

At the foot of the Great Rocky Mountains, in the very heart of the Canadian Backwoods, lies the Cedar Creek School where the Famous Author spent his schooldays with his rough-neck pals.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Play's the Thing!

"SHAKESPEARE!" said Frank Richards.
"Ahem!" remarked Bob Lawless.
Vere Beauclerc looked doubtful. And Chunky Todgers asked:
"Who's that?"

It was a meeting in the old corral near Cedar Creek School.

Frank Richards, as president of the Cedar Creek Thespians, was presiding.

Frank was responsible for the existence of the Thespians.

It was he who had introduced amateur theatricals at Cedar Creek, and he had displayed great energy in making a success of the idea.

Quite a number of Cedar Creek fellows, and some of the girls, had joined the Thespian Club, the subscription being fixed at a low figure, suitable for all pockets.

The subscriptions did not, as a matter of fact, cover the cost of the "props," especially as the latter had to be brought all the way from Fraser.

But the wealthier members of the club were at liberty to stand the extras, if they liked—and some of them liked.

Bob Lawless' father had generously "donated" fifty dollars to the club, and that handsome sum went a very long way, for Frank Richards, who was treasurer as well as president, was a very careful manager, and looked at every cent twice before he expended it.

The Thespians had met to discuss a new play shortly to be produced, and the first step, of course, was to decide upon the play.

Chunky Todgers had offered to write a play all on his own, and promised in advance that it would be a regular sock-dolager, but the offer was received with a plentiful lack of enthusiasm, and Chunky had indignantly withdrawn the generous offer.

So far the Thespians had been successful in a small way, but the honourable president was growing ambitious.

Moreover, he had secured a "job lot" THE POPULAR.—No. 206.

of props that were going cheap in Fraser, which were suitable for a Shakespearean production.

So Frank Richards suggested Shakespeare.

"Chap you know?" inquired Chunky Todgers innocently.

"Fathead!" was the president's reply.

"I've heard the name before, I believe," remarked Chunky thoughtfully. "Does he write plays?"

"Well, of all the jays!" said Tom Lawrence. "How can he write plays when he's been dead about a thousand years?"

"Not quite that," said Frank Richards, laughing. "Nearer three hundred."

"Well, if the galoot wrote plays three hundred years ago, I should think they were jolly old-fashioned," said Chunky. "What we want is something a bit more modern."

There was a snort from Frank Richards.

"Chunky, old man, use your ears instead of your mouth for a bit. What do you fellows say to 'Julius Cæsar'? I've got a copy of the play at home, and we've got the props—with a bit of altering. Molly will help with the altering and cutting and sewing and things—won't you, Molly?"

"Oh, yes!" said Molly Lawrence. "Anything you like!"

"Molly will make a good Portia, too," said Frank. "She will look nobby as a Roman matron. Beauclerc can play old Julius—he's got the manner."

"Thanks!" said Beauclerc, laughing. "I'll put myself down for Brutus, if you fellows agree," went on Frank modestly.

"Does Brutus have most of the chin-wag?" asked Chunky Todgers.

"That's got nothing to do with it, ass!"

"I guess it has."

"Bob can take the part of Cassius," continued Frank. "That will suit him all right. Lawrence can be Octavius Cæsar. As for Mark Antony—" He paused.

"Does Mark Antony chew the rag a lot?" inquired Chunky.

"Well, yes, a good bit."

"Put me down, then."

"My dear chap, you're too fat for Mark Antony. Besides, we shall want you as—as First Citizen," said Frank.

"I don't mind so long as it's a good part," said Chunky.

Frank Richards diplomatically left that remark unanswered.

"Hopkins can play Mark Antony," he went on. "We'll whack out the other parts later. You see, we can handle it all right. My idea is that we ought to go the whole hog, you know, and play something really topping. Do you fellows agree to 'Julius Cæsar'?"

"Well, you mean to have 'Julius Cæsar,' anyhow, so we may as well agree first as last," remarked Bob Lawless. "I'm on!"

There was a general nodding of heads.

It was decided unanimously that the Thespians were to undertake the rendering of "Julius Cæsar."

Just as the amateur actors came to that decision, Gunten and Keller came into the old corral.

The two Swiss looked rather loweringly at the Thespians.

They did not belong to the amateur theatrical club.

"Hallo! Chewing the rag, as usual!" remarked Kern Gunten, with a sneer. "We'd better find somewhere else, Keller."

"I guess this'll do," answered Keller, sitting down on a log. "I suppose those galoots won't tell Miss Meadows they've seen us playing poker."

Gunten took a pack of well-worn cards from his pocket.

"Can't you rotters go and gamble somewhere else?" exclaimed Frank Richards warmly.

"Don't care to."

"Well, I'm blessed if you're going to play poker here!" exclaimed Bob Lawless, jumping up. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves—with ladies present, too! Vamoose the ranch!"

"Go and chop chips!" retorted Gunten.

He began to shuffle the cards. Bob Lawless strode towards him, and

with a well-aimed kick knocked the pack out of his hands.

Gunten jumped to his feet with a yell as the cards were scattered far and wide.

He clenched his fists and strode at Bob Lawless, who put up his hands coolly and waited for him.

Gunten changed his mind, however, before he reached the Canadian schoolboy.

"Hang you, you interfering rotter!" he muttered savagely.

"Are you going to vamoose?" answered Bob. "You're interrupting the meeting."

Gunten sullenly gathered up the scattered cards, and the two young rascals lounged out of the corral.

The Thespians were left to discuss the forthcoming production of "Julius Caesar" uninterrupted.

Before the meeting broke up, the parts were allotted, and to Frank Richards was assigned the task of copying out the script required by the various members of the company.

That evening, at the Lawless Ranch, Frank was very busy, and when he arrived at Cedar Creek the next morning he had the written parts all ready in his pocket.

The businesslike manager of the Cedar Creek Thespians did not allow the grass to grow under his feet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Thespians Get To Work!

FRIENDS, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears! I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise 'im!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Frank Richards.

Lessons were over, and most of the Thespians were improving the shining hour by learning up their parts.

Harold Hopkins, the Cockney of Cedar Creek, had been cast for the part of Marcus Antonius.

In handing that important part to Hopkins, who was a keenly enthusiastic member of the society, Frank Richards had forgotten Hopkins' delightful accent, which he had brought to Canada with him and never lost.

The cheerful Cockney always referred to himself as "Arold 'Opkins" and Miss Meadows had striven in vain to drive into him some slight respect for the aspirate.

But to compensate for leaving out aspirates where they were wanted, Hopkins frequently put them in where they were not wanted, and that, Bob Lawless had remarked, made it all right in the long run.

But it certainly was a drawback when it came to delivering the declamations of Mark Antony.

"The devil that men do lives after them, The good is hoft interred with their bones.

So let it be with Cæsar. The noble Brutus

'Ath told you Cæsar was hambitious."

"Ye gods!" murmured Bob Lawless.

"Bide a wee, Hopkins," said Frank.

"Ain't that all right?" asked Hopkins, who rather prided himself upon his delivery.

"Topping—but put in an 'h' or two, old chap!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Hopkins. "You coves are always cuttin' jokes about my aitches."

"Frinstance," said Frank. "Lend me your ears." See?"

"I got that all right. Lend me your ears," said Hopkins.

"Not hears—ears!"

"What?"

"Hears—not hears!"

"Hears, not hears," repeated Hopkins. "I don't savvy. What are you getting at?"

"It's his own ears that are to blame," grinned Bob. "I mean, his own hears."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look 'ere, if you're goin' to larf at a chap!" said Hopkins indignantly.

"But this is serious, old sport," said Frank Richards. "We can't have Mark Antony dropping 'h's' all over the place. Now, listen to me. Lend me your ears. Like that, see?"

"I see! Lend me your hears!" said Hopkins.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What's wrong with that there?" demanded Hopkins warmly. "What are you all larking at, I'd like to know? I'm surprised at you, Molly Lawrence, larking at a chap!"

"I'm sorry!" gasped Molly. "I didn't mean to laugh—ha, ha! But what do you do it for?"

"Wot do I do wot for?"

"Oh, get on with it, and let's see how you manage it!" said Frank Richards resignedly.

And Harold Hopkins went on:

"The noble Brutus, 'Ath told you Cæsar was hambitious

—"

"Ambitious!" shouted the manager.

"I said hambitious!"

"My only hat!" said Frank Richards. "I don't think we can give Hopkins a fat part, unless we play the 'Dumb Man from Manchester.' Then he could have the title role."

"I say, Frank—"

"Dry up a minute, Chunky!"

"But look here!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers indignantly. "I've been looking

better change over with Chunky. You can come in as a trumpeter, and a soldier, and a senator, and a page, and things, all through the play."

"Oh, orl right!" said Hopkins. "Hany-thing for a quiet life."

"Let's see how you do it, Chunky."

Chunky Todgers took Hopkins' script, and blinked at it, and puffed out his podgy chest, and started.

Grinning faces surrounded him as he delivered Mark Antony's celebrated oration. Certainly, Chunky did not look a very convincing Mark Antony, but at least his aspirates were in the right places.

"Just my part!" wound up Todgers.

"You wait till you see me in the togs."

"The toga," said Frank laughing.

"Well, the toga was the Roman togs, wasn't it?" said Chunky. "I tell you, I guess I shall simply live this part. You can see that what it needs is a fellow with a commanding presence."

"A whatter?"

"A commanding presence," said Chunky firmly. "A stately sort of galoot."

"Oh, my heye!" said Hopkins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you're cackling at. A fellow with a presence and some flesh on his bones, you know."

"Well, you've got a ton or two," said Frank, "if that's any good. Anyhow, we'll give you a trial as Mark Antony. Now, you chaps, take your script home with you, and slave at it and get letter-perfect. We're going to have a dress rehearsal on Friday. I'm going to bring all the props with me and stack them in the cabin on the old clearing. That's the place for the rehearsals."

And the members of the Thespian company dispersed for their various homes, and some of them astonished parents and relations that evening by speaking in language that was certainly not customary in the Thompson Valley.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mr. Shepherd is Alarmed!

MR. SLIMMEY, the assistant master at Cedar Creek, received a surprise the following day, when

Bob Lawless looked into his cabin after dinner, and asked for the loan of the hunting-knife that hung over his chimney.

"My dear Lawless, what do you want a hunting-knife for?" asked Mr. Slimmey.

"To kill the Cherub, sir."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I—I mean Beauclerc, sir."

Mr. Slimmey's gold-rimmed glasses nearly fell off his nose.

"What can you possibly mean, Lawless?" he stammered.

"We're going to kill him, sir."

"Are you insane, boy?"

"I—I mean, the Cherub's Julius Cæsar, and we've got to assassinate him," explained Bob.

"Oh," said Mr. Slimmey, "you are acting a play?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had better use something a little less dangerous than a real knife, then," said Mr. Slimmey dryly. "You probably do not want to change your play into a real tragedy, Lawless."

And Bob retired without the hunting-knife.

But several table-knives were borrowed from Black Sally's kitchen in the lumber schoolhouse, the "property" daggers being still at the ranch.

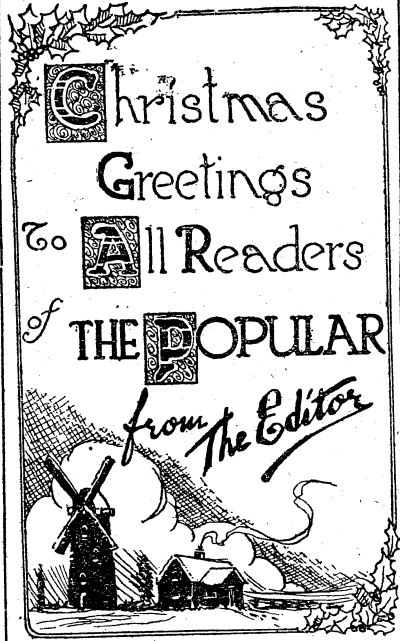
After lessons it had been arranged for Julius Cæsar's death scene in the Roman senate-house to take place in a corner of the playground, so that Frank could judge how his company was getting on; and the knives gave an air of reality to the scene—in the eyes of the schoolboys, at least.

Black Sally's table-knives were not sharp enough to do much damage.

Bob Lawless was practising a thrust at Beauclerc, when Mr. Shepherd, the new master, came by.

Mr. Shepherd was a tenderfoot from Henderson, as Bob expressed it. He had brought great stores of knowledge

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over my part, and it's rotten. Only a few lines for me."

"You do them so jolly well, Chunky, that they'll be the success of the piece," said Bob Lawless solemnly.

But the soft answer did not turn away wrath. Chunky Todgers was not satisfied with the meagre role of First Citizen.

"I'll tell you what," said Chunky. "Give me Mark Antony. I can do that a treat; I've looked at Hopkins' part. Hopkins can be First Citizen, and he can chuck 'h's' all over the place."

"You let my aitches alone!" growled Hopkins.

"Let's see how you do the First Citizen, Hopkins. Give him your script, Chunky."

Hopkins took the paper from Todgers.

"Go on from 'Thou art a cobbler,'" said Frank.

And Hopkins went on:

"Truly, sir, halt that I live by is with the hawl—"

"All that I live by is with the awl!" shouted Frank.

"That's right," assented 'Arold 'Opkins.

"Halt that I live by is with the hawl. That's wot I said."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's better as First Citizen than as Mark Antony," said Frank. "You'd

with him from the Old Country, but not much adaptability, and he found it very difficult to get into Western ways.

The boys rather liked him, but they were never tired of pulling his leg; which was all the easier because Mr. Shepherd never dreamed that anybody could pull his leg, or would venture to do so if he could.

Mr. Shepherd halted in amazement as Bob made a thrust at Beauclerc with the gleaming steel, exclaiming "Die!" The new master ran forward, seizing Bob's arm just in time, and stopping the thrust.

"Lawless!" he gasped.
"Oh crumbs!" said Bob. "All right, sir; no harm done."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Shepherd, "is that a joke—a Western joke? You should not play such jokes, Lawless. It is dangerous. Please put that knife away at once, my boy. You may cut yourself."

Mr. Shepherd shook his head seriously and walked on, leaving Bob Lawless blinking after him, and Beauclerc grinning.

"Well, my word!" ejaculated Bob. "Of all the howling idiots! Blessed if the ass didn't think I was going to stick you, Cherub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Richards.
"Isn't he a prize jay?" exclaimed Bob. "A joke—a Western joke, the howling chump! I don't believe that galoot knows enough to go in when it rains."
"He is an ass, and no mistake," agreed Frank.

"A jay from Jaysville!" growled Bob.
During afternoon lessons Mr. Shepherd glanced at Bob Lawless several times, as if in doubt.

Bob caught his glance once or twice, and he wondered whether the "tenderfoot" was still in doubt as to whether he had really intended to slaughter Vere Beauclerc in the playground.

The new master was so unacquainted with Western ways, and had so many queer ideas on the subject, that there really was no telling what he might or might not get into his head.

After lessons, however, Bob forgot all about Mr. Shepherd, as the chums of Cedar Creek repaired to a retired corner of the playground to rehearse the senate-house scene from the third act of "Julius Cæsar."

Vere Beauclerc was there as Cæsar, and Frank Richards as Brutus, and Bob as Cassius.

Dawson was Casca, and Hopkins was Metellus Cimber.

And all the conspirators were armed with table-knives, which had been polished but not sharpened, and looked quite dangerous, though they would not have cut into cheese without some pushing.

The scene went quite strong. The actors were well up in their parts, and Vere Beauclerc made quite an imposing Cæsar.

But though Bob Lawless had forgotten Mr. Shepherd, Shepherd had not forgotten him.

The new master noted the fact that Frank Richards & Co. did not leave after lessons as usual, and after a time he strolled out of his cabin, to take a glance at the corner whither the schoolboys had retired.

He was quite uneasy in his mind.

He had heard of brawls in the backwoods in which knives were used, and though certainly he had never heard of a case of knifing at Cedar Creek, he would not have been greatly surprised.

Mr. Shepherd had an enormous amount to learn about Canada—and a great deal to unlearn!

He started a little as he saw the group of schoolboys in the distant corner, surrounding Beauclerc with very serious looks.

And even as he glanced at them, Dick Dawson's shining blade was flashed at Beauclerc, who staggered.

Mr. Shepherd had never even heard of the Thespians of Cedar Creek, so naturally he did not know that it was only Casca stabbing Cæsar.

He stood rooted to the ground with horror, as Beauclerc staggered artistically, and caught Dawson by the arm as if to stop a second stab.

Bob Lawless stabbed him at the same moment, and then Hopkins, and then, last of all, Frank Richards.

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"Et tu, Brute!" groaned Cæsar, as the dearly-loved Brutus stabbed; but the horrified master was too far off to hear him.

Beauclerc sank to the ground.
He moved for a moment or two, and then stretched out still.

Over him were brandished the fatal weapons.

Pale with horror, Mr. Shepherd dashed towards the group.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "Wretched boys, stop! Hold your hands!"

The conspirators spun round in amazement.

The speeches that were about to be delivered over Cæsar were never delivered. The amateur actors stared at Mr. Shepherd instead, blankly.

The new master dashed up breathlessly. With a swing of his arm, he sent Frank and Bob staggering back, and the other fellows jumped out of his way.

Mr. Shepherd threw himself upon his knees beside the still form of Vere Beauclerc.

"Good heavens," he panted, "you have killed him!"

"K-k-kick-kick-killed him!" stuttered Bob Lawless.

"Wretched boy!"
"Wha-a-at?"

"My poor lad!" Mr. Shepherd raised Beauclerc's head, and Vere's eyes opened wide in utter amazement. "Ah, he lives! He lives! Thank Heaven he lives! Stand back, you reckless young ruffians! Touch him again at your peril!"

"My heye!" gasped Hopkins. "Is he orf his rocker?"

"My poor boy, you are hurt!"

"Eh? I'm not hurt, sir," gasped Beauclerc.

"What?"
Frank Richards burst into a yell.

He understood now that the new master had taken the scene seriously, and that discovery was too much for him.

He yelled almost hysterically.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Lawless, as he, too, understood. "Oh, by gum! Ha, ha, ha! This is too rich!"

Mr. Shepherd looked up at them in horrified amazement.

"Do you dare to laugh in the presence of your victim?" he thundered. "Are you lost to all sense of humanity?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, sir!" gasped Frank. "You see—ha, ha!—we—we—ha, ha!—oh dear!"

And Frank Richards went off into another yell, quite unable to explain for the moment.

To Mr. Shepherd's surprise, the dying youth on the ground joined in the yell of laughter.

The new master could scarcely believe his eyes or his ears.

"Beauclerc!" he gasped. "You—you are hurt—"

"Not at all, sir," gurgled Beauclerc. "It's only—ha, ha!—it's only—ha, ha, ha!"

"Only a—ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dawson.
"Only a—ha, ha!—play, sir!"

"What?"
"We're doing 'Julius Cæsar,' sir!" gurgled Frank Richards, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Only a play, Mr. Shepherd! Beau is Julius Cæsar, and we're assassinating him in the Capitol."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Shepherd.
Beauclerc sat up and roared. He did not want to be disrespectful to Mr. Shepherd, but he could not help it.

The other fellows were yelling.
The new master rose to his feet, his face crimson. He, too, understood at last, and realised that he had put his foot in it once more.

He walked away very quickly, leaving Frank Richards & Co. almost in convulsions.

When he met the Co. in class the next morning Mr. Shepherd was still looking rather pink.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Gunten is Humorous!

"DRESS rehearsal after dinner!" said Frank Richards on Friday.

"Right you are!"
Kern Gunten, who heard the remark, looked round.

"You're bagging the corral again, I suppose?" he said.

Frank Richards nodded.

"Yes; if you want to sneak off somewhere to play poker, Gunten, you can sneak off somewhere else. The corral's booked."

Gunten gave a sniff, and said no more.

Immediately after dinner, Frank Richards & Co. repaired to the old corral near the school.

This was a secluded spot, and eminently suitable for rehearsals; and the weather was so fine and clear that a rehearsal in the open air was no disadvantage.

The "props" were in the old cabin, packed there in readiness, and the altering and cutting and sewing had been done.

There was not time for a full rehearsal before afternoon lessons, and the Thespians were going to rehearse the senate-house scene in full dress, chiefly to make sure that the costumes were all right.

"We shall have time to do the third act if we don't waste any," Frank Richards remarked. "We can do the fourth after lessons, the fifth to-morrow. One Saturday we must have a grand rehearsal of the whole thing, with all the characters present. And after that—"

"After that the terrific performance!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Well, Franky, really think we shall get through the performance without having things thrown at us—unless they heave rocks at Mark Antony."

"You silly jay!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "Mark Antony's the best of the bunch! Just hear me do the oration as we go along—"

"Mercy!"

Chunky Todgers snorted.

Every time he rehearsed that oration he was more and more pleased with it, which, according to some other members of the company, showed how easily satisfied he was.

There were no feminine characters in the third act, which Tom Lawrence rather ungallantly declared was an advantage.

At all events, it enabled all the rehearsers to use the old cabin in the corral as a dressing-room.

All the "props" that were required had been conveyed there during the week, and were locked up in a big chest.

Frank Richards opened the chest, and the costumes were handed out.

There was plenty of brightness and colour about the costumes, and they were very pleasing to the eye.

The schoolboys stripped off their more prosaic everyday garments in the cabin, and donned togas and hoods and sandals.

They grinned at one another a good deal during the process of transformation from Canadian schoolboys into ancient Romans.

The window was darkened as a head appeared there, and Frank Richards glanced round, and saw Kern Gunten looking in, and grinning.

"Buzz off!" he snapped.
"Mayn't a galoot look on?" jeered Gunten.

"By gum, you look a precious set of circus performers!"

"Vamoose!" roared Bob Lawless.
He picked up a property Roman sword, and Gunten vanished from the window, chuckling.

The dressing was finished at last, and the crowd of Romans, in their togas, moved out into the old corral.

In a corner of the corral grew a big tree, and under its wide-spreading branches the schoolboys started the rehearsal of the third act.

Frank Richards was a hard-working and exacting manager; but he was very well satisfied with the progress of his company.

The senate-house scene was voted a great success, and even Chunky Todgers' oration in the Forum went very well.

While the rehearsal was going on under the big tree, Kern Gunten's keen and cunning face looked in at the window of the old cabin again—the Swiss being careful to keep the cabin between him and the actors.

Gunten's eyes gleamed as he looked in. About the cabin were thrown the clothes the schoolboys had discarded when they put on the Roman costumes, with a dozen pairs of boots, and as many hats.

Gunten chuckled softly.

He turned to the window, and made a sign to Keller, who was waiting at a distance; and his comrade came up quietly, keeping,

like Gunten, the cabin between him and the party rehearsing under the tree.

"All safe?" asked Keller.
"You bet! You stand here and take them as I pass them out of the window," whispered Gunten.

Gunten squeezed himself in through the window, Keller's grinning face watching him from outside.

With swift hands the Swiss collected up the clothes left there by the Thespians, made them into bundles, and passed them out to Keller.

Laden with bundles, Keller hurried away, and returned in a few minutes for more.

In ten minutes the cabin was cleared of the clothes belonging to the amateur theatrical society.

The boots were next handed out, and conveyed away, and after them the hats. The cabin was left quite bare.

Then Gunten squeezed himself through the window again, and dropped quietly outside.

From the other side of the cabin came the fat voice of Chunky Todgers:

"For when the noble Caesar saw him stab, Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,

Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart!"

"They're still going it!" grinned Keller.

"They'll go it till the bell rings!" chuckled Gunten. "And then how they'll turn up to classes without their duds they can work out for themselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laden with the last of the boots and the hats, Gunten and Keller crept softly away, leaving the old corral by a gap in the broken palisade.

"Outside, on the ground, lay the clothes piled by Keller.

For the next ten minutes the two Swiss were very busy carrying them to a safer spot farther off, where they were hidden in the thickets.

Then, with grinning faces, the two young rascals strolled away to the lumber school, reaching it as the bell began to ring for afternoon classes, and leaving Frank Richards & Co. to work out, as best they could, the toughest problem that the Thespian Club had ever had to deal with.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Surprising the School!

"BRING me to Octavius!" concluded Chunky Todgers.

The school bell was ringing as Mark Anthony wound up.

"My hat! We've run it rather close!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "Only just time to change before we get in. Get a move on!"

The rehearsal of the third act had been a great success. All the Thespians agreed that the costumes lent reality to the scene, and, indeed, the more enthusiastic members felt as if they really were ancient Romans.

But the clang of the iron bell at the lumber school summoned them back to everyday life, and they rushed into the cabin to change back to modern life again.

And then there was a chorus of dismayed exclamations.

"Where's our clothes?"

"Great gophers!"

The Romans stared into the empty cabin in astonishment and dismay.

It was quite empty, save for an odd boot or two lying about.

Frank Richards blinked round him.

"Who on earth—" he ejaculated.

"One of you duffers been larking?" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

"Somebody's been larking!" growled Dawson. "Where's our clothes gone?"

"Somebody's been 'ere!" said Hopkins.



A SLIGHT MISTAKE!—Mr. Shepherd threw himself upon his knees beside the still form of Vere Beauclerc. "Good heavens!" he panted. "You have killed him!" He raised Vere's head, and the schoolboy opened his eyes. "Ah, he lives! Stand back, you reckless ruffians! Touch him again at your peril!" (See Chapter 3.)

"Perhaps—perhaps the things are outside!" exclaimed Franky.

He ran out of the cabin again with two or three others. But there was no sign of the clothes outside.

It was evident that the garments had been taken clean away.

Utter dismay fell upon the Thespians.

The Roman costumes had given reality to the rehearsal, and the amateur actors were very pleased with them; but those light and airy garments were not suitable for the lumber school.

Their cheeks crimsoned at the thought of the meriment that would greet them if they turned up at Cedar Creek, in broad daylight, habited as Cæsar, Mark Antony, Brutus & Co.

But Miss Meadows was a stickler for punctuality, and already the school bell had ceased to clang.

Cedar Creek had gone in to lessons now, excepting the unhappy cast of "Julius Cæsar."

"Wh-at on earth are we going to do?" ejaculated Lawrence. "We—we—we can't go in like this!"

"Miss Meadows will be mad if we don't go," said Dawson. "We're late already."

"We—we can't!"

"But we've got to go some time," said Bob.

"We—we can't stay here all the afternoon and the evening, too. We've got to make a move, Frank!"

"Oh, my hat! I wish I had that practical joker here!" gasped Frank. "It was Gunten, of course—I'm sure it was Gunten. He was watching us."

"I'd rather have the clothes here!" groaned Bob.

The schoolboys made another desperate search for the missing garments, inside and outside the corral, but there was not a trace of them.

It was borne in upon their minds that there was nothing to be done but to return to the lumber school as they were.

What Miss Meadows would say, when they presented themselves in the school-room as ancient Romans, instead of modern Canadians, they could not even guess.

"We—we'd better go," said Beauclerc at last.

Frank Richards nodded.

"Can't be helped," he said. "C-c-come on! Oh, my hat, what awful asses we shall look!"

And the unhappy Thespians started at last.

In a body they came out of the corral and started for the lumber school.

As they came in at the school gates Cæsar, Antony, Brutus, & Co. all seemed to be trying to hide behind one another.

Black Sally, the cook, was crossing the school ground with a pail when they came in. Black Sally gave them one look and shrieked, and the pail went with a clatter to the ground.

"It—it—it's only us, Sally!" called-out Frank Richards.

"Golly!" gasped Black Sally, her black face a picture of astonishment. "Golly! Dat Mass' Frank? Oh, golly!"

(Continued on page 27.)

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THE CEDAR CREEK PLAYERS!

(Continued from page 5.)

"Golly!" mumbled Bob Lawless hopelessly. "Golly isn't the word! Miss Meadows will snatch us bald-headed for this! Oh dear!" The unhappy Romans marched in at the porch, but they paused in the passage outside the school-room door.

It required a great deal of nerve to enter the crowded school-room in the garb of ancient Rome.

"Better get in!" said Bob desperately. "Here goes!"

And he marched as boldly as possible into the school-room, with the others at his heels.

"Oh, here they are!" exclaimed Miss Meadows, at the sound of many footsteps; and she turned to look sternly at the newcomers. Then her expression changed, and she gasped: "Why—why—who—how— Words failed her.

With crimson faces, and their eyes fixed on the floor, Julius Caesar & Co. came up the middle of the big school-room.

Mr. Shepherd rubbed his eyes.

Mr. Slimmey blinked over his glasses like a man petrified.

Miss Meadows was rooted to the floor.

Then a roar of Homeric laughter sounded through the school-room.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

It was in vain that Miss Meadows made frantic gestures for silence and called for it. Her voice was drowned in the roar of merriment that rang through Cedar Creek.

Boys and girls were almost weeping with mirth as they stared at the unhappy crowd of ancient Romans.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards & Co. stood sheepishly before Miss Meadows, their eyes on the floor.

At that moment they fervently wished that the floor would open and swallow them up. But the floor didn't, and they had to face the really terrific look that the schoolmistress fixed upon them.

"What—what—what—" Miss Meadows fairly stuttered. "What—what— Silence! There is nothing—nothing whatever to laugh at! Silence, I say! Richards—Lawless—what does this mean—this—this ridiculous masquerade?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If—if you please, ma'am," mumbled Frank Richards—"if—if you please, we—we were rehearsing, and some beast collared our clobber—I mean clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! I will cane the next boy or girl who laughs! Richards, this—this is—is—is unheard of! I—"

"We couldn't help it, ma'am!" groaned Bob Lawless. "Our truck's been pinched, and—and we had to come in. We—we couldn't find our clothes!"

"Leave the school-room at once!" gasped Miss Meadows. "You—should not have come here like that. Go—go into the dining-room, and—and I will send some of the boys to look for your clothes! Bless my soul! Leave the school-room at once!"

Frank Richards & Co. were only too glad to leave. And in spite of Miss Meadows' wrath a fresh yell of laughter followed them as they went.

The Thespians had to wait some time before their clothes were found and brought in, and it happened to be Gunten and Keller who found them.

Frank Richards & Co. did not feel grateful. They had a shrewd suspicion that those who hid could find.

When they took their places at last in the school-room all Cedar Creek was on the broad grin, and even Miss Meadows' severe face was twitching at little.

The Thespian Society of Cedar Creek decided to postpone the great performance of Shakespeare's masterpiece, after due consideration.

After what had happened, it was probable that the audience would have taken it as a comedy, instead of a tragedy. But though Gunten declared that he knew nothing of the matter, the Co. found some slight satisfaction in pommeling him on suspicion.

THE END.

(Next week's story of the chums of the Backwoods is a real thriller, entitled, "In Deadly Peril!" Don't miss it!)

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What You Have to Do!

Here is a splendid Footer competition which I am sure will interest you. On this page you will find a history of Newcastle United Football Club in picture-puzzle form. What you are invited to do is to solve this picture, and when you have done so, write your solution on a sheet of paper. Then sign the coupon which appears underneath, pin it to your solution, and post it to "NEWCASTLE UNITED" Competition, POPULAR Office, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, so as to reach that address not later than THURSDAY, January 4th, 1923.

The FIRST PRIZE of £5 will be awarded to the reader who submits a solution which is exactly the same as, or nearest to, the solution now in the possession of the Editor. In the events of ties the prize will be divided. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to add together and divide all, or any of the prizes, but the full amount will be awarded. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor must be accepted as final. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

This competition is run in conjunction with "Gem," "Magnet," and "Boys' Friend," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.