

On the Western Trail!



By
Martin
Clifford.

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On the Western Trail!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**



Follow the Western Trail with **FRANK RICHARDS & Co.**, the popular chums of the Backwoods School in the Wild West. Their nerve-tingling adventures will thrill you throughout this magnificent book-length complete yarn.

CHAPTER I.

The Guileless Stranger!

HOLD on, sonnies!" Frank Richards & Co. drew rein as a horseman rode out of the trees ahead in the trail and called to them.

The chums of Cedar Creek School were riding southward from the Thompson Valley, en route for the railhead at Kamloops. Cedar Creek had broken up for the holidays, and Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beaulere were starting for their holiday on the Pacific coast.

There was a long journey before them, and they were starting on it in the cheeriest of spirits.

Their bags were strapped on behind

their saddles. The bags were to be taken on the railway, and the horses sent back from Kamloops in charge of a ranchman returning from the town.

For some hours they had seen nobody, as they trotted along the lonely trail, till the stranger rode out from the trees and hailed them.

"Hallo!" sang out Bob Lawless cheerily. "Anything wanted?"

"I guess so!"

The horseman eyed the schoolboys rather curiously. He was a big man, with a long, greyish beard and moustaches, and a pair of large spectacles perched on a hooked nose. He looked a good deal like a schoolmaster. The chums of Cedar Creek returned his scrutiny with interest.

"You boys know this trail, I suppose?" he asked.

"Correct!"

"Then perhaps you can tell me if I'm right for Kamloops?"

The three schoolboys smiled.

The spectacled stranger had his back to Kamloops, which was many a long mile distant. But Bob Lawless nodded gravely.

"You'll get there if you ride right on, in time," he answered.

"Is it far?"

"About twenty-five thousand miles the way you're going."

"Eh?"

"You'll have to keep right on past the North Pole," explained Bob Lawless with great seriousness. "After that you come down through Russia, I guess, and keep on to India——"

"What?"

"Then there's an ocean to swim and——"

"I guess you're being funny," said the bearded gentleman good-humouredly. "Do you mean that I'm riding away from the town?"

"Exactly!" said Bob, laughing.

"I guess I'm a stranger hereabouts. If you'll be good enough to point out the trail——"

"We're going to Kamloops," said Frank Richards.

"Oh, good! Then I guess if you don't object to my company, I'll ride along with you," said the stranger, and he wheeled his horse in the trail.

"I reckon you're welcome," said Bob Lawless. "But we don't get there to-day. We're camping out to-night on the plain."

"Oh, Jerusalem!" said the stranger.

Frank Richards & Co. rode on, the grey-bearded man riding with them. As they rode he talked volubly, chiefly about himself. He explained that he had been wandering for most of the day on the plains, without meeting a soul. His name was Ebenezer Johnson, and he had been a master in a lumber school at Potter's Creek. Now he was going to Vancouver for the holidays.

There was a simplicity about Mr. Johnson that rather interested the chums of Cedar Creek, and they good-naturedly made up their minds to see that he did not lose his way again that side of Kamloops.

The sun was sinking towards the far Pacific, and Bob Lawless was looking out for a favourable spot for camping.

He drew rein at last by the bank of a rippling creek, under a clump of trees. "I guess this will fill the bill," he remarked.

Mr. Johnson glanced round him.

"Stopping here for the night?" he asked.

"That's it."

"I guess I'm keeping on, if you'll point out the way," remarked Mr. Johnson. "I'm not used to camping out."

Bob Lawless smiled.

"I can point out the way right enough, but I guess you'll be puzzled to follow it," he said. "The trail's hardly marked in some places, and there's no signposts in this section, you know. You'd better camp with us for the night, and strike Kamloops to-morrow. It's a good step yet."

Mr. Johnson looked dubious.

"I've never camped out before," he said.

"It's easy enough," said Bob, laughing. "Don't you worry, sir. We'll see you through."

"Your horse couldn't keep on to Kamloops without a rest," remarked Vere Beauclerc.

Mr. Johnson nodded.

"I'm afraid that's so," he agreed.

"But I hate to be a trouble to you young fellows——"

"Not at all!"

"Not a bit of it!"

"It's rather a change for us to be looking after a schoolmaster, seeing that we're schoolboys ourselves," grinned Bob Lawless.

Mr. Johnson laughed.

"Well, you're very kind, and if you'll let me trouble you, I'll join your camp," he said. "But if you are schoolboys,

surely you are a long way from home by yourselves!"

"We're off for the holidays," explained Bob. "We're taking the railway to New Westminster, and then we're going up the coast to Pacific Point."

"And your parents trust you all that way by yourselves?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather! We can look after ourselves, you know!"

"I should think so," said Frank, with a smile.

The chums of Cedar Creek soon showed Mr. Johnson that they knew how to look after themselves. They dismounted, and staked out the horses, and in a few minutes they had gathered dry brushwood, and lighted a camp-fire.

Bob Lawless unpacked sandwiches, corn-cakes, and a cold fowl, while Frank Richards made coffee over the fire. The schoolboys' guest rested on a grassy knoll and watched them.

"Supper's ready, Mr. Johnson!" said Vere Beauclerc at last.

And the quartette sat down round the fire to supper.

They chatted cheerily over the meal, Mr. Johnson displaying a keen interest in the plans the chums had laid for their holiday by the shore of the sunny Pacific.

The moon rode in a sky of dark velvet, and sailed over the trees. Bob Lawless rose from his log at last.

"I guess it's time we turned in," he remarked.

And, with their feet to the fire, the campers rolled themselves in their blankets and settled down to sleep.

CHAPTER 2.

A Thief in the Night!

FRANK RICHARDS awoke suddenly.

He had been dreaming of Cedar Creek School, when he came abruptly out of the arms of Morpheus.

His eyes opened, and he blinked round him in the gloom.

For a moment he expected to find himself in the familiar room at the Lawless Ranch. But the cold wind on his face, as he raised his head from the blanket, recalled his thoughts.

There was deep silence in the camp by the creek, and Frank wondered what had awakened him.

Overhead, the moon was glimmering through a network of foliage. The fire had died down very low.

He could hear the steady breathing of his chums close at hand. Bob Lawless and Beauclerc were still sleeping peacefully.

There was a sound of a trailing rope in the grass, and a stir from the horses. It ceased again.

"Only the horses moving!" Frank Richards reflected; and he settled down to sleep again, satisfied that it was some sound from the animals that had awakened him.

But he did not sleep again at once.

Several times again there came a sound of stirring among the staked horses, and he thought drowsily that the animals were very restless. The sounds ceased at last, however.

But Frank wondered drowsily what was the cause of their restlessness, and the thought came into his head that a lynx might be lurking among the branches. At that thought, he started up from his blanket, and threw an armful of brushwood on the dying fire.

The camp-fire crackled and blazed up merrily.

Bob Lawless' eyes opened.

"Hallo! What's that?" he murmured drowsily.

"Mending the fire, old scout!" answered Frank. "The horses don't seem to be quiet easy."

"Oh, all right!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Frank, suddenly.

He was glancing round for the horses, and, to his amazement, they were not in sight.

Four steeds had been staked out with

the trail-ropes when the campers turned in. Now, there was not a horse to be seen; and the ends of the ropes lay loose round the pegs—cut!

Frank Richards gave a shout.

"Bob—wake up!"

"What's the row?"

"The horses—they're gone!"

"What!"

Bob Lawless sprang to his feet.

Frank's shout had awakened Vere Beauclerc also, and the remittance-man's son was on his feet in a twinkling.

They stared round blankly for the horses.

"Where's Mr. Johnson?" exclaimed Beauclerc suddenly.

Frank Richards had forgotten that gentleman for the moment.

He fairly blinked at the place by the fire where the campers' guest had been lying.

It was empty!

Mr. Johnson was gone!

Bob Lawless' teeth came together hard.

"Lit out!" he said. "Lit out—and taken our horses! Oh, thunder! Kick me, you galoots—kick me hard!"

"But—but what—" stammered Frank. "Perhaps he's gone after the horses—"

"Can't you see the ropes are cut? He's stolen the horses and lit out with them!" howled Bob.

"But—but a schoolmaster—"

"Schoolmaster be blowed! He's a horse thief, and he's taken us in!" yelled Bob Lawless. "And we've let him do it! He's a schoolmaster about as much as his name's Johnson, I guess—and he was no more going to Kamloops than he was going to China! He was after our outfit—and, by Jerusalem!—he's got it!"

"My hat!"

The chums of Cedar Creek looked at one another with feelings too deep for words.

They understood now.

That guileless stranger, whom they had so kindly taken under their protection, was a horse thief; and in the

three unsuspecting schoolboys he had seen three innocent victims.

Bob Lawless clenched his hands.

"Fooled—by a sneaking horse-thief!" he muttered. "Oh, gum! What a start for a holiday! And I told popper that we could look after ourselves—and this is how we've begun!"

"The awful rascal!" muttered Beauclerc.

"My hat! We shall have to get back to the ranch!" groaned Frank. "He's got our whole outfit!"

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"I guess we're not going back!" he said. "Why, we should be laughed to death at the ranch! I guess I can't face them and tell them we've started our holiday by being cleaned out by a horse-thief the first night!"

"But—"

"Nuff said! We've got to get after that skunk, and get our outfit back!"

Frank Richards looked round him helplessly. There was no sound from the trees save the sigh of the wind in the branches. But Bob Lawless did not lose another moment.

The rancher's son dropped on his knees, in the depression of the grass where Mr. Johnson had laid down. He groped round with his hand, his chums watching him in silence.

"Good!" he exclaimed, as he sprang up. "He's not been gone long!"

"How do you know?"

"Because the place is still warm."

"Oh, good!" said Frank.

"I guess it's lucky you woke up, Franky, or the galoot would have got clear off, for sure," said Bob. "He's not far away, I reckon, and we're going after him. If I had my gun—" He gritted his teeth. "I reckon he will be healed; but we've got to tackle him, and get our truck back, all the same. There's no time to lose. Get something in your fists and follow."

It was the work of a minute to cut cudgeles in the thicket. Then Bob Lawless ran out of the trees, and surveyed

the plain across which the trail ran southward.

On the open plain the moonlight shone almost as clear as day, and there was no moving figure to be seen.

"I guess he went through the wood," said Bob. "He's not followed the trail in the open. Of course, he wasn't going to Kamloops at all—and he wouldn't care to show up there with stolen horses, anyway. I shall pick up his trail in the timber easily enough!"

Bob was as good as his word.

The rancher's soon was skilled in woodcraft, and to his keen eyes it was an easy matter to pick up the traces of the passage of a bunch of four horses through the thicket.

Bob led the way through the trees without a pause, his comrades keeping pace behind him.

The horse-thief had headed west through the timber, and the trees were too thick for rapid riding.

"Mr. Johnson" had undoubtedly expected not to be missed till the campers awoke at dawn, and by that time he would have been a dozen miles away, and far beyond the reach of pursuit.

As it happened, however, the chums of Cedar Creek were not far behind him.

In the dim moonlight that filtered through the branches above, Bob picked out the track without a moment's hesitation; and Frank and Beauclerc followed his lead unquestioningly. They proceeded at a run.

Bob halted suddenly, and held up his hand.

"Listen!" he whispered.

The three chums strained their ears. "I guess we're close to the galoot!" said Bob Lawless grimly. "Come on!"

There was no need of picking up the trail now; the sound was guide enough, and the three schoolboys ran hard—stumbling over roots and logs occasionally, and picking themselves up and dashing on again.

The sound of the horses came more

clearly to them every minute. It seemed as if Mr. Johnson was having some trouble with his outfit. Vere Beauclerc's big black horse, Demon, was the most valuable prize of the three, but Demon was very likely to give trouble in a stranger's hands. In an open glade, where the moonlight fell clearly, the panting boys caught sight of the horse-thief at last. He was riding his own steed, with the three trail-ropes in his hand, leading the stolen horses; and Demon was rearing and "cavorting" savagely. Again and again the horse-thief struck the black horse with his whip, but at each savage blow Demon became more fiercely restive.

The whole outfit had come to a halt in the glade, when the pursuers sighted it. Demon was rearing and pawing, and he made a sudden snatch at Mr. Johnson's whip-hand with his teeth. The horse-thief backed away with a curse, and drew a revolver from his hip.

The bearded face was aflame with rage.

Vere Beauclerc gave a cry.

The intention of the ruffian was evident—to shoot the obstinate animal and clear off with the other two. Beauclerc ran desperately forward. At the sound of the voice the horse-thief started, and turned in his saddle towards the schoolboys.

For a moment the rascal stared at them blankly. The sudden appearance of Frank Richards & Co. was evidently the last thing he had expected.

But he recovered himself quickly.

The revolver, which had been about to threaten the black horse, turned upon the schoolboys as they ran up.

"Halt!"

"You rotten thief!" panted Frank Richards.

"Halt, or I'll drop you in your tracks!"

The horse-thief's eyes gleamed over the levelled revolver, and Frank Richards & Co. came to a sudden stop.

CHAPTER 3.

Rough on Mr. Johnson!

"STOP where you are!"

The three schoolboys, panting for breath, stood with clenched hands, their eyes gleaming at the horse-thief.

With the revolver in his right hand, and the trail-ropes of the three stolen horses bunched in his left, the rascal looked at them, with a savage grin.

"I never reckoned I'd see you fresh young galoots again!" he said. "And now I guess I've seen enough of you! Turn right about, and make tracks, or down you go!"

"Oh, you rotter!" panted Frank.

Bob Lawless breathed hard.

But it was impossible to rush on the levelled revolver, and the rancher's son held himself in check.

The horse-thief was master of the situation, but it was only for a moment.

A sudden sharp whistle left Vere Beauclerc's lips.

It was a signal to his horse—a signal that Demon knew well, and never failed to answer.

The black horse swung round and dragged at the trail-rope held by the thief, nearly dragging him from the saddle with the sudden jerk.

Mr. Johnson pitched forward on his saddle-bow, the revolver sinking at his side, and, before he could recover himself, the three schoolboys rushed forward as if moved by the same spring.

Crash!

Beauclerc was the first, and his heavy cudgel crashed on the horse-thief with a thud.

There was a flendish yell from Ebenezer Johnson.

He reeled in the saddle, and as he reeled, Frank Richards and Bob struck at him hard.

Demon was still straining at the trail-rope, and the pull of it unseated the rascal as he reeled under the blows.

There was a crash as he landed in the grass.

The revolver exploded harmlessly as it flew from his hand.

"Our turn now!" panted Bob Lawless.

The horse-thief cast off the trail-rope as he scrambled to his feet, his face black with fury.

But three smiting cudgels met him as he scrambled up, and he rolled in the grass again, groaning.

Bob Lawless crashed his cudgel upon the revolver. The horse-thief lay groaning, and the schoolboys gathered round him, with weapons ready if he tried to rise again.

"Will you have some more, you pesky thief?" asked Bob.

Groan!

"I guess we win this deal," remarked Bob. "And as the pesky galoot roped in our horses, we'll take away his! He can hoof it from here to where he hangs out when he's at home!"

"Good!" grinned Frank Richards.

Mr. Johnson sat up dazedly, clasping his head in both hands.

He blinked dizzily at the chums of Cedar Creek, but was evidently not inclined to try any further conclusions with them.

He did not attempt to resist as Bob searched him for weapons, and took away a concealed knife, which he broke off short at the handle under his boot.

The chums secured their horses and mounted them, Bob taking the horse-thief's own steed by the reins.

Then the rascal staggered up, panting:

"Give me my horse!"

"I guess Shanks' pony is good enough for you!" said Bob Lawless coolly. "You were going to leave us on foot. I reckon we're not going to steal your horse, you jay; but we're going to let it loose on the trail, and you can hunt for it to-morrow, if you choose! Savvy?"

The horse-thief muttered a string of curses as the chums of Cedar Creek rode away, leading the captured steed.

But he did not attempt to follow.

Without his weapons he had no chance against the three sturdy schoolboys, and there was no help for him.

His savage oaths died away in the

timber as the chums rode away and returned to their camp.

The recaptured horses were staked out again, and Bob Lawless led Mr. Johnson's steed out on the open trail. There a flick of the whip sent it galloping away to the south.

Bob grinned as he returned to the camp.

"I guess friend Ebenezer will have a long tramp before he ropes in that bit of horseflesh again!" he remarked.

"We'll keep a watch here till morning," said Beauclerc.

"You bet!"

And the three chums watched in turn till dawn came flushing up above the distant summits of the Rocky Mountains.

But they were not disturbed.

Evidently Mr. Ebenezer Johnson knew when he had had enough, and he did not approach the camp again.

Frank Richards & Co. rebuilt the camp-fire in the dawn, and breakfasted in cheery spirits.

They were elated by their victory over the horse-thief, though, as Bob remarked, it was as much due to Demon as to themselves.

They started cheerily on the trail after breakfast, keeping their eyes open at first for Mr. Johnson.

But nothing was seen of that gentleman, and they soon forgot his existence. They did not expect to set eyes on him again, though, as a matter of fact, if they had only known it, they were not by any means finished with him yet.

It was late in the afternoon that day when they rode into Kamloops.

There, at the railway hotel, they met Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, who was in the railroad town on business for Mr. Lawless.

Billy Cook took charge of the horses, to take them back with him to the ranch, and that evening the chums spent looking round the town.

They were to start for the West on the morrow, and they returned to their hotel early to sleep.

As they drew near the building Bob

Lawless stopped, with a sudden exclamation.

"By gum, there he is!"

"Who? My hat," shouted Frank, "the horse-thief!"

A dusty and tired-looking pilgrim was tramping up the street, and, as the light from the railway hotel fell upon him, the chums of Cedar Creek recognised Ebenezer Johnson.

Apparently he had just arrived in Kamloops on foot.

He caught sight of them at the same moment and stopped. The next moment he darted away down a side-turning and vanished.

Bob Lawless made a movement in pursuit and then stopped.

"After all, we've done with him, I guess," he said. "Let the scallywag go!"

"It seems that he was coming to Kamloops, after all," remarked Frank Richards, as they entered the hotel.

Vere Beauclerc looked thoughtful.

"Unless he has followed us here," he said. "We gave him a rather rough handling, you know, and he looked malicious enough."

Bob Lawless laughed.

"I reckon he can't hurt us if he is following us," he said. "If we come on him at close quarters we'll handle him again!"

And the chums dismissed Mr. Ebenezer Johnson from their minds and went to bed.

CHAPTER 4.

On the Train!

"HERE'S the train!" The big train was booming into the station from the east, and Frank Richards watched it with curious eyes.

From the far east of Canada the train had come, by the great Lakes, and over the Rocky Mountains by the Kick-in Horse Pass.

Frank Richards remembered the

train from the east which had landed him at Kamloops long before, when he first came to British Columbia to live at his uncle's ranch.

Now he was to take the train again on its westward journey, and, for the first time, to finish the crossing of the Continent.

As he looked at the shining metals, stretching away into the infinity of distance, Frank Richards could not help thinking of his old home.

But his old home, in the old country, existed no longer. His father was in India; his little sister Hilda at a boarding school. Bob Lawless' clap on his shoulder interrupted his reflections.

"Time to get aboard, Franky."

"Right-ho!" answered Frank cheerily.

The three chums boarded the big train, with their bags.

Bob Lawless had been to the Pacific Coast before; but it was an exciting experience enough to his English cousin and to Vere Beauclerc, and they looked about them with glistening eyes as the huge train boomed out of the station.

A young man came sauntering down the central aisle of the train and paused near the three schoolboys.

"Bob Lawless, I guess?" he remarked.

Bob looked round quickly.

"Hallo! You seem to know my name," he remarked.

"I dare say you'll remember mine," he said. "You've heard your father speak of Captain Carker, I dare say."

"I don't recall the name."

Captain Carker dropped into an unoccupied seat, with a smiling face. The chums of Cedar Creek looked at him. They were wary enough not to make friends with strangers, but it was evident that Captain Carker knew Bob Lawless, whether Bob knew him or not. The captain was a young man, certainly not over thirty, with a clean-shaven face, save for a small, dark moustache, and very sharp eyes. He had a very pleasant and agreeable smile, and wore his Stetson hat a little on the back of

his head. He was dressed like a prosperous rancher of the West.

He took out a cigarette-case, and extended it to the schoolboys.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"Thank you, no!" answered Bob, rather dryly.

"You don't mind if I do?"

"Not at all."

Captain Carker lighted his cigarette.

"I guess you're trying to place me," he said, with a smile. "But I reckon it's years since you saw me. I came up to the ranch in the Thompson valley, buying cattle. How's your father?"

"Quite well, thanks!" answered Bob.

"Still keeping the ranch?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And you're still going to Cedar Creek School?"

"Correct!" answered Bob.

"Holidays now, I suppose?"

"That's so."

The chums were quite cordial to Captain Carker now. His references to Cedar Creek School bore out his statement that he knew Mr. Lawless.

"Going on to Vancouver?" he asked.

"No; New Westminster. We're going up the coast for a holiday at Pacific Point," explained Bob.

The young man nodded.

"Then I guess you'll see me again," he remarked. "I'm staying at Pacific Point for the summer holidays. I'm going there now. My fruit farm is only a couple of hours' ride from the place. I guess I'll show you over it any day you care to ride out."

"We'll be glad to see it," said Bob.

Captain Carker chatted for a few minutes, and finished his cigarette, and then rose, nodded to the schoolboys, and strolled along the train.

"Rather an agreeable chap, that fellow," Frank Richards remarked, as the captain disappeared.

"I guess so; though I don't ever remember seeing him at the ranch," said Bob.

"He knows all about you, though."

"Yes, that's so. I'm rather glad he's

going to be at Pacific Point while we're there. What do you think, Cherub?"

Vere Beauclerc did not reply immediately.

His brows were knitted a little in a thoughtful frown. Frank Richards and Bob regarded him curiously.

"Don't you like the chap, Beau?" asked Frank.

"No."

"Why not?" asked Bob in surprise. "He seems a jolly decent sort of chap, and he knows my father."

"You don't know him?" asked Beauclerc.

"Not from Adam! But he knows me."

"You don't remember seeing him before?"

"No."

"Nor you, Frank?"

"Not that I know of," said Frank Richards, puzzled. "What the dickens are you driving at, Beau?"

"I may be mistaken," said Beauclerc slowly, in a low voice, "but I think you've seen him before, and lately."

"When?"

"Last night, in the street at Kamloops, and the night before in the timber on the trail."

"Wha-a-at?"

"And then he wore a grey beard and spectacles, and looked like a schoolmaster," said Beauclerc quietly.

CHAPTER 5.

Left Behind!

FRANK RICHARDS and Bob Lawless stared blankly at their chum. Beauclerc had taken their breath away.

Not for a moment had they dreamed of any connection between the agreeable-looking young man and the horse-thief they had encountered on their way south from the Thompson valley.

"Beau!" ejaculated Frank at last.

"Cherub!" gasped Bob Lawless. "You're dreaming!"

But Vere Beauclerc's face was very grave.

"It may be a mistake," he said. "But his voice seemed familiar to me, though he's changed his tone; and as he sat there I was studying his features. Think of him with a grey beard and spectacles, and then picture him like that in your minds."

"By gum!" murmured Bob.

"He uses that rig as a disguise, of course," said Beauclerc. "It's safe. He looks like a respectable man; and, after committing a theft, he can alter his appearance and be safe. I believe he hasn't forgiven us for the way we dealt with him in the timber, and he has followed us for revenge. With all his smiling, he was as watchful as a cat: I noticed that."

"But—but he knows my father——"

"He knows what we told him while he was with us, when he called himself Ebenezer Johnson," answered Beauclerc.

"Oh!"

"Pulling our leg," said Frank Richards. "Of course—that accounts. We told Mr. Johnson all about Cedar Creek and the rest. But this chap isn't anything like that greybearded rascal——"

"Because he isn't in disguise now," answered Beauclerc. "I may be mistaken, of course; but I feel that I'm right. And if he's the man I think, I believe he will try to get us off the train somehow. He knows we have money with us, and he is revengeful for the way we handled him. If he tries to get us off the train——"

"We'll see," said Bob.

Beauclerc's words gave the chums plenty of food for thought.

It was not very pleasant to reflect that they were being "stalked" by a revengeful horse-thief.

During the morning they saw no more of Captain Carker; but when they went along to the luncheon-car they met him again, as agreeable and smiling as before.

The captain sat at their table for

lunch, chatting agreeably; but the chums, watchful now, noted that several times he rubbed his head, as if he had some injury there. They remembered the cudgel blows they had given Mr. Ebenezer Johnson in the timber.

"I guess I'm going to stretch my legs at the next stop," Captain Carker remarked after lunch. "Friend of mine lives at Logwood Camp, and he will lend me a horse."

"Is it a long stop, then?" asked Bob.

"Just over an hour. If you youngsters would care to ride round, I can find you some horses, and you can get back in plenty of time for the train," said the captain. "I dare say you're getting a bit tired of sitting in the train by this time."

"That's true enough," assented Bob.

"Then I'll fix it up with my friend at Logwood to give you a ride. I'll look for you at the stop."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Not at all. Only too glad to be able to show Mr. Lawless' son a little attention," answered the captain.

The schoolboys returned to their seats after lunch, leaving the captain smoking in the car.

Bob Lawless left his chums, and went along to speak to the conductor, whom he found outside on the train platform.

"When's the next stop, conductor?"

Bob Lawless inquired.

"Half an hour or so, at Logwood," was the reply.

"How long do we stop there?"

"Five minutes for the mails."

"Is that all?"

"Yep."

"No time to get off and look at the place?"

The conductor grinned.

"I guess you can hop off if you like," he answered. "But if you do, you'll have to hop on again pretty slick if you don't want to be left behind."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"Just a water camp."

"Oh!" said Bob.

He rejoined his chums, with a very

thoughtful brow. Frank and Beauclerc listened quietly while he explained what the conductor had told him.

"I guess the Cherub is right," said Bob. "The pesky captain says we stop there for an hour, and can ride round the town, and he knows jolly well it's only a few minutes' stop for the mail to be chucked into the train. If he got us off the cars, we shouldn't get on again."

"Just as Beau said!" muttered Frank Richards, with a deep breath.

"And I dare say he's got friends there," said Bob grimly. "These water camps are pretty tough places, some of them. I rather reckon that as soon as the train was out of the station, we should find ourselves knocked on the head and cleaned out by the captain and his friends, and stranded. That's his little game."

Frank Richards' eyes gleamed.

"It's plain enough!" he said. "Well, when he comes along, let's tell him plainly that we know him, and know his game, and——"

"And pitch into him," said Beauclerc.

"Not so jolly fast!" said Bob Lawless, with a grin. "Play up, and let him think he's pulling the wool over our eyes. Play the innocent—same as he did when he first landed on us. We'll get off the train with him——"

"What?"

"And get on again at the last tick, and take jolly good care that he doesn't!"

"Oh!"

Frank and Beauclerc stared at Bob for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

The chums of Cedar Creek were smiling when Captain Carker came strolling along a little later.

"Close on the stop now," the captain remarked. "Better get off the minute the cars stop, and make the most of the time."

"That's a good idea," assented Bob.

"Hallo! There go the brakes already!"

There was a jarring of the train.

The long line of cars drew to a standstill by a rough wooden platform, with two or three log shanties beyond it. It was not a station—only a stop for water and mails; but Frank Richards & Co. followed the captain's lead with great docility, much to that gentleman's satisfaction.

The captain jumped down lightly to the rough wooden planks alongside, and the three schoolboys followed him.

"This way!" said Captain Carker.

He started across the planks, and the chums followed. They moved out behind a wooden shanty; and then, before the captain even knew what was happening, the three chums seized him.

Bump!

Captain Carker struck the ground with a mighty smite.

The next moment the three schoolboys were racing back to the train.

"Hurry up, there!" roared the conductor wrathfully. "What the thunder did you get down for, you pesky young idiots? Do you want to be left behind?"

The train was beginning to move as Frank Richards & Co. scrambled aboard.

They laughed breathlessly.

"Pesky young jays!" growled the conductor, as he went on his way.

The schoolboys did not heed him.

They were watching the planks as the train moved on, waiting to see the captain.

A hatless, breathless man came tearing round the shanty, and raced along after the train.

It was Captain Carker.

Bob Lawless waved a hand to him. He was hopelessly left behind, and he realised it, for he halted, gasping, on the planks.

"Good-bye, captain!" yelled Bob.

"Good-bye, Mr. Johnson!" shouted Frank Richards.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Captain Carker, alias Ebenezer Johnson, stared at them, with fury in his face. He shook his fist savagely at the three grinning chums.

"You've done me this time!" he

shouted. "But wait—wait a bit and —"

The rest of his sentence was drowned in the distance and the roar of the train. And the last the chums of Cedar Creek saw of him was a crimson, furious face and a brandished fist. Whereat they chuckled as the cars swept away westward.

CHAPTER 6.

By the Pacific!

BOOM!

Boom!

Frank Richards listened to the dull, heavy roar that came through the thickening dusk.

"It's the sea!" said Bob Lawless.

"The sea!" repeated Frank.

He peered through the gloom that surrounded the buggy. On the forest path leaves were whirling in a fierce wind. The driver had his collar turned up, and his cap pulled low over his brow as he faced the wind. In the buggy the chums of Cedar Creek School were seated.

Cedar Creek and the Thompson Valley were many a long mile away now. Frank Richards & Co. were nearing their destination where they were to spend their summer holiday on the shore of the blue Pacific. The buggy from the hotel at Pacific Point had picked them up at the nearest railroad stop, and there was a seven-mile drive before them. As the vehicle followed the dusky route Frank Richards had noted the deep roar that sounded faintly in the distance, growing louder and clearer every minute with each turn of the wheels.

"The Pacific!" said Vere Beauclerc, with a smile. "Not very pacific at the present moment, I should say."

Boom!

Bob Lawless grinned as Frank peered into the shadows of the forest path.

"It's a good many miles off yet, Franky," he said. "You've never heard the Pacific in a bad temper before. I

have—once. It's going to be a wild night."

"It sounds like it," said Frank.

The wind was roaring through the trees, and occasionally there came to the ears of the chums the crash of falling branches. But, deeper than the roar of the wind or falling timber, sounded the voice of the distant ocean.

Boom, boom!

"The breakers, I suppose," said Frank.

"Correct! And thundering big breakers at that," answered Bob Lawless. "Bigger than you've seen on your little island at home."

"I've seen some big ones on the North Sea in winter," said Frank.

"You'll see bigger on the Pacific."

The roar in the trees almost drowned their voices. They sat silent as the buggy dashed on.

The darkness thickened.

Frank Richards had looked forward keenly to his first visit to the Pacific coast of Canada. He had thought of the Pacific as blue and sunny and smiling; but evidently it was not to be thus that he would behold the great ocean for the first time. For miles inland sounded the boom of the great rollers breaking on mighty rocks.

The buggy slowed down as it met the force of the wind from the sea. It came out of the forest path at last, and the dark sky was open above the schoolboys. Hardly a star was to be seen; black clouds were scurrying over the heavens, driven by the fierce wind. Louder and more threatening sounded the breaking waters.

Bob caught Frank Richards' arm.

"Look!" he said.

"What is it?"

"The sea!"

In the black distance there were broken gleams of rolling water. In the midst of the blackness a light gleamed and danced.

"A ship!" said Beauclerc.

"A ship at sea—in this weather!" said Frank with a deep breath.

He watched the dancing light as if fascinated.

Not a glimpse of the vessel was to be had; the schoolboys could not even guess whether it was a steamer or a "windjammer"—a schooner or a full-rigged ship. But the dancing of the light showed how it was rolling and pitching on the stormy sea.

The horse's hoofs rang on a rocky road.

Lights gleamed on the shore, and the driver turned his head for a moment.

"Pacific Point!" he said.

Then he turned to his horse again.

The road was open to the wind from the sea, and Frank wondered at times whether the blast would whirl over the buggy as it swept by. But the man drove on steadily, and the lights of Pacific Point drew nearer and brighter.

A big lumber building, with a piazza and steps in front, loomed up out of the shadows.

"That's the shebang," said Bob Lawless.

There was little to be seen in the darkness. The buggy stopped, and the schoolboys tumbled out, taking down their bags after them. A door opened, and a big man with red beard and whiskers came out to greet them. It was Bill Hichens, once a ranchman on the Lawless Ranch in the Thompson Valley, now landlord of the summer resort on the Pacific Coast.

"Young Lawless?" he asked.

"You bet!" answered Bob.

"I guess you've had a rough drive here," said the big man. "Here, Long Lung, tote this truck in!"

A Chinaman came out and relieved the chums of Cedar Creek of their bags and carried them into the lumber hotel.

Frank Richards smiled a little as he followed his chums into the building.

He had been thinking of a seaside hotel such as he had seen in his native island. But Pacific Point did not bear the remotest resemblance to Brighton or Scarborough.

The hotel was built of lumber and logs, and there was no other building in

sight save a few sheds. A holiday at Pacific Point meant "roughing it."

But Frank had been too long in the Canadian West to mind roughing it.

There was homely comfort, and the chums of Cedar Creek were quite prepared to dispense with "trimmings."

Long Lung showed them to their room, in which there were three camp-beds in a row, and a big window looking towards the sea. But the window was protected by thick wooden shutters at the present moment. The whole building, firm as it was, seemed to shiver in the blows of the wind, as if smitten by a giant's hand.

"I guess we shall be all right here," remarked Bob Lawless. "No good looking round for the bell, Franky. There isn't one, and nobody to answer it if there were."

"I wasn't looking for the bell," said Frank, laughing. "I'm thinking of supper. That drive's made me hungry."

"Same here!" said Beauclerc. "My hat! Listen to the wind! I wonder how that ship's getting on?"

"All right, I guess," said Bob Lawless. "They're safe enough if they keep well off the coast. I pity any ship that gets too near the rocks at the headland. You fellows ready?"

The chums of Cedar Creek went down to supper. They found a good many other guests at Pacific Point—a fruit-farmer from the valleys, a "drummer" from Chicago, three or four city men from Vancouver and New Westminster with their wives, a mission minister with a large family, and several others. There was quite a cheery party at the supper-table, and conversation ran on lightly, while outside the wind roared and the waves of the Pacific boomed and boomed upon the rocky shore.

CHAPTER 7.

The Wreck!

"I GUESS that racket will keep us awake a bit."

Bob Lawless made that remark when the three chums went to their room at an early hour.

The storm was increasing in violence, and every board in the lumber hotel seemed to be creaking and groaning.

Frank Richards sat on his bed; but he was not thinking of turning in.

His new surroundings and the close proximity of the stormy Pacific excited him, and he did not feel inclined for sleep.

"Feeling tired?" asked Bob.

"Not a bit!"

"What are you thinking of?" asked Vere Beauclerc, looking at Frank with a smile.

"Going out," said Frank.

"The shebang's closed up for the night," said Bob. "And I reckon it's none too safe out of doors, Franky, with falling trees and branches. We're under the wing of Mr. Hichens here, you know; the popper's put us in his charge. I reckon he will look glum if we go down to go out."

"This window opens on the piazza, doesn't it?"

"Yep."

"Well, let's have a look round before we turn in. I've never seen the Pacific before, you know."

"It will keep till morning. It won't flow away in the night, you know!" said Bob, laughing.

"But the storm may be over by morning, and we mayn't have another chance of seeing it like this."

Bob Lawless nodded.

"Well, I'm game!" he said. "I don't know whether Mr. Hichens would approve, but we needn't tell him, so that's all right. By gum, though, we shall get the wind in here if we open the window! Blow out the candle first!"

Frank extinguished the candle, and the window was opened and the big wooden shutters unfastened.

A mighty blast of wind swept into the room, and there was a rattle and clatter as several articles were overturned.

"My hat! This won't do!" said Beauclerc. "Let's get outside and close the shutters again!"

"Right-ho!"

The three chums gasped for breath as they stepped out on the piazza, and the fierce wind beat upon them.

The shutters were closed and fastened outside, and the schoolboys stood with their backs to the wall, looking out from the piazza towards the sea.

There was still no rain, but black clouds loomed overhead, and at intervals a forked tongue of lightning pierced the blackness.

When the lightning flashed they were able to see the wide ocean, rolling and tumbling with white edges of foam.

Frank Richards watched for the light he had seen dancing on the waters a couple of hours before, but it had vanished.

He wondered where was the ship that had carried the light.

"Come on!" he said at last.

Every window was shuttered, and there was no eye to observe the three schoolboys as they went down the steps of the piazza. In front of the lumber hotel the ground lay open to the shore, and the chums hurried towards the sea, and did not stop till the spray was lashing in their faces.

Vast, limitless, the great ocean rolled before them, the black gloom alternating with ghastly light as the lightning gleamed.

The foam from the breaking waves rolled almost to their feet as they stood and watched the storm-tossed sea.

Frank Richards uttered a sudden exclamation:

"Look!"

Overhead, a blinding sheet of lightning irradiated the dark heavens. For some moments the rolling sea was as clear as by day. And in those lurid moments a vessel came into sight—a dismasted schooner—driving heavily on towards the rocks of the headland, a quarter of a mile from where the schoolboys stood.

Then deep, dense blackness.

The wrecked schooner vanished like

a spectral vision, swallowed up by the black night.

For a moment the chums stood frozen. Then Bob Lawless panted:

"Come on!"

He dashed away over the rocks, reckless, along the shore of the headland, his chums at his heels.

All three had seen the startling sight, and they knew that in a few minutes—long before they could reach the spot—the schooner would crash upon the headland. Their only thought was to get there as rapidly as they could, to help any survivor struggling shoreward through the waves.

The glimmering foam on their right was their guide as they raced on through the darkness, stumbling and falling and picking themselves up again, bruised and breathless.

Through the boom of the wild waters Frank Richards thought that he heard the crash of the striking vessel, but he could not be sure.

The chums stopped at last, breathless, on a shingly shore, with the waters lashing to their feet. A great bulging rock stopped further progress. They breathed hard, and waited for the lightning. It came, in a vivid flash, and showed them the tossing sea; but the schooner was not to be seen. Sea and sky and wild rocks were all that met their gaze.

"She's down—gone down!" muttered Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards shivered.

It seemed only too certain that the schooner had gone down with all hands, and the chums were too late to render aid, if aid had been possible.

But they were loth to leave the spot while the shadow of a chance remained, and they waited and watched, while the wind buffeted them and the waves foamed at their feet.

And suddenly Bob Lawless darted away from his chums, plunging waist-deep in the foaming water.

"Help me, you fellows!" he shouted in the darkness.

Frank and Beauclerc rushed after him. Bob's grasp had closed on some object tossing in the surf, and his chums lent their aid. It was a body—the body of a man—but whether alive or dead they could not tell. The three schoolboys grasped it, and dragged it from the water, the waves thundering behind them as if hungry for their prey.

Out of reach of the cruel waters, they sank down exhausted upon the shingle, their grasp still upon the shipwrecked seaman.

CHAPTER 8.

The Man from the Sea!

BOB LAWLESS was the first to recover.

He sat up, panting.

"I guess that was close for all of us!" gasped Bob. "I was nearly sucked away—" He broke off. "I wonder whether he's alive, poor chap?"

The chums of Cedar Creek staggered up.

They were breathless and panting from their struggle with the water, but their first thought was for the man they had saved.

He had not moved since they dropped on the shingle.

"Get him into shelter!" said Frank.

Three pairs of hands grasped the seaman again, and he was lifted and carried into the shelter of a big rock, which screened them from the tearing wind.

There he was laid down again on the sand, gently enough. In the darkness it was barely possible to see the outline of his form. Bob Lawless groped over him, and felt for the beating of his heart.

"He's alive!" he said, with a deep breath.

"Thank goodness for that!"

"We've saved one, at any rate!" muttered Beauclerc. "But the rest—" He shivered.

"Not much chance for them on this coast, I guess," said Bob. "This poor

chap was nearly gone when we pulled him out. But we've saved him, anyhow. I think he's coming to."

There was a faint moan from the seaman.

Even in the darkness the schoolboys caught the glitter of his eyes as they opened—large, glittering black eyes.

He made an effort to move, and groaned.

"It's all right!" said Bob Lawless. "You're among friends. You're safe now."

The man gave a violent start at the sound of his voice. As if called suddenly to himself, he sprang up; but his strength was spent, and he fell on his knees.

"Keep still a bit," said Frank Richards. "Why, what—My hat!"

There was a gleam of sharp steel in the gloom. A knife flashed in the hand of the shipwrecked man.

The schoolboys started back.

The action of the shipwrecked man was utterly unexpected, and the fear came to them that he had lost his senses in his struggle with death.

"Mind what you're at!" shouted Bob Lawless. "Put that sticker away! You're among friends now."

"Chi parla?"

"Wha-a-at?"

The chums of Cedar Creek heard the words in a foreign tongue, without understanding them.

They could guess that it was the tongue of a Latin race, and that was all.

The man was peering at them suspiciously in the gloom, the knife still in his hand. He was evidently on his guard.

"Chi parla—non posso vedervi—"

"You're in Canada," said Bob Lawless. "Bless your little heart, you haven't got wrecked among Red Indians or cannibals! You're in no danger here. You're among white Christians, my man. Put away that sticker!"

"Can't you speak English?" asked Beauclerc.

"Inglesi? Capisco. Sì, sì, signorì!"

"Some blessed Spaniard or Italian!" muttered Bob Lawless.

"I think that's Italian," said Beauclerc.

"You are English?" came the voice in the gloom.

"Canadian—same thing," answered Bob Lawless. "So you can speak English?"

"Oh, yes, I speak English!"

"You'd better speak it, then. Your own lingo is a bit too deep for us," said Bob.

"Put away your knife!" said Frank.

The man was still peering at them. In the confusion of his first conscious moments he had spoken in his own language, but it was clear that he could speak English as well. He was in no hurry to put away his knife, but it disappeared into his belt at last.

He rose slowly to his feet.

"Where did you find me?" he asked abruptly.

"We pulled you out of the water."

"Cospetta! Then you have saved my life?"

"Something like it."

"Grazie tanto!" The words were grateful, but the man's tone was indifferent. He was not even looking at the schoolboys, but was staring round him. "The ship—did it come ashore?"

"I guess it's gone down."

"Is anyone else saved?"

"We've seen nobody."

The man muttered to himself in a savage tone. The schoolboys could not understand his words, but they had a strong suspicion that he was cursing.

"You have seen nobody?" he asked at last.

"No."

"Not a man with a brown beard—a big man with a brown beard—an Englishman?"

"Nobody at all," said Bob.

"A friend of yours?" asked Frank.

The Italian showed his teeth for a moment in a strange grin.

"Sì, sì, sì! A friend! Un amico—

carissimo amico mio! I am very anxious to find him. If he is lost—oh, cospetto!—if he is lost—" He broke off with muttered curses in a strange tongue. "Tutto perduto! Niente—niente—niente!" He cursed again. "But perhaps he has come ashore. He may be found!"

"I guess nothing will be found till dawn," said Bob Lawless. "You'd better come along with us to the hotel."

The man started.

"The hotel! There is an hotel here?"

"A summer holiday hotel," explained Bob. "It's some distance from here—back of the headland. They'll be glad to take you in and give you shelter. Come with us!"

The Italian seaman did not answer. He moved away from the big rock towards the sea, and stood for some minutes staring at the turbid waters. Frank Richards & Co. watched him rather uneasily.

They were glad that they had saved the man's life, but there was something about him that aroused suspicion and distrust.

"A rather tough customer that galoot, I guess," murmured Bob Lawless. "Pesky handy with his knife, too. Still, we'll tote him along and give him a night's shelter."

The man came back towards them at last.

"Lead the way!" he said.

"Come on, then," said Bob. "By the way, what's your name?"

The foreign seaman hesitated before he replied.

"Beppo," he answered, at last—"Beppo Lazarini."

It came into the minds of the three chums—they hardly knew why—that the man was speaking falsely; that he had paused to think of a false name before answering.

Bob Lawless led the way along the headland in silence.

The Italian seaman followed slowly,

stopping every now and then to look towards the sea.

He seemed hardly able to take his eyes from the hungry waters that had swallowed up the schooner.

It was a weary tramp over rock and shingle, through the fierce wind, back to the lumber hotel. But the schoolboys reached it at last. A single light gleamed from one of the lower windows, and Bill Hichens, in great surprise, opened the door at Bob's knock, and stared at the schoolboys.

"You out of doors!" he exclaimed.

"There's been a wreck," said Bob hastily. "A schooner's gone down on the headland."

"By gum!"

"We've saved one man."

"Good for you!"

Mr. Hichens looked curiously at the Italian seaman as he entered with the schoolboys. He closed the door, and then had another long look at the man who had been saved from the sea. Frank Richards & Co. looked at him, too, in the lamplight.

Beppo Lazarini, as he called himself, was a slim, lithe fellow, dressed as a seaman, roughly. He was rather handsome in a dark, swarthy style, and his eyes were big and black and gleaming. Mr. Hichens gave him a civil greeting, but the chums could see that he was not favourably impressed by the man.

"You young jays had better get off to bed!" said Mr. Hichens. "You can leave this man to me."

And the schoolboys were glad to go to their room and get their wet clothes off, and in spite of the boom of the storm, they were soon in bed and sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER 9.

By Whose Hand?

DAWN flushed up on the wide waters of the Pacific.

Before the sun fairly showed over the mountains inland Frank Richards & Co. were out of bed and down on the beach.

Only Mr. Hichens and the Chinese servants were down when they appeared, and in answer to their questions Mr. Hichens informed them that the rescued sailorman was still sleeping in the barn.

Frank Richards & Co. lost no time in getting along the headland to see whether anything remained of the wreck.

The storm had almost passed, and the wind had dropped, but the sea was still rolling roughly. Turbid waves glimmered in the morning sunlight, and broke on the headland with a deep murmur.

The juniors scanned the sea in vain for the wrecked schooner.

The vessel had evidently gone down, but there were plenty of fragments from the wreck floating on the waves or strewn along the shore. Casks and planks, spars and torn rigging, and a staved-in boat lay along the shingle, tossed there by the sea.

There were no bodies to be seen, as they had feared.

"They'll come ashore later, I guess," said Bob Lawless. "I guess there wasn't anybody saved excepting our Italian friend. I wonder who that chap was that he was speaking of—the Englishman with the brown beard? He said he was his friend."

"He did not mean that," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "He was an enemy of the man he spoke of."

"That struck me, too," said Frank Richards. "I—I wonder if there was trouble on the schooner before she went down? That fellow had his knife very handy, and it looked——" He paused.

"I wonder!" said Bob.

The chums walked slowly back towards the lumber hotel for breakfast. On the staved-in boat they read a name—the Eliza Smith, evidently the name of the schooner that had gone down. Beppo Lazarini seemed to be the sole survivor of the Eliza Smith, though it was quite possible that other survivors had struggled ashore further along the

coast. As they drew near to the lumber hotel the schoolboys discerned a crowd gathered on the beach.

Bill Hichens was there with most of the visitors at the hotel, and several fishermen. They were gathered about some object that lay on the sand, and the juniors hurried up to see what it was.

"Stand back, you kids!" called out Mr. Hichens.

"What is it?" asked Bob.

"One of the bodies from the schooner."

"Oh!"

"Dead?" asked Frank Richards in a hushed voice.

"Yep!"

There was a buzz of voices in the crowd round the body. In every voice there was a note of horror. And it dawned upon the chums of Cedar Creek that there was something the hotel-keeper had not told them. They pushed forward and saw the body that lay in the sand.

One glance was enough for them, and they turned away sick at heart.

"Better get away, you youngsters," said Mr. Hichens.

The schoolboys were glad enough to get away. Their faces were white as they moved towards the hotel.

"That man wasn't drowned last night," muttered Bob Lawless huskily. "You—you saw——"

"It's horrible!" muttered Frank. "There must have been fighting on the schooner before she went down. He was killed——"

"It was a knife-thrust," said Bob in a low voice. "And—and that Italian chap—who was so handy with his knife—he must know something about it."

"He ought to be detained and made to tell what has happened."

"He will be, I guess."

The same thought had evidently occurred to Mr. Hichens, for he was proceeding towards the barn where the Italian seaman had been given shelter, with a couple of other men. The schoolboys followed. It was evident that some

terrible tragedy had happened on the schooner the previous night, and that there had been bloodshed on the ill-fated vessel; and Beppo Lazarini, of course, must know what the facts were.

Mr. Hichens entered the barn with the others at his heels.

The Italian was stretched out on a pile of straw, sleeping, but he awoke instantly at the sound of footsteps, and started up.

His big black eyes turned questioningly upon the newcomers. His dusky hand rested on his belt, close to the haft of his knife.

"Che cosa e?" he asked quickly. "What is it?"

"There's a body come ashore from the wreck," said Mr. Hichens quietly.

"E dunque?"

"It's a man who's been killed in a scrimmage."

Lazarini started.

"Non capisco niente—I know nothing of that," he answered.

"Was there fighting on the ship last night?"

"No."

"Then how was the man killed?"

"I know nothing—chi lo sa!" said Lazarini. "I myself was in the fore-castle asleep. I was thrown into the sea, and that is all I can tell you."

"I guess that isn't good enough. You will be detained here, and handed over to the authorities when I've sent news of the wreck," said Mr. Hichens. "Give me that sticker of yours. You're better without that."

Lazarini's eyes gleamed.

"I am a prisoner!" he exclaimed.

"That's the size of it."

"And why—why?"

"Till you give a good account of yourself, my man," answered Mr. Hichens. "I shall lock you up in a room in the hotel till someone comes to take charge of you."

He made a step towards the Italian.

Lazarini sprang back, and his knife flashed out.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed savagely.

"Drop that!"

"You shall not touch me——"

Mr. Hichens strode towards him, heedless of the knife. The Italian threw up his hand threateningly.

"Stand back!" he said between his teeth. "I warn you——"

He backed away from the burly Canadian, still threatening with the knife. The open window of the barn was near, and with a sudden spring, Lazarini clambered through it and dropped outside before he could be seized.

"Stop him!" shouted Mr. Hichens.

Frank Richards & Co. rushed round the barn.

But Lazarini was already fleeing at top speed, and he ran up the beach like a hunted hare.

There was a shout, and five or six pursuers dashed on his track; but the Italian had a good start, and he vanished among the rocks.

Mr. Hichens shouted to Long Lung for his horse, and in a few minutes he was riding in pursuit.

Frank Richards & Co. went in to breakfast in an excited frame of mind. Half an hour later Mr. Hichens returned unsuccessful. Beppo Lazarini had vanished, and was beyond pursuit. That afternoon two of the Mounted Police arrived at Pacific Point, and after a few minutes' stop at the lumber hotel they rode away in search of Beppo Lazarini.

CHAPTER 10.

In Direst Peril!

"THIS isn't quite the holiday we were expecting, I guess," remarked Bob Lawless.

The chums of Cedar Creek were strolling along the beach in the golden afternoon by the blue sea.

The storm was quite gone now, and the Pacific rolled calm and blue, shining in the sun, beautiful and blue as far as the eye could reach towards the setting sun.

The three chums were not thinking much of their planned holiday—of the

riding, fishing, swimming and sailing they had arranged to fill the summer days.

The tragic happenings of the previous night were in their minds, and their thoughts ran incessantly upon the strange mystery of the sea.

What had happened on board the ill-fated schooner as she drifted to her doom on the rocky shore? That was the question that was on their minds, and to which no answer could be found. Had it been a mutiny—had a deadly struggle been proceeding while the hapless vessel was driving to her tragic end? It seemed likely enough, and it was more than likely that whatever crime had taken place Beppo Lazarini had had a hand in it.

No more bodies had been washed up, though a good deal of wreckage had come ashore. The chums wondered what had become of the big man with the brown beard of whom Lazarini had spoken. The probability was that he had found a grave beneath the treacherous waves of the Pacific; but they could not help thinking of him, and hoping that he had, perhaps, reached safety somewhere on the shore. They kept their eyes well about them as they walked along by the sea in the faint hope of finding some trace of a shipwrecked survivor.

"I guess I don't feel like holiday-making," went on Bob Lawless. "I'd give a good deal to find that chap Beppo spoke of had got ashore. I suppose there's little enough chance of it."

"It's not likely, but it's possible," said Frank. "If he was a good swimmer he might have landed anywhere along the coast for miles."

Bob Lawless halted suddenly.

"By gum! Look!" he exclaimed.

He pointed to the sand at his feet.

Deep in the soft sand was the imprint of a foot.

The track ran along the sand for some distance ahead of them, and disappeared round a mass of high rocks.

"Might be anybody——" began Frank.

Bob shook his head.

"The folks at the hotel don't come up here," he said. "We're miles now from Pacific Point. And there isn't another building along the coast for a long way. I wonder——"

"Let's follow it, anyway," said Beaulerc.

"I guess we will."

There was a possibility at least that the track had been made by some survivor of the wreck, and the chums of Cedar Creek followed it with keen interest. It ended where the soft sand was replaced by a path of rocky, stony soil.

There was no one to be seen as the chums stared round them on the silent, lonely beach.

They listened, but there was no sound save the scream of a wheeling sea-gull.

"Somebody made that track, and it's fresh," said Bob. "Anybody landing here might think the whole coast was deserted. I guess we're going to find the galoot who's left his footprints here. Scatter among the rocks, and call out if you find any sign."

"Right-ho!"

The chums separated, and were soon lost to one another's sight among the big rocks.

Ten minutes after he had parted with his chums Frank Richards came on the track again, in a patch of sand among the rocks. It was a patch before the opening of a deep, shadowy cave in the rocks, and Frank looked curiously into the dark opening.

He was about to whistle to his comrades, when there was a quick step behind him, and he turned.

"Is that you, Bob? Oh!"

The dark, swarthy face of Beppo Lazarini was close to him, grinning evilly. Frank stared blankly at the Italian.

He had supposed that Lazarini was far away by this time, fleeing from the pursuit of the mounted police. It was a surprise—and not a pleasant one—to find the swarthy seaman close at hand.

Frank jumped back.

"Taci!" muttered the Italian threateningly. "Silence, signorino, on your life!"

His knife was in his dusky hand, and the signal whistle died on Frank Richards' lips.

The swarthy seaman came closer.

"So you have found me!" he said between his white teeth.

"I was not looking for you," answered Frank calmly, though his heart was beating with great throbs.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I was following a track in the sand——"

"My trail!" said Lazarini.

"I did not know it was your trail. I supposed——"

"Chi lo sa? Well, now you have found me, and you will not take the news back to your friends!" said Lazarini sourly. His black eyes glittered at the English schoolboy, and his hand closed on his knife.

Frank's heart thumped.

"I helped to save your life last night, Lazarini," he said.

Lazarini shrugged his shoulders.

"And now you have brought it into danger," he said. "If I am discovered here——"

"What is to prevent your escape if you choose?"

Lazarini laughed.

"I do not choose," he said. "I cannot go till I have found my friend from the schooner—the big Ingleso with the brown beard. But I cannot let you tell that I am here. I am sorry, signorino, but you have run your head into this, and it is your own fault."

He made a step towards Frank, who backed away, his hands clenched.

"It was you who murdered the man on the schooner last night, then!" he said. "You are an assassin!"

Lazarini did not answer, but he made a spring forward. The ruffian's murderous intention was plain enough, but Frank did not lose his presence of mind, terrible as the danger was. His eyes were fixed upon the swarthy ruffian, and he sprang back and eluded the rush.

But his foot slipped on a smooth pebble, and he staggered and fell.

The next instant the swarthy ruffian was upon him.

But the murderous blow never fell.

There was a sudden whiz, and a jagged rock came hurtling through the air, and it struck the swarthy face full on the jaw.

Lazarini uttered a yell of agony, and spun blindly away from the fallen schoolboy.

The knife clattered on the rocks.

Bob Lawless came tearing up with another lump of rock in his hand.

"Bob!" panted Frank.

Beppo Lazarini was scrambling up, his swarthy face black with fury, and as he did so the second rock crashed in his face. He rolled on the sand, and Bob Lawless, bounding forward, seized the knife and grasped it.

"Now, you hound——"

The two schoolboys rushed on Lazarini. But the lithe Italian eluded them and darted away among the rocks. Vere Beauclerc joined his chums, and the three followed the fleeing ruffian together, but they pursued him in vain. Lazarini had vanished amid the rocks of the rugged shore, and he was not seen again. The chums of Cedar Creek gave up the pursuit at last, and turned homeward to Pacific Point.

CHAPTER 11.

A Message from the Sea!

"WHAT is it, Bob?"

Bob Lawless did not answer.

He was standing on the rocky headland at Pacific Point, shading his eyes with his hand and looking away towards the sea.

It was a bright and sunny morning, and the wide waters of the Pacific glimmered blue in the sunshine. The waves broke on the rocky Canadian coast with a deep murmur, Frank Richards & Co. were clambering along the headland, exploring for traces of the schooner when Bob Lawless halted and fixed his eyes upon the sea. Frank and Vere Beau-

clerc followed his glance, but they could see nothing but the glimmering blue waters. Far out at sea a rocky islet rose barely to view on the horizon, and overhead the seagulls were wheeling and calling. But that was all.

But Bob Lawless evidently saw something more, for he stood shading his eyes and gazing at the sea with an intent gaze. Frank Richards tapped his Canadian cousin on the shoulder.

"What are you looking at, Bob?" he asked.

"I guess it's a bottle!" said Bob at last.

"A bottle?" ejaculated Frank.

"Yep!"

Frank glanced at the shining sea again. He made out a small object that rolled on the waves, occasionally glittering as it caught the rays of the sun.

"What the thump does it matter?" he asked. "Nothing in a bottle to bother about that I can see!"

"It's floating!" said Bob.

"That's curious!" remarked Beauclerc. "If the cork were out, it would sink!"

"Then the cork's in," said Frank. "It's a bottle from the schooner that went down, I suppose. What about it?"

"Franky, old man, you didn't learn to think at Cedar Creek School!" said Bob Lawless reprovingly. "If that bottle were full, it would sink; and if the cork were out, it would sink. I guess it's an empty bottle with the cork in—see?"

"Well?"

"Well, you jay!" exclaimed Bob. "Why should anybody put the cork in an empty bottle before chucking it into the sea?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Exactly!" said Bob. "But I'm going to know. It's drifting in on the water, and I guess I'm going to see that it's not broken!"

Bob Lawless ran down to the water's edge, and his chums followed him.

The bottle, dancing afloat on the incoming waves, was plainer to the view now, and the chums of Cedar Creek

watched it as it came on. Bob stood ready to wade in to save it from collision with the rocks if necessary.

"There's a good many bottles from the wreck strewn along the shore, Bob," said Frank Richards. "What does one more matter?"

"I guess that's not from the wreck!"

"Why not?"

"It's two days since the schooner went down. Everything that was coming ashore has come by this time. That bottle has been afloat all the time it's been in the sea, and if it had come from the wreck, I reckon it would have been ashore long ago. I guess it's not been in the water so long or else it comes from a greater distance. And there's something in it——"

"Whisky, perhaps!" said Frank, laughing.

"Whisky would sink it!"

"Then it's empty, I suppose!"

"Correct so far as liquor is concerned. But it's corked, or it would go down. Haven't you ever heard of messages from shipwrecked sailors shut up in a bottle and thrown to sea, fathead?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank.

He was interested now.

Three pairs of eyes were fixed upon the bottle as it danced shoreward on the waves.

Closer and closer it came.

The chums of Cedar Creek School watched it eagerly.

The possibility that the floating bottle contained a message from a shipwreck excited them.

And unless it contained something of the kind; it was difficult to see why an empty bottle should have been so carefully corked.

Bob Lawless tramped into the sea as the bottle was tossed close, and grasped it and bore it ashore in triumph.

"Now I'll guess we'll see!" he remarked.

The chums of Cedar Creek gathered eagerly round the prize.

The bottle was a common one, and had evidently contained spirits at one time, but its light weight showed that

it contained none now. The cork was driven in flush with the top, so that it could not possibly escape.

"Anybody got a corkscrew?"

"That's about the last thing I should have thought of putting in my pocket," said Frank, laughing.

Crash!

Bob Lawless knocked the neck from the bottle on the edge of rock.

Inside the bottle a folded paper was seen.

Bob Lawless drew it out with fingers that trembled with excitement.

The paper was a single leaf, apparently from a pocket-book, and it was written on in pencil.

And the first word that caught the eyes of the chums of Cedar Creek was "Help!"

CHAPTER 12.

Benedetto!

"MY hat!" murmured Frank Richards. "You were right, Bob, it's a message from a shipwreck!"

"I guess so!"

Bob Lawless unfolded the paper and spread it on a flat rock in the sunshine, and the chums of Cedar Creek bent their heads over it together, eager to read the strange message from the sea.

It ran:

"Help!"

"Whoever finds this bottle is begged to send help to save a shipwrecked man.

"I am the sole survivor, so far as I am aware, of the American schooner Eliza Smith, a coasting trader belonging to Seattle. I took passage in her from the North, returning from the Klondike. The crew learned that I had gold in my possession, and mutinied during a storm, and the ship struck while the struggle was going on. The ringleader was an Italian named Benedetto. I was thrown into the sea when the schooner sank, but I found a spar and clung to it. This morning I found myself cast upon a rocky islet. Where I am I cannot tell, but I can see mountains to the east-

ward, so I conclude I must be near to the Canadian coast. I have found water in a gully, and the eggs of seabirds, but there is no other food, and I must perish miserably unless I am speedily rescued.

"Send help! I will divide my gold—equally with whoever shall save me.

"Help!

"ROBERT OAKE."

Frank Richards drew a deep breath as he finished reading. The chums of Cedar Creek looked at one another.

"The schooner that went down here was the Eliza Smith," said Frank. "You remember the name—it was on the boat."

Bob Lawless nodded.

"And the Italian who escaped from the wreck—the man we dragged out of the sea," said Frank. "He called himself Lazarini, but—"

"As likely as not the man mentioned here, I guess," said Bob. "It's plain enough he was one of the gang who tried to rob this poor chap, Oake, on the schooner. And that's why he's hanging about Pacific Point, though the Mounted Police are after him. He's still after the Klondike gold."

"That's it."

Bob Lawless looked away towards the sea, and pointed to the rocky islet that rose just above the blue waters in the distance.

"He's there!" he said. "That's the island he mentions, I'll bet; it's the only islet near this part. He put this message in the bottle and threw it into the sea, and the water's brought it across the bay."

"My hat! Then we—"

"I guess we'll have a boat out today, and visit the island," said Bob. "If he's there we'll find him. We'll take this paper to Mr. Hichens at the hotel, though."

"Lazarini spoke of an Englishman with a brown beard who was on the schooner," said Frank. "I shouldn't wonder if this was the man. Of course, it's pretty clear. That's why Lazarini

was so anxious to know if the Englishman had come ashore—it was the gold, he was thinking about."

"Clear enough."

"And the poor chap's stranded on the island yonder all the time, most likely," said Vere Beauclerc. "If that's the case, we can soon have him off. And the sooner the better."

Bob Lawless spun round suddenly, as there was a sound among the rocks.

Only a few yards away a dark and savage face rose over the rocks—the face of Beppo Lazarini, the Italian whom the schoolboys had saved from the wreck.

His black eyes glinted at the chums of Cedar Creek.

The expression on his dusky face showed that he had heard every word uttered by the trio.

"Lazarini!" ejaculated Frank.

"Or Benedetto!" said Bob Lawless. "That's his right name, I guess; and now we'll collar him. Come on!"

The chums of Cedar Creek made a movement towards the Italian.

Lazarini did not retreat.

He came clambering over the rocks towards them, a heavy bludgeon in his hand.

The chums were unarmed; they had never dreamed of meeting the ruffian on the headland, so near to the hotel. But there were loose rocks at hand, and in a twinkling each of the schoolboys had hold of a jagged lump.

The Italian halted.

"Give me the paper!" he said.

Bob Lawless shoved the paper into his pocket.

"Come and take it!" he answered coolly.

The ruffian showed his white teeth.

"Listen to me, signorini," he said.

"I have heard you speaking; I saw you take the bottle from the sea, and I watched you and listened. I am Benedetto, and if I am taken, my life is forfeit for what happened on the schooner. I am a desperate man. Is it true that Robert Oake is on the islet across the bay?"

"Find out!"

"Give me the paper!" shouted Lazarini, or, rather, Benedetto, to give him his true name.

"I guess not."

"He is there—I know he is there!" hissed Benedetto. "Has he saved the gold he carried in his belt?"

Bob Lawless shrugged his shoulders.

"Will you give me the paper?"

"Nix!"

The Italian seaman made a spring forward, the bludgeon whirling in the air.

But the chums of Cedar Creek were ready for him.

They separated and dodged the savage blow, and at the same moment the lumps of rock were hurled.

Crash! Crash!

There was a yell of anguish from the ruffian as the heavy, jagged missiles struck him.

He staggered back, the bludgeon dropping from his hand.

"Collar him!" shouted Bob Lawless.

The chums of Cedar Creek rushed forward.

In a moment more their grasp would have closed upon Benedetto; but the Italian, eluding them, dashed away among the cliffs and disappeared.

"After him!"

Frank Richards picked up the bludgeon, and the three chums rushed in pursuit.

But the ruffian was gone.

"We'll let them know at the hotel!" gasped Bob Lawless, stopping at last. "Not much good hunting him among these rocks—like looking for a needle in a haystack. Come on!"

And Frank Richards & Co. hurried back to the lumber hotel at Pacific Point.

CHAPTER 13.

The Castaway!

MR. HICHENS, at the Pacific Point Hotel, removed his pipe from his mouth and whistled, as he listened to the story of the Cedar Creek chums.

"Then that Eyetalian is still hanging around," he said. "I calculated he had vamoosed the ranch; the Mounted Police haven't been able to find hide or hair of him. You youngers had better keep around the hotel, I guess, till he's laid by the heels."

Frank Richards & Co. smiled.

They had little enough intention of keeping "around" the lumber hotel.

"I guess not, Mr. Hichens," said Bob Lawless. "I reckon we've got a cruise on this afternoon."

"A cruise!" repeated the landlord.

"Correct! We're taking the canoe out to the island, to look for the galoot who put that paper in the bottle."

"What-ho!" said Frank.

Bill Hichens glanced at the sea and the sky, and nodded.

"I calculate there won't be a blow to-day," he remarked. "You can go in the canoe if you like; the dago won't be able to swim arter you, I reckon. Good luck to you!"

And after lunch at the hotel the chums of Cedar Creek ran out the canoe, and embarked.

The Pacific was as calm as glass, and the little craft was safe enough on the sea in the hands of experienced canoers like Frank Richards & Co. They had done a great deal of canoeing in the creeks and on the river in the Thompson Valley. As for the Italian, they gave him no thought. Benedetto might be dangerous ashore, but at sea he could not reach them. And several men from Pacific Point were already searching the headland for the elusive mutineer of the Eliza Smith.

Three paddles flashed into the water, and the canoe glided away swiftly across the bay.

Out in the wide bay the roll was wider and heavier, and the chums had to be careful.

In the distance the rocky islet rose more clearly to the view.

One or two sails ^{maneuvered} on the sea—coastwise vessels going south to Vancouver or the Californian ports;

and far out on the ocean they sighted the smoke-stack of a steamer.

Bob Lawless glanced back towards the land.

Pacific Point was only a spot now, and behind the shore the mountains of British Columbia rose in great masses against the sky.

Near the headland a boat was pulling out to sea, with a single man at the oars.

Bob gave it only a careless glance.

There were several fishermen at Pacific Point, and the chums had often watched them in their boats on the bay.

The boat was following the same track as the canoe, but at a good distance.

"I guess that's the island of the bottle galoot right enough," said Bob Lawless. "He mentioned that he could see the mountains, east, so he couldn't be so very far off the shore. I reckon we'll find him on Gull Island."

"I hope so," said Frank. "We ought to see something of him when we get a bit nearer."

The chums glanced incessantly at the rocky isle as it loomed up larger and clearer.

There seemed little of it but precipitous rocks, amid which numberless gulls had built their nests, and a score of the sea-birds could be seen wheeling in the air above it.

"Look!" exclaimed Beauclerc suddenly.

He pointed.

On top of a big rock, close by the sea, a spar stood upright, jammed in a crevice of the rock, and from the top of the spar fluttered a shirt.

It was evidently a signal of distress—the only one that the shipwrecked gold-seeker had been able to erect.

"I guess that settles it," remarked Bob Lawless. "There's somebody there, at any rate."

The chums paddled on with great vigour, and the canoe glided swiftly towards the islet.

Round the islet the sea rolled

roughly, and the canoers looked out cautiously for a safe landing.

There was a sudden shout in the calm, sunny air, and the figure of a man appeared on the rock beside the distress signal, waving his arms wildly.

"Help!"

Across the sea the shout floated to the schoolboys.

Bob Lawless waved his paddle in response.

The canoe glided closer to the big rock, which rose sheer from the water. There was no landing there, however.

Bob Lawless stood up, and shouted to the man above.

"We've come for you!"

"Thank heaven! Paddle round the rock on the south side, and there's a good landing."

"Good!"

The canoe passed on, and floated round the towering rock. A beach of shelving shingle came into view, upon which the waves broke softly.

"Here we are!" said Frank Richards cheerfully.

The canoe glided close to the sandy shore, and the figure of the castaway came speeding down to the water's edge. He waded into the sea and helped the canoe ashore.

Frank Richards & Co. jumped out.

They regarded the castaway with curiosity. He was a big man, more than six feet in height, with a thick, brown beard. His face was bronzed by exposure to the sun and weather. His clothes showed plain signs of long immersion in the sea-water, though they were now dried by the hot sun.

"You're Robert Oake?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yes; and you?" asked the castaway.

Bob smiled.

"We're schoolboys on holiday from Cedar Creek, in the Thompson Valley. We found your bottle on the headland this morning. That was a good stunt, Mr. Oake, and it's turned out well. The Eliza Smith went down by the headland, but nobody reckoned that a sur-

viver would have landed so far away as this rock."

"I guess I was hours clinging to the spar before I was thrown ashore," said Oake. "I had that little spirit-bottle in my wallet, and I've heard of such stunts, and I reckoned I would try it. Was anyone saved from the wreck?"

"Only a dago," said Bob. "Lazarini, he called himself, but he's owned up that he's Benedetto."

The brown-bearded man set his teeth.

"He was the leader of the mutiny," he said. "The skipper gave me a passage from the coast up north, and the rascally dago found that I had gold in my belt. There were only six hands on the schooner, and they followed his lead—excepting one, who was killed in the struggle. They would have killed me, but the vessel struck. And so Benedetto escaped?"

"We pulled him ashore after the wreck," said Frank Richards. "He was nearly gone when we got him out. The Mounted Police are searching the coast for him now. But we've got some grub in the canoe for you, Mr. Oake—we brought a basket from the hotel."

The basket was taken out of the canoe, and the chums of Cedar Creek busied themselves attending to the wants of the Klondike miner.

He ate almost ravenously, and the colour came back into his pinched cheeks as he did so.

"I guess there's another galoot coming out for you, Mr. Oake," remarked Bob Lawless, with his eyes on the sea.

The man from the Klondike glanced round.

The boat the schoolboys had seen pulling out from the headland was drawing near the island now.

The sun streamed down on the man who sat at the oars, pulling away steadily—a bareheaded man, with thick, black hair.

As his back was to the island, the schoolboys could not see much of him, but it struck them that there was

something familiar about the thick, clustering, jet-black hair.

"I guess I've seen that black poll before," said Bob suddenly. "That isn't the top-knot of any of the Canadian fishermen, I guess."

"Lazarini!" exclaimed Frank Richards, with a jump.

Oake sprang to his feet.

"Benedetto!"

As if he knew that his name had been spoken, the man in the boat looked round towards the islet, and the chums of Cedar Creek recognised the swarthy, savage face of the man they had saved from the sea.

CHAPTER 14.

Face to Face!

"BENEDETTO!"

The man from the Klondike muttered the name between his teeth.

His hand went to his hip-pocket, and a deadly glitter came into his eyes as he watched the Italian in the boat.

The boat pulled steadily on for the islet.

"The hound!" muttered Bob Lawless. "He must have taken that boat from one of the fishermen—it's one of the Pacific Point boats. What's he done to the owner, I wonder?"

"Let him come a little nearer!" said Oake grimly.

He had taken a revolver from his hip-pocket, and was examining it carefully.

Frank Richards & Co. looked at him quickly.

"You're not going to fire at him?" exclaimed Frank.

Oake nodded.

"I guess so!" he answered coolly. "What do you think the dago is coming here for?"

"He heard us talking, after we had found the paper in the bottle—"

"And he knows I am here?"

"Sure!"

"He is still after my gold-belt!" said

the Klondike miner. "I reckon it's something else he is going to get!"

"But——"

Oake held the revolver ready in his hand, down at his side, so that the Italian should not observe it, and watched the boat.

Frank Richards & Co. looked at one another.

They knew the Klondike man's intentions.

They knew, too, that Benedetto was pulling to the islet with murderous intent—that he was a mutineer and an assassin, and that he deserved his doom. It was for the sake of Oake's gold-belt that he had roused the mutiny on the *Eliza Smith*, and thus caused the wreck of the schooner; it was for that that he had lingered at Pacific Point, instead of making his escape inland. And it was plain enough that he would stick at nothing when he landed on the islet. But it went too much against the grain to see him shot down defencelessly.

The chums of Cedar Creek stood, troubled and undecided, as the boat pulled nearer. The broad back of the Italian, as he bent to the oars, offered an easy target, and the man from the Klondike was only waiting for a favourable moment.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Frank Richards, as Oake raised his arm.

Bob caught at his wrist.

"You can't shoot him!" he said.

Oake uttered an impatient exclamation. It was pretty evident that he had been used to rough ways on the Klondike, where life was held cheap.

"I guess I've two thousand dollars in dust in my belt," he said. "Half of it belongs to you youngsters, for coming here to me. That's what that dago is after. He's going to get lead instead of gold."

"We can't claim any reward for coming here for you," said Bob. "But—you can't shoot a man in cold blood. Let him land, and we'll rope him in and take him back to Pacific Point a prisoner."

"If he has a shooter about him——"

"He hasn't! He's lost his knife, too," said Bob. "We shall handle him easily enough when he lands."

The man from the Klondike gave a grunt.

"You've saved my life," he said. "I should have starved to death here but for you. You're a fool, but I guess I'll let you have your way. But if he resists, I'll drill him on the spot!"

"That's all right," said Bob.

The boat was very near now.

Benedetto had seen the landing-place and the four figures standing there by the canoe, and he came on, as if intending to land in the same spot. But at a distance of a dozen yards from the shore he stood up in the boat, and his black eyes fixed on the Klondike miner.

Oake eyed him steadily, his hand behind him, with the revolver in his grasp.

"Cospetto! So you are still alive, amico mio," said the Italian. "You also have had good fortune. And the gold—that is still in your belt, non e vero?"

"I guess so," answered Oake quietly.

"Listen to me, then. Throw the belt into the boat and I will pull away, and leave you in peace."

The man from the Klondike laughed.

"You refuse, signor?"

"I guess so. Come ashore."

"I shall come fast enough, mi amico," said Benedetto. "And neither you nor the boys will live to tell of what has happened."

"I guess that galoot is a cool customer," murmured Bob Lawless. "There's four of us here, and he's unarmed."

"Is he unarmed?" muttered Vere Beauclerc. "He must have taken that boat by violence; and he may have obtained weapons."

"He wouldn't be fool enough to attack four of us unarmed," said Frank Richards. "He must have a weapon. Look out!"

Benedetto stooped in the boat, as if to take up his oars again to pull ashore.

The next moment a rifle glinted over the gunwale.

It was evident that the Italian was armed.

"Look out!" shouted Oake.

Crack!

The Italian fired quickly, but the man from the Klondike was on his guard. He dropped on his knees behind a spur of rock, and the bullet whistled harmlessly over his head.

"Cospetto!"

A curse from the Italian floated over the water.

Frank Richards & Co. had darted into cover instantly.

As the report echoed and rang among the crags of the islet, the castaway and his rescuers were out of sight, and the Italian stood in the rocking boat, with the smoking rifle in his hand, gritting his teeth.

"I guess it's my turn now!"

Oake muttered the words grimly.

He raised his head cautiously above the rock.

The Italian was quickly reloading the rifle in the boat, his eyes glinting towards the shore as he did so.

Crack!

Oake's revolver rang out; but the Italian, quick as a cat, dropped on his knees in the boat.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three rapid shots pumped into the boat, but the Italian was lying below the gunwale, and there came no sound from him. But that he was not hit was soon proved. The barrel of the rifle rose into view over the gunwale, glimmering in the sun, the Italian keeping out of sight.

Oake watched grimly.

Frank Richards & Co. peered out of the cover of the rocks, and watched the boat.

They noted that it was drifting nearer to the shore on the undulating waves, and it was only a matter of minutes before the crouching Italian would be exposed to the revolver.

The man from the Klondike was waiting.

He did not waste a shot. Only two bullets remained in his revolver, and

he had no more ammunition. He could not afford to waste another ball.

There was a sudden movement in the boat, and Benedetto rose into view, and the rifle rang out. The revolver answered it at the same moment.

Crack-ack!

There came a scream of pain from the boat, and the Italian dropped the rifle.

The Klondike miner stood unhurt. The rifle-ball, fired so hastily, had gone near enough to clip a fragment of cloth from his shoulder, but that was all.

"I guess that's got him!"

The Italian was clasping his right arm with his left hand, and his fingers were red.

The rifle lay in the bottom of the boat, smoking.

Oake ran down to the water, with the chums of Cedar Creek at his heels. The boat had drifted very close now, and they were able to wade to it in the shallow water.

"Hands up, Dago!" shouted Oake, as he strode into the water to the rocking boat.

His revolver was levelled.

Benedetto, with a snarl like a wild beast, threw his hands above his head.

"Our game, I guess!" grinned the man from Klondike. "Ah, would you!"

Benedetto had made a sudden spring from the boat. The revolver rang as he did so; but the shot was hurried, and it missed the Italian by an inch or more.

The next instant the grasp of the ruffian was upon the Klondike miner, and they were struggling furiously in the water.

CHAPTER 15.

For Life or Death!

SPLASH!

The struggle was fierce, but it was brief. Before the chums of Cedar Creek could lend their aid to the Klondike miner it was over. For a moment it had looked as if the big, brown-bearded miner would crumple up the

slighter Italian in his grasp; but his foot slipped in the sand under the water, and he went backwards. The water closed over his head, and the Italian sprang free.

With the water washing to his waist, he stood for a moment, his black eyes glaring at Frank Richards & Co.

But he did not attack them.

He scrambled back to the boat, and clambered in, as Oake rose, panting and spluttering, from the water.

"Seize him!" panted the miner.

He splashed towards the boat. Frank Richards & Co. were already wading to it as fast as they could. Their object was to seize the Italian before he could reload the rifle. But Benedetto was in the boat again now, and an oar whirled in his grasp. He aimed a savage blow at Oake, and the miner sprang back, splashing.

The oar swept round, and the schoolboys floundered back out of reach. Oake had the empty revolver clubbed in his grasp, but it was useless as a weapon till he could get to close quarters, and the whirling oar drove him back.

Benedetto did not heed the rifle. He would have been given no time to reload it, and he knew it. He shoved the oar against a rock under the water, and the boat sprang out from the shore.

Out of reach of his foes, the Italian seaman seized the other oar, and began to pull.

His black eyes glittered back at the four as he pulled away from them. The blood was running down his wounded arm, but he did not heed the wound. Oake muttered an oath between his teeth.

"He's getting his distance, to pot us from the boat," he said bitterly. "If you had let me drill him at first—"

"Tumble into the canoe!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "I guess the canoe can beat that boat any day. He won't get us yet."

"I guess that's a good idea."

Frank Richards & Co. and the miner tumbled hurriedly into the canoe as the Italian pulled off.

The chums of Cedar Creek flashed out the paddles.

There was no paddle for Oake, and he sat watching the Italian, with the useless revolver in his grasp.

As the canoe glided out into deeper water the Italian ceased to pull. The boat was fifty yards distant, and he had time now. Laying in the oars, he picked up the rifle, and loaded it methodically.

There were tense faces in the canoe now.

Oake was muttering between his teeth. The Italian had been at his mercy, and the schoolboys had held his hand. But it was too late to think of that now. The Italian was preparing to fire.

"I guess we'll beat him yet!" muttered Bob Lawless. "Once we get a start, he'll never get near us in that heavy boat."

"Look out!" muttered Beauclerc.

The Italian, kneeling in the boat, was taking aim at the canoe. The rifle was far from steady. The ruffian's right arm was hurt, and the wound was painful, and the boat was rocking on the sea. Benedetto dwelt long and carefully upon his aim before he pulled the trigger.

Bob Lawless muttered directions to his comrades. The three paddlers acted as one man.

Instead of proceeding in a direct line, the canoe wound and twisted like a snake on the calm surface of the sea, zigzagging its course, and the evil scowl on Benedetto's face showed how the movement baffled him in taking aim.

He fired at last.

Crack!

But the zigzagging canoe was six yards from the line of fire when the bullet flew.

The ball splashed into the waves harmlessly.

"Good for you!" exclaimed Oake.

"Now," panted Bob Lawless, "go it! Put it on, like thunder!"

His comrades did not need bidding.

They paddled with every ounce of their strength to put a greater distance

between the canoe and the boat while the Italian was reloading his rifle.

The canoe fairly flew over the shining waters.

"Look out!" called out Oake. "He is taking aim again."

"Play up!" said Bob.

The canoe resumed its zigzagging course.

It was a good hundred yards and more from the boat now, and the Italian's task was more difficult than before. Only by chance could the bullet strike the occupants of the rapidly-twisting little craft.

Crack!

The bullet ploughed up the water a dozen yards from the canoe, and the chums of Cedar Creek burst into a laugh.

"Now put it on!" exclaimed Bob.

Again the canoe flew on at top speed.

The Italian, standing up in the boat, was reloading the rifle as fast as his injured arm would permit. Had he possessed a repeating-rifle the result would probably have been different. But the fisherman's gun he had stolen with the boat was an old-fashioned one. Before he was ready to fire again the canoe was almost at a safe distance.

Crack!

"I guess he won't hurt us now," grinned Bob Lawless. "Where did that one go?"

"About twenty yards off," said Beauclerc, with a smile.

"He's rowing now," said Oake.

Bob Lawless chuckled.

"Let him row. I guess we can beat that old row in this canoe, and not half try."

Bob Lawless was right.

Benedetto had taken the oars again, and was pulling desperately after the canoe. But at every stroke of the paddles the distance between the two craft was increasing.

Pacific Point was in sight now, and the schoolboys could see moving figures on the beach, among them a mounted man in uniform. It was one of the Mounted Police. Benedetto looked

round at the canoe, and, with an oath, relinquished the oars. He was losing instead of gaining, and the sight of the mounted officer on the shore gave him pause.

He seized the rifle again, and loaded and fired as rapidly as he could. But the canoe was almost out of range now, and the bullets flew wide. And from the shore there came the crack of a rifle, and a ball flew very near to the Italian's boat.

A furious dusky fist was shaken after the escaping canoe as the Italian abandoned the chase.

He threw down the rifle, and took up the oars again, pulling away to sea. For his life he dared not land, and he had to take his chance on the open ocean.

Frank Richards looked after him, and he was not sorry to see the boat vanishing into the haze of the sea. Benedetto was gone, and Frank wondered whether he had seen the last of him. The gold belt for which the ruffian had plotted and shed blood was safe from him now. Five minutes later the canoe ran on the sand, and Frank Richards & Co. jumped ashore.

The next day the man from the Klondike started for Vancouver, but on land this time, on a horse borrowed at Pacific Point. And for several days afterwards horsemen were riding up and down the coast in search of Benedetto. But the Italian was not found; and Frank Richards & Co. concluded that his boat had drifted out upon the Pacific, and the deep blue waters held the secret of his fate.

CHAPTER 16.

The Ocean Tramp!

"WHAT about a run down the coast?"

Bob Lawless asked the question.

The chums of Cedar Creek School were seated on a big boulder on the rocky headland at Pacific Point.

The wide Pacific rolled before them, deep blue to the utmost verge of the western horizon.

It was a blazing afternoon in the hot Canadian summer, and the shadow of the big rock close at hand was grateful and comforting to the three schoolboys as they sat and watched the sea.

Down in the bay a brig was at anchor, and a boat had gone off to the lumber hotel.

"A run down the coast!" repeated Frank Richards. "My dear chap, it's too hot for running anywhere."

"Fathead!" was Bob's reply. "I mean a run down the coast in a vessel—on the water."

"Not a bad idea," said Vere Beauclerc. "It's jolly here for our holidays, but I'd like to have a look along the coast if it could be managed. But how?"

Bob pointed to the brig anchored in the bay.

"That craft is going down to Vancouver," he said. "She's from the ports up north, trading along the coast. Her skipper would give us a passage for a few dollars."

Frank Richards sat upright and looked down at the brig with some interest.

The brig was an old vessel, a good deal in need of new paint, and looked generally the worse for wear and tear. Three or four of the crew could be seen loafing about her deck, and a man was sitting on the bowsprit smoking a pipe and spitting into the water every other minute.

"It's not a passenger ship!" said Frank.

Bob Lawless laughed.

"No fear! It's a cargo tramp," he answered. "But these craft take passengers when they can get them. Of course, the accommodation's rough and ready. You dig in somewhere aft, and take your chance. You mess with the captain and the mate, and the grub won't remind you of a first-class hotel at Vancouver or Toronto. But you see something of ship life,

and you see the coast and the sea, and—and it's a jolly good idea to go, I guess."

"Which means that you've made up your mind, and we'd better see about booking our passage," said Frank Richards, laughing.

Bob Lawless rose from the boulder, grinning.

"You've hit it!" he said. "But only if you'd care to go——"

"Oh, I'd like it all right!"

"Same here," said Beauclerc. "We've only been on the sea in a boat and a canoe so far. It will be simply ripping to have a run in a sea-going vessel. If it's rough and ready that won't hurt us. We're not soft."

"Then it's a cinch?" asked Bob.

"Oh, yes!"

"Yes, rather."

"Come on, then!"

And the chums of Cedar Creek started along the headland for the lumber hotel, where they were staying for their summer holidays.

"We shall have to ask Mr. Hichens," remarked Bob. "We're sort of in his charge here, but I guess that will be all right."

The three schoolboys arrived at the lumber hotel and found a stranger there, seated on the piazza. From his seafaring attire they guessed that he was the skipper of the brig. He was a big, lanky, loose-jointed man, with a little grey beard like a goat, and very sharp grey eyes. He was smoking a big Mexican cheroot, blowing out great clouds of smoke, not wholly to the comfort of the other hotel visitors, who were taking it easy on the piazza.

"That's the johnny, I suppose!" murmured Frank Richards.

"You bet!"

"Let's tackle him, then!"

"Come on!" answered Bob,

The three chums mounted the piazza, and saluted the sea captain politely. He blinked at them through the smoke of the Mexican cheroot.

"Good-afternoon, captain!" said Bob Lawless cheerily.

"'Arternoon!" was the skipper's laconic reply.

"Your ship in the bay?"

"My brig."

"Looking for passengers?"

"Nope!"

Bob Lawless coughed. The American skipper was evidently a man of few words. He stared past the schoolboys and continued to blow out smoke in great volumes.

"Could you give us a passage down to Vancouver?" asked Bob, coming to the point.

"Yep!"

"Good!" said Frank Richards.

"When do you sail?" asked Bob.

"When the water's aboard."

"When will that be?"

"I guess half an hour."

"Then we'd better get our bags," remarked Beauclerc.

"Hold on a minute! What's the charge, captain?"

The big man reflected. He blew out smoke for a minute or two, and then answered:

"Twenty dollars a man, all found!"

"Done!" said Bob.

"Be ready for the boat!" said the skipper briefly. "I guess the Ocean Queen don't wait for any galoot!"

"Right-ho!"

The chums of Cedar Cheek went into the hotel and sought Mr. Bill Hichens, the proprietor. They were more or less in charge of Mr. Hichens during their holiday at Pacific Point, many a long mile from their home in the Thompson Valley. Mr. Hichens looked thoughtful when they explained their intentions.

"Waal, I guess you won't come to any harm," he remarked. "I know Captain Finn; he's a good man. You'll land at Vancouver, and come back up the coast. None of your games, you know. You're not to go on to California."

"We'd like to," said Bob, smiling. "But we won't. We'll be back in a few days, Mr. Hichens—sooner than you want to see us, in fact!"

"Waal, you'd better pack your truck!" said Mr. Hichens.

And the schoolboys, much delighted with the prospect before them, hurried to their room to pack their "truck."

The "truck" did not amount to much. A couple of bags containing all that the chums thought they would need for a few days at sea.

They were waiting for the boat on the shingle by the time the long-limbed skipper came down from the hotel.

A couple of dago seamen were in the boat, with several big kegs that had been filled with water at the creek behind the lumber hotel.

"Tumble in!" said Captain Finn.

The schoolboys "tumbled" in, and the captain sat down in the stern, and the two dagoes pulled off.

A few minutes later Frank Richards & Co. were climbing the side of the Ocean Queen, and in a quarter of an hour more the anchor was up, and the brig was rolling out of the bay.

CHAPTER 17.

Life on the Ocean Wave!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. remained on deck, looking about them with much interest as the Ocean Queen rolled out into the Pacific.

"Rolled" was the right word. The old brig rolled her way through the water, and the chums could see that in rough weather she would be a far from happy home. But at present the Pacific was smooth and smiling, and a gentle breeze off the shore filled the patched old brown sails.

There were seven men to the crew, as well as the captain and the mate. Four of them were dagoes—seamen of Latin race. The boatswain and two of the foremast hands were American.

The cargo tramp was not exactly clean, as the chums soon observed.

Mops and holystones would have improved its appearance considerably, to

say nothing of fresh paint. There were several casks and packing-cases about the decks and a coop of fowls, who cackled and clattered incessantly as the brig "walloped" out into deep water.

The old brown sails were so patched that they looked like containing more patches than original canvas. Captain Finn was owner as well as skipper, and whatever profits he made by coast trading he evidently did not expend much of them on the adornment of his brig.

Frank Richards & Co. went below at last, shown to their quarters by a Chinaman, who was cook and cabin-boy. The chums of Cedar Creek had expected it rough on the coasting-tramp, and they found that they would have to rough it, beyond the shadow of a doubt. The companion-ladder led into a dusky region, where there was an old table with the fragments of a meal still adorning it, and a stuffy smell; and from this cabin the "state-rooms" opened. There were four of them—two belonging to the skipper and mate, and the other two were at the service of the passengers. One of them contained two bunks. All of them were filled with cargo—trading "notions" of various kinds, which the Chinaman shifted out to make room for them.

He left a great deal of dust behind, and plenty of smell, which he did not seem to think mattered at all.

Frank Richards looked round the tiny cabins, and whistled.

Bob Lawless made a grimace.

"I reckoned we should have to rough it," he remarked.

"And you were right!" said Beauclerc, laughing. "Never mind. We can stand it."

"I guess we shall have to now, anyhow. Oh, by gum, cockroaches!"

"In the bunks!" murmured Frank Richards.

"By gum! That Chinaman has got to do some cleaning!"

Bob Lawless went out into the cabin and caught the cook by the

pigtail as he was departing. The Celestial turned round with a howl.

"What's your name?" asked Bob.

"Wun Pang! You lettee go!"

"Well, you'll get more than one pang if you don't clean up our cabins," said Bob. "Cockroaches in the bunks are not good enough. See?"

The Chinese grinned.

"Allee samee," he replied. "Muchee plenty cockroach everywhere. No good killee!"

"Well, you can try the effect of killing a few hundreds," said Bob. "Here's a dollar for you, you heathen. Now start in!"

"Allee light."

Invigorated by the dollar, Wun Pang started work on the state-rooms, and they were considerably benefited by his efforts. There was a holocaust of cockroaches, and the chums hoped to see no more of them. Roughing it was one thing, but sleeping with cockroaches was quite another.

"I guess this place is a bit stuffy," remarked Bob Lawless, when the Chinese had departed with his mop and bucket. "It's making me feel quite queer."

"Same here!" said Frank.

"I was just going to say the same," remarked Beauclerc. "I've got quite a queer feeling inside."

"Better get back on deck."

The chums went up the companion, where the fresh sea breeze made them feel a little better. But they soon discovered that it was not wholly the stuffiness of the regions below that made them feel queer.

"You're looking quite pale, Frank," Bob Lawless remarked suddenly.

Frank breathed rather hard.

"I'm feeling a bit rotten," he answered. "I—I think this blessed old tub is rolling a lot."

"The old brute seems to be playing pitch and toss with the Pacific," grunted Bob. "I—I feel— Oh!"

Bob made a rush for the taffrail.

His chums joined him there a few minutes later.

The next hour was not enjoyable to

the chums of Cedar Creek. Their desire for travel on the ocean wave was dead and gone, and they would have given all the gold-mines in British Columbia to have their feet set upon the firm, dry land of the Thompson Valley once more. They were in the throes of misery when Wun Pang came along.

"Mass' Finn sayee dinnee!" he said. "Go away!" said Frank Richards faintly.

"Nicee dinnee," said Wun Pang. "Nicey loast pork——"

"Go away!"

"Sheer off, you horrid heathen!" groaned Bob Lawless.

"Nicee fattee pork——"

"Kill him!" murmured Frank Richards. "Pitch him into the sea! Ow!"

"Nicey gleasy pork——"

"Grooooo!"

"Ooooooch!"

Wun Pang grinned and retired, leaving the chums of Cedar Creek in their anguish. And Frank Richards & Co. did not join Captain Finn at dinner.

CHAPTER 18.

Picked Up at Sea!

BUMP!

"Yoooop!"

Frank Richards started and awoke.

It was morning, and the sun was streaming down on the wide Pacific. There was not much sun or air in the little state-room Frank was sharing with his Canadian cousin.

But Frank woke up feeling quite well.

The deadly seasickness had passed off overnight, and the terrible uncertainty he had felt inwardly was over.

"Hallo! What's the row, Bob?" he asked drowsily, as he listened to the disturbance in the bunk below.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"What the dickens——"

"Oh, dear!" Bob Lawless rubbed

his head. "There was a cockroach on my neck when I woke up——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I jumped and banged my head! Ow!"

Frank Richards turned out of the bunk hastily.

The massacre of the cockroaches by the Chinese had cleared the state-room the previous day. Now the cockroaches had returned, and there were dozens of them. Frank Richards grabbed at his clothes, and cockroaches fell out of them as he did so.

"Oh, dear! Oh, crumbs!" he gasped. "Is this a life on the ocean wave? Give me dry land!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Bob and Frank shook out their clothes very carefully before they put them on. Then they emerged from the state-room, and found Vere Beauclerc in the main cabin.

"Found any roaches?" asked Frank. Beauclerc made a grimace.

"About a hundred!" he answered.

Wun Pang came up grinning.

"Bleakfast?" he asked.

"You haven't killed all the roaches, you heathen!" said Bob sternly.

"No can. Plentee muchee loaches in hold, comee back allee samee," said Wun Pang.

"We shall have to get used to them," said Bob, as cheerfully as he could. "Never mind. Think what it must be like in the forecabin, and thank your lucky stars you're not sailing before the mast."

The keen air of the sea had given the chums of Cedar Creek a good appetite, especially as they had eaten nothing, as yet, since coming aboard the Ocean Queen. Wun Pang set out their breakfast, and though the fare was rough they did it full justice. After that another dollar induced the Chinaman to make a fresh raid on the cockroaches, while the chums of Cedar Creek sunned themselves on deck.

The brig was ploughing her way southward before a good breeze. Captain Finn gave the schoolboys a

nod when they came up, and Mr. Bunce, the mate, bade them good-morning. The old patched sails were fully set and drawing and the Ocean Queen was making good way. Overhead the sun blazed from a sky of cloudless blue.

The Co. found plenty of interest in watching the seamen at work, and in looking at the vessels that appeared in sight—a good many “wind-jammers,” like the one they were on, and a few steamers that left a track of black smoke against the blue horizon. Afar in the distance the dim outline of mountain summits against the sky told them where the land was.

Towards eight bells the chums noticed that Captain Finn was gazing with a very intent expression across the shining water, in the direction of the distant mountain summits.

They followed his gaze, but discerned nothing in the distance save the rolling waves and the dim mountains beyond.

The skipper looked round suddenly.

“Here one of you fetch up my binoculars from the cabin!” he called out.

“Right-ho!” said Bob.

He ran down the companion, and returned with the glasses.

The skipper clapped them to his eyes, and watched the sea again. Then he lowered the binoculars and rapped out an order to the helmsman.

“There’s something up!” remarked Bob to his comrades.

The Ocean Queen changed her course a little, bearing away to port, and the chums of Cedar Creek watched the sea keenly with some excitement, wondering what the captain had seen.

“I guess it’s a boat!” said Bob Lawless at last.

Before long they could see it clearly.

A boat was dancing on the waves, apparently unoccupied—at all events, no occupant could be seen.

But as the brig bore down on it Frank Richards discerned a form that

lay motionless in the bottom of the boat.

That was evidently what the skipper had seen through his binoculars.

All hands on the brig were looking towards the boat now, and Frank Richards & Co. watched it with deep interest.

Closer and closer the brig drew, till the motionless form in the boat was clearly made out.

“Dead, I reckon,” they heard Captain Finn remark to the mate, who had come up from below. “But I guess we’ll make sure.”

“Ay, ay, sir!”

“Poor chap!” murmured Frank Richards. “Some sailorman from a wreck, I suppose.”

“That’s it!” said Bob. “Goodness knows how long he’s been in that open boat. I—I hope—”

“We shall soon see whether he’s alive.”

The brig was close now, and the boat rocked on the swell from the vessel. Mr. Bunce stood ready with a line in the chains, and as the brig rounded to he jumped into the boat and made the line fast. The boat drifted alongside the Ocean Queen, and Frank Richards & Co. looked down into it as the mate examined the motionless man.

“Waal?” called the skipper.

“Alive, I reckon!” called back Mr. Bunce. “But purty far gone.”

“I guess we’ll take him aboard, then.”

The boat drew close under the chains, and the unconscious man was handed up.

He was quite insensible, and his face showed plain traces of the grim privation he had been through.

“A dago, I guess!” remarked the skipper. “But, dago, or not, he’s welcome to the Ocean Queen.”

“My hat!” muttered Frank Richards.

He stared blankly at the drawn dusky face of the castaway.

Changed as it was by privation and

suffering, Frank Richards recognised it. He had seen that swarthy Italian face before, and learned to know it well.

"By gum, I've seen him——" muttered Bob.

And Vere Beauclerc said quietly:
"Benedetto!"

CHAPTER 19. The Mutineer!

"BENEDETTO!"

Frank Richards & Co. repeated the name as the captain picked up the wretched, shrunk form in his powerful arms and carried the castaway below.

Mr. Bunce glared at them.

"You've seen the man before?" he asked.

"I guess so!" answered Bob Lawless. "He's an Italian seaman named Benedetto, and he's wanted by the law for mutiny."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!" said the mate.

Captain Finn was busy below with the wretched man for some time, the mate taking his watch on deck. The skipper came up the companion at last.

"I reckon he'll pull through," said the skipper to Mr. Bunce. "He's come round. Says his name is Piccini, and he's the survivor of an Italian steamer that went down with all hands in the storm a few days since. I reckon he's had a bad time."

Frank Richards & Co. exchanged glances. It was clearly their duty to tell the skipper what they knew of the castaway; Benedetto was too dangerous a man to go unwatched.

"The youngsters say that they've seen him before, sir," said Mr. Bunce.

"I guess that's so, captain," said Bob Lawless. "He's a dangerous man and a mutineer. You ought to know, I guess."

"Hey—what's that?" ejaculated Captain Finn.

Bob Lawless explained.

"He was a seaman on a schooner called the *Eliza Smith* that was wrecked at Pacific Point in the storm," he said. "He was the ring-leader of a mutiny, and he's being hunted by the Mounted Police ashore. He stole that boat from a fisherman at Pacific Point and fled to sea. I suppose he's been drifting about since—it's two days since he disappeared."

"Sure of that?"

"I'd know him anywhere, and so would my friends."

"Spin me the whole yarn."

Bob Lawless told the story of the encounter with the mutineer, the skipper listening attentively.

He blew out a big cloud of smoke when the Canadian schoolboy had finished.

"I guess I'm glad you've told me," he remarked. "Mister Benedetto will go ashore in irons at Vancouver. There was a rifle in the boat, Mr. Bunce?"

"Yep, and a belt of cartridges," said the mate. "I've brought them aboard, sir."

"You can cast off the boat."

The brig had resumed her southward course, and the captain paced the afterdeck for some time in deep thought, smoking hard; evidently thinking of what Bob Lawless had told him.

He went below at last. The castaway was lying on a mattress on the floor of the cabin, eating from a bowl of soup brought him by Wun Pang. He was already looking much better. His dark eyes fixed on the captain at once as he approached.

Captain Finn stood looking at him for some moments in silence. Then he spoke abruptly.

"You told me your name was Piccini?"

"Si, signor."

"Of the steamer *Marco Polo*, Leghorn?"

"Si, signor."

"Your name isn't Benedetto by any chance?"

The Italian started violently. A glitter shot into his black eyes.

"No, signor," he muttered.

"You didn't sail on the Eliza Smith?"

The dusky seaman panted.

"Who told you?" he muttered.

Captain Finn called up the companion.

"Step down here, you youngsters," he said.

Frank Richards & Co. came down into the cabin. Benedetto started again as he saw them, and set his white teeth. At the sight of the chums of Cedar Creek he understood that further deception was futile.

"You know these young gents, I guess?" remarked the skipper of the Ocean Queen grimly.

The Italian did not reply, but his black eyes glittered at the schoolboys.

"You know us, Benedetto," said Frank Richards. "We saved your life after the storm at Pacific Point."

"You—here!" muttered Benedetto.

"I guess it's a clear case," said Captain Finn. "As soon as you're better, my man, you're going into irons; and in a couple of days you'll be landed at Vancouver and handed over to the police. And if you give any trouble on board my vessel—"

The skipper paused and drew a revolver from his hip-pocket, and held it up for the Italian to see. "Look at that! Any of your tricks on my ship, and I'll lay you out as dead as a cockroach. Keep that in mind, Mister Benedetto!"

The captain replaced his revolver, and returned to the deck, followed by Frank Richards & Co.

Benedetto was left to his thoughts, which were probably not pleasant ones.

When the chums came down a little later Benedetto was still stretched on the mattress, and he looked weaker than when they had seen him before. He called to them in a faint voice.

"Signorini!"

"Hallo!" answered Bob Lawless, and the schoolboys approached the castaway.

"Signorini," said the Italian faintly, "it is true that you saved my life after the wreck of the schooner, and I—I attacked you afterwards. Now that I am dying, I ask your pardon."

Frank started.

"Dying!" he exclaimed.

"Presto, presto!" muttered Benedetto. "I have been without food—without water—in the blaze of the sun. I feel that I am sinking. I shall not see another sun rise."

"It's not as bad as that, I hope?" said Vere Beauclerc, with some compassion.

"I feel that it is so, signor. It matters little; but I ask your pardon before I die."

"Of course we forgive you!" said Frank Richards. "But keep your pecker up, Benedetto; you'll pull round."

The Italian shook his head feebly, and sank back on the mattress. The chums of Cedar Creek ate their dinner in silence in a rather sombre mood. Desperado as Benedetto undoubtedly was, stained with many a crime, they could not help feeling compassion for him now. When they returned to the deck Bob Lawless informed the skipper of what the Italian had said.

Captain Finn shrugged his shoulders.

"He's been through enough to kill many a man," he said. "I guess it's all the better for him if he pegs out here. There's a rope waiting for him on dry land, I calculate."

"I—I suppose so," said Bob.

Frank Richards & Co. looked at the Italian again before they turned in for the night. He was lying silently on the mattress breathing faintly, and certainly looked in a serious condition. He glanced up at them, and smiled faintly.

"Addio, signori!" he muttered. "I shall not see you again. Ahime! E giusto-e! Giusto! Addio!"

The Italian closed his eyes, and the chums went to their state-rooms in a subdued mood.

CHAPTER 20.

A Merciless Mutineer!

FRANK RICHARDS opened his eyes.

He had awakened suddenly; he could not tell why.

In the lower bunk Bob Lawless was sleeping soundly. It was warm and stuffy in the state-room; only a breath of air came in from the sea at the open porthole.

Frank lay with open eyes, wondering what had awakened him. From the captain's room he thought he heard a slight sound.

He listened.

Again there came a slight sound, and he started into broad wakefulness. For, faint as it was, he thought he distinguished the sound of a groan.

"My hat! What——"

Frank slipped from the bunk.

His movement awakened Bob Lawless, who opened his eyes and blinked at his chum in the gloom.

"Hallo! Wharrer marrer?" murmured Bob sleepily.

"I heard somebody groan, Bob."

"Benedetto, I suppose."

"Yes, perhaps. But I thought it came from the captain's room."

"More likely the Italian. If he's in pain we ought to see to him, I guess. I'll come."

Bob slipped from his bunk, and the chums dressed quickly. Again there was a sound, and both of them were sure that it was a faint groan.

Frank Richards slid back the door of the state-room, and put out his head. As a rule, there was a swinging lamp in the main cabin, but it was extinguished now, and all was dark.

"Got a match, Bob?"

"I guess so."

Bob Lawless struck a match. The chums glanced towards the mattress which the Italian had occupied. To their amazement, it was empty. Benedetto was no longer there.

"Where——" began Bob blankly.

"Hark!"

The door of the skipper's state-room

was partly open, and this time there was no mistaking the faint groan that proceeded thence. The match went out, and Bob Lawless struck another.

He lighted the lamp, and Frank opened the skipper's door. The light from the main cabin glimmered into the little room.

A sharp exclamation left Frank's lips.

Captain Finn was lying in his bunk, his face deadly white, and a splash of blood across it. The crimson oozed down from under his thick hair. He was unconscious, but at intervals a moan escaped him.

The skipper of the Ocean Queen had been stunned by a terrible blow on the head, dealt apparently while he was sleeping.

"Frank—— What——"

"Look!" muttered Frank.

"Good heavens!"

The schoolboys gazed at the fearful scene in horror. Bob Lawless caught his chum by the arm.

"Benedetto!" he muttered. "That awful villain——"

"But——but he was dying! He said——"

"Fooling us!" said Bob fiercely. "Fooling us, to get a chance for this! Oh, the villain!"

"The awful rotter!" muttered Frank.

"Let's wake the Cherub."

They hurried to Beauclerc's state-room. In a minute Beauclerc was wide awake and dressing, while his chums explained in breathless whispers.

"Where is he?" muttered Beauclerc. "Better warn Mr. Bunce," said Bob in a whisper.

"But where——"

The chums moved towards the companion-way. The Italian was not below; but he could scarcely have got to the deck without being seen by the watch. Where was he? What was he doing?

Even as they wondered the Italian stepped from the companion, almost within touch of them.

The schoolboys started back.

Benedetto was still pale and worn-looking, but he had evidently recovered very considerably. His movements were lithe and tigerish, and there was a glitter in his black eyes. His right hand held a revolver, which the chums recognised as the captain's. And the revolver was levelled at them.

"Silence!" said Benedetto.

A mocking grin came over the Italian's dusky face.

"You understand?" he said. "I am not to be taken into Vancouver to be hanged—not quite, signorini. You have seen il capitano?"

"Yes," muttered Frank.

"You, and he, believed I was dying!" Benedetto grinned. "But I shall not die yet, signorini!"

"You scoundrel!" muttered Bob.

"You saved my life after the wreck," said Benedetto. "I will spare your lives for that—if you make no resistance. Lift a finger, and I will shoot you dead. You know me! Go into the captain's room."

"But—"

"Obey me!"

The trigger moved a little, and the chums of Cedar Creek backed into the captain's state-room. There was no help for it.

"You should not have wakened," grinned Benedetto. "I was in the companion and I saw the light, and came back. You will not give the alarm, signorini. Silence, on your lives!"

He slid the door shut on the schoolboys.

They were left alone, in the darkness, with the injured man in the bunk, from whom low moans escaped at intervals.

There was a sudden sound in the main cabin.

"You dago! Whattee you wantee? Oh!"

Crash!

There was a door between, but the chums knew what had happened, as well as if they had seen it. Wun Pang had come upon the Italian, and

the butt-end of the revolver had stricken him down.

Silence followed.

"We can't stop here," muttered Bob resolutely. "Goodness knows what that villain intends, but we've got to warn the others. I'm going to chance his revolver."

"Same here!" said Frank.

Bob slid back the door. The main cabin was in darkness; the Italian had put out the lamp. The schoolboys stumbled over something on the floor. It was Wun Pang, lying senseless where he had been stricken down. They groped their way towards the companion ladder.

They were careful to be silent. At any moment they expected to hear the ring of the revolver. Bob Lawless led the way into the companionway. Overhead the hatch was open, and a square of starlight showed. But the starlight was broken by a crouching form.

Benedetto was there, crouching just below the level of the deck. He was waiting and watching. Wild as his scheme seemed, there could be no doubt that the ruffian intended to attack the watch on deck, and was waiting for a favourable opportunity.

The risk of giving the alarm was terrible. Bob knew that the first shout would probably be answered by a bullet from the ruffian crouching at the top of the ladder in the companionway. But to allow the watch on deck to be taken by surprise by the murderous ruffian was impossible.

"Danger! Mutiny!"

Bob Lawless' heart beat as he shouted.

There was a muttered foreign oath above, but the Italian did not turn. Instead of that he sprang out on the deck.

The revolver rang out sharply, and the shot was followed by a cry and a fall on the planks.

"Come on!" muttered Bob.

The schoolboys rushed up the companion-ladder.

There was a buzz of startled and ex-

cited voices on deck. Bright, clear starlight glimmered over the brig and the calm sea. On the after-deck lay Mr. Bunce, the mate, groaning feebly. He had fallen to the bullet from the mutineer's revolver.

He made a threatening motion with the revolver.

A marlinespike came whizzing through the air towards him. Benedetto dodged the missile and fired in return. A seaman dropped to the deck, groaned, and lay still.

The three other seamen put up their hands promptly enough.

"One of you to the wheel—sharp!" rapped out Benedetto.

The seamen stared at him. In the surprise of the unexpected attack the helmsman had abandoned the wheel. Benedetto made another threatening movement with the revolver, and the seaman went back to his post.

"Keep your hands up, you others!" snapped Benedetto. "I am master of the ship now! Remember that!"

"You durned dago—" began one of the seamen.

Crack!

The seaman rolled over with a bullet in his shoulder.

The other man kept silent, and kept his hands up, although his eyes were gleaming. The watch below were turning out of the fore-castle—three dagoes. They put up their hands promptly enough at the sight of the revolver.

"Helmsman!" rapped out Benedetto.

The man glared at him. The revolver swung round towards him, and the helmsman gasped.

"Ay, ay!"

"Hard aport!"

Benedetto rapped out orders to the amazed crew. Two men, as well as the mate, lay wounded on the deck, and one was at the wheel. There were only four to obey the new captain's orders. But they obeyed promptly enough, in fear of their lives. Benedetto's eyes glittered at the three schoolboys whose startled faces looked from the companionway.

"You, there!" he snapped. "Tumble up and lend a hand! You'll come in useful—I shall be short-handed." He grinned. "Tumble up! Tumble up! Do you hear me?"

Frank Richards & Co. turned out on deck. There was bitter wrath in their breasts; but for the time the Italian was master of the situation.

The chums of Cedar Creek lent what aid they could to the crew. Benedetto, on the after-deck, watched with glittering eyes and ready revolver. The mutineer was master of the Ocean Queen!

CHAPTER 21.

In Merciless Hands!

DAWN flushed upon the wide waters of the Pacific.

A glimmer of light on the seas, a rosy flush in the eastern sky, and then the red sun was above the waters, and it was day.

Frank Richards & Co. were still sleeping.

They had slept little during the night, while the brig Ocean Queen was ploughing her way westward over the wide ocean. But towards dawn the chums of Cedar Creek, overcome by weariness, had sunk into slumber in their chairs, their heads resting on their arms on the cuddy table.

There was a step on the companion-ladder, and Benedetto, the Italian, came down.

The dusky face of the Italian showed signs of weariness; he had not closed his eyes that night. But weary as he was, the mutineer of the Ocean Queen was keenly on the alert.

His revolver was stuck in his belt, ready to his hand if he needed it—and it was likely enough that he might need it at any moment. Single-handed, the mutineer had taken command of the brig, and he dared not sleep. His dusky face wrinkled into a grip as he looked round the cabin.

The three schoolboys, sleeping at the table, were not the only occupants.

The mate of the brig and two seamen lay on mattresses on the floor, bandaged and helpless. Frank Richards & Co. had done what they could for the victims who had fallen under the Italian's revolver in the struggle for the brig. Wun Pang, the Chinese cabin-boy and cook, was seated near the wounded men, rocking to and fro, and rubbing a huge bruise on his pigtailed head. He blinked at the Italian with a look of terror, but Benedetto paid him no heed.

"Wake up!"

Frank Richards started out of his sleep.

He rubbed his eyes and stared rather dazedly at the evil, mocking face of the mutineer.

For the moment it was difficult for Frank to remember where he was, and he expected to see round him the familiar walls of his room at the Lawless Ranch, in the distant Thompson Valley of British Columbia.

But the dusky face before him recalled him to himself.

He started to his feet, his eyes gleaming.

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc awoke at the same moment and rose. They eyed the mutineer grimly.

Benedetto touched lightly the butt of the revolver in his belt. It was a hint to the chums of Cedar Creek to be careful, and it was not lost on them.

The mutineer was master of the situation.

In the skipper's state-room, Captain Finn still lay unconscious from the terrible blow the ruffian had dealt him in his slumber. His revolver was in Benedetto's possession—and it was the only firearm on board the Ocean Queen. And the Italian had already proved that he was a dead shot.

"Buon giorno, signorini!" grinned Benedetto.

The schoolboys did not answer.

"Ah, you are sullen!" said Benedetto. "It will not serve you, signorini." He touched the butt of the revolver again. "I am master here. You have seen me shoot." He made a gesture towards

the mattresses. "Do you wish to join them?"

He smiled, as the chums of Cedar Creek were still silent.

"There is no other firearm on the ship," continued Benedetto. "There was a rifle and the mate's revolver—I have dropped them into the sea. You understand? Every life on board is at my mercy. On shore, in Canada, you know what awaits me."

"A rope!" growled Bob Lawless savagely.

Benedetto nodded.

"E vero!" he assented. "And so you understand, signorini, that I shall not stick at trifles. Cospetto! You have seen that already! The brig is shorthanded now, and I shall require your services on deck now that I am in command of the ship. You will turn to and pull and haul with the crew. You understand? Otherwise——"

He tapped the revolver again.

"We understand," said Frank Richards curtly. "You have the upper hand now, Benedetto."

"I mean to keep it! The brig will serve my turn, and land me somewhere on the coast of California, where I am not known. For some days I shall need it. After that, you can go where you please. But if you raise a finger against me while I am aboard, I shall shoot you down like a dog. Keep that in mind."

The Italian passed on and entered the skipper's state-room.

Captain Finn still lay unconscious in his bunk.

Frank Richards & Co. looked at one another as they heard the Italian in the skipper's state-room at work. He was breaking open a locker, and they could guess that he was in search of plunder. The mutineer did not mean to leave the brig empty-handed when he made his escape from her.

"The awful rascal!" muttered Beauclerc.

Frank Richards clenched his hands.

"He's got to be downed somehow," he whispered.

"Take care, old chap; he means

what he said. There's been proof enough of that."

"I know!"

Bob Lawless made a grimace.

"I guess this is a tophole holiday for us," he said dismally. "I never reckoned on this when we came away from Cedar Creek School for a holiday by the Pacific. I—I say, I guess I've landed you fellows in this. It was my idea to have a run down the coast in a tramp brig, and this is how it is turning out."

"It may turn out better yet," said Frank. "It will be some days before Benedetto can get ashore; he dares not go near a port."

"What a life—while it lasts!"

"We may turn the tables on him yet."

"Hush!"

Benedetto came out of the captain's stateroom, which opened upon the cuddy.

He called to the Chinese.

"Wun Pang!"

"Allee lightee!" whimpered Wun Pang. "Me comee."

"Breakfast."

"You bet—me gettee—allee light."

There was no doubt that the Chinese would obey the orders of the new commander of the Ocean Queen. He was trembling in every limb as the black eyes of the Italian glittered at him.

Benedetto returned to the deck, making the chums of Cedar Creek a sign to follow him there.

CHAPTER 22.

Playing 'Possum!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. looked round them as they came out on the deck of the Ocean Queen.

The wide Pacific lay glistening in the morning sunlight, and a light breeze played over the waters, and filled the patched canvas of the old ocean tramp. The brig moved through the waters due westward, and the Canadian mountains had long sunk out of sight below the horizon. Round the vessel lay the

waste of waters, with a sail or two dotting the blue in the distance. Benedetto rapped out an order to the man at the wheel—a Mexican half-caste. The Italian was very careful to keep out of hailing distance, and as far as possible out of sight of any other vessel.

There were five men on deck, including the helmsman—all that remained of the crew. Two lay wounded below in the cuddy, with the mate. And the seamen had evidently given up any idea of disputing the Italian's authority. Most of them were dagoes, and though quick enough in a quarrel, with fist or knife, they were not of the kind to resist a resolute and merciless ruffian like Benedetto. He was prepared to shoot them down at a sign, and they knew it.

Benedetto fixed his black eyes upon the chums of Cedar Creek.

"Yes," said Frank.

"Take your truck into the fore-castle. You will berth forward with the hands now."

"Oh!" said Frank.

"Get the wounded men moved into the fore-castle also. And the sooner the better."

"They are better where they are," said Frank anxiously. "There's precious little room in the fore-castle, Benedetto, and it may be dangerous to move them."

Benedetto shrugged his shoulders.

"Obey my order!" he answered.

"But—"

"Listen to me, signorino. I shall not repeat my orders to you. Take them into the fore-castle, or throw them into the sea, if you choose; but the cuddy must be left clear."

"Very well," said Frank quietly.

The Italian's orders had to be obeyed. Frank Richards could guess his object easily enough. He intended to have the after part of the brig to himself, for safety's sake.

The crew lent assistance, and the wounded men and the unconscious captain were brought up and conveyed

into the stuffy fore-castle, and laid in the bunks there. Then the schoolboys took their own bags into the foc's'le. Only the Chinese cook remained in the cuddy; from him Benedetto had nothing to fear.

The Italian descended for breakfast, the hapless Wun Pang waiting on him in fear and trembling.

The crew muttered together on the deck while he was below, and one of the half-castes showed a knife, and his teeth at the same time. But they were alert and obedient when Benedetto appeared on deck again.

The Italian glanced at the sea, and up at the sails, and rapped out orders to the crew. The course of the brig was changed again. Now that the vessel was far out of sight of land, she was put upon a southerly course, the Italian's intention being to run her ashore in some lonely part of the coast of Oregon or California, and escape with the plunder he had secured.

What happened to the brig or her crew after that he did not care.

As the sun rose higher, blazing heat poured down upon the Ocean Queen. The Italian stood leaning upon the taffrail, his eyes alertly about him. But weariness was evidently gaining upon him, and Frank Richards & Co. noted it with satisfaction. Sooner or later the rascal must sleep, and then

Benedetto slid into a sitting posture at last, his back against the taffrail, and his chin dropped on his breast.

Whether he was asleep was uncertain, but his eyes were closed now, though the revolver was now in his hand.

Frank Richards glanced at his chums.

"There are marlinespikes here," he said in a low voice. "What do you fellows think—"

"Look!" muttered Bob.

One of the crew was beginning to move stealthily towards the motionless Italian. It was the boatswain—a big, broad-shouldered New Englander. He had a marlinespike in his hand. If he

came within reach of the sleeping Italian it was clear enough what he intended to do.

The chums of Cedar Creek watched him.

None ventured to make a movement, lest the Italian should awake.

Benedetto did not seem conscious of his danger.

His head remained sunk forward, and his breathing was regular; his face was in shadow, but his eyes appeared closed.

Closer and closer the boatswain drew, silently, and the crew watched him in tense stillness.

Frank Richards could almost hear his heart beating as he watched.

If the Italian slept one minute more

The big boatswain was within six feet of him, the marlinespike gripped in his powerful hand. But at the next step there was a sudden movement from the Italian.

His right hand swept up, with the revolver in it.

Crack!

The boatswain staggered back with a cry, and fell upon the deck, the marlinespike crashing to the planks.

"Oh!" panted Frank Richards.

Benedetto sprang to his feet, the smoking revolver in his hand, and his glittering glance swept along the deck.

There was a mocking grin upon his swarthy face.

He was prepared for a rush, but the rush did not come. The half-caste seamen scuttled forrard.

Bob Lawless clenched his hands.

"Playing 'possum!" he muttered between his teeth. "It was a trick—he was never asleep—"

The Italian laughed lightly.

"Richards!" he called out.

Frank approached him.

"Pitch that carrion into the sea."

"What!"

The wounded boatswain was groaning at Frank Richards' feet. The ball was in the shoulder, and he was completely disabled.

"Throw him overboard!"

Frank's eyes flashed.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he answered, setting his lips. "Are you mad, Benedetto? Do you think you can make me into a murderer like yourself?"

The revolver rose to a level, and Frank Richards felt a sickness at the heart as he looked at it. He was looking death in the face. But nothing would have induced him to obey the savage order. The wounded boatswain groaned again.

For a moment the Italian looked as if he would pull trigger. But perhaps some recollection crossed his mind that it was Frank who had helped to save him from the sea—or perhaps he remembered that the brig was dangerously shorthanded now. He lowered the revolver with a light laugh.

"Carry him away, then," he said. "Let him live! I think these rogues have had their lesson."

Frank drew a deep breath.

The Italian turned away, rolling a cigarette, and the wounded boatswain was carried to the forecabin. A little later Benedetto sat in the shadow of a boat swinging at the davits and closed his eyes again. But he was not likely to be attacked this time. The crew of the ocean tramp had learned that the mutineer slept with one eye open, and whether asleep or awake, Benedetto was not likely to be attacked again.

CHAPTER 23.

A Desperate Attempt!

THE day passed in a shimmering blaze of heat on the blue Pacific. Frank Richards & Co. worked with the remainder of the crew at the orders of the Italian, but there was little to do but trim the sails. One of the half-caste seamen was kept at the helm, and the brig rolled and ploughed on her way southward. Sails appeared in the distance, but the watchful Italian avoided coming near them.

Dusk set in at last, and relieved the heat.

Captain Finn had recovered consciousness, but he was ill in his bunk in the forecabin. The chums of Cedar Creek spent a good deal of their time in tending the skipper and the wounded seamen. The state of affairs had been explained to Captain Finn, but he was too badly hurt to think of making any attempt to recapture his ship. All the wounded men were badly in need of a doctor's care, but there was no chance of that till land was touched—perhaps, indeed, not then. Frank Richards & Co. were in dread that one or another of them might sink under his injuries, and that the shadow of death might fall upon the Ocean Queen. But as yet the worst had not happened.

Glad enough were the chums when evening descended upon the ocean; the twilight quickly deepening into darkness. With her lights glimmering into the gloom, the brig forged on. Benedetto was still on deck, peering occasionally into the shadows of the sea. Frank Richards and his chums drew forward, near the foremast, and spoke together in low tones.

"This can't go on much longer," Frank muttered. "There will be death in the forecabin if the men there don't get proper attention. Something's got to be done, you fellows."

"The crew won't raise a finger again," said Vere Beauclerc.

"Not likely, I guess," remarked Bob Lawless. "We've got to handle the dago, if he's going to be handled at all. We could make the land in a few hours, if we got rid of him. But how—"

Frank Richards wrinkled his brows.

He was getting into a mood of desperation, as were his chums. The three schoolboys were in a mood to take risks, if there was any hope of success. Indeed, as matters were, their lives were not worth much, for at any time the reckless mutineer might break out into murderous ferocity. During the afternoon he had been below several times, and the schoolboys had heard him rummaging for valuables.

"The brute won't even close his eyes," muttered Bob Lawless; "or, if he

does, we can't tell if he's asleep. I guess it's no go, Franky. Can't argue with a loaded revolver, in the grip of a crack shot like that dago. It's only asking to be drilled."

"I wonder——" muttered Frank.

"Well?"

"When he goes below again——"

"Harder to tackle him below than on deck," said Bob, with a shake of the head. "He would have us at his mercy there."

"I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking that when he comes up the companion-ladder—it's dark now—the moment he puts his head out on deck——"

Frank paused.

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"I—I wonder!" he said. "If we failed——"

"If we failed, it's death!" Frank Richards shivered a little. "But it may be that, anyway. How do we know what he intends? When he runs the ship ashore, what may he do then?"

"He will vamoose, I reckon."

"And leave us to set the police after him?"

Bob started.

"By gum! I guess——"

"You've seen what a villain he is. He's much more likely to scuttle the ship and use his revolver on us, than to leave us to help bring him to justice."

"The awful villain! I guess it's likely enough."

"We'll try your scheme, Frank, if we get a chance," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "The lives of everyone on board may depend on it."

"That's what I was thinking. Get hold of something to use as a weapon, and keep it hidden."

"Right-ho!"

The chums separated; they did not wish Benedetto to observe them talking together too much.

They were in a subdued mood, but quite determined. Life or death hung upon a chance now, and they were quite ready to take the chance.

Bob Lawless found an iron bolt,

which he concealed about him, and Frank a short, thick billet of wood. Vere Beauclerc slipped into his pocket a big clasp-knife belonging to the boat-swain. So far as they could prepare for the struggle, they had prepared. It only remained to watch for their opportunity.

The opportunity was long in coming. Benedetto seemed in no hurry to go below.

Master of the brig as he was, his situation was full of terrible peril, and he realised it clearly.

The crew remained on deck, the fore-castle was crowded with the wounded in the bunks, and, besides, Benedetto did not allow them to go off watch. His rest in the afternoon seemed to have refreshed him, and he paced the after-deck tirelessly, occasionally rapping out a direction to the half-caste at the wheel. Wun Pang, the Chinese, put his pigtail out of the companion and announced that supper was ready, and then at last the Italian went below.

In the glimmer of the stars Frank Richard & Co. exchanged a quick look. The hour had come.

The chums of Cedar Creek were tired, but they did not think for a moment of sleep. Before their eyes closed again their fate was to be put to the test. They stole quietly aft, and gathered round the companion-hatch. Inside the companion a small lamp was burning, and Bob Lawless silently extinguished it.

Then the schoolboys waited.

The few members of the crew on deck had observed their action, but they did not speak, or make a movement. If the chums of Cedar Creek tackled the mutineer, they had to tackle him by themselves, though, doubtless, the knives of the half-castes would be ready if they succeeded.

They waited with beating hearts.

Below they could hear the Italian in the cuddy, and occasionally his voice was audible, snapping an order to Wun Pang. The scent of a strong cheroot came from below at last. Benedetto was smoking one of the captain's

Mexican cheroots after his supper. They heard him push back his chair and rise from the table.

"Now!" whispered Frank Richards.

"Hush!"

The footsteps of Benedetto were heard below. They heard him mutter to himself in Italian, doubtless because the light in the companion was out.

Then his footsteps came up the ladder.

In the shadow of the hatch the chums of Cedar Creek waited, their weapons in their hands, their hearts thumping.

Benedetto stepped lightly out on deck. Crash!

The iron bolt, in Bob Lawless' hand, crashed fairly in the dusky face of the mutineer, and he reeled back with a scream of pain.

His revolver was in his hand the next instant.

But before he could use it Frank Richards struck with the wooden billet, and the Italian's arm dropped paralysed to his side.

Crash!

The deadly weapon dropped to the deck and exploded there, the bullet whistling away harmlessly.

Benedetto was staggering, but he half recovered, and plunged towards the revolver. Beauclerc struck at him with the clasp-knife as he did so, and the blade hacked along the Italian's shoulder. Benedetto leaped back, lost his footing, and rolled down the companion-ladder, landing with a crash at the bottom.

CHAPTER 24.

Cornered!

FRANK RICHARDS made a spring for the revolver.

It was that deadly weapon that had made the mutineer master of the brig, and now it was out of his hands.

Frank caught it up with throbbing heart.

"He's coming!" panted Beauclerc. "Stand ready!"

"Give me the shooter, Frank."

Frank handed the revolver quickly to Bob Lawless. The Canadian school-boy gripped it, and his finger was on the trigger. Benedetto, hurt as he must have been by his fall, was coming furiously up the companion-way, and as he appeared in sight there was a gleam of steel. His knife was in his hand, and savage fury in his face.

Bob Lawless did not hesitate.

The mutineer had no chance of using his knife.

The moment he appeared in sight Bob Lawless opened fire with the revolver.

Crack, crack, crack!

As fast as he could pull the trigger Bob Lawless pumped out the bullets.

There was a yell of agony from the Italian, and he disappeared into the companion again. The first bullet had struck; the other two crashed into the woodwork over his head as he disappeared.

The chums heard a fall below and a groan.

"I guess that lets him out!" panted Bob.

Groan!

"Come down and collar him!" exclaimed Frank.

"Hold on! The pesky skunk may be playing possum again—it may be a trick to get us in his reach!" exclaimed Bob hastily. "Remember his knife."

Frank Richards stopped in time.

"You're right, Bob."

"Cospetto!" The furious voice of the mutineer came from below. "But I will kill you for this—cospetto!"

And he groaned again.

The seamen were coming aft now. As if by a miracle their dreaded enemy had been beaten, if not overcome, and they were ready to help. The four half-castes had their knives out.

But as they looked into the darkness of the companion they paused. The Italian could be heard moving below; he was wounded, but he was

evidently not disabled. The glimmer of light from the cuddy lamp was suddenly extinguished. In anticipation of an attack, the Italian had plunged the cuddy into darkness. And no one cared to tackle the desperate man in the darkness of the close quarters below.

"We've downed him, anyway," said Frank Richards, with a deep breath of satisfaction. "Keep the pistol handy, Bob."

"You bet! He gets the lead through his cabeza, if he shows it over the level of the deck," said Bob. "I've got two bullets left, and one will be enough for Mister Benedetto!"

Leaving his comrades to watch for the Italian if he should emerge, Frank Richards hurried forward. He entered the forecabin and found Captain Finn sitting up in a bunk, aroused by the firing. Frank hastily explained what had happened.

"Jerusalem!" said Captain Finn. "I guess I never reckoned you youngsters would have handled that bulldozer like that. I guess I'm obliged to you, sonny."

"The ship's yours again now, captain," said Frank. "Do you feel well enough to get on deck?"

"I guess so."

Captain Finn clambered out of the bunk. His bearded face was pale, and his head was swathed in bandages. But he walked steadily enough as he came on deck. The news that the mutineer had been defeated, and that he was in command of the brig again, seemed to have given Captain Finn new life. He proceeded aft, where Bob and Beauclerc were watching the companion—and Benedetto's voice could be heard below, muttering curses in his own language.

"Give me the shooter, kid!" said the skipper.

Bob Lawless handed it over.

"There's two cartridges left, sir," he said. "Benedetto's got the rest about him, I guess. It can't be reloaded."

"I guess one will be enough if I get

a bead on him!" said Captain Finn grimly, and he shouted down the companion: "Benedetto, you black-visaged swab, tumble up!"

A deep curse from below was the only answer.

"Will you tumble up, Benedetto?"

"No, signor."

"Wait there till daylight, then, and I calculate we'll rout you out, you murdering dago! You're going ashore in irons, after all, Benedetto!"

"Credo no, capitano," came the Italian's reply. "The irons are not forged that will hold me!"

"I guess we shall see about that. We're going to head for Vancouver, Benedetto, and I reckon we shall see Canada at dawn. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, you mutinous thief."

The captain stepped back.

"I reckon we're not going to give him a chance with his knife," he said. "Batten down the hatch!"

"Good stunt!" said Bob.

The hatch was closed and battened down.

It was impossible now for the Italian to come up to the deck if he wished, not that it was likely he would run the risk. Without a firearm he was at the mercy of the crew, and they would certainly have shown him no mercy. He was too dangerous to be attacked in the cuddy in the dark, but he was as good as a prisoner there. His teeth were drawn.

Captain Finn, in a state of great satisfaction, in spite of the aching in his head, gave orders to his crew, and the course of the brig was changed once more. Frank Richards & Co. lay down to sleep in some canvas on deck with light hearts. When the sun rose again they hoped to see the mountains of Canada on the eastern horizon.

Below there was no sound from the mutineer.

It was possible that his wounds had overcome him, or that he was sleeping. Somewhere below, too, was Wun Pang, the Chinese, doubtless hiding in terror in some obscure corner. In the glimmer

of the stars Frank Richards & Co. slept the sleep of deep fatigue.

The sound of knocking roused them from slumber later in the night. They started up.

Knock, knock, knock!

"It's the Italian!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

The knocking proceeded from the companion hatch. Captain Finn walked towards it with a grim smile.

"Signor!" came in a shout from below.

"Belay, there, you dago trash!"

"Ah, it is you, capitano! I will make terms with you!" came the Italian's voice, muffled by the closed hatch.

"I guess I'm not making any terms with a dago mutineer!"

"Listen to me, signor. Give me a boat, and I will leave your ship."

The captain grinned.

"You'll leave my ship in irons, Benedetto, when we drop anchor in port!" he answered.

"Cospetto! But I am not taken yet, signor."

"You're welcome to the cuddy till the morning. Then I guess I'm coming down for you, and if you don't surrender, you dog, I'll shoot you in your tracks!"

And the captain walked away, without paying further heed to the Italian.

"I guess Mister Benedetto is feeling where the shoe pinches now," grinned Bob Lawless. "His jig is up, I reckon."

And the chums of Cedar Creek settled down to sleep again.

They did not waken again till the rosy dawn was flushing over the Pacific. As they turned out Bob Lawless pointed to the eastward, with an exclamation of great satisfaction.

"Land!" he said.

Dim in the distance the mountain summits barred the sky. It was many a long mile distant, but it was land—Canadian land. And it cheered the hearts of the chums of Cedar Creek to see the misty summits against the sky.

"And now for Benedetto!" said Bob Lawless.

CHAPTER 25.

The Last of Benedetto!

CAPTAIN FINN called the hands aft as the sun rose higher and daylight streamed down upon the seas. The hatch was opened, and the skipper looked down into the companion-way. The revolver was in his hand now.

"Benedetto!" he shouted.

There was no answer from below.

"Benedetto, tumble up!"

Silence.

"I guess I'm coming down for you, then!" called out the captain. "Lift a finger, Benedetto, and down you go! That's a warning!"

"Hallo, he's coming!" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

There was a scuttling of feet below, but it was a pigtailed head that rose into view.

"Get out of the way, Wun Pang!" growled the captain, as the Chinaman scuttled on deck.

"Me so frightened!" gasped Wun Pang. "No sleepee! Hideo in coal locker! Pool old Chinaman frighten!"

"Where's Benedetto?"

"Me no savvy."

"Haven't you seen the Italian since dawn?" asked Frank Richards.

Wun Pang shook his head.

"No see," he answered.

Captain Finn looked puzzled.

"I guess he can't be in hiding," he said. "There's nowhere for him to lie in ambush, the skulking sea-lawyer! Anyhow, I guess I'm goin' down to rout him out some!"

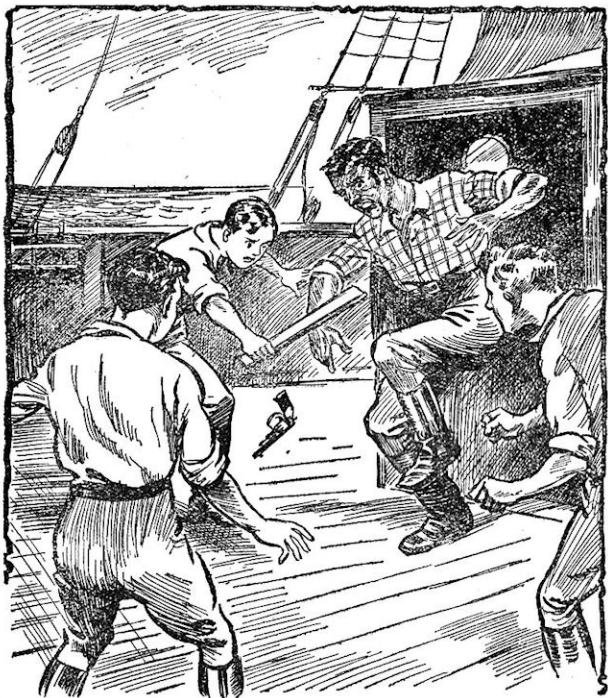
"And we're after you!" said Bob Lawless.

"You youngsters had better keep out of danger, I calculate."

"You may want our help, captain."

Captain Finn granted, and began to descend the companion-way. Frank Richards & Co. followed him, each of them with a weapon in his hand. A couple of the crew followed, armed with capstan-bars.

Desperate as the Italian was, he had little chance of resistance now. There



In a flash Benedetto's revolver was in his hand, but before he could use it Frank Richards struck with the wooden billet, and the Italian's arm dropped paralysed to his side. Crash! The deadly weapon dropped to the deck.

were enough to deal with him, even if he escaped the captain's revolver, which was not likely.

The cuddy was deserted.

The table was littered with captain's stores, which the mutineer had apparently turned out, and the fragments of a meal could be seen, but there was no sign of the mutineer.

"Keep your deadlights open!" said the skipper abruptly. "I reckon the pesky polecat is hiding in some corner, ready to jump out with his stick, don't give him a chance."

"You bet!" said Bob Lawless.

Every eye was wary as the search began for the Italian.

The state-rooms were examined and the lazarette, and every possible corner where Benedetto could have hidden himself, but the Italian was not discovered.

But Frank Richards noted that the cabin window was open, and he looked out at the sea creaming away in the wake of the Ocean Queen.

In the woodwork there was a stain of blood.

"Captain Finn!"

"Waal?"

"Look here!"

"Jehosophat!" ejaculated the skipper.

The searchers gathered round the cabin window. The bloodstain told its own story; it indicated where the Italian had climbed out in the hours of darkness.

"He's gone, then!" muttered Beauclerc.

Frank Richards shivered a little as he gazed down at the sea deep below. Evidently the Italian had taken to the water, knowing that he had no means of escaping arrest in the morning. Had he plunged down to his death in the deep waters, or with some vague hope of reaching the land, and yet escaping?

It was impossible to say. But it was certain that he was gone, and the deep Pacific held the secret of his fate.

Captain Finn nodded his head with grim satisfaction.

"I guess the pesky varmint preferred Davy Jones' locker to a rope on shore," he remarked. "I reckon he's taken some food with him and a flask; that's what he's been turning out my stores for, I calculate. But he couldn't swim leagues of the Pacific. I guess he's gone down, and a good riddance to him for a mutinous dog!"

And Captain Finn put his revolver in his pocket and returned to the deck. Frank Richards & Co. followed him more slowly.

There was little doubt as to the fate of the mutineer.

He had entrusted himself to the sea as a last chance, perhaps not aware of the real distance of the brig from land. The risk, great as it was, had doubtless seemed better to him than the certainty of being sent on shore in irons as soon as the brig dropped anchor, to take his trial and his just punishment.

"I guess he had pluck, anyway!" Bob Lawless remarked. "I suppose there's a bare chance he might be picked up at sea?"

"Not much," said Frank, "especially wounded as he was. I'm afraid I can't feel very sorry for him."

"I guess not. Still, he had plenty of pluck."

The chums of Cedar Creek returned to the deck in a thoughtful mood. Whatever had been the fate of the mutineer, he was gone, and there could be little doubt that the blue waters of the Pacific had closed above his head for ever.

The following day the Ocean Queen dropped anchor in Canadian waters, and glad enough were the chums of Cedar Creek to set foot on dry land again. They remained some days at Vancouver, and then journeyed northward to Pacific Point to finish their holiday by the sea. And in the cheery days that followed they soon forgot their tragic experiences on board the ocean tramp. And when the time arrived to return to the Thompson

Valley and home, they boarded the car on the Canadian Pacific in cheery mood.

"I guess we've had a good time," Bob Lawless remarked, when, on the last day of the journey home, they rode up the Thompson Valley trail. "We got more than we bargained for, but we came out right end up. We shall have a yarn to spin the fellows at Cedar Creek next week."

And a few days later Frank Richards & Co. rode up the familiar trail through the timber to Cedar Creek School, and their school life commenced once more.

CHAPTER 26.

News for the Cherub!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. halted where the trail forked on the prairie. The sun was setting towards the far Pacific.

"Here we are again!" remarked Frank.

"Home at last!" said Bob. "I guess I'm rather glad. I shan't be sorry to see popper and mopper again. Coming on to the ranch, Cherub?"

Vere Beauclerc shook his head with a smile.

"No; I'll keep on to the shack. Father will be expecting me. Good-bye till to-morrow, you fellows! I'll ride over in the morning."

"Right-ho!"

"So-long!"

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless rode away on the trail to the Lawless Ranch, and Beauclerc trotted on towards the timber.

The chums of Cedar Creek School had had a rather exciting but enjoyable time by the blue Pacific; but they were glad to see the old, familiar Thompson Valley again.

Vere Beauclerc's handsome face was bright as he rode through the timber, heading for the little shack where he lived with his father. Vere's father was what is termed in Canada—somewhat contemptuously—a remittance-man.

That is, he did no work, but lived upon money which was sent out to him from England. The sole income of Beauclerc senior was the allowance made to him by his brother, Lord St. Austells, an English peer of the realm.

Vere came along the trail under the big trees a rapid trot, and the silvery creek burst on his sight.

Then he suddenly drew rein, in sheer astonishment.

"Why, what—" he ejaculated.

The little lumber-shack, where the remittance-man had dwelt with his son, had vanished.

In its place stood a solid-looking, well-built cabin of timber, from the chimney of which smoke rose in the evening air. It was a good-sized cabin, with two stories—two rooms above and two below. Attached to it was a lumber-cookhouse, from the doorway of which a fat little Chinaman blinked at the new arrival.

Beauclerc stared blankly at the transformed scene.

His home—the only home he had known in Canada—was gone. What did it mean? His father could not have abandoned his holding during his absence, and yet—

He rode on again, a prey to a strange uneasiness, and jumped from his horse outside the new cabin.

"Father!" he called, as he ran into the building.

"Vere! You are back!"

Lascelles Beauclerc rose, with a smile, to greet his son. The room in which he stood was not much like that in the old shack. It was large, freshly painted, and furnished with what was evidently "store" furniture from the town at the railhead.

Father and son shook hands.

"I'm glad you're back, my boy!"

"I'm glad to be back, father! But—but this—" Beauclerc stared round the room. "I—I didn't expect that—What has happened?"

"Sit down, my boy. You'll want your supper, and I'll explain while you eat it."

Lascelles Beauclerc stepped to the door, and called:

"John!"

"Yes, Mass' Beauclerc?"

"Supper."

"Allee light!"

"Well, my hat!" murmured Beauclerc. "I—I thought for a minute, dad, that you had changed your quarters, and somebody else had settled here."

"I thought you would be surprised!" said the remittance-man, with a smile.

"I—I was astonished! What has happened, father? Have we suddenly become rich?" asked Beauclerc, laughing a little.

"Not exactly. But let me show you to your room."

"Oh, dad, this beats it!"

In the old shack the remittance-man's son had not had a room to himself. It had been very crowded quarters. Now there was a little room, with the pine floor stained, the walls painted, and a couple of pictures hanging, and two camp-beds ranged along opposite walls.

"Your room!" said Mr. Beauclerc, watching his son from the doorway, with a smiling face. "How do you like it, Vere?"

"Ripping!"

"The other bed is for a visitor we may be getting later. I will tell you about that at supper."

Mr. Beauclerc descended the stair—or, rather, broad-stepped ladder—that led below, and busied himself there, with the help of John Chinaman. When Vere Beauclerc came down, he found a savoury supper ready for him.

He sat down to it with great enjoyment.

"It's like a tale of Aladdin," he remarked. "And you've done it all while I was away, dad!"

"Not quite with my own hands. I've had men at work, too," smiled the remittance-man.

"But—"

"You see, we are not so poor as we were, Vere," said Mr. Beauclerc, colouring a little. "I have a good holding

here, and it only needed work to make it pay. We've had a good season. I've had money in the bank for a long time now, and I add to it instead of drawing from it. And it's all your doing, Vere!"

"My doing?" ejaculated the school-boy, in astonishment.

"Yes. For it was you that drew me from my old ways—ways of waste and folly," said the remittance-man, his brow clouding. "I have wasted many years, Vere. I could never quite forget my old life. You, I suppose, have very slight recollections of the Old Country?"

"I remember England."

"And your uncle?"

"Slightly," said Beauclerc, with a smile. "I remember Lord St. Austells as a rather grim, stern old gentleman."

"Do you remember your cousin?"

"Very faintly—just a remembrance of a little kid," said Beauclerc. "Little Algy—he wasn't a bad kid. I don't think I met my older cousin at all—his elder brother."

"Ah, you do remember Algernon?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I have several things to tell you, Vere," said the remittance-man slowly. "In the first place"—he paused—"Vere, I am no longer a remittance-man. When I finally broke with my foolish way of life I—I made up my mind to that. It is some months now, my boy, since I wrote to my brother in England, and informed him that I required his aid no longer. I intended to tell you as soon as the matter was settled, but Lord St. Austells' reply was not what I expected."

Vere drew a deep breath.

His handsome face was very bright.

"Oh, father, I am glad—glad! But what did my uncle say, then?"

"I had thought that he looked upon me as a burden, and would be glad to be rid of it," said Mr. Beauclerc, flushing. "Instead of that, he wrote that he was pleased to hear of my success, but urged me to keep the remittances until I was quite sure. I answered him that I was sure, and that I wanted no more assistance. That was

after you left on your holiday. So you were away when his next letter came."

"Yes, father."

"It was a surprising letter, Vere. He has asked me to take charge of his younger son for a time—your cousin Algernon."

Beauclerc started.

"My cousin Algernon here in the backwoods!" he ejaculated.

"Yes." Mr. Beauclerc smiled slightly. "Now that Lord St. Austells knows the change in my life he does not hesitate to trust his son to me. It is a proof that he believes in me. But he always knew that you were good and true, Vere. You remember he once offered to take you into his charge, and have you educated in England with his own son. But you refused to leave me."

"But Algernon here!" said Beauclerc, in amazement. "Surely my uncle does not know what it is like here to think of that?"

"It is because he knows what it is like, that he has thought of it," said Mr. Beauclerc. "Algernon has been causing him anxiety. He is a good boy, I believe, but lacking in strength of character—given to slacking and self-will. I rather think that my brother is over-indulgent with him, and realises that it is doing him harm, and still cannot make up his mind to be severe."

"Oh!" said Beauclerc.

"A few months roughing it in the Wild West may give him the tonic he needs to brace him up. That is what Lord St. Austells thinks."

"Has he been to school in England?"

"No; he has had a tutor at home, but I fancy he does very much as he likes. He works when he pleases—and does not often please. But at Cedar Creek—"

Beauclerc started.

"Is he coming to Cedar Creek?"

"That is his father's wish."

"My hat!" muttered Beauclerc. "He will have to rough it. The fellows there will be down on any nonsense."

"Which may do him good?"

"Yes, that's likely enough."

"I am under too many obligations to my brother to refuse, Vere," said the remittance-man. "I should have liked to consult you, but you had started on your holiday."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Beauclerc. "I'll do all I can for him. I was only thinking it would be rough on him, poor chap!"

The remittance-man nodded.

"When is he coming, father?"

"Lord St. Austells is answering by cable. The answer may come any day. If he decides to send Algernon, the boy will arrive in time for the new term—in fact, must have already left England. His tutor will bring him to Canada, and leave him here. We have to meet him on the railway, that is all—at Kamloops. You and your friends might ride down to Kamloops to meet him, Vere—it would give you an opportunity of making friends with him."

And so it was settled.

CHAPTER 27.

Cousin Algernon!

"HALLO, here comes the Cherub!" Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were strolling outside the ranch-house a day or two later, when Vere Beauclerc came riding up the trail on his big, black horse.

So far, Vere had not mentioned his cousin to his chums, though he had seen them several times since their return from the Pacific Coast. He had waited for the matter to be settled beyond doubt, by the receipt of the cable from Lord St. Austells.

"You're up early, Beau!" said Frank Richards, as the remittance-man's son dismounted. Frank and Bob had not long had breakfast.

"Anything on?" asked Bob.

"Yes; I'm off to Kamloops to-day," said Beauclerc.

Bob raised his eyebrows.

"That's two days' ride," he said. "And school's in two days. Forgotten school, old scout?"

Beauclerc shook his head with a smile.

"No; but my father has asked Miss Meadows to give me leave, as I'm going to meet a new kid."

"Wha-a-at?"

"A new kid at Kamloops!" ejaculated Frank Richards.

"Yes; he's coming from England."

Frank Richards and Bob stared blankly at Beauclerc.

"A new kid coming from England to school in British Columbia?" yelled Bob.

"Exactly!"

"Wandering in your mind, old chap?"

Beauclerc laughed.

"I'll explain," he said. "My cousin Algernon is coming to stay with us for a few months, and he is going to Cedar Creek School while he's here. I have to meet him when he gets off the railway, and pilot him up the Thompson Valley. See?"

"Oh, I see!" said Frank.

"What's his name?" asked Bob.

"Same as mine—Beauclerc. Algernon Beauclerc!"

"Stunning name!" said Bob, with a grin. "How many titles has he got? I believe your nobby relations over the water wallow in titles, Cherub!"

"None," said Beauclerc, with a smile.

"He is simply the Honourable Algernon, being a younger son."

"Your popper is an Honourable, isn't he?" asked Bob.

"Yes; but it wouldn't be much use here," said Beauclerc, laughing. "I think perhaps Algernon may leave the Honourable at Kamloops."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I want you fellows to come with me, if you will," said Beauclerc. "I'd like you to make friends with my cousin."

"Jolly glad—but what about school?"

"Miss Meadows has given leave for three—my father asked her. You'll have to ask Mr. Lawless, of course."

"Oh, that's all right, I guess," said Bob confidently. "I'll go and tackle the popper now. We'll come all right!"

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Richards.

Mr. Lawless gave his consent cheer-

fully, and Frank and Bob prepared for the ride to Kamloops.

The three chums started together, camping the first night half-way to the railhead town, on the bank of the river.

The next day they rode into Kamloops.

They arrived there soon after noon, but the big train that came down from the Kicking Horse Pass was not due for some hours, and they had to wait.

They occupied the time in lunching, and then riding round the town, and they were still at some distance from the railroad when they caught sight of the long line of cars swinging down towards Kamloops.

"There's the train!" said Bob Lawless.

And they rode back.

The cars were going on before they reached the depot, and, leaving their horses outside the station, they hurried in to look for the new arrival. A stack of baggage—"truck," as Bob called it—caught their eyes, and they glanced at it.

There were several large and very expensive leather trunks, a number of portmanteaux, and several hat-boxes, as well as a number of cases containing things they knew not what.

"That lot's from the Old Country!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Party of tourists landed here, I suppose!"

"There's the same initials on the lot of them," said Frank Richards, "and the initials are 'A. B.'"

"Algernon Beauclerc!" said the Cherub, with a slight smile.

"Phew!"

"You—you don't mean to say your cousin has brought all this truck from over the pond, Cherub?" ejaculated Bob.

"Looks like it!"

"We shan't get it up the valley on horseback, that's a cert!" chuckled Bob Lawless.

The chums looked round for the owner of the baggage.

At a little distance a youth of about their own age was standing, in conver-

sation with a middle-aged, rather tall and thin gentleman dressed in black.

The youth riveted their eyes at once.

He had riveted the eyes of most of the people about the railroad depot, too.

He was a rather tall youth for his age, of a rather elegant figure, and dressed with immaculate care.

He was dressed in riding-clothes that looked as if they had just come, newly-pressed, from Bond Street.

A diamond gleamed in his tie, and in his right eye there glittered a rimless monocle.

He carried a riding-whip with a silver knob, and he was sucking that knob as he talked to the thin gentleman.

The chums of Cedar Creek looked at him—and looked again.

If this was Algernon Beauclerc, his proper place certainly was not a back-woods school up-country in British Columbia. Certainly his fine feathers were likely to get considerably tarnished there.

"My hat!" murmured Vere.

"Great gophers!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Cedar Creek will faint when it sees this beauteous vision."

"The dear boy will tone down after a while," said Frank Richards. "He's a bit of a greenhorn to begin with. So was I when I first came here, Bob."

"You were, old chap!" grinned Bob.

"Let's go and nab him!"

The youth's voice came to their ears as they approached.

"Oh, gad! Can't I get a cab? Oh, gad! Now, look here, Mr. Toots, what are we goin' to do—what?"

"Algy!" said Beauclerc.

The youth started, and jammed his monocle a little tighter into his eye and blinked at him.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Don't you know me?" asked Beauclerc.

"Dashed if I do!"

"I'm your cousin Vere, and I've come here to meet you."

"Oh, gad!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Toots. "I am so glad you have come! I was

afraid we had missed you in this—this dreadfully wild place!"

Algernon Beauclerc shook hands with his cousin, and then with Frank Richards and Bob, as they were introduced. He seemed a good-natured fellow, but certainly a little vacant.

"Now, look here, you chaps," he said. "Toots says we can't get a cab here. What's goin' to be done?"

"You're going to be done, if you're looking for cabs!" grinned Bob Lawless. "You're coming up the valley on a horse!"

"Oh, gad!"

"You ride?" asked Frank.

"Dear boy, I can ride anythin' on four legs. But what about my luggage?"

"You'll have to leave your truck here," said Bob.

Algernon blinked at him.

"If I had a truck I'd put the luggage into it," he said. "But I haven't any old truck."

"Baggage is truck in this country," said Beauclerc. "It's all right, Algy. The baggage can come on by the post-wagon to Thompson."

"Thompson!" repeated the Honourable Algernon. "Don't know him. Friend of yours?"

"It's our post-town."

"Oh, gad! Town named Thompson!" ejaculated Algernon, evidently astonished. "Pullin' my leg—what?"

"No, no! That's the name of the town."

Algy smiled knowingly.

"Don't you think I'm green because I'm new to this country!" he said. "I'm all there, begad! Up on the mountains I asked the conductor chap the name of that pass, and he told me it was the Kickin' Horse Pass. I said to him, 'Old man, you can't stuff me!' Ha, ha!"

"But it was the Kicking Horse Pass," said Frank.

Algy winked with the eye that was not occupied with the monocle.

"Draw it mild!" he said. "I'm wide, very wide! Can't stuff me, you know—not this mornin', you know! I say, it's

jolly good of you fellows to come here and meet me—awfully good! I'm no end grateful! But Toots says there are no cabs. They've been stuffin' him, of course. Poor old Toots is always bein' stuffed, ain't you, Toots?"

"My dear Master Algernon——"

"They stuffed him on the train no end," said Algernon. "Made him believe that the coppery chaps who sold you beads and things were Red Indians. Ha, ha!"

"Well, they are Red Indians," said Beauclerc.

Another wink from Algy.

"Dear old man, I'm not a green-horn," he said. "I'm not bein' stuffed—not this mornin'! I say, where's the ranch?"

"What ranch?"

"Don't you live in a ranch? I thought everybody in Canada lived in a ranch."

"We live in a cabin, and it's two days' ride from here," said Beauclerc, smiling.

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

Algernon seemed quite overcome by that information. The chums of Cedar Creek led him from the station. It was arranged that Mr. Toots should remain, and come on in the post-wagon with the multifarious baggage, while Frank Richards & Co. took charge of Master Algernon. They had brought a spare horse from the ranch for him. Somewhat to their surprise, Master Algernon was able to ride the horse, and he mounted and rode away with the chums of Cedar Creek in a very good humour.

CHAPTER 28. Roughing It!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. could not help smiling as they started for the Thompson Valley with the youth from the Old Country.

Master Algernon was rather a new experience to them.

It was evident that there was a considerable amount of simplicity in Algy's

make-up, though he prided himself upon being very "wide."

He was too "wide" to credit that it was impossible to get a cab home from the station, but he cheerfully consented to going on horseback.

He rode very well, too. Bob Lawless had been careful to bring a quiet horse for him. As the sun set westward, Algernon rode on very contentedly, talking a good deal of the time. The subject of his conversation was chiefly himself.

The governor had had the idea of sending him to Canada, he explained, the "governor" being his father, Lord St. Austells. Algernon himself looked upon the idea as no end of a lark. The chums wondered whether he would find it such a lark when he settled down to the rough-and-ready life of the Thompson Valley.

As the evening came on Algernon looked about him a good deal, at the darkening plains and the hills growing misty in the distance.

"Near home yet?" he asked at last.

"Not till to-morrow afternoon," answered Beauclerc.

"Gammon, you know."

"We shan't get home till to-morrow, really," said Beauclerc.

"Oh, gad! You're not stuffin' me?"

"No, no!"

"Then where are we goin' to put up for the blessed night?" inquired Algernon. "I don't see any hotels."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Lawless. "We shall come to the hotel at dark."

"We carry our hotel with us," explained Frank Richards.

"Oh, gad! I say, what about my baggage? I've left all my clobber with old Toots, you know. What about dressin' for dinner?" asked Algernon anxiously.

"Dressing for dinner!" repeated Bob Lawless dazedly.

"Yaas. I suppose——"

"Wait till you see the hotel, and then you won't worry about that," said Frank Richards, laughing.

"I don't see any sign of it yet!" grunted Algy.

The darkness was setting in now, but the schoolboys rode on at a good pace. They wished to leave camping as late as possible, so as to arrive home in good time the following day. But a halt was made at last.

When the chums drew rein on the border of a wood near the river the Honourable Algernon gazed about him in perplexity.

"What are we stoppin' here for?" he inquired.

Bob Lawless pointed to a big tree with his riding-whip.

"There's our hotel," he explained.

"Eh—that's a tree, ain't it?" ejaculated Algernon, turning his eye-glass upon it in amazement.

"Exactly! We camp under it."

"C-c-c-camp!"

"Correct!"

"In the open air!" yelled Algernon.

"It's the only kind of air we've got in the Thompson Valley, you see."

"Oh, gad!"

Algernon seemed dazed. At first he had a fear that he was being "stuffed"; but when his companions dismounted, and staked out their horses, he was constrained to believe.

Bob staked out his horse for him, not trusting the animal to Master Algernon's management.

The scion of the Old Country's nobility sat on a log, and watched his companions in amazed silence as they built a camp-fire and prepared the evening meal.

"I say!" he ejaculated suddenly.

"Hallo!"

"We're really campin' out here?"

"I guess so."

"Then what am I to do for a bath in the morning?"

Bob Lawless jerked his thumb towards the river.

"There's your bath!" he answered. "Isn't it big enough?"

"Oh, gad!" said Algernon.

However, the Honourable Algy joined

the chums at supper, and ate with a good appetite.

After supper, he looked round again with an uncertain expression.

"Where's my bed?" he asked.

"Give him his blanket, Franky!"

"Oh, gad!" said Algernon. "What about sheets?"

"Didn't you bring any sheets from England?" asked Bob Lawless, very gravely.

"Nunno!"

"Ah! That was an oversight! You ought to have brought them, and a four-poster bed, too! As you've forgotten, old scout, I'm afraid you'll have to sleep rolled up in a blanket on the ground!"

"Sleep on the ground?" said Algernon.

"Yep!"

"You're stuffin' again, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha! Not a bit!"

"Suppose I catch cold?"

"It's a free country; you can catch all the colds you like!"

"You silly ass!" shrieked Algernon.

"Suppose I die of it—what?"

"That's all right, the river's handy!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear chap," said Beauclerc, "we're roughing it, you know! You'll find it all right!"

"Oh, gad!" groaned Algernon. "I say, Vere, do you always sleep on the ground at home?"

"Ha, ha! No. We're camping out now. You could have travelled in the post-wagon, and put up at the lumber hotel at Silver Creek. But this is really more comfortable."

"What about my boots?"

"Boots?"

"Yaas; there's no door for me to put my boots outside!" said Algernon helplessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I dare say it seems very funny to you," said Algernon warmly. "But I'd like to know how my boots are going to be cleaned!"

"They're not going to be cleaned till

"you get home, old chap!" said Beauclerc.

"Oh, my hat! They'll be rather a corker for the servants, then. But I don't mind!"

"For the what?" ejaculated Beauclerc.

"The servants!"

"We don't keep any servants at the cabin, Algy!"

Algernon sat up.

"You don't keep any servants!" he articulated.

"None, except a Chinaman, who does the cooking. But he's not a servant; he comes along to cook and clear up!"

"You're stuffin' me, of course! 'Tain't possible to live in a house without servants!" said Algernon sagely. "Why, a fellah would have to clean his own boots, and make his own bed."

"I guess you'll get used to that in the Canadian West, old scout!" grinned Bob Lawless.

"We'll make it as comfy for you as we can, Algy," said Beauclerc. "We'll manage about the boots and the bed. But surely your father told you you would have to rough it out here?"

"Yaas; but— Oh, my hat!"

And the Honourable Algernon fell into silence, and rolled himself in his blanket. Frank Richards & Co. followed his example. As they were settling down to slumber, the voice of the Honourable Algernon was heard again.

"Vere, old man—"

"Yes, Algy?"

"You might call me at ten, if I don't wake up!"

There was an explosive chortle from Bob Lawless. The Honourable Algernon was going to be called considerably before ten in the morning. Blissfully unconscious of the fact, however, Algernon went to sleep.

CHAPTER 29.

Nice for Algy!

"YAROOOOOP!"

Thus the Honourable Algernon, at six in the morning.

He had awakened suddenly.

The suddenness of his awakening was due to the fact that Bob Lawless had grasped his blanket, and rolled him out of it into the grass. The Honourable Algernon sprawled in the grass, and blinked.

"Wharrer marrer? What's happened? I—I didn't know you had earthquakes in Canada! Oh, gad!"

"Time to get up, dear boy!" said Bob Lawless. "Can't you see the sun over the pines?"

"Oh, gad! It's early, ain't it?"

"No fear! It's past six!"

Algernon sat up in the grass.

"Six!" he shrieked.

"Six!" assented Bob.

"You thunderin' ass! Do you think I can get up at six in the mornin'?" roared Algernon. "I asked you to call me at ten!"

"We're starting in an hour, old chap!" said Beauclerc. "We've got to get home to-day, you know!"

"I suppose a fellow's got to have a night's rest, hasn't he?"

"You've had it!"

"I've never been up at six in my life, and I assure you I'm not goin' to begin now!" growled Algernon. "I suppose you're stuffin' me. I don't like these jokes in the middle of the night. Be quiet!"

And Algernon rolled himself in his blanket again, and closed his weary eyes. Frank Richards & Co. looked at him.

"Well, by gum!" said Bob Lawless. "We've got a handful in your cheery cousin, Cherub. Shall I jump on him?"

"No," said Beauclerc, laughing. "I'll wake him!"

He shook his cousin by the shoulder, and Algernon's eyes opened again.

"Lemme alone!" he murmured.

"Wanter sleep!"

"But it's time to get up, Algy!"

"Rats!"

"We're starting soon!"

"Rot!"

Algernon snored.

"Leave him till brekker's ready," said Frank Richards.

The Honourable Algernon was left, while breakfast was prepared. Even the appetising scent of fresh fish, newly caught in the river, and broiled over the camp-fire, did not cause Algernon to move. He was sleeping the sleep of the just. When all was ready, Beauclerc shook him again, and was answered only by an irate grunt.

"Gerroff!"

Frank Richards & Co. ate their breakfast, and then prepared the horses for the journey. The Honourable Algernon continued to sleep peacefully in his blanket. Frank Richards looked at his chums with a perplexed grin.

"What are we going to do with him?" he queried.

"I guess I know what I'm going to do!" said Bob Lawless. "We can't hang about here all day while that slacker snores!"

He seized the blanket, and rolled Algernon out of it again. This time he rolled up the blanket, and strapped it on the horse. Algernon scrambled to his feet in great wrath.

"You silly ass!" he roared.

"We're ready to start, Algy," said Beauclerc mildly. "We've really got to get on the trail, you know."

"Well, I'm not ready!"

"Here's your brekker!"

"I haven't had my bath yet!" said Algernon suddenly.

"You'll have to cut that now!"

"Can't!"

The Honourable Algernon walked down to the river. He had consented to get up, though it was barely seven; and he evidently considered that he had made concessions enough. Frank Richards & Co. stood in silence, while the cheerful Algernon stripped and plunged into the water.

Bob Lawless had rather an exasperated expression; but he forbore to speak, from consideration for the Cherub.

"After all, he's new here!" said Frank at last. "He will shake down in time!"

Algernon came back from his plunge in a good-humoured frame of mind, and

did justice to the breakfast—not even remarking on the absence of silver forks for the fish!

After breakfast he mounted his horse, and the party were able to start again by half-past eight.

They pushed on at a good rate that morning, and camped at high noon in a clump of timber, for lunch and rest.

Algernon was standing the rough journey well, though he was now showing a good many signs of fatigue.

"You fellows startin' again?" he asked, when the chums of Cedar Creek began to saddle-up.

"Yes. We ought to get home before dark," answered Beauclerc. "My father will be anxious if we don't turn up."

"Oh, gad!" groaned Algernon. "I can tell you I'm gettin' pretty sore from that saddle! This is roughin' it, an' no mistake! Isn't your pater goin' to send a trap or somethin' to meet us?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Oh, gad!"

Algernon jerked himself upon his horse, and the chums resumed their way. But the Honourable Algy was not so cheerful now. The chums came out on the trail that ran to Cedar Camp and Thompson, and sighted the post-wagon coming south. Algernon's face brightened as he saw it.

"Couldn't we get a lift in that?" he inquired.

"It's going south, and we're going north," answered Frank Richards. "That's the post-wagon."

"Perhaps the man would turn round if we asked him."

"Oh, my hat! He wouldn't!"

"Suppose I offer him five pounds?"

"Ha, ha! I guess that wouldn't wash!" chuckled Bob Lawless. "Keep your pecker up. We're not far off home now."

Algernon suppressed a groan.

As they came nearer to the post-wagon, the driver looked at them and grinned. A night's camping-out had dimmed Algernon's lustre a little, but

he still looked a picture that would have delighted a tailor's heart. He seemed to move the wagon-driver's risibility. As they passed the wagon the driver curled his whip, and jerked off Algernon's handsome Panama hat.

The hat fluttered into the trail, and the driver gave a loud guffaw as he drove on.

"Why, what—what——" gasped Algernon.

"Only a little joke, old chap," said Beauclerc, jumping down into the trail to pick up the hat.

"Cheeky rotter, by gad!" exclaimed Algernon wrathfully. "Why, he's marked the hat with his thunderin' whip! I'm goin' after that chap to speak to him, by gad!"

"I say, hold on——"

"Rats!"

The Honourable Algernon wheeled his horse, and dashed up the trail in pursuit of the post-wagon. His comrades rode after him, expostulating. The rough joke of the post-driver meant no real offence; but Master Algernon evidently took it seriously.

The driver looked back at the thundering of hoofs in the trail, and grinned at Algernon.

That wrathful youth rode alongside the wagon, and fixed a lofty and indignant glare upon the driver through his gleaming monocle.

"I say!" he shouted.

"Haw, haw!"

"You're a rude fellow!" roared Algernon.

"What?"

"A rude fellow—a very rude fellow!" shouted Algernon crushingly. And he wheeled his horse and rode back, leaving the driver staring after him as if transfixed.

The Honourable Algernon smiled a satisfied smile as he rejoined Frank Richards & Co.

"I fancy that settled him!" he remarked.

"Settled him!" murmured Bob Lawless.

"Yaas. Took the wind out of his

sails a bit, I think," said Algernon, with a chuckle. "You don't think I was too hard on him—what?"

"Oh, Jerusalem! Too—too hard on him!" stuttered Bob. "Nunno! I—I guess the man will survive that! I really guess he will!"

The chums rode on, smiling; Algernon evidently in a satisfied frame of mind, feeling that he had quite "settled" the post-driver. Frank and Bob took leave of their companions on the Cedar Camp trail, and Beauclerc and his cousin rode on to the remittance-man's home together. They came in sight of the handsome new cabin—which had surprised and pleased Beauclerc so much when he saw it for the first time, on his return from his holiday. But it did not have the same effect on the Honourable Algernon.

"What are we stoppin' for?" he asked.

"Home!" said Beauclerc.

Algernon blinked.

"Home!" He glanced at the cabin.

"I see, this shed belongs to your place. But where's the house?"

"That's the house!"

"Eh? What?"

"That's the house, old fellow."

"That—that shed!" said Algernon faintly. "You—you—you don't live there?"

"Yes."

"Oh, gad!"

That was all the Honourable Algernon said. It was all he could say. He almost tottered into the remittance-man's cabin.

CHAPTER 33.

Algernon's Baggage!

"SCHOOL to-morrow, Franky!" remarked Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards nodded.

The two chums had come out of the ranch-house after dinner at the Lawless Ranch. There was an autumn mist on the plains, and the distant summits of the Rocky Mountains were shrouded from view.

"I guess," continued Bob, "that we'll

ride over and see the Cherub this afternoon. I want to see how that cousin of his is getting on."

"I'm on!" said Frank, with a smile.

And the cousins went for their horses.

At Cedar Creek, the other fellows were already back at school; but Miss Meadows had given a few days' leave to Frank Richards & Co., to allow them to meet Vere Beauclerc's cousin on his arrival in British Columbia.

And both Frank and Bob were very curious to know how he was getting on.

It was probable that Vere Beauclerc and his father, the remittance-man, had their hands full with their guest.

Frank Richards and his Canadian cousin trotted cheerily away across the plain towards Cedar Camp, on the outskirts of which was the Beauclerc clearing. As they came in sight of the Cedar Camp trail, the post-wagon from the south came into view.

"Hallo! They've got a load on today!" remarked Frank Richards, as he glanced at the wagon.

Bob Lawless burst into a chuckle.

"It's the tenderfoot's baggage!" he exclaimed.

"The what?"

"Algy's truck!" said Bob. "We left it at Kamloops, you remember, for his tutor man to come on with it. And there they are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards could not help laughing.

The baggage piled in the post-wagon was imposing to view. There were trunks, there were portmanteaux, there were bags and cases and hat-boxes. The "truck" made quite a little hill in the wagon.

Seated beside the driver was a bony gentleman whom they recognised as Mr. Toots, the tutor of the hopeful Algernon, who had brought his charge out to Canada.

The chums rode into the trail, and trotted on beside the wagon, which was heading for the cabin by the creek. They raised their Stetson hats in polite greeting to Mr. Toots.

That gentleman acknowledged the salute, with a very unhappy look. The bumping and jolting of the post-wagon on the rough trail had not been enjoyed by the tutor.

The trail was marked only by the ruts of wheels and hoof-prints of horses and cattle, and the wagon traversed it in a succession of jumps and jerks. And at each jump and jerk, poor Mr. Toots jumped and jerked in his seat, and he probably had more aches and pains than he could count in his hapless bones by that time. The post-driver seemed rather amused by his expression and his occasional ejaculations; and Frank and Bob, though sympathetic, could not help smiling.

"You've got a cargo on board this time, Hank!" called out Bob Lawless to the driver.

"Search me!" said Hank.

Which implied an expressive affirmative.

"All for the Beauclercs' shack?"

"Correct! Is Old Man Beauclerc starting a store, young Lawless?" inquired Hank.

"Ha, ha! I think that's his nephew's truck," answered Bob. "Merely school-boy's outfit, Hank."

"Waal, search me!" said the driver, more emphatically than before.

"Are we very far from our destination now?" inquired Mr. Toots, in a feeble voice.

"Nope!" said Hank. "Another mile, sir. You'll live through it, if you hang on careful."

Mr. Toots suppressed a groan. He was rather doubtful whether he would live through it if the journey was much prolonged.

"I guess it's rather lucky we moseyed along, Franky," murmured Bob Lawless. "They'll want a hand with all that truck when it arrives."

"Where the thump will it all be put?" asked Frank.

Bob chuckled.

"Ask me another, old chap. Mr. Beauclerc's got a nobby new cabin built,

where the old shack used to stand, so there's more room—but I guess his cabin won't hold that lot. Perhaps they'll stack it up in the timber."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wagon rolled and jolted on, leaving the direct trail to cut across the prairie towards the creek. As a rule, passengers alighted on the trail, and baggage was handed down there, and carried if it had to go farther. But Hank's present cargo could not be carried, and the post-driver was making an exception in its favour.

The cabin on the clearing by the creek came in sight.

Vere Beauclerc stepped out at the doorway, as the post-wagon rumbled up. He smiled and nodded to his chums as they jumped from their horses.

"Glad to see you, you fellows," he said. "My hat! This looks rather a lot of baggage!"

"Where's Algernon?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"He's not down yet."

"Not down?"

"Well, not up," said Beauclerc, with a smile.

"Not up at three in the afternoon!" roared Bob Lawless.

"He's tired after his journey," explained Beauclerc. "He's had breakfast and lunch in bed."

"Great gophers!"

"This is a new country to him," said Beauclerc. "He's not used to two days' ride on end, you know. I'm afraid he's a bit disappointed with Canada, too. He seems to have expected cabs and country mansions."

"Poor old Algy!" said Frank Richards.

"He's very anxious about his baggage, and I'm glad it's arrived," said Beauclerc. "I—I don't know where it's going to be put, though."

"Lend a hand with this truck!" said Hank.

"Certainly!"

Beauclerc helped Mr. Toots to alight, and then the schoolboys lent their aid

to the post-driver in landing the baggage.

It was rather a long task.

When the truck was landed, it made it imposing pile outside the cabin. Mr. Beauclerc, who was away at work down the clearing, was not there to aid, but Frank Richards & Co. piled in with hearty goodwill, and the truck was all stacked outside the cabin at last.

"I guess I'm glad to get rid of that, and the horses, too!" grunted Hank, as he climbed back into his seat. "You coming on to the camp, sir?"

Mr. Toots shook his head, and Hank drove away with the jolting wagon. The tutor blinked at Vere Beauclerc.

"I must see Algernon before I leave," he said.

"Come in, sir!" answered Beauclerc.

And the tutor followed him to the Honourable Algernon's quarters.

CHAPTER 31.

Awful for Algernon!

VERE BEAUCLERC tapped at his cousin's door.

"Come in!" yawned a tired voice.

The Cherub opened the door, and ushered Mr. Toots into the room.

It was a little room, with two camp-beds in it. One of the beds was made, but the other was occupied by the Honourable Algernon Beauclerc, the younger son of Lord St. Austells.

Algernon was sitting up in bed, with a lugubrious expression on his tired face.

The room was well furnished for a cabin in the Thompson Valley; but certainly it must have presented a striking contrast to what the Honourable Algy was accustomed to at home.

"Oh, it's you, Toots!" said Algernon.

"Yes, my dear boy."

"How are you feeling now, Algy?" asked Beauclerc.

"Rotten!"

"Oh!"

"Tired!"

"You'll get over that."

"I don't believe I shall."

"You'll feel as right as rain to-morrow," said Beauclerc encouragingly.

"Rot!"

Beauclerc coughed.

Algernon groped round, and jammed his eyeglass into his eye. He blinked at Beauclerc and the tutor.

"Don't think me an ungracious rotter, Vere," he said. "I'm no end grateful for your hospitality, and all that."

"We'll try to make you comfortable," said Vere.

"Yaas, I've no doubt you will."

Algernon's tone implied that he did not think Beauclerc would succeed, however.

Vere Beauclerc left his cousin and the tutor together, and descended to rejoin his chums.

"Shut the door, Toots, will you?" said Algernon.

"It is shut, Algernon."

"Sit down, if you can find anything to sit on."

Mr. Toots sat down.

"Nice hole this, ain't it?" said Algernon dismally.

"Your relatives seem very hospitable," said Mr. Toots.

Algernon groaned.

"Hospitable enough," he answered. "Vere is a really decent chap, and his father ain't a bad sort, I believe. But I'm not going to stay here, Toots."

"My dear boy——"

Algernon sat upright, and transfixed the tutor with his eyeglass.

"Can I stay here?" he demanded.

"The pater must have been fairly off his rocker to think of sendin' me here. He ought to have known better. It's a practical joke on the pater's part, that's what it must be. He can't intend to strand me here."

"I think——"

"You've really got instructions to take me back with you, haven't you, Toots?" said Algernon beseechingly.

"Not at all."

"The pater can't know what it's like.

Do you know, there isn't a bell in this room!" groaned Algernon. "And if there was a bell, there's nobody to answer it. I shall have to brush my own clothes if I stay here!"

"Bless my soul!"

"And my boots!" said Algernon, in a thrilling whisper of woe. "I shall have to black my own boots, Toots!"

"Good heavens!"

"If they're done for me, Vere will have to do them," said Algernon. "I can't have that. I can't be a cad! But how can I black my own boots, Toots?"

Mr. Toots gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders. He seemed to find that problem too much for him, so he gave it up.

"What the governor was thinkin' of," groaned Algernon, "I can't imagine! Can you, Toots?"

Mr. Toots coughed.

"Lord St. Austells considered that a drastic change would be beneficial to you," he remarked. "He thought that you would learn a good deal by roughing it a little."

"A little!" gasped Algernon. "I don't mind roughing it a little. I have roughed it in my time. I travelled second-class once. But this isn't roughing it a little, Toots. This will kill me!"

"I hope not, Master Algernon," murmured Mr. Toots.

"I'm coming back with you, Toots."

Mr. Toots shook his head.

"His lordship's instructions——" he began.

"Rats!"

"Master Algernon!"

"Jever hear of such an unnatural parent!" groaned Algernon. "It's worse than the babes in the wood. I'm a babe in the wood, that's what I am——only worse! I'm comin' home again."

"Impossible, Master Algernon."

"Are you stickin' here, Toots?"

"No. I am staying at the hotel in Cedar Camp till I have recovered from my dreadful journey. Then I am going back to Kamloops, to take the train."

"I'm comin' with you."

"Impossible."

"Look here——"

"I will leave you now, Master Algernon," said Mr. Toots, rising. "I must not risk darkness setting in before I reach my hotel. I tremble to think of what might happen in that case."

"Don't leave me, Toots."

"I must, Master Algernon."

"Look here, Toots, old chap——"

But Mr. Toots seemed deaf. He quitted the room, and the door closed after him.

"You're a rotter, Toots!" roared Algernon.

Mr. Toots was deaf even to that.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Algernon.

"What am I goin' to do? That's what I want to know. What the merry thump am I goin' to do?"

And as there was no answer to be found to that question, Algernon laid his weary head on the pillow, and groaned again.

CHAPTER 32.

French Leave!

FRANK RICHARDS and his chums were busy now with the Honourable Algernon's baggage.

Piece by piece it was carried into the cabin, and the trunks and portmanteaux were stacked wherever there was room for them.

Mr. Beauclerc came in from the fields while they were so engaged. The remittance-man stared at the baggage, but made no remark upon it. He greeted Mr. Toots when the latter came downstairs, Mr. Toots eyeing him with some curiosity.

He was aware that the remittance-man was brother to Lord St. Austells, but certainly the roughly-clad, muddy-booted man did not look much like a member of the nobility just then. Mr. Toots politely declined the hospitality of the cabin; he was anxious to get to his hotel. And Mr. Beauclerc walked with him to Cedar Camp, Mr. Toots being sublimely ignorant of his bearings. In those unaccustomed surroundings

the tutor hardly knew his right hand from his left, which was also the state of the hapless Algernon.

"Isn't it about time Algernon came down?" grinned Frank Richards, when the remittance-man and Mr. Toots disappeared down the trail together.

"I suppose so," said Beauclerc, with a rather embarrassed smile. "He's doing as he likes to-day. It's school for all of us to-morrow, you know. Algy's a bit of an ass, of course."

"He'll pull round," said Frank.

"Oh, yes; I'm sure he will! He's not a bad chap, by any means."

"I wish we had him at the ranch," said Bob Lawless, laughing. "I'd get no end of fun out of Algy."

"The poor chap isn't in much of a humour for fun, I fancy."

"You remember when you first came to Canada, Franky? I made you turn up at Cedar Creek in Etons and a silk topper. Ha, ha! The galoots nearly had fits!"

Frank Richards laughed.

"Yes, you ass," he answered. "But Beau isn't going to play tricks like that on his cousin. He's got more sense than you, Bob."

"But what a chance, Cherub!" urged Bob. "I've been counting the hat-boxes. I believe the galoot has four or five toppers with him. Suppose you made him believe it's a custom at Cedar Camp to wear two at a time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think Algy's quite soft enough for that," said Beauclerc.

"I guess he's soft enough for anything. Anyhow, you can get him to put on his very best dude rig to come to school to-morrow."

Beauclerc shook his head.

"Think of the sensation he'd make in topper and Etons and nice white collar," urged Bob. "And the eyeglass; that will be something special. Cedar Creek School has never seen an eyeglass before. Do it, Cherub."

"No fear," answered Beauclerc, laughing. "I'm going to keep Algy within

bounds in the matter of clothes, as far as I can."

"It's an opportunity wasted," grunted Bob Lawless. "It would be no end funny, and quite a treat for Cedar Creek. Anyhow, Algy had better come down now. Shall I go and yank him out?"

"No, no!"

"Well, I'll wake him up, anyhow."

Bob Lawless went to the foot of the little staircase, or rather ladder, that led to the upper rooms of the cabin.

"Fire!" he roared, with all the strength of his lungs. "Fire! Fire!"

"What the thump are you at?" exclaimed Frank.

"Waking up Algy."

"You ass, there isn't a fire——"

"Yep, there is—in the stove. Fire! Fire! Fire!" roared Bob.

There was a sound of hurried movements above.

A door opened, and flying footsteps came hurrying down the stairs. But the stairs were rather steep and narrow for hurrying, and Algernon, enveloped in a blanket, caught his foot and rolled down. Bob Lawless caught him at the bottom.

"All serene!" he exclaimed.

Algernon gasped.

"Help? Where's the fire? Oh, crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you ass," shouted Algernon, "there isn't any fire! Where's the fire, then, you silly fathead?"

Bob Lawless pointed to the stove.

"You silly idiot!" roared Algernon.

"Only waking you up, old scout," said Bob Lawless soothingly. "Jerusalem! You've forgotten your eyeglass! You'll catch a cold without it."

"Rats!"

Algernon stalked upstairs again, trailing his blanket. But he did not get back to bed; movements above announced that he was dressing himself at last.

"Anything more I can do for your cousin, Cherub?" asked Bob Lawless genially.

"No, you ass; you've done quite enough," said Beauclerc.

"Then come for a ride?"

Beauclerc hesitated.

"I don't know whether Algy may want me——"

"Oh, bother! Ask him!"

Beauclerc stepped to the stairs.

"Algy!" he called up.

"Hallo!"

"Like to come for a ride?"

"No."

"Ahem! Do you mind if I run out for an hour?"

"What rot! No!"

"Right-ho, then!"

Vere Beauclerc was glad enough to lead out his black horse and join his chums in a scamper over the prairie. He had spent the morning looking after his cousin as well as he could, and the change was welcome.

Frank Richards & Co. enjoyed a long gallop under the afternoon sun, and it was growing dusk when they rode back to the clearing on the creek. Frank and Bob looked in to say good-bye to Algernon before riding on to the ranch.

It was dusky in the cabin, and Vere Beauclerc lighted the lamp.

The light fell upon a sheet of paper—evidently a leaf from a pocket-book—pinned to the pine top of the table.

Beauclerc started as he saw it.

"My hat!"

"Hallo! Somebody been in and left a message!" said Bob.

Beauclerc picked up the paper, and held it up for his chums to see, with a troubled brow.

It was scribbled on in pencil; and the message ran:

"Dear Uncle and Cousin,—Please don't think me ungrateful for your hospitality, but I have decided to go home. Good-bye,

"ALGERNON BEAUCLERC."

"Gone!" ejaculated Frank Richards.

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

Beauclerc ran quickly up the stairs.

He came down again in a minute. The room above was empty.

He looked at his chums with a startled face.

"He's gone!" he said almost helplessly. "Cleared off while we were out riding. My father hasn't come back yet—what on earth am I to do?"

"Blessed if I wouldn't let the silly gopher go!" growled Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards looked very serious.

"I can't let him go, of course," said Beauclerc. "Father will be distressed if he sees this. Oh, the young ass! He's in father's charge now, now his tutor's gone; his father trusted him to us."

"He may land himself in bad trouble, wandering out on the prairie by himself," said Frank Richards, with knitted brow. "He can't even have a horse. You had no spare horse here?"

"No."

"Then he's gone on foot!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "Has the utter idiot started trying to walk to the railway? Oh, gum! He will be lost on the plains as soon as night sets in."

Beauclerc compressed his lips.

"He's got to be found and brought back," he said. "There are plenty of rough characters in this section that he might fall in with, and——" He broke off. "I'm going to look for him."

"We're coming with you," said Frank. "Very likely Bob can pick up the young duffer's trail. What a silly trick, sneaking off like that when no one was about."

"He knew that he would not be allowed to go, as he is here by his father's orders," said Beauclerc. "He's got to be found. Anything may happen to him—even if he didn't lose his way and die of hunger on the plains. The awful young duffer! Come on!"

The chums of Cedar Creek hurried out for their horses.

The sun had almost disappeared, but the moon was rising over the mountains, and there was light enough for Bob Lawless' keen eyes to pick up the trail left by Algernon's nobby riding-boots.

Evidently he had started on foot, for

the tracks of his boots were found leading away towards the post-trail.

But the hapless Algernon had not even been able to find his way to the post-trail, for his track wandered off to the prairie before the trail was reached.

"Can you pick it up, Bob?" asked Frank Richards, as the rancher's son stopped, scanning the ground carefully.

"Yep! We shall have to walk our horses for a bit. We've struck a stony patch. But we'll run the young gopher down!"

And Frank Richards & Co. followed on the track of the elusive Algernon, as fast as the faint track and the dim light would allow.

CHAPTER 33.

Algy Finds Trouble!

"MY luck's in!"

Dry Billy Bowers made that remark.

Mr. William Bowers was tramping across the grassy plain, under the moonlight, in the direction of Cedar Camp. Mr. Bowers looked very wayworn, as he generally did. He had been at Silver Creek looking for work. He had been looking for it, apparently, in a chicken-run belonging to a citizen of Silver Creek, who had found him there, and, being of a distrustful turn of mind, had imagined that Mr. Bowers was looking for chickens. With the aid of a heavy boot and a riding whip, the Silver Creek citizen had helped Mr. Bowers to depart, and the hapless "hobo" was on his way to Thompson with several severe aches in his bony person, and in a very pessimistic frame of mind.

And then he suddenly came upon the Honourable Algernon.

Dry Billy had never seen the Honourable Algernon before, and he could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw him now.

It was the eyeglass gleaming in the moonlight that caught Mr. Bowers' attention at first and made him jump.

Billy Bowers had seen monocles before, certainly; but not in the Thompson Valley of British Columbia.

Algernon had stopped.

He had tramped some miles, and he was fatigued; and he had not the faintest idea of the direction he should take. The dim prairie on all sides of him loomed vaguely, almost terrifyingly. The boundless space had an oppressing effect on him. Mr. Bowers was glad to see him, but Algernon was more glad still to see Mr. Bowers. He would have been glad to see a Red Indian just then, to break the oppressive silence and solitude.

"William, my boy," murmured Mr. Bowers, "your luck's in! It ain't a dream. This yer dude has stepped out of his handbox just to oblige you, William."

Thus apostrophising himself, the loafer advanced towards the Honourable Algernon.

"Evening, sir," said Dry Billy affably.

"Good-evening," said Algernon.

"Stranger in these hyer parts, sir?"

"Yes," gasped Algernon. "I—I—I think I've lost my way."

Mr. Bowers grinned. He did not need telling that. His only wonder was, how the elegant Algy came to be there at all. Such "critters" did not grow in the Thompson Valley; Mr. Bowers knew that.

"P'raps I can help you, sir," he suggested.

"You're very kind," said Algernon. "I hope you can. I want to get to Kamloops, to take train for the east."

"K-k-kamloops!" stuttered Dry Billy. "That's donkeys' miles from hyer."

"I suppose it is," sighed Algernon. "I know it was a thunderin' long ride up here from the railway. Can't I get a coach or a trap or somethin' to take me there, somewhere?"

"I'd give you a lift myself, sir, but I've left my carriage an' pair at home," said Dry Billy.

Algernon gave him a suspicious look. Mr. Bowers' appearance was not reassuring. He was sober, for once in a

way, but there was a strong smell of late drinks about him. His coppery, stubbly, unscrupulous face had a rather unpleasant effect upon the Cherub's cousin. Algernon backed away a little.

"But I guess I can get you a lift, sir," said Dry Billy. "Course, you'd have to pay for it."

"I could do that!" said Algernon.

"P'raps a buggy would serve your turn, sir," suggested Mr. Bowers amicably. "P'raps you'd like to hire a buggy for, say, fifty dollars, to drive you down to the railroad."

"I'd be jolly glad. Look here, you show me where I can get a vehicle and I'll stand you somethin' for your trouble."

"Tell you what, sir," said Mr. Bowers. "You take a rest hyer, sir, under this hyer tree and I'll fetch the buggy to take you on."

Algernon's face brightened up.

"By gad! That's a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Bowers held out a dirty hand.

"Fifty dollars for the buggy, and say five for me!" he suggested. "How does that strike you?"

Algernon Beauclerc was green. But a much deeper shade of green than Algernon's would have been required to make him trust Dry Billy Bowers with fifty dollars.

"I'll pay the man when he brings the trap," he said.

"I guess I'll bring it myself, sir."

"Then I'll pay you after the drive."

"I guess I'll have to put the money down for the buggy when I hire it in Cedar Camp," said Mr. Bowers persuasively.

Algernon shook his head.

"Are we far here from Cedar Camp?" he asked.

"Just a few miles."

"Well, you guide me there, and I'll give you your five dollars, and I can hire some vehicle there myself."

Mr. Bowers' agreeable smile faded a little. He had hoped to extract a handsome "stake" from the dandy tender-

foot by means of the use of his tongue only. But he was quite prepared to use other methods if his tongue did not prove efficacious. Mr. Bowers was thinking of the flowing fire-water at the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson, and he was not likely to stick at trifles. He was too dry for that.

"Can't you trust me, young feller-melad?" he demanded, in a very gruff tone, and his eyebrows knitted threateningly.

Algernon backed away another pace.

"Look here——" he began.

"Kin you trust me or kin you not?" roared Mr. Bowers, following him up.

"Well, no, I can't, if you want it plain," answered Algernon; "and I know I'm jolly well not goin' to, anyhow. So now you know!"

Dry Billy blinked at him. Algy's answer showed that he was not wanting in courage, whatever might be said of his intelligence. Persuasion had failed Mr. Bowers, and bullying seemed to fail, too. But Dry Billy had still other resources.

He raised a horny fist, and brandished it under the Honourable Algernon's aristocratic nose.

"Hand it over!" he said. "Pony up! And be sry!"

"Eh—what?"

"I'm letting you off," said Mr. Bowers, "at fifty dollars. Not a cent less. Pony up, if you know when you're healthy!"

"Confound your cheek!" exclaimed Algy hotly. "Why the dickens should I give you fifty dollars?"

"Because I'll mash you into a pesky jelly if you don't!" answered Mr. Bowers darkly. "Got that!"

Algernon clenched his hands. There was a thrill at his heart, as he backed farther away from the ruffian's threatening face. It was borne in upon his mind that he would have done better to remain in the cabin on the Beauclercs' clearing, in spite of the fact that there was no bell in his room, and no foolman to answer it. He realised that he had run into danger, and if he had been less fatigued he would probably

have thrown his loftiness to the winds, and taken to his heels. But he knew there was no chance of escape by flight.

The loafer watched him savagely, assuming as ferocious an expression as he could. Dry Billy was not an ill-natured man in his own way, and he would have preferred not to "handle" his victim.

But Algernon was not to be frightened by black looks into handing over his money.

"Are you going to pony up?" demanded Dry Billy.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Algernon undauntedly.

"What?"

"I won't give you a cent!"

"Then I guess I'm goin' to make cat's-meat of you, you pesky dude!" roared Mr. Bowers. "And hyer goes to start!"

He rushed right at Algernon.

To his surprise, the dandified tender-foot stood up to his rush, and hit out, straight from the shoulder. Flight being impossible, Algernon was making a fight for it, and he had plenty of pluck. And there was a good deal of strength behind that drive. It caught Mr. Bowers by surprise, and sent him staggering backwards.

"Yoooooogh!" spluttered the astonished ruffian.

Crash, crash!

Algernon followed up the attack with right and left. His hope was to knock out the ruffian for long enough to enable him to make his escape. There was a heavy bump as Mr. William Bowers landed on his back in the grass.

Then Algernon scuttled.

But the loafer was up in a twinkling, and rushing after him, his hard face inflamed with rage.

Before Algernon had taken a dozen steps Dry Billy's grasp was on his shoulder, and he was swung round.

"Now, then!" panted Mr. Bowers.

Algernon struck out desperately, but Dry Billy was not taken by surprise this time. Unheeding the blows, he threw himself upon Algernon, and bore him to the ground in a powerful grip.

"Help!" shrieked Algy.

The cry came instinctively to his lips, and it rang through the dusk of the prairie. Dry Billy grinned savagely. It was not likely that a cry for help would be heard on the lonely plain.

He planted a knee on Algernon's chest, and pinned him down on the rough ground.

"Help!" yelled Algernon.

"Oh, shet your yaup-trap!" growled Dry Billy. "There ain't nobody to hear, 'cept it's the gophers. Now then, turn out your greenbacks!"

Instead of turning out his cash, Algernon struck up at the brutal face above him, and Mr. Bowers gave a howl as his red nose caught the blow.

The next moment blows were raining on the hapless Algy.

He struggled and squirmed and yelled frantically, dazed by the shower of furious blows. His nose was streaming red, his senses swimming.

"Oh—oh, help!" he shrieked.

"Now then, you pesky dude, p'raps you'll——"

"Help!"

To Algy's joy and Mr. Bowers' astonishment an answering call came back through the dusk of the plains.

"We're coming!"

CHAPTER 34.

Algernon Gives In!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO., following the dimly-marked track in the moonlight, had heard the despairing cries of Algernon from the distance. And as soon as they heard them they understood.

"That's Algy!" exclaimed Beauclerc, stopping and listening.

"Hurry up!" exclaimed Frank.

The horses fairly raced through the grass.

"Help, help!"

"We're coming!"

The schoolboys urged on their horses.

Dry Billy Bowers, with a muttered curse, leaped up from his victim. His

bleared eyes stared through the dimness towards the shadowy figures that loomed up. He cursed again.

In his rage and disappointment the ruffian bestowed a kick on the prostrate figure at his feet, and then darted away into the gloom. Algy sat up dazedly.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Bob, dragging at his horse.

Dry Billy Bowers had vanished into the high grass as the three riders drew rein round Algernon. They jumped from the saddle.

"Algy!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"Oh, ow! Oh, you!" gasped Algernon. "I—I—I've been attacked! I've been nearly killed! Ow!"

"You're bleeding!" muttered Beauclerc. "Are you——"

"It's my nose. That beast hammered me on the ground!" groaned Algernon. "Ow! I feel bad! Ow!"

"Poor old chap! Who was it, do you know?"

"A hulking ruffian, with a whisky face!" groaned Algernon. "He wanted to rob me, and I wasn't havin' it. Ow!"

Bob Lawless whistled.

"So you put up a fight?" he said.

"Ow! Yes."

"Blessed if I thought——" Bob Lawless checked himself, realising that it would not be polite to the Cherub's cousin to state what he would have expected the Honourable Algernon to do under such circumstances.

"Get on my horse, old chap," said Vere Beauclerc hastily. "We'll soon get you home."

Algernon hesitated one moment, but only one. The thought of the Beauclercs' cabin, from which he had fled, was like the thought of a haven of rest and safety, after his wanderings on the prairie and his encounter with Mr. William Bowers.

"I—I—I'll come!" he stammered.

Beauclerc helped him on to the black horse.

"You—you found my note?" stammered Algernon.

"I've got it in my pocket. No need for my father to see it; it would only

distress him," said Beauclerc quietly. "That is, if you'll give me your word not to play the fool like this again, Algy! My father's responsible for you."

Algernon groaned.

"I—I won't hook it again!" he mumbled. "I—I suppose I've got to make the best of it! Ow!"

"You'll find it all right if you do that!" said Frank Richards.

Algernon grunted. He did not feel so sure of that. But he said no more as the schoolboys started for home. Near the clearing the chums separated, Beauclerc taking his cousin on to the cabin, and Frank and Bob riding for the ranch.

"A queer customer, that tenderfoot, and no mistake!" remarked Bob.

"Yes, rather!" assented Frank.

"But he's got pluck, anyhow," said Bob Lawless sagely. "I reckon he'll pull round in time."

And Frank Richards could only hope that his chum was right. He could not help wondering what was likely to happen to the Honourable Algernon when he made his first appearance at the Cedar Creek School.

CHAPTER 35.

In Style!

"THEY'RE late!"

Bob Lawless and Frank Richards dashed up along the trail through the timber, and reined in their horses at the fork in the trail.

It was school that morning after the holidays, and the chums were on their way to Cedar Creek.

But Vere Beauclerc was not waiting for them at the fork, as of old, and he was not in sight on the branch trail that ran through the trees towards the creek and the Beauclercs' clearing.

"I reckoned they'd be late!" said Bob, with a grunt. "The Cherub was always as punctual as a dago cow-puncher on pay-day. But that cousin of his—"

Frank Richards laughed.

"The Honourable Algernon may not be up yet!" he remarked.

"Then the Cherub's a jay to wait for him!"

"Well, as it's Algernon's first day at school, I dare say Miss Meadows will go easy if he's a little late."

"More likely a lot than a little!" growled Bob Lawless. "What's it to be? Are we going on, or calling for the Cherub? That'll make us late."

"Let's chance it."

"Oh, all right!"

The two schoolboys turned into the branch trail, and rode at a gallop towards the Beauclercs' cabin.

They came in sight of the Beauclercs' cabin at last, without meeting their chum on the way.

Old man Beauclerc could be seen at work on the clearing, a diminished figure in the distance. In the open doorway of the cabin Vere Beauclerc was standing, holding two horses. He was ready to start for school, but his Cousin Algy, invisible in the cabin, evidently was not ready.

"Hallo, Cherub!" shouted Bob Lawless, as he rode up with Frank.

Beauclerc looked round at the sound of hoof-beats.

"Hallo, you fellows! You'll be late."

"We've come for you."

Beauclerc made a grimace.

"I'm waiting for Algy!" he said.

"Isn't he ready?" asked Frank.

"Not yet."

"What's he up to, then?"

"Brushing his topper!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Brushing his topper!" said Beauclerc, in a tone of resignation. "I rather wish the post-wagon had tipped his baggage into the creek. But it didn't, and he's got no end of clothes here, and—and—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

Bob Lawless chortled.

"Oh, by gum! You're working off that stunt on him, then, same as I did on Franky when he first came to Canada. You're letting him go to

school rigged up in Bond Street style. Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass! I've tried to persuade him not to——"

"Then it's his own idea?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"I'm blessed if I quite know what to do," said Vere Beauclerc, with a worried look. "As he's a guest, I can't dictate to him. I've tried to give advice. But he knows best. He thinks he does, at least. Perhaps you fellows may be able to persuade him to——"

"Let him rip!" chuckled Bob. "Cedar Creek School will be no end delighted with a real dude."

"Dry up, Bob, you duffer!" said Frank. "We can't let Beau's cousin make an ass of himself, if it can be prevented. Let's speak to him."

"It's spoiling a good joke," grumbled Bob.

"Rats!"

"Here he comes!" said Beauclerc.

The Honourable Algernon came out of the cabin at last.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless blinked at him.

For the moment they could only blink.

The Honourable Algernon Beauclerc was rather a good-looking fellow, and he certainly looked very nice. At some really select scholastic establishment in the Old Country he would have looked quite the thing, perhaps a little remarkable for fastidious elegance, but no more than that.

But in the backwoods of Canada he was a vision to make the oldest inhabitant rub his eyes.

He was dressed in Etons—Etons of an exquisite cut and fit. His white collar, lately unpacked, was spotless. His tie was tied as only an expert in ties could tie a tie. His cuffs were things of beauty, and his bright boots were joys for ever. Handsomest of all was his tall silk hat. It was not the only topper ever seen in the Thompson Valley, for Frank Richards had brought one there with him, in his early bliss-

ful ignorance of the place. Frank's topper had long ago gone the way of all toppers. It was his Cousin Bob's sense of humour that had caused Frank to sport it once, only once, at the backwoods school. But Algernon's topper was being sported, not as the result of a practical joke, but from Algernon's own sense of the fitness of things. And it was polished till it reflected back the sunshine.

Bob Lawless shaded his eyes with his hand, as if this vision dazzled him.

"Is it real?" he murmured.

Algernon extracted an eyeglass from his waistcoat pocket, and inserted it in his eye. That gave him the finishing touch.

"Help!" gasped Bob.

"Shurrup!" murmured Frank Richards.

Algernon turned his monocle upon the two riders, and nodded.

"Good-mornin'!" he remarked.

"Good-morning, old scout!" said Frank. "You'll have to hurry up and change for school, won't you?"

Algernon started.

"Change?" he said.

"Yes. You see——"

"I have changed for school."

"Oh!"

"Algy, old chap——" murmured Beauclerc helplessly.

"I'm ready!" said Algernon.

"But, I say——"

"This my gee?"

"Yes. But——"

"Do you always ride to school?" asked Algernon.

"Yes. We——"

"I'd rather drive. I'm not really dressed for ridin'."

"Why not dress for riding, then?" asked Frank Richards.

"My dear man, I'm goin' to school."

"We—we—we don't dress in Etons at Cedar Creek, you know."

"So Vere says. You ought to."

"Eh?"

"If you fellows don't do the right thing there's no reason, why I shouldn't, is there?"

"Nunno! B-b-but——"

"Let's get goin'!" said Algernon.

"We don't drop our final g's at Cedar Creek, if you don't mind my mentioning it," murmured Frank.

Algernon stared again.

"What a country!" he said.

"But, you see—ahem!"

"It's time you learned, isn't it?" suggested Algernon.

"Ahem! Look here, if you're really coming to school like that——"

"Like what?"

"That!" gasped Frank.

"I suppose you're jokin'!" said Algernon coldly. "Can't say I see the joke myself. Anythin' wrong with my clobber?"

"Nunno. But—but in the back-woods, you know——"

"You said I was keepin' you waitin', Vere. Now I'm ready, you don't seem ready to start," said Algernon severely. "I understand that your headmaster is a lady—I mean headmistress. It's rather no class to keep a lady waitin', if you don't mind my sayin' so. Are you comin'?"

Algernon climbed on his horse.

There was no help for it. With a hopeless glance at his chums, Vere Beauclerc followed Algy's example, and the four schoolboys started at a gallop for Cedar Creek School.

CHAPTER 36.

Algy at Cedar Creek!

"HERE they come!" said Chunky Todgers.

The fat and cheerful Chunky was standing at the gateway of Cedar Creek. It was close on time for the bell to ring for classes, and Chunky had been wondering what had become of Frank Richards & Co.

Four riders came in sight on the trail, riding very fast. Chunky looked at them, and recognised his three old acquaintances, and saw one whom he did not recognise.

Chunky looked at him—and looked

again, and then said, in emphatic tones:

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

"Great gophers!" ejaculated Tom Lawrence. "Who's that? What's that? Great jumping gophers!"

"Vellee nicee, what you tinkee?" chuckled little Yen Chin, the Chinese.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a dude!" roared Eben Hacke. "A dude from Dudesville! Ha, ha, ha!"

Hacke's roar of laughter brought a dozen fellows out of the playground to look.

Every eye was fixed upon the Honourable Algernon.

Come of the Cedar Creek fellows looked astonished; all of them looked amused. There was a grin on every face as Frank Richards & Co. rode up.

Three of the newcomers looked rather red, but the Honourable Algernon was calmness itself.

His garb was certainly distinctive, but Algernon did not mind that. He rather liked being distinctive.

"Well, here we are again, you fellows!" said Bob Lawless, as he jumped from his horse.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Hacke. "Is this another of your jokes, Bob? This is how you brought Richards to school his first day."

"Oh, dry up, Hacke," answered Bob. "Bring your cousin in, Cherub, and let him see Miss Meadows!"

"Jump down, Algy," said Beauclerc, as he dismounted.

Algernon alighted.

He held out his rein to Eben Hacke. Hacke stared.

"Take my horse," said Algernon.

"What?"

"See he's properly looked after."

"Hay?"

"What are you dawdlin' for? Why don't you take it?" exclaimed Algernon sharply.

Hacke looked at the new boy as if he would eat him.

"Algy!" exclaimed Beauclerc

sharply, "what are you up to? Bring your horse in to the corral."

"Can't the stable-boy take it in?"

"The—the what?"

"Stable-boy?" roared Eben Hacke.

"Who's the stable-boy?"

Algernon looked surprised.

"By gad! Am I makin' a mistake?" he asked, with perfect coolness. "Ain't you a stable-boy?"

"Why—I—I—I'll——"

Wrath overcame Master Hacke, and he could only splutter. Vere Beauclerc hastily took his cousin's arm and led him in.

Hacke stood spluttering. He was too taken aback and overcome to proceed to action just then. The fellows round him were roaring.

"Algy, you ass——" stuttered Beauclerc.

"Isn't he a stable-boy, then?"

"No, you fathead; he's a Cedar Creek chap!"

"Oh, he looked a horsey fellow—I thought he was, naturally. Never mind—only a mistake."

"I don't think Hacke enjoyed the mistake," said Bob Lawless, rather dryly. "He looks rather mad."

Algy started.

"Begad! Mad! Is this an asylum?"

"Mad is American for ratty," said Frank Richards, laughing.

"Oh, my hat! What a language!"

The horses were put up in the corral, and the four schoolboys turned towards the lumber school-house. A crowd of Cedar Creek fellows came round them—all interested in the Honourable Algernon. Eben Hacke had his big fists clenched, and was evidently meditating vengeance; but just then Mr. Slimmey, the second master of Cedar Creek, appeared on the scene. Mr. Slimmey's gold-rimmed glasses almost fell off at the sight of Algernon.

"My cousin, sir!" said Beauclerc, colouring.

"Oh, ah, yes!" stammered Mr. Slimmey.

He shook hands mechanically with the boy.

"Your name is Beauclerc, I think?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Algernon.

"Is your sight defective?"

"Eh? No!"

"Then why are you wearing a glass?"

"I always do, sir."

"Nonsense! Take it off immediately!"

"Begad!"

Algernon seemed indisposed to obey Mr. Slimmey's order, but Bob Lawless kindly jerked at the cord of the monocle, and it left Algy's eyes quite suddenly.

"Beauclerc, you should have advised your cousin to dress himself differently here," said Mr. Slimmey, severely.

"I—I——" stammered Beauclerc.

"This attire is quite suitable for an English school, but utterly unsuited to Cedar Creek. You must be well aware of that, Beauclerc."

"Ye-es, sir, but—but——"

"I am surprised at you, Beauclerc."

And Mr. Slimmey, evidently under the belief that Beauclerc had been pulling the leg of his tenderfoot cousin, shook his head severely, and walked away.

"Queer old bird, that!" commented Algernon. And he replaced the monocle in his eye.

The quartette went on towards the School House, near which they encountered Mr. Shepherd. Mr. Shepherd blinked at Algernon.

"Is—is this your cousin, Beauclerc?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," groaned Vere.

"Oh! Ah! You—you had better take him in to see Miss Meadows, I think," stuttered Mr. Shepherd.

"Yes, sir."

Algernon was piloted into the lumber schoolhouse, and Beauclerc tapped rather nervously at the door of Miss Meadows' sitting-room. He was wondering uneasily what the Canadian

schoolmistress would think of this exotic.

"Come in!" said Miss Meadows' low, pleasant voice.

Beauclerc marched his cousin in, Frank Richards and Bob remaining in the passage.

Algernon held his handsome silk topper in his hand, as he walked in to be presented to his schoolmistress.

Miss Meadows looked at him.

A slight smile played round her lips for a moment, but it was replaced by a severe expression.

"My—my cousin, ma'am—Algernon Beauclerc!" stammered Vere.

"I am glad to see you, my boy!" said Miss Meadows.

"The pleasure is all on my side, ma'am!" replied Algernon politely.

There was a gurgle from the passage.

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Meadows. "Beauclerc!"

"Yes, Miss Meadows?"

"I am surprised at your not having informed your cousin that his school attire at home was not suitable here."

"I—I—"

"Kindly see that he is differently clad to-morrow, Beauclerc."

"Ye-es, ma'am."

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Algernon politely. "If it is all the same to you, I should prefer to dress as I am."

"It is not all the same to me," said Miss Meadows sharply. "You may take your cousin to the school-room, Beauclerc!"

"But, I say—" began Algernon.

"Come on!" whispered Beauclerc.

He dragged the Honourable Algernon from the room.

In the passage there were twenty or more Cedar Creek boys and girls, and they were all smiling—with the exception of Eben Hacke. That burly youth was in a towering rage.

He thrust a huge, clenched fist under the Honourable Algernon's startled nose.

"Where will you have it?" he demanded.

"Begad!"

"Hold on, Hacke!" exclaimed Beauclerc hastily.

"Stable-boy!" said Hacke sulphurously. "Giving me his critter to hold! Why, I'll smash him into a jelly! I guess I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Hacke!"

It was Miss Meadows' quiet voice. Eben Hacke dropped his clenched fist suddenly, as Miss Meadows looked out of her doorway.

"Oh! Ah! Yes, ma'am!" he gasped.

"Kindly behave yourself, Hacke!" said Miss Meadows sternly. "If I find you quarrelling with the new boy, Hacke, I shall punish you very severely! I shall keep an eye on you. Now go into the school-room!"

And Hacke, suppressing his feelings as well as he could, went. Algernon walked cheerfully into the school-room, leaving his hat hanging up on a peg, along with a crowd of caps and Stetsons, in the lobby.

Beauclerc found a place for him, and he sat down between his cousin and Frank Richards. Miss Meadows came in, followed by Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd, and classes began. But there was not very much attention given to lessons for some time. The attention was bestowed upon the Honourable Algernon, and Miss Meadows' class was in a state of semi-suppressed merriment all the morning.

CHAPTER 37.

Chunky Is Too Funny!

ALGERNON, under the peculiar circumstances, might have been expected to betray some sign of self-consciousness.

But he didn't.

Not a sign of it. If he noticed that he attracted unusual attention, he probably took it as his due. He was quite at his ease during the morning. Only once did he wake up, as it were, from his serene repose. Miss Meadows' back being turned for a moment, Eben

Hacke took advantage of the opportunity to lean over his desk and give Algy a fierce whisper.

"You pesky dude! I'm going to smash you after lessons!"

Then Algernon looked round calmly. The big and burly Eben was almost twice as large as the slim Algernon, but Algy certainly was not afraid of him.

"Did you address me, my good fellow?" he asked.

Hacke choked.

"Good fellow! G-g-good fellow! Why, I—I guess I'll—I'll——"

"If you did, perhaps you wouldn't mind explainin' what a dude is!" suggested Algernon. "I've never heard the word before. Is it American or Canadian?"

"I—you—I—I'm going to break you up into little pieces!" said Hacke, between his teeth.

Algernon shook his head.

"I don't think you could, really," he answered.

"I calculate I'll show you!"

And, by way of a hint, Hacke reached over and grasped the Honourable Algernon by the shoulder.

Unfortunately for the bully of the lumber school, Miss Meadows turned back to her class at that moment. The schoolmistress' brows knitted at the scene that met her view.

"Hacke!" she rapped out.

Eben Hacke released Algy's shoulder as if it had suddenly become red-hot.

"This is the second time I have had to speak to you, Hacke!" said Miss Meadows coldly. "You will be detained an hour after lessons. If I find you quarrelling with the new boy again, your punishment will be more severe."

Hacke sat silent and furious.

His little scheme of "smashing" Algernon after lessons had to be dropped now. Even for that pleasant experience he did not dare to face the wrath of Miss Meadows.

Algernon calmly brushed his shoulder with his handkerchief, as if Hacke's grasp had left a stain there—a pro-

ceeding that made the other fellows grin, and made Hacke almost foam.

When the school was dismissed after morning lessons, Hacke had the pleasure of remaining, kept in, till dinner-time. He cast a fierce glare after Algernon as the latter went, but Algy did not even notice it. He seemed to have forgotten Eben Hacke's unimportant existence already.

He walked cheerfully out of the lumber Schoolhouse with Frank Richards & Co. in the midst of a smiling crowd.

His topper was still on the peg, which rather surprised Frank Richards & Co., for a number of the other fellows had been out before the leisurely Algy, and the chums rather expected to find the topper in use as a football in the passage.

But there it was, and Algernon put it on his head.

"He, he, he!" came from Chunky Todgers.

Chunky had been first out that morning—contrary to his usual custom. He was generally slow to move, but he had a reason for hurrying himself that morning. The reason transpired afterwards.

Algernon glanced at the fat Chunky as he heard the chortle.

But he disdained to take any further notice of Chunky, and he walked out into the playground with his friends.

Frank Richards and Bob went down to the creek with their canoe, and Algy was left with Vere Beauclerc. Beauclerc did not feel that he could desert his cousin, though the sensation Algy's appearance was making considerably disconcerted him.

"I don't dislike this place, after all, Vere," Algy remarked.

"I'm glad of that, Algy!"

"The chaps seem to be rather ruffians——"

"Eh?"

"And the schoolmistress doesn't seem to have much sense——"

"What?"

"But I dare say I shall get on all

right. The school work is easy enough—not like the stuff I had to cram with my tutor, old Toots. But I suppose Miss Fields—”

“Miss Who?”

“Fields—isn't her name Fields?”

“Meadows—”

“Oh, yes—Meadows! I knew it was somethin' grassy. Miss Meadows, then! I suppose Miss Meadows was only spoofin' about my havin' to wear different clobber to-morrow—”

“No, of course not! You can't dress like this in the backwoods!”

“I'm goin' to!”

“You heard what Miss Meadows said.”

Algernon nodded.

“Yaas! I regard her as exceedin' her authority in the matter. I'm not goin' to take any notice of such rot.”

“Algy!” exclaimed Beauclerc, in great distress. “Don't you understand that you're at school now? You have to do as your schoolmistress tells you. She can't indulge you as your tutor used to, even if she wanted to—and, of course, she doesn't!”

“There's a certain amount due to myself,” said Algernon loftily. “I can't make myself look a guy—like you, for instance!”

“Wha-at?”

“You're dressed like a stable-hand, Vere. I can't dress like that. I don't criticise your taste, of course. Not my bizney. But I'm the best judge for myself. I shall come to-morrow just as I am to-day!”

“Miss Meadows will be angry.”

“I hope not!” said Algernon carelessly.

“But she will be!” exclaimed Beauclerc.

“Well, let her, then! Can't be helped. Where do we have lunch?”

“We have dinner here—all the fellows who live at a distance do. But look here, Algy, suppose we ride home quick, and change clothes—you, I mean—”

“Rot!”

“Can't you see that you're making

every fellow in the school chuckle?” exclaimed Beauclerc, losing patience.

Algernon shrugged his slim shoulders.

“Let 'em chuckle!” he said.

And with that he swung away, apparently having had enough of his cousin's plain English.

Beauclerc compressed his lips, and went to join his chums by the creek. Algernon paraded the playground, quite satisfied with himself and the attention he was receiving. Chunky Todgers and some other fellows kept him in sight all the time, with grinning faces.

“I put it under the lining, you know,” Chunky murmured to Dick Dawson.

“It will work out soon—there was plenty of it—red ink, you know. He will be the colour of a Kootenay soon!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Algernon gave the chuckling school-boys a haughty glance, and turned away. Down his forehead several red streaks were already showing, but the superb Algernon was unconscious of them.

That was the reason why Chunky Todgers had scudded out so quickly after lessons that morning. The humorous Chunky had been unable to resist the temptation of the topper.

“By gad, it's rather warm!” murmured Algy. “I'm actually perspirin'!”

He felt the damp oozing out from under his hat upon his forehead. But it wasn't perspiration, if the Honourable Algernon had only known it; it was red ink. He brushed his forehead lightly with his hand, smudging the red across with a very striking effect.

“Ha, ha, ha!” came in a roar.

Algy's get-up had already provoked smiles, but now the Cedar Creek fellows seemed to be nearly going into convulsions when they looked at him. The sight of red streaks coming down under the silk topper was irresistible.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Algernon's haughty glance in reply

to the laughter was crushing, but its effect was quite spoiled by the red streaks that marred his face.

The Cedar Creek fellows yelled.

Algernon walked away angrily.

He came upon Miss Meadows near the Schoolhouse, and the schoolmistress stopped and stared at him blankly.

"Upon my word!" she ejaculated. "Beauclerc, come here!"

Algernon stopped, and raised his silk hat to the schoolmistress very gracefully. The raising of the hat revealed a forehead smothered with red ink, and the effect was extraordinary. There was a howl of laughter from all directions.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "What ever have you been doing?"

"Doin'?" repeated Algernon, in surprise.

"Your face is red——"

"That is not surprisin', madam, considerin' the dashed impertinence I've met with this mornin'!" said Algy.

"But—but what—— Bless me, it is ink! Have you been silly enough to put ink into your hat?" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

Algernon jumped.

"Ink!" he stuttered.

He stared into his hat. The lining was dripping with red ink.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Algernon.

"You utterly absurd boy!"

"I—I—I didn't do it!" shrieked Algernon. "Somebody has been playin' tricks with my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" Miss Meadows exclaimed, as severely as she could, though her lips were twitching. "Beauclerc, you had better go and wash your face! It is streaked with red ink!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Todgers, take Beauclerc into the house, and show him where to wash!"

"Certainly, ma'am!" grinned Chunky. "This way, dude!"

Algernon, with a furious face—as furious as it was inky—followed the fat Chunky into the lumber Schoolhouse,

leaving the playground echoing with laughter. Eben Hacke was coming out of the school-room as he entered, and at the sight of Algernon he clenched his big fists. But he unclenched them again the next moment, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Until dinner-time Algernon was busy washing—washing hard. He found the red ink rather clinging. And his face was still very red—though the ink was gone—when he joined the Cedar Creek fellows at dinner.

In the course of the next few days Algy had to put up with a good many rough jokes of a similar nature, but he gradually began to settle down to his new life.

CHAPTER 38.

In This Style, Fifty Cents!

"H A, ha, ha!" Frank Richards & Co. looked round as that sudden burst of laughter rang through the playground at Cedar Creek.

"Algy, I guess," murmured Bob Lawless.

And Bob was right.

Vere Beauclerc frowned a little, as his two comrades smiled. The Honourclerc did not exactly enjoy his cousin which made some difference. Beauclerc did not exactly enjoy his cousin Algy being the object of merriment.

"What's up now?" said Frank.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see——" began Beauclerc.

"Well, here he comes."

The Honourable Algernon Beauclerc was sauntering across the playground towards the lumber Schoolhouse, outside which the Co. were standing.

Nearly every eye in the playground was on him, and every face wore a grin; but for the moment the Co. could not see the cause.

True, Algy's monocle was gleaming in his eye, but Cedar Creek was used to Algy's eyeglass by this time. Algy

had been at the school a week or more now, and they had had time to get used to it.

Algernon was very nicely dressed, it was true. He had been prevailed upon at length to abandon his Etons, and his topper, and his high white collar. But his clothes, though in more accordance now with his surroundings, were very elegantly cut, and of a beautiful fit. And nothing could induce Algy to part with his monocle. He had parted with his topper with a pang, but parting with his eyeglass would have cost him too many pangs.

He strolled gracefully towards his friends, swinging a light cane, and, apparently, unconscious of the fact that he was the centre of a sudden eruption of mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Eben Hacke. "In that style, how much?"

"Fifty cents!" yelled Chunky Todgers.

"Dear at the price!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I don't quite see the joke," remarked Bob Lawless, a little puzzled.

"What's this game, Algy?"

Algy shook his head.

"Don't ask me," he yawned. "I haven't the faintest idea. Perhaps it's your necktie, old scout."

"What?"

"Somethin' seems to be excitin' the general risibility," said Algernon. "Unless it's your necktie, dear man, I really can't guess what it is."

Bog Lawless turned pink.

"What's the matter with my necktie?" he breathed.

"Nothin' at all—really nothin'. But the way it's tied——"

"The way it's tied?" said Bob.

"Yaas; and the colour——"

"The colour?"

"Yaas; and the stuff it's made of——"

"The—the stuff——"

"Yaas; there's a certain amount of room for merriment in that necktie," said Algernon, fixing his eyeglass

upon it. "Still, it's rather personal to burst out cackling like this."

Bob Lawless stared at the Honourable Algernon. That it was Algy who was the subject of that outburst of mirth was quite clear, but Algy either could not or would not see it. He preferred to attribute it to Bob's necktie, which certainly was not such a thing of joy and beauty as Algy's.

"Well, you—you——" murmured Bob, almost overcome by the cool cheek of the dandy of the lumber school.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the playground.

Algernon Beauclerc turned round, jamming his eyeglass a little more firmly into his eye, to survey the laughing schoolboys.

As he did so, the cause of the outburst dawned upon Frank Richards & Co., as Algy's back was turned towards them.

On Algy's elegant back a placard was fixed with a hook.

On the placard—evidently borrowed from a store in Thompson Town—was the inscription in bold black letters:

"IN THIS STYLE, 50 CENTS."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co. in chorus.

"Begad!" ejaculated Algernon.

He spun round at the unexpected burst of laughter behind him. His placarded back was exhibited to the crowd in the playground once more, and there was another roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fellows laughin' at?" inquired Algernon. "Anythin' ticklin' you, Frank Richards?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"In that style, fifty cents!" yelled Eben Hacke.

"Now, I wonder what that bounder means by that?" exclaimed Algy. "What is fifty cents in real money, Vere?"

"About two shillings in English money," answered Beauclerc, laughing.

"And what does it mean?"

Algy looked round at the laughing crowd again. Just then Miss Meadows stepped out at the porch.

"Beauclerc!" she exclaimed sharply.

Algy turned round.

"Why are you carrying that ridiculous card on your back?" exclaimed the Canadian schoolmistress.

"I, madam?" exclaimed Algy in astonishment.

"Yes. Take it off at once!"

Algy blinked.

"Is—is there anythin' on my back?" he ejaculated. "Take it off, Vere! Why don't you take it off, you ass?"

Vere Beauclerc reached out his hand and unhooked the placard. Algernon's face was a study as he gazed at it.

"In this style, 50 cents!" he murmured dazedly. "Oh, gad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a shriek from the playground.

"By gad! That's why that ruffian Hacke pushed against me—he was stickin' this on my back!" exclaimed Algernon indignantly.

He made a rush towards Eben Hacke. That burly youth was doubled up with merriment, roaring. But he roared in quite another way as Algernon suddenly seized his nose between a finger and thumb.

"Ooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hacke tore his nose away the next moment, and jumped at the dandy of Cedar Creek with clenched fists. Miss Meadows ran quickly between them.

"Stop!" she rapped out.

"I—I—he—he—I——" spluttered Hacke.

"You should not play such tricks on a new boy, Hacke," said Miss Meadows. "As for you, Beauclerc, if you act in this manner again, I shall punish you severely!"

"The rotter was impertinent, madam," said Algy.

"Silence! Go into the schoolroom and wait there till lessons!"

Algernon looked rebellious, but he had learned by this time that Miss Meadows had to be obeyed, so he walked into the schoolroom and sat down there.

Eben Hacke rubbed his crimsoned nose savagely as Miss Meadows went into the house.

"I—I—I guess I'll make cold meat of that gol-darned dude!" he spluttered.

"Pulling my nose—my nose, by James! I—I—I guess——"

"Did it hurt?" grinned Chunky Todgers. "You yelled as if you'd caught it in a gate! He, he, he!"

The bully of the lumber school gave the fat, cheerful Chunky a glare. He was not in the humour then for Chunky's chuckles.

"Did I?" he gasped.

"You did. Ha, ha—yaroooh!"

The next moment Chunky Todgers was yelling too as Eben Hacke smote him.

Eben Hacke stamped away angrily, leaving the fat Chunky sitting in the playground, roaring.

CHAPTER 39.

Algy is Ready!

EBEN HACKE gave Algernon a ferocious glare as he came into class with the rest of Cedar Creek a little later. Algy did not even notice him. He was depositing his eyeglass very carefully in his pocket. Miss Meadows did not allow him to wear that adornment in class, though Algy sometimes sported it there from habit. He put it away as the schoolmistress came in, however.

Hacke sat down with a black brow. More than once the bully of the lumber school had been on the point of "lambasting" the Honourable Algernon, as he expressed it; but Miss Meadows had an eye on him. His bullying ways were well known, and he was not allowed to wreak his wrath on the new fellow, which Eben regarded as very hard lines indeed. He was

half as large again as Algernon and twice as heavy, and Algy could certainly not have stood up to him, which Eben regarded as being quite sufficient reason for licking the Cedar Creek dandy, apart from his somewhat exasperating manners and customs. And now Eben's prominent nose had been pulled, and it was the last straw.

Ebenezer was thinking of his injuries as he sat in class that morning, and he gave Algernon many black looks, of which Algy Beauclerc was blissfully unconscious. The lofty Algy had pulled Hack's nose for his "dashed impertinence," and there he apparently considered the matter ended. But it was very far from ended.

When the Cedar Creek fellows came out after lessons that day, Ebenezer Hacke came up to Frank Richards & Co., his eyes gleaming at Algernon, who was with his friends.

"You pesky dude!" said Hacke.

Algernon extracted his eyeglass from his pocket, jammed it into his eye, and surveyed the burly Eben calmly.

"Begad! Did you address me?" he asked.

"Yep!"

"Do you want your nose pulled again?"

"Shurrup, Algy!" murmured Frank Richards.

Hacke thrust his face closer to Algy, as if deliberately placing his prominent nasal organ in danger.

"Pull it, you pesky dude!" he retorted. "Do you think I wouldn't have mashed you like a potato if Miss Meadows wasn't interfering? I'll be glad of the chance. Pull it!"

"I'll oblige you, by gad!"

Algernon was stretching out his hand when Beauclerc caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back.

"Chuck it!" he said curtly.

"But he's askin' me to pull his nose, dear boy," said Algernon.

"Well, don't do it. Don't play the goat!"

"But I think——"

"Dry up, you jay!" said Bob Lawless. "Can't you see that Hacke wants to get you into a scrap?"

"Well, I don't mind."

"Oh, rats! Come away!"

Frank Richards & Co. did not want to see the elegant Algernon being mauled by the bully of the lumber school. Vere Beauclerc slipped his arm through his cousin's to lead him away. Algernon shrugged his shoulders.

"Anythin' for a quiet life!" he remarked. "Take your nose away, Hacke. It really isn't a beautiful thing to look at, don't you know?"

Eben burst into a scoffing laugh.

"And that critter's a Cedar Creek chap!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "A soft galoot that can't scrap, and can't ride, and can't——"

Algernon looked round.

"My dear man," he said, "I'll ride anythin' on four legs in Canada."

It was Algernon's weak point that had been touched. With all his soft ways he was a good rider, as Frank Richards & Co. had found, rather to their surprise. There was good stuff in Algernon, as Bob Lawless had observed, but it did not show on the surface.

"I guess you couldn't ride my horse!" said Hacke jeeringly.

"What rot!"

"Will you try?"

"Yaas, certainly!"

"Hacke's horse is rather a tough critter, Algy," said Bob Lawless, a little uneasily. "You'd better leave it alone."

Algernon smiled.

"Let him trot it out," he answered.

"If there's a gee in Canada that I can't ride, I'd be glad to see it. My dear man, I could ride Hacke's horse's head off!"

"I guess you'll back down when you see the critter!" sneered Hacke.

Algernon fixed his monocle upon Hacke with good-humoured contempt.

"My dear kid, that remark is in your usual good taste!" he said. "If you

want to see me ride your horse, trot it out."

"Business?" asked Hacke, as if still sceptical.

"Oh, yaas!" said Algy carelessly.

"I guess I'll bring him out on the trail, then."

"Right-ho!"

Eben Hacke strode away towards the corral to fetch his horse, with a grin on his hard face. Algernon walked towards the school gates to wait for his challenger on the trail outside. His companions went with him, Frank and Bob feeling rather ill-at-ease. Vere Beauclerc did not seem uneasy, however, and he smiled reassuringly at his chums.

"It's all serene, you fellows!" he said. "Algy is a good many kinds of an ass, but he can ride."

"Thanks!" yawned Algernon.

"I don't like the look in Hacke's eye," said Bob Lawless. "He means mischief, that pesky galoot does. His horse may be savage to-day."

"I think Algy will manage him all right."

"Well, he's in for it now," said Bob.

Frank Richards & Co. waited on the open trail, and a good many of the Cedar Creek fellows gathered round. They were curious to see an exhibition of buck-jumping, with the dandy of the school in the saddle. Hacke's horse was well known as a rather vicious brute, very different from the handsome pony Algy rode to school. Algernon, being plentifully supplied with cash, had selected the best pony to be bought in the Thompson Valley for his own use, and it was a really handsome "critter." Very different from the big, raw-boned, savage-tempered brute that belonged to Ebenezer Hacke.

In a few minutes Eben Hacke led his horse out at the gates. Algernon surveyed it critically through his eyeglass. The horse was a little restive, but not looking specially vicious just then. It was ready saddled and bridled.

"Hyer he is!" announced Hacke. "And I guess you'd better keep off him, tenderfoot, and own up you can't ride. He don't like strangers."

"Give him to me!"

"Waal, here he is!"

"Look out!" called out Tom Lawrence. "That critter will begin buck-jumping as soon as you get a leg across him."

"Yaas, all serene."

Algernon examined the girths and shortened the stirrups. Eben Hacke watched him with a sarcastic smile. The horse stared away uneasily as Algy touched the girths.

"Quiet, old boy!" said Algernon.

"Like a ladder to get up with, Algy?" called out Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall I bunk you up, dude?" grinned Eben Hacke.

"Rats! Stand back!"

The horse was shying nervously, and there was a growing irritation visible in his looks. Algy did not mind, however. If the creature had been really dangerous, the Honourable Algernon would not have backed out at this stage of the proceedings. There was plenty of pluck hidden under Algy's soft and elegant manners.

Appearances were deceptive, as the Cedar Creek fellows were to discover. The general expectation was that Algy would roll helplessly off the horse's back at the first jump.

Algy vaulted into the saddle with an ease and grace that rather surprised the schoolboys to begin with.

"He can mount a critter!" remarked Dick Dawson, in a tone of wonder, and there was a laugh.

"Hold on to his ears, Algy!" yelled Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh gad!" said Algy. "I think you must be a little loose in the crumpe, Hacke. There's nothin' in ridin' this horse."

"Jest you see!" grinned Hacke. "If you keep on him three minutes I'll eat my hat!"

"You'll have to eat your headgear, then, dear boy. I'll run him up and down the trail."

Algy touched the horse lightly, and trotted up the trail towards the creek.

For a minute or two the horse trotted on obediently, and gave no sign of trouble. But as Algernon wheeled him in the trail to ride back to the school gates, he began. He came round with a whirl, and suddenly his forefeet flew into the air, and he stood almost perpendicularly on his hind legs, pawing the air.

There was a gasp from the watching crowd. This was the beginning of the expected display of "buck-jumping"—and it was beginning in style. Almost every one of the spectators expected to see Algernon go spinning over the horse's lashing tail, and there were exclamations of alarm from several.

"It's too bad!" exclaimed Lawrence. "He may be hurt!"

"He asked for it!" grinned Hacke.

Crash!

Algy was still in the saddle, his knees gripping the flanks of his mount. The horse came down on his forefeet with a crash that made sparks fly from the stones in the trail. And Algernon was still in the saddle.

CHAPTER 40.

The Buck-jumper!

CRASH, crash!

The buck-jumper was going on in deadly earnest now.

The crowd of schoolboys watched the scene breathlessly.

Hacke's horse was growing wildly excited. Up and down he went, first on his hind legs, then on his forefeet, with his nose almost touching the ground. It seemed a miracle that the rider was not pitched out of the saddle like a pip from an orange.

But he sat tight.

Crash, crash!

"My hat!" murmured Frank Richards. "Dash it all, I can ride,

but—but I'd rather not be on that gee just now."

"I guess he's a real sockdolager!" said Bob Lawless. "There's something wrong with the brute. I've never seen him as mad as that before."

"Only buck-jumping," said Eben Hacke.

Vere Beauclerc compressed his lips.

"Have you been doing anything to the horse, Hacke?" he asked.

"Eh, what?"

"That isn't ordinary buck-jumping. The brute's seems nearly mad."

"That's only his temper, I guess."

"He ought to be shot for a temper like that!" growled Bob Lawless.

"The dude asked for it, didn't he?" sneered Hacke. "If he can't ride, he shouldn't have got on the critter."

"Look out!" yelled Chunky Todgers. "He's coming!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

There was a sudden scattering of the crowd outside the school gates.

Hacke's horse, after two or three minutes of frantic bucking, had suddenly burst into a furious gallop, straight at the watching crowd.

The schoolboys scattered on all sides.

If the raging horse had burst through the crowd, there would have been serious injuries on all sides, if not fatalities.

Some of the fellows rushed into the playground, and others swarmed on top of the fence. The trail was empty almost in an instant.

Clatter, clatter, crash!

"Hold him in!" yelled Hacke from the top of the gate.

But the rider could not hold in the furious horse at that moment. His grip was like iron on the reins, but the horse was beyond control.

Algernon sat in the saddle grimly. His eyeglass gleamed in his eye; his hat had blown off, and his hair was loose in the wind. But he was perfectly cool and collected.

Even a good rider might have failed

to keep his seat on the horse in its present mood. But Algernon was keeping it.

The galloping steed swept by the gates and thundered on towards Thompson Town at a terrific burst of speed.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bob Lawless, dropping from the fence again. "What the thunder is the matter with the critter? He looks mad! Did you see his eyes?"

"There's something wrong with him," said Beauclerc between his teeth. "Hacke has played some trick."

"Eh? What trick could he play?"

"I don't know; but the horse is mad at this moment!" said Beauclerc. "That's not buck-jumping! The animal's frantic!"

"I guess it does look like it," said Bob soberly.

"Here he comes!" yelled Chunky.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

Algernon had succeeded in wheeling the horse on the Thompson trail, and he was coming back at a furious speed.

From various coigns of vantage, the schoolboys watched him, safe out of the reach of the animal's hoofs.

Algernon was still firm in the saddle.

His face was a little pale, and his teeth were set, his lips drawn in a tight line. His brows were wrinkled over his gleaming eyeglass. But he was still as cool as ice.

"Look out!" he shouted, as he came thundering up.

But the warning was needless; the Cedar Creek fellows were looking out sharply enough.

Vere Beauclerc watched his cousin with a white face. There was no help for Algy. It was a struggle between him and the infuriated horse, and it had to be fought out to a finish.

That there was something wrong with the horse was clear now to all eyes. It was not merely a vicious

temper that was the matter with him—though what the matter was, was a mystery.

Close by the school gates the horse stopped with startling suddenness, and Beauclerc gave a gasp as he looked to see Algernon shot over the lowered head of the animal. But Algernon was well back in his saddle, the stirrups almost at the horse's neck as he sat back. With his nose to the trail, the horse was flinging up his hind legs, looking every moment as if he would roll over head-foremost.

The quality of Algy's riding was pretty evident then. There was hardly a fellow in the watching crowd who could have sat the frantic horse through that ordeal; and Algy was sitting him as if born to "witch the world with noble horsemanship."

"By gum! He can ride!" muttered Bob Lawless.

"Jump down, Algy!" shouted Frank Richards as the horse, as if exhausted by his own fury, stood for a moment or two nearly motionless, panting and steaming.

Algernon did not heed.

"Get down, you fool!" roared Eben Hacke, whose harsh face was pale and perspiring now. "Take your chance!"

But it was too late, if Algy had wanted to take his chance. The horse glared around with bloodshot eyes at the little group, then leapt forward like a shot from a gun.

Crash, crash, crash! rang the hoofs on the hard trail.

"Oh, my hat! How is this going to end?" muttered Frank Richards.

"He'll be killed!" groaned Chunky Todgers.

Crash, crash!

The schoolboys gazed on, spell-bound.

The horse was excited now to a pitch of fury that was terrible to look upon. More than once he had reached round with his teeth, snapping at the rider's legs, but Algy was on the watch, and

the white, snapping teeth had not touched him.

Now the animal rose perpendicularly on his hind legs, and, instead of coming down on his forefeet again, rolled backwards into the trail, his legs thrashing the air.

Beauclerc suppressed a cry. It seemed a miracle that Algy was not pinned under the weight of the horse. But he had leaped clear at precisely the right moment, keeping the reins in a grip of iron. As the frantic horse rose again, Algy was in the saddle once more, and the horse leaped up with the undaunted rider on his back.

Crash, crash, crash!

The movements of the animal were almost too rapid to be followed by the eye as he reared, and jumped, and kicked, and plunged. He burst into the furious gallop again, and once more tore along the trail in the direction of Thompson. In less than a minute horse and rider had vanished from sight.

"Let's get our horses!" gasped Frank Richards. "We'd better follow. Goodness knows what will happen now!"

"Correct! Come on!"

Frank Richards & Co. rushed to the corral for their own mounts. In a couple of minutes they rode out on the trail, and started in pursuit of the vanished buck-jumper. The rest of the crowd remained round the school gates in excited, breathless discussion. Not a fellow there thought of starting homeward till the result of that strange struggle between horse and rider was known.

The three schoolboys rode hard up the Thompson trail, with the deadliest fear in their hearts for Algy.

"There he is!" exclaimed Bob Lawless at last.

"Dismounted!" exclaimed Frank.

The buck-jumper was quiet at last. He stood in the trail, trembling in every limb, Algy holding the rein and sooth-

ing him. The saddle lay in the grass. Frank Richards & Co., as they rode up, could see that the girths had burst.

Algernon glanced round as they arrived. He was breathing hard, but looked quite cool.

"Thank goodness you're safe!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"Safe as houses, old scout! The girths burst," said Algernon. "A jolly good thing they did, too!"

"But you——"

"Oh, I landed on my feet, old chap. I believe I mentioned that I could ride," drawled Algernon.

"Well, you can ride; no mistake about that," said Bob Lawless. "The critter looks quiet enough."

"He's not bein' tormented with a bunch of thorns now," said Algernon quietly. "Look at that."

He pointed to the broken girth, and then to the horse's heaving flank.

"Jerusalem!" gasped Bob Lawless.

"It was Hacke's little joke," said Algernon. "He saddled the horse before he brought it out, you know, and he put that bunch of thorns well under the saddle-girths. You can figure out for yourselves what the poor brute felt like when the thorns began to work into his skin." And Algernon smoothed the horse's dripping neck soothingly.

Bob Lawless' brow was like thunder as he picked up the bunch of thorns, stained with blood now. Under the girth the horse's skin had been cruelly scored.

"By thunder!" said Bob Lawless, between his teeth. "By thunder! Of all the dirty tricks! The poor horse——"

"I'm goin' to thrash the rotter for that!" said Algernon. "I don't mind for myself, but think of the poor old gee——"

"Let's get back," said Bob abruptly.

The chums walked their horses back to the school, leaving Hacke's saddle lying in the trail. Bob Lawless re-

marked that Hacke could fetch it if he wanted it. And a shout greeted them as they arrived at the gates of Cedar Creek.

CHAPTER 41.

Rough Justice!

"HERE they are!" squeaked Chunky Todgers. "The tenderfoot ain't dead!"

"He's off the hoss, though," remarked Lawrence.

Eben Hacke stepped towards his horse as the new-comers halted, with a rather uneasy expression.

"Where's my saddle?" he demanded.

"Half-way to Thompson in the trail," answered Bob Lawless. "You can see that the girths broke."

"And you left it there?" shouted Hacke.

"Yep!"

"Why, you gol-darned jay——"

"And look at that!" said Bob Lawless, holding up the bunch of thorns.

"Look at that, all you fellows!"

Hacke bit his lip hard. He had not expected his trick to come to light. But it had come to light now, with a vengeance.

"What on earth's that?" asked Dick Dawson.

"And look at the critter's flank!" said Bob.

"Phew!"

"Hacke put those thorns under the girth when he saddled up," said Bob. "That's what made the critter so wild. Algy might have got his neck broken, for all Hacke cared."

"I reckoned he would get thrown off," said Hacke sullenly. "He needn't have stuck on so long if he hadn't wanted. I never reckoned he would get hurt, 'cept a bump or two."

"You cowardly rascal!" exclaimed Frank Richards hotly. "And what about the horse?"

"It's my horse!" growled Hacke. There was a buzz among the Cedar

Creek fellows as they crowded round the now quiet animal. There was indignation on all sides. The remarks that were addressed to Eben Hacke made that youth's ears burn.

Algernon pushed back his cuffs.

"I'm goin' to lick that brute!" he said. "You've been lookin' for a scrap with me, you rotter; now's your chance!"

"I'm ready for you, you pesky dude!" growled Hacke.

Bob Lawless pushed the warlike Algernon back.

"Hold on!" he snapped.

"I'm goin' to thrash him, I tell you!" exclaimed Algy.

"My dear chap, you can ride, but you can't thrash a fellow twice your size," said Frank Richards. "Leave him to us!"

"I'm goin' to try."

"You're not!" grunted Bob Lawless. "Hacke is goin' to get worse than you could give him, you jay! You fellows, you see what the brute's done. He's risked breaking a chap's neck. And that's not the worst. Look at the hoss! Hacke's going to smart for it!"

"I'm ready to fight any galoot here!" growled the bully of the lumber school.

"That isn't what you're going to do, though," said Bob. "You're going to be ridden on a rail, and ducked in the creek."

"Yes, rather!"

Hacke clenched his big fists.

"I guess I'd like to see any galoot ride me on a rail!" he roared.

"You'll see it soon. Get a rail, Franky, will you?"

"You bet!" answered Frank Richards.

Bob Lawless tethered the horses. Hacke made a stride towards his steed, and was unceremoniously shoved back. Vere Beauclerc and Tom Lawrence collared him by the arms and held him.

"Let me go, hang you!" said Hacke between his teeth, struggling in their grasp.

"Hold him!" said Bob.

Hacke was held fast enough. The whole Cedar Creek crowd were exasperated by his foul play, and there were plenty of hands ready to hold him.

Frank Richards returned in a couple of minutes with a big rail. Half a dozen fellows held it in readiness for its rider.

"Get on, Hacke!" rapped out Bob Lawless.

"I won't!" roared Hacke.

"Stick him on!"

Hacke struggled savagely, but three or four fellows had hold of him, and he was pitched astride of the rail. The rail was swept into the air, and Eben Hacke had to clutch at it with both hands to save himself from a fall as it was lifted shoulder high.

"Let me down, you pesky jays!" he howled.

"Go ahead!" called out Bob Lawless.

"Stick to it, Hacke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd surged away towards the creek, shimmering at a distance in the setting sun. Hacke roared and howled as he clung to the rail. He jumped from it once, and stumbled and crashed on the ground, with a howl of anguish. He was promptly collared and flung on the rail again, and it was lifted once more. After that Hacke decided that it was wiser to keep his place, and he clung to the rail with hands and legs, gasping and spluttering.

"Let me down! Oh, you jays! Oh, oh, ow!"

The crowd came along the bank of the creek, Eben Hacke riding the rail in their midst.

"In with him!" shouted Bob Lawless.

"Stoppit!" roared Eben Hacke. "You pesky galoots! Stoppit! I—I—I guess— Oh! Ooooch!"
Splash!

The rail was tipped, and Eben

Hacke shot off into the shallow water by the bank of the creek.

He disappeared into two feet of water and mud with a mighty splash.

"I guess that's good enough for the galoot!" said Bob Lawless.

"Oooooooch!"

Eben Hacke's head and shoulders rose from the water. He had sprawled in thick mud at the bottom, and he was almost unrecognisable when he came into view again. Mud was thick on his face, and in his nose and mouth and ears, and thick in his hair. Mud and water streamed from him as he splashed towards the bank.

"Oh, oh, ow! Groogh! Oooooch!" he spluttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you galoots! Ow, ooch! Oh, Jerusalem!" gasped Hacke. "I guess I'll— Ow, ow! Groooooch!"

"I guess you'll think twice before you play a dirty trick like that again, you low-down skunk!" said Bob Lawless. "It's not good enough for Cedar Creek!"

"Groooooch!"

The crowd, laughing, turned back towards the school. Frank Richards & Co. untethered their horses, while Hacke, crawling from the creek, limped up the trail after them, shedding mud and water at every step. His appearance was greeted with loud chuckles by the Cedar Creek fellows. The bully of the lumber school stopped outside the gates, squelching mud, and shook a wet and muddy fist at Frank Richards & Co.

The chums of Cedar Creek had mounted their horses, and Bob Lawless had taken the reins of Hacke's steed, as if to lead it away.

"Give me my critter, you fool!" howled Hacke.

Bob Lawless shook his head.

"I guess I'm taking your critter home with me to the ranch," he answered.

Hacke jumped,

"Taking my critter home!" he spluttered.

"I guess so. He wants seeing to, and I'm going to take him to the ranch for the vet to see him," answered Bob Lawless.

"You crazy galoot!" yelled Hacke furiously. "He's my critter, ain't he?"

"You can have him again when he's got over your rotten trick," said Bob Lawless coolly. "He's not fit to be saddled now, and won't be for a day or two. I'm taking him home."

Hacke spluttered with fury.

"How am I to get home, then?" he howled.

"Walk!" answered Bob Lawless laconically.

"I'm going to have my hoss!" roared Hacke.

"Rats!"

The chums of Cedar Creek started. Hacke made a rush after them, amid loud laughter from the schoolboys now starting for home. He grasped the reins of his horse, and held on to them.

"Let go, Bob Lawless, you galoot!" he panted.

Bob Lawless had his own reins and his riding-whip bunched in one hand. He let the reins go, and gripped the whip, and brought it down across Hacke's knuckles with a sounding lash.

There was a wild howl from Hacke as he released his horse.

"Yow-ow-ooop!"

"Have some more?" asked Bob grimly.

"Yow-ow!"

"Come on, you fellows!" said Bob.

And Frank Richards & Co. rode away up the trail into the timber, with Hacke's horse trotting beside Bob.

Eben Hacke stood in the trail, looking after them, panting with wrath. The chums of Cedar Creek disappeared into the timber, and the bully of the lumber school turned slowly away.

"I guess that will be a lesson to that galoot," remarked Bob Lawless, glancing at his grinning chums. "I suppose

you jays think I've been a bit high-handed. But the critter wants looking to, and it's precious little looking to Hacke would give it. He thinks he can do as he likes with it because it's his own horse. It's time he learned better."

Frank Richards laughed.

"Quite right, old scout," he answered.

"Yaas," remarked Algernon, with a nod. "Right on the wicket, dear boy. But you should have let me thrash the rotter, you know."

Whereat the chums of Cedar Creek chuckled. While they rode cheerily homeward with the led horse, the hapless bully of Cedar Creek had the pleasure of tramping a mile along the Thompson trail to recover his saddle, and then of heading for home—on foot. And by the time he trudged into his home it was possible that Eben repented of his sins.

CHAPTER 42.

Algy on the Ice!

"I 'M comin', dear boys!"

"Ahem!"

"Looks rippin', doesn't it?" said Algernon of Cedar Creek.

The creek did look ripping, as Algy expressed it; the waters that bubbled and sang past the backwoods school in the summer were frozen hard now, and the creek was covered with gleaming ice.

Morning lessons were over at Cedar Creek, and a crowd of boys and girls had come down to skate on the frozen stream. And with Frank Richards & Co. came Algernon Beauclerc. Algernon turned his eyeglass upon the creek with satisfaction in his glance. Apparently he was looking forward to the skating.

Bob Lawless grinned, Frank Richards coughed, and Vere Beauclerc looked at his cousin from the Old Country very dubiously. The elegant Algernon did not impress Cedar Creek as a fellow who could do things. He had shown

that he could ride, and ride remarkably well; but the chums of Cedar Creek had not seen him on the ice yet, and they were exceedingly doubtful as to whether he could maintain his perpendicular there.

"Looks simply toppin'!" continued Algernon. "I've been looking forward to some skatin'."

"You skate at home?" asked Vere Beauclerc.

"Yaas, a little bit, you know."

"Well?" asked Frank.

"Well, I can keep up if I'm held, you know," said Algernon confidentially. "I'm sure you fellows won't mind holdin' me."

"Oh!"

"Two of you could do it," said Algernon. "I suppose the ice is thick enough to stand it if we come a mucker."

"The fact is, old scout, we haven't come along to fall down and roll," explained Bob Lawless. "We're going to skate."

"I dare say I could give you some tips in skatin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll help you, Algy," said Vere Beauclerc, smiling.

"I want two to help—these chaps," said Algernon. "They're stronger than you are, Vere. Strength may be needed."

Vere Beauclerc looked rather comically at his chums. Frank and Bob exchanged a glance, and nodded.

"Oh, all right! We'll give Algy a run before we begin," said Bob Lawless. "Try not to bring us down too hard, Algernon."

"I'll try, old top."

"Put your skates on then."

Algernon glanced round.

"What am I to sit on?" he asked.

"The bank!"

"Oh, my hat! That will soil my bags, you know!"

"Awful!" said Bob Lawless. "Would you like me to ride over to Thompson town and tote along an easy-chair?"

"Yaas!"

"Fathead!" exclaimed Beauclerc. "Sit down and put your skates on, and don't be an ass, Algy!"

"And look spry!" grinned Chunky Todgers. "We want to see you at it, Algernon. It will be funny!"

"Make a knee for me then, some of you," said Algernon.

"Here you are!" said Bob.

Bob Lawless made a knee for the dandy of Cedar Creek, and Algernon sat on it to put on his skates. As soon as he was comfortably seated Bob jerked his knee away.

Bump!

"Oh, gad! Wha-a-at——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon sprawled on the bank roaring. There was a howl of laughter from the Cedar Creek fellows.

"You silly ass!" shouted Algernon, sitting up. "What are you playing the goat for? Yow-ow-ow!"

"You can sit on the bank now, old scout!" chuckled Bob Lawless. "You won't gather up more dust than you've gathered already."

And Frank Richards & Co. sat down to don their skates; and the Honourable Algernon, with a frown, followed their example. Most of the fellows were on the ice now, but they were not skating away. They kept near at hand to watch the performances of the "tenderfoot." There was a general expectation that the dandy of Cedar Creek would cut an extraordinary figure on the ice.

"Ready?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yaas!"

"Why don't you get on then?"

"I've got my skates on."

"Well, come on!"

"How can I get up without help?"

"Oh, Jerusalem! Take his other ear, Franky!"

"Yarocoo!"

Frank Richards, laughing, grasped Algernon by his arm, not by his ear as the playful Bob suggested. The new fellow was helped on to the ice.

"Now look out for fireworks!" chuckled Tom Lawrence.

"Go it, tenderfoot!"

"Let him slide, Lawless! Give him a start!"

But now that Algernon was on the ice, Bob Lawless loyally supported him on one side, with Frank Richards on the other. Vere Beauclerc hovered near, looking rather anxious.

Algernon proved even more helpless on the smooth ice than the chums of Cedar Creek had anticipated. His feet persisted in travelling in different directions, and he clung frantically to his helpers.

"D-d-don't l-l-leggo!" he gasped.

"Hold to me!" said Frank encouragingly. "We'll soon get you going. Oh, my hat! Don't throttle me, you ass!"

Algy flung his left arm round Frank Richards' neck, and held on as if for his life. It seemed to be his object to get Frank's head into chancery.

"Here, give a grip, and don't quite kill Franky!" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

"Oh! Ah! Yaas! Oh!"

Algy's right arm wound round Bob's neck. The rancher's son was dragged nearly over, and he roared.

"Yah! Go easy! Stoppit! Hold on!"

"I'm holdin' on, ain't I?" gasped Algy.

"I mean, leggo!"

"Can't! I'm slippin'!"

Algernon certainly was slipping. His skates were beating a sort of tattoo on the ice. The Cedar Creek fellows crowded round and yelled with merriment. Algernon was providing great entertainment for his schoolfellows.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Frank Richards. "If I'd known this was coming—oh, dear! Let me breathe, you howling ass!"

"Can't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go easy!" shrieked Bob Lawless.

"Can't!"

"Oh, crumbs!" howled Chunky Todgers. "Ain't he a sight for sore eyes! Go it, tenderfoot! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep on your skates, you idiot!" gurgled Bob Lawless. "Don't put your

silly feet in the air and hang on me! I'm not a derrick!"

"Oh, begad! The—the—the ice seems slippery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get him going somehow!" spluttered Frank Richards. "Oh, dear!"

Frank was bent half-double with Algy's arm round his neck and Algy's weight on him, and he tried in vain to get his head up. It was with difficulty that he kept his balance. Algy's feet were going like lightning, as if he intended to act as a human ice-breaker.

Crash, clatter, crash!

All of a sudden he started. He shot across the ice, and Frank and Bob were fairly dragged after him by their necks. Naturally enough they pitched forward and sprawled on the ice with loud and furious yells. Algy shot away from them fairly across the creek.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yah! Oh! Ah! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards and his Canadian cousin were sprawling and gasping; but all eyes were fixed upon Algernon. He was shooting across the creek like an arrow, and everyone expected to see him crash into the opposite bank with a terrific concussion.

But he didn't!

Within a yard of the steeply rising bank Algy whirled round on his skates, just escaping a collision, and came whizzing back. And there was a yell.

"Look out!"

And the skaters scattered to avoid the charge.

CHAPTER 43.

Algy's Little Joke!

"LOOK out!"

"Stand clear!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

Whiz! Algy's arms were waving wildly in the air, his brows were corrugated over his eyeglass. His expression was fixed. At any moment he was expected to go sprawling and spinning—but he did not. His skates were

apparently running away with him, but he kept on them.

"Look out!"

With yells of laughter the skaters scattered. Frank Richards and Bob were dragging themselves to their feet when Algernon came charging down on them. They had no time to get out of the way like the others, and it looked as if a terrific collision was inevitable.

"Algy!" yelled Beauclerc.

"Help!" shrieked Algernon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At the last moment, when he was almost upon the two scrambling school-boys, Algy's direction changed, and he swerved round them. He made a clutch at Frank Richards as he passed, as if to catch on and stop himself; but he only caught Frank's hat, which he dragged off and carried away with him.

"There he goes into the bank!" roared Eben Hacke. "Serve him right! I guess he's going to get smashed!"

The bully of Cedar Creek would not have been sorry to see Algernon smashed, as he expressed it. But Algy's luck held good. He seemed booked for a crash on the bank—but he swerved again at the last moment and whirled round, and came whizzing directly at Eben Hacke.

"Look out, Hacke!" yelled Beauclerc.

"Oh, great gophers!"

Eben Hacke fairly took to his heels—or, rather, to his skates. He fled away down the frozen creek at top speed. A crashing collision would have been painful. Hacke was a good skater, and he put on speed and vanished promptly round a bend of the creek. And he did not come back.

Algy whizzed after him almost as far as the bend, and then he whirled again. Again the skaters scattered as the figure with wildly waving arms came whizzing back. Frank and Bob were on their feet now in great dismay.

"I guess we've got to stop him somehow!" gasped Bob Lawless. "He'll do some damage at this rate."

"He will, to himself, if he hits the

bank going at that rate," said Frank Richards. "Come on!"

"Help!" yelled Algy.

Vere Beauclerc started after his chums; but he paused, a slight smile breaking out on his face. If the Honourable Algernon was really as helpless on the skates as he appeared to be, it was marvellous that he had kept his footing so long. It was, in fact, a little too marvellous, and it dawned upon Beauclerc that Algernon was not quite so helpless as he was supposed to be.

But that fact had not yet dawned upon his comrades, and they rushed to the rescue.

"Now then, Algy——"

"Help!"

"Collar him, Franky!"

It was not easy to collar a skater going at full whiz; but the chums essayed the task. One of Algy's wildly waving arms smote Bob Lawless across the chest, and Bob sat down with a bump. Frank Richards just dodged the other arm, and then Algernon was past him. But, to Frank's amazement, he found his hat jammed back on his head as Algy passed. Algernon had replaced it there while he was going in full career.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" stuttered Frank. "Why, the rotter, he's spoofing us all the time! He can skate!"

"I—I—I guess he can skate!" gasped Bob Lawless. "Pulling our leg, the cheeky jay! Why, I'll skin him!"

It was pretty evident now that Algernon could skate. He had ceased waving his arms and yelling for help. And he was cutting figures of eight on the ice, with a good deal of grace.

"Why, he—he—he's skating!" ejaculated Chunky Todgers. "Here, I say, look out! Keep off!"

Algernon circled round the fat Chunky and picked off his hat. He circled round again, and replaced it backwards. Chunky's expression was extraordinary during that performance.

"Collar him!" roared Bob Lawless.

"He's been fooling us! We'll give him fooling! Collar him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon kissed his hand gracefully to the incensed Bob, and whizzed away down the creek in the direction Eben Hacke had taken ten minutes before. In a twinkling almost he was out of sight round the bend.

"After him!" roared Bob.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Beauclerc, wiping his eyes. "Hold on, Bob! Ha, ha! We really asked for this, you know. We took it for granted that he couldn't skate!"

"The cheeky jay! I guess I'll—I'll

"Go easy!" said Frank Richards, laughing. "After all, we did ask for it in a way. Let him rip! Come on, Bob, Molly's waiting for us!"

And Bob Lawless turned back.

Meanwhile, Algernon was speeding down the creek, enjoying his rapid run on the smooth ice, with a contented smile on his face.

CHAPTER 44.

In Deadly Peril!

"B Y gum, here he is!"

Eben Hacke started, and his eyes glittered under his bushy brows.

He had had a run down the creek as far as the ice was safe. As the stream approached the rapids the ice was thinner and broken in places, and at that point Hacke turned back. And as he came gliding up the creek he caught sight of the Honourable Algernon.

Algernon was coming down the centre of the stream at a good pace, his eyeglass glinting in his eye.

"I guess this is my chance!" muttered the bully of the lumber school, setting his teeth.

Hacke had been far out of sight during the scene on the ice, and he was not aware that Algy's clumsiness on the skates had been a joke on his school-fellows. He was surprised, indeed, to see Algy keeping his balance as he came whizzing along.

There had been trouble between the bully of the backwoods school and the new boy; and only the intervention of Miss Meadows had prevented Hacke from "hammering" the elegant Algy. Eben was debarred from that method of wreaking his vengeance. He thought he saw another way now.

He placed himself directly in Algy's path as the new boy came skating merrily along. Algernon looked at him.

"Stand clear!" he called out.

"I guess not!" grinned Hacke.

He intended to avoid the rush as Algy came closer, and to clutch at him and drag him over as he passed. But it did not "pan out" quite like that. Algy came closer and closer; but, at the last moment, he swerved and went round the burly Hacke. As he passed he jerked off the bully's hat and went on his way waving it in the air.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" spluttered Hacke, whirling round after him in amazement

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and rage. "Give me my hat, you jay!"
 "Come and fetch it!" called back Algy.
 "I guess I'll smash you!" roared Hacke.

He sped after the new boy, not doubting for a moment that he would run him down with ease. But it did not prove to be easy. Algy looked back over his shoulder, and smiled at the exasperated Eben as he kept easily ahead. But the cracks in the ice warned him to go no farther at last, and he circled back, and Hacke rushed at him as he came.

Algernon smiled cheerily, and dodged the rush of the lumber school bully, eluding him with ease. He glided on, and Hacke, unable to stop himself, went whizzing past the spot where he had stood.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algernon looked back again, laughing. But the laugh died on his lips the next moment. Hacke had rushed right on, and as he whirled round there was a loud and threatening crack of the ice under his feet. In his rage and excitement he had not observed how close he was to the thin ice, and now he was in danger.

The rage died out of Hacke's face suddenly as he realised his peril. Algy turned back in alarm.

"Look out!" he shouted.

But the warning was useless. Eben Hacke saw his danger, but it was too late to escape it. He came tearing desperately back, with the ice cracking under his feet. The catastrophe came suddenly. A spurt of dark water came through the cracking ice as Eben Hacke's skates went through, and in the twinkling of an eye the burly American schoolboy was waist-deep. His hands clutched at the ice about him, but it crackled in his grasp, and he went down.

Algernon stared at the black, widening pool in the ice in horror.

Hacke's head reappeared in a moment, his face deadly white. His hands, already half-frozen through his thick gloves, clutched at the ice.

"Help!" he shouted hoarsely.

"Oh, gad!"

Algernon tore at his skates. They came off quickly enough, and he left them on the ice and ran towards the hole. Under his feet came ominous cracks from the ice.

"Help!"

"I'm comin'!"

The current under the ice was tugging at Hacke, as he clung on desperately, the thin edges crumbling in his grasp. His face was white and despairing. Already the bitter cold of the water had penetrated to his very bones, and he was chilled to the marrow. His teeth were chattering.

Algernon dropped softly on his knees and crept to the edge of the black, swirling pool.

Hacke's eyes were fixed on him wildly. He was almost fainting with the bitter cold and the fear that was in his heart. But he knew that in venturing thus on the thin ice Algernon was taking the risk of sharing his fate. And there was no help in sight. The Cedar Creek crowd were more than a mile away, out of sight, and the nearest building was the Hopkins' homestead, hidden from sight by the timber along the bank.

But Algy did not seem to be thinking of his danger.

"Give me your fist!" he said.

"Help!"

"Give me your fist, you ass!"

Algernon grasped Hacke's hand firmly. It was only in time, for the frozen fingers were losing their grip on the broken, crumbling ice.

Algy's grasp pulled Eben Hacke up, and his shoulders came well out of the swirling water.

Under Algy the ice creaked ominously.

"Oh, I'm done!" moaned Eben Hacke.

"You're not done yet, old top!" said Algy between his teeth. "I'm goin' to get you out somehow."

He cast an almost wild glance round.

He could support Hacke so long as his strength lasted; but he could not drag him on the already cracking ice. And

at any moment his frail support might give way and plunge him headlong in. And then it was death—death for both of them in the black depths of the stream. Over the timber on the bank rose the smoke from the chimney of the Hopkins' farmhouse. But there was no one to be seen on the bank or in the leafless timber.

"Help!" shouted Algernon, with all the strength of his lungs. "Help!"

Hacke was past shouting now. He was numbed and blue with cold, and but for Algy's grasp he would have gone down like a stone. He was fast losing his consciousness.

"Help, help!"

Algy's voice rang through the frozen timber.

"Help!"

"Hallo!"

A voice answered from the bank at last. The frenzied shouts had reached Mr. Hopkins at work on his clearing near the creek. There were heavy footsteps in the timber, and the farmer came out on the bank, staring round him. He started as his eyes fell on the kneeling figure by the gap in the ice holding up the almost unconscious Hacke.

"Old on!" shouted the Cockney emigrant. "I'm comin'!"

He ran back, and reappeared again in a few moments with a hurdle in his grasp. A few moments more and the hurdle was laid on the ice, and Mr. Hopkins and Algy between them dragged Hacke upon it. Eben Hacke sank into insensibility as he was pulled from the water.

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Algy. "Only just in time!"

Hacke was lifted in the farmer's strong arms and carried to the bank and straight on to the Hopkins' home—stead. He was laid, still unconscious, in the bed that belonged to Harold Hopkins of Cedar Creek, and the farmer and his wife attended to him kindly enough. Algy warmed himself by the kitchen fire till Mr. Hopkins rejoined him.

"How is he, sir?" asked Algy.

"Oh, he'll pull round all right," said Mr. Hopkins, with a rather curious glance at Algernon's eyeglass. "I'm going into Thompson, and I'll ask Doc Jones to call and see him. But he'll be all right—only a chill. I guess he won't get out of Arold's bed to-day, though. You belong to Cedar Creek?"

"Oh yaas!"

"Then you'd better tell Miss Meadows wots 'appened, and tell her the boy is safe and sound 'ere," said Mr. Hopkins.

"Right-ho!" said Algernon.

And the dandy of Cedar Creek returned to the ice, where he put on his skates and glided away cheerfully to the school.

CHAPTER 45.

Condemned!

FRANK RICHARDS & Co. had gone off the ice and were returning to the lumber school for dinner when Algernon came speeding up. Algy removed his skates and followed them to Cedar Creek School, where he immediately proceeded to Miss Meadows' sitting-room to take her the message from Mr. Hopkins. When he came away after delivering his information to the Canadian schoolmistress, he was joined in the passage by Frank Richards & Co. Algy adjusted his eyeglass, which he had removed before entering Miss Meadows' presence, and glanced at the three chums with a sweet smile.

"Enjoyed your skatin', dear boys?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" said Frank, laughing. "I've a jolly good mind to punch your head for spoofing us, though."

"You spoofed yourself, old top. What made you suppose I couldn't skate?" demanded the Honourable Algernon. "Naturally, I pulled your leg. The fact is, dear boys, you go around askin' to have your legs pulled."

Algernon strolled into the dining-room before the Co. could think of any reply to that statement. They looked at one another. The tenderfoot of Cedar

Creek was surprising his schooffellows in a good many ways of late.

"My word!" said Bob at last. "Of all the cheeky jays! Cherub, old man, I took your cousin at first for the biggest jay that ever moseyed out of Jaysville. I'm beginning to think he's the cheekiest monkey——"

Beaulerc laughed.

"There is more in Algy than meets the eye," he remarked.

"I guess there is," assented Bob.

But after dinner, when the school-bell rang for afternoon classes, Chunky Todgers remarked that Hacke was not in the crowd that headed for the lumber Schoolhouse.

"Hacke's late," Chunky remarked. "Gone home, I guess, and started back late. He will get a chinwag from Miss Meadows."

Algy glanced at Todgers.

"Hacke isn't comin' this afternoon," he said.

"Why not?" asked Frank Richards.

"He can't, you know."

"Nothing happened to him, is there?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yaas."

"What's happened to Hacke?" asked a dozen voices.

"Ice busted, you know. Hacke was rather too heavy for it," said Algernon. "I say, the bell's stopped. We'd better be gettin' in."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Bob Lawless, catching Algernon by the arm. "Tell us what's happened, you goat!"

"But I've told you, dear boy."

"I remember you went up the river after Hacke," said Bob. "Did you have a row with him along there?"

"Yaas."

"And what happened, Algy?" exclaimed Beaulerc anxiously.

"Don't I keep on tellin' you?" said Algernon in surprise. "Hacke chased me for some reason, an' ran on thin ice and went through. That's all."

"He fell in the water?"

"Yaas."

"And what did you do?" roared Bob Lawless.

"What could I do, dear boy?" answered Algernon, raising his eyebrows.

Bob Lawless compressed his grasp on Algy's arm, and shook him in his excitement. His eyes were gleaming.

"You didn't do anything, then?" he exclaimed.

"My dear chap——"

"Do you mean to say that you stood by and saw a fellow drown without lending him a hand?" shouted Bob.

Algy jammed his eyeglass a little more tightly into his eye.

"I don't mean to say anythin'," he answered.

"Algy——" exclaimed Beaulerc.

"Time we were goin' in, I think," remarked Algernon. "There's dear old Slimmey blinkin' at us. Comin', sir."

"Answer me, you fool!" shouted Bob. "Is Hacke drowned?"

"My dear fellow——"

"Oh, you awful rotter!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "You stood by and let a fellow drown!"

"Algy!"

"Funk!"

"You mean coyote!"

"Begad, you seem awfully excited about somethin'," said Algernon calmly. "Hacke was goin' for me, you know——"

"That's no reason why you should let him drown!" roared Lawrence.

"Isn't it?"

"No, you rotter, it isn't!"

"Algy!" exclaimed Beaulerc in great distress. "You didn't do that—you couldn't! You went in for him, at least——"

"His clothes ain't wet," said Chunky Todgers. "He's not been in the water."

Beaulerc was stricken silent. It was evident enough that his cousin had not been in the water.

"Praps the poor rotter can't swim, though——" said Dawson.

"Are you alludin' to me, dear boy?"

"Yep. Can you swim?"

"Oh, yaas! Toppin'!"

"You can swim, and you never went in for Hacke after he'd gone through the

ice!" exclaimed Frank Richards incredulously.

"Just so!"

"Algy, is this some idiotic joke?" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"Not at all."

"Well, my hat!" said Frank Richards.

"I—I——" Words failed Frank.

"It's not a joke," said Chunky Todgers. "Hacke hasn't come back, has he? And I noticed the dude went in to speak to Miss Meadows as soon as he came in. Miss Meadows has gone out now. She's gone to see poor old Hacke, of course—to see if the body's got out of the creek."

"Did you tell Miss Meadows what had happened, Algy?"

"Yaas."

Mr. Slimmey came out to the excited crowd.

"My boys," he said mildly, "it is past school-time. Go into the school-room at once, please."

"Certainly, sir," said Algernon cheerfully.

The dandy of Cedar Creek walked into the school-room.

He was quite calm and cheerful.

Lawless drew farther away from him than usual on one side, and Frank Richards on the other. Algernon glanced at them alternately.

"Anythin' up with you fellows?" murmured Algernon. "What's bitin' you, Lawless?"

"Don't speak to me," growled Bob in angry disgust.

"Why not?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Certainly, old top, if my conversation bores you," replied Algernon politely. "Richards, old scout——"

"Dry up!"

"You got your back up, too, dear boy?"

"I'd rather you didn't speak to me," muttered Frank.

"Oh, gad!"

"Coward!" came in a fierce whisper from several desks.

"Well, my hat!" said Algy. "I

wonder what they are callin' me names for? Do you know, Lawless?"

"Silence in class, please," said Mr. Slimmey. "Boys, you must give your attention to your lessons. This whispering must cease."

And there was silence in class. But the looks of the Cedar Creek fellows were eloquent, though their tongues were silent; and it was amazing that Algy bore them with so much equanimity. But he did.

CHAPTER 46.

Light at Last!

THERE was a good deal of restlessness in the school-room that afternoon. Mr. Slimmey found it no easy task to keep Miss Meadows' class at work. Mr. Shepherd was taking the other two classes together, and he found them whispering and buzzing almost as much as the senior class. The two masters were aware that there was something unusual "on," though they could not guess what it was.

And lessons proceeded till hoofbeats were heard outside announcing the return of Miss Meadows. The Canadian schoolmistress came in, and Mr. Slimmey willingly relinquished the class to her.

But Miss Meadows did not proceed to business at once.

"Algernon Beauclerc!" she said quietly.

"Yaas, madam?"

"When you informed me, Beauclerc, that Hacke had fallen into the creek and had been taken to Mr. Hopkins' cabin, you did not acquaint me with all that had happened."

"There was nothin' to tell you, Miss Meadows," murmured Algernon.

"Nonsense! Hacke has told me that he was trying to run you down on the ice, and he has expressed his regret for doing so," said Miss Meadows. "He has also told me that you saved his life."

"Oh, gad!"

"Mr. Hopkins has told me the same."

"Oh, dear!"

"S-s-s-saved his life!" murmured Bob Lawless.

The whole class blinked at Miss Meadows. That was about the last statement they had expected to hear from the schoolmistress.

"Saved his life!" stuttered Dawson.

Vere Beauclerc's face lighted up.

"Oh, Algy," he stammered, "you ass—you silly ass! Why couldn't you—"

"Silence, please!" said Miss Meadows.

"I wish the whole class to know what Algernon Beauclerc has done. He has acted very generously and courageously."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"After Hacke had fallen through the ice and was unable to climb out, Algernon Beauclerc ventured upon the thin ice and held him up till help came," said Miss Meadows. "He ran the greatest possible risk of going through the ice, and, in fact, was exposed to the most terrible peril all the time he was

supporting Hacke till Mr. Hopkins was able to come to their assistance. My dear boy, you have acted very bravely and nobly, and your schoolfellows should be proud of you!"

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Algernon.

He sat down with crimson cheeks.

Vere Beauclerc squeezed his arm.

"Algy, you awful ass!" he whispered.

"You thumping idiot!" said Frank Richards. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"Silence, please!" said Miss Meadows.

"We will now resume lessons."

And lessons went on. But when Cedar Creek was dismissed that afternoon a swarming crowd gathered round Algernon as he emerged from the School House. A dozen fellows wanted to shake his hand all at once, while a dozen others thumped him heartily on the back—much to Algy's discomfort.

"You silly gopher!" Bob Lawless roared in his ear. "Why didn't you tell us? Why couldn't you—"

"My dear ass, I told you what you asked me," answered Algernon.

"You let us think—"

"I'm not responsible for what you think, old top. My idea is that you shouldn't start thinkin'," said Algernon calmly. "You're not used to it, and—"

"I've a jolly good mind to punch your silly head," said Bob Lawless. "You were pulling our legs again—"

Algy chuckled.

"Lettin' you pull it yourself, old scout," he answered. "That's all. Hallo, what are you fellows at? Oh, gad!"

The Honourable Algernon was seized by half a dozen fellows and hoisted shoulder-high and paraded round the playground amid thundering cheers.

"Oh, crumbs! Mind my bags! You're rumpling my bags!" wailed Algernon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah!"

And the Honourable Algernon, in spite of his fears for his elegant "bags," enjoyed his triumph.

THE END.

S.S.

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LOST

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FOUND.

FANCY losing a bunch of keys in the middle of a desert, and then, several months later, arriving accidentally at the very same spot and finding them again!

This extraordinary experience befell a R.A.F. pilot, Squadron-leader H. M. Probyn, when he was on service in the East. Flying over the desert one day, Probyn found his engine needed attention, and landed in the middle of a sandy waste to put the trouble right. The repair made, he took off again, but later found he had lost a bunch of keys.

Some time after he was flying over the same desert when once again the engine "conked." He landed, and on getting out of his machine the first thing he saw was the missing keys!

The Angler's Luck.

Freak cases of "lost and found" like the one related are always cropping up. Here's one that occurred at a famous seaside holiday resort.

A man fishing off the end of the pier leant over the balustrade to look at the water below, and his watch fell out of his pocket into the sea. Of course, there was no way of recovering it, so the man went on fishing.

A few minutes later he pulled up a big fish. When he took it home and had it cut open, there was the watch inside the fish—and it was still going!

A watch figures in another extraordinary coincidence that a farmer related to a newspaperman some time ago. This farmer lost his watch while ploughing in a field one day. He looked for it everywhere—even digging

up the ground at the spot where he must have lost it.

A year later he was ploughing the same field, when he turned up the watch and chain. The field had been ploughed four times and harrowed twice in the interval between losing the watch and finding it again!

The Rudder Returns!

But all these incidents seem insignificant compared with a strange happening that befell Sir Ernest Shackleton on one of his expeditions to the Antarctic.

Sir Ernest's exploration ship had just reached South Georgia, which is the nearest inhabited land to the South Pole, when the boat's rudder became detached and floated off. Before it could be recovered the bay in which the ship was lying became filled with ice, which blocked the entrance to the outer sea.

Unable to retrieve the rudder, Shackleton and his men took shelter in a cove. Three days later came an alteration in the tide, and strong currents, aided by wind, cleared the bay of ice. What followed seems almost like a miracle. "The rudder," says Shackleton, "with all the broad Atlantic to sail in, and the coasts of two continents to search for a resting-place, came lobbing back into our cove."

That grim joke of Nature has its counterpart in the story of a Hudson Bay fur-trapper caught upon an ice-floe which broke away from an ice-field and floated out to sea.

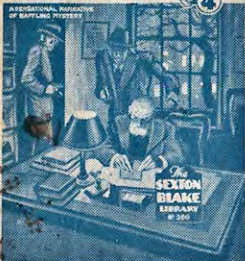
For a day and a night the trapper was borne into the unknown on his unusual raft, without food, fire, or shelter, in a temperature that never rose above sixty-four degrees of frost.

Then the wind and tide turned, and the ice-floe was carried back to its starting-point. When rescued the fur-trapper had frozen feet and his blood had almost turned to ice in his veins. But he lived to tell the tale of the land which was lost and found.

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