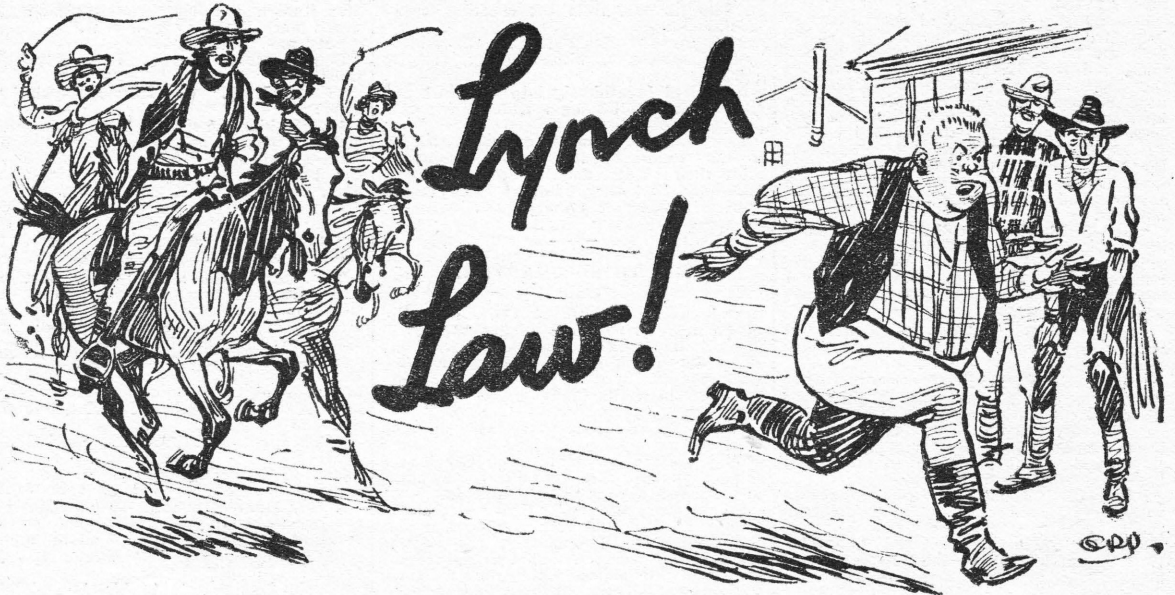


**COWBOYS TO THE RESCUE!** The ranchmen of the Thompson Valley take the law into their own hands in dealing with the rascally Swiss, Gunten. They are not men to stand aside and watch the persecution of one of their fellows!



An Extra-Special, Long, Complete story of FRANK RICHARDS' schooldays in the Lumber School of the Canadian Backwoods!

#### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

##### The Cowboys to the Rescue!

"I GUESS there's trouble thar!" Billy Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, bent his head a little, and listened.

From the distance, in the evening shadows, came the echoing of rapid revolver-shots.

Five stalwart ranchmen were riding up the trail on the northern side of Thompson Town, Billy Cook in the lead. And the sound of firing came to their ears from beyond the patch of pine and larch that hid the Hopkinse's clearing from their sight.

"Shootin'," continued Billy Cook. "Jest like young Bob Lawless to land himself in the middle of it. Lucky his popper sent us to look arter him. Get your quirts ready, and come on!"

The ranchmen turned from the trail, following a rough bridle-track towards the Hopkinse's homestead.

They came through the screen of pines, and in the setting sun, a rather startling scene burst upon their view.

The Hopkinse's log cabin was closed up, door and windows barred and shuttered. Within that cabin were Frank Richards & Co., of Cedar Creek School.

At a distance from it, lying in cover among the scrub and tree stumps, were half a dozen roughly-clad men, "bulldozers" every one of them, keeping up a revolver-fire on the shuttered windows.

The pistol-shots spattered on the thick pinewood, without doing any damage beyond scarring the wood. They could not penetrate into the cabin.

Billy Cook surveyed the scene grimly. "That's the Red Dog crowd!" he remarked. "And thar's Old Man Gunten egging them on, by thunder!"

"Old Man Gunten," the storekeeper and moneylender of Thompson, was standing behind a tree, watching the besieged cabin from that safe cover. Neither Gunten nor the Red Dog ruffians observed the cattlemen riding up behind them. They were too busy.

It was not till Billy Cook and his companions were close at hand that Mr. Gunten caught sight of them. The fat Swiss storekeeper gave a start at the sight of the horsemen from the Lawless Ranch.

He called out to his men, and the spattering fire of the revolvers ceased. Keno Kit and his gang stared round surlily at the ranchmen.

"Waal, I guess we've arrove in time for the circus, Old Man Gunten," remarked Billy

Cook, drawing rein within a couple of yards of the fat storekeeper.

Mr. Gunten scowled at him. "You're not wanted here!" he snapped.

Billy Cook grinned.

"I guess you're mistaken, Mr. Gunten. Keep that shooter down, Keno Kit, or you'll get my quirt round your shoulders before you can say 'No sugar in mine!'"

Billy Cook made a movement with the heavy cattlemen's whip he carried in his hand.

"I guess you've no business here!" snarled Keno Kit, but he lowered the revolver.

"What do you want, Billy Cook?" demanded Mr. Gunten. "What the thunder have you come along here for now?"

"Old Man Lawless sent us along," explained the ranch foreman. "Young Todgers arrove with a message that Bob Lawless and Frank Richards were puttin' up to-night at the Hopkinse's shebang. Old Man Lawless scented trouble, and sent us along to inquire. You see, all Thompson knows that you've got a claim on Hopkinse's farm, and that you're tryin' to get his land off him, and so—"

"If you want to know, I've foreclosed on a mortgage on the holding!" said Mr. Gunten sourly. "I'm here to take possession!"

"The sheriff's the man to put you in possession, if you've got an order from the court at Fraser."

"The sheriff's away, down at Kamloops."

"I guess you'll have to wait till he's home agin, then."

"That's my business!" said Mr. Gunten savagely. "Everyone in that cabin is welcome to walk out if he chooses. But if it's held against me, the proper owner, I'm going to set it on fire!"

Billy Cook shook his head.

"I guess not!" he said. "Young Todgers told us that you'd been offered the money due on the mortgage—"

"Too late!"

"You won't take the money?"

"No, I won't!" snapped Mr. Gunten. "I know my own business best, and I choose to take the property."

The ranch foreman looked at him keenly.

"I dunno how the law stands about that," he said. "I guess the sheriff wouldn't be in a hurry to turn a settler out of his homestead when you're offered your dollars. P'raps that's why you're trying to get possession while Mr. Henderson is away at Kam-

loops. Anyhow, this is clear agin the law. You can't take possession with a gang of bulldozers from the Red Dog, without any representative of the court hyer. And you're not going to be allowed!"

"Who's going to stop me?" shouted Mr. Gunten.

"I am!" answered the ranchman coolly. "That's what I'm hyer for! Your bulldozers are going to stand off instanter! I give them two minutes to abquatulate!"

There was a growl among the Red Dog crowd, and they handled their revolvers.

Billy Cook regarded them serenely.

"Two minutes!" he repeated. "Arter that we're goin' to begin on you with our cattle-whips! I guess if you use those shooters you'll be sorry for it arterwards! There's a rope in Thompson for any galoot who forgets that he's in Canada, and thinks he's at home in Oregon, and lets off his shootin'-iron reckless! But take your chiece! Boys, get your quirts ready!"

The cattlemen grinned, and grasped their heavy whips in readiness for the fray.

Keno Kit and his comrades looked at one another.

As a matter of fact, they dared not venture upon reckless shooting, which might have led to fatalities, such fatalities being called, in the Thompson Valley, by the unpleasant name of murder, with punishment appropriate to follow. The manners and customs of the Oregon mining-camps were not safe to practise on the Canadian side of the border.

Old Man Gunten, too, realised that it would not do.

He was a prominent citizen of Thompson, and he had his position there to consider. A pitched battle, with two or three deaths to follow, was a rather too serious matter for the fat Swiss to contemplate. And he had a very keen concern for his own fat, unhealthy skin.

He made a sign to his followers, which gave them the excuse they wanted for "backing down."

The Red Dog ruffians, still growling threateningly, drew off, and started for Thompson.

Billy Cook watched them out of sight, with a serene grin, and then rode on to the log cabin, and smote on the door with the butt of his whip.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Order of the Boot!

**F**RANK RICHARDS opened the door of the log cabin.

Never had Frank been so glad to see the brawny foreman of his uncle's ranch.

Frank Richards & Co. had come there to help Mr. Hopkins and his son Harold to hold the fort against Mr. Gunten's myrmidons, and they had held it successfully so far. The rattling pistol-shots outside had done no damage. The fusillade had been intended chiefly to scare the garrison into surrender. But if Mr. Gunten had carried out his threat of setting fire to the cabin, the situation of the garrison would have been serious enough. The arrival of the cowboys had changed the aspect of affairs, however.

"Hallo, old Billy!" called out Bob Lawless. "Jolly glad to see you!"

"Never so glad to see anybody!" remarked Vere Beauclerc, with a smile. "I suppose Mr. Lawless guessed that trouble was going on here?"

"I guess he did," grinned Billy Cook. "It wasn't very difficult to guess. Anybody hurt?"

"No," said Frank: "only some of those ruffians have some small-shot in their legs from Mr. Hopkins' shotgun."

"And they'd 'ave 'ad some in their 'eads if they ain't cleared off," remarked Harold Hopkins, the Cockney of Cedar Creek. "They ain't taking our 'ome off of us!"

Billy Cook chuckled. Harold's difficulty with the aspirates was very entertaining to the Canadians.

Old Man Gunten had followed the cattlemen to the log cabin, and now he looked in at the doorway with a frowning face.

Mr. Hopkins eyed him grimly.

The Swiss storekeeper stepped inside.

"What may you happen to want?" asked Billy Cook, looking at him.

"Possession of this cabin and clearing," answered the storekeeper. "I can show you the order of the court authorising me—"

"I guess that's of no interest to me," answered the ranchman. "I ain't looking at any of your documents. But if this was my cabin, I'd take you by the scruff of the neck and fire you in two shakes of a coyote's tail!"

Mr. Hopkins pointed to the door.

"Houtside!" he said.

"The law—"

"Never mind the law," said the settler. "You've been offered your money, and that's enough. Take it, if you like—"

"I refuse to touch it, and I claim my rights here!" said the Swiss savagely.

The settler advanced upon him, and Mr. Gunten backed into the doorway again.

There he stopped, uneasy but defiant.

"If you lay hands on me—"

"I'll do that fast enough."

The settler suited the action to the words at once.

He grasped the fat Swiss, spun him round, and planted a heavy boot behind him.

Old Man Gunten flew out of the cabin under that powerful propulsion, and landed on all-fours two or three yards away, yelling.

There was a roar of laughter from the cattlemen.

"We'll see that galoot back to Thompson," said Billy Cook. "I guess he won't want to go on the war-path agin when we're through with him. Come on, pard!"

As Mr. Gunten scrambled furiously to his feet the cattlemen's whips cracked round him.

"Off you go!" called out Billy Cook.

"I—I— Yaroo!" howled the storekeeper, as the ranchman's whip curled round his legs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand back! I— Yoohoop!"

Four or five long quirts were lashing round the storekeeper's fat legs, and he took to his heels, howling.

The cattlemen rode after him as he started in flight towards Thompson. They kept pace with him, riding round him, cracking their whips, and giving him an occasional cut round the legs, roaring with laughter.

Mr. Gunten was not a sprinter; he had too much weight to carry. But he put on a remarkable speed as he headed for the town.

The cracking whips hunted him all the way to Thompson, and he arrived in Main Street red and panting and perspiring, and babbling with fury.

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The sight of the fat storekeeper scuttling up the street, with the laughing cowboys cracking their whips round him, drew a crowd at once.

There were yells of laughter on all sides. Mr. Gunten was a prominent and wealthy citizen, but not a popular one. There was no help for him from the chortling crowd in Main Street.

Right up to Gunten's store he was escorted by the ranchmen, with cracking, stinging quirts.

He bolted breathlessly into the store and escaped at last, leaving a mob roaring with laughter outside.

Then Billy Cook and his comrades rode on to the Occidental for liquid refreshment after their efforts, and it was at rather a late hour that they galloped home to the Lawless Ranch across the prairie.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### Gold!

**F**RANK RICHARDS & CO. stayed the night in the Hopkins' homestead.

Door and windows were barred, but the night passed without any disturbance. Old Man Gunten and his myrmidons had been effectually scared off by the ranchmen.

The chums of Cedar Creek were up soon after dawn.

They breakfasted with the settler in the cabin, and over breakfast Frank Richards was wearing a very thoughtful look.

Frank was giving the affair a "big think."

The fact that Old Man Gunten had lent more money on the homestead than it was worth in the market, and that he had refused to accept his money with interest added, was very perplexing, and Frank had been trying to think out an explanation of the mystery.

Tyrannical and overbearing as the fat Swiss was by nature, his greed of dollars was his ruling passion, and evidently he had some more powerful motive for his conduct than the mere desire to show his power and "act ugly."

If he refused the offer of five hundred dollars, it could only be because the holding was worth more than that sum to him.

Which was very perplexing, because better holdings could have been bought, up and about the Thompson Valley, for less money.

Frank, coming over that curious in his mind, found an explanation at last—

assisted, perhaps, by the sound of the miners at work on the creek, the "placer" claims being very near the Hopkins' homestead on Cedar Creek.

"I think I've got it," Frank remarked at last, after a long silence.

"What and which?" asked Bob.

"Old Man Gunten is bent on getting hold of Mr. Hopkins' land," said Frank. "Why?"

"Because he's a pesky coyote," said Bob. Frank Richards laughed.

"He would rather have the money, unless the land was worth more than five hundred dollars to him," he said.

"That's what beats me," said Mr. Hopkins. "This holding wouldn't fetch that if I sold it in Thompson. And I ought to know the value of the land I've worked on."

"There's only one explanation," said Frank quietly. "The land's worth more than you suppose, Mr. Hopkins."

The settler shook his head.

"I guess I know what it will produce," he said. "Of course, with money spent on it for fertilisers and agricultural machinery, it would be worth a lot more. But there's better land down the valley, if Old Man Gunten wants to try farming."

"It's this holding he wants," said Frank, "and it can't be for farming. There's something else."

"What else, then?" asked Beauclerc, with wide-open eyes.

Frank waved his hand towards the diggings along the creek.

"What about gold?" he said.

"Gold!"

Frank Richards nodded.

"Yes. The placer miners are at work just over Mr. Hopkins' border. There's gold close at hand, anyway. Suppose Old Man Gunten has found that there was gold in this land?"

"Phew!"

"It's quite likely," said Frank. "There's quartz cropping up in the soil, and it's close to the gold-bearing rocks. The fact is, that's the only possible explanation of Old Man Gunten acting in this way. He's a beast! But he doesn't want to make himself

unpopular for nothing, and lose money by doing it. I've heard that he's planning to stand for the legislature; and turning a farmer out of house and home isn't the way to get votes in the valley, is it? The land's worth more than Mr. Hopkins knows; that's the only way of accounting for what Old Man Gunten is doing. And it can only be worth much if there's gold in it."

"My hat!" said Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless gave a long, expressive whistle.

"Great Scott!" was Harold Hopkins' remark.

Mr. Hopkins sat silent. The simple settler had been puzzled and perplexed by Old Man Gunten's apparently inexplicable determination to seize upon his holding. But he had never thought of that explanation.

He nodded at last slowly.

"It's possible!" he said.

"Have you ever come across traces of the yellow?" asked Bob Lawless eagerly.

"Oh, yes! The soil's mighty poor and rocky for farming. There's traces of gold turned up in half the farms hereabouts," said Mr. Hopkins. "Not enough for pay-dirt, but enough to show. But I've never thought—"

"Great Jerusalem!" said Bob. "That's the explanation, of course! We were jays not to think of it before! You've got to hold on to this land, Mr. Hopkins, like grim death to a nigger!"

"You bet!" said the settler concisely.

"If there's gold in the soil," continued Frank Richards, "it may be no end of a bonanza—in fact, it must be valuable for Old Man Gunten to be so keen on it. You can get one of Mr. Isaacs' surveyors here, Mr. Hopkins, to make an examination and report. And, meanwhile, Old Man Gunten has got to be headed off!"

"We'll take a note to Mr. Isaacs' office on our way to school," said Bob Lawless.

"I guess that's the proper caper!" said the settler slowly. "It's a chance that Richards is right, at least; it makes it all clear, and it was a puzzle before. You'll stay at 'ome from school to-day, 'Aroid, and I'll 'old the cabin if there's trouble. And I'm expectin' Bill 'ome to-day, too—he ought to be 'ere any minute. I'll write that there note to Mr. Isaacs now."

A little later Frank Richards & Co. called to their horses to start.

A big, bronzed young man rode in from the southern trail as they were starting. It was Bill Hopkins, the settler's eldest son, from Kamloops. With three Hopkinses at home, the chums of Cedar Creek felt that the holding would be safe enough if Old Man Gunten recommenced his tactics. They rode away in cheerful spirits to Thompson.

At that hour of the morning Thompson was generally a quiet town; it did not, as a rule, "wake up" till nightfall. But on this special morning there was unusual excitement in the frontier town.

As Frank and Bob and Beauclerc rode into Main Street they found a crowd gathered there outside Gunten's store. The crowd looked excited, and Bob recognised among them two or three cattlemen from the Lawless Ranch.

"Something's on!" remarked Frank Richards.

"Up against Old Man Gunten, I guess!" said Bob Lawless. "I fancy the burg has heard now about his trying to turn Mr. Hopkins out of his home. There may be trouble for the old rascal!"

"Serve him right!"

"You bet!"

The chums rode on to Mr. Isaacs' office, which was just open. Mr. Isaacs was a gentleman of the Oriental persuasion, who "financed" mining concerns, and did a great business with prospectors on "grub-stakes," and supplied surveyors and engineers for the more important mines, and also lent money at considerable interest—having many irons in the fire. There was no love lost between Mr. Isaacs and Old Man Gunten, whose money-lending activities Mr. Isaacs regarded as poaching upon his special preserves. And although Old Man Gunten often alluded scornfully to Mr. Isaacs as a "sheeney," there was no doubt that Mr. Isaacs was the more honest man of the two.

Mr. Isaacs received the settler's note, and read it with much interest, and smiled and rubbed his hands.

"I guess my man will be with Mr. Hopkins inside an hour," he said. "Goot-morning, Young shentlemen!"

Frank Richards & Co. left the office, feeling quite satisfied. Mr. Isaacs' own personal feud with Old Man Gunten was a guarantee

that he would do his best to help the victim of the Swiss storekeeper.

There was a roar of voices in the direction of Gunten's store, and the chums rode back in that direction. They were keenly interested in what was going on there. The crowd outside the store was thickening.

Cattlemen from the ranches, placer-miners from the creek, "hands" from the quartz-mines, small-holders from down the valley, and all sorts and conditions of "galoots," had gathered in strong force, letting the business of the morning slide while they gave their attention to the affair in hand. And the affair in hand was, apparently, the bringing to order of Mr. Gompers Gunten.

"Lynch him!" was a cry being raised in sections of the crowd, as Frank Richards & Co. came along.

Bob Lawless grinned. "Old Man Gunten don't look like being popular just at present," he remarked.

"Hallo, you fellows!" Chunky Todgers, on his fat little pony, joined the chums in Main Street. Like them, he was on his way to school, but was letting school stand over for a while. "I say, there's going to be trouble here! The whole town's talking about Old Man Gunten and Hopkins!"

"Looks like it!" said Frank, laughing. "I fancy they're going to rush the store!" said Chunky Todgers. "If the place is wrecked, you chaps, do you think a fellow would be justified in helping himself to some maple sugar?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's been a row last night," continued Todgers. "Some of the citizens cleaned out the Red Dog saloon, looking for Keno Kit and his gang. Those bulldozers are hiding away now. I reckon they'd get strung up if the crowd found them! I say, what do you think Old Man Gunten is feeling like just now?"

The chums of Cedar Creek chuckled. Old Man Gunten at that moment was probably in the bluest funk of his career.

In his dealings with Mr. Hopkins he had acted within the letter of the law, certainly—as did Shylock when he demanded his pound of flesh. But the letter of the law did not matter much to the rough-and-ready citizens of Thompson.

All they knew was that the greedy money-lender was taking advantage of a legal technicality to turn a hard-working man, with his family, out of house and home, and conduct like that was not popular in the Thompson Valley of British Columbia.

Mr. Gunten, with all his sharpness and cunning, had certainly never foreseen what a storm he was raising about his own ears. "There'll be bad trouble!" said Beaulere, watching the buzzing crowd from his horse. "The sheriff's away, too. I say, Frank, this is a rather good time for dealing with Gunten."

"How do you mean?" "You offered him the money yesterday to clear up Mr. Hopkins' debt to him, and he refused it!"

"Well?" "Would he refuse it now, with this merry mob under his windows, do you think?" Frank Richards started.

"My hat! Good for you, Cherub! Come on! We'll go and see Gunten!" And the chums of Cedar Creek pushed on through the crowd towards the store.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**  
**Lynch Law!**

"HOLD on!" "Stop!" "By thunder—"

Loud and angry voices sounded round the schoolboys as they tried to push through the mob. There was not much room for horses in the crowded throng outside Gunten's store.

"Sorry, gents!" said Bob Lawless politely. "Please let us pass! We're going to pay Mr. Gunten what Hopkins owes him. We want some of you to come into the store and see that he takes the money."

"Good for you, young Lawless!" exclaimed Buster Bill, whose red head and beard towered over the crowd. "Let them pass, you galoots! I reckon we'll see that Old Man Gunten takes the money!"

"Hurrah!" The crowd surged on round the store, with the schoolboys in their midst. Frank Richards & Co. dismounted, and Bob rapped at the door, which was bolted and barred.

"Come down and let us in, Old Man Gunten!" roared Buster Bill. A window opened above.

At the window appeared the fat face and figure of Gompers Gunten, his face almost as white as chalk.

A threatening roar greeted his appearance. Two or three revolvers cracked in the air, though they were not directed at the store-keeper.

"Go away!" shouted the storekeeper in a quavering voice. "If you touch my store, you'll be fired on!"

"I guess that'll be the last thing you'll do in this hyer airth if you pull trigger on this crowd!" answered Buster Bill contemptuously. "Come and open the door!"

"I refuse—"

"We've come to pay for Mr. Hopkins!" shouted Frank Richards.

Old Man Gunten looked down at him savagely. "It's too late, as I've told you before!" he snapped.

"I've got an order on the Thompson Bank for the money!" "Keep it!"

The crowd roared and surged. Heavy blows rained upon the door, and there was a crash of glass as a window smashed.

Mr. Gunten disappeared for a moment, and returned to the upper window with a rifle in his hands.

His hands were trembling too much to hold the rifle very steadily, however. But the sight of the weapon was enough for the crowd in the street. A dozen revolvers glistened in the morning sunshine.

"Put down that gun, or we'll riddle yer!" roared Buster Bill.

Bullets were flying now, though as yet they only spattered at random on the walls of the store.

But it was clear enough that if Old Man Gunten used his unlucky rifle it would be, as the cattlemen said, his last action on the earth. He realised it himself, and he dropped the gun out of sight.

"I—I guess I'll come down!" he gasped. "Git a move on, then, afore we smash in the door, and your durned store along with it!" growled Buster Bill.

In a few minutes there were sounds of bars and bolts being removed within.

Old Man Gunten, with mingled fury and fear in his heart, had bowed to the inevitable. He had to open the door or see it broken in, and he chose to open it.

The instant the door opened Frank Richards & Co. were swept inside in a surge of the mob.

Mr. Gunten was swept back by the rush into the room behind the store, which was soon crowded, as well as the store itself, with a shouting mob.

"Order hyer!" roared Buster Bill, making his powerful tones heard over the din. "Order, you galoots!"

"Lynch him!" "Ride him out of town on a rail!"

"Hurrah!" "Order, I say!" shouted the big cattleman, shoving back the too-eager citizens who were crowding round the terrified store-keeper.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen—" panted Mr. Gunten.

Buster Bill succeeded in restoring something like order. Mr. Gunten sank, trembling, into a chair at the table, and the Thompson men surrounded him, leaving him a little room. Buster Bill was master of the ceremonies, emphasising his commands by brandishing a big Navy revolver.

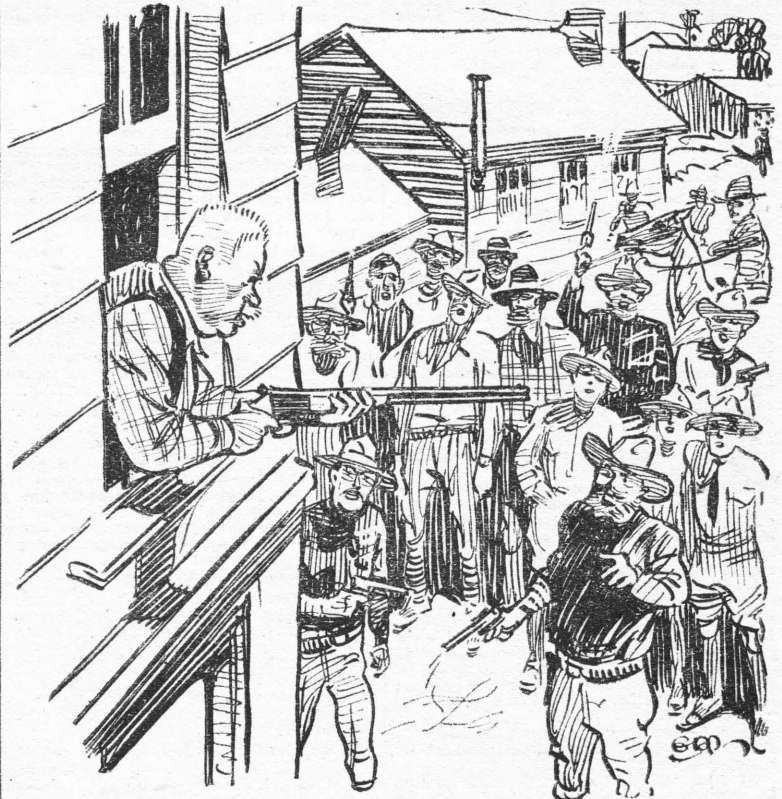
"Now, then, young Lawless—"

"Here we are!" said Bob cheerily. "Mr. Gunten, Frank Richards has come to pay you—"

"I—I—"

"I'm ready," said Frank. "I offered you the money yesterday, Mr. Gunten, and you refused it. Here's the order on the bank for five hundred dollars, the sum with interest that Mr. Hopkins owes you on the mortgage. Will you take it?"

The fat Swiss breathed hard. Strictly speaking, he was within his rights in refusing the money, as the time allowed for payment had lapsed. But with a crowd of angry men round him to see fair play refusal was difficult.



**HOLDING UP GUNTEN!** Mr. Gunten appeared at the window with a rifle in his hands. The sight of the weapon was enough for the crowd in the street. A dozen revolvers glistened in the sunshine. "Put down that gun!" shouted Buster Bill. (See Chapter 4.)

"I—I claim my rights," he said feebly. "The money wasn't paid on time, and the holding's mine!"

"What do you want with it?" asked Frank.

"That's my business!"

"You happen to know that there's gold there, of course?"

Frank jumped.

Frank Richards had spoken at a venture, hoping to take the fat rascal by surprise; and he had certainly succeeded.

Old Man Gunten stared at him blankly, with dropping jaw and wide-open eyes.

Frank Richards did not need an answer. The answer was to be read plainly enough in Mr. Gunten's startled face.

His eyes glinted as he looked round on the surprised faces of the Thompson men.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you hear that? Old Man Gunten found out that there's gold on the Hopkins' holding, and he lent Mr. Hopkins money to get him into his clutches. Now he refuses payment because Mr. Hopkins couldn't raise the money quite in time. That's his game, and you know what to think of it."

Buster Bill looked round.

"Get a rope from the store, some of you gaboos!" he called out.

"What are you doing to do?" shrieked the Swiss.

"Hang you over your own door!" answered Buster Bill coolly. "That's the stuff you want, you foreign trash!"

"I—I—"

"Lynch him!"

The store rang with the threatening shout, and rough hands were laid on the scheming storekeeper on all sides.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### The Luck of the Hopkinses!

LD Man Gunten staggered to his feet, his face white as ashes.

"Stop! I—I— Gentlemen, stop! I guess— Mercy!"

"Lynch him!"

Frank Richards & Co. drew nearer to the wretched schemer. Rascal as Gompers Gunten was, they certainly did not wish to see him lynched by the angry crowd. Fortunately, Buster Bill interposed. For the moment it looked as if all Mr. Gunten's cunning schemes would end at the end of a rope over the doorway of his store.

"Hold on! Now, Mr. Gunten, jest you give us the frozen truth, if you know what's good for your health!" said the big cattleman. "Is there gold on the Hopkinses' holding?"

"I—I—"

"Lynch him!"

"Yes!" gasped Mr. Gunten. "It's—it's true! Mercy!"

"You pesky polecat!" said Buster Bill, in great disgust. "You've found out the holding's worth a fortune, and you want to rope it in for five hundred dollars!"

"The—the law—"

"Now, you can do the fair thing, or you can dance at the end of a riata!" said Buster Bill. "Hyer's young Richards with your money, and there's a pen and ink! You're going to be paid, and you're going to put it in writing fair and square, to see old Hopkins clear before any court in Canada. You're got your own free ch'ice, remember; but you'll be lynched if you refuse! Is that clear?"

It was clear enough for the hapless plotter. Old Man Gunten's cunning scheme had ended in disastrous failure; and with the rope very nearly round his fat neck, he was only too glad to see his money again and escape with a whole skin.

He grabbed the pen.

The document he drew up was comprehensive enough, and satisfied even Frank Richards & Co., who scrutinised it with the greatest care, knowing the slippery nature of the rascal they had to deal with. Buster Bill and five or six of his comrades signed it as witnesses in a remarkable variety of "fists."

Then the order 'on the bank was handed over, and received with a shaking hand by the storekeeper.

"I guess that lets us out," remarked Bob Lawless. "We'll ride back to Hopkins' cabin before we go to school, Franky. Thanks very much, Mr. Gunten! How does it feel to be honest for once in your life?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A bitter scowl was the storekeeper's only reply.

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Frank Richards & Co. returned to their horses, and mounted and rode away in the greatest spirits.

They left a worried and terrified rascal behind them.

Mr. Gunten's rascality had roused the Thompson men, but his tardy act of justice was not sufficient to quieten them. Like the hapless magician of old, he had raised a spirit he could not quell.

There was already wrecking going on in the store, and tins and packets and all kinds of goods were being pitched recklessly into the street, and there was hardly a window left whole in the building. And some of the more lawless spirits in the mob were still demanding lynching.

Old Man Gunten had signed away his unjust claim, but it looked as if he would have to pay the penalty of his rascality after all. The damage already done was not to be covered by five hundred dollars. But Buster Bill's bull-voice dominated the crowd.

"Gents!" bawled the big cattleman, "Old Man Gunten hev played up, and he's goin' to keep his neck—till next time. But he's wasted the time of a hundred gaboos hyer, and he's tried to swindle a feller-citizen. The drinks are on him!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a shout of applause at once.

"I agree—I agree!" panted Mr. Gunten, glad of the loophole of escape. In mortal fear of his worthless neck, he was only too glad to be let off for "drinks."

"Old Man Gunten is askin' all of us to the Occidental to lieker up!" continued Buster Bill. "Is that kerrect, sir?"

"Quite—quite!"

"Then come along!" said Buster Bill.

He took Mr. Gunten by the arm, and led him from the store, accompanied by a laughing and good-humoured mob now. The Thompson men were thirsty after so much shouting, and they followed Mr. Gunten and Buster Bill to the Occidental like lambs. In the bar-room of the Occidental Mr. Gunten grinned as cordially as he could. In the Western phrase the "drinks were on him," and he was not let off lightly.

But when he limped back to his damaged store at last, he was glad to find himself alive and well—and glad that he had had to pay no more heavily for his rascality. And it dawned upon his mind that honesty, after all, was the best policy—at least, in a town like Thompson!

Frank Richards & Co. were late at school that day, and they bore with becoming meekness the censure of Miss Meadows. They were thinking quite as much about the Hopkins' holding, and the investigations there of Mr. Isaacs' man, as about their lessons.

But it was not till a couple of days later that Mr. Isaacs' man made his report.

When that report was made it was, as Bob Lawless expressed it, a "regular sock-dollager."

From Old Man Gunten's confession it was already known that there was gold in the holding. The storekeeper had made the discovery long since, and had laid his cunning plans for getting possession of the land.

The surveyor's report confirmed that confession, and set all doubts at rest.

Where Mr. Hopkins' plough had scratched the scanty, stony soil for a bare living, rich veins lay deeper down, and the outcrop was so promising that Mr. Isaacs was ready to "go in" with the farmer to develop the mine. And when Harold Hopkins turned up at Cedar Creek School again he came with a beaming face.

"It's jest orl right!" said Hopkins gleefully. "Jest a bit of orl-right, and no error. We're going to roll in it, you can bet. You'll see me in a silk at yet, like the one you wore when you first came to Cedar Creek, Frank Richards! Old Isaacs is advancing the money to work the lode, and poppers' got your five hundred dollars ready for you, Frank. We're all going to be blessed Creeshuses!"

It remained to be seen whether the Hopkins would be transformed into Cræsus; but Frank Richards & Co. and all Cedar Creek cordially hoped that it would come to pass.

THE END.

(There will be another stirring long complete story, dealing with the adventures of Frank Richards & Co. of Cedar Creek, in next week's special issue.)

## IN THE TOILS!

by The Editor.

ONE of my most enthusiastic readers of the "Popular" sends me a graphic account of an amazing adventure which befell him some time back during a visit to the wonderful Amazon country.

Some months back he was bitten once again by this desire to cross the seas, and he secured a passage in an interesting little tramp steamer bound for Monte Video. But on its way to the land of the pelicans the vessel touched at several South American ports, including Bahia. From this Brazilian port my chum went right up-country. As we all know there is little more than a fringe of civilised country in Brazil. The coast cities are brilliant. Up country you get the wilderness. A pretty wonderful wilderness it is. My correspondent can handle the Portuguese language, and had no difficulty in finding means to visit the forests of the interior. He tells me, in the course of his long letter, that one day he was surprised by hearing cries of distress coming from the jungle as he sat in his boat. He had made the boat fast, and was thinking of having a meal, when the piteous call from something in distress fell on his ear. The sound came from quite near at hand, and my chum made his way through the thick vegetation which grew down to the shore. Up the sloping ground he went—a quarter of a mile it must have been. Then suddenly he came upon a scene which for sensation eclipsed all the many adventures he had met with on the voyage out.

Just ahead of him he saw a dense bush, which he immediately recognised as the octopus plant, which preys on animals, dragging the unwary into its toils. Right in the centre of this bush, with its deep crimson, waxy flowers, and its lithe and sinuous tentacle-like, coiling tendrils, my chum saw a quaint little brown monkey. The poor little creature was fighting for its life.

It was, as the narrator points out, impossible to avoid a shrinking. The spectacle was horrible, but he overcame his scruples, and dashed forward, his big jack-knife in his hand. The little simian heard his approach, and turned and gazed at his rescuer. Succour had arrived only just in time. The tiny victim was abandoning the struggle. The air was filled with the weird, swishing rustle of the moving tendrils, and the monkey was being slowly drawn inwards. My chum slashed with his knife at the curling tentacles, and then he made a grab and managed to draw the monkey out of danger. It was panting hard, and there was a strange hunted look in its eyes. In a minute, however, it had partially recovered, and leaped on to my chum's shoulder, rubbing its funny little head against his ear.

The next second it leaped again, catching at a branch of a towering tree. In a second it was up and away into the leafy sanctuary, chattering as it went.

But in that spell of time its rescuer's attention was off the peril of the Southern forest. He had cause to regret his carelessness the moment after, for suddenly he felt the soft pressure of a coil of creeper round his leg. He was jerked back, and he almost fell. Just saving himself, he swung round and cut at the tendril which had laced itself about his thigh and lower leg. The tendril was tough, but he managed to sever the strand. The danger was not over, however. A huge tentacle from the hideous octopus plant dropped from the top of the bush and fastened, vice-like, on his shoulder, swinging him towards the centre of the plant.

He fought savagely, and, as he realised, well-nigh hopelessly, for life and liberty. His left arm was pinioned by a writhing tendril of the thickness of a garden hose-pipe. But his right hand was free, and he fought on, slashing madly at the soft strands which had him in their power. He was being steadily sucked in by the monstrous plant. There was no help at hand. All rested on himself. There was a mist before his eyes; but, though his senses were almost inert, he struggled on, hacking at the fleshy tentacles until at last the pressure was relaxed, and he staggered out of captivity, a free man. He tells me that he hardly knew how he managed to regain his boat. One can well believe that!