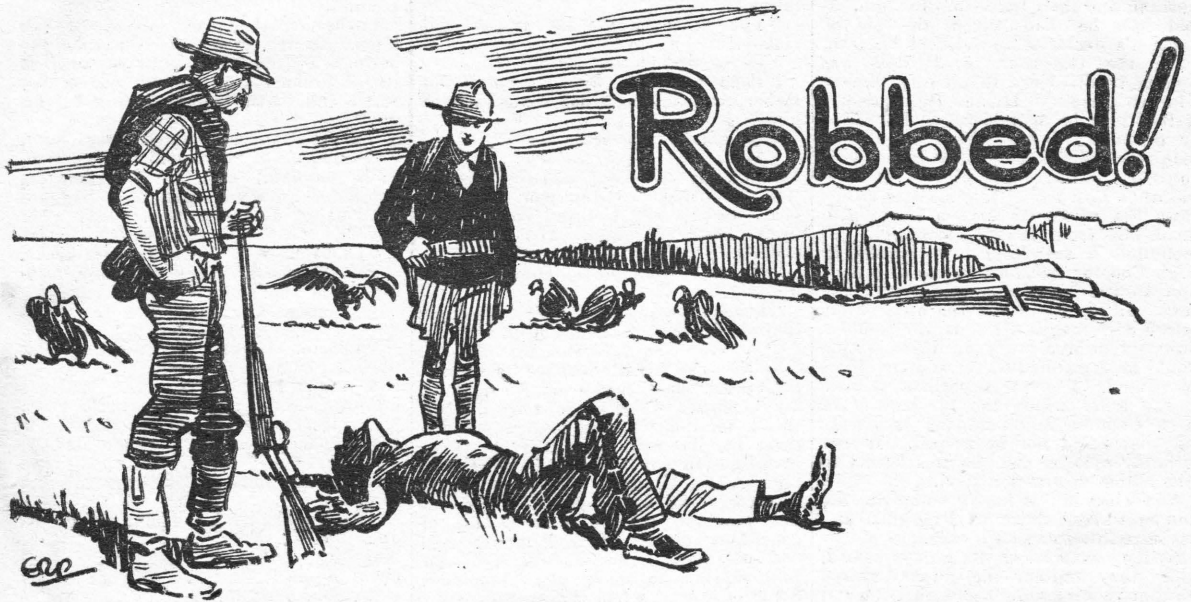


THE GOLD THIEF!

It is a terrible moment for Frank Richards and his partner when they discover their gold, fruit of many days' hard labour, missing. Who has managed to find a way into the locked valley to steal the sack of precious metal?



Another Thrilling and Dramatic Long Complete Story of Frank Richards, the Homeless Schoolboy of the Canadian Backwoods!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Startling Accusation!

"DINNER'S ready!"
Frank Richards called out that announcement in cheery tones.

It was past midday, on the Cascade Mountains of British Columbia.

The sun blazed down into the narrow, rocky gulch, and upon the glimmering creek where Frank and his "pardner," Bronze Bill had been working at the placer claim through the hot days.

For two or three weeks now Frank had been camped with the big miner in the locked gulch, and every day he had turned out cheerfully to work on the placer.

The deposit of golden grains in the creek bottom was almost worked out by this time, and the little sack of gold in the shack had grown to quite respectable dimensions.

It was drawing near the time for the gold-seekers to "pull up stakes," and find their way out of the locked gulch.

The store of provisions in the camp, too, was growing very slender, though it was eked out by the game occasionally found in the thickets on the rocky slopes of the gulch.

Frank had been cooking the dinner at the camp-fire. Bronze Bill was resting in the shack after a morning out with his rifle. The big miner had now almost recovered from the wound he had received in the encounter with Le Couteau and his gang, though so far Frank had done most of the hard work on the placer.

"Dinner, Bill!"

There was no answer from the shack. Frank Richards looked round.

As a rule, Bronze Bill was prompt to the call of meal-times. Frank Richards called again.

"Coming!" came a deep voice.

The bronzed miner emerged from the shack.

Frank started as he looked at him.

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Since the fight with the half-breeds the two had been on the best of terms, and Frank had very willingly accepted Bronze Bill's offer to make him his "pardner" in working the claim.

He had found the big miner rough-and-ready in his ways, but kind and good-humoured enough. But there was no good-humour in Bronze Bill's face now. His expression was hard and grim as he came towards the camp-fire.

"Anything up, Bill?" asked Frank.

"I guess so."

"Dinner—"

"Never mind dinner, for a shake," said Bronze Bill. "I guess you and me has got to have a talk first, Richards."

"I'm jolly hungry!"

"I guess you can wait a bit, sonny!" said the big miner grimly. "This hyer bizness won't wait."

He sat on a log, and to Frank's surprise drew the big Navy revolver from his belt.

"What the dickens—" began Frank. Bronze Bill lifted the revolver so that the muzzle bore upon his schoolboy "pard."

Frank stared at him blankly, wondering whether it was sunstroke.

"You needn't put up your hands, sonny," said Bronze Bill quietly. "But don't try any gum-games, or I reckon this hyer shooting-iron will go off some. You get me?"

"I don't understand you in the least!" said Frank Richards indignantly. "If you're trying to pull my leg—"

"I guess I mean cold business from the word 'go'!" said Bronze Bill.

"Look hyer! Ain't I treated you fair and square since we became pards?"

"Yes," said Frank. "I've nothing to grumble at."

"When you came moseying up Dead Man's Canyon and lighted on me," continued Bronze Bill. "I reckoned you was a spy sent by Le Couteau and his gang to nose out my claim. I roped you in. Then you stood up for me like a little man when the breeds tried to

jump my claim, and I calculate you saved my life. I ain't forgotten that. I reckon that's the reason why I don't drop you in your tracks this pesky minute. But you ain't played fair, Richards. You oughtn't to hev gone back on the galoot what made you his pardner fair and square."

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Frank angrily. "How have I gone back on you?"

"I reckon you know."

"Haven't I done my share of the work on the claim?" demanded Frank. "More than my share, if you come to that, as you've been laid up with your wound."

"Correct. And you've nursed me through, too," said Bronze Bill. "I ain't denying it. Up till now you've played up like a little man, and arter what you've done, I'm going to forgive you and let you have your share in the dust; but I ain't going to let you rob me."

Frank jumped.

"Rob you!" he exclaimed.

"That's about the size of it."

"Are you mad?"

"Oh, come off!" said Bronze Bill. "I'm going to treat you fair, young Richards, though you don't deserve it arter robbing your pard. Where's the gold-sack?"

"The gold-sack?" repeated Frank.

"Yep."

"In the shack, in its usual place, under the bearskin, I suppose," answered Frank Richards.

"Come off, I tell you!" exclaimed Bronze Bill impatiently. "Do you figure it out that I can't believe my own eyes?"

"Do you mean to say that it isn't there?" demanded Frank, in astonishment.

"I reckon so."

"My only hat?"

"There ain't nobody in this hyer gulch excepting you an' me," said Bronze Bill. "The tunnel from the canyon is blocked up with about a

hundred ton of rock, and nary a gopher could find a hole to creep through, let alone a man. No living galoot can get into this hyer gulch, and I reckon it's going to be a hefty job for us to find a way out arter we're done here now that the tunnel's blocked. Only you an' me, Richards, and one of us has lifted the gold-sack—and it wasn't me. So it was you! Savvy?"

"Oh, rats! Let me have a look for it!"

Bronze Bill nodded slowly.

"There ain't any way out of the gulch, anyhow, till we find one by hunting for it," he said. "I reckon you're my game, Frank Richards, if you don't hand over the dust! But you can root into the shack if you like, though it's wasting time."

Without answering, Frank Richards turned and strode away towards the shack, Bronze Bill following him, revolver in hand.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bitter Blood.

FRANK RICHARDS was breathing hard, and his handsome face was crimson with anger.

But he was puzzled.

Bronze Bill, though rough in his ways, was honest as the day, so far as Frank Richards could judge. Frank would never have suspected him of "bagging" the proceeds of the work on the placer. But if the gold-sack was gone, there was nothing else to think.

Bronze Bill—driven to the same conclusion by the same circumstances—suspected him.

There was no third party to be suspected.

The gulch in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains was "locked"—that is, it was shut in by inaccessible walls of rock.

There had been a cavern-tunnel from the canyon beyond, leading into the gulch through the rocky hillside; but the tunnel had been blocked by a dynamite explosion, to keep off the attack of Le Couteau and his gang of "breeds."

Since then the two gold-seekers had been shut off from all communication with the outside world.

When the time came to travel, they had to find a way out over the apparently inaccessible rocks that shut in the gulch, and success was by no means certain. That task was left till the claim was worked out, and they were ready to go.

The disappearance of the gold sack, therefore, could only be imputed to one of the partners.

Frank entered the little shack.

Under the big bearskin on the floor was an excavation, in which the canvas gold-sack had been kept, concealed from sight.

Every evening there had been a little more to add to the store of gold in the sack. The previous evening it had been opened, as usual, and the gains of the day added. Then it had been left under the bearskin, and Frank Richards had not seen it since. There was no reason to visit the store of gold until the evening came again.

As for keeping watch on it, that had not occurred to him, knowing that he and his partner were shut up alone in the locked gulch.

He tossed the bearskin aside, and revealed the excavation in which the canvas sack had been kept.

It was empty!

Evidently the gold-sack had been removed.

Frank Richards was well aware that he had not removed it; but he looked round the shack, searching every corner.

Bronze Bill stood in the doorway, watching him with a sarcastic smile on his tanned face, the revolver still in his hand.

His look was that of a man patiently watching another going through a meaningless comedy.

Frank turned to him at last.

"You ain't found it," said Bronze Bill sardonically.

"No."

"I reckon you'd better mosey along to the place where you've hidden it," said Bronze Bill. "I ain't waiting much longer."

Frank stepped out of the shack into the sunlight.

His face was set.

"You rotter!" he said, between his teeth.

"I guess—"

"The gold-sack's gone," said Frank, his eyes blazing. "Do you think you can bluff me? It's gone, and only one of us can have taken it. I did not take it. You've robbed me!"

"What?" roared Bronze Bill.

"You needn't have done it," said Frank. "The claim was yours, and it was your own offer to me to become your partner in working it. I'd have looked after you while you were laid up with your wound, without that. But I've put in two or three weeks of hard work on the claim, and I'm entitled to something for that. Give me ordinary miner's wages for what I've done, and keep the rest. We'll part at once."

Bronze Bill stared at him blankly.

"I guess I don't make head or tail of you," he said. "I'm asking you to hand over the gold-sack you've stole, you young scallywag!"

"And I'm telling you that you've taken it, and hidden it, because you want it for yourself, and you're trying to bluff me!" exclaimed Frank savagely. "And I tell you you can keep it, and be hanged to you!"

"Nuff said!" exclaimed Bronze Bill. He raised the revolver. "I've given you a fair show, Richards, and now you've got to hand over the dust!"

"Keep it up!" said Frank disdainfully. "Do you think you'll make me believe that you haven't taken the gold-sack? Who could have taken it if you haven't? There's nobody else here!"

"You've taken it!" roared Bronze Bill.

"Liar!"

"By gosh!"

For a moment it seemed that Bronze Bill would pull trigger, but he restrained his fury.

"I guess I won't drop you!" he said, his tanned face red with wrath. "I want to know where the gold-sack is, and you've got to tell me, Richards—and I reckon you couldn't if I blew you out as you deserve, you scallywag! If you don't point it out instanter I'll rope you till you do!"

"Try it!" said Frank fiercely.

Bronze Bill thrust the revolver into his belt and started for the shack. He picked up a rope and came back towards the schoolboy of Cedar Creek, his grim, savage look leaving no doubt of his intentions. Frank made a spring for the pick he had been using in the creek. He grasped it and stood on his defence.

"Put down that pick!" shouted the miner savagely.

"Hands off, then!"

"I'm going to rope you till you hand over the gold-sack!" roared Bronze Bill. Frank, keeping the pick in his hands

for defence, looked at him with growing wonder.

Unless Bronze Bill was mad, there was no accounting for his actions—unless the seemingly impossible had happened and a third party had penetrated the gulch and lifted the sack.

Impossible as that seemed, Frank began to believe that it must be the case, for it was pretty clear now that Bronze Bill believed in his accusation, and Frank was conscious of his own innocence.

"Hold on a minute, Bill!" said Frank Richards. "Is it possible that somebody else has lifted the sack during the night?"

"Pesky rubbish!"

"We slept outside the shack, as the night was hot," said Frank, "and if some other party could have been in the gulch—"

The miner laughed scornfully.

"I guess I'm not swallowing a yarn like that!" he said. "You'll hand over the sack, or I'll rope you till you do! That's final! Now—"

"Keep off!" shouted Frank.

"I reckon not!"

The miner rushed at him, gripping the coiled rope. Threatened as he was, Frank could not find it in his heart to strike with the pick. But he drove the head of the pick against the miner's broad chest as he came on, and Bronze Bill, with a grunt of pain, slipped and fell. The next instant Frank had dropped the pick, and, springing forward, he jerked the revolver from his partner's belt.

Before the bronzed miner could rise Frank was standing over him, the revolver aimed at his face.

"Hands up!"

Bronze Bill blinked at him.

"You young scallywag—"

"Hands up, you fool!" shouted Frank. The trigger moved a little under the pressure of his finger. He did not mean to shoot, but Bronze Bill's hands went up quickly enough as the trigger moved. He sat panting with fury, his hands above his head.

"You young villain!" he gasped. "I oughter have dropped you instanter! I would have, only you saved my life from the breeds! Now shoot, you pesky scallywag, and keep the gold-sack!"

"You fool!" said Frank, lowering the revolver. "If I had robbed you I should shoot! Haven't you sense enough to see now that I haven't touched the gold?"

"That's a lie!"

"Oh, you haven't the brains of a prairie rabbit!" exclaimed Frank impatiently. "Keep your hands up! I'm going to take your rifle! It's too dangerous a toy for a fool like you, Bill!"

"You scallywag—"

Frank picked up the rope with his left hand, the miner watching him furiously. Frank looped the rope round Bronze Bill's upraised arms.

The miner made a movement to resist, and the muzzle of the revolver was pressed to his temple.

"Quiet, you fool!"

Quivering with rage, the big miner submitted. He had no doubt that Frank was ready to press the trigger.

With one hand Frank contrived to loop the rope round the miner's arms and draw the loop taut.

Bronze Bill was helpless now. Then Frank put the revolver into his own belt and lifted the rifle from the miner's back. Then he gave a little more attention to the rope, knotting it securely so that the miner had no chance of getting his arms loose.

(Continued on page 16.)

"ROBBED!"

(Continued from page 13.)

Bronze Bill watched him, with bitter rage in his tanned face.

"Now what's your game?" he asked in a choked voice. "You may as well put a bullet through my head, you pesky rascal!"

"You deserve it for your foolery!" snapped Frank. "But I'm going to leave you tied up while I find out what's become of the gold!"

"You've got it!"

"Fool!"

Leaving the bronzed miner to himself, Frank Richards walked back to the camp-fire. His dinner was more than ready, and he was more than ready for it. He sat down on a log to eat it, thinking the while, Bronze Bill watching him from a short distance with burning eyes.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Trail of the Redskin!

FRANK RICHARDS rose at last. Taking no heed of the furious looks of his partner, he went to the shack to begin his examination.

In the old days in the Thompson Valley Frank Richards had learned a great deal of woodcraft from his Canadian cousin, Bob Lawless, and the skill he had acquired stood him in good stead now.

Any "sign" that might have been left inside the shack had been destroyed by the search the miners had made. It was outside that Frank started his examination.

The ground was dry and stony, and retained no trace of footprints.

But within a dozen yards the spring bubbled and rippled, and by the spring and the creek Frank hoped to find some trace.

From what direction the intruder had come he could not guess. Only he knew that the unknown thief must have descended from the rocky walls that shut in the gulch on all sides.

It was half an hour before Frank's search was rewarded. But it was rewarded at last.

In the mud by the creek a footprint showed up under his eyes, and the print was that of a moccasin, and could not have been left by either Frank or Bronze Bill, who, of course, wore boots.

"An Indian!"

Frank Richards uttered the exclamation, with a gleam in his eyes. His suspicion was a certainty now.

He raised his head and looked around him. The rocky sides of the gulch, broken here and there by patches of scrub, met his eyes, apparently untrodden by human foot. It seemed that only an elk could have obtained footing among those inaccessible rocks. But here, under Frank's eyes, was the proof that during the night a Redskin had crept into the camp, and he could only have come from beyond that rocky barrier.

Bending his head again, Frank sought for further "signs," and picked it up again on the further side of the shallow creek. This was evidence that the Indian had waded through the creek to reach the shack, and was a rough indication of the direction from which he must have come.

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Frank pushed on, looking for more "sign."

There was no chance that the Indian was still in the locked valley. He must have fled before dawn with the plunder he had stolen from the shack. But the trail, if it could be followed far enough, would reveal the way of escape from the gulch.

There was a shout from behind Frank in the distance. In his eagerness and excitement he had forgotten Bronze Bill.

The bound miner, sitting with his back against a boulder, had been watching him, at first in sheer fury, then in astonishment, and now with the keenest curiosity.

"Richards!"

Frank turned his head.

"What do you want?" he called back. "I guess I want to know what you are arter."

"The man who bagged the gold-sack."

"There ain't any galoot—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Frank Richards turned impatiently to the trail again. Bronze Bill scrambled to his feet awkwardly, with his arms tied, and came striding towards him. Frank did not heed him.

He was progressing slowly, picking up sign after sign of the moccasined foot, and the miner overtook him at last.

"Now, what are you arter?" demanded Bronze Bill.

"Look and see for yourself," he snapped. "If you've got eyes in your head, you can see the trail of an Indian here."

"An Injun—"

"Look!" snapped Frank.

He pointed to a hollow, where rain had left a damp patch on earth. In the soft soil the print of the moccasin came out clearly.

"Moccasin!" Bronze Bill dropped on his knees, his eyes almost starting from his head as he read the sign. "Injuns! Jerusalem crickets!"

"Do you understand now?" growled Frank Richards.

Bronze Bill looked dazed.

"Three months I've located in this hyer gulch," he said, "and nary galoot came nigh till you came moseying up through Dead Man's Canyon, Richards. I never allowed there was any way over them hills."

"You can see now that there must be."

The miner nodded slowly.

"Arter all, we reckoned p'raps we'd find a way out," he muttered; "and if there's a way out there's a way in. Some Injun hunter, p'raps, lookin' for elk; and comin' into the gulch from up yonder, mebber he spotted the light of our camp fire one night, and came spying around. Mebber been watching us for days, and we never knowed. Richards, sonny, I reckon as I've made a mistake, and it wasn't you that collared the gold-sack, arter all."

The big miner spoke shamefacedly.

"I'm glad you've got sense enough to see that at last!" said Frank Richards coldly. "You can sit in camp and chew on it while I'm finding out where the Redskin went."

"I allow I was mistookin'," mumbled Bronze Bill. "Let's go this together, Richards. I calculate I'm a better hand at following a trail than any ornery schoolboy."

"It's a bit too late to propose that, after threatening me with a revolver," said Frank Richards dryly. "I can't trust you with your paws loose, Bronze Bill."

The big miner bit his lip.

"I deserve it for suspectin' you," he confessed. "But then agin, you sus-

pected me afore you found this hyer trail, Richards."

"Well, that's so," admitted Frank. "Seeing that we were alone here, as I believed, I—I thought—"

"Same as I thought," said Bronze Bill, with a rather wry smile. "I reckon we can call it quits, Richards."

Frank hesitated.

"That's all very well," he said. "But are you satisfied now that there was a third party on the scene? If I let you loose, will you get a bee in your bonnet again, and start playing the fool?"

Bronze Bill shook his head vigorously.

"Think I can't read 'sign'?" he demanded. "I know now that there was an Injun here last night, and he sneaked into the shack and robbed us while we were snoozing under the trees. There ain't no time to waste, Richards. He's got a good start of us as it is, with all the dust we've earned. The claim's nearly worked out—we was thinking of pulling up stakes in a few days. Let's take this chance of getting clear. I reckon you can trust me; I've been a fool, I allow, but—but you can keep the shooting-irons."

Frank, without replying, cast loose the rope with which Bronze Bill's brawny arms were secured.

"That's the real white article," said Bronze Bill, stretching his arms. "Now I reckon I'll get a bite, and we'll take the trail."

"Here's your rifle," said Frank.

"Keep it, kid!"

"Rot!" said Frank Richards, smiling. "I can trust you now you've come to your senses."

Bronze Bill slung the rifle on his back shamefacedly.

"Keep the revolver," he said. "You may need it if we come up with the Injun. Pack your grip while I get a feed. I reckon we're following this trail right out of the gulch."

"Right-ho!" said Frank.

And the preparations for departure were soon made, the queerly-assorted "pardners" being once more on the best of terms now that the black cloud of mutual suspicion had passed.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tracked Down!

BRONZE BILL was, as he had said, a better hand at picking up a trail than the schoolboy of Cedar Creek. He picked up the Indian "sign," and followed it faster than Frank Richards could have done.

The partners travelled "light." The mining implements were left in the shack, and they packed only the remains of the provisions in their wallets. If they ran down the Indian thief, and recovered the gold, the loss of the tools would not be a serious one to the successful miners, while if they failed, they could always find their way back, and work out what little remained of the gold deposit in the creek. That was how Bronze Bill put it, and Frank agreed with him. It was necessary to travel light, in order not to lose time on the trail. The Indian had had at least twelve hours' start, and it would not be an easy task to run him down in any case.

From the bottom of the gulch, the "sign" led them up the rocky slopes, by difficult paths. Here and there they had to climb with their hands, and on more than one jag of rock they discovered some torn fragments from the Redskin's moccasins or leggings. They stopped on a rough plateau of rock about a hundred feet above the level of the camp. There Bronze Bill gave a shout.

"That was what he was arter; that's

what led him over the hill!" he exclaimed, pointing to a dark mass on the rocks. It was what remained of the dead body of an elk.

A black vulture rose leisurely on the wing, and fled screeching over the cliffs as the trackers came up. The skeleton of the elk had been picked almost clean. Frank turned his head from the sight; but Bronze Bill examined it with a careful eye. He nodded his head several times, as if in confirmation of unspoken surmises.

"I reckon it's fair clear," he said at last. "The Injun was arter that elk, and the brute lit it over the hill, and down on this side, the Red arter him. The Injun got him hyer, and killed him, and then I reckon he spotted our camp-fire down below. Look back, Richards, and you'll see our camp jast as if was spread out to view."

Frank nodded as he glanced back from the height.

Far below, the creek ran like a silver ribbon in the sunlight, and the shack and the dying fire showed up clearly by it, and the placer workings were clearly seen.

"He never knowed there was a white man near till he got to this spot," continued Bronze Bill. "Then he saw us at work—saw us take the day's gold into the shack, I reckon, and leave it there. Arter dark he came creeping down the way we've come up. Us sleeping out of the shack gave him his chance, and he loafed in and hunted for the gold and found it. I reckon if we'd been inside the shack we'd have got a few inches of his hunting-knife, too. But he wouldn't risk it, as he got the gold safe without. I reckon one of us would have woke and put the cinch on him. He bagged the gold and hooked it—that's how I figger it out, Richards. And the way he followed that elk into the gulch is the way I'm going to foller him out, I reckon!"

"That's it!" said Frank.

"Kim on!"

It was clear enough now what must have happened. The trackers pressed on, the track growing steeper and wilder under their feet. More than once Bronze Bill came to a dead halt.

But for their knowledge that an elk and a pursuing Redskin had come by that route, the partners would have given it up more than once in despair. But the knowledge that it had been done once was a proof that it could be done again.

In one place, baffled by a perpendicular rock that barred all further progress, they chafed and sought a way out, and half an hour was wasted. But the mystery was elucidated at last.

"I reckon he jumped it," said Bronze Bill, "an' the Injun jumped in arter him! But he had to climb back, I reckon, and where he climbed we can climb, or bu'st!"

And, after a long search, a rag on a point of rock revealed where the Indian had climbed, and after several essays and failures the partners succeeded in clambering up the perpendicular rock, and threw themselves down breathlessly to rest at the top.

Above was a ledge little more than fifteen inches wide, and on that giddy verge they lay at full length and rested for ten minutes or more. Below, it looked like the wall of a house that they had climbed. Above, rock rose over rock in endless disorder. The climb had been fatiguing, but after a short rest they struggled on again.

Climbing, clambering, with feet and hands, they won their way higher and higher, and still, here and there, Bronze Bill's keen eye picked up traces of the



TURNING THE TABLES! As the miner slipped and fell, Frank Richards sprang forward and jerked the revolver from his partner's belt. Before Bronze Bill could rise, Frank was standing over him, the revolver aimed at his face. "Hands up!" shouted Frank. (See Chapter 2.)

page of the elk and the Indian hunter. They came out at last into a narrow gorge between two peaks.

"I reckon this is the top of the divide," said Bronze Bill, as he sank on a boulder to rest. "We've done the climb, Richards. I guess I could pick my way from here to Hard Pan by the sun and stars."

"Good!" gasped Frank.

The sun was sloping down in the west now, but it was still warm. Only a few minutes were allowed for rest. Bronze Bill improved the occasion by filling his pipe and lighting it. He wrinkled his brows thoughtfully as he puffed out blue clouds of smoke.

"I reckon it was about noon when he got back hyer, that Injun," he remarked, at length. "I reckon he wanted a rest. It's hot at noon, too. He'd look back from the last point where there was a view of the gulch, and he'd see that we wasn't arter him yet, so he'd reckon he had plenty of time, even if we was able to foller him at all."

"That's so," assented Frank.

"Sure! And so I reckon he never humped himself after getting this far. He'd take a rest and he'd take it easy," said Bronze Bill. "That's all to the good, if I've figured it out correct, Richards. From this hyer p'int he won't have such a long start. But hawsmd- ever far he leads us, I reckon I'm hangin' on the heels of that Injun till I get the dust back—and his scalp along with it! Come on!"

Under the westering sun the partners tramped down the gorge. They were over the highest part of their climb now. They had crossed the "divide" from the locked gulch, and their path was now perceptibly downward. Bronze Bill halted at a spot where a mountain torrent roared down the gorge.

"The Injun camped here," he said.

There were plain traces of it—the

embers of a camp-fire by the water, and remains of elk-meat thrown carelessly away. The Indian had cooked elk-meat and eaten, there, in the shadow of the rocks, and the embers still retained a trace of warmth. The trackers were not far behind. Close by the camp-fire embers they discovered a few golden grains glittering up from the rock. Frank uttered an exclamation as the golden glitter caught his eye.

"He opened the gold-sack thar, to look over what he'd stole!" said Bronze Bill sententiously. "Spilled a few grains, the careless fool! He got the dust easier than we did, I reckon, and he could afford to. I reckon he took it purty easy arter getting out of the locked gulch; we ain't so far behind him now. Let me jest get a bead on him with this hyer rifle, and I guess he won't give more'n one hop. Kim on!"

The trailers pressed on.

They were weary to the bone by this time, but they did not stop to camp and rest as the Indian gold-thief had done. Every minute was precious now, for they had to make the most of what remained of the daylight. The setting sun was flooding the hills with crimson and gold as they tramped resolutely on.

From the gorge they emerged into a wide green valley, restful to the eye after the expanses of barren rock they had traversed. Bronze Bill halted, his eyes fixed on the distance ahead, and Frank followed his example, though he could not see what attracted his companion's gaze.

"What is it?" he asked at last, after Bronze Bill had stared steadily for several minutes, his hand shading his eyes.

"I reckon we don't want to pick up 'sign' any longer," answered Bronze Bill. "But keep your peepers open.

(Continued on page 28.)

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"ROBBED,"

(Continued from page 17.)

That there Injun has run up agin a snag."

"I don't see——"
"Look! Them johnny crows——"
Frank started.

For ahead, in the distance, three or four black vultures, dots against the blue were circling and settling.

"Johnny crow comes down for carrion!" said Bronze Bill tersely. "I reckon that Injun's dead meat."

"But who—what——"
"I reckon we'll find out. Keep your eyes peeled."

Frank's heart beat fast as he hurried on after his companion. Hardly conscious of fatigue now, they broke into a run. As they drew near the spot where the vultures had gathered, they heard the screeching and squabbling of the obscene birds.

"Don't loose off at them," warned Bronze Bill, as Frank touched his revolver. "I reckon there may be trouble within hearing. Kick the brutes!"

With loud screeches and flappings, the vultures scattered as the hunters ran up. They retired only a few yards, however, watching hungrily close at hand, till they should have access to their prey again. Frank Richards shuddered as he saw what their prey had been.

On his back, on the ground, was stretched an Indian—a hunter in deer-skin leggings and moccasins. He was dead; his coppery face, set in a frozen scowl of anguish and hatred, was turned like stone to the sky. It was evidently the Indian that Frank Richards and his partner had tracked so far, and they had found him—thus!

Bronze Bill stood looking down upon him, with a grim brow. His hand rested on his rifle—the rifle was not needed now.

Bronze Bill pointed. The crimson was oozing through the Indian's deer-skin,

where a knife had struck home in his breast. Bronze Bill dropped on his knees beside the body.

"One drive, and that cooked his goose," he said coolly; "and I reckon it wasn't long ago, or the johnny crows would have gobbled him before this; it don't take them long to smell out carrion. He got this far with our gold-sack, and then he hit trouble, bad. The gold-sack's gone—the galoot what stuck him froze on to that, you bet—and now I reckon that's the galoot we've got to find. And I guess we ain't fur to look!"

"You think——"
"Look!"

Frank Richards followed the direction of the miner's pointing finger. Against the gathering darkness, in the distance, a red glow leaped up—the glow of a camp-fire!

THE END.

(Another thrilling long complete story of Frank Richards, the homeless school-boy, and his partner, Bronze Bill, the miner, next week, entitled "Red Gold!")

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