



ANOTHER NEW MASTER ARRIVES AT ROOKWOOD!
 ACCUSED OF BEING A THIEF!
 WHAT MORNINGTON SAW FROM BEHIND THE SCREEN!



The BOYS' FRIEND 1 1/2d

No. 926. Vol. XIX. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending March 8th, 1919.

The Master With A Past!

By Owen Conquest.



Jimmy Silver & Co. Greet Their New Master!

The 1st Chapter.

Looking for Trouble.

"Look out! There's Bootles!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. Jimmy Silver & Co. paused. There were eight Rookwood juniors in the party coming cheerily along the old High Street of Coombe towards the railway-station. Jimmy Silver had a football under his arm, but as Mr. Bootles was sighted Jimmy slipped the footer behind him to keep it out of sight. Mr. Bootles, the dismissed master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, was pacing slowly along, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow. He was apparently taking a "constitutional" after his lunch at the Coombe Arms. "Poor old Bootles!" murmured Raby. "He looks worried!" "He hasn't had the pleasure of taking us in class for a long time!" grinned Mornington. "He misses us, of course!" "Hallo! He's seen us!" said Newcome. Mr. Bootles glanced up, and spotted the party of juniors. Jimmy Silver & Co. raised their caps respectfully, Jimmy keeping the footer behind him with his left hand. For some reason best known to himself the captain of the Fourth did not want Mr. Bootles to see that footer. Mr. Bootles returned the salutation of the juniors gravely. He coloured a little as he did so. The position of a "sacked" master was not pleasant, though the Fourth-Formers

of Rookwood were careful to treat him with even more than usual respect. "Dear me!" said Mr. Bootles, blinking at the juniors over his spectacles. "I'm very pleased to see you, my boys. I—I hope you are progressing satisfactorily with your new master?" "Not at all, sir!" said Jimmy Silver. "Dear me! I am sorry to hear that, Silver." "In fact, he's gone, sir!" "Bless my soul!" "He's been gone some days, and there's a new man coming this afternoon, sir," explained Jimmy Silver. "We—we're going to the station to meet him." "Indeed?" said Mr. Bootles. "That is a mark of attention that will doubtless be very gratifying to your new master, Silver!" "Ahem!" murmured Jimmy. There was a chuckle from somewhere, and Mr. Bootles glanced round. He did not see anything in his remark to excite risibility among his former pupils. The juniors became grave again at once. Jimmy Silver kept the football very carefully out of view. "We don't want a new master, sir," said Lovell. "We want you to come back to Rookwood, sir." "Yes, rather, sir!" chorused the juniors. Mr. Bootles smiled rather sadly. "I am afraid that is impossible, my dear boys. But I am very glad that you have not forgotten me." And, with a kind nod, Mr. Bootles passed on.

"Lucky he didn't spot the footer!" remarked Conroy. "Bootles would have been down on giving the new master a reception—the kind of reception he's going to get." "Ha, ha, ha!" Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on cheerily to the station. The chums of the Fourth had learned that the new Form-master was expected that afternoon, and they had come along to the station to meet him—but it was pretty certain that this mark of attention would not be so gratifying to the new master as Mr. Bootles supposed. There had been a council of war in the Fourth Form at Rookwood School, and it was agreed on all hands that Mr. Egerton, the new master, was not to be allowed to find life worth living so long as he occupied the dismissed master's place. The Fourth Form wanted their own Form-master back, and as the Head would not see reason on the subject, the cheery juniors had decided to take their own measures. Hence their presence at the station that afternoon, and the football under Jimmy Silver's arm! While they waited for the train the juniors entertained themselves by punting the footer about, and as there were a good many puddles, the leather was soon in an exceedingly muddy state. They were, in fact, getting it ready for the new master. "Train's in!" said Lovell suddenly. "Keep your eye on the door!" said Jimmy Silver. The Rookwooders waited.

In a few minutes a gentleman stepped out of the station doorway and looked along the village street. All eyes in the party were fixed upon him at once. He was a young man, rather good-looking, with very keen eyes; and, in spite of the juniors' prejudice against Mr. Bootles' successor, they could not help liking his looks. "I say, is that the man?" whispered Lovell. "We don't want to rag the wrong chap, Jimmy." "Ask him!" answered Jimmy. "Oh, I say—" "Go and ask him," said Jimmy Silver. "If he's the man take your cap off—and we'll take that as a signal." "All right!" Arthur Edward Lovell moved off towards the station doorway, where the young man was standing looking out. "Excuse me, sir," said Lovell, with elaborate politeness. "Might I inquire if you are Mr. Egerton, the new master for Rookwood?" The young man glanced at him. "Quite right, my boy!" he answered. Lovell raised his cap. Mr. Egerton probably took that for a polite salute, but Jimmy Silver & Co. took it as a signal. Jimmy had the muddy footer at his feet, and almost as soon as the cap had left Lovell's head he kicked. Whiz! Jimmy Silver was an onerring shot, and the footer rose and whizzed at the new master like a bullet to its target.

The juniors watched breathlessly—to see the "accident." But the accident did not happen. Mr. Egerton was not looking for anything of the kind, certainly, but he seemed to be a particularly sharp gentleman. He made a quick movement, and the footer whizzed by a foot from his ear and crashed into the vestibule of the station. "Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "My hat!" murmured Raby. "Call that a shot, Jimmy?" Mr. Egerton glanced at the group of juniors. Lovell ran into the station for the footer, and dribbled it out. The new master strode towards Jimmy Silver & Co., and Lovell, who was now behind him, took aim with the footer. It had been intended for the new master's features, but the back of his head was the next best thing in Lovell's opinion. Whiz! Arthur Edward Lovell put his beef into that kick. But the new master really seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, for as the football whizzed forward he made a step aside, and the leather whizzed past him like a bullet. Crash! "Varoooh!" roared Jimmy Silver. And the captain of the Fourth sat down—in a puddle—as the muddy football smote him forcibly on the chin.

(Continued on next page.)

THE MASTER WITH A PAST!

(Continued from the previous page.)

The 2nd Chapter.

A Surprising Meeting.

"Yooop!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell.

"Yarrooh! Grogg! Gugggg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

Mr. Egerton stared down at Jimmy Silver, whose face was smothered with mud, and almost unrecognisable.

A smile lurked round the new master's mouth.

"Ow, ow, ow!" mumbled Jimmy Silver, dabbing furiously at the mud on his face.

"You ass, Lovell! Yow! You chump! Oh! Ah!"

"Dead shot!" chuckled Mornington.

"You've got your shooting-boots on today, Lovell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you boys belong to Rookwood School?" inquired Mr. Egerton.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"What form are you in?"

"Fourth, sir!" said Raby, rather rebelliously.

"Then I am your Form-master!" said the young man. "And I will ask you to explain what this means."

Jimmy Silver scrambled up, dabbing at his face with his handkerchief.

The handkerchief was very quickly a limp rag.

Jimmy blinked at Mr. Egerton.

The new master was not much like the other new masters the Fourth had experienced lately.

They had been a "scratch" lot, as Lovell expressed it; but Mr. Egerton was evidently made of different stuff.

"What does this mean?" repeated the new Form-master.

"Eh?" stammered Jimmy.

"I suppose it is what you would call a rag," said Mr. Egerton. "Upon my word! Boy, let that football alone!"

Conroy, the Australian, who had nerve enough for a whole regiment, had backed-heeled the football away to a favourable position, and was about to kick.

He did not heed the new master's injunction.

Whiz!

Mr. Egerton put up his hand quickly, and the football dropped at his feet.

Then, to the blank amazement of the juniors, he kicked it, and it shot back at Conroy like a bullet.

Before Conroy knew it was coming, it had crashed on his chin, and he went spinning.

Bump!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

The new master burst into a hearty laugh.

"You should not play tricks like this, especially on a master, my boys," he said. "Neither should you play with a football in the street. I will overlook this occurrence, but it must not occur again!"

And with that the new master strode away down the village street with a springy stride.

Conroy sat up and gasped.

And the chums of the Fourth looked at one another, Jimmy Silver still dabbing his face.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy, with a deep breath. "That chap isn't quite what I expected to see."

"He's a bit of a corker!" grinned Newcome.

"This rag doesn't seem to have been a howling success."

"Ow! No."

"He can't be a bad sort," remarked Van Ryn. "It's a bit thick footballing a new master, when you come to think of it; and pretty nearly any man would report us to the Head for it."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Conroy. "Fancy the beast slamming the ball at a chap's chivvy, like a blessed fag! Ow!"

"Sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander!" chuckled Lovell. "I say, I rather like that chap. He's a sportsman!"

"Pick up that footer," said Jimmy Silver disconsolately. "This has been a frost, and no mistake. We shall have all our work cut out, if we're going to make that merchant tired of Rookwood."

And the juniors followed the new master down the street—without any further intention of footballing him.

"My hat!" exclaimed Lovell suddenly.

"Bootles—he's running right into Bootles!"

The new master was striding past the Coombe Arms, when Mr. Bootles, having completed his peregrinations, arrived at that building from the opposite direction.

The two gentlemen came face to face—the old and the new masters of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver & Co. saw Mr. Bootles stop suddenly, his eyes fixed upon the young man.

"He knows he's the new master!" murmured Jimmy. "He can't be going to slang him, can he?"

"Hardly!" grinned Lovell.

Mr. Egerton had stopped, too—he had no choice, for Mr. Bootles had halted directly in his path.

"Cyril Egerton!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, in tones of surprise, which reached the ears of the Fourth-Formers.

Mr. Egerton looked at him.

"You seem to know my name, sir!" he answered.

"Bootles knows him!" murmured Raby. "That's jolly queer! Can't be a friend of Bootles taking his job."

"Bootles don't look friendly."

"He doesn't, for a fact."

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on, curiously interested in that meeting between the two masters.

Mr. Egerton's handsome face had grown sombre in expression.

It was pretty clear that he knew Mr. Bootles by sight, at least, and that the meeting was both unexpected and disagreeable to him.

"Certainly I know your name, Cyril Egerton!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles warmly. "I am not likely to forget!"

"You have the advantage of me."

"Indeed! Perhaps you have forgotten me!" said Mr. Bootles, with a touch of sarcasm.

"If I have ever met you, sir, I have certainly forgotten you," answered Mr. Egerton. "I must ask you to excuse me, as I am rather pressed for time."

And, avoiding Mr. Bootles, he strode on, leaving the Form-master blinking after him.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. Then his glance fell upon Jimmy Silver & Co. "Silver!"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

"Did you meet your new master at the station?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Is it possible," asked Mr. Bootles, "that that—ahem!—gentleman is the man?"

"That's the man, sir," said Jimmy, in wonder. "He's the new master of the Fourth, sir."

"Scandalous!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "Wha-a-at?"

"Surely the Head cannot be aware—However, no matter."

Mr. Bootles broke off hastily, and went into the inn, his manner quite agitated.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on, in great astonishment.

"Bootles don't like the new man!" grinned Newcome.

"He can't be expected to like a man who's bagged his job," remarked Mornington. "But he seems to have something against Egerton, too. Egerton looks a good sort, so far as I can see."

"Bootles is a bit prejudiced, very likely," said Jimmy Silver. "This man Egerton is more likely to keep the job than the other men who came. It looks like a freeze-out for poor old Bootles this time. Unless—unless we get rid of the man."

The juniors walked on in silence.

The plan for "getting rid" of the new master, for Mr. Bootles' sake, was all out and dried; but Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling doubtful about it now.

For it was pretty plain that Mr. Egerton would not be an easy customer to tackle; and more than that, the juniors were feeling a liking for him already, and they did not feel satisfied with the scheme that had been so carefully laid.

The 3rd Chapter.

The New Master.

Bulkeley of the Sixth had been taking charge of the Fourth Form for some days, in the absence of a master; but when the Fourth assembled for lessons on this particular afternoon, they found the new Form-master installed.

The Fourth-Formers took their places.

Mr. Egerton glanced over the class, and beckoned to Jimmy Silver to come to his desk.

Jimmy came out before the class, with a rather grim expression.

If he was to be called over the coals for the affair at the station, he was quite ready for trouble.

But Mr. Egerton's manner was quite pleasant.

"Your name, my boy?" he asked.

"Jimmy Silver, sir."

"You are head boy of this Form, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were the leader, I presume, in the rag this afternoon?"

"Ahem!"

"You may speak frankly, Silver. The matter is closed, and it is not my intention to revive it."

"Oh!" said Jimmy, rather taken aback.

"Yes, sir; I was the leader."

"It is not a custom at Rookwood, I presume, to greet a new master by kicking a muddy football at him?"

"Ahem! No, sir."

"Then why did you make an exception in my favour?" asked Mr. Egerton. "I am rather curious to know, that is all."

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"You may speak out, my boy," said Mr. Egerton, with a smile. "I am sure there must have been some motive behind it, and I should like to know what it was."

"Very well, sir. We want our own Form-master back," said Jimmy Silver bluntly.

"Who is that?"

"Mr. Bootles, the gentleman you met in Coombe, sir, who spoke to you."

Mr. Egerton frowned.

"You asked me, sir," said Jimmy, thinking that the new master was displeased with his candour.

"Yes—yes, quite so, Silver. I desire you to be frank. So Mr. Bootles was your master formerly?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he resign his position here?"

"Oh!" said Jimmy, a little dismayed. The projected campaign against the new master seemed more dubious than ever. Mr. Egerton, apparently, did not know that he was in the position of a black-leg. "No, sir; he did not resign. He was dismissed by the Head."

"Am I to understand, Silver, that you juniors take it upon yourselves to criticise your headmaster's action in dismissing him?" exclaimed Mr. Egerton sternly.

"Yes," answered Jimmy fearlessly, "we do. If you wish to know how the matter stands—"

"That is what I am asking you."

"Very well, sir. Mr. Bootles interfered with the Head, to prevent a chap being flogged unjustly. He was dismissed for it. It came out afterwards that the chap concerned was innocent. Everybody thought then that the Head ought to have reinstated Mr. Bootles. All the masters thought so. But the Head wouldn't, and all the staff went on strike."

"On strike!" ejaculated Mr. Egerton.

"Yes. And they're all on strike now,"

said Jimmy. "They refused to keep on unless justice was done to Mr. Bootles. There are new masters in the school now. The old masters are all putting up in Coombe—on strike."

"Well, upon my word! That is a very extraordinary state of affairs. So that is why Mr. Bootles is still in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes, sir."

"But doubtless he will go—"

"I don't think so, sir. The masters don't mean to go, I believe," said Jimmy. "Some of the fellows think they're going to get the governors of the school to take the matter up. I don't know."

Mr. Egerton compressed his lips slightly.

"Then Mr. Bootles, your former master, is likely to remain near the school for some time?" he asked.

"I think so."

"H'm! And the rag this afternoon was intended to show your new master that you did not want him, I suppose?"

Jimmy coloured.

"We—we feel bound to stand by Mr. Bootles, sir," he answered. "He was a good sort to us, and he got the sack. I—I mean he was dismissed for standing up for justice to a Fourth-Former."

"I quite understand your feelings," said Mr. Egerton quietly. "Now, Silver, and the rest—Mr. Egerton glanced over the attentive class—"I shall say no more about what occurred at the station. I excuse you fully. I shall not find fault with you for loyalty to your former master. But I am now master of the Fourth Form."

Jimmy Silver was silent.

"I knew nothing of the state of affairs here when I accepted the appointment," went on Mr. Egerton. "I came here in the ordinary course, to take up my duties in the vacancy created by the departure of the former master. I sincerely hope that you boys will not entertain any prejudice against me on that account. I desire to be on good terms with my Form. I shall certainly exact respect and obedience, but I desire very strongly that there shall be good feeling on both sides. This is only fair-play, as I am sure you will see."

Some of the Fourth murmured approval.

"I must ask you," continued Mr. Egerton, "to hold no communication with your former master. You may, of course, salute him if you come in contact with him—that is your duty—but I must forbid you to hold any communication with him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"If this command should be disobeyed I shall request the Head to place Coombe permanently out of bounds for the Form!" said Mr. Egerton. "But I prefer very much to make it an amicable arrangement. You must accept my decision as just. Now, my boys, I hope we shall be good friends, and we must try to work together in a cordial spirit. You may go to your place, Silver."

Jimmy Silver returned to his seat.

Lessons began in the Fourth Form-room.

The juniors found their new Form-master firm enough, but invariably kind, and quite well up to his work.

And there was a general feeling in the Fourth that it was only fair-play to give the man a chance. Mr. Egerton had not appealed to them in vain.

Possibly he wanted to be popular in his Form; but if that were so it was surely not a blameworthy ambition.

By the time afternoon classes were over there was no doubt that the new master was growing popular.

And Jimmy Silver's intended campaign was "indefinitely postponed."

The 4th Chapter.

Mr. Bootles Insists.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came cheerily out of the Form-room after lessons.

Jimmy was looking rather thoughtful as he strolled out into the quadrangle with his chums.

Lovell grinned a little.

"What price the merry warpath?" he asked.

"What about raising the new man's scalp, Jimmy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Jimmy Silver frankly. "We're sticking to Bootles, of course. But—but Mr. Egerton seems quite innocent in the matter, and he's a good sort."

"A real brick!" said Raby.

"It doesn't seem quite fair to be down on him, when he's done nothing," said Jimmy. "He didn't even know Bootles had been sacked, when he came. I—I suppose he's entitled to fair-play, and—well, the long and the short of it is, I don't think we ought to rag him."

"Just what I was thinking," said Newcome.

The Fistical Four were in agreement on that point, and their opinion was pretty generally shared in the Fourth.

If the new master had been a bully, or an unpleasant character, the juniors would have felt justified in going ahead with the campaign; but under the present circumstances they lacked the justification.

"I say, Jimmy"—Tubby Muffin rolled up to the Fistical Four in the quad—"what do you think?"

"I think you're a fat duffer, old scout," answered Jimmy.

"What do you think's happened, I mean?" said Tubby. "Bootles is coming! Fancy that!"

"Bootles!" exclaimed the four juniors, with one voice.

Tubby Muffin grinned.

"I've just spotted him at the gates," he said. "He's coming in."

"My hat!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. turned in the direction of the gates.

A visit to Rookwood by the dismissed master was the last thing they expected to happen.

But Tubby Muffin's news was well founded.

The little gentleman turned from the road into the old gateway, and old Mack

looked out of his lodge with a stare of surprise.

Old Mack, certainly, had never expected to see the "sacked" Form-master visiting Rookwood.

Mr. Bootles coloured as he caught the porter's surprised glance, and hurried on into the quad.

The Fistical Four capped him respectfully, but they kept at a distance, mindful of Mr. Egerton's instructions on the subject of communicating with their former master.

Mr. Bootles whisked on towards the House in a great hurry.

"I wonder what Bootles wants here?" said Raby. "The Head can't have sent for him—when the new master's just come, too!"

"Blest if I can catch on!" said Jimmy Silver. "He's gone in!"

Mr. Bootles had disappeared into the House.

The Fistical Four walked on, much puzzled.

But the appearance of the dismissed master within the precincts of Rookwood surprised other fellows as well as the Fistical Four.

Smythe of the Shell was on the steps, and he stared at the little gentleman as he went in, quite forgetting to "cap" him.

Adolphus Smythe prided himself upon his polished manners, but he had no civility to waste upon a man who was "down and out."

Bulkeley of the Sixth was coming out, and he, though not at all polished like Adolphus, saluted Mr. Bootles very respectfully, though he was evidently surprised to see him.

Tupper, the page, took Mr. Bootles' name in to the Head, even Tupper indulging in a stare as he saw Mr. Bootles.

The little gentleman waited in the hall, in a state of self-conscious discomfort.

He was quite aware that he was being curiously observed on all sides.

Algy Silver of the Third looked over the banisters.

Howard and Tracy of the Shell came out of the Common-room and stared, and went in again, grinning.

Some of the Second Form came along and stared, and passed, muttering to one another.

Mr. Bootles grew redder and redder as he waited.

Tupper came back at last.

"Mr. Bootles, sir—" stammered Tupper.

"Yes, yes, Tupper?"

"Which the Head says he cannot see you sir!" blurted out Tupper.

Mr. Bootles compressed his lips.

"Thank you, Tupper!" he said quietly. And, instead of leaving the House, Mr. Bootles walked on down the corridor leading to the Head's study.

"Oh, my heye!" murmured the astonished Tupper.

Evidently Mr. Bootles meant to see the Head, in spite of that gentleman's distinct prohibition.

Tupper disappeared below stairs, washing his hands of the matter.

If Mr. Bootles chose to "shove" himself in, it wasn't Tupper's business to stop him, as Tupper explained to the cook.

"I dessay it's a matter of wages," Tupper further opined to the cook. "Praps he ain't been paid up. The 'Ead's a 'ard ole barge, cook, that he is—'ard as nails! I'd 'ave it out of 'im to the last penny if I was Bootles!"

Quite unconscious of Tupper's approbation, Mr. Bootles tapped at the door of the Head's study and opened it.

The 5th Chapter.

A Man With a Past.

Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet.

He did not bow to his visitor.

He greeted him with a cold, steely stare, as if attempting to rival the freezing glance of the fabled basilisk.

Mr. Bootles glanced at him nervously.

"Really, sir," exclaimed the Head, "this is—is—is outrageous! You have forced yourself, Mr. Bootles, into my presence—"

"I beg you to excuse me, Dr. Chisholm—"

"I shall do nothing of the sort, sir!" rapped out the Head. "I regard this intrusion as utterly inexcusable—"

"I have a very powerful motive—"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Your motive does not interest me," he said. "You will oblige me, Mr. Bootles, by taking your departure immediately!"

"I will take my departure, sir, when I have said what I have come to say," said Mr. Bootles firmly.

"Really, sir, this passes all bounds!" exclaimed the Head.

"You appear to have engaged a new master for the Fourth Form, Dr. Chisholm—"

"Quite so! A gentleman satisfactory in every respect!"

"You have made inquiry—"

"I am perfectly well acquainted with Mr. Egerton's recommendations, Mr. Bootles, and I decline to hear one word against him!"

"You will hear more than one word against him, sir. I am acquainted with that gentleman."

The Head's lip curled.

"Really, Mr. Bootles, this is unworthy! You admit that you have come here to malign the gentleman I have engaged in your place! I must say that I am surprised!"

"I malign nobody, sir!" said Mr. Bootles hotly. "I warn you that that young man is not a fit person to reside in this school!"

"Nonsense!"

"I came in contact with him at Highwood School, where a relative of mine holds a position," said Mr. Bootles.

"You are mistaken, sir. Mr. Egerton has been acting as a private tutor for two years."

"It was two years ago that I saw him at Highwood."

"Well, well!" said the Head impatiently. "Even if you saw Mr. Egerton at Highwood School, wherever that is—I have never heard of it—what then? It is not a public school, or I should have heard of it. Doubtless that is why Mr. Egerton has not mentioned it to me—if your statement is correct."

"It is a private school in Yorkshire," said Mr. Bootles. "Mr. Cyril Egerton was a master there, and I met him casually while on a visit to my relative."

The Head glanced at the clock.

"Mrs. Chisholm will be expecting me," he said. "Mr. Bootles, I request you to draw your visit to a close."

"In spite of your incivility, sir, I shall tell you what I know of Cyril Egerton!" retorted Mr. Bootles. "There was a robbery at Highwood School—"

"What!"

"Suspicion fell strongly upon this young man—"

"You are dreaming, Mr. Bootles!"

"I was there at the time, sir. A large sum of money was taken from the headmaster's safe, and it was discovered that Mr. Cyril Egerton had been spending money far in excess of his known means."

"Absurd!"

"Actual proof of his guilt was lacking, though it might have been found," said Mr. Bootles. "The money was gone beyond recovery—and that fact, added to the notoriety that would have fallen upon the school in case of a prosecution, induced the headmaster to take no legal steps. Mr. Egerton left the school at once."

"Really, Mr. Bootles—"

"The headmaster did not conceal his belief, and the law, sir, was at Mr. Egerton's disposal if he had considered himself wronged. He did not take advantage of it—a tacit admission of guilt—"

"Nonsense!"

"The man, sir, is a thief!" said Mr. Bootles. "And such a man should not be placed in control of Rookwood boys—"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand, his brows contracted with anger.

"Mr. Bootles, I refuse to listen to one word more! I will not say that you have invented this story—"

"Sir!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

"But your prejudice, sir, against the gentleman who has taken your place here is evidently the cause of your peculiar belief. On your own showing, if I accept your story, there was no proof against this young man—and I have not the slightest doubt, sir, that you have exaggerated all the circumstances—unintentionally, perhaps."

"I—I—"

"No more, sir! Even on your own statement, Mr. Egerton seems to have been suspected without proof, and treated with harshness and injustice. I have not the slightest doubt that he could explain fully. Mr. Bootles, I refuse to hear another word!"

"But—"

"Since you will not leave my study, sir, I will do so myself!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

"I will go, sir; but you will be sorry—"

"Nonsense!"

Mr. Bootles, greatly agitated, left the study.

The Head sat down with a frowning brow.

"A very painful scene!" he murmured. "I should really not have expected this of Mr. Bootles. He has allowed his prejudice to carry him actually to the length of slander! I am surprised—shocked!"

From his study window the Head observed Mr. Bootles making for the gates, and frowned again.

He caught sight of Mr. Egerton in the quadrangle in conversation with Bulkeley of the Sixth.

The new master was chatting pleasantly, with a smile on his face, and Bulkeley was evidently pleased and interested.

The Head's brow cleared.

"Absurd!" he muttered. "Utterly ridiculous of Mr. Bootles! Perhaps—perhaps I had better mention the matter to Mr. Egerton, however."

He opened his window.

"Mr. Egerton! Will you step into my study for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Dr. Chisholm resumed his seat, and in a few minutes the new master of the Fourth entered the study.

The glance he cast upon the headmaster was very keen.

"I must apologise in advance for what I am about to say, Mr. Egerton," began the Head, flushing.

"Not at all, sir," said the young man politely.

"I have heard a most extraordinary statement from Mr. Bootles, who formerly held here the position you now hold, Mr. Egerton. Were you ever at a private school in Yorkshire called Highwood?"

"Years ago I was there for a short time, sir," answered Mr. Egerton, with a smile.

"May I ask you why you left?"

"Certainly, sir! There is no secret about it. If Mr. Bootles has given you that impression—"

"Mr. Bootles has sought to prejudice my mind against you, and my question implies no doubt of you, Mr. Egerton—none whatever."

"Thank you, sir. I left Highwood owing to a misunderstanding with the headmaster. A sum of money was missing. After I had left the truth was discovered, and Dr. Woodward wrote to me expressing his deep regret and begging me to return and resume my position there. That letter is still in my possession, and you are welcome to see it, sir."

"Merely as a matter of form, Mr. Egerton, you might show me the letter," said the Head.

"My baggage has not yet arrived. The letter is in my trunk, and as soon as the trunk is here I will bring you the letter," said Mr. Egerton. "The trunk should be here this evening."

"I am ashamed to give you the trouble," said the Head. "But after Mr. Bootles'

statement—foolish and prejudiced as it is—

Mr. Egerton smiled. "My dear sir, it is no trouble, and I shall be glad to satisfy even a prejudiced person like Mr. Bootles!"

"It is not a question of that. I shall see that Mr. Bootles has no opportunity of entering this school again. I will see the letter at your convenience, Mr. Egerton."

"This evening, then, sir."

And Mr. Egerton left the study, leaving the Head of Rookwood quite relieved and satisfied.

But there was a very thoughtful expression on Mr. Egerton's face as he went to his own study.

The 6th Chapter. Morny Means Business.

"Silver!"

"Hallo, Adolphus!"

Adolphus Smythe frowned.

"Mr. Egerton wants you!" he said stiffly. "Like his cheek to send me faggin'! And you can tell him so from me if you like!"

"You can tell him that yourself, old top!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "What does he want me for, Adolphus?"

"To give you a thumpin' good lickin', I hope," answered Smythe charitably. And he walked away with his nose in the air.

Jimmy Silver went into the School House, a little surprised by that summons to the Form-master's study.

He tapped at the door of the study that had once been Mr. Bootles', and entered.

Mr. Egerton was standing before the fire with a frown upon his brow, and Jimmy noticed that there was a cane lying ready on the table.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Jimmy.

"Yes," said Mr. Egerton, fixing his eyes grimly on the junior's surprised face.

"This afternoon, Silver, I warned you against holding any communication with your former master, now dismissed from Rookwood."

"Yes," said Jimmy.

"You have disregarded my order."

"Not at all, sir," answered Jimmy. "I suppose I'm bound to raise my cap to Mr. Bootles if I see him?"

"If that were all it would not matter. But you have been speaking to him!" exclaimed Mr. Egerton sternly.

"I have not, sir!"

"Then some other boy has," said the new master. "I suspect you, Silver, as you appear to be the ringleader in anything that goes on in the Fourth Form, and if my orders have been disregarded, I am pretty well assured that it was done with your knowledge."

"I don't think anybody in the Fourth has spoken to Mr. Bootles since you came here," said Jimmy.

"Nonsense! How, then, does Mr. Bootles know that I have taken his former place in the school, if he has not been told?" exclaimed the Form-master.

"Oh," said Jimmy, comprehending then, "I can explain that, sir! We saw you meet Mr. Bootles in Coombe to-day, and after you had gone on he spoke to us and asked us the question. That was before you spoke to us in the Form-room, of course."

Mr. Egerton gave him a searching glance.

But it was easy for him to see that the captain of the Fourth was speaking the truth, and his brow cleared.

"Very well, Silver, I accept your word," he said. "But remember that my order holds good for the future. Mr. Bootles has constituted himself into my enemy for some reason—"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

"I am sorry to say, Silver, that that is the case; and Mr. Bootles has called upon the Head and attempted to prejudice him against me. Fortunately, Dr. Chisholm refused to pay any attention to his insinuations. In these circumstances, you can see how very improper it would be for Rookwood boys to hold any communication with Mr. Bootles."

"Ye-es, sir," said Jimmy slowly.

"That is all, Silver. You may go!"

The cane on the table remained unused. Jimmy Silver quitted the study with a rather worried look on his face.

"Well?" said Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, with one voice, as they met him at the end of the passage. "Licked?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"I say, it's rather rotten," he said. "Mr. Egerton says that Bootles has been here slanging him to the Head. I shouldn't have thought Mr. Bootles would do a thing like that."

"I dare say the poor old chap's ratty," said Newcome.

"Well, that isn't really an excuse."

"He may know something against Egerton!" suggested Raby.

"What could he know? Besides, if there was anything against him, the Head wouldn't keep him here, and he is keeping him," said Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose Mr. Egerton is right—we ought to give Bootles a wide berth, if he's getting malicious like that. I must say I'm surprised, though."

"I've been looking for you fellows," Valentine Mornington came along.

"What about the campaign, Jimmy Silver?"

"That's off, for the present, at least," said Jimmy.

"I don't see it," said Morny. "What about sticking to Bootles, and backing him up, and all that?"

"Bootles seems to be backing himself up, from what we've just heard," said Lovell drily. "Not in a way I admire, either."

didn't know the damage was already done, and now he's afraid of what Bootles may say to us about him."

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

"It looks like it, and it looks as if Bootles knows something" about the man; and has told the Head," answered Morny obstinately.

"It can't be anything serious, then, or the Head would be down on the man."

"Very likely he wouldn't listen to Bootles—you know what a mule he is," said Mornington. "He would put it all down to jealousy of the new man. Look here, you fellows, you seem to be quite gone on Egerton."

"Well, he seems a really decent chap, and a sportsman. I've noticed that Bulkeley likes him, too."

"I don't say he's not," admitted Mornington. "But I'm sticking to Bootles—and, dash it all, Silver, you ought to do the same. It was through standing up for you that Bootles got the push."

Jimmy shifted uncomfortably.

"How can we go for a man who's done nothing?" he asked. "There's such a thing as fair-play. If he were a worm like the other new masters, it would be different. But he's not. And, as a matter of fact, Morny, Egerton isn't the kind of man to be ragged out of a school. He's not soft at all. Snags or little Mobbsy, if you like—but Egerton's over the weight."

"I mean to try my luck."

"Look here, Morny—"

"Nuff said!" answered Mornington. "Let's agree to differ. I like the new man well enough, personally, but I'm not going to see him permanently berthed in Bootles' place, if I can stop it somehow."

"Well, you can't!"

"I'm goin' to try!"

And Mornington walked away whistling, leaving Jimmy Silver with a knitted brow.

"Cheeky ass!" grunted Lovell.

"Well, he can go ahead," said Jimmy.

"It's hard on Bootles, I know, and I'm not deserting him, if it comes to that; but I can't make up my mind to be

Mr. Egerton was at tea in the Head's house, as Morny had learned, and the cheery Morny had slipped into the study with the intention of "ragging" the room thoroughly in the master's absence.

That was to be the beginning of the campaign against the new master.

Morny was looking round the study, preparatory to beginning the rag, when there were footsteps in the passage outside, and he paused to listen.

There was a sound of bumping, and Morny guessed at once what that meant.

The new master's trunk had arrived, and it was being conveyed to the study.

"What rotten luck! Oh, gad!" muttered Mornington.

Bump! came again from the passage. Mornington cast a hurried look round for a hiding-place.

He did not want old Mack or the sergeant to see him in the room, and it was possible that Mr. Egerton was coming with his trunk.

There was a screen standing in front of the alcove beside the fireplace, and the junior slipped behind it, drawing it back a little so as completely to hide the alcove.

He had barely finished, when the door opened, and old Mack and Sergeant Kettle came in, bearing a heavy trunk between them.

The trunk was bumped down on the floor.

"Eavy, ain't it?" gasped old Mack.

"You're right," said the sergeant.

"Books, I s'pose," said Mack. "Least-ways, he said it was to come into this 'ere study, not upstairs. Wot does a man want with all them books, hey?"

"Blessed if I know," said Mr. Kettle. "No use for 'em myself, I know that."

"And p'raps our gentleman wouldn't want such a blessed lot if he 'ad the carrying of 'em about!" said old Mack darkly. "Ahem! Ah! Hum! Hum! I—I didn't see you, sir."

Mr. Egerton stepped into the study.

His face was bland, however; he did not seem to have heard the old porter's remarks.

He lifted out a writing-case and laid it on the study table.

Then he carefully re-locked the trunk. Morny hoped that he was finished now, and would leave. But, instead of that, Mr. Egerton drew a chair to the table and sat down.

He opened the writing-case, and selected notepaper from the interior, and Morny, watching through the screen in wonder, saw him examining it, as if in search of some special kind of paper.

The Form-master muttered something, as if he had found what he wanted, and the junior's wondering eyes noted that the sheet of paper he held in his hand bore an engraved heading.

It was in the full light, and Mornington was easily able to read the heading: "Highwood Collegiate School."

There was more, in smaller type, which Morny could not discern.

Mr. Egerton laid the sheet on the table, and took up a pen.

He began to write slowly, but not upon the Highwood paper, though he had sorted it out so carefully.

He was writing upon blank sheets slowly, as if composing a letter very carefully as he went along.

Mornington groaned inwardly.

His brief curiosity had evaporated, and he was not in the least interested in the master's proceedings. Neither had he any desire to play the spy.

The junior would have given a good deal to be safe out of the study.

If the man would only go—

But Mr. Egerton showed no sign of going.

He wrote sheet after sheet, and Mornington suppressed his yawns.

"I think that will do!"

Morny started as the unconscious Form-master made that remark aloud, and a slight laugh followed it.

He glanced through the slit again.

To his blank amazement, Mr. Egerton had taken the Highwood School notepaper, and laid it very carefully on the blotter before him.

He proceeded to copy out the last sheet

had been suppressing, had been incautious for a moment.

For some seconds there was silence, and Mornington hoped that he had been mistaken.

Then the new master spoke quietly. "You can come out!"

"That made it clear that the game was up, and Mornington quietly pushed the screen aside, and stepped out of the alcove.

He faced the Form-master calmly, but with a beating heart.

"Mornington, I think?" said Mr. Egerton, scanning him.

"Yes, sir."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was behind the screen," said Morny. "I know that. Why did you come here? The truth, mind."

"I came to rag the study," said Mornington, as coolly as he could.

There was not much use in attempting to disguise the fact now.

"I see. A renewal of what occurred this afternoon at the station in Coombe," said Mr. Egerton.

"Yes."

"And you have been hiding there while I was unpacking my trunk, and writing a letter?"

"Yes."

The master's eyes were searching his face, as if they would read his very soul.

Morny returned his gaze calmly, though his heart was throbbing.

He did not mean to let Mr. Egerton suspect that he had seen, and noted, the Highwood School paper.

He looked as unconscious as he could.

"I have overlooked what happened in Coombe to-day," said Mr. Egerton. "I can make allowances for foolish boys, and their attachment to a former master. But anything further of that kind, Mornington, will not be allowed, and I shall punish you very severely for entering my study without permission."

Mornington breathed hard.

He knew as well as if he had been told that the new master dreaded that he had observed something, though he dared not question him, lest by so doing he should betray himself.

And he knew, too, that a bitter punishment was coming, not because he had intended to "rag" the study, but because the new master had a secret, and feared prying eyes.

Mr. Egerton picked up a cane.

"Hold out your hand, Mornington!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

The cuts were terrible ones, and Morny as the master signed to him to hold out his hand again after the fourth cut, the junior put his hands behind him.

"Hold out your hand, Mornington!" said the new master harshly.

"I've had enough!" said Morny, between his teeth.

"Will you obey me?"

"No."

The next moment he was grasped by the collar, and the cane lashed on his shoulders.

The junior struggled, and kicked, and shouted, but the cane lashed again and again.

The master was almost breathless when he threw open the door, and tossed the quivering junior into the corridor.

"Now go!" he said grimly.

Mornington tottered away.

"Morny!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, aghast, coming quickly up the passage.

Morny's wild yells had reached many ears.

Mr. Egerton stepped out of the study.

"Boys!" he said, and the startled juniors looked at him. "Mornington entered my study for what he calls a rag. I have punished him. Any boy in my Form who follows his example will be dealt with in the same way."

And Mr. Egerton strode away to the Head's study.

Jimmy Silver took Mornington's arm.

Morny was white as chalk, and quivering with pain.

He did not speak as a dozen juniors crowded with him up the staircase to his study in the Fourth.

Erroll uttered a sharp exclamation as he came in.

"Morny! What—"

Mornington threw himself into a chair, gasping.

"He's had it bad, and no mistake," said Lovell. "But, really, Morny—dash it all, the man couldn't be expected to stand having his study ragged."

"I've had it bad," said Mornington, between his teeth, "not because of a rag, but because that man's got a secret, and he was afraid I'd found it out."



"YOU CAN COME OUT!" SAID THE NEW MASTER.

down on a decent man who's done nothing. Let Morny do as he likes, and we'll—well, we'll be guided by circumstances."

To which the Co. assented.

It was really a difficult position, and leaving guidance to circumstances seemed the easiest way out.

Valentine Mornington, however, had made up his mind; his wifful nature was uppermost now, and he meant to have his way.

But when he consulted with his study-mate, Erroll, he found his chum down on the idea.

"Leave it to Jimmy Silver to decide," counselled Erroll. "He's captain of the Fourth, you know, Morny."

"So you're not goin' to help me, Kit?"

"Dash it all, Morny, what has the man done?" asked Erroll.

"He's taken Bootles' job."

"But he was quite innocent in that, as it seems. He never even knew that Bootles was sacked; you can't call him a blackleg."

"We can make him tired of Rookwood," said Mornington, unheeding. "That was the arrangement, an' I don't see droppin' it. Raggin' all along the line—mornin', noon, and night—what?"

"I wish you'd drop it, Morny," said Erroll uneasily. "The fact is, old man, you're ripe for mischief, and you're looking for trouble."

Mornington laughed.

"Perhaps!" he said coolly. "Well, if I go lookin' for trouble, perhaps I shall find it. Perhaps Egerton will. We'll see."

And Mornington strolled away, to carry out his scheme—whatever it was—on his own.

The 7th Chapter. A Startling Discovery.

"Oh, gad!"

Mornington of the Fourth uttered that exclamation below his breath.

He was standing in the Form-master's study, about half an hour after his talk with Erroll.

"Thank you," he said. "Did you find it heavy? I have rather a number of books."

"Eavy is the word, sir," mumbled old Mack.

But his brow cleared as the new master dropped a half-crown into his hand, and the sergeant smiled as he received a similar coin.

As they went down the passage they compared notes, and decided that Mr. Egerton was a gentleman!

Mornington had been grinning behind the screen, but he ceased to grin as he heard Mr. Egerton's voice.

He remained very quiet, hoping that the new master would leave the study; but apparently Mr. Egerton had finished his tea with the Head and Mrs. Chisholm, and had come to stay.

The prospect of remaining behind the screen while Mr. Egerton unpacked his books was rather a dismaying one.

The hidden junior heard the Form-master cross to the door when Mack and Kettle were gone, and close it.

To his surprise, he heard a click, and knew that Mr. Egerton had locked the door.

Why the new master should lock himself in the study with his trunk was a mystery to Mornington, and his curiosity was aroused.

His eyes scanned the screen in front of him, and found a small slit in the material—it was not a new screen, by any means.

Morny had just applied his eye to the slit, when Mr. Egerton came towards the screen.

The junior's heart thumped.

For a moment he thought that his presence there was discovered.

But Mr. Egerton passed the screen, towards the window.

He drew the blinds and turned on the light.

Then Morny heard him unlock the trunk.

There was a sound of unpacking, and of books being laid on the floor, and Morny put his eye to the slit again.

he had written, upon the Highwood paper!

That action was so utterly astounding that Morny could only blink, wondering if he saw aright.

Why should a man at Rookwood School write upon Highwood School notepaper, after carefully composing first what he intended to write?

There could be only one explanation—that he was writing a letter which was to appear to come from Highwood.

What it could possibly mean was a mystery to Mornington.

There was dead silence in the study as Mr. Egerton wrote the letter, and read it over after it was written.

He laid it aside, and carefully collected the other sheets he had written, crumpled them, and put them into the fire, stirring the fire till they were all consumed.

Mornington was a good deal more than suspicious now.

All those sheets had evidently been rough drafts, and he had carefully destroyed them.

Only the letter on the Highwood paper remained.

Mr. Egerton examined it carefully, with Morny's amazed eye on him, and folded it, crumpled it a little, and rubbed it on the blotter.

Morny did not need telling that this was to take the newness off it, and give it the appearance of an old letter.

Then the master slipped it into his pocket.

He stood then, as if in deep thought, and Mornington saw his face in the light.

It was pale, and there were deep lines in it.

He moved at last, and went to the door and unlocked it.

He came back and reached up to the light, and then suddenly paused.

Mornington's heart stood still.

had been suppressing, had been incautious for a moment.

For some seconds there was silence, and Mornington hoped that he had been mistaken.

Then the new master spoke quietly. "You can come out!"

"That made it clear that the game was up, and Mornington quietly pushed the screen aside, and stepped out of the alcove.

He faced the Form-master calmly, but with a beating heart.



LYNCH LAW!

A Splendid Long Complete Story,
dealing with the Adventures of
FRANK RICHARDS & Co., the
Chums of the School in the
Backwoods.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

The 1st Chapter. Held by the Law.

"Cheer up, Beau, old chap!" Frank Richards tried to speak encouragingly, but in spite of himself his look and tone were somewhat dismal.

"I guess it'll all come right, Cherub," said Bob Lawless.

Vere Beauclerc smiled faintly. The three chums of Cedar Creek School were riding home from Thompson, and they had ridden miles in silence with deep gloom on their faces.

Only the beat of hoofs on the dusky trail broke the silence till Frank Richards spoke at last.

Night was falling on the prairie. Behind the three riders the flare of naphtha lights in the frontier town had died down into darkness.

But it still seemed to Vere Beauclerc that he could hear the murmur of the excited mob that had thronged the streets in Thompson.

Beauclerc pulled in his horse as the shack by the creek came in sight in the gloom.

The shack was deserted and dark. Beauclerc's father, the remittance-man, was no longer there.

"What are you stopping for, Cherub?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Good-night, you fellows!" answered Beauclerc.

"Rats!" said Frank promptly. "You're coming home with us—isn't he, Bob?"

"I guess so!" answered Bob emphatically. "You jay, Cherub! Do you think we're going to leave you alone at the shack to-night? Ride on!"

"I've been there alone at night a good many times," said Beauclerc. "It won't hurt me."

"I tell you you're coming on to the ranch!" exclaimed Bob. "Why, the popper would scalp me if I didn't bring you home to-night, when he knows what's happened!"

Beauclerc shook his head. "I'd rather stay at the shack, old fellow. Thank you all the same. Good-night!"

Beauclerc was turning his horse from the trail when Bob caught at his reins.

"Stop!" said Bob. "You're coming to the ranch, old son, whether you like it or not. We won't leave you!"

"Come on, Beau!" urged Frank. Beauclerc's face clouded.

"The fact is, I'd rather stay at home," he said. "I don't feel like company to-night—even yours. I—I want to think it over, for one thing. I've got to help my father somehow."

"You can't help him at present, anyhow. And my popper is the man to give you some advice," said Bob. "No good wagging your chin, Cherub; you're coming, if we have to take you against your will."

"Or else we shall stay at the shack with you," said Frank.

"Look here," said Beauclerc. "I—I mayn't stay indoors to-night—I don't know. Goodness knows what will happen at Thompson! I sha'n't be able to sleep. I don't want to be a worry to you fellows—"

"My dear kid, you can worry us all you want and welcome!" said Bob. "Come on—this way!"

He pulled Beauclerc's horse back into the trail.

The remittance-man's son hesitated a few moments; then he nodded, and rode on with his chums.

The schoolboys of Cedar Creek finished the ride in silence to the Lawless Ranch.

As they came in sight of the ranch-house a burly figure loomed up into view.

"Hallo, you young scallywags! You're back, then?"

"Here we are, Billy!" answered Bob Lawless cheerily.

"You haven't been at school this afternoon," said Billy Cook. "Your popper has heard from Miss Meadows, Bob. Look out for the trail-ropes when you get in!"

And the ranch foreman chuckled, and trumped on towards his cabin.

The chums of Cedar Creek put up their horses, and went into the ranch-house, where Mr. Lawless met them with a stern brow.

He gave Vere Beauclerc a genial nod, but he had only frowns for his son and nephew.

"What does this mean, Bob?" he asked. "I have heard from Miss Meadows that you left school to-day, and did not return for the afternoon."

"I'm afraid it was my fault, Mr. Lawless," said Beauclerc, colouring. "Frank and Bob came with me. My father—"

His voice faltered.

Mr. Lawless' expression changed at once.

"I hope nothing has happened to your father, my boy?" he said kindly.

"He has been arrested," said Beauclerc, in a low voice.

"What!"

The remittance-man's son coloured more deeply.

"He is accused of being the leader of the Flour-Bag Gang, who robbed the post-wagon, sir. It is not true, of course!"

"I am sure of that," said Mr. Lawless. "It's a shame!" broke in Bob Lawless.

"Mr. Beauclerc was taken to Thompson this afternoon, father, and put into the calaboose. The deputy-sheriff arrested him. We—we went along when they started, and we couldn't get back to school."

"I understand. This is very serious," said the rancher, with a grave face. "It is a mistake, of course."

"Of course!" said Frank.

"But Mr. Oakes must have some grounds for his action," went on the rancher. "Do you know—"

"Well, there is some evidence," said Bob reluctantly. "One of the Red Dog crowd in Thompson accused Mr. Beauclerc at first—a ruffian named Keno Kit. Nobody would take his word, of course, but it made Mr. Oakes go to the shack with the sheriff's men and search it. And—and they found—"

"Well, what did they find?"

"They found the four gold-bags that had been taken from the post-wagon by the road-agents," said Beauclerc very quietly. "They were hidden in the roof of our shack."

The rancher started.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. Beauclerc smiled bitterly.

"They were not hidden there by my father," he said. "Last night someone was hanging round the shack—we found his footprints in the morning. That man, whoever he was, hid the gold-bags in the roof. There was no gold in them. He put them there for evidence against my father."

"Oh!"

Mr. Lawless uttered that ejaculation in a very dubious way.

"I think it was Pooker Pete, the sport of Thompson," said Beauclerc. "He was my father's enemy, and my father knew him to be one of the Flour-Bag Gang, and warned him to leave the section. He has played this trick to revenge himself. And—and the sheriff was shot down by the road-agent—and my father is accused of that."

Mr. Lawless knitted his brows.

He was aware that Mr. Henderson, the sheriff of Thompson, was lying badly wounded in his home, and that all Thompson was wildly excited on the subject.

"Where was Mr. Beauclerc when the post-wagon was robbed?" he asked.

"At the shack."

"Alone?"

"He is generally alone when he is working on our clearing. The shack is in a very lonely place."

"That is true. Then he cannot prove—"

"No."

The rancher pursed his lips. "You see, father," said Bob dismally, "the road-agent who shot the sheriff down got away with those four gold-bags. Now

everybody in Thompson believes that it was Mr. Beauclerc. I—I suppose we can't blame them, if you come to that. But we know it wasn't the Cherub's father who did it."

Mr. Lawless nodded.

He was quite aware that Bob's faith was founded upon the fact that Beauclerc was his chum, and that he could not believe such evil of his chum's father.

That was reasoning good enough for Bob and Frank, but it was not likely to be good enough for the Thompson folk.

"And Mr. Beauclerc is now in the calaboose?" he asked.

"Yes, under guard," said Bob. "I—I suppose he will have to stand his trial. But it's bound to turn out all right."

"I am sure of it," said Mr. Lawless. "I am glad you have come here, Beauclerc. You must stay here until your father is released. And I will see to his having proper defence. I will ride over to Thompson first thing in the morning and see him in the calaboose, and make arrangements with him."

"You are very good, sir," said Beauclerc, his voice trembling a little. "My father was never so much in need of a friend."

"He will not want for a friend to see him through," said the rancher, with a smile. "There is good law in Canada, my boy, and your father will have justice. Now go in to your supper."

The 2nd Chapter. The Shadow of Dread!

Frank Richards and his cousin did their best to cheer up Beauclerc that evening, and both the rancher and Mrs. Lawless were very kind to him.

They felt keenly for the lonely boy, upon whom this terrible blow had so suddenly fallen.

It was arranged that Beauclerc should make the ranch his home until his father's release, that release being spoken of as a certainty.

But in their hearts Beauclerc's friends knew that it was by no means a certainty.

And the boy knew that they knew it, hard as they tried to conceal their belief.

Innocent or guilty, the evidence was strong against Lascelles Beauclerc, and his old reputation as a wastrel told against him.

When his trial came off, his acquittal was anything but certain, and the rancher's family could not help realising it.

Indeed, it was by no means assured that Mr. Lawless himself believed in the remittance-man's innocence.

If he doubted it, he did not say so in the presence of Vere Beauclerc, but the boy was quick to observe.

Not that he blamed the rancher for any doubts that might have come into his mind.

All Mr. Lawless knew of Lascelles Beau-

clerc was that he was a "remittance-man," a man who, in the hard-working Canadian West, lived on money sent him by relations in the Old Country, and who generally spent his remittances in riotous living.

True, of late, the remittance-man had settled down to steady work, but he had had spells of reform before, and they had never lasted.

Whether he doubted or not, the rancher intended to do all that could be done for the accused man, and to see that he had proper defence at his trial when it came off.

Even if guilty, the unfortunate man was entitled to that.

But there was a deeper dread haunting Beauclerc's mind, though he did not speak of it.

The trial would not come off for some time, but the accused man's son feared a nearer danger.

The men of Thompson were enraged by the shooting down of the popular sheriff, and Mr. Henderson, lying in a serious condition in his house, would not be able to exercise his usual control over the rougher elements in the town.

When the chums had ridden out of Thompson, the ugly words "Judge Lynch" had already been muttered on all sides.

What if the prisoner in the calaboose was given no chance to stand his trial, and to prove, if he could, his innocence?

What if Lynch Law reigned, perhaps that very night, in Thompson?

That was the terrible thought at the back of Beauclerc's mind.

He would not appear insensible to the kindness he received on all sides, and he did not wish to cast a gloom over his kind friends, so he did his best to assume a cheerfulness that evening that he was far from feeling.

But it was a hard task.

He was glad when bedtime came, and he went up to the room shared by Frank and Bob, where another bed had been placed for him.

Frank Richards looked rather anxiously at his chum's haggard face in the candle-light.

Beauclerc smiled faintly as he met his glance.

"You fellows turn in!" he said.

"You're going to turn in, too, Beau?" Beauclerc shook his head.

"I couldn't sleep," he answered.

"But, old chap—"

"I sha'n't disturb you, though. I'll lie down a bit, anyhow," said Beauclerc.

"Never mind about disturbing us," said Bob. "You ought to get some sleep, Cherub."

"Well, I'll try, Bob."

Beauclerc lay down in his clothes, only removing his boots.

His eyes did not close.

Sleep was impossible to the remittance-man's son that night.

He was thinking of his father, shut in the lumber gail at Thompson.

What was happening in the town now? Beauclerc pictured to himself the rough crowd in the Red Dog saloon—Four Kings, Euchre Dick, and their associates—and the wild talk of Lynch Law that would grow bolder as the whisky circulated.

And it was not only the ruffianly Red Dog crowd. All Thompson was excited and furious.

He had heard many a wild tale of lynch mobs over the border. Such happenings were unknown, or almost unknown, in law-abiding Canada.

But Thompson was a frontier town, on the edge of the settlements, and the strong man who was a pillar of order there, lay in a sick-bed, struck down by a lawless robber while doing his duty.

And the Thompson mob believed, with full conviction, that the man who had shot him down was the man in the calaboose.

What if the mob rose that very night, to administer the rough justice of the West?

LET US HEAR FROM YOU 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!

I should not be at all surprised if the astounding happenings in this week's story of the Rookwood chums have considerably puzzled my readers. Mr. Egerston's actions are certainly very perplexing, and I have no doubt that you are all wondering whether there is any truth in Mr. Bootles' assertion that the new master is a thief. When I tell you, however, that the title of next Monday's magnificent long complete story is

"SCHOOLMASTER AND CRACKSMAN!"

By Owen Conquest,

you will, no doubt, be able to guess the real character of the new master. You will read how Mornington rebels against the new master, and how he pays a visit to the old masters and hears some startling news. But, what is more important than all, you will read of some exciting experiences that befall Jimmy Silver & Co. at dead of night. A desperate attempt is made to rob the Head's safe, and— Well, I wonder whether you can guess the name of the robber?

Next Monday's grand long complete tale of Frank Richards & Co. will be entitled:

"PAYING THE PENALTY!"

By Martin Clifford.

I am sure you have all been extremely sorry for Vere Beauclerc's father in his terrible predicament, and have longed for the leader of the Flour-Bag Gang to be caught and brought to justice. In next Monday's yarn you will learn how the chums undertake this tremendous task. Pooker Pete is a daring, reckless rogue, and is not the sort of man to give in without a desperate fight. Therefore, you can rest assured that there will be no lack of thrilling and exciting incidents in "Paying the Penalty."

You will not be able to help roaring with laughter when you read next Monday's grand long instalment of our amazing adventure serial,

"THE BOYS WHO CAUGHT THE KAISER!"

By Duncan Storm.

The boys take Baron von Slyden in hand. They help to feed the Hun, and Cecil, the orang-outang, lends his assistance, too. Cecil is by no means light of hand, and, therefore, you may be sure that things do not run at all smoothly for the Kaiser's agent. But Slyden's sorrows do not end there—not by any means. The boys are resolved to do their best to reform him.

In the next instalment of our splendid school serial,

"BARKER, THE BOUNDER!"

By Herbert Britton.

you will find out what happened to Jack Jackson after he fell over the edge of the cliff. You will also read of a desperate attempt on the bouncer's part to escape the punishment that he so richly deserves.

GREAT BARRING-OUT SERIES.

I want to draw the attention of every reader of the BOYS' FRIEND to the splendid series of Barring-Out stories which are now appearing in the "Penny Popular." Next Friday's story is entitled:

"BARRED OUT!"

By Owen Conquest,

and the exciting adventures which fall to the lot of Jimmy Silver & Co. and the other rebels make most interesting reading. There are two other stories in this Friday's "Penny Pop." One is entitled: "Bunter, the Smoker" by Frank Richards, and introducing Harry Wharton & Co. whilst the other deals with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. and is called "Misunderstood!" by Martin Clifford.

I would strongly urge upon every one of you to order your copies of the "Penny Popular" at once.

YOUR EDITOR.

It was not likely that Beauclerc would sleep with such a thought in his mind. He knew the excitement and fury that reigned in the frontier town, and the bitter animosity towards all the Flour-Bag Gang.

The fact that the Flour-Bag Gang were the first rascals to attempt the "road-agent" business in the Thompson Valley added to the bitterness. The robbers had found many easy victims during the short time they had been at work in the valley.

Miners who had lost their hard-earned "dust," and cattlemen who had been held up on the prairie and robbed of their pay, were not likely to make nice distinctions about forms of law.

The chief of the road-agents was there, according to their belief; the man who had robbed them, and had shot the popular sheriff in evading capture, and the proof of his guilt seemed complete.

Why wait for the law's delays, when a rope and a branch would settle the matter at once, and constitute a warning to any other rascals who might think of playing the same game?

That thought was in many minds, as Beauclerc knew well.

Even before he had left the town he had heard the rumblings that told of a coming storm.

His eyelids did not close.

Long after the lights were out, and the ranch was buried in slumber, Beauclerc lay with wide-open eyes, staring into the darkness.

Early hours were kept at the Lawless Ranch, as in most Canadian homesteads, and the night was yet young when Beauclerc moved at last.

He could bear the misery of doubt and fear no longer.

He rose quietly from his bed, felt for his boots in the darkness, and slipped them on.

There was a sound of a movement, and he started.

"Is that you, Beau?"

Beauclerc caught his breath. "Frank!"

"Yes. What are you getting up for?"

"I didn't know you were awake, Frank."

"I haven't slept, old chap." Frank sat up in his bed, peering through the gloom. "I guessed what was in your mind."

"I guess it was pretty plain," came Bob Lawless' voice. "Don't be a goat, Cherub, old man. You can't get out to-night."

"I'm sorry you fellows are awake. Don't get up," said Beauclerc.

"Are you going out?"

"Yes."

"To Thompson?"

"Yes."

"But, look here, Beau—"

"You should have let me stay at the shack," said Beauclerc. "I can't rest here. I've got to go."

"But you can't see your father, old chap. The calaboose will be shut up for the night, anyhow."

Beauclerc breathed hard.

"If I were sure of that, Frank, I shouldn't stir," he said. "But I'm not sure of it."

"What are you afraid of, Beau?" asked Frank quietly.

"Lynch Law!" muttered Beauclerc.

"Not in Canada," said Bob Lawless. "Dash it all, Cherub, this isn't the Black Hills, you know, or South Carolina."

"You heard the talk as we came away from Thompson, Bob."

"Only bluff—the Red Dog crowd," said Bob.

"I don't feel sure of that. I'm going, anyhow. You fellows go to sleep. You'll feel rotten in the morning."

"We're not going to sleep; we're going to Thompson if you go," said Bob Lawless coolly.

"There's no need—"

"You fathead!" said Frank. "If you're right there'll be a lynch mob loose in Thompson. And do you think we're letting you go there alone?"

"You couldn't do any good."

"You couldn't, for that matter. If you go, we go."

"I must go!" said Beauclerc.

"That settles it, then."

Frank and Bob turned out of bed and dressed themselves quickly.

Beauclerc raised no further objection to their accompanying him. He knew it would be useless.

Quietly the three schoolboys slipped downstairs and let themselves out of the ranch.

The night was dark, but a few stars glimmered in the sky overhead.

As they led their horses from the corral Billy Cook, the foreman, loomed up in the gloom.

The ranch foreman was making his rounds before going to his cabin for the night.

"Waal, what's this game?" demanded Billy Cook severely.

"Just a little trot," said Bob. "The Cherub's anxious about his father, and were going to Thompson. Not a word, old man!"

The ranchman gave them a startled glance.

"You young scallywags, get back to bed!" he exclaimed gruffly. "You keep away from Thompson!"

"Why?" asked Beauclerc quietly, but with a throbbing heart.

For he saw—as his comrades saw—what was in Billy Cook's mind.

The grassland flashed away under the galloping hoofs as the chums rode at a reckless speed for the town.

The lights of Thompson flared in the sky at last.

It was midnight, when most of Thompson was usually in bed, only a few saloons keeping open till a later hour.

But the light in the sky showed that few of the Thompson folk had gone to bed, all the naphtha lights were still ablaze in Main Street.

As they drew nearer the town a dull, heavy murmur reached their ears from afar—the murmur of a mob.

Beaulere, his face white as chalk, urged on his horse, and his comrades rode hard to keep pace with him.

The murmur grew louder and more menacing in tone, and at last the three riders could distinguish words.

And the words that came clearly to their ears at last were:

"Lynch him! Lynch him!"

The 3rd Chapter.
Lynch Law!

"Lynch him!"

It was a roar from a mob that thronged the main street of Thompson.

The crowd was thickest round the lumber calabooze.

The flare of the naphtha-lamps showed up fierce, excited faces, and there was an occasional rattle of revolvers discharged into the air.

Frank Richards & Co. dismounted at the point where the trail ran into Main Street, and tethered their horses to a tree.

Their faces were pale now.

Together, in silence, they pressed on and mingled with the crowd.

Little notice was taken of the school-boys.

The crowd were moving towards the calabooze, thickening the throng already gathered there.

"Lynch him!"

"Have him out!"

"Judge Lynch! Judge Lynch!"

It was almost an incessant roar, the mob, like a wild animal, lashing itself to fury with its own voice.

The three schoolboys, caught in the whirl of the crowd, were carried on almost without their own volition.

Gunten's store, which they passed, was closed and shuttered, but at upper windows they caught sight of the faces of Kern Gunten and his father looking out on the wild scene.

The mob surged past the store.

The calabooze was a wooden building, on a patch of waste ground off Main Street, with no other buildings close at hand.

The open ground was thronged now with a mob that encircled the gaol, but was thickest in front.

On a barrel amid the throngs was mounted Four Kings, the leader of the Red Dog crowd.

The ruffian was addressing the mob.

In any lawless mischief that might be afoot the Red Dog crowd were sure to be to the fore, and surest of all Four Kings, the worst of the gang.

No doubt the lawlessness of Lynch Law appealed to the brutal instincts of the ruffians, but it was possible that he had other motives.

Frank Richards & Co. knew that Four Kings was a "pard" of Poker Pete, whom they suspected of being the real leader of the Flour-Bag Gang, and whom Mr. Beaulere had warned out of the valley.

If Poker Pete had placed the incriminating evidence at the Beaulere shack, it was probable that his friends in Thompson were completing the work by rousing a lynch mob to take the unhappy man out of gaol and execute a summary sentence.

Only Mr. Beaulere could witness that Poker Pete was connected with the road-agent gang, and the summary justice of Judge Lynch would close his lips for ever, and save the sport from the penalty of his crimes.

As the three schoolboys were borne onward by the crowd towards the calabooze the loud voice of Four Kings boomed to their ears.

"Have him out! Citizens of Thompson, yonder lies the sheriff, with a bullet in him, peggin' out! Who shot him down? The man who's in yonder calabooze!"

There was a roar.

"They're talking of sending him to Kamloops for trial!" continued Four Kings. "Is that what we want—out of reach, with lawyers paid to swear that black's white to save his skin? You put your money on it, pards, that if he goes out of Thompson with a whole skin he goes free by lawyers' tricks."

Another roar.

Four Kings' rough eloquence appealed to the crowd in their present humour.

"Have him out!"

It was a shout from a hundred throats.

The more law-abiding citizens were keeping within doors. The mob held possession of the town, and every moment they were working themselves into wilder excitement.

The "tanglefoot" had been flowing freely in the Red Dog saloon, as the flushed faces in the crowd showed.

"Hang him!" roared Euchre Dick.

"Have him out, citizens! No lawyer tricks at Kamloops for this crowd! Have him out!"

"Lynch him!"

Vere Beaulere set his teeth, his face colourless, his eyes burning.

Jammed in the thickening crowd, the boys were swept towards the calabooze, Four Kings jumping down from the barrel to lead the mob.

Within a few yards of the flimsy building there was a half.

The gaol consisted only of two rooms, both on the ground floor, with a little porch.

In the porch stood the short, thick-set figure of John Oakes, the deputy-sheriff of Thompson.

His bearded face was steady and calm, and his strong hands grasped a rifle.

He faced the mob with the rifle half-raised.

"Steady!" he called out. "Not a step nearer! I guess I'm in charge of this calabooze, boys!"

A roar answered him.

"We want Old Man Beaulere!"

"Hand him out, John Oakes! Give him to us!"

The deputy-sheriff shook his head.

"I reckon not," he answered. "Old Man Beaulere is my prisoner. You won't touch him without walking over my rifle first!"

"Do you want a rope and a branch, too?" roared Four Kings.

"Try it on!" answered Oakes coolly.

The crowd surged and shouted, but they hesitated.

The deputy-sheriff stood like a rock in the way, and there was no doubt that he would fire in defence of his charge.

And most of the crowd, rough as they were, were loth to harm the man who was standing up for his duty.

There was a breathless pause.

"Let up!" said Oakes at last. "You can't have Old Man Beaulere! He's going to stand his trial, and that's good enough for Canada. This hyer town isn't run by a gang of rustlers from over the border!"

Four Kings and his "pards" were the object of that remark, which made some impression on the rest of the crowd.

Four Kings made a step forward, and the deputy-sheriff's rifle came up to the level.

"Stop!" he said grimly. "Men of Thompson, your sheriff lies ill in his bed, and his duty falls on me. I shall do it to the end. Four Kings, if you take another step I shall burn powder! Men, isn't there anyone here to stand up for law and order?"

From the crowd a figure leaped. Vere Beaulere ran forward.

"I, for one!" he exclaimed.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless followed him.

His bearded face was steady and calm, and his strong hands grasped a rifle.

He faced the mob with the rifle half-raised.

"Steady!" he called out. "Not a step nearer! I guess I'm in charge of this calabooze, boys!"

A roar answered him.

"We want Old Man Beaulere!"

"Hand him out, John Oakes! Give him to us!"

The deputy-sheriff shook his head.

"I reckon not," he answered. "Old Man Beaulere is my prisoner. You won't touch him without walking over my rifle first!"

"Do you want a rope and a branch, too?" roared Four Kings.

"Try it on!" answered Oakes coolly.

The crowd surged and shouted, but they hesitated.

The deputy-sheriff stood like a rock in the way, and there was no doubt that he would fire in defence of his charge.

And most of the crowd, rough as they were, were loth to harm the man who was standing up for his duty.

There was a breathless pause.

"Let up!" said Oakes at last. "You can't have Old Man Beaulere! He's going to stand his trial, and that's good enough for Canada. This hyer town isn't run by a gang of rustlers from over the border!"

Four Kings and his "pards" were the object of that remark, which made some impression on the rest of the crowd.

Four Kings made a step forward, and the deputy-sheriff's rifle came up to the level.

"Stop!" he said grimly. "Men of Thompson, your sheriff lies ill in his bed, and his duty falls on me. I shall do it to the end. Four Kings, if you take another step I shall burn powder! Men, isn't there anyone here to stand up for law and order?"

From the crowd a figure leaped. Vere Beaulere ran forward.

"I, for one!" he exclaimed.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless followed him.

His bearded face was steady and calm, and his strong hands grasped a rifle.

He faced the mob with the rifle half-raised.

"Steady!" he called out. "Not a step nearer! I guess I'm in charge of this calabooze, boys!"

A roar answered him.

"We want Old Man Beaulere!"

"Hand him out, John Oakes! Give him to us!"

The deputy-sheriff shook his head.

"I reckon not," he answered. "Old Man Beaulere is my prisoner. You won't touch him without walking over my rifle first!"

"Do you want a rope and a branch, too?" roared Four Kings.

"Try it on!" answered Oakes coolly.

The crowd surged and shouted, but they hesitated.

The deputy-sheriff stood like a rock in the way, and there was no doubt that he would fire in defence of his charge.

And most of the crowd, rough as they were, were loth to harm the man who was standing up for his duty.

There was a breathless pause.

"Let up!" said Oakes at last. "You can't have Old Man Beaulere! He's going to stand his trial, and that's good enough for Canada. This hyer town isn't run by a gang of rustlers from over the border!"

Four Kings and his "pards" were the object of that remark, which made some impression on the rest of the crowd.

Four Kings made a step forward, and the deputy-sheriff's rifle came up to the level.

"Stop!" he said grimly. "Men of Thompson, your sheriff lies ill in his bed, and his duty falls on me. I shall do it to the end. Four Kings, if you take another step I shall burn powder! Men, isn't there anyone here to stand up for law and order?"

From the crowd a figure leaped. Vere Beaulere ran forward.

"I, for one!" he exclaimed.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless followed him.



IN THE HANDS OF THE LYNCHERS!

"They faced round at the crowd beside the porch.

There was a howl from the lynch mob as Beaulere was recognised.

"That's his son!"

"Hang him, too!" roared Four Kings.

John Oakes knitted his brows.

"Out of this, you boys!" he rapped out. "This isn't a place for schoolboys!"

"My place is where my father is when his life is threatened," answered Beaulere quietly.

Frank and Bob did not speak or move. They stood steady beside their chum.

They would not desert him, but there was no hope in their hearts.

Already, from behind, the crowd was pushing forward those in front, and the mob edged nearer.

Four Kings hesitated, for the deputy-sheriff's eye was upon him, and he knew that the first bullet was for him when the rush came.

Suddenly, from the back of the crowd, a stone came whizzing, and it struck the deputy-sheriff on the side of the head.

Oakes staggered, with a sharp cry, and reeled against the door, his rifle sagging down, and as the deadly muzzle was lowered Four Kings rushed forward.

Oakes recovered himself and raised his rifle, and there was a sharp report; but the ruffian had hold of the barrel, and he forced it upward.

The bullet sped away towards the sky, and the next instant the rough crowd was round Four Kings and the deputy-sheriff.

The rifle was wrenched away, and the deputy-sheriff, struggling manfully, was borne down, and disappeared under the mob.

Crash, crash!

Heavy blows rained on the door of the calabooze like the knell of doom to the unhappy man within.

Vere Beaulere struggled forward, but the surge of the crowd drove him back, and Frank caught him as he was falling.

Crash!

The door splintered, and, with a roar, the mob swept into the gaol.

Lynch Law was triumphant now.

"Seize that cub!" shouted Four Kings. "Drag him away!"

Crash!

The boy's clenched fist struck the leader of the lynch mob full between the eyes, and Four Kings went to the ground like a log.

Then Beaulere faced the surging, shouting mob with blazing eyes.

"Cowards! Brutes!" he shouted. "If you kill him you can kill me, too! Cowards!"

There was a rush, and the remittance-man, left free for a moment, threw himself before his son.

"Stop!" he cried, in a voice of agony. "Let him go! You have me! You do not want to hurt my boy! Let him go!"

"Smash him! Smash the cub!" howled Four Kings, staggering to his feet. "Let me get at him!"

"Go, my boy—go!" panted the remittance-man.

"I will not go! Let them kill me, too!"

The mob closed on father and son.

Rough hands seized Vere Beaulere, and he was dragged away from his father, resisting desperately.

As he fought and kicked and struggled heavy blows struck him, and he was buried away, half senseless, to the ground.

Then the mob swept on again with their victim.

Beaulere rose dazedly to his knees. His senses were swimming.

Frank Richards reached him as the mob left them behind, and grasped his chum's arm to support him.

"Beau!" he panted.

The lynchers were under the tree now, Euchre Dick clambered into the tree, and threw the end of the rope over a branch.

As it dangled down it was seized by three or four pairs of hands, and it tautened about the neck of the doomed man.

Still the remittance-man stood pale and calm.

Grim death hovered over him.

There was no mercy in the savage faces round him, no faltering in the grasp that held the fatal rope.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

The 4th Chapter.
In the Hands of Judge Lynch.

"Have him out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Lynch him!"

"Hyer he is!"

Four Kings and another ruffian appeared in the doorway with a haggard, white-faced man between them, grasping his arms.

It was Lascelles Beaulere, the remittance-man of Cedar Camp.

Even in that terrible moment the remittance-man was calm.

His face was white and set, but no emotion flickered in it; his courage was equal to this fearful trial.

"Hyier he is!" roared Four Kings. "A rope! A rope!"

"Hyier's the rope!"

"Bring him along!"

Euchre Dick flung the noose of a lasso over the head of the remittance-man as he stood in the grasp of his captors.

"Bring him along!"

A dozen yards away, on the edge of the street, stood a tall tree, left there when the clearing was made.

Towards the tree the mob surged, the remittance-man in its midst, still calm, silent, almost disdainful.

Then through the surging mob a figure came struggling, fighting his way with hands and feet in a madness of fury and despair.

There were curses and savage blows, but Vere Beaulere reached his father's side.

The remittance-man's face changed at the sight of his son.

"Vere!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Are you mad, boy? What are you doing here?"

"Father!"

Reeling under the blows that had struck him, Vere Beaulere reached his father, and clung to him.

Frank Richards and Bob struggled to reach him, but the angry crowd whirled them back.

Four Kings stood before him, a savage grin on his face, to give the signal for the rope to be hauled—the signal that was to plunge an unhappy man into eternity.

"I guess this lets you out, Old Man Beaulere!" said the ruffian. "Anything to say before you go up?"

Lascelles Beaulere's lip curled.

"Only this," he answered, in a clear, steady voice that was heard on all sides as the roar of the mob was hushed. "I am innocent! If you hang me you hang an innocent man!"

"Is that all?" jeered the ruffian.

"That is all!" said Mr. Beaulere steadily. "Now do your worst!"

"Lynch him!"

"Father!" It was a cry of anguish from Vere Beaulere, struggling to reach his father, and held back by rough hands.

"Father!"

"Lynch him!"

"Up with him!"

The hands were tightening on the rope when there was a thunder of horse's hoofs, and wild howls from the mob, as a horseman drove his way recklessly through them, hurling them right and left.

He reached the doomed man under the tree, and dragged in his horse, amid a yell of fury from the lynchers.

But the yell died away in a gasp of stupefaction as the horseman was recognised.

"The sheriff!"

The 5th Chapter.
Saved!

It was the sheriff.

He was pale as death, his bronzed face worn with illness, his eyes deeply sunken.

The roar of the lynch mob had brought Sheriff Henderson from his bed of sickness.

The lynchers let go the rope in sheer amazement.

Lascelles Beaulere stood like a statue,

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant.

In the midst of a stupefied silence the sheriff seized the noose and threw it from the prisoner's neck.

Then he faced the mob, his white face set and grim.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

His voice was weak and faint, but its tone was commanding.

The crowd surged back.

Four Kings uttered a howl of rage.

"You sha'n't save him, sheriff! That's the man who shot you down. That's the last of the Flour-Bag Gang! He's going to hang!"

"He may be," answered the sheriff coolly; "but he's going to be tried for his life in a court of law. There'll be no Lynch Law in the Thompson Valley while I am sheriff. I've come from a sick bed to stop you, and it may cost me my life—very likely will. But the man who lays a hand on him dies the next second."

A revolver glimmered in the sheriff's hand.

But it was not needed.

The sight of the man who had come, weak from a sick-bed, at the risk of his life, was enough for most of the lynchers.

It was the shooting down of the sheriff that had roused their rage and vengeance, and his voice was enough to calm the tumult.

The looks of the rough crowd showed Four Kings plainly enough that the feeling was turning against him.

He glanced round at the abashed faces, gritting his teeth.

"Boys, we're out to lynch the road-agent!" he shouted. "Are you going to let a sick man stop you? Follow me!"

The sheriff raised his hand.

"Seize that man!" he said. "Men of Thompson, I am the sheriff of this town, and I call on you to support me. Put that ruffian in the calabooze!"

There was a moment of wavering.

Then two or three big cattlemen closed round Four Kings and gripped his arms.

The ruffian struggled, but the sheriff's revolver was levelled at him.

retrieved from death at the last instant