

FRANK RICHARDS UNDER A CLOUD!

Frank Richards left Cedar Creek with a tottering step and white face. He had been dismissed from the school in disgrace, condemned for an action of which he is innocent! How long will he remain in the shadow of disgrace?



Righting a Wrong!

Further adventures of
the Cheery Chums of
Cedar Creek School.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Good News for Gunten!

"RICHARDS!"

Frank Richards did not answer. It was a sunny spring afternoon, and lessons were proceeding in Cedar Creek School.

Frank Richards was absent from his usual place in Miss Meadows' class.

He had come away from the gates of the backwoods school with a white face and an almost tottering step.

He was dismissed for the afternoon—dismissed in disgrace, with worse disgrace to follow.

He saw nothing as he moved blindly out upon the grassy trail.

"Richards!"

His name was called again, but still he did not heed.

Kern Gunten, the Swiss schoolboy of Hillcrest School, was lounging against a tree near the gates, with a cigarette between his thick lips.

His eyes fell upon Frank Richards at once, as the English schoolboy came out, with a glitter in them.

He threw the cigarette into the bracken, and stepped out into the trail towards Frank.

It was not till he called a third time that Frank Richards heeded him. Then he stopped, a look of angry dislike coming over his face at the sight of Gunten. His old enemy was the last person Frank Richards wished to see at that moment.

But Gunten's manner was quite genial—in fact, friendly.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"Yes!" muttered Frank.

"You're looking rather bad. And you're out of school," said Gunten, with a curious look. "Lawless and Beauclerc at lessons?"

"Yes."

"And you're out?"

"So are you, it seems!" snapped Frank. "You ought to be at Hillcrest!"

Gunten smiled.

"I've got a holiday," he said. "Mr. Peckover goes rather easy with me, you know. I happened to be strolling this way,

and I sighted you coming out. Has anything happened at Cedar Creek this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"You've been fighting; your face looks a bit damaged," remarked Gunten.

Frank nodded.

"You're not sent home for fighting?" exclaimed Gunten.

"No."

"But you're sent home?"

"Yes."

Frank Richards' answers were in monosyllables.

"Going home on foot?" smiled Gunten.

"You've forgotten your horse."

Frank started.

"I—I—yes, I forgot!" he muttered. "Don't bother me, Gunten! I don't want to talk to you!"

"You look awfully upset," said Kern Gunten. "Tell me what's happened."

"I don't care to tell you."

"I don't see that you need be unfriendly," said Gunten. "I'm not thinking of the rows we've had, and you needn't, Richards. If you're in trouble at school, I guess I'm sorry."

Frank Richards looked at him dully. He was thinking of the late scene in the Cedar Creek school-room; of Miss Meadows' stern brow, and the scornful murmur of the class; of his own chums' averted looks. Even Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc seemed to have lost their faith in him. At that moment of terrible loneliness, almost of despair, there was something of comfort in the unexpected friendliness of the Swiss, much as he disliked the cad of Hillcrest.

"I used to be at Cedar Creek with you," continued Gunten. "We had plenty of rows, but that don't matter. You've pitched into me for playing cards with Yen Chin, the Chinese. Never mind that. I guess I'm not a galoot to bear malice. I'm real sorry if you're in trouble!"

"If you mean that, it's very good of you," said Frank. "My own pals have turned on me now."

"So bad as that?"

"Yes!" groaned Frank.

"Perhaps I could help you out," suggested Gunten. "Sit down on this log; you look worn out. Spin me the yarn, anyhow, and perhaps I can help you through."

Frank Richards sat down on the log silently.

He was still feeling stunned by the scene he had been through, and cut to the heart by the averted looks of his chums. Nobody at Cedar Creek believed in him; he was condemned by the school. It would be strange enough if his old enemy, Kern Gunten, was the one to bring him comfort at that moment of utter misery. He felt a glow of something like gratitude towards the Swiss, which was very new to him.

"I'll tell you," he said. "You can't help me. Nobody can help me. I—I don't even know how it's happened. I—I—" He broke off.

"Go ahead, old scout! Whom have you been fighting with?"

"Tom Lawrence."

"I reckoned he was a friend of yours!" said Gunten, with a very curious look at Frank's stricken face. "You've always seemed chummy with him and his sister Molly."

Frank Richards winced.

"It's about Molly!" he gasped.

"You haven't quarrelled with her?"

"No, no! But—but," Frank stammered, "she's had a letter—an insulting letter—and it's in my handwriting! I can't understand it. I didn't know what was the matter at first. She wouldn't speak to me. Then her brother rowed with me, and we fought. I couldn't make out what was the reason. Then it all came out before Miss Meadows, and the letter was produced."

"In your fist?"

"Yes."

"Then you wrote it?"

"No!" gasped Frank. "It was a rotten letter—insulting. It—it was signed with my initials, and written in my hand. I never wrote it! It—it said that she was always bothering me, and wouldn't give me any peace, and that I was fed-up, and all that—horrid stuff that no decent chap would write to a girl, even if she was bold and forward. And, of course, Molly isn't. Some awful cad wrote the letter, and put my initials to it."

"And in your fist?" grinned Gunten.

"Yes."

"But if it was in your fist you must have written it."

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"That's what they all think!" groaned Frank. "It fairly knocked me over. I—I suppose it was a forgery. Miss Meadows has sent me home for the day. I—I can't go home. How can I explain to my uncle and Mrs. Lawless? I—I can't go! But—but I don't think Miss Meadows will let me go to the school again. I—I don't know what will happen now!"

Frank Richards let his face fall into his hands.

It was seldom that the plucky schoolboy gave way like this, but at this moment he felt utterly overcome and hopeless.

He felt shackled by the chain of circumstances, and in despair of ever being able to prove his innocence. His own handwriting was testimony against him that could not be contested. If the letter was a forgery—as undoubtedly it was—what fellow could he accuse of it? There was no one at Cedar Creek whose name he could mention.

His face buried in his hands, Frank did not see Gunten's look—the grin of malicious, malevolent satisfaction upon the heavy features of the Hillcrest fellow.

He looked up at last.

"That's how it is," he said. "I'm done for at Cedar Creek. I don't know what to do. Even my own chums don't believe me."

Gunten rose from the log.

The sneering grin was still on his hard face, and Frank Richards started as he saw it. It dawned upon him that Gunten's sympathy had been a pretence to lead him on to tell his story.

"Don't they believe you?" grinned Gunten. "I should say not! I guess your yarn wants some believing, Frank Richards!"

Frank started as if he had been stung.

"You—you—" he began. "You don't believe—"

"Not a word!" answered Gunten contemptuously. "Not a syllable! I guess I'm not jay enough to believe you!"

"You cad!" exclaimed Frank savagely, starting to his feet. "Leave me alone, then! I was a fool to speak to you, knowing what you are!"

"A fool, right enough, if you thought I should swallow such a yarn!" sneered Gunten. "You wrote the letter right enough, and you've got what you deserve! And if you're kicked out of Cedar Creek, serve you right."

Crash!

Frank Richards' face was crimson with anger, and he struck out at the Swiss with clenched fist, straight from the shoulder.

Gunten gave a yell as he rolled in the grass.

"Now keep your distance!" muttered Frank savagely.

He turned away, with a moody brow.

Kern Gunten scrambled to his feet. He did not follow Frank. He was dabbing his nose as he plunged into the timber and disappeared.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Loyal Chums!

"BOB!"

Bob Lawless started.

Lessons were over at Cedar Creek, and Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc were riding away together on the timber trail, Bob leading Frank's horse, which he had found still in the corral at the school.

In the shadowy timber his name was called, and he looked round, to see Frank Richards. He pulled in his horse at once, and Beauclerc followed his example. The two schoolboys were looking grave and moody.

Frank Richards came out into the trail from the trees as they stopped.

"You haven't been home?" asked Bob awkwardly.

"No."

"I've brought your horse along."

Frank took his horse. He held the animal, and looked at his two chums with a miserable and bitter look.

"So you're down on me, like the rest of the school!" he exclaimed.

Bob Lawless shifted uneasily in his saddle and Beauclerc coloured.

"You—like all the rest!" repeated Frank.

"Hang it all!" Bob burst out angrily.

"Do you expect a galoot to stand by you, after what you've done, Frank Richards? You're my cousin, but I'm ashamed of you! You're not fit for a white man to speak to!"

"Frank!" muttered Beauclerc sadly.

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"You think I did it, then?" said Frank. "All Cedar Creek knows what you did!" retorted Bob. "You've insulted Molly Lawrence, the nicest girl in the school! Miss Meadows has given me a letter to take to my father. I guess she doesn't want you to go back to Cedar Creek. And no wonder!"

Frank drew his horse aside.

"You can ride on!" he said bitterly. "If you don't believe in me, I don't want ever to see either of you again!"

"You're coming home, I suppose?"

"No."

"Where are you going, then?"

"Anywhere—I don't care much!" said Frank. "I suppose my uncle will believe the same as you do, Bob. If he does, I'll never sleep another night under his roof!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Bob. "Do you want us to believe that that letter was decent—that it was manly, or honest, or anything but cowardly and rotten?"

"It was all that, and worse; but I expected my friends to believe that I never wrote it," answered Frank quietly.

"It was in your fist."

"It was a forgery!"

"What!" shouted Bob.

Vere Beauclerc uttered a cry.

"Frank, I believe you, old chap—I believe you! I couldn't believe—I take your word that you never wrote it!"

Bob stared at his cousin blankly.

"A forgery!" he repeated. "You mean that some galoot imitated your handwriting, and wrote that letter—"

"I mean that that's the only way it could have happened, as I never wrote it, and never even saw it till Miss Meadows had it in the school-room," said Frank Richards steadily.

"Oh, gum!" gasped Bob.

His face was a study for a moment or two.

"Do you believe me now?" asked Frank.

"But—but why should any galoot play such an awful trick?" gasped Bob. "And—and who's so hefty with his pen that he can imitate your fist like that, Frank?"

"I don't know! I only know that that's what must have happened."

"I believe you, Frank," repeated Vere Beauclerc. "I felt all the time that you couldn't have done anything so base, though I couldn't understand— And Bob believes you, too. Don't be an ass, Bob!"

Bob Lawless nodded.

"I guess I take your word, Frank!" he said.

Frank Richards' face brightened.

The whole school had condemned him; but it was something, at least, if his two chums kept their faith in him.

"Come on, Frank! Get on your horse!"

Frank vaulted into the saddle.

The three chums rode down the timber trail together.

"I guess I was a jay not to have thought of that!" Bob Lawless said, after a long silence. "I guess you've got it, Franky. Some mean galoot has got a copy of your fist, and imitated it, and written that letter to Molly. But—but who? There isn't a chap at Cedar Creek that would do it."

"I don't think so," said Beauclerc.

"But, then, nobody outside the school could get hold of Frank's handwriting to copy," said Bob, in perplexity. "It was Frank's fist to the last crossing of a T!"

Frank set his teeth.

"It was done by an enemy," he said—"somebody who wanted to get me into disgrace. As soon as Molly got that letter it was certain that it would make her down on me—and it would be noticed, and it was all bound to come out, just as it has done!"

"I guess so! But—"

"It's got me into disgrace with the Lawrences, and Miss Meadows, and everybody at the school!" said Frank bitterly. "There's only one fellow who hates me enough to act like that. I was a fool not to think of it before—especially when I found him waiting outside Cedar Creek this afternoon!"

"You found whom?"

"Kern Gunten."

"Wasn't he at school?"

"He had a holiday—you know how his headmaster favours him, owing to his father having money invested in Hillcrest School," said Frank. "He was outside Cedar Creek when I came out. He said he came along by chance. I'm quite sure that he was

curious to see how his scheme had worked, and came along for that reason."

He described his meeting with Gunten and how it ended, his chums listening in grave silence.

"I—I guess it may have been Gunten," said Bob slowly. "I know Gunten's hefty with his pen. He keeps books for his popper, at the store in Thompson, and does some of the post-office accounts. But—but—"

"Who else could it have been?" said Frank. "That's so. But look here, Frank; there's no proof. Gunten's a bad lot, and we all know it; but forgery—"

"It could have been no one else," said Frank Richards, with conviction. "He hates us all three, and he wouldn't stop at much against us. He's played this trick on me; but it might have been either of you two."

Bob knitted his brows.

"How did he get a copy of your fist, Frank?" he asked. "He couldn't have done it without that."

Frank was silent.

"He used to be at Cedar Creek," remarked Beauclerc. "He saw Frank's hand often enough then."

"He left before Christmas," answered Bob. "It can't be supposed that he had planned all this then, and kept some of Frank's exercises and things as a copy, on purpose. I guess that's no good!"

Frank shook his head.

"Whoever forged that letter must have had a good copy in front of him all the time," said Bob. "And not a few words, either; he's got every trick of the writing to a T. I guess I don't see how it could have been Gunten, Frank!"

"I can't think of anybody else who could have done it."

"That's not enough to accuse him on."

"I know—I know."

The chums rode on in silence. Beauclerc left the cousins at the fork of the trail, and Frank and Bob rode on to the Lawless Ranch together.

Frank's face was troubled and clouded as the ranch came in sight.

He had a miserable ordeal before him.

His heart was heavy as he alighted at the ranch, and he did not even hear the cheery greeting of Billy Cook, the ranch foreman, who was passing on the trail.

"Give your father Miss Meadows' letter at once, Bob!" he muttered, as they went into the house. "For goodness' sake, get it over as soon as possible!"

"I guess you can depend on the poppa, Frank," answered Bob. "You come in and pitch your yarn first, and then I'll hand him the letter."

That seemed good advice, and Frank Richards resolved to act upon it.

A few minutes later he was relating the story to his uncle and aunt, with downcast face and flushed cheeks, helped out by emphatic interjections from his cousin.

To his great relief, Mrs. Lawless was all sympathy; the good lady did not doubt his explanation for a moment.

Rancher Lawless was grim and silent.

"Give me Miss Meadows' letter, Bob," he said at last.

Frank Richards waited with beating heart while his uncle read the schoolmistress' letter.

Mr. Lawless spoke at last, his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"I believe you, Frank," he said quietly. "I will ride over and see Miss Meadows in the morning. This will want looking into. For a few days, anyhow, you'd better stay away from school. I guess I can keep you busy about the ranch. You can't show up at Cedar Creek again till this is explained—and I guess it will be looked into till the truth is found. Keep a stiff upper lip, my boy; you've got friends to stand by you."

Frank's eyelids were wet. He could not speak; his heart was too full for words.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Dark Days!

AWFUL about that galoot Richards, isn't it?"

Chunky Todgers made that remark when Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc arrived at Cedar Creek School the next day.

Chunky's face was very serious.

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There is a Deep Mystery at Cedar Creek School Next Tuesday!

"Who'd have thought of his turning out like that?" continued Chunky.

"Like what?" growled Bob.

"Like he's done!" said Todgers. "I'm surprised at him! He's not coming back to school, I suppose? I see he's not with you."

Bob gave a snort.

"He's coming back right enough as soon as this rotten affair is cleared up," he said.

"Frank never wrote that letter, you fat jay, and it's going to be proved somehow."

Chunky Todgers whistled.

"I reckon it was in his fist," he said.

"It was a forgery!"

"Oh, come off!" said Chunky Todgers incredulously.

"That's how it is, Chunky," said Beauclerc quietly.

"By gum!" said Chunky, his eyes glistening. "I see! It's a plot! Just like you read in novels—what?"

"Oh, bother your novels!" growled Bob. He was in no mood just then to listen to the romantic Chunky on that topic.

"I guess it's just like the forged letter that wicked marquis wrote to the missing duke in the book I've just been reading," said Chunky eagerly. "I say, Bob, though, there isn't any wicked marquis at this school!"

"Fathead!" was Bob Lawless' polite reply. Chunky Todgers was not long in spreading the news; but it found few believers. Chunky was a romantic youth, and a forged letter appealed to his fat imagination. But the other fellows were rather more practical. Even Molly Lawrence shook her head when Beauclerc explained to her. She had been deeply hurt by the letter, and deeply aggrieved, and she was sorry that the matter had become public and caused Frank's punishment; but the theory that the letter had been forged was too "steep."

As for Tom Lawrence, her brother, he sniffed contemptuously at the suggestion.

"If Richards thinks that he can sneak back on a yarn like that, he's making a mistake," said Lawrence. "I know I'm going to hammer him if I see him at Cedar Creek again—and every time I see him!"

"You didn't have much luck with your last hammering!" growled Bob.

"Better luck next time!" answered Lawrence. "And I'm surprised, too, at your standing up for him, Lawless!"

"I believe in him."

"More fool you!"

"Look here—"

Fortunately, Molly Lawrence came along in time to stop the argument, which was growing warm.

It was pretty clear that strong proof would be required to convince the Cedar Creek fellows of Frank Richards' innocence.

How and where that proof was to be found was a mystery.

Even little Yen Chin, the heathen Chinese, professed to be shocked at what Frank Richards had done; though it was not easy to imagine the most complete rascal in the school being shocked at anything.

"Flanky velly bad boy!" Yen Chin confided to Bob and Beauclerc. "Velly bad boy—oh, yes! Me despise!"

"And you're such a precious good boy, aren't you?" grunted Bob.

Yen Chin nodded calmly.

"Me velly good boy!" he answered. "Oh, yes! Me velly good boy allee samee white Christian!"

"How long since you've played poker with Gunten?" growled Bob.

"No playee poken with Guntee. Guntee velly bad boy!" answered Yen Chin. "Me good boy!"

"You lying heathen! The other day we gave Gunten the trail-rope for gambling with you. As for Frank, he never wrote that letter," said Bob. "You ungrateful little rascal! Frank's done you a lot of good turns, and you ought to stand by him now."

"No can. Flanky velly bad boy."

"Then shut up!" snapped Bob.

"No shutee up!" answered Yen Chin cheerfully. "Me tinkee Flanky velly bad boy, sultee nicee ole Molly. Velly bad boy, and you velly bad ole Bob for speakee to bad ole Flanky. Oh, yes— Yoop!" wound up Yen Chin, in a wild howl, as Bob Lawless, losing patience, took him by the neck and shook him.

Bob strode away angrily, leaving the heathen Chinese yelling.

Bob and Beauclerc looked rather grim in class that morning.

They were the only fellows in the school

who believed in the absent boy, and their belief in him was making them unpopular.

During morning lessons Mr. Lawless arrived from the ranch, and Miss Meadows left the school-room for a few minutes to speak to him.

She came back with a severe brow.

The fact that the rancher supported his nephew surprised her, and did not shake her opinion in the least. The suggestion that the letter had been forged by some revengeful hand she dismissed as an absurdity. And she did not want the rancher's nephew at the school. Indeed, she pointed out that it would be scarcely safe for Richards to venture among his schoolfellows in their present state of exasperation. Molly Lawrence was much liked and admired at Cedar Creek, and the letter in Frank's handwriting had made all the Cedar Creek fellows bitterly angry.

After lessons Bob Lawless and Beauclerc left together, without exchanging a word with their schoolfellows. They came on Tom and Molly Lawrence on the trail outside the gates, but the brother and sister looked the other way, and rode off as quickly as possible.

Bob's brow was black as he took the homeward trail.

"Pretty state of affairs now, isn't it, Cherub?" he growled.

Beauclerc nodded.

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BUY

THE

"HOLIDAY

ANNUAL!"

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NOW ON SALE!

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"We can't wonder at it, Bob," he answered. "The fellows all believe that Frank wrote that letter. We've got to prove somehow that he didn't."

"But how?" said Bob hopelessly.

"Somehow—I don't know how yet. But I can't believe that such a piece of rascality will be successful," said Beauclerc, with conviction.

Bob Lawless found his cousin in a far from happy mood when he arrived home at the ranch.

Frank Richards had spent the day in hard work as he was not at school. On a Canadian ranch there was always plenty to be done by willing hands. Frank was more than willing to work, but that day he had worked with a heavy heart. He looked hopefully at Bob as the Canadian schoolboy came trotting down the trail. There was a faint hope in his breast that something might have been discovered about the forged letter.

"Any news, Bob?" he asked.

Bob Lawless shook his head, and Frank's handsome face clouded again.

"But we'll get at the bottom of it somehow," said Bob hopefully. "Never say die, Franky, old scout!"

And the chums went into the ranch together.

On the following morning, and for some days, Bob Lawless started alone to school, Frank Richards remaining at the ranch. And during those sunny days of the bright Canadian spring Frank Richards' face had lost its old sunny look, for the hope that his innocence would be proved was growing fainter with every day that passed.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Confession!

YEN CHIN! You young rascal!"

Bob Lawless uttered that exclamation in angry tones.

He had come suddenly into the school-room at Cedar Creek, and found the heathen Chinese bending over his desk, going

through it with his slim, deft fingers. Bob had come in for a book he had left under his desk, little dreaming of the discovery he was going to make.

Yen Chin started and jumped away from the desk as he heard Bob's sharp and angry voice.

His hand, with a paper in it, disappeared into his loose garments, and came out empty. Bob Lawless strode towards him, with a knitted brow.

"What are you after, you young rascal?" he exclaimed.

"Pool lil' Chinese no do wrong!" mumbled Yen Chin, with a longing look at the doorway.

But Vere Beauclerc was standing in the doorway, waiting for his chum.

"What's the matter, Bob?" called out Beauclerc.

"This heathen was going through my desk!" answered Bob.

"What on earth for?"

"Blessed if I know! There's no money there."

"Pool lil' Chinese no takee anything!" howled Yen Chin. "Me no tief! What you tinkee?"

"You were after something, and you've taken something and hidden it in your rags!" growled Bob. "I saw you!"

"Handsome ole Bob makee mistake!"

"I couldn't have left any money there, or I should jolly well know what to think!" said Bob angrily. "But I want to know what you've taken."

"No takee!"

"I tell you I saw you!" roared Bob.

"No see! Pol lil' Chinese no stealee!"

Bob Lawless made a grasp at the little heathen, and Yen Chin dodged him and ran.

"Stop him, Cherub!" roared Bob.

Beauclerc stood ready to stop the heathen, and Yen Chin halted before he reached the doorway. But he heard Bob's heavy steps after him, and ran on, seeking to dodge the schoolboy in the doorway. Vere Beauclerc promptly caught him by his pigtail, and Yen Chin yelled dismally.

"Yow-ow! You lettee go! Pool lil' Chinese cly!"

"Hold him, Cherub!" panted Bob.

"I've got him!"

"You lettee go!" shouted Yen Chin, wriggling. "Nicee ole Molly! You makee Chelub lettee goee!"

Molly Lawrence was passing in the passage, and she looked round.

"It's all right, Molly," said Bob Lawless. "The heathen has taken something from my desk, and I want to know what it is."

"You bad boy, Yen Chin!" said Molly.

"No takee!" wailed Yen Chin. "Ugly ole Bob tellee lie, samee as bad ole Flanky!"

"You young rascal!" roared Bob. "Why, I'll—I'll—"

Molly Lawrence came quickly forward.

"What have you taken, Yen Chin?" she asked.

"No takee nothing. Me good boy—oh, yes!"

"Hold on to his pigtail while I see what he's taken," said Bob. And Beauclerc nodded—and held on.

Yen Chin wriggled as Bob turned out his pockets, a folded sheet of exercise-paper, covered with Bob's writing, coming to light. Bob stared at it in utter astonishment.

"What on earth did you want that for, you silly heathen?" he exclaimed.

"No wantee!" gasped Yen Chin. "You takee back. Ole paper—no good."

"You can have it if you like," said Bob.

"Why couldn't you say what it was? And why couldn't you ask me first, if you wanted it?"

"You give me papee?"

"Yes, you can have it if you like, you young ass! Blessed if I don't think you're loose in the roof!" grunted Bob. "Let him go, Cherub."

But Vere Beauclerc did not let the Chinese go. He tightened his grasp on Yen Chin's pigtail. His handsome face had taken on a very grim expression.

"Hold on a minute, Bob—and you, Molly," he said. "Before we let the young rascal go we'll find out what he wants that paper for."

"No wantee," said Yen Chin hastily.

"Then why did you take it?"

The heathen was silent. With all his Oriental facility in lying, he did not seem to have a falsehood ready.

"What does it matter, Cherub?" asked

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RIGHTING A WRONG!

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Bob, in wonder. "It's only a sheet of an essay, and it's done with."
 "It may matter a lot," answered Beauclerc quietly. "That old paper is covered with your handwriting, Bob."
 "Naturally, as it was in my desk. What does it matter?"
 "A lot, I think. It's a specimen of your handwriting."
 "Wha-a-at?"
 "Last week a letter was written in Frank's handwriting, and we wondered how the forger got a specimen to copy," said Vere Beauclerc, very quietly. "Now we find Yen Chin pilfering a specimen of your writing from your desk, Bob. It looks to me—"
 "Oh!" exclaimed Molly Lawrence.
 Bob understood.
 He grasped Yen Chin's shoulder, with a look on his sunburnt face that made the little heathen quake.
 "Out with it, you rascal!" said Bob, between his teeth. "That paper's worthless, but you don't want it for nothing."

"No stealee. Takee."
 "Whom did you take it for, then?"
 Yen Chin cast a hopeless glance round. There was no escape for him.
 "Guntee!" he whispered.
 "Kern Gunten!" shouted Bob.
 "Allee light."
 "Gunten made you take this paper from my desk?"
 "Me stony-bloke after playee piecee card!" wailed Yen Chin. "Gunten sayee givee dollee fol papee with handsome ole Bob's witing. Me no tinkee any wrong. Papee no gooddee."
 Molly uttered a cry.
 "Yen Chin! You wicked boy! Don't you know what Gunten wanted a sheet of Bob's handwriting for?"
 "Guntee no say."
 "Didn't you think, you silly heathen?" exclaimed Bob.
 "Me thinkee of Guntee's dollee," said Yen Chin simply. "Me gottee no money—me wantee dollee."
 Bob tightened his grasp on the heathen's shoulder till Yen Chin squeaked with pain. "Now, tell me this," said Bob savagely. "Has Gunten got you to take him any other chap's writing—Frank Richards', for example."
 "Answer that!" breathed Molly Lawrence.

day, when Bob Lawless came galloping from the timber.
 Bob was riding hard, and he waved his hat to Frank as he came tearing up, and Frank's heart leaped as he saw it. There was evidently news.
 "Franky!" yelled Bob, dashing up in a cloud of dust, and drawing in his horse so suddenly that the animal's hoofs struck fire from the stones. "Old man! Hurrah!"
 "Bob—"
 "It's all O. K.!" gasped Bob. "Right as rain, Franky! You're all right!"
 "Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Billy Cook.
 Bob Lawless jumped off his horse, his face ablaze with excitement and hard riding. Evidently he had made good speed from Cedar Creek. He grasped his cousin by the shoulders, and waltzed him round on the trail in the exuberance of his satisfaction.
 "All O. K.!" he thrilled. "All serene! Right as rain! You're all right! Hurrah!"
 "But—but what's happened?" gasped Frank breathlessly.
 "Oh, gum! I'm out of breath! It's all right! Gunten, Yen Chin, Miss Meadows knows! You're to come back to school! Hurrah!" panted Bob Lawless.
 "I guess that's good news," said Billy Cook heartily, and he clapped Frank Richards on the shoulder. "I knowed you was the real white goods, kid! You'd better go and tell your poppa, Bob. There he is in the doorway, with your moppa."
 Bob Lawless, grasping Frank's arm, rushed him to the ranch-house, where his father and Mrs. Lawless were looking out of the doorway, surprised to see Bob home from school at that hour.
 "What has happened, Bob?" demanded the rancher.
 Bob gasped for breath.
 "It's all out!" he said. "All O.K., poppa! I found Yen Chin—that blinking little heathen, you know—rummaging over my desk. And what do you think he was after? A copy of my fist! And then I never guessed. But the Cherub tumbled. The Cherub's sharp, poppa! And Yen Chin owned up that Gunten had offered him a dollar for a copy of my fist, and owned up that last week the foreign trash gave him a dollar for a copy of Frank's fist. What do you think of that, poppa?"
 Mr. Lawless knitted his brows.
 "It's pretty clear," he said.
 "Only the day before Molly Lawrence got that letter, Yen Chin took a copy of Frank's handwriting to Gunten," said Bob breathlessly. "He's owned up to Miss Meadows. I don't think he knew; in fact, I'm sure he didn't. He was only thinking of the dollars, the silly heathen! But it's plain enough what Gunten wanted the copy for."
 "The wicked boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawless, greatly shocked.
 Frank Richards drew a deep breath.
 "I guessed it was Gunten," he said. "There was no proof, but this is pretty good proof. We'll see whether Gunten has the nerve to deny it."
 The rancher nodded.
 "You can leave Gunten to me," he said. "I will ride over to the store and see his father, and have the matter out. Leave it in my hands."
 "Yes, uncle," said Frank, with rather reluctant assent. He would have preferred to deal with Kern Gunten with his own hands.
 But the matter was too serious to be left to a schoolboy. Frank was aware that it was better for his uncle to deal with it, and he submitted cheerfully.
 "Has Miss Meadows sent you for Frank, Bob?" asked the rancher.
 "Yes, dad. I'm to take him back to Cedar Creek this afternoon."
 "Good!"
 Frank Richards' face was very bright when he rode away on the trail for school with his Canadian cousin. The clouds had rolled by at last. He was late for afternoon lessons, and all Cedar Creek was in the big school-room; and never had Frank Richards been so glad to see the school-room before. In the last few shadowed days he had wondered whether he would ever set his feet inside Cedar Creek again, or whether he had looked his last on the backwoods school.

There was a buzz in the school-room as Frank entered with Bob Lawless. Vere Beauclerc waved his hand to him from the class, with a joyous smile, and Tom Lawrence gave him a welcoming grin. Molly coloured



ENCOURAGEMENT FOR FRANK RICHARDS! Frank waited with beating heart while his uncle read the schoolmistress' letter. Mr. Lawless spoke at last. "I believe you, Frank," he said. "This will want looking into. But you must stay away from the school till the truth is found out. Keep a stiff upper lip, my boy!" (See Chapter 2.)

Somebody has put you up to getting a specimen of my fist."
 "Me no savvy."
 "It's worked so well in Frank's case that I'm to be the next!" said Bob, white with anger. "Somebody's going to get an insulting letter in my handwriting next. I see the game. Thank goodness you had the sense to think of it, Cherub! This young rascal is the man—unless he's been put up to this by somebody else. He stole a specimen of Frank's hand, same as he's stolen a specimen of mine. It's plain enough now. Yen Chin, you young villain, did you write that letter to Molly?"
 Yen Chin gave a dismal yell.
 "No white nothing. No can."
 "He couldn't have done it, Bob," said Beauclerc. "We know his fist—he can hardly write English. It was some chap accustomed to handling the pen who forged Frank's hand. Yen Chin got the specimen for him; there's no doubt of that now. Yen Chin, you're coming to Miss Meadows."
 "No wantee see Missy Meadee!" wailed the hapless heathen. "Missy Meadee whackee pool lil' Chinee!"
 "Who got you to steal this paper?" demanded Bob.
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"You hurtee pool lil' Chinee!" wailed Yen Chin.
 "Answer me!" snapped Bob.
 "Allee light. Lastee weekee Guntee givee me dollee for takee papee flom ole Flanky's desk," whimpered Yen Chin.
 "What did he want it for?"
 "Guntee no say. Me no tinkee harm."
 "I believe the little idiot didn't know what Gunten's game was," said Bob, after a pause. "He was only thinking of the money, and gambling with it, the little rascal! You can come to Miss Meadows and tell her, Yen Chin."
 "No wantee see Missy Meadee—"
 "That doesn't make any difference," answered Bob grimly. "Come on!"
 And Yen Chin, quaking, was led into Miss Meadows' sitting-room, with Bob's iron grasp on his shoulder.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Cleared at Last!

FRANK RICHARDS started.
 "Bob!" he exclaimed.
 Frank was talking with Billy Cook on the ranch trail after dinner that

"A Backwoods Mystery!"—That's the Title to Remember—Next Week!

and smiled. It was clear that Frank was on his old footing with the Cedar Creek crowd.

Miss Meadows turned to the cousins as they came in, the lesson stopping. She gave Frank a kind smile.

"Come here, Richards!" the schoolmistress called out.

Frank joined her before the class, his cheeks red, but his eyes very bright. The buzz in the school-room, deepened, and Miss Meadows made a sign for silence.

"Richards, your cousin has made a discovery here to-day. No doubt he has told you of Yen Chin's confession."

"Yes, ma'am," said Frank.

"There is no doubt in my mind now that the letter sent to Molly Lawrence was a forgery," continued Miss Meadows, her voice heard in every corner of the school-room, in breathless silence. "Yen Chin has confessed that Gunten bribed him to obtain a copy of your handwriting, the day before the letter was written. The conclusion is plain. The matter is very serious, and I shall see your uncle and Mr. Gunten about it. For the present, Richards, the matter rests there, and you return to Cedar Creek cleared of all suspicion of having acted in the base manner for which you were condemned."

"Hurrah!" came from Bob Lawless.

Miss Meadows smiled.

"I am sorry, Richards, that you were condemned unjustly. I cannot blame myself for being deceived by what looked like conclusive evidence, but I am very sorry! Your name is cleared, my boy."

And Miss Meadows shook hands with Frank Richards before the class, and Frank went to his place.

"I'm sorry, old scout!" whispered Tom Lawrence, as he passed.

Frank nodded cheerily.

"All serene!" he said. "You were taken in. It's all right."

"Me solly, too, ole Flanky!" murmured Yen Chin.

"You little rascal!"

Molly Lawrence did not speak, but her glance was eloquent, and showed that Frank Richards was forgiven for what he had not done!

That afternoon was a very happy one to Frank Richards. When lessons were over he was surrounded by a friendly crowd as he came out of the lumber schoolhouse. In his happiness he could almost have found it in his heart to forgive Kern Gunten's black treachery.

But that was not to be. Gunten was yet to be dealt with.

THE END.

(There will be another fine story of Frank Richards & Co. next Tuesday.)

"MORGAN O"

THE MAIN!"

(Continued from page 6.)

And when Don Jose asked him what he said, monsieur smiled—a vague smile.

"I had a mind to prepare a new lodging for you, senor," said he. "But tell me," he murmured. "Do you believe in dreams?"

Despite himself, the Don could not repress a start at the unusual question.

"How now, Sir Governor?" he frowned. "Hast taken leave of your senses?"

But the Governor seemed to be going to sleep. He slipped lower and lower in his chair, till his velvet hat fell over one eye, giving him a lop-sided appearance. With a snort of disgust, the Spaniard went to the door.

"Senor," called monsieur, "in my dream methought I was hanging outside my own castle walls!"

Don Jose stopped as if shot. In an age of superstition, the Don was more superstitious than most.

"Monsieur," he asked—and his voice trembled—"was that all your dream?"

The recumbent figure drew itself upright and adjusted its hat.

"Not quite," he said. "For I dreamed the pirate Morgan had the hanging of me!"

Don Jose turned white as a sheet. He looked fearfully around the room, as if he expected the dead buccaneer to spring from behind the arras. Then, after a last look at the Governor, he fled; but as he went monsieur called after him, and every word came to the Don with startling distinctness.

"As Morgan hanged me," he said, "he gave me a message to carry to the shades."

And the pallid Don came trembling to the door.

"He bade me tell them to prepare a place for you!"

Then with a crash the door shut to, and monsieur was alone with the price of his treachery.

Don Jose's footsteps died away in the distance, and monsieur rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Pierre!" he called. And as the man's dark face appeared monsieur yawned. "To bed with you. I will spend the hours seeing that Senor Admiral has not cheated me!"

And he reached for a canvas bucket, full to the brim with the Spaniard's gold.

(Another long thrilling instalment of our powerful romantic serial in next week's bumper issue.)

"THE SNEAK

OF THE THIRD!"

(Continued from page 10.)

"It wasn't! He—he—" stammered Teddy. "I saw the whole occurrence," exclaimed Mr. Bohun. "Wegg was not even looking at you when you struck him."

"He wouldn't answer me," muttered Teddy sullenly.

"What! You dare to say that you struck Wegg because he did not answer you?" exclaimed Mr. Bohun in amazement. "Follow me to my study at once, Lovell minor. I shall punish you most severely. Come!"

"I—I—"

"Silence! Follow me at once!" Mr. Bohun strode away, and Lovell minor, after an instant's hesitation, followed at his heels.

The fags looked at one another with delighted grins.

Wegg was rubbing his nose, but he was grinning, too.

"Oh, what larks!" murmured Grant ecstatically.

The fags crept along the passage, to listen as near to Mr. Bohun's door as they could venture. There was a sound of swishing from the study, mingled with suppressed howls from Lovell minor.

"He's getting it!" chuckled Wegg. "He's a Bohun and a blessing this time!" chortled Stacey, and the fags chortled gleefully.

Lovell of the Fourth stood near the big doorway with a clouded brow. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome went out into the quad.

Teddy came out of Mr. Bohun's study at last.

His face was pale, and there were heavy, unshed tears in his eyes. He started as he saw the crowd of fags in the passage.

They did not speak. They lined up, for the hapless outcast to pass between two rows of grinning faces. They expected him to scowl and glare; but the unfortunate Teddy was past scowling and glaring at that moment. He was only thinking of the ache in his palms.

Squeezing his hands together, and trying hard to keep back his tears, Teddy Lovell limped away, leaving the fags chortling in his rear.

"That's what he wanted!" grinned Wegg. "He wouldn't be happy till he got it!" chortled Pipkin. "He's got it!"

"But he don't look happy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Teddy Lovell limped on, and his major joined him near the door.

Lovell's face was very kind and tender. "Poor old chap!" he said softly. "You've had it hard, Teddy?"

"Oh! Ow!" muttered Teddy. "The beast! Oh, the rotter! He'd no right to cane me! I wish I'd kicked his shins now!"

"Teddy, old chap—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Teddy.

And he went on, leaving Arthur Edward apparently attempting to gulp something down.

Lovell's look was very sombre as he joined his comrades in the quadrangle.

"How's Teddy?" asked Jimmy Silver, with as much sympathy as he could muster for friendship's sake.

"Teddy? Oh, I don't know—never mind him!" muttered Lovell. "Let's go and punt a footer; I'm fed up with him."

"Right-ho!"

And the subject of Teddy was dropped. But Arthur Edward Lovell, fed up as he was, remained thoughtful while he was punting the footer with his chums. He was thinking of Teddy, and wondering whether he would ever get on better at Rookwood, and whether he could help him to get on better. If he could, Arthur Edward Lovell's loyal affection would not be wanting, though in his heart he could not help acknowledging that the fags were right, and that Lovell minor was a disgrace to his Form.

THE END.

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