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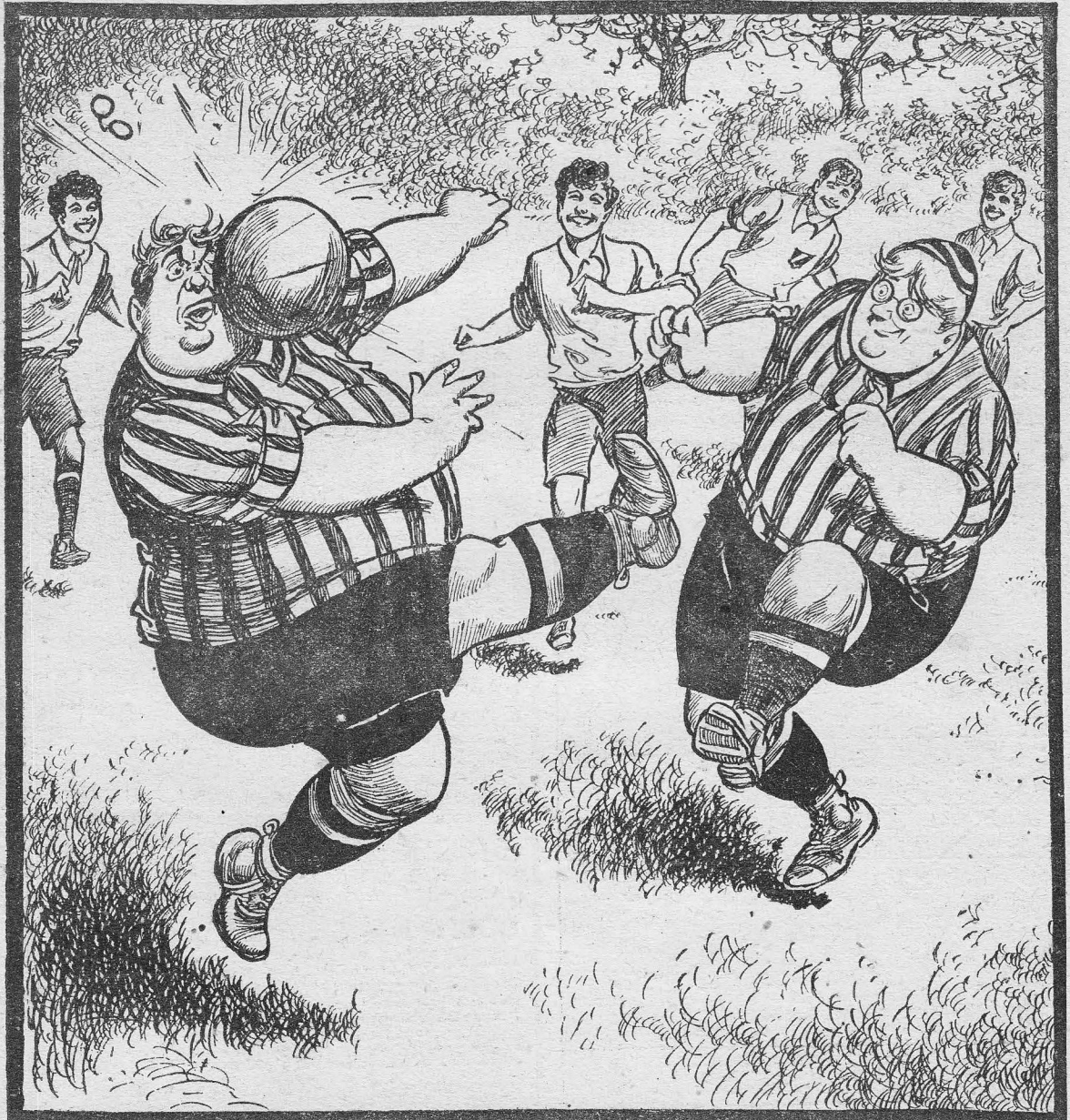
Week Ending
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No. 256.

Twenty-eight
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The POPULAR 2^D

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for Boys.

EVERY
TUESDAY



"BUNTER, THE CHAMPION!"

(An Amusing, Long, Complete Story of the Immortal Billy Bunter of Greyfriars in this issue. Don't miss it!)

RESCUED BY THEIR OLD ENEMY!

Frank Richards has reasons to bless the day he saved the life of Diaz, the Mexican schoolboy, for the latter comes upon the scene at a most opportune moment, when the Cedar Creek chums had given up all hope of rescue from the hands of the North-West Traders!

SAVED By the MEXICAN!



Another thrilling, long adventure of FRANK RICHARDS & Co., the famous chums of Cedar Creek Lumber School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**Pursuers on the Path!**

"SADDLE up!" Louis Leronge rapped out the words sharply.

There was a cloud upon the brow of Black Louis, the half-breed, and a fierce glitter in his dark eyes.

The camp of the half-breeds, on the slope of the stony hillside, was the scene of alarmed activity.

Frank Richards & Co., the kidnapped chums of Cedar Creek School, watched their captors with beating hearts.

Many a long mile lay between the three chums and their homes; and as the half-breed traders had pushed on farther and farther into the wilds of the North-West, their hopes had sunk lower and lower. But the alarm of Black Louis and his gang brought them renewed hope.

Louis Leronge stood upon a rock, staring back across the plain at the foot of the rocky hillside, a wide expanse of waving grass in the distance.

What he saw, the chums did not know; but it was evidently something that alarmed him.

"We're being followed!" muttered Frank Richards. "I don't know by whom—but that much is certain!"

Bob Lawless nodded. "The sheriff of Thompson, perhaps," he muttered.

"Or your father and the cowboys, Bob," said Vere Beauclerc.

"I guess Leronge is rattled, anyhow," said Bob, with a glance at the dark, anxious face of the half-breed leader. "They're taking the trail again as fast as they can. Here they come for us!"

The three schoolboys were taken to the mules, and lifted upon them, their arms still bound. It was impossible to resist, and the Co. submitted quietly; but their faces were hopeful now. At a word from Black Louis, the party moved on from the camp deeper into the hills.

The haste of the half-breed traders was evident; their prisoners did not need telling that pursuers were on the trail. But the hill-paths were difficult, and progress was slow.

The sullen, savage faces of the half-breeds showed how anxious they were. They had reason for anxiety, for at least half the horses in the party were stolen animals, and horse-thieves were severely dealt with in the Canadian West. It was probable that the

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packs on the mules contained a good many things that did not belong to Louis Leronge and his gang. And the presence of the kidnapped schoolboys was a danger to the rascals if they were run down.

The cavalcade came out at last through a wood of stunted pines upon a high slope far up the hills. Louis Leronge growled out an order, and the riders halted. The setting sun was behind the hills now, and shadows lengthened on the plain to the east. Leronge turned his horse and looked back from the height, his glance followed by the rest—with anxiety by the half-breeds, with hope by their prisoners.

Out on the plain, still a little distance from the hills, appeared a number of moving figures. They were too far off for recognition; but it was easy to see that they were horsemen, advancing at the gallop.

Frank Richards counted them, and made out twelve riders, strung out on the plain, with here and there a glint of sunlight on the barrel of a rifle. Bob Lawless muttered an exclamation.

"They're the ranchmen, Frank—I'm sure of it. I—I guess I can make out poppa, and Billy Cook—sure!"

"I can't make them out," said Frank. "But they look like ranchmen. And they're gaining, Bob!"

Bob Lawless chuckled softly. "I guess so," he answered. "We're moving like snails in the hills, and they're on the plain. They won't be very far behind when they strike the hills. I guess they've been putting on speed since they started."

"Do you think they'll pick up the trail in the hills?" asked Vere Beauclerc, in a low voice.

"I guess Billy Cook could do it, if he's there."

"But they'll have to slow down in the hills, as the half-breeds have done," said Frank.

"Sure! But they're not loaded up with pack-mules and stolen horses. I guess they'll gain on this gang!"

"Silence, there!" rapped out Louis Leronge savagely.

His hands dropped on a revolver in his belt as he looked at the kidnapped schoolboys. The savage half-breed seemed half-inclined to use the weapon.

The chums of Cedar Creek held their peace.

For some minutes Black Louis watched the party on the plain, growing clearer and clearer as they approached the low range of foothills.

He gave the word to ride on at last.

The pine-wood swallowed up the half-breeds again; but Frank wondered whether they had been visible to the pursuers while they remained on the eminence. It was most probable that they had been seen from the plain, and the looks of the half-breeds showed that they thought so.

The direction of the party was changed now. Leronge's object had been, in the first place, to push on through the foothills to the plain that extended as far as the upper Fraser River; but with the pursuers so close on his heels, he dared not take to the plains again. The half-breeds proceeded in a more northerly direction, keeping to the hills, evidently in the hope of throwing the pursuers off the track amid those rocky, barren recesses.

They plunged into a deep gulch, where the horses' hoofs left no trace upon the hard rocks, and followed its winding for a mile or more as the dusk of night settled deeper and deeper.

They did not halt with the fall of night, however.

The half-breeds dismounted, and led the horses and mules now by stony tracks amid great spurs of rock, choosing paths where little or no trace could remain of their passage.

Frank Richards felt his heart sink as he watched this manoeuvre. The most cunning trailer could not have picked up the track over the hard rocks that retained scarcely a sign.

The cloud had passed from Black Louis' brow now. It was plain that he felt himself secure at last.

The stars twinkled overhead, shedding a dim light upon the path of the half-breed traders. Ahead of them now lay a deep, shadowy ravine, too narrow for more than two to proceed abreast. Louis Leronge led his horse into the ravine, guiding the rest; it was plain that Black Louis knew every track in the range. Suddenly, from the dim shadows of the ravine, there came a sharp, ringing report.

Crack!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.**The Unseen Foe!**

CRACK! The rifle-shot started a thousand echoes among the rocks as it rang out with startling suddenness in the shadows.

Louis Leronge gave a sharp cry. His Stetson hat, struck by a bullet

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Coming none knew whence, spun from his head and fluttered away in the shadows.

"Pardien!"
The half-breeds halted instantly, with a clatter of hoofs and a whinnying from the startled horses.

"Cover!" tapped out Leronge.
Black Louis was kneeling behind a rock in a couple of seconds, his revolver in his hand. Somewhere in the darkness of the ravine ahead was the unseen rifleman, and the half-breeds, bunched together in the starlight, were exposed defencelessly to his fire.

With panting exclamations, the dusky ruffians scrambled behind their horses, or behind the boulders close at hand, clutching at their weapons.

Frank Richards & Co., mounted upon the mules with their arms bound, remained fully exposed. They could not help themselves, and the ruffians did not give them a thought. They sat with thumping hearts.

Who had fired the shot, they could not guess; it was as great a mystery to them as to Louis Leronge and his gang. It could not be one of the pursuers they had seen back on the plain; they were miles behind, even if they were still on the track. Who was hidden in the black shadows of the rocky ravine, rifle in hand. Unless it was some savage Redskin, the chums of Cedar Creek could not even guess.

They waited with tense nerves. On the mules, in the starlight, they were easy targets for a bullet, and every moment they expected to hear a rifle ring again.

Long minute followed minute, the silence broken only by the sigh of the wind in the pines and the anxious mutterings of the half-breed traders. Frank Richards spoke at last, in a whisper:

"Bob! What—what is it? Who is it?"

Bob Lawless shook his head.

"It beats me!" he whispered back. "I can't catch on at all. Some Redskin full of fire-water, perhaps, on the warpath."

"Then he would shoot at us," said Beauclerc. "He could pick us off like pigeons if he wanted to."

"I guess so, too. But if it's not that, I can't make it out."

They waited.
Frank strained his eyes into the darkness ahead, but he could see nothing save the dim outlines of great rocks and nodding pines.

Somewhere in the blackness the rifleman was hidden, but not even the flash of his rifle had been seen to betray him.

But the schoolboys' hearts were lighter now.

Whoever the mysterious marksman was, he was no foe of theirs—the half-breeds were his game. And a sudden thought came into Frank Richards' mind that made his eyes dance.

"I—I think I know!" he muttered, sinking his voice so that the half-breeds should not hear. "Bob—Beau—I think I've guessed who it is!"

"Who, then?" asked Bob, in wonder.

"Diaz!"

"The greaser of Cedar Creek?" exclaimed Bob.

"The Mexican," said Frank, with conviction. "I feel sure of it. He told me—he said that if anything happened to me, as it did to you two, he would know where to look for me—at the half-breeds' camp in the timber. He's looked for me there, Bob, and found the half-breeds gone, and followed. He said he would. It's the Mexican."

"By gum!" muttered Bob Lawless.

"That greaser!"

"I believe I know what's happened now," muttered Frank. "Ricardo Diaz found the half-breeds had broken camp in the timber, and he got word to the ranch and followed. He's ahead of the ranchmen, and he's here, Bob. I'm sure it's Diaz! Who else could it be?"

"If that's true, Franky, you did a good thing for all of us the day you fished him out of the water," said Beauclerc.

"Sure!" said Bob.

"They're moving again!" muttered Frank.

The half-breeds were on the move. They were creeping back among the rocks, leaving the horses and mules where they stood, in a frightened group. The chums wondered, for a few minutes, whether the scared ruffians intended to abandon the animals.

But that was not Black Louis' intention. They crawled away in cover. At a distance from the black, threatening opening of the

ravine they stopped, and Louis Leronge called to his horse.

The animal turned on the trail and trotted back, the rest following him. The mules upon which the schoolboys were mounted followed the horses. Then the half-breeds seized the animals, and led them away, trampling along swiftly and recklessly. In a few minutes the ravine was left behind.

By a new track, the north-west traders pursued their way—frequently glancing round them in the shadows. To their startled and uneasy eyes every crevice of the rocks was peopled by possible enemies.

Frank strained his ears to listen; and several times he thought he heard the clink of a falling stone in the rear, or the crackling of a bough. Bob whispered to him suddenly:

"Leronge is going back!"

Black Louis had slipped behind the rest, and as they went on the half-breed chief was left in the darkness in the rear.

Frank drew a quick breath.

"He's stopped—for Diaz!" he muttered.

"If it's Diaz—yes!"

"He's following us!" muttered Frank.

"I'm sure I hear him. And Leronge has heard him, too. Bob, I—"

He was suddenly silenced. Three of the half-breeds seized the three schoolboys, and dragged horse-cloths round their heads.

Frank gave a cry, but the heavy folds drowned it. The chums of Cedar Creek were silenced, while in the darkness behind Louis Leronge waited for the pursuer, with a deadly weapon in his hand.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Mexican.

FRANK RICHARDS' heart was beating almost to suffocation.

The heavy horse-cloth dragged round his face and held in thick folds by a strong hand, silenced him.

Over if his eyes were uncovered, and he could see, though he could not speak.

The savage face of the man who held him was close at hand, dark and threatening. The half-breeds had halted now, and were listening, with almost feverish intentness—as the schoolboys were listening—for some sound from the darkness behind.

Black Louis was there—to meet the mysterious pursuer as he followed. The prisoners knew with what intention.

Whether it was Ricardo Diaz, the Mexican schoolboy of Cedar Creek, or another, he was to perish there in the darkness, if the murderous knife of the half-breed leader could reach his heart.

The silence was terrible.

It seemed a century to Frank Richards and his comrades as the seconds passed on leaden wings.

Suddenly from the darkness there came a loud, shrill cry.

Frank's heart throbbled.

The foes had met, there in the darkness; and one had uttered that cry. But which?

Silence; and then the heavy beat of hurried footsteps. Then Black Louis came into view in the starlight, running—with blood streaming down his dusky face. A knife had slashed there, and the dusky cheek was laid open from mouth to ear.

"En avant!" panted Leronge.

It was not Black Louis who had been successful in that encounter.

He grasped his horse's bridle, and rushed the animal on, the whole cavalcade following in noisy confusion. For the rifleman whom the half-breed leader had so successfully ambushed was close behind now, and at every instant the ruffians expected to hear the rifle ring.

Crack!

Frank Richards gave a cry as the mule he was mounted upon pitched forward on its knees.

The schoolboy rolled from its back to the ground, unable to save himself, his arms still being secured by thongs of raw hide.

The mule's body quivered for a minute, and then was still. The animal was dead.

"Frank!" shouted Bob Lawless.

The horse-cloths had fallen away as the half-breeds took up their fight. Bob and Beauclerc turned their heads in an anguish of fear for their chum.

Frank dragged himself up on his knees.

"I'm not hit!" he shouted back.

With a clatter and a rustle the half-breed

gang rushed on, not a glance being thrown back at the fallen mule and Frank Richards.

The ruffians were too terrified by the fear of fire from behind, to give him a thought. In a few seconds the trampling crowd had vanished into the shadows, and Frank Richards was alone, with his arms bound, struggling to his feet.

Frank gazed round him with thumping heart. He felt sure that the pursuer was Ricardo Diaz, of Cedar Creek, but as he heard creeping footsteps, a thrill ran through him. He half-feared to see some savage copper face emerge from the shadows.

A lithe figure ran into the starlight from the rocks towards him. Frank gave a gasp of relief:

"Diaz!"

It was the Mexican schoolboy.

His black eyes were flashing to and fro, watchful as a cat's, and his rifle was ready in his hands.

"They've gone on," said Frank.

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"Muy bien!"

The Mexican let the rifle slide into the hollow of his arm, and drew a knife from his belt. In a few moments he had cut the English schoolboy free.

"Well met, seniorito!" he said, with a smile.

Frank grasped his hand and wrung it, his heart too full for words.

"You saved my life, seniorito, when I was your enemy," said the Mexican. "I have saved you—amigo mio. And the others—we shall save them!"

He was watching the shadows as he spoke, on the alert. He drew Frank into the cover of a thicket.

"Diaz!" panted Frank. "How—how did you—"

The Mexican laughed softly.

"Did I not tell you, seniorito?" he answered. "I warned you that your old enemy, Kern Gunten, was at the bottom of it all—that the half-breeds, his friends, knew what had become of your comrades. Did I not tell you, that if you disappeared also, I should look for you at the camp of the half-breeds?"

"But—but—"

"After leaving school that day I rode to the ranch—the Lawless Ranch," said Diaz. "I asked if you had returned. I knew you were seeking for your comrades, and I knew what was likely to happen."

"I fell into Black Louis' hands," said Frank. "I was watching their camp, and they found me!"

"I guessed it. When you did not return I waited at the ranch, and I told your uncle what I suspected. At midnight you had not returned. Senior Lawless called up the ranchmen, and I rode with them to the camp in the timber, and found that the birds had flown. The half-breeds were gone. Then Senior Lawless had no further doubt. The half-breeds trail was followed as far as the edge of the timber, but there it was lost, and the ranchmen waited for morning."

"But you—"

"I did not wait, seniorito. I took the chance. I knew that Black Louis came from the north-west, and that he was likely to return thither all the faster because he had prisoners with him. The route lay across the foothills to the Fraser River, and I pushed on. My horse is a good one. I did not lose time. In the morning I had missed their trail—if they left a trail—but the foothills were close at hand. Before noon I was in the hills."

"They stopped to rest in the afternoon," said Frank. "But these hills must run for miles. How did you find us?"

"I have good eyes, seniorito. In the afternoon, looking back from the hills, I saw the ranchmen on the plain."

"We saw them, too," said Frank. "That is why Leronge broke camp, and pushed on farther into the hills."

"I saw them coming on at a gallop, so I knew Billy Cook had found the trail," said Diaz. "As they were following the trail, the direction they were taking showed me where the half-breeds must have struck the hills."

"Easy for you, perhaps," said Frank, with a smile.

"I am used to the sierra in my own country," said the Mexican. "I could have found their camp, but that was not needed. I found them on the trail. I saw them halt on a height to look back and watch the

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ranchmen, and then I pushed ahead of them, keeping them in sight. It was easy enough, carambo! with the jangle and clatter they made!" He laughed. "I planned to stop them as soon as the ground gave me a chance, and when they came on to the ravine I was ahead of them and ready. Madre de Dios! I stopped them easily enough, and they turned back; and then—" "Leronge waited for you behind the rest," said Frank, with a shudder. "I guessed it was you, Diaz, and I would have called out, but they silenced me—"

"But I was prepared for such a trick!" grinned the Mexican. "I am used to the sierra, senorito. The half-breed could not catch me, but I caught him. He was in cover, watching, when I came on him from behind. He bears the mark of my cuchillo on his face."

"He was wounded," said Frank. "And he ran, dropping his revolver," said Diaz. "I have it here. He hardly saw me in the dark. He does not even know, I think, that it was a boy he had to deal with; he saw only my knife. Then I followed them again, and then it came into my mind to shoot your mule, senorito, and they were in too great a hurry to stop for you."

He peered from the thicket. "It was to save you that I came, because you saved my life, senorito. But if you choose, we will follow on and save your comrades. They are nothing to me, but to you—"

"They are everything to me," said Frank quietly.

"Vamos!" said the Mexican. "Take the revolver—you can use it?"

"Yes."

"It will be useful to you when we meet them. Come!"

Frank followed the Mexican from the thicket. The sounds of the retreating half-breeds had died away; and alone, Frank Richards would have been helpless. But the Mexican pushed on without a pause. His keen eyes, accustomed to the sierra in his native country, detected signs that were invisible to the English boy.

"Listen!" he muttered at last.

There was a faint sound from the rocks. "We are close upon them!" muttered the Mexican. "They cannot go fast here; the tracks are too rough for riding. I have left my horse not far away, but I shall not need it. They will never reach the plain with their prisoners!"

The Mexican's hand helped Frank as he stumbled on the rocks. Ahead of them the sound of the retreating half-breeds became plainer. Frank Richards followed the Mexican's guidance without question.

Diaz stopped at last, and dropped on his hands and knees, signing to Frank to follow his example.

"We are close now," he whispered. He pushed aside a mass of thick sasafra, and Frank followed his glance through the opening.

Before them the rocks sloped away abruptly, and, twenty feet below, the half-breeds could be seen, dim in the starlight, leading their horses. Bob Lawless and Beauclerc and one man alone being mounted, Ricardo Diaz pushed his rifle silently forward through the twigs of the sasafra, his black eyes gleaming along the barrel.

Frank Richards shivered. He touched the Mexican's arm lightly, and Diaz looked round.

"You will not—" muttered Frank.

The Mexican shrugged his shoulder. "I will not shoot to kill, if that is your fancy, senorito," he said.

Frank said no more.

The half-breeds, winding along the base of the rocky declivity, were within ten yards of the Mexican's rifle, as he looked along the barrel. Louis Leronge had a bandage tied across his dusky face, and over it his eyes glittered watchfully in the starlight. But he did not see the hidden rifle in the sasafra twenty feet above him. Crack!

Black Louis uttered a fearful cry, and pitched forward on his face, but he was on his feet again in a moment. His right arm hung useless by his side.

"Fire!" he shouted hoarsely. "Fire!"

But the half-breeds were not thinking of using their rifles. The sudden shot from above struck panic among them, and, leaving the horses and mules they were leading, they ran. There was a furious trampling

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of feet, as the ruffians disappeared among the rocks. Black Louis shrieked out oaths and threats, but they did not turn their heads.

Several of the horses, whinnying with fear, broke away, and went scrambling wildly into the darkness, the rest gathering in a frightened bunch round the pack-mules. Louis Leronge made a step or two after his men, and then turned towards the mules, drawing a hunting-knife with his left hand.

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc saw him coming, and they knew what he intended, and their hearts sickened. But at the same moment two nimble figures came bounding down the rocks. A rifle-butt just missed the head of Black Louis, and the wounded half-breed dodged, and fled after his men.

"Frank!" yelled Bob Lawless.

"Diaz!" muttered Beauclerc.

The Mexican's long, sharp cuchillo slashed through their bonds. The chums of Cedar Creek were free.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Saved!

"QUICK!" muttered Diaz. He pulled Frank Richards among the boulders, dragging him down. A shot rang out, and a bullet whizzed over them.

Bob and Beauclerc followed them quickly.

Crack, crack, crack!

The half-breeds were firing now at random. But some of the bullets came very close.

"Follow me!" muttered the Mexican.

He led the way among the rocks, moving bent half-double, to keep in cover. The three chums followed him without a word.

Crack, crack, crack!

From the darkness the hurried fire of the half-breeds pursued them, and bullets flattened on the rocks round them.

"Keep low!" muttered Bob.

Crack, crack!

"They're following us!" exclaimed Vere Beauclerc.

"Carambo! Let them follow!"

The four schoolboys scrambled on, stumbling among the rugged boulders, gasping for breath.

Behind them now were sounds of pursuit.

Black Louis succeeded in rallying his men.

Diaz halted at last.

The four had reached a high ledge on the hillside, with sheer rising rock on one side and an abrupt, broken slope on the other.

"There is cover here, senoritos!" said Diaz. "Let them follow farther if they dare!"

The schoolboys, breathless and fatigued, sank down among the boulders on the ledge. Diaz lay, with his rifle before him, in cover, watching the slope, upon which the starlight fell more clearly.

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"Let them follow us!" he repeated.

There was a trampling of heavy boots on the rocks, and Black Louis came in sight on the slope below, with another half-breed close behind. The retreat of their unknown pursuer had encouraged them, and they had taken up the chase in their turn.

Diaz grinned over his rifle. The half-breeds had a hundred yards of open ground to cross to reach the high ledge, and his rifle commanded every inch of it. And over the hills now the moon was rising, and the light was growing clearer.

Tramp! Tramp!

"Corblen! They are here—"

The voice of Black Louis came to the ears of the schoolboys on the ledge.

Crack!

Diaz's rifle rang out the next moment. The bullet struck Louis Leronge in the shoulder, and the half-breed reeled and fell.

"Well hit!" muttered Beauclerc.

A howl of pain came to their ears. Diaz rammed in a fresh cartridge, but it was not needed.

Black Louis, on his hands and knees, was crawling away. His companion had already vanished.

Diaz laughed softly.

"Basta!" he said. "They have had enough senorito!"

The Mexican of Cedar Creek was right.

In the distance the sounds could be heard of the half-breeds leading away the horses and mules, hidden by intervening rocks and thickets from the eyes of the chums of Cedar Creek.

Ricardo Diaz glanced at his companions.

"They are going!" he said.

"Let them go, and thank Heaven for it!" said Frank Richards.

"And we owe our liberty to Diaz!" said Beauclerc, in a low voice.

"I guess we sha'n't forget this Diaz!" said Bob Lawless.

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"It was for Francisco's sake," he said.

"He saved my life."

"Then we owe it to you, Francisco, my pippin!" grinned Bob Lawless, and Frank Richards smiled.

Bob Lawless stretched himself on the ground, resting his head on his arm. Frank and Beauclerc followed his example. The three chums were tired out, though while the excitement had lasted they had not thought of fatigue. The Mexican watched them with a smile.

"Sleep!" he said. "I will keep watch."

"I guess we'll take it in turns, Diaz. You wake me in an hour."

"Si, senorito!"

In a couple of minutes the chums of Cedar Creek were fast asleep. The Mexican, who seemed tireless, remained watchful, his rifle across his knees, keeping watch and ward.

Diaz did not awaken his companions, and they were too fatigued to wake of their own accord. The sun was climbing the foothills when Frank Richards opened his eyes at last.

Then he started to his feet.

"Diaz!" he exclaimed reproachfully. "You have kept watch all night!"

"It is nothing to me, senorito!" said the Mexican, with a smile. "You are hungry?"

"Yes, rather!" said Frank, with deep feeling.

Diaz turned out his wallet. Bob Lawless and Beauclerc rose, and his corn-cake and dried ham were shared out, and never had the chums of Cedar Creek enjoyed a meal with so keen an appetite.

"And now," said Bob Lawless, "we've got to find poppa. He's somewhere in these hills with the ranchmen."

Diaz tapped his rifle.

"If they are within hearing of my gun, it is easy enough," he said.

"Good!"

"Fire away!" said Frank Richards, with a smile.

The Mexican discharged his rifle into the air, and loaded and fired in quick succession a dozen times.

Then for a considerable time he fired a shot at intervals.

He held up his hand at last.

"Someone has heard!" he said.

There was a rustling in the thickets at the foot of the rocky slope. Bob Lawless looked over the boulders, and shouted:

"Hallo!"

Commencing in Next Week's Issue—"The Night Rider!"



HOLDING THE ENEMY AT BAY! As the half-breeds came in sight over the edge of the rocks Diaz pulled the trigger of his rifle. Crack! The bullet struck Louis Leronge in the shoulder, and the half-breed reeled and fell backwards. "Well hit!" muttered Beauclerc. (See Chapter 4.)

"Hallo, you 'uns!" came an answering shout. "Is that young Lawless' toot?" "I guess so, Billy Cook!" chuckled Bob. "Waal, I swow!"

The burly figure of Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, came into view from the thickets.

"Come on!" exclaimed Frank Richards. The four schoolboys ran down the rocky slope and joined the cattlemen. Billy Cook stared at them.

"Waal, I swow!" he repeated. "So you're here, eh? And you, young Dago—how did you come hyer?"

"Diaz rescued us," said Frank Richards quietly.

"Waal, carry me hum to die!" ejaculated Billy Cook. "When I missed Diaz I calculated he had mosseyed off home. And he was ahead of us all the time! Jerusalem!"

"Is poppa with you?" asked Bob. The cattlemen nodded.

"Sure!" he answered. "Old man Lawless and a dozen of the boys are camped in a gully a mile from here. I reckon we was waiting for dawn, to pick up the trail of those goldarned half-breeds. Then we heard the firing, and I humped along this way to scout. I never calculated I should find you 'uns hyer, though! Jerusalem!"

Billy Cook led the way, and the schoolboys followed him through rocks and thickets to the gully where the ranchmen were camped. "Hyar they are, boss!" he roared.

Mr. Lawless came running to meet his son. "Bob! And Frank! Thank Heaven for this!" he exclaimed.

"Here we are, dad! Turned up like the bad penny!" said Bob Lawless, with a grin. "But for Diaz, though, goodness knows where we should be! Black Louis was taking us to the North-West to sell among the Yukon Indians!"

The rancher's brows knitted. "The scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "Where is he now?"

"Lit out, I guess!" answered Bob. "He's got a bullet in him somewhere that Diaz gave him, and I reckon he doesn't want any more!"

The rancher listened quietly to his son's account of what had happened. Then he led to his men to saddle.

"Black Louis must be brought to justice, eh?" he said. "We will give up the lot to it, anyhow! But, since you are

free, I shall not follow the rascals farther than these hills."

And Frank Richards & Co. rode with the ranchmen in the hunt for Black Louis and his gang.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Home Again!

THE sun was sinking when the ranchmen turned their horses homewards across the plain.

The half-breeds had not been found.

The pursuers had pressed them close, and they had abandoned their horses and the pack-mules and escaped on foot into the recesses of the hills. It was not much use to seek to track them out, as they had evidently separated. The ranchmen roped in the horses and mules—most of which were stolen property—and Black Louis and his men were left to go their way. They were never likely to seek the vicinity of the Thompson Valley again.

Frank Richards & Co. started on the homeward ride in cheery spirits. The home they had hardly hoped to see again was drawing closer at every bound of their horses on the grassy plain.

"I guess the old folks at home will be glad to see us," Bob Lawless remarked. "But there's one that won't, and that's Kern Gunten! There's a big reckoning for that galoot to pay!"

"And he shall pay for his rascality this time!" said Frank Richards. "We've got enough proof that he set on the half-breeds to kidnap us!"

"Heaps!" said Bob. "I guess I'm anxious to see Gunten!"

It was midnight when the Lawless Ranch was reached. On the way Vere Beauclerc had left his chums in the timber to return to his father's shack on the creek, and relieve the anxiety of the remittance-man. Ricardo Diaz went on to the ranch, and stayed till the morning. Early in the morning, however, he saddled his horse.

"We'll see you again at school to-morrow," said Frank Richards, as he shook hands with the Mexican.

"Si, seniorito!" said Diaz, with a smile. And he rode away.

"I guess that greaser is the real white article, after all, Franky," Bob Lawless

remarked thoughtfully. "I reckon there's plenty of good in him, though I couldn't see it at first."

"One of the best—in his own way," said Frank. "I know I shall always be friends with him after this."

"Same here!" assented Bob.

That morning Mr. Lawless rode over to Thompson to call at Gunten's store in the town. Frank Richards and Bob waited with some curiosity for his return.

There was plenty of evidence that Kern Gunten was at the bottom of the kidnapping affair which had ended so disastrously for the kidnapers, and this time it was determined that the rascally Swiss should be brought to justice.

When the rancher was seen riding home his son and nephew ran to meet him. Mr. Lawless' brows were knitted.

"What about Gunten, poppa?" asked Bob. "Gone!" answered the rancher laconically. "Gone?" exclaimed Frank.

"Yes. Mr. Gunten says that he's gone on a visit to relatives at Vancouver, and isn't expected back for weeks. I guess myself that he's got wind that his rascality is known, and his people have sent him away," said Mr. Lawless. "His father was looking pretty sick. It's a hard blow for him, though I don't like the man. So I told him—"

Mr. Lawless hesitated a moment. "I told him, my lads, that so long as Kern Gunten doesn't come back to the Thompson Valley nothing more will be heard about the matter from us. So long as the young rascal keeps away we can afford to leave him alone, and let him land himself in prison some day in his own way."

"I guess that's all right, poppa!" said Bob. And Frank Richards nodded assent.

The next day Frank Richards & Co. were back at Cedar Creek School, and the interrupted thread of their school life was taken up again. They wondered sometimes whether they would see Kern Gunten again; but the days passed, and the rascally Swiss was soon dismissed from their minds.

THE END.

(Another top-hole story of Frank Richards & Co., the chums of Cedar Creek, next week.)

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Look Out for "Chunky's Great Idea!"—Next Week!