

THE FIGHT WITH THE RUSTLERS!

Riding down the trail of the Thompson Valley, Frank Richards sees his old enemy, Kern Gunten, in the hands of desperate rustlers who have held him up in the post-waggon. Does he turn aside and leave the Swiss to his fate—or does he throw personal dislikes overboard, and go to his rescue? You will read all about it in the thrilling tale below!

TO SAVE HIS ENEMY!



The Amazing Schooldays of FRANK RICHARDS, the world-famous author, in the Backwoods of Canada!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Dicky Bird on the War-Path.

STOP a minute, Richards!" Chunky Todgers rolled after Frank Richards & Co. as they came out of the lumber schoolhouse at Cedar Creek after morning lessons.

Frank glanced round. "What's wanted, Chunky?" "I've got a message for you," said Chunky. "I met Gunten on the trail this morning, coming to school."

"Oh, bother Gunten!" "Come along!" said Bob Lawless. "Never mind Gunten! We're going to play leap-frog to keep ourselves warm till dinner. Tuck in your tuppenny, Chunky!"

"But Gunten said—" "Bless Gunten! We don't want to know what Gunten said. You're an ass, Chunky, to talk to that galoot!"

"I didn't talk to him—he talked to me," answered Chunky; "and he gave me a message for Frank Richards."

"Only some cheek, most likely," said Vere Beauclerc.

Frank looked rather impatient. He did not want to hear anything from Kern Gunten, the Swiss fellow who had been turned out of Cedar Creek School, and who had always been on ill terms with the Co.

Gunten was at Hillcrest now—the new school along the Thompson trail—and Frank desired to see and hear nothing more of him.

But Chunky Todgers was evidently full of news, so Frank good-naturedly gave him a hearing.

"Well, pile in, and cut it short, Chunky," he said.

"I like that!" said Chunky warmly. "I jolly well won't tell you now; but you'll be jolly surprised when Dicky Bird comes along and kicks up a shindy, if I don't tell you!"

"Dicky Bird?" repeated Frank. "That Hillcrest chap," said Chunky. "He's coming over here to-day to wallop you, Richards."

Frank flushed a little. "Did Gunten tell you that?" he asked. "I guess so. Gunten says that Bird is awfully mad about the trick you fellows played on his headmaster, old Peckover, and—"

"What rot!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "Dicky Bird doesn't like old Peckover any more than we do."

"Well, he couldn't like him," agreed Chunky Todgers. "Nobody could. But he thinks it's up against his school, you know, and Gunten says he's going to wipe it out by thrashing Richards."

"Perhaps the thrashing may work out

the other way round," remarked Frank. "I don't want to row with Bird, but he can try it if he likes."

"Perhaps it's only Gunten's rot," suggested Beauclerc. "He's tried before to stir up trouble between us and the Hillcrest chaps."

"Correct!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "More likely than not. Don't get your rag out, Franky; very likely Dicky Bird said nothing of the sort."

Frank Richards nodded. On second thoughts he considered that very probable indeed; he did not trust Kern Gunten an inch.

"Well, that's the message," said Chunky Todgers; "and I guess that if Dicky Bird comes over here swanking, we'll collar him, and ride him home on a rail. That will take some of the cheek out of him."

"No fear!" answered Frank promptly. "If he comes over here to fight me, he can have his way, and we'll give him fair play."

"Ten to one he won't come!" said Bob. "You're an ass, Chunky; Gunten has been stuffing you. Now then, let's get going; we don't want to freeze while Chunky is exercising his lower jaw."

"Right you are!" said Frank cheerily. It was a cold, sharp day, and the wind from the distant Rocky Mountains was keen and searching.

Some of the Cedar Creek fellows were already playing leap-frog, and Frank Richards & Co. joined them.

They were soon going strong, and in the excitement of the game they forgot all about Chunky's message from the Swiss.

But they were to be reminded of it before long.

About a quarter of an hour later Bob Lawless, glancing towards the gates, uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hallo! There's that Hillcrest galoot!" Frank Richards was about to make a run, but he stopped and looked round.

Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest School, had just entered the gates.

He looked round the school enclosure, and came directly towards the crowd of schoolboys.

The leap-frog went on, but Frank Richards and his chums did not join in it now.

They waited for Dicky Bird to come up, watching him curiously.

Dicky Bird was generally a very good-tempered-looking fellow, with merry eyes and an almost perpetual smile.

But he was not looking good-tempered now.

His face was dark and angry, his brows

knitted, and his dark eyes gleaming under them.

If ever a fellow looked as if he were "hunting for trouble," it was Dicky Bird of Hillcrest at that moment.

The three chums did not speak as he came up; but their doubts on the subject of Gunten's message had vanished now.

For once in a way it appeared that Kern Gunten had been speaking the frozen truth.

Dicky Bird strode up to the group, and his eyes glittered at Frank Richards, whom he singled out at once.

"I've come for you, Richards!" he said. "Thanks!" answered Frank. "Anything on?"

"I dare say you know why I've come." "Well, I think I can guess," assented Frank. "I don't quite see why you should look for trouble with me, though."

"I've come to give you a hiding." Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead!" he answered.

"By gum!" exclaimed Bob Lawless angrily. "You cheeky jay, I've a jolly good mind to run you down to the creek, and put your head under the ice for a bit, to cool you down!"

"Not a bad idea," said Beauclerc. Dicky Bird looked at them grimly.

"I've come here alone," he said. "I depended on getting fair play here, so I wouldn't bring a crowd, and make a shindy of it. I've left my friends outside. But they'll come in fast enough if I don't get fair play!"

"Oh, ring off!" snapped Bob. "You'll get plenty of fair play. I dare say Frank can knock some of the impudence out of you!"

"I'll try!" remarked Frank. "Well, will you come along into the timber?" said Dicky Bird. "I suppose we can't fight here, under Miss Meadows' windows." Perhaps you'd like your school-mistress to come out and stop us, though."

"That's a caddish thing to say," said Frank quietly, though his eyes gleamed. "I'll come where you like."

"Come on, then!" With that Dicky Bird turned and strode away to the gates.

Frank Richards & Co. followed him at once, and Chunky Todgers joined in.

Two or three more of the Cedar Creek fellows followed on their track.

They entered the timber by the creek, and found three fellows awaiting them under the trees—Fisher and Watson and Blumpy, of Hillcrest.

The trio were looking grim. "Oh, here you are!" said Fisher. "Get your jackets off!"

Dicky Bird threw his jacket off, and

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pushed back his shirtsleeves. Frank Richards followed his example.

Frank was angry now, and he was quite ready for a determined "scrap."

The resentment of the Hillcrest fellows on the subject of a "stunt" played on their headmaster seemed to him unreasonable; and Dicky Bird's manner was disagreeable enough.

"Ready?" asked Bird.

"Quite!"

"Then, come on!"

And, in the midst of an interested circle, the fight began.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Fight!

"Go it, Franky!" Frank Richards faced his adversary with calm coolness, though his eyes were gleaming.

He was as angry now as Dicky Bird, though with a good deal more reason, as he looked at it.

But he did not allow his wrath to affect his coolness.

Dicky Bird led the attack, and he came on hard, and in a few minutes he showed that he knew a good deal about boxing.

He was a good deal more burly in build than Frank Richards, heavier and perhaps stronger; but Frank was fit all through, and he was very quick and nimble on his feet.

He gave ground a little at first, and Fisher & Co. grinned as they saw him driven round the ring by Bird's heavy attack.

But they ceased to grin all of a sudden, as Dicky Bird, taken in by a clever feint, rushed in, and was stopped by a sudden and terrific drive on the chest.

There was plenty of weight behind that drive, and it toppled the Hillcrest champion fairly over.

Bump!

Dicky Bird sat down, gasping.

"Well hit!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"Bravo, Franky!"

Frank Richards stepped back to give his opponent plenty of time to rise.

There were no rounds in the fight; but Frank was not a fellow to take advantage of an enemy.

Dicky Bird staggered to his feet.

He had apparently started with the belief that it was a simple matter to administer a hiding to the slim English schoolboy; but it had dawned upon him now that that was a mistake.

He came on again, breathing rather hard, and much more cautiously.

The Cedar Creek fellows looked on with keen interest.

Frank did not look wholly a match for his muscular adversary; but he was more scientific, and quicker in his movements, and his pluck was unlimited.

He had to stand up to some severe punishment for some minutes, but he broke away, and stalled Dicky Bird off successfully, and it was the Hillcrest fellow who went down again.

This time it was an upper-cut, landing like a hammer on his chin, that rolled him over, and he was slower to rise.

Frank Richards stood panting a little.

He dabbed at his nose with his handkerchief as he waited for Dicky Bird, and the handkerchief came away very red.

Dicky Bird blinked up at him, with a new respect in his expression.

He rose slowly to his feet, Frank standing back.

"You're a good plucked 'un, Richards," he said. "I guess I shouldn't have thought it of you, considering."

"I don't see why not," answered Frank.

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean, considering that you're a swanking rotter—"

"That's enough! Come on!"

"I'm ready!"

The fight was harder and faster from that point.

Frank Richards had a good deal more punishment to take; but it was easy for the onlookers to see that he was getting the upper hand now.

As bare knuckles were used, there were signs of severe damage on both sides, but the adversaries hardly seemed to feel them.

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Both were fighting hard; but superior skill was telling, as strength was spent.

Dicky Bird was driven back and back till he was driven through the ring, the onlookers grinning and making room for him.

He brought up against a tree, when he could go no farther, and he defended himself desperately, without being able to recover ground.

But he was evidently failing.

His breath came in short, quick gasps, and his defence was growing fatigued and feeble.

There was a bump as Dicky Bird went down at last.

He lay gasping.

Frank stood back, dabbing his heated face with his handkerchief.

Dicky Bird made an effort to rise, but he sank back again. He was "done" now beyond denial.

Fisher stepped forward to help him up, and Bird stood unsteadily, leaning on his chum.

His head was swimming, and he had to cling to Fisher for support.

"Licked!" said Chunky Todgers triumphantly.

"Dry up, Chunky!" said Frank.

"Well, he is licked, isn't he?" demanded Chunky.

"Shut up, I tell you!"

"Yes, I guess I'm licked," said Dicky Bird bitterly. "You're a better man than I thought, Richards. You've done me this time, but I'll try you again another time."

"Just as you like," said Frank.

"Now you," can go swanking as much as you like!" said Dicky savagely.

Frank looked at him steadily.

"That's the second time you've said that," he remarked. "I don't quite see what you're getting at, Dicky Bird. I don't see what you've come and picked a quarrel with me at all for."

"You know well enough," gasped Dicky Bird. "Ow!"

"What does it matter to you if we japed your headmaster the other day? You don't like the man."

"What's that got to do with it?" growled Dicky Bird. "You can go for old Peck-over as much as you like, for all I care."

"But I thought—"

"Then what have you come over here at all for, if it's not that?" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

"Richards knows!" groaned Dicky Bird, mopping his nose.

"I'm blest if I know," said Frank.

"Gunter told Todgers this morning you were coming over on the park-path because of the trick we played on Peckover. That's all I know."

Dicky blinked at him painfully.

"I don't understand that," he said. "I came over to wallop you—ow!—because you told Gunter I was afraid of you, and was dodging you. It was a thumping lie, and you know it."

Frank started.

"Because I told Gunter—" he began. "Oh, you silly chump! I haven't told Gunter anything. I never speak to the rotter!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"So Gunter told you I had been swanking and bragging, and you were silly ass enough to believe him?" exclaimed Frank hotly. "You chump! Hadn't you sense enough to see that Gunter was pulling your leg?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Dicky Bird. "You— you didn't say—"

"Of course I didn't, you fathead! Why should I? Haven't you known Gunter long enough to know that he's a lying worm?"

"Oh!" said Dicky Bird.

He blinked doubtfully at Frank Richards. Fisher whistled.

"I guess Gunter is rather a liar," remarked Watson. "But—but I—I never thought—"

"You don't seem to grow much brains at Hillcrest," said Bob Lawless scornfully. "If you had any boss-sense, you'd know that Frank wouldn't talk in that strain. Gunter was putting you up to come over here and fight Franky because he's afraid to come himself, the coyote!"

"Oh!" said Dicky again blankly. "I—I've been taken in."

Frank smiled faintly.

"Of course you have," he said; "and we've had this scrap for nothing. You might have explained before we started."

"I—I thought—"

Frank held out his hand, smiling.

"Give me your fist," he said. "We're both pretty well licked, and honours are divided. I'm not going to fight you again, Dicky Bird, but I'm going to look for Gunten, and scalp him!"

Dicky Bird shook hands with the Cedar Creek fellow in a very shamefaced way.

"I—I was taken in," he mumbled. "I'm sorry."

"All serene!"

The late adversaries put on their jackets, both of them feeling very spent and sore.

The Hillcrest fellows moved away through the timber, Dicky Bird grunting dismally as he went.

"Do I look very bad, you fellows?" asked Frank, rubbing his face.

"You look a picture, I guess," said Bob Lawless. "You'd better come and bathe your face before Miss Meadows sees it."

Frank Richards did the best he could for his damaged face, but it was certainly a "picture" when he had done all that was possible, and there was no hope of the damage escaping Miss Meadows' observation.

His nose was swollen and red, and one of his eyes had a dark shade round it. As matters had turned out, it was no comfort to him to know that his adversary's state was a good deal worse.

All his wrath was centred upon Kern Gunten, who had wreaked his malice in this cunning way, keeping safe out of the combat himself.

And Frank Richards was determined that the cunning Swiss should pay the piper at the very earliest opportunity.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In Disgrace.

"RICHARDS!"

Miss Meadows' voice was very severe as she caught sight of Frank's face at the dinner-table.

"Yes, Miss Meadows?" mumbled Frank.

"You have been fighting!"

"Ye-es, Miss Meadows!"

"I did not know you were a quarrelsome boy, Richards."

"Oh, Miss Meadows!"

"And with which of your schoolfellows have you been fighting?"

"None at all, ma'am. A—a chap outside the school. It—was all a mistake," stammered Frank. "We're really good friends, only there was—a sort of misunderstanding."

"You should not allow a misunderstanding to go to that length, Richards. You are not in a state to appear in class."

"Oh!"

"You will be sent home this afternoon," added Miss Meadows sternly, "and you will not return to school, Richards, until your appearance is less likely to reflect discredit on Cedar Creek."

Frank Richards sat crimson and dumb. He said nothing.

But he was feeling extremely uncomfortable—apart from the discomfort of his injuries—during dinner, and he was glad when the meal was over, and he escaped from Miss Meadows' severe glance.

He went out into the playground with his chums, who were sympathetic.

Missing lessons was certainly not a misfortune in itself, but to be sent home because his appearance reflected discredit on the school was a punishment Frank felt more than he would have felt a caning.

"It's rotten, old chap!" said Bob, with great sympathy. "I reckon, though, Dicky Bird will get ragged to death by old Peck-over when he shows up at Hillcrest with two black eyes."

"I'd rather be ragged than sent home!" growled Frank. "What am I going to say to your pater, Bob?"

"Tell him the facts, old chap, and he won't blame you," said Bob comfortingly. "Feel very bad?"

"Ow! Yes! I don't want to mooch about by myself at the ranch nursing a dashed black eye!" said Frank disconsolately.

Bob chuckled.

"Well, then, you needn't waste the afternoon. Look for Gunten."

"But he'll be at school! I can't march

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"Tricked on the Trail!"
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into Peckover's class-room and punch his nose, ass!"

"To-day's Wednesday," answered Bob. "When Gunten was at Cedar Creek he used to be excused lessons on Wednesdays to drive the post-wagon. It will be the same at Hillcrest. This afternoon Gunten will be taking the post-wagon out of Cedar Camp to the southern trail."

Frank's eyes gleamed.

"My hat! I never thought of that!" he exclaimed. "I'll jolly well be on the trail when Gunten comes out of camp, Bob! I want to reward him for this nose and this eye! The awful rotter!"

"I reckoned it would console you!" chuckled Bob. "I wish I could come with you. But you could handle two or three Gunten's on your own."

"You bet!"

Frank remained with his chums till the bell rang for afternoon classes.

Then, as the Cedar Creek fellows went into the school-room, Frank fetched out his horse.

There had been no snow for some days, but there was still a powdering of white on the trails.

Frank Richards mounted, and trotted away through the timber.

When he reached the fork of the trail, instead of keeping on towards the Lawless Ranch as usual, he turned at the fork, and rode on in the direction of Cedar Camp.

This brought him within sight of Vere Beauclerc's home, the little shack by the creek where the Cherub lived with his father, the remittance-man.

Frank glanced towards the shack, which stood back from the trail, as he trotted by, with a salute ready for Mr. Beauclerc if he saw him.

A horseman had just dismounted outside the little wooden building, and was looking in at the doorway.

The man's back was turned to Frank Richards, but he knew him well enough. It was Poker Pete, the "sport" of Thompson.

Frank gave his horse a touch, and rode on faster.

He did not want to see Mr. Beauclerc in the presence of Poker Pete; and there was a shade on his brow as he rode on.

It seemed clear, from Poker Pete's visit to the shack, that the remittance-man was falling into bad company again.

It was no business of Frank's, of course; but he felt keenly for his chum, who had been sorely troubled in the past by the recklessness of the remittance-man.

Frank dismissed the matter from his mind, however, and broke into a gallop as he left the timber behind and came out on the open plain on the south side of Cedar Camp.

He halted when the chimneys of the camp were in sight in the distance across the plain.

The grassland was marked by the trail that ran southwards from the camp towards Silver Creek, and beyond that the railway—many a long mile distant—towards the American border.

Here and there by the trail clumps of trees grew, and in one of the clumps Frank Richards came to a halt and jumped off his horse.

Leaving the animal to crop the herbage under the trees, Frank posted himself on the edge of the clump and watched the trail.

That afternoon, sooner or later, the post-wagon would leave Cedar Camp, driven by Kern Gunten, who was the son of the postmaster at Thompson.

Frank knew that he was in time for it; in fact, that he had considerable time to wait. But as it was possible that Gunten might be earlier than usual, he had taken no chances and lost no time.

As it turned out, he had a long wait before him.

He moved to and fro under the trees to keep himself warm while he waited and watched the trail.

There was nothing to be seen on the wide plain save the nodding tops of the trees, and in the distance an occasional steer wandering from the Lawless Ranch.

Frank became more attentive as he heard a distant sound of hoof-strokes, and his glance turned quickly towards the distant Cedar Camp.

But the post-wagon was not coming. Two horsemen appeared in view some distance up the trail, emerging from a belt of spruce-thickets.

Frank glanced at them carelessly, expecting to see them turn from the plain into the trail, either towards the camp or towards him.

To his surprise, they rode into a clump of timber close beside the trail, and did not appear again.

He watched the clump for some minutes. It was about a hundred yards from the trees which concealed himself, in the direction of Cedar Camp.

If the horsemen had emerged he could not have failed to see them.

But they did not emerge. A quarter of an hour passed, and there was no sign of them.

Frank was more and more astonished. He himself had an object in keeping under cover by the trail and watching. It was to settle accounts with Kern Gunten.

But what game were the two horsemen playing?

Frank Richards' thoughts were interrupted by a sound of hoofs and the rumble of the post-wagon in the distance.

His heart beat as he looked along the trail towards the camp and saw the big vehicle come into sight.

Two horses were drawing the wagon at a trot, and Kern Gunten sat in the driver's seat, the reins in his hands.

The Swiss was alone, and whistling carelessly as he drove on his horses.

Frank watched, his heart beating, forgetful now of the purpose with which he had come. He was wondering whether the two horsemen in the further clump would "show up" now that the post-wagon was in sight.

But he had not long to wait now. As the post-wagon came almost abreast of the clump of timber there was a sudden sound of brushing branches, and two riders darted out into the trail.

The wintry sun glinted on a steel barrel. "Halt!"

The challenge rang sharply on the keen air, and it reached Frank Richards' ears a hundred yards along the trail.

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Kern Gunten started violently, and drew in his horses.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER, The Road-agents.

FRANK RICHARDS caught his breath. There could be no doubt now. One of the unknown riders had a revolver in his hand, which was bearing upon the astonished Swiss schoolboy in the post-wagon.

The other had gone to the horses' heads, and was holding them in.

It was evidently a robbery that was intended, and Frank knew there was likely to be a good quantity of "dust" on the post-wagon on its way from Thompson down to Kamloops.

Amazing as it was in the law-abiding Thompson Valley, there was no further doubt; the two men were "road-agents," and they intended to plunder the post-wagon.

If Frank had needed more proof it was there, in the fact that both men now had their faces hidden, each of them wearing a strip of canvas tied over his face in the way of a mask, with slits cut for the eyes and mouth.

That was proof enough that they were thieves.

"Put up your paws!"

Gunten stared at the men from the driver's seat.

"What stunt's this?" he asked. Crack!

There was a loud yell of alarm from Gunten as his hat went spinning from his head, carried away by a bullet.

"You'll get the next one through your cabeza if you don't put up your paws, you fool!" exclaimed the horseman menacingly.

Gunten's hands went up fast enough then. He realised at last that the masked riders were in deadly earnest, and that it was a robbery that was intended.

"Keep them up!" stammered the ruffian.

"I—I guess so!" stammered Gunten.

"Keep that shooter away! I guess I'm not giving trouble."

"You'd better not!"

"I—I say—"

"Stop your chinwag! Get out on the trail!" grunted the horseman. "Sharp!"

Gunten descended from the wagon, a matter of some difficulty with his hands clasped over his head, but he dared not lower them.

He stumbled into the trail, and almost fell, but pulled himself up, and stood with his knees knocking together.

It was pretty plain that the road-agents had no interference to fear from Kern Gunten.

"Get along yonder!"

Gunten obeyed the gesture, and stumbled along to where the other rascal was holding the horses.

He was to be kept under that individual's observation, evidently, while the man with the revolver "went through" the post-wagon.

The latter clambered off his horse into the wagon, returning the pistol to his belt.

He drew a knife, and bent down by the pile of sacks containing letters and packets. Gunten watched him dumbly.

Frank Richards, from the distance, was watching, too.

He had called softly to his horse, and the animal joined him under the edge of the trees, and, still in cover, Frank climbed into the saddle.

He had his riding-whip, and he resolved to intervene in the rascally robbery that was proceeding on the trail.

In a tussle with two road-agents, of course, he had no chance. He was not thinking of that.

But a sudden charge, when they believed themselves alone and unobserved, would flurry them, and if they believed that there were other foes at hand, it was likely enough that they would be scared from their prey.

Frank was thinking of the hard-working miners of the upper valley, whose dust, the fruit of hard toil, was in the grasp of the conscienceless rascals who had stopped the post-wagon.

He felt that he could not stand idly by while the robbery proceeded; and there was no help at hand.

It was a risky trick he intended to play, but in the excitement of the moment he hardly thought of the risk.

He drew a deep breath, and set his teeth. As he moved out of the timber into the trail. A touch of the whip, and his horse broke into a gallop.

At top speed, Frank Richards swept up the trail towards the halted waggon, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Come on! Here they are! Billy Cook, this way! Don't let them get away!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

By Luck and Pluck!

"COME on! This way!" yelled Frank, as he charged up the trail.

The man in the waggon jumped out, with a muttered curse on his lips.

Frank Richards, tearing up the trail at a frantic gallop, was on the scene in a moment.

The man at the horses' heads turned in his saddle, but before he could raise a hand, Frank was upon him, and the heavy butt of his riding-whip swept through the air, and struck the ruffian full in the face.

There was a fearful yell as the horseman tumbled out of his saddle and landed in the tough grass.

"Come on!" roared Frank.

The man in the waggon had caught at his revolver for a second, but he did not draw it again.

With one bound he was out of the vehicle, and in the saddle of the horse waiting by the wheels.

Scarcely had he touched the saddle when the horse was in motion, galloping off the trail into the prairie.

He had not given one glance at his comrade, who had fallen under Frank's riding-whip butt; his only thought was for his own safety at the sudden attack.

So swift were his movements that Frank's first shouts were still echoing on the plain when the rider vanished in the grass at full career.

"This way!" shouted Frank again, with all the strength of his lungs. "Don't let them get away! Shoot! Shoot!"

The fallen man scrambled up, half blinded by the blow he had received across the face.

He threw himself across his horse, and drove it out into the plain, setting it in furious motion before his leg was fairly over the saddle.

The trick had succeeded like a charm.

Both the rascals had the impression that a party had come upon them, and that only hard riding could save them.

They were not likely to suspect, even if they had had time to think, that a school-boy had charged them "on his own" without help at hand.

As the two rascals vanished on the grass-land Frank shouted again and again, his voice ringing over the prairie.

Bending low over their horses, spurring as if for their lives, the two road-agents vanished from sight.

Frank halted, breathless, in the trail.

Kern Gunten was staring blankly.

The sudden turn of events had dumb-founded him.

The two road-agents were probably feeling relieved at getting clean away; but their relief did not equal that of Frank Richards'.

The trick had succeeded, but it had been tough and go.

"Thank goodness they're gone!" he panted. "Gunten, you moon-struck duffer, get aboard and get a move on."

"Frank Richards!" stuttered Gunten.

"Yes. Get going, you duffer!"

"Where are the others?"

"What others?"

"Isn't there anybody with you?" yelled Gunten, in astonishment.

Frank laughed breathlessly.

"No; it was a trick. I was trying to scare them off. I succeeded, too!"

"Great gophers!" gasped Kern Gunten.

He stared round him, as if more willing to believe his eyes than his ears, but the trail was deserted, and he had to believe.

"Well, carry me home to die!" ejaculated Gunten. "Of all the nerve—"

"Get the waggon going, you ass!" exclaimed Frank. "They may come back!"

"I guess I—I'm kind of rattled!" gasped Gunten. "Give a chap time to get his breath!"

"There's no time to waste!" exclaimed Frank.

He jumped into the waggon, and gathered up the reins.



TO THE RESCUE OF THE POST WAGGON! Frank Richards, tearing up the trail at a frantic gallop, was on the scene of the hold-up in a moment. The rustler at the horses' head turned in his saddle, but before he could raise a hand, Frank was upon him, and the heavy butt of his riding-whip swept through the air, and struck the ruffian in the face. (See Chapter 5.)

"Now get in, if you don't want to be stranded!" he called out.

He was already setting the post-waggon in motion, and Kern Gunten hastily clambered in behind.

Frank called to his horse, which trotted after the vehicle as it rolled along the trail.

Gunten sat on the post-sacks, gasping for breath.

The sacks had been sliced by the knife of the road-agent, but he had not had time to lift any of the contents when the alarm had put him to such sudden flight.

Frank Richards, in the driver's seat, heedless of Gunten, cracked his whip and urged the horses to a gallop.

He was anxious to get the post-waggon in safety, for it was possible that the robbers might observe the true state of affairs from a distance, and return for their plunder.

The post-waggon rumbled and jolted on at a great speed behind the two galloping horses, while Frank's steed followed behind.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" said Kern Gunten, recovering himself at last. "I guess those galoots were going to clean out the waggon, Richards."

"No doubt about that."

"Some rustlers from over the border, I guess."

"They seem to know their way about this section," answered Frank.

"That's so, too." Gunten eyed the English schoolboy curiously. "My word! You've got an eye there, Richards! What are you doing out of school?"

Frank knitted his brows as he remembered what had brought him to the Cedar Camp trail.

"I was sent home for fighting," he said.

"And I came along here to wait for you, Gunten, and give you a thumping licking for telling lies to Dicky Bird, and making him come over and row with me."

Gunten backed away in the waggon.

"Oh, you needn't be alarmed!" exclaimed Frank contemptuously. "I'm not going to touch you now."

"I—I guess—" faltered Gunten.

"Oh, dry up!"

Frank Richards gave the Swiss no further attention.

After what had happened, he did not feel inclined to carry out his purpose; his wrath had evaporated now.

Silver Creek was in sight when Frank relinquished the reins to Gunten.

"Safe now!" he said.

Gunten nodded, and took the reins. Frank jumped out on the trail without stopping the waggon, and mounted his horse.

Gunten slowed down, and turned his head.

"I—I say, Richards, you're a good plucked one," he said shamefacedly. "I—I guess I'm sorry I spun Dicky Bird that yarn. Look here, I'll tell him I was only chewing the rag!"

"All serene!" said Frank.

The waggon rumbled on, and Frank Richards rode away across the plain, heading for the Lawless ranch.

The afternoon was growing old now; and instead of going on to the ranch, Frank followed the timber trail, to meet Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc coming away from school.

He passed the shack by the creek once more, but there was no sign of Mr. Beauclerc there, neither was any smoke rising from the chimney.

Apparently the remittance-man was absent.

Frank trotted on along the trail under the big, leafless boughs, in a very satisfied mood.

He had not carried out his purpose, for which he was not sorry, now that he was calmer; but he was glad that he had way-laid the post-waggon that afternoon.

There were some hard-toiling miners up the valley who would be glad of it, too, when they heard what had happened.

And he had some exciting news for his chums.

Frank's eye was still painful, but his heart was light.

He reached the fork of the trail, and caught sight of his chums ahead in the dusk of the forest, and spurred on cheerily to meet them on the trail.

THE END.

(You must not miss next week's topping

backwoods tale.)