

Next Monday! "THE BOYS WHO BEAT THE KAISER!"

# The BOYS' FRIEND 1<sup>d</sup> 1/2

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED THE "PENNY POPULAR." WAR TIME PRICE

No. 897. Vol. XVIII. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending August 17th, 1918.]

## THE CARAVANNERS' GUEST!

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

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

### The 1st Chapter.

#### Tubby is Too Clever!

"What's the matter with Tubby?" Jimmy Silver shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked away across the green common, glimmering in the setting sun.

The Rookwood caravanners were in camp, and while Jimmy Silver & Co. were "doing the chores," Tubby Muffin had been despatched to the neighbouring village for supplies—such supplies as were to be had.

The Fistical Four had been busy gathering brushwood for the campfire, fetching water from the stream, and attending to the horse, and performing the other duties of dutiful caravanners.

They were quite ready for supper, and they were glad to see Tubby Muffin returning.

But Tubby's aspect as he came plodding across the common was peculiar—not to say astounding.

He had a bundle under each arm, so it was evident that he had secured supplies of some sort.

As he came along he stopped several times, and blinked this way and that way.

His manner betrayed excessive caution—caution so excessive that it would infallibly have drawn attention to him if there had been anyone to observe him.

The Fistical Four stared at him in amazement.

"Is he off his rocker?" said Lovell, in wonder. "He looks as if he's been burgling, and is afraid that the bobbies are on his track."

"Blessed if he doesn't!" agreed Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo! Look at him now!" exclaimed Raby.

"My hat!"

Tubby Muffin had suddenly darted from the footpath on the common into the cover of a mass of furze.

He disappeared from the sight of the astonished caravanners.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his eyes.

"The howling ass!" he exclaimed.

"What on earth's the matter with him? He must be potty."

The furze hid Tubby Muffin from sight a hundred yards or more from the caravan camp.

He did not emerge again.

"Better go and rout him out, I think," remarked Newcome.

"Look there!" exclaimed Lovell.

A pedestrian came in sight on the common, crossing towards the road.

Evidently Tubby Muffin had sighted him first, and that was the reason why he had taken cover so suddenly.

The pedestrian passed on, glancing towards the furze-bushes as he passed them, having observed Muffin bolting out of sight like a scared rabbit.

He went on towards the road, however, and disappeared.

After he was out of sight a fat face peered cautiously from the furze.

In utter wonder, the Rookwood caravanners watched Tubby Muffin blink round him with great caution,

and then emerge from the furze almost on tiptoe.

He came on towards the camp at a run.

"You fat lunatic!" shouted Arthur Edward Lovell, as Tubby came panting up. "What game are you playing?"

"Are you potty?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

The fat Classical of Rookwood gasped for breath.

"Ow! That was a narrow shave!"

"N-a-narrow shave!" stammered Lovell. "What was a narrow shave?"

"Didn't you see that man?" panted Tubby.

"You ass! What about him?"

"He might have been a plain-clothes policeman, you know."

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at Tubby Muffin as if his fat face mesmerised them.

They were really beginning to entertain some doubts as to his sanity.

"Suppose he was a plain-clothes policeman," stammered Raby, "what would it matter to us?"

"And he wasn't, either," said Newcome. "He was a farmer chapping home from work."

"Might have been in disguise," said Tubby.

"D-d-disguise!"

"Well, it's possible, you know. Suppose he was a detective!" said Tubby. "We might have been caught if I hadn't been careful."

"C-c-caught!"

"Yes, rather."

Jimmy Silver took Tubby Muffin by one fat ear.

"What are you burbling about?" he asked. "Is this a game, or have you gone off your dot?"

"Yaroo!"

"Explain, you fat chump!"

"Yow-ow! Leggo my ear!" howled Tubby. "I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"Grub!"

"Well, that's what you went for, isn't it?" snapped Jimmy. "If you'd come back without it you'd have been scalped."

Tubby jerked his ear away.

"You don't understand!" he gasped. "You're dense. Look at these bundles. Don't open them here. Get them into the van."

"What for?"

"They might be seen, you know."

"Suppose they are seen," roared Lovell, "what does it matter?"

"It might mean three months, for all I know."

"Three months!" stammered Jimmy. Tubby Muffin nodded.

"Three months' hard, very likely," he answered.

He stared round cautiously, and looked relieved when he found that no one was in sight on the common.

A sudden suspicion smote Jimmy Silver.

"What have you got in the parcels?" he exclaimed.

Tubby gave him a fat wink.

"Grub!" he answered. "I've



## DISCOVERED IN TIME!

spent the whole quid, you fellows. We're going to have a top-hole supper this evening. I ran into a merchant near the village, and asked him the way to the shops, and he sold me the stuff. He told me he's been doing a lot of it—on the quiet, of course."

"On the quiet!" murmured Newcome.

"Of course. It wouldn't do for a bobby to spot him."

"A—a bobby!"

"You fat villain!" shouted Jimmy Silver. "Do you mean to say you've been buying rationed stuff from some swindling rotter without coupons?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Tubby anxiously. "Anybody might hear you!"

"My hat!" breathed Lovell. "So that's it."

He grabbed at the parcels and tore them open.

Tubby Muffin had expected enthusiasm on the part of the caravanners, but he was disappointed.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not betray any enthusiasm. Their ideas of the food question were quite different from Tubby Muffin's.

From one parcel three large tins rolled into sight—two-pound corned-beef tins.

From the other Lovell drew a large bag of thick paper, which had the knobby feel of a bag of loaf sugar. It weighed five or six pounds.

"All that lot without a single coupon!" grinned Tubby Muffin. "What do you think of that?"

"Think of it!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You—you fat brigand!"

"Oh, draw it mild, you know!" protested Tubby. "There's six pounds of meat there—corned beef, pre-war beef, you know, the man said. He had some more, but that was all I could get for a quid. You see, you have to pay extra for dodging the rations. It's risky."

"Only risky?" howled Lovell.

"Nothing but risky? Not mean, or spoofing, or swindling, or unpatriotic, you fat toad?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Muffin. "I suppose we want what we can get hold of, like everybody else. You fellows would never have been able to bag this little lot. The man was jolly cautious, I can tell you. We jawed quite a time before he let on that he had the stuff. I say—Yaroo! Wharrer you up to? Leggo! Oh! Yah!"

Bump, bump, bump!

The Rookwood caravanners colored Tubby Muffin in great wrath, and Tubby's fat person smote the rough surface of the common with heavy concussion.

### The 2nd Chapter.

#### Making the Punishment Fit the Crime.

Tubby Muffin sat in the grass and roared.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not heed him.

They gathered round the supplies Tubby had brought to the camp, and which they had no intention of using.

"What are we going to do with the stuff?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell. "It's against the law even to have it here."

"It would serve that fat bouncer right to march him off to the police-station, and the grub along with him!" growled Raby.

"Yaroo!" came from Tubby.

"Shut up!"

"Yow-ow! I'm hurt! You ungrateful rotters! Ow!"

"Give him another bump!" exclaimed Newcome wrathfully.

Tubby Muffin jumped up and stood prepared to dodge round the caravan.

"Look here, you rotters," he howled. "I did it for you! You know I don't care much about grub."

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"We've got to eat the stuff now that we've got it," urged Tubby.

"You'll get prosecuted if it's found here."

"Let's make him carry it to the police-station!" said Lovell.

Tubby gave a gasp of alarm at the bare idea.

"Yow-ow! I should be locked up!" he howled.

"Serve you jolly well right, you fat Hun!"

"Hold on, though!" Jimmy Silver was regarding the supplies with a very thoughtful expression. "It's jolly queer where the man could have got all that stuff from to sell to Tubby. It seems to me that I smell a mouse."

Jimmy Silver untied the string, and opened the sugar-bag.

There was a yell from the Rookwood juniors as the contents were revealed.

It was not sugar.

The bag contained a collection of chunks of stone and sand.

Tubby Muffin's expression was extraordinary as he gazed upon that valuable purchase.

"Oh, my aunt!" he stuttered. "I—I've been swindled!"

"Stones!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Sand! Ye gods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver took the wood-chopper and gashed open one of the big tins marked "Corned Beef."

Earth—common or garden earth—rolled out at the gash.

The tin had been soldered up carefully, and the paper label fastened over it, concealing where it had been opened before.

The enterprising merchant whom Tubby had met was evidently more enterprising than the fat junior had supposed.

The grub rules had not been broken, after all—only in Tubby's imagination.

The food-hog had been swindled.

"No need to open the others," grinned Jimmy Silver. "They've got the same stuff in them. You born idiot, Tubby!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Muffin faintly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on the next page.)



The constable nodded and rode on. He disappeared ahead on the road, leaving the chums of Rookwood a little excited.

"A blessed Hun hanging about here!" said Lovell. "My hat! We'll round him up if we come across him. It would be something to swank about at Rookwood next term—what?"

"Not likely to see him," answered Jimmy. "If he's got any sense, he'll keep to the woods."

"Offside!" answered Lovell. "He must be making for somewhere. He can't live without grub, for one thing."

"I don't see how he could get any grub. If a chap started asking for grub in German it would make folks a little bit suspicious, I should think."

"Most likely he speaks English. Lots of Huns do."

"And very likely he's got friends somewhere," remarked Newcome. "Huns stick together like glue. There were some prisoners escaped once, with civilian clothes and ration cards complete. I read it in the papers. They must have had help."

Tubby Muffin's eyes glistened.

"I say, Jimmy, very likely there's a reward for collaring the beast," he remarked. "Might be a hundred pounds."

"Br-r-r!" was Jimmy Silver's reply.

"But, I say, suppose we chuck caravanning for a bit, and hunt for him?" suggested Tubby. "You can sniff at the reward if you like, but I'm rather short of money."

"Rats!" answered the Fistical Four together.

And the caravan went on.

The Fistical Four kept their eyes about them, in the faint hope of spotting the escaped Hun.

Tubby Muffin being the keenest, Tubby was thinking of a possible reward.

Nothing was seen, however, of a lurking Hun in the lanes and fields and woods.

When the village of Wheatfield came in sight in the distance, Jimmy Silver looked into the caravan.

The caravanners' guest was lying in one of the bunks, apparently asleep.

"Hallo!" called Jimmy.

Mr. Jones looked up.

"Just on Wheatfield," said Jimmy Silver. "Like to keep on further? We're keeping on towards the coast."

"I am afraid I am a trouble to you," said Mr. Jones, in a faint voice. "The old pain in my leg has started again. I don't think I could walk."

"An old wound?" asked Jimmy, with much sympathy.

"Shrapnel," said Mr. Jones.

"Well, keep in the bunk as long as you like," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to stop for lunch at Wheatfield, and I'll bring you some grub into the van."

"You are very kind. I have some money," said Mr. Jones. "You will allow me to pay?"

Jimmy smiled and shook his head.

"Not a bit of it!" he answered. "You're our guest for the present, Mr. Jones. We're jolly glad to be of use to an old Tommy. You stay where you are, and I'll bring you some lunch when we stop. Afterwards we'll take you as far as your home. We're in no hurry, and all roads are much the same to us, you see."

"I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't trouble, old scout!"

The caravan stopped outside the inn in Wheatfield, and the caravanners, lunched in the building, Jimmy Silver carrying out a plentiful supply to the man in the van.

Supplies were laid in for supper and for the next day, and then the caravanners resumed their route, Mr. Jones resting in the bunk.

**The 6th Chapter. Tubby's Hun.**

Jimmy Silver called a halt a couple of miles past the village.

His chums were quite agreeable to turning from their road to convey Mr. Jones to his home, wherever that was.

But the guest of the caravanners was fast asleep in the bunk, and Jimmy Silver did not wish to awaken him.

"We can rest here for a bit," said Jimmy. "He's sleeping soundly, poor chap; and I fancy he's badly in need of rest. Let's wait a bit."

And the Co. assented.

The caravan halted on a belt of grass beside the road, beyond which lay a thick wood, with a footpath leading into the green depths.

Tubby Muffin scanned the wood with keen interest.

"I say, Jimmy, that's just the kind of place where the escaped Hun would be hiding!" he remarked.

"Oh, bother the escaped Hun!" yawned Jimmy Silver, settling himself down comfortably in the grass.

"But I say, if there's a reward—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Precious lot of slackers, ain't you?" exclaimed Tubby, indignantly surveying the Fistical Four as they reclined in the grass. "The Hun may be lurking a dozen yards away from you at this very minute!"

"Well, go and look for him, and give us a rest!" said Raby.

"I jolly well will!" exclaimed Tubby. "If I find the beast, I'll call you fellows. Mind, if I find him I shall claim the reward!"

"If you find him we'll eat him for supper," answered Jimmy Silver humorously.

Tubby Muffin snorted, and rolled away into the wood.

The idea of a reward had taken possession of Tubby's fat brain, and it spurred him on to unaccustomed exertion.

The Fistical Four chuckled as Tubby disappeared.

Their opinion was that the fat Classical had about as much chance of tracking out the escaped Hun as of meeting the man in the moon.

It was very pleasant resting in the grass under the shade of the trees, and the caravanners were not sorry to be taking it easy for once.

After about ten minutes Tubby Muffin came out of the wood, and the Rookwooders grinned at the sight of him.

"Caught your bird?" asked Lovell.

"Hist!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Hist!" said Tubby breathlessly. "I've spotted him!"

"My only hat!"

"He's lurking in the wood!" breathed Tubby. "I nearly ran into him. He's lying asleep under a bush!"

"Rats!" said Jimmy incredulously.

"I tell you I've seen him!"

"You've seen somebody!" grunted Lovell. "How do you know it's the German, you ass?"

"He's hiding," said Tubby. "He looks a ferocious beast, too—I saw his face. He's got a big stick lying beside him. I tell you I'm certain it's the German. What's he hiding for if he ain't? You fellows come and help me to collar him. Mind, I'm going to have the reward!"

Tubby Muffin was breathlessly excited.

"Well, we may as well have a look at him," said Jimmy Silver. "I dare say it's only some tramp."

"I tell you it's the Hun!"

"Well, we'll see. Lead on, Macduff!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the fat Classical into the wood. Tubby Muffin was tremulous with excitement as he led the way.

The sound of a deep and unmusical snore greeted them as they neared the spot where Tubby had made his great discovery.

"Well, he's asleep, whoever he is!" grinned Lovell.

"Hist!" murmured Tubby. "Better take him by surprise. He's a desperate villain, you know. I say, there he is!"

A pair of very old boots could be seen peeping from a thicket. The owner of the boots was almost hidden from sight by grass and creepers and thickets.

crumbs! Let a man alone! Gerroff my neck! Ow, ow, ow!"

"Hallo! That doesn't sound like German!"

"Yaroo! Gerroff! Ow!"

The prisoner struggled furiously in the grasp of the Rookwood juniors.

As he struggled a dead rabbit dropped from his coat.

"Poaching, by gum!" said Raby.

"Let a man alone!" roared the prisoner.

"Can't a man bag a rabbit in these 'ere 'ard times? Yow-ow-woop!"

Jimmy Silver had a knee planted on his chest, and the man gave up the struggle at last. Jimmy scanned him sharply.

He was a rough and a bearded man, with a rum-tinted face and shaggy hair, and certainly did not look like a German.

He looked like a tramp, as undoubtedly he was.

"Who are you?" demanded Jimmy.

"Yow-ow! I'm Bill Uggins, if you want to know, and I'll be the death of yer!" roared the prisoner. "Let a man alone! It's only a wild rabbit, ain't it?"

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh.

The cause of Mr. Huggins' sudden flight was explained now. He had been poaching, and had his booty about him.

Tubby Muffin came panting up.

"Got him?" he exclaimed. "Hold him! Hit him on the head if he tries to get away. Lovell! He's only a rotten Hun!"

"Who yer calling a 'Un'?" yelled Mr. Huggins indignantly. "You lemme gerrup, and I'll give you 'Un, you young vagabone!"

"He speaks English, you see," said Tubby. "Lots of Huns do. Don't let him get away! Mind, I'm putting in for that reward! That's mine! You fellows were simply helping me. I say, wharrer you letting him go for, Jimmy? He's spoofing you, you know! He's the German!"

"Fathad!" answered Jimmy Silver.

road we shall pass pretty near your place, anyway."

"You're very good. I—I will point out the place where I should like you to set me down, then," said Mr. Jones.

"Right up to your door, if you like!" said Jimmy.

"It would be across some fields, where the van could not go," said Mr. Jones. "I shall be able to walk again. My leg is getting better."

"All serene, then!" said Jimmy.

He jumped off the van and walked on with his comrades.

The chums of Rookwood went cheerily on their way, excepting Tubby Muffin, who was still suffering from his disappointment.

The miles glided under the heavy wheels of the caravan, but there was no sign from the man in the van. Apparently, his home was further on than Jimmy Silver & Co. had supposed.

The sunset was fading into dusk, and the caravanners were beginning to look for a camping-place for the night, and their guest was still in the van.

Jimmy Silver was a little puzzled.

"I suppose the chap knows his own business best," he remarked. "But from what he told us I should think we've passed his place by this time."

"He seems a bit reticent about his place," said Raby. "I don't see why he can't tell us exactly where it is."

"Well, we shall have to camp soon."

Jimmy Silver was looking for a camp, and when a suitable spot was sighted the Rookwood caravan halted.

It was a meadow within a short distance of a farmhouse, and the farmer's permission to camp was asked and obtained.

Robinson Crusoe was taken out and tethered as usual, and the caravanners set about preparing supper.

They scanned the caravanners with very keen glances.

"Hallo! Looking for the escaped Hun?" asked Lovell, with a grin.

"Yes, my lad. What are you doing—caravanning?"

"That's it!"

"We've been keeping our eyes open for the Hun since we heard of him," said Jimmy Silver. "No luck, though."

"Anybody in your van?" asked the soldier.

"Yes; a chap we've given a lift," answered Jimmy Silver.

The two cavalymen exchanged a quick look.

"What sort of a man, my boy?"

Jimmy laughed.

"Not your Hun," he answered. "A discharged soldier."

"I think we'll have a look at your discharged soldier," said the Tommy, rather drily. "The Hun we're after speaks English like a native. I—Hallo!"

There was a sudden movement in the caravan.

To the amazement of the juniors Mr. Jones slipped out of the van, and—with no sign now of damage to his leg—bolted like a rabbit across the meadow.

The juniors stared after him, dumb-founded.

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Lovell.

"Stop!" roared the soldier. "That's the man! After him!"

The two cavalymen fairly flung themselves on their horses, and dashed in pursuit of the fugitive.

Jimmy Silver almost collapsed.

"That—that's the man!" he said dazedly. "That—that—that's the escaped Hun! Oh, my only summer hat! We've been spoofed! Oh, crumbs!"

"The Hun!" stuttered Lovell. "The—the Hun! We—we—we've been helping a Hun to escape! Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

The juniors stood rooted to the ground. They were too astounded to move.

But the running German had no chance against the cavalymen. Before he reached the hedge he was run down, and in a few minutes the soldiers came back, one of them leading the prisoner with an iron grip on his collar.

"Mr. Jones was looking furious. But a grin came over his face at the sight of the petified faces of the Rookwood juniors."

"Now, young gentlemen, you will have to explain this!" said the corporal. "This man was hiding in your van. You seem to have been keeping him out of sight, or he would have been caught before this!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Jimmy Silver. "We—we never knew! He told us he was a discharged soldier, and asked for a lift. Of course, we gave him a lift. The awful rascal!"

"Blessed if the beast isn't grinning at us!" howled Lovell. "Live a jolly good mind to dot him in the eye!"

The German chuckled.

"I thank you, young gentlemen, for your hospitality," he said. "With a little more luck I should have reached the coast. I hardly hoped to fall in with such very unsuspecting persons. You are confiding people, you English—very! I have had a pleasant day in your company."

"You come along, Jerry!" said the corporal. "I advise you young fellows to be a little more careful in future. This might have landed you into trouble. Now then, Jerry, hop it!"

"Jerry" made the Rookwooders a graceful bow, and—marched away with the soldiers, who were grinning.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another with sickly expressions as the two men in khaki disappeared with their prisoner.

"I—I say, we might have bagged the reward after all!" groaned Tubby Muffin.

"I—I say, under our noses all the time! You are a silly ass, Jimmy!"

"A howling chump!" agreed Raby.

"A frabjous jossler!" said Newcome.

"You silly asses! How could I help it?"

hoofed Jimmy Silver, in great exasperation. "You didn't spot him as a German—"

"We trusted to our Uncle James," said Lovell. "Uncle James has nearly landed us in chokey, and nearly helped Jerry to get back to Hunland. Under the circumstances, Uncle James is going to be bumped!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Look here, you silly chumps—I tell you—Yoop!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Bump, bump!

"That's one for Fritz, and one for Jerry!" grinned Lovell. "Next time you give a lift to a discharged soldier make sure that he isn't a Hun, Uncle James!"

Jimmy Silver was quite eloquent for the next five minutes.

The Rookwood caravanners were on the road very early the next morning, feeling rather keen to put some distance between themselves and the spot where the escaped Hun had been captured in their company.

They were glad enough that the matter had ended no worse, as it certainly might have done.

And the Co. remained convinced that it was all Uncle James' fault, and they told him so so often that Uncle James developed an almost Hunnish ferocity whenever the Hun was mentioned.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

**"JIMMY SILVER & CO'S VICTORY!"**

By OWEN CONQUEST.

DON'T MISS IT!



Jimmy Silver reappeared at the door of the caravan, dragging the "body" after him, and, to the horror of his chums, he pitched it out on to the grass.

Tubby Muffin stumbled over a trailing root, and gave a yelp.

The snore ceased at once, and a rough-looking man sat up and blinked at the Rookwooders.

The next instant he sprang to his feet and dashed away into the wood.

He fled in so great a hurry that he left his stick lying on the ground where he had been sleeping.

His sudden flight took the Rookwooders by surprise, but in a moment they were rushing in pursuit.

They had doubted very much whether the man was the escaped Hun, but his sudden flight was presumptive evidence that he was the man.

If he had nothing to fear, why had he fled so suddenly at the sight of them?

"After him!" shouted Lovell.

He caught up the stick as he rushed on. If the fugitive was the Hun, that stick might be useful in dealing with him.

"Collar him!" gasped Tubby Muffin, panting along after the Fistical Four.

"Mind, I'm claiming the reward!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. ran their hardest, winding through the trees after the panting fugitive.

The man ran hard, too, but the juniors of Rookwood gained upon him.

There was a heavy bump as the fugitive caught his foot in a root and rolled over in the herbage.

"Pin him!" yelled Lovell.

As the panting man was scrambling to his feet the Rookwooders reached him.

In a twinkling they had piled on him, and four pairs of hands grasped him on all sides.

There was a yell as he was brought to the ground again with a bump.

"Got him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yah!" roared the prisoner. "Oh,

"Who's a German?" shouted Mr. Huggins ferociously. Mr. Huggins was a tramp and a poacher, but he naturally felt insulted at such an epithet as that.

"I'll give you German, you insulting young varmint!"

"Here, keep him off!" yelled Tubby, as Mr. Huggins rushed at him.

Jimmy Silver put out his foot, and the tramp stumbled over it, and laid down in the grass again.

The Rookwooders left him there, using expressions at the top of his voice that were really only fit for a German.

"I—I say, I believe he's the Hun, all the same!" gasped Tubby.

"Well, you can go and capture him," said Jimmy Silver.

But Tubby Muffin did not accept that offer. He followed the Fistical Four back to the road.

Mr. Huggins was left to his own devices, and the enticing prospect of the reward faded from Tubby Muffin's vision like a beautiful dream.

**The 7th Chapter. The Hun at Last!**

"Gee up!" said Lovell.

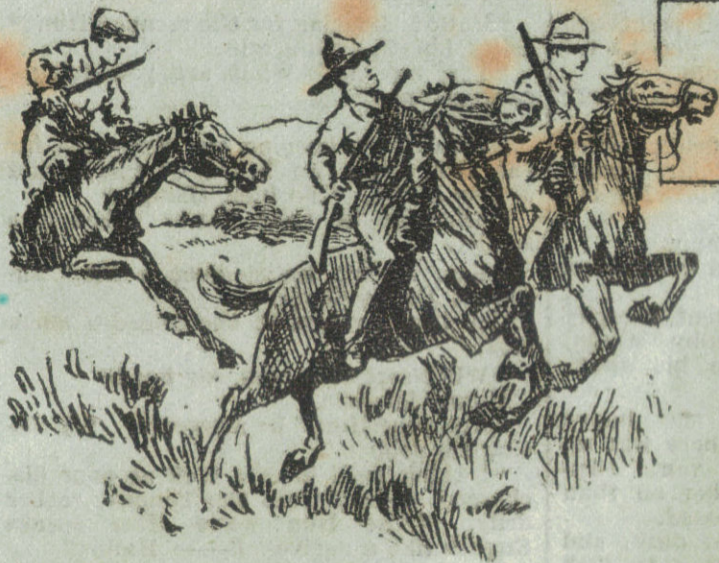
Robinson Crusoe "gee'd" up, and the caravan rumbled on the road.

Jimmy Silver stood on the step and looked in. Mr. Jones was lying in the bunk, which was rather small for him, but where he seemed to find himself comfortable.

"We're starting," said Jimmy. "Now, if you'll tell me just how to get to your home, Mr. Jones, we'll head for it."

There was some hesitation in Mr. Jones' manner.

"It won't be any trouble," said Jimmy reassuringly. "If you live near the high-



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The 1st Chapter. Yen Chin Too!

"Last day at school!" remarked Bob Lawless. "No more blessed work for weeks to come!" said Chunky Todgers, with great satisfaction. Frank Richards laughed. Frank was looking forward to the summer holidays, but not exactly for the same reason as Chunky. He did not object to work. "We're going to spread ourselves a bit these holidays," went on Bob Lawless. "A few days at home, just to make our people happy—ahem!" "Ha, ha!" "And then the North-West trail!" said Bob, with glistening eyes. "Just our hosses and guns and ourselves, and all the North-West in front of us! Up the Cascade Mountains, perhaps right on through the Coast Range to the Pacific—hay? You've never seen the Pacific, Franky?" "Not yet," said Frank Richards. "It's a great sight. We shall see something of the mining-camps in the Cascade section, too, and Redskins in their native haunts. As Chunky's coming with us we'll make him do all the chores." "Oh, will you?" said Chunky Todgers warmly. "The whatter?" asked Frank. "Ah! I forgot you don't speak Canadian well yet," grinned Bob. "I mean the work about camp—the chores, you know. Chunky will be useful if not ornamental." "Why, you jay!" exclaimed Chunky. Chunky Todgers was far from believing that he was not ornamental, and he had no great desire to be useful. "It will be ripping!" said Vere Beauclerc.

"The time of our lives, Cherub!" said Bob. "I suppose your poppa vont want you coming away for a few weeks!" Beauclerc shook his head. "No; father will be away himself, as it happens. I've told him I'm going on a holiday with you fellows, and he's glad." "Good!" "I say, there's been a lot of big strikes in the Cascade Mountains," remarked Chunky Todgers thoughtfully. "Suppose we found a gold-mine—" "I'll bring home in my hat all the gold-mines you find, Chunky. Hallo, you lumpy of yellow wickedness, what do you want?" Bob Lawless addressed that polite question to Yen Chin, the Chinese of Cedar Creek School. The chums of Cedar Creek were standing in the gateway, chatting while they waited for the bell for afternoon lessons—the last lessons they were to receive for many merry weeks. Yen Chin came wiggling up with an agreeable grin upon his yellow face. "No mole schooltee aftel to-morrow," he said. "Just found that out?" "You chappee goee away" said Yen Chin. "Me heal talky-talky. You goee on long journey North-West—oh, yes?" "Correct!" "Nicey-nicey!" said Yen Chin. "Me comee." "Eh?" "Me comee North-West with handsome Bob," said Yen Chin. "You likee me comee?" "Oh!" "You likee me comee, Flanky?" "Ahem!" murmured Frank Richards. "You likee, Chelub?" Vere Beauclerc coughed. As a matter of fact the chums of Cedar Creek were not yearning for the company of the Chinese on their North-Western trip. Chunky Todgers, who was not quite so polite as the rest, answered the little Chinese with delightful directness. "You likee me comee, Todgee?" "No fear!" answered Chunky. "No likee?" "No heathens in this outfit!" said Chunky. "Run away and chop chips, you young jay! You'd be in the way!" "Chinese velly nicey boy," said Yen Chin sorrowfully. "Me tinkee likee comee. Me cookee." "Yep, I guess I know your cooking!" said Bob Lawless, with a wry face. "No cats and dogs on my plate, thanks!" "Me cookee nicee." "The fact is, four's company, and five's a crowd!" said Bob. "You wouldn't like it, Yen Chin." "Takee only four, nottee fivee?" said Yen Chin thoughtfully. "Correct!" "Allee lightee. Leave ugly Chunkee, and takee me instead." "Why, you cheeky heathen!" roared Chunky Todgers in great wrath. "Do you want me to scalp your pigtail?" Yen Chin jumped back. "No wantee nicey Chinese?" he exclaimed. "Allee light! You go choppee-chippee. You velly ugly, bad boy." The chums of Cedar Creek grinned as Yen Chin marched away with that remark.

"Hallo, there's the bell!" exclaimed Bob. Frank Richards & Co. went into the schoolhouse. There was a buzz of voices in Miss Meadows' class when the schoolmistress came in. That afternoon most of the boys and girls were thinking more of their coming holidays than of their last instructions at Miss Meadows' hands. "Silence, please!" said Miss Meadows. The lessons proceeded. The lesson happened to be geography, and it dealt with North-Western Canada, and so Frank Richards & Co. were more than usually interested in it. That was the region where they were to travel. But the lesson was suddenly interrupted by a terrific yell from Bob Lawless. "Yaroooop!" Bob leaped to his feet as he yelled. Miss Meadows spun round towards him, almost petrified. All eyes were turned on Bob. "Lawless!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "Ow! Oh! I—I— Sorry, ma'am!" gasped Bob, with a crimson face. "S-s-something stuck into me!" "What?" "Something stung my leg, ma'am!" stammered Bob, stooping down and rubbing his calf tenderly. Miss Meadows frowned. "A—a—a mosquito or something, ma'am." "There are no mosquitoes here, Lawless! Take your seat at once, and be more orderly, please!" "Ye-es, ma'am." Bob Lawless sat down again amid a grinning class.

But he did not sit still for long. Five minutes later he interrupted Miss Meadows with a war-whoop worthy of a Red Indian and leaped to his feet. "Yow! Ow!" "Lawless!" almost thundered the Canadian schoolmistress. "How dare you?" "I—I—I—I—I was stung again!" gasped the unhappy Bob. "Something sharp ran into my leg, ma'am." "Nonsense!" "I—I did, ma'am! Somebody stuck a pin in me, I guess" howled Bob, turning to glare at the row behind him. In the form behind there were Chunky Todgers, Tom Lawrence, and Yen Chin. All three of them stared at Bob and grinned. Miss Meadows came among the desks. "Did one of you touch Lawless with a pin?" she exclaimed severely. "Nunno, ma'am!" "Certainly not, ma'am!" "No touchee Bobbee," murmured Yen Chin. "No leachee. How can?" "That is quite true. These boys could not reach you, Lawless, without leaving their seats," said Miss Meadows. "All the same, somebody stuck something into me," said Bob. "It hurts like anything! Ow!" "This is very extraordinary! You may change places with Richards, Lawless." "Yes, ma'am." Bob changed forms with his chum, and Frank Richards sat down in his place. Miss Meadows, with a very severe look, resumed the lessons. But there was destined to be another interruption. It came from Frank Richards this time. He jumped up suddenly with a howl that rang through the class-room, and caused all the class to stare round. "Yah, yah! Oh! Oh, my hat! Ow!"

The 2nd Chapter. Four in Trouble!

"Richards!" "Yow-ow-ow!" "How dare you interrupt the lessons, Richards?" exclaimed Miss Meadows angrily. "Are you out of your senses, boy?" "Somebody stuck a pin in my leg, ma'am," stammered Frank—"somebody behind me! Ow, ow!" "Lawrence! Todgers! Yen Chin! Did you touch Richards?" "No, ma'am!" "No touchee nicee old Flanky," said Yen Chin. "How can?" "Richards, I am afraid that you are deliberately wasting time," said Miss Meadows sternly. "This appears to me to be a joke concerted between you and Lawless." "Oh, no, ma'am! I—I—" "Beauclerc, take Richards' place! Richards, you will take this seat under my eyes!" said the schoolmistress severely. Frank Richards obeyed with scarlet cheeks. Vere Beauclerc, with a rather puzzled look at his chum, took the place he vacated. Miss Meadows, good-tempered as she always was, looked angry now. She concluded that the exuberance of spirits, natural on the eve of the holidays, was leading some of her pupils to perpetrate a "rag" in class. For it really seemed impossible for anyone at that desk to be reached by a pin from behind without the action being seen by the whole class. And certainly Lawrence, Todgers, and Yen Chin had not moved from their places, and without moving they could not get within reach of the fellow in front. Even Beauclerc was puzzled, and wondered whether Bob and Frank had allowed their high spirits to lead them a little too far, for "ragging" the schoolmistress was an amusement quite unknown at Cedar Creek. Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd, the two masters, were gently ragged sometimes; but Miss Meadows never. Beauclerc, who was a rather more serious-minded fellow than his two chums, was certainly the last member of the class likely to enter into a rag during lesson-time. But before ten minutes had elapsed Miss Meadows was interrupted by a sharp cry from Vere Beauclerc: "Oh!" "The schoolmistress' eyes were fixed upon him at once. "Beauclerc!" "I—I am sorry, Miss Meadows!" stammered Beauclerc. "Someone ran a pin into my leg!" "You must be well aware, Beauclerc, that you are stating an impossibility!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "No one could do so without stooping; and certainly no one has stooped. I am sorry to see that three boys whom I have regarded as my best pupils, have entered into a scheme to show disrespect to their schoolmistress on the last day of term." "Miss Meadows! I—I—" "That is enough!" rapped Miss Meadows. "Richards, Lawless, and Beauclerc, come out before the class!" Frank Richards & Co. obeyed with crimson faces. Miss Meadows pointed to the corner of the class-room, where Mr. Slimmey was busy with the youngest class. "You will join Mr. Slimmey's class for the present," she said. "Mr. Slimmey,

will you kindly take charge of these three unruly boys?" "Certainly, Miss Meadows!" There was a general grin as the three blushing culprits went to Mr. Slimmey's class, where they were placed in a row of little girls of about eight or nine. There is really no indignity in sitting among little girls of eight or nine, but a schoolboy has his own views on that subject. Frank Richards & Co. were being ridiculed as a punishment for their supposed disrespect, and they felt it keenly. Moreover, Mr. Slimmey made them work with his class; and though the work of the class was naturally easier, it was not gratifying to the trio to learn—quite unnecessarily—that the United Kingdom was composed of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and that London was the capital of England, Edinburgh of Scotland, and Dublin of Ireland. That elementary knowledge had long ago been assimilated by Frank Richards & Co. Their cheeks were burning, and they longed with an intense longing for that afternoon's lessons to be over. Grimacing glances were turned towards them from their own class, and Miss Meadows had some difficulty in keeping the attention of her pupils to the work in hand. It was about a quarter of an hour later when a sudden terrific yell from Chunky Todgers rang through the school-room. He leaped up so suddenly that he nearly pitched Tom Lawrence out of the form. "Yaroooh! Yah! Yawp!" Chunky Todgers fairly bellowed. "Todgers!" shrieked Miss Meadows. "Yah! Oh! Somebody's stabbed me!" yelled Chunky. "I've been stabbed in the leg! Yaroooh! Oh, crumbs! Oh, Jerusalem!" "Come here, Todgers!" "Yow-ow-ow!" "Come here, you bad boy!" "Oh, dear!" moaned Chunky, as he limped out before the class. Swish! "Now go and take your seat with the other unruly boys!" said Miss Meadows sternly. "If there is any further disorder I will detain the whole class for an hour this evening!" Chunky Todgers rolled away dismally to Mr. Slimmey's corner, and was there accommodated with a seat between two smiling little girls. There was no more disorder in Miss Meadows' class. If it was a rag, the threat of detention had been sufficient to make an end of the little game. When lessons were over, at last, and Miss Meadows dismissed her class, she came towards Frank Richards & Co. with a stern brow. "You have displeased me very much," she said quietly. "I am sorry to punish you on your last day at school. But you will be detained for one hour, you four. I will set you a task." "But, ma'am—" "You need not speak!" "But I assure you, Miss Meadows—" stammered Frank. "Silence!" There was nothing more to be said. While the rest of the school marched out Miss Meadows set the unhappy four their detention task, and they were left to it in the deserted school-room. Miss Meadows' brow was very severe when she left them, and her displeasure was a greater punishment to the four than the detention, for they had a very great respect for the schoolmistress, and valued her good opinion. "It's too bad!" grunted Bob Lawless. "Miss Meadows has got mad with us now, and she won't hear a word!" "And we weren't to blame!" groaned Chunky Todgers. "Somebody ran a pin into my leg; I know that!" "Same here!" said Frank. "And here!" smiled Beauclerc. "But I don't quite see how it was done, either. There was nobody close to me." "Miss Meadows don't believe it, anyway. She don't know that we beat Georgie Washington in his own particular line," said Bob, with a rueful grin. "Some heastly jay having a lark with us, somehow. Hallo, you yellow imp! Vamoose the ranch!" Yen Chin trotted softly into the deserted school-room, and came up to the detained quartette with an expression of deep sympathy on his little yellow face. "Pool old Flanky!" he said. "Me solly!"

"All serene, kid. No bones broken, you know." "Lill' Chinee velly solly, allee samee. Pool lill' Chinee cly!" said Yen Chin solemnly. "Br-r-r-r!" grunted Bob Lawless. "You likee goee way?" asked Yen Chin. "Can't, dufer! We're detained, ain't we?" "Me askee Miss Meadee!" "Fathead!" said Frank. "You'll get detained, too, if you're cheeky to Miss Meadows." "No cheekee; me askee. Me gettee you off, you askee me comee on holiday in north-west—oh, yes?" asked Yen Chin. "Oh, absquatulate!" said Bob. "The silly jay can't beg us off!" said Chunky Todgers. "Me know how can." "Rats!" "Me showee you, then you takee me on holiday, oh yes!" said Yen Chin; and he toddled out of the school-room. Frank Richards & Co. settled down to their detention task. They had no faith whatever in Yen Chin being able to beg them off. They did not quite know the facts yet.

The 3rd Chapter. Ungrateful!

"Come in!" called out Miss Meadows, as a tap came at her study door. Yen Chin wriggled into the room. The school-mistress gave him a smile. Yen Chin was a thorough little rascal in many respects, but he was a good fellow in some ways, and the queer little Celestial was rather liked in the lumber school. Miss Meadows was always kind to Yen Chin. "Well, what is it, Yen Chin?" she asked. "Me solly." "What?" "Pool lill' Chinee velly bad boy," said Yen Chin sorrowfully. "Wicked old heathen, you bet!" Miss Meadows suppressed a smile. Yen Chin had not learned that way of expressing himself at Cedar Creek. "What have you done, my boy?" asked Miss Meadows, supposing that the Chinese had come to her to confess some little fault that troubled his tender conscience. "Me stickee pinnee in pool old Flanky." "What?" exclaimed Miss Meadows, with a start. "Me plickee them with pinnee," said Yen Chin. "Chinee velly bad boy, awful old lascal. No can say how solly. Must confess to Miss Meadee, because pool old Flanky kept in. Oh, yes!" Miss Meadows' look became very stern. "You had boy!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that Richards and the other boys were stating the truth all the time?" "Collect!" "You are a very bad boy, Yen Chin. But I fear that you are not telling me the truth. I should have seen you if you had done as you state." Yen Chin grinned. "Chinee velly clever old lascal," he said penitently. "Lookee!" The Celestial held up his foot. On the toe of his boot a large, thick pin was fixed, point outwards. Miss Meadows stared at him. She could see how Frank Richards and his chums had been jabbed with the pin without the young rascal getting near them. Yen Chin, while keeping his place on his form, had simply stretched out his leg under his desk to make his attack. The Canadian schoolmistress was speechless for some moments. "You wicked boy!" she exclaimed at last. "Chinee awful solly." "Why have you come and told me this, Yen Chin?" "Pool old Flanky kept in. Bad conscience," said Yen Chin. "Feelee mustee tell Miss Meadee." "I am glad you have so much conscience," said Miss Meadows. "As you have confessed this of your own accord, Yen Chin, I cannot very well punish you. If it had come to my knowledge in any other way I should punish you severely." "Me solly." "I hope you are sorry. You have acted very badly. You may go!" "Me tankee beautiful Miss Meadee." And Yen Chin glided from the room with an expression of penitent remorse on his face. As soon as he was in the passage, however, that expression gave place to a wide grin, and he chuckled softly and silently as he glided out of the schoolhouse. Yen Chin's remorse was evidently only skin-deep. Miss Meadows proceeded to the school-room, where she found four dismal youths buried in their task. "My boys, you may go," she said kindly. "I am sorry that I misjudged you. It seemed so impossible that your statement could be correct that I concluded you were playing a foolish, practical joke. I find that that was not the case." Frank Richards & Co. rose to their feet, wondering how Miss Meadows had learned that much. But the schoolmistress explained at once. "Yen Chin has confessed to me," she added. "Yen Chin!" exclaimed Frank. "Yes; he had a pin fastened on his boot," said Miss Meadows. "The awful young rascal!" exclaimed Bob. "I am sorry you have been detained for no fault," said Miss Meadows. "It doesn't matter a bit, ma'am!" said Frank cheerfully. "I'm glad you know now that we were not being disrespectful." The four boys quitted the school-room with great satisfaction. As they crossed the playground towards the corral for their horses they met Yen Chin. Four glares of great wrath were turned at once on the Chinese.

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"You pesky jay!" howled Chunky Todgers, shaking a fat fist at the youth from the Flowery Land.

"You young rascal!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"You—you pig-tailed, pink-eyed, yellow-skinned son of a pesky heathen!" said Bob Lawless.

"No savvy," said Yen Chin. "Chinese good boy. Me askee Missy Meadee lettee you off. Me good pal."

"It was you all the time, sticking a pin in us with your boot!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

Yen Chin backed away.

"Miss Meadee talky too muchee," he said. "No wantee Missy Meadee tellee you."

"Let's duck him in the creek!" exclaimed Todgers.

"No duckee pool lill' Chinee. Me gettee you off!" urged Chin Yen. "Me good boy; velly fond of nicey, old Flanky. Now me comee with you on holiday—oh, yes?"

Apparently Yen Chin thought he had a strong claim on the gratitude of Frank Richards & Co. for getting them off detention.

But, considering that he had been the cause of their detention in the first place, the chums did not see where the claim for gratitude came in.

If Yen Chin expected gratitude, at all events he was disappointed. It was something quite different that he received.

The four exasperated fellows rushed on him and collared him on all sides.

Yen Chin was slammed over a bench, and Chunky Todgers started operations on him with his satchel.

Whack, whack, whack!

As the satchel was full of books it was rather a formidable weapon, and Chunky laid it on with all the vigour of his podgy arm.

Yen Chin roared and wriggled.

"You lettee up! Yoop! Pool lill' Chinee solly! Oh, clumbs! Ugly Chunkee stoppee! Ugly old Bob lettee go! Yah!"

Whack, whack, whack!

The final whack burst the satchel, and Chunky's books were scattered far and wide.

"Hold him!" panted Chunky. "I'll give him some more!"

"That will do," said Bob Lawless, laughing.

Yen Chin was released, and he made a bolt for the gates.

Chunky collected up his books, and the schoolboys led their horses out of the corral.

On the trail outside the gates they found Yen Chin waiting for them.

Chunky Todgers glared at him, and gave him a cut with his whip as he rode away. His wrath was by no means appeased.

Yen Chin dodged, with a howl.

Frank Richards & Co. started for the trail through the timber.

"Flanky! Dear old Flanky!" called out Yen Chin.

Frank Richards looked round, drawing rein.

"What is it now, you heathen?" he demanded.

"Chinee solly."

"Oh, buzz off and shut up!"

"Pool lill' Chinee cly."

"Cry away! It's a free country!" answered Frank.

"No wantee pool lill' Chinee comee?" asked Yen sorrowfully.

"My hat! Rather not!"

"You blessed cheeky heathen! After getting us into a row with Miss Meadows!" exclaimed Bob. "Here, I'll give you some of my trail-ropes before we go! That's what you want, I guess!"

Bob Lawless wheeled his pony and rode towards the Celestial.

But Yen Chin did not wait for the trail-ropes.

He scuttled away.

"Come on, Bob!" said Frank Richards, laughing.

The chums rode on again. A yell from Yen Chin in the distance followed them.

"Yah! Ugly old Flanky! Ugly Bob! Ugly Chelub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three chums chuckled as they rode away into the timber, and Yen Chin's complimentary epithets died away in the distance.

The 4th Chapter. Off for the Holidays.

Cedar Creek School broke up the next day, and Frank Richards & Co. rejoiced thereat, as did most of the other fellows.

Not that they were not attached to their school in the backwoods; but to any schoolboy the prospect of a long holiday is always delightful.

And Frank Richards & Co. had laid plans for an excursion of unusual magnitude and interest.

Frank had not forgotten his brief trip into the wild North-west, and he was very keen to see more of that wide, half-settled country.

The chums of Cedar Creek were to travel on their "lonesome," as Bob expressed it, looking after themselves, as they were quite capable of doing.

Bob Lawless had all the cool self-reliance of the young Canadian, and his father had no doubt of his ability to take care of himself.

Beauclerc's father, the remittance-man of Cedar Creek, had willingly given the Cherub permission to join in the long excursion, more especially as he was to be away from home himself for some weeks.

The shack by the creek would have been lonesome for Beauclerc, with his father and his chums away.

Chunky Todgers, the fourth of the party, was very keen on the journey, entertaining a hope of discovering a gold-claim somewhere in the North-western hills.

Big strikes had been made there by prospectors, and Chunky did not see why he should not happen on a bonanza. He meant to keep his eyes open, at all events.

But Bob Lawless was probably quite safe

in undertaking to carry home in his hat all the gold-mines that Chunky should discover.

The holiday journey meant a good deal of hard work, for the schoolboys had to camp out, to care for their horses, to hunt and fish for most of their food, and do everything for themselves.

But hard work is one of the natural conditions of existence in the Canadian West, and even Chunky Todgers did not want to slack all the time.

Several days passed very cheerily in making preparations for the journey.

Frank and Bob and Vere Beauclerc and Chunky were continually riding over to one another's homes to make arrangements about the "outfit."

When all was ready, and it was time to start, the "outfit" gathered at the Lawless ranch.

Bright and early in a summer's morning the chums of Cedar Creek took the trail.

Mounted upon their own horses, and with a pack-mule led with baggage packed on his back, they started on the western trail.

Two rifles and a shotgun and a hunting-knife and axe apiece were the armament of the party.

Chunky Todgers had a desire to carry a revolver—a desire upon which his companions sat at once.

Mr. and Mrs. Lawless accompanied the quartette for a few miles on the way in the ranch buggy, to see them off as far as the ford of the Indian River.

"Take care of yourselves, my dear boys," said Mrs. Lawless when they parted.

"You bet!" said Bob.

"You rely on me, ma'am," said Chunky Todgers. "I'm looking after them, you know."

Mrs. Lawless smiled.

"I'll bring 'em back safe and sound!" said Chunky; while his companions glared at him. "Rely on me!"

"Good-bye, Bob! Good-bye, Frank!"

The riders plunged in at the ford.



Yen Chin was stung over a bench, and Chunky Todgers started operations on him with his satchel.

On the other side they stopped to wave their hands at the rancher and his wife in the buggy, which then turned back towards the ranch.

Then the four trotted on across the green, rolling prairie.

The sun rose higher upon a wide expanse of green, with dusky timber in the distance.

The chums of Cedar Creek were in great spirits.

"Off at last!" said Bob Lawless. "By the way, I rather expected to see that Chinee heathen again. He hasn't shown up."

Frank Richards laughed.

"This trip wouldn't have suited Yen Chin," he said. "Besides, I believe the young rascal is wanted in his pater's laundry during the holidays."

"Well, my popper was in two minds about letting me go," remarked Chunky Todgers. "He said there was lots to be done on the farm. I've promised to work like thunder the last week of vacation. I've promised mopper a big gold-nugget if I hit on a bonanza in the Cascade Mountains."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I'm going to keep my eyes peeled," said Chunky, with a sage nod of the head. "We may come back from this trip millionaires."

At which Chunky's companions roared.

A good many miles glided under the pattering hoofs before the adventurers camped for the noonday rest in a clump of timber beside a silvery spring.

The horses were staked out, and Bob Lawless went into the wood with his gun to look for dinner.

Chunky Todgers cooked the dinner at a fire of chips, with great satisfaction to himself and his comrades.

After dinner the chums of Cedar Creek laid in the grass to rest and to give the horses a rest before taking the trail again.

The four horses and the pack-mule were staked out with the trail-ropes on the edge of the stream at a little distance.

The faint sound of the crop-cropping of the animals came to the ears of the schoolboys as they rested in the rich, long grass. The sound ceased, but they did not notice it for some time. It occurred to Bob Lawless at last, however, and he sat up in the grass and looked about him.

The next moment he bounded to his feet.

"Jehoshaphat!" he exclaimed.

"What's the row?" asked Beauclerc.

"The hosses!"

"What's the matter with them?"

"Gone!" yelled Bob.

"What?"

"The campers were on their feet in a twinkling."

They dashed along the stream to the spot where the horses had been roped.

Not a sign of them was to be seen.

Close at hand was the timber, into which the animals had evidently vanished.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "You couldn't have tied them safely, Bob!"

Bob Lawless snorted.

"Do you reckon I don't know how to stake out a horse?" he demanded. "They couldn't get loose from the peg!"

"But they have, old scout!"

"They've been let loose, I guess!"

"There's nobody here but ourselves," said Chunky Todgers.

"You jay! There must be—some dashed horse-thief, I guess. Look at that rope!"

Bob Lawless held up the end of a trail-ropes still attached to the peg.

It had been cut through with a knife.

"Oh, my hat!" said Beauclerc, in dismay. "A horse-thief, right enough! Almost under our eyes, too!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Bob.

The trail of the horses into the timber was plain enough in the rich grass.

Bob had caught up his rifle as he ran from the camp, and he held it in readiness for use as he started for the timber with a grim look on his face.

It was a hard blow to be robbed of their

horses on the first day of their journey; and if it was necessary to return to the ranch for fresh mounts, they could anticipate the smiles with which they would be greeted.

They would almost rather have continued the journey on foot.

If a horse-thief had to be dealt with, they were prepared to deal with him as drastically as need be.

Bob Lawless would have had no hesitation whatever in using his rifle for the recovery of the stolen mounts.

The trail of the horses and the pack-mule was easily followed through the timber, and they came out on the plain beyond.

Bob, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed out over the sunlit prairie.

"There they are!"

Far out on the plain a bunch of steeds came into view, with a single rider in their midst.

watching them as they toiled nearer, his almond eyes glimmering.

As soon as they were within hailing distance he held up his disengaged hand.

"Stoppee!" he called out.

The chums did not reply; they put on a spurt to get nearer.

Immediately Yen Chin set his pony in motion, and started off, the led horses following him at the end of the trail-ropes.

The whole bunch trotted away, leaving the schoolboys, on foot, hopelessly in the rear.

Bob Lawless panted.

"By Jerusalem, I'll lambaste that heathen when I get near him!"

Chunky Todgers gave a prolonged gasp.

He had more fat to carry than his companions, and he was at the end of his tether.

"We e-c-can't get near him!" he gasped.

"I say, I can't keep on!"

"Go back to the camp and look after our truck," said Bob Lawless. "We'll see about the hosses!"

"All right!" gasped Chunky.

And the fat youth limped away on the back-trail, quite content to leave to his comrades the difficult task of running down the elusive Yen Chin.

How Yen Chin was to be run down was a mystery, as a matter of fact. On foot the chums could not get near him unless he chose.

They halted at last, panting for breath.

Bob Lawless put his hands to his mouth, and shouted desperately:

"Yen Chin! Halt!"

The Chinese looked back over his shoulder, grinning.

As soon as he saw that the pursuers had stopped he stopped also, but evidently ready to trot off again at a moment's notice.

"Allee light!" he called back. "You stoppee, me stoppee—oh, yes!"

Bob came a little nearer, and the Chinese held up his hand.

"That enuffe! You talkie if wantee, but no comee mole neal."

"Not a horse-thief, after all! We shall get the gees back," he said.

"And I guess we'll make that heathen smart for this trick!" growled Bob Lawless.

The four schoolboys strode out on the plain, the grass rising thigh-deep round them.

They hurried in the direction of the halted group of steeds, which was the direction in which they had come from home.

As they came closer Yen Chin was easily recognised.

He was mounted upon a wiry-looking Indian pony, and he held the trail-ropes of the four horses and the pack-mule in one hand.

The captured animals were cropping the grass, and Yen Chin sat motionless on his pony, regarding the chums of Cedar Creek as they came towards him with a grinning countenance.

Evidently he had observed them in pursuit, and was waiting for them to get nearer, though it was doubtful whether he would allow them to get near enough to recapture their mounts.

It was tiring work tramping over the rough prairie in the hot sun, and the tempers of Frank Richards & Co. were not improving as they tramped on.

It was clear to them that Yen Chin had been watching when they started, and had followed on their trail unnoticed, with the intention of playing this impish trick on them at the first halting-place.

If they got near enough to reach Yen Chin with a trail-ropes they intended to give him a severe lesson on the subject of practical jokes of this kind.

The question was, whether they would get near enough, for the cunning Chinese was master of the situation.

Being mounted, while the Co. were afoot, he could keep any distance he liked.

For the present, however, he remained as motionless, almost, as a yellow image,

Bob breathed hard.

"Give us back our horses, you yellow scamp!" he exclaimed.

"You wantee hoss?"

"Yes, you young rascal!"

"Bob Lawless old lascal, velly ugly!"

"Will you bring back our horses?" shouted Frank Richards.

"Me blingee backee, if wantee. You wantee me comee on holiday with nicee pals?" asked Yen Chin.

"No!" roared Bob, understanding now the reason of the little Celestial's trickery.

"Then me no blingee hosses."

"I'll scalp you!" roared Bob.

"You catchee me firstee!" said Yen Chin cheerfully. "Wantee long leggee to lun attee hosses, you old lascal!"

"Oh, by gum!" murmured Bob. "If I was only near enough to give him one right on the nose, the grinning little pagan!"

"Yen Chin, don't be a silly beast!" exclaimed Frank. "We're going to have the horses, if we follow you all the way home; and then you'll get the trail-ropes!"

"No goee homee," answered Yen Chin calmly. "Goee on holiday, takee hosses, you bet! Lill' Chinee velly deep old lascal—oh, yes!"

The chums shook their fists at the Celestial, who kissed his hand to them in response.

They drew a little nearer, and Yen Chin promptly set the horses in motion, keeping his distance.

Bob Lawless suddenly brought his rifle to his shoulder.

"Yen Chin, bring back those hosses, or I'll wing you!" he roared.

Yen Chin looked back and grinned.

"No shootee pool lill' Chinee!" he called back. "Gleat Shiff Henderson comee along with lope and hang up on tlee. Oh, yes!"

The threat was evidently useless. The wily little Oriental was quite well aware that Bob would not pull trigger upon him.

But Bob was not in a mood to be trifled with.

"I won't wing you, Yen Chin, but I'll jolly well drop your pony in his tracks!" he exclaimed. "Mind, I mean that! You take another step away from us with those gees, and down goes your pony!"

"Good!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "You can do that! It's your own fault if you lose your pony, Yen Chin!"

The Celestial's grin suddenly vanished.

His pony presented an easy target to Bob's rifle.

It needed but a slight pressure of Bob's finger to bring Yen Chin's pony rolling in the grass, and Yen Chin along with it.

"Go on and take the hosses, you chaps!" said Bob. "I'll keep him covered. If he takes them only a yard farther away, I'll drop him in his tracks!"

Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc strode on towards the group of horses.

Yen Chin hesitated.

He did not want his pony shot. His father, the laundryman of Thompson, would certainly have had a very painful explanation with him if he had come home and announced that his valuable pony was dead.

He was watching Bob's face to ascertain whether he really meant to carry out his threat.

Bob's rifle never wavered for a moment.

Yen Chin watched Frank and Beauclerc uneasily as they came nearer.

"You no wantee lill' Chinee comee?" he asked sorrowfully.

"No fear, you tricky little beast!"

"Me no likee you."

"You'll like us still less when we get near enough to boot you!" answered Frank.

"Flanky velly ugly!"

Frank Richards laughed.

"Chelub velly ugly old lascal!"

"Thanks!" said Beauclerc.

"Bob Lawless ugly old lascal, too!" said Yen Chin. "Ugly old Bob! You no shootee, me leavee hoss!"

The little Chinee threw down the bunch of trail-ropes.

Then, when Frank and Beauclerc were within a few yards, he clapped spurs to his pony and dashed off.

Bob Lawless lowered his rifle.

Yen Chin did not mean to stay for the licking he had earned; but he had to be allowed to escape.

Shooting his pony was a desperate resource only to be used for recovering the horses, and they were recovered now.

Frank and Beauclerc gathered up the trail-ropes.

"I guess I've a good mind to run him down and lambaste him!" growled Bob, as he sprang on his horse.

But Yen Chin, who feared exactly that proceeding, was riding headward as if for his life, and even the pleasure of lambasting the mischievous heathen was not worth an afternoon's hard riding.

Only too thankful to have recovered their horses, the chums mounted, and rode back to the timber, Yen Chin fading out of sight on the horizon.

"Got 'em!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers, as they rode up to the camp. "Good! You galoots will have to keep a sharper eye open after this."

"I guess we've done with Yen Chin," said Bob.

"I wonder?" remarked Frank Richards thoughtfully. He was by no means so certain that the pertinacious little Chinee was done with.

But nothing was to be seen of Yen Chin as the chums of Cedar Creek rode out of the timber in the sunny afternoon and resumed their journey towards the wild North-West.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY!  
**"YEN CHIN'S RUSE!"**  
 By MARTIN CLIFFORD.  
 DON'T MISS IT!