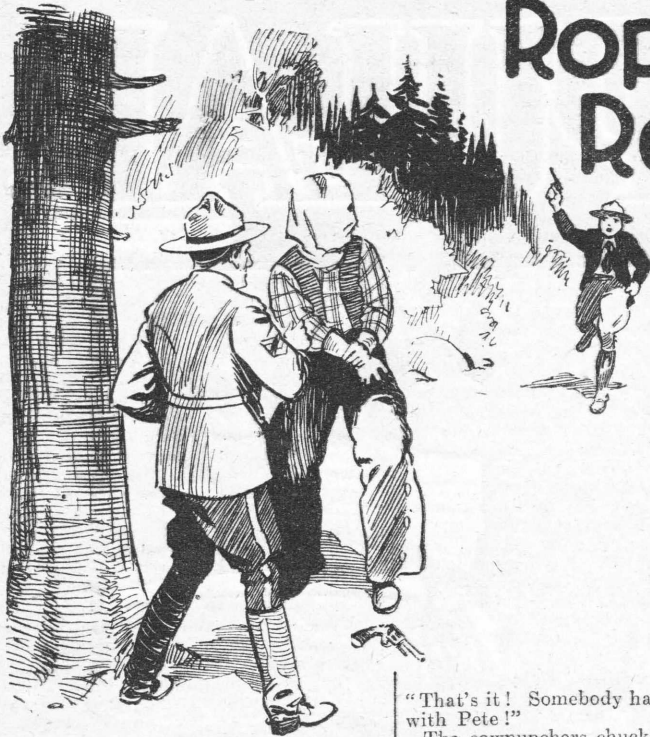


## JIMMY SILVER'S PLUCK!

Windy River Valley, Jimmy Silver has been on his track. But the schoolboy plays the greatest part when he brings the robber to book!



# Roping in the Road-Agent!

A GRIPPING, LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE ROOKWOOD CHUMS, OUT WEST.

By  
Owen Conquest.

(Author of the topping new story of Rookwood just starting in the "Gem.")

### THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Road-agent Again!

"WHAT'S the matter with Pete?" Two or three cowpunchers in a group outside the bunkhouse at Windy River asked that question at once.

Jimmy Silver, who was rubbing down Blazer by the corral rails, looked round.

Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch, was riding in from the prairie.

There was thunder on the brow of Mr. Peters. Even at a distance the portentous wrath on his bearded face could be seen. It was not uncommon for Mr. Peters to be wrathful, especially in the busy season on the ranch, when sometimes his looks were thunderous and his remarks were "frequent and painful and free."

But never had Mr. Peters looked so wrathful as he looked now.

"I guess something has riled Pete," remarked Skitter Dick.

"He does look like that, for sure!" grinned Baldy, the cook. "Pete has got his mad up, and there's going to be ructions!"

And Baldy rolled away into the cookhouse, apparently not anxious to take part in the ructions when they began.

"There's something wrong with Pete," said Spike Thompson. "Look at the way he's riding!"

"Can't have been on the fire-water—not Pete!" said Skitter Dick.

Three or four more of the outfit gathered round to look at the oncoming horseman.

Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

"He's tied to the saddle!" "Jerusalem!" ejaculated Skitter Dick.

THE POPULAR.—No. 447.

"That's it! Somebody has been larking with Pete!"

The cowpunchers chuckled.

The big and burly Mr. Peters was about the last man at the Windy River Ranch to be "larked" with with impunity. But as he came nearer it was plain to see that his hands were fastened down to his sides. He was guiding his horse with his knees in the cowboy way.

Blacker and blacker grew Pete Peters' brow as he rode up and saw the grinning faces turned towards him.

He halted by the bunkhouse and glared at the grinning punchers.

"Ain't there any work doing on this ranch?" he inquired. "Has Boss Smedley gone out of business and left the outfit to loaf around in the sun for the rest of the summer?"

Evidently Mr. Peters was not in a good and reasonable temper.

"Are you galoots cowpunchers or a flock of turkey-buzzards setting round a dead mule?" further inquired Mr. Peters.

"Ease off, Pete!" said Skitter Dick good-humouredly. "'Tain't us that's tied you up like a Injun papoose on a squaw's back! Who's done it?"

Snort from Mr. Peters.

"Suppose you cut a galoot loose instead of asking fool questions?" he suggested.

Jimmy Silver had already opened his pocket-knife. He came up to the horse-man and began to saw through the knotted rope.

Mr. Peters' wrath did not prevent the cowpunchers from chuckling. And the more they chuckled the more wrathful Mr. Peters looked. It was evident that he was deeply humiliated by his return to the ranch in this ridiculous fashion.

"Who's done it, Mr. Peters?" asked Red Alf. "Some galoot in Mosquito been playing a game with you?"

Another snort from Mr. Peters.

"I guess there isn't a galoot at Mosquito that could tie me up!" he grunted.

"Waal, you're tied!" grinned Skitter Dick.

"There you are!" said Jimmy Silver.

And Pete Peters shook off the severed rope and jumped down from the saddle.

Mr. Hudson Smedley came along from the ranch-house.

"You've got the mails from the post office, Pete?" he asked.

Mr. Peters crimsoned.

"I guess not, sir," he answered.

"Haven't you been to Mosquito?"

"Yep!"

"Well, then——" said the rancher, puzzled.

"I was held up on the trail comin' back," said the foreman reluctantly.

"I guess I've got to own up. The flour-bag road-agent stopped me on the trail, boss."

The rancher uttered an exclamation.

"The road-agent again!"

"Sure!" said Pete. "I hadn't nary a chance. Fust I see of him he had his gun fair under my chin, and it was hands up for me! He collared the mail and roped me to my saddle. I guess I'd have handled him if there'd been a ghost of a chance. But there wasn't!"

"You can't argue with a gun lookin' you in the eye!" remarked Skitter Dick.

Mr. Smedley compressed his lips.

"'Twarn't my fault, boss," said the foreman. "I guess you know I ain't afraid of any he-critter between Mackenzie and the border. But he had me covered, and it was hands up or me for the long jump!"

"I don't blame you," said Hudson Smedley. "I've been held up by him myself, and he had five thousand dollars from me. You're sure it was the same man?"

"Sure! Galoot with a flour-bag over his face, and a gun in his hand as steady as a rock," said Pete Peters. "It's the third hold-up in this section in three weeks. I guess it's time the Mounted Police got after that pilgrim serious."

"Did you see Sergeant Kerr in Mosquito?"

"Yep! He's coming along to the ranch this evening."

"Good!"

Mr. Smedley turned away, with a thoughtful brow, and Pete Peters went into the bunkhouse—perhaps anxious to hide his blushes. Jimmy Silver returned to Blazer, and went on rubbing down his favourite horse. His chums, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, joined him by the corral rails to discuss the news. The whole section was in a state of excitement over the appearance of the flour-bag road-agent, and for days hardly anything else had been discussed at the Windy River Ranch. The "hold-up" business was not uncommon on the other side of the border, but it was rare enough in Alberta, and the activities of the man in the flour-bag had caused quite a sensation.

"They'll have him before long," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Once the Mounted Police get on his track they won't be long in roping him in. I say, Mick's coming back from Lone Pine this evening. I'm thinking of riding over there."

"Let's all go!" said Raby.

And Newcome nodded.

"I was thinking of riding down the Mosquito trail to meet the sergeant on his way here," said Jimmy.

"What the dickens for?" asked Lovell. "Are you going to protect him if he falls in with the road-agent?"

Raby and Newcome chuckled.

Jimmy Silver smiled, but did not reply. But when, in the cool of the late afternoon, Lovell & Co. rode away with Spike Thompson from Lone Pine, Jimmy Silver mounted Blazer and took the Mosquito trail. He had his own reasons for wishing to meet Sergeant Kerr, of the Canadian North-West Mounted Police—reasons which he had not yet confided to his chums.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Holding up the Sergeant!

**A** KHAKI coat and a Stetson hat glimmered on the dusty trail in the sunlight. Jimmy Silver had ridden three or four miles from the ranch at Windy River when he sighted the Canadian sergeant coming up the trail from Mosquito.

The trail ran through a belt of thickets; it was the spot where Hudson Smedley had been held up by the flour-bag man a week ago and robbed of five thousand dollars.

Jimmy was not thinking of the road-agent at that moment, and he rode into the shade of the high thickets, glad to get out of the blaze of the setting sun.

His horse's hoofs made little sound on the thick grass of the trail.

The sergeant was still a quarter of a mile distant towards Mosquito, and as soon as he entered the bush Jimmy lost sight of him.

Instead of riding on into the open plain again, Jimmy determined to halt in the pleasant shade, and wait for the sergeant to come up.

He drew rein and dismounted, and threw his reins over a branch. Blazer looked round him, as if uneasy, and gave a low whinny. To Jimmy's surprise the whinny of a horse answered

from the depths of the thicket beside the trail.

The Rookwood junior was on the alert at once.

There was a horse tethered in the bush, that was evident. It was possible that it belonged to some cowpuncher who was taking a rest in the shade; but the thought of the man in the flour-bag came into Jimmy's mind.

Leaving Blazer tethered, he plunged into the thickets in the direction of the sound he had heard.

A dozen yards from the trail, in a little clearing among the thickets, a horse was tethered to a tree.

There was no sign of the rider to be seen, but there was no doubt that he was not far away from his tethered horse.

Jimmy approached the animal, keeping his eyes well about him, and stroked his neck to keep him quiet.

"Mick's horse!" he muttered.

He knew the animal.

It was a rather large, raw-boned horse, and Jimmy recognised it at once as the animal ridden by Ulick Fitzgerald—known as "Mick" on the Windy River Ranch.

Mick, of Windy River, was on duty at Lone Pine, five miles from the ranch in another direction. Spike Thompson was to relieve him that evening, and Mick was then due to return to the ranch, but at the present moment he should have been at Lone Pine.

What was his horse doing here tethered in the thickets on the Mosquito trail—the way Sergeant Kerr was to come?

Jimmy's heart beat faster.

Already his suspicions of Mick amounted to a certainty. It was to consult the sergeant on the subject that Jimmy was now riding to meet Mr. Kerr.

And Mick, who should have been at Lone Pine, was evidently here, and had left his horse tethered in concealment. Where was Mick?

If Mick, of Windy River, was in reality the flour-bag road-agent, as Jimmy Silver believed, it was pretty clear where he was—laying an ambush on the trail for the Canadian sergeant.

Jimmy's hand slid into his pocket to make sure that his revolver was there.

He left the tethered horse and returned to the trail, picking his way cautiously and silently through the bushes and young trees.

If there was an ambush on the trail of which the Canadian sergeant was the destined victim, Jimmy Silver intended to take a hand in the game.

He emerged into the trail, and followed it towards Mosquito, treading almost on tiptoe and watching the thickets on either side with the eye of a hawk.

He could hear the faint sound of hoof-falls on the grass now, and knew that the Canadian sergeant was drawing near, though he could not see him.

He caught his breath suddenly as he sighted a moving figure ahead on the trail.

Behind a tree, watching the trail towards Mosquito, stood a man over whose head was drawn a flour-bag.

His back was towards Jimmy Silver, but there was no doubt as to his identity; the flour-bag was enough.

It was the road-agent watching the trail for the sergeant of the Mounted Police.

Jimmy stopped.

He had made no sound as he approached, and the man in the flour-bag did not glance round. All his attention was concentrated on the approaching horseman.

There was a jingle of a bridle, and Sergeant Kerr rode into view. In an instant the flour-bag man leaped out into the trail, and a revolver was levelled at the rider.

"Hands up!"

Sergeant Kerr pulled in his horse.

He stared at the man in the flour-bag, his eyes gleaming and his bronzed face very grim.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Hands up, or—" The levelled revolver moved a little.

With a grunt the sergeant put his hands over his head.

The man in the flour-bag stepped closer to him.

"You're coming to Windy River to look for me, sergeant?" he asked in a bantering tone.

"I guess so."

"Well, you've found me! What are you going to do about it?"

The Canadian sergeant made no reply, but his face grew grimmer. It needed only a motion of the road-agent's finger to send a bullet through his heart, and he could see that the ruffian was prepared to shoot.

"Get off that horse!" said the man in the flour-bag. "Leave your carbine where it is. You're a dead man if you touch it."

The sergeant obeyed.

"Back up against that tree!" said the road-agent, with a motion of his left hand.

The sergeant breathed hard.

"What's this game?" he said, between his teeth. "What are you going to do, you skunk?"

"I guess I'm going to bind you to that tree and leave you," said the road-agent coolly. "You aren't wanted on Windy River, sergeant. I reckon you'll be found sooner or later—the cowpunchers use this trail nigh every day—but twenty-four hours tied to a tree will warn you off, I guess. Anyhow, you're for it!"

"You coyote!" breathed the sergeant.

"Guess why I don't send a ball right through your skull?" said the road-agent, with a laugh. "I ain't shot a man in this section yet, that's why. It's the penitentiary if they rope me in, but it ain't hanging so far. That's why I don't lay you out stiff, sergeant!"

He made a threatening gesture as he read the look in the Canadian sergeant's eyes.

"But I reckon if you raise a finger I'll make you the first, sergeant. I ain't taking risks. Back up agin that tree, or you're a dead man."

Crack!

From along the trail there came the sudden report of a revolver, and the road-agent gave a startled yell.

The bullet struck the levelled pistol in his hand and hurled it away from his grasp.

Disarmed and numbed by the shock, the road-agent staggered back as Jimmy Silver came racing up.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### Hand to Hand!

"**C**OLLAR him, sergeant!"

Jimmy Silver shouted, as he raced up the trail, revolver in hand.

The man in the flour-bag stood for a second, staggering, utterly taken by surprise by the shot that had torn away his weapon. The sergeant was equally taken aback.

"Collar him!"

Sergeant Kerr made a spring at the

road-agent, at whose mercy he had stood a moment before.

But the ruffian, disarmed and numbed and taken by surprise as he was, was as wary as a wild-cat.

A backward leap into the thickets saved him from the grasp of the Canadian sergeant by a hairbreadth.

In the thicket he turned and ran, with the burly sergeant close on his track. Jimmy Silver turned from the trail and followed fast.

The road-agent and the sergeant disappeared from view in the thickets, but Jimmy followed the trampling and rustling in the bushes.

A sudden sharp cry rang out ahead of him, and he heard a heavy fall.

He rushed on.  
"Sergeant—"

Sergeant Kerr was on the ground, striving to raise himself by grasping at a tree. His bronzed face was white, and there was a trickle of blood on his dusty khaki.

The road-agent had disappeared, but there was still a sound of rustling and trampling dying away in the distance.

Jimmy Silver hesitated a second.

His impulse was to rush on in pursuit of the flour-bag man, and bring him to book at the revolver's muzzle. But he stopped to help the wounded man.

"He turned on me with a knife!" panted the sergeant hoarsely. "He got me here! Don't stop! Get after him with that gun!"

"But you—"

"I guess he's got a horse hereabouts. Get after him before he gets clear. Never mind me! Quick!"

Jimmy Silver obeyed.

He ran on through the thickets, following the trail made plain by torn, and trampled bush.

The direction led him towards the spot where he had seen Mick's horse tethered; it was clear that the man in the flour-bag was making for Mick's horse.

Not much further proof was needed that the masked road-agent was, in reality, Mick, of Windy River.

Jimmy ran as hard as he could through the tangled thicket; but ahead of him came the sound of a horse in motion.

The road-agent had reached the horse well ahead of his pursuer, and dragged it loose and mounted.

Jimmy heard the driven animal plunging through the thickets towards the open plain.

He reached the edge of the bush-belt, and looked out on the plain in the setting sun. In the open the man in the flour-bag was urging on his horse—Mick's horse—to full speed in flight. Jimmy Silver raised his revolver.

It was a difficult shot, at long range for a pistol; but he took careful aim and fired.

The Stetson hat spun from the head of the road-agent.

The man in the flour-bag looked back and shook a savage fist at the junior.

Then, with intrepid coolness, he dismounted, picked up the hat, and replaced it on his head, and jumped on his horse again.

Crack!

The bullet flew a foot wide as the road-agent dashed away, bending low in his saddle.

Jimmy Silver gritted his teeth.

His own horse, tethered on the trail, was too far away for immediate use, and it was futile to follow the mounted man on foot over the prairie. With bitter disappointment, Jimmy Silver

THE POPULAR.—NO. 447.

turned back, and hurried to rejoin the sergeant.

The big Canadian was coolly binding up the gash of the road-agent's knife in his shoulder. He gave Jimmy a hasty, inquiring look as the Rookwood junior came panting up.

"He's got away!" said Jimmy.

"I heard shooting—"

"I put a bullet through his hat," said Jimmy ruefully. "He's got clear on his horse. It's rotten luck!"

"Not so bad," said the sergeant, with a faint smile. "It was pesky lucky for me you were on the trail. How did you come to be here?"

"I was coming from Windy River to meet you," explained Jimmy. "But you're hurt, sergeant. Can I help you?"

"I guess I can fix this," said the sergeant coolly. "It ain't so deep as he meant it to be—he was in too big a hurry. I guess I can ride on to the ranch."

The sergeant moved slowly back to the trail, and remounted his horse. Jimmy walked by his side till they reached the spot where Blazer had been left, and then Jimmy mounted, and rode on to the ranch with the Canadian. Sergeant Kerr's bronzed face was pale, and his teeth hard set, but the pain of his wound did not draw a word of complaint from his lips.

"I've got something to tell you, sergeant, if you're fit to hear it now," said Jimmy Silver.

"About that fire-eater?"

"Yes."

"I guess I'll be glad to hear it," said the sergeant. "They told me in Mosquito that it was you who stopped him holding up the hack from Kicking Mule the first time he showed up in this section."

"Well, I helped," said Jimmy.

"And you was with Boss Smedley when he was held up and robbed on this very trail?"

"Yes. And I believe I know the man when he's got that flour-bag off his face," said Jimmy Silver.

"Gee-whiz! Go ahead, my boy!" said the sergeant eagerly. "If you know that much, I guess Mister Flour-bag is a gone coon, unless he lights out of this section mighty sudden. Tell me what you know."

"I can't say for certain that I know, but I suspect a new man at the ranch," said Jimmy. "His name's Ulick Fitzgerald—or he says so. He's called Mick, and he speaks with a strong Irish accent."

"I guess that galoot who held me up a while ago didn't speak any Irish," said the sergeant. "He talked like a bad man from the States."

"That's the idea," said Jimmy. "I believe that the Irish name and the Irish accent are a trick, and that the man's no more, really Irish than you are, Mr. Kerr."

"By gum! That would be a cute stunt," said the sergeant. "The galoot would have to have some brains to think of that. I allow. But give me your reasons for suspecting him."

"I picked up the trail of the road-agent the day the hack was stopped, and found that his horse had cast a shoe. When Mick came in later his horse had lost a shoe."

"That isn't all?"

"No. That was the beginning. It made me think of him," said Jimmy.

"When he came along to Windy River hunting for a job, he seemed on his uppers; but I found that he had a handsome revolver among his truck. Out-of-work Micks don't usually carry a gun hidden in their bundle."

"That's so. But—"

"The day Mr. Smedley was robbed I was with him, and I rode off at top speed to Lone Pine, where Mick was stationed, to see if he was there."

"And was he?"

"No."

"Might have been out after the cattle."

"I know. I left him there after nightfall, and figured it out that if he was guilty he would guess I suspected him, and might lay for me on the way home. I heard a horseman pass me on the plain in the dark, and went back to Lone Pine, and found that Mick—who was to have gone to bed—had gone out again, and taken his horse."

"And then—"

"I did not go home by the ford, but rode round about," said Jimmy.

"Next morning I examined the mud-banks at the ford, and found tracks where a man had waited the night before, leaving his horse tied up on the bank. My belief is that he was ambushing me at the ford on Muddy Creek, and that I'd have broken my neck there if I'd gone home that way."

The sergeant whistled.

"It begins to look thick," he said. "You say this Mick is a new man on the ranch. When did he come?"

"About a week before the flour-bag man was first seen."

"It fits together," said Sergeant Kerr thoughtfully. "Have you told anybody about this so far?"

"Nobody. Not even Mr. Smedley. I thought I ought to speak to you first," said Jimmy. "It's all suspicion so far; but there's a hundred little things that make me feel certain that Mick is the man, and I believe that he knows that I know it."

Sergeant Kerr was silent and thoughtful.

"You see, it's pretty certain that the thief is a man belonging to this section," said Jimmy. "He knows too much for a stranger. He knew about the money on the hack, and about Mr. Smedley going to Mosquito for the dollars the other day, and knew that you were coming to the ranch this evening. And the horse he's just got away on was Mick's horse."

"Thunder! Are you sure of that?"

Jimmy Silver explained how he had found Mick's horse tethered in the thickets.

"I guess that puts the lid on it," said Sergeant Kerr quietly. "When we get to Windy River, I guess I'm going to see this man Mick."

And then they rode on in silence to the ranch.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Mick's Return!

**A**RTHUR EDWARD LOVELL greeted Jimmy Silver as he rode up to the ranch-house with the sergeant.

"Just in time for supper," he said. "Hallo! Anything the matter with the sergeant?"

"Only a jab from a bowie-knife," said Mr. Kerr, as he dismounted rather painfully.

"We came on the flour-bag man," said Jimmy.

"Oh, my hat!"

Hudson Smedley hurried out of the house, and helped the sergeant indoors. Lovell and Raby and Newcome gathered round Jimmy Silver for an account of what had happened. Pete Peters and some of the cowpunchers came along to hear the tale.

"Waal, I guess you are some tenderfoot, young Silver!" said Mr. Peters admiringly. "I guess you're the ornariest tenderfoot that ever struck Windy River section; and if Mister Flour-bag ever meets you on the prairie it will be you for the long jump!"

"Or him!" said Jimmy, with a laugh. "And he stuck the seregant, did he?" said Skitter Dick. "I do allow that that galoot is some fire-eater."

"Where's Mick?" asked Jimmy. "Didn't you fellows ride over to Lone Pine to come back with him?"

"He wasn't there," said Lovell. Jimmy's eyes gleamed.

and the sergeant. Sergeant Kerr's wound had been dressed, and, though he was evidently in pain, he was cool and composed. He talked with the rancher on the subject of the flour-bag man, but made no reference to what Jimmy Silver had told him of Mick. That information, apparently, was to be kept dark until the sergeant had seen Mick.

After supper Jimmy Silver went down to the bunkhouse, to learn whether anything had been heard of the missing cattleman.

Light streamed out on the dusk from the open door of the cookhouse, and in the doorway stood Baldy, the cook, and

be too perlitte to say 'No' to any galoot in them circumstances!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

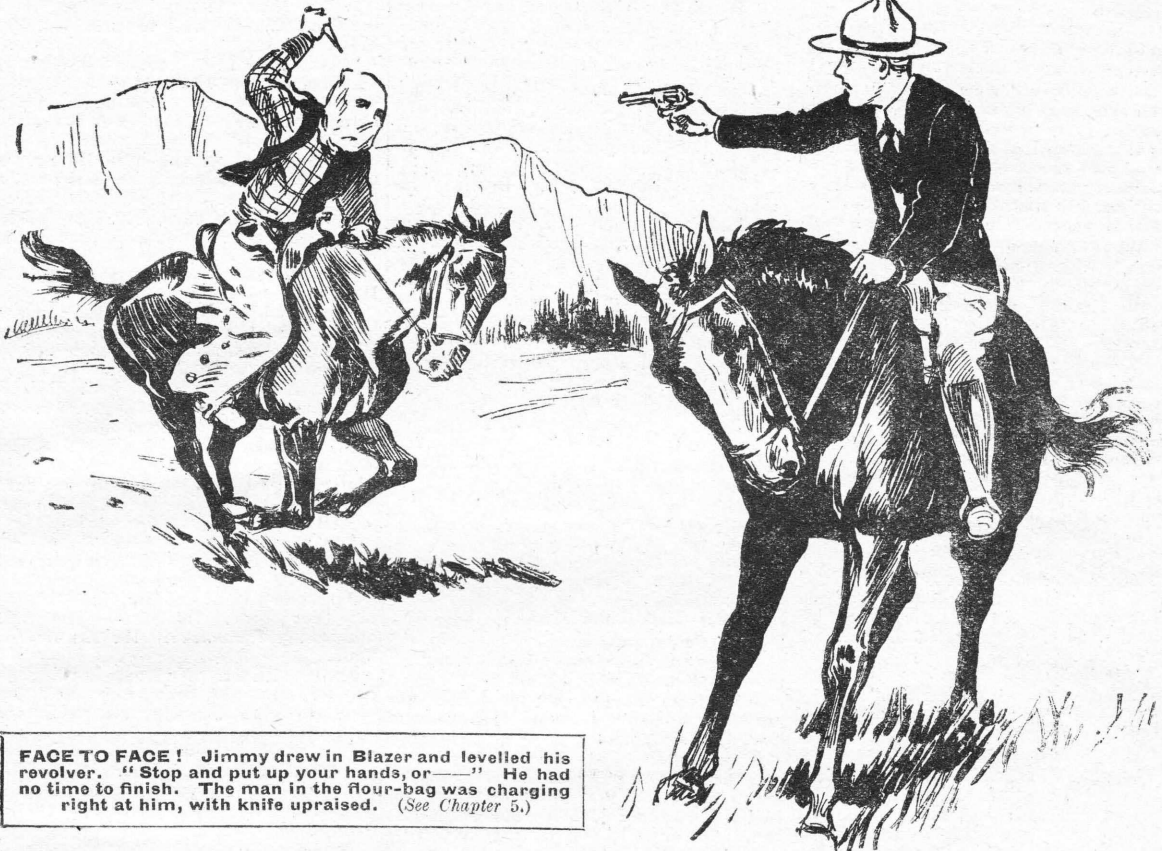
"So he got your hoss?" asked Pete Peters.

"He did that, sorr; and, sure, as it's Mr. Smedley's property, it's afraid I am that the boss will be wild!" said Mick. "But could a man help it, with a revolver looking him in the eye and all?"

"You couldn't help it," admitted the foreman.

Mr. Peters could scarcely say less after his own adventure with the flour-bag man that afternoon.

"If the boss stops it out of my wages



**FACE TO FACE!** Jimmy drew in Blazer and levelled his revolver. "Stop and put up your hands, or—" He had no time to finish. The man in the flour-bag was charging right at him, with knife upraised. (See Chapter 5.)

"He wasn't at Lone Pine?"

"No. Spike Thompson's staying there now. I suppose Mick was out after the cattle, and he will be coming in later," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver had fully expected to hear that his chums had failed to find Mick at Lone Pine at the very time that the flour-bag man was on the Mosquito trail.

But he did not feel at all sure that Mick would come in later.

By that time, Jimmy considered, the secret robber would probably have come to the conclusion that the game was up, and that the Windy River section was no longer healthy for him. It was very probable that the man in the flour-bag had disappeared for good, Jimmy thought.

If, after all that had happened, Mick turned up at the ranch as usual, Jimmy felt that his belief in his guilt would be staggered a little, in spite of the accumulated evidence. At least, it would show that the road-agent had a nerve of iron.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went into the ranch-house to supper with Mr. Smedley

round about stood six or seven of the Windy River outfit. And in the midst of them, red-faced and dusty, but genial as ever, stood—Mick!

Jimmy Silver blinked at him.

The man had come back! Evidently he had just arrived on foot.

"Hivens, it's me that's tired out and footsore!" said Mick. "Fifteen mortal miles have I tramped on the prairie this blessed afternoon! And that thafe of the world has stolen me horse intoirly!"

"The flour-bag galoot?" asked Baldy.

"Yis, sorr!"

"That galoot seems to have a down on this hyer ranch, and no mistake!" said Red Alf.

"But how did it happen?" asked Pete Peters.

"Sure I was looking afther the cattle, and niver thinking a word about the man himself," said Mick, "and all of a sudden there he was, the thafe, and me with a revolver looking me in the eye! And whin he asked for me horse, sure I couldn't refuse him!"

The cowpunchers chuckled.

"I guess not," remarked Baldy. "I'd

it's harrd on me!" said Mick. "But maybe you'll put a word in for me, Mr. Pethers?"

"The boss won't do nothin' of the kind!" grunted the ranch foreman. "Ain't he been held up by that fire-eater hisself? You couldn't help it, especially a fool tenderfoot from Manitoba like you, Mick!"

"Sure, I wish I was back in Manitoba, where there ain't any road-agents searing an honest man out of his siven sinces!" said Mick. "It was harrd work on the wheatlands, but a man could ride fifty miles without bein' told to put up his hands!"

"And what did you do when he'd got your hoss?"

"Faith, he tould me to sit down in the grass, and niver move for an hour, or he'd come back and make dead meat of me!" said Mick. "And sure I did as he tould me, me being without a gun! And afther that I legged it here, and I'm tired to the bone and wanting my supper!"

"Come in, and I'll fix you, Mick!" said Baldy.

And the man from Manitoba went into the cookhouse to be "fixed."

Jimmy Silver had listened to the tale without speaking. His brain was about in a whirl.

Was this the man in the flour-bag who had ridden away from the thickets on the Mosquito trail, mounted on Mick's horse? Was this man innocent, after all, and unjustly suspected? Or was this a cunning story to account for his horse being in the road-agent's possession, for he would guess that Jimmy Silver might have recognised the animal?

Jimmy hardly knew what to think.

He went back to the ranch-house to inform Sergeant Kerr that Mick had returned.

The sergeant came down to the cookhouse to hear Mick's account of his meeting with the horse-thief.

During the interview Sergeant Kerr's keen eyes read the man's face, but Mick seemed quite unaware of it. He told his tale candidly, as he had told it to Baldy and the cowpunchers.

Jimmy met the sergeant as the latter came back to the ranch-house. He could see that Sergeant Kerr was perplexed.

"What do you think of him, sergeant?" the Rookwood junior asked.

"I guess I hardly know what to think, Jimmy," the sergeant answered frankly. "He tells his yarn well enough, and it accounts for the freater having his boss when you saw him with it, and accounts for his being away from Lone Pine when your friends got there. I guess, if he's the road-agent, he's the deepest card that ever struck Alberta!"

"And he's come back," said Jimmy. "If he's guilty, he must know the risk of coming back here, with you here, too!"

The sergeant nodded.

"There might be a reason for that," he said. "He's got plunder stacked away somewhere, and it may be in his quarters here. Does he bunk with the outfit?"

"No; he has the room over the barn. The bunkhouse is crowded out."

"I guess I'm lookin' into that room later!" remarked the sergeant. "And for the present, not a word!"

The next day Mick was at his usual duties on the ranch with a new horse. He went out with the cowpunchers, and while he was away Sergeant Kerr found an easy opportunity of examining the loft over the barn where Mick had his sleeping quarters.

But when Jimmy Silver met the sergeant at dinner Mr. Kerr gave him a shake of the head, indicating that no discovery had been made.

If Mick was the road-agent, he was too cunning to keep any proof of his guilt so near at hand. Was he the road-agent?

Jimmy Silver was assured of it, and yet at moments his mind wavered. But if Mick was the guilty man, there seemed no way of coming to actual proof, unless he could be caught in the very act, mask on face and revolver in hand.

And that, as the days passed and the sergeant remained at the ranch, was the problem that Sergeant Kerr revolved in his mind, and Jimmy Silver also. For if Mick was the man in the flour-bag, his only reason for taking the risk of remaining at Windy River must be that he intended to carry on his lawless career in the section, and so, sooner or later, the road-agent would be seen on the trails again: And then surely

there would come the chance of roping in the secret thief,

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### The Last Struggle!

"ME, too?" asked Mick. Pete Peters grinned. "I guess you'll be looking after the steers," he said. "You ain't no good in a circus of this kind, Mick!"

"Faith, and I'd like—" "Rubbish!" said the ranch foreman tersely. "Can you shoot any?" "It's me that's never tried!" said Mick. "But—"

"Waal, you ain't trying for the fust time, in a scrap with a road-agent," grinned Pete Peters. "Get off to Coyote Creek and don't worry."

And Mick mounted his horse and rode away to the south, looking disappointed. Jimmy Silver joined the group of cowpunchers who were saddling-up.

"What's the game, Mr. Peters?" he asked.

"The hack comes up from Kicking Mule to-day," explained the foreman. "Mr. Smedley's sending some of us to meet it, and see it safe into Mosquito. There's dollars on board for the post-office, and the boss reckons that the flour-bag galoot may have wind of it."

"Oh!" said Jimmy Silver, with a whistle, and he looked after Mick as the red-faced cattleman rode away south.

Mick was going to Coyote Creek for duty there, miles from the ranch, and Jimmy Silver wondered.

"How far will you go to meet the hack?" he asked.

"As far as Alfalfa Hollow—that's a dozen good miles out of Mosquito," said Pete Peters. "Half-way to Kicking Mule."

"Does Mick know that?"

Pete Peters stared.

"I guess he does. What does it matter if he does?"

The foreman did not wait for an answer to that question. He turned away to his horse.

Pete Peters and five or six cowpunchers rode away at a trot south-east, to strike the Mosquito trail at Alfalfa. Jimmy looked after them for a minute or two, and then went to the corral for Blazer.

Sergeant Kerr had left the ranch the previous day; and, so far as was known, his visit there had resulted in nothing. Whether he "took stock" in Jimmy's suspicions of Mick, the Rookwood junior hardly knew; but he was sure that the Canadian sergeant had not forgotten, at least.

Jimmy Silver mounted Blazer, taking his revolver and field-glasses with him, and rode southward the way Mick had gone.

If his suspicions were well founded, this was a chance the road-agent was not likely to miss.

From his post at Coyote Creek he could ride at a gallop for the Mosquito trail, and strike it farther on towards Kicking Mule than the spot where the cowboys were to meet and escort the hack.

Knowing that they were going no farther than Alfalfa Hollow, the robber would take care to hold up the hack well on the Kicking Mule side of that spot. But if that was his intention he had no time to lose, and would not linger at Coyote Creek.

Jimmy's intention was to look for

him there. If he was not on duty, it would be pretty plain where he was.

Mick was already out of sight on the rolling prairie. Jimmy Silver rode south at a gallop, and reached the stockman's hut at Coyote Creek, near the old ranch-house of Grudger Grimes.

The hut was empty, and there was no horseman in sight among the herds of cattle on the plain.

Jimmy Silver climbed to the roof of the hut, and swept the surrounding prairie through his glasses.

Far away to the south-east he made out the figure of a horseman, urging on his steed to a gallop, his back to Coyote Creek.

Jimmy smiled grimly.

It was Mick; and he was riding hard for the Mosquito trail towards Kicking Mule.

"That settles it!" muttered Jimmy. "I dare say he would have some good reason to give for deserting his duty here, if he was asked. But it's clear enough to me."

Descending from the hut, Jimmy remounted Blazer, and rode away at a gallop on the track of the cattleman.

Mick was out of sight, but Jimmy had carefully noted the direction he was taking, to strike the Mosquito trail about two miles south-east of Alfalfa Hollow.

The "hold-up" was to take place long before the hack reached the spot where Pete Peters and his men waited to escort it.

That, Jimmy was assured, was Mick's intention, and it was Jimmy's intention to defeat him if he could.

Blazer put in his best speed under Jimmy's guiding hand, and at last Jimmy sighted a high bluff crowned with fir-trees, which he knew overlooked the Kicking Mule trail.

For a second at the foot of the bluff he caught sight of a Stetson hat, but it vanished in the timber.

No doubt disguised in his flour-bag by that time, the road-agent was ambushing the hack in the firs by the bluff.

Jimmy Silver rode on, keeping a belt of pines between him and the bluff, to hide his approach from the road-agent.

He reached the pines and dismounted, tethering Blazer to a tree. Then he crept forward on foot, taking advantage of every inch of cover in his way.

As he drew nearer to the Kicking Mule trail, he dropped on his hands and knees, and wormed his way through grass and scrub, till he was almost on the edge of the hoof-marked trail, opposite the timbered bluff.

There he waited in cover.

Already the hack could be heard; the crack of Billy Peck's long whip echoing far across the prairie flats.

The sound of wheels became audible, and the clatter of the pair of horses driven by Billy Peck.

The little two-horse hack came in sight at last, and from his cover Jimmy Silver watched it rattling up the trail.

Billy Peck was driving, and so far as Jimmy could see, there were no passengers in the hack, which was stocked with cargo. On the roof of the hack was a pile of baggage, two huge packing-cases being stacked there, which Jimmy guessed to contain supplies for Mr. Lesage's store at Mosquito town.

Jimmy watched in silence, his heart beating fast.

Unless all his calculations were wrong, the road-agent was somewhere in cover along the trail, ready to step

out and hold up the hack as soon as it came abreast of him. Mick, of Windy River, knew that there were "dollars" aboard.

Exactly where the road-agent had taken up his position, Jimmy could not guess. If the man was there he was well in cover.

Jimmy Silver could only wait and watch.

Nearer and nearer came the rattling hack, Billy Peck cracking his long whip every other minute.

The hack was still more than a hundred yards from Jimmy Silver, when the expected happened. From the fir-trees a man masked in a flour-bag jumped into the trail, revolver in hand.

The revolver bore full upon Billy Peck.

"Halt!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!" ejaculated the stage-driver.

He pulled in his horses at once. Without even waiting to be bidden, he elevated his hands over his head.

"I guess I want your mails, Mr. Peck," said the man in the flour-bag. "You're not arguing about it, I reckon?"

"Not this infant," answered Billy Peck.

"Get down into the trail and hold your horses!"

"I guess I'm too perlit to say no to a gent like you, Mister Flour-bag," answered Billy Peck cheerfully.

And he obeyed promptly.

Jimmy Silver, keeping in cover, drew cautiously nearer to the spot along the trail. The road-agent was turning out the mails, throwing the letters carelessly aside, evidently seeking the sealed packet that was addressed to the postmaster at Mosquito.

Billy Peck stood like a graven image at the head of his team, holding the horses; but there was a peculiar grin on his face.

Jimmy Silver was still at a distance, unseen and unsuspected, when a sudden, sharp voice rang over the trail.

"Hands up, you rascal!"

The sealed packet was in the hands of the road-agent, but he dropped it in his amazement as the sudden command fell on his ears. He stared round him blankly.

There were no passengers in the hack, and he had believed himself alone on the trail with the stage-driver.

"Hands up! Do you hear?"

The voice came from the roof of the hack.

The road-agent stared up.

From one of the big packing-cases the burly figure of Sergeant Kerr had risen, revolver in hand. And the revolver was aimed at the road-agent.

From the other packing-case Trooper Bright, of the Mounted Police, was rising, carbine in hand.

Through the holes in the flour-bag the road-agent stared at the two troopers with glittering eyes.

He was taken utterly by surprise. Jimmy Silver stopped where he was, looking on at the strange scene. He was as surprised as the road-agent.

Billy Peck grinned gleefully. The stage-driver, of course, was aware of that scheme for trapping the man in the flour-bag.

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. He understood now that the sergeant had acted on the "information received." It had been made known at Windy River that there were "dollars" on the hack, and that the Windy River escort was to meet it at Alfalfa Hollow. It had therefore seemed easy business to the road-agent to stop the hack between Kicking Mule and Alfalfa; and the des-

perate rascal would have been prepared to deal with any passengers—if necessary "plugging" them from ambush before the hack stopped. But he was not prepared for two armed men hidden in packing-cases on the roof.

The sergeant's revolver, backed up by the trooper's carbine, bore full upon the man in the flour-bag.

"Are you putting up your hands?" asked Sergeant Kerr grimly. "I guess you're dead meat if you don't!"

The road-agent gritted his teeth.

In spite of the two deadly barrels aimed at him, he gripped his revolver and swung it up.

Crack! Crack!

Sergeant and trooper fired together.

There was a wild yell from the man in the flour-bag, as his weapon went spinning from his hand, torn away by the bullet from the carbine. The sergeant's ball went through his right arm, and the limb dropped to his side.

"Collar him!" shouted the sergeant, as the wounded man staggered across the trail.

**Jimmy Silver  
& Co.'s Western  
Adventures.**



**"SIR BALDY, OF  
WINDY RIVER!"**

**By Owen Conquest.**

**Next week's topping, extra-  
long complete tale of the Rook-  
wood Chums in the Wild West.**

**There's a laugh and a surprise in  
every line.**

**DON'T MISS IT!**

Sergeant and trooper leaped down to the ground.

The man in the flour-bag, wounded as he was, sprang back into the firs and dragged loose a tethered horse. Before they could reach him he was in the saddle and riding like the wind, grasping the reins in his left hand.

"Shoot!" roared the sergeant.

His revolver rattled out shots, and Trooper Bright's carbine cracked again. The man in the flour-bag reeled in the saddle, but he bent low and rode on desperately, and a belt of scrub shut him off from view.

"By thunder! He's cleared!" exclaimed the sergeant.

But Jimmy Silver was acting now. He was racing back to the spot where he had left Blazer.

In less than a minute he reached his horse, loosened him, and leaped into the saddle. A second more, and he was riding hard on the track of the fleeing road-agent.

For a mile or more the man in the flour-bag did not even look back. But when he glanced over his shoulder, it was to see Jimmy Silver scarce a

hundred yards behind him and gaining at every stride of the horses.

A savage exclamation floated back to Jimmy's ears from the wounded robber.

"Stop!" shouted Jimmy.

The man in the flour-bag urged on his horse to a furious gallop. Jimmy Silver rode hard in pursuit.

The game was up for Mick, of Windy River, now. He was wounded in two places, and, with all his cunning, he would have found it difficult to explain at the ranch had he returned there. He was heading now for the foothills, evidently thinking of nothing but escape.

But Jimmy Silver was quite determined that the dangerous rascal should not escape; and the game was in Jimmy's hands. Blazer was twice as powerful an animal as the horse ridden by the road-agent, and at every stride Jimmy drew nearer to the fugitive. Another mile, and Jimmy was close up, and he could have shot the fugitive down with ease with his revolver.

"Stop!" he shouted again.

Still the masked robber rode on.

Jimmy urged on Blazer, and rode alongside of the man in the flour-bag.

Through the eye-holes of the flour-bag the road-agent's desperate eyes glittered.

His right arm was useless, and there was blood oozing through his moleskin coat on the left shoulder. But with his left hand the road-agent jerked a knife from his belt.

"Drop it!" shouted Jimmy.

"You young cub! What are you doing here?" hissed the man in the flour-bag. "Go while you are safe!"

Jimmy Silver laughed breathlessly. He was not afraid of the knife in the ruffian's hand.

"I came on from the ranch to Coyote Creek, and followed you here, Mick!" he answered. "I fancy you know that I've suspected you all the time. The game's up, and you may as well give in. Savvy?"

"Will you clear?" hissed the man in the flour-bag.

"Not likely!"

The road-agent turned his horse and rode straight at Jimmy Silver, knife in hand.

Jimmy drew in Blazer and levelled his revolver.

"Stop, and put up your hands, or—"

He had no time to finish.

The man in the flour-bag was charging right at him, and as he charged the knife was hurled.

But Jimmy Silver was on the alert, and he swung aside in time, and the hurtling weapon shot past his ear.

The next moment the two riders collided with a crash; and Jimmy, swinging his revolver by the barrel, struck at the road-agent with the heavy butt.

Crash!

The man in the flour-bag gave a hoarse yell, and pitched out of his saddle. He came to the earth with a crash.

Jimmy Silver jumped down.

With his revolver ready, he ran to the fallen man: but the weapon was not needed. The ruffian had fallen upon his wounded arm, and the pain had made him swoon. He lay inert in the grass at the feet of the Rookwood junior.

Jimmy Silver drew aside the flour-bag that covered the face of the road-agent.

The red face of Mick, of Windy River, was revealed.

Mick's eyes opened.

He stared up at Jimmy Silver, and made a feeble motion with his hand

towards his belt, as if in search of a weapon. But his strength was gone.

"You!" he muttered, and there was no Irish accent now. That trick had served its turn and was done with. "You young hound! You all the time! If I'd got you at the ford that night, I'd—"

"But you didn't!" said Jimmy Silver. "Hallo, here comes the sergeant! This way, Mr. Kerr!"

There were hoof-beats on the prairie. Sergeant Kerr and Trooper Bright, mounted on Billy Peck's stage-horses, were riding up. They had had little hope of running down the road-agent thus mounted, but the sergeant would not leave a chance untried. Certainly he had not expected to find the man in the flour-bag grassed, with Jimmy Silver of Rookwood standing guard over him.

"By hokey! You've got him!" exclaimed the sergeant as he strode up and jumped from his horse.

"Some kid that!" remarked Trooper Bright.

Sergeant Kerr looked down grimly at the wounded man, meeting a glare of defiance from the road-agent.

"I guess you were right, Jimmy!" he said. "It's Mick—and I fancy Mr. Fitzgerald won't play Mick any more in this section. I guess his name's no more Fitzgerald than mine is Dennis. By gum! He's played a deep game at Windy River, but he was bound to slip up on it at last!"

"You'd never have roped me in!" growled the road-agent. "I'd have beaten you at the finish but for that durned tenderfoot!"

"I own up, you would," said the sergeant. "I reckoned we had you dead to rights when you stopped the hack; but you'd have got clear, I guess, after all, but for Jimmy Silver. Anyhow, you're my game now. Put him on his horse."

And the road-agent, bound to his

horse, was taken away by Sergeant Kerr and the trooper, and Jimmy Silver rode away to Windy River Ranch with the news of the capture.

"Where have you been, Jimmy?"

Arthur Edward Lovell met Jimmy Silver with that question as he rode up to the ranch.

"Looking for the giddy road-agent?" grinned Lovell.

"Just that!" assented Jimmy, with a smile, as he dismounted from Blazer.

"Caught him?" chuckled Lovell.

"Yes!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Arthur Edward fairly jumped.

"You've caught him?" shouted Raby and Newcome together.

"Why not?" asked Jimmy Silver carelessly.

"Gammon!" said Lovell.

"My dear man, catching road-agents is nothing to me!" said Jimmy Silver airily. "Besides, it was fairly easy, considering."

"Considering what?"

"Considering that you didn't come along to help," explained Jimmy Silver affably. "If you had, I admit I might have found the job too hefty for me."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"But, honest Injun—" said Raby.

"Honest Injun, the man's bagged!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

Mr. Hudson Smedley came out of the ranch-house, with some excitement in his bronzed face.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"They've got the man in the flour-bag!" said Jimmy Silver. "Sergeant Kerr and Trooper Bright have got him, and he'll be at Mosquito in the hack by this time!"

"By gum!" said the rancher. "And have they found out who he is? Does he belong to this section, after all?"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Yes, rather! And to this ranch!"

"What?"

"It's Mick!"

"Mick!" almost shouted Hudson Smedley.

"Just Mick!" answered Jimmy Silver.

And he proceeded to give a full account of the affair, much to the rancher's amazement, and still more to the amazement of Lovell & Co. And a little later Pete Peters and his men came riding in from Alfalfa, with the news that they had seen the hack, with the sergeant and the trooper in it, sitting on either side of the wounded road-agent and guarding him on the way to the calaboose.

"And it was Mick!" said Pete Peters. "Just that man Mick! He took me in—he took in all of us—making out he was a Mick with a Kerry accent, and all the time he was a bad man from Montana! Took us all in excepting young Silver, from what the sergeant told me at Alfalfa! Jimmy, you're a tenderfoot, but I take my hat off to you!"

"Well, that beats it!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You were an ass not to tell me, Jimmy! We'd have bagged the man long ago if you had! Jolly odd that I never suspected him at all! That's surprising Jimmy!"

"Not so surprising as if you had, old chap!" said Jimmy, with a grin.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Lovell.

And Raby and Newcome chuckled.

Mick, of Windy River, was never seen at the ranch again, and the man in the flour-bag was seen no more on the Alberta trails. And if Jimmy Silver had not been a modest and sensible youth, his head might have really been turned by the compliments he received from the Windy River outfit on the part he had taken in roping in the road-agent.

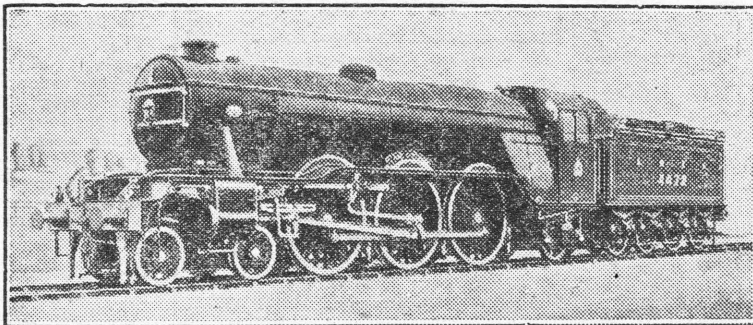
THE END.

(You will all enjoy "Sir Baldy of Windy River!"—next week's grand story of the Rookwood Chums out West.)

## THE SECOND FREE GIFT!

A CORRECTLY COLOURED METAL MODEL OF THE "FLYING SCOTSMAN" GIVEN AWAY FREE!

Correct  
in  
every  
detail.



The L.N.E.R.'s Crack Express Engine, "FLYING SCOTSMAN."

Will  
stand  
up  
anywhere.

This Magnificent Metal Model in Full Colours is something that every boy or girl should possess!

In this week's issue of the "MAGNET" Library you will find the SECOND of our Companion Paper's magnificent series of FREE GIFTS. This time it is a beautiful model of the "Flying Scotsman." Next Week there will be another Free model.

Do not lose a moment, but go to your newsagent now and buy a copy of our grand Saturday Companion Paper,

THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY—PRICE 2<sup>d</sup>.