

ON THE GOLD-THIEF'S TRAIL!

Many thrilling adventures and dangerous obstacles have to be overcome before Frank Richards and his partner can touch again the gold that has been stolen from them!

Red Gold!



Another breathless adventure of Frank Richards, the homeless schoolboy of the Canadian Backwoods!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"Hands Up!"

"LE COUTEAU!"

Frank Richards whispered the name.

Night had fallen on the Cascade Mountains. In a deep, shadowed valley the flare of a camp-fire danced against a black background of pines and firs. In the circle of light from the fire, a man sat on a log. The firelight played on his dusky face, showing up the thin, cruel lips, the white teeth, the black, glittering eyes.

A score of yards away, Frank Richards and Bronze Bill halted. They had crept as silently as the lynx towards the lonely camp-fire in the valley; the half-breed sitting on the log had not heard a sound to cause him to turn his head.

He had a small canvas sack open on his knees, as he sat, and was running his dusky fingers through the contents—golden grains and small nuggets of the precious metal.

On the canvas of the sack was a stain of blood, still wet; but that was of small account to Le Couteau, the half-breed.

With glittering eyes in the firelight he counted over the nuggets, and weighed the gold-dust in his hand.

"Cover him!" breathed Frank. "But don't shoot; there's no need to shed blood, Bill. I tell you—"

Bronze Bill ran forward into the firelight, his rifle up. His first impulse had been to shoot the half-breed dead at sight; but he yielded to his schoolboy partner.

"Hands up!" he shouted, with the rifle raised.

Frank Richards followed him fast, revolver in hand.

The half-breed started violently at the sight of the burly miner and his schoolboy comrade. His hand flew to

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his belt, to the handle of the long "couteau de chasse," from which the ruffian derived his nickname.

"Touch that sticker, and you're a dead man!" rapped out Bronze Bill.

The half-breed's hand did not reach the knife.

The rifle-muzzle was looking him full in the face, and the miner's finger was on the trigger.

The canvas sack dropped at his feet, as his dusky hands were raised above his head.

He fixed his black eyes, glinting with rage and hatred, upon the tanned miner and the schoolboy of Cedar Creek.

"You here!" he muttered.

"I guess so, as large as life!" answered Bronze Bill. "Keep your paws up, you durned 'breed; I'm watching you. Richards, pick up that sack, sonny."

"You bet!" said Frank.

He stepped forward, and stooped to secure the canvas sack.

A quiver ran through the half-breed, as he saw his prize in the hands of the schoolboy of Cedar Creek.

"So you have turned gold-thief, Bronze Bill!" he sneered.

"I guess you know the owner of that sack," said the miner. "If you don't, you're going to Parn. That 'old-sack belongs to me and my pardner. It was lifted from our camp in the gulch last night by an Injun; and we've found the Injun dead down the valley yonder. It was you that gave him his quietus, I guess."

"It is false!" muttered the half-breed. "I—"

"That's the sack, Frank?"

"That's it," answered Frank, "and the stuff is all here. We've been jolly lucky, old scout!"

"It is mine!" hissed the half-breed. "There's blood on the sack!" said Frank, with a shudder.

"The Injun's juice, I guess," said

Bronze Bill. "You pesky breed, you rubbed out that Injun less'n half an hour ago, I reckon, and bagged the gold-sack off him. I guess, if it wasn't for my pardner hyer, I'd drop you in your tracks, instanter."

The half-breed quivered with rage. "Take away his sticker, Frank. He's safer without that; though I reckon it would be safest to serve him as he served the Injun."

Frank Richards disarmed the half-breed, removing the knife and revolver from his belt.

Le Couteau's black eyes glittered at him.

"Now rope him up," said Bronze Bill. "Fasten his paws behind his back, and he'll keep safe till morning."

"Nom d'un nom!" muttered Le Couteau, between his teeth. "It is your turn now, scelerate! But—"

"Nuff chin-music!" interrupted Bronze Bill. "Make a safe job of it, Frank. He ain't to be trusted, any more'n a rattlesnake."

"Leave it to me," said Frank.

He drew the half-breed's hands behind him, and secured the wrists together, knotting the rope with great care.

Then Bronze Bill lowered his rifle.

Le Couteau had made no resistance; he could see that the big miner was ready, and anxious, for an excuse to drive a bullet through him. It was only on account of Frank that the prospector held his hand. Le Couteau's life hung on a thread.

He sat on the log again, with his hands securely bound, and black and bitter fury in his face.

Then Bronze Bill examined the gold-sack, with a grin of satisfaction on his tanned face.

"I reckon it's all hyer," he said. "All but a bit of the dust that has been spilled. I reckon this lot will figure out at a thousand dollars, and more, when we get it safe to Hard Pan, Frank."

"Good!" said Frank. "We're camping hyer to-night," continued the miner, "and I guess we'll light out for Hard Pan at sunrise. You're goin' to have our company till mornin', Le Couteau."

The half-breed replied only with a savage scowl.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Desperate Device!

FRANK RICHARDS was glad to roll himself in his blanket, with his feet to the fire, and sink into slumber.

The day had been a hard one for the wandering schoolboy, and he was aching with fatigue in every limb.

Tired as he was, he was feeling satisfied and at ease, as he lay down to sleep. The gold—the fruit of weeks of hard work at the claim in the locked gulch—had been recaptured; from the Indian gold-thief it had passed into the hands of Le Couteau, and from Le Couteau back to the owners. And Frank, who had seen a great deal of hard luck since the day he quitted his home at the Lawless Ranch, in the Thompson Valley, found fortune smiling on him at last. His half of the gold would amount to at least five hundred dollars, and that was a handsome nest-egg for the future. It was a turn of fortune's wheel that gave the schoolboy of Cedar Creek much satisfaction.

He sank into a deep slumber, and dreamed of his old home and comrades in the Thompson Valley, and of Cedar Creek School—the backwoods school where he had spent many happy days, and upon which he had looked his last. Bronze Bill stamped out the camp fire before he turned in.

Lonely as the valley in the cascade foothills was, it was possible that the light might be seen from afar by some wandering Indian or lawless white man, and the miner was running no unnecessary risks.

He examined Le Couteau's bonds before he rolled himself in his blanket to sleep, and left him secure.

Darkness blotted out the camp when the fire died out. But the stars were coming out in a velvety sky, and a dim light was shed on the sleeping camp.

Le Couteau did not sleep. The half-breed writhed his wrists in the cord till the skin was chafed and bleeding, but he could not get his hands loose.

An hour passed, and then he ceased, from sheer pain and exhaustion, and lay breathing hard, staring up at the glimmering stars, his perspiring face fanned by the breeze that blew through the valley.

From where he lay he could see the gold-sack.

It lay between the two sleepers, partly covered by a corner of Bronze Bill's blanket.

The half-breed's eyes turned upon it again and again feverishly.

If he could but get loose—

Bronze Bill slept with his hand on his rifle, and if he had awakened and found the half-breed loose he would have shot him down like a coyote. But Le Couteau was ready to take the risk if he could but get loose. But his hands were held as though by iron manacles. A sudden flare of light broke the darkness and made the watching half-breed blink.

A half-dead ember in the camp-fire stamped out by the miner's big boot had been smouldering in the heap, and it was fanned at last to a sudden blaze by the wind.

The flame leaped up and danced, casting strange lights and shadows on the forms of the sleepers and the dark trees near at hand.

The sleepers did not stir. But into the eyes of the half-breed, as he watched the flickering flame, there came a sudden gleam.

He moved silently, softly, as a panther stealing on its prey, creeping closer to the fire.

He made no sound that could disturb the sleepers.

With his back to the flicker, he held out his bound hands behind him so that the flame licked the cord that secured his wrists.

It licked his wrists also, and the agony of the burn caused the perspiration to start out on his dusky forehead in big drops.

But he set his teeth like iron, and was silent.

With the Indian blood that ran in his veins the half-breed had many of the red man's attributes. A grim and stoical endurance of pain was one of them.

No white man could have endured the licking of the flame upon his flesh without a cry. But not a sound passed the set lips of the half-breed.

Hardy as he was, and bitterly determined, the anguish forced the half-breed to withdraw his wrists from the contact of the flame.

He strained to burst the cord, but it still held.

With set teeth, he extended it over the licking flame again.

The sweat poured down his face like a stream. His heart was beating in irregular spasms. But he still endured.

And suddenly, as he strained his tortured wrists, the charred cord burst.

He was free!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

At Bay!

LE COUTEAU lay silent on the ground beside the dead fire, breathing long and slowly.

He was free, but for the time he could not move; the pain he had endured had exhausted even his iron frame.

The light of the flickering ember died down and vanished. All was dark again save for the glimmer of the stars.

But the half-breed was free!

He moved at last, and softly chafed his scorched and tortured wrists. His eyes were on the sleepers, watchful as a cat's.

But they did not stir.

It was an hour more before Le Couteau felt himself able to make another move. The pain in his wrists had settled down into a dull, grinding ache, a torture that would have been almost unendurable to a white man. But the "breed" bore it in grim silence.

He moved at length, creeping stealthily closer to the sleepers.

His hand was on the gold-sack at last.

The thought was in his mind of groping for a rock and dashing out the brains of the sleepers as they lay.

But he did not dare to risk it. One, at least, of them would have awakened in time, and a bullet would have laid the half-breed dead on the ground before he could escape. And his scorched and quivering wrists were scarcely equal to the striking of a deadly blow.

The day of vengeance should come, the ruffian promised himself. Now he was thinking only of escape and of the gold.

Inch by inch, with infinite caution, he

drew the gold-sack towards him till it was clear of the sleeping miners.

Then he rose to his feet.

He threw the strap of the canvas sack over his shoulder and buckled it. One last look he gave at his sleeping enemies.

Again the impulse seized him to attack them before he fled—to hurl a rock at an unconscious head. But it was too risky. Bronze Bill's arm was over his rifle; Frank Richards' hand was on his revolver under his blanket. It was impossible to touch the weapons without awakening them. Vengeance upon one meant death at the hands of the other, and the half-breed restrained the murderous impulse.

With silent steps he stole away in the darkness.

In a few minutes the shadows of the night had swallowed him up.

Still the miners slept on.

They were weary from the long day's trail, and they did not open their eyes until the early sunlight was creeping into the valley over the mountain-peaks to the east.

Bronze Bill was the first to awaken.

He sat up as the early sunrays glimmered on his face, and gave a deep yawn and threw his blanket aside.

His hand groped instinctively for the gold-sack at once.

Then a change came over his face as he was startled into full wakefulness.

He leaped to his feet.

The gold-sack was gone, and a rapid glance showed that the half-breed was gone also.

"Gone!" stammered Bronze Bill. He drove his boot against the sleeping form of his comrade. "Wake up!"

Frank Richards started up.

"What—" he began drowsily.

"He's gone—and the gold!" roared Bronze Bill furiously.

Frank Richards was on his feet in a second.

"Gone!" he repeated blankly.

"Look!" yelled Bronze Bill.

"My hat!"

Frank Richards stared round him.

"Gone!" hissed Bronze Bill, between his teeth. "He's got loose and lit out, taking the gold with him. You durned young fool, you never tied him safe!"

"I did!" exclaimed Frank. "He couldn't have got loose—"

"Ain't he gone?" roared Bronze Bill.

Bronze Bill picked up the fragments of the charred cord. He stared at them, and held them up for Frank to see.

"By gosh!" he said, in a hushed voice. "Look at that! Injun all over! There was a bit of the fire left, I reckon, and he burned the cord through. That's Injun."

"But—but he must have burned his wrists, too," said Frank. "How could he—"

"I guess he stood that, like the durned Injun he is!" growled Bronze Bill. "I reckoned I'd stamped the fire out, but it blew up agin, I guess. Your fault—"

"Yours, you mean," said Frank warmly. "You must have left an ember—"

"Your fault, for stopping me putting a bullet through his cabeza!" exclaimed the bronzed miner savagely. "I reckon this wouldn't have happened if I'd dropped him dead in his tracks, as I wanted, you young jay!"

Frank Richards was silent. His partner was right—there was no doubt about that. But Frank could not regret what he had done.

"The fire's dead and cold hours ago!" said Bronze Bill, feeling among the ashes. "I reckon he lit out by midnight. You young jay! If you'd let me put a bullet through him—"

"No good slanging now," interrupted

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Frank Richards. "We're wasting time, Bill. We've got to get after him."
"Just let me get a bead on him agin!" said the big miner savagely. "I reckon I'll pull trigger instanter. Get a move on! There ain't any time for feeding. We've got to get arter the cuss afore the trail's cold."

Without a word more the miner began to hunt for the "sign" of the half-breed, and he was not long in picking up the trail.

Le Couteau had left as little "sign" as he could, but he had not been able to avoid leaving a trace here and there on the soft soil of the valley bottom.

"He went up the valley!" said Bronze Bill, after a few minutes. "He's not striking out for Hard Pan. I reckon he'd be afraid of meeting us agin there. He's goin' north, to strike over the range, I guess, headin' for the rocks, where he won't leave a trail. But I'll run him down, if I have to follow his track as far as the Yukon River!"

With his rifle in his hand the bronzed miner started, and Frank hastily slung on his wallet and followed him.

Within five minutes of the awakening the camp was deserted, and the partners were pressing on swiftly up the valley.

A mile from the camp Bronze Bill halted on the bank of a stream. He picked up a great deal of sign on the bank.

"I guess the cuss was feeling that burning some!" he said, with a savage grin. "He stopped here to bathe his wrists, I reckon. I guess he won't get over it for some time. He ain't got such a cinch on us as he figured out. He's unarmed. We know that. And he's hurt. He must have burned his wrists bad in charring off that rope. I calculate we'll have him sooner or later. Kim on!"

The sign of the trail led up the hill-side beyond the green level. After a couple more miles there were rocks under the feet of the trailers, and the trail was harder to pick up. But it led by a steep ascent into a narrow, shadowy gorge. On either side the steep gorge was shut in by wall-like cliffs, and here the trail was certain enough, for the fugitive could not have turned either to the right or to the left.

Bronze Bill's brow was knitted as he tramped on and upward, his eyes keenly about him.

"What did he vamoose this way for, young Richards?" the miner exclaimed suddenly. "This hyer trail only leads up to the peaks. There ain't no escape for him on the hilltops, I reckon. He's got a reason for going up this way. Keep your eyes peeled!"

"He's unarmed," said Frank. "He can't think of stopping and holding us off."

"I guess he can't be thinking of anything else, or he wouldn't mosey into a trap like this," said Bronze Bill.

"But—"

"Look out for a rock coming down the trail, you young jay!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank.

His heart beat faster.

The narrow gorge was merely a split in the mountainside, in some places not more than four or five feet across, with almost perpendicular walls. The ascent was steep and rugged.

A heavy rock hurtling from above would have swept through the gorge, down the steep slope, crashing from side to side. And at the thought of it Frank felt his cheeks grow paler.

But there was no resource but to keep on and take the risk.

Le Couteau knew—he must know—that the miners he had robbed would follow him with unshaken determina-

tion. He was unarmed, and he was partly disabled, at least. It was only too probable that he intended to choose his own spot for turning on his pursuers. Unless he could rid himself of them he would be tracked down at long last. Was it for that reason that he had chosen to follow the steep path up the gorge?

Frank Richards felt that it was so, and he knew that with every step he and his comrade were taking their lives were in their hands.

But he did not think of a halt.

The gold sack was in the hands of the fleeing half-breed, and at any risk the robbed gold-seekers were resolute to keep on the pursuit.

The gorge narrowed still more as they ascended.

The cliffs on either side were lower now. In a cleft of the rock a stunted pine-tree jutted out. Ahead of them the ascent ended on a rocky plateau.

"Once there, I reckon we're clear of this!" muttered Bronze Bill. "But if I figure it out right I guess that cuss is there, ready for us. Look out!"

The words had hardly left his lips when there was a sudden, grinding roar farther up the acclivity.

From the edge of the plateau above a great boulder was displaced, and it came rolling down the slope with a noise like thunder.

"Look out!" panted Frank Richards.

For an instant, far ahead, he caught sight of a dark-skinned face and a pair of flashing dark eyes. It was the half-breed! But there was no time to shoot. Down the rocky slope, grinding and roaring, came the rolling boulder, crashing from side to side of the narrow gorge as it rolled, leaping, and roaring towards the two doomed trailers who stood in its fatal path.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Last Struggle!

CRASH!

Crash!

From side to side of the narrow gorge the great rock crashed and bounded, sending rocky splinters in a shower.

For a moment Frank Richards stared at it as if transfixed. There seemed no possible escape for the trailers in the path of the rushing, leaping rock.

High above them, at the top of the

gorge, a dark face grinned down, blazing with savage malice and vengeance. Le Couteau, the half-breed, had turned at bay, with some effect. He had lain in wait for the pursuers he knew would come, with the big rock ready to roll down the slope; and now it seemed certain that they must fall, crushed to death under the boulder as it roared down the gorge.

Frank Richards was white as chalk. There was no way of escape. On either side the rocky walls shut him in.

"The tree!" panted Bronze Bill. Frank felt himself seized by a powerful hand and lifted. He caught a branch as the big miner swung him into the tree that jutted out from a rocky ledge three or four feet up the side of the gorge. Hardly knowing what had happened, what was happening, he clung on, dazed and dizzy, with the roar of the crashing boulder deafening his ears.

Crash, crash!

The boulder struck again the rocky side of the gorge, and rebounded, and crashed on its downward way.

Bronze Bill dragged himself into the tree beside Frank.

"Hold on!" he breathed. "Hold on for your life! There's a chance! Hold on—"

Frank clung dizzily to the branch, the bronzed miner beside him. It had all passed, so far, in a few seconds.

Crash!

The rock seemed like a thing of life as it bounded and leaped down the slope.

Had the trailers remained in its path nothing could have saved them from being swept away, crushed and shattered out of all semblance to humanity. But the tree that jutted out above had enabled them to drag themselves from the path of the rushing rock, though the stunted pine was already sinking under their weight.

Crash!

The boulder had reached them, after what seemed an age, though it was but a few seconds.

It struck the side of the gorge, just under the ledge where the stunted pine jutted out with the two trailers clinging to it.

But they were a couple of feet above it as it crashed, though the tree to which they clung was sinking down, and evidently would only support their weight for a time that could be counted in seconds.

But it was long enough!

The boulder rolled on, crashing, grinding, roaring on its way to the bottom of the gorge.

There was a tearing sound as the roots came rending out under the stunted tree, and the trunk sank down lower, and fell. It dropped the two trailers to the ground in the very spot where the rolling rock had crashed half a minute before.

But the rock was past now. Far down, in the distance, its crashing echoed back to their ears.

Frank Richards reeled against the rocky wall of the gorge, panting, dizzy, almost overcome.

The fearful danger, so narrowly escaped, had unnerved him for the moment.

Crash!

It was the report of Bronze Bill's rifle that awoke the echoes of the gorge.

The bullet whizzed within an inch of the evil, dark face that peered down from the top of the ascent.

Le Couteau sprang back, with a fierce oath.

He had counted on the destruction of his enemies; he had watched and waited

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and planned for it, and it had seemed a certainty; it had seemed that only a miracle could save the two trailers from a terrible death. But the miracle had happened!

He barely escaped the bullet as he leaped back into cover.

"Come on, Richards!" roared Bronze Bill.

He was racing up the ascent, eager to get to close quarters with the half-breed, before another rock could be displaced and sent hurtling down.

Frank Richards pulled himself together. One fearful danger had been eluded, as if by a miracle; but the hunters were not out of the wood yet. If the half-breed had time—

But he was not given time.

He was struggling to roll a heavy rock to the verge, and set it spinning down, when Bronze Bill came tearing over the last rise, and, raising his rifle as he ran on, fired again.

There was a yell from the half-breed, following the ring of the miner's rifle.

The bullet gashed along his cheek, as he turned his head, leaving a red mark where it had torn.

"He's our meat now!" roared Bronze Bill.

He rushed on, without stopping to reload the rifle, clubbing the weapon as he ran, to crash the butt down upon the head of Le Couteau.

The half-breed sprang away, showing his white teeth in a snarl like a wild animal.

He had no weapon; and he turned to fly, as the clubbed rifle-butt whirled over his head.

Crash!

The rifle-butt came crashing down, but a desperate spring saved the lithe rascal from the blow, and the rifle struck a boulder, with a force that smashed the stock.

Bronze Bill uttered an oath.

With the swiftness almost of a hunted elk, the half-breed fled across the rocky plateau, the burly miner panting on his track.

But in a foot-race the lithe half-breed was more than a match for the Canadian miner. Bronze Bill gritted his teeth, and threw aside the useless rifle.

"Frank!" he panted.

"Coming!" gasped Frank Richards.

He came up, panting for breath.

"The shooter—quick!"

Without a word, Frank Richards handed the revolver from his belt to his partner.

The half-breed was already fifty yards distant, leaping from rock to rock like an elk, the gold-sack strapped on his shoulders.

Bronze Bill dropped on one knee, revolver in hand, rested his left elbow on a boulder, and used his left hand as a rest for the revolver as he took aim.

Frank Richards stood panting—without speaking a word. It was no time for him to interfere, as he had done before. It was a fight to the death for the gold-sack; and already the trailers had been fearfully near to death. Le Couteau must take his chance; he had brought it upon himself. Frank spoke no word.

Crack!

The ring of the revolver was answered by a scream from the fleeing half-breed.

He had leaped from one rock to another when Bronze Bill pulled trigger, and for the moment his wild figure had stood out black against the sky; and at that instant the miner had fired. The next instant, Le Couteau was plunging headlong down the rock.

"Winged!" panted Bronze Bill.

He rushed on, revolver in hand, with Frank Richards at his heels. The half-breed lay crumpled on the ground,



THE GOLD-SEEKERS' PERIL! There came a terrific crashing sound along the narrow trail. "Up the tree!" yelled Bronze Bill. Frank and the miner made a frantic dash for the tree, and as they scrambled up the slender trunk a huge boulder came hurtling down the rocky side of the gorge.

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sprawled over the gold-sack, his dark, savage face upturned.

Bronze Bill's finger was on the trigger, but the revolver was not needed. The fierce face of the half-breed was fixed; Le Couteau, the gold-thief and murderer, had paid the penalty!

Frank Richards turned away his face.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Hitting the Trail!

FRANK RICHARDS and his partner camped for the remainder of the day and the following night at the head of the gorge in the lonely foothills. They were almost worn out, and needed a rest before they started on the long trail to Hard Pan.

It was Frank who drove away the black vultures that gathered by the body of the half-breed. He scooped a shallow grave with his knife, in a hollow of the rocks, and Le Couteau was laid there, and Frank piled boulders above to keep off the ravening beaks of the obscene birds. It was all he could do for his old enemy; the lawless rustler who had fought so desperately for the gold-sack, and failed.

It was with a saddened face that Frank Richards turned away when his task was done. Bronze Bill was examining the contents of the gold-sack, with grim satisfaction in his tanned visage. But there was no satisfaction for Frank Richards at that moment. He was thinking then of his old home in the settlement of the Thompson Valley, and feeling a revulsion against the wild, savage life of the foothills. Gladly enough he would have turned his back on the mountains, and taken the trail for the Thompson Valley, shaking the dust of the gold-mines from his feet.

But his old home was closed to him;

at Cedar Creek the shadow of shame rested upon his name.

Would it ever be lifted? Frank wondered, with an ache at his heart. Bronze Bill looked up as his schoolboy partner came back to the camp, and nodded to him with a smile.

"I guess we score, this deal, Frank!" he remarked. "Thunder! You don't seem to look rosy over it!"

Frank smiled faintly.

"I'm jolly glad we've recaptured the gold-sack," he said. "I suppose we start for Hard Pan at sunrise."

"Sure! I guess it's five hundred dollars each for us," said Bronze Bill, with satisfaction. "Share and share alike, like good pards. I reckon we've both worked for this, and fought for it, too, by thunder! What are you going to do when we strike Hard Pan, Richards?"

"I don't quite know, yet," said Frank. "What are you going to do, Bill?"

Bronze Bill grinned.

"I guess it's me for a bender!" he said impressively. "I'm goin' on a regular bender, Richards, and don't you forget it! I guess if you hang on in Hard Pan you'll see your old pard painting the town red—real crimson! Just a few!"

"Then I don't think I shall hang on in Hard Pan," said Frank, with a smile.

"Nope. I reckon a bender ain't much in your line, sonny!" grinned Bronze Bill. "You're a tenderfoot, you are! I reckon you'd better put your share of the dust in your grip, and hit the home-trail, and get back to your people, wherever they are!"

Frank's face clouded.

That was what he would gladly have

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"We're not!" said Jimmy Silver curtly.

"We call it off!" stammered Tracy.

"Oh, yaas, we—we call it off! We—"

"You do nothing of the kind!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're waiting for you, and you're going to play, and you'll play all the time—hard! We're going to see that you do."

"Play up, slackers!" came in a roar from the crowd round the ropes.

Smythe gave a hopeless look round.

He was in for it, and he realised it. That fearful match had to be gone through.

"Mob 'em if they don't play up!" roared Higgs of the Fourth.

"Yes, rather!"

"We—we're ready!" gasped Smythe, as there came a threatening movement from the crowd.

The whistle blew.

Brown, of the Fifth, grinned as he blew. Never had a football team looked so sick as the knuts of Rookwood looked at the kick-off.

They looked sicker as the game proceeded.

It was not much like football. Smythe & Co.'s chief object seemed to be to keep out of the way of the opposing players. They did not worry about goals.

Neither did Jimmy Silver & Co. They had come there to play footer, but if there was no footer, they were ready to play Smythe & Co., and they played them.

It was a long-drawn-out horror to the Rookwood slackers. The ball lay neglected. The slackers dodged and twisted, and ran and rolled over. But there was no escape for them.

A dozen times a panting member of Smythe's team tried to dodge off the field, but the crowd turned him back. There was no escape from the field, and no escape from the footballers.

In vain Smythe & Co. rolled on the ground even. The enemy rolled on them and bumped on them till they scrambled up again. In vain they scattered and dodged. They were pursued and charged and shouldered without mercy.

If Teddy Leech had been there, Jimmy Silver & Co. would not have had much time to waste on the slackers. But he was not there, and that made all the difference.

When the interval came, Smythe & Co. lay about and gasped spasmodically. Five minutes flashed by like five seconds to the miserable knuts.

Then they had to get going again.

If the first half had seemed like a nightmare to the wretched slackers, the second half was like the horrors of opium.

How they lived through it they never quite knew.

An outburst of heavenly harmony could not have sounded so sweet to the ears of Adolphus & Co. as did the "pheeep!" of the whistle when Brown blew it at last for the finish.

The awful ordeal was over! Smythe & Co., perspiring, panting, groaning, limped off the field, doubled up with fatigue and anguish. Loud yells of laughter, jeers, and cat-calls followed them.

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he strolled off with his chums.

"I fancy," remarked Uncle James of Rookwood—"I fancy that it will be rather a long time before Smythe challenges us to another game of footer."

THE END.

(There will be another splendid long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co., the chums of Rookwood School, entitled: "Raby the Sport!" next week. You simply must not miss reading this grand yarn of many thrills and surprises.)

"RED GOLD!"

(Continued from page 5.)

done; and what he could not do. Not till his name was cleared at Cedar Creek.

Until they turned in for the night, Bronze Bill made frequent allusions to the "bender" he was planning, and chuckled with anticipation of the happy prospect. They turned in at last, and slept under the summer stars.

At sunrise the next morning the partners took the trail down the mountain.

It was late afternoon when they "struck" Hard Pan.

Frank Richards tramped into the mining-camp with his partner, tired, but cheerful. Only a few weeks before he had struck Hard Pan footsore and almost on his "uppers," looking for a job. Now he was re-entering the camp with gold-dust and nuggets in his possession to the tune of five hundred dollars or more. It was a change in fortune for the wandering schoolboy, and Frank felt considerably elated.

At the lumber hotel, where they put up for rest and refreshment, the gold taken from the claim in the locked gulch was disposed of, and the partners divided the sum of one thousand and fifty dollars in Canadian bankbills. Frank Richards retired to his room to sew up the greater part of his money in his belt, for security, keeping only a few bills in his pocket for immediate use.

Bronze Bill did not follow his example.

After long hardship and privation in the mountains, the bronzed miner was bent upon indemnifying himself by "going on a bender," as he expressed it; and his "bender" started the same evening. With the result that after a particularly glorious evening, Bronze Bill spent the remainder of the night in the camp calaboose.

In the morning a wagon was leaving Hard Pan on the southern trail, and Frank Richards decided to take a seat in it. He had had enough of the diggings, and with his little capital safe in his belt, he hoped to make a successful start in a more settled region. Bronze Bill was out of the calaboose in time to bid his schoolboy partner good-bye.

The wagon rolled away with Frank Richards, Bronze Bill waving a horny hand after him in farewell. Probably his bender was resumed that day—how long to last, Frank did not know; but probably till the proceeds of his successful gold-seeking had disappeared, when Bill would shoulder spade and pick, and "hit the trail" for the mountains, gold-seeking again.

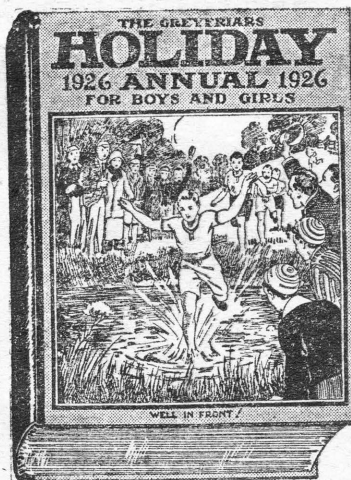
Frank Richards had had luck at the diggings, but he was not sorry to turn his back on the foothills. In the creaking wagon, under a sunny sky, with five hundred dollars sewn up in his belt, he rolled away southward, and he was glad to see the green ranchlands fresh and bright before his eyes at last.

THE END.

(Look out for the further adventures of Frank Richards, the Homeless School boy of the Backwoods, in "On The Southern Trail!" next week. With the gold in his belt, Frank sets out to try his luck on the ranches of British Columbia.)

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