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FRANK MERRIWELL'S RACES

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's Schooldays," "Frank Merriwell's Trip West," "Frank Merriwell's Chums," "Frank Merriwell's Foes," etc.

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S RACES

CHAPTER I.

HORSE TALK.

"He's a beauty!"

Jack Diamond uttered the exclamation. He was admiring a horse Frank Merriwell had lately purchased.

"He is," agreed Danny Griswold, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets and his short legs set far apart. "But think of paying a thousand dollars!"

"He looks like a racer," declared Bruce Browning, who showed unusual interest and animation for a fellow who was known as the laziest man at Yale.

"He's got the marks of a swift one," asserted Diamond, walking around the bay gelding, which Frank Merriwell had led out into the middle of the stable floor for inspection. "He is rangey, has clean limbs, and a courageous eye. I shouldn't wonder if he could cover ground in a hurry."

"I did not buy him for a racer," asserted Frank. "I purchased him as a saddle horse purely for my own use and pleasure."

"You must have money to burn," chirped Griswold. "Your old man must have made loads of it. I had an uncle four times removed once who made money, but he got arrested when he tried to pass it."

"That reminds me of my father and his partner," said Browning, with apparent seriousness. "They formed a strange sort of a partnership. One of them stayed in New York all the time, while the other remained in California. In this manner they managed always to have plenty of money between them."

"Oh, goodness!" gasped Diamond, "if you fellows keep this up, I shall want to get away."

"If you want to get a weigh, we'll try to find some scales for you," chuckled Griswold, his eyes twinkling.

"They say Dan Dorman's father has plenty of money," said Frank.

"I've heard so," admitted Browning. "But Dorman is too mean to make much of a drain on the old man's pile."

"That's right," nodded Griswold. "Why, he is so mean that in the winter, when his hair gets long, he wets it thoroughly, and then goes out in the open air and lets it freeze."

"What does he do that for?"

"So he can break it off and save the price of a hair-cut!"

"Say," cried Diamond, desperately, "I thought you fellows were talking about a horse!"

"No," yawned Browning, "we're talking about a jackass."

Every one but Jack seemed to appreciate this, for they all grinned.

"Well," said the lad from Virginia, "Merriwell has brought out his horse for us to inspect, and I move we do so. After this is over, you may talk of anything you please."

"It is rather remarkable that you should pay such a price for a mere saddle horse," declared Browning.

"I simply kept my promise," smiled Frank.

"Your promise?"

"Exactly."

"What promise?"

"The one I made to myself when this horse enabled me to overtake a runaway that was dragging Winifred Lee to danger and possible death. This is the animal on which I pursued the runaway, and I took him without asking leave of the owner. I vowed that if this horse enabled me to catch and stop the runaway before Miss Lee was harmed I would own the creature if it took my last dollar," he added.

"And that," cried Griswold, trying to strike a dramatic attitude—"that is true love!"

"Well, I don't know as I blame you, Merriwell," admitted Bruce. "Winifred Lee is a stunning girl. But it strikes me that the owner of the horse swindled you."

A bit of additional color had risen to Frank's cheeks, and he looked strikingly handsome. The boys knew it would not do to carry the joke about Winnie Lee too far, and so they refrained.

"The man who owned the horse did not want to sell him at any price," explained Frank. "I induced him to set a price that he thought would settle me, and then I snapped him up so quickly it took away his breath."

"I should think your guardian would have kicked at throwing up a thousand for such a purpose."

"He did," laughed Frank, looking at Diamond, who showed a little confusion. "You remember that Jack, Rattleton and myself went on to Springfield to meet him a few days ago?"

"And got arrested for kidnaping a baby!" chuckled Griswold. "That was a corker. We didn't do a thing to you fellows when you got back here!"

"That's right," admitted Jack, dolefully. "Not a thing! You simply marched us through the streets and onto the campus with a band and banners and made a stunning show of us!"

"Well," said Frank, "Professor Scotch, my guardian, was so glad to get out of the scrape when the judge discharged us that he gave up the thousand without a flutter. That's how I got the money."

"Well," yawned Browning, "now you have the horse, you'll find him an expensive piece of furniture. It takes money to take care of 'em and feed 'em."

Diamond had been inspecting the gelding from all sides, surveying him with the air of one who knows something about horses, and he now asked:

"Has the creature a pedigree, old man?"

"Sure," nodded Frank. "Its pedigree is all right. I have it somewhere, but I don't care so much for that."

"Oh, I don't know! It may prove of value to you some day."

"How?"

"Well, you may take a fancy to enter Nemo in a race or two."

"What then?"

"If he should win, you'll want his pedigree."

"I suppose that is right, but I am no sportsman of the turf; that is professional. Amateur sports are good enough for me."

"Honest horse racing is one of the grandest sports in the world!" cried Jack, with flashing eyes.

"Honest horse racing!" laughed Griswold. "What's that? Where do you find anything like that?"

"Oh, there is such a thing."

"There may be, but people are not used to it."

"That's why I do not think much of horse racing," declared Frank. "There are too many tricks to it to suit me."

"Oh, there are tricks to any sort of sport."

"Very few to college sports. If a man is caught at anything crooked it means ruin for his college career, and he is sure to carry the stigma through life. I tell you college sports are honest, and that is why they are so favored by people of taste and refinement—people who care little or nothing for professional sports. The public sees the earnestness, the honesty, and the manhood in college sports and contests, and the patrons of such sports know they are not being done out of their money by a fake. Prize fighting in itself is not so bad, but the class of men who follow it have brought disgrace and disrepute upon it. Fights are 'fixed' in advance by these dishonest scoundrels, and the man who backs his judgment with his money is likely to be done out of his coin by the dirtiest kind of a deal."

"What makes me sore," said Diamond, "is that some sensational newspapers should send professional bruisers to witness our college football games and denounce them as more brutal than prize fights."

"That makes me a trifle warm under the collar," admitted Browning. "But I don't suppose we should mind what that class of papers say. Their motto is 'Anything for a sensation,' and the intelligent portion of the newspaper readers is onto them. These papers have faked so many things that they carry no weight when they do tell the truth."

"I wouldn't mind putting Nemo into a race just to see what sort of stuff there is in him," admitted Frank.

"Why don't you do it?" cried Diamond, eagerly.

"I wouldn't want to enter him in any of the races around here."

"Take him to New York."

"No; those races are beyond my limit. All I want to do is try him for my own satisfaction."

"Then run him into the Mystic Park races at Bethany. You can do that quietly enough."

"That's so," said Browning. "You can do that without attracting too much attention to yourself."

"We'll all go up and see the race," declared Griswold. "It will be great sport. Do it, old man!"

"But where can I get a jockey I can trust?"

"You'll have to scrub around for one, and take chances."

"No!" cried Merriwell, as a sudden thought struck him. "I can do better than that."

"How?"

"I have the fellow."

"Who?"

"A colored boy at home. He is fond of horses."

"Has he ever ridden in a race?"

"Twice."

"Did he win?"

"Once. My uncle, who kindly left me his fortune, was a crank on fast horses, and he owned a number of them. Toots could ride some of them that would allow nobody else to mount them. Uncle Asher had horses in the races every year, but he was often 'done' by his jockeys. He knew it well enough, but he found it impossible to get the sort of jockey he wanted. Toots begged to ride a race, but he was a little shaver, and uncle was afraid. Finally, one day, just before a race was to come off, Uncle Asher discovered that his jockey had sold out. At the last moment he fired the fellow, and was forced to let Toots ride, or withdraw his horse. Toots rode, and won. The next time he rode he might have won, but the horse was doped."

"He's just the chap you want!" nodded Jack, with satisfaction. "Put Nemo into the Bethany races, and let Toots ride him."

"I'll think of it," said Frank.

A hostler approached the group.

"Howdy do, Mr. Merriwell, sir?" he said. "One of your friends called to see your horse this morning, sir."

"One of my friends?" cried Frank, in surprise. "Who was it?"

"He gave his name as Diamond, sir—Jack Diamond."

Merriwell immediately turned on Jack and asked:

"Hello, how about this? Did you call to see Nemo this morning?"

"Not much!" exclaimed Jack. "This is the first time I have been here. The hostler is mistaken."

"You must have misunderstood your visitor, Grody," said Frank. "He could not have given his name as Jack Diamond, for this is Jack Diamond here."

The man stared at Jack, and then shook his head.

"That's not the feller," he declared.

"Of course not. Your visitor must have given you some other name."

"Not on your life," returned Grody, promptly. "He said his name was Jack Diamond, sir, and I will swear to that."

"Well, this is somewhat interesting!" came grimly from Frank. "What did he do, Grody?"

"He looked Nemo over, sir."

"Looked Nemo over how—in what way?"

"Why, I offered to take Nemo out of the stall, but he said no, not to bother, as he only wished to glance at the horse. He went to the stall, which same I showed him, and looked in. The door wasn't locked, for I had just been cleanin' the stall out. He opened the door and stood there some little time. First thing I knew he was gone. I went and looked into the stall, and he was examinin' Nemo's feet. He seemed wonderful interested in the horse, and I saw by the way he acted he knew something about horses."

"The interest deepens," observed Frank. "Go on, Grody."

"When he came out of the stall he says to me, says he, 'Merriwell has struck a right good piece of horseflesh there.' Says I, 'In the best of my judgment he has, sir.' Says he, 'I understand he paid a fancy figure for the gelding, something like a thousand, he told me.' Says I, 'If he told you that I have no doubt he told you correct, sir.' Then says he, 'Does he mean to race him?' 'That,' says I, 'bein' a friend of Mr. Merriwell, is something what you should know as well as I, or better.' Then he says, says he, 'Horses is mighty uncertain property, for you never can tell what may happen to them.' In this I agreed with him, but there was something about him I didn't like much. Then he went away."

Frank whistled.

"This is highly interesting," exclaimed Frank. "What did this fellow look like, Grody? Can you describe him?"

"Well, I looked him over rather careful like, sir, but I don't know as I can describe him particular, except that he had on a checked suit and wore a red necktie, in which were a blazer, genuine, or to the contrary. I know horses, but I'm no judge of diamonds. He was smooth shaved, and his jaw were rather square and his hair short. The eyes of him never looked straight at me once. Somehow I didn't think he were a student, for he made one or two breaks in the words he said that made his talk different from your student's. He didn't have that sort of real gentleman way with him neither."

Frank turned to his friends.

"Now what do you suppose this business means, fellows?" he asked.

"It means crookedness!" declared Diamond, rather excitedly. "I am dead sure of that!"

"It looks that way," admitted Browning.

"But what sort of crookedness can it mean?" asked Frank, bewildered. "What is the game?"

"That will develop later; but there is some kind of a game on, be sure of that," asserted Jack. "If not, why should anybody come here and give a fictitious name? That gives the whole thing away. Look out, Frank, all your enemies are not sleeping!"

"Well, it is time they let up on me," said Merriwell, seriously. "They have brought nothing but disaster and disgrace on themselves thus far, and—"

"Some of them are looking for revenge, mark what I say."

"I am tired of being bothered and harassed by petty enemies!" exclaimed Frank. "I have had considerable patience with the fellows who have worked against me, but there is a limit."

"That's right, and they would have reached the limit with me long ago," declared Diamond.

"Well, it is like this, Jack," said Frank; "it is almost always true that not all of a man's enemies are bad fellows. To begin with, you remember that you were my enemy, and now we are friends, and this is not the first time such a thing has happened with me."

"Well, if a man were bucking against me, I do not think I would wait to see how he would turn out before I bucked back."

"Oh, I am not in the habit of doing that. You will remember that I bucked back pretty hard in your case."

Jack did remember it, and he felt that Merriwell was capable of holding his own with his foes.

"You will do well to look out for your horse, all the same," said Diamond.

"That's right," grunted Browning. "If I were in your place, Merriwell, I'd watch out pretty sharp."

"I will," said Frank. "I'll have Toots come on here and keep watch over Nemo most of the time. When he is not here, Grody can take his place. If I have an enemy who thinks of stealing my horse, he'll have hard work to accomplish his design."

"Unless he does it before you get things arranged," said Griswold. "Put him up, Merriwell, and let's get out."

"I am going for a ride," said Frank. "Put the saddle on him, Grogan. Will see you later, fellows, if you are going now."

"We'll wait till you leave," yawned Browning. "There's no reason why we should tear our clothes hurrying away."

"You are not liable to tear your clothes doing anything," laughed Frank.

CHAPTER II.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE ROAD.

Grody soon had Nemo saddled and bridled. The horse was eager to be away, as he showed by his tossing head, fluttering nostrils and restless feet.

"Whoa, boy," said Frank, soothingly. "Don't be so impatient. We'll get away in a moment."

He swung into the saddle, the stable doors rolled open, and away sprang the gelding.

The remaining lads hurried out of the stable to watch Frank ride, Grody accompanying them.

"He seems like he were a part of the horse," declared the hostler, admiringly. "That young gentleman were born to handle horses, he were."

"He is, indeed, a graceful rider," nodded Diamond. "I am sure he did not learn in any riding academy, for he rides naturally. The riding academies all turn out riders with an artificial and wooden style. There is no more distressing sight than the riders to be seen in Central Park, New York, almost any afternoon. They bounce around in the saddle like a lot of wooden figures, and it is plain enough that many of them do not bounce because they want to, but because they think it the proper thing. Southerners ride naturally and gracefully. Mr. Merriwell rides like a Southerner."

"He rides like Buffalo Bill," said Browning, with an effort. "Bill is the best rider I ever saw."

Diamond was watching Merriwell and the horse, a queer look on his face. Finally he exclaimed:

"By Jove! there's something the matter with Nemo!"

"What is it?" asked Griswold. "I didn't notice anything."

"The horse shows a suspicion of lameness," asserted Jack.

"You have good eyes to detect it," observed Browning, doubtingly. "I can't see that anything is the matter with the horse."

"I'll wager he goes lame before Merriwell returns."

"If he does, I shall think you have great discernment."

Merriwell turned a corner and disappeared.

"Come, fellows," said Griswold, "let's shuffle along."

"Merriwell is altogether too generous," declared Diamond, as the trio walked away.

"In what way?" asked Browning.

"With his enemies. I know you and I were both enemies to him in the beginning, and——"

"He threw us down hard."

"That's all right; but there are enemies you have to hold down."

"Merriwell didn't do a thing to Hartwick!" exclaimed Griswold, grinning. "He scared the fellow so he ran away from college, and nobody knows where he went."

"Yes, but Merriwell gave him the opportunity to skip and escape the disgrace that must follow public exposure of his acts. Some fellows would have exposed him and brought about his expulsion."

"That's right," chirped Griswold. "Merriwell was as generous with Hartwick as he could be with such a fellow. He might have used him much worse than he did."

"And do you fancy Hartwick thinks any more of Merriwell for not exposing him publicly?" asked Jack.

"Oh. I don't know."

"Well, I will wager that he does not. More than that, I'll venture that Hartwick, wherever he may be, cherishes a fierce desire for revenge, and longs for the day when he will be able to get back at Frank. Merry will hear from that chap again."

And there the subject was dropped.

Frank enjoyed the ride upon Nemo's back, for the horse seemed intelligent and something of a comrade. The boy talked to his mount as if the animal could understand every word he uttered.

He had ridden beyond the limits of the city before he noticed that Nemo was limping the least bit.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" asked Frank, with concern. "Have you hurt yourself some way?"

Nemo shook his head. It almost seemed that the animal was answering the question in the negative.

"You must have stepped on a stone," Merriwell declared. "Why, you are really beginning to limp in earnest!"

Frank immediately dismounted, after having decided it was Nemo's left hind leg or foot that was lame.

"I'll make an inspection, and see if I can discover what is the matter," said the boy, anxiously.

He examined both of the horse's hind feet, but could not see that anything was wrong.

"If that rascally shoer has blundered in his work he'll not get another chance at you, boy," Merriwell declared.

After patting Nemo's neck and fondling the fine creature a bit, Frank mounted once more.

But Nemo limped worse than ever.

"This is singular," muttered the perplexed lad. "I don't understand it at all. There's something wrong, for a fact."

He watched the horse, and decided that he had made no mistake in locating the lameness in the left hind leg.

Again he dismounted and made an examination, and again the result was far from satisfactory.

"I wish you might speak and tell me what is the matter," said Frank, in dismay. "I'll have you examined without delay by somebody who knows his business."

He rode slowly into the outskirts of the city.

Of a sudden there was a rattle of wheels and a clatter of hoofs behind him.

He turned and looked back, to see a carriage coming along the road at a reckless rate. Two persons were seated in the carriage, and the horse was covered with sweat.

"Why are those fools driving like that?" muttered Merriwell. "Are they drunk, or is it a matter of life or death?"

"Get out of the road!"

The command was hoarsely shouted, and Frank reined aside, having no desire to get in the way of the reckless driver.

Once more the boy on the horse turned to look back.

"Drunk, sure enough," he decided. "And they are two young fellows, too. Students on a tear, perhaps."

The occupants of the carriage had been drinking heavily, but they were not so drunk that they did not recognize the boy in advance when he turned in the saddle the second time.

"Hey, Rolf!" exclaimed the one who was not driving. "It's Merriwell!"

"That's what it is!" cried the driver. "I haven't seen him for some time, but I know his face too well to ever forget it!"

"He's out on his new horse."

"Sure."

"Run him down! run him down! Throw him off! Now's our chance!"

The driver was just intoxicated enough to be utterly reckless of consequences, and he snarled:

"Hang me if I don't do it!"

And then, when they were very near the boy and the horse, he suddenly reined toward Frank with the intention of running into Merriwell's mount.

In another moment there might have been a grand smash there on the road, but Frank had caught the words "Run him down!" and he gave Nemo a light cut with the whip, at the same time pulling him still farther into the ditch.

Nemo was not used to the whip, and he leaped like a flash. Such a spring would have unseated any but a most expert rider, but the boy in the saddle seemed to move as a part of the horse. Into the ditch they went, and past them spun the carriage containing the two reckless young men.

The carriage came very near upsetting. It careened and spun along on two wheels, threatening to hurl its occupants into the ditch, for the driver had reined the horse back toward the middle of the road. Both clung on for life.

"Don't blame me!" muttered Merriwell, through his teeth. "You were looking for a smash."

But the carriage did not go over; it righted at last. One of the young men looked back and shook his fist at the boy on the horse, and then away they went in a cloud of dust.

"If that was not Evan Hartwick, I am greatly mistaken!" exclaimed Frank, as he reined Nemo back into the road. "So he is back here as soon as this? I know what that means. He is looking for revenge on me."

Frank had seen the face of the driver as the carriage spun past, and he added:

"Hartwick's companion is somebody I know. I did not obtain a fair look at him, but—great Scott! it was the card sharp, Rolf Harlow!"

Harlow was a fellow who had entered Harvard, but had not completed his second year there, leaving suddenly for reasons not generally known.

A Yale man by the name of Harris, familiarly known as "Sport," because of his gambling inclinations, had known Harlow, and had introduced him to a number of Yale students.

Harris and Harlow were both poker players, but they claimed that they played the game "merely for amusement."

A number of Harris' acquaintances had been induced to enter into the game, and there had been some very "hot sittings."

No one seemed to suspect that Harlow was crooked, for he almost always lost, although he never lost large sums.

Harris won almost continually. He seemed to be the luckiest fellow in the world in drawing cards. He would hold up one ace on a large jackpot and catch two more aces and a small pair. It seemed the greatest kind of "bull luck."

Harry Rattleton, Merriwell's roommate, was following the game. Frank tried to induce him to keep away, but it was without avail.

Then Frank seemed to take an interest in the game, and it was not long before he proved that Harlow was a card manipulator, and caught him at one of his tricks.

That finished Harlow's career at plucking Yale "fruit," and the fellow left New Haven suddenly.

Harris had remained under a cloud of suspicion since that time, as there seemed very little doubt but he had been in league with Harlow, and they had divided the plunder between them.

The proof had not been sufficient to incriminate Harris, but it had been enough to make him unpopular and cause him to be shunned.

He had seemed to take this very meekly, but some of Merriwell's friends declared that Harris had not forgotten or forgiven, and that he would strike back at Frank if the opportunity ever presented.

Now Harlow was back in New Haven, and Hartwick, who had been forced to leave college to escape expulsion, was also there.

That meant something.

"Hartwick, Harlow and Harris—the three hard tickets. They are birds of a feather. All they need is Ditson to make a most delectable quartet!"

So muttered Frank Merriwell, as he gazed at the receding cloud of dust.

Frank began to realize that there was more trouble in store for him.

"I shall not deal gently with that gang this time," he declared, with a hard-set face. "This little adventure has put me on my guard, and I don't propose to let them have much fun with me. Those two fools were just full enough to drive right into me with the hope of doing me an injury, without a thought of their own necks. They might have been thrown out and killed, but they did not hesitate because of that. The one thought was to do me some way—any way. Hartwick always was a desperate fellow, but I did not fancy Harlow could be such a chap. However, he was driving that horse, and the way he drove was proof enough that he is careless of life and limb at times."

For some time Frank paid very little attention to Nemo, but the lameness of the horse became so pronounced at last that he could not help observing it once more.

"That worries me, old fellow," he admitted, with a troubled face. "It is something I can't understand."

He rode slowly back to the stable.

It was growing dark when he arrived at the stable. A strange man was standing outside as Frank rode up. The man looked keenly at the boy and the horse, and then, as the doors rolled open, followed into the stable.

"Horse is lame, eh?" he said, questioningly. "I didn't notice that when he went out. He wasn't lame then, was he?"

Frank paid not the least attention to this question. The man was a stranger, and the boy did not care to talk with him.

"I spotted that horse when yer rode out, young man," the stranger persisted. "Fine lookin' critter—just the kind I've been wantin' some time for a saddle horse. Whose critter is it?"

"Grody," said Frank, utterly ignoring the man, "I want you to see if you can tell what ails Nemo. He is lame in one of his hind feet. He was taken that way after I had been out a while. I think it possible there is something the matter with the way he is shod. Will you look after him without delay?"

"To be sure, sir—I'll not fail, sir," said Grody.

"Then the horse belongs ter you, does it?" asked the strange man, coming forward and addressing Frank in a point-blank manner. "I am a horseman, and I know all about critters. If there's anything the matter—and there seems to be—I can tell what it is in five minutes. Shall I make an examination, young man?"

"No, sir!" came sharply from Merriwell's lips. "I do not propose to have strangers fooling around my horse. I do not know you, sir, so your offer is respectfully declined."

CHAPTER III.

TEACHING A RASCAL A LESSON.

"Now hold on, young man, don't be so fast," said the stranger. "You do not know me now, and I don't blame yer fer not wantin' anybody yer don't know doing anything fer yer horse; but here's my card—Professor James Colbath—and now I know you have heard of me. I am one of the greatest veterinary surgeons in the country."

Frank ignored the card, and the man began to show signs of anger.

"This is no bluff!" he exclaimed. "It's on the level. I have nary doubt but I can find out what's the matter with the critter in five minutes, and if I don't give yer a square deal I don't want a cent for my services, that's all."

He would have lifted one of Nemo's feet, but Frank cried:

"Drop that! I tell you I don't want you, and I won't have you! Get away from this horse!"

The man growled and stiffened up.

"All right," he said, somewhat savagely. "I did think of trying to buy the critter off yer, but you're too flip. If the animal stays lame, don't blame me."

Although Frank had seemed to pay very little attention to the stranger, he was inspecting him closely. He saw the man had pulled his hat down over his eyes, and wore his coat collar turned up. He had a black beard that concealed his features to a great extent.

Grody was also looking the stranger over closely. He fancied he detected a familiar sound in the man's voice. The light in the stable was rather dim, and that served to make the inspection of the boy and the hostler rather unsatisfactory.

All at once, Grody started as if struck by a sudden idea. As soon as possible, he whispered in

Frank's ear:

"That mug is the same chap that were here this afternoon, sir."

"The same chap? What chap?"

"The one what gave his name as Diamond."

"No? You said that fellow had no beard."

"I don't believe this man's beard is all right."

Frank was aroused. He fancied that he saw a ray of light.

The fellow who had called himself Professor Colbath turned away. He had heard the hostler whisper, and he caught Frank's question. Immediately he showed a desire to get out.

Leaving the horse to Grody, Frank quickly placed himself before the stranger, saying:

"Hold on a minute. I don't know but I'll talk with you a little."

"No, yer won't!" growled the man. "I'm done tryin' to talk with a fresh youngster like you—I'm done with you."

"Well, I am not done with you!"

Frank's voice rang out sharp and stern.

"What do you want?" asked the man, uneasily.

"I want to see your face."

"Well, look at it, and when ye've seen it I'll proceed to smash yours! I don't take no insolence from a kid!"

"Take off your hat!"

"I will—nit!"

"And that beard—take it off!"

"Ye're crazy!" cried the man, as he started back.

"Am I?"

Frank gave a spring and a grab with both hands. One hand snatched away the cap, and the other tore off the black beard, which, indeed, proved to be false.

The man uttered an exclamation of rage, and struck at Frank, who dodged the blow.

"Is this the fellow, Grody?" cried Frank.

"The same mug!" declared the hostler, excitedly.

"Well, that's all I want to know!" burst from Frank, as he flung the hat and beard to the floor. "So you were monkeying around my horse to-day, you fakir! Well, what you need is a pair of good black eyes, and I propose to give them to you!"

Snap!—off came the boy's jacket in a twinkling, and he still stood between the unmasked man and the door.

The man, who was a coarse-looking young ruffian, ground his teeth and uttered some violent language.

"Git out the way!" he snarled. "I'm a fighter, and I'll kill yer! I can put yer ter sleep with one punch!"

Merriwell's blood was thoroughly stirred, and he felt just like teaching the fellow a lesson. Although a youth in years, Frank was, as my old readers know, a trained athlete, and he could handle his fists in the most scientific manner.

"I am going to give you a chance to put me to sleep," he shot back. "I see your dirty game from start to finish! You are a fakir of the worst sort, and you tried to work me. You did something to my horse to make him lame, and you thought you would get a fat pull out of me for doctoring him. Instead of that, you have run your head into a bad scrape, and it will be damaged when you get it out."

"You talk big for a kid. Why, I can blow yer over with my breath."

"It is strong enough. But I don't go over so easy. Up with your hands if you are such a fighter! I'm coming for you!"

"All right! If ye're bound to have it, come on!"

The man put up his guard, and then Merriwell went at him, while Grody gasped for breath, thinking the college lad could be no match for the young ruffian.

There were a few swift passes, and then Frank went under the fellow's guard and gave him a terrific uppercut on the chin. That was a staggerer, and the boy followed it up while the man was dazed.

Punk!—biff!—two blows, one on the body and the other fairly in the eye.

The second blow nearly knocked the man down, and it made him as fierce as a famished tiger. Snarling like an enraged beast, he tried to close in on the lively lad.

"Oh, let me get hold of you!" he grated. "I'll crush the life out of ye!"

Frank avoided the rush by stepping aside, and gave the fellow another body blow as he passed.

Body blows, however, were not as effective as they should have been, on account of the fellow's clothing, and Merriwell quickly decided to waste no more energy in that manner.

The man turned, and went for Frank again. This time the boy did not try to get out of the way, but he met his antagonist squarely, and gave him a heavy one in the other eye.

"That ought to make them mates," said Frank, with a laugh. "You won't know yourself when you look in the glass to-morrow morning. Perhaps it'll teach you better than to try any of your rackets on a boy. You can't always tell what you are getting up against."

The man's teeth could be heard grinding together. He was so furious that he quite lost his head. Then Frank sailed in to finish the affair as soon as possible.

Grody held his breath, nearly bursting with astonishment and admiration.

"Oh, say!" he chuckled. "I never saw a youngster what were that fellow's match! He's hot stuff!"

The hostler could scarcely believe it possible that Merriwell was giving the scoundrel a first-class whipping, but this became more and more evident with each passing moment.

In fact, Frank was struck just once during the entire encounter, and that was a glancing blow on the forehead, which he scarcely noticed. He thumped the rascal to his heart's satisfaction, and then knocked him flat with a round-arm swing that landed on the jaw.

The ruffian lay on the floor and groaned. When he started to get up Merriwell exclaimed:

"There, I think that will do you for to-night! When you want some more of the same just come fooling around my horse!"

He caught the man by the shoulders, yanked him to his feet, ran him to the door, and booted him out of the stable.

Having done this, Frank turned back and coolly put on his coat.

"There, Grody," he said, "I feel better. I think it is possible I have given that rascal a lesson he will not forget in a hurry."

The hostler stared, and then he cried:

"Mr. Merriwell, sir, you are a wonder! If as how you were to go inter ther ring you'd make some of the duffers hustle. That were the neatest job what I ever see!"

"It was not so much of a trick," declared Frank. "The fellow is strong, I'll warrant, but he is too heavy on his feet and too slow in his movements. There are scores of fellows in college who can polish him off."

"I will allow I never knowed you college chaps were able to fight like that before. I knowed some of you were for fighting among yourselves all right, but I didn't think you could go up against a reg'ler scrapper."

"It's a part of the education at Yale," smiled Frank; "and I've found it comes in handy occasionally. The man who can't fight his way through this world in one manner or another gets walked over by chaps who are not his equal in any other way. I do not believe a man should fight only at the proper time, but when he has to fight, I hold that he should be able to do a good turn at it."

"Well, you can do your turn all right, sir."

"Now, Grody, Nemo must receive proper attention. I am sure that fellow did something to make the horse lame. What he did I can't tell. I don't see how he did it without getting his brains kicked out."

Grody hesitated, and then he said:

"Mr. Merriwell, sir, I wants to tell ye something."

"All right, Grody, go on."

"I didn't tell all what happened in the stall to-day when that bloke were here."

"Oh, you didn't?"

"No, sir. What called my attention to the fact that he had gone inter the stall were a racket."

"What sort of a racket?"

"Nemo kicked and squealed, sir, and I heard the man speaking to him. Then I ran over and looked in."

"What was the rascal doing, Grody?"

"He were examinin' Nemo's feet, sir."

"And that was when he got in his dirty work!" cried Frank, angrily. "I'm afraid I didn't thump him as much as he deserved! I feel like hunting him up and giving him a few more!"

CHAPTER IV.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

In a little back room of a saloon three young men were sitting. They were talking earnestly, for all that two of the three showed they had taken altogether too much liquor to be entirely sober.

"We're glad to see you, Sport," one of the drinkers declared.

"Well, I am glad to see you, Harlow, old man, and you, too, Hartwick, although we were never friendly before you left Yale so suddenly."

"That was my fault," admitted Hartwick, huskily. "I didn't know enough to pick out the right sort of pals. I trusted too much to Ditson. He's no good!"

"Now there is where you make a mistake," asserted Sport Harris, quickly. "I know Ditson has no nerve, but he hates the same fellow we hate, and he is good to do the dirty work. We can make use of him, Hartwick."

"I don't know anything about him," confessed Harlow.

"No, he hasn't the nerve to play poker, and so you did not get acquainted with him when you were here."

"I don't know that he hates Merriwell so much," growled Hartwick. "You remember that Ditson blowed everything to Merriwell, and that is why I was forced to skip. Oh, I'd like the satisfaction of punching the face off the dirty little traitor!"

"But what caused Ditson to blow? He says you misused him."

"I choked the cad a little, that is all."

"But there was something back of that," declared Harris. "What led you to choke him?"

"Oh, we had a little trouble. He was trying to squeeze me too hard, and I wouldn't stand for it."

"Trying to squeeze you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you. You know I tried to mark Merriwell for life by punching my foil through the mask that protected his face while we were engaged in a fencing bout. I had prepared my foil for that in advance by fixing the button so I could remove it, and by sharpening the point of the foil. I wanted to spoil the fellow's pretty face!"

The most malignant hatred was expressed in Hartwick's words and manner. He went on:

"I tried the trick, but did not succeed. Ditson carried off the foil, and kept it. He would not give it up, although he promised to a hundred times. He used it to aid in blackmailing me. When he asked me for money, I did not feel like refusing him, for he could throw me down hard by turning the foil over to Merriwell. But he carried the thing too far.

"One night when I was in a bad mood he tried to squeeze more money out of me. He had been living in luxury for some time, while I was broke almost continually. I kicked and refused to give up. Then he had the insolence to threaten me with exposure. I lost my head and choked him. Directly after that he turned like a viper and blowed everything to Merriwell. That was my downfall. I had to skip. Is there any reason why I should not hate the sneak?"

"No, I do not wonder that you are sore on him; but he did not make anything out of the trick."

"Didn't make anything! Why, he forced me out of college!"

"That was not the main thing he was looking for."

"Then what was?"

"He hoped to get in with Merriwell, and he fancied Merriwell would think him a fine fellow for

blowing."

"Well?"

"Well, he made a mistake in Frank Merriwell, for Merriwell despised him all the more, although he did nothing to injure Ditson. He does not recognize Ditson at all, and now Ditson is more eager than before to do Merriwell an injury."

"All the same, Ditson can't be trusted."

"Not unless he is so deep in the game that it means ruin for him to blow. Then he is caught. As I said in the first place, he is a good man to do the dirty work that we do not want to touch."

"I think Harris is right," nodded Harlow, "and you may get a chance to even up with Ditson by throwing him down when we have fixed Merriwell nicely."

"But you want to remember you are going up against a bad man in Frank Merriwell," warned Sport. "I do not care to be forced out of Yale."

"Of course not," said Hartwick and Harlow.

"You fellows have not so much to look out for. You can do things that would be beyond me."

"We made a bluff at doing something to-day," growled Hartwick. "We were out for a drive, and we came upon Merriwell. He was on his new horse, and we tried to run him down, but he got out of the way."

"I don't know but it is a good thing he did," confessed Harlow. "If we had struck him there'd been a general smashup. I was driving, and we were making the old nag hit a hot pace. We came near going bottom up as it was."

"You must have been badly rattled," exclaimed Harris.

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Hartwick, harshly. "We've been up against it for the past three days. Eh, Harlow?"

"That's what," nodded the card sharp. "Hartwick is a hard man to follow. He can kill more stuff than anybody I ever saw."

"Well," said Harris, "I have asked Ditson to come in here this evening. I took a chance on it, for I thought we could get rid of him easily enough if we didn't want him. He is liable to be along at any moment."

Harlow looked at a handsome watch.

"A quarter to ten," he said. "He ought to be around soon if he is coming at all."

"He will be. Where'd you get that ticker, old man?"

"Oh, I took it off a sucker in a game. I'll have to soak it if I don't strike some sort of graft pretty soon. I'm getting down to hard pan."

"I suppose you are all right, Hartwick?" questioned Harris. "You can call on your old man and make him give up any time."

"Well, I guess not! I haven't been able to get a dollar out of the old duffer since I left college. He is icy toward me, and he says I can go it for myself and be hanged."

"That's pleasant! What have you been doing to gather in the coin?"

"Why, confound it! haven't I formed a partnership with Harlow! I don't know anything about card tricks, but he works all of that, and I win the money. He gives me the hands to do it on, you see. If there is suspicion aroused, the poor suckers take to watching me, and they are unable to catch me at anything crooked. Our only trouble is to find the right sort of fruit for plucking. We generally pretend we are strangers to each other. Sometimes we have a little disagreement over the table, just to fool the fools all the more."

"That's first-rate," laughed Harris. "I wish the gang here was not onto Harlow. I could get you some ripe plums."

"And that's what made me so sore on Merriwell," growled Harlow. "But for that fellow we'd be right in it now. Oh, I want to soak him some way, and soak him hard!"

"And we'll find a way to soak him, too!" growled Hartwick. "Let's have another round, fellows."

He pushed a button and a waiter appeared. Drinks were ordered. When they were brought, Ditson came in with the waiter.

"Hello, Roll!" called Harris. "Glad you came along. Mr. Ditson, Mr. Harlow. I think you have met the other gentleman."

Ditson started and turned pale when he saw Hartwick, who was glowering at him.

"Oh, yes! Mr. Ditson has met me!" said Evan, significantly. "We do not need an introduction!"

Ditson seemed on the point of getting out in a hurry, but Harris arose and took him by the arm.

"It's all right," he assured. "Sit down, Roll."

"What sort of a game is this?" hesitatingly asked Ditson, keeping his eyes on Hartwick. "Have you fellows got me in here to do me up?"

"Nothing of the sort."

"Not but I'd like to do you, and do you good," confessed Hartwick, "but Harris won't have it."

"No," said Sport; "I hold that we are all united by our hatred for a common foe, and we cannot afford to be anything but friends."

"All the same, it was a dirty deal you gave me, Ditson," growled Evan, who seemed to be longing to pick a row with the newcomer.

"You forced me into it," declared Ditson, weakly.

"Forced you?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"You know well enough. You set on me like a mad tiger, and I'll bet you would have choked me to death in your room if you hadn't been seized with one of your attacks of heart trouble. I was afraid of you, and I had to do something to protect myself."

"So you blew the whole thing to Merriwell! That was a brave trick. But I understand Merriwell has turned you down in great shape since that."

"Well, he hasn't used me right," admitted Ditson. "Sometimes I think I'd like to kick the wind out of him, but I know I can't do it."

"You may have the chance to take the wind out of him," said Harris. "Sit down, old man, and we will talk matters over. What are you drinking?"

"Bring me a sherry flip, waiter," ordered Ditson, seeing the waiter had paused outside.

Then he sat down in a chair offered him, saying:

"If there's any sure way of doing Merriwell up, I'm in for it; but I give it to you straight that I am sick of trying to do him and having him come out on top. It's got to be a sure thing this time, or I don't touch it."

Beyond a thin partition in a room next to the one occupied by the four plotters sat a man who had a cut and bruised face and a pair of swollen black eyes.

This man had been drinking heavily. A bottle of whiskey and a glass sat on the little table before him. He was alone in the room.

He had seemed to suddenly lose all interest in the whiskey, and he was leaning against the board partition with his ear close to a crack, intently listening to the talk of the four lads in the next room.

The man had heard Frank Merriwell's name spoken, and that was the first thing to attract his attention to what the occupants of the next room were saying.

"That's the fellow!" muttered the man, hoarsely. "He's the one what gave me these beautiful peepers and pretty mug! I'll give him something worse than this before long."

Then he decided to listen.

"Wonder if them chaps is his friends? I'll jest see what they're sayin' about him."

It was not long before the man was able to hear enough to satisfy him that the lads in the next room were anything but friends of Frank Merriwell, and he listened with fresh eagerness.

He heard Ditson come in with the waiter, and caught much of the conversation that followed. Then Ditson sat down, and the plotters lowered their voices.

"That settles it!" exclaimed the man. "I'm goin' right in there and see if they don't want to take me inter the gang. Them college ducks will be jest the fellers to help me in gettin' back at Frank Merriwell."

He got up, left the little room, and went around to the door of the other room. Without stopping to knock, he opened the door and walked in.

"H'waryer," he saluted, as the four lads stared at him in amazement. "My name's Mike Hogan, and I want ter join in with ther push."

"Get out of here, you bum!" cried Hartwick, fiercely. "You are intruding on a private party."

"Hold hard, young feller!" returned the fellow who had given his name as Mike Hogan. "Don't call me a bum! I'm onto your curves, and there ain't no reason why you and me shouldn't be friends."

"Friends!" exclaimed Hartwick—"friends! Well, I prefer to choose my friends."

"And you didn't make much of a success when you chose a young gent here what is named Ditson. Keep yer seat!"

"Press the button, Harlow, and we'll have this fellow thrown out!" came savagely from Hartwick's lips.

"Wait a minute before you press the button," urged Mike Hogan. "Do you see this face?"

"Yes."

"It's a peach, now, ain't it?"

"You can consider yourself lucky if it isn't worse than that when you get out of here, my man."

"Don't 'my man' me, young feller! I don't like it! Do yer know who give me this face and these two beautiful eyes?"

"No, and we——"

"Well, I'll tell yer who it was. It was a feller what goes by the name of Frank Merriwell."

"Well, he did a first-class job," commented Harris. "That really looks like some of Merriwell's work."

"He done it," nodded Mike. "Nacherlly I ain't got no love to speak of for him. Well, I was in the room next to this just now, and as I was leanin' against the partition I happened to overhear what you chaps was sayin' in here. From what I heard, I judged you didn't love this Merriwell none to brag about, and I says to myself, 'Mike, if you want to get even, them is the boys to hitch fast to.' Then I got right up and came in here without bein' invited. I hope you'll excuse me, gents, but I couldn't help it under the circumstances. I had a sort of feller-feelin' for you chaps, and I thought mebbe we might arrange some sort of a deal together that would do this Merriwell, and do him for keeps. I'm not a chap with much education, but I'll bet anything I can hate just as hard as you fellers, and if there's anybody I hate on the earth, it's Frank Merriwell."

"There, now, gents, you have heard what I have ter say, and I hope you'll tumble ter ther fact that I am on the level. This is no case of stringing. I want ter pay back that feller for these two black eyes and this mug. Mebbe you can help me to do it, and I can help you to square yerselves with him at the same time. If that is right, why shouldn't we kinder go into partnerships for a short period? I put the question to yer, and you can do as ye please."

The quartet at the table looked at one another inquiringly and doubtingly. They seemed to hesitate.

"If this man tells the truth, and I should judge that he does, he may be of service to us and we to him," said Sport Harris.

"That's right," nodded Harlow. "If Merriwell gave him that mug and those beautiful eyes, I don't wonder that he wants to get square."

Hartwick was silent. He was looking Mike Hogan over, and he was thinking:

"Is it possible I have fallen to the point where I have to take such a fellow as a comrade? No! It will not be as a comrade. We can use him as a tool, perhaps, and that is what we will do, if we use him at all."

"Sit down," invited Hartwick, suddenly rising and offering Mike his chair. "I'll get another. I want to hear just how you came by those eyes."

Hogan sat down at the table and Hartwick brought a chair from a corner.

"We are all anxious to hear how you came by those eyes," declared Harlow.

"Some gent order drinks, and I will tell ye. Never mind," he cried, as he saw them look at each other knowingly, as if they thought he was trying to work them for liquor, "I'll order, myself! Don't you think for a second that I'm broke!"

Then he flung a small roll of bills on the table before them, reached past Harlow, and pressed the button. When the waiter appeared, he said:

"Give these gents anything they want, Pete."

"Wot if they orders champagne?" grinned Pete, winking at the boys.

"Then bring it, dern ye!" snarled Hogan, as he grabbed up the roll of money and thrust it at the waiter. "Take the pay out of that and gimme the change."

Drinks were ordered and quickly brought. Hogan paid for them and gave the waiter a quarter as a tip.

"How about it, Pete?" he asked. "Am I all right?"

"Ye're all right, Mike," declared the waiter, promptly; "and the young gents will find that anything you says sticks."

Then he went out.

"Now," said Hogan, "before I begin I want to tell you chaps this: I'm on the make. That is how I happened to get up against this chap Merriwell. I heard that he paid a cool thousand for that horse of his, and I kinder admitted that a boy who could pay that sum for a horse must be in circumstances that would permit him to burn money in an open grate. Such a chap was worth my attention. I know horses from their hoofs to the tips of their ears. There ain't much of anything I don't know about 'em. And I knew Merriwell must be stuck on the horse for which he paid a thousand plunks.

"Well, gents, I'll tell ye my scheme. I kinder thought it would be easy to play the horse doctor, and work Merriwell for a good pot. All that was necessary was to make something ail the horse. Then I went round to the stable where he keeps the critter, after I had first learned the name of one of Merriwell's friends. I wanted to get at the horse, and I knew it wouldn't be easy unless I appeared to be on the inside track with Merriwell. I went round and said I was this friend of Merriwell, and in that way I got into the stall with the horse.

"Don't you care what I done to make that horse lame, but I done it all right. When Merriwell rode out this afternoon the critter went to limpin' under him. When he came back to the stable I was there, but I had changed my clothes and I wore a beard. I introduced myself as a horse doctor, and offered to cure his horse, or not to charge him a dollar. If I cured the critter, which I could do easy, I meant to charge him a hundred dollars, and I thought he'd be fool enough to pay it without a kick."

"That shows you didn't know the kind of a fellow you were trying to fool," said Harris.

"I found that out all right. He wouldn't make any talk with me. Then when I got hot and was going away he suddenly took a notion to stop me. The first thing I knew he had snatched off my hat and beard, and the hostler recognized me as the same chap as was in to see the horse this afternoon.

"I didn't feel alarmed then," Mike went on, "for Merriwell is a young chap, and I know something about fighting. That is, I thought I knew something about it. I'm not sure about that now. I told him to get out of the way, or I would do him up. I saw my scheme was bu'sted, but I felt sure it'd be some time before he'd find out what ailed his horse.

"That young fool didn't seem at all scared of me. He wouldn't get out of the way and let me go, but he put himself in my way, and then we had it. When we got through I found that I had it, and I had it bad. There ain't no need to tell just what happened. Take a look at my mug and you'll see for yourself. That young cuss can fight like a tiger!

"But now I'm goin' to get level with him, and don't you fergit it! I'll make him sorry that he ever gave Mike Hogan a pair of black eyes! I'll never be satisfied till I have done him the worst kind of a turn.

"I heard you chaps talkin', and it struck me that we might pull together to do him dirt. That's why I came right in. What do you say to it?"

The boys looked at each other, and then they nodded approval.

"You'll do," said Harris. "You may prove a very valuable man for us."

CHAPTER V.

WHAT A HAIR CAN DO.

At his first opportunity to get away from recitations the following day Frank took Diamond and Rattleton and hastened down to the stable to find out how Nemo was coming along.

Grody, who had just saddled a horse for a gentleman, met Frank, and the expression on his face was anything but reassuring.

"Well, how is the pony this morning?" asked Merriwell, anxiously.

"Just as lame as he were, sir," answered Grody. "I've been tryin' to find out what it were that happened to him, but I can't, sir."

"Did you take him to the shoer the first thing this morning and have his feet examined, as I directed?"

"I did that, sir."

"And what did the shoer say?"

"He located the lameness in the same foot what we said were lame, sir, and he took off the shoe, but he said as how it were all right, and no fault of the shoeing. He didn't know but a nail might have gone too deep, sir, but he found that were not it."

This was anything but satisfactory, and Frank showed it by his face.

"Well," he said, "you know I told you to summon Dr. Cobb, if it proved something beyond the shoeing."

"And that were what I done, sir."

"And the doctor could not tell what ailed the horse?"

"The doctor has not come yet, sir. He were busy when I send the message to him, but he said— Here he is now, sir."

A rig drew up at the door, and a short, stubbed, red-bearded man stepped out. This man entered the stable with a quick step and called to the hostler:

"Well, Grody, did you telephone me?"

"Yes, sir, I did, sir," said the hostler, quickly.

"Important case, you said?"

"Yes, sir, very important."

"Where's the horse?"

"I'll bring him right out, sir."

The hostler hastened to do so, and Dr. Cobb looked keenly at Nemo.

"Walk him around," directed the doctor.

Grody obeyed.

"Just a bit lame," commented the doctor. "It may be a slight strain. It doesn't seem to be much."

"But it grows worse when he is taken out on the road," said Frank. "It was very bad yesterday afternoon."

The doctor glanced at the boy.

"Your horse?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"When did you first notice he was lame?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Had him out this morning?"

"Grody took him to the shoer, that's all."

"What did he say?"

"Said there was nothing the matter with the way Nemo is shod."

"Perhaps he lied. Didn't want to hurt his business. Did he do anything?"

"Yes, he reset the shoe on the lame foot."

"Hum! Horse may be all right by to-morrow or next day."

"I do not think he will, doctor."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because I have reasons to believe he was made to go lame."

"Is that so? Well, now the matter becomes more interesting. What causes you to think anything of the sort?"

Frank explained, and the doctor listened attentively to his story.

"This is worth investigating," he declared. "I know a few of the tricks of these fellows, and I think I'll find out what was done to your horse, if anything was done."

The boys watched the doctor with great interest. They saw him examine the lame leg from the knee down. In doing this he put on a pair of spectacles.

Nemo was nervous. He seemed afraid the doctor would hurt him, and it was not found easy to make him stand.

At last Dr. Cobb uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Bring my case, which you will find under the seat in my carriage, Grody," he directed.

Grody hastened to obey.

"Have you found out what the matter is, doctor?" Frank anxiously asked.

"I believe so, but I am not sure yet."

Jack and Harry came near, eager to learn what had been done to lame the horse.

The doctor opened his case, and took out some tweezers.

"Do you see this hair here?" he asked, having brushed the fetlock aside and taken the end of a hair in his fingers.

The boys saw it, but wondered what that hair could have to do with the lameness of the horse.

"It is not the right color," declared the doctor. "You see it is white, instead of being the color of the other hairs here."

Despite himself Frank felt his anger rising. How could the color of a hair make the horse lame? Did the man take him for a fool because he was a boy?

The three boys exchanged glances, and Harry made a threatening gesture at the back of the doctor's head.

"I see the hair is white, sir," said Frank, his voice cold and hard; "but I scarcely think a white hair could make my horse go lame. I know I am a boy, but I do not like to be taken for a fool."

The doctor looked up and saw the indignation expressed on the faces of the three lads. Then he chuckled in a singular way and said:

"Wait till I get through, young man. I do not take you for a fool ordinarily, but you can easily make a fool of yourself over this matter."

He had taken the short white hair, which was very coarse, in his fingers, having separated it from the others.

"Notice the peculiar place where this hair seems to grow," he directed. "It is not a part of the fetlock, but the fetlock hid it from view. I am going to pull this hair out, but first I want you to notice that there is another hair, it seems, on the other side of the ankle, and it is just like this. See it?"

The boys saw it.

"In a moment you won't see it," declared the doctor, as he adjusted the tweezers, getting a careful grip on the end of the hair. "Here it comes."

Then he quickly drew it out and Nemo started a bit, but was quieted by Grody.

"Young man," said the doctor, "look at this. This hair appeared to be about an inch in length, but now it is three inches long. It is not broken off, and yet it has no root. I will guarantee there is not another hair on this horse like it! I will guarantee it did not grow on this horse! I will guarantee it was what made this horse lame! And I do not want my fee if this horse shows any lameness two hours from now!"

The boys were astonished, as their faces indicated.

"But, doctor, I do not understand!" cried Frank. "You must explain. How could a hair——"

"I will explain. It's an old trick, but one seldom tried. This hair came from the tail of a white horse. It was threaded into a long, keen needle. The fellow who got at your horse yesterday was an expert. With one jab of that needle he passed the hair through the flesh just back of this cord. It went in at one side, and came out on the other. After that, while he was pretending to look at the horse's feet, he clipped off the ends, and the hair was left in there. It could remain a day or so without doing any particular injury, but it was bound to make the horse lame as soon as he used that leg much. If it had been left there permanently it might have ruined the horse. That is all, young man."

"Why was a white hair chosen, doctor?"

"The fellow felt sure it would not be noticed, and yet he could quickly locate it by its color when the time came for him to cure your horse of its lameness."

Once more the boys looked at each other, and this time it was plain they realized there were some things they did not know.

"Doctor," said Frank, promptly, "I wish to beg your pardon. I believe I said something rather hastily, but now I wish to say that you know your business thoroughly."

The doctor smiled, and closed his case.

"I have been in the business all my life," he said, "but I expect to continue to learn something new about it as long as I live. I will say that I doubt if I should have seen what was the matter with your horse if you had not told me of the fellow you believed had lamed him and how the horse kicked up a racket when the man was in the stall. That set me to looking for tricks, and I found the hair."

Frank offered to pay the doctor, but he refused to take it then, saying:

"Here's my card, young man. If your horse is all right this afternoon you may send me five dollars. You may need me again some time."

Then he strode out of the stable, flung the case under the seat, scrambled into his carriage, caught up the reins, and away he went in a hurry.

"Well, may I be farred and tethered—I mean tarred and feathered!" cried Harry Rattleton. "I never saw anything like that before."

"Nor I," confessed Jack Diamond. "It's astonishing! I have learned something to-day that I never knew before. I never would have dreamed that a hair could lame a horse in that way!"

"You want to look out for Nemo now," said Harry, "and not let that chap get at him again."

"I mean to," asserted Frank. "I have sent for my colored boy, Toots, to come on and keep watch here when Grody is unable to do so. Till he gets here, Grody, I want you to watch Nemo like a hawk. I hardly think the whelp will try another trick, but there is no telling. I gave him a bad thumping."

"But not half what he deserved!" cried Diamond.

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCE AND THE EAVESDROPPER.

Nemo's lameness seemed to vanish as if by magic, and Frank was well satisfied. Grody took the utmost care of Nemo till Toots arrived.

The colored boy was delighted to come on to New Haven, and, as he was a lover of horses, his new occupation suited him very well. When Frank could not find time to take the horse out for his daily exercise Toots did it.

One evening a party of students gathered in Diamond's room. He had invited them there to show them his new bulldog.

Diamond had a fad, and it was dogs. His dog had caused trouble between Diamond and Merriwell early in their college career by taking a strip out of Frank's trousers. That dog had received mortal injuries in a fight, and now Diamond had another dog.

"Isn't he a beauty!" cried Jack, as he displayed the ugly-looking brute. "Look at that head and those jaws! He comes from a line of gladiators."

"What do you call him, Diamond?" asked Ben Halliday.

"Prince."

"Put not thy trust in princes," croaked Dismal Jones.

"Is he kind?" asked Bandy Robinson.

"Oh, he has a sunny disposition," assured Jack, smiling.

"A sunny disposition," chirped Griswold, from the top of the table, upon which he had climbed so that he might be out of the way. "By that I presume that you mean he will make it hot for any other dog he may tackle."

"Hold on, Danny, old man!" cried Jack, reprovingly. "Haven't I treated you right?"

"Not lately, but if you've got any beer in the coop you can."

"That gives me a pain!" cried Robinson.

"You must have been eating window glass," chuckled Griswold. "That's how you happen to feel the pane."

"You ramed little bunt—I mean you blamed little runt!" exclaimed Rattleton, catching Danny by the neck. "If you keep up this reckless punning you'll receive a check some day."

"I hope so," was the instant retort. "I'm broke, and I sent to the governor for one to-day."

"Let him alone, Harry," advised Merriwell, laughing. "You simply make him worse by talking to him."

"That's the only thing I have against Griswold," declared Jack. "He will pun in the most reckless manner at all times. Some of his jokes are not what they are cracked up to be."

"Like the eggs we used to get down at Mrs. Harrington's when we were freshmen," grinned Griswold.

"Even the vilest sinner may repent and be forgiven," came solemnly from Dismal Jones. "There's a faint ray of hope for Griswold."

"But it's mighty dim," declared Robinson.

Once more attention was given to Jack's dog, and Diamond pointed out the animal's fine features.

"When are dogs at their best?" asked Halliday, seriously.

"In winter," Griswold instantly put in. "There are no flies on them then."

"Smother him!" howled Robinson, wildly.

"Smother time," cackled Danny, as he slipped off the table and dodged around a chair to get out of reach.

Halliday caught up a pair of scissors and pretended to sharpen them, looking at Griswold as if he meant to shed his gore.

"What are you going to do?" asked Danny. "Going into the scissors-grinding business? It's great when things are dull."

It was plain that Danny could not be suppressed, and so the boys tried to ignore him. Prince was admired some more, and then Halliday picked up a banjo, put it in tune, and sang a song.

"Your voice is somewhat off color to-night, old man," observed Robinson, "and I think you skipped a bar."

"You don't know him," cried Griswold, instantly. "I was out with him last night and he didn't skip any."

Then almost every other fellow in the room grabbed up something and threw it at Danny, who could do nothing but shield his face and take the pelting he received.

"Diamond is a dog crank, and Merriwell is a horse crank," said Robinson. "By the way, I hear you think of racing your horse this spring, Merriwell?"

"Who told you that?" asked Frank.

"Who told me? Oh, I don't know. Is it a secret? I think I have heard several fellows speak of it."

"Oh, I don't know as it is a secret," said Frank. "I may try him in some small country race, if I get a good opportunity; but I am not likely to have much of a chance, between baseball, rowing, and my studies. I'm kept pretty busy."

"The only wonder to me is that you get time to study at all," declared Halliday. "I never before saw a fellow who could carry on so many things at the same time and make successes of them all."

"I hear two more men have been dropped a class," said Diamond.

"That's right," sighed Jones. "Dorman and Street have departed hence. May peace go with them."

"Poor old Easy!" exclaimed Robinson. "He was a fine fellow, but he was altogether too easy. He wouldn't skin, and he couldn't keep up with the push."

"There are some other fellows who are bound to go sooner or later," observed Rattleton. "I can name several."

"Both Harris and Ditson are bound to get it in the neck," said Griswold. "They are skimmers of the worst kind."

"That's right," agreed Halliday. "Ditson is an expert at it. He spends more time and ingenuity in concocting schemes to fool the examining tutor or professor than it would take to learn his subjects ten times over."

"Sure's you're born!" exclaimed Jones. "Why, he has his finger nails, cuffs, and the palms of his hands covered with writing and diagrams every time he knows he is to be called up, and in this way he always succeeds in making a clean rush."

"Harris knows something about photography," said Halliday, "and he is continually making minute pictures of diagrams and writing, which he arranges on little tabs, which he can hold in his palm. He seldom flunks, but he'll trip some time."

"Hanged if I can see why fellows should work so hard to fool tutors or professors when they might learn all that was required of them without half the trouble," cried Harry.

"That is easy enough to explain," smiled Merriwell. "Harris is a natural gambler. He delights in excitement and danger, and he actually enjoys taking such desperate ventures."

"Well, there is something in that," laughed Rattleton. "I never regarded it that way before. I'll be fanged if there isn't fascination in it—no, I'll be hanged if there isn't fascination in it!"

"It's too bad this matter was mentioned, fellows," said Merriwell, with pretended seriousness. "I regret it very much."

"Why?" asked Robinson, curiously.

"Notice how excited Rattleton has become over it? He's not quite such a sport as Harris, but he had rather take chances on anything than eat, and it's ten to one he'll be skinning within a week."

"Sometimes a fellow has to skin," declared Griswold.

"Did you ever, Danny?" asked Diamond.

"Did I? Well! I have a patent scheme of my own."

"What is it?" asked Rattleton, eagerly.

"Why, I have a box of chalk crayons which I bought for myself. I have soaked them in alum water till they are hard, and I usually have several of them about my person. They are covered with diagrams and everything that may prove interesting or necessary. But I want to tell you something. I never use 'em unless I am driven to the wall."

"By that he means the blackboard," laughed Halliday.

"And you were talking about Harris and Ditson being skimmers!" came reproachfully from Jones. "My dear young man, there is a place that burneth with fire and brimstone!"

"That is reserved for liars," chuckled Danny. "Jones, beware, any moment may be your next."

"That's right," agreed Jones, sadly. "I am sure I shall not live to see another day—if I die to-night."

"Gentleman," said Merriwell, "death is a grave subject to jest upon. You'd better bury it."

"That's all right," put in Robinson. "If he catches cold any of us may go to coffin."

"I'll not undertaker pun," murmured Rattleton.

Then there was a deathlike silence, and the lads all looked at one another reproachfully.

"Let's change the subject," cried Diamond. "Speaking of Ditson, I believe he claims to have blue blood in his veins. Says his ancestors came over on the *Mayflower*, and were among the first to settle in this country."

"They may have settled," said Griswold, "but none of his family has ever settled since that time. They owe everybody that will trust them."

"Ditson has stuck his friends right and left since coming to Yale, till he has not a friend left," said Robinson.

"Why, he owed Hartwick several hundred dollars when Hartwick left," declared Diamond.

"Just the same, Hartwick is back in New Haven and in is chummy with Ditson again," asserted Jones.

Merriwell displayed some interest.

"How do you know he is chummy with Ditson?" he asked.

"I have seen them together!"

"That means something!" cried Rattleton, excitedly. "Those pads are copping—I mean those cads are plotting! You want to look out for trouble, Merry!"

"I will!" exclaimed Frank. "Ditson is treading on dangerous ground. If he makes a break, I'll descend on him. I have been easy with a chap of his treacherous nature quite long enough."

"Too long!" burst fiercely from Diamond. "If I had been in your place I'd ended Mr. Ditson's career long ago."

"I don't know what the fellows can do to injure me," said Frank.

"They'll find some way to give it to you if you don't watch out," said Rattleton. "Perhaps one of them hired that fellow to lame your horse."

"Perhaps so."

"You think a great deal of that horse," said Jack. "You want to be constantly on your guard or something will happen to it."

"Toots is on the watch, and any one will have hard work getting the best of that darky. He is about as sharp as they make 'em."

"He is a very clever coon," admitted Harry; "and he seems to know his business, still you can't tell what may happen."

"I wouldn't have anything happen to Nemo for worlds. I don't quite understand why I think so much of that horse, but he is a wonderfully intelligent creature."

"Don't tell that you care so much for him. If your enemies were to find it out they would scheme to fix Nemo."

"I'd have no mercy on the person that injured that horse."

"What's the matter with your dog, Jack?" asked Robinson. "He is acting in a very queer manner."

Prince was sniffing at the door, whining and growling, while the hair on his neck bristled in a

significant manner.

Diamond got up and quickly approached the door. In a moment he flung it open, and out shot Prince.

There was a sound of swiftly retreating feet, a clatter on the stairs, a scramble, a shout of pain or fear, and a sudden blow.

"Quick, fellows!" cried Jack, excitedly. "Prince has found an eavesdropper!"

They rushed out, they sprang down the stairs, and at the foot they found the dog, apparently in a dazed condition, but with a piece of cloth in his mouth.

"Good dog!" cried Jack. "Where is he?"

Prince growled and chewed away at the piece of cloth.

"He got away," said Frank. "He must have struck Prince with a heavy cane, or a club, for we heard the blow. The dog was stunned, but he held fast to this piece of the fellow's trousers."

"After him!" spluttered Rattleton. "He may not be able to get away! We'll try to capture him!"

But the effort was vain. The eavesdropper had made good his escape.

After a little time the boys all came back to Diamond's room. They found Jack examining the piece of cloth, which he had taken from the bulldog with no small difficulty.

"It is from somebody's trousers," said Jack, seriously. "Whoever the sneak was, he'll have to buy a new pair. He hit Prince a frightful blow behind the ear, but the good old fellow held fast to this trophy."

"If we'd nabbed the fellow, we wouldn't have done a thing to him—not a thing!" cried Griswold.

"See if any of you fellows recognize this piece of cloth as belonging to the clothing of any chap you know," invited Diamond.

They all examined it.

"If I mistake not," said Dismal Jones, "this came from a certain section of a certain individual's trousers, and the section to which I refer is located about eight inches south of the back strap."

"And the fellow," exclaimed Robinson, "the fellow is——"

"Roland Ditson!" finished Rattleton.

"In that case," said Diamond, "Merriwell's enemies have received a good tip concerning his fondness for Nemo. You will have to be doubly careful about that horse after this, Frank."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT.

If Roland Ditson was the person from whose trousers the piece of cloth had been torn he took good care to destroy what he had retained of the breeches without delay, for they were never again seen in his possession.

The figure on the cloth was not pronounced enough to distinguish it in a manner to make it absolute proof that it came from a garment owned by Roland.

Nevertheless Diamond accused Ditson of listening at his door, but Roll vigorously denied that he had done so. Diamond told him he was a natural-born prevaricator, and let it go at that.

But Ditson was watched like a hawk by the boy from Virginia, for Jack felt sure the fellow was up to crookedness.

Frank Merriwell knew that if Ditson had been listening to the conversation that was taking place in that room his enemies must know in what light he regarded Nemo.

This caused Frank to caution both Toots and Grody to redouble their vigilance in watching over and caring for the splendid creature.

"Don' yo' worry about me, Marsar Frank," assured the darky lad. "Dat's de fines' hawse dat dis chile ebber seen, an' I'se gwan ter watch ober heem lek he wus de apple ob mah eye."

"I have decided to enter Nemo in the Mystic Park races at Bethany, Toots," Merriwell declared, "and I think I'll let you ride him, my boy."

Toots showed two rows of gleaming ivories and beamed with the greatest delight.

"If yer done dat, Marsar Frank, I'se gwan ter win on dat hawse jes ez shore ez yeh bawn, sar!" he cried. "I'se done rid dat critter enough teh know he's a wondah, sar. Dat hawse is wuf a forchune,

sar!"

"If you win, Toots, I may give you a chance to ride him in some races later in the season."

"If I don' win dat race, I done hope I nebber dror annodder bref, sar!" cried the darky boy, excitedly. "Dat'll show yo' what yo' kin do at de Coney Islan' races. If yo's gwan ter gamble on dat hawse, yo's a dead sho' winnar, sar!"

"I am not much of a gambler, Toots, but I may back Nemo for a little something."

"Yo'll win, Marsers Frank. If dis darky ebber knowed what he wus talking about yo'll win!"

Frank's enemies seemed remarkably quiet, but something told him that every move he made was watched. This was true, and they soon knew exactly what races he intended to enter Nemo for, and that the darky was going to ride the horse.

One night Harris, Hartwick, Harlow, Ditson and Mike Hogan met in the saloon where they had first formed a combine against Merriwell. They were there by appointment, called together by Hartwick, who seemed to have assumed the leadership.

Hartwick was taking no chances on any thin partitions, and so he secured a little back room in the place, where it seemed that nothing could be overheard by any one who might chance to be watching them.

Drinks were ordered, and when they were brought and the waiter had departed Hartwick said:

"Gentlemen, we may as well get down to business at once. I have called you together to make arrangements for striking a blow at our common enemy."

"Well, I think it's erbout time!" growled Mike Hogan. "I've been wantin' ter do something fer a long while, but you have kept holdin' me back."

"You have been too much on the jump, my friend," said Hartwick, scowling. "If we'd let you gone it alone you'd had Merriwell on his guard, and that would have ruined everything."

"It strikes me that Merriwell is on his guard now," observed Harris. "He acts as if he knew there was something in the wind."

"Well, he doesn't know what."

"I don't know about that, either. He guards that horse as if the animal was worth its weight in dollar bills."

"Which comes entirely from the fact that Hogan here tried to knock the horse out once," declared Harlow.

"I don't know about that, either," said Hartwick. "But I want to say one thing here and now: If there's any one of this party who is playing double and carrying information to Merriwell, he'd better order his own coffin without delay, for he is bound to be found out, and we'll throw him cold in a minute."

He looked at Ditson in a most significant manner as he said this, but Roll showed no signs of guilt.

"Well, what's yer plan of war, boss?" asked Hogan, impatiently.

"Don't get in too much of a hurry," scowled Hartwick.

"We know Merriwell intends to enter Nemo in the Mystic Park races, at Bethany."

"Yes."

"That is the time to get at him."

"How?"

"He has money to burn. Get him to back Nemo for large sums for any of the first three positions. Give him all sorts of odds, if necessary; but get him to chuck up the dough, and then beat him out."

"That's all right," growled Hogan; "but where's the dough comin' from what is shoved up against his good stuff?"

"Let me alone for that," said Hartwick, significantly. "I know a way to get it, and we'll have it. I wish we might get Merriwell to stake his entire fortune on that horse. We'd end his career at Yale."

Harris laughed.

"I'd like to know how you are going to get so much money, Hart?" he cried. "Why, I had to lend you twenty as capital the last game of poker you entered."

"Don't let anything worry you if you don't know all about it, Sport," advised Hartwick. "You've got your twenty back, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can't kick."

"All right; but I'm afraid your scheme won't work out very well."

"It will, just as hard, if we can depend on Mike here to make sure Merriwell's horse does not win."

"Watcher want me ter do?" asked Mike.

"Doctor the animal at the last moment, if you can't buy off the jockey."

"That's easy! But where does my share of ther profits come in?"

"You shall have your share, don't you worry. We'll have that all arranged in advance."

"Then that goes! I am with yer, gents."

"What are the rest of us to do?" asked Harris.

"There will be something for all of us to do. Ditson must continue to play the spy on Merriwell."

"And that's the most dangerous job of all!" cried Roll. "You know what came near happening to me the night I found out Merriwell intended to put Nemo in the Mystic Park races. I was nearly chewed up by Diamond's dog."

"But you escaped with your life," said Harris.

"Because I took that cane with the loaded end. If it hadn't been for that the infernal dog would have eaten me. I hit him an awful blow. It would have killed any other dog."

"Well," said Harlow, "we'll strike a different kind of a blow directly—one that will do more than lay out a dog."

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKING CHANCES.

It was the day of the spring races at Mystic Park, and Bethany was filled with strangers. Horsemen, sporting men, sightseers, touts, race-track gamblers, women in gay attire, and all the different kinds of persons usually seen at a country horse race in the State of Connecticut were on hand.

A number of Yale lads had come up to Bethany to attend the races. The most of them were friends of Frank Merriwell. Some of his enemies were there, also.

Frank had brought Nemo up himself, and he scarcely slept the night before the races. He felt that there was danger in the air.

Nemo had been entered in the "free for all," and his name was on the bills. Frank had been informed that he would be given odds that his horse did not take a purse. He had received an anonymous letter ridiculing him for thinking of entering such a horse. He had been taunted and told that he dared not stake money on Nemo.

Merriwell knew well enough that there was a plot afloat, and it seemed that the scheme was to make him lose money on his horse. If he had been timid he would have hesitated about backing Nemo for anything; but the ones who had been taunting him had reckoned well on his mettle, and they had succeeded in pricking his pride and arousing him.

Frank had seen Nemo work on a track with Toots in the saddle. He had timed the horse repeatedly, and he felt confident that Nemo could not fail to take a position if he were in proper form when he entered the race.

Frank sent for money. He demanded it. His guardian did not feel like refusing, as he remembered that his last effort to suppress Frank had resulted in a most painful train of incidents, the culmination being his arrest for kidnaping a baby. He sent Frank a check for the sum desired.

When Bethany was reached Merriwell was approached by a tall, thin man, who wore a Prince Albert coat and looked like a parson. This man introduced himself as John Baldwin, and he proved to be very "smooth."

Frank knew in a moment that the stranger was trying to catch him for a sucker. He felt like knocking the man down, but, instead of that, he bet three hundred and fifty dollars against a thousand dollars that Nemo would take a purse in the "free for all."

John Baldwin departed, apparently looking for other bloods who wished to take flyers. But Frank was to see Baldwin again. The man came back and in the most sneering manner possible, offered to let him out of his bet for fifty dollars. He told Frank that Nemo was a "dead one" and could not even crawl. The result was that Merriwell bet the man five hundred even that Nemo would take a purse, and there were but three purses in the "free for all."

After Baldwin departed the second time Frank regretted that he had not booted the insolent fellow.

"Never mind," thought the lad. "I'll win his cash all right."

In the morning there was a row in the stable where Nemo was kept. Toots was found vigorously punishing a flashily dressed negro.

"Tek dat, yo' dirty brack nigger!" shouted Toots, as he smashed the other fellow on the nose. "Yo' cayn't com' 'roun' dis chile wid none ob yere 'swinuations an' yore offers ob money to throw de race! I'll kick part ob yore panjaloons clean out frough de top of yore hade, yo' brack son ob a gun!"

The colored boy fought like a furious tiger, and the other fellow, after trying to strike back a few times, took to his heels, leaving a smashed silk hat behind him.

"What's the matter, Toots?" asked Frank, who had rushed to the scene of the conflict, accompanied by others.

"Mattah, sar?" cried Toots, fiercely. "Why, dat brack whelp come call me out ob de stall har, an' he says to me, says he, 'If yo' pulls Nemo so he don' take a purse it am wuff two hundred dollars to yo'.' An' he flashes his roll ob bills in mah face. I didn't wait fo' no mo' conwersashun, sar, but I jes' soaked him a dandy under der ear."

"Good boy, Toots!" laughed Frank. "You're all right!"

"Well, w'en dey fools 'roun' dis chile dey strikes hot stuff," grinned the boy.

Frank knew now that there was a "job" to knife him in the race. Rattleton and Diamond were on hand, and they took turns in helping Toots keep guard over Nemo.

Merriwell was angry. He went out looking for John Baldwin. When he found Baldwin he offered to bet all the money he had about him that Nemo would take either the first or the second purse. Baldwin snapped at the bet in a manner that showed he believed he had a "soft thing."

"You'll go back to Yale broke," he sneered.

"Don't let that worry you," returned Frank, coolly. "It strikes me that the fellow who is furnishing you with cash stands a chance of dropping something."

"You say that very mildly. You're scared now."

"If I had more money about my clothes I'd put it all up."

"That shows what an easy thing you are. I'll take your paper against my good money, and now you don't dare do a thing."

"How much do you want to risk that way?"

"Any sum you like."

"I'll go you for five hundred."

"Done."

Frank had made the original selection of stakeholder, and he had chosen a man who was interested in the track, but was known to be perfectly square. This choice had proved satisfactory to Baldwin.

Once more this man was hunted up, and he felt it his duty to caution Frank. The boy simply smiled.

"Don't lose any sleep about me, Mr. Davis," said Frank, quietly. "It isn't necessary."

Twenty minutes after this bet was made John Baldwin informed Evan Hartwick.

"Good!" cried Hartwick, fiercely. "If I get hold of that piece of paper I'll use it to ruin Frank Merriwell at Yale. I can do it! Nemo must be fixed for fair!"

Then he rushed away.

"Oh, well!" said Baldwin, with a satisfied smile; "I don't care which way the wind blows now. I have made my commission on this work to-day, and I have nothing to lose. If those fellows slip up in their plans it won't be my funeral."

Then he lighted a cigar and strolled away.

Rattleton and Diamond watched Nemo closely, permitting Toots to get an hour's sleep. Then the colored boy came out feeling first rate, and Merriwell showed up to take his friends to have something to eat.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, with a happy laugh. "One of you fellows will have to loan me the money to settle for the feed. I've staked every cent on Nemo, and I haven't enough left to purchase a sandwich."

"Whew!" whistled Diamond. "Haven't you been plunging pretty steep, old man?"

"Oh, I don't know!" smiled Frank. "We'll have money to start a conflagration with when we return to New Haven."

"I think so," agreed Jack; "but there are slips."

"Now, Toots," said Frank, "we are going to leave Nemo in your care for a short time. You know what I expect of you."

"Yes, sar, an' you may 'pend on me, sar."

"All right, my boy. Come on, fellows."

Away the three went, arm in arm, laughing and joking, like the light-hearted fellows they were.

Ten minutes after they left Toots decided to give Nemo some water. He stepped out of the stall for a bucket. As he picked it up he fancied he heard a suspicious sound inside the stall, and he hurried back.

When the colored boy stepped into the stall he saw a tough-looking young man in a plaid suit offering Nemo an apple. It was Mike Hogan.

"G'wan frum dat hawse, man!" shouted Toots, as he flung the bucket straight at Mike's head.

The bucket struck Hogan, knocked him down, and he lay stunned almost beneath the feet of Frank Merriwell's racer.

An hour later the starter's flag had fallen and the "free for all" at Mystic Park had begun.

Among the spectators were three lads who were excitedly watching the beginning of the race.

They were Hartwick, Harlow and Harris.

"If that horse is doctored I'm a fool!" declared Harlow, his eyes fastened on Frank Merriwell's Nemo.

"He must be—he must be!" palpitated Hartwick, whose eyes were bloodshot and whose face was flushed so that it betrayed he had been drinking heavily.

"Nemo starts all right," said Harris, in an agitated voice. "I should not wonder if Harlow were right, Hartwick, my boy."

"Then Hogan has betrayed me!" came gratingly from Hartwick. "If he has I'll have his life!"

"Where is the fellow?" asked Harlow. "He should be on hand."

"That's right, where is he?" echoed Harris. "He has not reported."

"But he was sure he would not fail," said Hartwick. "He had everything fixed with one of the stablemen, and he said he knew he could get into Nemo's stall."

"All the same I'll wager that Frank Merriwell will come out on top again," fluttered Harris. "It is just his luck. Perhaps he has outwitted us in some way."

"No! no!" exclaimed Hartwick, with sudden satisfaction. "See—see there! Already Nemo is dropping behind Black Boy. Pawnee is in the lead, Fanny D. is second, Lightfoot is third, and now Black Boy has pushed ahead of Nemo! Ha! ha! ha! Everything is all right! Hogan has done his work, and the stuff is beginning to tell on Merriwell's racer at just the right time. We'll send the fellow back to Yale penniless, and then I will jump on him with his paper. I'll expose him as a race-track gambler, a fraud, a swindler! I'll ruin his college career, as he ruined mine! But I'll not be satisfied then. I'll hound him till he is weary of his life! I'll make him remember the day he dared lift his hand against Evan Hartwick! I can feel his blow now! It left a mark on my cheek. That mark is not there now, but the scar is on my heart! Nothing can cure it but full and absolute reprisal! This is my first triumph!"

Hartwick almost frothed at the mouth, and his reddish eyes glared as if there were a glowing furnace within his passionate soul.

Evan's companions looked at him with awe, and Harris shivered a bit, drawing a little away.

The passions of the revengeful lad had been wonderfully aroused by the liquor he had taken, and he showed at his very worst just then.

"Toots does not seem to be pushing Nemo as he might," muttered Harlow. "The boy is taking it easy. If I did not know the attempt had failed I should think he had been bought off."

"Pawnee can't hold the lead," declared Harris. "I am willing to bet all I have that he will not take the race."

"Hang Pawnee!" snarled Hartwick. "I do not care which horses secure the purses, if Merriwell's animal is not one of them."

"Well, it begins to look as if you were safe," came with some satisfaction from Harlow. "Black Boy is the favorite and he is crawling now. Already he is neck and neck with Lightfoot."

Hartwick's hand shook as he adjusted the field glasses he held and brought them to bear on the

racing horses.

"It's all right. I know it's all right!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Lightfoot is holding the lead on Nemo. Frank Merriwell's horse is fifth, and the animal will not hold out to get around the track. I believe Nemo is swaying now. The horses behind are gaining! Ha! ha! How it will wring Merriwell's heart to see his beauty come in last!"

"This is early," cautioned Harris. "They have just reached the quarter now. Wait till they pass us before you begin to count your chickens, old man."

The spectators grew excited as the racing horses swung around the half-mile track and came flying down toward the judges' stand on their first round. Men waved their hats and cheered, the white handkerchiefs of women were fluttering.

"Black Boy! Black Boy! He is the winner for a thousand!" roared a big man in the grand stand.

"Fanny D.! Fanny D.!" shouted another. "She is taking the lead!"

This was true. Pawnee, as Harris had declared, proved unequal to the task of holding the lead. In the second quarter Fanny D. crept alongside and gradually forged ahead, for all that Black Boy's rider used whip and voice.

Poor old Lightfoot was steadily losing ground, and Hartwick ground his teeth as he saw Nemo come into fourth place. Still it did not seem that Merriwell's horse had made a spurt.

And then, as the horses came thundering down the track, a sudden change seemed to come over the black boy on Nemo's back. He leaned far forward, and appeared to be talking into Nemo's ears, which were laid almost straight back. He cut the air with his whip, but the lash did not fall on the glossy coat of the handsome animal.

"Look!" palpitated Harlow. "See Nemo! The creature has awakened! That horse is all right! Hartwick, I believe Merriwell will secure third money, after all."

"Not on your life!" ground forth Evan, his eyes glaring. "The creature is doing his best now."

As the foremost racers shot past the judges' stand at the expiration of the first half, it was seen that Fanny D. had taken the lead away from Pawnee, while Black Boy was steadily gaining. Although Nemo had shown a streak of speed he had not grown dangerous.

But now came the time when the mettle of the racers was to be tested. Black Boy responded nobly to whip and voice. He went ahead in a marvelous manner. He was soon nose and nose with Pawnee, and then he took second place, with his nose at Fanny D.'s flank.

But there was another change. Again the black boy on the back of Frank Merriwell's racer leaned forward and talked into the ears of the horse, and then came a spurt that caused hundreds of spectators to gasp with amazement.

Pawnee struggled nobly to hold third place, but Nemo passed him, and Evan Hartwick nearly choked with fury. Then it was seen that Nemo was gaining on the others. He crept up beside Black Boy till they were nearly even, and thus the two animals passed Fanny D. at the end of the third quarter.

When the home stretch was reached Black Boy was leading by a neck, with Nemo second and Fanny D. third.

Evan Hartwick was nearly beside himself with rage. The language that came from his lips cannot be printed here. In vain his companions tried to calm him. He cursed them both, and struck at them.

Then the voice of another person was heard.

"I slipped on the trick, boss. They caught me, and they didn't do a thing to me—not a thing! My head was near broke and they made me take a bite outter ther apple I was tryin' to feed ther horse. It'd killed me if they'd made me eat ther whole of the apple. I'm sorry, but——"

It was Mike Hogan, his brutal face pale and drawn, if he were, indeed, ill, and a bloody handkerchief tied about his head.

"Your head was near broken!" snarled Hartwick. "You bungling fool! I'll finish the job!"

And then he hit Mike in the face with his fist. They grappled and fell, and, as the other lads were trying to pull them apart, there came a great shout that announced the race was over. The crowd was heard cheering.

"Which won?" was the question Harlow paused to ask.

"Nemo came in first by a full length," replied a spectator.

Then Hogan was dragged off Hartwick, who lay pallid and still on his back, looking as if the end had come for him.

Two nights later a jolly party gathered in Frank Merriwell's room to offer him congratulations. There were speeches, songs, toasts and jests.

"How much will you take for Nemo now, Merriwell?" asked Jack Diamond. "I want to buy him and send him South to my father."

"You can't," laughed Frank. "Your father hasn't money enough to buy the dear old boy."

"But what are you going to do with him?" asked Rattleton. "You must think of the future."

"Not now," smiled Merriwell. "To-morrow is my queen's birthday, and I am thinking of the present."

Bruce Browning loafed into the room.

"Heard the news, fellows?" he asked.

"No; what is it?" cried several voices.

"Hartwick's been arrested."

"Arrested? What for?"

"For robbing his own father of seven thousand dollars. He knew how to get at the old gentleman's dough, and he swiped it several days ago. He's been burning money since then."

"Was the robbery committed before the Mystic Park races?" asked Frank.

"Sure, my boy."

"Then that explains why the mysterious man in black followed me up and drove me into so many bets. He had Hartwick's money, and Hartwick was behind the entire game. Well, all his plots miscarried and he got it in the neck at last."

"Which served him right," declared Jack Diamond, with satisfaction.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRONG ACCUSATION.

After the great horse race matters moved along smoothly for some time.

Frank worked hard over his studies and made fine progress.

He did not dare race Nemo again, for the college authorities would not permit it, in the face of what had been said about betting.

Frank had gotten rid of some of his enemies for the time being, but there were others, those who could not stand it to see him become such a general hero.

One evening a crowd of these gathered in a resort known as Jackson's. All had been drinking freely, and it was not long before every tongue was loosened.

In the crowd were several students that my old readers have met before. They included a hot-headed lad named Tom Thornton, a fussy fellow called Puss Parker, and Fred Flemming, Willis Paulding, Andy Emery and Tad Horner.

Earlier in the evening they had met at Morey's, but found they could not talk privately there, as the place was filled with students.

Then Thornton had given them the tip to go down to Jackson's, a place sometimes patronized by the students, although it did not exclude the general public.

Jackson's was known as a "joint," and very few of the college lads cared to have it known that they ever went there; but it was a place where a private room could be obtained in which to drink, gamble, or carouse, and for this reason it appealed to a certain class of students.

It was in this place that Frank had exposed the gambler, Rolf Harlow, and broken up the game by which Harlow and Harris were bleeding a certain number of "lambs."

In getting together his party, Thornton had chosen the ones who seemed to have sympathy with himself and Fred Flemming, or held a grudge against Frank Merriwell.

Merriwell's name had not been mentioned until all had indulged very freely in wine, Thornton being the most generous in "blowing off."

Then came a discussion about college sports, over which all had grown more or less heated. At length Merriwell's name was mentioned, and then Thornton declared Frank a cad.

"By Jawve!" drawled Willis Paulding, allowing cigarette smoke to escape from his mouth as he spoke, "I agree with you, Thornton, don't yer 'now. I nevah could bear that fellow Merriwell."

Tad Horner gave a sniff.

"Merriwell would feel bad if he knew it," observed Tad, sarcastically. "It would break him all up."

"That would not make the least difference to me, my dear fellow," declared Willis, who was too dense to catch the sarcasm. "I have nevah twaveled awound with him."

"I have noticed that," grinned Tad. "You have permitted him to avoid you in a most astonishing manner."

"What have you against Merriwell, Thornton?" asked Parker. "I didn't know you were so down on him. You both played on the football team last fall."

"And Merriwell made a record for himself by winning the game for Yale," said Andy Emery.

Thornton laughed sneeringly, showing his perfect white teeth.

"Merriwell is always making a record for himself at something," he returned. "I'd rather have his luck than be born rich. If any other fellow on the team had obtained the ball at that particular moment, he could have gone through Princeton's line as well as Merriwell did, for Yale's interference was simply marvelous, and a clear road was given the runner."

Emery shook his head.

"I think your memory is slightly at fault, old man," he said. "I am sure Merriwell bowled over at least one man, and dodged one or two others, besides going down the field like a wild engine, with Princeton's fastest runner at his heels and unable to tackle him. Oh, it is not all luck with Merriwell, Thornton, as you would acknowledge, if you were not prejudiced."

"You talk as if you are stuck on the fellow!" snarled Tom, in his most cutting manner.

"But you know I am not. I have held away—have had nothing to do with him."

"And that is the reason why I invited you down here to-night."

"So? Well, I thought there was something more in the wind than a simple discussion of athletics. What's up?"

"Don't be in a hurry. We'll come to that presently. Have another drink all around. This is on me. Push the button, Horner. I want to order more fizz."

"This is too much!" sighed Tad, as he pressed the button that communicated with an electric bell at the bar. "If we do not let up, we'll be in rocky shape in the morning."

The waiter appeared, and the wine was ordered. When the waiter went out, after serving the order, he left the door communicating with the next room standing open.

"Gentlemen," cried Thornton, lifting his glass of sparkling "fizz," "here's to a break in Merriwell's luck. May it come soon."

All drank.

"I can't quite agree with Thornton that it is all luck," said Puss Parker, lowering his half-emptied glass. "It is not luck that enables Merriwell to pitch on the ball team."

"Oh, I don't know!" exclaimed Tom. "If Heffner's arm had not been in bad condition, Merriwell would not have obtained the opportunity when he did. If he had not obtained it then, he might not have obtained it at all, for there are several other fellows who can twirl quite as well as he."

"They think they can, but I have my doubts."

This kind of talk did not satisfy Thornton, and he snapped:

"I must say I didn't suppose you were one of that cad's sycophants, Parker! I fancied you had more stamina than that. Next thing you'll be saying that when his horse won the 'free for all' at Mystic Park it was something more than luck."

"From what I have heard, I presume there was a great deal of luck connected with that affair, but that is outside college sports. I did not see the race, but I have heard that all sorts of tricks were tried to put Merriwell's horse out of the race."

"So his friends have reported; but I take no stock in it. If he ever enters that horse in another race he will lose his socks betting on the beast."

"We were talking of rowing a short time ago," said Emery. "Let's return to our mutton. Thornton was kicking because Merriwell has made a try for the eight, and seems to stand a good show of getting there. I don't see where Thornton's growl comes in. He can't pull an oar."

"But Flemming can," came quickly from Tom; "and he was sure of a position on the eight till Merriwell went for a place. Like Pierson, who captained the ball team last season, Collingwood seems to be stuck on Merriwell. That's why he has thrown Flemming down."

"But I thought Merriwell's ideas about rowing did not correspond at all with Collingwood's ideas?" said Tad Horner, with unusual gravity. "When Merriwell was captain of the freshman crew, he introduced the Oxford oar and the Oxford stroke. He actually drilled a lot of dummies into the use of the oar and into something like the genuine English stroke. Everybody acknowledged it was something marvelous, and one newspaper reporter had the nerve to say that the freshmen had given the 'varsity crew a pointer.'"

"Oh, yes," grated Thornton, bitterly. "The newspapers have advertised Merriwell at every opportunity. Remember what a howl they made when he stopped that runaway horse and rescued Fairfax Lee's daughter. Any one would have thought the fellow had done a most marvelous thing, and since then he has been taken into the very swellest New Haven society, and he is lionized as if he were something more than a mere snob. It makes me sick!"

"There is still some mystery about the fellow," said Parker. "How did he happen to know so much about the Oxford stroke?"

"I've heard that he was at Oxford long enough to thoroughly acquaint himself with the English methods," answered Emery.

"And it has been reported that the fellow has traveled all over the world," said Horner. "His rooms are decorated with all sorts of strange weapons, trophies and skins of wild animals, which it is said he gathered in his travels."

"Bah!" sneered Thornton. "I have my doubts about his ever being at Oxford, and I take no stock at all in the rest of that guff. It is barely possible that he may have been over to England, but the yarn about his having traveled in South America, Africa and Europe, is the biggest sort of rot."

"Well, let it go as rot," said Horner; "you must acknowledge that he did something most astonishing with that freshman crew. We did not have the least idea in the world that they could beat us, but we were not in the race on the home stretch."

"Oh, we thought we had a soft thing, that's all. If we'd dreamed we had a hard race coming, we'd won all right."

"That may be, but I am not so sure. Still, if Merriwell could do so much with a lot of freshmen, what might not be done if the same methods were used with the 'varsity crew?'"

"Bah!" cried Thornton again. "That sort of rot makes me sick! Bob Collingwood has his own ideas, and he will not accept suggestions from any one, although I think he was a fool to throw down Flemming for Merriwell. Flem did great work on the football team, and he is in condition to make a special effort at rowing this spring, while Merriwell is obliged to play ball as well."

"I don't see how Merriwell does so many things and does them so well," confessed Tad Horner.

"Oh, he is one of the chaps who has the nerve to try anything, and will stumble through anything after a fashion. Nine times out of ten those fellows are never heard from after they leave college. The fellow who takes some branch of athletics at college and sticks to it is likely to select some line of business when he has graduated, and stick to that. He is not diving into everything, and making a success of nothing."

"But Merriwell seemed to be diving into everything, and making a success of everything. He is put up differently than most fellows."

"He showed his caddishness in introducing the English oar and stroke when he was captain of the freshman crew. He would ape things English, and in that line he makes a failure, at least."

"By Jawve! that is wight, don't yer 'now," drawled Willis Paulding, who had visited London once on a time and endeavored to be "awfully English" ever since. "He has not cawt the English air and expression, don't yer understand. He—aw—makes a wegular failyaw of that, deah boys."

"Oh, say!" cried Tad Horner, "don't pile on the agony quite so thickly, Paulding. It is nauseating!"

"Merriwell may not try to ape English manners and speech," said Thornton, "but he is a cad, just the same, and the friends he has made here at Yale are a lot of thin-blooded, white-livered creatures. Look at them! There is Bruce Browning, once called 'King of the Sophomores,' but cowed and bested by Merriwell, to be afterward dropped a class. There is Jack Diamond, a boastful Southerner. He forced Merriwell to fight, but fawned about Merriwell's feet like a cur when whipped."

"You lie, sir!"

By the open door a supple, well-built, dark-faced lad sprang into the room. His eyes were flashing, and his teeth came together over his words with a click.

It was Jack Diamond himself!

CHAPTER X.

A FIGHT AGAINST ODDS.

"Diamond!"

"Great Scott!"

"Here's trouble!"

The lads about the table sprang to their feet, giving utterance to these exclamations. Willis Paulding was the only one who did not say anything, and he failed to speak because the sound seemed to stick in his throat.

Diamond's manner showed that he was fully aroused by what he had overheard, and that he meant "fight" was evident. The hot blood of the Old South was pulsating in his veins and flaming darkly, like a danger signal, in his face.

Pointing straight at Tom Thornton, Jack slowly and distinctly said, his manner showing the struggle he was making to hold himself in check:

"Mr. Thornton, you are a liar! More than that, Mr. Thornton, you know you are a liar!"

Thornton quailed a bit, and then, in sudden fury, he flung back:

"And you are an eavesdropper, Jack Diamond. Eavesdroppers seldom hear good of themselves!"

The muscles of the Virginian's face twitched, and his clinched hands were quivering.

"By accident I overheard what you were saying," he declared. "I was looking for a friend, and so came into this place, which I seldom visit. I was told a party of students had gathered here, and as I entered the room adjoining, I heard my name spoken by you—I heard you declare that, like a cur, I fawned about Merriwell when he had whipped me."

"And I say it again!" cried Thornton, hotly. "It is the truth. Your boasted Southern courage is a sham. You have shown that."

Diamond walked forward to the table.

"Mr. Thornton," he said, "you are among friends, and I am alone, but I brand you as a liar!"

As he uttered the words he picked up a partly emptied glass of wine and dashed the contents in Thornton's face.

"There!" he cried, dashing the glass to the floor; "I have expressed myself! You cannot mistake my meaning, sir!"

Thornton whipped out a handkerchief and wiped the liquid from his eyes. Then he dropped the handkerchief, and caught up a wine-bottle, with which weapon he leaped at Jack.

Parker caught Thornton's uplifted arm just in time to keep him from trying to break the bottle over Diamond's head.

"Do you want to kill him?" exclaimed Puss, excitedly.

"Yes," snarled Thornton, "I will kill him!"

"Pray do not interfere with the fellow, Mr. Parker," urged Jack, his voice shaking with passion. "I will take care of myself."

"You'd better get out of here!" came fiercely from Parker. "You have no business here!"

"I have business in any place where I am lied about and insulted, sir! Let him alone, and I will agree to give him all the fight he desires!"

Now, for the first time, Fred Flemming stepped forward. He was a big fellow, and was known to be a fierce fighter, with the inclinations of a bully.

"I think we'll give you a thumping before we let you go, Diamond, just to teach you a lesson," he said, in a most insolent manner. "I've wanted to get at you or your friend Merriwell for some time."

"You—you get at Merriwell!" flung back Jack. "Why, he'd do you up with his right hand tied behind him!"

"You think so because he did you. Well, I am going to break your face, and then Merriwell may pick it up, if he dares."

He threw off his coat in a moment, and then came at Jack, crying to the others:

"Close the door! Don't let anybody in here till I have fixed this sneak as I will fix Merriwell when I get at him! Close the door!"

Willis Paulding started to obey, but before he could swing the door shut it was flung open with such violence that Willis was sent tumbling to the floor.

Into the room leaped Frank Merriwell, and he placed himself between Diamond and his would-be assailant.

"Wait a moment, Flemming," he said, with the utmost self-possession. "It is not necessary for you to waste your energies on Mr. Diamond."

It was a most dramatic tableau, as every lad stood motionless and staring for some seconds.

There was a strong contrast between Diamond and Merriwell.

Jack was literally quivering with passion, while Frank actually smiled serenely into Flemming's face, as if he thoroughly enjoyed the situation.

But those who knew Merriwell best said that in times of trouble he was the most dangerous when he smiled.

"So you are around!" Flemming finally growled. "How did you happen in here? Were you playing the eavesdropper also?"

"I happened to be passing the saloon, and I thought I saw my friend Diamond come in here," explained Frank, calmly. "I wondered what could bring him into such a place, and so I entered likewise. They said he had come back here. I came also. That is how I happened to arrive at precisely the right moment."

"You'll find it was precisely the wrong moment!" cried Flemming. "Close and fasten the door, boys! We'll jump on these two cads, and do them up now and at once! Come on!"

"I don't know but it will be a good time to settle a few old scores with them," said Emery, becoming aroused. "It will do them good to show them they can be licked!"

"That goes!" shouted Puss Parker.

"Six to two—three to one!" laughed Frank. "Oh, well, that's not so bad. Come on, my brave fellows! We'll do our best to make it interesting, eh, Jack?"

"Oh, all I want is a chance at Thornton!" panted the Virginian.

Willis Paulding was quivering with excitement. He thought he saw his opportunity, and he lost no time in improving it. He had hated Merriwell from the first, but never had he dared do anything to injure Frank. Now, grasping his heavy cane, he slipped forward and came up behind Merriwell.

Swish—crack!

The cane cut through the air and fell on Merriwell's head, dropping the lad in a senseless heap to the floor.

It was a cowardly blow, but it put Merriwell out of the fight in a twinkling, for he was stunned.

"So this is the way you fight!" cried Diamond, wheeling about and leaping at Willis, who gave a scream and vainly tried to escape.

Jack caught the fellow, grasped him by the ears, and flung him back against the wall. Thump! thump! thump!—Jack banged the head of the helpless wretch against the wall till it seemed that Paulding's skull would crack.

Willis tried to scream for help, but with the very first thump his tongue was caught between his teeth, and he nearly bit it in two. Blood gushed from his mouth, and he sunk in a limp heap to the floor as Jack released him.

Diamond turned quickly, but not in time to escape Flemming, whose heavy fist caught the Virginian behind the ear.

Down Jack went. As he tried to get up Flemming kicked him over.

The sound of the fight had aroused those in the front of the saloon, and several came hurrying in.

The door had not been closed, as Flemming had directed, and the curious ones gained easy admission to the room.

Among the foremost was Plug Kirby, a tough of the town, whom Frank had once whipped. He saw Frank stretched on the floor, and he hoarsely demanded:

"Who done that job? Who hit me friend Merriwell? Show me der blokie, an' I'll punch der face offen him instanter!"

Thrusting out his chin, Kirby glared around at the boys. At best, he was an ugly-looking scoundrel, with a bullet head and a bulldog neck.

"So you are one of Merriwell's friends!" sneered Flemming. "That speaks well for Merriwell!"

"W'at's dat?" snarled Plug, advancing on Fred. "Dat Merriwell is white ter ther bone, an' I sticks by him—see! Dis gang has done him dirt, an' I'm goin' ter punch der mugs offen der whole of yer!"

"Merriwell should be proud of his friends!" cried Flemming, scornfully. "It is plain that he has been very careful in his selection!"

"An' it's plain ter me dat Merriwell has been took foul, else yer never'd knocked him out dis way. I've been up ag'inst him, an' he could lick dis whole gang if he had a square deal."

Then Kirby pointed straight at Flemming, and fiercely exclaimed:

"I t'ink you're der bloke w'at done him dirt! I'm goin' ter knock der packin' outer youse, me fine chap!"

He rushed at Fred, who caught up a chair and struck at Kirby's head. Plug dodged, caught hold of the chair, and wrenched it from Flemming's grasp.

"Right here is where I cleans out der place!" he shouted.

He swung the chair aloft, and the boys made a rush to get out of the room.

Whiz!—the chair flew through the air, striking Fred Flemming between the shoulders, knocking him down instantly.

Then the police came in suddenly, and clubbed Kirby into a helpless condition, while all the others, with the exception of Merriwell and Diamond, escaped from the place.

Jack was examining Frank's wound when they were both placed under arrest.

"What is this for?" demanded the young Virginian. "What have we done to merit arrest? Why didn't you take those fellows who got the better of us in such cowardly ways?"

"Don't ask questions!" growled one of the officers. "You'll have a chance to answer a few when yer come before the judge in the morning."

Those words filled Diamond with a feeling of terror. He knew what it would mean if they were brought up before a magistrate in the morning. It would become known that they had been arrested in a place like Jackson's, and in company with a ruffian of Plug Kirby's stamp. Kirby would claim that Frank Merriwell was his friend, and that would settle everything. Jack saw that it meant disgrace and expulsion for himself and Merriwell. Flemming and Thornton would be triumphant.

Jack was very proud, and it made him writhe with anguish when he thought how heavily such a blow would fall upon his parents. For a moment he was quite overcome.

Jackson came into the room. He was greatly excited, and he begged the officers to let the prisoners go, for he knew unpleasant attention would be attracted toward his place if it became publicly known that two students had been arrested there.

"It's time we pinched somebody in this joint," said one of the policemen. "There's been more crooked jobs put up here than anywhere else in the city. You oughter lose yer license, Jackson, and I rather think yer will this time."

Jackson had ordered the door closed to keep out the curious crowd that had been attracted by sounds of the conflict. One of the bartenders was standing guard over the door.

The saloon-keeper drew one of the policemen aside, and spoke earnestly and excitedly to him. The officer shook his head, and replied:

"We've overlooked things that went on here till it won't do no longer, Jackson. There has been complaints against this joint, and ye're lucky that we don't pull the whole shooting-match."

The other officer now took a fair look at Merriwell, who was sitting up and feeling tenderly of his head.

"Why, hello!" exclaimed the policeman. "I t'ink I knows you!"

"Hello, Magoon!" returned Frank, rather faintly. "I hope you didn't hit me that crack over the head with your stick?"

"I do know yer!" cried the officer. "Ye're ther boy what stopped ther horse and saved Fairfax Lee's girl! You're all right!"

"My friend there says we're arrested, Magoon. How about it?"

"We didn't know it was you, but ther job is done now," said the policeman, apologetically.

"Well, can't this matter be fixed up?" asked Frank, anxiously. "You know what it will mean to me if I am pulled up before a magistrate in the morning. Everything will come out, and then I'll be expelled from college."

"That's rocky," admitted Magoon; "but what can I do? I can't let you off without lettin' the others go."

"Well, why shouldn't you let my friend Diamond go? We were up against six fellows, and it seems that we got the worst of it. Those chaps are the ones who should be arrested."

"But we didn't catch 'em."

"You caught us because we had been foully knocked out by the crowd," declared Jack. "We were taken at an advantage, and did not have any kind of a show. Now are we to suffer while the ones who were to blame go free?"

"You made a big mistake in coming into this kind of a joint," declared the officer, severely. "And you were arrested at the same time with Plug Kirby, a tough of the lowest order. That's what gits you in a hole. If we lets you go, we've got to let him go."

Then Diamond explained how Kirby happened to be in the room, and Frank added light to the matter by telling how he came to know the thug, who had been hired to whip him once on a time,

but who had received a severe thumping instead.

"And that is how it happens that he claims you for his friend?" asked Magoon, grinning. "You hammered friendship into him?"

"That's right," said Frank. "He has been ready to do anything for me ever since that night."

"Well, I must say that's the first thing I ever knowed about Plug Kirby that made me feel like goin' easy with him! And he was fighting for you against the crowd? I'll have a word with Murphy."

Two of the officers drew aside, while the third stood guard at the door. After a few moments, Jackson was called up by Magoon, and the trio spoke in low tones.

Frank was keeping watch of all that passed, and he saw Jackson take something out of his pocket and slip it into Murphy's hand.

"That lets us out, Jack," said Merriwell, guardedly. "Jackson has fixed it with the officers."

"If you're right, we are dead lucky," muttered Diamond. "It began to look as if we were booked for our walking-papers."

"Which would have pleased certain young gentlemen who do not admire us very much."

"They would have held a jubilee over it. With you out of the way, Flemming would have gone on the crew. He has suddenly come to hate you because he thinks you have shut him out from that position."

"Scarcely do I settle with one set of enemies before another rises up to make it interesting for me," said Frank. "I believe I have more enemies than any other fellow at Yale."

"And you have more friends. Any man who is as popular as you is certain to have enemies. You arouse the envy of the weak and shallow, and the jealousy of those who would become your rivals, but are incompetent to become your equals. At the same time, you are able to command a larger following than any fellow at Yale. You are a leader in everything, and it is certain that you will be able to make your choice of the junior societies next year. It is no more than natural that you should have bitter foes who desire your downfall."

"Well, my enemies have not succeeded very well with their plots thus far. If we get out of this scrape all right, I'll give my attention to this new gang who have rallied around Fred Flemming, for he is evidently the leader."

"Yes, he is the leader, and Tom Thornton is his first officer. If you give your attention to Flemming, I will look after Mr. Thornton. Is that settled?"

"It is settled."

"Good! Now we'll see if Jackson has fixed matters."

One of the policemen was having a talk with Plug Kirby. Kirby seemed rather sullen and obstinate.

"I weren't doin' nothin' to git me head t'umped like dis," he muttered, sulkily. "Me frien' Merriwell was bein' jumped by a gang, an' I went in fer ter back him up. You cops lets der gang git off, an' den yer pinches us. I don't care wot yer do wid me, an' I don't make no promises. Go on wid yer deal."

Here Frank Merriwell stepped in.

"You profess to be a friend of mine, Kirby," he said.

"Dat's wot I am, pal," nodded the tough.

"Then show it. If I am pulled up before a magistrate, it is pretty sure that I'll be expelled from college, which will be rough on me. If you are my friend, you will agree to keep your mouth shut about this affair. If you are my enemy, you will refuse."

"Well, pal, if yer puts it dat way, I can't refuse yer. I did kinder reckon you'd stan' by me when I was hauled up, an' I t'ought your influence might fix t'ings; but, if it's der way you say, I'll take me medicine, an' never open me trap. Is dat satisfactory?"

"You have not been placed under arrest at all—understand that?" demanded Officer Murphy.

"Sure."

"And you know nothing about a row in this place. Catch on?"

"Sure."

"You're doing this for your friend Merriwell. See?"

"Sure."

"That's all. We'll have a drink all around on Jackson, and I'll club the head off you, Kirby, if you blow anything."

Frank took seltzer, while the others drank beer or whiskey, according to their fancy.

Ten minutes later, Merriwell, Diamond and Kirby were let out of Jackson's by the back door.

When they were at some distance from the saloon, Frank turned to the bruiser and said:

"Diamond tells me that you got into this trouble by attempting to defend me, Kirby. I am sure I appreciate it, but I had rather you would drop calling me your friend. You can do me more harm that way than any other."

"All right," nodded Plug, gloomily. "Dat goes. I know I ain't in your class, an' I don't want ter do yer no hurt. All der same, if I git a chance ter fight fer yer any time, I'll do dat."

Frank appreciated the kindness of the big bruiser, whose admiration he had won by giving him a severe thrashing.

"All right, Kirby," he laughed. "I certainly can't object if you want to fight for me. There have been times when I could have found you quite useful in pitting you against ruffians who had tried to injure me. Are you down on your luck nowadays?"

"Well, rudder!"

"Well, here's a V. Go play you are a millionaire."

Kirby eagerly grasped the five-dollar bill which Frank passed him, earnestly exclaiming:

"If youse ain't der whites' young cove what I ever seen, I'm a liar! If yer wants me ter do up der whole gang as was ag'inst yer ter-night, jest you say so! I'd like der job."

"If I need you, I'll let you know," assured Frank. "Good-night."

Plug doffed his battered hat.

"Good-night, young gent. May ye alwus prosper, an' may Old Nick take yer enemies."

As Frank and Jack walked toward their rooms in South Middle, the Virginian observed:

"You are the strangest fellow I ever saw, Merriwell. When you do make a friend he is ready to go through fire for you, and you make friends of all sorts and conditions of persons. Your friends are as firm and unwavering as your enemies are virulent and dangerous."

"And still I seldom seek the friendship of any one," declared Merriwell. "If they wish to be my friends, I accept them for what they show themselves to be. If they choose to be my enemies, well and good; let them look out for themselves. To-night I have found that a new combine of enemies has risen against me. I know them all, and I shall treat them as they deserve."

CHAPTER XI.

A MATTER OF SPECULATION.

Frank spent an hour every afternoon in the gymnasium, where he took such exercise as he considered best, always spending at least a few minutes of the time on one of the rowing machines.

A great deal of speculation had been aroused by Bob Collingwood's determination to take Merriwell upon the 'varsity crew.

It was known that Collingwood was a thorough believer in the American oar and American stroke as opposed to the shorter-bladed Oxford oar and the longer English stroke.

Collingwood had ever seemed thoroughly satisfied with Yale methods, and he had expressed his scorn of the Oxford method of placing the seats on alternate sides of the boat.

It was generally presumed that Frank Merriwell was thoroughly English in his ideas and beliefs, and it was thought that he was altogether too set to give up what he fancied was right, even though he might get on the crew by so doing.

Still some one had been forced to give in, and there was much speculation about it. Then came the rumor that Yale was to have an English coach, and the tongues of the gossips began to wag furiously.

"It's a great triumph for Frank Merriwell!" cried Danny Griswold to a party of friends gathered in the gym.

Danny was flushed and perspiring from recent violent exertions on the bars. Some of the group about him were in training suits, and some were in street dress.

"Also a triumph for good old 'Umpty-eight," declared Ben Halliday, with satisfaction.

"How is that?" asked Bandy Robinson.

"Why," answered Halliday, "it was the freshman crew of 'Umpty-eight that, under Merriwell's instructions, adopted the Oxford oar and stroke and defeated 'Umpty-seven at Saltonstall. Do you

see?"

"Vanity, vanity," quoth Dismal Jones, with the air of a Methodist preacher of old times. "They who exalt themselves in high places shall be cast down. Beware of false pride and the swelled head."

"Oh, you are always croaking!" exclaimed Lewis Little.

"I think it is a mistake to run off onto English methods," said Burn Putnam. "Harvard has done that, and they'll say we are following Harvard's example."

"What if they do say so?" yawned Bruce Browning, lazily. "What do we care, so long as we win the race at New London?"

"But we can't win this year," declared Walter Gordan, who had been swinging the clubs, and was flushed from the exertion. "It strikes me it is a crazy scheme to attempt to change the oars and the stroke at this late day. Harvard has been hammering away at her crew since last fall, and it will be in perfect trim when the New London race comes off, while Yale's crew will be all broken up if this change of methods occurs."

This seemed logical, and not a few were ready to agree with Gordan. Harry Rattleton came up, and the lads appealed to him at once.

"You are Merriwell's roommate," said Robinson, "and you should know if it is true that Yale is going to change her oars and stroke for the Oxford oar and stroke."

Harry grinned mysteriously.

"Why should I know all this just because I am Merriwell's roommate?" he asked. "Do you think he knows everything he tells me—I mean do you think he tells me everything he knows?"

"Of course not, but he'd be sure to tell you this, for you know he introduced English methods with 'Umpty-eight last year, and he must be rather proud if Collingwood has given in that those methods are preferable to the old Yale ways."

"If Merry were proud of anything, you'd never know it by his words or manner," said Harry. "He is not given to boasting."

"Oh, of course not!" cried Little, impatiently. "We all swear by Frank Merriwell, but what we wish to know is if he has induced Collingwood to adopt the Oxford oar and stroke."

"Well, you'll have to ask Merriwell, for I will tell you frankly that I don't know. The longer I room with him the less I pry into his affairs, and, if he knows Collingwood's plans, he has not seen fit to reveal them to me. That is all, gentlemen."

That was anything but satisfactory, as the faces of the assembled lads plainly indicated.

"Well, it can't be long before we find out!" cried Robinson, in disgust. "If Yale has whiffled about at this late hour it will show reprehensible weakness and lack of policy. Harvard is bound to win. Then she will crow. They have won the annual debate right along, so that my old foggy uncle declares all the brains are in Harvard. If they win the spring race he'll decide that brawn is going to Harvard, as well as brain, and Yale is in the decline."

"They never won anything fair," declared Halliday. "Why, I've heard they have men out West all the while searching for new debaters. They claim that Harvard don't care to go in for athletics, but takes a leading stand in all intellectual pursuits, such as debating and chess."

"Chess is certainly a highly intellectual pursuit," drawled Browning. "If I had entered Harvard I should take an interest in it. Debating is too trying. The exertion of standing on one's feet and talking is very severe."

"If you would take a little more exertion you might get some of the flesh off you," said Putnam. "How did you happen to get fat so suddenly, Browning, old man?"

"Oh, he fell off the roof one day and came down plump," chuckled Griswold, mischievously.

"Here! here! here!" exclaimed Rattleton, making a grab at Danny, who dodged and slipped out of the way. "You want to let up on that, young fellow."

"I have tried to reduce my weight by dieting," said Bruce, with apparent seriousness. "I've been in the habit of eating a juicy tenderloin steak twice a day, but I gave that up and tried cheap fifteen-cent steaks instead."

"How did you find it?" asked Little.

"Oh, pretty tough," answered Browning, with a sly wink.

"This isn't what we were talking about," broke in Walter Gordan, impatiently. "If those Harvard Willies win from us this spring, it will be a frightful blow for Old Eli."

"If they win it will come from Collingwood's shallying about," asserted "Deacon" Dunning, who had just joined the group. "Merriwell's ideas may be all right, but it is too late to adopt them this season. I am Merriwell's friend, but I believe Fred Flemming should have been retained on the crew. By taking in Merriwell it may upset everything. Flemming is a good man, and Merriwell already has more than he can properly attend to."

"Now you are getting me hot under the collar—I mean hot under the collar!" exclaimed Rattleton, his eyes snapping. "I want to ask you a question, Mr. Dunning. When have you known Frank Merriwell to make a failure of anything he has attempted?"

"Oh, he has been wonderfully successful, I grant that; and I do not doubt but he would have made a good man had he been taken on the crew last fall."

"He will make a good man anyway, and you can bet on that!" cried Harry. "It is not necessary that there shall be a change of methods because Merry has been taken on the crew. Although he believes in the superiority of the Oxford oar and stroke, he may not think it good policy to attempt to make a change now. But that is not all. Merry makes a good leader, but he is also a good follower, and it is his theory that utter obedience is due superiors. I'll wager that he will not intrude his ideas on Collingwood. If he does not regulate his stroke with that of the rest of the crew he will soon be dropped, and Flemming or some other fellow will have his oar. All this talk you are making is mere speculation, and I advise you to wait a while till you know what you are talking about."

Having thus delivered himself, Rattleton turned away.

At this moment Frank entered the gymnasium to take his regular exercise. He was accompanied by Jack Diamond, who had been seen with Merriwell very often of late.

Immediately the group of sophomores decided that one of their number should ask Merriwell point-blank if a change to the English methods was contemplated. The choice fell on Bandy Robinson, who did not relish his job much.

Robinson approached Frank with no little hesitation, and something about his manner seemed to betray his object, for Merriwell read his thoughts.

"Go back," directed Frank, grimly—"go back and tell them that they will find out all they want to know by waiting."

Then he entered one of the dressing-rooms, and Robinson retreated, muttering:

"It's no use—Merriwell seems to know just what a person is thinking about. He is one of the jolliest fellows in the world, and, at the same time, when he takes a fancy, one of the most unapproachable."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHALLENGE.

Merriwell and Diamond entered a dressing-room together. The moment the door closed behind them, Frank laughed shortly.

"I'll wager that I hit the nail on the head that time," he said. "The moment I saw that knot of fellows talking so excitedly I decided they were speculating concerning the change on the crew, and my eyes told me they had deputized Robinson to question me, so I did not give him the chance."

"The dropping of Flemming and your acceptance in his place has created a stir," said Jack. "It is generally thought that you will ruin everything with your English ideas."

"That shows how little they know me," smiled Merriwell, as he threw off his coat. "I almost fancy it is generally believed that I go in for English methods simply because they are English."

"You fancy rightly, Merry. The majority of the fellows believe that."

A cloud came to Frank's face.

"I do not care to be misunderstood to such an extent," he said. "I am no Anglomaniac; I am American to the bone. I have traveled some, and I prefer this country above all other countries on the face of the earth. I was at Oxford long enough to witness the races and make an investigation of their methods. I believe that in the matter of rowing the English are more advanced than the Americans. This is not strange, for they have been at it longer. Now, although I claim to be thoroughly American, I try not to be narrow and pig-headed. Simply because a thing is American, I do not believe it must therefore be superior to everything else in the world; but I am bound to defend it till I find something by which it is excelled. If Americans will adopt the English oar and the English stroke, I am confident that, in a very few years, they will so improve upon them that they will be able to give points to our cousins across the 'pond.'"

"You are, indeed, broad-minded and liberal, Merriwell," said Diamond, with admiration. "It was you who first convinced me that Northerners no longer hold a feeling of enmity against Southerners. Till I met you the word 'Yankee' seemed to me to be a stigma—a name to be applied in derision to the people of the North. To my astonishment, I found you were proud to be called a Yankee, and then you explained to me that foreigners applied the name to all native-born Americans. You explained to me that in the early days of this country, when Northerner and

Southerner fought for one common cause, freedom and independence, all who opposed the tyranny of our oppressors were termed Yankees. I remember the night when we sat up till two in the morning talking of these things. You did not tell me anything I had not considered before, but you revealed things to me in a new light. You showed me the North and South bound by ties of blood, and I think you aroused in me a broader feeling of patriotism than I had ever before known."

The cloud passed from Merriwell's face as his companion spoke, and, as Diamond finished, Frank reached out and took his hand.

"You are from the South, I from the North," he said, in his most charming manner; "yet we are brothers. In the North and in the South there are those who still entertain sectional feelings and prejudices, but the time will come when all this will pass away."

"I think it is fast passing," declared Jack.

"It is," nodded Frank. "So far as sectional feelings go, there should be no North, no South, no East, no West. We are all united under one flag, the most beautiful of all flags—the Star Spangled Banner! We are all citizens of one country, the greatest and grandest the sun ever shone upon! We should be ready at any time to lay down our lives for our flag and our country."

Diamond's eyes flashed, and it seemed that the noble look on Frank Merriwell's face was reflected in Jack's. His blood was stirred by the grandest of all emotions—patriotism. Looking at the Virginian at that moment, no one could for an instant doubt his courage and his loyalty.

"I believe we should pay more attention to the early history of our country, when North and South were united against a common foe," continued Frank. "That is what will arouse true patriotism. Massachusetts had her Tea Party, but Virginia had her—Washington!"

Jack Diamond bared his head.

"Merriwell," he said, with great earnestness, "the greatest enemies of our country are those who try to arouse sectional feeling. I am sure of that."

"Quite right," said Frank. "In the North and in the South there are cheap fellows and cads who pose as gentlemen. You and I have had a few experiences with some of them, and it seems that there are others."

"I presume you mean Flemming, Thornton and their crowd?"

"Flemming is the leader, and his enmity against me has been aroused because I have been taken on the crew in his place. I did not seek the position, and I was surprised when Collingwood called on me to take it."

"You were no less surprised than others, for Collingwood has always maintained that Yale's methods are superior to those of Oxford, and he knows you believe quite the opposite. It is a matter of speculation if he intends to change to the English methods at this late hour."

Frank smiled.

"Collingwood is not a fool. There will be no change. Already I am in training to perfectly acquire the Yale stroke."

This was both a surprise and a relief to Jack, who had feared that Collingwood had decided on the change, and that in case Harvard won Merriwell would be blamed to a certain extent.

"I am glad, Merry!" exclaimed Diamond, his eyes gleaming. "If Yale wins and we square matters with Flemming and Thornton, I shall be perfectly satisfied."

"I am hoping to get at Mr. Flemming this afternoon," said Frank, grimly.

"How is that?"

"He spends some time in the gym every day, and I timed my visit to-day in order to catch him here."

"But what can you do here?" asked the Virginian, wonderingly. "You can't fight him in the gym."

"I do not want to fight him."

"No?" cried Jack, in astonishment. "Then what do you mean to do?"

"Flemming considers himself the champion wrestler at Yale. I hope to wrestle with him."

"Hope to wrestle?" exclaimed Diamond, still more astonished. "Why, even if you were to throw him, it could give you very little satisfaction."

Frank smiled mysteriously.

"Do you think so?" he inquired. "Well, we shall see. When you are ready, we shall go out. I will wrestle with you, and you shall throw me. We'll be near Flemming at the time. That will give him an opportunity to pass some remarks, if he so desires. If he does so, you may be sure I will lose no time in picking them up. I am tired of fighting, and I hope to finish this chap in another way."

"If you finish him by wrestling with him, I shall consider it a marvel. I am afraid you have

misjudged your man, Merry; he'll not be finished so easily."

"We shall see. Are you ready? Then come on."

They left the dressing-room, Frank in advance. As they came out they were regarded with some interest by the knot of sophomores, who were still talking of the surprising change that had been made on the crew.

As he passed the lads, Frank called pleasantly to them, and they greeted him in return, and the manner in which this was done would have betrayed to a keen-eyed stranger that Merriwell was something more than an ordinary man at college.

Frank's keen eyes detected Flemming at the ladders.

"That is first rate," he muttered. "The turf is nearby."

A few moments later Frank was engaged in casting the shot near where Fred Flemming was exercising on the ladders.

At about the time Frank fancied Flemming would finish, Frank gave Jack the signal, and they were soon struggling in what seemed to be a good-natured wrestling match.

Diamond was really supple and catlike on his feet, and he possessed more than common strength; but he was not Frank Merriwell's match, for, besides being a natural athlete, Frank had developed himself in every way, so that he was really a wonder for a youth of his years.

The struggle between Frank and Jack quickly attracted a number of spectators to the spot, and Merriwell was well pleased to see Flemming come down from the ladders and approach, accompanied by Tom Thornton.

It seemed that the battle between the wrestling lads became fiercer and fiercer, but at last Jack secured a sudden advantage, and Merriwell went down heavily.

"Bah!" Fred Flemming was heard to say. "Those fellows remind me of two awkward cubs. Neither knows the rudiments of scientific wrestling."

One leap brought Frank Merriwell to his feet, another leap carried him before Flemming, who was turning away.

"Wait a moment, sir," said Frank, his voice cold, clear and distinct. "I believe you consider yourself something of a wrestler, Flemming?"

Merriwell had appeared before him so suddenly that Fred started back involuntarily. Then, angry with himself at the recoil, his lips curled scornfully, and he surveyed the other lad in the most haughty and insolent manner.

"Get out of my way!" he cried, harshly. "I will not be bothered by you!"

The same old smile—the smile that was so dangerous—crept over Merriwell's face.

"You think you will not be bothered by me," he said, his voice smooth and soft, "but you deceive yourself. You have taken a fancy to bother me, to revile me behind my back, even to make false statements concerning me, for you have said that I sought your position on the crew and obtained it by underhand means. In the presence of these witnesses you have stated that I am a most bungling wrestler. That is something you cannot deny."

"I do not wish to deny it. You are not a wrestler—you know nothing of the art."

"And you claim to be a wrestler?"

"Yes, I can wrestle."

"Then, here and now, I challenge you to wrestle me at side-holds, catch-as-you-can and arm's end, the winner of two out of three falls to be acknowledged the best man, and Hugh Heffner to be the judge. If you refuse to wrestle, I will brand you as a blower and a braggart—a fellow not fit to be accepted in the society of gentlemen. Your answer, Flemming—your answer!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WRESTLING MATCH.

Flemming turned pale and trembled with suppressed passion, while his hands were clinched, and he glared at Merriwell as if he longed to strike the lad who had dared face him and fling such an insulting challenge in his teeth.

He tried to speak, but the words were choked back in his throat. He felt that Merriwell was seeking retaliation, and, for that reason, had purposely worded his challenge in a manner calculated to cut him deeply.

"Shame!" came from the lips of Tom Thornton.

Still the lad who had given the challenge smiled.

"I am meeting Mr. Flemming as he would meet me," said Frank, calmly. "I am using the sort of language he would not hesitate to apply to me. Of course I feel that I am lowering myself in doing so, but it is absolutely necessary in some cases to place one's self on the level of an unscrupulous enemy in order to meet and defeat him."

All this was said with coolness and distinctness, and it was as if Frank were deliberately sinking the knife deeper in Flemming's writhing body.

It seemed to be more than Flemming could endure, for he lost control of himself, and would have leaped toward Frank.

"You insolent hound!" he cried, through his set teeth.

Merriwell stood with his hands at his side, making no move, but he saw that Flemming's friends had grasped him and were holding him in check.

"Steady, Flem, my boy!" fluttered Thornton. "Remember where you are!"

"I will strangle him."

"Wait! You can't do it here!"

"Let me go!"

"Thornton is right," declared Andy Emery, who had placed himself between the two foes. "You cannot fight him here, old man."

"Then fix it so I can fight him somewhere—anywhere! I could murder him!"

"You will have to wrestle him."

"Yes," said Thornton, "you will have to do that, Fred, or his friends will believe you are afraid."

"Then I will wrestle him—and I will break his back!"

"You must calm down before you attempt it, and you must promise to wrestle fairly according to rules."

"That will give me no chance to get square for this insult."

"You can show your superiority by throwing him, which you will do, as you are an expert wrestler, and, for all of the other things he does so well, no one ever heard that Merriwell could wrestle. Then, the next time you meet him outside college bounds, you can force him to apologize."

Emery nodded.

"Thornton is right, Flemming," he said.

Then, with a mighty effort, Fred seemed to gain control of his anger, and he calmly said:

"All right, I will wrestle him, but I shall not be gentle with him, although I promise not to foul him."

"Be as rough as you choose, as long as you keep within bounds."

Then it was that Frank Merriwell was heard saying to the friends who had gathered around him:

"It may seem that I have opened myself to criticism by my manner in challenging this person, but I call you all to witness that he was the first to be insulting by his manner of criticising the friendly bout between Mr. Diamond and myself. That, however, was not the beginning. Had not Flemming given me other cause, I should not have challenged him in such a manner. I have sought neither his friendship nor his enmity, but he has seen fit to regard me as an enemy. I can honor an honest foe who meets me man to man, but not one who takes a mean advantage of me. On my head I now bear a bruise where I was felled by a heavy cane in the hands of one of Flemming's friends, when he with five companions set upon Diamond and myself. I always endeavor to square all my accounts with friends and foes, and I shall balance the books with Flemming."

Fred forced a scornful laugh.

"A very fine speech!" he cried. "I assure you, Merriwell, you shall have the opportunity to square matters. I could wish something somewhat more businesslike than a mere wrestling match, but that may come later—if you have as much nerve as you wish persons to think you possess. To begin with, I'll show you that I spoke the truth when I said you know nothing of the art of wrestling. I am satisfied to have Hugh Heffner for judge and referee."

Merriwell had chosen Heffner because he knew Hugh was a square man, and they were not at all chummy, so he could not be accused of having selected a person who would favor him. Heffner was in the gymnasium, and had been attracted by the struggle between Merriwell and Diamond, so he had overheard all that passed between Frank and Fred.

Diamond was standing at one side, his arms folded, a look of satisfaction on his face. For all of

Flemming's reputation as a wrestler, Diamond felt sure that Merriwell was making no false moves. He knew Frank too well to think he would deliberately challenge his enemy to wrestle without feeling certain of his own ability to accomplish his defeat.

Flemming was eager for the struggle, while Merriwell was calm and deliberate in his movements. Flemming's friends gathered about him, giving him advice.

Then Frank was not a little astonished to find Tad Horner at his side, and heard the little junior say:

"Look here, Merriwell, I want you to understand that I am not your enemy, although appearances may be against me."

"You were one of the Flemming gang at Jackson's."

"I acknowledge it but with shame," said Tad, and, to Frank's surprise, the little fellow colored deeply. "At the same time, you will remember that I did not lift a hand against you. You are a white man, Merriwell, and I think you all right."

Frank was impressed by Tad's sincerity.

"Thank you," he said. "It is not necessary for every fellow who dislikes me to be a rascal. I am sure that all of Flemming's friends are not rascals. It is quite probable that a great many honest fellows think me in the wrong, but I am glad to know that you, who were present at Jackson's, do not think so."

Tad retired, quite satisfied with this. He had long admired Merriwell, and he felt it his duty to come out on this occasion and express himself openly. He did not mind that Flemming and his friends regarded him with anger and scorn.

Arrangements for the wrestling match were soon made, and then the two lads faced each other on the turf. Flemming was tall and solid, with broad shoulders and a back of which he was particularly proud. He was heavier than Merriwell.

There was not a single ounce of superfluous flesh on Frank Merriwell. He was a mass of bone and sinew, splendidly formed and supple as a young panther. In every movement and pose there was indescribable grace, and, at the same time, a suggestion of wonderful strength and self-reliance.

Flemming was bold and confident. He had made a special study of wrestling, and he knew all the tricks employed by experts. He had seen Merriwell and Diamond wrestling, and he felt certain that his adversary and rival would be an "easy thing."

It chanced that the under holds in the first match fell to Flemming, which made him certain in his own mind that he would have no trouble in throwing the lad he hated.

The signal was given, and the enemies advanced and secured holds. Then Heffner gave the command, and the struggle began.

In the twinkling of an eye Flemming tried the cross-buttock, but it seemed that Merriwell had been expecting just such a move, for he passed his left leg behind Fred's right and through in front of Fred's left. Then the force of Flemming's surge seemed to lift both lads off their feet.

"Down Merriwell goes!" cried Thornton, triumphantly.

But it seemed that in the act of falling Frank whirled in the air and brought his rival under. This, however, had been planned from the very instant that Fred made the first move to accomplish the cross-buttock, and Frank's lock-trip had brought it about by lifting the other lad from the ground by a whirling movement.

Flemming struck fairly on his shoulders, with Merriwell across his body, and Heffner cried:

"First fall for Merriwell!"

Exclamations of astonishment broke from the spectators. Instead of a struggle of some moments, this fall had seemed to come about in the twinkling of an eye.

But what was most astonishing was that Flemming was flat on his back at the bottom when the lads struck the ground, although it had appeared that he had successfully accomplished the cross-buttock.

It is certain that very few of those who witnessed the affair had the least idea how Merriwell had accomplished this, but they saw that he was the victor in the first contest.

Jack Diamond seldom smiled, but now he did so, and the expression of satisfaction on his face was complete.

"Who said Merriwell was going down?" squealed Danny Griswold, in delight. "Somebody fooled himself that time!"

Thornton bit his lip, muttering some fierce exclamation beneath his breath.

Of them all no person was more astonished than Fred Flemming. He lay dazed and wondering, scarcely able to realize that he was flat on his back and his enemy across his chest.

Frank arose hastily, his face quite calm and expressionless. He did not betray satisfaction or triumph, but his manner indicated that what had happened was no more than he had fully expected. He had confidence in himself, which any one must have to be successful, but still he was not overconfident, which is a fault quite as much as timidity.

Flemming sat up. He had felt himself lifted from his feet with a twisting movement, and he had felt himself whirled in the air, but still he could not understand how the feat had been accomplished.

Shame caused the hot blood to rush into his face, and he ground his teeth together, his whole body quivering.

"It was an accident—it must have been an accident!" he told himself. "I tried to throw him so heavily that I overreached myself."

The look on Merriwell's face cut him like a keen knife and made him feel a fierce longing for the next tussle.

"They actually think he threw me, when I threw myself," was his thought; "but I will undeceive them in a moment. Next time I will drive him into the earth beneath me! There'll be no further miscalculation."

Thornton was at the side of his friend.

"How in the world did you happen to let him take a fall out of you in that manner?" whispered Tom, in extreme disgust.

Flemming's lips curled.

"Bah!" he returned. "He did not do it!"

"No? But you were thrown! Explain that."

"I was not thrown."

"Yes, you were, my dear fellow! Heffner has given Merriwell credit for winning the first fall."

"I made a misjudgment in the amount of strength I should use on the fellow, and I turned myself in the air," declared Fred.

"Is it possible?"

"Of course it is!" hissed Flemming, who saw the incredulity in the face of his friend. "He is even easier fruit than I imagined."

Thornton brightened up somewhat, although not fully satisfied.

"You must not let him accomplish it this time."

"I tell you he did not accomplish it before!" came bitterly from the crestfallen and furious youth. "I will convince you of that in a moment. See the fellow stand there with that lordly air as if he had actually accomplished something. I will take all of that out of him! This is catch as we can, and I will break his back!"

"Injure his back in some way, and he will not be able to hold the place that belongs to you on the crew."

"That is right!" panted Flemming, his eyes glittering and his teeth showing. "A fellow with a sprained back is no good at an oar. Why, Thornton, my boy! Merriwell has played right into my hands! He has given me the very opportunity I most desire, and I'll be a chump if I neglect it! If he is not taken to his room on a stretcher, it will be necessary for some of his friends to aid him. I know a hug that will take the stiffness out of his spine and make him lame for a month!"

"Give it to him!" fluttered Tom, with returning confidence. "Fix the cad this time so he will not be able to wrestle any more!"

"I will, rest assured of that. This is my opportunity. In five minutes the starch will be taken out of him."

Flemming was confident, far more confident than he would have been had he dreamed that Merriwell had turned him in the air and brought him underneath in the first fall.

In his mind he saw Merriwell groaning on the ground, saw him assisted to his room, saw him helpless in bed and attended by a physician.

But what gave Flemming the greatest satisfaction was the vision of Collingwood humbly asking him to again resume his place on the crew—the place now given to Frank Merriwell.

It seemed remarkable to Fred that he had not planned to engage the lad he hated in a wrestling match, and so injure him in such a manner that he would be unable to row on the crew.

But no less remarkable, it seemed, was the fact that he had been challenged to wrestle by Merriwell, and thus given the opportunity he most ardently desired.

The only thing that marred his satisfaction at that moment was that Merriwell had, apparently by

accident, seemed to have acquired the honor of having thrown him in the first struggle.

"Gentlemen," said Heffner, "are you ready?"

The antagonists stepped forward and signified their readiness. The spectators fell back.

"This time it is catch as you can," said Yale's famous pitcher. "Any kind of a hold is fair. Is that understood?"

"It is," nodded Merriwell.

"Certainly," bowed Flemming, giving Frank a scornful look.

"Very well, gentlemen. Prepare to clinch. Ready—go!"

CHAPTER XIV.

PLOTTING FUN.

Like a panther Merriwell sprang forward, but he halted quite as suddenly and stood erect, careless and disdainful.

Flemming came forward in a crouching posture. He believed he saw his opportunity, and, with a gasp of satisfaction, he darted in and caught the lad he hated about the body.

This time it was not Flemming's intention to throw Merriwell too suddenly. He wanted a little time to wrench Frank's back, and then he would cast his foe writhing and helpless at his feet.

Tom Thornton saw that Fred had obtained the hold he sought, and he mentally exclaimed:

"This time there will be no blunder!"

Jack Diamond no longer smiled. He saw that Flemming had obtained what seemed to be a great advantage, and his face was filled with concern.

"It was careless of Merriwell to give the fellow such a hold!" thought Jack. "Flemming is sure to be the victor this time!"

There was a look of intense satisfaction on Fred Flemming's face as he made firm his clasp about Merriwell's back.

And then, just as Flemming was ready to give a bear-like hug, something happened.

Frank's right arm was bent so that his forearm came directly under Fred's chin, while his left arm was clasped across Fred's shoulders behind his back.

Merriwell gave a sudden surge, drawing Flemming close with his left arm, and thrusting back the fellow's head by pressing his right arm under his enemy's chin.

In the twinkling of an eye Flemming's wind was shut off, and his neck seemed to crack beneath the strain. He made a mad effort to hurl Merriwell to the ground, but he had delayed the attempt a moment too long.

Frank Merriwell well knew how dangerous was the trick he had played upon his enemy. He knew that he could break Flemming's neck in that manner if he desired to do so, and he was careful not to make the sudden pressure too intense.

Flemming could not breathe, and his eyes started from his head. His strength seemed to leave his body, and his struggles to throw the lad he hated were weak and ineffectual. He was like a child in the hands of Frank Merriwell.

The spectators stared in astonishment, and Diamond gasped:

"Great Cæsar! Merry purposely let Flemming get that hold!"

"Break away, Flem—break away!" cried Tom Thornton, quivering with excitement.

But Flemming could not break away, for he had not sufficient strength to do so.

"Foul!" shouted Emery, starting forward, as if he would part the combatants.

In a moment Jack Diamond's arm was extended and pressed across Emery's breast, holding him back like a bar of iron.

"There is no foul in this match!" came exultantly from the lips of the Virginian. "That was stated at the beginning."

Flemming made one last feeble struggle, and then the two lads went down together, with Fred under. They fell heavily, and Merriwell came down on his enemy with his full weight.

A moment later Frank arose.

On the turf Fred Flemming lay white and still, his eyes closed.

"Bring some water," calmly directed the victor. "I think Mr. Flemming has been stunned."

"This fall settles the match," decided Hugh Heffner. "Frank Merriwell has won by throwing Flemming two times in succession. Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Merriwell, for it is apparent that you are as expert in the art of wrestling as you have proved yourself to be in the other things you have attempted."

"Thank you," said Frank, simply, as he accepted Heffner's hand.

Jack Diamond whispered in Tom Thornton's ear:

"It is your turn next!"

Diamond called on Merriwell that evening.

"You are a dandy, old man!" cried the Virginian, admiringly. "You got back at Flemming in great shape. They say he has been weak as a rag ever since you dropped him the second time, and it is pretty certain he will hold you in respect hereafter."

"I shall be satisfied if he will let me alone," said Frank, quietly. "I have no grudge against him, but the fellow who has not the nerve to fight his way in this world gets left. Life is a battle from start to finish, and the hardest fighter is the winner."

"True," nodded Jack.

"My mother was one of the gentlest women in the world," continued Merriwell. "Thoughts of strife and contention distressed her. To her a personal encounter was brutal and vulgar, and she instructed me never to fight unless absolutely compelled to do so. As far as possible I have tried to remember her teachings. I have not found it possible to do so at all times, as my enemies would ride over me if I did. When I see that a foe is determined to force me into an encounter then I become the aggressor. In another thing my mother was at fault. Many times she told me never to strike the first blow. She was wrong. Often the first blow wins the battle. If a person sees there is certain to be an encounter, he should do his best to get in the first blow, and make it a good one. Then he should not be satisfied to let it rest there till his enemy has recovered, but he should follow it up. That is my belief."

"And you are right. Old man, you have a level head. I never saw another fellow like you, Merriwell, and I doubt if there is another in the world."

Frank laughed.

"You flatter me, Diamond."

"Not at all."

"Ah, but you do. I know my own failings."

"I wonder what they are?"

"Do not think for a moment that I have no failings! I have studied my own nature, and I have discovered them. As far as possible, I seek to remedy them. To myself I am a very ordinary sort of fellow. I know it, Jack. The man who can see no flaws in himself is an egotist, a cad, and a shallow fool! As soon as he is perfectly satisfied with himself, he ceases to progress—he deteriorates."

"That is true."

"Among my friends I see many things worthy of emulation. You, my dear Diamond, are not aware of your own fine qualities, and——"

"That will do, Merry!" cried Jack, blushing. "I am sure that I try to be a gentleman. My father was a true Southern gentleman."

"There can be no doubt of that. You show your breeding in every way. A natural gentleman will be a gentleman under any circumstances. He carries the air about him, and nothing can disguise it."

Jack sat down.

"You have squared your score with Flemming," he said; "but I have a little matter to settle with Thornton. I am wondering how I shall settle it."

"Thornton is Flemming's satellite. It would be cruel to use him roughly."

"But I will not let him off! He should be taught a lesson."

"Look here, Jack, I have a scheme."

"What is it?"

"Let's put up a racket on him."

"What sort of a racket?"

"Oh, one out of which we can get some sport and humiliate him at the same time. I am sure you

do not want to fight with the fellow?"

"I have been thinking that I would be ashamed to have an encounter with him."

"Exactly so. Now, I know you are not much of a fellow for pranks, but I hope you will agree to this little scheme of mine."

"State it," said Jack, rather doubtfully.

"Well, you know Thornton considers himself something of a masher. He gets stuck on every pretty girl who smiles on him."

"Yes."

"Danny Griswold is a daisy as an impersonator of girls. You know he is to play a girl's part in one of the entertainments to be given in the fall. He has done the trick before, and he sent home for his outfit a week ago. Yesterday, while Rattleton and I were cramming for recitations the door opened, and a stunning blonde walked into the room. She seemed confused when she saw us, begged our pardon, and said she was looking for her cousin, Danny Griswold. She had entered the wrong room by accident. Harry offered to show her to Danny's rooms, but she said she could find the way. Still she was in no hurry to go, and I began to be rather nervous, for I did not fancy the idea of having a young lady without a chaperon visit us. I feared it would become known, and we would receive a reprimand. She was decidedly giddy, and she sat on the arm of the easy-chair there and giggled and said it must be so nice to be a boy and go to Yale. After a while I began to smell a rat. I got up and took a closer look at her. Say, she was gotten up in great shape! It was that little imp Griswold!"

"Well, what is your scheme?" asked Jack, smiling.

"It is to put Griswold onto Thornton. Let Danny rig up and see what he can do. It's ten to one Thornton will think he has a new mash, and then we can have any amount of sport with the fellow."

Jack looked more doubtful than ever.

"I don't see how that is getting square with him," he declared.

"If the game works, you can pretend to be in love with the same girl. You can challenge Thornton to mortal combat. He won't dare meet you. Then you can expose him, and if that will not be getting even with him I don't know how you can get even."

This scheme did not exactly meet Diamond's approval, and Frank found it difficult to induce him to agree to it. At last, however, Merriwell succeeded.

"We'll have barrels of fun out of this," laughed Frank. "I feel in need of a little fun to wake me up."

CHAPTER XV.

THORNTON'S "MASH."

Tom Thornton was alone in his room when there came a knock on the door.

"Come in," called Tom, without turning his head or taking his feet down from the table on which they were resting.

As he had been out late the night before, he was not in a very agreeable mood. He had sent for his tailor some time before, and he supposed it was the tailor who had knocked and entered at his command.

"Well, here you are at last!" Tom growled. "I've waited long enough for you, too! You are slower than molasses in midwinter! I suppose you want to know what ails me now. Well, I'll tell you. That last pair of trousers you made me are too short in the waist and too full around the bottoms—that's what's the matter. I'd be mobbed if I should show myself in them. Now, don't tell me they are all right! I'll just try them on right before you, and let you see—— Great Jupiter! What have I been saying!"

He had turned his head, and he saw a vision that electrified him and brought his feet down from the table with a thump.

Just within the room a very pretty girl was standing, and she was staring at him in a half-frightened, half-amused manner.

"I—I—I beg your pup-pup-pardon!" stammered Thornton, jumping up, confused and flustered. "I didn't know! I—I thought it was my tailor!"

"And you nearly frightened the senses out of me by growling at me in that way," giggled the girl. "Why, I thought you were a great horrid bear, and you were going to eat me."

"If I were a bear, I couldn't ask for a daintier meal," said Tom, gallantly.

"Oh, my!" laughed the girl. "What a difference!"

"I am bound to even matters if possible."

"That's it? Then you did not really mean what you just said, after all?"

The smile vanished from her face, and she seemed a bit offended.

"Oh, yes I did—I vow I did!" exclaimed Tom, hastening to repair the "break." "You see I am all broken up by the surprise. I—I didn't think of seeing a young lady here—alone."

"I suppose not. I am looking for my cousin, Mr. Griswold."

"Griswold? Griswold? Why, I have heard of him. Yes, he is a soph. You'll find him over in South Middle. This is Welch Hall."

"Oh, dear! Then I was misdirected. I was told I'd find him here somewhere. I beg your pardon, sir."

"Oh, don't mention it, Miss—er—Miss—"

"Darling. My name is Grace Darling, and I have come down to spend a week in New Haven. You see I am from the country."

"I should say so!" thought Thornton; "and as fresh as they make 'em! But she is pretty—yes, she is a genuine stunner! A sort of wild flower. She is so innocent and unsophisticated!"

"I presumed you were not familiar with Yale, or you would not be in the dormitories without a chaperon," said Thornton, aloud. "It is all right, though," he hastened to declare, as she seemed to shrink back. "I will escort you over to South Middle, and help you find your cousin. My name is Thornton—Thomas Thornton."

"You are very good, Mr. Thornton, but I think I can find Danny all right. I will not put you to the trouble."

"Oh, it will be no trouble—not the least in the world, I assure you."

"Still I don't know what Danny would think. Even though your company would be very pleasant, I dare not accept it without a proper introduction, Mr.—Mr. Thornton."

This was said in the most coquettish manner possible, and Tom Thornton felt his heart beating proudly.

"I've struck her all right!" he told himself. "I mustn't let it slip. I'll improve the opportunity."

So he talked to her in his most fascinating manner, and was bold enough to express a hope that he might see her again, to which she replied that he "might." And when she left Tom was in a state of delighted satisfaction, thoroughly pleased with himself.

Thornton was inclined to boast of his conquests, and it was not long before he had told several of his friends about the "corking pretty girl" who had wandered into his room.

"And I caught her without a struggle," he declared repeatedly. "Country girl and rather unsophisticated; but a regular rustic rose—no, a regular daisy. Cousin of some fellow over in South Middle. Her name? Never mind. I am not giving things away. She is going to stay down a week, and gave me her promise that I should see her again. But she intends to be strictly proper, although she does not know much of city ways, for she declared that I must be properly introduced to her before she would make an appointment with me. Oh, it's dead easy when you know how!"

Tad Horner was Thornton's roommate. "Grace Darling" had chosen an occasion when Tad was not in, and thus had found Tom alone.

Tom boasted of his conquest to Tad, who grinned and tried to chaff him about his charming country girl.

"Did she have hayseed in her hair?" asked Tad.

"It's not that kind of a lady, Horner. They'll all be envious of me. She is a stunning blonde, and her innocent country ways make her all the more attractive. She has such eyes—and such teeth! Her lips are very inviting, my dear boy. It's just the sort of a mouth a fellow longs to kiss. And if I do not sip nectar from those ruby lips before she returns to her country home, I'll be dead slow."

"Wow!" whooped Tad. "Sip nectar! That beats! Thornton, this rural maiden has knocked you silly!"

"Wait till you see her, and you will not wonder, my boy."

"I'll go something you do not see her again."

"Oh, but I have her promise!"

"Ah, she was giving you a jolly!"

"You'll see!" cried Tom, piqued. "Just wait a while."

Two days passed, and Thornton began to think he would not hear anything from his "mash." Then came an invitation to spend an evening at Winnie Lee's, and Winnie hinted that among her guests there was to be a young lady from the country who wished to apologize for intruding upon Mr. Thornton in his room.

"It's Grace Darling!" thought Tom, exultantly. "She will be introduced to me! And she must be of fine people to be accepted as a guest at Miss Lee's, for the Lees belong to the *élite* of the town. Oh, Gracie is all right, if she is from the country!"

On the evening of the party Tom arrayed himself in his finest, used perfumery liberally—too liberally—on his handkerchief and his clothes, and set out with a light heart for Miss Lee's.

As old readers know, Winnie Lee and Frank Merriwell were very friendly. As Winnie was of a lively disposition and enjoyed a joke thoroughly, it was not difficult for Frank to induce her to aid him in carrying out his plan.

Winnie was all the more ready to do so because she disliked Tom Thornton, who had made himself offensive by having declared that he could "catch" her without a struggle if he so desired, but she was not his style.

This had been repeated to Winnie, and she had treated Thornton with the utmost disdain since hearing it; but Frank had urged her to consent to invite Tom to the party that the joke might be carried out, and she finally had consented.

For a moment Thornton wondered when he received the invitation, and then he decided that "Grace Darling" must have induced Miss Lee to offer it.

Tom little dreamed of the surprising events that were to take place before the evening was passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER CHALLENGE.

Thornton found Merriwell, Diamond, Rattleton and Browning were among Winnie Lee's guests. This he had expected, however, and he was resolved to notice them as little as possible.

Willis Paulding was there, and Tad Horner came later, much to Tom's surprise, as he had not known Tad had been invited.

There were a number of jolly girls, and Thornton was not long in looking around for Grace Darling.

When Tom finally discovered her, to his disgust, she was chatting with Jack Diamond in a cozy corner, which was almost shut off from the rest of the room by portières.

"Hang that fellow!" thought Thornton. "He has been introduced to her, and he has lost no time in getting in his work."

As soon as Diamond left the girl Tom hastened to find Winnie Lee, of whom he requested an introduction to "Miss Darling."

"Oh, yes!" said Winnie, laughing; "she spoke of you, but I had almost forgotten. I trust you will find her very entertaining, Mr. Thornton."

"I am sure I shall," said Tom. "We have seen each other, you know, but have not been introduced."

"And she is very particular about that. Being bred in the country, she is not fully conversant with the ways of the world, but she knows an introduction is the proper thing, and she insists on that. There she is."

"Miss Darling" was seen chatting with a number of young gentlemen and ladies who had gathered about her.

The group scattered as Winnie and Tom came up. "Miss Darling" saw them, and timidly held her fan before her face, peering over it shyly.

"Mr. Thornton," laughed Winnie Lee, "it gives me the greatest pleasure to introduce you to Miss Darling."

Tom bowed profoundly, while the girl giggled, and made a courtesy. Winnie Lee laughed more than ever.

At a distance Frank Merriwell and Jack Diamond were watching.

"Will you see Winnie Lee!" softly exclaimed Merriwell. "She is nearly exploding with laughter."

She can't hold it. It will be a miracle if Thornton does not tumble."

"All the others are laughing," said Jack. "They had to get away when Thornton was introduced. He will be crazy when he finds out how he has been fooled."

Frank was laughing.

"Oh, yes; he'll tear his hair. The story is bound to circulate. Don't give him too much time with Griswold before you get in your work and challenge him. Horner is in the game, and he has agreed to help it along."

"Thornton will murder Horner."

"It will be remarkable if they do not suddenly cease to room together."

"Have you brought the pistols?"

"You bet! Everything is ready. Willis Paulding must be involved. We must soak him, as well as Thornton. There go Thornton and his mash toward the cozy corner. You must intrude before it becomes too warm for Griswold, or he is liable to give the whole snap away."

In the meantime Thornton had expressed his delight at meeting his charmer again, and had led her away to the very cozy corner in which he had seen her chatting so vivaciously with Jack Diamond.

Once in the corner the girl ensconced herself in the shadow of the portières, and, for the first time, the fan dropped from her face.

"This is charming," declared Thornton, in his most fascinating manner. "Ever since I first saw you I have dreamed of an occasion like this, Miss Darling."

The girl giggled.

"Oh, you are such a flatterer, Mr. Thornton!" she returned, leaning toward him.

"Not at all," declared Tom, as, apparently by accident, his hand fell on hers and remained there. "I am telling you the truth. Since that hour when fate led you to my room, I have thought of you almost constantly by day, and I have dreamed of you at night. Your face has been before my eyes continually."

Her head was bowed, so he could not see her eyes. He felt her hand quiver in his clasp.

"Oh, I am not doing a thing!" was his mental exclamation. "She can't resist me!"

He grew bolder with amazing rapidity. He seemed to fancy that he could do so with this unsophisticated country girl without being "called down."

"Miss Darling," he murmured, leaning yet nearer to her, and holding her hand with both of his own, "do you believe in love at first sight?"

She giggled again.

"Why, I don't know," she confessed.

"I do," declared Tom. "I did not till I met you, but since that delightful moment I have."

"Oh, rot!" the girl seemed to say.

"Eh?" exclaimed Thornton, in astonishment. "What did you say?"

"I said, 'I think not,'" was the laughing answer. "My cousin has told me all about college fellows, and how they pretend to be all broken up over a girl, but are giving her the dead jolly all the time."

Tom gasped, for the girl rattled off slang as if thoroughly familiar with it. But this dampened Thornton's ardor for no more than a moment.

"I never give any one a jolly, Miss Darling," he declared, trying to appear sincere. "Miss Darling!" he murmured. "What a sweet name! And it suits you so well!"

"Do you think so?" laughed the girl.

"I do—I do!" palpitated Thornton. "It will be a lucky fellow who can call you his darling! If I might —"

"Mr. Thornton, you are presuming! This is too much!"

Then Jack Diamond suddenly appeared, and asked:

"Did you call for aid, Miss Darling?"

"I was about to do so," declared the girl. "Mr. Thornton has been very presuming and forward."

"Then Mr. Thornton shall answer to me!" came sternly from Jack's lips. "If he is not a coward, he will come outside."

Tom turned pale and stammered. He felt like refusing to go outside, but he feared the girl would

think him a coward. Then he looked around, and his eyes fell on Willis Paulding.

"Yes, I will go out with you," he said.

"Miss Darling" seemed to be overcome with fear.

"Don't kill him, Jack!" she whispered.

So she addressed Diamond as "Jack." That fired Thornton till he longed to strangle the Virginian.

"Lead on!" he exclaimed. "I will follow."

They left the room, Thornton calling to Willis, who followed them, wonderingly.

Diamond had made a signal to Merriwell, and Frank was not far behind.

Diamond led the way to the garden.

It was a moonlight night, and seemed almost as light as day.

"Mr. Thornton," said Diamond, sternly, "you have grossly insulted a young lady friend of mine. It is my duty to protect her. I challenge you to fight me, the weapons to be pistols, the place here, and the time now. Your answer, sir—your answer!"

Thornton turned pale, and hesitated. He knew nothing of dueling, and therefore did not know that, being the challenged party, it was his privilege to name the weapons, the time and the place.

In a moment, he found Tad Horner at his elbow. Where Tad had come from and how he happened to be there Tom could not conceive. But Tad was on hand, and he whispered:

"Take him up, old man—take him up! He is a regular fire-eater—in his mind. He thinks you will squeal. If he finds you will fight, he is sure to back out. He hasn't any real nerve. If he does fight, I'll fix it all right, for I will see that the pistols are loaded with blank cartridges. After the first shot, I will demand that the duel cease. Thus you will get the reputation of having fought a duel, without incurring any danger to yourself."

Thornton was pleased with the scheme. He wished to be considered a dare-devil sort of fellow, and he felt that it would give him a great reputation if he fought a real duel.

"Sir," he said, turning to Diamond, "I accept your challenge, and I shall do my best to shoot you through the heart!"

Five minutes later came the question:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"All ready," answered both Diamond and Thornton.

"I will count three, and then give the word," said Frank Merriwell, distinctly. "One!"

Despite himself, Willis Paulding felt his flesh creep and heard his teeth chatter.

Thornton was shaking, even though he had been assured by Tad Horner that there were no bullets in the pistols.

Diamond was cool as an iceberg. The bright moonlight seemed to show a look of deadly determination on his face.

"Confound him!" thought Thornton, quaking. "He'd as lief fight a duel as eat! Hang those Southerners! They do not know what it is to be afraid!"

"Two!" counted Merriwell.

The duelists raised their weapons and seemed to take careful aim.

"Three—fire!"

At that instant there was a scream, and a female figure sprang out from the shadows and rushed before Jack just as Thornton pulled the trigger.

There was a single report, and the female figure dropped to the ground, although Diamond tried to catch her in his arms.

Thornton, the smoking pistol in his hand, stood staring, as if turned to stone.

"Good gracious!" gasped Willis Paulding. "You have shot somebody, Thornton, deah boy!"

"There must have been some mistake," said Tad Horner. "It seems that there was a bullet in your pistol, Tom!"

Thornton hurried forward and looked down at the fallen girl, whose eyes were closed, and whose face seemed ghastly pale in the white moonlight.

"It is Miss Darling!" came hoarsely from Tom. "I have killed her!"

"Don't let the murderer escape!" cried Diamond, sternly. "Seize him and his second! They are

both guilty!"

"Excuse me!" fluttered Willis Paulding. "I think I will go right away, don't yer 'now!"

Then he took to his heels, and ran, as if pursued by a hundred officers of the law.

Thornton was scarcely less terrified, and he slipped away into the shadows while the others were gathered around the fallen girl.

When both Willis and Tom were gone, the girl suddenly sat up, and burst into a peal of boyish laughter.

"There!" cried the voice of Danny Griswold; "didn't I do that all right? I wouldn't be surprised if Thornton's hair turned gray. But I'm going to get out of this rig as soon as possible. These corsets are killing me. I can't get a full breath."

"You little rascal!" laughed Frank Merriwell, as he gave Griswold a shake. "You are a born actor, and you have given Tom Thornton a shock that he will not get over for some time—to say nothing of Willis Paulding."

"If it cures Thornton of bragging about his mashes I'll be satisfied," said Tad Horner. "But I'm afraid he'll never forgive me. I'll have to make a hustle and find him before he does something desperate. I'll tell him Miss Darling simply fainted, and was not injured at all. Good-night, fellows. See you later."

Then he hastened away.

"Well, Jack," said Frank, addressing Diamond, "it strikes me that you and I are more than square with Mr. Flemming and Mr. Thornton."

"I think that is right," admitted the Virginian, with a grim smile.

CHAPTER XVII.

PURE GRIT.

All other college sports seem to grow dim in comparison with the great spring race. It is the crowning athletic event of the season. The vast gathering of people at New London occurs but once a year, and the only event to be compared with it is the annual football game in New York.

New London for a week before the race is filled with "old grads," fathers of Yale men who are interested in boating, college lads, mothers of students, sisters and sweethearts.

At Eastern Point the Fort Griswold House is thronged with persons of this sort. The Pequod is overflowing. On the broad piazzas old classmates meet and talk over former victories and defeats. There they watch the thronging craft upon the river.

Every one talks boating, whether he knows anything about it or not. "Willie off the yacht" is there, togged in flannels and making a desperate struggle to roll in his gait. For a week, at least, he is a waterman, with the salt flavor in everything he says or does.

And the girls—the girls! They, too, dress in flannels and yachting caps, and they try to talk knowingly about "strokes," "oars" and "the crew." But they are charming—every one of them!

Yale and Harvard's quarters are on the left bank near Gale's Ferry. Many of the "old oars" are permitted to visit the crew. The great coaches are there. They are regarded with awe and respect, for surely they know everything there is to know about racing!

The race comes off at five in the afternoon. By midday the town is full, and every train brings fresh throngs of laughing girls and boisterous students. All are decorated with the blue or the crimson. Flags are everywhere, and there are horns in abundance.

At the docks the great Sound steamers are moored, and they are packed with sight-seers. There are numberless yachts on the river, all decorated with gay colors and thronged with gay parties.

Within the boathouse, preparations were being made for the race. Collingwood was giving final instructions to his men. Bastow, an old coach, was surveying each and every one in the most critical manner possible.

They were handsome fellows, these men of the crew. Their flesh was brown and firm, and their eyes were bright. They had broad backs and powerful shoulders.

Collingwood looked troubled. It was evident there was something on his mind. Fred Flemming, in a new spring suit, is talking with Popkay, the little cox. Some wonder that Flemming, who had been dropped for Merriwell, should be there.

Among the spectators on a certain yacht are Tom Thornton and Willis Paulding. They are watching for the crew to appear, and, as they watch, Thornton says something that betrays a knowledge of Flemming's presence in the boathouse.

"I'll go you two to one that Flem rows after all," he declares. "Do you dare take me, Paulding?"

"By the way you say that I should think you were betting on a sure thing, don't yer 'now," drawled Willis.

"I am," asserted Tom. "I have it straight that Merriwell is not in trim, and will be laid off. Flemming was called to quarters at the last moment."

"It'll be a corker on Merriwell if he is not allowed to row, by Jawve!"

"Yes; it will give me no end of satisfaction. That fellow put up the 'Grace Darling' job on me, and Diamond helped him to carry it out. I have been a guy for the whole college ever since Danny Griswold told down at Morey's how he fooled me. Some day I'll wring that little rat's neck!"

"They never could have worked the game if Horner hadn't helped them."

"Of course not; but I have cut clear of Horner. We have separated, and I never give the fellow a look when we meet. Like the other fools, he is stuck on Merriwell, and he thought he was doing something cunning when he helped them work the horse on me."

"If Merriwell doesn't row you'll have a chance to get back at them. You can say you knew it all the time, old chappie."

"Oh, he won't row to-day, and I'll rub it in when I get the opportunity."

Within the boathouse, at this very moment, Bob Collingwood was saying to Frank Merriwell:

"You cannot row in the race to-day, Merriwell. You are out of condition."

Frank turned pale.

"If you say I can't row, that settles it," he said, huskily; "but I think you are making a mistake. I can row, and I'll prove it, if you will give me the chance. You shall have no cause to complain of me."

"But I know you are not fit to pull an oar. You have tried to conceal it from me, but I know you have a felon on your hand. Am I right?"

"You are right," calmly admitted Frank; "but give me a chance, and I will row for all there is in me, even if it takes my arm off at the shoulder."

Collingwood looked into Merriwell's eyes, and what he saw there caused him to say: "All right, my boy, you shall row if we lose by it."

"If we lose the race it will not be my fault," returned Merriwell.

The Harvard cheer broke from a thousand throats as the Harvard crew came down the stream and arrived first at the start. Yale followed almost immediately, and two students who were on a trim little yacht craned their necks and glared at the men in the boat.

Something like a groan escaped the lips of Tom Thornton, and Willis Paulding declared:

"I don't see Flemming, but Merriwell is there!"

"Yes!" grates Tom; "he has managed to keep his place somehow! Well, that settles it! Harvard will win!"

Orders were shouted, and then it was seen that both crews were "set." The men, their brown backs gleaming in the afternoon sunshine, were reaching forward at arm's length, ready for the first stroke.

A voice was heard commanding them to make ready, then came the cry: "Go!"

There was a pistol shot, and both boats darted forward. The four-mile race to the railway bridge piers of New London had begun.

In an instant the great crowd set up a wild cheering, and colors fluttered everywhere. Away went the boats, side by side. Harvard's style of rowing had changed completely from that of the previous year, when her boat had jumped at every stroke. Now her crew bent with a long sweep that sent the boat through the water with a steady motion.

Yale used a shorter and more snappy stroke. The men seemed to have more life at the start, but it was the kind of a stroke that was sure to pump away their energy to a great extent in a long race.

But Collingwood was crafty. He knew that it would be an easy thing to take the life out of his men by steep work at the beginning, and he doubted if the advantage thus gained could be held. To a certain extent, he regulated Yale's speed by that of its rival.

In his heart Collingwood feared Harvard's new style of rowing. He was not willing to acknowledge that anything English could be superior to anything American, and yet he remembered how the freshmen of 'Umpty-eight, coached by Merriwell, had adopted something like the Oxford stroke, and had won the race from the sophomores at Lake Saltonstall. He also remembered Merriwell's hand, and he feared the fellow must give out before the finish.

If Yale could hold her own till near the end Collingwood hoped to win by a spurt. Outside of

Merriwell, he felt that the crew was in perfect condition. He was sure the men were superior to those in the Harvard boat.

Harvard begins to gain. That strong, steady stroke is telling. It looks as if the crimson lads were going to pull away from the blue with ease.

Collingwood does not allow himself to get excited in the least. He keeps his men steadily at work, husbanding their strength as far as possible.

"'Rah! 'rah! 'rah! Harvard! Harvard!" roared the crowd.

Frank Merriwell was working perfectly with the rest, and no one could imagine from his appearance that every stroke seemed to drive a keen knife from his wrist to his elbow. His face was very pale, but that was all.

At the end of the first mile Harvard was two lengths in advance, and seemed to be gaining. Still Yale worked steadily, showing no signs of excitement or alarm.

The crowds on the yachts were waving hats and handkerchiefs and flags. They cheered and yelled and hooted like human beings gone mad. It was a scene of the wildest excitement.

It had become plain to all, despite the fact that Harvard had a lead, that the race was to be a stern one. Yale was out to win, if such a thing "lay in the wood."

When the second mile was passed Harvard was still another length in advance. But Yale was beginning to work up steadily, forcing Harvard to a more desperate struggle to hold her advantage.

When the two and a half mile flag was passed it was seen that Yale had begun to creep up. Still she was not dangerous. Her friends were encouraged, however, and the sound all Yale men love—the Yale yell—could be heard above the roaring of the crowd.

That sound seemed to put fresh life and heart into the Yale crew. At the beginning of the last mile Harvard was scarcely two lengths in advance.

It was a wonderful race. The excitement was at the highest pitch.

The Harvard crew, although it had started out so beautifully, had not the stamina to endure the strain. No. 3 was pulling out of the boat, while No. 5 showed signs of distress.

Yale begins to spurt. Her men are working like machinery. No one could dream that one of them was suffering the tortures of a being on the rack, and still such was the truth.

A hundred times it seemed to Frank Merriwell that he must give out; a hundred times he set his teeth and vowed that he would die before he would weaken. No one could know the almost superhuman courage and fortitude which enabled him to keep up and continue his work in the proper manner. Those who watched the crew closely fancied that he worked with the utmost ease, for all of the long pull.

Collingwood had forgotten Merriwell's felon. He was reckoning on the final spurt to bring "Old Eli" to the front. Harder and harder he worked his men.

Now the uproar along the river was deafening. The prow of the Yale boat was at Harvard's stern—and then Yale began to creep along by Harvard's side.

No. 7 of the Harvard crew reeled on his seat. Then he braced up and went at it again. But he was not in stroke. The faces of both crews were set. They were like gladiators battling for their very lives.

In the Yale boat was one who seemed to be growing blind and numb. In his heart he was praying for strength as earnestly as he would have prayed for the salvation of his soul. Only a few moments more—he must hold out.

The boats were side by side, and the excitement was simply indescribable. Such a finish was unprecedented. It was a race to be remembered for all years to come—to be spoken of with pride and discussed with wonder.

Then came the moment when Collingwood drove his men for all there was in them. He was pitiless, and Yale shot into the lead.

The line was crossed. Then cannons boomed and whistles shrieked. But in the Yale boat was one whose ears were deaf to all this tumult of sound.

Frank Merriwell had fallen in the bottom of the boat in a dead faint.

But Yale—Yale had won!

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE BOAT RACE.

"Breka Co ax Co ax Co ax!
Breka Co ax Co ax Co ax!
O—up! O—up!
Paraboleau!
Yale! Yale! Yale!
'Rah! 'rah! 'rah!
Yale!!!"

Imagine a thousand, full-lunged, hearty, healthy American lads shouting this cry in unison! It was a sound never to be forgotten by those who heard it. The victorious blue fluttered everywhere.

Harvard had made a gallant fight, and it had been "nobody's race" almost to the finish. The Yale crew proved superior, but it won purely by brawn and stamina. Old oars confessed that up to the last half mile Harvard had shown better coaching and had seemed to establish the superiority of the Oxford oar and stroke over American methods.

But "Old Eli" had seemed to feel that it would be a lasting disgrace to be vanquished by anything about which there was an English flavor. The spirit of Bunker Hill and '76 was aroused, and the defenders of the blue were willing to die in the struggle if such a sacrifice could bring victory.

It was not the first time that pure grit had won against odds.

As the Yale boat crossed the line Frank lay, deaf to all the tumult of applause, his eyes closed, but still with his pale face set in a look of mingled pain and unyielding determination.

"It's Merriwell!" exclaimed Bob Collingwood. "I had forgotten him."

His words were drowned by the roaring of the excited thousands and the shrieking of the whistles.

The prow of the Yale boat was turned toward the bank. It was necessary to avoid the craft that came rushing about on every side, but the shore was soon reached.

"Hold her steady!" cried Collingwood. "Somebody dash water into Merriwell's face."

The command was obeyed, and in a moment Frank opened his eyes. It was at the moment when the Yale cheer was pealing from a thousand throats, and the look of pain on Merriwell's face changed to one of satisfaction and joy.

"Did we win?" he huskily asked.

Collingwood nodded, his flushed face beaming, pride in his big blue eyes.

"You bet!" he answered. "It's hard to beat Old Eli!"

"I am satisfied!" gasped Merriwell.

His eyes drooped, and he seemed on the verge of going off into another swoon.

"Throw more water on him," pitilessly directed Collingwood.

It was done, and Frank started up, gasping.

"Here—here!" exclaimed a man on the bank; "give him a pull at this. It will fix him all right."

He stooped down and held out a flask.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"It's the best brandy money can buy," was the answer.

It was passed to Frank, but he pushed it away, shaking his head.

"I never touch liquor," he declared. "I do not want it."

"But it will not hurt you now—it will do you good," declared the man who owned the flask.

"I can get along without it."

"But I shall be offended if you do not take it."

Frank looked sharply at the man. He saw a suntanned individual, who wore a wide-brimmed hat and was dressed in clothes which were worn and appeared to have been made for service rather than for fit and elegance. There was something piercing about the man's dark eyes, and something about the beardless face that impressed it upon the boy's memory. There was a small purple scar on the man's chin, and Frank noted this, although he might have overlooked it easily in that hasty glance.

"Then you will have to be offended, sir," said Frank, firmly. "I do not wish to appear rude, but I never drink under any circumstances, and I will not begin now."

The man drew back after the flask was returned to him. The last look he gave the boy was peculiar, as Frank could not tell whether it was one of satisfaction or anger.

In a moment this man was forgotten. The boat slipped out to the *Clyde*, the little steam yacht that

was to take the victorious crew back to quarters. The exhausted rowers were lifted on board amid renewed cheering, and the trip up the river began.

It was a triumphant procession. All along the line the *Clyde*, which was decorated with blue, was received with cheers and shrieking whistles. Men waved hats and flags, pretty girls fluttered handkerchiefs and pennants, squads of students gave the Yale cheer at intervals, and two scores of boats, crowded with students and friends, accompanied the boat that carried the victorious crew. The jubilant Yale men sang songs of victory and cheered till their throats ached and they were hoarse.

On board the *Clyde* were Jack Diamond and Harry Rattleton. When Merriwell was lifted to the deck he found himself clasped in Harry's arms, and the dear fellow laughed and cried as he hugged his roommate to his breast.

"I never dought you'd threw it—I mean I never thought you'd do it!" cried Harry, brokenly. "I thought that hand would knock you out sure. How could you do it, Merry, old boy? It must have been awful! I saw you keel over when the line was crossed, but you never havered a ware—wavered a hair till the race was over."

Frank smiled a bit.

"A fellow can do almost anything if he sets his determination on it," he said. "But I came near not having the opportunity to try."

"How was that?"

"Collingwood found out about my hand. I am afraid you said something about it, Harry."

"Not a word, save to Diamond, and not to him till after the race began."

"Well, Coll found it out some way, and he came near laying me off for Flemming, who was on hand."

"And now I understand a few things I heard this morning," broke in Diamond. "Emery and Parker were offering to bet that Flemming would row to-day."

"How much did you fake 'em tor—I mean take 'em for?" cried Harry.

"I didn't know but some of the men had given out or something, so I did not take them at all. I did not imagine for a moment that they thought Flemming was going to row in Merry's place."

Collingwood came up. He was bundled from his ears to his heels. Merriwell was in a sweater and coat.

"How's your hand, old man?" asked Bob, his eyes gleaming.

"Oh, it is giving me a jolly time!" grinned Frank, grimly. "It isn't doing a thing."

"Mr. Merriwell," said Collingwood, earnestly, "I want to tell you frankly that to-day you made the greatest display of pure grit that it has ever been my fortune to witness. I did not believe it possible you could hold out through the race with that hand, and I meant to lay you off for Flemming, although I regretted doing so, as he has not been working with us of late, and I felt that the change would weaken the crew. When you told me square and straight that it would be no fault of yours if the race were lost, I decided to keep you. After that I felt that I was making an error, but it was too late to change. Now I know it was no error, and I wish to say that I am sure you aided materially by your splendid work to win."

Others of the crew came up. Merriwell was surrounded by friends and admirers. Diamond whispered in his ear:

"You should be happy, old man, for you have triumphed over your enemies, and the story of your heroic work will be known to all Yale by Monday."

Then Collingwood led Frank below for a rub down.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE YALE SPIRIT.

At the boathouse there was a scene of riotous jollification. It was impossible to exclude the overjoyed friends of the crew. They crowded in and expressed their unbounded delight in almost every imaginable manner.

There was a popping of corks, and "fizz" began to flow freely. Now that the great race was over, the crew were no longer in training, and they were allowed to drink as much of the wine as they liked. It was forced upon them from all sides.

Merriwell was almost mobbed by the fellows who were determined that he should drink champagne with them.

"You can't refuse now, old man!" shouted Charlie Creighton. "I saw it all, and no one suspected there was anything the matter with you. Just to think that you rowed the race with a felon on your hand! It is marvelous! And I won a cool five hundred on Old Eli! Whoop! If you refuse to take a drink of champagne with me I'll call you out and shoot you through the liver pad!"

He was wildly waving a bottle of Mumm's about his head as he made this excited speech.

But Merriwell did refuse, and he did it with a firmness that showed them all that he could not be induced to drink.

"Queer chap, that Merriwell," commented Charlie Creighton, addressing his chum, Paul Hamilton. "Never knew him very well, but I've seen enough of him to know he's the clean white stuff even if he is a temperance crank."

"In the year and a half that he has been here," said Hamilton, "he has made a greater record in athletics than any other man ever made in twice that time. And think of his rowing the race to-day with that hand, and then fainting the moment he knew the line was crossed and Yale had won! I tell you, Creighton, that fellow is all sand—every bit of him."

"That's what he is," nodded Creighton. "He is running over with the true Yale spirit. I tell you, my boy, Old Yale bears mighty men! Come, let's kill this bottle of fizz, which I got off the ice expressly for Merriwell, confound him!"

Then they lost little time in opening the bottle and swallowing its sparkling contents.

Bob Collingwood was overwhelmed with congratulations. He said very little before the crowd, but to a particular friend he declared:

"It is one of the marvels of the year that we won to-day. Harvard outraced us for fully three-quarters of the course, and she would have finished in the lead if her crew had been as stocky as ours. Their stroke is easier on a man than ours."

"Then you acknowledge at last that the Oxford stroke is superior to the American?" eagerly questioned the friend.

"I have acknowledged nothing yet, but I fear I'll be forced to."

The jubilant fellows were making the boathouse ring with songs of victory. About twenty flushed lads were roaring:

"How can they ever beat us—
How can they beat Old Yale?
We down 'em when they meet us,
You bet we never fail!
We've got 'em so they fear us
In every contest fair;
And soon they'll not come near us,
Because they will not dare.

CHORUS: "Then give us a cheer for Old Eli—
A cheer for our gallant crew;
She has won, and she wins forever,
With her noble boys in blue.

"Poor Harvard falls before us,
She is not in the game;
So swell the merry chorus,
Old Eli's won again!
It was a gallant battle,
My boys who wear the blue;
But you they cannot rattle,
No matter what they do."

There were other songs, and in the midst of all this rejoicing a crowd of pretty girls, accompanied by chaperons, came into the boathouse.

Among them was Winnie Lee, who lost no time in finding Frank and congratulating him.

"I knew you would win, Frank—I knew you would!" she exclaimed, her bright eyes sparkling.

"Why, you are talking as if I rowed the whole race!" he said, laughing and blushing.

"Well, I'm sure they'd never won without you," she declared.

"That's like a girl! Of course Yale would have won anyhow! How can they beat us?"

At this moment Collingwood came up, accompanied by a gentleman who carried a case in his hand.

"Here, Merry, old boy," cried the captain of the crew, "I've brought a doctor to look after that hand of yours."

"What is the matter with your hand?" asked Winnie, anxiously.

"Oh, nothing much," assured Frank, carelessly.

"Nothing much, only there is a bad felon on it," said Collingwood.

"A felon? And you rowed with a felon on your hand? Oh, Frank!"

Winnie looked at him with added admiration showing in her eyes.

"That's what he did," nodded Collingwood. "It was the greatest display of grit I've ever seen. Do you wonder he flopped over in a dead faint when we crossed the line at the finish?"

The doctor looked at Frank's hand, which was now badly inflamed. After a thorough examination the physician glanced up at Frank and observed:

"If you were able to row with this hand, I rather think you'd endure burning at the stake by a band of Indians without uttering a murmur!"

"You dear fellow!" cried Winnie, with girlish enthusiasm; "I feel just like giving you a good hug!"

Then Frank blushed more than ever.

The doctor opened his case and proceeded to dress Merriwell's hand.

While the physician was thus employed Frank was somewhat surprised to observe at a little distance the same man who had offered him a drink of brandy as he was recovering from his swoon at the close of the race.

This man was watching the boy in a strange manner, but the moment he saw he was observed he quickly turned away.

Frank's curiosity was aroused.

"I wonder who he is and what he wants here?" thought the boy. "How did he get in here, anyway? He seems to take a remarkable interest in me, and I can't say that I like it."

The man walked away and mingled with the throng.

In a short time Frank's hand was cared for, and the doctor gave directions for future treatment of the felon.

"It is bound to trouble you for some time, and you will find it very painful," he said. "After what you have done to-day, I doubt if you sleep much to-night."

"I don't care if I do not sleep for a week so long as Yale won!" declared the boy.

"You have the true Yale spirit," said the doctor, approvingly. "Yale men carry that unconquerable spirit out into the world, and that is why Old Eli turns out so many successful men in all walks of life. I think there is no fear as to your future, my boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Merriwell, simply.

CHAPTER XX.

SPURNING A BRIBE.

"I would like to speak with you."

Frank felt a touch on his shoulder, and the words sounded in his ear. He turned quickly and found himself face to face with the mysterious stranger.

It happened that at that moment they were alone, nearly all the throng having gathered about three fellows who, with banjo, mandolin and zither, were making some lively music.

"What do you want?" asked Frank, rather suspiciously.

The man beckoned for him to come aside.

"I have something I wish to say to you, and I do not care to be overheard by others," he declared.

"Well, I wonder what sort of a snap this is?" thought Merriwell.

He hesitated a moment, and then curiosity to know what the stranger had to say overcame him, and he followed the man to a corner of the room.

The stranger was very mysterious in his manner.

"You are a likely sort of youngster," he said, in a rather noncommittal way.

"Is that what you wish to tell me?" asked Frank, sharply.

"Steady, young colt! Don't be in too much of a hurry. It doesn't pay to be in a hurry—none

whatever."

Frank's impatience increased. He did not like the stranger's manner, for there was something crafty and insinuating about it.

"If any one were watching us, he'd be sure to think we were putting up some sort of a crooked game," thought Merriwell.

"My time is valuable," he said aloud.

"Then you can't make more out of it than you can by spending it gabbling with the crowd."

The man's manner was offensive, but Frank's curiosity caused him to hold himself in check and listen to what the stranger should say.

"You are interested in other sports besides rowing, I reckon?" said the unknown, inquiringly.

"Yes."

"Baseball?"

"Yes."

"I have heard that you pitch on the 'varsity nine."

"That is right."

The man assumed a more cautious air than ever, and lowered his voice still more.

"I allow that the man who pitches can throw a game, if he wants to?"

Frank's dislike for the stranger increased rapidly.

"He can throw a game if he is crooked and dirty enough to do such a mean thing!" came with spirit from the lad.

"That is putting it a heap rough," deprecatingly declared the man. "Every galoot is out for the dust. It is the way of the old world, as you will find before you have hoofed it much farther along the trail of life."

"Well, what are you driving at?"

"Yale won the race to-day, and I reckon she's got glory enough to last her a while."

"Go on."

"The last ball game of the series between Yale and Harvard comes off next week?"

"It does."

"Yale has won one, and Harvard one."

"That is right."

"Yale stands a right good chance of winning the deciding game?"

"She is pretty sure of winning."

"And I have a pot of dust on Harvard. I can get odds that Yale will win, so I can stake more money."

Frank fancied that he saw the stranger's game, and he felt his anger rising rapidly; but, with a great effort, he held himself in control, and pretended that he did not understand.

The boy looked the man over from head to heels. He was making a study of the unknown. Already he had decided by the man's appearance and language that he was a Westerner, or wished to be considered such. Frank was not absolutely certain that the fellow was not masquerading as a man from the West.

As Merriwell remained silent after the stranger's last statement, he went on:

"If there is any way of knowing as how Harvard will win, I can stake my rocks on her, and pull off a good thing."

Still Frank was silent.

"You can see that plain enough, can't you, youngster?" demanded the man, seeming to grow impatient and restless before the lad's steady, piercing gaze.

"Any one should be able to see that," was the cold answer.

"Then all I've got to do in order to make a stake is to fix it so that Harvard is dead sure of winning."

"How can you fix it?"

"I don't see but one way."

"How is that?"

"Make it worth something to the Yale team to throw the game to Harvard. I can afford to do that, I reckon; but I've got to find the right man to do the trick."

Frank's jaws seemed to grow square and hard, and there was a dangerous fire in his eyes. The stranger did not appear to discern this, however, for he went on:

"It rather strikes me that the pitcher has the best chance to do the little turn I want done, and that's why I've come to you. Now, don't go off half-cocked! Hold hard, and hear me chirp. Every young fellow at college needs money, and they need a right good bit of it, too. I don't allow that you are any exception. Now, I reckon I can show you how you can make a smart bit of a pile and do it dead easy. Nobody but you and me will ever know you did it at all, and there isn't any danger that we'll preach about it—none whatever."

"Make a square statement as to what you want," commanded Frank, finding it difficult to keep his voice from quivering, and feeling that his cheeks were burning with the angry blood that had surged into them.

"That's what I'll do, youngster. If you will pitch that game so Harvard will win, I'll give you a thousand dollars in cold cash. Now I reckon you understand me."

"I think I do," came icily from Frank. "You want me to sell the game for a thousand dollars! You put a small price on my honor, sir!"

"A small price! You talk as if a thousand were nothing! Hang me if I ever saw a youngster of your caliber! Perhaps you think I'm fooling? Perhaps you think I won't pay? Look here! I'll make it two thousand dollars, and I'll give you a thousand in advance. That is a square deal, as you must allow."

Then he took a huge roll of bank notes from his pocket. Some were new bills, while some were worn and soiled. He rapidly counted off a thousand dollars in ten, twenty, fifty and one hundred dollar bills. This money he thrust into Merriwell's hands, saying:

"There you have it, and that binds the bargain between us. I'll give you the other thousand directly Harvard wins and I collect my wagers. I'm a man of my word. I reckon it is settled?"

Frank looked at the money, making sure it was genuine. He quickly satisfied himself on that point. It was all right.

Never before had such a bribe been offered Merriwell, and, for some seconds, he stood with the money in his unbandaged hand, feeling somewhat dazed and doubtful.

"Put it out of sight!" whispered the stranger. "Don't let 'em see you have it. Give me your promise that you will throw the game to Harvard."

"I shall not pitch that game," said Frank.

"No?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"My hand will not be in condition, as you should know. True it is my left hand, but I'll not be able to bat with it, even if I could pitch."

"But you would throw the game if you could pitch?"

"No!" cried Merriwell, fiercely, letting his outraged indignation flame forth. "What do you take me for? I am no sneak and traitor, and not for ten thousand dollars—not for a hundred thousand dollars—not to save my very life would I do such a dastardly thing! You have made a mistake in your man! Take back your dirty money! I would not touch a dollar of it for the world! It would contaminate me!"

Then he flung the roll of bills straight into the face of the astonished man.

As the man stooped to pick up the money, which had fallen at his feet, Frank caught him by the collar with his well hand, yanked him up, and started him on a run for an open window.

Clinging to the money, the stranger uttered a protest at such rude treatment, but he was unable to turn about or break away, although he tried to do so.

Headlong through the window Frank pitched the fellow, giving him a powerful kick to help him along.

There was a cry of pain and rage, and the man disappeared.

This act of Frank's had been noted by the others within the boathouse, and it created no little wonder and excitement.

Harry Rattleton came running up, spluttering:

"Hello, Frank! mut's the whatter—I mean what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," answered Merriwell, quietly. "I simply fired a scoundrel, that's all."

"What was he up to, old man?" demanded Bob Collingwood, in a tone that indicated that he was sorry not to have taken a hand in the little fracas. "Did he try to do you?"

"No; but he is trying to do Yale."

"How is that?"

Frank explained, briefly telling of the bribe offered by the mysterious stranger.

A circle of lads had gathered about Merriwell, and they listened with rising anger to his words. Cries of astonishment and rage broke from their lips when Frank told of the truly astonishing bribe which the unknown had offered.

"My only regret," concluded Frank, "was that I did not have two good hands with which to handle the rascal."

"And my regret is that I was not there to handle him for you!" cried Jack Diamond.

"I wonder how the fellow got in here?" exclaimed Collingwood. "I'll have to inquire into that."

"He can't be far away," cried one of the angry lads. "Let's get out and nab him!"

"Come on! come on!" was the general cry, and there was a rush for the door.

But the unknown had not lingered in the vicinity of the boathouse. He was not found, which made it plain that he had taken to his heels as soon as he landed outside the window.

"Too bad!" growled Collingwood. "A good soak in the river is what he'd got, if we'd caught him."

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE SPECIAL TRAIN.

Some of the lads felt like staying in New London and making a night of it, but this was strictly against rules, and those who did so took a desperate chance of getting into trouble by it.

After the race there was a general rush for the trains, and those bound west over the N. Y., N. H. & H. were crowded.

Later on there was a special train for the Yale crew and their friends. As this train was not exclusive and it was generally known that it would be run, large numbers of students waited for it, and it was quite as crowded as the trains which had preceded it.

The car containing the victorious crew was a scene of wild merrymaking. The eight muscular lads who had pulled off another victory for Old Eli were gathered in the middle of the car and surrounded by admiring friends, who cheered and sang and smashed one another's hats, and played the very Old Nick with one another.

Beer, wine and whiskey had been brought on board the train, and it was urged upon the crew. Danny Griswold was in his glory. About half the time he was perched upon the shoulders of the crowd, and it was observable that he did not refuse anything that was offered him in the way of a liquid. Still, for all that he drank so much and mixed his drinks, he did not seem to get any worse off than he had been when the train started from New London.

Charlie Creighton climbed upon the backs of two seats and made a speech.

"Hark, ye noble sons of Old Eli!" he began, with a spread-eagle gesture that came near causing him to lose his balance and fall off headlong. "This is the great day when we can get up on our hind legs and make the welkin ring with war whoops of victory. To-day we stand with one foot on Princeton's neck and the heel of the other foot gouging into Harvard's back. They have bitten the dust before us, oh, mighty warriors in blue! They have fallen like autumn leaves before a gale. We have carried our colors on to victory in many a mad scrimmage, but never have we done a better job than we did this day. During the greater part of the race it looked as if Harvard would take our scalps. We who watched the awful struggle felt our blood turn cold with fear. Then, when we looked upon the calm face of our captain [cheers], we took heart and hoped. Like clockwork he was handling his men, and his calm confidence gave them heart. They saw he did not fear the result, and when he began to drive them for the final spurt every one of that noble band responded like the greatest of heroes. [More cheers.] Then it was that Yale began to crowd Harvard. Then it was that the Harvard crew showed how the pressure was telling on them. Then it was that the backers of Old Eli who were watching the struggle became confident that we were still in it and would pull off the race after all. Then Old Yale crept into the lead, the spurt being admirably timed, so that our boat crossed the line just in time to make Old Eli again the winner. And to whom is honor due for this? You know!"

"Collingwood! Collingwood!" roared the jubilant crowd in the car. "Hurrah for dear old Bob!"

Then they cheered and cheered, and then they called for a speech from "dear old Bob."

Collingwood was lifted to his feet. He protested that he could not make a speech, but they would not be satisfied till he had said something, and so he cried:

"Well, boys, we did them—and we did them good!"

This was better than a long speech, and it produced the most unbounded enthusiasm.

When the excitement had abated somewhat, Collingwood arose again, and motioned for silence. In a moment he was receiving the full attention of every one.

"Every man on the crew deserves praise," began Bob.

"Hooray for the croll hew—I mean the whole crew!" shouted Harry Rattleton, smashing his new straw hat over Bandy Robinson's head.

"But there is one who deserves especial commendation," Collingwood added.

There was a breathless silence, and all eyes were turned on Frank Merriwell, who flushed beneath this sudden attention.

"There was one man on the crew who was not in condition to row in the race to-day, and I came very near letting him out. Now I am glad I did not, for, although he had a bad felon on his left hand, there was no man of the crew who pulled a stiffer stroke or showed more lasting powers till the finish was reached. He fainted then, it is true, but it was because of the frightful pain in his hand and arm, and I wish you to remember that he did not faint till the victory was won."

"Merriwell! 'Rah! 'rah! 'rah!"

Not even Bob Collingwood himself received a greater ovation. Frank was seized, he was lifted aloft, he was perched on the shoulders of his friends, and then there was a general howl for a speech.

Frank felt himself thrill from his hair to his toes; his eyes were dimmed with moisture, even though he laughed. In his bosom there was a choking sensation of gratitude and love for his comrades and the admiring throng around him. He forgot that he had a single foe at Yale—that he had a foe in all the wide world.

"Boys," he said, somewhat brokenly, "I did my best for dear old Yale—that is all."

That was all he said. It was enough. It seemed to touch a chord in every breast, and there was a ring of patriotism in the cheering that followed.

"Here's to good Old Yale—drink it down!
Here's to good Old Yale—drink it down!
Here's to good Old Yale,
She's so hearty and so hale—
Drink it down! drink it down! down! down!"

It seemed that every person in the car joined in singing this song. The enthusiasm was running higher and higher. In every heart the Yale spirit grew deeper and stronger during that ride from New London to New Haven. The students who were there never forgot that scene—never forgot how they thrilled with love for Old Yale. The hardships and struggles of college days were forgotten; the triumphs and joys alone were remembered.

But with it all it is certain that the result of the race had disappointed no Harvard man more than it did Fred Flemming.

At the last moment he had been overjoyed to learn that Merriwell had a bad felon on one of his hands, which, it seemed, must debar him from rowing in the great race.

Flemming had kept himself in condition as far as possible, and he lost no time to let Collingwood know that he could be called on in case of emergency.

That he would be called on seemed almost certain, for he was notified to be on hand at Yale's quarters before the time set for the race to begin.

He had been on hand, ready to strip off in a moment, and had seen Collingwood talking earnestly with Merriwell. Then, to his inexpressible astonishment, he had been told that Merriwell would row after all.

From that moment Flemming hoped and prayed that Yale would lose the race. He would have given almost anything in his power to give had Frank Merriwell been unable to row to the finish.

But Merriwell had finished the race, and Yale had won. Flemming's friends, who had bet that he would row in the race, had lost money, and they were sore also.

It was bitter gall for Flemming and Tom Thornton to pretend to rejoice over Yale's victory, but they dared not do otherwise. It happened that they waited till the special train left for New Haven, and they were on that train and in the car which carried the victorious crew.

Occasionally they cheered with the others, to keep up appearances; but, for the most part, they remained seated in a corner at one end of the car and talked in low tones.

"How was it that Collingwood happened to retain the fellow for all of his hand?" asked Thornton, referring to Merriwell.

"Ask me something easy!" exclaimed Flemming. "I am sure he intended to fire the fellow, but I think Merriwell begged to be given a show, and Collingwood did not have the nerve to chuck him off."

"Collingwood must be soft!"

"Oh, I don't know. I think that cad Merriwell must be a hypnotist by the way he gets around some fellows."

"I don't want to have anything further to do with him."

"Oh, you've lost your nerve since Merriwell and Griswold put up that girl job on you, and Diamond drew you into a bogus duel."

"That was enough to make any fellow lose his nerve."

"Rats!"

"You may say 'rats,' but you don't know how you would have felt if you had been in my place. Just as the word was given to fire and I pulled trigger, Griswold, dressed as a girl, rushed between us. I fired, and, with a frightful shriek, he fell. Then I ran forward and looked at him. The moonlight made him look deathly white, and I felt sure I had shot him. I'll never forget the sickening sensation that came over me at that moment! The hangman's noose seemed to dangle before my eyes. I dropped the pistol and rushed away to my room. I think I was stunned, for Horner found me sitting on a chair and staring blankly at the wall about an hour afterward. Then he said the girl had not been shot at all, but had fainted. Say, Flem, my boy, it is utterly impossible for me to tell the feeling of thankfulness and relief that rushed over me. I felt just like getting right down on my knees and thanking Providence, but I didn't, for Tad Horner was watching me all the time, and I saw the laughing devil in his eyes. Then, within two days, I found myself the guy of the whole college, and, finally, it all came out that 'Grace Darling' was Danny Griswold in his theatrical rig, and I had been played for a blooming guy by Merriwell and Diamond, assisted to a certain extent by Horner, my own roommate."

"And the only decent thing you ever did about it was to quit Horner cold. You've never seemed to have sand enough to make an effort to get back at Merriwell."

"I decided that Merriwell is a bad man to monkey with."

"That's rot! It's his reputation that frightens you. I'm going to watch my chance to get even with him."

"So am I, young man!" whispered a voice in Flemming's ear.

Fred whirled swiftly, and saw close at his shoulder a rather rough-appearing, smooth-faced man, who wore a wide-brimmed hat, and was weather-tanned, as if by much exposure.

"Eh?" exclaimed the college lad. "Who are you?"

"One who has a good reason to dislike that fly chap, Mr. Frank Merriwell," was his answer.

Flemming was suspicious.

"Why should you hate Merriwell?" he asked.

"Because he kicked me," was the fierce reply.

"He kicked you? Then you are the man he fired out of the boathouse? I heard about that little affair."

"I am the man."

"You should have known better than to try to bribe Merriwell to throw any sort of game or race to Harvard. That chap is so honest that he has wings sprouting under his clothes. He said you pushed a thousand dollars at him?"

"I did—I put it into his hand."

"And he flung it into your face?"

"Yes, curse him! Then he threw me out of the window!"

"Well, you do seem to have a reason for disliking him. What would you do to him if you got a good chance?"

"Ask me what I wouldn't do! All I want is the chance!"

"Can you keep your mouth closed?"

"You bet your dust! I never peach!"

"Then you may be just the kind of a man I am looking for. I want somebody with nerve. The trouble with the fellows in college who hate Merriwell is that they do not dare butt up against

him. They are afraid of him."

"Well, I'm not afraid of any man living, let alone a mere boy. He's nothing but a tenderfoot! Waugh!"

"Hear them shouting over him!" muttered Thornton. "See! They have lifted him on their shoulders! One would think he alone won the race to-day!"

Then Frank was heard to make the brief speech which elicited such hearty applause.

"It is sickening!" growled Flemming, pale with jealous rage.

"It is," nodded the stranger. "It makes me want to give him back the kick he gave me!"

"If you stick to me, I promise you that you shall have a good opportunity," said Flemming.

"You may bet your rocks that I'll tie to you, pard," assured the unknown. "I'll help you to get square, and you can help me. Frank Merriwell will have to keep his eyes open if he dodges us both."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIGHT ON THE TRAIN.

It happened that, as he was perched on the shoulders of his friends and admirers, Frank Merriwell saw Flemming and Thornton in the further end of the car.

Merriwell would not have given his enemies more than a passing glance, but it occurred that he saw and recognized the man who was talking to Flemming.

"It is the scoundrel who tried to bribe me!" muttered Frank, angrily. "And he is with Flemming and Thornton! I fancy I smell a mouse."

Then he forced his friends to put him down, and, the moment he was on his feet, he hastened along the aisle toward the end of the car, having called Diamond to follow him.

The plotters saw Frank coming, and the expression on his face told them that there was a storm brewing.

"By Jove!" fluttered Thornton, in alarm; "he looks as if he means to thump somebody!"

Although he did not show it, Flemming was not a little alarmed by Merriwell's angry appearance.

Several of the students gathered about the crew saw there was something in the wind, and they followed Merriwell and Diamond down the crowded aisle.

Halting within a short distance of his enemies, Frank pointed straight at the stranger and cried:

"There he is! Take a good look at him, boys! That is the creature who tried to bribe me to throw the ball game to Harvard!"

His words rang through the car, and were heard by every one. The uproar and excitement that followed was quite unexpected by Frank.

A wild shout of anger broke from the college lads, and there was a scramble for that end of the car.

"Mob the wretch!"

"Thump him!"

"Choke him!"

"Don't let him get away!"

These cries broke from the crowd of lads, who strove in mad haste to get at the stranger.

"Great Christopher!" gasped Tom Thornton, in terror. "I'm going to get out of this! It's altogether too hot for me!"

Then he tried to slip away.

Flemming did not know what to do. The manner of the angry lads was alarming, and he saw no reason why he should defend a man who was quite unknown to him.

But the stranger did not wait to be defended. With a wild shout, that was like the war whoop of an Indian, he leaped up and lunged straight into the crowd, striking out right and left.

In less than ten seconds a general fight was taking place in that end of the car. Jack Diamond, who had a grudge against Tom Thornton, collared Tom as he was trying to slip away.

"Hold on!" cried the Virginian. "You can't play the sneak in that way! I saw you talking with that

scoundrel! Did you and Flemming set him on to bribe Merriwell?"

"I don't know anything about it!" protested Tom, struggling. "Let go, Diamond!"

"Well, not in a hurry!" returned Jack. "I don't know where the money came from, but I believe you and Flemming tried to ruin Merriwell by bribing him to throw a game and then exposing him. If that was the trick, you fooled yourselves. Frank Merriwell is not that kind of a fellow!"

With a fierce exclamation, Thornton struck savagely at Jack's face, but Diamond dodged the blow.

"Oh, you will, will you!" he cried, and then he gave Thornton a terrible thump between the eyes.

In another moment they were at it fiercely.

Although Flemming was a big fellow with a reputation as a bully, Harry Rattleton had not hesitated to lay hands on him.

"You're a chine fap—I mean a fine chap!" shouted Harry. "So you are concerned in this attempted bribery!"

"Get out!" snarled Flemming. "I'll break your nose!"

"Break it!" invited Rattleton. "I'll try to do a little something while you are about it!"

Flemming waited to say not another word, but, quick as a flash, he did strike Harry a heavy blow on the jaw. Rattleton was staggered, but he held on to Flemming. A moment later both were swept down by the rush of the crowd.

It was something of a blind fight, and it waged with great fierceness, although in an aimless manner, for some moments. Several of the windows in the car were broken.

Bob Collingwood waded into the midst of the struggling mass of human beings, scattering them with his powerful arms, and crying:

"Here, stop this senseless scrapping! Where is the fellow who tried to bribe Merriwell?"

Where, indeed? All looked around for him, but he was gone. In some manner he had made his escape in the midst of the tumult.

"He must be on the train!" cried Frank. "He can't escape from the train till it stops! Here—I have his coat! He left it in my hands when the crowd tore us apart."

Merriwell held up the garment.

"He must be in the car back of this!" declared Collingwood. "I want to see him—I want to get a fair look at his face."

"I'd like to do something else to his face!" shouted another student. "Think of any one offering a Yale pitcher money to throw a game to Harvard!"

This brought a mad howl from the angry students.

Rattleton and Flemming had been torn apart during the struggle, and Thornton and Diamond were separated, but not until Jack had thumped the fellow he disliked, and done it several times.

Both Flemming and Thornton were forgotten. The excited students rushed out by the open door, and crowded into the rear car, which was the only one on the train to which the unknown man could have escaped.

"Where is he?" was the hoarse shout that went up, as the angry boys packed into the car.

They looked desperate and dangerous, as if they were thirsting for human blood.

At the farther end of the car a man in his shirt-sleeves crouched and muttered:

"Well, derved if I expected to kick up this sort of a rumpus! I've seen all kinds of mobs, but I will allow that this reminds me of a regular Judge Lynch crowd, and no mistake. Never judged a lot of youngsters would get stirred up this way any whatever. They're on a regular rampage."

He kept out of sight as far as possible, feeling that it was the most "healthy" thing to do.

"Where is he?" demanded Collingwood, who was just ahead of Merriwell—"where is the man who belongs to this coat? He must have come in here! Did a man in his shirt sleeves come in here?"

"Yes, yes!" replied several. "What has he been doing?"

"Doing!" roared "Dear Old Bob," flushed with anger. "Why, he is the creature that tried to bribe Merriwell!"

It seemed that this piece of business was generally known, for Collingwood's words produced a roar of indignation.

Down at the rear end of the car a young man stood up and shouted:

"This way! Here he is! He can't get away!"

Then it seemed that the students all spotted their game at the same moment, and there was a

fierce scramble for that end of the car.

The hunted man saw them coming, and a desperate look settled on his face.

"I'd as lief fall into the clutches of a whole tribe of Apache Indians!" he gasped. "They're after my scalp for sure!"

He leaped to the door, and tore it open.

"Stop!" rang out the voice of Frank Merriwell. "You cannot escape, for you will be killed if you leap from the train!"

The man hesitated one moment. He saw the college lads rushing down the aisle, and then, although the train was making a speed of at least forty miles an hour, he descended the steps.

Collingwood and Merriwell came out through the open door. As they reached the platform, they saw the man clinging in the darkness at the foot of the steps. He was in a crouching position, his hands clasping the iron holds. In the gloom his face seemed fully as white as the sleeves of his shirt, which fluttered in the breeze.

"For Heaven's sake, don't jump!" cried Frank.

Collingwood tried to grasp the man by the arm. As he did so, the mysterious man dropped from the steps, instantly disappearing in the darkness.

"He's gone!" gasped Frank, horrified.

"Yes, he is gone!" said Collingwood, hoarsely. "That's the end of him, for surely he was killed when he struck the ground!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEEN AGAIN.

For two days Frank scanned all the newspapers for an account of the finding of the body of an unknown man somewhere on the line of the N. Y., N. H. & H. R. R., but he looked in vain.

"Well, that is remarkable!" Merriwell decided. "I can't understand it. If that fellow escaped, it is a miracle. And if he escaped, I believe I shall hear from him again," he finished.

The spring term was drawing to a close. But two more events were to transpire before the coming of the long summer vacation. There was the final ball game with Harvard, and then the great intercollegiate athletic tournament at Madison Square Garden in New York—the latter affair to be the great college event of the year.

Frank was entered for several of the contests in New York, but his hand, although improving, would not be in condition to allow him to play ball again that season.

As for the coming vacation, his plans were not perfected as yet. Some of his friends were going to Bar Harbor, some contemplated spending the summer quietly at home, some were going abroad for a flying trip, and many had expressed themselves as quite undecided as to the manner in which they would pass the summer months.

Frank had boldly proposed a bicycle journey across the continent, but all his friends, with the exception of Diamond, had considered the proposition a joke.

Diamond grew enthusiastic over it, urging Merriwell to carry out the plan, even though but two of them should make the jaunt.

Frank's plan embraced a party of at least four—possibly more. What made Rattleton believe that Merriwell was joking was that Frank had soberly asked Bruce Browning, the reputedly laziest man at Yale, to make one of the party.

Bruce came near fainting with horror at the mere mention of such a thing.

"My dear Merriwell!" he gasped, "is it possible that you take me for a candidate for a lunatic asylum? Do you think that I am on the verge of lapsing into complete idiocy? Or are you simply trying to have a little sport at my expense?"

"Nothing of the sort, my dear fellow, I assure you," said Frank. "I am in sober earnest about getting up a party to make the trip across the continent, and I think it would be a fine thing for you if you were to make one of the company."

Bruce was reclining on a couch in Merriwell's room at the time, lazily puffing away at a cigarette. He languidly reached out his hand and felt for Frank's wrist.

"Permit me to examine your pulse, old fellow," he murmured. "If you are not trying to work some kind of a horse on me you must be in a bad way. Ah!" he said, knowingly, with his thumb and finger on Frank's wrist, "I thought so! Pulse irregular—flutters like an old rag in the wind—flesh

hot and dry, eye changing and unsteady, dryness in your throat and general vacancy in your stomach. What you need is a tonic—and you need it bad. You should take whiskey, it may be the only thing that will save you from an utter breaking up of the nervous system or premature death. The premature death will happen if you try to jolly me any more. I shall carry a gun with me constantly hereafter, and it will not cost too much of an effort to point it in your direction and pull the trigger."

Frank laughed.

"I know you are almost too lazy to draw your breath," he said, "and I also know that the best thing that could happen to you would be just such an expedition as I have proposed. However, I suppose it is useless to waste my breath talking to you, and so I will drop it."

But for all of Browning's refusal to be one of the party, Frank did not give up the project of a trip across the continent from ocean to ocean during the summer vacation.

But almost immediately other matters occupied his attention.

One night he was spending an evening in town with a jolly party of students. The others were drinking beer and ale, while Merriwell took nothing but ginger ale or bottled soda.

As they were leaving Traeger's, Frank caught a glimpse of the face of a man who seemed to be waiting for them to come out.

For one moment Merriwell stopped as if turned to stone, and then, with a hoarse shout of recognition, he leaped after the man, who had slipped away.

The others followed Frank, and they soon pursued him around a corner, where they found him standing still and staring about in a disappointed manner.

"What is it, old man?" asked Paul Hamilton. "Why did you give that whoop and then chase yourself around here in such a lively fashion?"

"It was not myself I chased," declared Frank. "It was quite another party, I assure you; but he has given me the slip, for I can see nothing of him."

"Who was it?"

"The man who tried to bribe me to throw the last ball game to Harvard!"

"That fellow?" exclaimed all the lads, excitedly. "Are you sure?"

"Dead sure," asserted Frank, confidently. "I saw his face fairly in the light in front of Traeger's when we came out."

"Then he was not killed in the leap from the train!" cried Diamond. "How did he escape?"

"Ask me something easy!" exclaimed Frank. "I never expected to look on that man's face again, unless I looked on it as a corpse."

"Confound him!" exploded Harry Rattleton. "I'd like to hake his break—I mean break his head! What does he want around here?"

Frank was silent. There was a grim look on his face, and it was plain that he had been not a little disturbed by the sight of the mysterious stranger.

The boys turned toward college, discussing the queer actions of the unknown as they walked along. One or two of them fully believed the man must be a lunatic.

That night, as Frank and Harry were preparing for bed, the former declared:

"That strange man is about as large a mystery as I ever ran across. He is beginning to be a decided nuisance."

"What do you make of him, anyway?"

"That he is a Westerner, or wishes to be thought such. His language betrays that. And he is the last man I could dream would be staking enough money on a game of college baseball to be able to offer a bribe of two thousand dollars to make sure that the game would result in his favor."

"By Jove!" cried Rattleton; "if any other fellow but yourself had told me that a stranger had made them such an offer and had forked over one-half cash in advance I should have considered him a looming byer—no, a blooming liar!"

"And you would not be to blame for thinking so. To me it seems like a dream, but I know it actually happened."

"Well, what is he hanging around New Haven for?"

"I'll give it up, unless he hopes to get at Heffner or Dad Hicks, one of whom must pitch the game at Springfield."

"He'll get used rough if he pushes his dirty dough at either Heffner or Hicks!" cried Rattleton.

"I think so," nodded Frank. "I believe they are loyal to dear old Yale, and nothing can buy their

honor."

"Most Yale men are. There may be one or two sneaks who would sell out, as there are black sheep in every flock. I don't believe Flemming would be above such a trick."

"Oh, I don't know! I do not wish to think that bad of Flemming. I know he is my enemy, and I believe he hates me so he would do almost anything to injure me but I do not wish to think that a fellow like him even would stoop to such a dastardly trick as to betray old Yale."

"You always think every fellow is white till you are convinced to the contrary beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"I had rather believe all men honest and deceive myself in that manner than to suspect everybody and thus think that one honest man was a rogue."

Harry regarded Frank in a queer manner, slowly shaking his head, but saying nothing more. For all that they had been friends and roommates for a year and a half, Rattleton was forced to confess to himself that there still remained many things about Merriwell that he could not understand.

That Frank was shrewd Harry knew, and yet Merriwell sometimes seemed to deliberately deceive himself by thinking that certain fellows were honest when he should have known better. It seemed the hardest thing in the world for Frank to be convinced that any fellow was thoroughly bad, even though that person might be an enemy who had endeavored in numerous ways to do him an injury.

"Merriwell seems to come out all right in everything," thought Rattleton; "but it would not be the luck of any other fellow who dared take the chances he does."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO WARNINGS.

The morning after the evening when Frank saw the mysterious stranger in front of Traeger's he received a warning note through the mail. It read as follows:

"Be constantly on your guard. Your enemies are plotting to do you serious injury. I shall do what I can to foil them, but you had better watch out."

It was unsigned, and the handwriting was cramped and awkward, as if the person who wrote it was not accustomed to handle a pen.

"Well, I wonder what sort of a game this is!" cried Frank, in disgust. "It is a fake, pure and simple!"

Rattleton was at his side.

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"Read that!" invited Frank, thrusting the anonymous warning into the ready hands of his friend.

Harry glanced it over and then whistled softly.

"Rot!" he cried. "Anybody can see that's lot on the nevel—I mean not on the level."

"But what sort of a game is it?" questioned Frank, in perplexity. "If it was an appointment to meet somebody somewhere, or even a warning to stay away from some place, I could see something in it; but the mere statement that enemies are plotting to injure me doesn't indicate much in this case."

"It seems to indicate that somebody fakes you for a fool—no, takes you for a fool!" spluttered Rattleton.

Frank's face grew scornful.

"That somebody may find out that it is not entirely healthy to try crooked games with me," he grimly said. "I believe I see through the trick."

"What is it, then?"

"This bogus warning will be followed by another. The other will go a little further than this. Then will come the third, which will be the one intended to draw me into some sort of a trap. Oh, the game is too thin!"

Harry looked into his roommate's face, and saw that Frank Merriwell was aroused at last.

"What are you going to do?" asked Rattleton.

"I am going to have a few words with Fred Flemming at the first opportunity. I have been easy with Flemming, for I could not believe the fellow all bad, even though he had tried to injure me,

but, if he is going to hire a ruffian like this unknown man to try to work my ruin, I shall draw the lines on Mr. Flemming. He is rich, but that will not save him."

"They say he has money to burn."

"I don't care if he is a Monte Cristo. He cannot ride over me with all his money, and I do not believe that a scoundrel will be tolerated at Yale after his villainy is exposed, even though he may be rich and have influential parents and connections."

"What do you think the game is?"

"As to that I am more or less at sea; but I believe that the bribe which was offered me to throw the ball game to Harvard was a trap meant to work my undoing."

"Flemming must have known your hand would not permit you to play in that game, so he could not have been in that piece of business."

"My dear boy, I do not fancy I was expected to pitch that game. It was thought that I would keep the money. That money was marked. This man would have gone forth and blowed that he had bribed me. He would have told what marked money he had given me. I should have been cornered—perhaps arrested—then searched. You see what that would have meant. The marked money would have been found on my person. It would have been exactly as the stranger had described it. It is certain that somebody was watching and saw him give me the money. That person would have testified against me. Then Frank Merriwell's college career would have come to a sudden termination. In some ways it was a bungling plot, and in others it was crafty enough."

"But a cool thousand—that was an awful roll to push at a fellow!"

"It was a bold and desperate stroke, and the fact that such a sum was offered shows that the one who put up the job knew I could not be bought with a petty amount. He did not know that it made no difference whether it was one dollar or one million—I would not sell my honor and betray dear old Yale for any sum!"

"You have other enemies besides Flemming."

"Yes—Thornton."

"He doesn't count, for he lacks nerve."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Harris does not love you."

"It will be a long time before Sport Harris will venture to lift a hand against me again, for the memory of the fate of his comrade, Hartwick, is too vivid before him. Hartwick brought disgrace and ruin on himself by trying to injure me. He was forced to leave college, and then, when he came back to New Haven and put up that race-track job on me, he finished his own downfall by robbing his father in order that he might have a sum of money to stake against me, feeling sure I must lose. Directly after that race he was arrested."

"What was done about that matter? Was he sent to prison?"

"No; his father would not press the case; but I have heard that the old man's heart is broken by Hartwick's actions. The worthless rascal was the apple of the old man's eye. His father had expected to see him go through college and graduate with flying colors. The disgrace has bowed the father with grief, and it is said he cannot live long."

"Then Hartwick will get all his money."

"No. The old man has made a will that cuts Evan off with a very small sum. The rest of the money and estate goes to other relatives and to charity."

"And Evan Hartwick brought all this on himself by his dastardly attempts to injure you. It should be a warning to others."

"It is an old saying that 'the way of the transgressor is hard,' but it seems to take human beings a long time to become convinced that it is absolutely true."

Frank kept his eyes open, and waited for the second warning, which he felt sure would come.

He was not mistaken, for it came near night.

A boy appeared at Frank's door, and handed over a sealed envelope, which he explained he had received from a man with a heavy beard. He said he had been paid a quarter of a dollar to deliver it.

Frank tore it open and read:

"You will be invited to go to the theatre to-night. Do not go. Your enemies will be on the watch for you."

"Oh. I knew it was coming!" cried Frank, scornfully. "It is a flimsy trick! It actually disgusts me!"

Harry was out, and Merriwell was alone.

Later Harry came in, accompanied by Diamond, Browning, Griswold and Creighton.

"I say, old man," cried Charlie Creighton, addressing Frank, "we have something on for to-night, and we want you to take a hand."

"You may take a few rotten eggs or decayed vegetables with that hand, if you like," grinned Griswold.

Frank remembered the second warning. Of the party Creighton was the only fellow he did not know very well, and, if there was an enemy among them, Creighton must be the man.

Frank resolved to show no suspicion.

"What's up?" he asked.

"To-night," cried Griswold, dramatically, "the curtain will go up on one of the greatest tragedies ever enacted on any stage—nit!"

"Hush!" whispered Creighton, mysteriously. "Whisper it softly. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' is in town, with two *Little Evas*, two *Marks*, three real Siberian bloodhounds, bred in New Jersey, and a jackass."

"The jackass is the manager of the company," grinned Griswold.

"I presume you have heard of that immortal play, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' Mr. Merriwell?" questioned Creighton.

"Methinks I have," assured Frank.

"'Methinks' is good," nodded Creighton. "It has a fat sound."

"Eh?" grunted Browning, who already had deposited his corpulent body on the couch. "Did anybody speak to me?"

"Ah, Mr. Browning," said Creighton, "I think you said as we were coming along that you have had the pleasure of seeing 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'?"

"Yes, I said so."

"Then permit me to inquire if you have ever seen 'Ten Nights in a Barroom'?"

"No," grunted Bruce; "but I have seen ten barrooms in a night."

"Here, hold up!" cried Griswold, promptly. "That belongs to me, and I have used it on everybody I could hit with it."

"Never mind," murmured Browning. "It is a good thing, so we'll have to move it along."

"Seriously," said Diamond, "there is a crummy 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' company at a cheap theatre in town, and Creighton has purchased a box. He wants us to go along."

"That's the idea," acknowledged Charlie. "All the fellows are onto it, and there will be two or three hundred Yale boys there. We won't do a thing to the hamfatters!"

Frank smiled. He saw that it would be an opportunity for any amount of sport he was sure, and the mere thought of it made him eager to go.

But he remembered the warning. It was most remarkable that the invitation to the theatre had followed so closely after the receipt of the note from the unknown.

"Of course you'll go, old fellow?" cried Creighton, who saw that Merriwell was hesitating.

"Of course he will!" cried Rattleton. "Merry is always in for a little racket of this sort."

"He is always foremost in anything of the kind," said Diamond.

"That is why I want him in my box," smiled Creighton. "Oh, we won't do a thing in that box—not a thing! I have ordered plenty of fizz on ice, and—oh, but you do not drink fizz, do you, Merriwell?"

"No," said Frank; "but I am no temperance crank, and I do not make myself offensive by trying to convince everybody else that men who do drink are fools. College lads should have brains enough to know what they want and what they do not want, and it is impertinent for any fellow to go around trying to make Good Templars of men who enjoy a glass of beer or wine now and then."

Creighton impulsively grasped Frank's hand.

"Merriwell," he cried, "by example you are the best possible temperance lecture, and you will make more converts by keeping still than by preaching."

"There may be something in that," admitted Frank. "I knew a parson once on a time who never mentioned religion unless some one broached the subject, except when he was in the pulpit. His name was Lamfear. He did not go around with his face drawn down, asking everybody if they had received salvation and loved the Lord. I admired him more than any parson I ever knew, and I used to go to his church Sundays to hear him preach. He was a good man, although he seemed to enjoy seeing boys play baseball and skate and coast and fly kites. I remember that one time he put on skates himself, and took a spin on the river with the boys and girls. Now I know that man

did more good by keeping still about religion than he could have done had he dinned it into the ears of everybody he met. Every one saw he was a good man, for his daily life told that. All the young folks admired him as much as they disliked another old parson who was forever talking about the wickedness of the world and the goodness of the Lord, and collaring persons everywhere to ask them why they did not attend church oftener. Good old Parson Lamfear! May his tribe increase!"

"Well," said Griswold, "we'll let Parson Lamfear rest. What we want to know is if you are with us to-night."

"To go, or not to go? that is the burning question," murmured Browning, as, still stretched on his back, he struck a match, lighted a cigarette, dropped part of the match on his chin, and gave a howl of pain.

Frank suddenly made up his mind.

"I'll go," he said.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE THEATRE PARTY.

It was a gay party that left South Middle that evening and started for the theatre. Merriwell had not said a word to Rattleton concerning the receipt of the second warning. A spirit of sheer reckless defiance led him to accept the invitation to the theatre, even though he had not wished to spend his time that evening in such a manner.

"This may be a jolly," he told himself; "if I were to stay away the fellows would have a horse on me sure."

Creighton had a beautiful tenor voice, and as they started out beneath the elms, he sang:

"I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth—I know not where——"

Danny Griswold seemed to take a fiendish delight in giving a humorous twist to anything sentimental, and so he interrupted with:

"The next day a man came around
And sold me dead dog at a dollar a pound."

"If that were original I wouldn't mind," said Creighton; "but you got it from some star vaudeville performance, you little runt."

"That's where I get all my gags," frankly confessed Griswold. "I store them up for use, and they come in handy some time."

"Some time, when you spring a stale joke, I shall be led to assassinate you," declared Bruce Browning.

"Impossible!" cried Griswold. "That would be a crime."

"Well, what's the odds?"

"You are too fat to commit a crime."

"How is that?"

"It is difficult for fat persons to stoop to anything low, you know."

"You seem to find considerable amusement because I am somewhat overweight," said Bruce, with attempted severity.

"Not at all," chirped Danny. "Some men are well enough in their weight, but this doesn't apply to coal dealers."

"Say, Griswold," called Rattleton, "what's the average fate for a wool—no, I mean the average weight for a fool?"

"A simple ton," replied the little fellow, quick as a flash.

Frank clapped Danny on the back.

"Good boy!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Rattleton didn't get ahead of you that time."

"It is hard for anybody to get ahead of me," declared Griswold. "I am really a lively man in a footrace, for my father is a watchmaker, and he has given me instructions in the business."

"I fuf-fuf-fuf, fail to see huh-huh-how that applies," said Joe Gamp, a lad with a serious impediment in his speech.

"Why, you see I have learned how to make good time," chuckled Danny.

Gamp roared with laughter. He was a big, raw-boned, hulking fellow from New Hampshire, and his laugh was like the braying of a mule. Creighton had invited Gamp to the theatre for the amusement the country lad would provide.

"He'll break the performers all up if he ever gets started laughing," said Charlie to Merriwell. "When he gets going in good style nothing will stop him."

There was something about the country boy that Merriwell liked. Frank quickly decided that Joe was a big-hearted, honest fellow, such a blunder-heels that he was certain to provoke ridicule, and yet thoroughly worthy and deserving.

In laughing, Gamp opened his mouth to the widest extent. He suddenly closed it, and clapped his hand to his jaw.

"Jee-ru-sa-lem!" he gasped; "there gug-gug-gug-goes that old aching tut-tut-tooth of mine! I was careless to let the night air gug-gug-get into it."

"Why don't you have it pulled out?" asked Diamond.

"I'm going to have it pup-pup-pup-pulled and all the rest of my 'tut-'tut-'tarnel teeth just as soon as I can afford the money to bub-buy a new set," declared Gamp, honestly.

"Why spend your money in such a foolish way?" said Griswold, with apparent seriousness. "Save the dentist's bill. I know a dog that will insert a full set of teeth free of charge."

Open flew Gamp's mouth again, and his braying laugh caused a passing pedestrian to dodge so suddenly that he jumped from under his own hat.

"Say!" exclaimed Charlie Creighton, getting hold of Griswold; "save those till we get to the theatre. Then you can set him going, and we'll have sport."

"Can't save them," declared Danny. "They have to come when the opportunity offers."

And so they went on their way to the theatre, laughing and joking, singing snatches of college songs, and having a jolly time generally.

Creighton had made no mistake in saying a large number of college lads would be present. It seemed that there were at least two hundred in the theatre, and it was apparent that they were there for "a racket."

The moment Creighton's party entered the box a tall young man in the first row of orchestra seats arose and faced the house, soberly saying:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is a most auspicious, not to say suspicious, occasion. It is probable that many of you were not aware that we were to be honored to-night by having the privilege of witnessing the performance in company with royal personages, but such is the fact. The party that has just entered the box on the right is the Prince of Chow-chow, who is accompanied by the Duke of Dublinstout, the Earl of Easytogetajag, the Emperor of Buginthishead, the High Mogul of Whooperup, the Chief Pusher of Whangdoodleland and the Great Muckamuck of Hogansalley. Gentlemen, it is your privilege to salute them."

Then every college boy in the house arose and bowed with great gravity toward the box.

"Well, this is sure to be a hot time!" laughed Merriwell, delighted.

"You bet it is!" assured Charlie Creighton. "We'll make *Simon Legree* regret that he is living."

An usher came down the aisle and remonstrated with the tall student. The tall student replied to the usher with exaggerated politeness, declaring that he meant no harm, but that he had felt it his duty to inform the audience that such distinguished personages were in the box.

Then when the tall young man sat down, as if by a prearranged signal, there was a wild outburst of applause, stamping of feet, whistling catcalls, and so forth.

The musicians came out and began to put their instruments in tune. They composed an orchestra carried with the troupe, and were, as Rattleton forcibly expressed it, "decidedly on the bum."

Some of the musicians seemed to dread what was coming, for they looked pale and agitated.

"They know that some of the over-ripe vegetables and stale hen-fruit which the audience may toss at the performers is liable to fall short," smiled Merriwell.

Having tuned up after a fashion, the orchestra began to file away at some sort of a medley.

Griswold rolled his eyes and said:

"I am carried away with the music, as the monkey who was perched on the hand-organ remarked."

It was with the utmost difficulty that the assembled students repressed a desire to uplift their voices and drown the sounds which came from the wretched orchestra; but they felt that it would not do to alarm the players by too great a demonstration, and so the only interruptions to the overture were a few catcalls.

At last the curtain rolled up, and the play began. An ominous silence seemed to hang over the audience. The actors were nervous at first, but as the silence continued and offensive demonstrations were not immediately made, they gained courage and swung into their parts with as much enthusiasm and ability as possible.

It is possible that the sight of two or three policemen at the back of the house gave the performers courage. The officers had been called in to overawe the college lads in case they became too demonstrative.

At length, in a very pathetic part of the first act, Griswold leaned over to Joe Gamp, and whispered:

"It is very touching, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the country boy, chokingly, "it mum-mum-mum-makes me fuf-fuf-fuf-feel like th-th-thunder!"

He nearly blubbered outright, for he had never seen many plays, having found it necessary to spend his money with the greatest care, as he was confined to a certain allowance to take him through college.

"And Uncle Tom's Bible," said Danny—"it reminds me of a conundrum. How was the ark propelled?"

"Dud-dud-darned if I know."

"By a Noah, of course," explained Griswold.

Gamp caught his breath, and then he lay back and roared:

"Haw! haw! haw! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!"

This roar of laughter, coming as it did at a solemn and pathetic point in the play, was most startling. *Uncle Tom* came near collapsing on the stage, and the other actors were so disturbed that they got tangled in their lines.

The students caught on, and there was an immediate burst of applause that swelled louder and louder. This died away most suddenly and unexpectedly, and Joe Gamp was heard to shout in his endeavor to make Griswold hear:

"By jiminy! that was a good one! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw! a-haw!"

The lad from the country went off into another paroxysm of laughter, pressing his hands to his sides, and shutting his eyes, utterly unconscious for the moment of his surroundings.

Of a sudden Joe remembered that he was at the theatre. His mouth came together with a snap, his eyes flew open, and he ceased to laugh and stiffened up, with a frightened look on his face.

The change was so ludicrous that the entire audience was convulsed, and the actors could not help laughing.

From that moment the play progressed under difficulties. In the scene where the slaves were being sold at auction some of the students began to pepper the actors with pea-shooters, doing it cautiously, so that they would not be spotted in the act. Every time *Marks* would open his mouth to say "seventy-five" he would be struck by one or more peas, which were fired with force sufficient to make them sting like hornets.

"Seventy—Wow! Whoop!" yelled *Marks*, clapping a hand to the side of his face, and suddenly dancing an original can-can.

"Five hundred," cried *Legree*.

"Seventy-fi— We-e-e-ow! Stop it! Somebody is shooting things at me!"

Marks had been spotted on the end of his long nose, to which he was wildly clinging with both hands, as he pranced around the stage.

"What's the matter?" growled *Legree*, in a guarded tone, unable to understand what had happened. "Have you gone crazy, you fool? Stand up and bid!"

Then he cried: "Six hundred!"

"Seventy-five— Hornets and blisters!" finished *Marks*, as he was nailed by three or four peas. "I can't stand this! It's too much!"

He bolted off the stage.

Legree looked dismayed, and then he advanced to the footlights and addressed the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I trust you will excuse the gentleman who is playing the part of *Marks*. He has not been well for several days, and he is somewhat troubled with hallucinations. Of course we know his troubles are all imaginary, and— Ye-e-e-ow! I'm shot!"

A pea had struck him squarely between the eyes, and he started back so suddenly that he sat

down on the stage as if he had been knocked off his feet.

"A-haw! a-haw! a-haw!" roared the voice of Joe Gamp, and the audience joined in the shout of laughter.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRAPPED.

There was an uproar in the theatre, which the ushers and the police were unable to quell for some time.

The curtain was rung down, and then, after a short wait, the manager came out and said the show would go on, if the audience would behave. He threatened to have the persons who were using the pea-shooters arrested, and this threat was greeted by hisses and catcalls.

After a while, however, the curtain went up once more, and the play proceeded in a tangle of "real Siberian bloodhounds," *Gumption Cutes, Marks, Topsyies, Little Evas*, escaping slaves, slave hunters and general excitement and confusion.

It was plain that the actors feared further trouble, and they were rushing through their lines, eager to get off the stage as soon as possible.

The bloodhounds were cheered by the students and peppered with peas. When *Topsy* declared she "nebber was born, but jes' growed," some one inquired the name of the fertilizer used in her rearing. When the jackass appeared, a solemn voice from some uncertain part of the theatre called the attention of the audience to the "leading actor of the colossal aggregation." *Little Eva* was invited to exhibit her wings.

The college boys were irrepressible, and yet they did not do anything to absolutely break up the show, although Joe Gamp's haw-haws came near proving disastrous several times.

A policeman came down to the box and threatened to arrest Joe, but he was pacified by Creighton, who had a decidedly smooth way of "fixing things."

Frank Merriwell remained quiet until near the end of the play, enjoying the sport the other fellows were making. At last, however, he decided to produce some amusement himself.

Frank was a very good amateur ventriloquist, although he seldom practiced the art. Now, however, he saw his opportunity.

Little Eva was on her deathbed, and the mourners were assembled about. All at once one of the mourners seemed to say:

"This business is on the bum."

Every one started and stared. The actors were astounded, and the audience amused. Then the death agony went on until another of the watchers by *Eva's* side observed:

"It makes me sick!"

The manager was heard to hiss from the shelter of the wings:

"I'll make you sick when you come off!"

"Oh, go fall on yourself, you old cheat!" the actor seemed to fling back.

Then *Little Eva*, in her death agony, apparently remarked:

"Give it to the old duffer! He owes me six weeks' salary, and I'll quit dying right now if the ghost doesn't walk immediately!"

This brought laughter and hearty applause from the college lads.

When the applause had subsided *Uncle Tom* apparently observed:

"He can't get ahead of me. I've put an attachment on the jackass."

This was more than the excitable manager could stand, and he rushed onto the stage, shaking his fist at *Uncle Tom* and crying:

"Confound you! I don't owe you a cent! You obliged me to pay up before you would go on to-night!"

And then he nearly collapsed when he realized what his anger had led him to do and say.

The college lads arose from their seats and cheered.

Standing in the front of the box, Charlie Creighton shouted:

"This is the best part of the show, fellows. Let's give 'em one! Now—all together!"

Then the Yale yell pealed forth, and *Little Eva* came near dying in reality from heart failure.

This broke up the show entirely, and the curtain came down with a rush, while the frightened orchestra made haste to disappear. From behind the curtain the manager shouted that the show was over, and the laughing, tumultuous students hurried out of theatre.

"Well, Merriwell," said Charlie Creighton, "how have you enjoyed the evening?"

"Immensely," laughed Frank.

"It was a regular sus-sus-sus-circus," declared Joe Gamp. "Never had so much fuf-fuf-fuf-fuf-fun in all my bub-born days!"

"We had them on a string, like a kite," murmured Bruce Browning.

"And that's what made them soar," chuckled Griswold.

Just as the street was reached, Frank gave a slight exclamation, and quickly forced his way through the crowd toward a man who was near at hand.

That man was the mysterious stranger.

The unknown seemed to be watching Merriwell, for he whirled about and hastened away the moment Frank started in his direction.

"Oh, I want to get my hands on that fellow!" grated Frank.

The man did his best to escape, but Merriwell was close after him. The stranger hurried along a street, and Frank broke into a run. Then the unknown glanced over his shoulder, and started to run himself.

"Hold on!" commanded Frank.

That made the stranger run the faster.

Frank followed, but could see nothing of the person he was pursuing.

"He must have dodged into a doorway," decided the lad. "No—here is where he went, down this alley."

The mouth of a dark alley was before him, and he plunged into it. He did not go far before he decided that further pursuit was folly, and he turned back.

"He's slippery," muttered the boy; "but I'll catch him some time, if he continues to shadow me."

Dark forms appeared at the mouth of the alley, and a hoarse whisper came to Merriwell's ears:

"He went in here, and the alley is blind, so he can't get out. Do him—and do him dirty!"

For all that Frank had been often in desperate peril, something about this situation chilled him to the heart. The uncanny darkness, the unknown alley, his creeping foes coming down upon him, possibly with deadly intent, all served to make him feel weak and helpless for the moment.

There are times when the bravest heart shrinks with dread, and, for all that Frank was a lad with remarkable nerve, it is not strange that he felt a thrill of fear at that moment.

It is claimed that men have lived who "never knew the meaning of the word fear," and it is possible that this may be true; but in case they ever were placed in situations of extreme peril, such persons must have been lacking in some of the essential elements that compose a human being. We think of them as deficient in certain ways, wanting in the finer qualities, and naturally coarse and brutish.

It is the person who experiences fear and conquers it by his own determination to do so who is the greatest hero.

One of the bravest generals America has produced, a man who had the reputation of being utterly fearless, once was asked if he ever had been afraid while in battle. "No, sir," was his reply, "never in battle; but sometimes just before going into an engagement, I have felt it necessary to keep my teeth clinched to prevent my heart from jumping out of my mouth."

Still the men whom he commanded never knew that he experienced a single thrill of fear. He conquered his trepidation by his wonderful will power, and always in battle he appeared perfectly unaware that there was the least danger. Indeed, he was sometimes criticised for his apparent recklessness in exposing himself to deadly peril.

Frank Merriwell never courted peril, and he avoided danger when he could do so in a manly way and without lowering his own sense of dignity.

Once engaged in a dangerous encounter, or forced into a position of peril, Frank's blood arose, and he seemed to be seized by a reckless disregard of his personal safety. Then it was that he laughed in a singular manner, and his enemies had learned that he was the most dangerous when that laugh sounded from his lips.

As he heard those unknown foes creeping down upon him in the darkness of the alley, Frank crouched close to the ground, and felt about with his hand for some weapon of defense.

Fear suddenly gave place to anger, and he longed to retaliate on his enemies. He knew well enough that the men creeping down upon him were hired tools, chosen by his foes to do him severe bodily injury.

"Oh, for a club—a stone—anything!" he thought.

But his hand found nothing that suited his need at that moment.

The cautiously advancing men came nearer and nearer. He could hear them whispering to each other, and they seemed to block the entire width of the narrow alley. He could not make out their number, but he was sure there must be several of them.

"Can yer see him, Jake?"

"No, an' I can't hear him neither."

"But he's here somewhere, and they say he'll fight. Look out fer him."

Frank heard these whispered words, and then, without realizing that he was about to do so, he laughed!

There were hoarse cries, curses and blows. A savage struggle suddenly was begun in the dark alley.

Frank had hoped to break through the line of his foes by his sudden rush, but he was not successful, although his hard right fist knocked a man down with his first blow.

Then he received a shock that seemed to cause a thousand bright lights to flash before his eyes, and he knew he had been struck on the head with some sort of weapon.

The boy staggered. Uttering hoarse exclamations, his assailants, like beasts of prey, sprang upon him.

"Give it to him!" cried a voice.

With new strength, Frank twisted and squirmed. In doing so, he threw his head from side to side, and it chanced that he succeeded in saving it from the blows which were intended to render him helpless.

Those blows, many of them, at least, fell on his shoulders and his back with benumbing force.

He forgot that his left hand was not yet well, but he used it as freely and as vigorously as his right.

And, once more, something like a laugh came from his lips.

"Hear him!" hissed one of the ruffians. "Why, he's a perfect young fiend!"

But Frank could not long hold his own against such odds. Some of the blows aimed at his head fell glancingly, but they were enough to rob him in a measure of his strength. He tried to tear away, and then he was felled to the ground.

Merriwell felt that "the jig was up" with him. They had him at their mercy, at last.

Then it was that a surprising thing happened. With encouraging cries, two men came through the darkness and attacked the boy's assailants.

That the new arrivals on the battlefield were armed with heavy clubs was apparent, and they used them mercilessly on the ruffians.

This attack was unexpected by Frank's assailants, and they could not meet it. Immediately they turned and fled, pursued by one of the men who had set upon them.

Just then, apparently disturbed by the sounds of the fight, some person came to a nearby window with a lighted lamp.

The light shone out into the alley, and fell on Frank Merriwell and one of the men who had saved him.

"Plug Kirby!" gasped Frank, sitting up.

"Dat's wot, me boy!" cried the bruiser, cheerfully. "An' I kinder t'ink we didn't git round any too quick neider."

"You came just in time."

"Be yer hurt much, youngster?" asked Kirby, anxiously, assisting Frank to arise.

"I think not. Got a few cracks and was upset, but that is all. Where is the man who was with you?"

"He whooped it along after der gang. Kinder t'ink he wanted ter ketch one of der blokes an' hold him fer der perlice ter pinch."

"Who was he?"

"Dunno."

"What?" cried Frank, astonished—"don't know who was with you when you came to my aid?"

"Well, I dunno his name, youngster, and that's on der level."

Frank was eager to ask more questions, but Plug said:

"We'd best push outer dis. Dunno wot'll happen if we stays here too long. Der gang might come back."

So they hurried out of the alley, Frank receiving some assistance from Kirby, as he was rather dizzy when he tried to walk.

When the street was reached no one seemed to be in the immediate vicinity.

"Shall we wait for your friend?" asked Merriwell.

"Naw," answered Plug. "He ain't likely ter come back."

A short time later they were seated at a table in a nearby resort, and Frank was treating Kirby.

Frank had examined his own injuries, and discovered they were not serious, although it was likely that he would be sore about the head and shoulders from the bruises he had received.

"Now tell me," urged Frank, "who was with you when you came to my assistance? I am eager to know."

"I tole yer dat I don't know der cove's name, but I do know dat he is all right an' on der level."

"Well, how is that you do not know his name?"

"Never asked him."

"How do you happen to know him?"

"Well, yer see, it was dis way: I was inter Jackson's der odder evenin' takin' me nightcap. Dere was some fellers in dere wot was college chaps, and dey was talkin' about races and t'ings. Pretty soon dey said somet'ing about you. Some of 'em was hard on you, an' dat got me mad up. I jes' waded inter der gang an' offered ter lick anybody wot didn't t'ink you was der clean stuff."

Frank smiled a bit, realizing that he had, indeed, made a firm friend of this bruiser who had once tried to whip him, but had received a severe drubbing, instead.

"Dey didn't want ter shove up against me," Kirby went on, "an' dey got out right away. Den a man walks up ter me, and he says I was all right, an' he blows me. He continues ter blow me, an' ask me questions about you. Arter a while, he asks me if I would fight fer you if I had der chance. 'Would I!' says I, jes' like dat. 'Well, old sport, show me der chance!' Den he says dat you has some enemies wot is plannin' ter do yer, an' he might be able ter give me a chance ter put in a few licks fer yer.

"Well, dis evenin', as I was inter Jackson's, who should come in an' call me aside but dis same cove. He says ter me, 'Kirby'—he had found out me name—'Kirby,' says he, jes' like dat, 'I'm goin' ter give yer dat chance ter put in some licks fer Frank Merriwell.'

"Den he tells me dat he were in a place an' heard a scheme ter put some toughs onter yer ter-night w'en yer was goin' home from der t'eeter. Dey had heard some feller say dat he was goin' ter invite yer ter be in er box wid him at der t'eeter, an' so dey knew yer was goin'.

"Dat's all, 'cept dat me an' der bloke wot was wid me went ter der t'eeter, him payin' all expenses, an' we kept watch of yer. W'en we came out, you started fer him, an' he hooked it. I was s'prised, but I follered. Den I found dere was odders follerin', an' der gang run yer in here. Der feller I was wid, as was in a doorway nigh der alley all der time, skipped back fer me, an' we jumped right down inter der alley, takin' some heavy canes, wot we had wid us all der time. You know wot happened arter dat."

Frank was puzzled and mystified. He asked Plug to describe the mysterious man, and Kirby did so. This added to Frank's wonderment, for the description tallied with that of the stranger who had tried to bribe him to throw a ball game to Harvard; but that it could be the same man, even though everything indicated that it must be, Frank could not believe.

That night, after going to bed, Frank lay awake for hours, thinking of the stranger and the mystery which surrounded him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN EMISSARY FROM THE WEST.

Frank was determined to solve the mystery of the unknown man. He did not tell Rattleton everything concerning his adventure of the previous night, although he was forced to explain that he had been in an encounter, and that he did not know who his assailants were.

The theatre party had wondered greatly at Frank's sudden disappearance, and Frank confessed that he had followed the mysterious unknown, who had given him the slip.

"That fellow is playing the shadow on you, Frank," cried Harry, indignantly. "He's up to some sort of crookedness."

"He must bear a charmed life, or he would have been killed the night he jumped from the New London special," said Frank.

"He decided it was best to take chances by jumping rather than to fall into the hands of Old Eli's sons, and I think he was right."

Creighton came around to inquire how it happened that Merriwell disappeared so suddenly the previous evening.

Since the boat race Creighton had sought Merriwell's company, although he had scarcely given Frank any attention before that.

Creighton was a prominent society man and had considerable influence at Yale; his friendship was of value to any fellow on whom he saw fit to bestow it.

His father was rich, and Charlie spent money freely, as his whims dictated. Not even those with whom he was not on friendly terms, however, could justly accuse him of being a cad.

"Awfully jolly time last night," yawned Creighton. "It was rather kiddish, but it is a relief to play the boy once in a while. It capped the whole business when the actors themselves finished the fun by giving the manager away in the last act."

Frank smiled, but did not explain his connection with the crowning event of the evening.

"Jove! I'm hungry," Charlie declared. "Come on, Merriwell and Rattleton, we'll go down to Bob's, and have a chop."

He would not take no for an answer, and so, a few minutes later, the trio crossed the campus, Creighton in the middle, his arms locked with those of the other lads. All were laughing and joking in a light-hearted manner.

Creighton took them directly to a restaurant that was famous for its chops. They ordered, Charlie and Harry taking ale with their food.

Just as the chops were brought on, a man came in and took a seat at a table nearby. This man was dressed in a new suit of "store clothes," and wore a full beard. He gave his order to the waiter in a low tone, and then began perusing a paper, behind which his face was almost entirely hidden.

Rattleton happened to sit so that he naturally looked toward the man, and, several times, he caught that individual peering over the top of the paper. It did not take Harry long to note that the person with the paper seemed to be watching Frank Merriwell.

Suddenly Frank's roommate arose, and, with two swift steps, he was at the man's side. Without a word, Harry caught the gentleman by the beard, which he gave a sharp jerk.

The beard came off in Harry's hand!

It was false!

"Look, Frank!" cried Rattleton, pointing at the smooth-shaven face exposed; "it is the mysterious man who has been following you about!"

It was in truth the mysterious unknown, and Frank was on his feet in a twinkling, resolved not to let the man escape till he had given a full explanation of his remarkable conduct.

To Merriwell's surprise, the stranger showed no desire to run away, but sat smiling serenely up at him, calmly observing:

"Do not excite yourself, Mr. Merriwell; there is no reason for it. I have completed my business in a most satisfactory manner, and I am now ready to explain everything to you."

"It is an explanation which I expect and demand," said Frank, coldly. "It is no more than fair that I should have one, as you have shown yourself my persistent enemy, and that without any just cause that I know of."

"You are mistaken," returned the man; "instead of your enemy, I have been your firm friend from the very first."

"I fail to see how you can make that out."

"I will call at your rooms this evening and give you a full explanation."

"No!" cried Frank, promptly, "you will give me an explanation here and immediately."

"I do not think you will press me to that," was the calm assertion. "I might speak of affairs of a personal and family nature."

"You—you speak of such affairs—to me? Now it strikes me that you are attempting a bluff, sir;

but it will not work."

The stranger reached into his pocket and took out something, which he held up before Frank's eyes.

"This," he said, with confidence, "will convince you that I speak nothing but the truth."

"My father's ring!" gasped Frank.

"Yes," bowed the man; "it is the ring that led him to one of the richest mines in the Southwest. He said that it would simply be necessary for me to show it to you, and you would know that he sent me. Shall I call this evening, Mr. Merriwell?"

"If you please, sir," said Frank, bowing respectfully.

The boys were surprised, but Frank said he would explain some time later.

That evening the stranger called, as he had said he would. Frank had taken pains to run Harry out of the room, so they were quite alone. The boy locked the door, as a precaution against unwelcome interruptions.

The mysterious man introduced himself as David Scott, the confidential agent of Charles Merriwell, Frank's unfortunate father, who had spent the best years of his life and separated himself from his family and friends in the mad search after "phantom fortune."

At last Charles Merriwell had "struck it rich," and he was now a very wealthy man; but he was broken in health, and he often feared for his reason. As Charles Merriwell had been eccentric and unfathomable all his life while poor, thus he remained now that he was rich. Of late he had been seized by a conviction that he could not live long, and it was his desire to make a will that would give almost his entire wealth to his son. But before he made such a will, Mr. Merriwell decided to know just what sort of a young man his son had become. As he did not feel like leaving his mine and going East to investigate, he sent his confidential clerk, David Scott.

In his instructions to Scott, Charles Merriwell showed the peculiarities of his character. He provided the agent with plenty of money, and instructed him to thoroughly probe the inward character of the youth about which he was to acquire information. Scott was instructed to discover all of Frank's bad habits, and to determine if the lad could be led astray by evil influence, or in any other manner. The agent had carried out his instructions to his complete satisfaction, and he complimented the blushing boy on his integrity of character and sterling manhood.

Scott explained how he had pretended to ally himself with Frank's foes, and thus had heard the plots against the boy. He had sent Frank the warnings, and he had secured the aid of Plug Kirby to aid him in beating off Merriwell's ruffianly assailants.

"I scarcely think you will be troubled any more by your enemies," declared Scott. "I had a session with them last night, after the failure of their attempt on you, and I sent the varmints scurrying for tall timber in a hurry. I told them that I was your friend, and not your enemy, and that I would come up as a witness against them if you saw fit to prosecute them. Then they begged me to keep still, and agreed to let up on you for good and all if I wouldn't chirp. I made the galoots no promises."

For hours Frank and Scott sat and talked of Charles Merriwell, his health, his mine and his plans. And when the man departed, it was with a letter from Frank Merriwell to Charles Merriwell in his possession.

The next evening Frank received a call which surprised him greatly. What it was the next chapter will tell.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRIENDS OR FOES.

Thump—bang! thump—bang!

"Open this door!"

Thumpety—thump—bang! bang; bang!

"Open this door, or I will dake it brown—I mean I will break it down!"

Harry was excited.

"Hold on a moment, can't you?" cried the laughing voice of Frank from within the room.

Harry was pressing against the door with one hand, having rained the heavy blows upon it with the other hand, which was clinched in a most threatening manner.

The door flew open with a suddenness that precipitated Rattleton into the room with a headlong

rush and plunged him plump into the stomach of a young man who happened to be in the way.

"Ugh!"

"Wow!"

Bump! bump!—both went down, clasped in each other's arms.

Two other lads stood staring at the fallen ones. They were Frank Merriwell and Fred Flemming.

Tom Thornton was the unfortunate who stood in the way of Rattleton's headlong rush.

And Harry, quite unintentionally, had struck Thornton a smart blow with his clinched fist.

At that moment it did look as if the excited lad had rushed into the room with the premeditated purpose of hitting Tom.

"Here! here!—break away!" cried Merriwell, sharply.

"Not much!" panted Tom, in excitement and anger. "Think I'm going to let him go, so he can hit me again?"

"Catch hold, Flemming," ordered Frank—"catch hold of your friend, and we'll part them."

He grasped Rattleton by the collar as he spoke, but Fred made no move to pull Thornton away.

Seeing this, Merriwell obtained a firm hold on the collars of both Harry and Tom, and, with a surprising display of strength, wrenched them apart, yanked them to their feet, and held them at arm's length.

"Steady, now!" he cried, as they seemed to betray a desire to get at each other. "Quit it!"

"He struck me!" cried Thornton.

"It was antirely excidental—no, entirely accidental," declared Harry, flourishing his arms.

Tom dodged.

"Well, you act as if you are trying to bring about another accident," he said. "I know you hit me intentionally, and I'll make you pay for it, too!"

"Bah! you can't make me pay for anything!" flung back Harry, his anger aroused by Thornton's words.

"Do you think you can run around punching fellows in this way without getting it back? You'll find you are mistaken!"

"You were in my way when I came in."

"I didn't have time to get out of your way."

"Well, what's all this about anyway?" demanded Frank. "Are you fellows trying to settle some sort of a score?"

"It looks to me," said Flemming, stiffly, "as if Mr. Rattleton took advantage of our presence in this room to strike Thornton."

"Well, what are you chaps here for, anyway?" demanded Harry. "That is what I would like to know. We don't run in your class, and so——"

"Hold up, old man," interrupted Merriwell, promptly. "Mr. Flemming and Mr. Thornton called to see me about a personal matter."

"I thought so," declared Rattleton, "and I decided you would get the worst end of it, as they were two to your one—and the door was locked. If they are here to do you, count me into it. I'll take care of this fellow Thornton while you polish off Flemming."

"We did not come here to fight," said Fred, haughtily.

"Didn't?" exclaimed Harry, in surprise. "Then what sort of a game are you up to, for I know it is something crooked?"

Flemming tossed his head.

"Mr. Rattleton," he said, "your language is very offensive to me."

"Had to glear it—I mean glad to hear it," shot back Rattleton, rudely. "I didn't want you to misunderstand me."

"Mr. Merriwell," said Fred, turning to Frank, "I think we had better go. Our business was with you, and Mr. Rattleton seems determined to raise a quarrel with us. As you know, we did not come here to quarrel, and, regarding Mr. Rattleton as your friend, we will endeavor to overlook his behavior and insulting language."

"But we cannot forget it," added Thornton, giving Harry a fierce look. "It will be remembered."

"I am sure I don't want you to forget it," flung back Rattleton.

"Come, Tom," urged Flemming, "we will go. Good-day, Mr. Merriwell."

Frank released Thornton, who followed Flemming from the room, simply pausing at the door to say:

"Good-by, Mr. Merriwell."

"Good-by," smiled Frank.

And then, when the door had closed behind them, Frank dropped into a chair and laughed softly but heartily.

"Well, I fail to see anything sunny about it—I mean I fail to see anything funny about it," growled Rattleton, prancing fiercely up and down the room. "If you'll tell me where the laugh comes in, I'll snicker, just to keep you company."

"The whole thing is very funny," laughed Merriwell. "Why, you were eager to hammer Thornton, and the fellow was afraid you would, for all the bluff he put up."

"It would have given me great satisfaction to thump him," confessed Harry; "for I know it is exactly what he deserves. What were they up to, anyway? That's what puzzles me. I expected to find that they had done you up."

"Oh, nothing of the sort!"

"But they were up to some crooked game—I know it. I thought they had fastened the door, so that they could do the job without being interrupted."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Frank. "That explains why you looked as if you were literally thirsting for gore when you lunged into the room and grappled with Thornton."

"Did I hit him?"

"You had your fist clinched, and you may have given him a slight rap in your excitement."

"Well, I did not give him that rap intentionally; if I had, he'd found something entirely different. By jingoes! I may get the chance to show him the difference some time!"

"You'd better drop it, old man."

"Eh? Drop it?"

"That's what I said, Harry, and that is what I meant, my boy."

"But why? I don't think I understand you. Those fellows are your enemies, and that makes them mine."

"They have been my enemies, but we have had a peace conference."

"The dickens!"

"And we buried the hatchet."

"Well, I didn't suppose you could be fooled so easy! I knew they were up to some sort of a game—I knew it."

"Well, what sort of a game do you think it was?"

"They're trying to fool you—trying to make you think they are ready to bury the hatchet, while they are still waiting to hit you behind your back whenever they can. That's the kind of chaps they are. They can't fool me, if they can you. If they can lull you into carelessness till their opportunity comes, they will drive the knife into you, and sink it deep. Don't think I'm thisted—I mean don't think I'm twisted. I am dead certain of the sort of cattle I'm talking about. You will be playing right into their hands if you get the idea that they have let up on you in the least. When they get a good chance, you'll get it in the neck."

"Well, Harry, you may be right; but I have reasons to believe that Flemming is anxious to call a truce just at present. He made a serious mistake when he tried to enlist David Scott against me. Scott found out all of Flemming's plots and secured enough evidence of the fellow's rascality to cause his expulsion from Yale if it were made public."

"Well, it should be made public immediately."

"Oh, I don't know about that! Expulsion from college might mean the ruin of Flemming's future."

"If he keeps on, he'll do that, whether he is expelled or not."

"If he does it himself, I shall not have it on my conscience. If I were to bring about his expulsion, and he went to the dogs, I might blame myself for it, thinking he would have done differently had he remained here. Do you catch on?"

"I catch on that you are dead easy with your enemies till they force you to down them for good."

"But when they do compel me to down them——"

"I will acknowledge that you always do a good job," said Rattleton, with an approving grin.

"Mr. Scott believed that I should be severe with Flemming and Thornton," admitted Frank; "but I knew that Thornton was dragged into the business by Flemming, without having any real heart for what he was doing. If I were to expose Flemming, it would implicate Thornton, and that seemed too much of a retaliation. I thought the whole matter over carefully, and decided to give the fellows a chance. Then Mr. Scott went to them and nearly frightened the life out of them by saying he meant to expose them to the faculty. That brought them to their knees immediately."

Rattleton expressed his satisfaction by a vigorous pantomime.

"Finally," continued Frank, "when they had begged and promised, Mr. Scott agreed to let up on them if they would come to me, offer apologies, and give me their pledge to let me alone in the future."

"And that is how they happened to be here to-day?"

"Yes."

"Why was the door locked?"

"I locked it to prevent any of the fellows from dropping in on us while we were talking the matter over."

"Well, Jones told me he had seen those chaps come in here, and I decided they were looking for bother, so I made a hustle to get here. When I found the door locked, I was sure they had you in a corner, and so I threatened to break it down if it was not opened without delay."

"And, when it was opened, you came in like a raging lion."

"Well, I was ready for any scrim of a shortage—I mean any sort of a scrimmage."

"You showed your readiness," laughed Frank. "I have the word of those fellows that they will let me quite alone if I drop the past."

"I wouldn't believe either of them under oath!"

"You are a doubter anyway. We'll wait and see what will occur."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TALK OF A TOUR.

There was a rap on the door, which immediately popped open, and in bobbed a head, thatched with carrotty hair, upon which was perched a crumpled cap. A freckled, jolly face was wrinkled into a cheerful grin, and a voice that was made up of bubbles and hollows cried:

"Hello, chaps! I just looked in to see if you were doing well, as the cook said to the lobster, when she lifted the sauce-pan lid."

"Come in, Stubbs," invited Frank, promptly—"come in and make yourself as big a nuisance as possible."

"No need to tell me to do that," piped the lad at the door, as he bounced into the room. "I always make myself a nuisance wherever I am. It is my policy."

He was a little short-legged fellow, with a roly-poly body and twinkling eyes. Good nature bubbled out all over him. At a glance you could see he was the sort of chap who would try to be merry under almost any circumstances.

This was Bink Stubbs, a lad with whom Frank and Harry had recently become acquainted. Frank had picked him up because of his merry ways and quaint sayings of the wise and humorous order.

"Have you fellers got any smokers?" asked Bink, as he deposited himself on a chair.

"No, we haven't got any smokers," answered Harry. "And the last time you were here, Bruce Browning said you swiped a whole package of cigarettes from him."

Stubbs tried to look horrified, and then cried:

"Well, I'll be hanged! as the picture said when it found the cord was tied to it."

"You know neither of us smoke," said Merriwell.

"I know you pretend you do not, but I don't know that you are not bluffing when you say so."

"What's that? Do you mean to insinuate that I am lying? Why, I'll step on you, Stubbsie!"

"In that case my days are numbered, as the calendar said to the blotter."

There was a sound of voices outside the door, and then, with very little ceremony, three lads came filing into the room.

There were Browning, Diamond and Griswold.

"Get up, you little villain!" said Bruce, as he collared Stubbs and yanked him off the easy-chair. "Don't you know enough to let other folks have a chance to sit down, you lazy little rascal?"

And then, with a sigh of relief, Bruce deposited his corpulent form on the chair.

Stubbs bristled up, as if he meant to fight, then seemed to change his mind, and shook his head and remarked:

"Such things are bound to a cur, as the dog said when he looked at the tin can that was tied to his tail."

The boys were welcomed by Frank and Harry, and Merriwell said:

"I'm glad you fellows dropped in. I want to find out how many of you are going to take that bicycle trip across the continent during the summer vacation."

"Jeewhiskers!" grinned Danny Griswold. "Think of Bruce Browning, the champion lazy man at Yale, riding a bicycle across the continent. The exertion of riding across the campus would utterly prostrate him."

"Um!" grunted Bruce. "It's singular that small things annoy one worst."

"Oh, yes," returned Danny, promptly; "even a little mosquito bores me frightfully."

"Say, Griswold," piped Stubbs, "that's a bad habit to get into."

"What's a bad habit to get into?" demanded Danny, bristling up resentfully.

"That suit of clothes you have on," said Stubbs, whimsically. "It's a miserable fit."

"Well, you'll have a bad fit if I get after you!" exclaimed Griswold, hotly. "You're a base fraud and an impostor! You are trying to steal my thunder by reading the same comic papers that I do. If you keep this up you'll use up all of my original jokes."

"Oh, well," said Stubbs, "cough up a cigarette and I'll let you forgive me. I'm dying for a whiff."

Griswold hesitated, and then flung a package of cigarettes at Bink, who skillfully caught them, extracted one, closed the package, and tossed it back. A moment later the little chap had lighted the cigarette, and, as he deposited himself at full length on a tiger-skin rug, he puffed out a great whiff of smoke, and murmured:

"Now I have something to blow about, as the cyclone said when it lifted a house and barn into the next State."

"Speaking about clothes," said Browning, languidly, "did you see Goldstein, the tailor, to-day, Rattleton?"

"Yes, I saw him," nodded Harry.

"And did you tell him I said I would settle that little bill?"

"Sure."

"That's kind of you. Did he seem convinced?"

"He said he was."

"Was what?"

"Convinced that you lied."

This provoked a laugh. When the laughing had ceased, Griswold sagely observed:

"It is remarkable that man is the only animal that can lie standing up."

"Say, you chaps," called Frank, "drop this sort of chatter, and answer my question. How many of you are in for spending the summer vacation in a bicycle trip across the continent?"

"You'll have to excuse me," said Griswold, as he followed Stubbs' example and lighted a cigarette. "I'm going down to Bar Harbor, and play tennis on my vacation."

"I can't endure tennis," drawled Browning.

"I should say not. Too much exertion for you."

"It is not that. I don't like to be around where others are playing it."

"Don't? Why not?"

"Because it is so noisy."

"Noisy? Christmas! How do you make that out?"

"Why, you can't play it without a racket," said Browning.

Griswold staggered and clutched at his heart.

"What papers have you been reading?" he gasped.

Diamond spoke up for the first time:

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Merriwell—I'll go on this bicycle trip across the continent, if I can secure my mother's consent?"

"Will you?" cried Frank, eagerly. "Then see her as soon as possible. I couldn't ask for a better fellow than you. Harry thinks he can go, and that makes three of us. We'll do the trick, even if we can't get another fellow. Is it agreed?"

"It is agreed if I can get my mother to agree to it," assured Jack.

"Well, let's talk about another matter," said Bruce. "The tournament at Madison Square Garden is right upon us. Are you on for anything, Merriwell?"

"Yes," answered Frank, "I shall take part in several contests."

"How about the mile run?" questioned Diamond.

"I believe Yates is in for that," said Merriwell.

"That's something I want to speak to you about," drawled Bruce.

Frank was rather surprised, as Browning had taken very little interest in athletics of late. During his early days at Yale, Bruce had been a pusher in athletic matters, being at that time an athlete himself, as he kept himself in form and held back the threatening development of flesh by the severest sort of training.

But Bruce could not continue to resist the temptations of his appetite, and it became more and more difficult for him to keep in trim. As long as he was a freshman he had done so, but when he became a sophomore he gradually abandoned the struggle.

Still he had remained active as a leader, and had been known at one time as "the King of the Sophomores." His final effort at training had been when he put himself in condition to meet Merriwell in a four-round hard-glove contest.

The bout had been pronounced a draw, but Browning afterward acknowledged that he must have been knocked out had it continued to a finish.

From that time Browning's interest in athletic matters waned.

He lost ambition in that line, and he soon became so overburdened with flesh that nothing save a question of life or death could have induced him to go into training.

It was not so very long before Bruce was known as the champion lazy man at Yale. All that he seemed to care about was to eat, drink, smoke and loaf. He seldom was known to "grind," and his attempts at "skinning" were pitiable failures.

Then he was dropped a class, and, as he still stuck to Yale, he found himself arrayed with Merriwell and the fellows whom he at one time had regarded as enemies.

In that class Merriwell was regarded as a leader in athletic matters, and Bruce seldom mentioned anything of the kind. Now, however, to Merriwell's surprise, he displayed sudden interest in the great intercollegiate tournament to be held in Madison Square Garden, New York, directly at the close of the spring terms.

In the various contests Yale was to be represented by her best men. There had been some uncertainty concerning the one who would wear Yale's colors in the mile run, but the belief grew that Duncan Yates, a junior, would be the one finally settled on by the committee in charge of the matter.

"Why don't you go into that race, Browning, old sylph?" grinned Danny Griswold. "You would astonish the public."

"Some time I'll sit on you, runtie," growled Bruce.

Stubbs remarked:

"That will settle it, as the sugar observed when the egg dropped into the coffee."

Rattleton threw a slipper at Bink, who grunted as it struck him in the ribs, but serenely continued to smoke, his mottled face wrinkled into a quaint grimace.

"What is it that you want to say about the mile race, Browning?" asked Frank, his curiosity aroused.

"I want to say that I do not believe Yates is the proper man to represent Old Eli."

"He is fast, and he has a record."

"It's no use to talk about his record."

"Why not?"

"Orton, of U. P., lays over him, and this will be a case of Yale against the field. Better men than

Orton may show up."

"Yates may break his own record."

"That word 'may' is all right, but it can be applied both ways. He may not."

"There's Van Tassle," said Diamond. "He claims to be a record-breaker."

"A record-breaker!" sniffed Griswold. "Why, that fellow couldn't break an egg!"

"That's right," nodded Rattleton. "He breaks records with his mouth. Don't talk about him."

"Well, there are others," laughed Frank.

"Name a few of them," invited Browning, with more animation than he had displayed for some time.

"There's Hickson."

"He's stiff in the joints, as you know."

"Walter Gordan."

"He's no stayer. That fellow can run, but he has not the sand to make himself a winner."

"He thinks himself the biggest thing on ice," said Rattleton.

"By the way," broke in Griswold, "what is the biggest thing on ice?"

"The profit," promptly answered Stubbs, and then he made a scramble to get out of Griswold's way.

"It's no use, I can't shine when that chap is around!" exclaimed Danny, with attempted seriousness. "He has an answer for all my conundrums."

"That makes me think of one for you," piped Bink, who was now perched on the back of a high chair, like a monkey. "Why is a duel a quick affair?"

"Answer it yourself. I'll never tell."

"Well, a duel is a quick affair because it takes only two seconds to arrange it."

"There won't be a duel in this case," grunted Browning; "but there'll be a cold-blooded murder if you kids keep on. I'll assassinate you both!"

Frank laughed.

"Oh, let them go it, Bruce," he said. "It seems to amuse them, and it doesn't harm anybody else."

"I think Browning is right about Yates," declared Diamond. "He is not the proper man to represent Yale in that race."

"Whom would you suggest?" asked Frank.

"Frank Merriwell, by all means."

"Now that is folly!" said Merriwell, seriously.

"I fail to see why it is folly," cried Browning. "You are the man I have had in my mind all along."

"But I have no record."

"To the winds with your records! What we want is a man who can run. He'll make a record."

"Why do you think I can run?"

"I have seen you run, and I have heard the fellows tell about your speed. That is enough in your case."

Frank shook his head.

"It is not enough," he contradicted. "I know I have a record as a base runner in a ball game, but the best base runners are not always able to make good showings in races. Besides that, base running is dash work, and this is a case of running a mile. There is a vast difference."

"That's all right," spluttered Harry, quickly. "You can mun a rile—I mean run a mile with the best of 'em. I've seen you on a long run."

"When was that?"

"When we had that turkey chase. You led us all, and it didn't bother you a bit. Then, after you made the run out into the country and back, Pierson got after you before you could get to our rooms. You ran away from him, and held on to the turkey. That settled in Pierson's mind that you could hustle along all right, and it had something to do with his giving you a place for a trial on the ball team."

"That is true," Frank was forced to confess.

"Have you ever been in any races?" asked Diamond.

"Oh, I took part in some races when I was at Fardale Academy."

"What did you do in them?"

"I believe I won, but you must remember that I had no such rivals to go against as will be found at the tournament."

"And you were in no such condition as you are now. Is that right?"

Frank was forced to confess that it was. Then Browning tried to pin Frank down and make him answer the question whether he did not have confidence enough in himself to believe he could race Duncan Yates for a mile.

"Of course I could race him," smiled Frank, "but the matter of winning is another question."

"Well, I believe you are the man to run for Yale in that race," said Browning; "and I am going to use my influence to see that you, and not Yates, are entered. That is settled, and it is no use for you to make any objections."

CHAPTER XXX.

A HOT RUN.

Soon it became evident that Bruce Browning had not lost his old-time push entirely. When there was something to arouse him, he could bestir himself and get to work in a marvelous manner, as long as it was not necessary for him to again go into training.

Browning knew Paul Pierson, who was one of the committee of arrangements for the coming tournament, and he knew that Pierson was well aware of Frank Merriwell's general ability. Bruce had heard Pierson express a belief that Merriwell was one of the persons who, by sheer determination and sand, as well as ability, was bound to win in almost everything he attempted.

Bruce went to Pierson immediately after leaving Merriwell's room. Pierson was one of the sort who seldom said much, and Browning left him without knowing whether he had made an impression or not.

Late that afternoon, however, Pierson accidentally met Frank, who was crossing the campus.

"I say, Merriwell," said Paul, in his abrupt manner, "can you run?"

"Some," answered Frank, sententiously.

"Hum!" grunted Pierson.

Then he looked Frank all over, as if he had never seen him before and was taking his physical measure.

"You keep yourself in the very best condition all the time, I see," he finally observed.

"Well I seldom do anything to abuse myself."

"Are you in training for a race?"

"Not exactly."

"How long would it take for you to put yourself in condition?"

"Possibly a week."

"What are you good for—a short dash, or a long run?"

"I think I can do either fairly well."

"Fairly well does not go at Yale, as you know, Merriwell. You must do things exceptionally well. You are altogether too modest. If something had not brought you out, nobody could have known you could do anything at all. You have been pushed in various ways by others, but you fail to push yourself."

"Oh, I do not go about blowing my own horn," said Frank, smiling.

"You will find you'll have to blow your own horn when you go into business, or my brother is a liar. He keeps hammering at me that the man who does not blow his horn is the fellow who gets left. To a large extent, it is that way here at Yale. The fellow who keeps still and sits back gets left. That's my sermon. I'm not going to say any more now. Get into training for a long run. I'll come round at nine this evening and go you a sprint of a mile or two, just to see how you show up."

That was all. Pierson turned and sauntered away, without another word.

Frank whistled softly, and smiled.

"This is Browning's work," he muttered. "Pierson takes things for granted. How does he know I will take any part in a race? He does not ask if I will, but he tells me to go to work and get into shape. He is coming round to-night to see how I show up. All right."

At ten minutes of nine that evening, Paul Pierson rapped on the door of Merriwell's room, and was invited to walk in. He was in a rig for running, and he immediately said:

"Come, come! get out of those duds, Merriwell. You are to run with me to-night."

"How far?"

"From one to five miles, as I take a fancy."

"Oh, well, I won't change my clothes for a little thing like that," said Frank, carelessly.

"You'd better," declared Paul. "I'm going to give you a hustle, and you'll find you can keep up better if you are in a suitable rig."

"I'll take the chances of keeping just as I am."

Pierson's teeth came together with a click. He did not like that, although he tried not to show it.

"The fellow thinks he can outrun me on a long pull, as he happened to do so for a short distance once on a time," he thought. "I'll see if I can fool him."

Pierson considered himself an excellent long-distance runner, although he seldom took part in races, realizing that, good though he was, there were still better men.

Frank had on a loose thin shirt, and a light-weight suit of clothes. He caught up a cap, and announced that he was ready to go with Paul.

They went out, and soon were crossing the campus. Having arrived at a point quite outside the college grounds, Paul paused and said:

"We will start from here and make a run out into the country. I will set the pace going out, but when we turn to come back, it will be a case of the best man gets home first. The termination of the run will be your room."

"That is satisfactory," nodded Frank.

Far away a band of jolly students were singing "Stars of the Summer Night," their melodious voices making sweet music beneath the great elms. The soft breath of June came across the campus, seeming to gently bear the words of the beautiful song to their ears.

"Are you ready?" asked Pierson, sharply.

"All ready."

"Then here we go."

They were off, shoulder to shoulder.

Although Frank had not seemed to prepare for the run, he had put on his running shoes, feeling that he might absolutely need them.

Along the streets of New Haven they went, attracting but little attention, as it was not an uncommon sight at that season to see some of the college lads taking a night run in that manner.

They passed a group of fellows who were standing beneath a street light near a corner.

"Here!" softly exclaimed one of the group; "who are these chaps?"

The entire party turned to take a look at the runners.

"It's Pierson——"

"And Merriwell!"

"What did I tell you, Yates!" exclaimed Fred Flemming, a ring of satisfaction in his voice.

"Well, may I be kicked!" growled Duncan Yates, as he started after the two lads, who had passed and were scudding along the street at a steady trot.

"Flem seldom makes a mistake," murmured Tom Thornton.

"But Merriwell is not in his rig," said Andy Emery, the fourth one of the group.

"That doesn't make any difference," declared Flemming. "He is taking a run with Pierson, and that proves what I told Yates. You all know how that chap undermined me on the crew. I don't say that he can't row, mind you—I do not claim that I could have done any better than he did; but I do claim that he is full of such sneaking underhand tricks, and I knew he was trying for something when I saw him stop Pierson on the campus to-day."

Yates was silent, staring along the street, down which the two runners had disappeared.

"Come, old man!" cried Flemming, slapping Yates on the back, "let's go into Morey's and sit down, where we can have a drink and talk this matter over."

Duncan shook his head.

"I won't go in there," he said.

"Why not?"

"I am in training, you know, and somebody would see me drinking there. That would kick up some talk."

"Well, will you go anywhere?"

"Yes, I'll go somewhere that we can sit down in a quiet room, where there is no chance that fellows who know me will drop in. I feel just like having something."

"I know the very place," declared Flemming. "Come on."

Then the quartet moved away, Flemming leading.

In the meantime Merriwell and Pierson had continued on their way. As had been agreed, Pierson set the pace. At first he ran along at a gentle trot, but by the time the outskirts of New Haven were reached he had begun to increase his speed.

"Now," he thought, "I'll put Merriwell to the test, and I do not fancy he will be in condition to make a very hot run on the return."

Faster and faster went Paul, and still the lad at his side kept there with apparent ease. With their clinched hands held close to their breasts and their heads thrown back, they ran on and on.

There was a slice of a moon in the western sky, shedding a thin white light over the world. From far to the south came the shrill whistle of a locomotive, cutting through the air like a keen knife.

The road which Pierson had selected was one over which there was considerable travel, and it was in very fair condition.

Without appearing to do so, Paul slyly kept watch of Merriwell, wishing to see just how Frank stood the strain. He was forced to acknowledge that, for a time at least, Merriwell was standing it very well.

"Oh, he is endeavoring to show me how easy he can do it!" mentally exclaimed Paul. "Wait—wait a bit! I think I will give him a hot push for a bit."

Faster and faster ran Pierson, and soon he was rather gratified to hear Frank beginning to breathe heavily. Yes, although Paul had hoped that Merriwell would show up well, he did feel a momentary sense of satisfaction when it seemed that he was making the pace a hot one for his companion.

Then Frank began to lag. He did not fall far behind Paul, and still he seemed unable to keep his place at Pierson's side.

"I won't do a thing to him coming back!" decided Paul. "Browning was dead wrong. The fellow is capable of short dashes, but he is not the man for a long run. I am rather sorry."

At last, he decided that they had gone far enough into the country, and so he turned about, without stopping, calling to Frank:

"Now for the hustle into town, and let's see what you are made of, my boy. I am going to run away from you as if you were standing still."

"I wouldn't do that!" flung back Merriwell, as he wheeled about.

Somehow it seemed to Paul that there was a touch of sarcasm in the way Frank uttered the words. That aroused the committeeman still more, and he retorted:

"No, you wouldn't do it, because you couldn't; but I am going to."

"All right," laughed Frank. "I don't suppose there is any danger that somebody will steal me for my beauty if you leave me alone out here in the country. Go ahead and run away from me."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

Then Pierson did run. He skimmed over the ground in a wonderful manner, but the sound of running feet clung close behind him, and, when he glanced over his shoulder, Merriwell was still there.

"Hanged if he doesn't hold on well!" mentally exclaimed Paul.

Then, as he glanced around, it began to seem that Merriwell was running with still greater ease than he had at any previous time. Somehow it appeared as if he was keeping close behind Pierson without any particular effort.

"You're doing well," Paul finally flung over his shoulder. "Can you keep it up?"

"I think so," was the half-laughing answer. "I am holding myself in so that I can make an attempt to follow you a short distance when you get ready to run away from me."

"Great smoke!" thought Paul. "Is he guying me? or does he fancy I have not been doing my best?"

After a little, he confessed:

"I am beginning to think that won't be an easy trick, Merriwell. You will not be far behind when we reach your room."

At this, Frank suddenly came up beside Paul.

"Judging by the way you talk, you are somewhat out of wind," he said.

"Not at all," declared Pierson.

"Then I presume you are in condition for a little dash?"

"Oh, of course! But you may beat yourself out if you crowd yourself too hard."

"Think so?"

"Sure. Better not."

"Oh, I think I'll chance it. Come on, old man, let's tear up some dust."

Then Frank spurred.

Pierson set his teeth and made a desperate effort to keep up, but, despite his determination not to fall behind, he found that Merriwell was steadily and surely drawing away.

"Come on," called Frank, in a rather tantalizing manner. "It can't be that you are going to let me run away from you?"

Paul did not answer.

"What's the matter?" called Frank again. "Are you ill?"

Still no answer.

"Well, you are not sociable at all," laughed the lad in advance, tauntingly. "I don't seem to like your company, and so I think I will move along. Good-by."

With that, Pierson could see that the tantalizing fellow actually made an increase of speed.

"Confound him!" grated Paul. "I believe he was fooling me all along when he seemed to be having a hard time to keep up. All that panting and heavy breathing was put on."

It was decidedly humiliating to be "jollied" in such a manner; but Paul found he could not hold his own with Frank, and he finally gave up the struggle. Still he continued to run on, thinking that the lad ahead would use up his wind by such a burst of speed, and believing there was a possibility of overtaking Merriwell before South Middle was reached.

This did not happen, however, and when Paul burst into Frank's room, he found Rattleton there, listening to a funny story that Merriwell was telling.

And Merriwell? He had his feet resting comfortably on the top of a table, while he lay back in an easy-chair, looking remarkably cool, as if he had not lately made a run of several miles.

More than that, he had changed his clothes, as the suit he had on was not the same he had worn during the run!

Paul staggered in, and dropped limply on the couch, staring at Frank, as if he saw a ghost.

"Look—here—Merriwell," he panted, "what—are—you—made—of? Are—you—run—by—steam?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Frank. "I beg your pardon for leaving you in such a manner, but you know you had become so very unsociable that I had to do—"

Pierson made a weak gesture, and interrupted with:

"Don't apologize for that—it was the agreement that one should run away from the other, if possible, on the way back. You had a right to do it."

"What is all this about?" asked Rattleton, in a mystified manner. "What have you fellows been doing?"

"Don't you know?" cried Paul, amazed.

"No, I don't know," declared Rattleton. "Frank walked into the room a short time ago, went into his bedroom, took a sponge bath and changed his clothes, and we have been telling stories since then."

"Took a sponge bath?" shouted Pierson, popping bolt upright. "Jerusalem. You talk as if he had been here half an hour! I will admit that this beats anything I ever experienced!"

Then he flopped down on the couch again, as if utterly overcome.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN INCENTIVE TO WIN.

Paul Pierson had made a discovery that night, and, before he left, he told Frank Merriwell to put himself into condition to enter one of the races at the Madison Square Garden tournament in New York.

"You seem to be in pretty good condition now," he said, with a grim smile; "but you know whether you can improve your condition or not. If you can, do it, for you are liable to be pitted against men who will give you a decidedly hotter time than you have ever struck."

"All right," said Frank, quietly. "You'll find that I shall be in shape, and I'll do my best to be a credit to Old Yale."

"You have been a credit to Yale ever since the day you entered college," said Pierson, sincerely. "To-night has settled one thing in my mind. I believe you are a wonder in almost anything in the way of athletics."

"Oh, not a wonder!" said Frank. "But you can be sure that I am bound to do my level best in anything I attempt."

"I know it! I am not sure I'll be able to get you on, but I am going to try to run you into the one-mile race. We have some men for the shorter dashes, but do not seem to have but one man besides yourself who can be considered for the mile run. He has been in training for some time, and the committee had nearly decided on him. Now I am satisfied that you are the better man, but I'll have to satisfy the others."

"I want you to bear witness that I have not worked to fill the place of any other fellow."

"It might be better for Yale if you would work for such things," growled Pierson. "You will not find other fellows holding back. If any chap is capable of filling your place at anything, you may be sure he will fill it, and he'll never stop to consider your feelings about the matter."

"That is rust jite—I mean just right!" cried Rattleton, approvingly.

"Well, I am going to my rooms and take a rub down," said Paul. "Good-night, fellows."

"Good-night, Mr. Pierson."

When the door had closed behind Paul, Rattleton executed a grotesque dance on the carpet.

"Whoop!" he softly cried. "Didn't I knock him silly when I pretended not to know anything about the run this evening! Oh, wheejiz—er, jeewhiz! he nearly fainted when I told him you calmly walked into the room, took a sponge bath, put on another suit, and then we had been telling stories."

"You rascal!" cried Frank, laughing and giving Harry a shake. "That was all your own work. I didn't know you were thinking of running such a bluff on him."

"Never thought of it myself till he came in," chuckled Harry. "Between us we managed to get you out of your other clothes, give you a quick rub, and jump you into a fresh suit before Pierson showed up."

"It has been a very enjoyable evening," smiled Frank, as he again deposited himself on the easy-chair. "If I had planned to have sport with Pierson, I could not have worked it better. You should have heard me panting and puffing along behind him on our way out! You should have heard him bidding me good-by when we started to come back! And then you should have heard me asking him if he was ill when I got ready to leave him!"

Harry laughed in the heartiest manner, as his imagination supplied the picture.

"It is too good!" he cried. "And you will go into the mile run sure! Browning caused Pierson to tackle you."

"It seems that I have done pretty well in athletic matters this spring," said Frank, "and I was rather indifferent concerning the matter of taking any prominent part in the tournament at Madison Square. However, if I can do anything to uphold the standard of Old Eli, I want to do my best."

"Frank, if you run in that race, you will win," came soberly from Harry's lips. "I shall stake every dollar I can rake on you. If you do win, I'll have enough cash to take me through the summer vacation we have planned."

The door had been softly opened, and the most of Rattleton's speech was overheard by a third person, who now exclaimed:

"And I'm going to bank my cash on you, Merriwell! If you win, I'll—I'll—why, hang me! I'll make that trip across the continent with you!"

It was Bruce Browning, who advanced into the room.

"Are you in earnest about that, Bruce?" asked Frank.

"You bet I am in earnest!" was the assurance.

"You will try to pump a bicycle from New York to San Francisco?"

"Try it! Confound it! I tell you I'll do it if you win the mile run for Old Yale!"

"Then," said Frank, "I have a double object to work for, and I am going to win if it is in my body to do so!"

Rattleton was astonished to see Browning show so much animation.

"Why, you actually appear like your old self!" he exclaimed.

Bruce sat down.

"Tell me about it," he invited, speaking to Frank. "Some of the fellows said they saw you and Pierson chasing yourselves, and I caught what Rattleton was saying just as I came in."

Frank told Bruce all about the night run, and a lazy smile spread over the fat lad's round face as he listened.

"That's one on Pierson!" he exclaimed. "He thinks he is unequalled when it comes to a long-distance run, and I'll wager something that you have fixed him so he will fight to get you into that race. I can see him bidding you farewell! Ha! ha! ha! And then I can see him when you took your turn! Ha! ha! ha!"

Bruce laughed in a hearty manner, and, for some time they talked over the events of the evening.

"What sort of a fellow is Yates?" asked Frank. "I've never met him to have a talk with him."

"Oh, he isn't half bad," answered Bruce, in a somewhat noncommittal manner.

"I presume he will feel injured if I am chosen to run, instead of him?"

"What if he does? That's none of your business."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RUN TO THE STATION.

The final ball game of the series between Harvard and Yale was to take place at Springfield. The day of the game arrived, and there was an exodus from Yale.

There was a rush for the last train by which the college lads could reach Springfield in time to witness the whole of the game.

On their way to the station, Frank and Harry fell in with Jack Diamond and Danny Griswold.

"We've got to hurry," said Diamond, glancing at his watch. "There is no time to waste if we want to catch the train."

They soon overtook Flemming, Emery and Yates. These fellows were in the company of several other lads, among whom were two of the committee of arrangements for the tournament.

"You fellows seem to be in a great rush," one of the party called to Frank and his friends.

"You had better rush a little, if you want to catch the train," flung back Griswold.

"Ah!" said Andy Emery, with an undisguised sneer; "it's Merriwell and his trainers. They are putting him in condition to beat the field in that race he expects to enter."

"Go him to the station, Yates!" exclaimed one of the lads accompanying Duncan. "Just show him he doesn't know how to run."

"Yah!" flung back Griswold, quick as a flash. "Yates knows better than to try that. Where would he be when Merriwell reached the station?"

"Buying his ticket inside," sneered Emery, in return.

That aroused Jack Diamond, who flushed hotly and turned on Andy.

"I'll go you ten even that Merriwell beats Yates to the station platform," he flashed, producing a roll of bills. "This is business! Take me if you have the nerve!"

"Oh, I'll take you!" cried Emery; "and, when the business is over, I'll take your money, too."

He promptly produced a ten-dollar bill, and the money was quickly thrust into the hands of a stakeholder, who was chosen by mutual agreement.

"It strikes me you men are pretty swift," said Yates, in a manner that showed his disapproval. "How do you know I will run?"

"Sh!" warned Flemming. "You'll have to run now, or they'll say you were afraid to go against Merriwell."

It was plain that Yates did not feel at all pleased by the situation, but he said:

"If I must run, I will, and I'll beat the fellow, but I don't care about getting into a sweat just now."

"Never mind that," said Emery, in Yates' ear. "If you beat Merriwell to the station, it is pretty sure that you spoil his show for getting into the mile run. This is your chance to do that little job, so don't let it slip."

Frank had said very little. It was not easy to tell if he felt satisfied or displeased over the situation.

The party turned a corner, and came in view of the station.

"Here is a good starting point," said Emery. "Does it satisfy you, Diamond?"

"Perfectly," bowed Jack.

"Then that's all right. Are you going to run, fellows?"

"I leave that entirely to Mr. Yates," said Frank, quietly.

"Oh, I'll go you—and I'll do you!" exclaimed Yates, as he tore off both coat and vest and flung them at Flemming, who caught them.

That started Rattleton, who excitedly cried:

"I'll tet you ben dollars—I mean I'll bet you ten dollars you don't do it!"

Yates paid no attention to this, but Flemming said:

"I'll have to go you, Rattleton. Put up the tenner."

The money was quickly posted, and then the rivals stood side by side, with their coats and vests removed, ready for the word.

Merriwell seemed quiet and indifferent, as if it were an event of no particular moment; while on Yates' face there was a look that plainly showed he was determined to settle all dispute by winning the dash to the station.

One of the committee had been chosen to give the word, and he stepped out, sharply calling:

"Ready!"

The lads leaned forward over the scratch in the dirt, which had been drawn by somebody's heel.

"Go!"

Away shot the rivals like leaping fawns. They seemed like two foxes, and the crowd of lads who broke away in pursuit resembled a pack of hounds.

It was a hot dash, and, for some time, the boys were running side by side, neither seeming to have an advantage.

"Wait a bit," panted Emery, at Diamond's side; "you'll soon see Yates spurt and leave Merriwell."

"What do you think Merriwell will be doing while Yates is spurting?" asked Jack, sarcastically.

"He'll seem to be standing still."

"Will he? Wait and see!"

The rivals were drawing near the station, and still it seemed that they were keeping side by side.

"Now they are spurting!"

Yes, they were spurting for the finish, but, to the amazement of Yates' friends, a single bound had seemed to carry Frank Merriwell two yards in advance of the other runner, and this advantage Merriwell maintained.

In another moment the station would be reached, and the race must end. Seeing this, Andy Emery was bitterly grinding out an exclamation of rage and disgust.

Suddenly Yates seemed to trip and fall heavily. He tried to spring up, but seemed to be hurt, and he was struggling to rise when Flemming reached the spot and lifted him to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" asked several, as they gathered around Duncan.

"Not much," he answered, rather thickly; "but I lost the dash by that fall."

"Rats!" muttered Harry Rattleton. "He had lost it before he fell."

"I was ready to make the final spurt, which would have carried me ahead of Merriwell at the

finish," declared Yates.

"Oh, it is a case of beastly luck!" growled Andy Emery. "It is the way everything turns in Merriwell's favor. He never wins except it is by cold luck."

"Oh, come off!" chirped Danny Griswold. "You're sore, that's all ails you!"

"Shut up, or I'll wring your neck!"

"You can't catch me, you know," taunted the little fellow, as he skipped out of reach.

On the station platform Merriwell was quietly waiting the arrival of the others, fanning himself with his handkerchief.

It happened that Bruce Browning was at the station, and he had seen the race between the rivals. In his ponderous manner, he hurried to congratulate Frank.

"Yates was a fool to try it!" declared Bruce, his round face seeming to expand into one broad grin. "He might have known what would happen. I see Crockett and Gibbs, two of the committee, with the fellows. They witnessed the whole business, and it must have settled matters in their minds."

"I wish Yates had not fallen," said Frank, with regret.

"He did not fall accidentally, and you can bet your greasy coin on that! It was plain enough."

"Then you think—just what?"

"That he saw he was beaten, and fell so that he might make a claim that you outran him by accident."

"I had the lead."

"Yes, and he could not have recovered and overtaken you in a week! But that makes no difference. Allee samee, I rather fancy Yates will not fool anybody very much."

The knot of fellows now approached the station, where there was a great throng of Yale lads who had seen the race.

Yates was very pale, but there was a burning light in his eyes. He advanced straight to Frank, and distinctly said:

"Mr. Merriwell, you beat me this time through an accident; but I will run you again, and I'll win."

Frank bowed with the utmost courtesy.

"Mr. Yates," he said, "you will find me willing and ready to run with you any time."

"Whoopee!" squealed Danny Griswold, turning a handspring. "That's business straight from headquarters!"

"Here comes the train!" was the cry.

Then there was a scramble for tickets and for seats on the train.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ENEMIES AT WORK.

It happened that Merriwell and his friends entered the smoker. They found Bink Stubbs curled up in a corner, puffing away at a cigarette.

"You seem to be well fixed, Stubbs," said Frank.

And the little fellow cheerfully returned:

"Oh, I've got a snap, as the bear said when he stepped into the steel trap."

Then room was made for a jolly little party in the corner, and all the fellows who smoked lighted up cigarettes or cigars.

"I've got ten more to put on the game to-day," cried Rattleton, gleefully. "And I took it out of Flemming. That is what pleases me the most."

Jack Diamond smiled.

"It pleases me to say that I pulled a sawbuck out of Emery," he said. "He squirmed a little, but it was too late to squeal."

"We'll all come back with our clothes stuffed with money," declared Browning. "Yale is sure to win to-day, and that will put lots of fellows on their feet. Some of the boys have soaked everything they could rake together to get money to put on the game, for Heffner's arm is in great form, and he says he will make monkeys of the Harvard Willies."

"Speaking about hocking things," said Bandy Robinson, "I let my unc. have a dozen white shirts, among other things. If Yale doesn't win, I won't have a shirt to my name."

"That's nothing," declared Ben Halliday, nonchalantly, as he blew out a big whiff of smoke. "I've soaked my entire wardrobe, save what I have on my back. But Willis Paulding did the slickest trick to raise the wind."

"Paulding?" cried Diamond. "I'd never dreamed he could do anything very smooth."

"He did, just the same. Last year, when Merry pitched the deciding game of the series, Paulding felt sure Harvard would win, and he stuck on 'em every last rag of money he could rake and scrape. Well, Yale won, and Willis was busted. He was forced to tell his old man the whole truth before he could get money enough to let him out of New Haven for the summer. More than that, the old man has taken precautions to prevent Willis from having any money to waste in betting this year. He has all of Willis' bills sent to him to settle, and keeps his son horribly short of filthy. Just as hard, Willis found out that the governor had told his tailor to make the boy all the clothes he wanted. That was enough. Willis ordered six suits at fifty dollars each, and he soaked every one of them at ten each as soon as he got them. So you see Paulding is provided with plenty of coin for this little racket, and he says he is going to put every red he has on Old Yale. Last year cured him of betting against his own colors."

"If Willis thought of that scheme himself, he has more brains in his head than I fancied," smiled Diamond.

"Tell you how I made a strike," chirped Danny Griswold. "You know I've been writing a few things and giving them away to the papers. Well, the governor heard of it, and he decided I was making a fool of myself, so he sat down and fired a shot at me. He called my attention to the fact that Johnson said the man who writes for anything but money is a fool. This is the way I answered: 'Dear Gov: I observe you say some chap by the name of Johnson says the man who writes for anything but money is a fool. I quite agree with Mr. Johnson. Please send me one hundred dollars.' That must have hit the old boy about right, for he sent me fifty."

Danny ended with a gleeful chuckle, and the listening lads laughed.

"That's pretty good—for you," nodded Bink Stubbs; "but speaking about clothes reminds me that I had a little lunch in a restaurant last evening, and I found a button in the salad. I called the waiter's attention to it, and he calmly said, 'That's all right, sir; it's part of the dressing.'"

"Now he has broken loose!" cried Danny Griswold. "There is no telling what sort of a rusty old gag he'll try to spring. If we only had a few stale eggs for him!"

Bink grinned, as he observed:

"There's nothing like poached eggs, as the nigger said when he robbed the hencoop."

Diamond proposed a song, and soon the boys were at it. When they had finished one song, Browning soberly observed:

"It seems to me that there is one song which would be particularly appropriate for this season when all of us are soaking something in order to raise the wind."

"What is it?" shouted several voices.

"Solomon Levi."

In another moment the merry lads were shouting:

"My name is Solomon Levi, my store's on Salem Street;
That's where you buy your coats and vests and everything that's neat.
I've second-handed ulsterettes, and everything that's fine,
For all the boys they trade with me at a hundred and forty-nine.

CHORUS: "Oh, Solomon Levi! tra, la, la, la!
Poor Sheeny Levi! tra, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

"And if a bummer comes along to my store on Salem Street
And tries to hang me up for coats and vests so very neat,
I kick that bummer right out of my store, and on him sets my pup,
For I won't sell clothing to any man who tries to hang me up."

Thus the rollicking lads spent the time as the train rolled along bearing them to witness the great ball game of the season with Harvard.

Again and again Frank Merriwell's friends expressed regret because his hand, on which there had been a felon, prevented him from taking part in the game. They could not forget that he had pitched the deciding game between Yale and Harvard the previous year, and had won it.

Frank had also done some good work during the present season, and sporting papers all over the country had declared that he was one of the very best college "twirlers."

This, however, was Hugh Heffner's last year at Yale, and, without doubt, the coming game was the last he would ever pitch for "Old Eli."

Until Merriwell appeared, Heffner had been Yale's mainstay in the box, and his admirers declared that it was pretty sure that a long time would elapse before he would have a worthy successor.

But Heffner was overworked, and he came near throwing his arm out. As it was, he strained his arm so that he was utterly unable to pitch at all.

Then it was that it was found necessary to find somebody to assist the "change pitcher," Dad Hicks, in his work.

Hicks was good for four or five innings, but he was unable to keep up the strain through an entire game.

Paul Pierson, captain and manager of the Yale nine, had seen Merriwell do some pitching for the freshmen, and he resolved to give Frank a trial.

Pierson's judgment was not at fault, and Merriwell quickly proved that he was worthy to become Heffner's successor.

Of course there was much regret because Frank could not be on the bench, at least, ready to go into the game if needed; but all seemed to feel confident that Heffner would make his last game for Yale a hot one. He had done some marvelous work, and, as he declared himself in prime condition, there was no reason why he should not hold Harvard down on this occasion.

While Merriwell was surrounded by friends in the smoker, and the boys were having a decidedly jolly time, Duncan Yates was getting into a decidedly ugly mood in the adjoining car.

When Yates thought of his failure to beat his rival in the dash to the station he ground his teeth and muttered bitter curses.

And he was egged on by Fred Flemming and Andy Emery. Tom Thornton had joined the group, but he said very little; and, when he found an opportunity, he whispered in Flemming's ear:

"Better go slow. Remember the promise we gave Merriwell. If he finds out we are working against him, it will go hard with us."

"He won't find it out. I hate him too much to keep still if I can arouse another fellow against him. Give me your flask. Yates has killed all I have in mine."

Thornton took a whiskey flask from his pocket, and slipped it into Flemming's hand. Then he left, for he did not wish Merriwell's friends to see him in such company.

Flemming and Emery made a pretense of drinking with Yates, but they did not take much. Yates, however, continued to "hit the bottle hard." His face became flushed, and his eyes glowed as Flemming continued to tell him of Merriwell's "underhand work."

"That fellow did me dirt," declared Flemming. "In this same sneaking way, he had me dropped from the crew this spring, and got on in my place."

"That's right," agreed Emery. "He has a way of influencing such men as he can get at, and he is using his influence to get the committee to throw you over."

"And he can't run with you, anyway," said Flemming. "It is possible that he can lead you in a short dash, like the race to the station to-day, but he would not be in it in a long run."

"That race was one of his tricks," asserted Emery. "I believe the job was put up by him."

"How?" asked Yates, huskily.

"Why, he saw you in company with the rest of us, and he thought he stood a good show of outrunning you for a short spurt, so he had Diamond and Rattleton make the talk that they did to bring the race about."

"If that was not crooked, I don't know what you could call it," nodded Flemming. "He sprung it on you when you were not suspecting, and he led you to go against him for a short run, in which he is at his best. All the time, he knew he was not your match for a long race. That doesn't make a bit of difference to him."

"Not a bit," said Andy. "He is not looking for the good of Old Yale, but he is looking to get into the big race at the tournament. He has been lucky in everything he has tried, and he is depending on his luck to win the race and acquire further glory for himself."

"Let's have another drink all round," suggested Flemming, as he produced Thornton's flask once more.

Yates took several swallows. Emery and Flemming pretended to drink in a hearty manner, but they allowed very little whiskey to go down their throats.

This drink seemed to be the one that aroused Yates to action. He suddenly jumped to his feet, and there was a fierce look on his face as he cried:

"Come on!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Flemming, quickly thrusting the flask into his pocket.

"I am going to find Frank Merriwell!" came hoarsely from Yates' lips.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BASEBALL.

There was a crush in the rear end of the smoker. A crowd had gathered there, and the lads were singing, shouting, laughing and making merry in various ways.

Some fellows were sitting on the backs of the seats. The trainmen could not drive them down. It was useless to try with such a set of lads.

Danny Griswold was astride the shoulders of Dismal Jones, who was the only solemn-looking man in the car. Occasionally Jones would "break out" in his peculiar camp-meeting revivalist's style and would deliver fragments of a sermon on the frivolous things of the world. Each time he was quickly suppressed, however.

Into the midst of this jolly crowd came a lad whose face was flushed and whose eyes were gleaming strangely. His lips curled back over his set teeth, and he seemed to quiver with a strange eagerness.

"Let me through!" he growled, forcing his way along. "There is a fellow here I want to see."

There was something in his voice that caused them to give him room to advance till he was standing directly in front of Frank Merriwell. Then his hands clinched, and, as he tried to speak, he choked with passion, so that words failed him.

A sudden hush came over the throng, for they saw that there was trouble impending.

"It's Yates!"

Somebody muttered the words, and they seemed to break the spell that had fallen on the enraged lad who was glaring at Frank.

"Yes, it is Yates!" he snarled. "I suppose all you fellows are Frank Merriwell's chums, but that makes no difference to me."

He stopped a moment, but he did not take his eyes from Frank's face. He seemed to be gathering himself for the supreme effort.

"Merriwell," he said, his voice shaking, "you are a sneak!"

Every one expected Frank would leap to his feet and strike Yates, but he did nothing of the kind. The hot blood rushed to his face, and then fled away again, leaving him cold and pale. About his firm jaws there was a sudden hardening, and in turn he showed his teeth.

"Mr. Yates," he said, "you are not complimentary."

"I do not mean to be to such a fellow as you!" Yates shot back.

"You are insulting!"

"I am if the truth can be considered an insult."

"I demand an explanation."

"I do not propose to waste any breath in giving explanations to such as you. You know why I say you are a sneak—you know you are a sneak!"

Frank Merriwell laughed. That laugh was a warning that he was dangerous. Diamond knew it; Rattleton knew it. They held themselves ready to make room when Frank Merriwell saw fit to act.

"You put yourself in a bad light by calling a man a sneak and then refusing to tell why you call him that," said Frank.

Yates did not know Merriwell very well and that laugh had not sounded a warning to him. Instead, it really seemed that Frank was frightened, and he had laughed to conceal the fact.

"It is my conviction," he cried, "that you are not only a sneak, but you are also a coward! If that is not enough, I will make it still more forcible."

Quick as a flash, he struck Frank in the face with his clinched fist.

A gasp came from those who witnessed this act. There was no time given for further words.

Like a leaping panther, Frank Merriwell shot up and alighted on Duncan Yates. He clutched Yates in his strong grasp, snapped him off his feet, swung him into the air.

The spectators had fallen back in a wild sort of scramble to get out of the way. Thus enough room was made for Merriwell to act.

It was a warm day, and the car door was open. Almost before any one could tell what Frank thought of doing, he leaped out through the doorway, and, with the lad who had delivered the blow still poised above his head, seemed on the verge of hurling Yates from the flying train!

"Stop, Frank!"

Diamond shouted the words.

Cries of horror broke from the lips of the other spectators of the scene, but, strangely enough, none of them made a move to prevent Merriwell from carrying out his apparent purpose.

If Merriwell flung Yates from the train the unfortunate lad who had aroused Frank's wrath must be instantly killed.

At first, when he had felt himself clutched, Yates had struggled, but, to his amazement, he seemed like a child in the grasp of the infuriated athlete.

As Frank reached the platform and poised Yates aloft, the latter seemed to realize his peril, and fear robbed him of nerve and strength. He was limp and helpless in Merriwell's grasp.

And then, almost as quickly as Frank had caught the lad up, he lowered him to his feet.

Again Merriwell laughed, but this time there really seemed to be something of amusement in the sound.

"If I had dropped you off, Mr. Yates, you must have been injured," he said, and his voice was soft and gentle.

Yates gasped.

"Jee!" chattered Bink Stubbs. "That was a regular hair-raiser, as the fellow said when he finished the blood-and-thunder story."

Yates swayed and caught at the iron rail. The flush had gone out of his face, which was ashen-gray.

"Better go into the car," said Merriwell. "You seem rather unsteady, and you might fall off here."

Without a word, Yates steadied himself by taking hold of the side of the door, and entered the car.

Merriwell followed, taking out his handkerchief and pressing it lightly to the spot on his cheek where a slight bruise marked the spot that had felt the enraged lad's fist.

The witnesses of this scene seemed to breathe freely for the first time. They stared at Frank as if his marvelous display of strength had been a revelation to them.

Yates had plenty of friends, as he had never seemed a bad sort of fellow, but the fact that he had struck Merriwell while the latter was sitting down was against him.

"He's been drinking," one declared. "Merriwell could not have handled him that way otherwise."

"Did Merriwell really mean to throw him off?" asked another.

There were some murmurs of disapproval at Frank's action, but the expressions of astonishment and admiration for his display of strength drowned all other sounds.

Yates turned and looked at Frank, but he seemed unable to express his feelings by means of words.

Jack Diamond was flushed with rage.

"It would have served the fellow right if Merriwell had dropped him off!" declared the hot-blooded Southerner.

Andy Emery was near at hand, but he had been unable to give Yates any assistance when the latter was grasped by Frank.

"Good heavens!" he kept repeating, as he stared at Frank Merriwell in a manner that showed his unutterable amazement.

It was plain that such a display of strength had been a revelation to him, and from that time Emery was bound to regard Merriwell with renewed respect.

"Mr. Yates," said Frank, quietly, "this is no place to settle any quarrel that has arisen between us; but I wish to say before witnesses that I consider you entirely in the wrong, and certainly you owe me an apology. You may not think so now, but I believe you will think so in time."

That was all. He returned to his seat and sat down. Yates seemed to hesitate, and then turned away, accompanied by Emery.

Flemming had kept himself in the background during the entire affair.

When the train reached Springfield Yates was in no condition to go to the ball ground. He had taken too much whiskey to carry, and his pretended friends, Flemming and Emery, were forced to get him out of sight as soon as possible.

"That ought to be a settler for him," said Diamond. "A fellow who is in training for a race can't afford to get loaded."

Yale men had heavily backed their own club to win, and it seemed that the majority of the Harvard crew was trying to put money on the blue.

It was expected by Harvard that Merriwell would pitch the deciding game, for the actual condition of his hand had been kept a secret, and Harvard feared Merriwell.

To himself Frank confessed that he could pitch the game, as his hand was in fairly good condition, but such improvement had not been expected, and it had been arranged that he should do no "twirling."

Besides that, it was Heffner's last game for Yale, and, taking into consideration the record he had made, it seemed no more than right that he should be placed in the box.

The usual crowd had gathered to witness the game, and there was the usual display of flags. Yale was over-confident; Harvard was hopeful, but filled with fears.

The game began, and for three innings Yale had the advantage. The "sons of Old Eli" were jubilant, and they made the air ring with their cheers and songs.

At the end of the third inning it was seen that Harvard must make a change if it had any hope of winning. Yedding, the great Cambridge pitcher, was "rocky." He could not find the plate, and he was "hammered" when he did "get 'em over."

Some Yale man with an inclination to rhyme had composed some doggerel verse, which about twenty lads were singing to some sort of mongrel tune.

"Poor Harvard she can talk—
(That's all!)
At other things she'll balk;
We'll beat her in a walk—
Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

"Poor Harvard's lost her grip—
(That's so!)
She's let the pennant slip,
We've done her up this trip—
Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"It is altogether too early in the game to crow," declared Frank Merriwell. "Several things may happen before the ninth inning is over."

"Oh, we've got the game nailed solid now!" declared Bruce Browning, in a satisfied way. "Robinson will be able to get his shirts out of soak."

In the fourth inning Harvard sent a new pitcher into the box. It was Coulter, who, as a freshman, had pitched against Merriwell.

Coulter was nervous and rather wild at first, but he puzzled the Yale men, who could not hit him when he did get them over the plate.

"If he steadies down, he will prove to be a bad man," said Frank, soberly. "This is his first trial on the regular team, and he is not at his best just now."

Yale secured one score in the fourth inning, while Harvard retired with her third whitewash.

In the fifth there was a change. Coulter did steady down in a most astonishing manner, for he sent the Yale men to the bench in one-two-three order.

That seemed to give Harvard new life, and, when she came to bat, she showed a determination to do something.

Right there was where Heffner took a streak of wildness, and Harvard scored three times.

Coulter kept up his work in the sixth, by allowing but one short single to be taken off his delivery, and no Yale man got further than second base.

Then it seemed that Harvard came to the plate with a determination to "pound it out." The defenders of the crimson jumped on Heffner's curves, and the way they banged the leather gave the Yale crowd symptoms of heart failure. A single, a two-bagger and a homer in quick succession caused Heffner to develop a bad case of "rattles," and it seemed that Harvard would never let up. There was consternation in the Yale ranks when Harvard tied the score with but one man out, and that consternation threatened to become a panic when two more scores came in.

Old Man Hicks was set at work "warming up," although it was felt that he must be a desperate resort. When Harvard scored again, Hicks was sent into the box.

The change seemed to work well, for Harvard's score getting was brought to an abrupt termination.

But Yale was in a desperate situation, for, at the beginning of the seventh, Harvard was three

scores in the lead.

Merriwell had been on the point of going down and offering to do what he could to check Harvard's wild career, but it seemed that Old Man Hicks had done that, and so he sat still.

But Yale could not score. Coulter seemed to feel that the opportunity of his life had arrived, and he sent the Spalding's over the plate with all sorts of twists. The Yale men could not make fair and satisfactory connections with the ball, so no man reached home.

Hicks was lucky, and he succeeded in scattering the hits, which, with fine support, enabled him to retire Harvard with another goose's egg.

The eighth inning was disastrous for the blue, although Yale won a score by hard base running. When Harvard took her turn, she seemed to fathom Dad Hicks' delivery, and, for a short time, he was treated quite as bad as Heffiner had been. At the end of the eighth inning Harvard was six scores ahead, and it was plain that the game was lost for Yale.

Scores of sad-faced Yale spectators were heard expressing regret that Frank Merriwell had not been used in the game. Some of the wearers of the blue left the field immediately, unwilling to witness the termination of the game.

With despair set upon their faces, the Yale men went to the bat, ready to fight to the last gasp. But Coulter was also determined not to let slip any of the glory he had won, and all Yale's efforts to score were fruitless. The game ended with Harvard still six in the lead.

Phil Coulter was the hero of Harvard that night, while poor Hugh Heffiner returned to New Haven with his heart almost bursting with disappointment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

KIDNAPED.

"We'll down Harvard in everything at the tournament," was the angry resolve of the disappointed Yale crowd, who returned to New Haven to find no band and no great gathering of cheering students awaiting them at the station.

Among them all, not excepting Hugh Heffiner himself, no one felt worse about the defeat than did Frank Merriwell. In his heart, he blamed himself for not going to the manager of the Yale team and offering his services in case of emergency. He knew it was possible he might not have been able to save the game, but still the possibility that he might have done so bore heavily upon him.

But Frank did not dream that his enemies would make capital out of the fact that he had not taken any part in the game. He did not know they were saying he had kept among the spectators where he could not be found when things seemed to turn against Yale.

"Merriwell didn't dare pitch any part of that game," they were saying. "He was afraid, and he knew it would dim his glory if Harvard won. He has his record, and you won't see him pitching out any games in order to pull Yale out of a hole."

But Yates had ruined his chance of running in the mile race at the tournament by getting full on the train. Directly after the next meeting of the committee of arrangements, Frank was notified that he had been chosen to represent Yale.

Each night Frank took a run out into the country. He was determined to put himself in the very best condition possible.

This practice of Merriwell's was generally known, and he was watched with interest by friends and foes.

The time for the tournament drew near. Arrangements for all the contests had been completed. The end of the spring terms had come. Commencement was over, and another class had been showered with sheepskins.

In all the doings of this busy time of the college year Merriwell took little part, as he was putting himself in shape to do his best at the tournament, and the time he had to spare from "grinding" was given to hard physical work.

Then he went down to a summer cottage on the sound. The cottage was located near Southport, and there he continued his training, taking long runs into the country.

The day before the great tournament came at last. That afternoon Frank took his last run in training. He waited till near evening, and then jogged gently out along the country road.

It was dusk when he turned back toward the cottage where he knew Bruce Browning, Rattleton and Diamond were loafing on the veranda and awaiting his reappearance.

As he was passing through a small patch of woods, a cord that was strung across the road, about six inches from the ground, tripped him, and he fell heavily.

Frank was stunned by the shock. Before he could recover, dark forms rushed out and flung themselves upon him.

Frank realized that he had been attacked, and he tried to make a fight of it, but the shock of the fall had taken away his strength, and then he found there were three against him.

"Work lively!" growled a hoarse voice. "He's worse than a tiger in a scrap!"

His hands were twisted about behind his back and held there, while a cord was bound about them. In a remarkably brief space of time he was rendered helpless.

Then Frank's feet were bound, and he was forced to submit to the tying of a blindfold over his eyes. Before this was accomplished, however, he saw the three men through the gloom, and discovered that all wore masks to hide their faces.

When Frank was blindfolded, the man who had given all the commands, and who seemed to be the leader, said:

"Bring out the team."

Frank's ears told him that one of the men went away, and soon, by the sound, the boy decided that a team was being brought from some place in the woods, where it had been concealed.

"What sort of a job is this?" thought the captive lad. "It seems to be a case of real highwaymen right here in Connecticut. And still they do not seem like highwaymen, for then they would have robbed me and let me go. They are up to something else."

He soon found that his captors meant to remove him from the spot, for he was lifted from the ground and tossed into the bottom of the wagon, like a sack of grain. Then the men climbed in, the horses were whipped up, and away they all went.

After a drive of at least two hours, during which Frank had several times asked where they were taking him, and had been repeatedly cautioned to "shut up," the team came to a halt.

Frank was glad of it, for much of the distance had been made over rough roads, and he had been several times menaced in order to keep him quiet, and once choked into silence by two of the men, who sat upon him while they passed another team.

Frank was taken from the wagon, his feet were set at liberty, and he was marched into some sort of a building.

"There," said the hoarse voice of the leader. "He's safe and solid here."

Through the blindfold there was a glow of light, and then the cloth was removed from his eyes.

Frank found himself in a rough room, to which there seemed to be no windows and but one door. In the room there was a table, a broken chair, and a rude sort of bed.

One of the two men who had brought him into the room coolly sat down astride the chair, and stared at Frank, his eyes gleaming by the flaring light of the tallow-dip that burned on the table.

"Set down," invited the man, making a motion toward the bed. "We offer our visitors the upholstered furniture out of courtesy. Make yourself at home."

"Don't care if I do," returned the boy, with equal coolness, "but in order for me to be thoroughly comfortable, it will be necessary for me to have my hands free."

"Sorry I can't accommodate ye just now, but I want to have a talk with yer first. Set down."

Frank obeyed.

"Well," he observed, "I suppose I might as well, as long as I do not seem to have much to say about it; but I'd like to know what this little game is."

"Thought you'd be kinder curious," said the man, with a hoarse laugh. "Well, ye see, it's this way. We've heard so much about you that we thought we'd kinder like the pleasure of your company for a day or two, and so we brought you over here."

A day or two! Frank gasped for breath, as a sudden light dawned upon him.

If he were held there for a single day he would not appear at Madison Square Garden to take part in the tournament!

"This is the work of my enemies!" he mentally cried. "They have hired these ruffians to kidnap and hold me till the tournament is over! Cæsar's ghost! I never dreamed such a thing could be done in this quiet part of the New England States!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TOURNAMENT.

The interior of Madison Square Garden was decorated with the colors of a dozen colleges, and was aglow with hundreds of bright lights. The rows of seats, tier upon tier, were packed with people. The private boxes were all taken. A band was playing a lively air, and the tournament was on. Down in the great cleared space young men from the various prominent colleges of the country were struggling for victory in the athletic feats on the programme. At times some well-known amateur contestant was greeted by cheers as he appeared or accomplished a feat that was plainly remarkable. The favorites were greeted by the yells of the colleges which they represented, as they were seen preparing for some difficult attempt.

It was a scene of the greatest excitement and enthusiasm. Pretty girls were there in large numbers, their faces glowing with admiration for the young men who were struggling like gladiators down in the modern arena. The swell set of New York occupied the boxes. Fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, cousins and aunts of the contestants were on hand, watching with eagerness for the appearance of those in which their interest centered.

In some instances the parents of the young men engaged in the contests were plainly from the country. Their manners, their dress, their language indicated this. It was a wonderful occasion for them, and their hearts almost ceased beating when the favorite for whom they were watching showed himself and made his brave effort in some trial of strength and skill. Happy were they if he acquitted himself nobly.

The blue of Old Yale dominated one great section of seats. And when a Yale man won in some of the contests hundreds upon hundreds of strong-lunged young men arose to their feet and sent the college slogan pealing forth, while that great mass of blue fluttered and swayed as if swept by a fitful tempest.

It was Yale against the field, and Old Eli was acquitting herself nobly.

One of the private boxes was occupied by the Hon. Andrew Flemming and his family. His wife and his two daughters were there. In a corner of the box sat two lads who were talking earnestly in guarded tones. They were Tom Thornton and Andy Emery.

Thornton and Emery had been entertaining Fred Flemming's sisters, but now, for the moment, they had drawn aside and were earnestly discussing some point that seemed to interest them greatly.

"It must be that the matter is settled, and Yates has been substituted for the one who is missing," said Thornton; "but it seems rather astonishing that Flem should be so sure Merriwell would not appear."

"But he did seem sure," nodded Emery. "He told me over and over that Merriwell would not be here to run."

"And you must know enough of Frank Merriwell to be sure he would be here if he could get here, even if he had to crawl on his knees."

"That's right."

"Then what has happened to Merriwell?"

"You tell!"

"I can't. I know Flemming would go to any extreme to carry out his desires. In fact, he is altogether too reckless and headstrong. I knew he did not mean it when he told Merriwell he was ready to bury the hatchet, and I have felt that he was not talking to hear his own voice when he told us Merriwell would not be on hand to race to-night."

At this moment Fred Flemming entered the box. His face was flushed, and there was a look of triumph in his eyes. He spoke to his mother, and then addressed himself to the two boys, saying:

"It's all right."

Some event below attracted the full attention of all in the box save the trio in one corner.

"Yates will run?" asked Emery, eagerly.

"You bet your filthy!" nodded Fred. "I told you he would."

"But where is Merriwell?"

Flemming smiled mysteriously.

"It is evident," he said, "that Mr. Merriwell decided not to attend the tournament."

"Look here, Fred," said Thornton, nervously, "you haven't done anything that will get you into trouble, have you?"

Flemming snapped his fingers.

"What is it to me if Merriwell sees fit to stay away?" he asked. "He may tell some sort of a wild story, but it seems that he was afraid to appear and run. All I ask of you fellows is that you keep your mouths closed on one point."

"What is that?"

"I don't care to have you breathe to a living soul that I knew in advance that Merriwell would not be on hand."

"We'll not say a word about it."

"Yates had no idea that he might be called on. I found it necessary to keep with him all the time and see that he did not get geared up. Then I had him where he could be found by the committee in case he was needed."

"And——"

"And he was found."

"He has gone to prepare for the race?"

"Sure."

"That settles it! Merriwell has failed to show up!"

A wild Yale cheer turned their attention to the arena at this moment. Big Hickok was preparing to put the shot, and he had been greeted in this manner by his admirers as he stepped out.

Hickok was a giant, and Yale had the utmost confidence in him. Thus far the best record made by any other man was forty-one feet and five inches. Hickok must do his very best to beat that.

The cheers died away as the Yale Goliath poised himself for the effort. He crouched, and then the heavy iron sailed through the air and fell with a thud to the ground.

The tape was quickly drawn, and then the score went up.

Forty-two feet and three inches!

Once more Yale let herself loose, and it seemed that the roof must crack.

Hickok quietly declined to take the two remaining trials open to him. He was the last man on the list, and Yale had won. The hammer-throwing was to follow, and he was entered for the contest.

In the hammer-throwing contest Yale had another opportunity to yell, for Hickok was again the winner over all others, making a record of one hundred and twenty-three feet and nine inches.

The contests followed each other in swift succession, and Yale more than held her own. There was no reason why the wearers of the blue should not be jubilant.

At last, the races came on. Up in the Flemming box were three lads who were anxiously awaiting the announcement of the one-mile run.

Despite the triumph which he felt, Fred Flemming betrayed a sort of hilarious nervousness as he chatted with his sisters and his friends.

Watching Fred closely, Tom Thornton saw that he was under a strain. And again Thornton wondered what had become of Frank Merriwell.

Princeton won one of the shorter races, and Harvard won another. In each of these a Yale man was second.

"If Mr. Merriwell had contented himself with being less ambitious, he might be here to-night," said Flemming, in an aside to his college comrades.

Emery and Thornton exchanged glances. There was a significance about such language that could not be misunderstood. Thornton shivered a bit, and, unconsciously, drew back from Flemming.

The excitement of the evening was at its highest pitch thus far. The contestants for yet another race were getting into position, and, in another moment, they were off like a pack of greyhounds.

This time a Yale man carried his colors to victory, and the "Sons of Old Eli" yelled their approval and delight. Yale was doing nobly. This night she was making a record for herself that would be remembered.

But now came the greatest race of all—the mile run. Preparations were made for it, and feverish anticipation swayed the great multitude.

Fred Flemming was literally quivering as he leaned over the rail of the box.

"Let's give Yatsie a great send-off!" he exclaimed. "They are coming out in a minute."

He was watching the point where the runners must first appear. His hand shook on the rail.

The runners appeared. The first was Beatty, the Harvard man, and the Harvard crowd "hoorahed" hoarsely. Then came Mansford, of Princeton, and the Tigers let themselves loose. Jetting, of Dartmouth, followed, and the New Hampshire lads greeted him in a manner that brought the blood to his cheeks. Then little Judd, the U. P. man, trotted out, and he was received with howls of delight from the Quakers.

"Now—now comes Yates!" cried Fred Flemming.

The Yale man appeared, and Flemming stood up to cheer. He dropped into his seat as if he had been shot, his face turning ashen gray, and the cheer dying on his lips.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom Thornton. "It is Frank Merriwell!"

But his exclamation was drowned by the mighty cheer which greeted the appearance of the Yale standard-bearer.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TO VICTORY—CONCLUSION.

"Merriwell! Merriwell! 'Rah! 'rah! 'rah!"

It was a mighty roar of voices. Then came the well-known Yale yell, which was repeated again and again. The entire Yale crowd was standing, wildly waving hands, hats, flags, handkerchiefs, anything and everything that could be found to wave. It was an ovation that might have gladdened the heart of an emperor.

It was not strange that the sound nerved the Yale man to vow within himself to die in the effort to win for dear "Old Eli," if he could not win otherwise.

But up in one of the boxes not far from the starting point were three young men who were utterly overcome with amazement and consternation. One of them had a face that was drawn and pale, as if he had received a mortal wound.

"What's it mean, Flem?" asked Andy Emery, in Fred's ear. "Merriwell is here! Have you been horsing us?"

Then, for all that his parents and his sisters were present, Fred Flemming ground out a bitter cry. His voice shook and he choked, as he answered:

"You know as well as I what it means! Oh, what luck!"

He was utterly unmanned, and his mother, observing his pallor, asked him if he had been suddenly taken ill. He answered her with a snarl, like a mad dog.

The five runners came down to the line. Just as they did so, Duncan Yates burst into the Flemming box.

"What sort of a jolly business is this, Flemming?" he demanded, his face pale with anger.

And then, seeing there were ladies present, he removed his cap and mumbled an apology.

Fred did not introduce Yates; he was too much broken up to think of such a thing.

"That's what I'd like to know," he said, helplessly. "You know we were told Merriwell was not on hand to run."

"But he showed up in time to dress, and I was coolly informed that I wasn't in it. I object to such treatment, and I want to know if it was a job on me."

"If it was a job, I'll give you my word I know nothing about it," said Fred, in a weak and humble manner.

At this moment, as they looked down, Frank Merriwell was seen to gaze straight toward them, and something like a scornful, triumphant smile flitted across his face.

"I'd like to strangle him!" grated Flemming.

The runners were preparing for the start. Pistol in hand, the starter stood ready to give the signal. His voice was heard bidding them make ready.

A moment later, the pistol cracked, and the runners leaped away.

"Oh, if he'll come in the tail-ender!" panted Fred Flemming.

The band was playing its liveliest air, and the runners sped around the track like fawns. Graceful fellows they were, with the possible exception of little Judd. Judd started off bravely, however, seeming to scoot into the lead like a squirrel, his short legs fairly twinkling.

The U. P. crowd let out a great cheer to encourage the little fellow.

Beatty, of Harvard, was likewise a quick starter, and he was right at Judd's heels, while Mansford and Merriwell got away side by side. Jetting, the Dartmouth representative, was slow about starting, but still he was a runner.

It had been expected that other colleges would take part in this race, but, for certain reasons, there were but five starters.

Around the track ran the lithe-limbed youngsters, with Judd holding the lead for two laps. Then

he was passed by Beatty, who spurted to get to the front, and this gave Harvard an opportunity to "hoo-rah."

From the very outset it seemed that Merriwell and Mansford were in for a neck-and-neck match. They clung together in a singular manner.

For a time the five runners were well bunched, but there came a stringing out at last. Little Judd began to lag, and Jetting, who had pushed past Merriwell and Mansford, went by the U. P. man and began to crowd Beatty.

The New Hampshire boys cheered him on, and the sound of the yell he loved to hear got into his head and worked his undoing. Otherwise Jetting must have been a dangerous man for the leaders at the finish. As it was, he pumped himself out some seconds too soon.

At the first quarter Harvard led, and she was still leading, with Dartmouth second, when the first half was passed.

Then came a fierce struggle for the lead, which ended with the weakening of both Beatty and Jetting. Beatty weakened first, however, and fell back, but Jetting was seen to stagger a bit, recover and go on.

Merriwell and Mansford passed Beatty and narrowed the gap between them and Jetting. Mansford set his teeth and gained an advantage of ten feet by a quick break. This advantage he was resolved to hold.

Jetting fought like a tiger to hold the lead, but Mansford crowded him harder and harder, finally going to the front.

Then came a desperate struggle between Merriwell and Jetting, but Yale's colors were carried into second place at the beginning of the last quarter.

And now—now there was excitement. The finish was drawing near, and Princeton had the lead, although the distance was short.

As Frank passed the Yale crowd he was given a rousing cheer, which seemed to put fresh life and strength into his body. He crept up on Mansford, who was running like the wind. The difference grew less and less. Eight feet, six feet, four feet—could he close the gap?

Then, for a moment, a black cloud seemed to pass before Frank's eyes. His heart was in his mouth, where it lay hot and dry, like a stone that has baked in the sun. It seemed that he must fall.

"Win or die! win or die!"

Those words rang through his head as if some one had shouted them into his ear.

"I will!"

He knew the end was close at hand, and still the black and yellow was before him.

Then it was that Frank nerved himself for one last great effort, and dashed forward with a fresh burst of speed that seemed little short of marvelous. That burst carried him to Mansford's side—carried him into the lead—carried him over the line at the finish—a winner!

There was a grand supper in New York that night, at which Frank Merriwell was the guest of honor. He was toasted again and again by his admiring friends, and it seemed that everybody was his friend at last. There were speeches and songs and a general merry time. Old Yale had carved her way to glory once more, and among her standard-bearers Merriwell was the leader.

"Tell us, tell us, old man," cried Paul Pierson, "how was it that you happened to be so late in appearing at the garden? Really we had given up hope that you would come, and were for getting Yates into running rig. You barely got along in time. What kept you away?"

"I was unavoidably detained," answered Frank, smiling.

"Yes, but that is an unsatisfactory explanation. Rattleton and the fellows who were with you reported your mysterious disappearance, and we were for putting detectives on the case to-morrow. Can't you clear up the mystery?"

"Well, you see, it is like this: I fell in with some gentlemen who seemed to take a strong interest in me. Note the word strong there. In fact they were too strong for me. They seemed to like me exceedingly well, and they pressed me to stay all night with them. I was sort of roped into it, as it were. I found it difficult to get away without wounding their feelings."

This was said in a queer manner, and the lads about the table looked at each other inquiringly.

"But you managed to get away?" said Pierson.

"Yes, I offered them inducements in the shape of coin of the realm. They seemed to be out for stuff, and some person, who must love me dearly—had induced them to take charge of me and care for me tenderly. However I worked on their greed by offering more than my friend had offered, and, as I promised not to make too much of a fuss about it, I was let off, but barely in time to reach here. I am not going to say anything more about this matter just now, but I expect

to look around some and find out who my friend is who engaged the gentlemen to care for me so tenderly. When I find him—well, I won't do a thing to him!"

"Well, here's luck to you!" cried Pierson, lifting his glass. "Gentlemen, here's luck to Frank Merriwell, the best all-around man who ever called dear Old Yale *alma mater*. Drink—drink hearty!"

A few words more and we will bring this story to a close.

Frank was truly the hero of the college, and it was many a day before his wonderful dash was forgotten by even the most indifferent of the students.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK MERRIWELL'S RACES ***

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