ANOTHER BACKWOODS MYSTERY!

Vere Beauclere has mysteriously disappeared without leaving a single trace behind. He has vanished into thin air. Who is the hidden foe working against Frank Richards & Co.? Who will be the next victim of the Unknown? He has vanished into thin



### More Amazing Adventures of Frank Richards & Co., the chums of Cedar Creek Lumber School!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. By Whose Hand?

ERB'S Richards!"

"Any news, Frank?"

"Have you found Beauclere?"
Half a dozen voices greeted
at the gate of Cedar Creek School.
Chunky Todgers rolled forward to hold
his borse

Chunky Todgers rolled forward to hold his horse.

"Found him?" he exclaimed.
Frank Richards shook his head.

"No, Beauclerc hasn't been found yet," he answered.

"But you've come back to school?" asked Chunky.

"No; only to speak to Miss Meadows."
Frank Richards hurried through the crowd of Cedar Creek fellows to the lumber school-house. Frank's cheery face had lost its brightness now. His chum, Vere Beauclerc, had been missing for twenty-four hours, and as yet not a trace of him had been discovered. Anxiety for his missing chum was weighing like lead upon Frank's heart.

Miss Meadows, the schoolmistress of Cedar

Miss Meadows, the schoolmistress of Cedar Creek, met him as he came into the porch of the lumber school. She had seen him from her window.

from her window,
"I am glad to see you back, Richards!"
she said kindly, "I hope you have good
news of Beauclerc."
"No, ma'am," answered Frank. "I haven't
come to school this morning. Mr. Lawless
asked me to ride over and tell you. He
wants you to let off Bob and me from
lessons, so that we can help in searching
for Beauclerc."

Miss Meadows nodded at once.

Miss Meadows nodded at once.

"Certainly!" she said.

"Thank you very much, ma'am!" said Frank, in relief. "I—I don't think I could do much, anyway, while I'm worried about poor old Beau. I know something's happened to him, though I can't guess what."

"You may both remain away from school so long as Mr. Lawless requires you," said Miss Meadows kindly. "I hope you will soon be successful in finding poor Beauclerc."

"Thank you, Miss Meadows!"
Frank raised his hat to the schoolmistres and hurried back to the gates, where Chunky

and hurried back to the gates, where Chunky Todgers was holding his horse. The school bell was ringing now, and the boys and girls were making for the school-

"Going out?" asked Chunky, as Frank took

his horse.

"Yes, Chunky. I'm off lessons for the present."
"Lucky galoot!"

"Lucky galoot!"
Frank smiled faintly.
"I don't feel very lucky, Chunky. I'm
going to help look for Beauclerc."
"I guess I'll come and help," said Chunky
Todgers thoughtfully, "if Miss Meadows will
let ran off ten"

let me off, too."
"I'm afraid you wouldn't be much use, Chunky."

Chunky."
"I guess I'll ask the schoolmarm. The fact
is, I really reckon I'm the very antelope
that's wanted on this job!" said Chunky
Todgers confidently. "You wait a minute,
and if I come back you'll know I'm coming."

Chunky Todgers rolled off towards the schoolhouse, and Frank led his horse into the trail. He waited there—rather to rest the horse than in any expectation of seeing

Chunky again.

Miss Meadows was not likely to allow the fat Chunky to get out of lessons so easily as all that.

as all that.

A swarthy, lithe schoolboy had remained at the gate after the rest had started for the house, and he came out to Frank in the trail. It was Ricardo Diaz, the Mexican—a new fellow at Cedar Creek, with whom Frank Richards & Co. had been on the worst of terms, until the day Frank pulled the drowning Mexican from the creek. Since that incident Frank Richards had been on very good terms with Diaz, though they had little to do with one another.

"Your amigo—Beauclerc—he has disap-

"Your amigo-Beauclerc-he peared, so the fellows say," said Diaz, fixing his black eyes curiously on Frank's face.

The English schoolboy nodded.
"It is strange!" said Diaz. "How did he

"It is strange!" said Diaz. "How did he disappear, mi amigo?"
"On his way to school yesterday morning," answered Frank. "So far as we can find out, Beauclere left his horse somewhere on the trail, and the horse wandered to the plains. Billy Cook, my uncle's foreman, roped it in yesterday afternoon—riderless. Why Beauclere left it, and what happened to him afterwards we can't guess."
"There is no reason why he should run away?"

away?"
"None at all. Besides, if he was going away on his own accord, he would go on his horse, not on foot."
"If he was thrown—"
"If he was thrown—"

"Demon wouldn't throw him; he was too fond of him; but if he had been pitched

off, we should have found him on the trail. But there was not a sign of him."

The Mexican schoolboy wrinkled his brows

in thought. "You can

"You cannot guess what has happened?" he asked.

"Not so far."

"Not so far."
"In Mexico—" Diaz smiled. "In my country we should say at once that the senorito had met an enemy."
"But this is not Mexico," said Frank, with a slight smile. "Beauclerc had no enemy who would seek to injure him."
"What of Gunten?"

Gunten!" repeated Frank.

"Gunten is your enemy, and the enemy of your friends," said the Mexican. "You have not thought of that."

"My dear chap, Gunten is our enemy, certainly, but he cannot have done anything to Beauclerc. Beau could knock him into a cocked hat with one hand!"

The Mexican smiled again.

The Mexican smiled again.

"Possible," he said. "But Gunten might not attack openly. It is nothing to me, but I have not forgotten that you saved me from drowning, amigo mio, and for that reason I would help you find your friend if I could. In Canada your customs are different from ours in Mexico; but in my country, in such a case I should say—call to mind if your missing friend had an enemy, and seek him."

And, with a wave of his dusky hand, the Mexican went in at the gate and hurried to the schoolhouse.

Frank Richards mounted his horse with

Frank Richards mounted his horse with a strange expression on his face.
He rode away thoughtfuly down the trail.
The Mexican's suggestion had startled him.
For the first moment or two he was inclined to dismiss it as absurd; Canada was not Mexico, and it seemed incredible that Kern Gunten, of Hillcrest School, rascal as he was, could have had a hand in Rearcleric discould have had a hand in Beauclerc's dis appearance.

appearance.
But on reflection, it did not seem so impossible. More than once the chums of Cedar Creek had experienced the treachery of Kern Gunten. And only a few days before Gunten had suffered disgrace and punishment for having forged a letter in Frank Richards' hand!

As he galloped away on the timber trail Frank could not help wondering if the Mexican had hit upon the truth, and it

THE POPULAR.-No. 254.

Kern Gunten had any knowledge of what had happened to Vere Beauclere!

It was, perhaps a wild idea, but it was the only gleam of light in the deep darkness of the mystery that surrounded Beauclerc's disappearance. Frank knew instinctively that his uncle, Mr. Lawless, would not entertain such a thought for a moment. But he was determined to take Bob Lawless into counsel on the subject as soon as he arrived at the ranch. ranch

### THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Chance of a Clue!

OB LAWLESS met Frank on the trail as his cousin came trotting up to the ranch. Frank Richards pulled in his horse.
"No news?" he asked.

"No news?" he asked.
Bob shook his head.
The Canadian schoolboy's usually sunny
face was clouded. Vere Beauclerc's disappearance troubled him almost as much

as Frank.
"No news," he answered. "No news," he answered. "It beats me hollow, Franky—beats me to a frazzle, and no mistake! I thought at first it might be a horse-thief who'd taken a fancy to Cherub's horse—it's a valuable animal. But we've found the horse—at least, Billy Cook has. But Beauclere—not a sign of him anywhere. What on earth can have become of him, Frank?"

"I spoke to Diaz, at Cedar Creek," said Frank abruptly.

Frank

nk abruptly. The Greaser?"

"The Greaser?"

"Yes. And he's put an idea into my head, Bob. Beauclerc can't have cleared off on his own accord—that's impossible. If he'd met with an accident we should have found some trace of him. He must have been collared by somebody—somehow."

"I guess it looks like it, Frank; but—but—but who, and why—."

"Gunten !"

Bob stared.

Bob stared.
"Gunten—a schoolboy—Frank!"
"I know it sounds rot!" admitted Frank Richards, colouring a little. "But look how the matter stands, Bob. Gunten was the only enemy we had—the only enemy Beau-elerc ever had. And isn't this the work of an enemy? What else can it be?"
"But—"

an enemy? What eise can it be?

"But—"

"I know Gunten couldn't touch Beauclerc alone. But we know that he was friends with that gang of half-breed traders who're camped in the timber—Louis Leronge and his crowd. They may have helped him!"

"But—but what could be his object? He wouldn't dare to hurt Beauclerc—"

"I don't know. But it looks to me as if Gunten may have had a hand in the business—he's the only chap I can think of who could have had a motive."

Bob Lawless nodded slowly.

"I guess it's not much good saying that to poppa," he said. "He wouldn't think of it for a moment."

"I'm not thinking of that. We're free from school now, till Beau is found. We can take the matter in hand ourselves."

"And see Gunten—"

""I'm and the wouldn't it won't do any

take the matter in hand ourselves."

"And see Gunten—"
"It won't do any harm, if it won't do any good," replied Frank Richards.

"That's so. And I guess we might tell by his looks, whether he knows anything of Beau," said Bob Lawless. "We can ride over to Thompson, and see him when he comes home to dinner from Hillcrest."

"That's what I was thinking of."
"Let's, then."

And the chums of Cedar Creek, having arrived at that decision, took the trail to Thompson town.

Thompson town.

Thompson town.

They had plenty of time on their hands, for Gunten was not to be seen till after morning lessons were over at Hillcrest School. They went by way of the timber trail, and looked in at the Beauclercs' shack. But Vere's father was not there. The shack was deserted; the remittance-man was away, evidently keeping up the search for his confor his son.

"It's hit poor old Beauclerc hard!" said. Bob Lawless, as they came away from the deserted shack. "Beau was the apple of his eye. I never thought he was so fond of the Cherub.-before he was missing"

Cherub—before he was missing."

The chums rode through Cedar Camp, where they met Billy Cook. But the ranch foreman had no news, and they trotted on

to Thompson.

They passed They rode through Main Street, and assed Gunten's store, where Old Man The POPULAR.—No. 254.

Gunten was in the doorway, looking out into the sunny street.

The Swiss storekeeper frowned at the sight The Swiss storekeeper frowned at the sight of the two schoolboys; there was no love lost between the Gunten family and the chums of Cedar Creek. But as they were riding past, the storekeeper stepped from the doorway and called to them:

"Any news of young Beauclere yet?"

Frank pulled in his horse.
"Not yet?" he answered.

"Not yet," he answered.
"Not yet," he answered.
"Queer where he's gone to, isn't it?" said
Mr. Gunten, eyeing him. "He's cleared out
of the section, it seems."

of the section, it seems."
Frank did not answer.
"I guess it would be all the better for the section if his father followed him!" added the storekeeper, with a sneer. "We can do without remittance-men in the Thompson Valley."
He returned to his store before Frank could answer.
"Pleasant old galoot!" grinned Bob Lawless. "It will be rather a surprise for him if his precious son had a hand in this

Lawless. "It will be rather a surprise for him if his precious son had a hand in this business, and we spot him. We'd better wait about here for Gunten."

Outside Thompson, on the side of the town towards Hillcrest School, the chums dismounted, and waited in the trail.

They were in good time, and it was a quarter of an hour later that Kern Gunten came in sight, tramping home to dinner.

The heavy face of the Swiss schoolboy was darkly clouded, and his eyes glittering under his knitted brows.

his knitted brows.

his knitted brows.
Since the exposure of his rascality, Guntenhad not had a pleasant time at Hillcrest.
Dicky Bird and the rest had left him in no doubt as to what they thought of him, and Gunten was a good deal of an outcast in bis school.

Gunten was a good deal of an outcast in his school.

"Stop!" called out Bob Lawless.
Gunten looked up quickly, and scowled at Frank Richards and Bob.

"Oh, you!" he exclaimed, halting.

"We want to speak to you!" said Frank.

"The want's all on your side, then!" snapped Gunten. "I don't want to speak to you!"

to you!"
"About Beauclerc?" said Frank.
"Hasn't he turned up yet?"

No. "Anything valuable missing when he

went?

Frank's eyes flashed.
"You rotter!" he ex he exclaimed hotly. "How

"You rotter!" he exclaimed hotly. "How dare you suggest—"
"Well, I don't see why he should levant for no reason!" said Gunten coolly. "He must have had a motive for going, I suppose."
"I guess that's a tall story. Do you think he's been raided off by Redskins, like kids in the old days?" grinned Gunten.
"No," said Frank, with his eyes fixed on Gunten's face searchingly. "I think he's been kidnapped, Gunten!"
"Wha-a-at?"
"And I think you had a hand in it!"

#### THE THIRD CHAPTER. Under Suspicion!

T ERN GUNTEN started back. For a moment his heavy, sallow face was pale and startled. Frank Richards was watching him.

Frank Richards was watching him, to see the effect of his words, hoping that Gunten would be taken off his guard, if he really had a guilty knowledge of Beaucler's disappearance.

And for a moment or two, at least, Frank Richards thought that his shot had struck home. Gunten stared at him, pale and startled and breathless.

But he recovered himself quickly.

bartled and breathless.

But he recovered himself quickly.

"I!" he repeated.

"Yes, you!"

"Oh, you're mad, I reckon!" said Gunten, peaking quite coolly now. "I've seen "Oh, you're mad, I reckon!" said Gunten, speaking quite coolly now. "I've seen nothing of Beauclerc, of course. If that's the yarn you're going to spin, Frank Richards, I warn you that it won't wash. It's not good enough, you know. You won't get any galoot in the valley to believe that your pal has been kidnapped. And as for me having a hand in it— Ha, ha! Do you think I've got him headed up in a molasses-barrel at the store?"

And Gunten laughed loudly.
"No, I don't think that," said Frank Richards quietly. "But he has been taken away by somebody, and I believe you know something about it."

"Oh, come off!"
"You deny it?" asked Frank, watching him.

"You deny it?" asked Frank, watching him. Gunten shrugged his shoulders.
"I guess it's not worth the trouble," he answered. "Tell that yarn, in Thompson, and you'll be langhed at. You know it, I reckon. How could I kidnap the fellow? He could handle me, I reckon."
"Alone, yes; but you could find help!" Gunten laughed again.
"He started for school vesterday morning.

Gunten laughed again.
"He started for school yesterday morning,
I hear?" he asked.
"Yes."
"And disappeared on the way?"
"That's and "

"That's so."
"Well. I reckon all Hillcrest can bear witness that I was in school as usual yesterday morning," said Gunten. "I wasn't late for morning, said Gunten. "I wasn't late for class, either. I was doing lessons with Mr. Peckover at the time your precious pal did the vanishing trick. And all Hillcrest can prove it."

"I don't doubt that," said Frank.
"Well, you fool, how could I have touched Beaucfere if I was in school at the time?" exclaimed Gunten savagely.

"Your friends-"What friends?"

"The half-breed traders," said Frank.
"They're a set of ruffians, and none too good for such a thing, as they were paid for the trouble.

Gunten drew a quick, hard breath. This time he showed unmistakably that the

This time he showed unmistakably that the blow had gone home. For a moment there was terror in his eyes.

"Oh, you're mad!" he gasped, at last. "If you think Louis Leronge and his crowd know anything of Beaucierc, you can go to their camp. The sheriff can search there if he chooses. I guess I've listened to enough of this foolery!"

The Swiss tramped on towards Thompson, with lowering brows.

Frank Richards and Bob looked at one another quietly.

another quietly.

"What do you think, Bob?"

"Blessed if I don't begin to think there's something in it," said Bob Lawless, in a low voice. "Gunten was scared—I could see that. Of course, it mightn't have been about Beau. He goes to the half-breeds' camp to gamble with them, and he wouldn't like his father to find that out. But it looks-

The Swiss had turned from the direct trail, nd was following a path towards the

timber.

"Come on!" said Bob abruptly.

The chums remounted their horses, and rode after Gunten.

Bob Lawless led the way, and Frank followed him without question. As he heard the hoof-strokes behind him, Gunten turned

the noot-strokes benind him, Gunten turned his head, scowling.

"Well, haven't you galoots finished chinwagging yet?" he demanded.

The chums did not reply. They passed Gunten, going on towards the timber at a slow trot.

The Swiss halted in the trail, staring after them with a black look.

He turned at last, and tramped away to-

wards Thompson.

Bob Lawless looked back, and saw the Swiss disappearing from view among the outlying cabins of the frontier town.

"I guess it's a cinch, Franky!" said the rancher's son.

"I don't see——"

"Where was Gunten going?" asked Bob.

"Blessed if I know. He's turned back," answered Frank.

Bob Lawless nodded. wards Thompson.

Bob Lawless nodded.

"Exactly! After seeing us, he started for the timber, and turned back when he found we were still on the seene," he said. "He didn't want us to spot where he was going, Franky. Think a little bit, old scout. We told Gunten that we suspected him of putting up his friends, the half-breeds, to kidnap the Cherub. What would he reckon after that? That Louis Leronge's camp was going to be visited and searched, eh?" "I suppose so!" "Exactly! After seeing us, he started for

going to be visited and searched, eh?"
"I suppose so!"
"And then he started for the timber," said
Bob grimly. "He was going to put Black
Louis on his guard, Franky—to warn him that
there was suspicion about."
Frank whistled.
"That's why I rode after him," continued
Bob. "I wanted to see whether he would
keep on—no reason why he shouldn't if he
didn't mind us seeing where he went. He
turned back, Franky! That means that he's

put off where he was going. Why should he put it off simply because we are around?" Frank Richards drew a deep breath.

He was going to warn the half-breeds,

Bob."
"I reckon so!"

"I reckon so!"

Bob turned his horse towards Thompson, and Frank followed.

"He's chucked it for this time," said the rancher's son. "But now he knows that we suspect the half-breeds he's sure to get to Leronge's camp to give him the tip to keep on his guard. That is, if we're right. We're going to make sure, Frank!"

"How?"
"By keening an eve on Conton."

"How?" as steep or Gunten," answered Bob. "If I'm right, he'll try to nip out to the timber, and speak to Leronge at the camp, before he goes to school this afternoon. If he does, that will settle it!" "But if he sees us—" "He won't see us! We'll get a snack of lunch at the Occidental, and then keep an eye open for Gunten—without his seeing us."

us."
Frank Richards nodded assent.
His suspicion of Gunten was strengthened
now, and it nearly amounted to a certainty.
If Gunten did seek the camp of the halfbreeds, it would be very nearly proof.

As they rode into Main Street, the chums caught sight of Kern Gunten again, entering the store. They rode on to the Occidental Hotel, where they had a hurried lunch.

In ten minutes they returned to their horses, and as they mounted, Bob Lawless made a gesture towards the store.

"Look—without turning your head, Franky," he said.

Frank glanced towards Gunten's store.

Kern Gunten stood in the doorway, watching them from the distance with a scowling brow.

brow.

"He wants to make sure we're clear off before he starts for the timber," said Bob, with conviction. "We'll let him see us off, Frank: and he won't know when we come back, I guess!"

The chums rode out of Thompson, on the trail towards the Lawless ranch, as if homeward bound.

ward bound.
Gunten, from the doorway of the store, watched them till they were out of sight.
Bob and Frank followed the trail for some distance, till they were out of view of Thompson, and then Bob led the way into the timber.
The Canadian schoolboy's face was very grim now. It was evident that he believed that they were on the track of the missing Cherub at last.

"I guess it's a cinch, Franky," he said. "If we can spot Gunten on the way to Leronge's camp, that will settle it; and he may even lead us to where the Cherub is at this minute, for all we know. But we've got to take care that he doesn't know we're trailing him."

reflected a few moments. Bob Richards waited in silence. In this matter it was for his Canadian cousin to take the

lead.

"There's two ways Gunten can get to the half-breeds' camp," said Bob slowly. "He can strike straight for it, through the forest from Thompson, or he can go round by Hill-crest way, as if he were going to school, and enter the timber by the trail on that side That's more likely, I guess, as he would risk less being seen. Then, if he found us hanging round, he could keep on straight for school, and leave it all till after lessons—see?"

school, and leave it all till after iessons—see?"
"Likely enough, Bob!"
"I reckon I'll keep watch on the Hillcrest side, and you can watch the town from the edge of the timber," said Bob. "I'll post you, Franky, as you're not so well up in wooderaft as I am, and then I'll mosey along Hillcrest way. If you see Gunten coming into the timber, you're to follow him without showing yourself. You can do that?"

without that?"
"You bet!"
"Come on, then!"
The chums rode through the timber at a good pace, till the trees and undergrowth were too thick for them to proceed on the companies.
"The chums rode through the timber at a good pace, till the trees and undergrowth were too thick for them to proceed on the companies."
"The companies the companies that the the

foot they plunged on through the

thickets.

It was not long before they reached the edge of the timber towards the town of Thompson, where a wide space of clearings

lay between the trees and the first buildings

"If Gunten comes this way, you'll spot him easily enough," said Bob Lawless. "Keep in cover, Franky!"

easily enough," said Bob Lawless. "Keep in cover, Franky!"

"Rely on me, old chap—"

"I'll get on Hillcrest way. I reckon Gunten's more likely to go round that way. Solong, old scout!"

And Bob disappeared into the trees, leaving Frank Richards to watch the buildings of Thompson and the paths that lay between the town and the weed. between the town and the wood.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Tracked Down!

OB LAWLESS lost no time. The chums had ridden out of Thompson to the south, and Hill-crest lay on the northern side of the town, so the Canadian schoolboy had a good distance to cover.

He followed a track through the wood, winding among the trees, finding his way

and whether the Swiss was, after all, simply

going to school.

But his doubts were soon set at rest.
Gunten slipped suddenly from the trait, and ran into the timber, moving so quickly, with the evident intention of escaping observation if any eye should chance to be on him.

on him.

Bob Lawless breathed quickly.

Gunten was out of sight now in the timber, but he knew where to look for the Swiss, and he glided silently through the trees to pick him up again.

In a few minutes he was near enough to

hear the sound made by Gunten in brushing through the thickets.

Bob made no sound as he moved along. He parted the bushes with care, and hardly the rustle of a twig followed his passage. Kern Gunten was not so cautious.

Having, as he believed, entered the timber without being observed, he was no longer in fear of watchful eyes, and he tramped on carelessly through the thick wood.

Bob Lawless hung upon his trail, now and



THE TRACKER CAUGHT! There was a sudden movement in the thicket and Black Louis sprang out on the schoolboy. Bob Lawless gave a startled cry, but before he could move a hand to defend himself the Mexican had closed with him, and he was hurled off his feet. (See Chapter 4.)

without a fault, though much of the timber was quite untrodden.

The camp of the half-breed traders was in the heart of the forest, and Bob did not pass within two miles of it, as he kept on his way.

on his way.

He came out of the timber at last on the side towards Hillcrest and Cedar Creek.

Keeping in cover, he scanned the open trail, which ran on either hand towards Thompson in one direction, and Cedar Creek School on the other, Hillcrest beyond it over the tree-clad hill, at the foot of which the trail wound.

tree-clad hill, at the foot of which the trail wound.

Bob was pretty well assured that if Gunten intended to pay a visit to the half-breeds' camp, he would come by that direction. He knew that the chums suspected him, and might be watching, and if he was seen leaving Thompson on that side, it would only be supposed that he was going to school as usual. to school as usual.

It was getting towards school-time now, and Bob, as he kept in cover and watched the trail, saw several fellows belonging to Hillerest pass by.

Hillcrest pass by.

Kern Gunten came in sight at last.

The traif was deserted, save for the Swiss, as he came tramping along, looking well about him.

Bob kept closer than ever in a thicket, watching the Swiss through the foliage.

As Gunten tramped on, the rancher's son wondered whether he had been mistaken,

then catching sight of the heavy figure of the Swiss, through openings in the bushes. Once or twice Gunten looked back, though

followed; but the Canadian schoolboy was not to be seen. One of the Redskins who had haunted the forest in ancient days could not have followed in the track of the Swiss more cautiously and cunningly.

Trackless as the timber was at this point, Bob was well aware of the direction the Swiss was taking; it led towards the camp of Black Louis and the North-West traders.

It was still possible that Gunten was simply It was still possible that Gunten was simply visiting Black Louis, as he had visited him before, to play poker with the half-breed; but Bob did not think so. Gunten was missing school for the purpose, and though he was a favourite with Mr. Peckover, he would not do that without a strong motive.

The conviction was growing in Bob Law-less' mind that Vere Beauclerc had been kidnapped by the half-breeds, at Gunten's instigation—and his heart was beating as they drew nearer and nearer to Black Louis' camp.

Gunten gave utterance to a sudden shrill whistle. It was answered from the half-breeds' camp, which was close at hand now. There was a sound of tramping feet in the timber, and Gunten stopped as a lithe, muscular, swarthy man came into view under The Popular.—No. 254.

"Three in the Toils!"—a Remarkable Backwoods Story in Next Tuesday's Bumper Issue!

It was Louis Leronge, the leader of the North-West traders.

"Corbleu! You have come, then," said Leronge, as Gunten stopped.
"Yes." gasned Gunten beathing the

Leronge, as Gunten stopped.

"Yes," gasped Gunten, breathing hard after his long tramp.

"Why?" asked the half-breed. "It was arranged that you should not come near the camp, in case of suspicion. This is an act of folly."

Bob Lawless was on his hands and knees now, creeping through the thickets with the caution of a lynx.

He could hear the voices ahead, and he knew that Gunten had met one of his associates on the border of the camp. As he moved silently through the thick undergrowth, Gunten's voice came to his ears.

"I didn't choose to come, Leronge. It was

"I didn't choose to come, Leronge. It was necessary. I came to warn you."
"Why?"

"Why?"
"They're searching everywhere for Beau-clerc," said Gunten, in a low, hurried voice, which came clearly enough to the ears of the Canadian schoolboy in the undergrowth, however. "Have you seen anything of

Black Louis shook his head.

Black Louis shook his head.

"No; they are not likely to trouble me."

"There was no trail—"

"Do you think I am a fool?" said the half-breed contemptuously. "The boy was roped in from a tree above the trail, and his horse ran on. It went against the grain to let the horse go; but if it had been taken, they would have thought of my crowd at once." The half-breed grinned. "The sheriff of Thompson came moseying along the other day to inquire after a missing horse. Well, we let the boy's horse escape, and roped him in to the tree. When we brought him along to the camp, one of us stirred the trail after we passed, leaving no sign that a lynx could have detected."

Gunten nodded.

could have detected."
Gunten nodded.
"But the others—we have had no chance at them yet," said Black Louis. "But do not fear. We shall finish our work."
Bob's eyes glittered.
The half-breed's words were enough to reveal the whole plot arranged between Kern Gunten and the ruffian from the North-West ranges.

"But you came to warn me, you say?' tinued Leronge. "Of what? There danger!" There is no

danger!"
"They suspect me."
"Mon Dieu! You?"
"Yes. I've seen Richards and Lawless this morning, and they suspect I had a hand in Beauclere's disappearance."
"You were at school, and could prove it."
"I guess so. But they suspect you, too. They know that I've been associated with you and so....." you, and so—"
"They told you so?" exclaimed the half-

Sure!"

Black Louis uttered an angry exclamation. "And you have come here? How do you

"And you have come here? How do you know you have not been watched?"
"I guess that's safe enough. I went out of town towards Hillcrest, as if I were going to school as usual, and cut into the timber from that side. You will have to be prepared for a visit to the camp—perhaps a search—" search-

search—"
Black Louis did not answer.
His head was bent, as if he were listening.
His black, penetrating eyes were fastened upon the thicket close at hand.
"What is it?" asked Gunten impatiently.
"Are you not listening to me, Leronge? I tell you, Bob Lawless may bring his father and the ranchmen to your camp to search for Vere Beauclere, and if they find him it may be a case of lynch law. What the thunder—"

thunder—"
Gunten broke off in angry astonishment
as the half-breed made a sudden spring past
him and plunged into the thicket.
"Leronge! What— Oh, gum!"
There was a panting cry from the thicket.
Gunten rushed after the half-breed, and
gave a startled cry as he saw Black Louis
and Bob Lawless locked in a fierce struggle, rolling in the herbage.
"Lawless!" panted Gunten.
less!"

"Bob Law-

less!'
Bob struggled furiously in the powerful grasp of the half-breed.
Black Louis' spring into the thicket had been so sudden, so unexpected, that Bob had had no chance of guarding against it. He did not know that the lynx-eared half-breed had detected his presence till Black THE POPULAR.—No. 254.

Louis was upon him. Gunten had not suspected; but to the half-breed, trained amid danger, bred to the forest and the plain, the slightest rustle of a twig was Louis plain, the slightest rustle of a twig was warning enough. His iron grasp was on the rancher's son now, and hard as Bob struggled, he struggled in vain.

The rufflan was too powerful for him. And Bob was underneath, his plucky resistance growing weaker. Not a word was spoken. Both the combatants needed all their breath for the struggle.

Gunten stood looking on, with dropping iaw.

he saw that Black Louis

But as he saw that Black Louis was gaining the upper hand, the fear died out of his face, and he grinned.

Bob Lawless lay helpless at last, on his back in the herbage, with the half-breed's knee planted on his chest, pinning him down. The swarthy face of Leronge grinned

down at him.
"The bird is snared, I guess," said the half-breed. "Gunten, there is a cord in my wallet —take it out and bind his hands while I hold

Gunten obeyed.

Gunten obeyed.

Bob Lawless, bound and helpless, lay in the grass. Black Louis rose, breathing hard after his exertions. He lighted a cigarette, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

Gunten and the half-breed exchanged a few words in a low voice, and then the Swiss disappeared through the trees, without another look at Bob Lawless. Louis Leronge stooped over Bob, picked him up as if he had been an infant, threw him across his shoulder, and bore him away through the timber towards the camp.

# THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Under the Shadow!

RANK RICHARDS watched, as the sun sank lower towards the far Pacific, and waited. He had watched in vain and wated. He had watered in van as the afternoon wore away, and he, wondered whether his chum, miles away through the timber to the north, had had better luck. He wondered, too, whether his suspicion of Gunten was well founded, after all, or whether he had spent the day upon

at wild-goose chase.

It was not till dusk was deepening over
Thompson and the town clearings that Frank

left his post.

left his post.

The long, weary afternoon had worn away without result—so far as Frank Richards was concerned. He wondered why Bob had not returned. Even if he had found Gunten and followed him, he should have rejoined his chum long since. Frank was puzzled, and he was not clear as to what he had better do; but it seemed useless to remain on the watch after dusk had fallen. If Gunten came then, he might pass unseen within a dozen vards. yards.

Frank determined to seek his chum towards Hillerest, but he soon found that that was impracticable. He was not equal to picking his way, surely, through the trackless timber as his Canadian cousin had done, and the fall of evening made the task cill ware impossible. His only resource done, and the lart of evening made the task still more impossible. His only resource was to return to his pony, and ride round by way of Thompson. He returned to where the horses had been tethered, and there he stopped to reflect again.

stopped to reflect again.

It was a good hour's ride, round by the trail, and through Thompson, to the Hill-crest side. And at any minute Bob Law-less might return for him. On reflection, Frank decided to remain with the horses. Bob Lawless was certain to return to 'that spot sooner or later, unless he was prevented, and it did not occur to Frank that he might be prevented.

Darkness cottled more deeply upon the forest

Frank Richards moved about uneasily, pacing the wood near the tethered horses, his uneasiness growing.

One by one the stars came out in the vault of heaven, glistening down through the foliage overhead.

Frank's disquietude increased with every

There would be anxiety at the ranch if he did not return with his cousin. Where was Bob?

was Bob?
Something had happened—but what?
With a shudder, Frank wondered if the
mysterious fate that had overtaken Vere
Beauclere had also overtaken the brave lad
who was searching for him.
He could bear the anxiety no longer, and
he returned to the spot where he had been

keeping watch for Gunten, in the faint hope of finding that Bob had returned there for him. But there was no sign of him; and then he hurried back to the horses, fearing that he had missed the rancher's son in his brief absence. But the tethered horses were still cropping the herbage undisturbed; Bob had not come. The hour was growing late now. Black darkness lay under the forest trees, broken only by glimmerings of starlight through the high branches.

Where was Bob?
Had he followed Kern Gunten to the halfbreeds' camp? Had disaster fallen upon him there? Careless of danger to himself, Frank would have started for the camp of Black Louis, to seek his chum, but the impenetrable forest baffled him. Somewhere in the gloomy shades of the timber the camp of the halfbreeds lay, but Frank knew that he could not have found it.

The hour was late, and he left the spot at last; it was useless to wait longer. There was a faint hope in his breast that Bob might have returned to the ranch, for some reason he could not guess. He left Bob's

was a faint hope in his breast that Bob might have returned to the ranch, for some reason he could not guess. He left Bob's horse tethered, cropping the grass, in case the rancher's son might yet return, and mounted his own steed.

With a heavy, anxious heart he rode back to the trail beyond the timber, and took his homeward way.

the train beyond the timber, and took his homeward way.

The trail to the Lawless Ranch ran up to the Beaucleres' shack, and as Frank passed the Beaucleres' shack, and as Frank passed the saw a light in the little building. He rode up to the door, and Mr. Beauclerc looked out. "Has Bob been here?" asked Frank breath-

"Lawless! No!" said the remittance-man.
"I have not seen him, at all events. But I have only returned an hour ago."

"And—and you've seen nothing of Bob?" asked Frank hopelessly.
"No."

Mr. Beauclerc stepped out of the shack, eyeing Frank curiously.
"Has anything happened to Lawless?" he

asked. "I—I

"Has anything happened to Lawless?" he asked.

"1—I don't know. He left me in the timber this afternoon, and he has not come back," muttered Frank. "But—but he may have gone back to the ranch—it's possible, at least. Good-night, Mr. Beauelerc."

"You will find him at the ranch, most likely my boy," said the remittance-man. "Good-night!"

He stepped back into the shack, and Frank's face was pale and set as he galloped on the trail towards his uncle's home. He clung to the hope that Bob might have returned to the ranch, but in his heart of hearts he knew that it was not so. The mysterious shadows of the forest hid Bob Lawless' fate as they hid the fate of Vere Beauclerc, and Frank Richards' heart was aching with fear and anxiety as he galloped homeward.

The lights gleaming from the ranch-house came in sight at last. A shadowy figure loomed up on the trail. It was Billy Cook.

"Oh, here you are, you young scallywags!" exclaimed the ranch foreman. "You've come back."

back."

"I've come back," said Frank heavily.
Billy Cook stared at him.

"Isn't Bob with you?" he demanded. "Old man Lawless is reg'ler mad at your staying out so late, I can tell you. Where's Bob?"
Frank's heart was like lead.

"He hasn't come home, then?" he asked.

"I guess not," answered Billy Cook. "And I guess hot," answered Billy Cook. "And I guess his poppa and moppa are anxious about him, and you. Where is he, if he hasn't come with you, the young scally-wag?"

wag?"
"I—I don't know. Something's happened
to him—just as it has to Beauclerc," answered Frank huskily.
"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated the rancnman.
Frank Richards rode on towards the ranch.
Bob Lawless had not returned. His faint,
lingering hope was scattered to the winds.
What, then, had happened in the dark shades
of the forest?
Frank Richards hardly dared to ask him-

Frank Richards hardly dared to ask himself that question, or to attempt to answer it. The ranch-house door was open, and the stalwart figure of Mr. Lawless stood there, framed in the light. And Frank Richards dashed on at a gallop, with black news for Bob's father!

THE END.

(Don't miss reading next week's roaring Wild West story of the chums of the Back-woods school.)