



F. Hiscocks

THE FIRST CHAPTER The Runaway!

THE last of the De Browns drifted gloomily from the south end of Piccadilly towards the north. His aristocratic features showed intense distress, his slender figure drooped within an expensive spring suit which that morning had filled his soul with joy, and his monocle seemed to have lost its accustomed glitter.

For Millicent Manners, the lady for whom Archibald de Brown would have risked his life, had told him plainly that she would never marry him.

"No, Archie," she had said, "it's very nice of you, but I certainly won't marry you. When I marry I want a strong, clever, self-reliant fellow who has made his own position in the world. A creature whom I can respect and fear."

Archie had gulped.

"Now look at you," she had continued. "You've inherited a large fortune, and all

Archie de Brown is an aristocratic dude, but he also has unlimited pluck—as a gang of rustlers in the Wild West find out to their cost!

you do is to drift about and spend money that stronger men have made. You do some things, certainly—you play polo and drive a racing-car that someone else tunes for you. But those things *mean nothing*."

Archie had opened his mouth.

"And, further," Miss Millicent had continued, "you haven't a thought above the crease in your trousers and the parting in your hair. You expect a girl to be interested in a man like that? No, Archie; not this girl, anyway. I like you awfully. But when I marry, I'm going to marry a *man*. Sorry!"

"I see," Archie had managed to ejaculate.

"You mean, my dear old beautiful person, that before our marriage you would like me to sort of ginger up the old intellect and infuse more zip into the beef and biceps. Eh, what?"

But Miss Millicent had risen with some suddenness and proceeded to the door.

"I said nothing about a marriage," she

told him heatedly. "I never shall. There isn't going to be one as far as you and I are concerned—never! I hate to be cruel. But do you understand?"

Whereupon, without waiting for an answer, she had disappeared into the fastnesses of the house. So Archie disappeared, too. He tottered into the south end of Piccadilly and wandered dully towards the north.

Now it so happened that from the north end of Piccadilly upon this fateful morning there walked a grim-looking young man of about Archie's age, heading south. His usually kindly eyes held the glint of steel, his strong mouth looked as though it had been cut out of granite, and his name was Buller. Upon his back was a well-cut but distinctly shabby suit, and in his right-hand trouser pocket three shillings and fourpence-ha'penny—which articles constituted Mr. John Buller's entire fortune and effects in this world.

Mr. Buller had behind him twenty-five years of an extremely varied life. His people had lost their money just after he had left the great school where he and Archie de Brown had been educated; so he had gone to Canada, where he was given employment on a relation's ranch. From this he had drifted away on a gold-prospecting trip into the United States; but finding a depressing scarcity of anything that looked even faintly like gold, he worked his way to the West coast.

A job on a tramp ship took him to the South Seas, where he laboured in a pineapple-canning factory in the Fijis. Further restlessness and a growing dislike of the constant smell of pineapple, sent him wandering on various occupations through the Malay Islands into China. Here he won a considerable sum at fan-tan, bought a share in a rice plantation, and started to make real money.

Two years later he sold out and came home to have a good time. But he found his father and mother in stark poverty instead of the modest comfort that he had imagined was their lot. So without hesitation, he presented them with the whole of his bank balance, and got himself a job in a City office,

meaning to save up his fare to India, where he had heard money was to be made.

Office life and people who inhabit offices did not suit Mr. Buller, however. He stuck it for the inside of a week and put up with the petty hectoring of his stout and bald employer. Then his temper broke.

He up-ended the stout and bald gentleman into a waste-paper basket with a simple but impressive movement, formally tendered his resignation to the wildly-waving legs, and marched out, minus salary. Slightly ruffled, he walked into Piccadilly and turned southwards, debating upon his future.

Whereupon a passing horse took fright at the sudden back-firing of a motor-engine and bolted, drawing behind it a large van which rocked violently and threatened to crash over amongst the traffic at any moment.

Buller ran out instinctively to catch the reins on the off-side, so that the horse might not swerve on to the crowded pavement when it was checked. He noticed another figure dashing at the animal from the wrong side, and he yelled to him to let go.

But the valiant Archie, who had far more instinctive pluck than Miss Millicent had ever dreamt, paid no attention. He grabbed at the bridle and immediately lost his footing. Wildly, he scrambled about with his feet, and heaved with kangaroo-like movements of the body as he was dragged along, but the sudden check had already proved disastrous.

The horse swerved, the van rocked on two wheels, and the driver was flung out, to land, fortunately unhurt, on the well-sprung back seats of a passing car.

Meanwhile, the runaway went on, and Archie managed to get one of his legs up over a shaft, meaning to get up on to the driving-seat and grab the trailing reins. Mr. Buller had much the same idea, with the result that the two met, reaching for the reins at the same moment. But Archie got them first.

Heartily, he pulled upon them, not realising that the off-side was slack and that he was wrenching the horse's head inwards to the pavement. Buller yelled and grabbed, but he was too late to prevent disaster. The cart-



Archie de Brown and John Buller thought and acted at the same moment. Simultaneously they sprang from different sides and grasped the bridle of the runaway horse.

wheels struck the kerb with a crashing jar, and the shafts snapped off, leaving the horse to gallop on free until it was stopped by a policeman.

But long before that happened that jar had sent the cart clean off its balance. It crashed through the window of an outfitter's shop with a terrific smashing of plate-glass and woodwork, and the two young men plunged head-first into a sea of shirts, ties, socks and gents' natty underwear.

Archie was the first to get his head clear, and he sat up, groping for his eyeglass and blinking about him. His gaze settled upon a tie that was a choice mixture of spring sunset colours, with a suggestion of a forest fire in the background, and he gasped.

With trembling hands he picked up the tie, whilst Buller heaved into sight beside

him, and the scared owner of the shop scrambled through into the wreckage. It was to the latter that Archie turned, however, holding out the tie and waving it.

"Dear old shop-person," he said, shaking his head solemnly, "name your price. It's perfect. You couldn't charge too much for it."

"What on earth—" gasped the proprietor. "Do you mean you'll pay for the window?"

"Window?" echoed Archie. "Dear old pants-peddlar, what are you wiffling about? I want to buy this tie. It'll just go with my fawn tweed that has the cunnin' little red pin-stripe pattern."

But he broke off in hurt surprise as he heard a sudden howl of mighty laughter at his side.

John Buller was still laughing weakly

when he and Archie had left the wrecked shop, given their names to the police, and were walking off arm-in-arm.

"To think," he said unevenly, "that after ten years I should meet you, you blinking tailor's dummy, bang in the middle of a clothes shop! Why, Archie, do you realise that we haven't seen each other since we both left St. Botolph's? Let's drop in somewhere and chat. What have you been doing with yourself all this time? Living on your giddy fortune, I suppose, and making life worth while for the tailors?"

But when they sat down in a restaurant, Archie shook his head and emitted a deep sigh.

"My life," he said forlornly, "is over! Nipped out, Bulldog, old egg! No good to me at all, if you grasp what I mean."

"I get a faint drift of it," said Bulldog gravely. "You are breaking the news gently, but you indicate that there is some little annoyance on what you call your mind."

Archie told him what had happened, describing Miss Millicent at great length.

"So, you see," he finished, "that's the end of all things—the limit, dear old friend of my college days. I can't possibly go on livin' now, don't you see? Or don't you?"

"I don't," grinned Bulldog. "Archie, you're an ass; a cheerful, plucky and good-hearted ass, but an ass, for all that! You could make yourself into all that this Miss Manners desires if you tried. You've only got to travel about the world a bit and work for your living, and any girl will think you a real man."

"Tell me," gasped Archie feverishly—"tell me how it's done, old bird! You look one of the strong, tough chappies that make Millicent shiver with joy. Tell me how you did it."

Bulldog laughed, but launched on a brief story of his travels and adventures. At the finish, he said nothing about his generous action to his parents. He said that his money was lost, and got Archie howling with laughter about the brief but spectacular job in the City office.

In the middle of the laughter Archie stopped suddenly.

"I've got it!" he almost shouted. "The jolly old brain-box has suddenly started firin' on all four, and I've got a fine idea. Listen. I've inherited something of a fortune, as it were."

"That was a good idea, of course," said Bulldog, "but—"

"Wait. Further to that, I want to be a real man for little Millicent's sake," continued Archie. "I want to be a tough, two-fisted, sharp-shootin'—er—what'sisname. Isn't that so?"

"You mean a thingummy," said Bulldog. "Still, go on."

"Well," said Archie, "I'll give you a job—a good, well-paid job. You're to take me away out West and show me the ropes. I'll pay all expenses, and I'll hand out whatever salary you think fair. And all you've got to do is to lead me around the wild and woolly open spaces and show me how to get tough. There, is it a go? Are you on, old chappie?"

It took them fully an hour of argument, discussion, and table-thumping to finally boil down the only idea that Archie was ever known to produce, but at the finish of it they shook hands.

Bulldog, after pooh-poohing the whole thing, had gradually come to see that, amazingly enough, it might be quite a *good* idea.

The hard but healthy life out West would do Archie all the good in the world; would prevent him becoming the aimless fop into which he would develop if he went on as he was. And the arrangement would be a relief to Bulldog, who ached to be out of the stuffy, smoky city.

Finally, therefore, he agreed; but he refused to take any salary.

"You pay expenses, Archie," he finished. "I'll make any pocket-money I want as we go along. I know the ropes well enough not to be ever hard up."

And from that he would not depart. But both of them departed from England three weeks later, en route for Canada, and Archie was in the highest of spirits.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Stampeding Steers!

DOWN in the cup of a dark valley a herd of steers stood together, their drab brown backs making a restless, undulating carpet beneath the clouded sky. Over upon the hillside a coyote yelped dryly, its harsh note seeming to crack through the humid heat of the night. And the ranch foreman swore gently.

"Hey, Bulldog," he said, trotting his horse across to the Englishman, "get out amongst the steers and watch for trouble. This scorchin' heat'll mean a stampede unless we're careful. The beasts are nervous, an' if any of the yearlings start fightin' they'll send the whole herd off."

He stared up at the lowering sky and mopped his brow as Bulldog raised a hand to his sombrero and moved off.

"Darn them clouds! Why don't they

break?" the foreman muttered. "If only the rain'd come, we'd be out of danger."

Much the same thought was in Bulldog's mind as he guided his pony through the restless steers. Cowmen were strung out round the great herd, keeping constantly on the move and singing crooningly, but danger threatened with every second of this baking heat.

Bulldog wondered, too, where Archie was. He hadn't seen him for more than an hour—not that he was hard to see. His gorgeous cowboy outfit made that almost impossible.

They had arrived in Canada a few weeks back, and had drifted down to a mid-western ranch a fortnight later.

This was a place Bulldog already knew, and the owner gave them employment gladly. For one thing, he had a big herd of cattle to be moved some hundreds of miles across the plains, and he was short-handed. And for

"Dear old pants-peddlar," said Archie, as he and John Buller sat up among the wreckage of the shop window, "I want to buy this tie." The proprietor stared at Archie in astonishment.



another, Archie was more than willing to work for nothing in exchange for the experience.

The rest of the cowmen treated the last of the De Browns as though he were some strange animal at first. They played tricks upon him, put lizards in his bunk, and generally pulled his leg until he might have been expected to walk with a permanent list. Bulldog hung round constantly, ready to chip in on his friend's behalf, but hoping that Archie would gain the men's respect by looking after himself.

And Archie did. He stuck it out wonderfully and played tricks back in his turn. Also, his old polo days stood him in good stead, and he soon showed himself to be as good a horseman as anyone else on the range. At the end of a week he was accepted as one of the bunch and genuinely liked; but his marvellous habit of doing the most thick-headed thing at precisely the wrong moment on all occasions didn't improve the foreman's temper.

The herd was two days out on its long journey, and Bulldog stared around in the darkness as he rode amongst them. Archie had gone off on his own after the evening meal, and Bulldog preferred to keep him in view.

Bulldog began to get angry. Conditions were electric. The danger of a stampede was imminent—a flapping piece of paper, a sudden noise, would be enough to send the animals off. And if that happened Archie was certain to get himself into the most dangerous position possible.

Archie, however, was quietly but thoroughly enjoying himself. At a nearly-dry creek on the fringe of the herd he was washing the bright-coloured shirt he had bought a few weeks back. It had been nicknamed the "Forest Fire" by the cowmen, who often pretended to light their cigarettes at it; but a week's wear had soiled its brilliance.

So, with soap and a bottle of petrol, Archie got busy. He wrung the shirt out and then, engrossed in his labour of love, rose and shook it out with mighty flaps. The cattle near him scattered, and within a minute fright had run like an electric shock all through the herd. Hoofs stamped and bodies swayed. Heads butted. But Archie noticed nothing.

He opened the petrol bottle and held it in one hand, splashing the liquid on a bad spot, preparatory to rubbing. But in that moment he heard a chorus of yells, a scatter of shooting revolvers and a sound like low, rumbling thunder.

The whole floor of the valley seemed to be moving as he glanced round. A great, heaving brown carpet swept along it and thundered towards the open country beyond, whilst yelling cowmen raced their ponies at the sides, shooting and cracking their whips in a hopeless attempt to stop the stampede.

"Deah me!" gasped Archie. "Those careless fellows have allowed the beastly cows to run away. Dash it, I'd better make haste and help round them up."

Saying which, he rose and flung himself into the saddle of his nervous mare, spurring it forward. He jammed the petrol bottle which he was still holding into the opening of his vest. He had guarded the cleaning liquid jealously ever since leaving the ranch. Archie bent low over the reins riding blindly ahead through the sudden clouds of flying dust.

Meanwhile, in among the plunging steers, Bulldog and another cowman fought for their lives. They shot down wildly racing steers which charged at their horses, and they tried to forge ahead, for Bulldog's companion had yelled out:

"They're heading towards the canyon. Get ahead and turn 'em if you can, an' if you can't, leave your horse and take a chance, jumpin' out of it over their backs. The whole herd will go over if they ain't turned—the canyon's only half a mile ahead."

Bulldog rode as he had never ridden before. He lashed aside at steers that endangered him and forced his horse into any opening that showed ahead. He was quite near the stampede leaders, and vaguely through the darkness he could see the broken line of the canyon edge. But he realised suddenly that to turn the herd was impossible. In a couple of minutes the herd would have reached the edge, and then—

But still he hesitated. He hated to leave his pony to such a terrible fate, and he checked it in a wild, reckless attempt to battle his way aside out of the herd.

Meanwhile, Archie had been riding hard. In the thick, choking dust he couldn't see which way he was going, and he was only guided by the thunder of the hoofs somewhere near him. Blindly he pushed ahead, spurring his mare until it suddenly slid to a stop and nearly sent him over its head. Archie stared down and saw a yawning abyss a few yards in front. He gasped.

Although he didn't know it, he had ridden a diagonal course that took him clean in front of the stampede. He could hear it coming now, but didn't realise that it was thundering straight towards him. Archie mopped his brow.

"Deah me, how extraordinary!" He pondered. "The herd's somewhere near—I can jolly well hear it gettin' nearer. But which way is it goin'?"

Feeling that now was the time for action, he groped in the pocket of his chaps and produced a box of matches, striking one close to his body between cupped hands. If he could only see the herd—

The match flared; Archie fell backwards off his horse and wondered for an instant if he had been struck by lightning, for that match had been one inch away from the open neck of a well-splashed petrol bottle.

"Ow!" howled Archie, plunging on the ground and tearing the blazing bottle from where it was fondly embraced by his vest. "Ow-wow! Dash it all, I'm jolly well burnin'! Ow, bai Jove! Help! Assistance! Deah me—ow!"

He got the blazing bottle free much quicker than he imagined and flung it away. But it fell into a bush which roared into flame immediately.

Archie, rolling upon the ground, eventually extinguished his burning shirt. Then the thunder of hoofs as the herd drew nearer came to his ears, and suddenly he forgot all about the fire in a new danger, for he realised what had happened.

The great stretch of the thundering herd swept like a brown plunging sea out of the choking dust clouds beyond the burning bushes. The terrified animals were pounding along shoulder to shoulder, with widened nostrils and panic-stricken eyes. As Archie

scrambled to his feet he thought that his last moment had come.

Then the leaders of the stampede saw the fire, and they checked suddenly, bucking, kicking and shouldering aside to get away from the one thing which all animals fear above anything else. Like a wave, the following steers piled up behind, leaping over those which were flung down, horning and fighting madly to try to get out.

Fear had set them going, but fire was in front, and that saved the disaster which had seemed imminent. Within a few more seconds the whole herd had turned. They had swept aside from the canyon edge, which was now fringed with flame, and they were running up the steep slope amongst the undergrowth where they soon came to a standstill, exhausted, but glad to be beset by no further terrors.

In a daze Archie watched, as a crowd of horsemen rushed up and jumped down to beat out the flames which he had caused.

Archie helped them, but at the finish they crowded round him and raised him shoulder-high. With yells and cat-calls, they marched him round, for every one of them thought that he had recklessly risked his own life to get ahead, fire the bushes, and thus turn aside the herd from disaster.

Archie accepted the applause with slight mystification, but great pleasure. He waved his sombrero and smiled from left to right.

But Bulldog fell off his horse. He was neither injured nor exhausted. He was, in fact, the only one who had seen all that had happened.

And he was laughing like a hyena.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Bulldog's Brain-wave

ARCHIE DE BROWN polished his eyeglass with considerable vim, and then fitted it carefully into its accustomed place.

"Bulldog," he said, "I've been thinkin'." Solemnly he nodded and settled himself more comfortably in the saddle of his horse. "It's about time that some of us—er—jolly well did a bit of—ah—thinkin', if you grasp what I mean. About these rustlers, dash it all."

John Buller grinned amiably and tilted his sombrero, but did not answer.

The two trotted their horses on the fringe of a herd, far away on the sunny plains of South Dakota in America. Already they had been adventuring now for three months. They had drifted down from the ranch in Canada, where Archie had learnt enough to make him quite a useful "hand," and had got jobs on another ranch.

"Dear old laddie, I was talkin'," said Archie. "I remarked that I'd been thinkin'. I said that I'd been thinkin' that——"

"Quite!" said Bulldog cheerfully. "And since you mentioned the subject of rustlers, I think I've got an idea. Altogether, the rotters have stolen a hundred and fifty head of cattle from this range in the last fortnight. We've combed the hills and tried to follow up the tracks, but we haven't found a thing. What's more, the men who've lived all their lives hereabouts are quite certain that no group of cattle-stealers are hiding anywhere."

"Then, dash it all, where *are* they hidin'?" said Archie. "And where are the stolen cattle bein' kept? That's what *I* want to know!"

"They aren't being kept anywhere," said Bulldog. "My idea is that the rustlers run each stolen bunch straight off to the railway ten miles off across the range, and ship them off to stockyard buyers who don't question where they come from."

"Oh!" said Archie.

"And I also think that the rustlers are men of this ranch," continued Bulldog. "That's why they've got away with their cattle each time without any of us knowing about it until the morning. There are a bunch of traitors at work, drawing pay as cowhands and 'tealing their own employer's stock."

"Ah!" gasped Archie. "You mean that—that—deah me! Bai Jove, there's somethin' in what you say, old laddie. Now I might have thought of that myself if only it had occurred to me, don't you know. I'm really somethin' of a detective when I concentrate."

He slapped the beautiful goat-skin chaps that covered his legs, and grinned happily.

"Well, now that we've seen through their rotten little game, what are we goin' to do

about it?" he asked. "I was tellin' you only a little while ago that it was time some of us did a little thinkin'."

"Now that *we* have seen through their little game," said Bulldog, with a grin, "we'll keep quiet about it. I've got an idea all ready fixed up, and you, Archie, are the only man I can trust to help me. Listen, now. You know we had to shoot a couple of steers some days ago, in order to stop a stampede?"

"Yaas," breathed Archie excitedly.

"Well, I had their skins dried out, and on the quiet, I've pegged them up with supports, so that they'll stand. You and I are going to creep in amongst the herd to-night, climb inside those skins, and wait. When any rustling starts we'll see it, and we'll be able to knock the rotters over with our rifles. I've made loopholes in the sides and heads."

"Bai Jove!" said Archie. "Another minute, old laddie, and I should have thought of that, too. It's a fine idea. Dash it all, the rustlers won't see us, an' so they won't be afraid to rustle—if you grasp what I mean."

"I get it vaguely," grinned Bulldog. "Well, Archie, that's what I brought you riding so far away from the other chaps for this morning. I wanted to tell you all about it, with no one overhearing. But now that you know the plan, we'd better not ride together any more. No one on the ranch must have the slightest idea that we're hatching anything, or the traitors will prick up their ears."

"Quite," breathed Archie, glancing from left to right over his shoulders. "Mustn't raise the bad old suspicions—everybody in blissful ignorance—rustlers trippin' into the trap. When do we start?"

"I'll meet you at nine behind the horse-corral," said Bulldog. "Now, buzz off, Archie—and remember, not a word to a soul!"

Archie rode along the southern fringe of the herd, and when he had got a mile or so from Bulldog, one of the other men from the ranch trotted out to meet him.

"Howdy, Archibald?" he said, with a mocking grin. "How's the paradin' clothes-peg, this mornin'? That's a natty line in shirts you've got on. Yellow stripes sure go

well with a purple background and green horseshoes—but ain’t you afraid of settin’ the pampas grass on fire ? ”

Archie snorted. This individual, known to his comrades as “ Smoky ” by reason of his jet black hair, was not a favourite with the last of the De Browns.

Smoky, indeed, was not a favourite with any of the more decent and clean-living men. He was a notorious bully and most of his

Choked with dust and bruised all over, Archie clung on desperately to the tossing horns of the stampeding steer. If he lost his grasp he would be pounded to death by the oncoming herd!

Smoky flung back his head and let out a howl of laughter. He always found Archie an easy target for cheap wit, and he was never happier than when pulling the august leg of the last of the De Browns.

“ Haw, haw ! ” he laughed, imitating Archie’s cultured tones. “ Bai Jove, old fellah, I’m awfully sorry, doncha know, but if you will insist on ridin’ the range dressed up like a cross between a movie hero and a



off time was spent in the saloon of a near-by cattle town.

“ Good-mornin’, Smoky, ” said Archie, with dignity. “ I do not wish to—ah—have words with you, but if you have anything to say about my clothes, I should be obliged if you would—ah—refrain from makin’ me an object of ridicule. Dash it all, I feel bound to point out that your mannah is hardly good form—if you grasp what I mean.”

prairie fire you’re the only one who has anything to do with the ridicule part.”

Archie started to get down from his horse.

“ Smoky, ” he said, in fiery tones, “ I don’t mind ordinary chippin’, but I nevah allow any fellow to be deliberately rude. Therefore, I must ask you to put up your fists and take a really remarkable hidin’.”

“ Is zat so ? ” asked Smoky with a snarl, and he made a lightning movement, so that

when Archie turned to face him, the last of the De Browns found himself looking into a shining revolver. "Stick 'em up!" went on Smoky. "I'm not doin' this because I'm scared of you, but because no one dare touch you on this range. If I got down and beat you up your friend Bulldog would start a lot of trouble. But I'll tell you this. If you hadn't got him behind you, you wouldn't live a day in this bunk."

"Deah me," gasped Archie. "You—you perfectly frightful cad. You jolly well know that isn't true, dash it all! Put that beastly gun away and get down now—I'll give you such a remarkably good hidin' that you'll wish you were never born. And what's more, I'll guarantee that Bulldog doesn't do anything about it whatever happens."

"Oh, yeah!" grinned Smoky, who for all his fine words was genuinely afraid of Archie's well-known pluck and muscle. "Well, I'm not wasting any time givin' you a thick ear, anyhow. You run away and weep your troubles out on your big friend's knees. You'd better keep near him in case the rustlers run you off amongst the cows one dark night—without your hat on you might easily be mistook for a steer."

Archie swung up back into his saddle.

"I'll jolly well make you fight me one day, Smoky," he breathed fiercely—"and let me tell you that I've got my eye on one or two people on this range who might know a lot more about the rustlers than the rest of us. Bulldog was only saying just now— But, dash it all, of course, you can't expect me to say a word about that. Just you look out for yourself, that's all."

Smoky's eyebrows went up so that they nearly touched his sombrero.

"Well—well," he said slowly. "Why, Archie, that's interesting. Come now, p'raps I have been a bit too funny with you this morning, but I've always been one for my little joke and you mustn't mind. What's all this about the rustlers? We're all keen to catch 'em, and if there's any stunt on, you want as many helpers as possible."

"Not a bit of it," said Archie, shaking his head firmly. "Bulldog and I agreed not to jolly well say a word to anyone. Not a

single livin' soul. And what's more, Smoky, I still consider your behaviour has been jolly well unpardonable. Dash it all, yes!"

But a keen light had come into Smoky's eyes, and he slipped his gun away and swung his horse round so that it was beside Archie's.

"Land sakes!" he said. "What a temper you've got, Archie. Can't you take a joke? There now, if I went too far, I apologise, and isn't an apology enough between one gentleman and another?"

Archie was slightly mollified. Smoky's words touched him upon his most sensitive spot—the way in which well-bred people ought to always forgive and forget.

"I—ah—accept your apology, Smoky," he said grudgingly, "and after that, of course, there's nothing more to be said."

"But about this stunt for catching the rustlers," persisted Smoky. "Just to show that you forgive me, Archie, let me in on it. Bulldog gave me a hint earlier to-day, but I didn't quite understand what he meant."

Deep suspicion lived in Archie's eyes as he looked at the other.

"I find that very difficult to believe, Smoky," he said solemnly. "Bulldog told me that he had not given our plan away to a single soul. Dash it all, he said he had a terrible job in fixin' up the dummy steers without anyone else knowin'. Look hear, I believe you're still tryin' to pump me, and I shall make a point of asking Bulldog if he confided in you. If you've been tellin' lies, my friend, I shall administer a most fearful hidin', whether you pull your guns on me or not." He nodded fiercely. "Good-bye!" he almost exploded, and rode off.

Smoky stared after him, and a wide grin came over his lean face.

"Dummy steers," he muttered to himself. "Great jumpin' cat-snakes! If I ever want anything shrieked all over the plain and howled from the hilltops, I'll tell it to Archie in confidence. So that's the idea, is it?"

He suddenly let out a roar of laughter, and swinging his horse round, galloped away to where a group of his special cronies were talking together.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER Rounding Up the Rustlers!

FAR over the floor of a wide valley the brown backs of the herd stretched like an undulating sea beneath the wan moon. Half a dozen men strung out at various points around the edges kept guard, but two of them rode together and talked in undertones.

"There's no one else but our gang on guard to-night?" asked one of them.

"You're sure of that, Smoky?"

"Everything's O.K.," grinned the other. "And what's more, I've ridden amongst the herd and managed to catch sight of those two boobs in their dummy cow-skins."

He stretched out his hand and pointed.

"See that tree over there on the far side of the herd?" he asked. "Well, look along that line and count twenty steers; the twenty-first and twenty-second are the dummies. Got 'em?"

"Sure I've got 'em," answered the other man, with a grin. "Yes, you can see they're dummies now; they're standing so blamed still. Well, what are we going to do—slip 'em the works?"

Smoky nodded.

"Start cutting out the bunch of cows we've chosen," he whispered, "and if they start any trouble let 'em have it. Don't shoot unless they do because the noise is bound to bring the rest of the boys out from the ranch house, and we don't want that if we can help it. You see, they may be only hidin' there so that they can spot who the rustlers are. If that's so we can quietly put 'em out of the way later on, before they can spill the beans. Now get busy—time's short."

"O.K.," grinned his friend, and obediently trotted away into the darkness. As he went he gazed over the herd and chuckled as he saw one of the dummies rock slightly. As a matter of fact, Archie, within that skin, was not having the best of times. The scent of a newly-cured cow-skin at close quarters is none too pleasant.

The temperature on this hot night made the interior of the skin something like a bakehouse, and the hunched-up position that the

last of the De Browns was forced to adopt gave him cramp in every limb.

However, he stuck it manfully. Through the loopholes provided by the inventive-minded Bulldog, who lay concealed beside him, he could see all round the herd, and watch the riders.

A Winchester repeating rifle was hugged close to his chest and he had stuck the muzzles of his two revolvers through a couple of convenient slits.

Meanwhile, he was getting bored.

"What ho! What ho!" he whispered hoarsely. "How's things goin' with you, Bulldog? Bai Jove, after this I shall take my hat off to every jolly old sewerman I pass. What heroes those laddies must be."

"Shut up," came a growl from the next hide. "If you start talking, Archie, I'll—I'll plug you before the rustling starts. Now, for heaven's sake keep your entertaining views to yourself."

"Sorry!" breathed Archie. "I won't say a word, dear old boy."

It was at that moment that Bulldog noticed the riders coming together towards one end of the great herd, and he stiffened, swinging up his repeater rifle ready for action.

"Gosh!" he gasped to himself, as he watched proceedings. "The whole lot of 'em are at it. I see how they've been doin' it now. Well, here goes."

As he sighted his rifle at one of the distant horsemen he raised his voice slightly and called out to Archie in a hoarse whisper.

"They're starting," he breathed. "Get busy now, Archie, and let 'em have it. That bunch of riders right at the end there."

Archie, who had been too occupied with his own discomfort to keep his attention on the herd, became wildly excited in a second. He heard the sharp crack of Bulldog's repeater and the answering yell of a distant horseman who spun out of his saddle clutching a shattered forearm.

Wildly the last of the De Browns fumbled for his own rifle, caught the trigger by mistake—and lost eyebrows and front hair in one instant of blazing sound that made him think that the house of De Brown was finished for ever.

Finding himself still alive, however, he rammed the rifle out, sighted it vaguely, and pulled the trigger.

It was only then that something rather like a wasp stung that portion of his back which rose highest within the steer's skin. He gave a yell and flattened himself out, shooting out his legs with a convulsive movement.

This upset the dummy steer, which canted over, thudded against that occupied by Bulldog and brought both down with a crash. Then something like powerful rain began to patter into the hot sand all about the fallen dummies, whilst the live steers scattered in terror, leaving a clear space.

Archie plunged about in the smelly darkness, emptying both his revolvers in a willing attempt to do something helpful, and thereby shot the heel off one of Bulldog's boots and smashed the butt of the rifle he was holding.

Bullets now kicked up spurts of sand all around, thudded through the tough hides and ricocheted off the horns—and Bulldog realised that the whole plan had somehow gone wrong.

It was perfectly clear that their position must have been known from the start, or otherwise that volley of shooting would not have been so accurate. As it was, flight was the only thing possible.

He kicked himself out of his skin, yelled to Archie to do likewise, and then dived in amongst the cattle, staggering and falling to his knees as a bullet ploughed a furrow along the side of his head, stunning him with its force.

Archie lost no time in following suit.

Still holding one of his revolvers he, too, plunged in amongst the steers, and then threaded his way through them, making for the group of shooting men. His temper was up. The blood of the De Browns boiled, and he was going to teach that crowd something in no uncertain manner.

But before he could reach them the section of the herd in which he was now began to move off. The riders had broken up and were swiftly cutting out the group of cattle which they had arranged to steal. In the darkness they had not seen Archie—and so he now found himself in the middle of a minor stampede.

He was shouldered and knocked from side to side several times, almost missing his footing as the cattle swept forward in a gallop. His position now was one of wild danger, and he knew it. If he once fell those pounding hooves would leave very little trace of the last of the De Browns, and at this rate he could not hope to keep his feet. What was more, he dare not climb up on to one of the plunging backs or he would be seen and shot down by the rustlers.

Desperate, choked with dust, and bruised all over, Archie grasped at a tossing pair of horns to steady himself. Then he lost his feet altogether, was charged sideways by a frightened beast at his elbow, and then found himself in a difficult position.

With his hands gripping the horns of the steer, he was hanging below its neck with his feet trailing along the ground between its front legs. It was an uncomfortable manner of travel, but Archie gasped with relief when he saw what it meant.

So long as he could hang on he would be taken wherever the herd went, unseen by the rustlers, and he would be able to hold them up, as he fondly imagined.

By now, however, the herd were going at full gallop and shots were ringing out from far behind. Bulldog had recovered consciousness, and men had also come running out from the ranch house, attracted by the shooting.

Archie heard, and thought that the day was saved. The followers would be easily able to keep off the rustlers and catch them up; but that was just where he was wrong, for Smoky, in the lead, yelled out a sharp order and the herd was suddenly turned aside into a narrow defile which apparently ended in a blank wall of rock.

The ground all along this part was thickly covered with prickly cactuses and thorny bushes, and Archie's appearance began to suffer. His beautiful goat-skin chaps dissolved like snow before sunshine. The cactuses tore them to shreds and great portions were wrenched away and left fluttering upon the sharp spines.

One by one his boots followed suit, together with large portions of his underpants, and the tail of his gorgeous shirt.



Presenting an amazing figure on the back of the steer, Archie blazed his guns at the rustlers. "Put your jolly old hands up!" he bawled. "I've got you covered!"

But the last of the De Browns hung on.

He couldn't see where the herd was going, and he was too occupied with the loss of his beloved finery to notice that the rock wall at the end of the defile had a narrow passage through it which would not be noticed by any man at a distance of ten yards.

Smoky evidently knew it well, however, for he led the herd and the riders through it, and within a couple of minutes they had apparently disappeared off the face of the earth.

This indeed was how things appeared to Bulldog and the rest of the men from the ranch as they came tearing up. The Englishman had leapt up behind the ranch foreman's saddle, and as that worthy brought his horse to a standstill, he stared around him.

All the men were nonplussed.

"Gosh!" gasped the foreman. "Am I dreaming or what's happened! The whole darned bunch of steers have gone into thin

air and the russians with 'em. They swung along somewhere by this line of rocks. But where, for the love of Mike, have they gone to?"

Bulldog drew a deep breath and stared around as the moon drifted from behind a cloud and bathed the empty plain in its pale radiance. He noticed the cactus bushes, and saw curious patches of white stuff scattered in a rough line amongst them. Then he caught sight of a shred of cloth that looked something like a small sunset, and he let out a yell.

"Gosh!" he shouted, "look at that. Look at those lumps of white stuff—it's goat's hair. And there's not another piece of cloth with that gorgeous pattern on it anywhere else in the United States. Archie's been along this way. It looks as though he's been dragged right up to that wall of rock there. He was with me five minutes ago, and where he's

gone there we'll find the stolen herd. Come on, boss."

The ranch foreman swung his horse round and led the group through the defile at a gallop. Not until they were right up against the rock did they find the passage through it, and then the whole method of the disappearance became plain to them.

"Get ready, boys!" yelled the foreman, whipping out his gun. "Make it snappy and shoot down any man you see. They may be waiting for us at the other end, so we've got to go through with a rush."

And it was with a rush that they went through that narrow path and came out a quarter of a mile farther on in an unexpected cup-shaped valley.

A big herd of cattle stretched over the floor of this hidden fastness, and a group of horsemen were gathered together, bending over one of their number who had been wounded.

They heard the noise of the newcomers and jerked round at once, putting up their guns; but in the same second they were taken by surprise from behind.

For an amazing figure had scrambled up on to the back of a steer and blazed his gun in the air. A monocle glittered fiercely in his left eye. A gorgeous shirt covered the upper part of his body and a tasteful fringe of long grasses was bunched round his waist, stretching down like the skirt of a hula-hula dancer over a pair of white and badly scratched legs.

"Put your jolly old hands up!" bawled Archie. "Dash it all, drop your guns; I've got you covered if you grasp what I mean."

And by way of illustrating his remarks he put a couple of bullets into the ground at the heels of the amazed rustlers.

The newcomers also fired a volley that kicked up the sand all about the scoundrels' feet, and they were so hopelessly surrounded that not one of them fired a single shot.

Swiftly they were disarmed, and their hands knotted behind them. Then the men of the ranch burst into loud laughter. Archie's comic appearance made it irresistible.

When the punchers had got over their mirth, the rustlers were mounted on their horses and, amid the punchers, led back to the ranch. When it was reached Archie

promptly disappeared, and was not seen for another hour, at the end of which time he reappeared in another smart outfit, his elegant self once again.

Meanwhile, the rustlers had been taken off to the calaboose in the nearest cattle town, there to await their trial.

Archie came in for the congratulations of everyone for the part he had played in rounding up the rustlers, for it could not be denied that it was due to him that their hiding-place had been discovered.

And it was with regret that the ranch-owner parted with Archie and Bulldog when the pair decided to move on again.

A few weeks later found Archie and Bulldog working on another ranch, in Texas, and it proved to be the last stage in their travels.

Quite unexpectedly, one morning, a letter arrived for Archie, and when he saw the writing his heart-beats increased. He tore the letter open eagerly and hastily read it.

Bulldog, watching Archie, saw a gleam come into his eyes and his face break into a smile. He knew who that letter was from, for, unknown to Archie, Bulldog had written to Miss Millicent Manners, telling her of the last of the De Browns' activities in the Wild West.

So Miss Manners had written to Archie, in which she said she would be coming out to visit him.

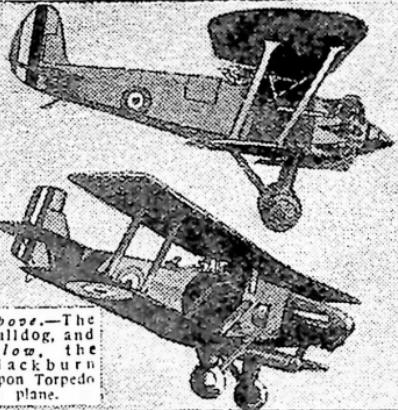
"Bai Jove!" cried Archie, when he had finished reading the letter. "Topping news, Bulldog. Dear old Millicent is coming out to see me!"

"Gee, I'm glad to hear that!" said Bulldog, trying hard not to smile. He didn't wish to let Archie know that he had been the cause of the letter from Miss Manners arriving. And, indeed, it never occurred to the last of the De Browns that it was extraordinary that Millicent should know where to find him. He was too excited over the glad news.

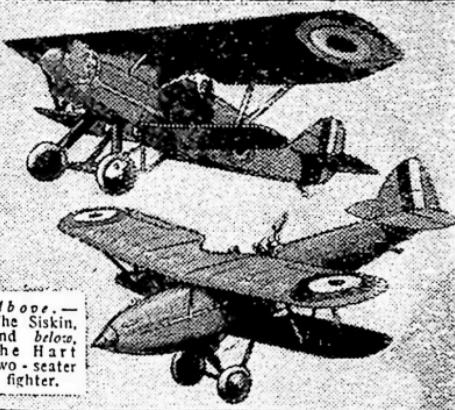
But he learnt six months later, when he settled down on a ranch he bought in British Columbia with Mrs. Archie de Brown. And he was ever thankful afterwards to his foreman, Mr. John Buller.

THE END

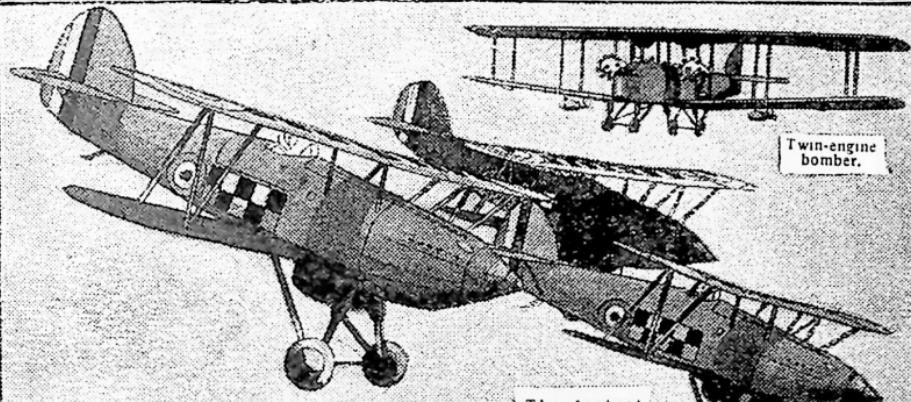
FIGHTING PLANES OF THE R.A.F.



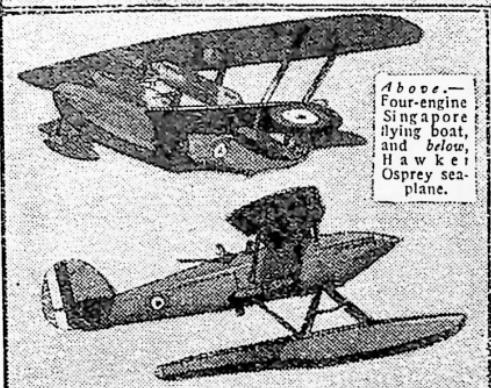
Above.—The Bulldog, and
below, the
Blackburn
Ripon Torpedo
plane.



Above.—
The Siskin,
and below,
the Hart
two-seater
fighter.



Twin-engine
bomber.



Above.—
Four-engine
Singapore
flying boat,
and below,
Hawker
Osprey sea-
plane.



The Gamecock.



The Greyfriars Law Courts are a huge joke, and everybody enjoys it—except the prisoners! By S. Q. I. FIELD.

CHUMS of ours who remember to have read in the GREYFRIARS HERALD a lot about the cases in the Greyfriars Law Courts may like to know something of this famous institution.

The Law is not taken seriously, of course. From beginning to end the Law Courts are a huge joke. And yet, possibly they may be doing a great deal of good; for cases of caddishness and misbehaviour are often dealt with by the judge—and the sentences are carried out severely.

To start at the beginning, there is the Greyfriars Police. The Remove Police has its headquarters in Study No. 9, which is always referred to as Jotland Yard in the Law Courts. Detective-inspector Dick Penfold is in charge of the Police, and with him are Detective Morgan, Inspector Newland, Inspector Ogilvy, and Constables Kipps, Trevor and Bolsover.

The Law Courts are held once—sometimes twice—a week, and may take place anywhere from the Rag to the woodshed. The ruling force behind all this business is Peter Todd, who is the judge of what he calls the "Class Bench Division."

Fellows who complain of infringement of Study Rights; fellows who have got into debt and have nothing to pay their indignant creditors; footballers who miss open goals and cricketers who muff easy catches; funks who run away from Highcliffe cads—all these are brought before Mr.

Justice Todd in the Class Bench Division.

The Central Criminal Court is presided over by Mr. Justice Wharton, and deals with all criminal cases, from pork-pie pinching to assault and battery.

The Divorce and Breach of Promise Court, presided over by Mr. Justice Linley, deals with fags who want a divorce from their seniors, and seniors who impeach their fags for breach of promise.

It is all great fun. Suppose the Remove Police nab you for swindling or sneaking. You are told that you will have to attend before Mr. Justice Wharton on the following Friday. In the meantime you may go to any proper counsel and ask him to take the case up for you.

The counsels are Mr. Bob Cherry, K.C., Mr. Vernon-Smith, K.C., Mr. Herbert Bulstrode, K.C., Mr. H. J. R. Singh, K.C., and Mr. Harold Skinner, C.A.D. The Public Prosecutor (Mr. Frank Nugent) will instruct one of these merchants to speak against you at the trial, and you may instruct any other one of them you like.

The trial comes on. You are found guilty and sentenced—somehow prisoners nearly always are found guilty. It may be a fine, in which case the money goes to the Remove Sports Club. It may be a ragging—in which case you go through it.

But whatever it is, everybody enjoys it—except the prisoner!