

THE CEDAR CREEK PANTOMIME

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



*In the days of his youth Frank Richards, famous author of the *Greyfriars* stories, went to school in British Columbia. Here is a cheery story of his schooldays at Cedar Creek, told by his old friend and colleague, Martin Clifford.*

THE FIRST CHAPTER PREPARING FOR THE PANTO!

"**W**HERE do I come in?"
Chunky Todgers asked
that question.

It was not immediately answered.
Frank Richards & Co. were busy.

There were nine or ten Cedar Creek
fellows in the dining-room at the
Lawless Ranch, and most of them
were busy, and all of them were
talking. For it was the morning of
Boxing Day, and that evening there
was to be a great event at Cedar
Creek—nothing less than the per-
formance of the first pantomime
ever performed in the Thompson
Valley of British Columbia.

It was Frank Richards' idea—in
which he was loyally backed by his
chums, Bob Lawless and Vere Beau-
clerc. And all the members of the

Cedar Creek Thespian Society backed
him, too, with enthusiasm.

The performance was to be given in
the big school-room at Cedar Creek—
which, like most Canadian schools in
outlying districts, was a general
meeting-place for the "folk" of the
section.

The snow that covered hill and
valley, creek and timber, was not
likely to keep away the audience. On
snow-shoes and sleighs and in buggies,
they were sure to come from far and
near. The Cedar Creek school-room,
large as it was, was sure to be crowded

Frank Richards & Co. were busy
with the costumes now. Frank had
assigned all the parts, and had
coached the panto performers; the
preparations had been going on for
some time. At Gunten's Store in
Thompson there was a large notice

posted up in a prominent position, to the following effect :

" BOXING NIGHT !!!

GRAND PERFORMANCE OF
THE WONDERFUL PANTOMIME
' THE THREE BEARS ! '
BY THE CEDAR CREEK THES-
PIAN SOCIETY.

In the School-Room at Cedar Creek.

6 p.m. sharp.

Admission 50 cents."

That notice was read by nearly all the inhabitants of Thompson, and nearly all had decided to pay their fifty cents and come.

Frank Richards had written the "book" of the panto. That was quite in his line, for was he not already an author? Did not a short story appear every week in the "Thompson Press," signed "F. Richards"? Frank had selected the "Three Bears" as a subject, for excellent reasons—there were bear-skins available for the actors.

The skin of a gigantic grizzly, shot by Mr. Lawless long ago, was for the Great Huge Bear, and two smaller skins were available for the Middle-Sized Bear and the Little Wee Bear. And Molly Lawrence was available for the part of Little Silverhair—though Molly's hair, as a matter of fact, was golden.

The room at the Lawless Ranch was in a buzz of voices; and costumes, and materials for costumes, covered the long pinewood table and most of the floor. Mrs. Lawless had given that room up; it was not much use trying to keep it tidy while the Cedar Creek Thespians were at work.

Bob Lawless was trying on the grizzly skin; and Frank Richards the Little Wee Bear—which was the most desirable part of the three, really, as the skin required less padding for the Little Wee Bear.

Vere Beauclerc was going to be Prince Charming—a part for which his good looks fitted him.

Chunky Todgers was looking on. Somehow or other—it was inexplicable to Chunky—no part had been assigned to him. Chunky had mentioned that fact several times, without obtaining any satisfaction; and now he mentioned it again, very emphatically.

It was really Chunky's own fault. He had cheerfully laid claim to the part of Prince Charming, and announced that if it wasn't given him, the Thespians needn't expect any support from him. The Thespians took him at his word—which was not apparently quite what Master Todgers expected. So now Chunky was as gloomy as a skeleton at the feast, while the cheery preparations went on, and several times he demanded morosely :

" Where do I come in? "

" You don't come in at all, old chap," answered Frank, without looking up from his needle and thread.

Chunky Todgers snorted.

" I'm going to wash my hands of the whole affair," he said loftily. " It's bound to be a failure, I guess. I'm going— "

" There's pie for dinner!" said Bob Lawless.

Chunky Todgers paused in the doorway.

" Oh!" he said thoughtfully.

And Chunky's departure was postponed. He was not going to bewitch the Cedar Creek audience with his



"Pelt them!" roared Lawrence. The Cedar Creek crowd gathered round and hailed snowballs on the hapless Dicky Bird & Co. as they rolled in the snow. "Oh, crumbs!" gasped the Hillcrest chums. "Groogh!"

remarkable histrionic powers; but there was solace in the pie.

THE SECOND CHAPTER DICKY BIRD IS NOT PLEASED!

"HALLO!" "Hallo, Dicky!"

Three youths on snowshoes came to a stop on the trail through the timber. The Lawless Ranch buggy, driven by Bob Lawless, was progressing along the trail in the direction of Cedar Creek.

Dicky Bird, Blumpy, and Fisher, of Hillcrest School, stopped as they saw it, and hailed the occupants.

Bob was driving, and Frank Richards sat beside him. Vere Beauclerc and Molly Lawrence and Kate Dawson were in the buggy, with bundles galore of "props" that were to be used in the Cedar Creek pantomime.

Bob slackened down, and grinned at the Hillcrest trio.

"Coming to the panto?" he asked. "Six sharp, and fifty cents admission. All are welcome—if they pay at the door."

"My dear chap, if you're acting, I guess I'd rather pay a whole dollar to stay away," answered Dicky Bird.

"Of course, you'll be expected to wash your faces if you come," went on Bob Lawless. "We're rather more particular at Cedar Creek than you are at Hillcrest."

"Why, you cheeky jay—" began Blumpy.

"You're really going to spring a pantomime on the folks?" asked Dicky Bird, looking up curiously at the occupants of the buggy.

"Haven't you seen the notice in Gunten's store?" asked Frank Richards, with a smile. "And there's

a whole column advertisement in the 'Thompson Press,' too."

"I guess I've seen it. And you've really got the neck?" said Dicky Bird. "You should have asked us for help. Even a panto is improved by a little good acting."

"That's why we didn't ask your help, old scout."

Bob Lawless cracked his whip, and the buggy ran on. Dicky Bird & Co. raised their caps very politely to Molly and Kate. It was the presence of the Cedar Creek girls that saved the buggy from a volley of snowballs.

"We're done this time," remarked Fisher, as the buggy disappeared towards the backwoods school by the creek. "You ought to have thought of getting up a panto, Dicky."

"Does Dicky ever think of anything?" remarked Blumpy, in a decidedly disparaging tone.

Dicky Bird grunted.

He was feeling a little annoyed. In the rivalry between the two schools in the backwoods, Frank Richards & Co. had certainly come out ahead this time.

"Hallo! Here's Fat Jack of the Bonehouse," observed Fisher, as Chunky Todgers came along the trail.

Chunky blinked rather suspiciously at the Hillcresters. He had an uneasy expectation of snowballs as he sighted them.

"No larks, you fellows!" he said. "Don't you play any tricks!"

"Tricks!" repeated Dicky Bird in mild surprise, as he stooped for a handful of snow. "What tricks?"

"Look here, you beast——"

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!

"Yaroooooh!" roared Chunky Todgers, as the snowballs rained on him. "Keep off, you pesky jays! Help! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Cedar Creek pantomime exasperated the Hillcrest fellows a little. They found comfort in snowballing Chunky Todgers. The fat Chunky sped forward on his snowshoes in a hail of snowballs. Dicky Bird & Co. fairly showered them on him as he fled.

Then up the trail from the direction of the ranch came Tom Lawrence, and Dawson, and Hopkins, and half a dozen other Cedar Creek fellows. They were following the buggy, and they came quite suddenly on the Hillcrest trio.

"Hillcrest rotters!" shouted Tom Lawrence. "Give 'em socks!"

"Look out!" gasped Dicky Bird.

The Hillcrest trio spun round to stand on their defence, and there was a collision in the trail.

The next moment Dicky Bird & Co. were rolling in a snowdrift by the trail, with their snow-shoes in the air.

"Pelt them!" roared Lawrence.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Grooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Cedar Creek crowd gathered round, and hailed snowballs on the hapless three as they struggled in the drift.

Then they sped on after the buggy, laughing merrily, leaving Dicky Bird & Co. to sort themselves out.

Snowy and rumpled and breathless, the chums of Hillcrest crawled out of the snowdrift.

"Oh dear!" gasped Blumpy.

"Oh crumbs!"

"The cheeky rotters!" gasped Dicky Bird. "They—they took us by surprise——"

"Somebody's always catching you napping!" snorted Fisher.

"You silly ass——"

"Br-r-r-r! Nice state we're in, and those Cedar Creek jays chortling at

us ! " howled Fisher. " You're no good, Dicky ! "

" If you want your nose punched, Fisher—"

" Yah ! " retorted Fisher.

He jerked off a dislocated snowshoe, and tramped away. His temper appeared ruffled.

" Silly ass ! " said Dicky Bird. " You see, Blumpy—"

" Rot ! " said Blumpy. " You're no good, Dicky ! You let Cedar Creek beat you all along the line. Yah ! "

And he followed Fisher.

" My hat ! " murmured Dicky Bird.

He followed his chums, with a very ruffled countenance. Dicky Bird's prestige was at a low ebb just then.

" Look here, you fellows— " he said, as they came out into the Thompson trail.

" Br-r-r-r-r ! " said Fisher.

" I've been thinking—"

" You couldn't ! Dry up, old scout ! "

" About their pesky pantomime that—"

" Bother their pantomime, and bother you ! " said Fisher morosely. " They score all along the line, and we're no good ! You're no good ! Rats ! "

" Listen to me, you jay ! " said Dicky Bird impatiently. " Don't you tramp off to Thompson. We're not going home."

" Why not, ass ? "

" We're going to Cedar Creek ! "

" I guess I'm not going to their pesky panto ! " roared Fisher. " They can bring it off without my paying to see them do it."

" Fathead ! I've got an idea—"

" Take it away and bury it ! "

" It's no end of a stunt—"

" There's no end of your chinwag, you mean ! Cheese it ! "

Evidently there was something like mutiny in the Hillcrest camp. But

Dicky Bird did not " cheese it." He persisted in explaining the remarkable " stunt " which had dawned into his fertile brain.

Fisher and Blumpy interrupted him from time to time with scornful snorts and sniffs. But they listened.

Finally, an appreciative grin dawned upon their faces.

" Might be something in it ! " admitted Blumpy, when Master Richard Bird had finished.

" Lots in it, tons in it ! " said Dicky Bird loftily. " Now, you fellows, come along to Cedar Creek—"

" If they spot us—"

" We're not going to let them spot us. Besides, they're too jolly busy with their pesky panto to think of us. Come on ! "

And the Hillcrest trio changed their direction and headed for the backwoods school.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

THE PANTOMIME !

LIGHTS glimmered from the windows of the lumber schoolhouse at Cedar Creek.

The early dusk of the Canadian winter was falling. Deep shadows lay over the snow that covered the playground of the backwoods school. But inside the schoolhouse all was light and activity.

Frank Richards & Co. were very busy.

The plank stage had been fixed up, and trestle seats made to accommodate a numerous audience. Additional lamps had been hung up, as well as a row to serve as footlights. The stage was adorned with a festoon of coloured Chinese lanterns, bought by the dozen at Gunten's store in Thompson.

There was holly on the walls of the schoolhouse, and the whole effect was, as Bob Lawless declared, O.K.

Behind the stage, screened off by "scenes," was the ladies' dressing-room, where Molly Lawrence was already transforming herself into Princess Silverhair. Kate Dawson and Clara Hopkins were also there, and Miss Meadows, the schoolmistress of Cedar Creek, was kindly lending a helping hand.

The little door at the end of the lumber schoolhouse gave access to the gentlemen's dressing-room, which was more crowded. A covered way led to a shed, and that shed was the dressing-room. It was rather cold and a little draughty, and the oil-lamp that illuminated it smoked a little. But these were only minor discomforts, disregarded by the enthusiastic Thespians.

Vere Beauclerc was already complete as Prince Charming, and he was chatting behind the scenes on the stage with Dick Dawson, who was a halberdier.

Harold Hopkins was a dumb page, but he was chatting, too. He had to be dumb when he went on. Frank Richards had not felt disposed to decline the Cockney schoolboy's services. But 'Arold's weird accent would have been quite out of place on the histrionic boards, so Frank had had the brilliant idea of making him a dumb page.

Having written the panto himself, Frank was able to extend it here or lop it there, to fit the characters, costumes, and scenery, which was a great advantage.

Frank Richards came along the passage, and joined the schoolboys behind the scenes. He was in his garb of the Little Wee Bear, only his face being visible through the open jaws of the bear's head. Frank's good-looking face peering out from the bear's fur had a curious effect, and he was greeted with a chuckle.

"You'll 'ave to shut up that 'ead before you go hon!" remarked Hopkins; and there was another chuckle.

Hopkins' liberties with the aspirate always tickled the Canadian schoolboys.

"That's all right," said Frank, with a smile. "It shuts when I want it. But the bears don't come on in the first scene. Where's the Wicked Old King?"

"Here!" said Bunker H. Honk, who was in all the glory of a gorgeous robe, studded with precious stones—not genuine—and a gilt-paper crown. "I guess I'm ready to mosey on, Richards!"

"For goodness' sake, don't guess when you're in front!" said Frank Richards uneasily. "It will spoil the effect. Kings don't guess."

"I guess I know my lines all O.K.," answered Bunker H. Honk confidently. "You leave it to this infant!"

"You and Beau and Princess Silverhair are wanted in the first scene, with the halberdiers. Where are the halberdiers?"

"Here you are!"

"And the giddy Dumb Page——"

"'Ere!" said Hopkins.

"Mind you don't speak. You're only to hold up the Princess' train when she sweeps off the stage——"

"Orlright!" said Hopkins. "But couldn't I say just a word? S'pose I jest said, 'Ere you are!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or 'Old my 'and, madam!'" suggested Hopkins.

"Not a word!" said Frank severely. "You're a Dumb Page, you ass! It's a—a quite romantic character. If you fellows crock on your lines, I'll scalp you! Where's the Princess?"

The Middle Bear came in from the passage to the dressing-room, and he looked quite an alarming object. Big glass eyes glittered from the bear's head. But Tom Lawrence looked out from an opening left in the muzzle.

"I expect the Princess will keep you waiting," chuckled the Middle-Sized Bear. "She always keeps me waiting, starting for school."

"Stuff!" said a sweet voice; and Molly Lawrence came out of the dressing-room, smiling and charming as the Princess.

"Ripping!" said Frank Richards heartily. "Now buzz on! The audience are coming in, and it will

soon be time for the curtain to go up."

Frank Richards was stage-manager and general manager, as well as Little Wee Bear. He arranged the first scene on the stage, hidden by the closed curtain from the view of the audience, now pouring into the schoolhouse of Cedar Creek.

There was an incessant stamping of heavy boots and murmuring of cheery voices in the auditorium.

Thompson Town was turning up in great numbers, and cattlemen had ridden in from half the ranches near at hand. Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, was already in a front seat, with a crowd

"Hallo, you jays!" ejaculated Bob as the three Hillcresters ran in. "Why—what— Oh, crumbs!" Fisher and Blumpy rushed at him and in a moment the Great Huge Bear was in their grasp.



of the Lawless cattlemen, and their stentorian voices could be heard all over the building.

Frank Richards peeped through a slit in the curtain and nodded his head with satisfaction.

"Nearly full already. Here come the Smileys."

"Good!"

"Mr. Peckover's come, and Mr. Penrose. Penrose will put a good report of this in the 'Thompson Press' next week. You fellows remember there's a representative of the Press present," said Frank, laughing. "Now then, all ready?" he asked.

"Yes, old scout!"

"Ring up the curtain!"

Frank returned behind the wings, and the curtain was rung up, and disclosed to the enraptured gaze of a crowded audience the first scene in the Cedar Creek pantomime.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER DICKY BIRD TAKES A HAND!

BOB LAWLESS was busy.

The grizzly bear's skin was about six sizes too large for the rancher's son, and the difference had to be made up with padding.

Bob had plenty of time to finish his preparations in the shed—or, rather, dressing-room—before he was wanted on the stage. He could hear the voices of the players as the first scene progressed, and the applause of the audience. Prince Charming and Princess Silverhair were making a good impression on the audience, whatever the Wicked King and the Wicked Prince were doing.

Bob Lawless was so busy that he did not observe three faces that looked in at the window of the shed. He had no eyes for the window.

He would have been interested, however, if he had seen the grinning

features of Dicky Bird, Fisher and Blumpy of Hillcrest.

Through the window they watched Bob Lawless at work, and noted, too, that he was the sole occupant of the dressing-room.

"What scrumptious luck!" whispered Dicky Bird. "Couldn't be better!"

"Any of the jays may come in any minute!" muttered Fisher.

"We've got to risk that," answered Dicky. "Anyhow, they're busy. The play's started."

"That's so."

"Strike the iron while it's hot!" said Dicky Bird. "He won't be able to put up much trouble with all that rubbish on him. Come on!"

Dick stole round quietly to the door of the shed and opened it.

The three Hillcresters ran in.

Bob, who was struggling with the big bearskin, stopped to stare at them.

"Hallo, you jays!" he ejaculated. "This isn't the door for the audience. You go round to the big door at the other end. Why—what— Oh, crumbs!"

Fisher and Blumpy rushed on him, and in a moment the Great Huge Bear was on the floor, with the two kneeling on him.

Dicky Bird had dashed at once to the other door of the shed, which opened on the passage leading into the schoolhouse.

He closed that door quietly and quickly.

Then he stooped and jammed a wedge of wood under it. The door could not open from the other side now. The three adventurers from Hillcrest were safe from interruption, for a moment at least.

Then Dicky Bird ran to help his comrades.

Bob Lawless was struggling furiously, but, cumbered by the bearskin, his struggles were not of much avail. He had opened his mouth to yell, but Blumpy had a hand over his mouth with a grasp like iron.

"Keep him quiet!" panted Dicky Bird.

"I'm keeping him!" chuckled Blumpy.

"Grooooggh!" came in muffled tones from Bob Lawless.

Dicky Bird knelt over him, and coolly and methodically rammed a handkerchief into his mouth, and tied it safely with a length of twine. Bob Lawless glared up at him in helpless and silent wrath.

As yet he could not guess the object of the raiders, but he did not need telling that they meant mischief.

"Off with that bearskin," breathed Dicky Bird. "Sharp! There isn't a second to lose!"

The costume of the Great Huge Bear was jerked off Bob Lawless. As soon as he was freed from it he began to struggle fiercely. But he was powerless in three pairs of hands, and in less than a minute his wrists were tied together behind his back.

"Get him away!" snapped Dicky Bird.

Bob Lawless' eyes spoke volumes, though unfortunately his tongue could say nothing.

Fisher and Blumpy hurried him out of the shed into the darkness, but before he was gone, Dicky Bird was getting to work—slipping into the big bearskin that Bob had been deprived of.

Then Bob Lawless understood, but he was powerless to interfere. With his hands tied behind him, and Blumpy and Fisher gripping either arm, he was hurried away.

Dicky Bird gave a breathless chuckle.

Luck had befriended him at last. For a couple of hours the Hillcrest chums had lurked about the building, watching for a chance, and it had come more completely than they had dared to hope.

With almost feverish haste, Dicky enveloped himself in the bearskin, and closed down the mighty jaws over his face.

He could see now through a slit in the great red muzzle armed with terrible-looking teeth. But he could not have been recognised by any of the Thespians.

With hurried hands he stuffed in the padding. There was a footstep in the passage, and Dicky jumped to remove the wedge he had put under the door. It was not needed now.

Frank Richards came in unsuspectingly.

"Nearly ready, Bob?"

"I guess so," came in muffled tones from the head of the Great Huge Bear.

Frank glanced at him.

"Your voice sounds a bit muffled, old chap," he said. "Perhaps you've got the head closed a bit too tight. Voice must be clear. What the thunder have you got the outside door open for? Cold enough, I should think."

Frank Richards closed the outer door, little dreaming that his chum had been walked through it a few minutes before by a couple of Hillcrest fellows.

"Well, if you're ready, come on. The first scene's nearly over, and it's going as strong as anything. Audience no end delighted. Come on, old scout!"

Dicky Bird grinned inside the bear's head, and followed Frank Richards along the passage to the stage.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER UNREHEARSED !

THE curtain rose upon the second scene in the Cedar Creek pantomime. It disclosed the den of the Three Bears, in which later Princess Silverhair was to take refuge. The Three Bears were seated round a little table, upon which stood the porridge-dishes containing their breakfast.

There was a general chortle from the audience at the sight. Bears in the Thompson Valley did not sit up to porridge for breakfast. According to the "book" of the pantomime, the Three Bears were to go out hunting after breakfast, and then Little Silverhair was to appear.

But there was destined to be an unrehearsed development in that scene. Not for an instant did it occur to Frank Richards that the skin of the Great Huge Bear concealed anyone but Bob Lawless, and when the Great Huge Bear departed from the programme, Frank wondered whether Bob had taken leave of his senses.

The Three Bears rose from the table, and the Great Huge Bear picked up his porringer, and with a sudden movement, jammed it down on the head of the Little Wee Bear. There was a howl of astonishment from Frank Richards.

"Bob, you ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the audience.

The Great Huge Bear seized the end of the table and up-ended it, sending it crashing across the stage. The Middle Bear dodged it just in time.

"You jay, Bob!" shrieked Tom Lawrence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience took this for part of the performance, and they shouted

approval. Frank caught hold of the Big Bear's shoulder.

"Bob! Are you potty?" he shouted. "Get off the stage—quick! Yaroooop!"

Frank broke off as one of the Great Huge Bear's paws smote him, and he landed on his back.

Tom Lawrence seized the Great Huge Bear, in utter consternation, to drag him into the wings. The Big Bear closed with him, and the astounded audience were treated to the view of a wild and whirling bear-fight on the stage.

The Great Huge Bear was victorious. The Middle Bear was bundled through the footlights, and rolled among the audience, gasping.

Frank Richards sat up, dazed and gasping. He could only suppose that Bob Lawless had gone suddenly insane.

"Bob!" he spluttered.

He squirmed out of the way as the Great Huge Bear charged at him. The huge paws were laid on him, and Frank was sent whirling after Lawrence. Yells of merriment from the audience greeted him as he rolled down.

The wings were crowded with the Thespians, now, staring at the scene on the stage in wonder and alarm.

They backed and scattered as the Great Huge Bear turned and charged at them.

"He's mad," gasped Dawson—"mad as a hatter!"

"Bob!" called out Beauclerc anxiously. "Don't play the goat!"

"Don't play the goat!" shouted a dozen voices in the audience, echoing Beau's words. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank staggered to his feet, treading on the toes of Mr. Penrose as he did so.

"Put the curtain down!" he gasped.

Two Cedar Creek fellows were in charge of the curtain. They lowered it hurriedly.

But as it came within the reach of the Great Huge Bear, he seized it and dragged it with terrific vim, and the curtain came down bodily.

It enveloped Frank Richards and Lawrence as it fell, as well as the two fellows who were handling it.

that something was wrong now, and that these proceedings could not possibly have been part of the programme.

Frank Richards struggled out of the rumpled curtains.

"Get him off!" he shouted.

He sprang on the stage and rushed at the Great Huge Bear. They closed in combat.



Prince Charming had hold of the Great Huge Bear's head, and suddenly it came off. As a flushed face was revealed, the mystery was explained. "Dicky Bird!" yelled Frank Richards.

The audience shrieked.

The Great Huge Bear, exhilarated by his success with the curtain, turned and charged at the "scenes," and sent them all whirling. The remainder of the company were exposed to the view of the audience as the scenes went down. The stage by that time looked a good deal as if a cyclone had struck it.

The audience were all on their feet, staring breathlessly. It was evident

"Go it!" roared the audience.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bob, you potty idiot, come off!" gasped Frank. "You're ruining everything, you—you—you—Help me, you fellows!"

Prince Charming and the Middle Bear rushed to his aid, as well as the Dumb Page and the Wicked King, and the Wicked Prince and several other members of the company.

The Great Huge Bear put up a terrific fight.

Round and round and over and over the combatants swayed and rolled, and the grizzly skin suffered very considerably in the struggle. Prince Charming had hold of the head, and it suddenly came off. And then, as a flushed face was revealed, the mystery was explained.

"Dicky Bird!" yelled Frank Richards.

"Squash him!"

The Cedar Creek Thespians fairly piled on Dicky Bird. The Great Huge Bear was dragged bodily off the stage to the dressing-room.

"Let up!" gasped Dicky Bird. "Only a stunt, you know—just helping you with your panto——"

"Where's Bob?" shrieked Frank Richards.

Dicky gasped.

"He's in the stables. Blumpy and Fisher are looking after him."

"Go and bring Bob in, some of you!" gasped Frank Richards. "The ass, to let these rotters—— Jump on that brute! Bump him! Rag him!"

The bearskin was stripped from Dicky Bird. He was bumped and shaken and smacked with great vigour, and finally a dozen boots assisted him into the outer darkness. He collapsed in the snow, gasping, and wondering dizzily whether he was still all in one piece.

Three Hillcrest youths fled into the night a few minutes later, chuckling—though Dicky Bird's chuckles were breathless and spasmodic. Bob Lawless had been found in the stables and released, and Fisher and Blumpy promptly fled. In the Cedar Creek dressing-room, as on the Tiber banks of old, there was "tumult and affright." The audience were roaring

with laughter, and their roars could be plainly heard. But the Cedar Creek Thespians were not laughing.

"It's all mucked up!" gasped Frank Richards. "The curtain's down, the scenes are all knocked over. You can't wear that dashed bearskin in this state! Oh, my hat! What's going to become of the panto?"

"We must go on—can't chuck it in the second scene," said Beauclerc.

"We—we must manage somehow!"

They did manage somehow.

After Dicky Bird's miniature tornado, it required a lot of hard work and time to right the stage. Scenes had to be righted, the curtain had to be re-erected, and most of the players had to spend much time in the dressing-rooms attending to their costumes, which had suffered in the conflict.

Frank Richards went on the stage, and, in a little speech to the laughing audience, explained that there had been a "little hitch" in the programme, but that the performance would proceed in the course of half an hour or so. Most of the audience had guessed at the real cause of the "hitch," and took the delay all in good part.

Yells of laughter greeted the actors when they showed up on the stage again, and there was a ripple of laughter all through the remainder of that unfortunate pantomime.

How they ever got through the performance the performers hardly knew; but they did get through it—somehow. And when it was over, the audience were still chortling—and they were chortling as they departed—there was no doubt whatever that they had been entertained that evening. So from that point of view, at least, success had attended the Cedar Creek Pantomime.

THE END