

FRANK
MERRIWELL'S
FALSE FRIEND



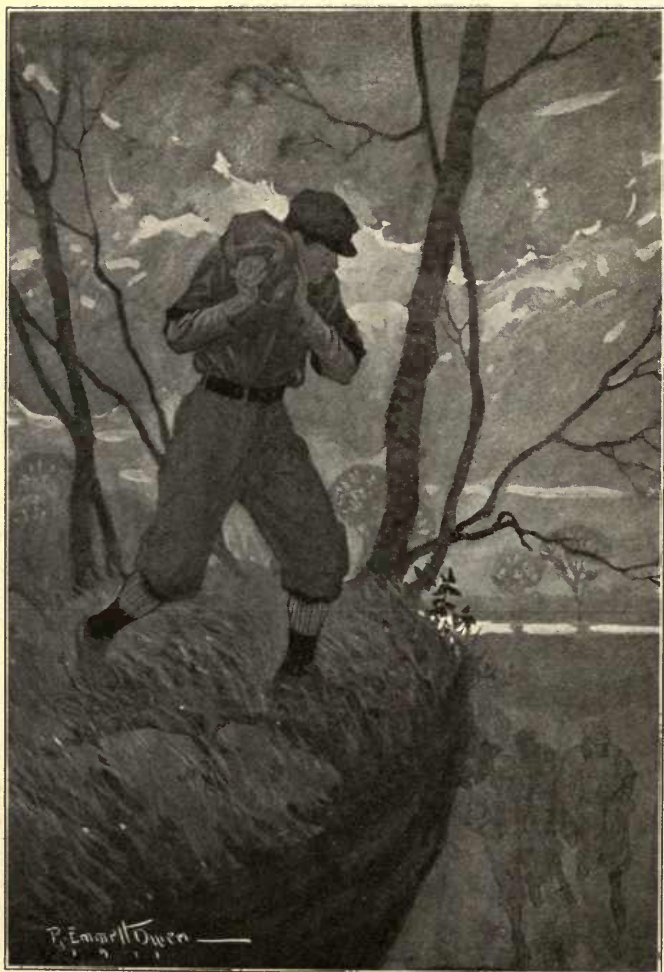
BURT · L
STANDISH



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LOS ANGELES

IN MEMORY OF
EDWIN CORLE

PRESENTED BY
JEAN CORLE



In a moment the unconscious young athlete would be directly beneath the
revengeful scoundrel on the ridge.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S
FALSE FRIEND

A STORY FOR BOYS

BY

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"The Merriwell Stories"

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Frank Merriwell's False Friend

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S FALSE FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

ANXIETY AT YALE.

Yale was in perplexity and distress.
Where was Merriwell?

That question created all the trouble. He had obtained permission to leave a few days on important business, but the "few days" had lengthened into many and still he remained away.

He was needed at Yale, for he had been chosen captain of the baseball-team, and the men were in training for the Easter trip to the South. His absence and the uncertainty of his return seemed to have a most baleful influence upon them, for they failed to turn out with enthusiasm for work in the cage, and they plainly lacked the needed spirit that year after year has led Yale gladiators to stand ready to sacrifice anything and everything, but honor, for the glory of Old Eli.

The coaches were in despair, for never before had they handled such indifferent material. It seemed im-

possible to find the usual number of new men who took an interest in baseball, and were willing to work with vim and enthusiasm.

The outlook was discouraging. Experienced men shook their heads and looked blue. Was this a relapse after their great victory over Harvard on the gridiron the previous fall?

Among all the new men in the squad only one showed up enough to create general comment, and that one was the black-haired freshman, Dade Morgan.

Having resolved to try for a place on the nine, it was not remarkable that Morgan should attract attention, for at everything he had attempted since entering college he had made himself a marked man. He was a fellow who went at any task with a determination and intensity that would have advanced a poorer subject. Being an athlete, supple, strong, quick, sure-eyed, and confident, it was not singular that he made rapid advancement. It would have been far more singular if he had not.

Morgan had played baseball before coming to college. In fact, he had once captained a very clever amateur team at a summer resort. He was one of those surprisingly versatile fellows who could fill any position. It is a well-known fact that much of the success of a ball-team depends on putting the players into the positions for which they are best adapted, and that it is not often a good first-baseman does equally well on second or third, while a remarkable outfielder may be utterly worthless in the diamond, or vice versa.

But Dade could handle grounders, catch flies, cover a base, play behind the bat, even pitch with a certain amount of skill that did not seem lessened in any position.

But it was his ambition to pitch, and for that he began to train as soon as the squad got to work.

There were a number of new candidates for the position, but the coaches confessed to themselves that Morgan was the only highly promising man in the lot.

Frank Merriwell, however, had been depended on as the mainstay in the pitching department of the team.

Of course, Bart Hodge would fill his old position behind the bat, and there were one or two promising men who might serve as substitutes in case any accident happened to him.

But Bart did not go about the work with his usual spirit. In fact, it was hard to get him genuinely interested, and, somehow, he seemed sad and restless, appearing at times to be brooding over something. To the surprise of everybody he did not say much about Merry's absence, save that he had not heard from Frank and did not know why he was remaining away so long.

The anxiety and restlessness caused by Frank's unaccountable failure to return spread to the professors, who began to inquire about him day after day.

Merriwell's enemies had been keeping pretty quiet, for they realized that it would not be best to say too

much at first, as he was the pride of the college, and slurs against him would not be tolerated.

Honest men who had once been his enemies were silent now, or his pronounced friends. In fact, it seemed that no open enemies were to be found.

But the petty spite and meanness of the Chickering set was simply held in restraint. Although they were not particularly brilliant, they knew enough to realize that it would not be healthy to express themselves too freely in public.

As time went on and it began to seem that Merriwell might not return to college, these creatures grew bolder. At first they dared not speak outright, but they hinted and slurred and sneered. Without saying why at first, they suggested that there had been "a very good reason" for Merriwell's sudden departure, and that it was not at all likely he would ever again be seen at Yale.

Thus it came about that one sunny afternoon these fellows were gathered at the fence along with other students, who were discussing the baseball situation.

"I tell you what," said Lib Benson, "I'm afraid we're going to get it in the neck all round this spring. It's a dead sure thing that the men are not taking hold with the usual spirit, and I have it straight that the coaches are disgusted with the material for a nine."

"Oh, that's always the way," declared Irving Nash. "It's the same old cry that's heard every year."

"Not a bit of it," put in Gene Skelding, who had blossomed out with a handsome new pink shirt, of

which he was very proud. "Yale seldom has much to say, though the newspapers may be full of rot about the nine, or the crew, or something or other. This year it is different. We've tried to keep the truth from getting into the papers, but it's out just the same."

"What maketh me thick," lisped Lew Veazie, "ith thith thilly talk about all the twoble coming fwom the abthence of that fellow Fwank Merriwell. It ith vewy tirethome!"

"That's so, chummie," agreed Ollie Lord, standing as high as possible on the high heels of his polished shoes. "As if he could make any difference if he were here!"

"He's usually made a difference in the past," said Nash instantly. "He has a way of stirring things up."

"That's right," agreed Lib Benson. "I wonder where he can be and what is keeping him away. He'll fail in his exams sure as fate if he stays away much longer. Even now I'm afraid he'll have to grind so hard that he won't have much time for baseball, or anything else."

"Talking about Merriwell?" grunted Browning, loafing up and leaning lazily against the fence. "Don't worry about his failing. You never knew him to fail in anything."

"Not even in waking you up and getting you onto the eleven last fall," laughed Hock Mason. "Why aren't you in the baseball squad, Browning? You played with Merriwell's ball-team last summer."

“And got enough of it, too. It’s altogether too much like work, Old South Carolina; that’s why I’m not sweating in the cage every day.”

“If Merriwell were to show up now, he’d be pretty sure to drag you out in a hurry.”

“Never! There are plenty of others. I refuse to be sacrificed again for the public good.”

“What is this rumor I’ve been hearing lately?” broke in Julian Ives, thrusting his cap back and patting down his pet bang. “It can’t be true that Merriwell got out because he knew he must fail at exams this spring. He has wasted his time, it is said, in athletics and such folly, till now he is face to face with failure in his studies, and he can’t stand that. Rather than to be set back a year he has taken himself out of the way, and he’ll not be seen here again.”

“And I brand that as a malicious lie!” rang out a clear voice.

It was Bart Hodge, who had approached in time to hear Ives’ words. There was a black look of anger on Bart’s face, and his flashing eyes glared with scorn and contempt at Julian.

“There is a very good reason for Merriwell’s absence,” declared Hodge. “Starbright saw him in New York and said he would surely be here in a day or two.”

“But Starbright did not tell what was keeping him away, you know,” gently said Rupert Chickering. “I have nothing against Merriwell, and I sincerely hope

the rumors about him are not true, but I have begun to entertain fears."

"Bah!" exclaimed Hodge, giving Rupert a look of intense scorn. "Why do you still play the hypocrite, Chickering? Everybody knows you. Everybody knows you hate Merriwell and would do anything in your power to injure him."

Chickering held up his hands, his face expressing denial, resentment, and martyrlike anguish.

"You are very unjust!" he exclaimed. "But as you are a fellow of violent passions, I will forgive you and try to forget your unjust judgment of me. Still, I advise you to remember the Biblical injunction, 'Judge not that ye be not judged.'"

"Oh, you make me sick!" was Hodge's rather unoriginal retort. "You are the most sickening thing of your whole sickening crowd. You disguise your hatred under pretense of generosity, even of friendliness—that is, you try to disguise it. But every one is onto you, and it is well known that you are trying to stab a man in the back when you say a pretendedly kind thing about him. That brands you as a snake in the grass, Chickering! This is plain talk, but I've been waiting for just this opportunity to make it, and if you or any of your friends wish to pick it up now or any other time, you all know where to find me."

Rupert heaved a deep sigh.

"It is hard to be thus misjudged," he said sadly; "but still I must forgive you. I don't suppose I can

blame you, for you must be worried into a dreadful state of mind over Merriwell's failure."

"Merriwell never made a failure in his life, and he will not begin."

"Plainly," said Chickering, with resignation, "it is useless for me to tell what I have heard and know. I would not tell it, anyhow, but it must come out in time. I am sorry for you, Hodge, as I know you think a great deal of Merriwell; but even you would not like to see him flunk in his last year."

"More of your dirty insinuations, put in your own nasty way!" flashed Bart.

Ives and Skelding had their heads together and were glaring at Bart, while they mumbled to each other in low tones. Now Gene took a step forward and grasped Chickering's arm, hoarsely exclaiming:

"Don't talk to the fellow, Rupert! He knows you or your friends do not care to fight him here, and that's why he is making all this blow. He's doing it for a bluff and to obtain notoriety."

The fire that came into Bart's eyes made even Skelding start back a bit. But Hodge held himself in check enough so that his voice did not get higher than an ordinary tone. However, it seemed so intense that every hearer was thrilled, and not a word was missed by those on the outskirts of the gathering.

"You, Skelding, are not a hypocrite, but you are a malicious liar, and you know it! I have said that I'll fight anywhere, and that stands good for you. I never make bluffs that I cannot back up. You do. But now

and here I give you fair warning to keep your mouth shut about Merriwell. If you make any further talk about him, I promise to meet you where we cannot be interrupted and give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life!"

Gene laughed and snapped his fingers.

"If I have anything I wish to say you may be sure I shall say it, for all of your threat," he declared; "but I do not consider the fellow worth discussing."

"It's a good thing for you that you do not!"

Skelding and Ives took to mumbling to each other again, and Jim Hooker asked Bart:

"Then you are dead certain Merriwell is coming back? Nothing has happened to cause him to fail to return?"

"I know he'll be here," was the declaration, "else he would have communicated with his friends. Something has happened to keep him away longer than he intended to stay, but he'll show up before long, and I'll bet my life on it."

"There he is!" shrieked a voice. "Look, fellows—he's coming now! Hooray!"

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CAMPUS.

The excitement of the moment was intense, for Merriwell was crossing the campus toward the fence, coming from Vanderbilt Hall.

Alone and unheralded, he had arrived. It had been his fortune to reach his room without attracting attention, and now he had come forth to look for his friends and acquaintances.

When he was seen there was commotion at the fence. The gathering gave a sudden surge, a shout, a dissolving, and then the men went tearing toward him, shouting.

And Bruce Browning—big, lazy, useless Bruce—was at their head!

“Hooray!” he roared.

Then he caught Frank in his arms and gave him a regular bear-hug, while the crowd gathered and pressed around.

“Oh, Betsey!” shouted the giant senior, as he held Frank off and looked at him; “but you may bet your sweet life we are glad to see you, old man!”

They grasped his hands and shook them, coming forward one after another, even if they had to fight to reach him. They laughed and shouted and rejoiced.

“He’s here!” they told each other, gleefully, and

when they could not shake hands with Frank they shook hands with each other. "Now we're all right!" they declared. "Just see if he does not stir things up!"

From somewhere Jack Ready bobbed up and wormed his way into the crowd till he reached Frank, loudly commanding all to stand back and make room for him.

"I salute you!" he cried, making some grotesque movements with his hands. "Oh, great and mighty potentate, we have missed you, yes, we've missed you! In sooth, we have been getting into a very bad way without you. Give us a wag of your fin, salubrious one. Ah-ha! 'Richard is himself again!'"

Then he smote himself violently on the chest with his clenched fist and immediately fell to coughing.

"The same old Jack!" laughed Merry.

"Yes, the same old jackass," said somebody on the outskirts of the crowd.

Ready straightened up stiffly and glared around.

"Who made yonder insolent remark?" he fiercely demanded. "Bring him away from me, else I may be tempted to do him a severe kindness! It is more than mortal flesh can bear!"

"Somebody is onto you, Jack," smiled Frank.

"Isn't it sad?" sighed the queer fellow, pretending to wipe away a tear. "Just when I attempt to assume a little dignity some blame chump has to spoil everything. 'Tis envy, kind sir. They envy me my radiant

beauty and my graceful demeanor. Base churls! Common clods! I scorn them all!"

He flung out one hand with a gesture of lofty pride and scorn, his chin high in the air and his eyes closed for a moment.

"That will do," said Browning. "You're nothing but the low comedian. Get off the center of the stage."

"Refuse me!" murmured Jack, as the big fellow pushed him aside.

And now Starbright appeared. At first he was inclined to hold back, being only a freshman, but Frank caught sight of him and stepped toward him.

Dick's face was flushed with pride and pleasure when, before them all, the great senior, the greatest man in his eyes that had ever attended Yale, grasped his hand and shook it warmly, saying:

"I'm glad to see you, Dick, and I hope you are getting into form for the nine."

Frank longed to say more, but that was no time nor place for it. He realized that Starbright had opened his eyes to the fact that Inza Burrage really and truly loved him as she had in the old days, if not more intensely, and, regarding himself as an interloper, Dick had withdrawn and left the field to Frank, with the result that Merry had proposed and was accepted.

No time had been set for the marriage, but over the gate of the old home in Fardale they had plighted their troth, and it seemed certain that the happy day must come at last.

Looking into Frank's eyes, Dick fancied he read the truth there. Despite himself, despite his nobleness in withdrawing, he felt a pang of pain.

Inza was lost to him!

"That's it, Merriwell!" cried Irving Nash. "You're needed here to wake the men up. They say the prospects for a winning ball-team this season are decidedly dark."

Merry looked serious.

"We'll have to see how that is," he said.

Chickering's set had not rushed to greet him, and now they were moving away, seeking to escape without attracting attention. Rupert had expressed a desire to go over and shake hands with Frank, but Skelding had prevented it.

"Don't give that fellow Hodge another chance to call you down," he advised. "Besides that, you know Merriwell does not think much of you."

"It is not right that I should permit his feelings to make any difference in my treatment of him," murmured Rupert. "If he hates me I am sorry for him, that's all. He does not know what he is missing by not having me for a friend."

"Let's all keep away," said Ives. "The entire college will go foolish over Merriwell now, see if it doesn't; I did hope the fellow would never show his head here again."

"Tho did I," chirped Veazie. "I think he'th a wegular wuffian! If I could do tho jutht ath well ath

not I'd never become the beathtly stwong ath he ith. I wegard thuth stwength as thimply bwutal."

"Brutal is the word, chummie," agreed Ollie Lord. "There ought to be a law to prevent any man from training till he is so much stronger than other men. It isn't fair to the other men."

"Don't talk like asses!" growled Skelding. "You know that either one of you would gladly be as strong as Merriwell if you could; but he's not the only athlete in the world—or in Yale, for that matter. It's this bowing down and worshiping him that gives me a pain! Why, I could be just as strong and skilful as he is if I'd deny myself drinks and smokes and good things to eat and keep working away every day to put myself in form. But I like a little booze, I enjoy a cigarette, I like to stuff my stomach full of good things, and I won't pelt away with dumb-bells, clubs, chest-weights, and such things every moment I get from my studies. What's life good for if a fellow has got to be a regular slave!"

"I with you wath ath thmart ath Merriwell," lisped Lew.

"Well, I thought I was once," confessed Gene; "but I found it was no use for me to try to buck against a fellow like him who kept at his very best all the time. I'm not fool enough now to try to fight him with my fists. If I found another good way to get in a lick at him I might try it."

"That's the only way to jar him," said Tilton Hull,

his high collar holding his chin very high in the air. "Let's go up to Rupert's room and talk it over."

"Yeth, yeth!" urged Veazie. "I feel the need of a thigawette and a dwink of wine thince Gene had that wow with that low fellow Hodge. That dithturbed my nerveth."

So they passed from the campus, and the sun seemed to shine more brightly when they were gone.

Bart Hodge had shaken hands with Frank during the rush and crush of the students to reach Merriwell, but he did so silently and withdrew at once. He had been ready enough to defend Merry from his defamers a short time before, but he was not among those who made the greatest hurrah over Frank's return to college.

After a while Merry looked round for Hodge and saw him standing quite by himself on the outskirts of the throng. The expression on Bart's face was not one of happiness; indeed, he seemed sad and depressed.

It is possible that an inkling of the thoughts passing through Bart's mind came to Merry then.

The dark-eyed lad knew nothing of what had taken place while Frank was away from college. He knew only that he cared for Elsie Bellwood with all the intensity of his passionate nature and that she had repeatedly told him she would never marry at all.

Why had she made that assertion? Was it not because she still loved Frank Merriwell? Bart believed so, and it was his conviction that in the end Frank

must win her, for had not he a way of winning anything he greatly desired!

Still, he would not give up. He had told Frank squarely and honestly that he would never cease his efforts to obtain Elsie till he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that there was no hope for him.

Then, what? Who could tell? For Bart had a peculiar disposition, and a disappointment of this sort might wreak havoc with his sensitive organization.

Merriwell's hand had lifted him from the path of temptation and ruin in the past and set his feet upon the highway leading to splendid achievements, but this disappointment might undo all the good that had been done and turn him back along the downward course.

Frank thought of this, and he was eager to let his friend know what had happened, revealing to him that the road to Elsie's heart was open and undisputed.

"Hodge!"

Frank spoke Bart's name and started toward him. Then one of his many friends caught hold of him and asked him a question, which he paused to answer.

When he looked for Bart again he looked in vain, for Hodge had hastened away.

CHAPTER III.

A SHOCK FOR BART.

Bart Hodge sat alone in his room. The curtains were drawn at the windows and a lighted student's lamp was on the table, over which books and papers were scattered. In Bart's hand he held the photograph of a pretty, sweet-faced girl, at which he was gazing with earnest intentness, the light in his dark eyes being one of unspeakable admiration.

It was the picture of Elsie Bellwood. Bart had been trying to study, but his mind would revert to Elsie, try as he might to fix it on other matters, till at last he gave up, brought out her picture and sat there musing over it.

His love for her had seemed to take possession of him full blown in a moment, but cooler afterthought had revealed to him that he had always admired her intensely since that wild night when he had aided Frank to save her from the wreck on Tiger Tooth Ledge, near Fardale.

He had first seen her that night as she was lashed to the mast of the doomed vessel which had struck upon the terrible ledge. Led by Merriwell, the cadets had succeeded in manning a boat and pulling off to the vessel. On reaching the dripping deck Bart had seen Elsie held fast to the mast by ropes, but in the gloom

he was unable to discern if she were young or old. Her voice, however, as she appealed to the lads for aid when her father was assaulted by one of the sailors had sounded musical and sweet.

The music of that voice had stirred silent chords within Bart's heart many times since that wild night. But he was loyal to Merry, his best friend, and it had seemed that Elsie and Frank cared for each other, so, with Spartanlike heroism, he had resolutely compelled himself to think not at all of her.

Thus he had lived with the germ of love in his heart, refusing to permit it to sprout and grow. For a long time he had fancied himself a "woman-hater," but it was all because other girls made him think of Elsie—made him think of her as a thousand times more winsome, pretty, and attractive. That he wished to forget, so he avoided girls in general.

But it is not natural for a strong, manly youth to shun womanly and attractive girls, and Hodge began to succumb at last. He could not hold himself aloof from them, try as he might. He was naturally attracted by them and enjoyed their society far more than he would confess to himself.

And the time came when, like other young men, he fancied he cared for one of them. The first was Stella Stanley, an actress several years older than Hodge; but Stella had told him it was not true love and that he would get over it.

At first he had taken this rather hard, but he came

at last to recognize her wisdom and thank her for her plain speech.

Then there was another, Grace Vernon, who fascinated him for a time.

With Elsie it was different. Having once discovered how much he cared for her, he was unable to brush aside the knowledge, which remained with him constantly, no matter what he did or where he was.

The knowledge that his love for her might be hopeless simply made it all the more intense, for it was not Bart's nature to relinquish anything on which he had once fairly set his heart.

But Merriwell stood as a barrier between them, and, worse than everything else, Merriwell was his friend.

No wonder Hodge spent sleepless nights! No wonder he spent wretched days! No wonder he lost flesh and became more and more irritable till it became dangerous to cross him in anything!

Still, in his loyal heart he was true to Frank Merriwell, whom he well knew had been his best friend and benefactor in a thousand ways when almost any other fellow would have been a mortal foe.

As of old, Hodge would have yielded up his life for Frank, but his love for Elsie was something stronger and more intense than his love for life, and he could not put that aside. As of old, he had been ready to defend Frank against enemies and traducers; but the sight of Frank's happy face filled him with gloomy forebodings and intense misery.

Why had Merry looked so happy? Why had he remained away from Yale so long?

Bart could not help being suspicious of that happiness. He could not help wondering if it came through an understanding between Frank and Elsie. And that had been brought about while Merry was away from college!

If this was true, Bart felt that Elsie was lost to him, and the ambition had gone out of his life forever. Therefore he sat alone in his room and gazed longingly, earnestly, and almost hopelessly, at her pictured face. Her open eyes seemed to smile back at him reassuringly, but they did not lift the gloom from his heart. Her lips——

Impulsively, he lifted the picture and kissed it.

The door opened quietly and some one stepped into the room.

“Hello, Bart, old man!” cried a hearty, familiar voice. “What are you doing there?”

Hodge sprang up, his face flaming, and tried to hide the picture behind him.

Frank closed the door and advanced into the room.

Hodge stood beside the table, trembling from head to feet. His eyes were fastened on Merry and he was speechless.

“I thought you’d come round to see me, Bart,” said Frank. “You did not, so I came to see you, though I’m missing time that I ought to spend in grinding. Oh, I’ll be a greasy grind for a while now till I get on

Easy Street again. It will take lots of stiff work for me to catch up, but I believe I can do it."

Still Bart stood there without speaking, looking straight at Frank.

"What's the matter?" Merry asked, in perplexity. "Why do you stare at me that way? Why, hang it! you don't seem at all pleased to see me."

He was surprised and hurt by Bart's singular manner.

Hodge opened his lips to say something, but the words did not seem to come freely, and he stuck.

Merry came close and placed his hands on Bart's shoulders, looking deep into the dark eyes of his comrade.

"Tell me why you meet me like this, old man!" he urged. "Have I done anything to cause it?"

"No."

"Then why——"

"It's nothing, Merriwell—nothing!" huskily muttered Bart. "Take a chair. I've been thinking, and I expect I'm in a deuced unsociable mood, but I'll try to be decent."

Frank did not sit down immediately on the invitation. Instead, he looked at Bart as if trying to read his very thoughts.

"You're thin," he said. "You have lost flesh and there are dark circles round your eyes. Are you ill?"

"No."

"Something is the matter with you, and I fancy I know what it is."

"Perhaps so."

"I've come to talk it over——"

The dark-eyed lad cut him short with a gesture.

"Don't!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Talk of anything else—baseball, spring sports, the Southern trip, anything!"

"What is that you have in your hand?"

Almost rudely Bart pushed Frank aside and walked to a desk, into the drawer of which he thrust the photograph. But when he turned round he felt certain Merriwell knew it was a picture of Elsie and that he had been seen pressing that picture to his lips.

"Sit down," he invited again, with a motion toward a chair.

Frank did so.

"There are a number of things I wish to speak about, Bart," said he. "One important thing is the nine. Are you working to get into form to catch? That's one thing."

"Perhaps I'm not working as hard as usual," confessed Hodge. "Somehow, I haven't seemed to have any heart in it. You know you were not here, and that has made lots of difference."

"I'm here now, and we must get to work, for I hear that the outlook for a strong team is very unsatisfactory."

"It might be better."

"Well, if we get into our usual form, the battery should not be so very weak, though, of course, I can't pitch all the games."

“Do you know who’s working like a fiend to get into the box?”

“I haven’t heard.”

“That cad, Morgan! Why, he’s training every day, and they say there’s a prospect that he’ll make it. What do you think of that?”

“A good thing.”

“Good? Do you fancy I’ll ever catch with him pitching? Not for my life!”

“Not even for Yale?”

“Why should I?”

“Because you should be ready to do anything for Yale, my boy.”

“I can’t swallow that scoundrel, and I refuse to have him thrust down my throat! That’s all there is to it! If you can stand for him, that’s all right, but I decline.”

“Well, we won’t get into an argument over that now, though I want you to remember the splendid work Morgan did on the gridiron last fall.”

“And I don’t want you to forget that up to the last minute he pulled every string possible to down you, Merriwell. He was as full of tricks as an egg is full of meat.”

“Let it pass now. I hear that Starbright has not been given much of a show with the squad. How is that?”

“Rot! You know any man will be given all the show he deserves.”

“And Browning?”

"He refuses to get out."

"And Ready?"

"He's too flip. He's got himself disliked by his freshness, and I fancy he'll have a hard pull to make the nine."

"Nor is he better than other men who are working for his place. I have been promised absolute authority this spring, and I shall have something to say about the make-up of the team I am to captain."

By this time Bart had begun to cool down somewhat, and now, of a sudden, Merry reverted to the thing about which he had attempted to speak a while before.

"Hodge, you want to stop worrying about the thing that has troubled you so much lately. I am your truest friend, and you must let me speak out frankly. You'll feel better when I have finished. I know whose picture you held in your hand when I entered—the picture you put in that drawer."

Bart's face was very pale now and he had begun to quiver again.

"We had a plain face-to-face talk about her on Cumberland Island not so very long ago, but the finish of that talk left us just where we began. Since then many things have happened, and, as far as I am concerned, that matter has been entirely settled."

Bart felt a tightening about his heart. So it was true that Frank had remained away from college to see Elsie again and to win her back to him! Somehow, it did not seem just exactly like Merriwell, and

yet how could Bart complain, for had not Frank held the prior claim to her?

"Elsie is a beautiful, noble-hearted girl, whom I cannot find words to properly extol," Merriwell calmly continued, his coolness and confidence causing Bart's heart to sink still more. "I do not wonder that I came to admire her very much. It would have been far more remarkable if I had not. But I have learned that I wholly misinterpreted my feelings and emotions toward her. Read others however well I may, I did not properly read and analyze myself in regard to her."

What was Frank saying? Hodge felt a rush of blood to his heart, which began to thump violently in his breast.

"Events which I cannot fully describe have opened my eyes and revealed to me the truth. I loved Elsie and still love her as a very dear friend, and one of the sweetest girls alive, but I do not love her and never did love her as one should love the girl he means to make his wife."

Bart's lips parted, but no sound escaped them. He stared at Frank as if turned to stone.

"But I have learned," Merry continued, "that I love another with all my heart, and that knowledge has brought me great happiness, for my love is returned, and we are engaged to be married some time, though the day is not set yet. Of course, you know without being told that the other of whom I speak is Inza Burrage."

Bart sprang up.

“Merriwell,” he gasped, “you—you really mean that you are engaged—to Inza?”

“Yes, that is just what I mean. So you see, my dear boy, that you have been worrying over a trouble that does not exist, and the field is open and clear for you to win Elsie.”

There was a ringing as of many bells in Bart’s ears, and the room seemed to whirl round him.

Then he sat down quickly, all the strength having gone out of his legs. But the happiness of the shock made him long to shout, though his lips uttered no sound.

CHAPTER IV.

A DESPERATE ENEMY.

"Ginger up, there, Robinson! You're worse than a dead man!"

"Get in front of 'em, Dashleigh! Stop 'em with your body if you can't hold 'em with your hands!"

"You throw like an old woman, Mason! You'll break your back some day."

"Here, here, Ready! that will do with those flourishes! When you get hold of a ball throw it. Don't juggle it."

"Say, you chap with the curly hair, don't get so excited. Take a little time in throwing to first, after picking up a ball."

"Who is that long-legged chap?" Gamp questioned.

"Here, Gamp, it's your turn to bat."

"Oh, murder! Who let that grounder go through him? Carker? Is that his name? Say, Carker, you're a sieve! Keep your feet together and you'll do better."

It was a lively scene in the great baseball cage at Yale, for the squad of candidates for the ball-team were hard at work and the coaches were putting them "through the paces."

The men were working hard, and the coaches were

yelling and shouting at them, giving orders, criticizing, commenting—but seldom expressing approval.

It would not do to let any man think he was doing too well at this early stage of the work, for it might spoil him by giving him a good opinion of his ability.

More men have been spoiled by praise than by adverse criticism, and the professional coach knows this very well.

It is a pretty level-headed youth who can stand open praise without thinking himself the "only one."

Sometimes it pays to praise a man, but it is best to know your man before you venture to praise him. Be sure it will do him more good than silence, or keep your mouth shut.

In rare instances praise will serve to spur a man on to do still better. Far oftener it will cause him to think he is good enough already and that the other fellows should hustle to keep in his class.

The fellow who manages or coaches a ball-team must know this, and he must be exceedingly careful with his praise.

In the cage the sweating crowd of candidates accepted this criticism without a word, for it would not do to "talk back." When one was called down for something he did, if he was a good man, he shut his teeth and made an extra attempt to do it well the next time. If he was sulky and had a bad temper, he might tell himself he did not care a rap, and then he would be careless and do worse the next time. In that case, the chances were he would be quietly informed that it

would be a waste of time for him to practise further, and that the room he occupied in the cage was needed for others.

Of course, there were men, and plenty of them, who worked like slaves to improve, yet failed to make the necessary progress, and who were dropped one after another for that reason.

But no man of this class, willing and determined, was dropped till the coaches were perfectly satisfied that there was no possible chance of making good material out of him.

The turnout this year had been most unsatisfactory, barely more than half the usual number of candidates coming to the cage each day.

This happened despite all efforts to get out the usual large squad. It seemed very remarkable, but men came to attribute it to the absence of Merriwell, which, they said, accounted for the apathetic interest taken in baseball.

There was at one time talk of making some move to choose a new captain for the team, to see if that would not bring about better results; but Merriwell had given no notice that he would not be on hand to fill the position, and the one who hinted openly of selecting some one to fill his place was soon hissed down.

But now Merriwell had arrived, and his return showed immediately by the change that took place in the cage. He had made inquiries about the work, and, having learned what men were practising and who

were not, he went around among those whom he regarded as having a chance to make the nine.

The following day a swarm of new men flocked into the cage and went to work with a vim that astonished and delighted the coaches. Joe Gamp, Hock Mason, Berlin Carson, and Greg Carker were among the new men.

Carson had given up in despair, having tried to make the team the year before and failed; but during the trip of Merriwell's athletes through the West the previous summer Frank had been given an opportunity to see what the rancher's son could do at the game, and he urged Berlin to come out and make one more attempt to get onto the varsity nine.

Frank did not have so much confidence in Greg Carker, the pessimist, for he knew that Carker's peculiar temperament was such that he could never be at his very best in anything.

Joe Gamp, however, despite his awkwardness, was one of the best outfielders Merry had ever seen. This was rather astonishing, for Gamp was not regarded at college as a person having the least baseball material in him, and he had never tried for a place on the varsity nine.

But Merriwell had seen him play center field on the great athletic trip, and he knew Gamp could cover an "outer garden" in splendid style, and could throw with almost the marvelous power of the once famed Sockalexis, and was an unusually good hitter against

pitchers who had not discovered his "weak spot"—high and close to his shoulders.

With Hock Mason it was different. Frank had seen Mason, who was from the South, catch some flies in field practise, which he had done very well; but outside of that Merry knew very little about the fellow except that he was sturdy, well built, and a perfect bulldog at anything he set out to do.

It was well enough to get such a man into the cage and see if something could not be made of him, so Frank urged Mason to turn out and practise. Mason did so.

A long time before this Mason had been one of the greatest bullies in college; but he found more than his match in Frank, and the result of the sound thrashing he received was very beneficial. After that it was his belief that Merriwell must despise him, but when he was injured and lying in a hospital it was Merriwell who came every day to ask about him, it was Merriwell who first reached his side when a visitor was permitted to see him, and it was Merriwell who pressed his hand and spoke encouraging words to him.

When he left that hospital the student from South Carolina was cured completely of his bullying ways, and Frank Merriwell had made a new and staunch friend.

Still, Mason was strangely proud, and he would not force himself on any one, for which reason it happened that he never became one of Merriwell's recognized "flock."

Deep in his heart Mason had often longed to join the jolly band of Merriwell's friends, but his pride had held him back.

Now, when Frank came and asked him to get out for practise in the cage, Hock was ready enough to do so, even though it seemed really preposterous that he could ever make sufficient advancement to have a show to get onto the nine.

Bertrand Defarge was among the men who had taken his regular amount of work in the cage day after day, and he was showing up pretty well, too. But Frank knew Defarge of old, and he was aware that such a fellow, though full of vigor, fire, and intensity at times, could not always be relied upon, having a temper that conquered and swayed him absolutely at times.

Of course, Frank was on hand, and it was his presence in the cage that seemed to make the marvelous change in things, so that the men went at their work with a gingery earnestness that quite surprised and wholly delighted the hitherto disgusted and disheartened coaches.

And Frank had managed to keep himself in excellent form, so that he remained the admiration and marvel of the athletic-loving students. He began his pitching-work easily, however, knowing the folly of starting off with too much vigor, even though he was in perfect condition.

Even Frank was not above taking advice from the coaches, although it is probable that not one man

among them knew more about baseball and the work of getting into trim for it than did Merry himself.

If any one watched the first day to see him throw some samples of the "double-shoot" that person was disappointed, for he indulged in nothing of the kind.

But he still had it at his command, as he very well knew, and his wrist was hard as iron. When the time came he would swiftly convince his doubting opponents that the "double-shoot" was not a fanciful invention of some romancer's brain.

For among the hundreds of pitchers who had worked and tried and schemed to learn his secret, it was not probable that one had entirely succeeded, therefore they gave up in despair, and became scoffers, saying there was no such thing as the double-shoot.

Among the candidates for pitching-honors was Dade Morgan, and he worked persistently and faithfully.

On the first day of Frank's appearance in the cage one of the coaches asked him to watch Morgan's work and see what he thought of it. Merry did so for a few moments, and Dade flushed hotly when he saw this, though he kept at it without a break.

When Frank had moved away the man who was coaching Morgan said:

"Try to throw that drop with just the same motion you use in throwing your other curves. You give yourself dead away every time you start to throw a drop. The batter would know just what was coming."

Dade's dark eyes flashed and drooped. For one

moment he betrayed anger, and then he smiled sweetly, saying:

"I'll do my level best."

But Bertrand Defarge quickly found an opportunity to slip over to Morgan and sneer:

"So you got a call-down! I knew it would come the minute Merriwell saw what you were doing. He's jealous, and you don't stand the least show of making the nine. You may as well give up trying now."

"How about you?"

"Oh, I'm not a pitcher, and there is no chance that I'll rob him of any glory. Indeed, if I pan out well, I may add to his glory by helping him in games, so he'll let my head alone. Yours comes off before the Easter trip, see if it doesn't. You may as well quit now."

"I'll never quit till I have to!" returned Dade. "Get out and let me alone! I'm sick of your croaking!"

"Go to blazes!" hissed Defarge. "I may find a way to make you sicker!"

A number of men were hard at work fielding ground balls and throwing to first. Mason was one of this squad, and he was not making a great success of it. The coaches yelled at him, but that did not seem to do him much good.

Then Frank Merriwell, being a privileged character, walked down and talked to Mason in a quiet, soothing tone.

"You're rattled, Mason," said Merry. "Just get rid of the idea that everybody is looking at you. They

are not. The other men are busy taking care of their own affairs."

"I reckon you made a mistake when you asked me to get out here, sah," said the Southerner, the perspiration standing out on his drawn and worried face. "I judge I ain't put up right to be howled at like this by a lot of loud-mouthed duffers."

"Don't be touchy, man. You can't succeed if you are. We've all had coaches yell at us in the same way."

"But it's mighty galling to a man like me."

"Haven't a doubt of it, but you must set your jaws and lay right down to the work. Get your body in front of those bounding balls every time, even if they take your head off. Keep your heels together, and they may stop balls when your hands fail. Jump into the track of anything that comes your way. If it's a slow one, go ahead to meet it, for every second counts in trying to cut off a runner who is sprinting to first."

"All right. I'll try it again, sah, but I'm mighty afraid it isn't my line."

After that Mason did better stopping the balls that came his way, even though he did not pick them all up cleanly, but he made his worst mistake in his hurry to throw to first. Seeing this, Frank fancied he had given the fellow a wrong impression, and so worked round to Hock to set him straight.

"Don't be in such a fearful hurry to throw," he instructed. "You make poor throws by your hurry."

"But you told me a little while ago that every moment counts in cutting off a man running to first."

"That's true, but it's far better to lose a little time in taking care to make a good throw than it is to hustle for all you're worth and lose the man entirely by a poor throw. Besides that, you do not throw right. You never get into the right position."

"That being the case, sah, I reckon I better quit now."

"I don't think you're a quitter, Mason. Let me tell you where you make your mistake. In your haste to throw, if you pick the ball up with your body leaning away from the base you wish to throw to, you do not take time to right yourself, but you throw in that attitude. You can't get any force into the throw. Besides, you swing your arm too far. Try a shorter swing; throw from the ear. Never take a hop, skip, and a jump before throwing, as I saw you do a few moments ago. Even though you send the ball whizzing across the diamond like a bullet, you have lost lots of valuable time before you got it away from your hand, and that may mean the loss of the runner. Pull your hand back behind your ear, lean forward a little as you throw, and just as it leaves your hand take a single step. Try that. Practice it all the time.

Then Frank worked on to another man he had selected to advise, and in this manner Merriwell assisted the coaches. In fact, his quiet coaching was far more efficacious than that of some of the regular coaches who made considerable noise.

A regular system of batting-practise was gone through, each man being directed how to stand properly, how to hold his bat, and how to swing. Bunting and place hitting were practised by the more skilful batters.

Base-running and sliding to bases was a part of the regular work. At this the older hands showed up well, but some of the new men were very awkward. It caused the coaches to howl when a runner was told to slide, and he slammed himself prone on the ground as if going through to China and slid about ten inches, but they howled equally as much at the one "who let himself down in sections," his knees striking first.

Dade Morgan was making excellent showing. He had a good eye for the ball when batting, and he could sprint to first like a deer. When it came to sliding, he slipped over the ground in an easy, graceful manner that was deserving of applause.

Frank felt like giving Morgan a word of praise, but remembering the past, and not knowing just what the effect on Dade would be, he refrained from doing so.

Dick Starbright, the giant freshman, was in the midst of the work, and he went at it with an energy that seemed almost savage. A change had come over him, and the good-natured, pleasant look that had seemed habitual had vanished before one of stern determination.

Indeed, Dick was doing everything possible to keep

his mind from dwelling on a certain beautiful dark-eyed girl whom he now knew was lost to him. He studied hard, worked hard, played hard, and in this manner succeeded fairly well in his purpose.

He had read in Frank's happy face the result of the trip to Fardale, but it had been exactly what he expected.

And Frank's talk with Hodge had seemed to transform Bart, who had been fretful, listless, and ill-natured before, failing to take much interest in the cage-work or seeming to care whether Yale put a winning team on the field or not.

Now Hodge went into the work with vim and earnestness, and he actually smiled occasionally, which was so remarkable that it caused more than one to comment upon it.

Defarge had seen Merriwell talking to Mason, and at the first opportunity the French youth spoke to the Southerner.

"Did you get a calling down from the high muck-a-muck of this combination?" sneeringly asked Bertrand.

"What do you mean, sah?" demanded Hock.

"Why, I saw Merriwell shooting off his mouth at you, and I presume he was telling you just what sort of a slouch you are, which is a habit of his, the egotistical cad!"

"No, sah, he was not calling me down. He was giving me a few pointers, and I appreciate his kindness in doing so."

"Well, you're just like all the others," growled

Defarge. "He can rub it all over you and you'll think it's nice, but you'd kick like a mule if anybody else tried it."

"I may kick like a mule, sah, if you are not careful about your language in addressing me, and I'll guarantee that you'll be within reach when I kick."

Defarge showed his teeth.

"If you ever kicked me I'd make a hole in your skin and let some of your confounded upstart blood out!" he hissed.

"And if you ever tried that trick," retorted Mason, not in the least frightened, "I'd forget that I've sworn never to strike a man who did not weigh as much as myself, and I'd give you the blamedest thrashing, sah, that you ever had in all your life!"

"Pouf!" said Bertrand, as he wheeled away.

"It really would do me good to thump him," muttered Mason, watching the fellow's retreating figure. "I think he's about the only enemy of any account that Merriwell has left in college."

Roland Packard did not occur to him just then. Besides, Roland had been keeping pretty quiet about Merry since the beginning of the term, realizing that popular sentiment was entirely against him.

The Chickering set was not regarded as worth considering.

Defarge could find little consolation in his attempts to deride and sneer at Merriwell, and it began to seem to him that all the old enemies of Frank with blood in their bodies and courage to take a stand against

the idol of Yale had given over the struggle as worse than useless.

Thus, when the practise work was over and the men were preparing for the run into the suburbs, which always followed cage training, Bertrand sulked and growled and was disagreeable to every one.

"I'd like to get a good chance to do up Merriwell!" he thought; but he remembered how all his former efforts had failed and brought disgrace upon himself in several instances, and even his hating heart quailed.

As soon as the men were ready they left the gymnasium in a body and started at a brisk trot along one of the widest and most comfortable streets of the old city. The pace was not made too fast at first, and yet it was enough to keep them going sharply.

It was an interesting spectacle to see these sturdy-limbed youths start out in a body, their heads up, mouths closed, cheeks flushed and nostrils dilated. Surely a representative lot of young Americans they were.

Frank ran lightly and easily, seeming to find it no effort at all to get over the ground at the pace set. Hodge was beside him, and Jack Ready had swung in with them. Ready still ran in his own peculiar fashion, toeing in with his left foot, a habit he had been unable to break, try as he might. His cheeks were rosy and his eyes bright.

"Ah-ha!" he exclaimed, as he trotted along. "This is the kind of stuff that makes one feel fit to tackle the gods! Yea, verily! Why, just now I believe I could

give old Thor, the god of thunder, a rattling good set-to!"

"Yet," said Frank, "we know any amount of fellows in Yale who are literally grinding their lives out, and not one of them has sense enough to take sufficient exercise to preserve their health."

"Which means that a few more fools will graduate near the head of their classes and go out into the world with broken constitutions. What will they be good for?"

"It's all right for a man to graduate as near the head of his class as possible," Merry asserted, "in case he gives enough time to exercise to keep his health and strength; but when he wears his life away and goes forth from college a physical wreck he has committed a crime. Not only that, but he will be punished for his crime, and there is no way for him to escape that punishment."

"And all the while he doesn't dream what fun he's missing," laughed Jack, thumping his breast with his clenched hands. "Why, it's great just to be living and feel this way! I could fly—if I had a flying-machine."

"You have the necessary wheels in your head," declared Merry.

"But you'll never develop a pair of wings," asserted Hodge.

By the time they were well out into the suburbs it had begun to grow dark. They had passed Beaver Ponds, and were not far from West Rock, before the

leader swung to the left by a country road and turned back toward the city.

The men had strung out behind for a short distance. It was impossible to tell if all of them had held out and kept with the squad.

In fact, one of them had not. Defarge had slowly fallen behind until he was near the rear of the squad, and then, making an excuse to tighten up his shoe, he knelt beside the road and let them go on without him.

"I know the way they'll come back," he muttered. "And I know where I can watch them without being seen. If Merriwell would just take a fancy to spurt, or would get off by himself! Oh, yes! I'd make one more try to settle his hash!"

Then he turned back, struck into a cross-lane, and ran swiftly through the gathering gloom, his heart filled with black thoughts and evil designs.

CHAPTER V.

BAFFLED.

Defarge crouched behind some rocks and bushes which grew near the top of a high ridge of ground. Some distance below him, running parallel with the ridge, was the road along which he knew the baseball men must come on their way back to town. It was rather dark down there, but the crouching youth could see the road when he lifted his head and peered down.

In his hands Defarge had a large, jagged rock; in his heart was a design so dark that he dared not meditate upon it.

Although it was cold, he felt perspiration starting out upon his face, which he mopped with his handkerchief. He told himself that he was justified in doing anything in his power to down Frank Merriwell, for had not Merry once brought about his disgrace and nearly caused his expulsion from college?

He did not pause to consider that it was through Frank's generosity alone that he still remained at Yale. Had he reasoned calmly he must have known that any other man might have exposed him fully and compelled him to leave.

Hark! They were coming! He heard the beat of running feet far along the frozen road. It was likely

that Merriwell would be among the very first, for of old Frank had often led the squad on the return trip to the gym.

The crouching lad quivered in every limb.

"He disgraced me before them all!" he panted.

He made me the laughing-stock of the college! No man can do that to a Defarge and escape! I've waited a long time, but I'm going to fix him now!"

He gripped the jagged rock with feverish intensity and peered along the darkening road. The sound of running feet came nearer.

"Hello, Merriwell!"

Some one of the runners was hailing Frank.

"Hello!" sounded still clearer in the unmistakable voice of the captain of the nine.

"Take the Blake road."

"All right."

"Merriwell is leading, as usual!" panted Defarge. "Here he comes!"

A dark figure was coming swiftly down the dusky road. With the stone in both hands, Defarge crouched and watched, every muscle taut, every nerve quivering.

"He's some rods ahead of the next man," he thought. "He's played right into my hands."

The figure was plainly that of Merriwell. Defarge straightened a little and lifted the stone. In a moment the unconscious young athlete would be directly beneath the revengeful scoundrel on the ridge.

"Now!" Defarge panted the word as he swung the

stone over his head with both hands, and hurled it with murderous aim straight at the head of Merriwell.

There was a thud, and he saw Frank go down and lay outstretched upon the ground.

"I've done it! I've done it!"

With that awful thought filling his heart, the wretch crouched behind the bushes and ran quickly back along the ridge, passing over it and disappearing.

Hidden from view, he ran as swiftly as he could back along the course of the road down which the baseball men had come. Pretty soon the ridge sunk and he was in a piece of thin timber, through which he pressed till he came to the road itself.

He halted amid some trees to let several men pass, and then he sprang out into the road and started along in the same direction as if he had been in the procession all the time.

"Now let any one prove that I did it!" he laughed to himself. "I took nobody into my confidence, and there is no proof against me. It's a job well done."

As he approached the spot he was not surprised to find the men ahead of him had stopped and were gathered in a group.

"They'll take him in on a stretcher," thought De-farge.

He came up, breathing heavily, as if he had been running all the while.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as he approached. "Anybody hurt?"

"Hello, Defarge," said one of the men. "You've made good time to-day. You're usually a tail-ender."

"Anybody hurt?" persisted Bertrand, coming up and stopping. "What has hapened?"

"Oh, nothing much," was the answer. "Merriwell's got a nasty fall, that's all."

"That is not all!" declared a voice that caused Defarge's heart to stand still, for it was that of Frank Merriwell himself. "My fall was nothing, but I'd like to know where this huge stone came from, for I know it whizzed past my head just as I tripped and went down."

Beneath his breath Defarge muttered an oath.

Frank was absolutely unharmed, for, being in perfect condition, the shock of the fall over a stone which he had not seen in the road affected him to no perceptible extent.

Indeed, when a man is in the best physical condition, ordinary falls, that seem to jar and severely injure the untrained, are not noticed at all. Sometimes a man may, in perfect condition, receive shocks and sustain falls which naturally would break the bones of the unprepared and still escape without any apparent harm.

Thus it is that exercise, physical training, and muscle-building prepare those who follow faithfully the upbuilding of the body for all the hardships they may have to encounter in life.

"The survival of the fittest" is a law of nature that has been in full sway since the dawn of creation, and

modern conditions have simply seemed to emphasize its unyielding rigidity.

A weakling might have been severely, even fatally, injured by the fall that had not harmed Merriwell at all.

Sometimes men die from the effects of shocks which trained athletes would have withstood without great distress.

Thousands of weak-backed, narrow-chested, scrawny-necked men are swiftly wearing away their lives in offices and stores and other places of business when, had they known and respected the laws of health, they might be strong, and robust, and healthy.

They will stand up to their tasks as long as the candle of life flickers and flares in their wrecked bodies, but one by one they will lie down and die long before there is any need of it, had they paid the slightest attention to the demands of nature.

Frank Merriwell had not been born strong and healthy. His mother was an invalid, and he had inherited a weak body. But, fortunately, he had been given brains with which to think and reason. And he had used those brains! That was the best part of it.

Having found that others had acquired health by exercise and by obeying the laws of nature, he had made a resolve to do the same. He was stubborn, and, having made such a resolve, he kept at the work day after day, week after week, year after year.

What a glorious reward was his! From a weak

boy he had become a strong, supple, superb youth, a typical young American of the very highest class, and all by his own efforts! Was not the reward sufficient for the effort?

It had not always been by chance, as on this occasion, that his enemies had failed to wreak upon him the injuries they sought to inflict. Had he been weak they must have succeeded many times. But one by one they had fallen before him, and he remained triumphant and unharmed.

"The fellow bears a charmed life," thought Bertrand Defarge. "It's no use—he can't be harmed!"

Once more he felt for his handkerchief to wipe from his face the beads of cold perspiration that started forth; but the handkerchief was not in the pocket where he fancied he had thrust it.

"Where could the stone have come from?" Bert Dashleigh was asking. "You don't suppose——"

"Hello, Defarge!" exclaimed one of a little bunch of men that came up. "How the dickens did you get ahead of us? We thought you behind with the tail-enders."

"What's the matter here?" asked another, and, to Bertrand's relief, they all pressed forward to learn what had happened.

That saved Defarge from answering an unpleasant question and explaining how he came to be ahead of those men.

But Bart Hodge had heard the question and had noted that no answer was given.

When the men started on again, Bart was at Merry's side. He soon found an opportunity to say, using a guarded tone:

"You still have some enemies, Frank—or an enemy, at least."

"Then you think——"

"Of course! Somebody tried to knock your brains out with that stone."

"I don't like to think that," declared Frank. "And yet——"

"You can't help it. Your enemies have been chirping mighty soft of late, but it was because they didn't dare sing louder. They are not all dead, or converted. Where is Morgan?"

"Somewhere on the road. You know I have that fellow's pledge."

"Which doesn't amount to shucks!"

"But his uncle is dead, and there is no further reason why he should try to injure me."

"Don't fool yourself! He's ambitious and proud. He wants to pitch this spring, and it is his way to long to be cock of the walk at anything he tries. He knows he can't be that with you on the team."

"But he could not have possibly done the trick; he did not throw that stone."

"I don't say he did."

"Then what——"

"He is a fellow to use accomplices."

Frank shook his head.

"I know all about your hatred for Morgan," he

said, "and I confess the justness of it; but something tells me the fellow did not do this trick, or know anything about it. In fact, even though he may not love me, I do not believe he will make any further attempts to harm me. While Santenel lived he held Morgan under his hypnotic influence and made him do some very nasty things. But Santenel is dead."

"Well, Morgan still lives, and you'll see that you will have your troubles just as long as he remains in college."

Frank knew how useless it was to try to reason Bart out of a conviction so firmly implanted in his mind, and so he made no further effort.

Along the hard road they sped, their lungs filled with fresh air, their entire bodies tingling with the intoxication of perfect health.

Ahead of them gleamed the city's lights. On either side lights shone from the windows of houses.

They strung out on Whalley Avenue, for now they were permitted to speed up some as the end of the run drew near. At last they came to Elm Street and the gym.

There the men were given cold showers, and rubbed down with rough towels, till their bodies glowed like furnaces.

When they left the gym they felt "like fighting cocks," for all of what they had done and gone through.

Frank and Bart left the gym together.

"Are you going to your room, Hodge?" asked Merry.

"Not now," was the answer.

"Well, come up to mine. I've got to work hard to-night, but we can have a little chat of a few minutes before I get down to grinding."

"I've got to go somewhere else. I'll see you to-morrow, Merry. So-long."

Frank wondered as Bart swung away. He would have wondered still more had he observed where Hodge went and what he did.

Direct to a certain store the dark-eyed lad proceeded, and there he purchased a lantern, which he had filled with oil and prepared for lighting. With this lantern he struck out at a brisk walk, avoiding the vicinity of the college buildings.

More than half an hour later Bart was searching along the ridge of high land near where Merriwell had fallen on the road. The lighted lantern aided him in his search behind the mass of evergreen bushes.

He came to a place that interested him very much, for there was every indication that some one had been there ahead of him.

Then he uttered a low cry of satisfaction, and suddenly snatched something from the ground.

It was a handkerchief!

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT WITH RAPIERS.

Defarge had roomed alone ever since entering college. He was so exceedingly unpopular that it would have been difficult for him to find a roommate had he desired one; but he declared that on no condition would he share his apartments with another.

His rooms were well furnished and comfortable, but he cared little about their arrangement or decorations, and about them there was not a single thing in the way of ornament that would suggest to a casual visitor that a Yale man slept and studied there.

In other rooms were flags, badges, blue ribbons, and a hundred other things gathered by the students as tokens to remind them of something connected with their college-life. When they visited home at holidays they took some of these things along to give brothers or sisters, who treasured them with pride.

But it is probable that Defarge felt none of that love for Yale that seems to imbue almost every man among the great throng of students. It is even possible, astounding though it may seem to every other Yale man—that he would have been quite as well satisfied had it been his fortune to attend Harvard, or any other college. He had failed totally and entirely to imbibe the “Yale spirit.”

Personal conquest and advancement had been all the French youth seemed to care for, and his utter selfishness made him offensive to those who might have regarded him in a friendly spirit because of similar likes and dislikes.

He had regarded himself as a wonderful fencer, and, indeed, his skill was most commendable. He found little difficulty in defeating all comers until he encountered Merriwell, upon whom by sneers and insults he forced an engagement.

Merriwell, however, had studied fencing under a past master of the art, and the French youth was easily defeated by the representative American, which filled him with unspeakable shame and chagrin.

His defeat caused Defarge to lose his head entirely, and he took to drink without delay. That very night, while in a state of insane intoxication, he attempted to strike Frank in the back with an open knife. Fortunately, Frank saw him in a mirror and was able to turn and grapple with him.

Then followed something that astonished all who witnessed it, for, looking straight into the eyes of the intoxicated youth, Frank caused him to quail and become as harmless as a lamb.

In that moment Frank discovered that he possessed a strange power, and this power he had been called upon to use many times afterward. Once, at least, it had saved his life. Once it saved the life of his father.

But although Merriwell had declared that he might make a friend of Defarge, the French youth remained

his bitter and unyielding enemy. For a time he had avoided Frank, but now, Merriwell having been away from college a while, he ventured to strike again.

Alone in his room that evening, Bertrand cursed the luck that had permitted him to fail in accomplishing his terrible intention. And while he was cursing, the door opened to admit Bart Hodge!

Defarge stared in astonishment. Never before had such an amazing thing occurred and he could not understand it now. He wondered if Hodge had by accident wandered into the wrong room.

But Bart deliberately closed the door behind him. There was a key in the lock. This key Hodge turned, after which he removed it, and quietly put it into his pocket.

"What the deuce are you doing?" cried Defarge, who was now on his feet.

Bart advanced, his eyes fixed on those of Bertrand.

"I've called to see you," said Frank Merriwell's bosom friend, in a peculiar tone of voice.

"You locked that door?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"So it would not blow open," answered Hodge, in the same queer way.

"Blow open! Why, there's no danger of that! Are you crazy?"

"I don't think so, but I'm mad."

There was a sort of grim, mirthless humor about Bart that made Defarge uneasy.

"You have no right to lock my door and put the key in your pocket!" snarled the French youth.

"That may be true, but I've done it. I want to have a little talk with you, and I do not propose to have that talk interrupted, even though you may get noisy and yell for assistance."

There was a threat in this, and Defarge retreated behind the table that stood in the center of the room.

"What's your game?" he demanded. "Are you playing the highwayman or the house-robber?"

"Thank you; I do not travel with your class in society."

Still there was a look in Bart's eyes that made Defarge think himself in danger. Usually, Hodge was excitable, but now he seemed strangely cool, which gave him an air of menace.

Defarge glanced quickly round in search of some weapon with which to defend himself.

"Sit down!" commanded Hodge. "It won't do you a bit of good to raise a rumpus."

"Now, what in the name of the Old Harry do you want?" panted Bertrand, beginning to get angry himself.

"I have a few questions to ask you."

"Well, go ahead. I'll answer them or not, as I like."

"You'll answer them before I leave this room! In the first place, how did you happen during the run after the cage practise to take the short cut through Beaver Pond Lane from Crescent Street to Fitch Street?"

The French youth had flushed, but now he suddenly became pale.

"I did nothing of the kind!" he declared.

"You are a liar!" said Hodge, without lifting his voice, still keeping his eyes fastened straight on those of the lad across the table.

Bertrand's bosom heaved and his lips curled back from his teeth, which gleamed white and wolfish.

"You shall answer for the insult!" panted Defarge.

"With pleasure," was the grim retort. "I think you must know by this time that I take special delight in thumping you."

"I'll not fight you that common way! You have not the skill of Merriwell, and you must meet me with rapiers!"

"Hardly," said Bart. "I know better than that."

"You can't avoid it."

"Oh, yes, I can!"

"You shall not! I will force you into it!"

"And I shall insist on meeting you with the weapons provided for us by nature, our fists."

"Do you think I could be satisfied that way for such an insult? No! You have come here to force a quarrel upon me! I see that!"

"Nothing of the sort. I've come here to compel you to tell the truth, and, by Heaven! I'm going to make you do it!"

"You can never force me to anything! You want the fight, and you shall have it! I will let out some of your nasty American blood! I may kill you!"

Then, with a pantherlike leap, Defarge reached the wall against which hung a pair of crossed rapiers. Quick as a flash, he grasped them and tore them down, whirling them in his hands. Seizing the hilt of one, he flung the other with a clanging sound at Bart's feet, shouting:

"Take it and fight for your life, you American pig, for I swear I'll run you through without mercy if you don't!"

Bart Hodge was a fighter without a drop of cowardly blood in his well-developed body; but he had seen Defarge handle a rapier, and he knew he was not the equal of the wily French youth in that particular line. He could handle his fists, or shoot a pistol with great skill; but he was not an expert fencer, and so would be at a disadvantage in an encounter of this sort.

But it was useless to admit this to Defarge, whose eyes were glaring. Defarge would laugh exultantly and come on. Indeed, he was making ready to attack even now.

"Pick up the weapon!" commanded the French youth. "Do your best, for I'm going to pink you—I swear I am!"

Bertrand's heart was full of mad joy, for he believed his opportunity to obtain revenge on Hodge for past grievances had come, and he meant to make the most of it. Laughing savagely, he started to advance.

Hodge's hand rested on the back of a chair, and he had not altered his position when the other youth sprang to the wall and tore down the rapiers.

Now, without the least warning and with such strength and quickness as only a trained athlete could command, he grasped the chair with both hands, swung it aloft, and hurled it straight at Bertrand's head.

Defarge had no time to dodge, but he put up his arm to protect his face, and the chair sent him reeling against the wall. Hodge followed the chair with two swift bounds, and was on the French youth instantly.

He grasped Bertrand's right wrist with one hand and his throat with the other, pinning the fellow against the wall and holding him there.

"You devil's whelp!" grated Hodge. "You would not hesitate at murder! I'll guarantee that you land in prison yet!"

Defarge had been shocked by the impact of the chair, and for a few seconds he seemed quite helpless and unresisting. Then he suddenly gathered himself and tried to hurl Bart off.

Hodge kept his hold, attempting to twist the fellow's wrist, and thus force him to drop the rapier. But Bertrand's hold was not broken thus easily, and with his left hand he tore Bart's fingers from his throat.

"Dog!" he huskily hissed. "Throw a chair at me, will you? Now I am going to fix you!"

Then the struggle for the possession of the rapier began, Defarge doing his best to cast Bart away long enough to lift and thrust with the weapon.

Bart knew it was a fight for his very life, as the French youth was wrought to a pitch of rage that

robbed him entirely of his reason. There was a terrible glare in his eyes. His teeth were set and a white froth began to form on his parted lips.

With all his strength he strove to twist away from Bart's grip, but Hodge held fast.

"Steady!" Bart growled. "You can't do it!"

"I will! I will!" panted Defarge. "I'll kill you!"

"You may find that I'm quite as hard to kill as Frank Merriwell."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean!"

"You lie! You came here to insult me and make lying charges against me. You shall pay for it!"

Again Defarge gave a mighty twist and tried to fling Hodge off. They reeled against a chair, which was overturned. Then Bart's feet struck against the chair, and he fell backward to the floor, his grip on Defarge's wrist being broken as he went down.

Down upon Hodge came his antagonist, but he tore himself away from the fingers that tried to clutch and hold him. With a quick spring, Bertrand rose to his feet and stood over Hodge with the rapier uplifted.

"Now!" he hissed, with a savage laugh—"now you get it for fair!"

Then he lunged as if meaning to pin Hodge to the floor.

With a squirming movement to one side, Bart barely avoided being run through by the blade.

"A miss is as good as a mile!" he thought, and at the same time he again cast the chair at Defarge.

Bertrand's legs were struck and he was confused and disconcerted for a moment, and that was enough to give Bart time to spring up.

As he rose, Hodge had the other rapier gripped in his hand. At last he realized that there was no way to avoid such an encounter, and so he hurled himself into it with the furious energy of a creature at bay.

Clash! clash! rang out the meeting blades.

Probably no stranger encounter ever occurred at Yale than this night battle between two students armed with deadly rapiers. The expressions on their faces told that the struggle was of the most serious nature.

This was no mere fencing-bout for sport. On one side, at least, it was a duel with the most deadly import.

But Defarge had been astounded by the escape of Hodge from that thrust. The crack of the chair against his knees had confused him. And then he was dazed when Bart leaped up like a supple panther, gripping the rapier, and attacked him with the gleaming blade.

The fierceness of Bart's assault was something impossible to withstand long.

Sparks flew from the meeting weapons, which gleamed and flashed and hissed through the air.

The look on the face of Bart Hodge was one of such furious determination that the French youth involuntarily gave way before him.

"You would have it, you devil's whelp!" came through Bart's teeth. "Stand up and fight! You

forced it on me, now make good—or take the consequences!”

With a twisting stroke, Bart had torn the weapon from the hand of his adversary and sent it spinning in a far corner, where it fell rattling to the floor.

The next instant, with his left hand, Frank Merriwell's friend and champion seized the unarmed youth by the throat and hurled him backward upon the table that stood in the middle of the room.

As Defarge lay there helpless and terrified, Bart stood over him, his gleaming rapier raised as if to make the final and fatal thrust of this most remarkable encounter.

The helpless youth turned chalky white with fear.

“Don't strike!” he gasped.

“Why not?” demanded the other, quivering with the excitement of the encounter.

“You'll kill me!”

“Just as you tried to kill me when I lay on the floor helpless and unarmed, you cowardly sneak!”

“I didn't mean to——”

“Don't lie! If you lie, I'll be tempted to finish you off anyhow!”

“I was crazy!”

“Well, I'm rather excited myself! Why, it would be a mercy to puncture you now! You are a miserable, crawling snake, and you've tried to kill the best man that ever lived!”

“No! no!”

"Don't lie, I say! You tried to kill Merriwell this day!"

"I did not!"

The look of fury on Bart's face seemed to become more intense.

"The truth is the only thing that can save your worthless life now!" he panted.

"I shall shout for help!"

"That won't save you! No one could reach you in time. If you shout, I swear by my life I'll stick you once for luck!"

There could be no doubt concerning Bart's sincerity in this threat, and Defarge decided not to shout.

"Confess that you tried to kill Merriwell to-day with a stone, which you threw at his head."

"I'll not confess to a lie—not even to save my life!"

"But you must confess the truth. You cannot help it. I have the proof against you."

"The proof?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here!"

With his left hand, Hodge took out and held up before Bertrand's staring eyes the handkerchief he had found that night with the aid of the lantern.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FALSE CONFESSION.

"What is it?"

"Your handkerchief."

"Where did you get it?"

"I found it. See, here are your initials on the corner. I have been to the laundry where you take your linen, and there I compared this with one of your handkerchiefs in the place. It is your mark, and you cannot dispute it."

"Well, let me up. What if I do not dispute it? What about that?"

"It proves beyond a doubt that you threw the stone at Merriwell with deadly intent, for I found it on the spot where you stood when you did the trick, just behind the bushes on that high ridge beside the road."

Something like a mumbled curse came from Bertrand's lips.

"Let me up," he begged.

"Will you confess?"

"How can I confess down here this way? Let me up."

"All right, but you must sit down beside the table here and sign a written confession. If you try any tricks, I shall prick you a little with this sticker. If you know much about me, you realize now that I mean

business and I'll make good every threat. If you were harmed and made charges against me I should swear that you attacked me with murderous intent after I came here and accused you, and that I did the trick in self-defense. Even if you were able to swear to the contrary, which is not likely after I jabbed you with this dainty tool, my word would be as good as yours. Now, get up—and sit down there!"

Hodge stood with the weapon held ready for instant use, and Defarge, like a whipped child, meekly obeyed.

"That's right," nodded the victor, with satisfaction. "Now, don't dare to wriggle, for if you try to get hold of that sticker over in the corner I'll be on top of you like a catamount, and I'll finish the job instanter."

Then Bart stepped over to a desk, still keeping nearer than Defarge to the weapon in the distant corner, and brought over an ink-well and writing-materials

"What do you think you can make me do?" asked Defarge, with a sneer.

"You are going to write out and sign a confession."

"Why should I?"

"Because you must. Now I know the whole business, and you can't deceive me by making any false statements. I know who was behind you in what you did—who got you to do the trick."

Defarge was silent, filled with surprise.

"Don't try to shield that snake," urged Bart. "It will be better for you if you do not. You may claim

that he hypnotized you, or anything you like, but you must confess that he was behind you in what you did."

"Who?" asked Bertrand.

"Why, Morgan, of course! Didn't he suggest this piece of business? Own up!"

The French youth caught his breath and then said:

"Yes!"

"I knew it!" cried Bart exultantly. "I saw him speak to you in the cage! I knew something was up then."

A sudden idea had taken possession of Defarge. He felt that he was caught in the net, and he would not go down without pulling Morgan with him. He had gradually learned to dislike Dade almost as much as he did Frank Merriwell. Of late it had been impossible for him to interest Dade in his crooked schemes and tricks, which had brought about the strong dislike he now harbored.

"But you don't know the kind of fellow Morgan is," declared Defarge. "Oh, those eyes of his! They have such an influence over me!"

"His uncle was a hypnotist!"

"He must have hypnotized me, for I made a pledge that I'd never lift my hand against Merriwell again, yet, when he ordered me to do so, I could not refuse."

Bart's heart was throbbing wildly.

"It's just as I thought!" he declared, feeling almost friendly toward Defarge for this statement. "But there's only one way for me to prove it against him."

"I can't make a charge against him—I can't!"

"You must!"

"If he is present, it will be impossible. He'll throw his power over me, and I'll be helpless to tell the truth."

"You shall do it here and now!"

"Please don't make me do that! It will ruin me! I shall be expelled from college, and all on account of Morgan! Think of that! I could not help doing what he told me to do. If he were not here I'd never think of harming Merriwell. I know I did try to do so long ago, but he was generous to me, and I vowed never to lift my hand against him again."

Hodge was silent a moment, and then he said:

"Merriwell is always generous, you know. I might kick you both out of Yale, having such a chance; but I think he will be easy with you. What I want is for him to refuse to take that dog Morgan onto the nine, and Morgan will make it unless Merriwell objects. With your confession, I can convince Merriwell of the whelp's perfidy, and Morgan will be dropped immediately."

This was a very simple matter, and Defarge had feared Bart would use the confession to cause both of them to leave college. If this was the only thing Hodge wanted the confession for, he should have it in short order. Inwardly, the French youth was chuckling with satisfaction.

"I told the fellow his head would come off before the Easter trip!" he mentally chuckled. "Now, he'll find out!"

Aloud he said :

“If you will promise me to show the confession to no one but Merriwell I’ll give it to you; but you must tell him I could not help doing just what Morgan commanded. Ask him to be easy with me. It will ruin me if I have to leave college before I finish my course.”

“I’ll do it,” agreed Bart, readily enough, delighted to get the accusation against Morgan on such terms.

Defarge pretended to hesitate, but Hodge forced him on, and he took up the pen and wrote as Bart dictated, now and then making a suggestion. He stated that Morgan possessed some sort of hypnotic power, and this power Dade had exercised to compel Bertrand to obey his commands. He had commanded the French youth to hide beside the road and hurl the stone down at Frank as Merry came along. Bertrand had begged Morgan not to compel him to do that, but Dade had remained unyielding. Thus it came about that Defarge did the trick against his own will, and he was very, very sorry for it and profoundly thankful that Merriwell had not been harmed.

“Now sign it!” cried Bart exultantly. “We’ll see if Merriwell will have any compassion on that whelp after this.”

“What will Morgan do?” whispered Defarge, seeming to hesitate, with the pen uplifted.

“No matter what he does!”

“But you do not think of me! He will be furious! I dare not sign it!”

He was playing his part very well.

“By Heaven! you must sign!” roared Bart.

“But Morgan’s power over me—what revenge will he take? He will be sure to seek revenge on me!”

Under other circumstances, Bart might have seen that Defarge was overdoing the terrified act.

But Bart was blinded by his own hatred of Morgan and his desire to get this signed confession which must convince Merriwell of Dade’s dastardy.

“Sign it!” he cried, “and I’ll protect you from Morgan! Perhaps Morgan will never know how it came about.”

“He must not know—he must not!” panted the other. “You cannot help me if he finds it out. He will put me under his influence and command me to commit suicide, perhaps! Promise me that you will make Merriwell agree not to let Morgan know I revealed the truth about him.”

After a little hesitation, Bart said:

“I’ll do what I can. Go ahead and sign. You must throw yourself on Merriwell’s generosity, and I know you will not do so in vain.”

Then Defarge signed the lying confession, which Bart soon folded and placed in his pocket.

“That’s all, Mr. Defarge,” said Hodge, as he rose to his feet and walked to the door, taking out the key. “I have obtained just what I came for, though I must say you gave me quite a lively little time before I got it.”

He inserted the key and threw back the bolt of the lock.

“Good night,” he said.

Then he opened the door, flung down the rapier, and went out.

Alone in his room, Defarge laughed softly with satisfaction.

“You are welcome to all you got,” he said. “Now, Mr. Dade Morgan, you’ll find that I told you the truth when I said your head would come off, and perhaps you’ll learn to hate Merriwell again as intensely as you did not long ago. We’ll see if he will make a friend of you, as he has of so many others who began by hating him.

“Bah, Bart Hodge! you thought you had forced an unwilling confession from me; but, instead of that, you played right into my hands. I owe you something for helping me along with my little schemes. Why, I have really enjoyed this call from you!”

And he laughed again, softly, with a hissing sound through his white teeth.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANK FORCES THE TRUTH.

Bart went straight to Merriwell's room and turned over the confession. He watched Merriwell's face, glowing with exultation, as Frank read the remarkable statement of Defarge.

"Where did you get this?" Merry asked, when he had finished.

Bart explained, and Frank listened.

"Well, this is rather astonishing, to say the least," Merry admitted, frowning over it.

"It proves beyond the least doubt that Morgan is still your enemy, though he is trying to strike you in the most dastardly way without becoming implicated himself."

"It seems to prove that," Frank admitted.

"Well, now you have him in your power. But Defarge is mortally afraid of the fellow."

Then Hodge explained the promises he had made to the French youth.

"That being the case," said Merry, as he folded the confession and put it into his pocket, "I don't see how we are going to use this document against Morgan. Do you?"

"You must drop Morgan from the ball-team. That will hurt him as much as anything."

“How can I do that without an explanation? Would it be right?”

“Right? How can you stop to think of such a thing in connection with that fellow? He ought to be forced to leave college!”

“I agree with you in that, but it cannot be done now, as you have given Defarge those promises, and Defarge might fall with Morgan.”

“Then hang the promises to Defarge! That fellow is a scoundrel, and promises to such dogs do not hold!”

“Yes, they do! With me a promise to any man, high or low, honest or dishonest, saint or scoundrel, holds good!”

“But you don’t mean to say that you will not do a thing?” snarled Bart, in bitter disappointment.

“No, I do not say that; but I shall wait a while before I make a move. I may find some other thing by which I can drop Morgan from the team—something that will permit me to be square and open in whatever I do. Wait and see, Bart.”

* * * * *

The work in the cage went on regularly day after day, and each day the poorer men were weeded out from the great mass and dropped. From nearly a hundred men the squad thinned down to fifty, to forty, to thirty.

Still Dade Morgan remained, though Defarge had been dropped. The latter could not understand it. Apparently Merriwell had made not the slightest move

after receiving the confession. One day Bertrand ventured to ask Hodge if he had given the confession to Frank, but Bart snarled at him furiously and would not answer.

Indeed, Hodge was in a most disagreeable humor, kept so by the manner in which Morgan hung on. Fully believing the fellow a wretch of the most dastardly dye, Bart could not understand Merry's laxity in not forcing Dade to get out, and this served to put Hodge in anything but an agreeable temper.

Many times Frank had studied the confession of Defarge. He did so while quite alone in his own room, and he found something about it that convinced him of falseness and insincerity.

At least ten more men would be dropped before the team would start on the Southern trip, and out of the eighteen or twenty men who were to play during the Easter holidays would come the regular nine.

There was still time enough to drop Morgan, but Frank did not wish to drop him without being satisfied of the absolute justice of such a move. He had watched Morgan closely, and saw there was good baseball-material in the lithe, supple youth. More than that, he saw that Morgan might develop into a clever pitcher, and Frank greatly needed assistance in the box, for he could not pitch all the games.

One night, while sitting alone and meditating over the remarkable confession, Frank began to think of the time he had quelled and controlled Defarge by the power of his eyes. He remembered that the French

youth had seemed absolutely helpless beneath his influence.

All at once, Merry sprang to his feet, exclaiming: "It's worth trying!"

Two minutes later he had left his room. He found Hodge and said:

"I want you. Come along with me, and don't say a word."

Bart was ready enough, for he fancied Frank had decided at last to act against Morgan. But Merriwell led the way to the rooms occupied by Bertrand Defarge, and, by rare good luck, they found the French youth there alone.

Defarge was astonished when both Merriwell and Hodge entered without stopping to knock. He was more astonished when Hodge again closed and locked the door.

What were they after? With pale face, Defarge rose, and faced Frank Merriwell. Frank's eyes met his squarely, and in their depths the accuser of Morgan saw something that made him shiver.

"What—what do you want?" he weakly asked.

"We have called to see you a few moments," said Frank, in a calm, soothing tone. "Don't be alarmed. We have not the least intention of harming you physically." He had advanced to the table as he spoke, still keeping his eyes fastened on Bertrand's, who seemed to feel a strange power creeping over him and pervading his entire being. "Let's sit down here by the table where we can talk," urged Frank.

Defarge sank into a chair, still staring at Frank's eyes. As the French youth sank, so sank Merriwell, and Hodge saw them sit looking at each other over the table. Bart held his breath, wondering what was to follow.

Frank seemed to put his very soul into that look, and Defarge gradually paled and took on a limp and lifeless expression, although he sat there looking at Merry.

With a gentle motion, Frank leaned over and lightly touched Bertrand on the forehead. Defarge remained motionless, without winking.

"It is well," said Merry. "You must now answer my questions faithfully and truly. "You will do so!"

It was a command.

"I will."

Bertrand's voice was hollow and listless.

"Now," said Frank, turning to Bart, with a smile, "We'll find out the real truth. He cannot lie to me if he wishes."

"What in the name of all that's wonderful have you done to him?" gasped the astounded fellow, approaching the table. "Have you——"

"Yes," nodded Merry. "You remember the time he tried to stab me while intoxicated. I discovered then that I possessed this power over him. To-night I resolved to exercise it to make him speak the truth."

Then he turned to Bertrand, while Bart looked on and listened expectantly:

"Defarge, do you regard Morgan as a friend?"

"No."

"Do you like him?"

"No."

"Do you hate him?"

"Yes."

"Why do you hate him?"

"Because he was once friendly toward me, but now seems to be ready to become your friend."

"Would you like to do him an injury?"

"Yes."

"Has he any influence over you?"

"No."

"Not the slightest?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then he cannot compel you to do anything he commands?"

"No."

"He did not force you to conceal yourself beside the road one night when the squad took a run into the suburbs and throw a stone at me?"

"No."

"You did that of your own accord?"

"I did."

Frank took the confession from his pocket and held it before Bertrand's eyes.

"Then this confession is false?"

"Every word of it."

"That's all," said Frank quietly, as he tore the paper into shreds. "I have nothing further to ask you. But now, while you are in this condition, I want to force upon you the knowledge that you cannot harm

me if you try. More than that, I want you to know that you can never try to harm me again. I hold absolute power over you, and you will never again lift a hand to do me an injury."

Defarge bowed slightly.

Merry rose and passed his hand before Bertrand's eyes.

"Wake up!" he said sharply. "I've finished with you!"

The French youth gave a start, rubbed his eyes, stared at Frank and Bart, and mumbled:

"Why, what—what—where——"

Merriwell and Hodge were retreating. Bart turned the key in the lock.

"Good night," said Merriwell, as the door closed behind them.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" muttered Hodge, when they were outside.

CHAPTER IX.

A PLOT AGAINST FRANK.

Bart, of course, had no further objection to offer to Dade Morgan as a member of the nine, and the work of choosing the players went on without any other unpleasant incidents. When the final selections were made, Frank was satisfied that the Yale team was competent to put up a good game of ball and would more than hold its own against its Southern rivals, and his judgment was confirmed on the field.

The date scheduled for the game at Charlottesville, Virginia, proved to be a beautiful, mild day, early in April. It was near noon, and among the crowd gathered to greet the players on the platform of the railroad-station were two men strikingly unlike in appearance. One was tall, raw-boned, sinewy; the other was of medium height, young, slender, and flashily dressed. The taller of the two was rough, and plainly given to dissipation. He was about forty years of age and a tough-looking customer. The other was in his early twenties, but he had the face of a youthful drinker, and there was about him an offensive air of conceit.

The elder man was Jack Cunningham, brother of Bill Cunningham, the famous Blue Ridge moonshiner

and outlaw. The younger was Roland Ditson, once a student at Yale College.

Cunningham was listening to the guarded talk of his youthful companion. He had reddish hair and beard. His trousers were tucked in the tops of his boots, and he wore a woolen shirt that was open at the neck. His build was that of a man possessing great strength and endurance.

"I reckon yo' don't love this Frank Merriwell much," said Cunningham.

"I hate him," replied Ditson, who was smoking a cigarette and nervously handling his cane. The first two fingers of his right hand were stained a sickly yellow.

"What makes yo' hate him so ver' much?" asked Cunningham.

"I can't tell the whole story; it's too long."

"Did he steal a girl away from yo' some time?"

"No. We were at college together. He's still going to college. He set himself up as a leader as soon as he entered."

"An' yo' didn't approve of that?"

"Well, I didn't like it much. You can bet your life I did not bow before him, same as most of the fellows came to do."

"Bucked agin' him, did yo', boy?"

"Decidedly."

"An' he slammed yo' down hard?"

"Confound him! he always had a way of coming out on top. But I've got a score to settle, and I'm going

to settle it! He disgraced me before the whole crowd one night, and I swore then that I'd find a way of getting even before I died. Oh, I suppose I've got the best reason for hating him that a fellow ever had! No matter just what it is; I don't like to talk about that. He did me dirt, and I'm going to get back at him."

"Yo' say he's comin' here?"

"Yes. He's the pitcher on the Yale baseball-team, which plays Virginia here this afternoon."

"Well, what's your game?"

"Virginia must win. I have learned that Merriwell will pitch here to-day, for Yale means to take no chances."

"Well?"

"Virginia can't win with Merriwell pitching for Yale."

"Why not?"

"Because it is impossible. The fellow is one of the most remarkable twirlers who ever threw a ball. He has a curve that no batter can hit, and I understand that he is in perfect form this season. Virginia has not a ghost of a show with Merriwell pitching."

Ditson puffed fiercely at the cigarette, blowing some of the smoke into Cunningham's face. The giant coughed and fanned it aside with his huge paw.

"What in thunder any human being wants to smoke anything like that for is mo' than I can understand!" he blurted, in disgust. "The smell of it would make a pig sick!"

"Excuse me," said Ditson, who did not wish to offend the fellow.

"Why don't yo' be a man an' smoke a pipe?" demanded the other. "Does this Merriwell smoke them?"

"I believe he does not smoke at all. He's one of the goody-good kind that never does anything bad. Oh, he's a most sickening and disgusting fellow."

"Kind of a mammy's boy, eh?"

"In some ways, yes; but you do not want to make a mistake by getting to think he's weak, for he isn't. He is one of the strongest men at Yale—he's an athlete."

"Haw!" blurted Cunningham, with a gesture of contempt. "I judge I know what that means. Them college athletes don't amount to anything. The best of them would be a child in my hands."

"Now, don't make the mistake of underrating college athletes," Ditson hastened to say. "Some of them are wonderfully strong and expert, and this Merriwell is a leader among such men."

"All right; have it that way if yo' want to. I don't care."

"If Merriwell does not play with the Yale team Virginia will win, for she has a good nine, and Virgil Paragon, her pitcher, is clever. I want her to win the worst way. It will make Merriwell feel mean, for he's captain of the Yale team."

"Well, how yo' goin' to do the trick?"

"That's why I sent for you. That's why I had you to come here with your team."

"Yo' ain't made it clear yet."

"I want you to carry this Merriwell off."

"Is that all?"

"Don't you know some place about two or three miles outside of town where you can take him and keep him till about six o'clock this afternoon?"

"I judge I do. I could take him out to Ben Shannon's place."

"That's all right."

"But how'm I goin' to get him to go, suh? I can't jest openly nab him right here befo' everybody and carry him off without raisin' a row."

"I'll fix that all right so he will go along with you without a word. When you get him out there you must take care of him and see that he doesn't come back."

"Oh, I can do that all right if I can get him to come along without raising a fuss. But how'm I to get him to come along, suh?"

"I'll explain. There is a girl stopping in this town whom he knows. Her name is Elsie Bellwood, and she is stopping out at the Parker plantation. Merriwell is more or less smashed on her, and he always stands ready to fly to her at her call."

Cunningham rolled his quid of tobacco over his tongue, and winked at Roland, as he observed:

"I begin to see yo' game. I'm ter tell him she wants to see him, git him inter my turnout, an' whisk off."

"Something like that, but I've prepared something that will make it dead easy to fool him. I happened

to get hold of some of her handwriting, and I've written a note for you to give him. I've imitated her writing and signed her name, and I think it will fool him. He won't be looking out for tricks, so it will be dead easy."

"How much money did yo' say there was in it?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Cash in advance?"

"Twenty-five in advance; twenty-five afterward."

"I'll do it. Where's the letter an' the money?"

"Wait. I don't want anybody to see me give you the letter or the money. Let's walk out here a piece where we'll be alone."

"All right."

They made a strangely mated pair as they walked down the station-platform and passed round behind the freight-building.

"Here is the letter," said Roland, as he took a square envelope from his pocket and passed it over to Cunningham.

On the envelope was written: "Mr. Frank Merriwell, kindness of Mr. Muldoon."

"Who's Mr. Muldoon?" demanded Cunningham.

"You're Mr. Muldoon," explained Ditson, with a crafty smile. "That's so he will not get onto your real name at once. He's posted, and he may have heard of you, or your brother. Best not to wake up his suspicions too quick."

"S'pose that's right," nodded the giant, as he thrust

the letter into his pocket. "Seems to me I've heard of a strong man by the name of Muldoon."

"There is such a man—William Muldoon, and he's a wonder."

"Then I'm his brother, an' I can throw Willie four times out of five, with one hand tied behind me. Mr. Frank Merriwell will think so when I lay fingers on him."

Again Roland warned the confident ruffian not to underestimate Merriwell's prowess.

"If you do, he'll surprise you, just as true as you live. He is a wonder."

"That's all right," grinned Cunningham. "I know all about them kind of wonders. Where's yoah money, suh?"

Ditson produced a roll of bills, the sight of which caused the eyes of the rascal to glitter and his fingers to twitch. In that moment it is likely he was tempted to snatch the whole amount, run for it, and let Frank Merriwell go his way.

"Here's twenty-five," said Roland, stripping off two tens and a five and handing them over. "I'll give you the rest to-night after you have done the job. When the train comes in all you have to do is go right in among the Yale men and ask for Merriwell. They'll point him out to you. Give him the letter and get him into your wagon as soon as you can. After that it's for you to make sure he doesn't show up again til' after the ball-game is over."

The train whistled in the distance.

"There she comes!" exclaimed Cunningham.

"Yes, there she comes!" palpitated Ditson. "Get back to the platform and be ready for your work. Don't make a fizzle of it."

"There ain't the least danger of that, suh," confidently declared Cunningham, as he strode away.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREETING AT THE STATION.

Of course, the expected arrival of the Yale baseball-team brought out a crowd to see the team come in. The fact that Frank Merriwell, the model young American, and the pride of the youth of the whole country, was captain of the Yale nine, had something to do with the gathering of a throng of young men at the station-platform. The students from the college had come down to greet the Yale men, and there was more or less excitement as the train drew up at the station.

Nor were the colors of Virginia the only ones to be seen in the gathering at the station. One freckle-faced, but athletic-appearing, youngster, whose clothes were somewhat shabby, had somehow procured a knot of dark-blue ribbon, which he wore conspicuously.

"Say, Jimmy," called another boy, as a crowd of youngsters gathered round the wearer of the blue, "what do you think you're doing, anyhow? What's them colors ye're wearin'?"

"Them's Yale colors," was the proud and defiant reply. "What have you got to say about it, Scrubby Watson?"

"We want to know what you're wearin' them for! Ain't you for the home team?"

"Well, any other time I am, but not to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because the Yale nine is run by Frank Merriwell, and I'm for him first, last, and all the time. He's the boss jim-dandy, and don't you forget it! Why, I'll bet a thousand dollars that he just wipes up the earth with U. V. to-day. There ain't anybody can beat him, and don't you forget that, either!"

"Go on! He's pretty good, but Paragon will show him some tricks to-day. You're a traitor, else you wouldn't be wearin' that ribbon."

"You're a big fibber, Scrub! I've always been for Frank Merriwell, and I'd be a traitor to him if I went back on him to-day. His friends never go back on him!"

"Well, I guess you've worn that long enough."

Then the boy called Watson suddenly snatched the ribbon from the ragged coat of the other lad. A moment later Watson got it good and hard on the point of the jaw, and he went down with a thud.

"That's one of Frank Merriwell's settlers," declared Jimmy, as he snatched up the ribbon. "I read all about how he did it, an' I'm willing to give any of you other fellers some of the same. Come on, if you want it."

But by this time the train had come to a stop, and the Virginia students gave a cheer on catching sight of the Yale men. Instantly every lad was pushing and crowding in a mad endeavor to get nearer the car, the trouble between Watson and Jimmy being forgotten.

The Yale men were a lusty-looking set of fellows as

they descended from the car. The crowd swayed and pushed and commented.

"There's Browning—the big fellow!"

"Who's that farmerish-looking fellow? Can he play ball?"

"Where is Merriwell?"

"That big fellow with the light hair must be Merriwell."

"No, that's Starbright, the freshman who made such a football record last fall."

"Where's Merriwell?"

"Who's that black-eyed chap? He looks as if he might sprint."

"That's Morgan. He's a freshman, but he was on the eleven last fall."

"Where's Merriwell?"

"Here he comes! That's Frank Merriwell! Hurrah for Merriwell!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" roared the crowd.

A look of dismay came to the handsome face of the captain of the Yale nine as the crowd broke into a great cheer when he appeared on the platform of the car.

The little fellow with the freckled face and the knot of dark-blue ribbon pinned on his jacket shinned to the shoulders of a man and shrieked:

"There he is! There he is! There he is! That's Frank Merriwell, the greatest pitcher that ever lived! Hoop-ee! Yee! Hoo-ray!"

Frank saw this excited youthful admirer, whose

freckled face fairly gleamed with joyous admiration, and he was forced to laugh outright. That laugh won to Merriwell many friends in the crowd. Indeed, there was something so magnetic and winning about this handsome youth that his mere appearance on the platform of the car was enough to make him friends.

Many in the crowd had heard of Frank and conceived a prejudice against him, fancying him a college youth with a swelled head, but even these were struck by his handsome proportions, his graceful, muscular figure, his fine head and that look of clean manliness which stamped him as a fellow with lofty thoughts and ambitions.

“No one could mistake any other for Frank now that Frank had appeared. The word “leader” was written all over him. And yet, remarkable to say, there was not about him the least suggestion of conceit. To be sure, he regarded himself with a certain amount of self-esteem, and it is requisite that any man should so look upon himself if he wishes to win the esteem of others. But the fact that his appearance in any place should create so much excitement and enthusiasm was something he could not understand, and he never ceased wondering over it. It seemed quite inexplicable, for he could not believe that he had ever done anything extraordinary enough to make himself thus well known and admired.

As Frank descended the car-steps he was met by Phil Drake, the captain of the U. V. nine, who grasped his hand, uttering some words of welcome.

But Merry looked round for the little freckled fellow who had uttered such a joyous shriek on seeing him. He found the boy in the clutch of the man upon whose shoulders he had perched, and the man was shaking him roughly, growling:

“Climb me for a tree, will yo’? I’ll teach yo’ better manners, yo’ brat!”

With a sweep of his arm, Frank thrust aside all who stood between him and the man. With a stride he was at the man’s side. Quick and firm was his grasp on the man’s arm.

“Don’t hurt that boy! Stop it, sir!”

With a snarl, the man whirled and——

Jack Cunningham and Frank Merriwell were face to face!

CHAPTER XI.

KING JIMMY THE FIRST.

“Mind yoah business, suh! The youngster climbed all over me, an’ I’m goin’ to——”

“I wouldn’t hurt him, if I were you. He didn’t mean any harm.”

Frank spoke quietly, softly, smoothly, looking into the fierce eyes of the ruffian.

“That settles it!” breathed the delighted boy. “Now I reckon you’ll let me go! If you don’t, Frank Merriwell will do something to you!”

“Frank Merriwell?”

Cunningham repeated the name, his manner changing.

“Are you Frank Merriwell?”

“Yes,

“An’ he can wallop the stuffing out of two of you, if you are big and do chew tobacco!” instantly declared the boy. “If you don’t think he can, just give him a chance. Hit me a good cuff side of the head, and I’ll bet a hundred dollars he’ll throw you clean over the train!”

Frank could not resist his laughter at this declaration of the freckle-faced fellow. Cunningham laughed, also.

"Haw! haw!" he roared. "Pears to me the youngster is mightily stuck on yo', mister."

"Stuck on him!" burst from Jimmy. "You can bet your life I am! He's made himself what he is, the boss athlete of the United States, and I'm going to be just as much like him as I can. I know some other fellows that feel the same way about it, too."

"Why, yo' don't s'pose he could wallop me, do yo', boy?"

"Don't I! Say, he can do it with one hand tied behind him, for he's Frank Merriwell."

"But he ain't got any whiskers."

"He don't need 'em; he's got muscle, and he knows just how to use it."

"Haw! haw!" roared Cunningham again. "It sure makes me laff at the idea, an' feelin' tickled so I can't hit yo', so I'll let yo' go."

The boy seemed disappointed.

"I'd just like to see what Frank Merriwell would done to you if you had basted me again," he sighed. "Won't you please hit me a good one?"

At this Cunningham roared once more, slapping his thigh.

"Why, yo're a queer little staver!" he said, with a great show of good nature. "Yo' want to get me inter trouble, but I refuse to be caught."

"Well, it's a mighty good thing for you that you had sense enough to refuse," nodded Jimmy.

The crowd all about was laughing, and somebody cried:

"Those are the kind of admirers you have, Merriwell."

Then Frank reached down, grasped the boy, and swung him lightly up to his shoulder.

"And I am proud to have such admirers," he gravely declared, a look of earnestness on his face. "I had rather have the love and admiration of the boys of this nation than all the wealth of the Klondike! This boy says he wants to grow up and be like me and that there are others who have the same desire. Those words will serve to make me still more careful in regard to my actions, for more than ever I realize that the example of every man affects others."

The crowd was suddenly silent. From some other these words might have made no impression, or might have sounded stilted and egotistical; from the lips of this splendid specimen of perfect manhood they made a deep and lasting impression on many who heard them.

"My boy," said Merry, "what is your name?"

"James Lee, sir; usually called Jimmy for short."

"Well, James Lee, I thank you for your great faith in my prowess, but I'm glad you did not involve me in a fight, for I dislike fighting more than anything else—unless it is lying and cheating, and things of that sort. I prefer a fighter to a liar any day."

"I don't s'pose you ever told a lie in your life?"

Frank laughed again.

"I fear I have," he confessed. "I am not a second George Washington in that respect, but I hope I have

never told a malicious or harmful lie, and I hope I may never again tell a lie of any sort. I see you are wearing our colors to-day. Do you live here?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are for Yale?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Because you are captain of the Yale team, and I know U. V. can't beat you!"

"Hooray for Jimmy Lee!" roared Bruce Browning, aroused by the words of the boy.

Then from those Yale men rose a cheer, to the end of which was tacked the name of Jimmy Lee.

And Jimmy—well, you should have seen him! He was the happiest youngster in all Virginia. He tingled from his head to his heels. His eyes shone and his freckled face gleamed. These Yale men, these handsome, athletic fellows, these followers of Frank Merriwell, were cheering for him! Why shouldn't he be happy? Why shouldn't he thrill with unspeakable delight?

And back at a distance stood Scrubby Watson and his followers, looking on in unspeakable envy. Was this little Jimmy Lee, whom they had often bullied? They had been astounded when he dared hit Watson, the king-pin of their set, for that showed a great change had come over Jimmy. He had been following in the footsteps of Frank Merriwell, and the result was a shock to them. But now—well, now he would be a god among them for some time to come! Watson

was deposed; the mighty had fallen; the idol of the past was dust. Up with the new king! All hail King Jimmy, the "man" who had sat upon Frank Merriwell's shoulder while the Yale team cheered for him!

Jimmy looked about and saw them and smiled upon them. Forgotten was his shabby clothes, his ragged jacket, and patched trousers. He was clothed in robes of royal dignity now. Oh, never would he forget that day as long as he lived. It would always remain the proudest day of his life. He would tell his children and his grandchildren how, when he was a little boy, he had sat upon the shoulder of the great Frank Merriwell while the Yale ball-team had cheered for him! That was glory enough to last a lifetime!

And certain it is that this little event of that day was to have an influence on Jimmy's entire life. It was to make him a more self-respecting man; it was to give him new and greater ambitions; it was to urge him onward and upward.

Yes, King Jimmy had risen, and it was not likely that he would be deposed. He had been working for some time to develop himself and emulate Frank Merriwell; he would work harder now. He would become a leader among the smaller boys in athletic sports and games, for the man who had sat upon Frank Merriwell's shoulder must know how to tell them the proper way to develop their muscles! And they would follow in his lead, all of them taking new interest in the work of developing their bodies—the work that is the greatest and happiest play for a boy.

Thus the little event there at the station-platform had wrought a vast amount of good in that handsome Virginia town. Thus it was that the influence of Frank Merriwell spread and broadened so that in after-years it must astound Frank himself.

"Well, well, well!" cried Jack Cunningham. "I judge it ain't often a kid like you gets cheered in that way."

Jack Ready, with apple cheeks aglow, pranced forward and posed before Jimmy.

"Ah-ha!" cried the queer fellow, "I salute you, James the First of Charlottesville. May your power never wane, and may your subjects be as numerous as your freckles. James, you have a level head on your youthful shoulders, and I will give you the great and exceeding honor of gently touching my lily-white hand."

Then he grasped Jimmy's hand and shook it vigorously.

Other Yale men followed Jack's example, so that Jimmy received a grand greeting as he sat there upon the shoulder of the young American he admired more than any other living human being. As they pressed forward to shake Jimmy's hand the Yale men made jolly remarks and the crowd in the background began to cheer.

Why, these Yale chaps were all right! Nothing rowdyish about them! Were they fair samples of what physical training made young men? Then great was physical training. They had life and spirit; their eyes

were bright and their cheeks glowed. There could be no mistaking that clear eye and healthy cheek; alcoholic drink had nothing whatever to do with that. The color of the cheek was not the congested flesh of false stimulation; it was the true tint of health which every youth should have.

"See Jimmy!" gasped the former followers of Watson.

"They're shakin' hands with him!"

"My goodness, fellers, don't you wish you was him!"

"Settin' up there on Frank Merriwell's shoulder——"

"And shakin' hands with the Yale ball-team!"

"O-o-o-oh!"

And "O-o-o-oh!" groaned Watson himself, fairly green with envy.

"I'd like to lick him!" thought Watson. Then he put his hand to his jaw and mentally added: "But he can hit like thunder! I never s'posed he could slug that way. Don't know as I could lick him if I tried."

You couldn't, Watson; you've lost confidence in yourself, and your day has passed, the sun of your glory has set to rise no more. You are deposed, Watson, and all your feeble struggles will make no difference now. King Jimmy the First is on the throne!

"Say, this is a right good lot of fun," put in Jack Cunningham; "but if you're Frank Merriwell, you're the very feller I'm lookin' for."

"Looking for me?" asked Frank.

"Yes."

"All right; I'll give you my attention in a minute. Jimmy, I want that knot of blue ribbon. I believe it will be a mascot for me if I wear it to-day, and I'll give it back to you to-night."

Off came the knot of ribbon and Jimmy handed it over to Frank.

"I don't want it back," he declared. "Keep it, won't you, sir?"

Frank put him down.

"Yes," he said, "I'll keep it; but how can I pay you for it? If there is anything——"

"I don't want pay; but I'd like to have something to remember you by—anything you'll give me."

Frank pinned Jimmy's ribbon to his breast, while Jimmy looked on with mist-dimmed eyes, feeling so proud that it did not seem that there was room enough in his breast for his swelling heart.

Then Merry felt in his pockets for something. He paused and thought a moment. All at once it came to him, and he quickly found a small ribbon badge, having crossed batsticks at the top, a bit of blue with a white Y upon it, and a silver baseball dangling at the bottom.

How Jimmy's eyes danced when he saw that! He almost shouted for joy. Then came the apprehension that Frank did not really and truly mean to give it to him, and his heart stood still in anxious dread.

"Will that do?" Merry asked.

“Will it?” gasped Jimmy. “Will it do! Just ask me! Oh, say! I’ll keep it just as long as I live!”

Then Frank stooped and pinned it over the heart of the happiest and proudest boy south of Mason and Dixon’s line.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUNAWAY.

“Now, sir, what can I do for you?”

Standing at a distance, watching with anxious impatience and taking care to keep out of sight, Roland Ditson muttered a little exclamation of satisfaction as he saw Frank Merriwell turn to Jack Cunningham, speaking these words.

The train was starting to pull out from the station.

“I came here to see yo’, suh,” declared Cunningham, turning his chew of tobacco. “I’ve brought ye somethin’.”

“What is it?”

“This.”

He handed over the forged letter. A moment later Frank was reading:

“DEAR FRANK: I am in serious trouble, and I wish you to come to me alone without a moment’s delay. I know I shall not appeal to you in vain. Tell no one where you are going, for I do not wish it known that I would trouble you at such a time, but I must see you—I must! Don’t lose a minute! Mr. Muldoon will take you in the carriage direct to the house where I am stopping, and you will have plenty of time before the game. Do come, dear Frank. Yours, as ever,

“ELSIE.”

Frank was not looking for a trick, and his hasty glance over the letter gave him no warning of anything wrong. Ditson had performed a very clever job in imitating Elsie Bellwood's handwriting.

Merry was aware that Elsie had returned from Florida and was stopping in Charlottesville, a fact which Roland had somehow learned, so the note gave him no surprise. He had anticipated seeing her while in the place. Hodge also anticipated that pleasure—or pain. She had taken care to let the knowledge reach him that she was in Charlottesville.

For a moment Merry seemed to hesitate. In the distance Ditson held his breath.

"Will the fool refuse?" he inwardly cried. "Why, no! for he is in love with the girl!"

Frank turned to Cunningham again.

"Mr. Muldoon?" he said.

"Yes, suh," declared the ruffian, though he feared some one might hear and expose him. But Jack Cunningham was known and feared in Charlottesville. And King Jimmy was proudly displaying to his admiring subjects the decoration of honor conferred upon him by Merriwell the Great, therefore he did not get at what was going on.

"You have a carriage here?" asked Frank.

"Yes, suh; right over yander."

"How far must we go?"

"Oh, just out beyond the town a short distance."

"How many miles?"

"Something over two, perhaps."

Frank looked at his watch.

"All right," he said. "Fellows, I'll have to leave you for a short time, but I won't be gone much over an hour."

Then without further explanation he motioned for Cunningham to lead the way.

Roland Ditson chuckled when he saw Frank follow the ruffian out round the station to the place where the team was watched by a colored man.

"He's going into the trap!" muttered Roland. "And I'll make a big pot on the ball-game to-day, besides getting even with Merriwell to some extent. My fifty dollars to that big whelp Cunningham will be well spent, for I'll make more than five hundred if U. V. beats Yale to-day. And I can get more bets, too, with plenty of odds, for it seems the general impression that Yale is bound to win, for all of Paragon's skill as a pitcher."

He had taken pains not to explain to his hired tool his full reason for wishing to get Merriwell out of the way, well knowing Cunningham would strike him for more money if he knew he was to win a large sum if Yale met with defeat.

"All right, Sam," said Cunningham, as he took the reins. "Here's a plug of tobacco for you."

He threw a piece of tobacco toward the colored man, who caught it skilfully.

"Thank yo', suh," grinned the negro. "Dat off hoss am po'erful nervous, suh, when der cayars come along, suh."

"Jump right in, Mr. Merriwell," invited Cunningham.

Frank did so, and the ruffian followed suit, swinging the horses toward the road that led from the station.

The Yale men had started for the nearest hotel, followed by a throng of men and boys, both white and black. At the head of this throng marched King Jimmy, with his head erect and the Yale badge secure upon his breast. After him flocked his new subjects, while behind them walked the deposed king, Scrubby Watson, with his hands thrust into his pockets, his hat pulled over his eyes, and his entire aspect one of hopeless dejection.

Jimmy stared as Cunningham's team went past with Frank Merriwell seated beside the sandy-haired giant, then off came the little fellow's hat in a profound salute.

And off came the caps of the followers of King Jimmy.

Frank waved his hand, and away went the team through the outskirts of Charlottesville, soon turning from the town to the country.

April in Virginia is fair and beautiful. The world was green and fresh, and in the purple haze of the west the Blue Ridge rose against the sky. Frank drew in great breaths of the pure air, his eyes glowing as he looked about at the attractive scene. The negro huts were picturesque, and the colored men and women smoking in the shade, with dancing pickaninnies here and there. were sights to delight the eye of an artist.

"Beautiful!" said Frank.

"Hey?" grunted Cunningham.

"I say this is a beautiful section."

"Yes, I s'pose it is."

"I presume it does not look as beautiful to you because of long familiarity with it."

"I dunno. I ain't been here so long, yo' see."

"Haven't? Are you employed by the Parkers?"

"The Parkers? No, suh."

"Then how does it happen that you came to the station for me?"

"Oh," said Cunningham, "she just asked me, an' I come. I'd do anything fo' her, suh."

"That is likely. Any one who knows Miss Bellwood is usually ready to do anything possible for her. Is this your own team, Mr. Muldoon?"

"Yes, suh. Great pair of hosses. Git, there, Demon! Hi, there, Ginger! Yes! Take 'er out!"

Cunningham cracked his whip over the horses, and put them both into a mad run, while with a leering grin he looked sideways at Frank to see the college chap get pale and frightened.

"What do yo' think of this fer goin'?" he demanded.

"Oh, it's fair," answered Frank, "but you haven't the right kind of a carriage for it."

"Hey?" roared Cunningham, in astonishment. "Ain't you satisfied with this? Well, I'll touch 'em up a little more, suh!"

Then he rose to his feet and—swish, cut! swish, cut!—the whip whistled through the air and twined about

the horses. The animals tried to go out of their harnesses, and the carriage careened along the road at a wild rate of speed.

But when Cunningham looked to see the effect on his companion he was astonished to discover that the "college chap" was still unruffled and serene.

"How does this suit yo', suh?" inquired the ruffian.

"This is very fair, if your horses can do no better."

"Almighty gizzards!" gasped the brother of the notorious Blue Ridge outlaw. "What do you want, suh?"

"I wouldn't whip the horses any more, if I were you," said Frank quietly. "They are already doing their level best. Besides, it is cruel to hit them that way."

This seemed to make the man furious, for he shouted:

"I judge, suh, I have a right to hit my own hosses! I'll give yo' the liveliest ride yo' evah took, by smoke!"

Then he arose and cut both the frightened horses again. The animals made a mad leap, and—snap!—one of the reins broke in Cunningham's hand.

The angry man dropped back with a gasp.

"Good Lord!" he said. "The rein is broke, an' them critters are going to raise some dust now! Whillikens! what a scrape!"

Now he showed alarm himself, but still the youth at his side was perfectly calm.

"You made a fool of yourself, Mr. Muldoon," Frank

grimly observed. "In your attempt to frighten me you have done a very bad job."

"Them hosses will never stop runnin' now till they've smashed thunder out of this rig!" the man observed. "Yo' had better jump for it, youngster."

Then, from another road, an old negro appeared, seated on a wobble-wheeled cart and driving a decrepit horse. The colored man turned into the road directly in front of them.

"Jump!" yelled Cunningham. "Things are goin' to smash in a jiffy! Jump!"

He rose to leap out, but Frank's strong hand grasped him and flung him back on the seat, while Frank's clear voice rang out:

"If you want to escape a broken leg or neck keep still! There is one chance to stop the horses!"

Then, having risen to his feet, with a long clean leap he flung himself over the dasher of the carriage and landed astride of the "near" horse.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE TRAP.

The astounded man expected to see the college youth flung headlong to the ground, but to his still greater amazement, Frank landed fairly on the back of the horse, where he clung with perfect ease.

But not a moment was to be lost, for they were close upon the old negro, who was vainly trying to rein his horse out of the road. Still, Frank Merriwell did not seem at all nervous or excited. With a swift, sure grasp he caught both the reins and then he turned the madly running horses to one side.

Just in time. One of the carriage hubs clicked against the car as they whirled past. But a catastrophe had been averted for the time, at least.

Jack Cunningham stared as the "college chap" clung to the galloping horses, drawing strong and sure on the reins, and talking in soothing tones to the badly frightened animals.

It was a revelation to Cunningham, but he had no hope that the youth would be able to handle and stop the runaways.

However, although not seeming to be making great efforts to stop them, Merriwell continued to talk to the terrified creatures, his voice rhythmical, soothing, and pleasant.

For a considerable distance the runaways continued at their mad pace, but at last they began to slacken little by little, reassured and checked by that soothing voice.

And so, watched by the amazed man in the carriage, Frank slowly quieted them down until he was able to bring them to a halt upon the road, although they were trembling and nervous.

Merry had them by the heads the moment they stopped, having leaped to the ground.

Jack Cunningham jumped out of the wagon, declaring, in very picturesque language, that the trick had been well done.

"Yo' must have been raised with hosses, young feller?" said the wondering ruffian.

"Not exactly," said Frank, "but I have had some experience with them, and I have learned that no sensible man ever uses a whip on a horse without reason."

"Do yo' mean to call me a fool, youngster?"

"Well, I did not state it in exactly that language, but I think you were foolish to whip the horses in order to try to frighten me. That is plain."

Cunningham glared at Merry, longing to put his hands on the cool youth who dared talk to him thus plainly.

"That's sassy!" he growled.

"But it's true, Mr. Muldoon."

"Well, I don't 'low everybody to tell me the truth, so yo' had better be careful in the future."

"As long as it is my misfortune to be in your society, I shall not hesitate to tell you the truth, sir."

Frank was gently stroking the muzzles of the horses and patting their necks while he talked, and the animals became calmer and calmer beneath his touch.

"Well, yo' are a mighty queer chap!" blurted Cunningham, who was beginning to realize that he did not understand Merriwell at all.

"Splice that rein somehow," said Frank, "and we'll go on, for I have no time to waste."

When the horses were thoroughly quieted, Cunningham found a piece of stout twine in his pocket. Merriwell had a jack-knife that was also a handy kit of tools, and with these the rein was securely spliced, Frank doing most of the work.

"Yo' are clever at some things," the ruffian was forced to confess; "an' I judge yo' don't scare very easy."

To this Frank deigned no retort, but asked:

"How much farther have we to go?"

"Not more than a mile, suh."

"A mile? Why, you said it was not over two miles at the start, and I'm sure we've covered a longer distance than that already."

"Well, suh, Virginyah miles are pretty long."

"I should say so! Well, make it as soon as you can, for I must get back to town, but don't use your whip on the horses again."

Frank vaulted lightly into the carriage, and Cunningham followed him. Then they drove along once more. Reaching a piece of timber, they turned into a road that seemed little used. After driving some dis-

tance they came in sight of a ramshackle-looking house with some outbuildings near.

"Is that the place?" asked Frank wonderingly.

"Yes, suh; that's the place," averred Cunningham. "The girl is waiting for yo' there."

Elsie in such a place as that! It seemed impossible. No wonder she had appealed to Frank for help! She must be in dire distress.

But was this the home of the rich Mrs. Parker with whom Elsie had been traveling in the South? It could not be!

"Does Mrs. Parker live here?"

"Yes, I reckon that's her name," answered the man. Then he gave a sharp whistle, and a colored man loafed deliberately round a corner of the old house.

"Take care of the hosses, Toby," ordered Cunningham. "You know what to do, you black rascal. Give them a good rubbing down, or I'll tan your hide!"

"Yes, suh; all right, suh!" said Toby, moving with greater alacrity when he recognized the man in the carriage.

Cunningham jumped out.

"Come on, suh," he said to Frank.

Feeling bewildered, as well as dismayed, Frank obeyed.

Where was Elsie? Why did she not appear at the door to welcome him? Perhaps she was ill! The thought was startling. He had not asked "Muldoon" about that.

"Come right in," invited Cunningham, as he led the way.

Frank followed. The front door had been closed, but Cunningham thrust it open and entered. When that door closed with a bang behind Frank, a sudden presentiment of danger seized upon him.

Up to that time there had been nothing to arouse his suspicions, and, knowing Elsie was in Charlottesville, it is not at all strange that he had failed to penetrate the deception. Had there seemed to be any reason why any one should wish to do him harm, Merriwell would have been on his guard before, and it is certain he must have penetrated Cunningham's trickery.

Now, having proceeded thus far, Frank quickly resolved to see the matter through. He would not retreat until he knew what was "doing," but he would be on his guard.

"She's up-stairs," said Cunningham.

Up-stairs Frank followed the ruffian, striding along in advance in a careless manner.

"She's right in this room," declared the man, flinging open a door. "Walk in."

But Frank did not walk. In that room he had caught a glimpse of two men who were playing cards at a rough table.

Instantly Cunningham turned round and grasped Merry's collar.

"Walk in!" he repeated commandingly. "Here, Ben, I've got a visitor to see yo'."

“Remove your hand!” said Frank, in a low, cold tone. “Remove it instantly!”

And then, when Cunningham failed to obey, Merry struck the man a blow that sent him up against the partition with a terrible thud that seemed to shake the whole house.

CHAPTER XIV.

CUNNINGHAM MEETS HIS MASTER.

But Jack Cunningham had a hard head, and he was not a man to be knocked out by the first blow. Somehow he continued to cling to Frank's collar.

Recovering quickly from the shock of Merry's blow, he uttered a snarl and swung back. Frank ducked, and the huge fist of the giant went over his shoulder.

The two men who had been playing cards came running out.

"Hey, Jack, what's the matter?" they cried. "Want some help?"

"No, I don't want any help!" roared Cunningham. "Just yo' keep back an' watch me knock some of the conceit out of this college chap."

Then he gave Frank a thrust away and spat on his hands.

"I'm goin' to everlastingly knock the corners off yo', youngster!" he declared. "Yo' thumped me, an' no man ever does that without gittin' licked, and licked good!"

Frank saw that he was in for a hand-to-hand encounter with the big ruffian.

Knowing now that he had been tricked and brought to that old house for some evil reason, Merry was

inwardly seething with anger, though outwardly he seemed perfectly cool.

"Before we engage in this little racket," he said, "supposing you tell me what your name is. I'm all in the dark. Why have you lied to me and brought me out here?"

"Oh, just to have fun with yo'," declared Cunningham, tearing off his coat and flinging it down. "Yo' are a conceited college chap, an' I've taken all this bother just to have a good chance to thump some of the conceit out of yo'."

"Muldoon, I told you when you used the whip on your horses that you were a fool, but now I am forced to add that you are a liar!"

"Muldoon?" cried one of the other men. "What's he callin' yo' that fer, Jack?"

"Why, because I'm Muldoon, brother to the strong man," returned Cunningham. "An' I'm goin' to break this feller plumb in two. Look out, youngster!"

The upper hall, like the lower, was wide and roomy, giving them a very fair chance for the battle.

Cunningham rushed at Merry, but Frank side-stepped, avoiding him easily, and he gave the fellow a body-blow that knocked a great puff of wind out of him.

"Stand up, hang yo'!" grunted Cunningham. "Don't try any of yoah monkey-tricks!"

"He hit you a thumper, Jack!" cried one of the watching men.

118 Cunningham Meets His Master.

Cunningham recovered, but he was surprised when the beardless youth took the initiative and came at him, leaping aside and then diving in.

Once more Frank landed, and this time his hard knuckles cut the cheek of the man who had led him into the trap.

"Why don't you smash him, Jack?" shouted the watching men.

"I'm goin' to!" was the fierce retort. "Just you see!"

But he soon found it was not such an easy task to "smash" the young Yale athlete, who was a scientific boxer and knew all the tricks of the professional fighter. Just when Cunningham thought he had the youth cornered—biff! biff! biff!—he got it in such swift succession that he was dazed and the nimble-footed lad slipped away. It was not long before the ruffian began to lose his head and try to "rush."

"Steady, Jack!" shouted one of the men. "Yo' can't do him that way!"

"I'll kill him!" grated Cunningham. "I'll smash him!"

"Smash him!" shouted the men again.

Not a word came from the youth, whose lips were pressed together, whose jaws were set, and whose eyes flashed.

Frank was determined to punish this man for the trick, and he soon had the fellow's face bruised and bleeding in a dozen places. But Cunningham was hard as iron, and he possessed the "wind" and endurance

of a mountaineer. It was not an easy thing to wear such a man out.

Once Merriwell found a good opening, went in, his fists flashed, and the man went down heavily. One of the ruffian's companions assisted him to rise, saying:

"We'll all jump on him, Jack! We'll do him in short order!"

"Keep off!" roared the giant, his eyes gleaming fiercely, while blood began to trickle from his chin. "No whiskerless kid like that can whip Jack Cunningham!"

He swept his would-be assistant back with one arm and advanced on Merriwell again.

"Dern yo'!" he panted, his great breast heaving. "What right have yo' to fight like this! You're nothing but a boy!"

No reply. The college youth was standing there, his arms hanging by his sides, his bosom not seeming to heave to any great extent from the exertion. He was utterly fearless in his aspect, causing those men to wonder greatly, for never before had they encountered a lad just like this one.

If there was anything Frank Merriwell detested it was fighting; but he had perfected himself in the art of self-defense for such an occasion as this, and now, highly indignant at the deception practised upon him, he was resolved to teach this ruffian a lesson.

Had Merriwell not been a skilful boxer he must have

fallen before the savage assaults of the ruffian long before this.

Could he defeat Cunningham, he felt that he would then be ready to meet the other men, even though they both came at him at once, for something told him they were no such savage fighters as the man with whom he was battling.

Frank did not wait for Cunningham, but suddenly his hands went up and he sprang forward. The ruffian was on guard, but Merry quickly retreated, without offering to strike a blow.

Then the man did the very thing Frank had hoped to lead him into. He rushed once more.

The youth halted and met that rush. Cunningham struck a ponderous blow, but the Yale youth's head went to the left and the hairy fist shot over his shoulder. Frank's left fist landed on the man's ribs. Had Cunningham been stripped it would have proved a much more effective blow, but as it was his ribs seemed to crack.

"Oh!" grunted the watching men.

Cunningham stood stock-still, an expression of pain on his face. Frank had gone under his arm and whirled, and he struck again, hitting his opponent in the back of the neck, almost at the base.

With outstretched arms, the ruffian staggered forward and was caught in the arms of one of his friends.

"That was an awful one, Jack!" gasped this man. "Better let us fix him!"

"Keep off!" cried the giant once more. "Jack Cunningham can't have it said he was licked by a kid!"

Frank was waiting when he turned. For a moment Merry fancied the ruffian thought of drawing a weapon, but it is possible that Cunningham's pride kept him from being forced to use a knife in order to do up an unarmed lad.

"Yo're the devil!" snarled the man; "but I'll finish yo' yet!"

Indeed, he recuperated quickly, soon being ready to resume the fight.

"That kid in town said yo' could fight," muttered the man; "but I didn't believe it. He was right, but I swear I'll down yo' in the end!"

Now, however, Merriwell closed in on the man and gave him not a moment's rest. He saw that the only way to put Cunningham out was to never let up until able to strike the knock-out blow.

The man had learned a very painful lesson, and he was not as careless as he had been; but the skill of the athletic young boxer was far too much for him.

Again and again Frank reached Cunningham's face, which would bear the marks of that encounter for many days. One of the man's eyes was swelling fast, threatening to close entirely.

Again Cunningham's friends begged to be permitted to take a hand, plainly not daring to strike in without permission as long as he remained on his feet.

Frank gave the ruffian no chance to reply. He was

122 Cunningham Meets His Master.

pressing Cunningham hard. A blow that reached the fellow's solar plexus caused his hands to fall.

Then Merriwell found the opening he wanted, and he struck Cunningham a fearful blow on the point of the jaw.

The ruffian went down—and "out."

But as he fell one of his mates struck Frank over the head with a piece of lead pipe that was wrapped about with several folds of cloth.

Struck down in this cowardly manner from behind, the champion athlete of Yale fell limply across the body of the ruffian he had whipped.

CHAPTER XV.

BART AND ELSIE.

In the suburbs of Charlottesville, sitting at the window of a handsome house, was a pretty, blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, whose sweet face told of the great beauty of her character.

The window at which the girl sat commanded a view of the distant highway and the winding walk that led up from the gate through the shrubbery of a beautiful garden lawn.

The girl was watching the road and the walk, her face expressing both eagerness and anxiety. She surveyed every pedestrian that passed along the street, and her heart fluttered, sending the pink flush of hope into her cheeks, when a swiftly driven carriage appeared coming rapidly along the street. The flush died when the carriage passed, and a sigh of disappointment escaped her.

The girl was Elsie Bellwood, looking fairer and sweeter than ever, if possible.

“Will he come?” she murmured.

Of whom was she thinking? Was it Frank Merriwell, or——

Two persons appeared, coming from another street, and soon turned in by the gate to the grounds of the handsome mansion.

One of them was a sturdy-looking boy with freckled face, who walked proudly, carrying his head high, while upon his outthrust chest might be seen what to him was far more precious than the medal of the Legion of Honor—a Yale baseball-badge.

The other was dark-eyed, dark-haired, finely formed, handsome, stern. Bart Hodge was coming, escorted and directed by King Jimmy the First.

The girl was standing on the broad veranda, a bright smile on her face, when they came up.

"There she is, suh," said King Jimmy, taking off his torn old hat, pressing his hand to his heart, over which hung that ensign of royalty, and bowing low with courtly grace. "This is Miss Bellwood, suh."

Bart Hodge did not speak. His face was very pale, but there was a glowing light in his dark eyes. She held out her hands to him, and they trembled a little.

"Bart," she said, "I am so glad to see you!"

With a bound he went up the steps to the veranda, he clasped those small hands in a grasp that was almost crushing, he looked deep into her open blue eyes, as if he would read her very soul.

"Are you glad—are you really glad?" he breathed, his strong body beginning to shake a little in spite of his efforts to hold himself in control.

"I am really and truly glad, Bart," she honestly answered, and who could doubt the sincerity of Elsie Bellwood when she spoke like that!

He longed to clasp her in his arms, to hold her to

his throbbing heart as he had in that terrible yet joyous moment on the burning steamer when he poured into her ears the tale of his long-smothered love. He longed to hold her thus and press a kiss on those sweet lips—to smother that beautiful mouth in kisses.

But Bart Hodge, who had once been unable to govern himself and his desires, had learned the value and art of self-control from his dearest friend, Frank Merriwell, so that he now was able to hold himself in check.

But the eyes of King Jimmy were keen, and the tact of King Jimmy was great, for he deliberately turned his back upon them and seemed intensely and wondrously interested in the beauties of the well-cultivated lawn and the efforts of the gardener who was laboring on a distant flower-bed. But to himself the king whispered :

“My stars! but ain’t he just completely smashed on her! It’s a dead gone case!”

Elsie read the truth of Bart’s continued love in his looks; she realized that it had grown still stronger and deeper. If she had hoped that he would put it away from him she now saw that there was no possibility of his making an effort to do such a thing. And, while it enchanted her, still there was a strange intensity about it that made her afraid.

Still, a man who could love like this was a man who would make a most devoted husband. He would be ready to shield from all harm the prize he had won. He would devote the remainder of his life to her with-

out reservation and without selfishness, no matter what his past record showed him to be.

At least, thoughts like these flitted vaguely through the mind of the girl who had met him there upon the veranda of that beautiful Virginian home.

"Yes, I'm awfully glad you've come!" declared Elsie, smiling even though it seemed that he would crush her slender fingers in his fierce, thoughtless grasp. "But where is—Frank?"

He dropped her hands suddenly.

"Frank?" he said, and there was a strange hoarseness in his voice. "You are disappointed because he did not come instead of me!"

"Crickets!" thought His Royal Highness, still maintaining his position with his back toward them, although he would have given the wealth of half his kingdom to peep at them then. "That feller is jealous! My! my! but he's a hot one!"

"Oh, no!" Elsie quickly declared, putting both her hands on Bart's arms and looking again into his eyes; "not that. I am disappointed because he did not come with you."

"Wonder which one she's worse smashed on," speculated the king to himself. "Frank? Why, she must mean Frank Merriwell! Jeroosalam! If that's the case, this feller don't stand a ghost of a show! Why, of course she cares most for Frank!"

King Jimmy the First was loyal to the core.

"Do you wish to see him so much?" asked Hodge, still with the wound of jealousy rankling in his heart.

"Of course I do, Bart. You know what a true friend he has been to me. You know I never could have obtained my fortune if it had not been for him. You know he has saved my life more than once."

"Yes, I know," muttered Hodge. "I know he saved your life that time when he was rowing with you and Inza. When the boat was capsized, he saved you, instead of Inza. Why did he do that unless he loved you most?"

"How foolish you are, Bart! It is always Frank's way to help first those less able to help themselves. He did so in that case."

"It was his choice between you!"

"Nonsense! It was nothing of the sort! Inza is an athletic girl, and he knew she was a splendid swimmer, therefore she was better able to take care of herself. At least, he thought so, and that was why he came to my rescue first. Now, don't be foolish, Bart—please don't!"

Their loyal companion, still standing with his back toward them, was forgotten for the time being. But his ears were wide open, and his wisdom that had made him king was brought to bear on this case.

"That's what she thinks about it," he mentally commented. "She's honest in thinkin' so, but I guess she's wrong. If Frank saved her first, I'll bet my new pair of suspenders that she's the one he's most stuck on."

However, even the wisdom of a king may sometimes be unwise.

"Perhaps you are right," admitted Hodge; "but I don't believe it. Let's not talk of that."

"That's where you're sensible, young feller," whispered James the First to himself. "If you want to stand the least show, don't get her to sizing you up alongside of Frank Merriwell, 'cause you ain't in it for a minute. You're a pretty good feller, but yo' ain't in his class, suh."

"But I wrote—I wanted him to come, you know," said Elsie, with some hesitation. "I suppose he was so busy he did not have time, but I'll see him at the game this afternoon."

"I don't understand just what happened," said Bart, "but a man—a big, red-headed fellow——"

"Regular darned old pirate!" was King Jimmy's unspoken comment.

"——met him at the station when we arrived," Hodge went on, "and gave him a letter. Frank read it, told us he must leave us for a while, jumped into a double team with the man, and was driven off. He didn't tell a soul where he was going or anything about it. It's rather queer, I think."

Elsie looked suddenly worried.

"I'm afraid, Bart," she said, "that something is wrong."

"Wrong? Why? What can be wrong?"

"Well, I don't just know, but my heart seems to tell me that Frank is in serious trouble."

"Jee-whill-i-kins!" gasped King Jimmy, almost staggering with the shock. "I wonder if that's so!"

"What trouble could he get into here?" said Hodge. "He has no enemy who would wish to do him harm—that is, none in this place."

"Yes he has!" exclaimed Elsie earnestly.

"Has?"

"Yes."

"Why, who——"

"One of his old enemies at college is right here in this place!"

"Great horn spoon!" muttered the now thoroughly excited king. "This is getting mighty interesting."

"Who is it?" asked Bart, also interested.

"Do you remember Roland Ditson?"

"Do I? I should say I did! Why, he was one of the most contemptible sneaks I ever saw!"

"Roland Ditson is in Charlottesville."

"But he hasn't courage enough to do anything. No one need ever fear him."

"He might not have courage enough himself, but there are desperate men in these parts who will do almost anything for money. We do not see many of them here in town, but we hear of them. You know there is an outlaw by the name of Cunningham who defies officers to capture him and who has carried on a perfect reign of terror not more than a hundred miles from here."

Bart laughed, trying to reassure her.

"Oh, well, it's not at all likely Mr. Cunningham has had anything to do with Roland Ditson or is in this

vicinity. Don't get alarmed, Elsie. Frank can take care of himself."

"But Roland Ditson has been so confident that U. V. would defeat Yale! It has seemed strange. You know he comes here to this house, and I have been compelled to meet him and treat him decently. He has made some talk, and it has been his boast that Virgil Paragon, the great U. V. pitcher, would 'make Yale look sick.' I understand that he has bet lots of money against Yale."

"Well, he'll lose it," said Bart.

"You bet your boots he will," mentally agreed King Jimmy.

"Not if Frank does not pitch."

"Oh, I don't know! We've developed two good men on this trip. You know Merriwell is doing only just enough pitching to get into perfect form. When a game looks bad, of course, he goes in and pulls us out. We've found a good man in Morgan."

"Morgan?"

"Yes."

"Why, I thought——"

"That he was Frank's worst enemy and would not be taken onto the nine? Well, a change has come over Morgan since that villainous old uncle of his died. I don't like the fellow at all, but I have been compelled to confess to Merriwell that there is a prospect of Morgan becoming a great pitcher."

"The other——"

"Is Starbright. He can pitch, but he does not forge ahead quite as fast as Morgan."

"What do I care about them chaps?" King Jimmy whispered. "They ain't in it with Frank Merriwell. He's the only feller that can beat Virgil Paragon, and if anything's happened to him, Yale will get walloped out of her boots to-day."

"But I tell you Virginia will win to-day if Frank does not pitch. I believe Ditson is satisfied of that, and I fear he has done something to get Frank out of the way."

"I hardly think that, Elsie. Don't get nervous about Frank. I'll look him up when I go back to the hotel. I must have a little chat with you first."

"Won't you come in?" she invited. "Mrs. Parker will be glad to see you."

That was no inducement, but Hodge was ready enough to go in. However, as they were moving away, a violent cough attracted their attention, and they turned to perceive King Jimmy, who still stood with his back squarely toward them.

"By Jove! I nearly forgot him!" exclaimed Bart, diving into a pocket. "Here, young man, is the quarter I promised you for showing me the way."

Jimmy turned and caught the shining piece of silver which Bart tossed to him.

"Thank yo', suh," he said, as he bowed low, floppy hat in hand. "I'll be at the ball-ground this afternoon with all the fellers, and you can bet Yale will have some rooters in this town."

"That's the stuff!" smiled Bart. "Give us some encouragement, James. Good-by."

"Farewell," said the king, with a stately wave of his hand. "Good day, lady." And once more he bowed, with his hand touching the decoration of glory and honor over his heart.

"What a polite little chap!" said Elsie, as she entered the house with Bart. "And so dignified!"

Had they looked back they would have seen that all the king's dignity had vanished and that the king had taken to his heels and was scudding away as fast as his legs could carry him.

And to himself the king was communing thus as he ran:

"Great jumping Jingoos! I'll bet two hundred thousand dollars that something has happened to Frank Merriwell! I'll bet that was a trick to get him out of the way! I'm goin' to find out, and if he's in any trouble he can rely on me! I'll stand by him to the death!"

Hurrah for King Jimmy, the loyal!

CHAPTER XVI.

HODGE AND DITSON.

Bart and Elsie were quite alone at last. He had seen Mrs. Parker and chatted with her a few moments, after which, making some excuse, she retired from the airy sitting-room and left them there. The doors were open, but the house was quiet, and there seemed to be no one near to overhear what might pass between them.

Then Bart hesitated. He had come there with the determination of again assaulting the fortress and making a desperate attempt to carry it by storm, but now his heart was filled with forebodings of defeat.

Elsie was looking downward, tapping the carpet lightly with one small foot. He gazed at her with his heart seeming to pound madly in his throat.

Surely she was the sweetest and most beautiful of all girls! He could not doubt it. He thought of other girls, and to him the fairest of them were as common clay beside her.

"I love her!" he told himself. "I must win her—I will!"

How could he begin to say what he wished to express? With sudden determination, he rose and walked over to the window near her.

"This is a beautiful place, Elsie," he said, looking out of the window.

"Very beautiful," she answered, rising. "Virginia is delightful in the spring time."

"You like it here?"

"Oh, yes."

"You have not been lonesome?"

"Ah, but I have," she confessed. "You know I was quite a stranger here, and I could not help being lonesome a little. Besides, I used to long to see you all at New Haven."

He drew nearer to her.

"Whom do you mean by 'you all'?" he asked.

"Why, you and Frank, and all the friends I know there."

"But most of all?"

"You and Frank."

"If Frank were to ask you that question, you would answer, 'You and Bart.'"

"Why, yes, I suppose I would."

He showed a shadow of disappointment.

"I thought you did not intentionally place me first," he said; "but I hoped you did."

She looked up quickly, and that glance made his heart beat still more swiftly.

"Bart," she said, "I would not intentionally place either one of you before the other."

His heart seemed to drop back into his bosom with a thud.

"I had hoped you did," he repeated.

He knew he must brace up at once. He looked on her, and the fire returned to his heart.

"Elsie," he said swiftly, yet gently, taking her hand, "I love you! You know that, for I have told you so before now. My love has not changed in the least, unless it has grown stronger. I know it has taken a firmer hold on me, for now I feel that I cannot live without you!"

The hot blood had rushed to his face, and he was trembling again. He drew her toward him, and she felt his panting breath on her cheek, which had paled as he grew flushed.

"Don't stop me, Elsie—please listen! You must listen! This love is filling my heart with fire! It is burning out my soul! Elsie, if you could love me in return! I would do anything for you, sweetheart! I would give you my life's devotion! I would protect you from every storm and hardship! I would take you in my arms and bear you tenderly over all the rough places in the journey of life! I know I am not worthy of you, dear girl—I know it, but still I cannot give up the thought that I may win you! It is like giving up my very life! I will try to make myself worthy! I will do everything to bring myself nearer your level, which I know I can never reach!"

"Now, stop, Bart!" she exclaimed, with sudden firmness. "I will not hear you talk that way about yourself. Don't try to make me out such a paragon of per-

fection, for I know I have my faults, just like any other girl, and I——”

He stopped her.

“You are not like other girls in any way,” he declared, with all the intense infatuation of youth. “You are wholly and entirely different. You are as far above them as——”

“Don’t, Bart!” she protested, her face crimson. “Truly you are mistaken!”

She was laughing and confused, but she looked prettier than ever before. He tried to draw her into his arms, but she would not permit it.

“I don’t care!” he declared, with that same intense earnestness. “To me you are different, and that is enough! To me you are everything! Elsie, answer me one question, answer me honestly: Are you still in love with Frank?”

She hesitated with bowed head, her laughter stopped now, the blushes fading from her face.

His heart seemed to stand quite still while he waited for her to answer, for he felt that his future happiness depended on the words her lips would speak.

It was plain that she was trying to analyze her own feelings; she was trying to read the secret depths of her heart. He could see that, and a fearful dread of the result rose up and grasped him with a grip of iron. He was not a coward in any sense, yet, aware as he was of the new understanding between Frank and Inza, he felt that he dared permit Elsie to speak without knowing what had taken place.

For what if Elsie were to confess that she still cared for Frank as of old? Then he could not tell her. And he had sought permission from Frank to tell Elsie what had occurred.

Having made such a profession, would not Elsie be too proud to ever alter her mind, and might it not raise up still greater barriers between them?

"Wait!" he panted, as he fancied she was on the point of speaking. "I want to give you more time, dear girl. I want you to know just what your answer means to me. Frank is my friend, and he is the finest fellow in the world, so I am not——"

"That's your opinion, Mr. Hodge. Beg pardon for intruding. I am looking for Ned, and, happening to hear voices here, I strayed in."

The speaker was Roland Ditson, calm, cool, swaggering.

Hodge, furious at the intrusion, gave the fellow a black look, while Elsie drew back a little.

"Don't let me interrupt your enjoyment," said Ditson, with a laughing sneer. "I'm going right out; but before I do, I want to say that the opinion of Mr. Hodge in regard to Merriwell is not shared by everybody."

Bart took two steps toward Roland, hoarsely demanding:

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," declared Ditson, with cool defiance. "I do not regard Merriwell as the finest fel-

low in the world, but far from it. In fact, I think he is——”

“Hold on!” Bart’s hand was outflung. “Be careful what you say!”

“Whew!” whistled Roland. “This is a free country, and my tongue is my own. You can’t muzzle me here, Hodge, and I shall express my opinion of Merriwell if I wish.”

“Don’t do it! There is a lady present.”

“Well, it is true that I couldn’t properly say just what I think of Merriwell in the presence of a lady.”

Bart was beginning to tremble again, but this time it was for an emotion entirely different from the one that had possessed him a short time before. He longed to walk to Roland and knock him down without another word.

“I shall be glad to go outside with you and hear you express yourself,” said Bart, in a manner that Roland could not misunderstand.

Now Ditson had no fancy for getting into a fight with Hodge, who had a reputation as a chap who had as soon fight as eat.

“Excuse me,” he said airily. “I haven’t time, you know. I’m looking for Ned Parker. I want to tell him that Virginia is dead sure to win the ball-game to-day. Yale will not be in the game at all.”

“Your wisdom does you credit!” returned Bart scornfully.

“That’s all right,” returned Roland. “You’ll see pretty soon that I know what I know. Yale can’t

win to-day. The die is cast, and Virginia drags her feathers in the dust."

Hodge became convinced that he understood the fellow's meaning. He remembered Elsie's words of a short time before. Why was Ditson so confident? For once in his life, Bart resolved to be diplomatic. He would seek to draw the fellow out.

"With Merriwell in the box, there is a possibility that Virginia will not score," he said.

"With Merriwell in the box!" laughed Ditson. "Ha! ha! ha! Why, is that so? Well, wait and see what Mr. Merriwell does to-day. It is my private opinion that he will not do any pitching worth mentioning. I tell you Virginia will bury you."

There was that in the fellow's manner that added to Bart's conviction that something was wrong. For the first time Hodge began to be alarmed.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Merriwell is in first-class trim. He is sure to do good work to-day."

"Is he? Ha! ha! ha! Wait and see!"

"What is up?" hissed Hodge, unable to control himself longer. "Have you been at your old dirty tricks, Ditson? If you have—if the least harm has befallen Frank Merriwell——"

"Don't say it," warned Roland, with a careless gesture of his cane. "I don't mind your bluffing talk, Hodge. I know nothing about anything that has happened to your pet, Merriwell. I only know that he is a——"

"Come outside and say it—come outside!" begged Bart. "Don't force me to hit you here!"

"Why, you big blower! you wouldn't dare to strike me!"

"Wouldn't I?"

With that exclamation, Bart went forward. Roland lifted his cane to strike. Like a panther Hodge leaped, clutched the cane, tore it from the rascal's grasp, and broke it over his knee.

"That's all!" breathed the dark-eyed lad, as he flung the broken cane at Roland's feet. "I won't hit you, though you deserve it. But if I find that you have been at any dirty work, look out for me! I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had!"

"The threat of a bully," declared Roland. "I don't mind anything you may say. You had better keep away from me. But I want you to pay me for my cane."

"You do? Well, it's likely you will take it out in wanting."

"We'll see about that!"

With these words Roland turned and left the room.

Elsie had not interfered, but now she came forward swiftly, and suddenly she put her arms about Bart's neck, crying:

"I know now that he has done something to Frank! Bart, you must find out about it—you must! If anything has happened to Frank——"

She stopped, but already she had said enough—too

much, Bart thought. There was a feeling of intense pain in his heart, and he mentally cried:

“She loves him—she loves him still!”

But aloud he said:

“Elsie, I will do everything I can. You know that. He is my friend—my dearest friend, and I’ll do anything for him.”

CHAPTER XVII.

JIMMY ON THE TRAIL.

King Jimmy the First had thrown aside the robes of royalty for the time. He was on the trail! He was also in disguise! From his bosom he had removed the ensign of his exalted station, he had turned up his coat-collar, and his old hat was pulled far down over his eyes, while upon his upper lip was a smooch of charcoal that was intended to represent a mustache. He was now Old Ferret, the Sleepless Detective.

Already his investigations had revealed that the name of the man with whom Frank Merriwell had departed from the railway-station was Cunningham. Cunningham—ha! why, that was the name of the desperate Blue Ridge outlaw! S'death! Here was a clue! It was enough for Old Ferret. The Sleepless Detective would track the outlaw to his lair. The victim of the outlaw's perfidious machinations should be rescued at all hazards.

So Old Ferret set about his task of tracking the outlaw down. He found that the man's associates in town were a most disreputable set, indeed; but he went among them boldly and told them that he had been given an important letter to deliver to Mr. Cunningham. It was not Jimmy Lee, of Charlottesville, who

told this falsehood, mind you; it was Old Ferret, the Sleepless Detective, and he did it for a good cause.

One man offered to take the letter to Cunningham, but Old Ferret declined to transfer such an important message into the care of any other person. He must deliver it himself as a sacred duty. Then somebody told the detective that Cunningham hung out at Ben Shannon's a great deal. Where was Ben Shannon's? The information was obtained, and the Sleepless Detective took the trail afoot and alone.

On the way the great sleuth made inquiries, and he learned that a man driving such a team as Cunningham's and accompanied by a smooth-faced youth had passed along that road. Farther on he also learned that the team had run away on that road, and the beardless youth had leaped astride one of the horses and pulled the animals down to a walk.

Ah, but this was information, indeed! It was the heart of Jimmy Lee, of Charlottesville, that thrilled with delighted admiration when he heard of this daring feat of his idol; but it was Old Ferret, the detective, who muttered, "He cannot escape me, for I'll not rest night or day till he is in the toils!" And he was referring to Cunningham, not Frank Merriwell, when he muttered those words.

Sometimes the trailer paused to examine with a critical eye the tracks on the dusty road, and the look of wisdom on his charcoal-mustached face would have done you good to see. When he met a wayfarer, he turned his collar still higher, pulled his hat still lower,

and so, safe in his disguise, passed on. Perchance the wayfarer smiled at him; but what of that so long as he was not recognized as the great detective, Old Ferret!

And so, at last, he came to the strip of timber in which he had learned was the home of Ben Shannon, standing at a considerable distance from the public road. And in due time he arrived at what he knew without doubt was the private road that led to Shannon's, the lair of the outlaw.

Even a great detective must be cautious, and so Old Ferret slipped into the woods at a distance from the private road, the course of which he pursued without venturing into it.

At times he stopped and crouched in the shelter of some shrubbery bushes or behind the bole of a tree, while he peered through the forest and listened. Being satisfied with his investigations, he went on till he saw through the trees the ramshackle resort of the outlaw.

What was to be done now? Already midday was long past. The sun was in the western sky. Old Ferret had not eaten since early morning, but little cared he for that. His iron frame gave no heed to fatigue or hunger while he was on the trail.

Should he wait in hiding until night and see what he could do then? Night! Why, that would be too late, for then the base design of the outlaw would be accomplished. Beyond a doubt that design was to keep Frank Merriwell from the ball-field that afternoon.

There could be no delay. Onward, Old Ferret, to the rescue!

The house looked silent and deserted. There were not even dogs around it, for which the great detective was thankful enough, for dogs always raise a rumpus at the wrong time.

However, while Old Ferret was meditating on the next move, a colored man came out of the house, leaving the front door open as he did so. He was singing thickly to himself, and his steps were not quite steady as he walked toward some distant sheds. Before he reached the sheds he paused, took a bottle from his pocket, and drank from it.

"Ha!" hissed the watchful sleuth. "Methinks I smell something!"

It would not have been the contents of the bottle, for he was much too far away.

However, as intoxicated colored men are seldom seen coming from the front door of the homes of white people in Virginia, it is possible that Old Ferret did smell something, metaphorically speaking. And that something gave him great encouragement to move without delay.

Nevertheless, he waited till the colored man had disappeared in the shed. Then he worked round till he was very near that shed. After a time he slipped up to the door and peered in.

The colored man was fast asleep on some straw in a corner, his bottle by his side. Standing in the shed were two horses. They were the very ones Cunning-

ham had driven when, with Frank Merriwell at his side, he left the railway-station that day.

Old Ferret was well satisfied. Thus far he had not made one false step. Now he surveyed the house.

Still, as before, there were no signs of life about it. It was strangely silent and deserted.

The daring detective slipped up close under the shelter of its walls, and, with one ear pressed against the moss-grown shingles, he listened as a physician listens to the beating of a patient's heart.

No sound from within.

Still thinking how that colored man who was sleeping in the shed had issued from the front door, which he had left ajar, Old Ferret was led to advance round the corner and approach the sagging steps.

He knew he was taking his life in his hand when he ventured into the retreat of a desperado like Cunningham, the outlaw, but what recked he of that! Had not his life been in peril thousands of times as he tracked down the minions of crime!

And at the very foot of those sagging steps, lying on the ground, Old Ferret found something to cause his eyes to glitter. He quickly stooped and picked it up.

It was a knot of dark-blue ribbon, the same modest knot that had been worn by Jimmy Lee when the train bearing the Yale team drew in at the railway-station that day.

There was now no longer the least doubt but that the great detective was on the right track. However, the

most desperate and daring part of his work lay before him.

It must be confessed that his heart was performing queer capers in his bosom as he mounted those steps and paused to peep into the hall that the partly open door revealed.

It was a forbidding-looking hall, too. No wonder he felt like drawing back. Unpapered, unpainted, and dirty it seemed on close examination.

But Old Ferret bethought himself of his disguise and turned not back. If he were seen, he would have recourse to his ready wit to get himself out of the scrape. Any detective could do that, and when did the ready wit of the real detective ever fail him in time of emergency!

Into the hall he slipped, with the velvet tread of the panther. Never mind if one of his shoes did squeak a little, it was just the same, "the velvet tread of the panther." Great detectives always walked that way in a place like this.

Still the silence of the place was unbroken. He wondered greatly at it, and he longed to call to Frank Merriwell. This inclination to shout, however, he knew was very unprofessional, and he sternly repressed it.

From room to room he went with the same cautious tread, peering into first one and then another. Apparently all were empty save of the battered old furniture. There seemed to be no woman about the place. Plainly Ben Shannon was not partial toward women.

The lower part of the house was explored. There

was no cellar. Even Old Ferret, for all of his wonderful nerve, might have hesitated in the teeth of a dark cellar that abounded with rats.

There being no cellar, it was necessary for him to proceed to the upper story of the house. The stairs complained and tried to shout a warning, and it must be that their vociferousness caused him to pause several times in the ascent.

But at last the top was reached, and then, as he halted there to survey his surroundings, he distinctly heard a sound that made him crouch with every nerve strained and every separate hair threatening to kick his hat off.

A strange and awesome sound it was, coming from whence he could not tell. A shuddering, nerve-trying sound, like the growl of some fierce wild beast preparing to leap upon its prey.

What could it be? Was it possible the outlaw was guarded by tame lions? Even that thought was not enough to break the iron nerve of Old Ferret, although it must be confessed that it gave his nerve a mighty wrench.

Then he heard it again.

It was a snore!

The tenseness went out of the great detective's body, his hair permitted his old hat to settle back upon his head, and he straightened up with a deep sigh of relief.

"Well," he said, "this seems to be about the sleepest

place I ever struck. Everybody is taking a snooze. That's first-class! I like it."

But even then, knowing some one was near, it was some time before he could summon his strength to go on. He saw an open door, and, still with his professional panther-tread, he slipped up to it.

The room into which Old Ferret peered was the same one in which Frank Merriwell had caught a glimpse of two men who were sitting at a table and playing cards. The table was there, the men were there; but they were not playing cards. On the table were empty bottles that had once contained moonshine whisky, but which were empty now. Glasses were also there. One man lay sprawled forward on the table, though still seated on a chair. He was sound asleep and snoring. Another man had slipped from his chair and lay beneath the table in a most uncomfortable position, which he did not seem to mind in the least.

In a corner lay yet a third man, and this was the mighty outlaw himself, although—ye gods!—what a face he had! He was recognizable more by his red hair and beard than anything else. His face was battered and disfigured by blood, which had run down upon his clothes, and, taken all together, he was a most pitiful-looking object.

Old Ferret stared when he saw this fellow. What did it mean? Something had happened to Cunningham, and it had happened very much, too!

"I know!" thought the detective, in triumph. "Jimmy goshfry! Didn't Frank Merriwell give it to him

good! Oh, say! Um-um! Didn't he just paralyze Mr. Outlaw! I'd give fourteen thousand dollars just to have seen that scrap!"

Then came a horrible and blood-chilling thought. What had happened to Frank Merriwell?

Old Ferret shivered in his boots, only they were not exactly boots, and they had holes enough in them to cause anybody to shiver.

Where was Frank Merriwell? Had these ruffians killed him? This was the fear that caused even the freckles of the great detective to turn pale.

"If he is dead, I will avenge him!" vowed Old Ferret, through his clenched teeth.

Then he resumed his search, though it was with his heart filled with dread at what he expected to discover.

Almost the first room he peered into contained the object of his search.

Not dead! Not dying!

Bound hands and feet and tied to the floor, spikes having been driven down to hold the ropes. Bound and gagged!

Old Ferret hopped into that room and softly closed the door behind him. He felt like whooping for joy, but no great detective ever whooped, so he did not whoop.

But he said, "Ha! I have accomplished me purpose!" and his unutterable satisfaction was shown on his face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FACING CERTAIN DEFEAT.

Six innings of the game between Yale and Virginia had been played, and Virginia was three scores in the lead, the tally standing four to one.

The game had been begun without Merriwell, for all efforts on the part of Hodge and others of the nine to find Frank had failed.

Roland Ditson was triumphant. His heart was filled with great joy, for it was his disposition to regard this as a great victory for him. Besides that, was he not going to make a lot of money through the defeat of Yale?

The distress of the Yale team without its captain and leader was apparent, though it made a fierce fight under command of Bart Hodge, who had been given charge by the manager.

But Hodge was so worried that he could not do his best, and to him had been due the giving of Virginia her first score on a passed ball.

That was in the fourth inning, Yale having made her only score in the first. Then Morgan seemed to get rattled, and two more scores came in on clean hits.

Without the least hesitation Hodge set Starbright to "warming up," intending to put him into the box and take Morgan out.

The sight of Starbright preparing to pitch did not rattle Dade Morgan. Instead of that, it seemed to cause him to brace up in a most wonderful manner. He clenched his teeth, pressed his lips together, and struck out the next man. The man who followed put up a little fly that Morgan captured, and the side was retired.

But where was Merriwell? That was the cry that filled the heart of every man on the Yale bench. With Merriwell absent they felt that Virginia was bound to carry off the game. And Virginia had a team that was in no way comparable with Yale's. Paragon was the only great man U. V. had, and he really was a wizard, else how had he kept the slugging Yale men down to three hits and one score in six innings? His support had been far from gilt-edged.

In the sixth Virginia had obtained another score, and Morgan had pulled himself together again after filling the bases with one out, and had permitted no more tallying.

There was one knot of youngsters who gathered by themselves and looked very miserable. Early that day they had been the followers of King Watson, but with the accession of King Jimmy they transferred their allegiance to him, and King Jimmy was faithful to the great Frank Merriwell. It made no difference that he was strangely missing, it made no difference that Watson taunted them and sneered at them, they remained faithful to him who had won the glory of sitting upon the shoulder of Frank Merriwell.

Therefore they were very miserable, and they told themselves that "things would be different if Frank Merriwell was here." And they wondered and speculated at the absence of both Frank and King Jimmy from the ball-field.

Hodge had been compelled to give up the search for Frank and go into the game. He was satisfied that Ditson's trick was simply to keep Merry out of the way till U. V. could win, and he firmly believed that the fellow would take good care that no real harm befell the captain of the Yale team.

Then Bart resolved to defeat Ditson's purpose by encouraging the men to win, even though Frank was not there to pitch. But Virgil Paragon, the Virginia pitcher, proved to be the great stumbling-block. They could not seem to get safe hits off him when hits were needed.

Ditson, who had obtained odds when he bet on Virginia earlier in the day, was now offering odds, and with no takers.

Had Frank Merriwell been there, he would have found plenty who were ready to cover his money; but without Frank Merriwell the Yale men seemed to lack heart and confidence.

"Just hear that blower!" growled one of the disgusted subjects of King Jimmy. "If Frank Merriwell was here, I'd shut him up! But I reckon it ain't any use as long as he ain't here."

Then they resigned themselves to fate.

In the sixth Morgan had again seemed on the point

of going to pieces, and Hodge feared the third time this should happen; therefore he resolved to put in Starbright.

So Dick was again set to "warming up," and Morgan knew he was to be taken out. If he felt angry over this, he held his temper. He had learned that pitchers might be changed any time during the game on a trip like this, and no pitcher was liable to win the satisfaction of claiming truthfully that he had carried off a game without assistance.

In the first of the seventh the Yale men were at the bat, but Paragon toyed with them as before, not permitting a man to reach second.

Deep was the gloom of the men from the North when they moved out onto the field beneath that smiling blue Virginian sky.

The crowd was delighted, as it had a right to be, for it was an honor to defeat Yale.

Oh, where was Merriwell!

Morgan sat on the bench and saw Starbright go into the box.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ditson. "Our boys will make short work of that big duffer! Why, he can't pitch!"

Now Starbright had been doing very good work during the trip, but on this occasion he felt the absence of Merriwell as much as any one, not even Hodge being excepted.

Somehow it seemed to Dick that Merriwell had always given him strength and courage in whatever he undertook since entering college. A look from Frank's

eye was enough to brace him up and give him unbounded confidence.

He could not receive that look now, and even Hodge's words of instruction spoken to him just before he entered the box were not enough to steady his nerves and put him on his mettle.

Elsie Bellwood, her face pale, was there amid the spectators. Inwardly she was almost frantic, but what could she do? Bart had tried to soothe her by telling her that Merriwell would not be harmed, but her fears could not be so easily allayed.

Starbright was in his position. The batter came up to strike. Hodge was under the bat, with his mask adjusted.

Then Dick sent in the first ball, and the batter lined it out with a tremendous crack.

The crowd rose as the man who had hit the ball sped down to first. Gamp, Yale's center-fielder, was doing his best to get near the place where the ball must fall, but it went far over his head and he chased it into the distance, while the runner circled the bases and came home, with the crowd roaring.

Dick Starbright was white as chalk. With difficulty Bart choked back a groan.

"It's all over!" he told himself. "Where is Merriwell? If he would come now?"

Roland Ditson shouted with laughter and waved his hat in the air.

"I told you he could not pitch!" he cried. "Oh, Virginia will pound him all over the lot!"

"And I'll pound you a few after the game!" muttered Hodge, with deep fury in his heart.

The next batter advanced to the plate. The ball had been returned to Starbright, but the big fellow seemed dismayed. He stood there, looking around.

"Pitch the ball!" cried somebody in the crowd.

Starbright did not stir.

"Pitch the ball!" again was the cry.

The batsman was waiting.

"One ball!" declared the umpire, when more than twenty seconds had elapsed without Dick making an offer to deliver.

Then the giant freshman shook himself together, hearing, however, the guying of the crowd and feeling it keenly.

He began to pitch, and the batter soon got a clean hit off him, making first.

The next batter followed with a hit. Then an error filled the bases.

"Virginia does it right here!" said Ditson. "A good hit now means two or three more scores, which will clinch the game."

What was that commotion amid the crowd? Men were standing and gazing down the road. A murmur arose; it swelled louder and louder.

"What is it? Who is it?" the crowd cried.

Two horses were coming at a mad gallop along the road, their hoofs ringing clear, a cloud of dust rising behind them.

The riders were urging their horses to the highest rate of speed, racing along side by side.

One was a man, a handsome, determined, beardless youth, who, though the horse he bestrode was without a saddle, rode like a centaur.

The other was a boy, and he clung like a monkey to the back of his horse, his eyes gleaming with excitement, every freckle on his face seeming to sparkle with excitement. On his upper lip was a strange black smooch.

“Here he comes!”

Then Dick Starbright uttered a little sigh of relief. But the batter sprang to his place, crying:

“Make him deliver the ball, Mr. Umpire, according to the rules. Don’t let him delay the game!”

A hit now meant the winning of the game.

Dick saw—Dick knew. Down to the ground he dropped, writhing in apparent pain, seemingly seized with cramps, while nearer and nearer came the hoofbeats of the galloping horses.

“Call a ball on him, Mr. Umpire!” cried the batter.

“You can’t make a sick man pitch,” said the umpire, with a strange grin. “Mr. Hodge, where is your next pitcher?”

Into the enclosure by the open gate dashed the horses and their riders.

“He is here!” rang out the clear voice of Hodge, as Frank Merriwell flung himself from the back of one of those horses and advanced.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE MAN WHO WON THE GAME."

"Yee-ee-ee!" screamed King Jimmy, the Conqueror, as he waved his tattered hat over his head. "Here he is, fellers!"

Then King Jimmy's loyal subjects danced and capered and yelled and stood on their heads and turned cart-wheels.

Oh, it was a great and thrilling moment! Proud? Why, Jimmy hardly deigned to breathe just plain ordinary every-day air! It was not good enough for him!

The Yale men were wild with delight, and the crowd was thrilled with the intensity of it all.

Roland Ditson sneered.

"He's arrived too late," Ditson declared. "The game is lost already, and he cannot save it."

"How does the score stand?" Frank asked, as he met Hodge, who grasped his hand.

"Five to one, in their favor," was the answer, "and it is the last of the seventh, with not a man out and the bases full."

"Give me the ball!"

Frank walked into the box, and, although their sympathies were with Virginia, the crowd cheered him. He wore no ball-suit, but he had simply flung aside his

coat and prepared to pitch that inning just as he was. There was no time for him to “warm up.”

Every man was ready now. Yale was herself again. A little while before those men had believed it impossible to win that game. Now, with Frank in the box, they regarded it as won already.

Frank began to pitch. He knew the situation was desperate, and he did not dally. He used all his skill at the very outset. He dealt out the double-shoot in liberal portions, and the first man to face him had soon fanned the air to the limit and retired. The next one met the same fate. The third fared no better, and Virginia obtained no more scores that inning.

Those Yale men gathered about Merry seeking an explanation, but he declined to make it until after the game.

“No time to talk now,” he said. “We’ve got to win this game, and that will keep us busy.”

“But we’ll win it!” they declared.

King Jimmy was surrounded by his subjects. Happy? Why, it didn’t seem that there was room enough for his swelling heart in his bosom.

The Yale men went to bat, and it happened that Merriwell was the first to come up. He got a two-bagger off the second ball Paragon delivered, and that brought the head of the batting-list, its strongest portion, against the U. V. pitcher.

Strange how fortune will seem to turn in a game of ball, the same as in a game of cards. A little while before none of those men seemed able to hit the ball:

now they came up one after another and biffed it. Frank scored; Ready followed him; Castleman came round in turn—three scores before a man went out. Then, with Hodge and Browning ahead of him on the bags, Gamp put a fly into the hands of the left-fielder. Carson came up and was thrown out at first.

The score was five to four, and it seemed that Yale had suddenly come to a stand.

Carker got a good drive into right field, and Browning came puffing home.

The score was tied, and the inning ended with it that way.

* * * * *

The coming of Merriwell saved the game for Yale, the final score standing six to five. It was a tight squeeze, but one score was quite enough.

"And I owe everything to Jimmy Lee," Merry declared, when the men gathered around him after the game.

Then he told how Jimmy, disguised as Old Ferret, the Sleepless Detective, had come to his rescue. And Jimmy was dragged forward and made a hero, while his subjects looked on and yelled like wildcats in their delight.

But when Frank sent an officer to look for the ruffians, they had awakened from their drunken slumbers, taken the alarm, and disappeared.

Hodge, however, had better luck in finding Ditson. He had a very agreeable interview with Ditson—that

is, it was agreeable to him. It may have been somewhat painful to Ditson.

As Bart was washing the blood from his knuckles at the hotel somebody asked him what he had been doing.

“Licking the meanest cur in Virginia,” he replied.

When the Yale team departed for the North, a great crowd gathered at the station and cheered them off. Elsie was there, and she pressed the hands of both Frank and Bart, smiling upon them.

Just as Frank was about to step onto the train, somebody cried:

Three cheers for Frank Merriwell, the man who won the game!”

As they finished giving the cheers, Merry lifted in his arms a ragged, freckle-faced, blushing boy, crying:

“Here, gentlemen, is the man who won the game! Three cheers for Jimmy Lee!”

And the Yale men cheered handsomely. Then they gave him a regular Yale yell.

And he thought he was going to die right there from happiness.

Not until the train had rolled away did he come out of a trance-like state. Then somebody told him to wake up, for Frank Merriwell was gone.

“But he’s great!” said King Jimmy. “He’s the greatest feller that ever lived in all the whole world, and I can lick the man who says he ain’t, I don’t care if it is Jim Jeffries!”

CHAPTER XX.

DEFARGE PLOTTING AGAIN.

Although Bertrand Defarge had failed in his attempt to injure Merriwell and prevent him from leading the Yale nine to victory in the South, his malice had in no wise abated, and the team had scarcely returned to New Haven before he was again plotting darkly against the young athlete.

This time he felt confident of success, but he needed assistance to carry out the scheme, which he finally evolved for the undoing of Merriwell. He thought long over the men on whom he believed he could depend, but the list of Frank's enemies had been considerably thinned and there were few to whom he could look for aid in his dastardly plans or whom he dared to take into his confidence.

At last he decided upon Roland Packard as a safe man, strong in his hatred of Merriwell. With his malicious plot well matured, he sent for Packard, without divulging anything of his purpose, but hinting mysteriously about "mutual interests" and "a man we both hate," which he was confident would bring Roland to his room even though he might otherwise have ignored the invitation; for Packard was not an admirer of Defarge, and their hatred of Frank was the only common ground between them.

But, as Defarge had hoped, the hint that the man

they both were desirous of injuring was the reason for the summons was sufficient.

As usual, Packard was in anything but a pleasant mood when he entered Defarge's room, and also, as usual, he had been drinking heavily.

"Well, you sent for me," was Packard's greeting. "What do you want?"

"Don't!" whispered Defarge, slipping across the room and closing the door securely. "Be careful not to talk too loud. I would not have him catch on for the world, and some one might hear us."

"Who is 'him'?"

"You know."

"Merriwell?"

"Of course."

"I supposed so. If I remember correctly, you have not been in love with Frank Merriwell in the past."

"Hardly," admitted Defarge, although he took care to keep his voice lowered. "You know I have hated him. Sit down, Packard, and we will talk this matter over."

Packard finally accepted the chair which Bertrand urged him to take. It was near a little table, on which sat a cut-glass decanter that contained a reddish-amber liquid. Defarge had placed that decanter in a conspicuous position for the purpose of having it fall beneath the eyes of his visitor.

Roland Packard, a Yale "medic," had within a short time made a reputation for himself as a heavy drinker.

On entering college he had seemed no worse than scores of other students in this respect, but circumstances and his own disposition had led him into bad ways. This Defarge knew very well, and he had rightly fancied that the sight of that decanter and its contents would attract Roland.

Defarge drew another chair near the table on which sat the decanter. There were glasses on it also. The curtains of the window were closely drawn.

Bertrand studied the face of his visitor closely for a moment, and what he saw there seemed to trouble him a little, for he shrugged his shoulders with an unconscious gesture of dismay. He even hesitated about offering Packard any of the contents of the decanter. The latter seemed to understand that something was the matter, and he frowned blackly.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Spit it right out!"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all!" assured Bertrand, with a quick gesture. "I happened to think—of him!"

"Why are you so confoundedly afraid to speak his name?"

"Because I do not wish to be overheard. You do not know everything that has happened, Packard."

"So you are afraid of him? Well, I'm not! I'm not afraid of a whole regiment of Merriwells!"

"Sh! That is why I sent for you. You are about the only one left who has not surrendered to him."

"That's right!" grated Roland. "It used to be different. Now everybody is bowing down to him and worshiping him. If a man opens his mouth about

Merriwell in a public place he has every one who hears him on his back in a moment. Yale has gone Merriwell mad, Defarge! Even the instructors and professors take off their hats to him! Think of that! Why, he's a regular little tin god! Isn't it enough to make anybody sick! Isn't it enough to drive a man to drink!"

"I am afraid it has driven you there too frequently."

"What do you mean?"

"You are drinking pretty hard, Packard."

"That's nobody's business but my own."

"People will talk about it; besides, it's beginning to show on you."

As he made this remark, Bertrand glanced at Packard's purplish countenance.

And this was a medical student! This man was one who should know that when he took alcohol into his stomach he was introducing it by a roundabout course to his brain!

Packard growled like a dog.

"Don't get so personal in your remarks!" he retorted. "I don't like it, especially from a fellow who is so afraid of Merriwell."

Defarge flushed.

"You do not understand," he declared. "Merriwell has a strange power over me. I don't know what it is, but he can make me do anything he likes."

"Hypnotism," declared Packard.

"No!" cried the French youth. "I do not believe in hypnotism!"

"That doesn't make any difference. Hypnotism is an actuality, whether you believe in it or not. I have known for some time that Merriwell possessed some sort of hypnotic power, else how does he always succeed in turning his enemies into friends?"

"He does not always succeed. He has not succeeded in your case—or in mine."

"He's come near it as far as you are concerned."

"No! It's not true!" panted Bertrand hotly. "Here, here," beating on his chest, "I feel the same hatred for him slumbering! But he can read my secrets! I have to avoid him! I am afraid of a man who can read my mind, for sometimes I think of things I would not have any one but myself know."

"Haven't a doubt of that. We all do. I wouldn't like to have all my thoughts published in the *Lit.*"

"That's it. Besides, he holds me under his thumb."

"That's bad," said Packard, with a sneering laugh. "No man can hold me there."

"If he could read your thoughts he might. You do not know everything that has happened since Merriwell returned to college."

"You mean since the Southern trip of the ball-team?"

"No; before that—while the men were training for the team. You know I trained and tried to get on."

"Yes."

"I failed."

"Merriwell kept you off."

"I ruined my chances one day when I tried to spoil

Merriwell for any use this spring. I laid for him out along the road when the men took their run into the country. Had not the devil protected him, I'd fixed him by dropping a stone on his head. He fell down, and the stone missed his head by about an inch. Had he not fallen just at that instant—well, Frank Merriwell would not be running the Yale nine now."

"He certainly has Satan's luck! He's a man who would not fall down once in five years, yet he fell just then."

"Exactly. I thought I had fixed him all right, for it was rather dark, being in the early part of the evening. I hustled away from that place and got into the road behind him without being seen, coming up to him with others. And there he was, all right and well. But the stone——"

"Ah! the stone," said Packard. "Did it recognize you and sing out, 'Hello, Defarge?'"

"It had caused him to stop. He knew somebody had thrown it. He told them."

"But you had been coming along the road far behind with others. How could it have been you who threw the stone? My dear fellow, you must have given yourself away by your actions."

"Not at all. But I had been at the tail-end of the party when I dropped off and cut across through a lane to reach the road by which I knew they would return to town. Two of the fellows saw me sit down beside the road as if to fix my shoe. They came up while I was there with the gang around Merriwell, and one

of them spoke up and asked me how the dickens I got ahead of them."

"Bad!" commented Packard. "Dead give away. Put Merriwell on the scent."

"No; Hodge."

"The devil!"

"Just as bad! He went back there that very night with a lantern and found my handkerchief which I had dropped on the spot where I stood when I threw the stone."

Packard nodded.

"A man who throws a stone at an enemy always makes a fool of himself by dropping a handkerchief or doing some other foolish thing to give himself away. I wonder why that is? I don't understand it."

"Well, Hodge demanded my exposure to the fac.," said Defarge.

"Like Hodge."

"To save myself, I faked up a pretty little story about being compelled by Morgan to do what I did. I thought Merriwell would come down on Morgan's neck, and I had it in for Morgan."

"He's like all the others—beginning to crawl before Merriwell."

"That's why I hate him! I thought he would stand out, but he has thrown up the sponge. He's even said sharp things to me. I told him he could not make the ball-team. I expected Merriwell would drop him from that, at least. Instead of that, he came upon me one night here in this room and forced me to acknowledge

that I had lied about Morgan. More than that, he made me promise that I would never again lift a hand to harm him. And," finished Defarge, in a husky whisper, "may I drop dead if I've ever been able to do so from that time to this!"

CHAPTER XXI.

MERRIWELL'S RESERVE POWER.

"Fancy," said Packard.

"Nothing of the sort!" declared Defarge.

"Then beyond a doubt you have been hypnotized by the fellow. It is useless for you to squirm and deny it, that's just what has happened. I know he has hypnotic power, although he does not make a practise of displaying it. You cannot make a physical move to do him harm?"

"No."

"But mentally——"

"I dislike him as much as ever. I fear him more than ever, and I keep away from him. But it is not natural for a Defarge to fear anybody, and my heart grows hot when I think he has brought me to this pitiful state. I would harm him somehow! If I cannot do it with my own hand, at least I can use my brain to do it."

"And succeed as you have in the past—by getting it in the neck."

"Not this time."

"Why not?"

"Because I shall bring to bear on him something of which he has no knowledge, and, so long as I keep out

of his way, can have no intimation. But I need assistance."

"That's why you sent for me?"

"Exactly."

"Do you mean that I am to pull your chestnuts out of the fire?"

"Not that. You dislike him as much as I."

"Well?"

"And there is nothing to hinder you from helping along any scheme to reach him."

"In other words, you will do the brain-work and I will be your tool?"

"No, no, no! Why do you put it that way? Have I not in the past always been ready enough to strike when I could? My time is past. If I make another open move that fellow will expose me, and out of Yale I'll have to go. But I can't do anything if I would."

Roland eyed the decanter.

"Do you keep that stuff to look at?" he asked.

"No, of course not—but you—I thought you——"

"Don't say anything nasty now, Defarge. I'm not drunk, but I am mighty dry. I can talk better if my throat is oiled a little."

"Help yourself," invited Bertrand, rising to place the glasses and decanter nearer his visitor.

Packard's hand shook a little as he poured out a brimming glass of whisky. Defarge shrugged his shoulders again as he noticed this, and went over to a sideboard, from which he brought a pitcher of ice-

water. Defarge poured a very little of the liquor for himself, mixing it with double the amount of water.

"Here's hoping you'll have better luck," said Packard, lifting his glass.

"Amen!" said the French youth, with almost ludicrous solemnity, and their glasses clinked.

Packard tossed off the liquor without blinking, taking a small swallow of water as a "chaser." It seemed to make him feel better, for he rubbed his hands together and brightened somewhat.

"Anyhow, you know good stuff, Defarge," he nodded. "Now I'm ready to hear you unfold your scheme, but I make no promises in advance."

"You will promise not to say anything about it if you do not go into it with me?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I didn't mean promises of that sort. I know Merriwell, and I know that it does seem as if Satan himself could not get the best of the fellow. Therefore, I look askance on any scheme to strike him till I am satisfied that it is good. His position is so secure now that there seems little prospect of shaking it in the least. He is king at Yale."

"But kings have been deposed, you know. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,' and so forth. The Easter trip of the nine has covered Merriwell all over with the glory he loves to bask in. The prospects for Yale on the diamond are better this year than ever before. But the nine is made up to a large extent of Merriwell's friends, and no one can dispute that.

Hodge, Browning, Ready, Gamp, Carson, and Carker are all of his flock. Lots of good fellows have been left out in the cold in order to squeeze those chaps in. The ones left out are hollering for Yale and the nine just the same, but, if I know anything of human nature, they are simply hiding their wounds, which rankle all the while."

"But what has this to do with your scheme?" asked the medical student impatiently. "Those fellows who did not make places on the nine can't say a word, for Merriwell has made no blunders thus far. You cannot count on a single one of them standing in with you. The only men in Yale to-day who are known to dislike Merriwell belong to Rupert Chickering's set of asses. They are worse than nothing and nobody. They have won the contempt of everybody outside their own circle."

"I am not counting on them, or on any man in Yale. But I know a man who can take the starch out of Merriwell."

"I doubt it."

"I'll convince you."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Hawkins. I met him in Paris last summer. It happened that my father was able to do him a favor, as he had gotten into some trouble through a duel in which he came within an ace of killing his man. Father had a pull, and enabled him to get off and leave the country. Naturally, he feels under obligations. He is here in New Haven."

Packard snapped his fingers.

"What of all that?" he asked.

"Wait a little. This fellow is not over twenty-two or three years of age, but he is the most wonderful swordsman I ever saw. You know I can handle a rapier a little myself. Well, this chap can toy with me as a cat toys with a mouse. And he can fight with his fists and feet. You know Merriwell learned in France to fight with his feet as well as with his fists. Here is a man who can box as well as Merriwell, and can kick better. It is marvelous the way he can handle those feet. He is the only fellow I ever saw in America who could defeat Merriwell at that trick. He can do it! I know it! But that is not the limit. As an athlete my man is a wonder. I have no hesitation in saying that he can outpoint Merriwell in any feat of strength."

"How do you know about that last? Merriwell, you know, believes it is a mistake for any athlete to be continually performing great feats of strength. It is his argument that any athlete who follows up such a practise must overstrain and weaken himself some time, which will do him permanent injury. I don't like Merriwell, but I have a belief that the fellow never displays the full capacity of his athletic powers."

"And I," cried Defarge, "believe he is much over-rated in that respect."

"I used to think so; but I have come to change my mind. I was forced to change my mind, to tell the truth. I didn't like to, but I couldn't help it."

"And now you think he really is a wonder?"

"I think he is a remarkable athlete. Mind you, I dislike the fellow just as much as I ever did; but I have been forced to acknowledge to myself that he is a wonder."

"Well, hanged if I'll ever acknowledge that, even to myself! He is athletic, I know; but he is no wonder. I won't believe he is a wonder!"

"That will not make him any less so, Defarge. He has a great amount of reserve force. By that I mean that he seldom calls into play the full amount of his will-power and strength. When he does so, the result is something astonishing."

"Tell me when he has ever done it and accomplished anything astonishing."

"Do you remember the football-game with Harvard? Of course you do! No Yale or Harvard man will ever forget that game. Well, you must remember that, on the very morning of the day of that game, Frank Merriwell was ill in bed. He had been delirious, and in his delirium he had fancied he was playing the game against Harvard. He kept giving signals and calling on the team to take the ball over the Harvard line, to block the Harvard rush, to hold Harvard or die. A fellow who was at his bedside a few minutes told me all about it. He writhed and strained, and sweat poured off him in streams.

"He was fighting that game there in bed, and the terrible exertion, according to what the doctors said,

was enough to kill any man—that is, any ordinary man. The doctors thought the fever must turn against him on account of that. But it turned in his favor, and he grew better so fast that everybody was amazed. If he had not been an athlete with perfect development, marvelous strength, and almost perfect natural health, he must have been left weak and limp for a week or more after that fever turned—he could not have got onto the football-field for a month or more.”

“Go on,” laughed Defarge, with curling lip. “I rather enjoy hearing you crack up Merriwell.”

— Packard frowned and looked displeased.

“I am not cracking up Merriwell; I am simply telling you the actual facts. On the morning of the day of that game Merriwell was in bed, kept there by the doctors, who fancied it might prove fatal for him to get up. But he would get up, and he did so. Then he called the men of the team to his room and talked to them there. As he talked, so those men say, his eyes began to shine, a healthy glow came into his face, he stood erect amid them, and when he grasped their hands as they were about to leave the room, his grip was strong and firm, as usual. In fact, it hardly seemed that anything ailed him at all. That was the reserve force of the man asserting itself. I have studied enough to understand the meaning of it. Every athlete has to a certain extent the same reserve force, though it may not be fully developed, or may be impaired by some organic weakness. In Merriwell it is at its full meridian.”

"By heavens!" cried Defarge, smiting the fist of one hand into the open palm of the other. "You are becoming an admirer of Frank Merriwell, Packard!"

"Nothing of the sort. I have been studying the fellow, to discover the secret of his marvelous power, and I believe I have discovered it. That's all. He is a man worth studying, and I'm not going to let his personal friends be the only ones to do so."

Bertrand shook his head, as if he did not quite understand this hard-drinking medical student who made a study of his enemies as well as his friends.

"To go on," continued Roland, toying with his whisky-glass, "and to show in the man the remarkable extent of this great reserve power of which I speak, just think of what followed on the day of that game. Merriwell insisted on having reports of the progress of the game brought to him constantly, and half a dozen messengers were kept busy running from the telegraph-office to his room in Vanderbilt. He sat there watching the progress of the game, tracing out every move on a diagram, and he knew just what was taking place.

"In his mind he saw Harvard slamming Yale all over the field in the first half, while Yale made desperate stands at critical times, and so kept the crimson from scoring. To watch that, for a man in his position, captain of the Yale team, should have been enough to put him back into bed. Did it? No! He grew stronger! He felt that he could go onto the field and lead his men. He began to walk the floor of his room

like a caged panther, and with every minute he felt the reserve force taking fuller possession of him."

Defarge was silent now, held thus by the singular earnestness of the speaker, who had been one of Merriwell's most active and bitter enemies.

"The second half of the game began," pursued Packard, "and Merriwell soon saw that the case had become even more desperate. Yale was swept down before Harvard's rushes. In short order Harvard got a goal from the field. When the message telling of that was brought to Merriwell it changed him completely. He sent the messenger for a cab, and he literally flung himself into his football-suit. Then he went leaping down to that cab, flung himself in, and gave the driver ten dollars to drive like the devil to the field. You know what happened when he arrived. Yale was making a last-ditch stand, with Harvard having things her own way. It looked like a touch-down for Harvard. Then Merriwell came rushing onto the field, yelling for Yale to 'tear 'em up.'

"The whole Yale side saw and recognized him, and you must remember that ten thousand people rose up as one man and roared his name. Then he ordered one of the men out and went in himself, despite the protests of his friends. And that fellow, who had been sick and delirious a short time before, was a holy terror the moment he reached the field. Nothing could stop him. He set everybody mad with excitement. He made perfect Trojans of his exhausted men. He dumfounded Harvard. He caused those ten thousand

watching spectators on the Yale side to yell like ten thousand maniacs. And, last of all, he got the ball himself, went through Harvard's tacklers, ran the length of the field, leaped square over the head of a Harvard man who was in his path, and made a touch-down! You remember that, Defarge?"

Bertrand groaned and nodded.

"I guess I do!" he muttered. "Oh, if any other man had done it!"

"No other man on the Yale team could have done it," asserted Packard. "When he had kicked a goal and knew the game was won for Yale, his great reserve power gave out and he toppled over. Now, that is the kind of man you are up against when you buck Merriwell. If you put a man against him, you must have a wonder who can overcome the most remarkable fellow Yale College has ever developed. I, his bitter enemy, tell you this. Now, do you think for a single moment that you have such a man?"

"I know it!" declared Defarge loudly and confidently. "I can prove it!"

"Where is he?"

"Here!"

The door had opened to admit a remarkable-appearing youth.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SCAR-FACED ATHLETE.

Packard started to his feet and turned. He saw a well-dressed, splendidly formed youth. But it was the face of the newcomer that instantly attracted the notice of the medical student.

Such a face! It was wrinkled and scarred and disfigured with red and purple discolorations. Plainly it had been burned in the most horrible manner.

The stranger paused, but Defarge immediately said: "Come right in, Hawkins. This is the gentleman I wished you to meet."

The stranger closed the door and came forward. There was something suggestive of confidence and power in his walk, in his every movement. Packard immediately realized that he was in the presence of a remarkable man.

"Mr. Packard, this is my friend Mr. Hawkins," said Defarge.

Hawkins put out his hand, which the medical student accepted. The grip of the scar-faced youth was soft as velvet, yet hard as iron. His hand was the hand of a trained athlete, with every inch of him in perfect condition. More and more Packard realized that the stranger was uncommon.

"I have just been telling Mr. Packard of you," said

Defarge. "That is, I mentioned you to him. Mr. Packard is a medico."

"Indeed?" said the stranger, in a voice that was pleasant, yet suggested power. "Why is it that medical students seem prone to indulge in stimulants? Is it because they acquire the habit by taking liquor to brace their nerves before going into the dissecting-room?"

He had looked at Packard with a pair of intensely piercing eyes, and Roland shivered a bit before that deep stare.

"I presume you judge by the decanter here," said Packard, with a motion toward the table. "Well, your friend Defarge put that there."

"I judge from your appearance," said the newcomer frankly. "Your face shows that you drink more than is good for you."

Packard frowned. He did not fancy being told his failings thus directly by a stranger.

"That is my business," he said. "I presume I have a right to drink as much as I like!"

"No, you have not."

Roland was astounded.

"Have not?" he gasped.

"I said that."

"Why not?"

"Because any man who has a taste for liquor, and drinks as much as he likes, makes himself troublesome to others in some way, and no man has a right to trouble others unnecessarily. Besides, you set a bad

example for other students. Although we may not know it, every one of us does good, or works harm, by our example."

Packard broke into a harsh laugh.

"What the devil have you here, Defarge?" he cried. "Is this a temperance crank?"

The effect of this speech on the stranger was not discernible, for his scarred face remained strangely inexpressive.

"I am no crank," he said; "but I simply tell you the truth. Ever since the world began, the man who has dared to tell the truth has been called a crank. Lots of these cranks have suffered and died for their convictions. Many of them were put to death because they believed and preached things which the world soon after accepted as scientific truths."

Packard gave himself a shake. Surely this was a remarkable chap. All at once Roland seized the decanter and poured out a glass of whisky, which he offered to the scar-faced youth.

"Here," he said, "take this. It will cheer you up. You must be dead sore on yourself. I'll drink with you; Defarge will join us. Let's be agreeable."

The one invited shook his head.

"No," he said; "I am one of those peculiar persons who practises what he preaches."

"You do not drink?"

"No."

"Not even beer?"

"Not a drop of anything that has alcohol in it. **I**

am an athlete, and no man who seeks to reach his highest ability as an athlete should deliberately poison himself with alcohol."

"But a little is good for a man. At least, it is good just when he is on the point of making some great exertion."

"It is not!" positively declared the other. "It is the very worst thing he can take."

"Oh, get out! Anybody knows it gives him a feeling of strength."

"A false feeling, sir. Tests and investigations have shown that a man can lift greater weights and perform severer feats of strength when he has not taken a single drop of liquor than he can when he has taken a moderate amount to stimulate him. The liquor makes him believe himself stronger and makes him want to display his power, but every swallow robs him of vital energy. Now, in your case, your face plainly shows that you are swiftly becoming an habitual drinker. You must stop it soon, or you will go straight to the devil, sir."

Packard had been standing with the glass of whisky in his hand. As the man talked, Roland observed his hand beginning to shake.

"Well," he said, "at least it is good to steady the nerves." And he dashed off the fiery stuff at one great swallow.

"That's another mistaken belief," declared Hawkins quietly. "See! are your nerves any steadier than mine? You drink; I do not. Are your nerves steadier

to-day than they were before you began to drink? Can you not remember the time when your hand never trembled?"

"Yes, but——"

"But now your nerves shake at times, and you drink whisky to steady them. The whisky has weakened them already by putting a strain upon them, and that is why they shake. When you drink more whisky you steady them with a renewed strain; but that strain simply results eventually in making them still weaker. Being a student of medicine, you ought to know that."

Packard did know it, but it seemed that he had never thought of it seriously before. He knew plenty of medical students who were steady drinkers, and they seemed careless of the final result. They were a jovial set of fellows now; but Packard suddenly realized that the future must hold disappointment and failure for many of them.

For one single instant a grisly phantom of future ruin rose before Packard himself, but he quickly brushed it aside, forcing a laugh.

"I believe in living while we live," he declared. "What's the use of denying ourselves every good thing of life in order to live a year or two longer?"

"Every good thing of life! My dear Mr. Packard, you are making one of the greatest errors a man can make. Look at me. I deny myself no good thing of life. Whisky is not good. Alcohol is not good in any form. It is only the boy with the inherited taste for it that ever relishes his first drink. To a perfectly

healthy fellow that first drink is repulsive. You know it, Mr. Packard. You say you believe in living and enjoying life. Man, you do not know what it is to enjoy life! You cannot know what it is as long as you do not feel perfect health pulsing all through your body. No drinker ever feels like that. Under the influence of the stuff he takes into his stomach, he may feel good for a short time, but the reaction always follows, and he suffers for his short enjoyment. It is not a case of shortening life a year or two, but most drinkers shorten it from ten to thirty years. And they die wretched wrecks. What's the use to talk about it?"

"Didn't you ever drink?" asked Roland wonderingly.

"Yes."

"Ah!"

"Long ago I was fool enough to do so. I was a boy then, and I thought it manly. But I learned my lesson and learned it well. See this face! It marks me for life and makes me an object of repulsion. If I had never touched liquor, I doubt if I should have been thus disfigured now. I entered a burning building, in an attempt to rescue a man. Another boy was with me. We flung open the door of a room, and fire shot out and enveloped me. It seemed as if my very breath took flame. I fell to the floor, and the other chap dragged me away."

"Wasn't he burned?"

"No."

“It just happened that way. It was fate.”

“It seemed to be punishment. I hated the other fellow, and I had tried to do him harm. He was an athletic chap, and he would not drink. I hated him because he seemed to think himself too good to drink. He had been given a medal for saving a life. I got hold of that medal. Another boy was accused of stealing it. As I did not like the other fellow, I should have remained quiet and let things go; but when I was burned I thought my time had come. I confessed. Of course, all the odium of the affair fell on me when I recovered, and I was compelled to leave school. But I swore then and there that I would never touch a drink again, and that I would become an athlete capable of defeating the fellow I had tried to down. From that day to this I have worked steadily to build myself up and reach a state of perfection. I believe I have succeeded, and now I am ready for the test. All I ask is to meet my old enemy in any kind of a contest.”

“And this enemy of whom you speak—what is his name?”

“Frank Merriwell!” declared the youthful athlete with the scarred face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MAGNIFICENT ATHLETE.

“Ah! I suspected it!” exclaimed Packard, sitting down.

Bertrand Defarge smiled with satisfaction, and pushed along a chair for Hawkins, who accepted it, permitting Defarge to take his hat.

“He is here,” said the scar-faced youth. “I learn that he is something of an athlete, and that he is rated as a king among you. I shall never be satisfied until I have defeated him. It has been my controlling desire since those days at Fardale. I have never permitted it to lessen. I have looked at my face and said to myself: ‘Let that aid you to remember.’”

Packard rubbed his hands with satisfaction. He was beginning to like this fellow.

“And you have worked hard to become strong and skilful?”

“I have worked hard in every way. I have had the best instructors a man could have. My muscles are firm as iron, my nerves are steady as the earth itself, and I believe there is no man living who can meet and defeat me in every department. I can shoot with the best experts, either rifle or pistol. I can fence with masters of the art and defeat them. I have thrown some of the greatest amateur wrestlers. As

an unknown, I have defeated professional pugilists who were regarded as wonders. I am satisfied that I have reached the highest point possible for me to attain, and now all I ask is to meet this man Merriwell."

Defarge had drawn up a chair, and was smiling his satisfaction.

Packard's interest had increased rapidly. To himself he now acknowledged that this youth with the scarred face was decidedly fascinating, to say the least.

"Of course, you realize the kind of a man Merriwell has become?" said Roland. "He has never met his match since entering Yale, and he has escaped unscathed from all the traps and snares laid for him."

Hawkins nodded grimly.

"That is just the kind of a man I have been training to defeat," he said. "All I ask now is the opportunity."

"And you and I," said Defarge, speaking to Packard, "must furnish the opportunity for him."

"How can we do it?" asked Roland, growing more and more interested.

"Have you heard that Merriwell is going to give a big supper to his friends? He calls it an athletic supper. Do you know anything about that?"

"I've heard something about it."

"That is the time to strike him. He should be led into the trap in the presence of his great gathering of friends."

"But I fail to see how I am to help bring that about."

"Your brother is one of Merriwell's particular friends."

"Not exactly a particular friend, as he has never belonged to Merriwell's flock; still, I think he is regarded by Merriwell as a friend."

"Exactly. That is what I have been counting on. Your brother is almost certain to receive an invitation to this supper."

"It is very likely that he may."

"Well, you have been mistaken for him hundreds of times. In fact, your very best friends have trouble in telling you apart. Now, can't you fix it some way that the invitation will not reach the hand of your brother?"

Roland whistled.

"I begin to see your little game," he said. "It is rather daring, to say the least."

"But you have worked just as daring games before. You have impersonated your brother more than once. Dressed in his clothes, who can say you are—not—Oliver?"

Defarge's voice sank, and he spoke the final words slowly, staring hard at Roland. Packard noticed this queer look and caught the strange hesitation in the French youth's voice.

"Well, what the dickens is the matter with you?" he exclaimed harshly. "Why are you staring at me like that?"

"I—I was thinking," faltered Bertrand.

"Thinking what?"

"That you are beginning to look different from your brother."

"Different? How?"

"Why, your face—it is flushed. The whisky you drink——"

But that was not all. Bertrand could discern a greater difference than that made by the unnatural flush brought to Packard's face by the intoxicants he drank. The fellow's countenance was somehow losing its refinement and delicacy, and was taking on a faint suggestion of grossness and brutality, telling that drink had lowered Packard's morals and filled his mind with evil thoughts.

It is a fact that the thoughts of any boy are finally written on his face in lines that all may read. If he has kind, elevating, noble thoughts, his face becomes handsome and attractive in its expression; but, no matter how handsome he may have grown to be, if he begins to indulge in evil, brutal thoughts, the result will be a gradual but certain change of countenance that will plainly indicate the trend of his mind.

Defarge had detected the growing difference in the looks of the brothers.

"Oh, Oliver is a pale-faced fool!" petulantly exclaimed Roland. "I've told him so."

"But your flushed countenance would betray you," said Bertrand. "Merriwell may have been deceived in the past, but he would not be this time. He would recognize the difference between you and Oliver. That would ruin the game."

"I fail to see quite through the game, anyhow. Even if I were to obtain possession of my brother's invitation to this supper, and should attend in his place, how could I bring about the purpose we wish to accomplish?"

"Every guest is permitted to bring a friend to the supper. I have heard that they are urged to bring a friend along. That would give you the chance to take Hawkins to that supper."

"That's so," nodded Roland. "By Jove! you have quite a clear head on you, Defarge."

"Oh, I can plan, even if I cannot make a direct move against Merriwell."

"And at the supper Hawkins could challenge Merriwell to various feats."

"That's the idea."

"It could be brought about very cleverly."

"There should be no trouble."

"And Merriwell could not refuse to accept the challenge."

"Of course not."

"Defarge, it is worth considering! I believe it may be done."

"But your looks—your flushed face——"

"Oh, don't worry about that. I know a little drug that will take all the color out of my face and make me look as pale as my goody-good brother."

"And would you use it?"

"In a minute!"

"Then I believe you can carry out my plan."

Packard rubbed his hands together again.

"It's worth trying—worth trying!" he muttered. "Oh, it would be great sport to have Merriwell defeated in feats of strength before all his friends!"

"But the best thing to do would be to have him defeated at boxing first, following that with a fencing-bout. In this bout Hawkins could——"

Defarge leaned over and whispered the rest of the sentence in Packard's ear:

"Run Merriwell through the body!"

"Whew!" whistled Packard once more. "Will he do it?"

"He hates Merriwell. Why shouldn't he? Look at that face!"

Packard seized the decanter and turned whisky into two glasses.

"Here!" he cried, passing one to Defarge. "To the downfall of Merriwell! Drink it!"

Quickly the strange youth caught a glass, into which he poured some water from the pitcher.

"I drink with you!" he exclaimed. "To the downfall of Frank Merriwell!"

"But now," said Packard, "before I go any farther, before I take this step, I must be convinced that Mr. Hawkins can stand a show with Merriwell—that there is a possibility of his defeating Merriwell."

"How do you wish to be convinced?" asked Hawkins, rising.

"With my eyes."

"You shall be."

Hawkins turned to Defarge, who nodded. Immediately the youth with the scarred face began to strip. He tossed aside his coat and vest and peeled down to his underclothes in short order.

Packard gasped with astonishment and admiration, for the stranger was magnificently developed, and his muscles were those of the perfect athlete. His legs were lithe, yet powerful and muscular; his waist was strong and slender; his chest was full and deep; his shoulders were broad and handsome; his arms—ah, what arms they were! They might have belonged to Samson! And his neck was the neck of the fully developed athlete.

But above this superbly handsome body rose that horribly scarred face. Packard shuddered when he looked at it.

“Do I strip all right?” asked the stranger quietly.

“By Jupiter! you are a physical marvel!” cried the bewildered medical student. “Apollo could not have had a more perfect figure!”

Was it a smile of satisfaction that contorted the scarred face of Hawkins?

“The beauty of my body is all I possess,” he said bitterly. “My face frightens people. Sometimes, in my own room, I put a mask over my face, tear off my clothes, and stand before a long mirror to admire my muscular body. Then I try to fancy myself with a face suited to this body—such a face as I must have had but for that fire. Oh, it is terrible to know that

I must always wear this disfigured face! I have no real friends! I have but one ambition in life."

"And that is——"

"To defeat and conquer Frank Merriwell! I shall do it, too!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

PACKARD IS SATISFIED.

Having made this statement, the young athlete of the scarred face turned to his clothing, as if he would dress.

"I am not yet satisfied," said Packard. "Let me see you display some of your powers and skill."

"Sit down," invited the one addressed. "Sit on that chair."

He pointed at a plain wooden chair, and Packard sat on it, as directed.

Immediately the youth of the hideous face stooped, thrust his arm under the front crosspiece of the chair-frame, grasped the back piece, and said:

"Hold fast to the chair and sit quite still."

The medic did as directed. Hawkins took a deep breath, and then his muscles began to swell and strain as he rose. And as he straightened up he lifted the chair from the floor with Packard upon it—up, up, up! The muscles of that magnificent upper arm and shoulder stood out hard and rigid! They swelled and grew taut across the back! Up, up, till Packard was lifted shoulder-high and held at arm's length, still sitting on that chair!

It was a most astounding feat of strength, and Packard was breathless with admiration.

But how was the fellow to put him down?

After a moment Hawkins began to stoop, lowering his body gradually, still balancing Packard on the chair as he let him down. Slowly, gently, deliberately the athlete lowered that chair and its human burden, depositing it lightly upon the floor.

"There!" cried Defarge triumphantly; "what do you think of that?"

"It was simply astounding!" admitted Roland, jumping up and drawing a deep breath.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Hawkins quietly.

"As to your strength, yes."

"You believe I am stronger than Merriwell?"

"You must be. I know Merriwell seldom exhibits the full extent of his strength, but I cannot conceive that he is stronger than that. Can you wrestle?"

"Yes, in any style you may name. I have taken lessons from masters of the art."

"Then you should be able to throw Merriwell. But the fellow is skilful in many other ways."

"For instance?"

"He can handle his fists and feet, as I have said."

"There are a set of boxing-gloves on the wall. You may put on one pair and Defarge the other. Then you may both come at me and try to hit me."

"What will you do?"

"I will not permit either of you to hit me once."

"Oh, come off!" laughed Packard. "We can get you between us, and you can't help being hit."

"If either of you are able to hit me one fair blow

in five minutes' time, I will admit that I am not yet prepared to meet Merriwell."

"All right; we'll show you!" cried Packard. "Move the furniture out of the way. But, before you begin, I want you to know that I am something of a boxer. Once on a time I took lessons from Buster Kelley, New Haven's great fighter, for the purpose of getting into shape for a go with Merriwell."

"So much the better," nodded the undisturbed athlete, "for it will serve as a more satisfactory test."

So the furniture was moved back from the center of the room, and Packard and Defarge threw off coats and vests, drew on the gloves, and prepared for the encounter.

When they were ready, the athlete said:

"Before we begin I will warn you that I may often defend myself with my feet, as well as with my hands. I shall strike neither of you with my clenched fists, but I may push you with either feet or hands."

"That's all right," grinned Roland. "I'll risk but I can dodge your feet."

"You may find it more difficult than you think. **Are you ready?**"

"Ready," said Packard.

"Ready," said Defarge.

"Then come at me, and make it as hot as you like."

They accepted the invitation, both springing forward. He was away before them, dancing to one side, quickly leading them to separate. Then, like a flash, he flitted between them.

Both struck at him—and missed!

He laughed in their faces. Packard followed him up closely and struck again and again. The wonderful youth of the scarred face parried or dodged every blow. But Defarge came rushing in, and they seemed to have the fellow cornered. Then, quick as a flash, Hawkins placed one foot against Packard's breast and gave him a push that flung him with a heavy thud to the floor. Defarge was tripped up and sent sprawling over Packard, and the athlete stood back, his arms folded, a chuckling laugh escaping his lips.

Packard got up, uttering words of mingled anger and wonder. Why, it seemed utterly impossible to corner the fellow! Roland vowed he'd not be caught again by that foot-trick.

Defarge was up.

"Now!" cried Packard, "both together!"

Again they rushed; again that handsomely built youth easily avoided them. They were separated, and once more he flitted between them. Neither touched him, though both tried to do so.

Packard set his teeth and followed the fellow up once more. The athlete put his hands behind his back and stood quite still, without guarding.

Packard struck at his head. That head moved to one side with the quickness of a flash, and Packard missed.

Packard struck at the man's body. That body leaped backward like a panther, and it was untouched.

The medical student gasped. Never in his life had

he seen a man he fancied could handle himself like that.

Then Defarge came charging in, and both struck at Hawkins together. Hawkins parried the blows of one with his left hand and the blows of the other with his right. Then, with his left hand, he gave one of them a thrust, at the same time pushing the other with his right foot, and again he skipped between them and was away.

Packard stopped and said:

"He's a wizard! Confound him! can't we corner him, anyhow?"

But they could not, though for five minutes they did their level best. When five minutes had elapsed by the little clock on the mantel, the scar-faced athlete stopped, saying:

"The time is up. Are you satisfied?"

"More than satisfied in this line. You are the quickest man I ever saw. Your foot-work is something marvelous."

Was that strange contortion of the scarred face a smile caused by Roland Packard's words?

"You say you can fence?" Packard went on. "Merriwell is the champion here since he defeated Defarge."

"Defarge was the champion before?"

"So called."

"But Merriwell has a thrust of his own that I am unable to avoid," Defarge confessed. "I have practised it since till I am sure I can make the lead quite as well as Merriwell himself."

"Try it on me," invited the stranger. "Have you a suit I can get into? I see you have a set of foils, masks, and protectors."

Defarge had several suits. He brought two of them out, and ten minutes later the two young men were prepared for a fencing-bout, while Packard had retired to a corner, where he sat on a chair and watched.

"On guard," said Hawkins.

They were ready.

"Salute."

They did so.

"Engage."

Clash! They were at it.

"Do your best," urged the strange youth. "Press me as hard as you like. Give me Frank Merriwell's pet thrust when you get—ah!"

Defarge had shortened his guard like a flash, dropped till the fingers of his left hand rested lightly on the floor, with his body straightened out, thrusting then with a movement that seemed too swift to avoid.

Hawkins parried with a circular movement of his wrist, moving just one foot to one side as he did so, and the thrust was avoided.

"By heavens!" cried Defarge, as he came up with a spring. "He caught me with that every time."

"And you came near catching me," confessed Hawkins. "To tell the truth, if you had not warned me in advance of a peculiar movement, I believe I should have been caught."

"See if you are as lucky next time."

They were at it again, and Defarge improved the very first opportunity to try that thrust again. But his success was no greater than before, his opponent seeming to escape with ease.

Then Hawkins showed that he could play with Defarge, counting on the French youth almost at will.

With an exclamation of rage, Bertrand flung down his foil at last.

"It makes me too mad to fence!" he snarled. "Here I've spent years at it, and I find myself like a baby in your hands!"

"And you gave Merriwell something of a go, if I have been informed correctly," said Packard.

"I kept him busy," declared Defarge.

"I'm more than satisfied," asserted the medical student. "Hawkins is the most wonderful athlete alive, and I'll bank on it! He can defeat Merriwell at anything!"

"I thought you would come to that conclusion," said the French youth. "Will you try to help carry out the plan I proposed?"

"Sure thing," nodded Packard. "You may count on me! At last I believe I shall live to see the day when Merriwell's colors will be lowered in the dust! It will be the happiest day of my life!"

CHAPTER XXV.

MORGAN'S WARNING.

Frank Merriwell was busy writing in his room. It was the night following the incidents just related, and the hour was late. So intent was he upon his work that he did not hear the first knock on his door. After a time the knock was repeated.

Merry gathered up the scattered pages of manuscript before crossing the room and opening the door.

Dade Morgan stood outside.

"Hello, Morgan!" exclaimed Frank, when he saw who was there. "Will you come in?"

"Yes," said Morgan, "if you do not object. I wish to have a little talk with you. Did I disturb you at your studies?"

"No; I have completed studying for to-night."

"Writing letters?"

"No. I was writing a——" Frank checked himself. "I was writing for my own present amusement," he declared.

"Queer occupation," commented Morgan, with a deep look at Merry. "Fellow seldom writes for amusement. But you are different from most fellows."

"Thank you," said Merry. "I think I may return the compliment. Take a chair."

He closed the door, and Morgan accepted the invitation.

"I believe this is the first time I have ever visited you in your room, Mr. Merriwell," said Dade.

"I believe so."

Morgan was pale. His training had seemed to rob him of color, if anything. He glanced at Frank, and then veiled his eyes with those dark, silky lashes. Only for a moment, however, for he looked up again with an expression of open honesty.

"Merriwell," he said, "I know you have good reason to hate me. My greatest wonder is that you permitted me to remain in college."

Frank wondered what Morgan was driving at.

"Do you wish to talk about that?" he asked quietly. "I fancied it might be unpleasant to you."

"It is; but of late I have been seized by a growing desire to set myself right in your eyes. I doubt if we can ever become friends, but I do not want you to continue to think me a dirty dog. Oh, I know you must have thought that about me in the past!"

"I have," admitted Merry, with perfect candor. "I had a right to think so."

"Admitted; but not of late—not since——"

"You refer to Santenel?"

"Yes; not since his death. I gave you a promise then, and I have kept it."

"I believe you have."

"I have wondered if you quite believed me when I told you of the power Santenel held over me. He was

my guardian, and he brought me up to hate you, Frank Merriwell. He led me to believe that your father did him the greatest wrong one man could do another, and that you were the worthy son of such a father. Before I ever saw you I was led to hate you with all my heart, and a Morgan hates intensely when he hates at all."

"I believe you."

"He trained me, as far as he could, to meet you in any manner, and it was his fondest hope that I might accomplish your overthrow by fair means or foul. He taught me that, in this case, foul means would be quite as honorable as fair. I came to believe it, for I looked on you as one who would hesitate at nothing to gain your ends. It took a long time for me to realize that I had been falsely instructed. When I had learned that, I had begun to hate you because I could not get the best of you. Nothing galls a Morgan worse than defeat, and you had left the bitter taste of defeat in my mouth many times."

Frank was wondering what the fellow could be leading toward.

"The death of my uncle left me utterly in your power," Morgan continued, looking at Merry from beneath those dark lashes, something like a faint, sad smile coming to his face. "I have the tattered remnants of his fortune left me, which will be enough to carry me through college. I was forced to beg for mercy, and you agreed to withhold your hand for a time. Since then there has been a truce between us.

I hope that truce may never be broken. But I know you have a particular friend who hates me like poison, and who has tried to hurt me in your eyes. I mean Hodge. He has told you that I am still at work against you. I do not think you have accepted his statements, for I was permitted to remain on the ball-team."

"Which was in need of just such a man as you are," said Frank.

"Thank you. It is kind of you to say that. I don't know how you induced Hodge to catch my pitching, but you did that. And now I am anxious to show that I appreciate what you have done. I think I have detected a plot against you, and I have come to put you on the scent."

"More plots?" exclaimed Merry, with an air of weariness. "Morgan, I had hoped plotting against me was at an end while I remained at Yale."

"I fear you hoped in vain. You are going to give a supper to your friends to-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have discovered enough to know that the plot is going to be put into operation at that time."

"What's the game?"

"Just what it is I cannot tell. I am not given to listening at keyholes, Merriwell; but having scented this thing last night, I did a little listening. I could not get at the bottom of the whole matter, but what I heard told me there was something wrong."

"Who owned the door, Morgan?"

"Defarge."

"No!"

Frank looked surprised.

"It's true."

"But he—why, he can't do anything!"

"He may not try, but the plot was laid in his room. I watched afterward, and saw two men leave that room."

"Who were they?"

"One was one of the Packards."

"Roland?"

"I presume so; but I can't tell them apart."

"It must have been Roland; Oliver would not be up to such work. Roland is an old enemy of mine."

"Then I suppose it was Roland."

"And the other—who was he?"

"I do not know."

"Didn't you see his face?"

"Yes; I got a fair look at it under a street-lamp. It startled me, for it was the most hideous face I have ever seen. It looks as if all the flesh had been burned off it at some time."

"Then he was not a Yale man?"

"No."

"Well, I'd like to know what sort of nasty work Defarge and Packard are planning. Defarge! Why, the fellow is sitting over a slumbering volcano! I have told him what would happen. But he cannot take an active part against me if he wishes."

"I don't know what he is doing," said Dade; "but I'm certain that a plot to injure you was concocted in that room last night. More than that, I am certain the blow will be struck at your banquet to-morrow evening. I came here to warn you, so that you may be ready."

"Thank you, Morgan," said Frank; "I appreciate it."

Dade rose to go, but seemed to hesitate.

"If I ever am able to do anything more"—he spoke a trifle huskily—"you may be sure I shall do it. I'm going to try to even up for the past."

Then he stopped, turned away, turned back, faltered, held out his hand.

"Will you take it, Merriwell?" he asked, flushing painfully.

Frank grasped it instantly.

"I'm willing to let the past die with Santenel," he earnestly declared.

"So am I!" said Dade sincerely. "I shall never try to resurrect it, you may be sure. Good night, Mr. Merriwell."

"Good night, Morgan."

Frank opened the door, and Morgan passed out. He came near running into Hodge, who was coming in. Bart stood still and looked at Dade, who stepped aside and passed on, without a word.

There was a strange look on the face of Bart Hodge when he entered Merriwell's room.

Frank closed the door, and Bart walked over and stood with his back to the open fireplace.

Merry had one of the handsomest rooms in Vanderbilt, but the beauty of the place was nothing to Bart then. He stood with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, a scowl on his dark face, staring down at the Persian rug beneath his feet.

Merry knew something was the matter with Hodge, and he divined what that something must be.

"You're up late to-night, old man," said Frank. "And you look tired. You should be in bed. You know how we have had the law laid down to us. Yale must win in all directions this spring. It is our last with her, and we must wind up and sever our connections in a blaze of glory. Sit down, Bart; you look tired."

"I'm not," Hodge growled.

"Something is the matter?"

"Perhaps so."

"What?"

"You ought to know."

Frank did know, but he pretended that he did not understand.

"Is it anything about the nine?"

"Look here, Merriwell," said Hodge sharply, lifting his eyes and looking straight at Frank, "has it come to taking Morgan into the circle? You know what that man is. I do not deny that he is a rather clever athlete, or that he can play ball; but you cannot tame a snake enough to make it anything but a snake."

“Even a snake may have its fangs drawn.”

“But the disposition to coil and strike remains in the snake. Morgan has the eyes of a snake. Haven't you ever seen them glitter? He knows when that snaky look gets into his eyes, and he hides it with his drooping eyelashes. He can smile, but a man may smile and smile, and be a villain still. I told myself some time ago that I'd never mention Morgan's name to you like this again; but, by the eternal skies! when I find him coming from your room at an hour close on to midnight, it is too much for me! I have to open my mouth.”

Bart was almost shaking with the intensity of his feelings. Without permitting Frank to speak, he went on:

“I have tried to conquer my hatred for that fellow for your sake, Frank; I have even brought myself to catch his pitching, which I once swore I'd never do. When I hate a man I hate him for all time. Don't speak of Badger! I know I disliked him, but, somehow, I never hated him in the way I hate Morgan. My hatred for Morgan is all through me—it is in every part of me. I can never make myself feel any other way toward him. I did bring myself to use Badger decently, though I must confess that I know I can never really like him. But he is as much different from Morgan as day is from night. Badger is something like me. Perhaps that was why I disliked him so. I haven't any use for a fellow like me. I've

wondered many times why you should have any use for such a chap."

"Hodge!"

"Oh, I know—I know, Frank! I appreciate it! I was a rascal when we first met, but I was not a natural-born snake like Morgan! I had become degraded through self-indulgence and associating with bad companions. My mother——"

"Is one of the sweetest women in the world, God bless her!" broke in Frank.

Bart was touched, but he went on:

"She tried to bring me up right, Merriwell. It was not her fault that I came so near going to the dogs. She loves you, Merry, because you have been my true friend. I have stuck by you through thick and thin, and——"

"Bart, you have been my truest friend!" exclaimed Frank sincerely, advancing and placing his hands on the shoulders of the frowning, excited youth. "I have understood you when others have not, and I knew the full depths of your friendship."

Hodge choked a little, but went on with forced calmness:

"If that is true, are you ready to sacrifice me now, Merriwell? I solemnly swear to you that I must step out of the circle of your friends when Morgan steps in. And I have heard it rumored that the fellow will be taken into your flock directly."

"You believed the rumor?"

"Well, I did not until—until just now. What am I

to think when I find him coming from your room at this hour, Merriwell? What can I think?"

"So that was all the trouble. Bart, Morgan told me here to my face that he doubted if we could ever become friends. He has no desire to be taken into the flock."

"Trickery! Deception! He is full of it! He knows that is the best way to get in! If he showed eagerness to be admitted, he knows you might turn him down."

"I do not think so. At any rate, Bart, I have no thought of taking him into the circle."

"Frank!"

"That is true, Bart."

"And he will not be invited to your supper?"

"No."

"I feared he might be there. I could not sit at the same board with him. But didn't he come here to say something about that?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"He claimed that he came to warn me."

"Of what?"

"A fresh plot against me."

"Morgan warning you of a plot! The heavens will fall next!"

"He thinks he has scented a plot to do something at the dinner, but he does not know what that something is."

"Little good the warning will do you!"

"But I believe I'll be able to find out all about it,

and I'm glad you have dropped in just now. I want you to go with me to the room of Defarge."

"Another snake!"

"I believe you have made no mistake as far as Defarge is concerned."

"Is he in the plot?"

"According to Morgan, the plot was concocted in the room of Defarge, who knows all about it."

"But I thought you had that fellow in such shape that he could not make a move against you?"

"He can make no direct move himself, but he may take part in a plot against me."

"Who else is in it?"

"Packard."

"Roland?"

"Of course. Oliver is all right."

"Who else?"

"A man with a scarred face. Morgan did not know him, but he said he obtained a fair look at his face, and it was horribly disfigured."

"I have seen that man!" exclaimed Hodge. "He has visited Defarge more than once. But what can any one of those three do? Not one of them will be present at the supper."

"That question is one I wish to answer to my own satisfaction. You remember that I caused Defarge to give me a key to his door. It is here."

Frank displayed the key, and Bart nodded.

"Defarge does not know he gave me this key," said Merry. "It will admit us to his room to-night. If

he is asleep, I shall place him under the spell and question him without waking him at all. He will never know we have been there, and we'll learn the full extent of the plot. Then we'll be prepared to meet it, and somebody will receive a surprise."

The face of Bart Hodge was flushed with excitement.

"Merriwell," he cried, "you are a wonder! If you can make one of the plotters tell you all about the plot, without knowing he has told it, it will be something marvelous! I do not believe such a thing can be done."

Frank smiled.

"Are you ready to accompany me to the room of Defarge?" he asked.

"Sure thing!"

"Then I will convince you. Come on."

They went out, and Merry closed and locked the door of his room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRANK TURNS THE TABLES.

Frank Merriwell's "athletic spread" at the New Haven House was a great success. Probably never before had there been given such a supper in the "College City," for meat or fish in any form was not served. The hearty food consisted of eggs and nuts prepared in the most tempting manner, so that it was sometimes impossible to tell what a dish consisted of before tasting it.

Fruits of all sorts abounded, there being great heaps of bananas, grapes, oranges, and things tempting to the eye as well as the palate. There were no pies, cakes, nor pastry of any sort on the table. Fresh strawberries in abundance were supplied. Whole wheat bread, corn bread, and rye bread might be had to any amount. The liquid refreshments consisted of pure water, milk, or "coffee" made from browned barley. In fact, it was a "vegetarian" banquet, but never had any one present relished a feast more than they did that one.

"So help me," said Jack Ready blandly, "I never supposed vegetarian cranks had so many good, hearty things to live on. I always imagined them as blue-nosed, pinched, and nearly starved to death. A man couldn't starve on this variety of stuff if he tried.

Anyhow, if he could, I'd be willing to starve on it a while."

"Mum-mum-me, too, b'gosh," agreed Joe Gamp. "I ain't never had such a sus-sus-slappin' good time eatin' sence I came down here to cuc-cuc-college."

"Out on a ranch," said Berlin Carson, "we can't get all these things to eat, and we have to live on beef."

"I believe," put in Greg Carker solemnly, "that along with the coming social revolution will come a revolution in eating."

"Oh, don't you hear the earthquakes?" shouted a dozen fellows, in chorus, and Carker's jaws came together with a snap.

"That's too bad!" said Jim Hooker sympathetically. "A fellow ought to have a right to air his views occasionally."

"But not to air his earthquake at a social function like this," said Ready. "I have no use for earthquakes at a dinner. Give me grub, instead!"

"Good Lord!" muttered Browning to his nearest neighbor on the right, who happened to be Hock Mason. "If I eat any more, I shall explode, and still this stuff don't seem to give me that stuffed feeling I get when I fill up on roast beef, or meat of any kind."

"That's right, sah," nodded the youth from South Carolina. "This supper has been a revelation to me, for I never knew before how many good things there were outside meat diet."

"If a fellow could lose flesh on such feed, it might be a good thing for me," put in Ralph Bingham.

"Where are the smokes to follow it?" inquired Bert Dashleigh, looking round. "A banquet is never complete without cigars and cigarettes to follow, while the speeches are being made."

"Gentlemen," said Frank, "I think we will dispense with tobacco to-night, just as we have dispensed with its twin poison, alcohol. If we do so, I think none of us will feel the worse, and to-morrow we'll all feel better."

"But I need a smoke to help me digest my food," murmured Dashleigh.

"That is where you make a great error," declared Frank smilingly. "Smoking does not help you digest your food. The soothing influence of the narcotic on your nerves gives you the impression that it has helped you, but it is a false impression, and it has done harm instead of good. You all know I am not a crank, for I do not go round prating about my beliefs to everybody I meet and annoying them. I know better, for I realize that such a course will work more harm than good. Still, when the right opportunity comes, I am never afraid to speak out and defend my convictions."

"Do you believe a strict vegetarian diet is more beneficial than a meat diet?" asked Mat Mullen.

"I believe we are prone to eat too much meat in these days," Frank unhesitatingly replied. "Vegetarians put up a strong argument, and they often show that abstainers from meat have greater endurance than meat-eaters. Still, I am not prepared to say that man should abstain entirely from meat-eating. He has

eaten meat since the days when primeval man hunted the reindeer with his stone spear and flint-headed arrows. Such being the case, even though nature may not have intended that he should eat meat, man has become so accustomed to a meat diet that an abrupt change to vegetarianism might not prove entirely beneficial."

"Those are words of wisdom," said the youth with a hideously scarred face, who, with Roland Packard at his side, sat at a distance from Frank.

This was the first time the stranger had seemed to address Merry directly. Bart Hodge looked at Frank, and he saw a singular smile play about the corners of Merry's mouth.

"Friends," said Merry, rising, "my original plan was to follow this feast with music and song, but certain things caused me to change my plans. We have with us to-night a wonderful athlete, who has come here for the sole purpose of pitting himself against me and bringing about my downfall."

Roland Packard gave a gasp of astonishment, while the scar-faced stranger straightened up rigidly, his eyes fastened on the cool, handsome youth who was speaking.

"The plan was," Merry went on, "to take me by surprise, to challenge me across this table, to force me into tests of strength and skill, and to show before this assembled party of my select friends that I am in many ways an impostor—that I am not the athlete I pretend to be. Now, gentlemen, I have never made

any false pretensions. I do not go about displaying my ability for the sake of winning applause. I never lift heavy weights in the presence of great crowds. In fact, as far as possible, I shun all dime-museum tricks. But I have been examined to-day by an expert, who has pronounced me in perfect form, and, therefore, I shall meet this wonderful athlete in the presence of you all, if he wishes to force the test. I have made full preparations for such a meeting, and I, like the athlete to whom I refer, have not eaten heartily at this meal. Gentlemen, I think you will not need to leave your seats to witness this little affair."

Merry touched a bell, and at the signal a pair of folding doors at one side of the room rolled back, showing another room, which had been cleared of furniture. On the floor of that room a huge mat was spread. Against the farther wall hung a pair of foils, masks, and a set of boxing-gloves.

There was a buzz of excitement around the table. Truly, this was a sensation.

"Who the dickens is the great athlete?" gasped Dick Starbright, staring round.

"Is it a joke?" questioned Bert Dashleigh.

"Bet he has a lot of chorus-girls trip into that room and dance for us!" grunted Browning.

"Behold!" said Jack Ready. "No man knoweth the things Frank Merriwell may do! And I'll guarantee he'll do any old athlete that bucks up against him. He's the real stuff. Trot out your blooming athlete!"

Frank now stepped from the table.

"In a room just off the one adjoining," he said, "are suits for wrestling, fencing, or boxing. It will not take us long to dress to carry out the remainder of this program. Mr. Hawkins, are you ready, sir?"

His eyes were fastened on the scar-faced youth.

Roland Packard, who was strangely pale, whispered in Hawkins' ear:

"Remember that you are to injure him some way, so that he will be unable to pitch any more. He has taken you by surprise, so that you cannot run him through the shoulder with your own trick rapier, but you ought to be able to twist that arm or shoulder somehow in wrestling. Don't underrate him."

"You, Roland Packard," said Frank, "may act as the second of your friend."

"Roland Packard?" exclaimed several, in surprise. "Why I thought he was Oliver!"

Brian Hawkins rose to his feet, his scarred face contorted by a strange smile, while his bright eyes glittered.

"To a certain extent, Mr. Merriwell," he said, "you have turned the tables on me; but the final result will be unaltered. How you tumbled to the game is something I cannot understand. As you have tumbled to it, I confess that I am here to defeat you. I did mean to challenge you across this table, but you got ahead of me. Do you remember me?"

"No."

"I am Brian Hawkins, and I was at Fardale with you."

“Hawkins—good Lord!”

Bart Hodge was on his feet, staring at the youth with the scarred face.

“Yes, Hawkins,” nodded the strange athlete. “You remember me, Hodge. We had some trouble at Fardale, and I believe you came out the victor; but tonight I will show you that you are no longer in my class by defeating your friend and superior. I have worked steadily to put myself in condition to accomplish this design, and the time has come.”

“Oh, say!” cried Jack Ready, “just wait till the little affair is over! I’ll bet my enormous fortune that you sneak away, with your tail between your legs, like a whipped dog! Yea, verily! So mote it be, for it’s bound to ‘mote’ so.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FENCING-BOUT.

There was a buzzing hum of excitement round that table when Merriwell and the strange athlete with the scarred face had disappeared into the dressing-room.

All had seemed to feel that something unusual was to take place at this feast, but not one of them seemed to have suspected anything like this.

Merriwell had a way of doing remarkable things, but the termination of this "athletic dinner" was an event to be long talked of at Yale.

And the fact that Roland Packard had been permitted to sit at that table was also very surprising, for Merriwell had permitted it, knowing all the time the fellow was Roland, while others had supposed him Oliver, with the exceptions of the youth with the scarred face and Bart Hodge.

But a short time elapsed before Frank and the stranger both appeared, attired in light suits fit for almost any athletic task.

Hodge and Packard were the seconds, and, for the time, Bart put aside his intense hatred for the medical student who hated Frank—that is, he put it aside enough to confer with Packard and come to an understanding about what was to take place.

It had been the intention of the plotters to make

the fencing-bout the last thing to take place between Merriwell and the stranger, and preparations had been made for the use of a special foil, from which the button could be snatched when the time came for Hawkins to puncture Frank through the right shoulder; but this discovery of the plot by Merry upset all these plans, and Packard was compelled to agree to Bart's demand that the fencing-bout should be first and the boxing-contest last, with a wrestling-match between.

The students gathered about the table moved their seats so that all could look into the adjoining room with ease.

As the principals and their respective seconds drew aside for a moment before the fencing-bout, Packard said to Hawkins in a low tone:

"It's infernally strange that Merriwell should have found out about our trap!"

"That's right," nodded Hawkins, looking searchingly at Roland. "But three persons knew of it. Two of us are here."

"Good gracious! You can't suspect that I told anything about it, man?"

"Somebody must have told."

"But I hate this fellow Merriwell. Don't think I'd let him get onto anything like that!"

"You drink too much whisky at times, Mr. Packard."

"But I have not since this plot was formed—I have not been under the influence of drink for a moment!

I swear to you that no hint of this has escaped my lips!"

"Then there was but one other way for it to reach Merriwell. Defarge has said that Merriwell had the power to force him to anything. He must have blabbed!"

"That's right!" grated Packard. "It has put us in a mighty awkward place, for it gave Merriwell the chance to turn the tables on us."

"Yes; but I shall defeat him at everything, just the same, so we will be triumphant in the end."

"I pray you do!" muttered Roland. "I shall be guyed to death if you don't."

"Don't worry. I'll soon show you that I can count on him at will in fencing; I will throw him twice out of three times when we wrestle, and I'll wind up by putting him out in the boxing-match."

"Do it!" panted Packard, "and this will be the happiest day I've seen in a year!"

"Are you ready?" called the voice of Hodge.

"We are," answered Packard.

The foils were offered for Hawkins to make his selection, which he quickly did. Then the masks were adjusted, and the two young athletes stood face to face, with Merriwell's breathless friends looking on.

"Gentlemen, salute!" sounded the clear voice of Hodge, to whom had fallen the privilege of giving the signal.

The contestants responded with a sweep of their foils.

"On guard!"

The proper positions were assumed.

"Engage!"

Click! The foils touched and slid along each other lightly.

Then followed such a display of light-footedness, agility, and skill as those present had never before witnessed. In a very few seconds it became evident to all that the stranger with the scarred face was wonderfully clever, but, with all his cleverness, he failed in his first four attempts to count on Merriwell. A backward leap, a quick side-step, or a simple turn of the wrist sufficed to enable Frank to escape in each instance.

But in the meantime Merry had made two attempts, and each had been balked with equal ease.

"Ye gods!" breathed Jack Ready. "Here is where we get the real article, and no discount!"

Then, of a sudden, to the astonishment of every spectator, the stranger tried Frank Merriwell's own particular and peculiar thrust. With shortened guard, he dropped like a flash, his body straightening out and the fingers of his left hand resting on the floor, while his foil flashed straight out in a long thrust.

It counted!

The first point had been made by Hawkins.

It was with difficulty that Bart Hodge choked back an expression of rage and dismay.

Packard smiled. So did Frank Merriwell! The

scarred face of the strange youth remained hideously expressionless.

They were at it again instantly, but both seemed more on the alert, more skilful, more determined.

Frank turned two lightning thrusts, and with the second one he countered so swiftly that the eye could hardly follow his movement.

And he counted fairly!

"Honors are even," said the stranger. "Now look out for yourself."

He became a perfect whirlwind. Round and round Frank he worked, striving to find an opening, but obtaining none, for all of his great skill. The work of Merriwell was quite as amazing as that of Hawkins.

Then came the moment when Hawkins dropped to the floor again and made that thrust.

Merriwell had seemed waiting for that very moment. With a long leap to the left he was out of the way. The moment his feet touched the floor he flung himself forward. Hawkins was recovering with an upward and backward spring as Merriwell dropped, using the same thrust, and counted beautifully.

Frank's friends could not keep still, and there was a volley of hand-clapping.

"Try Merry's tricks, will you?" muttered Hodge, his eyes glittering. "Well, he'll show you how he meets his own style of fighting. How do you like it?"

These words were not intended for the ears of Hawkins, but Packard heard them and cursed inwardly.

Merriwell now had the advantage, and that seemed to anger the stranger somewhat. The youth with the scarred face became fiercer than ever in his assaults, and Frank's skill in escaping every form of attack did not serve to soothe his wounded vanity.

Was it possible that Merriwell was his equal with the foils? The thought that this might be true enraged Hawkins, who exposed himself somewhat in his next reckless attempt to push Frank.

Merriwell had been waiting for the time when his antagonist should become impatient and anxious. In fact, in certain ways he had been seeking to provoke Hawkins somewhat. Now he took advantage of the fellow's carelessness, and, almost before the youth with the scarred face realized it, Frank had counted on him three times in succession.

Roland Packard was pale and angry. He had reckoned on a great triumph, but everything was going against his man.

Hodge was beginning to look intensely satisfied, and Jack Ready chirped up cheerfully:

"I'm afraid Mr. Hawkins has bitten off more than he can masticate. Merriwell is simply making a holy show of the gentleman."

Hawkins heard, and his heart seethed with bitter disappointment. Was it for this he had worked all these years? He had fancied himself perfected in the arts required to defeat Merriwell, but he found himself vulnerable where he had believed he was the strongest. For a moment he was seized with a fear that Merri-

well might defeat him, and in that moment his downfall came. It seemed that Frank read his thoughts, for he seized the occasion to make such an attack on Hawkins that the youth with the scarred face was placed entirely on the defensive.

In vain Hawkins tried to hold his own. Merriwell had several original and peculiar tricks, all of which were new to Hawkins and proved effective. Had they been tried by an ordinary fencer, they might have failed, but Merriwell made them count.

The time of the bout passed swiftly, but Hawkins was kept on the defensive from the turning-point to the end. When the end came, Merriwell had scored three times the number of points of Hawkins, and was easily the victor.

Hawkins threw down his foil.

"This is merely the beginning," he said, though there was a trace of bitter disappointment in his voice and manner. "I shall defeat you, Merriwell, in the next two matches. I have no doubt of it."

"La, la!" said Jack Ready. "How nice a fellow must feel when he owns such a large stock of conceit! But let's possess our souls in patience, and see how he will feel when the little circus is over."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HAWKINS CRIES "ENOUGH."

If possible, Roland Packard was more disappointed in the result of the fencing-bout than was Brian Hawkins. At least, the youth of the scarred face was able to better repress and hide his feelings. Packard's face was white and drawn, lines of anger and disappointment marking it plainly.

"It's always the way!" he thought. "Now I know Satan helps that fellow Merriwell!"

Hodge came forward, speaking to Packard.

"Mr. Merriwell will permit you to name the style of wrestling," he said.

"Allow us a few moments," bowed Packard, attempting to be coolly polite.

"Certainly," said Hodge, with something like a grim smile playing about his mouth.

Packard stepped over to Hawkins, who was standing with folded arms at one side of the mat. After a brief conference between them, Packard came back to Bart, observing:

"Mr. Hawkins says he prefers to wrestle catch-as-catch-can, the winner to be the one who throws his antagonist twice out of three times. Is that satisfactory?"

"Anything is satisfactory to Mr. Merriwell," de-

clared Bart, who well knew that Frank was particularly skilful at that style of wrestling, being successful in getting an advantageous hold on his opponent, or having a way of turning what seemed weak holds to his advantage.

If Frank was pleased, he made no display of it, and two minutes later the antagonists were crouching, facing each other at opposite sides of the mat. Then they began to work swiftly round, each one moving to the right, after the style of boxers, both watching for an opening.

The spectators scarcely breathed. It was a picture worthy of the brush of an artist. Those youthful athletes were like crouching panthers, their eyes shining, their muscles taut, their nerves on edge.

Merriwell's jaw seemed square and firmer than usual; his mouth was firmly closed and his lips pressed together; his nostrils were distended, and his look before the struggle began was that of the determined conqueror.

The look on the scarred face of Merriwell's antagonist cannot be described. It was savage and terrible enough to daunt a timid person.

Of a sudden, with one great spring at each other, they closed.

"Fair hold and no advantage!" cried Jack Ready, as he saw they had closed evenly, chest to chest, each man having his chin over his opponent's right shoulder, while there was no advantage of either one having a low hold with both arms.

Such a hold as this is seldom obtained in the catch-as-catch-can style of wrestling, and it seemed to indicate that both men were alert and skilful, neither having permitted the other the slightest advantage.

Then came the furious and skilful struggle which set the heart of every witness to thumping madly. The play of their magnificent muscles could be seen beneath their athletic suits. So swift were some of the movements of the men that the spectators did not catch the significance of every attempt made. From one end of the mat to the other they went, straining, twisting, writhing. And then——

"There goes Merriwell!"

Hawkins had succeeded at last in back-heeling Frank, who went down. The athlete of the scarred face flung his full weight onto Merry, thinking to crush him to the floor, for the shoulders of the loser must strike the floor flatly and fairly.

How did it happen? When it was all over there was not a man among the witnesses who could tell just how Merriwell did it, but, somehow, as he was falling, he turned aside with a twisting movement, and both men struck on their sides.

Their holds had been broken, but, like a flash, Hawkins' arms closed round Merry, whom he attempted to turn upon his back.

The strange athlete had the best hold, but Frank resisted with all his strength. However, he could not keep Hawkins from turning him.

Then Merriwell's body made a "bridge." That is,

his heels were on the floor, and also the back of his head, but from his heels to his head not a part of his body touched the mat. Hawkins would not be the victor till he had forced Merry's shoulders down upon the mat.

Still holding Frank in that position with a "lock-hold," the youth of the scarred face lifted his own body and flung its full weight upon Merry's chest.

"Ah!" cried the witnesses.

But not a particle did Merry's body give! It seemed rigid as a bent hoop of so much iron!

Again Hawkins lifted himself and flung himself down upon that arched chest, but with a like result.

Four times did Hawkins repeat this desperate attempt to crush the shoulders of the Yale man to the mat, and still there was not a sign that he had made any impression on that rigid form.

But, in his desperation, Hawkins relaxed his vigilance somewhat. There was a sudden writhing, turning movement. Hawkins' hold was broken, and Merry had turned and partly risen, getting a grip on his opponent.

Frank's movements were swift and sure, and he literally flung Hawkins across his back, the heels of the scar-faced youth seeming to whistle through the air overhead and coming down with a terrible thump upon the floor.

The shock was so great that Hawkins had no time to recover and "bridge" before Merry had driven his shoulders flat on the mat.

A great shout went up, for Merriwell had thus snatched victory from defeat and won the first fall.

"La, la!" said Jack Ready, as the sound subsided. "Wasn't it just perfectly lovely?"

Frank rose to his feet, and Hawkins got up slowly. Both were breathing heavily, for the exertion had been terrific.

Frank showed no elation as he walked over to his side of the mat, but, despite his efforts to appear otherwise, Hawkins could not conceal his bitter disappointment.

Roland Packard tried to speak to the youth of the scarred face, but his lips were dry and parched, and no words came at his command.

"You did it!" said Hodge, in a low tone, looking into Merry's flushed and dripping face.

"Yes; but he's the worst customer I ever tackled," confessed Frank. "I thought he had me once."

"I, too, was afraid he had you," acknowledged Hodge. "He is a great wrestler. And to think that he is Brian Hawkins, of Fardale!"

"He has wonderful strength and skill," said Frank. "His muscles feel like iron as they strain and play."

"Don't let him throw you once!" begged Bart. "If you down him the next time, that settles the wrestling-match."

After a few minutes of rest the wrestlers faced each other once more. Fire seemed burning deep in the eyes of the scar-faced youth. Round and round they circled, ready, crouching, watching.

Then they closed! But Merriwell was the swifter, catching the other's right wrist with his left hand and thrusting his right hand under Hawkins' left arm, getting a hold on his neck.

"The half-nelson!" cried several of the witnesses.

It was, in truth, the famous hold of Olsen, the great wrestler, and Hawkins was in a dangerous position.

Merriwell quickly released the fellow's right wrist, grasped him round the waist, following with the Cornish "heave," which landed the scar-faced athlete on his back in a twinkling.

And Merriwell came down upon his chest with force enough to drive the fellow's shoulders hardly and firmly down upon the mat.

Frank had not been thrown at all, and he had won two throws in succession, which made him the victor in the wrestling-match.

Roland Packard would have given almost any amount of money had he been somewhere else just then. The triumphant shouts of the excited and delighted witnesses were most hateful in his ears.

This was not what Roland had come there to witness, and it was something he had not anticipated seeing. His mouth tasted bitter, and everything seemed to swim around him. He actually gasped for air.

Hawkins got up slowly, as if he could not quite realize that the wrestling-match was over and he had been defeated. He looked at Merriwell in a strange, dazed manner.

"How did he do it?" were the words he whispered to himself. "Is this a dream?"

But it was stern reality. The hour of triumph for which Hawkins had toiled many years in building up his body was swiftly turning to an hour of galling defeat.

Hawkins walked over to his side of the mat, his appearance being that of a man whose every hope is shattered.

"He's defeated at everything!" muttered Packard, when he saw that look of dejection. "For Heaven's sake, brace up! Don't let his gang see you looking like this!"

"Wasted years!" muttered Hawkins thickly. "I can never conquer him unless I do now, for I have reached the highest point attainable."

"Then go in and knock his head off in the boxing-match!" panted the medical student. "That will be sufficient to give you satisfaction. If you defeat him at anything, his friends will die with shame, and it will break his heart."

"A heart like his is not easily broken. I'll guarantee that he can take defeat without a murmur."

"Well, test him—see if he can! You are not done up yet! He was lucky in getting that half-nelson on you. It was pure luck, and nothing else."

"You are right, and yet—I should not have let him get it! I was trying for the same hold on him."

"That was how you happened to be thrown off your guard. You were thinking of the hold you wanted

more than of preventing him from getting the one he was after."

"That's true."

"If you were to wrestle with him again, you could defeat him. If you beat him at one of the three contests, you will have an opportunity to challenge him for another trial at everything. Your only hope now is to do him up in the boxing-match."

Packard's words gave Hawkins hope, and the fellow swiftly braced up.

After a short rest, preparations were made for the final encounter. Hawkins was permitted to select his gloves. By mutual understanding, it was decided that the rules governing amateur glove-contests should be obeyed, and there should be none of the French method of "boxing with the feet."

They advanced and stood face to face. Their hands touched, and then they were on guard, sparring for an opening.

Again Hawkins was at his best, for he realized that his only hope for another trial with Frank lay in the success of this encounter.

Round to the right both men worked, sparring gently. Then they closed a little, and the work became swifter and more exciting. Merry feinted and sought an opening, but Hawkins guarded cleverly. Then the scar-faced youth came in like a flash, making a deceptive move with his right and getting in a body-blow with his left. He danced away before Frank

could counter, and the first point belonged to Hawkins.

Packard breathed again. But his satisfaction was short, for Merry followed Hawkins closely, giving him no time to recover. The work became swifter and more savage, and Hawkins struck, reaching Frank's cheek lightly.

That blow was disastrous to the scar-faced youth, however, for Merriwell countered with such terrible force that Hawkins was knocked prostrate on the mat.

"First down for Merriwell!" laughed Jack Ready. "Now we are getting right down to business!"

"You've reached him twice to his once, Hawkins!" cried Packard, his excitement making it impossible for him to keep still. "That shows you can do the trick. Up and at him!"

Already Hawkins was up, and quickly he went at Frank. Then the spectators saw some work that thrilled them. The play of fists was astonishingly swift, while those two young athletes leaped and danced about each other. Now they closed in, now one retreated, now the other fell back; but never was there a moment of rest until one of them found the opening he sought and again a heavy blow was struck.

Again it was Hawkins who dropped, but he came up like a flash, his scarred face contorted into an almost fiendish expression. The rage of the fighter was on him now, and he longed to tear Merriwell into strips.

"My, my!" said Jack Ready. "This is perfectly awful!"

But he was hugging himself and grinning with a look of intense delight.

"On, on!" panted Packard. "At him again, Hawkins! He can't stand before that long!"

But Frank Merriwell remained as calm as ever, though he was able to move with the swiftness of a flash of light. His powerful arms gave play to his gloved hands, which seemed everywhere in the way of his opponent.

Hawkins was determined, and he forced the fighting. He wondered if he could not wear Merriwell out, but he was wearing himself out. He fancied that his own strength was greater than that of Merriwell, but the demands he was making on it were too great.

Frank knew the time must come when Hawkins would slacken that swift pace, and he was waiting for that time. With everything else he had learned, the youth had not learned to husband his strength and make the very most of it in such an encounter as this.

Merriwell possessed a clear brain and good judgment under all circumstances, and a finely developed and well-balanced mind is a requisite of him who would be successful as an athlete, the same as of the man who would succeed at all things. The athlete who possesses the splendid body and the undeveloped mind is just as much deformed as the hunchback who has a splendid education.

All his life Merriwell had used his brains in what-

ever he undertook. This, to a large extent, was the secret of his phenomenal success. So, now that he was battling with this man who had vowed to defeat him, and who had spent years training for that purpose, Frank used his brain and led the other to exhaust himself. When Hawkins showed a sign of slacking up, Frank pretended to give an opening that lured him on again and kept him straining for victory.

At last the time came when Merry believed Hawkins had reached the limit and was weakening. Then, when the man tried to rest, Frank pressed him in turn, giving him no chance.

Now Merriwell became a perfect whirlwind. He was on all sides of Hawkins, who could only remain on the defensive. And at length the guard of the scar-faced youth was beaten down, and Merry stretched him for the third time upon the floor.

"It is becoming still more awful!" gasped Jack Ready, grinning like a monkey.

Hawkins sprang up, but barely was he on his feet when Frank knocked him flat again.

Five times was this repeated, Merriwell giving the other no chance to recover and get ready for defense.

With the final fall, Hawkins lay panting on the mat. After a moment he sat up slowly, all the confidence and conceit having departed from him.

"It's no use," he said, tearing off the gloves and flinging them aside. "I give up!"

Instantly Frank had flung off his gloves and offered

Hawkins his hand. That hand was taken, and Merry assisted the other to his feet, saying:

"You gave me a stiff go at everything, old man! You are a wonder, and that's all right! One time I thought——"

"Never mind what you thought," said Hawkins. "I confess now that you are my superior. I may as well own up honestly, for everybody here would know it, whether I said so or not."

"But you are a good one, Hawkie, old fel!" chirped Jack Ready. "Still, you were up against the real thing. Fellows, three yoops for Frank Merriwell!"

"Stop!" cried Merry quickly. "You are all my friends here, and I would not have you rejoice openly over the defeat of another. I propose three cheers for Brian Hawkins."

The cheers were given at once and most heartily.

"As for Roland Packard," said Merry, looking round. "He——"

But Packard had found an opportunity to slip away without being observed, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON NEUTRAL GROUND.

The sensational climax of Merriwell's dinner was the talk of the college for many days, and it seemed now that Frank's enemies must admit that they had met their Waterloo.

Roland Packard was bitter in his resentment toward Defarge for having lured him into a plot that had been so completely turned against him.

Hawkins, deeply humiliated by his defeat and the generous manner in which Frank had treated him, had disappeared promptly from New Haven, leaving the two chief conspirators to bear the burden of their signal failure.

But Frank was not vindictive, and, satisfied with the result as it had worked out, he discouraged any further reference to the matter among his friends. Merriwell was ever generous to a defeated enemy, and it was particularly gratifying to him to think that, of the long list of men who had arrayed themselves against him, because of a spirit of jealousy, so few now remained his foes. It was with this warm feeling in his heart that he looked now with a smile of pleasure at the gathering of his friends in his room.

Frank Merriwell's room was the neutral ground on which—or in which—all classes and conditions of

Yale men met. The air of that room, perhaps one of the finest rooms in splendid Vanderbilt, was thoroughly democratic. There the man with money, or with ancestry, cut no better figure than any other man, unless he had done something. To be a notable in Merriwell's room, the student must have accomplished something worthy of his efforts. Of course, the "good fellow" was not barred, but he could not hope to be a central figure merely because he was a good fellow.

The Merriwell spirit was "a do-something spirit," and it was strangely infectious, for all who associated with him regularly soon acquired the habit of doing things. Even big, lazy Browning awoke at times and astonished everybody by the accomplishment of some marvel. Hodge was a perfect engine of energy, although at times he became liable to break loose and run wild, like an untamed mustang. Jack Ready, the eccentric sophomore, was as restless and full of ginger as a young colt, or a half-grown kitten.

Berlin Carson, the Westerner, possessed all the breadth and sweep of the cattle-range and the plains, and he was fast making himself notable since coming "under Merry's wing." Hock Mason, the man from South Carolina, had once perverted his energy and been reckoned a bully, but after the days of his reformation he used his energy in the right direction, and accomplished things far more worthy than beating an enemy.

Joe Gamp, right down from New Hampshire, long, lank, awkward, hesitating in speech, had shown that

he had sterling qualities and could fill an emergency on the ball-field or in the classroom. Greg Carker, the socialistic young millionaire, whose head continually buzzed with schemes for the elevation of the masses and the leveling of the aristocracy, could forget his schemes at times, could cease to rant about "the coming earthquake," and could do things worthy of a young twentieth century Yale man.

Jim Hooker, who had been rescued from ostracism by Merriwell, and given a chance to hold his head up before all men, showed that he possessed manly qualities and would not hesitate in the face of necessity. Starbright, the young freshman giant and wonder, had been brought to the fore as Merriwell's protégé, and no man could say he had not proved himself worthy.

But only Starbright and Merriwell knew how worthy he had been as a friend, for it was the big, yellow-haired man from Andover who opened Frank's eyes to the fact that Inza Burrage had never changed in her devotion since the old days at far-off Fardale. Not only that, but Dick had caused Merry to look inward and discover that his heart, also, remained unchanged, and that Inza was dear to him as in the days of his boyhood. And then Dick stepped aside, making the greatest sacrifice of his life—all for Merry! What nobler friend could Frank have? Truly, Starbright had done something to win for himself the seat of highest honor amid that group of true-blue Merriwell men.

And then there was Dashleigh—he could do some-

thing. He could play the mandolin and sing divinely. He had been playing just now, and he lightly strummed the strings as the gathered students fell to chatting and joking.

"Dashleigh," said Jack Ready, posing with assumed grace before the freshman, "your playing is remarkable for its simplicity. Why shouldn't it be? It is perfectly characteristic of you."

"You're a critic of music, I believe!" retorted Bert scornfully.

"Why shouldn't I be?" came solemnly from the queer sophomore. "I have traveled a great deal with a band."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have a habit of wearing a band round my hat. Besides that, I have a lovely drum in my ear. Such advantages as those have given me the right to be critical in musical matters."

"I know a better critic than you who is deaf and dumb," declared the freshman.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Jack. "Deaf and dumb?"

"Yes."

"What an unspeakable affliction!"

Dashleigh started to say something, and then flourished his mandolin at Ready, as if to smite him. But the queer fellow waltzed away.

"Say, fellows!" he cried, "I was down to Traeger's, with Ned Donovan and his friends, last night, and we had a corking good time."

"By the bottles you had around you when I dropped in there last evening, I fancied you were having an uncorking good time," observed Berlin Carson.

"Now, that's not bad for a tenderfoot from the wild and woolly," nodded Jack, regarding Carson approvingly. "My boy, you are coming. Why, gentlemen, when he struck New Haven he was a walking arsenal! He carried a gun on each hip, three bowie-knives in his belt, two more in his boots, and had derringers in his sleeves. The first night at Old Lady Harrington's retreat for freshmen he went to bed with his spurs on. Just forgot to unshackle them from his boots, you know. Of course, Mrs. Harrington made a gentle kick in the morning, when she found his spur-tracks in her sheets, and I understand he had to settle for the sheets. That taught him a lesson. After that he remembered to take his spurs off his boots before rolling in. Oh, there's nothing like experience as a teacher. I have heard that he sometimes removes his boots on going to bed now."

Carson took this guying good-naturedly.

"That's all right," he said. "At least, I don't do one trick that I hear is customary with you. Fellows, why do you suppose Ready puts his pocketbook under his pillow every night when he goes to bed?"

"He cuc-cuc-can't be afraid of ru-ru-robbers," grinned Joe Gamp, "cuc-'cuc-'cause he never has enough mum-money to tut-tempt a robber who was lul-lul-looking for the price of a drink."

"Still he does put his pocketbook under his pillow,

I've heard," declared Berlin. "And for that very reason he reminds me of a thrifty business man."

"How is that?" asked Boxer.

"Why," said Carson, "he wants to feel that he has money to retire on."

Ready threw up his hands, uttered a terrible groan, and fell heavily on Bruce Browning, who was stretched on the couch. He rebounded with a springing movement, however, and leaped away in time to escape a kick from the big senior's heavy foot.

"Please have your fits elsewhere!" rumbled Bruce, with a glare at Jack, who was bowing profoundly and humbly craving pardon.

"I don't know where else I can find anything so soft to fall on," declared Ready.

"Say," smiled Bruce, "will you find a way to repress your idiocy for a short time?"

"Idiocy!" exclaimed Jack, with an expression of despair. "Did I hear aright? And only yesterday I had not been talking to him five minutes before he called me an ass."

"Why the delay?" grunted Browning.

"That reminds me of something I said the last time I attended the theater," Ready asserted. "The play was over, the orchestra was playing a lively march, all the people were moving toward the doors. I looked up, and right over one of those doors I saw the word 'exit' in large gilt letters. Then I said something real witty."

"What could it be?" murmured Dashleigh.

"I said, 'That lets me out,'" explained Jack. "Ha! ha! ha! That's what you call pure, unadulterated wit. Have a laugh with me! Ha! ha! Why, I'm budding into a second Sydney Smith, and Syd was the real thing."

"You will be nipped in the bud if you're not careful," said Frank. "Sit down, Jack, and let up for a while. You've had your mouth open long enough to thoroughly ventilate your system for an hour, at least."

"And there has been an awful escape of gas," said Carson.

"You've run your race," declared Greg Carker, with a solemn wave of his hand. "Stand aside now."

"Is the earthquake coming?" awesomely inquired Jack. "If so, I'll get out of the old thing's track in a hurry, Cark."

"Speaking about races," put in Bingham, the sophomore, "I heard a strange rumor to-day. It was to the effect that Merry has been asked by the freshmen to give them a little coaching, and has agreed to do so. I can't believe it, for it seems to me that he has his hands full without bothering with the freshmen crew. I'm sure it isn't true, is it, Merriwell?"

"Yes," said Frank quietly, "it is."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FRESHMAN COXSWAIN.

There was a moment of silence, and then Ready was heard sobbing violently, as if his heart were breaking.

"What makes you feel so bad, Jack?" asked Bingham. "Is it because we didn't get Merriwell to coach our crew?"

"Not that, not that!" asserted Jack, pressing his handkerchief to his eyes and flopping one hand in a gesture of intense sadness. "I'm so sorry for him! I love him even as I love a nice, juicy steak, and to think this terrible disappointment must be his! Alas! alas!"

"What ails you?" cried Dashleigh. "Don't get a foolish notion into your head that the sophs will beat us."

"It is written in the stars," solemnly declared Ready. "As far as that race is concerned, you'll not be in it this year."

"We'll have a walkover," put in Starbright, who had been keeping still and listening to the others, but who was aroused now. "Merry says we have the finest freshman crew since his day in the freshman boat."

"Taffy," said Jack. "But it's a poor coach that makes such talk to his men."

"He made it before he knew he was to coach us."

"Well, then it is certain that he will now find you in a very sloppy condition. There is nothing surer to spoil a freshman crew than praise. Freshmen fall easy subjects to that terrible disease known as the swellidus headedus, and it makes monkeys of them."

"You don't need to have it," said Starbright. "Nature got ahead of the disease."

"Young man," said Jack, severely glaring at Dick's muscular figure, "if you were not so small I'd thrash you for that insult! As it is, fearing lest I do you permanent injury, I withhold my hand. But we'll literally bury you out at Lake Whitney, for all of your new coach."

Starbright laughed heartily.

"That's the greatest joke you've cracked this evening, Ready," he cried, in his hearty way.

"Why, your old crew is made up in a crazy manner!" declared Ready, who was a little touched and dropped his bantering style for a time. "You've got a coxswain as heavy as I am—yes, heavier than I am. What sort of crazy notion is that?"

"Don't let it worry you," advised Dick.

"It isn't worrying me, fellow. It's delighting my soul. If you are crazy to pull around that amount of dead weight in the stern of your boat, go ahead. But I don't see how Merriwell can say you have a good crew. I think he is overworked, poor fellow! I fear I see in my mind's eye an asylum for the insane looming darkly before him."

"Sh!" said Bingham, with a cautioning motion toward Jack. "Don't alarm him, or it may send him off at once. Say something soothing to him, Ready."

"Don't worry, gentlemen," said Frank, standing up and stretching his splendid arms above his head. "I am sure I was never in better condition than at this minute, and I'm glad to be able to give a little time to the freshmen. I feel it my duty to give the time to the new class, just as I gave it to your class last year, Ready."

"Don't apologize! don't apologize!" cried Jack. "It isn't necessary. You had good stuff to work on last year; but just look at it this year! Oh, Laura! Think of a boat being pulled by such Indians as Starbright, Dashleigh, Morgan, and others of the same ilk, with a big duffer like Earl Knight in the stern! Merriwell, get Knight out of that boat! I beg—I implore you to do it! The poor freshmen! My tender heart bleeds for them, and their defeat will be bad enough without making it worse by giving them a man like that to drag around."

"When he wants your advice I think he'll ask for it!" snapped Dashleigh, who did not fancy this free-and-easy style of Ready with Merriwell.

"He may not know how bad he needs it till the race is over," said Jack. "Besides that, if I remember correctly, he is not in the habit of asking much advice."

"Why are you not going to row this year, Ready?" asked Carson.

"Oh, the boys wanted to give the freshmen a

chance!" said Jack. "I was urged to row, but I said, 'What's the use to make it a dead sure thing at the start?' So they left me out. Besides, baseball is just about all I can attend to. I'm no steam-engine, like Merriwell. He's the only one of his kind. He's the only fellow I ever saw who was able to do anything and everything without ever making a muff. But he can't make a winning freshman crew out of a lot of wooden cigar-store signs. Nay, nay, sweet one; 'tis impossible."

"Tell you what," cried Dashleigh; "I'll bet you a hundred dollars we beat your old crew!"

"Now, that is not money enough to pay me for the trouble of putting it up. If you had said one thousand dollars, I might have considered it."

"You haven't seen a thousand dollars since you looked in a window of a New York bank during the trip of the ball-team," said Starbright.

"And that's the only time you ever saw so much money," put in Dashleigh.

"Base calumny!" declared Jack. "But I so little regard such false statements that I will not even draw my purse to disprove them. But I'll take that bet of yours, if you will call it fifty cents, which I happen to have convenient in my waistcoat pocket."

With a languid air he brought forth a silver half-dollar, which he triumphantly displayed.

Carson snatched the piece and looked at it.

"Plugged!" he remarked, as he passed it back to

Jack. "I thought it could not be possible that you had all that good money."

Ready looked distressed.

"Plugged?" he gasped, examining the money. "Alas, too true! But I happen to know a near-sighted beer-slinger. I shall give the half to you, Carson, and let you go round there and enjoy yourself. The change will do you good."

"I couldn't think of leaving you penniless," declared the Westerner, with a wave of his hand.

"They're onto you!" cried Dashleigh, laughing.

There was a rap at the door, and Frank called "Come in." The door opened, and a young man with a splendid figure entered the room with some hesitation.

"Hello, Knight!" cried Merry. "Come right in. You're welcome."

"There," said Ready to Starbright and Dashleigh, "comes the handicap that will make you look like thirty cents in the little affair we have been discussing. Think of dragging around a coxswain like that! Haven't you a small man in your whole class that can steer a boat?"

"Shut up, please!" warned Dick, in a low tone. "Knight is sensitive, and he'll think you're making some observation about his face."

For Earl Knight had a terrible bluish scar that ran the whole length of his left cheek from temple to chin. Otherwise he was quite a good-looking fellow. But that scar was enough to attract and fascinate any one

who saw it for the first time, and it caused strangers to stare at Knight wherever he went, so that in time he became very sensitive about his misfortune.

This scar had made Knight very retiring when he first entered college, but he was a fine, strong, athletic-looking fellow, and his classmates finally drew him out and induced him to take part in athletics.

When it came to rowing, it was found that Knight had once been a coxswain on a high-school crew, or something of the sort, and some combination of circumstances gave him the stern of the freshman boat.

It was not long before the discovery was made that Knight knew his business. He could steer a boat, and he could keep a crew in trim at those times when they were not beneath the eye of a coach. He had an encouraging way of calling a man down pleasantly and putting new life and effort into him, instead of getting him mad and sulky, which is an art in itself.

Merriwell met Knight cordially, and soon had him feeling somewhat more at ease in the midst of this strange and remarkable gathering of students from all classes.

Because of his diffidence, Knight was scarcely known outside his own class. In fact, until he began working with the freshman crew, not even Merriwell had known there was such a man in college.

"Why, he's as large as Merriwell!" muttered Ready, who could not be repressed. "Say, Dashleigh, I'd like to make that thousand-dollar bet two thousand. You

can never win with a man like that in the stern of your old scow. I'll bet my life on it!"

"Make it something of value," said Bert. "Put up that plugged half!"

"Now, look here," growled Ready; "I'm the only chap who has a license to be fresh in this crowd, so you had better quit. You can't follow it up without getting into trouble. I have studied the art of being fresh and remaining alive; but an ordinary man who tries to follow in my footsteps should take out a large life-insurance and make his will."

After a time, Frank plainly stated that he would excuse all who had not been specially requested to remain, laughing as he did so.

"Fired out!" murmured Ready sadly. "Methinks I scent a secret conclave, and I wouldst rubber, if I could. But I must hie myself away."

So they filed out, bidding Frank good night, and not one took offense at being thus plainly told that they were to go. Starbright, Dashleigh, and Knight remained.

Some time later other members of the freshman crew found their way to Frank's room, where they remained for at least an hour behind locked doors.

"It's no use," declared Ready; "he can't talk victory into them."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TEMPTER AND THE TRAITOR.

Frank Merriwell's energy and the amount of work he was able to accomplish astonished every one. It seemed that he must have his hands pretty full as captain of the ball-team, but he found time to coach the freshmen, who relied on him far more than they did on any one else.

It had been predicted that Merriwell would remove Knight from the boat and put a lighter man in his place, and there was no little surprise when he failed to do so.

As far as possible, Frank's work with the freshmen was carried on privately. It seemed too early to get out on the harbor at night, but the weather came on warm and delightful, which gave the four crews the opportunity they desired.

The freshmen were the first to take advantage of a warm evening, and, under cover of darkness, they put in an hour of hard work.

The next day Orson Arnold withdrew from the freshman crew, and Ben Snodgrass took himself out of the sophomore eight. Frank Merriwell was responsible for both resignations.

Merry was a great character-reader, and somehow he had suspected Arnold the first time he talked with

the fellow. Arnold was one who made a great pretense of frankness and honesty, and he was forever calling attention to these traits of character, which he wished people to suppose he possessed. He had a way of telling how much he despised deceit, and Frank soon decided that the fellow was a bluffer and needed watching.

Then, without delay, he had set Jim Hooker to watching the suspect. Ordinarily, Hooker would not have relished the job, for he remembered how he had once been suspected and spied upon, but he was ready to do anything for Merriwell.

Hooker proved a good detective. He soon brought Merriwell information that made Frank look both grim and regretful.

"I thought it," said Merry; "but I hoped I was wrong."

"They meet in the old back room in Jackson's," said Hooker. "They do not choose to be seen together, you know, for that would create comment. Freshmen and sophomores do not become chums, especially if they belong to rival class crews."

"Jackson keeps a bad place," said Frank. "He should not be permitted in the city. I believe more crooked work has been planned in his joint than in any other place in New Haven, and I'm sorry to say that Yale men have been in many of the plots."

"Jackson knows you?"

Frank flushed a little, but promptly said:

"Yes, he knows me. I used to wander in there

sometimes. I have found it necessary to go there in search of friends, and I've had one or two little encounters there. I once threatened Jackson with police investigation if he did not refuse to let certain men play cards for money in that famous little back room of his. I had him on his knees before I was done with him, and he's been very respectful since. He always lifts his hat to me on the street, even though I may not choose to speak."

"Then you have a grip on him?"

"Not now, I fancy."

"Still, you might go there and have your way to a certain extent."

"Perhaps so."

"Then I'll find out the time, and you may see what you can do."

The night the freshmen took their men on the harbor, Orson Arnold and Ben Snodgrass met in the little back room at Jackson's. They sneaked into the place by the side door, taking care not to be seen, for their days on their respective crews would terminate if they were known to frequent that resort.

Arnold was a fellow with a fine pair of shoulders, coal-black hair, and eyes that seldom looked any one squarely in the face. That is, they seldom looked higher than the chin of another. He had a way of looking at the chin of any person with whom he was talking, but he looked higher only for instants. He was not a bad-looking chap, and he considered himself something of a lady's man, and it was his ambition to

cut a figure at Yale. His ambition was altogether beyond his means, as his grandmother was sending him to college, and she had limited him to an allowance, having repeatedly warned him that overstepping that allowance meant the termination of his college-course.

Snodgrass had muscular arms and a broad back, but his chest was not properly developed. His shoulders seemed burdened by too much muscle, and already they were beginning to roll inward somewhat. He was a rowing-crank. Since the day he entered Yale he had done nothing but row, row, row. It was his one engrossing ambition to finally make the varsity. Thus far he had succeeded only in getting onto the sophomore eight. In his first year he had not found a place in the freshman boat.

The fellow craved attention and admiration, and he was determined that the sophomore crew should attract attention this year by defeating the freshmen. Almost always the freshmen were the winners in the class races at Lake Whitney, being given far greater attention than the sophomores; but this year Snodgrass had sworn to himself that there should be a change about of the usual order of things. If the sophs won, attention would be drawn to their men, and that might mean that he, Snodgrass, would be observed at last and rated for what he believed himself worth. In such a case, he would go onto the varsity with a bound.

Now, it happened that Snodgrass had just what Arnold wanted—money. He spent it freely on himself,

but Arnold was the only man to whom he lent it freely. A mutual attraction seemed to draw these fellows together, and somehow they came to an understanding. Snodgrass found Arnold could be bought, and then there were secret meetings between them.

This night, having slipped into that dingy back room, with the green baize table in the middle of the narrow floor, they took care to bolt the door behind them. Then they sat down at the table and Snodgrass pushed the button. Pretty soon a panel in the door at the opposite side of the room slid open, and the face of one of the barkeepers appeared.

"What's yours, Ors, old boy?" asked Ben.

"A gin fizz," said Arnold.

"Ginger ale for me," said Snodgrass.

The slide went shut with a little bang.

"Well," said Snodgrass eagerly, "you've got something to tell me?"

"Sure thing," nodded Arnold. "That's why I'm here."

"Important?"

"Rather."

"Out with it."

"My throat's too dry to talk. Wait till I get that fizz."

"You hadn't ought to drink it, you know. You're in training."

"Training be—jiggered! What am I training for?"

"The regatta at Whitney."

"Come off! You know I'm training to help lose

that race. Why shouldn't I take a fizz? I'm awful dry."

"But you'd be fired off the crew if anybody found out you were drinking fizzes in here."

"So I'd be fired if anybody found out I was here talking with you. Might as well go the whole hog, to use an elegant phrase. So I'm going to drink, and I'm going to have a smoke."

The slide went back and the barkeeper appeared with the drinks. Snodgrass paid for them and placed them on the table. Then the slide slammed again, and they were alone.

"I'm a little thirsty myself," said Snodgrass, taking up the ginger ale.

"Let me get my face into that fizz!" exclaimed Arnold.

When he had drained the glass, he lighted a cigarette, and elevated his feet to the top of the table.

"I'm tired," he declared. "It tells on me, this infernally hard work Merriwell is giving us. The fellow seems to think we're made of iron—like himself."

"He must be made of iron to do all the things he does," said Snodgrass; "but I am not stuck on him much, for I know he kept me off the varsity last year."

"What? Why, you were a freshman."

"I don't care," growled Ben, scowling. "I was a better man than some who made the eight, but Merriwell ran in his particular friends, just as he has run them onto the nine this year. He had a pull then."

"Well, he's got a bigger pull now. He seems to be the only pebble."

"His advice is taken in everything," complained the sophomore bitterly. "He actually seems king of the sporting field here. They seem to regard him as authority on the subjects of football, baseball, rowing, hockey, and everything else. If he was like other fellows and simply made a specialty of something! But he goes into everything and leads at whatever he tries."

Arnold took out a pair of gloves and put them on.

"What's that for?" asked Snodgrass curiously.

"Precaution," grinned Orson wisely.

"Precaution against what?"

"Cig tracks. You know how they stain a fellow's fingers. Well, Merriwell would be sure to see the yellow. He has the cursedest, sharpest eyes I ever knew a man to have! Don't seem to look at you so hard, but he sees everything. Not a blamed thing escapes his notice. If he saw yellow on my fingers—well, that would be my finish."

"Then look out if you want to square that debt with me. It's a great chance for you, Arnold. You must help me out by doing what I say, or I shall have to have the money."

Arnold turned somewhat pale.

"Don't threaten, Snodgrass!" he exclaimed. "You know I can't pay the money back now. I've told you so."

“And I gave you a chance to square the whole business.”

“By throwing the race. I’m a square chap, Snodgrass, and it was gall and wormwood for me to agree to your terms; but you had me foul, and what could I do but agree?”

“Oh, nothing, of course!”

“Of course not! Why, my old chump of a grandmother would yank me out of Yale in a hurry if she found I had run into debt over two hundred. It’s the first time in my life I ever did anything dishonest, and the thought of it has driven me to drink.”

Arnold tried to squeeze out a tear, but it was plain to his companion that he was making a weak bluff.

“Well, if you stick to your agreement there will be no need to worry; but you must look out to keep your place on the crew. If you are dropped, the whole scheme goes to smash. That’s why I say be careful about your smoking and drinking. Merriwell’s keen eyes will soon discover it if you get a little out of condition and keep so.”

“Oh, blow Merriwell! I’d like to thump him. I wish we might catch him alone, Snodgrass, and give him a good drubbing. Why can’t we do it? We might lay for him some night and take him in a dark place.”

“If he recognized us, we’d be spotted as his enemies, and you know it isn’t healthy to be the enemy of Merriwell. The Chickering set are his enemies, and they are ostracized.”

"They would be anyhow."

"Oh, I don't know. They have rich parents; and money counts."

"Money counts less at Yale than at any other college in the world."

"I know it's claimed so, but I believe it counts here just the same as elsewhere. Still, I will admit that I do not care to become openly rated as the enemy of Merriwell."

Arnold inhaled the poisonous fumes of the cigarette with great relish, taking it deep into his lungs and breathing it out in a thin blue cloud, sometimes letting a little escape with each word.

"Well, you haven't told me what you were going to tell, old man," said Snodgrass. "What has Merriwell been doing to-night?"

"Guess!"

"I can't."

"That's true; you couldn't guess!"

"Well, what is it? You have me anxious now."

"You know he ordered us out for a pull to-night."

"Yes."

"Well, how do you suppose he did the coaching?"

"From another boat."

"Chased us round?"

"Yes."

"Not much!"

"How, then?"

"From the boat."

"The boat?"

"Yes; he took Knight's place and was coxswain!"

Snodgrass whistled.

"Well, I must say that's a new idea!" he exclaimed.

"What did Knight do?"

"Waited on a wharf."

"This is news!" nodded the sophomore. "I wonder if that is just the proper thing? It strikes me as being rather queer, to say the least. I don't think he'd want it to be known."

"Of course not! We are to say nothing about it."

"By Cæsar!" exclaimed Snodgrass, smiting the table. "It will be a double victory to defeat the freshmen! It will be defeating Merriwell! How that will cut him! We must do it without fail! I depend on you, Ors."

"And I am in such a predicament that I cannot refuse. If I could, you may be sure, Snodgrass, I'd not be here with you to-night, telling you all this stuff. My conscience will never cease pricking me. But what can a man in my place do!"

"Oh, drop it! You make me tired with that holler!"

"I can't help speaking of it. I have sold myself for a few paltry dollars! No, no—not that! I sold myself to keep myself from disgrace! There was no other way! I had to do it! It's the first dishonest act of my life."

"You've told me that before, I think," remarked the sophomore dryly.

"Perhaps so. But I'm broke again, old man. Let me have another tenner. I must have it."

"You're getting too frequent. Ors, I can't do it."

"Can't?" Arnold dropped his feet from the table and flung aside the cigarette.

"No; I haven't ten with me. I'll let you have five."

"But I need ten."

"I tell you I haven't got it! See here—that is all the money I have."

Snodgrass displayed the contents of his pockets, and there was less than six dollars in all. He had known well enough that Arnold would want money and had come prepared.

"Well, then, I'll have to make that five do for the time being," said the traitorous freshman regretfully, as he reached over and coolly took from the money the five dollars Snodgrass had agreed to let him have. "Now, let's have some more drinks and get out of here."

"You'll have to pay for the drinks," said Snodgrass. "You have all the money now."

"But you have just about enough left for one more round," said the freshman serenely. "Go ahead and push the button. I need this in my business. Why don't—you—do——"

Arnold stopped, staring suspiciously at the little slide in the door. He fancied it had moved.

"Snodgrass," he said, leaning forward and whispering the words, "I believe somebody has been spying on us!"

The sophomore looked startled.

“What makes you think so?” he asked, glancing nervously round the room.

“I think I saw that slide in the door move. It was open on a crack, so somebody on the other side could hear what we were saying.”

Snodgrass uttered an oath and sprang up.

“We’ll see about that!” he muttered. “If some fellow has been spying on us, we’ll thump the stuffing out of him!”

He sprang toward the door, meaning to see if the slide would open at his touch.

Instead of that, the door swung open and Frank Merriwell stepped into the room!

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRANK MAKES HIS TERMS.

With a gasp of dismay, Ben Snodgrass reeled back, staring at the intruder.

Arnold had started up, his face white as parchment, while he shook in every limb.

"Merriwell!" they both gasped.

Frank closed the door behind him.

"Sit down!" he said sternly, pointing to the chairs by the table.

Arnold dropped back with another gasp. Snodgrass seemed to hesitate, and then he stiffened up, as if in refusal.

Frank fixed his steady eyes on those of Ben Snodgrass. The sophomore made a mistake in glaring straight back. If he had desired to refuse to obey Merriwell he should not have looked Merriwell in the eye. It was not often any man looked Frank squarely in the eye and declined to obey any command he gave.

"Sit down," said Merry, more gently than before.

And Snodgrass suddenly wilted, sliding to the chair, upon which he sank.

But he had taken his eyes from those of Merriwell, and now he could speak. He said:

"So you played the eavesdropper—the great and honorable Frank Merriwell played the eavesdropper!"

“Don’t defile the word honor with your lips!” said Merry, without lifting his voice in the least, yet with such deep scorn in his low tone that Snodgrass shrank before it.

Still the fellow kept his eyes from meeting Frank’s, and thus he was able to speak.

“You can’t deny it! You played the sneak and the spy!”

Arnold was wondering how his companion dared utter such words to Merriwell. But the fact that Snodgrass did dare seemed to give Orson back some of the courage that had been shocked out of his body by the sudden and astonishing appearance of the man about whom they had been talking a short time before.

Arnold knew he was well built; he knew he was rather muscular; he knew he ought to be independent and fearless; but it took a man with nerve to be independent and fearless in the presence of Frank Merriwell after being caught under such circumstances.

Orson had never been thoroughly brave, and smoking cigarettes had not added to his stock of self-reliance. Perhaps if he had never touched them he would not have been caught there in that room with Snodgrass giving away secrets about the freshman crew.

Alcohol and cigarettes! Twin destroyers of all that is noble in human nature! We shudder sometimes at the ruin wrought by alcohol, and we turn in disgust or pity from the reeling drunkard; but as true as truth exists, cigarettes to-day are working as great havoc

among the boys and young men of our land as is alcohol!

All know that alcohol is dangerous and a thing to be shunned, and no youth need become its victim without realizing just what is happening.

With cigarettes it is different. Surely there can be no harm in smoking one of the tiny, clean-looking rolls? Why shouldn't a lad smoke them? All the fellows seem to be smoking them. Oh, yes; some of the fellows acknowledge they cannot get along without them, but that is simply ridiculous. Certainly there is nothing in those harmless little things that get hold of a man and make it impossible to leave them off! It's easy enough to prove that by smoking a few of them and then stopping. Just watch him, and see him prove it beyond dispute. So he begins with his first cigarette.

And the fellow who smokes travels with the fast set. He frequents the places they frequent. At first he slips in and out with a guilty feeling, hoping he will not be observed; but after a time that feeling passes off and he enters boldly, careless, or proud, or indifferent. He is making rapid strides on the road. Clear the track for him and watch his pace! It's all downhill now, and he is gaining momentum right along.

The fellow who smokes must drink a little, of course. Why not? The crowd he's drifted into all do it. A little beer, perhaps, to start with. Nasty stuff, but he gulps it down, keeps his face straight, and pretends that he's happy. The second glass goes down

harder than the first. It makes him feel queer. He laughs at silly things, and he smokes one cigarette after another. Oh, say! but this is having a time of it!

When it's all over he won't feel so well. It's likely he'll swear over and over again never, never to do it again. But a half-consumed package of cigarettes is in his pocket, and when he begins to feel a little better, so that he sits up and takes notice, he finds those cigarettes, and habit puts one into his mouth.

When he realizes at last that he is going the pace, he finds he cannot stop. He says he will smoke no more, but he hangs to the partly used package till he has puffed out the last little white-robed seducer. If he had been strong, if there had been a modicum of his strength remaining, he would have flung them away.

Arnold had begun to smoke at preparatory school. Before that he had taken active part in manly sports of all kinds, and thus he developed those magnificent shoulders and splendid arms. Smoking could ruin his moral sense and stop his advancement, but it could not undo at once all that he had done for himself before he began to smoke.

When he started in to train for the freshman crew at Yale he tried to put cigarettes aside. There was nothing else to be done. He seemed to leave them off completely, but he continued to smoke secretly right along.

Snodgrass had known how to work on Arnold's weak points. The sophomore was crafty. He did not smoke, and he did not drink anything intoxicating.

Snodgrass was looking out for Number One. He knew a man who smoked and drank did not stand as good a chance of making the varsity as one who did neither, and so he did neither. No better man than Arnold at the outset, cigarettes gave Arnold into his power.

"Don't talk to me about sneaks and spies!" said Merriwell, with unspeakable scorn. "Two greater sneaks than you I have never had the pleasure of seeing!"

"Be careful!" snarled Ben blackly. "I won't stand for it!"

"You will sit still till I tell you just what I think of you. You are a cur, Snodgrass, and you know it! You, Arnold, are a pitiful traitor, and I'm rather sorry for you; but you have only yourself to blame that you are in this rascal's power."

Arnold's breast began to heave. How could he save himself? Was there a way? Might he not break down now and throw himself on Frank's sympathy? He thought of that, and straightway set about compelling the tears to come to his eyes. Perhaps the sight of tears would be enough to melt Merriwell.

"I had to do it!" he choked. "There was no other way to save myself."

Snodgrass uttered a curse and looked at Arnold with scorn and contempt.

"For Heaven's sake, don't let Merriwell see you snivel!" he hissed.

Then he smote the table with his clenched fist, saying:

"Jackson shall answer to me for this trick! He shall pay dearly for permitting any one to play the eaves-dropper on me. He did it, for no one could reach that door without his permission."

"I advise you to keep your mouth closed as far as Jackson is concerned," said Merry. "If you tackle him and raise a dust, it may get out that you were here."

Arnold gasped again. Then Merriwell did not mean to expose them? He was not going to make the whole matter public? It was a great relief. Even Snodgrass pulled in his horns somewhat.

"It was a dirty trick!" he declared. "I didn't think Jackson would permit it. If I were to tell the fellows about it, it would hurt his old place."

"But I know you'll say nothing about it, Snodgrass."

"Why not?"

"Because it will be a dead give-away on yourself."

"You'll give it away! You'll go out and tell your story. We'll say you lied about it, but that Jackson let you in to that door, where you listened without overhearing anything in particular."

"How will you explain your presence here? Every man of your crew, and of the freshmen, is forbidden to come here."

"That's right," muttered Arnold.

"Oh, well, one slip——" began Ben weakly.

"You know my statement would be believed."

"Not against us both."

"I think so."

"We would swear you lied."

"And you know deep down in your heart that I would be believed."

"We'd swear you were trying to get us thrown off our crews in order to work your particular friends on."

"Think it over a little, Snodgrass, before you try it. Of course, if that is the course you choose, I shall permit you to have your own way about it. Anyhow, off the crew you will come, sir."

"I'm against it!" cried Arnold, resolved to play into Frank's hand, though not quite understanding the move to make. "I do not fancy having a smell raised about it."

Ben gave him a look of scorn.

"There is only one way for you two fellows to save yourselves," said Frank.

"That is—how?"

"You must both withdraw from your crews. If you do that at once, I'll say nothing about what has happened. If you do not withdraw at once, I shall expose you. Those are the terms; they are unalterable. You may choose."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NEW COMPACT.

They were forced to agree to the terms, though Snodgrass did so with such bitterness in his heart as he had never before known. Merry saw the fellow look at him with a glance of unspeakable hatred, and he knew Snodgrass would be his enemy from that day.

"I know you are bound the freshmen shall win," muttered Ben, "and that's one reason why you are going to force me to leave the sophomore crew. With me in the boat there was less chance for your crew to come in ahead."

"Conceit is not lacking in your make-up, Snodgrass," said Merry, unable to repress his amusement. "You seem to fancy yourself the biggest part of the crew."

"You can't deny that I've told you the truth!" hissed the sophomore, showing his teeth.

"I wouldn't take the trouble to deny anything so ridiculous. Arnold, if he'd let cigarettes and drink alone, might be a better man than you to-day, yet he has to get out of the freshman boat."

"To let in some friend of yours."

"I have two friends among the freshmen—two particular friends, I mean. They are Starbright and Dashleigh, and both of them are already in the boat.

I demand that you fellows get out because you are both crooked and unworthy to battle for the honor of your classes. That's what I think of you."

"I'm not going to say what I think of you," muttered Ben.

"Perhaps it is just as well for you that you do not," came meaningly from Merry's lips. "As I stood behind that door listening to your talk here, I felt like jumping in and giving you both the thrashing you deserved; but I decided not to put my hands on you, and I do not wish to go back on that resolution. However, Snodgrass, if you were to become too insulting, I might forget myself and give you a little jolting."

"You're a bully!"

"Is that so? As a rule, I believe bullies seek to have the odds in their favor. I didn't count on that when I entered here."

"You entered because Arnold had discovered you were behind the door."

"In a certain degree that is true. Yet I was ready to come in just then, having heard enough to put me onto your game. With Arnold out of the freshman boat, there will be no chance for such a fluke as was planned. With you out of the sophomore boat, you will win no unmerited glory."

Snodgrass ground his teeth in fury. For the time his ambition to make the varsity was dished. But, thank goodness! Merriwell would not be in Yale next year, and then he would have his chance once more. With Merriwell away he would make the crew—he

was confident of it. Surely he had reason enough to hate Merriwell, for had not Frank kept him from forging to the front?

But Merry, who had so many friends, was not afraid of making an enemy. The man who fears to make an enemy is not worthy to have friends. The man who fears to make an enemy seldom has friends who are staunch and true.

In a just cause Merry had never failed to make enemies, and he had made many of them in the past; but about him there was a particular something that finally won those enemies over to friends, even when he seemed careless, or undesirous of such a result.

"Now, as you both understand the terms on which I remain silent concerning this business," said Frank, "I'll bid you good night. I shall expect you to hand in your resignations by noon to-morrow."

With clenched teeth, Snodgrass half-started, as if to leap at Frank's back, Merry having turned carelessly away. But Frank, without so much as turning his head to glance back, said:

"Don't try it, Snodgrass! I shall do you harm if you do!"

Then the muscles of the sophomore relaxed, and he settled back on his chair, glaring till the door had closed behind Frank.

For some moments the detected rascals were silent. Then Arnold ventured to look at the chin of his companion. That chin frightened him.

Snodgrass was a tempest of fury. He raved at

Arnold and reviled him. He raved at himself. Then he fell to expressing himself concerning Frank Merriwell, and his words were lurid in the extreme.

Arnold, to tell the truth, felt glad to escape thus easily. One thing he dreaded was exposure and disgrace, and he had feared that was to follow Merriwell's discovery. Snodgrass seemed to understand the relief of his companion, and he snarled:

"Well, you can pay up now, and pay up in a hurry! I want my money, and you'll have to fork over."

"But I can't, and you know it!"

"I've got your paper, and your grandmother will have to pay."

Arnold was frightened.

"Don't force me to the wall, Snodgrass!" he implored. "She'll take me out of college! I don't believe she'll pay you, anyhow. Give me time, and I'll find a way to pay you. You must give me time, old man!"

"Time! time! time! You can't pay if I do give you time, and you know it! I know it! I've known it all along!"

"You've known it?"

"Of course I have!"

"Yet you let me have the money! You did it to get me in a trap!"

"Well, perhaps I did. I wanted to make use of you. Now you are no earthly use to me, and I want my money."

"Wait," urged Arnold shakingly. "Don't say I'm no use to you. You can't tell yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Are you going to give up? Are you going to let Merriwell triumph over you?"

"No; by thunder, no!"

"I thought not. But we've both got to obey his command, or get it in the neck. I'm a freshman, but he is coaching the freshmen, and I hate him. Therefore, I don't want them to win."

"It would hit him hard if they failed!" panted Snodgrass.

"Sure thing," nodded Arnold, lowering his voice to a whisper. "We can't make any plans here, old man, but I believe in getting back at him, and I'll help you do it."

"How can it be done?"

"Don't know yet; but we ought to be able to find a way. We must keep the freshmen from winning, somehow."

The face of Snodgrass took on a look of vindictive resolve.

"That's right!" he grated. "The freshmen shall not win now! It will hurt Merriwell if they fail! We will prevent them, Arnold."

"If I help you, will you cancel the account against me?"

"In case we succeed—yes."

"Then shake on it!"

They shook hands over the table.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SNODGRASS SEEKS SATISFACTION.

Of course the unexpected withdrawal of Arnold and Snodgrass from their respective crews created comment. Both men manufactured excuses, but these excuses proved to be rather flimsy when investigated. They seemed to have suddenly lost their sand in the face of the rigid training, and decided to get out. This caused many to regard them with contempt, and Snodgrass ate his heart out with rage toward the one he regarded as the author of all his trouble. Never for a moment did he regard himself as in any way to blame.

Arnold was afraid of Merriwell; but, if possible, just then he was more afraid of Snodgrass, who was desperate enough for any move. The sophomore swore by various things he was supposed to regard as sacred that he would get even with Merriwell. He vowed that the freshmen should meet with defeat, but when he came to meditate on the matter some time it did not seem to him that the simple defeat of the freshmen would be revenge enough on Merriwell.

No; he longed for blood! He pictured himself as jumping on Frank and giving him a terrible drubbing. In this fanciful encounter he knocked Merriwell down again and again. Oh, how he quivered with sat-

isfaction as he felt his fists beating Merriwell's handsome face into a mass of cuts and bruises! How he laughed and gloated. And at last, when he had knocked down and out the fellow he hated, he stood and sneered at him, with arms folded and a heart full of triumph.

This was a glorious battle and a glorious victory; but, unfortunately for the feelings of the revengeful Snodgrass, he knew it could happen only in his mind. He knew that he was no match for Merriwell, and it made him grind his teeth with fury. He even thought of sand-bags, brass knuckles, clubs, and such things.

He didn't wish to kill Merriwell; not at all. The desire to do so may have possessed him, but fear of the consequences was enough to make him cast such a thought aside at once. He wanted simply to have the satisfaction of maiming and hurting Frank. Oh, it would be great to do him up so he could not get out to the ball-ground! In that case, of course, he would be unable to coach the freshmen.

Arnold was frightened when Snodgrass imparted his desires. He feared that Ben might be foolish enough to set out to do the trick, taking him along as a witness. He expostulated with Snodgrass.

"Forget it!" he said. "Other fellows have tried to do Merriwell like that, and they've always got it in the neck themselves. You can't get even with him that way."

"I can and will!" grated the vindictive sophomore.

"You'll get the worst thrashing you ever had."

"Don't you think it. I'll not do the job myself. I can find a way."

Then Snodgrass proceeded to the loafing-place of a certain gang of young thugs. Buster Bill, the leader of the gang, had "done time," and, taken all together, the thugs were a disgrace to the college city.

Snodgrass put on his old clothes, and away he went to the vicinity of the wharves. Down there, near where he knew Buster Bill hung out, he collared a street urchin and questioned him.

At first the boy didn't know anything that Snodgrass wanted to know. He would not answer questions. He bawled: "Leggo, you big slob! Watcher think ye're doin', anyhow?" But Snodgrass persevered.

"I want to see my friend Bill Riley," he said. "I know he hangs out here. I'll give you a quarter if you'll find Bill for me."

"G'wan! yer can't fool me!" said the boy. "I dunno no Bill Riley, an' I don't believe you'd fork over a quarter, annyhow."

Snodgrass took out the money, and held it up before the eyes of the dirty, squirming lad. The squirming ceased, and the boy eyed the piece of silver greedily.

"There it is," said the college youth. "Now, show me Bill Riley, and it's yours."

The boy seemed to be contemplating making a grab for the money.

"I dunno Bill Riley," he persisted. "What's he do?"

"He's a gent," declared Snodgrass, with assumed loftiness. "He don't do a thing. He lives on the interest of his money. I met him last summer in jail."

"Hey?" said the boy. "Where was dat?"

"Blackwell's Island. Ever heard of it?"

"Sure, Mike! I know a feller that's been there, and the gang calls him Bill."

"What's his last name?"

"I dunno. Alwus heard him called der Buster."

"That's the man I want to find!" exclaimed Snodgrass. "He told me to hunt him up if I ever came this way."

The boy looked incredulous.

"Why, youse ain't like anny of his gang," he declared. "Anny of 'em could eat youse."

"Perhaps so; perhaps not. But I want to find Bill, and this quarter is yours if you take me to him."

The urchin reflected. He was in mortal fear of Buster Bill and "der gang," but he wanted that quarter. It was possible that this stranger told the truth. It might be he knew Bill, and Bill would be glad to see him. Did he dare to chance it for the quarter?

Snodgrass kept still, knowing it might be a mistake to seem too anxious.

"Annyhow," said the boy, "Bill an' his gang will knock the stuffin's out of you if you're a stranger. Dey don't like to be bothered when dey're havin' a little settin'."

So the boy knew where Buster Bill was to be found, and Snodgrass tightened his hold.

"I'll make it fifty cents," he declared. "Two good, new quarters. What do you say?"

"I tell ye you'll git your face broke sure if Bill don't know yer."

"I'll chance it."

"Den I'll take yer to 'em. Come on. Leggo my collar. Gimme der money first."

"Not on your life! I'll pay the minute I put my eyes on Bill—not before."

The urchin led him amid the wharf buildings, where the smell of the water was strong. Through an old lumber-yard they went, coming out at last to a sagging building.

"Sh!" cautioned the boy, as he stole forward on his toes.

Snodgrass stepped lightly, but did not hesitate to follow.

The boy opened an old door, and they entered the lower part of the building. There they paused, and the mumbling sound of voices reached them from some place up above.

Still motioning for Snodgrass to be still, the boy led the way to a ladder that led up through a square scuttle-hole above. Up the ladder the lad softly skipped, and Snodgrass followed at his heels. The heart of the college man was thumping heavily in his bosom, for this was more of an adventure than he had counted on when he started out.

"Dey're at it!" whispered the boy, pausing on the top of the ladder.

He looked to see if his companion showed signs of alarm, but Snodgrass appeared as eager as ever, and the boy slipped off the ladder to the floor of the loft.

Barely had Snodgrass followed when there arose a sudden commotion beyond a dark door that could scarcely be seen in that gloomy, cobwebby place. There was a volley of oaths, a blow, and a fall.

"That's him!" hissed the boy. "He's knocked somebody down! Oh, but he's a holy terror, an' he'll be red-hot now! Don't yer t'ink ye'd better turn round?"

"Not much!"

"Den gimme der fifty. I've kept my part of der bargain. He's in dere, so jest walk in."

Snodgrass gave the boy half a dollar, and, one second later, the youngster went down the ladder like a frightened cat, leaving Ben there alone.

The desperate sophomore shuddered a bit and shrugged his shoulders.

"He's just the kind of a man I must have!" he thought. "I'd be a fool to back out now! Brace up, Ben, and walk right in. Your reception may not be cordial, but you must set yourself right. It's to down Merriwell, and I'm ready to face the devil to do that!"

Then he advanced to the door and thrust it open.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ANOTHER COMPACT.

The light from one dingy and dirty window shone into the place. Where the light of the window fell on it was a rough table, about which four persons had been sitting. Just now one of them was standing, while another still lay on the floor, having raised himself to his elbow, but without daring to rise. The one on the floor had been knocked down by the one who was standing.

On the table were cards, money, and two bottles of whisky. There were no glasses to drink from. These men drank directly from the bottle.

Rough-looking fellows they were. Plainly, at a glance, they were young thugs of the city slums.

They had been gambling for money. The cards were scattered carelessly, as they had been dropped when the sudden quarrel began over the game.

The fellow standing was six feet tall, with broad shoulders, thick, muscular arms, deep chest, heavy legs, and the face of the genuine young ruffian. His jaw was square, protruding, and brutal. Still, in a certain way, there was something handsome about him.

At a glance Snodgrass knew that man was Buster Bill. No one could doubt that he was the leader of the gang.

When the door opened, and Snodgrass appeared before the startled eyes of the gang, they turned and glared at him.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said the college man. "I am looking for William Riley."

"The blazes you are!" said Buster Bill. "Who in thunder are you?"

"A spy!" cried one of the others excitedly.

"We're pinched!" exclaimed another.

The gang seemed ready to make a fight on the spot. Their hands sought hidden weapons. Snodgrass was uneasy, but he did not shrink or retreat, which was a very good thing for him. If he had betrayed signs of alarm just then he could not have escaped without broken bones. Instead, he calmly said:

"I am no spy, and the police are not behind me. I came here on business of importance, and my business is with Mr. Riley."

Mr. Riley! That was odd enough. William Riley had been a shocker, but Mr. Riley was worse still. They looked at Snodgrass in doubt.

What sort of business could this man, this beardless chap, have with Buster Bill? Generally the man who hunted for Bill on the pretext of business carried a warrant and a pair of handcuffs.

"Well, why in thunder don't yer come in?" demanded Bill himself.

Then Snodgrass entered, though he felt much more like making a dash to get out. He walked into the room with an assumed air of nonchalance.

Barely was he well into the room, however, when Buster Bill made one leap, slammed the door shut, and put his back against it.

"Well," he said, as he faced round, "we've got ye now, anyhow!"

"That's right," said Snodgrass, calmly sitting down on a box.

The other men were on their feet. The one who had been knocked down stood over the college man, demanding:

"Wot shall we do with him, Bill? Give der word an' we'll kick der packin' out of him!"

"Wait a little," said the leader. "We'll find out wot ther bloke wants here."

The fellow standing over Snodgrass looked disappointed. He had been struck, and he longed to retaliate on somebody. He had been eager to strike, beat, and kick the intruder.

Buster Bill stepped toward the college man. Despite his size and weight, his step was light. Snodgrass sized him up and nodded to himself with satisfaction. Surely here was a fellow who could give Frank Merriwell a go "all by his lonesome." With his gang at his back he could wipe Merriwell off the map. All that was needed now was to strike a bargain.

Bill pulled a chair out in front of Snodgrass and sat down, making a motion that the others understood. They pulled their seats out and sat all about the intruder. He was in the midst of them, and they had him foul. Let him whistle now, and they could pounce on

him and kick him into jelly before the police could reach them.

When they had seated themselves, Buster Bill seemed to think of something, and he said:

"Skip, just take a sneak out and look round. Come back and tell us if you see anything."

The smallest man of the gang, a wiry young thug, arose and slipped out of the room.

"I am sorry I interrupted your little game," said Snodgrass pleasantly.

"Don't mention it," growled Riley.

"You have a very comfortable place here," declared the college man.

"Uh-ha!" grunted Riley.

"Nobody likely to bother you here," declared the college man.

"You did," reminded Riley.

"Well, I had hard enough work finding you."

Skip came back and informed them that everything seemed to be all right, with nobody round to bother them.

"I hope you are satisfied, gentlemen," said Snodgrass, "that I am not a spy. I told you the truth when I said I came here on business."

"Wot's in it?"

"Money," was the answer. "I have heard of Mr. Riley's powers, and——"

"Call me Bill."

"Well, I've heard that Bill is a holy terror and can

lick his weight in grizzly bears. That report is what brought me here."

Buster Bill relaxed somewhat.

"Yer want somebody t'umped?" he asked.

"You've guessed it first shot."

"Wot's der price?"

"Fifty."

"Fifty wot?"

"Dollars."

"Got der dough?"

"Sure."

"In yer clothes?"

"No; I'm not fool enough to carry so much round with me. I don't think I have more than two dollars in my pockets."

The ruffians exchanged looks of disappointment.

Ben Snodgrass had been very wise when he left his money behind him this day.

"Are youse one of dem college guys?" asked Riley.

"Yes, I am a student."

"I was beginning to t'ink so. Got it in fer annodder dub an' wants ter have him cropped, eh? Well, I'll do der trick fer fifty, but I'll have ter have der dough in advance."

"Even you, Bill, may not find the job a cinch," said Snodgrass. "He's a bad man."

"Oh, wot yer givin' me! If I can have a good chance at him I'll polish der duck off in one minute."

"You may have as good a chance as you want. He goes out to the ball-field every afternoon lately, and

he has taken to walking in alone just at dark. He always returns to Vanderbilt a certain way. There are some scattering houses and an open spot. No lights there to speak of. A fine chance to come on him suddenly."

"Well, say! you oughter be able ter do him yerself widout callin' on me fer help. Wot's der matter wid layin' for him dere an' soakin' him wid a club?"

"I have to be somewhere else when it happens. If I'm suspected, I want to prove an alibi."

"Is dat it? Don't s'pose it's 'cause yer lacks der nerve? Of course not!"

The thugs laughed roughly, and Snodgrass flushed a little.

"It would be no disgrace to be afraid of this man," he asserted, somewhat haughtily.

"Well, who der blazes can it be?" cried Buster Bill.

"His name is Frank Merriwell," said the student.

"Wot!" cried the leader of the gang. "Why, you don't mean der feller wot everybody is makin' such a fuss over? Not der cap'n of der ball-team?"

"Yes."

"Yer wants me ter smash him?"

"Yes."

"An' you'll pay fifty for the job?"

"Yes."

"In advance?"

"Twenty-five in advance, and the balance the day following the completion of the job."

"That's the easiest way of makin' a fifty stroke I've

heard of lately! It'll be pie for me. An', say, I've been wantin' to get a lick at him fer some time. He makes me sick! Dey talk about him bein' a great athlete! I've seen him, an' I know I can break him clean in two!"

"If you have a notion that Merriwell is soft, you are making a big mistake, and you'll receive a severe surprise when you tackle him. He may look soft, but he is the hardest man you ever went against, and he has astonishing luck. It will be well for you to have your men along to see the sport. Perhaps you may need their assistance before you are done with Merriwell."

Riley was offended.

"Look here," he cried, "I don't like that kind of talk! I ain't never run against der bloke wot could do me. An' I'll have der advantage of dis feller by takin' him by surprise. Why, I'll pulverize him before he can lift a finger!"

"I hope so."

"How bad do you want him done?"

"I want him sent to the hospital. If you could manage to break a few of his ribs it would please me greatly. At any rate, I want him thumped so badly that he'll have to keep under cover for four days. That's all I ask."

"It's a snap! But w'en do I git der twenty-five? Dat has ter come down before I go inter de game."

"I'll pay you that to-night. I will meet you at ten

o'clock at the west end of Barnsville Bridge and give you the money there. Is that satisfactory?"

Riley looked at Snodgrass sharply, as if a doubt had entered his mind, but he finally nodded, saying:

"Dat's all right. I guess ye're on der level, pal."

"You needn't worry about that. I want Merriwell done up, and I'm ready to pay. You'll find me on hand with the other twenty-five at the same place the very night you jump him. It makes no difference to you just why I want him downed."

"Not a blamed bit, pal! I'm out for der dough."

"Then the bargain is made. Let's shake hands on it."

Snodgrass rose and offered his hand, which the big thug accepted, and gave a grip to seal the dastardly compact.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BUSTER BILL SURPRISED.

Frank was methodical in everything he did, and that was how he accomplished so much without being swamped. He gave just so much time to everything. When the work of the day was all done, he ventured to spend a little time in idleness, but not till then.

No man ever accomplishes great things and performs great labors unless he is methodical. The person who goes at any task by fits and starts does not make rapid progress. It is persistent hammering away at anything that counts in the end. In the fable the tortoise beat the hare; so the slow, plodding, determined man often beats the brilliant, flighty, erratic man of genius in the race of life.

Steady hammering at one kind of work becomes monotonous after a time, it is true, and a man may wear himself out before his time in such a manner. But give him variety, let him change at certain hours of the day from one thing to another, and the amount he can accomplish will amaze those who look on and never put their powers to the full test.

Frank Merriwell's life was one of constant change and variety. The classroom, the gymnasium, the ball-

field, the rowing-tank, or the shell led him from one thing to another at certain hours, and so he performed an amount of labor that astounded lazy students.

Each afternoon he reached the field at a certain hour. He entered into the work there with vim and vigor. When it was over, he had a way of starting off by himself to walk back to Vanderbilt. He preferred to make this little walk quite alone. His friends had found this out, and they permitted him to do so.

There may have been a secret reason why Frank chose to walk back unaccompanied from the field. Perhaps it would seem impolite to pry into some of his secrets. All day long he was thinking of studies, lectures, gymnastics, baseball, and rowing—all day except during this walk by himself in the dusk of early evening.

Of what was he thinking then? Why was it that he often smiled fondly to himself, as if looking into the face of some one very dear? Why was it that he seemed utterly oblivious to his surroundings as he swung along with that beautiful, easy stride? Why was it that sometimes his lips moved, and—listen! did he murmur a name? Was it—Inza?

But we'll not pry into his secrets, although we understand now how it was that, with his mind far away, he walked straight into the trap that had been prepared for him. At another time he might not have been taken so by surprise, for, as a rule, he seemed constantly on the alert. Now, before he realized anything was wrong, a man had jumped out at him from the

corner and struck him a terrible blow on the side of the head.

That blow knocked Frank down!

Buster Bill had started in to earn his money, and it must be confessed that he had made a good beginning.

He had intended to jump on Merriwell instantly, but now he paused, astonished that even a college athlete could be popped over so easily. That pause was fatal to the ruffian's plans.

Although the shock had been terrible, although his head was ringing and he was somewhat dazed, Merriwell quickly recovered and started to rise.

Then, with a snarl, the thug made another spring and a kick. He meant to earn his money by fracturing a rib with his heavy boot.

In a crouching position Frank Merriwell sprang aside with a froglike hop. Then he straightened up. The violence of that kick, which had reached nothing but empty air, had thrown Buster Bill down.

When Bill, astonished beyond measure, scrambled to his feet, he found Frank Merriwell, the Yale athlete, waiting for him.

Not a word passed Merry's lips, but he sailed into that fellow in a manner that meant business. He swung at Bill's head, and Bill did not entirely avoid the blow. He was hit pretty hard, but not hard enough to knock him off his pins.

Then a hot time followed. If Buster Bill had underrated his antagonist at the start, he soon experienced

a change of opinion. The Yale man, for all of the blow he had received, became the aggressor in less than thirty seconds.

Bill, you are in trouble for fair. There you have it, fair and square on the nose, and it was a solid jolt, too. It started your nose to bleeding, but you don't mind that, of course! only boys mind when they get a crack on the nose that starts the claret. But there is another in the eye. That will be likely to give you a very pretty eye to show your friends to-morrow. You'll be proud of it, Bill, and you will enjoy exhibiting it to the gang.

Brace up, Buster Bill; it won't do to let this smooth-faced, clear-eyed, handsome fellow get in many more like that one on the cheek. If he does, you'll have a mug that will arouse doubts in regard to your veracity when you explain to-morrow that you fell down on the hard ground just by accident. People may listen to you, Bill; but inwardly they will be asking if you fell or were pushed.

What ails the fellow, anyhow? Why won't he keep still and let you hit him back a few times, gentle William? It doesn't seem hardly fair for him to do all the hitting, with the exception of that first blow; now, does it? If you had dreamed he was going to act this way, you would have hit him with a brick, wouldn't you, Bill?

Great Scott! but that was an awful jab in the wind, Bill! It doubled you up beautifully. And then he was rude enough to give you another one on the ear.

What are you doing down there, William? You'll get your clothes dirty rolling round on the ground.

That's right, sir; get right up, like a little man. He'll accommodate you by knocking you down again. How long can you keep it up, Bill? Your head is pretty hard, but even a wooden head must get tired of being biffed round in such a manner.

Don't froth, man! It'll not do you a bit of good. Don't gnash your teeth, for you'll not frighten him that way. He doesn't seem a bit afraid of you, and he keeps coming right after you all the time. At least, he might have the decency to give you a rest.

What's that, you mighty thug, you slayer of men? Can it be that you realize you have met your master in this college chap at whom you sneered? Who are you shouting to? On my life, I believe you are calling to your friends for help!

Yes, it is true! And here they come through the dusk on the run, four of them in all! Well, well! you've surely got the college chap in a bad place now; but if you down him at last, Bill, you can't brag that you did it alone, and I do not fancy that you'll feel very proud of the job.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HIS FOES "SCATTERED AROUND."

Buster Bill had met the surprise of his life. He had not dreamed of anything like this. Why, he would have bet his life that he could whip any man in Yale with one hand tied behind his back! That was before the encounter. After the encounter he felt differently about it.

Never in all his life had he found a man so hard to hit as this fellow Merriwell. Never in all his career at the ringside had he seen a man who could do such lively foot-work. The manner in which Merriwell got in, punched, and got away was something very exasperating to Mr. Riley.

At first the ruffian had fancied he was doing the rushing, and he tried to follow his nimble antagonist about; but the time quickly came when he discovered that he was not doing nearly as much rushing as he had fancied.

The college man was a perfect tempest. He was here, there, everywhere. He went under Riley's arm with a ducking leap, came up behind the fellow and smote him a stagerer on the back of the head.

When that happened Mr. Riley got down on his knees. It was a most unusual position for him, and he wondered to find himself there. With an expression

of dissatisfaction at the way things were occurring, he hoisted himself in time to get a lovely jolt on the jaw.

Riley tried to induce the other chap to stand still and be hit a few times, just to even things up a little; but Frank Merriwell proved to be a most unaccommodating fellow at this point. He declined to let Riley get in another blow.

Then it was that Buster Bill began to be sorry that he had not used a brick when he hit the fellow at the start. A brick would have settled it at once, and there would have been no taking chances.

But he had not fancied he was taking chances, anyhow. We have all to live and learn. To-morrow Mr. Riley and his friends were to make remarks about Frank Merriwell, and, even though those remarks would not do for printing in the program of a Sunday-school concert, they were to be highly complimentary.

Bill snarled and frothed, but all that amounted to nothing. He found it was no use; he could not hit Merriwell, and he was swiftly getting cut all to pieces. When his wind gave out, he began to feel unspeakable alarm.

I hate to confess it about such a brave scoundrel as Bill, but there was a moment when he actually thought of taking to his heels and running for it.

Then he remembered that this Merriwell had the reputation of being a sprinter. Whatever he had ever said about college men, he had never denied that they could run.

Besides that, there were the fellows back there behind the old building, waiting for him to do the job. They were peering wonderingly through the gloom, he knew, speculating over the astonishing encounter that was taking place. If he ran away his days of leadership would be over with "the gang."

Then he thought of shouting to them, but it seemed almost equally as disgraceful to call for help, and his pride held his lips for a time.

Merriwell improved that time of silence by hitting the thug some jabs that made him somewhat weary. Not until he found himself groggy and going to pieces swiftly did Bill yell for his companions.

Up to that time Frank Merriwell had fancied his assailant was there quite by himself; but with that first cry Merriwell realized there might be other ruffians there.

Then Merry redoubled his efforts to finish Bill before the others appeared. He heard their footsteps, and from a corner of his eyes he saw dark forms coming swiftly toward him.

Then Merry did his level best to dispose of Bill before the others came up. He got in two terrible blows, and the second one stretched the thug senseless on the ground.

But he did not try to avoid the encounter with Buster Bill's friends. He met them, actually springing forward to do so.

The one in advance received a surprise in the shape of a hard fist on the chin, and he lay down to think

it over and wonder just what had happened. There were three left, and they went at Merriwell with intense ferocity.

Surely by this time Merriwell must be pretty well played out. It looks bad for him. These fellows are likely to find him an easy victim now.

But are they? Merry seemed just as fierce, just as lively, just as terrible as he had been when at his best in the little affair with Mr. Riley. He was not aware that he felt the least fatigue, and the way he met and smashed into those fellows was as much a surprise to them as his same style of conduct had been to Buster Bill.

Where was Bill? They called to him, but he did not answer. Could that be him on the ground? What was he doing down there? It must be that he had been knocked out with a slung-shot. No other explanation could be accepted.

The same kind of slung-shot was coming at them. Look out for it, you thugs of the long docks, or you'll find yourselves imitating your leader!

Why was it they could not seem to get at him and crush him at once? Why was it that he seemed able to keep them in the way of one another, so that they were bothered to reach him? When one of them opened his arms to grasp Merriwell around the waist from behind he succeeded in clasping a friend and throwing him down. And while he was doing this Merriwell got in a crack at the third man that caused him to seek a reclining position beside Buster Bill and

the other "gent" that had hastened at the call for aid to bump into Frank.

Then they found there were but two of them left to down this Yale man who should be such an easy mark for any one of them. Perhaps two would be able to do a better job than more of them. Two would not get in each other's way so often.

They were not given much time to think about this, for Merriwell followed up the fight and waded into them.

This put the ruffians on the defensive, which was something quite against their liking. He knocked one of them up against the other, and then tried to drop them both with a swinging right and left.

They separated and closed in on him from opposite sides. He struck one and kicked the other in the stomach. That kick had been most surprising, for the fellow was coming up behind Frank, and looked for nothing of the sort. It doubled him up gasping, and while he gasped, Merriwell went in to polish off the other chap. He found that fellow easy beside Buster Bill, and he took pains to swing accurately without chancing it. The blow was perfect, and the fourth thug went down and out.

This left but one man on his pins, and he was just recovering his breath, which had been knocked out of him by that terrible kick. He straightened up as Frank turned on him. Then he saw four dark forms on the ground, and his desire was to be a long distance away from that vicinity.

But he knew his wind would not let him run fast, and so he was compelled to stand up and take his medicine like the others. He put up his guard and ducked Merry's first blow. In following the fellow up, Frank caught his toe over the prostrate body of one of the men on the ground, and went down to his knees.

Uttering a snarl of joy, the last thug sprang in. This was his chance. He would get the best of this remarkable college man now. He would upset him, jump on him with both feet, half-kill him! Then, when the others sat up and took notice of things, he would say: "Behold, I did it!" or words to that effect.

It was a real pleasant dream, but it proved to be nothing but a dream. He did not even hit Merriwell, who dodged, leaped up, closed in, and kicked him reeling.

It was amazing how the Yale man could follow up an advantage. As that fellow staggered, he went in on him, deliberately selected the knock-out spot, and let him have it.

That ended the fight, for the fifth one of the gang joined his weary friends on the ground.

Frank stood in the midst of his fallen assailants, looking about.

Two men came rushing up through the darkness. They were Starbright and Hodge, who had decided to walk in from the field, and happened to be coming along behind him. They had heard the sounds of

battle as they approached, and fancying Frank might be in it, rushed forward to offer assistance.

"Merry," cried Bart, "is that you?"

"Yes," said Frank, in a calm, undisturbed tone, "I think it is."

"You—you've been attacked?" palpitated the giant freshman, who accompanied Hodge.

"Something of the kind happened," admitted Merry.

"Your assailants—where are they?" demanded Hodge.

"You'll find them scattered around here," answered Frank, as, with one hand in his pocket, he made a gentle, sweeping gesture with the other.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BEFORE THE RACE.

The day of the spring regatta at Lake Whitney arrived at last, and a perfect day it was—mild, sunny, balmy, and sweet. It seems that the sun, by some perennial contract, always shines on this day of days at New Haven. The trees were putting out their bright green leaves, and there was an odor of sweetness, like the breath of spring, in the air.

The lake was almost as smooth as a mirror. Near the shores there were no ripples. Out in the middle of the lake a tiny breeze stirred the water and made it take on a deeper blue.

A vast crowd had gathered and lined the shore of the lake to witness this contest between picked crews from the four classes. Men were there—men of all ages—fathers, brothers, and sons.

But pause a moment to observe the pretty girls! Don't you know that New Haven on any kind of a fête day seems to be the Mecca of pretty girls? One finds himself wondering where they all come from. It seems that some one with an eye to artistic beauty of varying styles must have traveled over the country, gathering up all the pretty girls to be found, and then rushed them on to New Haven.

The dresses of the ladies made the crowd lively with touches of color. Of course, they were disporting the colors of the various classes.

Yale men could be told from visitors and townies. They were discussing the probable result of the race. The Chickering set had found a comfortable and slightly spot, and there they were gathered in a body, waiting for the excitement to begin.

"Weally, felloth," said Lew Veazie, removing the head of his cane from his mouth in order to speak, "I believe the juniorth will win thith wace."

"I hope so," said Chickering, "though I shall feel sorry for Merriwell, who has put so much hard work upon the freshmen. It will be a great disappointment for him."

"That's right!" nodded Gene Skelding, with a harsh laugh, having thrust back his cap to permit the sun to fall fairly on his beautiful brow. "It's going to be a jolt for Merriwell, but I have it straight, the freshmen can't win."

"I'm afraid I don't understand why not," said Ollie Lord, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Why, because it is written on the Book of Fate that they are not to win," said Tilton Hull, looking solemnly over his high collar, as a boy might peer over a whitewashed board fence.

"But that doesn't explain it to me. Does it to you, chummie?" asked Ollie, turning to Lew.

"Hawdly," confessed Veazie. "There mutht be

thomething going on that we don't know anything about."

"I only received a hint of it," said Hull, lowering his voice to a whisper, which he seemed to shoot upward into the air, his collar held his chin so high. "We're willing to let the freshies and the sophs fight it out. We have done nothing."

"And if the sophs choose to steal one of the freshman crew, why, that is none of our business," said Skelding.

"But it is not honorable!" exclaimed Rupert, with an expression of horror.

"Don't let that jar you," said Gene. "The sophs may do the stealing, while we'll do the winning, and Merriwell will get left all round."

"That ith all I care for," nodded Veazie. "Oh, I hate that fellow! I'd like to give him a weal hard hit with the heavy end of my cane!"

Not a great distance from the Chickering crowd were gathered Hodge, Mason, Hooker, Browning, and Carker. Hodge was looking strangely worried, though he had nothing to say.

"A glorious day, gentlemen," said Mason. "Why, it's like a day in the South; yes, sah. A perfect day for such a race."

"But I've got an idea something is going wrong," put in Carker. "I don't know why I feel that way, but I can't help it."

"Oh, say!" grunted Browning; "do you ever feel

any other way? Why don't you try to be cheerful and hopeful one day, just for a change?"

"There is too much careless cheerfulness and hopeless hopefulness in this world," sighed Greg. "I tell you we are rushing into grave and terrible dangers, yet sober-minded men of to-day scarcely ever pause to scan the black storm-cloud that is gathering. Some day it will burst in all its fury."

"It's a thunder-storm this time!" grumbled Bruce. "Well, at least that is a relief from your tiresome old earthquake, Cark."

"You are like all the others," sighed Greg. "Some day you may awaken to the truth, but I fear it will then be too late. The storm will have burst. It is coming with the swiftness of——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, shut up!" growled Hodge, who was watching the starting-point with an expression of anxiety on his face. "This is a time to think of something else. I swear I believe there is something the matter!"

Berlin Carson came rushing up.

"Hello, fellows!" he panted. "Where is Merry?"

They did not know.

"What's the matter?" asked Hodge. "Has anything happened?"

"Sh!" cautioned Carson. "The sophs have stolen the freshman coxswain."

"Knight?"

"Yes."

"The dickens! What will the freshmen do?"

"They are in a mess, and they want advice from Merriwell. That's why I've been out looking for him. But it's no use to look farther."

"Not a bit."

"It's time for the race to start now."

"Past time."

"Well, we'll have to let the freshies go it the best they can. I guess the sophs have got them, all right. It's too bad, after Merry has given them so much of his time."

"This business has been hanging fire right along," said Bart. "I knew there were some men who meant that the freshmen should not win, anyhow. I think Merriwell knew it, too, and I'm sorry he should let those chaps get ahead of him. They'll have it to crow over for a month."

Carson sat down.

"It'll be the first time Frank has been tripped up," he said.

If any one of them had turned about and looked behind them at this moment he might have seen two fellows who disappeared into a thick mass of shrubbery, amid which they met.

"The trick is done," said one. "That's why there is a delay about the start. Give me the notes you hold against me, Snodgrass."

"Wait a little, Arnold," said Ben Snodgrass. "I've

ceased paying in advance since I forked over twenty-five plunks to Buster Bill, and he failed to carry out his part of the bargain."

"He did the best he could. It wasn't his fault."

"Yes, it was."

"How?"

"I warned him what Merriwell was, but he sneered at college athletes."

"And Merriwell literally whipped him and his whole gang."

"That's what Starbright reported. Said he had five of them laid out at once."

"Well, Merriwell will meet defeat, after all, for Earl Knight is ten miles from here at this minute, safely held under lock and key till the race is over. I know that, Snodgrass; so you may as well fork over the paper."

"You'll get the paper, all right, after the race."

"If the freshmen win, it's not my fault. I've carried out my part of the agreement by leading Knight into the trap."

"If the freshmen win without Knight, you'll get your money; but they can't do it, for there isn't another man who can take Knight's place and fill it as he did. People got over sneering at Knight as a coxswain. He was the great man of the crew, for, somehow, he put spirit and life and confidence in them."

"And he could steer."

"He was an expert. Oh, yes, you'll get your paper after the race! What's that? Listen!"

A shout came from the shore.

"The race has begun!" exclaimed Arnold.

Snodgrass did not pause to say a word, but made a break for the shore.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VICTORY OF THE STROKE.

The race was on! Down the lake they came, the freshmen and sophomores neck and neck. The great crowd shouted and cheered. Colors waved everywhere.

It was a beautiful sight to see those rival crews, their broad backs bending in perfect unison, their strong arms extended and drawn back with the muscular heave that was regular as clockwork. The dripping oar-blades flashed in the sunshine.

Who is the coxswain in the freshman boat? Everybody is anxious to know. It's not a little fellow. Why, it's a man as large as Knight! Look closer!"

"Great mavericks!" muttered Berlin Carson. "Am I dreaming? Why, that is——"

"I thought you said Knight had disappeared!" rumbled Browning. "Who gave you that fairy-story?"

"That is Knight in the stern of the freshman boat, sah," put in Hock Mason.

Of course it was Knight! There could be no mistaking that terrible scar down his left cheek, which was plainly visible through their glasses.

"Well, it's hard work to get ahead of Frank Merriwell!" chuckled Berlin Carson. "He must have found a way to trace Knight and rescue him. The freshmen will win!"

"It looks that way," admitted Carker; "but in times of greatest prosperity have come upon us our greatest calamities."

They felt like punching him, but of a sudden their attention was wholly given to the race. Surely something was wrong! See! the freshman stroke reels in his seat! It is Starbright! Something has fallen to the bottom of the shell—something that sounds suspiciously like a stone.

Then the sophomores begin to forge ahead.

The consternation in the freshman boat has spread to the shore. The race is ruined. Something had knocked the stroke-oar out, and that settles it.

But look again! A strange thing is happening. The coxswain, with amazing skill, grasps the senseless stroke and swings him aft, taking his place and his oar.

As he seized the oar the new stroke cries:

"Pull!"

Never before on Lake Whitney had such a remarkable thing happened. The freshmen quickly recover, and their oars rise and fall. With tremendous energy they almost fling the boat out of the water.

The race is near the end. There can be no hope for the unfortunate freshmen, who now have no coxswain, save a senseless man.

The great crowd of spectators thrill with wildest excitement. The new stroke has given that crew such life as they had not exhibited before at any stage of

the race. They forge ahead, recovering the lost distance with remarkable speed.

In a moment they will be neck and neck again. Is it possible that the race will be a draw?

Now they are together, and the spectators are cheering wildly, while hats, handkerchiefs, and flags wave everywhere.

And then, despite everything the sophomores can do, the boat of the freshmen forges slowly into the lead.

Over the line they go, with the nose of the freshman boat one foot in advance, and the race is won—the most remarkable race ever witnessed on Lake Whitney.

* * * * *

There were ugly rumors about that stone. Of course, somebody threw it, and, of course, the object had been to knock out Starbright and give the race to the sophomores. But for the remarkable work of the coxswain, this dastardly trick would have resulted in the defeat of the freshmen.

The name of the coxswain was on every lip. Earl Knight had become famous for his wonderful action. He had saved the race—a fact which no man disputed.

Of course, Merriwell's friends were well satisfied with the termination of this exciting contest, while his enemies were equally depressed.

But his friends were vowing they would find out who had thrown that stone.

"It was a dastardly piece of business!" declared Bart Hodge hotly. "The fellow ought to be hanged!"

"I think it would be a very good thing to give him a coat of tar and feathers," grunted Browning, who was not a little aroused himself.

"Some one must have seen him do it," said Mason. "It's our duty to find out who it was."

So they set out to investigate, but everybody seemed too excited to really know anything about it. Some declared no stone had been thrown, but that Starbright had fainted in the boat. Starbright's friends, however, knew better than that.

The Chickering set was disgusted. The result had added another laurel to the cap of Frank Merriwell, they thought, and they felt very bad about it. They were among those who declared no stone had been thrown.

Perhaps the most disgusted man was Ben Snodgrass, who had found a spot on a high piece of land, not far from the finishing-point. When the race was over he vanished from that spot, and he hoped that no one had seen him there.

He encountered Arnold, who was looking miserable enough. Snodgrass was furious.

"Oh, you're a dandy!" he grated. "You did a nice piece of business, didn't you? I thought Earl Knight was ten miles away when the race began, safely held under lock and key!"

"So did I," muttered Orson huskily.

"To-morrow you pay those notes, or they go to your

grandmother for collection!" snarled Snodgrass, as he shook them at Arnold, having taken them from his pockets.

Arnold was white as a sheet. With his teeth clenched, he leaped on Snodgrass, struck him down, snatched the notes from his hand, and tore them up. Then he took to his heels, while the baffled plotter arose, shaking with the rage of defeat and shame.

But at the boat-house a strange thing was happening. The coxswain who had steered and rowed the freshman boat to victory was bending over Dick Starbright, whom he was seeking to restore to consciousness. His face was beaded with perspiration, and down his left cheek from that remarkable scar ran streaks of blue.

Starbright opened his eyes and saw the other bending over him.

"How are you, Dick?" asked the coxswain.

"You, Frank?" gasped the big stroke, in amazement. "Why, what—what does it mean?"

Then there was great excitement in the boat-house, for the coxswain, whom no man observed closely in the rush at getting started, was none other than Frank Merriwell, who had made a grease-paint scar down his left cheek and taken the place of Knight.

But the race was won, and Merriwell remained invincible.

THE END.

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