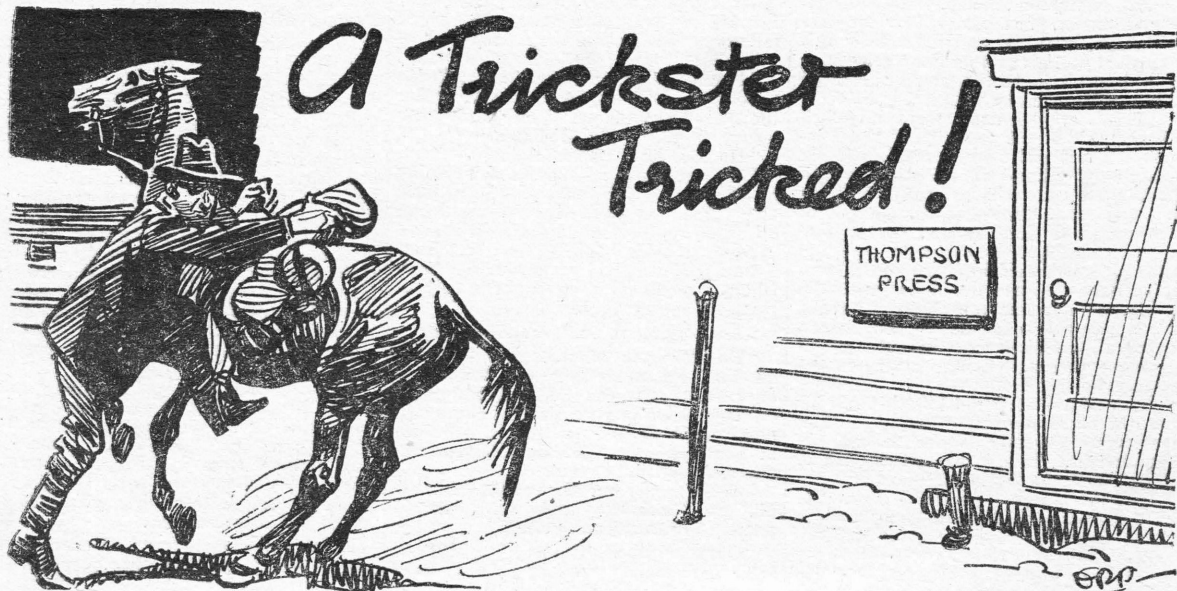


THE SWINDLE THAT FAILED! Mr. Penrose, the enterprising editor of the "Thompson Press," is forced to realise that his extraordinary trick to improve the circulation of his paper, is going to bring him trouble of a nature he had never dreamed of!



An Unusually Exciting Long Complete tale of Frank Richards & Co., the cheery chums of the School in the Backwoods!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Yen Chin Makes a Discovery!

FLANKY!" Little Yen Chin sidled up to Frank Richards, as he came in at the gates of Cedar Creek School, with his chums, on Monday morning.

"Hallo, kid!" said Frank cheerily.

"Missel Penrose wantee see you at Thompson—"

"Bother Mr. Penrose!"

"But he wantee see you," said Yen Chin, eyeing Frank Richards curiously with his sly, almond eyes. "He callee me when me passe, and givee me message. Wantee see you at office aftel school."

Frank Richards' face clouded.

Evidently the message from the editor of the "Thompson Press" was not a welcome one to the schoolboy author.

"We can ride over after lessons, Frank," remarked Bob Lawless.

Frank shook his head.

"I'm not going," he said.

"But an editorial request is equivalent to a Royal invitation," said Vere Beauclerc, smiling. "Mr. Penrose will expect you."

"Let him expect!" said Frank, with a frown. "Yen Chin, you pass Mr. Penrose's office on your way home?"

The little Chinese nodded.

"Me passe!" he said.

"Will you call in with an answer?"

"Me callee."

"Tell Mr. Penrose that he can go and eat coke!" said Frank.

Yen Chin's almond eyes opened wide.

"You wantee me tellee Missel Penrose eattee coke!" he ejaculated.

"That's it."

"Allee light! Me tellee!"

Frank Richards led his horse out of the corral, followed by his chums, who exchanged a glance of surprise.

"I reckoned something was up between Franky and Mr. Penrose after we were there the other evening," Bob

remarked to Vere Beauclerc. "There's trouble in the family!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Beauclerc. "But Frank had better not send that message. He will get pushed off the staff."

Frank Richards, still with a frowning brow, put up his horse, and was about to leave the corral, when his chums stopped him. They wanted an explanation.

"Hold on!" said Bob. "School isn't for another ten minutes yet. Now, what are you up to, Franky?"

"How do you mean?"

"You've had a row with Penrose?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had, but you haven't told us anything about it. Keeping secrets from your old pards!" said Bob Lawless severely.

Frank Richards coloured.

"Well, I'd rather not talk about it," he said. "It's a rotten business. But I'm not going to see Penrose any more."

"But you do a story every week for his paper," said Beauclerc.

"I'm going to chuck it."

"Because he doesn't square?" grinned Bob.

"No; other reasons."

"This won't do!" said Bob seriously. "Mr. Penrose pays up every now and then, and you can't afford to chuck dollars away. Besides, he will lose all his circulation if he loses the only good thing in his pesky paper. What has poor old Penrose done?"

Frank Richards was silent.

"Give it a name!" urged Bob. "Is it something to do with his new stunt—the Thousand Dollar Prize Competition?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"But that doesn't concern you!"

"As it happens, it does."

"But as a member of the staff—in fact, as all the staff—you ought not to compete," said Beauclerc. "There's

generally a rule that members of the staff on a paper don't compete."

Frank Richards shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I'd better tell you," he said at last. "I don't want it talked all over Cedar Creek, of course. Mr. Penrose is offering a prize of a thousand dollars for the first-opened answer to a dashed silly puzzle—"

"When does a horse become a building?" grinned Bob. "Everybody in the Thompson Valley is having a go at it, I guess."

"The answer's easy enough," said Frank. "Anybody could guess it on his head. That's where the catch comes in. Every fellow will think he has a chance of the prize."

"Well, so he has—if there is a prize."

"But there isn't!"

Bob laughed.

"I reckon I thought Mr. Penrose would find it a hefty job to raise a thousand dollars," he said. "But if he doesn't give the prize he will be rooted out of his office and lynched, I guess, after the way the Thompson folks have been buying up his paper at twenty-five cents a time."

"It's a swindle!" said Frank. "His idea is to fix up a dummy prize-winner."

"By gum! How do you know?"

"He told me," said Frank, his frown deepening. "He fixed on me for the spoof winner. There isn't any thousand dollars; he only wants a name and address."

"The cheeky jay!" exclaimed Bob indignantly.

"You refused?" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"Of course. We had a row in the office, and I'm not going there again. The silly owl took it for granted that I shouldn't have any objection, it appears. That's the way he learned the newspaper business in New York, according to what he says. He was quite surprised when I refused!" said

THE POPULAR.—No. 335.

Frank savagely. "He will have to look a bit farther for a spoofer!"

Bob Lawless whistled.

"By gum! If this got out he would have a lynch-crowd round his office!" he said. "He's a jay to try such a game in the Thompson Valley. Billy Cook, our foreman, has spent four or five dollars on coupons; and if he knew this he would pull his gun on Penrose as soon as look at him. And so would a hundred other galoots in the valley, I guess!"

"That's why I don't want it talked about," said Frank uneasily. "Old Penrose is a fool and a rogue combined. He doesn't really know anything about business. He's too sharp, really, to be a business man. How he will get out of the scrape I don't know. But I've warned him that he's got to give the prize now he's sold his paper on it, and if he fixes up some dummy winner I'm going to show him up. He can't make me a party to a swindle. So he can spend all his time now in getting together a thousand dollars to pay to the winner."

"I reckon that would take him all his natural life and a bit over," said Bob, laughing. "I never believed he had the spondulicks. This will mean the end of the 'Thompson Press,' I reckon!"

"All the better!" grunted Frank. "If he doesn't square he will have to clear out of the valley, and good riddance!"

"But he wants to see you—"

"Only to argue," said Frank. "He doesn't understand why I refuse; but I'm not going to see him again. He can go and eat coke!"

"Hallo, there's the bell!"

The chums of the backwoods left the corral, and walked away towards the schoolhouse.

There was a soft chuckle behind the corral fence, as Yen Chin, who had been crouching there out of sight, rose to his feet and blinked after the three chums.

Yen Chin had overheard every word, and it evidently gave him food for satisfaction, for he almost doubled up in a paroxysm of silent merriment. He trotted after Frank Richards & Co. to the lumber school, and his face was still wreathed in a happy grin when he took his place in Miss Meadows' class.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Perplexing Position!

CHUNKY TODGERS joined the company when they came out from lessons in the backwoods school that morning.

"Hold on a minute, Richards!" he exclaimed.

"Give us a rest, Chunky," answered Frank impatiently. "I've heard more than enough about the thousand-dollar prize."

"I guess—"

"We've told you about a hundred times we're not finding the cash for a merry syndicate," grinned Bob Lawless. "Go and chop chips, Chunky."

Chunky Todgers gave them a reproachful look. The fat Chunky was keener of all on the subject of the great cash prize offered in the "Thompson Press." In his imagination he had already spent the thousand dollars several times over.

"You galoots haven't any hoss-sense," said Chunky, more in sorrow than in anger. "With twenty dollars to spend on coupons I guess I could make sure of roping in the prize. It would be a dead sure cinch!"

"Suppose there isn't any prize!" suggested Bob.

THE POPULAR.—No. 335.

"Oh, rot! There is."

"There isn't!" snapped Frank.

"Rot!" said Chunky again. "Penrose wouldn't dare to spoof us. He would get lynched. You're talking out of your hat, Richards! Now, I've got a set of answers to the puzzle, and I want coupons for each one. You fellows need only find the money—"

"Rats!"

"I've asked every other chap at Cedar Creek," said Chunky sorrowfully. "But there ain't any takers. You've got some money in the bank, Richards—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

That was quite a common observation of Chunky's. Whenever he was hard up—which was often—his fat mind ran on the subject of Frank Richards' "money in the bank." The fact that Frank Richards had money in the bank Chunky seemed to regard as a sort of personal injury to himself.

"It's staying there," said Frank.

"I'll tell you what," said Chunky. "I don't mind letting you know my answers, so that you'll see what a splendid chance we've got. You fellows would never guess the conundrum in a month of Sundays. I've got six different answers, all good."

"There's only one answer that I know of," said Frank, "and that's simple enough for an owl to guess."

"Give us yours, Chunky," said Bob, with a chuckle. "When does a horse become a building?—that's the conundrum. How do you figure it out?"

"It never does!" said Chunky.

"Eh! Is that an answer?"

"That's one," said Chunky. "It's a catch, you know. I'm risking seventy-five cents on that answer; three coupons at twenty-five each."

"If you've nothing better than that—"

"Oh, I've some more—in case of accidents, you know. Another answer is, when it becomes its stable."

"Eh?"

"A pun on the word 'become'—see?" said Chunky. "To become means to be becoming—see? Sort of pun on the word. You fellows would never have thought of that."

"Blessed if I should!" said Bob. "It's rather too deep for me."

"It's rather too deep for me!"

"It's rather too deep for any fellow without much brain," explained Chunky Todgers.

"What?"

"No offence, you know; but I've told you often enough that I'm the only chap at Cedar Creek with any brains to speak of. If you fellows think you can find a better answer, I'd like to hear it. Try!" said Chunky Todgers disdainfully.

"Ass!" said Frank. "The answer's obvious enough."

"What is it, then?"

"When does a horse become a building? When it's turned into a stable," said Frank.

Chunky started, and pondered a little. "Well, that might be right," he said. "It's not so good as my answer—not so deep, you know; but it might be right. I'll put that in, if you fellows will stand the money. Don't march off while I'm speaking to you, you silly jays—"

But the company did march off.

Molly Lawrence and Kate Dawson were going on the frozen creek with their skates, and Frank Richards & Co. joined them. Somehow, they found Molly and Kate's company more entertaining than Chunky's.

But Frank Richards was looking very thoughtful when he came in to dinner; and he was very thoughtful for the remainder of the day.

He felt that he was in an awkward position.

Every fellow at Cedar Creek was taking at least one chance in the "Thompson Press" competition; and Frank was well aware that they were throwing their money away—unless Mr. Penrose could be forced to "pay up."

To see his schoolfellows swindled was impossible; and yet to tell them what he knew was difficult. All the town of Thompson had entered in the thousand-dollar prize competition with enthusiasm; such "stunts" were rare enough in the outlying settlement, and it had caught on. The "Thompson Press" had sold like hot cakes on the strength of it; Mr. Penrose had exhausted his whole supply of paper in meeting the demand. If the facts were known—as they were known to Frank Richards—the enterprising gentleman from "Noo York" would be in great peril of being lynched over his own door. Frank Richards did not want to be the cause of that.

Mr. Penrose had quite coolly and calmly assumed that Frank would enter into the scheme—Frank being his "staff"; all the staff he had. But the staff of the "Thompson Press" had now severed its connection with the paper, much to the enterprising gentleman's wrath and astonishment.

Frank's angry refusal had come as a surprise—a very dismaying surprise—to Mr. Penrose.

What he ought to do was a problem to Frank. To give Mr. Penrose away was to rouse an angry mob to deal with him; while to allow the swindle to proceed was impossible.

Frank could only hope that the threat of exposure would induce the too-enterprising gentleman to run straight. But, even so, it was a mystery where Mr. Penrose would get the necessary thousand dollars from.

It was doubtful if the enlarged sale of the paper would raise that sum; moreover, it was Mr. Penrose's habit to expend his takings, as they came in, in the poker-room or the bar-room at the Occidental.

Frank Richards' position was a very unpleasant one. But whatever happened, he was determined not to go near the office of the "Thompson Press" again.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Yen Chin makes a Bargain!

MR. PENROSE was in his office when Yen Chin arrived there, after school that day. He was not at work. He sat on the bench where he was accustomed to set type, with his pipe going, and a glass of whisky-and-water at his side. He wore rather a worried look.

The last few days had been days of worry to the enterprising gentleman from New York. Frank Richards' refusal to enter into his precious scheme had put him into what he called a "quandary." It was too late to withdraw the offer of the prize. Hundreds of copies of the "Thompson Press" had been sold to meet the new demand—Mr. Penrose had cleared at least five hundred dollars, in additional profits from the sale. Unfortunately, that five hundred dollars had taken unto itself wings, and flown away—with the assistance of Kentuck, the poker-player, in the card-room at the Occidental.

So far from being money in pocket, Mr. Penrose was in debt for an additional paper bill—such being the hapless gentleman's methods of conducting his

business. He was, in fact, far too thirsty a gentleman to succeed at any business.

Somehow or other he had to get out of the scrape he had landed himself in; but at present he could see no way. A spoof prize-winner had to be "fixed" up; but where and how to find the necessary individual, Mr. Penrose did not know.

He had to find somebody he could trust, and it was difficult to find a trustworthy person to enter a swindle. Trustworthiness and swindling did not really go hand in hand.

He brightened a little as there came a step in the doorway. For the moment he hoped that it was Frank Richards, coming in answer to his message. He was prepared to welcome that erring sheep back into the fold with open arms. But it was only Yen Chin.

"Well?" grunted Mr. Penrose morosely.

"Flanky say Missel Penlose goey eatee cokeek!" announced Yen Chin.

Snort!

"Flanky givee me notee."

"Hand it over!"

The heathen Chinese handed over Frank Richards' note. Mr. Penrose read it, and snorted again, and tore it into small pieces.

"Vamoose!" he said ungraciously.

Instead of vamoosing, the heathen Chinese closed the office door, and then came towards Mr. Penrose with a sly grin.

"Me knowee," he said.

Mr. Penrose stared at him.

"What do you mean, you durned heathen?" he snapped.

"Me hearee Flanky talkee at Cedar Cleek," said the heathen cheerfully. "He tellee Bob Lawless. Me knowee all the game, Missel Penlose. Yen Chin velly sharp Chinese."

Mr. Penrose gave him a glare and slipped from the bench. His intention of kicking the little heathen out into Main Street was so evident that Yen Chin jumped back in alarm.

"All selene!" he exclaimed hastily. "Me no givee gamey away. You rely on pool lill' Chinese. What you tinkee? Me plize-winnel?"

"What?"

"Flanky Lichards great fool!" said Yen Chin contemptuously. "No knowee nuff to go in when lainee. Me, Yen Chin, velly sharp lill' lascal! What you tinkee?"

Mr. Penrose gazed at him. He half-raised his heavy boot, and lowered it to the planks again.

"Cough it up!" he said. "What are you driving at, you benighted heathen?"

"You wantee somebodee to winny plizee, no payee," said Yen Chin. "Me knowee. You gib me ten dollee, and me winnee plizee that you no payee. Savvy?"

Mr. Penrose eyed him thoughtfully.

His inclination was strong to kick the grinning little heathen into the middle of Main Street. But he could not help realising that Yen Chin was offering him a way out of his difficulty that had been hopeless before.

In a few days, at the latest, the name of the prize-winner had to be given in the "Thompson Press." It had to be a winner who would not expect to receive the prize. Certainly, Mr. Penrose could have found any number of galoots to play the part for a few dollars, that was certain. But it was equally certain that such "galoots" would have spent the money in fire-water, and then told the story up and down Thompson.

Yen Chin was really a windfall.

In the first place, he had learned the facts by playing the eavesdropper. He

knew enough to give the game away, so the enterprising gentleman would be running no further risk in trusting him a little farther. It was annoying that the heathen should know so much. But he did, and that fact had to enter into calculation.

And there had to be somebody. Better chance Yen Chin than let an entirely new person into the shady secret! That was Mr. Penrose's final decision; so he refrained from kicking Yen Chin. Mentally he promised himself the pleasure of kicking him at some future date.

"Ten dollars," he said at last.

"Allee lightee."

"You'll keep it up that you're the prize-winner all O.K.," said Mr. Penrose. "If you're asked about the bill, you sent it off to a poor relation in New Westminster—nope, that's too near—in San Francisco."

"Me savvy."

"It's a cinch, then," said Mr. Penrose, with a sigh.

He did not like parting with a ten-dollar bill. But, after all, that was a cheap way out of the very serious scrape he was landed in.

For some little time the heathen Chinese remained in the office, listening to the instructions of the New York gentleman. He listened with a docility that was very agreeable to Mr. Penrose. Indeed, the Chinese was so amenable to reason that Mr. Penrose was glad he was dealing with him and not with that obstinate and self-opinionated youth, Frank Richards. Yen Chin was as clay in the potter's hand, to be moulded as the enterprising gentleman liked. At all events, that was the impression he gave Mr. Penrose.

The latter breathed more freely when Yen Chin took his departure at last.

"That lets me out!" he murmured. "I guess it's all serene now! By gum! I was thinknig I was in an awful scrape owing to that young jay Richards cutting up rusty! But I guess it's all O.K. now."

And Mr. Penrose locked his office in a satisfied frame of mind, and walked round to the Occidental Hotel with the free and easy step of a gentleman who has thrown care to the winds.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Prize-Winner!

"ROTTEN!"

"Yen Chin!"

"Lucky little beast!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

It was Friday again, and a crowd of Cedar Creek fellows were gathered in the playground round Chunky Todgers. Chunky had brought the earliest copy of the "Thompson Press" to school with him. He had also brought a sad and lugubrious countenance.

For the name of the winner of the great thousand-dollar prize was in that issue of the "Thompson Press," and the name was not Joseph Todgers.

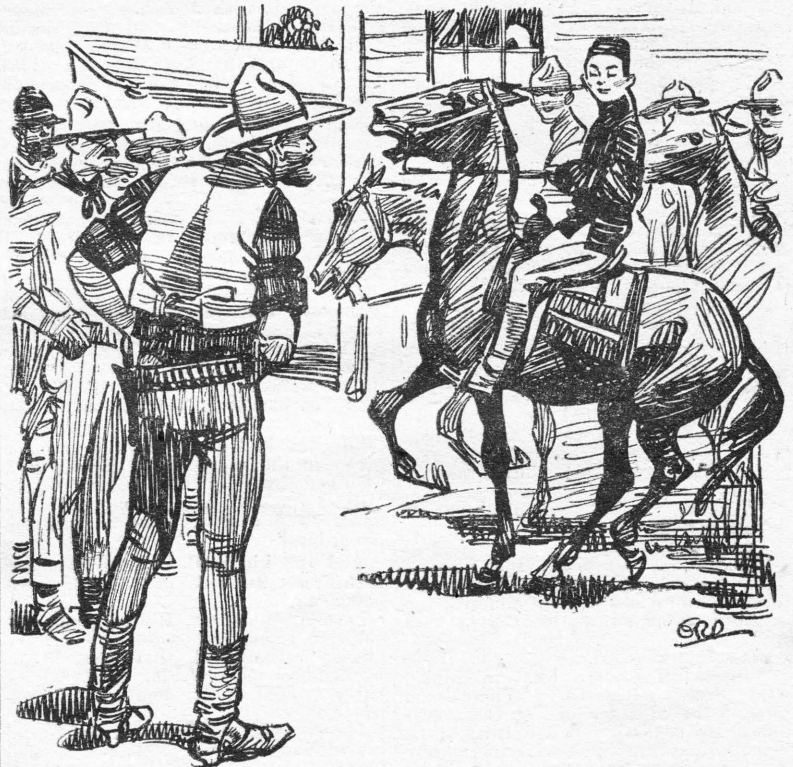
Frank Richards & Co. clattered up to the gate as the Cedar Creek fellows were examining the paper. They joined the group.

"All the winners?" asked Bob Lawless, with a laugh.

"Is the prize given?" exclaimed Frank.

"Yep!" groaned Chunky. "Your answer was right, Richards—when it's turned into a stable. Yen Chin got it right."

"Yen Chin!" exclaimed Frank.



OFF TO COLLECT THE PRIZE! "Thar's the winner!" said Buster Bill, as Yen Chin rode past. "Thar's the heathen who roped in the thousand-dollar prize!" Yen Chin grinned. "You comee see Missel Penlose payee plizee," he suggested. "You comee see fair play!" (See Chapter 4.)

"Yep!"

"He's won the prize?" yelled Bob.

"Yep!"

"Well, my hat!"

Frank Richards stared at the announcement in the paper. It ran:

"Result of the Thompson Press Grand Prize Competition!
Thousand Dollars Won by a Resident of Thompson Town!
Paid on the Nail!

"The answer to the conundrum given in last week's 'Thompson Press' is 'When it's turned into a stable!'"

"The first-opened correct answer was sent in by

Yen Chin,
Chinese Laundry,
Main Street,
Thompson,

to whom the prize of one thousand dollars has been duly awarded.

"The sealed envelope containing the answer, deposited at the Thompson Bank, will be opened this afternoon in the presence of any citizen who cares to mosey along. That our readers trust us we know; but we choose to place the Grand Competition, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion!"

"Well!" said Frank, with a deep breath.

"It's all square," said Chunky Todgers dismally. "The answer being at the bank beforehand shows that Penrose has given the right answer in the paper, and hasn't rung in a change on us. I know it's all square, but it's rotten, all the same! I've lost a dollar and a half on the pesky stunt. If you fellows had financed me, I might have bagged the thousand dollars, though perhaps you're sorry now you were so jolly mean."

Frank Richards & Co. walked away without replying. They looked for Yen Chin, and found that cheery heathen grinning in the playground. "So you're the winner?" said Beauclere.

The little Celestial nodded.

"Got your thousand dollars yet?" asked Bob sceptically.

"Nottee yet."

"Let's see it when you get it," said Frank Richards.

"Allee lightee. Me call on Missel Penlose aftee school and askee for plize," said Yen Chin. "You comee and see Missel Penlose payee."

"Good! We'll come," said Frank.

They left the little Chinese grinning. Frank Richards was sorely puzzled.

"Looks fair and square enough," Bob Lawless confessed. "If Mr. Penrose had wedged in some hobo as the prize-winner it would be suspicious; but Yen Chin is a Cedar Creek chap, though he's a pesky heathen—"

"He's an unscrupulous little rascal," said Frank.

"I guess so. But he's won the prize, hasn't he?"

Frank paused.

"My word!" exclaimed Bob Lawless breathlessly. "Franky! You don't think Penrose has fixed it up with the heathen, as he wanted to fix it up with you?"

Beauclere whistled.

"Blessed if I know what to think," said Frank Richards. "There's no getting the truth out of Yen Chin, anyhow. He couldn't tell the truth if he tried. If he's going to call on Penrose for the prize it looks square. We'll see what happens after school."

Frank was sorely perplexed, as a matter of fact. The unscrupulousness of Yen Chin was pretty well known at the backwoods school. He was quite rascal

enough to lend himself to a swindling scheme. On the other hand, Yen Chin, as a competitor, had as much chance as anybody else of having his solution opened first. If it was a swindle, Frank could not see how it was to be proved, so long as Yen Chin and Mr. Penrose were careful to keep their own counsel. But if it was a concocted scheme between the two of them, why was Yen Chin calling at the office for his thousand dollars, and asking Frank Richards & Co. to accompany him?

That was a mystery.

Frank Richards and his chums were keen enough for the day's lessons to be over, so that they could ride over to Thompson. When the time came, they found that some more Cedar Creek fellows intended to accompany Yen Chin. The little Chinese had asked nearly all the school to come with him, and a good number of the fellows had decided to go. Frank was more and more puzzled. It really looked as if Mr. Penrose had made a virtue of necessity, and determined to "shell out" the prize, after all. But even in that case it remained a mystery how he could possibly have raised such a sum.

Frank Richards & Co., and Chunky Todgers, Tom Lawrence, and a dozen more Cedar Creek fellows, rode into Main Street at Thompson together, escorting Yen Chin to the "Press" office. Yen Chin trotted along on his pony, with a placid and contented smile on his yellow face, and a sly, cunning gleam in his almond eyes.

Outside Gunten's Store there was a crowd, and copies of the latest number of the "Thompson Press" were much in evidence. The announcement of the prize-winner was the great topic in Thompson that day. Buster Bill, the big cattleman, was making remarks on the subject, with a richness of adjectives that was really eloquent. Buster Bill had spent ten dollars or so on coupons, and he had got the right answer; but he had evidently not had the luck to be "opened first."

Yen Chin checked his pony as he came by the stores. Evidently the prize-winner desired to attract attention to his fortunate self. Buster Bill glared at him.

"Thar he is!" he said. "That's the heathen that's roped in the dollars! I guess it's too good luck for a pesky heathen. If it was a white man, we'd make him stand drinks all round. Vamoose the ranch, you pigtailed pagan!"

"You comee see Missel Penlose payee plize?" suggested Yen Chin. "P'laps he no wantee payee pool lill' Chinee. You big handsome 'Melican man, you see fair play."

"I guess he'll pay. Ain't your name given in the paper?" said Buster Bill, mollified by Yen Chin's soft words. "But I guess I'll mosey along and see it done. 'Tain't often I see a thousand-dollar bill."

And the big cattleman strode along with Frank Richards' party to the newspaper office.

Several of Buster Bill's friends decided to come, too—curious to see the handsome bank-bill that was to be handed over to Yen Chin. Quite a large party arrived at the door of Mr. Penrose's office.

The editorial gentleman looked out of his window in surprise. It seemed that he was not expecting callers. Buster Bill hurled open the door, and the crowd swarmed into the dusty shanty.

Mr. Penrose's eyes turned on Yen Chin with an expression of threatening inquiry.

"What's this stunt?" he asked.

"Me winny plize," said Yen Chin softly.

"Correct!"

"Me callee for thousand dollee!"

"Wha-at?"

"Me winny—s'posee you payee!" said Yen Chin.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Precious Pair!

YEN CHIN smiled sweetly at the editorial gentleman.

His smile was not returned.

Mr. Penrose was staring at him as if the grinning little Chinese were some dreadful vision.

"What?" he stuttered, at last.

"You payee up—yes?"

"Why, you young scoundrel—" roared Mr. Penrose, taken off his guard in his angry alarm and indignation.

"You no callee pool lill' Chinee names," said Yen Chin deprecatingly.

"Me wantee payee plize. Me winny plize, me tinkee. Oh, yes!"

"That's fair and squar!" said Buster Bill. "The heathen's won the prize. Hyer it is in your own paper, boss. What's the matter with handing him his money?"

Mr. Penrose did not answer.

Frank Richards & Co. eyed him very curiously. They read wrath and indignation and terror in his face.

The hapless swindler was fairly "flummoxed," as he would have described it. He understood now why Yen Chin had brought a crowd of witnesses with him!

He understood that in making that arrangement with him, the wily little heathen had simply been pulling his dishonest leg.

Yen Chin had agreed to pose as the prize-winner for the payment of ten dollars. And his intention had been—as soon as the public announcement placed the wretched schemer in his power—to demand the thousand!

Mr. Penrose saw that now!

He discovered it rather too late to be of much use to him. The cunning little heathen had fooled him all along the line.

For it was impossible to deny Yen Chin's claim without letting out the whole story. And if the hapless man had revealed his secret arrangement with Yen Chin, there was not the slightest doubt that Buster Bill and his comrades would have laid violent hands upon him, and sacked the office, and probably lynched the swindler on the nearest tree. Buster Bill & Co. were not the kind of men to take such trickery tamely. So far from daring to defy Yen Chin, Mr. Penrose dared not let a whisper escape him—a breath of suspicion would have put his valuable neck in danger.

The weird and mingled expressions on Mr. Penrose's face were no mystery to Frank Richards. He guessed easily enough how matters stood—that his place as a spoof prizewinner had been assigned to Yen Chin, and that the wily heathen had betrayed his confederate. Frank smiled grimly. The schemer had been hoist by his own petard, and certainly it served him right.

Mr. Penrose's dismayed silence was puzzling Buster Bill & Co. They did not know what Frank Richards guessed.

Yen Chin did not turn a hair under the ferocious glare of the unhappy spoofer he had out-spoofed.

He had a truly Oriental conscience, warranted to stretch to any extent that was necessary.

"Me waitee!" he remarked, at last. "You gottee money—oh, yes? You handee me bill for thousand dollee, me tanky you! Oh, yes!"

(Continued on page 11.)

made him start. But certainly it was not possible for Lattrey to take up the attitude that his own father had been bribed to tell falsehoods. His game was up now. Montmorency was safe from him now. And Lattrey stood away with a black brow, and rage and disappointment running riot in his breast.

The letter was passed from hand to hand. In an hour's time every fellow in the Fourth had seen it. Montmorency walked the quadrangle with Townsend and Topham, his head held very high, his noble nose turned up higher than usual. As Mornington put it humorously, he had left the court without a stain on his character, though it was noticeable that Morny himself did not speak to Cecil Cuthbert, whose bona fides had been so thoroughly proved.

It was an hour later that Montmorency sauntered into his study, with a calm and smiling face. The doubts and misgivings that had weighed on the pretender were gone now. For the first time Cecil Cuthbert felt quite at ease and full of confidence. It was natural, considering the nature of Cecil Cuthbert, that in such a mood he should be more snobbish than ever. He found Tubby Muffin in his study, and the glance of contempt he gave him would have penetrated the shell of an oyster.

But it did not seem to worry Reginald Muffin. The fat Classical gave Montmorency a cheery nod and grin.

"All serene now, old top—what?" he asked.

"Get out of my study!"

"My dear old bean—"

"I'd rather not kick you out," said Montmorency. "It would soil my boot. But if you don't walk out—"

He made a stride towards the fat junior. Tubby dodged round the table. "Hold on, Monty!" he said coolly across the table. "Just a word—one little word! I was in the prefects' room the other day when you 'phoned home—"

Montmorency stopped dead.

"I was there—behind the big arm-chair," said Tubby cheerily. "Heard every word, old chap. I knew that Lattrey's father wouldn't play up. I knew he'd been got at. But would I give you away? Not for worlds, old chap, since we're so friendly!"

Montmorency's look was not exactly friendly. If looks could have killed, Reginald Muffin's fat career would have been cut suddenly short there and then. But looks couldn't; and Tubby rattled on cheerily:

"Rely on me, old fellow! I'll stand by you—so long as you're really pally, of course."

Montmorency breathed hard, almost gasping. Once more he had succeeded in stifling the truth, and once more his success had turned to bitter ashes in his mouth.

Tubby winked.

"Dear old bean!" he said. "That's right; take it calm, and rely on an old pal to see you through. By the way, Monty—Tubby's manner grew very friendly and confidential—"by the way, I'm rather short of tin. Could you lend an old pal a pound-note?"

In silence—the silence of dismay, almost of despair—the upstart of Rookwood fumbled in his pocket. Tubby Muffin rolled out of the study with a fat grin of satisfaction on his face and a pound-note in his fat paw. He left dismay and desolation behind him.

THE END.

"Monty's New Chum!" is the title of next week's exciting long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., and Cecil Montmorency, of Rookwood.)

"THE TRICKSTER TRICKED!"

(Continued from page 6.)

"I—I guess—" spluttered Mr. Penrose.

"Why don't you pay up?" demanded Buster Bill. "Hyer it is in the paper—in black and white! Pay the heathen his spondulics!"

"I—I—"

"Ain't there a prize, after all?" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "Look here, if there isn't a prize I want my money back! Dollar'n half!"

"I guess if there ain't a prize every galoot will want his money back, and the editor's hide into the bargain," remarked Buster Bill grimly. "Now, look hyer, Mr. Penrose, I don't foller this hyer. Are you paying the heathen his prize, or ain't you paying the heathen his prize?"

"Oh dear! I—I— Yes!" gasped Mr. Penrose. "Certainly! I—I—I was surprised—I—"

"Nothing to be s'prised at, in a galoot wanting his prize which is fairly won!" said Buster Bill. "I'm here to see him get it. Even a yaller heathen's entitled to fair play. Hand it out!"

"Hand it out, Mr. Penrose," said Frank Richards, with a smile; and there was a chuckle from Bob Lawless.

Result of "Characters" Competition No. 2.

In this competition the Six Cricket Balls have been awarded to the following competitors:

E. A. J. CROOK, West Street, Banwell, Somerset.

JAMES P. DOWNIE, 7, Shanks Crescent, Johnstone, N.B.

JOHN GALLAGHER, 15, Chadwick Street, Wallsend.

JOHN HALL, 16, Baldwin Street, Wigan, Lancs.

H. B. HARRISON, 7, Oak Bank, Buxton Road, New Mills, near Stockport.

J. HORTON, 15, Mitton Gardens, Stourport, Worcs.

The Twenty Consolation Prizes for the next best have been awarded to the following:

James Bury, 26, India Street, Darwen, Lancs; L. Drinkwater, 52, Albert Road, Halifax; Robert Hutchinson, 155, Ayton Street, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne; E. Jennings, 149, Englefield Road, Islington, London, N.1; James Lynch, 8, Greenhough Street, Oldham Road, Manchester; Albert Lake, 18, Lucas Street, Brinksway, Stockport; Frank Littler, 122, Greenfield Road, St. Helens, Lancs; A. R. Mitchell, 5, Glen Street, Greenock; Glyn Powell, 13, Trinity Terrace, Abergavenny; Sydney Roberts, 24, Albert Street, St. Barnabas, Oxford; Thomas Rainey, 56, Bank Road, Larne, Co. Antrim; W. E. Stephenson, 27, Station Road, Stone, Staffs; George Stubley, 8, Bond Street, Batley; John W. Spittle, 22, Fifth Avenue, London, W.10; Cecil W. Self, 145, Upper Bridge Road, Chelmsford; H. W. Thompson, 232, South Street, New Whittington, Chesterfield; A. L. Warren, 67, Cuthbert Road, London, E.17; R. H. Warburton, 10, Crescent Road, South Woodford, Essex; H. Wells, Traingate, Kirton Lindsey, Lincs; Harold Young, 77, Conran Street, Harpurhey, Manchester.

Bob, too, could make a very shrewd guess how matters stood.

Mr. Penrose pulled himself together. "I—I—I guess I—I was surprised," he said. "Because—because the prize has been sent already by—by post!" The hapless gentleman was trying to gain time. "You'll find it ready for you at home, Yen Chin."

Yen Chin smiled sweetly.

"My fiends come and see me open lettee," he said. "P'laps Missel Penlose forget to puttee in bankbill—oh, yes?"

Mr. Penrose breathed hard.

"Any galoot's welcome to see that letter opened," he answered. "If there ain't a bankbill for a thousand dollars in it, come right back hyer."

"I guess we will," said Buster Bill, very suspicious now. "And if it turns out that there ain't a prize, you look arter your neck, sir. I've got a trail-ropo that will jest about fit it."

And, with that terrific threat, Buster Bill marched out of the office, with his friends and Yen Chin. Frank Richards & Co. remained behind. Frank was quite well aware that Mr. Penrose had not posted any letter to the Chinese laundry with a thousand-dollar bill in it; the wretched man had only been seeking to gain time. Mr. Penrose stared at Frank with a dispirited countenance.

"I guess the game's up hyer," he said.

"The biggest stunt I ever thought of—to turn out like this! Oh gum! Vamoose the ranch, you kids, for goodness' sake!"

Frank Richards & Co. left, and mounted their horses in Main Street.

"What on earth is the silly ass going to do now?" Bob Lawless asked.

"Blessed if I know!" Frank said. "But, whatever happens, he's asked for it. It's a case of set a thief to catch a thief; and the thief's got badly caught. If he's got any horse-sense he'll bolt before Buster Bill comes back."

As a matter of fact, that was precisely the intention in the hapless stunt-merchant's mind.

When Buster Bill came back, his bearded, stubby face was red with wrath, and he had a six-shooter in his hand. His friends were equally excited. "Hallo! Where is he?" he demanded.

The office was empty.

"Gone to the Occidental, perhaps," suggested a cattleman.

An excited crowd rushed to the Occidental in quest of Mr. Penrose. He was not there; and the Red Dog also was drawn blank.

That evening, when it was known in Thompson that the grand prize competition was a swindle, and that there was no prize, quite an army of excited citizens searched high and low for Mr. Penrose, several of them thoughtfully carrying ropes with them. If Mr. Penrose had been found, it is only too probable that he would have received the shortest of shrift, and the fire-water trade would have lost one of its firmest supporters.

But he was not found. While Buster Bill & Co. were seeking him high and low, a dismal gentleman was ambling miles away from Thompson on the trail to Kamloops, mounted on a borrowed horse which the owner was destined never to see again. The editorial career of Mr. Penrose in the Thompson Valley had come to a sudden end.

THE END.

(There will be another rollicking long story of Frank Richards & Co., the cheery chums of the School in the Backwoods, entitled "Bob Lawless' Bargain!" next week!)