

# FALSE WITNESS!



*Innocent of snowballing the irascible headmaster of Hillcrest School, Frank Richards finds himself unable to prove it against the false evidence of the victim!*

By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

MR. PECKOVER MISUNDERSTANDS!

“MY hat!”

Frank Richards reined in his pony.

He was riding from the town of Thompson on the trail to Cedar Creek School at a leisurely pace, for the trail was thick with snow.

The flakes were no longer falling; but the snow lay thick on the ground, and it was piled in drifts against the trees along the trail.

At the corner, where the Hillcrest path jutted from the Thompson trail, Frank Richards caught sight of a tall,

angular figure, muffled up in coat and scarf against the wind.

Muffled up as it was, he recognised Mr. Peckover, the headmaster of Hillcrest School.

Mr. Peckover was coming down the path from the hill, apparently about to turn into the main trail for Thompson.

And as he turned, a snowball flew from the cover of the frozen thickets and smote Mr. Peckover full upon his long, red nose.

It was a large snowball, it was a hard one, and it was hurled with unerring aim.

It crashed on Mr. Peckover's nose, taking that gentleman completely by surprise.

"Ooooooooooh!"

The Hillcrest master staggered, his foot slipped in the snow, and he came to the ground with a crash.

Frank Richards, who was not a dozen yards away, looked on, and smiled.

There was no love lost between the Cedar Creek fellows and the Hillcrest headmaster; and Mr. Peckover's disaster earned him no sympathy from Frank Richards. Indeed, from the point of view of an onlooker, there was something quite comic in Mr. Peckover's sudden downfall. The comicality was, naturally, lost upon Mr. Peckover himself.

He rolled in the snow spluttering.

He was on rather a steep slope when he fell, and as he rolled he came down the slope and pitched into the drift beside the trail.

The next moment nothing was seen of Mr. Peckover but thrashing arms and legs and a cloud of powdered snow.

Frank Richards chuckled.

But he remembered that Mr. Peckover was a middle-aged gentleman, and entitled to respect and assistance, and he jumped off his pony and ran to the rescue.

Whoever had hurled the snowball had not shown up, but a momentary swaying in the frozen larches hinted that the marksman was beating a rapid—and judicious—retreat.

Whether it was a Cedar Creek fellow or one of Mr. Peckover's own boys, Frank Richards could not guess—the latter was very possible, for the headmaster's snappy severity made him far from popular in his school.

"Oooooooooch!"

Mr. Peckover struggled and plunged

in the drift. His hat had come off, and his scanty locks flowed in the wind. His clumsy plunges only landed him deeper in the drift, and he was badly in need of assistance. Fortunately, Frank Richards was there to render it.

He plunged actively through the snow, and grasped Mr. Peckover by the collar.

"Yoooop!" spluttered Mr. Peckover. "You young ruffian——"

"Eh! I'm helping you!" exclaimed Frank.

"Grooogh!"

Grasping the thin, angular gentleman with both hands, Frank exerted all his strength, and dragged him out on to the trail.

There Mr. Peckover sat in the snow, and gasped for breath.

He seemed quite winded, and his breath came and went in wild, spluttering gasps.

"Grooogh! Oh! Ooooch! Ow! Wooooooop!"

Frank Richards paused to pick up Mr. Peckover's hat, and return it to him. He had no time to waste, as he had to be back at Cedar Creek in time for afternoon classes.

"Can I do anything more for you?" asked Frank politely.

"Grooogh! You young rascal!"

"What?"

"You—grooogh!—young scoundrel!" panted Mr. Peckover.

Frank Richards flushed angrily.

He was aware that Mr. Peckover did not like him—neither did he like Mr. Peckover. But he had naturally expected a word of thanks, at least, for rendering first aid, as he had done.

The Hillcrest master staggered to his feet.

"You—you—you shall suffer for this!" he bellowed.

"For helping you?" exclaimed Frank.

"You young rascal! You hurled a snowball at me, and knocked me over into the drift!" shouted Mr. Peckover, making a fierce stride towards the Cedar Creek schoolboy.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Frank, jumping back. "You're mistaken, Mr. Peckover! I did not throw the snowball!"

Mr. Peckover groped for his stick in the snow, and started towards Frank Richards.

Frank dodged away towards his waiting pony.

"You jolly well won't!" he exclaimed. "I tell you I did not throw the snowball, and I don't know who did."

"And I tell you that I do not believe you, and that I am going to



As Mr. Peckover was about to turn into the trail for Thompson a large snowball flew from the cover of the frozen thickets and smote him full upon his long, red nose. "Oooooooh!" gasped the Hillcrest headmaster.

"Don't tell me falsehoods!" roared Mr. Peckover.

"I was on my pony, riding, when I saw it thrown——"

"Lies!"

"I jumped down to help you!" exclaimed Frank indignantly. "If this is your thanks, you can help yourself next time!"

"You young rascal! I will—will thrash you!"

thrash you!" roared Mr. Peckover.

"Rats!" retorted Frank.

He jumped on his pony.

Mr. Peckover was between him and Cedar Creek, and his escape was cut off if the Hillcrest master had the nerve to stop a running horse. But Frank knew that he hadn't! He put his pony to the gallop, and Mr. Peckover made a hasty jump out of the way.



"You—you——" he panted.

He made a swipe with the stick as the rider passed, but Frank swerved, and it just missed the pony's flank.

The Cedar Creek schoolboy laughed, and waved his hand in farewell, as he galloped on down the trail. Mr. Peckover brandished the stick furiously after him.

Frank Richards swept out of sight round a bend in the trail, and Mr. Peckover, gasping, took his way up the hilly path to Hillcrest, not feeling disposed for his walk to Thompson just then.

"Hallo, Richards!"

Frank drew in his pony, as a voice called from the wood, and a rather scared, boyish face looked out at him. It was the face of Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest.

Frank nodded and smiled.

"Was it you?" he asked.

"Yep! I—I say, I didn't mean to bowl old Peckover down like that, of course," said Dicky Bird. "I meant just to give him a dot on the boko, for caning me this morning for nothing. He didn't see me, did he?"

"No; he thinks it was I——"

"Oh, that's all right, then!" said Dicky Bird. "If he guessed it was I, there would be tantrums at Hillcrest this afternoon! So-long!"

And Dicky Bird, much relieved in his mind, disappeared into the wood, and Frank Richards rode on, smiling, to Cedar Creek.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### FALSE WITNESS!

"JUST in time!" called out Bob Lawless cheerily.

"You're nearly late, Frank," remarked Vere Beauclerc, as Frank Richards jumped from his pony at the gates of Cedar Creek.

The schoolbell was ringing for afternoon lessons when Frank Richards arrived at the backwoods school.

"All serene," he answered cheerily. "I was delayed on the trail."

Frank hastily put up his pony in the corral, and the three chums joined the crowd of fellows heading for the lumber schoolhouse.

"What happened on the trail?" asked Bob Lawless. "I guess I noticed you looked a bit flustered!"

Frank Richards explained the happening on the trail, and his rather unfortunate attempt to play the Good Samaritan to Mr. Peckover.

Bob Lawless chuckled.

"Serve Peckover right!" he remarked. "If I belonged to Hillcrest, I should feel more like lynching him than snowballing him. Ungrateful brute!"

"He thinks it was I that snowballed him!" said Frank. "Of course, he didn't see the other chap!"

"Let him think so, and be blowed to him!" said Bob.

"He was in an awful wax!"

"Let him rip!"

"What I mean is that, thinking I did it, he's pretty certain to come over here and complain to our schoolmistress."

"Let him!" said Beauclerc. "Miss Meadows will take your word!"

"I guess so!" said Bob.

Frank Richards nodded.

"I suppose so," he assented. "Of course, the silly ass can't say he saw me snowball him, as I never did. He can only say he thinks so!"

"And that won't cut any ice with Miss Meadows!" said Bob Lawless confidently.

The chums of Cedar Creek passed into the school-room. Chunky Todgers had heard their talk, as he came in with them, and Chunky gave Frank



Richards a fat wink as he dropped into his seat.

"Do you think it will wash, Franky, old sport?" inquired Chunky.

"What do you mean, fathead?"

"About snowballing old Peckover, you know. If you ask my advice," said Chunky, with quite a paternal air, "I'd own up!"

"You silly owl, I didn't do it—it was a chap in the timber——"

Chunky winked again.

"I guess I hope you'll be able to slide out on that yarn," he said charitably. "But do you reckon it will wash?"

Frank Richards gave him a glare, but made no other reply. Chunky did not always stick to the straight and narrow path of veracity himself, and he was far from giving other fellows

the credit of doing so. Frank Richards comforted himself with the reflection that Miss Meadows knew him better.

Miss Meadows came in to take her class, and the afternoon's lessons commenced. The recollection of Mr. Peckover was soon driven out of Frank Richards' mind.

But he was to be reminded of the existence of that gentleman before the day was over.

The second lesson was just finishing when there was the sound of hoofs and wheels in the playground outside.

Miss Meadows' back being turned for a moment, Bob Lawless stood up on the form and took a quick glance out of the window. He dropped quickly into his place again.

Frank gave him an inquiring glance.

"It's old Peckover in his buggy," whispered Bob.



"You—you——" panted the enraged Mr. Peckover. He made a swipe with his stick as Frank galloped past, but the Cedar Creek fellow swerved, and the stick just missed the pony's flank.

Frank Richards compressed his lips. He had expected that Mr. Peckover would drive over; and now he had come. In spite of his knowledge of his own innocence, Frank could not help feeling a little uneasy. Miss Meadows was well aware of her boys' dislike for the Hillcrest master, and she was very severe upon any public demonstration of it. If she believed Mr. Peckover's accusation, matters were likely to go hard with Frank Richards.

There was a loud knock on the school-room door, and it opened. Miss Meadows glanced round in surprise as the Hillcrest master strode in.

Mr. Peckover's brow was knitted, and his thin lips were set in a tight line. All eyes were upon him at once. It was clear, at a glance, that Mr. Ephraim Peckover had come to Cedar Creek for vengeance.

Miss Meadows frowned slightly. She did not like interruptions of lessons.

"Mr. Peckover——" she began.

"Madam — I have called ——" began Mr. Peckover, in a rasping voice.

"As you see, I am busy with my pupils," said Miss Meadows coldly. "If you have any business with me, Mr. Peckover, surely it can be postponed till——"

"My business cannot be postponed, madam!" rapped out Mr. Peckover. "It is necessary for it to be gone into before the young rascal leaves for home!"

"To whom are you alluding?"

"To Frank Richards."

Miss Meadows made an impatient gesture.

"If you have any accusation to make against Richards, I will hear it," she said. "I must ask you to be as brief as possible."

There was a breathless hush in the

school-room—Mr. Slimmey's class, as well as Miss Meadows', all looking at the Hillcrest master. Lessons had stopped all through the school-room.

Mr. Peckover pointed an accusing and bony finger at Frank Richards' flushed face.

"That is the boy!" he exclaimed. "He assaulted me on the Thompson trail a little more than an hour ago and——"

"I was not aware that Richards had been out of school bounds during the dinner interval," said Miss Meadows. "Is it the case, Richards?"

"Madam, if my statement is not accepted——"

"I must question the boy, Mr. Peckover. Richards, have you been on the Thompson trail to-day?"

"Yes, ma'am! I rode into Thompson on a matter of business," answered Frank. "I met Mr. Peckover on the way back."

"And assaulted me!" thundered Mr. Peckover.

"Nothing of the kind!"

"In what way did Richards assault you, sir?" exclaimed Miss Meadows testily. Whether the charge was correct or not, it was evident that the angry master was using very exaggerated language.

"By hurling a snowball at me!"

"He snowballed you——"

"I was knocked flying!" panted Mr. Peckover. "I was hurled down a dangerous slope into a snowdrift, and I have caught a cold as well as sustaining several severe bruises. If you do not regard that as serious, Miss Meadows——"

"On the contrary, sir, I regard it as very serious indeed!" interrupted the Cedar Creek schoolmistress.

"I am glad to hear you say so!" snorted Mr. Peckover.

"Richards, stand out here!"

Frank Richards came out before the class.

"Richards! You are well aware of the seriousness——"

"I did not do it, Miss Meadows!"

"You do not deny Mr. Peckover's statement?" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Richards!"

"Let me explain, Miss Meadows!" exclaimed Frank hastily. "I was riding along the trail home when I saw Mr. Peckover knocked over by a snowball. I jumped down to help him out of the drift. The chap who had thrown the snowball did not show up, and Mr. Peckover thought it was I, as he could see nobody else on the trail. I was only helping him."

Miss Meadows' brow cleared.

"Ah! It is a mistake!" she said.

"You hear Richards' explanation, Mr. Peckover——"

"He is speaking falsely!"

"I know Richards to be a truthful boy," said Miss Meadows coldly, "and the mistake was a very easy one to make——"

Mr. Peckover seemed on the verge of a fit. To do him justice, he fully believed that Frank Richards was the delinquent, and that the Cedar Creek schoolboy was lying himself out of a scrape.

"There was no mistake!" he thundered.

"Richards says——"

"He is lying! I saw him hurl the snowball!" shouted Mr. Peckover.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

#### FALSELY CONDEMNED!

FRANK RICHARDS jumped.

He stared blankly at Mr. Peckover.

That Mr. Peckover had seen anything of the kind was, of course,

impossible, since Frank had not thrown the snowball. But for a schoolmaster to utter a falsehood in an accusation against a schoolboy seemed equally impossible.

Miss Meadows' face hardened like steel. Even Bob Lawless and Beauclerc looked in dismay at their chum now. Could anyone believe that the headmaster of Hillcrest was uttering a falsehood?

Mr. Peckover, as a matter of fact, hardly realised that he was doing so. He was absolutely certain that Frank Richards was the guilty party, and his statement was only intended to make that certainty equally clear to others.

If there had been a shadow of doubt in his mind, certainly he would not have made the statement. But there wasn't a shadow of doubt in his mind—not the slightest.

But Frank Richards was taken utterly aback. He stared at Mr. Peckover open-mouthed.

"Oh Jerusalem!" murmured Bob Lawless.

Miss Meadows' eyes seemed to glint as they turned on Frank Richards. The hapless schoolboy could see that he was already condemned by the schoolmistress of Cedar Creek.

"Richards, have you anything more to say?" asked Miss Meadows, in a voice of ice.

Frank gasped.

"Yes, I—I—I——"

"Do you deny Mr. Peckover's statement now?" snapped Miss Meadows.

Frank's face flushed with anger.

"Yes!" he shouted. "He is lying!"

"Richards!"

"It is a lie!" exclaimed Frank, careless of his words now. "He



never saw me, as I didn't do it. And I'm sorry I helped him. I dare say he thinks I did it, but he knows he didn't see who threw the snowball!"

"Silence!"

"That is the truth, Miss Meadows."

"Silence, I say!"

Mr. Peckover choked with rage.

"I—I——" he spluttered. "Miss Meadows, this—this boy, he—he dares to—to—to——"

He choked helplessly.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Peckover!" said Miss Meadows quietly. "Richards will be severely punished for his wanton attack upon you, and still more severely for venturing to cast doubt upon your word!"

"Miss Meadows——" began Frank.

"You need say no more, Richards. I was prepared to accept your explanation, not being aware that Mr. Peckover actually saw you——"

"He did not! He——"

"Silence! I cannot cane you for this, Richards; a caning is not sufficient punishment. I shall send a note to your uncle requesting him to come here and administer a flogging to you in the presence of the school. That is the only way of dealing with your offence. Mr. Peckover, I shall be glad if you will be present when Richards' punishment is dealt out."

"I assure you that I intend to be present, Miss Meadows!" said the Hillcrest master venomously.

Frank Richards breathed hard.

"Miss Meadows," he faltered, "I—I assure you——"

"Enough! Go back to your place!"

Frank Richards returned to his seat, feeling quite dazed. Mr. Peckover gave him a bitter look.

The Hillcrest master exchanged a few words with Miss Meadows in a low voice before he drove away in his buggy.

Lessons were resumed at Cedar Creek.

But the whole school was in a state of suppressed excitement.

Frank Richards, when he looked round at his schoolfellows, could see that nobody believed his statement against the assertion of the Hillcrest master.

He was intensely glad when school was dismissed at last, though his return home that evening was not likely to be a pleasant one. Miss Meadows called to Bob Lawless, and gave him a note to carry to his father.

The three chums came out dismally into the playground.

They fetched out their horses and rode away on the homeward trail. They rode at first in dead silence. When Frank Richards spoke at last, he turned almost a haggard face on his chums.

"I—I suppose you fellows believe me?" he said.

"Yes," said Beauclerc quietly.

Bob flushed.

"I guess it's awfully queer!" he said. "How—how could Peckover think he saw you if he never saw you, Frank?"

Frank bit his lip.

"He doesn't think so," he answered. "He thinks I threw the snowball, and I suppose he imagines he's justified in saying he saw me do it. But it's false."

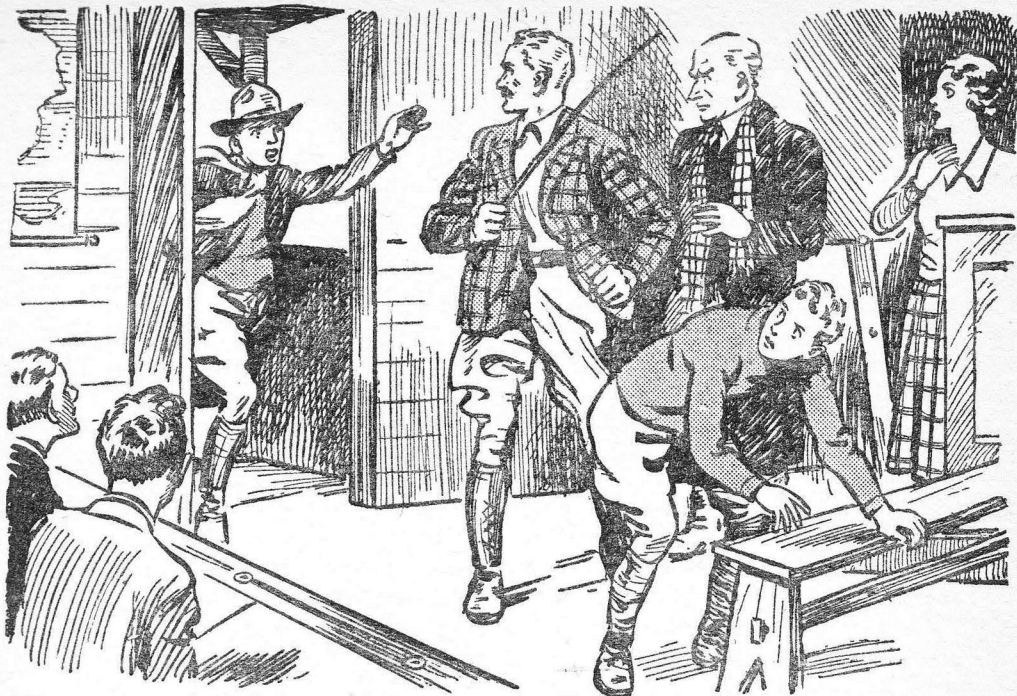
Bob drew a deep breath.

"I believe you, old chap," he said.

"But—but—but you can't blame Miss Meadows for not believing you, or—or anybody else. I—I'm afraid popper will take the same view as Miss Meadows."

"I know he will!" said Frank gloomily.

They rode on in dismal silence.



All eyes turned to the doorway as Dicky Bird of Hillcrest came dashing into the big school-room. "Stop!" he shouted.

Beauclerc left his chums at the fork in the trail, as usual, and Frank and Bob rode on to the Lawless Ranch in the gathering dusk.

Mrs. Lawless was away just then, on a visit to a relation at Kamloops, and Frank was glad of that now. But he had his uncle to face. The rancher noted at once the glum looks on his son and nephew when they came in, and he eyed them curiously.

"What's the trouble, boys?" he asked, in his hearty way.

Bob handed him Miss Meadows' note by way of reply.

Mr. Lawless, looking a little puzzled, opened it, and his face grew grim as he read the contents. The genial expression was quite gone, and Frank's heart sank as he noted it. The rancher fixed his eyes at last upon his nephew, with a knitted brow.

"I'm surprised at this, Frank!" he said quietly. "You ought not to have snowballed a schoolmaster; but that's nothing compared with the rest. Miss Meadows says that you lied about it, and that you accused Mr. Peckover of lying. Were you out of your senses?"

Frank made his faltering explanation.

The rancher listened till he had finished, and then he shook his head.

"You are asking me to believe that a schoolmaster bore false witness against you, Frank!" he said. "Do you expect me to believe such a thing?"

"I—I suppose it's not easy to believe——" faltered Frank.

"I guess it's impossible to believe. You must see that for yourself!" exclaimed the rancher impatiently.

Frank did see it.

"I—I know how you must look at it, uncle," he said miserably. "But I've told only the truth. I even know who it was that threw the snowball at Mr. Peckover. I met him as I came back afterwards."

"Who was it?"

"A Hillcrest fellow."

"Name?" rapped out the rancher sharply.

"If I give you the name, uncle, what will you do?" asked Frank.

"Call upon Mr. Peckover, and demand that he shall question the boy, of course."

Frank's lip trembled.

"I supposed so. I can't give him away."

Mr. Lawless made an impatient gesture.

"You had better say no more, Frank," he said. "You are making matters worse instead of better. I can't imagine what's come over you; you always seemed to be as open and honest as the daylight. Miss Meadows has asked me to ride over to the school, and take your punishment into my hands in her presence. I cannot refuse."

"It's not that I mind," muttered Frank, his voice breaking. "I—I'm not afraid of a licking. But—but to be set down as a liar——" He turned his face away. "And I've told the truth—only the truth, though I know you can't believe me."

He left the room with an unsteady step. It was a dismal evening at the Lawless Ranch that day.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR!

MR. LAWLESS' horse was saddled when it was time for Frank and Bob to start for school the next morning. When Vere Beauclerc joined

his chums on the trail, he found the rancher with them. The four rode on to Cedar Creek in grim silence. The first bell was ringing when they arrived, and the playground was crowded with the Cedar Creek boys and girls.

Molly Lawrence gave Frank a look of sympathy, and came up to him impulsively, as the rancher strode into the house to see Miss Meadows.

"I believe you, Frank," she said. "It's a shame!"

"Thank you, Molly!" said Frank, his voice faltering.

"Here comes old Peckover!" called out Chunky Todgers.

Mr. Peckover drove in in his buggy. He hitched his horse, and went into the school-house, without a glance at Frank Richards. Nearly all Cedar Creek gathered round the three chums.

Cedar Creek marched into the school-room. Miss Meadows and Mr. Peckover and the rancher were already there, as well as Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd. The school took their places in a grim silence.

Frank Richards went to his place with the rest, but Miss Meadows beckoned to him to come out before the class.

Frank came out quietly, his heart beating.

Mr. Lawless' bronzed face was cold and grim. He had a riding-whip in his hand, which was evidently to be the instrument of punishment. Frank glanced at it, and felt a choking sensation in his throat. Hitherto, he had received only kindness at the hands of his Canadian uncle. And yet he could not blame the rancher for what was about to happen. Everything was against him, and Mr. Lawless was only doing what appeared to him his bounden duty.



Miss Meadows broke the painful silence.

"Richards!"

"Yes, Miss Meadows?" faltered Frank.

"You are about to receive a flogging—not for having attacked Mr. Peckover, or even for having spoken falsely when accused—but for your reckless and unscrupulous audacity in accusing this gentleman of falsehood. Mr. Peckover will witness your punishment, as well as your school-fellows. I am very much disappointed in you, Richards. I can only hope that this punishment, and the pain you have caused your uncle, will be a severe lesson to you."

"I hope so, too!" said Mr. Peckover, his eyes glinting at Frank. "I trust, sir, that you will not exercise any undue leniency."

"You can leave that to me, Mr. Peckover," said the rancher brusquely.

He gripped the riding-whip.

"I'm sorry for this, Frank, as you know," he said. "But I have my duty to do. You will bend over this form."

Frank Richards quivered. The thought of resistance came into his mind—of flight—of defiance. It was not fear that withheld him. Unjust as his punishment was, he owed respect to his uncle; he owed him gratitude for much kindness. The thought came into his mind—but it passed away, and he obeyed.

Clatter, clatter!

There was a thunder of horse's hoofs in the playground. Then came a rapid crash of running feet in the porch and the passage.

All eyes turned on the doorway.

Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest, flushed and panting, stood there, his face crimson, his breath coming thick and

fast. At a glance he took in the scene.

"Stop!" he shouted.

He dashed up the big school-room.

Frank Richards straightened up again, in sheer amazement. Hope flushed into his pale, strained face.

All eyes fixed on Dicky Bird in amazement. Mr. Peckover raised his hand with an angry gesture.

"Bird, how dare you come here! How dare you——"

"I had to!" he gasped. "I—I heard from Todgers last night what was going to happen."

"Go!" thundered Mr. Peckover.

The Hillcrest schoolboy stood his ground.

"I've come to own up!" he gasped.

Mr. Lawless made a sudden movement. He remembered what his nephew had told him at the ranch the previous day. He made a stride towards Dicky Bird.

"To own up?" he repeated. "Then—then——"

"I threw the snowball" said Dicky Bird, panting, but his voice was very clear. "I—I wanted to keep it dark. I told Richards, but I knew he wouldn't give me away——"

"Bless my soul!" muttered Miss Meadows.

"I—I knew Mr. Peckover hadn't seen me," faltered Dicky Bird. "I—I thought it wouldn't come out. I—I was fairly knocked over when Todgers told me Mr. Peckover said he'd seen Richards throw the snowball."

Mr. Peckover's face was a study.

"It wasn't Richards; it was me," said Dicky ungrammatically, but very earnestly. "I—I couldn't let Richards be flogged for it, when it was me all the time. So—so I rode over. I—I'm jolly glad I got here in time——"

He broke off, panting.

There was a deep silence.

"So that is it!" Mr. Lawless' voice was like the growl of thunder. "My nephew told me last night that it was a Hillcrest boy, but he would not betray him. I did not believe him, for I thought it impossible that you, Mr. Peckover, could have made a false statement."

"Richards," said Miss Meadows, "go to your place. You are completely exonerated. I am sorry I ever doubted you. Only on Mr. Peckover's explicit assertion would I have done so, and it proves that his assertion was false.

"Thank you, ma'am!" faltered Frank.

The rancher strode towards the Hillcrest master, the riding-whip grasped in his hand, and the look in his eyes made Ephraim Peckover shrink back.

"Keep your distance, sir!" gasped Mr. Peckover. "I—I—the—the law —"

The rancher laughed contemptuously.

"You have lied, sir," he thundered, "and you have nearly caused me to punish my innocent nephew by your falsehood! This boy, Bird, has saved him, by owning up in the nick of time—a manly action, which he certainly did not learn from his headmaster. You deserve, sir, that I should lay this whip about you!"

"Keep your distance!" shrieked the hapless Hillcrest master. "If—if you dare——"

"You will pardon Bird for what he has done, and you will not punish him at Hillcrest," said Mr. Lawless.

Mr. Peckover's eyes blazed.

"I will punish him! I—I will ——" He choked with rage.

"He deserves to be pardoned for

his courage in coming here to prevent an injustice. You will assure him, in my presence, that no punishment shall fall upon him, or I will thrash you, sir, within an inch of your life!" roared the rancher. And the whip half rose.

Mr. Peckover gulped.

"In the—the circumstances, I—I shall c-certainly pardon Bird!" he stuttered. "I—I am, in—in fact, very much obliged to you, B-b-bird ——"

"Thank you, sir!" said Dicky demurely.

"Bird," said Mr. Lawless, "if you should be punished, in spite of Mr. Peckover's words, let me know! I do not trust this man. Peckover, if you lay a finger on this lad I shall come to your house, sir, and I shall bring a stock-whip, and I will thrash you, sir, before your school till you howl for mercy!"

And with that the rancher strode out of the school-room. Dicky Bird slipped away, smiling, and mounted his horse. He felt quite secure now. As for the hapless Mr. Peckover, he seemed rooted to the floor for some moments. He detached himself at last, however, and limped away to the door, followed by a loud and prolonged hiss from all Cedar Creek. The buggy was heard to drive away a few minutes later, and Mr. Peckover was gone, without even the consolation in prospect of flogging Dicky Bird. The thought of the rancher and his stock-whip effectually prevented that.

Frank Richards' face was very bright that morning, and so were the faces of his chums, all the more so when they reflected upon the probable feelings just then of the discomfited False Witness.

THE END