

Why Does Von Slyden Hate Horace, the Goat? See - - Below!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

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The Boys Who Beat the Kaiser! By DUNCAN STORM.



HORACE HITS THE HONEY ON THE HEAD OF THE HUN!

FOR NEW READERS.

THE KAISER is determined to obtain possession of the Mahdi's huge treasure which is hidden in the heart of the continent of Africa, and to do so, he employs three desperate Germans named BARON VON SLYDEN, CAPTAIN STOOM, and VON SNEEK.

The papers, however, containing the secret of the whereabouts of the treasure are in the possession of

CAPTAIN HANDYMAN and CY SPRAGUE, who decide to go in quest of the treasure, and to take with them the boys of the Bombay Castle, chief among whom are DICK DORRINGTON, CHIP, ARTY DOVE, SKELETON, PORKIS, and PONGO WALKER.

LAL TATA, a cheery Hindu, TOOKUM EL KOOS, a native wrestler, FLINT PASHA, a member of the Sudan Police, are also amongst the party, as well as the boys' pets, CECIL, the orang-outang, HORACE, the goat, and GUS, the crocodile.

So far Baron von Slyden and his confederates have made several endeavours to secure the papers containing the secret of the Mahdi's treasure, and on each occasion have met with defeat.

In last week's instalment Baron von Slyden was chased by a leopard, and forced to take refuge in the branches of a date palm. There he fell asleep, but when he awoke he found that the boys

of the Bombay Castle were picnicking below. Pongo Walker threw some resinous branches on to the fire, which sent up clouds of smoke, forcing the baron to break into a sneezing fit. He slipped off his perch, and landed on his head in a large honey-pot.

(Read on from here.)

The Baron's Escape.

The boys started up from their picnic beneath the date-palm as the baron's fat body came tumbling down amongst them.

They could hardly believe their eyes as the German's square head drove down into the huge pot of native honey, and he rolled over, kicking everything right and left with his great jack-boots.

The pot did not break under the impact of the baron's fall. It was a great, wide-mouthed jar, purchased by Skeleton, and it held pretty well a half-hundredweight of honey.

This acted as a sort of buffer when Baron von Slyden plunged head foremost into it.

For a moment the baron lay still, half-stunned by his fall.

"He's dead!" whispered Skeleton in awed tones. "He's kyboshed. But what on earth was he doing up that tree?"

"Goodness knows!" replied Dick Dornington. "But I expect his neck is

broken. Let's pull the jar off his head, anyway."

But the baron was not dead. He struggled to his hands and knees, and tried to wrench the long earthenware pot from his head.

But his chin had passed the curve of the jar's neck, and he could not withdraw his head from the clinging mass of honey.

"He can't get his head out of the pot!" said Tom Morton. "Let's smash it!"

And he picked up a tent-mallet which lay handy.

But Skeleton objected. "If you smash the pot we've got nothing to put the honey in," he said. "Let's see if we can't wangle his napper out of it, somehow or another."

"On, break the pot!" put in Dick Dornington impatiently. "He'll be smothered in a minute or two if you don't. Look at the way he's jumping about!"

And, sure enough, the baron was rolling over, and dancing about on his hands and knees in a most alarming fashion.

The Skeleton gave the matter a moment's thought.

"It's a pity to waste all that good honey," he said. "But I don't suppose anyone will fancy the stuff after it has had a German's head rubbed in it. All right, Tom; give the pot a cosh with the mallet!"

Tom Morton lifted the tent-mallet and gave the pot a fairly hard tap.

It rung, but it did not break. It was a good old-fashioned native pot of hard-baked earthenware, and it had been used for so many years for holding honey and other native produce that it had soaked up its contents into the clay, which had toughened almost like leather.

"Hit him harder, Tom!" urged Skeleton.

The baron seemed to understand that the boys were doing their best to get him out of the pot.

He sat up with the hated thing on his shoulders, oozing honey all down his chest and back, and he wagged his head feebly inside the pot, as though inviting them to have another whack at this uncomfortable headgear.

"Look at him!" said Dick. "He's asking you to give it a good old cosh!"

Tom Morton hesitated, mallet in hand. "I might break his neck if I whacked too hard," he objected.

"You needn't be afraid of breaking that German's neck," remarked Porkis. "He's a real Hun, and they have necks as thick as a rhinoceros!"

"Roll him over on his hands and knees again," said Pongo Walker. "Then you can whack the pot without driving his head down into his neck."

This suggestion was adopted. The boys rolled the baron over on his hands and knees.

Down came the mallet.

It was a good hefty blow this time—a blow that would have shattered a bread-pan or a flower-pot of equal size.

But the tough old honey-pot stood the blow like the steel casque of some knight of old.

The German stumbled on his hands and knees, but the pot held fast.

"That is most extraordinary tough pots," said Mr. Lal Tata, viewing their enemy with critical eyes. "Give me some mallets, Tom, and let me have jolly good whacks."

Lal tried his hand.

The pot rang like a drain-pipe, but it still held fast.

Horace, tied to the palm, had been looking on at this scene with flashing eyes.

He saw the boys hit the baron over the head—or, rather, over the pot—and in his goatish brain there lit up the idea that his help was wanted.

A man dancing about on his hands and knees, with a large earthenware pot on his head, was an object sufficiently out of the way to arouse Horace's anger at any time.

Horace had quietly chewed pretty well through the rope which secured him to the palm.

With a sharp backward tug he snapped the remaining strands like a bit of pack-thread.

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Then, swinging round on his hind-legs, he faced the potted baron. "Look out, you chaps!" exclaimed Chip. "Horace is loose!"

The boys scattered with a rush, for there was a gleam in the eye of Horace that showed he was going to run amuck. Horace wasted no time.

He dropped his head, and glared at the crouching figure of the baron and the wagging pot.

Then he shot forward like a rocket. There was a crash like a railway collision as Horace's head came in contact with the bottom of the pot.

Baron von Slyden was hurled head-over-heels by the force of the impact, and the pot, breaking in halves, revealed him smeared with great dabs of honey.

Then a dismal howl went up from him, for in rolling over he had sat on the head of Gus the crocodile, and Gus had promptly nailed him, biting him in the leg like a bull-terrier.

He staggered to his feet, with Gus clinging to him.

"Quick, boys!" gasped Lal. "Do not let Horace butt him some punches again. He will kill the man!"

He ran forward, seizing Gus by his dog-collar as Horace recoiled.

Then he leaped into the air with a howl as Gus, letting go of the baron, wriggled and got him by the arm.

"Wow!" yelled Lal. "Take away this crocodile fellow! He bites off my arms! He—"

Lal said no more. He had stumbled round in the path of the charging Horace as he made for the baron, and received the charge which was intended for their enemy.

"Hoosh!" coughed Lal, as he shot through the air like a projectile, with Gus hanging on to his arm.

Then with a roar like a bull Lal fell into the midst of a thick clump of "Wait a bit," a thorny shrub without leaves, and with thorns like tenpenny nails sticking out all over its branches.

Into the middle of this bush Lal descended with a crash, and Gus, releasing his hold on his victim's arm, disappeared amongst the thorns.

Gus did not mind the thorns a bit. But Lal, fat, soft, heavy, and round, felt every thorn in the bush.

"Quick, boys!" he yelled. "Come to my rescue! I am full of these prickly-some thorns. I am punctured like bicycle-tyres! The wind goes out of me! I deflate!"

The boys rushed to Lal's assistance as Gus, with a steely glint in his wicked eye, crawled out at the bottom of the thorny clump.

Gus was promptly collared and shoved head foremost into his cricket-bag, whilst the boys set to work with their jack-knives to cut away the clump of thorns, singing "Here we go round the mulberry-bush!" at the top of their voices.

"Ha!" groaned Lal, as he lay in his thorny bed. "It is all very well for you fellows to sing your songs whilst I suffer. I am like some pin cushions, full of needles and spikesomeness!"

"Don't move, sir," said Pongo soothingly. "The thorns will only go into you worse if you do. If you lie there nice and quiet for an hour or two we'll cut the bush away, so that we can get you out, and—"

Pongo looked round for their prisoner. "Where's that German sausage got to?" he demanded. "He was sitting there a minute or two ago wiping the sweetstuff out of his neck. Now he's hopped it!"

"And sure enough, when the boys looked for the baron, they found that, taking advantage of the confusion, he had stolen away, and had disappeared in the forest."

"Never mind," said Dick consolingly. "We don't want him. Let the beggar go. We've got to get old Lal out of this. He's as full of thorns as a hedgehog is full of bristles!"

And bit by bit they cut away the bush, till at last they cut down to Lal, and rolled him gently out of his thorny resting-place.

Horace, as soon as he saw what he had done in his blind rush, was as eager as anyone to help Lal, and chewed away industriously at the thorns, devouring branch after branch of the prickly bush, till, as Pongis remarked, his inside must have been like a bag of tenpenny nails.

Lal was a bit sulky when the boys at last rolled him out of the bush.

He wanted to go for Horace with a chopper.

He said that Horace was not fit to live, and that he was no goat, but a fiend in goatish shape.

But when the boys had picked the last of the thorns out of him Lal's customary good temper reigned again.

"That goat fellow will be deaths to me some day," he said, shaking his head. "Now, boys, what shall we do about that German rascal fellow? Shall we chase him and take him prisoners?"

"Oh, let him go!" said Dick impatiently. "We don't know what to do with him if we do take him. And we don't want the boats lumbered up with a German sausage like Von Slyden. He'd always be in the way. And I suppose we should have to give him up to the police somewhere, and then there would be an inquiry, and everybody would learn that we are out on a treasure-seeking expedition; and the captain doesn't want that to happen."

The picnic party packed up their gear, and allowed the runaway baron to race

through the forest and the brush on his own.

They returned to the launch and the boats, where Captain Handyman and Cy Sprague and Flint Pasha had been taking a quiet siesta, and they told their story of how the baron had come tumbling out of the palm-tree on to their spread.

The captain laughed when he heard the story of the honey-pot.

"I don't think the soundrel was chasing us up," he said. "I'll bet he has had enough of fooling around on our track for to-day. As likely as not when I gave him that towelling with the mop he bunked into the forest and lost his way—though goodness knows what could have made him climb up that palm-tree! But there, you never know what these Germans are up to!"

Perhaps if Captain Handyman had known what Baron von Slyden was up to, he would not have laughed so much when he heard the story of how the black herald had come with the challenge from King Obob el Mook, the hooligan who lived fifteen miles farther up the river, and who so greatly desired to box with Arty Dove, the strong boy, who had beaten the celebrated wrestler, Tookum el Kooos.

Flint Pasha shook his head when he heard of the challenge.

"King Obob el Mook is a truculent ruffian," he said, "and we have had a good deal of trouble with him. He thinks he has sovereign rights over the banks and the waterway of the Nile, and once or twice we have had to pull him up for stopping the native craft plying up and down the river. I'll bet he does not know that I am one of the party, or he would not have sent such an impudent message into camp."

"Do you think Arty can lick him?" asked Captain Handyman, as he overhauled the engine of the launch preparatory to making another start.

"I think so," replied Flint Pasha. "Obob has been drinking heavily lately, and he's bound to be as soft as putty. But in the ordinary course of things he's as powerful a nigger as you'd want to meet in a day's march, and he fights all in, uses his feet as well as his hands, kicks like a mule, and butts with his head, nigger fashion. He's a tremendously powerful brute. He wears a belt of diamonds, which he has awarded to himself, and I believe it is worth a mint of money."

"And if Arty licks him I suppose Arty will take the belt?" suggested the captain.

Flint Pasha rubbed his clean-shaven chin meditatively. This was quite a new notion.

"If Arty can lick that hooligan," he replied slowly, "Arty will be doing a greater service to Africa than he knows. Old King Muck, as they call him down the river, has got a big prestige through his boxing, and he has gathered round him about six hundred of the toughest ruffians of these parts. If Arty can knock him out and take the belt from him, the story will run like wildfire up and down the river. Traders who now crawl before Obob el Mook will cease to be afraid of him, and they won't pay the tribute which he now exacts from them."

Captain Handyman rubbed his hands thoughtfully on a piece of oily waste.

"I should like to have a slap at him myself," he said pensively, surveying a ridge of iron knuckles. "That in-and-out nigger fighting is right in my line. But as he has challenged Arty, I suppose that Arty will have to fight him."

"And if Arty does not fight him," added Flint Pasha drily, "it means that we shall have to fight King Obob el Mook, with all his navy of canoes and all his six hundred ruffians behind him. He would take it as a sign of funk, and he would dispute our passage up the river."

"Right-ho!" said Captain Handyman gladly. "Then we will get up the river, and we will paste old King Muck till his own mother wouldn't know him. We are quit of that German gang now, that's one thing. I don't think that Baron von Slyden will worry us any more."

The towing-lines were passed to the whalers.

Horace was shoved aboard the No. 4 whaler, whilst Gus, imprisoned in his cricket-bag, was dropped into her unceremoniously, and once more the little flotilla started off to meet King Obob el Mook, and to force the passage of the river, either by the weight of Arty's fists or by force of arms.

Von Slyden's Scheme.

Captain Handyman would have changed his mind concerning the intentions of Baron von Slyden had he seen the movements of the German after he had sneaked away into the shelter of the forest.

First the German headed inland from the river towards the line of country where he might expect to find the native path which led towards the stronghold of Obob el Mook.

But as soon as he had put a safe distance between himself and the picnic party the baron stopped by the banks of a small rivulet and made some sort of a toilet, washing the remnants of Skeleton's honey out of his head and neck, and removing as much of the black Nile mud from his clothing as he could.

The baron had a double intent in heading for this path.

It was possible that his companions, becoming concerned by his long absence from camp, would set out in search of him. If so, they would follow this track.

Von Slyden's luck was in. Hardly had he emerged on the beaten native path,

which ran some five miles inland from the river, than he heard in the distance the clink of camel-rings and the cries of camel-drivers.

His spirits rose with a bound as he realised that the advancing party was none other than his own gang of Askari ruffians who, under the leadership of Captain von Snoon, and followed up closely by Von Sneek, were heading along this track in search of him.

Soon they came up with him, and Von Sneek pulled up his camel and lifted his hands in horror when he saw the state his master was in.

The baron's face and hands were scratched, his clothes were in ribands. Trousers he had none, save a sort of kirtle of rags that hung from his waist like a savage kilt.

"Ach, Himmel! What has happened to our so dear master?" cried Von Sneek. The baron snarled.

"Get me water, quick!" he muttered. "And give me food and clean clothes. There is no time to be lost!"

The baron's camp equipment was speedily unpacked, and he washed and ate by the roadside.

A dozen bottles of German beer were laid in a row, and one by one the baron drank these in true German fashion as he washed the mud and honey out of his hair, and told the story of his adventures to his companions.

They muttered threats of vengeance when he told them how Saleeb, his Askari hunter, had run away from him, and had been so mutinous as to throw him into the Nile, merely because he had been kicked in the ribs.

They all agreed that the first thing to be done with Saleeb when they caught him was to flay the flesh from his bones with a good rhinoceros-hide whip.

Then the baron told his companions of the challenge he had overheard, sent by messenger from Obob el Mook to Arty Dove, the strong boy of the British expedition.

"So!" snarled the baron, as he tossed a quart of lager down his dry throat. "So! We shall see dot dis nigger king shall hit dot boy so dot he no get up again. Und dere will be fighting. Und der expeditions shall be viped out, und we shall get der blans of der treasure. I will myself dis Obob see, und he shall understand dot he shall have der Third Class of der Red Eagle from der All-Highest War Lord, our Kaiser. I raise my glass to der heat of his most illustrious Majesty, der Kaiser Wilhelm. He shall Kaiser of all Africa be from Cairo to Cabotown, und der English pigs we shall drive into der sea!"

And the baron poured down another quart of German beer, whilst his companions muttered their approval of his plan, which was to push ahead with all speed, and to arrive at the Court of King Obob el Mook before the boats of the expedition could arrive.

Obob could be bought.

They could make Obob big promises if he would only pick a quarrel with the British.

Obob could be shown that in a very short space of time all Africa would be in the hands of the Germans, and that he would stand very well with the Kaiser when it was revealed to that potentate that he had been materially assisted by Obob.

It was the old story of German treachery and German intrigue, which the baron revealed as he washed the last of the Nile mud and the last of the Skeleton's honey from his fat carcass.

Then, clothed in a clean suit of white duck, he mounted his camel and led his troop of ruffians at full speed along the winding track, which led to the citadel of Booloo, the stronghold of that sporting and pugilistic nigger king, Obob el Mook.

King Obob's Stronghold.

The fifteen miles up river which were supposed to divide the boys' picnic place from Booloo turned out to be fifteen real African miles.

Which is to say, that the launch coughed her way up the broad stream all the afternoon and evening, dragging her tow of whaleboats after her round endless long bends, fringed with tall walls of reed, without a sign of the village or city of Booloo coming into sight.

Booloo was built on an island.

It was a queer sort of island for this swampy part of the world, for it was a pinnacle of rock which stuck up from miles of mud.

Probably Booloo was built on the point of some long-extinct volcano or mountain, which had been thrust up in some upheaval ages ago through the great swamps of the Nile valley.

The boys could not help feeling a little depressed as the launch chugged along, past miles and miles of weeds which opened out into wide lagoons and labyrinths of reed and water, where the wild duck wheeled round in long flights, and the pink, long-legged flamingos stalked on the mud flats.

Then the launch delayed matters by getting her screw propeller tangled up in a lily bed, so that the boys had to set to work in hauling up hundreds of yards of tough lily stalks and the trailing water-mosses that were interwoven with these.

"I call this a rotten place," said Skeleton, looking round at the reed-beds miserably. "I never want to see another reed or water-lily as long as I live. I'm fed up! I'm going to catch tiddlers!"

And, unrolling a fishing-line, Skeleton made up a hook which he thought should entice one of the fish denizens of the Nile from its watery lair.

First he took a triple hook on a swivel, and attached to it a plated teaspoon.

Above this he tied a strip of red flannel, and then tied on to his line a strip of silver paper.

And when the launch, freed from the clutch of the lily stalks, plugged away again through the mazy channels of oily water, Skeleton dropped his queer fishing-

line overboard, regardless of the derisive laughter of his chums.

"What do you expect to catch, Skeleton?" demanded Tom Morton.

"Tiddlers!" responded Skeleton stolidly. Tookum el Kooos was greatly interested by this fishing.

"You wait um see," he said. "Catchum plenty big fess—plenty big tiddler. You wait um see. Too plenty light now. LIT! later catchum big fess!"

The light of the evening began to fade in the dull, grey sky, and nothing happened to Skeleton's line.

"Put some tracle in the spoon, Skeleton," suggested Dick Dorrington. "You may catch a bloater then!"

"Rats!" retorted Skeleton, intent on the thick line that was trailing the flashing spoon a hundred yards astern of the whaler. "Don't kick up such a row, or you'll frighten my fish. I've got a sort of feeling that there's a big chap hanging around after that spoon bait."

The words were hardly out of Skeleton's mouth when there was a swirl in the grey water close by the spinning spoon.

Then there was a snatch at Skeleton's line, which tightened suddenly, thrumming like a banjo-string.

"Jinny!" yelled Skeleton, who was nearly jerked over the stern of the whaleboat by the sudden snatch. "Hold me in, boys, I've got a whale on!"

The boys rushed aft, and clung on to the line, which was being pulled through Skeleton's bony fingers.

Then the water broke a hundred yards astern, and a huge fish leaped from the smooth surface high into the air, a fish which, to their excited eyes, seemed at least fifteen feet long.

With a crash and a plunge he dropped back, endeavouring to shake the hooks from his mouth.

"Hold um! Hold um!" yelled Tookum el Kooos. "Him too much big tiddler!"

Lal, who had been dozing, woke at the excitement and flurry which was going on as the boys tugged against the hooked monster.

"Ha, boys!" he exclaimed, starting up and rubbing his eyes. "You got fish. Ha! Skeleton, hold tight, you silly fellow! Hold tight! Let me come and make pulls. You will lose so great fish if you do not make care!"

The whole crowd assembled in the stern of the boat, pulling and hauling against the great fish, which kicked and struggled in a fashion that made them feel as though they had a donkey tugging at the other end of the line.

Luckily Skeleton's line was a strong one, and it held against the fierce struggles of the monster.

Lal, wildly excited, and perspiring from every pore, superintended the hauling in. Sometimes they would win a foot of line.

Then the great fish, with a kick and a struggle, would snatch a yard back from them.

Horace, greatly interested in the row that the group were making, came astern from his perch in the bow, and shoved his head into the closely-packed group of toiling boys.

"Hi, Horace!" shouted Pongo, as Horace's great horn prodded him in the ribs. "Keep up of this!"

"Yessa, Mister Horace," added Lal. "You push out of dot. We don't want goat fellows to help us with our so great fish!"

He clumped Horace's head, and Horace promptly butted him in the stomach.

Then a bright idea struck Pongis. They were making no headway with the fish at all.

"Let's give the line a turn round Horace's horns," he said. "We can wind the brute in bit by bit, then."

This was no sooner said than done. The slack of the line was turned round Horace's great horns, as though they were a cleat.

Then Skeleton's fingers were nipped, and he let go, so that Horace got the whole pull of the fish at the end of the line.

Horace's head was nearly pulled off by the sudden jerk.

His green eyes glinted in the dusk. "Maw!" he bleated. And he wriggled his head violently.

Then he butted at the line, which was pulling in the air in front of his eyes.

And every time Horace butted he caught up an extra turn of the line.

Then he turned round, and the line took a turn round his hairy legs.

After that Horace went mad. He rolled over on his back.

He bounced in the bottom of the whaler.

The boys, yelling, climbed up on the gunwale to get out of his way as he bounced round like an indiarubber ball, winding up the line round his horns, round his body, and round his legs.

There was a sigh like a punctured tyre from the cricket-bag in which Gus was stowed as Horace hurled himself down on it in one of his convulsive struggles.

The cricket-bag was ripped from end to end, and Gus, angry at being squashed in this fashion, crawled out and bit Horace just above the hoof.

This made Horace more wild than ever. He kicked Gus from one end of the boat to the other, and a dismal howl from Pieface, the cook, told that Gus had nailed him by the leg.

And all the time, as Horace rolled over, endeavouring to free himself from the line, he wound in length after length, till he looked more like a ball of string than a goat.

and more ferocious than the British variety.

Bringing its huge tail to its snout, it bent double, like a hoop. Then, letting fly, it leaped into the whaler, descending with a thump on the bottom-boards, lashing out, kicking, and biting, whilst the astonished Horace did a war-dance on its shining chest, till he was sent staggering by a swipe from the powerful tail, which knocked all the ginger out of him.

There was never a more astonished goat than Horace, when the great fish kicked back.

He sat on his haunches, and blinked, as though he saw stars.

Then, raising his head, he gave forth a doleful "Maw!" that sounded like the steam-whistle of a fogbound tug.

The fish would have another go at Horace, but Tookum el Kooos had drawn his long razor-edged knife from under his leopard-skin cloak.

Crawling on his hands and knees, Tookum, with a sharp slash, severed the snapping head, with its great rows of formidable teeth from the body.

And, after the head was severed, the great jaws opened and closed.

Tookum and Pieface cut up the huge fish speedily by the light of a couple of hurricane lamps, and before long, as the string of boats forged steadily ahead through the labyrinths of the swamp, potatoes were being sliced, and the fish cut into thick slabs which, like magic, were slapped into egg and breadcrumbs, and into the boiling olive-oil in Pieface's largest frying-pan.

The smell of the fish and chips reached even to the motor-launch.

Captain Handyman stopped his engines, and the boats gathered in a bunch, whilst the supper of fish and chips was handed round by the proud Skeleton, who blushed all over with pleasure when Captain Handyman complimented him on raising a fish supper out of a swamp.

They had not measured their fish, but everyone agreed that he was a good eight feet long, and that his jaws were powerful enough to bite the hind-leg off a donkey.

By the time this novel supper was over a dim moon was showing through the grey clouds.

The launch went ahead again through the dark mazes of the swamp, trailing her string of boats after her, and the boys settled down to tell yarns, and to amaze Tookum el Kooos with card tricks.

They were busy at this when a shout from the launch put them all on the qui vive.

The launch had turned into a wide channel, bordered on either hand by walls of tall, straight reeds.

But against the sky at the end of this long reach rose the weird shape of a tall mass of rock, on which sparkled lights.

Down wind came the roaring of braying conches and the rumbling of great drums.

There was no doubt that at last they had stumbled on Booloo, the stronghold of King Obob el Mook, the self-elected holder of the diamond belt of the Heavy-weight Championship of Africa.

And it was certain that their approach had been signalled by some of the mysterious methods of the nigger to the fortress of this river pirate.

His warders were giving the alarm, and before long they fell in with the first of the black king's outposts.

This was a tall perch, erected on the top of poles, full thirty feet high above the level of the channel.

It was a crazy structure, this sentinel-box of the swamps—just three long poles stuck in the bed of the mud, and rising to a small platform, which enabled the watcher there to see for miles across the tortuous channels of the swamp.

On the platform was built a tiny hut of palm-leaves, and on a clay hearth glowed a tiny fire.

By the light of this they could see a fat nigger squatting in the hut like a dog in his kennel.

He was a big nigger, and he was armed with a bell-mouthed blunderbuss, which he levelled threateningly down the channel from his airy perch.

This nigger could speak English. "S'posum you stop!" he shouted. "King, him no want you come dis way till he send! S'posum you stop now, or me shoot!"

"S'posum we don't stop?" replied Captain Handyman, entirely disregarding the threat that lay behind the nigger's words and actions. "We aren't going to stop for any nigger hobo that calls himself king of these parts!"

The fat nigger rose on his perch, and they could see his huge shape standing clear out against the sky on his slender perch.

"S'posum you try to go by, me shoot!" he said threateningly.

And he levelled the blunderbuss at the launch below him.

But Captain Handyman was standing no nonsense from King Obob el Mook or any of his rabble of soldiery.

In the darkness he kicked a lever.

The powerful little launch shot ahead suddenly at full speed, and before the nigger knew where he was, crashed in at the foot of the three tapering piles that formed his perch.

There was a terrific bang in the air, like the explosion of a bomb, as the blunderbuss went off.

There was a crash as the launch charged the piles, knocking them all ways at once, and there was a yell, and a plunge in the sullen, black water as nigger, blunderbuss, and hut descended in a shower of sparks from the fire from a height of thirty feet.

Captain Handyman had knocked King Obob's first watch-box clean out of the river.

(Another magnificent long instalment of this amazing serial in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. I should be glad if readers would write and let me know what they think of this new story.)



FACING THE FOE!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story, dealing with the Barring-Out at the School in the Backwoods.

- BY -

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

The Rebels.

"We're in for it!" Frank Richards made that remark. And Bob Lawless nodded, and rejoined emphatically:

"I guess we are, Franky!"

"Who cares?" grinned Chunky Todgers. "We're winners so far," remarked Vere Beaulere, smiling. "And we're not going to give in."

And there was a chorus of:

"Never!"

There was no doubt that Frank Richards & Co. were "in for it."

Cedar Creek School was in a ferment. In the big school-room, where classes were usually held by Miss Meadows, Mr. Slimmy, and Mr. Shepherd, there was an excited crowd, most of them talking at once.

The dismissal of Miss Meadows had been followed by the resignation and departure of her two assistant masters, and Cedar Creek was left without any masters at all.

Certainly there was the new headmaster, Mr. Ephraim Peckover, who had taken Miss Meadows' place, but that gentleman the school refused to receive.

Doors and windows were barricaded, and the schoolboy strikers were holding the fort, and so far they had held it successfully.

Outside, in the playground, Mr. Peckover was looking very angry and very blue, and Mr. Gunten, the chairman of the Board of Trustees, was stamping with fury.

"Old Man Gunten" was in a quandary, as Bob Lawless called it, and he was beginning to realise the fact.

He had "worked" it with the Board to dismiss Miss Meadows for sending his son away from the school, and he had supposed that it would be all plane sailing after that.

The revolt of Cedar Creek had taken him quite by surprise.

To add to his discomfort, he had quarrelled with the sheriff, whom he had brought in to restore order, and Mr. Henderson had departed with his men in a huff.

Old Man Gunten shook a fat fist at the schoolhouse, which sheltered the rebels, and from which derisive shouts and cat-calls came.

"They're going!" called out Tom Lawtner, who had his eye to a crack in a window shutter.

There was a rush to look.

Old Man Gunten and Mr. Peckover were going out at the gates, evidently giving the matter up as a bad job, for the present at least.

There was a cheer in the lumber schoolhouse.

"Beaten to the wide!" chuckled Chunky Todgers. "I say, you chaps, no lessons to-day! Hurray!"

Old Man Gunten will have to come round," said Bob Lawless. "One thing's a dead cert—we keep on strike till Miss Meadows comes back!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Velly good!" grinned Yen Chin, the Chinese. "Nicey idea, ole Bob! No lesson, no wolkee, what you tinkee! Playee poken passee timee."

"Let me catch you playing poker, you blessed heathen!" growled Bob Lawless. "Now, you fellows, we're in for it! No getting out of that. Old Man Gunten's gone, with his precious new headmaster, but he'll come back, I reckon."

"They can't handle us!" said Eben Hacke disdainfully. "I guess we can lay over anything they can do!"

"What are you scowling about, Franky?" asked Bob, glancing at Frank Richards, whose brows were knitted in thought.

Frank smiled.

"I was thinking," he said. "Old Man Gunten is pretty certain to call in our people to deal with us, Bob. What will you say if your father comes along?"

"Blest if I know!" confessed Bob. "But we're not going to give in. Popper was against sacking Miss Meadows, anyway, but he was outvoted on the Board."

"I guess everybody was against it," said Lawrence. "Miss Meadows was popular, and nobody's ever seen this man Peckover in the section before. My people are down on Old Man Gunten, I can tell you."

"If your people chip in, we shall have to put it to them as nicely as we can; but we're not giving in," said Bob Lawless decidedly. "We can hold out in the schoolhouse for a week, if we choose; and we'll do it!"

"A regular siege," said Chunky Todgers. "Good! What about grub, though?"

"Bother grub!"

"Oh, don't be a jay, Bob Lawless!" said Chunky warily. "I suppose we can't hold out without grub. I think I'd better see to the state of the larder at once."

"And somebody had better see to you while you're doing it, or there won't be anything left."

"It will be rather a difficulty if Old Man Gunten springs our people on us," remarked Lawrence. "A galoot can't check his own father. If a chap's popper comes for him he will have to go, that's all; and the rest can carry on."

"That's it!" said Bob. "I don't think my popper will interfere. He was mad at Miss Meadows being dismissed. What about your popper, Cherub?"

Vere Beaulere smiled.

"My father's gone away. He's in the States at present," he answered. "He won't be home for a week."

"That lets you out, then," said Bob, with satisfaction. "Now, let's see about some lunch, and we'll be ready for Old Man Gunten when he comes along again."

It was near the usual dinner-hour, and the Cedar Creek fellows were ready for a meal.

Chunky Todgers had led the way to the kitchen, from which Black Sally had been gently, but firmly, persuaded to depart.

The whole building was in the possession of the rebels.

Fortunately, a good supply of provisions was kept at the school, the backwoods school being a good distance from the settlements, and communications sometimes being interrupted by accident.

As most of the Cedar Creek crowd had their midday meal at the school, it was necessary for a good supply to be kept on hand, and Miss Meadows had been very careful in that respect.

Chunky Todgers' podgy face beamed as he examined the stores, and found that there was no danger of famine.

"Topping!" said Chunky. "You see, there was grub for the whole school—and there's only twenty or so of us—so it will last. No need for anybody to go short."

"We're going to be careful, all the same," said Bob Lawless. "You're not going to burst your crop, Chunky. I'm going to stop you when you've eaten enough for two."

"Look here, you jay—" began Chunky indignantly.

"Who's going to cook?" asked Dawson.

"Me cookee," said Yen Chin. "Me good cookee, oh, yes; topside gheat cook!"

"Go it, heathen!"

The log fire was soon roaring, and Yen Chin was at work.

Ere long the rebels of Cedar Creek were seated round the table, enjoying themselves.

They were getting used, by this time, to the peculiar state of affairs; but probably there was uneasiness in some minds as to the view their parents might take of the strike in the school.

The grown-up view was likely to be quite different from the schoolboy view; though the dismissal of the popular schoolmistress had caused indignation in the whole section.

Dinner was over, when there was a sound of knocking at the schoolhouse door.

"Here they come!" squeaked Chunky Todgers.

There was a rush from the dining-room at once.

Only one fellow remained there; and that was Chunky.

Chunky thought the opportunity too good to be lost; and instead of being allowed to enough for two, as Bob Lawless had declared, Chunky proceeded to allowance himself to enough for three, if not four or five.

The 2nd Chapter. Not a Success.

Frank Richards opened the shutter of the window nearest the door, and looked out.

The big door itself could not be approached, being barricaded with a stack of forms and desks.

It was not the enemy who had arrived.

"Molly!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw the new-comer.

It was Molly Lawrence, and she ran at once towards the window, her face flushed from hurrying.

"They're coming, Frank!" she exclaimed.

"Who are coming, Molly?" asked Frank. "Jolly good of you to come and tell us, kid!"

"Old Man Gunten—and father—and Mr. Lawless—and some more," she said. "Mr. Gunten has been riding round to the home-steads to get help. He wants all the boys' fathers to come here and order them to come out."

"Just like him!" grunted Bob Lawless.

"Some of them are not coming, though," said Molly. "I heard Mr. Gunten talking to them at our house. He hasn't got many to come. Mr. Todgers said he had no time to bother."

"Good old Todgers!" grinned Bob.

"He said it was a relief not to have Chunky home if he stayed here," said Molly, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Mr. Hacke told him he could manage the school without his assistance," said Molly.

"Good old popper!" said Eben Hacke.

"And I think most of them are too busy on the farms to bother about it," said Molly. "But Mr. Gunten has got some of them together, and they stopped at our house for dinner. They were laughing about it, but Old Man Gunten is very mad. I thought I'd ride over and warn you."

"Good old Molly!" said Frank Richards. "And my uncle's with them?"

"Yes. They're riding up the trail now," said Molly. "I had better go. Perhaps father wouldn't be pleased if he knew I'd come."

And Molly Lawrence ran back to her pony, and waved her hand to the schoolboy rebels, and rode away.

"Now for it!" said Bob Lawless rather grimly.

A few minutes later there was a clatter of hoofs in the playground of the backwoods school.

Old Man Gunten rode in with his party. The schoolboys, crowding at the window, looked out at them.

There were six in the party, including Mr. Lawless, Mr. Lawrence, and Old Man Gunten. The other three were the fathers of Dawson, Hopkins, and Mayhew.

Rancher Lawless rode up to the window. Bob saluted his father politely.

"So glad to see you, dad!" he remarked.

"Nice morning, isn't it, uncle?" ventured Frank Richards.

Mr. Lawless looked at them.

"Now, what does this shindy mean?" he demanded.

"Hasn't Old Man Gunten told you, popper?"

"I'm asking you!" said the rancher gruffly.

"Well, to put it in a nutshell, we're on strike, dad," said Bob. "We're standing up for Miss Meadows. She's been dismissed because she turned Kern Gunten out of the school for being a blackguard. We want her back. We won't let in the new headmaster at any price. He's a low-down coyote, anyhow. We're holding the fort until Miss Meadows comes back."

The rancher gnawed his moustache.

It was not difficult to see that his sympathies were with Miss Meadows' pupils.



"Well done, Franky!" exclaimed the schoolboy rebels, as the end of the pole struck Four Kings upon his brawny chest.

As a member of the Board of Trustees for the section he had opposed the dismissal of the schoolmistress, but had been outvoted.

"But this won't do, Bob!" he said at last.

"It's all right, popper! Old Man Gunten will have to toe the line," said Bob confidently. "You leave us to it, and we'll bring him to reason."

"That's the kind of insolence I've been hearing from your son, Mr. Lawless!" roared the Swiss storekeeper. "By gad, if he were a son of mine, I'd teach him better manners!"

Mr. Lawless gave the Swiss a grim look.

"I guess my son compares rather favourably with yours, Mr. Gunten!" he rapped out. "He has not been turned out of school for gambling and blackguardism, at any rate!"

"I don't want any chinwag from you, Mr. Lawless!"

"It comes to this," said the rancher quietly, though his eyes gleamed. "You've dismissed Miss Meadows, Mr. Gunten, and appointed a new Head. I don't deny you've the power, as you have a majority behind you on the board. But I want to know just this: Is your new headmaster going to take your son back into the school?"

"He is!" snapped Mr. Gunten defiantly.

"A gambling rascal, who isn't fit to associate with these boys!" said Mr. Lawless. "Well, as a member of the board, I can't uphold what they are doing."

"I should guess not!"

"But, at the same time, I don't feel called upon to interfere," said Mr. Lawless coolly. "It was a dirty trick, getting rid of Miss Meadows as you did, and I've told you so, and I tell you again. You've got the school into this pickle, and you can get it out again without my help. That's what I say, and I advise these gentlemen to say the same."

"Ear, ear!" remarked Mr. Hopkins. "I came 'ere to call my son 'ome, but I think I'll take your advice, Mr. Lawless."

Old Man Gunten clenched his fat hands. There was a consultation among the horsemen outside the schoolhouse, watched anxiously by the rebels within.

They had resisted the sheriff and his posse, and were prepared to hold the fort against all comers; but they were bound, of course, to obey their parents.

So those whose fathers were present waited anxiously for the decision.

"You'd better come home, Tom!" called out Mr. Lawrence at last.

"I say, dad—" began Lawrence, in dismay.

"Order him to open the door, Mr. Lawrence!" bawled Old Man Gunten.

"I guess we wouldn't let him if he wanted to," said Bob Lawless. "If Lawrence gives up the game he drops out of this window!"

"You bet!" said Tom emphatically.

"No business of mine, Mr. Gunten!" said the farmer. "Manage your school your own way, my friend. I'll take my son home with me; and that's all that concerns me."

"My view exactly," remarked Mr. Dawson. "Come out of it, Dick!"

Mr. Mayhew called to his son.

Three disconsolate youths dropped from the window in obedience to their fathers' commands.

It was a reduction of the garrison of the schoolhouse, but the fort was still held.

Old Man Gunten's trump card had not, after all, won the game for him. He was little "forrarder" than he had been before.

"Mr. Lawless, he spluttered, "you are upholding disorder—mutiny! I call on you to order your son to return to his duty!"

"My son is doing what he thinks is his duty," answered the rancher. "I guess I'm not taking a hand in the game, one way or the other. My advice to you is to reinstate Miss Meadows."

"I'll ask for your advice when I want it!" snapped Mr. Gunten.

The rancher shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'm done here," he said. "And I may as well mention, Mr. Gunten, that Miss Meadows is appealing to the

his teeth, "I shall ride back to Thompson, and get help there—not the sheriff and his men, but the kind of galoot that will do the business. And if you get hurt it's your own funeral."

"That means that you're going to enlist the rudies of Thompson, does it?" said Frank Richards. "Well, go ahead!"

"You young scoundrel!"

Squash!

An apple, in an advanced state of decomposition, caught Mr. Gunten's open mouth, and put a sudden stop to his flow of eloquence.

"Good shot, Yen Chin!" yelled Bob Lawless.

"Gerrrooogh! Yoooch!" Mr. Gunten spluttered wildly. "Ow! Ooooch! I'll Grooh!"

The storekeeper stamped away, spluttering. A howl of laughter followed him.

A minute more, and horses' hoofs rang on the trail, as the enraged man galloped away to Thompson.

Bob Lawless drew a deep breath.

"That means business!" he said. "Old Man Gunten is coming back with a gang of toughs—the Red Dog crowd very likely. He's too wild to care what happens. My sons, there is going to be a scrap!"

"And we're going to come out on top!" said Beaulere.

"We're going to try!" said Bob.

And the schoolboy rebels waited with almost breathless keenness for the arrival of the enemy.

The 3rd Chapter. The Red Dog Crowd.

Clatter!

There was a thudding of hoofs and a jingling of bridles in the playground of Cedar Creek School.

Frank Richards & Co. looked from the window.

They were serious now, though none the less determined.

Old Man Gunten had arrived, with his new assistants, a dozen rough-looking men in red shirts and Stetson hats—the scum of the Thompson Valley.

"The Red Dog crowd!" said Bob Lawless.

"We're ready for them!" said Frank Richards quietly.

But there were grim faces in the schoolhouse now.

The "Red Dog crowd" were well known in the Thompson Valley, and their reputation was an unenviable one.

More than once Sheriff Henderson had had trouble with them, and most of them had seen the inside of the calaboose.

They usually hung about the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson, an establishment famous for its "shindies."

A man in the position of Mr. Gunten, the rich storekeeper, was not supposed to have anything in common with that rough crew, but Old Man Gunten was too infuriated to care for the look of things.

He was going to reduce Cedar Creek School to submission, and he looked for aid where he could find it; and he found it at the Red Dog.

authorities against her dismissal, and that I am supporting her. You'll hear about it soon. Good-bye, Bob, and behave yourself, you young rascal!"

And with that the rancher rode out at the gates with Mr. Hopkins.

The others were already gone.

Old Man Gunten was left alone once more, shaking a furious fist at the grinning faces in the window.

"What's the next move, old scout?" called out Frank Richards.

The fat storekeeper gave him an evil look.

"I give you young rascals a last chance," he said. "Open the door, and let in Mr. Peckover—"

"Rats!"

"Return to your duty at once, and I'll see that you're let off with a thrashing all round."

"I guess we're not taking any."

"Otherwise," said Mr. Gunten, between

Most of the roughs had been drinking, to judge by their looks.

Probably the storekeeper had stood "drinks all round" to put them in a humour for the expedition, as well as promising liberal payment for their services.

If the gang could have got to close quarters with the schoolboys there was no doubt as to the result of the struggle; and Frank Richards & Co. were glad of the strong log walls and the piled-up barricades.

"There's four Kings!" said Bob. "He's the leader of the gang! You remember him, Franky?"

Frank Richards nodded.

Four Kings spotted the schoolboys at the window, and shook a brawny fist at them.

He had had trouble with Frank Richards & Co. before, and the chums had forced him to quit Thompson, with



FACING THE FOE!

(Continued from the previous page.)

the alternative of being handed over to the sheriff to answer for his rascality. Evidently he had returned to his old haunts, and he was glad of the chance of paying off old scores against the chums of Cedar Creek.

"Hyer we are!" roared Four Kings. "I guess I'm arter you! Come out of that there shebang! You hear me?" "Come and get us out!" called back Beauclerc.

"I reckon I'll do that!" "Hold on a minute!" rapped out Old Man Gunten. Furious as he was, the fat Swiss was aware of the serious trouble that might follow if the rough gang began to attack; it was certain that there would be heavy blows given and received. "I guess I'll speak to them first."

"What's the good of chewing the rag?" demanded Four Kings. "We've come hyer to lambaste the critters."

"Hold on, I tell you!" Mr. Gunten came towards the window. "You see that gang?" he said. "I guess you know what'll happen if they start on you. You'll get hurt. I give you a last chance of climbing down."

"Thank you for nothing!" answered Frank. "Mind, if those galoots once start, there'll be damage," said Mr. Gunten. "They've brought their cattle-whips, as you can see, and they'll use them."

"If they can get in here, they're welcome to use them!" said Bob Lawless. The storekeeper gritted his teeth.

"I don't answer for what they may do," he said. "You know their sort. If they get their dander up they may draw a knife or a shooter."

"That's your funeral, Mr. Gunten; you'll answer for it," said Bob Lawless. "I guess if my popper knew that gang was here, he'd come along with the cowboys off the ranch, and run them out."

"Will you give in?" "Nix!" "Then you'll take the consequences!" "And you'll take a chunk of wood on your cabeza, Mr. Gunten, if you don't vamoose!" answered Bob, raising his hand with the missile in it.

Old Man Gunten beat a prompt retreat. Bob Lawless stepped back from the window, and closed the shutter and barred it. "Look out!" he said tersely. "It's business now! Old Man Gunten must be mad to call in that gang; he's answerable for it to the law. But that won't help us now if they get at us."

"I guess we're going to help ourselves," said Eben Hacke. "Ear, ear!" said Hopkins. There was a sound of shouting outside. The Red Dog crowd were coming. Mr. Gunten had given his orders.

Four Kings and his gang came on to the attack. The roughs had heavy cattle-whips in their hands, dangerous weapons if they got near enough to use them.

Two of them, Four Kings himself and Euchre Dick, had axes, to beat in the shuttered window. The big door had already been found to be impregnable. Crash, crash!

"There they go!" "Oh, crumbs!" said Chunky Todgers, with a jump. "Buck up, Chunky!" said Bob. "Stand here; you're fat enough for all of us to get behind. Where are you absquatulating to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Crash, crash! The wooden shutter flew into fragments. In the opening the brutal, bearded face of Four Kings appeared, glaring in on the garrison.

Evidently the ruffian supposed that he had only to clamber in, and to drop unhindered into the school-room. He found that that was a mistake. Every one of the defenders had a stick or whip in his hand, and they were not slow to use them.

Three or four bearded came whirling at Four Kings' bearded face, and he popped it back just in time. "Bring a bench hyer!" he shouted. A pine bench from Mr. Slimmy's cabin was run under the window, and Four Kings mounted on it.

Then his sinewy arm came through the smashed window, his hand gripping the cattle-whip. He received two or three blows without heeding them, and lashed right and left with the heavy whip, clearing a space round the window inside.

There were loud yells as the defenders dodged the lashing, heavy thong, not in all cases successfully. The ruffian grinned, and put a leg through the window. Astride there, he lashed round savagely to keep the schoolboys back, and prepared to drop inside. But Frank Richards & Co. were ready for that.

upon his brawny chest, with all Frank's weight behind it. There was a fiendish yell from the Red Dog leader as he went spinning back from the window, completely dislodged by the charge.

Louder yells echoed it outside, as Four Kings sprawled down helplessly upon his followers. The schoolboys gave a breathless cheer. "Well done, Franky!"

"Vellee good, ole Flanky!" chuckled Yen Chin. "Hele comee Euchle Dickkee! You see me chuecke stool." Euchre Dick's swarthy face appeared in the window, and the Chinese hurled the pinewood stool with deadly aim.

Euchre Dick did not wait for it. He sprang back outside, and the stool struck the broken shutter and fell to the floor. The bull-voice of Four Kings could be heard outside, blustering and swearing furiously.

The ruffian was badly hurt by his fall, and his temper—never good—was at boiling point. "Why don't you get in?" Old Man Gunten was shrieking. "What am I paying you for? Get on! Get in! Do you hear me?"

"Not so jolly easy!" murmured Beauclerc. "Hallo, here he is again!" Four Kings' furious face appeared at the window, almost convulsed with rage. He clambered in head-first, recklessly.

"Give it him!" yelled Bob. Whack, whack! Crash! A shower of blows landed on the ruffian's head and shoulders, and he bellowed with rage. The punishment was too severe even for the infuriated bulldozer.

He scrambled back, and dropped to the ground again, yelling with pain, and clasping his head with both hands. "Our win!" gasped Bob Lawless.

The 4th Chapter. Danger Ahead!

"Hurrah!" Outside the barred schoolhouse there was a buzz of furious voices, as the Red Dog crowd raged there in vain. After the experience of their leader, no member of the rough gang was anxious to put his head in at the window.

The garrison stood on the alert. Surrender was less in their thoughts than ever, for if once the rough gang had been allowed to get at them it was certain that the damage would go far beyond what Mr. Gunten would be prepared to answer for.

Four Kings and his gang were out of the control of their employer now. Old Man Gunten realised that, and he was a little uneasy as to the outcome of the desperate measures he had taken.

But at his first word to Four Kings that much-injured gentleman hustled him roughly away, with a glare that warned Mr. Gunten to hold his tongue.

"We're goin' to have them critters out of it," said Four Kings, between his teeth. "And I'm going to lay my whip round them, till their own folks won't know them arter I'm done! That's the programme, Old Man Gunten, and you can stow the gab, or you'll maybe get some of it yourself!"

"How are you goin' to get them out, pard?" asked Euchre Dick. "I guess there's ways and means. I reckon there's a ladder somewhere around! Look for it, boys!"

"Good! I reckon that will do the trick!" The Red Dog crowd spread over the school buildings, searching for a ladder. One was soon found in the stable-yard, and it was rushed towards the lumber schoolhouse.

Bob Lawless was watching from the window. "They're going to climb on the roof!" he rapped out. "Cherub, you keep guard down here! Franky and six of you come after me!"

Bob hurried out of the school-room, Frank and half a dozen of the fellows following him fast. The big school-room had an almost flat roof, which could be reached from the schoolmistress' house, which was part of the same building, one of Miss Meadows' windows overlooking the roof.

Bob ran up the wooden steps leading to the upper story of the house, through a room, and threw open a window. He jumped out on the schoolhouse roof without hesitation, and his followers clambered after him.

They were none too soon. The top of the ladder already appeared above the edge of the roof, and Four Kings was ascending. The ruffian's intention was to force an entrance at the window over the roof; or, failing that, to hew his way with the axe down through the roof itself into the school-room below.

But as his head rose above the level, he found that Frank Richards & Co. were there to meet him. The roof sloped slightly from the ridge, but it was easy enough to keep footing on it. Four Kings glared up at the schoolboys gathered by the ridge, his eyes blazing.

ing him by the side of the neck, in the thick red shirt. Four Kings was brushed backwards, and his legs went dangling over the edge, and he clutched wildly at the ladder. "Look out!" yelled Euchre Dick, below, as one of his leader's boots smote him on the side of the head. "Wharrer you at? Yaroo!"

"By gum! He's going!" gasped Bob Lawless. Four Kings was falling, and his desperate grasp closed on the ladder, and it was dragged away with him. The ladder toppled over, amid loud yells from the men clinging to it, who jumped clear among their comrades below.

Four Kings and the ladder together disappeared from the sight of the schoolboys on the roof. Both of them landed on the heads of the Red Dog crowd below, in a chorus of furious yells.

The heads of his followers broke Four Kings' fall, and, to judge by the yelling, some of the heads were almost broken, too. "I guess they won't try that game again!" gasped Bob Lawless.

Bob was right. The ladder was not reared up to the roof again; the escalade was a little too dangerous to suit the views of the Red Dog crowd. Bob stood on the ridge, and looked into the playground.

The attacking party had retreated a little distance, and the ladder lay unheeded on the ground. Farther off, outside the school gate, he caught sight of a graceful, girlish figure mounted on a pony.

"Hallo! There's Molly!" he exclaimed. He waved his hat to the girl, and Molly Lawrence waved her hand back. There was no school for Molly that day, but she had not gone home with her father and brother, being anxious for her chums in the besieged schoolhouse.

Frank Richards jumped up on the ridge, and waved his hand. Then he looked down at the crowd in the playground. The Red Dog crowd had been defeated so far, and Frank had a faint hope that they would accept their defeat and leave Mr. Gunten in the lurch.

But there was no sign of a retreat. Four Kings was rubbing his bruises and swearing, whilst his comrades were spreading about the school buildings, as if in search of something. "What on earth are they up to, Franky?" asked Bob.

Frank shook his head. "Blessed if I can make out!" he answered. "They seem to be gathering firewood." The schoolboys watched anxiously. They could see that something was being planned, though they could not, so far, guess what it was.

Mr. Gunten came towards Four Kings, and Frank judged, by his expression, that the Swiss was already regretting that he had called in such allies. The schoolboys could not hear what he said; but the bull-voice of Four Kings came plainly to their ears, as he answered: "Yep! I guess we're goin' to smoke them out, Mr. Gunten!"

"But—" "Don't you chew the rag at me, Old Man Gunten!" roared Four Kings. "You hev brought me hyer to do the job, ain't you?"

"Yes," stammered the storekeeper. "But I reckoned—" "Never mind what you reckoned! I guess that cuts no ice with me! I'm hyer to handle them young varmintes, and I kinder reckon I'm going to do it! Look at my cabeza! Ain't I been hurt? I tell you, Old Man Gunten, I'm going to lambaste them galoots till they can't crawl home! They won't be able to yaup arter I'm through with them!"

Four Kings gritted his teeth, his eyes gleaming. It was clear enough that the brutal ruffian meant every word he said, or, rather, bellowed. He was aching from head to foot from the damages he had sustained, and it was no longer a question of earning Mr. Gunten's pay, but of making the rebels of Cedar Creek suffer for what they had done.

The storekeeper had a dismaying prospect before him of answering for the damage his brutal allies might do when they got the upper hand. "Look here, Four Kings!" he began feebly. "You may fire the place if you try that game!"

"Look hyer, Mr. Gunten!" Four Kings brandished a knuckly fist under Mr. Gunten's podgy nose, and the storekeeper jumped back in alarm. "See that? I

SAVING MADE EASY.

All can save almost without noticing it and without trouble by buying the new, bright blue Sixpenny War Savings Stamps. First get a free War Savings Card; then, whenever you are at the post-office or in a shop where War Savings Stamps are sold, take part of your change in War Savings Stamps. The card holds 31 stamps; when full, exchange it at the post-office for a War Savings Certificate, worth 20/- in five years' time. You will be helping your country to end the War, and you will be helping yourself, for you will get more money back when money will buy more than it does now.

guess you'll get it on your jaw if you chitwag me! Shet up!" And he turned his back on Old Man Gunten, and shouted to his followers to hustle. "Smoking us out, that's the game!" said Bob Lawless, setting his lips. "Franky, old son, that looks a bit serious for us."

Frank Richards nodded. He understood well enough how serious it was, though he was not daunted. The Red Dog crowd were gathering wood from all directions, tearing down palings from the corral to add to the supply.

Branches and twigs and pine-cones, sticks and logs and palings, were heaped up under the broken window, and there was a smell of kerosene as Euchre Dick broached a keg of oil over the stack. "We've got to face it!" said Frank.

He glanced once more towards Molly Lawrence, sitting her pony in the distant gateway. The girl's face was white. She had seen the preparations of the Red Dog crowd, and realised the danger there was of the lumber schoolhouse catching fire.

As Frank glanced towards her, Molly wheeled her pony and dashed away. Frank Richards & Co. descended into the house, barring the upper window behind them. They came down into the school-room, where they found Beauclerc and his companions with very grave faces.

"I guess this lets us out, you galoots!" said Chunky Todgers dismally. "Look!" muttered Hopkins. Outside, a sudden flare of flame danced in the gathering dusk of evening. It was followed by a thick column of smoke. The stack had been fired!

The 5th Chapter. The Ranchers to the Rescue!

There was grim silence in the school-room. Close under the window the fire was burning, and beyond it the Red Dog crowd were feeding it with wet wood, to thicken the smoke.

The window was open to it, the shutters being in fragments, as well as the planks the schoolboys had nailed across. A dense volume of smoke rolled in at the window. It thickened in the big room, and soon the fellows were coughing, and eyes were smarting on all sides.

Bob Lawless set his teeth. He had not foreseen that the enemy would attempt to smoke the garrison out like a racoon from its hole. But the move could not have been guarded against if he had foreseen it.

The big school-room was thick with smoke, which grew thicker and thicker, and the schoolboys could scarcely see one another in the haze. There was coughing on all sides. "Get out of this!" said Bob Lawless, at last.

The schoolboys retreated from the school-room into the house, and the big door was shut and locked and barricaded behind them. The school-room, now, was open to the Red Dog crowd to enter by the window, if they chose, but the schoolhouse itself was still held.

Wisps of smoke followed them, but the closed door kept off the worst of it. Crash! Crash! Frank Richards started. Outside, the blows of an axe were falling on a window of the schoolhouse, and a glimmer of daylight came through a shutter.

Blow after blow fell, and the shutter flew into fragments. But there was no attack, which the rebels of Cedar Creek were ready to meet. The Red Dog crowd had had enough of that.

There was a buzz of voices and roars of laughter outside as flaming brands from the fire were piled under the smashed window and a new fire started there. Smoke poured in in a dense volume. Four Kings was carrying out his purpose with deadly thoroughness.

He guessed that the smoke had already driven the defenders from the school-room, and he was now smoking them out of the schoolhouse itself. There was no defence against that attack, and as the smoke thickened, the heroes of Cedar Creek looked at one another in dismay.

"I guess we can't stand this!" groaned Chunky Todgers. "We can't breathe here!" muttered Bob. "Get up the steps!"

The ground floor was left, and the garrison retreated into the few upper rooms, which had belonged to Miss Meadows and the servants of the house. Doors were closed, and mats pressed along them, but the smoke followed by every interstice it penetrated and coiled into the rooms.

Bob Lawless threw open a window, on the side furthest from the smoking fire without, and the schoolboys gasped for air. There were no flames now; the Red Dog crowd were damping down the fires to render the smoke thicker.

Four Kings, with a savage grin on his face, was waiting the moment of his triumph, whip in hand. Sooner or later the garrison of the schoolhouse would be driven to rush out to escape suffocation, and they would be delivered into his hands.

Then would come the revenge the ruffian was promising himself. Old Man Gunten was looking on grimly. He had no further control over the ruffians he had enlisted, and he was only too thankful that they were taking care not to set the school on fire. "I guess that'll let 'em out," grinned Four Kings. "Stand ready, boys, and collar them as they run out!"

But the garrison were not running out yet. They knew what awaited them, and until the last minute, at least, they were determined to hold on. The smoke in the house was growing denser and denser.

It penetrated into every corner, and the coughing and gasping were incessant. "I guess we shall have to vamoose, Bob Lawless!" gasped Eben Hacke, at last. "It ain't pleasant, but we're caught by the short hairs."

"We're not knuckling under to the new Head!" said Bob. "Never that! But we can't stand this much longer!" Frank Richards gave a sudden start. From somewhere in the distance there came a sound of galloping hoofs—the hoofs of a crowd of horses.

"What is that?" exclaimed Frank. "Bob, you hear—" "It can't be help!" muttered Bob. "If the boys at the ranch knew what was going on they'd ride over here and scalp this crowd before you could say 'No sugar in mine!' But they don't know."

"Hark!" Gallop! Gallop! The horsemen, whoever they were, were coming nearer. The Red Dog crowd had heard them, and there were exclamations without that came to the ears of the schoolboys through the screen of smoke.

Louder yet, and louder, the crash of many hoofs; and then a confused din of shouting. Frank Richards leaned from the window, but it was at the back, and he could see nothing of what was happening. Loud yells of surprise and fury, and crashing hoofs, oaths, and shouts and the sound of blows.

"By thunder!" yelled Bob Lawless. "It's a scrap—it's help! I know Billy Cook's voice. They're the boys from the ranch." "Hurrah!"

Loud above the tumult came the roar of a stentorian voice the chums of Cedar Creek knew well—that of Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch. "Give 'em thunder, boys! Wipe 'em out!"

"The cowboys!" shouted Vere Beauclerc. "Hurrah!" The rebels of Cedar Creek dashed down the steps to the lower floor, and tore open a window at the back of the house.

From the window they poured out into the cool fresh air. It was safe to venture out now; the Red Dog crowd were too busily occupied to think of them. With a rush the rebels came round the house and past the smoke, and obtained a view of the playground.

The "scrap" was over. The Red Dog crowd were fleeing in all directions, pursued by the cowboys of the Lawless Ranch, lashing at them with their long whips. Old Man Gunten, as he ran and dodged with the rest, came in for a few of the cuts before he reached his horse and rode frantically down the trail.

In a few minutes more Cedar Creek School was clear of them; yelling with pain and rage the Red Dog crowd were in full flight. With a shout and a clatter of hoofs, the ranchmen rode back towards the schoolhouse.

"Billy Cook!" roared Bob Lawless. "Oh, crumbs! Billy, old man, I'd rather see you just now than anybody twice as good-looking. Good old Billy!" Billy Cook grinned.

"I jest guess we've wiped up that crowd handsome!" he said. "It was time the Red Dog crowd had a lesson; and, by hokey, I reckon they've got it!" "But how did you know?" gasped Frank Richards.

"I guess Molly Lawrence came along and told me they was smoking you out," said Billy Cook. "Molly! Good old Molly!"

"I sent her home, and called the boys together," said the ranch foreman. "Jest a word to your popper, Bob, and then we humped it hyer as fast as horsefever could bring us. I reckon this hyer business ain't our funeral, but the Red Dog crowd don't have any concern hyer, and we came to wipe them out; and I guess we've done it! But no time to chitwag. We're going to see them galoots safe home to Thompson, and I pity any of them that we catch on the trail!"

And, with a wave of the hand, Billy Cook rode away, with the laughing cowboys after him, in pursuit of the fleeing ruffians. "Well, my hat!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "Good old Molly! That's where she was going when we saw her ride off! But for that—"

"But for Molly I reckon we should have come out at the little end of the horn this time," said Bob. "But I guess the Red Dog crowd won't come moseying round again arter what Billy Cook's giving them. Old Man Gunten will have to look a bit further! Molly's saved our game, and we're holding on."

"Hurrah!" It had been a close thing; but, as Chunky Todgers remarked, a miss was as good as a mile. The rebels of Cedar Creek were still holding out!

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"THE SIEGE AT CEDAR CREEK!"

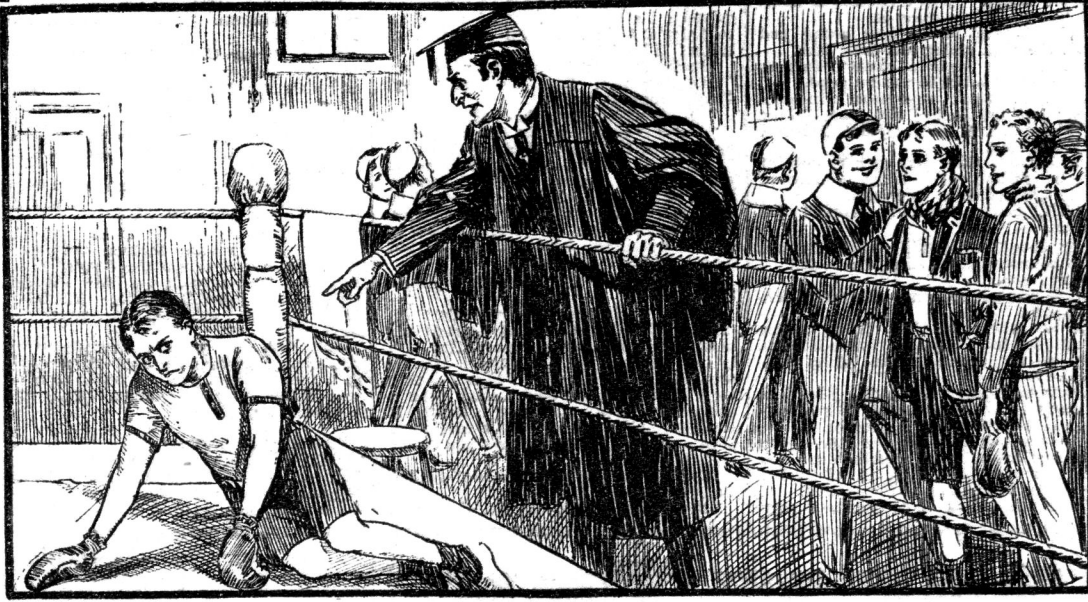
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

DON'T MISS IT!

BARKER, THE BOUNDER!

A Splendid New Serial, introducing Bob Travers & Co., the Chums of Redclyffe.

By HERBERT BRITTON.



THE CHIEF CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

BOB TRAVERS, DICKY TURNER, JACK JACKSON, and BUNNY, the chums of Study No. 5.

MASON and HARRIS, the bullies of the Fourth, who share Study No. 2 with

BARKER, the bounder. MR. CHAMBERS, the master of the Fourth Form.

JIMMY WREN & CO., the chums of the New House.

In previous instalments Barker, the bounder, proved himself to be an utter cad, and Bob Travers & Co. ducked him in the fountain for his misdeeds. Twice Barker endeavoured to obtain his revenge on the chums, but each time something went wrong with his plans, and it was the bounder who suffered in the end.

(Read on from here.)

Jack Jackson Interferes.

"I won't go!" Matthews, of the Third Form at Redclyffe, uttered the exclamation in a ringing voice. He gripped his fists tight, and his eyes flashed with determination as he looked up into the cynical face of Barker, the bounder of the Fourth. Barker glared savagely at the defiant fag. The bounder was not feeling in a pleasant mood after the failure of his cunning scheme for getting his revenge on Bob Travers & Co. Although it was the day after, Barker's hands were still sore through the sound thrashing he had received from Mr. Chambers. "My dear kid," he drawled languidly, "you will go, and if—"

give me the note, and I'll go straight to the Head's study with it!" "I don't think so," said Barker carelessly. "I shouldn't dream of allowing you to do such a thing. Directly after dinner you'll take the note along to the Plough and Harrow and give it to—"

your arm out of its socket if I wanted to. I don't say I'm going to do that, but—"

this rumpus is about! Give an account of yourself, Jackson, old son." Jack Jackson grinned, and explained the reason for his tussle with the bounder. "H'm!" said Dicky meditatively. "I'm rather sorry I interfered. But never mind, you might get the cad to stand up to you in the gym."

Now Bob Travers and Dicky Turner ranked him as their closest chum. He interested himself in the school sports, in spite of the fact that he had not yet succeeded in getting into the Junior Eleven.

(Continued at top of next page.)

BARKER, THE BOUNDER!

(Continued from the previous page.)

kicked by the bounder, but the consequences of his action troubled the fag little.

His one aim was to score off Barker, and, with that desire firmly fixed in his mind, he made his way to the master's study.

Licked to the Wide!

"Go it, Jackson!"
"Give the rotter socks!"
The fight between Jack Jackson and Barker had just commenced.

The combatants had risen from their corners, and were facing one another, Jack Jackson calm and confident, the bounder careless and sullen.

Jackson was the first to land an effective blow, and the burst of cheering which greeted the event showed plainly which of the combatants the juniors were supporting.

Possibly Mason and Harris and Wilson favoured the bounder, but even they did not care to express their feelings openly. Wilson was seconding Barker.

He had taken on the job for the sheer sake of ingratiating himself in the eyes of the bounder.

The bounder possessed plenty of money; Wilson was comparatively poor. Hence his desire to crawl round the fellow who was despised by the Form.

"Well hit, Jackson!"
"Give him some more like that!"

Jack Jackson grinned as he waited for Barker to recover from a severe blow on the head.

Jackson was perfectly cool and collected. At one time he could not have boxed without losing his temper.

But all that was changed now, entirely due to the tuition he had received at Bob Travers' hands.

Bob was seconding Jackson, and when at length the first round concluded, Bob gave him a pat on the back.

"Well done, old son!" he said cheerfully. "Don't be in a hurry to knock the cad out. Watch him carefully, and don't let an opening slip by."

"Right-ho!" said Jack Jackson. "I think I've pretty well got the measure of him. Shouldn't be surprised if he loses his temper soon, and then I'll let him have it hot and strong."

"Good man!"
"Time!"

Jack Jackson rose quickly from his corner, and so did the bounder.

The latter's eyes were glinting savagely. He was in an angry mood. He had expected the fight to be a walk-over, but already he had received more blows than he had given.

But Barker was determined that the second round should end in his favour, and with this intention in view he made a rush at his opponent.

Jack Jackson waited for the bounder to hit out, and then—
Smack!

Like lightning Jackson's left fist shot out from his shoulder, and, turning his head to the side, he eluded the bounder's blow.

But Barker ran full-tilt into Jackson's left fist, and saw more stars in a second than he had ever seen by gazing at the sky. He staggered backwards, to the accompaniment of a burst of cheering from the onlookers.

"Well hit, Jackson! Follow him up! Give him another like that!"

Jack Jackson did not follow the bounder, but no sooner had the latter recovered than he rushed forward again.

There was a look of bitter rage on the bounder's face.

He was determined to obtain his revenge for that telling blow.

But revenge was not to come Barker's way that afternoon.

In his eagerness to send Jack Jackson to the boards, he paid little attention to guarding his body and face.

But Jackson observed this fact, however, and after dodging several blows aimed at his head, both his fists shot out like piston-rods.

Smack! Thud! Smack!
Never before had the bounder been so bewildered in a fight.

Hard punches rained continuously on his face and body, and he had all his work cut out to remain on his feet.

Barker was hard, and could stand being knocked about. But there was a limit, and he was fast reaching it.

Jack Jackson forced him round and round the ring, giving him little rest.

The bounder made a strong effort to recover himself, but it was no good.

Twice in quick succession Jackson's strong left fist flashed out, and, taking each blow full in the face, Barker reeled to the ground.

Immediately there was such a burst of cheering as had never before been heard in the gymnasium at Redclyffe.

"Well, done, Jackson!" shouted the juniors.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dicky Turner. "The bounder's knocked to the wide!"

It was true.
There was not an ounce of strength left in Barker.

He lay where he had fallen, whilst Wilson, his second, dashed water into his face, in an endeavour to bring him round.

Mason and Harris sidled off. They had no desire to sympathise with their studymate, or to offer him a helping hand.

They made straight for the door of the gym, but before they reached there the door was flung wide open, to admit Mr. Chambers, the master of the Fourth.

There was a look of concentrated rage

on the master's face, and he was muttering to himself as he strode quickly towards the centre of the hall, where the juniors were gathered round Jack Jackson.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Chambers. "What—what—"

"Chambers, by gum!" cried Dicky Turner, happening to look round.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance?" thundered the master of the Fourth. "What—what—Barker!" he roared, as he observed the bounder rising slowly off the floor of the gymnasium.

"What are you doing there? You have been fighting, you disgraceful boy!"

Barker stared hard at the master, and his lips curved in a bitter sneer.

"Yes, I've been fighting!" he exclaimed, gripping his fists hard. "And I'm going to fight a bit more. I'll smash that rotter! I'll—"

"Barker!" roared the angry master. "How dare you! How dare you, I say! Behave yourself, sir!"

"I'll slaughter him, the cad! I'll—"
"Silence!" thundered Mr. Chambers, and he clutched the junior firmly by the arm. "How dare you use such expressions in my presence! Behave yourself immediately, otherwise I shall be compelled to take you straight to your headmaster. What do you mean by writing letters to bookmakers, and asking them to put money on horses for you?"

"I—I—I—" faltered Barker, taken by surprise.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Chambers, and he held out before the bounder the note that the latter had given to Matthews to take to the Plough and Harrow. "This is a note to a rascally bookmaker named Doshier, asking him to put money on a horse. It contains your name, and it is written in your handwriting. What have you to say in your defence?"

"I—I—I—it doesn't belong to me," replied Barker disagreeably.

"Nonsense!" rapped out Mr. Chambers.

"It is your handwriting. It must be yours! Nobody else could have—"

"Somebody must have forged my handwriting," said the bounder, in an attempt to clear himself.

"How dare you throw out such insinuations!" exclaimed the master of the Fourth. "Nobody at this school would be scoundrel enough to do such a thing! You have endeavoured to cover your guilt by throwing out base accusations. You shall suffer for it. You shall be thoroughly thrashed! Follow me!"

Mr. Chambers turned on his heel, and strode majestically out of the gymnasium.

Barker followed slowly behind, to the accompaniment of many sniggers of delight from the Fourth-Formers.

"By gad!" exclaimed Dicky Turner, with satisfaction. "The bounder's in for it now!"

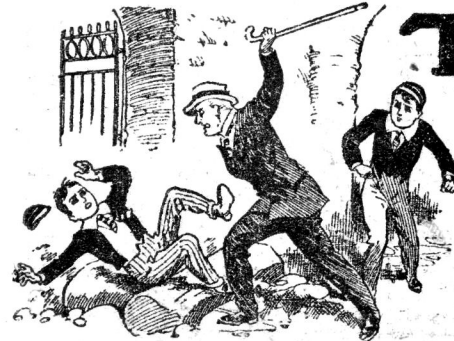
Dicky Turner was quite correct. The bounder spent a very unpleasant quarter of an hour in Mr. Chambers' study. The master of the Fourth gave him a sound thrashing, and when at length he left the study, and wended his way to his own quarters, he was in a more disagreeable mood than ever.

He kicked open the door of Study No. 2, and sat down by the fire, his aching hands tucked under his arms.

"By gad!" he muttered to himself. "I'll make that cad Jackson suffer for this! I'll get him into the biggest mess he's ever been into in his life! I'll get him expelled from Redclyffe! I'll have him hounded out of the place in disgrace!"

And, with that intention firmly fixed in his mind, the bounder took up a copy of a racing paper, and proceeded to console himself by picking out a winner for a forthcoming race.

(Another magnificent long instalment of this splendid new serial in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. I should be glad if readers would write and let me know what they think of this new story.)



THE MISSING TRIO!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story, dealing with the Adventures of JIMMY SILVER & CO., the Chums of Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

Tubby Sees It All.

There was a buzz of voices, mingled with laughter, in the Fourth Form passage.

In the end study Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth, was pacing to and fro with a moody brow.

It was past the hour for prep, but Jimmy Silver had not even thought of prep.

His usually sunny face was gloomy and preoccupied, and he moved restlessly to and fro in the study, as if unable to keep still.

He was alone in the end study; his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, were—where?

Jimmy Silver did not know; no one knew.

The disappearance of the three juniors had caused a sensation at Rookwood School, and many were the surmises on the subject.

For days now they had been missing, and no tidings had come of them.

Jimmy Silver was thinking of the strange problem. He seldom thought of anything else now.

He was striving to solve the mystery of the juniors' disappearance, but he knew that he could not solve it.

It puzzled him, as it puzzled all others. He heard, without heeding, the buzz in the passage outside. He was in no mood for a "rag."

But the voice of Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, caught his ear suddenly, and he stopped his pacing.

"I tell you I know where they are, you fellows!"

"Rats!" came the reply in many voices. "You can cackle," went on Tubby Muffin, "but I can tell you I know all about it! Captain Lagden thinks the same. I heard him say so to Bootles."

Jimmy Silver stepped to the study door and opened it.

The mention of Captain Lagden's name interested him.

Basil Lagden, the new football coach at Rookwood, had offered Jimmy his help in seeking his missing chums, and, though it had led to no result, Jimmy was grateful; and he had a good deal of faith in the captain.

Jimmy looked out into the passage. A short distance from the end study a crowd of the Fourth were gathered round Tubby Muffin, whose round figure was conspicuous, mounted upon a chair.

Tubby was evidently addressing a meeting, and it was evident that the meeting was not taking him very seriously.

"Now, you fellows, listen to me!" said Tubby. "This is important, you know. You all know what has happened—"

"No need for you to tell us, then," remarked Mornington.

"First, there was Lovell," pursued Tubby. "You know he went down from the dormitory one night to play a trick on Captain Lagden in his quarters. He never came back."

"Go hon!"

"Just vanished!" said Tubby. "Then there was Raby. Just after speaking

to Captain Lagden at the door of his room—the Oak Room—Raby disappeared."

"Well, what are you drivin' at?" demanded Mornington. "We know all that."

"Then there was Newcome," continued Tubby, unheeding. "It appears that Newcome had arranged with Jimmy Silver to call on the captain in his room one evening, and Jimmy Silver was called to fag for Carthew. Newcome seemed to have gone to the captain's quarters, and disappeared on the way."

"Well, ass?" said Oswald politely. "Is that all you've got to say?"

"Not by long chalks!" said Tubby emphatically. "That's how the facts stand. Now, what does it look like?"

"Sure, it looks as if the captain is a cannibal, and has eaten them up entirely!" remarked Flynn. "Is that what you mane?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass! It's as plain as anything to me!" said Tubby witheringly. "I remember hearing Lovell speaking once about a kid who got into the Army by making out that he was eighteen. Lovell seemed taken with the idea, and I know the silly ass measured his chest, to see whether he could pass for eighteen."

"Bow-wow!"

"It's as clear as noonday to me," said Tubby. "They fixed it up together to bolt, and try to enlist!"

"Rot!" said Mornington.

"It's as clear as anything, I tell you! I suppose they haven't vanished into thin air?" exclaimed Tubby.

"They wouldn't be such asses!" said Kit Eroll. "And if they were, they wouldn't have bunked without letting Jimmy Silver know what they were up to."

"That's what I'm coming to," said Tubby Muffin triumphantly. "Exactly what I'm coming to, if you'll give a chap a chance to speak. These four fellows were always together, and they hadn't any secrets from one another. Now, my belief is that Jimmy Silver will be the next one to disappear!"

"Oh!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

Tubby Muffin had succeeded in making an impression at last.

Jimmy Silver, from the doorway of the end study, stared blankly at the fat Classical.

But Muffin had his back to Jimmy, and did not see him.

He went on triumphantly:

"That's it! My belief is that the four duffers fixed it up together, and they slipped away from Rookwood one at a time, so as to get off more easily. Jimmy Silver must have been in the secret, and he'll be the next to go. Lovell and Raby and Newcome are lying dogs somewhere, waiting for Jimmy to join them, and then they'll all go as recruits."

"My hat!" said Mornington.

"Bedad! And it really looks as if there's something in it!" said Flynn.

"For where are the gossoons intirely?"

"And I can tell you," said Tubby. "I heard Captain Lagden say that very thing to Mr. Bootles this afternoon!"

"So you got your brilliant idea from Captain Lagden?" said Townsend.

"Well, I—I thought of it myself as well," said Tubby hastily. "Now, having settled exactly how the matter stands, I think we ought to keep an eye on Jimmy Silver, and not let him bolt."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And, in fact," said Tubby, "I'm going to dig in the end study with him, after this, till Lovell and the others come back. I'm not going to let him make an ass of himself. He's a good chap, though he hasn't much sense—"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Jimmy Silver in great wrath.

Tubby Muffin jumped, and nearly fell off the chair.

"Oh! I—I say! I didn't see you, Jimmy!" he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A good many curious looks were turned upon the captain of the Fourth as he came frowning along the passage.

The disappearance of Lovell & Co. was so strange and unaccountable that Tubby's theory did not seem at all an impossible one to the juniors.

The fact that Captain Lagden thought it possible gave it an added weight in the eyes of the Rookwood fellows.

"Anything in that, Silver?" asked Rawson.

"Of course not!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "I should think you fellows could see that I'm horribly anxious about my pals."

"Well, you look it," said Mornington. "You mean to say that you don't know where they are?" asked Tubby Muffin, with a fat wink at the Classical juniors.

"Of course not, ass!"

"Tell us another!" grinned Tubby. "My dear man, I tell you I can see it all! Captain Lagden thinks so, too."

"I don't believe that," said Jimmy Silver. "I've talked the matter over with Captain Lagden, and he certainly hasn't hinted that he thinks I know where Lovell and Raby and Newcome are."

"He said so to Mr. Bootles."

"Rot! You misunderstood, as you generally do, you fat duffer!"

"And you're not goin' to bunk and try to squeeze into khaki?" grinned Mornington.

"Fathead!" was Jimmy Silver's reply to that.

"He's stuffing us up!" said Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to keep an eye on him. I'm going to dig in the end study."

"Let me catch you there," growled Jimmy Silver.

"It's out of friendship, Jimmy," urged Muffin. "You can't be left all on your own, you know. You're lonely. I'm going to cheer you up. Besides, if I come it won't be necessary for any change to be made in the study rations for tea. Of course, Lovell and Raby and Newcome would like me to have their rations while they're gone, as they were my pals."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that's what you're after, you fat worm!" roared Jimmy Silver. "You want to bag the rations! That's the beginning and the end of it."

"I—I say, you know—Yarooooh!" roared Tubby, as Jimmy Silver kicked away his chair, and he landed on the floor. "Yah! Oooooop! You rotter—grooogh! I won't come into the study now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Yow! Yooop!"

"Silver!" Bulkeley's voice was heard from the end of the passage, at the stairs, and Jimmy Silver looked round.

"Mr. Bootles wants you in his study."

"Yes, Bulkeley."

Jimmy Silver followed the captain of Rookwood downstairs, while Tubby Muffin sat on the floor and struggled for breath, amid the chuckles from the Classical Fourth.

The 2nd Chapter.

Unrequited Kindness.

Mr. Bootles was looking very grave when Jimmy Silver presented himself in his study.

Jimmy's brow was knitted.

Tubby Muffin's statement worried him a little, though he did not quite believe it.

If Captain Lagden had spoken to the Form-master, as Tubby averred, it looked like a kind of double-dealing on the captain's part, for though the captain had hazarded the suggestion that Lovell might have been foolish enough to make an attempt to "joia up," he had never hinted to Jimmy that he suspected Jimmy himself of knowing where his chum was.

"Silver!" said Mr. Bootles gravely.

"Yes, sir?"

"Have you heard anything from your friends, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, since they left Rookwood?"

Jimmy started.

"No, sir," he answered.

"You have had no letter, and no communication whatever?"

"None."

"I am about to ask you a serious question, Silver," said the master of the Fourth, regarding Jimmy very attentively over his glasses. "It has been suggested to me that your friends may have left Rookwood with some foolish idea of trying to join the Army. Do you know anything of this?"

Jimmy started again.

It was an unexpected confirmation of Tubby Muffin's statement.

"Did Captain Lagden—" he began breathlessly.

"Captain Lagden certainly made the suggestion, though I do not quite see how you guessed the fact."

"Captain Lagden suggested that I might know what they had done?"

"The thought occurred to him, and he mentioned it to me, Silver. It appears to me very probable, as you were so friendly with the three juniors who have so unaccountably quitted the school."

Jimmy was silent.

me that possibly the whole affair was concerted between you and your friends," said Mr. Bootles. "In that case, you doubtless have some intention of leaving Rookwood secretly to joia them."

"Captain Lagden thought so, sir?"

"The thought occurred to him, Silver." Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Is there anything in this, Silver? Have you any idea where your friends are at the present moment?"

"None at all, sir."

"Have you any plan for leaving Rookwood and joining them?"

"Certainly not!"

Mr. Bootles gave him a scrutinising look.

"You give me your word on that, Silver?" he asked.

"My word of honour, sir," said Jimmy. "Very well; I accept your assurance," said Mr. Bootles, with an air of relief.

"I was bound to question you, Silver; it would have been most disconcerting if you had vanished from the school like your friends."

"Mr. Bootles! If—I did, you'd think that I had gone to join them, and that it was arranged between us?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"What else could I think, Silver?"

"It's not so, sir. I'm certain they never left Rookwood of their own accord!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "There has been foul play, sir!"

Mr. Bootles smiled slightly.

"I am afraid that suggestion is inadmissible, Silver," he said. "What could possibly happen to the boys, in a crowded school, and without an alarm being given?"

Jimmy Silver did not reply to that.

There was, in fact, no answer to be given. It was a hopeless, baffling problem.

But Jimmy's belief remained unchanged.

Perplexing as it was, he was certain that his chums had never left the school by a concerted arrangement among themselves, without taking him into their confidence.

Without the strongest proof Jimmy Silver was not likely to believe that.

"You are aware that the Head has called in the local police-inspector, and taken his advice," added Mr. Bootles. "The boys' fathers have also been here. It is clear that they have left Rookwood; and, even admitting it as possible that one boy might, for some reason, have been taken away by violence, it is impossible to suppose that the same thing could happen three times in succession."

Jimmy was silent.

"However, now that you have satisfied me that you were not acting in collusion with them, my mind is relieved," said Mr. Bootles. "You may go, Silver! Do not worry over

"Hallo!" said Higgs, looking out of his study as Jimmy passed. "You've not bunked yet?"

"Fathead!" grunted Jimmy.

"We're going to keep an eye on you, Jimmy," said Mornington, who was in his study doorway. "You're not goin' to do the vanishin' trick, old scout?"

"Ass!" was Jimmy's grateful reply.

He went on to the end study.

A light was burning there, and there was a sound of movement in the study.

As Jimmy Silver threw open the door Tubby Muffin spun round from the study cupboard, with a startled expression on his fat face.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"You fat bouncer, what are you doing here?" demanded Jimmy.

"I—I'm going to share this study with you, old chap, till Lovell and Raby and Newcome come back," said Tubby. "I can't leave you alone, old fellow; it wouldn't be chummy. Besides, there's the rats—"

"What's that on your mouth?"

"Eh?" said Tubby, screening his mouth with a fat hand.

"You've been scoffing my jam!"

"N-nothing of the sort!" gasped Tubby, dodging round the table. "I was just looking to—to see if there was anything for supper, Jimmy, as I'm sharing this study now—"

"The jar's nearly empty!" roared Jimmy.

"Is it?" asked Tubby, in surprise.

"Well, I never! I suppose Lovell must have taken it with him when he went, Jimmy."

"What?"

"Or—or Newcome," said Tubby. "Come to think of it, most likely it was Newcome. Fancy his bagging all your jam before he went, Jimmy!"

"Jimmy Silver did not answer Tubby in words.

He chased the fat Classical round the table, and Tubby Muffin—giving up all idea of relieving Jimmy's loneliness by sharing the end study with him—bolted for the door.

He arrived at the door just as Jimmy reached him.

Biff!

Yaroooop!"

Tubby Muffin landed in the passage on his hands and knees.

The door slammed after him.

A minute later it reopened, and a fat and wrathful face glared in at the captain of the Fourth.

"Yah!" roared Tubby. "I won't share the study with you now, Jimmy Silver—not if you ask me on your bended knees! Yah!"

And with that Parthian shot Tubby Muffin fled, leaving Jimmy Silver grinning.

He had succeeded in cheering up the captain of the Fourth for a few minutes, at least; though in a way he had not intended.

But Jimmy's face was soon clouded again.

The grim mystery of his chums' disappearance weighed on his heart and his thoughts, and it was exceedingly difficult for Jimmy to live up to his own maxim, and "keep smiling."

The 3rd Chapter.
Mornny's Little Game.

"Goin' for a walk?"

Mornington asked the question as Jimmy Silver strolled down to the gates after morning lessons the next day.

Erroll was with Mornny, and was looking uncertain, as if half amused and half impatient.

"Yes," said Jimmy. "Just a trot before dinner."

"We'll come."

"Just as you like."

"You don't feel inclined for company—what?" smiled Mornington.

"Well, to be candid, no!" said Jimmy. "I'm worried, and I can't get it off my mind."

"Never mind; we'll come all the same. What, Erroll?"

"Don't be an ass, Mornny!" said Kit Erroll, half laughing.

"My dear man, come along! Jimmy's too fascinatin' for us to give up his company—unless he kicks us out!"

The two chums sauntered down the lane with Jimmy.

In point of fact, Jimmy Silver would have preferred to be alone.

He was in a restless and troubled mood, and not inclined for talk. Even the subject of football had no interest for him at present.

But Mornny and Erroll did not trouble him with talk.

They walked with him in silence.

There was always a half-mocking air about Valentine Mornington; but it was easy to see that he was really concerned for poor Jimmy, which was curious enough, for the time had been when the two had been rivals and foes.

Jimmy understood, and he was grateful; but he was not feeling inclined to talk, and the two Classical juniors had to take him as they found him.

They walked as far as Coombe, and Jimmy paused when the village came in sight.

"Better get back for dinner," he remarked.

"Certainly!"

They turned back.

A fat, podgy man standing in an opening of the hedges glanced at them and nodded genially.

It was Mr. Brown, the fat detective, who had already called at Rookwood on business, and whom the juniors knew.

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Brown.

"Mornin', old nut!" said Mornington cheerily. "Found your man yet?"

"My man?" repeated the detective.

Mornington laughed.

"My dear man, all Rookwood knows that you're here after a chap named Baumann, who used to be at Rookwood once upon a time," he answered—"a cheery young merchant who took to manufacturing banknotes on his own, and passin' them on an innocent and unsuspectin'

public. For further particulars apply to Tubby Muffin!"

Mr. Brown smiled.

His business was pretty well known at the school, and most of the fellows wished him success, for they were not proud of Baumann, once of Rookwood, who had been expelled from the school years before, and had disgraced himself and all his connections since.

In fact, the Rookwooders concluded from that Old Boy's name that he was more or less of a Hun—as Conroy had remarked, the name of Baumann was not to be found in the Domesday Book.

But that Mr. Brown should imagine that he would find Baumann anywhere near Rookwood, simply because the fellow had once been at the school, appeared to the Rookwooders idiotic and exasperating.

However, Mr. Brown was keeping in the neighbourhood—and perhaps it was not injudicious of him to allow his business to be so widely known.

For it caused so much talk about Baumann that the fellow was in everyone's mind more or less; and if he had been seen anywhere the fact would certainly have been commented on widely, and would assuredly have reached Mr. Brown's ears sooner or later—which doubtless was exactly what the podgy gentleman wanted.

"You haven't dug him up yet?" asked Mornington regretfully.

"No, sir, I have not dug him up yet," said the smiling Mr. Brown. "I live in hopes of digging him up, my young friend."

"Best of luck! I suppose he was a bit of a Hun—what?"

"Of German descent, certainly!" said Mr. Brown. "His father, I believe, was naturalised in England many years ago, some years before his death. If you young gentlemen should hear anything of the man—"

"We'll nail him for you," said Mornny.

"I'll tell you what! Lend me your handcuffs, and I'll keep them ready for him."

Mr. Brown laughed.

"How is Captain Lagden?" he asked suddenly.

"Blessed if I know! Haven't seen him."

"He's still suffering a little from his old

for your Baumann, and let you know if I spot him."

Mr. Brown laughed.

"For instance, that chap who was hanging about Rookwood the other day in such a slinkin' way," said Mornington thoughtfully. "I wonder—"

He paused.

"Someone hanging about the school?" said Mr. Brown, with an air of careless but polite interest.

"Yes, I remember noticin' him at the time. He looked a slinkin' sort of cad, and he evidently knew the place, too," said Mornington, with an air of reflection. "I wonder— But let's get on, you chaps. We shall be late for dinner."

"Don't hurry away, my lads," said Mr. Brown. "You were saying—"

"I was saying I'd like to see your handcuffs, sir," said Mornington.

"I mean, about a man who— Don't go. I'll show you my handcuffs with pleasure," said Mr. Brown hastily, only anxious now to detain Mornington until he had heard all about the man who was slinking about Rookwood. "Here they are. Now, you were saying—"

Mornington took the handcuffs with an air of curiosity.

"I see. What a simple dodge for nailing up a criminal!" he remarked. "You slip them over a wrist like that, I suppose—"

"That's it," said Mr. Brown, smiling, as the junior, with an air of great simplicity, slipped the darbies on his wrists. "Don't fasten them—"

Snap!

"Snap me! Now I've fastened them!" said Mornington. "I suppose you can undo them easily enough, Mr. Brown?"

"No, not now they are fastened up; but I can show you how to unfasten them," said Mr. Brown good-humouredly. "No matter! You were saying you saw—"

"A suspicious-looking man slinkin' about Rookwood," said Mornington. "Quite so. His name's Manders."

"What?"

"And he's the senior master on the Modern side at Rookwood," said Mornington cheerfully.

things?" he demanded. "Like his cheek, wasn't it? Well, let him sort himself out, and be blown to him! Come on, or Tubby Muffin will have scoffed our dinner."

And the three juniors hurried on to Rookwood, leaving Mr. Brown standing in the middle of the road, the handcuffs on his fat wrists, and an expression on his face that would have excited the envy of Von Tirpitz.

The 4th Chapter.
Looking After Jimmy.

After dinner Jimmy Silver turned in the direction of the Oak Room, expecting to find Captain Lagden there.

The captain lunched with the Head, and generally retired to his quarters afterwards to smoke a cigar.

Jimmy wanted very much a plain talk with Basil Lagden concerning what he had said to Mr. Bootles, and he had Lagden's permission to call on him when he liked.

Jimmy noticed that Mornington and Erroll followed him up the big staircase.

They were still behind him when he turned into the passage leading to the Oak Room.

"Chuck it, Mornny!" Erroll was muttering.

"Rats!" was Mornny's reply.

Jimmy Silver stopped, and looked round.

"What's the game, you two?" he asked.

"Nothin'!" said Mornington airily.

"What are you following me about for?" asked the captain of the Fourth, in astonishment.

"It's Mornny's silly idea," said Erroll, half laughing. "He thinks you're going to disappear like Lovell and Raby and Newcome, and he's going to see that you don't."

"That's the game," said Mornny calmly. "Keepin' an eye on you, old bird."

Jimmy Silver looked impatient.

"Does that mean that you believe that silly rot, that they're gone to try to join the Army, and that I'm going after them?" he exclaimed.

"They were inside the House when they disappeared," said Mornny. "That is, if they didn't bunk, and you believe they didn't."

"Well, that's so. If you don't mind wasting your time, you chaps, I'll be glad of your company," said Jimmy Silver. "Blest if you haven't made me feel quite creepy."

"You won't do the vanishin' trick while we're with you, old top."

"I'm going to call on Captain Lagden now."

"We'll come up with you, then; he may not be at home."

"Right-ho!"

The three juniors went on together to the door of the Oak Room, and Jimmy Silver knocked.

"Come in!" called out Basil Lagden's voice.

Evidently the captain was at home.

Jimmy Silver opened the door, and the captain, who was reading by the window, glanced round.

He saw the three juniors in the doorway, and nodded to them cordially.

"See you later, Jimmy," said Mornington, and he strolled away with Erroll, leaving Jimmy to enter the Oak Room.

"Come in, my boy!" said Captain Lagden cheerily. "Shut the door after you. Are your friends waiting for you?"

His eyes rested curiously on Jimmy Silver's face as he asked that question.

Jimmy glanced out before closing the door.

"Yes, they're waiting at the window," he said. "in the passage."

"Oh!"

Jimmy came towards the captain's sofa.

"I hope you are better to-day, sir?" he said.

"Oh, fairly," said the captain indifferently. "I shall have to be careful so long as the weather is damp, that is all. You wished to see me about something?"

Jimmy's face became a little grim.

"Yes; something Mr. Bootles said to me. He got the idea from you, sir, that you believed that my friends had run away from school to try to join the Army."

"That certainly appears a probable surmise to me," said the captain, with a nod. "I mentioned it to you, I believe."

"But you did not tell me you suspected me of knowing their intentions, and of intending to join them out of Rookwood," said Jimmy.

"Not at all, my dear boy."

"Mr. Bootles told me—"

"Mr. Bootles appears to have misunderstood me, if he fancied I thought that, Silver. Not in the least."

"Well, Mr. Bootles certainly thought you meant that, and I've been called over the coals," said Jimmy.

"I'm sincerely sorry, Silver. A careless remark misconstrued, that is all," said the captain. "I must speak to Mr. Bootles, and correct that impression."

Jimmy Silver's face cleared.

His half-formed distrust of the genial captain disappeared at once.

In fact, he reproached himself a little for having allowed distrust to enter his thoughts over a misunderstanding that had been so simply explained away.

"I have been thinking over this strange affair," went on the captain, with a thoughtful expression on his scarred face. "While I am laid up here I have pondered about it a good deal. You still believe that your friends have disappeared owing to some foul play?"

"I can't believe anything else, sir."

"And that idea you had of a secret passage—"

The captain smiled.

Jimmy Silver coloured.

"I know that's rather a wild idea, sir," he said. "But it seems the only way of accounting for what's happened. And there's an old story of a secret passage somewhere in the School House leading to the abbey vaults. Some of the fellows think that that's how Baumann used to dodge in and out of the school when that fellow was at Rookwood."

"The captain started.

"I advised you not to mention your suspicions in the school!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't, sir—not a word. I've taken your advice," said Jimmy.

"That's good! Talking is never any use," said Captain Lagden. "Well, well! I've thought over your suggestion, and I've even been carefully over the panelled walls in this very room. Now, it occurs to me that if such a secret passage exists, another search in the abbey vaults might reveal it. By the way, see whether your friends are still waiting for you."

Jimmy looked out at the door.

Down the passage Erroll and Mornington were waiting by the big window, and they glanced towards him.

"Yes," said Jimmy, coming back into the room.

"Then I won't keep you any longer," said Captain Lagden. "But after lessons to-day I will join you, and we will search the abbey vaults again. Do you agree?"

"I'm only too glad of your help, sir," said Jimmy gratefully.

"Don't mention the matter to anyone. I'm afraid we should only be laughed at if it were known," said the captain. "It's best to work quietly."

"Not a word, sir."

"Then I'll be in the abbey ruins about five, and you can join me there by yourself."

"I'll be there," said Jimmy.

"And, do you know, I really think we may have some success this time," said the captain. "I've been thinking it over, and I have an idea where to look for the secret passage, if it exists. But not a word—that's understood. Time enough to talk if we are successful."

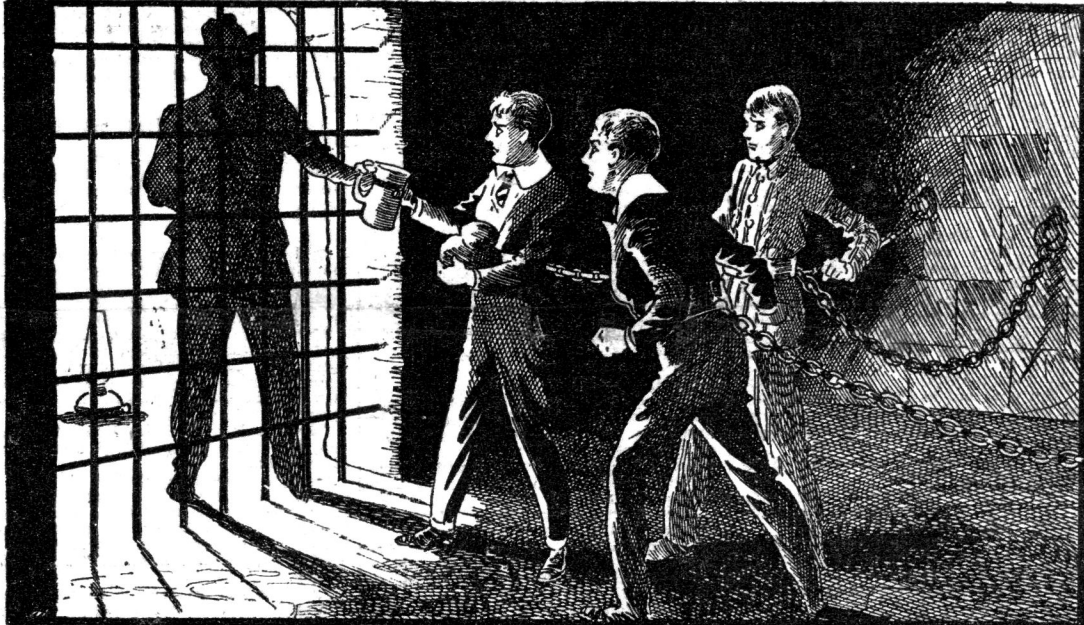
"Thank you very much, sir!"

"Not at all. Good-bye for the present."

Jimmy Silver left the Oak Room with a lighter heart.

The captain had succeeded in inspiring him with something like hope.

So far the Head pooh-poohed the suggestion that Lovell & Co. had been kidnapped; and the local police inspector,



"The police haven't found you yet, you villain!" exclaimed Lovell, his eyes glinting at the man outside the grating.

wound," said Jimmy Silver. "He lost his right arm out there, you know."

"Yes. Hard luck!" said Mr. Brown. "I understand that Captain Lagden is an old Rookwooder, and shared a study with Baumann when he was at the school?"

"Yes, that is so."

"And Baumann once shut him up in the vaults for a practical joke?"

"Yes. You got that yarn from the school sergeant, I know," remarked Mornington. "That fellow Baumann was rather a card, it seems. We're learnin' a lot of the ancient history of Rookwood owin' to you, Mr. Brown. Are you goin' to ask Captain Lagden questions about his old study-mate?"

"The captain is unfortunately not quite well enough to see me at present," said Mr. Brown regretfully. "He is a football coach at the school now, I think?"

"That's his game."

"Then he has to neglect his duties while he is unwell, of course?"

"Naturally," said Erroll. "He coaches the seniors, but he hasn't been on the footer-ground for some days now, I believe."

Jimmy Silver gave the fat detective a sharp look.

It came into his mind that Mr. Brown, somehow, was suspicious that the captain's indisposition was an excuse not to be bothered by him, and that Mr. Brown was "pumping" in order to learn the facts of the case.

But the podgy face of the man from Scotland Yard was an expressionless as usual, not to say inane.

Jimmy wondered whether there was a quick and suspicious brain behind that podgy, commonplace face.

It did not look like it, certainly.

"I suppose you carry handcuffs about you, Mr. Brown," Mornington remarked, with an air of boyish curiosity.

"Probably, young gentleman."

"I wish you'd let a chap see them. Never seen such things, you know—not in our line at all. I'll tell you what, Mr. Brown. You show me your handcuffs, and how they work, and I'll keep an eye open

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver and Erroll.

Mr. Brown's face was a study.

He realised that the innocent-looking junior had been pulling his official leg.

Mornny had been referring to Mr. Manders all the time, with the playful intention of raising Mr. Brown's hopes, and then dashing them to the ground.

The fat detective forced a smile.

"I see—a little joke of yours," he said. "Ha, ha! Well, unfasten these things for me, Master Mornington. I'll show you how—"

"No need to show me how," said Mornny. "I'm not goin' to unfasten them."

"What?"

"You've come nosin' round Rookwood lookin' for a criminal, as if anybody at Rookwood could have any connection with such a villain," said Mornny. "That's an insult to the school, Mr. Brown. I'm doin' this to give you a lesson. My advice to you is, go back to Scotland Yard, an' sit tight. You're not up to the level of Rookwood. Ta-ta!"

The expression on Mr. Brown's face was extraordinary.

He had allowed himself to be spoofed into submitting to be handcuffed, and there he was, with the "darbies" on his wrists, a helpless prisoner.

Mornny caught the arms of Jimmy Silver and Erroll, and walked them on.

Mr. Brown sputtered.

"Boy, come back! Do you hear? Come back and release me!"

"Another day, old bird!" answered Mornington, over his shoulder. "Drop in at the blacksmith's, and he may be able to do it. Or try the bobby-refuge—I mean the police-station. Ta-ta, old buck!"

"I say—" began Erroll.

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Mornny—" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rats! Come on!"

Mornington rushed his companions onward.

"Didn't he ask for it when he came nosin' round Rookwood looking for dashed counterfeiters and forgers and

"Well, where are they gone, then?"

"I don't know; but I know it's nothing of that kind. Look here, I've told the fellows that I know nothing of what's become of Lovell and the rest," said Jimmy Silver hotly. "If you can't take my word, Mornington—"

Mornington made a soothing gesture.

"Keep your wool on, old top!" he answered. "I take your word, of course, that you're not goin' to bunk. But look here, Jimmy Silver; if Lovell and Raby and Newcome haven't bunked, they've been dealt with, somehow, by foul play."

"I know that."

"In fact, kidnapped?"

"It looks like it," said Jimmy Silver. "Why should anybody kidnap them?"

"I don't know."

"Exactly; that's what I'm coming to. If they've bunked, it's pretty certain that you mean to bunk after them; you deny that, and I take your word. But if they've been kidnapped, isn't it jolly likely that you'll be the next?" said Mornington, quite earnest now. "Somebody seems to have it up against the end study—first Lovell, then Raby, then Newcome; and there's only one of the gang left, and that's you, Jimmy Silver."

Jimmy started.

He had not thought of any danger to himself in his troubled pondering on the subject of his missing chums.

"But—but why should anybody go for me, Mornny?" he said at last.

"Why should anybody go for Lovell & Co.?" was Mornny's reply.

"I—I can't guess. It—it's just as if some lunatic is at work," said Jimmy Silver. "It beats me!"

"Well, then, you're not going to follow them, wherever they are," said Mornington. "After what's happened, Jimmy, it's not safe for you to go about alone, and your friends are going to see that you don't."

"I think that's reasonable, Jimmy," said Erroll, in his quiet way. "Let us stick to you for a bit, old chap."

Jimmy smiled faintly.

"I don't see how I could be in any danger inside the House," he said.

THE MISSING TRIO!

(Continued from the previous page.)

whom he had taken counsel with, pook-pooed the idea still more emphatically. But if the secret passage could be discovered, and traces could be found of the missing juniors having been taken away by that means, it would at least make it clear that there had been a kidnapping, and that would be so much gained.

Captain Lagden, as an old Rookwooder, was quite as well acquainted with the place as Jimmy—if not more so. And his remark showed that he considered success possible.

So Jimmy was looking brighter as he joined Erroll and Mornington in the passage; and they went downstairs together. "The merry captain seems to have cheered you up, Jimmy," Mornington remarked.

"He's a good chap," said Jimmy. "Oh, toppin'! Are you comin' down to the footer after lessons?"

"No. But I won't keep you chaps away from it," said Jimmy, with a smile.

"You will!" said Mornington coolly. "We're not losin' sight of you, I can tell you. Footer for you, footer for us; otherwise, otherwise—see?"

Jimmy frowned a little.

He was grateful for Morny's good intentions, but he could see that this was likely to endanger the secrecy the captain had insisted upon concerning the further exploration of the abbey ruins.

"Look here, Morny, old chap," he said, "I'd rather you chucked it."

"I don't mind; but I'm not goin' to chuck it. Who knows what terrific dangers we've saved you from already?" grinned Mornington.

Jimmy Silver laughed. But there came a time when he remembered Mornington's words.

The 5th Chapter. The Prisoners.

Clink, clink!

The rusty iron chain jarred upon the flagstones.

A dim light burned, glimmering on the damp stone walls.

It was a vaulted room, built of huge stones, floored with great flags.

The air was heavy, but from somewhere in the vaulted roof there was ventilation—some concealed pipe that communicated with the air.

Save when the rusty chain jarred and clinked, there was deep silence.

On one side of the vaulted room there was a rusty iron grating, closing up the only exit.

Once, in days that were long gone by, that subterranean chamber had been used as a prison cell, in the ancient times when Rookwood had been a monastic foundation.

Long centuries had passed since then, and scarce a human eye had looked into the dusky recess; but now, once more, the old monastic prison was put to its early use again.

There were some mats and rugs on the stone floor, and on them sat or lay three figures.

Little did the Rookwood fellows dream how near to them were the three missing juniors.

It was Arthur Edward Lovell who was moaning restlessly, and the chain clinked as he moved.

Raby and Newcome were still and silent. Each of the juniors had an iron girdle locked round his waist, to which a chain was attached, the end of the chain being clamped to the wall.

The chains gave them freedom to move about the extent of their cell.

Four or five centuries had passed since those chains had confined a prisoner, and they were red with rust, but still heavy and strong, and beyond the strength of the kidnapped juniors to break.

Outside the grating the lamp glimmered, set on the floor far beyond their reach.

It was burning low.

"How long have we been here, yod fellows?" Lovell muttered the words.

"How long is it going to last?" Raby groaned.

"It seems like weeks!"

"I—I wonder what Jimmy's thinking?" muttered Newcome.

"I wonder?"

"And our people—"

"What can they think?" muttered Lovell. "They'll think we've bolted from Rookwood; they can't think anything else."

"We must be found in time."

"Not till that villain lets us. But—but he can't carry on his game here for ever." Silence again.

The grim imprisonment was telling on Jimmy Silver's chums; but hope still burned in their breasts.

The silence was broken at last by a sound of footsteps.

The three juniors rose, and fixed their eyes upon the grating, outside which a dim figure appeared.

Two keen eyes glinted in through the iron bars.

A loaf, an opened tin of meat, and a jug of water were passed between the bars—the daily meal of the unhappy juniors.

"The police haven't found you yet, you villain!" exclaimed Lovell, his eyes glinting at the man outside the grating.

A slight laugh was the only reply.

The man glanced at the lamp, refilled it with oil from a can, and then picked it up and moved away along the outer vault.

The three juniors drew near the grating, and followed him with their eyes.

The glimmer of the lamp passed behind a stone pillar and was lost to their view. Darkness reigned.

But from the darkness there was a faint glimmer, showing that the lamp was somewhere near at hand.

In the silence strange sounds came faintly to the juniors' ears—a sound as of machinery.

"What can it mean?" muttered Lovell. "What game is he playing, you chaps?"

"Goodness knows!"

They listened for some time.

Often and often they had heard similar sounds during the kidnapper's visits to the hidden vaults.

But the strange occupation, pursued in the depths of the recesses beneath the ancient pile of Rookwood, was a mystery to them.

After a long interval the lamp glimmered again.

It was set down outside the grating, and the light glimmered into the cell.

The dim figure of the kidnapper turned, and his footsteps died away.

They heard the footsteps as they mounted an unseen stair, till silence fell again.

Once more the prisoners were alone.

The 6th Chapter. His True Colours.

Jimmy Silver frowned a little as he came away from the Fourth Form-room after lessons.

Mornington joined him, with Erroll. Jimmy was rather perplexed.

He had to join the captain at the abbey ruins in a short time, and he had agreed to mention the expedition to no one.

Evidently Morny would be in the way. The three juniors went out into the quadrangle, and there Jimmy Silver halted.

"You fellows going down to the footer?" he asked.

"That depends on you!" answered Mornington. "Are you?"

"Well, no."

"Then we're not."

"Morny, old man," said Erroll, "Jimmy doesn't want us. Let's get off, and give up playing the goat, old chap."

Mornington shook his head.

"Look here," said Jimmy Silver restively, "I've got something on for this afternoon, Morny. I'm much obliged to you, but I want to get off by myself."

"Not safe for you to go wanderin' about alone, after what's happened to your pals."

"I sha'n't be alone."

"You're really insultin', Jimmy; you're impyin' that you prefer somebody else's company to mine!" said Morny sorrowfully.

"It's not a Rookwood chap, you ass!" "Callin' on dear old Brown, to see if he's got the 'darbies' off yet!" grinned Mornington.

"No," said Jimmy, laughing.

"You don't want to tell your pals where you're goin'—what? This looks bad, Jimmy! I suppose your young Cousin Agy hasn't been persuadin' you to go along with him to the Bird-in-Hand to back a horse?"

"Fathead!" said Jimmy. "Ta-ta! See you later!"

He walked away.

"The dear old ass will see us sooner, not later," remarked Mornington. "Come on, Erroll! What are you hanging back for?"

"We can't follow Silver about if he doesn't like it, Morny."

"I can, old bird," answered Mornington coolly. And he did, leaving Kit Erroll looking very undecided.

Jimmy Silver strolled towards Little Quad, and a few minutes later he glanced round, and frowned.

Morny was sauntering towards Little Quad, too.

The captain of the Fourth went into the library, which had a door on Little Quad, and a minute later Morny strolled in.

"Looking for a book?" asked Jimmy grimly.

"Oh, just lookin' round, you know!" Jimmy walked out.

So did Morny, and the dandy of the Fourth was hovering near as Jimmy Silver went through the old archway into Big Quad.

It was getting near time now for

Jimmy to meet the captain at the abbey ruins for the exploration of the vaults, and he grew more and more restive under Morny's pertinacity.

He would willingly have told Morny what was on, and taken him along, but the captain had asked him to keep the matter quiet, and he had given his word.

That settled it. He could not tell Morny, and he could not allow Morny to follow him to the ruins, and find the captain there.

He went away to the gates, as if going out. Morny shadowed him across the quad.

He turned back, and met his shadower face to face, suppressing his annoyance with difficulty.

"Look here, Morny!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Lookin', old bird!"

"I want you to clear off!"

"So that you can get kidnapped, like Lovell & Co., without a helpin' hand?" asked Mornington.

"I'm in no danger, you utter ass! I've simply got something to do, that I don't want any help for."

"A merry secret—what?"

"Well, in a way!"

"Jimmy, old man, remember what happened to your pals!" said Mornington, dropping his light manner, and speaking earnestly. "They couldn't have been nailed if they hadn't been caught alone! Why should Captain Lagden want you to be alone with him this afternoon?"

Jimmy started violently.

"How did you know?" he stuttered.

Mornington laughed.

"My dear, innocent kid, you said it wasn't a Rookwood chap you were goin' with or old Brown, so I jumped at the captain," he said.

Jimmy Silver bit his lip hard.

The secret had been surprised from him, and he was really angry now.

"Look here, Mornington," he said quietly, "I know you mean well, and I don't want to row with you. But if you follow me any farther, I shall punch your head! I mean that!"

"Alas, so much for friendship!" said Morny.

"Well, don't play the goat, then!" snapped Jimmy.

He walked away angrily, and Morny watched him go.

Jimmy evidently meant what he said.

There would be trouble if he was shadowed farther—and Mornington did not want a fight with the captain of the Fourth.

But he was not beaten yet, by any means.

He had ascertained that it was Captain Lagden who was to be Jimmy Silver's companion, and he walked away to the School House quickly.

Tubby Muffin was sitting on the stone balustrade outside, and Morny tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hallo, Morny, old fellow!" said Tubby affectionately. "Can you lend me a bob?"

"How long have you been squattin' here, kid?" asked Morny.

"Eh! Since lessons."

"Seen Captain Lagden come out?"

"No."

"Right!"

Mornington sat on the balustrade beside Tubby Muffin, whistling softly, and turning a deaf ear to Tubby's further appeals for a loan.

Ten minutes later Captain Lagden came out of the House, and strolled away with a careless air.

Mornington detached himself from the balustrade, and strolled after him.

The captain left the quadrangle behind, and walked towards the abbey ruins; but before he reached them he looked round.

His eyes glinted as he saw Mornington.

He stopped where he was, and proceeded to light a cigarette—a rather difficult business with only one hand to use.

"Can I help you, sir?" asked Mornington, coming up.

"Thank you, my lad! Hold the match-box for me," said the captain.

The cigarette was lighted.

Captain Lagden stood smoking it, without going on for some minutes, while Mornington stood apparently admiring the view of the School House.

"Not playing footer?" asked the captain casually.

"Not this afternoon, sir."

"The days are drawing in fast," remarked the captain. "You shouldn't lose what opportunities remain for getting a little practice, my boy."

"Oh, I'm not specially keen on it," said Morny carelessly.

The captain made a restive gesture, and walked away, not towards the abbey. Mornington strolled in the same direction.

He stopped as Captain Lagden looked round, and appeared to be busy tying up his shoelace.

The look on the captain's scarred face was menacing, and his lips were hard shut as he went on again.

"Now, what's this queer game?" murmured Mornington. "He was starting for the abbey ruins when he spotted me, and turned off. Jimmy's meeting him somewhere, and won't say where. What's the dashed secrecy about? I think, if I were a bettin' chap, I should lay ten to one that Jimmy's in the abbey ruins, and that the merry captain's goin' to meet him there. Why, I don't know. But Jimmy's not goin' out of my sight, I know that!"

Mornington turned off as the captain passed beyond a building.

The junior headed for the old abbey, pretty certain that he would find Jimmy Silver there.

He was not disappointed.

As he came up to the old shattered gateway he saw the captain of the Fourth sitting on a block of masonry within the ruins, near the entrance of the old vaults, evidently waiting there for somebody.

Mornington stepped back out of sight. "There's Jimmy!" he murmured.

"That's where he's waitin' for the merry captain. What the thump are they keepin' it dark for? I suppose Jimmy's all right, with Lagden with him, but—"

Mornington was tempted to throw up the whole affair and join his chum Erroll on the football-ground.

But there was a strain of obstinacy in Morny. He had set himself a task, and he would not fail in it.

If three members of the Fistical Four had been kidnapped, it was as likely as not that Jimmy Silver was in as much danger as his chums.

The danger was mysterious, unknown, unfathomable. But why should Jimmy be in less danger than the rest of the Co. had been?

Mornington determined not to lose sight of him.

There was a sound of footsteps on the crumbling stones, and Mornington glanced through the broken gateway again.

Captain Lagden had joined Jimmy Silver in the ruins.

Evidently he had reached the old abbey from another direction, after making a very wide detour.

Mornington was feeling rather curious by this time.

It was odd enough that the captain should be so careful not to allow his destination to be observed, and it was pretty clear to Morny that it was Lagden who had asked Jimmy to keep the matter a secret.

"Been waiting for me, Silver?" The captain's voice came clearly enough to Mornington.

"Only a little while, sir."

"All right, then. You have not mentioned to anyone our little scheme of exploring the vaults for a secret passage?" asked the captain, with a smile.

"Oh, no; I said I wouldn't!" answered Jimmy.

"Just as well to keep it to ourselves. It would only cause amusement if it were known, my boy."

Mornington grinned.

That was the harmless explanation of the mysterious meeting in the abbey ruins.

"You have your flash-lamp, Silver?"

"Yes; here it is."

"You can lead the way into the vaults," said the captain. "I have the key. I've borrowed it from old Mack. Why—what—"

Mornington sauntered in coolly through the gateway.

The captain's face blackened at the sight of him. Jimmy Silver gave him a glance of great exasperation.

"Hallo! Fancy meetin' you here!" drawled Mornington.

"Captain Lagden's left hand closed on the light stick he carried with an angry grip, his close-set eyes glinting at the dandy of the Fourth.

"Look here, Morny—" began Jimmy Silver hotly.

"Goin' to explore the vaults?" smiled Mornington. "What a lark! I'll come along with you! You don't mind, Captain Lagden?"

"You impertinent young scoundrel!" exclaimed the captain, making a stride towards Mornington. "How dare you follow me about?"

"What?" Mornington eyed him. "I really don't know what you are ratty about, sir! I suppose a chap can stroll here if he likes?"

He uttered a cry the next moment.

Captain Lagden, striding at him, was lashing with the stick, and the blow caught Mornington savagely on the shoulder.

Morny started back.

"You confounded ruffian, what are you at?" he shouted. "Keep off!"

The captain, unheeding, followed him up, still lashing with the stick, and Morny caught blow after blow as he strove to dodge the shower.

Jimmy Silver looked on, almost petrified by the sudden savage scene.

He knew that Morny had been watching him, not the captain; but even if it had been otherwise there was no reason why Basil Lagden should show this savage temper.

He had nothing to fear from being observed, so far as Jimmy Silver could make out.

If he had been a man with a dangerous secret, and determined to make it clear that it was not safe to watch him about, he would not have acted otherwise.

His temper seemed to have completely escaped his control, and it was pretty plain that it was a cruel temper when it was given full play.

Mornington was yelling as he tried to dodge the savage lashes.

His foot caught in a fragment of masonry, and he stumbled and fell, and the next moment the captain was bending over him, thrashing the fallen junior with cruel force.

"Oh! Ah! Oh! Yah!" roared Mornington. "You ruffian! Oh! Ah! Oh!"

Jimmy Silver dashed towards the furious man and caught his arm.

"Captain Lagden!" he panted.

"Stand back!"

"Let him alone!" shouted Jimmy, his anger rising at the brutality of the captain. "How dare you strike a fellow like that! Let him alone!"

And as the captain continued to lash, Jimmy dragged his arm back by main force and stopped him.

Captain Lagden turned on him with glittering eyes.

His face was so evil at that moment that Jimmy Silver released his arm and started back with an exclamation.

Mornington staggered breathlessly to his feet.

"You coward!" he shouted. "You cowardly brute!" He caught up a jagged lump of stone, his eyes blazing. "Now come on again, you hoodlum, if you dare!"

"If he comes on again I'll stop him fast enough, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver between his teeth.

Captain Lagden stood glaring at the two juniors for a moment, the stick gripped savagely in his hand; and Jimmy Silver and Morny drew together.

But the captain restrained his rage.

Without a word he turned and strode out of the ruins, leaving the two juniors together.

Jimmy drew a deep breath as he disappeared.

"The hound!" muttered Mornington, his lips quivering with pain. "The dashed wild beast! Ow!"

"Blessed if I understand him!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "He—he's not the man I supposed him! He's a cowardly brute to lash a fellow like that! By Jove, I'm sorry I didn't go for him now!"

The two juniors left the ruins together, Morny's face pale with pain.

Erroll met them in the quadrangle, and uttered an exclamation as he saw Morny's face.

"What's happened?"

Mornington explained quietly.

"The brute!" said Erroll. "The cowardly brute! But—but why should he have been so ratty, even if he thought you were watching him, Morny?"

"Blest if I know! I know I shall give the ruffian a wide berth in the future," groaned Morny. "Ow! Ow! Ow!"

Jimmy Silver went into the School House in a thoughtful and troubled mood.

That discovery of the captain's real character had been a shock to him, and he felt that he could not speak to the man civilly again.

But he was feeling disappointed, too. But for the scene at the ruins, the discovery he hoped for might have been made, and he was angry with Morny as well as with the captain.

It was not till afterwards, under strange circumstances, that Jimmy Silver learned how fortunate for him Mornington's watching had been.

THE END.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of the BOYS' FRIEND. All readers who write to me, and enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply by post. All letters should be addressed: "The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4."

FOR NEXT MONDAY!

"THE KIDNAPPING OF JIMMY SILVER!"

By Owen Conquest.

The present series of mystery stories of the Rookwood chums are, to my way of thinking, some of the finest yarns that have ever appeared in the BOYS' FRIEND. Lovell, Raby, and Newcome have all disappeared in a very peculiar way. In this week's story you will discover what has happened to them, but can you guess the name of the man who has kidnapped them?

The Rookwood fellows are completely baffled, and when, in next Monday's story, Jimmy Silver mysteriously disappears, the juniors are left absolutely thunderstruck. The Head is puzzled, the masters and prefects are puzzled—in fact, everyone is at his wits' end to discover what has happened to the Fistical Four. On no account must you fail to read this story; it is full of excitement.

"THE SIEGE OF CEDAR CREEK!"

By Martin Clifford.

In next Monday's splendid tale of Frank Richards & Co. you will find the juni