

The REBELLION at PACKSADDLE!

by FRANK RICHARDS



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== MODERN BOY ==

THE 1938 PAPER FOR THE 1938 BOY!

THE REBELLION AT PACKSADDLE!

By FRANK RICHARDS



"Give us back our Bill, or put up with the consequences!" is the war-cry of the Packsaddle Bunch, who are up in arms against the dismissal of their old headmaster, BILL SAMPSON!

CHAPTER 1.

Gun-Play at Packsaddle School!

"TWO-GUN!" exclaimed Slick Poindexter breathlessly. "Two-Gun Carson!" muttered Dick Carr.

"I guess that spells trouble!" said Mick Kavanagh.

The Packsaddle bunch had come out of the chuckhouse after breakfast.

Every eye was fixed on Two-Gun Carson at once. And then glances swept towards the timber schoolhouse, in expectation of seeing Bill Sampson, headmaster of Packsaddle, come striding out.

"By gum!" muttered Big Steve. "It's sure my popper! I guess Bill is

going to get the goods put on him now."

And Steve Carson grinned. "Aw, can it, you geck!" growled Slick. "I'll say that Bill can handle all the gunmen in Texas, and he won't make more'n one chew of Two-Gun."

Steve sneered.

"You watch out!" he answered.

Two-Gun Carson, after a glance round, came towards the crowd of schoolboys. The poker sharp of Packsaddle was perfectly cool, though his errand to see Bill Sampson that morning was rather like bearding a lion in his den. He called to Big Steve.

"Say, Steve, is Bill Sampson around?"

"I guess he's at chuck in the schoolhouse, popper," answered Steve.

"Put him wise that he's wanted."

"Sure!" grinned Steve.

He cut across to the schoolhouse.

The rest of the bunch stood staring at Two-Gun. The cool, slim, rather handsome gunman of Packsaddle waited with his hands resting on his gun-belt. There was rather a thrill in the Packsaddle bunch. They guessed why Two-Gun had come, and they wondered whether there was going to be gun-play in the playground of Packsaddle School.

Gunman and gambler as he was, Two-Gun was a member of the school committee of the cow town. And all the bunch had a shrewd idea that it was Steve's father who had led that committee into "firing" Bill, and appointing a new headmaster in his place. Only Bill had emphatically refused to be "fired"; and the new headmaster, having arrived, had departed again at top speed, with Bill "fanning" him with bullets as he fled. The bunch did not expect Mr. Scadder to horn in again till Bill was gone. But Bill was not gone—and showed no sign of going.

There was a sudden yell from the schoolhouse. Out from the porch came Steve Carson, flying, and an enormous cowman's boot appeared behind him.

Two-Gun knitted his brows. The bunch grinned.

Steve no doubt had failed in respect in announcing to his headmaster that a member of the Packsaddle School Committee had horned in to see him. Anyhow, out he came, with Bill Sampson's boot helping him.

Big Steve yelled and crashed. Bill Sampson glanced round and came striding towards Two-Gun. And the Packsaddle poker sharp, who packed two guns—whence his name—moved his hands a little closer to the butts. Bill, with a grim frown on his bearded face, strode up. He waved the bunch back, dropped his hands into the pockets of

his leather crackers, and faced Two-Gun with a grim inquiring stare.

"Shoot!" he said tersely.

"I guess the committee have asked me to mosey along," said Carson. "You sure did get mad with Marshal Lick and Mr. Wash when they horned in to tell you you was fired, Bill—"

"And they ain't honing for no more?" asked Bill.

"Nopel!"

"And they sent you to talk turkey to me—you being a gun-slinger," said Bill. "Well, I guess no goldarned gun-slinger ain't going to see me vamoose the ranch out of this here school. Spill what you've got to spill, Mr. Carson—and there's the gate."

"The gate's for you, Bill Sampson!" answered Two-Gun coolly. "I guess you ain't handling this baby like you did the marshal and that fat guy, Wash, and Scadder! Nunk! But I ain't heading for trouble—I guess I'm here to put you wise how the matter stands. You're fired—"

"Not the whole lot!" said Bill. "I want to see the guy that's going to fire me."

"Dismissed by the school committee!" said Carson. "Unanimous vote—"

"Got 'em in your pocket, ain't you?" said Bill.

Carson shrugged his slim shoulders. "What they say, goes!" he answered. "I guess they was sure surprised, after dismissing their headmaster at this here school, to be told that you wouldn't hit the trail, Bill! You can't get away with that!"

"Mebbe I'll surprise them some more afore I'm through!" said Bill Sampson. "I'm headmaster of this hyer school! That doggoned committee roped me in off'n the Kicking Mule Ranch to run this caboodle, and I'll tell a man that I'm running it! No Marshal Lick, and no Storekeeper Wash ain't going to fire this infant! Not so's you'd notice it! And no doggoned gun-slinger! Get me?"

"I'm here to give you notice—"

"Notice nothing!" said Bill.

"That you got to get out——"

"Forget it!"

"Or force will be used," said Two-Gun. "I reckon you figure yourself a big chief, Bill, but you can't get away with this. You ain't headmaster of Packsaddle now—Elias Scadder is headmaster! I guess Rancher 'Dunwoody will take you back into his outfit if you has to go back to punching cows. You got three months' salary waiting for you at Wash's office, if you call for it. You got to go!"

Bill, hands in pockets, stood looking at him.

The bunch gazed on breathlessly.

Excepting Steve Carson, every fellow at Packsaddle was keen on the side of the headmaster. The bare idea of "firing" Bill roused the deepest indignation in the Packsaddle bunch. With that one exception, the whole bunch stood for Bill.

Nevertheless, it was a peculiar position for the headmaster of Packsaddle to defy the school committee, who certainly had the power to dismiss him so far as the law went. But they did not give a boiled bean for the law at Packsaddle.

If Bill was going to put up a fight for it, all the bunch were behind him. And it appeared that he was!

Bill Sampson spoke at last.

"I get you, Two-Gun! You been arter my scalp ever since I allowed that a gun-slinging gambler of your heft oughter be run out of the town on a rail. You got your teeth into me, Two-Gun, and you're a-biting! I'm mentioning that I don't stand for it."

"You going?" asked Two-Gun.

"Not so's you'd notice it."

"You'll be put!"

"Sez you!"

"The marshal and his men will come up here and put you out by force," said Two-Gun, "and I guess if there's gunplay, Bill Sampson, you're more likely than not to go up on a branch."

"You've spilled a mouthful," said

Bill. "Now beat it while you're in one piece, you sneaking lobo-wolf of a poker sharp! I guess I give you one minute to get outer that gate."

"I guess I'm hanging on here to lend a hand when they put you out on the trail!" said the gunman coolly.

Bill, his hands still in his trousers pockets, made a movement towards him. Instantly Two-Gun Carson whipped out a Colt and had the schoolmaster of Packsaddle covered.

There was a shout from the bunch.

"Stick 'em up, Bill Sampson!" said Two-Gun in a quiet tone of menace. "Stick your paws over your head, old-timer, and walk out of that gate! You pull a gun, and I guess it's you for the long jump."

Bang!

It was not Carson's gun that roared.

The report—and the bullet—came from Bill's pocket. Bill Sampson was the best shot in Santana County, and it was not the first time, by many a one, that he had fired from the pocket. And the Packsaddle bunch, with a gasp, realised that their headmaster had had the gunman covered all the time—as Two-Gun realised too late.

Carson's Colt went with a crash to the ground. His hand hung at his side, numbed by the shock, a strip of skin torn from one finger by the bullet that had crashed on his gun and knocked it from his grasp.

But Carson was a two-gun man! Even as he yelled with the shock and the pain, his left hand grabbed his second gun from his belt.

"Forget it!" snapped Bill.

His hand was out of his pocket now. His smoking revolver looked the gunman in the face in the twinkling of an eye.

Over the levelled gun Bill's eyes were grim. And Carson did not raise his left hand.

"Drop your hardware!" snapped Bill.

The gun clanged on the ground. Carson, with crimson dripping from his cut hand, stood trembling with rage.

The schoolmaster of Packsaddle had beaten the two-gun man at gun-play!

"Now quit!" said Bill grimly. "I guess I'm letting you off cheap, you doggoned gun-slinger! You moseyed in here to bulldoze me—why, you ornery piecan, you couldn't bulldoze a gopher! You want to beat it, and beat it pronto! If you ain't out that gate in two jumps I'll sure fan you with bullets like I did that guy Scadder!"

One fierce, vengeful look the gunman gave him, and then he jumped for the gate! Big Steve gritted his teeth, but the rest of the Packsaddle bunch gave a shout of laughter as the gunman ran. Bill, with a grunt, strode back to the schoolhouse. A little later, Tin Tung clanged the school bell, and the bunch went into class with Small Brown.

But all the bunch knew that there would be little in the way of school that day! They did not listen to Small Brown—they listened for the beat of horses' hoofs, of the marshal of Packsaddle and his men coming, gun in hand, to enforce the dismissal of the schoolmaster who refused to be "fired." Every guy in the bunch knew that that was going to be an historic day at the cow town school.

CHAPTER 2.

Dick Carr's Ride!

"SILENCE in the class!" squealed Small Brown.

He squealed in vain.

Nearly every guy in the bunch was talking or whispering. Had Bill been present no doubt there would have been silence. But Bill Sampson was not in his accustomed place at the high desk.

Bill was in his "office"—doubtless expecting visitors. Visitors were likely to come in the shape of Marshal Lick and his posse. The bunch thrilled with excitement at the thought of it.

Small Brown was supposed to be teaching his class geography. But they

were not getting much geographical knowledge from Mr. Brown. Slick Poindexter, with a thoughtful frown on his face, was speaking to Dick Carr and Mick Kavanagh. Small Brown's squeal passed him unheeded.

"I guess I got the big idea, you'uns," muttered Slick. "You can lay a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent that the marshal will be along to-day with his outfit. Where does Bill come in?"

"They won't fire Bill!" said Mick. "I guess that guy Two-Gun won't mosey along with the marshal's crowd, anyhow. He's got his."

"You said it," agreed Slick. "But now Bill's gone off on his ear they'll sure bring enough galoots to handle him. Bill's some scrapper, but a dozen guys will put paid to him."

Dick Carr nodded with a wrinkled brow. In his first days at Packsaddle the tenderfoot had been astonished to see a schoolmaster like Bill. A headmaster in a ten-gallon hat, red shirt, and cowman's boots, who packed a gun, and kept order in the school-room with a cow-whip, had surprised and rather amused the schoolboy from the Old Country. But he had learned to like and respect Bill; and he was on the headmaster's side, tooth and toenail. But the outlook seemed to him doubtful. The town marshal of Packsaddle had force at his command, and he was going to use it—and he had the law on his side, for what that was worth in Santana County. Dick was indignant—but he was worried and anxious as well.

"What's the big idea, Slick?" he asked. "If it's anything to back up Bill, you've only got to cough it up."

"Bill was a puncher on Kicking Mule afore he started in to ride herd here," said Slick. "He's got friends on Kicking Mule—I'll say the whole outfit would horn in, body and boots, if they knowed that Bill wasn't getting fair play. I reckon they got to be put wise."

Mick's eyes gleamed.

"Slick, old-timer, you've shouted a

mouthfull!" he said eagerly. "If they knowed on Kicking Mule——"

"They got to know," said Slick, "and they got to know pronto."

"But how?" said Dick Carr.

"You got the fastest pony in Texas," said Poindexter, "and you got on the right side of Barney Bailey, the Kicking Mule foreman, along of helping him round up the brand-blotters what was stealing cows on the ranch. I guess you want to hit Kicking Mule——"

"But we're in class!"

Slick snorted.

"Forget it!" he snapped.

"I mean, Bill wouldn't stand for a fellow cutting class——"

"Bill ain't here, and I guess you don't want to yowl out to him when you go. But if you ain't honing for it, I'll take your pony and ride for Kicking Mule——"

Dick Carr rose to his feet.

"I'm game!" he said.

"Carr! Sit down! Sit down at once!" squealed Small Brown.

Dick did not even answer him. He had no time to waste on Small Brown. He started towards the door on the porch—and paused. Bill's office opened on the porch, and he did not want to meet up with Bill. He was going to get help for Bill Sampson, but any fellow seen breaking herd in lesson-time was certain to be rounded up by Bill's quirt.

Dick turned and cut across to the open window.

"Carr!" gasped Small Brown.

Dick was out of the window the next moment. He dropped to the ground and cut across to the corral.

Swiftly he called his pinto and saddled and bridled him. He was going—and he hoped to go unseen by Bill.

But Bill, though he was not riding herd in the school-room as usual that morning, and though he had plenty of other matters on his mind, was not deaf. The clatter of hoofs in the playground brought him to his window. He stared at Dick riding for the gate and roared:

"Say, you Carr! You breaking herd? Get back to the school-room pronto."

Dick waved his hand and rode for the gate. Bill stayed only to grasp his quirt and rushed out of the house.

The gate was closed. Dick had intended to dismount and open it, but there was no time. Bill was barring his path by now.

He gave his pinto a touch of the spur, and the horse rose to the leap. High over the headmaster and the gate flew the pony, the lash of Bill's quirt just missing the rider.

Clatter! came the hoofs on the sun-baked trail outside the gate. Dick did not pause. Down the trail he went at a gallop.

Bill brandished the quirt over the gate after him.

"Say, you young gink!" he roared, "I'll sure quirt you a whole lot! I'm telling you to pull in! You hear me whisper."

Dick heard his headmaster "whisper"—that whisper could have been heard from the Rio Frio to the cow town. But he did not heed. He galloped on, and vanished from Bill's angry eyes.

Pep, the pinto, was, as Slick had said, the fastest pony in Texas. And Dick stretched his mount to full speed. It was possible that Bill might ride after him to round him up—also, he wanted to hit Kicking Mule at the earliest possible moment.

Whether Bill pursued him or not, he did not know. He did not sight his headmaster again. Pep, urged on by his rider, fairly flew, his heels seeming hardly to touch the grass as he galloped.

Mile after mile of rolling prairie vanished under those galloping hoofs. Dick enjoyed the rapid gallop in the wind and sunshine; it was undoubtedly more enjoyable than geography with Small Brown. He passed herds of cows, and Kicking Mule punchers riding herd, but he did not pause till the ranch came in sight.

The gate was open, and Dick dashed

in, reining in his pony before the bunk-house. Half a dozen Kicking Mule men stared at Dick.

"Say, you young guy, what you doing out of school?" called out Mesquite Sam.

Dick panted:

"Barney Bailey here?"

"Yep—chewing the rag with Mr. Dunwoody over at the piazza."

Dick rode to the piazza in the front of the ranch-house. Mr. Dunwoody, the rancher, sat there in a rocking-chair, talking to his foreman, who stood by his horse at the steps. Both of them stared at the Packsaddle schoolboy.

Dick swept off his Stetson in salute.

"Barney!" he gasped.

Barney Bailey gave him a nod and a grin. There had been a time when Barney had trailed the Packsaddle tenderfoot with a quirt. But they had made friends since then.

"Who's this?" asked the rancher.

"It's the young guy who put me wise about the brand-blotters," answered Barney. "Say, what's the rookus, young Carr? What's Bill let you out of the herd for?"

Dick laughed breathlessly.

"I'm not let out; I've stampeded, and Bill got after me with a quirt!" he gasped. "Bill's in trouble, Barney, and I've come to tell you. Bill doesn't know, but—"

"What's the trouble?"

"They've fired Bill, and the marshal's coming up with his crowd to put him out of the school!" panted Dick.

"Jerusalem crickets!" yelled Barney.

"Bill fired! I guess them guys in Packsaddle must be plumb loco! Didn't they rope in Bill off'n this hyer ranch to ride herd at the school? This'll be Two-Gun Carson's doing! I'll say that tin-horn gambler has sure got his teeth into Bill!"

"Putting Bill Sampson out of the school!" said the rancher. "I guess Kicking Mule ain't standing for that!"

"I'll say nope!" roared Barney.

"I guess if Bill wants to quit, he can

come back here and punch cows, and I'll give him the glad hand!" said the rancher. "But Bill's going to have fair play!"

"You said it," rapped Barney, "and this here outfit is going to see that he gets it!"

"Take every man that's around, and ride, Barney!" said the rancher.

And the Kicking Mule foreman did not wait for him to speak twice.

Five minutes later Dick Carr was hitting the trail for Packsaddle again, riding with Barney Bailey and a dozen men of Kicking Mule. Every man in the crowd packed a gun, and faces were grim under Stetson hats. Bill's old comrades of the Kicking Mule were standing for Bill; and if Marshal Lick was going to put the Packsaddle headmaster out on the trail that day, Marshal Lick had a tough bone to chew.

CHAPTER 3.

An Advance in Force!

STEVE CARSON looked from the school-room window, and grinned.

It was close on time for the class to end; but the bell had not rung, and the bunch were still in the school-room. The thudding of hoofs on the trail floated in at the open windows and caused every heart to beat. The marshal and his men were coming! Slick and Mick hoped that it might be the Kicking Mule crowd; they could not be long now, if they were coming. But the grin on Big Steve's face as he looked out told another tale.

"Silence! Sit down!" squealed Small Brown, unheeded.

Every fellow in the bunch was on his feet now.

"I guess it's Ezra Lick!" grinned Steve. "Say, you guys, I reckon Bill will be put out on the trail—"

"Can it, you skunk!" roared Slick Poindexter, his eyes blazing at the bully of Packsaddle.

"You watch out!" grinned Steve.

"Here comes old Lick, with nine or ten guys to back him up, and that dog-goned bull-dozer, Bill Sampson, will sure get his if he kicks up a rookus!"

"You pesky piecan!" shouted Pie Sanders. "Every guy in this bunch is standing for Bill, and don't you forget it! We won't have Scadder!"

"I guess you'll get Scadder, whether you want him or not!" retorted Steve. "And I'll say I'll be plumb glad to see Bill put on the trail!"

That was enough for the angry bunch. Slick Poindexter led a rush at Steve, and he was collared on all sides. Any fellow who said a word against Bill that day at Packsaddle was asking for it.

"Order!" squealed Small Brown. "Order! I will call Mr. Sampson! Order!"

Steve, yelling, went sprawling along the floor in a dozen pairs of hands. Small Brown waved his pointer—till Slick jerked it from his hand and applied it to the sprawling Steve. It whacked again and again on Big Steve's riding-breeches, and Steve's frantic yells rang all over Packsaddle School.

"You pesky polecat!" panted Slick. "That's yours—and that—and that—and that! You want Bill put on the trail, do you, you ornery piecan! I reckon if Bill's put on the trail through your pesky popper pulling the strings, we'll ride you on a rail out of the school soon after!"

"You said it!" roared Mick Kavanagh. "Say, don't keep the guy all to yourself! Give me a chance with this inkpot!"

"Let up, you piecans!" yelled Steve, struggling wildly. "I'll say—Groooogh! Ooooooh! Wooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the bunch, as Mick got in with the inkpot.

Ink flooded into Steve's mouth as he roared, and he gasped and gurgled horribly.

There was a heavy tramp of feet across the porch. The uproar was bringing Bill to the spot.

The Packsaddle headmaster glared into the school-room, quirt in hand. Marshal Lick and his men were riding in at the gate, opened for them by Hank, the hired man; but Bill did not heed. Bill was still headmaster of Packsaddle School, and he gave his attention to the uproarious bunch.

"Say, what's this jamboree?" roared Bill. "You guys figure that you're going to make whoopee in lesson-time? You figure that I ain't your headmaster no longer, like them galoots along to Packsaddle allow? You want to forget it, you young ginks!"

Bill waded in with the quirt. Steve Carson was released as suddenly as if he had become red-hot.

There was a wild scampering among the desks to escape the whacks of the quirt.

Steve, spluttering ink, rolled on the floor. He gasped and gurgled and spluttered. Every other fellow was dodging the quirt, though not successfully. Poindexter yelled as he got it across his shoulders.

"Let up, Bill, you old guy!" he bel-lowed. "We're sure standing for you, you pesky old bonehead!"

"Standing nothing!" shouted Bill. "You got to sit quiet and I'arn from Mr. Brown, what's teaching you jobrafy!"

There was a tramping of hoofs in the playground, a jingling of spurs and bridles, as the horsemen dismounted. The voice of Ezra Lick, the marshal of Packsaddle, was heard shouting:

"Say, you around, Bill Sampson?"

Bill did not heed or answer. Lessons were not yet over, and he herded the bunch back to their places. It said much for the loyalty of the Packsaddle bunch that they were still as keen as ever on Bill's side after he had finished restoring order in the school-room. They squirmed on the pinewood benches.

Marshal Lick tramped in at the porch. He had his hand very near a gun as he looked into the school-room.

Bill turned towards him.

"Beat it!" he roared.

"I guess——"

"I've put you wise afore this, Ezra Lick, that guys ain't allowed to horn into this hyer school while lessons is on!" roared Bill. "If you've come to chew the rag, you wait till the bell goes!"

"I'm telling you——" shouted Ezra Lick.

"Telling nothing! Git!"

"We've brought Scadder——"

"Scadder nothing! You beating it?" demanded Bill, striding towards the doorway, his eyes gleaming under his Stetson hat.

"You doggoned, obstinate old prairie wolf!" yelled the enraged marshal. "I guess we're here to see you put on the trail, and put in Scadder! The school committee——"

"Doggone the school committee!"

"The law——"

"Doggone the law!"

"And you a schoolmaster!" hooted Mr. Lick. "You chew the rag that-away——"

"I ain't chewing the rag any in lesson-time! I guess you can spill all you want arter the bell's gone!"

With that Bill made a grasp at the marshal of Packsaddle. Ezra Lick whirled in the air in his powerful hands.

Bill strode through the porch with him, glared at the waiting crowd outside, and hurled the town marshal fairly into their midst.

There was a roar as Ezra Lick crashed, knocking his followers right and left.

"Now wait for the bell!" roared Bill.

"No guy is hornin in here while lessons is on!"

Bill slammed the door in the faces of the marshal's outfit. He turned back into the school-room.

"Mr. Brown——"

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir!" gasped Small Brown.

"Hit that jobrafy."

Small Brown resumed geography and the bunch gave him attention, under Bill's eyes. Outside the marshal's crowd muttered and murmured—and Ezra Lick rubbed a collection of bruises. But they waited till Tin Tung rang the bell for the end of morning lessons.

CHAPTER 4.

Bill Sampson's Good-bye!

"GIT!" roared Bill.

The bunch, dismissed from school, were generally glad to "get." But on this occasion they lingered round the schoolhouse porch.

Marshal Lick stood there and seven men were with him—his deputies from Packsaddle, grim-faced men who packed guns. Standing back from them was the bony, long-legged Mr. Scadder—the new headmaster of Packsaddle, if the school committee got shut of Bill! Mr. Scadder, in his store clothes and Derby hat, looked rather out of place—and he looked very uneasy and nervous. That new headmaster, with vast stores of book-knowledge, had been imported into Packsaddle as an improvement on the cow-puncher schoolmaster, who had hitherto run the school. Book-knowledge was useful and valuable in a headmaster—but some other qualities, too, were required to run a rough and tough cow town school and Mr. Scadder did not look as if he possessed them.

But he was there to take possession—to be installed in the place of the dismissed headmaster. The marshal and his men had come in force, to put it through. It was not through yet, however.

Bill waved a hand at the staring bunch.

"Git!" he repeated. "You young geeks, you figure that you want to stop hot lead? Git, I'm telling you!"

"We're standing for you, Bill!" shouted Slick Poindexter.

"Aw, can it, you young geck!" retorted Bill. "You beat it, pronto, or I'll sure hand you a few with the quirt."

Reluctantly the bunch backed to a distance. But they remained within view, looking on with breathless excitement.

Bill, standing in front of the porch, his thumbs hooked in his gun-belt, faced the marshal and his men. He hardly glanced at Mr. Scadder.

"Now, you Lick!" said Bill. "Lessons is over, and if you got anything to spill, shoot!"

Ezra Lick gave his bruises a final rub, glanced at his posse, and answered:

"You're wise to it that you're fired, Bill. I guess the guys along to Packsaddle honed to let you down easy, but you wouldn't be let. Now you got the boot. Here's Mr. Scadder, a guy what has come to take your place, and I'll say that he can lay over a doggoned uneducated cowpuncher of your heft! Yep! You hitting the trail?"

"Not a whole lot!" answered Bill.

"Chew on it that we're here on business!" warned Mr. Lick. "If you don't hoof it, you'll be put."

"I want to see the guy that's going to put me!" said Bill.

"That the lot?" demanded the Packsaddle marshal.

"You said it!"

Marshal Lick turned to his posse.

"Put that galoot out of that she-bang!" he said.

Bill's gun was glinting in the sunshine before the cow town marshal had finished speaking. Steady as a rock in the steady hand of Bill Sampson, it looked the marshal and his crowd in their faces.

"Go slow!" said Bill.

"You doggoned geck!" roared Mr. Lick. "You burn powder, and I guess there will be gun-play, and sure—"

"Can it!" interrupted Bill. "If you've come a-shootin', get on with it."

Hands were grasping guns. From a distance the bunch stared on with excited faces and beating hearts. Bill, alone and unaided, was standing up to the crowd that had come to put him out on the trail. Slick Poindexter cast a longing glance towards the gateway. From the prairie trail came a thunder of hoofs, and Slick yelled:

"Glory be! Here comes Kicking Mule!"

Bill Sampson and the Packsaddle crowd turned to stare at the gateway as the crashing hoofs thundered from the trail. Dick Carr, on his pinto, came galloping in, waving his hat.

Fast after him came the Kicking Mule outfit—a dozen men in chaps and Stetsons, cracking their quirts, and spurring their broncos.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Bill Sampson. He stared blankly at that unexpected reinforcement.

"I'll say Dick's worked the rifle!" roared Slick Poindexter. "I'll tell a man this is a sight for sore eyes!"

"You said it!" chuckled Mick.

Dick dashed up to the bunch and dismounted.

"We're in time!" he panted.

"Sure!" chuckled Poindexter. "I'll tell all Texas them guys will crawl out at the little end of the horn, and then some."

Barney Bailey and his punchers rode up to the schoolhouse with a thunder of hoofs and a cracking of quirts.

The Packsaddle men eyed them grimly. Guns were drawn, and faces were grimly set. The Kicking Mule punchers dropped from their broncos, leaving them to run in the playground. They tramped up to the porch, to stand by Bill.

"Say, how come?" gasped the amazed Bill.

Barney Bailey chuckled.

"I'll say that young geck, Carr, put us wise, Bill," he answered, "and we sure hit the trail hell-for-leather to see you through. I guess you ain't going

to be fired from this here school, old-timer—not so's you'd notice it."

"Not by a jugful!" roared Mesquite Sam, brandishing a long-barrelled Colt. "Mr. Dunwoody and all the bunch will be plumb glad to see you back at the ranch, Bill, if you want to quit school-mastering for punching cows again. But if you're holding on, this outfit is going to see you through. And I got a gat what says so!"

Bill nodded slowly.

The Kicking Mule punchers gathered round him, guns in hand, eyes gleaming under shady Stetsons. Facing them stood the marshal of Packsaddle and his men—with grim faces, also guns in hand. Mr. Scadder backed farther away. Bullets were no respecters of persons, and all Mr. Scadder's book-knowledge would not have helped him out, if he had been hit by a chunk of lead from a Colt.

Barney Bailey waved his gun at Marshal Lick.

"Beat it, Ezra!" he said. "We ain't honing for trouble with you, or any galoot along to Packsaddle. But we're standing by Bill. Bill's headmaster of this caboodle, and he stays headmaster."

"I guess not!" said Ezra Lick. "I guess I got my dooty to do, and I'll say that my side-kickers will stand for me! And I'll say this, Bill Sampson—I don't figure that you've had right treatment, and I'll allow that the guys along to Packsaddle what have fired you are a bunch of boneheads and cheap skates. But that ain't neither here nor there. And I'll say this—I'm s'prised at you, a schoolmaster, going off on your ear this-a-way, and setting a doggoned bad example to your bunch!"

Bill was silent.

"If there's gun-play——" said Marshal Lick.

"There'll sure be gun-play pronto if you don't beat it!" roared Barney Bailey. "You want to hit the trail—and hit it quick!"

"I'll tell a man I ain't hitting no

trail!" said Mr. Lick. "I'm putting Bill on that trail, and sticking that gopher Scadder in the school, according to law!"

"You goldarned piecan, Ezra Lick!" said Bill Sampson. "Here's a dozen good men, every guy packing a gun, what says you ain't! You begin a-shooting and there won't be a grease-spot left of your caboodle!"

"Mebbe!" said the marshal. "Mebbe! But I got my dooty to do, Bill, and this is sure the first time you've stood agin me doing it!"

"You've spilled enough!" snapped Barney Bailey. "Git!"

"Foller me, boys!" said the marshal, and he came steadily on, gun in hand. And his men followed him.

There was a breathless instant. Then Bill Sampson lowered his Colt.

With a sigh the headmaster of Packsaddle drove the revolver back into the holster of his belt.

Bill was angry. He was indignant. But the marshal's appeal had not been lost on him. Little as he looked the part, Bill was a schoolmaster—and a good one. Was he setting a bad example to the bunch in rebelling against law and order? He was—and he had to chew on it! It was bitter to Bill, but he got it down.

"Pack your guns, you'uns," said Bill quietly.

The punchers stared at him, or, rather, glared.

"Say, you gone loco?" demanded Barney Bailey. "Ain't we here to see you through, and ain't we the guys to chew up that crowd, body and boots?"

"Yep!" said Bill. "And I'll say I'm powerful obliged to you, old-timer, and I guess no guy could have better friends. But I ain't seeing no man's juice split agin the law on my account."

"You ain't hitting the trail?" yelled Mesquite Sam.

Bill nodded.

"I'm sure hitting the trail!" he said. "Ezra spilled a bibful, and I guess he's

got the right cow by the ear. Pack your guns, I'm telling you! I guess I'm through with Packsaddle School, and if Mr. Dunwoody will give me a job I'm going back to punching cows."

There was an angry growl from the punchers. But the guns were packed. Bill called to Dick Carr:

"Hyer, you Carr! I guess I ought to give you the quirt for breaking herd this morning, but I ain't your schoolmaster now. You hit the corral and tote along my cayuse, kid!"

"You're not going, Bill?" panted Dick.

"I guess I'm going as soon as I've packed a grip!" said Bill. "You hump along with that cayuse."

He walked into the schoolhouse.

"Bill!"

"Don't go!"

"We're standing for you, old-timer!"

Bill, with his few worldly possessions packed in a bag on his horse, stood holding the reins. The bunch gathered round him with dismayed faces. The rugged, bearded face of the cow town schoolmaster worked. He looked round the playground, the bunkhouse, the chuckhouse—a last look—then his eyes rested on the Packsaddle bunch. There was a lump in Bill's throat. But his voice was steady as he spoke:

"Boys, I guess it's good-bye! I guess I done my best for this bunch, and I sure have quirted you a few, and I'll say you needed it, and then some! Mebbe them guys is right and I ain't no great shakes of a schoolmaster! But I done my best, and I guess this bunch ain't none the worse for it! I'll say it gets my goat to quit, but there ain't no two ways about it. I want to ask you suthin' afore I hit the trail."

He paused a moment.

"Give your noo schoolmaster a chance," he went on. "Stand by Mr. Scadder like you've stood by me, and help him to make good at Packsaddle."

That's the whole lot! Good-bye, buddies!"

"Good-bye, Bill!"

The bunch stood and watched as Bill Sampson rode away from the school in the midst of the Kicking Mule punchers. They watched, till a fold of the prairie hid the horsemen from their sight. And even then they could hardly believe that they had lost Bill—that Packsaddle School was to see him no more.

CHAPTER 5.

The Bunch Miss Bill!

"BILL'S gone!" muttered Dick Carr.

Even yet the Packsaddle bunch could hardly believe it.

The bright sunshine of the Texas morning streamed down on the cow town school and the shining waters of the Rio Frio. The bunch had come out from breakfast in the chuckhouse, and Tin Tung was clanging the bell for school. Small Brown, the Packsaddle teacher, whisked across from his cabin to the schoolhouse, his horn-rimmed spectacles flashing back the rays of the sun. A new day had dawned on Packsaddle School—a new day's work was to begin—with so tremendous a change that the Packsaddlers simply could not get used to it.

Bill was gone!

"I guess it ain't the same old caboodle without Bill!" said Slick Poindexter sadly.

"You said it!" mumbled Dick Kavanagh glumly.

Dick Carr's face was clouded. The tenderfoot of Packsaddle had learned to like Bill and respect him. As deeply as any guy in the bunch, the English schoolboy resented the action of the school committee in Packsaddle Town in "firing" Bill and installing a new headmaster in his place. But resentment was keen on all sides. Mr. Wash, the chairman of the committee, or Two-Gun Carson, its most influential

member, would have been hardly safe in the Packsaddle playground that morning.

Only Steve Carson wore a grin. Steve had a deadly frown against Bill, and it was his popper who had "worked the raffle" and got Bill Sampson dismissed. Steve gloated openly, but other fellows gave him dark looks.

In the porch, where the Packsaddlers almost expected to see the brawny figure of Bill appear, so used were they to it, another figure appeared—tall and thin, in a black coat.

It was Elias Scadder, the new headmaster.

He was not a pleasant-looking man. Tall as he was, he was a mere wisp of a man compared to Bill. He had a sharp jaw, a sharp voice, and sharp eyes with red lids. No doubt he packed great stacks of knowledge, but after Bill he was just a washout in the eyes of the Packsaddle bunch.

He had a cane in his hand. Bill had always used a quirt, herding the school bunch like a bunch of steers. A cane, no doubt, was more in keeping with a schoolmaster's position, but the rough and tough Packsaddle bunch preferred Bill and his quirt, often as they had squirmed under it in Bill's heavy hand.

"Some jay!" said Slick, with a disparaging stare at the new headmaster. "Say, big boys, what's the matter with putting his cabeza under the pump, jest to show him that we want Bill?"

"You said it!" exclaimed Mick.

"You're shouting!" agreed Pie Sanders.

"I guess you guys want to watch out!" sneered Steve Carson. "That guy Scadder won't stand for any lip, I'm telling you."

"Can it, you, Carson!"

"Pack it up, you skunk!"

Steve scowled, and "packed it up." Even his pals, Poker Parker and Slim Dixon, went with the rest of the bunch. He was the only guy who was against Bill and in favour of Bill's successor. There would have been rough hand-

ling next if Steve had not packed it up. Wisely he did.

Slick waved his Stetson.

"Who says duck that big stiff under the pump?" he shouted.

A roar came from nearly all the bunch. They were in a mood for trouble.

"Hold on, you fellows!" said Dick Carr.

"Can it, you, Carr!" roared Pie.

"Hold on! You remember what Bill said when he went—give the new man a chance to make good!" said Dick Carr. "I'd run him out of school as soon as any fellow here, or sooner. But that's the last thing Bill asked."

"Bill's sure a soft guy!" snorted Poindexter. "He was going to pull guns and make a fight for it, but he let up and let them galoots run him out. I'll say he was a soft sap!"

"Bill was right," said Dick quietly, "and he was right in asking us to give the new man a chance."

Poindexter nodded slowly. All the bunch could do for Bill now was to carry out the last wish he had uttered before he rode away from Packsaddle with the Kicking Mule punchers.

"That goes!" said Poindexter. "I guess we better herd in."

He led the way towards the porch of the schoolhouse. Dick Carr and Mick followed him, then Pie Sanders and Domingo Duque, and then the rest of the bunch. Mr. Scadder had stepped out, and he was gripping his cane with a very unpleasant expression on his scraggy face. Mr. Scadder had been scared stiff by the six-gun schoolmaster, but now that Bill was gone he figured that trouble was gone with him. In more orderly sections than Packsaddle, Elias Scadder had schoolmastered, and he did not know yet what the Packsaddle bunch was like, and did not doubt that he could handle them.

It did not cross his mind that only respect for Bill was stopping the bunch at that moment from putting his head under the school pump. Small Brown,

who knew the bunch better, was twitting with nervousness in the school-room. Mr. Brown hoped that the day would pass without a rookus. He hoped so, but he did not bank on it.

"Why are you not in school?" snapped Mr. Scadder in a high-pitched voice that was as musical as a saw with a file working on it. "How dare you remain out of class after the bell has ceased to ring!"

The bunch eyed him as a pack of prairie wolves might have done. A sign from Dick or Slick would have led a rush. But they were still mindful of Bill—tough and gruff, but loyal old Bill.

"Awe, can it!" growled Slick Poindexter. "I guess——"

Swipe!

Slick yelled as the cane came down across his shoulders.

Bony as Mr. Scadder was, he seemed to pack plenty of muscle in his skinny arm. It was some swipe!

"Silence! Go in!" he rapped.

Slick clenched his hands hard. Dick Carr touched him on the arm, and Poindexter seeming to swallow something with difficulty, went in, and the rest of the bunch followed in silence—a silence that was grim.

CHAPTER 6.

Waking Up Trouble!

SMALL BROWN was not disappointed.

The Packsaddle bunch were rough and tough. They prided themselves on it. It was a full-sized man's job to handle that bunch, and they prided themselves on that, too. Bill Sampson could not have added a column of figures with a right result; his spelling would have made a lexicographer jump. He wrote a hand that looked as if a tarantula had dipped in ink and crawled across the page. But Bill could ride herd over the bunch, and see that Mr. Brown taught them.

Bill had authority, and Mr. Brown the learning. Now there was a double allowance of learning, but the authority was another matter.

Scadder was ready to use the cane; indeed, there was a gleam and a glitter in his red-rimmed eyes that showed that he liked handling it. The question was whether the bunch would let him.

Even Bill had not always been able to keep the bunch quiet. When Bill had been absent, often and often had they made Small Brown wish himself anywhere but in Texas. Now Bill was absent for good.

Steve Carson had been the roughest and toughest in Bill's time; but it was Steve's father who had worked the change in the school, and Steve was standing for the new headmaster.

Standing for the new headmaster did not, however, mean behaving himself—to Steve! It meant throwing his weight about. Mindful of the fact that Scadder owed his position to his father, Two-Gun, Steve figured that he could do exactly as he pleased. If the cane whacked it would whack on others, not on Big Steve!

In the playground Steve had been hooted and shouted down. All the bunch had a grouch against the fellow who was down on Bill.

But in the school-room, under the eye of Scadder, Steve guessed that he would make up for it.

Mr. Scadder sat at Bill's old desk, watching the class with his red-rimmed eyes, while Small Brown dealt with them. Perhaps those red-rimmed eyes did not observe Steve heave a geography book at the head of Slick Poindexter.

But certainly Mr. Scadder's long ears heard the yell that came from Slick as the volume crashed on the side of his head.

"Silence!" squealed Small Brown.

"Silence!" shrilled Mr. Scadder.

Heedless of both, Slick grabbed up the book and took aim at the grinning Steve.

Mr. Scadder bounded forward, cane in hand.

"Drop that book at once!" he thundered.

Slick glared at him.

"Say, didn't you see that guy heave it at my cabeza?" he roared.

"Put it down!"

Steve chuckled. As Poindexter did not obey, Scadder gave him a cut across the arm with the cane.

Slick yelled and dropped the book.

Dick Carr's eyes glittered. Mick breathed hard and deep. This was the guy Bill wanted them to give a chance to make good. This was how he was beginning. Not a word to Steve. The son of Two-Gun Carson clearly was going to be a privileged person. And the bully of Packsaddle was the hombre to take the fullest advantage of it.

"Say you, Poindexter, you hand me that book!" drawled Steve Carson, grinning.

"Doggone you!" roared Slick. "I guess——"

"Pick up that book at once!" thundered Mr. Scadder. "I will keep order in this school! You will remember that you have a schoolmaster now, not a roughneck from a ranch!"

"Why, you pesky galoot!" roared Slick. "You ain't man enough to clean Bill's boots!"

Swipe!

"Gum! I—I—I guess——"

"Pick up that book! Return it to Carson at once!" yapped Mr. Scadder. "I shall cane you severely——"

"You doggoned old piecan!" gasped Slick.

He stooped and picked up the book. He returned it to Steve—with a whiz! It caught the bully of Packsaddle under the chin and bowled him off his bench.

Crash! Steve landed on his back, with a fearful howl as he hit the planks with the back of his head.

"Oh, dear! Goodness gracious!" gasped Small Brown.

The trouble that Mr. Brown had anticipated had arrived.

Mr. Scadder, his face as red as his eyelids with rage, cut at Slick with the cane. It swiped across the school-boy's shoulders.

Poindexter grabbed the inkpot from his desk.

Up went his hand, with the inkpot in it, and the ink shot out in a stream, full at Mr. Scadder's bony face.

Splash!

"Oh, wake snakes!" gasped Mick.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll say that guy's got his!" chuckled Pie.

"Urrrgh!" spluttered the new headmaster of Packsaddle, staggering back, mopping wildly at the ink with both hands. "Yurrgh!"

The whole bunch roared. Mr. Scadder gasped and gurgled frantically. There was ink all over his bony features—ink in his nose, ink in his mouth. He lived and moved and breathed ink.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" squealed Small Brown. Mr. Brown knew that bunch, and knew that they needed a hand like Bill's. He doubted very much whether Elias Scadder could calm the storm he had raised.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Scadder. "Yurrgh!"

"Give him some more!" yelled Mick Kavanagh, jumping up and grabbing his inkpot.

"Hold on!" gasped Dick Carr. He caught his comrade's arm and stopped the ink just in time. "Hold on, Mick! Remember Bill——"

"Aw, can it!" snorted Mick; but he sat down again, grunting.

Small Brown fully expected the whole bunch to break out in riot. But they kept their places, only Slick standing and watching his new headmaster like a cat. Slick was having no more of the cane. He had settled on that. Giving Scadder a chance to make good, as Bill wanted, did not

mean knuckling under to injustice. Slick was through with Scadder.

Scadder, having dabbed the ink out of his eyes, leaped at Poindexter with brandished cane. Slick dodged him among the desks.

Small Brown looked on, his eyes bulging through his horn-rimmed glasses. The whole bunch yelled, and roared, and stamped. Up and down, round and among the desks and benches, Slick dodged the enraged Scadder. Then, darting across to the open door, he whipped out through the porch and vamooseed into the playground.

After him rushed Scadder.

The bunch was left yelling. Scadder was not likely to run the elusive Slick down in the open spaces. It was as well for Elias Scadder that he did not, for one yell from Poindexter would have drawn the whole bunch out of the school-room to the rescue.

But in a few minutes Scadder was seen to come back into the porch, breathless and panting. He did not return to the school-room; he went into his own quarters—formerly Bill's—in search of the wash he badly needed.

"Silence! Sit down!" squealed Small Brown.

Mr. Brown hardly expected to be heeded. The bunch did not heed him. They remained in their places, and that was all. Mr. Scadder had intended to take a class that morning, but he did not reappear in the school-room, and Small Brown was left to carry on.

He carried on, amid a buzz of voices and laughter, and a stamping of boots, only too glad that the bunch did not rag him, as they had done often enough when Bill was away. He dreaded it every moment. From the bottom of his heart Small Brown wished that Bill was still there. The school committee of Packsaddle, in their wisdom, had fired Bill and installed Elias Scadder in his place—a dwarf in a giant's robe! Small Brown

could have told them it would not work. And it was very probable that before long they would find it out for themselves.

CHAPTER 7.

Steve Gets Well

WITH a roar that was rather like the war-hoop of apaches on the war-trail, the Packsaddle bunch came out when the bell rang. Small Brown quitted the school-room in great relief. He had got through the morning somehow. He looked forward with dread to the afternoon. But the bunch were in high spirits. Dick Carr was still entertaining a hope of carrying out Bill's last wish, and Mick backed him up, though dubiously. But it was clear that most of the bunch were getting out of hand. And if Scadder started again on Slick Poindexter, as he was fairly certain to do when Slick was within his reach again, both Dick and Mick knew that they would back up their comrade. And then, it was certain, the fur would begin to fly.

Slick was grinning as he joined his comrades in the playground. Mr. Scadder was still in his own quarters, apparently leaving Slick over till class assembled again. Or perhaps he was going to cinch him in the chuckhouse at the school dinner. Anyhow, he had not shown up since he had gone in to wash off the ink.

"Say you guys!" said Poindexter. "I'll tell a man I'm through with that piecan Scadder—"

"But Bill—" urged Dick Carr.

"I guess I stand for Bill as much as any guy in this bunch!" hooted Slick. "But I ain't standing for being lambasted by no pie-faced bonehead like Scadder—not so's you'd notice it!"

"He may let it drop."

"I guess I'll give him a chance to!" grinned Slick. "I'm telling you hombres we got to put that piecan Steve wise to it that even if his popper's got Scadder in his pocket he

can't ride rough over this bunch. I'll say that Steve's cabeza is going under the pump!"

"You said it!" shouted Mick.

"Yes, rather!" said Dick Carr promptly. "And a ducking for Steve may warn Scadder to go slow."

"If he don't go slow," said Slick, "I guess he'll go quick—outer this hyer school! This bunch ain't taking no buck from a guy of Scadder's heft! Get hold of that piecan Steve!"

A crowd of fellows surrounded Big Steve. In the school-room Steve had been full of beans in the presence of Scadder, but after Scadder left, Big Steve had remained very quiet. If Scadder could have handled the bunch like Bill, the bully of Packsaddle would have been on velvet. But Steve was guessing now that Scadder couldn't.

"Aw, back off, you guys!" snapped Steve, as he was surrounded. "I guess I'll handle my quirt if you crowd me!"

The bully of Packsaddle had sorted out his quirt, in fear of trouble with the bunch. He grasped it hard and swung it in the air with a threatening glare at a circle of angry faces.

"I'll say that quirt won't help you none!" said Slick Poindexter. "You had a hand in getting Bill fired, you pesky piecan, and you figured that you could ride rough over this bunch with that guy Scadder backing you! You want to forget it, Steve, and I guess we'll show you how!"

"Stand back!" roared Steve.

"Cinch him!"

Slick rushed at the bully of Packsaddle, and Steve brought down the quirt with a desperate slash. Poindexter caught the blow with his arm, and the next moment his grasp was on Carson.

Five or six other pairs of hands were added instantly. Steve's quirt was wrenched away, and he went over on the earth, bumping.

Mick brandished the quirt.

"Say, I guess he's going to have a

few!" shouted Mick. "You galoots stand clear!"

Held by his arms and legs, Steve was stretched out, face down. Mick Kavanagh brought the quirt down with a terrific swipe.

Steve Carson's yell rang across the Rio Frio. He struggled and squirmed frantically.

A bony figure appeared in the schoolhouse porch. It was Mr. Scadder. He waved a skinny hand at the excited bunch.

"Stop! Stop this!" he shrilled. "Release Carson at once! At once!"

Whack!

The quirt came down again on Steve's riding breeches, and he yelled wildly. Mr. Scadder made a stride out of the porch.

"This way, you pesky lobo-wolf!" roared Poindexter. "I guess we'll give you a few when we're through with Steve!"

Scadder halted. The quirt came down on Steve again. His frantic yell rang far and wide. But the new headmaster of Packsaddle turned and went back into the schoolhouse. Perhaps he was doubtful of what might happen to him if he tackled the bunch in their present excited state, and was leaving them to cool down.

But this retreat brought a roar of derision from the Packsaddlers. They could not picture Bill Sampson backing down before the bunch. Bill would have waded in hard and heavy. Elias Scadder backed out.

Steve was left to the mercy of the bunch. They did not feel very merciful towards the fellow who had been against Bill, and who had tried to take the high hand under Scadder. Steve was dragged along to the pump at the end of the playground.

Struggling and spluttering, he was pitched under the pump, and Slick Poindexter grasped the handle to work it.

A stream of water shot out, engulfing the bully of Packsaddle. A roar of

laughter answered his spluttering gasp.

"Wade in, Slick!"

"Go it, old-timer!"

Slick, grinning, worked at the pump-handle. The stream of water became a torrent. Steve bounded out of his reach, only to be hurled back again, sprawling on his back under the descending water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mick. "I'll say that piecan's getting a wash!"

Splash, splash, splash! came the torrent from the pump on the wretched bully of Packsaddle. Again and again he squirmed and wriggled away—only to be seized and flung back under the pump. He gave up the struggle at last, and stayed where he was, drenched and spluttering.

"Gurrrrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess that ain't any answer! You sure are going to get the pump till you allow that you throw down Scadder!"

Steve gurgled wildly.

"Aw! Gurrrh! I guess I ain't standing for Scadder no more!" he spluttered. "I'll say I'm agin that guy! Yep! Gurrrh! Let up, you pesky gopher! Groogh!"

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

"You want Bill back?" grinned Mick.

"Gurrrrrgh!"

"You're getting the pump till you allow you want Bill back!"

"Urrrh! Yep!" gasped Carson. "I guess I want Bill back! I ain't standing for no Scadder, and I allow I want Bill back a whole lot! Urrugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slick ceased to work the pump at last. Steve was allowed to crawl away, drenched and dripping, leaving a watery trail behind him as he went. And the Packsaddle bunch, roaring with laughter, crowded away to the chuckhouse to dinner.

CHAPTER 8.

Breaking Out!

TIN TUNG, the Chinese cook, had an uneasy expression as he served dinner to the Packsaddle bunch in the chuckhouse. Tin Tung had known what it was like to be pelted with wooden platters when the bunch were wild and full of beans and Bill was not there!

The fat Chinese blinked with his slanting eyes, prepared to dodge missiles and anxious for the fate of his pigtail, which Steve had more than once threatened to cut off—a threat that Steve would have carried out, but for his fear of Bill. Now that Bill was back on Kicking Mule, Tin Tung trembled for that adornment, and it was a relief to him to see the bully of Packsaddle drenched and half-drowned, and in anything but a mood for fun.

But the rest were in a wildly excited state, and Tin Tung made up his Oriental mind that Packsaddle was not good enough for him if Scadder remained in the place of Bill Sampson.

Luckily for Tin Tung, the thoughts of the bunch turned on Scadder chiefly—apart from dinner. Still, Slim Dixon landed a maize-cake on the side of his head, and Poker Parker tripped him as he carried a dish of beans—signs of the wrath to come.

The chuckhouse was seldom silent while chuck was on; but there had always been a limit when Bill was on hand. Now there was a continuous roar. Every fellow was speaking at once. Some of them sat on the trestle-table instead of the benches, and took their platters on their knees there.

There was a roar to Tin Tung for more and more chuck—Pie Sanders, especially, who had the appetite of a prairie wolf, being determined to make hay while the sun was shining.

When the other fellows had got as far as pie, Pie Sanders was still going strong on frejoles, which Tin Tung cooked as well as ever they were cooked in Mexico. Well-cooked frejoles are

good provender, and Pie Sanders was revelling in his fifth helping, while the others were eating pie and shouting to Tin Tung for more.

The fat Chinnee buzzed to and fro like a busy bee, panting and perspiring, every now and then a playful missile landing on him to hurry him up. Packsaddle School was rather getting into the state of Israel of old, when there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

"Looks like Scadder running this bunch!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "I'll say it's some sizes too large for him."

"I should smile!" chuckled Mick.

Dick Carr looked serious. He still had a hope of carrying out Bill's last wish and influencing the bunch to follow his example. But he had to admit that the prospect was not rosy. Bill had never found it easy to ride herd at Packsaddle, and it was clear that the bunch did not give a continental red cent for Silas Scadder.

"Search me!" exclaimed Slick. "If that ain't Scadder horning in! I'll say he's heard the row across the playground."

The bony figure of Mr. Scadder appeared in the doorway of the chuckhouse. He had a cane in his hand, and behind him came the burly figure of Hank, the hired man.

Hank, who was hired to split logs, and sweep, and handle horses, had evidently been roped in by Scadder for help in dealing with the bunch, and he was looking very doubtful. Hank knew that bunch!

Perhaps the din from the chuckhouse had drawn the new headmaster there, or perhaps he considered it time to deal with Slick. It was, at least, plain that if he let the uproar go on he might as well say good-bye to his authority as headmaster, such as it was, and he had the same kind of "rookus" to expect in school. There was rather an uneasy gleam in his red-rimmed eyes, but his sharp jaw was set hard.

Every eye turned on him as he strode

into the chuckhouse, followed by the dubious Hank. Hank did not want to be fired, and Scadder had threatened to fire him if he did not help—so Hank was there to give what help he could. It was not likely to be a whole heap.

"Poindexter!" snapped Scadder.

"Yeah!" grinned Slick.

"Come here!"

"I guess I'm packing eats!" said Slick.

"Come here at once!" roared Scadder.

Dick Carr touched his comrade's arm. Slick gave a snort—but he nodded. He rose from his bench and went towards Mr. Scadder.

The bunch watched curiously and eagerly. If Scadder had come there to lambaste Slick, there was going to be trouble for Scadder—that was a cinch. And it seemed that he had!

"I am going to punish you, Poindexter, for your conduct in the school-room this morning, as an example to the school!" said Mr. Scadder sternly.

"Sez you!" grinned Slick.

Mr. Scadder grabbed at his collar—and missed, as Poindexter dodged back.

"Forget it, Scadder!" shouted Mick.

Mr. Scadder gave him a grim glare.

"I shall cane you next, Kavanagh!" he said. "Now, my man, seize that boy and hold him while I cane him."

He pointed to Slick with the cane. Hank, looking more dubious than ever, advanced on Poindexter to cinch him.

Whiz! came a wooden platter, crashing just above the buckle of Hank's belt! It came from one of the bunch—hard!

The hired man gave a fearful howl, and stumbled backwards and sat down. Both his hands were pressed to the spot where Hank had lately packed his dinner.

"Oooogh!" roared Hank. "Search me! Oh! Ow! Woooogh!"

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

"Seize that boy!" roared Scadder.

"Aw! Forget it!" gurgled Hank. "I guess I ain't cinching no guy in that

doggoned bunch! Nope! I'll say I ain't, you Scadder! Urrrghh!"

Whiz! Crash! Whiz! Crash! Hank scrambled up, gasping, and dodged out of the chuckhouse in the midst of a rain of platters.

"Get going, Scadder!" roared a dozen voices.

"Beat it, you piecan!"

"Vamoose the ranch, you piefaced gopher!"

It was a roar from the excited Packsaddlers.

There was a forward surge of the bunch. Dick Carr jumped to his feet.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "Bill asked us to give the man a chance! Mr. Scadder, for goodness' sake leave Slick alone, and—yarrooooo!" Dick broke off with a yell as Scadder swiped at him with the cane.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. He gave it up at that. Like the rest, he was through with Scadder now.

Mr. Scadder made a jump at Slick, and this time got him by the collar! The cane sang through the air and came down with a terrific swipe on Poindexter's back.

Scadder had time for only one swipe. The next instant Slick turned on him, grasped him, and hooked his leg. As Scadder staggered, Mick and Dick rushed forward and rushed him over.

The new headmaster of Packsaddle sprawled in the doorway of the chuckhouse. There was a roar of derision from the bunch. Bill, with his quirt, would have found it hard going to restore order just then. Scadder, with his cane, had not a dog's chance.

He scrambled to his feet, panting, and as he did so Pie Sanders—nobly sacrificing his sixth helping to the common cause—hurled the contents of his platter! It was a waste of good frejoles—but Pie was excited! Pie had been going to enjoy those frejoles—but Mr. Scadder did not enjoy them! A shower of hot beans and hot gravy in his face made Mr. Scadder howl wildly.

Three or four platters followed. Mr.

Scadder, howling, backed out of the chuckhouse doorway and fairly fled.

"After him!" roared Slick.

"Cinch him!"

"Lynch him!"

"Get Scadder!"

Dick, Mick and Slick led the rush. Scadder's long legs were going like lightning as he tore across the playground to the schoolhouse. After him, in a roaring mob, went the Packsaddle bunch.

Slam!

Scadder got the door shut just in time! Behind a bolted door he gasped in sheer affright. Outside the door the Packsaddle bunch roared and howled like a pack of prairie wolves!

It did not look as if Elias Scadder would be able to fill Bill Sampson's place and run Packsaddle School!

CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise for Mr. Wash!

JOB WASH, chairman of the Packsaddle School committee, walked, or rather, rolled in at the school gate. Job was fat, and Job was an important guy—the leading citizen of Packsaddle; the biggest storekeeper; chairman of the school committee—an important guy in every way. Some of the committee, especially Marshal Lick, had been doubtful about firing Bill and putting in a new headmaster of a more high-toned brand. But Job had had no doubts, and Two-Gun Carson had backed him and he had had his way.

The fact that Bill had "fanned" him with bullets from a Colt when he came up to the school to announce the committee's decision had got Mr. Wash's goat, and made him more determined than ever to fire Bill. Now Bill was fired, and Scadder ruled in his place, and the fat storekeeper walked up to Packsaddle School to give the new outfit the once-over, and see that it was working well. Bill had never had much use for Mr. Walsh, but Scadder had more respect for the

school committee, and especially for its chairman. Mr. Wash was going to give Scadder a word or two of encouragement, and deliver an address in the school-room to the assembled school, and generally air his own importance—which he had never been able to do while Bill ruled the roost.

It was lesson-time, but as Mr. Wash rolled in he was surprised to see that the bunch were all in the playground. They were gathered in a swarm in front of the schoolhouse, shouting and roaring and howling; which did not look as if Scadder was getting away with it.

Job Wash frowned. He strode towards the schoolhouse, and there was a yell as he was spotted.

"Say, big boys, here comes that guy Wash!" shouted Slick Poindexter. "That's the guy that fired Bill!"

"Beat it for home, Wash!" yelled Mick.

"Absquatulate, you, Wash!" yelled Poker Parker.

Mr. Wash stared around him in amazement.

"Why are you not in school?" he asked. "Go into the school-room at once! This instant!"

"I'll say you got another guess coming, Wash!" roared Poindexter. "Say, you fat guy, we want Bill!"

"We want Bill!" roared all the bunch.

Mr. Wash strode on to the school-house door. It was closed and fastened, and he rapped on it sharply. Behind him the bunch gathered.

"You, Scadder! Ain't you around?" shouted the storekeeper. "Say, what's come to you, Scadder?"

Mr. Wash had no time to get a reply from within. There was a whiz as Slick's rope circled in the air, and the loop dropped over Mr. Wash's fat form, and tightened round his ample waist. Mr. Wash gave a wild, gurgling gasp as a dozen hands jerked on the lasso, and he was pulled backwards from the door.

He sat down with a bump that almost shook Packsaddle.

As he sat, gasping for breath, the bunch crowded round him. Other members of the committee had doubted the wisdom of firing Bill—the man who had ridden herd over that rough and tough bunch—and now, perhaps, Mr. Wash began to doubt the wisdom of it. He gave a wild howl.

"Scadder! Mr. Scadder!"

"I guess Scadder ain't horning in, not so's you'd notice it!" chuckled Slick. "I'll say that galoot has found out he can't handle this bunch!"

"You said it!" chortled Mick.

"We want Bill!" roared Poindexter.

"You get me, you, Wash? Say, you going to fire Scadder and let old Bill horn in again?"

"No!" gasped Mr. Wash, struggling with the rope. "Never! Go into the school-room! Order! I shall instruct Mr. Scadder to punish every boy here—"

"I guess Scadder ain't honing for it!" grinned Slick. "I'll say that hombre Scadder knows where he gets off!"

"I should smile a few!" chuckled Pie Sanders.

"We want Bill!" roared the bunch.

Mr. Wash scrambled to his feet. His fat face was red with rage. He grabbed at the rope to get it off.

A swift jerk and Mr. Wash was rolling on the earth again. Then Slick and five or six others pulling on the rope started for the gate. After them went the whole bunch, yelling. From the schoolhouse window Mr. Scadder's scared face looked—but Mr. Scadder did not think of emerging from his shelter to go to the aid of the chairman of the Packsaddle School committee. Mr. Scadder was only too thankful that a bolted door was between him and the Packsaddle bunch—and he only hoped that it would remain between them!

Over and over rolled the leading citizen of the town of Packsaddle, at the end of the rope, over and over to

the gate. Mr. Wash had rolled in at the gate, fat and important! He rolled out on his back, his hat gone, his coat split, his buttons flying, covered with dust, red with rage, gurgling for breath, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

Right out on the trail marched Slick and his comrades, dragging the rope, and after them rolled Job Wash, in such a dilapidated state that Packsaddle would hardly have recognised its leading citizen!

"Get a quirt!" roared Slick.

Mick rushed for a quirt.

"Now, you guy, Wash——"

"Urrrgh! Wurrgh!" gurgled Mr. Wash. "Yurrgh!"

"You get me?" roared Slick, brandishing the quirt. "We want Bill! We don't give a continental red cent for Scadder, nor for the school committee, nor for you, Wash! Got that?"

"Gurrgh!"

"You beat it back to the burg, and put them wise that we want Bill! Got that?"

"Yurrgh!"

The rope was cast off. Mr. Wash scrambled to his feet. Slick lashed the quirt round his fat legs. Mr. Wash yelled wildly.

"Beat it!" roared the bunch.

Mr. Wash was glad to beat it! A lashing quirt round his fat legs urged him on. He started down the trail to the cow town at a wild rush. Slick rushed after him lashing with the quirt, and the fat storekeeper, fat as he was, put on a speed that would have done credit to a cow-pony. Panting and gasping, puffing and blowing, the chairman of the Packsaddle School committee vanished down the trail.

"I guess that puts paid to the pesky committee!" grinned Slick. "I'll say they'll be wise to it now that we want Bill! And now, you 'uns, get Scadder!"

"Get Scadder!" roared the Packsaddle bunch.

And the whole crowd rushed back into the playground to get Scadder!

CHAPTER 19.

Scadder is Seared!

"GET Scadder!"

It was a wild roar in the playground at Packsaddle. It woke every echo in the cow town school, and it might have been heard as far as the cow town down the trail. It rang in the ears of Mr. Elias Scadder, the new headmaster, as he peered out from a chink in a closed shutter at the schoolhouse window.

In front of the schoolhouse the Packsaddle bunch roared and surged. More than once that rough-and-tough bunch had been rather out of hand. But never so much as now. Bill Sampson, the six-gun schoolmaster, had not found it easy to ride herd over that bunch. Little chance had Elias Scadder!

The shutter was bolted, the door locked, and behind those defences Elias wiped perspiration from his brow, and wondered what was going to happen. Just then Elias wished, from the bottom of his heart, that he had never stepped into Bill Sampson's shoes!

"Have him out!" roared Slick Poin-dexter.

"Ride him on a rail!" yelled Mick Kavanagh.

"Duck him under the pump!"

"Come out, Scadder!"

Bang, bang, bang, came at the locked door! Bang, bang, came at the window shutter, and Elias jumped away from it like a startled gopher.

Small Brown looked across the playground from his cabin, his eyes bulging through his horn-rimmed glasses. Mr. Brown had anticipated trouble when Bill went.

Brown knew, if the Packsaddle school committee did not, that a man like Bill was needed to handle the bunch. Thankful that the bunch did not give him any attention, Small Brown watched from a distance. There was no help for the new schoolmaster from Mr. Brown.

Neither was there any other help.

Tim Tung, the Chinese cook, blinked from the cookhouse with his slanting eyes—having locked the cookhouse door. Hank, the hired man, sat on the fence and chewed tobacco. Hank was not hired to handle that bunch, and he would not have taken on the job for all the dollars in the bank of San Antonio. It was up to Scadder to handle the bunch—instead of which, Scadder was going to be handled if the bunch could get at him.

Bang! Thump! Bang!

"Come out, Scadder!" bawled Pie Sanders.

"Get Hank's axe, and we'll soon have that door in!" shouted Slick.

"You said it!" Pie rushed off to the wood pile.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Dick Carr. "Let's speak to Scadder and give him a chance to quit! Shut up a minute!"

There was a lull in the roar, and Dick Carr stepped to the window and tapped. There was no glass in the window, and there was a chink in the wooden shutter. He had caught a glimpse of Scadder's dismayed face there.

"Mr. Scadder!" he called out.

There was a gasp within.

"Cease this riot immediately!" came Scadder's voice. "You shall all be punished for this! I shall send for help to Packsaddle—I shall send for Marshal Lick—I shall——"

"Pack it up, Mr. Scadder!" said Dick Carr. "We're giving you a chance to get out! You're not wanted at Packsaddle——"

"I'll say nope!" roared Slick.

"We want Bill——"

A terrific roar from the bunch interrupted. The bunch wanted Bill—there was no doubt about that. Bill Sampson had ruled with a rough-and-ready hand, but the bunch, almost to a man, were standing for Bill.

"You're going, Mr. Scadder," went on Dick Carr. "We've given you a chance, because Bill asked us to when he went. You're no good! Now——"

"Now your jig's up, Scadder!" roared Slick.

"You got to hit the trail, Scadder!"

"Get going!"

"Vamoose the ranch!"

"You hear that, Mr. Scadder?" said Dick Carr. "We'll give you a chance to run, if you want to! Are you going?"

"No!" came Scadder's yelp. "How dare you, Carr? I shall punish you most severely——"

"Oh, chuck it!" said the tenderfoot of Packsaddle.

"Can it, Scadder!"

"Listen to me!" came Scadder's howl through the chink. "Order will be restored here! I have been appointed headmaster of Packsaddle by the school committee. I shall be supported in my authority. I shall remain in this house till help comes from the town. Then you will all be severely punished——"

"Talking hoss-sense to that guy won't buy you anything, you Carr!" snorted Slick. "We got to get him going!"

"We'll ride him on a rail!" hooted Mick. "We'll put him wise that he ain't big enough to stand in old Bill's boots!"

"You said it!"

"Have him out!"

"Get Scadder!"

Pie Sanders came scudding back with Hank's axe. The bunch surged and roared before the door. Slick took the axe, grasped it with both hands, and brought it down on the pinewood door with a terrific crash.

The door shook and groaned; the timber schoolhouse almost shook. Scadder, inside, jumped.

Scadder was new to Texas. And Packsaddle was the wildest corner of Texas. Scadder had not expected much trouble, but he was getting it hot and strong.

At the best of times the bunch were not an easy proposition. Now they were wild with indignation at the treatment of Bill, and they were determined to have Bill back. Scadder had to quit. But if Scadder was not a man

like Bill, at least there was a vein of obstinacy in him, and he was not going if he could help it.

The school committee were bound to stand by the man they had appointed. Help would come to reduce the bunch to order. He had only to play possum till it came.

But the bunch were wise to that as well as Scadder. Already it was known in the cow town that the school had broken herd. Job Wash, chairman of the committee, had been chased away down the trail under a lashing quirt. Scadder was going to follow before Job had time to rally his force. The bunch were not wasting time.

Crash, crash, crash!

The door split and fell in.

Slick threw the axe aside.

A dozen hands tore away the fragments of the door, and with a yell that would have done credit to a war-party of apaches, the Packsaddle bunch rushed in.

CHAPTER 11.

Riding the Rail!

"S TOP! Stand back!"

Scadder brandished his cane. Bill's quirt would not have stopped the bunch just then. Scadder's cane had no more effect on the bunch than it would have had on a stamped-ing herd.

"Get him!" roared Poindexter.

"Cinch him!"

Down came the cane, lashing. Poindexter roared as it landed. A second slash Scadder gave, eliciting a frantic yell from Mick Kavanagh. But he had not time for more.

The rush of the bunch swept him over. The cane was torn away, and the new headmaster of Packsaddle grasped by countless hands.

"Yank him out!" yelled Slick.

"Oh! Ow! Oooooooooogh!" gurgled Scadder, as he went flying out into the playground in the grasp of the bunch, arms and legs in the air.

"Get a rail!" shouted Mick.

Two or three fellows rushed up with a long rail dragged from a fence. It was held shoulder-high, and Scadder was hoisted on to it.

Astride of the rail, clinging to it wildly with both hands, his hair blowing in the wind, his eyes starting from his head, his long legs dangling, Elias Scadder rocked in the midst of the roaring bunch.

"Ow! Stop! Wow! Put me down! Yow! I shall fall—urrrrgh!" spluttered the hapless successor of Bill Sampson.

Bill, back on the Kicking Mule Ranch, punching cows, may have wondered how his successor was getting on. Bill would probably have smiled his grimmest smile if he could have seen him now.

"Ride him!" roared Poindexter.

"Get him going!"

"Put me down!" shrieked Scadder. "I—I—I will—urrrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The long rail rested on several shoulders. The bunch surged away towards the gate, Scadder riding the rail in their midst. He clung to it desperately as it rocked.

Suddenly he rolled over, unable to keep his balance. He hung to the rail with arms and legs.

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

"Oh dear!" gasped Small Brown, blinking from a distance with goggling eyes. "Oh dear!"

"I'll say this is some circus!" remarked Hank, the hired man. He watched like an interested spectator at a rodeo.

Hanging under the rail, Scadder swept on. Losing his hold, he bumped on Texas—hard!

He yelled frantically as he bumped, and yelled again as the bunch trampled over him.

But Poindexter called a halt. Breathless, dusty, dishevelled, the hapless headmaster of Packsaddle School was swung on the rail again.

"I guess you want to stick there,

Scadder!" grinned Slick. "Your best guess is to hold on."

"Oooogh!"

"Ride him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Astride of the rail again, Elias contrived to hold on. He had hit Texas once, and did not want to hit it again! Texas was hard!

With a wild roar, the bunch surged out at the school gate into the trail, riding Elias on the rail.

"Hit Packsaddle!" roared Slick. "We'll show them pesky guys what we think of their noo schoolmaster."

"You said it!" chuckled Mick.

"Ow, oh! Release me! Put me down! Yoop! Urrrrgh!"

Down the school trail went the roaring bunch. In the midst of the wild mob, Scadder bobbed and rocked.

Packsaddle town was not far away. As the bunch drew near the cow town, startled and amazed eyes turned on them.

Barney Bailey, foreman of the Kicking Mule Ranch, was riding into town, and he pulled in his bronco, grinning from ear to ear. Barney and his outfit had ridden to school when Bill was "fired," prepared to stand by their old side-kicker with their guns, but Bill had decided for peace. Barney grinned with glee at the sight of Bill's successor riding the rail.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the Kicking Mule foreman. "I'll say this is a sight for sore eyes, and then some! Say, you Scadder, you figuring that you can handle Bill's bunch! I'll tell a man you can't!"

"Help!" shrieked Scadder. "Help me—use your whip— Oh, ow! Will you help me?"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" roared Barney. "Say, I guess I'll spill this at Kicking Mule, and the boys sure will smile a few! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Tell Bill we want him back, Barney!" shouted Dick Carr, as the bunch surged past the halted cowman.

"I'll sure put him wise to it!" grinned

Barney. And he sat in the saddle and watched the mob sweep on to the cow town, roaring with laughter.

Main Street, Packsaddle, was not usually crowded. But it was quickly crowded as the school bunch swept in with Scadder.

Punchers from the ranches rushed out of the Red Dog and Hanson's store. They roared with merriment at the sight of Scadder. Every guy in Packsaddle turned out into the street, or to door or window, to "rubber" at the exciting scene. Ezra Lick, town marshal of Packsaddle, stepped out of his door in his official residence at the calaboose, and almost fell down as he saw the bunch. Two-Gun Carson stared from the Red Dog, and scowled, Job Wash looked out of his store with a wrathful face. Amid yells and roars and howls of merriment, the Packsaddle bunch surged on to Wash's store.

In the doorway, Job stared and gesticulated. He was still red and wrathful from his recent experiences at the school. But the sight of his specially selected schoolmaster riding the rail threw Job into a paroxysm of fury. He raved—he roared—he brandished fat fists.

"Here's Scadder, you Wash!" roared Slick.

"We've brought your schoolmaster back, Mr. Wash!" chuckled Dick Carr. "We don't want him at Packsaddle."

"We want Bill!" roared the bunch.

"Here's your pesky Scadder!"

"Tote him home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rail tipped, and Elias shot off it—right at the fat storekeeper in the doorway. He crashed on Mr. Wash, and threw his arms wildly round his neck for support. Job Wash staggered back and sat down, with Elias sprawling headlong over him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can keep your Scadder!" yelled Slick. "You tote him along to Pack-

saddle again and we'll sure drop him into the Frio."

The bunch surged away, leaving Mr. Wash and Elias Scadder to sort themselves out. As they marched down the street through a grinning crowd, Marshal Lick horned in.

"Say, you young guys, you guess that you're getting by with this?" roared Mr. Lick. "I'll say I'll sure quirt you a few. I'll say—yaroooh—ooogh!"

Marshal Lick, official representative of law and order as he was, rolled over in the grasp of the bunch. Recent rain had left a large puddle in Main Street, and Mr. Lick was dropped into it, face down, and Slick trod on the back of his head to push his features deeper into the mud.

"Gurrrrrgh!" was all the town marshal could say.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the bunch marched on, leaving Mr. Lick to sit up and grab mud from his eyes, nose, and mouth, and gurgle. They marched back up the school trail.

"I guess we're through with Scadder!" chortled Slick, as they marched in at the gate.

"I'll say yep!" grinned Mick.

"There'll be trouble!" sneered Steve Carson.

"We'll handle it when it comes, you geck!" answered Slick. "This bunch is kicking till Bill comes back! And if them guys hone for more trouble, they can have all they want, and some over."

"You bet!"

"You said it!"

The bunch expected trouble. They were ready for it! And it was not long in coming!

CHAPTER 12.

A Licking for Lick!

"**B**AR the gate!" said Dick Carr. The gate slammed shut, and the bar was jammed into the sockets.

The rebels of Packsaddle were in possession of the school now, and they had resolved to remain in possession—till Bill came back!

Every fellow in the bunch had agreed on that—nobody but Bill was going to ride herd at Packsaddle—even Steve Carson agreeing, lest worse should befall him! Dick, Slick, and Mick figured that when the school committee got wise to it that the bunch were in deadly earnest, they would climb down and fetch Bill back from Kicking Mule. Anyhow, the bunch were going to kick till they did. And with more than twenty husky fellows ready to scrap till the cows came home, it was not easy to see how they were going to be handled.

Over the barred gate Dick kept an eye on the school trail. There was a ten-foot fence round the school grounds, not easy to climb. And every fellow had got hold of a weapon of some sort, ready to knock off a climber. And the bunch were full of beans—so full that there was a whoop of joy when Dick shouted that the enemy were coming.

Immediately the top of the gate was lined with faces.

Up the trail from the cow town came the forces of law and order. Ezra Lick and two of his men on foot, Two-Gun Carson on his bronco, and Mr. Scadder and Job Wash. The two latter brought up the rear. Evidently they did not intend to horn in till the marshal and his men had reduced the bunch to obedience.

Slick burst into a laugh.

"Them guys figure they can handle us!" he exclaimed derisively. "I'll say we can eat that crowd body and boots."

"Say, Steve, you sing out to your popper to beat it!" yelled Mick. "Put him wise that he will sure get hurt if he horns in here agin."

Steve Carson grinned sourly.

"I guess my popper's on the school committee, and he's sure seeing it through!" he retorted. "Your best

guess is to take what's coming to you, and take it quiet!"

"Aw, forget it, you gink!"

Mick brandished a quirt.

"It was sure that guy Two-Gun that worked it to get Bill fired!" he exclaimed. "I'll say I'll hand him a few if he horns in!"

The marshal and his men halted at the gate. Two-Gun pulled in his horse, scowling at the schoolboys. They gave him a yell.

"Say, Two-Gun, you lit out mighty quick when Bill was here!" yelled Mick. "A guy couldn't see your heels for dust."

"You sure did look plumb sick when Bill got after you, Two-Gun!" roared Slick. "You stayed away like a good little man till Bill was gone!"

Two-Gun gritted his teeth. He did not like being reminded now he had vamoosed from Bill. He snarled to the marshal:

"Say, you, Ezra Lick—you coming down to cases? We ain't moseyed along to stand here like cows on a feeding range!"

Marshal Lick took no notice of the gunman. He scratched his nose, apparently puzzled what to do. His two deputies were grinning. They seemed amused by the schoolboy rebellion.

"Now, you young geeks!" said the marshal at last. "You git that gate open, pronto! You hear me toot?"

"Beat it, Ezra!" answered Slick. "No guy ain't coming in till Bill comes back! We want Bill!"

"We sure want Bill, Ezra!" roared the bunch.

Ezra shook his head.

"I guess the school committee have sat on that and fixed it," he answered. "I'm here to put Mr. Scadder back where he belongs!"

"Get on with it!" said Dick Carr, laughing.

"You opening that gate?" demanded the marshal of Packsaddle.

"Not so's you'd notice it!" grinned Slick.

The marshal waved his men on.

"Git over that gate!" he said.

His two deputies strode forward. The marshal came with them. The three of them jumped, caught the gate, and clambered. They did not seem to reckon that the bunch would come to blows at close quarters.

But the bunch did!

Mick's quirt came down on one head. Slick's on another, and the marshal's two men dropped back into the trail, bellowing.

Dick Carr grabbed the marshal himself by his neckscarf, and dragged him half-over the gate. Pie Sanders, Poker Parker, and Slim Dixon grasped his arms, and held him helpless there.

Head and shoulders inside the gate, legs outside, the marshal struggled and gurgled. Up went Dick's quirt.

Whack!

It came down across the marshal's leather trousers, landing with a crack like a pistol-shot.

There was a terrific roar from Mr. Lick, and a yell of laughter from the bunch. Ezra struggled frantically.

"Hold him!" shouted Dick Carr.

"You bet!"

"We got him cinched!"

"Lambaste him!"

Up went Dick's quirt again, and down it came.

The marshal roared wildly.

"Say, you young geeks, you let up! Say, I'll sure skin you for this! I'll sure quirt you like you was a bunch of ornery steers! Whoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him the quirt!"

"You've sure bitten off more'n you can chew, Ezra!"

The two deputies did not horn in again. They backed out of reach of lashing quirts, and stood rubbing their damaged heads, and making remarks that almost turned the atmosphere blue. They looked as if they had had enough from the bunch.

Two-Gun Carson pushed his bronco

nearer the gate, and lashed at the schoolboys with his riding-whip.

There were loud howls from the fellows who caught it. But that was a game that more than one could play at. Slick and Mick lashed back, and Two-Gun yelled in his turn as he caught the lashes. One or two landed on his horse, and the startled animal squealed and cavorted, nearly unseating the rider.

Two-Gun grasped his reins to control the horse. The bronco's hoofs clattered wildly on the trail as the gunman pulled at the reins. Slick reached over and lashed again, getting Two-Gun across the shoulders, and Carson was glad to ride clear.

Meanwhile, the marshal of Pack-saddle was not enjoying life. Sprawling half over the gate, his wrists and arms grasped by many hands, he was quite helpless, and Dick Carr was laying on the quirt on Mr. Lick's leather trousers as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet.

Ezra Lick's wild howls rang far and wide. He struggled and howled and roared like a roped buffalo.

"Let up!" he raved. "I'm saying let up! You doggoned, pesky young plebans! I'll tell a man I shan't be able to sit down for a month of Sundays! Doggone you, let up!"

"You beating it, Ezra, if we let you rip?" chuckled Dick Carr.

"Ow! Yep! I'll say so!" spluttered the marshal. "Doggone the school, and doggone the committee—doggone the hull caboodle! Let up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The marshal was pitched back, and he crashed down into the trail outside the gate. He landed with a heavy bump; the gate was high. He sat up and bounded to his feet, yelling. Then he strode towards Job Wash.

"Say, you Wash!" he roared. "What do you call this here game? You figure it's a town marshal's job to be quirted like an ornery steer? I'll tell a man I was always agin firing Bill! I'm tell-

ing you you want to fetch Bill back to handle that bunch! You get me, you Wash?"

"Do your duty!" yapped Mr. Wash. "You're here to reduce those school boys to obedience and reinstate Mr. Scadder—"

"Scadder nothing!" roared the enraged marshal. "That bunch wants Bill, and I'll say that Bill is jest what they need too! You figure that I'm honing to have my trousers dusted by them young geeks, you got another guess coming, and I'll say you can chew on that!"

And Marshal Lick, snorting, tramped back down the trail. His two men went after him. Marshal Lick wriggled as he went; his two followers were still rubbing their heads. Job started after them.

"Say, you Lick—" he gasped.

"Go and chop chips, you, Wash!" bawled the marshal over his shoulder. "You figure you can handle that bunch, I ain't stopping you! Get on with it—as much as you want!"

And the marshal tramped on with his deputies, evidently finished with the business.

Job Wash and Mr. Scadder looked at one another. Then both of them looked at Two-Gun. Carson backed his horse away from the gate across the trail.

"Leave this to me!" said Two-Gun between his teeth. "I guess when I get among them with a quirt, I'll sure make them talk turkey! You young geeks, you opening that gate?"

"Not by a jugful!"

"I guess I'm coming over, then!"

And Two-Gun gave his horse whip and spur, and came at the school gate at the gallop, and the bronco rose to the leap.

CHAPTER 13.

Putting Paid to Two-Gun!

"GUM!" gasped Slick Poindexter. "Stand clear!" yelled Dick Carr.

"Watch out!"

There was a hurried scurrying among the defenders of the school gate.

The action of Two-Gun Carson was utterly reckless; any of the fellows inside the gate might have been injured by the crashing hoofs had they not been spry. Holding the gate against an attack was one thing; holding it against a leaping bronco was quite another.

The bunch scattered back, barely in time. High in the air rose the leaping bronco, clearing the gate, and coming down in the playground with a thunder of hoofs.

Two-Gun had got in. He did not seem to care for the damage he might have done. He grinned savagely and handled his quirt. Once inside the defences, he had no doubt of getting the upper hand—riding herd over the bunch, quirt in hand, as Bill Sampson had been used to do. But the Packsaddle bunch were in a mood now that Bill had never known.

"You pesky scallywag!" panted Slick Poindexter.

He had been grazed by a lashing hoof as the bronco came over the gate.

"You doggoned gun-slinger!" howled Mick.

Carson rode at them, lashing with his quirt, and they dodged in haste. He turned his horse towards Dick Carr, as if to ride him down. Dick bounded out of the way, getting a terrific lick from the quirt as he did so.

"Cinch him!" yelled Pie Sanders; and he led a rush at the rider.

But Carson made his bronco cavort and the lashing hoofs drove them back.

"Now, you young geeks, you herd into the schoolhouse!" shouted Two-Gun. "I guess I'm going to see Mr. Scadder lambaste the whole caboodle before I quit! Get going!"

He rode at the schoolboys, lashing out. They scattered far and wide from the reckless rider. Two-Gun, for the time at least, had the upper hand.

Dick caught Poindexter by the arm as they ran.

"Your rope, Slick!" he panted. Slick's eyes gleamed.

"You said it!" he breathed.

He raced into the bunkhouse for his lasso.

Some of the bunch were taking cover in the schoolhouse, some in the chuckhouse. Two or three clambered on fence or roof; one climbed the flagpole. Two-Gun, cavorting recklessly on his bronco, was master of the situation, and he pursued one after another, running him down, and lashing with the quirt.

Big Steve saw his chance, while his popper was keeping the bunch busy. He cut along to the gate, and dragged away the bar. The bully of Packsaddle threw the gate wide open.

"This way, Mr. Wash!" he shouted.

Mr. Wash and Elias Scadder came in. Luckily for the bunch the marshal and his men were gone, or Steve's treachery would have brought in more assailants than they might have been able to handle. Job Wash and Scadder were not much use in a scrap. All depended on Two-Gun, and it looked as if Two-Gun was riding herd with success. His quirt had landed in turn on nearly every fellow in the bunch, and there were wild howls on all sides, and the playground was almost cleared.

Two-Gun pulled in his bronco, and grinned at the chairman of the school committee and the new headmaster.

"I guess we're putting it through," he said. "I'll say the young geeks are getting more than they want. I reckon I'll have them feeding from yore hand, Mr. Scadder, in a few shakes of a possum's tail."

Slick Poindexter came out of the bunkhouse, his coiled lasso in his hand, his eyes gleaming.

The rope whizzed through the air, uncouling as it flew, and the loop dropped over Two-Gun's head and shoulders.

"Look out!" gasped Mr. Wash.

But the warning came too late. Two-

Gun made a fierce clutch at the circling rope, but it tightened instantly as Slick dragged on it, and the gunman was roped in.

Plucked from the saddle by the drag of the rope, Two-Gun Carson hit the playground, and hit it hard. His startled bronco reared, and backed away, leaving him sprawling.

There was a roar from the bunch. Two-Gun, sprawling on the ground, struggled wildly with the rope. But he was not given time to loosen it.

From all sides came the bunch, swarming on him. Job Wash and Elias were knocked out of the way. Carson was gripped on all sides.

"I'll say we've cinched that bull dozer!" gasped Mick Kavanagh. "I'll tell a man we got him by the short hairs."

Two-Gun struggled desperately. He was dragged to his feet, and held on all sides. Slick knotted the rope round him. Pie snatched his quirt, and gave him a lick to go on with.

Job Wash and Elias Scadder exchanged a glance, and backed out of the gate. Matters were not going well for them, and they realised that the Packsaddle playground was not a healthy spot. Two-Gun, struggling in the grasp of the bunch, yelled to them; but if they heard they did not heed, as they burned the wind down the trail.

"I guess we got this guy where we want him," grinned Slick. "Cinch that cayuse of his'n, and stick him on it!"

Pie caught the horse and led it up. He held it by the bridle, while Two-Gun was heaved up on to its back, backwards, with his face to the tail.

With howls of laughter the bunch tied him to the horse in that position, fastening his feet underneath, and knotting him to the saddle. The gunman's face was crimson with rage. He howled and spluttered fierce threats, unheeded by the Packsaddlers.

"I guess you're going back to town like that, you Carson!" chuckled Slick.

"I'll say the guys will snigger a few when they see you."

Two-Gun was still wriggling and struggling, mad with rage at the idea of riding back to the cow town with his face to the horse's tail. He could picture the roars of laughter that would greet him when he arrived there. But he had no chance. The forty-foot rope was wound round and round him, and knotted in many places, and he was helpless.

He glared round desperately for Steve. Big Steve could not have helped his popper; but he was not to be seen, anyhow. Some of the bunch had seen him open the gate to the enemy. And now that they were victorious, Big Steve was in dread of what would be coming to him. While his popper struggled and wriggled in the hands of the bunch, Big Steve was getting his horse from the corral, and riding away—going while the going was good. The bully of Packsaddle disappeared from the scene, unheeded.

"Hank!" roared Slick Poindexter.

"Yeah," grinned the hired man.

"Tote along that can of paint you was using on the chuckhouse door."

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Hank.

He guessed what the paint was wanted for, and he hesitated. But as two or three of the bunch started towards him, Hank hurried to obey.

He came back with a large can of green paint, with a big brush sticking in it. Two-Gun Carson gave a howl.

"Don't you dare——"

He broke off with a horrible gurgle as Slick jammed the paintbrush into his open mouth.

"Gurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold that hoss steady," said Slick. "I guess I ain't no hand at painting, but I'll sure make Two-Gun look like he was a picture over a candy store."

"Urrrrgh!" Two-Gun spluttered paint. "Yurrgh!"

Yells of laughter came from the

bunch as Slick Poindexter handled the brush. He daubed green paint on Two-Gun's face, laying it on with a liberal hand.

Two-Gun's face was red with rage, but the crimson disappeared under a thick coating of green. His eyes sparkled with rage from a green complexion. His hat had been knocked off in the struggle, and his hair was wildly ruffled; but Slick smothered it with the paintbrush, coating it thick. There was plenty of paint, and he let the gunman have it all. Face and hair and ears were painted green, and then Slick poured what was left down the back of his neck. Then he jammed the empty can over the gunman's head in the place of his Stetson. It came down to his ears like a tin hat.

Two-Gun was rather a dapper and handsome fellow in his way, in his natural state. But he did not look handsome now. He looked extraordinary. Spluttering fury and paint, he sat backwards in the saddle, green as the prairie grass, reeking.

The bunch, looking at him, were almost in hysterics. They howled and gasped with merriment.

"I guess the guys along to Packsaddle won't be honing for more trouble with this bunch when they spot that baby," chuckled Slick. "And I'll mention that Two-Gun won't be horn-ing in again, not in a doggoned hurry!"

"He sure will make them smile a few when he hits Packsaddle," chortled Mick. "You'll get the laughs, Two-Gun."

"Set him going!" grinned Dick Carr. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The bronco was led to the gate, and out into the trail. A smack on its flank startled it down the trail to the cow town.

With his face to the tail, Two-Gun looked back as he went, with a green face, and eyes burning with rage. The bunch roared with laughter, and waved their hats as he went. And when the bronco trotted into Main Street, Pack-

saddle, with that astonishing-looking rider on its back, the whole town rushed out to see the sight, and the cow town rocked with laughter from end to end. Marshal Lick, though he was still wriggling, laughed till he almost wept.

"I'll say them young guys is genooline ginger," said Mr. Lick. "I'll mention that they ain't seeing me no more along to their goldarned school! No, sir! No Packsaddle bunch on my plate!"

And it was probable that Two-Gun was as tired of the bunch as Mr. Lick.

At Packsaddle School the gate was barred again, and the victorious bunch crowded to the chuckhouse for supper.

"I guess we've worked the rifle, you'uns," said Slick Poindexter, as he dealt with his bacon and beans. "I'll say that we've put paid to them pesky piecans, and they're wise to it by this time that nobody but Bill is going to run this shebang."

"You said it!" chuckled Mick.

"Bill or nobody!" said Dick Carr.

The Packsaddle bunch had made up their minds to that. It was Bill or nobody, and they figured that the school committee would chew on it, and make it Bill. And if there was going to be more trouble before they got Bill, the rebels of Packsaddle were ready for it—ready and willing.

CHAPTER 14.

Job Wash on the Warpath!

JOE WASH stood in front of his store on Main Street, Packsaddle, and spluttered with rage. His fat face was red, his podgy hands clenched. He almost danced. The chairman of the Packsaddle school committee was as mad as a hornet—or madder!

It was early morning in the cow town. Job was not usually an early

riser. The fattest and most important citizen of Packsaddle generally took things easy. But he had been drawn from his blankets betimes by the uproar in front of his store. Peering from a window, he had seen a gathering crowd—and every guy in the crowd was laughing. Which was so uncommon and surprising that Job had hastily jumped into shirt and trousers, and rolled out to see what the game was. Now he was seeing.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came a roar from the crowd as Job gurgled with wrath.

Across the front of the store, in letters a foot high, daubed in white-wash, ran a message:

**"WE WANT BILL!
NIX ON SCADDER!"**

(Signed) THE PACKSADDLE BUNCH."

Evidently that message had been daubed on the store during the night, while the cow town slept. Some of the Packsaddle bunch had come down to the cow town and left it there to greet Job's eyes in the morning.

With a red and wrathful face, Job Wash turned and strode down Main Street to the marshal's office. Ezra Lick, town marshal of Packsaddle, sat on his step, picking his teeth with a jack-knife after breakfast. He grinned at the enraged Job. Apparently he had given the message from the school the once-over, and was amused thereby.

"You piefaced, sniggering geek!" roared Mr. Wash. "Say, you dog-goned pesky piecan, you figure that a town marshal ain't got nothing to do but to sit on his hind legs and grin like he was a Mexican monkey? I'm telling you, you got to get busy, and you got to do it quick."

"Meaning?" asked the marshal.

"Ain't there any law and order in this hyer burg?" demanded Job. "Ain't I chairman of the school committee, and ain't the committee voted to fire that doggoned old cow-puncher, Bill Sampson, and stick in Scadder, a

guy with his cabeza full of book knowledge? And them young gecks rode him out on a rail, and ain't they making whoopee up at the school like they was a ranch outfit on a jamboree? Say?"

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Lick.

"Waal, then, you get busy!" roared Job Wash. "You get your deputies, and you mosey along to the school, and you put that bunch in order! Got that?"

"You onery old stiff!" retorted the marshal. "I'm telling you, I don't want no Packsaddle bunch on my plate! Ain't I been up to the school, and ain't them young ginks hid me on my pants with a quirt like I was a doggoned steer? You figure that I want some more? Forget it!"

"I'm telling you!" roared Job.

"Aw, can it!" said the marshal. "You pack it up a piece, and I'll tell you! There ain't no man can run that bunch 'cept ol' Bill Sampson! I tell you I was agin firing ol' Bill, what's as good a man as any hombre between the Rio Frio and Squaw Mountain. I tell you, you want to send Bill back to ride herd at the school. I tell you——"

"You figure that I'm giving in to a bunch of schoolboys?" demanded Mr. Wash. "Not in your lifetime! I guess I'm going to have that bunch feeding from Scadder's hand."

"Wade in, then," said the marshal. "But count me out! I ain't taking no hand in the game, and you can bank on that!"

"You pesky, doggoned——"

"Pack it up!" said the marshal.

Job Wash shook a fat fist at him, and turned away, leaving the official head of law and order in Packsaddle grinning and picking his teeth. The fat man rolled into the Red Dog Saloon, where he found Two-Gun Carson sitting at breakfast.

"Say, you, Carson——" began Job.

Two-Gun scowled. He guessed what was coming; but he did not want any

more to do with the Packsaddle bunch any more than Mr. Lick.

"That doggoned piecan Ezra is skeered of the bunch," said Job. "You're a member of the school committee, Two-Gun. It was you started the rookus, getting Bill fired! I'll say it's up to you—"

"I guess I got business down to Hard Tack!" said Two-Gun. "I sure got to hit the trail this morning."

"You skeered, too?" hooted Job. "Why, they've turned your boy Steve out of the school because he stood for Scadder! You standing for that?"

"I guess I got to hit the trail for Hard Tack—"

Job Wash gave a snort and tramped out of the Red Dog again. His next call was at Hanson's Hotel. Hanson, the Dane, was grinning.

"Say, you Hanson, you're on the school committee," said Job. "What you figure to do with that doggoned bunch?"

"I tink perhaps we let dem have Bill!" suggested Hanson. "I tink perhaps it was one mistake to fire Bill! What you tink?"

"Can it!" yelled Job Wash. "I'll tell all Texas. I'll bring that bunch to order and make them toe the line! Yep! You hear me whisper!"

He left Hanson grinning, and went back to his store. The crowd there was increasing in numbers, and yelling with laughter. The rebellion of the Packsaddle bunch seemed to strike most of the citizens of the cow town as funny. Moreover, there was general sympathy with the bunch, for Bill Sampson was one of the most popular guys in the valley of the Frio. The general verdict was "nix on Scadder"—but Job Wash was the last man in Texas to think of giving in. Opposition only made Job more obstinate, and he was going to have his own way—if he could get it. He was not going to leave a stone unturned, anyhow.

He hooted to the store assistants to wash out that message on the store

front. Then he retired to his office to think it over. An hour later a notice appeared on the door:

MEN WANTED! FIVE DOLLARS A DAY.

It was a busy morning for Mr. Wash. There was a regular procession in and out of the store. Man after man was signed on, and every one of them was a roughneck of the roughest and toughest description. Job was a wealthy man, the biggest storekeeper in the county. He was ready to spend money on having his own way. Perhaps, too, it was his idea to stick the school committee for the expenses. Anyhow, there he was, signing on men at five dollars a day, and in a few hours he had a list of a dozen of the toughest roughnecks in the Frio Valley—where the mildest galoot was no lamb. Hair-Trigger Pete, their leader, was a guy who had seen the inside of half the gaols in Texas—a burly bullwhacker with a red beard, and an ear missing, bitten off in a scrap.

When Job Wash started up the school trail with that crowd behind him, Job figured that the Packsaddle rebellion was going to fizzle out pronto. Job flattered himself that he was the man to handle the rebellious bunch, and bring them to heel! And it was a cinch that, if the bunch put up a fight against Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang, there were wild times ahead of Packsaddle School.

CHAPTER 15. The Attack!

TIN TUNG howled.
"You no cuttee pigtail b'long this Chine!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar in the playground at Packsaddle School. The Packsaddle bunch were rather enjoying life these days.

Since Bill had gone there had been no school. Small Brown, the teacher, only too glad that the bunch did not rag him, did not even think of suggesting school. Mr. Brown kept chiefly to his own cabin and longed for Bill to come back and ride herd.

The bunch were standing for Bill. They all agreed on that! But they were glad enough to get out of school—and perhaps not fearfully keen to hear the crack of Bill's quirt again. Dick Carr and Slick Poindexter wanted to keep some sort of order, and Mick Kavanagh backed them up more or less. But most of the bunch figured that, without a headmaster in charge, it was a time to make whoopee—and they never were an orderly bunch, at the best of times.

Now, Poker Parker and Slim Dixon had cornered Tin Tung, the Chinese cook, in the playground. Poker was flourishing his knife, while several fellows held the wriggling, squeaking Chinese, in mortal terror of losing his pigtail. He wriggled, and struggled, and howled.

Dick Carr, standing on the bench placed inside the barred gate, was looking down the school trail. Few of the bunch cared about keeping an eye open for the enemy, though they were all ready to line up if an alarm was given. Dick turned his head at the howling of the Chinese, and frowned.

"Let Tin Tung go!" he shouted.

Poker stared round at him.

"Say, you figure you're running this hyer bunch, you pesky tenderfoot?" he snorted. "I'll tell a man I'm going to have his pigtail off'n him! You hold him, you guys!"

"Aw, can it, Poker!" said Slick Poindexter.

"Stop!" shouted Dick Carr, jumping down from the bench. He ran into the laughing crowd.

"No cuttee pigtail b'long this poor Chinese!" howled Tin Tung.

Dick grasped Poker Parker's arm and dragged his hand back. As Poker

strove to wrench it free he grasped the knife, jerked it away, and tossed it over the roof of the bunkhouse.

"Now chuck it!" snapped Dick Carr. "We want Tin Tung to cook for us, same as when Bill was here. And——"

"You figure you're riding herd here?" roared Poker. "I'll say you got another guess coming."

And he hurled himself at Dick Carr, hitting out right and left.

Poker and Slim had been pals of Steve Carson's. Steve was gone, and they were backing up the bunch; but they did not pull with the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, and did not want to. There had been a good many rows since Packsaddle had been a school without a master. Now there was one more!

"Get him, Poker!" yelled Slim.

"Aw, can it, you geeks!" exclaimed Poindexter. "We sure don't want to be scrapping hyer when the school committee get going agin."

"Nix on the school committee!" said Pie Sanders. "They can't do a thing. Snakes! That was a sockdolager!"

Poker Parker went over with a crash as Dick's fist landed fairly in his eye. He hit Texas hard with his back.

Slim Dixon jumped at the tenderfoot. And as they closed in combat Poker scrambled up and joined in. There was an indignant howl from Slick.

"Two to one, you geeks! Forget it!"

And Slick Poindexter rushed into the fray.

It was a wild, scrambling scrap. The rest of the bunch stood round, laughing, and shouting, and cheering, while Small Brown blinked from his cabin window through his horn-rimmed spectacles, and Tin Tung, seizing his opportunity, darted away and escaped.

But the scrap was interrupted by a sudden yell from Mick Kavanagh. His eye had turned on the gate, and it had a view of a Stetson hat, surmounting a red-bearded face, with a slanting nose and a missing ear.

It was the face of Hair-Trigger Pete.

and, the gate being bolted, the rough-neck had pulled himself up outside to look over the high top.

"Watch out!" yelled Mick.

Hair-Trigger stared into the playground. Behind him were Job Wash and his "army." Hair-Trigger Pete swung a leg over the gate and sat on the top. He grinned down at the fat red face of Job Wash.

"I guess we won't be long rounding up this hyer bunch, Mr. Wash!" he remarked. "I'll say— Whoop!"

Hair-Trigger broke off with a fearful yell as a lump of rock caught him under the ear.

It came from one of the bunch, and it sent him tumbling off the top of the gate to crash in the trail outside.

He landed almost at the feet of Job Wash, who jumped back with a startled yelp.

"Aw! Wake snakes!" roared Hair-Trigger! "Great howling gophers! O—oooooh!"

"Watch out!" shrieked Mick.

"Line up!" shouted Dick Carr.

The scrap in the playground stopped instantly. There was a rush of the bunch to the gate. Poker and Slim dabbing crimson streams from their noses as they ran.

Hair-Trigger was a well-known loafer of the saloons in Packsaddle, and most of the schoolboys knew him by sight. What he wanted at the school they did not yet know, but some of them guessed. And as they looked over the gate, from the bench placed inside, they knew that they had guessed correctly. There were a dozen of the roughnecks on the trail—and Mr. Job Wash was there, in command.

Hair-Trigger Pete sat up and roared, his hand to his head. He had a lump there, and it felt painful. He glared up at the row of faces over the gate.

"Say, which of you young ginks heaved that rock?" he bellowed.

"I guess it was this baby," said Hunky Tutt, with a grin, "and I'll say I got another."

Whiz! Bang!

Hunky heaved the rock, and it knocked the Stetson off Hair-Trigger's head. The one-eared man scrambled up, spluttering rage.

"Keep back!" shouted Dick Carr.

"Hold on, Tutt—"

"Aw, can it!" said Hunky. "I guess you ain't king-pin, you Carr! I guess I got a rock for Wash!"

Whiz! Bump!

"Ooooooh!" spluttered Job Wash as a lump of rock hit him on the widest part of his circumference and he sat down with startling suddenness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dick, had he been in undisputed command, would have held the fire till the enemy attacked. But the bunch were full of beans, and not to be restrained. Five or six fellows had missiles, and they rained them on the enemy in the trail. There were loud and angry yells from the roughnecks as they received the fire.

"Foller me, boyees!" roared Hair-Trigger.

He rushed at the gate. He grasped the top to clamber up. The butt of Slick's quirt descended on his knuckles with a crash that numbed them, and the ruffian dropped back, roaring.

"Get on! Get on!" spluttered Mr. Wash. "Get on!"

Crash! Crash! Crash! came the butt-ends of quirts on hands and heads and shoulders. The whole bunch had gathered to defend the gate, and even a dozen husky bull-whackers did not find their task easy. Howls and yells rang in chorus on the trail.

Job, with one hand pressed to a pain in his fat waist, waved his army on with the other. Again Hair-Trigger charged the gate, and again he was knocked off, yelling. Five or six of his men sprawled in the trail.

Then Hair-Trigger yelled to them to scatter along the fence. There were a score of fellows inside, but it would have needed six times as many to man the length of the school fence. Some

of the roughnecks went to the left of the gate, some to the right, and clambered and climbed. One, two, three of the gang jumped down inside and rushed along to the gate to take the defenders in the rear.

Dick Carr shouted:

"Get to the schoolhouse!"

There was no help for it. The gate could be defended no longer, and, tough as the bunch were, they had no chance in hand-to-hand scrapping with twelve of the roughest and toughest bull-whackers in the Frio Valley. They rushed for the shelter of the schoolhouse.

CHAPTER 16.

Hard Pressed!

"QUICK!" panted Dick Carr.

Three of the enemy were within the fence, another was dropping over; two or three more were coming over the gate. But there was time for a prompt retreat—and it was prompt! The whole bunch rushed across to the porch of the schoolhouse and scuttled in. After them, with brandished cow-whips, rushed the three or four of the enemy who had got into the playground.

Pie Sanders, last of the bunch, stumbled in the porch, and a hand grasped him from behind, and he struggled in the grasp of a pursuing enemy. Slick and Mick turned back, and two quirts lashed at that enemy at the same moment, and Yuma Dave yelled and let go. Pie darted in, Slick and Mick followed, and Dick Carr slammed the door.

"The bars!" he panted.

"You said it!" gasped Mick.

Crash! came on the door. Yuma Dave hurled himself at it with all his weight, yelling to his comrades. The door surged open. The bunch packed behind it, and shoved it shut again.

But a heavy boot was jammed in, and they could not get it quite shut. They jammed at it in vain.

"Say, you guys, come on!" roared Yuma.

There was a rush of feet and a roar of voices. Across the playground came Hair-Trigger and his whole gang. Nearly every one of the rough gang had had a knock or two, some a good many, and tempers were up. Job Wash figured that the Packsaddle bunch wanted lambasting, and there was no doubt that if the roughnecks corralled them, they were going to get all the lambasting they needed, and a lot over.

"Keep the door shut!"

"Heave, you guys—heave!"

But Yuma's foot was in the way. His heavy cowman's boot, and his brawny knee intervened between the door and the doorpost.

Mick Kavanagh opened his sheath-knife and pressed the point to that brawny knee.

There was a fearful yell from Yuma.

The leg was withdrawn in a hurry, and the door slammed shut. Slick jammed a bar into place, and it rattled into the iron sockets just as a terrific crash came outside.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Another bar was jammed in. The bunch gasped with relief. For the moment the enemy were barred out.

"The windows!" panted Dick.

"Pronto!" gasped Poindexter.

The bunch scattered swiftly through the building. Windows at Packsaddle School were innocent of glass, but were protected by thick, strong wooden shutters, which barred inside. Swiftly the schoolboys rushed to the windows, dragged the shutters tight, and crammed in the bars.

They were only just in time, for already the roughnecks were spreading round the building, looking for other means of ingress.

The school-room windows were barred; the window of Bill's room, on the other side of the porch, secured at the same time. Bangs and yells rose outside the barred windows.

Dick Carr panted.

"We've stopped them! But that door won't last long if they try to break it in! It won't stop them!"

"It sure didn't stop us when we was after Scadder!" grinned Slick.

"Barricade it—quick!"

"You bet!"

"Wade in, you guys!"

Bang! Bang! Crash! came at the door on the porch. That door was only a brief defence. Already, a few days ago, it had been smashed in by the bunch to get Mr. Scadder. Hank, the hired man, had repaired it, but it was not likely to stand long against an attack.

Dick, Slick, and Mick started dragging the desks out of the school-room. The rest of the bunch piled in to help.

Heavy pinewood desks were stacked against the door. Heavy pinewood benches were stacked against them. Many hands made light work, and the barricade grew swiftly.

Job Wash had arrived on the scene now. He was shouting directions to his men:

"Get an axe! Break in the door!"

"You said it!" growled Hair-Trigger. "You, Tanglefoot—you get an axe—pronto! I guess that door won't stop this outfit!"

Crash! Crash! Crash! Rang the axe on the door. It flew into fragments under Hair-Trigger's hefty smites.

The door was down. But the doorway was blocked, and Hair-Trigger glared at the stack of desks and benches. As he glared, a bully-beef can came whizzing through one of the interstices in the barricade, and landed on his bearded chin. Hair-Trigger Pete staggered back and sat down.

"Ow!" he roared. "Great jumping gophers! Wow!"

"Come on!" yelled Slick.

"This way, you pesky plean!" bawled Mick Kavanagh.

Job Wash blinked at the barricade. Job had expected the way to be clear when the door was knocked in. But the way was far from clear.

"Boys," he squeaked, "remove these desks this instant!"

"Forget it, Job!"

"Go home, you Wash!"

"Can it, you cheap skate!"

The whole bunch yelled defiance. Hair-Trigger grabbed at the piled desks to attempt to drag the barricade down. Through one of the openings among the legs of the desks came a stream of ink from an inkpot. Hair-Trigger roared with rage as it spread over his face.

It was followed by the inkpot, which landed in his eye. Another fierce roar answered from the roughneck of Packsaddle. But he still dragged at the barricade.

Mick rushed into Bill's room and grasped the poker from the grate. He thrust his arm through an opening in the barricade, the poker in his hand. The end of it jammed into Hair-Trigger's red beard. The next lunge would have landed on his nose, but Pete jumped back just in time. He backed out of the porch, with a stream of remarks that almost turned the air blue. And the Packsaddle bunch roared:

"Come on, you pleanans!"

"This way, you hooch-slingers!"

"Wade in, you roughnecks!"

"Come on, you geeks!"

But the enemy did not come on. For the moment the attack was stopped, and the bunch were still holding their own.

CHAPTER 17.

Hot Work!

"GUM!" said Slick Poindexter.

He pushed back his Stetson, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"We've stopped them!" panted Dick Carr.

"You said it!" chuckled Mick. "I guess them Packsaddle roughnecks don't know how to handle this bunch!"

Through the openings of the barri-

cade and from chinks in the shutters the bunch watched the enemy. The playground, the bunkhouse, and chuckhouse were in possession of the chairman of the school committee and his men. But the schoolhouse was held by the bunch, and Job was as far from success as ever.

Job's programme was to quell the rebellion, lambaste the bunch till they were reduced to submission, and leave Mr. Scadder in undisputed rule at Packsaddle. Job was determined on that; when it came to sheer obstinacy, a Mexican mule had nothing on Mr. Wash! The most important citizen of Packsaddle was not to be defied by a bunch of schoolboys. But even the obstinate Mr. Wash had to admit that his programme was not easy to carry through.

His men were keen enough to earn their five dollars each. There was no doubt that the lambasting would be tough enough when it started. But it had not started yet. If the bunch had thought of surrender, the prospect of what would happen when that gang got at them would have stiffened their backs.

But the bunch were not thinking of it. They were only thinking of a fight to a finish. Scrapping came as naturally to that rough-and-tough bunch as breathing, and they were enjoying this jamboree. They would have been rather disappointed if Mr. Wash had called it off.

Crash! Crash! Crash! came suddenly from a window of the schoolroom. The enemy were coming again.

The heavy axe, in the powerful hands of Hair-Trigger Pete, crashed on the stout pinewood shutters. Splinters flew fast under the blows.

"Watch out!" yelled Mick.

"Come on!" shouted Dick Carr.

Slick Poindexter and three or four more stayed at the barricade. The rest rushed after Dick Carr into the schoolroom.

Already the sunlight gleamed

through slits in the wooden shutter, split by the crashing axe from without.

The schoolboys packed at the window. Every fellow had a quirt or a stick or a poker in hand. They could not stop Hair-Trigger from smashing the shutter. But they figured that they could stop Hair-Trigger from getting in after he had smashed it.

The shutter flew open.

Hair-Trigger Pete's Stetson showed under the window. On the crown of that Stetson the butt of a quirt descended, and Hair-Trigger sat down suddenly.

Job Wash waved encouraging fat hands.

"Get in!" he shouted. "Get in!"

"You show them the way, you Wash!" yelled Pie.

But that the fat storekeeper had no idea of doing. Like a prudent general, Job led his army from behind!

He waved and shouted to his men. But the Packsaddle roughnecks did not hesitate. They were eager to get at the bunch and start the lambasting!

Yuma Dave and Tanglefoot leaped at the window, and their heads and shoulders came through. Hefty blows rained on them. The bunch did not stand on ceremony. They knew what was coming to them if the enemy gained the upper hand. They hit hard and they hit often.

With frantic yells the two assailants tumbled back from the window. They sprawled on the ground, roaring.

There was no room at the window for more than two at a time. And more than a dozen were packed inside ready to hit. Two more Stetsons came in—to meet a shower of hefty knocks and disappear again. Then came Hair-Trigger Pete, his face flaming, his red beard bristling with rage. Blow after blow landed on him, but he took them and clambered on. Head and shoulders came through—and then the rest of Hair-Trigger Pete, rolling inside, and crashing down among the bunch.

"Get him!" yelled Dick Carr, and he

lashed with his cudgel at the next head that appeared at the window.

"Cinch him!" roared Mick.

Six or seven schoolboys piled on the man who had got in. Hair-Trigger was a burly and powerful man, but he had his hands full. He rolled on the floor, with hands grasping him on all sides. With a terrific effort, he gained his feet, the schoolboys clinging to him like cats. But he was dragged down again, roaring like a lassoed buffalo.

Two more of the enemy were scrambling at the window. But they were driven back by a rain of blows. Dick and Pie and Hunky and half a dozen more packed the window, and made the defence good. Mick Kavanagh and six or seven fellows had hold of Hair-Trigger. Had the brawny bullwhacker been told that any number of schoolboys could handle him, he would have laughed at the idea. But he found that they could!

Gasping and panting, Hair-Trigger was down on his back, with the Packsaddlers sitting or standing on him. Mick dragged his wrists together, and looped a rope over them. He knotted it hard.

"I guess that cinches you, Pete!" grinned Mick.

He knotted the rope round the roughneck's legs. Then Hair-Trigger was left to wriggle on the floor.

Mick jumped back to the window.

"I guess we got that guy hog-tied!" he chuckled. There was another rush from outside, and again heavy knocks descended on Stetson hats. Again the assailants were driven off.

"Say, you young ginks!" roared Hair-Trigger. "Say, you pesky young piccans, I'm saying—gurrregggghh!" Pie Saunders up-ended an inkpot over Hair-Trigger's open mouth, and he gurgled horribly as the ink went in.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" shouted Dick Carr, brandishing his cudgel at the window. But the enemy seemed no longer keen on coming on.

They bunched before the window, glaring.

"Get in! Get in!" squeaked Mr. Wash. "Say, you figure I'm paying you five dollars to quit! Get in and handle them young geeks."

"Aw, can it!" growled Yuma Dove, rubbing his head where he had a bump as large as a duck's egg.

"Yep, you pack it up a piece!" howled Tanglefoot, feeling his nose to make sure that it was still there. It had had a fearful knock, and felt as if it wasn't!

"I tell you——" yelled Mr. Wash.

Whiz!

The leg of a bench came hurtling from the window. It caught Mr. Wash on the side of the head, and bowled him over like a nine-pin.

"Whoo-hoop!" roared Job.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aw, carry me home to die!" gasped Yuma, as an inkpot flew and caught him in the eye. He backed across the playground in a hurry.

A shower of missiles of all kinds came whizzing from the window. There was a general backward movement on the part of the roughneck crowd. Inkpots and rulers and legs of pinewood benches were unpleasant landing on a guy's features. Yells of rage and pain came from them as they retreated.

"Sure, we've beaten them!" yelled Mick Kavanagh. "I'm telling you 'uns that we've beaten them, and so we have entirely."

And so they had! A crowd of the roughest and toughest bullwhackers in Santanta County had backed off—beaten by the schoolboys of Packsaddle.

It was in vain that Job Wash, almost dancing with rage, yelled to them.

They had had enough for the present, at least, and did not want any more. They rubbed bruised heads and streaming noses, and darkened eyes, and growled and snarled—but they did not heed Mr. Wash, and they did not come on. And their leader, Hair-Trigger Pete, was left in the hands of the victorious bunch—and Hair-Trigger

would have given twice or thrice Mr. Wash's promised five dollars to be safe back in the Red Dog Saloon at Packsaddle!

CHAPTER 18.

"Hop It, Hair-Trigger."

THE bunch gathered round Hair-Trigger Pete, with grinning faces. The red-bearded bullwhacker eyed them apprehensively. Had Pete got the upper hand, he would have been busy just then in handing out terrific licks from a quirt. But it was the Packsaddle bunch that had the upper hand, and Pete was apprehensive of getting those licks himself. He wriggled with his arms and legs tied, but he could not break loose.

"Gum!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "We sure got the king-pin of that outfit, and we're sure going to make him sorry he called!"

"You said it!" chuckled Pie. "We're going to larn them roughnecks not to horn into Packsaddle School. You got it coming, Hair-Trigger."

Mick Kavanagh rushed into Bill's room, and came back with a bucket of soot, raked from the stove. A roar of laughter greeted him. Hair-Trigger Pete gave a howl.

"Say, you pesky geeks—don't you dare—"

"Stick his cabeza into it!" chortled Mick.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hair-Trigger wriggled wildly as a dozen of the bunch grasped him and swung him from the floor. He was lifted over the bucket and up-ended into it.

Horrid gurgles came from the bullwhacker as his head was buried in the soot. He wriggled frantically in the hands of the bunch.

Over he went with a crash, landing on the floor, and the bucket rolled from his head, leaving most of the soot mixed in Pete's hair and beard, in his eyes and nose and mouth.

Hair-Trigger Pete had been suddenly transformed into a coon of the deepest dye.

He wriggled and gurgled on the floor, black as the ace of spades. He spat out soot, and spluttered for breath.

"Gurrgh! I guess—urrgh! You pesky young—gurrgh! Wurrgh!"

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

"Now get the ink!" roared Slick Poindexter.

A stone bottle of ink from Bill's office, containing a gallon of that useful fluid, was brought into the school-room.

Hair-Trigger Pete struggled into a sitting position, and spluttered soot. Slick drew the cork from the huge bottle and inverted the latter over the sooty head of the roughneck.

The ink came out in a flood, drenching the hapless bullwhacker from head to foot. Yells of laughter answered his gurgles.

"Now loose one of his laigs, and drop him out!" said Slick. "I guess he can hop on one laig back to his side-kickers, and I'll mention that we'll pelt him a few while he's doing it."

"You said it!"

"You got it coming, Pete!" chuckled Slick. "I'll whisper that your best guess is to beat it back to the Red Dog, and ride clear of this hyer school."

"Urrgh!" gurgled Hair-Trigger.

"Gurrgh!"

The bunch gathered at the open window, grinning with glee. Every fellow had a missile in his hand, and more ready. Hair-Trigger Pete's right leg was cut loose, leaving his left tied up, bent at the knee. He was dragged up on one leg and hustled to the window.

"Say, you young ginks—gurrgh—I'm telling you—urrgh— Let up on a guy!" gurgled Pete.

"Heave him out!"

"Out you go, Pete!"

Hair-Trigger was heaved out over the sill. He landed on his free leg, rolled over, and crashed.

With a wild effort, he struggled up on his single available leg.

From across the playground his gang stared at him with wide-open eyes. Yuma Dave rushed across, to lend him a helping hand. The big ink-bottle whizzed from the window and caught Dave under the chin, and he went over as if he had been dropped by a six-gun. A whirling bench-leg followed the ink-bottle, and Dave scrambled up and fled. There was no help for Hair-Trigger.

Standing on one leg, he hopped wildly.

"Beat it!" roared the bunch, packing the window with grinning faces, and missiles flew in a shower. They landed on Hair-Trigger Pete, hard and fast.

Gasping and gurgling, the big bull-whacker hopped away. Twice he went over, but the rain of missiles from the window urged him up again. Hopping frantically, and bellowing with rage, the roughneck got away at last.

Dick Carr closed the remnant of the shutter; Slick sorted out nails and a hammer, and planks, dragged from an interior wall, were jammed across the window and nailed fast.

Job Wash was evidently at a loss, and the attack still held off. With the schoolhouse as a stronghold, the rebels of Packsaddle were holding out, and they were going to hold out, as Slick declared, till the cows came home! How it was going to end, no fellow in the bunch could say; but one thing was a cinch—the Packsaddle bunch were going to kick, and keep on kicking, till Bill came back.

CHAPTER 19. The Hungry Bunch!

"HOW about eats?"
"Nix on the eats!" said Slick Poindexter.
"Nix on the eats?" gasped Pie Sanders.

"Jest nix!"

"Pie" Sanders—so called at Packsaddle School because of his great parking powers where pie was concerned—gazed at Slick. The quirt from Bill Sampson, or the cane from Elias Scadder, would not have hurt Pie so much as a shortage on the "eats." Pie's face grew long.

Other fellows in the cow town school were hungry as well as Pie. In the excitement of the "rookus" that was going on at Packsaddle the bunch had rather forgotten "eats." But as the sun set over Squaw Mountain, after a lively day, they had to remember that detail.

More than twenty fellows were in the cow town schoolhouse. The doorway on the porch was strongly barricaded with desks and benches; the windows were shuttered, and had planks nailed across them. The rebels of Packsaddle were holding the fort.

But the fort was not provisioned. There had been no time to think about that when Job Wash, chairman of the school committee, arrived with his forces to put down the rebellion. The bunch had been lucky to pack into the timber schoolhouse and hold it against the gang of roughnecks that Mr. Wash had enlisted in the cause of law and order. But it was as Slick said, "nix on the eats." There were absolutely no "eats" to be had.

Dick Carr, looking from a chink in a cracked shutter, scanned the playground in the red glare of the sinking sun. Job Wash could be seen standing at the door of Small Brown's cabin, talking to the Packsaddle teacher. His men had gone into the chuckhouse to supper. Chuckhouse, cookhouse, bunkhouse were all in possession of the enemy. Tin Tung, the Chinese cook, had hit the horizon, and the toughs of the cow town cooked for themselves—and seemed to be having a good time. But for the schoolboys holding the fort in the schoolhouse it was "nix on the eats."

"Oh, great gophers!" groaned Pie. "Great jumping gophers!"

"I'll say it's fierce!" remarked Slick. "I sure could pack away a few boiled beans—and then some!"

"You said it!" agreed Mick Kavanagh. "I'll mention that I could eat the hind leg of a Mexican mule."

"They got us!" said Poker Parker. "I guess old Wash is wise to that, too. We got to talk turkey."

"Can it!" snapped Slick. "This bunch ain't talking turkey, not by a jugful—not till they send Bill back!"

"Never!" said Dick Carr.

"Aw, you pie-faced geek!" hooted Slim Dixon. "You figure that we can stick here all night without any cats?"

"All night and all to-morrow and all the week!" said the tenderfoot of Pack-saddle determinedly. "We're not giving in! We've turned out their precious new headmaster—Scadder; we've told Job Wash that we're standing by Bill Sampson, and we mean it—every word."

"Eats," said Pie, "is cats!"

"You're a day-boy," said Dick; "you can cut out if you like and dodge that crowd and get home."

"Pack it up!" snapped Pie. "You figure I'd let the bunch down? I ain't throwing you down, you gink!"

"Here comes Mr. Brown!" called out Hunky Tutt.

Small Brown, the teacher, came across the playground, his horn-rimmed spectacles gleaming back the rays of the Texas sun. The bunch crammed the window, where a broken shutter, partly boarded over, gave them a view outside. Poker picked up an inkpot.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Dick Carr. "We're not up against Brown. Leave him alone."

"I guess I can get his headlights from here!" said Poker.

"Guess again!" snapped Dick, and he knocked the inkpot from Parker's hand.

Small Brown advanced very uneasily.

It was clear that Job Wash had sent him to speak to the rebels, not caring to risk his own fat and portly person within the reach of missiles. Small Brown did not like the task, but he did not venture to disregard the chairman of the school committee. He blinked and stared like a scared rabbit as he came towards the building.

"Boys!" squealed Small Brown, blinking at the faces packed at the window.

"Spill it, old-timer!" said Slick Poindexter encouragingly.

"Shoot!" grinned Mick.

"I have a message from Mr. Wash! Unless," said Small Brown, "you surrender at once——"

"Can it!"

"Pack it up!"

"Unless you surrender at once, Mr. Wash and his men will remain here until you do so!" squealed Small Brown. "As you have no food in that building you cannot continue these—these reckless and rebellious proceedings. I advise you to return to your duty."

"Ain't Mr. Wash sending us no supper?" grinned Slick.

Small Brown blinked at him.

"You will have nothing to eat!" he answered. "If you do not surrender now you will be compelled to do so to-morrow. You will be starved out."

"Great gophers!" groaned Pie Sanders.

"Tell Mr. Wash from us that we'll chuck it as soon as Bill Sampson comes back!" answered Dick Carr. "Bill's our headmaster, and we're not standing for any other—least of all that worm Scadder! We're holding on till Bill comes back!"

"We want Bill!" roared Slick.

"Bill or nobody!" yelled Mick Kavanagh.

"Mr. Sampson has gone back to the Kicking Mule Ranch," said Small Brown. "The school committee are determined not to reinstate him here, and that Mr. Scadder shall be head-

master of Packsaddle. I advise you——"

"Can it!"

"Beat it while you're safe, Mr. Brown!" said Slick. "We want Bill, and we're sure standing for Bill till the cows come home."

"And take that with you!" hooted Poker Parker, who had picked up the inkpot, and he took aim through an opening of the planks nailed over the window.

Dick Carr grabbed his arm in time, and the inkpot fell to the floor. Mr. Brown turned and bolted like a rabbit. A yell followed him, but nothing more dangerous. All the bunch knew that Small Brown wanted Bill back as much as they did. Nobody was going to hurt Small Brown. Only Poker wanted to—and he was stopped.

"You doggoned tenderfoot!" howled Poker, turning on Dick Carr. "I guess you, ain't running this hyar bunch!" And he hit out at the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, and Dick gave a yell as a set of hard knuckles landed on his nose.

The next moment Poker staggered under a fist that crashed into his eye, and landed on the floor with a terrific crash.

Slim Dixon made a jump at the tenderfoot. Dick's left met him as he came, and he rolled headlong across Poker.

"I'll say that was some sock-dolager!" said Mick admiringly. "That tenderfoot sure can hit! Get up and have some more, Slim!"

But Poker and Slim seemed to have had enough; they moved away scowling when they got up. Small Brown was out of range now. He rejoined Mr. Wash at the door of his cabin, and the glare of wrath that the fat store-keeper turned on the schoolhouse showed that he was receiving the defiant answer of the rebels. A long, thin man joined in the discussion at the cabin door—it was Elias Scadder, the new headmaster. He had arrived to take over control when Mr. Wash

put him in possession. But even with a dozen of the roughest and toughest bullwhackers in Santanta County to back him Mr. Wash was not able to put him in possession yet. And the Packsaddle bunch figured that he never would be.

CHAPTER 20.

Food In Sight!

NIGHT fell on the valley of the Rio Frio.

Pie Sanders groaned over the absence of "eats"; Poker and Slim were sulky and discontented. But nearly all the bunch were determined—and the most determined of all were Dick, Slick, and Mick.

There was no supper that night for the bunch.

Across the playground they could see the lights from the chuckhouse, where Hair-Trigger Pete, Yuma Dave, Tanglefoot, and the rest of Mr. Wash's roughneck crew supped and smoked, and wound up by roaring out a chorus more suitable for the Red Dog Saloon than Packsaddle School. After which the roughnecks turned into the bunks in the bunkhouse, left vacant now by the bunch, and Mr. Wash and Mr. Scadder were accommodated in Small Brown's cabin. Evidently the enemy intended to remain on the spot and besiege the rebels in the schoolhouse till they surrendered.

Probably Job Wash figured that they would be in a surrendering mood by morning. Healthy fellows, accustomed to the open air, had healthy appetites, and there was no doubt that already they were all hungry. By morning they would be ravenous. Then they would give in—and would receive such a terrific thrashing all round that they would not be in a hurry to rebel again against Job's specially selected headmaster.

That was how Job mapped it out, and Job, the most obstinate guy in Santanta County, was going to remain on

the spot till it happened, leaving his store on Main Street, Packsaddle, to the care of his assistants. Job reckoned that if there was a guy in Texas who could bring that bunch to heel, he was that very guy!

It was a long night to the bunch.

They had few fixings for camping in the schoolhouse. In the quarters formerly occupied by Bill, there were a bunk and blankets—but one bunk and half a dozen blankets did not go far among more than a score of campers.

But the Texas schoolboys were used to roughing it—and Dick Carr had learned to do the same since he had come to Packsaddle. Slick Poindexter slept like a top on bare planks, with his head pillowed on a box. Dick did not sleep quite so soundly—still, he slept. If fellows awakened, it was not so much the hard beds as the inward emptiness that did it. Pie Sanders opened his eyes and groaned regularly every half-hour.

As Pie was a day boy, he could have cut off home, where there were plenty of "eats," and it was really heroic of Pie to stand by the bunch in the circumstances. But he did it! But when he slept, he dreamed of boiled beans and bacon—and when he woke, he thought of pumpkin-pie. It was not a happy night for Sanders.

At the earliest gleam of dawn the bunch were up.

Every fellow was too hungry to want to bed down any longer. Pie rooted through Bill's quarters in the faint hope of discovering something in the nature of canned foods.

Mick Kavanagh took a notch in his belt and pressed both hands to the spot where he fastened the buckle.

"I'll tell a man I'm sure as empty as a drum!" said Mick. "It sure is fierce."

"You hungry, Carr?" asked Poindexter, with a dismal grin.

"Famished!" said Dick.

They looked from the broken shutter. Small Brown had come out of his cabin

and was trotting in the playground, every now and then turning his horn-rimmed glasses towards the schoolhouse. Nobody else was up yet—on the enemy's side.

Poindexter put his hand through a gap, and waved to the Packsaddle teacher.

Small Brown came cautiously towards him.

"Say, you, Brown!" called Slick.

"Shall I tell Mr. Wash you are giving in?" called back Small Brown.

"Giving in nothing!" snorted Slick.

"Say, you, Brown, we sure are short of the eats in this shebang! You sling us a few canned beef and beans while them roughnecks are snoozing, say!"

Small Brown blinked at him, hesitating.

He was anxious for the rebellion to be over on almost any terms, for he went in constant terror of Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang. And he believed, like Mr. Wash, that hunger would soon force a surrender.

But his sympathy was on the side of the bunch in standing for Bill, for he knew what Mr. Wash did not know, that there never would be order at Packsaddle till the six-gun school-master came back.

And Small Brown was not a bad-hearted guy, and he could feel for a crowd of hungry schoolboys cut off from all food supplies.

He hesitated, but at last he nodded.

"I will do my best, Poindexter," he answered.

"Say, that little man is the right stuff, I'll tell all Texas!" exclaimed Slick, as Brown went away towards the cookhouse, adjoining the chuckhouse across the playground.

Every face in the bunch brightened. Breakfast was the most pressing need if they were to hold out. If Small Brown got through—

"Hope he gets us the eats!" breathed Pie Sanders.

From the window the bunch watched breathlessly. Small Brown came out of the cookhouse after what seemed an

age. He carried a grip in one hand, packed full, and the schoolboys could guess what was in it. Pie Sanders' eyes danced.

"Eats!" he breathed.

Small Brown blinked uneasily towards his cabin where Mr. Wash and Scadder still slept. There was no sign of them so far. Still more uneasily he blinked towards the bunkhouse, where Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang were camped. They did not seem to be stirring yet.

Then he came trotting towards the schoolhouse, with the grip in his hand, the tails of his coat flying in the wind in his haste.

He was hardly a lasso's length away when a burly figure with a red beard appeared in the bunkhouse doorway.

It was Hair-Trigger Pete, the first of the roughneck crowd to turn out. Pie gave a groan.

"Pipe that bullwhacker! He's sure spotted Brown! Great gophers!"

Hair-Trigger, looking out into the morning sunlight, stared blankly at the sight of Small Brown trotting across the playground with a bag of canned foods. He stared—he glared—and he rushed out.

"Say, you geck, what's that?" he roared.

"Burn the wind, Brown!" shrieked Poindexter.

"Pronto!" roared Mick.

"Pull in, you gink!" roared Hair-Trigger, tearing in pursuit.

Small Brown blinked round in alarm at the roar of the bullwhacker. He almost tottered over in his alarm. The schoolboys watched him in an anguish of anxiety. Only a dozen yards away there was the supply of food—and they were all famished.

Dick Carr dragged at one of the nailed boards across the window. It came down, leaving room for a fellow to get out.

"Pronto, Brown!" yelled Slim.

But Small Brown stood rooted for some moments. Then, as if making up his mind, he rushed on towards the

schoolhouse, the burly roughneck almost at his heels.

He was hardly ten feet away when Hair-Trigger Pete reached him. The burly ruffian let out a heavy boot, which landed on Mr. Brown's coat-tails and sent him crashing.

"Orrrrrrh!" spluttered Small Brown as he hit Texas. The grip shot from his hand, and its contents rolled on the ground—cans of beef, cans of beans, cans of peaches—all sorts of canned provender. The bunch gave a groan of dismay.

Dick Carr slipped from the window and dropped outside. In a twinkling Slick and Mick dropped after him, and after them Pie, Hunky Tutt, and Bud Dunn. The rest packed the window and watched.

CHAPTER 21.

Brown Gets the Boot!

S MALL BROWN yelped like a run-over dog.

Hair-Trigger, having sent him sprawling with that hefty kick, turned on him to give him a few more of the same.

Small Brown had heaps and stacks of book-knowledge, but with his hands he was a poor fish. He could not have tackled one side of Hair-Trigger Pete. He sprawled and roared and howled, while the roughneck kicked him, and kicked him again.

Busy with applying boot-leather to the Packsaddle teacher, the ruffian did not observe the schoolboys dropping one after another from the window.

Half a dozen of them came at him with a rush.

"Wake snakes!" roared Hair-Trigger as the half-dozen cinched him and rushed him over. "Carry me home to die! Yooop! Hyer, boyees—say, you turn out—say, you wake up, you dog-goned gecks—say—whoop!"

But the rest of the gang were still in their bunks. No doubt Hair-Trigger's frantic yells reached them; but they

had no time to turn out and come to his aid.

Seconds were precious, and the schoolboys did not waste one. Hefty as Hair-Trigger was, six husky fellows handled him, and he rolled over, struggling and roaring, hammered and punched and pommelled till almost every ounce of wind was knocked out of him.

Then Pie Sanders, leaving him in the hands of the others, rushed for the "cats."

He grabbed up can after can. He did not stay to pack them in the grip; he hurled them in at the window. The first can of beef caught Poker Parker on the nose as it whizzed in, and Poker retreated from the window with a fiendish yell. Then the rest stood clear, as can after can whizzed in.

Small Brown sat up, set his spectacles straight and blinked dizzily. He had done his best, though his best did not amount to a whole lot. He sat and gurgled.

Hair-Trigger rolled and roared, struggled, punched, and kicked; but the five fellows who had hold of him gave him hard measure. They thumped him, and banged his head on the ground, stamped on his legs, and generally reduced him to a state of breathless wreckage. Every one of them had two or three hard knocks from the ruffian, but they did not heed them. Hair-Trigger, powerful ruffian as he was, was soon a mere heap of breathlessness and aches and pains.

But by that time his associates had taken the alarm. Yuma Dave stared out of the bunkhouse and yelled to his comrades. Out from the doorway rushed the whole crew of roughnecks.

In the doorway of Small Brown's cabin appeared Job Wash and Mr. Scadder, staring.

"Beat it!" panted Slick.

Leaving Hair-Trigger sprawling and gurgling, the schoolboys dashed back to the window. Pie had hurled in the last of the cans, and had head and shoulders into the gap between the

planks at the window, his friends within helping to drag him in.

Pie rolled inside, headlong, and Hunky Tutt and Bud Dunn after him. Mick was the next, and then Slick, Dick Carr remaining till the last.

There was no danger from Hair-Trigger—he was winded to the wide, gurgling spasmodically on the earth. But the roughnecks, racing across the playground, were close at hand—Yuma Dave ahead of the rest, his outstretched hand almost touching Dick's shoulder.

"Quick!" yelled Pie from within.

"Pronto, you geck!" gasped Slick.

He reached out a hand to the tenderfoot.

Dick plunged in head and shoulders, and Slick grasped one arm, Mick the other, to drag him right in. But at the same moment Yuma reached him and grasped one of his legs.

"I guess you're cinched, buddy!" grinned Yuma.

And he closed his grasp with both hands on that leg and dragged.

"Pull him in!" yelled Mick.

"Lend a hand here, you uns!" roared Slick.

Many hands grasped Dick at the top end, by his arms, his shoulders, his ears, his collar, even his hair. The bunch were not going to let the enemy get him if they could help it.

A fearful howl came from Dick Carr.

With his friends dragging him from within, and the enemy dragging him from without, he felt as if he was coming into two pieces.

Luckily he had one foot free.

He jerked it up and kicked backwards blindly. Yuma Dave gave a terrific roar as the schoolboy's boot jolted his front teeth. He let go Dick's leg, clapping both hands to his mouth. He figured for a moment that his jaw was broken, and his teeth driven down his throat. It was not so bad as that, but it felt like it, and Yuma was too busy for a moment to

hold on to the tenderfoot of Packsaddle.

Dick, dragged in, rolled inside the school-room. He bumped on the floor, yelling. Outside, Yuma was yelling, too.

"Faith, we got him!" exclaimed Mick jubilantly. "We sure cinched you, Dick—I'll say I had yere hair in both hands, and I'd sure have kept it if they'd got the rest of ye——"

"You blithering idiot!" yelled Dick Carr.

"Say, ol'-timer, what's biting ye?"

"You've pulled my hair out by the roots, you howling ass!" yelled the tenderfoot of Packsaddle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howly Mike, and is it grouching ye are?" exclaimed Mick indignantly. "And me holding on to yere mop like death to a nigger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dick scrambled to his feet, feeling his head tenderly. He had been saved from capture by the enemy, but it had been a painful process. He rubbed his head and grunted.

Outside, Yuma was rubbing an aching jaw, and gurgling strong words. Hair-Trigger staggered to his feet. Small Brown was scuttling back to his cabin, perhaps wishing that he had never horned in.

Most of the roughnecks were within range of the window, and five or six of the bunch began hurling inkpots and other missiles—and the enemy promptly retired across the playground.

Pie Sanders was already opening cans.

There was breakfast, after all, for the hungry bunch. Canned beef and canned beans went down at a great rate.

Dick, Slick, and Mick, as they chewed beef, looked from the window. They were rather worried about Small Brown. Mr. Brown had hoped, and intended, to convey that much-needed supply of food to the rebels unseen—but he had failed in

that. They wondered what was going to happen to Mr. Brown. It was certain that Job Wash would be as mad as a hornet at the action of the Packsaddle teacher in aiding the bunch.

It was soon clear that Job was as mad as a hornet—or madder!

The fat man was talking to Small Brown outside his cabin, and his enraged voice carried across the playground to the ears of the schoolboys. Job was purple with rage and brandishing fat fists at the Packsaddle teacher as he talked.

"You ornery geck!" yelled Job.

"You owl-eyed, pie-faced polecat! You figure the school committee is paying your salary to back up them young gecks agin their noo headmaster! You're fired, you pesky piccan—fired, do you hear, you ornery guy? Beat it! Hit the trail! Get out of this school and stay out! Get me?"

Job yelled to his men.

"Put that guy out on the trail, pronto! Boot him a few!"

The roughnecks were only too willing to obey.

They rushed at Small Brown.

With a squeal of terror the Packsaddle teacher streaked for the gate. After him rushed the rough mob, roaring with laughter.

"Poor old Brown!" gasped Slick.

"Put it on, Brown!" yelled Mick Kavanagh.

"Hit it, ol'-timer!" roared Hunkey.

Small Brown was hitting it in great style. Bareheaded, his hair flying in the wind, his coat-tails streaming behind him, Small Brown flew. The bunch could not help him—there was only safety in flight for Mr. Brown!

Luckily that was Small Brown's long suit. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as he flew.

The gate was shut and barred, and the rough crew behind him counted on cinching him there. But terror lent Small Brown wings. As he reached

the shut gate, he rose to the leap like a bronco.

Over the gate flew Small Brown, clearing it by an inch, stumbling and rolling over in the trail outside.

But he was on his feet again in a twinkling, and streaking down the trail to the cow town. The roughnecks stopped at the gate with a howl of disappointment. A runaway bronco had nothing on Small Brown as he went down the trail. He vanished.

"I guess he's a good little man, and were standing for him," said Slick. "He's coming back when Bill comes—and this hyer jamboree is going on till we get Bill! And don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER 22.

Hot!

DICK CARR watched with an intent eye.

"They're up to something!" he said.

"Bet on that!" said Slick Poindexter. "But I don't get it!"

"I guess Job is wise to it that he's slipped up on starving us out!" grinned Mick. "But what's his game now?"

The day was wearing on. A dozen cans of beef and beans was not a large supply for a score of fellows, but it was enough to see the bunch through the day.

There was no more to come, it was true, but for the present the bunch were able to hold on—and they were holding on. And they figured that Job was getting impatient.

He had counted on surrender that day; but if he was going to starve out the bunch, he had to wait—and from the expression on his face when they sighted him in the playground they reckoned that Job was not in a mood to wait.

And it was clear, as they watched in the afternoon, that something was being planned by the enemy.

Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang had already learned that they could not carry the schoolhouse by assault, defended by the bunch. The latter would rather have welcomed a fresh attack to break the monotony with a little liveliness. They had no doubt about being able to defend the barricade in the doorway.

Desks and forms and other furniture were stacked there, with planks, from interior walls, nailed to them. The gang had tried it and failed, and they were welcome to try again, if they had a hunch to do so.

Now a number of roughnecks had gone out at the gate, and some of the bunch wondered whether they had tired of the job, and vamoosed. But some of them remained, and Mr. Wash and Scadder were still to be seen. Dick Carr guessed that some new move was coming from the enemy, but he could not guess what it was.

"Say, look, you'uns!" exclaimed Slick suddenly.

From the direction of the gate came the toughs who had gone out some time ago. Evidently they had not gone for good. They came in, carrying in their midst a felled tree-trunk.

The branches had been lopped off, leaving a log a foot thick and twenty feet long, so heavy that half a dozen of the gang found it weighty to carry.

Dick Carr whistled. One glance was enough; he knew for what that log was intended. It was a battering-ram!

"Holy Mike!" ejaculated Mick in dismay. "I'll say that galoot Wash is no slouch! I guess them desks will start tumbling when they get going with that piece of timber."

"You said it!" muttered Poindexter.

"They got us!" said Poker Parker.

"Aw, can it!" growled Slick. "They ain't got us yet, not by long chalks they ain't, and I'll say there'll be cracked cabezas afore they horn into this hyer shesbang."

The roughnecks dumped down the log at a little distance from the

schoolhouse porch, out of range of missiles.

There the whole gang gathered round it with grinning faces. There was a sour grin on Job Wash's fat face as he gave his men directions. This was the big idea that the chairman of the school committee had thought of. And the bunch had to admit that it looked like a cinch.

Once they were at close quarters, Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang were too tough a proposition for a bunch of schoolboys. And once the barricade was knocked away, they would get to close quarters.

Dick Carr set his teeth.

"We're fighting it out!" he said.

"You said it!"

The bunch gathered behind the barricade in the doorway of the schoolhouse. Every hand grasped a weapon—a ruler, a pointer, a eudgel, or a quirt. There were going to be hard knocks, given and received, when the barricade was down, and the Packsaddle bunch braced themselves for the fray.

"Here they come!"

The whole gang of roughnecks grasped the heavy log and lifted it. In the grasp of a dozen hefty men, it was easy enough to handle, heavy as it was.

They came on with a rush, heading for the doorway, Mr. Wash and Elias Scadder watching them from a safer distance.

Missiles flew through the openings of the barricade. A bully beef can, empty and rather jagged in its edges, caught Hair-Trigger Pete under the chin as he came within range. He gave a roar like an enraged buffalo, but he came on. With a rush, the log was brought to bear on the barricade in the doorway.

Crash!

The whole structure rocked under the terrific shock. Two or three of the desks smashed to fragments. The front end of the log was buried in the stack.

Through the interstices the bunch lunged with their weapons, but the

assailants were out of reach. Grinning, the roughnecks jerked out the log, and retired for another charge.

"I guess that shack won't stand more'n one or two of them sock-dolagers!" said Pie Sanders ruefully. "They'll be at us then."

"Stick to it!" said Slick. "Every man's got to hit his durndest when they come on. Say, where's that guy Mick?"

Mick had left the bunch. Dick Carr stared round for him. It was not like Mick Kavanagh to ride clear when a shindy was on.

"Mick!" shouted Dick Carr.

"Aw, lave me be!" came back Mick's voice from Bill's room. "I guess I got something to surprise them hombres."

Dick ran across and looked into Bill's room. Mick was stacking pine chips into the stove, and it was roaring into the iron chimney. The long iron poker was sticking in the fire. To the safe end of it, Mick had bound a six-foot rail with a length of cord.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Dick.

"Aw, watch out and you'll see!" answered Mick over his shoulder. "Don't chew the rag when a guy's busy."

"They're coming agin!" shouted Poindexter.

"Come on, Mick, you fathead!" exclaimed Dick Carr, and he rushed back to the barricade.

Hair-Trigger and his gang were coming on again. They had retired to a distance to get force for the rush. Now they came on with the log, and it crashed on the barricade a second time, smashing desks and benches right and left. Half a dozen of the stacked desks rolled down, crashing, and the schoolboys had to jump clear.

They shouted defiance at the enemy. But they could do nothing else, and Hair-Trigger grinned at them, as his gang dragged the log back again.

"I guess you're getting yours, you young ginks!" shouted the red-bearded



Hair-Trigger Pete made a jump at the fence, and caught the top with his brawny hands. Before he could make his hold good, Dick Carr released one hand, clenched it, and hammered it on the red-bearded face. **Blit!** "Ooooooh! Woocoooooh!" bellowed Hair-Trigger.

bullwhacker. "I'll say we'll be in that shebang in two shakes of a possum's tail. I guess you got it coming."

A whizzing inkpot caught him in the eye, and he yelled and retired. Once more the gang gathered at a distance for a rush to the battering-ram.

"I reckon that will work the rifle!" said Slick Poindexter coolly. "That stack won't stand against it! We got to scrap!"

"We're ready!" said Dick between his teeth.

"I should smile!" agreed Poindexter. "Stand to it, you guys, and wherever you see a cabeza hit it, and hit it hard."

"You bet!"

"Here they come!"

On came the roughneck gang, and the heavy log crashed again with a thunderous crash! That did it! Right and left crashed the piled furniture, rolling and tumbling. The way was open to the roughnecks—they had only to scramble over and through the ruins of the barricade.

That was not an easy task with the way cumbered with broken and piled furniture, and the bunch standing ready to hit every head that came within reach. But the bullwhackers came on, with quirts in their hands for use as soon as they reached the defenders.

"Get them!" roared Hair-Trigger.

And he led the way, scrambling headlong through the wreckage, his men after him. Job Wash, at a distance, grinned with satisfaction. This was the finish, Job reckoned. A few minutes more, and the bunch would be down and out, and Scadder's cane, well laid on, would put them wise to the fact that it did not pay to resist the authority of the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee.

"Say, stand clear, you'uns!" came a yell from Mick Kavanagh.

He came running out of Bill's room with the rail in his hands. At the end of the rail was the long iron poker—glowing red!

"Oh, great jumping Jehoshaphat!" panted Slick. "Mick, you galoot——"

"Good man!" roared Dick Carr. He understood now.

The bunch gave Mick room. Holding the safe end of the rail in both hands, Mick Kavanagh thrust the red-hot poker through the piled wreckage of the barricade.

Hair-Trigger Pete was almost through the pile when the business-end of the poker jammed into his ribs.

The yell that came from Hair-Trigger might have been heard from the Rio Frio to the town of Packsaddle. "Yoo-hoo-hoooop!"

Hair-Trigger roared and bounded. One more shove at the tumbling wreckage of the barricade would have brought Hair-Trigger through. But he did not give that shove! Hair-Trigger was a determined ruffian, but the most determined bullwhacker in Santanta County would not have stopped to argue with a red-hot poker jamming in his ribs. Hair-Trigger Pete bounded back, crashing into Yuma Dave and Tanglefoot, sending both of them sprawling on their backs.

Mick, grinning, lunged again. Three or four of the gang were within reach of the long rail with the poker fastened to its end. They did not remain within reach!

One touch of the glowing end of the poker was enough—more than enough!

A few moments ago the whole gang had been shoving and crashing through the wrecked barricade—and less than a minute would have seen them at close quarters, with the upper hand. But the lunges of the red-hot poker made all the difference. One tap was enough to send the toughest of the gang yelling out of reach.

They packed in front of the porch, spluttering with rage, three or four of them rubbing places where the hot metal had touched, wriggling and howling like prairie wolves.

Job Wash, in the rear, waved his fat hands and yelled:

"Go on! Get in! Do you hear me? Go on at once!"

They heard him, but they did not heed. Hair-Trigger Pete, bent almost double, with a hand pressed to his ribs where the poker had poked, stamped away yelling. A flannel shirt was not much protection against a red-hot poker, and Pete felt hurt.

"Go on!" yelled Mr. Wash. "Go on!"

But they did not go on. Instead of advancing they retreated. Mick Kavanagh, grinning with glee, came forward, lunging with his surprising weapon, and the roughnecks backed and backed—and finally scuttled after their leader. Job waved his fat hands and yelled in vain! Mick Kavanagh had put paid to the attack, the battering-ram lay where it had been dropped, and the enemy were in full retreat.

"Our game!" roared Slick Poin-dexter. "Mick, old-timer, I'll tell all Texas you're a whole team and a cross dog under the wagon!"

"Good old Mick!" chuckled Dick Carr.

"Sure we've bate them!" chortled Mick. "We've bate them intirely, and so we have! And sure I'll keep the poker in the stove ready for them next time."

"I guess there won't be no next time!" chuckled Slick.

And Slick was right.

The attack had failed, and Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang kept their distance. Dick Carr and the rest of the bunch laboured at repairing the barricade without interference from the enemy. The great log was dragged in by the triumphant bunch safe from the roughnecks. It would not be used against them again. Behind their defences, the Packsaddle bunch were still unbeaten!

And when the sun went down again on the cow town school Job Wash had to make up his mind that there was nothing for it but to starve out the

bunch. But whether the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee was going to get by with that remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 23.

The Quitters!

"I 'M goin' to quit!"
Poker Parker made that announcement.

"Aw, can it!" growled Slick Poin-dexter.

"And squat on the can!" snapped Mick Kavanagh.

There were serious and solemn faces in the schoolhouse at Packsaddle. The rebels of the cow town school were up against it.

Dick Carr was taking in a notch in his belt. Dick was as determined as ever, but there was no doubt that he was feeling the pinch—like the rest of the Packsaddle bunch.

Pie Sanders declared that he could have eaten the hind leg off a Mexican mule, with the hair and the hoof. In the first excitement of the rebellion the bunch had not given much thought to "eats." But they had to think of the eats now.

For a whole day and more there had not been a morsel for any guy in the bunch. They all had healthy appetites. Every fellow barred in the timber schoolhouse was getting ravenous.

Outside in the playground the hot sun of Texas streamed down. Across the playground Job Wash, chairman of the Packsaddle school committee, could be seen standing with Elias Scadder in the doorway of Small Brown's cabin. In the shade of the chuckhouse Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang sat at ease, smoking and waiting. They were waiting for the rebel bunch to surrender. And it looked as if they had only to wait. The bunch had defeated all attacks, but they could not stand up against the enemy within—hunger. Mr. Wash was expecting surrender at any moment now.

Poker Parker was the first to speak of quitting, but his pal Slim Dixon backed him up at once.

"You said it, Poker!" exclaimed Slim. "I'll tell a man I'm hungry enough to chew off the tail of a prairie wolf! The game's up!"

"The game isn't up!" snapped Dick Carr. "We're holding out till the school committee let Bill Samson come back! We're not taking on Scadder as headmaster of Packsaddle!"

"Nix on Scadder!" growled Slick. "You doggoned pesky bonehead!" howled Poker. "How you figure we're going to hold on without a bite to chew?"

"We'll manage somehow——"

"Aw, pack it up! Them scallywags is watching all the time, and I guess they won't let us get in any eats. The jig's up, and I'm quitting!"

"I'm with you, Poker!" said Slim.

Dick Carr shut his teeth.

"I'm sticking it," he said. "I'm standing for Bill, and I'll hold on if I have to hold on alone!"

"Doggone Bill!" snarled Poker. "Bill's gone back to punching cows on Kicking Mule, and I guess he's forgot by this time that he ever was a school-master. I don't hone for the Scadder guy any more'n you do—but they got us by the short hairs, and we got to quit!"

Dick looked over the bunch. Every face was long and grim, but most of them were resolute. So far, at all events, there were only two quitters.

Poker stamped across to a window. The doorway on the porch was strongly barricaded, and there was no egress that way. Planks were nailed across the window, and Poker grasped one to drag it down.

"Let up!" shouted Slick.

"Go and chop chips!" retorted Poker Parker. "I'm quitting; and I guess if you guys have got any hoss-sense you'll quit, too! Lend a hand here, Slim!"

Slim Dixon lent a hand; they wrenched together at the plank to make room to get out of the window.

Slick Poindexter clenched his fists. Prospects did not seem hopeful for the besieged bunch. The garrison of the timber schoolhouse had no provisions, and there seemed little prospect of getting any, but they were going to hold on somehow.

"I'm saying let up!" roared Slick.

And as Poker and Slim continued to wrench at the plank Slick Poindexter jumped at them. His fists lashed out together, the right catching Poker on the chin, the left landing in Slim's eye. The two quitters yelled and rolled over on the floor.

"That's the stuff, Slick!" grinned Dick Carr.

"You said it!" chuckled Mick.

Poker and Slim scrambled up, red with fury; they hurled themselves together at Slick Poindexter.

"Boot them!" roared Mick Kavanagh.

And six or seven of the bunch rushed in. Poker and Slim backed away in a hurry and then ran for it. After them rushed the Packsaddlers, booting them the whole length of the school-room and back again.

With howls and yells the two quitters dodged and ran and scrambled. They got out of the school-room at last, streaked across the passage, and dodged into the room that had belonged to Bill Sampson when the six-gun school-master was there.

Poker slammed the door of that room and jammed his foot against it. Slim hastily wedged the end of a pointer under the door.

Bang, bang! came on the door or Bill's office, but the wedged door held fast.

"Come out of that, you goldarned quitters!" roared Poindexter.

"We're sure going to quirt you a few!" howled Mick.

Bang! Thump! Bang!

But the wedged door held. In Bill's office Poker and Slim were safe—for the moment, at least.

"Pronto!" breathed Slim.

He ran to the window of Bill's room. It was shuttered with planks nailed across it, like all the windows in the building. But the quitters had time now, and they grasped at the nailed planks and wrenched.

While the wedged door held the rest of the bunch off they dragged a plank away. Space was left for squeezing out.

"Beat it!" gasped Slim Dixon.

He squeezed through the opening; he got through and dropped on the ground outside. Poker Parker squeezed after him; but he was burlier in build than his comrade, and he stuck in the aperture.

"Aw, lend a hand, Slim!" he gasped.

Slim grasped his shoulders and dragged at him. Poker struggled wildly to get through. He knew that the wedged door would not hold long.

It did not! The whole bunch crashed on it and the wedge gave way and they came streaming into Bill's office.

"Get them!" roared Slick.

He tore across to the window. Poker Parker made a terrific effort and got half through. But Slick grabbed his legs in time.

"I'll say that guy's cinched!" panted Slick, as he grasped a pair of ankles and dragged.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give me room with this quirt!" shouted Mick Kavanagh.

Whack, whack, whack!

The quirt came lashing down on the seat of Poker's trousers. He yelled and wriggled frantically.

With Slick holding his legs he could not get through. He was half out and half in, and the half that was in was getting the quirt hot and heavy and hard.

"Aw, can it!" shrieked Poker. "I guess I'll come back! Let go, Slim, you bonehead! Wake snakes! Whoop!"

Slim let go, and Poker was dragged back into the room. Slim cut away like an escaped bronco. He had got loose, but the other quitter had to stay.

He rolled on the floor of Bill's office, roaring.

Whack, whick, whack! came the quirt, and Poker scrambled up and fled, yelling, across the passage to the school-room.

Dick Carr, grinning, nailed up the plank again.

CHAPTER 24.

First Come First Served!

JOB WASH scowled across the playground at the barricaded school-house. Job was the most obstinate guy between the Rio Frio and Squaw Mountain, but he was getting tired of the trouble at Packsaddle.

Job's temper was getting so bad that even his pet Scadder had to deal with him warily.

"It cannot last long now, sir!" said Elias Scadder. "The young rascals have had no food since yesterday—"

"If you was a man, you Scadder, you'd have taken them in hand and rode them!" snarled Job. "I guess Ezra Lick was right when he said you wasn't the guy to fill Bill Sampson's boots."

"My dear sir—" Scadder coughed.

"I'll tell a man!" hooted Job. "If it wasn't for going back on my word, I'd send you along where you came from, and bring Bill Sampson back! Why ain't you handled that bunch?" He snorted angrily. "Bill Sampson had them feeding from his hand. Why ain't you?"

"I am accustomed to a more orderly—"

"You knowed what you was taking on!" growled Job. "Did you figure you was going to handle a bunch of tin angels in the roughest section of Texas? Aw, pack it up!"

"A sufficient amount of punishment," said Elias Scadder, setting his thin hard lips.

"You said it!" agreed Job. "Hide them a few, and then a few more, and I guess you'll work the raffle. Yep!

Am I going to be beat by a bunch of pesky schoolboys? I'll say not! But if it wasn't for that, I'd sure send for Bill and go back to my store."

"My dear sir——"

"Pack it up—I've no use for back-chat!"

Job turned his podgy back on his new headmaster, and stamped across to his roughneck crew, sitting in the shade of the chuckhouse.

They eyed him under their Stetsons as he came. They had disappointed Job, and they had already had the sharpest edge of his tongue a good many times. But they were not the guys to take it like Scadder.

Halting in front of them, Job glared at them scornfully and savagely.

"Say, you doggoned prairie rabbits!" he hooted. "Say, there's a round dozen of you, and you allow that you're the toughest gang in Santanta County. And you let them schoolboys put it across you! I got to hang on hyer, leaving my store, while you sit around like a caboodle of old hens! What sort of pesky mugwumps do you call yourselves, anyhow? By the great horned toad, I'll tell a man, you want to get jobs in a Chinese laundry! That's the sort of crawling gophers you are!"

Hair-Trigger Pete looked up at him.

"You sure do shoot off your mouth a whole heap, Job!" he retorted. "I guess we're earning our dollars, with every guy here got bumps and bruises all over him from them young scallywags yonder. And I'll mention that if you spill any more, I'm the guy what's going to take you by the slack of your breeches, and sling you into the Frio!"

"I should smile!" remarked Yuma Dave.

Job Wash controlled his wrath. He did not want to be dropped into the river that rolled past the school fences, and the Packsaddle roughnecks were

just the guys to do it. There was a sudden yelp from Scadder.

"Here they come, sir——"

"What!"

Job spun round.

"At least, one of them," added Elias.

Job stared at the running figure coming across from the besieged schoolhouse.

It was Slim Dixon, hurried and breathless. Job's angry face cleared. This meant surrender.

For a moment or two he expected to see the rest of the bunch following. But it was soon clear that Slim came alone.

Elias Scadder, with a sour look on his bony face, went into Small Brown's cabin for a cane. Scadder's cane had never had authority at the cow town school like Bill's quirt, but he was anxious to get going with it.

"Please, Mr. Wash," gasped Slim, "I've got away! I—I'm quitting! I—I say, I'm hungry, Mr. Wash."

Job eyed him grimly.

He was very anxious for the bunch to surrender; he had sworn that he would have them feeding from Scadder's hand before he was through with them. He was going to do it—if he could. And the desertion of one member of the bunch looked like the beginning of the end. So Job ought to have been pleased; but at the same time he rather unreasonably despised the deserter as a "quitter."

Job was no quitter himself, as he had proved by his obstinate determination to put Scadder in, and keep Bill out. He prided himself on being no quitter. So, welcome as Slim's surrender was, Job glared at him morosely.

"You pesky young plectan!" he said.

"Ain't the rest coming out?"

"Nope!" said Slim. "I guess Parker would like to, but they got him cinched. I'll say the bunch are carrying on, Mr. Wash. But me, I've come back here, sir, good and obedient."

"Obedient, nix!" snorted Job Wash.

"Honing for eats, you mean, you young quitter! I guess you'll get some eats, but eats ain't what you're getting fust, by a long chalk! Mr. Scadder!"

Elias came out of Small Brown's cabin, cane in hand and a gleam in his fishy eyes.

"Sir!" said Scadder.

"You want to handle this young rube," said Mr. Wash, "and you want to l'arn him good and strong. Here, you Hair-Trigger, you get a holt on that young gopher and see he don't vamoose agin."

Hair-Trigger Pete, grinning, stepped over to the dismayed Slim and grasped him by his neckscarf. Scadder swished the cane.

"Say," roared Slim Dixon, "ain't you letting me off, Mr. Wash, seeing as I've come back good and obedient?"

"Let off Abraham Lincoln!" yapped Job Wash. "Skin him, you Scadder! You show that you can handle a cane, like Bill Sampson his quirt! You hear me toot?"

What followed was painful for Slim.

Hungry as he was, and now with a prospect of "eats" in store, he wished that he had stayed with the bunch.

And the bunch, staring across from the window of the schoolhouse, were glad that they were not with Slim—even Poker Parker was glad that he had not got away!

For Slim went through it good and strong, as Job expressed it. Bill Sampson had often laid on the quirt hard and heavy at Packsaddle School—but Bill had never laid on the quirt as Elias Scadder laid on the cane.

The whacks of that cane rang across the playground like pistol-shots. Louder still rang the frantic yells of Slim.

"Gum!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "I'll say that Slim is sorry he beat it, you guys. I'll tell a man!"

"Sounds like!" chuckled Mick, as the fearful yelling from Slim echoed through the building. "Say, Poker, if you want some, I guess we won't stop you! You drop out of the winder,

and go and ask Scadder for your turn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Poker did not accept that offer. He was glad to be where he was, eats or no eats. It was clear that stiff punishment awaited the bunch when they fell into the hands of authority—and first come were first served!

Slim was struggling wildly and frantically in the herculean grasp of Hair-Trigger Pete. But he struggled in vain. The red-bearded bullwhacker held him as helpless as a baby, while Elias laid on the cane.

Job looked on grimly. He hoped that this sight would be a warning to the rest of the bunch. It was—a warning not to surrender so long as they could possibly hold out!

Whack, whack, whack, whack! rang the cane on the struggling, wriggling, yelling Slim, till Scadder's bony arm was tired, and, in spite of himself, the whacks fell lightly.

"I guess," said Job Wash, "that that will see him through, Scadder! I guess they're all going to have the same! Now, you Dixon—"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" wailed Slim, doubling himself up in anguish, as he was released. "Yow, wow, ow! Wake snakes! Whoop!"

"You get into the chuckhouse!" said Job. "And stay there! I guess there ain't no school till this rookus is through, but you ain't going to rubber around lazy, you ain't! Nope! You're going to do the chores! Say, you 'uns, you keep that young gink working, and if you see 'im laze, you lam him a few!"

"You bet, boss!" grinned Yuma Dave.

Slim tottered into the chuckhouse. He had the eats at last; but he had also had the thrashing of his life, and now he had a chore-boy's job, kicked and cuffed by the rough gang of bullwhackers. It was not the reward he had expected for "quitting"—but no doubt it was as good as he deserved!

CHAPTER 25.

A Desperate Venture!

"WEVE got to get the cats!" Slick Poindexter spoke when the sun had gone down behind Squaw Mountain and darkness had descended over Packsaddle School and the Valley of the Frio.

"There ain't no two ways about that!" groaned Pie Sanders. "I ain't no quitter, I ain't, but I sure do feel bad! I'll tell a man, I could chew the sole off'n a cowman's boot!"

"It's eats, or the finish!" said Mick Kavanagh dolorously. "That doggoned fat old geck, Wash, has got us by the short hairs. If we feel like this to-day, what'll we feel like to-morrow?"

"We got to get in eats by to-morrow," said Slick.

Dick Carr nodded. He was trying to think out the problem.

It seemed as if all the cards were in Job's hand now that he had given up attacking and settled down to starve out the bunch. Job reckoned that he had only to exercise patience for the rebel bunch to fall into his hands like ripe apples. And it looked as if Job was right!

"How come?" groaned Poker Parker, pressing his hands to his stomach, which quaked with emptiness. "Slim's had it bad, but I guess he's getting the cats! I'll say I'd let that guy Scadder take the skin off'n my back for a can of beef or a plate of beans!"

"Aw, can it, you quitter!" growled Slick. "I'm saying we got to get the cats."

"And I'm saying, how come?" snarled Poker. "Any guy that gets out will be roped in at once by that gang; they're watching us for jest that very thing. And if you got down to the town, you wouldn't get any cats there—you'd be rounded up at once. How you going to get any eats, doggone you?"

"I've been thinking," said Dick Carr quietly.

"Spill it, old timer," said Mick hopefully.

"We can't get anything from Packsaddle town," said Dick. "But if a fellow could get out without being caught——"

"Forget it!" grunted Poker.

"Bill's at Kicking Mule Ranch," said Dick, "and if a fellow could get to the ranch——"

"Gum! That's a stunt!" exclaimed Slick. "All the Kicking Mule outfit stand for Bill, and they was sure mad when he was fired. But how you going to hit Kicking Mule, even if you get out? They got all our hosses safe—you'd never get hold of a cayuse——"

"Shanks' pony!" said Dick.

"It's ten miles of prairie to the Kicking Mule!" said Slick dubiously.

"And Bill wouldn't horn in, neither," said Poker. "He ain't nothing to do with the school now. Didn't he tell us when he went to make the best of Scadder. Bill's through with us."

"I know that," answered Dick Carr. "Bill can't very well chip in. But Barney Bailey, the foreman at the Kicking Mule, will help us fast enough when he knows we've got no grub. It's a chance, anyhow."

There was a discussion in the school-room. It was a desperate chance to take, for it was certain that the rough-necks were watching to cinch any straggler from the garrison. And any fellow who fell into their hands was booked for the same fate as Slim. Worse still, he would be taken care of, and would be able to take no further part in the rebellion.

But it was clear that something had to be done! No garrison could hold out without food.

"Who's going?" asked Hunky Tutt, at length.

It boiled down to that. It was the only chance, and the real question was who was going to make the venture.

"Let Carr go!" sneered Poker Parker. "It's his stunt, and sure he's the galoot to put it through."

"I'm willing to go," answered Dick at once. "Best for me to go, because Barney's a friend of mine, since I helped him get hold of the brand-blotters on the ranch. I'm ready."

"You ain't going alone," said Slick. "Count me in."

"Me, too!" said Mick.

Dick shook his head.

"Easier for one to get through," he said, "and you fellows are wanted here. If they get me, you try it on next, Slick."

"Mebbe you're right," admitted Slick reluctantly. "I sure do hate your going it alone, but I guess you're right. I'll be glad to see you safe back."

"Specially if you bring in some eats," moaned Pie.

Now that the matter was settled, no time was lost in getting ready.

The sun was gone, and deep darkness lay on the cow town school. The moon was not due to rise for an hour yet, and it was necessary for Dick Carr to get clear before moon-rise. Only in the darkness could he hope to elude the watchful eyes of Job's "army."

Quietly a plank was removed from a window to allow him room to squeeze out. Across the playground lights were burning in the chuckhouse and in Small Brown's cabin. Every now and then a moving figure could be seen against the light. But most of the enemy were hidden in darkness.

The bunch guessed that a watch was being kept on the besieged schoolhouse. Job Wash was not likely to give them a chance of getting out in quest of provisions if he could help it. But if the watchers were at hand, the darkness wrapped them, and they could not be seen.

Dick peered from the window. In the velvety darkness an enemy might have been within ten feet of him, unseen. But he had to take the risk.

Silently he squeezed out of the window.

Holding on to the wooden sill he felt

for the ground with his feet and landed without a sound.

"Good luck, ol'-timer!" breathed Slick.

"Stick it out while I'm gone," whispered Dick Carr.

"You bet!"

Leaving his anxious comrades packed at the window peering after him in the gloom, Dick stepped away from the wall. He groped along with hands outstretched, and disappeared from the sight of the bunch.

"Hope he pulls through safe!" breathed Pie.

"Hark!" panted Poindexter.

There was a sudden shout and a trampling of feet in the shadowy playground. The bull-voice of Hair-Trigger Pete roared.

"Say, that's one of them young scallywags breaking herd! Cinch him! Watch out, you geeks!"

Shouting—trampling—yelling! The bunch listened with beating hearts, breathless. Had they got Dick Carr?

CHAPTER 26.

Touch and Go!

"O H, my hat!" breathed Dick, as his outstretched hands, groping in the darkness, came in contact with a shadowy form.

Instantly a brawny hand grasped at him and grabbed him by the shoulder, and Hair-Trigger's voice was roaring.

Dick wrenched at the bullwhacker's grasp, but it closed harder and tighter. Dim in the thick gloom, the red-bearded face peered at him. There was yelling and trampling as the roughnecks rushed up at their leader's roar.

Dick was desperate! It was too bitter to be caught before he had taken a dozen steps on his mission. He clenched his fist hard, and drove it up fiercely at the stubby red-bearded chin.

The clenched fist crashed like a lump of iron on that stubby chin, and Hair-

Trigger Pete felt for a moment as if his chin had been pushed up through his head. Hair-Trigger, with a gurgling gasp, let go and staggered.

He was clutching again the next moment, bellowing with rage, but one moment was enough for the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. Dick leaped back the instant he was loose and dodged. The bullwhacker's brawny hands sawed the air for him in vain.

"Cinch him!" roared Hair-Trigger Pete. He clasped his aching chin with both hands and rubbed it. There was a severe pain in it. "You guys, you cinch that young geck. You hear me too? I'll say he's handed me a sock-dolager, doggone his hide! I'll sure lay him out!"

"Say, where's that guy, Hair-Trigger?" shouted Yuma Dave, from the gloom.

"Git to the gate!" yelled Tanglefoot. "He'll make for the gate."

The anxious bunch, packed at the window, listened with thumping hearts and tried to penetrate the darkness with their eyes. But they could see nothing except glimpses of shadowy forms passing between them and the lights of the chuckhouse across the playground. But they had one hope—the howls and yells of the roughnecks showed that Dick was not caught yet! He was still dodging in the darkness, even if he had not escaped.

"They ain't cinched him yet!" breathed Slick. "I guess he's got a chance—I tell you, that tenderfoot is a bully boy with a glass eye! Yep! I'll say he's got a chance."

The chance seemed slim enough to Dick Carr. He had streaked for the gate, but two or three of the gang loomed up there in the shadows, and he had to stop and dodge. All round the schoolgrounds was a ten-foot fence, and he was shut off from the gate. There was a side-gate on the river, and Dick made for that, but only to discern a burly form sitting on it, a black silhouette against the sky. He backed

and dodged again, panting for breath.

There was a bump in the darkness as he collided with a running figure. He barely missed a grasping hand. A yell followed:

"Say, he's hyer! I guess this is the young geck! Say, you stop him, you galoots! Watch out!"

Trampling feet seemed to surround the schoolboy dodging in the darkness.

He hardly knew how he eluded the crowd of them. But he cut away again, and headed for Small Brown's cabin. There was no escape that way, and, for that reason, Dick hoped that the roughnecks would give that direction a miss, and give him a chance to lie low.

The doorway of the cabin was open, and the light of a kerosene lamp streamed out, revealing Mr. Wash and Elias Scadder standing there. Dick dodged behind the cabin, stopped, and flung himself down on the ground, hugging the wall. The darkness wrapped him like a cloak, and hid him from searching eyes. And so long as he did not stir, he was fairly safe.

Shouting and trampling went on. He heard the voice of Elias Scadder speaking to Job Wash.

"Undoubtedly, sir, one of the boys trying to get away—perhaps to obtain a supply of food—"

"Perhaps nothing!" snarled Job. "Ain't it as plain as the dirt on the face of a Mexican half-breed? I guess they want the eats, and want 'em bad, goldarn 'em! They got to talk turkey if they can't get the eats. But they ain't making the grade, Scadder—I'll tell you that! I got the whole crowd watching, and I'll mention that they're going to watch all night, and any young guy what breaks herd will be sure cinched! And I'll see you hand him a few with that cane of yours."

Hair-Trigger came panting up. He still had one hand to his stubby chin where an ache lingered.

"You got him?" howled Job.

"Got nix!" grunted Hair-Trigger. "But I'm telling you he ain't broke

loose. He ain't got out, Mr. Wash. The moon'll be up in half an hour, and then I reckon we'll spot him, and have him dead to rights."

Dick Carr could hear every word clearly. He breathed hard. He knew, as well as Hair-Trigger, that his game was up when the moon came up over the Rio Prio. If he were not outside the school fence before then, he was caught.

"Say," went on the bullwhacker, "you, Scadder, you bring that lamp, and I guess you'll be some use. I'll say you ain't no use rubbering there with that long neck of yours."

"You said it!" agreed Job Wash. "You mosey along with that lamp, Scadder!"

Elias did not seem very keen, but he did as he was bid. He emerged from the cabin with the kerosene lamp in his hand. The light was cast for a considerable distance round him.

"I guess the young gink is keeping doggo," went on Hair-Trigger. "You show that glim round the cabins, Mr. Scadder. Mebbe we'll raise him behind the bunkhouse, or the chuckhouse, or mebbe this hyer very cabin. You mosey along with that glim."

Dick rose to his feet. He had hoped to lie low for a time till the rough-necks slackened in the search.

But Hair-Trigger had evidently spotted his game, and there was no time to lose now. The light of the kerosene lamp, carried in Scadder's bony hand, came glimmering round the cabin.

Even as Dick rose, the light glimmered on him as Scadder came round the corner, and the new schoolmaster of Paeksaddle gave a startled jump, and almost dropped the lamp.

"Here!" he squealed. "Here! Oooogh!"

Dick Carr lowered his head and charged. His head butted on Elias Scadder's waistcoat, and the long, thin Scadder folded up like a pocket-knife.

One long horrible gasp he gave as

he folded. Then he collapsed, gurgling for breath, and the kerosene lamp crashed on the ground, and went out. All was dark again.

Dick jumped back as Hair-Trigger, only a few paces behind Scadder, came trampling on. Heavy boots trampled on Scadder.

"Urrrghh!" came in agonised tones from Elias. "Wurrghh!"

There was a roar from the bullwhacker.

"Say, I got him! I got him, sure!" He grasped at the wriggling, gasping figure on the ground. "This way, boyees! I got him dead to rights."

"Yurrghh!" gurgled Scadder.

He could not speak. He could only gurgle as he wriggled wildly in Hair-Trigger's grasp.

Dick Carr dodged away swiftly in the dark. Five or six of the rough-necks were running to the spot. Job Wash was yelling:

"Where's that light? Say, what you put the lamp out for? You, Scadder! Where are you?"

Job came rushing round the cabin. He met a running figure in full career. Dick Carr staggered from the shock. Job Wash flew.

"Whoosh!" gasped Job, as he rolled. "What the thunder— Oooosh!"

The fat storekeeper sprawled over, panting. Dick Carr was running again. Behind him he heard the roar of Hair-Trigger Pete.

"I'm telling you, I got him! Get a glim hyer, you'uns! I'm telling you I've cinched that guy!"

Dick chuckled breathlessly as he ran.

Evidently, in the darkness, Hair-Trigger had grabbed Elias Scadder by mistake. A word from Elias would have set the mistake right, but the hapless Elias could not utter a word. He was winded to the wide, and could only utter gurgles.

The roughnecks were running up from all directions. Job Wash staggered to his feet, and tottered on. A crowd was gathering behind the cabin,

where Scadder wriggled in Hair-Trigger's mighty grasp.

It was a chance for the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, and he made the most of it.

He guessed that the gate was still guarded, and he did not head for the gate. He reached the school fence, and groped along it, feeling for a spot he knew, where a timber buttress made it fairly easy to climb. He found the spot, and began to clamber up, only hoping that he would have time to get over the top.

Behind him a light winked in the darkness. Somebody had got a lamp. There was a roar.

"Who's that?"

"By the great horned toad, you got Scadder!"

"You doggoned gink, Pete!"

"Great jumping gophers! I figured it was that young gink I'd got a holt on. Say, you goldarned Scadder! Why couldn't you put a galoot wise?" bellowed Hair-Trigger.

"Urrghh!" That was all Scadder could say. "Gurrghh!"

"You pesky goobs!" howled Job Wash. "You let that young gink beat it! You doggoned boobbs, you get arter him! You figure I'm paying you to let them young scallywags break herd, and get in the eats! Say, you puffed bunch of gecks——"

"Woogh!" moaned Scadder. "Oogh!"

"Arter him!" raved Job. "Get that young geck! Say, if he gets away, I'll sure leave you to whistle for your dollars, you boobbs! You figure I'm paying you to fool around and rope in my schoolmaster?"

Shouting and trampling, and a flashing light. Elias Scadder was left to moan and gurgle unheeded. Job Wash's infuriated voice rang far and wide, urging on the chase. In the schoolhouse the bunch listened in tense excitement.

The hunt was up again, hotter than ever. Dick Carr was clambering desperately up the fence. He was almost at

the top when a light flashed below, and there was a roar:

"There he is!"

"On the fence!"

"Cinch him!"

He was seen. A kerosene lamp gleamed on him, revealing the desperately clambering figure to a dozen pairs of eyes. Hair-Trigger rushed at him and grabbed.

At the same moment Dick dragged himself to the top of the fence. The grasp from below missed him by a foot or more as he whisked out of reach. Breathlessly he swung over the top. Job Wash, almost dancing with rage, yelled frantically:

"Get him, you goobs! Get him!"

Hair-Trigger made a jump at the fence, and caught the top with his brawny hands within a foot of Dick Carr. Before he could make his hold good Dick released one hand, clenched it, and hammered it on the red-bearded face. Hair-Trigger bellowed and let go, and dropped back within.

For a second Dick grinned breathlessly at the crowd of faces in the light of the lamp. Then he dropped outside the fence.

He stumbled over, jumped to his feet, and ran into the night. A minute later Hair-Trigger was scrambling over the fence again, and two or three more of the roughnecks were scrambling after him. But only a receding sound of running feet rewarded them. Darkness and the rolling prairie had swallowed Dick Carr.

In the besieged schoolhouse the bunch listened. The trampling and the yelling and shouting died away. Had they got Dick Carr? Slick Poin-dexter wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Hope he's got through," he murmured.

"Say, that's Job's toot," breathed Mick. "Lissen, you'uns!"

The angry voice of Job came to their ears.

"You doggoned gecks! You pie-faced goobs! You've let that young gink make his getaway. Doggone you, he's got clear! Say, you watch out for him! You hear me yaup? That pesky young geck's gone for eats; and if you let him get back with any eats, I'll sure fire the whole crowd of you!"

Slick chuckled.

"Say, you guys, young Carr's made the grade!" he said joyfully. "He's sure made his getaway!"

"You said it!" chortled Mick.

"I'll tell a man that tenderfoot is a whole team and a cross-dog under the wagon," chuckled Slick. "He's got clear, and he'll get back with the eats. I'll tell all Texas."

And the hungry bunch hoped that Slick was right.

CHAPTER 27.

Dick Carr's Errand!

BILL SAMPSON, sitting in the saddle, girth-deep in the thick grass of the prairie, stared in blank astonishment.

The sun was coming up over the Rio Frio. Bill, riding herd over two hundred cows belonging to the Kicking Mule Ranch, had been up with the sun. In his red shirt, big cowman's boots, and ten-gallon hat, Bill looked just as he had looked when he was headmaster of Packsaddle School. But his bronzed, bearded face was not so cheery. He was glad to be riding again with the Kicking Mule outfit, but he missed the school, and he missed the bunch, and he was sorely troubled about the state of affairs at the cow town school since he had left.

In the bright sunlight of the Texas morning Bill had been looking in the direction of Packsaddle School, far out of sight across the rolling prairie. A tramping, weary figure came into his view, and it was then that Bill craned his neck to stare at that tramping figure, and he ejaculated:

"Jumping painters! It's sure young Carr!"

Six or seven miles, at least, from the cow town school, Dick Carr, the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, was tramping on foot across the rough and rugged prairie. Nobody in the cow country went on foot if there was any kind of a cayuse to be had. Bill's keen eyes, as they picked up the tramping figure, could discern that the schoolboy was weary, dusty, and worn, but he was tramping steadily on, with fixed determination. From the direction he was taking it looked as if he was heading for the Kicking Mule Ranch, a good many miles farther on.

Bill Sampson gave his bronco a touch of the quirt and galloped towards the still distant schoolboy.

Dick was tramping wearily, his eyes on the ground, and he did not observe the horseman till the thudding of the hoofs caught his ears, and he looked up. Then, as he recognised Bill, his face brightened. He waved his hand to the former schoolmaster of Packsaddle.

Bill came up with a clatter of hoofs and a jingle of bridle and spurs, and drew rein. Dick Carr halted. He was glad to halt. He was so tired that he could hardly drag one weary leg after the other.

"You pesky young plecan!" said Bill, staring down at him. "What's this game? Why ain't you in school? I guess you must have hit the trail in the middle of the night to get as far as this on the hoof."

Dick Carr leaned on Bill's bronco. It was a relief to rest on anything. Bill regarded him with concern.

"More trouble at the school?" he demanded. "I guess I heard from Barney Bailey that you young guys was giving Mr. Scadder a rough house. What you breaking herd for this-a-way?"

"Jolly glad to see you again, Bill!" said Dick, with a faint grin. "I wish you were back at Packsaddle."

Bill grunted.

"Aw, can it, you young gink!" he said. "Ain't I been fired by Mr. Wash and the school committee, and ain't Mr. Elias Scadder your noo headmaster, and ain't I gone back to punching cows? I guess you ain't hoofed it across the prairie to tell me that."

"Give me a lift to Kicking Mule, Bill."

"What you aiming to do at the ranch?"

"Ask Barney Bailey for some grub to take back to the school," answered Dick. "Look here, Bill, the bunch is standing for you, and we won't have Scadder at any price. We're fixed up in the schoolhouse, and holding out, and Job Wash has got a gang of the toughest roughnecks in the county to help him; and we've got no food. They're going to starve us out—if they can!"

"Howling coyotes!" exclaimed Bill.

"I can tell you, Bill, all the bunch are hungry," said Dick Carr. "But we're not giving in. I know you can't chip in, Bill, but we're not going to give in till they send for you to come back."

"Carry me home to die!" said Bill.

"They're besieging us in the schoolhouse, waiting for us to chuck it, because we've got no grub," said Dick Carr. "I got out last night and dodged them. I'm going to ask Barney Bailey to help. I'm going to get some grub in somehow. Give me a lift to the ranch, old man. I'm not asking you to do anything more than that."

Bill eyed him.

"I guess," said Bill, "that I've got a big hunch to ride into Packsaddle School and give them hombres some gun-play. But"—he shook his head—"I guess that wouldn't do, young Carr. Nope! I'll say that your best guess is to forget that I ever was your headmaster, and make the best of Scadder."

"Nothing doing!"

"Git on!" said Bill.

He grasped Dick Carr with a brawny

hand and hooked him up on the bronco. Double-loaded, the horse trotted through the thick grass towards the distant ranch.

Dick Carr was more than glad of the lift. His legs ached from the long tramp on the rugged plains.

Bill's bronzed face was grim and thoughtful as he rode for the ranch. At the Kicking Mule they knew all about the schoolboys' rebellion, and there was not a man in the outfit who did not wish the rebels luck—except Bill himself, who was rather a grim disciplinarian. Bill would have handled a rebellion in the school with a hard and heavy hand. Still, Bill knew that Elias Scadder was not the man to handle the Packsaddle bunch; and Job Wash's stunt of starving out the rebels made him snort with anger and disgust. The idea of the schoolboys barred in the schoolhouse with nothing to eat got his goat sorely.

He said nothing as he rode for the ranch.

Not till he dropped Dick Carr at the gate did Bill speak.

"Thanks, Bill!" said the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, as he slid from the bronco's back.

"I guess," said Bill, "that if you want advice from me you'll toe the line, young Carr, and tell the other young guys to do the same. The school committee have sure played it low down on me, I allow, and I don't think a whole lot of that galoot Scadder, but he's your headmaster, and there ain't no two ways about that. You get me?"

Dick grinned.

"I get you, Bill. That's what I expected you to say. But I didn't come here for advice, old man; I came for grub. So-long, Bill!"

Bill Sampson grunted, and wheeled his horse to ride back to his herd. But his bearded face was sorely perplexed and troubled as he rode.

"Hallo, young Carr!" sang out Barney Bailey, the foreman of Kicking Mule, as Dick came in at the gate.

"What's blowed you in?"

Dick explained. Half a dozen of the Kicking Mule 'punchers' gathered round to listen as he told Barney.

"By the great horned toad!" exclaimed Barney. "I guess you've hit the right spot, young Carr! I'll say that if Bill would give the word we'd saddle up and ride for Packsaddle and wipe out that crowd and ride Mr. Wash home on a rail, and Scadder arter. But if it's eats you want, there ain't a guy in this outfit wouldn't hand you his last boiled bean."

"You said it, Barney!" exclaimed Mustang Sam.

"I knew you'd stand by me, Barney!" said Dick gratefully. "We cain't get anything in Packsaddle town, but here, if you'll lend me a horse——"

"I guess you can pick out the best cayuse in the corral," said Barney, "and we'll load him up with eats sky-high. S'long as you're standing for old Bill you bet this outfit is standing for you."

An hour later Bill Sampson had another view of Dick Carr—this time riding back to Packsaddle on a loaded horse. And Bill watched him with a worried brow, wondering how the jamboree at the cow town school was going to end.

CHAPTER 25.

"Eats" for the Rebels!

"A NY guy here hungry?" asked Slick Poindexter.

"Aw, can it!" groaned Pie Sanders. "I could sure chew boot-leather!"

"And then some!" mumbled Mick Kavanagh.

"The jig's up!" said Poker Parker. "That young guy Carr got through last night, but he'll never horn in with the eats. I'll say they've done got us by the short hairs."

"Pack it up!" snapped Slick.

"I guess," said Pie Sanders, "that we're holding on to give young Carr a chance. Mebbe he'll get through come dark."

Pie spoke with heroic hopefulness. He was the hungriest of the hungry bunch. But it was barely noon, and the idea of waiting till dark made the bunch groan. Yet, in the daylight, what hope was there of Dick Carr getting through? Even after dark the prospects were not rosy, for there were a dozen of the roughneck crowd all certain to be watching like cats. Even the most hopeful of the bunch realised that, difficult as it had been for Dick to get away, it was a much more difficult proposition for him to get back with a supply of food. And their hapless insides were quaking for eats.

Bang!

Slick Poindexter jumped.

"What the great horned toad!" he ejaculated.

That sudden bang startled the whole bunch. It was a heavy knock of some hard object striking timber.

"Them galoos heaving rocks?" exclaimed Mick.

"What the Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Hunky Tutt.

The schoolboys crowded to the window and stared through the spaces between the planks nailed across. They could not guess what had caused that loud knock on the timber, unless the enemy were heaving rocks.

But there was no sign of activity among the enemy. Hair-Trigger, sitting on the gate, was smoking a pipe after his beans. Yuma, at the other gate, was eating from a platter brought to him by Slim. The rest of the gang lounged or sprawled about. Mr. Wash could be seen sitting outside Small Brown's cabin, talking to the long, thin Scadder. Nothing was going on, and yet——

Bang!

It was another loud knock.

This time the bunch spotted whence the sound came. It was from the roof overhead.

Slick stared up blankly.

"It's sure some guy heaving rocks!" said Mick. "But what's the game?"

Nobody was to be seen near the

schoolhouse. Whenever the enemy came near the bunch pelted them from the windows, and they had learned to keep at a respectful distance. There were windows on both sides of the timber schoolhouse. In front was the playground; behind was a space of twenty feet or so that separated the building from the high school fence. And nobody was to be seen at hand.

Bang!

Another knock on the roof.

Mick gave a sudden yell.

"Aw! I guess it's young Carr come back!"

"Carr!" exclaimed Slick.

"Sure! I'll tell a man he's outside the fence, pitching rocks on to the roof to tell us he's there!"

"You've got it!" exclaimed Slick.

There was a rush to the back windows of the building. Beyond the open space there rose the ten-foot fence. As they stared they saw a small object suddenly whiz over the fence and sail through the air swift as an arrow. There was a bang as it dropped on the roof. Pie Sanders gave a howl of delight. He had caught a gleam of a red label on the object that whizzed through the air.

"Say!" yelled Pie. "He ain't heaving rocks—he's heaving cans of beef! He's got back with the cats!"

Slick gasped.

"Didn't I tell you guys that tenderfoot was a whole team and a cross-dog under a wagon!" he howled. "He sure has pulled it off! He sure has worked the rifle! I'll tell a man!"

There was a large trapdoor in the schoolhouse roof, in case of fire—an ever-present danger in the wooden buildings of the West. The ladder to reach it was kept in a corner. Slick rushed for the ladder, and five or six fellows rushed after him.

Almost in a twinkling, it was planted at the trap. Pie Sanders was the first to rush up. Canned beef was dropping on the roof, and Pie was feverishly anxious to get to it. He wrenched at

the trapdoor, and dragged it open. He put his head out.

At the same moment another can of beef, sailing through the air, dropped just over the open trap.

Thud!

There was a fearful yell from Pie as the can of beef dropped fairly on his head! He came slithering down the ladder, the can rattling and crashing after him. He landed on Slick and Mick, sending them spinning.

"Aw, wake snakes!" yelled Slick.

"Say, you pesky boob!" roared Mick

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" spluttered Pie, scrambling up dizzily. "I'll say—wow! Ow! I guess my cabeza's cracked a few—wow!"

Pie clapped his hand to his damaged head. But only for a moment! Then he pounced on the can of beef!

CHAPTER 29.

No Joke for Job!

DICK CARR rode back to Packsaddle School as fast as his well-laden horse could cover the ground. But within sight of the cow town school he halted in a clump of timber. To ride on was to fall into the hands of the roughneck crew; it was only by strategy that he could hope to get in the sorely-needed supplies to the besieged bunch.

He unpacked the innumerable bags loaded on the bronco, and stacked them away out of sight in a thicket. The bronco he started back towards the ranch, leaving it to find its way home. He had no further use for the horse.

Then he climbed into the branches of a tall cotton-wood, and surveyed the school. He could make out the buildings within the high fence, and the burly figure of Hair-Trigger Pete sitting on the gate, smoking, toy-like in the distance. His face was very thoughtful as he descended from the tree.

To wait for sundown was safest, but

the thought of the hungry bunch, waiting anxiously for supplies, decided him to try his luck without delay.

He packed one bag with as many cans of beef as he could carry, and started on foot towards the school—keeping low in the grass, and taking advantage of every bush or bit of timber for cover. Keeping well away from the gate, where the red-bearded roughneck was watching the trail, he reached the school fence at the back of the schoolhouse.

There he dumped down his bag of provisions. The next step required thinking out. To clamber over the fence, draw up the bag with a rope, and take his chance of getting into the schoolhouse with it, had been his idea, but he had to abandon it now.

From where he sat, Hair-Trigger could see along the fence, and though he had not spotted the schoolboy outside beyond the turn of the fence, he was certain to spot him if he appeared on the summit. And once he was seen, there was no chance of getting through.

Dick Carr did some hard thinking for long minutes. Through the chinks of the fence he could see the windows at the back of the schoolhouse—only twenty feet away! But it might have been twenty miles, for all the chance he had of getting there. Then the recollection of the trap in the schoolhouse roof flashed into his mind. It was easy to toss an object that distance. If the bunch caught on—

Carefully calculating the direction and the distance, he stepped back from the fence, and swung a can of beef through the air.

It whizzed over the top, and he heard a distant bang as it landed on the extensive roof. If it reached the ears of Hair-Trigger, he did not heed it. There was plenty of noise from the schoolhouse most times—especially when the bunch were breaking up furniture to strengthen the barricade at the door. Dick grinned with satisfaction, and heaved another can. Can after can flew over the fence, described an arc

in the air, and dropped on the schoolhouse.

The bag was emptied at last, and there had come no interruption from the enemy. Evidently Job Wash and his men were in happy ignorance of what was going on.

Dick peered through a chink. There were faces at the boarded windows now, looking out. They could not see him, but they knew he was there. He could see the happy grins on the faces that showed through the planks. The bunch were getting the "eats."

He had landed the first lot safely.

Leaving the fence, he dropped on hands and knees to crawl away, rising to his feet as soon as he reached safe cover, and returning to the clump where he had left the rest of the cargo from Kicking Mule.

In the besieged schoolhouse there was rejoicing.

Pie Sanders was the first to get his teeth into beef—heedless of a bump on his cabeza. Slick Poindexter crawled out on the roof from the trapdoor. The roof was spotted with cans of beef—more than a dozen of them.

Slick gathered them in and tossed them down into the schoolhouse, where they dropped into eager hands. The roof was high, and surrounded by a wooden parapet, and he was not spotted by the roughnecks in the playground. In a few minutes he descended again, and the trap was closed.

Mick Kavanagh greeted him with a slice of beef. The cans had been opened as fast as they dropped in.

"I'll say this is good!" grinned Mick.

"Good?" repeated Pie Sanders.

"Yep—and then some!"

Slick grinned and chewed beef.

"Ain't that tenderfoot Carr a great guy!" he chuckled.

"You said it!" agreed Mick. "Say, you, Pooker, you honing to quit now?"

"Quit nothing!" grunted Pooker Parker, with his mouth full. "I'll tell all Texas, I never knowed canned beef was so good."

Slick glanced from the window over the playground.

"Them guys ain't wise to it," he remarked. "They figure we're still honing for the eats! I guess it would surprise Mr. Wash a few if he could see us chewing beef."

"You said it!" chuckled Mick.

"And there's more to come!" said Slick confidently. "That tenderfoot Carr ain't through yet, not by long chalks he ain't."

It was a cheery bunch now.

There was plenty of water in the big cistern, and plenty of beef and beans, and more to come! The Packsaddle bunch were rough and tough, and they could do without the "trimmings."

They grinned as they saw Job Wash, with a perplexed face, come along several times that afternoon to stare at the schoolhouse.

From Dick Carr there was no sign. But they guessed that he was waiting for sundown before he came again.

They had got Job guessing!

Job had counted on hunger driving the bunch to surrender. As the sun dipped towards Squaw Mountain in the west Job became more perplexed.

So far as he knew, there had been no food in the besieged schoolhouse for forty-eight hours or more. He had no suspicion that the Packsaddle bunch had been enjoying the feast of their lives that afternoon.

He came within speaking distance at last.

"Say, you young goobs!" he shouted. "I'm telling you it's time you moseyed out of that shebang! How long you figure you can live without eats?"

Slick winked at his comrades.

"Keep it canned!" he whispered. "I reckon Job figures that we're down to bedrock! Don't spill a word."

He watched from a slit in the planks across the window.

"Say, you young ginks gone deaf?" shouted Job.

No reply.

Job came a little nearer. He was clearly puzzled. Perhaps he had a

mental picture of the bunch lying about in a state of exhaustion. If that was the case, a rush of his gang of rough-necks would finish the struggle.

Job wanted to know.

He approached the window cautiously, watchful for a whizzing missile. But no missile came. There was no sound, no sign of life, from the schoolhouse.

Mr. Wash drew nearer and nearer. His intention was to peer in at the window, through the spaces between the planks nailed across and ascertain how matters stood. If, as he began to believe, the famished bunch were at the end of their tether, it would not take long to finish!

He stood at the window at last, and peered in between two planks.

As he did so, a hand suddenly flashed out of the aperture, and a finger and thumb fastened on Job's fat nose. They fastened like a vice.

Job Wash jumped almost clear of the ground, letting out a wild yell that was muffled by the grip on his nose.

"Oooooogh!"

"I guess I've cinched this bird!" yelled Slick Poindexter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrrgh!" spluttered Job wildly. "Wurrgh! Led go by dose—wurrgh! I'll say—gooooogh!"

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

Slick Poindexter had a grip like iron on the fat storekeeper's nose. It did not relax for a moment.

He dragged Job's crimson and furious face close to the planks, with that grip on his nose. Job Wash struggled and wriggled frantically. He knew now that the bunch were not at the end of their tether! But that knowledge came too late. He clutched frantically at Slick's gripping hand. Both his fat fists came through the aperture between the planks, and his wrists were promptly grasped by Mick and Pie.

"Wurrgh!" spluttered Job.

He jerked wildly at his head. But Slick held on to his nose. Job felt as

if that organ was being pulled off, and he ceased to jerk.

"Ooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooooooogh!"

Elias Scadder came scudding across the playground, his long legs whisking. But a beef can, whizzing from the window, met him in full career, and caught him under the chin. Elias sat down suddenly with a fearful yell.

"Urrgh!" spluttered Job Wash. "Yurrrgh! Aw, wake snakes! Gurrgh!"

Hair-Trigger Pete came speeding up, roaring with laughter. Job's painful predicament seemed to strike the red-bearded roughneck as funny! But he came to his help, and grasped him to drag him away from the window.

Job fairly shrieked.

With the burly bullwhacker dragging him away, and Slick holding on to his nose from within, the hapless Job felt as if he was parting company with his suffering proboscis.

Slick, doubled up with laughter, let go at last, and Hair-Trigger dragged the chairman of the school committee out of reach.

Job Wash clasped his nose in anguish. With both hands to his nose, he tottered away, gurgling horribly. A yell of merriment from the Packsaddle bunch followed him. Only too clearly, the rebel bunch were not at the end of their tether.

CHAPTER 30.

Caught!

BANG!

Job Wash jumped clear of the ground.

Then he sat down.

Never had the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee been so utterly surprised.

Something had fallen on his head from the open spaces, and landed there with a hard knock.

It was night, and darkness lay like a cloak on Packsaddle School and the prairie.

Some of the roughneck gang were at supper in the chuckhouse, waited on by the hapless Slim. But the rest were on the watch, patrolling the school fence—and the keenest and most watchful of all was Job himself!

Job had a pain in his nose, and his temper was in a volcanic state. How the rebel bunch were holding out so long without "eats" was a mystery to Job—and he could only conclude that they were banking on getting a supply somehow from Dick Carr—little guessing that the tenderfoot had already landed some of that supply.

Job was grimly determined that if the tenderfoot came back with eats, he should have no chance of introducing the same into the besieged schoolhouse. Job was on the watch. The gates were guarded, and if the tenderfoot came, he could only come by clambering over a ten-foot fence. Within that fence Job made his rounds, keeping his men up to the mark.

He had no doubt that Dick Carr would make some attempt to get in, under cover of darkness, with all the food he could carry, and if he did, Job was ready to put paid to that attempt.

But he was not ready for what happened.

Pacing in the space that separated the schoolhouse from the fence, he was taken utterly by surprise by some heavy object dropping on his head as if it had come from the sky of Texas.

He sat in utter astonishment, wondering what the great horned toad it could possibly be. And as he sat he heard a whizzing sound, and then a "plop" from the direction of the building.

Dick Carr was busy!

Dick had yet to solve the problem of rejoining his comrades. But the problem of getting in the eats was already solved!

After the sun had set behind Squaw Mountain, Dick had lost no time. Tramping through the darkness, which hid him from all watchful eyes, he carried bag after bag, bundle after bundle, from the clump of timber,

stacking them under the school fence, till the whole supply from Kicking Mule was piled there. It was a good horse-load, and made quite a stack.

From the windows of the schoolhouse there came a gleam of light—a kerosene lamp was burning. It was sufficient to guide his aim.

Standing clear of the fence, Dick tossed over can after can of beef or beans or biscuits. He judged the distance well, and most of the missiles dropped right on the roof of the schoolhouse. But it was inevitable that every now and then one dropped short.

It was tiring work, but Dick stuck to it, steadily working through the pile. Can after can, packet after packet, circled over the high fence and dropped—eagerly gathered in by the watching and waiting bunch. The few that dropped short would not be missed from among so many. Unluckily, one dropped short as Job Wash was rolling by—and it was a one-pound tin of canned beef that landed on Job's head and caused him to sit down so suddenly.

Job sat and wondered. He rubbed his head and blinked round him. It was not a missile from the rebels that had knocked him over—they could not see him out there in the dark! What was it?

Another and another can whizzed through the air, and dropped, plopping, on the schoolhouse roof. Job groped round him in the gloom, and his fat hands same in contact with the object that had landed on his head. He grabbed it up, and felt it over, and peered at it. And no words could have expressed his feelings when he discovered that it was a can of beef!

He staggered to his feet.

Wrath choked him.

He got it now!

Last night, one of the bunch had got out, obviously to smuggle in eats. But he had not come back with his pockets full and tried to get in. He was standing outside the school fence, slinging over cans of beef, landing them on the

schoolhouse roof! And the besieged bunch were getting them! Job gurgled with fury. This was the end of his scheme for starving out the rebels of Packsaddle!

Another can whizzed over, and another. Dick Carr was getting to the end—but he had not finished yet! With gleaming eyes, Job trod away softly to the gate.

"Say, boss, what's got you?" Hair-Trigger Pete, sitting on the gate, chewing tobacco, peered at the fat storekeeper's infuriated face as it loomed up in the shadows of the playground.

"You pesky goob!" hissed Job. "You figure that I'm paying you five dollars a day to sit on a gate and chew, like you was a Mexican monkey chewing nuts, with that young geck Carr getting in the eats for the bunch. Say —"

"Aw, can it, boss!" drawled Hair-Trigger. "I'll tell a man, we're all watching, and if that young guy comes moseying along, we'll cinch him!"

"You boneheaded stiff!" hissed Job. "I'm telling you that young guy is jest outside the fence now, slinging over cans of beef like they was pebbles, and landing them on that shebang!"

Hair-Trigger whistled.

"I'll tell a man, that kid Carr sure is no slouch," he remarked. "How'd you get wise to it, boss?"

"I guessed a can of beef dropped on my cabeza!" Job snarled. "Aw, what you sniggering at, you big stiff? You figure that I'm paying you to snigger? Say, you mosey along outside and cinch that young guy, and go quiet, and don't give him a chance to vamoose. You got to get that young guy, and you got to get him pronto."

"Search me!" answered Hair-Trigger Pete.

He swung his burly limbs over the gate and dropped outside.

Job waited at the gate anxiously. And he grinned as there was a sudden, startled yell from the darkness.

Dick Carr was slinging over another can when a burly figure loomed out of

the gloom, and a brawny hand clutched him.

"I'll say you're cinched!" chuckled the bullwhacker. "I'll say— Yooooop! Great gophers! Whooop!"

The can of beef in Dick Carr's hand crashed into the rugged face. Hair-Trigger gave a fearful yell and staggered. Dick wrenched desperately to free himself from the brawny grasp.

But the roughneck held on to him. A stream of crimson spouted from his nose, where the can had landed. But he held on, and Dick, sturdy as he was, crumpled in the powerful grasp.

Hair-Trigger fastened one hand in his collar and the other in the slack of his trousers, and jerked him from the ground.

Lifting him off his feet, the big bullwhacker carried him bodily away to the gate. Struggling wildly, his arms and legs thrashing in the air, Dick Carr went—a prisoner!

"Say, you Wash!" roared Hair-Trigger. "I sure cinched him, and hyer he is, if you want him."

With a heave of his brawny arms he tossed the tenderfoot over the gate, and Dick Carr crashed on the ground within.

Job's grip was on his collar the next moment.

There was a shout and a trampling of feet as half a dozen of the rough-necks came running up. Hair-Trigger clambered in over the gate, and stood dabbling his streaming nose.

Dick Carr, struggling in Job's grasp, was surrounded. Yuma Dave and Tanglefoot grasped him by either arm.

"Take him to Scadder!" snorted Job. "I guess Scadder is going to get busy with his cane on that young guy! I'll mention that he's going to have such a lambasting that he won't forget it for a month of Sundays."

"We got the cats!" said Slick Poin-dexter. "We sure got the cats! But I'd sure like to know where young Carr is!"

As if in answer, there came a sound of yelling across the dusky playground. Slick rushed to the window. Mick rushed after him; then the whole bunch.

They listened breathlessly. They could see nothing but they could hear!

And what they heard was the yelling of a fellow who was getting such a lambasting that he was not likely to forget it for a month of Sundays!

"They got Dick!" exclaimed Mick.

The silence of dismay fell on the bunch. Dick Carr had succeeded in his mission. But he had fallen into the hands of the enemy. There were gloomy faces that night in the Packsaddle bunch.

CHAPTER 31.

In the Hands of the Enemy!

"YOU pesky young piecan!" roared Job Wash.

"You rebellious young rascal!" said Mr. Scadder.

Elias Scadder, the new headmaster of Packsaddle School, was rather more choice in his expressions than Mr. Wash, the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee.

Dick Carr did not answer either of them.

Job Wash, short and fat, and Elias Scadder, long and thin, glared at him. In the latter's hand was a cane.

The bright sunshine of the Texas morning shone down on the cow town school. It was a bright and cheery morning; but Dick Carr, the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, looked neither bright nor cheery.

Hair-Trigger Pete, the red-bearded roughneck, dragged him out of the fodder shed in which he had been locked during the night. Unheeding Job and Scadder, he looked across the playground at the schoolhouse on the other side. Planks were nailed across the windows of that building, but the spaces between the planks were crammed with faces, staring out.

Among them Dick recognised Slick Poindexter and Mick Kavanagh. The rebel schoolboys of Packsaddle were still holding the fort, though Dick had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

"You pie-faced young gink!" went on Job Wash.

"Some further punishment, sir——" suggested Mr. Scadder. He swished his cane.

"You said it, Scadder!" growled Job. "Say, you young guy, I guess you know what's coming to you. I'll say you was the king-pin in that caboodle, and they all jumped when you said jump!"

"Undoubtedly this boy was the ring-leader!" said Mr. Scadder, putting it in his choicer language, as became a schoolmaster.

"Ain't that so, you pesky young geck?" roared Job.

"More or less," answered Dick Carr. "But the bunch will hold on without me! We're not giving in till Bill Sampson comes back as headmaster, Mr. Wash."

"Waal," said Job, "you lissen! You've had one lambasting, you young gink, but it won't be a circumstance to what's coming to you if them gecks yonder don't talk turkey. You get me? You're the king-pin, I guess, and they follow your lead. You're going to get them to throw it up. Bring him along, you Hair-Trigger."

In Hair-Trigger Pete's brawny grasp Dick was marched along towards the barricaded schoolhouse. Job and Elias followed, the latter swishing his cane. After them crowded the gang of rough-necks whom Job had enlisted to deal with the Packsaddle bunch.

They halted within halting distance of the rebels' stronghold. Hands were waved to Dick through the apertures at the windows.

The bunch could not help him. Only so long as they remained entrenched in the schoolhouse could they hold their own against Job's rough crew. But they watched him with anxious eyes.

"Now, you pesky young skunk," said

Job grimly. "You toot to them young gecks. You tell them to come out of that shebang."

Dick stood silent. It was true that he was the leading spirit in the Packsaddle rebellion. But the whole bunch were standing for Bill, and he doubted whether he could have persuaded them to give in, if he had wanted to. Certainly he did not want to, and had no intention of trying. Job Wash seemed to think that he had a trump card in his hand with the ringleader of the rebellion a prisoner. But Job was making one more of his mistakes.

"You hear me yaup!" roared Job.

"I'm not deaf!" answered Dick.

"Get going, you young boob! I'm telling you that if them young gecks don't come out of that shebang, you're going to get such a lambasting you won't have a heap of skin left on your back. Now you sing out to that bunch."

"I won't!"

"You won't!" said Job. "Forget it! Mr. Scadder, you give him a sample of what's coming to him."

Whack!

The cane came down across Dick Carr's shoulders with a crack that rang like the report of a six-gun.

Dick gave a yell.

Whack! Whack!

Elias seemed to like the work. He laid it on with a heavy hand. Dick struggled and wriggled in Hair-Trigger's grasp. He was strong and sturdy, but he was an infant in the big bullwhacker's hands. Hair-Trigger Pete held him easily, and grinned down at him.

But the grin was washed off his face as Dick Carr landed a sudden kick. His heel crashed on Hair-Trigger's shin.

"Wow!" roared the red-bearded roughneck, and in sudden anguish he released the schoolboy and hopped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the schoolhouse.

"Beat it, Dick!" shrieked Mick Kavanagh from the window.

Dick Carr, as his collar was released, made a jump to escape. But he was grasped at once by the roughnecks round him. Yuma Dave grasped one arm—Tanglefoot the other.

"Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Hair-Trigger, hopping on one leg and clapping the other with both hands. "Great gophers! Yoooo-hoop! Wurrgrgh!"

"Search me!" gasped Job. "Say, you goobs, you keep a hold on that young scallywag! You get going, Mr. Scadder."

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Now, you pesky gink, you tooting to that bunch?" roared Job.

"Ow! Yes! Ow!" gasped Dick.

"I reckoned you would!" grinned Job. "Yep! Now you shoot off your mouth, pronto."

Dick was hustled nearer the window, crammed with watching faces. He was safely held, there was no escape for him, and Scadder's cane was ready. Job's fat face wore a grin now. The tenderfoot was going to talk under the persuasion of the cane.

"Slick! Mick!" called out Dick Carr. "You hear me?"

"Yep, old-timer!" called back Slick Poindexter.

"They've got me!" went on the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. "I'm going to get it hot and strong if you don't surrender. Well, don't let that make any difference to you. Stick to it! You've got the grub now, and you can hold on till Bill comes back. Never mind about me—you fellows just hold on and keep going."

Job Wash's fat face was a picture as he listened to that. It was not what he had expected the tenderfoot to say.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Job, purple with rage. "You—you—Aw, I guess this gets me goat! Mr. Scadder, you get going with that cane! You hear me whisper!"

Whiz! A beef-cane came sailing from the window, and it caught Job on the ear.

"Wake snakes!" yelled the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee, as

he clapped a fat hand to his ear. "Yaw-woop!"

There was a rush to get out of range of missiles. Dick Carr was hustled away among the roughnecks.

But they were still in full view of the windows when they halted out of range. And then Hair-Trigger and Yuma held the tenderfoot of Packsaddle stretched over a log, and Elias Scadder got busy with the cane.

And Dick, as he wriggled and yelled under the whacks, realised that the cane in Mr. Scadder's vicious hand was tougher than the quirt had ever been in Bill Sampson's.

CHAPTER 32.

Roped In!

"I 'LL say it get's my goat!" groaned Slick Poindexter.

"You said it!" mumbled Mick dolorously.

"I'd sure give the eats to get him back safe!" said Pie Sanders.

"Forget it!" grunted Poker Parker. "They got him—but I guess we got the eats!"

"Aw, can it, Poker!" growled Slick.

There were "eats" in plenty in the besieged schoolhouse of Packsaddle now. Job's stunt of starving out the bunch was defeated—for the present, at least. But for the capture of Dick Carr, the rebels would have been in high feather.

They had seen him thrashed by Scadder and locked up again in the fodder shed. And they could not help him.

"We're holding on!" said Slick. "We sure ain't talking turkey, not till they fire that guy Scadder and let Bill come back! But it sure does get my goat to see young Carr cinched that-a-way!"

"Say, there's Slim!" said Hunky Tutt, looking from the window.

"Doggone the pesky quitter!" grunted Slick.

Slim did not look happy.

He cast a longing glance towards the

schoolhouse. Plainly he would have been glad to be back with the bunch he had deserted.

"The pesky goob!" growled Slick. "If they gave Dick a chance, he would beat it; but Slim ain't got the sand to try it on. I guess he's fed-up with doing the chores for that gang, but he don't dare vamoose."

"Aw, they'd get him if he did!" growled Poker Parker. "There's that guy Scadder watching him."

The long, thin figure of Elias Scadder moved from Small Brown's cabin, where the new schoolmaster had taken up his quarters with Job Wash.

Evidently Mr. Scadder had a suspicion that Slim might make an attempt to rejoin the comrades he had quitted. As Slim filled the big kettle at the pump, Mr. Scadder moved between him and the schoolhouse, to cut off any such attempt.

It was late in the morning. Job Wash had gone down to Packsaddle town to give his store the once-over. Hair-Trigger and his gang were lounging in the shade of the fence, smoking and playing poker.

They were keeping tabs on the besieged bunch, but in Job's absence they were not taking a lot of trouble about it.

But Scadder was more alert. Scadder, with his appointment as schoolmaster in the balance, was very anxious for the rebel bunch to be brought to heel.

The look on Slim's face, as he stared at the schoolhouse, showed that the thought of beating it was in his mind.

But the long, thin Scadder was in the way, and he gave it up and filled the kettle. Dick Carr would not have hesitated to take the chance, but Dick was locked in the fodder shed and there was no chance for him.

"The doggoned polecat!" growled Slick. "Why don't he hand Scadder a sockdolager with that kettle, and ab-squatulate? I'll tell a man!"

"They'd sure get him!" said Poker. "Ain't we got the door blocked, and all the winders planked and nailed? How'd

he get in afore they cinched him, you boob?"

Slick made no answer. He looped his lasso over his arm and ascended the ladder to the trap-door in the schoolhouse roof. Mick Kavanagh grabbed up a rope and followed him.

The schoolhouse roof was protected by a wooden parapet all round. Slick stood at the parapet overlooking the playground, the lasso in his hand.

As Slim glanced towards the building again before carrying the kettle back to the cookhouse, Poindexter held up his hand with the coiled rope in it.

Slim was too far off for calling, but that sign showed him what Slick had in mind. If he had the nerve to run for it, Slick was ready to throw the end of the rope down to him, and pull him up before he could be recaptured.

Slim hesitated.

He was more than tired of the life of a chore-boy. He had quitted because the eats had run out, but he knew now that there were eats in plenty in the schoolhouse.

Slick wondered whether he would make up his mind to take the chance. He was ready to help, if he did.

Five or six more of the bunch came up on the roof. Several of them brought up ropes. There would be no lack of assistance for the wretched Slim if he took his chance. The roughnecks, sprawling under the shady fence, were too far off to stop him; there was only Scadder in the way. Poker Parker waved an encouraging hand to his pal,

Slim Dixon suddenly made up his mind.

He moved off, as if intending to return to the cookhouse with the kettle of water. Then, turning suddenly, he ran for the schoolhouse.

But Elias was watchful.

He jumped into the way, brandishing his cane. The watching schoolboys heard the crack of it as it came down on Slim.

They heard Slim's loud yell. The next moment there was a yell from

Scadder as Slim hurled the kettle at him.

It crashed on Mr. Scadder's waistcoat, and he seemed to fold up over it. Water drenched his trousers, and the kettle clanged on the ground at his feet.

For the moment Scadder was winded and Slim had a chance. He dodged round the gurgling Scadder and ran desperately. There was a yell of encouragement from the schoolboys on the roof, packed at the parapet.

"Beat it, Slim, ol'-timer!" yelled Poker.

"Put it on, Slim!"

"Burn the wind!"

Slim was burning the wind—but so was Scadder! The long, thin schoolmaster whirled round, and whisked after the fleeing Slim, his long legs fairly twinkling as he rushed in pursuit.

"Oh, great gopher! Scadder'll get him!" panted Poker.

"He'll sure get him!"

Slick Poindexter's eyes gleamed.

"Say, and I'll sure get Scadder!" he breathed. "You drop a rope for Slim, you Mick—I guess I'm for Scadder!"

Mick chuckled breathlessly.

Scadder was overtaking Slim Dixon fast. But the desperate Slim was running hard, and he was only thirty feet away. Scadder, ten feet behind him, came on hard and fast with outstretched hand.

A few seconds more and that outstretched hand would have grasped Slim Dixon's shoulder and dragged him back.

Poindexter's lasso flew.

The forty-foot rope, uncoiling as it flew, shot towards Scadder. The new headmaster of Packsaddle did not even know what was happening, when a loop dropped over head and shoulders, tightened round his skinny figure, and jerked him off his feet.

Bump!

Elias Scadder hit Texas with a loud bump and a louder yell.

He rolled helplessly at the end of the rope.

Slick dragged on it with all his strength, and howled to his comrades.

"Lend a hand here! I've sure roped that guy! Say, you lend a pull on this hyer riata!"

Pie Sanders and Hunky Tutt and two or three other fellows grasped the rope. They dragged hard.

Scadder rolled and rolled, with flying arms and legs. The loop round his waist had tightened like a band of steel. He had no chance whatever of getting out of it. He rolled, and howled, and raved.

Slim Dixon dashed on and reached the schoolhouse wall. Two or three ropes were already hanging down. He clutched the nearest, and climbed with frantic haste. Four or five fellows pulled to help him up. In a few seconds he was up to the wooden parapet, and they dragged him over and landed him safe on the roof.

Scadder was still rolling and howling. Every roll brought him nearer to the schoolhouse. He bumped and crashed at the end of the rope.

"Say, we got Slim now, Slick!" gasped Poker.

Slick grinned.

"And I guess we're getting Scadder, too!" he answered. "Pull, you guys—pull, you gecks! Get him afore them galoots can get a holt on him!"

Hair-Trigger Pete and some of his gang were running towards the schoolhouse. But they were too far off to help Scadder.

The drag on the lasso brought Elias crashing against the wall, yelling frantically. Mr. Scadder was jerked off the ground and whisked up to the parapet. The nearest of the roughnecks was a dozen feet away when he was dragged over on to the roof in the grip of the grinning bunch.

"We got him!" roared Slick.

"We sure got him!" howled Mick Kavanagh.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Scadder, sprawling breathlessly on the roof. "Gurrgh! Release me! Wurrgh!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Aw, carry me home to die!" gasped Hair-Trigger, staring up. "Say, them young goobs have roped in the pesky schoolmaster!"

Slick grinned down at him.

"We sure got Scadder!" he roared. "And you can tell Mr. Wash that he can have his schoolmaster back when he sends Dick Carr here. You got that, Hair-Trigger? Take this along with it!"

And Slick hurled a ragged chunk of timber, and Hair-Trigger yelled as he received it on his bearded chin.

Elias Scadder, wriggling and spluttering, was bundled down the ladder into the school-room below. It was startling news for Job Wash when he came back from the cow town.

CHAPTER 33.

Quirt for Two!

JOB WASH almost danced.

He had come back—not in a good temper.

And in that mood he learned from Hair-Trigger Pete what had happened in his absence from the cow town school, and he raved, he raged, he almost danced. He came near tearing what was left of his hair!

He talked to the roughnecks in a flow of language that moved them to admiration. For full five minutes he told the toughs, in gorgeous and lurid phrases, what he thought of them for letting the rebels rope his pet schoolmaster. But at last breath failed him, and he could only gasp.

"Boss," said Hair-Trigger, almost awed, "I pass it up to you. I'll say that every guy here can cuss a few, but we sure does pass it up to you, boss!"

"We sure does, boss!" said Yuma, with a nod.

This tribute, flattering as it was, did not calm Job's wrath. But he realized that addressing his toughs in flowery language would not buy him anything. He snorted, and tramped off towards

the schoolhouse, to give the rebels a turn. And as he arrived in front of that building a yell greeted him from the bunch within.

"Hyer's Fat Job!" yelled Mick. "Here's the ornery old piecan, looking for his schoolmaster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We got your Scadder, Job!" roared Slick. "We sure got that ornery bone-headed mugwump! We got him by the short hairs!"

"You better talk turkey, Job!"

"Say, you want your schoolmaster—you send Dick Carr along!"

"Chew on that, you old Wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Job shook his fat fists at the windows packed with grinning faces.

His fat face was purple. So far from getting the bunch to feed from Scadder's hand, the bunch had Scadder, and Job could not help him. In his rage he would have ordered his roughnecks on to a general attack, but he knew how useless it would be. Again and again they had tried that game, and had been beaten to it. But he could not leave his pet Scadder in the hands of the bunch. He brandished fat fists and roared:

"Say, you let Scadder loose! You hear me! You drop that galoot Scadder from a window! You hear me too?"

"Guess ag'in, Job!" chuckled Slick. "We'll let you have Scadder back in exchange for Dick Carr!"

Job raved with wrath.

"You loosing Scadder!" he howled.

"Not so's you'd notice it."

"We're freezing on to Scadder till we get Dick Carr!"

"Chew on that, bully boy!"

Job turned and yelled to his men, who were looking on, grinning. Job had a card to play yet.

"Hyer, you lazy coyotes!" he howled. "You tote that Carr along hyer! And you bring a quirt, you Hair-Trigger!"

"You said it, boss!"

Some of the toughs rushed off to the fodder shed. They returned, hustling Dick Carr in their midst.

"Glory for us!" chortled Mick.
 "We're getting him back."

"Sez you!" muttered Slick doubtfully.

He did not read surrender in Job Wash's furious face.

Neither was that Job's intention. The watching bunch saw Dick stretched over a log and held there while Hair-Trigger swished a quirt.

Then Job turned towards them again, spluttering with rage.

"Now, you young geeks!" he roared. "You let loose that galoot, Scadder, or you're going to see that young gink lambasted till you do! You get that?"

"Oh, great gophers!" gasped Mick.

Up went Hair-Trigger's brawny arm, and down came the quirt, with a loud whack across the tenderfoot's trousers. Dick gave a yell.

Slick Poindexter gritted his teeth.

"I'll say that's playing it low down!" he breathed. "By gum, Job Wash isn't getting by with that! Tote that guy Scadder up on the roof!"

Half a dozen of the bunch grasped Elias Scadder. He struggled and howled; but struggles and howls did not avail the unfortunate Elias.

He was dragged up the ladder and out of the trapdoor on the schoolhouse roof.

"Lay him across!" shouted Slick.

Scadder was hustled to the front parapet. In terror of being pitched over, he yelled and howled, for it was a drop of fifteen feet if he went. But he soon learned that that was not Slick's intention.

He was doubled over the top of the parapet, his head and shoulders outside, his long legs within, and a dozen hands held him pinned there.

Then Slick brandished a quirt.

It came down with a terrific whop on Scadder's trousers, and the yell that Elias gave rang far across the Rio Frio. It might have been heard on Main Street, Packsaddle.

Job Wash stared up, his eyes almost starting from his fat face.

"Say, you big stiff!" roared Slick Poindexter. "You let up on Carr!

Your schoolmaster is going to get the same as he does, and then some!"

Whack! came Hair-Trigger's quirt below on the wriggling tenderfoot. Whack! came Slick's quirt above on Scadder!

Whack again from Hair-Trigger. Whack again from Slick, like an echo! Dick Carr yelled. But his yell was a mere whisper to that of Elias Scadder! Job Wash howled with rage.

"Say, you let up on my schoolmaster!" he shrieked. "Don't you dare lambast my schoolmaster!"

"You let up on that tenderfoot!" roared Slick.

Whack! rang Hair-Trigger's quirt again. Whack! rang like an echo, and Elias Scadder howled frantically.

"Mr. Wash! Stop them! Yooop! Yoo-help! Help! Oh! Ow! Mr. Wash!"

Mr. Wash was almost gibbering in his rage. But he was not deaf to the appeal of the hapless Scadder. He made Hair-Trigger a sign to let up with the quirt. Mr. Scadder was going to get lash for lash, and Job had to quit.

Dick Carr was bundled back to the shed and locked in again. Elias Scadder was bundled down the ladder into the school-room. Job had not yet made up his mind to an exchange of prisoners, but the bunch were willing to wait till he did!

CHAPTER 34.

The Attack!

"I GUESS they're busy, a few!" remarked Pie Sanders.

"But what's the doggoned game?" asked Mick.

"Search me!" answered Pie.

The bunch listened and wondered. From the distance, beyond the bunk-house, came an almost incessant sound of hammering.

The afternoon was growing old, the sun sloping down towards Squaw Mountain. In the schoolroom, Elias Scadder sat on the floor, bound to a desk with a rope. The bunch figured

that Job Wash, sooner or later, would let them have Dick Carr in exchange for his pet schoolmaster—and Elias hoped from the bottom of his heart that Job would. But, so far, there had come no sign from Job. There came only that sound of busy hammering from behind the bunkhouse.

The rebels watched in vain. The bunkhouse screened from their sight whatever it was that the enemy were doing.

They could guess that it was some new move of Job's. Now that he had failed in his stunt of starving out the bunch, and now that his schoolmaster was a prisoner in their hands, Job had set his fat wits to work, and it was clear that he had thought of some new idea for getting the upper hand of the rebels. But what it was had them guessing.

Hammer, hammer, hammer, rang from the distance. None of the roughneck gang was in sight—only Job was to be seen, occasionally casting a glare towards the schoolhouse. The whole gang seemed to be at work behind the bunkhouse, and they made plenty of noise about it.

"They're sure busy!" said Slick Poin-dexter. "I guess we'll see what their game is when they're ready to start something. They won't catch this bunch napping, not worth a cent."

And the bunch watched. The hammering and banging ceased at last, and they knew that the work, whatever it was, was at an end. Job Wash disappeared behind the bunkhouse.

When he came in sight again, he was followed by the whole crew of toughs.

And in their midst they carried a gigantic ladder built of pine rails nailed together—a good sixteen feet in length, and three feet wide. Then the rebels knew!

That was what the hammering had been about. The enemy had been manufacturing a scaling-ladder—and the attack was coming!

Slick gave a startled whistle.

"Gum!" he ejaculated. "I guess that's the big idea!"

Five or six of the toughs were carrying the long, heavy ladder as they came tramping across the playground.

The bunch looked serious and grim now. Attacks on the barricaded door and the windows had failed, but if the enemy once succeeded in gaining the roof the game was up. Slick's eyes gleamed.

"I guess we ain't beat yet!" he said. "This way, you 'uns!"

He scuttled up the ladder to the roof. The bunch followed him fast. They lined the wooden parapet above as the enemy drew near. Every hand grasped a weapon of some sort. The Packsaddle bunch were not beaten yet.

With a rush the roughnecks reached the schoolhouse, and the long ladder was reared in many hands and planted against the parapet.

"Throw it down!" shouted Mick.

But it was impossible to dislodge the ladder, and Hair-Trigger Pete was already on it. He grinned up at the excited faces above.

"I guess we got you cinched this time, you young ginks!" grinned Hair-Trigger.

Job Wash waved them on.

"Get on with it!" he yelled. "Get on! You hear me toot?"

Up the ladder came Hair-Trigger Pete and Yuma Dave side by side. Following them came more of the gang, while others held the ladder.

Job Wash looked on with fierce anticipation. This was Job's big idea, and he figured that it was going to put paid to the Packsaddle rebellion. Once his roughneck gang were at close quarters, the rest was easy. Rough and tough as the bunch were, they had no chance hand-to-hand with a dozen of the toughest guys in Santanta County.

Two Stetson hats rose to the level of the parapet. Crash came half a dozen cudgels on them. Yuma Dave gave a fearful yell, and slipped back down the ladder.

In his descent he swept off those who

were following, and they mixed up at the foot of the ladder in a wild, howling heap.

But Hair-Trigger, brandishing a quirt, plunged on, heedless of blows, and got his chest across the parapet.

There, he lashed round with his heavy quirt, and the schoolboys jumped back from the swipes.

Two or three of them rolled over under the blows. Hair-Trigger, panting, clambered on, slashing savagely. He roared to his followers.

"Come on, you 'uns! Foller on, you gecks!"

"Get on!" yelled Job. "I'm telling you to get on with it, you pesky pie-cans!"

Up the ladder scrambled the rough-necks.

Slick Poindexter and Mick Kavanagh jumped at the red-bearded bullwhacker. But a sweep of his quirt sent them staggering back. Pie Sanders and Hunky Tutt were knocked spinning. Hair-Trigger, grinning savagely, got a knee on the parapet, and pitched over on the roof. The stout timbers of the schoolhouse roof groaned under his weight as he pitched.

He was up again in a moment, in the midst of the bunch, slashing round him with his quirt. Poker Parker and Slim Dixon dashed for the trap, and slithered down into the school-room.

But the rest of the bunch were made of sterner stuff. Slick Poindexter yelled to his comrades.

"Get him, you guys, or the game's up! Get that galoot!"

He hurled himself desperately at Hair-Trigger.

Seconds were precious now.

The whole gang of roughnecks were swarming up the wide ladder. Already Tanglefoot's Stetson rose over the parapet. Behind him came the rest, urged on by Job's frantic yells. Hair-Trigger had only to hold the bunch off for a few moments, and his game would be up!

Slick, unheeding a terrific lash of the quirt, closed with the red-bearded bull-

whacker. Hair-Trigger grasped him in his left hand. But Mick jumped in, and hung on the ruffian. Pie Sanders followed on, and then the whole bunch closed with Pete, swarming over him like hounds on a stag. Brawny ruffian as he was, Hair-Trigger staggered under that combined attack, and he could no longer handle his quirt with his arms grasped by many hands.

Back he went, towards the parapet. It was touch and go now—and every fellow in the bunch was exerting himself to the utmost.

Big as Hair-Trigger was there was hardly room on him for all the hands that clutched and gripped.

He struggled and resisted fiercely, but he went staggering back, and tipped over the parapet as Tanglefoot's head came over it. Falling backwards, Hair-Trigger crashed on Tanglefoot's head.

"Over with him!" shrieked Mick.

There was a wild roar below. The ladder was packed with the roughnecks. Tanglefoot, knocked backwards as Hair-Trigger fell on him, shot down, grabbing at the others to save himself. Once more the ladder was cleared.

With a final heave, the bunch sent Hair-Trigger over, and he slid down the ladder head first.

At the foot of the ladder there was a wild mix-up of sprawling toughs. Hair-Trigger Pete landed on them with a terrific bump. Fearful howls came from the roughnecks as fourteen stone landed on them from above.

"Gum!" gasped Slick. "I'll say we've put it across them guys! Heave that doggoned ladder down afore they get a hold on it agin."

For the moment Hair-Trigger and his gang were giving no attention to the ladder. They were too busy sorting themselves out.

The schoolboys grasped the top, and heaved, and hurled it away.

"Say, you gecks!" Job Wash was yelling. "Say, you mosey up that doggoned ladder, and—Whoo-hoop!"

Job did not see the falling ladder

coming—till it came! It crashed on Mr. Wash, and flattened him down suddenly on Texas.

"Urrgh!" A horrible gurgle came from fat Job, wriggling under the fallen ladder like a worm under a wheel. "Yurgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the bunch.

"Say, Job, you got yours!" yelled Slick Poindexter.

"Wurrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang scrambled up. Battered, bruised, and breathless they turned the atmosphere almost blue with their remarks.

The ladder was down—but if it had been up they would not have set foot on it again. They had had enough—rather more than enough—and they did not even heed Job's frantic squeals for aid—they tramped savagely away to escape the missiles that were beginning to rain down from the rebels on the roof.

Job, wriggling under the heavy ladder, squealed and howled in vain for help.

From above, the rebels looked down at him, roaring with laughter. They pelted Hair-Trigger & Co. till the roughnecks were out of range—then they pelted the wriggling Job. It was several minutes before the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee was able to wriggle out from under the ladder—and he did not enjoy one of them!

Then, foaming with rage, Job tottered away, with empty beef tins clattering on his podgy back as he went.

He had failed once more—his big idea had been a fizzle—and his gang of toughs were in no mood to get to close quarters with the Packsaddle bunch again.

Even Job was beginning to doubt whether he ever was going to get the upper hand of that bunch!

"Hyer's Dick!" yelled Mick Kavanagh.

"Hyer's the tenderfoot!" shouted Pie.

In the sunset Dick Carr walked across to the schoolhouse, free, and grinning.

Job Wash had made up his mind to it—he could not leave his pet school-master a prisoner in the hands of the bunch, and though it got his goat sorely, he had to make the exchange. Slick and Mick, chuckling, helped Dick Carr in at the window—and Elias Seadder was dropped out.

"Gum!" grinned Slick Poindexter.

"We've got the tenderfoot back, and we've got the cats and we've sure beat that crowd to a frazzle! I guess Job's getting wise to it that he can't handle this bunch, and he'll sure be sending for Bill to come back and ride herd!"

And the bunch agreed that it was so.

CHAPTER 35.

Calling in the Parents!

"POPPER!" ejaculated Slick Poindexter.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Dick Carr.

"I guess that lets you out, Slick!" said Mick Kavanagh ruefully.

Slick knitted his brows.

The Packsaddle bunch, besieged in the schoolhouse, stared from the barricaded windows. The bright sunshine of Texas streamed down in the playground of the cow town school. A bearded man in a Stetson hat dropped from his bronco at the school gate and strode into the playground, looking about him with a frowning brow. And Slick looked dismayed as he recognised his father—Rancher Poindexter.

The Packsaddle rebellion was going strong. It had lasted for quite a long time now, and it was the talk of Santanta County. From Packsaddle and other cow towns along the Rio Frio, punchers came up the trail to stare in at the school where the school-boys were staging a siege. They

seemed to be amused, and most of them wished the rebels luck.

Job Wash, came out of Small Brown's cabin as Mr. Poindexter appeared. Slick was dismayed to see his father on the scene; but Job was pleased. Job had been beaten all along the line in his tussle with the rebels. Job had vowed that he would have the bunch under the hand of Elias Scadder, the new headmaster. But that vow did not look like being fulfilled. And now the bunch could see that Job, fairly at the end of his resources, was trying a new game—calling in the aid of the boys' parents.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Poindexter!" said Job.

"Where's Slick?" rapped the rancher.

Job pointed a fat forefinger towards the barricaded schoolhouse. The rancher stared at it. Then he looked round him again, and frowned at Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang of rough-necks.

"What's them galoots doing here?" he demanded. "You got a crowd like that to help you handle the bunch? Search me! I reckon your best guess is to send for Bill Sampson to ride herd here, Mr. Wash, like he used."

Mr. Wash gave an angry snort.

"Bill Sampson nothing! Bill's been fired! Bill's long suit is punching cows, and they've given him a job punching cows down at Kicking Mule! Forget Bill Sampson! Here's the noo schoolmaster."

Mr. Poindexter glared at the long, thin Scadder. He did not seem much impressed by Scadder.

"I'm saying that Bill's the man to ride herd!" he snapped.

"And I'm saying forget Bill!" snorted Job. "I ain't sent for you to give me advice about Bill, feller! Nope! I sent for you to talk to that boy of yours, and tell him to come out of that goldarned shebang!"

"I guess I'll talk to him!" growled the rancher.

He strode towards the schoolhouse.

Job Wash and Elias Scadder followed

him. Both the chairman of the school committee and the new headmaster looked bucked. Slick and the rest of the bunch defied them both—but a fellow could not refuse to obey his father. Slick's game was up, Job reckoned; and the same method would prove equally successful with the rest!

"Hyer, you young gecks!" shouted Job. "Here's Mr. Poindexter come to take his boy out of that shebang! You hear me?"

"Slick!" rapped the rancher.

"Aw, this sure does get my goat!" groaned Slick. He looked out between two planks nailed across a window.

"Yep! I'll say I'm here, popper!"

"Now, you listen to me!" rapped Mr. Poindexter. "I've sure rode thirty miles to talk to you, Slick! I hear that Mr. Wash has led the Packsaddle school committee by the nose, and got them to fire Bill."

"You said it, popper."

"You got a nob headmaster, and you ain't toeing the line?"

"Nope!"

"And hyer's Job himself, with a gang of the toughest bullwhackers in the county, come to put you in order, and taking no notice?"

"Yep!"

"You're standing for Bill?"

"Sure!"

"And we're going on standing for Bill, Mr. Poindexter," said Dick Carr. "And if you take Slick away, the rest of the bunch will carry on. We want Bill, and we won't have Scadder."

There was a roar from the bunch.

"We want Bill!"

"Nix on Scadder!"

"You hear them, sir?" squeaked Elias. "You hear the young rascals? You hear—"

"Pack it up, Scadder!" said the rancher. "I guess I'm here to talk to my boy Slick." He glared at Dick Carr's face showing at the aperture at the window. "You pack it up, too, you young gink! Who's talking about taking Slick away?"

Slick's face brightened. It dawned

on him that this new move of Job's was not going to be the success he banked on.

"Now you listen, Slick, and all you young geeks!" rapped out the rancher. "You're standing for Bill—the whitest man in Santanta County! If you didn't stand for Bill, Slick, I'd sure quirt you a few, and then a few more! Keep it up! You keep it up till that old boob Wash sends for Bill to come back!"

"Doggone you!" roared Job. "That ain't what I sent for you to say to that young scallywag! I guess——"

"Mebbe not!" said the rancher. "But that's what I've moseyed along to say to Slick, and that goes! You keep it up, Slick! If you back down afore they send for Bill, you look out for the quirt when you hit the ranch agin."

Slick chuckled.

"Popper, you're sure spilling a hat-ful!" he said.

"Look here, you boob Poindexter——" roared Job.

"My dear sir——" squeaked Elias Scadder.

The rancher turned on them.

"I've sure spoken my piece to Slick," he said, "and now I guess I'm putting you wise what I think of you, you Job and you Scadder."

He made a sudden grasp at both of them.

Job, short and fat, Scadder, long and thin, wriggled in the powerful grasp of the rancher. But they wriggled in vain. There was no resisting that muscular grip. The sinewy hands dragged them forcibly together, and their heads met with a sudden shock.

"Whoo-hoo!" squealed Scadder.

"Aw, grent gophers!" yelled Job.

Bang!

"Ooooooh!"

"Woooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Packsaddle bunch. They gazed from the windows in huge delight.

Bang!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a swing of his arms Rancher

Poindexter hurled Mr. Wash and Elias Scadder sprawling on the earth.

"Keep it up, Slick!" he said.

"You bet, popper!"

And the rancher strode away to the gate, leaving Job Wash and Elias Scadder sprawling and spluttering. Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang eyed him, but they did no more than eye him. The rancher remounted his bronco and rode down the trail. Job Wash and Elias Scadder tottered away gasping, and a roar of laughter from the Packsaddle bunch followed them.

CHAPTER 36.

The Rebels Hit Back!

"HIT back!" said Dick Carr.

"Meaning——" asked Slick.

Dick was watching the enemy as the sun set behind Squaw Mountain. His face was very thoughtful.

"We've beaten them all along the line," said the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. "But—old Wash is a sticker, you fellows! He's as obstinate as a mule——"

"And then some!" agreed Mick.

"I'll say he's no quitter!" remarked Slick. "But he can't do a thing. Not unless the eats give out."

"And we still got some eats," said Pie Sanders.

"The grub won't last for ever," said Dick Carr, "and you can bet they won't give us a chance of getting in another lot. They're watching us like cats."

"Sure!" assented Hunky Tutt. "But we can't stop them. What are you getting at, tenderfoot?"

"Hitting back!" said Dick. "Look at them now! There's Hair-Trigger going to the gate on the trail and Tanglefoot watching the other gate and two or three of them patrolling the fences. The rest will turn in at the bunkhouse. Old Wash and Scadder are sticking in Small Brown's cabin since Brown was fired. Old Wash is thinking

out plans for getting at us—but I'll bet he isn't thinking that we may get at him!"

"Get at him!" repeated Bud Dunn. "If we step outside this shebang that gang will sure cinch us by the short hairs."

"What about a night attack?" asked Dick.

Slick Poindexter whistled.

"Forget it!" grunted Poker Parker. "I guess this baby ain't getting in reach of them bullwhackers!"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" said Slim Dixon.

"Gum!" said Slick. "I'll say it's a stunt! You pack it up, Poker, and you, Slim. I guess you ain't got the sand for it. But——"

"If we get old Wash——" breathed Mick, his eyes gleaming.

"That's the idea!" said Dick Carr. "We've got enough grub for a couple of days longer—and you can bank on it they won't give us a chance to get any more. And if old Wash fetches along any more poppers they mayn't take the same view as Slick's popper. Job reckons that he's only got to hold on till we drop into his paws. But—if we had Job here——"

Slick chuckled.

"You said it!" he declared. "I guess whatever Job's thinking of he ain't thinking of that! Them guys don't figure that we're aiming to start anything. I'm telling you it will be a surprise for them."

And as the night fell, the Packsaddle bunch discussed the tenderfoot's plan in low, eager voices.

The stars came out over the Rio Frio, but there was no moon and the night was dark. From the bunkhouse came a roar of voices, where the roughnecks were singing a chorus. But that din died away at a late hour when they turned into the bunks formerly occupied by the schoolboys. A light still burned in Small Brown's cabin. But it was extinguished at last and darkness reigned.

At midnight no sound was to be

heard, save the lapping of the Rio Frio on its banks. Usually at that hour the besieged bunch slept with one or two fellows keeping watch. But now not an eye had closed in the schoolhouse.

Quietly nails were withdrawn from one of the planks nailed across the window to give room for fellows to drop out. Dick Carr put out his head, watched, and listened.

The bunkhouse was silent; the roughnecks there were sleeping. Four or five of the gang were keeping watch at the gates and along the fences, ready to stop any attempt to smuggle food in.

Staring out the rebel bunch was Job's plan, and he still hoped that it would prove a winner if others means failed.

The enemy were on their guard against any attempt to get out of the school grounds, but they were not on their guard against an attack from the besieged bunch. Such an idea had never crossed their minds. At close quarters with the gang of roughnecks the bunch had no chance in a scrap. But it was not a scrap that Dick Carr was thinking of. He was thinking of a raid on Small Brown's cabin, getting hold of Job, and capturing him before his gang could come to his aid.

It was taking a long chance, with a big risk of capture. But Dick and Slick and Mick were ready to take the risk, and most of the bunch were keen enough to follow their lead.

"Three will be enough," said Dick Carr. "They would spot a crowd. You fellows keep watch while we're gone."

"You bet!" said Ple.

"If they get us carry on just the same!" said Slick Poindexter. "I guess we can stand the racket."

Dick squeezed through the window and dropped quietly. Slick and Mick dropped after him. The rest of the bunch packed at the window, breathlessly watching.

Still, on tiptoe, the three stole away from the schoolhouse. They knew every inch of the Packsaddle playground.

They passed the bunkhouse and heard a sound of deep breathing and a snore or two from within. The roughnecks there were fast asleep. Without a sound the three reached the cabin once occupied by Small Brown.

Dick Carr felt the door. It opened at his touch.

All was dark within, and there came the sound of steady breathing. Dick crept in and Slick and Mick crept in after him. Softly the door was closed.

So far all had gone well. But it was so dark inside the cabin that the three could not see one another. Dick felt for his matches.

"Ready?" he whispered.

Dick struck a match.

The idea was to grab Job and hook him away—in silence, if possible. But as the glimmering match illumined the interior of the cabin, the three adventurers stared in dismay. Elias Scadder lay asleep in Small Brown's bunk, but Job Wash was not in the cabin. And as Dick held up the match and they stared round, Elias awoke—and sat up in the bunk with a startled yelp, fixing his eyes on them!

CHAPTER 37.

Taken by Surprise!

SURPRISE at the sight of the schoolboys almost made Scadder's eyes pop out of his long, thin face. Why they were there he never guessed for a moment—but he knew that their intentions must be hostile. And he opened his mouth for a yell that would have rung all over the school.

Had that yell been uttered it would have reached the roughnecks guarding the fences and the others asleep in the bunkhouse—and Job Wash, wherever he was. But it was not uttered. Even as Elias' lantern-jaws opened, Slick Poindexter bounded at him, grabbed him and clapped a hand hard over his mouth. Instead of a yell, there came only a muffled gurgles.

"Pronto, you guys!" panted Slick. "We'll have the whole caboodle on our necks in two shakes of a 'possum's tail."

"Keep him quiet!" breathed Dick. Mick sprung to Slick's aid, and Dick struck a second match as the first flickered out.

A bony fist crashed on Poindexter's face, and his nose spurted blood. But he did not heed the blow. He held on tenaciously to Scadder, and kept his hand hard on the wriggling man's mouth. Elias struck a second time, and Slick yelped. But he held fast, and then Mick's grasp was also on the schoolmaster.

Mick grabbed the bony wrists and held them in a grip of iron that rendered Elias helpless. Either of the strong and sturdy Texas schoolboys was a match for him—together they were a good deal more than a match. They forced him down in the bunk, Slick's hand choking back his attempt to howl for help.

"The rope, Dick!" breathed Poindexter. "We've got him dumb—never mind the light—weigh in with the rope."

Dick dropped the burnt match and groped to the bunk. In the darkness the struggling Elias was only a shadow—wriggling, gurgling, striving to break loose and yell.

But Slick and Mick had him fast, and Dick passed the end of a rope round the bony wrists. They were dragged together and the rope knotted. His head was jammed into the blankets and the blankets twisted round it and tied in a bundle with the rope.

From the interior of the bundle came faint muffled howls and gurgles. But the sound was too subdued by the blankets to be heard by Hair-Trigger and his gang. Elias was safe!

Leaving him wriggling and gurgling in the bunk, the three schoolboys stepped back to the open door and listened.

But there was no sound of alarm. Except Scadder, who did not matter

now, none of the enemy knew that a sortie had been made from the besieged schoolhouse.

"We got Scadder!" muttered Slick. "But we don't want Scadder. I guess bony Scadder cuts no ice! We want Job!"

"Where the great horned toad—" muttered Mick.

They had fully expected to find Job in his quarters. He was not there, and they did not know where he was. But Dick Carr guessed that he was making a round to see that watch was kept. He remembered the night when he had smuggled in the supply of food—it was Job who had spotted him. Job had been making a round of the fences to keep his men up to the mark. Hair-Trigger's gang of roughs and toughs were only too likely to nod on the watch if they were not kept up to it!

"Listen!" breathed Mick.

A voice came through the silence—from the direction of the gate. Distant as it was, the schoolboys caught Job's tones.

"I'm telling you to keep your eyes open, you Hair-Trigger! You want them young geeks to run loose and get in the eats like they did afore!"

"Aw, can it, boss!" came Hair-Trigger's deep growl. "I guess I'm jest as wide awake as a doggoned prairie wolf, and then some! Them young geeks won't run loose while I'm around!"

"I sure found Yuma with his goldarned eyes shut a-sitting agin the fence and snoring a few!" snapped Job. "I'm telling you I ain't paying you guys five dollars a day and grub stakes to squat around and snore! Nope!"

There was a sound of footsteps.

Job, evidently, was going on his round, and it was pretty clear that his sentries needed it!

"You hear that?" whispered Dick. "Job doesn't mean to give us another chance of getting out of the school for

grub. If we'd gone anywhere near the fence we should have been grabbed."

"You said it!" murmured Mick. "But I'll tell a man it's Job for the grabbing when he hits this hyer cabin agin!"

They waited in deep silence just within the cabin door. Job, it was clear, was taking every precaution to make sure that none of the bunch got outside the school fences again. But it was equally clear that he had no suspicion that any of them had got out of the schoolhouse without thinking of approaching the high fence that enclosed the playground. Job was in happy ignorance of the fact that the Packsaddle rebels had planned to hit back.

The fat storekeeper of Packsaddle was in no hurry to return to the cabin. Several times they heard his voice from different points as he snapped at the men on watch. But they waited patiently. Sooner or later, it was certain, Mr. Wash would come back to his quarters. And they were ready for him when he did.

In the bunk, Scadder wriggled and mumbled. But the schoolboys gave him no heed. They watched and waited for the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee. Job was their game.

Footsteps approached the cabin at last.

"Watch out!" breathed Poindexter. "He's coming!"

It was too dark to see Job as he came, but they could hear him. Satisfied at last that watch was being kept round the fences, Job was coming back to the cabin to return to his night's rest. The footsteps came nearer and nearer.

A black shadow loomed in the doorway. They heard the fat storekeeper grunt and fumble, and guessed that he was feeling for his matchbox.

But they gave him no time to strike a light.

Suddenly, to Job's intense and

startled surprise, a grasp was laid on him in the darkness, and he was dragged headlong inside the cabin and squashed down on the floor.

Bump!

Job Wash hit the floor hard.

He gurgled in amazed surprise. Hands grasped him on all sides—a hand was feeling over his fat face with a neckscarf in it, and the neckscarf was drawn over his mouth and knotted hard. Before Job had any clear idea what was happening he was gagged.

"Got him!" breathed Dick.

Job jumped as he heard the voice of the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. He knew then in whose hands he was.

But he could make no sound beyond a faint mumble. He strove to resist as his fat wrists were jerked together and tied behind his podgy back. But he had no chance. He was helpless in three strong pairs of hands.

With his hands tied he was jerked to his feet. He mumbled under the gagging scarf, and his eyes glared with rage in the gloom. Slick and Mick held him by his podgy arms.

"Keep your whiskers on, Job!" chuckled Slick. "We ain't going to hurt hide nor hair of you, so long as you behave like a good little man. But we sure got you."

"I'll tell a man!" chortled Mick.

"Come on!" whispered Dick Carr. "We're taking you to the schoolhouse, Mr. Wash! Got that?"

"We sure want your company, Job!" grinned Slick. "You savvy? Get a move on, you old mule, you!"

Job resisted as they attempted to walk him out of the cabin. He planted his feet firmly and strove to hold back.

"I'm saying get a move on, Job!" snapped Slick Poindexter. "You ornery old mule, you, move, pronto! I'm sure going to pull you by the nose, Job, till you move!"

Gurgle!

Job moved.

Led by the nose, gurgling with fury

under the gag, Job Wash walked out of the cabin, and followed his captors across the playground to the schoolhouse.

CHAPTER 35.

Captured!

PIE SANDERS peered from the schoolhouse window. Moving shadows in the darkness of the playground loomed faintly, and a low gurgle reached his ears.

"By the great horned toad!" breathed Pie. "I'll say they've got him!"

"Sez you!" muttered Poker Parker doubtfully.

"Look, you piecan!"

Four dim figures stopped under the window. The central figure was that of the fat storekeeper of Packsaddle. Round him were Dick and Slick and Mick. Job's face was half-hidden by the neckscarf that gagged him; but what could be seen of it was crimson with fury.

There was a chuckle from the bunch packed inside the window.

"Lend a hand here!" came Dick Carr's whisper. "You ready, Pie?"

"You bet!" grinned Pie.

He reached out and grasped the fat storekeeper. Hunky Tutt and Bud Dunn reached out and grasped him also.

With three fellows pulling him within, and three fellows hoisting him without, Job Wash rose from the earth.

Job could not speak; but if he could have spoken, his feelings could not have been expressed in words. Never for an instant had he dreamed of such a move as this on the part of the besieged bunch. His whole thoughts had been concentrated on getting at them! He had never figured that they would think of getting at him!

He gurgled frantically and spasmodically in his wild efforts to utter a yell. One yell would have brought his gang of roughnecks rushing to the

rescue. Job was desperate. He was not going to be dragged inside the building if he could help it.

Up he went, Pie, Hunky and Bud dragging; Dick, Slick and Mick shoving from below. Job dragged a leg loose and kicked.

Silence was precious; but the silence was broken by a fearful yell from Mick Kavanagh. Mick really could not help it. A kick landing on a fellow's nose might have made anyone yell.

Mick, in the first moment of anguish, felt as if his nose had been kicked through the back of his head. He let go, staggered back, and yelled wildly.

"Quiet!" panted Dick Carr.

"Mick, you piecan!" gasped Slick.

"Yarooo-hoooo!" roared Mick. "Sure me nose is broken intirely, so it is— Yaroooooh!"

"Blow your nose!" gasped Dick. "Hold him, Slick!"

"Pack it up, Mick, you big stiff!" exclaimed Pie.

"Yurrrg-ggggh!" spluttered Mick. "Ow! Me nose! Wow!"

Job's legs thrashed wildly. But Dick and Slick secured them. Mick was hors de combat. He ceased to yell, but he clasped his anguished nose and mumbled. There was a distant shout.

"They've heard!" panted Dick. "Quick with him!"

Job was wriggling like an eel and striving frantically to kick again. Mick's yells had reached many ears. Hair-Trigger was shouting from the direction of the gate—and another voice called from the bunkhouse. There was no time to lose.

Unluckily, more haste made less speed. Pie, grabbing at Job's wriggling head, grabbed at the neckscarf and tore it loose. Job unexpectedly found himself ungagged.

Instantly he started yelling.

"Help here, you galoots! You Hair-Trigger—Yuma—Tanglefoot—they got me—they sure cinched me—help here—"

"Oh, great gophers!" gasped Slick. "That spills it! Pronto—"

"This way!" shrieked Job. "You Hair-Trigger—"

"Shove him in!"

Footsteps and shouting voices rang in the dark. The alarm was given on all sides now.

"Say, boss—" came Hair-Trigger's roar.

"This way—" raved Job.

But his head and shoulders were inside now. Pie and his comrades dragged him right in, and he bumped down headlong on the planks of the schoolhouse floor.

"Hurry up!" gasped Dick Carr. "You first, Mick—quick—"

"Ow! Me nose—"

"Quick!" panted Dick Carr, and he shoved Kavanagh at the window. Mick clambered in, helped by the fellows inside.

Running feet were approaching the spot. A herculean figure loomed up in the shadows, and the schoolboys had a glimpse of the red-bearded, startled face of Hair-Trigger.

Dick and Slick were still outside the window. They jumped at the bullwhacker together and crashed him over. Hair-Trigger Pete sprawled at full length, roaring. Then they dived for the window.

Before the roughneck could get to his feet Slick had dived headlong in, and Dick Carr after him. Dick rolled on the floor. Slick Poindexter landed on something softer. For the moment he did not know what it was. Then a fiendish yell apprised him that it was Job Wash.

Hair-Trigger staggered to his feet, peering round him in the gloom. He hardly knew what was happening.

"Say, boss!" he stuttered. "What the great thumping Jehoshaphat—say, where are you? I guess I heered you too—"

"Say, Hair-Trigger, what's this game?" came a yell from Yuma Dave out of the darkness. He came groping up.

"You can search me!" gasped Hair-Trigger. "I reckon they got the boss—I sure did hear Mr. Wash was tooting a few—"

"We sure got him, you guys!" roared Pie Sanders jubilantly. "We got that goob by the short hairs!"

Hair-Trigger came closer to the window, peering. An inkpot whizzed out and landed on his red beard hard. It was followed by an empty beef can. Hair-Trigger promptly retreated.

Mr. Wash, sitting up on the school-room floor, was yelling wildly.

"Say, you goobs, they got me. You come on and get me out of this! You hear me? You doggoned piecans, I'm telling you to get me out of this!"

"Not in your lifetime, Job, old-timer!" chuckled Slick. "They won't get you out of it, not a chance!"

"I'll say nope!" chortled Pie.

A kerosene lamp was lighted. There was a sound of hammering as Pie and Hunky nailed up the plank across the window again. The voices of the gang of roughnecks came from the darkness outside. But they were keeping their distance. Hair-Trigger and his gang had been beaten off every time they had tried to rush the schoolhouse, and they were not anxious to try it on again. There was no rescue for Mr. Wash.

He sat on the floor blinking in the light. His fat face was purple with fury. The bunch surrounded him with grinning faces. Dick Carr's stunt had been touch and go, but it had been a success, and Job was a prisoner in the hands of the bunch. They chuckled gleefully over their capture.

"You letting me loose?" roared Job.

"Not so's you'd notice it!" grinned Slick. "We sure want your company, Job, old boss, so long as this hyer circus goes on."

"We're keeping you, Mr. Wash!" said Dick, laughing. "And when we go short of grub again, you'll go short, too. Got that?"

"You doggoned young gink!" gasped Job.

"Pack it up, Job!" said Slick. "We got you dead to rights! You want to get loose, you sing out to Scadder to send for Bill!"

Job spluttered with rage.

"You figure I'll send for Bill, you pesky young scallywags!" he howled. "You got another guess coming! I sure ain't sending for no Bill!"

Job jerked at his tied wrists.

"You let a guy loose!" he roared. "Say, you figure you're going to keep me tied up like I was a hogtied steer?"

"I'll say so!" assented Slick.

And, Job, in a state of volcanic fury, spent the remainder of that eventful night with his hands tied behind his podgy back, and his legs tied to a desk in the school-room. The bunch had captured Job, and they were taking no risks of losing him again.

CHAPTER 39.

Til for Tat!

"SAY, you young geeks!" snorted Job Wash.

"Can it, Job!"

"I'm telling you—"

"Pack it up, old-timer!"

"I'm telling you," roared Job, "that I'm honing for some cats!"

There was a chuckle from the Packsaddle bunch.

The bunch were all in the school-room. Dinner was going on. The bunch sat around on desks and pine-wood benches, eating canned beef, washed down by cold water from the cistern.

"Eats" were running rather short at the cow town school. Short for the bunch, they were shorter still for Job. Job was not getting any!

"You ornery young ginks!" yelled Job, brandishing fat fists at the grinning bunch. "You figure you're going to starve a guy?"

"You said it, Job!" grinned Slick Foindexter.

"You figured you was going to starve

us out, Job!" chuckled Mick Kavanagh. "Now you got it coming to you."

Dick Carr laughed.

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, Mr. Wash!" he remarked. "You started this trouble. You jawed the school committee into dismissing Mr. Sampson. You got a gang of roughnecks to handle us, and they can't do anything——"

"Not a thing!" chuckled Pie Sanders.

"Then you settled down to starve us out!" said Dick Carr. "We got in one lot of grub, and your crowd were too watchful to let us get in another lot. So we got you!"

"By the short hairs, Job!" said Slick.

"And now we're playing your own game on you!" said Dick cheerfully. "You can chuck in your hand as soon as you like."

"You pesky young piecan, I'll tell a man I'm hungry!" roared Job.

"You're going to stay hungry, old-timer!" grinned Slick. "You've got no kick coming, Job! Wasn't you going to starve us into giving in?"

"You was," said Mick, "and now we're giving you the same goods, Job. Chew on that, old-timer! You won't have nothing else to chew on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Job Wash breathed fury.

No doubt, from the point of view of the rebel bunch, it was fair play to give him what he had aimed to give them. Every other method had failed, and Job had banked on starving out the bunch. Now they were going to starve him out!

"You see," explained Dick Carr, "the food's running short! With your gang on the watch, we can't get in any more. We haven't any to waste on prisoners, Mr. Wash!"

"Not by a jugful!" agreed Pie.

"We're going pretty short now, and there won't be a bite left in a couple of days more!" went on Dick Carr. "We're not giving in, if we have to eat our boots and belts! We want Bill back!"

"And we're going to have Bill back!" said Poindexter. "When you get really hungry, Job, you sing out to them geeks in the playground to hit Kicking Mule and tell Bill he's wanted. You won't get any eats till then."

"Not a chew!" said Mick.

"I guess you'll be so thin when you get back to your store that the guys there won't know you!" chuckled Pie.

"You figure you're keeping me roped in hyer without any eats?" shrieked Job.

"Surest thing you know!" assented Slick.

Job clenched his fat fists. He had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. The prospect of another forty-eight without a chew was appalling. And even then, if the rebel bunch came down to eating their boots and belts, what was to happen to Job? Job was desperate.

He made a sudden rush and grabbed a can of beef from the hand of Hunky Tutt.

Instantly the bunch jumped up.

Job had no time for a single bite! Dick Carr, Slick, and Mick grasped him and rolled him over.

Hunky clutched away the can. Dick, Slick, and Mick continued to roll fat Job.

They rolled him the length of the school-room. Shortage of foodstuffs had not yet reduced Job's girth. He rolled like a barrel.

Wild yells came from him as he rolled.

But he rolled on. From the end of the long school-room, they rolled him back again to the other end.

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

"I guess that lets you out, Job, old-timer!" grinned Slick. And the school-boys returned to their interrupted meal, leaving Job in a gasping heap on the pine planks.

He lay there and gurgled for breath.

He almost forgot that he was hungry. His chief need at the moment was wind; and he gasped and gurgled and spluttered for it.

Unheeding the hapless chairman of the school committee, the Packsaddle bunch finished their meal, and the remainder of the provender was safely locked up in Bill's room. Not a morsel was left out to be clutched by the hungry Job.

None of the bunch had had enough, the rations were growing thin, and had to be dealt out sparingly. So there was no sympathy for Job, though he was hungrier. Job could get the squarest of square meals as soon as he liked by giving in and recalling Bill Sampson to his old post as headmaster of Packsaddle. So long as Job continued obstinate, Job had to continue hungry! The Packsaddle bunch had got the chairman of the school committee by the short hairs, and it was up to Job to quit!

CHAPTER 40.

Enough for Scadder!

"YOU Scadder!" yelled Job Wash. Job was standing at a window in the school-room.

Across the window were nailed big planks, torn from interior walls. Job stared out through the space between two planks into the sunlit playground.

The bunch grinned as they watched him. They were ready to cinch Job and hog-tie him if he made any attempt to shift the planks and get out. So long as he contented himself with yelling, the bunch did not mind. They were prepared for his followers to make an attempt to rescue him—in fact, they would have welcomed it for a little excitement and liveliness. They had beaten off every attack hitherto, and were confident that they could beat off any more that came along.

Elias Scadder was standing at a distance, blinking at the barricaded schoolhouse. He was not looking happy. His new post at Packsaddle School was not turning out as expected.

Elias had stacks of book-knowledge.

In that line, Bill Sampson was not in the same street with Elias.

But Bill Sampson had been able to handle the rough and tough school bunch. Elias couldn't.

Elias was prepared to use the cane to any extent. Indeed, he had used it not wisely, but too well, for he had a vicious temper. But his cane did not enforce respect like Bill's quirt.

Mr. Scadder was beginning to wonder whether it was good enough. He was beginning to doubt whether Packsaddle School would be good for his health, even if Job succeeded in putting him in control. And it seemed very doubtful now whether Job could!

Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang were standing by the chuckhouse in a group, talking together. Mr. Scadder gave them occasional uneasy glances. He was fearfully nervous of that gang of bullwhackers. More and more Elias was doubting whether Texas was a healthy country for him.

He started as Job yelled his name from the school-room window. He approached a little nearer to hear what Job had to say.

But he approached very warily. He did not want to stop a whizzing ink-pot or bullybeef can with his long thin visage.

"Mr. Wash——" he squeaked.

"You Scadder! You pesky mugwump!" roared Job. "What you doing leaving me hyer with these pesky young ginks this-a-way! You call yourself a schoolmaster you piefaced prairie-rabbit?"

"My dear sir——" gasped Scadder. "What can I do?"

Really it was a difficult question to answer. Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang could not handle the bunch—how could Scadder? But Job was not in a reasonable mood. He was never a very reasonable guy at the best of times, and missing eats made him more unreasonable than ever.

"You pesky, slabsided mugwump!" he roared. "Didn't I fire Bill Sampson, and make you headmaster of this

caboodle? What's the good of you for a schoolmaster, with the school making whoopce this-a-way? You figure they'd be putting across this jamboree if Bill Sampson was here?"

"But, my dear sir—" gasped Scadder.

"Didn't I fire Bill because I figured that you was a dandy noo headmaster what would run the bunch better'n Bill did?" roared Job. "I'm telling you that if you don't pull up your socks and get going somehow, you'll get fired so quick it will make your head swim."

"But what—"

"Ain't I got to pay them guys five dollars a day to put this thing through?" roared Job. "You herd them this way, and tell them they got to get me out of this, or I ain't paying them a continental red cent."

"I—I—I will try, sir!" gasped Elias. "But—"

"Puck it up!" booted Job. "I tell you, I ain't had any eats for twenty-four hours! You get me out of this, you Scadder, or you're fired—and them geeks is fired, too! You get me?"

Elias Scadder turned away, and approached the gang of roughnecks gathered by the chuckhouse. The bunch watched him from the windows with grinning faces.

They could not hear what was said, but they could see signs of excitement in the roughneck gang. Then Hair-Trigger's bawling voice came across the playground.

"Lissen, you'uns!" chuckled Slick.

"I guess you're going to take a hand, Scadder! You figure that we're honing to cinch sockdolagers on the cabeza while you stand rubbering like you was a country Rube at a rodeo? Forget it! We'll sure foller you."

"We sure will!" said Yuma Dave.

The Packsaddle bunch chuckled. Elias Scadder was ready and eager to cane the bunch to any extent once they were brought under control. But he was not eager to take a hand in getting them under control.

"You're schoolmaster, ain't you?"

roared Hair-Trigger. "Waal, you get going! We'll come arter you."

It was clear that the bullwhackers were not keen to come to blows with the bunch again. At the same time, no doubt they realised that it was up to them to earn the dollars Job had promised for their support. But the whole crowd agreed that it was for Scadder to lead.

Elias Scadder's face was a study. He was not sure, by this time, that he wanted the job of riding herd at Packsaddle School. And he was quite sure that the enraged Job would fire him if he did not get him out of the hands of the bunch. Finally he seemed to make up his mind.

"Follow me!" he squeaked.

"Watch out!" yelled Slick. "They're coming."

"I guess we'll put paid to the guys!" chuckled Mick.

Job waved a fat hand encouragingly between the planks at the window. But Job was not wanted there now that the attack was coming. Slick and Mick grasped him and spun him away.

Mr. Wash rolled across the schoolroom, crashed into a desk, and stopped there. He lay gasping.

The bunch packed the windows. Every fellow had a weapon or a missile in his grasp. The door was too strongly barricaded for the enemy to have a chance there. With Scadder in the lead they headed for the largest window, Hair-Trigger and Yuma carrying a heavy log between them to crash on the planks and make an opening.

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz! flew inkpots, chunks of wood, and bullybeef tins through the apertures at the windows. An inkpot landed on Mr. Scadder's long nose—a beef can on his chin—and a billet of wood on his waistcoat. The long, thin Scadder folded up on the ground, and his roughnecks rushed over him.

Crash! came the log on the windows. Missiles rained on the assailants, and wild yells woke all the echoes of Pack-

saddle. But crash it came again, and again, and the planks flew.

Hair-Trigger Pete clambered. Yuma Dave and Tanglefoot clambered with him. The rest of the gang pressed on behind.

But the window was packed with the bunch. Cudgels and quirts rained hefty blows on heads and shoulders.

Dick Carr and Slick Poindexter caught up one of the fallen planks between them, and charged with it at the window. The end of the plank caught Hair-Trigger under his red-bearded chin.

He gave a gurgling yell, and went spinning back. He landed in the playground with a terrific crash. Hair-Trigger's impression was that his chin had been driven through the back of his head. He rolled on the earth, roaring, amid trampling feet.

"Give them socks!" yelled Dick Carr.

"Pile in, you galoots!"

"That's for you, Yuma!"

The roughnecks surged back. Hair-Trigger and Scadder, sprawling on the ground, were hors de combat. The bunch were holding their own—more than holding their own; the Stetson hats were little protection against crashing blows. Back went the enemy out of reach, panting and gasping.

Hair-Trigger staggered to his feet. But it was not to lead on again. He tottered away, holding his red-bearded chin in both hands, and moaning. And the rest of the gang followed him.

Slick brandished his quirt from the window.

"Come on!" he roared, "you're not licked yet. Say, I'll tell all Texas you ain't whipped yet, not by long chalks!"

But the Packsaddle roughnecks were evidently of a different opinion. Whipped or not, they had had enough, and they retreated.

"I guess that's their last kick!" chuckled Mick Kavanagh. "Them guys sure ain't honing for trouble with this bunch."

"You said it!" chortled Slick.

Job Wash, almost dancing with rage, glared after the retreating roughnecks. He glared at Elias Scadder, who was sitting up in a dazed state, feeling his features with bony hands, as if to ascertain that they were still there.

"You Scadder!" shrieked Job.

Elias blinked at him. Elias seemed rather uncertain whether he was on his head or his heels.

"You getting me outer this?" raved Job.

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Scadder.

"You get me outer this, you pesky mugwump, or you're fired!" yelled Job. Elias Scadder staggered to his feet. "You fat old fool!" he yelled back.

"Say? What are you spilling?" gasped Job.

"Fired?" hooted Elias. "Pah! You may get some other schoolmaster to take charge of this menagerie, Mr. Wash! I've had enough of it! I've had more than enough of it, Mr. Wash! I would not stay here for twice the salary you have offered me—got that? I am going, Mr. Wash! Do you hear, you cantankerous old idiot? I'm going—and going now."

And Elias went.

Job stared after him. And the Packsaddle bunch roared:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 41.

The Roughnecks Quit.

"QUITTING?" asked Slick Poindexter, with a grin.

Job Wash groaned.

It was the following morning. The Packsaddle bunch, up with the sun, were breakfasting in the school-room—a frugal breakfast.

Frugal as it was, there was a bite or two all round. But for the unhappy chairman of the Packsaddle school committee there was not a single chew!

A day more, and the bunch would be in the same state as Job—without a

bite! Even so, they were not going to give in.

Somehow, anyhow, they were going to pull through and keep up the tussle till their dismissed headmaster came back. But it seemed likely that it would not come to such a pinch, for Job was now in a state to chew boot-leather. Job was no quitter—he prided himself on it. But if he wanted an excuse for quitting he had one—his new headmaster was gone, fed-up with Packsaddle School, the school committee, and the school bunch. Even if Job gained the upper hand now his troubles were not at an end—he had to send for Bill, or root out another schoolmaster. And schoolmasters did not grow on every bush in Santanta County.

"You ornery young piecans!" groaned Job. "I'll say I'm hungry! But I guess I ain't quitting! Nope!"

"You'll quit!" grinned Mick Kavanagh. "But sure you can take your time, old-timer! You got it coming."

"Surest thing you know!" chuckled Slick.

Job groaned dismally as he watched the bunch eat. He sighed with deep gloom when the few remnants of provender were locked up after the meal.

He knew that rations were getting short. Starving out the bunch was, in fact, a practical proposition. But starving along with them was a dismaying prospect. Certainly the hungriest of the bunch could hold out longer than Job.

But, still clinging to his obstinacy, Job would not quit. He tightened his belt and chewed an empty pipe. No doubt he still had some hope in the gang of roughnecks. They had failed to rescue him, but Job's idea was that they could pull it off if they put all their beef into it. And if anything could make them put beef into it, it would be the prospect of losing the promised reward for their assistance.

So he watched for them to turn out. Hair-Trigger Pete & Co. were not early

risers. So far as scrapping went they had had a hard time at the cow town school—and there were few of them who had not captured bumps and bruises and all sorts of painful damages. But in other respects they took things easy.

It was quite a late hour of the morning when they turned out of the bunkhouse and cooked themselves breakfast in the chuckhouse. They were taking things all the easier, now they were no longer under the master's eye.

Having fed, they came out of the chuckhouse into the playground to smoke in the shade of the buildings.

Job watched them from the window with intensifying fury.

If they figured that he was paying them five dollars a day each to sleep and feed and smoke, while he remained a famished prisoner in the hands of the bunch, Job reckoned that they had another guess coming.

He waved and beckoned for quite a

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long time before Hair-Trigger Pete took the trouble to lounge across to the schoolhouse to chew the rag with him.

Hair-Trigger was not looking good-tempered. There was a bump on his chin bigger than an egg where the plank had crashed, and he had an ache like toothache all over his extensive jaw. And his temper was not improved by the greeting he received from Job Wash.

"Say, you pesky, doggoned, white-livered, sneaking son of a mangy rabbit," hooted Job, "how long you leaving me here? I'm telling you it's nix on the eats for me, and I sure could chew the tail off'n a Mexican burro! You getting me out of this, you long-legged, whisky-faced clam?"

"Aw, pack it up!" snorted Hair-Trigger. "Ain't we tried and tried agin, and ain't we all got hammered like we was nails in a fence? What you let them clinch you for? I'm telling you, Wash, you want a whole lot for your dollars, and I'll mention that we done enough, and then some, and some over!"

"You getting me out of this?" howled Job.

"Git nothing!" retorted Hair-Trigger. "They got you by the short hairs, and we can't help you none. I'll tell all Texas, Wash, we've had enough of that goldarned bunch!"

Job shook a fat fist at him.

"Then you're fired, same as Scadder!" he roared. "You hit the trail and hit it quick!"

"I'll say we're ready to hit the trail and willing!" answered Hair-Trigger. "You hand out the dollars

"Nix on the dollars!" hooted Job. "You figure I'm paying you to loaf around and look pretty? Forget it!"

Hair-Trigger glared at him. Hair-Trigger & Co. were beginning to doubt whether five dollars a day was worth the damage they were getting at Packsaddle School. The idea of getting the damages, without getting the dollars, got Hair-Trigger's goat.

"Why, you pesky old piecan!" he roared. "You ornery, doggoned old lobo-wolf——"

"Pack it up!" hooted Job. "I guess I've paid you more'n enough for setting around like a bunch of Mexican monkeys a-setting on their tails, and you skeered of a bunch of schoolboys! You get me outer this pronto, or you don't touch a continental red cent more from me, and I'm telling you so!"

"Doggone you!" roared Hair-Trigger. "I'll say—— Yarooooop!"

A bullybeef can, whizzing from the window, caught Hair-Trigger Pete on his already-damaged chin.

He roared and retreated.

"You hear me?" shrieked Job after him, as he went. "Not a doggoned dime, not a continental red cent, if you don't get me outer this pronto! You hear me yaup, you pesky, slab-sided scallywag?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Packsaddle bunch.

"I'll say that outfit won't help you a lot, Job!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "You quitting, old-timer?"

Job snorted. He watched the rough-necks gathered in an excited crowd by the chuckhouse. Job still hoped that his threat of a stoppage of pay would stir them into action. The Packsaddle bunch, more than ready for another scrap, hoped so, too.

But the bunch, as well as Mr. Wash, were disappointed. Hair-Trigger & Co. had had enough in the way of hard knocks. They were prepared to "set around," as Job expressed it, and starve the bunch into surrender—but they were not prepared to attempt once more the impossible task of carrying the barricade schoolhouse by assault.

There was a loud and angry discussion—and then the whole gang streamed away towards the gate.

Job's fat jaw dropped.

"They're going!" exclaimed Dick Carr.

"They're sure vamoosing the ranch!" chuckled Mick Kavanagh.

"Hitting the trail, surest thing you know!" roared Slick Poindexter. "Say, Job, I guess you come out at the little end of the horn."

Job stared blankly after his retreating army. He waved a fat hand frantically through the barred window.

"Say, you ginks!" he yelled.

Hair-Trigger turned in the gateway to shake a brawny fist at him, his other hand clasp his chin. Then he tramped out into the trail, and disappeared after the rest.

"Search me!" gasped Job.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They've sure beat it!" chuckled Pie Sanders.

The bunch watched from the windows.

The roughnecks were gone—the playground was deserted. It remained deserted, and at length, sure that the coast was clear, Dick, Slick, and Mick dropped from a window, ran to the gate, and closed and barred it.

Then the whole bunch came out of the schoolhouse, glad to get into the open air again. Once more Packsaddle School was in possession of the rebels.

So was Job!

If Mr. Wash fancied for a hopeful moment that the bunch were going to let him loose he had another guess coming. They marched across to the chuckhouse for dinner, and they took Mr. Wash with them.

Job watched them eat! He feasted his eyes—but he had no other feast! After dinner he was locked in Small Brown's cabin.

There was a small window to that cabin, at which Job's fat and furious face immediately appeared. The bunch, rejoicing in their freedom, were making whoopee in the playground. Job watched them with a dismal and baleful eye. Even upon Job Wash's obstinate mind it was borne in that the time had come to quit.

CHAPTER 42.

Bill Takes the Reins!

BILL SAMPSON rode up the school trail with a rugged brow. The six-gun schoolmaster was deeply worried.

Bill had gone back to 'punching cows on Kicking Mule, and tried to forget that he had been a schoolmaster. He had hoped that Elias Scadder would be able to make good. But the more news he received from Packsaddle the more worried he was. The thought of the bunch besieged in the schoolhouse by a gang of the toughest roughnecks in the Frio Valley kept Bill awake at night in the bunkhouse at Kicking Mule. Many times he had been tempted to ride over to the school to see what was going on. Now at last he was coming to give Packsaddle the once-over. And as he approached the school gate he heard a roar of cheery voices over the ten-foot fence.

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Bill.

It did not sound like trouble at the cow town school. It sounded more like a jamboree.

Bill pulled in his bronco at the gate and stared over with surprise in his face under his Stetson hat.

The playground was crowded with schoolboys. There was no sign of Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang. Bill, who had thoughtfully packed a gun in case of trouble with Hair-Trigger, realised that it would not be wanted. There had evidently been a change in the state of affairs at Packsaddle. The whole bunch were rejoicing.

Dick Carr was the first to see the bearded face looking over the gate.

He gave a yell:

"Bill!"

"Bill!" roared Slick Poindexter.

"It's sure Bill!" yelled Mick.

They rushed to the gate. Bars were dragged away and the gate swung open. Bill, still amazed, rode in. There was a roar of cheering from the Packsaddle bunch. Evidently they were glad to see Bill again.

"Welcome home, Bill!" shouted Dick Carr.

"Say, this is a sight for sore eyes!" howled Pie Sanders. "You come back to be schoolmaster, Bill?"

Bill shook his head.

"Forget it!" he said. "Scadder's your schoolmaster, you young ginks—"

"Scadder nothing!" chuckled Slick. "Old Wash fired Scadder yesterday and he's gone! Nix on Scadder!"

"We're standing for you, Bill!" said Dick Carr. "We're not having any other schoolmaster at Packsaddle!"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" chuckled Slick. "If a noo schoolmaster comes along we'll sure chew him up a few! But I guess Mr. Wash ain't looking for any noo schoolmaster."

"Where's Wash?" demanded Bill.

There was no need for the schoolboys to answer that question. Job Wash, glaring from the window of Small Brown's cabin, spotted Bill and howled to him.

Never had Job been so glad to see any guy as he was to see the six-gun schoolmaster! To Job, as well as to the bunch, Bill Sampson was a sight for sore eyes.

"Say, Bill!" yelled Job.

Bill Sampson stared round in wonder. He did not spot the fat face at the cabin window for the moment.

"Say, where's that pesky guy?" he ejaculated.

"Bill!" roared Job Wash. "This way, you galoot! I guess I want to get out of this! Hump it, you bonehead!"

"Carry me home to die!" exclaimed Bill, in astonishment. He rode across the playground to Small Brown's cabin and pulled in his bronco, staring at the fat face framed in the little window.

"That you, old Wash?" gasped Bill. "What do you call this game, you pesky old piecan?"

"You git me out of this!" howled Job. "I'll say I'm honing for eats! I'm sure pining away for eats, Bill!"

Bill looked round at the bunch.

"O.K., Bill!" said Slick. "Mr. Wash was sure going to starve us out, and I'll tell a man we was powerful short on the eats. But I guess a stunt like that works both ways and now we've got Job, and we're sure starving him out. He ain't going to chew nothing till he quits."

"Search me!" gasped Bill.

Job gave the former headmaster of Packsaddle a beseeching look.

"You'll sure get me out of this, Bill!" he pleaded.

Bill gave him a cold look.

"I ain't got no authority to interfere in this game, Mr. Wash," he answered. "I ain't a schoolmaster—I'm jest a cowpuncher from the Kicking Mule. You got a noo schoolmaster to handle this bunch—"

"I guess he can't handle them!" groaned Job. "I'll say I've fired that guy because he couldn't begin to handle them young geeks!"

Bill grinned.

"Not with all that book-knowledge that you told me about?" he asked. "Waal, I'll say you've bitten off a piece you can't chew, Mr. Wash!" He wheeled his bronco. "So-long, old-timer! I reckoned I'd give the old school the once-over, and I'll say I'm plumb glad to see things going so lively! S'long!"

"Pull in, you ornery old geck!" yelled Job Wash in alarm, as Bill started to ride away. "Pull in, you pesky piecan!"

"I guess I got to get back to 'punching cows, Mr. Wash!"

"Pull in!" shrieked Job. "You ain't leaving me like this, Bill!"

"Sure!" answered Bill. "A cowpuncher ain't got no call to horn into a goldarned school, Mr. Wash. You better send for Mr. Scadder—"

"Doggone Scadder!" yelled Job. "I guess I—I was going to send for you, Bill. You can handle this bunch! Say, you figure that you'd like to be schoolmaster ag'in? I guess I'll fix it with the school committee easy—they was all agin firing you, Bill."

"I guess I'm wise to that!" said Bill.

"It was your stunt, first and last, you ornery old jay! Now you done it, you want to make the best of it! S'long!"

"Stop!" yelled Job. "I'm quitting! Don't you get me, you pesky cow-puncher? I'm asking you to come back and ride herd here! I'm asking you to be schoolmaster of Packsaddle ag'in! Pull in, Bill! Say, you ain't going off on your ear jest because a guy's made a mistake! I own up I was a bonehead—I'll tell a man, I was the biggest boob from Boobsville! Ain't that good enough for you, Bill?"

Bill Sampson seemed to be considering it. Job watched him, almost in anguish.

He was not only ready to quit; he was eager to quit.

"Say, it's a cinch, Bill!" he pleaded.

"Say yep, old-timer."

Bill made up his mind.

"Yep!" he said.

And Job gasped with relief.

Bill slipped from his bronco. He threw the reins to Dick Carr.

"Put that cayuse in the corral!" he said.

"What-ho!" chuckled Dick.

"You let Mr. Wash out, you Slick."

"Sure!" grinned Slick.

Job was let out of the cabin. He made a bee-line for the chuckhouse. Bill walked across to the schoolhouse. He frowned as he saw the state that it was in.

A lot of work was required before school life at Packsaddle resumed the more or less even tenor of its way.

"I guess," said Bill, "that you'uns are going to be busy—and then some. If that shebang ain't in proper order by sundown, I'll sure quirt you a few, and a few over! Get going!"

"Aw, can it, Bill!" said Slick warmly. "I guess we've stood for you and got you back, and if we hadn't you'd still be punching cows! I guess you ain't come back to handle that quirt on this bunch, Bill, and I'll say— Whoop!"

"Whack, whack, whack!"

"Aw, let up, you old geck!" yelled Slick.

Whack, whack!

Slick dodged away from the quirt, roaring.

The bunch looked at one another. They had stood for Bill and they had got him back! Perhaps, after so long and successful a rebellion, they were not quite prepared to toe the line and submit to authority. But they were not dealing with Scadder now—they were dealing with Bill!

"Say, Bill, you pack that up!" said Mick Kavanagh. "I guess——"

Whack, whack!

The quirt rang round Mick's legs. He dodged and yelled.

"Say," roared Bill, "you young gecks figure that you can give me backchat like I was a slabsided bonehead of Scadder's heft? Forget it! And forget it pronto!"

And the Packsaddle bunch forgot it pronto!

They set to work, under Bill's eyes, getting the schoolhouse into order again. Slick grinned ruefully as he rubbed the places where the quirt had landed.

"I'll say Bill's a man, anyhow—ow!" he remarked.

"He's sure a man—wow!" said Mick.

There was no doubt that Bill was a man—and the man the Packsaddle bunch needed to handle them. Job Wash, packed with eats, rolled down to the gate and looked back—to see the whole bunch tolling away like one man under Bill's eye, jumping to orders almost before they were uttered. It was a startling change after what had been going on at Packsaddle, and even Job realised that Bill was the right man in the right place.

It was a tired bunch that turned into the bunkhouse that night. But the school-room was in order, ready for Small Brown to resume teaching in the morning. The rebellion at Packsaddle was over—and there was never likely to be another so long as Bill was riding herd.

THE END.

OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

TRAINING TO BE "TIGERS"!

BOXING is booming nowadays. Big fights are held regularly in every important town throughout Great Britain, and even those who don't go to the ringside get ringside seats in front of their own fireplaces, listening-in to the broadcast radio commentaries.

But top-class boxers have to spend weeks in training for the fight that may only last a few minutes, and training methods are sometimes astonishing. Special diet, long-distance walks, sparring, shadow-boxing, skipping, massage, steam-bathing to get down weight—these are only a few of the regular exercises of a fighting man who is getting himself into condition for the ring.

The Boxer Who Eats Sand!

Liebbrant, the South African heavy-weight who fought in London last November, has a curious stunt for meal-times. He mixes sand with some of his food, claiming that it helps digestion. It certainly puts "grit" into him, judging by his performance with the gloves!

Then there's the British lightweight who "muscles-up" by working in a blacksmith's forge. He claims that swinging the heavy hammer used for shaping horseshoes puts beef into his punch faster than any other form of exercise. Len Harvey's favourite muscle-builder is tree-felling.

The giants of the ring who lived in olden days had even more surprising practice methods. Bob Fitzsimmons, the last British holder of the world's heavyweight title, used to spar with a tame bear. He, too, believed in working as a blacksmith for muscle-building.

Many a big fight has been won in the

training camp, long before the fighters entered the ring. When Tom Cribb fought Tom Molyneaux, the negro champion, a hundred years ago, the black man was so confident of a walk-over that he scarcely bothered to train at all. Cribb was at that time getting on in years; Molyneaux was in the prime of life. But Cribb, who thought nothing of walking fifty miles, and then getting down to his ringcraft training, worked himself into perfect condition for the fight, whereas the negro ate an enormous meal just before going into the ring. Tom Cribb's patience was rewarded; he k-o'd his opponent in the eleventh round with a smashing right-hander that broke Molyneaux' jawbone!

Fighters Pickled Their Fists!

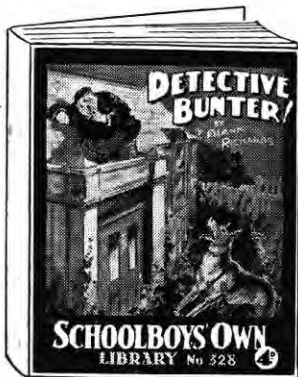
That fight took place in the barest days, when the boxer's gloveless hands sometimes got severely damaged. To toughen up their "mitts," the old-timers used to pickle them in strong brine. Nowadays the fighters wrap on bandages of lint to protect the skin, and wear padded leather on top of that.

Of course, there are always some supermen who can go into the ring and win without any really intensive training. Maxie Rosenbloom, one-time cruiser-weight world champion, spent most of his training-time in bed, they say!

Then there was Harry Greb, holder of the world's middle-weight title, who did his training on the dance-floor! He considered that plenty of dancing made him light on his feet, so that he could slip out of his opponent's punches, and he only went in "with both hands" when he'd got his rival tired.

Joe Louis, the American negro who gave Carnera such a drubbing, is probably the hardest puncher of the present time. He finds it hard to get sparring partners who can stand up to his slugging hits, and he reckons to burst a punch-ball every few days!

TWO MORE TIP-TOP SCHOOL TALES TO READ!

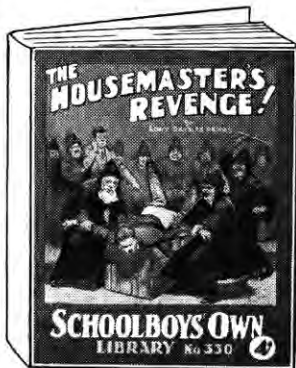


FOR many years Mr. Smale Foxe has awaited his chance to get revenge on St. Frank's, the school that once dismissed him. And now, as master of the College House, his chance comes, and Mr. Foxe sets out to bring disgrace on St. Frank's. You cannot fail to be enthralled by this gripping yarn of Nelson Lee, the schoolmaster detective, and Nipper & Co., of the Remove. See you don't miss it.

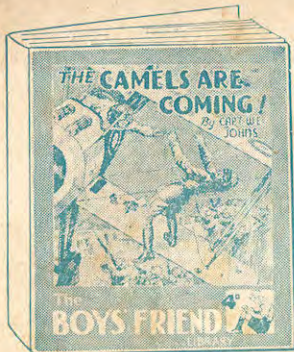
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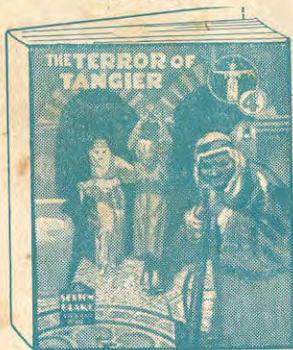
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