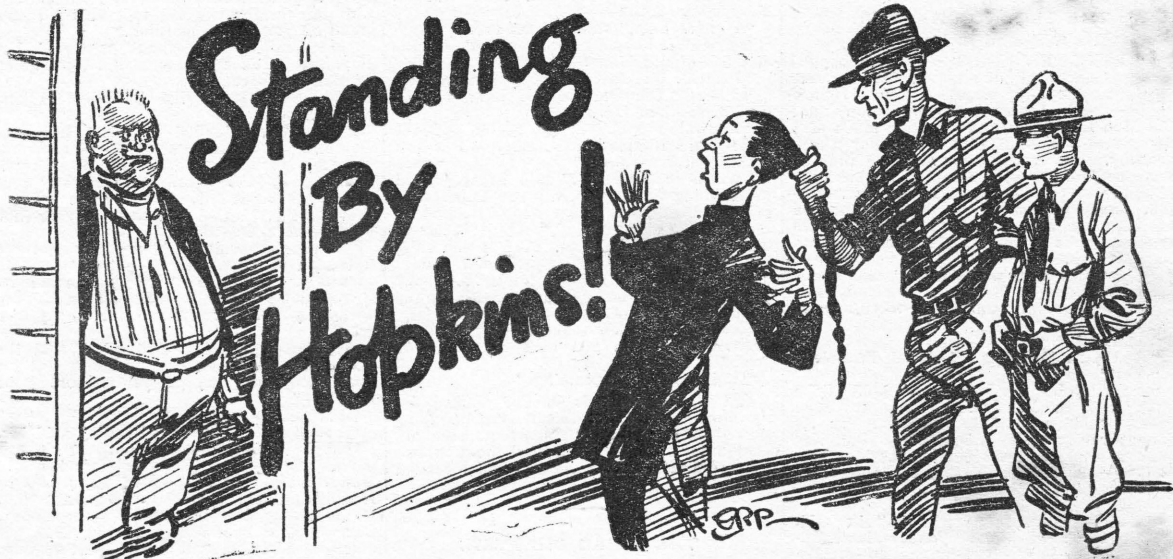


FRIENDS IN NEED! When the Hopkins family is in trouble they find sturdy supporters in Frank Richards & Co., who answer the call of friendship without counting the consequences!



A Stirring Long Complete Story of FRANK RICHARDS, in the Lumber School of the Backwoods!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Pal In Trouble!

"HOPKINS!"

Miss Meadows spoke somewhat sharply.

It was the second time she had addressed Harold Hopkins, the Cockney schoolboy of Cedar Creek, and the Canadian schoolmistress was not accustomed to speaking twice to a member of her class before receiving an answer.

Frank Richards glanced at Hopkins.

The Cockney youth was sitting with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and an expression of deep and gloomy thought was upon his ruddy face. He seemed oblivious of the fact that he was in class at all, and that Miss Meadows was speaking to him.

"Ow!"

Bob Lawless reached out with his boot, and gave Hopkins a smart tap on the shin to wake him up, as it were.

It certainly woke him up.

Harold Hopkins started out of his reverie with a howl, and blinked round him.

"Yow-ow!" he repeated.

There was a chuckle in the school-room of Cedar Creek. Miss Meadows silenced it at once with a frown.

"Silence! Hopkins, what is the matter with you?"

Hopkins blinked at the schoolmistress. Some of the Cedar Creek fellows noted with astonishment that tears were trembling on his eyelashes. All was evidently not well with Harold Hopkins.

"Skuse me, ma'am!" mumbled Hopkins.

"Did you speak?"

"I have spoken to you twice!"

"Sorry, ma'am; I didn't 'ear you!"

Miss Meadows glanced at the schoolboy rather curiously.

"You should pay attention, Hopkins," she said. "Is anything the matter?"

"No, ma'am."

"Are you not well?"

"Yes, ma'am," muttered Hopkins dejectedly.

Then, to Miss Meadows' surprise and concern, the tears escaped from his eyelashes and rolled down his plump cheeks.

"My dear boy, there is something the matter," said Miss Meadows, kindly enough. "You may go into the playground for a little while, if you like."

"Thank you, ma'am!" gasped Hopkins.

And, keeping his face averted from his schoolfellows, the Cockney of Cedar Creek hastily quitted the school-room.

Most of the fellows looked after him in

wonder, wondering what was the matter with him.

Hopkins was not of the crying kind. His early years had been spent in the East End of London, where he had grown up hardy and tough. He was a "tenderfoot" among the Canadian schoolboys, and a good many jokes were played on his ignorance of the Wild West, but he was liked, and not regarded at all as "soft." Yet there were undoubtedly tears on his cheeks, and tears were a sign of weakness much despised by the hardy youths of the Thompson Valley.

"Poor old Cockney!" murmured Bob Lawless. "Must be something wrong at home that's upset him."

"I know!" said Chunky Todgers. "You see—"

Silence!

Chunky's information was cut short by Miss Meadows' voice, and the lesson was resumed without Hopkins.

He did not return to the school-room before morning classes ended.

When Cedar Creek came out after lessons Frank Richards & Co. looked for the Cockney schoolboy.

They were feeling sympathetic; but there was another fellow looking for him who was not at all sympathetic. That was Eben Haeke, and it was the burly American boy who found him.

Hopkins was seated on the wood-pile near the lumber school-house when Haeke came on him. His eyes looked a little red, and his face was full of woe. He looked up, flushing, as he caught Eben's mocking glance.

"Waal, you're a soft cuss, you are!" said Eben Haeke derisively. "Turning on the waterworks in class! Are they ail as soft as you where you come from?"

"Oh, git out!" snapped Hopkins.

"I guess you want to go home to mammy!" said Haeke. "I guess— Yaroooh!"

Haeke was suddenly interrupted, as Frank Richards & Co. arrived on the scene.

Bob Lawless' knuckles ground into the back of his neck as the rancher's son gripped him by the collar.

Haeke was jerked away, and spun round, yelling.

"Leggo!" he howled. "I guess I'll make shavings of you! Let up!"

"You vamoose!" snapped Bob.

He spun the bulky Haeke away, sending him spinning at full length on the ground.

Haeke sat up and gasped.

"I—I guess—"

"Jump on him!" said Bob. "A's together!"

Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc jumped, but Haeke did not wait for them. He squirmed away, leaped to his feet, and fled.

Then the Co. turned to Harold Hopkins.

He grinned at them faintly.

"Now, young shaver," said Frank Richards, "what—"

"Don't you go for to make fun of a bloke, young Richards!" muttered Hopkins.

"I tell you—"

"You young ass!" said Frank. "I'm not going to make fun of you. I want to know whether we can help you in your trouble, whatever it is."

Hopkins shook his head dolorously. "Nobody can't help us," he said, ungrammatically and feelingly. "We're done for."

"Who's done for, old fellow?" asked Beauclerc.

"Us, at home."

"Trouble at home?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"Well, you've got three pals to tell about it," said Frank Richards encouragingly. "Go ahead, and we'll see you through."

Hopkins hesitated.

He was loth to tell his trouble, which seemed like asking for compassion; but, at the same time, he felt an urgent need of sympathy. There was no doubt of the hearty desire of the three chums to help him if they could, and his hesitation was brief.

"It's the 'omestead," he said slowly.

"You fellers know 'ow we are fixed. You 'elped us to get square when we came and settled in this 'ere valley, you remember."

"Yes, rather!"

"We've had bad luck," said Hopkins wearily. "Father 'ad not much capital, you know, and, then, we didn't know the country. Neighbours 'elped, of course, or we'd never 'ave got goin' at all. And then father borrered of Old Man Gunten, at the store in Thompson—"

His voice faltered.

The chums listened in silence.

It was not an uncommon story of a poor emigrant starting with insufficient resources, and being thrown on his beam ends by a single bad season.

"You see, we 'adn't any money be'ind us," explained Hopkins. "Everybody's worked, but it wasn't enough. My brother Bill's got a job down at Kamloops, and he sends 'ome money, workin' on the railroad, or else we'd

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never 'ave kep' going so long. Now it's all up. Old Man Gunten is going to turn us out o' ouse and 'ome."

And, in spite of himself, the tears trickled down the cheeks of the Cockney schoolboy once more.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Friend In Need!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. exchanged glances of discomfort. They were not wholly surprised by Hopkins' story. It was pretty well known that Old Man Hopkins was not making much of a success of his holding in the Cedar Creek clearing. But it was news to them that he was in debt to Mr. Gunten, the wealthy store-keeper of Thompson Town. Mr. Gunten, among his many other vocations, ran a business as a moneylender, and he was reputed to be a very hard-fisted gentleman to deal with.

"But I don't quite catch on," said Frank Richards, after a long and uncomfortable pause. "Has Mr. Gunten a mortgage on the homestead?"

"That's it!"

"And he's foreclosed?" asked Beauclerc.

"Yes."
"He can't be very keen to get hold of the land," said Bob Lawless. "It's improved, of course; but even improved land can be bought pretty cheap round here. Old Man Gunten would rather see his money, or part of it— Surely your father could make an arrangement with him?"

Hopkins shook his head.

"That's the queer part of it," he said. "Father's offered him the dollars in instalments—which is the best he can do—and he reckoned Mr. Gunten would rather 'ave the money. But he wouldn't. He wants the land."

"What the thump does he want the land for?" exclaimed Bob. "It's not specially good land. In fact, your father's got hold of a poor patch—it's too near the diggings to be good. There's no end of rock in the soil."

"I know. But Old Man Gunten wants it." "There must be some mistake," said Frank. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Gunten won't accept his money, and that he insists on having his pound of flesh, like Shylock in the play?"

"That's it."

"What good's the land to him?" "Dunno!" said Hopkins drearily. "But he wants it, and we've 'ad notice to quit. But where are we to go? Father and mother can't camp in the timber, I suppose, like Five-Hundred-Dollar Jones when he was about 'ere. But the notice is up, and if we don't go we're to be turned out."

"When?"

"To-morrow!" muttered Hopkins.

Bob Lawless' face had a very grim look.

"The sheriff won't be very keen on letting his men take a hand in a job like that," he said. "I fancy Old Man Gunten will have some difficulty in getting the order put into execution."

"That ain't worth a cent," answered Hopkins. "He's got the law on his side, and he's sendin' his own men."

"Oh!" said Bob.

"It's clear enough," said Hopkins. "He's foreclosed, and the notice was up more'n a week ago; and if the sheriff refuses to help him, he could get some officer up from Kamloops to put us out. He's choosin' to send his own men instead, that's all. It's 'ard lines, but it can't be 'elped."

"It can be helped—and it's going to be helped," said Frank Richards quietly. "Your father and mother aren't going to be turned out, kid. You say he won't take the money a bit at a time?"

"He won't."

"How much is the lot, do you know?"

"Course I do. It's five hundred dollars." "Blessed if I know what Old Man Gunten's lent five hundred dollars on that patch for!" said Bob Lawless in astonishment. "It certainly isn't worth more than that in the market."

"We thought he was kind, and wanted to 'elp a neighbour what was down on his luck."

"Lot of kindness about that fat Swiss!" said Bob contemptuously. "What have you got in your noddle now, Franky?"

Frank Richards coloured a little.

"We've got some money in the bank at Thompson," he said.

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"'Ere, stow that!" exclaimed Hopkins, flushing scarlet. "Do you think I was asking you for money?"

"Dry up!" answered Frank. "Listen to me! If your father can pay in instalments, he can pay us, and we'll settle the total sum in advance with Old Man Gunten. You fellows agree—"

"I guess I do," said Bob at once. "Anything to help a neighbour out of the clutches of Old Man Gunten."

"I agree, certainly!" said Beauclerc, with a smile. "The three of us have a good deal more than is needed."

"You ain't goin' to do nothin' of the sort!" said Hopkins stubbornly. "I wasn't askin' you for money."

"We know that, ass!" said Frank. "But we're going to chip in, all the same. I'm going to see your father about it, and he can pay back the money, and get clear of Old Man Gunten at once. And if you raise any more objections I'll punch your head!"

Harold Hopkins grinned faintly. Chunky Todgers came puffing up to the group sitting on the wood-pile.

"Aren't you fellows coming in to dinner?" he asked. "Can't you hear the bell, you jays?"

"Right-ho! We're coming!"

And Frank Richards & Co. started for the lumber school for dinner, Hopkins going with them, and looking much more cheerful, though he still protested that he wouldn't hear of Frank's little scheme being carried into effect.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Too Late!

FRANK RICHARDS spoke to Miss Meadows after dinner; and when Cedar Creek went back to the school room, Frank did not accompany the rest. He led his horse out of the corral, mounted, and rode away down the trail towards Thompson.

Frank had spoken impulsively to Harold Hopkins, but he did not repent of the generous impulse after reflection. Mr. Hopkins was an honest and hard-working man, and he had done his best on his unpromising clearing. Want of capital and want of experience had been against him, and he had failed from no fault of his own. And there was no doubt that if a friendly hand helped him over the present emergency he had a good chance of turning the corner, and no doubt at all that he would pay back the loan with scrupulous honesty. Frank was only thinking of helping a man who was willing to help himself, and able to do so if given a chance.

Frank would have preferred to consult his uncle, Mr. Lawless, if there had been time; but he was certain that the rancher would approve. But there was no time to be lost in seeing Mr. Gunten.

The schoolboy turned off the trail near the town and rode first to the Hopkins' homestead.

In the middle of the clearing, where some of the burnt-out stumps of old trees still showed through the soil, stood a log-cabin. No smoke was rising from the timber chimney as Frank trotted up—there was an air of desolation about the place. Mr. Hopkins was not to be seen at work as usual, and his eldest son was now away from home, working on the railway. Neither were the little Hopkinses to be seen. The windows and door of the cabin were shut.

Frank jumped from his horse and rapped on the door with his riding-whip.

There was a sound of bars being removed within.

"Is that you, 'Arold?" called out a voice before the door opened.

"No; it's Frank Richards."

"You're welcome!"

The door was thrown open.

Mr. Hopkins stood in the doorway, looking out, with grim despondency marked in his weather-tanned face.

"Come in, Richards!" he said. "Ain't you at school to-day, then?"

"I've got leave from Miss Meadows for the afternoon," said Frank. "I've heard from Harold how matters stand here, Mr. Hopkins, and I want you to come with me to see Mr. Gunten."

The settler stared.

"I don't see—" he began.

Frank Richards hurriedly explained,

Mr. Hopkins shook his head at first, and it was only after considerable argument that Frank succeeded in convincing him; and then he stipulated that Mr. Lawless' consent should be obtained.

"I'm sure about that," said Frank; "and there's no time to be lost, Mr. Hopkins, if Old Man Gunten is going to take the homestead off you in the morning."

"He won't get it easy!" muttered Mr. Hopkins. "It's my 'ome, and I ain't going to give it up easy!"

Frank understood the barred door and windows now.

The settler intended to resist Old Man Gunten's myrmidons when they came to take possession. There was a shot-gun standing by the door, and Frank's face clouded as he saw it. It was quite possible that his intervention had come only in time to prevent a tragedy.

"You must come with me now and see Old Man Gunten, Mr. Hopkins," he said earnestly. "It's the best way. Look here, if you don't come, I shall call on Gunten without you, and run the affair on my own bat."

"You're a good kid, Richards!" said the Cockney settler huskily. "I guess I'll let you 'ave your way if you're sure your uncle—"

"I'm quite sure."

"Every cent will be paid back," said Mr. Hopkins. "You understand that? I can pay it all right, given time. I reckon Old Man Gunten must be out of his senses to refuse my offer; the land's no good to 'im. He could buy a better patch for the money, if he liked. That's why I ain't takin' it quiet—he just wants to turn me out of 'ouse and 'ome for nothing at all, fur as I can see."

"He won't refuse the lump sum," said Frank. "Perhaps he thinks you could raise it if he derives hard enough. Anyhow, you can raise it now, and the old Shylock is going to be choked off. Come on!"

"I'll come!"

The settler secured the door, and fetched his horse from the shed. He mounted, and rode away with the schoolboy for Thompson. They passed the placer claims on the creek, which bounded the Hopkins holding on one side. The "water-rights," owing to its situation on the creek, were about the only valuable thing in the Hopkins holding. But water-rights and all, the holding was not worth five hundred dollars as farming land. The soil was poor and rocky—more suitable, in fact, for a mining fossicker to work on than a farmer.

Frank Richards and his companion rode into Main Street in Thompson, and stopped at Gunten's Store.

The store was the largest business establishment in Thompson; Mr. Gunten was known as the wealthiest citizen of the frontier town, though some of his methods of accumulating wealth were commonly said to be open to question.

Frank Richards knocked at the private door, at the side of the store, and it was opened by a Chinese servant.

He asked to see Mr. Gunten; and the Chinese left the visitors waiting at the door while he went to inquire.

He returned in a few minutes.

"Mr. Gunten no homee," he said.

Frank Richards' eyes glistened.

"I saw him at the window as we rode up," he answered. "Tell him Mr. Hopkins wants to see him on important business."

"Mr. Gunten no see."

"I tell you— Stop!"

The Chinaman was attempting to close the door. Frank Richards promptly put his boot in the way.

"You go away!" said the Celestial. "Mr. Guntee sayee no see!"

"We're going to see Mr. Gunten!" answered Frank grimly. "Get out of the way! We're coming in!"

"No comee—"

The Chinaman broke off with a howl as Mr. Hopkins, losing patience, grasped him and forced him back from the doorway.

The settler took a grip on the Oriental's pigtail.

"Now take me to Mr. Gunten!" he said savagely.

"No takee!"

"I'll twist your pigtail till you do!"

"Yow-ow-owl!" howled the Chinese, as the angry settler proceeded to suit the action to the words.

There was a heavy step in the passage beyond, and the fat and angry face of Mr. Gompers Gunten appeared in sight. He stared angrily and contemptuously at his visitors.

"What the thunder do you mean by kicking up a rumpus at my door?" he demanded violently. "Get out! Let my servant alone and clear!"

"I guess I want to see you about the mortgage," answered Mr. Hopkins, pushing the howling Chinaman aside.

"That's over and done with!" said Mr. Gunten sourly. "You know as well as I do that it's lapsed!"

"I guess I'm ready to pay you in full!" said the settler disdainfully.

"And where are you getting the money?" sneered Gunten.

"That's my business! I can give you an order on the Thompson bank for five hundred dollars, representing principal and interest, and I guess I want your receipt!"

"I guess you can keep your five hundred dollars," returned the storekeeper coolly. "It's too late!"

"You don't refuse the money?"

"I guess I do!"

"Come, Mr. Gunten," said Frank Richards mildly. "You lent the money, expecting it to be returned, I suppose. Mr. Hopkins has the whole sum—"

"He should have brought it two weeks ago if he wanted to keep his holding!" sneered the Swiss. "It's too late now!"

"But you don't want the land!" exclaimed Frank. "You know quite well that it's not worth five hundred dollars!"

Mr. Gunten shrugged his shoulders.

"I know that it's my land," he answered. "If Hopkins wanted to pay he should have paid when the land was his. It's mine now!"

"So you refuse the money?" said Mr. Hopkins.

"I've said so. Now get out!"

"You won't take my 'ome off me so easy," said the Cockney farmer. "I may as well tell you, Mr. Gunten, that I've sent my wife and the nippers to a neighbour's, and I've got a shot-gun ready for any critter that tries to butt into my 'ouse!"

The Swiss storekeeper laughed derisively. "You'd better keep your shot-gun out of sight," he answered. "There's the calaboose for ruffians who let off shot-guns at honest men. Now get out of my house, you loafer!"

That was a little too much for the exasperated settler.

Unless Old Man Gunten had some secret and mysterious motive, he was, apparently, bent on turning the landholder out of his home from the sheer love of tyranny. That was unlikely enough, in a man like Mr. Gunten, who was exceedingly keen on the track of dollars; but there seemed to be no other motive to be assigned. And Mr. Hopkins' patience gave way as his tyrant pointed to the door. He made a savage stride towards the fat Swiss, and struck out straight from the shoulder.

The blow caught Old Man Gunten full on his fat, purple nose, and sent him spinning along the passage.

He came down on his back with a crash on the planks.

The yell he gave rang right across Main Street, and drew three or four passers-by to the open doorway.

Mr. Hopkins glared down at him.

"That's the stuff for your sort!" he panted. "Now get up and have some more, you foreign scum!"

"Help!" yelled Mr. Gunten, showing no intention whatever of getting up. He did not want to be knocked down again by his exasperated victim.

"Come on, boy!" said Mr. Hopkins, turning contemptuously from the fat rascal on the floor.

And Frank Richards and the settler left the house together, the Chinaman slamming the door after them.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Holding the Fort!

IT was with a glum face that Frank Richards rode back to Cedar Creek School, to meet his chums there.

The result of the visit to Mr. Gunten had surprised and dismayed him.

Cedar Creek School had been dismissed when Frank Richards arrived there, and he found Bob and Beauclerc, and Harold Hopkins waiting for him on the trail outside the gates. Hopkins' face fell as he saw the expression on Frank's.

"What's 'appened?" he inquired.

"It's all serene, isn't it, Frank?" asked Bob.

Frank Richards explained concisely. His chums eyed him in astonishment.

"But why should the foreign rascal have refused the money?" exclaimed Beauclerc.

"He couldn't sell the holding at such a figure if he wanted to, and it can't be any use to him personally. Old Man Gunten doesn't go in for farming, excepting by holding shares in the fruit-farms down the valley."

"It beats me," answered Frank.

"And it beats me to a frazzle," said Bob Lawless. "But Old Man Gunten's had the offer of his money, and if he won't take it that's his funeral. He isn't going to turn Mr. Hopkins out."

"I'm afraid of what may 'appen!" faltered Harold. "Father's got his shot-gun 'andy, and there's goin' to be awful trouble when Gunten's men come along to turn 'im out."

Bob gave a low whistle.

"That won't do," he said.

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble," said Frank. "I think Old Man Gunten will very likely act to-night instead of to-morrow, after our visit to him. Whatever his reason is, he's determined on getting his claws on Mr. Hopkins' holding. I was thinking that we'd go home with Hoppy to-night. You could put us up, kid?"

"Course!" said Harold.

"And we'd help to hold the cabin against the rascals, and see that Mr. Hopkins did nothing rash, too," said Frank. "We can send a message home, if you fellows like the idea. Mr. Hopkins will want some help, or he will be turned out!"

"How's it goin' to end?" muttered Hopkins.

"I don't know. But the place has got to be kept in your father's hands, kid; that's the important matter now."

"We'll do it," said Bob decidedly.

"Chunky Todgers hasn't gone home yet, and he'll take a message to the ranch, if we ask him, and tell your popper at the same time, Cherub."

Beauclerc nodded assent.

No more time was spent in words; in a few minutes Chunky Todgers was found and despatched with the message, which was simply that the Co. were going home with Hopkins for the night.

A promise of liberal maple-sugar as a reward made Master Todgers quite obliging, and the chums saw him start off on his fat little pony.

Then they set out at a gallop for the Hopkins' homestead, half fearing that something might already have happened there.

Exactly how the law stood in the matter the schoolboys were only dimly aware; but they knew that in justice, at all events, Old Man Gunten was not entitled to take possession of the place after the offer of the return of his loan in full, with interest. Whether it was tyranny or some hidden motive that actuated him, it came to the same thing; he was to be prevented from having his own way. The chums of Cedar Creek were quite determined on that.

"Hallo! That looks like Gunten's lot!" muttered Bob Lawless, as the chums were passing Thompson at a little distance.

On the trail outside the town they caught sight of six horsemen—all of them exceedingly "tough" characters, and well known as belonging to the Red Dog crowd. One of them, called Dry Billy Bowers, had only recently returned from prison, and all of them were rascals. Old Man Gunten was speaking to them in the trail, and it was pretty clear that he had been busily engaged in gathering them together, and was about to despatch them on their mission.

The Swiss store-keeper caught sight of the schoolboys in the distance, and scowled at them.

"Hurry up!" said Frank. "If they're bound for the homestead, we want to get ahead of them."

"You bet!"

The chums galloped on at great speed. A few minutes later they were on the



THE ATTACK ON THE CABIN! The six ruffians, bearing the trunk, came on with a rush, heedless of the shot-gun that peered from the window. "Stop, or I'll pull the trigger!" shouted Mr. Hopkins. (See Chapter 5.)

bank of the creek, and dismounted in the Hopkins' enclosure.

The door of the cabin was thrown open at once, as Mr. Hopkins recognised them from within.

The settler was alone in the cabin, his family, with the single exception of Harold, having been sent to a friendly neighbour's, to be kept clear of the "trouble."

The schoolboys let their horses loose to graze by the creek, and entered the cabin; in the distance a bunch of riders could already be seen approaching at a trot.

Mr. Hopkins seemed surprised by the arrival of Frank Richards & Co., and he looked very doubtful when he was informed that they had come to aid him in holding the cabin against the enemy.

But he raised no demur. The door was closed and barred again; already the hoof-beats of the approaching horsemen could be heard.

Frank Richards looked out of a slit between the window shutters.

Dry Billy and his companions were riding up, headed by a ruffian called Keno Kit, Old Man Gunten now, and he's given instructions for it to be pulled to splinters. It won't take us long, I calculate. Lay hold of a log and bust in the door, to start!"

"You bet!" And the ruffians laid hands upon a felled trunk near at hand, and raised it in their united grasp, for use as a battering-ram.

They came on towards the cabin door with a rush.

Mr. Hopkins pulled back the shutter of the window by the door, and grasped his shotgun, his eyes glinting.

Frank Richards caught his arm. "Don't shoot!" he exclaimed.

"I guess what they're doing is agin the law," answered the settler grimly. "I'm bound to surrender the house to the sheriff's men, but these ain't the sheriff's men. I guess Mr. Henderson won't have any truck with it. This lot is the Red Dog crowd, and if they attack my house I'm at liberty to fire on them!"

"But—" "I'll warn them first."

Mr. Hopkins put the muzzle of his gun out of the window, and shouted to the Red Dog crowd.

"Stop!" No answer was returned, and the six ruffians, bearing the trunk among them, came panting on. There was no doubt that one heavy drive from such a weight would send the cabin door flying into fragments.

"Stop, or I'll pull the trigger!" shouted the farmer.

"I guess you don't dare!" snorted Keno Kit. "Come on, you galoots! We ain't going to be all night about this hyer funeral!"

And they came on with a rush, heedless of the shot-gun that peered from the half-open window.

The farmer hesitated no longer. He aimed low, to catch the ruffians in the legs, and pulled the trigger.

Bang! There was a chorus of surprised and furious yells, as the small shot scattered among six pairs of legs.

The tree-trunk came to the ground with a crash, as six pairs of hands let go at the same moment.

One end of it jammed on Mr. Billy Bowers' toe, and Dry Billy hopped and danced, letting out a succession of wild howls.

Three of the ruffians turned tail and ran instantly, and did not stop till they were in cover of the nearest bunch of larches.

Dry Billy, hopping and yelling, did not even think of retreat, much less of further attack.

Keno Kit and another drew their revolvers, and turned towards the window with savage looks. They had been stung about the legs by the scattering shot, and they were furious.

Frank Richards dragged Mr. Hopkins back from the window, and Bob slammed the thick pine shutter and fastened it.

Crack, crack! Spatter, spatter! Two pistol-shots smashed on the pinewood at the same moment.

Frank drew a quick breath. "That looks like business!" he muttered.

Mr. Hopkins coolly reloaded his shotgun.

"I guess Colt's bullets won't hurt that pinewood much," he said. "They've got no rifles, and they wouldn't dare to use them if they had."

Mr. Hopkins opened the shutter a few inches.

In the distance, among the larches, Keno Kit and his gang were gathered in a group, engaged in loud and emphatic consultation.

At last Dry Billy Bowers was seen to tramp away in the direction of the town, and it was easy to guess that he had gone to seek Mr. Gunten for further instructions.

"Jolly good thing Old Man Gunten sent this gang instead of the sheriff's men," murmured Bob Lawless. "Firing on the sheriff's posse would have been pesky serious business!"

"He won't get any help from the sheriff," said Mr. Hopkins. "Not that I'd give up my holdin' anyhow!"

"Ear, ear!" said Harold loyally.

The garrison of the log cabin waited anxiously. If the sheriff of Thompson arrived on the scene with Mr. Gunten, the chums realised that the matter would assume a much more serious aspect.

But the sheriff in an outlying settlement like Thompson held the scales rather of justice than of law, and it was clear that Old Man Gunten had not ventured to invoke his aid—yet, at all events. Indeed, it was probable that if the exact story of Mr. Gunten's dealing with the farmer became generally known in Thompson trouble might arise for the greedy Swiss, from the rough-and-ready citizens of the valley settlement.

Frank Richards watched from the window, keeping a sharp look-out for a reckless pot-shot from the Red Dog crowd. The sun was sinking low over the pines when the fat figure of Mr. Gunten came in sight, accompanied by Dry Billy Bowers.

The store-keeper came on towards the cabin—but stopped as the muzzle of the shot-gun peered out at him.

"Hands up, if you come nearer!" rapped out Mr. Hopkins.

With his fat face dark with rage, Old Man Gunten put up his hands as he came on. He stopped outside the window, giving the settler a venomous look.

"I guess I'm hyer to demand surrender of my property," he said, between his teeth.

"I've offered you your money."

"Money be durned!" said Old Man Gunten. "I'm after the property. I give you five minutes to clear out this shebang afore it's set on fire!"

"I give you one minute to get clear before I send a charge of shot at you!" said the farmer grimly.

He put his finger to the trigger. The fat, red face of the store-keeper paled, and he swung round and started to run.

There was a chuckle from the cabin as the terrified Swiss raced and plunged and stumbled away over the rough ground, fear lending him wings. He tripped over a trailing root at last, and came down on his hands and knees, howling. On all fours, the moneylender of Thompson squirmed into the larches for cover, and vanished from sight.

"And now—" muttered Frank Richards tensely.

They waited.

delights of the Red Dog bar. They had some of Old Man Gunten's money in their pockets already, and the promise of more; their reward for doing the dirty work of the Swiss store-keeper was to be a "jamboree" at the Red Dog.

"I guess it's plane-sailing!" said Keno Kit. "This hyer shebang belongs to Old Man Gunten now, and he's given instructions for it to be pulled to splinters. It won't take us long, I calculate. Lay hold of a log and bust in the door, to start!"

"You bet!"

And the ruffians laid hands upon a felled trunk near at hand, and raised it in their united grasp, for use as a battering-ram.

They came on towards the cabin door with a rush.

Mr. Hopkins pulled back the shutter of the window by the door, and grasped his shotgun, his eyes glinting.

Frank Richards caught his arm. "Don't shoot!" he exclaimed.

"I guess what they're doing is agin the law," answered the settler grimly. "I'm bound to surrender the house to the sheriff's men, but these ain't the sheriff's men. I guess Mr. Henderson won't have any truck with it. This lot is the Red Dog crowd, and if they attack my house I'm at liberty to fire on them!"

"But—" "I'll warn them first."

Mr. Hopkins put the muzzle of his gun out of the window, and shouted to the Red Dog crowd.

"Stop!"

No answer was returned, and the six ruffians, bearing the trunk among them, came panting on. There was no doubt that one heavy drive from such a weight would send the cabin door flying into fragments.

"Stop, or I'll pull the trigger!" shouted the farmer.

"I guess you don't dare!" snorted Keno Kit. "Come on, you galoots! We ain't going to be all night about this hyer funeral!"

And they came on with a rush, heedless of the shot-gun that peered from the half-open window.

The farmer hesitated no longer. He aimed low, to catch the ruffians in the legs, and pulled the trigger.

Bang! There was a chorus of surprised and furious yells, as the small shot scattered among six pairs of legs.

The tree-trunk came to the ground with a crash, as six pairs of hands let go at the same moment.

One end of it jammed on Mr. Billy Bowers' toe, and Dry Billy hopped and danced, letting out a succession of wild howls.

Three of the ruffians turned tail and ran instantly, and did not stop till they were in cover of the nearest bunch of larches.

Dry Billy, hopping and yelling, did not even think of retreat, much less of further attack.

Keno Kit and another drew their revolvers, and turned towards the window with savage looks. They had been stung about the legs by the scattering shot, and they were furious.

Frank Richards dragged Mr. Hopkins back from the window, and Bob slammed the thick pine shutter and fastened it.

Crack, crack! Spatter, spatter! Two pistol-shots smashed on the pinewood at the same moment.

Frank drew a quick breath. "That looks like business!" he muttered.

Mr. Hopkins coolly reloaded his shotgun.

"I guess Colt's bullets won't hurt that pinewood much," he said. "They've got no rifles, and they wouldn't dare to use them if they had."

Mr. Hopkins opened the shutter a few inches.

In the distance, among the larches, Keno Kit and his gang were gathered in a group, engaged in loud and emphatic consultation.

At last Dry Billy Bowers was seen to tramp away in the direction of the town, and it was easy to guess that he had gone to seek Mr. Gunten for further instructions.

"Jolly good thing Old Man Gunten sent this gang instead of the sheriff's men," murmured Bob Lawless. "Firing on the sheriff's posse would have been pesky serious business!"

"He won't get any help from the sheriff," said Mr. Hopkins. "Not that I'd give up my holdin' anyhow!"

"Ear, ear!" said Harold loyally.

The garrison of the log cabin waited anxiously. If the sheriff of Thompson arrived on the scene with Mr. Gunten, the chums realised that the matter would assume a much more serious aspect.

But the sheriff in an outlying settlement like Thompson held the scales rather of justice than of law, and it was clear that Old Man Gunten had not ventured to invoke his aid—yet, at all events. Indeed, it was probable that if the exact story of Mr. Gunten's dealing with the farmer became generally known in Thompson trouble might arise for the greedy Swiss, from the rough-and-ready citizens of the valley settlement.

Frank Richards watched from the window, keeping a sharp look-out for a reckless pot-shot from the Red Dog crowd. The sun was sinking low over the pines when the fat figure of Mr. Gunten came in sight, accompanied by Dry Billy Bowers.

The store-keeper came on towards the cabin—but stopped as the muzzle of the shot-gun peered out at him.

"Hands up, if you come nearer!" rapped out Mr. Hopkins.

With his fat face dark with rage, Old Man Gunten put up his hands as he came on. He stopped outside the window, giving the settler a venomous look.

"I guess I'm hyer to demand surrender of my property," he said, between his teeth.

"I've offered you your money."

"Money be durned!" said Old Man Gunten. "I'm after the property. I give you five minutes to clear out this shebang afore it's set on fire!"

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Attack on the Cabin!

HERE was a brief consultation among the half-dozen ruffians gathered outside the cabin, but it was very brief. The ruffians were anxious to get their task over, and return to the

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