

ANOTHER TOPPING SCHOOL IN THE BACKWOODS YARN! TROUBLE FOR FRANK RICHARDS!
Frank Richards is not very surprised when the first offer of a horse for sale arrives, but when several more follow and the sellers are persistent in saying he had asked for them, then he begins to wonder if everyone has gone suddenly mad. But there is someone who could tell him very well the reason for it all—and thereby hangs the tale!

A Backwoods Comedy!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Extraordinary!

TRAMP, tramp!
 Clatter!
 Lessons were proceeding at Cedar Creek School, when that sudden trampling and clattering of hoofs was heard in the playground without.

"Whoa!" came a deep voice from outside, audible to everybody in the big lumber-school-room.

"Visitors!" murmured Bob Lawless, with a grin.

And Chunky Todgers murmured:
 "Good! I can do with a rest!"

But Miss Meadows apparently was not expecting visitors, and she took no heed of the trampling under the windows.

"Anybody at home?" came the deep voice from outside. "Hi! Show up! Hi, there!"

Then Miss Meadows frowned.
 A minute later the school-room door opened, and Black Sally put in a shining, ebony face with a surprised look on it.

Miss Meadows glanced at her impatiently.
 "Gen'lman to see Mass' Richards!" said Black Sally.

"What?" exclaimed Miss Meadows.
 Frank Richards looked up in astonishment. He was certainly not expecting a call during lessons from a gentleman with a string of jingling horses.

Miss Meadows glanced at him.
 "Richards! What does this mean? You cannot see anyone during lessons, as you know very well!"

"I don't know what it means, ma'am," answered Frank. "I wasn't expecting anyone, of course."

"Tell the gentleman that Richards cannot see anyone till twelve o'clock, when the class is dismissed."

"Yes, missy."
 Black Sally withdrew and the door closed.

"What the dickens does that mean, Frank?" whispered Vere Beauclerc.

Frank shook his head.
 He hadn't the faintest idea what it meant.

Miss Meadows resumed the lesson; but it was interrupted again in a couple of minutes.

The school-room door flew open, and a powerful-looking individual in huge boots and a Stetson hat tramped in.

He stared round the astonished school-room and touched his big hat to Miss Meadows.

"Skuse me, marm—" he began.
 "But I do not excuse you, sir!" said Miss Meadows sharply. "You are interrupting the work here!"

"Sorry, marm, but I've come all the way from Thompson with three hosses for Mister Richards to see."

"What?"

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"Purty critters, every one of them," said the big man. "Where's Mister Richards? Pr'aps you'll let him step out a minute, marm, to look at the critters?"

Frank Richards could only stare.
 All eyes in the class were turned upon him.

The horse-dealer was scanning the class, apparently trying to pick out "Mister Richards" from among the rest.

"Richards!" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

Frank stood up.
 "This man says he has brought horses for you to see!" said Miss Meadows. "You know perfectly well, Richards, that you should not make such arrangements for lesson time!"

"But I haven't, ma'am!" exclaimed Frank Richards, in bewilderment. "I haven't asked anybody to bring horses here for me to see!"

"Oh, come off!" exclaimed the horse-dealer. "Are you Mister Richards?"

"Yes; but—"

"Step out and look at the critters, then! There's three of them, and they're all first-class."

"But—"

"I guess, Mister Richards, I'm the man to come to for hoss-flesh—Bocus Bill, that's me! And, being in Thompson this morning with hosses to sell, I've mosseyed along to show you the critters."

"But—"

"Sorry to interrupt lessons, marm, but I didn't know the young feller would be at lessons, of course. I came right hyer, as stated. Mister Richards, you step out and look at them."

"But I don't want to buy a horse!" exclaimed Frank.

"What! You don't want to buy a hoss?"

"Certainly not!"

Bocus Bill stared blankly at Frank Richards, evidently surprised.

For some reason or other, which was a mystery to Frank, the horsey gentleman had believed that he wanted to buy a horse, that was clear.

"Will you kindly leave the school-room at once?" said Miss Meadows.

Bocus Bill grunted.
 "I guess I've humped it hyer from Thompson to sell that young fellow a hoss!" he answered.

"You hear what he says—"

"I hear, marm, not being deaf!" answered the horse-dealer warmly. "But wot about the time it's took me to hustle here from Thompson? If the boy has changed his mind, that's his business, not mine!"

"I haven't changed my mind!" shouted Frank.
 "Then you want to buy a horse?"
 "No, I don't! I've never intended to buy a horse!"

"You ain't never intended to buy a horse?" roared Bocus Bill, in great wrath.

"No!"

The big man glared at him, and the whip under his arm slid down into his hand. He looked as if he meant to use it.

"Little joke of yours, I s'pose—hey?" he demanded.

"I don't know what you mean!"

"I calculate you know what I mean well enough, young feller-me-lad!" said Bocus Bill darkly. "Hyer, I've mosseyed all the way from Thompson, and there's my hosses cavortin' outside ready to be looked at. Now you say you don't want to buy a hoss! Well, that gets my goat, and no mistake!"

"There seems to be some mistake," said Miss Meadows quietly. "But you hear what Richards says—"

"I hear wot he says!" roared Bocus Bill. "And now let him hear what I says! Hyer's me, and there's my hosses, ready for a trade. Good critters, every one of them, and the price reasonable. If the young gent chooses to come and look at them and do business, well and good. If not—"

"Kindly—"

"If not," roared Bocus Bill, "saving your presence, marm, I'm going to lay this hyer whip round him as a warning not to waste a busy man's time with his little jokes!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Frank.

"Now then!" shouted the horse-dealer, striding towards the class. "Do you want to buy a hoss, Master Richards?"

"No!" howled Frank.

"Then here's for your hide!"

Frank Richards stared at the man blankly. Beauclerc and Bob Lawless jumped up to stand by their chum. He needed it if the big horse-dealer got at him with his whip.

But Miss Meadows ran between.
 Bocus Bill stopped.

He was a rough fellow, and was very angry, but he evidently did not wish to use rough measures with the schoolmistress.

"Look hyer, marm—" he began angrily.
 "Stand back!"

"I'm going to lay my whip round that young jay for bringing me hyer all the way from Thompson for nothing!" roared the horse-dealer.

"There is some mistake—"

"Nary mistake! I suppose the kid knew whether he wanted to buy a hoss or not! And hyer's me, and there's my critters!"

Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd had drawn near, ready to interfere if Miss Meadows required protection.

But Bocus Bill plainly did not intend to hurt the "school-marm." It was Frank Richards he wanted to get at, and he could not do it with the Canadian girl in the way. "You will not be allowed to touch Richards!" exclaimed Miss Meadows indignantly. "Leave the school-room at once!"

Our School in the Backwoods Yarns are the Rage of the Season!

Bocus Bill gave Frank a glare over Miss Meadows' shoulders.

"You young raskil!" he exclaimed. "I guess I'd have hidid you if it wasn't for your school-marm! All right, missus, I'm goin'!"

And with an angry snort Bocus Bill tramped out of the school-room.

He paused at the door to shake his whip menacingly at Frank Richards, and then disappeared.

The tramping of the horses was heard again in the playground.

Bocus Bill was departing from Cedar Creek with his string of unsold "critters."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Rough on Richards!

HERE was a murmur in the school-room.

Every eye was fixed on Frank Richards, who stood with a red and bewildered face.

Why Bocus Bill should have supposed he wanted to buy a horse, and should have taken the trouble to bring a string of "critters" to Cedar Creek for him to choose from, was a matter of deep perplexity to Frank.

His first suspicion was that the man was the worse for drink; but that was clearly not the case. Bocus Bill was sober enough, and he was very earnest and very indignant.

"Richards!" Miss Meadows' voice was very quiet, but very stern.

"Yes, ma'am?" stammered Frank.

"What does this mean?"

"I—I don't know."

"You did not ask the man to call here with his horses?"

"No. I've never seen the man before, that I remember."

"It is very singular," said Miss Meadows, eyeing him sharply. "I cannot understand how such a mistake could arise."

"I cannot either, ma'am," said Frank. "But I never wanted to buy a horse. My uncle gave me a pony when I came to Canada, and I don't want two."

"Very well; you may sit down, Richards." Frank sat down, in great bewilderment.

Miss Meadows accepted his word; but she looked a little suspicious, as was natural in the circumstances.

Silence was restored in the class, and Frank Richards received more attention than the schoolmistress for some time.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

There was a sudden sound of hoofbeats in the playground about an hour after Bocus Bill's departure.

Frank Richards started, and Miss Meadows compressed her lips.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" murmured Bob Lawless. "Here he comes back again, I guess!"

"Bother him!" muttered Frank.

The tramping hoofs stopped outside the schoolhouse door.

There was a breathless pause in the school-room.

Black Sally's surprised face appeared in the doorway.

"Well, what is it?" rapped out Miss Meadows, in whose cheeks there showed a spot of red, indicative of rising temper.

"Gen'leman to see Mass' Richards—"

There was a buzz in the class.

"Is it the same man?" asked Miss Meadows.

"No, missy. This Mass' Barker of Cedar Camp," answered Black Sally.

"Here he comes!" murmured Chunky Todgers.

A tall, angular man, with a "lantern" jaw and a goatee beard, appeared behind the negress in the doorway.

He raised his hat to Miss Meadows. "I calculate I've looked in at the wrong moment, ma'am," he said politely.

"You shouldn't play tricks like this in lesson-time! You'll get scalped!"

"I—I haven't!" stammered Frank.

"What's the galoot come for, then?"

"Goodness knows!"

Chunky Todgers closed one eye sceptically. It was clear that the fat youth believed that this invasion of horse-dealers was some stunt planned by Frank to interrupt lessons.

It was pretty clear, too, that Miss Meadows shared that opinion now.

Her eyes, usually kind, glittered now as they fixed on the unfortunate schoolboy.

"Well, Richards," she said, "will you tell me now that you did not ask Mr. Barker to call?"

"I—I certainly did not!" gasped Frank. "I haven't the remotest intention of buying a horse!"

At that statement the agreeable expression faded at once from the angular face of Mr. Barker of Cedar Camp.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "I don't want to buy a horse!" shouted Frank.

"Why, you haven't seen the critters yet?"

"I mean what I say! I—"

"I guess you can't tell whether you want the critter or not till you've seen it," said Mr. Barker. "Unless you mean to imply that I ain't the galoot you can do business with."

"I don't mean that—I mean—"

"Your school-marm will let you step out and see the horses. If you've got anything agin my horses, you'll only have to say so. I'm a reasonable man. But if you mean that my horses ain't any good, no how—"

"I—I don't!" gasped Frank. "I mean that I'm not thinking of buying any horses at all!"

"That won't do!" said Mr. Barker, with a disagreeable look. "I'm open to do trade, and I've brought you the critters here from Cedar Camp according. If they don't suit you, tell me what you want, and we may be able to do business."

"I don't want any horse at all!" yelled Frank, beginning to lose his temper. "What the thump have you brought them here for? I don't want to see them and I won't!"

"You won't even step out and look at my horses?" roared Mr. Barker.

"No, I won't!"

"Well, I swear!"

"Mr. Barker—" began the worried schoolmistress.

"Marm," interrupted Mr. Barker, "I guess I've been made a fool of. In your presence, marm, I won't treat that cheeky young rip as he deserves; but I leave it to you, marm, to see that he's punished for wasting a man's morning. I've brought four horses here for him to pick from, and now he tells me he never meant to buy a horse at all. Is that straight goods, marm?"

"Did Richards actually say that he wishes to buy a horse?" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

"Certainly he did!"

"I didn't!" roared Frank Richards.

"Mr. Barker's statement is explicit, Richards. I can only conclude that you have been playing a foolish and inconsiderate trick!" said Miss Meadows sternly.

"But I—I haven't! I—" stuttered Frank.

"You may rest assured, Mr. Barker, that Richards will be punished for having wasted your time in this manner."

"Very well, marm, I leave it in your hands," said Mr. Barker. "Sorry to have interrupted, marm." And Mr. Barker, with an angry and disdainful glare at Frank Richards, tramped out of the school-room.

He was jingling away with his horses in a few minutes.

Miss Meadows took a cane from her desk. "Richards! Come here!"

Frank Richards went slowly out before the class.

His cheeks were burning.

It was impossible for Miss Meadows to doubt the plain statement made by Mr. Barker, and it followed that she could not credit Frank's denial.

Her eyes were fixed sternly on Frank's crimson, troubled face.

"Richards, it is clear to me that you have played a foolish trick," she said. "I presume that your object was to interrupt lessons here. You have wasted the time of two men who have come a considerable distance, in the belief that you wished to purchase their horses. I have no alternative, Richards, but to punish you severely."

"I—I haven't—"

"You do not deny Mr. Barker's statement?" exclaimed the schoolmistress angrily.

"Yes, I do," answered Frank. "I never asked him, or anybody else, to sell me a horse."

"You can hardly expect me to believe, Richards, that Mr. Barker has brought his horses here from Cedar Camp and made a false statement, for no reason whatever."

Frank Richards was silent. There was simply nothing to say to that; and Frank almost wondered whether, in a moment of mental aberration, he might have asked the horse-dealers to bring their "critters" to Cedar Creek.

"Hold out your hand, Richards!"

"But—but, Miss Meadows—"

"That will do! Hold out your hand at once!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

It was but seldom that Miss Meadows administered severe punishment; but she felt that this was an occasion for it, and for once she did not spare the rod.

Frank Richards was squeezing his hands dimly as he went back to his place.

During the remainder of morning lessons he was chiefly occupied in rubbing his hands and wondering whether any more horse-dealers would arrive at the school with a string of "critters" to sell.

Fortunately, there were none, and morning lessons finished without further interruption.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Little Hasty!

FRANK, you ass—"

"Frank, you jay!"

Veré Beauclerc and Bob Lawless spoke simultaneously as the Cedar-Creek fellows came out of the lumber school after morning lessons.

"Of all the duffers!" said Chunky Todgers. "What did you expect, Richards, after playing a trick like that?"

"Peskiest silly stunt I ever heard of!" remarked Eben Hacke.

"Vellee funnee!" murmured Yen Chin. "Vellee funnee jokee, and vellee funnee Flanky getee stickee! Oh, yes!"

Frank looked round at his grinning school-fellows.

He was not in a pleasant mood. "You silly asses!" he said hotly. "I don't know what it means, any more than you do!"

"Oh, draw it mild, you know!" murmured Tom Lawrence.

"If you can't take my word—" began Frank angrily.

"Go easy!" murmured Bob Lawless soothingly. "If you say you don't know what it means—seriously—"

"Well, I do!" snapped Frank.

"Well, I'm blest if I can understand it!" said Bob, much mystified.

The chums strolled out into the playground discussing the remarkable happenings of the morning. They were interrupted by a yell from Chunky Todgers.

"Ha, ha! You're wanted, Richards!"

Frank looked round.

"Dicky Bird!" he exclaimed.

"Now we'll see whether it's a Hillcrest stunt!" murmured Bob Lawless.

Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest School, was trotting in at the gates, mounted on his pony and leading a spare pony.

It was so remarkable for Dicky to pay a visit to Cedar Creek leading a spare steed, that the Cedar Creek fellows jumped to the conclusion at once that he had a horse to sell and there was a general shout for Frank Richards.

Dicky Bird nodded cheerily to Frank Richards and Co., seemingly surprised by the laughter round him.

"I reckon I'd trot over, Richards," he remarked. "Anybody else got in first? I couldn't miss lessons of course."

"Ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Yes, there's been two before you, Dicky! But it's all right; Franky hasn't bought a horse yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said Dicky Bird. "My poppa has this pony to sell, Richards, and as you want one, I've trotted him over for you to see."

Frank Richards looked at him grimly. He had no doubt now that the whole affair was a Hillcrest stunt, of which he had been the victim.

"So you've come to sell me a horse?" he asked.

"Yep; if you want to buy one," answered Bird. "You can look at it, anyhow, and make an offer for me to tell poppa. It's a good pony."

"You're rather funny merchants at Hillcrest," remarked Frank. "I dare say this is a funny stunt, Bird; but you should have been funny from a distance. It would really have been better for you, old scout!"

"I don't quite see—" "I'll make you see!" answered Frank. He made a rush at Dicky Bird, grasped him by the leg, and had him out of the saddle in a twinkling.

Dicky Bird roared as he came down: "Yoooop!" "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob. "Roll him in the snow!"

"Collar him!" "Yarook! Help! Wharrer marrer? Groogh!" spluttered Dicky Bird.

Half a dozen hands were laid on the Hillcrest fellow, and he was rolled in the snow, struggling unavailingly.

"Bless my soul! What is the matter here?" exclaimed Mr. Slimmey, the junior master, hurrying to the spot.

"Only a Hillcrest jay, sir!" said Bob Lawless cheerily. "He came here to be funny, so we're giving him some fun!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Yurrgrghhh!" came from Dicky Bird, as he sat up in the snow, gasping and spluttering. "Let up! What have I done, you silly idiots? Oh dear!"

"Stop this at once!" exclaimed Mr. Slimmey. The grinning schoolboys were willing to stop; even Frank Richards thought that the Hillcrest had had enough.

Mr. Slimmey gave Bird a hand to help him out of the snow-bank, and the unfortunate youth wriggled out, spluttering.

"Now, Bird—" began Mr. Slimmey. "I guess they're all gone mad!" gasped Dick Bird. "I came here to sell Frank Richards a horse—"

"What?" shouted Mr. Slimmey. "And—googh!—and they—yow-ow-ow—"

"You shouldn't be so funny, Dicky!" said Bob Lawless, chuckling.

"You silly jay!" roared Dicky Bird wrathfully. "What is there funny about selling a horse? If Richards don't want to buy a horse he can say so, I suppose?"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Slimmey. "This is very odd! Did Richards say he wished to purchase a horse, Bird?"

"Of course he did!" gasped Dicky Bird. "I guess I shouldn't trot the critter here for nothing, should I?"

"I never said anything of the kind!" shouted Frank Richards.

"You did!" yelled Dicky Bird. "I didn't!"

"Not to me personally, of course," snorted Dicky Bird. "I saw the notice you put up in Gunten's Stores at Thompson."

"What?" howled Frank. "Perhaps you were sleep-walking when you did that!" hooted Dicky Bird, gouging snow out of his hair and his ears.

"I—I—I never did!" gasped Frank. "If there's a notice up in the store, I never knew it—and I had nothing to do with it."

"Gammon!"

"It's true, you silly ass!" howled Frank. "I understand now. I suppose it's a joke of Gunten's—the cheeky rotter! What are you cackling at, Bob, you chump?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. And even the grave Mr. Slimmey grinned.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Called to Account.

FRANK RICHARDS did not join in the general chortle. He was exasperated.

All was clear now as to the mysterious visits of the horse-dealers.

It was not surprising that Bocus Bill, and Mr. Barker had supposed that Frank Richards wanted to buy a horse, if there was such a notice up in the store at Thompson.

It was common enough for a notice to be put in the store by any man who had something to sell, or wanted to buy some article. If a citizen of Thompson wanted a fiddle, or wanted to sell a sleigh, he would notify the fact to his fellow-townsmen by means of a notice stuck up by the stove at Gunten's Store.

If Frank Richards had, indeed, wished to buy a horse, it was quite probable that he would have called at the store with such a notice, to be pinned up near the big stove and read by all Thompson.

Such a notice was undoubtedly there, though Frank Richards knew nothing of his name being appended to it.

"It's Gunten, of course!" he muttered to the chuckling Bob. "Dicky Bird took it for genuine, so it's not his stunt."

Bob Lawless nodded. "I guess it's quite bright for Gunten," he said. "What a stunt! Why, if that paper stays there, Franky, you'll have all the horse dealers in the valley calling on you one after another."

"And leading strings of horses for you to select from!" chuckled Vere Beauclerc.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "It is evidently a foolish joke!" said Mr. Slimmey, smiling. "You had better call at the store as soon as possible, Richards, and have the notice taken down, as it is not genuine."

"I will, sir," said Frank. Mr. Slimmey walked away, still smiling. Dicky Bird was grinning now, in spite of the snow.

"I suppose it's a joke on you, Richards," he said. "But you can't blame a galoot for thinking you wanted a horse, when it's there in black and white. I guess you might have let me explain before you bundled me into the snow, though."

"You can reckon that we take that back," said Bob, laughing.

Dicky Bird granted. "Give a chap time to speak, next time," he said. "I've brought that blessed pony over here for nothing, anyhow. Sure you don't want to buy a pony, Richards?"

"Quite, thanks!" said Frank. "What I specially want just now is to see Kern Gunten."

He hurried away to the corral for his horse. His chums led out their steeds at the same time, for a ride to Thompson.

It was necessary to get the notice taken down as quickly as possible, if Frank

was not to receive visitors that afternoon, with strings of horses for sale. Dicky Bird was still cleaning off snow when the three chums rode out at the school gates.

"Don't quite slaughter Gunten, Franky," said Bob Lawless, as they rode swiftly along the trail to Thompson. "It's rather a good joke, in a way."

"It's got me a licking from Miss Meadows!" growled Frank.

"Never mind; Slimmey will tell her, and she, will know that you didn't deserve it."

"That doesn't make my hands feel any better, fathead!"

"Nope; I suppose it doesn't," admitted Bob. "But think how much worse it would have been if Bocus Bill had got at you with that big whip!"

"Br-r-r-r!" was Frank's reply. But he recovered his good-humour during the ride, and was no longer in a slaughterous mood when the chums trotted into Main Street at Thompson.

Outside Gunten's Store a string of horses were tied to a post, and Bob uttered an exclamation as he saw them.

"Here's one of the dealers, by gum!" he exclaimed. "Franky, had you better go in? It's Bocus Bill—"

"I'm going in," answered Frank. "We ought to have brought a gun!" chuckled Bob.

The chums dismounted and tethered their horses, and walked into the store.

Kern Gunten was there, sitting on the counter, being home for dinner from Hillcrest School.

He was talking to a powerfully-built man, whom the chums recognised at once as Bocus Bill.

The horse-dealer had a big whip tucked under his arm, and the tone of his voice as he spoke showed that he was in a wrathful mood.

"Moseying around all morning!" he was saying. "Wasting time! Turning up his nose at my critters, by Jerusalem, without even looking at them! If it hadn't been for the schoolmarm, I'd have larruped him. You believe me!"

"Like his cheek, I guess!" said Gunten. "He doesn't seem to know his own mind."

Gunten started as he caught sight of the Cedar Creek chums coming in.

Bocus Bill followed his glance; and a thunderous expression came upon his bronzed face at the sight of Frank Richards.

He strode towards the three schoolboys, letting the big whip slide down into his hand.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "So here you are!"

Gunten grinned. He had looked alarmed for a moment, and had made a step towards the parlour door; but now he stayed. It looked as if Frank Richards had walked into trouble, and Gunten was prepared to enjoy it.

"You young varmint!" roared Bocus Bill, shaking his whip at Frank. "You don't want to buy a horse—eh?"

"No!" said Frank. "You want a lambasting—eh?"

"Thanks, no!" "Look at that!" roared the angry horse-dealer, pointing with his whip at a paper pinned up near the stove. "You put that up, and then you say you don't want to buy a horse, arter a man moseying around all morning!"

Frank Richards looked at the paper. It ran, in large, scrawling letters:

"WANTED TO BUY! A GOOD HORSE. Price no object, for a good animal. Call on Frank Richards, Cedar Creek School, any time."

That was the announcement that had brought Bocus Bill to Cedar Creek, and after him Mr. Barker and Dicky Bird.

The paper was not in Frank Richards' handwriting; but that, of course, made no difference, as his "fist" was not known in Thompson.

"You see that there!" hooted Bocus Bill.

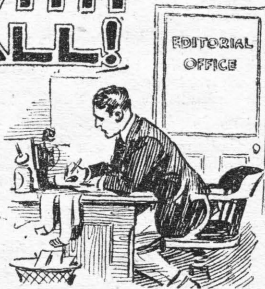
"I see it," answered Frank. "What does it mean, if you don't want to buy a horse?" demanded the dealer, taking a firm grasp on his big whip.

"That's what I've come here to find out," answered Frank Richards. "I never put up that notice, you see, Mr. Bocus Bill."

"Oh, come off!" answered the horse-

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The New Boy at Cedar Creek School Causes a Sensation! He's Some Live Wire!

dealer. "Own up that you did it for a fool joke, to waste people's time!"

"But I did not!"

"I guess it's your name ain't it?"

"It's my name, but not my writing!"

"I guess I don't know nothing about that; but I know I'm going to take it out of your hide, or else sell you a horse!" declared Bocus Bill.

"You're going to do neither," answered Frank Richards quietly. "Keep that whip away, please. I've come here to see the fellow who put up that notice in my name—you, Kern Gunten!"

Gunten shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I don't know anything about it," he answered.

"Look here, that chicken won't fight," said Bocus Bill. "You can't get out of a hiding so easy as that, young feller-mead! Moseying around all morning, by gum! You're going to get it, hot!"

And he strode at Frank, grasping the whip.

The next moment he stumbled over Bob Lawless' foot and as he staggered he was grasped by two pairs of hands, and went down on the floor with a terrific crash.

"Yaroooh! Let up!" he roared.

"Sit on him!" gasped Bob.

Bocus Bill struggled furiously.

But he was downed, and Frank Richards ran to the aid of his chums. Burly as the horse-dealer was, the three sturdy schoolboys were too much for him, and he was pinned to the floor.

Gunten looked on, breathless. The affair was taking a turn he did not like.

"Let up!" bellowed Bocus Bill. "My eye! Oh, gum! I'll hide you, all round! Let up, I keep on telling yer!"

A crowd was gathering in the doorway of the store, much entertained by the scene within.

From the back room, Old Man Gunten came striding into the store, his fat face red with wrath.

"What does this mean?" he shouted.

"How dare you kick up a shindy in my store? You young rascals! Stop this at once!"

"Can't be did, Mr. Gunten," answered Bob Lawless. "The galoot's on the war-path, and we've got to hold him!"

"Let up!" yelled Bocus Bill. "Yaroooh! Gerroff my head! I'll limb yer!"

"Stop this shindy at once!" shouted the storekeeper angrily. "Kern, fetch me a stick to lay round these young rascals!"

"Yep!"

Gunten rushed into the back room, and returned with a big stick, which he handed to his father. A burly ranchman detached himself from the grinning crowd in the doorway and strolled into the store. It was Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch.

"Go easy, boss!" said the ranchman, pushing the fat storekeeper back.

"Let me pass—"

"Go easy, I tell you!" answered Billy Cook. And he gave Old Man Gunten another shove, perhaps harder than he intended, and the fat Swiss sat down with a heavy bump and a howl.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Right at Last!

"**Y**OW!"

"Easy does it," said Billy Cook soothingly. "Let's hear what's the row, Mr. Gunten."

"You—you—you" spluttered the storekeeper.

"Yes, yes; that's all right," said the ranchman. "Never mind letting off steam now. What's the row, Bob Lawless?"

"Look at that notice by the stove," answered Bob. "This galoot wants to pitch into Franky, for fooling him about buying a horse."

"I'm going to skin him!" roared Bocus Bill.

The ranchman glanced at the paper.

"Waal, what did Frank put that up for, if he don't want to buy a horse?" he inquired.

"I didn't!" gasped Frank. "Somebody put it up in my name, to start silly idiots bringing me horses to sell!"

"Gammon!" bellowed Bocus Bill. "I'm goin'—"

"Tain't Frank's handwriting," commented Billy Cook, inspecting the paper closely. "You know anything about this, Mr. Gunten?"



THE TRICKSTER FOUND OUT! "I'll teach you to waste a man's time, and play tricks on him!" roared Bocus Bill. He grabbed up the whip and made for Kern Gunten. Lash! Lash! Lash! The whip curled round the Swiss boy's legs. "Yarooooh!" (See Chapter 5.)

"Eh? Yes. My son put that there," he answered. "He was asked to do so by Richards, I suppose."

Kern Gunten's jaw dropped.

He made a retrograde movement towards the back room, but Billy Cook strode forward and caught him by the collar.

"Not so fast," remarked the big cattleman. "We'll hear what you've got to say first about this hyer."

"Let me go!" panted Gunten.

"Put it up, did he?" howled Bocus Bill.

"Young Gunten put that paper up, did he, boss?"

"Yes!" snapped Mr. Gunten, quite unaware of the fact that he was giving away the falsehoods Gunten had uttered a few minutes before. "I suppose Richards asked him to."

"I never asked him," shouted Frank; "and he's just denied that he even saw it put up! He said he found it there, and supposed I'd put it up."

Mr. Gunten glanced at his son, puzzled, as the Swiss schoolboy wriggled in Billy Cook's strong grasp.

"What nonsense! Why did you put up the paper, Kern, if Richards did not ask you?" exclaimed the storekeeper angrily.

"It—it was only a joke on Richards!" gasped Gunten, realising that further falsehoods were useless. "Only a joke—"

"You young fool!" snapped the storekeeper. "What do you play such jokes for? However, there is no harm done."

Snort from Bocus Bill!

"No harm done! Hyer's a man moseying round all the morning with a string of critters to sell, wasting time, and nearly hiding the wrong galoot for playing him tricks! No harm done! I reckon there's going to be some harm done, boss, and I'm going to do it!"

And he grabbed up his whip and started towards Kern Gunten.

Billy Cook released the Swiss schoolboy.

"Vamoose!" he said briefly.

Gunten did not need telling to "vamoose."

He jumped away as Billy Cook released him, and dashed for the parlour door; but the horse-dealer headed him off, and his whip curled round Gunten's legs.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Yarooooh!"

There was a fearful howl from the Swiss.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Gunten.

"I guess not!" answered Bocus Bill, and he lashed away, Gunten dodging wildly round the store to escape.

Lash, lash!

Kern Gunten hopped, and dodged, and yelled, and leaped, and ran. He seemed to be performing weird gymnastics in his frantic efforts to escape the lashes of the long whip.

The thrashing had come home to the right party at last; and it was being well laid on.

"I guess you won't fool a galoot again in a hurry!" grunted Bocus Bill. "Take that! I guess you'll think twice next time! Take that!"

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"And that—and that!"

Kern Gunten made a wild break for the doorway. The yelling crowd opened for him to pass, and he sped into the street. Bocus Bill dashed on his track, the long whip still lashing; and Gunten's wild yells and the horse-dealer's heavy footsteps died away up Main Street. Bob Lawless wiped his eyes.

"Oh, gum! Gunten's little joke is funnier than he ever supposed it would be!" he gasped. He jerked down the notice from the wall. "Time we got off. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Frank Richards and Co. chortled as they rode away to Cedar Creek, to the accompaniment of wild yells from the distance, where Kern Gunten was still dodging the horse-dealer's whip.

THE END.

(There will be another splendid story of the School in the Backwoods next Tuesday. Do you know there is a 15,000-word story of Frank Richards & Co. in "The Holiday Annual"?)

Meet the Cheery Chums of Cedar Creek School Again Next Week!