

ANOTHER SCHOOL IN THE BACKWOODS TALE!

In Kern Gunten's fertile imagination the "gold mine" he has swindled his schoolmates out of develops into a regular "bonanza," then he makes a discovery, and down come his golden castles in the air with a crash!

YOU'LL ENJOY IT!

Gunten's Bonanza!



More Adventures of Frank Richards & Co., the Famous Chums of Cedar Creek School.

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
In High Feather.**

"HERE'S Gunten!" said Bob Lawless. Frank Richards & Co. were on their snow-shoes, in the trail out of Thompson, within sight of the snowy roofs of the cabins.

The chums of Cedar Creek School were early astir that morning.

Dicky Bird and his friends had passed them going to Hillcrest School, and the Co. were about to start for Cedar Creek, when Kern Gunten came in sight.

They stopped at once.

Kern Gunten—once their school-fellow at Cedar Creek, now of Hillcrest School—was an object of great interest to the three chums just then.

Gunten came tramping along through the snow from Thompson Town, his eyes on the ground, and his brow wrinkled in thought.

A smile played over his heavy face occasionally, making it clear that his thoughts, whatever they were, were of a pleasant nature.

Frank Richards & Co. exchanged a smile.

"Gunten seems in high feather!" remarked Vere Beauclerc.

"No wonder, when he's struck a valuable bonanza on the island in the creek!" chuckled Bob Lawless. "Gunten's dreaming dreams of millions of dollars. I guess he'll never see the dollars. But he doesn't know that yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The merry laugh of the Cedar Creek chums reached Kern Gunten's ears, and he looked up quickly.

"Oh, you!" he said.

"Little us!" smiled Frank Richards. "You seem quite cheery this morning, Gunten."

"I've had some good luck," said Gunten airily.

"Struck a gold-mine?" asked Bob. Gunten nodded.

"You've hit it!" he answered coolly.

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Beauclerc.

Gunten gave another nod, and eyed the chums of Cedar Creek in a rather lofty manner.

As the son of the richest storekeeper in Thompson, Kern Gunten was a little given to "swank," but his swank had grown upon him since the chums had seen him last.

His visions of wealth had got into his head, so to speak, and he already looked upon himself as a person of very considerable consequence.

His nose, which was a little elevated by nature, was very much elevated now by conceit and self-satisfaction.

"Quite a bonanza!" he said, with assumed carelessness. "I don't know how many dollars to the ton it will work out at; I haven't had it assayed yet. But it's a rich strike. One of the biggest strikes ever made in the Thompson Valley, I reckon."

"What luck! Where is it—if that's not a secret?"

"No secret now; I've got the claim registered in proper style," grinned Gunten. "The Prime Minister of Canada couldn't take it away from me now. It's properly protected by law."

"That's wise," said Bob Lawless solemnly.

"I guess I'm not the antelope to let the grass grow under my feet," said the Swiss boastfully. "As soon as I'd made the strike I moseyed along to the sheriff's office and put in the claim. My father helped me through. It's all in order now."

"And where's the ten-strike?"

"On the island in the creek."

"Honest Injun?" asked Frank.

"You bet! You fellows saw me there the other day when you were skating. You remember?"

"Yes; Dicky Bird and his crowd were with you."

Gunten flushed slightly.

"They hadn't anything to do with striking the bonanza," he said hastily. "I did that quite on my lonesome."

"Oh!"

"They went back to school, you know, while I moseyed down town to get the claim registered," remarked Gunten.

"And they haven't a share in it?"

"None at all!"

"Dicky Bird passed us here ten minutes

ago," said Bob Lawless, eyeing Gunten very curiously. "He seemed to think he had been frozen out."

Gunten sneered.

"Oh, he's been talking that rot to me!" he answered. "He thinks he has a claim to a share in my gold-mine, simply because he happened to be on the island at the time I made the strike."

"It wasn't Bird who made the strike?"

"Certainly not!"

"He seemed to think it was!" grinned Bob.

"If he can prove that, he may be able to upset my claim!" sneered Gunten. "It would mean a lawsuit—with my poppa's money and influence on my side—and I don't calculate Dicky Bird's folk will take it on. The claim's mine in law, and I'm sticking on to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at myself," said Gunten. "I dare say you're envious. I shall be rich. It's a tip-top strike—and no mistake! In a few weeks' time, Bob Lawless, I should be able to buy up your father's ranch without missing the money."

And with that Kern Gunten tramped on, with his nose in the air.

The Cedar Creek chums chuckled.

"He doesn't know we know all about it," grinned Bob Lawless. "Blessed if I should ever have thought this, even of Gunten—dishing his own school-fellows and simply robbing them! I shouldn't be surprised if they lynch him at Hillcrest to-day. They ought to!"

"He is an awful rascal, and no mistake!" said Frank Richards. "Hallo! Here he comes again."

The chums stared along the trail.

Gunten had tramped on into the patch of timber near Hillcrest School House, and now he came speeding back, kicking up clouds of snow as he ran.

The cause was soon apparent.

Three fellows were on his track—Dicky Bird, Blumpy, and Fisher.

The three had evidently lain in wait in the timber to catch the Swiss on his way to school, doubtless to argue out the matter of the island claim.

Gunten came tearing along, panting for breath, his face crimson with exertion.

"Stop him, you galoots!" yelled Dicky Bird. Gunten came pounding past Frank Richards & Co.

He gave them a terrified, beseeching look



as he came, and they made no movement to stop him.

He sped past, panting.
"You silly jays, why didn't you stop him?" roared Dicky Bird angrily.

He did not wait for an answer, but rushed on in pursuit of Gunten, with his comrades at his heels.

"Time we got to Cedar Creek," chuckled Bob Lawless. "I guess Gunten won't go to school this morning if he's got any hossense!"

Gunten and his pursuers vanished among the snowy cabins of Thompson, and Frank Richards & Co. started for Cedar Creek, chuckling merrily.

Gunten had "bagged" the claim on the island, and left his school-fellows out—a cunning stroke of rascality which surprised the Co., even in Kern Gunten—for the Hillcresters had been gold-seeking in company, and it was actually Dicky Bird who had struck the claim. It seemed likely that the cunning Swiss, though he had made his position secure in law, would have to pay for his rascality in ways unrecognised by the law if Dicky Bird & Co. could get hold of him!

Indeed, it seemed improbable that Gunten would be able to venture to school at all, under the circumstances. The school-fellows he had swindled were not to be appeased, naturally.

And the cream of the joke—from the Co.'s point of view—was that the claim on the island was not a gold-mine at all, but a "salted" claim, prepared by the humorous Bob, for a joke on the Hillcrest fellows.

If Kern Gunten could have known that he would not have been dreaming those dreams of great wealth. But he did not know it—yet!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not Wanted!

THERE was an interruption to lessons at Cedar Creek that morning.

While Miss Meadows was busy with her class there came a knock at the school-room door, and, to the surprise of all Cedar Creek, it opened to give admission to Mr. Gunten, storekeeper and post-master of Thompson.

The fat gentleman strode in, with Kern Gunten, looking very uneasy, at his heels.

Miss Meadows looked at them.
"Old Man Gunten!" murmured Bob Lawless. "What's the game, I wonder? He can't be going to ask Miss Meadows to take Gunten back?"

"Silence in class, please!" said Miss Meadows severely. "Mr. Gunten, may I inquire—"

"Good-morning, madam!" said Mr. Gunten, with great politeness.

"Good-morning! But—"

"Some time ago, madam," pursued Mr. Gunten, "there was a certain disagreement, and my son left this school. You refused to take him back."

"Well, sir?" said Miss Meadows coldly.

"Madam, some time has elapsed since then, and my son's conduct since that date has been exemplary—quite exemplary. He is prepared to apologise to you, madam, and promise complete amendment. Under these circumstances, Miss Meadows, I trust you will accept him once more as a pupil."

The Canadian schoolmistress looked perplexed.

"But is not your son a pupil of Mr. Peckover, at Hillcrest?" she asked.

Mr. Gunten coughed.

"I am not satisfied with Hillcrest," he said. "Madam, I should take it as a very great favour if you would receive my boy back into Cedar Creek. Considering the time that has elapsed since his fault—"

Miss Meadows' face hardened.

"Does that mean, Mr. Gunten, that your son has been sent away from Hillcrest, as he was sent away from here?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly not, madam! I am taking him away."

"For no reason?"

"The fact is, he does not get on with the other boys, for some reason," said Mr. Gunten. "There is a set against him. For the lad's sake, Miss Meadows, I hope you will give him a chance here, even for a few weeks."

The schoolmistress hesitated.

It was a considerable "climb-down" for the fat and pompous storekeeper to come to

Cedar Creek and make that humble request, and Miss Meadows was inclined to be lenient.

Bob Lawless gave his chums a grim look.
He knew that Mr. Gunten must be well aware why his son was not safe at Hillcrest among the school-fellows he had swindled; and Bob did not mean to see Miss Meadows deceived, and an unscrupulous young rascal "planted" on Cedar Creek School. Cedar Creek had had enough of Kern Gunten in the past.

Bob Lawless jumped up.

"Miss Meadows—" he began.

"You sit down, Lawless!"

"Mr. Gunten hasn't told you why his son is in trouble at Hillcrest, Miss Meadows," said Bob firmly.

"Really, Lawless—"

"Ask him, ma'am, whether it isn't because Kern Gunten has swindled half a dozen chaps!" said Bob.

Miss Meadows started, and Kern Gunten gave the rancher's son a bitter look. Old Man Gunten frowned portentously.

"Miss Meadows, kindly take no notice of that insolent boy!" he said. "I trust that you—"

"I will make an inquiry into the matter, Mr. Gunten," said Miss Meadows decidedly.

"That is all I can say now."

"My son may as well remain here—"

"He cannot remain for the present, until I am acquainted with all the circumstances of his leaving Hillcrest."

"Really, madam—"

"That is my last word, Mr. Gunten!"

The fat storekeeper coloured with anger; but he yielded the point. It was no use to argue further, as he could see.

He gave a snort, and marched out of the school-room, with Kern Gunten at his heels, and the door closed on them.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Light on the Subject!

CHEEK!" growled Bob Lawless, as the Cedar Creek fellows came out after morning lessons.

"Neck, and no mistake!" agreed Frank Richards.

"I suppose Gunten must go to some school or other," remarked Beauclerc. "But there are only two in this section, and Gunten seems to have made both of them too hot for him. Old Man Gunten will be driven to sending him away to a boarding-school. Still, this trouble at Hillcrest will blow over—when the fellows there find out the facts."

Bob Lawless laughed.

"I guess we may as well mosey along to Hillcrest and see them," he said. "We'll tell Dicky Bird as a secret, and let Gunten run on with sticking to the claim and getting a mining man to come and test it. We don't want to deprive him of his pleasant surprise when he finds out what it's worth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums buckled on their snowshoes and started down the frozen trail for Hillcrest.

The Co. considered that the little joke had gone far enough, so far as Dicky Bird was concerned; and they were anxious, too, not to run any risk of the obnoxious Swiss being planted in Cedar Creek again.

There was a buzz of voices in the playground when they reached Hillcrest School and looked in at the open gate.

Dicky Bird & Co. were there, with most of the other Hillcrest fellows, evidently discussing the iniquities of Kern Gunten.

The Hillcrest fellows took Dicky's word as to the facts; besides, there were five other fellows who had been in the gold-seeking party, and they all backed up Dicky's statements.

Kern Gunten was condemned on all sides, and he had made himself a pariah in his school, universally despised and scorned.

"He hasn't come this morning," Dicky Bird was saying, as Frank Richards & Co. arrived. "But that won't do him any good. He's diddled us over the claim, but he's not going to enjoy it quietly. Hallo, you Cedar Creek galoots, take your faces away!"

Bob Lawless held up his hands.

"Truce, old scout!" he said. "We've come for a little pow-wow with you, Dicky."

"Br-r-r!" said Dicky Bird.

"We've got news about the claim."

"Oh!" said Dicky Bird, showing some interest. "You can pile in! Of course, if we dispute Gunten's ownership, you fellows are witnesses. You were there, and saw us.

I don't know whether we can do it, though." "Mosey along with us a minute, and you'll hear," said Bob.

Dicky Bird and Fisher and Blumpy came out on the trail. They regarded the chums of Cedar Creek curiously.

The Cedar Creek trio were grinning. They could not help it. Considering what they knew, this storm over the island claim was comic enough.

"I guess I'm going to surprise you, Dicky," began Bob Lawless. "You see, we spotted you gold-prospecting on the island the other day—before you knew it. And we knew you were going to strike the next day—"

"What rot! You couldn't know it!" "But we did!" chuckled Bob. "You see, we made the gold-mine ready for you to strike!"

"What!" "A dollar's worth of bronze-powder and a squirt!" explained Bob Lawless.

Dicky Bird looked at him.

"Wha-a-at!" he stammered.

"Bronze-powder!" murmured Fisher.

"Catch on?" asked Bob cheerily. "Haven't you ever heard of a salted claim, Dicky?"

"A-a-a salted claim!" stammered Dicky Bird.

"Yep!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"We moseyed along to the island over night, and salted the rock, all ready for you!" said Bob. "We reckoned you'd make a ten-strike, you know. Of course, we never dreamed about Gunten stealing a march on you—registering the claim in his own name. That was really too rich!"

And Bob roared.

"Oh, gum!" exclaimed Dicky Bird, staring blankly at the rancher's son. "You mean to say you planted a salted rock there for us—"

"Correct!"

"And there's no gold there at all?" yelled Dicky Bird.

"Nary a speck! My dear jay, that island's been prospected a hundred times, and if there was any gold there it would have been found before this."

The Hillcrest fellows looked at one another. That lucky strike, so easily made, was explained now—the ten-strike and it's wonderful wealth was gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream.

"I—I—I say, is that straight goods, though?" asked Fisher.

"Honest Injun!" said Frank Richards.

"You can mosey along to the island and hack off a chip of the golden quartz," said Bob. "Take it to any mining-man, and ask him what it's worth to the ounce."

Dicky Bird nodded.

He did not doubt now; indeed, Bob Lawless' explanation enlightened him as to many little circumstances connected with that lucky strike on the island in the creek.

It gave Bob Lawless a very peculiar look.

"That is what you call a joke, I suppose?" he remarked.

"The joke of the season, old scout!" answered Bob. "But the cream of the joke is Gunten bagging the claim. There will be surprise for that pilgrim when he brings his expert along to test it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky Bird and his comrades burst into a roar.

"We ought to scrag you for playing such a trick on us!" said Dicky Bird. "I guess I've a good mind—"

"Go ahead!"

"Well, I reckon we'll let you off," said Dicky Bird magnanimously. "I'm jolly glad there's nothing in the claim, as Gunten has jumped it. We were going to take a crowd to Gunten's store and mob him, after lessons. He doesn't dare to show up at school."

"Well, you needn't mob him," said Bob Lawless, laughing. "He will feel pretty sick when he finds out what he's robbed you of!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky Bird's eyes glistened.

"We'll go to the store, all the same," he said. "I reckon I've got a stunt, too. We'll offer Gunten terms, and let him buy us off cheap."

"Oh, Jerusalem!"

"You fellows come, too!" said Dicky Bird eagerly. "We'll all drop in at the store after lessons, and see him. He'll think we've come to lynch him, and then we'll make terms—easy terms—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he can keep the claim!" grinned Dicky Bird. "After all, he's welcome to it. If we want a heap of rocks, we can pick 'em anywhere."

Another SCHOOL IN THE BACKWOODS STORY Next Week!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rivals of Cedar Creek and Hillcrest separated on the best of terms, for once. Frank Richards & Co. slid homeward to Cedar Creek in merry spirits.

After lessons they were to meet Dicky Bird and his comrades at Gunten's store in Thompson. And they were looking forward with happy anticipation to that collective call upon the schoolboy claim-jumper.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Striking a Bargain!**

KERN GUNTEN compressed his thick lips. The Swiss was in charge of the store when dusk was falling on Thompson.

As there was no school for him that day, the storekeeper's son had been making himself useful at home; not very willingly.

Gunten's early satisfaction over his clever stroke of business had given place to mixed feelings.

He had no scruples about the trick he had played on his schoolfellows; and his legal hold on the island claim seemed secure enough against all that his rivals could do. But there were other considerations that he had not thought of at first.

Certainly he could not go back to Hillcrest School while Dicky Bird & Co. were in such a mood as at present. Even Mr. Peckover, the headmaster, could not possibly have protected him against the schoolboys he had so unscrupulously swindled.

Cedar Creek School was closed to him; there was little doubt that after Miss Meadows had made the "inquiry," she would refuse to take Gunten back on any terms.

If the gold-mine panned out well, as Gunten expected, there was no reason why he should not be sent to an expensive boarding-school south; but at present he had to remain at home.

Remaining home meant working either in the house or in the store or the woodyard; and Gunten did not like work.

Moreover, though he was not ashamed of his action, he felt the contempt it had brought upon him. It was not pleasant to be hooted out of his school as a common swindler; and the story was spreading in Thompson, too, and Gunten had heard many unpleasant remarks on the subject among the customers at the store.

He was not wholly without fear that the sheriff might take the matter in hand, and that the registration of the claim might possibly be rescinded; though, in that case, if the claim turned out a valuable one, there would be legal action, supported by his father's wealth; for Old Man Gunten was certainly no more scrupulous than his son.

With those thoughts in his mind, Gunten was not quite happy; and he felt still less satisfied, as there was a tramp of feet in the doorway and a crowd of schoolboys poured in.

Gunten compressed his lips as he recognised Dicky Bird & Co., with Frank Richards and his friends in their company.

He guessed at once that the heroes of the rival schools had made common cause against him.

The Swiss made a movement to leave the store, intending to call his father to deal with these unwelcome customers. Dicky Bird shouted to him.

"Hold on, Gunten!"
The Swiss gave him a savage look.
"If you've come here to kick up a row, Bird, you've got fired out on your neck!" he said.

"I've come for a friendly talk, my boy!"
"Just a little chat, old scout!" said Bob Lawless. "Dicky's going to make an arrangement with you about the claim."
"We're all witnesses!" said Frank Richards.

"There's no arrangement to be made," said Gunten sullenly. "The claim's mine, and that settles it!"
"I don't reckon you'll get all Thompson to believe your version of the yarn, Gunten," said Blumpy, shaking his head.

"I guess I've got the claim registered."
"That can be disputed, too," said Dicky Bird. "But suppose we agree to let you have the claim without dispute, Gunten?"
"Will you?"

"Well, we don't want to be kicking up a shindy," said Dick Bird placably. "And



GUNTEN FINDS OUT! The parlour door opened, and Gunten came back into the store. His face was pale, and he shook a fist at the grinning chums of Cedar Creek. "This is your work," he hissed. "You knew it was a salted mine on the island—it was a plant!" (See Chapter 5.)

you don't want to keep away from school because you're afraid of getting lynched, I guess."

"I'm willing to make friends," said Gunten, eyeing him. "I don't want to cut up rusty. I'm sure. In fact, I don't mind agreeing to let you chaps have something when the mine's working; but it's understood that it's a present, and you can't make a claim."

"Well, a bird in hand's worth two in the bush," remarked Dicky Bird reflectively. "When do you expect the mine will start?"
"Some time yet, of course. The expert's going down to-morrow to test it. Father's paying his fee," said Gunten. "A lot depends on his report."

"Oh, by gum!" murmured Bob Lawless. He wondered how Old Man Gunten would like paying the expert gentleman's fee—when he received the report!

It was a just punishment on the storekeeper for backing up his son's dishonesty. "But it may be some time before the mine gets going," said Dicky Bird gravely.

"Some weeks, very likely."
"You don't want to stay away from school all that time."

Gunten scowled.
"No, I don't; but I'm not coming there to be ill-used. I'm willing to make friends, if you come to that; and I'll treat you well if the mine pans out as I expect. That's more than some fellows would do after the way you've chinwagged me."

"Well, the mine seems to be yours legally, whatever may be said about it morally," said Dick Bird. "We don't want to keep up this trouble. What's it worth to you for us to withdraw our claim to it?"

"Not much," said Gunten cautiously.
"Will you come to the office and register the mine afresh in all our names?"
"Nope!"

"You'd rather we went to the sheriff and entered a protest against the registration, with these fellows as witnesses?"

"It wouldn't do you any good," said Gunten uneasily.

"I guess it would show you up to all the valley for what you are, whether it did us any good or not," said Dicky Bird. "But we've come here to make terms if you

choose. If you don't, say so, and we'll mosey along to see the sheriff."

Gunten hesitated. It was certainly worth something to buy off the hostility of the fellows he had tricked, and to save himself from being pointed out in the streets as a common swindler.

But though he fully believed that he had robbed Dicky Bird & Co. of their shares in a valuable gold-mine, which would doubtless pan out tens of thousands of dollars, the meanness of his nature was uppermost, and he was inclined to drive a hard bargain.

"Oh, come on!" said Frank Richards, as Gunten hesitated. "Come along to the sheriff's! We're your witnesses."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Gunten.

"Well, get a move on, quick!" said Dicky Bird impatiently. "We haven't come here to waste time or to jaw with you till the registrar closes his office!"

"Wait a minute or two while I speak to my father, said Gunten.

"I don't see the need; it's not his mine."

"I won't keep you long."

"Oh, all right! Hustle, then!"

Gunten disappeared into the parlour behind the store-counter.

Dicky Bird & Co. kept up grave countenances. They were quite aware that several glances were cast at them round that parlour door as Old Man Gunten listened to his son's explanation.

The Swiss schoolboy came back into the store at last.

"I guess I'm willing to do the right thing," he said.

"Go ahead!"

"I'm ready to stand you five dollars each," said Gunten.

There was a howl at once.

"Five dollars!"

"For our whack in a gold-mine!"

"This isn't a joking matter, Gunten!"

"I'm not joking," said Kern Gunten.

"You mean five hundred?" suggested Frank Richards.

"I mean five dollars!"

"And you expect to make thousands out of the mine—our mine!" exclaimed Dicky Bird indignantly.

"Well, there are lots of chances in gold-mining," said Gunten. "We—I mean, I made a good strike. But we're not experts. I'm taking the chances."

"Something in that, Dicky!" said Bob Lawless gravely.

"Yep. But five dollars—five measly dollars!" said Dicky Bird, in disgust.

"Take it or leave it!" said Gunten. "My poppa's willing to advance me that much to settle the trouble with you; but not a cent more—not a continental red cent. That's a cinch!"

"Five dollars!" repeated Dicky Bird, looking at his companions.

Gunten grinned as he thought he detected the signs of yielding.

"And you galoots will have to sign a paper, witnessed, giving up all claim on the mine," he said. "That's a condition."

"No need to sign a paper; our word's enough, I guess," answered Fisher.

"I'll have your names in black and white as well, if you don't mind," said Gunten, with a laugh.

"We can't let it go for five dollars," said Dicky Bird. "What would you advise, Frank Richards?"

Frank assumed a very thoughtful look. "Well, as Gunten says, he's taking the chances," he remarked.

"That's so!" assented Gunten eagerly.

"Then the mine will want capital to develop, I suppose," continued Frank. "Old Man Gunten has got the capital, and you fellows haven't. Your people mightn't be willing to put cash into a gold-mining proposition. And I don't see how you could sell the mine, with an ownership dispute hanging on to it. I don't want to influence you, really, but in your place I should accept Gunten's offer."

"I guess so," said Bob Lawless, with a nod.

"That's hoss-sense!" said Gunten approvingly. "Why, the mine may turn out to be worthless, for all you know."

"We've seen the gold, and so have you," answered Dicky Bird.

"Still, there's chances—"

"Make it ten dollars."

"Five's the figure!" answered Gunten. "And I want your written paper in exchange for that, too!"

Dicky Bird cast another look round. "I leave it to you chaps," he said.

"Oh, take the offer!" said Blumpy. "We can't work a mine, anyhow; and, as Frank says, our folks haven't the capital to take it up. It means getting up machinery by railway, and all that. Let's take the money and give Gunten the paper he wants."

"That's my idea," said Watson.

"Done, then!" said Dicky Bird, in a grudging tone. "You're a pretty hard driver in a bargain, Gunten."

"Here's pen and paper," was Gunten's answer.

"What do you want me to write?" asked Dicky Bird, taking up the pen.

"A plain statement that you fellows resign all claim to the pegged-out mine on the island in Cedar Creek, signed by the lot of you, one after another," said Gunten.

"All right!"

Dicky Bird wrote to Kern Gunten's dictation, and the Hillcrest fellows signed the paper one after another.

Gunten watched them with glistening eyes. "Now you chaps as witnesses," he said, looking at the chums of Cedar Creek.

"I'm willing," said Bob.

And Bob Lawless, Frank Richards, and Vere Beauclerc signed their names as witnesses to the paper of renunciation.

"Cash!" said Blumpy.

Kern Gunten went into the parlour again, and came out with a buckskin bag in his hand.

From the bag he counted out thirty dollars—five each to the six Hillcrest fellows.

Then the signed paper was handed to him. "Anything for us, Gunten?" asked Bob Lawless, with a grin.

"Nope!" snapped Gunten.

"Then we may as well mosey along," said Bob. "Good-night, Gunty! I hope you'll become Premier of Canada when you're a millionaire."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the schoolboys crowded out of the

store, laughing, leaving Kern Gunten very well contented.

He knew that Dicky Bird & Co. would keep to the bond, and that he had nothing to fear in returning to Hillcrest School; and that was a great relief to his mind.

He would not have felt quite so contented, perhaps, if he had heard the remarks exchanged among the merry Canadian schoolboys as they went down Main Street.

Fortunately for his peace of mind he did not hear them.

And the next morning Kern Gunten started for school, and he found the Hillcrest fellows quite urbane when he met them, though they smiled to an extent that perplexed him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Gunten Disillusioned!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. came out with their snowshoes after morning lessons the next day at Cedar Creek School.

That morning they knew Mr. Gunten and the mining expert were to visit the claim on the island, Old Man Gunten having secured the services of a mining man well known in the Thompson Valley for the purpose.

What the mining man would say when he found that he had been brought miles to look at a "salted" rock, the schoolboys wondered, and they wondered, too, what Old Man Gunten would say. It was certain to be something very emphatic.

They intended to run down to Thompson to get the news from Kern Gunten; it was sure to be interesting news.

They were in good time, and they met the Swiss on his way home from Hillcrest for dinner at the store.

"Hallo, Gunten!" called out Bob Lawless. "All O.K. at school?"

"Certainly," answered Gunten, with a lofty look. "Why not? The fact is, the fellows have got too much sense to quarrel with a chap who's going to be as rich as anybody in the Thompson Valley."

"Oh!"

"Keller's been grousing," said Gunten, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He reckons he ought to have something; but I don't see it. Friendship doesn't mean whacking out a gold-mine."

"I guess not," agreed Bob. "You won't forget your old friends at Cedar Creek when you're rolling in money, Gunten?"

Gunten sneered.

"I sha'n't forget what you said to Miss Meadows when I came with my father yesterday!" he answered. "And you needn't be so jolly friendly, Bob Lawless. I know what it's for and what it's worth!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Frank Richards. "You grow nicer and nicer, Gunten," said Bob Lawless admiringly. "Have you heard the report of the mining expert yet?"

"Nope; I've been at school all morning. I want to hear it, though, and I can't waste time on you galoots."

And with that polite remark Kern Gunten sped on towards Thompson.

"Follow your leader!" said Bob Lawless, with a chuckle. "Gunten's going to get a shock, and we're going to see him get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of Cedar Creek slid along the snowy trail after Kern Gunten.

The Swiss lost no time.

He knew that his father and the mining man must have returned from the claim on the island before this, and he was anxious to hear what the expert had reported.

He had no doubts as to the richness of the mine; the only question in his mind was whether it was worth thousands or millions of dollars.

Gunten's golden dreams were growing more and more golden.

That was natural, as his title to the mine was undisputed now. It was his, and his only, with all the wealth that was in it!

He seemed to be walking on air as he went into the store in Main Street.

Frank Richards & Co. left their snowshoes outside and sauntered into the store.

They wanted to see the denouement, for they knew what sort of a report the mining man must have given the Old Man Gunten.

Gunten had disappeared into the back parlour, and from that apartment there came the sound of excited and angry voices.

There were several customers in the store, and they were glancing towards the parlour door in astonishment and some amusement.

"Here comes Gunten!" murmured Vere Beauclerc at last.

The parlour door opened, and the Swiss schoolboy came back into the store.

His face was pale, his lips trembling with fury. His eyes blazed as he looked at Frank Richards & Co., and he shook a furious fist at them.

"This is your work!" he hissed. "What is?" asked Bob Lawless innocently. Gunten panted.

"You knew it was a salted mine on the island!" he shrieked.

"Salted!"

"The mining expert says it's salted, and there's no gold on the island at all!" hissed Gunten.

"My word!"

"You knew it!" said the Swiss, biting his thick lips with rage. "I can see now that it was a plant!"

"My dear chap, we don't mean to deny it," chuckled Bob. "We salted the rock as a joke on the Hillcrest chaps. We never guessed that you'd steal a march on them and rob them of that mine. Ha, ha!"

Gunten shook his fist at them furiously. "They've robbed me!" he howled. "I've paid them five dollars each to give up their claim on a mine that isn't worth a red cent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in the store. Dry Billy Bowers was fairly doubled up before the store, howling with mirth. Even Injun Dick, the Apache, who was warming himself there, grinned.

All Thompson knew of the gold-mine on the island in the creek by this time and the foul play Gunten had been accused of; and this ending to Gunten's golden dream struck everyone as funny—except Gunten.

He was writhing with rage and malice and disappointed avarice.

"Next time you're going to jump a claim, Gunten, make sure there's something in it worth jumping!" said Beauclerc, laughing.

"Hang you! You—you—I'm thirty dollars out of pocket!" wailed Gunten. "It's me that's been swindled!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're not the first galoot who's gone for wool and come back shorn," said Bob Lawless consolingly.

"Hang you!"

There was a step in the doorway, and Dicky Bird, of Hillcrest, walked cheerily into the store.

He nodded to the Cedar Creek fellows, and smiled at Gunten.

"Heard the mining man's report yet?" he asked.

"Hang you!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"The mine's worthless!" howled Gunten. "There's nothing in it. Those silly jays salted it for a silly fool joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Found that out, have you?" roared Dicky Bird. "They told us yesterday, old scout."

Gunten looked at him with an expression that the fabied Gorgon might have envied.

He realised now that the Hillcrest chums had known the facts when they had come to bargain with him in the store the previous day, and he had paid over hard dollars for their claim to a share in the "mine."

He could not speak; he could only stammer with fury as he glared at the cheery Dicky Bird.

That youth drew out a buckskin bag from his coat, and the greedy eyes of the Swiss fastened upon it at once. He recognised the bag.

Dicky, with a laugh, tossed it on the store counter, and there was a metallic clang as it landed there.

"There's your dollars, Gunten," he said. "The—the dollars!" gasped Gunten.

"Ha, ha! We were only stuffing you, you silly jay!" roared Dicky Bird. "You are the only swindler at Hillcrest, old man. Count out your dollars, and see if they're right."

With a trembling hand Kern Gunten clutched the buckskin bag. The dollars were all there, and he gasped with relief. His gold-mine had vanished into the region of dreams, but his own money was safe, and that was a consolation.

Dicky Bird, grinning, walked out of the store with Frank Richards & Co., and Gunten had the pleasure of hearing their merry laughter as they went.

THE END.

(Next week's School in the Backwoods story is great! Don't miss it!)