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TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR!

No. 1,001. Vol. XX. New Series]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending August 14th, 1920.

REDSKINS AND "RUSTLERS"



DESPERATE ODDS!

"Steady, boys!" roared Arizona Jim. The circle of charging Indians was less than a hundred yards wide now, and the few white men in the centre of it were firing grimly, steadily. But the odds were desperately heavy against them!

(For Opening Chapters turn to next page.)

A Hot Fight.

As Bob watched, he understood the manoeuvre the raiders were seeking to carry out. They had the white men surrounded, they travelled at a speed which made the chance of hitting them very rare. And, after each time they completed the circle they rode, they came perceptibly nearer to the coach and its defenders.

"Mr. Bob," said Dicky, over his right arm, "they told me back home in England that Indian fightin' was done with. This don't look like it. This reminds me of Buffalo Bill's adventures, which I was readin' about just before we left home!"

Bob said nothing, but he felt almost like laughing at the quaintness of his little servant and friend.

"But I wish they'd start and do somethin'!" Dicky continued. "I'm gettin' tired of this, Mr. Bob. Bit like a circus!"

"Fire!" said a stern voice suddenly—the voice of Arizona Jim.

Bob had had the man marked he intended to fire at when the order

came, and at once he got that Redskin well over his foresight. Now, with the danger really here, Bob felt no nervousness; only a tense excitement. His hands and eye were steady.

So quickly did the white men obey the order, that their shots were almost a volley. Bob saw the man he aimed at drop, but, like a soldier in action, he knew that the chances were strong that somebody else had fired at him also.

Four Redskin saddles were emptied by that volley. Four riderless horses began to gallop about the plain. And the circle the rest of the Indians formed began to widen, as the red men turned away from the coach. But the circle was not in any way broken; only the intervals between the riders increased.

"Fire only when you're told, boys," said Arizona quietly. "This is going to be a long job, unless the cavalry turn up sooner than I expect 'em to." They held their fire, while the Indians, now three hundred yards away, continued to gallop about them in their steady circle. Three hundred yards is a long distance at which to fire at a moving object. Bob Raynor

himself knew that. And the odds were something like twenty to one, therefore it behooved them all not to waste ammunition yet. Arizona Jim, if no one else, knew that this method of fighting had always been resorted to by the red men. It tempted the defending party to throw away valuable powder and shot, so that when the final rush was made they would be defenceless.

But it was plain that the Indians had received a lesson as a result of that first volley. They had, no doubt, been surprised to know that Arizona Jim was amongst the white men. Arizona Jim was a man whose name was feared through the West, by Redskins and rustlers alike. Now they had grown cautious. But they continued their encircling movement.

"Did ye hit yours, Mr. Bob?" asked Dicky. "I aimed at a yelling murderer, and he threw up his hands. I hope I knocked him over. The swine! They knew we've got women with us, too!"

Bob shrugged his shoulders, his ears alert for Arizona's next order. But he was inclined to agree with Arizona now. He did not blame the red men

so much for this lapse from grace, as the rustlers, white men, outlaws, Ishmaels, men who had fallen so low as to tempt red men to come out on the war-path to murder, burn, and ravish.

He looked round at the pile of boxes and trunks, including the Wells-Fargo chest, which, he knew, contained over a hundred thousand dollars in currency, but which just now had hastily been rigged up as a redoubt behind which Mrs. Grant might crouch and shelter. No stray bullets would hit her, Bob figured. And, setting his teeth, he determined that, while there was a breath in his body, those red fiends should not get near enough to her to harm a hair of her head.

"Ha!" cried Arizona Jim suddenly. "Keep steady, boys! Fire independently, but don't waste a shot. They're rushing us sooner than I thought they would! They seem a desperate lot. Curse that blackguard Mattawa Frank! Steady!"

The Redskins had certainly adopted another manoeuvre. They had all wheeled their horses on their hunkers, so that now every one's head was

towards the white defenders of the coach. And they were charging steadily down upon the gallant whites, their circle growing narrower every stride their horses took.

Bob Raynor set his teeth grimly, worked the lever of his Winchester, and poured his bullets—as did the rest—into the oncoming horde of yelling demons.

Upon the steadiness of his aim, and the aim of the other menfolk, depended the lives of all, including Mrs. Grant.

And, as he fired, he forgot his original mission in coming out here—that of looking for a friend. He remembered, instead, that this attack was the work of a renegade white, a rustler, an outlaw. He only wished he could see a white man amongst these Indians. He knew that, if he could, his rifle would not waver as it pointed at the man.

"Steady, boys!" roared Arizona Jim. "We sure could do with the cavalry now!"

The circle of charging Indians was less than a hundred yards wide now, and the few white men were in the very centre of it, firing grimly,

A GRAND, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.



Back To The Old School!

A Splendid, Complete Story of
the Chums of Rookwood School,
and Valentine Mornington.
By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

Music Hath Charms!

It started suddenly. Rookwood School was at lessons. In the Fourth Form room, Mr. Bootles was busy with his class.

Erroll of the Fourth had stood up to construe. His construe was not quite up to the mark, though as a rule he was one of Mr. Bootles' best pupils. But poor Erroll was thinking of his absent chum, Mornington, whose place in the Fourth was empty, and his work had fallen off very much of late.

Mr. Bootles had opened his mouth to make some remarks on Erroll's construe; and Lovell whispered to Jimmy Silver that Erroll was going through it. But Mr. Bootles' remarks were never made.

For just then the music started suddenly.

Through the open windows of the Form-room—wide open in the warm summer morning—the sweet strains floated in from the quadrangle.

It was the grind of a barrel-organ that smote abruptly upon the ears of master and pupils.

The tune it was playing was an ancient one, and had reference to a Mr. William Bailey, who, apparently, was far from home.

Mr. Bootles jumped, and then stood rooted to the floor, as if thunderstruck.

Erroll's voice faltered and stopped. Jimmy Silver looked at his chums, aghast. Two or three of the juniors broke into a chuckle.

A hurdy-gurdy grinding under the Form-room windows was a new experience at Rookwood.

Certainly it was Mack the porter's duty to see that no such itinerant music-merchant gained admittance into the sacred precincts of the school. Equally certainly, old Mack had failed in his duty that morning. For there the hurdy-gurdy was grinding!

"Is it Morny?"

That was the question in every mind in the Fourth Form-room.

But the question answered itself. They knew it was Morny; that it must be Morny. Certainly no common or garden organ-grinder would have wheeled his machine into the school quad in the hope of gathering coppers there. The utmost he could have expected was the order of the boot. But Morny, the amateur organist, was not so keen on gathering coppers, as on exasperating the headmaster who had expelled him from Rookwood. And this purpose could be effected thoroughly by grinding the hurdy-gurdy under the Form-room windows.

Gr-r-r—whirr! Yowl-owl-owl!

"Bless my soul!" murmured the dazed Mr. Bootles.

He stirred at last, and started for the door. As he rustled into the corridor, he almost ran into Mr. Greely, of the Fifth, and Mr. Bohun, of the Third, bound on the same errand—to interview the organ-grinder. In the Fourth Form-room there was a chortle loud and long.

"Morny again!" howled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Morny, of course! And here!"

"Here, under our merry windows!" chuckled George Raby. "What next?"

"Let's see if it's Morny!" said Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Bootles being out of the Form-room, the juniors left their seats and crowded up to the windows.

The windows were crammed. Every eye was fixed upon the figure outside, standing by the barrel-organ, industriously turning the handle.

It was, of course, Valentine Mornington, lately of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood School, now an outcast and a lodger at the Bird-in-Hand Inn at Coombe.

Mornington was looking very shabby; quite a contrast to the one-time dandy of Rookwood.

But his handsome, reckless face was the same as ever.

He glanced up at the faces craming the windows, and nodded and winked. But the industrious handle never ceased. The strains of "Bill Bailey" rang through Rookwood, from the painful beginning to the bitter end, and then the amateur organist started again.

"The awful nerve!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Hallo! There's old Mack coming after him!"

Old Mack was ambling up from the direction of the gates. Morny had found the gates unlocked, and Mack elsewhere, when he gained admittance. But the strains of music drew Mack to the spot, and he was coming up with wrath in his visage.

But before he arrived, Mr. Bootles and Mr. Greely and Mr. Bohun came bursting out of the School House.

They bore down on the organist in threatening array.

"Boy!" shouted Mr. Greely.

"Cease that noise!" shrieked Mr. Bohun.

"Wretched boy!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "Have you no sense of shame—of decency? Wretched youth!"

"Good-mornin', sir!" said the organist cheerily.

"Cease—"

"Stop!"

"Go!"

Valentine Mornington, still turning the handle, pointed to the placard on the barrel-organ with his free hand. It was a new placard, with letters of great size daubed on it in red. It ran:

"SPARE A COPPER FOR AN OLD ROOKWOODER!"

"Ere, you git out of this 'ere, you young rip!" panted Mr. Mack, arriving in a state of breathless fluster.

"Eject him, Mack!" gasped Mr. Bohun.

"Turn him out!" boomed Mr. Greely.

"Go it, Morny!" howled Putty Grace from the window; and the juniors roared with laughter.

Mr. Bootles spun round.

"Go back! Go back from the windows at once! Take your places! How dare you! Bless my soul!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. drew back obediently from the windows; but the next moment they were there again. They simply could not help looking on at the extraordinary scene now being enacted in the quadrangle of Rookwood. The three masters were almost dancing round the organ, in their wrath and excitement; but they checked themselves as an awe-inspiring figure emerged from the House. It was the Head!

Dr. Chisholm, deep in the mysteries of Greek with the Sixth Form, had been drawn forth by the strains of "Bill Bailey."

His face was a study.

Valentine Mornington did not seem abashed.

"Boy!" said Dr. Chisholm.

"Sir!"

"How—how dare you?"

"Don't you care for music, sir?" asked Mornington innocently. "I've got a jazz. I can play you, sir, if you'd prefer it."

"Go!"

"But I haven't collected any coppers yet, sir."

"Mack!" thundered the Head.

"Yessir!"

"Remove that boy, and his instrument! If either enters the gates again, I shall discharge you!"

"Tain't my fault, sir! I never knowed—"

"Remove him!"

"Yessir!"

Old Mack closed in on the organist. The strains of music came to a sudden stop as he grasped the organist by the shoulder.

"Now you git a move on, you

young raskil!" said Mack. "I don't want to 'urt you—"

"You couldn't," said Mornington cheerfully.

"Look 'ere—"

"Remove him!" thundered the Head.

"Come along, Master Morny—I mean, you young raskil!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington stood with his hands in his pockets, and old Mack was constrained to pick up the handles of the organ and wheel it away to the gates. Mornington, with a cool grin, extended his hat towards the Head.

"Spare a copper, sir?" he said.

"Go!"

"Not a stiver, sir, for an old Rookwooder down on his luck?" asked Mornington. "This is a rather hard life, sir, for a public school chap. I've been accustomed to better things."

"If—if you do not depart at once, I—I shall forget myself, and—and strike you, you wretched boy!" stuttered the Head.

"Dear old bean, keep your wool on!"

"I—I—"

Dr. Chisholm made a stride towards the expelled junior, his face crimson with anger.

Mornington backed away, smiling. The Head's "rag" was out with a vengeance. He had more than achieved his object in paying that morning visit to Rookwood.

"Ta-ta, old top!" he said. "I'll see you again later. Keep smiling!"

And Mornington strolled away to the gates to take possession of his instrument of torture, which old Mack trundled out into the road. The Head stared after him blankly, and then turning, disappeared quickly into the House.

The 2nd Chapter.

The Head's Problem.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth Form room echoed with merriment as Mr. Bootles came back, looking very disturbed and flustered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

Morny's astounding impudence struck them as funny, though it did not have that effect on the Head or his staff.

The expelled junior was still making his presence felt at Rookwood School. Since his expulsion Valentine Mornington had certainly been the most talked of fellow in Rookwood.

Mr. Bootles raised his hand angrily as he strode in, and the laughter died away.

"Silence! What does this unseemly disturbance mean?" rapped out the Form-master. "Silence, I



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say, or the whole class shall be detained this afternoon!"

That was enough. That afternoon was a half-holiday, and nobody wanted detention. But it was with difficulty that the juniors composed themselves to a proper gravity. Mr. Bootles' dark frowns could not repress the smiles that continually broke out on their faces during the remainder of morning lessons.

When the class was dismissed at last it was a chuckling crowd of juniors that swarmed out into the quad.

Erroll was the only fellow in the Fourth who was looking grave. Arthur Edward Lovell slapped him on the shoulder.

"What are you looking like a graven image for, fathead?" inquired Arthur Edward. "Why don't you grin?"

Erroll smiled faintly.

"It really isn't a laughing matter," he said.

"Most of the fellows seem to think that it is!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

"But it isn't! Morny ought not to be checking the Head like this—"

"True, O king!" said Lovell.

"He oughtn't. But it's funny to watch the Head's face when Morny's cheeking him, all the same."

"It makes it hopeless to think of Morny ever coming back to Rookwood," said Erroll, with a sigh.

"Not much chance of that, in any case!" said Newcome. "Morny's taking it out of the Head like this because he knows he can't come back. But bringing his hurdy-gurdy inside the school is really the limit. Mack will get the boot if Morny gets in again."

"He won't have a chance again," said Jimmy Silver. "His hurdy-gurdy is only a stunt. He will be thinking of something new soon. It looks as if he's set out to worry the Head into a fit. I wonder what the beak will do?"

Most of the Rookwooders were wondering what Dr. Chisholm would do. Perhaps the Head himself was wondering.

This state of affairs could not be suffered to continue. Yet how it was to be ended was a problem.

Morny's guardian refused to take any steps in the matter unless the expelled junior should return home and apologise for his conduct—which Morny was not likely to do. And nobody else had any legal control over the reckless fellow.

On rare occasions culprits had been expelled from Rookwood before, but an expelled fellow generally slunk quietly away, ashamed to be seen, and ashamed to revisit the scene of his humiliation.

It was quite otherwise with Morny. True, it was for no shameful act that he had been expelled. It was for being insubordinate and unmanageable. He was to blame, but he had committed no crime that should have made him ashamed to look his old schoolfellows in the face.

That made a difference, and his view was that he had been treated harshly, which entitled him to "get his own back" on the Head, which undoubtedly he was doing in a very effective way.

All Coombe was talking of the Rookwooder who had come down to playing a hurdy-gurdy for a living. Indeed, the Head was in constant terror that it might get into the papers.

If some enterprising journalist with a keen nose for a "stunt" should get wind of the affair, it might become famous through the length and breadth of the land.

Rookwood was a famous old school, and there was "copy" in the extraordinary affair. Quite entertaining columns might be written about it if some pressman got hold of it at a time when there was a dearth of other news.

And if that had happened, Dr. Chisholm's feelings would have been beyond description. Like most quiet and scholastic old gentlemen of his kind, he had an intense horror of publicity and scandal.

It would have been a deadly blow to him if Rookwood and its affairs had become a theme of public comment, to be chatted and joked about in "buses and trains."

Yet Mornington was not to be got rid of. The Head had succeeded in inducing Mr. Bandy, the grocer, to sack him. But instead of clearing off, the reckless fellow had hired the barrel-organ, with which he perambulated Coombe and the neighbourhood, and probably he made a good thing of it, too, and earned his daily bread thereby.

The placard on the organ attracted much comment and sympathy from the simple country-folk. And the

Head, though he reigned supreme within the walls of Rookwood, had no more power outside the gates than the smallest fag in the Second Form. There was no law or influence by which he could exclude the expelled junior from the vicinity.

"The Head's in a rare wax!" Tubby Muffin confided to Jimmy Silver & Co. that afternoon. "Trotting up and down his study like a wild lion in a cage, you know! He's been ragging Bootles."

"How do you know?" grunted Jimmy.

Tubby chuckled.

"I saw Bootles coming away from his study looking as if he'd been bitten," he explained. "The Head's taking it out of everybody who comes near him. I heard Catesby say he was awfully rough on the Sixth this morning, after Morny came here. He jawed Bulkeley in class—the captain, you know. I wonder Bulkeley stood it."

"Well, a chap has to stand the Head!" remarked Lovell. "I'm rather glad I'm not in the Sixth at present."

"Same here," chortled Tubby Muffin; "and I say it's a good wheeze to keep out of the Head's way, and not come near him in the passages. He might start on anybody."

Jimmy Silver grinned. He could not help wondering what the august Head of Rookwood would have thought if he had heard that. But Reginald Muffin's remark was undoubtedly well-founded.

The dispute with Mornington was telling on the Head's nerves, and his temper was growing very tart and uncertain. His staff had much to bear with, and the Sixth Form were not enjoying life these days.

A Third Former had been called in and caned for whistling near the Head's window. The sight of his frowning brow in the corridors was enough to set the fags scampering away. But the Head's reflections would have been interesting to know if he had guessed that he was now looked upon by the smaller boys as a sort of Hun that was dangerous at close quarters.

Early that afternoon, when Jimmy Silver & Co. were going down to the cricket-ground, the Head was observed crossing to the gates, and Tubby Muffin scudded after the Fistical Four to Little Side with the news.

"I say, Jimmy—I—I say—" panted Tubby.

"Well, what is it now?" grunted the captain of the Fourth.

"The beak's gone to see Morny."

"What?"

"He's gone to the Bird-in-Hand!" chirruped Tubby Muffin. "Out of bounds, you know, for Rookwood! I say, the Head ought to give himself a licking for going out of bounds! He, he, he!"

"How do you know he's gone?" demanded Lovell.

"I heard him say to Bootles—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Jimmy. "You're always hearing something that doesn't concern you."

"But, I say, the Head said—"

"Rats!"

"He didn't say rats, you ass; the Head wouldn't! He said—"

But the Fistical Four did not stay to hear what the Head had said. They went to the cricket, leaving Tubby Muffin to impart the rest of his news to anyone who cared to hear.

The 3rd Chapter. Ordered to Quit.

"Excuse me—"

"My eye!"

The gentleman who was washing glasses behind the bar of the Bird-in-Hand jumped, and nearly dropped a glass.

It was the Head of Rookwood who had suddenly dawned upon him in the dusky bar; and the sight of his Majesty King George the Fifth himself would hardly have astonished the barman more.

He blinked at Dr. Chisholm.

"Excuse me," said the Head, in a very quiet voice. "I have called to inquire—"

The barman winked at a fat man in a corner, who was smoking a big black cigar, and washing down the flavour with a glass of spirits. It was Mr. Joseph Hook, a sporting gentleman of disreputable character. Mr. Hook winked back at the barman.

Dr. Chisholm coloured painfully.

"Yessir," said the barman. "You was saying, sir—whisky, sir?"

"No, no!" said the Head of Rookwood hastily. "I have merely called to inquire whether there is a boy named Mornington staying at this inn."

"Ho!" said the barman.

"I wish to see him," said the Head. Another wink passed from the

gentleman behind the bar to Mr. Hook in the corner.

"Know where the young feller is, Mr. Hook?" asked the barman.

"Knockin' the balls about, I believe," answered Joey Hook. "You'll find 'im in the billiard-room, sir."

"Thank you very much!" faltered the Head.

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Hook politely. "Always pleased to oblige a gent like you, sir! If you'd care to take somethin'—"

"Thank you, no!" gasped the Head.

And he beat a hurried retreat.

As he retreated the sound of chuckling followed him from the dusky bar. Apparently, Mr. Hook and the barman saw something amusing in the Head and his visit.

The sound of clicking balls guided Dr. Chisholm to the billiard-room. His colour was high as he entered that apartment. He was glad to see that it had only one occupant. The solitary occupant was Valentine Mornington, who was knocking the balls about idly.

The outcast of Rookwood glanced round, and started as he saw the Head. He dropped the butt of the cue to the floor, and stood staring at Dr. Chisholm, too surprised to speak.

"I have called to see you, Mornington," said the Head, in a deep voice.

Morny recovered himself at once.

"Thank you, sir; that's kind of you," he said. "You're welcome, for old acquaintance sake."

The Head bit his lip.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Mornington cordially. "Shall I call for some refreshments?"

"Certainly not!"

"You wouldn't care for a whisky-and-soda?"

"Mornington!"

"Or a gin cocktail, sir?" asked Mornington genially. "Though rather down on my luck at present, I can stand refreshment to an old friend. You may command anythin' in the establishment, in fact."

"This is insolence, Mornington!" gasped the Head.

"I'm sure I only meant to be civil, sir," said Morny. "Won't you sit down, and make yourself at home?"

"I will not sit down, Mornington!"

"Very well, sir. Care for a hundred up?"

"Wretched boy—"

"Not at all, sir. Enjoyin' life, I assure you," said Mornington cheerily. "It's a bit hard work, trundling round an organ, but I make a livin'. Lots of kind people take compassion on a public school chap reduced to organ-grindin' for his daily bread. It's really better than grindin' Latin in school, with a peppery old headmaster always ready to drop on a fellow—what?"

"Mornington, I am going to make an appeal to you—"

"You want me to come back to Rookwood, sir?"

"No, sir, I do not want you to come back to Rookwood!" thundered the Head. "Under no circumstances whatever shall you ever enter the gates of Rookwood again!"

"My mistake, sir," said Mornington blandly. "I might come back if you asked me nicely!"

"I am going to make an appeal to your better feelings, if you possess any," said the Head, in a gasping voice. "This course of conduct on your part, Mornington, is disgraceful!"

"Opinions may differ on that point," answered the junior. "If you were my headmaster, sir, I should be bound to respect your opinion. As you're not, I'm entitled to regard you as an interferin' old gentleman!"

"Wha-at?"

"And to advise you to mind your own business, sir!"

Dr. Chisholm breathed hard.

"You are disgracing yourself and your old school," he said. "You do not seem to care whether you drag the good name of Rookwood in the dust."

Mornington laughed.

"Rookwood can't ask much of me, sir, after kickin' me out," he said. "What about my good name, which Rookwood has dragged in the dust?"

"It is your duty to return to—"

"School?"

"No; to your guardian."

"My dear guardian bores me, sir, and my cousins at home are simply intolerable. I prefer organ-grindin'!"

"If you must pursue this disreputable career, Mornington, can you not have the decency to take yourself into another district, and not make the name of your old school a byword of scorn?"

"No fear!" answered Mornington coolly. "You kicked me out of Rookwood, an' I don't think I deserved it. I'm goin' to haunt Rook-

wood. You won't get rid of me in a hurry, sir!"

"You will not be allowed to continue—"

"I don't see how you are goin' to stop me," interrupted Mornington. "I'm earnin' an honest livin', and turned the age when the School Board inspector can't worry me. I really don't see what you are goin' to do, sir."

"You refuse to go?"

"You bet!"

For a moment they looked at one another, the headmaster and the expelled junior, with cool defiance in the latter's face, grim wrath in the former's.

Then Dr. Chisholm, without another word, left the billiard-room.

Mornington winked at the ceiling, and returned to knocking the ivory balls about.

But his face grew serious.

Cool and self-reliant as he was, and determined to continue upon the peculiar course he had marked out for himself, Mornington was not satisfied. Since leaving Rookwood he had had plenty of time for reflection, and he realised quite clearly that he had made a fool of himself—that he had given up what was good for what was not so good. His recklessness had led him too far, and, defiant as he was, he had the penalty to pay. Defiance and cool insolence could not alter the fact that he was an outcast, going from bad to worse.

There was a surprise in store for him, too. He found soon that the Head had not exhausted the arrows in his quiver. From the dirty window of the billiard-room Morny watched the old gentleman pass down the street again. A few minutes later

"Cheek to camp here, in sight of our boat-house!" remarked Newcome.

"My dear chap," said Jimmy Silver tolerantly, "it's public land along the river, and anybody can camp there. Picnickers and caravanners haunt the place. Let 'em rip."

"They'll rip anyway, whether we let 'em or not," Newcome remarked, "so we may as well let 'em."

These observations were made by the Fistical Four of Rookwood, as they strolled down to the river after cricket.

From the trees by the river a thin column of smoke was rising, showing that someone had lighted a camp-fire on the bank.

The weather was too warm for a fire to be wanted for its heat, so it was pretty clear that cooking was going on.

The juniors turned into the path by the river to have a look at the camp, which was much nearer the school than was generally the case with caravan campers. Indeed, the column of smoke might have been seen, and doubtless was seen, from the quadrangle.

A cheery fire crackled away, fed by branches and twigs, and over it three sticks were erected, from which swung a pot, in gipsy style.

But it was not a gipsy who tended the fire.

As the Fistical Four came in sight of the solitary camper, one amazed exclamation burst from all four of them at once.

"Morny!"

The camper looked up and smiled and waved his hand to the chums of the Fourth.

"I don't deny it, old top. I'm goin' to turn the Head's hair white for kickin' me out of Rookwood," said Mornington coolly. "I'll go back if he asks me nicely—"

"I can see him doing it!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, unless he does, I'm going to haunt him. You fellows care to have tea with me? I'm brewing some coffee in that pot, and I've got a cake and some sandwiches. Lots, in fact; and I'm glad of company."

The Fistical Four exchanged smiling glances.

Morny's endless "stunts" were entertaining, from the junior point of view, at least, and they could not help admiring the outcast junior's determination. "No surrender" was evidently Morny's motto.

They accepted Mornington's invitation to tea, and sat down on the green bank of the river, under the setting sun. The coffee Morny was brewing was not, perhaps, quite perfect, but the Fourth-Formers were not very particular. They enjoyed their tea, and long before it was over there were fresh arrivals on the scene.

Tubby Muffin had spread the news.

Rookwood juniors came from far and near to see the camp, and to stare at the camper and chortle. Peele remarked that it was another pull for the Head's nose, as certainly it was. Hansom and Talboys of the Fifth came along, and advised Morny to clear off, and as he declined, they seemed disposed to help him shift.

But the Fistical Four chipped in promptly, with a dozen more juniors, and the Fifth-Formers were chased away with ignominy.

"For the last time, Mornington, will—"

"There'll be a moon, too—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew strode right at the outcast junior, his hands raised to grasp him. Swoosh!

Mornington jerked his hand forward, and the contents of the coffee-cup shot full into the Rookwood prefect's face.

Carthew staggered back with a wild howl.

"Yurrrgggh!"

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

Mornington rose quickly to his feet, and picked up a thick cudgel that lay in the grass by his side. He stood on the defensive, as Carthew gouged coffee from his eyes and nose.

"You—you—I'll—I'll—"

spluttered Carthew. He sprang savagely at the outcast of Rookwood.

He sprang back again faster still, as Morny's cudgel lashed at him. Mark Carthew would have received a very unpleasant knock if he had not escaped that blow.

"You—you young ruffian!" he panted.

"Better mind your own business," suggested Mornington calmly. "I've got this cudgel to deal with any tramps who may interfere. I'm quite ready to crack your head, Carthew, if you want it cracked. You've only to come on!"

Carthew evidently did not want his head cracked, for he did not come on. It was clear enough that Valentine Mornington was in deadly earnest. The prefect stood furious and perplexed for a minute or so, while the crowd of juniors looked on, grinning.

"Here comes Bulkeley!" murmured Lovell.

The captain of Rookwood came striding on the scene. Carthew turned to him at once.

"Help me clear this young scoundrel off, Bulkeley," he said. "The Head won't allow him to stay here."

"Hum!" said Bulkeley, in perplexity. "I don't think we have a right to clear anybody off this ground, Carthew. You'd better go, Mornington."

"Thanks; I'm stayin'!"

"Will you help me clear him off, Bulkeley?" demanded Carthew savagely.

The Rookwood captain shook his head.

"We've no right—"

"Oh, hang that! I shall report this to the Head, then."

"You can do as you like about that," said Bulkeley shortly; and Carthew tramped angrily away towards the school.

"You ought not to be here, Mornington," said Bulkeley, turning to the outcast junior again, with a frown.

"Sorry I don't agree, old top!"

"You fags can clear off!" said Bulkeley, taking no further notice of Morny. "Now, then, get back to the school, the lot of you! You know the Head's forbidden you to speak to Mornington."

"I say, Bulkeley—"

began Jimmy Silver.

"That's enough! Get a move on!"

The juniors reluctantly retired from the spot, and Bulkeley followed them, shepherding them all back into the gates of Rookwood. Valentine Mornington shrugged his shoulders, and sat down again to finish his coffee.



SAVING THE HEAD! The river tore at the junior from below, but he held on grimly. The Head's eyes met his. "Can you reach up and get hold, sir?" breathed Mornington. "It's the only chance!"

the red-faced barman came into the billiard-room with a grin on his face.

"It's outside for you, young man," he remarked.

Morny looked at him.

"What does that mean?" he inquired.

"Landlord wants your room."

"Rot! There's two or three garrets empty, as well as mine."

"Landlord wants it, all the same, and you're to go to-day," answered the man coolly. "You've got till six to remove your traps; if they're there later than that they're to be put in the street. That's all."

And the man lounged back to his bar.

"I suppose the Head of Rookwood has tipped your landlady to do this!" said Mornington bitterly.

He received no reply. But he did not need one. It was easy enough to see that the Head had interviewed the landlord of the Bird-in-Hand, and that he had induced him to turn the lodger out—a few pounds in hand were worth more to the innkeeper than the few shillings Morny paid for his wretched garret.

That afternoon Valentine Mornington stood in the street again, with a bag in his hand, containing his worldly possessions. He was homeless once more; but there was a bitter, determined expression on his face. Once more the Head had made a move that he could not counter; but Rookwood was not done with the expelled junior yet.

The 4th Chapter. In Camp.

"Some blessed gipsy camp!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

They came up, gazing at him blankly.

"Where's your hurdy-gurdy?" asked Newcome, with a grin.

"I've dropped that stunt for a bit," drawled Mornington. "Wheelin' it about is rather heavy work. I'm campin' out here."

"Here!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Why not?" asked Mornington coolly. "This is common-land, and it has the advantage of bein' within hail of Rookwood, so I sha'n't have quite to part company with the dear old Head. I'm sure he will be delighted to hear that he's got me for a near neighbour."

"Oh dear!" murmured Jimmy.

"The dear old beak dropped in at the Bird-in-Hand to-day, an' got me turned out," explained Mornington. "I've decided on campin' life for a bit. The weather's splendid for it. I bought a few things in the village an' ambled along here. Hallo, here's Muffin!"

Tubby Muffin came out of the trees, and stood transfixed, staring at the camp and the camper.

For some moments Muffin was non-plussed, and then the explanation dawned upon him, and he gave a fat chortle.

Without approaching nearer to the camp, Tubby started off for the school as fast as his fat little legs would carry him—to bear the startling news.

"I suppose I shall have half Rookwood here in ten minutes," remarked Mornington, with a grin.

"Which is what you want, I believe!" grunted Arthur Edward Lovell.

It was different when Carthew of the Sixth arrived on the scene. Carthew was a prefect, and, as such, was not to be handled by the juniors—unless they were prepared for trouble with the Head. And Carthew ordered Morny to quit at once.

Mornington eyed him coolly, and did not even answer. He sipped the tin cup of hot coffee in his hand as if Carthew had not spoken.

"Do you hear me?" snapped Carthew.

"You've no right to interfere, Carthew," said Erroll mildly. "Anyone can camp on this land."

"Take fifty lines, Erroll, for checkin' a prefect."

Erroll bit his lip hard.

"Now, Mornington, you're to go!" said Carthew, coming closer to the outcast of Rookwood. "The Head won't allow you to plant yourself down so close to the school, and you know it! Will you go?"

Mornington smiled.

"Fine weather for campin', isn't it?" he observed.

"What?"

"Lucky it doesn't look like rain, or I should need a tent or somethin'."

There was a chuckle from the on-lookers, and Carthew's face reddened angrily.

"I don't want any of your impudence, Mornington!" he bawled. "You're to clear out of here at once, or I shall shift you!"

"I can't afford a tent at present," went on Mornington imperturbably. "I've got a couple of rugs, that's all."

"Will you go?"

"But it's going to be a warm night, so I think I shall be all serene."

The 5th Chapter. The Heart of a Hero!

"Impossible!"

"It's true, sir! He's there!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm.

The Head of Rookwood looked so angry, that Carthew half-regretted coming to his study with the news. In the Head's present state of irritable nerves, there was no telling upon whom his wrath might turn.

"You should have sent him away, Carthew!" snapped the Head.

"I tried, sir; but he had a cudgel—"

"Nonsense!"

"Bulkeley refused to help me—"

"You may go, Carthew!"

Carthew went—rather glad to escape from the Head's presence just then. Dr. Chisholm, giving him no further thought, strode to and fro in his study with corrugated brows.

This was the last straw; the expelled junior camping in the open air almost at the gates of Rookwood. It was not to be borne.

After some minutes of agitated reflection, the Head selected a cane. He had just taken it in hand, when there was a tap at the door, and it opened to admit Mr. Bootles. The Fourth Form-master looked very agitated.

"Dr. Chisholm, are you aware—"

"I am aware that that insolent boy has posted himself almost at the school gates, Mr. Bootles! I am going to send him away."

"That is the difficulty, sir. It appears that he has camped on public land, and cannot be interfered with—"

"Nonsense!"

The Head made a gesture, and Mr. Bootles was silent. Dr. Chisholm strode from the study, cane in hand. There was an expression of grim determination on his face. Fags who sighted him in the corridor scudded off and vanished round corners. There were many glances turned upon him as he strode away to the gates; but his path was avoided, as if it were the path of a devouring lion.

Headless of the glances, if he was aware of them, the Head strode on and trod the path down to the river. His eyes glittered at the sight of the thin column of smoke rising from the bank, and his grip tightened upon the cane.

He came rustling up to the camp with a brow like thunder.

Mornington was at the river-side, drawing a can of water from the stream. He straightened up at the sight of the Head. His cudgel lay in the grass near the camp-fire, and the Head was between him and it. The Head sighted him, and came directly towards him.

"Mornington!"

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Mornington coolly, with one eye on the Head's cane. "Nice day, sir!"

"You have camped here?"

"Yes, sir!" said Morny. "I've left my lodgin's at the Bird-in-Hand, sir! Some interferin' old johnny got me turned out of there!"

"You will not be allowed to remain here."

"I don't see how you are goin' to prevent it, sir," answered Mornington. "Anybody can camp on common land."

"I shall not allow it!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders. "Will you go?"

"No!"

"Then you will take the consequences, Mornington."

And the exasperated Head strode right at the junior, with the cane uplifted. It came down on Mornington's shoulder with a sounding thwack, and the outcast of Rookwood gave a yell. Then he sprang forward, butting at his assailant, and the Head grasped him by the collar with one hand, while the other wielded the cane. Mornington struggled furiously, and hooked his leg in the Head's, and tore himself loose as Dr. Chisholm staggered.

He sprang away, panting, and the headmaster of Rookwood reeled in the rushes on the river's margin, struggling to recover his balance. But he struggled in vain, and the next moment there was a loud splash.

"Oh gad!" gasped Mornington.

He sprang forward, as the Head splashed bodily into the river. The cane flew into the rushes, and the headmaster went completely under. He came up a dozen feet from the bank, struggling with the current.

Morny stared at him blankly for a second.

The Head could swim, but he was a poor swimmer, and he was old, and the current was strong. It was borne in upon the junior's startled mind that he was looking upon what was probably to be a tragedy!

That thought was enough for Mornington.

He threw off his cap, put his hands together, and dived into the river.

The Head, resisting feebly, was swept out into the middle of the river by the current, going under again.

Mornington had to swim hard and strong to reach him at all, but fortunately he reached him.

"Hold up, sir!" he panted.

His grasp was on the Head, dragging him up as he was going under for the third time. Swimming strongly, he supported the exhausted old gentleman.

It was all he could do; the Head was helpless now, and, cumbered by him, Morny had no chance of getting to the bank. He could only support his burden and go with the current. Twice he made a fierce effort to get shoreward, but the river was too strong for him.

His eyes swept the banks despairingly. But the banks were clear of any human form; the Rookwood fellows had been ordered away from the river, since Morny had camped there.

Fortunately, Valentine Mornington was a strong swimmer, or he would have gone down to death with the headmaster in the depths. But all he could do was to keep afloat with his burden; and, unless help came, that could not last long. And there was no sign of help.

But his face lightened suddenly with hope. Ahead of him, the river made a bend, with a racing current; and a point of land that jutted out at the curve was crowned with willows, and a long branch hung drooping over the water. With a great effort, Morny steered himself to pass under the overhanging branch, and caught it with one hand as he passed beneath.

The river tore at him from below, but he held on grimly.

The Head's eyes met his.

"Can you reach up and get hold, sir?" breathed Mornington. "It's the only chance."

Dr. Chisholm did not speak, but he understood. The branch, dragged down by Morny's weight, was within his reach, and he caught it with both hands, and held on. There was an ominous crack along the branch. It was long and slender, and the weight was breaking it down.

Morny's heart throbbed. The

promise of safety was false after all; the branch was breaking under his grasp.

"Mornington!" The Head's voice was a husky whisper. "My dear, brave boy, I forgive you all. Heaven help us now!"

Crack, crack!

"Hold on, sir!" said Mornington quietly. "The branch will hold one, and help must come if you hold on. I'm sorry I've played the goat, sir, and given you so much trouble. I'm goin' to take my chance now."

He let go the branch.

"Mornington!" panted the Head. But Valentine Mornington was gone, swept away round the bend of the river by the fierce current, and in a moment he had vanished from Dr. Chisholm's sight. Holding on to the creaking, swaying branch, the headmaster of Rookwood gazed dazedly over the swirling, shimmering waters, in the sinking light of the sunset. Mornington was gone to his death!

"Help!"

For a quarter of an hour the half-unconscious man clung to the branch, crying faintly for the help that did not come. It was death to let go, and his strength was exhausted. He could scarcely keep his hold upon the swaying, creaking branch, with the river tearing at him like a wild animal hungry for its prey.

But help was coming at last. A farmer's dog was barking by the clump of willows, and the farmer came through the trees, and shouted to the exhausted man. The Head called back feebly.

"Hold on, sir! I'm coming!"

To the big, sturdy farmer it was not a difficult task. Holding to the branch, he plunged neck-deep in the water and waded out. He was out of his depth before he reached the Head, but he grasped him, and bore him shoreward. Even for the powerful man it was a struggle, then; but he came into the willows at last, and dragged the headmaster ashore breathlessly. It was an insensible man that he landed in the willows. When Dr. Chisholm's eyes opened he was lying in the farmhouse, and his first question was of Mornington. But of Mornington nothing was known, and the Head groaned in bitterness of spirit. Was that the end of Mornington's rebellion? Had the wilful, headstrong, but true-

hearted boy gone to his death in the depths of the river, gone to his death in the effort to save the headmaster who had expelled him?

The 6th Chapter.

All's Well that Ends Well.

And Mornington?

When he let go the branch, and the swirling current tore him away, Morny had no hope of escape. The act was the last reckless act of his reckless young life. It was in keeping with his character to give his life for the headmaster he had defied. But though there was no hope in his breast, he was still fighting for his life, and long after the river had swept him from Dr. Chisholm's sight, he was still resisting his fate. Once he came near the bank, but a whirling eddy tore him away again, and the current sped him on, his senses failing him now. Twice he had been under, and dimly, dazedly, he knew that the end was near.

And then came a sudden shock and an exclamation, and Mornington, as in a dream, felt himself grasped by the collar, and drawn from the cruel waters.

He was too far gone to see clearly, or to think clearly; but he realised that he had been dragged into a punt, and that a face was bending over him. He heard, without understanding, a voice that spoke. The sky and the trees danced before his closing eyes.

Then he knew no more.

His eyes opened. He was lying in the punt in a pool of water, but the punt was moored to the bank now. A round, ruddy face looked at him, the face of Mr. Boggs, the village policeman of Coombe. Mornington blinked at him dizzily.

"Comin' to, sir?" said Mr. Boggs. "Bless your 'eart, sir, you give me a start, bungin' into my punt like that there. Lucky for you, sir, I was doin' a bit o' fishin' arter dooty, sir. Feel better now, Master Mornington? I'm jest goin' to get you to the school—"

Mornington tried to speak. His voice came in a faint whisper.

"Not to the school. I don't belong to Rookwood now—"

"I'll 'ave to take you somewheres," said Mr. Boggs. "I can get Mr. 'Uggin's' trap at the farm yonder, you see, and— My eye! Blest if he ain't orf agin'!"

Mornington did not know what

happened next. He had sunk into a deep insensibility, and he did not know how a crowd of anxious faces gathered round him at Rookwood when the cheerful Mr. Boggs drove him in in Huggins' trap. That day and that night he lay unconscious, while all Rookwood waited in deep anxiety for news of his recovery.

Dr. Chisholm's face was the first that Valentine Mornington saw when his eyes opened in the morning sunshine. His gaze turned dazedly round him from the white pillow.

"Lie still, my boy!" It was the Head's voice. It sounded far away in Mornington's ears, though the Head was at his bedside. "Quiet!"

"Is—is that the Head?"

"Yes."

"Where am I, then?"

"In the sanatorium at Rookwood, my dear boy. The doctor is here. You must not speak now."

There was another blank to Mornington. But in the afternoon he was sufficiently recovered to speak and to take refreshment. Kit Erroll was by his bedside then.

Morny stretched out a feeble hand to his old chum.

"Have I been ill?" he asked.

"Just a little, old fellow. You mustn't talk much," said Erroll. "Dear old fellow, all Rookwood's talking about you."

"I've given 'em somethin' to talk about lately," murmured Mornington, with the ghost of his old smile.

"I mean about your rescuing the Head. Dr. Chisholm thought at first you had been drowned. When he came back to Rookwood you were still missing, and then Boggs brought you in."

"He picked me up in his punt. First time old Boggs has done anythin' useful in his life. Lucky he was there. I say, how long before I can get out of this?" muttered Mornington. "I never meant to come here. You see, I couldn't help myself—"

"You old fathead!" said Erroll, smiling. "You're at Rookwood now, Head's said so. After what you've done, do you think he would let you go? Don't you understand that the whole school's proud of you, you duffer, and the Head as much as anybody. You're going to make a fresh start at Rookwood, Morny."

Mornington lay silent.

"Your guardian's coming," said Erroll. "The Head sent for him, and he's anxious about you. Everybody's been anxious. But it's all right now. You're booked for sunny for a week, the doctor says. That won't hurt you, and then you'll be back in the Fourth Form."

"Oh gad!" murmured Mornington. His pale face had brightened. He was glad to be back at Rookwood, glad that it was all over. And as he lay in the shaded room, Mornington, during the following days, made resolutions for the future, which afterwards he did his best to keep.

It was a great day at Rookwood when Mornington left the sanatorium. Jimmy Silver & Co., and most of the Fourth, came in a body to march him in triumph to the School House, and the celebration that followed was quite tremendous, in honour of the expelled junior who had come back to the old school!

(Next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND will contain another fine complete story of the Chums of Rookwood School.)

THE STORY OF A SCAMP'S GAMP!



1. The other day when Smithson borrowed his aunt's umbrella he found it in such a terrible condition that he felt quite ashamed of it.



2. However, he soon had the laugh of his Form-fellows over it by tearing off the old twill silk, and then baiting the steel wires.



3. And that evening he was able to present his aunt with one of the most wonderful catches extant. Smithson says this is quite true and no cod!

THE SCOUTS' POW-WOW CORNER.

Well, the Jamboree is over! What a glorious week it has been! My arm is tired with shaking, and my voice husky with shouting and cheering those topping finals for the World's Championships. But is the Jamboree over? I think not. The actual spree at Olympia is finished, true, but the results of our great gathering will last for many generations yet. Friendships were made quickly, but—well, I, for one, don't intend to forget my new-found friends from this and other countries in a hurry, and the postman will do the rest.

I suppose everybody who hasn't been to camp yet is under canvas now. We are—and having an A1 time, too. I can look out of my tent flap on to the green fields, and in my nostrils is that pure, life-giving ozone that smacks of the open air—to say nothing of the tempting odour from the Irish stew simmering away merrily over the camp-fire under some trees.

These seven days in camp make opinion. Not only in enjoyment itself. I am thinking of the things which lead up to enjoyment. In camp we really get a proper chance to understand ourselves, our pals, the glorious Nature surrounding us, our own puny weaknesses, and how to look after ourselves.

This week I am going to give you a few words of sound advice, and, whether you are in camp, have been, or are going, read, learn, and inwardly digest. The more times you have been in camp, the more you realise that there is always something fresh to learn, and the more about camping you learn the less you will have to "rough it." The old camper is full of "little dodges" for his own comfort, and, tenderfoot and first-timers, watch him with all your eyes, and perhaps you won't wake up stiff in the middle of the night, or find your boots full of water, or turn in in a tent, and wake up in the middle of the night with your tent careering away in the wind, and an inquisitive cow trying conclusions with your big toe.

First of all, don't pitch your tent on a slope, or touching trees, unless you are very fond of getting wet. If you can get permission from the owner of the field, dig a small trough around the bottom of the curtain, so

that the rain will be collected and led away, and not run through into your kit. Slacken your guy-ropes before turning in, or the dew may tauten the rope and bring the tent down upon you.

Bracken makes a very comfy bed for sleeping on, but, personally, I would rather have dear old Mother Earth. Bracken is all very well, but there are no roses without thorns, and there's no bracken without swarms of tiny insects of a roving, explorative nature. It is a good tip to dig a small hole so that your hip-bone will just fit into it. It enables the weight of the body to be more distributed, and prevents the stiffness and soreness everyone experiences after the first night under canvas.

Now, in making your camp-kitchen, see that the cooking fire is made to leeward, or down wind of the camp, so that the smoke and sparks from the fire don't blow into your tents. Remember, too, that the greatest enemies to health are flies, and that if you leave scraps of food lying about your camp you will get swarms of disease-carrying flies smothering your food. Dig a small pit a couple of feet deep near your kitchen, and throw into it all the refuse that won't burn, such as empty condensed milk or meat-tins, and keep a pile of loose the ideal week of the year, in my

earth always by it, and cover everything you throw away.

A word of warning. Be very careful to keep your drinking-water clean. If it comes out of a stream, boil it before you drink it, never mind how clear it may look. All water has a large number of very small germs, invisible to the naked eye, floating about in it. Many of these germs are poisonous, and, tough customers that they are, require at least a quarter of an hour's boiling before they are killed.

Bathing is one of the greatest joys of camp, and the biggest duty of every scout in camp—because no scout can consider himself a full-blown scout until he is able to swim and save life in the water. If you can't swim, make up your mind that you'll be able to before you set foot home-wards. It can easily be learnt in a week. Get one of the good swimmers in your troop to take you on, let it be a chap you know well, so that you can put all your confidence in him, and you will be surprised how dead easy it is to learn to swim.

Of course, swimming has its dangers; but nine out of ten of the accidents whilst bathing are people's own fault. Never stay in the water too long. Ten minutes is usually ample, five minutes is safer. Don't bathe within an hour and a half of taking

a meal—that is, before your food has digested—it is asking for cramp; and, above all, good swimmers and bad, don't try and "show off" how brave you are. There are more lives lost that way than any other.

Remember, too, when you pack up and strike your camp, the troop that leaves a dirty camping-ground are no good. A clean camp, or what has been a camping-ground, means a clean, smart troop. The ground you are camping on is lent to you through the kindness of some farmer. Don't repay evil for good; and, above all, don't damage the surrounding fences or crops. Always shut all gates after you, don't take firewood without asking for it, and always do your best to do some good turn to the farmer every day, and when camp-time comes next year he will look forward to your coming again.

Try to persuade your scoutmaster to let you have a sing-song round the camp-fire, with something hot brewing over the logs. A good song and a cup of coffee or cocoa makes a ripping end to a perfect day.

And as soon as ever you get back from camp start saving up your pennies for next year. Next week I am going to tell you heaps of ways in which you can make your troop one of the richest in the country.

THE END.

A Complete Story of the Chums of the Backwoods School.



THE LUCK OF THE HOPKINSES!

A Grand Tale of Frank Richards & Co. of Cedar Creek.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

The Cowboys to the Rescue!

"I guess there's trouble thar!" Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, bent his head a little, and listened.

From the distance, in the evening shadows, came the echoing of rapid revolver-shots.

Five stalwart ranchmen were riding up the trail on the northern side of Thompson Town, Billy Cook in the lead. And the sound of firing came to their ears from beyond the patch of pine and larch that hid the Hopkinses' clearing from their sight.

"Shootin'," continued Billy Cook. "Best like young Bob Lawless to land himself in the middle of it. Lucky his popper sent us to look arter him. Get your quirts ready, and come on!"

The ranchmen turned from the trail, following a rough bridle-track towards the Hopkinses' homestead.

They came through the screen of pines, and in the setting sun, a rather startling scene burst upon their view.

The Hopkinses' log cabin was closed up, door and windows barred and shuttered. Within that cabin were Frank Richards & Co., of Cedar Creek School.

At a distance from it, lying in cover among the scrub and tree stumps, were half a dozen roughly-clad men, "bulldozers" every one of them, keeping up a revolver-fire on the shuttered windows.

The pistol-shots spattered on the thick pinewood, without doing any damage beyond scarring the wood. They could not penetrate into the cabin.

Billy Cook surveyed the scene grimly.

"That's the Red Dog crowd!" he remarked. "And thar's Old Man Gunten egging them on, by thunder!"

"Old Man Gunten," the storekeeper and moneylender of Thompson, was standing behind a tree, watching the besieged cabin from that safe cover. Neither Gunten nor the Red Dog ruffians observed the cattlemen riding up behind them. They were too busy. It was not till Billy Cook and his companions were close at hand that Mr. Gunten caught sight of them. The fat Swiss storekeeper gave a start at the sight of the horsemen from the Lawless Ranch.

He called out to his men, and the spattering fire of the revolvers ceased. Keno Kit and his gang stared round surlily at the ranchmen.

"Waal, I guess we've arrove in time for the circus, Old Man Gunten," remarked Billy Cook, drawing rein within a couple of yards of the fat storekeeper.

Mr. Gunten scowled at him. "You're not wanted here!" he snapped.

Billy Cook grinned. "I guess you're mistookin, Mr. Gunten. Keep that shooter down, Keno Kit, or you'll get my quirt round your shoulders before you can say 'No sugar in mine!'"

Billy Cook made a movement with the heavy cattleman's whip he carried in his hand.

"I guess you've no business here!" snarled Keno Kit, but he lowered the revolver.

"What do you want, Billy Cook?" demanded Mr. Gunten. "What the thunder have you come along here for now?"

"Old Man Lawless sent us along," explained the ranch foreman. "Young Todgers arrove with a message that Bob Lawless and Frank Richards were puttin' up to-night at the Hopkinses' shebang. Old Man Lawless scented trouble, and sent us along to inquire. You see, all Thompson knows that you've got a claim on Hopkins' farm, and that you're

tryin' to get his land off him, and so—"

"If you want to know, I've foreclosed on a mortgage on the holdin'," said Mr. Gunten sourly. "I'm here to take possession."

"The sheriff's the man to put you in possession, if you've got an order from the court at Fraser."

"The sheriff's away, down at Kamloops."

"I guess you'll have to wait till he's home agin, then."

"That's my business," said Mr. Gunten savagely. "Everyone in that cabin is welcome to walk out, if he chooses. But if it's held against me, the proper owner, I'm going to set it on fire."

Billy Cook shook his head.

There was a growl among the Red Dog crowd, and they handled their revolvers.

Billy Cook regarded them serenely. "Two minutes!" he repeated. "Arter that, we're goin' to begin on you with our cattle-whips. I guess if you use those shooters you'll be sorry for it arterwards. There's a rope in Thompson for any galoot who forgets that he's in Canada, and thinks he's at home in Oregon, and lets off his shootin'-iron reckless. But take your choice. Boys, get your quirts ready!"

The cattlemen grinned, and grasped their heavy whips in readiness for the fray.

Keno Kit and his comrades looked at one another.

As a matter of fact, they dared not venture upon reckless shooting, which might have led to fatalities, such fatalities being called, in the Thompson Valley, by the unpleasant name of murder, with punishment appropriate to follow. The manners and customs of the Oregon mining-camps were not safe to practise on the Canadian side of the border.

Old Man Gunten, too, realised that it would not do.

He was a prominent citizen of Thompson, and he had his position there to consider. A pitched battle, with two or three deaths to follow, was a rather too serious matter for the fat Swiss to contemplate. And he had a very keen concern for his own fat unhealthy skin.

He made a sign to his followers, which gave them the excuse they wanted for "backing down."

The Red Dog ruffians, still growling threateningly, drew off, and started for Thompson.

Billy Cook watched them out of

guessed that trouble was going on here?"

"I guess he did," grinned Billy Cook. "It wasn't very difficult to guess. Anybody hurt?"

"No," said Frank; "only some of those ruffians have some small-shot in their legs from Mr. Hopkins' shotgun."

"And they'd 'ave 'ad some in their heads, if they 'adn't cleared off," remarked Harold Hopkins, the Cockney of Cedar Creek. "They ain't taking our 'ome off of us!"

Billy Cook chuckled. Harold's difficulty with the aspirates was very entertaining to the Canadians.

Old Man Gunten had followed the cattlemen to the log cabin, and now he looked in at the doorway with a frowning face.

Mr. Hopkins eyed him grimly. The Swiss storekeeper stepped inside.

"What may you happen to want?" asked Billy Cook, looking at him.

"Possession of this cabin and clearing," answered the storekeeper. "I can show you the order of the court authorising me—"

"I guess that's of no interest to me," answered the ranchman. "I ain't looking at any of your dockyments. But if this was my cabin, I'd take you by the scruff of the neck and fire you in two shakes of a coyote's tail!"

Mr. Hopkins pointed to the door. "Houtside!" he said.

"The law—"

"Never mind the law," said the settler. "You've been offered your money, and that's enough. Take it, if you like—"

"I refuse to touch it, and I claim my rights here!" said the Swiss savagely.

The settler advanced upon him, and



"LYNCH HIM!!!" An angry, threatening mob had gathered outside Gunten's Stores. Then Old Man Gunten appeared at a window. "Go away!" shouted the storekeeper, in a quavering voice. "If you touch my stores you'll be fired on!"

"I guess not!" he said. "Young Todgers told us that you'd been offered the money due on the mortgage—"

"Too late!"

"You won't take the money?"

"No, I won't!" snapped Mr. Gunten. "I know my own business best, and I choose to take the property."

The ranch foremen looked at him keenly.

"I dunno how the law stands about that," he said. "I guess the sheriff wouldn't be in a hurry to turn a settler out of his homestead when you're offered your dollars. P'raps that's why you're trying to get possession while Mr. Henderson is away at Kamloops. Anyhow, this is clear agin the law. You can't take possession with a gang of bulldozers from the Red Dog, without any representative of the court hyer. And you're not going to be allowed."

"Who's going to stop me?" shouted Mr. Gunten.

"I am," answered the ranchman coolly. "That's what I'm hyer for. Your bulldozers are going to clear off, instanter. I give them two minutes to absquatulate."

sight, with a serene grin, and then rode on to the log cabin, and smote on the door with the butt of his whip.

The 2nd Chapter. The Order of the Boot!

Frank Richards opened the door of the log cabin.

Never had Frank been so glad to see the braveny foreman of his uncle's ranch.

Frank Richards & Co. had come there to help Mr. Hopkins and his son Harold to hold the fort against Mr. Gunten's myrmidons, and they had held it successfully so far. The rattling pistol-shots outside had done no damage. The fusillade had been intended chiefly to scare the garrison into surrender. But if Mr. Gunten had carried out his threat of setting fire to the cabin, the situation of the garrison would have been serious enough. The arrival of the cowboys had changed the aspect of affairs, however.

"Hallo, old Billy!" called out Bob Lawless. "Jolly glad to see you."

"Never so glad to see anybody," remarked Vere Beauclerc, with a smile. "I suppose Mr. Lawless

Mr. Gunten backed into the doorway again.

There he stopped, uneasy but defiant.

"If you lay hands on me—" he began.

"I'll do that fast enough."

The settler suited the action to the words at once.

He grasped the fat Swiss, spun him round, and planted a heavy boot behind him.

Old Man Gunten flew out of the cabin under that powerful propulsion, and landed on all-fours two or three yards away, yelling.

There was a roar of laughter from the cattlemen.

"We'll see that galoot back to Thompson," said Billy Cook. "I guess he won't want to go on the war-path agin when we're through with him. Come on, pard!"

As Mr. Gunten scrambled furiously to his feet the cattlemen's whips cracked round him.

"Off you go!" called out Billy Cook.

"I—I— Yaroooh!" howled the storekeeper, as the ranchman's whip curled round his legs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand back! I— Yoooooop!"

Four or five long quirts were lashing round the storekeeper's fat legs, and he took to his heels, howling.

The cattlemen rode after him as he started in flight towards Thompson. They kept pace with him, riding round him, cracking their whips, and giving him an occasional cut round the legs, roaring with laughter.

Mr. Gunten was not a sprinter; he had too much weight to carry. But he put on a remarkable speed as he headed for the town.

The cracking whips hunted him all the way to Thompson, and he arrived in Main Street red and panting and perspiring, and babbling with fury.

The sight of the fat storekeeper scuttling up the street, with the laughing cowboys cracking their whips round him, drew a crowd at once.

There were yells of laughter on all sides. Mr. Gunten was a prominent and wealthy citizen, but not a popular one. There was no help for him from the chortling crowd in Main Street.

Right up to Gunten's store he was escorted by the ranchmen, with cracking, stinging quirts.

He bolted breathlessly into the store and escaped at last, leaving a mob roaring with laughter outside.

Then Billy Cook and his comrades rode on to the Occidental for liquid refreshment after their efforts, and it was at rather a late hour that they galloped home to the Lawless Ranch across the prairie.

The 3rd Chapter. Gold!

Frank Richards & Co. stayed the night in the Hopkinses' homestead.

Door and windows were barred, but the night passed without any disturbance. Old Man Gunten and his myrmidons had been effectually scared off by the ranchmen.

The chums of Cedar Creek were up soon after dawn.

They breakfasted with the settler in the cabin, and over breakfast Frank Richards was wearing a very thoughtful look.

Frank was giving the affair a "big think."

The fact that Old Man Gunten had lent more money on the homestead than it was worth in the market, and that he had refused to accept his money with interest added, was very perplexing, and Frank had been trying to think out an explanation of the mystery.

Tyrannical and overbearing as the fat Swiss was by nature, his greed of dollars was his ruling passion, and evidently he had some more powerful motive for his conduct than the mere desire to show his power and "act ugly."

If he refused the offer of five hundred dollars, it could only be because the holding was worth more than that sum to him. Which was very perplexing, because better holdings could have been bought, up and down the Thompson Valley, for less money.

And Frank, coming over that curious puzzle in his mind, found an explanation at last—assisted, perhaps, by the sound of the miners at work on the creek, the "placer" claims being very near the Hopkinses' homestead on Cedar Creek.

"I think I've got it," Frank remarked at last, after a long silence.

"What and which?" asked Bob.

"Old Man Gunten is bent on getting hold of Mr. Hopkins' land," said Frank. "Why?"

"Because he's a pesky coyote," said Bob.

Frank Richards laughed.

"He would rather have the money, unless the land was worth more than five hundred dollars to him," he said.

"That's what beats me," said Mr. Hopkins. "This holding wouldn't fetch that if I sold it in Thompson. And I ought to know the value of the land I've worked on."

"There's only one explanation," said Frank quietly. "The land's worth more than you suppose, Mr. Hopkins."

The settler shook his head. "I guess I know what it will produce," he said. "Of course, with money spent on it for fertilisers and agricultural machinery, it would be worth a lot more. But there's better land down the valley, if Old Man Gunten wants to try farming."

"It's this holding he wants," said Frank, "and it can't be for farming. There's something else."

"What else, then?" asked Beauclerc, with wide-open eyes.

Frank waved his hand towards the diggings along the creek.

"What about gold?" he said.

"Gold!"

Frank Richards nodded.

"Yes. The placer miners are at work just over Mr. Hopkins' border."

There's gold close at hand, anyway. Suppose Old Man Gunten has found that there was gold in this land?"

"Phew!"
"It's quite likely," said Frank. "There's quartz cropping up in the soil, and it's close to the gold-bearing rocks. The fact is, that's the only possible explanation of Old Man Gunten acting in this way. He's a beast! But he doesn't want to make himself unpopular for nothing, and lose money by doing it. I've heard that he's planning to stand for the legislature; and turning a farmer out of house and home isn't the way to get votes in the valley, is it? The land's worth more than Mr. Hopkins knows; that's the only way of accounting for what Old Man Gunten is doing. And it can only be worth much if there's gold in it."

"My hat!" said Beaulere.
Bob Lawless gave a long, expressive whistle.

"Great Scott!" was Harold Hopkins' remark.

Mr. Hopkins sat silent. The simple settler had been puzzled and perplexed by Old Man Gunten's apparently inexplicable determination to seize upon his holding. But he had never thought of that explanation.

He nodded at last slowly.

"It's possible!" he said.

"Have you ever come across traces of the yellow?" asked Bob Lawless eagerly.

"Oh, yes! The soil's mighty poor and rocky for farming. There's traces of gold turned up in half the farms hereabouts," said Mr. Hopkins. "Not enough for pay-dirt, but enough to show. But I've never thought—"

"Great Jerusalem!" said Bob. "That's the explanation, of course! We were jays not to think of it before! You've got to hold on to this land, Mr. Hopkins, like grim death to a nigger!"

"You bet!" said the settler concisely.

"If there's gold in the soil," continued Frank Richards, "it may be no end of a bonanza—in fact, it must be valuable for Old Man Gunten to be so keen on it. You can get one of Mr. Isaacs' surveyors here, Mr. Hopkins, to make an examination and report. And, meanwhile, Old Man Gunten has got to be headed off!"

"We'll take a note to Mr. Isaacs' office on our way to school," said Bob Lawless.

"I guess that's the proper caper!" said the settler slowly. "It's a chance that Richards is right, at least; it makes it all clear, and it was a puzzle before. You'll stay at home from school to-day. 'Arold, and 'eipi' old the cabin if there's trouble. And I'm expectin' Bill 'ome to-day, too—he ought to be 'ere any minute. I'll write that there note to Mr. Isaacs now."

A little later Frank Richards & Co. called to their horses to start. A big, bronzed young man rode in from the southern trail as they were starting. It was Bill Hopkins, the settler's eldest son, from Kamloops. With three Hopkinses at home, the chums of Cedar Creek felt that the holding would be safe enough if Old Man Gunten recommenced his tactics. They rode away in cheerful spirits to Thompson.

At that hour of the morning Thompson was generally a quiet town; it did not, as a rule, "wake up" till nightfall. But on this especial morning there was unusual excitement in the frontier town.

As Frank and Bob and Beaulere rode into Main Street they found a crowd gathered there outside Gunten's store. The crowd looked excited, and Bob recognised among them two or three cattlemen from the Lawless Ranch.

"Something's on!" remarked Frank Richards.

"Up against Old Man Gunten, I guess!" said Bob Lawless. "I fancy the burg has heard now about his trying to turn Mr. Hopkins out of his home. There may be trouble for the old rascal!"

"Serve him right!"

"You bet!"

The chums rode on to Mr. Isaacs' office, which was just open. Mr. Isaacs was a gentleman of the Oriental persuasion, who "financed" mining concerns, and did a great business with prospectors on "grub-stakes," and supplied surveyors and engineers for the more important mines, and also lent money at considerable interest—having many irons in the fire. There was no love lost between Mr. Isaacs and Old Man Gunten, whose money-lending activities Mr. Isaacs regarded as a poaching upon his special preserves. And although Old Man Gunten often alluded scornfully to Mr. Isaacs as a

"sheeney," there was no doubt that Mr. Isaacs was the more honest man of the two.

Mr. Isaacs received the settler's note, and read it with much interest, and smiled and rubbed his hands.

"I guess my man will be with Mr. Hopkins inside an hour," he said. "Goot-morning, young shentlemen!"

Frank Richards & Co. left the office, feeling quite satisfied. Mr. Isaacs' own personal feud with Old Man Gunten was a guarantee that he would do his best to help the victim of the Swiss storekeeper.

There was a roar of voices in the direction of Gunten's store, and the chums rode back in that direction. They were keenly interested in what was going on there.

The crowd outside the store was thickening.

Cattlemen from the ranches, placer-miners from the creek, "hands" from the quartz-mines, small-holders from down the valley, and all sorts and conditions of "galoots," had gathered in strong force, letting the business of the morning slide while they gave their attention to the affair in hand. And the affair in hand was, apparently, the bringing to order of Mr. Gompers Gunton.

"Lynch him!" was a cry being raised in sections of the crowd, as Frank Richards & Co. came along.

Bob Lawless grinned.

"Old Man Gunten don't look like being popular just at present," he remarked.

"Hallo, you fellows!" Chunky Todgers, on his fat little pony, joined the chums in Main Street. Like them, he was on his way to school, but was letting school stand over for a while. "I say, there's going to be trouble here! The whole town's talking about Old Man Gunten and Hopkins!"

"Looks like it!" said Frank, laughing.

"I fancy they're going to rush the store!" said Chunky Todgers. "If the place is wrecked, you chaps, do you think a fellow would be justified in helping himself to some maple sugar?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's been a row last night," continued Todgers. "Some of the citizens cleaned out the Red Dog saloon, looking for Keno Kit and his gang. Those bulldozers are hiding away now. I reckon they'd get strung up if the crowd found them! I say, what do you think Old Man Gunten is feeling like just now?"

The chums of Cedar Creek chuckled.

Old Man Gunten at that moment was probably in the bluest funk of his career.

In his dealings with Mr. Hopkins he had acted within the letter of the law, certainly—as did Shylock when he demanded his pound of flesh. But the letter of the law did not matter much to the rough-and-ready citizens of Thompson.

All they knew was that the greedy money-lender was taking advantage of a legal technicality to turn a hard-working man, with his family, out of house and home, and conduct like that was not popular in the Thompson valley of British Columbia.

Mr. Gunten, with all his sharpness and cunning, had certainly never foreseen what a storm he was raising about his own ears.

"There'll be bad trouble!" said Beaulere, watching the buzzing crowd from his horse. "The sheriff's away, too. I say, Frank, this is a rather good time for dealing with Gunten!"

"How do you mean?"

"You offered him the money yesterday to clear up Mr. Hopkins' debt to him, and he refused it—"

"Well?"

"Would he refuse it now, with this merry mob under his windows, do you think?"

Frank Richards started.

"My hat! Good for you, Cherub! Come on! We'll go and see Gunten!"

And the chums of Cedar Creek pushed on through the crowd towards the store.

The 4th Chapter. Lynch Law!

"Hold on!"

"Stop!"

"By thunder—"

Loud and angry voices sounded round the schoolboys as they tried to push through the mob. There was not much room for horses in the crowded throng outside Gunten's store.

"Sorry, gents!" said Bob Lawless politely. "Please let us pass! We're going to pay Mr. Gunten what Hopkins owes him. We want some of you

to come into the store and see that he takes the money."

"Good for you, young Lawless!" exclaimed Buster Bill, whose red head and beard towered over the crowd. "Let them pass, you galoots! I reckon we'll see that Old Man Gunten takes the money!"

"Hurrah!"

The crowd surged on round the store, with the schoolboys in their midst. Frank Richards & Co. dismounted, and Bob rapped at the door, which was bolted and barred.

"Come down and let us in, Old Man Gunten!" roared Buster Bill.

A window opened above.

At the window appeared the fat face and figure of Gompers Gunten, his face almost as white as chalk.

A threatening roar greeted his appearance. Two or three revolvers cracked in the air, though they were not directed at the storekeeper.

"Go away!" shouted the storekeeper in a quavering voice. "If you touch my store, you'll be fired on."

"I guess that'll be the last thing you'll do in this hyer airth if you pull trigger on this crowd," answered Buster Bill contemptuously. "Come and open the door!"

"I refuse—"

"We've come to pay for Mr. Hopkins!" shouted Frank Richards.

Old Man Gunten looked down at him savagely.

"It's too late, as I've told you before!" he snapped.

"I've got an order on the Thompson Bank for the money."

"Keep it!"

The crowd roared and surged. Heavy blows rained upon the door, and there was a crash of glass as a window smashed.

Mr. Gunten disappeared for a moment, and returned to the upper window with a rifle in his hands.

His hands were trembling too much to hold the rifle very steadily, however.

But the sight of the weapon was enough for the crowd in the street. A dozen revolvers glistened in the morning sunshine.

"Put down that gun, or we'll riddle yer!" roared Buster Bill.

Crack, crack, crack!

Bullets were flying now, though as yet they only spattered at random on the walls of the store.

But it was clear enough that if Old Man Gunten used his unlucky rifle it would be, as the cattlemen said, his last action on the earth. He realised it himself, and he dropped the gun out of sight.

"I—I guess I'll come down," he gasped.

"Git a move on, then, afore we smash in the door, and your durned store along with it!" growled Buster Bill.

In a few minutes there were sounds of bars and bolts being removed within.

Old Man Gunten, with mingled fury and fear in his heart, had bowed to the inevitable. He had to open the door or see it broken in, and he chose to open it.

The instant the door opened Frank Richards & Co. were swept inside in a surge of the mob.

Mr. Gunten was swept back by the rush into the room behind the store, which was soon crowded, as well as the store itself, with a shouting mob.

"Order hyer!" roared Buster Bill, making his powerful tones heard over the din. "Order, you galoots!"

"Lynch him!"

"Ride him out of town on a rail!"

"Hurrah!"

"Order, I say!" shouted the big cattlemen, shoving back the too-eager citizens who were crowding round the terrified storekeeper.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen—"

panted Mr. Gunten.

Buster Bill succeeded in restoring something like order. Mr. Gunten sank trembling into a chair at the table, and the Thompson men surrounded him, leaving him a little room. Buster Bill was master of the ceremonies, emphasising his commands by brandishing a big Navy revolver.

"Now, then, young Lawless—"

"Here we are," said Bob cheerily.

"Mr. Gunten, Frank Richards has come to pay you—"

"I—I—"

"I'm ready," said Frank. "I offered you the money yesterday, Mr. Gunten, and you refused it. Here's the order on the bank for five hundred dollars, the sum with interest that Mr. Hopkins owes you on the mortgage. Will you take it?"

The fat Swiss breathed hard.

Strictly speaking, he was within his rights in refusing the money, as the time allowed for payment had lapsed. But with a crowd of angry men round him to see fair play refusal was difficult.

"I—I claim my rights," he said

feebly. "The money wasn't paid on time, and the holding's mine!"

"What do you want with it?" asked Frank.

"That's my business!"

"You happen to know that there's gold there, of course!"

Mr. Gunten jumped.

Frank Richards had spoken at a venture, hoping to take the fat rascal by surprise; and he had certainly succeeded.

Old Man Gunten stared at him blankly, with drooping jaw and wide-open eyes.

Frank Richards did not need an answer. The answer was to be read plainly enough in Mr. Gunten's startled face.

His eyes glinted as he looked round on the surprised faces of the Thompson men.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you hear that? Old Man Gunten found out that there's gold on the Hopkins' holding, and he lent Mr. Hopkins money to get him into his clutches. Now he refuses payment because Mr. Hopkins couldn't raise the money quite in time. That's his game, and you know what to think of it."

Buster Bill looked round.

"Get a rope from the store, some of you galoots!" he called out.

"What are you going to do?" shrieked the Swiss.

"Hang you over your own door!" answered Buster Bill coolly. "That's the stuff you want, you foreign trash!"

"I—I—"

"Lynch him!"

The store rang with the threatening shout, and rough hands were laid on the scheming storekeeper on all sides.

The 5th Chapter.

The Luck of the Hopkinses!

Old Man Gunten staggered to his feet, his face white as ashes.

"Stop! I—I—gentlemen, stop—I guess—Mercy!"

"Lynch him!"

Frank Richards & Co. drew nearer to the wretched schemer. Rascal as Gompers Gunten was, they certainly did not wish to see him lynched by the angry crowd. Fortunately, Buster Bill interposed. For the moment it looked as if all Mr. Gunten's cunning schemes would end at the end of a rope over the doorway of his store.

"Hold on! Now, Mr. Gunten, jest you give us the frozen truth, if you know what's good for your health," said the big cattlemen. "Is there gold on the Hopkinses' holding?"

"I—I—"

"Lynch him!"

"Yes," gasped Mr. Gunten. "It's—it's true! Mercy!"

"You pesky polecat," said Buster Bill in great disgust. "You've found out the holding's worth a fortune, and you want to rope it in for five hundred dollars!"

"The—the law—"

"Now, you can do the fair thing, or you can dance at the end of a riata," said Buster Bill. "Hyers' young Richards with your money, and there's a pen and ink. You're going to be paid, and you're going to put it in writing fair and square, to see old man Hopkins clear before any court in Canada. You've got your own free choice, remember; but you'll be lynched if you refuse. Is that clear?"

It was clear enough for the hapless plotter.

Old Man Gunten's cunning scheme had ended in disastrous failure; and with the rope very nearly round his fat neck, he was only too glad to see his money again, and escape with a whole skin.

He grabbed the pen.

The document he drew up was comprehensive enough, and satisfied even Frank Richards & Co., who scrutinised it with the greatest care, knowing the slippery nature of the rascal they had to deal with. Buster Bill and five or six of his comrades signed it as witnesses, in a remarkable variety of "fists."

Then the order on the bank was handed over, and received with a shaking hand by the storekeeper.

"I guess that lets us out," remarked Bob Lawless. "We'll ride back to Hopkins' cabin before we go to school, Franky. Thanks very much, Mr. Gunten. How does it feel to be honest for once in your life?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A bitter scowl was the storekeeper's only reply.

Frank Richards & Co. returned to their horses, and mounted and rode away in the greatest spirits.

They left a worried and terrified rascal behind them.

Mr. Gunten's rascality had roused the Thompson men, but his tardy act of justice was not sufficient to quieten them. Like the hapless magician of old, he had raised a spirit he could not quell.

There was already wrecking going

on in the store, and tins and packets and all kinds of goods were being pitched recklessly into the street, and there was hardly a window left whole in the building. And some of the more lawless spirits in the mob were still demanding lynching.

Old Man Gunten had signed away his unjust claim, but it looked as if he would have to pay the penalty of his rascality after all. The damage already done was not to be covered by five hundred dollars. But Buster Bill's bull-voice dominated the crowd.

"Gents!" bawled the big cattlemen. "Old Man Gunten hev played up, and he's goin' to keep his neck—till next time. But he's wasted the time of a hundred galoots hyer, and he's tried to swindle a feller-citizen. The drinks are on him!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a shout of applause at once.

"I agree—I agree!" panted Mr. Gunten, glad of the loophole of escape. In mortal fear of his worthless neck, he was only too glad to be let off for "drinks."

"Old Man Gunten is askin' all of us to the Occidental to licker up!" continued Buster Bill. "Is that korrect, sir?"

"Quite—quite!"

"Then come along!" said Buster Bill.

He took Mr. Gunten by the arm, and led him from the store, accompanied by a laughing and good-humoured mob now. The Thompson men were thirsty after so much shouting, and they followed Mr. Gunten and Buster Bill to the Occidental like lambs. In the bar-room of the Occidental Mr. Gunten grinned as cordially as he could. In the Western phrase, the "drinks were on him," and he was not let off lightly.

But when he limped back to his damaged store at last, he was glad to find himself alive and well—and glad that he had had to pay no more heavily for his rascality. And it dawned upon his mind that honesty, after all, was the best policy—at least, in a town like Thompson!

Frank Richards & Co. were late at school that day, and they bore with becoming meekness the censure of Miss Meadows. They were thinking quite as much about the Hopkinses' holding, and the investigations there of Mr. Isaacs' man, as about their lessons.

But it was not till a couple of days later that Mr. Isaacs' man made his report.

When that report was made it was, as Bob Lawless expressed it, a "regular sockdologer."

From Old Man Gunten's confession it was already known that there was gold in the holding. The storekeeper had made the discovery long since, and had laid his cunning plans for getting possession of the land.

The surveyor's report confirmed that confession, and set all doubts at rest.

Where Mr. Hopkins' plough had scratched the scanty, stony soil for a bare living, rich veins lay deeper down, and the outcrop was so promising that Mr. Isaacs was ready to "go in" with the farmer to develop the mine. And when Harold Hopkins turned up at Cedar Creek School again he came with a beaming face.

"It's jest orl right!" said Hopkins gleefully. "Jest a bit of orl right, and no error. We're going to roll in it, you can bet. You'll see me in a silk 'at yet, like the one you wore when you first came to Cedar Creek, Frank Richards! Old Isaacs is advancing the money to work the lode, and popper's got your five hundred dollars ready for you, Frank. We're all going to be blessed Creeshuses!"

It remained to be seen whether the Hopkinses would be transformed into Cresuses; but Frank Richards & Co. and all Cedar Creek cordially hoped that it would come to pass.

THE END.

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