

FRANK MERRIWELL'S TRIP WEST



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"Like a cat he leaped aside, and the blade of the knife in Jack Darrol's hand was driven into the wall."
(See page 185)

Frank Merriwell's Trip West

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's School Days," "Frank Merriwell's Chums,"
"Frank Merriwell's Foes," etc.

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Frank Merriwell's Trip West

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Frank Merriwell's Trip West.

CHAPTER I.

IN A GREAT CITY.

A sudden and unexpected stroke of apoplexy had been the cause of the death of Asher Dow Merriwell, Frank Merriwell's uncle and guardian.

There were a few clauses in the will which came as a surprise to Frank, even though he had known his uncle to be somewhat original and peculiar.

Mr. Merriwell had desired a simple funeral, without ostentatious display, to be held in the old mansion that had been his home, and it was his request that nothing but a small marble slab be erected at his grave, bearing no inscription save his name, the date of his birth, and the date of his death.

As he believed Frank the relative most closely connected to him by ties of blood, and as he loved the boy as if Frank were his own son, he bequeathed him everything of which he died possessed.

But he forbade Frank to wear mourning or to make any prolonged display of grief; and he directed the boy to leave Fardale Military Academy, which he had attended so long, as related in other volumes of this series, and begin a series of travels through the United States and other countries. In order for the boy to derive the greatest benefit possible from his travels, continuing his studies meanwhile, Mr. Merriwell desired that he be accompanied by a competent guardian and instructor, and made the request that Professor Horace Orman Tyler Scotch, of Fardale Academy—generally known among the cadets as "Hot" Scotch, on account of his fiery-red

hair and peppery temper—should become Frank's guardian and companion.

Further than this, that Frank might thoroughly enjoy himself during his travels, Mr. Merriwell expressed a desire that he should take along a friend and comrade from the academy, for whose expenses a provision was made in the will.

It happened that Mr. Merriwell had met Hans Dunnerwust, and thoroughly enjoyed the odd ways of Frank's comical little Dutch friend, and he expressed a desire that Hans be the first to accompany Frank. At the same time, he gave Frank permission to choose another companion to fill Hans' place at the end of three months from the setting out on their travels, and provided that he might make such an exchange every three months while his journey over the world continued.

What boy is not possessed of a desire to travel—to see the world? What boy has not dreamed of the wonders of the great cities, majestic mountains, mighty rivers, and vast oceans? What boy has not longed to behold the marvels of our own land, the strange things and people to be seen in tropical countries, the inhabitants, animal and human, of the far North and the far South? What boy has not fancied himself on the boundless western prairies, amid the mountains, sailing over tumultuous oceans, gliding across the placid bosom of the blue Mediterranean, drifting down the Red Sea, and bounding over the Indian Ocean? What boy has not contemplated the delights of visiting the countries of the Old World, of beholding London, Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, Constantinople, and other great cities across the ocean?

Night after night Frank Merriwell dreamed of these things. He dreamed of sailing into the frozen North; of being amid the convicts of Siberia; of fighting tigers and killing elephants in India; of pursuing the ostrich across vast deserts, where, in the blue distance, long camel trains could be seen crawling snail-like along; of tramping through African forests, surrounded and assailed by deadly dangers; of seeing South America and Australia, and of coming safely home at last.

It must not be imagined that Frank felt no grief at the

death of his uncle, for Asher Merriwell had been like a father to the lad, and Frank had a heart that was tender and affectionate, as well as tender and true.

But Asher Merriwell had forbidden a display of grief, and the boy resolved to respect this expressed desire of the deceased. Asher Merriwell had directed that Frank leave Fardale Academy at once, and start upon his travels through the United States, and little time was wasted in doing this.

It was necessary that Professor Scotch should be appointed guardian of Frank, and this matter was not delayed.

As Mr. Merriwell's will provided that Professor Scotch should be well remunerated for his duties, and every expense of travel was to be paid from the fortune left to Frank, the little professor was more than glad to resign his position at Fardale and enter without delay upon his new duties.

And so, after a lapse of time necessary to make all arrangements, Frank started for New York City, where he was to join Professor Scotch and Hans Dunnerwust. They were to meet at the Grand Central Station, and everything had been arranged, so it seemed there could be no mistake.

It was at dusk of a late October day that Frank found himself leaving a train at the Grand Central. Dressed in a suit of brown clothes, with stout but stylish shoes on his feet, a brown soft hat on his head, and with an alligator-skin traveling bag suspended at his side by a strap over his shoulder, he stepped briskly down the long platform that ran up between the trains, looking the picture of a handsome, alert, up-to-date nineteenth century youth.

"Keb, sir, keb!"

"Have a carriage, sir?"

"This way, sir—this way!"

"Baggage, sir—baggage!"

A line of hackmen assailed him, shouting and gesticulating, but he passed on, gazing to the right and left for the professor and Hans.

He looked into the waiting-room, but the persons he sought were not there, and he was turning away in disappointment when he felt a touch on the shoulder.

Turning quickly, the blue-white glare of the electric lamps showed him a medium-sized man, who wore a soft felt hat, the brim of which was slouched over his eyes. The man was plainly dressed in black, and a full black beard concealed the expression of his face.

"Excuse me," said the man, in a repressed tone of voice. "I think from your appearance that you are the young man I am looking for."

"How is that?" asked Frank, instantly on his guard, for he did not intend to be snared by a sharper.

"Your name is Frank Merriwell, is it not?"

"It is, sir."

"I thought you answered the description give me."

"Given you by whom?"

"By a German or Dutch lad by the name of Dunnerwust."

Frank's suspicions grew.

"Why should he give you a description of me?"

"So I could meet you here."

"Why didn't he meet me himself?"

"An unfortunate accident prevented that."

"An accident?"

"Exactly."

"What kind of an accident?"

"A very serious one, I am afraid."

Despite himself, Frank began to feel somewhat alarmed, for the man's manner was sincere and convincing.

"To whom did this accident happen?" asked the boy.

"To your guardian."

"Professor Scotch?"

"Yes, sir."

"What could have happened to the professor?"

"He was struck by a cable car on Broadway, and——"

"Killed?" cried Frank, in horror. "Tell me the truth! Was he killed?"

"No, but he was seriously injured—perhaps fatally. The gripman saw him, but not in time to stop the car before it struck the professor, who was knocked down and dragged a considerable distance. He was taken up in an unconscious state, and has remained thus ever since, except for one or two brief intervals of consciousness."

Frank Merriwell was shocked, stunned, stupefied. He

stood staring at the man as if he did not fully understand what had happened. It required some moments for him to recover sufficiently to gasp:

"This is terrible!"

It seemed very natural that Professor Scotch, who had passed so many years at Fardale that he must have become quite unused to the hustle and bustle of a great city, should be knocked down and injured by a cable car, for Frank had read in the New York papers of the many persons who had met with accidents of this sort.

Somehow, Frank's suspicions were banished. This man knew him by description, knew his name, knew of Professor Scotch and Hans Dunnerwust, and must have been aware that they were to meet at the Grand Central Station at the hour of Frank's arrival. How could he know all these things and be a rascal and an impostor?

"Why didn't Hans meet me here?" Frank finally asked.

"He has not left Professor Scotch since the professor was hurt."

This seemed natural.

"And you were sent to meet me?"

"Yes, sir. I did not know as I would be successful, but Hans Dunnerwust gave me a very good description of you, and, as he knew on which train you were to arrive, I took the chances. I watched all the passengers as they came down the platform, and you happened to be the only lad who was unaccompanied. I followed you, and I saw by your movements that you were looking for some one. Then I ventured to speak."

"Take me to the professor without delay!"

"All right, my lad," came briskly from the hidden lips of the black-bearded man. "This way. I knew you would be in a hurry, and I had this carriage wait."

It was a closed cab. Frank entered, the stranger followed, the door swung to, the driver whipped up his horses, and away they went.

The man took a seat opposite Frank, and, as it was now quite dark, he could be seen but indistinctly by the glare of the street lamps.

Not a word had passed between the black-bearded stranger and the driver as Frank and the stranger entered

the cab, yet, the moment the door was closed, the driver whipped up and drove at a high rate of speed.

This seemed natural to Frank, who fancied the driver had been directed to drive that way by the black-bearded stranger, who had given every direction previous to the arrival of the train which brought the boy to the Grand Central Station.

The cab bounced and rumbled over the paved streets, passing under the structure of an elevated railroad, and then, in a few moments, passing under yet another such structure, upon which, from the cab window, Frank caught a glimpse of a swiftly moving, lighted train.

There were fruit-venders at street corners, with their flaring torches lighting up their dark faces, and their whistling peanut heaters sending up tiny spouts of steam. People were moving to and fro on the sidewalks, cabs, carts, and cars were flitting past, and the roar of a great city rose on every side of Frank, who was so stunned by the terrible news the stranger had brought him that he scarcely realized he was in New York.

The stranger was saying nothing.

"Where was the professor taken?" Frank asked, presently.

"To Bellevue Hospital," answered the stranger.

"And is this the quickest and shortest way there?"

"Most certainly."

The man did not seem inclined to talk a great deal.

Looking from the window, Frank saw the carts and cars seem to grow less and disappear from the streets, saw the people also disappear till no more than an occasional pedestrian was observed, saw the streets grow darker and more disreputable in aspect, and, finally, became uneasy and suspicious. The stranger drew the shade at one of the windows.

"Why do you do that?" demanded Frank.

"The light from the street lamps hurts my eyes," was the explanation, as the man deliberately drew the other, inclosing them in dense darkness.

In a moment all Frank's suspicions returned with a rush, and he believed all was not as it should be.

"I must have one or both of these shades up," he said, as he reached to raise it.

"And I say they must both remain down," returned the man, in a low, harsh tone of voice.

"What do you mean?"

A strong hand suddenly fastened on Frank, and these words reached his ear:

"I mean that you are in my power, Frank Merriwell."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE CAB.

Although thus suddenly attacked, Frank instantly grappled with his assailant, determined to fight for liberty.

As my old readers know, Frank had been the champion all-around athlete at Fardale Academy, and, boy though he was, he was no mean antagonist.

This the man soon discovered.

A hand that had fixed itself on Frank's throat seemed crushing the boy's windpipe. He could not breathe, and he realized that he must obtain a breath very soon or perish from suffocation.

With all the energy he possessed, Frank tore at that hand, and he succeeded in releasing his throat.

He tried to cry out, but the terrible pressure seemed to have robbed him of the power of uttering a sound other than that made by his hoarse gasping for breath.

The driver had whipped up his horses, and the cab was rocking and swaying and bouncing along a dark and wretchedly paved street.

With all his strength Frank forced himself upward, striking with all his strength at his unknown enemy.

That blow landed fairly in the man's face, and he uttered a fierce exclamation.

But he did not strike back.

Then, in striking at the man again, Frank's hand caught in the fellow's beard, which came from the face it had served to disguise, revealing to the lad that the beard was false.

But it was densely dark within the cab, and this unmasking did not serve to show the youth the face that was hidden behind the black beard.

It was a horrible battle, and Frank knew not but that at any moment the man might resort to a deadly weapon which would end the struggle suddenly.

The man and boy thrashed about within the cab, and the driver must have known the battle was taking place. That the driver was in the plot with the man who had worn the black false beard was certain, else he must have stopped to investigate.

Once more the hand came up and gripped Frank's throat. The boy tried to tear it away, but it clung there tenaciously.

"Now, you whelp! I have you!"

Frank seemed to hear these words spoken at a great distance. They were not spoken; they were snarled, as the wind sometimes snarls amid the rigging of a ship at sea.

They crashed against the window and smashed out the glass, which let in a grateful bit of air, the place having become suffocating.

Then Frank uttered a cry:

"Help! help!"

The man struck him in the face, and the bravely fighting lad returned the blow with interest.

Then Frank flung himself against the door, trying to burst it open, but in this he did not succeed.

The man was panting now. Plainly he was astounded by the battle the lad was making. He would have been more astounded had Frank Merriwell been able to get in a good square blow, straight from the shoulder. But in that cramped space Frank was at a great disadvantage. Already he felt that he was capable of whipping his assailant in an open space, but he feared that those fingers would again close on his throat.

His fears were well founded, for, suddenly the man had him by the windpipe.

"This time you can't break my hold," he cried.

That was true. Frank struggled madly to tear the hand away, but he could not do so. He knew those fingers were bringing about his death, but it was useless to struggle. Again he heard the roaring and saw the bursting lights. And then, amid the roaring, he seemed to hear the far-away shouts of a multitude and the clanging of a bell.

Clang! clang! clang!

Nearer and nearer came the sound, till it was close at hand, mingled with a frightful uproar.

“Clear the way!”

He fancied he heard the cry, even as he sunk helpless on the seat, overcome by the hand of the unknown enemy.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE ACCIDENT.

Clang! clang! clang!

Faint and far away seemed the sounds, yet full of wild warning and alarm.

Frank Merriwell seemed to feel himself floating away on a bed of flowers, from which arose a delightful perfume—away, away, away!

Of a sudden the flowers dropped from beneath him with a great crash, as it seemed, and he plunged into a pit of utter darkness—nothingness—oblivion.

When Frank recovered consciousness he found himself stretched on his back upon a sort of cot, and he realized he was still being conveyed along the poorly paved streets by some kind of a vehicle.

Near his head sat a man who was serenely smoking a cigar, as Frank saw by the light which shone in now and then from the street lamps.

Whether this man was his late assailant or not was a question that troubled Frank somewhat at first.

Surely they were not in the cab. The rear end of the conveyance they were in was wide open, admitting light and air.

The light of the street lamps showed Frank that the face of his unknown companion was youthful and beardless; but the man did not seem to be dressed the same as the one who had been disguised by the false beard.

That he had been unconscious for a period of time the boy was aware.

How long had he been in such a condition?

Frank asked himself the question, but there was very little satisfaction in that, for he could not answer it.

“What has happened?”

He spoke the words aloud, causing his companion to look down at him and observe:

“So you’re coming round, young man? Well, you

didn't seem to be very much injured, although the smash-up was a bad one."

"The smash-up? What smash-up? Tell me what has happened! Where am I being taken?"

Frank would have risen to a sitting position, but the man placed a hand on his breast, and held him down, saying, sharply:

"Now, don't get excited, as it is quite unnecessary, and it may do you some injury."

"How—how——"

"Keep calm, I say. You were in a smash-up, and you were picked up in an unconscious condition. How severely you are injured I was unable to tell by a hasty examination, so you are being taken to the hospital."

"What hospital?"

"Bellevue."

The thought that this might be a continuance of the trick that had been worked upon him flashed through the lad's head.

But Frank Merriwell was not an excitable lad, and the presence of danger made him calm and ready-witted on almost any occasion. He lay back and considered what it was best to do. As a result of his act, he soon came to the belief that he had really been in some kind of smash-up, and was lying at that moment in an ambulance that was taking him to a hospital. His companion was a young surgeon from the hospital.

It is not strange that Frank was eager to know just what had transpired.

He questioned the surgeon, who explained that the cab had been struck by a fire engine, and smashed. The driver was not injured, and it was surprising that Frank had escaped being crushed. He had been picked up in an unconscious condition.

Now Frank understood the meaning of the clanging he had seemed to hear while that hand of the unknown man was fastened on his throat. It had been no fantasy of his roaring brain, but it was the warning gong of a fire engine driven at full speed. Without doubt, the engine had turned a corner suddenly and crashed into the cab in a most unexpected manner. The cab had been wrecked,

and one horse was killed. Truly, Frank's escape from death was most surprising and providential.

But the man who had snared him—his unknown enemy! What of him?

"Was no one else injured?" asked the boy.

"No one," replied the surgeon. "Why, the engine didn't even stop; it went right on to the fire."

"But—but the man who was with me in the cab——"

"The man with you?"

"Yes; what of him?"

"Why, the driver said you were the only occupant of the cab."

"Oh, he did!"

The young surgeon did not mistake the inflection of Frank's voice, and he quickly asked:

"Do you mean to say there was some one with you?"

"I do."

"Who?"

"A man—a stranger."

"Well, it is singular the driver knew nothing of it."

"He did."

"And you mean to say he lied when he stated that you were the only occupant of the cab?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what became of the other man?"

"That is something I'd like to know myself," said Frank, heartily. "Nothing would please me better than to know just what became of him. It seems that he escaped without injury."

"He must have escaped thus; but I don't understand why nothing was seen of him."

Frank understood this well enough, but he fancied it might be best to say nothing further in regard to the stranger. It was plain the man had not been killed or severely injured in the accident, and he had not lost a moment in getting away.

Frank Merriwell's unknown enemy was at large, and the boy felt that they were destined to meet again.

"When we do," thought Frank, "all I ask is that I may know him. It seems that I should recognize his voice."

Then came another thought to Frank, and he quickly asked:

"Can you tell me if there is a patient by the name of Professor Horace Scotch in Bellevue?"

"Do you think I keep run of every patient brought in?" asked the young surgeon, rather scornfully.

"I thought it possible this case might have fallen beneath your notice."

"Well, I guess not."

"Do you know if there is a patient in Bellevue who was knocked down and injured by a Broadway cable car?"

"There's no such patient there now."

"You're sure of it?"

"Dead sure."

"Then, can't you let me out right away? See, I am not injured. I was no more than stunned, and I am all right now."

"That may be true, but I've taken you into this ambulance, and you will have to go to the hospital."

Frank soon found it was useless to protest, and so he submitted to the unavoidable.

The ambulance soon reached the hospital, and Frank was removed to a room where he was inspected by two surgeons, who could discover no injuries further than a few bruises and abrasions. Within fifteen minutes after entering the hospital, the youth was at liberty to leave it.

He made sure that Professor Scotch was not there, and then he took his departure, thoroughly thankful that he had come through the affair so well.

Walking west as far as Second avenue, he then turned south, and soon found himself on Twenty-third street, where he took a west-bound car, requesting the conductor to let him off at Broadway and Fifth avenue.

Frank had purchased a guidebook to the United States and Canada, and he had studied the map of New York City till he had familiarized himself with it, and his knowledge began to prove of value.

The boy knew well enough when Madison square was reached, although he had never been in New York before. The lights, the trees, the fountains, the moving masses of humanity, the swiftly gliding Broadway cable cars, and the crush of cabs, carriages, cars, and human beings where Broadway and Fifth avenue cross served to make his blood flow more swiftly in his veins, and

gave him a feeling that the world was grand and beautiful, and life was well worth living.

Frank left the car, made his way easily and readily through the mass of carriages and human beings, and reached the corner of the sidewalk, where he paused to look around.

For all of his recent perilous adventure, a feeling of elation had seized upon Frank. The roar of the city was music in his ears. Here was life—throbbing, pulsing life. He watched the big policeman piloting squads of ladies across the dangerous intersection of Fifth avenue and Broadway, he watched the changing colored lights which formed lettered advertisements high up on a dead wall, and over at the Sixth avenue station he saw two elevated trains pass in opposite directions.

Turning to walk up Broadway, Frank found himself almost at the very door of the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He had seen pictures of its pillared front, and, somehow, from the outside the place was disappointing to him.

But it was at the Fifth Avenue he had decided to stop while in New York, so he entered briskly and unhesitatingly. As he did so he ran plump into a fat, round-faced, comical-looking boy, who staggered back a step, exclaiming:

“Shimminy Gristmas!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOGUS TELEGRAM.

"Hans!"

"Vrankie!"

Two surprised and delighted lads they were, for the fat boy was Hans Dunnerwust.

"Dunder!" gasped the Dutch lad, his eyes bulging. "Vos dot you, Vrankie?"

"I rather fancy it is," laughed Frank, holding out his hand.

"How you peen in New York alretty yet?" asked Hans, stupidly, making no attempt to take the proffered hand.

"A regular railroad train brought me," answered Frank, as he got hold of the Dutch lad's pudgy fingers and gave them a squeeze that made Hans cringe.

"Vell, uf dot don'd peat der pand!"

"Where is the professor?"

"In his room der elefator up."

"Take me there."

But Frank was forced to take hold of Hans and turn the boy about before they could get started, and the Dutch lad continued to mutter:

"Vell, uf dot don'd peat der pand!"

Down the long corridor they passed, with well-dressed, prosperous-appearing men sitting about on sofas, reading, chatting, smoking, and other prosperous-looking men standing in groups to talk or moving briskly up or down the tiled floor.

Hans succeeded in finding the elevator, after some trouble, and they were soon in the car.

"Which floor?" asked the elevator boy, as the car glided upward, with Hans clinging to himself with both hands and looking scared.

"Vot?" asked the Dutch lad, dully.

"Which landing?"

"How you mean, ain'd id? Dis don'd peen any schooner, I pet you. Uf she vas, shust run her up to der pest wharf der ranch in."

"Do you know which floor you want to get off at?" came the sharp question.

"Yaw."

"Then which is it?"

"Der vloer Brofessor Scotch has a room on, py shiminy!"

"Well, which is that?"

"Vell, uf you ask me dot, I pelief you don'd know mein pizness. Vot you peen here vor, ain'd id?"

Frank was enjoying this thoroughly; but when the elevator boy applied to him, he was unable to be of any service, as he had failed to look on the register to see which room the professor had taken. This made it necessary for them to descend to the main floor, where Frank visited the office, and soon found the name of H. O. T. Scotch on the register, followed by the number of the room taken by the professor.

This time there was no trouble in being let off at the right floor, and they were soon at the door of the room taken by the professor and Hans.

Hans flung open the door, bursting into the room like a cyclone, as he shouted:

"Brofessor! brofessor! uf dot Vrankie Merrivell don'd peen here alretty yet!"

Frank followed closely behind Hans, crying:

"All on deck and ready for action, professor!"

Professor Scotch was so astonished that he came near falling off his chair to the floor.

"Eh? Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, staring at Frank, and dropping the guide to New York City, which he had been reading. "Bless my soul!" he repeated, as he tried to get on his feet, but fell back limply in his chair. "Is it really you?"

"Sure as you're alive!" was Frank's hearty assertion, as he grasped the little man's hand, giving it a terrific squeeze, which brought a smothered roar of pain from the little man's lips.

"Then you changed your mind?" said the professor.

"Changed my mind? In what way?"

"You came a day ahead of the time you finally decided on."

"Not much. This is the day we agreed on, and I ar-

rived at the Grand Central just when I said I would. Why weren't you on hand to meet me?"

"Got your telegram at one-thirty this afternoon."

"My telegram?"

"Exactly. The telegram stating you could not come until to-morrow. I have it here somewhere. Had barely arrived and settled here before the telegram was delivered. Wondered how you knew I meant to stop at this hotel, as we had made no decision on that matter."

Frank's face was decidedly sober, as he said:

"Professor, I want to see that telegram."

The little man of the fiery hair and big voice bustled around excitedly till he found a Western Union envelope, from which he extracted the telegram in question, and gave to Frank. It was a regular Western Union telegraph blank, on which was written:

"PROFESSOR H. O. T. SCOTCH,

"Fifth Avenue Hotel,

New York City:

"Business prevents coming to-day. Will be on hand to-morrow at same hour. Meet me then.

"FRANK MERRIWELL."

"This telegram is a fake," declared Frank.

"What's that?" ejaculated the professor. "Do you mean to say you did not send it?"

"That is just what I mean."

"But, see, it is postmarked Bloomfield, and it seems regular enough."

"I see that, but it is none the less a fake and a fraud. It was gotten up to deceive you and keep you from meeting me at the Grand Central Station. As you said, how did I know you meant to stop at this hotel?"

Professor Scotch began to prance wildly up and down the carpeted floor.

"If this was intended for a joke," he thundered, wildly waving his clinched fists in the air; "all I have to say is that it's a very poor joke!"

"But it was not intended for a joke," declared Frank.

The professor stopped short, and stared at the lad.

"No joke? No joke? Then what does it mean? Can you tell me that? Will you tell me that?"

"I can and will. This was the work of a deadly foe to me."

"What? How? Who?"

"That is more than I can answer, but I mean to learn the truth, if possible. I have lately had a very narrow escape from the hands of that foe."

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans. "I don'd toldt you so!"

"This fake telegram," explained Frank, "was intended to keep you from meeting me at the station, and it succeeded; but I was met there, just the same."

"By whom?" breathlessly asked the professor.

"By my mysterious enemy."

Then Frank explained how he had been ensnared, and how, by means of an accident, he had been saved from the dastardly clutch of his unknown enemy.

The man and boy listened in amazement and horror. When he had heard the whole story, Professor Scotch collapsed on a chair.

"Why, who can this enemy be?" he asked, after some moments, which Frank spent in studying the bogus telegram. "Who could have put themselves to so much trouble? It must be somebody who knows me—somebody who followed me here to this hotel."

"Exactly so," nodded Frank; "but who it is you have just as good an idea as I. I did have a deadly enemy, but he perished in the fire at Fardale several weeks ago." he continued, referring to Carlos Merriwell, the pretended son of his dead uncle, Asher. "When I left the academy, I did not believe I had anywhere on the face of the earth a foe who desired my life; but it seems that I was mistaken. I have such a foe, and I feel that I must be constantly on my guard against him."

CHAPTER V.

HANS AT THE THEATER.

Taking everything into consideration, Frank felt that he had cause to be decidedly thankful for the manner in which he had come through his encounter with an unknown and deadly foe, and had afterward found his way directly to the professor and Hans.

For a long time the three continued to talk of Frank's surprising and mysterious adventure.

At length, wishing to attend some place of amusement that evening, they prepared for dinner, and descended to the dining-room.

Before sitting down, however, Frank registered and gave his trunk-check to a porter, who agreed to see that the trunk was brought from the station without delay.

The dining-room was a wonder to Hans, who had never seen anything like it before. All he could do was to faintly gurgle:

"Shimminy Gristmas!"

But Hans' table manners had been looked after at Fardale, so, as long as he refrained from talking, he did not draw the attention of the other guests.

Frank and the professor quietly discussed their plans while eating, but the Dutch boy heard scarcely a word they were saying, he was so absorbed in staring about him. Midway during the meal, Hans recovered sufficiently to lean across the table and hoarsely whisper:

"Brofessor! brofessor! uf dis don'd peat der pand, alretty!"

From that time till the meal was finished, it was with the greatest difficulty that Frank and the professor forced the Dutch boy to keep his enthusiasm bottled up. They could see he was ready to explode, and they knew he was liable to create a sensation if he did so in the dining-room.

As they left the dining-room, Hans flung his arms

around the professor, giving the little man a bear-hug that brought a cry of astonishment and alarm from Scotch's lips.

"Here! here! break away!" laughed Frank, catching Hans by the collar. "What's the matter with you?"

"Vell, I feel so goot as nefer vas, und I don'd know vot to do mit yourself."

"Keep cool till we reach our room, or we are liable to be turned out of the hotel, or taken to Ward's Island for lunatics."

"I don'd toldt you so!" exclaimed Hans, in alarm. "Vell, I don'd like dot pein' took some lunadic vor, und so I vill keep sdill, ain'd id?"

But when they were safely in their rooms he broke loose, catching the professor about the waist and waltzing the little man about till his head swam.

"Uf we don'd haf some fun dis excursion on, you peen misdaken!" he warbled.

Then he let go of the professor, who was sent spinning into a corner, where he ran his nose against the wall, recoiled from the shock, and sat down heavily on the floor.

"Vot's der madder, professor?" asked Hans, innocently. "You hope I ain'd peen drinkin', don'd id?"

"Look here, confound you!" roared Scotch, as he scrambled to his feet, clinging to his nose with one hand and feeling blindly for Hans with the other; "you're getting altogether too familiar with me—altogether too familiar! What you need is a thumping, and I'm feeling just like giving you that!"

He was still dazed and bewildered by the whirling Hans had given him, and he lurched forward toward a figure that seemed lurching to meet him. He put out his hands to grapple with this figure, and, at that moment, Frank Merriwell caught him by the collar, saying sharply:

"Steady—steady, professor! I noticed you took a bottle of wine at dinner, but I didn't think it was enough to make you feel like running through full length mirrors.

Then the staring professor saw that the figure he had

been on the point of grappling was his own reflection in a mirror.

Hans was sitting on a chair, grinning in a jolly way.

"That whirling rather stirred me up," confessed the professor. "That seemed to make every bit of the wine fly into the top of my head. I think I'd better take a stroll in the open air."

"Wait a few moments, and we'll all go."

"Yah. We'll go along to see dot you don'd took no more vine, py shimminy!"

So Frank and Hans prepared for the street, while the professor bathed his nose in some cool water.

At length all were ready to go out, and they descended to the first floor, where, arm in arm, the professor and Hans marched down the long corridor, with Frank following, and observing that the little man and the fat Dutch lad were regarded with amusement by the men who were moving, standing, or lounging about.

It was an unusually warm evening for the season, so warm, in fact, that top coats were not required.

Broadway was thronged with people, and Hans muttered:

"I don'd see how in plazes they all ged along midou'dt running somepody indo all der dimes."

The lights of Madison Square Garden tower gleamed high in the sky, and to the north other lights spelled out in giant letters the name of a brand of cigarettes. Persons were weaving to and fro beneath the trees in the square, or were lounging on the benches. The gongs on the cable cars were clanging their warnings to pedestrians and teams, and the hum and roar that arose on every hand told that they were in the very heart of the metropolis.

"Which way?" asked Frank.

"We'll take a stroll down Broadway," said the professor.

They had some trouble in running the blockade of cars, trucks, carriages and so forth at Twenty-third street. After trying to get over three times, and being howled at by car drivers and teamsters, Hans was so frightened that Frank and the professor were obliged to drag him across.

Having reached the other side, the Dutch boy paused to wipe the cold sweat from his face and observe:

"We don'd nefer been aple to ged back to dot hotel some more!"

"I don't know as we will, if we have to get you across," laughed Frank.

They continued their walk down Broadway to Fourteenth street, where they asked a policeman about the theatres, and he directed them to the Fourteenth Street Theatre, where he said there was a "great show going on."

Hans had never been in a theatre in his life, and nearly all he knew about it was what Ephraim Gallup, a country boy, who had attended Fardale, had told him. Ephraim had visited a theatre once, and he said:

"I bought a piece of pasteboard of a man they hed shut up in some kind of a cubby-hole, so he didn't have northing but a little fut-square winder ter look out of, and then I went right in. Feller at the door grabbed holt of me, an' he says, says he: 'I want your ticket.' Says I to him, says I: 'I bought this air ticket an' paid fer it, an' you can't take it away from me unless you're bigger'n I be, b'gum!' Then I jest spit right slap on my hands, and I told him to wade right in. But he talked kinder peaceable like, an' seemed like a decent sort of feller arter all, so, kinder thinkin' he might be needful, I let him tear my ticket in two, an' keep half of it fer himself. They let me in on t'other half, but a boy tried to git that away from me. I wouldn't give it up, an' so, seein' he couldn't work the bunkum racket on me, he looked it over some, an' showed me where I was to set down. I sot, an' people kept comin' in till the seats was purty nigh full. Then some fellers down in front that had fiddles an' brass horns, they played something. I kinder reckoned it was to call attention to the big picter that kivered the hull of one end of the room. That was a purty good picter, but I didn't think it wus worth paying fifty cents to see, by gum! Arter them fellers stopped playin', somebody pulled the picter up out of the way, an' then some folks kem out on a platform, an' went to talkin' 'bout somethin' that didn't consarn me nohow, so I got up an' come away."

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIGHTFUL PERIL.

This story of Ephraim's visit to a theatre had been repeated at Fardale till every lad in the academy was thoroughly familiar with it, and every one but Hans Dunnerwust had laughed over it. Hans listened to it repeatedly, with mouth and ears wide open, but he was unable to discover where the joke came in. However, it had aroused his curiosity, so he was more than eager to visit a theatre.

They found the Fourteenth Street Theatre without trouble, and the professor bought tickets for them all.

Their seats were in a very good location, about two-thirds of the way to the front.

Hans looked around with interest, and he stared at the picture on the curtain in a way that plainly showed he meant to get his money's worth.

After a short time the orchestra played a piece, and the curtain slid up.

As soon as this happened, Hans rose and was going to leave.

Frank and the professor found it difficult to induce the Dutch boy to remain.

Finally Hans sat down and watched the performance, although he seemed to take little interest in it at first.

It was a razzle-dazzle sort of a melodrama, however, and it was not long before the Dutch boy began to get excited.

"Say," he whispered to Frank, "vy don'd dey stop dot veller from dot girl chasin' aroundt, ain'd id? I don'd like dot veller. He peen a scondrel, you pet me your boots!"

"Keep still," warned Frank. "Watch the play and say nothing."

"Vell, uf I ain'd surbrised in you!" muttered Hans.

"Dot peen der first time I efer know you not to stand ub vor der girls!"

He relapsed into silence, but not for long. The villain of the play had pursued the heroine out on Brooklyn Bridge, where he grappled with her, and started to fling her from the bridge into the river, whereupon she cried:

"Help! help! Will no one save me from this wretch?"

That was more than Hans could stand.

"You pet your poots!" he shouted, as he jumped up and jerked off his coat. "I peen there britty queek alretty, und I knock der backin' uf dot veller oudt!"

Down the aisle he rushed, before Frank could get hold of him, and he seemed determined to scramble over the orchestra to the stage. He might have succeeded, but two ushers rushed forward and clutched him, holding him back.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" howled the Dutch lad. "Vot kindt uf a crowd this peen, ain'd id? Vos you all going to sed still und let dot villain kildt dot girl?"

The audience was convulsed with laughter as Hans was hustled up the aisle by the ushers.

"Come, professor," said Frank, hurriedly catching up Hans' coat. "We must get him out of that before they hand him over to a policeman."

So they hustled out of the theatre, and found the ushers on the point of delivering the Dutch boy to an officer. Frank immediately protested, and, by giving the ushers half a dollar each and the policeman a small bill on the sly, he succeeded in getting Hans away.

"Vell," observed Hans, as they found themselves again on the street, "uf dot don'd peat anydings I efer saw before, you vos a liar!"

"You came near spending the night in a station house," Frank sharply declared. "Why did you make a fool of yourself?"

"I don'd peen retty to sed still und see any female girl throwed a pridge off py a pig rascal mit a plack mustache und a red neckdie on, dot's vot's der madder mit me."

Hans was still rather excited, and Frank found it expedient to calm him down.

As it was yet early in the evening, and they did not wish

to retire to the hotel, it was decided that they should take a ride on the elevated railroad.

Hans was rather reluctant about doing anything of the sort, fearing the trestle might break and let them come crashing down to the street; but he was finally induced to accompany them up the stairs to the station, and they coaxed him onto the first train that came along.

This was a Harlem-bound train, and seats were secured midway of the car which they entered.

Hans held onto the seat, his face being very pale.

Professor Scotch was not a little nervous, although he tried to conceal the fact.

For them all it was a novel ride, but Frank enjoyed it the most, as his companions provided great amusement for him.

It was decided that they should ride to the termination of the elevated road in Harlem, and then come back.

The curves at Fifty-third street were almost too much for the nerves of Professor Scotch, who wanted to get off at the Fifty-ninth street station and walk back.

Hans, however, declared that, as they had started in to have some fun with him, he was going to stay on the train and see the thing through. He was beginning to derive some enjoyment from the professor's discomfiture.

When the great S at One Hundred and Tenth street was reached, and the professor found they were spinning along far above the roofs of the houses, Hans was given a chance to enjoy the terror shown by a very frightened man.

"This is dud-dud-dreadful!" chattered the professor, as the engine spun the long train round the curve and the cars lurched far over. "We're going off the track sure!"

"Yah!" snorted Hans. "Now you peen britty scat, ain'd id? Now you don'd haf some fun mit me, I pelief."

"There should be a law to restrict the speed of this train!" gurgled Scotch. "This is terrible! Where is Frank?"

But Frank, determined to have an unobstructed view, had stepped out on the platform of the car. As he did so, he noticed a man who was standing with his back to the car, having the brim of his hat slouched over his eyes.

Frank did not give this man more than a glance, but turned to look over the fields of lights which twinkled below.

To one not familiar with the situation it was decidedly novel and fascinating, and it was not strange that Frank's blood tingled in his veins.

The guard had stepped into the rear car, and the boy and the strange man were alone on the platform.

The train struck the upper curve of the S, and Frank leaned over the iron gate to look down. It was a fearful distance to the ground below, and the lad shuddered as he thought of falling from that position.

"Such a fall would mean instant death," he muttered, aloud.

Then he felt himself clutched behind, and in his ear these words were hissed:

"You are right, Frank Merriwell, and down you go!"

He recognized that sibilant voice; he had heard it before. It was the voice of his unknown foe!

The man lifted Frank to hurl him over the gate. But Frank was not the sort of a boy to give up tamely without a struggle.

He clutched at the gate, and he fiercely strove to break the hold of his foe.

Then Frank found his tongue, and he cried for aid, but the creaking of the iron wheels as they wore harshly around the curve drowned the sound of his cry.

He was lifted off his feet, and, despite his utmost endeavor, felt himself being forced over the gate.

"It's all up with me!" was the thought that flashed through his brain.

Round the curve the car was dragged, and the straight stretch of track leading to the station at One Hundred and Sixteenth street was struck.

"Help!" called Frank.

"Down you go!" panted the man.

Then Frank Merriwell was lifted fairly over the gate, on which his hold was broken, he felt himself suspended in the air for an instant. The horror that possessed him seemed to cause his heart to stop beating.

"Nothing can save me now!"

He felt that it was useless to cry for help. If help

came, the man would release his hold, and Frank must fall.

To the boy it seemed that he was suspended thus for hours, and he believed the man was gloating over the agony thus inflicted.

“Good-by, Frank Merriwell!”

The man released his hold, and Frank fell!

CHAPTER VII.

STRUCK DOWN.

In that moment when the hands of his deadly foe released their hold upon him, Frank fancied he heard a hoarse shout, as if some one had discovered what was taking place on the platform of the car.

But the discovery had been made too late.

Like a rock, Frank fell toward the street.

In falling his hands were outstretched to clutch something—anything.

He fell about five feet!

Along the side of the trestle-work were stretched several telegraph wires, and the boy struck on them, clutched them, clung there!

The spring of the wires would have flung him off had he not caught hold of them with his hands and clung fast for his very life.

He succeeded in holding on, and he was saved from a frightful fall and instant death.

But Frank was so dazed that he could do nothing but cling to the wires, on which he rested, staring after the lighted train, which was drawing up at the station above.

He felt weak and cold, and he began to fear that his strength would desert him and he would slip from the wires.

He looked down upon the great field of lights which stretched away to Fifth avenue across the vacant lots to the north of Central Park, and they seemed like a thousand demon eyes winking and blinking at him. Somehow they hypnotized him, and he fancied they were drawing him from the wires, as if they were so many loadstones.

“Stop! stop!” he gasped. “I shall fall in a moment! My strength—my strength is deserting me!”

Then he tore his gaze from those blinking demon eyes,

looking again toward the train, which had stopped at the station.

"I'd give a thousand dollars to know who this enemy of mine is!"

Then the thought that his deadly foe might be stepping from that train at that very moment seemed to give him new strength. Courage came back with a rush. His life had been spared in a marvelous manner. Providence was with him, but he must keep a stout heart.

"If I can get upon the trestle without falling, I'm all right."

The wires had sagged beneath his weight so he was at least two feet below the level of the trestle.

Now, without looking down again, he carefully reached up with one hand and obtained a firm hold on the woodwork of the trestle. When he had done this, he let go of the wire to which he had clung with the other hand, and, a moment later, both hands were fastened on the trestle.

As has been said, Frank was the champion all-around athlete at Fardale Academy, and now his strength and skill stood him in good stead. Slowly and surely, he drew himself up till his knees rested on the wires, and then it was not such a difficult task to get upon the trestle.

Even then Frank would have been overcome by the reaction of his feelings, but he realized his danger as he found a sort of giddiness and faintness was coming over him. He was tempted to lie down and rest on the boardwalk beside the track, but the hope of overtaking his assailant in some way kept him from doing so.

"Courage—strength!" he whispered, as he turned toward the station.

It seemed that hours had passed since the man flung him over the gate, but the train was still standing at the station, and he understood that the peril through which he had passed had deceived him in regard to the lapse of time.

He longed to reach the station and intercept his enemy, but the train began to pull out as he hurried forward.

The station at One Hundred and Sixteenth street is between the tracks, and the ticket-chopper and ticket-seller were astonished to see a bare-headed, pale-faced

boy climb to the platform from the tracks and rush past them on his way downstairs.

As Frank reached the station, he had seen in the lighted street beneath a man who wore a hat slouched over his eyes exactly the same as had the man who assailed him on the train.

The boy resolved to have a look at this man's face, and he lost not a moment in rushing down the long flight of stairs, the elevator in use at that station being too slow for him just then.

Reaching the sidewalk, he looked about for the man, who seemed to have vanished.

Frank hurried to the corner and looked along One Hundred and Sixteenth street toward Seventh avenue.

An exclamation of satisfaction fell from his lips, for he saw the man walking rapidly to the east.

"You're the chap I'm after!" muttered the boy, as he started to follow the man. "I am going to have a square look at your face."

But Frank had been deceived by a resemblance, which is not strange, as he had given the man on the platform of the car no more than a glance, and had simply noted that he wore a hat with the brim slouched over his eyes.

At the moment that Frank started in pursuit of the man who was walking toward Seventh avenue, another man, who was excitedly puffing at a freshly lighted cigar, came out of the elevator building.

The cigar dropped from the man's lips, and he reeled as if he had been struck a blow in the face.

"Heaven above!" he gasped. "Can it be possible?"

The boy did not see him.

Panting with excitement, his face ghastly pale, the man darted to the corner and stared after Frank Merriwell.

"I can't be deceived!" he muttered, hoarsely, "and yet—and yet it is impossible! He could not fall that distance and not be instantly killed! I am dreaming! I have been fooled by a resemblance!"

There was a long, livid scar running down the man's left cheek, and it seemed to change color with his shifting emotions.

Like a wolf, he started after the boy, lopping the brim of his hat still further over his eyes.

Frank little dreamed that he was being shadowed, and there was small chance that he would discover it, as he was giving his entire attention to the task of following the man in advance.

There were few pedestrians on that particular street at that hour, but those who were passing along stared curiously at the bare-headed lad.

Frank did not mind that he was attracting attention, for he was not aware that he had lost his hat.

Little by little the boy drew nearer to the man in advance. They crossed Seventh avenue and continued on toward the east.

Frank made his plans to overtake the man at the corner of Lenox avenue, where there was a strong light.

"I'll have a look at his face, anyway!" the boy muttered.

He hastened forward, passed the man, whirled about and they met fairly beneath the street lamp.

"Excuse me!" exclaimed Frank, as he snatched the hat from the man's head, much to the astonishment of the latter.

To Frank's disappointment, the face was that of a man he had never before seen.

The man gave an angry and astonished exclamation, and made a dash for the boy.

"You young scoundrel!" he cried, madly. "What do you mean?"

Skipping lightly aside, Frank replied:

"Oh, nothing; I simply wanted to get a good look at your face. Didn't know but you were a particular friend of mine, but I see I have made a mistake. Beg your pardon. Here's your hat. Catch!"

He tossed the hat, and the man caught it, growling:

"If I could get my hands on you——"

"But you can't, don't you see," was the aggravating assertion. "And I've got your face photographed in my mind. Don't know as we ever met before, but I'll know you if we ever meet again. That's all. So long!"

The lad skipped lightly away toward Seventh avenue, leaving the man to stare a moment and mutter:

"That was strange—mighty strange! Hanged if I understand what it meant! He didn't seem like a young

rowdy, but I can't understand what sort of a game he was playing."

However, he had recovered his hat, and so he moved on again, glancing back occasionally to see if he were followed.

But Frank had no thought of following the man further. He had obtained a fair view of the face hidden by the lopping brim of the hat, and it had proved a disappointment, for the man was an utter stranger. More than that, the voice had not sounded like that of Frank's mysterious foe.

"Don't believe that was the man," muttered the boy, as he swiftly retraced his steps. "Right one got away, and I've lost Hans and the professor. All I can do is go back to the hotel and wait for them."

The street was deserted, and there were long, dark places between the lights. It was in one of these dark spots that a man crouched in an angle of the board fence that ran along there. He was awaiting the approach of the boy, and he held something gripped tightly in his hand.

Frank did not see this man till he was passing that very spot. Then he caught a glimpse of a figure that leaped toward him. He had no time to defend himself, but he threw up one arm to ward off the blow which he saw descending.

The attempt to avert the blow was vain. He was struck on the head by some heavy instrument that felled him unconscious to the sidewalk.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CAPTIVE.

"What happened? Did a building fall on my head—~~or~~ what?"

Frank Merriwell sat up. As he did so, he heard a savage growl, and the wretched light of a smoking kerosene lamp showed him a huge dog that was standing less than six feet away. The reddish, shifting eyes of the beast seemed to rove all over Frank's person.

"Whew!" breathed the boy, in utter astonishment. "What's this mean? Where am I, anyway?"

The light showed him that he was in a wretched, hovel-like room, and the dog was between him and the only door leading from the place. There were no windows to be seen.

The boy's head was throbbing with a dull, heavy pain, but this did not prevent him from feeling astounded.

He tried to remember what had happened, and, at first, he found this an impossible task.

All at once he uttered a low cry, and sank back on the floor.

"Merciful goodness! I'm falling!" he fluttered, clutching at the floor with his hands. "My unknown foe has cast me from the train! It is a hundred feet to the street below! I shall be dashed to death! Help! Ah! I have struck on the wires—I am clinging to them! No, I am slipping off! Heaven help me now! I must reach the trestle before consciousness leaves me! Now—steady—up, up, up! Ha! I have a hold on the trestle—I can draw myself up! Easy—slow and sure! A slip now means a frightful fall to certain death! Thank Heaven! I have reached the trestle—I am saved!"

The blow the boy had received seemed to have brought on something like delirium, and thus he lived over those minutes of horror which he had passed through on the great S of the elevated railroad.

A cold perspiration came out all over his body, and he shook in every limb.

At length he lifted himself again, staring wildly about, a bewildered look on his face.

"I seem to remember," he muttered, lifting a hand to his head. "I reached the station—hastened to the street—thought I saw the man who flung me from the train. I followed him, and I obtained a fair look at his face; but I did not know him, and then I turned back. What happened then? It seems as if something came crashing on my head, and I remember no more."

The dog growled and moved about restlessly. Frank could see that the eyes of the creature were very red, and it was holding its mouth open, with its long, red tongue hanging out. Somehow, the aspect of the beast filled the boy with a feeling of horror, and he involuntarily drew back a bit, which caused the dog to growl still louder than before.

In drawing back, Frank came against the partition of the room, which he saw was very small, and devoid of furniture, save for a staggering old table that stood in one corner.

"It must be that I am a captive here, and that dog is on guard over me," thought Frank Merriwell. "I cannot see any other explanation."

It seemed quite probable that he was right.

Feeling of his head in a tender manner, he found a swelled lump that was very sensitive to the touch of his fingers.

"I was struck down by some sort of an instrument, and, as it did not cut my head, it must have been a sandbag. That rendered me unconscious, and thus I remained till I was brought here to this room. But who did the job? That is the question."

The more Frank thought of these things the greater grew his bewilderment, and it seemed to make his head throb still more heavily with pain.

That the dog was his guard, he had no doubt, but he resolved to make friends with the creature, if possible. In order to begin, he spoke to the dog in a soothing way:

"Good dog! Nice old fellow!"

But that brought a growl louder and fiercer than those heard before.

Still Frank continued for some moments, but, as a result, he simply succeeded in arousing the beast, who began to move about in front of the door, keeping its shifty red eyes roving over the boy's figure, and growling fiercely.

It soon became plain to the captive lad that he could not make friends with the dog, and he gave up the attempt, feeling that he was in a decidedly awkward scrape. Whenever he moved the dog set up such a snapping and growling that he became alarmed and sat still.

"By Jove! this is not at all to my taste," thought Frank. "What if that beast takes a fancy to make a meal off me! He can chew me up at his pleasure."

The captive began to feel in his pockets. He found they had been searched by his captors, but, in one of his hip pockets, a small knife had been overlooked. This he took out and opened, thinking:

"I will have some kind of a weapon to defend myself with if the beast attacks me."

Barely had he done this when he heard heavy footsteps beyond the door. The steps were approaching.

"Some one coming to make an inspection," flashed through the boy's head. "Possibly it is this mysterious foe of mine, and I may be able to get a square look at his face if I play 'possum. 'Possum it is, then."

He quickly stretched himself on the floor, with his face turned toward the door, and his eyes nearly closed, but open just enough to permit him to gaze through the lashes.

The dog whined as the steps came nearer. Plainly the animal recognized the sounds as familiar. He sniffed at the crack of the door, and wagged his tail a little. Till that moment Frank had not realized what a huge beast the dog was; but now he saw that the creature was large enough to drag down an ox.

There was a rattling sound outside the door, and then an opening about a foot square appeared midway near the top.

At the opening appeared the face of a man, who looked into the room.

That face was a disappointment to Frank Merriwell.

It was the face of a ruffian, unshaved, and covered

nearly to the eyes by a reddish beard—a face that Frank Merriwell had never before looked on.

The dog stood up on its hind legs, and it reached nearly to the opening in the door.

From the lips of the man came a growl of disappointment—a growl that sounded very much like those emitted by the dog.

“So the young fool is still dead ter der world,” muttered the man, hoarsely. “Der boss must have gin him a stiff tap on der nut. Mebbe he’ll croak widout comin’ round at all. Ef he does, der boss kin be satisfied wid his own work. Dunno wot he wants ter do anyhow. Says he wants ter make der kid sign somet’in’, now we’s got him here, but I t’ink dat’s rot.”

Then he spoke to the dog:

“Down, Demon—down! Keep watch on der feller. Ef he tries ter monkey wid der door, taste of him. No, I ain’t goin’ ter feed yer. You might git lazy an’ careless. Down, and watch der cove.”

The dog did not seem to like this very well, for he growled angrily.

“Dat’s right,” snarled the ruffian; “growl at me, will yer? Well, you’ll go hungry all de longer fer dat! See!”

The opening in the door was closed with a slap, and Frank Merriwell was once more alone with his fierce guard.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAD DOG.

The dog was enraged by the departure of the man. The beast flung himself against the door, setting up a roaring howl that seemed to make Frank's hair stand on his head.

"By jingoes!" thought the captive lad; "this is decidedly pleasant! That dog may turn on me now."

Frank decided it was best to keep very still until the dog was somewhat cooled down.

There was no longer a doubt but he had fallen into the hands of his unknown enemy, and that very enemy had struck the blow that knocked him senseless. How it came about he could not conceive, but come about it had.

That his position was one of the gravest peril Frank could not doubt.

What could he do?

It did not seem that there was a chance for him to do anything but wait, but that seemed too much like waiting for the enemy to finish the job, and it did not suit Frank at all.

"Wants me to sign something, does he?" muttered the captive. "What can it be? I cannot understand this business at all."

It was useless to speculate on the mystery, as speculation simply served to make his head throb more fiercely with pain.

He fell to watching the dog, and he saw the creature was moving to and fro in front of the door, with its head down, and its tongue hanging out. These movements filled Frank with a vague feeling of alarm.

The boy watched the dog as if fascinated. From the end of the animal's tongue a bit of frothy drule was dropping. Now and then the beast would turn and look at Frank with those red, restless eyes, and the boy's blood would grow cold.

After a time the dog began to whine and snarl, shaking its head as if annoyed. It lay down repeatedly, but got up immediately each time and resumed the walk to and fro in front of the door.

"The dog is sick," Frank decided. "That is plain enough. If he'd get so bad he didn't mind me, I might stand a show of getting out."

With each passing moment the dog grew worse. It was not long before he seemed to forget that he was there to guard the captive, for he left the door and went into a corner, where he put his nose close to the floor and snarled and whined in a way that made Frank Merriwell long to get out without delay.

Of a sudden, the beast began to tear about the room, snapping and snarling, a white foam forming on its lips.

And now the sensation of horror that assailed Frank Merriwell was indescribable.

"The dog is mad!" gasped the boy.

Frank dared not stir, fearing he would be attacked the moment he did so.

Had he escaped from a frightful death in being hurled from the elevated train to the street, simply to meet a still more frightful death in this wretched room?

Twice in his mad lunging about the room the dog jumped fairly over Frank's prostrate body; but still the boy did not stir, and it was well for him that he remained motionless.

If the dog had been attacked by hydrophobia, it was the first stage of the disease as plainly manifest, and Frank hoped the creature might quiet down.

After a little time this happened, and the dog crouched in a corner, shivering and whining, seeming overcome with terror.

"Now is my time!" muttered Frank.

As quietly and carefully as possible, he got upon his feet, keeping his eyes on the dog all the time. To his intense satisfaction, the creature seemed to heed his movements very little. The door was no longer guarded, and toward it Frank swiftly and quietly moved.

The dog continued to shiver and whine.

"If I had a shotgun, loaded with double-B shot, I'd soon fix you!" thought the boy.

The door was reached, but it would not open when Frank pushed upon it. This, however, was no more than the boy had expected.

Continuing his examination, he soon found the door was somewhat shaky.

"I wonder if I could burst it open if I were to make a run across the room and hurl myself at it?" speculated Frank.

Then he thought of the dog, and he quickly decided it would not do to make such an attempt, for the creature would be aroused, and, in case the attempt failed, it was likely the dog would be upon him in a moment.

Putting his shoulder against the door, Frank attempted to force it by a sharp thrust, but that effort failed.

Then he thought of his knife, and he wondered how long it would take him to cut a hole through the door.

He did not spend much time in speculating on that, for he quickly decided he must get out of that room in short order, if he wished to escape being bitten by the rabid dog. When the next attack came, it was pretty certain the beast would snap and bite at everything within the room, animate or inanimate, in case it should be within reach.

A mad desire to get away without delay seized on Frank, and it was only by a great effort of his will that he held himself in check. He longed to beat upon the door, to shout, to break something.

He tried the small panel that covered the square opening in the door, but that was also fastened. He pressed upon it with all his strength; but it did not stir, and he began to feel that his situation was becoming still more desperate.

Now and then Frank turned to look at the dog. The creature was still standing with its head down and its tongue out; but the shivering that had agitated his body was diminishing.

"It is liable to have another wild spell in a moment," thought Frank. "I must get out, or I must obtain some weapon of defense besides this knife."

What sort of a weapon could he obtain? He looked about for something—anything, and his eyes fell on the wretched table.

Moving silently and gently, Frank soon reached the table, his sharp eyes having noted that one of the legs looked as if it could be torn away without much trouble. The touch of his hand showed him that the leg was very loose, and he grasped it, gave a wrench, and tore it free.

A savage snarl came from the dog.

Frank whirled about, and it required but a glance to show him that the animal was on the verge of having another fit.

"The tug of war is coming!" muttered the boy, nerving himself for the emergency. "The chances are against me, but I'm going to put up as stiff a fight as I can."

The table was standing on three legs, and an idea flashed through Frank's head. If he could get upon the table he would be out of the dog's way, and he would have all the better chance of beating the beast off.

"I'll try it."

Up upon the table he leaped, taking care not to overturn it. In a moment he was standing so the table was well balanced on its three legs.

This he did not a moment too soon.

The dog set up a frightful snarling and howling, and then it began to dash about the room once more.

Frank lifted the leg of the table which he had wrenched away, holding it ready for use.

Round the small room tore the great beast, froth flying from its lips. It snapped and snarled at everything.

Once it went round without attacking Frank, but on the second turn it rushed straight for the boy, launching itself into the air, with a frightful howl, and seeming to fly straight for the lad's throat.

With all the strength he possessed, Frank swung the table-leg.

Whack!

The blow struck the dog fairly between the eyes, and the beast was flung back to the floor, where it fell in a quivering, howling, snarling heap.

In a moment, however, the dog was up again and rushing around the room.

Frank realized that he had been very fortunate in hitting the dog so fairly the first time, and he knew a second leap might not result so well.

In a moment the creature came at him.

Again Frank struck with the table-leg. In bringing it around, he swept the lamp from the shelf on which it had been setting, and it was dashed to pieces and extinguished on the floor.

Frank felt the club strike the dog again, and the rabid beast was beaten off once more.

But the position was one of indescribable horror, for Frank was imprisoned in that small, dark room with the mad dog, and he could no longer see to defend himself.

CHAPTER X.

BY FIRE AND WATER.

The dog continued its wild charges around the room, and the boy on the table heard it plunge headlong into the wall several times. Then it seemed to quiet down.

It is not strange that Frank found himself quivering in every limb. It would have been marvelous if he had not experienced a sensation of horror.

Listening, he could hear the dog panting somewhere in the room, but he could not tell whether the creature was nearby or at the further extremity of the narrow place.

In either case he was much too near to suit Frank.

After a time, the boy could see the eyes of the beast glowing in the darkness, and they seemed turned straight on Frank.

Frank watched those glowing orbs, and a singular sensation began to creep slowly over him—a sensation of utter helplessness.

“If I am attacked again, I shall not be able to defend myself!” thought the boy.

What was that?

Frank’s heart gave a hopeful bound, for he heard footsteps outside the door.

The dog heard the sounds, and began to howl in a frightful manner.

Then the door was flung open, and the voice of the man who had appeared at the panel a short time before said:

“What’s all this racket in here? Hello! Dark! The light is out! Demon, boy, where are——”

A snarl came from the throat of the dog, and it was followed by a howl from the lips of the man.

Frank Merriwell knew what it meant, and he shuddered with unspeakable horror.

The man had been attacked by his own dog!

The boy on the table heard a fearful battle taking place just outside the door. The smothered snarling and snap-

ping of the dog were mingled with shrieks and appeals for help from the lips of the man.

If Frank could have seen, he would have gone to the aid of the man, even though the fellow was a ruffian of the lowest type. As it was, he could do nothing.

The cries of the man soon brought some one, and Frank saw a light that shone in at the door of the room.

Down from the table he sprang, and, looking out at the door, he saw an old woman appear at the farther end of a narrow, dirty passage. The woman had a lighted lamp in her hand.

"Dave! Dave!" she called, in a harsh voice; "w'at's der matter, anyhow?"

"Help!" roared the man. "Demon's chawin' me up!"

When the woman saw what was taking place, she dropped the lamp, uttering a scream of terror, and fled.

The lamp broke, but did not go out. The running oil caught in a moment, and flames sprang up.

Then the man, bleeding and torn, succeeded in flinging the dog from him. With a hoarse shout, he leaped over the flames and quickly disappeared.

The glare of the fire caused the dog to crouch and cower.

Frank was still in a frightful trap, and his peril was increasing with every moment. Between him and liberty blazed the fire and crouched the mad dog.

What could he do?

He fully realized that there could not be many moments to spare. If he did not escape in a few seconds, the fire would shut him off so escape would be impossible.

Swiftly and silently he crept up behind the cowering dog, the table-leg uplifted. Well it was that the sight of the fire seemed to fascinate the animal and command its entire attention.

Reaching the proper position, Frank struck the beast upon the head with all the strength he could command, and the table-leg broke in his hands.

Without waiting to note the result of that blow, Frank dashed forward and sprang over the flames, determined to make his escape if possible.

He plunged fairly into the midst of several persons who were hurrying to the spot, and he heard a voice cry:

"It's the boy! He's escaping! Stop him!"

It was the voice of Frank's mysterious foe!

"It isn't so easy to stop me now!" panted Frank.

Out shot his hard fists to the right and left. Smack! smack! At least two blows landed fairly, and at least two of the party were sent staggering.

Like a cyclone Frank burst through, avoiding hands outstretched to grasp him. He felt that nothing should stop him now.

Without hesitation, he flung open any door that stood before him, and plunged straight ahead.

Through one or two rooms he went in this way, hearing angry cries behind him, and knowing he would be hotly pursued.

"I must trust to luck now," he muttered, as he unhasped a door and sprang through it.

Splash! Frank struck in a body of water, and went completely under.

In a moment, he came to the surface and looked around.

"The open air—a river!" he thought, exultantly. "I have escaped! I am free!"

Distant lights were twinkling on the farther shore of the river, while, near at hand, he could see a few wretched buildings and some wharves. The door through which he had plunged into the river stood wide open close by.

Frank was an expert swimmer, and he immediately struck out. He had not taken three strokes before a man appeared in the open door, lamp in hand, and shouted:

"There he is! He's getting away! Out and after him! Don't let him get ashore without being nabbed!"

Understanding it was a lonely location on the river, where almost any kind of a crime might be perpetrated without fear of detection, Frank made all haste to get ashore before he could be recaptured.

The current was quite strong, and it swept him down the river and under an old pier.

Just as Frank disappeared under the old pier he saw two men come running out upon it, and he believed they were two enemies who had seen him carried in that direction.

Getting hold of a slimy timber, Frank clung there in the darkness, listening. He was able to hear the men

speaking to each other, and, although he did not understand their words, he felt certain he had made no mistake in believing them foes.

For some time the men lingered above. At length they secured an old skiff, with which they came poking around the pier, trying to peer into the darkness beneath the structure.

There was no longer any doubt in Frank's mind, for, he was now able to hear their words. One of the men was railing at the fortune which had enabled Frank to get away, and that man, so the boy believed, was the mysterious enemy who had caused him so much trouble.

Frank had expected that the building from which he had just escaped would burn to the ground, but it was a long time before the light of the fire began to shine out on the river. This finally happened, however, and he heard one of the men in the skiff say:

"Dave's ranch is a goner this time. Here comes the first engine, and the old place is so far along that it can't be saved."

"What do I care for Dave's ranch!" snarled the other man. "That infernal boy got away when I had him tight and fast! That's what's troubling me."

"It was your own fault, boss. We'd done him any time; but, as you did seem to have him fast, you was goin' to make him sign some kind of a paper, an' that——"

"Oh, shut up! Shove under the pier, and we'll look around."

Then the skiff began moving directly toward the place where Frank was clinging to the water-soaked timber.

CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF THE RIVER.

Frank saw he was not yet out of danger.

"What's the use of looking under here?" grumbled one of the men. "We won't find anything."

"Perhaps not, but we'll look."

"The kid's got away. He's a fly young cove."

"Altogether too fly," growled Frank's unknown foe.

"Wonder how he worked it to set Dave's dog onter the critter's own master?"

"It's my opinion the dog's mad, and that's why he attacked Dave."

"Thunder! You may be right. The brute's been actin' queer for two days."

"If he is mad, I hope he chewed Frank Merriwell some—that's all."

"You don't like that boy any to brag of."

"Like him! I should say not! Why did I bring him to the gang, and offer them good money to dispose of him so his body'd never be found? I have no reason to like him, I hate him, and I don't propose to rest till he is put out of the way for good and all."

The light of the fire was growing stronger, but it did not reach far enough beneath the pier for Frank to see the faces of his foes. The boy would have given much had he been able to see the features of the man who hated him with such deadly hatred.

Again it seemed to Frank that there was something familiar about the voice of that individual.

"I've heard that voice before I ever saw New York," thought Frank; "but when—where?"

Slowly the men pushed the skiff about amid the timbers, and Frank kept as far down in the water as possible, hoping thus to escape detection, although they were close upon him.

"What's the use of pokin' 'round in here?" grumbled

the fellow who accompanied Frank's foe. "We can't see anything."

"You've got no reason to kick—I'm paying."

"Well, I don't like this place. Perhaps the boy is drowned."

"Little danger of that. Fire, water, or a hundred-foot fall from an elevated railroad will not kill him! I believe Satan aids him!"

"I don't need assistance from your master," thought the boy.

The skiff floated past where Frank could reach out and touch it, which he did as the stern came along.

Releasing his hold on the slippery timber, Frank fastened to the stern of the boat, still keeping well down in the water, and allowed himself to be towed along.

In this way the men who were searching for Frank towed him out from beneath the pier.

A feeling of mischief seized upon the boy, and, with a sudden effort, he upset the skiff, throwing both of the men into the water, which was rather cold. This was not a difficult matter, for the boat was old, leaky, and cranky.

Two strokes carried Frank back beneath the edge of the pier, where he clung and awaited the result of his act.

The men had disappeared beneath the surface, but they quickly came up, spouting water from their mouths, and the water was followed by some decidedly violent language.

"What do you mean, you blundering fool?" snarled Frank's particular foe. "Why did you upset the boat?"

"I didn't upset it!" flung back the other. "You upset it yourself!"

"That's a lie! You did it by your blundering carelessness!"

"That's a lie for you. I've been around the river all my life. What do you know about boats?"

"Well, I should know something, and I don't propose to be called a liar by you!"

"What're ye goin' to do about it?"

"This!"

Frank could see them on the surface of the water, and he saw his enemy lift a hand and strike the other in the

face. In another moment, the men had clinched, and then began a desperate struggle in the water.

"If they will drown each other it will be a great relief to me and a fine thing for the country at large," thought Frank.

The battle was a savage one, and the current caught the two men and swept them away. At times they sank beneath the surface, but when they came up they resumed the struggle. This continued till they had floated beyond Frank's sight under the shadow of the shore.

"Well, I rather think it is time for me to get out of this," muttered the boy.

It was not a difficult task to swim ashore, and he was soon where he could climb upon the pier and look for the men who had been searching for him a short time before.

He could see nothing of them, althought the light of the fire shone on the water.

Looking toward the old building from which he had escaped in such a providential manner, he saw nearly one-half of it was in flames. A fire-engine was working nearby and several streams were being poured on the flames.

The light of the fire showed that a wretched mob of human beings had gathered near the blaze, called out of the surrounding hovels by the fire.

Not caring to be questioned, Frank sought a spot where he could remove some of his clothing under cover of the darkness and wring out some of the water.

"I wonder if they found my money?" he muttered.

He had a hidden money pocket in his clothes, and, without delay, he examined it to see if they had relieved him of its contents.

To his intense satisfaction, he found they had not discovered it, and his money was all right, although the bills hidden away there had been well soaked.

Frank had not the least idea concerning the part of the city he was in, but he had money, and he believed that would take him back to the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

Without spending much time in that vicinity after getting out of the river, he hastened away. Through the wretched streets he made his way till he came to an elevated railroad trestle. Passing on yet another long

block, he came to a second elevated railroad, and found himself on a brightly lighted street, where there were numbers of pedestrians, although Frank was sure the hour must be late.

A cab was passing, with the driver nodding sleepily on the box and Frank immediately hailed the fellow.

"How far is it to the Fifth Avenue Hotel?" he asked.

"Five miles," was the surly reply.

Frank whistled with surprise.

"How much will you charge to take me there?"

"Five dollars."

"What do you take me for?" cried the boy. "I can make it by the elevated for five cents."

"Perhaps yer might if they didn't arrest yer."

"Arrest me? What for?"

"On suspicion. You don't look jest right, me young covie."

Frank realized that he did not look "just right," and that was why he wished to obtain passage in a closed carriage, but he knew the legal rates of the city, and he was aware that cabby had asked him exactly two dollars and a half more than the correct price.

"Look here," he said, "I'll give you three dollars to take me to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and not a cent more. What do you say?"

"Say, young feller, wot d'yer take me fer? Think I dunno me biz?"

"You are not allowed to charge over fifty cents a mile, at the most. Five miles would be two and a half. I've offered you three. Accept it or not, as you like."

"Pay in advance?"

"No."

"Don't believe you've got der scads."

"Here—see."

Frank showed his money.

"That looks all right, though I ruther think you've been in ther wash. Get in."

Frank lost no time in entering the cab, as he saw his appearance had begun to attract attention, and one or two persons were stopping to look and listen.

The door closed behind Frank, and the driver turned about, whipped up his horse, and headed downtown.

CHAPTER XII.

AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS.

Safe within the cab and on his way to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, Frank lay back and tried to think of the adventures of the night; but when he did so he could scarcely believe them all real, and he wondered if he had not been dreaming.

He shuddered as he thought of his struggle on the elevated train and what had followed; but thoughts of his situation when he was confined with the mad dog overcame him with unutterable horror. Surely a kind Providence had watched over him, else he could not have passed through all this and come forth unharmed—almost unscathed.

Frank knew he had every reason to be thankful, and thankful he surely was.

He had been buoyed by excitement, but now it was all over, he sank back on the cushioned seat of the cab in an exhausted condition.

Thus he lay while the cab rumbled along the streets. It was a long, tiresome ride, but, looking from the window, Frank finally discerned the familiar corner of Madison square, and, a moment later, the cab drew up in front of the hotel.

The driver jumped down quickly and opened the door, evidently to make sure the boy did not escape without paying.

The smallest bill in Frank's possession was a V, and, showing this, he caused the driver to produce two dollars in change before he passed over the money.

"S'pose ye think yer mighty sharp," growled the man, as he reluctantly passed over the two dollars; "but I'll make up fer you on some other bloke."

"That's all right," laughed Frank. "I am not looking out for other folks. I am making sure you do not beat me."

Despite the hour, there were still not a few pedestrians on Broadway, a thoroughfare on which there is pulsing life and movement constantly night and day year after year. Late at night the current may dwindle, but it continues to flow, and thus it fluctuates and flows, summer and winter, storm and shine.

Frank was well aware that he presented a singular appearance, and he did not care to attract much attention, therefore he hurried into the hotel without delay.

The few individuals who were moving in the long corridor opened their eyes in astonishment and wonder as they noted his appearance. The night clerk sat bolt upright, as if he had received an electric shock, staring hard at the bareheaded lad, who, although he was well dressed, looked as if he had been for hours in a drenching rain-storm.

Frank stepped forward briskly, passed the clerk, and was soon rousing the rather sleepy elevator boy. The latter had never before seen Frank, at whom he stared in bewilderment, thickly asking:

“Which floor?”

“Fifth.”

Up glided the car, and Frank drew a breath of relief, for he had feared that he would be stopped and forced to explain, which he did not care to do.

The boy let him out at the fifth floor, but he held the car there and watched till Frank disappeared around the corner.

Frank had good cause to congratulate himself, for ordinarily he could not have reached that floor without being questioned; but his confident, unfaltering manner had plainly declared him a guest of the hotel, for all of his remarkable appearance.

As Frank approached the suite of rooms engaged by Professor Scotch, the door was flung open, and out came the professor, with Hans at his heels. Both wore top coats, and their movements indicated that they were in a hurry.

“It’s useless to wait longer,” the professor was declaring. “We must report to the police.”

“Yah,” agreed the Dutch boy, “we must report to der bolice.”

The little professor nearly ran into Frank, who was standing directly beneath one of the subdued lights. The appearance of the lad gave Scotch a terrible shock, and he recoiled against Hans, who gurgled:

"Shimminy Gristmas! Vos dot a ghost, ain'd id?"

In a low, hollow voice, which seemed to come from the depths of some great cavern, Frank said:

"Behold, I come to lead you to the spot where my body may be found."

The professor turned pale, and Hans' teeth began to chatter.

"Oxcuse me!" came faintly from the lips of the Dutch boy. "Vere vos dot?"

"At the bottom of the East River."

"Vell, I don'd peen no fish!" fluttered Hans, as he released his hold on Professor Scotch and bolted from the spot.

The professor had been leaning so heavily upon Hans that he dropped to a sitting position the moment his support was gone, and he hastened to say:

"To be sure! to be sure! Of course we'll accommodate you, if we can secure divers' suits."

This brought a merry burst of laughter from Frank's lips, and he hastened to assist the professor to rise.

"Well, well, well!" muttered Scotch. "Is it really you? Of course it is! I knew it all the time; you didn't fool me."

"Oh, no, not at all!" chuckled Frank.

"Not a bit," asserted the professor, stoutly. "I am not in the least superstitious. Educated men are never superstitious. But I will admit that you looked rather ghost-like as you stood there."

"I did frighten Hans a bit."

"Somewhat. But where have you been? Your hat is gone, your face is pale, and your clothing is dripping wet."

"Well, I have been in the Harlem River, the East River, the Atlantic Ocean, or somewhere else. Let's get into the room, and I'll tell you about it."

Hans was watching them from a distant end of the passage, and he began to feel reassured when he saw Frank and the professor talking together familiarly.

"Vell, maype dot don'd peen a ghost," muttered the Dutch boy; "but I'd rather haf a huntret tollars than see him do dot again!"

Professor Scotch and Frank entered the parlor of the suite, and Hans slipped swiftly to the door, where he could hear them talking in a way that made him think everything all right, so he opened the door and slipped inside.

Frank's trunk had been brought from the station, and he was losing no time in exchanging his water-soaked clothing for garments that were dry, in the meantime relating the story of his recent thrilling experiences.

To this astounding story Professor Scotch and Hans Dunnerwust listened in the most profound amazement, and when it was finished, the professor was excited as he had never been before.

"The police must be notified!" he almost roared. "Those villains must be captured!"

"Dot peen pusiness!" cried Hans. "Uf dose villains don't peen captured righd away queek alretty yet, you vos a liar!"

"Easy," cautioned Frank. "You will not find them if you look for them now. The old house burned, and two of them floated off in the river. If they succeeded in drowning each other, my enemy will give me no further trouble. It will be time enough in the morning for me to make a report at police headquarters."

He found it somewhat difficult to convince the professor that the whole affair should not be reported at once, but he finally succeeded.

If Frank had not been utterly exhausted, the professor would have kept him up to talk over the affair for hours. But, having told the story from beginning to end, and being dreadfully tired, Frank refused to do any further talking till morning, and was soon in bed.

It was more than an hour after that before Professor Scotch retired, and then he did not sleep well, for he dreamed of the frightful adventures through which Frank had passed.

Strangely enough, Frank seemed to slumber like a child, and he awoke in the morning feeling bright and

refreshed, notwithstanding the lump on the side of his head, which still made itself felt.

But the professor was ready to hammer him with hundreds of questions, and Frank was tired of answering and explaining long before they descended to breakfast.

According to the professor, Frank had not been missed from the train till they were near the end of the line. As he could not be found when the train reached the station at One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street, Professor Scotch and Hans were greatly alarmed.

Knowing Frank was inclined to perpetrate practical jokes, the professor fancied he might be working something of the sort in this case, so they returned to the hotel and waited for him there.

But they could not sleep, and they had decided to visit police headquarters and report Frank's disappearance. They had just started when they ran upon the missing lad outside the room.

Having eaten breakfast, and finding the morning somewhat chilly, they returned to their rooms and donned overcoats, after which they left the hotel and proceeded to police headquarters in Mulberry street.

Here they finally obtained an interview with the inspector, and Frank told the story of the assaults upon his life since he entered New York a few hours before.

At first the inspector had shown very little interest, but his interest grew, and he was simply astounded when Frank told of his marvelous escape from death on the elevated railroad.

When the tale was finished, the inspector put a number of questions to the lad, but found that Frank was unable to describe his mysterious foe, although he felt sure he would know the man's voice if he ever heard it again.

Then the inspector questioned the lad in regard to any enemies he might have. Frank explained that he had made a number of enemies at Fardale Academy, but they had all turned to friends at last, so that, when he left the school, he did not seem to have an enemy among them.

The inspector then brought out that Carlos Merriwell, Frank's cousin, had made two desperate attempts on the boy's life, but that he had lost his own life in the second

attempt, having perished in a burning house where he had tried to imprison Frank.

"If the fellow was not drowned in the river, we may be able to run him down," said the inspector. "That's all. Leave your address. Fifth Avenue Hotel? Very well. Good-day."

They were curtly dismissed, and the next visitor was admitted.

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH.

Leaving police headquarters, the trio visited the Bowery, along which they strolled, thoroughly enjoying the sights to be seen there. Hans was tempted by the cheap shows, and it was with no small difficulty they kept him from patronizing everything of the sort.

At length they reached City Hall square, and they rested on a seat near the fountain, from which position they could view the tall buildings and watch the rush of human beings on every hand.

On one hand was Park Row, with its crush of street cars and trucks, and on the other hand was Broadway, almost as badly congested with a crush of traffic. The new office building on the west side of Broadway loomed high in the air, and on the east side of Park Row the *World* building thrust its gilded dome up into the sky.

"Vell," muttered Hans, after he had stared about in open-mouthed wonder, "uf dot don'd peat der pand, I don'd know vere you vos at!"

Leaving City Hall Park, they strolled through the post-office, and came out upon Broadway, down which they continued to Wall street, which proved something of a disappointment to Hans.

"I don'd seen der vall somewhere alretty yet," he said. "Und vere vos all dot money vot they half biled oop mit der vindows in down here, ain'd id?"

Evidently, he had expected to feast his eyes on heaps of money, and it was likely he had fancied it possible to pick up some in the street.

They had some difficulty in discovering the entrance to the Stock Exchange, but were finally successful.

As soon as they were inside the doors, a roar of voices reached their ears, and Hans immediately felt like getting out as soon as he could.

"Vot they keep in here, ain'd id?" he asked. "Vos dot a menagery vot I hear howling?"

They ascended the stairs to the balcony, although Frank was forced to assure the Dutch boy over and over that he would not be in danger of getting hurt by the wild animals.

When they were able to look over on the floor of the exchange, and Hans could see the mass of swaying, surging, struggling, shouting human beings, the Dutch lad's hair threatened to rise up and lift his hat off his head.

"Dunder and blitzen!" he gurgled. "Uf dot don'd peen der piggest free fight you efer seen."

It happened to be an exciting day in the exchange, and the brokers were disporting themselves in ways that made them seem like a gang of violent lunatics.

When one man smashed the new silk hat of another, and then jumped on that individual's shoulders in order to howl at still another man who was surrounded by a wild mob, the Dutch lad began to take off his coat.

"Here! here!" cried Frank. "What are you going to do?"

"Vell, I don'd peen much uf a fighter," replied Hans, wildly, "but I nefer sdoed sstill und seen anybody murdered."

"Keep cool. Nobody is being murdered."

"Vell, I know dot, but uf they don'd mean to murter dot leedle man der mittle uf dot crowd in, you vos a liar!"

"Nothing of the sort, Hans. That's business."

"Say, Vrankie, you can'd fool me. I peen roundt a leedle mit der vird in, und I know ven somepody vos in danger uf peing safe. Look at dot man der ret musdashe mit shake his fist der leedle man's face in! Look at dot oder man der plack musdashe mit crab der leetle man hold uf! Come, Vrankie, ged a club, und we peen goin' to sail into dot gang!"

It was useless to argue with Hans. Frank could not quiet the Dutch lad, and he became more violent when the professor tried to talk to him. So they found it absolutely necessary to get hold of him on either side and drag him down the stairs and out to the street.

"Vell," he observed, as Frank made him put on his coat, "uf dot man vos killed, I don'd peen to plame."

They turned back toward Broadway, on the farther side of which Trinity Church lifts its spire to the heavens.

The sight of this church inspired the professor to enter into a dissertation on Gothic architecture, but Frank cut him short by reminding him that they did not have time to waste there.

The professor did not propose visiting the graveyard near the church, but he explained that it contained the graves of Alexander Hamilton, Robert Fulton, the inventor of the first steamboat, and Captain Lawrence, the hero of the *Chesapeake*.

Frank wished to view the city from the tower of the *World* building, and so they returned to City Hall square, which they recrossed.

Entering the *World* building, they were able to obtain permits to visit the top, and they entered the narrow, cagelike elevator that carries passengers to the dome.

The newspaper office at the top of that towering building was of great interest to Frank, and, having left the elevator, he took his time in climbing to the last eerie, allowing the professor and Hans to precede him.

Little did Frank dream that his steps had been dogged, and that the next time the elevator came up it would contain his deadly enemy.

Frank found Hans and the professor at the top. They were standing within the narrow space between the cupola and the rail, to which both were clinging convulsively.

The panorama spread out on every hand was enough to bewilder a person and take away his breath.

Looking down over the bulging side of the dome, Frank could see the human beings in City Hall square looking like pigmies, while the cars and teams seemed like tiny toys. A strange feeling of terror seemed to come up and clutch at his heart as he gazed, and he drew back from the rail.

To the north New York City stretched away into the smoky distance, with the broad Hudson on one side, and the East River on the other. He could see Blackwell's Island, Ward's Island, Hell Gate, and Long Island Sound. To the east lay the housetops of Brooklyn,

stretching far down toward Coney Island. Almost directly beneath him, as it seemed, was the great Brooklyn bridge. To the south lay the bay, in the midst of which the statue of Liberty uplifted its unlighted torch. Bay and rivers were covered with moving vessels, steamers, ferryboats, tugs, and all kinds of craft. To the west was Jersey City, and beyond Newark the Orange Mountains could be seen.

It was a thrilling and inspiring view, and Frank felt his blood quicken in his veins. He moved around the cupola, leaving the professor and Hans.

It happened that there were not many visitors to the dome, and Frank found himself alone. So absorbed was he that he did not notice when another person slipped to his side.

All at once he was clutched, and in his ear hissed a now well-known and hated voice:

"You may be thrown from an elevated train and escape, but we'll see if a drop from the top of this building will do you any damage. Over you go!"

He was lifted from his feet and over the railing!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ENEMY UNMASKED.

Frank felt himself grasped by yet another hand—a strong hand that held him suspended in midair, for all of the frightful strain. Then the boy got hold of the rail and dragged himself back.

The watchman had saved him.

His mysterious enemy was gone.

Seeing Frank was safe, the watchman hastened after the would-be murderer.

Frank followed, although his legs felt weak beneath him.

Hastening down the steep stairs, the watchman was barely in time to see the elevator glide downward and disappear.

Turning to Frank, the man said :

“He got away, young man, for he was on the elevator.”

“What did he look like?” panted Frank. “Describe him!”

“’Bout the only thing I noticed was that he had a heavy red beard.”

“That was a disguise. This is not the first time he has attacked me.”

In a remarkably brief space of time, it was known throughout the office that a strange man had attempted to throw the boy from the top of the building.

That was exactly the sort of a sensation which the paper relished, and Frank found himself a captive in the clutches of several reporters. He wished to pursue his assailant, but was not permitted. However, the watchman and two reporters lost little time in getting after the man.

Frank was taken to the managing editor, who expressed unbounded satisfaction when he heard what had happened.

“This will be a great ad!” he exclaimed. “Mr. Smith,

you may do the story. Make it any length up to two columns."

So Frank found himself delivered into the hands of Mr. Smith, who set about learning everything that could be worked into the story.

At first, Frank had thought that he would not tell that this was the fourth attempt upon his life since he entered the city the day before, but, by adroit questioning, Smith learned everything, and when he had obtained the full particulars his delight knew no bounds.

"This will make a corking story!" he exclaimed. "It is the best thing we have struck in a week."

He then offered Frank money to keep the story from any other reporter for four hours. The money Frank declined, but Smith succeeded in extracting a promise of silence.

This was all over when the professor and Hans came down from the top of the building, looking around for Frank in a bewildered way.

"Vere you peen, Vrankie?" asked the Dutch boy. "We don'd seen you when you come town. Why you ain'd spoke mit us when you done dot?"

"Yes, yes," fluttered the little professor. "We didn't know but you had fallen from the building."

When they were told that Frank had been assailed and cast over the railing outside the cupola with them not twenty feet away, the professor collapsed into a chair and Hans fell over against a reporter.

"Frank," said Professor Scotch, "I think we had better get out of New York without delay."

"Yah," nodded the Dutch lad; "uf we don'd done dot you vos a deadt poy."

"That is right," asserted the professor. "This enemy is determined to succeed, and he will do so before long."

"I don't think so," replied Frank, quietly. "He has failed four times within twenty-four hours. I am not going to run from him."

"You will not leave the city?"

"I will not be driven out by my unknown foe. If I left he would follow me and I should be no better off. The matter has been placed in the hands of the police, and we'll see what they are able to do. So far it has been

a case of fighting in the dark, for I have not known who my enemy is, but he'll not be able to keep his identity a secret much longer."

Before Frank left the *World* office, the watchman returned and said he had been unable to follow Frank's assailant, although the elevator man had carried the fellow to the first floor. The two reporters were still trying to track the would-be assassin.

Frank was praised for his nerve by almost every one of the reporters and editors before leaving, and his hand was shaken till his arm ached.

Despite the frightful peril through which he had passed, Frank resolved not to have his sight-seeing for the day spoiled, and, when they reached the street, he said:

"We'll take lunch at a restaurant, and then make a trip over Brooklyn bridge. Now—that we are so near—is the time to see it."

So they went to a restaurant and ordered lunch. As they were waiting to be served, Frank heard a man behind them giving an order at the counter.

The sound of that man's voice brought Frank Merriwell to his feet in a moment.

He saw the man was one who had come in since they entered. His back was turned to Frank, but the boy strode straight toward him.

Just before Frank came within reach, the man turned and faced him fairly, then leaped erect, with an exclamation of dismay.

As for Frank, he seemed stricken motionless with astonishment and incredulity. His amazement was so great that he stood there, motionless and staring, faintly muttering:

"Carlos Merriwell—alive!"

"Yes, alive!" came lowly from the man.

Then, quick as a flash, he whirled and dashed toward the door.

"Stop that man!" shouted Frank, as he sprang after the fellow.

Instantly there was the utmost confusion in the place. Men sprang to their feet, and at least half a dozen of them got in Frank's way. The boy savagely thrust them

aside, but they bothered him just enough to allow his enemy to escape.

Reaching the street, Frank saw his foe already swallowed in the throng that literally packed the narrow sidewalk at that point, and, although he searched, he saw nothing more of Carlos Merriwell.

Frank blamed himself for letting the fellow get away, but it was not strange that he did so, for up to the very moment that he saw the scarred face of his pretended villainous cousin he had believed Carlos had perished in a burning house at Fardale village. Naturally, Frank was stricken motionless with astonishment for a moment when he saw the fellow alive before him.

Returning to the restaurant, he found the professor and Hans waiting in a great state of apprehension.

As they had attracted no small amount of attention there, Frank left the place immediately.

"Where are you going?" asked Professor Scotch.

"Direct to police headquarters," was the reply. "I can now give a complete description of my enemy."

To police headquarters they went, and Frank told the inspector what had happened since they were there some hours before, and gave a description of Carlos Merriwell.

When this was over, it was not strange that Frank cared no more for sight-seeing that day, but preferred to go straight to the hotel, where he could meditate on his remarkable discovery that Carlos Merriwell was still living.

As Carlos was the son of Asher Dow Merriwell, to whose property he would have been the legal heir if it had not been left to Frank by will, it is not surprising that Frank wished to consider the situation somewhat.

The professor and Hans found he did not feel at all like answering questions, and so they let him alone.

The *Evening World* contained the story of Frank's remarkable escapes from death, and the following "scare headlines" were used:

"HE CAN'T BE KILLED.

"Pursued by a Mysterious and Deadly Foe, Brave Frank Merriwell Escapes Every Danger."

"Whew!" whistled Frank, when he read the heading,

"This is notoriety. I'd escaped this if the last attack upon me hadn't been made in the *World* building. Then there was no possible escape."

Frank wondered if his foe would continue to harass him hotly.

On the following morning he received a letter that was postmarked at Jersey City. It was directed and written in scrawling chirography with a lead pencil. Tearing open the envelope, Frank read as follows:

"BELOVED COUSIN: I had a notion that I was somewhat lucky myself, but you take the purse. However, I am not done with you yet. You thought me burned to death at Far'dale, but I escaped from the house and got out of town without being seen. Have been watching your movements since then, and knew when you were coming to New York. I hired two private detectives to keep me posted constantly, concerning your movements and your plans, and they did their work well. Was ready for you, and meant to do you. You have robbed me of property which is rightfully mine, and I do not mean that you shall enjoy it. But New York is far too hot to hold me longer, and so I leave you for a time. But we'll meet again. Till then, farewell, beloved cousin!

"CARLOS MERRIWELL."

"That may be a blind," thought Frank. "I'll remain on my guard all the while."

But Frank was not to be troubled further by his villainous cousin while he remained in New York City, nor was Carlos Merriwell captured by the police, for he had, indeed, departed.

During the next ten days Frank and his companions enjoyed the sights and pleasures of New York to their hearts' satisfaction, and then they left the metropolis to continue their travels, Hans and the professor going ahead to Chicago and Frank first paying a necessary visit to his home.

Although Frank did not know it, Carlos Merriwell had spoken truly when he said they would meet again.

CHAPTER XV.

DE LANCEY DUNCAN.

"This seat taken?"

The question was asked of Frank, who sat alone, on the train bound West.

"No, sir."

"Good enough! I'm sick of riding in the smoker. Good place in there to cure hams. I'll smell of smoke for a month. Going to Chicago, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Great village. Beats all creation. New York isn't in it with Chicago. Chicago's got hustle, bustle, rush, go, snap, vim, and other things too numerous to mention. It is destined to be the metropolis of the new world. You're from the East?"

"Yes."

"I knew it. You wear it all over you. Bet you say *She-car-go*. My name is De Lancey Duncan. Sorry I haven't a card. If we're going to be seatmates, let's be sociable. What's your name?"

"Frank Merriwell."

"That's first-rate—almost as good as De Lancey Duncan. By Jove! I believe we look something alike, and we are dressed very nearly alike. Great Scott! And our alligator grips are alike! Say, Frank Merriwell, we must be careful not to get mixed."

Frank laughed. There was something rushing, bustling, breezy about De Lancey Duncan—something extremely fresh, as it appeared to Frank. For all of De Lancey's free-and-easy air, the boy from the East distrusted him vaguely. Yet it seemed to Frank that his new seatmate lacked sincerity.

Frank Merriwell was an acute observer; he was a student of human nature, and he was not deceived very often.

It was true that they were dressed much alike; it was

true that their alligator grips were alike, and it was true that they slightly resembled each other in other features.

Duncan held his grip on his knees, clinging fast to it. Frank's rested on the floor at their feet.

The train was running through Northern Indiana. Prairie lands lay on both sides of the track. At times they passed little collections of wooden houses, built in straight lines, every house looking like every other house, and all looking desolate and lonesome, for all of companionship. Sometimes these little houses were uplifted on posts that held them free from the ground, often they were surrounded by dirty children, and slattern women lounged in the doors to watch the train pass.

There were villages that seemed strangely flat and monotonous to Frank's unaccustomed eyes. He had begun to feel bored, and had been covertly admiring the profile of a pretty girl who sat opposite. De Lancey Duncan seemed a welcome diversion, and then came that feeling of distrust.

Frank was a believer in first impressions. He had found that, in almost every case, with him first impressions were right impressions.

But he resolved to study Duncan; it would take up his time—give him something for amusement.

Having settled himself in the seat, Duncan looked around nervously.

Frank was watching. He saw Duncan's eyes and the eyes of the pretty girl opposite meet, and then the girl looked away quickly.

Duncan turned to Frank once more.

"First visit to Chicago?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You will enjoy it," assured De Lancey, patronizingly. "You can't help it. Now, I have traveled; I've been around in this country quite extensively, and I've crossed the pond. Ever been over?"

Frank was forced to confess that he had not. De Lancey smiled on him in a sympathizing, pitying way that made Frank feel rather insignificant—and rather angry.

"It's pleasant," declared Frank's new companion. "London is a large city—larger than Chicago. But we've got plenty of ground out here—we can expand

without taking in Long Island, New Jersey, and the Atlantic Ocean. We're not obliged to resort to any 'Greater New York' sort of scheme. Now, you may live in New York; I may be rapping you."

"I do not live in New York, and you are not hitting me. Go on, I find you very diverting."

"Thank you," nodded De Lancey, accepting Frank's words as a compliment. "As I said, Chicago has plenty of room to spread out—she is bound to spread. The time is coming when she'll be the largest city in the world, you bet!"

"That is possible."

"Possible, possible! My boy, it is certain, it is assured. If you study Chicago fairly and without prejudice, you will soon agree with me. Friends in the city?"

"I expect so."

"Expect—what do you mean?"

"That I expect to meet some friends when I arrive there."

"Where do you stop?"

"Palmer House."

"Now, why do you stop there? There are other hotels—the Great Northern, Grand Pacific, Leland, and a score more with advantages superior to the Palmer House."

"I anticipate that my friends have arrived at the Palmer House, and engaged rooms."

"Oh, that's it? That's different. How did it happen?"

"We were in New York together, and I had some business that took me to my home. While I attended to that, my friends came on to Chicago, and I followed as soon as possible."

"I see, I see. Traveling for pleasure?"

"Yes."

De Lancey Duncan regarded Frank with renewed interest.

"That's pleasant. Why don't you go abroad?"

"I am going; but my uncle especially directed in his will that I was to see something and know something of my own country before going abroad. In some respects, my uncle was odd and original. Unlike most Americans, he believed that a man should know his own country be-

fore visiting others, so he could answer questions. He held in derision the cads who rush over to London and Paris and visit the Alps and the Rhine without having seen Niagara Falls, the Rocky Mountains, the Yosemite, or Yellowstone Park.”

Frank meant this for a rap, but De Lancey took it as cool as could be.

“Your uncle was quite right, Merriwell,” he said. “The wonders of our own country are well worth seeing. I presume your uncle was a rich old chump who never saw much of anything himself. Such old chaps always think they know a heap. They give me lassitude. About all they are good for is to die and leave their rocks to some of us young fellows who know how to blow the cash.”

Frank drew back from Duncan, for this sort of a speech was decidedly offensive.

But De Lancey did not notice Merriwell's movement; he was looking round again in that nervous, excited way, while his fingers seemed to clutch the alligator grip with a tenacious clasp, as if he feared it would be taken from him.

Something made Frank wonder what the grip contained. Why did its owner cling to it so persistently?

“There is something about this fellow that's not square and aboveboard,” was Frank's mental decision.

The train whistle blew for a crossing, and Duncan started, seeming to turn pale. Then he settled back on the seat with a breath of relief.

Frank wondered still more. De Lancey Duncan was strangely nervous and excitable for a healthy youth. He seemed to fear something—seemed to dread some danger.

Once more Duncan began to talk, and he seemed to rattle on in a way intended to hide his nervousness, but which made it all the plainer to Frank. He insisted in giving the lad from the East “tips” and “pointers” about Chicago, as he called them.

It was not long before Frank made a rather interesting discovery. Duncan did not seem to be talking about what he had seen and knew, although he thus pretended; on the contrary, he was quoting freely from a guidebook that Frank had in his grip at that moment.

That set Frank to wondering if his companion was a

- pour
paris
Ld etc

native of Chicago, as he plainly wished to appear, or if he was pretending to be a native for some reason known to himself alone.

Once or twice the fellow glanced in a peculiar manner at the girl across the aisle, but, after that first glance, she seemed to notice him not at all.

All at once Duncan stopped in the midst of a speech and started.

The front door of the car had opened to admit a rather rough-looking man, whose right leg had been cut off above the knee, and who wore a stout wooden peg in place of the missing limb. The man had sandy whiskers around the lower part of his face, but his upper lip, his cheeks, and his chin were shaved. Somehow he looked like an old sailor, and a tough old sailor at that.

The man closed the door hastily, and his eyes ran over the faces of the passengers in the car.

Stump, thump, stump, thump, stump, thump—down the aisle of the car came the man with the wooden leg. He looked at De Lancey Duncan, and De Lancey Duncan looked at him. The man held his clinched left hand before him, with the thumb, short and stubbed, pointing upward. De Lancey Duncan caught his breath, and nearly fell off the seat, dropping the alligator grip.

Stump, thump, stump, thump—the man with the wooden leg continued on his way down the aisle.

The engine slowed up for a station.

"Excuse me," fluttered Duncan. "We stop here. I expect to see a friend at the station. Will return presently."

He caught up the alligator grip, and hastened toward the rear of the car.

"Well, there's something decidedly queer about that, or I'm a wooden-headed Injun!" thought Frank Merriwell.

*swatched alligator grip
the one Frank now has
is loaded with \$20 banknotes.*

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WRECK.

The train stopped. In a moment a man came into the car in which Frank Merriwell was sitting. He was dressed in black, and his eyes were keen and piercing. He passed Frank, at whom he glanced sharply, and took a seat directly behind the boy.

In a few moments the train began to move again, and it was soon drawing out of the town.

Frank looked for De Lancey Duncan to return, but that youth did not put in an appearance.

"He said he'd come back. Wonder if he has left us,"

Frank took a fancy to examine his guidebook, and see just how accurate Duncan had been in his quotations, so he picked up the alligator grip and attempted to open it. It did not yield readily to his touch.

"Didn't know I locked it," muttered Frank, as he fumbled in his pocket for his keys, which he quickly brought forth.

Selecting the right key, he quickly unlocked the grip, which seemed strangely stuffed with something, and immediately sprang open when released by the lock.

Then Frank Merriwell uttered an exclamation of utter amazement, staring wildly at the contents of the grip.

For it was stuffed to overflowing with packages of bright new twenty-dollar banknotes!

Little wonder Frank was astonished.

The girl across the aisle uttered a little shriek, and seemed fully as amazed as Frank.

"What does this mean?" gasped the boy. "This does not belong to me!"

"Very well," said a cold, even voice in Frank's ear; "I will take charge of it, and of you also."

A hand came over the bewildered lad's shoulder and snapped the grip closed, while another hand fastened on Frank Merriwell's collar.

Frank looked up and saw the man in black who had entered the car at the last station.

"What—what do you mean?" stammered the dazed lad. "There is some mistake here."

"I fancy so," smiled the man, grimly, "and you made it. You can't work your little game so easy. The cipher message was intercepted and read. Result, you are nabbed."

"But I tell you there is a mistake!" panted Frank. "This is not my grip! I don't know how it came here. Yes, I do!" he almost shouted. "The other fellow—the boy who looks like me—he dropped it!"

"So there is a boy who looks like you," sarcastically asked the man in black. "That gag is stale; it won't work, my fly youngster. You are caught, and that's the size of it."

"Wait—listen! I am telling you the truth. There was another boy—he came and sat with me. Said his name was De Lancey Duncan. He looked something like me, was dressed like me, carried an alligator grip like mine."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, lots. He acted nervous."

"So do you."

"Give me a show; I'll explain it all."

"Go ahead. I am curious to hear what kind of a fairy tale you can invent."

"He talked about Chicago, but, from his talk, I mistrusted that he had never been there. He tried to appear free and easy, but he was excited."

"You're doing first-rate."

"Just before the train pulled into the last station——"

"Known as Valparaiso."

"——a man with sandy whiskers and a wooden leg entered the car. When he passed this seat, he clinched his left hand and held up his thumb—like this. My seatmate started and dropped his grip, which he had been carrying on his knees. Then, when the train whistled for Valparaiso, he caught up one of the grips and dusted out, saying he was going to meet a friend. He must have taken my grip and left his own; and he didn't come back."

The man in black smiled again. It was a cold, incredulous smile.

"You do first-rate," he said, scoffingly. "You have concocted a fine story on the spur of the moment; but it doesn't go down for a cent."

"You do not believe me?"

"Not a great deal."

"I can prove it—I will prove it!" palpitated Frank, in distress. "The young lady across the aisle—she saw him. Didn't you, miss?"

The girl's face was pale, and she shook her head.

"Really, I do not remember," she declared. "I did not notice him."

"You can't work the rifle, my hearty," said the man in black. "You answer the description, and you are the chap I want. Here, on they go!"

He had produced a pair of handcuffs, and he attempted to snap them on Frank's wrists; but he found that was no simple trick, as he quickly discovered.

"Wait a moment!" cried the lad. "Tell me what it means first."

"It means that you are arrested."

"And you are an officer?"

"Just so."

"It is an outrage!" cried Frank. "I can prove who I am. I appeal to the other passengers. Surely some of them saw the other boy and the man with the wooden leg."

"I don't care if there were twenty other boys and forty men with wooden legs!" growled the officer. "I have you, and you are the chap I want. It is useless to resist. I shall have to handle you roughly if you do, and——"

He was interrupted by a crash, a shock that hurled man and boy off their feet, wild shrieks, groans, chaos, confusion.

Bruised, battered, bewildered, Frank found himself hemmed in by broken timbers and surrounded by groaning and shrieking passengers. He quickly understood that there had been a terrible accident, and the train was derailed.

Cars had been smashed and splintered, and Frank wondered why he was not instantly killed.

He found himself penned in an arch of timbers, but beyond a few severe bruises he seemed quite uninjured.

As for the man in black, he seemed to have utterly and completely disappeared.

"Help! Save me!"

It was a feminine cry of distress, and it sounded near at hand, but Frank could see no one in the darkness of the wreckage.

"Where are you?" he called.

"Here, here—close at hand!"

He reached between some broken timbers and touched the person who had called. His hand was clasped by another, small, soft, warm—the hand of a girl.

"It must be the girl who sat opposite," thought Frank.

Then he asked:

"Are you badly hurt?"

"I don't know," was the answer. "I am terribly shaken up, and I cannot move here. Please get me out!"

"I'll do it if I can."

He fell to work, but he could not seem to exert all his strength in that cramped space. However, he made some progress, and she encouraged him.

"You are the boy who was arrested?" she asked.

"I am the boy somebody tried to arrest," said Frank; "but this accident made the attempt a failure."

"Where is that man?"

"I don't know."

"He isn't with you?"

"He doesn't seem to be."

"Perhaps he was killed."

It seemed to Frank that she said this as if she really hoped such a thing had happened.

In the course of a few moments, Frank succeeded in making an opening large enough to enable him to drag her through, and he found it was indeed the girl to whom he had appealed. She did not appear to be injured at all.

"So far so good," said Frank. "Now we must get out of this pen. Here seems to be the remnants of a car window. Possibly we may be able to creep out beyond. I'll try it, and, if I am successful, you may follow."

He went ahead, and, by considerable exertion, succeeded in getting through the opening and making a way to the open air. Then he called to the girl, and she followed him.

Looking around, Frank beheld a scene of indescribable confusion. Four passenger coaches had been derailed, and were piled in a confused heap beside the track. The one in which Frank had been riding had suffered the most, being shattered in a terrible manner, so that the boy wondered how one of its occupants had escaped a frightful death.

"We may consider ourselves lucky," he observed to the girl. "How we pulled out so well I do not know."

Men were at work on the wreckage laboring to extricate the unfortunate passengers pinned beneath. Frank spoke to one of them.

"How did the accident happen?" he asked.

"Dunno. Must have been a defective axle, flaw in a wheel, or something of that sort," was the answer.

Frank turned to speak to the girl again, but paused with his mouth open, staring about him.

She was gone!

CHAPTER XVII.

ESCAPE AND PURSUIT.

"Didn't stop to say thank you," muttered Frank. "Skipped without a word."

He fancied she must be near at hand, and something caused him to search about for her. But she had vanished in a singular manner, and he found no trace of her.

Then Frank set about assisting in the work of rescue; but he found his aid was not required, as there were already more persons thus employed than could labor to advantage.

The cars had not taken fire, consequently the horrors of a conflagration were not added to the catastrophe.

Frank was decidedly uneasy, for he knew not what moment might witness him again in the grasp of an officer of the law. He made inquiries concerning the possibility of getting on to Chicago without delay, and was informed that a local train left Valparaiso within forty minutes by one of the other roads which passed through the place.

How could he reach Valparaiso within forty minutes? That was a question that began to trouble him.

The point at which the catastrophe occurred was within a short distance of the main highway for teams, but it was a sure thing that he could not walk to Valparaiso within the time that would elapse before the local pulled out for Chicago.

As he was meditating on the situation he observed a bicycle amid the wreck of the baggage car.

"Great Scott!" muttered the boy. "If I owned that wheel, I could make the town and catch that train."

The bicycle did not appear to be damaged at all, and Frank wondered if he could not find the owner and buy it. Perhaps the owner was dead, but Frank decided to look for him.

He did not look far. From the wreck he saw some men dragging a man whose clothes were torn, and who

seemed to be somewhat injured, although it was evident at a glance that he was not seriously hurt.

That person was the man in black—the very one who had attempted to arrest Frank!

“Jingoes!” gasped the staring boy. “He’s all right, and he’ll nab me if I linger here. I must light out lively.”

He was right. The man saw him, struggled to his feet, pointed a shaking finger at him, and shouted:

“Stop that boy!”

“I guess not!” palpitated Frank. “You’ll have to get a hustle on if you do.”

He made a rush for the baggage car, hearing the man cry out something else, hearing other men shout at him, knowing he was liable to be seized and detained if he faltered.

“I’ll have to borrow that wheel, even if I can’t find the owner; but I’ll leave it at the station in Valparaiso, and tell somebody how I came by it. Hope the owner will get it all right, if he is lucky enough to come out of this scrape with his life.”

He grasped the wheel, lifted it lightly, clambered out of the ruins, put it down and ran down toward the road, pushing it along.

Several men were running toward him, as he saw by casting one fleeting glance over his shoulder.

“Stop! stop! You’re wanted!”

They were shouting at him, and he set his teeth resolutely, made a flying leap, and landed in the saddle. His feet caught the pedals in a twinkling, and he bent to his task, half laughing:

“Come on! You are welcome to catch me—if you can.”

For a short distance the grass interfered with his locomotion, but he soon reached the road, into which he wheeled, heading toward Valparaiso.

“Stop!” roared the men.

“Good-by!” cried Frank, with a defiant wave of his hand.

Then he leaned far over the handle-bars, and worked the pedals, swiftly. In truth, there was little chance for the pursuers to overtake Frank Merriwell then.

But Frank did not know how hotly he would be pur-

sued; he did not know but a team might be pressed into service to follow him.

"I'll give them a good race, anyway," he muttered.

In a few moments he had passed beyond view of the wreck, and then he settled to a pace that he knew he could hold straight through to Valparaiso.

Twice it was necessary to make inquiries where other roads crossed the one he should follow, but within the forty minutes he was in the town.

Without difficulty, he obtained directions to the station he was seeking, and, on arriving there, he was informed that he had ten minutes to wait for the train.

Frank disposed of the wheel he had confiscated, explaining that he had taken it from the wreck, and, as it happened, he was the first to bear intelligence of such a wreck to the town. He found himself questioned, pestered, and pursued by astonished and incredulous persons, and he became aware that he had obtained a sudden and unenviable notoriety.

However, he talked as little as possible, and he took care to secure a ticket for Chicago, as the ticket he had purchased for the other line was taken up, and it would not have been good over any but the roads named upon it had he still held it in his possession.

Frank was nervous. Every minute seemed an hour, and he kept his eyes open for pursuers. He had a horror of being stopped, of being arrested there. He knew he could not escape detention if such a thing as his arrest should be made, and he would be put to trouble and expense to prove his identity and innocence.

Innocence of what? That puzzled him. What had De Lancey Duncan done? Had he stolen those crisp new bank notes with which the alligator grip was stuffed? Of course he had done something unlawful, for it was certain the officer had attempted to arrest Frank through a mistaken belief that he was Duncan.

Frank was relieved when the train rolled in at the station, and he made haste to get aboard. Still he watched the streets leading to the station—watched them with keen anxiety.

"All aboard!"

The train was going to start; the conductor was giving the signal.

Who was that? A horseman coming down the street at a mad gallop, the horse covered with foam, the man waving his hand wildly.

"Great Jupiter!" gasped Frank. "It is the detective!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN SPRIGGSBORO.

The train moved; the man was not seen by any one about the station with the exception of Frank.

"Faster! faster!" panted the boy. "If he makes them see him, they may stop!"

He knew the man was shouting, and he seemed to hear his cries. Urged by voice and hand, the horse was fairly tearing down the street.

But the train was gaining speed. If the man were not seen in a moment, he would not be seen at all.

The station shut out Frank's view of the horseman. The engine was puffing and snorting, the car wheels were rolling faster and faster, and Frank Merriwell's heart was growing lighter and lighter.

The train was fairly on its way at last, and the horseman had not been seen.

Looking back, Frank saw the man whirl around the corner of the station and gaze in angry disappointment after the departing train. For a moment he remained thus, then he sprang from the horse to the station platform, and rushed into the building.

"Wonder what that means?" speculated the boy. "He is up to some kind of a game. By Jove! I know! He'll telegraph ahead—I'll be arrested at the next station, which is Spriggsboro!"

This thought put the boy in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. At first it seemed that he would have to submit to arrest, and then prove his innocence of any charge against him, for he could scarcely conceive of any other way out of it.

But Frank's stubborn side was fully aroused. He had avoided arrest thus far, and he did not fancy submitting now. He felt that it would be an acknowledgment of his inability to outwit the officer, and he set about trying to

devise some scheme for escaping any person who might attempt to detain him at Spriggsboro, the next station.

"If I escape there, all the other stations will be warned—I'll find officers everywhere."

As he thought of this he became angry. What right had any one to arrest and detain him? He had done nothing to merit such treatment, and he would not stand it.

It was easy enough to say he wouldn't stand it, but how was he to get around it?

"I'll try," muttered Frank.

"Tickets—tickets!"

The conductor was coming through the train. When he reached Frank he asked the boy if he were going straight through without stop. Frank did not know, and he said he might have to stop off somewhere before he got into the city. So the conductor punched his ticket and handed it back to him.

Frank wanted to ask questions; he opened his mouth to do so, closed it again.

"No," he thought; "I'll not call too much attention to myself. If I should ask too many questions, I might somehow give away what I decided to do. I'll keep mum; I'll go it alone."

From Valparaiso to Spriggsboro is seven miles. Frank was on the watch for Spriggsboro. He did not propose to be taken into the town without knowing it; he was ready for a move.

It did not take many minutes to make the run. The engine gave a wild, doleful wail, after the fashion of all the engines of the local trains running into Chicago. A brakeman flung open the door of the car and squealed:

"Spreegs-burrah! Spre-egs-burrah!"

"Now's my time," thought Frank. "If I'm going to skip, I must get a move on right away."

He was in the last car. He arose and carelessly sauntered toward the rear. Opening the door, he stepped out on the platform. A moment later he was down on the steps, looking for a chance to swing to the ground.

Fortunately, there was no other person on the platform, and Frank found he was not to be hampered in any way. The train was not a lightning express, and he believed he

could make the jump successfully. Anyway, he was determined to make the attempt.

The town limits had been entered; ahead was a crossing.

"I'll try it there."

He made ready, swung down, let go, struck on his feet like a cat, ran with the train, and did not fall.

"Very well," breathed the boy, with deep satisfaction, as he stopped to stare after the train, thrusting his hat back on his head and his hands deep in his pockets. "What next?"

"Say, you're a dandy—you are! You did the trick slick, and that's straight goods."

Frank looked around. A boy sat in a carriage near at hand, clinging fast to the reins which lay along the back of a dancing young horse. The horse had spirit and snap, and it was plain the boy had driven him as near the cars as possible, for the purpose of getting the animal accustomed to them.

"Out of the road," he called to Frank. "Ginger wants to go, and when Ginger wants to go it isn't so very easy to hold him. I don't want to run you down."

"Don't do it," said Frank. "Hold on a minute; I want to chin with you."

"Fire away, but make it lively. Ginger is getting more an' more excited. He doesn't like to stand. Whoa, there—whoa, pony!"

"He seems to be a mettlesome animal. Can he travel?"

"You bet! He's a flyer!"

"Whose horse is he?"

"Mine."

"So?"

"Yep. Dad gave him to me if I'd stay at home another year. You see, I'd tired of Spriggsboro, and I'm sick of hoeing corn. I want to see the world—I want to see life—whoa, Ginger! Easy, boy! Say, if you talk with me, you'll have to get in here. Can't make him stand any longer."

"In it is."

A moment later Frank was seated beside Ginger's owner, who gave the lively young horse rein, and away they went.

"Say," said Frank, "perhaps you are the very person I am looking for. Do you want to make five dollars?"

"Do I! Well, say! I don't get hold of V's every day. Do I! See me smile!"

"I found myself on the wrong route," explained Frank. "Didn't want to lose time, and so I dropped off here to look for somebody to set me right."

The stranger boy looked puzzled. It was plain this explanation did not quite satisfy him; but he refrained from asking questions. He would not seem to insinuate that Frank was not telling him the truth.

As for Frank, he was bound to stick as close to the truth as possible. Surely he had found himself on the wrong route. He could not tell everything; it would not do to tell too much.

"Now," continued Frank, "I want to get out of this place right away. What's the name of the railroad to the north of this town?"

"Baltimore and Ohio."

"That's it. What's the name of the nearest station on the Baltimore and Ohio?"

"There are two about the same distance from here, and they're McCool and Coburg. If anything, I reckon McCool is the nearer."

"Let's see—which place is nearer Chicago?"

"McCool by nearly twenty miles as the railroad runs."

"How far is it to McCool?"

"Some say ten, some say twelve miles."

"Trains run often over the Baltimore and Ohio?"

"Pretty often."

"How is the road to McCool?"

"Good."

"Land me there within an hour and a half, and I'll give you a V."

"It's a bargain! I'll have to drive home to let dad know, but that's on the road. I'd like to strike this sort of a snap every day. Don't worry, Ginger; you'll have plenty of chance to stretch your legs between here and McCool."

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO CHICAGO.

And so, with scarcely any delay, without being molested at all, Frank left Spriggsboro behind, and found himself being whirled across the country toward McCool.

The autumn air was crisp and bracing, but the sun shone brightly, and Frank's blood seemed to circulate more freely in his veins.

The boy who owned the team said his name was Tom Morgan, and the two lads were soon pretty well acquainted.

Tom was a lively sort of lad, and he was afflicted with a burning desire to get away from Spriggsboro and his father's farm.

"Was born and raised out here," he said. "Never saw any city but Chicago, never saw any water but Lake Michigan, never saw any hills worth mentioning. I'm sick of prairie land, I'm sick of most everything around here. Where are you from? Did you ever see the ocean?"

Then Frank proceeded to entertain Tom, so that the drive to McCool seemed remarkably short to the latter.

Frank kept looking his companion over. They were nearly of the same height and build. The cloths that would fit one ought to fit the other.

"When they find I have jumped 'em at Spriggsboro, it's ten to one my description will be dispatched to every station in Chicago. The police will be on the watch for me; I'll be nabbed when I arrive in the city."

Such a thing was not pleasant for Frank to contemplate, and he fell to studying on a scheme to defeat the officers. Tom Morgan was rather roughly dressed, his clothes being in strong contrast to the natty traveling suit worn by Frank.

"Look here, Tom," Frank finally said; "I'm going to tell you something."

"Let it come."

"First, I want you to take a square look at me, and say if you think I'm crooked."

"Not on your life!" was the prompt return. "You're white; I can see it sticking out all over you bigger'n a house."

"Thank you, Tom. Now I will tell you just why I am jumping from Spriggsboro to McCool."

"I know," grinned Tom.

"You do?" cried Frank, startled.

"That's what."

"Then why am I doing so?"

"You're running away," declared Morgan, astutely. "Oh, I suspected it in the first place, and now I'm sure of it."

"Well, I am," admitted Frank.

However, he did not explain from whom he was running away; he left that as a matter for Tom's imagination to work on.

"I don't blame you," asserted the young owner of the team. "I've been tempted to run away myself. By jinks! I'm liable to do it some time!"

"Well, now," said Frank, "it's likely my description has been sent on ahead, and I run a good chance of getting nabbed almost anywhere."

"Likely."

"I don't want to be nabbed."

"I believe it."

"And I'm going to try to fool 'em."

"Go ahead!"

"Now, Tom, my clothes are a give-away, and I want to get rid of them. They ought to fit you all right, and yours ought to fit me. Let's exchange."

Tom's eyes bulged.

"I'd like to," he admitted, "but I ain't got the money to pay the difference."

"There won't be any difference to pay."

"What?"

"We'll trade even. I'll take your outfit, and you may have mine. It will be a favor to me, for it may enable me to avoid pursuit. What do you say?"

"Done."

Out on the prairie where there were no houses near the team stopped, and the two lads proceeded to exchange clothing. It did not take them long to make the shift, and it made a remarkable alteration in the appearance of both.

Frank's clothes fitted Tom as if they had been made for him, and the country boy was changed into a rather spruce-looking chap.

"Get your hair cut, Tom, and you'll look fine," said Frank.

The change in Merriwell was equally as marked. The clothes seemed to transform him into a decidedly ordinary-appearing boy, if one did not regard his sharp, clear-cut face too closely. He pulled Tom's old lop-brimmed hat far down on his head, so his neatly trimmed hair was concealed.

This being done, they jumped into the carriage again, and away Ginger whirled them toward McCool.

"Now, Tom," said Frank, "I want you to do me still another favor."

"Name it."

"When you return to Spriggsboro, I want you to go directly home, and I don't want you to show yourself in town before this evening."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want any one to question you and find out how you obtained these clothes, unless you are forced to tell your own folks the truth. I want to have plenty of time to get away without being stopped before it gets abroad that I am not dressed as usual. Do you see?"

"Sure."

"And you'll do it?"

"Yes."

"Good! I'll make that V an X, and here it is."

He gave Tom a ten-dollar bill, which was received with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Say!" cried Tom Morgan, "won't I sport around Spriggsboro for a while! Well, I should murmur!"

Before long McCool was seen in the distance.

"I'll leave you outside the town," said Frank. "I'll walk in. I'm bound to do this business in a way that will enable me to escape detection if possible."

So the horse was stopped beyond the limits of the place, and the boys bade each other good-by.

"I won't forget you, Frank," declared Tom; "and I hope we'll meet again some time."

"Hope so," said Frank. "Good-by."

"Good-by."

Tom turned Ginger back toward Spriggsboro, and Frank trudged into McCool. He had the appearance of a country boy, the walk of a country boy, and—strangest of all—his face had changed till it looked like the face of a rather stupid country boy.

Merriwell was a natural actor and mimic. He was continually studying characters, and he had practiced in altering the expression of his face. And now the friends who knew him best might have passed him on the road without recognizing him.

Straight to the railroad station he made his way, and he found he had time to secure a square meal before the next train departed for Chicago. As Frank was decidedly hungry, he secured the meal.

It was not far from mid-afternoon when he found himself on a train bound for Chicago. He was keeping up his assumed character of a rather dull country boy, for he did not know who might be a detective on that very train.

It was not long after leaving McCool before he obtained his first view of Lake Michigan, the waters of which, to his surprise, were dashing in dirty green waves against the wooden pilings which protected the banks. Frank had not expected that a fresh water lake would appear that color.

Naturally, he felt nervous, for he knew not what might happen when Chicago was reached.

Through the outlying towns and suburbs the train ran, and it seemed to Frank that the station would never be reached, even after he knew they had been in the city of Chicago some time.

At last, however, the train pulled into the Baltimore and Ohio Station on Fifth avenue, and Frank knew that he was finally in Chicago. He left the train without being troubled, and, unmindful of the howling carriage drivers, entered the station.

Just ahead of him he observed a girl who was carrying

an alligator grip that was strangely like the one he had lost. Something led him to hasten his steps till he obtained a fair look at her face.

He came near uttering a cry of astonishment.

"Cæsar's ghost!" he gasped. "It's the girl I saved from the wreck!"

CHAPTER XX.

PLAYING THE SHADOW.

Frank Merriwell had an excellent memory for faces; he seldom forgot a face he had once seen and taken note of, and he knew he was not mistaken in this case.

"Cæsar's ghost!" he repeated. "Where did she drop from?"

She did not appear to be more than eighteen years of age, but she had a self-reliant, independent air that fascinated Frank and filled him with wonder. Plainly she was a girl who cared little for the services of a chaperon.

Having satisfied himself that it was beyond a doubt the girl he had dragged from the wreck, the boy's eyes fell again on the alligator grip she carried.

"Is it mine, or is it De Lancey Duncan's?" speculated Frank. "If it's mine, I want it; if it's Duncan's, I don't want it, for all of the money it contains. That money's bound to get somebody into trouble."

He would have given much to know for a certainty whether the grip belonged to him or not. It attracted him, it filled him with doubts and fears, it dragged him after the girl like a loadstone.

"If she'd stop! If she'd open the grip!"

But he knew there was not one chance in ten thousand that she would do anything of the sort. Still, he followed her, watching the grip with his keen eyes.

The girl left the station for the street, where horse cars and cabs were plentiful. She moved to the corner of Fifth avenue and Harrison street, and there she stood, looking first one way and then the other. She seemed somewhat perplexed.

"Expected to meet somebody here," thought Frank. "Somebody isn't on hand. She doesn't know what to do. Will she take a car, or will she not—which will she?"

A cab driver spotted her. He approached her, and

asked her to patronize him. At first she shook her head, but he continued to urge her. She took out a small gold watch and glanced at it, after which she asked him some questions, in reply to all of which he nodded, and said:

"Of course I can! I know every foot of the city. I'll take you right there."

Frank heard him say that, and straightway Frank began to look around for another cab, for he saw the girl hesitate, and then move along with the man.

"Look out, my boy," muttered Frank to himself; "look out, or you'll be left."

"Cab, sir—cab?"

Frank glanced toward the girl. She was just entering a cab, and he resolved to follow her. A red-faced, sandy-bearded cabby had hailed him, and he was at the man's side in a moment.

"Look!" he said, swiftly. "See that girl getting into that cab?"

"Sure."

"I want to follow her."

Cabby looked Frank over, and the latter actually blushed as he suddenly remembered that he looked awkward and countryfied.

"Do I git me fare in advance?" asked the driver.

In a moment Frank produced a five-dollar bill, which he thrust into the fellow's greedy hand, asking:

"Is that enough?"

"You bet! I'll foller 'em anywhere in the city's limits. Tumble in."

"If you have to go beyond the limits, I'll pay extra. But you mustn't let the other fellow get away."

"He can't lose this child; don't you worry about that, young feller."

Frank plunged into the cab, the door slammed, the man sprang up to his seat, his whip snapped, and away they went on the trail of the other cab.

"Never tried playing detective before," muttered the boy in the cab. "It's new business to me, but there may be something in it. I want my grip, but I want to know more than anything else if the grip she has contains all

that money or not. If so, she's sacking around a fortune in a mighty cool way. She's got nerve to let."

Up Harrison street, over the river, that was crowded with all sorts of craft, and away, winding in and out, here and there, went the two cabs.

Looking from the window, Frank sometimes caught glimpses of the cab he was pursuing, and he began to believe his driver was attending strictly to business.

The quarter of the city into which they soon plunged was wretched and dingy, and Frank fancied that the very air was heavy with soft coal smoke. The pedestrians on the streets had a dingy look, and cheap eating houses abounded.

From that section they entered yet another, where clothing stores abounded, all being of the Cheap John class.

All at once, the cab turned sharply about, went back around a corner, and stopped.

Cabby's florid face appeared at the door in a moment.

"Lively, young feller," he said. "They're around there to the right. She's gittin' out. Get a move on, and you won't lose her!"

"Good work!" complimented Frank, as he sprang out. "Here, take it! You've done first-rate."

He thrust a silver dollar into the man's hand.

Without stopping to hear cabby's thanks, Frank walked briskly round the corner.

Sure enough, half a block away was the cab he had hired the fellow to follow. The girl had left it, and she was settling with the driver. There seemed to be some disagreement, and the girl appeared decidedly angry. Finally, she gave the man some money, and he tipped his hat, sullenly.

Then the girl walked on briskly, and the man stared after her, muttering aloud.

Frank struck out after the girl, and, as he passed the cab driver, he heard the man growl:

"That chick's altogether too fly for her age. Said I overcharged. And now she's sprinting it! Didn't let me take her all the way to the place where she wants to go! That's odd!"

"You're right," thought Frank, as he hurried onward;

"but there are plenty of odd things connected with that young lady. This has been a day of odd happenings, and they may not be all over yet."

The girl turned a corner, looking back as she did so. She looked straight past Frank, not seeming to notice him at all. If she had looked straight at the boy, it is doubtful if she would have recognized in the slouching, awkward, country boy the neat and natty youth who dragged her from the railroad wreck earlier in the day.

The girl did not stop; she hastened along the street into which she had turned, little dreaming there was a trailer not far behind.

To Frank it seemed that she was trying to make sure she was not followed, and the boy lost little time in taking the opposite side of the street; but he did not lose sight of her for a single instant.

Another corner was reached by the girl, and she came near colliding with a young fellow who came from another direction, carrying an alligator grip in his hand.

Frank stared, and gasped:

"De Lancey Duncan!"

It was the breezy youth who had occupied the seat with him on the train.

The grip which he carried was the counterpart of the one in the possession of the girl.

"One of them belongs to me!" palpitated Frank. "It must be the one Duncan has, for he got away with mine. The other contains the money, I guess."

De Lancey Duncan and the girl both seemed astonished. They stared at each other, and the grips they carried. Then they spoke, and in a moment they were talking earnestly.

"They know each other!" came faintly from the lips of Frank, who was nearly knocked breathless by this discovery. "May I be shot!"

With every moment, Frank's interest and excitement were increasing. He was mystified, perplexed, bewildered.

The girl seemed to be accusing De Lancey Duncan of something, and he, at first, was too astounded to reply. When he would have opened the grip he carried, she

stopped him, and Frank fancied he understood what had passed between them.

"She charged him with making a blunder and getting the wrong grip. That must be it."

All at once, boy and girl turned and walked along the street together.

Frank followed.

Before long they came to a miserable little clothing store, over the narrow door of which was the name of the proprietor—Solomon Moses. Into this store they went, without hesitation.

"I mustn't get left now," muttered Frank, as he hastily made his way across the street and followed them into the store.

CHAPTER XXI.

LEFT TO THE FLAMES.

Frank walked in, boldly. As he did so, he heard a Jewish voice saying:

"So you dit got along all righd? I don'd igsbeet you ven I hear vat Meesther Sullifan hat to say. I don'd know but you pote been arresdet pefore dis."

"Oh, we're too soon for the cops, uncle," assured the girl, airily. "But Bob would have made a mess of it if it hadn't been for me. You see, he——"

"Nefer mindt dat here," said the old Jew, swiftly checking her. "Meeshter Sullifan vos in der pack room, un' he peen glat to see you. Valk righd in."

He flung open the door, and the boy and girl entered the back room. As they did so, Frank saw the same wooden-legged man who had been on the train come stumping toward them.

Then Frank allowed the door to slam, and Mr. Solomon Moses turned and hobbled painfully toward the front of the store, adjusting a pair of spectacles on his nose. Moses was an old man, as the gray in his hair and beard indicated, to say nothing of his decrepit gait and bent back.

"Vot coot I do vor you, mine friendt?" he asked, blandly, looking Frank over. "You vant a suid er clodes to-day, young shentleman?"

"Wal, I dunno," drawled Frank, staring around. "I kinder guess not, for I hain't got much money; but I'm short of handkerchiefs, and marm she told me to git some while I was in the city. I didn't know but I'd strike a trade in here."

"Dot vos righd, mine son—dot vos righd. I nefer gif you anyding but a pargain. I vos goin' oud uf drade pime-py, and I peen sellin' eferyding sheap. Vot you haf—von tozen uf dose peautiful ret pandanna handkershiefs, vot sell eferyvare else vor dirty sends abiece, but vot I sell vor fifteen sends, dwo for a gwarder, four for hallefer

tollar? You don'd peat dot vor a drade der whole cidy in, young shentleman."

Moses hastened to display his handkerchiefs, and Frank pretended to look them over. All the while the boy was longing to walk straight into that back room and claim his grip.

Frank began to think he had reached the end of his rope. He had followed the girl to that place, had seen her meet De Lancey Duncan, had seen them both met by the man with the wooden leg; but what did it amount to, after all? He had not solved the mystery of the gripful of money; he had not even recovered his own grip.

What kind of a shop was this he found himself in? He looked around at the miserable stock, illy shown by the light which sifted through the small, dirty windows, and he could not conceive that the old Jew made a living by selling clothing.

The face of the aged Jew was that of a scoundrel, and Frank began to believe he had been led to a den of crooks.

Still, it was hard to believe that the pretty girl knew anything of crooked ways.

How had De Lancey Duncan come by so much money, unless it had been stolen? If it had been stolen, Frank could readily understand why the officer had tried to arrest him.

Frank was thinking of going out and telling his story to the police, when he heard a wild shriek from somewhere in the back of the building. The shriek was followed by other cries, and, a few seconds later, a woman came bursting out of the back room, screaming:

"Fire! Fire! Solomon—Solomon Mosesh, der gazolene sdove vos igsblooded, und der puilding vos afire!"

"Vell, don'd peen so igscidet, Repecca," advised the old Jew, coolly. "I haf eferyding insured vor touble vat it vos vort. Uf der vire engin' don'd ged aroundt too soon, dot vire been a britty coot thing vor us."

Smoke began to roll out of the back of the building, and Frank Merriwell saw his opportunity. In a moment he darted into the back room, as if hurrying to aid in extinguishing the fire.

But he did not reach the room in which the fire was.

On a table in the first room he entered he saw both of the alligator-skin grips.

"I am bound to recover my property," he muttered. "But I wonder which one belongs to me?"

He could not tell without opening them, and he immediately unclasped the one nearest at hand. It was not locked; it flew open in a twinkling.

And once more Frank Merriwell gazed in fascination on those packages of bright, new twenty-dollar bills!

Frank must have stood thus some seconds, spellbound and staring; but he finally awoke, as from a trance, as the smoke was swiftly growing dense in that room.

"This does not belong to me," he said, aloud; "therefore, the other grip must be mine."

He grasped it. As he did so, he realized there was some one close behind him. A voice cried:

"Drop that!"

"Not much!" flashed Frank. "It's mine!"

He whirled, to confront De Lancey Duncan. No longer did Frank try to alter the expression of his face and the sound of his voice. Duncan knew him, and staggered in amazement, gasping:

"It's—it's the fellow I met on the train—the fellow I changed grips with!"

"You're right!" rang out Frank's voice. "I have traced my grip here, and I mean to take it away. The other one——"

He never finished the sentence, for at that moment he received a heavy blow on the head—a blow that stretched him helpless on the floor. He was not unconscious, for he seemed to see the man of the wooden leg looking down at him—seemed to hear the man say:

"He's a spy—he's dangerous! Leave him here!"

Then they left him there, closing and locking the door as they departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE GIRL.

Stunned and dazed though he was, Frank Merriwell seemed to fully realize his peril. He could hear the crackling of the flames in an adjoining room, and could see their glare. As soon as the door leading to the store was closed, the room the boy was in began to fill with smoke.

But, though he understood what had happened—though he knew he had been abandoned to die in the flames, it was some moments before he seemed able to throw off the numbness that had grasped his entire body when he was knocked to the floor.

At last, however, he stirred, he groaned, he lifted himself on his elbow.

Somehow, his first glance about was in search of the alligator-skin grips.

"Gone!" came in a whisper from his lips. "Both gone!"

Yes, both were gone; they had been taken away by the heartless human beings who had left the boy to perish as a spy in the flames.

Crackle! Crackle! He saw the fire spreading in the next room; the glare seemed to sear his eyes, the heat smote upon him, and he began to gasp for breath. He coughed; the smoke was getting too thick for him to breathe.

"I must get out of here!"

His legs shook under him when he dragged himself to his feet, and he found that he was very weak. There was a roaring sound in his head, and cold fingers of iron seemed to clutch, with crushing force, at his heart.

"Courage—strength!"

He reeled to the door, but it seemed fast and solid beneath his touch. He fell against it, gasping, coughing, strangling; he beat upon it with his fists.

"Help! Help!"

The cry was so faint that he knew it could not be heard beyond the bounds of the room he was in.

Was there no other avenue of escape?

He faced about, and the yellow glare of the flames drove him back against the door. The smoke caused tears to blind his eyes, and a blood-red haze seemed to float all about him.

The fire guarded the open door leading from that room. "Trapped! Doomed!" murmured the boy.

He made one last, frantic effort—he hammered on the door with his clinched fists—he kicked upon it with his feet.

No use! It withstood the shocks.

Down upon the floor sank Frank, overcome by weakness and the smoke. The crackling of the flames seemed to be the laughter of a hundred little demons. They were pointing at him with fiery fingers—they were reaching into the room in search of him!

Wild fancies began to flit through Frank's brain. The flames seemed like a cohort of fantastic creatures dancing a wild and merry dance; he heard funeral bells, and the rumbling of an earthquake; then followed a wild strain of music, and a long procession of black-robed figures filed past. Suddenly the boy fancied himself alone in a deserted city, where the sun beat down upon him with terrible heat. He wondered how he came there, he wondered where the inhabitants of the city were, he wondered how he could escape from the place. Then the lofty buildings of the great city began falling, one by one, crashing into the streets.

"He is in there somewhere! Save him!"

He heard the words, as if they came from a great distance, and, for all of his condition, he recognized the voice.

It was that of the strange girl he had rescued from the railroad train wreck.

Then he felt himself lifted and carried swiftly from the spot where he had fallen—carried into the open air.

It was some moments later when Frank recovered, to see a crowd of people in the street, to see a fire-engine near at hand, with a column of black smoke and sparks

rolling from the stack, and to see firemen pouring water into the burning building.

"How do you feel? You are better?"

The girl was close beside him, and he was propped on some steps, with his back against a brick wall. He looked at her, and he saw fear and anxiety expressed on her face.

"How did I get out?" Frank faintly whispered.

"The firemen brought you out," explained the girl. "They smashed down the door and brought you out here."

"You—you told them where to find me; I heard your voice directing them."

"Yes, I told them. You helped me out of the wreck; I was not going to leave you there to die."

"Good girl!"

"No!" she cried, in a way that astonished Frank. "I am a bad girl—a wicked girl! But I am not bad enough to desire the death of any one."

"I won't forget you!"

"Nor will I forget you!"

"What's your name?"

"Never mind. It would do you no good to know. I must leave you in a moment, and we'll never meet again."

"We may."

"Not if I can prevent it. I want to warn you. Be careful! You followed us, and it came near leading you to death. Be careful! You do not know Solomon Moses—you do not know Barty Sullivan. Be careful, I say!"

"Be careful of what? I do not understand you. I followed to recover my grip."

"Nonsense! There was nothing of great value in it. You followed because you saw what the other grip contained. You cannot deceive me."

"Well, if you cannot be deceived, then tell me to whom all that money in the other grip belongs."

"I knew it!" cried the girl. "I knew it was that which had aroused your curiosity! The money was not stolen, not a dollar of it—I'll swear to that!"

"But the officer——"

"The one who tried to arrest you? Ha! That was a joke!"

"On me—yes."

"On the officer, as well. But you are all right now. I can't talk with you more—I must leave you. I would not leave you for the fire. I skipped them—I slipped back—I told the firemen you were in there. Now, we are square for what you did for me. I always like to square my debts."

Frank was strangely interested in this most singular girl. She was bright as a new dollar, and as self-reliant as a man of the world. The boy had never before seen a girl quite like this one. Somehow, he could not help feeling admiration for her, although some of her ways astonished him.

The crowd in the street was growing denser. Reddish flames flared out from some of the windows of the burning building, flinging a ruddy glare against other buildings across the street, lighting the features of the strange girl, for it was growing dark with the coming of night.

She drew away.

"I must leave you now. Good-by."

Still weak and unsteady, Frank got upon his feet. With an impulse of chivalry, he reached to lift his hat, but found it was gone. Then, with a still bolder impulse, he held out his hand.

"Won't you take it?" he asked.

She hesitated; then she placed her warm fingers in his grasp, and her face was half turned away.

"Thank you, miss," he said, sincerely; "thank you for telling the firemen where to find me."

"Oh, don't thank me!" she cried, petulantly. "I don't deserve thanks—I don't deserve anything!"

"Yes, you do—you deserve a good beating!"

The voice was hoarse with anger, and the man with the wooden leg appeared at her side. He clutched her arm, he savagely pulled her away.

"Come!" he grated. "A pretty mess you'd make!"

"Stop!" cried Frank. "If you harm her——"

The man paid no heed to those words. He was hurrying away with the girl, and both were swallowed by the

swaying crowd that watched the firemen fighting the flames.

Weak, swaying, uncertain, Frank tried to follow. The pack of human beings closed before him, and he had not the strength to force his way through.

"It's useless!" murmured the boy. "I cannot follow!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW DANGER.

Unsteady, uncertain, dismayed by his own weakness, Frank was forced to seek the curbing and sit down once more. His lungs still seemed filled with smoke, and he coughed painfully. There was a dull throbbing in his head.

For some time Frank sat and rested, and he gained strength with each passing moment.

He wondered at the strange things that had happened to him during the day, and, but for the clothes he wore, but for his throbbing head and aching lungs, he might have fancied he had dreamed it all.

There was a mystery about the strange girl, the youth who had given his name as De Lancey Duncan, and the fierce old man with the wooden leg—a mystery Frank Merriwell would have given much to solve.

The man had looked very fierce when he appeared and clutched the girl by the arm, and she had seemed strangely submissive for one of her independence and spirit.

"He's her master—she's afraid of him," thought Frank. "She has to do as he says. He was the one who gave me the tap on the head, and he left me to roast. I won't forget her; I won't forget him!"

He got upon his feet. Something led him to search through the crowd for some one of the mysterious trio; but he could not find a trace of them.

It was getting dark.

"I must report at the Palmer House," thought Frank. "The professor and Hans expected me hours ago. They will hear of the accident, and they'll think I was killed."

He was disinclined to leave the locality, and he resolved to know how to find his way back there, so he learned the name of the street, and the number of the burning building.

Frank walked away, although he knew not which direc-

tion to pursue. He looked for a cab, but cabs were decidedly scarce in that part of the city.

"I must have different clothing from this suit I have on," he decided. "I do not fancy I would be admitted to the Palmer House in this rig."

He looked for a clothing store where it seemed that he might obtain a ready-made suit that would do for the time. There were plenty of Jew stores, but it was some time before he came upon one that looked promising.

He found a dark gray suit that fitted him as well as if it had been cut expressly for him. He bought a hat, shirt, collar, cuffs, necktie, and such other articles as he required and could obtain there, and then he set out to look for a shoe store. This he soon found, and he exchanged the coarse boots of the country boy for a pair of easy-walking shoes.

In this place he made inquiries concerning the way to proceed to reach the Palmer House. For a wonder, the shoe dealer was able to direct him so that he could obtain a car that would let him off within half a block of the hotel. In order to reach the car, Frank found it necessary to walk half a mile, but his strength had returned, so he did not mind that.

Directed by one or two policemen, he made his way straight to the nearest spot where he could take the car, and he felt relieved when he got aboard and heard the conductor assure him that he was all right.

Frank was so thoroughly used up that he did not have enough interest in his surroundings to look out of the car window, and he was in a doze when the conductor touched him on the shoulder, and called:

"State street—Palmer House!"

Thanking the conductor, much to that person's surprise, Frank quickly left the car, and, a few moments later, he entered the Palmer House.

Frank's first act was to examine the register, on which he soon found the names of Professor H. O. T. Scotch and Hans Dunnerwust. Frank registered, told the clerk who he was, and was immediately given a key to the suite of rooms engaged by the professor.

"Professor Scotch is out at present," explained the clerk.

Frank saw that his trunk check was given to the proper person, who, on being tipped half a dollar, assured him that the trunk should be brought as soon as possible.

Then the boy took the elevator and ascended to the rooms engaged by the professor.

"Well," muttered Frank, as he let himself in, "I may consider myself a lucky fellow to be here at all. The adventures of this day have been enough to take away a fellow's breath. I've been arrested, been in a railroad smash-up, been pursued by an officer, skipped across country to dodge the fellow, been left to roast in a fire—and I still live! If this sort of thing keeps up, I'm afraid I'll have to give over traveling, as it may prove detrimental to my health."

He did not find Hans awaiting him, as he had half expected, but there was a note from the professor, which said they had gone out together, and did not know just when they would return.

Frank found there was a bath connected with the suite, and it did not take him long to undress and take a plunge in a brimming tub. A brisk rubbing with a rough towel set his blood to circulating and his flesh to glowing, and he felt like a new boy when he was dressed once more.

"Well," he half laughed, "I don't know but I'm good for another day like the one past."

Frank was hungry, and he resolved not to wait for the professor and Hans, so he descended to the dining-room at once. The amount of food he was able to stow away made the eyes of the waiter bulge, but Frank found the waiter very attentive and courteous, and he tipped the fellow liberally.

Frank had fancied that he would find himself quite used up and ready to rest when he had eaten, and he was surprised to discover that he had recovered so that he did not feel like resting quietly in his rooms.

For a while he waited the appearance of the professor and Hans, wondering why they did not return; but he finally decided to go out and take a brisk walk, although he was not provided with a top-coat, and a raw breeze from the lake was cutting through the streets.

Leaving the hotel, the clanging cable cars on State street

made him think of Broadway. He crossed State street, and wandered whither his fancy led him.

By chance, he strolled into the very heart of the business quarter, and he gazed in wonder at the lofty office-buildings on every side of him, fairly bewildered by their number and their height.

His stroll finally led him to the Clark street viaduct, which extends over the Chicago River and the railroad tracks on the north bank.

The scene from the viaduct interested Frank, and he stood a long time watching the shipping strung along the wharves which lined each bank of the river. In mid-stream many boats, bearing colored lights, were moving to and fro, and the puffing, fussing little tugs were constantly shrieking signals at each other. Down the river a swinging bridge opened now and then to let some craft through.

Frank was completely absorbed in what he saw, and was quite unaware that he had been dogged, step by step, since leaving the hotel, as he was also unaware that he had been tracked to the hotel when he left the vicinity of the fire from which he had had such a narrow escape.

At last, he moved on across the viaduct, and the shadows, two in number, were close upon his heels.

A train was approaching from the west as Frank reached that part of the viaduct above the tracks, and he paused to watch it pass below.

Then the pursuers darted forward, and were upon him, as, at that moment, neither horse car nor foot traveler happened to be passing.

"Over with him!" snarled a harsh voice. "Drop him on the track, and he'll never play the spy any more!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TEMPERANCE DRINK.

Frank had heard that voice before. He knew the man of the wooden leg was there. At least two other ruffians were with him.

Frank felt himself clutched, lifted, poised for the drop that should land him in the path of certain death.

Snorting like an enraged monster, its headlight gleaming like a fiery Cyclopean eye, breathing forth smoke and sparks, the locomotive came thundering on.

In another moment the boy would be hurled down to death upon the track—would be stunned by the fall and crushed and mutilated beneath the whirling wheels.

Life was sweet to Frank, and it surely was worth a struggle. Twisting about, he succeeded in clutching both the men who held him.

“If I go, you go with me!” he panted.

Near at hand was the man with the wooden leg, and he snarled:

“Over with him! Be quick, or the train will pass!”

The ruffians struggled to break the hold of the lad, but Frank was hanging on for dear life, and he could not be cast off.

Beneath the viaduct roared the train, and a cry of baffled rage came from the lips of the man with the wooden leg.

“You blundering fools!” he grated. “What’s the matter with you?”

“He’s worst than an octopus, boss!” declared one of the men.

“He sticks like a plaster,” asserted the other.

“And you’ve fooled till it’s too late! Some one is coming! Slug him, and skip!”

Frank saw an arm uplifted, saw something descending, and dodged. In this way, he partly avoided the blow, but

a sandbag struck him with sufficient force to knock him down.

In a dazed manner, he sat up, some seconds later, and found a policeman bending over him.

"What's ther matter here?" demanded the officer, roughly. "Are yer drunk? This ain't no lodgin' house, young feller."

"I am not drunk," declared Frank, "for I do not drink. But I was attacked here a few moments ago by three men. They hit me on the head with something that dropped me like a log."

"Sandbagged yer," said the officer, carelessly. "You'd oughter been home with yer folks, 'stead of ramblin' round the streets nights. Where d'ye live?"

"I am stopping at the Palmer House."

"Then, ye don't live in the city?"

"No."

"All ther more reason why yer'd better keep in nights. Can yer git up?"

"I rather think so."

Frank got upon his feet without trouble, and the policeman offered to accompany him a short distance toward the Palmer House.

"If yer walk along sharp, and don't loaf, you'll be likely to git there all right," said the officer. "You'll most likely find, when you git there, that you hain't got any change left in yer pockets; and mebbe this will learn yer not to be loafin' round the streets nights."

Half an hour later, Frank found himself in the hotel again. He was surprised to find that Hans and the professor had not returned. Securing an evening paper, he awaited their return, beginning to feel somewhat anxious concerning them.

Frank found he had not been robbed by his assailants, but his head had been thumped in a way that made it impossible for him to read much, as it was throbbing with a dull pain.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Frank was surprised to hear some one singing outside the door, and he was still more surprised to recognize the voice of Professor Scotch, who was dismally chanting, "We Won't Go Home Till Morning."

A key rattled in the lock, the door opened, and the little professor rolled into the room, followed by Hans Dunnerwust, who was saying:

"Uf you don'd shud oop, you peen fired der hotel oudt righd away, queek. Vot vos der madder mit you, ain'd id? I nefer seen der peat uf dot your porn days in!"

The professor's silk hat was canted over his eyes at a rakish angle, causing Frank to gasp with amazement, for he had never beheld Scotch in such a condition before.

"Here! Here!" he cried, aghast. "What's the matter with you, professor? Have you been toying with the wine-cup?"

"Hullo, Frank!" cried the professor, with a military salute. "Fines ossifer in the cadet corps at Fardale. Military ash a vet-ransh. Halt! By twosh right, forward, marsh! Letter go, Galligher! Hoopee!"

"For goodness' sake, close the door, Hans!" palpitated Frank, in dismay. "I wonder how you succeeded in getting through the building and reaching these rooms without being stopped. Keep still, professor! We'll be invited to move to-night, if you keep this up."

"Whash that?" owlshly gurgled Scotch, bracing up in the middle of the floor, with his feet very wide apart. "Who'll 'vite ush to move? Whassher massher, anyhow?"

"You've been drinking, professor! I am ashamed of you!"

"Drinking! Young man, you have 'shulted me! I never drink. I'm strictly temp'rate—strictly sho. Guesh man hash a right to stop at a drug store an' have a drink of shody! Shody-wassher never hurt anybody."

Frank turned to Hans.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "How does it happen that the professor is in this condition?"

"Vell," said Hans, with a grin, "uf you vasn't misdaken, id vas dot soty-vater."

"Soda-water!" cried Frank. "What are you trying to tell me? Nobody every got drunk on soda-water!"

"Der brofessor don'd took notting else."

"Tha's ri'," rumbled the little man with the big voice. "Jesht took sody-wassher. Took sody-wassher cold, an'

sody-wassher hot, an' then took it mixed. Besht sody-wassher ever tasted. Hoopee!"

Frank was more puzzled than before.

"What kind of soda-water did you drink?" he asked, bewildered.

"Temp'ransh sody-wassher. Told man I neversh dranked anyshing by temp'ransh sody-wassher. Man winked—I winked. Then he drew sody-wassher. Besht sody-wassher ever tasted. Took 'nuzzer cold one. Didn't sheem to shatisfy me, sho I took a hot one. Shomehow, cold ones sheemed 'bout ash hot ash the hot onesh. Besht sody-wassher ever tashted."

Frank collapsed on a chair, and burst into laughter.

"Oh, professor!" he cried; "that wink was what did the job! When you called for temperance soda-water and winked, you fixed everything nicely."

"Whash you mean?" asked Scotch, blankly.

"I'll tell you what that wink meant. It meant whiskey, and you got it in the soda-water. You took it cold, and then you took it hot, and you've got a load, professor."

"Shay," said the professor, soberly, trying to brace up, "'f that man gave me wishky in sody-wassher, I'll have 'm 'reshted for shellin' liquor under falsh pretenshesh."

"The best thing you can do now is to get into bed without delay, and sleep off this load," said Frank.

"Don't wanter to bed; wanter talk. Feel like shinging shongs. Lesh all shing a shong."

It was with no little difficulty that Frank persuaded the professor to be undressed and put into bed, and, after the man was in bed, even, he persisted in trying to sing. Finally, declaring the Palmer House was "besht hotel eversh shaw—beds rocked fellersh to shleep," the professor closed his eyes and began to snore.

"There," breathed Frank, with relief, "he's settled for to-night, but there'll be a difference in the morning."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ITALIAN COUNT.

In the morning, Professor Scotch felt decidedly indisposed. When Frank aroused him, he stared blankly at the boy, and then asked:

“When did you arrive?”

“Late yesterday afternoon. I was here when you came in last evening, professor. Don’t you remember?”

“It seems that I remember something about it, but I’ve got a terrible headache! What is the matter with me?”

“You’ve been monkeying with that decoction which stingeth like a serpent and biteth like an adder. You came in drunk last night, professor.”

Scotch tried to sit up quickly in bed, but fell back with a groan.

“Frank! Frank!” he cried. “What do you mean? I am not a drinking man—you know I am not! Sometimes I take soda-water; I remember that I took some last night.”

“And you winked at the man who mixed it?”

“I don’t remember; possibly I did.”

“That wink gave you the beautiful head you have this morning.”

“Why, how——”

“Simplest thing in the world. You were taken for the kind of temperance crank who drinks his whiskey in soda-water. You took several drinks, and you came in very much intoxicated. It’s a miracle that you reached these rooms, for you were singing ‘We Won’t Go Home Till Morning,’ and it’s a wonder you were not arrested. If it hadn’t been for Hans, you could not have reached these rooms. He made you keep still till you arrived on this floor.”

The professor groaned again.

“I am horrified and shocked,” he said, dolefully. “If I can find that druggist again, I shall talk to him severely.”

"Look out that you do not wink at him when you speak," laughed Frank.

"Little danger of that. Oh, my head! Bring me a wet towel, Frank, and leave me to my misery."

The Dutch boy was listening, a broad grin on his fat, good-natured face.

"You don'd feel so goot as you did, broffessor," he chirped. "You said last nighd you vas goin' to trink dot soty-vater efery tay you stayed in Chigawgo. Maype you changed your mindt righd avay alretty yet."

"Get out!" roared the professor, glaring at Hans. "I believe you were at the bottom of this, you rascal! If I find out you were—well, something will drop with a dull thud."

A wet towel was brought and tied about the professor's head, and he was left alone, while Frank and Hans descended for breakfast.

To Frank's surprise, a dark-skinned, foreign-looking man, with mustache and imperial waxed to needle points, was placed at the table with them. He seemed to have entered the dining-room close behind them, and Frank fancied he had asked the waiter to seat him at that particular table. He was well-dressed, and had an air of cool self-possession.

"Excusa me, young gentlemen," he said, with a decidedly foreign accent. "I have not-ta da vera gr-r-reat honah of know-a you, bot I like-a your appearanze. At da vera last hotel where I be, I have-a da misfort' to sit-ta at da tab' with-a one peeg. He stuf-fa da food in his mout' with hees knife-a—with his fork-a—almost with hees feen-gar-r-rs! Bar-r-r-rr! Dat-a make-a me-a seek! I say I take-a da care I don' seet at da tab' wid dat kiñe peopl' no more. I seet at da tab' wid genteelmen. Excusa me-a if I speak-a diffren' frome da Americ' peopl'. I am Ital-a-ean. Excuse-a me-a—my card-a."

With a profound bow, the dark-faced stranger placed an engraved card before the boys, and they read:

"COUNT ANTONIO POLICASTRO,

"Milan."

Frank felt for his card case, but, to his dismay, found he did not have it with him.

"I haven't a card at hand, count," he said, "but I will introduce my friend and myself. Mr. Hans Dunnerwust, Count Policastro. My own name is Frank Merriwell."

The count bowed gracefully.

"Young genteelmen, I salute-a you," he smiled, showing his teeth beneath his dark mustache. "If you no objec', I take-a da pleasure to seet at dees tab' while I stay da hotel at."

"I do not think we object," said Frank. "We`are not cads."

"Dot vos righd, Count Bolecatero," nodded Hans, who was determined to say something agreeable. "Shust you sed righd down dis table at all der vile und make yourseluf righd at home. I don'd peen efery day we eat hash a count mit, you pet me your poots."

The count smiled again, lifting his eyebrows somewhat, and staring pleasantly at the Dutch boy.

"I hear dat great many of da counts in this-a countaree be no-a count," he observed.

Frank was amused by this pleasantry, as Hans plainly saw, but the Dutch boy was greatly puzzled to see the point.

"Noah Count," muttered Hans. "Vell, I don'd know dot feller, but, if dis peen der blace to laugh at, you don'd get me left any alretty yet."

Then he broke into a roar of laughter that startled everybody in the dining-room, and came near giving Frank a fit. Seeing he had make a mistake, the Dutch lad broke off suddenly in a manner quite surprising, and drank a whole glass of water at a single swallow.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank. "You'll be taken for a lunatic, Hans; an' we'll both be fired, if you do that trick again."

"Meester Dunnerbust seem-a to be vera orig'—vera much-a da same like-a himself," observed the count.

During the remaining time at breakfast Hans did not venture to speak a word or utter a sound.

Frank conversed pleasantly with the count, and found much of interest in the dark-faced Italian.

When they left the dining-room, and were moving toward the elevator, Frank said to Hans, speaking in a low tone:

"That count is a palpable fraud."

"Vot vos dot?" gasped the Dutch boy, astonished.
"You mean to say dot——"

"That the fellow is no count, and I doubt if he ever saw Italy. I happen to be pretty well posted on Italy, and I led the conversation into a channel that tended to bring out what he knew, with the result that he got badly twisted. If he came from Italy, he knows very little about his own country, and Milan, from which place he claims to hail."

Hans was dazed.

"You don'd mean to say he peen a fraud?" asked the Dutch lad.

"That is what I suspect," said Frank.

"Shimminy Gristmas! Und we don'd sed at der table a real count mit?"

"I think not."

"Vell, uf I don'd go pack und knock der sduffin' from him oudt you kick me!"

Hans would have started, but Frank caught him by the shoulder, and prevented it.

"You seem determined to do something that will get us fired from the hotel. I don't know Count Policastro is a fraud; I simply suspect it. American girls love titles, and the man may be traveling on his title, which he has adopted for that purpose. Some way, his face seems familiar to me, although I cannot place him."

On reaching their rooms, the professor was found still in bed, and, after much persuasion, Frank succeeded in inducing him to take some coffee, which was brought by a boy.

But the coffee did not brace the unfortunate man, who declared over and over that he was "awfully sick."

At length, as the professor did not seem to get any better, Frank decided to go out and look around. He left Hans to look after Scotch.

Frank decided to visit the stock yards without delay. This he did, taking a State street cable car to Thirty-ninth street, from which point he proceeded by a stock-yards car.

Frank had learned to keep his eyes open constantly, and it was not long before he discovered that Count Antonio

Policastro was going right along with him, although the count seemed to shun the boy's observation, as far as possible.

"Now, there is something in this," decided Frank—"far more than appears on the surface. This bogus count is shadowing me. Why? That's the question."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CUNNING FOLLOWER.

At first, Frank was uneasy, for he did not fancy being dogged about like a criminal.

But he resolved to lead the count a merry dance.

"If he follows me, he'll have to keep moving," muttered the boy.

At the stock yards he found himself in the midst of nearly a hundred and fifty acres of pens, where were confined vast numbers of Texan and Western cattle, hogs from the entire Mississippi Valley, sheep from Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, and elsewhere, unbroken horses from Kentucky and Western horse ranches, all, with the exception of the horses, having been brought there for slaughter.

Around and about amid the yards Frank hurried, and the Italian count kept on his track.

Then the boy visited the slaughter and packing houses; the sights and scenes of which proved sickening for him, although he was astounded and bewildered by the rapidity with which a living hog or steer was converted into dressed pork or beef.

Amid the slaughterhouses Frank fancied he had succeeded in dodging Count Policastro.

He breathed easier, but he hastened to leave the slaughter pens, with their nauseating sights and smells.

Frank had desired to see the stock yards and slaughterhouses, for these were of the many sights which Chicago boasts, but, having seen them once, it would have been a difficult thing to induce him to visit them again.

On getting away from the locality, he felt as if he might turn vegetarian for a time.

Three things about Chicago had impressed themselves on Frank Merriwell, and he fancied he would not forget them very soon. They were the lofty buildings, the Chi-

ago River, with its swinging bridges and viaducts, and the stock yards and slaughterhouses.

Having left the stock yards, Frank fell to thinking of his singular adventures of the previous day. Somehow, it seemed that he had dreamed those things, but there were two swelled places on his head, each very tender to the touch, and those stood as evidence that he had not dreamed.

But what had it all meant? The mystery remained unsolved, and thoughts of it made Frank fretful and restless.

He wondered what had become of the pretty girl whose acquaintance he had so strangely made.

Somehow, remembering how she had been seized and dragged away by the man with the wooden leg, he fancied she might be in trouble and distress.

Why had that man followed and made an attack on the life of the boy who had been rescued from the burning store of the old Jew?

Frank was satisfied that the man was a desperate ruffian and criminal.

What relation to him was the girl?

Plainly, there was some bond of connection between the girl and the fresh youth who called himself De Lancey Duncan.

And the mystery of the alligator grips added to the confusion.

The girl had declared that not a dollar of the gripful of money Frank had seen had been stolen.

Then, why was De Lancey Duncan pursued by an officer, who sought his arrest, but had made a mistake and tried to arrest Frank himself?

The girl had said of herself that she was bad and wicked, but Frank could not believe that she was so from choice.

Thinking these things over, Frank concluded that the man with the wooden leg was an old rascal, and the boy and girl were his tools, willingly or otherwise.

He longed to see the girl again, to talk with her once more. This desire grew stronger and stronger upon him.

But how could he find her?

"I'll attempt to find Solomon Moses," decided Frank. "I may be able to find the girl through the old Jew."

He did not return to the Palmer House, but took a luncheon in a restaurant.

Then, crossing the river by one of the many swinging bridges, he set out for the quarter in which the store of the old Jew had been located.

Frank knew that he might be going straight into new perils, but that knowledge did not cause him to hesitate.

He found a car that took him to a point within a few blocks of the locality for which he was bound.

A brisk walk through the narrow streets brought him in a few minutes within sight of the burned store.

The walls of the building were standing, but it had been gutted by fire, although the flames had not been allowed to spread.

Frank shuddered when he thought how near he came to perishing in that fire.

In front of the ruins stood two men. They were Jews, and the boy saw, with no little satisfaction, that Moses was one of them.

"He is looking the ruins over," muttered Frank. "It is possible he will lead me to the people I wish to find."

Remembering he had quite changed in appearance since he was seen by the old Jew, Frank took a fancy to drift past, and hear what Moses was saying.

The old Jew was excited. He waved his arms, as he exclaimed:

"Meeshter Einstine, Meeshter Einstine, if der beople don'd stob tellin' dat mein vife, Repecca, set dat vire, I vas a ruint man! I must haf dat insurance, Meeshter Einstine!"

"Vell, Meeshter Mosesh," said the other Jew, "you vas a man vat knows your own pusiness, but I vind id petter to go indo inzolvenzy than to haf a vire."

Frank walked on to the end of the block, and then paused, where he could keep an eye on Moses.

An Italian organ-grinder was coming slowly up the street. He was a wreck of a man, seeming scarcely able to totter along and carry the organ. His clothes were tattered and torn, and he presented a most miserable appearance.

Frank paid little attention to the organ-grinder till the fellow was close at hand.

The broken tunes that came from the wheezy old instrument annoyed the boy.

"Give-a da poor ol'-a man some-a-thing?" entreated the Italian. "Poor ol'-a man have-a da monk' two day 'go; now da monk' be dead-a. Give-a da poor ol'-a man some-a-thing."

Frank thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Good-a boy!" said the organ-grinder, eagerly. "When poor ol'-a man have-a da monk', den da monk' pic-ca up-pa da cent-a. Now da poor ol'-a man no-a have-a da monk', he no-a find-a man-a cent-a to pic-ca up-pa. You have-a lot-ta mon'. You never-r-r miss-a one dol'; give-a da poor ol'-a man-a one dol'."

"Well," said Frank, falling to slang as most fitting for the occasion, "you've got a crust!"

"Yes-sa, yes-sa," nodded the dago, fishing around in his pockets; "have-a da crust-a. No-a have-a notting els'-a to eat-a."

Then he produced a crust of bread, on which he began to gnaw.

Frank was pretty familiar with beggars' tricks, but the readiness with which the old man produced the crust of bread quite staggered the boy.

"Great Scott!" thought Frank. "That came along as if he was expecting me to say just what I did."

Aloud, he asked:

"Why don't you buy something to eat with the money you pick up each day?"

"No-a pic-ca up-pa much since da monk' he die," whined the old man, sadly. "Da monk' dance-a on da hand-org', please-a da children, get-ta da pennies da-a way. When da monk' he die, ol'-a Benito hold-a him in his arms-a, cry, cry, cry, all-a sam'-a lik-ka one child. When da monk' die, ol'-a Benito be vera near-a broke at da heart."

"That's a very slick story," smiled Frank, "and you deserve something for inventing such a pathetic tale. Now, here is a dollar," taking out a silver dollar in one hand, "and here is a nickel," taking a nickel out in the other. "If I believed you were honest and deserving, I'd give you

the dollar; as I do not believe you are honest and deserving, I will give you—nothing.”

He returned both the dollar and the nickel to his pockets.

“Hol'-a smok-a!” cried the Italian, nearly falling down in dismay.

Then he made a few choice remarks in Italian, and moved away.

Frank watched the old organ-grinder hobble away, and there was a peculiar smile on the boy's face.

“Go on!” he muttered. “That was a very slick change, and you played your part very well, but you did not fool me, Count Antonio Policastro!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NOTE OF WARNING.

Frank had discovered that the seemingly crippled and tottering old organ-grinder was the peculiar Italian count of the Palmer House.

The discovery had been a startling one, but the boy had not betrayed the fact that he had made such a discovery.

He had succeeded in concealing his surprise, although it had cost him an effort.

Frank realized that he had not been able to dodge the "count" at the stock yards, as he fancied he had.

The fellow was following him with persistent and alarming determination.

The change from an Italian count to a wretched organ-grinder was remarkable, and very few lads could have detected the cheat.

"He must be one of the old wooden-leg's rascally tools," thought the boy. "He is following me about, and watching for an opportunity to get in his work. Jupiter! I don't like this! It gives me the chills. An Italian is liable to gently insert a knife in the small of a fellow's back just when the fellow is expecting nothing of the sort."

For a moment he had allowed his mind to wander from the old Jew, whom he had resolved to watch.

He turned quickly, and looked for Solomon Moses, being barely in time to see the form of the old man disappearing into the mouth of a narrow alleyway.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank. "I came near losing you!"

He hurried to the mouth of the alley, and looked for Moses; but, to his dismay, the Jew was not to be seen.

"Where has he gone? I believe I have lost him, after all!"

Down the alley hurried the boy. It was a narrow,

wretched sort of place, and, somehow, Frank felt that he was none too safe in there.

A man slouched past, staring at the boy from the corners of two evil-looking eyes. Some ragged and dirty children were quarreling over a bit of yellow cigar ribbon. A slatternly woman openly carried a pail of beer in at a miserable doorway.

Frank hurried on, finally coming out upon another street. Still, he saw nothing of the Jew.

"The bogus count is responsible for this!" muttered Frank, fiercely. "If I had not given him a few minutes of attention, I shouldn't have lost track of Moses."

He stopped, and fell to thinking it over.

"It cannot be that the old Jew hurried through that alley, and then got away on this street before I could reach this spot," decided the boy. "He did not rush into the alley in a hurry. Unless the dago gave him a signal, Moses had no reason to think I was watching him."

But Frank felt that it was quite possible the Jew had been given a warning sign by the organ-grinder. In that case, without doubt, Moses had lost no time in getting under cover.

Why he was followed and watched, Frank could not understand, although he fancied he was regarded as a spotter in the employ of the police.

Frank finally decided that Moses had not passed through the alley. That being the case, the Jew must have entered one of the wretched doorways Frank had passed.

The boy turned back into the alley. He believed the chances were against him, but he determined to make a search for Moses.

Slowly he moved along, keeping his eyes open. He well knew that his dress and appearance would make him an object of much attention; but there was no time or chance for him to alter his attire and assume a disguise.

It did not seem to Frank that Moses, poor though the old man had seemed, was a person to accept lodgings in that wretched quarter, unless forced to do so, or unless he did so through policy.

Jews are thrifty, and they flock together. The people

of the alley were not Jewish, although there were many Jew stores in that neighborhood.

Frank began to think that Moses had been warned by the Italian, and had lost no time in hiding himself.

That being the case, the boy felt that it was the next thing to useless to search for the old rascal.

Frank was beginning to grow discouraged.

He paused midway in the alley, and looked up.

He had been there several seconds, when he saw a hand and arm reach out through a broken pane of glass in a window far up on the wall. The hand was small and white; the arm was round and shapely. Somehow, there was something dainty and refined about that hand and arm, and Frank Merriwell was astounded by their appearance in that wretched quarter.

Something fluttered downward from those dainty fingers, and then the hand was withdrawn from view.

For several seconds Frank stood staring up at the broken window.

Somehow, he felt that he had seen that hand before—that he had felt those white fingers within his clasp.

He looked down at his feet. Something white lay on the ground, and, stooping, he picked it up.

It was a bit of paper, wrapped about a side-comb, such as might be used by a girl, and tied there with a single strand of dark golden hair.

Frank's heart gave a great bound.

"The strange girl had golden hair!" he softly palpitated. "This looks like a strand from her head! Is it possible I have found her?"

He removed the paper.

Something was written upon it with a lead pencil, and the writing was distinctly feminine and girlish.

In a moment Frank was reading the words written there:

"FRANK MERRIWELL:—You are in danger here—great danger! Go away—do not come back! My uncle believes you are a police spotter; he thinks I told you things I should not; he says you are dangerous. You may be killed if you do not go away! Never mind me. If they

keep me locked here a month, fed on bread and water, I will not——”

The writing ended abruptly, as if the person had heard some one approaching, and had not been able to finish.

That the one who wrote those words was the girl he had saved from the railroad wreck, Frank had not a doubt.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

"I have found her!" thought Frank, exultantly. "She is up there—a captive!"

He again read the last words of the unfinished note.

"If they keep me locked here a month, fed on bread and water, I will not——"

The girl had become rebellious, and she was a prisoner.

All the chivalry in Frank's nature was aroused, and he felt ready to battle for her against a score of ruffians.

"She must have seen me pass when I went through this alley in the first place," thought the boy; "and, thinking it possible I would return, she began to write this note, watching for me the while. She saw me pause beneath the window—she heard some on approaching the room, or she feared I would move away—she barely had time to drop this to me."

He thrust the scrap of paper into his pocket.

"What can I do?" That was the question he asked himself, and it was not easily answered.

He felt that he must do something; he was determined to do something. He would not go away and leave the girl to the mercies of the ruffians who held her a captive.

She had spoken of her uncle, and Frank knew she must mean the man with the wooden leg, as Solomon Moses could not be her uncle.

And the boy was sure that the man with the wooden leg was a ruffian capable of almost any deed.

It made his blood boil as he thought of her position in the power of such a villain.

Frank's first thought was to call on the police for aid.

But what could he tell the police? What charge could he make against Solomon Moses and the man with the wooden leg?

While he was searching for a policeman, the birds might take the alarm and fly away.

A sudden resolve seized Frank, and, a moment later, he entered the wretched doorway that he knew must lead to the room where the girl was confined.

Up a dirty flight of stairs he made his way. The stairs were narrow, and they twisted here and there in a strange fashion, so that from various positions which he reached he was able to look down to the bottom of the several flights.

From the narrow, filthy landings doors led into rooms on every hand.

That these rooms were occupied, Frank quickly discovered, for from all sides came strange sounds—the quarreling of women, crying of children, singing of a drunken man, and the scraping squeak of an old violin.

Some of the doors were standing wide open, but the boy slipped boldly and silently past, and, by a rare chance, did not encounter any one on the stairway.

At length he reached a door near the top, and he was sure the girl must be confined near at hand.

He listened at a door that was securely closed.

The door was a shaky old affair, and Frank distinctly heard voices in the room beyond. More than that, he could understand what was being said.

It seemed that some kind of a quarrel was going on, and he recognized the voice of the old Jew, who was whining:

“Meeshter Sullifan, you vill be der ruin uf me! You vill haf me arresdet der handt uf der law by, Meeshter Sullifan! I vos a boor oldt man, und I nefer been aple to make inuch moneysh——”

“Bah!” snarled another voice, which Frank recognized as that of the man with the wooden leg. “You’re an old hypocrite, Moses! You have been a crook all your life, but you’ve been so sly that the police have not been able to nab you. That’s all right, but don’t try to make me think you are honest. Don’t try to make me believe you did not know the kind of people who met in that secret room behind your store. You were paid well, and you kept your mouth shut.”

“Vell, uf I been arresdet, I svare I don’d know vot vas done der pack room in, Meeshter Sullifan, und I tells der

trute. Now I been purned out, und I haf to come here ven you say so, und I haf to keeb you, und I haf to led dose crooks come here to see you, und der virst ding you know I been arresdet as one uf der gang. I don'd lige dot, Meeshter Sullifan."

"Like it or not, you'll have to stand it. I have you under my thumb, Moses, and you'll do exactly as I say."

The listening boy heard the old Jew mutter a dismal groan.

"Meeshter Sullifan, you haf no symbathy on a boor, oldt man?"

"Not a bit, you old scoundrel!"

"Vell, I peen in a pad scrabe. Id vas der virst dime in my life I ged dis kindt uf a scrabe indo. Uf I come outd uf id all righd, I don'd do no more pusiness your kindt uf beoble vid."

"If we come out all right, and get rid of our stock, I'll pay you so much you'll be glad to keep in with us."

Frank had hoped to hear something that would solve some of the mysteries which puzzled him, but he was doomed to disappointment. However, since entering the alley, he had discovered what hold the man of the wooden leg had on the strange girl. The man was her uncle—possibly her legal guardian.

What of De Lancey Duncan? How was he related to the girl?

Barely had Frank asked himself the question when he heard a sound like the sudden flinging open of a door, followed by the voice of the boy, crying:

"Come on—come out here! Here's a pretty sort of a sister! See if you'll dare talk to Uncle Bardy as you've been talking to me!"

"Sister!" muttered the lad outside the door. "She is the fellow's sister!"

Then he heard the voice of the girl uttering an appeal: "Don't, Dell—please don't! You are hurting my wrists! You never abused me in this way before! You've always been good to me. What has changed you so?"

"Your disgusting foolishness," was the answer. "Here Uncle Bardy is working to make us rich, and you are getting contrary and dangerous."

"He is working to get us all into prison!" rang out the clear voice of the girl. "My father was an honest man, and he believed Uncle Sullivan an honest man when he left us in uncle's care! but Bardy Sullivan turned our old home into a workshop for criminals, and he has been trying to make us assist him in his unlawful work. I did yield at first, but, now that I see where it will lead us, I am done with it forever!"

"You little fool!" snarled the man with the wooden leg. "You would ruin us all! You may have ruined us already by what you told that boy spotter!"

"That boy was no spotter, and I told him nothing."

"I know better than that! You were telling him things you should not when I found you with him while Moses' store burned. You can't make a fool of me!"

"And you can't make a dupe of me! Shut me up—keep me on bread and water—kill me—I'll never aid you in your lawless schemes again!"

The listening boy outside the door felt like uttering a cheer of admiration and delight.

"There is a brave girl!" he thought.

Then the voice of the old Jew was heard.

"My tear Mish Lawrenze," whined the old fellow, "I hobe you don'd ged poor oldt Solomon Moshesh indo no scrabe vid der law—poor oldt Solomon Moshesh, vat vas losd his sdore und all uf his elecant sdock by vire! I vas an oldt man, Mish Lawrenze, und I vould die vid a proken heart uf I vas arresdet, my tear."

"Oh, I don't want to get anybody into trouble!" half sobbed the girl. "All I want to do is to go away—go back home, and live in peace. But I'll never go back there and have the same old work go on! I'll run away—I'll kill myself—I'll do anything!"

"You talk like a little fool, Lucy!" sneered the voice of the boy Frank knew as De Lancey Duncan.

"And you talk like a young criminal!" the girl flashed back. "You have been ruined by this man we call uncle!"

"Rot!"

"It is the truth!"

"It is useless to talk with you!"

"Quite useless, sir!"

"Vait," pleaded the old Jew, who seemed to be terrified

lest the girl betray them all—"vait, und led me gall my wife, Repecca. Maype Repecca been aple to talk some sense vid er tear young laty."

"It's no use!" growled the owner of the wooden leg. "Nobody can talk sense to her! We'll have to keep her locked up while we are disposing of our goods."

"Then what?"

"That's the question. We'll have to decide about that later. Take her back."

"If you would give me some comforts, I could endure it better; but that room is a wretched place. It doesn't seem that I can stay there very long."

"You'll have to!" snarled the uncle. "You have chosen that place instead of comfort and ease. You have only yourself to blame. Take her back, Dell."

"Come on, Lucy."

At this moment something caused Frank to leave the door and peek downstairs. Halfway up the shaking, winding flights came a creeping figure, making no noise, stealing up the stairs, bit by bit, like an assassin crawling on an unsuspecting victim.

It was the bogus organ-grinder, Count Antonio Policastro!

"He tracked me here!" thought Frank. "I have been followed in here by that wretch, whom I had forgotten. It looks as if I am in a bad scrape, for I'm caught between two fires!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

CLEARING UP.

Of a sudden, loud voices sounded within the room close at hand, and Frank listened again.

"Dell—brother!" cried the girl, appealing, "will you turn against your own sister because this man—this unnatural uncle—bids you do so?"

"Come along, Lucy; don't make a fool of yourself!"

"I believe that man has hypnotized you! I do not believe it is natural for you to be a criminal! Stop! Take your hands off me! I won't go! Help! Is there no one to help me now?"

Bang—crash!

Frank flung himself against the door, and it went down before him.

"Yes!" he cried, in a ringing tone; "there is some one to help you! I am here!"

Into the room he sprang, and two bounds enabled him to reach the boy who stood clutching the girl's wrist.

"Let up!"

Frank tore them apart, sent the boy reeling, placed the girl behind him, and faced the old Jew and Barty Sullivan.

For a moment both men were dazed and astounded by this sudden and unexpected appearance and onset of the daring boy.

Sullivan quickly recovered, and roared:

"It's the spotter! Don't let him escape! We are ruined if he gets away!"

A knife glittered in the man's hand, and the girl uttered a shriek of terror, clutching at Frank.

"What made you come here? You will be killed!"

He shook her off.

"Don't touch me—leave me free to meet them!"

"Are you armed?"

"No."

"Then, you have no chance—you are lost!"

"Yes," snarled the man with the wooden leg, "this will wind up your career!"

He started for Frank, but the old Jew caught him, and held him back, crying:

"No you don'd, Meeshter Sullivan! Der scrabe vas pad enough now, bud you don'd mage id no vorse by killin' somepody!"

"Let go!"

"Vell, I guess nod!"

"Then, I'll——"

"You will keep still, or I'll blow the whole roof of your head off, Cagey Joe!"

A man stood in the doorway, and he held a revolver, which was leveled straight at the head of Bardy Sullivan.

The man with the revolver was the Italian—the organ-grinder—Count Antonio Policastro!

He lifted his other hand, and placed a silver whistle to his lips, blowing a sharp, rallying call, which was almost instantly answered from the alley.

"Trapped!" snarled the man with the wooden leg. "The police are coming! You have caught me at last, Nob Harlow!"

"You are right," returned the man in the doorway. "This place is guarded by policemen on every side, and several officers are coming up the stairs at this minute. There is absolutely no chance for you to escape."

The knife disappeared from Bardy Sullivan's hand, and he laughed, mockingly:

"All right, my slick detective," he said. "Now, you have caught me, let's see you prove anything against me. It is possible you have overshot the mark."

The policemen appeared behind the man in the doorway, and all entered the room.

"Secure that man with the wooden leg, nab the old Jew, and arrest the two boys and the girl," directed the person Frank had believed an Italian. "Do not let anybody escape."

The order was obeyed.

"Why do you arrest this boy?" demanded the girl, indicating Frank. "He has done nothing."

"Hasn't, eh? That remains for him to prove. It was

by following him that I found you. I have shadowed him since I was lucky enough to run upon him after getting into the city, although he was suspicious and tried to dodge me. I did not have time to change my disguise entirely, so I changed from a count to an organ-grinder; but he seemed to see through the trick."

"I did," smiled Frank; "but I swear I did not dream you were a detective. I thought you belonged to this gang, and——"

"That sounds first-rate, but I do not believe it will go. Why did you go to such extremes to avoid arrest before reaching the city? In some way you tricked me, although I followed you hot, and telegraphed ahead for your detention."

"You—you are the officer who tried to arrest me after we passed through Valparaiso?"

"Yes."

"Now I understand why it was that it seemed I had seen 'Count Antonio Policastro' before. You are great at disguising yourself. If I understood this man right, he called you Nob Harlow. I have heard of Nob Harlow, the detective."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you have."

At this moment two policemen, who had been searching, dragged Solomon Moses' wife, Rebecca, into the room. Each officer also brought an alligator-skin grip.

"We have found them!" they cried.

Harlow regarded the two grips with surprise.

"There are two," he said.

"One is mine," Frank promptly claimed.

"Open them," directed Harlow.

One was opened, and it contained such articles as a young man would be likely to carry in a handbag if he were traveling.

"That is mine," asserted Frank Merriwell.

"Open the other," ordered he detective.

It was opened, and it proved to be quite empty!

A sneering laugh came from the lips of Bardy Sullivan, and he said:

"You may have some trouble in obtaining proofs, Mr. Harlow."

"I think not," said the detective, coolly. "Officers, remove that man's wooden leg."

Sullivan remonstrated and resisted, but the policemen held him fast and unstrapped the leg, which was handed to Harlow. The detective quickly removed a large cork from the end of the leg which joined the man's amputated limb, and then it was seen that the wooden leg was hollow and stuffed with bank notes.

"I have wondered why your wooden leg was so large, Cagey Joe," said the detective, speaking to Bardy Sullivan; "but I tumbled to the secret at last. I have never till the present moment been able to find a dollar of the queer upon you, although I have caused your arrest four times, and I knew you were shoving the stuff. This leg has been a fine hiding place."

"The queer?" cried Frank. "Do you mean to say that money is——"

"Counterfeit, every scrap of it," asserted Nob Harlow.

It was not difficult for Frank to prove he was in no way connected with the gang of counterfeiters, of which Bardy Sullivan, or "Cagey Joe," was the leader. He was released from custody.

The right name of "De Lancey Duncan" was Delmont Lawrence, and Lucy was his sister. At the death of their father, Sullivan, the brother of their mother, who was also dead, had been appointed their guardian. Sullivan was a crook, although at that time he was almost universally believed to be an honest man.

Almost immediately, Sullivan began the manufacture of counterfeit money at the home of the boy and girl over whom he was guardian. In this he was aided by Blume Fales, who did the engraving. They had succeeded in fooling the secret service officers, who had twice searched the place for bogus money or plates, but had found nothing.

At length, Fales was arrested on an old charge, and Sullivan found he must go it alone. He forced the boy and girl to aid him, although Lucy did so under remonstrance.

Sullivan did not dare bring the money to the distributing point in Chicago, which was the old Jew's store,

so he had the boy and girl bring it in, having arranged to meet them in the city.

In some way, he found that the boy was to be arrested before Chicago was reached, and he hastened to meet him and give the warning. Thus it came about that, through their decided resemblance to each other, and through the fact that Lawrence had swapped grips, Frank was caught by Harlow.

Then came the wreck. Frank saved the girl. She found the grip that contained the "queer money," and she succeeded in bringing it into Chicago. By chance, the detective found Frank at the Palmer House, and the rest is known to the reader.

Sullivan was sent to Joliet for a long period. Solomon Moses received a lighter sentence, as also did Rebecca, his wife.

Dell Lawrence was consigned to a house of correction, while Lucy found a home in an institution for the shelter and protection of homeless girls.

She wrote a long letter to Frank, which he received before he left Chicago. What she said in that letter remains a secret, for Frank destroyed it, and told no one what its contents were.

"And, now, ho! for Colorado and the West," said Frank, some days later. "I've had enough of Chicago for the present."

"So vos I," said Hans.

"Yes, let us move on by all means," came from the professor, "and I trust we shall leave all our enemies behind."

CHAPTER XXX.

“MR. HARD PILL.”

Shortly after crossing the line which divides the States of Kansas and Colorado, the engine of the Overland Flyer shrieked a wild warning of “down brakes.”

The passengers were immediately thrown into a state of confusion and excitement, as several attempts at train wrecking, one of which was successful, had been made in Colorado within the past few months.

The brakes were applied with a sudden violence, which checked the forward movement of the train so abruptly that many of the passengers were thrown from their seats.

“Shiminy Gristmas!” came from Hans, who had fallen from one of the comfortable parlor car seats, on which he had been taking a quiet nap. “Vot vos der madder mit Hannah, ain’d id?”

“Boys, boys!” roared Professor Scotch; “we’ve jumped the track! Hold fast before everything goes all to smash!”

“Get up, Hans; keep cool, professor,” advised Frank, who had remained on his chair for all of the jarring shocks. “I reckon we’ve struck a snag of some kind, but it is useless to get excited about it.”

“Oxcited!” squawked the Dutch lad, getting upon his feet and pitching headlong into the lap of the professor, who was nearly crushed. “I don’d peen oxcited, vos I, professor? Vot’s der madder mit you?” he asked, as the unfortunate man struggled to cast him off. “You peen oxcited myseluf, ain’d id?”

“Help!” rumbled the professor, in a smothered tone, “Get up! You’re sitting on my stomach.”

“Vell, you peen kickin’ at efery hodel sense we left der East because you don’d ged someding to set vell your sdomach on, und now you kick ven you ged someding to do dot. You vos the hardest man to suit vot I nefer seen.”

“Get up, Hans,” said Frank: “Have you got a grudge against the professor so that you are trying to kill him and say it was done in a railroad accident?”

“Oh, I don’d vant to kill him,” answered Hans Dunnerwust; “but I dinks maype I holdt him sdill so he don’d oxcited get. He mighd jump outt der vindow.”

In a few minutes the train came to a stop. Windows were thrown open, and excited passengers thrust their heads out to ask what had happened, while trainmen and other passengers hastened to get off and run forward.

“Come on, Hans,” said Frank, “give the professor a rest, while we get out and stretch our legs.”

“Yaw,” grinned the Dutch lad, “we will done dot, Vrankie. Goot-py, professor. Shust keep cool und led your hair curl dot pald spot on your headt mit. Maype you seen us pack apoudt den minutes in. Dra-la-loo!”

Then, airily waving his hand, Hans followed Frank from the car, leaving Professor Horace Orman Tyler Scotch gasping for breath on the chair.

“What’s happened?” asked Frank, springing from the car steps to the ground. “Why did we stop?”

“Don’t know,” puffed a fat man, who was hurrying forward.

“Obstruction on the track, I reckon,” said another man, who was following the fat man.

“Led’s go vorwart und see dot instruction, Vrankie,” urged Hans.

“Come on.”

Away they went, the Dutch lad panting at the heels of his companion, who ran easily, as if without effort.

A short distance in front of the powerful engine an excited knot of men were gathered on the track. In the centre was a wretched wreck of humanity—a tramp in rags and tatters. To Frank he seemed a most miserable specimen of humanity. He was tall and thin, so thin that he looked as if he had not eaten a square meal for a year; his cheeks were sunken, and his face was covered with a stubbed red beard of a week’s growth; his nose had a purple tinge, and he seemed half-frozen, for it was late in the fall, and the weather was not mild, even on the open plains.

This man was speaking.

"Yes, gents," he was saying, "I found the loose rail at this particular curve. If I hadn't diskivered it, this train would be in the creek down there now, and some of the passengers would be in eternity. This is the first time in a long, weary, and most disappointing life that I have ever found an opportunity to distinguish myself. I grasped it as a drowning man grasps a straw; I clung to it as an Ordway plaster clings to a poor man's back. I heard the train approaching. I rushed to stop it. You know the rest."

The conductor confronted the tramp.

"How did you happen to be here, sir?" he demanded, sternly.

"I was strolling along the track for my health," answered the vagrant, with a queer wink, which wrinkled the entire side of his face and moved his scalp. "Walking, sir, is a most healthful exercise, and I indulge in it each day—if I can't find a place to ride."

"You're a tramp!"

"No, sir! No, sir! I scorn the insinuation, sir! I am a gent of leisure."

"Which way were you walking?"

"Toward Denver."

"Denver is a long distance from here. Where did you come from?"

"Well, the last place of importance in which I stopped was Kansas City. I came from Chicago to Kansas City in a special car—that is, a car specially for the transportation of grain. I started from Kansas City for Denver in another special car, but there seemed to be some misunderstanding, and I was dropped by the wayside. I am thinking of suing the railroad for a hundred thousand dollars. That may be another opportunity for me. I have never struck an opportunity to make a fortune before this. In fact, I am known far and wide as 'the man who never had an opportunity.'"

"What's your name?"

"Um, let me see? Wonder if I can remember my original name? Ha! yes, I have it! I was christened Harden Pillsbury, but, for short, my most intimate friends and companions have come to call me Hard Pill. To be sure,

this is a familiar mode of address that I do not countenance from strangers.”

“From your appearance, I should say it is most appropriate. How did you happen to discover this loose rail, Mr. Hard Pill?”

“Oh, I dunno. I jest noticed the spikes had been pulled—that’s all.”

“Are you aware there have been several attempts at train-wrecking in this part of the State lately?”

“Nope.”

“Haven’t heard anything about it?”

“Nope.”

“Papers have been full of it.”

“Never read papers; too much work.”

“You appear very innocent.”

“I be.”

“Look here, my beauty,” came sharply from the lips of the conductor, “do you know what I think?”

“I’m no mind reader.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. I believe you know more than you see fit to tell; I believe you know something about the removal of these spikes.”

“Oh, say! what’re ye trying to give us! That’s rot! You don’t think I’d pull the spikes?”

“I do not think any better of you.”

“Why, how’d I do it—with my teeth?”

“You may have hidden the instrument with which you pulled them, Mr. Hard Pill.”

“What would I do it for?”

“Perhaps to get a ride to Denver—perhaps to get the passengers in their gratitude to make a purse for you—possibly to wreck the train. Your conscience may have smitten you after you removed the spikes, so you hastened to stop the train. You are a rascal—I can see it in your face. It is my opinion you ought to be hanged for attempting to wreck this train.

The conductor was angry, and he wanted to frighten the tramp. Some of the passengers were angry also, and they shouted:

“Hang him! Lynch him! String him to a telegraph pole!”

Hard Pill looked frightened.

"Gents, gents! he called, appealingly; "I'm a norphan, and I never had but one mother! Luck has run against me all my life, and I've never found many opportunities——"

"You'll find an opportunity at the end of a rope now!" shouted a fat passenger.

"Yes," cried an excitable little man, "an opportunity to do a fancy dance on empty air! Hang the train-wrecker!"

"That's dead wrong," muttered Frank. "I believe in giving a man a show. This fellow is a tramp, but he may have told the truth about the rail."

"Yaw," nodded Hans; "he may haf dold der trute, Vrankie, but I'll pet id makes him sick uf he did."

"If you think we're fools enough to raise a purse for you and make a hero of you, you are very much mistaken," declared the conductor. "We'll take you to Denver, and turn you over to the law."

"That's right! that's right!" cried several voices.

"Well," said Hard Pill, "I did think I'd found an opportunity to become famous, "but it begins to look like an opportunity to be hung. I ain't goin' to help ye put the rope round my neck."

Then he gave a shout, struck out with both hands, knocked down two men, broke from the crowd, and took to his heels.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRAIN WRECKERS.

"Stop him!"

Somebody shouted the words, but it was no easy thing to stop the tramp, who seemed thoroughly frightened.

"Out of the way!"

Away he went across the open ground. The fat man fumbled furiously in his hip pocket, bringing forth a revolver.

"I'll stop him!"

"No, you don't!"

Frank uttered the latter exclamation, thrusting up the hand that held a revolver which had been drawn and pointed in the direction of the running man.

The revolver spoke, but the bullet whistled harmlessly over the head of Mr. Hard Pill, who plunged into a small ravine, and quickly disappeared.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" spluttered the fat man, glaring at Frank.

"I do not mean to stand still and see you make a target of a poor fellow like that."

"He is a vagabond—a ruffian—a train-wrecker! He might have sent us all into eternity!"

"A vagabond he certainly is, but a ruffian and train-wrecker—perhaps so, perhaps not. It is possible he told the truth—it is possible you would be a dead man at this moment, buried beneath the wreck of this train if that wretched tramp had not happened along and discovered the loose rail. You had no right to shoot at him, and you should be punished for such a reckless and reprehensible act!"

"What—what! You young upstart! Do you dare speak to me like this—do you dare?"

"The boy is right," declared the conductor, promptly. "I was trying to frighten the tramp, but there was no excuse for such a reckless use of firearms. You must be

one of those Easterners who have an idea that promiscuous shooting is indulged in all over the West. You should be arrested and fined for carrying concealed weapons."

Some of the passengers joined in with the conductor, and the fat man found himself regarded with universal contempt, at which he hastened to beat a retreat to his car, muttering and growling as he departed.

Frank was complimented for his prompt action, and he was regarded with no little admiration.

Directions were given for the re-spiking of the rail, so the train might proceed.

"Come, Hans," said Frank. "We'll have time to walk out this way a short distance before the train goes on, and we may find Mr. Hard Pill hidden out there somewhere."

"Vell, I don'd peen surprised at dot, but I pet you your life he don'd found a hole long enough for him to grawl indo alretty yet."

Hans followed at Frank's heels, like a big dog, and they followed along the bank of the ravine, into which they could look. Pretty soon they came to where it branched, and some scrub bushes hid them from the train.

"Say, Vrankie," said Hans, "don't we petter gone pack britty queek? Maybe dot train vill valk away mitoutd us."

"The engineer will whistle a warning before the train starts, and we'll have plenty of time to get back."

So they went onward still farther.

All at once Hans caught Frank by the arm, and pointed down into the ravine, exclaiming:

"Uf dot don'd peen Meshter Hardt Bill you vos misdaken!"

Frank had seen a man quickly disappear from view behind some bowlders.

"I'd like to have a few words with him, Hans," he said. "Come on."

Down into the ravine slid Frank, and the Dutch lad came tumbling after, losing his footing, and landing on his stomach with such violence that his breath was driven in a great grunt from his lips.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" he gurgled. "Uf I don'd look oudt, you vill kill meinsel!"

"Which way did the tramp go?"

"Dot rock aroundt," answered the Dutch boy, scrambling to his feet.

Fearing he might be lost, Hans kept as close to Frank as possible, and both hurried around the rocks, running into the midst of a party of men who were crouching behind the boulders.

Every man had his face concealed by a mask. They were armed with rifles, revolvers, and knives, and each one held a weapon ready for instant use.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank.

"Dunder und blitzen!" gurgled Hans.

A dozen rifles were pointed at the heads of the two lads, and one of the men sternly said:

"Be still, or we'll blow the tops of your heads off! Don't make an outcry! Up with your hands!"

"Caught!" palpitated Frank.

"Fast!" groaned Hans.

"Up with your hands!" repeated the man, in a low, harsh tone.

"Up they go," said Merriwell.

"Uf mein ain'd ub far enough vor you, id voss because mein arms ain'd long enough," exclaimed the Dutch boy, his teeth chattering and his eyes rolling.

"Disarm them," ordered the spokesman of the masks.

The boys were searched, and a handsome self-acting revolver was removed from one of Frank's pockets. On Hans, concealed in some manner, they discovered an old horse-pistol that was not loaded.

"Tie them," directed the leader.

"Hold on," said Frank, quickly. "What have we done to merit such treatment?"

"Keep still!" muttered one of the men, and the cold muzzle of a rifle touched the boy's cheek.

Both lads were quickly and skillfully tied.

"Gag them!"

"Dot seddles id!" murmured Hans, who was ghastly pale. "You vos a goner!"

"Give us a show," protested Frank. "You have no reason to treat us this way, and——"

Again the cold muzzle of the rifle came against his cheek, giving him a chill and stopping him abruptly.

The masked men worked swiftly, and the gags were soon applied to the mouths of both boys.

Sitting on the ground, Frank and Hans stared at each other in helpless dismay.

"There," muttered the man who had given the orders, "there can be do danger that they will shout and bring the men from the train on us now."

"Not a bit of it," hoarsely chuckled a gigantic man, who had lost the little finger of his left hand. "If they were sent out to work that little game, there's goin' to be a hitch in the procedin's."

"But we must get away from here," said a third. "They may take a fancy to hunt for these chaps, and——"

"Right," broke in the leader. "Our little game was spoiled for to-day, and it is dangerous in this vicinity, so we'd better skip out."

Frank listened to every word. They had not plugged his ears, and he was determined, if possible, to remember the voices of these men.

Frank knew they had stumbled right into the midst of a band of train-wreckers—the very band that had been operating in Colorado of late. These were the men who had attempted to wreck the train—these men had loosened the rail.

Where was Hard Pill, the tramp?

Looking around, Frank could see nothing of the strange individual who had stopped the train, and who had been forced to flee for his life after—as it seemed—he had averted a catastrophe and saved many lives.

Still Hans had fancied he saw the tramp dodge around those very rocks.

If he was with the party, his face was concealed by a mask, and he had exchanged his ragged outer garments for other clothes.

Frank decided the man was not there.

What had become of Hard Pill?

Remembering the ravine branched near at hand, Frank believed the tramp must have gone the other way, thus escaping running straight into the clutches of the train-wreckers.

The masked men were making preparations to leave.

"What'll we do with these boys?" asked one.

"Leave them here," answered the leader. "We can't bother with them, and they won't be able to holler loud enough to make anybody hear more than a mile away."

"People from the train may search for 'em."

"Let 'em search. By the time they're found we'll be where we can mount our horses and defy pursuit. We can't take the kids along, so leave them."

Frank felt both dismayed and relieved. Somehow he was filled with dismay at the thought of being left thus, bound hand and foot, gagged, helpless; but he was relieved to know these desperadoes did not contemplate doing them any further injury.

The eyes of the boys met, and the disgusted look that passed over Hans Dunnerwust's face would have made Frank laugh aloud had the gag permitted it.

The masked men gathered up their weapons, got upon their feet, and started down the ravine.

"So long, boys," called the giant, with a farewell wave of his mutilated hand. "Sorry to leave ye this way, but it can't be helped. Business is business, and our business makes it necessary for us to be somewhat harsh in our measures at times. This is one of the times. Hope the wolves won't get ye. So long. We may meet again."

"Come on!" sharply ordered the leader of the band. "Don't make a fool of yerself, talking so much, Hank."

So the last man filed down the ravine and disappeared from view.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LEFT!

Frank listened till the sound of their feet died out in the distance.

Click-plunk, click-plunk, click-plunk!"

It was the men of the train re-spiking the rail to the sleepers, and Frank knew that meant that the Overland Flyer would soon be rushing on its way again, with the engineer working hard to make up lost time and reach Denver on the schedule.

"It looks as if we are left," thought Frank.

He saw that the same thought gradually worked itself through the brain of the Dutch lad.

What could they do?

If they were left there, the chances were that they would perish from the cold, if it did not happen that they were devoured by wolves.

Both boys strained at their bonds till the cords cut into their wrists, but they could not succeed in breaking away.

The gags kept them from talking or shouting for aid. If the gags were not in their mouths they might succeed in making their voices heard by some one near the train.

Frank fell to hoping that some of the passengers would stroll in that direction. He hoped the passengers had noted that two boys had wandered away and failed to return.

Would the train go on without them?

Frank feared it might, in case they did not return in time, for the Overland Flyer could not afford to wait while a search was made for two boys who had been foolish enough to wander away and get lost.

Toot! toot! toot!

A series of shrill shrieks from the engine sent an electric thrill through Frank Merriwell.

The train was preparing to start, and that was a warning for all to get aboard.

A dismal groan came from behind the gag that had been forced between Hans Dunnerwust's teeth, telling that the Dutch boy fully understood the meaning of those whistles.

Hans' eyes were filled with a questioning light, and the expression on his face might have been laughable under other circumstances. Just then Frank did not find anything laughable about it.

"The professor," thought Frank. "Will he allow them to go on? will he go on himself?"

He knew the professor would be unable to tell if they were on the train unless he made a thorough search, and there would be no time for anything of that sort. Without doubt, Professor Scotch would not miss them until it was too late.

Again Frank fought madly with his bonds, and again he was baffled, relinquishing the struggle in despair.

But his brain was working. If their feet were freed! How could the trick be done?

Again the engine sent forth a wild shriek.

In frantic haste, Frank flung himself at full length on the ground, rolled toward Hans, and finally twisted about till they were back to back, his fingers touching the cord that was knotted about the wrists of the Dutch youth.

This trick was not easily accomplished, for it was a long time before Hans could understand what his companion wanted to do. At length, however, Frank succeeded in getting into the position desired, and he began picking and working at the Dutch boy's bonds.

Every knot had been drawn tight and hard, and Frank was not aided in his efforts by his eyes. He was obliged to depend entirely on his sense of touch, which prevented him from making as rapid progress as he might under other conditions.

Still he was not discouraged—still he kept at work desperately, hoping for success.

Sometimes he would loosen a knot, and then he might get hold of it wrong and tighten it again, all because he could not have his eyes to assist him.

At length, however, he succeeded in getting Hans released so the Dutch boy could set himself at liberty.

Hans sat up deliberately, removed the gag from his mouth, worked his jaws, and said:

"Uf dot don'd peen a britty pad scrabe, alretty!"

He then began to slowly and carefully untie the cords which held his feet.

Frank was bursting with impatience, for every moment was precious, and the train was liable to depart without them at any time. He rolled up against his companion, but the Dutch boy moved away, continuing to slowly work at the knots which held his feet, as he said:

"Von dime I didn't know but we peen opliged to sday oudt mit dis blace all nighd in. Dot peen a pad scrabe, eh, Vrankie? You don'd like dot kindt uf a scrabe? Vot you t'ink? You pelief dot gang vos roppers, ain'd id? They dook our guns, but I don't pelief they dook notting else, do you?"

Frank replied by giving Hans a kick that nearly knocked him upon his back.

"Stob dot!" squawked the Dutch boy, moving still farther away. "Vot you done dot I kick you like dot, ain'd id?"

"You blockhead!" thought Frank, furiously. "The train will leave us, after all!"

This belief made Frank so angry that he tried to get near enough to give Hans another kick, but the Dutch lad freed his feet and sprang up, observing:

"I don'd like dot, Vrankie. I haf enough uf dot to last me a long dime, alretty yet."

Then he stared down at Frank, seeming to realize for the first time that his companion was still helpless.

"Uf you keeb sdill, I couldt undie dot robe, Vrankie."

Frank groaned, and lay still.

Hans began, in the most awkward manner possible, untying Frank's feet first, and he was very slow about it. Just as this task was accomplished, the engine whistled for the third time, and Frank felt that it was the last warning.

Having set Frank's feet free, Hans began work on the piece of rope that held his hands. It took him a full minute to get it so the fuming lad could force his bonds.

Getting a hand clear, Frank tore the gag from his mouth, leaped to his feet, and ran madly up the ravine.

To his ears came the regular "puff-puff" of an engine starting a train.

Frank shouted with the full strength of his voice, he ran with all the speed he could command, and yet he was certain he would be too late.

Panting, staggering, stumbling, shouting, he made his way from the ravine and reached a point where he could see the track, and, as he had expected, he was in time to see the train rolling away in the distance, with a trail of black smoke floating away above it, like a pirate flag.

"Gone!" gasped Frank, helplessly.

"Stob!" roared the voice of Hans, as the Dutch lad came puffing to the spot. "Vot dot drain gone off like dot vor, ain'd id?"

"Because you were so slow!" cried Frank, hotly. "Because you spent precious moments in setting me free, when you might have hastened. If you had untied my hands immediately on my setting yours free, I could have torn that rope from my feet and got out here in time to hold that train.

"Vos dot so?"

"Of course it is!"

"Und I peen all to plame vor losin' dot drain?"

"Yes."

"Vos dot so? Who vos id didn'd vant to go no furder away dot drain mit? Who vos id run down der rocks indo, und vos caught virst? Who vos id brobosed dis valkin' pusiness?"

"Well," confessed Frank, "I presume we are both to blame. I led you into the trap, and you were too slow to help us out when you had the opportunity. I won't jump on you too hard, Hans; I'll give myself a kick at the same time."

"Vell, vot we goin' to do now, ain'd id?"

"Walk."

"Valk?"

"Yes."

"Vich vay?"

"Toward Denver."

"How far vos dot?"

"Oh, about two hundred miles or more."

"Shimminy Gristmas!"

Hans came near collapsing in a heap on the ground, and he was such a picture of woeful dismay that a smile was literally forced to Frank's face.

"You don't like the prospect, Hans?"

"Oh, I don't mindt der brospect; id vos der valkin' vot makes me tiredt."

"Well, it is not particularly agreeable to think about. I haven't an idea how far it is to the first railway station. We may not be able to obtain anything to eat for a long time."

"Vot made you sbeak apout dot, Vrankie? Id makes me hongry to haf you mention him."

"If we strike one of these Western deserts on our way, we'll be able to obtain luncheon."

"How?"

"Why, just think of the sand which is there."

"Sandviches there? Oh, yaw! I seen der boint now! Yaw! yaw! yaw! Vot baper you read dot in, Vrankie—*Buck* or *Shudge*?"

"Perhaps it was original."

"Oritchinal? I nefer seen dot baper."

"Well, if we don't want to sleep in the open air to-night, we'll have to move. Come on; we'll hoof it after the train."

But just as they started, a familiar voice called:

"Hello, hello, my youthful friends! whither away so hastily?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MYSTERIOUS EXPLOSIONS.

Turning quickly, they beheld a long, lank, battered, tattered, red-headed man, who was seated comfortably on a stone, serenely smoking a short-stemmed "Missouri meerschaum."

This man was Mr. Harden Pillsbury—"Hard Pill," the tramp.

Frank uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, and immediately approached the vagrant, while Hans followed doubtfully at the heels of his companion.

"There is no reason why you should tear yourselves away," said Hard Pill, calmly. "Stop a while, and let's be sociable. This is my parlor—all outdoors. Sit down on any of the furniture that comes handy—make yourselves at home."

"Thank you," smiled Frank. "You are very hospitable."

"That's natural—can't help it; born that way. I'm one of the most generous beggars on two legs. I am always willing to give away all I have. However, that may not be so very strange, for I never have anything. Sit down. Let's us have a sociable growl. Where are we at, anyway? and how do we happen to find ourselves here?"

"We are here because the train went off and left us," exclaimed Frank, as he sat down on another stone near that which served Hard Pill.

"That is exactly why I am here," declared the tramp, with a comical twist of his face. "When I found that loose rail, I says to myself, says I, 'Pill, you've struck an opportunity—improve it; you're sure of a free pass into Denver, and that's all you want.' I considered it a snap. My heart rejoiced, and was exceedingly glad. I flagged the train with this old red handkerchief of mine—kept the whole outfit from going to eternal smash. How did they thank me? Wow! Wanted to lynch me! Tried

to fill me full of bullets! I had to run for my life, and the way I worked these long legs of mine surprised myself. At one time I did think I'd never stop running, but I got over my scare after I'd covered about two miles, and then I sneaked back. Didn't know but I could manage to get aboard the train some way. Was too late. Train had pulled out when I got here. Just my luck. Never mind; what do you care?"

"You are determined to take things philosophically, I see."

"It's no good to take things otherwise, my boy. I've knocked round the world till I've had the edges all knocked off me. I have about given up looking for an opportunity. When I strike anything by accident, it turns out same as this affair did to-day. But tell me how you happened to get left. Did you wander so far from the train that you could not get back after she began to whistle a warning?"

"We didn't go very far; but we ran into trouble."

"Um? How?"

Frank explained, telling how they had been captured by the masked men and left to get out of the scrape as best they could, how they had succeeded in freeing themselves, but were too late to catch the train.

Hard Pill whistled.

"Well," he said, "it's plain you struck the fellers who pulled the spikes and loosened the rail. They're the train-wreckers who have been operating in Colorado, and there's a reward offered for their capture. If you'd capture them all, you'd make a ten-strike."

"Vell," broke in Hans, "I don'd know how we done dot, unless we surroundet dem verillers."

"That would have been the slickest way," nodded Hard Pill; soberly. "Say, boys, I've got a grudge against them fellers. If they hadn't loosened that rail I shouldn't have run into such deadly danger. They have no right to endanger the lives of persons who may be peacefully meandering along the railway. There should be a law for it. When I think it over it makes me real angry. I feel like punching somebody's head. I'd like to meet those gents. Kindly take me to the spot where they effected your capture."

"We can'd vaste der time, Vrankie," protested Hans. "Uf we don'd ged a move on, we don'd peen able to valk to Denver to-nighd britty queek right away."

"You'll have to jig up a lively jog if you come anywhere near Denver in a week," said Hard Pill. "There's a ranch over this way somewhere, and I'm goin' to make for it. That's the place to stop to-night, and you'd better come along."

Frank took a fancy to accompany Hard Pill, although he knew the man might lead him into serious dangers.

Hans had to follow or be left, and he chose to follow without further talk.

Frank led the way straight to the spot where they had been captured by the train-wreckers.

The tramp examined the ground with a critical eye, asked several questions, and then told the boys to follow, striking down the ravine in the direction taken by the departing desperadoes.

Hard Pill walked with a long, swinging step that enabled him to cover ground at astonishing speed, and the boys were forced to hustle to keep up with him. For all of his speed, the man's footfalls were soft and catlike, and there was something pantherish in his appearance, as Frank fancied.

The ragged vagabond kept his eyes on the ground, and he seemed to follow the trail left by the masked ruffians—followed it with the ease and skill of an Indian trailer.

He was not inclined to talk much after taking up the trail, and the boys remained silent, paying attention to the task of keeping up with him.

Suddenly a startling thing occurred. High up in the air, away to the east, sounded a heavy explosion.

The trio looked up instantly, but they saw nothing but a puff of bluish smoke that quickly vanished into thin air and was gone.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans, in terror. "Vot vos dot, ain'd id?"

"It wasn't thunder," said Frank.

"No, it was not," agreed Hard Pill. "It sounded like the bursting of a bombshell."

"Maype dot peen id!" fluttered the Dutch lad. "Maype there haf peens a vaw deglared mit dis gountry on, und

dot vos a pombshell vrom a vawship New York Harbor in. You know vot we read apoudt dose long-range guns, Vrankie?"

Frank was utterly bewildered, for he could not understand the cause of the explosion, if an explosion it had been. It was neither thunder, a cloudburst, nor a cyclone.

"What do you think it was, Mr. Pillsbury?" he asked.

The tramp staggered.

"Mr. Pillsbury!" he gasped. "Say, go light; I have a weak heart. You are the first one who has called me anything but Hard Pill, or bum, or something of that sort in twenty years. Don't do it again! I have delicate nerves, as well as a weak heart."

"All right," laughed Frank; "but what do you think it was?"

"You tell."

"Can't."

"Let's watch a while. Maybe there'll be another. Keep your eyes open in the sky."

"Und be reaty to dodge uf id comes dis vay," advised Hans.

They sat down and watched, looking upward and about them toward the sky.

They had not watched thus a great while when Frank exclaimed:

"Look there! What's that?"

He caught Hard Pill by the arm, and pointed away toward the east, where a black ball was seen slowly and steadily rising into the sky.

"It looks like a large toy balloon," said the tramp.

"That's what it does."

"Sus-sus-say," chattered the Dutch boy, "were vos a blace I can grawl indo from?"

"Kepp cool, Hans," advised Frank. "Don't talk; watch."

"Vot for?"

"We want to see what'll happen."

"Oxcuse me! I don'd peen anxious to seen dot."

Higher and higher rose the black ball, from which a basket-like something was dangling.

All at once, the watching trio saw a blaze of fire, a bursting puff of smoke, and the black ball had disap-

peared from the sky in the twinkling of an eye. Directly after this came the sound of the explosion, which was far heavier than the first one.

Hans dropped on his knees, and mumbled:

"Dis vos der endt uf der vorld alretty come, I pet you *zwi* dollars!"

Frank was filled with wonder, and Hard Pill seemed puzzled to know the meaning of the mysterious explosions.

"There's some kind of rascality behind this," declared the tramp. "Stay here. I'm going to investigate."

And then, for all that Frank called to him, he darted away, quickly disappearing.

Frank was not at all pleased with this, not being ready to trust the tramp.

"I propose to do some investigating myself," he said. "Follow me, Hans."

"Vere to?"

"To find out what those explosions mean."

"Oh, dunder und blitzen! don'd gone dot vay, Vrankie! I don'd vant to done so! Uf I do, you vos a deat man!"

"Don't be foolish—come along! We don't want to stay here."

"I had petter stayed here than gone ofer dot vay. I don'd feel so vell as you might. Why don'd we gone back to der railroat righd away off?"

After no small amount of trouble, Frank succeeded in inducing the Dutch lad to follow him, and he struck out toward the point from which the balloon, or whatever it was, had seemed to ascend.

For more than thirty minutes they hurried forward at a brisk pace, and during that time there were no explosions.

Frank had begun to wonder if there was a chance of finding the spot from which the balloons rose, when, all at once, a huge round ball shot up into the air just ahead of them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EXPERIMENTER.

Hans uttered a gasp of dismay, and fell to the ground, gurgling:

“Dunder und blitzen! you vas a goner!”

Three long strides brought Frank to a point where he could look out into a bit of open land, and there he saw a wagon, a horse, and a man. The latter was paying out a line attached to the balloon, for such the round ball was, as Frank had believed.

“What’s he doing?” thought the wondering boy. “This beats my time! Is he crazy? Hear him mutter!”

The stranger was roughly dressed, and wore a full black beard. His hat lay on the ground, so that its wide brim might not obstruct his view of the balloon. He was muttering and mumbling as the balloon ascended.

Hans crept up behind Frank, past whom he peered at the man, his teeth chattering.

“Led’s get away oudt uf this, Vrankie!” he whispered. “Uf we don’d, you vos a deadt boy!”

“Keep still,” ordered Frank. “Look—watch—wait!”

“Vait! Vait for vat? To peen blowed to kinkdom gone?”

Before long the end of the line was nearly reached. It ran into the wagon, toward which the man sprang. He did something, and then there was another explosion, far up in the air. The balloon was blown to a thousand fragments.

Hans tumbled over backward, and lay groaning on the ground.

All at once, Frank dropped beside the Dutch lad, over whose mouth a hand was clasped, while Merriwell softly panted:

“Keep still! Here are the masked train-wreckers! They’re coming to investigate. If they find us—well, we may not get off as easy as we did the other time.”

Hans sat up. Some bowlders concealed the two lads from the view of any one within the opening. Peering forth, they saw the masked men surround the wagon, the horse, and the author of the mysterious explosions. The leader of the gang confronted the man, and demanded:

"What does this mean? Explain it! What are you exploding away up there in the air?"

"Dynamite, giant powder, anything to make a thundering noise," was the reply.

"Well, why are you doing that? Are those explosions signals?"

"You bet!"

"Of what?"

"Moisture."

The masked men muttered. They seemed mystified and bewildered; but they were no more bewildered than were the two lads peering from behind the bowlders.

"He's crazy!" sibilated Frank.

"As a pedbug!" whispered Hans.

Some of the men spoke with one another in asides. They fell into groups about the stranger, who seemed serene and unconcerned, for all of their presence.

In a few moments the leader asked:

"What do you mean by such a reply? What do you mean by saying those explosions mean moisture?"

"Just what I said," was the sharp reply. "What do you mean by coming round and bothering me. I haven't time to waste with you. You are retarding the advance of science—you are making yourself very obnoxious. I wish you would go away."

"That's nerve," thought Frank Merriwell. "That is a first-class bluff."

The leader of the masked men was somewhat angered. His hand fell on the shoulder of the black-bearded individual, and he growled:

"You had better be a little more respectful, my man! We are not to be trifled with."

"So?"

"You will find it so. Now, you talk straight, or we may take a fancy to fill you full of holes. I want you to answer some questions."

"Fire away."

"What are you doing?"

"Making rain."

"What's that?"

"It is condensed vapor precipitated from the clouds."

"You don't mean to say—you can't mean that——"

"My dear sir, that is exactly what I mean. It has been demonstrated that clouds gather after heavy battles and rain falls. It is believed that this is brought about by heavy concussions. I am experimenting. I am attempting to kick up a shower. This wagon is loaded with giant powder and dynamite. I have a number of balloons, and I make my gas with this small charcoal stove. I have been sending up balloons and exploding them with electricity, the battery to generate which is also here in the wagon. That is a full and complete explanation, and I hope you are satisfied."

The masked men looked at each other. They seemed hesitating and doubtful. One of them went to pawing around the wagon, and the stranger immediately cried:

"Better let that alone, if you don't want to blow us all sky-high! It's dynamite!"

The man fell back precipitately; all seemed alarmed.

"You don't think you can bring on a rainstorm now, do you?" asked the leader of the masks. "This is the wrong season of the year."

"So much the better. The dryer the atmosphere the better I am pleased. If I succeed, my triumph will be all the greater. It doesn't make any difference to me whether I bring on a rainstorm or a snowstorm. Either will show me my experiment is successful. The name of Prof. Turner Side will be spread broadcast throughout the land. I shall become famous."

"Hank," said the leader, addressing the big fellow, "come out here. I want to talk to you."

They drew aside, put their heads close together, and spoke in low tones. Turner Side knew they were speaking of him, but he seemed cool and unconcerned. They did not worry him in the least.

Some moments passed. Plainly the men were doubtful. The leader turned to the rainmaker once more.

"How did you happen to select this spot on which to carry on your experiments?" he asked.

"How did I? Give it up. Wanted to get away where I should not be seen. Didn't care to let everybody know all about it if I failed in my efforts. Left the train at Wild Horse. Hired this wagon and beast and came here. That's all."

"You may be telling the truth, but——"

"I am a peaceable man, but I shall feel it my duty to thump you real hard if you call me a liar."

"Then I won't call you that; but you'll be watched, and, if it turns out that you have lied—well, it will be very unfortunate for you."

"All right; let it go at that. I don't care. I'll move into the next county. Don't fancy being watched. Somebody might steal my secret and go into the rainmaking business."

"You do not seem to have brought down much rain around here."

"I had just begun."

"So? Well, go on. Come, boys."

The leader moved away, and his men followed. Turner Side watched them till all had disappeared from view, and then he turned to his wagon, muttering:

"Too bad! Broke me off right in the middle of my experiments. Let it go. Won't try it any more to-day. I'll strike for the ranch I saw away to the northeast."

He began making preparations to hitch the horse, a scrawny, razor-backed beast, into the thills.

A sudden impulse seized Frank and he sprang to his feet, walking boldly toward the would-be rainmaker.

The man looked up and saw the lad approaching.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "More visitors. Well, well! I didn't suppose there were so many people within a hundred miles."

Frank spoke.

"With a friend, I happened to overhear your conversation with those masked men. We also heard you say you intended striking out for a nearby ranch."

"Oh, it is not so near. It is at least fifteen or twenty miles away. Saw it from an elevation. Have good eyes in my head. It's a cattle ranch, for I could see the herds.

Must be a barbed-wire ranch. Thought I might stop to-night."

"Just so. Now, my friend and myself have been left here—stranded. We've got to stop somewhere to-night. What say if we go along with you? We'll pay."

"Come along. There won't be any trouble about pay. We'll travel along together."

Frank went back and spoke to Hans, but it was some time before the Dutch lad could be induced to trust himself with the rainmaker. He felt sure the man was crazy.

By the time Hans' fears were overcome Turner Side had gathered up everything and hitched the old horse into the thills of the wagon.

"Come on, boys," he called, as the lads slowly approached. "We ain't got time to waste if we want to strike that ranch to-night. This fiery, untamed steed may feel inclined to loiter on the way."

Frank thought of Hard Pill. He did not want to abandon the vagrant, and he vaguely wondered where the tramp could be.

"What's it best to do?" he asked himself.

The answer came quickly.

"Hard Pill can take care of himself, and we'll look out for ourselves."

The boys climbed on the wagon, and Mr. Side whipped up the old horse.

"Never saw such a country," he grumbled. "Looks deserted, but a little noise seems to bring men and boys out of the ground."

He found a road out of the opening. In about half an hour they left the broken ground and struck the great plain. The strange man did not seem to hesitate about the direction they should pursue. He selected the course, and the wagon went creaking and complaining across the brown expanse.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STAMPEDE.

Having left the broken country near the railroad, it was not long before they came to a barbed-wire fence. Still there was no ranch building to be seen, nor yet any grazing herds in view.

The rainmaker explained that the fence might inclose a "grazing range" hundreds of miles square, the property of several large cattle raisers, who thus kept their herds from the railroad, but allowed them to mingle freely, each owner distinguishing his cattle by the brand, as of old, before the time of barbed-wire fences.

"This fence stops us," said Frank. "How are we going on?"

"Dot's vot I'd like to know," spoke up Hans.

"I go prepared for such emergencies," replied the man, as he fumbled beneath the wagon seat and brought out some strong cutnippers. "We'll soon make an opening."

"But—but have you a right to cut the fence?"

"I'll take the right."

Down from the wagon sprang the strange man. Snap, snap, he clipped two strands. Then he swung them aside, and told Frank to drive through.

When the wagon had passed beyond the fence, Turner Side tossed the nippers back beneath the seat, brought out some pieces of wire, and swiftly mended the cut strands, so the fence was unbroken once more.

"That is what I call handiness!" laughed Frank. "You must have known what you were liable to run across out here."

"Oh, I know something about barbed-wire fences. If a fellow runs on one of them without having nippers in his possession, he is liable to travel a hundred miles round to get ten miles across."

"Don't the ranchers ever kick about having the fence cut?"

"Not if they know you mend it so it is good as ever. If you cut it and left it, you'd stand a first-class show of getting shot."

They drove on. The old horse was lame, and the boys walked beside the wagon much of the way. In fact, Hans preferred to walk all of the time, as he was afraid of the explosives which the wagon contained.

Frank asked Mr. Side many questions about rainmaking, and the man endeavored to explain his theory of producing showers by means of heavy explosions. He used so many large words and scientific terms that his explanations were rather vague and foggy to the boys, and it is doubtful if he thoroughly understood what he was talking about himself.

After a while, the rainmaker fell to questioning the boys, and Frank told how they came to be left by the Overland Flyer.

"Those gentlemen who wear masks," observed Mr. Side, "may be very dangerous customers. All I want of them is to let me alone."

"Something ought to be done to break up the dastardly band!" cried Frank, hotly. "Just think of a body of men banded together to wreck trains and rob the dead and dying passengers! It is horrible!"

"It is rather unpleasant to think of," acknowledged the man. "They are desperate fellows."

"They are inhuman monsters! They should be hanged, every one of them!"

"I think you are right, but I would not be too free in expressing my views on that point; you don't know who may be in sympathy with them around these parts."

"I am sure you are not."

"You are safe on that point, but there are others. Heed my warning; keep still about the train-wreckers."

"I'd like to be able to turn the whole gang over to the law."

"A very commendable desire; but it is not at all likely you will be able to do anything of the sort."

"I'd like to know vot pecome uf dot Hardt Bill," said Hans.

"That fellow is a mystery," declared Frank. "If he had

not stopped the train, and thus saved it from being wrecked, I should believe him one of the gang."

"He may be," said Turner Side. "That piece of business may have been some part of a scheme that failed to work. Who knows?"

"I don't believe he is anything but a wretched tramp who stumbled along the track just in time to discover the loose rail before the flyer came along."

"Vell," said Hans, "I don'd know vat he peen, but I'd like to know ver he vent to alretty queek right avay ven he left us."

"I shall not worry about him," laughed Frank. "He'll take care of himself."

It was a clear autumn day, and now, far to the westward, a hundred and fifty miles away, they could see the bluish ridge of the Rockies, with Pike's Peak looming blue and white amid the range. It did not seem possible that the mountains were so far away, but Turner Side assured them that it was all of a hundred and fifty miles to the base of Pike's Peak.

The plains were brown, the grass having been baked into fairly good hay by the summer's heat and sunshine.

The old horse plodded steadily on, mile after mile, and yet the ranch they were seeking did not come into view.

Finally the trio heard a faint, rumbling sound that seemed to come up out of the very earth.

"What's that?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"Dunder," suggested Hans.

Turner Side stopped the team and listened.

With each passing moment the sound grew louder and louder, swelling steadily and ominously.

"Look out for squalls," said the man. "If that isn't a cyclone, the chances are it is something fully as bad."

Frank's eyes swept the horizon, and a cry broke from his lips.

"Look—away to the west! What is that?"

They looked in the direction he was pointing, and the plain seemed covered with a dense moving mass that drew nearer and was more plainly seen with each moment.

"Vot is id?" gasped Hans.

"A stampede, by the eternal skies!" shouted Turner

Side. "That is a great drove of cattle, and it is headed this way!"

"Then we're in danger?"

"I should say so. If we do not get out of the way, we'll be run over by those mad animals—trampled to death—exterminated!"

"Our only hope is to get out of their course!" came from Frank. "We must let them pass."

"Right you are," agreed Turner. "We must keep straight ahead."

Then he lashed the old horse with the rawhide whip, and they were soon rattling along as swiftly as the creature could carry them.

Nearer and nearer came the great drove of mad cattle, spreading out against the horizon line, in a manner that made Frank's heart sink within him.

"We can't escape!"

"It doesn't look like it," confessed the man, whose face was very pale. "The old horse is doing his best now."

"It is a singular thing that this stampede should come in our direction just now."

"It is rather remarkable."

"Maybe they vill durn oudt vor us," fluttered Hans.

"Never," declared the rainmaker. "We'll be swept away like so much chaff! If we can't get out of their way, we are done for."

It was not long before it became evident that such a thing was impossible. The old horse was doing his best, still Turner plied the whip. Finally the horse stumbled and went down in a heap, throwing the trio from the wagon.

It had been a wild ride, for they had not known at what moment the jolting of the wagon might cause some of the dynamite to explode, so they would all be blown to pieces; but the ride was ended now, and they were still in the road of the oncoming herd.

"Done for!" palpitated Frank, struggling to his feet. "The old horse has broken a leg! There is no escape now."

"You are right," confessed Turner Side. "We cannot escape them on foot!"

The rumbling sound had increased to a dull roaring,

and the ground quivered beneath the tread of hundreds of hooved feet. With clashing horns, fiery eyes, bellowing madly, the furious herd rushed down upon the unlucky trio.

At times a steer would fall, others would go whirling over him, still others would pile upon them, and then the ones that were down would be crushed and trodden into the very ground, and the herd flew on.

"See!" shouted Frank. "There are men behind them—masked men, with whips and revolvers! They have stampeded the cattle! They are driving the herd in this direction!"

"Right!" cried the rainmaker. "Those are the train-wreckers! They have stampeded the herd in this direction! It is a trick—a scheme to kill us all—to wipe us off the face of the earth!"

The horsemen who were urging the frightened cattle on with whips and firearms could be plainly seen. They were lashing the tailenders of the herd, they were yelling and shooting into the air, and they were directing the herd toward the stranded wagon!

Frank was furious.

"This is murder!" he grated. "Those men believe we know too much. It is their plot to put us out of the way, and it will seem that we were killed by accident!"

He longed for some means of defending himself, but there seemed none. Hans was lying stunned on the ground, and Frank would not have deserted the Dutch lad, even though he could have saved his own life by doing so.

"Wait!" screamed the rainmaker. "It's our only chance—it's a bare hope!"

Frank did not know what the man meant. He saw Turner Side grab something from the wagon, saw him run straight toward the oncoming herd. It seemed that the man was rushing headlong to his death, and Frank watched with baited breath.

In his hands Turner carried a can—two cans. What did he mean to do with them? How could he hope to check or turn the mad herd?

"He's crazy!" muttered the boy. "He has gone mad! All of us are lost!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SPLITTING THE HERD.

The hoofbeats of the mad herd made the ground tremble like the jarring of a distant earthquake, and filled the air with a sound similar to the steady roll of thunder—the pouring of a Niagara.

Above the herd rose a cloud of dust, beyond which occasional glimpses of mounted men could be seen. They were wielding whips and yelling madly, but not a sound of their cries came to the ears of the unlucky trio in the track of the stampede. Through this dust cloud flashes of fire were seen now and then, plainly telling that the men were urging the cattle onward by firing their rifles and revolvers.

Frank shuddered and stood fascinated, spellbound, incapable of action.

Still the rainmaker ran straight toward the herd, the sunlight glistening coldly on the tin of the two cans he carried.

“He has gone mad!” repeated Frank. “He fancies he can frighten the cattle some way by running to meet them. There is no hope for any of us. It is doubtful if the world ever knows how we died, for we shall be blotted out of existence. Professor Scotch will search for us in vain.”

And now terror no longer dominated him, but a sort of stupor came upon him, and he stood there, calmly awaiting death beneath the crushing hoofs of the wild cattle. Most persons become calm when they know death is right at hand and cannot be avoided; thus with Frank Merriwell. He knew there could be little suffering; he would go down beneath the feet of the foremost steers, and it would be all over in the twinkling of an eye. He could feel no more than a shock; he doubted if he would experience pain.

Suddenly his eyes turned from the herd to the rainmaker. The man had stopped—he was carefully placing

the cans on the ground at some distance from each other—he was coming back toward the wagon as fast as his legs would carry him.

Still Frank wondered. What did it mean? How could those innocent-looking cans check or turn the stampeded cattle?

As he ran toward the wagon, the man wildly motioned to the boy, but Frank did not understand the meaning of his signals. He saw Turner Side open his mouth, he knew Turner was shrieking some words, but every other sound was drowned in the thunder roar of the stampede.

The earth seemed to quake with terror beneath the feet of the boy who stood beside the wagon so calmly regarding advancing doom. He could see the fiery eyes of the mad steers, could see the dust blown from their nostrils like smoke, could see their horns glinting like bristling bayonets in the sunlight.

The van of the herd were close upon the cans—had reached them, and then——

It seemed that the earth upheaved to the sky, and the very heavens were rent asunder. There was such a roar as might come from the mouths of a hundred cannon. Frank caught a glimpse of a black mass of earth and cattle flung far into the air, and at the same time the shock hurled him prostrate and stunned upon the ground.

Dazed though he was, Frank understood what had happened, and he gasped:

“Nitro-glycerine—dynamite—something of the sort! That’s what the cans contained! The hoofs of the cattle exploded it!”

Deafened and dazed, he lifted himself on one elbow and looked toward the spot where the explosion had taken place. At the same time he saw the rainmaker, who had also been flung to the ground, sit up and look toward the herd.

Where the cans had been there was a great hole in the ground. Scores of torn and mangled steers had been hurled in every direction from that spot. The herd was split—it was swinging to the right and left—they were saved!

Saved? Yes, if the herd did not unite again, they were saved. That great opening in the ground yawned di-

rectly in the path of the stampeded cattle, and the leaders had been frightened into dividing. Having divided, it was doubtful if they would unite again.

Turner Side got upon his feet and ran toward the wagon. Frank struggled up, and found Hans sitting with his back against a wheel, staring, shivering, quaking. It seemed as if the shock of the explosion had aroused him from his stunned condition.

And the horse—the old horse was getting on his feet! The creature's leg had not been broken after all!

"Hurrah!" screamed Frank. "We're all right!"

The rainmaker came rushing up. He leaped upon the wagon, caught up a rifle, brought the butt to his shoulder. And then, standing thus, he worked the repeater so swiftly that a steady stream of fire and smoke seemed to pour from its muzzle.

He was shooting over the herd—he was trying to reach some of the masked horsemen!

"Give it to 'em!" shouted Frank, in savage joy. "They tried to kill us! Salt some of them, if you can!"

The man could not have heard a word, but he did not need such advice. He was thoroughly aroused, and the wondering boy admired him at that moment.

To the right and left rolled the cattle, to the right and left swept the mounted men, and they took good care to keep beyond ordinary rifle shot.

The cloud of dust closed in and covered the wagon and the human beings near it like a pall. For some minutes the stampeded cattle continued to thunder past. At length they swept on, and the danger was over. The masked horsemen were seen departing with the cattle.

The rainmaker refilled the magazine of his rifle with cartridges. Then he sprang to the ground and proceeded to examine the horse. He lifted the animal's feet, he felt of its legs, he nodded with satisfaction.

"Dead lucky!" he said aloud. "Leg wasn't broken, after all. Critter's all right. We'll make the ranch, and our colors will be flying. It's rather hard work to down Turner Side."

Frank hurried to the strange man, grasped his hand, and shook it with great heartiness.

"You're a dandy, Mr. Side!" cried the boy. "That was a great trick! It saved our lives!"

"Without a doubt, young man. So it seems that my stock is good for something, if I have not been able to kick up a rainstorm with it."

"I couldn't imagine what you were doing; I thought you had gone crazy. My wits must have been dulled just then."

"Vell," said the Dutch lad, who had gathered himself up from the ground, "don'd you peen surprised at dot, Vrankie; mein vits vas fulfilled a leedle bit, you pet me my life!"

Those fellows who stampeded the herd didn't seem to care about getting too near us," chuckled Turner. "They sheered off beyond good rifle shot."

"I don't wonder," laughed Frank. "That explosion must have given them a shock. They didn't know but there'd be another."

"I'd like to get a can of that stuff under them!" cried the rainmaker. "They wouldn't wreck any more trains."

The divided herd was rolling on to the east in two sections, the thunder of their hoofs sounding fainter and fainter with each moment.

No longer were the cattle pursued by the masked horsemen. The two parties had united, and they were riding away to the north.

"That shows they intended to destroy us with the cattle," said Turner. "Having failed, they follow the creatures no farther."

"The dastardly wretches!"

"Well, we won't let 'em worry us any more to-day. Come on, old horse; let's see if you are able to draw this load."

The horse was still quivering with the fear that had made it stand still after getting on its feet; but the animal started at the word, and the wagon rolled on once more.

Man and boys walked. They could have crawled and been thankful.

In time the herd and the horsemen had disappeared.

There was enough to talk about as they pressed for-

ward. Such an adventure could provide material for any amount of discussion.

After a while, however, Turner Side grew taciturn and moody. He ceased to take any part in the conversation unless questioned, and then he answered curtly. He seemed to be thinking, speculating, planning.

In time they came in view of some ranch buildings, toward which they headed direct. The buildings did not seem many miles away, but the sun was well down toward the distant peaks of the Rockies, and the afternoon was far spent before they came near the ranch-house and corrals.

Fierce dogs barked and ran out toward them, some men came round one of the corrals, and another man whistled to the dogs from the broad veranda of the house.

Hans quickly climbed on the wagon to get away from the dogs, but the creatures responded to the shrill whistle of the man on the veranda, and quickly turned back. He drove them away to one of the stables, and then came forward to meet the boys and the rainmaker.

He was dressed roughly, but was smoking a fragrant cigar. His mustache and imperial were coal black, as also were his piercing eyes.

"Hello, strangers!" he bluffly called. "Whar away? an' whar from?"

"I, sir," explained the rainmaker, "am Prof. Turner Side, experimentalist. I have come out to these parts to conduct a few experiments with the atmosphere."

"Wa-al, I'm right glad to see yer, professor. Give us yer paw. My name's Robinson—Lije Robinson—an' this yars' my ranch. Ye're welcome to stay hyar just as long as yer want to, an' don't yer fergit it."

"Thank you, Mr. Robinson; you are a gentleman—a thorough gentleman. We'll gladly accept your hospitality. Permit me to introduce my companions. Mr. Robins-son, this is Frank Merriwell; and this is Hans Dunner-wust. These young gentlemen were dropped from the Overland Flyer."

"Dropped?" questioned Robinson, with a puzzled expression on his face as he shook hands with the boys. "How dropped?"

Frank explained, and the rancher whistled.

"So the train-wreckers are at it again, and they're near us, eh? Wa-al, I like that thar—dern my hoofs if I don't!"

The way he uttered the words seemed to indicate he did not like it.

Turner Side continued to explain, telling of the stampede, while Robinson listened with a queer frown on his face. When the rainmaker had finished, the rancher said:

"Herder brought in word a bunch had stampeded, but he didn't seem ter know thar wuz human critters behind it. I've sent out men ter look arter the critters."

After a moment, Robinson whistled again, and this time the signal brought two men running to the spot.

"Hyar, boys," he said, "take car' o' this yar hawse, while I take car' o' these uns. Come, Side; come on, boys. I'll allow you may be hungry."

"I can eat a pair of broiled boots!" exclaimed Frank.

"Wa-al, yer shall have something better as soon as it can be made ready fer yer. Come inter ther house."

They followed him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A RANCH DANCE.

Robinson had a wife and daughter. The latter was black-eyed, like her father, and rather pretty in a wild sort of way. She was two or three years older than Frank, but the boy caught her regarding him with admiring eyes more than once during supper.

Hans tried to flirt with the girl, but she gave him such a snub that he was quite upset.

Her name was Edna, and Robinson saw that both lads were introduced to her.

"Want yer ter make yerselves right ter home," said the rancher. "We're sociable people hyar. 'Tain't often we have visitors from ther East."

After supper, as they were sitting on the veranda, watching the glow of the sunset, which rose over the purple Rockies, amid which Pike's Peak gleamed snowily, Robinson said:

"You fellers come along at just about ther right time. We're goin' ter have a hoe-down hyar ter-night."

"A hoe-down?" questioned Frank. "What's that?"

"Don't yer know what a hoe-down is? Why, it's a dance, of course. Haw! haw! haw!"

"Why, of course it is!" exclaimed Frank, rather embarrassed. "I should have known that."

"Oh, wa-al, you're excusable, seein' as how ye're a tenderfoot. Tenderfeet ain't expected ter know ev'rything."

"Vos you peen goin' to haf a tance?" cried Hans, in delight. "Vell, uf dot don'd peen der stuff! Don'd I vos glat I gome!"

"Yeh," nodded Robinson, who was smoking another cigar; "goin' ter have a reg'lar ole rip-snorter. Invited everybody fer a hundred miles around hyar. They'll be comin' in purty soon."

All at once, Turner Side made a leap and came to his feet, crying:

"Great smoke! I forgot to say anything to the cowboys about the contents of my wagon! If they go to monkeying with that stuff, they're liable to blow up the whole ranch!"

Round the corner he plunged, running toward the stable, whither the wagon had been taken.

Robinson rose deliberately, saying:

"Dern my boots! it's lucky ther boys ain't been nosin' round that yar wagon."

Then he slowly followed the rainmaker.

Shortly after this the first squad of visitors arrived, bringing the musicians with them. These musicians were three decidedly villainous-looking Mexicans, a violinist, a harper, and a guitar player. There were three other men, and two women, in the party.

From that time onward the visitors came thickly, and Robinson was on hand to welcome them all.

Frank felt a touch on his arm, and saw Turner Side at his elbow. The rainmaker walked round the corner of the cabin, and the boy followed.

"Are you armed?" whispered the man.

"No. Train-wreckers took my revolver to-day."

Turner thrust a revolver into Frank's hand.

"Take this; keep it out of sight. You may need it later on."

"Why? What have you heard? What makes you think I may need a revolver?"

"I heard something when I hurried into the stable to warn those fellows about monkeying with my wagon. Two of the cowboys were talking together. What I did hear was enough to make me think we might find ourselves in serious trouble to-night. We mustn't talk too much; might be heard. It was unlucky for you when you fell in with me. I am suspected."

"Of what?"

"Of being an enemy of the train-wreckers. 'Sh! You're a level-headed boy, or I would not trust you as much as I have. Look out for yourself. We may find ourselves in the midst of a pack of tigers before long. Don't say a word to the Dutch boy; he's too thick. Now get back. Some one may be looking for us now. Be

cautious. If we get in a tight corner, we must stand together."

"Depend on me."

"Good!"

Turner Side strolled round the ranch, and Frank returned to the veranda.

The interior of the house was illuminated with many tallow candles. The visitors were talking and laughing, the coarse voices of the men mingling with the smoother voices of the women and girls.

Some of the girls were pretty, in a rough way, some were bashful, and some were boisterous.

Somehow Hans had taken a fancy that he was good-looking, and he was doing his best to make a hit with the girls. Frank found him the center of a laughing party, all of whom were having sport at his expense, although he had an idea that they were laughing at his bright remarks. Seeing Frank, the Dutch lad called:

"Gone away from here, Vrankie; you don'd cut some ice ven I vos aroundt."

Edna Robinson quickly left the group and approached Frank, to whom she said:

"Permit me to introduce you, Mr. Merriwell. You may find a pretty girl in the party."

"I found one before the party came," returned Frank, in a tone that brought the color to her cheeks. "It is not possible to find a prettier one now."

"You are a flatterer!" she murmured, with her eyes on the floor.

"Not at all; I am a second edition of the immortal George—I can tell nothing but the truth."

She introduced him all round, and Frank set about making himself as agreeable as possible.

Robinson came up and slapped him on the shoulder with good-natured familiarity.

"That's right, young man; hoe right in. Ther music is goin' ter start up in a minute, an' you want ter capture ther purtiest gal for ther fust dance."

"Thank you, Mr. Robinson."

The musicians began to tune up. The cowboys and ranchers were impatient for the dance to begin.

Frank looked around for Robinson's daughter, and

found her talking with a rather dandified, dark-faced, black-eyed fellow.

"Wonder if he is asking her to dance with him?" speculated the boy. "I meant to be ahead of all comers."

He slowly approached them, and Edna saw him, immediately saying:

"Oh, you want a partner, Mr. Merriwell. I will get one for you. Excuse me, Jack."

The young fellow with whom she had been talking scowled blackly at Frank, as the girl skipped away and took the boy's arm, asking:

"Whom have you chosen as the one you most desire for your first partner?"

"You," he replied, softly.

"Me?"

She seemed greatly surprised.

"Yes. I sincerely hope you are not engaged for the first dance?"

"Well, no—not exactly. I suppose Darrol expects me to dance with him. He's the one I was talking with just now. I don't like him too well; but pop thinks he's all right, and Darrol bothers me to death. Everybody thinks I'm going to tie to him; but I reckon they'll find out they're mistaken."

She tossed her head, and looked prettier than ever.

"By jingoes! she has spirit and nerve!" thought Frank. "She is something like a young panther."

A loud, he said:

"Give me the first dance; let Darrol take his turn later."

"All right, it's a go. Jack may be mad, but he ain't got any rope on me, and I want him to understand it."

The music struck up, and the couples began to form on for the first dance. It happened that Frank and Edna were at the head of the first set. Frank saw Jack Darrol approaching in a hurry, his face black as a thundercloud.

"Look here, Miss Robinson," said Darrol, "this is our dance."

The girl pretended to be very much surprised.

"Ours! I reckon not. You didn't ask me."

"I didn't; but you knew. You always dance the first dance with me. Come."

"Not this time, Jack. I'm on the floor, and I can't leave my partner. I'll dance next time with you."

"To blazes with the next dance! I want this one, and I'm going to have it!"

Then she showed her spirit; her head went back, and her eyes blazed upon him.

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Darrol; I shall not dance this set with you, nor will I dance with you at all, unless you are more respectful in your language!"

He ground his white teeth.

"All right! Dance away! You'll be sorry for it, and so will that kid tenderfoot you've cottoned to! He may be taken sick before morning!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MORE TROUBLE.

The look which Jack Darrol shot at Frank Merriwell betrayed the murderous hate gnawing at the man's heart.

Just the faintest trace of a contemptuous smile flittered across the boy's face.

Darrol walked away, and the hand of Edna Robinson fell on the arm of her partner, while she whispered:

"I oughtn't to have done so! He is dangerous—is Jack. I didn't think what kind of a quarrel I might get you into, Mr. Merriwell."

"Don't worry about me," said Frank, quietly. "I can take care of myself."

"Ah, but you don't know Jack Darrol. He has a fearful temper, and he is handy with gun or knife."

"I'll keep my eyes open for him."

"That's right, keep your eyes peeled. If he tries to jump on you, holler for help. There goes the music!"

The dance had begun.

The music was rather lively, and the dance started off with a whoop from the cowboys, who soon kicked up the dust out of the floor with their heavy boots so that the entire party fell to coughing. It was a wild "hoe in" affair such as Frank Merriwell had heard about, but never dreamed of taking part in. The foreman of the ranch, who had been "irrigating" freely from the jug of "strong water" which was kept in an adjoining room, stood up on a chair and roared:

"Dance thar, you fellers, or you'll git ther gout!"

Edna Robinson was the best girl dancer in the room, and Frank entered into the spirit of the dance most heartily.

The jug of "strong water" had been freely drawn on by the majority of the guests, so that every one seemed to feel like dancing.

At the expiration of the first dance, Edna whispered to Frank:

"Remember to be on your guard against Jack Darrol. I like you, and I don't want to see you carved just because you took a shine to me."

Frank thanked her, and they separated. He took a fancy to watch the next dance, and he wandered into the room where a hilarious party was gathered round the jug.

Darrol was there, and he was talking in a corner with a big, ugly looking ruffian. They were speaking in a low tone, and they saw Frank enter the room.

Almost immediately Darrol left the big man and approached the boy, saying:

"You worked it slick, tenderfoot, and scooped my gal. That's one on me. Let's take a drink together and talk it over."

"I am willing to talk," said Frank, pleasantly; "but I beg you to excuse me from drinking, as I never touch liquor."

"Get out!" cried Darrol, with an attempt at good-natured bluntness. "That won't go down here. You may not drink in the East; but everybody drinks out here. Eh, boys?"

"That's right," chorused the gathering.

"So now, come on," said Darrol, dropping a hand on Frank's arm. "It is a personal insult to refuse to drink when asked—it's an insult to me and to Lije Robinson, who provides the stuff."

"I am sorry; I assure you I mean no insult to anybody, but I never touch liquor, and I cannot do so now."

Frank regretted that he had entered the room, but now that he was there, the only possible course seemed to be to keep a stiff back, and face the affair through to the end. He knew well enough that Darrol meant to force a quarrel, and he did not mean to be taken at an advantage.

Darrol's teeth came together with a click.

"You must drink!"

"You cannot force me to do so."

"You're a baby! Men drink whisky; babies drink milk. Boys, who'll bring the baby-boy some milk?"

The hot blood rushed to Frank's cheeks, but he held himself in check.

Darrol's scornful words had caused the big ruffian to roar with laughter, and the boy looked sharply at the

man. The giant's hands were resting on his hips, and, in a moment, Frank noted that the little finger of the left hand was missing!

That discovery came near staggering Frank, for he remembered that the giant among the train-wreckers had lost the little finger of his left hand.

The big fellow spoke:

"Reg'ler cow's milk might be too strong for the kid; he must take it watered."

The voice was that of the masked giant, and Frank knew this man had been with the train-wreckers. Such being the case, it was possible Jack Darrol was one of the band. Besides those two, there might be many more of the wreckers present at the dance.

Frank began to feel that his situation was far from pleasant, as it was possible those men would suspect him of being a spy. At any rate, if Darrol belonged to the band, he would stand little show of receiving square treatment.

Frank backed up against the wall, not wishing to be caught from behind.

"Boys," cried Darrol, "hold the jug, an' I'll lead the kid to it."

"All right," laughed the giant; "bring ther babby up."

"If you touch me, you will be damaged," said the boy, very calmly.

Darrol laughed derisively, and attempted to grasp Frank's arm, when——

Spat! a hard fist struck the young ruffian fairly between the eyes, driven with all the strength of Frank's muscular arm.

The promptness with which the calm lad knocked Jack Darrol down brought exclamations of amazement from the men in that room.

"What's this?" roared the giant, in amazement. "The kid has hit Jack with a club!"

"Nary club," declared another, who was no less astonished. "He done it with his little fist!"

"But—but he knocked Jack down!"

"Sure pop."

"It wuz an accident—it sure wuz an accident. No kid like this could do that job."

"Waal," growled the big ruffian, "I reckon I'll have ter spank ther babby fer that."

He took a step toward Frank, but Jack Darrol sat up, sharply, crying:

"Hayer, you! don't be interfering with my meat! I can look out for myself; let the tenderfoot alone."

"All right, Jack, if yer say so; but this yar tenderfoot seems ter be mighty lively."

"I'll make him lively!" snarled the young ruffian, as he got upon his feet, his black eyes fixed menacingly on Frank. "Boy, there's going to be a funeral to-morrow, and you'll provide the corpse!"

"You alarm me," smiled Frank, his manner seeming to indicate that he was quite cool and unconcerned. "This is the first time I have heard that such an event is to take place."

"Oh, it is?"

"That's what I said."

"Well, you hear it now, and you hear it straight. No man ever struck me like that and got away with a whole skin; much less, a kid."

Slipping his feet forward slowly, Jack Darrol began advancing inch by inch toward the boy. Frank flung up one hand, crying:

"Stop, Jack Darrol! If you crowd me, you will be the one to get hurt!"

This brought a roar of laughter from the ruffianly gang, for there was not one present who did not think Frank had succeeded purely by accident in knocking Darrol off his feet. That there was the least chance for such a thing to be repeated they did not dream.

Darrol did not laugh, nor did he pause. He continued to advance on the lad, and his manner of doing so was so snaky that it gave Frank a chill.

Of a sudden, Darrol's hand disappeared into his bosom, appeared again, and in his fingers glittered a knife. Not a word came from his lips, but he hurled himself forward, striking straight at Frank Merriwell's heart.

It was the first time in his life that Frank had faced peril of such a nature, and he retained his presence of mind in a most marvelous manner.

Swift as were Darrol's movements, Merriwell moved

still more swiftly. Like a cat, he leaped aside, and the blade of the knife in Jack Darrol's hand was driven into the wall. Like a cat, Frank went under his assailant's arm, caught Darrol by the collar, stooped with a twisting movement, and flinging the fellow over his back, sent him whirling right across the room.

It was a wrestling trick Frank had studied, and, in this case, he had exerted every pound of strength he possessed. The result amazed all who witnessed the feat.

Darrol spun and slid across the room, and his head struck the wall with such force that he fell back and lay quivering on the floor.

For a moment an awed hush came over the ruffians who had seen this wonderful feat; then the silence was broken by a roar of astonishment and anger.

Out came revolvers, and bang, bang, bang, out went the lights, the lighted wicks being cut by the bullets.

Quick as thought, Frank flung himself flat upon the floor, and a dozen bullets passed over his body and lodged in the wall.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FRANK OVERHEARS A PLOT.

Up to the moment Jack Darrol drew the knife Frank had not realized the full extent of his danger. Now he knew that every man in that room stood in with Darrol, and, more than that, was ready to shoot in a manner that was decidedly dangerous.

Having dropped to the floor when the lights were extinguished, he escaped harm.

For all of his fortune thus far, he felt that he was still in a bad scrape, and he instantly resolved to get out of the room with the least delay possible.

"The door will be guarded," was his thought. "I must escape by the window."

He had located the window before the lights were shot out, and he made for it the instant he could leap to his feet.

By good fortune, he made no mistake. But the window was closed, and it did not open to his touch.

Frank backed off a few steps, preparing to hurl himself headlong through the window, for he was ready to accept a few gashes from broken glass if he could get away without further damage.

Just as he was on the point of making a leap he felt himself grasped by the hands of some unseen person.

Finding he could not break away, the desperate boy turned and grappled with his assailant.

Not a word passed between them, but the man quickly found he had more than his match.

With an outlay of strength that astonished himself, Frank broke the man's hold, lifted him from his feet and fairly hurled him through the window.

In another moment the lad had followed the man through the opening, striking on his feet, and he lost not a moment in slipping away from that locality.

Round the corner of the house he went, and there he paused in the darkness, muttering:

"That was a decidedly close shave, and I don't care about getting into that kind of a scrape again. It is rather unhealthy round here, and I feel like moving on without delay."

Barely had these words left his lips when he felt himself clutched once more, and his first thought was that he had been followed by the man whom he had cast through the window; but he was amazed to hear a familiar voice say:

"So you've struck fast company, have you, Frank Merriwell? Well, you are a rising young man, and it may be hard work to down you. Now, I am a fellow who never had an opportunity to rise—unless it happened to be on the toe of somebody's boot."

"Hard Pill!" exclaimed Frank. "You—you here?"

"I guess yes."

"Why—why, how——"

"Now don't go to asking too many questions," cautioned the tramp, for it was indeed Harden Pillsbury. "I am here about my business—seeking an opportunity."

"An opportunity for what?"

"'Sh! Keep your voice down. Are you aware that you have dropped into a nest of very bad birds?"

"I had begun to suspect it."

"Um—yes. Well, it is not healthy round these parts, and it will be a good thing for you to move right up and get away from here soon as possible."

"I think you're right."

"I know I am. Now I have some horses out here a short distance. Never mind how they came there. I object to answering so many questions. They're there. I want you to watch 'em, while I gather in that Dutch boy. You stick to me, and you'll come out of this with a whole skin; but I don't allow you'll be that lucky if you attempt to go it alone."

Frank did not know just why, but he placed a large amount of confidence in Hard Pill, wretched tramp and vagrant though the fellow was; and he permitted himself to be led away by the man, although fully aware that he was taking many chances by so doing.

They proceeded some little distance into the darkness, and then they came to a hollow where three horses were

huddled. Hard Pill quieted the animals by speaking to them in a low tone, and the lad noticed that the voice of this miserable tramp was musical and soothing.

"Stay right here till I come back," advised the man. "Keep close to the horses."

And then, before Frank could say anything more, Hard Pill slipped away into the darkness.

There had been considerable excitement about the ranch, but it was subsiding, although Frank had no doubt but a search was being made for him at that moment.

The music had started up again, and he could hear the cowboys whooping with delight as they capered about.

It was all very wild and strange to Frank, and he wondered if he were not dreaming.

What had become of Hans and Turner Side?

He began to feel as if he had deserted the Dutch lad in a time of danger, and that thought made him very uneasy and restless.

Then, when he came to think of it all, Hard Pill had acted queerly. He had declined to answer questions, and he had seemed to talk and appear differently from his manner at the time when Frank had first seen him.

"There's something about that fellow that isn't just as it shows on the surface," thought the boy. "He did not question me as to how I came here, and he would not allow me to question him."

Frank's uneasiness increased. Perhaps, after all, Hard Pill was not to be trusted.

Then came a thought that fairly staggered the boy.

"How should a tramp have three horses? If he did not steal them, it is possible he contemplates doing so. Or it is possible I have let him lead me into a trap. If I were found here with these horses, I should be taken for a horse thief, and they make short work of horse thieves out in this country."

It did not take Frank long to decide that he would look after Hans himself. He could see no reason why a common tramp should take so much interest in them, and he was not going to trust everything to Hard Pill.

Having arrived at a belief that it was not best to trust the tramp too far, it was not long before Frank slipped

away from the horses, and he breathed easier when he was at a safe distance in the darkness.

"Now," he muttered, "I must approach the house without being seen. I'll slip round behind the nearest corral."

This he soon did, but, as he was stealing round the corral, he was brought to a sudden halt by the sound of voices close at hand—the voices of men talking in a low tone in the darkness.

Slowly and cautiously Frank crept forward, and he was soon able to make out that a little knot of men had gathered there in the darkness, and the manner in which they were speaking seemed to indicate they did not wish to be overheard.

The boy's curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and he resolved to hear what the men were saying, if possible.

Lying flat upon the ground, he wormed his way forward, and he did not stop till he was near enough to overhear and understand their talk.

The first words he heard were spoken by the big man who had been so ready to back Jack Darrol a short time before. This man, whom Frank firmly believed was one of the train-wreckers, was saying:

"That boy is altogether too smart for an innercent kid—you hear me. He didn't come hyar for the fun of it, you bet; an' I think we hadn't oughter rest till he's found."

"Oh, let the kid go, Hank!" said another voice, which Frank instantly recognized as being that of the leader of the train-wreckers. "He's liable to come back to the ranch, and then somebody'll take care of him."

"Darrol is the man to do that."

"Wa-al, I dunno," put in a third person. "From what we saw, ther boy is altogether too swift fer Darrol."

"Next time it will be different. But the chances are that the boy was so badly scared that he hasn't stopped running yet, and I do not think he will be found."

"You're makin' a mistake in that boy," declared the voice of the giant. "To begin with, he ain't as young as he looks—not by a blamed sight; and you'd all oughter know he ain't as innercent as he appeared. I wouldn't

be surprised if he turned out to be Jarvis Jackson, the detective who had sworn to break us up."

"Oh, he ain't Jackson! Such a thing is impossible."

"Mebbe so; mebbe not."

"Well, Jackson or not, we're to throw the east-bound Pacific express just the same, eh?"

"Of course."

Now the boy in the grass listened with the most intense eagerness.

"It's a daring scheme, cap; right on top of our failure with the Overland Flyer."

"That is why I believe in doing it at once. In every other instance we have waited some time, and then had made a big jump from one place to another. We won't be expected to repeat the trick on the same track in a little more than twenty-four hours."

"That's right."

"Of course it's right."

"Well, what you say goes."

"Then be at White Gap to-morrow night at the time set, and we will carry out the work. We can dump the express into Sandy Creek, and we'll do the job under cover of darkness, too."

"All right, cap, we'll be on hand."

Frank hugged the ground, his heart pounding in his bosom, for he had overheard a plot to wreck another train, and he knew that he, and he alone, might be able to save that train. If he were discovered, he would not only lose his own life, but the lives of many on the express would be sacrificed.

The boy was horrified by the cold-blooded manner in which the desperadoes had talked of hurling the express from the track into Sandy Creek.

"They are monsters!" he mentally exclaimed. "If I am discovered by those ruffians, it will mean sure death!"

He was about to begin creeping away, but he suddenly realized that it was too late. The little party of plotters was breaking up and separating.

Then Frank caught his breath and hugged the ground, for one of the men was coming that way.

CHAPTER XL.

IN THE HERDERS' HUT.

Frank lay close and still upon the ground, and the man passed within reach of the boy's arm. Frank did not venture to stir till the sound of footsteps had died out.

"To-morrow night at White Gap," thought Frank. "I ought to be able to save that train—— I must do so! More—I should be able to trap those ruffians in some way. I must trust to myself—I must depend on myself. How can I get there? Those horses—I can take one of them—must do so. I must run my chances of being taken for a horse thief."

He was on his feet and ready for the move, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"Hans!"

He could not desert the Dutch boy; Hans must be found and taken along.

With great caution, he passed round the corral and approached the house, from which came the sounds of hilarious revelry. In a few moments he obtained a position where he could look in by a window, and he saw Hans wildly prancing around in the midst of the dancers.

It was evident the Dutch boy was having a very good time, and Frank was relieved to see that his friend had not been harmed.

"Ten to one he doesn't know anything about my close call. If he did, he'd not be there. He has stuck by the girls so closely that the ruffians have not had a good opportunity to down him, if they contemplate doing so. He is quite unaware of his danger. How in the world am I going to get him out of that? It will not do for me to go in there, and——"

He broke off abruptly, for the ranch door opened, and a girl came out. For a moment the light behind her revealed her distinctly. It was Edna Robinson.

"Why is she coming out here?" thought Frank. "If

she will get away from that door, I can—— By Jingoos! she is going!"

Edna came down the veranda, and passed round the corner of the house.

Frank lost no time in following.

"Miss Robinson," he called, in a low tone.

She was a short distance ahead of him, and he saw her pause and turn, uttering a low cry. In a moment he was beside her, saying, swiftly, in a guarded manner:

"This is a great piece of fortune! How did you happen to come out here?"

"I came to look for you," she replied.

"For me?"

"Yes."

"How did you happen to do so?"

"I heard Bud Hayes and Mike Grady talking. They did not know I was listening. We all thought the shooting and the smashing of the window was a little fun—that is, we thought so at first. After a while I missed you. And then I found Jack had a black eye. I began to suspect you had gone into that room and found trouble; but I couldn't find out a thing till I heard Hayes and Grady talking it over. They said you hit Jack in the eye and then threw him against the wall and stunned him when he tried to stab you. How could you do it? Why, you are only a boy, and Jack Darrol is a tiger to fight."

"I don't know how I did it," said Frank, modestly. "I found I was cornered and must do something, so I waded in."

"Now they think you're a detective, or something; but I don't believe it. You're not a detective, are you?"

"No."

"I knew it; but Hayes was sure you could not be as young as you look."

"I am younger, as I am large for my age."

"Well, you are certainly the most wonderful boy I ever knew; but you must not go back there. There are some ugly men in there, and you could not get off so well again. Father could not protect you, even though you are his guest. I did not expect to find you; but now

that I have, I will tell you that you must go away from here at once."

"I am quite ready to go," half laughed the boy. "But it is not so easy getting away."

"I will provide a horse for you. I own two horses of my own, and you shall have one of them."

"But I cannot go away and leave Hans Dunnerwust."

"Of course not! I thought of you alone."

The way she spoke the words made the boy fear she was about to make an open declaration of affection for him, but if she felt such an impulse, she restrained it.

"Dunnerwust shall have my other horse," she declared. "Strike straight for the railroad, which is to the south. The clouds are beginning to break away without so much as a drop of rain, for all of Professor Side's efforts, of which he has been telling the company. The stars will guide you. From the wire fence to the railroad is but a short distance—two or three miles. When you reach the track, turn to the west, and you will come to a station within eight or ten miles. There you can flag the first train, and take my advice, get out of this part of the country as soon as you can. We may never meet again, but you are the boy who downed Jack Darrol, and I shall not forget you."

"Nor shall I forget you," assured Frank. "You have done me a great service. How can I pay the debt I shall owe you?"

He saw her head droop, and her words were a mere murmur, as she said:

"Pay me? I don't know. Do you want to pay me?"

"To be sure I do."

In a moment she stepped close to him, and swiftly whispered:

"I don't care if it is bold—I don't care what you think! We'll never see each other again. Then kiss me—kiss me good-by!"

Frank hesitated in his surprise. To be sure this girl was not like other girls he had met; but he knew from her speech and her manner that she had not lived all her life on a ranch. She admired him, but still she looked on him as a boy, younger than herself, and she asked a

kiss in return for what she had offered to do for him—for saving his life, perhaps.

He felt the blood burning in his cheeks, and then, just as his hand touched hers, she started away, exclaiming:

"No! I see you do think I am bold—too bold. Perhaps I am. Good-by!"

Before he could detain her, she darted away, leaving the boy troubled with confusion and regret.

"It is her way," he murmured. "She has befriended me; I should not have hesitated, and now——"

"Now I'll fix you!"

He distinctly heard the words—recognized the voice—and then it seemed that the very heavens fell crashing upon his defenseless head.

Jack Darrol had followed the girl, and he had seen them meet. Consumed by jealousy, he crept swiftly up behind Frank, and the butt of a heavy revolver struck the boy senseless to the ground.

With the return of consciousness, Frank became aware that two men were quarreling near at hand. He started to sit up, and then he discovered that he was bound securely.

"He is a spy. How can you doubt it. He must be put out of the way."

It was Darrol's voice.

"You're away off, Darrol," declared the voice of the other man, and the unfortunate lad recognized it as that of Lije Robinson, the rancher. "This yar boy is no spy, and I don't propose ter have him murdered on my ranch. You hear me shout!"

"I wish I had finished him, instead of bringing him here! I'd done it, too, if you hadn't made such a fuss about having him wiped out round the house."

"You're altogether too ready ter do dirty work. That's why Edna has soured on you."

"And she has taken a fancy to a baby, like this youngster!"

"It's a mighty lively babby this youngster is, as your eye shows. You're jealous of him, Jack, an' that's what's ther matter with you."

"If the whole gang is roped in you'll be to blame for it."

"I'll take ther chances. I promised my little gal that I'd see this yar kid had a squar' deal, an' I'm goin' ter do it, you bet!"

"Well, are you goin' to set him free, and let him run?"

"Not yet. I'm goin' ter keep him hyar a while, till I am sure he ain't a spy."

"Then what?"

"I may set him free."

Darrol growled in his throat, like an enraged beast.

"Why, don't you take him home, and marry him to your daughter. She's in love with the babv. and she——"

"Stop—stop right thar, Jack Darrol! It won't be healthy fer you ef you slur my little gal! She's as good a gal as ever drew a breath; an' she ain't got no reason ter be proud of her father. Ef she knew ther whole truth, I'd never dare look her in ther eyes again; an' I'm afraid she suspects a heap."

"You're getting soft, Rob!"

"Wa-al, I'm sorry fer the day I ever fell in with this yar gang, an' I'd like ter begin life over; but it's too late, an' I can't turn back. Some day Edna'll know her old dad fer jest what he is, an' then—wa'al, life won't be worth much arter that!"

Frank felt a sudden sympathy for Robinson, as it was evident the man was not wholly bad. He had fallen into evil ways, and had been led on by evil companions, but he was inclined to be remorseful.

Darrol laughed harshly.

"You make me sick! You'd better go join the church!"

"That's all right, Jack; you ain't got a gal o' your own as loves yer, an' so you don't know."

"Drop that! It's this kid we were talking about. So you're bound to keep him here?"

"For a while."

"There may be a search for him."

"Wa-al, they won't be likely to find him in this old herders' hut."

"He may get away."

"Not with Manuel watchin' him."

"Then you're goin' to leave Manuel to guard him?" cried Darrol, eagerly.

"I am; an' I'm goin' ter tell ther greaser that ther boy ain't ter be hurt. I'll fix it so you can't get back hyar an knife ther lad, you bet! You thought o' doin' that—I saw it. Wa-al, you can't work ther trick, Jack."

"Bah! You're a fool!"

"I may be; but I kin read you."

"'Sh! The boy moved—he's coming round. We'd better get out."

"That's right. Come on."

They hurriedly left the hut.

"This is what I call a mighty bad scrape," thought Frank, as he strained at his bonds. The chances are against me, for Darrol means to murder me in the end. I have been getting in deeper and deeper, and it looks as if I had got in so far that there is no getting out. These rawhide ropes, they cut into my wrists, but I cannot loosen them. So I am to be left to the care of a greaser. Ten to one, Darrol will slip back here, fill the greaser with liquor, and then finish me. Frank Merriwell, you have been in many tight places, but this looks about as bad as any of them."

His head was throbbing with the pain of the blow he had received, but he did not think of that.

In vain he tried to free his hands; the work of binding him had been well done.

In a few moments the door of the hut opened, and a villainous-looking Mexican entered.

Frank tried to talk with the fellow, but the Mexican would make no reply to his questions. Squatting in a corner, the fellow rolled and lighted cigarette after cigarette, smoking in stony silence.

The hours passed, and Frank was sure another day had dawned, although it was dark and gloomy within the hut, which was lighted by a single candle. The burning of the candle told him the flight of time. It burned itself out, and another was lighted by the Mexican.

At length, utterly worn out and exhausted, although aching in every limb, the captive boy slept.

When Frank awoke it was with a feeling of hunger seeming to gnaw at the pit of his stomach. The old

Mexican was still squatting in the corner and the boy believed the fellow asleep; but the instant Frank stirred, Manuel was on the alert.

"Say," Frank called, "am I to be starved to death?"

Without a word, the Mexican arose and brought some coarse bread and water to the captive.

Placing the bread and water on the ground, the guard cut the bonds that held the boy's hands; but as Frank was ready to fling himself at Manuel, a revolver appeared in the fellow's hand, and it was pointed straight at the lad's head.

Frank ate in silence, and he was forced to submit himself to be bound again when he had satisfied his hunger.

Then came other wretched hours, and the boy began to long for something to happen.

He thought of the plot to wreck the Pacific express, and a groan was forced from his lips when he contemplated his inability to prevent the consummation of the nefarious scheme.

Another night must be at hand. In a short time the train would be derailed, and many of the passengers must be hurled into eternity.

What was that? Frank listened, and he was sure he could hear the thud-thud of horses' feet. The sound came nearer and nearer; it stopped close to the hut.

Manuel arose, his hand resting on a weapon.

Then the door of the hut was flung open, and in the doorway appeared Edna Robinson, the rancher's daughter!

CHAPTER XLI.

EDNA.

"Found!"

The word fell from the girl's lips as her eyes rested on Frank.

The youth gave an exclamation of relief and satisfaction.

Manuel seemed to hesitate.

Suddenly the girl whirled toward the Mexican, and a revolver appeared in her hand. It was pointed straight at Manuel's head.

"Throw down your weapons!" she cried. "Throw them down! You know me, and you know I can shoot. If you do not obey me I will shoot you!"

There could be no doubt but that she was in deadly earnest, and with a muttered ejaculation in Spanish, the Mexican cast his weapons on the dirt floor at his feet. She made him thus dispose of every one of them, then she made him hold his hands above his head, face about, and walk up against the wall.

Quickly catching up Manuel's knife, the girl lost not a moment in setting Frank free.

"This makes the debt larger than it was before," he said. "I cannot——"

"Don't spend time in talk," she cut in. "We have no time to lose. I knew they had taken you somewhere, but it was no easy task finding you. You must not fall into their hands again. Here, take these cords, bind that greaser's hands, and make them secure. He must be trussed up so he cannot wiggle till some one sets him free."

Frank followed her directions in everything, and it was not long before Manuel was lying on the floor, bound so he could scarcely wiggle a finger.

"That settles him," said the girl. "Now we must be off. Come."

He followed her from the hut, and it was with a feeling of unutterable thankfulness that he breathed the free air again.

It was near sunset. Unless he could prevent it, in a few hours the express would be derailed at White Gap.

There were two horses near at hand, both saddled.

"I brought an extra horse, hoping I'd find you," explained the girl. "We must strike for the railroad without the loss of a moment."

"But the other boy—Hans Dunnerwust?"

"He disappeared, together with the rainmaker. Somebody told him you had gone, and he said he wouldn't stop running till he struck Denver. Come, mount."

She was in the saddle before he could swing up, and soon they were riding away to the south. Few words passed between them, for the girl did not seem inclined to talk.

The sun sunk from view, and night came on. Still the girl led the way unhesitatingly. When they reached the barbed-wire fence, she dismounted, and it did not take her long to remove the top strand, so they were able to make the horses leap over.

Then, passing through a broken country, they came to the railroad and to a small station, about which were a collection of rude houses. Edna accompanied Frank to the station.

It happened that the station agent was on the point of closing. He had been talking with a long, lank, red-headed, trampish-looking man, who turned to leave, and ran full into Frank.

"Hard Pill!" cried the boy, in surprise.

"Well, throw me cold!" gasped the tramp. "You have turned up all right! That's a surprise. We gave you up as done for."

"We? Who?"

"The rainmaker, the Dutch boy, and myself."

"Hans and Turner Side; where are they?"

"Here."

"Where?"

"Nearby, at the hotel."

"A hotel in this place?"

"Well, it is called that; but it's not exactly first-class."

Frank was relieved, but he had no time to ask for a complete explanation. He remembered that there was a plot to wreck the express, and he asked how far it was to White Gap. When he found it was less than ten miles away, he took Hard Pill aside, and said:

"Look here, I am going to trust you, for it seems that you are square."

"Appearances may be against me, but I'm a white man," assured the vagabond.

"Well, I know of a plot to wreck the Pacific express this night, and——"

Hard Pill caught Frank by the shoulder, with a grip of iron, hoarsely hissing:

"You know of a plot to wreck the express? Then tell me, boy; tell me!"

"But you——"

"Look here, I am no tramp; I am Jarvis Jackson, a detective, and I am here to break up this gang of train-wreckers. You can help me, and you shall have the credit for doing so. You are a boy, but you're the smartest lad I ever struck, and that's why I am ready to give myself away to you. Tell me what you know, and be lively."

So Frank told the man everything, and he did not waste many words in doing so.

"Good!" cried the detective. "I will best Wyman Hawes on this job."

"Who is Wyman Hawes?"

"Turner Side, the rainmaker. He is a rival detective, and I am dead onto him; I have penetrated his disguise. I'll dump fifty men upon the wreckers, at White Gap, and I reckon the gang will be wiped out."

Jarvis Jackson stopped the station agent as that worthy was leaving, and, ten minutes later, a cipher telegram was being sent to intercept the express a hundred miles west of White Gap. In a remarkably brief space of time he set his trap, as he had been prepared to act swiftly in case it should be required.

Edna Robinson, forgotten for the time by Frank, had overheard the boy when he told Jackson he knew of a plot to wreck the express. In a moment she was excited and interested, but she had not been able to hear and un-

derstand more of the conversation that passed between the lad and the detective.

As soon as possible, Edna drew Frank aside, and began to question him.

The boy instantly realized that it would not do to tell her too much, for it was quite likely that Robinson himself was with the train-wreckers.

Feeling like an ingrate, sick of the whole business, Frank avoided telling her at what point the wreckers meant to derail the train; avoided doing so till Hard Pill stepped in and told her a deliberate falsehood.

Sometime later a little band of horsemen rode out from the town, and made straight for White Gap.

And they were followed by the girl, who had not been deceived by Hard Pill.

Frank and Hans were with the party, but Wyman Hawes was left behind.

Every individual of the party was thoroughly armed.

Before White Gap was reached the party left the horses behind, proceeding cautiously on foot.

Jackson did some scouting on his own hook, and succeeded in locating the wreckers, after which he struck the railroad to the west, and fastened two torpedoes to the track.

When this was arranged, he placed his men so the wreckers were cut off on one side, and then they waited for the express.

It came on time, and the explosion of the torpedoes gave the warning required.

The train stopped before the fatal point was reached—stopped to allow a band of men to leap off, every man carrying a rifle.

Then it was that the wreckers sought to take to flight, but found themselves between two fires, as Jackson was ready for the move.

A short, fierce encounter followed, and the ruffians were overpowered, although they did not surrender till several had been shot down.

When the captured desperadoes were inspected, Jack Darrol was found among them. He fairly frothed at the mouth, as his eyes rested on Frank.

“I knew it!” he grated. “I knew you were a spy!”

You have worked the trick, as I told Robinson you would."

A hand was on Frank's arm, a pleading voice sounded in his ear.

"My father—where is he? Is he here? Save him—help him to escape! Remember what I have done for you!"

It was Edna Robinson, and the appeal touched the boy's heart. He did not pause to ask how she came there, but he cautiously declared:

"I will save him, if it is possible!"

Then he found Jackson—told him all—explained how the capture could not have been effected but for Edna.

"Now, she asks that her father may be given a show to escape. Can it be done? He saved my life, and now——"

"We'll try it," whispered Jackson.

Five minutes later there was considerable commotion, for one of the captives broke away and took to his heels, being quickly swallowed in the darkness. Thirty bullets were sent after him, but Lije Robinson escaped unscathed.

The girl had disappeared, and Frank never saw her again. Nor was Robinson captured. He did not return to his ranch, and Frank believes he is living in some foreign land, safe from the clutch of the law, and trying to be an honest man. It is probable that Edna is with him.

The other wreckers who were captured were brought to trial, and all of them received long sentences. As Jack Darrol was shown to be sort of a lieutenant, he was given a sentence equal to that of the chief of the gang.

Wyman Hawes, the "rainmaker," was thoroughly disgusted by Jackson's success; but Jackson came out fairly, and declared he owed it all to Frank Merriwell, so it was soon known from one end of the country to the other that a boy had been instrumental in breaking up the worst band of train-wreckers ever known.

Frank and Hans rejoined Professor Scotch in Denver, and the trio continued on their travels, bound for the interior of Arizona.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STORY AND A MYSTERY.

"Vell, Vrankie, vot you sbent so much time dot biece uf baper ofer, ain'd id? Vos dot a love letter vot you peen carrying in your bocket aroundt so long id looks like id vos in need repairs uf?"

"No, this is not a love letter, Hans."

"Vot id vos, ain'd id?"

"It is a chart."

"Vot vos dot?"

"A map."

"Oh, yaw! You peen sdutyng geology to seen vere you vos at. Vos id map uf der world?"

"A very small part of the world. It is a map of a portion of the Santa Catarina Mountains, Arizona, where we are now. In fact, I am sure it is a map of this particular locality."

"Vell, vot you peen so inderested in dot for alretty yet so long?"

"Because this map, or chart, should guide me to a piece of property that is of sufficient value to make me the richest boy in the world."

Hans gave a gasp of surprise, and almost fell off his chair to the floor.

"I don'd toldt you so!" he cried.

"That is straight," declared Frank.

"Vot kindt uf broperty?"

"Mine."

"Yaw, I know you say id vos yours; but vot id vos, ain'd id?"

"Why, a mine—a mine!"

"Oh, yaw, a mine! Und id vas yours, so id vasn't mine. Uf you throw noddings ad me I vill dodge id!"

Frank laughed.

The boys were seated in the largest private room, "one floor up," of the New York Hotel, which was located in

the new mining town of Powder Gap, Santa Catarina Mountains, Arizona. On a rude bed near at hand, Professor Scotch was taking his regular afternoon nap, snoring now and then in a distressing and convulsive manner.

In the course of their travels, the trio had wandered to this remote mining town, the professor being led to go there through the request of Frank, who had a strange desire to visit the place.

They found it a rude, bustling "camp," consisting of rough slab shanties and canvas tents of all ages, stages of wear, and shades of color.

It was a wild and picturesque place, situated in a rocky gorge, through which flowed a small stream of water, which, in the rainy season, according to report, swelled to a wide, wild, rushing, roaring river.

Powder Gap was not a placer-mining town; it depended entirely on its ore mines, of which the Giant, the first one located, was the richest and employed the most men. Besides the Giant, there were the Queen Bees, the White Lightning, the Big Injun, and the Noble Roman. Of these mines, the Big Injun was said to be the most valuable, standing second to the Giant, although it was a mere dwarf beside the latter.

Wallace Coville, a dark-faced man of middle age, was the owner of the Giant. There were streaks of white in Coville's hair, but his lips were very red, his eyes glittering black and restless, and his entire aspect sinewy, alert, pantherish.

Coville and Carter were the original owners of the Giant, but Jason Carter had disappeared, in a sudden and mysterious manner, and no one seemed to know what had become of him. If any one hinted at foul play, he took care not to speak too openly.

As little or nothing was known of Carter, who had been a strangely silent and taciturn man, forming no friendships and making few acquaintances, his disappearance did not create as much of a sensation as it might under other circumstances.

After Carter's vanishing, Coville continued to run the mine just the same, and he once publicly stated that he and Carter had formed a chance partnership, that he had known nothing in particular of Carter's past, that he did

not know if Carter had a relative living, and that, in case he did have relatives, they could have no claim on the Giant Mine, as there had been an agreement between himself and Carter when they went into partnership that at the death of either the property should belong wholly and undisputedly to the other.

He did not state if such an agreement had been made in writing, and there were those who winked and looked wise when they heard of it.

There were a few who longed to investigate the mystery of Jason Carter's disappearance, and one inquisitive individual attempted to do so.

He also disappeared in a most sudden, silent, and mysterious manner, and George Bailey had not been seen since in Powder Gap.

No one else attempted to investigate, and the impression was general that it was not a healthy thing to be too inquisitive concerning the mystery.

As the town of Powder Gap grew rapidly, and other mines were opened up, the mystery concerning Jason Carter was in a great measure forgotten.

Powder Gap became a typical Southwestern mining camp, wherein all sorts and conditions of people, and almost all nationalities, could be seen.

The place contained numerous saloons and gambling joints, two "hotels," of which the New York was far the better, and one theatre and dance hall, which was the pride and boast of the town.

As yet there was no church in the place, and some of the ruffians declared it would not be a healthy thing for any "praying parson" to enter the limits of Powder Gap.

Together, Frank and Hans looked over the chart, while Professor Scotch slumbered peacefully on the bed.

"There," explained Frank, "is Tucson, and here is Oracle."

"How you know dot?" asked the Dutch lad. "I don'd seen no name to him."

"Well, that is what I have made out of it by studying it carefully. The names were not engraved on the ring."

"On der ring? Vot ring?"

"The ring this chart was made from."

"Vrankie, you peen got me all dwisted so soon alretty. I don'd know nottings apout dot ring."

"Don't you remember the odd ring I wore at Fardale—the one with the shining, black stone, on which fine lines were traced?"

"Oh, yaw! Der ring vot dot man in plack sdole vrom you?"

"Yes."

"But he didn't get away mit dot ring, Vrankie. He took a dumble mit himself der oldt quarry in, und dot dumble seddled his goose, for he vas puried right away soon after dot."

"Yes; he was trying to get away with the ring, and we were pursuing him, when he fell into the quarry. He was killed by the fall, and I recovered the ring. That man knew the value of the ring, and, with his dying breath, told me it would guide any one to a rich mine in Arizona. He died too soon to explain everything fully, but he said enough to show me just how much the ring was worth."

"How vos id he knew all apout dot?"

"He had seen the ring before he saw it on my hand—he claimed to have possessed it once."

"How he lost id?"

"I don't remember, but I think he said it was stolen from him; but it was not rightfully his, as he had stolen it in the first place."

"Und how you came to haf dot ring, Vrankie?"

"My father, who was seeking his fortune in the West, sent it to my mother, and told her to keep it till he called for it. Then came the report that father was dead, and, when mother died, she gave the ring to me, telling me to keep it always."

"Oxactly. Where dot ring peen now?"

"My father has it."

"I thought he peen deadt?"

"It was a false report; he was not dead."

"I don'd toldt you so!"

"Yes; after the ring came into his possession, he was tracked from place to place, like a wild beast, by a band of men who were determined to possess the ring. In vain he tried to throw them off the scent; they were like bloodhounds on the trail. He found he was constantly in

deadly danger, but, knowing the value of the ring, he would not give it up. He sent the ring to my mother, and then, with the aid of friends, his apparent death and burial were brought about. Notices of his death appeared in papers, and were sent to my mother, so she believed him dead."

"Und he don'd peen deadt ad all?"

"No."

"Vell, uf dot don'd peat der pand! How he come to haf dot ring, anyway?"

"It was given him by a dying man, whom he had befriended, and the man told him its value."

"Uud he haf got dot ring pack now?"

"Yes; he came for it at the time when we visited Uncle Asher. My living father was the ghost which Uncle Asher, my father's brother, believed he saw in the old mansion. You know that, at my request, I was allowed to sleep in the chamber where my mother died—the chamber frequented by the supposed ghost. He came that night, and I confronted him. Then I found that my father, whom I believed dead and buried, was alive. He had come for the ring, which he believed mother had left secreted in a hidden drawer of a dressing-case in that chamber. I had the ring, and I gave it up to him. The one ruling ambition of my father's life had ever been to get rich. This passion had made him a wanderer on the face of the earth, an exile from his home and the ones he loved. He pledged me to secrecy; he made me swear not to tell his brother, my Uncle Asher, the truth, and then he bade me farewell till the ring should lead him to the wonderful mine of the Santa Catarina Mountains. From that day to this I have heard nothing from my father."

"Dot peen a story like, Vrankie. I vos so inderested as nefer vos in dot."

"It does sound rather strange and improbable, but it is true."

"Vot you dink haf pecome uf your fader alretty yet?"

"That is a mystery I would like to solve; that is one thing which brought me to the Santa Catarina Mountains and Powder Gap."

"You dinks maybe you found him here, ain'd id?"

"I did not know."

"Vot you dinks now?"

"My father is not in this place; I am satisfied on that point."

"Vell, vot you going to done apout dot?"

"I am going to institute an investigation of certain things, and you may bet your last dollar on that, Hans!"

"Dot's peesness! Vot you going to invesdigate?"

"I am going to find out, if possible, how Wallace Coville came into possession of the Giant Mine."

"Vot dot haf to do your fader mit?"

"This chart, which was drawn from the lines on the stone of my father's ring, locates the Giant Mine. That is the mine for which my father passed through so many dangers, to obtain which he pretended to die and be buried. If my father is still alive, that mine should belong to him; if he is dead, it should belong to me."

CHAPTER XLIII.

DISCOVERY OF THE RING.

"Shimminy Gristmas! Dot peen more inderesting as nefer vas! Dot mine peen owned by Vallace Goville, und your fader don'd peen in dot. How you explain him?"

"I don't try to explain it; but I would like to have Mr. Wallace Coville make a few explanations."

"I don'd plame you vor dot, Vrankie. You shust ged righd away after dot Vallace Goville."

"I will," declared Frank, rising to his feet. "I will see him at once."

"Und I will seen him mit you."

"No; I want you to remain here with the professor. He need not be aroused till he finishes his nap. If he awakens before I return, tell him where I have gone."

Hans looked disappointed.

"Maype you ged into a scrap mit Vallace Goville, und I don'd peen in dot."

"No scrap, Hans. I shall look out for that."

"You haf a revolver?"

"Yes."

Frank took out a handsome weapon, and examined it to make sure it was properly loaded and in working order.

"I do not believe in carrying a weapon of this sort," he said; "but it is likely to prove handy in this part of the country. As has been said, 'one may never need a gun in the West; but, if he should happen to need it, he is sure to need it bad.'"

"Yaw, I pelief me."

Restoring the revolver to his pocket, Frank left the room and the hotel.

He made his way straight down the main street of the town toward the office of the Giant Mine. Near the opening of the mine, which was like a great mouth in the face of the mountains, were numerous large wooden buildings, about and within which everything was moving with a

rush and a roar. A car track ran down into the mine, and up from the dark depths came carload after carload of ore, the cars being drawn up by means of stationary engine and cable.

As fast as the cars came up, their loads were dumped into a great sluice, down which the ore shot on its way into a building where the ore-crushers were hammering and roaring, driven by another powerful engine.

Gangs of men were busy everywhere, and clouds of smoke came from the black chimneys.

"By Jingo!" muttered Frank. "This town is calling for a railroad from the Tucson and Globe line, and it will be built if one or two more mines like the Giant is opened up. Coville says he will build it himself, if it cannot be obtained in any other way."

He paused, and watched the laborers a few minutes, seeing the loaded cars come up, one after the other, like magic, from the dark mouth of the mine. It was an interesting and entertaining sight, but Frank did not allow it to divert him from the attempted accomplishment of his purpose.

Over the door of a small building he saw a sign that told him that was the office of the Giant Mine. Toward this building he made his way.

Just before he reached the building, the door suddenly opened, and out shot a wild-eyed Chinaman, aided by a kick from a heavy boot. The Celestial landed on his hands and knees, quickly scrambled to his feet and ran straight into Frank's arms.

"Gitte lout!" squealed the frightened heathen, as he reeled backward and sat down heavily on the ground. "Chinee man in bely gleet hurry."

"I noticed that," laughed Frank. "You seem to be on the jump. Business must be rushing with you."

"No blisness—bely poor blisness. No shirtee to washee; no sockee to washee. Melican mlan in Plowder Glapee no washee at all. Melican mlan dirtee allee samee pige. Sing Lee no gitee blisness; have to glo some odder placee."

"Well, that is rough on Sing Lee."

"Bely rough, you betee! No likee! Heap mlad! Go roundee tly to git shirtee to washee, sockee to washee,

slom'ting to washee. No gitee. Tellee Chineeman to git-tee lout. Chineeman tly to tlak blisness, gitee klicked lout. Oh, Chineeman heap mlad, you betee!"

Then the excited Celestial got upon his feet, and danced around, like a wild Indian, flourishing his fists in the air, while his pigtail flopped and squirmed and twisted like a snake.

Frank had never seen a Chinaman so thoroughly wrought up, and the spectacle was something highly comical, so the boy laughed heartily.

"Lafee! Lafee!" squawked Sing Lee, furiously. "Blimebly you gitee slick you lafee slo mluch!"

Then, for the first time, he seemed to notice that Frank wore a fancy shirt, with a rolling collar, which had been starched.

"Melican bloy wearee whlite shirtee!" he cried. "Melican bloy mlake glood clustomer. Sing Lee washee, washee bely clean, starchee bely nice."

"Where is your place of business?"

"No open placee ylet; jlust comee tlo tlow'n."

"Well, when you get your place of business open, I may have something for you to do, if I am here."

"Blully bloy! Me hugee you!"

And then, before Frank comprehended his purpose, Sing Lee flung his arms round the lad's neck.

"Break away!" shouted Frank, as he flung the Celestial off. "Don't get so affectionate on short acquaintance."

"Blully bloy!" repeated the heathen, grinning like an ape. "Sing Lee getee clustom now; luck have turned, you betee!"

"Well, I am glad if I have changed your luck," said Frank; "but don't get affectionate again, or you may think you've been struck by something harder than the toe of a boot. So long, Sing, old boy. See you later."

"Allee light, Melican bloy. Slee you later."

Away went the Celestial, appearing very happy in the belief that his luck had changed.

"Now for it," muttered Frank, as he boldly approached the office door, pushed it open, and entered.

Almost immediately he found himself in the presence of a man who was industriously writing at a desk. This

man looked up, and Frank saw the cold, hard face of Wallace Coville, whom he had seen before on the street.

"Mr. Coville, I believe?" said the boy, respectfully, hat in hand.

"Yes," was the harsh reply. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk with you a few moments, if you can spare the time, sir."

"My time is valuable."

"I haven't a doubt of it, sir; and I beg your pardon for bothering you, but it is concerning a matter of great importance to me. If you can give me a few moments——"

"What do you want to say? Be lively!"

Coville turned round in his chair, and faced the boy. Frank kept his eyes fairly on those of the man, which seemed to make the latter somewhat uneasy, as his own eyes were restless, and his gaze did not seem to rise higher than Frank's chin, save for a fleeting, furtive glance or two.

"I am here to speak about the Giant Mine," said the lad.

Coville moved uneasily.

"Well, what about it?"

"I have a few questions to ask you concerning it,"

"Ask away. I'll answer them or not, as I choose?"

"Were you the original discoverer of this mine?"

"I was one of—— Look here, it's none of your business! You have nerve to come here and ask me anything of the sort! I just kicked out a Chinaman for being insolent, and you want to look out, or you will follow him!"

"There is no reason why you should get so angry, Mr. Coville," said the boy, quietly. "I asked you a simple question, and you did not see fit to answer it. That being the case, I will answer it for you. You were not one of the original discoverers, but you were brought here by a man who knew of this mine. You had the cash required to open it and work it as it should be, and so you were taken in as a partner. Where is that man now?"

There was a black scowl on the mine owner's face, and his voice grated harshly, as he returned:

"You seem to know altogether too much for a youngster of your years."

"Then, you acknowledge that what I have stated is the truth?"

"I neither acknowledge nor deny it; I decline to say anything about it."

"That is plain enough, Mr. Coville; but there is an old saying that 'murder will out,' and—— Why, what's the matter, sir?"

For Wallace Coville had leaped to his feet, his face livid, quivering in every limb, as if he longed to fly at the throat of the boy.

"Who are you?" hoarsely demanded the man. "How do you dare come here and talk to me in such a manner?"

"My name is Frank Merriwell, and I am the son of Charles Merriwell, who, if living, has a claim on this mine."

"A claim on this mine! Boy, you are crazy!"

"Not much! He owned the precious ring that would lead its possessor straight to this spot and to this mine."

"The ring——"

"Yes, the ring that I see upon your hand at this moment! It is too late to hide it! How came you by that ring, Wallace Coville?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

A DAUNTLESS BOY.

The startled and shaken mine owner had carried his hand behind his back, in order to conceal the ring, but it was too late, as the keen eyes of the dauntless boy had detected it.

Man and boy stood facing each other in the small office room, one cowering, startled, speechless, the other bold, accusing, aggressive.

At that moment Wallace Coville did not seem like his usual, harsh, defiant self. He was shrinking before the boy, with rage and fear mingling in a look of pain on his face.

Once more Frank asked the question.

"How came you by that ring?"

"It is none of your business!"

Coville made the retort, but he did so weakly, and his voice was far from steady.

"You dare not answer that question truthfully!" declared the lad, in a ringing tone.

"Go away!" cried the man. "Go away from here! You will regret it if you do not!"

"Your threats cannot scare me. I am here on business, and I mean business, as you are certain to discover."

Frank seemed to have aged wonderfully since entering that office. His face now was that of a man, and his bearing was that of a man. The mine owner began to realize that he was not dealing with an ordinary boy, who could be easily browbeaten and intimidated.

"This ring is like a hundred others," asserted the man, with an effort.

"It is not!" was the instant refutation. "It is like no other ring in existence!"

"Why, it is a simple gold ring, with a black stone in the setting."

"It is a peculiarly twisted band of gold, and on the

black stone are traced lines which form a chart. That chart is a guide to the location of this mine."

Coville forced a harsh laugh.

"That's rot!" he declared. "Don't come here with such stuff. How is it that you know so much about the ring? Bah! It's rot, I say!"

"I dare you to let me examine that ring."

"You must think I'm a fool! I have stood too much insolence from you already! Get out at once, or——"

"Or what?"

"I'll throw you out, as I did the Chinaman!"

He took a step toward Frank, but the boy was not daunted in the least. Upward was flung one of Frank's hands, and he cried:

"Stop! If you dare to lay a hand on me, you will be sorry for it!"

"How melodramatic!" sneered the hard-faced mine owner.

Still, he halted, and he really seemed afraid of this strange boy, whose face was set and hard as if cut from marble.

"I have a few things to tell you, Wallace Coville," said Frank. "To begin with, that ring belongs to my father. How it came into your possession I do not know, but I mean to know in time—I will know! What has become of my father I do not know, but that is another thing I mean to learn. It brought me to these mountains, and, here I mean to remain till the whole truth is known. If there has been foul play—if my father has been injured at your hands—I mean to bring you to justice! You may laugh—you may sneer! I know that I am only a boy, but I will not be the first boy to avenge a wrong, or bring retributive justice on the head of a villain!"

Coville made a gesture of scorn.

"You talk as if you had lately escaped from a lunatic asylum. I fancy you have been reading trashy stories, and you are trying to imitate some of the heroes you admire."

"You are at liberty to fancy anything you choose, sir."

"You are at liberty to get out of this office, and you had better go while you can get away with a whole skin."

"Don't be in so much of a hurry. It is plain you are

very anxious to get entirely rid of me, but I am not easily driven."

"Oh, well, take your time! If you were a man, I'd throw you out. As it is, I will not have it said that I assaulted a boy."

"That lets you off easy. You might find one boy who would not keep still and let you throw him out. I am quite sure you have found one you cannot bluff, and you have begun to realize that fact."

Coville sat down at his desk, and pretended to resume work, but his hand shook so that he could not write, and he was forced to keep his teeth set and his back stiffened. He felt as if he had completely wilted.

Frank stood watching him, quite aware that he was putting the man to no small amount of discomfort. The boy longed to gain possession of that ring, but he could see no way of succeeding at that time.

It is true that Frank was also aware that he must find a powerful and dangerous enemy in the mine owner, who, with his riches, held all the advantage in any struggle that might arise between them.

But Frank was dauntless, and he believed that, in most cases, right and justice triumphed. In youth one is likely to believe this far more fully than in after years.

Frank had not accomplished his object in coming to Wallace Coville, but he had made a discovery—the discovery of the ring. Now he felt sure something of a serious nature had happened to his father, and Wallace Coville knew what it was.

All at once, the mine owner demanded:

"Boy, what is your name?"

"Frank Merriwell."

"Merriwell, Merriwell," repeated Coville, knitting his brows. "Why, I never heard the name before."

Then Frank remembered that his father had wished certain parties to still believe him dead, and it was likely he had returned to the West under a fictitious name.

In an instant, like a flash of light, a new thought came to Frank's brain.

Jason Carter—was he not Charles Carter Merriwell?

To be sure! There could be no doubt of it! And Carter had been Coville's partner.

It was plain sailing now, and everything began to clear up rapidly.

Coville had murdered his partner, and thus he had come into possession of the ring.

But it had not been merely to get the ring that the man did the deed. In fact, it was doubtful if the possession of the ring had been considered.

Together they had opened the Giant Mine, Coville furnishing the capital. He had seen that the mine would make one man enormously rich, and he had longed to own it wholly, entirely. Although he might never have seen the mine but for Carter, he did not take that into consideration. He had thought that it was not right for Carter to lay back and risk nothing in working the mine and receive one-half of the profits. His greed had made him desire everything, and it had led him to commit a dark and terrible deed.

Frank shuddered as he thought what the fate of his father possibly was.

"I will avenge him!"

The words seemed to run through the lad's head. Never before in all his life had he experienced such a revengeful feeling. It was so strong and overpowering that he himself was awed by it.

Gradually an expression of relief had come to the repellent face of the agitated mine owner.

"I never heard the name of Merriwell before," he repeated. "You are barking up the wrong tree, young man."

"Not a bit of it," firmly retorted Frank. "I presume you have heard the name of Carter?"

"Jason Carter was my partner."

"Exactly. My father's name was Charles Carter Merriwell."

"What of that?"

"I am satisfied that Jason Carter, whose mysterious disappearance I believe you can explain if you wish to do so, was none other than my father."

The boy saw a queer look pass across the face of the mine owner.

"Why should your father be known under any but his right name?" asked Coville.

"Because he had foes—deadly foes. There were men who thirsted for his life—men who longed to kill him, rob him of that ring, obtain this mine!"

"That sounds more than ever like the wild fancy of some story-teller's brain."

"It is true, no matter how it may sound."

"Well, I know nothing of any one but Jason Carter. You imagine he was your father, or pretend to; but I have no reason to think so. He never told me anything of himself or his affairs. There was an agreement between us that when one died the mine was to fall to the other."

"What kind of an agreement?"

"A written, signed, and witnessed agreement."

"You have it now?"

"I have."

"Will you let me see it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not care to do so. If it ever becomes necessary, I can and will produce it, in proving my right as sole claimant to and owner of the Giant Mine."

"Very well, Mr. Wallace Coville; I will not trouble you more. However, before I go, I will tell you that a correct and accurate chart was made from the lines on the stone of that ring. That chart I have in my possession. It may be valueless; it may be worth a great deal. You will hear more from me. Good-day."

Frank walked swiftly on his way back to the hotel. He did not see Wallace Coville come to the door of the office and make a signal to a big, red-whiskered man, who was loafing near at hand, nor did he observe that, after Coville had spoken a few words to this man, the ruffian also hastened toward the New York Hotel.

The boy's face was hard and set. He was fully convinced that his father had been foully dealt with, and that the present owner of the Giant Mine had been the instigator of the deed.

Believing this, Frank saw before him the task of learning all the black truth, and bringing the guilty wretch to justice.

"He shall not escape!"

Those were the words which Frank repeated over and over to himself.

Just as he reached the steps of the hotel, the red-whiskered ruffian came up behind, ran heavily against him, and fell aside, with a snarling exclamation.

"I beg your pardon," said Frank, quietly.

"Oh, yer does, does yer?" grated the tough citizen. "Wa'al, that don't go with me, kid, unless yer gits down on yer knees an' beseeches it most humble like."

In a moment Frank realized that he had a hard character to deal with, and that the man was looking for trouble.

The boy quickly faced about. Just then he was not in a mood to be bluffed.

"You want me to get down on my knees and ask your pardon?"

"That's whatever I does, an' yer'd better be about it derned lively! You hear me chirp!"

"What will you do if I do not get down on my knees to you?"

"Do? Why, dern yer skin, I'll chaw yer up—I'll make a lunch off yer! You ain't big enough fer a squar' meal!"

"Then, you had better begin by taking a bite at once!"

"What?"

"I say you had better begin by taking a bite at once."

"You won't git down on yer marrer-bones?"

"Nary git, my strawberry blond!"

"Whoop!" howled the ruffian, going through a wild war-dance, as he rolled up the sleeves of his woolen shirt.

"Strawberry blond! Wow! Give me room! I'm going ter scatter yer all over ther street!"

"Sail in."

Being a character reader, Frank knew the big ruffian was a coward at heart, for all of his bluster and fierce appearance. He knew the man could be easily and quickly cowed if the trick were done in the proper manner.

And he had not forgotten the revolver in his pocket.

"Yer don't know me!" roared the tough, as he spat on his hands.

"I haven't that misfortune, I am happy to say."

"Woosh! Misfortune! But you do want to be chawed up! I'll tell yer who I am. I'm Ben Bolt, ther feller

what ther song was writ about, only some chump twisted ther words round ther wrong way. They wuz all about me ter begin with, an' this wuz ther way they run :

“Does yer remember Jim Corbett, Ben Bolt—
Jim Corbett, as yer done up so brown?
He thought he wuz a dandy, Ben Bolt;
But yer put him ter sleep in one roun'.”

“You must be a regular slugger.”

“Oh, I am; I'm a terror on trucks. When I gits ter goin', you want to clear ther road an' stan' from under.”

“You alarm me.”

“Then, git down on yer marrer-bones, an' beg my pardon instanter!”

“I couldn't think of it, Ben Bolt.”

“Then, I'll put yer down!”

He made a grab for Frank's neck. The boy dodged, and then, quick as a flash, standing on the step in a position that brought him on a level with the desperado, he brought round his right fist with a heavy, swinging motion, landing fairly on Ben Bolt's jaw.

Never in all his life had the fellow been more astonished, for that blow knocked him flat in the dust. He sat up quickly, staring at the boy in amazement, gasping :

“Say, who threw something?”

“Nobody.”

“Did you hit me with a chunk of quartz?”

“No.”

“What did yer hev in yer hand?”

“Nothing.”

“An' yer knocked me down with yer bare fist?”

“I did.”

“I don't believe it!”

“Come again.”

“Dern me ef I don't, an' I'll paralyze yer!”

The ruffian scrambled to his feet; but, at this moment, a solemn-looking, long-haired man came down the steps, having witnessed what had passed between the man and boy. This person was dressed in black clothes, and wore a long, black coat.

“Peace, brother, peace,” he said, addressing Ben Bolt. “Attempt not to molest this gentle lad.”

"Gentle lad!" snorted the ruffian. "Did yer see him soak me?"

"I did, brother; but you provoked him to wrath. I am sure he would not have done so otherwise. You know the Good Book saith ye shall be long suffering and slow unto anger."

"Whoop! What's ther matter with yer? Be you a gospel sharp?"

"I am an humble but unworthy servant in the vineyard, doing the best I can, in my poor way, to bring sinners unto repentance before it is everlastingly too late."

"Wa-al, you've struck a right bad town fer your business, an' I advise yer ter git out instanter."

"I go wherever I am called."

"Wa-al, yer ain't got no call ter meddle with this yere difficulty, so git out!"

"Peace, brother—peace once again. Strife and contention are distasteful to me, and I entreat you to restrain your angry passions."

"Git out, parson! That kind of guff don't go in this yere place, as you'll right soon find out. Ther boys don't care fer preachin', an' they won't hev it."

"Oh, I think you are mistaken, brother. At any rate, I have decided to preach in the Snow Flake saloon at nine o'clock this evening, and I trust I may have the pleasure of seeing you among those there assembled."

"In ther Snow Flake? Wow! Has Andy Barter said yer could preach thar?"

"Who is Andy Barter, brother?"

"He's ther gent as runs ther Snow Flake, an' he's hot stuff, yer bet yer boots!"

"I have not asked Brother Barter anything about it, but I go where I am called."

"Wa-al, ye'll go whar you're sent in case you tries ter spout gospel in ther Snow Flake, an' thet'll be right out of ther door on ther toe of Andy's boot."

Quite a crowd had now gathered around, and the rough men were grinning at the strange parson, and making derisive remarks, none of which the man seemed to hear.

Frank had remained quietly on the steps, rather amused by the turn affairs had taken.

Now, however, the ruffian again turned on the boy, snarling:

"Yer hit me by accident, an' I made a misstep and tumbled down; but now I'll hammer yer face!"

"You had better not try it," warned Frank, calmly.

"Bah!"

Ben Bolt started to strike the lad, but he stopped suddenly, with his fist uplifted, staring straight into the muzzle of a revolver.

The revolver was held in Frank's hand, and it was steady and firm as a rock.

"You are a ruffian and a bruiser," said the lad, "but this makes me your match. By sheer brute strength you might be able to beat me senseless. However, you will not be given the opportunity, for I'll shoot the roof of your head off if you move toward me another inch!"

Ben Bolt glared, but he saw that the youth meant exactly what he said.

"Be careful with the deadly weapon, my young brother!" cried the parson, quickly. "You are commanded not to shed human blood."

"Self-defense is the first law of nature."

"Strife and contention I abhor."

"Then, you have come to a poor place for your peace of mind."

"I believe in avoiding trouble in all cases."

"There are times when it is impossible, and this seems to be one of them."

Ben Bolt was grinding his teeth and looking as if he longed to eat Frank, but the boy did not take his eyes off the ruffian for a second.

In the meantime, another ruffianly character came out of the hotel, and, seeing how matters stood, stole down quietly behind the lad.

Before Frank was aware that another person was close behind him, the fellow reached over the boy's shoulder, clutched the revolver, and twisted it out of his hand, saying:

"Let me hiv thot plaything, me b'y; it's hurrut ye might get wid it."

Frank was disarmed.

"Now I'll hammer yer!" howled Ben Bolt.

"Hold!" commanded the parson. "There must be no contention!"

"Go to thunder!" snarled the ruffian. "I'm goin' ter knock ther stuffin' out of ther kid!"

"An' Oi'll see thot yee does it, Binny, me lad," said the Irishman who had disarmed Frank.

"Lo and behold, this is too much for frail mortal to endure!" sighed the parson. "Human flesh is prone to weakness, and all humanity is sorely tried by temptations. I can't stand idly by and see the weak assailed by the strong, even though I may grievously err. If there is going to be a scrap, I'll have to be in it, even though it may cause me hours of remorseful repentance."

And the peaceful parson began to remove his coat, in a very businesslike manner.

CHAPTER XLV.

A GENTLEMAN FROM FRANCE.

Both ruffians stared in astonishment, and the crowd roared with laughter.

"Go it, old socks!" cried one.

"Give him gospel!" adjured another.

"Quote Scripture to him!" advised a third.

"Begorra," cried the Irish ruffian, in astonishment, "Oi belave th' praste manes ter foight!"

"I am one of the most peaceful members of the spotless flock," declared the old parson, "but, as I observed before, human flesh is prone to weakness, and I cannot remain idly at hand and see the weak beset by the strong."

"Get out!" snarled Ben Bolt, in an ugly manner. "Ef you dip in hyar, you'll wish yer hadn't!"

"It is possible, brother, that you may wish I hadn't."

The parson was now ready for business, and he squared away at the big ruffian in a manner that quickly convinced Frank he knew something of the "manly art."

"Wa-al, I'll knock ther corners off yer in one punch!" cried Ben Bolt.

He made a rush for the parson.

Spat—smash—thud!

A howl of delight went up from the spectators, for the parson had ducked under Ben's arm, come up behind the fellow's shoulder, struck him twice with astonishing swiftness, and dropped him like a log in the dust.

More than one present declared it the prettiest piece of work they had ever seen.

"Mike! Mike!" thickly bellowed the man who had been knocked down; "jump in hyar! Don't let 'em kick me!"

"Begorra, it's no nade thot wan has to do innything av th' koind," retorted the Irishman. "Th' spalpane stroikes harruder thin a mule can kick. Ye may have him. Oi'll take th' b'y."

Then Mike made a rush for Frank, whom he expected to take by surprise and easily overcome.

Frank was on the watch for just such a move, and he met Mike more than halfway.

The Irishman was short and thickset, rather slow of movement, and strong.

He tried to clutch the boy, but he grasped no more than empty air. Frank was not there, and, the next moment, Mike felt himself flying through the air.

Frank had stooped low down, caught Mike near the knees, and flung the Irishman fairly over his head.

The astounded Irishman struck on his head and shoulders, fell at full length on his back, and lay there, gazing blankly up at the sky, muttering:

"It's an illigant, foine lot av shtars ye are, to be sure! Oi nivver saw so minny before in th' daytoime."

"What's the matter with the boy?" howled some one in the crowd of spectators.

"He's all right!" roared a stentorian voice.

Then a cheer of delight went up.

As for the parson, he was urging Ben Bolt to get up.

"Arise, brother," he entreated; "I never like to do a thing by halves, and, now that I have been led into this unseemly strife, it is my earnest and sincere desire to polish you off properly."

"It wuz a mistake," mumbled Ben. "You can't do it again."

Then he got upon his feet, keeping his eyes on the parson, who made no offer to take an advantage of him as he was getting up.

"I'll do yer this yar time, Old Gospel!" snarled the ruffian.

He approached the parson, in a manner that plainly indicated he had learned to be cautious. The slender man in black calmly awaited the fellow's attack.

Of a sudden, the bruiser closed in, striking heavily at the parson's face. It was intended for a knockout blow, and such it would have been if it had landed.

The parson guarded, and countered with his left.

Ben Bolt's fist was thrust upward into the air, and an opening was made, through which the parson struck, with a swinging, round-shoulder movement.

It seemed as if something broke when the hard knuckles of the man in black were planted under the bully's ear.

Down dropped Ben Bolt, like a lifeless thing, fairly knocked out.

Mike, the Irishman, had sat up in time to see this, and he now said:

"It's a mistake we made, Oi'm thinkin', fer thase gintlemin are not in our class. Oi don't care fer thot koind av medicine, an' so Oi'll jist kape Binny company."

Then he deliberately lay down in the dust once more.

"The trouble is over," shouted somebody in the crowd.

At this moment, Frank heard a familiar voice call:

"Vrankie!"

He looked up, and saw Hans leaning out of a window above.

"Uf you don'd vant some hellup in dot row, Vrankie, why ain'd you said so?" demanded the Dutch boy, reproachfully. "Vait an hour und I peen down und stood behind you."

"You're too late," laughed Frank.

The delighted and admiring crowd flocked around the boy and the parson, and, before the two could comprehend the intention of the mob, they were lifted on broad shoulders and carried toward the Snow Flake saloon.

There was no way of escaping, and so they submitted as gracefully as possible.

Right into the saloon they were carried, and twenty men ordered drinks for the victors.

"Brothers," called the parson, "I fully appreciate the kindness of your hearts, but I never look on the whisky when it is red, for it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder."

"I am with you, parson," said Frank. "I never drink, under any circumstances."

"Stick to that, my boy. 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.'"

The crowd was greatly disappointed.

"We want ter drink ter ther health o' ther swiftest parson an' ther smartest kid we ever saw," said one.

"Then, drink in water," said the parson, "and we will

'drink with you. Come, brothers and friends, surprise your stomachs and satisfy us by drinking water."

"Water?" cried one old bummer, with a very red nose. "What is water, anyhow?"

"I can't drink that," protested another. "It'll make me sick."

"I saw the whole affair," said Andy Barter, the proprietor of the saloon, "and, if the parson and the kid say water, water goes. Every blamed galoot hyar drinks water with the parson and the kid. Hold on, thar, Red-nose Jerry!" he called, sharply, whipping a revolver out from beneath the bar and covering an old bummer, who was hurrying toward the door. "You can't escape. Once more in your life you'll have to stand up and take water!"

"Well, if ther stuff kills me, you'll have to pay the funeral expenses," whimpered the bummer.

Andy Barter and his barkeeper quickly filled a long row of glasses with water, and every person present was required to take a glass.

Then, for the first time, Frank observed a striking-looking man, who stood upon a box and called the attention of the crowd by proposing a toast.

This man was tall and finely formed. He was dressed in a black velvet suit, on which were buttons of gold. His hat, a soft, fashionable affair, was encircled by a gold cord. On his feet he wore wine-colored tan shoes. His handsome negligée shirt had a wide, starched collar, beneath which a tasty silk tie was passed round and knotted. In the knot sparkled a diamond that contained a thousand colored fires. A gold chain was strung across his vest, and another diamond gleamed from the one ring he wore upon his left hand.

But it was the man's face that attracted Frank's attention. The flesh bore a cold, deathly pallor, like marble, as if this man had long been confined in some dark dungeon. His eyes were dark and piercing, alive with the fires of youth, but his long hair was snowy white, as, likewise, were his mustache and imperial.

A low cry of wonder was forced from Frank's lips, as he stared at this striking figure.

"That face!" whispered the boy to himself. "I have

seen it before! It is the face of—— No, no! I must be mistaken!"

"Genteelmen," said the stranger on the box, "I see ze fight. Eet was wondaerful—eet was gr-r-reat! Genteelmen, I am a strangaire in your countaree, but een my own countaree, in France, I sometime see some wondareful things. Nevaire have I seen ze bettaire fight zan zat. I am a offizare in ze French armee—I hole ze commissione of marshal. My name ees Fabian Danglar. Genteelmen, Marshal Danglar propose to you ze toast. Here to ze health of ze parzone; may he be successful in ze conversione of souls. And here to ze health of Frank Merriwell; may he solve ze mysteree zat breeng him here—may he learn ze secret zat ees buried in ze black depth of ze ground. Drink heartee."

Frank was astonished. This white-haired, marble-faced, fire-eyed Frenchman knew him, knew his name, knew more.

What did he mean by speaking of a secret buried in the heart of the ground?

The question flashed through Frank's mind in a moment.

For the briefest space of time the boy was dazed, but he swiftly recovered, and then he drank with the rest.

Jerry, the old toper, pretended to drink, but he managed to deftly toss the water on the floor, and he was heard to mutter:

"I don't take no chances—I don't. There ain't no knowing how long I'd be sick if I took a drink of water, and I might drop dead."

"Now, dear friends in sin," said the parson, "I wish to announce that I will speak a few words of spiritual comfort in this place this evening at nine o'clock, and I hope to see you all present."

Andy Barter gasped.

"Well, that's what I call nerve!" he cried, in a dazed way. Then he thumped the bar with his fist, and declared: "But it goes, you bet! A parson that can fight the way this one can oughter have a chance to talk gospel, and I'm honored at his selecting my saloon. If any of my regular customers stay away this night, I shall consider it a personal insult."

"We'll all come!" cried the crowd.

The parson expressed his thankfulness, and then, begging them to excuse him, hastily left the saloon.

Frank would have followed the parson, but he wished to have a word with Fabian Danglar, for which purpose he lingered.

The Frenchman soon came toward the boy, and Frank felt his heart rising into his mouth, as the man approached. He seemed fascinated and spellbound by those wondrous, black eyes and that deathly-white face.

"Mistaire Merriwell," said Danglar, with the polished politeness that is natural to a Frenchman, "you are a wondraire for a boyee. Zat treek you do when you knock ze beeg ruffian down was goode, but zat ozare treek you do when you t'row ze Ireeshman ovare your head was vera much bettaire. And you do not dreenk ze whiskee? Ah, zat ees goode! Nevaire touch ze whiskee, for eet have ruined vera many men."

The face, the voice, the eyes—all seemed strangely familiar to Frank; but still the boy could not remember that he had ever met Marshal Danglar before that day. There was something fascinating about the man, something awesome.

"I thank you for your compliments," said the lad, with an effort.

Danglar waved his hand, with a graceful movement.

"I speak ze trute, Mistaire Merriwell—I always speak ze trute. Sometime my word they be not so pleasant to somebodee."

"How is it that you know me?" questioned Frank.

The man smiled, in a mysterious way.

"I know manee people zat do nevaire know me."

"It almost seems that I have seen you before. Your face, your voice, and your eyes seem strangely familiar."

"Zat may be ze trute. Do you believe in ze transmigration of ze soul? Do you believe zat everybodee have live manee lives before ze one zey live now? I believe in zat, Mistaire Merriwell. I even remember some of ze things what I do when I live some ozare life in some ozare body, before I have zis bodee zat you see now. Maybe we meet zen, and we remembaire each ozare."

From any other man, these words might have seemed

ridiculous to the boy; but there was something about Fabian Danglar that made them strangely impressive, and Frank shivered a little, although he forced a laugh.

"I scarcely think that is why I remember you," he said. "It is possible I do not remember you at all; it may be mere fancy."

Danglar's eyes seemed piercing him through and through, and Frank fancied they could read his secret thoughts.

"Oh, I don't think eet ees ze fancee. You do not believe ze t'ings zat I believe, Mistaire Merriwell."

"You knew my name."

"I found it out at ze hotel."

"You spoke of something strange."

"What was zat?"

"Of a mystery I came to Powder Gap to solve."

"Zat ees trute."

"And of a secret hidden in the ground."

"*Oui*, I may say zat."

"What did you mean by it?"

Danglar shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask me somet'ing easee."

"Do you mean that you cannot tell?"

"Sometime I say t'ings zat I do not know ze meaning of myself. I do not know zat I am going to say zem, but when I speak zey come out."

"You surely knew what you were saying then?"

"Perhaps."

"You do not deny it?"

"I deny nottings, Mistaire Merriwell."

Frank was more puzzled than ever, and utterly baffled by the man's manner. He felt a rising anger and impatience, but he suppressed them, and held them in check.

"You will not tell me what you meant, sir?"

"You will find out for yourself in ze course of time."

"Perhaps so."

"You are pritee sure to do zat, for you do what you try to do. You have ze way of always coming out at ze top in anyt'ing. But I have to warn you."

"Warn me?"

"*Oui*, Mistaire Merriwell."

"Of what?"

"Dangare—vera great dangare."

"What kind of danger?"

"Dangare of your life."

"How is that?"

"You have in zis place one eneme—he hate you, and, zough you be one boyee, he fear you at ze same time. Eet was heem zat set ze beeg ruffaine on you. Zat ruffaine was to pound you teel you was keeled by ze accident some way."

"You must mean Wallace Coville?"

Danglar said nothing.

"Are you sure he sent the ruffian after me?" eagerly asked the boy.

"I am sure your eneme do zat."

"I can have no other enemy in Powder Gap, so he must be the one."

"Zen, look out for heem; zat ees all. Bimeby I see you again latare."

Politely bidding Frank adieu, the strange Frenchman left the saloon.

Wondering at what he had heard, the boy soon followed Danglar, although the crowd would have kept him longer.

Frank was supplied with plenty of food for reflection. He still felt that he had seen the Frenchman somewhere before this meeting in Powder Gap, but where, or when, it was impossible for him to tell.

There was something awe-inspiring about the man with the white hair, marble face, and coal-black eyes, and yet Frank felt drawn toward him in a most mysterious and unaccountable manner.

It was certainly wonderful that the man knew so much about Frank, and the boy felt that his warning was to be heeded.

Wallace Coville was rich and powerful, and he was certainly a bad man for an enemy.

That Coville had sent Ben Bolt to pick a quarrel with Frank was something the lad had not suspected, but, now, he did not doubt it in the least.

It was plainly Coville's object to drive the lad from Powder Gap, or fix him so he could never make any troublesome investigation of the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Jason Carter.

Knowing this beyond a doubt, Frank was more than ever determined to know the entire truth, and bring Coville to justice.

Then he thought of Danglar's words concerning a "secret hidden in the black depths of the earth."

"The Giant Mine," thought the boy. "The secret must be hidden there, and I will find a way to bring it from the black depth to the open light of day."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PROFESSOR'S TROUBLES.

The peculiar parson had registered at the New York Hotel as "P. C. Full," and it did not take the citizens of Powder Gap long to fall into the way of calling him "Parson Peaceful."

Long before nine o'clock that evening the entire town had heard of the encounter in front of the hotel, and there was a general desire to see the queer preacher and the remarkable boy who had easily whipped two of the worst ruffians in the Santa Catarina Mountains.

There had been a sudden influx of noteworthy strangers, of whom Frank did not attract the least attention, being pointed out and admiringly inspected wherever he went.

For all of his sudden notoriety, the parson conducted himself with modesty, being quite unassuming and lamb-like in manner. Looking at him, as he strolled pensively through the town, no one could have fancied he knew the least about fighting, or could be driven into fighting if he did know anything.

Fabian Danglar would have attracted attention anywhere, even though he had dressed modestly and in an unassuming manner. As he dressed extravagantly, and seemed to court observation, he produced no small amount of comment.

If an ordinary man had appeared in Powder Gap wearing Danglar's clothes, a dozen men would have regarded it as a personal insult, and sought to "curry him down."

Danglar, however, was anything but an ordinary man. There was something awesome about his cold, white face, and his keen, black eyes had a way of seeming to look down into one's very soul.

No one thought of tackling the strange Frenchman.

Among the strangers was one who was regarded as of little importance, and yet he attracted considerable atten-

tion, as he was the first Celestial to enter Powder Gap. Sing Lee, the Chinaman, persisted in trying to "drum up business," although he ran into no small amount of trouble, and seemed nearly frightened out of his senses a dozen times an hour.

Returning to the hotel after his talk with Danglar in the Snow Flake saloon, Frank found Hans and Professor Scotch anxiously awaiting his arrival.

"Vere you peen so long alretty?" demanded Hans.

"Look here, Frank—look here!" blustered the professor, caressing his fiery whiskers, "I've enough of this!"

"Why don't you shave it off?" laughed the boy.

"Eh? What's that? What's that?"

"I can't name it."

"Young man, you are altogether too gay. Remember, I am your legal guardian, and I don't want to be treated——"

"I never knew you to refuse, if you were asked to take something."

The professor gasped, his face flushing.

"This is too much! This is too much!" rumbled the little man with the big voice, as he excitedly rubbed his long nose.

"I think so myself," chuckled the irrepressible lad; "but I suppose it grew there without your consent?"

"Yaw, yaw, yaw!" roared Hans, forgetting himself, and giving the little professor a resounding slap on the back.

The Dutch boy's hands were like hams, and Professor Scotch was sent down on his hands and knees in a twinkling.

"Oxcuse me, professor!" cried the frightened lad. "I don'd meant to done dot!"

He made a spring to assist the professor to his feet. Frank thrust out a foot, and tripped the fat Dutch boy, so he fell fairly upon Professor Scotch, who was crushed to the floor.

"Murder!" roared the professor. "I can't stand this!"

"You can't, can you?" laughed Frank.

"This is no joke!" cried Scotch, as he gave Hans a kick in the stomach.

"Vell, I dinks dot meinseluf!" gurgled the Dutch boy,

beginning to get mad himself. "You don'd like dot, do I? Vell, dot makes you efen mit me."

He kicked the professor, in return, and the little man went down on his face, rubbing his nose into the rough floor, and filling it with splinters.

Scotch sat up, clasping his nose with both hands, and glaring at Hans, who also sat up, clasping his stomach, and glaring at the professor.

The sight was so ludicrous that Frank was convulsed with laughter.

"Oh, if I had a camera now!" he cried. "What a picture you would make!"

"I'll fix him so he'll make a picture!" rumbled the angry professor, as he made a scramble for Hans.

The Dutch lad gave a squeal, and swiftly rolled out of the way.

"Go it!" cried Frank, standing on a chair, in order to be out of the way. "I'll bet on the best man!"

"Professor! Professor!" squawked Hans; "uf you don'd let me alone, I vill get hurt!"

"Just let me get hold of you!" cried the excited and angered man.

"Not on your electrotype! Vait an hour, und let me oxcuse yourself!"

In the excitement of the scramble, the two came heavily against the chair on which Frank was standing, and he came down with a bump on the professor's shoulders. As he fell, one of Frank's feet struck Hans on the ear, and the Dutch lad was sent rolling onto his back, stunned and bewildered.

The professor was so shocked that he made no effort to rise, and Frank remained seated on his shoulders, whistling "Hold the Fort."

Hans sat up, with one hand clasped to his stomach and the other to his ear.

"Vell," he murmured, "I don'd oactly know vere I vos at."

Professor Scotch groaned.

"What has happened?" he thickly asked, in a smothered voice. "Has there been an earthquake, or anything of that kind?"

"Oh, there's been a slight breeze, that's all," laughed

Frank. "Professor, you seem to be full of business—and splinters. If you are all right now, I'll remove myself, and let you get up."

"Oh, sit still!" gurgled the professor. "Make yourself comfortable!"

Frank arose, and assisted the professor to his feet. Blood was running from the end of the man's nose, and he looked badly broken up. Hans got upon his feet, and the two gazed at each other, ruefully.

"I think there has been a mistake," said Scotch.

"Yaw," murmured the boy; "I belief dot."

"The professor nose it," declared Frank, and then dodged, as if expecting somebody to throw something.

"You boys will be the death of me yet!" sighed the little man. "Look at my nose—full of splinters! Hans, as you were the cause of that, you'll have to pick them out."

"Vell, I vill done dot uf you got me a knife."

"I won't have a knife used about my nose," declared the professor. "I have here in the lapel of my coat a fine cambric needle which you may use."

"Dot vos der sduff, professor! I peen retty to done dot."

"You must be very careful not to hurt me."

"Oh, yaw; I don'd hurt you no more than I can, professor."

"If you hurt me unnecessarily—well, you'll wish you hadn't."

"Don'd you got oxcited. I vos der most careful veller vot you nefer seen, professor."

"All right. Here's the needle."

"Come ofer der vindow by, und I done dot surgical oberation righd away off soon."

So they went over to the window, where the professor sat on a chair, and Hans stood over him, ready to begin work.

Frank pretended to examine the professor's nose, making some sympathetic observations. Then Hans began to pick out the splinters.

It was a most ludicrous spectacle, and Frank was convulsed with laughter.

"If you could see yourself now, professor, you would be proud all the rest of your life," he said.

"Oh, it's all right!" grated Scotch, who was holding himself in check with an effort. "I know who is responsible for all this."

"Hope you don't mean me?" exclaimed the mischievous lad, with pretended sorrow. "It grieves my heart to see you suffer, professor."

"Oh, you are very tender-hearted, now it is all over!"

"I don't know whether it is over or not," thought the boy, as he watched Hans picking away at the splinters.

"Ouch!" ejaculated Scotch. "Be careful, Hans! That needle is sharp!"

"Yes," said Frank, soberly, "be very careful Hans, for that needle is sharp."

Then he gave the Dutch lad a sharp, sly pinch.

Hans gave a howl and a jump, driving the needle into the professor's nose.

Then it was Scotch's turn to howl.

"Murder!" he roared, bounding from the chair like a rubber ball. "I'm stabbed!"

He came near going into convulsions, tearing madly round the room, as he thundered:

"Send for a doctor! I'm stabbed! I am bleeding to death!"

"Send for a doctor, Hans!" shouted Frank, as he tore about the room at the professor's heels. "A moment's delay may be fatal!"

"The needle!" bawled the little man. "It's sticking in my nose!"

"The needle!" echoed Frank. "It's sticking in his nose! And that is not a pincushion."

The professor found the door, yanked it open, sprang out, and fell all the way downstairs. Picking himself up when he reached the bottom, he rushed into the office, where he found a clerk, who extracted the needle, with the aid of some tweezers.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PARSON PEACEFUL.

That evening at nine o'clock the Snow Flake saloon was packed to the doors. It seemed that the entire town had heard that Parson Peaceful was to deliver a sermon there, and had turned out to hear it.

Although Professor Scotch professed a pronounced horror of such a place as the Snow Flake, Frank had induced him to visit the saloon that evening to hear the fighting parson speak.

The professor wore a patch of plaster over the entire end of his nose, and he had a woeful, downcast expression, that made him look very tame and dejected.

Until nine o'clock came, Andy Barter did a rushing business at the bar.

Promptly at nine Parson Peaceful mounted to the top of the bar and announced that the sale of drinks would be suspended till he had finished speaking.

As Barter had not been asked about this, he was not a little surprised, but he said:

"That goes! Drive ahead, parson."

So the parson took his text, and began to speak. He did not attempt to express himself in a flowery manner, but used simple language, and talked to the miners in a friendly, confidential way, that quickly won their attention and sympathy.

Among the listeners, Frank observed Wallace Coville and Fabian Danglar.

The Frenchman seemed inclined to keep behind Coville, and was almost constantly within reach of the mine owner, although the latter did not seem to notice Danglar at all.

Something led Frank to watch the two men, although he was listening all the while to the parson's words.

The parson illustrated how easy it was to sin and travel the wide road that leads to destruction. He told little

stories and anecdotes that were applicable to whatever he wished to impress upon his hearers, and, as some of his stories were humorous, the rough men of the camp felt well repaid for listening to him.

For some reason, the sermon sounded very peculiar to Frank. It seemed all the while that the parson was beating around a certain object, yet drawing nearer and nearer to it. Although it might be called a sermon, it was far more like a lecture, and the man did not go into rhapsodies or attempt to get his hearers religiously enthused.

Finally, however, the sermon took a queer turn. The parson sought to impress them that sin was on every hand.

"Within the sound of my voice," he said, "within the sight of my eyes, it is possible there are men who have committed the greatest of sins. The betrayal of friendship and confidence is a sin and a crime. Gold has lured many a man to sell his soul and stain his hands with blood.

"Once there was a man who was trusted by another; they were partners in a great enterprise. But one partner betrayed the other—sought his destruction. The unfortunate one was buried deep in the darkness of a black cavern, and there left to perish from hunger. He was not killed outright, and through the cavern trickled a stream of water, by the aid of which he lived many days. He suffered the tortures of the damned, as he tore at the rocks and earth with his bare, bleeding hands, frantically seeking to dig his way out. He cried to his false partner to come and set him free, to give him a morsel of food, or to kill him. And the guilty one used to steal down into the cavern, where, through a rift in the rocks, he could hear the entombed wretch calling and shrieking, turning to a maniac in the eternal darkness of his living tomb!

"Think of it—picture it! Think of the heartless monster, as he crept down there, time after time, to listen to the dying cries of the man who had befriended him, and whom he had thus rewarded! Each time those cries grew weaker and more incoherent, and the dastardly betrayer knew his victim was dying by inches.

"There was another, who suspected the truth, and he followed the wretch down into the darkness of the cavern. He heard the last faint cries of the doomed man, and,

shuddering, quivering, sickened with horror, he sought to flee from the place, and make public the knowledge he had obtained. Fate was against him. He made a misstep in the darkness—he fell, his head struck against a rock, and he lay unconscious in the passage. There he was found by the dastard, who knew he had been followed. Then the spy was dragged up through a rift in the rocks, and cast into the living tomb with the first unfortunate.

“And now there were two to cry out in agony, to suffer most horribly and die in the darkness. The wretch continued to creep down and listen. He heard the cries of one cease; he heard the cries of the other grow fainter and fainter, and finally he heard them no more. Then he felt that both were dead, and his terrible secret was forever buried in the heart of the earth.

“But such a fearful secret can never be safely buried. It left its marks upon the murderer—it streaked his hair with gray, and it hardened and lined his face, changing it fully. The memory of this crime is still doing its work on that face. Day by day it is writing an awful word there—a word that all men may read. That word is—Murderer!

“Can such a monster escape justice? No! The time has come when all men may read the fearful secret in his face! Men of Powder Gap, that wretch is in your midst! Look around you—look into one another’s faces! You cannot fail to detect the one on whose features the fearful word is branded!”

It is putting it mild to say that these words of the peculiar parson created a sensation in the saloon.

Frank had been wondering at the strange turn which the man’s “sermon” had taken; but the ending was of a most unexpected and sensational nature.

The listeners turned to stare at one another, looking for the man whose face should betray his dreadful secret.

One man, with head bent down, moved toward the door, his intention being to leave the place.

He ran fairly against Fabian Danglar, who, seemingly, had taken pains to place himself in the man’s way.

“Sare,” said the Frenchman, in a low, insinuating tone,

"why ze vera great hurree? You hole your head down, like you deed not want your face to be seen."

Wallace Coville was the man whom Danglar had stopped, and a harsh exclamation came from the mine owner's lips.

But the exclamation was broken in the midst, and, with his eyes staring from their sockets, Coville fell back a step, glaring like a hunted thing at Danglar.

The Frenchman stood straight as an Indian in the mine owner's path, his right side toward Coville, his arms folded, and an icy, chilling smile on his marble face.

"Mercy!" gasped the startled mine owner, lifting one arm, as if to ward off a blow.

"What ees ze mattaire, sare?" asked Danglar. "You look like you see the ghost."

"The face is that of—— No, no! It cannot be!"

"You speak vera strange, sare. Is zere anyt'ing 'bout my face zat frightun you?"

Coville pulled himself together, with a mighty effort.

"No, no!" he harshly cried. "It is nothing! I thought I had seen you before."

"Is zat all?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Zen, I must remaind you of some one zat you expect nevare to see again? Ees zat right?"

"Oh, I can't spend my time talking! I have remained here too long already."

He attempted to pass Danglar, but the Frenchman again blocked the way.

"Wait," he said, and Frank heard every word distinctly. "I have somet'in zat I weesh to say to you, sare."

"I do not care to hear it! Stand aside, or——"

"Or what?"

Coville's hand went toward his hip pocket, his fingers clutched the butt of a revolver, and he jerked the weapon forth.

But he was given no chance to use it, for Fabian Danglar was watching every move, and the Frenchman's iron fingers closed in a crushing grip on Coville's wrist.

"Not zis evening, Mistaire Coville!" he said, in the same calm, chilling tone. "I am reddee for zat beesness!"

Then he gave the mine owner's wrist such a twist that Coville dropped the weapon, with a cry of pain.

"Zat ees a vera handsome revolvare, sare," observed Danglar, as he placed a foot on the weapon. "Eet look like eet might shoot vera well."

"It can!" grated Coville, "and it is liable to shoot well enough to take your life! You shall be called to account for this!"

Danglar smiled, with a positive expression of pleasure.

"Zat would be most agreeable to me, Mistaire Coville. You have but to name ze time and ze place. I geef you zat privilege. I will name ze weapon."

"I have not challenged you."

"Zat ees ze trute; but I eenfer zat you mean to do eet."

"I don't know. Why should I fight with anybody like you? I do not know you."

"You theenk for one moment zat you deed, ha? You be vera much frightun."

"Bah! I was surprised, that's all. Stand aside! Duels are altogether different here than they are in France. Here it is a case of shoot at sight, with no seconds and no preliminaries."

"By zat do you mean you theenk you weel shoot at me ze next time you see me?"

"Why should I? I will think it over."

Danglar picked up the revolver, which he unhesitatingly passed to Coville, who received it with surprise. The Frenchman did not seem at all afraid the mine owner would attempt to use the weapon, and, if Coville had a fleeting desire to do so, he quickly abandoned it, for those coal-black eyes were full of warning.

Thrusting the revolver into his pocket, the mine owner once more started for the door.

As the man passed, Danglar leaned forward, grasped his arm, and whispered something in his ear.

A choking sound came from Coville's throat, and he staggered, his face ghastly white. Then, flinging aside any one who blocked his path, he leaped, like a frightened hare, from the open doorway, and hurried down the street.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN THE MINE.

Frank had seen enough to give him food for thought. With the exception of the final words, which Danglar whispered into Wallace Coville's ear, the boy had missed scarcely anything that passed between the two men.

Others had seen and heard it all, and there were mutterings and exclamations of wonder as Coville rushed away.

Those who remembered the mystery connected with Jason Carter's disappearance spoke in low tones to others about it, and many believed the parson had deliberately aimed his words at Coville.

If Parson Peaceful had sought to kick up a sensation in the Snow Flake, he had certainly succeeded very well.

But where was the parson?

The men who had listened to his talk now began to look around for him, as he had disappeared from the bar, and was not to be seen. Nor could he be found in the place, which made it evident that he had slipped away in the midst of the excitement following the startling climax of his remarks.

Frank had heard and seen enough. He touched the professor's arm, he grasped Hans' wrist, and he spoke a single word:

"Come."

Professor Scotch was ready enough to leave the place, and Hans made no objection.

A few minutes later they were in their room at the hotel.

"What do you make of all this?" asked the professor, in a puzzled way. "That was the queerest sermon I ever heard, and then it seemed the man stopped by that Frenchman was all wrought up over the parson's words. I fancy there is something behind this affair—something we do not understand."

"It is something I mean to understand," assured Frank.

"Professor, you wondered why I wished to come to the Santa Catarina Mountains, and to Powder Gap. I will tell you. I had reasons to believe I should find my father in these mountains. You look astounded. I know my father has been believed dead for years, but he was alive six months ago. He owned a ring that would lead him to a wonderfully rich mine amid these mountains. I believe that mine is the Giant, now owned by Wallace Coville, who was so wrought up by the parson's words to-night. My father is not here! but I have good reason to believe he was Wallace Coville's partner, known here as Jason Carter. Carter mysteriously disappeared some time ago. What became of him is not known. A man by the name of George Bailey attempted to solve the mystery, and he also disappeared. The words of Parson Peaceful to-night have set me to thinking that the Giant Mine may hold the secret of both disappearances. It is possible that my father was buried alive in that mine, and that Bailey met a similar fate. It is a horrible thing to contemplate, but I fear it happened. If so, Coville is the guilty wretch, and he shall not escape just retribution!"

Frank spoke with forced calmness, and Professor Scotch listened in profound amazement. Then the professor asked a hundred questions, all of which the boy answered as best he could, giving the man a very good understanding of the matter.

Far into the night they talked, while Hans, having grown sleepy, slumbered quietly on the bed.

At length, the professor proposed to turn in, but Frank did not feel like sleeping, and he sat by the window, thinking, thinking.

When the professor was fairly asleep, Frank rose, and slipped from the room, leaving the hotel.

Powder Gap was not asleep. There were loungers about the hotel, and the bar was doing a rushing business. Every saloon was running at full blast, and the sound of music and shuffling feet told that the rough men were enjoying themselves in a way at the camp's one dance-hall.

Frank walked through the place, and approached the building near the mouth of the Giant Mine. He felt himself drawn thither, as if by a loadstone. All at once, the mine seemed to possess a remarkable fascination for him.

There was a bright moon, the light of which showed him the black mouth of the mine, which yawned like the jaws of some greedy monster that feeds on human flesh and blood. He wondered if, somewhere far down in the bowels of the monster, his father's corpse lay withering in the living tomb to which a dastardly partner had consigned him. The thought turned the boy's blood to ice water, and caused his heart to sink like a stone in his bosom.

In the shadow of the buildings, he drew nearer to the mouth of the mine, even though he felt a horror of the place. He longed to enter and explore it, and yet the thought was repugnant to him.

For a long time he stood in the shadow of one of the buildings. At length he resolved to return to the hotel, and he was turning away, when a moving figure caught his attention.

A man was approaching, and Frank drew into the deepest shadow, waiting and watching.

Nearer and nearer came the man, and the boy began to feel that he must be seen. He made ready for such an emergency, but, to his relief, the man passed on.

Then, for the first time, he noticed something familiar about the figure, and, looking closer, he recognized the man. It was Wallace Coville.

"What can have brought him here at this hour?" was the question which flashed through Frank's mind.

Now keenly interested and curious, Frank watched every movement of the mine owner.

Twice Coville stopped, and seemed on the point of turning back. He appeared to be fighting a battle with himself, and the watching lad fancied that he was also fascinated by the mysterious and awesome power of the yawning mine, which was drawing him nearer and nearer, despite his fears.

The spectacle caused Frank to shiver.

Close to the dark mouth of the mine Coville halted, and the boy could hear him muttering to himself, but the still night air did not carry the words to Frank's ears.

All at once, with a wild, despairing upflinging of his arms, Coville plunged forward and disappeared into the black mouth of the mine.

"Gone!" panted Frank. "It cannot be he is going far in the darkness!"

Like a young panther, the lad darted forward, and reached the shadow of a great boulder close to the black opening in the side of the mountain. There he crouched, peering into the darkness, watching and waiting—for what?

Some moments passed, and every moment seemed an hour. Once a faint sound seemed to come up to the ears of the boy, and then all was deathly still once more.

Flash—splutter—flare; a light gleamed down in the darkness.

"It's a miner's lamp," thought Frank. "Coville has lighted it! He is going down into the mine!"

He could see the man, and he saw that Coville was really going down the slope.

"I'll follow him!"

It was a wild resolve, and Frank could not have told why he thought of such a thing; but the fascination of the place was still upon him—now stronger than ever—and he felt an irresistible desire to know why Wallace Coville should visit the mine at that hour.

With the stealthy tread of a cat, Frank slipped swiftly and noiselessly down the slope, keeping his eyes fastened on the twinkling miner's lamp which Coville carried. That light was the boy's guide, and he picked his way along with wonderful silence.

Once a stone turned beneath Frank's foot, sending his heart into his mouth, and causing Coville to halt and listen.

The boy stood still as long as the man remained in a listening attitude; but Coville finally muttered something, and moved onward and downward again.

Keeping between the rails of the car track, Frank continued to follow.

On they went, and the air began to seem close and disagreeable. Frank filled his lungs with difficulty, feeling as if the walls, which he could not see on either hand, were pressing in upon him.

Finally, far down in the earth, deep in the heart of the mountain, Coville came to a spot where an old shaft led off from the main vein. A mass of rocks and earth had

fallen down there, where the timbers had failed to prevent a partial cave in. Over these Coville climbed, and Frank did not hesitate about following. Now that he had gone thus far, the boy would not have allowed that gleaming light to pass beyond his view for worlds.

Beyond the fallen mass the abandoned shaft zig-zagged hither and thither in an eccentric manner, and Frank was forced to keep yet nearer to the mine owner in order to hold the light of the lamp constantly in view.

How far they went Frank had not the faintest idea, but it seemed an interminable distance. Finally Coville approached a great mass of fallen earth and stone—approached it hesitatingly, as if filled with awe and fear. The mass blocked the entire passage, with the exception of a small black opening far up at the roof of the chamber, if chamber it might be called.

Coville was listening—he was stealing toward the barrier like a guilty thing. The lamp quivered in his hand, and he seemed nearly overcome with his emotion. The boy heard him mutter :

“Still—all is still! Not a sound comes—— Hark!”

Clink! clink! clink!

The sounds were faint, muffled, far away, and still they were distinct.

They seemed like the blows of a pick.

The mine owner had straightened up, and stood like an image of stone.

Man and boy were listening for a repetition of the sounds.

Clink! clink! clink!

There could be no mistake; surely somebody was using a pick beyond the barrier of earth and stone.

A grating groan startled Frank, but he instantly realized that it came from the lips of Wallace Colville.

“Digging—still digging!”

The words were spoken by the mine owner, and the boy heard them distinctly. The voice was that of a man overcome by unutterable horror.

The sounds of the pick had ceased, and after listening some moments, Colville hoarsely whispered :

“He is dead—both are dead! They died many weeks ago, and yet they are digging, digging, digging! They

cannot rest—they are determined to dig their way out! Merciful heavens! Think—think of two dead men who have found a pick, and who are laboring to open a passage that the world may come in and discover their bones! But they shall not succeed!” he almost shrieked, waving the lamp above his head. “I’ll put in a dozen blasts, and this branch shaft shall be filled with earth and stone, so that they cannot dig their way out in a thousand years!”

Again Coville listened.

“Still—all is still!” he harshly murmured. “Yet they will not rest long. Night and day they are working to open a passage that the world may come in and find their bones; but I will baffle them—ha! ha!—I will baffle them!”

“But that infernal parson knows my secret! How he knows it is more than I can tell, but know it he certainly does. That seals his fate! He shall die—his bones shall rot in an unmarked grave! He shall not bring me to justice!”

“But the Frenchman—may the fiends fly away with him! The Frenchman with the face of the dead, and eyes that look one through and through! Who is he? I fear that man! I am sure he is a thousand times more dangerous than the parson! They are marked, both of them! They cannot escape!”

Frank heard every word.

“The parson and the Frenchman shall know of this,” thought the boy.

Coville was looking upward toward the small, dark opening.

“Shall I go up there—shall I look into their tomb?” he said, putting the question to himself. “Ah! but it can’t be done, for I closed the last opening when Bailey was thrown in to keep Carter company. The place is sealed.

“How Carter struggled to reach the opening! But it was impossible for him to mount to the spot. Now he is dead! Yes, he is dead, but he will not rest. Until this occurred I always believed a dead man disposed of; but now I know the dead sometimes refuse to rest quietly in their graves.”

Having heard these words, there was now no longer a doubt in Frank’s mind concerning the fate of Jason Carter

and George Bailey. Colville was a wretch of the deepest dye; and had consigned Carter and Bailey to the most horrible of fates, a lingering death by starvation in the darkness of this underground tomb.

Frank felt that Wallace Coville was the most repugnant and fearful of criminals; but he was rich and powerful, and it might be no easy thing to bring him to justice.

"Still, he shall not escape—I swear it!" was the mental vow registered by the determined lad.

Coville seemed on the point of turning away, yet he lingered near the spot, as if held there by some powerful fascination. He listened, with the lamp held aloft, and the boy saw him press a hand over his heart, as if to silence its tumultuous throbbing.

And then the sound of the pick was heard once more.

"Dig—dig away!" screamed Coville, as if suddenly overcome by his emotion. "When you dig out I will have been dead and gone a thousand years!"

Barely had the last words left his lips when another voice was heard, faint, muffled, appearing to come from beyond the barrier of stone and earth, but speaking every word plainly:

"Your time is near, Wallace Coville! The sword of justice is suspended by a single hair above your head, and it is soon to fall! There is no escape for you!"

The mine owner reeled backward, nearly dropping the lamp, gasping for breath, and clutching at the empty air. It seemed that he had been struck a staggering blow full in the face. For a moment he swayed weakly, his legs threatening to melt beneath him. The light of the lamp revealed his face to Frank, who never forgot the look of unspeakable horror depicted there.

Frank, being something of a ventriloquist, had spoken the words, making them appear to come from behind the fallen mass of earth and stone.

Coville's nerve was completely shattered. As soon as he could recover, he uttered a wild cry of terror, and then fled screaming from the spot.

In passing, the man fairly brushed against Frank, yet he was so blinded by fear, that he did not see the lad at all.

Along the winding passage fled the mine owner, cling-

ing to the lamp, without the aid of which he could not hope to make his way directly to the surface.

"I must not lose sight of that light," muttered Frank, as he started after the man. "If I do, I'll not get out of here to-night."

Like a terrified hare, the man fled on. Sometimes he ran into some jagged projection of the passage, sometimes he stumbled and fell, but he bounded up in a twinkling and continued the mad run.

Frank found he had no easy task to keep the terrified wretch in view.

As they passed into the main shaft, Colville seemed to hear the sound of pursuing feet, and he looked back, catching a glimpse of the boy's dark form.

"They're coming—coming!" screamed the miserable creature, and he renewed his speed.

Up the long slope to the mouth of the mine the man ran, with a speed that fairly amazed Frank, who was taxed to the utmost to keep the twinkling lamp in view, and Frank was a most excellent runner himself, having remarkable endurance.

At length the surface was reached, and, flinging aside the lamp, Coville fled through the moonlight, as though the foul fiend were at his very heels.

A moment later Frank came panting from the mine and rushed headlong upon a moving form, which he mechanically clutched with both hands.

"Gitte lout!" screamed a familiar voice. "Lette glo, or gitte plunchee!"

It was Sing Lee, the Chinaman.

Not a little surprised, Frank held fast to the squirming Celestial, demanding:

"What are you doing here?"

"Sing Lee nebber do a tling," was the earnest protest. "Lette glo, Melican bloy!"

"Wait a minute; I want to talk to you."

"Sing Lee no want to tlalkee."

"That may be true, but you will find it necessary to talk before I let you go."

Frank's curiosity was aroused, and he was determined the Chinaman should tell just how he happened to be there at that time of night.

"Melican bloy bely glood; no hurtee Sing Lee?"

"Not if you answer my questions, and tell the truth."

"No savvy blout tluth."

"I haven't a doubt but the truth is something you know very little about, but you had better stick to it just about now, for I am a bad fellow to lie to."

The Chinaman was silent.

"Now tell me just why you are prowling around here at this hour of the night."

"No have place to sleepee."

"No place to sleep?"

"No."

"And you were looking for a place around here?"

"Thlought mebbe flind one."

"Well, this is a strange place to look for anything of that sort. Why didn't you find a place in the camp?"

"No havee Chinaman in campee. Tlell him to glitee lout heapee qlick, of gitte klick lout. Offal to play monee; no keepe Sing Lee flor twenty-flive dollal. Tlell Sing Lee to glo to hotee place down in gloundee, so clome lound tlo see if this was place where gitee in. Savvy?"

"I savvy that you are giving me a great jolly, Sing, and it doesn't go a little. I told you it would be best to tell the truth, but you do not seem to think so."

"Alus tlell tluth. Sing Lee lashun to Glolge Wash- ington allee samee great lot."

Frank could not hold back a faint laugh, and the Celestial grinned in the moonlight.

All at once, the Chinaman gave a squirm and a twist, broke away from Frank and took to his heels.

As Sing was escaping, Frank made a clutch at him, grasped something, and held fast.

The strange Chinaman fled on, and the boy stood staring in petrified amazement at the thing that dangled in his grasp.

"It was Sing Lee's queue.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HELD AT BAY.

“Great Scott!”

Frank stared in unutterable wonder at the thing which he held in his hand.

It was the Chinaman’s cue, but it took Frank some time to realize that it was false.

“Never knew hair to come out by the roots so easy before this!” he murmured.

Then, after examining it, he quickly decided:

“Sing Lee is a fraud! This cue is very neatly made up, but the hair never grew on the head of a Chinaman. If Sing’s cue is false, why not other things about him?”

Following this came a most startling thought:

“I’ll wager my life the fellow is not a Chinaman at all!”

If not a Chinaman, then what was he? Frank asked himself the question, and he felt puzzled and mystified beyond measure.

If the Celestial was in disguise, surely the disguise was most perfect. Up to the moment that Frank had discovered the cue to be false, he had not suspected the fellow of being anything but just what he seemed, a Chinaman.

Surely, there was a reason why the man should disguise himself in such a manner, and the boy began to see that there was something behind his movements besides a mere desire to pick up “washee-washee” business.

Frank might have fancied himself dreaming, but the cue was in his hand to prove it was no hallucination.

Surely the events of the day and night had been of a most surprising and unexpected nature.

And now——

“The Chinaman is gone,” muttered Frank; “and judging by the way he ran, there is little chance of seeing him again to-night. I will keep this scalp; the fellow may call for it to-morrow.”

There was no reason for lingering longer in the vicinity of the mine, and so he made his way toward the hotel.

His mind was in a tumult, and he wondered beyond measure at all he had seen and heard. Now he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt what fate had befallen Jason Carter and George Bailey. He knew that Wallace Coville, the rich and powerful mine owner, was a betrayer of friendship, a dastardly wretch, and a murderer.

But the sound of the pick behind the barrier of rock and earth—what had been the meaning of it? Surely, neither of the men entombed in that dreadful place could be living and striving to dig a way out?"

The thought that this was possible flitted through Frank's mind, but he banished it almost instantly.

"They were entombed there many weeks ago. It is an utter impossibility that either should still be alive. They could not subsist on water, even if they found enough of that. No, no! both men are dead! but the sound of the pick—what did it mean?"

Frank was not superstitious; he did not believe in ghosts. Not for a moment would he accept the belief of Wallace Coville that the murdered men could not rest in their tomb, and were laboring to open a passage that the world might come in and find their bones.

Still, there was something about the sounds of the pick that Frank could not understand—something mysterious and awesome. He was glad to get away from the mine, which had seemed to weave a spell about him—had fascinated and horrified him.

When the boy remembered the expression of horror and fear on the face of Wallace Coville at the moment when the mine owner believed he had heard the voice of one of his victims, Frank shivered and was sick at heart. Still he could not pity the wretch; still he felt no merciful inclination for the dastardly murderer.

Frank fancied that the meshes of a snare were drawing tighter and tighter about the guilty man. Coville had thought his secret safely buried in the heart of the earth, where there was no danger that it would ever be brought to the light of day. Then came accusers crowding thickly about him; first the son of the partner he had betrayed, then a wandering parson who told his horrible secret to

the public, to be followed quickly by a fiery-eyed Frenchman, with snowy hair and the face of the dead.

But most horrible of all had sounded the blood-chilling words which he heard in the abandoned shaft of the mine—the shaft of death. Those words had seemed to come directly from the lips of one of his victims.

Right well Frank knew there would be little sleep for Wallace Coville that night.

Nor did the feverish lad believe he could close his eyes in slumber, for the thoughts running riot in his brain were of a nature that chilled him at one moment and filled all his veins with burning heat at the next.

Frank went back to the hotel. Hans and the Professor were sleeping, but Frank sat by the window and looked out into the street of the mining town.

The moon was drifting over to the west, and the saloons of the camp were closing. The last dance had been reeled to the finish in Powder Gap's dance hall, and drunken miners were singing and shouting on their way to their wretched homes. From the farther end of the town came the sudden, sharp sounds of pistol shots and hoarse cries. Frank wondered if a human being had been shot, or if some intoxicated fellow had discharged his revolver into the air.

At last, tired of sitting at the window, the tumult of his mind having ceased in a measure, he resolved to go to bed.

Although the last to bed, Frank was the first to rise in the morning. He did not disturb his companions, but went out for a walk, hoping the morning air would clear his brain and make him feel better.

Frank returned in time for breakfast at the hotel, and found the professor and Hans not a little worried about him. They were greatly relieved by his appearance.

"How you vos, Vrankie?" called the jolly Dutch boy. "I didn't know but you peen carrit off der pedpugs by."

"I guess not. There are things more formidable than bedbugs in this town."

"Yaw; dot peen so. Look ad der broffessor, und seen uf his nose don'd proof dot."

Professor Scotch's nose was terribly swollen and inflamed, and the little man looked the picture of misery.

"This life in the wild and woolly west is altogether too

swift for me," he said, dolefully. "I shall be glad when we get back to civilization."

The breakfast at the New York Hotel might have been worse; but then, it might have been much better. However, the little party was hungry, and each one ate heartily. The professor drank three cups of rank black coffee, and then declared that he felt much better.

Almost the first person Frank saw after leaving the dining-room of the hotel was Fabian Dangler.

The remarkable Frenchman looked fresh and clean as he smoked a fragrant cigar in front of the hotel, his keen black eyes closely regarding every one who passed.

The moment this man saw Frank, he saluted and bowed with extreme politeness.

"*Bon Jour, monsieur,*" he called. "Ze vera pleasant morneeng, saire."

Frank paused to speak with the man, and then, all at once, he was seized with an irresistible desire to tell Dangler about his adventure in the Giant Mine. This desire grew stronger and stronger, and, almost before he was aware what he was doing, Frank found himself relating the story.

Dangler listened with intense eagerness, his interest and excitement growing with each moment. When Frank had finished, the hand of the strange Frenchman fell on the boy's arm.

"We must act without delay," he swiftly said. "Zat man, he mean to block up ze old shaft. He must not do eet."

"You are right," cried Frank. "I must know if the bones of my father rest in that chamber! Must know it? I know it already! They must be brought forth and given decent burial."

"And ze murderer—what of heem?"

"Must be punished!"

"*Oui, oui, oui!* Zat ees raight! But he will defeat us eef we do not move wiz ze vera great haste."

"What is to be done?"

"What I do, I do myself, You must find ze parzone—ze one zat be called Parzone Peesful. Tell him queek all zat you know. Tell heem not to let ze pazzage be closed.

Ma fois! Zere is not one moment to lose! Ze parzone will know what to do."

"But you——"

Dangler was already bounding away, and five minutes later, mounted on a coal-black horse, he rode furiously out of Powder Gap.

Frank had some difficulty in finding the parson, but the man was found at last, and the boy hurriedly told him everything.

"The wicked shall escape not the wrath that is in store," declared Parson Peaceful, resolutely. It will take me some minutes to gather my supporters, but we will penetrate the mine and explore the abandoned shaft. Coville shall be prevented from closing it.

"Unless he gets the start of us, which he may do," said Frank, who was possessed with a fever of anxiety.

"I will do my best to prevent that."

Then the parson rushed away. From one man to another of the citizens he quickly passed, saying a single word to each, and soon a band of rough, determined-looking fellows began to gather near the New York Hotel.

Frank could not wait for all this. To him it seemed that things were progressing far too slowly. Hans and the professor tried to question him, but he refused to be bothered by them, and rushed away, they knew not whither.

Some hint of what was going on must have reached Wallace Coville. The mine owner had not appeared at his office as early as usual, but he was finally seen hurrying toward the mouth of the mine, carrying something in his hand.

At the same time a party of men, headed by Parson Peaceful, came rushing toward the mine from the direction of the town.

But there was no chance for them to intercept Coville.

Down a rugged path from a point where he had been hidden above the mouth of the mine leaped and bounded a queer figure—a queueless Chinaman. The Celestial seemed determined to intercept Coville in some way, but he saw he would not be in time to block the mine owner's path with his body, so he drew a revolver, and cried:

"Halt! Stop where you are, Jack Larkins! I know

you, and you know me. I am Dash Wylde, and I want you for the Coburg bank robbery!"

"Dash Wylde!" grated Coville, glaring up at the advancing man—"Dash Wylde, the detective! And I thought him a Chinaman! He is a dead shot, and he will drop me before I can plunge into the mouth of the mine!"

Then he lifted the cylinder-shaped thing which he carried in his hand, and shouted:

"Halt, you infernal bloodhound! This is dynamite which I hold above my head, and it will explode if it falls to the ground! It is heavy enough to tear out tons of earth from the side of this mountain, to blow us both to eternity! If you shoot, it will fall; if you come nearer, I will fling it at you!"

The detective halted.

But the men from Powder Gap, headed by the parson, were coming on, and Coville cried to them:

"Stop! Stop, or, by the eternal skies, I will blow you all into eternity!"

Thus he held them at bay.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.—CONCLUSION.

From a place of concealment behind a bowlder, near the mouth of the mine, rose a boy—Frank Merriwell.

He was directly behind Wallace Coville's back, and he swiftly made a cautioning gesture to those who saw him.

Inch by inch, step by step, with the silence and caution of a creeping cat, Frank stole upon the man.

The spectators held their breath and watched, fearing Coville would turn and see the lad.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the desperate and defiant mine owner. "You know my power, and you dare not approach me! If I were to drop this to the ground, I would not be the only one to suffer. Some of you would be maimed or killed. If you were nearer, death would be certain!"

"Look here, brother," said the parson, by way of keeping Coville's attention, "why resort to such desperate expedients? We seek but to visit your mine."

"For what reason? You cannot deceive me! Not one of you shall enter the mine!"

Frank was close behind the desperate villain. He measured the distance with his eyes, and then made a leap and a grab.

Only too well did Frank realize what would happen if he failed in his purpose. The dynamite bomb would fall, the explosion would follow, and he would suffer instant death with Wallace Coville.

His hand darted through the air, and he clutched the deadly thing with which the mine owner had held the men at bay. In the twinkling of an eye it was torn from Coville's fingers, and then——

Crack!

Frank struck the man with all his strength, planting the blow behind Coville's ear, and the villain dropped like a log.

Down the steep leaped Dash Wylde, and, with a cheer, the parson and his followers rushed forward.

Dazed and furious, Coville tried to struggle up, tried to draw a weapon, only to find himself clutched by strong hands, and hear the voice of the detective cry:

"These wristlets will fit you very nicely, Larkins."

Click—snap—manacles closed upon the wrists of the miserable wretch, making him secure.

"This is what I call very providential," said the parson, as he came up.

"Providential! Humbug!" came from the detective. "There was nothing providential about it. It was a case of clean pluck on the part of this boy. Not one lad in ten thousand would have dared to creep up behind the man and snatch at the bomb. Failure to catch it from the man's fingers meant death in the twinkling of an eye. Providence! It was the cleanest case of nerve I have seen in a long time."

"Dot vos noddings Vrank Merrivell for," loftily assured Hans Dunnerwust, who was one of the party from the camp. "Dose vos der d'ings vot he do for der fun uf id."

"Put down that bomb—put it down, Frank!" cried Professor Scotch. "I want to shake hands with you, but I won't come nearer as long as you hold that in your hand."

The bomb was given to a man who promised to take care of it, and then the delighted professor clasped the boy in his arms.

Coville glared at Frank.

"You have done the very thing I knew you would!" he grated, with impotent rage. "You have brought about my destruction. When I first saw you, I felt sure you were a dangerous and deadly enemy, even though you are but a boy."

"You shall have due credit for all you have done in aiding me to capture this notorious bank robber," said Dash Wylde.

"I am not looking for glory," was Frank's sober assertion. "I wish to avenge my father, who suffered through the dastardly perfidy of this man."

"If your father were living, he would have cause to be proud of such a son. This man, who has been known

here as Wallace Coville, is one of the most notorious bank-breakers. He knows me well, and so, when I started to run him down for his last job, I was forced to assume a disguise. But he has changed in an astonishing manner since I saw him last, and, at first, I was not sure that he could be Jack Larkins. I have been watching him since coming into town. I had been watching him last night when you came upon me. I fancied you believed Sing Lee was not a Chinaman, and so I broke away from you; but you caught my queue, and I left it in your hands."

"Thereby surprising me very much."

It was now proposed that the captive should be taken down into the mine. At first the detective did not approve of this, but Parson Peaceful drew him aside and gained his consent.

Dejected, listless, limp, and weak, Coville allowed them to do as they desired.

The miners were astonished by what had taken place, but no one attempted to interfere.

Lamps were procured, and the entire party entered the mouth of the mine and descended the slope.

At last the captive seemed to realize what was taking place, and he began to show symptoms of agitation as they approached the abandoned shaft. When they were on the point of turning into the shaft, he halted and refused to go farther.

"I will not go there!" he declared.

But he was forced to accompany them, although his agitation and fear increased with each moment.

Finally the barrier was reached, and there they halted. At this point the prisoner braced up, forcing a harsh laugh, and sneering:

"Well, now that you have dragged me down here, I hope you are satisfied! What have you found to please you?"

"We have found the place where you bury your victims," said the parson, solemnly; "but the grave shall give up its dead."

The manacled man fell back a bit, and then once more forced a laugh.

"What are you trying to do—frighten me?"

The parson lifted one hand.

"Listen!"

Click! click! click!

It was the sound of a pick, and it seemed to come from beyond the barrier which filled the passage.

The prisoner began to tremble, seeking to draw still farther from the spot.

A deathlike hush came over the party, and they could distinctly hear the steady blows of the pick.

Of a sudden, the silence was broken by the prisoner, who struggled to break away, shrieking:

"Let me go! He is digging out! He is coming! I can feel him coming nearer, nearer, nearer! I can feel his cold, dead hand at my throat! He is strangling me!"

The wretch choked and grew black in the face, but Dash Wylde pounded him upon the back, and he finally breathed more freely, but he was so weak that it was necessary to hold him upon his feet.

"I told you the grave should give up its dead," said the solemn voice of the parson. "Behold it shall come true. Look, look! The barrier falls!"

The final blows of the pick were heard, and the wall that blocked the passage was seen to move, a great boulder and mass of earth sunk inward, leaving a large opening.

Wondering and spellbound, the men stared at this opening, with the prisoner now upright and rigid, as if turned to stone.

Something moved in the darkness beyond the range of the lamps, and then through the opening slowly came the form of a man. Down over the mass of earth and stone he stepped, keeping his dark eyes fairly on the man with manacles on his wrist.

Frank reeled in his tracks, gasping:

"Father—it is my father!"

"It's Jason Carter!" shrieked the prisoner.

And then, with a rattling sound in his throat, he fell limply into the detective's arms.

Dash lowered the man to the ground fanned him, tore open his shirt at the throat, felt of his pulse, felt of his heart, and then cried:

"He is dead! Jack Larkins will never do time for the Coburg Bank robbery!"

"It is the hand of justice!" sounded solemnly from the lips of the man who had come through the opening. "The wages of sin is death, and he has suffered for his many crimes."

It is Carter!" shouted one of the miners, in the greatest wonder. "It's Carter—alive!"

"Now," said another, "if George Bailey were to appear——"

"George Bailey is here!"

It was the parson who spoke.

"My friends," he continued, "the removal of my beard and my efforts at disguising my voice has deceived every one. I am no parson, but I am the man who started to find Jason Carter, dead or alive."

"And you found him—alive?"

"Yes. I was thrust into his tomb—thrust in there by Coville, who closed the last opening, which was far above Carter's reach. Carter was nearly dead. With a pick, which he had discovered, he had been trying to dig his way out. I went at the task, trying all the walls. One of them sounded hollow, and a few hours' work enabled me to force a way through into a great cavern. Hope returned to Carter, and we sought a way of getting out to the world. I will not tell of all our sufferings and our wanderings. We finally made our way out to a distant side of the mountain; but Carter was changed to an old man with snowy hair and ghastly face, besides being nearly dead from want of nourishment. We obtained shelter and food at the hut of old Injun Joe, and Carter did not die, although he came very near it. When his strength returned, we re-explored the cave. We found a little stream, at the bottom of which were golden nuggets, and we made our way back to the place where Coville had entombed us to die. Then our plan for revenge was perfected. Carter had changed so that, by shaving off part of his beard, it was believed he would not be known. I was also changed, and I disguised myself. We hired Injun Joe and two other men to constantly dig within the place where we were supposed to be entombed. We did some work ourselves, believing we could open a passage into this shaft. At length, by careful work, we had everything ready, so a few strokes

of the pick would make the opening. Still we kept the men picking, although careful not to break through, knowing that Coville sometimes came here and listened. It was part of our plan to fill his heart with terror. Carter had a beard and wig prepared to make him look as he appeared before being entombed here, and then we appeared in Powder Gap. When he learned that Coville was likely to fill the old shaft with explosives, he lost no time in taking a horse and riding round the mountain, hurrying through the cave, and being ready to appear if things worked right. They worked all right, and he appeared."

"Then," cried a wondering listener, "Carter must have appeared in Powder Gap as——"

"As Fabian Danglar, the Frenchman," said the man himself, removing the wig and beard.

A few words more and we will bring our story to a close.

Frank Merriwell's father, Charles Carter Merriwell, was alive, and his false partner, Wallace Coville, alias Jack Larkins, was dead. Every mystery in connection with the most remarkable affair had been explained, but Powder Gap did not get over its wonderment for a week.

In that place Charles Merriwell continued to be known as Jason Carter. It was his choice. To Frank he said:

"Some day I may choose to be known as Charles Merriwell; but that time has not come. For the present, you are well fixed, and I heartily approve of my brother's scheme for the perfection of your education. Continue your travels, my son, and let me hear from you occasionally."

So Frank continued to travel, as Asher Merriwell had designated by his will, and some of his future adventures will be related in the next volume of this series, entitled: "Frank Merriwell Down South." For the time being all went well, and here let us shake him by the hand and say farewell.

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