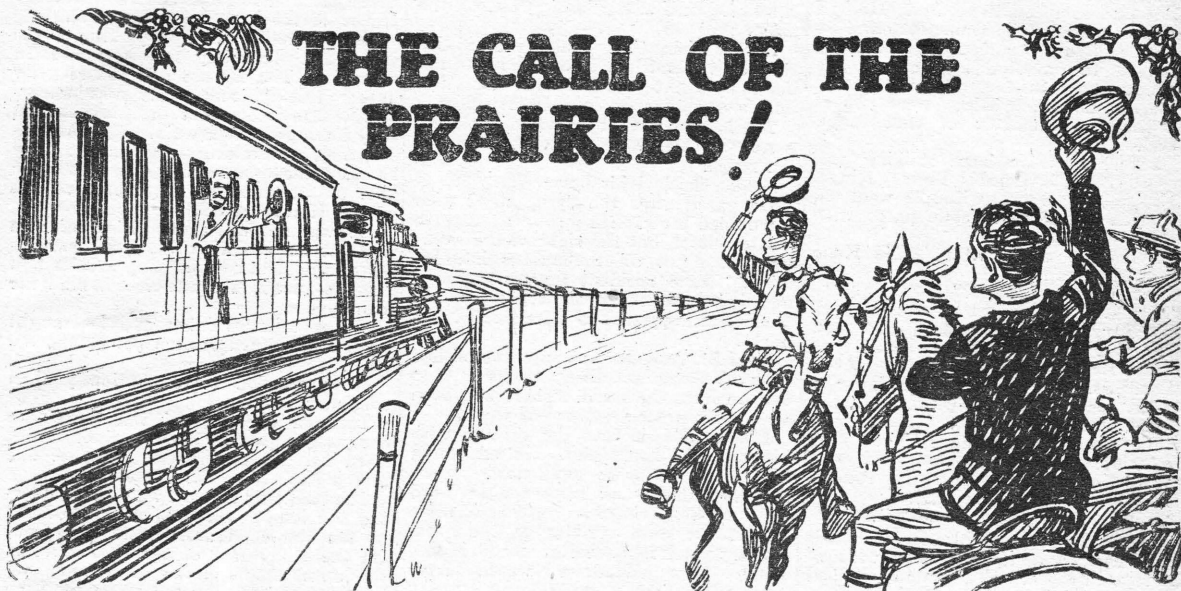


FRANK RICHARDS' CHOICE! Frank Richards is given a wonderful chance to return to the Old Country with Lord St. Austells—but the call of the prairies is too strong for him. He could not leave his old chums, or the school in the Backwoods!



A Splendid, Long Complete Story of Frank Richards & Co., the Chums of the School in the Backwoods!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Roped In!



FRANKY!" Click, click! "Franky, you jay!" Bob Lawless bawled up the stairs at the Lawless Ranch; but only the click of the typewriter answered him.

Frank Richards was busy.

The schoolboy author had turned out early that morning. He had "copy" to produce for Mr. Isaacs, the proprietor of the "Thompson Press"; and he was putting in a couple of hours before school.

"Franky!" yelled Bob. "Time for school, you ass!"

Click, click!

Bob Lawless came tramping up the stairs, and he put a wrathful and indignant face into the doorway. Frank Richards did not even look round. When the tide of inspiration was flowing the schoolboy author was blind and deaf to all other considerations.

Click, click, click, click! The typewriter was going again strong.

"You precious ass!" said Bob Lawless. "We'll start, anyhow, and you can come on after us. You'll have to ride hard."

Click, click!

Bob Lawless tramped down the stairs again. Frank Richards forgot his existence the next moment, as his nimble fingers clicked away on the keys of the typewriter.

From the window where he sat at work Frank could see a wide stretch of grasslands of the Lawless Ranch, with the timber in the distance. Through the timber the trail ran to Cedar Creek School. As he paused a moment in his work and glanced from the window he saw Bob Lawless riding

away from the ranch with Lord St. Austells, Mr. Lawless' guest at the ranch. Both of them glanced up at Frank's window—Lord St. Austells with a smile, and Bob with a wrathful frown.

Frank waved his hand, and then resumed his work. That instalment of "Bullivant's Schooldays" was reaching a dramatic conclusion, and Frank simply couldn't give his thoughts to anything else. There were certain difficulties in combining the occupations of a schoolboy and an author, as Frank had discovered before.

"The awful jay!" growled Bob Lawless as he rode away with his companion. "He'll have to ride like thunder to get to school in time. But it's no good arguing with Franky when he's on the typer."

Lord St. Austells smiled.

He had seen a good deal of Frank Richards during his stay at the ranch, and he had taken a great liking to the cheery schoolboy of Cedar Creek. And he had not forgotten how Frank Richards had rescued him from the clutches of the rustlers in the Cascade Mountains.

"Frank is beginning literary work early!" he remarked.

"I believe he began to scribble before he could walk," said Bob, laughing.

"He does a story every week now for our local paper—old Isaacs, you know. They pay him ten dollars for it."

"I have seen some of his productions," said Lord St. Austells. "Very remarkable in one so youthful! It is rather a pity that a lad so gifted should pass his life in these remote backwoods."

Bob stared.

From Bob's point of view, British Columbia was the most delectable land to be found on the wide surface of the globe, and he felt a kind compassion for anybody who had to live anywhere else.

But he realised that Lord St. Austells,

the peer from the Old Country, probably had a very different view-point, so he did not argue the question.

They rode on into the timber, and at the fork of the trail Vere Beauclerc joined them. Beauclerc saluted his uncle cheerily, and looked along the trail for Frank.

"Where's Franky?" he asked. "On the typewriter!" grinned Bob. "He will be late for school, and Miss Meadows will be waxy. But old Isaacs will get his copy; so I suppose Frank thinks it is all right."

"The ass!" said Beauclerc, laughing. The three rode on to Cedar Creek, Bob and Beauclerc occasionally looking back for Frank, hoping to see him coming on at a gallop. But Frank Richards did not appear on the trail. Evidently he was still busy with the instalment of "Bullivant's Schooldays."

Lord St. Austells left his young companions at the gates of Cedar Creek. He rode back towards the ranch with a thoughtful expression on his face. His stay at the ranch was drawing to an end; on the morrow he was to leave. He had visited the Thompson Valley to see his brother, the remittance man, and his nephew, Vere Beauclerc. But he had remained longer than he had originally intended. His meeting with Frank Richards in the Cascade Mountains had been a dramatic one, and he was very keenly interested in Frank. It was partly through his lordship that Frank had been able to return to Cedar Creek after his wanderings, and to clear his name and take his old place in the backwoods school.

"Halt!"

Lord St. Austells was riding slowly with a loose rein under the green branches when that sudden challenge fell upon his ears.

Two horsemen pushed out of the larches into the trail, and drew in on either side of him.

A rough hand grasped his bridle, and

his lordship had no choice about halting.

"Let me pass!" snapped his lordship.

"I guess not!"

"You're our mutton, I reckon!"

The earl compressed his lips. He had "seen the sights" in Thompson, and he had seen these two ruffians before. They belonged to the Red Dog crowd, the toughest gang in the settlement; and Keno Kit and Four Kings were two of the toughest members of that tough crowd.

"I reckon we've been stalking you for days," grinned Four Kings. "You're our mutton, with the wool on. Will you come for a leetle paseo with us?"

"I reckon you'd better!" said Keno Kit, with a chuckle.

"What do you want?"

"I guess we want what we can get," said Four Kings humorously, "and that's five hundred dollars before you see the Lawless Ranch again."

Lord St. Austells gave his horse a sudden cut with the whip, and the animal bounded forward. The sudden action took the two ruffians by surprise; the bridle was jerked loose, and in a second the earl was past the ruffians and galloping down the trail.

"Rope him!" yelled Keno Kit.

Four Kings grasped the lariat at his saddle-bow, and there was a whiz of the rope in the air. The loop descended over Lord St. Austells' shoulders, and he was plucked from the saddle as it tightened. He came with a heavy bump into the grass, and the riderless horse dashed on at full gallop.

"I guess he's our meat!" grinned Four Kings.

Lord St. Austells lay dazed in the trail as the two rascals rode up. A minute later and he was dragged upon Four Kings' horse, and the two ruffians disappeared into the timber with their prisoner.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tracked in the Timber!

"MY only hat!"

Frank Richards uttered that sudden exclamation.

The schoolboy author had finished his installment; and once it was done, and neatly ribboned at the corner, Frank awoke, as it were, to his surroundings. He realised then that he was late for school, and that a school-boy's duty was to be punctual, regardless of other considerations—even literary ones. And Frank hurriedly shoved his manuscript into his pocket, rushed downstairs, and sped out of the ranch-house. Bob Lawless had left his horse tethered ready for him to one of the veranda poles. To jump upon the animal and gallop off was the work of a second or so; and Frank Richards rode away towards the timber at top speed.

Hard as he rode, he had no hope of overtaking Bob before the youth reached Cedar Creek. He knew that Bob must have already reached the school. Frank was certain to be late for first lesson, and it worried him a little, for he respected Miss Meadows highly, and hated to displease her. But it was rather too late to think of that now; and, anyhow, there was some consolation in having his completed manuscript in his pocket. He could cut across to Thompson with that in the dinner interval, and deliver it at the office of the "Thompson Press," and everything in the garden, so to speak, would be lovely, so far as "Bullivant's

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Schooldays" was concerned. So far as Frank's own schooldays were concerned, there might be some trouble.

He was just entering the timber, at full gallop on the grassy trail, when a riderless horse came dashing out on the plain.

It was then that Frank uttered his startled ejaculation. For he knew the horse by sight—a handsome roan that had been ridden by Lord St. Austells.

The horse dashed by him, evidently in a scared state, and galloped on towards the ranch.

Frank checked his horse.

He gazed after the flying steed with a troubled brow. He was in a hurry to get to school, but the sight of the riderless horse put other thoughts into his mind. Some accident must have happened in the shadows of the timber. What had happened to Vere Beauclerc's uncle?

Lord St. Austells was an accomplished rider; he was not likely to have been thrown from the steed. There had been some serious accident, or—or what?

Frank rode on into the timber, with his eyes well about him. He was going at a more moderate speed now.

If something had happened to Lord St. Austells, giving him aid was of more importance than arriving at the backwoods school in time for second-lesson. Even Miss Meadows would have assented to that.

Frank had learned a great deal of woodcraft during his sojourn in the Canadian West, and he could read a trail with something of the skill of his Canadian cousin. In the thick grass he easily followed the tracks of Bob's and Lord St. Austells' horses, going towards the school, and noted where Vere Beauclerc had joined them at the fork. The three tracks went on together, with the back track of Lord St. Austells' horse intermingling, sometimes overlapping, the others. And at a certain point there came into sight the tracks of two other horses that had emerged from the timber, and returned into it.

There Frank Richards halted.

He knew all that the trail could tell him—that the earl had ridden on with Bob and Beauclerc, and turned back alone to ride home to the ranch—that two horsemen had suddenly appeared from the wood, and then the earl's riderless steed had pushed on alone.

Frank jumped down from the saddle.

He knew, for the trail told him as plainly as words, that the two unknown men had seized his lordship and taken him into the timber.

As he scanned the trail, he soon found the traces where the lassoed man had bumped into the grass.

Frank's eyes gleamed.

"Roped in, and taken a prisoner into the timber!" he muttered. "Thank goodness I stayed behind this morning! I can't be far behind him. The horse had only time to get from here to the edge of the timber when I came along."

Frank Richards tethered his horse by the trail, and reflected for a few minutes.

It was not difficult to guess why his lordship had been roped in. There were "tough" characters in the Thompson Valley, and the greed of some gang of rascals had been tempted by the rich peer from the Old Country. Frank Richards had first made the earl's acquaintance in rescuing him from a gang of rustlers in the mountains, and it was evident that something of the kind had happened again; and, if Frank could contrive it, he intended that it should end the same way. He was close

behind the rascals. He thought it could not be ten minutes since they had quitted the trail with their prisoner. He was unarmed, but that did not make him hesitate.

He plunged into the timber where the tracks of the two horses led him.

He proceeded warily, picking every step, and listening for a sound in advance. The larches and cedars grew rather thickly, and there was underwood. He knew that the horses could only have gone at a walk. He was confident of overtaking them before they reached the open country on the other side of the wood—if they ventured out of the timber at all.

He was not mistaken. Five minutes had not elapsed when his quick ear detected the sound of jingling bridles and stirrups ahead. He was close behind the kidnapers.

A few minutes later and he caught sight of a ragged Stetson hat among the trees.

He proceeded more cautiously than ever now.

Through openings of the timber he caught glimpses of the two riders, with Lord St. Austells in the grasp of one of the ruffians on his horse.

The Red Dog ruffians were now following a dried-up watercourse in the heart of the timber, remote from any trail. On the stony bed of the dried stream the horses' hoofs clinked and rang, and left no trail. The sound was more than enough to guide Frank Richards; but had he been out of hearing, he could not have picked up a trail on the stony bed. He felt glad again that he had stayed late at the ranch that morning, and so had chanced upon the scene before the kidnapers had had time to get clear.

Four Kings and Keno Kit rode on without once looking back. Evidently they had not the faintest suspicion of pursuit.

But Frank was very careful to keep in cover as he followed on.

Either of the ruffians would have thought little of firing at him.

The two horsemen halted at last, in a deep, stony gully by the side of the stream-bed, completely overhung with trees and underwoods. They dismounted from their horses, and Lord St. Austells was dropped roughly to the ground. He rose rather painfully to his feet.

Frank Richards stopped, not more than a dozen yards away, deep in the cover of a leafy bush.

He watched silently, with beating heart.

Unarmed, he could not intervene. His only thought, at present, was to keep watch, and wait for an opportunity of helping the kidnapped earl.

"I guess he'll be safe hyer, Kit."

Four Kings' deep, rough voice reached the ears of the watching schoolboy.

"I reckon so."

"Put the rope round him."

"I guess one of us is going to stop and watch him," said Keno Kit, "and the other gets a letter sent to the ranch. I'll draw you a card for it, Four Kings."

"Sure!"

The rope was run round Lord St. Austells, and he was secured to a tree-stump in the gully. He sat down quietly at the foot of the stump, not deigning to address a word to his captors.

Keno Kit drew a pack of well-worn, greasy cards from a pocket of his leather trousers.

"Cut for high," he said.

Four Kings cut, and showed a seven.

"Loser stays," said Keno Kit.

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THE CALL OF THE PRAIRIES!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Sure!"

Keno Kit cut, and showed a knife. "My win," he remarked. "You hang on hyer, Four Kings, and look arter the cuss, and I'll mosey on to Thompson. I'll git a 'breed to take the letter and leave it at the ranch, afore three hours. If they don't pay up—"

"They won't see his nibs agin, if they don't!" said Four Kings savagely. "And put it in the letter that he won't get any feed till the ransom's paid."

"You bet!"

"Five hundred dollars is to be put inside the dead oak on the Silver Creek trail, and if there's any gum-game about it, the cuss hyer gets a bullet through him instanter!"

"Leave it to me," said Keno Kit.

He remounted his horse, and rode away into the timber, leaving Four Kings alone with the prisoner.

The departing ruffian passed within six feet of Frank Richards, crouching in the bush; and Frank lay quite still and held his breath. The hoof-beats died away down the watercourse.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Frank to the Rescue!

FRANK RICHARDS raised his head when the sound of Keno Kit's horse had long died away into silence. He looked through the twining bushes at the scene in the gully.

Lord St. Austells sat at the foot of the tree-stump, without moving or speaking. The rope round him secured him to the stump, and Four Kings, aware that he could not get loose, gave him scarcely a glance. He sat on a boulder and smoked his pipe, blowing out thick clouds of smoke.

Frank Richards thought hard.

The demand for the earl's ransom was to reach the ranch that day; but it was not likely to be acceded to by Rancher Lawless. The rancher was more likely to call out his men, and begin a search immediately for his kidnapped guest.

But if he refused—if the rascals found themselves hunted for—what was likely to happen?

Frank shivered at the thought.

Frank watched Four Kings, with determination growing in his breast. Had he been armed, he would not have hesitated to advance upon the ruffian, and call upon him to put up his hands. But he had no weapon, and there was a revolver sticking in the belt of the bulldozer.

But the schoolboy was resolved now not to quit the spot and leave Lord St. Austells in the hands of the kidnappers.

He waited patiently, thinking hard. Keno Kit, if he returned, was not likely to be back till late in the day. He had plenty of time. Four Kings was already showing signs of restiveness. He yawned over his pipe, rose and stretched himself, and sat down again, and Frank heard him mutter curses.

An hour passed.

The ruffian rose with another yawn, and put away his pipe. He selected a soft patch of grass, and threw himself down to sleep.

Frank's heart beat faster.

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His chance had come at last. In a few minutes he could hear the deep snoring of the ruffian.

He rose quietly from the bush.

Stooping in the dry watercourse, he selected a round, heavy stone—it was all he could find to use as a weapon if needed. Then he stood up, out of cover, and in full view of the kidnappers' camp, and waved his hand as a signal to Lord St. Austells.

The earl gave a violent start as he saw him.

His lips opened to speak; but he closed them again quickly. He could only move his head, but he gave a nod towards the sleeping ruffian, as a warning to Frank Richards.

But Frank did not need a warning to be cautious. He knew that he was taking his life in his hands in advancing into the gully.

He stepped forward on tiptoe.

Closer and closer he came, till his shadow fell across the sleeping ruffian, and still Four Kings did not move.

Another step—

Frank hoped against hope that he might reach the prisoner without alarming the ruffian, and cut him loose; then at least they would be two against the bulky bulldozer, if it came to a fight. But his hope was in vain.

Four Kings stirred, and his eyes opened.

He stared blankly as his glance fell on Frank Richards, and, with a curse, he sat up and dragged at his revolver.

If Frank had hesitated a second he would have fallen dead the next, but he did not hesitate.

Before the ruffian could loosen the revolver from his belt, the schoolboy sprang upon him desperately.

Crash!

The heavy stone, in Frank's grip, came with a fearful crash on the ruffian's head.

There was a gasping cry from Four Kings.

He fell limply sideways, the half-drawn revolver in his hand, and rolled over helplessly.

But he was not quite stunned; and Frank Richards, with his life at stake, could not afford to take chances. He threw himself upon the ruffian, and the stone crashed down again.

Then he rose, panting. It was enough. Four Kings lay insensible at his feet.

"Frank," breathed Lord St. Austells.

Frank Richards jerked open his clasp-knife and cut through the rope that bound the prisoner to the stump.

Lord St. Austells grasped his hand and wrung it. For a moment his impassive face was full of emotion.

"Frank, this is the second time you have saved me!" he said in a moved voice.

"Thank Heaven I had the chance!" said Frank. "Let's get out of this quick, before he can come to! Take his horse, sir, and I'll mount behind you and show you the way."

Four Kings did not move as Lord St. Austells mounted his horse, and, with Frank mounted behind, took his way to the watercourse.

He lay senseless; and it was likely to be half an hour at least before consciousness returned.

But Frank Richards and his companion lost no time.

Lord St. Austells was quite at a loss in the depths of the timber, but Frank had no difficulty in following back the way by which he had come.

In half an hour they emerged into

the broad, open trail through the timber from Cedar Creek to the plains.

There they halted.

"You'll get back to the ranch from here, sir," said Frank. "Tell my uncle that you were kidnapped by Four Kings and Keno Kit. He knows them. They belong to the Red Dog crowd, in Thompson. Mr. Lawless will send word to the sheriff—"

"But you—" said Lord St. Austells.

Frank Richards smiled.

"I'm going on to school," he said. He loosened his horse from the tether. "I was going to school when I met your horse, sir, and found what had happened. I left my horse here, and followed on foot. Now I've got to get to Cedar Creek."

Lord St. Austells nodded.

"My dear, dear boy, I owe you more than I can repay!" he said earnestly. "But I shall find a way, perhaps, of repaying part of my debt. I shall speak to you again this evening. Good-bye, now, my dear lad!"

And they parted, the earl returning at a gallop towards the ranch, and Frank Richards riding hard for Cedar Creek School, where he arrived just in time for the school dinner.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

New Prospects!

"HERE you are, you jay!"

Frank?"

"Miss Meadows is in a

prize wax."

Frank Richards laughed.

"I think Miss Meadows will excuse me when I explain," he said. "I'll go and speak to her now."

And Frank went into the lumber schoolhouse. It was dinner-time, and a few minutes later Frank joined the Cedar Creek crowd going into the dining-room. And from the cheerful expression on his face, it was evident that Miss Meadows had accepted his excuses.

After dinner, Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc took an arm each of their chum, and marched him out into the playground, and demanded explanations. So Frank Richards explained.

Bob Lawless gave a long whistle.

"Jerusalem!" he ejaculated. "I reckoned that you were sticking to the typer, and had forgotten all about school!"

"Not quite!" said Frank, laughing.

"Was my uncle hurt?" asked Beauclerc.

"Only a few bruises, I think. Will you fellows ride with me to Thompson?" said Frank. "I've got to hand in my copy at the office of the 'Thompson Press' before afternoon school."

"You bet!"

The three chums rode into Thompson, where the "copy" was duly delivered at Mr. Isaacs' office. As they came away from the office, they halted by the side of the street to allow a bunch of horsemen to pass.

"They've got the galoots" said Bob, with a grin.

The horsemen were Sheriff Henderson and three or four of his men; and in the midst of the party two sullen-faced ruffians rode, with their hands bound behind their backs. Keno Kit and Four Kings had already been "roped in" by the active sheriff of Thompson. The horsemen passed on towards the calaboose, where the defeated kidnappers found a secure lodging under lock and key.

"I guess those two bulldozers are

sorry you came home to Cedar Creek, Franky!" chuckled Bob Lawless, as Frank Richards & Co. trotted along the trail to the backwood school. "But now you're back, you're back for keeps, I hope."

"Eh? Of course," said Frank. "I'm not likely to go on my travels again, Bob. What are you driving at?"

Bob grinned. "Beau's uncle was chatting to the popper last night," he said. "His nibs was asking the popper a lot about you, and he said—"

Bob hesitated a little. "He said what?" asked Frank. "That you'd have a better chance in England than in the Canadian backwoods."

Frank laughed lightly. "That's possible," he said; "but I'm booked for the Canadian backwoods, Bob, and I'm satisfied."

"He said something of the sort to me this morning, too," said Bob. "I d.n't catch on to his point of view. I can't help thinking a man is a jay if he doesn't want to live in British Columbia. But if his noble nibs has some idea of lifting you off to the Old Country—"

Frank started. "What rot!" he said. "Well, I believe he's got some such stunt in his little brain-box," said Bob confidently.

The chums rode into Cedar Creek, and Frank made no rejoinder. But he was very thoughtful during afternoon lessons. Bob's suggestion had startled him; and he could not help wondering whether there was something in the rancher's son's belief.

Frank Richards was still in a thoughtful mood when he rode homeward with his chums. It had not occurred to him that he might leave Cedar Creek; and he could not say whether, if the chance came his way, he would care to take it.

He dismissed the matter from his mind at last. He met Lord St. Austells at the early supper at the ranch-house. His lordship was extremely genial to the schoolboy author, and asked him a good many questions concerning his contributions to the "Thompson Press." After supper, his lordship lighted his cigar and strolled out into the porch, open to the soft, summer breeze from the prairies. On the plains, the soft, sweet moonlight of British Columbia lay like a silver sea. Lord St. Austells beckoned to Frank, who joined him in the porch. Frank's heart beat fast, for he realised now that Bob Lawless' surmise was correct, and he wondered what his answer would be to his lordship; for even yet he could not decide whether he would say "Yes" or "No."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Frank Makes His Choice!

LORD ST. AUSTELLS was silent for a few minutes, smoking his cigar and looking out into the soft moonlight. He turned at last to Frank Richards abruptly.

"I owe you a great deal, Richards," he said.

"Nothing at all, sir," answered Frank.

His lordship smiled. "Twice you have saved me, each time from death, in all probability," he said. "I cannot forget that. I want to do something, if I can, Richards, to make the account equal."

Frank was silent. "I have been thinking a good deal about you," went on his lordship, after a pause, "and I am going to make a suggestion. Would you like to return to England with me?"

It was out now. "I understand that your father had some financial difficulties, and that is why you were sent out to your uncle in Canada?"

"Yes, sir."
"Your father is in India now?"
"Yes."

"This is a great country," said his lordship. "Your relatives here seem to be kindness itself. I have a very great admiration for Mr. Lawless—a splendid type of man. But in this country, Richards, you have not, of course, the chances you would have in England!"

"I—I suppose not."
"I have spoken to your uncle," continued Lord St. Austells. "He is willing that you should decide this matter for yourself, subject to your father's approval when he is communi-

country; you will never have such opportunities here as you might have in England."

Frank was silent. "Well, Frank?" said his lordship at last, with a faint smile.

Frank started a little. "I—I—"

"Speak freely, my boy," said Lord St. Austells kindly. "I shall not be offended if you refuse."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, sir!" said Frank in a low voice. "I shall always be grateful for your kindness, but—"

"But—" smiled his lordship.

"I'd rather not leave my chums, sir, and—and my home here," said Frank. "And, although I know I could accept your kindness, I—I—I think that I ought rather—"



ROPING IN HIS LORDSHIP! "Rope him!" yelled Keno Kit. Four Kings grasped the lariat, and there was a whizz of the rope in the air. The loop descended over Lord St. Austells' shoulders and he was plucked from his saddle. "I guess he's our meat!" grinned Four Kings. (See Chapter 1.)

cated with. I should be very glad to take you into my charge. You would return to your old school in England, and go on to the University at the proper time, and all charges would be defrayed by me. I should treat you exactly as if you were a son of my own; and you need have no scruple about accepting what I can offer, Richards. I should be acting in your father's place in his absence."

"I thank you from my very heart, sir!" said Frank in a faltering voice. The kindness of the earl's tone moved him deeply. "I should not hesitate for a moment to accept, but—"

"I hope you will accept," said his lordship gravely. "You have shown a literary ability, Frank, that is very remarkable in one so young. This gift would have free play in an older

"I think I understand," said Lord St. Austells. "You would rather fight your own way through the world than be beholden to anyone."

Frank coloured. "Not exactly that, sir," he said. "I would gladly be beholden to you, if there was need. But I belong to Cedar Creek, and I will stick to Cedar Creek. Some day I shall return to England—some day, I hope, I shall be earning my bread with my pen. But until then—"

Lord St. Austells laughed. "Well, I am disappointed; but perhaps you are right, Frank," he said. "Anyhow, we shall part good friends; and in the future—when it comes—"

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'em that this wasn't a trap, like they thought the one at Three Crossings was. A trap!" He laughed hoarsely. "I'll say it was a trap, an' I laid it, Kansas. Y'see, your information was sure not up-to-date. I slipped from th' lock-up at Three Crossings, an' y' didn't know it."

Still Kansas King was silent. It was as if he realized the uselessness of speaking.

Buffalo Bill went on implacably.

"What I want t' know, Kansas," he said, "is t' truth about the gold I was supposed to have stolen—th' gold that was handed over by Larkins at Red Buttes, an' wasn't there when Morley called for it at Three Crossings? What's the truth?"

Kansas King spoke now.

"Dunno what you're talkin' about, Cody!" he snarled. "What gold?"

"All right; there's some more time t' some f'r answering questions, I reckon," said Cody. "I'm thinkin' it's time my pardner Tom Clark came back, an'—"

He spun on his heels, even as he squatted there. It was not that he had heard anything so much as that his plains-trained senses had, as it were, felt that there was somebody near.

But Buffalo Bill was just too late; he had been too engrossed in his one-sided conversation with Kansas King, otherwise those acute senses of his would have warned him of the peril behind him.

As he went round, his revolver thrust out, something rose from the ground. Cody's revolver spoke but just the fraction of a second too late. He received a crack on the head, delivered with all the force of a brave's right arm, and Buffalo Bill went toppling over on his heel and dropped into oblivion.

"By th' Pole Star!" mouthed Kansas King, with difficulty raising his head as he lay on the ground. "Who's that?"

He asked that two-word question in Sioux, for his eyes had told him that the assailant of Buffalo Bill was an Indian.

An old peril came back to Kansas King, who imagined that the Redskin had seen Cody apparently with an Indian captive, and had come to the rescue of a brother. But King was under no delusions; those first words of his, "By the Pole Star," would have already given him away. The Indian would know he was a paleface; presently he would know him for Kansas King, the paleface, whom the Redskins believed had betrayed them—twice.

And Kansas King, used as he was to danger, shuddered. As a prisoner to Buffalo Bill the worst that could have happened to him was to suffer death by hanging; as a prisoner again to the Indians, Heaven only knew what tortures were in store for him before the end came—

He saw the Indian stooping over Cody, and for a moment thought the savage intended scalping the scout, a sight at which, even in his own parlous situation, Kansas King could have looked without turning a hair.

Then there came to Kansas King the surging thought that there was here a way by which he could not only save his own life, but also win back the confidence of the Redskins.

"Brother," he called out to the red man—"brother, that is—Pa-nas-ka."

The Indian straightened himself up.

He strode to where King lay.

"Bush of Fire," he said, "it is

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Pa-nas-ka, I know, even as I know you, for I heard your voice, when you two spoke together, though I could not understand those things you were saying. What means all this?"

Kansas King could have shouted for very joy that the Indian was one who did not understand English. He knew the man—none other than Little Red Hawk, the son of the chief Red Hawk. Here was his chance.

"O, Little Red Hawk," he said, trying to sit up. "Bush of Fire is glad you have come. Listen, Little Red Hawk."

"I listen!" said the Redskin slowly.

"But we must be quick," said Kansas King, remembering something. "Pa-nas-ka has palefaces with him—who have gone pursuing red men. At any moment they may be back, Pa-nas-ka," he went on hurriedly, "came up with me when I was with your father, Red Hawk; and he shot Red Hawk, killed him, and took me prisoner. No chance had I against so many as Pa-nas-ka had with him, though I fought to save Red Hawk. Have you more red men with you, O brother?"

"None," was the reply. "Why, Bush of Fire?"

"Because there are many in the band of Pa-nas-ka," said Kansas King. "They will return soon. Loose me, and we will get away before they come back. Good trophy have you to take to your lodges, Little Red Hawk. The lodges shall ring with the praise of Little Red Hawk who brings in, not just the scalp of Pa-nas-ka, but the man himself."

"Few are there in the lodges to sing, Bush of Fire!" was the Indian's retort.

"Yet those few shall sing while Pa-nas-ka runs the gauntlet that ends in death and mine shall be the hand that gives him death!"

He bent over Kansas King, and cut through the man's bonds.

"They said you were a traitor, Bush of Fire," Little Red Hawk told him, "yet it seems they were wrong, else would you not have been here, prisoner to Pa-nas-ka. Come, we bind him, and then take him away with us."

He used his own lariat to truss up Buffalo Bill, who was still unconscious, and left the slashed ropes that had bound Kansas King lying on the ground—where later Tom Clark was to find them and to read in them a riddle that he could answer in but one way—that misfortune had overtaken Bill Cody, and Kansas King was free, probably with Buffalo Bill his prisoner.

"Have you a horse, Little Red Hawk?" Kansas asked as the Indian roped up Cody.

"Yes, Bush of Fire," was the reply.

"We must not stay here," said Kansas King, "for the palefaces may come and—"

"Pa-nas-ka should die when they did," said Little Red Hawk.

The Redskin lifted Buffalo Bill and slung him across his shoulder.

"Follow, Bush of Fire," he said. And Kansas King, pleased at the way in which the fates had been kind to him and the tables turned so completely on Buffalo, strode off in the wake of Little Red Hawk.

"Speak that which you know, Bush of Fire," the Indian called out to King.

"We must hurry to the woods, Little Red Hawk," said King, "because if Pa-nas-ka knows that the camp was there, many other palefaces will know also. We must warn your braves."

"How came it that Pa-nas-ka knows?" the Indian asked.

"He is a devil, Little Red Hawk,"

said Kansas King, and half believed it himself. "Listen! It was Pa-nas-ka who laid the trap at Three Crossings. He told me so. He told me that he escaped from his brothers, the palefaces, and went to Snake Creek, was there when we were there. He killed Cut Nose and took his place and listened to all we said."

"So it was that none saw Cut Nose after," said Little Red Hawk. "What else know you, Bush of Fire?"

"Pa-nas-ka warned Three Crossings," was the reply, "and so my brothers, the Sioux, suffered defeat. Then Pa-nas-ka was in the woods when your father would have burned me to death, Little Red Hawk. He saw—he heard, and went his way, knowing all we were to do. He found the wagons with the guns, emptied them of guns, and had them filled with palefaces. So did he bait another trap for us, Little Red Hawk."

"And has fallen into one himself," said the Indian, as, reaching his horse, he flung Buffalo Bill across the animal and tied hands and feet together beneath the beast's stomach. "I have a thought, O Bush of Fire, that even as he baited traps for us, so will we bait a trap for the palefaces, and Pa-nas-ka shall be the bait."

"How so, Little Red Hawk?" Kansas King asked wonderingly.

"How you shall see some day, brother," was the reply. "We go now to warn those who have got back to the woods—and have them get away, lest the palefaces come and surprise them."

(Look out for next week's thrilling long instalment of this powerful romance of the Wild West.)

"The Call of the Prairies!"

(Continued from page 17.)

Frank Richards, the celebrated author, will always be a welcome guest at St. Austells' House."

On the following day Lord St. Austells left the Lawless Ranch, and Frank Richards & Co. had leave from school to escort him as far as the railroad. They took leave of his lordship at Kamloops, and rode back to the ranch, Frank in a thoughtful mood. He knew what he had given up; but, on reflection, he was far from regretting his choice.

Bob Lawless slapped him on the shoulder as they rode up the well-known trail to the ranch, with the steers grazing round in the rich grass, and the calling of the cattlemen sounded musically from the distance.

"You're not sorry, Frank?"

Frank looked at his chum quickly.

"No," he answered; "I'm glad to stay, Bob."

"I—I guess I was afraid you would go, old chap," said Bob, with a little catch in his voice. "We—we'd have missed you, the Cherub and me, old scout! And you're glad you're staying?"

Frank smiled.

"Jolly glad, old fellow!"

And Frank was more glad than ever the next morning when he rode up the familiar trail to Cedar Creek School that the call of the prairies had been too strong for him to resist.

THE END.

(A grand new series of old-time romances will commence next Tuesday, featuring Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, and the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest, and other romantic figures of the past.)