

Dick Dorrington & Co. Appear in Next Week

# The BOYS' FRIEND

TWELVE PAGES!

TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR!

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No. 1,028. Vol. XXI. New Series.]

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending February 19th, 1921.]



**A MOMENTOUS MEETING!**

Excitement was rife. The Boy with Fifty Millions was nearly delirious with joy at meeting his cowboy friends who had come all the way from Mexico to see him. While the two were jerking one another's right arms up and down like pump handles the other "boys" were firing off round after round as a salute to their late master.

**£10 in Prizes Every Week—See Page 82!**



Jimmy Silver & Co. jumped up at once.

"We'd have met him at the station if we'd known his name," said Lovell. "He might have adopted us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's come by car!" said Mornington. "Spankin' big Rolls-Royce car. His own. Fairly rollin' in it! He's got a new silk hat and a diamond pin."

"Dear old Bootles!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Let's go down and see his new silk hat and his diamond pin."

And the Fistical Four hurried downstairs, followed by Tubby Muffin, who was eager to be first to greet his beloved Bootles. With a Rolls-Royce car, a new silk hat, and a diamond

he'll be here for a week or two, and I'm glad to have him back. It's rotten being taken by a prefect. But I was saying when that idiot Muffin butted in—"

"You were saying something?" yawned Lovell. "I believe you—you generally are."

"Ass! About that affair in the vaults—"

"My only hat! Haven't you forgotten that yet?" exclaimed Lovell. "I can tell you, Jimmy, I'm fed up with Smythe & Co., and I don't care twopenny who it was pulled their silly leg and scared them!"

"I've been thinking," said Jimmy quietly. "I don't believe it was a fag pulled their leg in the vaults. I don't see how a fag could have

Bootles is home again to-day, I don't know," said Jimmy. "But it's most likely. He'll be spying round after dark, if it's as I suppose."

"Then Bootles is in danger here!" exclaimed Raby.

Jimmy nodded.

"I believe so! You see, the man's getting desperate. I don't suppose he's got much money and he can't keep up the game for long—probably he couldn't pay his fare to follow Bootles to Cape Town—and he will know that Bootles has to go there. It's now or never with him and after Bootles' narrow escape out of gates, he won't go out alone again. If he doesn't get him in Rookwood, he's got to drop the whole thing and I don't believe he will. He tried to use a revolver when he was stopped kidnapping Bootles, that shows the kind of ruffian he is. I can't help feeling uneasy about old Bootles."

"Hum!" said Lovell thoughtfully. "We've looked after Bootles before—but—but we came a cropper once and—"

"What about going to the Head?" asked Newcome.

Jimmy wrinkled his brows.

"Well, he would most likely think it was a practical joker playing tricks on Smythe in the vaults," he said. "And—and we can't give Smythe away, anyhow. The Head would want to know what he was doing there. The vaults are out of bounds."

"Yes, but—"

"There's an easier way," said Jimmy quietly. "We don't want a search, and the rotter scared off, to try again when we're off our guard. We're going to keep watch—"

"Eh?"

"That's the game," said Jimmy Silver determinedly. "If that villain is hiding in the vaults, to come out and go for Bootles after lights out, he can come out, and drop into our hands!"

"Phew!"

"I know it's risky—"

"Oh, blow the risk!" said Lovell. "We'll take the risk for poor old Bootles—though we don't love him so much as Muffin does. But—but getting out of dorm at night, Jimmy, and—"

"And what about losing our beauty sleep?" said Raby.

"And perhaps there's nothing in it," remarked Newcome. "It may only be Jimmy's rot, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver gave a grunt.

"I'm going to keep watch," he said. "If you fellows don't want to back me up, I'll ask Morny and Conroy and—"

"Fathead!" said Lovell politely. "We're game! I think you're very likely talking out of the back of your neck, but we'll give you a chance—and if we keep watch for nothing, we'll jolly well bump you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Raby and Newcome.

And so it was arranged.

stopped and took cover, and grasped the cricket-stumps they had thoughtfully brought with them.

In the circumstances, it was judicious not to speak, which was all to the good. For, as their feet got colder, the Co. would have been strongly tempted to grumble but for the necessity of keeping silence.

An hour passed.

Midnight had struck, and they waited for "one" to toll out from the clock-tower.

It seemed an age before it came. But it came at last.

Boom!

"One o'clock!" breathed Lovell.

"Oh, my hat! Jimmy—"

"Shurrup!"

Silence again.

"It's all rot!" whispered Raby.

"There isn't anybody in the vaults; and that beast Stacey is most likely a hundred miles away, and—"

"Hush!"

Raby's whisper stopped suddenly. For from the sunken staircase there came the unmistakable sound of a heavy, creaky door opening.

The juniors thrilled to the very marrow of their bones.

There was somebody in the vaults—and he was emerging. They stifled their breath, trembling with excitement.

Through a gap in the masonry they could see the steps, and they watched, throbbing, for the figure of the unknown to appear in view from below.

Footsteps!

Cautious, almost silent footsteps, that crept up the stone stair. Against the dim starlight a dark figure loomed.

At the top of the steps the unknown stood, watching and listening. The four juniors, scarce a dozen feet from him, hardly breathed.

The man was wrapped in an old coat, and had a soft hat pulled down over his brows. But in the starlight they saw the hard, brutal face—and the scar! It was the scarred ruffian who had twice attempted to kidnap Mr. Bootles!

He remained for some moments, still listening, and then turned from the steps to creep through the ruins.

Jimmy Silver gave his chums a look.

The moment had come, and the Fistical Four prepared to act, with beating hearts, but with steady nerves. As the scarred ruffian moved away from the steps Jimmy Silver made a spring towards him, and before the rascal could make a movement to escape, a cricket-stump crashed on his head.

There was a sharp, savage cry in

The struggle went on savagely. But the man was over-matched, and his furious resistance grew fainter. He bit and scratched and tore at the juniors till Jimmy Silver jammed his head hard on the flagstones, and then he lay still. He was not stunned, however, and the juniors hurried to secure him before he recovered. They were gasping breathlessly from the struggle. Jimmy dragged the ruffian's hands together, and drew a whipcord from his pocket; and they breathed more freely when his wrists were bound tightly together.

"Our win!" gasped Lovell, rubbing his nose, which was streaming red.

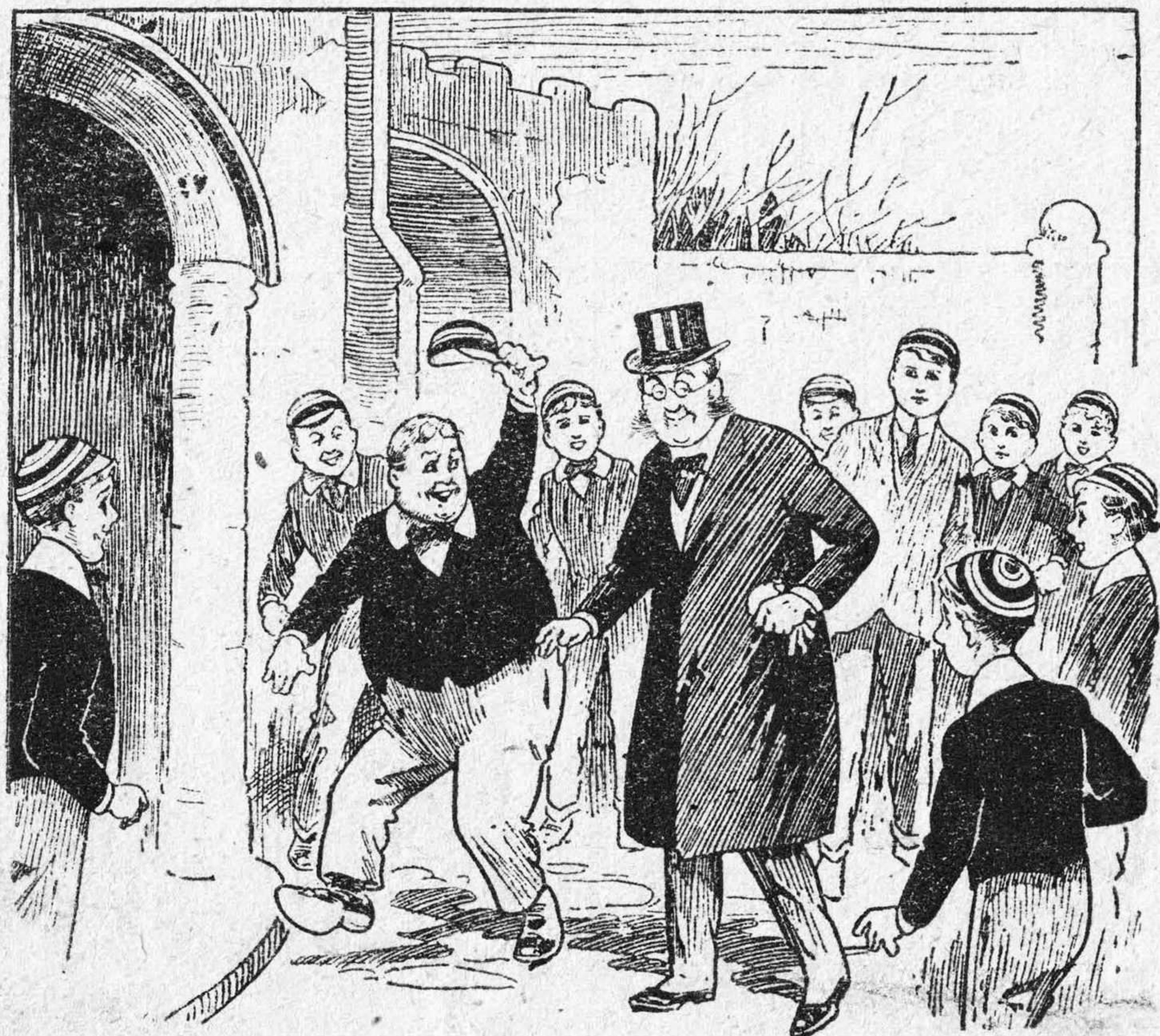
"Ow! The beast! I got his elbow!"

"Never mind—"

"Ow!"

"We've got him!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's the scarred man, right enough! Stick him on his feet! I say, there'll be a bit of a sensation when we march him in! Even the Head won't grouse at us for being out of dorm, I think, this time."

The scarred man was struggling with his bonds now, and pouring out savage curses. Heedless of his rage, the juniors dragged him to his feet, and marched him out of the ruins. To an accompaniment of savage oaths, the ruffian was marched to the door of the School House, where Jimmy Silver rang a mighty peal on the bell.



**THE HERO OF THE HOUR!** Mr. Bootles was now a gentleman of almost unlimited financial resources. As he passed through the smiling crowd of juniors he nodded to Jimmy Silver & Co., but he did not observe Tubby!

pin, Mr. Bootles was more lovable than ever, and Tubby Muffin felt quite towards him as towards an adopted father. From Tubby's tender feelings, indeed, nobody could have guessed that for whole terms he had spoken of his Form-master as "that beast Bootles." Mr. Bootles was a millionaire now, and no longer a beast.

### The 3rd Chapter. Uncle James is Suspicious!

Mr. Bootles was the centre of quite a crowd, as he came in.

Outside, a handsome, big car, with an impressive chauffeur, was being admired by another crowd.

Little plump Mr. Bootles was much the same as ever, personally. But evidently he had paid visits to expensive tailors while away in London.

And now he had come back. Millionaire as he was, he was going to take the Fourth Form as usual for a week or two, until another Form-master was engaged to take his place.

Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, shook him by the hand with touching cordiality.

Masters and boys seemed to vie with one another to do Mr. Bootles honour.

From the doorway to the Head's study Mr. Bootles' progress was a kind of triumphal march. And in the Head's study Dr. Chisholm greeted him with great cordiality. Even the Head was not unimpressed by the fact that Mr. Bootles was now a gentleman of almost unlimited financial resources. As he passed smiling through the crowd, however, Mr. Bootles gave a smile and a nod to Jimmy Silver & Co. He had not forgotten that those cheery juniors had rescued him from the kidnappers.

But he did not observe Tubby Muffin.

Muffin was eyeing him with tender affection, and Mr. Bootles never even noticed it.

Plainly the thought had not occurred to him of adopting Muffin as a comfort for his declining years! So far, Tubby's yearning affection was in vain, like the flower mentioned in the poet which is born to blush unseen.

"Nice little man!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, as the Fistical Four returned to their study for the remnants of tea. "I'm sorry we're going to lose him. As Shakespeare remarks, I fear there will be a worse come in his place."

"Oh, we'll educate the next man in until he's as nice as Bootles," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Anyway,

known they were going there. They'd keep it dark, as they were going to dodge the prefects."

"You think it was the Rookwood ghost?" asked Lovell, with a grin.

"I think it was somebody hiding in the vaults," answered Jimmy.

"Eh?"

"You haven't forgotten that Mr. Bootles was twice nearly kidnapped by that scarred villain, who it's pretty clear is his cousin, Mortimer Stacey," said Jimmy. "His confederate was lagged, and is now in chokey at Latham. But Stacey got clear, and hasn't been heard of since, though Inspector Sharpe is after him. Well, it's clear why he was trying to kidnap Bootles. He would have inherited the millions if Bootles had disappeared. That was in the old man's will."

"But—" said Lovell, startled.

"He couldn't get at Mr. Bootles in London," said Jimmy. "He was going to put himself under police protection, and it would have been too risky for Stacey. But he would know, of course, that Mr. Bootles would come back to Rookwood some time or another, if only to say good-bye before he went to Africa. I've thought all the time that Stacey may have been lurking in the neighbourhood, watching for a chance."

"But the bobbies are looking for him—"

"They haven't thought of looking in the Rookwood ruins—"

"Jimmy!"

The Co. stared at their leader. It was a startling thought to them.

"I don't say it is so," said Jimmy quietly. "But I think it's jolly likely. The villain had to disappear, and yet hang about here. He could take rugs and things and a supply of grub into the abbey vaults, and simply vanish from the earth."

"My hat!"

"I confess I shouldn't have thought of it. But Smythe & Co., finding somebody there this afternoon—"

"It does look a bit suspicious," said Lovell. "Let's take a crowd of chaps and search the vaults—"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"If he's been there for days, he's learned the ins and outs of the vaults by this time," he said. "There's no end of passages leading goodness knows where. Smythe & Co. took him by surprise; he never expected anybody to come into the vaults. But he wouldn't be caught napping a second time. He would dodge us easily."

"Well, then—"

"Whether he will find out that

"What about going to the Head?" asked Newcome.

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"And perhaps there's nothing in it," remarked Newcome. "It may only be Jimmy's rot, you know."

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And so it was arranged.

### The 4th Chapter. The Heroes of the Hour!

Night lay upon the ancient pile of Rookwood School. A keen wind blew from the sea; and four juniors who scuttled round the shadowy School House shivered, and pulled up the collars of their coats.

Rookwood was sleeping. In the dormitory of the Classical Fourth four dummies were arranged in four beds, and Jimmy Silver & Co. had quietly departed by way of the lower box-room. In the box-room they had donned coats and caps, placed there in readiness. As they scudded round the dark, silent buildings, they kept their eyes well about them. The last light had disappeared from the window—it was half-past eleven.

In the masters'-room there had been a happy party that evening—Mr. Bootles being lionized by the admiring staff. But the millionaire Form-master had retired to his room now the staff were sleeping the sleep of the just. In all Rookwood, only the Fistical Four were awake—and they were sleepy!

But it was no use being sleepy! They had work to do! They trod cautiously into the abbey ruins, glimmering in the starlight.

Silent and ghostly were the ruins, the silence only broken by the faint moan of the wind.

Jimmy Silver led the way with light steps, and his chums followed him, with rather mingled feelings.

But the Co. realised that they were in for it, and they did not grouse. With silent steps, they approached the stone stair that led down to the vaults. The stair was quite in the open—the mossy walls were all that remained of the great building that had covered the spot in ancient times. Amid the rugged masses of masonry, close by the stair, the Fistical Four

stopped and took cover, and grasped the cricket-stumps they had thoughtfully brought with them.

In the circumstances, it was judicious not to speak, which was all to the good. For, as their feet got colder, the Co. would have been strongly tempted to grumble but for the necessity of keeping silence.

An hour passed.

Midnight had struck, and they waited for "one" to toll out from the clock-tower.

It seemed an age before it came. But it came at last.

Boom!

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"Oh, my hat! Jimmy—"

"Shurrup!"

Silence again.

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"There isn't anybody in the vaults; and that beast Stacey is most likely a hundred miles away, and—"

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**AN AMBUSCADE!** Through a gap in the masonry the juniors could see the unknown man at the top of the steps leading down to the old abbey vaults. It was the scarred man who had attempted to kidnap their Form-master, Mr. Bootles!

the silence of the abbey ruins as the man reeled under the blow.

"Quick!" panted Jimmy.

He flung himself recklessly on the ruffian as he reeled, and they came to the ground with a crash together.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were upon him the next moment.

The ruffian struggled furiously. But for the fact that they had taken him by surprise, there might have been a fearful tragedy in the abbey ruins under the stars. Even as he struggled in the grasp of the four sturdy juniors he succeeded in dragging a revolver from his hip-pocket.

But Lovell kicked it out of his hand instantly, and it rolled down the steps, and exploded harmlessly at the bottom.

taken away, with handcuffs on his wrists, by Inspector Sharpe, of Rookham. From that day the scarred ruffian was to be taken exceedingly good care of, and Mr. Bootles' danger was over.

And the Fistical Four were the heroes of the hour. In the Form-room that morning the millionaire Form-master was all graciousness to the happy four. And Tubby Muffin realised dimly that if Mr. Bootles adopted anybody, there were at least four fellows with better chances than his fat and fatuous self.

THE END.

(Keep a look-out for "Tubby Wants Adopting!" A grand, long complete Rookwood yarn in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)



not have made the statement. But there wasn't a shadow of doubt in his mind—not the slightest.

And so the untruth had leaped to his lips without his quite realising that it was an untruth. He had, as he supposed, seen Frank a moment after he had thrown the missile, and it was only a slight exaggeration to say that he had seen him at the actual moment.

That was how Mr. Peckover looked at it, so far as he was cool enough to look at it at all.

But Frank Richards was taken utterly aback. He stared at Mr. Peckover open-mouthed.

"Oh Jerusalem!" murmured Bob Lawless.

Miss Meadows' eyes seemed to glint as they turned on Frank Richards. The hapless schoolboy could see that he was already condemned by the schoolmistress of Cedar Creek.

"Richards, have you anything more to say?" asked Miss Meadows, in a voice of ice.

Frank gasped.

"Yes, I—I—I—"

"Do you deny Mr. Peckover's statement now?" snapped Miss Meadows.

Frank's face flushed with anger.

"Yes!" he shouted. "He is lying!"

"Richards!"

"It is a lie!" exclaimed Frank, careless of his words now. "He never saw me, as I didn't do it. And I'm sorry I helped him. I dare say he thinks I did it, but he knows he didn't see who threw the snowball!"

"Silence!"

"That is the truth, Miss Meadows."

"Silence, I say!"

Mr. Peckover choked with rage.

"I—I—" he spluttered. "Miss Meadows, this—this boy, he—he dares to—to—to—"

He choked helplessly.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Peckover!" said Miss Meadows quietly. "Richards will be severely punished for his wanton attack upon you, and still more severely for venturing to cast doubt upon your word!"

"Miss Meadows—" began Frank.

"You need say no more, Richards. I was prepared to accept your explanation, not being aware that Mr. Peckover actually saw you—"

"He did not! He—"

"Silence! I cannot care you for this, Richards; a caning is not sufficient punishment. I shall send a note to your uncle requesting him to come here and administer a flogging to you in the presence of the school. That is the only way of dealing with your offence. Mr. Peckover, I shall be glad if you will be present when Richards' punishment is dealt out."

"I assure you that I intend to be present, Miss Meadows!" said the Hillcrest master venomously.

Frank Richards breathed hard.

"Miss Meadows," he faltered, "I—I assure you—"

"That is enough! Go back to your place!"

Frank Richards returned to his seat, feeling quite dazed. Mr. Peckover gave him a bitter look.

The Hillcrest master exchanged a few words with Miss Meadows in a low voice before he drove away in his buggy.

Lessons were resumed at Cedar Creek.

But the whole school was in a state of suppressed excitement.

Frank Richards, when he looked round at his schoolfellows, could see that nobody believed his statement against the assertion of the Hillcrest master.

He was intensely glad when school was dismissed at last, though his return home that evening was not likely to be a pleasant one. Miss Meadows called to Bob Lawless, and gave him a note to carry to his father.

The three chums came out dismally into the playground.

They fetched out their horses and rode away on the homeward trail. They rode at first in dead silence. When Frank Richards spoke at last, he turned almost a haggard face on his chums.

"I—I suppose you fellows believe me?" he said.

"Yes," said Beaulere quietly.

Bob flushed.

"I guess it's awfully queer!" he said. "How—how could Peckover think he saw you if he never saw you, Frank?"

Frank bit his lip.

"He doesn't think so," he answered. "He thinks I threw the snowball, and I suppose he thinks he's justified in saying he saw me do it. But it's false."

Bob drew a deep breath.

"I believe you, old chap," he said. "But—but—but you can't blame Miss

Meadows for not believing you, or— or anybody else. I—I'm afraid popper will take the same view as Miss Meadows."

"I know he will!" said Frank gloomily.

They rode on in dismal silence after that.

Beaulere left his chums at the fork in the trail, as usual, and Frank and Bob rode on to the Lawless Ranch in the gathering dusk.

Mrs. Lawless was away just then, on a visit to a relation at Kamloops, and Frank was glad of that now. But he had his uncle to face. The rancher noted at once the glum looks of his son and nephew when they came in, and he eyed them curiously.

"What's the trouble, boys?" he asked, in his hearty way.

Bob handed him Miss Meadows' note by way of reply.

Mr. Lawless, looking a little puzzled, opened it, and his bearded face grew grim as he read the contents. The genial expression was quite gone, and Frank's heart sank as he noted it. The rancher fixed his eyes at last upon his nephew, with a knitted brow.

"I'm surprised at this, Frank!" he said quietly. "You ought not to have snowballed a schoolmaster; but that's nothing compared with the rest. Miss Meadows says that you lied about it, and that you accused Mr. Peckover of lying. Were you out of your senses?"

Frank made his faltering explanation.

Frank's lip trembled.

"I supposed so. I can't give him away."

Mr. Lawless made an impatient gesture.

"You had better say no more, Frank," he said. "You are making matters worse instead of better. I can't imagine what's come over you; you always seemed to be as open and honest as the daylight. Miss Meadows has asked me to ride over to the school, and take your punishment into my hands in her presence. I cannot refuse."

"It's not that I mind," muttered Frank, his voice breaking. "I—I'm not afraid of a licking. But—but to be set down as a liar—" He turned his face away. "And I've told the truth—only the truth, though I know you can't believe me."

He left the room with an unsteady step. It was a dismal evening at the Lawless Ranch that day.

**The 4th Chapter.**  
**Dicky Bird Chips In!**

Mr. Lawless' horse was saddled, when it was time for Frank and Bob to start for school the next morning. When Vere Beaulere joined his chums on the trail, he found the rancher with them. The four rode on to Cedar Creek in grim silence. The first bell was ringing when they arrived, and the playground was crowded with the Cedar Creek boys and girls. Molly Lawrence gave Frank a look of sympathy, and came

him, and Mr. Lawless was only doing what appeared to him his bounden duty.

Miss Meadows broke the painful silence.

"Richards!"

"Yes, Miss Meadows?" faltered Frank.

"You are about to receive a flogging—not for having attacked Mr. Peckover, or even for having spoken falsely when accused—but for your reckless and unscrupulous audacity in accusing this gentleman of falsehood. Mr. Peckover will witness your punishment, as well as your schoolfellows. I am very much disappointed in you, Richards. I can only hope that this punishment, and the pain you have caused your uncle, will be a severe lesson to you."

"I hope so, too!" said Mr. Peckover, his eyes glinting at Frank. "I trust, sir, that you will not exercise an undue leniency."

"You can leave that to me, Mr. Peckover," said the rancher brusquely.

He gripped the riding-whip.

"I'm sorry for this, Frank, as you know," he said. "But I have my duty to do. You will bend over this form."

Frank Richards quivered. The thought of resistance came into his mind—of flight—of defiance. It was not fear that withheld him. Unjust as his punishment was, he owed respect to his uncle; he owed him gratitude for much kindness. The

Dicky Bird, panting, but his voice was very clear. "I—I wanted to keep it dark. I told Richards, but I knew he wouldn't give me away—"

"Bless my soul!" muttered Miss Meadows.

"I—I knew Mr. Peckover hadn't seen me," faltered Dicky Bird. "I—I thought it wouldn't come out. I—I was fairly knocked over when Todgers told me Mr. Peckover said he'd seen Richards throw the snowball."

Mr. Peckover's face was a study.

"It wasn't Richards; it was me," said Dicky ungrammatically, but very earnestly. "I—I couldn't let Richards be flogged for it, when it was me all the time. So—so I rode over. I—I'm jolly glad I got here in time—"

He broke off, panting.

There was a deep silence.

"So that is it!" Mr. Lawless' voice was like the growl of thunder. "My nephew told me last night that it was a Hillcrest boy, but he would not betray him. I did not believe him, for I thought it impossible that you, Mr. Peckover, could have made a false statement."

"Richards," said Miss Meadows, "go to your place. You are completely exonerated. I am sorry I ever doubted you. Only on Mr. Peckover's explicit assertion would I have done so, and it proves that his assertion was false."

"Thank you, ma'am!" faltered Frank.

The rancher strode towards the Hillcrest master, the riding-whip grasped in his hand, and the look in his eyes made Ephraim Peckover shrink back. For a moment he thought the angry rancher was about to lay the whip on his shoulders, as indeed Mr. Lawless was inclined to do.

"Mr. Peckover—" began the rancher in his deep voice.

"Keep your distance, sir!" gasped Mr. Peckover. "I—I—the—the law—"

The rancher laughed contemptuously.

"You have lied, sir," he thundered, "and you have nearly caused me to punish my innocent nephew by your falsehood. This boy, Bird, has saved him, by owning up in the nick of time—a manly action, which he certainly did not learn from his headmaster. You deserve, sir, that I should lay this whip about you!"

"Keep your distance!" shrieked the hapless Hillcrest master. "If—if you dare—"

"You will pardon Bird for what he has done, and you will not punish him at Hillcrest," said Mr. Lawless.

Mr. Peckover's eyes blazed.

"I will punish him! I—I will—" He choked with rage.

"He deserves to be pardoned for his courage in coming here to prevent an injustice. You will assure him, in my presence, that no punishment shall fall upon him, or I will thrash you, sir, within an inch of your life!" roared the rancher. And the whip half-rose.

Mr. Peckover gulped.

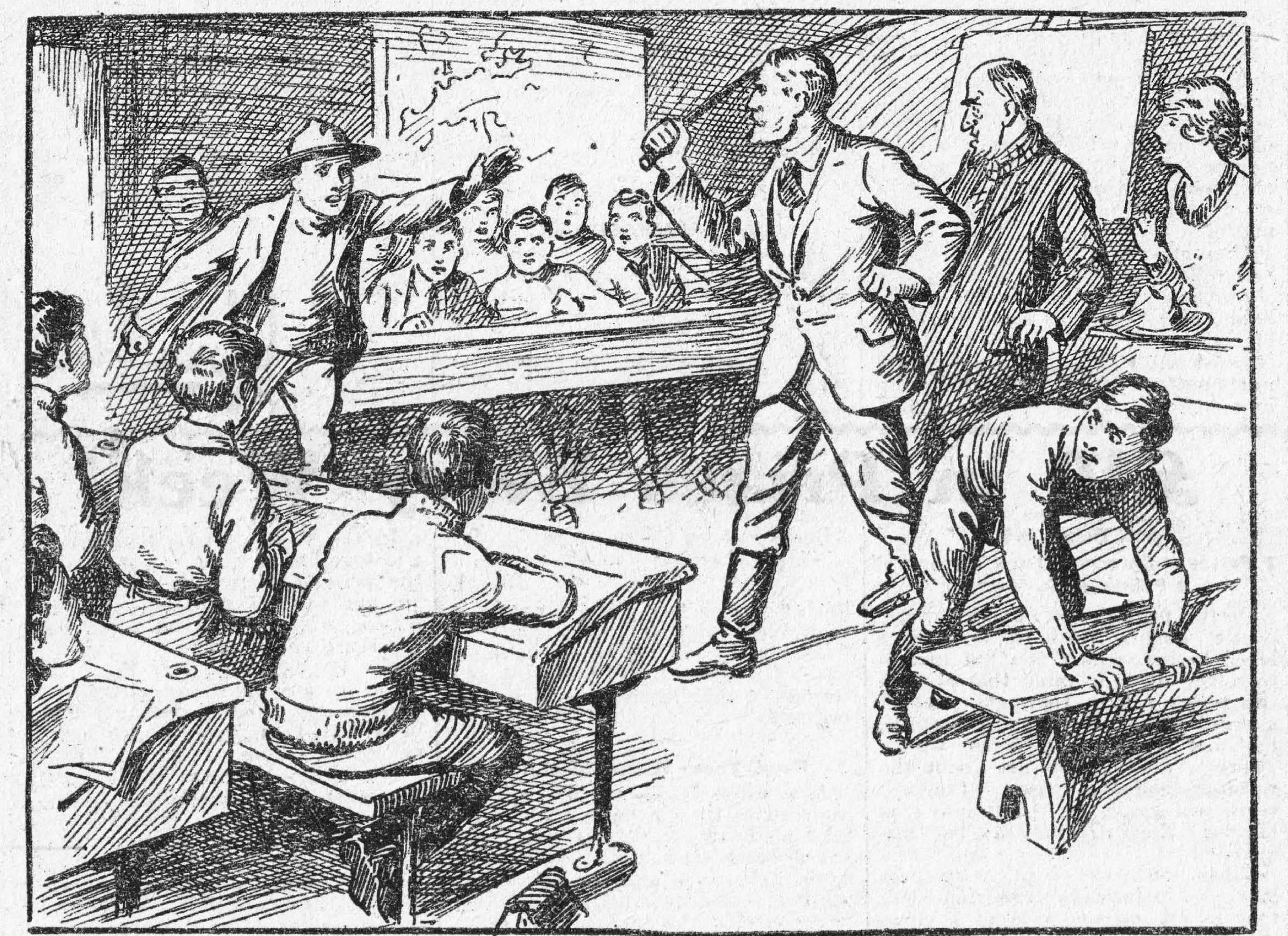
"In the—the circumstances, I—I shall certainly pardon Bird!" he stammered. "I—I am, in—in fact, very much obliged to you, B-b-bird—"

"Thank you, sir!" said Dicky demurely.

"Bird," said Mr. Lawless, "if you should be punished, in spite of Mr. Peckover's words, let me know! I do not trust this man, Peckover, if you lay a finger on this courageous lad, I shall come to your house, sir, and I shall bring a stock-whip, and I will thrash you, sir, before your school till you howl for mercy!"

And with that the rancher strode out of the school-room. Dicky Bird slipped away, smiling, and mounted his horse. He felt quite secure now. As for the hapless Mr. Peckover, he seemed rooted to the floor for some moments. He detached himself at last, however, and limped away to the door, followed by a loud and prolonged hiss from all Cedar Creek. The buggy was heard to drive away a few minutes later, and Mr. Peckover was gone, without even the consolation in prospect of flogging Dicky Bird. The thought of the rancher and his stock-whip effectually prevented that.

Frank Richards' face was very bright that morning, and so were the faces of his chums, all the more so when they reflected upon the probable feelings just then of the discomfited False Witness.



**A TIMELY INTERVENTION!** "Stop!" yelled Dicky Bird as he rushed into the school-room. Rancher Lawless was just about to commence his unpleasant duty, but he stopped and looked round in astonishment at the Hillcrest junior.

The rancher listened quietly till he had finished, and then he shook his head.

"You are asking me to believe that a schoolmaster bore false witness against you, Frank!" he said. "Do you expect me to believe such a thing?"

"I—I suppose it's not easy to believe—" faltered Frank.

"I guess it's impossible to believe. You must see that for yourself!" exclaimed the rancher impatiently.

Frank did see it.

"I—I know how you must look at it, uncle," he said miserably. "But I've told only the truth. I even know who it was that threw the snowball at Mr. Peckover. I met him as I came back afterwards."

"Who was it?"

"A Hillcrest fellow."

"Name?" rapped out the rancher sharply.

Bob Lawless looked anxiously at his chum. Frank Richards had told him and Beaulere. In the extreme circumstances, would Frank feel himself justified in giving Dicky Bird away? Bob hardly knew what his chum ought to do; he could only look at Frank anxiously and wretchedly.

"If I give you the name, uncle, what will you do?" asked Frank at last.

"Call upon Mr. Peckover, and demand that he shall question the boy, of course."

up to him impulsively, as the rancher strode into the house to see Miss Meadows.

"I believe you, Frank," she said. "It's a shame—a shame!"

"Thank you, Molly!" said Frank, his voice faltering.

"Here comes old Peckover!" called out Chunky Todgers.

Mr. Peckover drove in in his buggy. He hitched his horse, and went into the schoolhouse, without a glance at Frank Richards. Nearly all Cedar Creek gathered round the three chums.

Cedar Creek marched into the school-room. Miss Meadows and Mr. Peckover and the rancher were already there, as well as Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd. The school took their places in a grim silence.

Frank Richards went to his place with the rest, but Miss Meadows beckoned to him to come out before the class.

Frank came out quietly, his heart beating.

Mr. Lawless' bronzed face was cold and grim. He had a riding-whip in his hand, which was evidently to be the instrument of punishment. Frank glanced at it, and felt a choking sensation in his throat. Hitherto, he had received only kindness at the hands of his Canadian uncle. And yet he could not blame the rancher for what was about to happen. Everything was against

thought came into his mind—but it passed away, and he obeyed.

Clatter, clatter!

There was a thunder of horse's hoofs in the playground. Then came a rapid crash of running feet in the porch and the passage.

All eyes turned on the doorway.

Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest, flushed and panting, stood there, his face crimson, his breath coming thick and fast. At a glance he took in the scene.

"Stop!" he shouted.

He dashed up the big school-room. Frank Richards straightened up again, in sheer amazement. Hope flashed into his pale, strained face.

All eyes fixed on Dicky Bird in amazement. Mr. Peckover raised his hand with an angry gesture.

"Bird, how dare you come here! How dare you—"

"I had to!" he gasped. "I—I heard from Todgers last night what was going to happen."

"Go!" thundered Mr. Peckover.

The Hillcrest schoolboy stood his ground.

"I've come to own up!" he gasped.

Mr. Lawless made a sudden movement. He remembered what his nephew had told him at the ranch the previous day. He made a stride towards Dicky Bird.

"To own up?" he repeated. "Then—then—"

"I threw the snowball!" said

THE END.

*("The Coming of Mrs. Peckover!" is a grand, long tale of Frank Richards & Co. at the school in the backwoods. It appears in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. Order your copy to-day!")*