you tell the police that?"

"The—the police!"

"As soon as I make it public that I have lost a five-pound note, the police will be called in," said Montmorency grimly. "You can confess yourself a blackmailer, if you choose, but that won't save you. You can give me away, Muffin, and then look out for yourself! A reformatory is the proper place for your sort. And if you breathe one word—one word, mind—about me, or what you think you've found out—if you ever dare to call me Monty again, or claim my acquaintance—you're goin' to a reformatory as a juvenile thief. Think it over, my fat tulip, and hold your tongue, if you know what's good for you!"

Tubby Muffin gasped.

Montmorency turned on his heel, and walked back to Rookwood, without giving the fat Classical another glance.

Tubby Muffin almost crawled in at the gates of Rookwood. Montmorency, Townsend, and Topham were sauntering in the quadrangle, chatting, and they all three glanced at the fat Classical. Tubby gave them a blink, and his blink, as it fell on Montmorency, was full of terror. Montmorency's eyes glittered. He called to the fat junior.

"Muffin!"

"Yes," gasped Tubby. "Yes, M-M-Monty, old fellow?"

"You've taken the liberty of callin' me Monty several times," said Cecil Cuthbert icily. "It's not to occur again. If it does I shall kick you! Catch on!"

"Yes, M-M-Monty!" stammered Muffin.

"There he goes again!" grinned Townsend.

Montmorency made a stride towards Muffin, and caught him by the collar. The next moment his elegant boot thudded on Muffin's ample person.

"Yow-ow!"

"Now, cut off, you fat rascal, or—"

Montmorency lifted his boot again.

Tubby Muffin did not wait for the second kick. He dived into the School House and vanished.

The three nuts paraded the quad arm-in-arm, in their old lofty way, on the very best of terms. Montmorency was smiling and genial; he had saved himself once more.

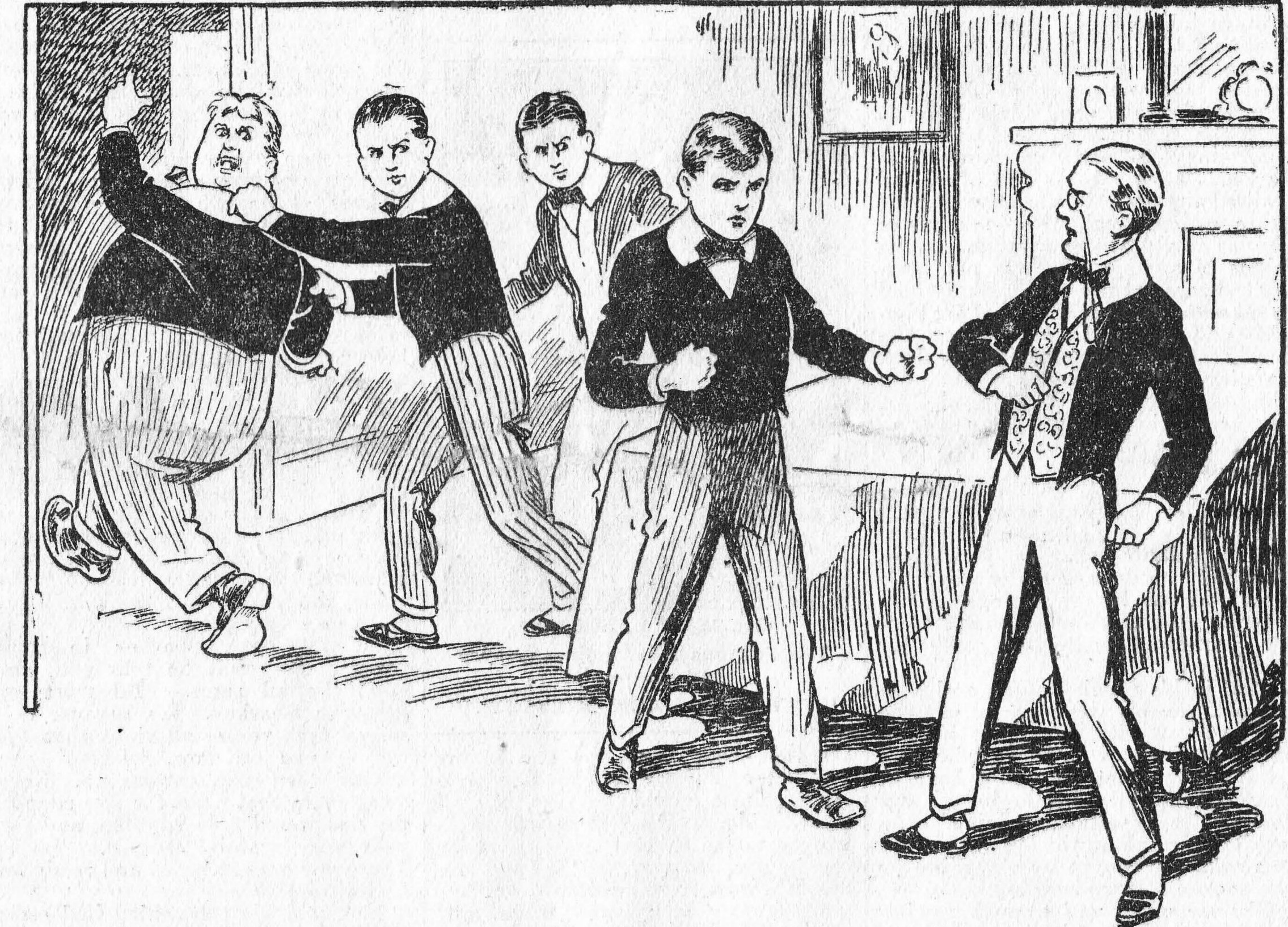
The saunter of the Rookwood nuts brought them near Little Side, where Jimmy Silver & Co., coming off from the cricket, had stopped to speak to Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth. Tommy Dodd had a letter in his hand, and a somewhat indignant expression on his rugged face. Apparently he was confiding his troubles to the Classical chums.

"It's rotten!" said Tommy Dodd. "The pater don't know what a worry a new fellow is. Just because he knows a kid's father, he's asking me to take him under my wing, you know, and see him through his troubles at Rookwood. Of course, I've got to oblige the pater; but as for this blessed new kid, Goby—"

Involuntarily Jimmy Silver's glance turned upon Montmorency. Montmorency did not meet his eyes. He dropped the arms of Topham and Topy, and turned away, and walked quickly to the School House, with calmness in his face, but the bitterness of despair in his heart.

THE END.

("Shewn Up!" is the title of the long, complete Rookwood School story appearing in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. Why not get a copy of the "Popular" every week, in which you will find a further series of long, complete Jimmy Silver tales?)



EXIT TUBBY MUFFIN! Whilst Townsend and Topham hustled the yelling junior out of the study Tom Rawson kept the aristocratic Montmorency at bay. Evidently Tubby was not welcome in Study No. 5!

Tubby's chief occupation was rubbing his fat limbs and groaning.

The 4th Chapter. A Desperate Trick!

"A—a fiver!"

Tubby Muffin opened his round eyes wide. It was a couple of days since Muffin had made his attempt to jump the claim, as it were, in Study No. 5. During those two days, Tubby had eyed his pal Monty, when he met him, with a morose eye. Tubby felt injured; and he missed the well-spread tea-table in Study No. 5, where he had fondly imagined that he would annex the lion's share every time. For Topham and Topy, backed up by the muscular Rawson, had tabooed Tubby in that study, even as a guest; he had only to present himself there in order to get the emphatic boot. And as Montmorency, hefty as he was, could not handle Tom Rawson, there was no help for it—as even Tubby realised.

But Tubby was injured; and Tubby was wrathful; and he "took it out" of Monty!

He would treat him publicly with disdain, and he would make deep and meaning remarks before other fellows; and Montmorency was kept on the trembling edge of uncertainty, dreading every moment that the fat junior would blurt out all he knew.

And Tubby knew enough to destroy, at one fell swoop, all the network of falsehood and importance the

already about his frequent loans from Montmorency; and he considered it judicious not to change the fiver in the school shop. He rolled away to Coombe to stand himself a record feed at Mrs. Wicks'.

Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency drove his hands deep into his pockets and strode away, with a glitter in his eyes. The poet has said that desperate diseases require desperate remedies; and it was a desperate device that Montmorency had hit upon to save himself from Tubby's greedy clutches.

The dandy of the Fourth strolled into Study No. 5 to tea, and found Topham and Topy there. They eyed him grimly. The friendship of the Rookwood nuts had received a severe shock, from which it had not recovered. But Cecil Cuthbert surprised his nutty pals by nodding to them cheerily.

"I owe you fellows an apology," he said smiling.

"You do!" grunted Townsend.

"But you needn't speak to us, Montmorency—not so long as you pal with Muffin."

Montmorency laughed.

"My dear old bean, I was only pullin' your silly leg," he said. "You couldn't think I really wanted to chum with that fat cad? I was only leadin' him on to stuff him."

"Oh!" said Topham blankly.

"Gammon!" said Townsend sourly.

"Honest Injun!" said Montmorency lightly.

apples? I've got some in my pockets."

Tubby's pockets were bulging, and his fat face was red and shiny, and he breathed stertorously. It was evident, from his looks, that Tubby had "done himself" remarkably well at Mrs. Wicks' establishment in the village. He had done himself, in fact, not wisely but too well!

"Changed the fiver!" asked Montmorency carelessly.

The question was unnecessary. Tubby's look showed plainly enough that he had not only changed the fiver, but had expended a considerable part of it in filling up his capacious inside.

"Yes, old chap; and, I say"—Tubby looked aggrieved—"Mrs. Wicks made me pay an old account of ten bob last term. I call that rotten—a good customer like me! So I've got only thirty-five bob left."

Montmorency smiled—a strange smile, that made Tubby Muffin start. He blinked at the dandy of Rookwood, feeling uneasy, he hardly knew why.

"I suppose you know that fivers have numbers on them, Muffin?" said Montmorency, sinking his voice, though they were alone in the lane.

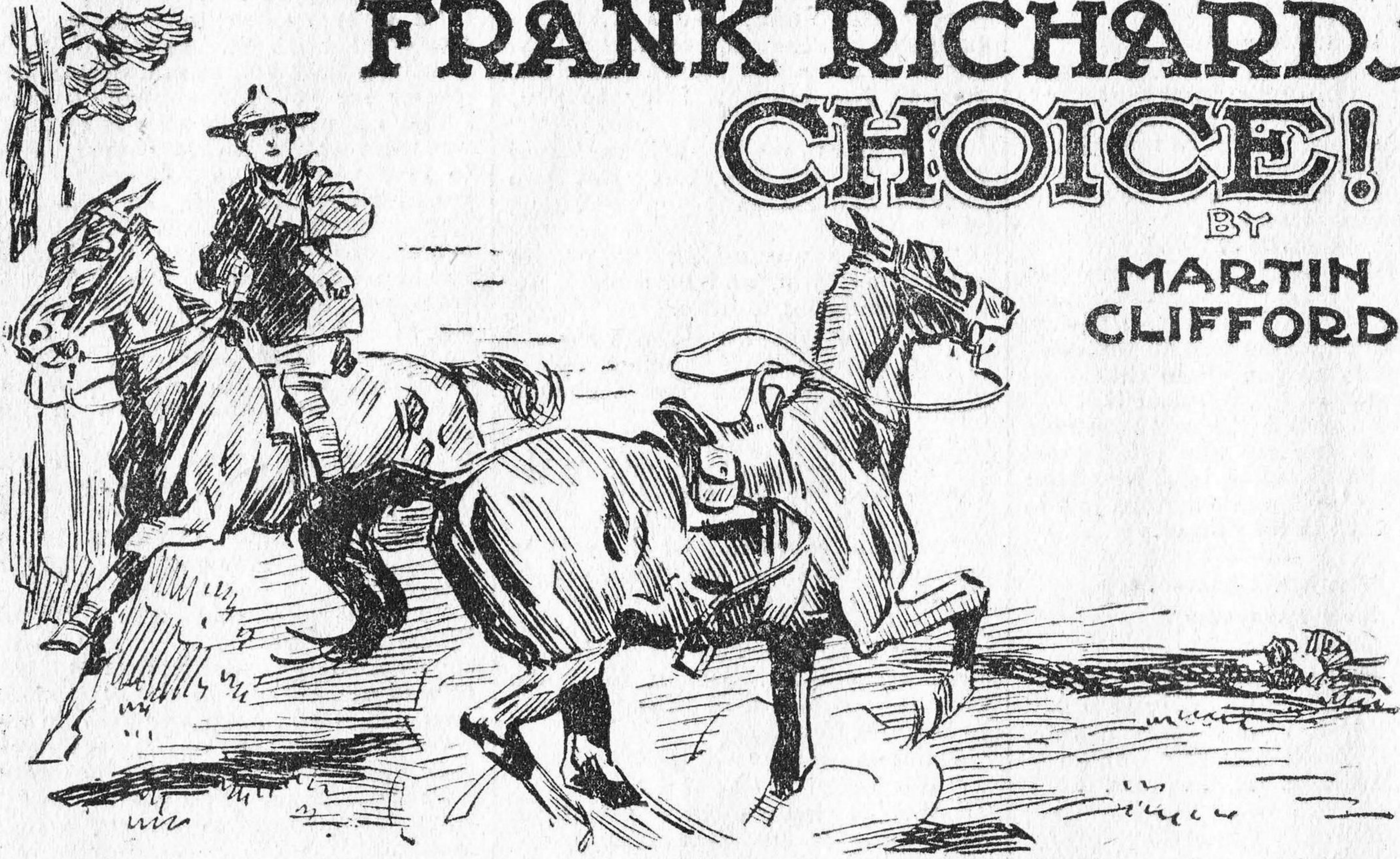
"Eh? Yes, I suppose so."

"Any banknote can be traced by the police."

"Wha-at are you driving at?" asked Tubby uneasily.

"I've missed a fiver from my study!" said Montmorency, in low,

A SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE YARN OF FRANK RICHARDS & CO.

FRANK RICHARDS'
CHOICE!BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD

The 1st Chapter.

Roped In!

"Franky!"
Click, click!

"Franky, you jay!"

Bob Lawless bawled up the stairs at the Lawless Ranch; but only the click of the typewriter answered him.

Frank Richards was busy.

The schoolboy author had turned out early that morning. He had "copy" to produce for Mr. Isaacs, the proprietor of the "Thompson Press"; and he was putting in a couple of hours before school.

"Franky!" yelled Bob. "Time for school, you ass!"

Click, click!

Bob Lawless came tramping up the stairs, and he put a wrathful and indignant face into the doorway. Frank Richards did not even look round. When the tide of inspiration was flowing, the schoolboy author was blind and deaf to all other considerations.

Click, click, click, click! The typewriter was going again strong.

"You precious ass!" said Bob Lawless. "We'll start, anyhow, and you can come on after us. You'll have to ride hard."

Click, click!

Bob Lawless tramped down the stairs again. Frank Richards forgot his existence the next moment, as his nimble fingers clicked away on the keys of the typewriter.

From the window where he sat at work Frank could see a wide stretch of grasslands of the Lawless Ranch, with the timber in the distance. Through the timber the trail ran to Cedar Creek School. As he paused a moment in his work, and glanced from the window, he saw Bob Lawless riding away from the ranch, with Lord St. Austells—Mr. Lawless' guest at the ranch. Both of them glanced up at Frank's window—Lord St. Austells with a smile, and Bob with a wrathful frown.

Frank waved his hand, and then resumed his work. That instalment of "Bullivant's Schooldays" was reaching a dramatic conclusion, and Frank simply couldn't give his thoughts to anything else. There were certain difficulties in combining the occupations of a schoolboy and an author as Frank had discovered before.

"The awful jay!" growled Bob Lawless as he rode away with his companion. "He'll have to ride like thunder to get to school in time. But it's no good arguing with Franky when he's on the typer."

Lord St. Austells smiled.

He had seen a good deal of Frank Richards during his stay at the ranch, and he had taken a great liking to the cheery schoolboy of Cedar Creek. And he had not forgotten how Frank Richards had rescued him from the clutches of the rustlers in the Cascade Mountains.

"Frank is beginning literary work early!" he remarked.

"I believe he began to scribble before he could walk," said Bob, laughing. "He does a story every week now for our local paper—old Isaacs, you know. They pay him ten dollars for it."

"I have seen some of his productions," said Lord St. Austells. "Very remarkable in one so youthful! It is rather a pity that a lad so gifted should pass his life in these remote backwoods."

Bob stared.

From Bob's point of view, British Columbia was the most delectable land to be found on the wide surface

of the globe, and he felt a kind compassion for anybody who had to live anywhere else.

But he realised that Lord St. Austells, the peer from the Old Country, probably had a very different view-point, so he did not argue the question.

They rode on into the timber, and at the fork of the trail Vere Beauclerc joined them. Beauclerc saluted his uncle cheerily, and looked along the trail for Frank.

"Where's Franky?" he asked.

"On the typewriter!" grinned Bob. "He will be late for school, and Miss Meadows will be waxy. But old Isaacs will get his copy; so I suppose Frank thinks it is all right."

"The ass!" said Beauclerc, laughing.

The three rode on to Cedar Creek, Bob and Beauclerc occasionally looking back for Frank, hoping to see him coming on at a gallop. But Frank Richards did not appear on the trail. Evidently he was still busy with the instalment of "Bullivant's Schooldays."

Lord St. Austells left his young companions at the gates of Cedar Creek. He rode back towards the ranch with a thoughtful expression on his face. His stay at the ranch was drawing to an end; on the morrow he was to leave. He had visited the Thompson Valley to see his brother, the remittance man, and his nephew, Vere Beauclerc. But he had remained longer than he had originally intended. His meeting with Frank Richards in the Cascade Mountains had been a dramatic one, and he was very keenly interested in Frank. It was partly through his lordship that Frank had been able to return to Cedar Creek after his wanderings, and to clear his name and take his old place in the backwoods school.

"Halt!" Lord St. Austells was riding slowly with a loose rein under the green branches when that sudden challenge fell upon his ears.

Two horsemen pushed out of the larches into the trail, and drew in on either side of him.

A rough hand grasped his bridle, and his lordship had no choice but halting.

"Let me pass!" snapped his lordship.

"I guess not!"

"You're our mutton, I reckon!"

The earl compressed his lips. He had "seen the sights" in Thompson, and he had seen these two ruffians before. They belonged to the Red Dog crowd, the "toughest" gang in the settlement; and Keno Kit and Four Kings were two of the "toughest" members of that tough crowd.

"I reckon we've been stalking you for days," grinned Four Kings. "You're our mutton, with the wool on. Will you come for a leetle paseo with us?"

"I reckon you'd better!" said Keno Kit with a chuckle.

"What do you want?"

"I guess we want what we can get," said Four Kings humorously, "and that's five hundred dollars before you see the Lawless Ranch again."

Lord St. Austells gave his horse a sudden cut with the whip, and the animal bounded forward. The sudden action took the two ruffians by surprise; the bridle was jerked loose, and in a second the earl was past the ruffians, and galloping down the trail.

"Rope him!" yelled Keno Kit.

Four Kings grasped the lariat at

his saddle-bow, and there was a whiz of the rope in the air. The loop descended over Lord St. Austells' shoulders, and he was plucked from the saddle as it tautened. He came with a heavy bump into the grass, and the riderless horse dashed on at full gallop.

"I guess he's our meat!" grinned Four Kings.

Lord St. Austells lay dazed in the trail, as the two rascals rode up. A minute later, and he was dragged upon Four Kings' horse, and the two ruffians disappeared into the timber with their prisoner.

The 2nd Chapter.

Tracked in the Timber!

"My only hat!" Frank Richards uttered that sudden exclamation.

The schoolboy author had finished

little, for he respected Miss Meadows highly, and hated to displease her. But it was rather too late to think of that now; and, anyhow, there was some consolation in having his completed manuscript in his pocket. He could cut across to Thompson with that in the dinner interval, and deliver it at the office of the "Thompson Press," and everything in the garden, so to speak, would be lovely, so far as "Bullivant's Schooldays" was concerned. So far as Frank's own schooldays were concerned, there might be some trouble.

He was just entering the timber, at full gallop on the grassy trail, when a riderless horse came dashing out on the plain.

It was then that Frank uttered his startled ejaculation. For he knew the horse by sight—a handsome roan that had been ridden by Lord St. Austells.

The horse dashed by him, evidently in a scared state, and galloped on towards the ranch.

Frank checked his horse.

He gazed after the flying steed with a troubled brow. He was in a hurry to get to school, but the sight of the riderless horse put other thoughts into his mind. Some accident must have happened in the shadows of the timber. What had happened to Vere Beauclerc's uncle?

Lord St. Austells was an accomplished rider; he was not likely to have been thrown from his steed. There had been some serious accident, or—what?

Frank rode on into the timber, with his eyes well about him. He was going at a more moderate speed now.

If something had happened to Lord St. Austells, giving him aid was of more importance than arriving at the backwoods school in time for second lesson. Even Miss Meadows would have assented to that.

Frank had learned a great deal of woodcraft during his sojourn in the Canadian West, and he could read a trail with something of the skill of his Canadian cousin. In the thick grass he easily followed the tracks of Bob's and Lord St. Austells' horses, going towards the school, and noted where Vere Beauclerc had joined them at

As he scanned the trail, he soon found the traces where the lassoed man had bumped into the grass.

Frank's eyes gleamed. "Roped in, and taken a prisoner into the timber!" he muttered. "Thank goodness I stayed behind this morning! I can't be far behind him. The horse had only time to get from here to the edge of the timber when I came along."

Frank Richards tethered his horse by the trail, and reflected for a few minutes.

It was not difficult to guess why his lordship had been roped in. There were "tough" characters in the Thompson Valley, and the greed of some gang of rascals had been tempted by the rich peer from the Old Country. Frank Richards had first made the earl's acquaintance in rescuing him from a gang of rustlers in the mountains, and it was evident that something of the kind had happened again; and, if Frank could contrive it, he intended that it should end the same way. He was close behind the rascals. He thought that it could not be ten minutes since they had quitted the trail with their prisoner. He was unarmed, but that did not make him hesitate.

He plunged into the timber where the tracks of the two horses led him.

He proceeded warily, picking every step, and listening for a sound in advance. The larches and cedars grew rather thickly, and there was underwood. He knew that the horses could only have gone at a walk. He was confident of overtaking them before they reached the open country on the other side of the wood—if they ventured out of the timber at all.

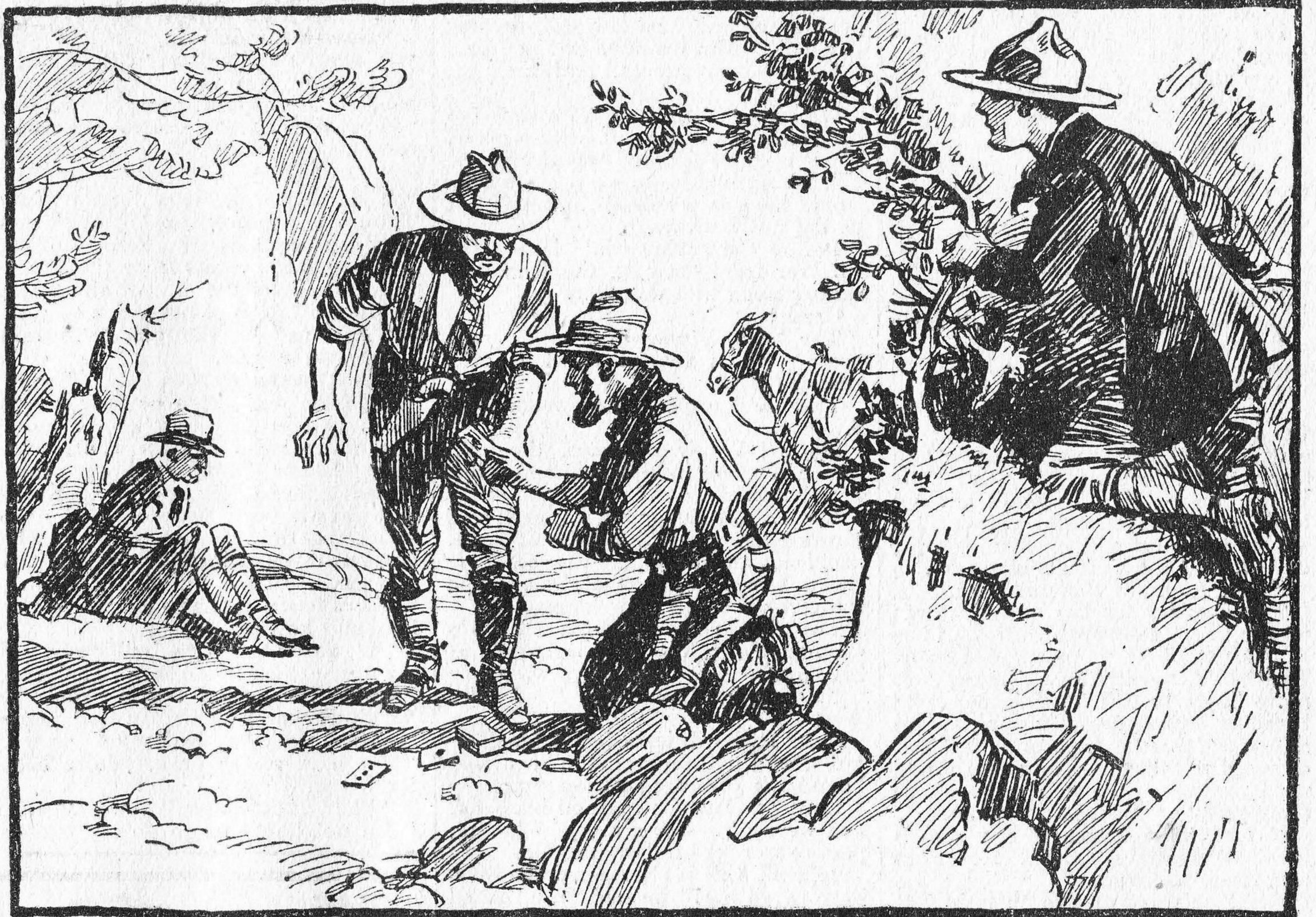
He was not mistaken. Five minutes had not elapsed when his quick ear detected the sound of jingling bridles and stirrups ahead. He was close behind the kidnappers.

A few minutes later and he caught sight of a ragged Stetson hat among the trees.

He proceeded more cautiously than ever now.

Through openings of the timber he caught glimpses of the two riders, with Lord St. Austells in the grasp of one of the ruffians on his horse.

The Red Dog ruffians were now fol-



HELD TO RANSOM! Frank looked on breathlessly as the two hold-up men proceeded to cut a pack of cards to decide which of them should remain on guard. The result of the "cut" would mean either success or failure to Frank Richards' daring plan of rescue.

his instalment; and once it was done, and neatly ribboned at the corner, Frank awoke, as it were, to his surroundings. He realised then that he was late for school, and that a schoolboy's duty was to be punctual, regardless of other considerations, even literary ones. And Frank hurriedly shoved his manuscript into his pocket, rushed downstairs, and sped out of the ranch-house. Bob Lawless had left his horse tethered ready for him to one of the veranda poles. To jump upon the animal, and gallop off, was the work of a second or so; and Frank Richards rode away towards the timber at top speed.

Hard as he rode, he had no hope of overtaking Bob before that youth reached Cedar Creek. He knew that Bob must have already reached the school. Frank was certain to be late for first lesson, and it worried him a

the fork. The three tracks went on together, with the back-track of Lord St. Austells' horse intermingling, sometimes overlapping, the others. And at a certain point there came into sight the tracks of two other horses that had emerged from the timber, and returned into it.

There Frank Richards halted.

He knew all that the trail could tell him—that the earl had ridden on with Bob and Beauclerc, and turned back alone to ride home to the ranch—that two horsemen had suddenly appeared from the wood, and then the earl's riderless steed had pushed on alone.

Frank jumped down from the saddle.

He knew, for the trail told him as plainly as words, that the two unknown men had seized his lordship, and taken him into the timber.

lowing a dried-up water course in the heart of the timber, remote from any trail. On the stony bed of the dried stream the horses' hoofs clinked and rang, and left no trail. The sound was more than enough to guide Frank Richards; but had he been out of hearing he could not have picked up a trail on the stony bed. He felt glad again that he had stayed late at the ranch that morning, and so had chanced upon the scene before the kidnappers had had time to get clear.

Four Kings and Keno Kit rode on without once looking back. Evidently they had not the faintest suspicion of pursuit.

But Frank was very careful to keep in cover as he followed on.

Either of the ruffians would have thought little of firing at him.

(Continued overleaf.)

The two horsemen halted at last, in a deep, stony gully by the side of the stream-bed, completely overhung with trees and underwoods. They dismounted from their horses, and Lord St. Austells was dropped roughly to the ground. He rose rather painfully to his feet.

Frank Richards stopped, not more than a dozen yards away, deep in the cover of a leafy bush.

He watched silently, with beating heart.

Unarmed, he could not intervene. His only thought, at present, was to keep watch, and wait for an opportunity of helping the kidnapped earl.

"I guess he'll be safe hyer, Kit," Four Kings' deep, rough voice reached the ears of the watching schoolboy.

"I reckon so."

"Put the rope round him."

"I guess one of us is going to stop and watch him," said Keno Kit, "and the other gets a letter sent to the ranch. I'll draw you a card for it, Four Kings."

"Sure!"

The rope was run round Lord St. Austells, and he was secured to a tree-stump in the gully. He sat down quietly at the foot of the stump, not deigning to address a word to his captors.

Keno Kit drew a pack of well-worn, greasy cards from a pocket of his leather trousers.

"Cut for high," he said.

Four Kings cut, and showed a seven.

"Loser stays," said Keno Kit.

"Sure!"

Keno Kit cut, and showed a knave.

"My win," he remarked.

"You hang on hyer, Four Kings, and look arter the cuss, and I'll mosey on to Thompson. I'll git a 'breed to take the letter, and leave it at the ranch, afore three hours. If they don't pay up—"

"They won't see his nibs agin, if they don't," said Four Kings savagely. "And put it in the letter that he won't get any feed till the ransom's paid."

"You bet."

"Five hundred dollars is to be put inside the dead oak on the Silver Creek trail, and if there's any gum-game about it, the cuss hyer gets a bullet through him instanter."

"Leave it to me," said Keno Kit. He remounted his horse, and rode away into the timber, leaving Four Kings alone with the prisoner.

The departing ruffian passed within six feet of Frank Richards, crouching in the bush; and Frank lay quite still and held his breath. The hoof-beats died away down the watercourse.

The 3rd Chapter.

Frank to the Rescue!

Frank Richards raised his head when the sound of Keno Kit's horse had long died away into silence. He looked through the twining bushes at the scene in the gully.

Lord St. Austells sat at the foot of the tree-stump, without moving or speaking. The rope round him secured him to the stump, and Four Kings, aware that he could not get loose, gave him scarcely a glance. He sat on a boulder and smoked his pipe, blowing out thick clouds of smoke.

Frank Richards thought hard.

The demand for the earl's ransom was to reach the ranch that day; but it was not likely to be acceded to by Rancher Lawless. The rancher was more likely to call out his men, and begin a search immediately for his kidnapped guest. Even if he had felt disposed to pay the ransom, he would not have trusted the ruffians to release their prisoner when it was paid.

But if he refused—if the rascals found themselves hunted for—what was likely to happen?

Frank shivered at that thought. It was only too likely that the earl would find a last and unknown resting-place in the depths of the trackless timber. If they failed to extort their plunder, the two ruffians, at least, were likely to secure their victim's silence.

Frank watched Four Kings, with determination growing in his breast. Had he been armed he would not have hesitated to advance upon the ruffian, and call upon him to put up his hands. But he had no weapon, and there was a revolver sticking in the belt of the bulldozer.

But the schoolboy was resolved now not to quit the spot and leave Lord St. Austells in the hands of the kidnapers.

He waited patiently, thinking hard. Keno Kit, if he returned, was not likely to be back till late in the day. He had plenty of time. Four Kings was already showing signs of restiveness. He yawned over his pipe, rose and stretched himself, and sat down again, and Frank heard him mutter curses. He lighted his pipe again, and smoked, and at last drew

a packet of greasy cards from his pocket, and began to deal himself "hands," playing poker with an imaginary opponent.

He called to the prisoner at last.

"Say, pard!"

Lord St. Austells looked at him grimly, without speaking.

"Guess you'd like to take a hand of keerds, if I let you have a paw loose?" said Four Kings.

"Certainly not!"

"Please yourself!" growled the ruffian discontentedly.

He played poker patience for an hour at least, Frank Richards still watching in silence.

The ruffian rose with another yawn, and put away his cards. He selected a soft patch of grass, and threw himself down to sleep.

Frank's heart beat faster.

His chance had come at last. In a few minutes he could hear the deep snoring of the ruffian.

He rose quietly from the bush.

Stooping in the dry watercourse, he selected a round, heavy stone—it was all he could find to use as a weapon if needed. Then he stood up, out of cover, and in full view of the kidnapers' camp, and waved his hand as a signal to Lord St. Austells.

The earl gave a violent start as he saw him.

His lips opened to speak; but he closed them again quickly. He could only move his head, but he gave a nod towards the sleeping ruffian, as a warning to Frank Richards.

But Frank did not need a warning to be cautious. He knew that he was taking his life in his hands in advancing into the gully.

He stepped forward on tiptoe.

The earl watched him in breathless silence. If Four Kings awakened—both the earl and Frank Richards knew that, in that case, what would happen next would be the crack of a revolver, and that Frank Richards would fall back into the watercourse with a bullet through his body. The schoolboy's life hung on a thread.

But he did not pause.

Closer and closer he came, till his shadow fell across the sleeping ruffian, and still Four Kings did not move.

Another step—

Frank hoped against hope that he might reach the prisoner without alarming the ruffian, and cut him loose; then at least they would be two against the bulky bulldozer, if it came to a fight. But his hope was in vain.

Four Kings stirred, and his eyes opened.

He stared blankly as his glance fell on Frank Richards, and, with a curse, he sat up, and dragged at his revolver.

If Frank had hesitated a second, he would have fallen dead the next; but he did not hesitate.

Before the ruffian could loosen the revolver from his belt, the schoolboy sprang upon him desperately.

Crash!

The heavy stone, in Frank's grip, came with a fearful crash on the ruffian's head.

There was a gasping cry from Four Kings.

He fell limply sideways, the half-drawn revolver in his hand, and rolled over helplessly.

But he was not quite stunned; and Frank Richards, with his life at stake, could not afford to take chances. He threw himself upon the ruffian, and the stone crashed down again.

Then he rose, panting. It was enough; Four Kings lay insensible at his feet.

"Frank," breathed Lord St. Austells.

Frank Richards jerked open his clasp-knife, and cut through the rope that bound the prisoner to the stump.

Lord St. Austells grasped his hand, and wrung it. For a moment his impassive face was full of emotion.

"Frank, this is the second time you have saved me!" he said, in a moved voice.

"Thank Heaven I had the chance!" said Frank. "Let's get out of this quick, before he can come to! Take his horse, sir, and I'll mount behind you and show you the way."

Four Kings did not move as Lord St. Austells mounted his horse, and, with Frank mounted behind, took his way to the watercourse.

He lay senseless; and it was likely to be half an hour at least before consciousness returned.

But Frank Richards and his companion lost no time.

Lord St. Austells was quite at a loss in the depths of the timber, but Frank had no difficulty in following back the way by which he had come.

In half an hour they emerged into the broad, open trail through the timber from Cedar Creek to the plains.

There they halted.

"You'll get back to the ranch from here, sir," said Frank. "Tell my uncle that you were kidnapped by Four Kings and Keno Kit. He knows

them. They belong to the Red Dog crowd, in Thompson. Mr. Lawless will send word to the sheriff—"

"But you—" said Lord St. Austells.

Frank Richards smiled.

"I'm going on to school," he said. He loosened his horse from the tether. "I was going to school when I met your horse, sir, and found what had happened. I left my horse here, and followed on foot. Now I've got to get to Cedar Creek."

Lord St. Austells nodded.

"My dear, dear boy, I owe you more than I can repay!" he said earnestly. "But I shall find a way, perhaps, of repaying part of my debt. I shall speak to you again this evening. Good-bye now, my dear lad!"

And they parted, the earl returning at a gallop towards the ranch, and Frank Richards riding hard for Cedar Creek School, where he arrived just in time for the school dinner.

The 4th Chapter. New Prospects?

"Here you are, you jay!"

"What on earth kept you, Frank?"

"Miss Meadows is in a prize wax."

"You'll get a jolly good licking, Richards!" said Chunky Todgers.

"Miss Meadows is as mad as a hatter."

Frank Richards laughed.

"I think Miss Meadows will excuse me when I explain," he said. "I'll go and speak to her now."

And Frank went into the lumber schoolhouse. It was dinner-time, and a few minutes later Frank joined the Cedar Creek crowd going into the dining-room. And from the cheerful expression on his face, it was evident that Miss Meadows had accepted his excuses.

After dinner, Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc took an arm each of their chum, and marched him out into the playground, and demanded explanations. So Frank Richards explained.

Bob Lawless gave a long whistle.

"Jerusalem!" he ejaculated. "I reckoned that you were sticking to the typer, and had forgotten all about school!"

"Not quite!" said Frank, laughing.

"Was my uncle hurt?" asked Beauclerc.

"Only a few bruises, I think. Will you fellows ride with me to Thompson?" said Frank. "I've got to hand in my copy at the office of the 'Thompson Press' before afternoon school."

"You bet!"

The three chums rode into Thompson, where the "copy" was duly delivered at Mr. Isaacs' office. As they came away from the office, they halted by the side of the street to allow a bunch of horsemen to pass.

"They've got the galoots!" said Bob, with a grin.

The horsemen were Sheriff Henderson and three or four of his men; and in the midst of the party two sullen-faced ruffians rode, with their hands bound behind their backs. Keno Kit and Four Kings had already been "roped in" by the active sheriff of Thompson. The horsemen passed on towards the calaboose, where the defeated kidnapers found a secure lodging under lock and key.

"I guess those two bulldozers are sorry you came home to Cedar Creek, Franky!" chuckled Bob Lawless, as Frank Richards & Co. trotted along the trail to the backwood school. "But now you're back, you're back for keeps, I hope."

"Eh? Of course," said Frank.

"I'm not likely to go on my travels

again, Bob. What are you driving at?"

Bob grinned.

"Beau's uncle was chatting to the popper last night," he said, "over their cigars after supper, and I happened to get a few words. Lord St. Austells has taken a fancy to you, Frank."

"He likes me, I believe," said Frank. "I like him, too. But you haven't told me what you're driving at."

"His nibs was asking the popper a lot about you, and he said—"

Bob hesitated a little.

"He said what?" asked Frank.

"That you'd have a better chance in England than in the Canadian backwoods."

Frank laughed lightly.

"That's possible," he said; "but I'm booked for the Canadian backwoods, Bob, and I'm satisfied."

"He said something of the sort to me this morning, too," said Bob. "I don't catch on to his point of view. I can't help thinking a man is a jay if he doesn't want to live in British Columbia. But if his noble nibs has some idea of lifting you off to the Old Country—"

Frank started.

"What rot!" he said.

"Well, I believe he's got some such stunt in his little brain-box," said Bob confidently. "I've figured it out, and I reckon that's what he thinks. He reckons he owes you a lot, and he wants to square the account; and that's his funny way of doing it."

The chums rode into Cedar Creek, and Frank made no rejoinder. But he was very thoughtful during afternoon lessons. Bob's suggestion had startled him; and he could not help wondering whether there was something in the rancher's son's belief. He remembered, too, that when they had parted on the timber trail, Lord St. Austells had said that he would speak to him that evening.

Frank Richards was still in a thoughtful mood when he rode homeward with his chums. It had not occurred to him that he might leave Cedar Creek; and he could not say whether, if the chance came his way, he would care to take it.

He dismissed the matter from his mind at last. He met Lord St. Austells at the early supper at the ranch-house. His lordship was extremely genial to the schoolboy author, and asked him a good many questions concerning his contributions to the "Thompson Press." After supper, his lordship lighted his cigar, and strolled out into the porch, open to the soft, summer breeze from the prairies. Out on the plains, the soft, sweet moonlight of British Columbia lay like a silver sea. Lord St. Austells beckoned to Frank, who joined him in the porch. Frank's heart beat fast, for he realised now that Bob Lawless' surmise was correct, and he wondered what his answer would be to his lordship; for even yet he could not decide whether he would say yes or no.

The 5th Chapter.

Frank Makes His Choice!

Lord St. Austells was silent for a few minutes, smoking his cigar and looking out into the soft moonlight. He turned at last to Frank Richards abruptly.

"I owe you a great deal, Richards," he said.

"Nothing at all, sir," answered Frank.

His lordship smiled.

"Twice you have saved me, each time from death, in all probability," he said. "I cannot forget that. I want to do something, if I can, Richards, to make the account equal."

Frank was silent.

"I have been thinking a good deal about you," went on his lordship, after a pause, "and I am going to make a suggestion. Would you like to return to England with me?"

It was out now.

"I understand that your father had some financial difficulties, and that is why you were sent out to your uncle in Canada?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your father is in India now?"

"Yes."

"It must have been a disappointment to him when you had to be taken away from your old school?"

"I think it was, sir," said Frank.

"But I have written to him often to tell him that I am very happy here."

"This is a great country," said his lordship. "Your relatives here seem to be kindness itself. I have a very great admiration for Mr. Lawless—a splendid type of man. But in this

country, Richards, you have not, of course, the chances you would have at!"

"I—I suppose not."

"I have spoken to your uncle," continued Lord St. Austells. "He is willing that you should decide this matter for yourself, subject to your father's approval when he is communicated with. I should be very glad to take you into my charge. You would return to your old school in England, and go on to the University at the proper time, and all charges would be defrayed by me. I should treat you exactly as if you were a son of my own; and you need have no scruple about accepting what I can offer, Richards. I should be acting in your father's place in his absence."

"I thank you from my very heart, sir!" said Frank, in a faltering voice. The kindness of the earl's tone moved him deeply. "I should not hesitate for a moment to accept; but—"

"I hope you will accept," said his lordship gravely. "You have shown a literary ability, Frank, that is very remarkable in one so young. This gift would have free play in an older country; you will never have such opportunities here as you might have in England. You realise that?"

"I suppose it is so, sir," said Frank. "You have gifts and abilities, and there is no reason why you should not take a distinguished place in the world," said Lord St. Austells. "I shall be pleased and happy to make it possible. I hope you will accept, Richards."

Frank was silent.

"Well, Frank?" said his lordship at last, with a faint smile.

Frank started a little.

"I—I—"

"Speak freely, my boy," said Lord St. Austells kindly. "I am anxious for you to accept my offer. I want to take you with me to England, and see you rise to your proper place in the world. But I shall not be offended if you refuse."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, sir!" said Frank, in a low voice. "I shall always be grateful for your kindness; but—"

"But—" smiled his lordship.

"I—I'd rather not leave my chums, sir, and—my home here," said Frank. "And, although I know I could accept your kindness, I—I—I think that I ought rather—"

"I think I understand," said Lord St. Austells. "You would rather fight your own way through the world than be beholden to anyone."

Frank coloured.

"Not exactly that, sir," he said. "I would gladly be beholden to you, if there was need. But I belong to Cedar Creek, and I will stick to Cedar Creek. Some day I shall return to England—some day, I hope. I shall be earning my bread with my pen. But until then—"

"It will not be easy," said Lord St. Austells. "You would start under better auspices, Frank, if you accepted my offer."

"I know it, sir. But difficulties were only made to be overcome, weren't they?" said Frank, with a smile.

Lord St. Austells laughed.

"Well, I am disappointed, but perhaps you are right, Frank," he said. "Anyhow, we shall part good friends; and in the future—when it comes—Frank Richards, the celebrated author, will always be a welcome guest at St. Austells' House."

On the following day Lord St. Austells left the Lawless Ranch, and Frank Richards & Co. had leave from school to escort him as far as the railroad. They took leave of his lordship at Kamloops, and rode back to the ranch, Frank in a thoughtful mood. He knew what he had given up; but, on reflection, he was far from regretting his choice. Bob Lawless slapped him on the shoulder as they rode up the well-known trail to the ranch, with the steers grazing round in the rich grass, and the calling of the cattlemen sounded musically from the distance.

"You're not sorry, Frank?"

Frank looked at his chum quickly. "No," he answered; "I'm glad to stay, Bob."

"I—I guess I was afraid you would go, old chap," said Bob, with a little catch in his voice. "We—we'd have missed you, the Cherub and me, old scout! And you're glad you're staying?"

Frank smiled.

"Jolly glad, old fellow!"

And Frank was more glad than ever, the next morning, when he rode up the familiar trail to Cedar Creek School, amid the scent of the pine-woods.

THE END.

ONE LONG LAUGH!



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