

The BOYS' FRIEND 1^{1d} 1^{1d} 2

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THREE HALFPENCE.

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CUFFY AND THE CARAVANNERS!

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

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

A Very, Very Painful Parting!

"Jimmy, you ass!"
"Jimmy, you fathead!"
"Jimmy, you chump!"
Lovell and Raby and Newcome all spoke together.

The Rookwood caravanners were in camp.

The caravan stood in the grass of the common, and Robinson Crusoe, the horse, was cropping away industriously.

Jimmy Silver was seated in what a novelist would call an attitude of un-studied grace—his legs stretched out in the grass, his back supported against a rather dusty wheel, his straw hat on the back of his head.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were standing, their eyes fixed on him in exasperation.

Tubby Muffin nodded assent to Lovell & Co.'s remarks, but he did not speak, as his jaws were otherwise engaged.

A bag of apples had recently been purchased at a farm, and Tubby was apparently trying to get to the bottom of the bag in the shortest possible space of time.

In the distance, Clarence Cuffy, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood, could be seen. He was gone to the stream for water.

He was out of hearing of the Classical juniors, and the Co. had taken that opportunity of telling Jimmy Silver what they thought of him.

"Of all the crass idiots!" Arthur Edward Lovell said reflectively. "Of all the howling, burbling, frabjous jabberwocks!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Jimmy Silver defensively. "It wasn't my fault that Cuffy joined us."

"He belongs to Tommy Dodd's caravan," said Lovell. "He's a Modern, ain't he? He's been with us twenty-four hours, and he's broken nearly all the crocks in the van, he's nearly set fire to the tent, he's upset all the milk twice, and spilt paraffin on the cheese, and—"

"I know he's an awful duffer," said Jimmy.

"And the worst of all, he's bored us all to death," groaned Lovell. "He never leaves off talking, and he talks pink piffle, and you oughtn't to have planted him on us, you shrieking ass!"

"I didn't! Only—only I put him up to japing the Moderns, and they kicked him out, so we were bound to take him in," said Jimmy Silver.

"I don't see it."

"Noblesse oblige, old chap."

"Noblesse o'rats," said Raby.

"He's a good chap," said Jimmy Silver. "He can't help being a duffer and a bore. He's gone to fill the water-jug now, like a good chap."

"Bet you he'll bust the jug."

Jimmy grinned.

"He can't! It's a tin jug."

"Then he'll lose it in the stream."

Lovell's words were prophetic. Clarence Cuffy came back toward

the camp, and the Classical juniors noted at once that he came back empty-handed.

"Where's the jug?" asked Newcome.

"I am so very, very sorry," said Cuffy. "It slipped from my hand, and lies now at the bottom of the stream. Was it not unfortunate?"

Lovell snorted.

Clarence Cuffy had a genius for blundering.

He was not useful on a caravan tour.

And Cuffy really belonged to the Modern caravan party, but he had been Jimmy Silver's unconscious instrument in japing Tommy Dodd & Co., and the three Tommies had become exasperated with him.

After that, Jimmy felt bound to take him when he proposed joining the Classical party—he felt that it was a case of "noblesse oblige."

But the duffer of Rookwood was a sore trial, and Jimmy's comrades did not seem to feel so keenly the claims of noblesse oblige.

"That's our last big jug," said Lovell, in tones of tragic resignation. "Cuffy broke the other. We shall have to fetch water in tea-cups after this."

"Cuffy hasn't broke all the tea-cups yet," remarked Raby, by way of consolation.

"Not quite all," said Raby.

"There's enough to last him over to-morrow."

"My dear friends—" said Cuffy.

Lovell groaned.

That was Cuffy's way of speaking.

"My dear Lovell, are you in pain?" asked Cuffy, with great concern.

"Yes, awful," grunted Lovell.

"My dear fellow, I am so very, very sorry," said Cuffy. "Perhaps I can be of assistance to you, Lovell. If you are ill, I would nurse you."

"Thanks! I'm not tired of life."

"My dear Arthur—"

"Br-r-r!" said Lovell.

Clarence Cuffy turned to Jimmy Silver again.

"My dear James," he said, "I have been reflecting. I have now been with you twenty-four hours, and it has been very enjoyable—has it not, my dear friends?"

"Ripping!" said Raby, with a deep sarcasm that was quite lost on Clarence Cuffy.

"Topping!" said Newcome.

"Simply terrific!" gasped Lovell.

Cuffy beamed.

"I'm so very, very glad to hear you say so, my dear fellows," he exclaimed. "It is very flattering to me, but it is also very gratifying to learn that you find my society so agreeable. My dear papa would be so pleased."

"I wonder your pater can spare you from home, Cuffy, you're—you're so nice," said Lovell. "If—if you feel that you ought to be with him, d-d-don't mind us. We—we should miss you, but—but—"

"But we should bear it," said Raby.

Cuffy shook his head.



THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP HIM QUIET!

"I left home for a caravan tour," he answered. "My dear papa does not expect me back yet."

"Why not give him a pleasant surprise?" suggested Newcome.

Cuffy shook his head.

"I have been reflecting," he said.

"I parted from dear Thomas Dodd in anger. I had been smitten with violence upon the nose, and I regret to say that it made me very, very angry. But since I have reflected, I have quite forgiven dear Thomas. I can make allowances for him. My dear fellows, I fear that what I am about to say may be a shock to you."

Cuffy paused, as if to soften the blow.

The Classical juniors of Rookwood gazed at him curiously.

They could not guess what in the world Clarence Cuffy was driving at.

"We have been so happy together," said Cuffy, beaming on them. "It would be so very, very pleasant for us to pass the remainder of the vacation together, would it not, employing all our leisure moments in serious and improving conversation?"

"Oh, topping!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"But—my dear friends—I fear—"

Cuffy paused again, breaking it gently. "I fear that it is my duty to assure Tommy Dodd of my forgiveness."

"Eh?"

"And prove to him that I do not bear malice—"

"What?"

"By rejoining his party," said Cuffy. "Such is the result of my somewhat serious and prolonged reflections, my dear friends."

The Classical juniors gazed at him. They could hardly believe their ears.

Cuffy met their glances sadly.

"I am so very, very sorry to give you this painful shock," he said. "We have been so very, very happy together. But do you not agree with me, my friends, that such is my duty? Can I leave dear Thomas under the impression that I have allowed the sun to go down on my wrath? Can I?"

Jimmy Silver gasped. "Impossible!" he exclaimed fervently.

"You can't!" said Lovell, at once.

"It's—it's rather a heavy blow, losing you, Cuffy, but—but your duty is clear."

"Clear as mud—I mean daylight," exclaimed Raby. "I—I feel that I shall cry when you go, Cuffy. But then, think of Tommy Dodd's joy when you come back."

"Yes, that will console us," said Newcome.

"I am so glad you agree with me, my dear friends," said Cuffy. "I am very, very sorry to tear myself away. I feel that you will miss me. In my humble way, I have tried to lead your thoughts to a higher plane, and to banish thoughtless frivolity from our happy circle. I feel that you have been more serious since I joined you."

"We have!" groaned Lovell.

"No doubt about that."

"Awfully serious!"

"How very, very kind of you to say so," said Cuffy. "But I feel—I am convinced—that duty calls me back to dear Thomas."

"It does," said Lovell. "Not a shadow of doubt about that."

"Not the slightest."

"I'll get your bike ready, Cuffy," said Raby.

"You are very, very kind. If you do not object, I will depart this evening, as then I can reach Valley Wood before dark, and I am aware that dear Thomas is camping there to-night," said Cuffy. "Would you mind, my dear friends?"

"Not a bit!"

"Not at all!"

"Give our love to dear Thomas."

"You are quite, quite sure that you are not offended by this somewhat abrupt departure?" asked Clarence anxiously.

"Not in the least, old fellow. We—we don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go," gasped Lovell.

And Clarence Cuffy went, much to the satisfaction of the Classical chums.

The 2nd Chapter. The Only Way!

"This is something like!" Tommy Dodd made that observation, in tones of deep contentment.

The sun was setting on the hills, and in the valley the Modern caravanners were camped, within a mile of the farmhouse where they obtained supplies for supper.

They had enjoyed their supper after the day's march, and were taking it easy, resting in the rich grass, and watching the red sunset.

"Beats classes at Rookwood—what?" said Tommy Cook, with a grin.

"Faith, and ye're right," said Tommy Doyle. "I wonder where those Classical asses are now."

"And Cuffy?" said Tommy Dodd.

"I suppose poor old Cuffy's gone home. I really wish his nose hadn't been punched so hard."

"The howling ass! He ought to have been lynched."

"Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

The ringing of a bicycle bell on the footpath caused the three Tommies of Rookwood to raise their heads and glance round.

A cyclist was bumping along the grassy path towards the camp.

Tommy Dodd's face altered.

"Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia! Cuffy!"

"Cuffy!" said Cook and Doyle, in a breath.

The three Modern juniors watched Cuffy as if fascinated as he came up and jumped off his bicycle.

Clarence beamed upon them.

"Here I am, my dear friends," he said.

"Oh, there you are, are you?" ejaculated Tommy Dodd.

"My dear, dear friends, I sincerely hope that you did not suppose I was still angry with you," said Clarence.

"I have forgiven you from the bottom of my heart. I felt that I had done wrong in leaving you, dear Thomas. That is why I have returned. I am sure you are very, very glad to see me."

"Oh, begorra!"

(Continued on the next page.)



CUFFY AND THE CARAVANNERS!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"I—I thought you'd gone home!" stammered Tommy Dodd.

"I felt in with the Classical fellows, Thomas, and have remained with them until this evening. They fully agreed that I ought to come back to you," said Clarence, beaming.

"I'll bet they did!" muttered Tommy Cook.

"I felt that I must," continued Clarence. "Your Uncle Dodd, my dear Thomas, would have been so disappointed to hear that I was not spending the holiday with you. It might also have pained my dear papa. Was it not fortunate that I remembered your intention of camping here this evening?"

"Awfully!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

The three Moderns looked at the ineffable Clarence. There were certain considerations of politeness to be observed, and, moreover, Tommy's kind uncle, Mr. Dodd, wanted his old friend's son to spend the vacation caravanning with the three Moderns, and Tommy Dodd had not liked to refuse.

But Clarence Cuffy was a heavy trial. He was far from realising that, however.

In the simplicity of his heart Cuffy was assured that he spread pleasure and contentment wherever he went.

It was his aim, as he frequently remarked, to preserve a high tone of seriousness and thoughtfulness in his surroundings, and undoubtedly fellows became very, very serious when Clarence's company was inflicted upon them.

Tommy Dodd looked resigned to his fate, but Cook and Doyle had rebellious expressions.

They felt like Jimmy Silver's chums, and were not inclined to stand Clarence for any length of time.

They did not want to hurt his feelings, but they wanted him to go home. He really was not suitable for caravanning.

Leaving Clarence to rest after his ride, the three Tommies took a stroll down the valley.

"It's too bad," said Tommy Dodd, when they were out of hearing of Cuffy. "The ass means well, but he's an awful worry. Uncle Dodd wouldn't understand that, though."

"I've got an idea," said Cook. "Well?"

"I'm going to have botulism." "Whatter?"

"Botulism," said Cook. "What on earth's that?"

"It's the new fashionable disease. It's the thing you die of nowadays, if you're really up-to-date," said Tommy Cook. "Look here, I'm going to have a bad attack of botulism, and get a rash over my face—I can work that—and Clarence can be scared off. He's awfully afraid of catching things. He thinks he's got a cold whenever the wind blows."

Doyle chuckled. "Faith, it's a janius ye are, Cooky!" he said. "We'll help ye back to camp now, and scare Clarence out of his wits, if he's got any."

"Good man!" said Tommy Dodd, with a grin. "How are you going to get a rash, though?"

"Easy enough. A bit of rubbing will do it."

"Do botulists have rashes?" asked Doyle.

"I don't know. But Clarence doesn't either, so it doesn't matter."

Tommy Cook began to rub his cheek with great vigour. It was soon red with rubbing.

"That'll fade out," remarked Doyle. "Sure, you'd better let me rub it hard with a rough stone, and it will last."

"You silly ass!" "Sure, isn't that a good idea intirely?" "Fathead!"

The 3rd Chapter. A Sudden Recovery.

"Ass!" Evidently Cook was not amenable to reason on that point.

"That'll do," he said. "I'll give it a rub every now and then to keep it red. Now you fellows help me back to camp, and I'll begin to groan as soon as Cuffy can hear me."

Cuffy jumped back. "Botulism!" he ejaculated. "It's an awful thing!" said Tommy Dodd. "I'm afraid poor old Cook is done for. But you needn't catch it."

"Goodness gracious!" Tommy Cook groaned deeply. "Help me into the van," he said faintly. "Cuffy can stay with me to-night and look after me, you fellows. I don't want you to run any risks."

"Oh, dear!" said Clarence. Tommy Cook rubbed his cheek, making it a deeper red.

"Is there a pain there, my poor, poor friend?" asked Cuffy. "Can't you see it's a rash?"

"Oh, dear! What a very, very awful occurrence, my dear friends!" said Cuffy in great distress. "You are very, very young to die, my dear Cook. Dodd had better go for a doctor while I remain with you!"

"Groan!" "How very, very fortunate that I have one of my dear papa's tracts in my pocket," said Cuffy. "I will read it to you now, Cook. It is very, very suitable at the present terrible moment."

"Groan!" "We can't get a doctor before morning," said Tommy Dodd. "I suppose you don't mind staying in the caravan with poor old Cook, Cuffy? If you catch it, the doctor can attend to both of you at the same time."

"B-b-but I do not want to catch b-b-botulism, Dodd!" ejaculated Clarence. "I suppose you don't want me to catch it!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd warmly.

"Nunno! But—" "Sure it's for poor old Cook to say," remarked Doyle. "Which would you prefer to stay with you to-night, Cook?"

"Cuffy!" said Cook faintly. "He's sure to catch it, I'm afraid; but Cuffy is so good he won't mind. You don't mind dying if I do, do you, Cuffy?"

"Oh, dear!" "You couldn't die in better company, Cooky!" said Tommy Dodd heartily. "Help him into the van, Cuffy. We'd better not touch him again."

Clarence Cuffy stood rooted to the ground. His face was a study. Clarence was rather given to fancying that he was ill, and the word botulism had a terribly sinister sound.

What botulism might be Clarence did not know any more than the three Tommies did, but he knew it was something distinctly unpleasant.

"Of course, if Cuffy would rather clear off and avoid infection—" said Tommy Doyle gravely.

"Yes, he has a right to if he chooses," agreed Dodd. "Oh, dear!" said Cuffy. "I—I—I am not in the least afraid, my dear friends, but—but I cannot help thinking what a terrible grief it would be to my dear papa if anything should happen to me."

"You're bound to consider that," agreed Doyle. "Yet I cannot desert poor Cook in this fearful extremity."

"Don't mind me!" groaned Tommy Cook. "You're bound to think of your dear papa first, Cuffy. Perhaps you'd better go."

"If—if you will not regard this as a desertion, my dear friends—" said Cuffy in great distress. "Not at all, old fellow!"

"Then—then—then—" Cuffy hesitated. His terror of that terrific disease, botulism, was evidently great, but his sense of duty was struggling with it.

Tommy Dodd rushed to bring his bike. "Better clear off before you get it, Cuffy!" he exclaimed. "I say, there's a pink spot on your cheek. Do you feel any pain?"

Cuffy gave a gasp. "Is—is that a symptom, my dear Thomas?" he gasped.

"Well, it may or may not be," said Tommy Dodd cautiously. "But the safest thing is for you to get back to Gander's Green as quickly as possible and consult the family doctor."

"You—you really think so, Thomas?" "Well, that's my advice."

Clarence Cuffy climbed on his bike, which Tommy obligingly held for him. Tommy Dodd started him with a shove, and Cuffy went pedalling down the footpath.

Tommy Cook sat up, grinning. He did not look like a victim of botulism now. "My hat! He's really gone!" he breathed.

"Look!" "Ha, ha, ha!" In great glee the three Tommies watched Clarence Cuffy growing smaller and smaller in the distance.

"Forgotten something?" asked Tommy Dodd. "No!" gasped Cuffy. "Then what—" "My dear Thomas, did you think that I could really desert poor Cook in this extremity?" panted Cuffy. "Never!"

"Wha-a-t?" "EVEN for the sake of my dear papa. I cannot desert the poor fellow!" said Clarence firmly. "I shall remain with you."

"Oh!" "And nurse poor, dear Cook at any risk to my own health," said Clarence heroically. "I am ashamed of the momentary impulse to seek my own immunity from this terrible disease, my dear fellows. I am prepared to remain with poor Cook to the very, very end."

"Oh, my hat!" "You shall go for a doctor, Thomas, while I look after Cook. I will never, never leave him!" said Clarence.

"Oh, crumbs!" Tommy Cook sat up in the grass. His look did not express gratitude for the devoted kindness of Clarence Cuffy.

Evidently it was no use being ill any longer, and Cook had decided that it was time to recover.

He had no further use for botulism. "Are you feeling better, my dear friend?" asked Cuffy anxiously.

"Oh, I'm all right!" growled Cook, rising to his feet. "Tain't botulism, after all."

"Are you quite, quite sure?" "Yes, ass!"

"Then we have been alarmed for nothing," said Clarence, in great relief. "I am so very, very glad! But it would be much, much better to see a medical man and make quite sure, my dear friend. I will walk with you to the nearest—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Cook crossly. "My dear Thomas—" "Bow-wow! Time to turn in, you fellows," said Cook. "Let's get the tent up."

"But, my dear Thomas—" Cuffy was not heeded.

The tent was erected, and the three Tommies turned in, and Clarence Cuffy followed their example, considerably puzzled by Tommy Cook's rapid recovery from his illness.

The 4th Chapter. Stranded

"Look after the van and the horse, Cuffy!" "Certainly, my dear Thomas!"

"We'll be back under the hour." It was morning, bright and sunny, and the Modern caravanners had turned out in cheery spirits.

Even Cuffy did not seem so much of an inflictee that sunny morning. The three Tommies started for the farmhouse, a mile away up the valley, out of sight from the camp.

They carried a big can and a bag and a basket, in the hope of obtaining supplies of milk and eggs and bread.

Cuffy, duffer as he was, was supposed to be able to keep watch at the camp while they were gone.

Clarence wanted to be useful, and as Clarence wanted to be useful, and as soon as his comrades had departed he proceeded to gather materials for the morning fire.

When he returned to the camp, with his arms full of brushwood, he found that it was not untenanted.

Two rough-looking fellows were standing there, surveying the caravan and the horse, and looking at them curiously.

They turned and stared at Cuffy as he came up. "Good-morning!" said Cuffy brightly. The two tramps blinked at him.

"This 'ere turn-out belong to you, sir?" asked one of them, a burly fellow with a black patch over one eye. "To me and my friends," answered Cuffy.

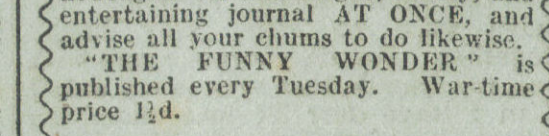
The two men exchanged glances. "Oh, there's some more of you, hay?" said the one-eyed man.

"Yes, my friends have gone up to the farmhouse," said Cuffy. "Just coming back, I dessay?"

"Oh, no; they will probably be absent nearly an hour!" answered Cuffy innocently. "I think the farmhouse is a mile away."

"Oh! You're all alone 'ere, then?" "Quite alone, my friend," said Clarence unsuspectingly.

A condensed cinematograph entertainment for Home, Trench, or Battleship. This is:



The only journal in which CHARLIE CHAPLIN, THE COMICAL KING OF THE KINEMA, appears in a new and really screaming comedy every week.

The two men exchanged glances again. Anybody but Clarence Cuffy would have seen that they were a pair of tramps of a particularly unpleasant kind, and would have kept a very sharp eye on them.

But Cuffy was not suspicious. "This 'ere looks all right, Bill," murmured the one-eyed man.

"A bit of all right, and no mistake, Ikey," answered Bill, in the same tone. "Why, we could be miles an' miles away."

"And a fresh coat of paint would make that there van look a bit different," murmured Ikey.

"And we know where to get rid of the 'orse," murmured Bill. "The gipsies we saw yesterday wouldn't ask no questions."

"You're right, ole pal!" Clarence was piling up the brushwood for the fire while the two tramps were muttering together.

"So them blokes going up to the farmhouse was your friends, sir?" said Ikey, addressing Clarence again.

"Yes," assented Cuffy. "Then the message they give me is for you, I s'pose," continued Ikey, watching Clarence's simple face intently.

"Did they give you a message for me?" asked Cuffy, with interest. "They did that. They want you to meet them 'ari way back and 'elp them to carry something," said Ikey. "Come on, Bill; time we was going."

The two tramps slouched off, and disappeared through the trees. Out of sight of Clarence Cuffy they stopped, and peered back at him under cover.

Their intention was to impress Cuffy with the fact that they were gone, so that he would have no hesitation in leaving the camp unguarded.

But they need not have taken that trouble, for Cuffy had no suspicions. He started up the path to the farmhouse at once, and in a few minutes he was out of sight.

Ikey indulged in a chuckle. "That blessed young idjit's gone, Bill!" he murmured. "This is where we come in, I think."

"I think we does!" grinned Bill. The two tramps hurried back to the camp, and in hot haste put the horse to the caravan.

Cuffy's bike was shoved in the van, and the vehicle led out of the camp to the path down the valley.

Taking the direction opposite to that taken by Cuffy, Ikey and Bill drove off in great spirits.

They came out into the country lane, and turned into another lane, and another, feeling the safer for every turning they placed between their precious selves and the owners of the stolen caravan.

Meanwhile, Clarence Cuffy was tramping contentedly towards the farmhouse. He enjoyed that pleasant morning walk.

He was in sight of the farmhouse when he met Tommy Dodd & Co. on their way back.

Tommy Dodd had the big can full of milk, Cook had the basket of eggs, and Doyle had his bag full of other comestibles.

They had done very well at the farmhouse. "Hallo! Here's Cuffy!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, in surprise. "What have you left the camp for, fathead?"

"I came to help you carry the things, my dear Thomas," answered Clarence. Tommy Dodd grunted.

"That's all very well, but you ought to have stayed at the camp. It's not safe to leave the van alone."

"But you asked me to come, my dear Thomas!" exclaimed Cuffy, in surprise. "Eh! I did nothing of the kind."

"Yes. Your message—" "My what?"

"Your message," said Cuffy, in bewilderment. "Surely, Thomas, you have not forgotten sending me a message to meet you half-way."

"I never sent you any message!" roared Tommy Dodd. "How could I send you a message when there was nobody to send?"

"Those two men—" "What two men?"

"The two men at the camp, dear Thomas. They said you had sent me a message to meet you—"

The tramps had made a clean sweep. "Gone!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "The caravan—" "Oh, my hat!"

"After them!" shrieked Tommy Dodd. Up and down and round about the three furious caravanners raged in search of the thieves. But they raged and searched in vain.

The tracks of the van were lost in the many tracks of the rutty lane, and there was no clue to the direction taken by the two rascals.

Tired, breathless, and furious, they returned to the spot where the camp had been, in utter dismay.

Clarence Cuffy had arrived there. "The caravan is not here, my dear Thomas," he said. "Is it possible that those unscrupulous persons have taken it?"

"Dummy!" "I—I have brought the things you left on the footpath, dear Thomas," said Cuffy meekly. "I am very, very sorry to say that I have spilt the milk, and that the eggs are broken."

The three Tommies looked at him. Their breakfast was strewn somewhere along the footpath, and the caravan was gone, and they were hungry and stranded.

It was too much. They fell upon Clarence and smote him, and bonneted him with the empty milk-can.

Then they held a desperate council of war—what time a suffocated and anguished voice proceeded from the interior of the milk-can—a voice they heartlessly refused to heed.

The 5th Chapter.

A Capture on the Enemy.

"My only summer hat!" Jimmy Silver uttered that exclamation in tones of surprise.

"What's the row?" asked Lovell, looking round from the horse, which he was leading.

The Classical caravan was rumbling on its way through a deep lane in the morning sunshine.

"Those blessed Moderns seem to be haunting us!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "The Moderns!"

"Look there!" Jimmy Silver pointed. A short distance ahead of the Classical van a side-lane turned off from the road.

Down that lane came a caravan, rumbling. It had nearly reached the corner when Jimmy Silver spotted it across the intervening field.

"Tommy Dodd's lot, by Jove!" exclaimed Raby. "Look here, don't you let Cuffy plant himself on us again, Jimmy Silver!" roared Lovell. "If you begin any more noblesse oblige on us, we'll begin with our boot-leather on you, so you can take that as a tip!"

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He was walking on beside the Classical van, but his eyes were fixed on the Modern van about to turn into the lane.

He knew Tommy Dodd's van by sight, of course. It was rather gaily painted, and Jimmy Silver would have recognised it half a mile off, and it was now only twenty yards away.

It was the Modern van, but where were the Moderns? A rough-looking man, with a black patch over his eye, was driving the horse, and another rough fellow sat by him, smoking a pipe.

Nobody else was to be seen about the van. It was absurd to suppose that the three Tommies and Cuffy were packed inside the closed caravan that warm morning; but if not, they were evidently not with their van at all, and it was entirely in charge of the two rough-looking men.

"What's the matter with you, Jimmy?" asked Lovell, surprised by Jimmy's fixed expression.

"There's something jolly wrong about this," said Jimmy Silver. "Stop those men—get the van in the way! It looks to me as if Tommy Dodd's van has been stolen."

"Great pip!" But the same thought came to Jimmy's chums as they looked at the two rough men alone in the charge of the Modern van.

They hurried Robinson Crusoe on to the turning, and reached the corner in time to block the progress of the other caravan.

Ikey and Bill, on Tommy Dodd's van, had to stop. The Classical van was halted right across the narrow side-lane, and there was no advance to be made, and the lane was too narrow for turning the big vehicle in a hurry; that was an operation that required time and care.

But Ikey and Bill were not thinking of turning the van. They were not aware that it was known by sight to the caravanners in the road.

"Hi, there!" yelled Ikey wrathfully. "Whatcher blackin' the way for? Let a chap pass, can't yer?"

"Clear the road, blow yer!" exclaimed his companion. Jimmy Silver ran towards them, his comrades at his heels.

Tubby Muffin prudently remained behind. He did not like the looks of the two tramps, and thought he would like them still less at closer quarters.

"What are you doing with that van?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Ikey gave him a one-eyed glare. "Driving it, ain't it?" he replied. "Hain't you got any heyes?" "That van doesn't belong to you."

Ikey gripped his whip. "Are you going to clear the road and let a bloke drive on?" he demanded. "No fear!"

"Then I'll start on yer!"

Jimmy Silver looked at the ruffian coolly as he gripped the whip and raised it.

"If you use that whip, my man, we'll have you off that van before you can do it twice," he said. "Be careful."

Ikey paused.

The four Rookwood juniors were rather a handful to tackle, and they looked quite determined.

Ikey lowered the whip.

"Well, let a man pass, then," he said sulkily.

"You're not going to pass till we know how you got hold of that caravan. Where are the chaps it belongs to?"

"It's all right, sir, on my davy," said Ikey, civilly now. "The young gents asked me to drive this 'ere van for them. They—they're taking a walk, and they're going to join us at the next town."

Perhaps that was the best yarn Ikey could be expected to spin on the spur of the moment, but naturally the Classical juniors of Rookwood were not inclined to believe it.

It was too highly improbable that Tommy Dodd would have entrusted his caravan to the hands of such exceedingly disreputable persons as the two tramps evidently were.

Lovell grinned.

"Is that the best you can do?" he asked.

"I don't know wotcher mean."

"Well, I mean that if you can't make up a better yarn than that, you may as well give up trying."

Ikey looked at his comrade.

The two rascals were nonplussed.

"You may as well own up," said Jimmy Silver, as the ruffians did not speak. "You've stolen this caravan."

"Look 'ere!" roared Ikey. "Nuff of this 'ere! You move your van out of the way, and let a chap pass, or I'll soon shift yer. See?"

"You're going to give up that van," answered Jimmy Silver quietly.

"We'll see about that. Come on, Bill!"

Ikey jumped down into the road, grasping his whip, and his comrade jumped after him.

They advanced fiercely upon the Rookwoods.

The two ruffians looked dangerous enough, but Jimmy Silver & Co. did not flinch.

"Line up!" said Jimmy quietly.

"Now, then, out of the way!" shouted Ikey, and he rushed forward, lashing with the whip.

Jimmy Silver yelled as he got the lash, but Ikey did not have time for another.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth dodged in under the whip, and closed with the one-eyed man.

They struggled fiercely.

"Lend a hand, you fellows!" panted Jimmy.

Raby was springing to his aid, while Lovell and Newcome tackled Bill.

Ikey went down with a crash, with Jimmy Silver and Raby on top of him.

The whip flew from his hand, and Ikey found himself grasped by the ears, and his head jammed on the hard road.

He roared with anguish.

"Yow! Leggo! 'Eip! Lend a cove a 'and, Bill! 'Eip!"

But Bill had plenty to do, without helping his comrade.

Lovell and Newcome were pressing him hard, and Bill was retreating before the vigorous attack.

Instead of coming to Ikey's assistance, Bill suddenly made a jump for the hedge, plunged through it, and went fleeing across the fields. Bill evidently had had enough.

Lovell and Newcome, panting, turned to Jimmy's aid.

Ikey's resistance ceased then.

The four juniors collared him, and dragged him to his feet, keeping a tight grip on him.

"Heavy does it, gents!" mumbled Ikey. "No offence, gents! Go heavy with a man! It was only a lark, young gents! 'Pon my davy, it was!"

"You stole that van?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"We—we borrowed it!" gasped Ikey.

"Only a joke, sir, on my davy! We wasn't going to sell the contraption to the gipsies, sir—we wasn't, really."

"Where did you steal it?" demanded Jimmy.

"We—we borrowed it a few miles from 'ere, sir," said Ikey dolefully. "Down the valley, sir—Valley Wood they calls the place. No 'arm done, sir. Never knowed they was friends of yours, sir, on my davy!"

"The rotter ought to be locked up," said Newcome.

"He ought to be," said Jimmy Silver. "But it will save time to give him a jolly good Rookwood bumping, and kick him out."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ere, I say—let up—chuck it!" roared Ikey.

Ikey probably was not conversant with Rookwood customs, and a bumping was a new experience to him.

To judge by the sounds that proceeded from him, it was not a pleasant experience.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Once, twice, thrice, the unhappy Ikey smote the hard road with his frowsy smote, and each concussion elicited a fiendish yell.

Then he was pitched into the hedge.

"If you're not gone in a second—" said Jimmy Silver, picking up the whip. But Ikey was gone in a second.

"Do you want to be slain, and buried in some quiet spot in this valley, Cuffy?" asked Tommy Dodd, in concentrated tones.

"Goodness gracious! Certainly not!"

"Then shut up!"

Clarence sighed, and was silent.

The Modern caravanners were not in a good humour.

They were tramping on a dusty road, in very bad tempers, as a matter of fact. They had held a long council of war at their camping-place, but the only decision they could arrive at was that there was nothing doing.

They made what breakfast they could upon the loaf in the bag, which, fortunately, Cuffy had not been able to damage.

Then they started out.

There was nothing to be done but to walk to the nearest town, and there give information of their loss to the police.

And the nearest town was several miles distant.

They came up the footpath, and turned into the road, Clarence Cuffy with an expression of patient martyrdom on his face.

Cuffy was, as he would have expressed it, very, very hurt at the crossness of his companions.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Tommy Dodd looked up crossly as the bicycle bell rang ahead.

Then he jumped.

"Jimmy Silver!" he exclaimed.

It was the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, mounted upon Clarence Cuffy's bicycle.

He pedalled up, smiling, and jumped down to greet the surprised Moderns.

"That's Cuffy's bike!" exclaimed Cook.

"Goodness gracious, so it is!" said

Jimmy Silver chuckled as they walked on.

Having suffered under Clarence himself, he could feel for his old rival of Rookwood, but he could see the humorous side, all the same.

"Hallo! Here's our van!" exclaimed Cook, in great satisfaction.

The two vans were drawn up together beside the road.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned at the Moderns as they came up, and Tubby Muffin emitted a fat chuckle.

"You blessed Moderns are a worry!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "We've lost most of this morning waiting about with your blessed van!"

"Much obliged!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, all serene, old scout! Rookwood always backs up Rookwood," said Lovell, laughing. "Here's your van, none the worse for wear. I should advise you to keep it on a chain after this."

The Moderns took possession of their caravan again, with great satisfaction.

The Classical van started up the road.

Jimmy Silver lingered to speak a quiet word in Tommy Dodd's ear, out of hearing of the ineffable Clarence.

"I've got an idea, Tommy," he said.

"You'd like to take Cuffy?" asked Tommy hopefully.

"No fear."

"Then bother your idea! Your blessed Classical ideas ain't worth much!" said Tommy Dodd peevishly. "I—I wonder if it would offend my Uncle Dodd very much if I sent him home by goods-train, this side up with care?"

"Ha, ha!" But I've really got a wheeze," said Jimmy.

"Well, what is it?"

"Go mad," said Jimmy.

"What-a-at?"

"You wouldn't have far to go, you know!"

"Do ye mane the rhinoceros?" he demanded.

"The—the what, my dear friend?"

"The rhinoceros! Do you mean to say that that's a horse, and not a rhinoceros?" roared Doyle furiously.

Clarence Cuffy stared at him speechlessly. He mechanically put out his hand to lead the horse.

"Kape away!" snapped Doyle. "You don't know how to manage a rhinoceros!"

Cuffy tottered on with the Moderns. He was too astounded to speak. Tommy Doyle was beginning!

The 7th Chapter. Dangerous!

"We'll camp here!"

Tommy Doyle made that announcement suddenly. It was barely noon.

"Not time yet," said Tommy Dodd.

"We camp at sunset," answered Doyle.

"Mum—mum—my dear Doyle, it is many, many hours to sunset," murmured Clarence Cuffy feebly.

"Oh, you're mad, Cuffy!" answered Doyle. "I say it's sunset, and we're not going to wear out the rhinoceros by going any farther."

Dodd and Cook submitted, and the Modern caravanners camped on the edge of a common.

Clarence Cuffy was in such a state of bewilderment that he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He drew Tommy Dodd aside nervously.

"Wha-at is the matter with Doyle, my dear Thomas?" he asked nervously.

Tommy Dodd tapped his forehead.

"Sunstroke?" asked Clarence, in horrified tones.

"Yes."

"Oh, dear!"

"In the family," said Tommy seriously.

"Ye spalpeen, don't I know oysters from eggs?"

"M-m-my dear, dear— Yaroooh!"

"Are they oysters?" roared Doyle, seizing the alarmed Cuffy by the collar and shaking him violently.

"Ow! Ow! Yow! Oh! Yes!" shrieked Cuffy. Leggo! They—they certainly are oysters, my dear fellow!"

"Then why couldn't ye say so at first?" growled Doyle.

Cuffy sat palpitating, squirming a little farther away from the lunatic.

"This—this is dreadful, my dear Thomas!" he whispered to Tommy Dodd.

"Awful, isn't it?" agreed Tommy.

"Frightful!" groaned Cook.

"Had we not—not better get him to a doctor?" murmured Cuffy.

"Doctors have a frightfully exciting effect on him, said Dodd, shaking his head.

"Do you think your dear papa would mind very much, Cuffy, if you should happen to be slaughtered?"

"Ow!"

Doyle rose to his feet.

His hand was groping under his jacket, and Clarence, who knew that the carving-knife was there, palpitated.

"Sure, and you've brought the sheep, then," he remarked, looking at Clarence.

"How much did ye give for that sheep?"

"Oh, gracious!" moaned Clarence. "The poor fellow! He takes me for a sheep! This is—is dreadful!"

Doyle came closer to Clarence Cuffy, inspecting him, as if he were an animal.

Cuffy trembled violently.

"Tain't a very good sheep," said Doyle disparagingly. "It's bony. It's got blinkers on."

"They—they are my spectacles, my dear afflicted friend," murmured Cuffy.

"Hould yer tongue intirely! Tain't for a sheep to talk to a butcher!" said Doyle darkly. "This ain't much of a sheep, but sure I suppose I'd better kill it and get it cut up before we start intirely."

Clarence jumped away.

"I'm not a sheep," he shrieked. "Keep off! Oh, dear! Keep off!"

"Sure I'm sorry, but I've got to slaughter ye, or we sha'n't have any mutton for dinner," answered Doyle, sharpening the knife on his boot. "Bring that sheep here!"

"Better not cross him, Cuffy," whispered Tommy Dodd. "You have to humour lunatics, you know."

"B-b-but I cannot let him slaughter me, my dear Thomas!" gasped Cuffy.

"Well, I think you ought to humour him."

"B-b-but—"

Clarence Cuffy cast a longing glance at his bicycle, which was leaning against the caravan.

At that moment he would have given a great deal to be safe home in Gander's Green.

He made a movement towards the bicycle as Tommy Doyle made a movement towards him.

"Keep him off!" he shrieked.

"Catch that sheep for me!" roared Doyle. "Don't ye know a butcher's a busy man intirely? I can't waste a whole day on one sheep!"

He made a rush at Cuffy, who skipped away wildly. Dodd and Cook grasped the "insane" junior and held him back.

"Hook it, Cuffy!" shrieked Dodd. "He won't hurt us! Hook it!"

Cuffy already had one leg over his bike.

"Let me go intirely!" yelled Doyle.

"That blessed sheep is getting away! Phwat are we going to do for mutton?"

Whirr! Whizz! Whirr! Clarence Cuffy was riding for his life.

He did not slack down till he was five miles from the Modern caravan.

Then at a more leisurely pace, but still in haste, he pedalled on the road to Gander's Green.

Clarence had had enough of caravanning.

After he had vanished from view, naturally, he could not see the three Tommies.

If he could have seen them it might have dawned even upon Clarence Cuffy that his leg had been pulled.

The three merry youths threw themselves into the grass, kicking up their heels in hysterical mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd & Co.

They laughed loud and long, what time Clarence Cuffy was whizzing away at top speed. They were still chuckling when they harnessed the horse, and the Modern caravan rumbled on its way.

Clarence Cuffy slept that night under the paternal roof at Gander's Green, while the Modern caravanners camped under the bright stars and rejoiced.



"Oh, gracious!" moaned Clarence Cuffy, as Tommy Doyle advanced towards him. "The poor, poor fellow—he takes me for a sheep! This is dreadful!"

Clarence. "Wherever did you find it, dear James?"

"In the van," answered Jimmy Silver carelessly.

"In our van?" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, my infant."

"Then—then—"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"It's all serene, Tommy!" he said. "We came on the rotters who bagged your van, and got it back for you. I found Cuffy's bike inside the van, so I got on it, and came back this way to look for you. Your van's three miles away, so you've got a walk before you."

Tommy Dodd fairly gasped with relief.

"Oh, my hat! I say, Silver, we're awfully obliged!"

"Don't mench, my dear chap!" said Jimmy Silver airily. "It's up to us, as the top side of Rookwood, to help you poor little Moderns out of your scrapes."

To which the three Tommies replied, with one voice:

"Rats!"

A walk of three miles did not hurt the Modern juniors, with their van waiting for them at the end of it.

Tommy Dodd explained, en route, how the van had been lost, and Jimmy Silver chortled.

"It's all very well to cackle," said Tommy dolefully. "But if you had that born idiot planted on you—I say, would you like to try him again?"

"No jolly fear!" said Jimmy Silver promptly. "Why don't you make him tired of caravanning, same as you did the sergeant, when he was with you?"

Tommy Dodd shook his head sadly.

"We've tried it," he said. "Cook got botulism—"

"Great Scott!"

"And the dutiful beast only decided to stay and nurse him over it!" said Tommy Dodd dismally. "So Cook got well again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"Go mad," repeated Jimmy, in a whisper. "Violent and raving, you know. Cuffy would get fed-up with that. See?"

Tommy Dodd stared at him blankly for some moments. Then he burst into a chuckle.

"What a wheeze!" he murmured.

"Good enough for Cuffy!" said Jimmy Silver. "Ta, ta, old chap!"

Jimmy Silver ran after his comrades, and the Classical van rumbled on out of sight.

Tommy Dodd & Co. breakfasted in the van before they started.

And when the Modern van went on Cuffy was left inside, washing up, while the three Tommies walked with the horse.

While they walked there was a good deal of whispering among the three.

There were subdued chuckles as well as whispers, as they discussed the startling wheeze suggested by Jimmy Silver.

"It'll suit you best, Doyle," murmured Tommy Dodd. "Being Irish, you're a bit potty, anyway."

"Why, you silly spalpeen," exclaimed Tommy Doyle, in great wrath, "it's as potty as the Kaiser ye are yerself intirely. But if you mane that I can do it best—"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean, old scout."

"Then, sure, I'll thry it!"

Clarence put his head out of the van.

"My dear Thomas, I have finished washing up. I am very, very sorry to say that I have somehow broken the bowl—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And it is very, very unfortunate that the water has fallen over your coat, my dear Thomas. Does it matter?"

Tommy Dodd did not reply to that question. Clarence jumped off the van.

"Shall I lead the horse?" he asked.

Doyle looked at him.

"Doyle's father and grandfather were as mad as he is. He's not often like this, of course. It's rare—very rare. Don't irritate him. My hat! What is he doing now?"

Clarence glanced round quickly.

Doyle had taken the carving-knife, and was concealing it under his jacket.

"Wha-at is he—he—he going to do with—that knafe, Thomas?" asked Cuffy through his chattering teeth.

"I sincerely hope that he's not going to commit murder with it," said Tommy Dodd with owl-like gravity. "That would spoil our tour, and no mistake!"

"Hadn't you better t-t-take it away from him, Thomas?"

"You take it away from him, Cuffy."

"I—I—I think perhaps it would be wiser not to irritate him, Thomas, if he is really insane."

"Mind you don't turn your back on him while he's got that knife!" whispered Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, dear!"

Clarence Cuffy was not likely to turn his back on the mad junior. He eyed him nervously and incessantly.

The caravanners lunched, and Tommy Doyle's actions were certainly most peculiar.

If he was not insane he looked very much like it.

He held his fork by the prongs instead of the handle, and when Dodd pointed that out to him he insisted that he was using chop-sticks.

He asked for another helping of oysters, to Cuffy's helpless bewilderment.

"Will ye pass me the oysters, Cuffy?" he repeated truculently.

"I am very, very sorry, but there are no oysters, my dear friend," faltered Cuffy.

"What do ye call these, then?"

"They—they are eggs, my dear fellow."

"Oysters, I tell ye!" shouted Doyle, leaping to his feet in great excitement.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

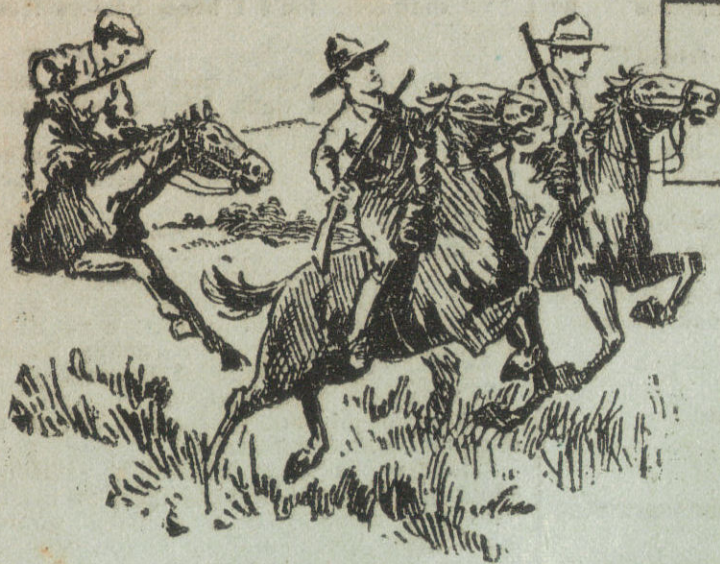
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The 1st Chapter.

Two on the Trail.

The full, round moon was high in the sky, and the light fell in a silvery flood upon the Lawless Ranch and the wide green grasslands.

It wanted only a couple of hours to dawn.

But there was one at least in the silent ranch-house who was not sleeping.

Bob Lawless stood at his open window, looking out upon the moonlit plain, and the dim mountains in the distance, and the dark, silent patches of timber.

Bob could not sleep.

He was thinking of his chum, Frank Richards, and his anxiety for his missing chum was too keen to allow him to close his eyes.

Where was Frank?

He had ridden away from Cedar Creek School the previous day, and ridden into the unknown.

From that hour nothing had been seen or heard of him.

The shadowy forest had swallowed him up, and hid his fate from all human eyes.

"Bob!"

The rancher's son turned from the window as Vere Beauclerc's voice spoke in the dim room behind him.

Beauclerc had thrown himself on Frank's bed; he had come home with Bob that night. But he, too, had not slept.

"Yes, Cherub?" said Bob, in a low voice.

"You're awake, then?"

"I haven't slept," answered Beauclerc quietly.

"Can you hear anything, Bob?"

"Only the wind in the larches."

"I thought I heard a horse."

"Only the hoeses in the corral, then, old chap."

"I don't think so."

Vere Beauclerc slipped from the bed and joined his chum at the window.

His eyes swept the moonlit plain without.

"Listen!" he muttered.

He held up his hand.

Bob Lawless strained his ears to hear.

Faintly, from afar, came a low sound, and, as it drew nearer, it could be recognised as the tattoo of horse's hoofs.

"By gum, you weren't mistaken, Cherub!" muttered Bob, his eyes gleaming.

"It—it can't be Frank, surely!"

The two schoolboys watched eagerly from the window.

Closer and closer came the tattoo on the plain, and at last a dim form loomed up in the moonlight.

It was a riderless horse, heading for the ranch-house, as if well knowing its way.

Bob caught Vere Beauclerc by the arm.

"Frank's pony!" he muttered.

"It's Brownie," said Beauclerc, with a nod, "and without Frank!"

"I guess I'm going down!"

"Quiet!" said Beauclerc. "No need to wake the horse, Bob."

The chums of Cedar Creek quitted the room silently, and crept down the stairs.

Cautiously Bob Lawrence removed bolt and chain on the massive door of the ranch-house.

The fresh night wind blew in as he drew back the door.

Outside, the pony was whinnying softly.

"Brownie!" called Beauclerc.

He ran out and caught the horse.

Brownie rubbed his soft muzzle on the arm of his master's chum.

Beauclerc stroked the pony's glossy neck.

"It's Frank's pony right enough," muttered Bob Lawless.

"But where's Frank? If the brute could only speak!"

Beauclerc was examining the pony attentively.

"If Frank's been thrown, and hurt, Beau, it's curious that the horse didn't get home before this," said Bob.

"It's not that, Bob," said Beauclerc quietly.

"Frank's being kept away?"

"How do you know that, Cherub?"

"Look at Brownie. His bridle's been taken off; he's been roped up. There's the trail-ropes loose round his neck," said Beauclerc.

"He's been tied up, and he's gnawed through the rope. Look at it!"

"By gum! You're right, Cherub."

"Whoever roped in Brownie knows what's become of Frank," said Beauclerc.

"Brownie was captured, and Frank was with him then. Brownie's got away, and Frank hasn't."

"But who? Why?"

"Goodness knows. But that man, Mr. Smith, with whom Frank rode away from Cedar Creek, must be at the bottom of it," said Beauclerc.

Bob knitted his brows.

"He looked a harmless galoot enough, Cherub. He came into the school to ask after a chap who could speak French to interpret for him, because he'd found a French-Canadian hurt on the trail."

Bob shook his head.

"It was sheer chance that Frank went with him. Miss Meadows called him out from the class. Smith couldn't have known Frank would come with him, Cherub. So it couldn't have been a trick by somebody who had it up against Frank."

Beauclerc nodded.

"No, it couldn't," he agreed.

"Well, then, if the man was a stranger to Frank, why should he hurt him?"

"I don't know," admitted Beauclerc.

"But I know that Frank rode away from school with this man Smith, and that he's not been seen since. I believe that if we found Smith we should find Frank."

"We're going to find Frank," said Bob, setting his teeth.

"If Brownie was taken along with him, and it looks like it, Brownie's come from where Frank is now. And he's left a trail, Cherub."

"I was thinking of that."

"The dew's thick on the prairie," said Bob, his eyes glistening.

"and this light is as good as daylight. If I can't pick up the trail, you can call me a Chinaman. We'll leave Brownie with Billy Cook, and take the trail, Cherub. What do you say?"

"Good man," said Beauclerc.

"That's my idea, too. We'll borrow a gun from Billy Cook."

Bob Lawless led the pony away towards the ranch foreman's cabin, Beauclerc following.

He knocked lightly at Billy Cook's door.

The chums did not want to awaken Mr. Lawless, who might very possibly have demurred when he learned of Bob's scheme; in fact, it was very probable that he would.

"Hullo!" came from within the cabin.

"Wake up, Billy!"

"You, Bob! Has Frank come home?"

"No; but his pony has."

"Gee-whiz!"

The door opened, and Billy Cook looked out, rubbing his eyes.

"Here's the pony, Billy," said Bob Lawless.

"We're going to try and pick up his trail. Tell popper, will you, and you can come after us. I believe Frank's in bad hands."

"You get back to bed," advised Billy Cook.

"Leave this hyer business to your elders, Bob Lawless."

"Take the pony," answered Bob.

"I guess I'll wake your popper, and put it to him," said the ranch foreman.

"And I reckon he won't let you go humping on any trail before morning, and on your own, you young scallywag!"

Billy Cook led the pony away, and Bob slipped into the cabin.

He knew where the ranchman kept his rifle and cartridges, and in a few seconds he emerged with the rifle under his arm and the cartridge-belt slung over his shoulder.

"Come on, Cherub!"

"I'm with you, Bob."

The two schoolboys started at a run.

Where the pony's hoofs had trampled the dewy grass the trail was plain and glistening in the moonlight, and they were able to proceed at a trot and keep it under observation.

For a mile or more the trail led them without a pause, and they did not stop.

Then a patch of stony ground brought them to a pause.

Beauclerc scanned the ground in vain.

Bob Lawless was deeply learned in the lore of the woods and the prairie, and he was not long at fault.

In a few minutes the young Canadian was following the trail again, but it was at a snail's pace now.

For some distance they proceeded slowly and cautiously, till the stony patch was passed.

"Here we are again!" said Beauclerc.

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"Lucky we started at once, Cherub! It will be sun-up in an hour, and then the dew will dry. I guess this trail won't be easy to follow then. Put it on, kid! We can run here!"

And they ran on, without a pause or a fault, till the sombre shadows of the timber received them.

Then Bob Lawless halted again.

"Sign" was difficult to find amid the tangled undergrowths of the wood.

But here and there the snapped twigs and trampled herbage showed where the pony had forced his way, and even so slight a sign as the dew shaken from a bush was enough for the keen-eyed Canadian.

Even when the moon had set Bob Lawless still pushed on, though slowly now, and with hesitation.

But as the early rays of the rising sun penetrated the shadows of the wood his task was easier.

Slowly but steadily the chums of Cedar Creek School pushed on into the sombre depths of the almost untrodden forest.

The 2nd Chapter.

The Last Hope.

Frank Richards stirred and awoke.

Towards dawn the schoolboy prisoner had fallen into an uneasy slumber, rolled in the blanket on the grass.

The sound of movements awakened him. He sat up in the grass.

For a moment or two Frank expected to see about him the familiar walls of his room at his uncle's ranch.

But recollection came quickly of the strange adventure of the preceding day.

Before his eyes was the log-cabin, in which the French-Canadian miner, Jules Clement, lay bound a prisoner.

"Mr. Smith" and his companion, Bocus Bill, were talking in low tones near him, taking no heed of the schoolboy.

Frank glanced at them, and then looked away towards the sombre woods that surrounded the lonely cabin.

He thought of Brownie, and wondered whether he had reached the ranch, and whether the trail he had left would help his friends to find him.

Upon that faint hope everything depended, even life itself.

Bocus Bill left his companion and went round the cabin.

A minute later there was a loud exclamation, and the ruffian came hurrying back.

"The pony's gone, boss!"

"The pony?" repeated Smith.

"The kid's pony."

"You fool! Didn't you tether him?" growled Smith.

"I guess I put the trail-ropes on the critter!" snarled Bocus Bill.

"The brute's bitten it through and vamoosed!"

Smith strode over to where Frank Richards lay in the grass.

Quickly he examined the rope that shackled the schoolboy to the trunk of the big tree close at hand.

"The kid had no hand in it," he said.

"He's safe enough. He hasn't moved."

"Don't I tell you the critter gnawed through the rope?" answered Bocus Bill.

"I guess he's fur enough off by this time."

"Well, it matters little. We're after bigger game than a horse," said Smith.

"I guess that critter would have fetched two hundred dollars over the line!" grunted the ruffian.

Smith uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Don't chew the rag about that, Bill. This isn't a horse-thief game," he said.

"Our critters are safe, I suppose?"

"Yep."

"Then it's all O.K."

Frank Richards did not speak.

His heart was heavy.

His hope that Brownie's trail might lead rescuers to the lonely log-cabin in the forest was faint, but it was fainter now that he saw that the thought did not even occur to the two kidnapers.

His hope of safety was their danger, but the danger was too slight to trouble them.

As the sunlight strengthened Smith and Bocus Bill sat down to a hurried breakfast outside the cabin.

They did not heed Frank Richards.

When the hasty meal was finished Bocus Bill untied the rope that fastened Frank Richards to the tree.

The door of the cabin was opened, and Smith strode in.

The French-Canadian miner was lying on the earthen floor, bound securely.

His pale face turned towards the adventurer when he entered.

"Bring the boy here, Bill."

"Yep."

Frank Richards was brought in.

"I guess I want you to talk to the galoot again, sonny," said Smith.

"Last night the critter agreed to lead us to the place where he hid the bag of dollars. We're taking him along with us now. Tell him in his lingo that if he tries any gum-game on us it will be the last gum-game he will ever play on this earth!"



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Each card is divided up into thirty-one spaces. Whenever you have 6d. to spare, you just buy a stamp at the post-office and fix it on one of the spaces. As soon as all the spaces are filled up you can take the card to a post-office and exchange it for a 15s. 6d. War Savings Certificate.

In five years' time that certificate will be worth £1.

This is the best way for a patriotic boy to put money by. Won't you try it?

"Qu'est que c'est?" asked the Frenchman.

Frank Richards translated the threat. Clement shrugged his shoulders.

"On verra," he said.

"What does he say?" growled Smith.

"He says you will see."

"I guess we will, and I guess he will wish he'd never been born if he tries to pull the wool over our eyes!"

At a sign from the adventurer Bocus Bill unbound the Canadian and led him from the cabin, with his arms, however, still secured behind his back.

Smith proceeded to bind Frank Richards to the log-bench in the cabin.

Evidently the schoolboy was to be left there while Clement was taken away by the two rascals.

Bocus Bill looked in at the doorway, his hand resting on the butt of his revolver in his belt.

Frank shivered as he caught the expression on the face of the ruffian.

"What's the good, boss?" muttered Bocus Bill.

"I reckon we're through with the younker."

"We may want him again," answered Smith.

"He's done the talking for us, I guess."

Smith shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"The Frenchman may be fooling us," he answered.

"Haven't you any sense? If we don't find the dollars we shall want the kid to talk again."

"Correct!" assented Bocus Bill.

Smith followed him from the cabin, and the door was closed, and wedged fast with a chip of wood outside.

Frank Richards sat on the bench, shivering.

His life hung on a thread in the hands of the two desperadoes from the mines.

Only the fact that he might still be wanted to translate between them and their victim had saved him so far.

When he had served his turn, and was wanted no longer, he knew what to expect. The life of a schoolboy would not stand between the thieves and safety.

Ten years in prison waited for them, if Frank Richards could help in bringing them to justice, and they did not mean to run that risk.

How was this to end?

Frank listened to the sound of receding footsteps and the rustling of the underwood as the two rascals departed with their prisoner.

Then silence fell.

Dimly through the interstices in the rough walls of the cabin the sunlight penetrated.

From without came the chirping of birds, the sounds of the awakening of life of the new day.

Frank Richards thought of Cedar Creek School, of the boys and girls who would soon be arriving there for lessons, little soon be arriving there for lessons, little dreaming of the terrible peril in which their schoolfellow lay.

He thought of his chums, too—his chums who would not have shrunk from any danger, however great, to save him.

What were they doing?

Had Brownie arrived at the ranch—had the gnawed trail-ropes told them the tale? And were they even then seeking to pick up the trail of the pony in the grassy plain and the tangled woods?

The hope was slight, but it was all he had, and it did not leave him.

For some time he made attempts to loosen his bonds, but the roping had been done too carefully, and he desisted at last, with aching arms and heavy heart.

Weary and restless, he sat and waited, expecting soon to hear the sound of the kidnapers returning, but hoping against hope that he would hear the voices of his friends.

Suddenly he started.

Outside the cabin there was a sound—a low, faint sound—but he knew that it was a cautious footfall.

His heart beat almost to suffocation.

Was it the footstep of friend or of foe?

The 3rd Chapter.

Tracked Down!

"Hang it!"

Bob Lawless muttered the words savagely.

Beauclerc did not speak; he watched his chum in silence.

To him the woods told nothing. He was not so skilled as the Canadian lad in woodcraft.

And even Bob seemed beaten at last.

Twice he had lost the trail, and found it again, but now, for the third time, he was at a loss.

Right and left he tried, but no "sign" met his penetrating gaze.

"Hang it!" he repeated.

The trailers had had good luck so far, but it seemed that their luck was too good to last.

For half an hour now Bob had been seeking "sign," and had found none.

He stopped at last, leaning against a tree-trunk, his hands driven into his pockets, Billy Cook's rifle in the hollow of his arm.

"I guess it looks as if we come out at the little end of the horn this time, Cherub!" he muttered.

"But we're not giving in. We've beaten Billy Cook, anyhow. I reckon he's on the trail long ago with popper, but he's lost it before this, or he'd have been up with us."

Beauclerc nodded.

"We've got to find it, Bob," he said.

"By thunder, we're going to find it!" said Bob, between his teeth.



TRACKED BY TWO!

(Continued from the previous page.)

and his hand tightened in its grip upon his cudgel.

The moment was at hand now. From the wood, at a little distance, three forms emerged into sight. Bob Lawless and Beauclerc recognised one of them, "Mr. Smith," who had come to the lumber school the day before with his lying tale in quest of an interpreter.

"That was cute," said Bob. "He was at the Cascade mines, and had a claim there," explained Frank. "He got news that his father was ill in the East, and sold his claim and started home with the money on him. Those two villains followed him from the mines, and laid for him in the forest. He got away wounded, and hid the bag of dollars in the timber somewhere, and when they ran him down and captured him, they did not know where to look for the money. So they wanted an interpreter to get the information out of him."

"I see." "They would have tortured him to make him speak," said Frank, with a shudder. "But we worked it between us—speaking in French—that he should pretend to be willing to guide them to where the money was hidden, to gain time. It had to be left till morning. Soon after dawn they started, taking Clement with them. That was hours ago. When—when I heard you, I thought perhaps it was those villains coming back. That would have been the finish."

Bob knitted his brows. "Then the Frenchy isn't going to let them bag the dollars?" he asked. "No, he's fooling them."

"When they find that out—?" "I don't think they will hurt him till they've got their hands on the money," said Frank. "Smith told Bocus Bill that I might be wanted again, so they kept me a prisoner here. If they find the dollars, I believe they will shoot him dead, to save their dirty skins; but if they don't find them, they'll bring him back here to torture him."

"My hat!" said Beauclerc, with a deep breath. "They're a pair of rustlers, the scum of the mines," said Frank. "They will torture him, as they threatened, and keep me to translate what he says. That's the game. But if they find no gone when they get back, I don't know what they'll do. They'll know it's not safe to stay here, and they will have to run for it, and Clement—"

"They couldn't take a prisoner with them, if they vamoose out of the section," said Bob. "I reckon Clement would stay here, with a bullet in him, if that's the sort of galoots they are."

"That's what I think," said Frank. "This is where we take a hand in the game, then," said Bob quietly. "It's up to us, you fellows. You're game?" "Yes," said Beauclerc. "You bet!" exclaimed Frank. "I'm glad you've got a rifle, Bob. Mind, those rotters will shoot."

"So shall I," answered Bob laconically. "It will be a fight," said Vere Beauclerc coolly. "We'd better get hold of something, Frank."

Frank Richards nodded. In a few minutes the two had cut themselves cudgels from the wood. It was the best they could do, and then, with beating hearts, but cool heads, the chums of Cedar Creek waited for the return of the rustlers.

The 4th Chapter. For Life or Death!

Bob Lawless closed the door of the log cabin, and jammed the wedge into place again. "I guess we'd better let those galoots think it's all as they left it," he said. "They won't know anybody's been here till they see us—and my rifle is the first thing they'll see of us."

"Good!" said Frank Richards. The three chums, keeping their eyes on the woods about them, moved away from the cabin, to a clump of trees within a dozen yards of the door.

Taking cover in the underwoods, they waited, out of sight, and watching the cabin. Bob Lawless held the rifle in readiness. The schoolboys had desperadoes to deal with, and life itself depended on Bob's quickness with his weapon.

The log cabin presented the same aspect as when the two rascals had left it at sunrise. They would not discover that any change had taken place during their absence, until they were close at hand, and had opened the cabin door. By that time they would be under Bob's rifle-muzzle.

The trio waited anxiously. Not one of them thought of seeking safety and abandoning the French-Canadian miner to his fate; but they were grave and quiet, fully realising the terrible peril they were facing.

They hardly spoke as they waited. An hour had passed, when a rustling in the wood came faintly to their ears. Bob gave his comrades a glance. "I guess they're on hand," he whispered.

He lifted the rifle, and the muzzle looked out from the foliage, directed towards the cabin, the butt resting firmly at his shoulder. His hand did not tremble. Frank Richards drew a deep breath,

and his hand tightened in its grip upon his cudgel.

The moment was at hand now. From the wood, at a little distance, three forms emerged into sight.

Bob Lawless and Beauclerc recognised one of them, "Mr. Smith," who had come to the lumber school the day before with his lying tale in quest of an interpreter.

"That's the crowd?" whispered Bob. "Yes."

"I guess I've got a bead on them." The French-Canadian was walking between the two rustlers.

He tottered a little as he walked, and his face was deadly pale. His pallor, and the blood-stained bandage about his head, gave him a ghastly look.

Bob's eyes glinted as he looked at him. Bocus Bill was helping, or, rather, dragging, the miner along by one arm.

The ruffian was evidently in a savage mood, and Smith was scowling furiously. The search for the hidden bag of dollars had been unsuccessful; probably the two ruffians realised that Clement had been leading them only on a wild-goose chase.

"Come on, you critter, goldarn you!" dragged at the wedge under the cabin door.

"You know what that's for, whether you speak English or not, you coyote!" hissed the adventurer, as he threw down the brushwood beside the bound man.

"Vous ne savez jamais," said the French-Canadian faintly. "Oh, stow your lingo! Bring the boy out, Bill."

Bocus Bill strode into the log cabin, and disappeared from view. Next moment he came striding out of the little doorway.

A revolver glittered in his hand now, and his savage eyes swept round the clearing.

"Boss, he's vamoosed!" he exclaimed. Smith turned back, his arms full of brushwood.

"What?" he shouted. "The kid's gone!"

"Impossible! The door was fastened!" yelled Smith.

"He's lit out, I tell you! Somebody's been here!"

The ruffian was glaring round as he spoke, his revolver raised, evidently ready to shoot at sight.

Bob Lawless hesitated no longer. Crack!

From the clump of trees came the sharp, ringing report, and it was followed by a fearful yell from Bocus Bill.

The sudden bullet tore through his brawny shoulder, and the ruffian went reeling back into the log cabin, and crashed upon the floor.

Had the rancher's son chosen to aim at his heart, it would have been a dead man that rolled on the floor of the cabin.

But even at that terrible moment Bob had spared him.

Bob Lawless coolly, as he put in a fresh cartridge.

"Come on!" muttered Frank. The three schoolboys ran out of cover swiftly towards the cabin.

"Amis—mes amis!" cried the French-Canadian joyfully.

Smith raised himself on his elbow. His leg had been broken by Bob Lawless' bullet, and he was unable to rise; but he supported himself on one elbow, and in the other hand he gripped his six-shooter, his eyes blazing over it.

"Drop that!" shouted Bob Lawless, thrusting forward his rifle.

Whiz!

Frank Richards hurled his cudgel even as Bob spoke.

The heavy billet of wood crashed into Smith's face, and he rolled over, his revolver exploding harmlessly as he fell.

"Look out for the other!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

Bocus Bill was still groaning just inside the log cabin.

Bob Lawless led the way, and his rifle covered the wounded ruffian. Bocus Bill half raised his revolver, but lowered it again as the rifle-barrel bore full upon him.

"Let up!" he panted. "Let up! I guess I pass!"

"You'd better!" said Bob Lawless grimly. "Take away his shooter, Frank! I'll give him one to get on with if he tries to use it!"

But Bocus Bill did not try to use the revolver. He was almost fainting from loss of blood, and the rifle-muzzle within a yard of his face was too much for him.

of the most bon—is that right, Franky?—I mean, three of the best!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "The chap don't seem fit to travel," remarked Bob. "I guess you'd better look after him here while I fetch somebody from the ranch. I reckon I shall find the popper and Billy Cook hunting for the trail. See that those two galoots don't get away, Franky. I'll leave you the rifle, and if they give the least trouble, make 'em fit for the coyotes' supper."

"You bet!" answered Frank. And Bob Lawless started on the home trail.

Julius Clement sat in the grass, his back resting against a tree, his white face very bright in the sunlight.

He had passed through the valley of the shadow of death, and in his relief and joy he scarcely felt exhaustion and pain.

Frank Richards searched the log cabin, and found food for the Canadian, which he ate ravenously.

And then Frank gave his attention to the two wounded rustlers.

"I suppose we ought to do something for them, Beau," he said.

Beauclerc nodded. "I think so," he answered.

And the schoolboys bound up the wounds as well as they could of the two rascals, receiving in return curses and savage scowling, which did not trouble them, however.

It was an hour later that Bob Lawless returned.

He did not come alone. Mr. Lawless and Billy Cook and a couple of the ranch cattlemen were with him.

"Safe, Frank?" exclaimed Mr. Lawless. "Yes, uncle; thanks to Bob!" answered Frank Richards. "If we hadn't followed the trail, though—"

"When I found he was gone I promised him the biggest trail-roping of his life!" growled the rancher. "But, as it's turned out, I'm glad he tried it."

He turned to the French-Canadian, and spoke to him in his own tongue. Then he gave directions to his men.

"Get those two rustlers down to Thompson, and hand them over to the sheriff. Better stick them on their horses and lead them. You boys can come with me. We're going to help Mr. Clement get back his dollars."

"Good!" said Bob. And while Smith and Bocus Bill were taken away by the cattlemen, the rancher and the schoolboys started with the French-Canadian through the forest.

Clement was smiling and joyful now. In company with the rustlers he had failed to find the hiding-place of the bag of money; but he did not fail now.

Within an hour they stopped at a hollow tree in the heart of the timber, and Clement turned to Frank.

"Ici," he said. "Voulez vous—?" "You bet!" answered Frank.

He squeezed himself into the hollow trunk and groped for the bag. In a couple of minutes it was handed out to the miner.

"Good!" said Mr. Lawless. "Maintenant, monsieur, vous allez chez moi."

"Merci, monsieur!" answered Clement gratefully.

And the miner from Cascade was taken to the Lawless ranch for the attention he so badly needed.

Bob Lawless rubbed his eyes when he rose from the dinner-table.

"We didn't get much sleep last night," he remarked. "I feel sleepy! Hallo, popper! What is it?"

The rancher pointed to the clock. "School!" he answered.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" said Bob Lawless. "Blessed if I hadn't forgotten school. I say, popper, we shall be a bit late for afternoon lessons."

"Better late than never!" answered Mr. Lawless cheerfully.

And Frank Richards & Co. rode away to Cedar Creek School, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in Miss Meadows' class.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"IN A BORROWED NAME!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD. DON'T MISS IT!

CADET NOTES.

One of the most striking results of the war has been the growth and expansion of the Cadet Movement. It is estimated that since the war broke out the numbers of members of various forms of Cadet Corps has nearly doubled. Before the war not more than about 60,000 boys belonged to Cadet Corps altogether, and it is now stated that the present strength of the Movement is about 120,000. This is very good so far as it goes, but there is still plenty of room for further expansion. Out of the million and a half lads in the country of suitable age for the Cadet Movement at least half a million ought to be enrolled in the corps.

Every boy between 14 and 18 years of age ought to belong to some recognised Cadet Corps. In such times as these it is necessary that all should prepare for the possibilities of the future. Nor need it be supposed that the membership of the Movement involves nothing more than tiresome and monotonous exercise in military drill, etc. The Movement provides all kinds of other relaxation, and this side of its work will be enormously extended in the near future. All our readers should join the Cadet Force, and any desiring to do so should apply to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2, who will send them full particulars of the nearest corps, etc.



The heavy billet of wood crashed into Smith's face, and he rolled over, his revolver exploding harmlessly as he fell.

growled Bocus Bill, as Clement tottered over a trailing root and almost fell.

He dragged savagely at the prisoner, and Clement uttered a faint cry.

"I guess you'll have suthin' to yamp about soon," muttered the ruffian, with another savage drag at the helpless man.

The French-Canadian did not understand the words, but their tone left no mistake as to the ruffian's meaning.

He tottered on towards the cabin, and Bocus Bill flung him roughly into the grass near the door.

Smith stood looking down upon him, with bitter rage and malice.

"You've had your chance, my buck," he said. "I guess you'll be sorry you've wasted our time. You don't get another chance. I'll make you write it down, with the fire burning your feet, and I guess you'll tell the frozen truth next time."

"Stow the chinwag, boss!" grunted Bocus Bill. "The galoot don't understand."

"I'll make him understand soon!" said Smith savagely. "Get the boy out to interpret, while I build the fire."

"Yep."

The words came clearly to the ears of the hidden schoolboys.

They left no doubt as to the savage intentions of the rustlers.

The threat was not an idle one. The French-Canadian miner was to be put to the torture till he told the rustlers what they wanted to know.

From the cabin came wild, savage yelling, as the ruffian lay on the floor, drenched in his own blood, and helpless from his wound.

"Thunder!" Smith spun round, his eyes seeking the smoke of the rifle, to find whence came that sudden shot.

His revolver was raised, ready to shoot. Over the glittering barrel his eyes were glaring.

The white curl of smoke from the clump of trees caught his eyes at once, and he fired shot after shot without a pause:

Crack, crack, crack!

The bullets tore through leaves and branches.

But the three schoolboys were in cover behind the trunks, and Bob Lawless was hurriedly but deftly jamming a fresh cartridge in the rifle.

Crack, crack!

The rustler was still firing.

Bob peered cautiously round the trunk through the foliage that screened the three from sight.

His rifle was raised again.

Five shots had cracked out almost in as many seconds, and but for the cover of the thick tree-trunks the schoolboys would have been riddled.

The rustler was reserving his last shot, and springing for cover himself. But he was too late.

Frank Richards took away his revolver and the knife from his belt.

Bocus Bill groaned deeply.

"I guess I'm a gone coon!" he said hoarsely. "Winged—winged by a gold-darned schoolboy! Oh, great gophers!"

"Winged—and a good shot, too!" said Bob Lawless. "But you're not done for yet, my buck! You'll live to serve your sentence; but you'll be lucky if you're ever able to use your right arm again!"

The ruffian groaned.

"A moi! A moi!" the French-Canadian was calling.

The three schoolboys hurried out to him.

Smith, wounded as he was, was trying to creep away into the forest; but he was very quickly stopped.

Beauclerc opened his knife and cut the Frenchman loose. Smith's hands were tied with the same cord.

He lay in the grass, white with pain and loss of blood, and his eyes glittering at Frank Richards & Co. like a reptile's.

"I guess this is our win!" grinned Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards helped the French-Canadian to his feet as soon as he was freed from the rope.

"All serene!" he said, smiling. "Voici mes amis, Monsieur Clement. Maintenant vous etes libre."

Bob Lawless grinned. "I guess I savvy that much French," he said. "Right-ho, old scout! We're three