

The BOYS' FRIEND 1^{1d}/₂

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending April 13th, 1918.]

Algy's Pal!

A MAGNIFICENT NEW LONG COMPLETE TALE
OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. AT ROOKWOOD SCHOOL

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

Jimmy Silver Takes a Hand.

"Algy!"
"Can't stop!"
"I want to speak to you, Algy!"
"Oh, it will keep! Can't stop now!"

Algy Silver of the Third Form at Rookwood walked on towards the gates, leaving his cousin Jimmy staring after him wrathfully.

Apparently Algy was in a hurry. Jimmy Silver knitted his brows. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, who were looking on, grinned.

Jimmy Silver's efforts to keep his young cousin in hand and look after him always entertained Jimmy's chums.

Jimmy glanced at their grinning faces, and frowned more darkly.

"Nothing to snigger at, that I can see!" he snapped.

"You wouldn't!" agreed Lovell. "It's a lovely afternoon for the river, Jimmy. Come on!"

"I'm going to speak to my cousin." The captain of the Fourth followed Algy to the gates, hurrying to overtake him.

Lovell bawled after him wrathfully: "Look here, Jimmy, we're not going to hang about while you play the goat! Let that silly fag alone!" Jimmy did not heed.

He overtook Algy Silver at the gateway and clapped him on the shoulder.

Algy turned his head irritably.

"Hallo, you again!" he exclaimed. "For goodness' sake, give a fellow a rest, Jimmy! Can't you keep your sermon till another time?"

"Where are you off to, Algy?"

"I'm goin' to the station."

"I'll walk with you," said Jimmy quietly.

Algy sniffed, and halted.

"I don't know that I want you," he said sulkily. "If you want to know, I'm goin' to meet De Vere, who's comin' alone, as it happens, so I specially want to meet him. I don't know how you'll get on with him."

"I thought so," said Jimmy.

"Well, it's about this kid De Vere that I want to speak to you, Algy."

"Well, don't!"

"Are you coming on the river, Jimmy Silver?" bawled Lovell.

"No. I'm going along with Algy."

"More fathead you, then!"

"Better come, Jimmy," urged Newcome. "What do you want to fool around with a Third Form fag for?"

"Fag yourself!" retorted Algy warmly.

"And, for goodness' sake, take Jimmy on the river, or take him to Jericho, or anywhere you like! I'm fed up with him!"

"If that young rotter were my cousin," said Arthur Edward Lovell, "I'd take him by the collar and shake him till he couldn't yelp!"

"You'd jolly well get your shins kicked!" remarked Algy.

"And for two pins I'd do it, anyway!" roared Lovell.

"Well, I haven't two pins," said Algy coolly. "But I'll make it two-pence, if you like. Go ahead!"

Jimmy Silver pushed Lovell back as his chum made an angry stride towards the fag.

"Cheese it, Lovell!"

"The little beast wants a licking!" said Arthur Edward, breathing hard.

"Why don't you lick him, Jimmy? He's asking for it every day!"

"Let's get on the river," said Raby.

"Well, I'm going!" growled Lovell. "Are you coming, or not, Jimmy?"

"Not just now."

"Then you can go and eat coke!" grunted Lovell. "Come on, you chaps, and let Jimmy get on with his dry-nursin'. I'm fed up!"

Arthur Edward Lovell tramped away wrathfully.

Raby and Newcome hesitated a moment or two, looking at him and at Jimmy.

Then they followed him.

They were as "fed up" with Jimmy's cousin as Lovell himself was.

Algy grinned at his cousin.

"Well, why don't you go with your pals?" he asked.

"Never mind that. About this new kid, Algy—"

"I'm goin' to meet him now, and I've got to be in time for the train. Go on the river, old scout. Ta-ta!"

Algy started down the lane.

The fag was dressed with unusual care that afternoon.

He was in his best Etons, his collar was spotless, his tie neatly tied, and his boots shining.

Evidently Algy wanted to make a good impression upon De Vere, his old friend at his former school.

Jimmy Silver walked down the lane with him.

Algy's eagerness to greet his old pal, and his unconcealed delight that De Vere was coming to Rookwood, worried Jimmy.

He got no thanks—rather the reverse—for playing "Uncle James" to the wilful fag of the Third.

But, easy-going fellow as Jimmy was, he had a strong sense of duty.

Algy Silver had shown many signs lately of becoming a less reckless young rascal than he had once been.

And Jimmy was apprehensive of the effect his "old pal" would have upon him.

Jimmy was well aware that Algy had been taken away from High Coombe School, chiefly to get him out of the society of De Vere and his other friends there.

It was sheer bad luck, from Jimmy's point of view, that De Vere should be coming to Rookwood this term.

But Algy was delighted at the prospect.

Algy sniffed angrily as he found the Fourth-Former walking at his side.

He could not shake Jimmy off.



JIMMY SILVER & CO. INTERVENE!

"Look here, Algy," said Jimmy, after a long silence, "I wish you wouldn't be thick with young De Vere while he's here."

"You can wish!" answered Algy.

"You know very well that your father wouldn't like you to know him."

"Rats!"

"Why is the fellow leaving his own school in the middle of the term?" demanded Jimmy. "There's something fishy about it."

Algy laughed.

"I fancy he's made High Coombe too hot to hold him," he remarked, with some complacency. "Old De Vere is a goey chap. The Head had him up on the carpet last time—me, too. He jawed us both—but especially De Vere. Threatened not to let him come back at all, you know. All because of a few smokes and a pink paper! Rats! I fancy De Vere has been kickin' over the traces again, and his people have been asked to take him away."

"And now he's coming to Rookwood!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Is our school a refuge for young blackguards kicked out of other schools?"

"He hasn't been kicked out, you ass! His people are tremendous great guns! The Head wouldn't have dared to expel him. But I think he's been pilin' it on too thick, and he's been taken away quietly."

"A nice sort of a friend for you!" growled Jimmy.

"Oh, rippin'!"

"The less you have to do with him the better."

"Thanks!"

"That means that you're going to pal with him at Rookwood, I suppose?"

"Of course I am!" exclaimed Algy hotly. "I'm only too jolly glad he's comin'! He's just my sort. I fairly danced when I got his letter sayin' that he was leavin' High Coombe, and was goin' to wangle it to make his people send him where I was. It was toppin' of him!"

Jimmy walked on in silence, his brows knitted.

They came in sight of the village, and then Algy paused.

"Look here, Jimmy," he said, "I don't want you scowlin' at my old pal on his first day here. You cut!"

"I'll meet your friend with you," said Jimmy curtly.

"I don't want you!"

"Better make the best of it, then," said Jimmy. "I'm going to see this specimen, and see what he's like. If he's at all decent, you needn't be afraid of me."

Algy breathed hard through his nose.

"Look here, as a matter of fact, we're not goin' straight to Rookwood!" he said savagely. "De Vere's arranged specially to drop his escort at Latcham, an' come on here alone, an' we're goin' to make somethin' of the half-holiday. See? An old sober-sides like you will be in the way."

"I guessed as much," replied Jimmy grimly, "and I'm going to see that you go straight to Rookwood, both of you!"

"You sha'n't!" roared Algy furiously.

Jimmy did not answer that.

He waited for the fag to start for the station again, quite determined that he should not go alone.

From all that he had heard of Bertie de Vere, late of High Coombe, Jimmy Silver surmised that he was a shady young rascal—not in the least

such a fellow as his name might have implied.

He knew that Algy had been under the other fag's influence, and had very nearly been landed in serious trouble by it; and Jimmy stood somewhat in the position of a guardian towards his young cousin.

Algy's father, Commander Silver, was away at sea, and the gallant sailor was not going to receive bad news of his son at school if Jimmy could help it.

Algy stood for some minutes, with a lowering brow, evidently at a loss.

Jimmy waited for him to move.

"Look here, will you get off?" demanded Algy at last.

"No."

"You're an interferin' cad!"

"Good!"

"You're a meddlin' rotter!" howled Algy.

"Go it!"

The fag clenched his hands.

"By gad, if I were big enough I'd mop up the road with you, you sneakin' meddler!" he shouted.

"You're not quite big enough, Algy. But you may as well bear in mind that I'm big enough to give you a good hiding if you don't use better language."

Algy snorted, and stamped into the station.

Jimmy Silver followed him in.

The 2nd Chapter.

Algy's Old Pal.

A pasty face looked out of a first-class carriage window as the local train from Latcham stopped at Coombe.

Jimmy Silver and his cousin were standing on the platform.

(Continued on the next page.)



At the sight of the pasty face Algy rushed across to the train, and dragged the door open.

"Hallo, old scout!" he exclaimed. The pasty face looked down at him. "Oh, gad, it's you, Algy!" drawled a voice, that sounded as pasty as the face looked.

"You bet!" Bertie de Vere stepped from the carriage.

He tossed his rug to Algy, who received it as if it were an honour to carry a rug for the noble Bertie.

De Vere was a smaller fellow than Algy, but he looked older.

His face was not healthy, and his eyes were dull, and there was a peculiar bored, tired expression about him that was amazing in a lad so exceedingly youthful.

His tiredness, no doubt, was partly affectation, but so far as it was genuine, it was no credit to his way of life.

He looked as if he had been up late every night for weeks on end. Perhaps he had.

"This Coombe?" he asked languidly. "Yes, Bertie."

"Dreary hole."

"Yes, isn't it," said Algy, whose policy was evidently to agree with every sentiment uttered by this model youth.

"There's a trunk somewhere," said De Vere. "I suppose they'll have sense enough to pitch it out, and send it on. I'm not goin' to bother about it."

"I'll speak to the porter."

"Oh, do!"

The new fag stood looking about him, without betraying the slightest interest in his surroundings, however, while Algy was looking after his box.

Jimmy Silver looked at him across the platform.

He had wondered a little what the fellow was like of whom Algy had talked so much, and through whom Algy had been landed in disgrace at his old school.

The sight of the fag confirmed his worst impressions.

Jimmy felt a sense of anger and disgust at the fellow being sent to Rookwood at all.

And he was still more angry at the idea of his chumming with Algy Silver.

Algy came back, and rejoined his friend, with one eye doubtfully on Jimmy, whom De Vere had not noticed yet.

Glad enough would Algy have been if the captain of the Fourth would have kept his distance, and not claimed an introduction.

But Jimmy had no intention of doing that.

It was far from Jimmy's nature to meddle with any affair that did not concern him; but this affair did concern him, very closely.

He came across the platform, and De Vere's glance turned lazily on him.

"My Cousin Jimmy, De Vere," said Algy reluctantly.

De Vere nodded carelessly to Jimmy. He did not offer to shake hands, for which Jimmy was glad.

He did not want to shake hands with the new fag.

"How d'ye do?" yawned the new fag. "Let's get out of this, Algy. You can leave that rug with the porter; you don't want to carry it round all the afternoon. We're goin' somewhere, I understand?"

"Ye-es," hesitated Algy, with a dubious look at his cousin.

"Oh, yes; you're going to Rookwood," remarked Jimmy.

De Vere stared at him. "Perhaps we'd better get straight on to the school, Bertie," muttered Algy.

"What's the game?" said the new fag coldly. "I've dodged old Rooke at Latham—left him stewin' in his own juice—to come on here and meet you. You told me in your letter you were goin' to show me round the town before we got to the school."

"Ye-es."

"Good gad! It's bad enough when a chap does get there. Stick it out till the last minute," said De Vere. "Now, where are we goin'?"

Algy gave his cousin a helpless, furious look.

But for Jimmy's presence, Algy's programme was marked out, and would have gone off swimmingly.

That programme included some items which, if known to the school authorities at Rookwood, would have earned Master Algy the "boot" in a very short time.

Evidently such items could not be carried out with Jimmy Silver's grim face looking on.

The unfortunate Algy was in a fix. "Well, what are we waitin' for?" asked De Vere sulkily. "I didn't come here to stand moonin' on a station platform, Algy. Might as well have stuck to old Rooke, by gad!"

"Somebody was sent with you to Rookwood, then?" asked Jimmy Silver.

De Vere stared at him, as if not thinking it worth while to take the trouble of replying.

Finally, however, he answered. "Yaas. Old Rooke, my old tutor. Sneakin' old worm! The pater put me in his charge, to be landed at Rookwood."

"And you dodged him at the junction?"

De Vere grinned faintly. "I spoofed him about the time of the train, and landed him in the buffet," he said. "I dare say he's still there. Poor old Rooke!"

Algy chuckled. "For goodness' sake," said De Vere, "let's get a move on! Do you want me to take root to these dashed planks, Algy?"

"Come on, then," said the fag. They walked out of the station, Jimmy Silver keeping them company.

Jimmy was grimly determined that Algy, at least, should go straight back to Rookwood.

Algy was quite aware of his determination, and he was puzzled and dismayed.

They walked down the village street together, De Vere's pasty face growing more sullen in expression.

He saw no signs, so far, of the exhilarating time Algy had promised him on his arrival.

As they came out of the village, Algy's pace slackened more and more, and his eyes gleamed fiercely.

He was in danger of angering his precious pal, and perhaps of losing the valuable friendship of Bertie de Vere, and all through "Uncle James."

"You're leavin' us here, Jimmy," he muttered half-savagely and half-appealingly.

"Not at all," answered Jimmy calmly. "I'm walking to Rookwood with you."

"Look here, Jimmy—"

"Come on, kids!"

"We're not goin' to Rookwood yet!" exclaimed De Vere, with an angry, puzzled stare at the two of them. "We're goin' round the town a bit first. We're not bound to get in early."

"You're not going round the town, kid," answered Jimmy, as politely as he could. "You'd better go straight to Rookwood."

"Thanks, I don't choose to."

De Vere turned his back on Jimmy. "Where's the place you mentioned in your letter, Algy—the Bird-in-Hand?" he asked.

Algy flushed a little. "Just down the road," he muttered. "Some of your friends are goin' to be there this afternoon, you said."

"Ye-es."

"Those fellows, Tracy and Gower, that you've told me about?"

"Ye-es," muttered Algy. "What are you mutterin' about? Why can't you speak out?" exclaimed the other.

"The—the fact is—"

"Well?" snapped the fag from High Coombe.

"I—I— Jimmy, you cad," exclaimed Algy savagely, "clear off, and leave us alone!"

"To go to the Bird-in-Hand?" asked Jimmy contemptuously.

"What bizney is it of yours, confound you?"

"Lots."

"Will you clear off?"

"No."

De Vere looked from one to the other. He began to understand.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "That's how the merry wind blows, is it? You've brought your father-confessor along with you, my buck?"

"I didn't want to!" said Algy, almost crying with rage. "The cad's my cousin, but I don't want him! He's fastened on to me. I want to get rid of him!"

"Get rid of him, then!"

"How are you going to do that, my cheerful young friend?" asked Jimmy Silver.

De Vere looked at him. "You won't interfere with me!" he said. "Come on, Algy!"

They walked on, till they came abreast of the Bird-in-Hand.

The inn, among its gardens, lay well back from the road.

"That's the place, Algy?"

"Yes."

"Well, come along!"

De Vere started for the building, and Algy, hesitating a moment or two, followed him.

Jimmy Silver's grasp closed on his collar, and he was swung back.

"Let go!" shrieked Algy.

"Come along!" answered Jimmy.

And, with a grip of iron on Algy's collar, the captain of the Fourth marched him, kicking and struggling, up the lane.

The time had come for drastic measures, and Jimmy Silver was not standing upon ceremony.

The 3rd Chapter.

On the Razzle!

"Hallo! What's the game, Silver?"

Jimmy Silver started.

He was so occupied with Algy, who was strenuously resisting, that he had not observed anyone approaching.

Bulkeley and Neville, of the Sixth Form at Rookwood, were coming down the lane together, and the two seniors stopped at the sight of the fag struggling in Jimmy's grasp.

Jimmy released Algy at once, colouring crimson.

The fag jumped away from him, and stood panting.

Bulkeley looked at the two rather sternly.

It looked, at first glance, like a case of bullying, and Jimmy's evident confusion added to that impression.

Jimmy stood dumb and confused.

"Well," said Bulkeley severely, "what are you up to, Silver? Do you usually drag your young cousin along by the neck?"

"Nunno!" gasped Jimmy Silver. Algy, panting, his fists clenched, looked at Jimmy with gleaming eyes.

He was very well aware that Jimmy would not tell Bulkeley the cause of the dispute. "Sneaking" was not in Jimmy's line.

"I shouldn't have thought this of you, Silver!" said Neville. "I've never seen you bullying a fag before."

"I wasn't bullying him!" exclaimed Jimmy hotly.

"What do you call it, then?" demanded Bulkeley sharply.

Jimmy was silent.

"He won't let me alone!" piped Algy. "He wants to make me go back to Rookwood! Can't I stay out of gates on a half-holiday, if I like, Bulkeley?"

"Certainly you can!" said the Rookwood captain. "I'm surprised at this, Silver! Let the kid alone!"

"I—I want him to go back to the school!" muttered Jimmy.

"Well, if he doesn't choose, he can please himself, I suppose?"

"Ye-es; but—"

"But what?"

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Jimmy.

"Well, let him alone!" said Bulkeley, frowning. "Cut off, kid! And you can get back to Rookwood yourself, Jimmy Silver, and I'll see you start! Cut!"

"I—I—"

"Cut!" said Bulkeley tersely.

Jimmy Silver, with a crimson face, moved off down the lane.

There was no help for it.

He could not explain to Bulkeley.

The consequences to Algy would have been too serious if Bulkeley had known that the young rascal was being prevented from entering one of the shadiest resorts in the vicinity.

Jimmy's tongue was tied.

He did not blame Bulkeley, who could not have acted otherwise under the circumstances, but his feelings towards Algy were not quite cousinly just then.

The two big seniors walked on, leaving Algy grinning in the lane.

The fag followed them slowly, and by the time he got back to the Bird-in-Hand they had disappeared into the village.

Algy looked round for his friend.

He was a little uneasy lest the captain of Rookwood might have seen De Vere lurking about the public-house.

But the new fag was astute in his way. He did not know Bulkeley and Neville by sight, of course; but he guessed, when he saw them, that they belonged to the school, and he had taken cover at once.

He emerged from behind a fence as Algy looked round for him.

"Hallo! You've got away from your precious cousin!" he exclaimed.

"Bulkeley made him let me go!" grinned Algy.

"Who's Bulkeley?"

"Our captain," answered Algy. "He must have passed you, with Neville—"

"Those two fellows?" yawned De Vere. "Two spoony-looking merchants!"

"Old Bulkeley isn't a spoony!" exclaimed Algy, rather warmly.

Even Algy was numbered among the admirers of the most popular senior at Rookwood.

De Vere shrugged his narrow shoulders. "He thought Jimmy was bullying me!"

"He thought Jimmy was bullying me!" grinned Algy. "So he was, too, for that matter. He made Jimmy let me go. You should have seen Jimmy's face when he went off!"

"Didn't he tell your prefect what he was stoppin' you for?"

"Of course not!"

"I don't see why."

"Well, it would be sneakin'! Jimmy wouldn't do that!"

"Quite a model character, your Cousin Jimmy!" sneered De Vere. "Perhaps you'd rather go after him, after all, instead of havin' a good time this afternoon?"

The fag coloured uncomfortably.

"Well, he is an interfiner cad, but he means well," he said. "Of course, it was like his confounded cheek to chip in as he did! I never take any notice of him, I assure you."

"Let him drop, for goodness' sake; I'm fed up with your Jimmy!" said De Vere. "Are you goin' in here?"

"Yes."

Algy, like Moses of old, looked this way and that way before he ventured into the inn-garden.

The lane was deserted. Bulkeley and Neville had disappeared in one direction, Jimmy Silver in the other.

"Come on!" said Algy briskly.

He led the way into a path near the inn, from which they entered the garden at the back by a side gate.

There they were quite safe from observation.

At the back of the house, an open French-window looked on the garden, and from it came the sound of the clicking of billiard-balls.

Algy looked in, rather cautiously, and then signed to his friend to follow him in.

"Only Tracy there, with old Hook," he whispered, "and Gower!"

The fags entered.

Allen Tracy, of the Classical Shell, at Rookwood, was playing billiards with Joey Hook, the sharper.

Gower was looking on, smoking a cigarette.

Mr. Hook gave Algy a very affable grin.

Mr. Hook knew what had become of a good deal of the fag's too liberal allowance of pocket-money.

Tracy and Gower greeted Algy in a very friendly way.

The Shell fellow and the Fourth-Former, as a rule, looked down with a lofty eye on fags; but they made an exception in favour of the enterprising Algy.

Algy Silver presented his friend, with some pride.

Tracy and Gower had heard of De Vere, and they had heard that he was wealthy, so they were prepared to be civil.

The new fag, however, seemed perfectly unconscious of the honour he received in being taken notice of by the Fourth and the Shell.

He acknowledged the introduction in a most perfunctory manner, and there was more than a trace of superciliousness in his look.

"Did you ever see such a sickenin' conceited little cad?" Gower murmured in Tracy's ear, a little later.

"I'm goin' to make him pay for his cheek," answered Tracy, in the same tone.

"He looks jolly cute."

"He looks a nasty little scoundrel. Little beast who's been spoiled from birth," growled Tracy. "He wants a hidin', that's what he wants, and I shouldn't be surprised if he gets it before he's been an hour at Rookwood."

But, in spite of that unfavourable opinion of Algy's dear old pal, Tracy very amicably started a game with him, with two sovereigns on fifty up.

And when the new fag ran out thirty ahead, and pocketed his two sovereigns with a careless hand, Tracy felt very much inclined to give him, in addition, the thrashing he had predicted was in store for him.

The 4th Chapter.

Backing-up Jimmy.

"What's the merry trouble?"

"Anything wrong, Jimmy?"

Jimmy was tramping on to Rookwood, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a wrinkle in his brow, when he met Mornington and Erroll of the Fourth.

He paused, colouring a little.

"All the troubles in the world suddenly dropped on your shoulders?" grinned Mornington.

"Not quite," said Jimmy Silver, smiling. "Have you seen my pals?"

"Yes; catchin' crabs," answered Mornington, with a nod towards the river. "They've been rowin' with the Moderns over a boat, and they've just started."

"Good! I can catch them, then."

"They're going down the river, Jimmy," said Erroll. "Cut across to the towing-path, and you'll see them."

"Right!"

Erroll and Mornington went on, and Jimmy Silver, leaving the lane, cut across the fields to the towing-path, without going on to the boathouse.

He ran out on the path, and sighted a boat on the river, with six fellows in it. They were Lovell & Co. and the three Colonials, Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons.

The six seemed to be in great spirits.

"Hallo!" shouted Jimmy from the bank. "Hallo, there's Jimmy!"

"Pull in," said Lovell.

The boat pulled to the bank, and bumped in the rushes.

"Changed your mind, Jimmy?" grinned Arthur Edward. "All serene! Jump in!"

"What on earth have you been doing to your nose?" demanded the captain of the Fourth.

Lovell rubbed his nose, while his companions chuckled.

"This is a Modern boat," explained Raby. "Tommy Dodd was just running it out. We mopped them up, and collared the boat."

"We left 'em yeling on the raft," grinned Newcome. "You should have heard 'em yell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid Tommy Dodd got rather wet," remarked Conroy. "But we couldn't dip his head in the river without wetting him, could we?"

Jimmy laughed.

"Jump in, Jimmy," said Lovell. But Jimmy did not jump in.

"The fact is—" he said.

"The fact is, we'd better get off, or there'll be an army of Modern cads coming along," interrupted Lovell. "Get a move on."

"I want you chaps—"

"Well, if you want us, here we are. Jump in!"

"Get out!"

"Get in!"

"Look here, you fellows, I want you to back me up this afternoon," said Jimmy Silver, with a worried look. "Do come along!"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Raby at once. "You chaps don't mind if we clear?" he added to Conroy & Co.

"Not at all," said the Australian junior politely; and Van Ryn and Pons nodded.

"Any old thing!" grunted Newcome. Lovell snorted.

Arthur Edward Lovell had a most expressive snort, and now he snorted fortissimo, a great deal like an angry war-horse.

But he stepped out of the boat.

He was not proof against the demands of friendship.

Conroy & Co., rather puzzled, pulled out into the river again, leaving the Fistical Four together on the bank.

"Well!" grunted Lovell, while Raby and Newcome eyed Jimmy inquiringly.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your row—"

"Oh, bother your sorrow!" said Lovell.

"What the dickens does that matter? If you want us, here we are. What's the rumpus?"

"It's young Algy—"

two, quids with the enterprising youth from High Coombe.

"They could ill-afford to lose such stuns, but they had noticed that De Vere had a wad of currency notes in his pocket-book.

They walked home to Rookwood in bad tempers, leaving Algy and his pal to their own devices.

De Vere threw down his cue, and yawned.

Partly from affectation, and partly because he sought pleasures only suitable for a much older fellow, the fag seemed in a perpetual state of boredom.

"Pretty slow, this," he remarked to Algy.

Algy looked at him rather reproachfully.

"You've done pretty well, Bertie," he remarked.

"Oh, those fellows can't play!" said De Vere contemptuously. "They handle a cue as if it was a rake."

"Tracy rather prides himself on his game."

"Tracy's an ass!"

"H'm!"

Mr. Hook peered out of the door leading into the passage.

"There's some gents comin' in, I think," he remarked.

"Better clear, Bertie," said Algy. "We don't want to be seen here."

"Why not?"

"Might get heard of at Rookwood," said Algy uneasily.

"Are you funky?"

"No, I'm not," said Algy tartly. "But I don't want to be hauled up before the beaks."

De Vere shrugged his shoulders.

He looked curiously old when he did that, and Mr. Hook glanced at him very oddly.

Mr. Hook's opinion—which he kept to himself—was that he had never seen such a vicious young reprobate as Master Bertie de Vere.

"Praps you gents will step into the next room," suggested Mr. Hook. "That's my sittin'-room, and if you'd care for a game—"

"Just the thing!" said Algy, at once.

"Oh, any old thing!" yawned De Vere.

Mr. Hook opened a door, and they passed through, the sharper following them.

A few minutes later loud voices and the clicking of balls sounded from the billiard-room.

Mr. Hook's sitting-room was a pleasant apartment enough, with French-windows opening on the lawn behind the house, shaded by a big elm.

It was rather stuffy from the ancient fumes of drink and tobacco, but the windows stood wide open, letting in the sunlight and fresh air from the garden and the river.

Upon a card-table near the window stood a box of cigarettes, and De Vere helped himself to one, Algy following his example.

"Praps you young gents would like somethin' to drink?" suggested Mr. Hook, who was still watching De Vere very curiously.

"Yes, rather! Ginger-beer for me," said Algy.

"Same for me, with a dash of whisky," said De Vere indifferently.

Algy started a little.

"Bertie, old chap!" he murmured.

Bertie did not seem to hear.

Mr. Hook gasped a little, but he went to the door and gave the word, and came back with a tray.

Algy looked rather scared as De Vere "dashed" his ginger-beer with whisky—and it was quite a liberal dash.

He watched his friend as if fascinated as the fag from High Coombe drank the concoction.

De Vere's pasty face flushed, and his dull eyes sparkled a little.

He lighted another cigarette.

He felt that he was quite a hero and a man of the world in his friend's eyes; but, as a matter of fact, Algy was feeling very uncomfortable.

He felt that there ought to be a line drawn somewhere, and for a moment he regretted that he had not taken Jimmy Silver's advice, and gone straight on to Rookwood.

There was a distinction between wilful recklessness and downright blackguardism, in Algy's mind; though his friend did not seem to see it.

"Well, what's the game?" asked De Vere, seating himself at the card-table and carelessly shuffling the cards.

Nap was the game, and the three soon began to play.

Mr. Hook was in a very smiling humour, and he cheerfully assented to half-crown points—extravagance which rather alarmed Algy.

Sixpenny points seemed reckless enough to Algy Silver, but he gave way to his friend, as he always did.

He was very anxious that the peerless Bertie should not consider him "spooney."

Mr. Hook was congratulating himself.

It was somewhat beneath his dignity to be playing cards with two fags like this—even Mr. Hook had some dignity.

But he had caught a glimpse of the contents of Bertie's pocket-book, and he fully intended to annex a considerable share of the currency notes he had seen there.

That task, which he expected to be an easy one, was a little more difficult than he anticipated, however.

Bertie had not been an ornament to the Form he belonged to at his old school, but in other respects his education was very complete.

He quite held his own in the game for quite a long time.

In fact, his currency notes did not begin to pass over to Mr. Hook until that gentleman fell back upon certain devices to assist fortune, with which even the knowing fag from High Coombe was unacquainted.

Algy Silver was soon cleared out of money; he was not nearly so well provided as his friend.

"Not leavin' off," said De Vere, as Algy

signed to him not to deal him any cards in the next round.

"Stony!" said Algy tersely.

"Oh, rot! Have some of my tin."

"Good man!"

The wealthy youth carelessly moved half a dozen currency notes over to Algy, who resumed play with renewed zest.

The luck was quite with Mr. Joey Hook.

When the dealing fell to him he had remarkably good hands, and even at other times he occasionally improved his hand with a card from his sleeve.

Certainly the sharper would have reaped a rich harvest that afternoon had there been no interruption to the "little game."

But there was.

"Nap!" De Vere was yawning when a shadow darkened the open French-window.

"Here they are," said a quiet voice.

Jimmy Silver rushed into the room, with his chums at his heels.

The 6th Chapter.
By the Strong Hand.

The Fistical Four had not found much difficulty in running down their quarry. Jimmy Silver had glanced into the billiard-room, and seen there the marker and a couple of sporting gentlemen of Coombe—not the fellows he sought.

But he heard the voices through the open French-windows of Mr. Hook's sitting-room, a little further along.

He moved along, followed by his chums, and his eyes fell on the three at the card-table.

Jimmy's brows darkened savagely as he took in the scene—the cards, the bloated face of the sharper, the two flushed and excited fags, and the whisky-bottle on the side table.

Lovell gave a snort of disgust.

"My hat!" murmured Raby.

Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

He drew Algy towards the window, but the fag clung to the table. There was a bitter sneer on De Vere's sallow face, and it goaded Algy to fury.

"I won't go!" yelled Algy. "Lend me a hand, Mr. Hook!"

Mr. Hook stood irresolute.

"He'd better," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You interfere, Mr. Hook, and you'll find your head in the coal-scuttle before you know how it got there."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome lined up between the bookmaker and Jimmy.

The fat sharper fell back a pace.

He did not relish the prospect of a tussle with those three sturdy young gentlemen.

De Vere did not move.

"Will you come, Algy?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"No!" howled Algy.

"Then I'll make you."

"Bertie—help me!"

Algy's grasp was torn away from the table, and he was whirled to the French-windows in Jimmy Silver's strong grasp.

De Vere started to his feet.

"Let him alone, you interferin' cad!" he shouted. "Hook, call in somebody to pitch them out—do you hear?"

Mr. Hook made a movement, and Lovell put his back to the inner door.

"Stay where you are, Hook!" he said curtly. "You'll get hurt if you come this way."

"Look 'ere, you ain't got no right 'ere," protested Mr. Hook feebly. "What call have you to come interfering with a gentleman in his own rooms—hey?"

"You can call in the police, if you like," suggested Raby.

Mr. Hook would as soon have called in the Germans.

He did not think of acting on Raby's suggestion.

"Help me, hang you!" yelled Algy, as he was forced, struggling and kicking, towards the French-windows.

His face was white with rage. Jimmy Silver was half leading, half dragging Algy down the garden path.

The fag was still resisting furiously, but he had no chance.

Jimmy did not stand on ceremony with him, and the fag had to go.

De Vere stood panting, his eyes glittering at Lovell & Co.

"There's your way!" said Arthur Edward, pointing down the path.

"Do you think I'm goin' at your orders?" hissed De Vere.

"I do, my infant."

"Let me pass, you cad!"

"There's your way, I tell you. Get a move on, or I'll start on you with my boot!" exclaimed Lovell.

"You cheeky cad—"

"Are you going?" demanded Lovell impatiently.

"No, you hound!" yelled the fag.

"Then I'll jolly soon start you."

Lovell was more than fed up.

He grasped the fag by the collar, spun him round, and applied his boot.

De Vere dodged, but Lovell's boot followed, and he fairly ran down the path at last, Lovell after him, dribbling him, as it were, down to the gate.

Raby ran on, and opened the gate on the towing-path.

Jimmy strode through with Algy.

De Vere made an attempt to double back into the garden, and Lovell swung him off his feet, and pitched him out on the towing-path.

Then he slammed the gate.

In his little sitting-room in the Bird-in-Hand, Joey Hook gasped, and stared out after the Rookwood juniors.

The wind had fairly been taken out of his sails.

"By gosh!" murmured Mr. Hook. "By gosh!"

And Mr. Hook poured himself out an extra stiff helping of whisky, to soothe his fluttered nerves.

Hand, they guessed pretty accurately how matters stood.

De Vere, after a quite ferocious look at Lovell, who was advancing upon him, stepped into the boat of his own accord.

The Fistical Four followed.

The Colonials shoved off, and pulled up the river with their passengers.

Algy sat up, gasping.

He clenched his hands hard.

"I'll make you pay for this, Jimmy, you rotter!" he muttered.

Jimmy did not heed.

The boat glided on, and stopped at the Rookwood landing-raft.

"Get out!" said Jimmy Silver briefly.

The fags got out, followed by the Fistical Four.

"Much obliged, you fellows!" said Jimmy Silver, as the Colonial Co. were shoving off again.

"Oh, don't mench!" said Conroy, with a smile.

"Happy to oblige!" said Pons.

Jimmy Silver & Co. marched up to the school with the two sullen fags in their midst.

They passed in at the gates of Rookwood.

Both the fags cast a last look down the road, but they made no attempt to bolt. They had realised by this time that Jimmy Silver was in deadly earnest.

Under the escort of the Fistical Four Algy Silver and Bertie de Vere were marched into the School House.

Several fellows glanced at them, wondering a little at the two sulky, savage faces.

"Now will you let us alone?" muttered Algy, his voice trembling with passion.

"You can cut now!" said Jimmy. "I'm going to take De Vere in to report himself to his Form-master."

Algy changed colour.

"You're not going to tell—"

He stammered.

Jimmy cut him short contemptuously.

"You know I'm not! Clear off!"

"I'll report myself when I choose!" said the new fag, between his teeth.

"You'll report yourself now!" answered Jimmy Silver, and he took De Vere by the collar, and led him on towards Mr. Bohun's study.

Algy gave his friend a last look, receiving a steely stare in response.

De Vere did not resist. Jimmy still had a hand on his shoulder, when, with the other hand, he tapped at the Third Form-master's door.

"Come in!"

Jimmy Silver opened the door, and Mr. Bohun looked up.

"De Vere, the new fellow, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh! Come in, De Vere!"

The fag entered the study, and Jimmy Silver withdrew, closing the door after him.

He went slowly up the staircase, and to the end study in the Fourth Form passage, where he found his chums.

Lovell & Co. were getting tea, and they turned grinning looks upon Jimmy's sombre face.

"Well?" said Lovell.

"Well!" said Jimmy Silver gruffly.

"Ready for tea?" smiled Lovell.

"Hang tea!"

Jimmy Silver threw himself into a chair, his usually sunny face still glum.

He was worried and troubled.

He felt that he had acted for the best that afternoon, but he knew, too, that he had finally alienated Algy, and that he had only the bitterest aversion to expect from the fag afterwards.

What was the use of it, after all?

And yet, could he have acted otherwise?

"Keep smiling!" said Raby. "Your own merry maxim, you know!"

But Jimmy Silver did not smile.

"You haven't thanked us yet for backin' you up, and fetchin' Algy out of the lions' den, like a brand from the burning!" smiled Lovell.

"Thank you!" said Jimmy.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Lovell. "Don't look like a sudden attack of thunder, Jimmy! Algy isn't the only pebble on the beach; and I fancy, too, that there will be a rift in his cheery friendship with the sporty De Vere after this. That goey young sportsman won't want to chum with a fellow who's got a cousin with such a terrific sense of duty, I opine!"

"Not likely!" grinned Raby.

Jimmy nodded thoughtfully, and his expression brightened a little.

"Well, there's something in that!" he assented. "They may break off for good over this. That's so much to the good!"

"Here's your Yarmouth warrior, old man! Tuck in!"

The Fistical Four sat down to tea.

The meal was not finished when the door was flung violently open, and Algy of the Third glared into the study.

The Fourth-Formers looked round, to see a shaking fist, and a savage, sulky face behind it.

"You rotter!" howled Algy.

"Hallo, young hopeful!" grinned Lovell.

"Jimmy, you rotter, you cad, you beast!" Algy was almost crying with rage. Jimmy looked at him steadily.

"You beast! You beast! De Vere won't speak to me now—he won't look at me! It's all your doing!"

"I'm glad of it!" said Jimmy quietly.

"You're glad, you rotter! You—"

Words failed Algy. He shook his fist in Jimmy's face, and stamped away, crimson with rage and chagrin.

"Tragic end to a valuable friendship!" yawned Lovell. "Might have lasted till Algy's pal was sent to a reformatory! Sad! But keep smiling, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver smiled.



"Jimmy, you rotter—you cad—you beast!" Algy Silver was almost crying with rage as he dashed into the end study. "De Vere won't speak to me now! It's all your doing!"

The three chums followed Jimmy Silver into the room.

Mr. Hook rose to his feet, considerably taken aback. His golden harvest had been interrupted.

Algy started up, his face crimson.

Bertie de Vere did not move. He lay back a little in his chair, staring at the Fourth-Formers of Rookwood with a cool and insolent smile.

"This 'ere is a private room, young gents," said Mr. Hook, hardly knowing whether to bluster or to try civility. "Billiard-room's the next."

"We're not looking for the billiard-room," growled Lovell.

"I've come here for you, Algy," said Jimmy Silver quietly, and without looking at the sharper. "Come with me."

Algy set his teeth.

"I won't!"

"You'd better, Algy."

"I won't, I tell you!"

Jimmy compressed his lips.

He was very angry and very determined. He did not want a scene there, but Algy had to go.

He crossed over to where the fag stood by his chair, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Come!" he said quietly.

"I tell you I won't!" exclaimed Algy shrilly. "Let me alone! What business is it of yours, you meddlin' cad?"

"Your father—"

"Oh, don't jaw about my father, you rotter!"

"Your father asked me to look after you, Algy," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "He took you away from your old school, chiefly to keep you away from that young scoundrel sitting there. I'm going to keep my word to him, Algy. Come away without making a fuss."

De Vere looked at him, shrugged his shoulders, and sat down again.

"You should look after your merry relations a little better, old scout," he drawled. "I didn't come here for any fightin' with your relations, dear boy. My deal, I think, Hook."

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Joey Hook.

"Lovell," called out Jimmy Silver.

"Adsum!" grinned Lovell.

"Pitch that young cad out, too!"

"Right-ho, my lord!"

Lovell strode to De Vere, who glared at him with eyes that glittered like a reptile's.

"Don't you dare to touch me!" muttered the fag thickly. "Don't you dare, you low hound! You lay hands on me—"

He had no time for more, for Arthur Edward Lovell's hands were already upon him.

Lovell whirled him out of his chair, sending the latter spinning across the room.

"Kim on!" said Lovell grimly.

Algy was already outside, still struggling breathlessly in his cousin's grasp.

Lovell followed with De Vere, and Raby and Newcome brought up the rear, with an eye on Mr. Hook, in case that gentleman showed a disposition to chip in.

But Joey Hook didn't.

The High Coombe fag was kicking, struggling, and scratching like a cat.

Lovell yelled as the nails scored his face.

"Out you go!" he panted.

He pitched the fag bodily out, and De Vere sprawled dazedly on the lawn.

Raby picked up two hats, and threw them out.

"There you are!" he remarked.

De Vere staggered to his feet.

The 7th Chapter.
Algy Loses His Pal.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gathered round the two breathless and dishevelled fags on the towing-path.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were grinning. But Jimmy's face was sternly set.

"Now you're going to Rookwood, both of you," he said quietly. "Get a move on!"

"I'll do nothin' at your orders, you outsider!" said De Vere savagely. "By gad, I'll make you suffer for this!"

"I'm stickin' here," said Algy sullenly.

"Miud, I'm going to take you both to Rookwood," said Jimmy. "You can walk, or you can be dragged. That's the choice for you."

"Hang you!"

"Hallo, here's the merry Colonials!" exclaimed Raby, pointing to the river. "They'll give us a passage back."

"Good egg!"

Jimmy Silver hailed the boat.

Conroy & Co. had seen the sudden exit from the inn garden from the river, and they were watching the juniors rather curiously.

They pulled in, at Jimmy's call.

"Hallo, trouble in the family?" asked Van Ryn, with a smile.

"Will you take us along to the school boathouse?" asked Jimmy.

"Certainly. Roll in!"

"Get in, Algy."

"I won't!"

Jimmy bundled him in without ceremony.

Conroy & Co. looked rather surprised, but as they had seen the two fags yanked out of the garden gate of the Bird-in-

NEXT MONDAY.
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The 1st Chapter.

Back Again.

Frank Richards' usually sunny face was very glum. Bob Lawless looked much less cheery than usual. That bright spring morning they both looked and felt, as Bob expressed it, as if they had lost a Canadian cent and found a Mexican dollar.

"Myself, in the flesh," said Beauclerc, laughing. "Glad to see me?" "You bet!" grinned Bob, shaking hands with the Cherub three or four times in his exuberance.

him a kind welcome, and a prosperous career had been before him in the Old Country. But he looked round at the great trees, showing the green of spring—at the fleecy clouds trailing across a turquoise sky above the interlaced branches over the trail—the ringing of the horse's hoofs and the murmur of hidden waters in the wood sounded pleasantly in his ears.

At the fork of the trail, in the timber, they were accustomed to meet their chum, Vere Beauclerc, on his way to school. But this morning there was to be no meeting—and on no morning in the future.

"Well, I'm jolly glad! You couldn't make up your mind to leave Canada—eh? Shows your sense, old boss!" "But your father?" asked Frank.

It was the sharp, sudden report of a revolver, and it rang with a thousand echoes among the trees. Beauclerc looked quickly towards the wood. It was not likely that a sportsman after game would be using a revolver, and he wondered why that sudden pistol-shot had been fired.

The great cars of the Canadian Pacific Railway had borne their chum away eastward, to take the steamer for the Old Country. Frank and Bob knew that they would miss him sorely.

"My father's agreed for me to stay with him," he said. "He's written to Lord St. Austell's to-day, to say that I shall not come. I never wanted to leave him, you know—or you fellows either. And I—I thought he needed me with him, and he does. And I'm staying."

From the wood there came a distant sound of crashing and trampling. The schoolboy's brows knitted. Someone at a distance from him was

It was not long that the three chums had known one another, but they had become almost inseparable. Frank and Bob felt as if a gap had been left in their lives; they could not imagine Cedar Creek without the "Cherub."

He could guess that something had passed at the shack by the creek that Vere Beauclerc did not explain. "You must have travelled all night back from the railway," said Bob. "You look a bit done, Cherub."

running—fleeing, as if for his life, through the tangled larches and thickets. Beauclerc jumped from his horse. The wood was too thick at that point to ride among the trees.

"It's rotten, Franky!" Bob Lawless remarked at last, breaking a long silence. "Rotten isn't the word," grunted Frank. "I guess I don't feel so spry as usual," confessed Bob. "We shall have to get used to the old Cherub being away. I wonder where he is now?"

"I'm quite done," said Beauclerc. "I'm not going to school to-day, but I couldn't resist meeting you fellows on the trail as usual, to let you know." "Happy thought!" chuckled Bob. "Franky was just offering all the gold-mines in British Columbia to meet you on the trail as usual."

Someone was in danger, he knew that. He was unarmed, but he did not think twice about "chipping in." He threw his reins over a low bough, and plunged into the wood.

"I hope so, Bob." "I dare say it's a good thing for him. His father will be lonely now he's gone, though." "He's bound to miss him."

His face, though pale and worn, was very bright. It was evident that all his great prospects in the Old Country did not weigh with him in the balance with losing his chums at Cedar Creek.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

Frank Richards nodded glumly. The remittance-man of Cedar Camp was likely to miss his son, as much as Frank missed his chum. "I hear there's a new master coming to Cedar Creek," Bob remarked, after a time.

"Ass!" said Beauclerc, laughing. "Well, they do," said Bob. "Franky and I have to take a back seat when you're around, Cherub. I say, isn't this ripping. I'll tell Miss Meadows you're coming back, Cherub—when?"

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"Is there?" said Frank carelessly. He wasn't much interested in new masters just then. "I heard Chunky Todgers saying so. Man coming up from New Westminster, I think."

"Right! Come a bit along the trail." "Yes, rather." In great spirits, the three chums rode away along the trail towards the school, the horses' hoofs ringing merrily under the trees.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"Bother him!" said Frank. Bob laughed. The chums were drawing near to the fork in the trail now, hidden from sight at present by the thick trees. "I say, Franky—"

They were only too glad to have their chum back again. They understood that something must have happened to cause the change; but they were not inquisitive.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"What wouldn't you give to see the old Cherub waiting for us at the fork, just as he used to, on his black horse?" said Bob. Frank Richards sighed. "I'd give all the gold-mines in British Columbia, Bob."

Within sight of the creek, the chums parted, Beauclerc riding back through the timber, and Frank Richards and Bob went on to the school, to acquaint the other fellows with the glad tidings.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"So would I, with the ranches thrown in," said Bob. They rode on, and as they came in sight of the fork, their glances turned into the branch trail that led away to Cedar Camp.

They were only too glad to have their chum back again. They understood that something must have happened to cause the change; but they were not inquisitive.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"Great Scott!" "My hat!" A simultaneous exclamation burst from both the chums. For the spot was not vacant, as they had expected.

They were only too glad to have their chum back again. They understood that something must have happened to cause the change; but they were not inquisitive.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

At the fork of the trail, a pale and handsome schoolboy sat in the saddle of a big, black horse, evidently waiting for them. The chums could scarcely believe their eyes.

They were only too glad to have their chum back again. They understood that something must have happened to cause the change; but they were not inquisitive.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"Vere!" gasped Frank. "The Cherub!" yelled Bob Lawless. It was Vere Beauclerc! The chums put spurs to their ponies, and dashed on in amazement and delight. Beauclerc swept off his Stetson hat, and smiled as he saluted them.

They were only too glad to have their chum back again. They understood that something must have happened to cause the change; but they were not inquisitive.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

rupted in his rascally work in the lonely timber. "Stand back!" he shouted, as Beauclerc rushed towards him. "Let that man go, you scoundrel!" "Stand back, scurrito!" There was a crash in the larches, and a burly man came panting up. Another joined him a moment later. "Keep that nino away!" panted Frisco Jo. "He will spoil all."

They were gone. "Listen!" exclaimed Beauclerc suddenly. Faintly, from the far distance, came the echo of the beat of horses' hoofs. Billy Cook shrugged his shoulders. "That's on the lower creek trail," he said. "They've got hosses. We'll never get arter them. But where's the pilgrim they was handling?"

Beauclerc halted. The two rustlers had run between him and the Mexican, and one of them had a still-smoking revolver in his hand. "Stand back!" he snarled. "You brat, what are you doing here?" "What are you doing to that man?" answered Beauclerc, his eyes blazing. There was a cry from the struggling man. "Run for it! Get help! I am Philip Trevelyan, and these scoundrels— Ah!"

"They've taken him!" panted Beauclerc. "By gum! Why should they?" "I don't know. But they were kidnapping him, and they would have kidnapped me, too, to keep my mouth shut. He called to me that his name was Philip Trevelyan."

He choked into silence as the Mexican grasped his throat. "Seize the boy, too!" yelled the Mexican. "He will talk! Seize him, too! Fools, do not let him escape! Caramba, seize him, I say!" The two rustlers made a rush at Beauclerc. The latter dodged them promptly. Unarmed as he was, a boy against two grown men, he was helpless to aid the traveller, but he could obey the struggling man's despairing appeal. He dodged into the trees, and ran for the trail.

"Never heered the name," said the ranchman. "Stranger in this section, I reckon. I guess Frisco Jo is none too good to rob any galoot down to the skin; but why he should want to rope in a stranger, and carry him off, beats me! They're gone, sonny, and I calculate you'd better get to the sheriff about it!" Beauclerc nodded. The distant hoof-beats had died away, and pursuit was evidently out of the question. Long before the cattlemen could have forced a way for their horses through the wood the rustlers would have been miles out of sight.

For what reason was a mystery he could not fathom, but it was evident that Frisco Jo and his associates were kidnapping the stranger, and that their intention was to seize the schoolboy, too, to prevent his betraying them. Beauclerc ran for his horse. "Stop!" He ran on without heeding. "Stop, or I'll shoot!" came a shout behind him. Crack! The bullet rang past the schoolboy's head.

"I'll go to the sheriff at once," said Beauclerc. He went back to his horse, and rode away towards Thompson, much puzzled by the strange occurrence, and concerned for the stranger who had fallen into the hands of Frisco Jo and his gang. Billy Cook went back to his duties in the ranch, equally puzzled. But for the plain traces of the struggle in the wood, the ranch foreman would have suspected that Beauclerc had been pulling his leg. As it was, he could not account for it, and he gave it up.

Another bound, and he was in the trail, and springing for his horse. He tore the reins from the branch, and flung himself into the saddle with breathless haste. Without even stopping to catch the stirrups with his feet, he dashed away towards the fork, and thundered down the main trail. A shot rang from the distance, but the two ruffians were out of sight in a twinkling. Beauclerc rode on desperately towards the Lawless ranch.

"The 3rd Chapter. The New Master. 'You fellows heard?' Chunky Todgers asked the question as the Cedar Creek fellows came out of the lumber schoolhouse after morning lessons. 'Heard what?' asked Frank Richards. 'About the new galoot,' said Chunky. 'New kid here?' asked Frank. 'No, you jay—new master!' 'Oh, he's here, is he?' asked Bob Lawless.

He knew that the cattlemen would be out on the plains, and his only thought was to bring help for the hapless stranger who had fallen among thieves. As he came out of the timber he caught

"Not yet," said Chunky Todgers. "He's coming to-day. I heard Miss Meadows say to Mr. Slimmey that he was coming this morning." "He don't seem to have materialised," remarked Eben Hacke. "What sort of a bloke is he?" asked Harold Hopkins. "You ain't seen 'im, Todgers, but you know all about it, of course." "No, I ain't seen 'im," answered



"Help!" panted the man as he burst through the thick undergrowth. "They're after me!" Vere Beauclerc ran at top speed towards the man.

sight of Billy Cook, the ranch foreman, on the plain, and he shouted to him. There were a couple of Kootenay cattlemen with Billy Cook, and all three turned in their saddles to stare at the schoolboy as he came thundering up. "Hallo!" exclaimed the ranch foreman. "I reckoned you was off on the railroad, sonny."

Chunky, with a playful imitation of the Cockney schoolboy's speech. "But I know something about 'im. He's coming up from New Westminster, where he's been master in a school. The committee made him the offer last month, and he accepted it. He's an Englishman, like old Slimmey."

"Help!" panted Beauclerc. "There's a man being robbed in the wood! Frisco Jo and two other rustlers—" "By gum!" "Come—come quick!" Beauclerc wheeled his horse, and rode back into the wood; and Billy Cook, after a stare of surprise, rode after him, calling to the cattlemen to follow. They rode hard, and in a few minutes reached the spot where Beauclerc had heard the pistol-shot.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" said Eben Hacke. "One Slimmey is enough!" "He's a University man in England," continued Chunky, evidently feeling of some consequence, from the extent of his information. "Oxford man, I heard Miss Meadows say."

Leaving their horses in the trail, they plunged into the wood. "Here's the place!" panted Beauclerc. "But where's the rustlers?" demanded Billy Cook. Beauclerc stared round him. In the grass and the thickets there were plenty of signs of the struggle. A spent cartridge lay in the grass, and Billy Cook picked it up and examined it curiously. But there was no sign of the rustlers or of their victim.

"Well, that's a nice name, anyway! But why hasn't he come, if he was coming this morning?" "I guess I don't know that!" answered Chunky. "P'raps the post-wagon's broken down. It does sometimes." "He didn't come by the post-wagon from Kamloops yesterday," said Gunten. "That stops at my popper's store, in Thompson. There was only one passenger last night, and that was Old Man Beauclerc."

AN AFFAIR OF MYSTERY!



(Continued from the previous page.)

Miss Meadows for a half-holiday to look for him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was some curiosity among the Cedar Creek fellows on the subject of the new master.

A change in the school naturally interested them.

Cedar Creek School was not an old establishment.

It had grown up, like all the lumber-schools of the Canadian West, to meet the wants of the district, and it was still growing.

Bob Lawless could remember when Cedar Creek had had only one class, with not more than ten or twelve members.

But it had grown since then.

The new master, according to Chunky Todgers, who seemed to have gathered a good deal of information, was to take charge of a class, and relieve Miss Meadows of some of her work.

Indeed, Chunky declared proudly that in the fulness of time Cedar Creek would have a "staff," just like a school "east."

But Mr. Trevelyan had not arrived by the time Cedar Creek went in to afternoon lessons.

Frank Richards noticed that Miss Meadows looked very thoughtful, once or twice, during the afternoon.

Perhaps she was surprised at the delay of Mr. Trevelyan in making his appearance.

The gentleman was a stranger to the district, and hitherto communications had been by letter.

True, there was no reason why anyone should lose his way in the Thompson Valley, if he had a tongue in his head.

But Miss Meadows was aware that "tenderfeet" did sometimes lose their way, all the same.

It was just as lessons came to an end that the sound of hoofs and the wheels of a buggy were heard in the school-ground.

"That's him, you bet!" whispered Chunky Todgers.

The Cedar Creek fellows came out in time to see Black Sam taking the buggy away, and a tall stranger coming into the porch.

They saluted him respectfully, at the same time "taking stock" of him with some curiosity.

He was a tall, well-built man, dressed in town clothes.

His face, though not handsome, was well cut, and his eyes very keen in their glance.

He wore a dark moustache, but his chin was clean-shaven.

An eyeglass gleamed in his right eye.

He glanced at the boys pouring out, and called to Bob Lawless.

"I suppose this is Cedar Creek School, my lad?"

"You bet!" answered Bob cheerily, with a smiling eye on the gentleman's monocle.

"Is Miss Meadows about?"

"Certainly, sir! I'll show you in, if you like."

"Thank you, my lad!"

Bob Lawless took the stranger in, and tapped at the door of Miss Meadows' study.

"Come in!"

Bob opened the door.

"There you are, sir!"

The stranger passed in, and Miss Meadows rose to meet him.

"Mr. Trevelyan?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"Pray be seated! I was expecting you earlier, and had really begun to fear that some mischance had happened to you."

"I must apologise, madam," said Mr. Trevelyan.

"Somewhat recklessly, I underlook to drive myself here in a buggy I hired at Lone Wolf, and I missed the way."

Bob Lawless had closed the door, but he could not help hearing that much as he went.

He was grinning as he came out of the schoolhouse, leaving Mr. Trevelyan in conversation with the schoolmistress.

"It's the new galoot?" asked Tom Lawrence.

"You bet—Trevelyan," said Bob, with a grin.

"I heard him tell Miss Meadows that he'd missed the way here from Lone Wolf."

"I guess he must be a jay!" said Eben Hacke.

"How the thunder could he miss a trail like that?"

"You never know what a tenderfoot can do," said Bob, laughing.

"It's lucky he didn't miss Cedar Creek altogether, and keep on into the mountains."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He looks a decent sort," remarked Frank Richards.

"What's that thing he wears stuck in his eye?" demanded Eben Hacke.

"Ha, ha!"

"Like a blessed dude from Noo York, with store clothes and a glass eye!" said Hacke, in great disgust.

"The pilgrims will shoot at that eyeglass if he shows it outside the school," grinned Gunten.

"He might as well have come in a plug-hat!"

"Same as Richards did, when he first came to school!" chuckled Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps he needs it to help his sight," suggested Frank Richards mildly.

"Then why don't he wear barnacles, like Old Man Gunten?"

"Perhaps only one eye wants help."

"Oh, gammon! He's a dude!" said Hacke disparagingly.

"A dude from Dudesville, I tell you. He won't go down hyer!"

There were a good many eyes on Mr. Trevelyan when he came out of the lumber schoolhouse a little later with Miss Meadows.

His eyeglass afforded considerable entertainment.

It was probably the only one in the Thompson Valley, and it was certain to be remarked upon—perhaps forcibly—if the new master showed it in the streets of Thompson or Cedar Camp.

Anything that smacked of the "dude" was not popular among the rough-and-ready men of Thompson.

"Come on, Franky," said Bob Lawless.

"We'll drop in and see Beauclerc at the shack on the way home."

"Tell Beauclerc we'll all be glad to see him here to-morrow," said Tom Lawrence.

"You bet!"

The new master was passing, with Miss Meadows, as the schoolboys were speaking, and he paused and glanced quickly at Bob.

He seemed about to speak to Bob, but checked himself, and walked on with the schoolmistress.

Bob looked after him in surprise.

"What's the matter with the galoot?" he said, in wonder.

"He fairly jumped. I didn't say anything to startle him, did I?"

"He may know Mr. Beauclerc," said Frank, also surprised.

"It's a rather uncommon name. Let's get off, Bob."

The chums rode away on the homeward trail, giving the incident no further thought.

But Mr. Trevelyan was apparently giving it further thought, for as he walked on with Miss Meadows he remarked:

"You have a pupil named Beauclerc here, it seems."

"Yes," answered Miss Meadows. "He is not at school to-day."

"A very uncommon name."

"Yes, very uncommon," agreed Miss Meadows. She glanced at the tall man by her side.

"You may know Mr. Beauclerc. He is from England, like yourself, Mr. Trevelyan, and, I think, an Oxford man."

"No, I do not remember meeting anyone of that name," said Mr. Trevelyan carelessly.

"Ah! This is the corral, is it not?"

And Mr. Trevelyan showed great interest in Cedar Creek and its surroundings, and did not refer to the subject again.

The 4th Chapter.

Mysterious!

Sheriff Henderson, of Thompson, was enjoying his after-dinner pipe on his veranda, when Vere Beauclerc rode up to the house.

Beauclerc spotted the sheriff on the veranda, and leaving his horse tethered to a post, he came up the steps.

"Afternoon!" said Mr. Henderson, glancing at him.

"Good-afternoon, sir! I've got something rather important to report to you," said Beauclerc.

"Go ahead!" said the sheriff tersely.

Beauclerc explained what had happened in the timber.

The sheriff of Thompson listened, in growing surprise, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and, in his interest, letting it go out.

"Jerusalem!" commented the sheriff, when the schoolboy had finished.

"You're sure you've got it right, sonny?"

"I've told you exactly what happened, Mr. Henderson."

"The name the pilgrim gave you—"

"Philip Trevelyan."

"That's the galoot, I reckon."

Beauclerc looked at him.

"I thought he was a stranger in this section," he said.

"I guess he is, but his name isn't," explained Mr. Henderson.

"Trevelyan is the name of the new master for the school. He came up on the railroad yesterday, or should have done so, and was expected at Cedar Creek to-day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"You see, I know as I am on the school committee," explained the sheriff.

"It's Mr. Trevelyan from New Westminster, as sure as a gun. You say it was 'Frisko Jo, the greaser, who was manhandling him?'"

"Yes; and two other rough fellows whom I did not know by sight."

The sheriff rose.

"I guess I'll look into this," he said.

"It beats me! If they robbed him, that's not surprising. But why should they take him off? It's a puzzle. But thank you for coming to me, sonny. I'll look into it."

Beauclerc returned to his horse, and rode away from the town.

He was as puzzled as the sheriff by the strange occurrence.

Had Mr. Trevelyan been some rich mine-owner, or prosperous rancher, he could have understood it better.

Such a victim might have been worth holding to ransom, if 'Frisko Jo' had dared to play such a game in the Thompson Valley.

But a schoolteacher was not worth the trouble; it could not be supposed that an assistant-master at a lumber school could be worth anything in that line.

Unless the ruffians were his personal enemies there was no accounting for it. And how could a tutor from New Westminster have gained the enmity of the Mexican loafer of Thompson?

Yet it was clear that the ruffians had waylaid him on his way to the school and seized him.

Vere had done all he could in the matter now, and he rode back to the shack.

He found his father, the remittance-man, at work in the clearing.

Mr. Beauclerc greeted him with a smile.

"You have stayed a long time, Vere. I thought you were only going to meet your friends on the trail. You ought to be resting."

Beauclerc explained.

His father listened in astonishment.

The strange story perplexed him, as it had perplexed Billy Cook and the sheriff.

"I've been to Mr. Henderson to tell him," added Vere.

"It's in his hands now. I suppose he will soon get those rascals run down."

"Now you had better go in and sleep, my boy."

"Yes, dad."

In a few minutes Beauclerc was in his bunk, sleeping the sound sleep of healthy youth.

It was long since his eyes had closed.

The sun was sinking towards the far Pacific, and the shadows lengthening along the creek, when he was awakened by the clatter of hoofs outside the shack.

He came out to find his chums there.

"I guess we thought we'd give you a look in, Cherub!" announced Bob Lawless cheerily.

"Here we are, turned up like a bad penny!"

"And jolly welcome!" said Beauclerc, with a smile.

"You'll come in to supper?"

"Right-ho!"

The remittance-man was still at work in the fields, in the fading light; and the three chums sat down to supper together in the shack.

"There's news at school," said Bob, as

same man. The trail from Lone Wolf joins our old trail near the timber, so he would pass that way."

"Then he got away from 'Frisko Jo,' after all, and got back to his buggy somehow," said Beauclerc.

"I shall have to drop in on the sheriff to-morrow, and tell him. He's taken the matter in hand. It's very odd that Mr. Trevelyan has not made any complaint to the sheriff himself."

"Dashed odd!" said Bob Lawless.

"A chap don't usually let himself be handled by a gang of rustlers, and say nary a word about it. I should think he would be simply mad, and would want them arrested."

"Yet he told Miss Meadows—"

"That he'd missed the trail in his buggy. I heard him."

"I shall be glad to see the man to-morrow," said Beauclerc.

"I don't understand it at all."

Frank Richards and Bob were thinking over the matter, in great perplexity, as they rode home to the ranch after supper.

It was impossible to doubt that Mr. Trevelyan at Cedar Creek was the same Philip Trevelyan who had called for help in the wood.

But in that case, why had he deliberately kept secret the fact that he had been waylaid in the timber by a gang of rustlers?

His explanation to Miss Meadows might have been true, so far as it went—perhaps he had missed the trail.

But why had he made no mention of his adventure in the timber—certainly an exciting one to befall a stranger?

The schoolboys could not account for it, and they wondered.

The 5th Chapter.

Face to Face.

Frank Richards and Bob met Beauclerc on the trail, as usual, the next morning, and they rode on in company to school.

"What about seeing the sheriff, Cherub?" Bob asked.

"You want to let him know that it's all serene."

"Yes; but on second thoughts I want to see Mr. Trevelyan first," said Beauclerc.

"He may not be the man I saw in the wood."

"But he must be. The same name—"

"Better see him first, though," agreed Frank Richards.

"You can ride over to Thompson after morning lessons."

Beauclerc nodded, and they entered the school together.

Mr. Trevelyan was not to be seen; it was yet early for school.

Miss Meadows had just come in from an early morning ride, and Beauclerc ran towards her as she went into the porch.

"Miss Meadows—"

"I am glad to see you back again, Beauclerc," said the schoolmistress, with a kind smile.

"Thank you, ma'am; I'm very glad to be back," said Beauclerc.

"Can I see Mr. Trevelyan, ma'am?"

"I suppose so, if you wish to," said Miss Meadows, in surprise.

"Why—"

"I think I met him yesterday, ma'am, on his way to the school," said Beauclerc.

"If it was he, I saw him being attacked by a gang of rustlers in the timber, and I went to the sheriff to tell him about it. If he got away from them all right, Mr. Henderson ought to be told."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Miss Meadows, in astonishment.

"It can scarcely have been Mr. Trevelyan you saw, Beauclerc, or he would certainly have mentioned such an occurrence."

"Here he comes!" murmured Frank Richards.

The tall figure of Mr. Trevelyan was seen approaching from Mr. Slinmeyer's cabin, where the new master was putting up till his own quarters were ready.

He raised his hat gracefully to Miss Meadows.

Beauclerc's eyes were fixed upon him.

He was trying to ascertain whether this was the man he had seen in the timber the previous day.

That man, he remembered, was tall, and looked about Mr. Trevelyan's age, and was similarly clad.

Indeed, the "store" clothes were exactly alike.

Vere had had only a glimpse of the features of the man in the wood, and had only a dim picture of the face in his mind.

But such as it was, it did not quite seem to fit in with Mr. Trevelyan's looks.

Offhand, he would have said that the new master was not the man he had seen struggling with 'Frisko Jo' in the timber.

But he did not feel at all sure.

It was for Mr. Trevelyan himself to settle that point.

Certainly the new master gave no sign of knowing Beauclerc by sight.

"Good-morning, Mr. Trevelyan," said Miss Meadows.

"This lad is Beauclerc, whom I mentioned to you yesterday."

The new master's keen glance turned on Beauclerc then, sharply enough.

"Beauclerc has just told me a very strange story," continued Miss Meadows.

"He thinks he met you on your way here yesterday."

Mr. Trevelyan started.

The schoolboys were watching his face, and they could not fail to see how the colour wavered in it for a moment.

He seemed utterly taken aback.

"He met me!" repeated the new master.

"He thinks so."

"That is, if you were the man I saw attacked by 'Frisko Jo' and his gang, sir," said Beauclerc.

"I want to know, so that I can tell the sheriff it is all right; otherwise, he will be searching for you."

"Ah!" Mr. Trevelyan drew a quick breath.

"I—I think I understand. You were the boy—you were the boy on the trail who—"

He paused.

"Then it was you, sir," said Beauclerc.

"You called out your name to me, and were going to tell me something, when 'Frisko Jo' stopped you—if it was you."

Mr. Trevelyan smiled.

"It was I," he said.

"Certainly."

"We thought it must be, sir," said Bob Lawless.

"Of course, if it wasn't, the sheriff would have to look for 'Frisko Jo,' and see what he's done with the man he was kidnapping."

Mr. Trevelyan laughed.

"That would be a great deal of trouble for the sheriff to take for nothing," he remarked.

"I should be sorry for the sheriff's time to be wasted for no cause. I remember you now, my lad," he went on, looking at Vere Beauclerc.

"You were on the trail—"

"I went for help," said Beauclerc.

"I came back in a few minutes with some of the Lawless Ranch men, but you were gone, and the rustlers too. So I went to the sheriff at Thompson to report what had happened."

"I—I see! And the sheriff is hunting for this—this 'Frisko Jo,' as you call him?"

asked Mr. Trevelyan quickly.

"I suppose so; he said he would."

"He ought to be warned at once that there is no occasion to trouble," said Mr. Trevelyan.

"It would be a great shame if his time is taken up for nothing."

"I can send word to him," said Miss Meadows.

"Sam is going to Thompson this morning, and I can send a message by him to Mr. Henderson. But if the Mexican was guilty of such an outrage as Beauclerc describes, he should be found and punished."

Mr. Trevelyan