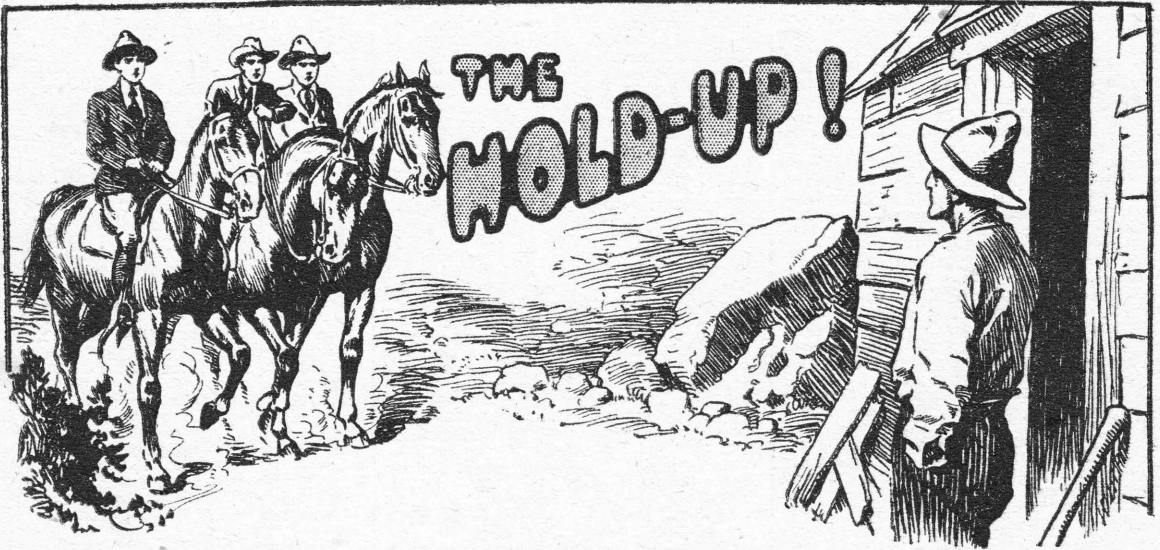


THE TERROR OF THE THOMPSON VALLEY AGAIN!

The Chums of the Canadian Lumber School come again at grips with Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones, the notorious desperado from over the border, in an unexpected manner. Then there's some excitement and thrill. You must not miss this full-of-punch yarn!



Have you met Frank Richards & Co., the Cheery Chums of the School in the Backwoods? Here they are again, in another great Wild West Thriller!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**Poker Brown!**

TUCKER'S Tailings are taken!" Chunky Todgers imparted that peculiar piece of information in the playground at Cedar Creek School.

Frank Richards & Co. were chatting in the playground, waiting for the bell to ring for morning classes, when Chunky joined them. The chums of Cedar Creek were discussing a subject which was just then uppermost in the minds of most of the inhabitants of the Thompson Valley—the deeds of Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones. The Californian outlaw, who had lately "located" in that section of British Columbia, was still at large, and no one had yet succeeded in earning the five hundred dollars offered as a reward for his apprehension.

But as Chunky Todgers imparted his information, Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones was dropped as a topic, and the three chums looked inquiringly at Todgers—Frank Richards in considerable surprise.

"Tucker's Tailings!" repeated Frank.

Chunky nodded.

"It's taken!" he said.

"What the merry dickens are Tucker's Tailings?" demanded Frank Richards, half suspecting that the fat Chunky was pulling his leg.

Frank had been some time at Cedar Creek now, but he still had some things to learn that were not included in the school curriculum.

But Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc evidently understood, for they exclaimed together:

"Who's taken it?"

"A tenderfoot, I reckon," answered Chunky. "He's built a shanty near the old mine, and he's working on the tailings. Must be green!"

"But what—" began Frank.

Bob Lawless grinned.

"What's what?" he asked.

"What on earth are tailings? And why should they be taken?" asked Frank. "And what is Chunky driving at, anyhow?"

"Oh, you're a greenhorn!" said Todgers.

"I guess you are still a little green, Franky," said Bob Lawless. "Tucker was a miner, who sunk some thousands of dollars in a mine near Thompson, years back. He had what he thought was a regular bonanza; but it was a quartz proposition, and he had to get machinery up from the railway. He found some gold, too, but I reckon it never paid his outlay, for he chucked up the mine and moved on, after a time."

"But the tailings—"

"The tailings are the stuff left over. You'll find stacks of tailings round any old mine."

"Oh, I see! After the ore's crushed, and the gold extracted?"

"You've got it!"

"What use are the tailings?" asked Frank.

"None at all."

"Then why should they be taken? Chunky says that Tucker's Tailings have been taken."

"Listen, my infant, and be enlightened!" said Bob, with a laugh. "When the gold's extracted, they don't extract the lot; there's always some left. You can't get out the last ounce. But every improvement in the mining machinery gets out more and more. Tucker didn't have the latest machinery, naturally. He probably left a good deal of pay-dirt behind. It's often happened that the tailings of an old mine have been worked at a profit by a galoot coming along with later dodges in machinery. Some pilgrim has spotted Tucker's Tailings, and has pegged them out as a claim, to try for the gold Tucker left in them—see?"

"I see!" said Frank.

"It's been tried before," went on Bob. "I've heard of half a dozen galoots who have squatted on Tucker's Tailings, and some of them have washed out some dust. But I reckon that if Tucker left much in the tailings, it's been got out before this."

"Then the new man is only wasting his time?" asked Frank.

"Sure!"

"Must be a greenhorn!" said Chunky Todgers, with a sniff. "I hear that it's a man from over the Line. He's got a room at the Occidental Hotel in Thompson, and rides out every morning to Tucker's Tailings to work."

"What's his name?" asked Bob, evidently interested in the stranger who was trying his luck on the tailings of the abandoned mine.

"Brown," answered Chunky. "He's signed himself Amos Brown in the register at the Occidental; but the galoots have nicknamed him Poker Brown. He plays every evening in the poker-room at the Occidental."

"And does he make anything out of the tailings?" asked Frank Richards.

Chunky grinned.

"I guess not; but he seems pretty flush of money, so I suppose he brought some dorecks with him to sink in the mine, like poor old Tucker. Still, he sticks to work. He's out at the mine every day, and sometimes stays there all night at the shanty. He don't look much like a galoot to work;

but he does stick to it. I've seen him lounging about the Occidental, though. He looks a good deal like a sport."

"A sport?" repeated Frank.

"Short for sportsman!" explained Bob, with a smile.

"Hunting?" asked Frank.

"Ha, ha! Nope! A sportsman out here isn't a merry Nimrod. It means a man who plays cards for a living."

"Oh, a gambler!"

"Correct! But they like to call themselves sports; it sounds nicer. It's quite possible that he makes his way at poker, and has pegged out a claim to keep up appearances. Sports ain't popular here, of course, but Chunky says he sticks to work."

"Every day," said Chunky. "He's had the tailings a week now, and he hasn't missed a day."

"That looks like work. Well, I hope he'll find a fortune in Tucker's Tailings!" said Bob Lawless, laughing.

"Not likely!" remarked Vere Beauclerc. "But if he should strike anything, it's rather a dangerous place for him, with Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones hanging about the valley. It's a couple of miles from the town, with no other shanty anywhere in sight."

"I don't reckon he's heard of Jones," said Bob. "That bulldozer is a new thing in this section, too."

Beauclerc nodded.

"It might be a good idea to ride over and see him," he said. "Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones attacked my father at the shack because he had some money there, and he's tried to rob Cedar Creek. He would be quite capable of shooting down a lonely miner if he thought there was gold in the shanty."

"Good idea!" said Frank Richards. "We can tell him how the matter stands, as we've come in contact with Jones. He mightn't pay any attention to the talk of people in Thompson who haven't seen the man."

"But we could give him the straight goods," said Bob Lawless, with a nod. "I reckon that's a good idea, Cherub. We'll ride over to the tailings after school."

"There goes the bell!"

The Cedar Creek fellows trooped off towards the school-house, Frank Richards & Co. having quite decided to visit Tucker's Tailings after school and put the "tenderfoot" on his guard against the outlaw. They were rather curious, too, to see the "pilgrim," who was trying his luck on the tailings as a good many pilgrims had done before him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

At Tucker's Tailings!

CEDAR CREEK SCHOOL had less than half its usual attendance that day. The raid on the school by Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones a few days before had caused a great deal of alarm. Mr. Stimney was still suffering from the wound he had received on that occasion, and his class was taken by Mr. Shepherd, the other assistant master. But the class was not large, for many of the younger pupils of Cedar Creek were being kept at home for the present. Even Miss Meadows' class was less than half its usual number.

Frank Richards & Co. were coming to school as usual, but they carried shot-guns on their saddles. For some days Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones had not been seen, but no one supposed that he had "vamoosed" from the section. And where and when he would next put in an appearance was rather an anxious question.

It was a new experience for the Thompson Valley to be the scene of an outlaw's depredations, and there was alarm in many homesteads. There were a dozen or more of the North-West Mounted Police in the valley, searching for the outlaw, but so far they had not been successful.

The discovery had been made that the outlaw's red beard and hair were a disguise, and that in his proper person he probably presented a very different appearance. Without his disguise he might have been passed in the street unrecognised, and that, of course, made the task of tracking him down more difficult. There were always plenty of strangers coming up the valley, and any one of them might have been Mr. Jones, of California, minus his disguise.

During lessons at Cedar Creek the school gates were now kept barred, and Black Sam, the stableman, kept his gun handy. Under those conditions, a good many of the parents naturally considered it advisable to keep their boys and girls at home.

Nobody supposed that such a state of affairs would last long. The outlaw was certain to be run down sooner or later. But it was indubitable that he had not been run down yet.

There were a good many at Cedar Creek who were thinking as much of Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones as of their lessons that day; but Miss Meadows was very lenient with her class.

She only chided Chunky Todgers gently when that bright youth, asked for the name of the victorious general at the Battle of Quebec, answered absent-mindedly: "Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones!"—a reply that made the class chuckle.

After lessons Frank Richards & Co. mounted their horses for the ride to Tucker's Tailings.

Chunky Todgers declined to join the party; he declared that he was wanted at home to help on the farm before dark. The chums of Cedar Creek grinned as they left Chunky on the trail and rode away. The fat Todgers was not usually keen on helping on the farm, and they could guess that he had a dislike for lonely places while Mr. Jones, of California, was at large. And Tucker's Tailings was a lonely place.

Bob Lawless was the guide as the three schoolboys rode away from the Thompson trail, past the placer claims on the creek.

The original Tucker had located his mine a couple of miles out of Thompson, in the hills, and the way was not marked by a trail. Here and there in the earth the schoolboys discerned tailings.

Bob Lawless raised his riding-whip and pointed at last.

"There's the shebang!"
The "shebang" was a roughly built cabin of logs and lumber, backed against an almost perpendicular cliff.

Close by were the "tailings" which Mr. Brown was working.

The lumber from the old mine showed signs of pick and shovel, but it did not look as if much work had been done there.

There was no smoke rising from the pine-wood chimney of the shanty, and it looked deserted.

The chums looked round in vain for Mr. Brown.

There were still some hours of daylight, but he was not to be seen at work on the tailings. This did not quite agree with Chunky Todger's statement that he left Thompson every morning, and returned every evening, putting in a hard day's work on his claim.

The chums dismounted, tied their horses to a stump of a tree, and walked up to the cabin.

Bob Lawless gave a loud rap on the door with his riding-whip.

"There was no answer from within.

"I guess the galoot's not here," said Bob. "We've had our ride for nothing, then," remarked Beauclerc. "According to Chunky's yarn, he should be here."

Bob Lawless nodded.

"The cabin's locked up," he said. "Looks a pretty strong lock, too. He must have got that from a distance; they don't make those locks in the valley. May as well wait a bit, as we're here. If he's as industrious as Chunky has heard, he can't have knocked off work so early. He may be hanging about somewhere."

The chums returned to their horses and waited.

They had ridden a good distance, and were indisposed to return without having seen the new squatter at the tailings.

But the sun sank lower towards the far Pacific, and when an hour had passed there was still no sign of Mr. Brown.

Bob Lawless gave a grunt of annoyance.

"I reckon we've come here for nothing," he said. "The ornery galoot has knocked off early to-day, that's clear!"

"Bother him!" said Frank.

"Never mind. We've had a pleasant ride, and we'll have another home," said Beauclerc. "If you want to see him we can drop in at Thompson on the way home, and see him at the Occidental."

"Well, I admit I'm rather curious about the galoot," said Bob, "and it would be only good-natured to give him the office about the bulldozer Jones, as we know what kind of a hair-raiser he is. Let's!"

And the chums rode into Thompson on their way back from Tucker's Tailings. They dismounted outside the Occidental Hotel, which was the general meeting-place of the better class of Thompson's citizens in the evening. The rougher variety forgathered at the Red Dog Saloon.

Beauclerc uttered a slight exclamation as he tethered his horse, and Frank Richards looked at him.

"My father!" said Beauclerc in a low voice.

Mr. Beauclerc, the remittance-man of Cedar Camp, was just entering the hotel. He did not observe the schoolboys, but passed in without glancing round. Frank Richards & Co. followed him in, and Beauclerc was moving quickly forward to speak to his father, when he stopped suddenly. Lascelles Beauclerc had opened the door of the poker-room and gone inside, closing the door after him.

Beauclerc stopped dead.

There was only one thing the remittance-man could want in the card-room, and that was a game of poker with some of the other habitués. At one time Mr. Beauclerc had been a frequent evening visitor there, in the days when he had spent his remittances as fast as they arrived, in reckless riot. But those days were over—at least, his son had firmly believed that they were. It was a shock to Beauclerc to see his father going into the poker-room.

He stood quite silent.

Frank Richards understood well enough the feelings of the remittance-man's son—his fear that his father was falling back into the old, evil ways. But there was nothing Frank could say, and he was uncomfortably silent.

"I will wait outside for you fellows!" said Beauclerc abruptly.

He quitted his chums before they could speak.

"Poor old Cherub!" murmured Bob Lawless, with a commiserating glance after his chum.

"Mr. Beauclerc may be here for—for some reason!" muttered Frank.

Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess his reason looks clear enough!" he answered. "It's the old game! Poor old Cherub! But we came here to see Brown. Come into the office."

Frank and his Canadian cousin entered the office and asked for Mr. Brown. They knew the hotel clerk, who was a brother of Dick Dawson of Cedar Creek School.

"I guess he hasn't come back from the tailings," said Dawson.

"Oh!" ejaculated Frank.

"Mighty industrious galoot—Mr. Brown!" grinned Phil Dawson. "Out he goes every morning on his horse, and back he comes nearly every night. Never heard of a

tenderfoot puttin' in such a hefty day's work before!"

"But he's not at the tailings now," said Bob.

"I guess he is."

"But we've been there!"
"Well, he hasn't come in yet."

Frank and Bob left the office rather puzzled, and rejoined Beauclerc in the street.

"Seen Brown?" asked Beauclerc.

"Nope! He hasn't come in! It's queer!" said Bob. "We know he's not at the mine, but he hasn't come home to the Occidental. Gone off somewhere on some pesky business, I suppose. Blow the man!"

And the chums rode on.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Poker Brown at Home!

THERE was a thoughtful, almost sombre expression on Vere Beauclerc's face when he joined his chums on the trail next morning, going to school.

Frank and Bob guessed easily enough what was the cause of it.

The fear that his father, after so long a spell of reform, was slipping back into the old ways, haunted and troubled poor Beauclerc.

It was not for him to judge his father or to remonstrate or advise, and his affection for the unfortunate man was too strong for him to wish to do so. But he was troubled and distressed. It was not a matter in which his chums could help him; but it troubled them, too, to see Beauclerc in distress, and Frank Richards ventured upon the subject at last.

"Look here, Beau!" he began.

"Yes, Frank?"

"You're worrying about your father."

Beauclerc coloured deeply, and did not answer.

"I know it's not my bizney, old chap," said Frank quietly; "but I can see it. Look here, Mr. Beauclerc may have had a dozen reasons for dropping into that dashed card-room last night. You're an ass to give it a second thought. I really think that."

Beauclerc's lips quivered.

"I can't help being afraid," he muttered.

"My father is one of the best men breathing, but under the influence of others he—he—you understand. He's not been to the Occidental for a long time, that I know of, and he's never mentioned to me that he's going there again. He was not home till midnight last night—"

"You ought to have been asleep then."

"I couldn't sleep."

"But if you asked him—"

Beauclerc shook his head.

"He did not say a word to me this morning, and I did not mention that I saw him last evening," he said. "It's odd, if—if—"

But most likely you're right, Frank. I'm a fool to worry!"

And Beauclerc endeavoured to smile cheerfully; but it was rather a failure. He could not drive the doubt from his mind. The usual remittance from England had arrived only a week before, and the boy knew what the remittance-man was only too likely to do when there was money burning in his pocket.

Frank did not pursue the subject; it was too painful to his chum. The trio were rather silent when they arrived at Cedar Creek.

They found the playground in a buzz.

Chunky Todgers rushed up to them, his fat face full of excitement.

"You fellows heard?" he gasped.

"Heard what?"

"About Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones!" gasped Chunky.

"Oh! Is he on the warpath again?"

"Yes, rather—you bet!" said Chunky breathlessly. "I heard it in Thompson this morning! He's raided a claim down the Thompson river, and shot a Chinaman and wounded a white man! He's vamoosed with a thousand dollars' worth of dust! What do you think of that?"

"My hat!"

"News got into Thompson last night!" said Chunky. "It was at the Spotted Dog claim—that's a mile out of the town. It happened about six. I say, you galoots might have run into him!"

"We didn't," said Frank. "We were at Tucker's Tailings at six."

"Did you see Brown?"

"No; he wasn't there."

"We're going to see him again to-day," said Bob. "We'll go after morning lessons, and catch him at work on the tailings."

There was a thrill of excitement in Cedar Creek School that morning, and it was not easy for Miss Meadows to keep her pupils' attention upon school work.

The latest outrage by Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones was the one thought in all minds, and the one topic on all tongues. The attendance at the school was even smaller than the day before.

After morning lessons very few of the fellows went outside the school fence. But Frank Richards & Co. mounted their horses to ride to Tucker's Tailings. They had provided themselves with sandwiches, for there would be no time to return to the school for dinner. The ride was a long one from Cedar Creek.

They rode at a good pace, and came in sight of the shanty on the old mine at last. The door of the shanty was open now, and a pick was standing against the wall outside.

"Mr. Brown's at home to-day!" remarked Bob Lawless.

"Looks like it."

"He's watching us from the window," said Vere Beauclerc quietly.

"What?"

"Look at the window."

Bob Lawless and Frank glanced at the little, unglazed window of the shanty in surprise. The shutter was open, and they caught a glimpse of a clean-shaven, dark-complexioned face watching them. The face disappeared the next moment.

"He's heard our horses," said Frank. "Perhaps he thought it was Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones coming."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's on his guard, anyhow. Doesn't seem to be so much of a tenderfoot," remarked Bob.

A slim man of medium height stepped out of the cabin as the schoolboys rode up. They looked at him rather curiously.

He was a rather good-looking man, clean-shaven, with very sharp eyes of an uncertain colour.

"Mr. Amos Brown?" asked Bob Lawless.

"I guess so. What do you want here?"

"Called to see you, Mr. Brown," answered Bob.

"You might have saved yourself the trouble."

"What?"

"I guess I'm not entertaining visitors," answered Mr. Brown coolly. "Next time you make a call, make it where you're welcome."

Frank Richards & Co. stared at him, colouring. There was a deliberate offensiveness about Poker Brown that raised their ire at once.

"Well, by gum!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "Is that the kind of manners you've brought over the Line with you, Mr. Brown? You'll find that they won't do for Canada!"

"I guess the sooner you levant the better I shall like the look of you!" answered Mr. Brown. "I'm too busy to chinwag with schoolboys!"

"You don't look so jolly busy," retorted Frank Richards. "There's precious little work been done here that I can see."

"That's my business."

"We came to do you a good turn," exclaimed Beauclerc indignantly.

"I guess I'm not asking for it."

"Well, we'll give you the office, all the same," said Bob. "Have you ever heard of Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones?"

Mr. Brown stared at him.

"I guess I've heard the boys in Thompson talking about that frebug," he answered. "What about him?"

"Well, we've come in contact with the rascal, and we know he's quite as dangerous as folks say. You're in a very lonely place here."

"Not so lonely at present as I'd like it to be," said Mr. Brown rudely.

"If the man Jones came along, you'd be in danger," said Bob, controlling his anger.

"That's what we came to tell you, as you're a stranger here, and a tenderfoot into the bargain. If you're making money out of the tailings, Jones is as like to hear of it as not, and he might give you a look-in any day."

Mr. Brown laughed.

"I guess he won't worry me!" he answered. "I reckon I'm making a fairish thing out of the tailings, too. I guess it's a bonanza, and the guy who gave it up was a prize jay from Jaysville, I guess!"

"Glad to hear it," said Bob. "But that's all the more reason why you should



THE DARING OF THE DESPERADO! Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones came out of the bank and, brushing past two men, ran to his horse. Almost in a twinkling the outlaw reached his horse, sprang into the saddle and spurred away in the rain. The next moment there was a rush to the door of the bank as Frank Richards & Co. came tearing out. (See Chapter 4.)

keep an eye peeled for Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones."

"And that's what you came to tell me, is it?" asked Poker Brown, eyeing the three schoolboys curiously.

"Sure!"

"Well, I guess I'm obliged. And now you can travel. Good-bye!"

"Oh, go and chop chips!" growled Bob Lawless.

And the chums wheeled their horses and rode away.

Poker Brown stood watching them till they were out of sight, and then went back into the cabin.

"What do you think of that galoot?" grunted Bob Lawless, as the chums rode at a gallop for Cedar Creek.

"Well, he's not exactly polished," said Frank Richards, laughing. "It's pretty clear that he doesn't want visitors on his claim."

"Bless his cheek! It's not because we interrupted his work, anyhow!" growled Bob.

"Precious little work he seems to have done there. As for his making dollars out of the tailings, that's rather a tall story. More likely he makes it playing poker at the Occidental, I reckon."

And the chums of Cedar Creek rode back to school, quite decided not to pay any more visits to the pilgrim at Tucker's Tailings.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Held Up!

BOB!

"Yes, dad?"

"I want you to ride over to Thompson this afternoon, to the bank."

"Right-ho, pop!"

It was Saturday, and there was no school that day for Frank Richards and his Canadian cousin. A summer rainstorm had come on in the afternoon, and the chums were watching the rain from the window of the ranch-house, when Mr. Lawless called Bob.

"I guess we've kicked our heels indoors long enough," remarked Bob. "I'll be glad of a ride in the rain. What about you, Franky?"

"Same here," answered Frank, at once.

"I was going myself," said Mr. Lawless.

"But now the rain's come on I'm wanted here. I guess you can manage, Bob."

"Easy as falling off a horse, popper. Nothing much in riding over to the bank at Thompson, is there?"

"Not as a rule; but with Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones in the section it might be different."

"Oh, never mind the man Jones!" answered Bob cheerfully. "If you're sending money, it's safer with me than with one of the ranchmen. Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones isn't likely to go through a schoolboy."

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"Yes, that is what I was thinking," he said. "I've received six hundred dollars in notes this morning, and I'd rather not keep it in the house. If the rustler is in this quarter he's not likely to bother his head about a couple of schoolboys. But put the packet in your boot, Bob, to be safe in case the unexpected should happen."

"You bet!"

Bob Lawless concealed the wad of notes in his riding-boots, and the cousins left the ranch-house.

The rain was still falling, the sun-baked prairie drinking up the water as if athirst. But the chums cared little for the rain. With their waterproof cloaks and big Stetson hats, they were well protected. They rode away from the ranch in cheerful spirits.

"What about calling for the Cherub, Franky?" asked Bob. "It's not much out of our way."

"He usually helps his father on the clearing on Saturday," said Frank doubtfully.

"That's so. I'll guess we'll get on."

The cousins rode at a good rate for Thompson. The rain was still falling upon them as they entered the frontier town, and there were few people to be seen in Main Street. They clattered on through the rain towards the bank.

The bank was rather a new institution in Thompson. It was a branch of a bank at Kamloops, and it was not much like a bank to look at, being a long-built edifice. But it was built very strongly, and the windows were barred; and the strong-room was a cellar beneath the building. Leaving their horses under a tree outside, Frank and Bob

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opened the door and entered the building, closing it after them to keep out the rain and wind.

There was no other customer in the building just then, and no one to be seen save Mr. Hooker, the manager, who was smoking a big cigar behind the bank counter, with his feet on the counter—in the free and easy Western style. He nodded to the two callers without rising or removing his cigar.

"Still raining?" he asked.

"I guess so," answered Bob.

He extracted the wads of notes from his riding-boots, and pushed them across the counter. Then Mr. Hooker yawned, rolled off his stool, and picked up the notes. With his cigar poking out of a corner of his mouth, he counted over the notes, locked them in a drawer, and began to write out a receipt for the deposit.

He was thus engaged when the outer door opened, and a man, muffled in a greatcoat, came in, closing the door after him.

Frank and Bob glanced idly at the newcomer.

His coat was turned up against the rain, covering him to the ears, and his hat was drawn down almost to his nose. All that could be seen of his face, in fact, was the tip of a rather red nose, wet with rain.

Mr. Hooker glanced up from the paper he was writing.

"One moment, sir! Please take a seat!" he said.

"I guess I'm not taking a seat," replied the newcomer. And to the bank manager's amazement his right hand whipped from under his rain-wet cloak, with a revolver in it.

"Hands up!"

"Wha-a-at!"

With his disengaged hand the newcomer pushed back his hat.

A red-bearded, red-whiskered face was revealed to view, and there was a yell from Frank Richards and Bob Lawless, and a horrified gasp from Mr. Hooker.

"Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones!"

Three pairs of eyes were fixed on the desperado in consternation.

The ruffian had chosen his moment well.

The rain had afforded him a pretext for muffling up, so that the well-known red beard should be hidden as he rode up to the bank through the Main Street of Thompson, and it also made it unlikely that many of the Thompson folk would be abroad.

The revolver was levelled at Mr. Hooker, whose hands promptly went up over his head, the pen still in the fingers of his right.

Not for more money than there was in the Thompson Bank vault would Mr. Hooker have argued with a revolver in the grip of Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones.

"Hands up!"

The outlaw's sharp eyes glittered at Frank Richards and Bob, and he made a menacing movement with the revolver.

He was reluctant to use the weapon, for a pistol-shot in the bank would have brought a crowd there at once, but there was no doubt that if the ruffian pulled trigger he would shoot to kill. There were too many crimes on Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones' conscience for the desperado to care whether one more was added.

The chums of Cedar Creek raised their hands.

They were unarmed, and there was nothing else to be done. They had shotguns on their saddles outside, in waterproof covers, but it had never even crossed their minds that there might be danger in the bank itself. Such a "hold-up" was not an uncommon occurrence in the unsettled Western States south of the Line, but it was very new in the Thompson Valley.

"Keep your paws up!" grunted the outlaw. "If I pull trigger you won't know what happens next. Now, Mr. Hooker—"

"Oh, by gum!" groaned the bank-manager.

"Hand out the rocks—sharp! I've no time to cut to waste! I give you one minute, or they'll want a new manager for the Thompson branch!"

Mr. Hooker blinked helplessly at the red-bearded ruffian.

He was utterly at the Californian outlaw's mercy. It needed only the pressure of a finger to lay him lifeless behind the bank counter, and there was no doubt that Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones would fire if his orders were not obeyed.

The unfortunate manager's fat face was white, and his hands trembled.

"You hear me?" rapped the outlaw.

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"Ye-e-es," gasped the manager.

"Get a move on, lively!"

Mr. Hooker cast a despairing glance around.

The door of the office behind was closed. There was a clerk in the room at work on the books, but he was unconscious of what was going on. And Mr. Hooker could not venture to call to him, even if he could have rendered aid if called upon.

With the revolver looking him in the face, the manager had no choice.

He was allowed to lower his hands, and he opened several drawers and laid bank-bills on the pinewood counter.

The outlaw watched him like a cat.

Once Mr. Hooker was tempted to make a grab at the six-shooter on a shelf under the counter, but the watchful eye of the outlaw was too keen for him. Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones guessed his intention before it had fairly formed in his mind, and the revolver made a menacing movement.

"Mind your eye!" grunted the red-bearded ruffian. "Don't make me shoot, pard!"

And Mr. Hooker gave up all thought of the six-shooter. Even if he had grasped it he was not likely to be so quick as Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones in an exchange of shots.

With his left hand the outlaw scooped up the banknotes that were handed over the counter. He stowed them away in some bag under his coat, in crumpled wads. All the time he was watching the manager like a cat, and with the tail of his eye, as it were, he kept observation upon Frank Richards and Bob Lawless, and upon the door on the street. At any moment the door might have opened to admit another customer. The ruffian was taking big risks. But it was such a risk as the reckless rascal delighted in. The very audacity of the raid made it more likely to succeed.

In the inner office the scratching of the clerk's pen could be heard in the silence. Outside there was a sound of voices as two Thompson men stopped under the porch for shelter from the rain and began to chat there. And all the time the reckless ruffian was scooping up the notes and coin handed out in desperate haste by the terrified Mr. Hooker.

"I guess that lets me out," grinned Five-Hundred Dollar Jones. "Another time, pard, I'll call on you and ask you to take me down to the vault. But I guess time presses this byer afternoon."

"Oh dear!" mumbled Mr. Hooker helplessly.

The ruffian had bagged fifteen hundred dollars. There was a much greater plunder in the cellar below, but even Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones did not care to risk penetrating there. It was only too probable that his retreat would have been cut off.

Indeed, Mr. Hooker would have been very glad to see him carry his audacity to that length in the hope of turning the tables on him. But the Californian was too cunning to take the risk.

Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones backed to the door, the revolver still at the level. Frank and Bob Lawless watched him, breathing hard.

With his left hand the ruffian reached behind him and opened the door.

The next moment the revolver disappeared, the hat was dragged down over the red-bearded face, and Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones sprang through the doorway, slamming the door after him.

He brushed against the two men in the porch, and was followed by several emphatic remarks in consequence, as he ran to his horse; but they little dreamed that the man they were addressing was the outlaw for whose arrest five hundred dollars reward was offered.

Almost in a twinkling the outlaw reached his horse, sprang into the saddle, and spurred away in the rain.

The moment the door had slammed upon him, Mr. Hooker grabbed his six-shooter and yelled for help. Frank Richards and Bob Lawless rushed to the door and dragged it open just in time to see the outlaw spur away down Main Street at a furious gallop.

"Stop him!" shouted Bob Lawless. "It's Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones! Stop him!"

"He's robbed the bank! Stop him!" yelled Frank Richards.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

Almost before they had uttered the warning shouts the outlaw had galloped down Main Street and was whirling into the trail outside the town.

Someone cracked a revolver from a window

down the street, but the bullet missed by yards, and then the Californian outlaw was gone.

The thundering hoofbeats were still heard in the distance when the shouts of alarm brought a crowd into the street.

"Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones!"

The name was on every lip.

The chums of Cedar Creek returned into the bank. The room was crowded now, and Mr. Hooker was almost wringing his hands. Fifteen hundred dollars of the bank's funds had vanished with the outlaw, and the manager had little or no hope of seeing a single dollar of them again. Bob Lawless picked up his receipt from the counter. The notes he had paid in were among the plunder carried off by Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones. But that was the bank's business, and, fortunately, not Bob's.

"Poor old Hooker! This will turn his hair grey—what's left!" said Bob, as the chums left the bank. "That bulldozer ought to be laid by the heels. Hallo! Here's Old Man Beauclerc!"

The remittance-man of Cedar Camp was in the street with the excited crowds of Thompson folk, and he came towards the chums as he saw them. They could guess that he had been on his way to the Occidental, as usual, when the alarm was given.

"I think I saw you come out of the bank," said Mr. Beauclerc. "What has happened there?"

Bob and Frank explained rather breathlessly.

"And it was Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones?" exclaimed Mr. Beauclerc.

"Yes."

The remittance-man turned and hurried towards the Occidental without another word. He untethered his horse, which he had tied up there, and sprang into the saddle.

"My hat!" exclaimed Frank. "He's not going after the outlaw—alone—"

The remittance-man rode past the chums the next moment. But he did not take the trail the outlaw had taken. He turned from Main Street through an unbuild block and dashed away on a trail eastward. Through the openings of the buildings the schoolboys watched him in wonder.

"That's the way to Tucker's Tailings," said Bob, in astonishment. "That trail ends in the foothills, and there's nothing in that direction but Tucker's Tailings and the hills beyond. What the Dickens—"

"I suppose he's going to see Brown," said Frank, mystified.

"But it was what we told him about Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones at the bank that started him off. You could see that."

Frank Richards nodded.

"Blessed if I catch on," he said.

The chums did not leave Thompson at once. They were wanted by the sheriff, when that official came down to interview Mr. Hooker, and after that a curious crowd wanted their story of what had happened. It was more than an hour later that they untied their horses to ride home; and as they started they saw Mr. Beauclerc riding up Main Street, rain-wet and muddy. He had returned from his sudden ride to Tucker's Tailings.

"Mr. Brown at home, sir?" asked Bob Lawless, with a grin, as the remittance-man was passing.

"Mr. Brown?" he repeated.

"I guess you've been to Tucker's Tailings," explained Bob. "That trail led nowhere else."

Mr. Beauclerc gave him a rather sharp look, and then smiled.

"You are very keen, my boy," he answered. "Yes, I have had a ride out to Tucker's Tailings, and Mr. Brown was not there. I reckoned he would not be there while Five-Hundred Dollar Jones was robbing a bank in Thompson."

With that mysterious remark—which made the chums of Cedar Creek stare blankly—Mr. Beauclerc rode on to the Occidental.

"What on earth was Old Man Beauclerc driving at, Frank?" asked Bob. "Why shouldn't Poker Brown be at the mine while Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones was in Thompson?"

"Blessed if I know!" answered Frank, shaking his head.

And the chums puzzled a good deal over the remittance-man's strange words as they rode homeward.

THE END.

(Another roaring Wild West tale of Frank Richards & Co., entitled "Solving a Problem!" next week.)