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Title: Frank Merriwell's Son; Or, A Chip Off the Old Block

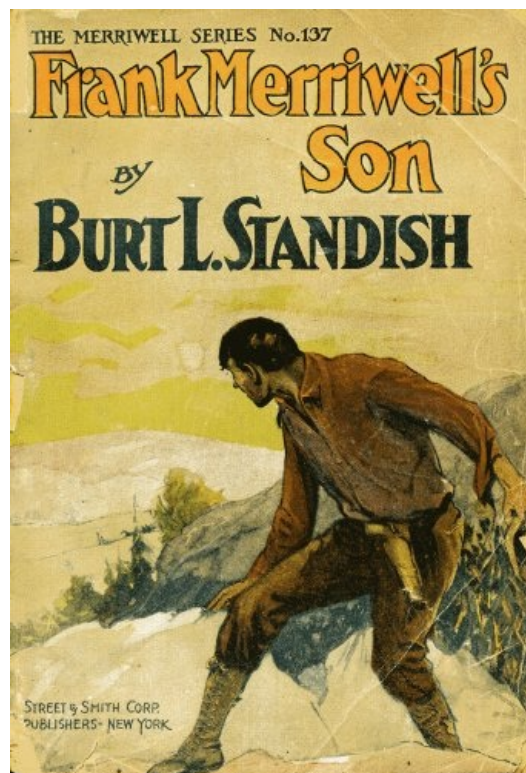
Author: Burt L. Standish

Release date: May 3, 2008 [eBook #25316]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Steven desJardins and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK MERRIWELL'S SON; OR, A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK ***



Frank Merriwell's Son

OR,
A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

BY
BURT L. STANDISH

Author of the famous MERRIWELL STORIES.



STREET & SMITH CORPORATION
PUBLISHERS
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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Frank Merriwell's Son

(Printed in the United States of America)

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S SON.

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CHAPTER I.

A NEW LIFE.

Lizette, the French nurse, came softly and lightly down the stairs and found Frank Merriwell pacing the library floor, while Bart Hodge and Elsie Bellwood talked to him soothingly.

"Madame will see you now, saire," said the nurse, with a little curtsy. "Ze doctaire he is gone now some time. Madame she is comforterbill. She say she see you—alone."

Frank was all eagerness to go. He bounded up the stairs, two at a time, scarcely heeding the white-capped nurse, who hurried after him, softly calling:

"Not on ze rush, saire. You make ze rush, you gif madame ze start."

"That's so," muttered Merry, checking himself at the head of the stairs and waiting for the cautious nurse. "Lizette, lead the way."

The girl, stepping softly as a cat, gently opened a door for him, thus revealing a chamber where the light was softened by drawn window shades. Within that chamber Mrs. Merriwell reclined amid the snowy pillows of a broad bed.

"Ze mastaire is here, madame," said the nurse, as Frank entered.

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In a moment Merry was bending over his wife.

Something small and pink, in a soft white garment, nestled on her arm. It uttered a weak little cry—the cry of a new life in the great seething world—which was sweet music to the pale woman on the bed and the anxious man who bent over her.

"Oh, Frank," murmured Inza, "he's calling to you! He knows his father has come."

Merriwell kissed her lightly, softly, tenderly. Then, with that indescribable light in his eyes, he gazed long and fondly at the babe.

"It's a boy, Inza!" he murmured. "Just as you wished!"

"Just as I wished for your sake, Frank," she said. "I knew you wanted a son. This is the happiest moment of my life, for I have given him to you."

"A son!" exclaimed Frank softly, as he straightened up and threw his splendid shoulders back. "Why, think of it, Inza, I'm a father—and you are the dearest, sweetest, handsomest, noblest little mother in all the world!"

The nurse ventured to speak.

"Madame is so well! Madame is so strong! It is wonderful! It is grand!"

"You've been very good, Lizette," said Inza. "We'll not forget it."

The nurse retired to the far end of the room, where she stood with her back toward the bed, pretending to inspect and admire a Donatello upon the wall.

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Frank took the chair beside the bed and found Inza's hand, which he clasped in a firm but gentle grasp.

"What shall we name him?" he asked.

"Why, haven't you decided on a name, dear?"

"Without consulting you? Do you think I would do such a thing, Inza?"

"The name that pleases you will please me," she declared. "What shall it be, my husband?"

"Why not the name of my most faithful friend? Why not call him Bartley Hodge Merriwell?"

"If that satisfies you, he shall be called by that name."

Somehow Frank fancied he detected a touch of disappointment in her voice.

"But you, sweetheart—haven't you a suggestion to make?"

"If you would like me to make one."

"You know I would, Inza."

"Then let Hodge be his middle name. Let's call him Frank Hodge Merriwell. The initials are the same as your own. Bart will be pleased, and to me the baby will be little Frank."

"Fine!" laughed Merry, in great satisfaction. "That is settled. That shall be his name. Hello, there, Frank Merriwell, the younger! I'll make an athlete of you, you rascal! I'll give you such advantages to start with as I never had myself."

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"No matter what you give him, no matter what you do for him," murmured the happy mother, "he can never become a better or nobler man than his father."

Frank kissed her again.

THE BIRTHMARK.

"Where are Bart and Elsie, Frank?" asked Inza.

"They're in the library."

"I want them to come up. Tell Lizette to call them."

The soft-footed nurse flitted from the room, and a few moments later Elsie Bellwood and Bart Hodge appeared. Hodge followed Elsie with an air of reluctance and confusion, which caused Inza to smile.

In a moment the golden-haired girl was bending over the bed, caressing her bosom friend, and murmuring soft words of affection.

"You're such a brave, brave woman, Inza!" she exclaimed. "Oh, you make me feel like a coward!"

"Come here, Hodge," urged Frank, drawing his friend round to the other side of the bed. "Here's the boy. Here he is—Frank Hodge Merriwell."

"Frank Hodge Merriwell?" echoed Bart, fumbling for Merry's hand and grasping it with an almost savage grip. "You've given him my name?"

"We did it—both of us together, old man."

"Merry, I—I don't know what—to say," stammered Bartley. "You've completely upset me. It's the greatest honor——"

"There, there," smiled Frank, "don't splutter and mumble like that, old fellow. You don't have to say a word. Just make a bow to the new-born king." [Pg 9]

Elsie was not one to gush, but, with clasped hands and flushed face, she expressed her admiration for the child.

"You ought to feel proud, Bart," she said. "You ought to feel almost as proud as Frank."

"Proud?" laughed Hodge. "Why, I—I—— My chest has expanded three inches in the last thirty seconds. Proud? I'll bet my hat won't fit me! He's a star, the little rascal!"

"He has ze star on his left shouldaire," said Lizette. "Shall I show it, madame? Shall I show zem ze beautiful mark?"

"Please do," said Inza.

The nurse loosened the child's clothes and exposed the small, shapely shoulder. There, at the very base of the arm, was a small, perfectly formed pink, five-cornered star.

"I was right!" cried Hodge. "There's been a wonderful addition to the universe! A new star has risen!"

"It's a birthmark," said Frank.

"Oh, isn't it very strange!" breathed Elsie. "It gives me a superstitious feeling of awe. It seems to me that he is marked by fate to be something grand and wonderful."

"It was so good of you, Elsie, to come to me when I wanted you," breathed Inza. "And Hodge—he traveled so far." [Pg 11]

"Oh, everything is coming as smoothly as possible at the mines," declared Bart. "There's a first-class foreman at both the Queen Mystery and the San Pablo. I could leave as well as not, and the old trains couldn't run fast enough to bring me here after I received the wire from Frank, saying that Elsie would be here. You bet I was glad to shake the alkali dust out of my clothes."

"You've done great things for me at the mines, Bart," said Merry. "Everything now seems to be going right for me everywhere in the world. The Central Sonora Railroad is practically completed, and the San Pablo is paying enormously. But these are not things to speak of on an occasion like this."

After a few minutes Bart and Elsie retired, the nurse took the baby, and Frank lingered a while longer at the side of his wife.

On returning to the library, Elsie stood at one of the large windows and looked out upon the grounds and across the broad road toward the handsome buildings of Farnham Hall. There was a strange expression of mingled happiness and regret on her fair face. Something like a mist filled her eyes.

Hodge came up behind her and put his arms round her.

"A penny for your thoughts, Elsie," he said.

"I don't think I could express them in words," she confessed. "Do you think me a jealous person, Bart?" [Pg 12]

"Jealous?" he exclaimed. "Far from it!"

"But I am—I'm jealous. I'm dying of envy."

"You—you jealous—of whom?"

"Inza. Look how all the best things of life have come to her. She has a grand husband, who is doing a magnificent and noble work. Look at those splendid buildings. Every one acknowledges now that Frank has done and is doing more for the upbuilding and the uplifting of American boys than any person has ever before done in all history. Inza is his wife, and they have a son."

Bart's arms dropped at his sides, and he turned away.

In surprise, Elsie turned and saw him move from her. In a moment she had him by the arm.

"What is it, Bart?" she exclaimed, in dismay.

He shook his head, seeming unable to speak.

"Tell me what it is. Tell me what I did to hurt you," she commanded.

He faced her again, looking deep into her blue eyes.

"You called up the past, Elsie," he said, in a low tone. "I can't forget that once I thought Frank loved you—and you loved him. You've confessed a feeling of jealousy toward Inza."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she said quickly. "You didn't understand me, Bart—truly you didn't! It was not the sort of jealousy you mean. I'm not jealous of her because she is Frank's wife—never! never!"

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He seemed puzzled.

"Then what did you mean—what did you mean?" he asked.

"Why, can't you understand? Can't you see how it is? Fortune or fate, or whatever you may call it, has been against me—against us, Bart. Have you forgotten how we planned on a double wedding? Have you forgotten—"

"Forgotten?" cried Hodge. "I should say not! It was the bitterest disappointment of my life! You know I urged you, Elsie—I used every persuasion in my power."

"But I could not consent. I was an invalid, and I feared my health would never return."

"It has returned, little sweetheart. You're well again. You're stronger and handsomer than ever before in all your life. You put me off then, but you can't do it now! I won't let you!"

"You mean that—"

"I mean that when I left Mexico I made a resolve—I swore an oath. If I go back there—if Frank wants me to go—you will go with me."

"Bart!"

"You must go with me," he repeated.

"Must?"

"I have said it. Look here, Elsie, I know you're not jealous of Inza because Merry is rich."

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"Oh, no, no!"

"As a rule, I have told you everything, my girl, but I now confess that there is one thing that I have not told you. I have a secret."

"A secret from me?"

"Yes, a secret from you. You heard Frank state how well the San Pablo is paying. You heard him say that I had been faithful in my work for him. Perhaps you do not know that ere we entered into an agreement by which I took charge of his two mines and acted as overseer for both of them—perhaps you do not know that we nearly quarreled."

Elsie looked astounded.

"Nearly quarreled?" she exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Why, how could you?"

"Because he insisted on a certain condition in our agreement. Because he insisted that, after a lapse of time and at the completion of the Mexican railroad, I should accept a third interest in the San Pablo Mine. I fought against it. I told him it was not right. I even threatened to quit and have nothing to do with the work he wished me to perform. He was inexorable, unyielding. I pointed out that my service was not worth what he offered. I showed him that he could get experienced and expert men to do the work for an infinitesimal part of what he proposed to give me. He asserted that he was not giving me this merely for my labor, but on account of past favors and things I had done for him which could not be paid for in money. Even though I did not permit him

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to force me into consenting to take this share of his mine, I finally remained and did my best. I arrived in Bloomfield three days ago. The day I reached here he placed a paper in my hands. That paper makes me one-third owner of the San Pablo. I'm rich, Elsie. The future is assured for me and for you. That very day I went to the town clerk and had another paper made out. Here it is."

He took a document from his pocket, opened it, and placed it in her hands.

"Why—why, what——" faltered Elsie.

"It's a marriage license," said Bart. "I've made all arrangements, and to-morrow, God willing, you and I will be made man and wife."

It was even as Hodge had said. On the morrow, at her request, they were married in Inza's chamber.

CHAPTER III.

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ON THE VERANDA.

It was a beautiful sunny morning some three weeks later.

Inza and Elsie sat on the broad veranda of Merry Home, while Lizette, the nurse, trundled the baby up and down beneath the shady trees on the broad lawn.

Over at the east of Farnham Hall a group of laborers, among whom were fully twenty of the Farnham boys, were completing the foundations for Merriwell's new manual-training school building.

A glimpse of the distant athletic ground showed a number of boys hard at work on the track and the baseball field.

There was a look of serene happiness on Inza's face, while Elsie was positively rosy. After chatting a while, they sat some moments in silence, busy with their own thoughts. Finally their eyes met, and Inza laughed.

"No one would ever dream now that you were at one time determined to be an invalid, Elsie," she said.

"Determined to be?" exclaimed Elsie. "Why do you use that word, Inza?"

"Why, you remember that I laughed at you—you remember I told you a hundred times that you would be well and strong again."

"Yes, you were most encouraging, Inza, and I'll never forget how faithfully you stuck by me. Still, there were reasons why I feared for my future health."

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"Silly reasons."

"Oh, no, Inza; not silly. You can't call them that. You know my mother was never strong, and she finally became a chronic invalid."

"But your father——"

"Oh, he was a rugged man."

"You know it's said that girls generally take after their fathers and boys after their mothers."

"But in my case it was different. A thousand times my father told me how much I looked like my mother. I had a picture of her, and I could see I was becoming more and more like her every day."

"You're a person who worries, Elsie. When things are not going just right you give yourself over to fears for the future. I have absolute courage and faith."

"Oh, I know my failing," admitted the golden-haired bride. "You and Frank were made for each other. You're both courageous and trustful. Frank has done marvels for Bart in the way of giving him unwavering confidence and courage. You know Bart used to be quick-tempered, resentful, and inclined to brood. He has learned, through Frank's example, to overcome such failings, and he's now almost as confident and optimistic as Frank himself. I think Bart will help me in that respect."

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"We're both extremely fortunate," said Inza gravely. "If other girls could have such good fortune, this world would be a happy place. You are going to stay with us this summer?"

"Oh, I don't know. Bart thinks it his duty to return to the mines. If he goes, I shall go with him."

"But Frank says Bart will not be needed there for three months, at least. You're not going to settle down to live in Arizona or Mexico, Elsie?"

"Oh, I don't expect we'll live there all our lives," was the smiling answer. "But while duty keeps

my husband out there, I shall remain with him."

"That's fine—that's splendid! But Frank says there is no reason why Bart should spend more than five or six months of the year at the mines. Frank wants you to have a home in the East—here in Bloomfield."

"Oh, I hope we may!" cried Elsie. "I'm sure Bart would like that."

"Then you'd better make your plans for it. There's a fine building lot down the road, and Frank owns it. You know you were married so suddenly we had no opportunity to make you a wedding present. If you can induce Bart to build, Frank and I have decided to give you that lot as a wedding present."

Elsie sprang up, her eyes dancing, flung her arms round Inza's neck, and kissed her repeatedly. [Pg 19]

"It's too much—too much!" she cried.

For a few moments their words and laughter were mingled in such confusion that the record would produce a senseless jumble. Finally Elsie sat down, appearing utterly overcome.

"Oh, what a glorious world!" she murmured. "What a grand, inexpressible thing real true friendship is! Still, such a gift is——"

"Now don't feel that this is a case of charity," laughed Inza. "I want you here—we want you here. Bart doesn't need charity. His interest in the San Pablo makes him independent. He could buy a building lot anywhere he chose in Bloomfield; but it happens Frank owns the best lot near us, and our selfish desire to have you close by is one motive for the present."

"Selfish, Inza? There never was a selfish bone in you or in your husband. I understand and appreciate the spirit of the gift, and I'm sure Bart will. Oh, won't it be the finest thing to plan our new house, to watch while it is being built, to furnish it, and finally to move into it and start with a real home of our own!"

Again they were silent.

Amid the trees birds were calling, mate to mate. A proud redbreast danced across the lawn, pausing to capture a fated insect, then flew up into one of the trees to feed its mate upon a nest. [Pg 20]

Elsie was watching the maid, now bending over the carriage and crooning softly to the baby.

"Did you ever notice how queerly Lizette does her hair, Inza?"

"Yes, I've noticed," was the answer. "There are several queer things about her. Her skin is strangely dark, almost as if stained, and I know she makes up her eyebrows. Sometimes I've noted that her French, when she speaks in her own language, is anything but correct, yet she seems a girl of some education. Her intonation is occasionally a trifle different from that of most French people I've met."

"But she's very faithful."

"Yes, she is very faithful and very kind with the baby. But I believe Lizette has a secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes."

"Why do you think that?"

"Occasionally she looks at me in the most peculiar manner. I've caught her looking that way several times. Once I discovered her glaring at Frank's back in a way that was almost savage."

"How singular! What do you suppose it means?"

"Oh, I don't know, unless it may be that she envies Frank and me. It may be that some time she was disappointed by an unfaithful lover."

"Poor girl!" breathed Elsie. "If such is the case, I think I realize how she feels. But look, Inza, here come the boys now. They're coming over from the Hall." [Pg 21]

The "boys" were Frank and Bart, who were approaching side by side, two splendid specimens of American manhood.

CHAPTER IV.

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A MAID OF MYSTERY.

Frank and Bart waved their hands and lifted their hats. Hodge dashed up the veranda steps to join his wife, while Merry paused to bend over the baby carriage.

"Why, he's wide awake," laughed Merry, as he surveyed the baby. "He's chipper and bright as a new-minted dollar, but he isn't raising much of a racket."

"Oh, he has ze most splendid tempaire for ze baby zat I evaire see," said Lizette. "He no make ze cry, ze squawk, ze squeal all ze time, like some babeez. When he is hungaire he hollaire some. Zat is naturaile."

"Quite," laughed Merry. "When I'm hungry I'm inclined to put up a holler myself. Hey, hey, toddlekins, you're getting a dimple!"

He touched the baby's cheeks, and the tiny hands found and grasped his finger. A moment later that finger was in the baby's mouth.

"Hold on, you cannibal!" protested Frank, in great delight. "You're trying to eat your own father! Haven't you any heart or conscience! Haven't you any feeling for your dad! I believe he's hungry now, Lizette. I believe he's perishing! Lizette, you're starving him!"

"Oh, oh, monsieur!" cried the nurse. "I nevaire starve heem. He have all he need. You gif heem too much he git ze colic—he git ze cramp. You make heem sick. You know how to feed ze big boys to make zem strong and well, but you know not how to feed ze baby. You leave it to Lizette. She takes ze perfect care of heem."

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"I fancy that's right, Lizette," said Merry, straightening up and looking at her. "You've proved that you know your business. I'll remember you well, my girl. But, say, Lizette, what makes you do your hair so queerly? What makes you hide your ears with it?"

The nurse seemed confused, and bowed her head until he could not see her face fairly.

"Oh, maybe I have ze very ugly ear, monsieur. Eef not zat, mebbe I like ze way I do ze hair. You know one time ze many girl do ze hair zis way like Cleo de Merode."

"Well, you don't need to advertise yourself, and that was one of Cleo's advertising dodges. Have you a brother?"

"A brothaire?"

"Yes."

"Why you ask it?"

"Because there's something wonderfully familiar in your appearance. Because I've either seen you before or some one very much like you. Have you a brother?"

"I have not ze brothaire."

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"Then it must be a coincidence, but somehow I seem to remember dimly a boy who looked like you. I may be mistaken."

"I have neither the brothaire nor the sistaire. I am all alone in ze world, monsieur. I have ze hard time to geet ze living once. It gif me ze great work."

"Well, don't worry about that any more, my girl. We need you right here at Merry Home."

Inza was calling to him, and Frank hastened up the steps.

"I didn't expect you'd be able to come so soon, Frank," said his wife, as he drew his chair close to hers.

"Oh, I arranged it to get off early this forenoon. Hodge has been helping me. Diamond and Browning are still hard at work keeping the boys pegging away."

"Everything is going well at the school?"

"Things couldn't go better. I don't know a boy who hasn't made great improvement, although some have done far better than others. Each day it seems that they take hold of the work with fresh enthusiasm and energy."

"You've got a great baseball bunch there, Merry," said Hodge. "I don't wonder they trimmed everything in their class hereabouts. As a pitcher, that fellow Sparkfair is the real article."

Frank nodded.

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"You're right. Sparkfair is a wonder."

"But I can't quite fathom him," confessed Hodge. "If ever I saw a deceptive young scoundrel, it's that chap. At times he's so meek and modest that he dazes me. At other times he's so flippant and forward that I want to collar him and shake him out of his clothes. I wouldn't know how to deal with him, Frank."

"In some respects it was a problem with me," confessed Merry; "but fortunately I struck on the proper course. Once I found out how to manage, it was not hard to handle Sparkfair. He raised a lot of dust when he first landed at Farnham Hall. It didn't take him long to get arrested as a highwayman, and right on top of that I had to kill a fine horse in order to keep the horse from killing Sparkfair. He's as full of queer quirks and unexpected moves as an egg is full of meat. If there's a practical joke perpetrated, I generally look for Sparkfair at the bottom of it. About nine times out of ten I find him there. Still, he's not malicious, and in a case of emergency I believe I can depend upon him to be on the right side. For instance, when the boys started a rebellion

against manual labor Sparkfair refused to join them, and it was his scheme that put a prompt and ludicrous end to the rebellion."

"I think he's a splendid boy," said Inza. "I took a liking to him the first time I saw him."

"He's done a great deal in the way of helping young Joe Crowfoot along," said Frank.

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"There's another marvel!" exclaimed Bart. "If any one except you were to tell me that your Indian boy has made such astonishing progress from savagery to civilization in such a brief time, I'd disbelieve the yarn. I've been giving him points on his work behind the bat. He grasps everything almost instantly."

"He's remarkably apt," nodded Merriwell. "With his whole soul he's determined to learn everything the white man can teach him. Old Joe swore the boy to this obedience, and young Joe has never faltered or hesitated. Still, I know he is sometimes consumed with a longing for the wild life that's natural to one of his race. At times he wanders alone in the fields and woods. He takes pleasure in following the trail of any wild animal if he happens to find such a track. As a trailer, I believe he's almost as wonderful as a bloodhound."

The conversation wandered on to other topics, and finally Inza spoke of the wedding gift to Bart and Elsie. Hodge seemed quite overcome and unable to express himself.

"Not a word, old fellow!" cried Frank, glancing at his watch and rising quickly. "Come on if you're going into town with me."

"Are you going into town?" asked Inza.

"Oh, we won't be gone long," smiled Merry. "It's a little matter that requires attention. Perhaps we'll bring back a surprise."

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"Oh, now you've aroused my curiosity!"

"I intended to."

"Aren't you going to tell me what it is?"

"Then it wouldn't be a surprise."

"But I can't wait."

"Just like a woman," chuckled Merry. "Give them a hint of a surprise in store for them, and they'll badger you to death until they spoil the surprise. Let's take flight, Bart. Let's get away before the girls coax it out of us."

He snatched a kiss and sprang down the steps, followed by Hodge.

"I think you're real mean!" cried Inza. "You just wait and see if I don't play it back on you! I'll have a secret some time and keep it from you!"

"Impossible!" said Merry. "No woman ever kept a secret."

"Especially from her husband," put in Hodge.

"Oh, you'll see—you'll see!" threatened Inza.

But the two laughing young men disappeared round the corner.

"Now, I'd just give anything in the world to know what they're up to," said Inza. "Aren't you dying to know, Elsie?"

"I am, but still I think I'll survive," was the answer.

Proceeding to the stable, Merry called Toots, who promptly appeared, jerking off his cap and bowing as he showed his teeth in a grin.

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"How'd do, Marsa Frank—good mawnin', sah," he said. "How'd do, Mist' Hodge? What ken Ah do fo' yo' dis lubly mawnin'?"

"Hitch the span into the surrey," said Merry. "I want you to drive us to the station."

While the colored man was hitching up, Frank and Bart talked.

"I heard some of the things you were saying to that French nurse girl, Merry," said Hodge. "You seem to have an idea that you've seen her before."

"I can't get over the feeling," confessed Frank. "Still, it doesn't seem so much as if I'd seen her as it does seem that I've seen some one like her."

"You asked her if she had a brother?"

"Yes."

"She said no?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that she told you the truth?"

"I had no reason to think otherwise."

"You trust her?"

"She seems perfectly trustworthy to me."

"Well, you may be right. In old times I was forever suspecting some one you trusted. In most cases I was wrong, and I suppose I am wrong this time."

"Then you suspect Lizette?"

"I have a queer feeling about that girl. I can't give my reasons for it, Merry. Still, after you were through talking with her a little while ago and you started up the veranda steps, I saw her give you a queer look behind your back."

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"What sort of a look?"

"I can't describe it. She just flashed you one daggerlike glance with those black eyes."

"Oh, well, that meant nothing. Are you ready, Toots?"

"Yes, sah, all ready, sah. Git right in, gemmans. Whoa dar, Flossie! Don't yo' git so nimpatient! Stop yo' dancin', old girl. You're gittin' Dick all fretted up."

Frank and Bart sprang in and took the rear seat. In a moment Toots was on the front seat, and the horses clattered out of the stable.

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 30]

THE SURPRISE.

The eastbound express drew up at Bloomfield station. Among the passengers who got off was a slender, grave-faced young fellow, who carried a satchel, and whose hand was grasped almost as soon as his foot reached the depot platform. It was Frank Merriwell's old friend, Berlin Carson.

"How are you, Berlin, old boy!" cried Frank, shaking that hand warmly. "Here's Hodge."

Bart Hodge followed Frank in giving the traveler a handshake.

"By George, I'm glad to see you, Carson," he said.

The young man's grave face brightened and a look of seeming sadness vanished from his eyes as he surveyed Merry and Hodge.

"Glad doesn't express it with me," he said. "I can't find words, fellows. By Jove! you're both looking fine and happy as lords."

"Hodge ought to look happy." chuckled Merriwell. "Just married, you know."

"Elsie Bellwood——"

"You've named her," nodded Frank. "She's the bride."

"Congratulations, Bart, old boy!" said Carson, again wringing the hand of Hodge.

"But hasn't Frank put you onto the other event?" asked Bart. "There's a new Merriwell in Bloomfield."

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"A new Merriwell?"

"Three weeks old."

"And you never sent me word, Frank!" said Berlin, with a slightly injured air.

"How could I? Didn't know your address. Last I knew you were not on the ranch."

"No, I haven't stayed on the ranch much since father's death and since——"

Carson broke off abruptly, as if his lips had nearly uttered something he did not care to speak about.

"You were en route when I received your wire, Berlin," explained Merry. "You couldn't expect me to answer it, you know."

"Of course not. It's all right, Merry."

Merriwell led Carson toward the waiting surrey. Toots was standing on the platform, holding the horses.

"I believe you've met Toots, Berlin," said Frank.

"How'd do, Mist' Carson—how'd do, sah?" bowed Toots, his cap promptly coming off his kinky head. "Long time since Ah've seen yo', sah, an' Ah don' believe Ah'd known yo'. Yo's monstrous

changed—monstrous changed."

"I suppose I have changed, Toots," said Berlin.

It was true, and both Frank and Bart had taken note of it. Carson was much thinner, and there was a certain wan and weary look about him.

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Merriwell had arranged that his assistants, Browning and Diamond, who were also old schoolfellows of Carson's, should be at Merry Home when Berlin reached there. And there was a great handshaking and much exclaiming over his appearance.

"I salute the little mother!" said the Westerner, as he bent over Inza's hand and kissed it. "And the bride, too!" he exclaimed, as he greeted Elsie. "Merriwell, Hodge, let me shake hands with you again! My grip must say the things my lips cannot."

"Where's the baby?" questioned Frank.

"Lizette has taken him in," answered Inza. "He's asleep now. Oh, this was a surprise, Frank! I'm still angry at you, and yet I'm glad you didn't tell me."

"And that's like a woman, too," smiled Merry. "Come, Carson, I'll show you your room. You look pegged out, but a wash-up and something to eat will brace you. Later on we'll have a royal chat over old times. Then I'll show you through Farnham Hall and around the grounds."

Berlin was left in his room, off which there was a bath. Instead of hastening to wash up when Merry was gone, Carson sat down on a chair, and the expression of weariness crept back into his sad eyes.

"And I might have been as happy myself!" he murmured. "I suppose it was not to be. I know I'm a fool, but I can't forget—I can't forget!"

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After a few moments he arose and made preparations to descend.

At the head of the stairs he came face to face with Lizette, who was coming up. He gave her a glance, then stopped as if turned to stone. Like a flash he seized her arm.

"Bessie!" he exclaimed; "Bessie, you here?"

Lizette fell back against the wall, her face gone white and her lips parted. Her free hand fluttered up to her heart, and for a few moments she was speechless. Finally she forced a little laugh.

"Oh, how you frighten me, monsieur!" she exclaimed. "You catch me so queek by ze arm, and your feengaires hurt!"

Carson released his hold, but blocked her path.

"Bessie?" he repeated, but this time there was a note of inquiry in his voice.

The girl seemed bewildered, but she shook her head.

"Zat is not my name, monsieur. It is Lizette. I am ze nurse."

"That face! Those eyes!" breathed the agitated young man. "That voice, also! Bessie, you cannot deceive me!"

"You gif me ze fear," said the nurse, shrinking away. "You look so very strange. Why you glare at me wiz ze eye? Why you keep calling me Bess-ee?"

"Are you not Bessie—my Bessie?"

[Pg 34]

"You haf ze very strange idea in your mind, saire. I nevaire saw you before."

Berlin Carson was like one dazed and utterly bewildered. To all appearances he had badly alarmed the girl. As he faltered in seeking further words, she suddenly brushed past him and fled, her soft-falling feet making no sound.

For fully three minutes Carson stood there without speaking. Finally, with his hand on the banister, he started to descend the stairs.

"Am I deceived?" he whispered huskily. "No, by Heaven, it is she!"

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 35]

THE FACE IN THE WATCH.

At lunch Carson was strangely silent and abstracted. The raillery of his friends failed to awaken him into anything like liveliness. He smiled a bit at their jokes and chaffing, but any one could see those smiles were forced.

"I should say it was high time you got away from the wild and woolly West!" cried Jack Diamond. "I've heard that loneliness on the ocean or the plains makes a man gloomy, and, by Jove! I believe

it's true."

"Cowboys and cattlemen are not gloomy," returned Carson. "As a rule, they're a jovial, good-natured set, who thoroughly enjoy a joke or a bit of humor. It's not loneliness on the plains that affects me, if there's anything the matter with me."

"Anything the matter with you?" rumbled Browning. "Why, in the old days you were always light-hearted. This is the first time I've ever seen a depressed mug on you."

"Let me alone, and I presume I'll come out of it," said the young Westerner. "I'm sorry if I'm casting a shadow on an otherwise happy gathering. I didn't mean to."

"Oh, you're all right, Carson. I should say your liver might be out of kilter. You need something to stir it up." [Pg 36]

"If there's anything that will stir up a man's liver more than a hundred-mile jaunt on horseback, I'd like to know what it is. I've been taking plenty such jaunts this spring. Although I haven't been at the ranch for a month, I was there when the snow came off, and rode the range with the rest of the boys to find out how our cows had come through the winter."

"Don't suppose you've been troubled any more by cattle thieves since the demise of that fake Laramie Dave?" questioned Merriwell.

"No, we put an end to the business in our parts. We had you to thank for it. You were the one who discovered how our brand of the B. S. was being turned into the Flying Dollars brand. You stopped cattle stealing in the Big Sandy region."

"Things were hot around there for a while, weren't they, Berlin?" laughed Frank.

"I haven't heard about this," said Diamond. "What's the story?"

Carson looked disturbed.

"I don't like to tell it," he confessed. "Still, I don't suppose Frank would give himself proper credit if he should tell you. Did you ever hear of Laramie Dave, the rustler?"

"My dear fellow, I've been living on the other side of the pond so long that I haven't heard of anything taking place out in your part of this country. Who was this Laramie Dave?" [Pg 37]

"The worst rustler known in recent years. He carried on most of his operations on the big ranches to the north of us. He operated extensively in Wyoming and in Montana. At last the cattlemen became exasperated and made things hot for him up there. Next we knew Laramie Dave was said to be getting in his work in Colorado. We lost cattle right along on the Big Sandy, and the Bar S people had the same trouble. The Flying Dollars people also made a similar complaint. The Flying Dollars Ranch was owned by Colonel King.

"There was an old feud between my foreman and the foreman of the Flying Dollars. I was with Merry in Denver when I received word that the rustlers were hitting us hard, and I struck out for the Big Sandy, Frank accompanying me. We found our fences were being cut everywhere, which permitted our cattle to stray or to be driven off. We rode over our ranch, took a look at the Bar S cattle, and visited the Flying Dollars.

"The night following our visit to the Flying Dollars Merry sat up scrawling on a piece of paper in an aimless way, while I went to bed. He woke me from a sound sleep by uttering an exclamation of triumph. I think I growled at him, but he made me get up, and there on the paper he had drawn the different brands of the three ranches, the Bar S, the Big Sandy, and the Flying Dollars. He had combined all three brands into one. He showed how either the Bar S or the B. S. could be turned into the Flying Dollars by having the latter brand burned over them. But every one in those parts respected Colonel King. No one had ever dreamed that he was concerned in the rustling. Nevertheless, Merry's detective work put us on the right track, and in the end we learned beyond question that King was stealing and rebranding our cattle. His assertions that he was losing cows were lies." [Pg 38]

"The climax came when a posse of officers and detectives cornered Laramie Dave, and some lead was pumped into him. Colonel King was a gray-haired, respectable-looking man, while Laramie Dave wore long black hair and a drooping mustache. But Laramie Dave's mustache was false, and his long black hair was a wig which covered the white hair of Colonel King. King was the real cattle thief. He was not, however, the real Laramie Dave, who was still up in Wyoming somewhere. He had simply made himself up to look like Laramie Dave, in order that the genuine rustler might get credit for the cattle stealing.

"That's the whole story."

"Sounds like a romance or a bit of fiction," observed Diamond. "Don't suppose such business could be carried on in the West at the present time."

"We put an end to it as far as Colorado is concerned," nodded Carson. "Merry deserves the credit for rounding up the last of our big cow thieves." [Pg 39]

"Let me see," murmured Merriwell, "Colonel King had a daughter, didn't he? What became of her, Berlin?"

Carson shook his head.

"No one knows," he replied. "She disappeared after her father's death."

After lunch they again sat on the veranda and chatted a while. Finally Frank, Bruce, and Jack went over to Farnham Hall, to attend to their duties there.

"Show Berlin over the grounds, Hodge," said Merry, as he was leaving. "I'll take him through the buildings myself later on."

Hodge and Carson strolled about that afternoon, first visiting the picnic grove and from thence turning toward the lake and the boathouse. At the boathouse they rested a while, for the spot was cool and inviting.

"I'd like a camera," said Carson. "Jingoes, Bart, a fellow could get some great views here! The scenery is soothing. That's the word for it, soothing. It gives me a feeling of rest."

"Then take your time and rest as much as you like," said Bart. "Since coming here I've had my first opportunity in months to rest. I never fancied there was a lazy streak in me, but I'm getting lazier and lazier every day. I'm afraid it would spoil me to hang around here long. I wouldn't have any relish for Arizona alkali or Mexican dust and sunshine." [Pg 40]

They sat in one of the boats that drifted beside the boathouse float, Carson dabbling his fingers in the water.

"It is a lazy spot," he murmured. "I should think Merriwell's boys would get the tired feeling."

"Oh, some of them do," smiled Hodge; "but Frank won't let them loll around long enough for it to become chronic. He keeps them up and doing."

After they had been there nearly an hour, Bart felt for his watch and found he had left it at the boathouse.

"What time is it, Carson?" he asked.

The young Westerner drew forth a hunting-case watch and opened it.

"Nearly three," he said. Then he sat staring at the watch.

But Bart observed it was not the face of the watch at which his companion was gazing with a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes. Leaning forward a bit, Hodge discovered that on the reverse side of the open front case there was a pictured face—that of a girl.

Finally, with a faint sigh, Carson closed the watch and slipped it into his pocket.

"You and Frank are very fortunate, very happy, Bart," he said. And again began dabbling in the water with his fingers. [Pg 41]

"I know your secret now," thought Bart. "There's a girl behind it. By Jove! Berlin, old man, you're hard hit."

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 42]

A BLACK SAMSON.

The sound of boyish voices at a distance finally aroused them.

"It must be the baseball squad over on the field," said Bart. "Don't you wish to go over, Carson?"

"Eh? Did you speak to me?" asked Berlin, glancing up from the pellucid water.

"Hear those chaps over on the field?"

"Yes."

"We haven't looked that field over, you know. It's very interesting. You haven't begun to inspect things yet, my boy. You want to see how Merry has fitted up for all sorts of sports here. You ought to see the bathhouse and the little clubhouse, the stand, the track, the diamond, and the field in general."

"I suppose so."

Carson displayed very little desire to move.

"Well, come on," urged Hodge.

Without protest Berlin stepped from the boat to the float and followed Bart. In a short time they were on the athletic field.

"What do you think of it?" asked Hodge, with a sweep of his hand. "Just take a good look."

"It's a splendid field, I should say; but I don't see where the people are coming from to fill that [Pg 43]

stand over yonder."

Bart laughed.

"That does look like a problem, doesn't it. The stand is almost large enough for a city race track. All the same, it has been crowded more than once this season."

"It doesn't seem possible."

"Certainly it doesn't."

"Why, it looks as if the stand could accommodate the whole of Bloomfield and have room to spare."

"Merry doesn't draw on Bloomfield alone. There are lots of towns around here, and they're already hot on athletics. Wellsburg isn't so far away, and more than once Wellsburg has sent trainloads of people down here. Pittston is larger than Bloomfield, and Pittston has the fever. I understand the citizens of this little town thought Merry crazy when he built that stand. They've changed their minds since."

"No one besides Frank Merriwell could build a stand like that and bring out people to fill it in a little country village. His old-time magnetism is as strong as ever. He draws people to him. Whatever he does, he arouses them, and they come out like magic."

"That's right. This was a sleepy village if I ever saw one. In fact, this was the sleepest burg I ever did see. I was here, you know, before Farnham Hall was built. I was here before the old Merriwell house was remodeled and turned into Merry Home. This field was an uneven, rocky strip of land, and the lake down yonder was half drained, the dam having fallen into disuse. The metamorphosis seems almost as surprising as the magic changes worked by Aladdin's lamp. Frank is the modern Aladdin. He has the lamp hidden somewhere—I'm sure of it."

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At the bathhouse they found the big colored man, Jumbo, who bowed most respectfully to Hodge.

"Hello, Jumbo," said Bart. "How are your muscles to-day?"

"Well, sah," grinned the darky, "dey am not painin' me so much as dey uster was. No, sah! Marsa Frank he sorter finds plenty ob work fo' to reduce de pain in mah muscles."

"Berlin," said Bart, "Jumbo is so strong that his muscles actually ache unless he can have some strenuous occupation by which to employ himself."

The big negro grinned and winked at Carson.

"That was what Ah tol' Marsa Frank when Ah come here," he said. "Ah wanted a job as perfesser in de 'cademy mos' monstrous baad. Dat gemman friend ob mine, Toots, he done tol' me dar was an openin' for a physicum destructor at de 'cademy. So, seem' Ah had all dat strength to spare, Ah jes' 'plied fo' de position. It happened Ah was about twenty minutes too late. De place was filled, but Marse Frank he gibbed me anudder job. In de first place, he made me 'sistant physicum janitor at the 'cademy. All Ah had to do was to keep things cleaned up around de place and fro out on de back ob dere necks dem fool people what come round to bodder Marsa Frank. Ah was so skeered for fear Ah wouldn't qualify fo' de position ob 'sistant physicum janitor dat Ah jes' scratched gravel night an' day, and it wa'n't long before the reduction of the pain in mah muscles begun to took place. I was plumb busted when Marsa Frank gib me dat position. Ah didn't hab a cent about me. Eber hear ob a coon what didn't hab a cent about him? Yah! yah! yah! Well, sah, dat was my condition. Now, sah, Ah'ze rich. Ah'ze gut eleben dol's in de bank, an' Ah'ze addin' to it continerly, sah—Ah'ze addin' to it continerly. If things keep up an' nuffin' goes wrong, Ah'll soon hab mo' money dan dat bloated bond holder, old Stranded Royle, an' dey say he's one ob de richest Creases dere am outside ob de Raithchils. But Ah ain't nowhere nigh as rich as at gemman friend ob mine, Toots. Bah golly! Ah bet dat brack nigger has gut pretty nigh a hundred dollars salted away. He suttingly belongs to de colored narrerstocracy. If Ah eber 'cumulates as much as dat, Ah'll buy a brownstone house in Pillumdelphy an' settle down dar to lib on mah income. Ah'd suttinly like to keep mah strength down the rest ob mah life a crippin' coupins off'n gover'ment bands. Neber see none ob dem gover'ment bands, but, bah jinks! dey mus' be de real stuff. Yah! yah! yah!"

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At last, to the satisfaction of Hodge, Carson was genuinely amused, and he joined heartily in the infectious laughter of the big colored man.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 47]

THE SUBSTITUTES.

After looking through the baths and the cozy little clubhouse, Bart and Berlin mounted the stairs to the observation cupola of the latter. From this point they could look down on the field or back toward Farnham Hall and Merry Home.

"Truly a most fascinating spot. That's a grand old house of Frank's. Makes me think of the fine

old colonial mansions of the South."

"That was Merry's idea in remodeling it," nodded Hodge. "Although born in the North, Frank is a man of the whole country. He's cosmopolitan. He has absorbed the spirit of the South, the East, and the West. He's in every way what you may call a representative American. There's no question about the home atmosphere of those old colonial houses. They make one feel sorry for the dinky, finicky, filigree houses built by most people in these days."

There was a shout from the baseball field below, and, looking down there, they saw several boys scampering round the diamond.

"Somebody made a great hit then," observed Berlin. "It was a homer, and evidently the bases were full."

"That's the regular team at bat," exclaimed Hodge. "It's playing the second team."

"How many teams are there?"

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"Four in all, although beyond the second team the other two are not particularly strong. The second team fancies it's as good as the regulars, and it has beaten the regulars once. Let's go down."

A few minutes later they walked onto the field, where a hot dispute seemed to be taking place. Guy Featherstone, the pitcher of the second team, was furiously arguing with the umpire, who threatened to put him out of the game.

"Put me out! put me out!" dared Feather. "You're robbing us, anyhow! You're giving Sparkfair's bunch everything! You passed Bemis when I had him fairly struck out, and that gave Sparkfair a chance to make that hit. Before that we had three to one and were trimming them in great shape. Now they're two runs ahead of us. I suppose you've fixed it up with Spark. He's bound to win, if he has to make a deal with the umpire to do it."

Dale Sparkfair, a handsome lad with blue eyes, broke into a merry laugh.

"Featherstone, your head is as light as the front part of your name and as thick as the rear end of it," he declared. "You know I'm not given to making deals with umpires. All I ever ask for is a square show, and I'll have that or take to the warpath."

"Well, what do I get, what do I get?" snarled Feather, showing his teeth. "You can't bully everybody, Dale Sparkfair! I demand a square show myself. I can tell when I strike a man out. I put the third strike over fairly, and Bemis never wiggled at it. Kilgore called it a ball and filled the bases."

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The umpire was a boy with a queer, crooked mouth, one corner of which twisted up while the other drooped.

"You seem to think everybody's crooked, Featherstone," he said angrily. "I'm not umpiring this game for fun, but because you—you asked me to."

"I didn't suppose you were another of Sparkfair's sycophants!" flung back Featherstone. "You're as crooked as your mouth!"

An instant later, had not Sparkfair and others held them apart, Kilgore would have struck Featherstone.

"Stop where you are, both of you!" commanded Dale sternly. "We'll have no fighting here on this field."

"He'll have to swallow his words, or I'll punch him for them!"

"I'll play no further with that fellow umpiring!" declared Featherstone. "I am going to stop right here, and I think some of the rest feel the same. Come on, boys, let's quit."

"The quitters will quit," came from Sparkfair; "but I don't believe there are many quitters here, Feather."

Guy walked out and called for his men to follow him off the field.

"I'm with you," said one of them. "I think you're right, Feather, and I'm done."

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"Yes, take Booby along with you, Feather," said Dale. "I thought likely he might hoist the white flag."

"We'll stop the game!" sneered Featherstone. "The team can't play without us. Kilgore can forfeit to you, and you may feel as proud as you like over your victory."

"Perhaps we'll be able to pick up a pitcher and a second baseman to fill the vacancies," said Sparkfair, looking around. "Who'll volunteer? Any one will do. We want to finish out this practice game."

"Come, Carson," urged Hodge, "let's you and I go into that game. I'll pitch, and you play second."

"I'm all out of practice," said Berlin.

"And I'm not a pitcher, you know," reminded Hodge. "We can limber up and have some

amusement, anyhow."

He offered their services, and his offer was promptly accepted by the second team, not a little to the dissatisfaction and dismay of Featherstone.

"I'm the captain of that team," cried Guy, "and I order it off the field!"

Bart walked up to the angry boy, placed a hand on his shoulder, and looked straight into his eyes.

"I'm afraid you're just what Sparkfair has called you, my son—a quitter," said Hodge, in a low tone. "The rest of the boys are going to play. You and your friend had better run over to the Hall. Trot along, now."

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Muttering and growling, Featherstone turned away.

Hodge and Carson removed their coats, vests, collars, and neckties, and prepared for business.

"How does the game stand?" asked Bart, as he walked out to the pitcher's position.

"Score is five to three against you, and this is the sixth inning," answered Sparkfair. "You have your last turn at bat."

"How many men out?"

"Two."

"Come here, catcher," invited Bart. "I'll have to know your signals."

Walter Shackleton hurried to meet Hodge and explained his system of signals. Bart listened and nodded.

"Give me a few minutes to get the kinks out of my arm, Sparkfair?" he asked, as he again resumed the position at the pitching plate.

"Sure, sure," smiled Dale. "Go ahead and unbend your wing."

Hodge threw a dozen balls to Brooks at first. Then, with Lander, the next batter, standing back, he sent two or three over the plate to Shackleton.

"All right," he finally nodded.

"Play!" called Kilgore.

Jake Lander stepped into the batter's box and smashed the first ball pitched by Bart. He drove it whizzing past Hodge, who did not have time to touch it.

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Carson trapped it cleanly, scooped it up, and threw it to Higgins at first.

"Out!" shouted Kilgore.

"Great support, Berlin, old boy!" laughed Bart, as the second team trotted in, and Sparkfair's nine took the field.

"Now we want to take a little fire out of this bright Spark, boys," said Bart. "We need a couple of runs right off the reel. Who's the first hitter?"

"I am," answered Sam Higgins.

"What's your position on the list?"

"Third."

"All right. Play your own game."

Higgins stepped out and swiped rather wildly at the first two balls, missing them both.

"Make him get it over, my boy!" urged Bart.

With Sam anxious to hit, Sparkfair did his best to "pull" him on wide ones, but Higgins let them pass, and three balls were called.

"Now you have him where you want him," came from Hodge. "If he doesn't cut the pan, you will saunter."

Sparkfair attempted to cut the pan with a swift one, but Higgins hit it. It was a hot grounder to Netterby, who fumbled it long enough for Hungry Sam to arrive at first in safety.

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Tommy Chuckleson and Sam Scrogg were on the coaching lines.

"We're off again!" shouted Scrogg.

"Off again, on again, gone again!" piped Chuckleson. "It's up to you, Balloon! Don't take an ascension!"

Abe Bunderson, nicknamed "Balloon," was the next man to strike. Ere he left the bench, Hodge whispered in his ear:

"Bunt, my boy. You know what Joe Crowfoot can do throwing. Higgins can't steal. Sacrifice him to

second."

Balloon nodded.

He obeyed instructions, bunting rather awkwardly, yet skillfully, and sacrificing himself at first, while Higgins took second.

"Hodge next!" called the scorer.

"You're up against it now, Sparkfair," came from Lawrence Graves, as Bart stood forth to the plate.

"I'm scared to death!" laughed Dale. "See me tremble! See me vibrate!"

The infielders crept in for a bunt, while Sparkfair pitched a swift, high ball.

Hodge attempted to drop the ball just inside the first-base line, but made a foul tip, and the sphere plunked into young Joe Crowfoot's mitt.

"Don't pick 'em right off the bat, Joseph," remonstrated Bart. "If you get so close, you'll catch the ball before I have time to hit it." [Pg 54]

The Indian boy smiled grimly.

"Mebbe that keep you from tying score," he said.

Sparkfair worked cautiously with Hodge, and, as a result, two balls were called after this first strike.

"Walking is easier than running, Spark," reminded Bart.

"Then I think I'll let you chase," said Dale. "I hope you chase the ball instead of chasing round the bases."

Hodge was watching Dale's every movement. He saw Sparkfair hold the ball, covered by his hands, close to his mouth. Evidently the pitcher intended to use the spit ball. Nevertheless, something warned Bart that Dale had turned the ball over and grasped the dry side. His pretense of trying a spit ball was all a bluff.

Whiz! The ball came whistling from Spark's fingers.

Crack! Hodge met it fairly on the trade-mark.

Away, away, away sailed the sphere, passing far over the head of Thad Barking, the center fielder, who had turned and was running as fast as his legs would carry him.

Guy Featherstone and Booby Walker had paused at a distance to watch the game a few moments.

Featherstone uttered a furious exclamation of anger. [Pg 55]

"I'm glad he hit that ball, and yet it makes me mad!" he grated. "I might have done the same myself. Just look at that—just look at it! It's a home run! It ties the score!"

He was right.

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 56]

SPARKFAIR'S HIT.

Sparkfair sat down on the pitcher's plate and watched Hodge circling the bases.

"Hereafter," he observed, with a doleful grin, "I'll put my fielders over in the next county when you come to bat."

Bart's hit reminded Dale of Dick Merriwell's first appearance at Fardale. He recalled the fact that Dick had come to bat in the ninth inning, with two men out, the bases full, and three runs needed to tie the score. Merriwell managed to connect with the ball after two strikes had been called. He drove it far over Barking's head, clearing the sacks and coming home himself, thus winning the game by a single run.

That recollection was decidedly unpleasant to Spark.

"If I get to ruminating on such things, I'll spring a leak and weep real tears," he muttered, as he rose to his feet.

From the distance, Guy Featherstone shouted:

"Yah! yah! You're not so much, Sparkfair! You're pie for a real batter!"

With this parting taunt, Feather took Booby Walker's arm and led him away, both disappearing into the bathhouse.

Tommy Chuckleson was the next hitter to face Dale. "Why can't I do something like that?" exclaimed Chuck. "If I could ever hit the ball hard enough, you'd see me making a record round the bases!"

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"Just set a few mice after you and you'd make a record, all right," laughed Dale, in return.

Then he proceeded to strike Tommy out in short order.

Lawrence Graves, his face as expressionless as a doormat, came up and batted a weak one into the diamond, being thrown out with ease.

The sixth inning ended, with the score tied.

Hedge returned to the pitcher's slab.

"We're going to trim you to-day, Spark," asserted Walter Shackleton, as he crouched froglike behind the bat. "There are no quitters on the team now."

"Don't alarm me—please don't!" implored Dale. "It's most unkind, Shack."

Fred Hollis was the first one up. He batted a grounder through Bubbs and reached second. Then came Brooks, who romped to first on an error by Netterby, although Hollis was held at second.

"Joseph," said Hodge, as young Joe Crowfoot stepped out, "I know your noble grandsire, and for his sake I'm not going to work you very hard to-day. I'll let you go right back to the bench in a moment."

"Mebbe so," muttered young Joe. "We see."

Then he picked out a good one and lifted a long fly into the field.

"Hold your bases! hold your bases!" shouted the coachers at Hollis and Brooks.

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Bunderson, really looking something like a balloon with his round body, made a hot run for the ball and pulled it down close to the foul flag.

A moment before the ball struck in the fielder's hands both coachers shrieked:

"Run!"

Even as the ball landed in Bunderson's grasp Hollis and Brooks were off.

Abe lost a little time in turning to throw toward second. This lost time enabled Brooks to reach the sack safely, while Hollis landed on third.

Crowfoot skipped down to first, hoping his fly might not be caught, but he turned back in disappointment.

"I told you I'd let you rest, Joseph, my boy," said Bart.

"You near make bad mistake," retorted the young redskin. "You near guess wrong that time."

"I confess it," nodded Hodge. "You gave me a heart throb when you smashed the sphere."

"We need these runs, Barking!" called Sparkfair, as the next batter walked out.

"It's a deuced poor game, don't you know," said Barking. "I'm really getting sore on it, by Jove! I wish they would take up cricket. Mr. Merriwell ought to introduce some good English game into this school."

"Hello!" said Hodge; "here's a pickle from Piccadilly. Here's a blooming Britisher—in his mind. What are you going to do to me, Johnny Bull?"

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Barking was actually flattered. He enjoyed being mistaken for an Englishman.

"Aw," he drawled, "it's such a blooming bother to run bases. I rawther think I'll walk, don't you know."

He did. In spite of Bart's best efforts Thad waited undisturbed and was finally passed to first on four balls.

"If I had my hat with me, I'd take it off to you, Johnny Bull," said Hodge. "You're clever—altogether too clever for us poor unsophisticated Yanks. How long have you been over?"

"How long has he been over?" sneered Sim Scrogg from third. "Why, he never saw the Atlantic Ocean. He was born inland, and he has never yet been two hundred miles away from home."

"Play ball, fellows—play ball!" cried Sparkfair. "The sacks are charged! The pillows are peopled! Only one out! Now's our time to settle this game! The new pitcher is a mark! Bump him, Bubbs!"

Little Bob Bubbs was a clever hitter, and he connected with the ball all right this time. He smashed it out on a line, and the crack of ball and bat was followed almost instantly by the smack of ball and mitt as Hodge pulled the sphere down with his left hand.

Without losing a moment to transfer the ball from the left hand to his right, Bart snapped it over to Scrogg at third, catching Hollis off the sack, and completing a breathless double play.

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For an instant the regulars seemed dazed. For once in his life Sparkfair could not find appropriate words, and, silently shaking his head, he started for the pitcher's position.

"Ho! ho! ho!" rumbled Sam Higgins, as he lumbered in from first. "Just fooling with you, that's all! Just getting your courage up to take some of the swelling out of your heads!"

At bat Slick now faced Sparkfair. Oliver pulled his cap down hard on his well-oiled hair, smiled a greasy smile, and then struck out.

Carson was the next man.

"I don't believe I can hit a balloon," he muttered to Bart, ere leaving the bench. "I'm all out of practice, you know."

"You didn't appear very rusty at the start off," said Bart.

Berlin walked out, fouled the ball twice, and then lined it into left for two bags.

"Oh, yes, you're all out of practice!" laughed Bart. "You can't hit a bit, Carson!"

He was glad to see Berlin laughing on second.

"The old game's making him forget his troubles," thought Hodge. "That's the main reason why I wanted him to play." [Pg 61]

"These back numbers seem to be onto your curves, Dale!" cried Bob Bubbs.

"Don't rub it in—please don't!" implored Sparkfair. "The way they slam me is simply awful! I did think I could pitch a little, but I'm afraid I was deceived."

He knew Scrogg's weakness, however, and, forced Sim to put up an easy infield fly, which Hollis handled.

Shackleton batted one into right field, and Carson attempted to reach home on it.

Sleepy Jake Lander was very wide awake, and he made a line throw to the plate.

Regardless of the fact that he was not in playing uniform, Carson slid. Crowfoot was there, however, and he promptly tagged Berlin. Kilgore declared it a put-out.

Hodge laughed at Carson and slapped him on the shoulder.

"These kids know how to play the game, old boy," he said. "We mustn't forget that Frank Merriwell is their instructor and coach."

Carson joined in the laugh.

"I thought I had that score recorded on the score sheet," he confessed.

In the eighth, with one out and the bases full, Brooks drove in a run.

Two men attempted to score, however, and the second runner was put out at the plate. A moment later another man was caught off his sack, making the third out. [Pg 62]

But the regulars had the lead.

"As a pitcher I don't seem to be a howling success," laughed Hodge. "I thought they were going to make half a dozen that trip."

"We've got to get some now," said Carson. "If we don't I see our finish."

"There's another inning. We come to bat last."

"But we can't depend on winning out in the last of the ninth."

"That's right; we do need runs."

Once more Sam Higgins was up to lead off, and Bart spoke a few words of instruction in Sam's ear.

Higgins picked out an opening in the infield and drove a ball through it.

Bunderson bunted once more and was safe on Bubbs' bad throw to first.

"Look out, Spark—look out!" cried the boys. "Here comes Hodge again!"

Sparkfair used all his skill to deceive Bart, and the boy's shoots and curves were indeed enigmas. Hodge could not solve them, and a great shout went up from the boys as Dale finally struck him out.

Chuckleson lifted a foul that dropped into Shackleton's mitt.

"Two gone, Spark—two gone!" barked Bubbs. "Now you can hold 'em!" [Pg 63]

Hodge whispered instructions to Graves. Graves walked out, held his bat on his shoulder, and stood like a post while Dale pitched. Somehow the very fact that Lawrence seemed so utterly unconcerned appeared to rattle Dale, who finally passed him to first, filling the bases.

"Too bad Slick is next," muttered Scrogg, as Oliver took his turn at bat.

Slick drove a sharp grounder at Netterby, who booted it into the diamond, and a run came in before the ball could be recovered.

Oliver was safe on first, and the sacks were still full.

The score was tied once more. Carson walked out and laced out a handsome single, which brought in two runs.

"How Featherstone would rejoice had he lingered!" muttered Sparkfair. "They're getting away with this game. I must stop it—I will!"

In spite of this determination, another error let in still another run, and Sim Scrogg reached first.

At last Sparkfair found a victim, and Shackleton fanned.

Still, to most of the boys the game seemed lost, for the second team had a lead of three runs.

"It's our last chance, fellows," said Dale gravely. "No fooling now. No sacrificing. We've got to hit the ball." [Pg 64]

Barely had he uttered these words when an inspiration came to him. He called his players about him.

"Fellows," he said, "neither Scrogg nor Higgins are swift in handling bunts. We won't try sacrificing, but we'll try bunting, with the idea of bothering them. Don't bunt the ball where Hodge can handle it. Drop it toward first or third. Lead off, Crowfoot."

Young Joe stepped out and bunted handsomely, dropping his bat and scooting down the base line like a flash. Scrogg was seconds too late in securing the ball and sending it to Higgins. Crowfoot was safe.

Thad Barking followed with an equally successful bunt.

Hodge called Higgins and Scrogg in a bit.

"Look out for those tricks," he warned.

Bubbs glanced toward Sparkfair inquiringly. Dale nodded.

Bubbs followed with the third bunt, while Crowfoot and Barking moved up. Nevertheless, Scrogg managed to secure the ball and throw Towser out.

Netterby attempted to bunt, but popped up a little fly to Hodge and followed Bubbs to the bench.

"I rather guess it's all over," said Higgins. "The bunting game didn't work."

Bemis looked doubtful, but Sparkfair still held to his instructions. Hiram obeyed and laid down a bunt on the line toward first. [Pg 65]

Unseen by any one, Scrogg hooked his fingers into Crowfoot's belt and held him at third. The Indian boy was angry and came near hitting Sim.

Hodge secured the ball too late to throw Bemis out, and the sacks were full once more. Crowfoot appealed to Kilgore, but the umpire had not seen Scrogg's trick and refused to penalize the second team on that account.

Sparkfair was given a hand as he walked out to the plate. Once more Dale thought of Dick Merriwell's feat on his first appearance at Fardale. The situation was nearly the same. Two men were out, the bases were full, three runs were needed to tie the score, and four to win.

"You'll have to check them, Bart," said Carson.

Hodge did his best with Sparkfair, and it began to look as if he would succeed in striking Dale out, for Spark missed two benders.

But Dale did not strike out. He finally found a ball that suited him and "found it good." It was a duplicate of Hodge's drive over center field. The regulars whooped with joy as runner after runner came galloping over the plate. They yelled like Indians as Sparkfair tore round the bases and came in from third. Four runs were secured, and once more the first team, had a lead of one tally.

"That's where you got even with me, Sparkfair!" called Hodge. [Pg 66]

"I had to do it," laughed Dale. "You struck me out before."

With the sacks cleared, Hodge seemed invincible, for he quickly settled Lander's hash.

The game was not over, for the second team had another chance. Nevertheless, Sparkfair was at his best, and the three batters who faced him went down, one after another.

Hodge was the first to congratulate Spark.

"You're a good man in an emergency, and such men win games," he said.

"Thanks," smiled Dale. "Don't mind my blushes. I simply love to blush."

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 67]

A MOONLIGHT MEETING.

In truth, the game had livened Carson up and taken his thoughts from unpleasant things.

The remainder of the afternoon was fully occupied, for Merry showed Berlin through the buildings and explained the methods of the school.

At dinner Carson seemed much brighter and joined in the talk and laughter. After dinner he accompanied Frank and Inza to see the baby. Little Frank was sound asleep, and one of the maids was watching over him.

"Where's Lizette, Maggie?" asked Inza.

"Th' poor crather do have a headache," answered Maggie. "She axed me would Oi look afther th' choild whoile she rested a bit."

"A headache? That's strange. Lizette has told me she never had an ache or a pain in all her life."

"Did yez notice, ma'am, if she touched wood whin she said it?" asked Maggie.

"I didn't notice."

"Thot's it, thot's it," declared the maid, with conviction. "Oi'm not superstitious, but Oi nivver brag about mesilf thot Oi don't touch wood. Mark me worruds, whin a person boasts and fergits to touch wood, something happens to thot person. I nivver knew it to fail."

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"A fine baby, Frank," said Berlin, as he stood looking at the child. "You ought to be proud of him."

"No peacock was ever prouder," laughed Merry. "We hope to make a star of him, eh, Inza?"

"Oh, the star—the birthmark!" exclaimed Inza. "Can't you show it to Mr. Carson without waking the baby, Maggie?"

"Oi kin try, ma'am."

The maid gently slipped the clothes from the baby's left shoulder and revealed the tiny, perfectly formed pink star.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" declared Berlin. "Why, one would think it stamped there. I never saw anything so perfect in all my life. Frank, Inza, that child is marked for something great."

"Let us hope you're right," said Merry.

That night, after retiring to his room, Carson sat a long time at the open window, gazing out through the whispering trees toward the fall moon that was rising in the east. The old feeling of sadness and disappointment stole over him and gave him a sensation of uncontrollable loneliness in the world.

"I suppose I was mistaken about Lizette," he finally muttered. "I shall be able to tell when I see her again. I hoped to see her when they took me to look at the baby. Rather strange she wasn't there. Still, I presume it's true that she had a headache."

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Finally he undressed, donned his pajamas, and got into bed.

Sleep did not come readily at his command. His brain was busy with many thoughts. He recalled the old days at college, when he first met Frank Merriwell. In those happy days ere meeting Bessie he was heart-free and care-free. It seemed so long ago—so long ago. It was something like a dream. Dimly he recalled the classroom, the campus, and the field. He saw his youthful comrades gathering about him at the old fence in the dusk of a soft spring evening. He heard their light talk and careless laughter. He heard them singing beneath the windows of the dormitories. He heard them cheering on the field as Old Eli battled for baseball honors or struggled to win new gridiron glory.

Ah, those were happy days, Carson, my boy! They were the happiest you have ever known. You did not appreciate those glorious days as they were passing, but you appreciate them now, and the memory is a precious one. Can such happy days as those ever again be yours?

Then he recalled old times on the ranch. He thrilled as he remembered his first meeting with dark-eyed Bessie. How she had bewitched him! How she had puzzled and fascinated him! At the very first he had felt her fascination dangerous, yet it was so delightful that he did not mind the danger.

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Thinking of Bessie, he finally fell asleep and dreamed of her. On the bed he tossed restlessly, murmuring her name. He seemed to see her near at hand, yet gliding away before him as he vainly sought to overtake her. She turned her bewitching face and smiled at him alluringly.

Desperately he strove to reach her, but always she kept just beyond his grasp. Yet she beckoned him on with her smile and with her hypnotic eyes. Finally, in mad desperation, he made one last great leap and seized her. He had her now! She was his! She could not get away! In that moment of triumph a marvelous metamorphosis took place, and as his arm bound her to his side he beheld her transformed into a boy. She was no longer Bessie, but young Tom King, reckless, taunting, derisive, and mocking.

In that mysterious way of dreams, he now beheld himself gazing down upon a dying man, who lay stretched upon the ground, a bullet having passed through his body. He knew the man. It was Colonel King, the cattle rustler, who had carried on his criminal work disguised as Laramie Dave. There were other men standing about—armed men. The sheriff was there with his posse. At last, through the revelation and information furnished by Frank Merriwell, this cattle stealer had been captured and shot. And now he was gasping his life away, and soon his stain-spotted soul would stand naked before the judgment bar above.

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Through his dream—if dream it was—a voice sounded, cutting him to the heart. That voice cried, "You have killed him, you devils!" Then young Tom King threw himself on his father's prostrate body, weeping bitterly. Carson attempted to lift the boy, but once more before his eyes a change took place, and Tom King became Lizette, the French nurse.

He awoke, shaking in every limb, with cold perspiration on his face.

"Did I dream," he hoarsely muttered, "or did I live the past over again?"

There was no more sleep for him. He rose and went to the window. The cool night beckoned to him. The soft moon smiled at him. The whispering leaves said, "Come out, come out."

Carson dressed, softly descended the stairs, and left the house.

He filled his lungs and stretched his arms. The moon had mounted into the eastern sky, and there were deep shadows beneath the trees. The restless young man walked amid those shadows.

Suddenly he paused, startled by the sound of voices. Near at hand two persons were talking. One voice, hoarse, harsh, suppressed, was that of a man. The other was a woman's voice.

"What does it mean?" thought Carson. "Who is here at this hour? I must know—I'll investigate."

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Cautiously he stole forward, keeping deep within the shadows. He had not proceeded far before these words, spoken by the woman, came distinctly to his ears:

"I cannot—I will not do it!"

An instant later a shadowy figure came rustling toward him. It was the woman, and she was right upon him ere she discovered the silent man who stood there beneath the trees. With a little gasp, she turned and fled on. A patch of moonlight, shimmering through the branches, had shown him her face.

The face of Lizette!

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 73]

THE TRUTH.

His first impulse was to follow her. Then he stopped and stood waiting for the man. The man did not come.

"Where is he? who is he?" speculated Berlin.

After a time Carson turned toward the house.

"She's in her room long ere this," he thought.

But close by the wall a shadow lingered, and, as he approached, this shadow suddenly moved forward and confronted him.

"What is it you do here?" demanded the voice of Lizette. "I know you see me. I know you hear sometheeng. Why you watch me? *Mon Dieu!* would you hurt a poor girl?"

Carson took a firm grip on himself and was deliberate in speaking.

"Why should I wish to hurt you?" he asked. "You have done no harm, have you?"

"Oh, no, no, no! I haf done notheeng!"

"Then why do you fear?"

"You watch me. You follaire me."

"If you have done nothing wrong, you need not fear to be watched."

"But it is not honerable to play ze spy on a girl."

"I did not do so intentionally. I could not sleep, and I came out here to get the air. It was wholly by chance that I ran across you. Who was with you?"

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"No one, monsieur."

"Tell me the truth," commanded Berlin, still in that calm, deliberate tone.

"It is ze truth."

"Think again. You place me in the awkward position of contradicting a lady. You were talking with a man."

"No."

"But I heard him."

"What deed you hear?" she fiercely demanded, as she clutched his arm. "Tell me what deed you hear heem say?"

"Then you acknowledge there was a man?"

"Oh, what is ze use to deny! *Oui, oui, zere was ze man!*"

"Who is he?"

"Perhap maybe he is my lovaire. Perhap he has promised me to marry."

For one instant Berlin seemed on the point of losing all his assumed self-control. His hands shook, and he made a move as if he would seize her roughly. He checked this movement just in time.

"Your lover, eh?" he said. "Well, what sort of a lover is he who meets you in this sort of a manner at night? Why doesn't he see you like a man, instead of sneaking around this way? Your lover, girl? What right have you to have a lover other than myself? You call yourself Lizette, and you speak with an accent, but I know you are Bessie King. I did think I might be mistaken, but now I'm positive there is no mistake. I am right. You are Bessie!"

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She threw back her head and laughed softly.

"I hear ze madame say you are not well, monsieur," she said. "I theenk ze madame is right. It must be een your head. I am vary, vary sorree for you. You should not become so much excited."

"I knew you were a wonderful actress, Bessie, but you astonish me still. When you lived on the Flying Dollars Ranch you took delight in acting a part."

"What is ze Flying Dollairs Ranch?"

He paid no heed to the question.

"Yes, you were a great actress even then," he went on. "Colonel King had a beautiful daughter, and he was supposed to have a son—a harum-scarum, reckless lad, who went galloping over the ranges with the cowboys, roped cattle, took part in round-ups, and did all sorts of things like that. This boy was known as Tom King. Colonel King's foreman, Injun Jack, had a grudge against Frank Merriwell and swore to kill him. He found his opportunity and attempted to shoot Merriwell. In order to save Merriwell's life young Tom King shot Injun Jack. It was thought that Jack had been instantly killed. But while Colonel King lay dying a few hours later and Tom King was weeping over his father, Injun Jack appeared and made a revelation that astounded every one. The boy who had been known by that name was Bessie King, the colonel's daughter. You are that girl."

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Again Lizette tried to force a laugh.

"It is so strange a crazee notion," she said.

"Why keep it up?" demanded Berlin. "You must realize you cannot fool me, even though, by the change in your appearance, by doing your hair in a peculiar manner, penciling your eyebrows and staining your skin, you have deceived Merriwell himself. He did not know you as I knew you. Look at me, Bessie. Have your eyes shown you no change in me? Have you not seen how altered I have become since your disappearance? I never knew how much I loved you until you had vanished and I could not find you. I have searched everywhere, and every hour since your vanishing has been an hour of restless torture for me. It seems to me that I loved you, Bessie, as no man ever loved a girl before. You gave me no opportunity to declare my love, but I declare it now. It's as strong as it was then—and stronger. I swore I would find you some time. I vowed you should be mine. I have found you, and I intend to keep that vow. What's this, little girl—you're weeping? You won't deny me longer? You are Bessie—Bessie, my own!"

"Yes," she answered chokingly, "I am Bessie!"

CHAPTER XII.

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A HEART LAID BARE.

It was the truth at last. His heart leaped madly. But when he reached for her she started back.

"Don't touch me!" came huskily from her lips. "You must not!"

"Mustn't?"

"No."

"Why, Bessie, I still——"

"You can't forget that I am the child of a cattle thief—a criminal!"

"That's not your fault, little girl. I can forget it. I have forgotten it."

"It's impossible," she declared, shaking her head.

"Such talk is folly, Bessie. Your father's misdeeds should not blight your life. I will not have it so! You were innocent."

She turned her face toward him, and those wonderful dark eyes looked sadly into his. There were tears trembling on the long lashes.

"You know I'm not foolish, Berlin Carson," she said, in a strangely hardened tone. "In the old days on the ranch I was no soft-hearted, light-headed girl."

"You were the most bewitching and fascinating creature the Colorado sun ever shone upon. There was always a mystery about you, and it bound me with a magic spell. The years since I saw you last have made that spell more potent and powerful."

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"Still, I'm the daughter of a man who rustled cattle. He did not rustle them in the good old-fashioned way. Instead of that, he stole them after the manner that a sneak thief picks a pocket. He did his work by altering the brands. He posed as another man. He sought to lay all the blame on the shoulders of Laramie Dave, a known rustler."

"Why talk of that, Bessie?"

"I lived on the Flying Dollars Ranch. Dressed as a boy, I rode the range with my father's cattlemen, who helped him rustle. Do you think I knew nothing of what was taking place? Do you think I was silly enough and soft enough to be deceived? You must understand that I knew my father was a criminal."

Carson shivered a little, but it was not because of the cool night air. In all the weeks and months since her vanishing, in all his thoughts of her, this thing had never occurred to him. He had regarded her as the innocent, unfortunate daughter of a bad man.

Now, however, he sought an excuse for her.

"He was your father, and you had to protect him. You could not betray your own father. You must have suffered."

"You're too kind, too generous," she hoarsely explained. "It was no effort on my part to keep his secret. I knew what business he followed long years before I ever saw you. I knew it long before he purchased the Flying Dollars. Down in Texas he was a rustler, but, unlike other rustlers, he did not squander his money. He saved it and sent me to school. In a boarding school I was regarded as the daughter of a wealthy ranchman. I was popular with my girl schoolmates. No one of them ever suspected that my father was a cattle thief and that I knew it."

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"For Heaven's sake, stop!" commanded Carson. "Don't seek to degrade yourself in my eyes! Don't try to turn me against you in this manner!"

"I'm simply telling you the truth, Berlin Carson. Do you wonder why I vanished after my father's death? Do you wonder why I never faced you again? You knew a part of the miserable truth. Had I been compelled to see you again, I knew I would tell you all, and I likewise knew what that meant."

"What it meant?"

"Yes."

"You thought——"

"I knew it would shock you beyond words. I knew the effect it must have upon you. I could not bring myself to meet you, well knowing that you would shudder and shrink from me."

He lifted his hand.

"No, no, never!" he declared. "You were wrong, Bessie. You were frightfully mistaken. The trouble was that you did not understand me—you did not know me."

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"It cannot be that you——"

"I should have pitied you, and I should have loved you all the more, even as I do now," he asserted. "Why not? It was not your fault that your father was a criminal. Of course you had to keep his secret. It was a cruel fate that placed you in such a position."

"Wait a little longer," she urged. "You must know the truth, every bit of it. I admired my father. I loved the danger and the thrill of that wild life. Not only did I know what he did, but more than once, in the darkness of night, I aided him and his men in their work. I was dressed as a boy, and only Injun Jack and my father knew I was not a boy. Now you know what sort of girl you have fancied you loved. I mingled with those men, those desperadoes, who were profane as pirates—who were, in a sense, the pirates of the great plains. A fine life for an innocent girl! Have you forgotten that my hands are stained with human blood? Have you forgotten it was my bullet that killed Injun Jack?"

"That was one of the bravest deeds of your life. Only for that, Frank Merriwell would be dead. Only for your nerve and bravery in shooting that ruffian, one of God's grandest men would have been murdered in cold blood. Since my college days I have loved and admired him above all other men. When you saved his life by taking another worthless life you did a noble deed. Had you not fled, I would have married you at the earliest possible moment. I am ready now, Bessie."

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CHAPTER XIII.

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THE PLEDGE OF FAITH.

Still it seemed impossible for her to believe. She put out her hand toward the near-by wall of the house, as if seeking support. When he offered to give her that support, she continued to hold him at bay.

"You're a noble boy, Berlin," she whispered. "You will make a noble husband for some girl."

"For you."

"No, not for me."

"Then you do not love me! You never loved me!" he panted. "You were toying with me! You were deceiving me! It was a part of your amusement! You knew you had fascinated me and bewitched me, and it gave you pleasure to toy with me! Ah, this hurts more than everything else!"

"I did care for you," she asserted faintly.

"You did care—in a way, perhaps."

"You never told me that you loved me."

"Because you would not give me a chance. I never told you in words, but my eyes told you so a hundred times."

"I've seen others who talked with their eyes and kept silent with their lips."

"And you thought me like them?"

"Well—no. You were different; I acknowledge that."

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"But you thought me fit only to flirt with. That was it. You took delight in arousing the fire in my heart that you might see it glowing from my eyes. You're like them all. They love to play with fire. They love to lead a man on and then throw him down. But I didn't think you just like every other girl. I thought you different."

"You have learned that I was different, but in a way you did not suspect."

"Then you confess you were toying with me, deceiving me?" he bitterly exclaimed.

A little while before she had sought to turn him against her by telling all the truth. When that effort failed and he suddenly accused her in this manner, she had fancied she saw the way to accomplish her purpose with a falsehood. But now that she was face to face with it she faltered and could not lie.

"I tell you I did care for you—I cared for you more than words may express. My fear in those days—and it was the only fear I had ever known—was that you would learn the truth about me and despise me. Do you remember the day that you brought Frank Merriwell to the Flying Dollars? Do you remember that you were left alone in the little library and in a book you found some verse I had written? I used to write poetry in those days. Those verses were entitled 'My Secret.' I was angry when I found you had read them, and I tore them up. I can quote the first stanza."

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In a low musical voice she repeated the following lines:

"When he comes riding up the valley
I watch from my window nook;
My cheeks burn hot, my heart is throbbing
For a single word or look
To tell me that he loves me truly,
But fear his lips will not be
Unsealed to whisper low the story

That means so much to me.

"It's poor poetry, Berlin—poor poetry; but it expressed the longing of my heart. And your lips remained sealed!"

Now he would have seized her and crushed her to his heart, but with astonishing strength she clutched his wrists and held him back.

"My lips are unsealed now!" he panted.

"It's too late!" she cried, in a weak, heartbroken tone; "too late!"

"Why is it too late? How can that be?"

"One thing you have forgotten. You found me here playing a part. Do you think I'm pretending to be a French nurse merely as a whim—merely as an amusement?"

"I can't understand that," he confessed. "Why is it?"

She forced a laugh that was wholly without merriment.

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"Perhaps this is only one of many parts I have played. You called me an actress. I am—an actress on the stage of life. I intended that no one should ever again recognize me as the daughter of Colonel King. I found it necessary to work—to make my living somehow. Had I appeared here as Bessie King, do you think Frank Merriwell would have trusted me? Do you think I would be an inmate of his home? Oh, no, Berlin. I had to disguise myself to deceive him, and it was necessary to play my part well. Even when I did my best I realized he knew he had seen me before some time, somewhere. Once he questioned me. Once he asked me if I had a brother. He was very, very near discovering the truth then. Do you think I can have any feeling of friendliness for this man Merriwell? Do you think I can forget that it was through him my father met his fate? Only for Frank Merriwell the real truth might have remained a secret. In time the cattle stealing would have ceased. My father would have sold the Flying Dollars, and we would have gone elsewhere. But Merriwell came, and his discovery brought the sheriff and his posse. Sometimes when I have thought of this I've longed to kill Frank Merriwell. More than once I have said to myself, 'His life is yours, for you saved it once.'"

"You should put aside such thoughts and feelings, Bessie. You cannot blame Frank. He was my friend. I brought him to the Big Sandy. Our cattle were being stolen. As my friend, he did his best to aid me."

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"Oh, I suppose it's wrong, but a person brought up as I have been finds it hard to distinguish right from wrong. Many of the things people recognize as right seem wholly wrong to me. Would you have a wife with such a distorted conscience, Berlin Carson?"

"Let me be your guide," he pleaded. "Let me teach you the right."

"I tell you it is too late!"

Words seemed useless, and he stood there gazing at her helplessly, almost hopelessly. A sudden thought struck him like a blow, and he almost reeled.

"There is another!" he hoarsely whispered. "Ah, ha, that's it! I've struck the truth at last! It's that man—the man you met to-night! Speak up, Bessie! Tell me who he is! By Heaven, you shall tell me!"

"I will—in time," she promised. "Wait, Berlin—please wait!"

"I've waited too long already. Have I waited simply to find another man in my place?"

"Wait a little longer," she urged. "I have promised to tell you all, and I will. Can't you trust me a little longer, Berlin? Please—please trust me a little longer!"

She held out her hands in pleading, and a moment later, ere she could check him, he had seized her and was holding her to his heart.

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"Yes, yes," he panted, "I will trust you, Bessie—I'll trust you with my very life!"

Their lips met, and then—

The heavens fell!

CHAPTER XIV.

[Pg 88]

THE SIGNAL FOR SILENCE.

Lizette was hammering at Frank Merriwell's door.

"Wake up, monsieur!" she cried. "*Mon Dieu*, it is such a terrible theeng! Queek! queek! Do come, monsieur!"

Her knock and her cries brought Frank forth in pajamas.

"What is it—what's the matter?" he demanded.

The voice of Hodge was heard questioning the cause of the disturbance, and Bart came forth from another room.

Lizette seized Merry's arm.

"Oh, come queek!" she implored. "I see it from my window. I have ze bad headache so long I cannot sleep. Zen I geet up and sit by ze window. I look out and see some one walking beneath the trees. When he walk in ze moonlight I see it is ze Monsieur Carson. Zen all at once—oh, ze terrible theeng!"

"Go on!" commanded Frank. "All at once—what?"

"I see ze ozzer man—just ze glimpse. I see heem run out queek and soft behind Monsieur Carson. He lift his hands. He strike Monsieur Carson with sometheeng, and Monsieur Carson he fall down and lie so still on ze grass. Zen ze ozzer man he run away."

It did not take Frank long to go leaping down the stairs, and Hodge followed him closely. They tore open the door and rushed out. Within the shadow at the corner of the house they stumbled over a prostrate figure. [Pg 89]

Frank dropped on his knees.

"It's Berlin!" he hoarsely exclaimed. "Heavens! is he dead?"

"Hardly that, Merry," came a faint whisper, as Carson stirred in Frank's arms. "What was it that fell on me? It seemed as if the moon came down and burst upon my head. I saw a flash of fire and heard a frightful explosion. What happened to me?"

"Some one struck you down from behind. Lizette saw it from her window. She was sitting at the window and saw you walking here on the lawn. She saw the man rush upon you and knock you senseless."

"Lizette?" muttered Carson. And then again in a queer tone he said: "Lizette?"

"Yes, she saw it."

"From—her—window?" questioned Berlin.

"From her window," repeated Frank. "Have you been robbed, Carson? The ruffian must have been a robber. I presume he went through your pockets."

"I don't know," muttered the young Westerner thickly.

"Let me see," said Frank. "He didn't take your watch, and here's your purse. Why, this is singular! I wonder if he saw Lizette. I wonder if she uttered a cry and frightened him away." [Pg 90]

"Let's find the whelp!" snarled Hodge.

"First let's find out how badly Carson is hurt. Let's get him into the house."

Together they lifted Berlin and assisted him to the house between them.

Inza was calling from the head of the stairs to know what was the matter.

"Lie to her, Merry," said Hodge. "Don't let her get excited. Wait, I'll do the lying. I'll quiet her and Elsie."

He hastened up the stairs.

Carson sat on a chair and felt of his head with both hands.

Frank struck a light, and he examined to see how badly his friend was injured.

"Here's a bad bump," he said; "but I don't believe your scalp is broken. Looks as if you'd been struck by a sandbag."

"Whatever it was, it put me out of commission mighty quick," mumbled Berlin. "Goodness! my head aches a whole lot. I'm weak a-plenty."

They heard Bart telling Inza and Elsie that a man had been seen prowling around outside. Hodge was concealing the fact that anything had happened to Carson. He urged them to go back to their rooms.

"No need of frightening them over me, Merry," muttered Berlin. "I'm all right. My head is too thick to be easily cracked." [Pg 91]

"Tell me just how it happened," urged Merry.

"Didn't Lizette tell you?"

"Yes, but I thought she might be mistaken in her excitement. Did you see any one? Did you see who struck you?"

"No, I didn't see him."

"Nor hear him?"

"Nor hear him, Frank. I heard nothing. It's doubtful if I'd heard a clap of thunder just then."

"Eh, why not?"

"Oh, well, you see I was—I'd been—I'd been—thinking," faltered Carson.

"How did you happen to be out there?"

"Couldn't sleep. Went out to get the air."

"Well, let me doctor that bump. Sit right still; I'll take care of you."

Merry hurried away, soon returning with a bowl of cool water and a sponge. He also had some sort of soothing liniment.

Hodge returned while Frank was at work over Berlin.

"Managed to calm the girls down and sent them back to bed," he said.

Then he took something from his pocket, clicked it, and looked it over.

"What's that?" asked Merry.

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"My pistol," answered Bart grimly. "I'm going out to look for the gent who did this little job."

"Don't go alone. Wait till I get Carson fixed, and I'll be with you."

"And that will give him plenty of time to get away. We've given him too much time already, Frank. Don't worry about me. I'll take care of myself, and I'll take care of him if I find him."

Bart went out.

"Are you feeling better, Carson?" questioned Merry.

"Oh, I tell you I'm all right," was the answer, as Berlin tried to force a laugh.

"Who could be prowling round here?" speculated Frank. "I wonder if a burglar was trying to break in."

"That must be it," said Carson quickly. "Did Lizette describe the man?"

"No. She said she barely saw him as he rushed out behind your back and struck you."

"It's strange that Bessie should——"

Carson checked himself.

"Bessie?" questioned Frank.

"I mean Lizette," Berlin hastened to say. "My thoughts are all in a jumble. Don't mind me if I get mixed up. I'm all right now, Merry."

"If you need a doctor——"

"I don't. You've done everything a doctor could do."

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"Then if you're all right, I think I'll go out and look around for Hodge."

Carson rose to his feet a trifle unsteadily.

"I'm going with you," he declared.

"You'd better not," Merry advised.

"I must—I want to."

"You're still weak."

"Oh, no; I'm strong enough. Just see, Frank, I can walk all right."

"Come on, then," said Merriwell.

All around the grounds they searched, finally finding Hodge, who stated that he had seen no trace of any one.

"The rascal made good his escape," said Frank. "I'll notify the sheriff first thing in the morning. A while ago there were some burglaries in surrounding towns. Perhaps the crooks have decided to operate in Bloomfield."

"And it was natural they should pick out your house first, Merry," said Carson.

They turned toward the house and paused again beneath the very tree where Berlin had stood when he heard the mingled voices of Lizette and the unknown man. As Frank and Hodge were talking, Carson turned away and walked a short distance toward the house. Stepping out from beneath the trees, he looked up.

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In an open upper window a face appeared, distinctly shown by the moonlight.

It was Lizette.

He gazed up at her, and she looked down at him. Then she leaned forth from the window, lifted one hand and pressed a finger to her lips.

He understood the signal and nodded.

She vanished, and he saw her no more that night.

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 95]

KIDNAPED!

The following day Lizette seemed strangely overcome—almost prostrated—by what she claimed she had beheld from her window the previous night. Professing that she was quite ill, she kept to her room a great deal, permitting Maggie to care for the baby.

Carson was restless and nervous, and in his face his friends observed a strange look of eagerness, which at times gave place to an expression of triumph or of doubt. His injury proved to be comparatively slight.

Frank reported the presence of the prowler and the attack on Carson to the local authorities.

Somehow an atmosphere of unrest and uncertainty, a sensation of expectation in the face of some unforeseen calamity, seemed to hover over Merry Home.

It was nearly mid-afternoon, and Inza was on the veranda, with Elsie near, when Maggie appeared, looking puzzled and frightened.

"Shure, ma'am," she said, "Oi wish ye'd come up and take a peep at the choild."

"Is anything the matter with little Frank?" exclaimed Inza, hastily rising. "Is he ill, Maggie?"

"Nivver a bit," answered the girl. "He's slaping loike a top."

"But what is it? You look so queer."

"It's quare Oi feel, ma'am. Oi left him in his little bed a whoile ago to take a bit av a breath, which Oi naded. Whin Oi came back he was there, all roight, all roight, but it's moighty odd he looks to me." [Pg 96]

Inza followed Maggie to the chamber where the child lay asleep.

"Lift the window shade and let in the light," she said.

It happened that Frank came over to the house a few moments later to get a book he needed, and he was startled when his wife, pale and shaking, came flying down the stairs, seized him by the arm, and panted:

"Come, Frank—this minute! Come quick! The baby!"

Believing the child seriously ill, Merry lost no time in following his wife. They found Elsie beside the crib. The baby lay there wide awake, looking at them in a wondering way as they stooped above him.

"Why, he doesn't seem to be ill, Inza," said Merry. "You frightened me. I thought he was dying."

She clutched his arm with a grip that was almost frantic in its astonishing strength.

"Look at him!" she hoarsely cried. "Look close!"

"What is it, Inza? What do you see?"

"His hair—can't you see the change?"

"The change?"

"Yes, yes! His hair is lighter!"

"Lighter?"

"Yes, lighter than little Frank's! And his eyes—his eyes are blue! Frank's were brown!" [Pg 97]

"Great heavens, it's true!" burst from Merriwell. "What does it mean, Inza? What sort of juggling in this?"

"Frank Merriwell, that's not our child!"

He staggered as if struck a terrible blow.

"Not our child? Then, who— What child is it? Where did it come from? You must be mistaken,

Inza!"

"I'm not! I know my own baby boy!"

"The star—look for the star!" shouted Merriwell.

Almost fiercely he seized the baby's garments and with one movement tore them from the tiny shoulder.

The mark of the star was not there!

Merriwell straightened up and stood for a moment like a man turned to stone. In that moment, however, while he outwardly seemed so inactive and dumfounded his brain was working swiftly.

"Where's Lizette?" he demanded, and his voice was calm and cold.

"Where's Lizette, Maggie?" panted Inza, turning on the now thoroughly frightened servant.

"In her room, ma'am, Oi suppose," was the answer.

"Find her," said Frank. "Bring her here instantly."

Maggie rushed away and soon returned with the announcement that Lizette was not in her room.

By this time Inza was so frightened that she was threatened with hysterics. She almost fought Elsie, who was seeking to calm her.

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"Let me talk to her, Elsie," said Frank.

He grasped his wife firmly yet gently, holding her and looking straight into her eyes.

"Look at me, Inza—look at me," he commanded. "Look me in the eyes."

Even in her frantic condition she could not disobey him. Tremblingly Elsie looked on, seeing Merry gaze intently into his wife's dark eyes.

"Inza," said Frank, in that same calm, masterful tone, "you must be quiet. You must trust me. I've never failed you yet. I'll not fail you now. That is not our child, but I will find little Frank and bring him back to you. Sit here!"

He lifted her bodily and placed her in a big easy-chair. Again he gazed intently into her eyes, and beneath that gaze she rapidly grew calmer.

"You know I'll do what I have said I would, Inza—you know it."

"Yes," she huskily whispered, "I know it, Frank—but I'm almost distracted—I'm almost crazy! Don't lose a moment!"

"Wait calmly and confidently when I'm gone. I'll have to leave you. When I return I'll place little Frank in your arms."

He kissed her.

A moment later he was gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

[Pg 99]

FOR THE SAKE OF OLD DAYS.

A man and a woman were making their way through a strip of timber where the shadows were thick. They were almost running, the man being in advance. He carried a bundle, from which at intervals came a strange, smothered cry, like the wailing of an infant.

"Oh, Selwin, Selwin," gasped the woman, "I can't keep this up! I'm ready to drop now! Can't you go a little slower?"

"And have those human hounds overtake us?" snarled the man. "Curse them! They're like bloodhounds on the scent! I've tried every trick to turn them off our track. I've doubled and turned, I've crossed ledges and waded streams, but I fear to hear them behind us any moment!"

"You were mad, Selwin—mad!" gasped the weary woman, whose garments were tattered and torn, and whose hands and face were scratched and bleeding. "I told you how it would be! I told you we could not carry this mad scheme through!"

"I will carry it through!" he grated. "If we can keep away from them until darkness falls, they'll be unable to follow us farther."

"But the whole country will be aroused! We can't escape! I say it was madness!"

"How in the devil did they find it out so soon?"

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"I knew they would—I knew it! The other child——"

"Looked enough like this one to pass muster for a few hours, at least," he interrupted. "Satan take the brat! Hear it squall!"

Again a smothered cry came from the bundle.

"Don't hurt it!" pleaded the woman. "Don't handle it so roughly!"

"Hurt it? Furies! I'd like to strangle it! Here's a path. We'll follow that."

The path soon brought them into an old wood road, and they mounted a wooded hill, the woman desperately stumbling along at the heels of the man. On the hillside they came upon a deserted hut. Through the trees they could see the sun sinking redly in the west.

"Oh, stop, Selwin—stop a little while!" entreated the fatigued woman. "Let's rest here."

He halted and scowled as he stood in thought.

"They should be somewhere over to the northeast," he said. "I wonder if I could see them from the top of the hill. I'll try it. Here, take the brat, Bessie. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He tossed the bundle into her arms, whirled and rushed away up the hill.

The woman sat down on the trunk of a felled tree. She opened the bundle and gazed sadly, almost lovingly, on the face of an infant. The little eyes looked up at her, seemed to recognize her, and something like a smile came to the child's face.

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"Poor little Frank! poor little Frank!" she breathed. "It's a shame—a brutal shame! Oh, why did I ever consent! Even though I have hated your father, I love you! It's drink that's turned the brain of Selwin Harris!"

The baby began to fret and cry.

"You're hungry, darling," muttered the woman. "Oh, what brutes we are! What a wretched thing I am! I've always been bad, and I always will be. Still, a noble man loves me. Oh, Berlin, Berlin, you will despise me now! Even though you loved me through all the past and for all of the past, you'll scorn and despise me now! Well, what does it matter? You found me at last, and you forced the truth from my lips; but it was too late—too late!"

Bitter tears of mingled sorrow and shame welled into her eyes and blinded her. They fell from her cheeks upon the cheeks of the fretting child.

"Oh, Frank—oh, little honey boy!" she sobbed. "I hope you may never live to know such wretchedness as I have known! Better that you should die now! Better you had never been born! Why was I born? Why was I set adrift in this wretched, wicked old world? Not one thing in life has ever gone right with me!"

A crashing sound gave her a start, and she saw the man returning on a run. As he passed a corner of the old hut one foot seemed to break through the ground, and he went down. With some difficulty, he drew forth his leg from a hole into which he had plunged. Pausing, he looked down into that hole, and far beneath he caught a faint mercurylike glitter.

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"An old well," he muttered. "The brush and deadwood had fallen over the mouth of it and hidden it. I came near dropping in there myself."

"Are you hurt, Selwin?" called the woman.

"No," he answered; "but I came mighty near falling into a trap."

As he approached her she observed a look on his face that gave her a shuddery chill.

"Let me take the child," he said.

"No; I'll carry him a little while. Did you see anything of the pursuers?"

"See them?" he snarled. "Curse them, yes!"

"They're still on our track?"

"Following it like hounds—like hounds! There are four of them. I know Merriwell and Hodge. The other two are boys. One of the boys is leading, and he runs, stooped forward, with his eyes on the ground. No Indian ever followed a trail more accurately than he has followed ours."

"No Indian?" cried the woman. "You say he is a boy. Then it must be young Joe Crowfoot! I've seen him. He's one of the boys at Merriwell's school. He is a full-blooded Indian."

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"That accounts for it!" rasped the man. "That explains my failure to deceive them. The rest of the pursuers are far away on the main road. I saw them. They're in a carriage. Give me that child, Bessie."

He sought to take the baby from her.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, her hand shaking as she put it up to hold him off.

"There's only one thing to be done. If we're captured with the child in our possession, we go to the jug. If the child is not in our possession and cannot be found, we can swear we know nothing

about it. The other one——"

"You're still mad, Selwin Harris! Would you murder this helpless infant?"

"Murder?"

"Yes. There's murder in your heart—in your face! I see it!"

"Look here, Bessie; there's only one show for us to escape. That kid has encumbered me frightfully. I couldn't help you. That child out of the way, I can help you. We'll dodge them until it gets dark. I'll drop the brat into that old well and pull the brush over the opening. I can do it so that the well will not be found. We'll go back a short distance on our tracks and then turn off. They'll turn at the same point and follow us. There's no time to waste. Let me have the brat."

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She fought him with all her strength.

"Never! never! never!" she panted. "You'll have to kill me first!"

In a moment or two he realized that, unless he beat or choked her into unconsciousness, he could not take the infant from her.

"You're a fool—you always were!" he raged.

"Yes, I'm a fool!" she flung back. "I was a fool to ever have anything to do with you! Back yonder somewhere in the carriage that is following us is a man who loves me—a noble, manly, honest man. I knew him first, and he would have married me. Had I not run away from him, I'd be his wife to-day, and I'd be an honest woman."

"You—you an honest woman!" flung back the ruffian, with a sneering laugh. "You an honest woman—the daughter of a cattle thief!"

"Laugh! Sneer! Taunt me! Fling my disgrace in my face! And you're the man I once thought I loved! I thought I did! Ha! ha! ha! You've called me a fool. It's true! I thought I loved you; but now I hate you—I hate you!"

"Oh, rats! You're playing to the gallery now, Bessie. Well, we'll have to move—we'll have to hike lively. The sun is almost down. The shadows are growing thicker. Will darkness never come?"

"It's come for me!" she groaned. "It's in my heart! It's in my soul! For me it is the eternal, never-ending night of sin, disgrace, and shame!"

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He clutched her arm and dragged her on. Again they stumbled and lunged and tore their way through the shadowy woods. To their right the sun had dropped beyond the far-away hills, flinging a last reddish glow up into the highest sky, and this glow seemed temporarily to lighten the whole forest. Through a boggy spot they floundered. Through a jungle they thrust themselves. And at last, as the reddish sky was fading and turning to lead, they came upon a rutty, winding country road. Darkness shut down quickly.

A light gleamed ahead of them. It came from the window of a house.

Hitched to a fence corner in front of the house was a horse, attached to an old wagon.

The man paused beside the wagon.

"Get in!" he commanded.

"What are you going to do?"

"Get in! I'm going to take this team. Somebody who is calling at that house left it standing here. It was left for us."

He lifted her into the wagon, sprang to the head of the horse, unhitched the animal, and a moment later was by the woman's side. The horse was reined around into the road. The man seized the whip and a moment later the sound of the animal's hoofs mingled with the rattle of the wagon wheels.

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"Night at last!" cried the desperate kidnaper. "Now we'll dodge them somehow!"

"You cannot dodge them, Selwin," said the woman. "I feel that we're hurrying straight into their clutches."

"Why, you fool, they're behind us! I tell you we'll dodge them now. Why in blazes did I ever bother to take that other brat from the poorhouse where its mother died? It was your plan to substitute one child for the other, Bessie. I wanted to steal Merriwell's kid in the first place. Furies take him! I swore years ago to strike at his heart when the time came. He was responsible for the death of my brother. They were at Yale together, this Merriwell and poor old Sport. Merriwell disgraced Sport by exposing him as a card sharp. Sport sought to get even. He followed Merriwell to England, and in England he died. In his last letter to me he wrote that he had a premonition of his fate. He said he felt sure that Merriwell would do him up at last."

"Did Frank Merriwell kill him?"

"Oh, just the same as that. I believe Sport was killed in some sort of an accident while he was running away from Merriwell. I've waited a long time, but I've struck at last. Satan take this hill!"

He lashed the horse, and the animal went galloping up the road that wound over the hill.

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Suddenly, at a turn of the road, two fiery eyes burst into view, and through the night came the wild shriek of an automobile horn.

With an oath, the man sought to rein to one side of the narrow road.

The fiery eyes were right upon them.

There was a crash. The wagon was struck and smashed. Man, woman, and child were hurled into the ditch.

Chester Arlington, a lad who, despite his father's wealth, had been dismissed from school, stopped his machine ten rods farther on.

"Are you hurt, June?" he asked, addressing his sister, who numbered Dick Merriwell and Dale Sparkfair among her admirers.

"No, I'm not hurt," answered the girl, who was sitting beside him. "But I believe you've killed some one, Chester! I told you that you would! Oh, it's terrible! Let's go back and see."

Arlington removed one of the oil lamps from his car, and they started back toward the scene of the collision.

Another wagon came over the brow of the hill and stopped. From a distance in the opposite direction came a sharp signal whistle that was answered by one of the three persons in the wagon.

"That's Merry!" exclaimed Berlin Carson, as he leaped out. "I wonder what's happened here. Somebody's smashed up."

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Two minutes later young Joe Crowfoot, Frank Merriwell, Bart Hodge, and Dale Sparkfair arrived. They found a horse, with the shafts of a smashed wagon attached, calmly grazing by the roadside. The wrecked wagon was in the ditch. Near by lay the body of a man. A few yards away sat a woman, holding an unharmed child in her arms.

"We've got them, Frank!" said Berlin Carson, as he took the lamp from Arlington's hand and turned the light on the face of the prostrate man. "Here's the wretch who did it! Do you know him?"

Merry looked down.

"He's dead!" said Frank.

"I think his neck was broken," exclaimed Carson. "I don't believe he realized what happened after the automobile struck the wagon. Do you know him, Frank?"

"I've seen that face before. Yes, I think I know him. His name—his name is Harris! That's it! Why, his brother was at Yale! You remember Sport Harris, Carson?"

"Sure!" breathed Berlin.

Merriwell seized the child, and the woman surrendered it to him.

"I'm wicked!" she said. "Put me in prison! But I saved your child's life when Selwin Harris would have taken it!"

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"Lizette, why did you do this thing?" asked Merry. "What was that man to you?"

"He was my husband," she replied. "I'm not Lizette. That's not my name. I deceived you because he commanded me to. Put me in prison! I hope they keep me there till I die!"

Carson's hand found that of Merriwell.

"Merry," he said huskily, pleadingly, "this poor girl is Bessie King. I loved her once. It's dead now, all the love I knew. She has been more weak than sinful. You have your boy safe in your arms. You'll take him back to Inza. You'll keep your promise to her. We were old comrades at college. I would have done anything for you then, and I would do anything in my power for you now. For my sake let this poor woman go—for my sake, Frank!"

There was a hush. Frank stood there in silence for such a long time that every person seemed to hear the beating of his own heart.

At last Merriwell spoke.

"For your sake I will, Berlin," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

[Pg 110]

A CALL TO THE "FLOCK."

Protected from arrest by the pity of Berlin Carson, whose love for her was as dead as was the man she had acknowledged as her husband, Bessie left behind her the home which, for several hours, she had plunged in grief and anxiety. An examination of the infant which had been kidnaped showed that it had sustained no injury, and, filled with a spirit of thankfulness, Frank and Inza Merriwell resolved that the little foundling which had been substituted for their baby son should be placed in a more worthy home than was afforded by the asylum from which it had been taken. In a few days such a home was found, and the infant which had inspired Frank and Inza with such feelings of consternation when they had discovered that it was not their own, was committed to the kindly care of a prosperous and honest young farmer and his wife, who were childless, and who lived only a few miles from the Merriwell home.

But it did not take long for the sympathetic eyes of Frank and Inza to see that the ardent love of Berlin Carson for the young woman, who had proved herself to be unworthy of him, though now extinguished, had left him moody and disinterested in the future.

And so one evening, Inza, laying a hand on one of the arms of her husband, said gently:

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"We must do something for Berlin, Frank. It is wrong for a man to brood so over a misfortune as he is doing. Is it not possible for us to do more to enliven him and cause him to think less of his disappointment and the shock he has received?"

Frank shook his head thoughtfully.

"I scarcely see what more we can do, Inza," he replied. "Men are unlike women. The grief of a woman may yield to the sympathetic words and actions and cheerful influence of friends, but when a man has some great trouble—especially if he be a strong man—it is best that he should have an opportunity to make his fight against depressing influences alone. He must have time to think it out. All references to his sorrow are likely to irritate him, and evidence of the pity of others galls his pride. No, no, Inza, there is little that you and I can do, I fear. Let us do our best to surround him with a cheerful atmosphere, and——"

"That is precisely what I mean, Frank. Now, I have a plan. Several weeks ago I heard you say that one day you might find it possible to have around you here many of the members of what you are so often wont to call your 'old flock'—your old school and college mates, and some of your old friends from the Southwest. Why do you not make an effort now to get them here?"

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Frank gave a little start, and then smiled thoughtfully.

"I will think it over, Inza," he said.

Early the next morning Frank sent out a number of telegrams to his old friends. To these telegrams he received replies in the course of the next twenty-four hours.

And thus it came to pass that the pilgrimage to Merry Home began.

Several days later, in a parlor car of the eastbound express were four young people who had traveled far. They were Ephraim Gallup; his wife, Teresa; Barney Mulloy, and a charming and vivacious Spanish girl, Juanita Garcia, Teresa's bosom friend. The men were old friends of Frank Merriwell.

All wore sensible traveling suits, and, in spite of the long journey, they appeared to be little fatigued. There was an expression of eagerness and impatience on the face of Gallup, and Mulloy seemed in a similar mood.

"By gum, we're gittin' back into God's country ag'in!" exclaimed the lanky Vermonter. "Arter bein' buried down there in Mexico so long it seems jest like heaven."

"Do they be afther callin' this a fast expriss?" burst from Mulloy. "Faith, but it crawls loike a shnail, so it does. Will we iver reach Bloomfield? It's itchin' Oi am to put me hands on Frankie Merriwell."

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"Eet ees so glad I shall also be to see Señor Merriwell," laughed Teresa.

"Hey?" cried Gallup, giving her a look of mock reproof. "Naow yeou be keerful, young woman! I ain't fergut that you was kinder smashed on him once."

At this his wife laughingly protested her innocence.

"Nevvier, nevvier after I knew you loved me, Ephraim," she declared. "One time I theenk you do not care. Then I geet so very angry. Then I make eyes at ze handsome Señor Merriwell. I do eet to see how you like that. Eet make you geet to your job on. Eet make you set your tongue loose and say the word I want you to say. Señor Merriwell he not care one snap for me. I know eet. Do you theenk Teresa ees the foolish girl?"

"Not a hanged bit of it!" chuckled Gallup. "She was the slickest little article I ever run up ag'inst. I guess yeou're right, Teresa. I guess yeou kinder waked me up when you flung them goo-goo eyes at Frank. Fust time in my life I ever felt that way, but, by ginger! I wanted to swat him on the jaw. Great Hubbard squashes, wasn't I in love then!"

His wife frowned.

"Een love then?" she exclaimed. "You not be so much so now, ah?"

"Thunder! I'm ten times wuss now than I was then, and you know it, Teresa. Didn't I coax and beg and hang on like a dog to a bone to git you to come East with me to visit Frank?" [Pg 114]

"It was the baby," breathed Teresa. "The question was to breeng the baby or to leave eet with eets grand-fathaire. I know he take the most splendeed care of eet. He have the nursees watch all the time, and he watch heemself. He know how to care for the baby most beautiful."

"That's right," nodded Gallup, "the old don is a rappin' good baby nuss. It's the funniest thing in the world to see him doddling round with a baby in his arms. And to think that he used to be a red-hot revolutionist, and called the Firebrand of Sonora! As a fighter, he was a rip-tearer. As a baby nuss he's the greatest expert that ever wore men's trousers."

"Begob, the don is all roight, all roight," agreed Barney. "The only gint who iver downed him was Frankie Merriwell. Instid av layin' it up against Frankie, and lookin' for revinge, the way people ginerally suppose Mexicans and Spaniards do, the don shook hands, and became wan av Frankie's bist friends."

Ephraim leaned forward to pat his wife's cheek.

"Your old dad is a jim-hickey, Terese," he said.

Juanita had been smiling, and now she laughed outright in a rippling, musical manner.

"What ees eet you laugh at, Juanita?" demanded Teresa. [Pg 115]

"Oh, eet ees the way the Yankee man he keep on making love," answered the girl. "One time I theenk I despise every gringo. One time I theenk maybe perhaps if I find one who have the great likeeng for me—eef he be handsome, eef he be good—I theenk maybe—perhaps—"

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Mrs. Gallup laughingly. "Eet ees the great change of the mind. Maybe you meet lots of good-lookeeng young man at Señor Merriwell's. We make the marriage for you."

"Oh, no," protested Juanita. "That ees the way they do in Mexico. I like the way the American girl do. She make her own marriage. She catch the man she want. She not have to take the one her people say she must marry. No one for me ees to make the match."

"Hooroo for you!" cried Barney. "Thot's the stuff! It's a diclaration of indepindince! Oi wonder who'll be at the reunion, Ephie?"

"I dunno," answered Gallup, shaking his head. "Merry's telegram said there'd be a lot of the old flock there. I'll be all-fired glad to see 'em. Wonder how the fellers have prospered. I hope they've all done as well as we have, Barney."

"Av they have," nodded Mulloy, "the most av thim should be satisfied. It's a clane little pile av money we made in thot railroad business, Ephraim." [Pg 116]

"You bate!" chuckled the Vermonter. "Take us together, Barney and we make a hull team, with a little dog under the wagon."

"As a business partner," said the Irishman, "Oi'll take a down-east Yankee ivery toime. Begobs, Ephie, ye know how to do business all roight, all roight!"

"And as a railroad construction boss," grinned Gallup, "yeou're right up to date, Barney. Yeou handled your end of the business slick as a whistle while I was lookin' arter my end. I wonder what they're stoppin' here for?"

The train was pulling up at a junction. On questioning the porter, they learned that there would be a stop of nearly twenty minutes while other cars were taken on from another route.

Gallup proposed that they should step out on the platform and get some air. Neither Teresa nor Juanita seemed anxious to do this, so Ephraim and Barney left them in the car.

The junction was a bustling little town, and there was a great deal going on in the vicinity of the station.

Mulloy and Gallup lighted cigars and promenaded the platform.

At the far end they observed a group of men and boys surrounding a person who stood on a small square box, making a speech. This person was bareheaded, and his hair was unusually long and disheveled. He was dressed in a loose suit of light-colored clothes, wore a negligee shirt, with a soft turndown collar, and had no vest. His back was toward Barney and Ephraim as they approached. [Pg 117]

"Begorra! it's natural he looks," muttered the Irishman.

"Gol-dinged if that ain't right!" agreed Gallup. "Somehow his voice sounds kinder nateral, too."

They paused at the edge of the group to listen.

"Friends and brothers," cried the speaker, in a clear, sad voice, "I presume many of you heard me speak on your public square last evening. Still it is possible that some of you were not there to listen to my words, to hear my warning of the great coming clash of the classes. It is as inevitable as the sinking of yonder sun to-night and its rise again to-morrow. With a prophetic eye I look into the future and behold the day when labor shall have its rights. That day is coming as surely

as the sun continues to rise in the east. The iron hand of Capital would hold it back, but that cruel iron hand cannot, Joshua-like, stay the course of the sun nor stem the tide of human progress.

"Every intelligent person within the sound of my voice knows it is true that the rich are growing richer and the poor are becoming poorer. The accumulation of stupendous fortunes in the hands of individuals threatens the very foundations of our government. Time was when a man worth a million was supposed to be immensely rich. To-day the possessor of a single million is looked on with scorn and contempt by our multimillionaires. Ten millions, twenty millions, fifty millions—aye, even a hundred millions are now accumulated by individuals. This money belongs to the masses, the laborers who have earned it by the sweat of their brows."

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"Hear! hear!" "That's right!" "Hooray!" cried the crowd.

Mulloy had gripped Ephraim's arm.

"Ivery word av thot has a familiar sound to me," muttered the Irishman. "Oi've heard thot talk before and from the same lips."

"My friends," continued the speaker, "we are all brothers. Justice to one and all of this great human family should be our motto. Unfortunately for me I was not born of the masses, as the royal knights of labor are now called by the American aristocrats of boodle. By birth I was supposed to be exalted above the lower strata of humanity. My parents were wealthy. My father gave me an education to be a slave driver over the common people. His blood runs in my veins, but my heart is not of his heart. In his eyes I have become disgraced because I dared boldly claim the street laborer, the man with the hoe, the man with the pick and shovel, the man with the sweat of honest toil on his brow—I have dared to claim him as a fellow man and brother."

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"I have traveled from coast to coast, and I have lived in the poorest quarters of New York, Chicago, and other great cities. My heart has bled at the sufferings of the poor people who are wearing their wretched lives away in toil for a most wretched sustenance. The friends I once knew have turned from me and called me a socialist, an anarchist. They call us anarchists because we sympathize with the downtrodden masses—because we prophesy the coming of the great struggle that shall emancipate these masses. We are not anarchists, but we are proud to be called socialists. Anarchy is disorder and ruin. Socialism is order and equal rights for all. Let them point the finger of scorn at us. What care we? But let them beware, for the great earthquake is coming."

Mulloy and Gallup had forced their way through the crowd, and even as the speaker uttered these words Barney gave him a terrible slap on the back, while Ephraim kicked the box from beneath his feet.

"The earthquake do be come, begorra!" shouted Mulloy. "Greg Carker, ye bloody old socialist raskil, Oi have yez in me hands, and Oi'm going to hug yez till ye holler!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

[Pg 120]

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE.

Carker was almost smothered in the powerful arms of the delighted Irish youth.

To the crowd, however, it seemed that a violent assault had been made on the orator. In that crowd were many who sympathized with the socialistic speaker or were pronounced socialists themselves. These persons grew excited immediately, and a dozen of them sought to push forward to Carker's assistance. They reached for Mulloy and Gallup with savage hands or sought to smite the two young men with clenched fists.

"Great hemlock!" exclaimed Ephraim, as he thrust aside the outstretched hands or warded off blows. "What in thutteration's the matter with this bunch of lunatics!"

"Down with them—down with the aristocrats!" snarled the angry crowd.

"Whoop! Hooroo!" shouted Barney Mulloy, releasing Carker. "Is it a schrap thot do be on our hands, Oi dunno? Begorra, it's so long since Oi've been consarned in a real fight that me blood tingles with pleasure at the thought av it."

By this time Carker recognized the sun-tanned young man who had interrupted his speech. As quickly as possible he flung himself in front of the excited crowd, threw up his hands, and shouted:

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"Stand back! stand back! They're my friends!"

"Gott in Himmel!" gurgled a German. "Did not they you attackt? Dit ve not see them py our eyes as they didid it?"

"I tell you they're my friends," persisted Carker.

"They hit-a you! They grab-a you!" shouted an Italian. "They stop-a you from making the speech!"

"It's all right," persisted the young socialist. "I had finished my speech. I tell you to keep back! Stand off! The man who touches them is not friendly toward me. He's not friendly toward socialism."

"Vale," said the German, "uf you put it to us up dot vay, it vill a settlement make."

Then he turned and faced the crowd, pushing many of them back with his pudgy hands as he shouted:

"Stood away nearer off! Don't push up so far close! Dit you not hear our prother say they vas his friendts alretty?"

The excitement of the crowd rapidly subsided. Carker spoke to them calmly, explaining that the two young men who had brought his speech to such a sudden termination were his bosom comrades of old times, even though they might not be thoroughbred socialists.

"Where the dickens did you two boys come from?" he finally demanded, as he once more turned toward Ephraim and Barney, grasping their hands. "Oh, it's good to see you again, fellows!"

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"Begorra, to see yez is a soight for sore eyes and to hear yez is music to deaf ears!" chuckled Barney Mulloy. "You're the same old rabid champeen av the downtrodden masses. You're still pratin' away about the coming of the great earthquake."

"That's right, by gum!" grinned Gallup. "But, say, why didn't yeou warn the people of Frisco before they gut shook up?"

"When I speak of the great coming earthquake," said Carker, "you know I'm talking figuratively. But you haven't answered my question. Where did you chaps come from?"

"Right up from old Mexico," replied Ephraim. "We've been down there, me and Barney, a-helpin' put through the new Central Sonora Railroad. The old road's finished, and we're takin' a vacation now, with a big bank account to our credit and plenty of the long green in our pants pockets."

"Tainted money! tainted money!" exclaimed Greg dramatically. "You've been laboring for a heartless corporation. These great railroad companies have made their wealth by robbing the downtrodden masses."

"Ye don't say!" grinned Barney. "The money we have made may be tainted, but the only taint I've discovered about it is 'tain't enough."

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"Oh, you're still frivolous and thoughtless, both of you," asserted Greg, with a shake of his bushy head. "You can't seem to realize the fact that in these degenerate days there are no longer opportunities for men to rise from the lower ranks to positions of competence, independence, and power. The great corporations and trusts are killing competition and holding the masses down. A boy born in the lower walks no longer has a chance to get out of that strata of existence."

"It's rot ye still talk, me fri'nd," declared Barney. "Oi think th' chances are as good as they iver were, and a lot better, av anything."

"If yeou're right," put in Ephraim, "'tain't the great corporations and trusts alone that are to blame. It's the labor organizations that say every workingman, no matter whether he's capable of great things or is just an ordinary dub, shall take a sartain scale of wages. That kills ambition and keeps young fellers of ability and genius from risin'. Yes, siree, it sartinly does."

"Oh, your mind is too narrow to grasp all the phases of this great question," asserted the young socialist, with a sweep of his hand. "I wish you'd prove to me that young men still have a chance to rise in these days. Show me an example."

"Me bhoy, ye moight take a look at Barney Mulloy," suggested the smiling Irishman. "It's something loike tin thousand clane dollars he's made in th' last year. Thot he's done in Mexico."

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"And when yeou git through lookin' at him," suggested Gallup, "yeou might cast an eye round in my direction. Me and Barney have been partners, and, by jinks! I've cleaned up ten thousand, too."

For a moment Carker seemed a bit staggered, but he quickly recovered.

"What's ten thousand in these days? What's that but a drop in the bucket when your big magnates accumulate millions upon millions?"

"Well, me bhoy," laughed Barney, with a comical twist of his mug, "tin thousand will do for a nist egg. Wid thot for a nist egg, we ought to hatch out enough to kape us from becomin' objects of charity in our ould age."

"A man is foolish to waste his time in argument with such chaps as you," said Greg, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Are you on this train?"

When they replied that they were, he explained that he was there to take the same train. Within the station he secured his battered old suit case, which he had left there.

"Have yeou a seat?" asked Gallup.

"Why, I expect to get a seat on the regular passenger coach," answered Carker.

"You kin git a seat in our car, I guess," said Ephraim. "Not more'n half the seats was taken."

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At the steps of the parlor car Greg halted.

"Are you riding in this car?" he asked.

"Shure," nodded Barney.

"Then I'm sorry," said the young socialist. "I can't ride with you."

In a breath both Mulloy and Gallup demanded to know why.

"Parlor coaches are made for aristocrats," explained Greg. "I'm one of the masses. I'm democratic. I ride with common people in the common coaches."

"Begorra, ye'll roide in this car av we have to kidnap yez!" shouted Mulloy. "Av you're too close-fisted to buy a sate yersilf, Oi'll pay for it!"

This touched Carker's pride.

"You hurt me by such words, Barney," he protested. "Close-fisted! My boy, do you know I've given away nearly all my ready money in the last six months to the needy and suffering? I've seen big, fat-stomached, overfed men lolling in their parlor-car seats while weak invalids, wretched and faint from the strain of trouble, have sat in the common cars. Do you think I could be selfish enough to spend my money for my own comfort and luxury, knowing that such poor people might be suffering on this train?"

"Yer heart's all roight, Greg, ould bhoy," explained Barney; "but ye'll foind that yer pocketbook isn't big enough to alleviate all th' suffering that ye'll discover in the world. Come on, Ephraim, we'll put him on this car or l'ave him dead on the platform."

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They seized Carker and forced him up the steps. In a moment he ceased to resist and permitted them to push him into the car.

"All right, boys," he muttered regretfully, "as it's you, and we haven't seen each other for so long, I'll put aside my scruples and travel in a parlor car to-day."

They found Teresa and Juanita chatting in Spanish, quite unaware of what had taken place on the station platform. Carker was introduced to Mrs. Gallup and her young friend. He removed his hat, flung back his mane of hair, and bowed before them with the grace of a true gentleman.

"Mrs. Gallup," he murmured, "it's the pleasure of my life to meet the wife of my old friend and comrade. And to meet Mrs. Gallup's friend, Señorita Garcia, is scarcely a smaller pleasure."

"How beauteeful he do talk!" murmured Juanita.

There was a strange flash in her dark eyes as she surveyed the young socialist. With his long hair, his pale classical face, his sad poetic eyes, he was indeed a handsome fellow of a type seldom seen. The fact that his clothes were unconventional in their cut and that he wore a negligee shirt with a soft wide collar detracted not a whit from his striking appearance.

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The train soon pulled out, and when the conductor came through a seat was secured for Carker, who restrained Mulloy with an air of dignity when Barney attempted to pay the bill.

"I'm not quite busted myself," asserted Greg, with a faint smile, at the same time producing a roll of bills.

The conductor was paid and passed on. Then they settled down for a sociable chat.

CHAPTER XIX.

[Pg 128]

AN INTRUDER.

Turned from his socialistic theories and arguments into a different channel, Carker proved to be a most delightful conversationalist and companion. He was educated, cultured, and witty, although evidently lacking in humor. Possibly this came from the fact that he had so long and so earnestly regarded and meditated on the somber side of life. He seemed to fascinate Juanita, who listened intently whenever he spoke.

"What you do, señor, when you travel so much?" inquired Teresa. "You leave Señora Carkaire at home?"

Carker smiled sadly.

"There is no Señora Carker," he answered.

"Oo!" cried Teresa. "You are not marreed?"

"No," replied Greg, "I'm not married."

"That ees so singulaire!"

"Veree, veree," murmured Juanita.

"It may seem singular," admitted Carker, "but a man like me, who has pledged his life to humanity, has little right to get married."

"I do not see why you say that," said Juanita.

"Perhaps I cannot make my reason plain to you, but there is an excellent reason. A man who marries should have a home. And a man who has a home should live in it. If I had such a home and was bound to it, I could not travel and carry on my life-work. I could not drag my wife around over the country, and it is not right for a married man to leave his wife alone a great deal."

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"Gol rap it, Greg," exclaimed Ephraim, "I don't believe that's your real reason for not gittin' married! I'll bet some gal throwed you down!"

"Well, perhaps you're right," admitted the young socialist. "You can't blame her if she did."

"Why not can we blame her?" questioned Juanita. "Deed she have the other lovaire? Oh, ha! ha! Señor Carkaire! Maybe eet ees not nice to laugh, to joke, to speak of eet. I beg the pardon, señor."

She had seen a shadow flit across his face and vanish.

He forced a laugh.

"If there was another man," he said, "I'm conceited enough to think I might have captured the prize in spite of him had I been willing to sacrifice my principles and renounce my socialistic beliefs."

"Oh, the girl she not have you because of that?" breathed Juanita. "Eet ees veree strange."

"Not so very strange," he asserted. "We'll say that she was a lady. Now it is a fact that nearly all ladies are extremely conventional in everything. They have a horror for the bizarre and the unconventional. They are shocked by the man who declines to be hampered with the fashion in clothes and in similar things. I could not fall in love with a girl who was not a lady."

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"Begorra, you're an aristocrat at heart!" cried Mulloy. "Ye can't git away from it, me bhoy, no mather how much ye prate about socialism and th' brotherhood av mon."

"Still I protest you do not understand me."

"By gum!" muttered Gallup; "it don't seem to me that yeou are right 'bout the gals. Yeou kinder stick for the sort that's been born in the higher strata of life, as yeou call it. Ain't thar a hull lot of mighty smart ones that come out of the lower strata somewhere?"

"Oh, I admit that most of the brainy women and most of the brainy men come from the lower strata. Nevertheless, such women are not ladies."

"Begobs, ye make me tired!" cried Mulloy. "What you nade, Greg, is a dhoctor to look afther your liver."

"Mebbe the best doctor," grinned Gallup, "would be a girl he'd fall in love with and who'd fall in love with him. I guess she could cure him. If he happened to run across the right one and she axed him to give up his career and stop rampin' round over the country, I'll bet a good big punkin he'd cave in right on the spot."

"You're wrong," denied Carker. "No matter how much I cared for a girl, I could not give up my career. There was one once who asked me to give it up. She married another man."

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He smiled as he made the confession, but in his eyes there was a look which told of the great sacrifice he had made.

"Mebbe you think you're doing a great work for humanity," observed Ephraim; "but, by ginger! I kinder think that Frank Merriwell is doing a greater work."

"What is he doing?"

"Haven't you heard 'bout it?"

"No. I haven't heard from Merriwell in the last year or more. The last I knew of him he was accumulating a fortune in mining. Like other men in these degenerate times, he had turned his great abilities to the mercenary task of amassing wealth. I was sorry when I heard this, for I had expected other things of him."

"Sorry, was ye?" snapped Ephraim.

"Sorry and disappointed," said Greg, shaking his head.

"Waal, now, you want to come right along with us to Bloomfield. We'll show you what Frank Merriwell's doing with that money he's accumulated. Ain't you ever heard 'bout his School of Athletic Development?"

"No."

"Waal, I guess that'll interest ye some, by jinks!"

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"Tell me about it."

As clearly as he could, Ephraim explained the plan of Merry's new school. Carker listened with a show of interest until the Vermonter had finished.

"Well, I'm glad he's doing some good," said Greg. "Still, this is of minor importance compared with the great work in which I'm engaged."

"You go to grass!" almost snarled Ephraim. "Great fiddlesticks! Why, Frank is making real men of growing boys. He's making good, strong, healthy men that kin go out and successfully fight their way through life."

"Life should not be a battle," asserted the socialist. "Every man's hand should be outstretched to help a needy fellow man. This old-fashioned theory that human life is bound to be a battle is all wrong. We are one great body of brothers, bound together by a universal tie."

"Choke off roight where ye are," commanded Barney. "Oi'm yer fri'nd, Greg Carker, but Oi'll hit ye av ye sling any of that socialist talk at us! Ye've r'iled me now. Oi must have a shmoke to soothe me narves."

"Me, too," grinned Ephraim, as they both rose. "You'll 'scuse us for a little while, won't ye, girls? We'll jest step into the smokin' compartment."

"You may have the excuse if you weel leave Señor Carkaire to entertain us," murmured Juanita. [Pg 133]

"I'll remain here," nodded Greg. "I don't smoke."

"Gol ding him!" growled Ephraim, as he followed Barney into the smoking compartment. "He's a bigger crank than ever! He's gittin' wuss and wuss!"

"What he nades is a girrul to marry him and straighten him out," declared the Irish youth.

Five minutes after the departure of Eph and Barney a slender, black-eyed man, with a small dark mustache, came sauntering through the car. As he reached the spot where Carker was talking to Teresa and Juanita he stopped short, uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, and lifted his hat, bowing with a triumphant smile.

"Ah, Señorita Garcia," he jubilantly said, "you take the flight from me, but I have found you."

"Jose Murillo!" exclaimed Juanita. And there was dismay and fear in her voice.

CHAPTER XX.

[Pg 134]

OLD FRIENDS EN ROUTE.

"*Si, señorita,*" laughed the stranger, "Jose Murillo."

"Where deed you come from?"

"The train on wheech I travel from the West eet join this train back at the junction."

Teresa's eyes were flashing. She rose and confronted the young Mexican.

"Señor Murillo," she said, in Spanish, "you have annoyed Juanita enough. You have no right to follow her. You have threatened her. You have frightened her. If you are the gentleman you profess to be, you will leave her alone."

He showed his white teeth in a smile.

"I am a man with a purpose," he retorted, in the same language. "I love Señorita Garcia! Her father promised that she should be my wife!"

"Her father is dead," said Teresa, "and that promise no longer binds her. In Mexico you sought to force her into a marriage. We are not in Mexico now. We are in the United States. It's different here. My husband is close at hand. If you do not leave us, I'll call him. He will protect us from you."

"Pardon, señorita," said Carker, also speaking in Spanish. "Permit me to offer my protection. I will see that this man gives neither you nor Señorita Garcia further annoyance." [Pg 135]

He rose and placed himself squarely before Murillo.

The Mexican glared fiercely at Greg.

"Gringo dog!" he sneered. "Who are you that offers your protection to these ladies?"

"I am their friend, señor, and the friend of Mrs. Gallup's husband. It'll be a good thing for you if you move along and move at once."

Murillo laughed.

"You miserable gringo!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you can frighten me? Do you think you can drive me away with words? I have followed that girl a very long distance. She belongs to me by the promise of her father. She cannot run away from me! I will have her!"

"Look here, Señor Murillo," retorted Greg quietly, "if you don't move along, I'll throw you out of that window!"

The Mexican fell back, and his hand was thrust into his bosom.

"Touch me, and you'll regret it!" he hissed, keeping his black eyes fastened on Carker.

"Is it a knife or a pistol you have in your hand?" questioned Greg quietly. "I know you've reached for one or the other. All the same I'll make good by throwing you out of the window if you don't pass on!"

Teresa grasped Carker's arm and whispered in his ear:

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"Wait! Here come the boyees!"

Ephraim and Barney were returning from the smoking compartment. The moment they saw Murillo they hurried forward, realizing that something unpleasant was taking place. Gallup uttered a cry of exasperation as he recognized the Mexican.

"Look here, Barney," he exclaimed, "here's old Wan! Consarn his pate, he's followed Juanita!"

"Begorra, we'll have to soak the persistint gint in the neck!" burst from the young Irishman.

Murillo backed away a bit, and his hand came forth from his bosom. It grasped a small shining revolver.

"Touch me, you gringo curs, and I'll keel you!" he threatened.

A stalky, broad-shouldered young man, wearing a broad-brimmed Stetson hat, came down the aisle behind the Mexican. There was a certain breezy, Western air about this broad-hatted stranger. He gave one sharp look at Murillo, and a moment later he had the threatening Mexican in a grip of iron. One of the stranger's hands shot over Murillo's shoulder and grasped the revolver, turning the muzzle toward the roof of the car.

"A popgun like that is a whole lot dangerous for fools to play with," observed this person who had interrupted. "You ought to be turned over some one's knee and spanked a-plenty. That's whatever!"

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"Great Juniper!" squawked Ephraim Gallup, flourishing his arms with a wild gesture of delight. "It's Buck—it's old Buck, by gum!"

"Hooroo, Badger, me bhoy!" laughed Barney. "Wherever did yez come from so suddint, Oi dunno?"

"In truth, it is my old college mate from Kansas!" breathed Carker.

Badger had twisted the pistol out of Murillo's fingers, with one hand while he easily held the Mexican helpless with the other hand. Badger was a big man. He stood six feet tall, and every inch of him was put up for strength and endurance. He was a fine-looking man, too, bronzed and weather-beaten, as if he had seen much outdoor life, yet having a certain atmosphere of ease and refinement about him which proclaimed him no ordinary cow-puncher or laborer. There was command and self-confidence in every glance of his eyes, in every movement of his person. In spite of his youth, a critical, discerning stranger would have pronounced him a man of much experience who feared nothing made of flesh and blood.

Murillo snarled at the Kansan in Spanish:

"*Santissima! Caramba! Caraj—*"

Like a flash Badger snapped the revolver out through the open window, and his hand closed on the throat of the furious Mexican, cutting the vile word short.

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"Here, you low-mouthed spawn of sin," grated the big Westerner, "there are ladies present! If you use that word before them, I'll shut off your wind a-plenty and let it stay shut! You hear me murmur!"

Murillo made one last furious struggle, but it was quite ineffectual, and he finally subsided, lying limp in the grasp of the big man.

"Who is this greaser coyote?" asked Badger, as he relaxed his hold on the man's throat, allowing him to catch a painful breath. "Whatever was he doing a-pulling a popgun that fashion?"

"Oh, he ees the veree bad man, señor!" exclaimed Teresa. "He annoy my dear friend, Juanita! He follow her all the way from Mexico! He threaten her eef she do not marry heem!"

Badger took a look at Juanita, and something like a gleam of admiration came into his big brown eyes.

"Juanita, you sure have my sympathy a-plenty," he observed. "You don't want to marry him?"

"Oh, no, no, señor!" replied the frightened girl.

"Well, then I opine I'll drop him out of the window. That may jar him some."

A second later Murillo, kicking and gasping, clawing at the air, had been lifted like an infant by Badger, who seemed on the point of hurling him headlong through the open window.

"Santa Maria! Mercee!" begged the frightened wretch. "Spare me, señor! Spare me, good señor! Eef you throw me through the window, eet will keel me!" [Pg 139]

"And that wouldn't be any great loss to the world, I judge," said the man from Kansas.

But now Juanita interfered.

"Oh, please do not throw heem from the train, señor!" she implored. "Even eef I do despise heem, I should not weesh to see heem keeled."

Badger chuckled.

"Well, on condition that the gent will promise a whole lot that he'll quit bothering you, I'll let him off and won't throw him out of the window. Speak up, you whining, chattering gopher! Make the promise instanter, or out you go!"

"Oh, I promeese, señor—I swear!" came from the frightened Mexican.

"Swear by all your saints," commanded Badger.

"By all the saints, I swear!" gasped Murillo.

"If I let you go now, you'll keep away from the señorita in future? You'll never trouble her again?"

Murillo choked, but his fear caused him to take the oath.

Badger dropped the wretch in an upright position, turned him down the aisle, gave him a start, and said:

"Don't look back! Keep on going just as far as you can go on this train! Get into the rear car, and if you show your cowardly mug around here again, I'll kick you clean up through the top of your hat! You hear my promise, I opine." [Pg 140]

Murillo heard it, and he kept on going until he had vanished from the car.

Barney Mulloy fairly quivered with laughter.

"Be heavins, Badger," he chuckled, "ye know how to handle a shnake! It's a relation to St. Pathrick ye are, and he drove all the shnakes out av Oireland. Hereafther you're St. Buck, begobs!"

"St. Buck is a heap good," laughed the Westerner, as he shook hands with his old friends, removed his broad-brimmed Stetson, and made a sweeping bow to the girls. "Mrs. Badger has a right jolly way of calling me angel sometimes, but, on my word, I can't discover even a pimple of a wing anywhere about me. But, say, people, however is it I find you all here together? Wherever are you bound for?"

"Bloomfield," answered Barney and Ephraim, in chorus.

"We're taking Carker along with us," explained Gallup. "We're all going to see old Frank at Bloomfield, by jinks!"

"Well, that's right fine," nodded Buck. "I'm bound for Bloomfield myself. Mrs. Badger and a friend are in the next car. Say, Winnie will be a heap surprised to see you boys. I'll lead her in. No, I have a better idea than that. We'll all hit the trail for the other car and descend on her in a bunch. There are plenty of empty seats in there, and we can have a right jolly old time." [Pg 141]

In his breezy, commanding way he gathered them all up and led them into the next car, which had been attached to the train at the junction recently left.

Mrs. Badger—the Winnie Lee of the old days at Yale—was dozing in her chair when Buck came down upon her and awoke her by grasping her shoulder and giving her a shake.

"Waugh!" cried he. "Part the curtains of your peepers, Winnie, and observe this bunch of Injuns."

Mrs. Badger's companion was a slender young woman in a brown traveling suit. She was rather pretty in a supercilious way, but she showed questionable taste in a display of jewels while traveling.

"Oh, Buck, how you startled me, you great bear!" exclaimed Winnie. "What is it? Who is it?"

"Take a survey," directed the Kansan, with a sweep of his hand. "Here is our friend Gallup from Vermont, and that Frenchman, Mulloy, who was born somewhere in the north of Ireland."

"Oh, Ephraim Gallup! Oh, Barney Mulloy!" cried Winnie, in delight, as she sprang to her feet and grasped the hand of each.

"And you don't want to overlook Professor Gregory Carker, whose earthquake predictions must have been unheeded by the people of Frisco. Here he is, Winnie." [Pg 142]

"Greg Carker!" burst from Winnie, as she shook hands with the young socialist. "Why, Greg, you're as handsome as a poet! You remind me of pictures of Lord Byron."

"Begobs, Ephie," whispered Mulloy, "we'll have to hold him and cut his hair! It's his hair that the ladies are shtuck on. No mon who predicts earthquakes has a roight to wear such ravishing hair."

At the mention of Carker's name Winnie Badger's companion had started and was now sitting bolt upright, staring at Greg and smiling.

Ephraim proudly introduced his wife and Juanita to Winnie.

While this was taking place Carker observed Winnie's friend. In a moment his face turned paler than usual, his eyelids started wide apart, and he lifted one hand with a movement of surprise and consternation. She looked straight into his eyes and continued to smile.

The others noted this. There was a hush, and all eyes were turned on the two.

Finally Carker's lips parted.

"Madge!" he breathed. And then after a moment, during which his bosom heaved, he repeated: "Madge!"

"Why, how do you do, Greg!" she laughed, extending her hand. "This is perfectly delightful! This is a most unexpected pleasure! I never dreamed of seeing you, Greg!" [Pg 143]

"Why, this is queer!" exclaimed Winnie Lee. "So you know my friend, Mrs. Morton, do you, Gregory?"

"I know her," came huskily, from Carker's lips. "I know her very well."

"Oh, yes," gushed the young woman, "we are old friends—dear old friends."

Juanita had fallen back behind the others. Her hands quivered a bit, and her white teeth were sunk into her lower lip. In a whisper she breathed to herself:

"This is the woman!"

CHAPTER XXI.

[Pg 144]

AT MERRY HOME.

On arriving in Bloomfield, they found Frank Merriwell at the station with carriages to accommodate them all.

Imagine their feelings as they once more greeted their old comrade and leader. Even Buck Badger, the big breezy man of command, seemed to take a second place in the presence of Frank.

Many of the Bloomfield citizens had somehow learned that several of Merry's friends were coming on that train, and, as a result, there was a gathering at the station. The curious ones stared at Merriwell's old flock, and it was generally remarked that these friends of Frank were "all right."

Eli Given, Uncle Ed Small, and Deacon Elnathan Hewett were there in a triangular group, and they nodded and chuckled and shook hands with each other as Frank shook hands with the members of his old flock.

"Purty 'tarnal good-looking people, Eben," said Eli. "Look at that big feller with the wide hat that has the leather band round it. There's a real man for ye."

"Yep," nodded Eben, leaning on his crooked cane and looking the party over. "He's a man, the hull of him, but even at that I don't cal'late he quite comes up to our Frank. What do you think, deacon?"

"Boys," said Elnathan, "I ain't never yit seen the man that comes up to our Frank. All Bloomfield is proud of him to the bustin' point, and they ought to be." [Pg 145]

"By jinks!" grinned Eli; "that tall feller jest introduced one of the dark-eyed gals as his wife. Wush! but she's a beaut! He's homelier than a barn door with the paint washed off, but she's a peach. Wonder how he ever ketched her."

"She's Spanish, or French, or something ferrun," asserted Uncle Eb. "I heerd her say something in some outlandish language to that other dark-eyed gal."

"Speakin' 'bout good-lookers," put in the deacon, "what's the matter with the one the big feller pushed for'ard as his wife? I don't guess Frank needed no introducin' to them, for it seems to me that he's met 'em both before."

"But, my jinks," gasped Eben, "look at the sparklers in the ears of that one in brown! S'pose them is real dimints? If they me, I bet they cost much as twenty-five dollars apiece!"

"Twenty-five?" said the deacon, with an intonation of contempt. "You ain't no judge of dimints, Eben! I bet they cost thirty!"

"Most of them seem to know Frank's nigger, Toots," said Eli. "Look at him show them ivories and nod and bow. By jinks! he'll snap his head off if he keeps that up. See that mouth of his'n stretch! The corners are going to pass each other at the back of his neck in a minute. If he keeps on, he'll lose the whole top of his head. It'll jest naturally crack right off."

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"Well, well, boys, this makes me feel mighty good, myself," said the deacon. "Never used to be no sech things as this going on here in our town. I tell you if I wasn't a temperance man, I feel so good I'd jest go down to Applesnack's store and open up two or three bottles of ginger ale."

"A little hard cider for me," laughed Uncle Eb. "Rufus has it in his storeroom. I know where we kin git at the keg, boys, and I think we better celebrate ourselves."

"That's a good idee, Eben," said Eli. "We'll all go over to the grocery and wash the dust out of our throats with Applesnack's cider."

"Now, boys," protested the deacon, "I don't think I'd better go. If it should come out, people would talk. I think I'll keep away."

"No, ye don't! No, ye don't!" declared Given, as he grasped one of the deacon's arms. "Git hold of his other wing, Eben. We'll lead him up to the keg and pour it into him, if we have to. There won't nobody see us, deacon. We'll be in the back room, and we'll have Rufus shet the door. I guess you kin trust us, can't ye? I guess you ain't afraid we'll go round tellin' folks 'bout it, are ye? You know we're your friends, don't ye?"

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"Course I know it," retorted the deacon. "But it's some agin' my principles, boys. It ain't jest right."

"Oh, fudge!" laughed Uncle Eb. "On a grand occasion like this you'd better set them air principles aside a little while. Frank is gittin' them into the carriages now. We'll see them off, and then we'll stroll over to Applesnack's and have jest one little taste of that cider."

"Let's start a cheer for Frank Merriwell and his friends as they go," suggested the deacon.

The others caught at this eagerly, and, as a result, when the carriages started away from the station, the villagers on the platform, led by the three "old boys," gave an irregular but hearty cheer for Frank Merriwell and his friends. Frank turned a laughing face toward them and waved his hand.

"The people around here seem a-plenty stuck on you, Merry," observed Badger, who was in the carriage with him.

"Oh, I have lots of friends in Bloomfield," answered Frank. "I had enemies enough at the start, but my worst enemies—the most of them—have turned into friends."

"Same old story," said the Kansan. "It was that way at college. You always made your strongest friends out of your bitterest enemies. Browning, for instance, was an enemy at the start, and I certain didn't cotton to you any at all. We had some hot old times in those days, Merry. That's whatever!"

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"Hot old times! Grand old times!" came from Frank's lips. "I often think of them. You'll find Browning, Diamond, Hodge, and Carson at the house. And away back in the days at Fardale, long before I met you, Buck, Bart Hodge was a bitter enemy. Browning and Diamond are two of my instructors in the A. S. of A. D. Hodge is my overseer at the mines. Bruce and Jack have had their hands full this afternoon rushing the boys through the regular work in order that they might get off for the afternoon. Hodge and Carson have been helping. I've kept Carson at work during the last week or so. It was necessary. Certain unpleasant affairs of his put him in a bad way, and the only thing was to take up his mind by work. I haven't given him much time to think and brood."

"I opine we've got a brooder with us in the carriage behind," said Badger, in a low tone. "Carker shows it in his face and eyes."

"Oh, he's still suffering mentally over the troubles of the masses, I suppose," said Frank.

"There's something beyond that—something that has affected him still worse," explained Buck. "You noticed Winnie's chum, Mrs. Morton?"

"Of course I noticed her," smiled Frank. "Didn't you introduce me? She's rather pretty."

"Well, to the surprise of both Winnie and myself, we discovered on the train when Madge and Greg met that there had been some sort of an old love affair between them. I reckon that's two-thirds the trouble with Carker."

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Over the bridge rumbled the carriages. As they rolled past Applesnack's store the grocer and several of his friends stood on the steps and waved a salute at them. All these villagers were smiling as if the reunion gave them almost as much enjoyment as it gave Frank and his old flock.

After leaving the village they soon came in sight of the buildings of Farnham Hall. These structures, located on a splendid site, brought exclamations of astonishment and pleasure from all who had not seen them before.

Then they saw Merry Home setting back amid the tall trees which surrounded it. The old Colonial house seemed to open its arms to them in welcome.

And on the veranda were Inza, Elsie, Jack Diamond, Bruce Browning, Bart Hodge, and Berlin Carson.

It's impossible to describe adequately the meeting as the newcomers left the carriages and were greeted by those waiting for them. The chatter and laughter of the girls made merry music, but for the most part the young men shook hands in silence, looking deep into one another's eyes and letting the grasp of their fingers express the emotions their lips could not speak.

The two colored men, Toots and Jumbo, together with the young Irish man of all work, who had also acted as a driver, took the turnouts round to the stables, where the three of them joined hands and did a crazy dance. [Pg 150]

"Bah golly, Jumbo, you big stiff," cried Toots, as he struck the huge darky a resounding blow on the back, "Ah'ze the happiest nigger in dis hull unumverse! Wasn't dat de finest-looking bunch ob people yo' eber set yo' homely eyes on, Jumbo? Bah golly! dat's de kind ob folks Marsa Frank trains round wid. Ain't dem gals jes' de slappinest good-lookers yo' eber see?"

"Now don' yo' git familiar talkin' 'bout Marsa Frank's lady friends!" warned Jumbo. "Ah'ze a friend to you, Toots, but dis familumarity don' sot well on mah stomach."

"Aw, go on dar, you big brack jollier!" yapped Toots. "Ah'ze known Marsa Frank eber since he was knee high to a grasshopper. Ah guess Ah knows mah place. He's tol' me more'n once, 'Toots, yo'se a gemman distinctive ob yo' color.' Dar ain't no udder nigger dat could gib Marsa Frank a piece of device de way Ah can. He'd took it off'n me when he'd up and slam any udder brack sassbox right ober de crannyum whack-o! Don' yo' git no notion, Jumbo, jes' beca'se Ah injuiced Marsa Frank to gib yo' a job, dat yo' ken hab de same familiar acquaintance wid him dat Ah has. Now back up an' look arter dem hosses! Git onto yo' job befo' Ah discharges yo'!" [Pg 151]

"Well, wouldn't dat ar gib a ring-tailed elephant a cramp!" muttered Jumbo warmly, as he went about his work.

An hour after the arrival at Merry Home the visitors were ushered into the large, light, airy dining room, where they found seats at a long table. There were servants enough for the occasion, and everything was served promptly.

Mrs. Morton sought to secure a seat at Greg Carker's side, but in a clever manner Carker had avoided such proximity to her, without seeming to do so intentionally. Instead of having her at his elbow, it was Juanita who sat there.

"Well, señorita," said Carker, smiling on her, "what do you think of Frank Merriwell's home and his friends?"

"Oh, eet ees the most splendeed theeng I evaire see," she murmured. "Eet makes me feel so happy for you all."

"Happy?" said Carker, regarding her closely. "Why, I fancied you were looking rather unhappy. To me you seemed downcast. Has anything occurred to make you sad?"

"Oh, eet ees that I am so far from home—perhaps," she answered. "Why deed you not seet by the beauteeful lady you meet again one time more on the train?" [Pg 152]

"Whom do you mean?"

"The friend of Señorita Badgair. I theenk she ees so verree pretty. She ees marreed, eh?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, she's married," muttered Carker.

"You are sorree?"

"Sorry?"

"*Si, señor.* Eef she was not marreed, perhaps you would beside her seet."

"I don't think so—at least, knowing her as I do now. Still, I don't blame her. I'm the cause of it all."

"You feel verree, verree bad?"

"I'll be honest with you, señorita—I can't tell whether I feel very bad or not. I have felt rather upset, I confess. But, my dear girl, human nature is peculiar. It's a strange thing, but I believe most men and most women take melancholy delight in feeling themselves to be martyrs. We all delight to moan over lost loves. That is the poetry in our natures. Occasionally we spend our time grieving over some lost love that reason and good judgment tells us would have come to naught under any circumstances. I hope Mrs. Morton is happy and satisfied. Perhaps you'll think me fickle, señorita, but let me confess to you the fact that I'm not feeling as much like grieving as I was—before I met you."

For a few moments Juanita did not seem to grasp his meaning, but when she did the soft, warm [Pg 153]

color mounted to her cheeks, and her confusion was plainly evident.

On the opposite side of the table Gallup nudged Teresa, who had been placed at his left.

"Hey, Teresa," he whispered, "get onto Carker. Gol rap him! He's making hay in a hurry."

"What ees eet you mean to make the hay?" questioned Teresa, puzzled. "To me it seem that he make the love. He talk so verree low that nobody except Juanita hear what he say, and Juanita she blush."

"That's right," chuckled Ephraim, "and, by Jim! Mrs. Morton is looking daggers and hoss pistols."

Then he lifted his voice and addressed Carker.

"Hold on there, Greg!" he called. "You can't eat your soup with your fork! Why don't you use a spoon?"

It was Carker's turn to be confused, but he forced a laugh.

"I have a lamentable habit of becoming abstracted in pleasant company," he said.

"Evidently you find your company extremely pleasant, Mr. Carker," observed Mrs. Morton, with a little toss of her head.

"Extremely is not quite the word, madam," he replied, with a bow. "Absorbingly pleasant is far better."

CHAPTER XXII.

[Pg 154]

ANOTHER PILGRIM.

At intervals during the meal the sound of plaintive, doleful music floated in through the open windows.

"Sounds like a baby squawking," observed Ephraim Gallup.

"Begobs! Oi thought it was some wan playing on bagpipes," observed Barney Mulloy. "Oi wonder whativer it can be, Oi dunno?"

Frank listened.

"To me it sounds like a cross between a clarinet, a flute, and a piccolo," he smiled. "Some one is trying to furnish music for this festive occasion."

He called one of the servants and asked her to find out the origin of the peculiar doleful music.

In a few moments the girl returned and quietly explained that a wandering musician had halted on the lawn and was performing on some sort of a wind instrument.

"He's a bery funny-lookin' maan, Mr. Merriwell," grinned the girl. "He suttinly am wearin' de oddest clo'es Ah eber seen. An' he's round an' corperlous, wid de biggest fat cheeks when he blows, an' a yeller mustache dat keeps wigwaggin' all de time."

Frank thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out a silver half dollar and put it in the colored girl's palm.

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"Give him this, Liza, and tell him to jog along," he said quietly.

But after Liza had performed the commission and returned to the dining room the doleful notes of the wind instrument continued to float in through the open windows.

"The wandering minstrel is bound to give you your money's worth, Merry," laughed Jack Diamond.

Although they lingered at the table fully an hour after that, the musician continued to play outside during all that time, with brief intervals of rest.

Finally, when dessert was over and they had chatted and gossiped a while, Frank proposed that they should move to the veranda.

As the jolly party came out upon the veranda they discovered the musician. He was a portly young German, and he stood on the lawn, with a battered old carpetbag between his feet, while he blew at a wheezy flute with such vigor and vim that his eyes threatened to pop out of his head.

"He certainly is working overtime," observed Diamond.

"I'd like to know the name of his tailor," chuckled Browning. "His clothes certainly fit him handsomely—in spots."

"Anyhow they touch the high places," came from Badger.

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Frank Merriwell paused on the veranda steps and scrutinized the musician intently.

"Fellows," he said, "that chap looks familiar to me. I've seen him before. I know him."

Bart Hodge's hand dropped on Merry's shoulder.

"You're right, Frank," he said. "We both know, him—we all know him."

An instant later Merry sprang down the steps, rushed forward and seized the flute player.

"If you need any assistance," called Gallup, as he descended to the lawn, "I'll help you kill him, Merry."

"Hans Dunnerwurst!" cried Frank, as he grasped the hand of the German and shook it delightedly. "I thought I knew you!"

The stranger seemed nearly pumped out of breath. As soon as he could speak he retorted:

"Uh-ha! I pelieft you vould knew me uf you recognitioned me. How you vos alretty, Vrankie? It peen a long dime since ve med up py each udder, ain'd it? I knew der lufly musig vot I vos discouragin' to you vould pring de houze oudt uf you bretty quick. Yah! I knew you coot not stand der delightfulness uf id forefer. *Ach Himmel!* How der flute does luf to blay me! Id peen der grandest instrument dot efer found me der vorld in."

Several of the party had followed Frank down the steps and surrounded Dunnerwurst. They greeted him warmly, seizing his hand and shaking it.

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But suddenly the Dutchman caught sight of Gallup. With a whoop of joy, he grabbed up his carpetbag and started for the Vermonter.

"Oh, Ephie, Ephie!" he squawked, rushing forward and embracing Gallup, who was nearly upset by this impetuosity. "You vos so glad to see me dot I coot almost cry right away alretty quick now!"

"Waal, gol dern my punkins!" exploded Ephraim. "It sartinly is old Hans!"

"Oldt Hans? Oldt Hans?" yelled Dunnerwurst indignantly. "Who vos you callin' oldt Hans mit such carelessness? Py Chiminy! I peen not more than a year younger as you vos yourselluf! Don'd you git so bersonal in my remarks!"

Then he saw Barney Mulloy, who was standing near, a broad grin on his face.

With a howl, Hans flung the carpetbag and the flute straight up into the air.

"Id vos Parney!" he shouted. "Id vos dot Irish pogtrotter!"

Then the carpetbag came down, struck Hans on the head and knocked him to a sitting position on the grass.

"Sarves ye roight for torturin' our ears wid thot croupy flute, ye bologna sausage!" laughed Mulloy.

"Pologna sissage! Pologna sissage!" howled Hans. "You vos chust as sauciness as I efer vos! Vy don'd I learnt some manners dot vould make a chentleman uf you!"

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Together, Mulloy and Gallup seized the Dutchman, one by each arm, lifted him part way to his feet and then permitted him to fall back with a thud.

"Look out there, boys," laughed Frank, "you'll dent the ground!"

"Mine cootness!" gurgled Hans. "The ground dented me alretty soon! Don'd put my hands on you again!" he ordered, as his friends once more offered assistance. "Don'd try to pull der ground away from me! I vill dood it mineselluf. I vill got up mitoudt nopody's resistance."

Puffing and grunting, he finally rose to his feet, wiped the perspiration from his face, and stood there, bowing and smiling in a manner that was little short of distressing.

Frank led the Dutchman up the steps and presented him to the ladies. Hans' effort at suave politeness as he bowed with his hand over his heart was most laughable.

"Mine cootness! vos dot Inza Purrage?" he gurgled. "I used to think she vos der most peautiful girl vot efer seen me, but, so hellup me sour kroust, she vos sixdeen times prettier-lookin' than efer!"

"You're the same old flatterer, Hans," said Inza; "but you mustn't try to flirt with me now. I'm married, you know."

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"Vy dit you hurriness so much? Vy dit I not vait for you?" he demanded.

"Here's Elsie, Hans."

"Vot, dot—dot angel vomans mit der golden hair her head all ofer?"

"She's now Mrs. Hodge," explained Bart.

Hans struck himself a furious blow on the chest and staggered.

"Dere I vos again!" he groaned. "Oh, vot a terrible misdake for her! Elsie Pellwood—und she iss

now Elsie Hotch? By Chiminy! you vos a lucky poy, Part; but I don'd blame her when I see tears in her eyes because she knows I vos not marreed mineselluf."

"You come here," invited Gallup, as he grasped Hans' arm and turned him toward Teresa. "I jest want to knock you daown to my wife. Mrs. Gallup, this hot dog is my old friend, Hans Dunnerwurst, that I've told ye about more'n once."

"Oo!" murmured Teresa; "I am charmed to meet Señor Dunnerwierst."

Hans seemed speechless as he bowed and bowed, keeping his eyes on Teresa all the while. Finally he turned, seized Gallup by the shoulder, pulled him down, and hissed in his ear:

"How dit you dood id? You vos so homely dot a clock coot stob you, und you haf marreed up py a curl dot vords coot not found my tongue for expressment."

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"Waal," chuckled the Vermonter, "if you want to express your tongue, send it to the Adams Express Company."

"Maype I think dot vos a coot choke!" sneered Hans. "You always vos so funny, Ephie, dot you caused me pucketts uf tears to veep."

Frank presented Juanita and Mrs. Morton, and when it was all over Hans sank on a chair, quite overcome.

"How did you happen to show up at such an opportune time, Dunnerwurst?" inquired Merry.

"Vun veek ago," answered the Dutchman, "vile the flute vos learning to blay me in Cinsanity, Ohio, a newsbaper reads me apout Vrang Merriwell's great School Athletic Envelopment uf. My mint made me up to come right away soon as der car fare coot raise me. Und here I vos."

"Well, you're welcome to Merry Home. You just fill out the party. You make it complete. This is indeed a great reunion of the old flock. Tell us what you are doing, Hans."

"Dit you not heard me on der flute play? I vos a musiga. Der heart uf me vos so full uf musig alretty dot I haf to play it oudt to keep from pursting vide open."

"Here comes some more visitors, Merry," called Diamond. "I think we know them."

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With their arms linked together, three old men were approaching rather unsteadily.

Merry instantly recognized Eli Given, Uncle Eb Small, and Deacon Hewett. As the trio turned in from the road their feet somehow became tangled, and all three went down sprawlingly. Uncle Eb sat up and made a whack at Eli with his crooked cane, crying shrilly:

"That's the second time you've tripped me!"

"Don't blame it on me, you doddering old fossil!" flung back Given.

"Peace, boys—peace!" remonstrated the deacon, waving his hands in the air. "Raise not your voices in harsh words and brawling. I don't think any one tripped you, Eben. I've noticed myself that the ground is rather unsteady. I think we're feeling a few left-over tremors from the Frisco earthquake."

"Mebbe you're right, deacon," said Uncle Eb, seeming pacified. "Kin you tell me jest how them earthquakes work? Do they make things go round in a circle? I've been noticin' durin' the last few minutes that the trees and fences were all floatin' round us."

"If we brace ourselves and walk carefully," said Elnathan, as he rose and swayed a bit, "I think we'll have no further difficulty in getting along. Permit me to assist you, Eben."

But when he tried to lift Uncle Eb up he lost his balance, fell heavily on Small and flattened him out.

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"This is really astonishing," muttered Frank, repressing his laughter with difficulty as he started down the steps.

"Oh, what's the matter with them, Merry?" asked Inza.

"Now don't get worried, dear," he answered, over his shoulder. "The sun is very warm to-day, and I'm afraid they're suffering from it. We must get them into the shade before they have sunstroke. Come on, fellows."

Assisted by the boys, the three old men were lifted to their feet and escorted into the shade beneath the spreading trees in front of the house.

Uncle Eb poked Elnathan in the ribs with his cane.

"Come on now with that speech, deacon," he urged. "You're the speechmaker of the party."

Elnathan cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "this is a grand and glorious day. This is the day when that grand and glorious bird, the American eagle, should plume itself with pride and utter a scream that could be heard from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from the Gulf to the Canadian border."

"Hooray! hooray!" piped Eli Given. "That's the talk, deacon. Spatter it on thick!"

"We are sons of free men," continued Elnathan, making a gesture that nearly caused him to lose his balance. "The Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation made us all free and equal. If there be one among you who is not stirred by this glorious thought, let him hide his head in shame. This is the day on which the whole country rejoices at the birth of liberty. Let the cannons boom! Let the rockets sizz! Let the pinwheels whizz! And let the popcorn pop!"

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"Hold on, deacon—hold on!" interrupted Uncle Eb. "That's your last year's Fourth of July speech. That don't seem 'zactly 'ppropriate to this occasion."

"Now you back up, Eben," commanded Given. "You let him spout. It sounds purty good to me, whether there's any sense to it or not."

"What was I sayin'?" asked the deacon. "Where did I leave off? You kinder interrupted my train of discourse, Eben. Mebbe I'd better stop."

"There's a lady coming to join our party," said Bart Hodge. "I think it's your wife, Eli."

"My w-h-a-t?" gasped Eli Given, actually turning pale. "Where is she? Great scissors! If she ever gits her hands on me now, I see my finish!"

A woman, with a sunbonnet dangling by the strings tied beneath her chin, was coming down the road in a hurried manner. With some difficulty Eli finally discovered her.

"That's Mrs. Given as sure as Adam ett the apple!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe she's seen me. Boys, I've gut to go, and I've gut to go in a hurry, too."

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"Well, don't you think I'm goin' to hang around for her to git holt of me," said Uncle Eb, as he started toward the corner of the house, hobbling along as fast as his legs and his cane could carry him.

"I think perhaps I'd better go, too," muttered the deacon, as he followed Eben's example.

In spite of the start of his companions, Given passed them on a run and turned the corner, making straight for the stable. The three old chaps legged it into that building and disappeared from view.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Given had seen them, and she was not far behind when they vanished through the wide-open door. She found Uncle Eb propped up with his cane, standing in a dark corner of a box stall.

"Eben Small," she said, as she shook her fingers in his face, "you're a disgrace to the community! Now, not a word! Don't speak! I know what you've been doing, you and my husband and Elnathan Hewett! You've been drinking hard cider at Rufus Applesnack's store! I'm going to take Eli home, and I'll give him a dressing down he won't soon forget! I tell ye not to speak! You ain't gut nuthin' to say!"

She then lifted her voice and called for her husband to come forth. As there was no response, she looked into the crib, and there she found Elnathan curled up, pretending to be fast asleep.

"Deacon Hewett," she said, "you've posed as an example to the community. Now don't snore! I know you're awake! You can't fool me? So you will continue to snore, will ye?"

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There was a squawk from the deacon, for she had seized him by the nose and given it a twist that brought him upright in the crib.

"Where's my husband?" she demanded. "Don't speak! Don't say a word! I want to know where my husband is!"

"Well, how kin I tell you if I don't speak?" snarled the deacon. "I dunno where he is, anyhow! Go 'way and lemme alone! This hot weather is giving me an awful headache."

"Oh, you've got a headache, have ye? Well, that's retribution, Mr. Hewett. You ought to have a headache. You've led my husband astray. He's a temperance man."

"Me lead him astray!" groaned Hewett. "Why, 'twas him and Eben that coaxed me over to Applesnack's store."

"Now don't you tell me that, you sinful old hypocrite! Eli never touches hard cider unless somebody induces him to do so. And I know Eben don't drink it on account of the effect on his rheumatiz."

"That's right, mother!" piped a weak, small voice from beneath the crib, as Eli poked his head out. "The deacon is all to blame!"

"Oh, there you be!" she snapped, as she pounced on him and pulled him forth. "Now you git up here and march home!"

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Having pulled him to his feet, she took a firm grip on his ear and led him from the stall and out of the stable.

IN THE NOOK.

That afternoon was to be long remembered by all the visitors at Merry Home. It passed pleasantly in spite of the fact that Hans insisted on "rending a selection" on the flute and seemed rather disappointed and downcast when they begged him not to play any more.

"Der musig haf no heart for you," he complained. "Maype you would like a popular song to sing to me. I vill gif you 'Efrybody Vorks Poor Vather.' Yes? No?"

"Don't yez do it, Hans," entreated Barney. "We have suffered enough already."

"Und id vos such a peautiful song!" moaned Dunnerwurst. "I understandt der author uf dot song got only fife hundret dollars for writin' id."

"Waal," drawled Gallup, "maybe it was his first offense. Did he pay the fine?"

"Fife hundret dollars vos a small amountt," said Hans. "Still I would like to add it py my 'lefen dollars and seventeen cents vot I haf my pocket in."

"How much would that make in all?" questioned Gallup. "You always was a rippin' good mathematicker, Hans, though seems to me you did git a little balled up in substraction. If you've gut eleven dollars and sixteen cents in your pocket, and I should take five dollars away from you, whaot would be the result?"

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"You would be carried away an ambulance in," said the Dutchman promptly.

Carker had bestowed a great deal of attention on Juanita. Although she pretended not to notice this, Mrs. Morton was waiting her opportunity, and it came when Greg strolled away alone beneath the trees. In a few moments she made an excuse and followed him. Finding him seated on a rustic bench in a little nook, she uttered an exclamation of pretended surprise over discovering him there.

"Why, Greg," she fluttered, "are you here?"

He rose at once.

"Yes, I'm here," he answered. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Morton, if I alarmed you. I'll not bother you if you wish to sit here."

"Oh, you foolish boy!" she laughed, placing her hands on his breast and pushing him back on the seat. "Sit down. Isn't this a delightful place! We're all alone here by ourselves, and nobody can see or hear us."

She placed herself at his side.

"It might be somewhat embarrassing for you if any one should discover us here," said Greg.

"Embarrassing for me? What a foolish idea! You always were a foolish fellow, Greg Carker."

"You've told me so before."

"And told you the truth."

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"I presume you still think so. You thought me foolish because of my socialistic beliefs. You used to make sport of me. I haven't forgotten that."

"The trouble with you, Greg, is that you take things too seriously. You never can see a joke. If any one plays a joke on you, you're offended, and you try to get even. You've been getting even with me to-day."

"In what manner?"

"By the way you made eyes at that insipid creature, Juanita."

"I wouldn't call her insipid if I were in your place," he remonstrated. "It doesn't seem nice of you, Madge—I mean Mrs. Morton."

"Oh, call me Madge. There is no reason why you should be so extremely formal. I knew you before I met George Morton."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought I knew you," he retorted, "but I discovered I was mistaken."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true."

"I don't believe you ever cared for me, Greg."

"And I know you never really cared for me. If you had, you'd not have cast me over as you did for Morton."

"But I couldn't do anything with you, Gregory. You persisted in throwing your life away."

"In what manner?"

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"In becoming a socialist. In lecturing on socialism in defiance of your father's wishes and my entreaties. Your father threatened to cut you off without a dollar."

"I believe he's made a will in which I am given the liberal sum of one dollar," said Carker. "So you see he has not quite cut me off without a dollar. The money made all the difference with you, Madge. Morton was wealthy. I had nothing in the world, and no particular prospects. You married Morton."

"Well, a girl has to look out for herself in these days."

"But you pretended that you loved me."

"I did," she declared earnestly. "I loved you then, Greg, and I've loved you ever since."

Again he shrugged his shoulders, and a low laugh came from his lips.

"You don't believe me!" she exclaimed. "If you only knew how much it hurt me to see you smiling into the eyes of that Spanish girl! Oh, I longed to choke her!"

"How do you think I felt when you dropped me and became George Morton's wife?"

"I'd never done that had you been sensible. Had you promised your father that you'd give up socialism, I'd have clung to you through everything, Gregory. You know socialism is so ridiculous! And socialists are the skuff and rabble of humanity. All the cranks and crackbrains are socialists."

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"Every great thinker since the world began has been called a crank. I admit that there are many undesirable persons allied with the socialists, but because of that the great principles of the party cannot be condemned. The theory of socialism is founded on the rock of justice and——"

"Oh, I've heard all that before, Gregory. Don't talk it any more. How can you blame me if I did not wish to marry a penniless man absolutely without prospects?"

"I don't blame you," he said. "At the same time, Madge, I hate to think that you married George Morton simply for his money. I hate to think you deceived him in such a manner."

"Oh, George was a good fellow, and money is an absolute necessity, Gregory. Had I possessed a fortune, it would have been different. The mere fact that your father had cut you off would have made no difference to me then. It makes no difference to me now."

"But it's too late now, Madge."

"Oh, no, it isn't too late."

He drew back from her, and the look she saw in his eyes brought a sudden flush to her cheeks.

"You think me bold. You think me forward," she hastily said. "Long ago you made me confess that I loved you. Do you think I forgot you? Oh, no; there's been never a day since we parted that I've not longed to see you again."

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In spite of her hand on his arm, he rose to his feet.

"This won't do, Madge," he said calmly. "You're a married woman. What if your husband should hear you speaking such words to me?"

She was on her feet also.

"My husband—why, Gregory,—don't you know—haven't you heard? I have no husband!"

"You—have—no—husband?"

"No. I'm a widow. I've just come out of mourning. George has been dead more than a year."

Carker seemed turned to stone. She was standing squarely in front of him, and she placed both her hands on his arms, looking up into his eyes.

"I supposed you knew," she murmured. "He left me in comfortable circumstances, and there is now no reason why I should worry about the future. If your father is unrelenting, it can make but little difference to us. Even though we may not agree about socialism, I'll let you have your way. Everything has come out right at last, Greg. Isn't it splendid!"

Before he realized her intention, one of her arms slipped round his neck.

At that moment Juanita Garcia passed the entrance to that little nook and saw them. She did not pause, but, pale-faced and wide-eyed, hurried silently on.

CHAPTER XXIV.

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ON THE CLIFF.

During the remainder of the day Juanita avoided Greg Carker.

Evening came. Within the house the boys were singing the old college songs to the accompaniment of a piano as Juanita stole away alone and listened a long time from a corner of the veranda. Tears dimmed her eyes, and she whispered soft words to herself.

"I know I'm a verree fooleesh girl," she said. "I cannot help eet. Eet ees not to be that he should care for me."

Her heart throbbed with bitter disappointment. She left the house behind and wandered away through the dusky June night. Crossing the road and the fields, she came at last to Ripple Lake, on the edge of which she lingered while the moon crept up in the east.

"I ought to return," she murmured. "If they mees me, they will become alarmed. But I cannot go back there yet—I cannot go back!"

Her restless spirit led her round the shore of the lake until she finally found herself on a bluff that rose from the water's edge. The moon was now behind her back. At the brink of the bluff she peered over into the shadow below.

A footstep startled her.

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With a smothered cry, she turned and found herself face to face with—Jose Murillo.

"It is you, Juanita!" he exclaimed, in Spanish. "All day I have waited and watched for the opportunity to speak with you!"

"Señor Murillo, why did you come here? You promised——"

"What is a man's promise to a gringo!" he retorted. "Did you think they could frighten Jose away from you? No, no, Juanita!"

"But I do not want to see you."

"You're a foolish girl. Why are you so determined against me? Your father gave me his promise ___"

"It will do you no good to speak of that, señor. I tell you now for the last time that I do not care for you—I never can. If you are a gentleman, you will bother me no more. I'm going back now."

He placed himself before her.

"Not yet!" he exclaimed.

"You cannot stop me, señor!"

"Oh, yes, I can, señorita. Don't fancy I've followed you all the way from Mexico to be baffled so easily. The Murillos are determined men. I have resolved that you shall be mine!"

"Never!"

"That word is easy to speak. What have I done that you should despise me?"

"You say the Murillos are determined men. They are, likewise, bloody men. I know not why my father favored you. I do know that my mother feared all Murillos, even as I fear you."

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"It is good for a woman to have a husband whom she fears and respects."

"In this case fear and respect do not go together, señor. I have no respect for you."

"Then I will teach you respect when you are mine."

"That opportunity will never be given you. Look, señor, we stand at the edge of this cliff. The water is very close at hand. I wish you to understand me. Rather than become your wife, I'd leap into that water. I cannot swim."

"Leap!" he exclaimed. "I will leap after you, and I cannot swim!"

"Are you mad?"

"It is madness perhaps, señorita, but it is the madness of love. You must understand me now. You must understand how useless it is to fly from me. Once I thought you cared for another man. Once I was jealous of Emmanuel Escalvo. He never knew how close he walked with death. When I learned you did not care for him I put away my knife. There can be no others—unless you have met him within a few hours. I am satisfied that there is no other."

With sudden indiscretion and defiance, she exclaimed:

"You're wrong, Señor Murillo! There is another!"

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He uttered a sudden curse.

"Who is the man? Tell me his name, and he shall have what Emmanuel Escalvo escaped!"

She was frightened by her folly.

"Who is the man?" he snarled, suddenly seizing her. "Speak quick—speak at once!"

"You hurt me, señor!" she panted, striving to break from his grasp. "Let me go!"

"I will not! I have you now, and I'll keep you! I'll never let you go!"

"I beg your pardon," said a quiet voice, "but I think you're mistaken."

Jose Murillo found himself sprawling on the ground. He looked up, and in the moonlight he saw Gregory Carker offering Juanita support.

"Oh, why deed you come?" panted the girl. "Now he weel know! He weel keel you!"

Snarling like an angry dog, Murillo leaped to his feet. The moonlight shimmered on a blade he had whipped from his bosom.

"This ees the man!" he panted triumphantly, as he sprang at Greg.

Carker flung up his arm, and Murillo's knife slashed his sleeve from shoulder to elbow.

In a twinkling Greg had closed with the Mexican, grasping the man's wrist and holding him in an effort to keep him from using the knife.

Juanita sought to interfere, but the cool, determined young American warned her back.

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"Leave this man to me," he said.

"He has the knife!"

"But I don't think he'll use it," said Carker, as he backheeled Murillo.

In a moment they were down, twisting and squirming and writhing on the ground.

With her hands clasped, and her lips parted, Juanita looked on, standing ready to do her best should she see Murillo free his knife hand.

Carker had once been an athlete. He was not now in the best condition, but, nevertheless, he was stronger than his foe, and he finally pinned Murillo to the ground.

"Drop that knife!" commanded Greg, seeking to force the weapon from the Mexican's fingers.

In this attempt he had almost succeeded, when of a sudden Murillo squirmed away, rolled over and over and scrambled up.

Carker rose on the brink of the cliff and again faced the man. Murillo came at him with a leap, making a savage slash with the knife. Carker dodged just in time and thrust out his foot. Over that outthrust foot the Mexican tripped. Straight forward he plunged, with a cry and a splash, into the water below.

"Perhaps a cold bath will do him good," observed Carker, breathing a trifle heavily.

Juanita seemed ready to faint.

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"Oh, señor, you are the brave man!" she breathed. "Oh, my heart eet beat so for you! I have such a terrible fear that he would keel you!"

Carker felt a strange thrill that ran over him from head to feet.

"Would you have cared so much?" he asked hoarsely.

"Eet would have keeled me, too, señor!" she answered. "The lake—I should have leaped into eet! Like Murillo, I cannot swim."

"Like Murillo, eh?" exclaimed Greg. "Then the fellow can't swim? Well, I think it's up to me to pull him out."

He stripped off his coat, ran some distance away to a point where he could descend to the water's edge and made his way along the foot of the little bluff. Peering into the shadows, he called in vain to the Mexican.

Out beyond the point where the cliff shadow lay on the water there were tiny shimmering waves, but in that shadow he could see nothing.

"I'm afraid this is rather a serious matter for Jose Murillo," he muttered. "Had I realized the scoundrel couldn't swim, I'd followed him into the lake and pulled him out. I take it he's gone."

Juanita called to him from above:

"Can't you see him, Señor Carkaire?"

"Don't be alarmed, Juanita," he answered. "I'm coming back there. I'll be with you in a moment."

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He took one last look in search of the Mexican.

"I had to defend myself," he thought. "I'm sorry I was concerned in it, but I think Jose Murillo will trouble Juanita no more."

She was waiting in a trembling anxiety as he reappeared. He picked up his coat and put it on.

"Deed you find heem?"

"Not a trace," answered Carker. "He must have sunk like a stone. It's an unfortunate affair, Juanita, but you have no further cause to fear that man. Come, little girl, I'll take you back to the house. Give me your arm."

Timidly she clung to his arm, and they turned their steps toward Merry Home.

"Do you believe in fate?" asked Carker.

"Si, señor. Eet was fate that I should meet Señor Murillo as I deed."

"And it was fate that led me here. I have been seeking an opportunity to speak with you all the afternoon. You would not give me a chance. Every time I approached you ran away from me. Why did you do so, Juanita?"

"Why deed you weesh to speak with me?"

"I had something I wished to say. Juanita, I can't seem to find the words. I presume I'm rather excited. That's natural under the circumstances. It was something about you that bewitched me. It must have been your eyes."

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"Oo, what ees eet you say, señor? You theenk I do not know sometheeng. On the train you tell of the girl who would not marree you—the girl who marree the other man. You meet her in the car with Señora Badgaire. I know! I know! She ees the one! You luf her!"

"I may as well make a clean breast of it," said Carker. "I thought I did once. She gave me the shake, Juanita. It's all over now."

"How can you say that? You theenk me a foolish girl to believe you? Wait and I weel tell you what I see. This afternoon you meet her in the little retreat of the shrubbery. I deed not know you were there. I walk out alone. I pass the place. I see you with her."

"That was unfortunate—for me. I presume it looked like an appointment. It was an accident, Juanita. It's all over between Mrs. Morton and Gregory Carker."

But the girl remembered how she had seen them standing there looking into each other's eyes, while the woman's arm was on Carker's shoulder.

"Wait, señor!" she panted. "Many time I have been told all the Americans are deceivers. I know what I see with my eyes. Juanita ees no longer a child."

"Oh, won't you listen? Won't you take my word?"

"I weel not leesten now," she declared. "Some time when you prove to me that you no longer care for her, maybe I weel leesten. I must have the proof, señor."

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"I'll prove it somehow!" vowed Carker.

CHAPTER XXV.

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A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Having escorted Juanita back to the house, Carker called Frank aside and told him what had happened at the lake.

"I'm afraid I'm responsible for a dead Mexican," said Carker. "I think Murillo was drowned."

"It's unfortunate that you are concerned in it," said Frank; "but Murillo will be no great loss to the world. Nevertheless we'll do our duty and report the affair to the authorities without delay."

Making an excuse to the rest of the party, Frank and Greg walked into the village, found Bill Hunker, the constable, and told him precisely what had taken place.

"The Mexican pulled a knife on ye, did he, young feller? Well, consarn them Mexicans! I've allus heerd they was dangerous critters. 'Cordin' to your story, you wan't none to blame in this affair. So the dod-rabbited critter kinder went in swimmin' arter that, did he? Think he's drowned, do ye? Um-her! I don't s'pose it'll do no good for us to go fishin' for him to-night. I'll git some fellers and drag for him in the mornin'. Don't s'pose you want him to soak there in your lake, Mr. Merriwell, and spile the water. We'll dig him out and bury him in the pauper's lot, if nobody don't claim his carkiss. I judge there'll be a settin' of the coroner's jury on the case, but I kinder guess you needn't worry, young man. A Mexican that tackles a woman gits what he desarnes if he's drowned same as this one. Don't you worry. Don't you fret. I s'pose this'll make plenty of talk for the boys at Applesnack's to-night. I was over there a while ago and hung around a-listenin' to Cy Tellmore yarnin' it until he made me sick and I had to git out. I swan that man can lie more inside of five minutes than any human critter that ever breathed."

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Frank smiled.

"Cyrus has a vivid imagination," he observed.

"'Magination? 'magination?" squawked Hunker. "Mebbe that's what you call it, but I'd give it a stronger name than that. When I tell him about this affair I bet a squash he'll have some kind of a story 'bout drowndin' seventeen Mexicans all in a bunch. Say, have any of your folks down that way seen anything of Eli Given this arternoon?"

"Why," answered Frank, "we saw Mr. Given, Mr. Small, and Deacon Hewett shortly after midday."

"Er-haw! haw! haw!" laughed Hunker. "I reckon the whole town seen 'em, too. Say, they hit up Applesnack's cider barrel, and the stuff fixed 'em—it suttinly fixed 'em. They were corned for keeps. Went through town a-hoorayin' and a-whoopin' for you and for all your friends. Said they was goin' down to show their good feelin's toward ye. Applesnack and a few of the boys tried to keep 'em away, but 'twan't no use. Ten minutes arter they went down the road Mis's Given come lookin' for Eli, and some one told her where he'd gone. She hit the trail, and next we saw she was marchin' him back through town, with Uncle Eb and the deacon peggin' along behind, lookin' as meek and meechin' as wet cats.

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"I dunno what happened arter Mis's Given gut Eli home, but he broke out ag'in and took to the woods or somewheres, and she ain't been able to find him. She was so all-fired mad that she come to me and wanted him 'rested. I had hard work to persuade her not to have him jugged. 'Course if it had been some feller who was inclined to git on a tear and raise thunder, I'd 'a' jest gone out and muckled onto him and shoved him into the lockup. But I did kinder hate to lock Eli up.

"I went over to Uncle Eb's lookin' for him, and there was Eben out in the woodshed a-snoozin' on a hoss blanket. Took me 'bout fifteen minutes to wake him up. He didn't know nuthin' 'bout Eli, so I went over to Deacon Hewett's. Er-haw! haw! haw! The deacon's wife had him on the lounge a-bathin' his head with cold water and a-holdin' smellin' salts to his nose. She said he'd been took sick sudden and was havin' a crackin' headache. She was in for callin' the doctor, but the deacon he wouldn't have it. He jest laid on the lounge and groaned and kept sayin' he was a poor sinful worm of the earth.

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"When I left Mis's Hewett she follered me outside, pulled me by the sleeve and kinder looked shamed and downcast and asked me did I believe the deacon had been drinkin'. She said he told her he jest took a little medicine when the headache fust struck him. I didn't give him away. I looked s'prised and shook my head and told her he wasn't a drinkin' man, so 'course there wan't no question on that p'int. But we're kinder worried 'bout Eli. If he don't turn up before long, we're goin' to send out searchers for him."

"You needn't bother to do that, Bill," said a mild, mournful voice, as a dusky figure came round the corner of the house. "I'm all right. I'm purty well straightened out now, and I guess I'll go back home and kinder quiet mother's narves. You see she was rather excited and disturbed over the affair, and she wouldn't let me rest arter I gut to the house, so I sneaked off into Silus Cobb's barn, crawled into the haymow and slept a while. It was dark when I woke up, and I didn't know jest where I was. 'Twixt you and me, I'm going to tell Rufe Applesnack what I think of him. That cider was the most violent stuff I ever put down my woozle. It had an awful kick. I s'pose me and Eben and Elnathan are disgraced in Bloomfield for the rest of our lives. I don't think I'll show my head outside of the house for a month."

Frank slapped the downcast old man on the shoulder and tried to brace him up, but Given was so depressed that he refused to cheer up in the slightest.

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"Think you can find your way home, Eli?" asked Hunker.

"Well, I'm over seven and I'm sober now," was the answer. "Don't you fret 'bout me. I'll git home, all right."

Bright and early the following morning Hunker and several villagers appeared at Merry Home and asked leave to use Frank's boats in the search for the body of the Mexican.

After breakfast Merriwell and a number of his friends went over to the lake and found the searchers at work.

Hunker reported that they had discovered no trace of the missing man. Carker, Hodge, and Merriwell launched a boat from the boathouse and joined in the work.

"It was on this cliff here that we had the encounter," explained Greg, as they rowed back and forth beneath the bluff. "The man's body should be here somewhere. There seems to be no particular current at this spot to carry it away. I think we'll find Jose Murillo within thirty yards of this locality."

There was a harsh, unpleasant laugh, and a voice cried:

"Señor Carkaire ees right. Jose Murillo ees witheen thirtee yards of heem thees minute."

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Looking up in astonishment, the trio in the boat beheld the Mexican standing on the brink of the cliff. His clothes were somewhat wrinkled and soiled, seeming to need cleansing and pressing. But the man was there in the flesh, grinning at them in a malicious, triumphant manner.

Greg Carker smothered an exclamation of amazement.

"Evidently you were mistaken in thinking the man drowned," said Frank quietly. "We've had all this trouble for nothing."

"Oh, eet ees not so easee to keel Jose Murillo!" sneered the rascal. "Where he fall in the lake the water ees not so deep. He stand up, with hees head out. He walk to the shore. He see Carkaire look for heem, and he keep steel. Now he look for Carkaire. Better have a care, gringo, for Jose Murillo weel find the time to strike you yet! *Adios!* He weel see you lataire!"

The man turned and hurried away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

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A LIVELY GAME.

When the Farnham Hall baseball team came out for practice that afternoon they found another team on the field. This team was dressed in blue suits, and on the breast of each shirt was a large white letter M.

Frank Merriwell had found these old suits stored away and brought them forth. At sight of them his friends were seized with the old-time enthusiasm for the great American game, and it did not take them long to get into the suits and onto the field.

"What's this?" cried Dale Sparkfair, as he surveyed Merry's team. "We seem to have intruders here. We'll have to put them off the field, boys. We'll have to do them up."

Hans Dannerwurst paused, with his hands on his hips, and stared at Dale. Half a dozen persons shouted at the Dutchman, but he failed to heed their warning, and a ball thrown at him struck him on the head, bounding off.

"Hey!" squawked Hans. "Who threw me at dot brick? Vos dot der vay you vill dood us upness? Py Chiminy! You fellers vant to vade right in und let it try you. I pelief ve can play paseball all aroundt yoursellufs. You vos challenched to meet us a game into. Yah! Vill you exception dot challench?"

"Where's the interpreter?" asked Spark.

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"Der vot?"

"The interpreter."

"Vot you vant py him?"

"You need some one to interpret your conversation, my Irish friend."

"Irish? Irish?" yelled Hans, in exasperation. "Don'd you callt mineselluf Irish! Parney Mulloy vos der only Irishman der party into, und he vos der greenest pogtrotter dot efer come der Emerald Isle oudt uf."

"G'wan, yer Dutch chaze!" said Barney. "Go talk to yersilf. Nobody understands yez at all, at all."

"If you're looking for practice, Dale," said Frank, "perhaps we can accommodate you. We feel like playing a little baseball ourselves."

"Yah!" put in Hans, who declined to be repressed. "Ve pelief der game uf paseball can play us some. Der practice vos oudt uf us a whole lot, but all der same ve vill dood our pest to dood you up. Between der acts I vill gif you a melodious selection der flute on. Der flute brought me vid it to der paseball groundt."

"Av you attimpt to toot thot flute, Oi'll hit ye wid a bat!" growled Mulloy.

"Oh, you vos chealous—you vos chealous pecause der flute coot not play you!" sneered Dannerwurst. "As Spokeshire observations, 'Show me der man who haf not music into his soul alretty, und I vill show you a son uf a gun dot vos fit for blotting assinations, general defiltry und all padness.' Dot vos you, Parney Mulloy."

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The idea of playing a practice game with Merry's team delighted the Farnham Hall lads, and arrangements were quickly made.

"I presume you'll give us a show, Mr. Merriwell," said Sparkfair. "Are you going to pitch?"

"I don't think I'll start the game," said Merry.

"I vill pitch mineselluf," announced Hans. "I vos der createst paseball pitcher dot efer seen you."

Sparkfair flipped a coin, and the choice of innings fell to Merry.

"We'll take the field," said Frank. "Go behind the bat, Hodge. Dannerwurst will pitch. You'll play your old position at first, Browning. Diamond will cover second, and we'll have Mulloy on third."

I'll play short."

"The middle lawn for me," announced Ephraim Gallup.

"That's all right," nodded Frank. "Badger will take left field and Carson right field."

When the players had taken these positions Dunnerwurst held up his hand and asked permission to pitch a few over the plate.

"Chust gif me the privilege of letting my arm limber me up, vill you?"

"Go ahead," laughed Sparkfair.

Hodge adjusted the body protector and pulled on the big catching mitt.

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"Keep open your eye for der curf uf der ball," warned Hans. "Uf I use too much speed for you, chust let me tell you so."

He presented a comical spectacle as he flourished, his arm with a windmill motion and delivered the ball to Bart. It was high and wide, but Hodge cuffed it down.

"Ho! ho!" shouted the Dutchman. "Did dot rise see you? Vosn't it a peauty, Part?"

"That was a great rise!" said Hodge. "Better try a drop next time. Get 'em lower."

On receiving the ball Hans made another flourishing motion, shut his eyes, and threw the sphere with great force straight at the ground in front of him.

"Mine cootness!" he gasped. "I vill haf to look oudt for dot drop. It vos a corker."

"Better start off with a straight ball," advised Hodge. "Give these youngsters a show. They can't hit your curves, Hans."

"I pelief me," nodded Dunnerwurst soberly. "Your advice vill took me."

A few moments later he announced that he was ready, and Bob Bubbs stepped out as the first batter.

Hans hit Bob with the first ball pitched, and Kilgore, who was umpiring, sent Towser to first.

"Vy did you not dotge?" demanded Dunnerwurst, in exasperation. "Any vun would pelief der ball did not see you coming. Vos you plind your eyesight in?"

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"Oh, I knew I couldn't hit," chuckled Bubbs, "so I got hit. That's part of the game."

"Veil, mebbe dot vos so, but you don'd pelief it. Der next man vill haf something different to did." Netterby was the next man.

After pitching a ball behind Net's back and another one over his head, Hans managed to get one across the pan.

Net hit it and drove it out of the diamond, although Mulloy made a desperate effort to reach it.

"Vat vos you goot for, you Irish pogtrotter?" demanded Hans. "Vy did dot ball not stop you?"

"G'wan! g'wan!" retorted Barney. "It was a clane hit, Dutchy."

"You dood not pelief it. I vill haf to struck efry patter oudt. Der vos no udder vay when a pitcher gets dot kind of rotten supportd."

Hiram Bemis stood forth to the plate and waited until Dunnerwurst had pitched four balls.

The bases were filled, and Hans began to growl at Kilgore.

"Vere did der umpiring efer learn you?" he demanded.

"Gol ding it!" shouted Ephraim Gallup from the field. "Yeou didn't git one of them balls within four feet of the pan! Yeou can't pitch! Yeou never could! Better let me go in and show 'em haow to pitch."

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"Go avay pack and sit down," advised Hans derisively. "You would dood a lot uf goot uf you would pitch, wouldn't you!"

"If I couldn't do better than yeou're doing naow, I'd never play another game of baseball!" retorted Gallup.

"He's envious," said Sparkfair. "Don't listen to him. I know you'll strike me out. You can't help it."

The first ball pitched to Spark happened to be just where he wanted it. He met it squarely and drove it Over Carson's head in right field.

It was a clean three-bagger, and three runs came in.

"Well, I think that will about do for you, Hans," said Frank. "Come in here, Gallup, if you want to show what you can do."

Ephraim promptly accepted the invitation and came galloping in from the field.

"You will be a peach!" sneered Hans, as he passed Gallup. "I vos ashamed for you alretty soon."

"I can't do any worse than you done if I tried a month!" retorted Ephraim.

After warming up a bit, Gallup pitched to Hollis.

Fred dropped a Texas Leaguer over the infield, and Sparkfair scored.

Dunnerwurst whooped derisively.

Then came young Joe Crowfoot, who also connected with the ball, lacing it out cleanly for two bases.

Hollis scored from first.

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"They seem to be hitting you, Ephraim," observed Frank.

"Jest wait a minute," observed Gallup. "I ain't settled down yet."

Jack Lander wearily dragged his feet out to the plate, stood there with his eyes shut and permitted Kilgore to call two strikes on him.

"I've gut him," thought Ephraim. "He's in a trance."

Gallup attempted to put another one straight over, but to his consternation Lander woke up, hit the ball a crack and drove it skimming along the ground out of the diamond.

"You vos a dandy—you vas a dandy!" squawked Dunnerwurst.

Perspiration started out on Ephraim's face, and he looked decidedly annoyed. His annoyance reached a climax when Brooks landed on the ball for two bases, scoring Crowfoot and Lander.

"I guess that's enough for me, Frank," said Ephraim, as he walked out of the box. "I kinder judge you'll have to go in yourself. Them fellers has made seven runs, and there ain't a tarnal man out."

"Yes, it's about time for you to go in, Merry," nodded Hodge.

Frank thought so himself.

Gallup retired to his regular position in center field. Dunnerwurst took right field, and Carson came in to play short.

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Merry entered the box. And Thad Barking astonished every one by lacing out a clean single.

Following this Bob Bubbs put up a foul, which was captured by Hodge. Brooks was caught off his base, and the agony ended when Netterby struck out.

Merriwell's team came to bat, facing the handicap of seven runs.

CHAPTER XXVII.

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MURILLO'S FAREWELL.

In the meantime at least twenty boys from the academy had gathered to watch the game.

Gregory Carker appeared, escorting Inza, Elsie, Winnie Badger, Teresa Gallup, Mrs. Morton, and Juanita Garcia.

"Now we've got to play real baseball, fellows," laughed Frank, as Carker escorted the ladies into the stand, where they took the most convenient seats. "The girls will be ashamed of us if we continue this monkeying. Start it up, Hodge. You're the first batter."

Bart Hodge stepped out, picked out one of Sparkfair's curves and smashed a hot grounder at Bubbs, who gathered the ball up cleanly and whipped it across to Brooks.

"Out at first!" announced Kilgore.

"Oh, Bart! Bart!" cried Elsie laughingly. "Can't you do better than that?"

He shook his head as he walked back to the bench.

"Your turn next, Mulloy," said Frank.

Sparkfair seemed to be in good trim, for he whipped over a couple of benders which fooled Barney, who missed them both.

"Vait till der pat gets holdt uf me," muttered Dunnerwurst. "Der ball nefer coot hit dot Irishman."

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Barney struck out.

"Don'd some more fun make uf me," advised Hans.

There was a hush as Frank Merriwell picked up a bat and stepped into the box.

"Now something vill see you," observed Dunnerwurst, in a low tone. "Der ball vill hit him a mile."

Sparkfair did his best to deceive Merry, but finally put one over, and Frank drove it far into the field.

Hiram Bemis covered ground rapidly as he raced for the ball, but no one fancied he could catch it. Making a final desperate spurt, Hi leaped into the air and pulled the globule down.

It was the third out, and Merry's team had not scored.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Merriwell," laughed Sparkfair, "but we can't afford to let you have this game now. It would be simply awful after getting seven runs in the first inning."

"The game is young," reminded Frank.

Having escorted the ladies to seats, Gregory Carker deliberately placed himself at the side of Juanita Garcia.

"Oh, Greg," called Madge Morton, "come here. I have something to show you."

"Excuse me just now," he answered, "I'll come directly. The señorita is telling me something."

Then he whispered to Juanita:

"Tell me something quick."

"Why do you not go, señor?" she asked.

"I prefer to remain here."

"But you weel have to go."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I'll have to be polite, but I shall return."

"She weel not let you."

At this moment Mrs. Morton rose and changed her seat, placing herself at Carker's side as she laughingly observed:

"Don't let me interrupt you. When the señorita has finished I will take a little of your time—just a little."

Juanita flashed her a look.

"I am sure Señor Carkaire weel geeve you the time now," she said. "Eet ees not important what I have to say."

Madge had a delicate gold chain about her neck, and to the end of this chain was attached a small locket. This locket she now displayed, asking Carker if he remembered it.

"I think I do," he answered.

"I should think you would!" she laughed. "You gave it to me. Don't you think it a pretty little locket, señorita?"

"Veree," answered Juanita.

"Yes," said Madge, with a sigh, "Gregory gave me this little trinket. He gave me something else. Let's see if I can open it."

She succeeded in opening the locket, and again held it up before Carker.

"See," she went on, "it's your picture, Greg—your picture and mine. I've worn this locket every day since you gave it to me."

"Oo!" murmured Juanita, with just the least touch of malice. "Deed you show eet to your husband, señora?"

Mrs. Morton shrugged her shoulders and lowered the corners of her mouth.

"He saw it," she replied. "We had more than one little disagreement over it. He threatened to take it away from me."

Carker was decidedly uncomfortable. Glancing toward Juanita, he observed that her cheeks were flushed and she seemed decidedly disturbed.

"It was rather a piece of folly on my part," he said. "You know a man gets foolish at times, Mrs. Morton."

"Oh, Mrs. Morton!" exclaimed Madge. "How formal you are, Gregory! You were not nearly so formal yesterday. You were not nearly so formal when I met you alone."

Her eyes were on Juanita as she uttered these words. She saw the girl bite her lip.

"Eet ees a veree strange game thees baseball," said Juanita, turning to Teresa. "Do you

understand eet?"

"Never mind her," said Madge Morton, pulling at Carker's sleeve. "Why do you pay her so much attention?" [Pg 200]

"Do you wish to know?" he asked, in a low tone. "Then I'll tell you. I'm in love with her."

The woman looked at him with incredulous eyes, then threw back her head and laughed.

"More of your folly, Greg," she said. "You always were a silly chap. In love with that girl? Don't be foolish, my boy. She's nothing but a kid."

"I don't like that word kid."

"Oh, I suppose you think it very unladylike to use such slang. Children like this girl are amusing, but only unsophisticated boys and doddering old men fall in love with them. You're neither, Greg Carker."

"No, I'm neither. I'm old enough to know my own mind."

"I don't think you do. You're bewitched by her eyes and her way of talking. Her dialect sounds rather cute to you. Don't be foolish, Greg."

"Mrs. Morton, I tried to make you understand yesterday. There was a time when I believed I cared a great deal for you. That's all over now. You chose your own course, and you have no one save yourself to blame because there is now in my heart not the least spark of anything like love for you."

"You may think there's no spark, but I believe the embers are still smoldering and I propose to fan them into a flame." [Pg 201]

"Evidently you don't understand men, Mrs. Morton. I don't think a woman ever yet caught a man by telling him what she proposed to do. It's a man's nature to pursue. He loves the chase. Let's watch this baseball game."

With the greatest difficulty, she repressed her annoyance and anger.

The game was progressing, and with Frank Merriwell in the box it became decidedly interesting. The second inning passed with neither side securing a score.

At the opening of the third inning Jose Murillo appeared on the field, attired in a fresh suit and looking cool and dapper. He carried a light cane and wore a straw hat. Glancing around, he discovered the ladies in the stand, lifted his hat, made a graceful bow, and showed his teeth in a smile.

To the astonishment of every one, the Mexican entered the stand and approached the party. Juanita Garcia was agitated and frightened. Seizing Carker's arm, she whispered:

"Don't let heem come near me!"

"I'll look out for him," promised Greg.

Murillo bowed low before them.

"I beg pardon for thees eentrusion," he murmured. "Eet happens that I know Señora Gallup and Señorita Garcia. I am a man of impulse. I do manee theengs I afterward regret. I presume Señorita Garcia has been annoyed by me, and now I weesh to ask her pardon. I have taken the time to considaire. I have thought eet all ovaire. Eet ees no use. When a girl een thees country decides that she weel not have anytheeng whatevaire to do with a man, he may as well gif eet up. Eet ees my decision to geeve eet up. I am going back to Mexico. I shall leave to-morrow. I have come to bid Señorita Garcia *adios*." [Pg 202]

"I don't beleef heem! I don't beleef heem!" whispered Juanita, cowering close to Carker's side. "He ees lying!"

"I think you have decided wisely, Murillo," said Greg. "If I were in your place, I'd git. In fact, unless you do git, I've decided to swear out a warrant for your arrest. I've decided to make complaint against you for attacking me with a deadly weapon."

Jose made a gentle gesture with his hand.

"Some day in the future perhaps we weel settell that, Señor Carkaire," he said. "Save yourself the trouble to swear out the warrant. I shall go."

With another sweeping bow, he turned and left the stand.

"Oh, I don't like this game at all!" exclaimed Mrs. Morton. "I never did like baseball. I think I'll go to the house."

She likewise left the stand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A COMPACT.

Madge Morton overtook Jose Murillo.

"A word with you," she said. "We are far enough from the field so that we'll not be seen if we step aside beneath the trees."

"Eet ees a pleasure," he bowed, although his face wore a puzzled expression.

Beneath the trees the woman turned and faced him squarely.

"There's a girl back yonder that you're smashed on," she said.

He shook his head.

"What ees eet to be smashed?"

"Oh, I mean you're struck on her—you're in love with her. It's that little soft-spoken, black-eyed chit."

"You mean Señorita Garcia?"

"Yes, that's the girl. You've followed her here all the way from Mexico."

"Eet ees right. I have follaired her."

"Now what do you propose to do? Are you going to quit? Are you going to throw up your hand? Are you going to lay down?"

Again he shook his head.

"Eet ees not plain to me what you mean, señorita."

"I'm married—at least, I have been. Call me señora, if you don't choose to call me Mrs. Morton. Are you going to give that girl up? Are you going to let her baffle you? You're a man of determination. I understand you had trouble with Gregory Carker last night." [Pg 204]

"*Si, si, señora.* Eet ees lucky for heem I deed not reach heem with my knife. I weel reach heem yet!"

She clutched his arm.

"No," she cried, "you must not! I love him! I'm going to marry him!"

"Ees eet true?" gasped Murillo, in surprise. "I thought he was——"

"Oh, he has a silly notion that he cares for your black-eyed Juanita. He's mistaken, that's all. Keep her away from him a week, and he'll forget her. Give me a week, and I'll win him back again. Instead of trying to harm him, why don't you carry off the girl?"

"How can eet be done?"

"She's afraid of you. If you can get her away from here, I think she will cow down and do anything you say. I don't believe she has real courage. I'll help you."

"How?"

"Let me think. You must take her away to-night. Bring a carriage. Stop near Merry Home, but far enough away not to be discovered. Come to the house at an hour past midnight. You know the back way? If you don't, you can find it. I'll be waiting for you. I'll let you in, and I'll help you take that girl out of the house." [Pg 205]

He looked at her with an expression of mingled doubt and admiration.

"You are a woman," he said. "How you dare to do such a theeng?"

"Dare?" she hoarsely cried. "I dare anything in a case like this!"

"But how can we take her out? She raise the disturbance."

"Oh, no, she won't. I know her room. She sleeps alone. A little chloroform will quiet her. Leave the matter to me. Will you come? Do you dare? If you haven't the courage to play this game, say so."

"I haf the courage!" cried Murillo suddenly. "I weel be there! Eef eet ees a trap, look out for me! I am not the man who forgets!"

"Save your breath," said the woman. "Don't bother to threaten me. I'll see you again to-night."

Then she turned and walked back to the athletic field, rejoined the party in the grand stand, announced that she had changed her mind about watching the game, chatted, laughed, and appeared wholly care-free and at ease.

Not until the fifth inning could Merriwell's team score against the Farnham Hall lads. It was

mainly Sparkfair's wonderful pitching that kept Frank and his friends from circling the bases. Dale had splendid speed, dazzling shoots, and masterly control. In the fifth the Merries tried the bunting game and filled the bases, with only one out. Badger then came up and smashed out a fine two-bagger, driving in three runs.

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Sparkfair then struck out Carson and Dunnerwurst. Although the head of Frank's batting order came up in the sixth and Hodge reached third, no scores were secured. In the seventh Gallup crossed the pan with a run.

Neither side could secure a tally in the eighth, and the ninth inning opened with Merriwell's team three runs behind the youngsters.

"Oh, we've got you!" laughed Sparkfair. "We haven't been able to make a run since the first inning, but those seven scores were enough."

"Yah," said Dunnerwurst "Dot Ephraim Gallup he didid der pizness. Der game threw him away."

"Gol dinged if yeou've gut anything to say!" rasped the Vermonter. "Yeou started all the trouble."

"Uf Frankie had let der pitcher's plate stay py me a vhile longer, it vould haf peen different. Der ball was chust gittin' control uf me ven he tookt me oudt."

Farnham Hall did not score in the first half of the ninth.

Diamond was the first batter up for the Merries, and he laced out a clean single.

"That's the stuff!" cried Frank. "Only three scores! We'll get 'em right here!"

Browning lifted a fly to left field, and Bemis scooped it. Diamond reached second. Gallup dropped a Texas Leaguer over the infield, and Buck Badger walked out With a bat on his shoulder.

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"It peen up to you, Padger!" cried Dunnerwurst. "See vot you coot dood py der ball."

At this juncture Sparkfair issued his first pass, and Badger walked, filling the bases. Berlin Carson tried to drive in some runs, but popped up an infield fly and was out. Then Hans Dunnerwurst started forth.

"Oh, crackey!" groaned Ephraim Gallup. "It's all over naow!"

"Yah, it vos all ofer," nodded Hans. "A home run vill knock me. Der game vos seddled."

It is probable that almost every one expected to see Hans strike out. After making two strikes, the Dutchman secured a clean single, on which Diamond and Gallup scored.

"Dot vos a mishdake," declared the Dutchman. "Der ball meant to strike me twice as far as dot."

There was great anxiety on both sides as Bart Hodge walked out.

"You can dood it, Hotch!" shouted Hans.

Bart smashed the second ball pitched him, driving it out on a line. Little Bob Bubbs thrust out his left mitt, and the ball spanked into it. It stuck there.

The game was over, and Sparkfair's team had defeated the Merries by a single run.

CHAPTER XXIX.

[Pg 208]

THE PROOF.

Gregory Carker never knew exactly why he rose in the night and stole out of his room with catlike steps. He had a vague idea that he would move silently in order not to disturb or awaken any one sleeping in the house.

Near the head of the stairs he paused and backed into a shadowy corner.

Two persons came up the stairs. One of them bore a candle which flickered and flared, the fitful light showing her features plainly.

It was Madge Morton. She was deathly pale, and the hand that held the candle shook like that of a person with the palsy. Behind her was a man. As she reached the head of the flight she paused, turned to this man, and whispered:

"Follow me closely. The girl's room is two doors to the left."

Carker saw the man's face, and he recognized Jose Murillo.

Forth from his nook leaped Greg, seizing Murillo as the Mexican placed his foot on the last stair. Mrs. Morton gave a gasping cry of dismay, dropped the candle, and fled. The candle did not go out. Although it fell on its side, it continued to burn fitfully.

At the head of those stairs a sharp, savage struggle took place. The Mexican uttered a smothered

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oath and sought to produce his knife.

"Thees time I fix you, Carkaire!" he panted.

The dim light of the candle gleamed on the blade. Greg Carker tore himself free and struck a swinging blow which landed on Murillo's jaw. The Mexican crashed to the foot of the stairs, where he lay groaning while the aroused household flocked to the spot.

"What is it, Carker? What the dickens is the matter?" demanded Frank, as he seized Greg's shoulder.

Carker had picked up the candle and was holding it in his hand.

"I think we'll find a man at the foot of these stairs," he said, his voice not quite steady in spite of his effort to command himself.

They did find a man down there. Jose Murillo had struck on his own knife and was seriously wounded. Doctor Schnitzle was promptly brought over from Farnham Hall, but after taking a look at Murillo's wound, he turned and whispered to Frank:

"Maype he vill last vun halluf hour, but it iss not to be expected. It vos der end uf him."

The doctor was right. To the end Murillo protected his accomplice, claiming he had broken into the house by himself, with the intention of carrying Juanita off.

And Gregory Carker said nothing.

The following day, however, Carker found an opportunity to speak privately, as he supposed, with Mrs. Morton. He followed her from the house and stopped her at a point where there was little likelihood that they would be seen. [Pg 210]

"You'll take the next train out of Bloomfield," he said. "I thought you might have good sense enough to take the first one, but you don't seem inclined to go without being invited."

"Oh, Greg——"

He put up his hand.

"Stop where you are," he said. "Not a word from you. You let that sneak into the house last night. You're responsible for the whole miserable tragedy."

"But you will not expose me—you will not tell them?"

"No, I'll say nothing about it—in case you take the next train."

"You despise me! I see it in your face!"

"You're right, I do. I despise you most thoroughly, and I pray it may never be my misfortune to see your face again."

"Oh, that girl—that wretched black-eyed——"

"And you may stop there," interrupted Carker. "You refer to Juanita. I'm going to marry her."

"I suppose you are. I'd like to strangle her!"

"You'll not be given an opportunity. I'm going to ask Mr. Merriwell to have a rig hitched up right away. It will take you to the station. Make any excuses you choose or no excuses whatever—but you're going. Better hurry back to the house now and pack up. Go on!" [Pg 211]

She saw words were useless, and, therefore, she turned and hurried away toward the house.

Carker stood there, his right elbow in his left palm, his chin resting on his hand. He heard no sound and was unaware of any one's presence until a hand touched his arm.

With a start, he found himself face to face with Juanita. There was a strange rapturous light in the girl's eyes.

"I asked for the proof," she whispered. "You gif eet to me when you deed not know I was there behind the shrubberee. I hear you tell her she must go. I hear you tell her that you—that you—that you——"

"That I'm going to marry you," said Carker, taking both her hands in his. "I mean it, Juanita. I've decided on my course in the future. If I'll quit lecturing on socialism and suppress my thoughts and theories in that line, Carker, senior, will give me a lift in the world. He'll change his will if he becomes satisfied that I've reformed. I'm a socialist, Juanita, and I shall always remain a socialist. But, perhaps, I've been a little too rabid—perhaps I've been a little too rank. Socialism is all right, but home is a great deal better. I'm going to have a home of my own, and I'm going to have you for the chief director of that home. I think I'll be satisfied to settle down with you there to anchor me. I'm going to kiss you now, Juanita." [Pg 212]

"Oh, Gregoree——" she murmured.

His lips smothered the remainder of the protest.

CHAPTER XXX.

[Pg 213]

THE EDUCATED HORSE.

Honk! honk! honk!

Frank glanced over his shoulder.

"Automobile coming, Bart," he said. "She's raising a cloud of dust. Better give her plenty of room."

Frank and Bart were out for a morning horseback ride through the country. After a dash of an hour or more, they had turned back and were now in sight of Farnham Hall and Merry Home.

Bart's mount began to dance and lunge.

"Whoa, Pansy—whoa, lady," he said soothingly. "She doesn't fancy buzz wagons a great deal, Merry."

"She never did," replied Frank, "but she'll get used to them. They're growing thicker every day. I've ordered one myself."

"Honk! honk! honk!" sounded the automobile horn close behind them.

With a purring of the valves, a soft panting from the exhaust, and a whirl of wheels, a huge red machine flew past them in a cloud of dust.

"Forty miles an hour," said Hodge, blinking his eyes and turning his cap brim down to the cloud of dust. "That's some speed for these roads, Merry."

"And I'll guarantee they'll go through town like that," returned Frank. "Whew! Some of these machines ought to have a sprinkler attachment." [Pg 214]

"They're stopping," said Bart. "By George! they're turning into your place. Did you know any one in the car?"

"Got only a glimpse of them, and they seemed to be strangers to me."

"That's a flyer they have. What make is it, do you know?"

"It's a French machine, I believe. It looks to me like a Mercedes."

"Are you going to have an imported machine, Frank?"

"Oh, no. I'm satisfied with the best American makes. A good American machine is better adapted for our roads than any of the crack foreigners."

"How do you make that out?"

"It's simple enough. In France they have grand roads everywhere. Their machines are made for such roads, and on such roads they can fairly fly. In this country we have a few fairly good roads, but the majority of our highways are wretchedly bad. The American makers have built machines adapted for such roads, and on these roads our better-made motor cars are superior to anything we can bring across the water."

"But I understand that most of the American machines are fakes. I've been told they are far from perfect." [Pg 215]

Frank laughed.

"The perfect automobile has not been made, and I doubt if it ever will be," he answered. "The honest American manufacturers who know their business are making honest machines. It's true that there are a host of fakers in the business. It's true that nearly seventy-five per cent of the machines turned out at the present time are built for the sole purpose of making money for the manufacturers. The American public has not yet been educated to the point of discerning between the fake and the honest article. Nevertheless they're learning mighty fast, and within a very few years the fakers are bound to reach the end of their ropes and go to the wall. Unless they change their methods, five years from now one-third of the concerns now doing business will no longer be in the field. Ten years from now a half of the present manufacturers will be out of it."

"That sounds a little pessimistical for you."

"Oh, no, Bart; it's optimistical. I'm confident that the sharks and sharpers will fail and the honest concerns will endure and prosper. The automobile has come to stay. There is no question about that. The majority of the present-day buyers are going to be defrauded, and many of them will become disgusted. In purchasing a machine I've not relied on my own judgment, but I've sought the advice of friends who were competent to advise. I hope and I believe that I've got my money's worth. Here we are, and there are the gentlemen of the red bubble talking with some of the fellows." [Pg 216]

The machine stood on the driveway in front of the house, with the chauffeur still in his seat. Two of the four men had stepped out of the car and were talking with Buck Badger, Ephraim Gallup, and Barney Mulloy. Mrs. Merriwell was with a group of her friends on the veranda.

Badger waved his hand as Frank and Bart turned in at the wide gate.

"Here are some gents what are looking for you, Merry," called the Kansan.

Frank clattered up and drew rein, but Bart's horse was frightened and shied at the machine. Hodge gave the little mare a touch of the spur and reined her toward the automobile. After a time he succeeded in bringing her close to it and guiding her round it, although she snorted and fretted and betrayed great alarm and excitement.

"You countrymen will have to kill off a few of your skittish horses," observed a stout, sandy-mustached man, one of the two who had left the car. "If you don't, they're liable to kill you."

"I don't think there's any great danger of that as long as a man knows how to handle them properly," said Frank, as he patted the neck of his own horse. "Dick was afraid of automobiles, but I've succeeded in eliminating that fear, and you can see how he behaves now."

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"You never can be sure what a horse will do," returned the stout man. "There never was one yet that had an ounce of brains. They're all fools."

"Do you think so?" smiled Merriwell. "Of course you have a right to your opinion, but I don't believe many people will agree with you. I've seen horses which were more intelligent than many men."

"Bah! bah!" retorted the stranger. "They can't reason. They can't think. All they know is enough to eat and work. The best horse in the country is none too good to pull a plow."

A queer twinkle flashed in Frank's eyes.

"Perhaps I can convince you of your mistake, sir," he said. "I don't happen to know your name, but—"

"My name is Basil Bearover. This young man here"—with a jerk of his thumb toward Badger—"informs me that you are Frank Merriwell."

"Yes, I'm Frank Merriwell, Mr. Bearover. We were speaking of horses. Now I'll admit that Pansy yonder hasn't been properly educated. In time I hope to improve her greatly. In time I hope to teach her to perform a few simple mathematical problems, although I doubt if she'll ever be able to talk."

"Huh?" blurted Bearover. "Mathematical fudge! Able to talk? What sort of rot are you trying to give me, young man?"

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"Have you never seen a horse that could add, subtract, multiply, and divide?" asked Merry, with pretended surprise.

"No, sir, I never have, nor has any one else."

"Wait a moment before you make such a confident statement. Now this horse of mine can do all those little things and still other things a great deal more surprising. I'll prove the truth of my statement to you. Hey, Dick—Dick, my boy, give me your attention. Now, sir, I wish you to do a little sum for me. Are you ready? Are you listening? Are you attentive?"

The horse nodded its head as if in answer to these questions.

"Very good, Dick," said Frank. "I'll give you a small sum in addition. How many are two and two?"

The horse lifted its forward right foot and struck the ground four times.

"That's right, Dick—that's right," laughed Merry, patting the creature's neck. "Now we'll take a little example in subtraction. If we subtract five from ten, how many have we left?"

The horse struck the ground five times with its foot.

"That's right again, Dick. Let's see what you can do in multiplication. Three times two make how many?"

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Six times the horse struck the ground.

"You're right up to the mark this morning, Dick," said the animal's master. "We'll finish up with a little subtraction. If we take seven from fourteen, how many will be left?"

Seven times Dick pawed the ground.

"There you are, Mr. Bearover," nodded Merriwell. "Are you satisfied that even horses have brains?"

"I'm satisfied that you've trained that critter to do a few tricks," was the answer. "You must think I'm purty dull witted. Why, you begun with an example that made the horse paw the ground four times. Your next question required five strokes of the critter's foot. Then came six, and you followed it up with seven. Come, come, Mr. Merriwell, you're not dealing with chumps. I've seen horses that could do them little things, but it's no sign of brains. You're on the critter's back. By

training it, you could git it so it would paw the ground every time you pressed your knee against its shoulder. Git off the horse and stand away; then let's see what it will do. Then let's see you make it do sums in addition, subtraction, and so forth."

"Very well," said Merry, as he dismounted, dropping the bridle rein on Dick's neck. "We'll see what he'll do in that manner."

He stroked the horse's muzzle, and the animal placed its head on his shoulder.

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"Dick," said Frank, "this doubting Thomas thinks it's all trickery. He can't believe that you're a finished mathematician. We must convince him, Dick. Now be careful and give your answers correctly. Stand where you are, sir."

Frank retreated fully ten feet. With his hands on his hips and a smile on his face, he said:

"We'll take a simpler sum in addition, Dick. You understand this is addition, old boy. Two and one make how many?"

The horse lifted his foot and struck the ground three times.

"Let me give him a question," grinned Bearover. "Let's see if he'll answer me."

"Oh, very well," said Frank. "Dick, do you see this gentleman here? Take a look at him. He's going to give you a problem, and you must answer it. I trust he'll make it a simple one. You haven't been brushing up in mathematics lately, and a difficult problem might bother you a little. Will you kindly make it a simple question, Mr. Bearover?"

"Oh, yes; oh, yes," chuckled the stout man, "I'll make it simple enough. Let's see if your wonderful horse can tell us how many ten and five added together be."

The horse stood quite still for a moment and did not lift its foot. Instead of that, the creature seemed to be eying Basil Bearover with a look of disdain. Finally a most astounding thing happened, for Dick's lip curled back, exposing his teeth, and from his mouth there seemed to issue these words:

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"Any blamed fool would know that ten and five make fifteen!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

[Pg 222]

A CHALLENGE.

Basil Bearover's usually florid face turned pale, and the man actually staggered.

The horse tossed its head, wrinkled its upper lip, and seemed to grin.

"That gave the big bear a jolt," he apparently observed.

Bearover's companion was a husky-looking young Irishman, and he now seemed on the point of taking flight. He was even paler than Bearover, and his teeth actually chattered together.

"Holy saints!" he gasped. "The divvil is in the beast! It spakes."

"Don't get excited," smiled Merry. "I told you Dick was an educated horse. I think I've proved my statement. Now, Dick, my boy, you'll follow Bart and Pansy round to the stable and permit Toots to look after you. I'll see you at the usual hour this afternoon and give you your lessons in algebra and Latin. Be a good boy, Dick. Trot along. Ta! ta!"

"Ta! ta!" answered the horse, as it turned away. "Look out for the big bear. He thinks he's a sharper, but he's only a common lobster."

With a whisk of his tail and a flirt of his heels, Dick followed Pansy and disappeared round the corner toward the stable.

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Basil Bearover pulled himself together and took a deep breath.

"Say," he huskily remarked, "have you a little something bracing round this place? I'd like a small nip of whisky after that."

"I'm sorry," answered Frank, "but I don't keep it in the house. I haven't a drop of liquor of any kind round the place."

"Be Heaven!" exclaimed the Irishman. "I nade a drink meself."

Bearover placed a hand on his companion's shoulder.

"Tell me, McCann," he said, "did you hear that horse speak? I must have dreamed it. I must be getting in a bad way."

"It was no dream, Mr. Bearover," was the answer. "I heard it meself. The baste talked as plain as any man could spake."

"Jerusalem!" exploded the stout stranger, as if struck by an idea. "That animal ought to make a fortune for its owner. What'll you take for that horse, Mr. Merriwell?"

"You can't buy him, sir," was the quiet answer. "Do you think I'd be heartless enough to sell Dick after spending all this time in educating him and getting him trained to such a high point of perfection? Why, it would break the poor creature's heart."

"I'll give you a thousand dollars for him," offered the man, thrusting a hand into his breast pocket and producing a pocketbook. [Pg 224]

"Put up your money," said Frank. "I tell you that you can't buy him. Why, if I should sell that horse to you, just as likely as not he'd be so disgusted and angry that he'd never speak again. You know it's no small matter for a horse to talk. It isn't natural for them. It could only be produced by a mighty effort, and the most natural thing in the world would be for the creature to relapse into dumbness if transferred to another owner."

Bearover looked disappointed as he slipped the pocketbook back into its resting place. Glancing around, he observed that the young man near at hand and the young ladies on the veranda were all smiling and laughing as if highly amused. Their suppressed merriment gave him a resentful feeling, and suddenly his face flushed, while an expression of anger came into his small eyes.

"You're purty smart, young man—purty smart," he said. "You think you fooled me, don't ye? Well, you didn't. I happen to know how you done the trick. You're a ventriloquist. The horse didn't talk. I was jest testing you to see if you would try to soak me by selling the critter to me."

Bearover fibbed, for, although he had finally hit upon the truth, it was an afterthought conjured up by the laughter of the spectators. [Pg 225]

"Do yer mean to say the horse didn't spake?" demanded the Irishman. "I heard it meself—I tell ye I heard it meself!"

"That's all right, McCann!" rasped the big man. "Perhaps you've never seen a good ventriloquist do a turn, but I have. That horse can't talk any more than a cow or a dog or any other dumb creature can."

"Vale," observed Hans Dunnerwurst, who stood Bear, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pocket, "it took it a long time to found you oudt. Dot hoss peen a good 'rithmeticker uf he coot talk or not. Yah!"

"You've had your fun with me, Mr. Merriwell," said Bearover, ignoring the Dutchman; "but I hope to have a little sport with you later. I've driven over from Wellsburg this morning for the express purpose of seeing you."

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked Merry.

"I understand you have a baseball team here."

"Do you mean my Farnham Hall team?"

"I don't know what you call it."

"Well, I have a ball team made up of youngsters. They are able to put up quite a game."

"What sort of youngsters?"

"Boys—my pupils at the Hall."

"But I ain't referring to that kind of a team. I mean your regular team—I mean the one you play on." [Pg 226]

"Oh, that's different."

"You've got such a team here, ain't ye?"

"As you see, a lot of my friends are visiting here just now. I can't say that we have a regular organized team."

"They told us in Wellsburg you had, and that's why I took the trouble to come here. I'm manager of the Rovers, the strongest independent team of this country. We're making a tour by automobile and playing the best teams we can get up against. I have a big seven-seated car at Wellsburg, and that machine, together with this one, carries my men from place to place. We made arrangements to play Wellsburg to-day and to-morrow. We were to have a guarantee of three hundred dollars and sixty per cent. of the gate receipts. When we gut into Wellsburg last night we found that the team had disbanded and the manager skipped out. That leaves us without a game to-day and to-morrow. We're looking for a game. This is Mike McCann, captain of my team."

The young Irishman nodded and touched his cap brim.

"Go on," invited Merriwell.

"I've always had a desire to meet you," continued Bearover. "You have a big reputation as a baseball man. I'd like to play you in Wellsburg for a purse."

"Evidently you're out for the dust," said Frank.

"It takes money to run a team."

"Your team is composed of professionals, isn't it?"

"They're all salaried players."

"Just a bit out of our class. We're straight amateurs."

Besides the chauffeur, a rather sad-faced, somber-looking man was sitting in the car. This man now arose with a languid air and stepped out.

"I told you how it would be, Bearover," he said, with a slight drawl. "Merriwell has made his reputation by defeating second-class amateur teams. I didn't think he'd have the sand to play a nine like the Rovers."

"Who is this gentleman?" asked Frank.

"This is Casper Silence, the backer of the Rovers," explained Bearover. "Mr. Silence, Mr. Merriwell."

"How do," nodded Silence, as he adjusted his nose glasses and surveyed Frank from head to foot. "I presume the report that you're a back number may have some truth in it. A great many pitchers use themselves up in their prime. You look all right, but I take it your arm is gone."

"Well, now," retorted Frank, "you place me in a rather embarrassing position, Mr. Silence. I don't feel like cracking up myself, you know."

"Waugh!" snorted Buck Badger, unable to keep still longer. "I certain opine you're still in the ring, Merry. I judge it wouldn't take you long to show this gent that you're no back number."

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"You're a prosperous young man," said Silence, still addressing Frank. "Such being the case, if you have a team here, why not play us in Wellsburg for a small purse? If you're the wizard we've heard you are, you can make a little money while you're having the enjoyment of a game. A purse of five hundred dollars would be all right. It would suit us. We'll play you to-morrow. What do you say?"

"I say no, sir," answered Frank. "If we were to play you for such a purse, we would immediately become professionals, like yourselves. We have no desire to be classed as professionals, and therefore I decline your proposition."

"Just as I thought," nodded Silence. "I've seen amateurs before who took refuge behind such an excuse. Well, if you'll not play us for a purse, will you play us with the agreement that the winning team takes the entire gate proceeds?"

"Not in Wellsburg."

"Eh? Why not in Wellsburg?"

"Because I have a better baseball ground yonder within sight of this house. Because at the present time I have a house party here, and we're not looking for baseball games. If your team of Rovers will come here and meet us on my field, we'll give you a game to-morrow, I think. What do you say, boys?"

"You pet my life ve vill!" shouted Dunnerwurst.

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"By gum, that'll suit me!" came from Gallup.

"I'm with you, Merry!" said Carson.

"You know you can depend on me!" rumbled Browning.

"Begorra, it will suit me clane down to the ground!" came from Mulloy.

"Waugh!" exploded Badger. "You can bank on the whole bunch of us, Frank. That's whatever!"

"But what inducement have we to come here?" demanded Bearover. "This is a little dried-up country town, and we couldn't turn out a hundred and fifty people to see that game. We've gut to make expenses somehow."

"If you decide to play us here, and the weather's favorable, I'll guarantee a thousand paid spectators. It's a safe guarantee, and in all probability there'll be two or three thousand persons here. I'll have the game announced by the *Wellsburg Herald*. I'll see that it is advertised in the neighboring towns. We do not depend on Bloomfield alone for our spectators. They come in from all the surrounding towns. We'll play with the understanding that the winning team takes the entire gate receipts. If we win, we'll donate the money to some charitable purpose. If you win, you may do whatever you please with it."

"Will you make a written guarantee that there'll be at least a thousand paid admissions?" asked Bearover.

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"With the weather favorable," assented Frank.

The manager of the Rovers turned to Silence.

"What do you say, Casper?" he asked. "We haven't any game for to-morrow, and we can't arrange one unless we accept this man's terms."

Silence shrugged his shoulders, lighted a cigarette, and stepped back into the car.

"Go ahead, Bearover," he drawled. "Make any arrangements you please."

"All right, Merriwell," said the manager, "we'll play you. Draw up that agreement in regard to the gate receipts, and we'll sign it."

CHAPTER XXXII.

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A HARD PROPOSITION.

Directly after lunch Frank had Toots harness a span of fast steppers, attach them to the double-seated surrey and bring the team round to the front door.

Merriwell, Mulloy, and Gallup sprang into the surrey, waving adieus to the jolly party that had gathered on the veranda to see them off.

"Which way, Marsa Frank?" asked Toots, as they reached the gate.

"To Wellsburg," answered Merriwell, "and get us there in a hurry. Show us what these ponies can do over twenty miles of good country road."

"Yes, sah," grinned the colored man, "Ah'll let de hosses out a notch or two, sah, jes' as soon as we git frough de village."

It was a beautiful drive to Wellsburg over an unusually level and well-made strip of road. The distance was covered in good time, and the team finally stopped in front of the Wellsburg Bank.

"Take the team round to the Franklin Square Hotel, Toots," directed Merry. "See that the horses are properly cared for. We'll drive back in time for dinner."

Mulloy and Gallup followed Frank into the bank. Merry called for the cashier. When the gentleman appeared and greeted him cordially, Frank said:

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"Mr. Casin, I wish to introduce two of my friends, Mr. Barney Mulloy and Mr. Ephraim Gallup."

"Glad to know you, gentlemen," bowed the cashier, as he shook hands with both.

"These young men wish to become depositors in your bank," explained Merriwell. "They both have an account with the Phoenix National Bank, but it is their intention to close out that account and transfer the money to this bank."

"We'll be very pleased to have Mr. Mulloy and Mr. Gallup as depositors," bowed the cashier.

"They will each give you a check on the Phoenix Bank," said Frank. "I'll indorse those checks, if that will make it satisfactory to you, sir."

"Wholly satisfactory, Mr. Merriwell," asserted Casin.

Mulloy and Gallup produced check books and proceeded to draw checks at a standing desk used for that purpose by depositors. These checks were made payable to the Wellsburg First National Bank, and Merriwell indorsed both of them. Casin himself received the checks, and Frank observed a slight expression of surprise on his face as he noted the sums for which they were drawn.

"Ten thousand dollars each," he said. "Is that right?"

"Yes, sor," answered Barney, "thot's right, sor. It's within two hundrid av all Oi have in the Phoenix Bank. Oi'll use up the remainin' two hundrid av Oi see fit by drawin' on it, but for the prisint Oi think Oi'll let it remain there as a nist egg. Oi've noticed nist eggs are moighty foine things to hav', av ye kept thim warm. They sometoimes hatch out all roight, all roight."

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No one had noticed the quiet entrance of a man, who stood unobtrusively near, listening to the talk. With a yawn, this man now advanced, saying:

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I presume it's very rude, but I need some change right away in order to pay a sum to a man who wishes to catch a train. I've been unable to get this hundred-dollar bill changed. Would you mind if the cashier stopped long enough to change it for me?"

The speaker was Casper Silence, backer of the Rovers baseball team.

"Niver a bit do we moind," answered Barney. "It's all roight, sor; go ahead."

"Yes, go ahead," nodded Gallup. "We've gut loads of time."

Silence pushed the hundred-dollar bill through to the cashier, who glanced at it critically, asked what sort of change he desired and then gave, at his request, five tens and ten fives.

"I'm very much obliged, gentlemen—very much obliged," said Silence, bowing to Mulloy and Gallup. "I hope I haven't interfered with you, Mr. Merriwell."

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"Not in the least," answered Frank.

"Do you think we'll have good weather for the game to-morrow?"

"The indications are that the weather will be all right."

"And are you still confident that we will be able to bring out a thousand people or more?"

"Quite confident," laughed Frank. "One of my errands in Wellsburg is to get a notice of the game into a newspaper here. I thought of looking Mr. Bearover up for the purpose of obtaining some facts concerning the Rovers, which might interest the newspaper readers."

"I can give you any information you desire," said Silence. "In fact, I have it here on this printed slip. Here's a whole history of the team and the players who make up the team. You'll see we've lost no games this season. If you'll read this slip through, you'll learn beyond question that our players form the most remarkable independent baseball organization ever assembled in this country."

While talking he had produced a leather pocketbook, from which he took a printed slip at least six inches long. This he handed to Frank.

As Silence opened the pocketbook both Mulloy and Gallup observed that it was well stuffed with bank notes, and the one on top proved to be another hundred-dollar bill.

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"I don't wish to take up your time, Mr. Merriwell," said Silence, in his languid, drawling manner, "but I'll just run over the players so that you'll understand who they are and get an idea of the records they have made. You met Mike McCann, our shortstop. He's from Charleston, of the South Atlantic League, and he knows the game from A to Z. Toby Mertez, our right fielder, is a New England Leaguer, having played on the Nashua, N. H., team last year. Jack Grifford, our center fielder, is from Youngstown, the champions of the Ohio-Pennsylvania League. Hoke Holmes comes from Birmingham, in the Southern League. 'Peep' O'Day is the old National Leaguer, who was supposed to be down and out, but he astonished every one by his work with Jersey City, in the Eastern League, last year. He's our third baseman. Bill Clover, who covers the second sack, comes from Portland, of the Pacific Coast League. Sim Roach, who gambols in our left garden, is from Los Angeles, of the same league. 'Bang' Bancroft was the second catcher of the champion Pueblo team, in the Western League. Bancroft obtained the nickname of Bang through his slugging year before last. It's possible you've never heard of 'Mitt' Bender, our crack pitcher. He's been playing independent baseball, but the Boston Americans were hot after him this year. I had to open up handsomely in order to hold him. Our second pitcher is Mike Davis, who's had much more experience than Bender, but who can't pitch more than one game a week and do his best. When we go up against a light team we use Toby Mertez in the box and save both Bender and Davis. Now I think you understand the sort of team we have."

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"Well," said Frank, "unless your men are has-beens they ought to make a hot combination."

"We haven't a has-been in the bunch," asserted Silence quietly. "I think you'll find the combination hot enough to suit you, Mr. Merriwell. I understand you've never been batted hard. I understand that no team has ever obtained more than eight or ten hits off you in a game. We have an aggregation of hitters, and the chances are you'll get a proper good drubbing to-morrow."

"You alarm me," said Frank. "Like any other pitcher, I have been bumped in my time."

"In that case the experience may not seem so unpleasant to-morrow," drawled Silence. "Fifteen or twenty hits are nothing for the Rovers. We've averaged ten hits through the whole season."

"Oi'll bet a hundrid dollars ye don't git tin hits to-morrow!" exploded Mulloy, unable to keep silent longer.

"I'll have to take that bet," said the backer of the Rovers.

"Oh, no," interposed Frank; "I object. I don't think there'll be any betting as far as my players are concerned. Keep your money in your pocket, Mulloy."

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Silence smothered a slight yawn behind his hand.

"I'm sorry you're so frightened, Merriwell," he said. "I'm sorry you haven't any more nerve. That hundred dollars would help me along in defraying expenses."

"Waal, gol derned if he don't figure it aout that he'd have the hundred cinched if he made the bet!" spluttered Gallup.

"I should consider it as good as mine the moment the money was posted," nodded Silence. "As long as we can't make a little wager, I'll move along and pay off the gentleman who is waiting for me. See you to-morrow. Good day."

He bowed himself out and leisurely walked away.

"Dod rap him!" snapped Gallup. "I'd like to take some of the conceit aout of him! We've gut to beat them Rovers to-morrer, Merry! If we don't, I'll be the sorest feller you can find in seventeen

States and seven Territories!"

"I don't know where you'd discover so many Territories," laughed Frank. "We'll do our best to beat them, boys; but we're not in good practice, you know."

"Begorra, we've been practicin' ivery day for a week!" came from Mulloy.

"That sort of practice isn't like regular games," reminded Merry. "We need to play a few games in order to get into first-class form." [Pg 238]

The cashier now passed out a little bank book to each of the depositors, and followed it up with check books for their use.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I hope this is the beginning of a long and pleasant acquaintance between us. Mr. Merriwell is one of our most valued depositors. He's doing a great work for the little town of Bloomfield. We regret very much he's not a citizen of Wellsburg. Bloomfield should be proud of him. I know it is proud of him. Wellsburg is proud of him, too. The whole county—the whole State is proud of him."

"By gum! I kinder think yeou've narrered it daown too narrer, Mr. Carson," said Ephraim. "I kinder guess the whole blamed country is proud of him."

"I stand corrected," laughed the cashier. "I realize his fame extends much farther than the borders of our State. Yes, I believe you're right, Mr. Gallup—I believe the whole country is proud of Mr. Merriwell as a representative young man of to-day."

After leaving the bank Frank said:

"I have some business of my own to look after now, and I need a witness. One of you might come along with me."

They both volunteered, but he explained that both were not needed, although they might come if they chose. Mulloy insisted on accompanying him. [Pg 239]

"Waal, then, by hemlock," said Gallup, "I'll kinder ramble raound over taown and see the sights. Arter being buried daown in Mexico for the biggest part of a year, it seems all-fired good to git where there's people movin', street cars runnin', and plenty doin'. Where'll I meet yeou, boys?"

"Meet us at the Franklin Square Hotel at four o'clock," answered Merry. "We'll be ready to start within ten minutes after four."

Not more than five or ten minutes after parting from Frank and Barney, Gallup came face to face with a man who stepped squarely in front of him and held out a pudgy hand.

"How do you do," said this man. "I'm glad to see you, young fellow. Saw you drive through with Merriwell. Did he bring that wonderful educated horse with him?"

It was Basil Bearover, the manager of the Rovers.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

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THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

Gallup grinned.

"That was a hoss on yeou, wasn't it, mister?" he said.

"Would have been if I'd bought the beast," confessed Bearover, with seeming good nature. "Your Mr. Merriwell must be a very clever chap."

"I guess he's all right, by gum!" nodded Ephraim. "They don't git ahead of him much."

"He's been very successful, hasn't he?"

"You bet."

"Too much success is liable to swell the head of so young a man. It does him good to be taken down a notch now and then."

"I ain't never seen nobody that could take him daown."

"Well, we'll have to let him down a little to-morrow."

"Don't yeou believe it. Yeou fellers are caountin' on carryin' off that game, ain't ye? Waal, by jing! ye'll have to go some if ye do."

"Our boys can go some. In order to give you a show, I think we'll put in our second pitcher against you."

"Yeou take my advice and put in the best pitcher yeou've gut. He won't be none too good."

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"You have a lot of confidence in your team."

"I've got confidence in Frank Merriwell. I know what he can do on the slab, and, with Bart Hodge behind the bat, he'll show yeou some twists and shoots that'll make ye blink."

Bearover laughed gurglingly, his fat sides shaking.

"Why," he said, "they tell me in this town that Merriwell has some kind of a curve which twists like a snake. They say it curves in and out. Whoever heard such rot!"

"Didn't yeou ever hear before this about Frank Merriwell's double shoot?"

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Bearover. "Double shoot? Ho! ho! ho! Is that what he calls it? Come, now, young man, don't try any more talking-horse tricks. There isn't no such thing as a double shoot. The spit ball is the nastiest thing to hit that ever was invented. It's the only new thing except Mathewson's 'fade-away.' I don't take any stock in the stories about Mathewson's fade-away. According to the yarns told, he has something that might be called a double shoot or a double curve, but I notice the batters are hitting him this year the same as usual. I think we'll make Mr. Merriwell very weary with his double shoot to-morrow afternoon."

"You kin think as much as yeou like. There ain't nothing to prevent yeou from thinking. We've heard all about your players. Happened to meet old Stillness a while ago at the bank.

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"Old Stillness?"

"Yep. Ain't that his name? Stillness, Stillness—I mean Silence. He's sort of a betting gentleman, ain't he?"

"Oh, he's always looking for good things. He's ready to risk his money backing his team."

"He come mighty near losing a hundred to-day."

"How was that?"

Gallup explained.

"Then Frank Merriwell doesn't countenance betting?" questioned Bearover.

"He's plumb sot agin' it," answered Ephraim. "He don't believe in any sort of gambling."

"But evidently some of his friends are inclined to take a chance."

"Oh, yeou git some of the fellers stirred up, and they kinder fergit Frank's prejudice. Rub 'em agin' the fur, and they'll chuck up their last dollar."

"That's good sporting blood," nodded Bearover. "I don't suppose you ever bet?"

"Oh, I don't go raound lookin' for bets. I 'low it ain't jest good sense for anybody to resk money on onsartinties. Speckerlation and gamblin' has ruined lots of folks."

"But a little wager on a baseball game, or any game of chance or skill, adds spice to it," suggested the manager of the Rovers. "It makes it all the more interesting."

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"There's interest enough in any good clean baseball game without betting," declared Ephraim. "I suppose your team is made up of clean players? They play the game on its merits, don't they?"

"Oh, yes," nodded the manager, "they play the game on its merits. At the same time they're good scrapping players, and they're out for every point that belongs to them. That's the only way to win. None of the boys like to be robbed."

"Waal, they ain't to blame for that."

Bearover produced a cigar case.

"Have a smoke," he invited.

"Don't keer if I do, thank you," said Ephraim, as he accepted a cigar.

"You're a pleasant sort of chap," said the manager of the Rovers, as he bit off the end of a cigar and slipped the case back into his pocket. "Wait a minute, I have a match. Here you are." He held the light for Gallup.

"Purty good weed that," observed Ephraim, as he puffed at it. "'Spect that ain't no five-center. Must be ten straight or three for a quarter, anyhow."

"These are Silence's special cigars. He buys them by the box. They cost him twenty dollars a hundred."

"Whew!" breathed Gallup, taking the cigar out of his mouth and looking at it admiringly. "That's twenty cents apiece. I've paid that price out West now and then, but I never heard of any one paying it in this part of the country, where cigars ought to be reasonable. Guess this is just about as good a piece of tobacker as I ever stuck in my face."

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"I'm glad you appreciate it. We're pretty near the hotel. Let's drop in and have a drink."

"Much obleeged," said Ephraim, "but I don't drink. That's one of the bad habits I ain't never

picked up."

"Well, you can come along and take something cooling. It's pretty hot to-day. There'll be some of the boys in the billiard room at Priley's. You can meet them and look them over. If you don't care to drink, that's your business, and I'll guarantee you won't be urged."

"Waal, that's pretty decent of you, Mr. Bearover," said Ephraim, permitting the stout man to take his arm and lead him away.

In a few minutes they arrived at Priley's Hotel, known in Wellsburg to be the "hang out" of the sporting class.

"We're stopping here," explained the baseball manager. "The Franklin Square is said to be the best place in town, but it's a little too stiff for the boys. They can enjoy themselves here without feeling it necessary to put on style in the dining room. You know some of the fellows are inclined to eat with their knives. Such manners might shock the aristocratic patrons of the Franklin Square." [Pg 245]

In the billiard room they found a number of young men playing pool or looking on. Several of these proved to be members of the Rovers baseball nine, and Bearover introduced them to Gallup.

The bar opened off the billiard room, and Ephraim was finally led to it, but he persisted in his resolution to drink nothing intoxicating. A seltzer lemonade satisfied him, while his companion took whisky.

When they returned to the billiard room they found Casper Silence there. The backer of the Rovers was telling, with a great deal of disdain, how he had nearly induced Barney Mulloy to make a wager, but had been baffled by Merriwell's interference.

"I've heard a great deal about the nerve of this youngster Merriwell," said Silence, "but it's my notion he's got a yellow streak in him. His courage is mythical."

Instantly Gallup bridled.

"Yeou ain't gut no right to say that, mister!" he cried hotly. "Yeou don't know what yeou're talking abaout! I've had dealings with all sorts of human critters in my career. I've handled niggers, dagos, Scandinavians, Turks, Chinamen, Swedes, French-Canadians, and Heaven-knows-what. I've seen Western bad men and gun fighters galore. I happen to know that Frank Merriwell has gut more nerve than any hundred men I've ever run acrost, if they was all rolled into one. There ain't no squealer abaout him, you bet. He didn't bet, and he didn't 'low Barney Mulloy to bet because it is ag'inst his principles. It wasn't because he was afraid Barney would lose that hundred." [Pg 246]

Silence smiled wisely.

"I wouldn't be impolite enough to contradict you, my friend," he said. "At the same time, you must permit me to have my own opinion of the matter. It strikes me that Mulloy was mighty willing to hide behind the fine principles of Mr. Merriwell. He was a little hot when he so rashly proposed to bet, and he gladly took water as soon as Merriwell spoke up. It saved him a hundred. We're going to trounce your team to-morrow in handsome style. We won't leave you in shape to do any boasting for some time to come."

"Yeou git aout!" shouted Gallup. "You couldn't beat us in a year with Frank Merriwell in the box. You ain't built right!"

At this the ball players present joined Silence in a burst of laughter.

"We'll rub it into ye, Mr. Gallup," said Mike McCann. "We'll wipe up the earth with ye."

"I'd like to find some one who had nerve enough to make a little bet on your team," said Silence. "Of course I don't expect any of you fellows will dare risk a dollar." [Pg 247]

"Dad rap ye!" snapped Gallup. "I'll make a bet! Yeou needn't go tell Frank nuthin' abaout it, but I'll bet yeou something. I'll bet anything yeou want to bet, and I don't keer a hang haow much it is! Yeou jest name the amount, and I'll kivver it!"

He smashed his fist down on a billiard table as he made this announcement.

"Why, you're a real sport!" chuckled Silence. "You're a reckless chap, aren't you! If I should say a hundred dollars, you'd wilt in your boots."

Ephraim's blood was boiling now.

"You kin say one hundred dollars or ten hundred dollars or ten thousand dollars!" he almost yelled. "I've gut the money, and I tell ye I'll chuck it up! I know yeou've gut a wad in your pocket, for I've seen it. Pull it out! Put it up! I'll go ye!"

"Drive him into his boots, Mr. Silence!" hissed Mike McCann. "You'll see him squawk in a minute."

Silence produced his pocketbook.

"As long as you're such a courageous young man," he said, "we'll test you. I am carrying quite a roll with me. It's a little habit I have. I might accidentally drop into a good warm poker game and need it. What was that highest figure you named? Did you say ten thousand dollars? I believe I have something like that right here. We'll make it ten thousand. Will you call the proprietor of the hotel, McCann? I think he's in the office. He'll hold the money for us."

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Even then Gallup did not believe Silence in earnest. He took it as a bluff and continued to "make a front."

"Put it up, put it up," he nodded. "I'm right here. I'm waiting to see that money stuck up."

Mike McCann hurried into the office and returned directly, followed by Fred Priley, the hotel proprietor.

"Mr. Priley," said Silence, "this young man has been making some betting talk. You know we're going to play Frank Merriwell's team to-morrow at Bloomfield. It's doubtful if the gate money will cover our expenses. For that reason I've been looking around to make a little wager on that game. This chap says he'll bet anything from one hundred dollars to ten thousand dollars. Let me see if I can dig up ten thousand."

With perfect coolness, he opened a pocketbook and counted out ten one-thousand dollars, which he handed to Priley.

"That leaves me a hundred or two," he said, "which will carry me over until I get my roll back and this gentleman's long green with it."

With a sneering smile, he turned and regarded Gallup.

"I've put my money up," he said. "Now let's see you do the same thing—or squeal."

Gallup swallowed down a lump which had risen in his throat.

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"Derned if I ever squealed in my life!" he snarled. "I've got ten thousand right in the Wellsburg Bank, and I'll draw a check on it jest as soon as I kin make it aout!"

"Oh, no," laughed Silence, "that won't do. I can't accept your check. I want to see the money."

"Mebbe yeou think the check ain't no good? Didn't yeou come into the bank and see me deposit the money?"

"Yes, I saw it. But you're aware, I presume, that the law would not enforce the payment of that check in case you lost your wager and I attempted to collect. You might stop payment at the bank, and I could whistle for my money."

"Yeou don't think I'd do anything like that, do ye?"

"I don't propose to take any chances, Mr. Gallup," said the man, as he glanced at his watch. "There are now exactly ten minutes before the bank closes. If you're earnest we'll accompany you to the bank, and you can draw your money."

"Mebbe they won't have ten thousand on hand to pay a check of that bigness."

"Then you can exchange your own check for a bank check. If you do that, you can't stop payment on the bank's check in case you lose. Let's have all these little matters properly arranged in advance. Will you do that, or are you going to squeal?"

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"I never squealed in my life!" repeated Ephraim, with a snarl. "Come on—come on to the bank! We'll fix it!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

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A TROUBLED MIND.

Ephraim found that Casper Silence was very much in earnest. There was no bluff about the man's proposal to bet ten thousand dollars, and Gallup was not the sort of chap to back down after making such talk.

Naturally the cashier at the bank looked surprised when Gallup asked for a bank check in exchange for his own check, drawn for the full amount of his deposit. Mr. Casin, however, did not ask questions, but made out the bank check and passed it to Ephraim.

In the presence of witnesses this check was placed in the hands of Fred Priley to cover the ten thousand dollars posted by Silence.

Casper Silence took pains to examine the bank check, over which he nodded and smiled, returning it to Priley.

"That's all right, I fancy," he said. "It ought to be as good as gold coin."

Then he turned to Ephraim with pretended admiration.

"Young man, you've got genuine sporting blood," he said. "You've got nerve. I can't help admiring your nerve, although I fear your judgment is rather poor. I hope you won't feel the loss of that little sum, in case you do lose it, which you certainly will."

"Oh, I guess I could stand it," retorted the Vermonter.

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"I presume you could, Mr. Gallup. You're young and energetic, and you may live long enough to accumulate ten thousand more dollars."

"Don't yeou fret abaout me!" snapped Gallup, in exasperation.

"You quite misunderstand," smiled Silence. "I'm not fretting about you in the least. Far from it. I was seeking to give you a little compliment. Better tell your friends of the great Merriwell baseball team to do their level best to-morrow. Better tell them what it means to you if your team loses."

"I won't tell them nuthin' of the sort!" growled Gallup. "I don't propose to say a hanged word abaout it, and yeou'll obleege me if you keep your mouth shet, too! If Mr. Merriwell found it aout, he'd be hot under the collar and give me a good dressing daown."

"Oh, very well," agreed Silence, "I'll say nothing. It's a small matter to me."

Silence, Bearover, and Priley bade Gallup good day and left for Priley's Hotel. Ephraim watched the proprietor of the Rovers as the man sauntered away.

"Yeou're a gol-dinged gambler, that's what yeou be!" muttered the Vermonter. "Yeou're a man that's allus lookin' for suckers, and yeou think yeou've ketched one naow. Waal, mebbe yeou have, but we'll see abaout that. I kinder guess yeou're due to bunt up ag'inst a red-hot surprise to-morrer. You won't feel so fine and sarcastic arter that game."

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Nevertheless Gallup was troubled by an unpleasant feeling that he had been reckless and imprudent to an almost reprehensible degree. Like many another man, he had attempted to call a bluff only to find that the other chap was not bluffing.

With his hands thrust deep into his pockets, the down-easter stood on the sidewalk and stared after Silence until the man turned a corner and disappeared. He saw the baseball proprietor laughing as he talked to his companions, every gesture and every expression indicating that Silence was absolutely confident he would win the bet.

"A man is a blamed fool to have anything to do with critters of his caliber," was Ephraim's decision. "I feel like I'd kinder lowered myself somehow. Thutteration! what if we should lose that game?"

A cold chill ran over him.

"Of course it's possible," he said, "but I don't 'low it's probable. Even Frank Merriwell can be beat sometimes. My jinks! wouldn't it be awful if things should go wrong! Whew!"

He fished out his handkerchief and mopped his face with it.

At last Gallup was beginning faintly to realize the extent of his folly.

Although he continued strolling around the town, he found no further pleasure in the sights of Wellsburg. In vain he sought to turn his mind from the thoughts of the coming contest between the Merries and the Rovers and the possibility of defeat for Frank's team. Never before had he been troubled by such doubts, and fears. Finally he sought the Franklin Square Hotel, in the lobby of which he was sitting in moody meditation when Frank and Barney appeared.

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"Is it a trance you're in, Oi dunno?" cried Mulloy, as he gave Gallup a sharp nudge. "Wake up, me bhoy!"

"Eh?" grunted Gallup, looking up and starting to his feet. "Why, hanged if I noticed yer when yeou come in!"

"Your mind seemed to be far away," observed Merry. "You actually looked troubled and careworn. What's the matter, Eph?"

"Not a thing—not a blamed thing," declared Gallup, forcing a sickly smile to his face.

"What were you thinking about so glumly?"

"Oh, nuthin'. I was jest kinder meditatin' on the fact that most folks are 'tarnal fools, and I guess I'm abaout the biggest fool I know."

"That's hardly like you. You're not usually troubled with such thoughts."

"He's gitting older and wiser, Frankie," chuckled Mulloy. "Oi think he's becomin' acquainted wid himself."

"Yeou ain't gut nuthin' to say!" snapped Eph. "Yeou wanted to make a bet with Mr. Silent, didn't ye?"

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"Oi did," nodded Barney. "Av it hadn't been for Frankie to kape me sinsible, Oi'd cracked up me money on the shpot. It's Frankie whot's got the livel head, Gallup. The rest av us are chumps,

begobs!"

"I guess, by gum, that's correct!" nodded Eph. "The older I git, the bigger chump I become."

"What's it all about?" laughed Merry.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," again asserted the Vermonter. "I was jest kinder meditating on some of my foolish breaks. I don't believe I know enough to paound sand."

"I can't understand what's made you so pessimistic concerning yourself. A man who can make ten thousand dollars of his own accord at your age and salt it away where it's safe has no right to be ashamed of himself."

"Who knows whether it's safe or not?" muttered Eph.

"It's pretty safe in the Wellsburg Bank, old man. You needn't worry about that. I think I'll find Toots and have the horses hitched up. We'll strike out for Bloomfield right away."

Mulloy lingered with Gallup as Frank turned away.

"Whatever is atin' yez, Ephie?" demanded Barney. "Phwoy don't yez spake up and tell the truth?"

"Haow do yeou know I ain't told the truth?" asked Gallup, with mingled offense and shame.

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"Oi've bunked with yez for a year. Oi've known yez under all sorts of circumstances, me laddie buck, and I can tell when you're spakin' the whole truth and whin you're tryin' to hide something. Oi'm yer fri'nd, Eph, and ye know it. Phwoy don't ye spake out and make a clane breast av it? Phwat's the mather?"

"I don't like to have nobody stomp on my co't tail," mumbled the Vermonter. "When a man rubs me the wrong way it kinder riles me, and I'm pretty apt to resent it. Yeou'd made a bet with old Silence if Frank hadn't happened araound, wouldn't ye?"

"Oi would," confessed Barney. "Oi'd been just chump enough to go him for any owld sum up to foive hundrid dollars. All the same, Ephie, thot was foolishness on my part."

"What's a feller goin' to do when one of these top-lofty critters comes araound a-rubbin' it into him?" demanded Gallup. "Nobody likes to have 'em a-sneerin' and a-chucklin'. I like to shet them kind of folks up and shet 'em up good and hard. I've seen old Silence sence we left the bank."

"Phwat?" gasped Mulloy, a sudden light breaking upon him. "Ye don't mane it, Ephie? Begorra, ye've been bettin' on the game!"

"That's jest what I have," nodded Gallup grimly. "Arter yeou and Frank went off and I went to roamin' araound I run up ag'inst the big bear. He give me a cigar, and we went into Priley's Hotel. He wanted me to have a drink with him, but I didn't take nuthin' intoxicatin'. Silence was there, with a whole lot of them baseball fellers. They was makin' a lot of talk abaout haow they'd trim us to-morrer. They gut my blood to b'ilin', and I told 'em a few things. That critter, Silence, begun to give me the laugh. He said us fellers made a lot of talk, but we didn't have sand to back it up. Dod bim him! I guess I showed him I had sand!"

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"Ephie," said the young Irishman soberly, "you and Oi are a little too suddin in making back talk to thim kind av crathers. Shtill Oi can't blame yez, my bhoy."

"Don't yeou tell Frank nuthin' abaout it, Barney," entreated Gallup. "I wouldn't have him find aout for anything."

"Thot's the bad part av it, Gallup—thot's kaping a secret from Frankie. It's doing something we know he wouldn't countenance."

"I guess that's what made me feel so rotten mean abaout it."

"How much did yez bet wid him? Did yez put up a hundrid?"

"More'n that."

"Two hundrid?"

"More'n that."

"Begobs, ye did plunge, my bhoy! Well, it won't break yez av we should happen to lose."

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"I dunno abaout that," half groaned Gallup.

Barney looked puzzled and somewhat excited.

"How much did yez bet, Ephy?" he asked. "Tell me the truth, old mon. Spake up."

"Sh!" hissed Gallup. "Don't say another word! Here comes Frank!"

Merriwell rejoined them.

"We'll start right away, boys," he said. "Toots will have the team round in less than five minutes."

REMORSE.

As they were passing Priley's Hotel Casper Silence hailed them.

"Pull up, Toots," said Merry. "Let's see what he wants."

The colored boy stopped the horses, and Silence came out.

"One point, Mr. Merriwell," he said. "We haven't decided on the umpire for that game."

"It's generally understood that the home team furnishes the umpire, I believe," returned Frank.

"That's a matter of accommodation. In this case it won't be any particular accommodation for us."

"Is that so?"

"That's right. If you don't mind, we'll furnish the umpire."

"What if I do mind?"

"Why should you?"

"I happen to have a good man who will officiate for us. He knows the game, and I know him."

"But I don't know him," protested Silence.

"I give you my word that he is square."

"I've been told such things before. I've had plenty of experience, Mr. Merriwell, and I know the sort of square umpires to be found through the country."

"I've had a few experiences myself," returned Frank, "and I confess they were not pleasant ones. I've been up against crooked umpires more than once. Nevertheless I promise you I'll supply a man who is thoroughly honest and conscientious." [Pg 260]

"It doesn't satisfy me. You'll supply one of your friends, of course."

"That's right," nodded Frank.

"I shall have to object, sir," said the proprietor of the Rovers. "It would be the most natural thing for your friend to favor you in close decisions."

"It might seem a natural thing, but I've often observed that the most conscientious umpires are so very careful that frequently they give their own friends the worst end of a deal."

Silence shrugged his shoulders and laughed languidly.

"I don't think that happens very often," he said, "and I wouldn't expect it to happen in this case. If it should, you'd be sore. On the other hand, if your friend gave you all the close points, we'd be sore. Let's get around that. Let's take a man who will have no particular interest in either team. Let's have an umpire from somewhere outside of your town."

"No," returned Frank firmly; "I'll furnish the umpire. I did not seek this game. You came to Bloomfield looking for it, and if you're not satisfied with the arrangements I'll make, you can easily cancel the engagement." [Pg 261]

"I don't want to cancel it. All I want is an umpire who'll give both teams a fair show. Now I understand they have such a man here in Wellsburg—a chap who is capable of handling a game right up to the mark. His name is Bowers."

Merriwell laughed.

"I happen to know this Bowers," he said. "I've seen him work, and the recollection is hardly a pleasant one. He does know the game, but he can be influenced. That's putting it in a mild fashion. I have reasons to believe that Bowers deliberately tried to give my Farnham Hall team the short end of a game played here in this city. No, sir, I'll not accept Bill Bowers."

"Well, we can find some one else."

"Don't put yourself to the trouble. I've told you I would supply the man, and I've guaranteed his honesty. If you don't like that, you're at liberty to cancel."

"Why not have two umpires? We'll furnish one, and you may furnish the other."

Under most circumstances Frank would have accepted this proposition without demur. Just now he had a feeling that Silence was determined to obtain some advantage in the umpire. He knew Greg Carker to be honest from his head to his feet, and therefore he resolved not to yield a point to the proprietor of the Rovers.

"There'll be only one umpire, Mr. Silence," he said. "It's useless to argue over that point." [Pg 262]

Casper Silence frowned.

"You're an obstinate young man!" he exclaimed. "I think we'll have to call that game off."

"Oh, very well," smiled Merry, "we'll cancel the engagement now, and I'll step in here and telephone the Wellsburg *Herald* to that effect."

"That's right, Frank," put in Gallup, "don't fool with 'em a bit."

Silence gave the Vermonter a queer look.

"You seem rather anxious, my friend," he drawled. "No doubt you'd like to have the game canceled. You appear to be frightened. No, we won't cancel it, Merriwell; we'll accept your umpire. But I want to give you fair notice now that we'll stand for no partiality on his part. We'll have a fair show, or we'll make trouble. If he tries to rob us, he'll get thumped."

It was Frank's turn to laugh.

"I wouldn't advise you or any of your players to attempt to thump any one on Farnham Field," he said. "If you do, you'll precipitate a riot, and I don't believe you'll like what'll happen. Don't threaten me, Mr. Silence. I don't like it, and I may take a fancy to cancel the game anyhow."

"Oh, go ahead!" sneered Silence. "I know you're frightened! Cancel it if you like, and I'll tell the facts to the Wellsburg *Herald*. I want you to understand that this game means something to me." [Pg 263]

"Indeed! Why, yesterday you entered into an agreement to play in Bloomfield with the greatest reluctance. You didn't seem to think it would pay you."

"It won't pay as far as the gate receipts go. Of course we expect to take the entire gate money, but I'm not fussing about that. I've made a little wager on this game, and I propose to win it."

"Is it possible you found some one in Wellsburg who was willing to back us against your professional team?" questioned Merry.

"Oh, yes, I found some one in Wellsburg who was willing to do that," answered the man, again glancing toward Gallup.

Ephraim was worried, for he feared that Silence would break his agreement not to tell about the bet. He frowned and shook his head a bit, without being observed by Frank.

"I've promised you a square deal, Silence," said Merriwell. "If you'll take the trouble to inquire, you'll find plenty of people in this little city who will assure you that I always keep my word. We're due home at dinner, and we'll have to drive along. Good day, sir."

Toots chirruped to the horses, and they were off.

"I don't fancy going back on an agreement with any one," observed Merry, "but I'm rather sorry that we made arrangements to play that team. Those men are professionals, and they're not in our class. It's evident Silence is a gambler. Gambling ruins any sort of a game. The man who bets money is liable to take 'most any questionable advantage in order to win. Betting is bad business anyway you look at it. It ruins a man's fine principles." [Pg 264]

"Yeou don't think that allus happens, do ye, Frank?" asked Gallup. "Don't yeou believe some decent fellers bet occasionally?"

"Oh, yes, occasionally. But the man who gets into it in a small way is pretty sure to keep it up. If he wins, it baits him on to repeat. If he loses, he feels that he must take another chance to get even. I saw many bad results of gambling both at school and at college. At Yale lots of young fellows who had no right to do so made bets on baseball, football, and other games. In most instances the money they risked had been supplied by their parents. They knew their parents would not countenance gambling, yet they gambled. It was not honorable. No man has a right to risk money on which any other person has a claim. Now, for instance, you, Ephraim, would have no right to risk your money on an uncertainty of this sort. You're married. You have a child. Both your wife and child have claims on the money you possess. Were you to wager that money and lose it, you would be robbing them of their just rights. I presume you've thought of this matter?" [Pg 265]

"Never thought of it that way," mumbled the Vermonter huskily. "S'pose I should put my money into some sort of business and lose it. Would that be robbin' Teresa and the youngster?"

"That's a different thing. Business is business. No man has a right to plunge into a reckless venture, but if it seems legitimate and he has investigated it carefully, he cannot be blamed if the venture proves a failure. The best and shrewdest men sometimes fail in business enterprises. I've never yet seen a genuine gambler who was thoroughly upright, conscientious, and respected by decent people. I have seen gamblers who were honest to all appearances, but they were not respected. There's something degrading in gambling. The man who gambles is compelled, as a rule, to associate with a class of men who have no standing in respectable society. He places himself on their level. Now, you, Ephraim, would not care to be estimated on the same level as Casper Silence. He's not a man you would invite to your home, introduce to your wife, and dine with at your table."

"Not by a blamed sight!" growled the Vermonter.

"Another bad feature of gambling is the effect on the individual who indulges in it. It spoils his taste for legitimate money making. If he's successful for a time as a gambler, the regular methods

of making money seem tame and insipid to him. Very few, if any, thoroughbred gamblers ever accumulate a fortune or a competence and retain it. Once the germ of gambling gets into their blood, they never quit. Let them make a small fortune, and they're determined to double it. Let them make a large fortune, and they still pursue gambling for the excitement there is in it. In the end, nine out of ten go broke. If others depend on them, they bring hardship and suffering upon those dependent ones. Most gamblers die poor."

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"It's logic, begobs!" put in Mulloy.

"You both know," pursued Frank, "that the loss of a few hundred dollars on a baseball game would not mean a great deal to me. I might have made a wager with Casper Silence. Had I lost the bet, it would not have brought immediate hardship or deprivation on any one. It was not the mere loss of a hundred or a thousand dollars that restrained me. It was the principle of the thing—I looked at that. I figured this thing out years ago, and that's why I've been opposed to gambling. More than once I've been tempted to set aside my scruples when some blatant, loud-mouthed chap has challenged me and shook his money in my face. Such a thing stirs my blood. It's mighty unpleasant to have one of these chaps accuse me of lacking nerve. I have one consolation, however. It's not a sign of nerve or courage to be led into anything wrong through the taunts of another. Usually it's a sign of cowardice. The boy who does a hazardous and unwise thing simply because a companion dares him to do it is the one who lacks nerve. He lacks nerve to say, 'No, I won't.'"

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"I guess yeou're right, Frank," confessed Gallup dolefully. "By hemlock! I've been dared into a lot of tomfool things in my day. Next time anybody tries it on me I'm goin' to remember what yeou've jest said. I'll say no, by thutteration, and I'll say it mighty laoud, too!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

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A FRIEND WORTH HAVING.

They arrived at Merry Home in time to wash up and sit down to dinner with the rest of Frank's jolly house party.

"It peen some red-hot paseball practice we put into us this afternoon, Frankie," said Dunnerwurst. "Py Chorge! Der game vill play us to-morrow on."

"We'll have to play the game to win, boys," said Merry. "This Rover baseball team is no ordinary wandering aggregation. It's composed of professionals with records."

He then told them about the players who made up the Rovers. There were many exclamations of surprise, for these men were known by reputation to nearly all of Frank's friends.

"Waugh!" cried Badger. "It's a whole lot plain We're going to have a hot rustle to-morrow. I'm seething to get into that game. That's whatever!"

"It'll seem like old times," rumbled Browning.

"I hope you're not worried about the game, Frank?" questioned Diamond. "We've been practicing team work for a week, and we ought to do a good turn at it."

"Oh, I'm not worrying," smiled Merry. "We can't win every game we play. There's something in being good losers."

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Hodge frowned.

"Never heard you talk like that before, Frank," he said. "Seems to me you think we're going to lose."

"Dot game vill nefer lose us der world in!" cried Dunnerwurst. "How coot it dood it? Vill der ball not pitch you to-morrow, Frankie? Vid you der box in, der game vos as good as skinched. Yah!"

Ephraim Gallup had little to say, and his appetite seemed unusually poor. Teresa noticed this, and she began to worry about it.

"You must be seek, Ephraim," she whispered. "You do not eat enough to keep the bird alive."

"I'm allus that way jest before a baseball game," he declared. "Don't yeou mind it, Teresa. Don't yeou pay no 'tention to me. I'm all right."

After dinner, however, she drew him aside and persisted in questioning him.

"There ees sometheeng on your mind," she said. "You cannot fool your Teresa."

"Oh, fudge!" exclaimed Gallup. "There ain't nuthin' on my mind. I ain't gut mind enough for that. I'm too big a dratted fool, Teresa."

"I nevaire hear you talk that way before. Ees eet the babee? That must be the trouble, Ephraim—you worree about the babee."

"Thutteration! I don't believe I've thought of the baby in twenty-four hours."

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"Oo, how could you be so cruel not to theenk of the babee?" murmured his wife. "I theenk of eet efry hour. I hope you are not going to be seek, Ephraim."

"Bless ye, Teresa, I couldn't get sick if I wanted to. Jest yeou let me alone, and I'll be all right. Guess I've gut a case of fan-tods."

"What ees them fan-tods? Ees eet the same as the malaria I hear you say they have sometimes een the United States?"

"Nope. The fan-tods are something like the blues. A feller gits them when he realizes he's one of the biggest chumps walkin' raound on two laigs."

She could get nothing more out of him, and finally she sought her friend, Juanita Garcia, to whom she confided her fears that Ephraim was on the verge of a sick spell.

Gallup wandered off by himself and strolled around the grounds, with his head down and his hands in his pockets, occasionally muttering and growling in a disgusted manner.

Barney Mulloy found an opportunity to follow Ephraim.

"Come on, Eph," he said, slipping an arm through Gallup's, "let's you and Oi go for a warruk. You nade it, my bhoy—you nade it."

"If yeou'll jest take me daown to the lake and kick me in, I'll be much obleeged to ye, Barney," said the Vermonter.

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"It's moighty bad you're faling, Oi dunno?"

"By gum! I oughter feel bad. Yeou heard Frank talking about jest sech gol-dinged chumps as I be. He made me so tarnal disgusted with myself that I wanted to find a hole and crawl into it. The trouble was that I didn't know where I could find a hole small enough."

"It's a livel head Frankie has, Ephie."

"You bet your boots!"

"Whin he got through talkin' Oi was ashamed to think Oi'd ever even contimplated makin' a bet."

"And I was the blamed idiot that done the betting, Barney! I thought I was kinder showin' my nerve. Naow I know I didn't show much of anything but foolishness. Barney, I'm married. I've got one of the finest little women that ever stood in shoe leather. And the kid—by gum! the kid's a ripper! Together me and yeou have made a pretty good thing in that railroad business. I was brung up on a farm in Vermont. It was called a pretty good farm, too. My old man was reckoned well off in that community, but his whole farm wasn't wuth more'n half what I've made in the last year. It took him years of hard diggin' and scratchin' to git that place and clear it of debt. Daown in them parts a man that's wuth ten thousand dollars is reckoned slappin' rich. They make every cent caount there, Barney. If them folks want anything that costs a dime and they kin git along any way without it, they git along without it and save the dime. That's what they call New England thrift. My dad had to scratch gravel pretty hard to send me to school. I helped aout some myself, but I'd never gut my schoolin' if he hadn't pinched and saved for me. Naow here I be, wuth more money in my own right than he's ever been able to scratch together in his life, and I'm jest darned fool enough to resk that money on a game of baseball. I kinder cal'late we're goin' to win that game, but it's jest as Frank says—we may lose it. If we do, where'll I be?"

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"Howld on, Ephie—howld on!" exclaimed the young Irishman. "Tell me something, my bhoy."

"What is it?"

"How much did yez bet on thot game?"

"If I tell ye, I want yer to promise never to say nuthin' abaout it to Frank. If I win that bet, I'm goin' to give every cent of my winnings to some charitable institution. I mean it, by ginger! If I win that bet, yeou'll never ketch me in a scrape like this ag'in if I live to be four thousand years old."

"Thot's a good resolution to make, Ephie. Ye know you can trust me. Oi'll say nivver a worrud about it to Frankie. How much did yer bet?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

Mulloy came near falling in his tracks. He caught Gallup by the arm and held on to support himself.

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"Tin thousand?" he gasped. "Tin thousand dollars? Ye don't mane it!"

"That's jest what I bet. Dad bim me for a fool!"

"Howly saints! It's crazy ye were, Ephie!"

"Call me anything yeou want to."

Barney was completely overcome. He realized that Gallup had spoken the truth, and now he understood why his old comrade had appeared so worried and broken up.

"Oi don't blame yez for wearing a face a yarrud long, Ephie," he said. "Tell me how it happened, me bhoy."

Gallup related the particulars. As he told how Silence had sneered and mocked, the young Irishman began to grow warm.

"It's roight Frankie is about betting," said Mulloy; "but divvil a bit different could Oi have done mesilf, Ephraim. It's wake and feeble crathers we are. Gallup, me bhoy, Oi'm your side parthner. We're going to do our bist to win thot game to-morrow. But if we lose, so help me, Oi'll nivver spake to yez again unless we take half the money Oi have in the Wellsburg Bank! Oi'll divvy with ye to me last cint. Now do brace up, Ephraim. It's not broke ye'll be. Ye'll have plenty av time to think what a thunderin' fool ye've made av yersilf. But let's not cry over it now."

"I couldn't take half of your money, Barney. That wouldn't be right. No, sir, I'll never do that."

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Gallup clenched his fist and pushed it up under Ephraim's nose.

"Ye'll take it or Oi'll knock the stuffin' out av yez!" he said. "Ye'll take it or ye'll have a doctor to bind up yer wounds. Thot's sittled. Come, now, let's go back to the house and make belave we're happy. To-morrow we'll play baseball loike the divvil himsilf!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

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A PROTEST.

The morning paper from Wellsburg arrived in Bloomfield at seven o'clock. Before the coming of Frank Merriwell to Bloomfield this morning paper had been able to boast of barely a dozen regular subscribers or purchasers in the little town. Now, however, things were different, and Bloomfield took fully fifty copies of the paper each morning. The formerly indifferent citizens had become eagerly anxious to get the paper as soon as possible after its arrival each morning in order to be posted on the county and State news.

The increasing circulation in Bloomfield had been noted by the editor of the *Herald*, who wisely decided to have a regular correspondent in that town who would furnish a daily news letter. This correspondent had faithfully reported the reunion of Frank Merriwell's old flock and the doings of the house party at Merry Home.

Between eight and nine o'clock each forenoon Frank found a short period of rest from his duties at Farnham Hall. On the morning following the arrangements for the ball game with the Rovers he jogged into town in company with Hodge and called at the post office for his mail.

Something unusual seemed to be taking place at the post office. More than a dozen villagers were assembled there in two or three groups, all of them talking earnestly and some appearing decidedly excited. Merry observed that many of them held Wellsburg *Heralds* in their hands.

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"What's up, Frank?" questioned Hodge. "Suppose the advertisement of that game to-day has kicked up all this disturbance?"

"I can't tell," answered Merry. "Perhaps we'll find out."

As they stepped inside they heard a tall, thin-lipped man declaiming in a sharp, rasping voice:

"You'll find out, neighbors, that my predictions will come true. They're coming true already. The spirit of frivolity and sin is running riot in this town. Wickedness is rampant. Staid and respectable citizens are losing their dignity. Good church members are becoming afflicted with this worldly spirit. And who's to blame for it all—who's to blame? There's only one man. He's created this indescribable change. The foolish ones have regarded him as a public benefactor, but I insist that he's doing untold harm. He brought about the downfall of Brother Hewett, who was respected and revered by every one in Bloomfield for years. You're afraid of him—that's what's the matter. You don't dare to speak out and express yourself. Now I'm not afraid of him. I am ready to denounce him in public. I'm ready to denounce him to his face. You know who I mean. His name is— Er, hum! How!"

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"Good morning, Deacon Crabtree," said Frank, as the speaker stammered and hemmed, having ceased abruptly in his remarks. "I notice that, as usual, you are denouncing sin and wickedness. Bloomfield should be proud of the fact that it has one man who makes no compromise with iniquity. Evidently you stand firmly rooted on the rock of righteousness."

"Yes, sir—yes, sir, that's right," said Crabtree. "I'm not one of these whiffle-minded creatures who changes his opinion every time the wind changes."

"That's a very good thing," nodded Merriwell. "I haven't much patience with people who are so extremely changeable. At the same time, it must be admitted there is some truth in the saying that only mules and fools never change their minds."

Jeremiah Crabtree turned red in the face.

"Is this a jab at me, young man?" he snapped. "Are you personal in your remarks?"

"I hope you won't take it as personal unless it happens to hit your case, Mr. Crabtree. People seldom care to wear clothes that do not fit them. What has happened now that's caused all this commotion and talk?"

"Mebbe you haven't seen the *Herald* this morning."

"I confess I haven't."

"Well, you'd better read it. If you'll look in the second column on the first page you'll find something about a great ten-thousand-dollar baseball game that's going to take place in Bloomfield to-day."

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"A ten-thousand-dollar game?"

"Yes, sir. Don't you know anything about it?"

"Well, I'm aware that there's to be a baseball game here this afternoon. I was not aware it was to be a ten-thousand-dollar game."

"Well, look at that—look right there!" snapped Crabtree, holding up the paper and pointing a long bony finger at an article in the second column. "Notice the heading in big black type. Notice it says that Frank Merriwell's own baseball team will play the Rovers, the champion independent team of the country, for ten thousand dollars."

Merry smiled.

"I think that's an exaggeration," he said. "I think that's simply an advertising dodge, Mr. Crabtree."

"Do you mean to say you ain't made no arrangement to play this team for a sum of money? Do you mean to say there ain't been no betting on the game? This article distinctly states that one of your friends, and a player on your team, has made a wager of ten thousand dollars that you'll beat the Rovers."

"I mean to say I know nothing whatever of such a wager, and I do not believe that a bet of that sort has been made. I was in Wellsburg yesterday and gave the *Herald* certain information to be used in advertising this game, but I assure you I gave them no information concerning a wager of that sort. On the face of it the yarn appears decidedly preposterous. I think Bloomfield citizens are generally aware of the fact that I am opposed to betting in any form."

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"I know you've always claimed you was," said Crabtree, with a sneer; "but, 'cordin' to some of the things I've heard about ye, you've been a mighty sportin' young feller in your day. You've lived pretty high for a youngster, and you've had dealings with sportin' people. They tell me you don't drink, you don't gamble, you don't swear, and you don't do any of them things; but I fail to understand how any man can associate with persons who do drink and swear and gamble without acquiring such habits himself. Now, sir, it's a well-known fact that professional ball players are generally dissolute and disreputable. These Rovers are professionals—they claim to be. When you play ball against them you sort of put yourself in their class."

"Well, not exactly, Mr. Crabtree," denied Frank. "I presume you are aware that a number of college baseball teams play games early every season with teams of the National and American Leagues. Yale usually plays the New York Nationals in New York. The Yale team is made up of non-professional college men, amateurs in good standing. They do not become professionals by engaging in a game with the New York Nationals. I don't care to discuss this matter with you, Mr. Crabtree. I simply give you my assurance that I know nothing whatever of this ten-thousand-dollar wager, and I am satisfied that no such wager has been made. The story is intended to arouse excitement and interest, with the evident purpose of bringing out a crowd of spectators to witness the game."

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"Then it's a fraud and a deception!" cried Jeremiah, flourishing the paper in his right hand and shaking his clenched left hand in the air. "It's a falsehood—a barefaced lie! It's an imposition on the public! You're concerned in it, sir! You can't get out of it! If you don't know anything about it, you're concerned just the same."

"I fail to see how you make that out."

"When you make an agreement to play them professionals you knew what sort of men they were. If they've originated this yarn for the purpose of deceiving people, you're responsible because you've had dealings with them."

"That's rather far-fetched, Mr. Crabtree."

"Nothing far-fetched about it."

"If I should purchase a horse of you for a hundred dollars, and, in order to increase the apparent value of that horse, with the idea of selling him to some one else, I should go around informing people I had paid three hundred dollars, would you be responsible in any way? Do you feel that in any manner you would be party to the falsehood?"

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Rufus Applesnack had been listening to the talk, and now he gave Crabtree a jab in the ribs.

"He's gut ye, deacon—he's gut ye!" chuckled the grocery man. "He's gut ye right where the wool is short!"

"I fail to see it! I fail to see it!" rasped Crabtree. "There ain't no similarity in the two cases. My mind is made up on the point, and I don't propose to change it."

"Which sorter reminds me of the mule Mr. Merriwell mentioned a few minutes ago," declared Applesnack, as he turned away.

Frank secured his mail and was leaving the post office, when outside the door he came face to face with Owen Clearpath, the new parson of the village church.

"I'd like to have a word with you, Mr. Merriwell," said the parson; "just a word."

He drew Frank aside, while Hodge waited.

"I don't see how Merry keeps his patience and temper in dealing with these hide-bound yokels," muttered Bart.

Clearpath seemed confused and ill at ease. He hemmed a little while Merry waited quietly for him to speak.

Suddenly the young minister began, as if forcing himself with a great effort to say something he regarded as decidedly disagreeable. [Pg 282]

"You know, Mr. Merriwell," he said, "that I hold you in the highest estimation. You know I'm considered by the members of my church and the people of this town generally as a liberal preacher. In fact, I'm entirely too liberal to suit some of the church members. You've done a splendid work for Bloomfield, and you're doing a splendid work. I'm proud of you, sir."

"It isn't necessary to sugar coat the pill, parson," smiled Frank. "Just hand it out to me, and I'll swallow it."

"Well, you know there's been several unpleasant, not to say sensational, occurrences in this town of late. I don't suppose you're to blame for everything that has happened. I have insisted that you could not be blamed for the unfortunate misstep of Brother Hewett, who was tempted to take a little more hard cider than was really good for him. Your detractors have insisted that the deacon was led into this action through his exuberance over the arrival of your friends. Some of them have tried to hold you responsible for Brother Hewett's temporary downfall."

"I'm very sorry the deacon did such a thing," asserted Frank. "I hope you've not been too harsh with him, parson."

"I haven't mentioned the matter to him. I've thought it best to overlook it, for I'm certain he feels deeply humiliated and downcast. I know for a fact that he's heard of it from other quarters. I've tried to show him that my confidence is unshaken." [Pg 283]

"Which I believe was a very wise course to pursue."

"Another thing that caused a great sensation was the unfortunate death of that Mexican who broke into your house some ten days ago. There have been all sorts of rumors about that affair. I'm positive the facts were given to the coroner's jury, who failed to find any one save Murillo responsible."

"No one could feel more disturbed over the matter than I have," said Frank.

"You see your enemies are inclined to use such matters against you, if possible. A number of persons have come to me this morning and shown me an item in the *Wellsburg Herald*."

"I've just seen that item," said Frank. "Let me assure you, parson, that so far as I have the slightest knowledge, I'm positive there's not a word of truth in the statement that a ten-thousand-dollar wager has been made on the result of the baseball game to be played this afternoon."

Clearpath looked relieved.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," he breathed. "I decided to ask you about it. Have I your authority to deny the truth of that statement?"

"You may say I gave you my word that I knew nothing whatever of the matter." [Pg 284]

"I'll do so, sir—I'll do so. If you think the game will be clean and respectable, I may decide to witness it myself."

"It's not my intention to permit anything on Farnham Field that may not be witnessed by you, by any lady, or by any child in town. I hope to see you at the game this afternoon, parson."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A CONFESSION.

Ere leaving the village Frank called on Bill Hunker, the constable.

"Mr. Hunker," he said, "I need your services this afternoon. I want you at the baseball ground, and you had better bring along five or six good husky assistants. Let them all have authority as deputies. Every man will be paid regular wages for special service."

"Be you lookin' for trouble?" asked Hunker.

"No, I'm not looking for it," smiled Frank. "I'm determined that there shall be no trouble. I have a premonition that we'll see an unusually large crowd, and I'm confident the crowd will contain a rough element. It is my purpose to suppress any symptoms of disorder."

"All right," nodded Hunker; "I'll be there with the boys. You can depend on me."

Frank was right in believing the game would bring out an astonishing number of spectators. That afternoon all roads seemed to lead to Bloomfield. With the opening of the gates an hour before the time for the game to begin, a stream of spectators commenced pouring on Farnham Field. This stream grew steadily in volume.

Hunker and his companions, with their badges prominently displayed, were on hand at the gates and held the impatient crowd in check. The ticket sellers and ticket takers were kept busy as bees. [Pg 286]

The stand soon became packed to suffocation, while the temporary seats which had been erected overflowed before either team appeared on the field. Frank had taken the precaution to have ropes stretched for the purpose of holding the crowd back. It was well that he did so.

Thirty minutes before the hour set for the game two large touring cars brought the Rovers onto the field. They were received with cheers. A party of Farnham Hall boys escorted them from the cars to the dressing rooms reserved for them.

In the meantime, Merriwell and his players were making ready for the contest. When they were prepared to go out Frank called them around him.

"Boys," he said, as he looked them over, "it's going to be a hard game, and I hope every man is prepared to do his best. Before we go out I have a question to ask. You know there's a report that a wager has been made on the result of this game. The Wellsburg *Herald* made the statement that some one of this team has wagered ten thousand dollars with Casper Silence. I've regarded the yarn as preposterous. At the same time, I've decided to ask you, one and all, frankly and fairly, if you know anything about such a wager. Do you know anything about a wager of any sort? If there's any one present who knows, it's up to him to speak out here and now." [Pg 287]

A few moments of dead silence followed. Then Ephraim Gallup, pale and agitated, pushed Barney Mulloy aside and stepped forward.

"I guess, by gum, it's up to me, Frank," he said. "I don't blame yeou for thinkin' yeou didn't have no friend here who was chump enough to make such a bet. I'm the chump."

"Vot vos dot?" gasped Hans Dunnerwurst. "You don'd pelief me! Dit ten thousand dollars pet you, Ephie? Mine cootness cracious sakes alive! You vos a spordt!"

"I'm a tarnal fool!" mumbled Gallup. "I know it."

"Then you did make a bet, Ephraim?" said Frank, unable to repress his feeling of dismay.

"Yes, I done it! I hope the whole blamed bunch will kick me! I ain't goin' to make no excuses, but when that critter, Silence, tried to rub it into me I gut so tarnal hot-headed that I right up and told him I'd go him for any old figger. I didn't s'pose he'd make it so large. Your talk about betting has made me so all-fired disgusted with myself that I jest want to jump off the earth."

"This is bad business—bad business," muttered Frank. "Give me all the particulars, Gallup."

Ephraim did so.

When the Vermonter had finished, Merry drew a deep breath. [Pg 288]

"You can't afford to lose that bet, Gallup," he said. "What are you going to do with the money if you win?"

"Do with it? Dad birn it, I'll burn it up!"

"That would be still more foolish. If you lose, you will be down to bed rock again."

"Yes, I'll be jest abaout the same as busted."

"Divvil a bit av it!" cried Barney Mulloy. "Gallup is me owld side parthner. Av he loses, Oi'll divvy wid him."

"But he mustn't lose," said Frank. "Philanthropists in Wellsburg are endeavoring to raise money to found a hospital for consumptives. There's an ideal location some ten miles from Wellsburg. If you win, Gallup, would you donate your winnings to the hospital fund?"

"Yeou bet I will!" cried Ephraim eagerly. "I'll give 'em every cent of it!"

"That's good," nodded Frank. "Now, boys, we're going into this game to win it. If we ever played

ball in our lives, we're going to play it to-day. I think and hope this experience will teach Gallup the folly of betting. I shall use all the skill I possess in the game, and I want you boys to back me up. We can't lose! We won't lose!"

Although his words were spoken in a quiet tone, they aroused something in every listener that stirred his blood and caused it to leap in his veins.

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"That's right! that's right!" they cried. "We'll win to-day!"

"Come on," said Merry, "we'll go out now."

As he marched onto the field, with his friends and comrades following at his heels, the great crowd rose and uttered a roar of welcome.

"Batting practice, fellows," said Frank. And they went at it at once.

Three minutes later the Rovers, in tigerish suits of yellow and black, trotted out from their dressing rooms.

Back of the ropes near first base a tough-looking crowd of Wellsburgans greeted the professionals with a cheer.

"Eat 'em up, McCann!" howled a husky fellow with a broken nose. "Take some of the conceit out of this Merriwell to-day! He's been crowing over Wellsburg long enough!"

Merry glanced around and saw Hunker, with several of his assistants, gathering in the vicinity of this tough crowd.

"Bill is onto his job," muttered Frank. "If there's any disturbance those fellows will make it."

The Rovers took the field for practice. They handled themselves like professionals, and many of their clever catches or stops elicited exclamations of wonderment and applause.

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Casper Silence and Basil Bearover approached Frank.

"Where's your umpire, Merriwell?" demanded Bearover.

Merry looked round and motioned to Gregory Carker. Carker promptly stepped forward.

"Here he is," said Frank.

Bearover placed himself in front of Carker, at whom he glowered.

"See here, young man," he said, "we want no monkey business to-day. If you don't give us what's coming to us, you'll get into trouble in short order. We know how to deal with crooked umpires."

"Evidently you do not know how to deal with gentlemen," said Greg. "You'll get your due and not a whit more. Bullying and browbeating will not give you an advantage."

"Oh, you're rather a stiff-necked young man, ain't ye?" growled the big bear. "Let's understand the ground rules before we begin. How about a wild throw into the crowd, Merriwell?"

"Perhaps we'd better make a rule that such a throw will give the base runner the privilege of advancing one base and no more," suggested Frank.

"That's satisfactory to us," nodded Bearover. "Do you think you can keep the crowd off the outfields?"

"I have six officers here for the purpose of handling this crowd. Not only will I see that the spectators do not intrude on the outfields, but I'll guarantee that those officers will suppress any riot or disturbance. They have full authority to arrest any one who attempts to make trouble here to-day."

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Casper Silence yawned and lighted a cigarette.

"There won't be any disturbance unless you chaps try to steal this game," said Bearover.

"We don't have to steal games," returned Merry, quick as a flash. "We can win them."

Silence smiled scornfully as he breathed forth a whiff of smoke.

"That may have been your experience in the past," he observed, "but you're up against a different proposition to-day, young man."

"Will you give your batting order to our scorer?" asked Bearover.

"You'll find our scorer sitting yonder," said Merry. "He'll give you the batting order."

"One more point," suggested Silence. "You seem determined to have things pretty much your own way here. I know it's customary for the home team to take its choice of innings. In this case it's possible you may be able to concede a point and give us the choice."

"Why, certainly," replied Frank, with a smile. "You may choose."

"Then we'll let you bat first."

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A few minutes later the Rovers came in, and Merry's team trotted onto the field.

The scorers recorded the batting order of each team as follows:

MERRIES. ROVERS.

Mulloy, 3d b. McCann, ss.
Hodge, c. Mertez, rf.
Merriwell, p. Grifford, cf.
Badger, 2d b. Holmes, 1st b.
Diamond, ss. O'Day, 3d b.
Browning, 1st b. Clover, 2d b.
Gallup, cf. Roach, lf.
Carson, lf. Bancroft, c.
Dunnerwust, rf. Bender, p.

Practice was soon over, and Merry called his team in.

Again the Rovers trotted onto the field.

Greg Carker broke open a box and tossed out a snow-white ball. Bender caught the ball with one hand and promptly proceeded to soil it by rubbing it on the grass outside the pitcher's box.

"Play ball!" called Carker clearly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

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JOLTS FOR BULLIES.

Bender was a thin, sinewy, long-armed, hatchet-faced chap, who looked like an Indian. He had "traveled in fast company" for years, but was said to be a hard man to handle, having jumped more than one contract and being of a sullen and revengeful disposition.

Bancroft, the catcher, was a rather stocky individual, inclined to be a trifle too fat. The general observer decided him out of condition and unfit for baseball. His position under the bat was awkward, and his face wore an expression of blankness, which seemed to indicate a lack of that quick wit and keen intelligence to be found in every exceptional baseball player.

Nevertheless, Bang Bancroft was one of the cleverest players on the Rovers. He was a great short-arm thrower to bases. He could bat like a fiend, and he had a knack of coaching and steadying a pitcher which brought out the best there was in any slab artist who "handed 'em up" to him.

McCann, shortstop and captain of the team, was a fighting Irishman with a peppery temper and a bullying disposition. This chap had a trick of bulldozing umpires and opposing players, and he generally played what is commonly called "scrappy baseball."

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The other members of the team took their cues from McCann, and their aggressiveness was made apparent almost before the first ball was pitched over the plate.

"Here's a mark, Bender!" cried McCann, as Mulloy stepped out with his bat. "Eat him up!"

"Come on, Mitt," came from O'Day, "burn a few hot ones over! Make him dizzy!"

"Get back from the plate!" rasped Bender, as Barney took his position. "Get back, or you'll get hit!"

"Hit him if he crowds," came from Holmes; "but don't kill him. You know you killed one man last year and broke another man's jaw."

"Go ahead and hit him," came from Clover. "He's Irish, and you can't kill him."

Frank Merriwell's eyes began to gleam with a peculiar light and his lips tightened.

"They fancy they're up against a lot of youngsters they can intimidate," he thought. "They mean to frighten us at the start."

Again Bender motioned for Mulloy to move back from the plate.

"Pitch the ball, me fri'nd—pitch the ball," said Barney. "Oi'm in me box, and I'll shtand here."

An instant later Bender delivered the ball, deliberately snapping a swift one straight at Mulloy.

Barney might have dropped to the ground and thus avoided being hit, but, instead of doing so, he leaned far forward, with his left shoulder advanced and his right shoulder held well back. In this manner he escaped being hit fairly by the ball, which glanced from the back of his right shoulder.

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"Take your base!" called Carker promptly.

Instantly there was a howl of protestation from the crowd back of first base.

McCann made a rush at Carker.

"Call him back!" snarled the captain of the Rovers. "He didn't try to dodge that ball! He didn't try to get out of the way!"

"The pitcher hit him deliberately," said Greg calmly. "He was threatened before the ball was pitched. Get back into your position."

McCann placed his hands on his hips and glared at Carker.

"Who are ye tellin' to git back?" he rasped. "Do ye know who ye're talkin' to, young feller?"

"I'm talking to you," said Greg, in the same calm manner. "If you don't get back in your position and play the game, I'll put you on the bench."

"What?" shouted the Irishman. "Put me on the bench—you put me on the bench? I'd like to see you do it!"

Greg pulled out his watch.

"I'll give you just thirty seconds to get into your position and go on with this game," he said. [Pg 296]

"If you put me on the bench, I'll take my team off the field!" threatened McCann.

"And I'll forfeit the game to the home team," retorted Carker. "Twenty seconds. You have ten seconds more."

McCann turned and retreated to his position, growling and muttering in an ugly manner.

"Play ball, boys!" he called. "We can win the game, even if the umpire is against us!"

Basil Bearover hurried to the bench of the home players and grasped Frank Merriwell by the shoulder.

"Is this the kind of square deal you promised us?" he demanded.

Merry rose, turned, and faced the man.

"What's the matter?" was his question. "You know Mulloy was entitled to his base."

"But your umpire threatened to put one of my men out of the game."

"He has authority to put any player out of the game. He can't fine the men, but he can order them off the field if they raise a disturbance and make back talk to him. If one of my players should rush at him the way McCann did, I should expect him to put the man on the bench or off the field. If he didn't do it, I'd do it myself. You know Bender threw that ball at Mulloy to drive him back from the plate, and you also know that Mulloy was in his proper position." [Pg 297]

"Aren't we going to have any sort of a square deal here?" gurgled Bearover furiously.

"You're going to have as square a deal as you ever received in all your career, but you're not going to bulldoze the umpire or any one else on this field."

"If we don't get what we want, we'll stop the game in the very first inning," threatened Bearover.

"You can stop it by refusing to play," said Frank. "You heard Carker tell McCann that he would forfeit the game if he did such a thing. It will be all over in short order in case you or your captain pulls the team off the field."

"But look at this crowd! You'll disappoint this crowd! You'll have to refund the gate money!"

"Which I'll do," said Merriwell. "I'll refund every cent that's been taken at the gate. Did you read the *Wellsburg Herald* this morning? If so, Mr. Bearover, I presume you saw a little item regarding a ten-thousand-dollar bet. Now, if such a bet has been made, and you lose this game through forfeit, you'll likewise lose the bet. It may not cost you anything, but it will cost Mr. Silence ten thousand dollars. I don't think you'll take your team off the field to-day."

Bearover was purple with anger.

"Look at that bunch of boys back of first," he directed. "If you are not careful, Mr. Merriwell, they'll waltz onto the field and wipe up the earth with you and your team and the umpire." [Pg 298]

"I don't think they will," said Frank. "At the present time they're being watched by six deputies, every man of which carries a billy and a pair of handcuffs. In case your tough crowd from Wellsburg attempts to make a disturbance, the ringleaders will find themselves in Bloomfield lockup. We've made preparations for you and your paid thugs, Mr. Bearover."

While this conversation was taking place Bender had pretended to busy himself in tying a shoestring, which he untied and retied several times before it seemed satisfactory to him.

"If you can win this game squarely, Bearover, you'll win it," said Frank; "but you'll never win it through intimidation and bulldozing. Now don't bother me any more. Better keep on your own side and let your men play the game. They'll have to play the best game they know if they want to win."

All this was quite unexpected by the "big bear" and his companions. Feeling that he was up against an unusual proposition, Bearover returned to the visitors' bench, where Silence was

somewhat nervously smoking a cigarette.

Bart Hodge was in position to strike. Bender whipped the ball over. Hodge let it pass.

"One strike!" announced Carker.

Bender's curve had carried the ball over the outside corner.

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The visiting pitcher followed this up with a sharp drop, which came down across Bart's shoulders. Again Bart declined to swing.

"Two strikes!" cried Carker.

Bart did not kick. He did not even frown, although he realized he had failed to swing at two fair balls.

The next ball was wide. Then followed a high one.

Hodge hit the next ball and put up an infield fly, which was easily captured by McCann. Mulloy had promptly returned to first as soon as he realized the ball was going to the infield.

Frank Merriwell received an ovation from the crowd as he stepped out with a bat in his hand. He held the bat in a position which was a signal for Mulloy to attempt to steal on the first ball pitched.

Merry swung at the ball, but was careful not to hit it. Mulloy went down to second.

Bancroft made a sharp short-arm throw. Clover took the ball handsomely, and Mulloy was tagged as he slid.

"Out!" announced Carker.

"Why, the kids think they can steal on ye, Mitt!" sneered McCann, while the Rovers, with the exception of Bender, shouted with laughter.

Two men were out, and there was a strike on Merriwell. Bender tried to pull Frank with a couple of wide ones. Failing in this, he whipped over a sharp shoot.

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Merry fouled it.

"Foul ball—two strikes!" came from Carker.

The tough crowd back of first howled with satisfaction.

"Strike him out, Bender!" they cried. "Show him up!"

Bender followed with a drop, but it was a ball, and Frank declined to swing at it.

"Three balls," said the calm, clear voice of the umpire.

"A valk vill take you, Frankie!" cried Dunnerwurst, from the coaching line. "He vill made you a present to der first pase. Yah!"

Bender pretended to kick a pebble from beneath his feet. Suddenly, without any preliminary swing, he sent over a swift straight ball.

Smash!

Merriwell nailed the ball on the trade-mark.

CHAPTER XL.

[Pg 301]

A DETERMINED FRONT.

Frank drove the ball out on a line and reached second base by sharp running.

"Vale! vale! vale!" spluttered Dunnerwurst, as he danced round like a huge fat toad. "Dot peen too pad! It vos an awful surprise dot der ball dit not make a home run vor him!"

"Naow we're started, gol ding it!" shouted Gallup excitedly, as he pranced out to coach. "Let's keep her a-goin', fellers!"

Ephraim was in a wildly excited condition. He felt himself tingling and shaking all over. At one moment he was hot and burning, and the next moment he was cold and shivering.

Buck Badger looked dangerous to Bender. The solid, stocky, square-shouldered Westerner seemed like a man who would hit the ball a terrible crack if he hit it at all.

In the stand, sitting amid the ladies of Merriwell's house party, was Winnie Badger, whose eyes gleamed with pride as she watched her husband.

"I hope Buck will get a hit," she murmured. "He used to hit well."

"Oo, eet ees the strange game!" exclaimed Teresa Gallup. "What ees eet Ephraim ees doing now? Does he have to hollaire so loud?"

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"He's a coach," explained Elsie.

"A coach?" questioned Teresa. "Why, the coach ees sometheeng for a horse to pull. Ees Ephraim sometheeng for a horse to pull?"

"He isn't just that sort of a coach," laughed Inza. "He's out there to give Frank instructions about running bases."

"Oo!" murmured Teresa. "Does he know more about the way bases to run than Frank knows?"

"Perhaps not," smiled Inza. "But you see the runner can't keep watch of the ball and the players while he's running. He can't tell just what every one is doing if he has to pay attention to himself. A coach can tell him what to do."

Juanita Garcia had not spoken since the beginning of the game, but now she ventured to ask:

"What ees eet Señor Carkaire he play? He keep saying: 'One ball! One strike! Two ball! Two strike!' but he do nothing else."

"He's the umpire. He is the judge who gives the decisions."

"Oo!" breathed Juanita. "He ees the judge! He ees the magistrate! Then he must know everytheeng about the game. He must know more than every one else. Eet ees splendeed! I am so proud of Señor Carkaire!"

Suddenly Winnie Badger clapped her hands, uttered a cry of delight, and started up.

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Buck had hit the ball.

A moment later Winnie's joy turned to dismay, for, with a leap, O'Day thrust out his gloved left hand and caught Badger's liner. It was the third put-out, and Merry was left on second.

"That's playing ball!" roared the man with the broken nose. "Now get after Frank Merriwell, and send him to the stable! Put the blanket on him! Polish him off!"

The Rovers trotted in, while the home team took the field.

Casper Silence lighted a fresh cigarette as the players in yellow and black settled down on the bench.

"Beyond question you faced the four leading batters of that team, Bender," said the proprietor of the visitors. "You know now what Merriwell and Badger can hit. If O'Day had not made a great catch, Merriwell would have scored."

"Oh, I'll get onto their style of hitting, all right," nodded Bender. "Neither of those chaps will touch me next time."

Bearover was speaking to McCann.

"We want to make some runs in this inning, Mike," he said. "If we can roll up a few tallies, it ought to discourage the youngsters. It's not easy to bluff them, but we may be able to get their tails down, and an uphill game is a hard game for any team to play. Start us off, McCann."

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The captain of the visitors walked out and hit the first ball pitched to him, although it was fully six inches higher than his shoulders. The hit was a sharp drive into the field, and Carson took it on the first bound and promptly sent it to Badger, which held McCann at first.

Frank believed Mertez would try to bunt, and he kept the ball high. Mertez fouled the first one, and a strike was called.

McCann was forced to return to first after getting a big start toward second.

Merry fancied he saw a signal exchanged between the batter and the base runner. Something told him McCann would try to steal.

Nevertheless, Frank appeared careless in permitting the captain of the Rovers to get a lead off first. When he pitched, however, Merry whistled the ball over high and wide so that it came into Bart's hands in such a manner that Hodge was in perfect position to throw to second.

McCann was scooting down the line.

Bart threw to second.

Badger covered the sack, took the ball and tagged McCann as the runner was sliding.

It was a close play, but Buck caught McCann as the latter's hand was fully six inches from the bag.

"Out at second!" declared Carker.

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There was a hush as the runner scrambled to his feet.

"What?" roared McCann, rushing at Carker and seizing him in a fury. "Did you call me out, you

chump? What do you mean?"

He swung Greg round roughly.

Frank promptly reached for the back of McCann's neck. His fingers closed there, and he sent the fellow reeling to one side.

"Hold on, Carker," he said, as Greg started to speak. He realized it was the umpire's intention to put McCann out of the game.

There were indications that the crowd of toughs contemplated rushing onto the field.

Bill Hunker sprang in front of those men and roared:

"I'll put the irons on the first son of a gun who ducks under that rope!"

That stopped them.

McCann was livid with fury. It seemed that he meant to spring at Merriwell, who stood calmly facing him.

"Hold on, you!" said Frank, shaking a finger at the captain of the Rovers. "I want to say just one word, and then you may come at me if you feel like it. I kept the umpire from putting you out of the game. You were out at second, and you know it. If you lift your hand against Carker during the remainder of this game or make any insulting talk to him, I'll back him up if he orders you off the field. Perhaps your team can get along without you. Perhaps it will be better off without you. Take the matter into consideration."

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On the temporary bleachers a crowd of Farnham Hall lads, led by Dale Sparkfair, gave a cheer for Merry.

As this cheer died away Uncle Eb Small rose in the stand, waved his crooked cane, and shrilly cried:

"That's right, Frank—that's jest right! We're here to see a game of baseball and not a fight! All the same, if them fellers start a row, we'll back you up to the finish! We know you're a gentleman on the baseball field and off it. You've got the sympathy of every decent man here."

"That's right! that's right!" came from all sides of the field.

Basil Bearover stepped out from the bench and called McCann's attention.

"Play ball, Mike," he said. "We can win, anyhow. Let the umpire alone."

Muttering to himself, the captain of the Rovers walked in from the field.

Things simmered down at once. At last the visiting players and the sympathizing crowd of thugs realized that the sentiment of the crowd would not tolerate such conduct as McCann's. The Merries were not frightened by it, and Frank had prepared to quell any outbreak of ruffianism.

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Toby Mertz tried hard for a hit, fouling the ball a number of times. Finally he put up a high foul, which Hodge gathered in.

Grifford was regarded as one of the heaviest and surest hitters among the visitors. Nevertheless, to his astonishment, he missed the first two balls pitched by Frank, although both crossed the pan. Two wide ones followed, and then Hodge called for the double shoot.

Merry threw his great curve for the first time that day, and again Grifford missed.

"Three strikes—you're out!" rang forth Carker's decision.

The first inning was over.

CHAPTER XLI.

[Pg 308]

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

Casper Silence succeeded in repressing his anxiety and disappointment as inning after inning passed and neither side secured a run.

The Rovers had fancied ere beginning the game that it would be an easy thing to down Merriwell's team. They had believed Frank's reputation as a pitcher to be exaggerated. They were confident of their batting ability, but gradually that confidence weakened before the wonderful boxwork of Merriwell, who seemed in his best form. Fortunately most of the decisions against the visitors were not close, and there were few excuses for kicks had McCann and the men been inclined to keep it up.

Ephraim Gallup could not throw off his feeling of anxiety and nervousness, and he was thankful as the innings passed and no opportunity came for him to display what he could do in the field. At bat he was a failure. In past days Gallup had batted well, but to-day Merriwell's wisdom in

placing him far down on the batting order became apparent as the Vermonter continued to strike out. In the sixth inning Ephraim had a chance to drive in a run, for, with two men gone, the Merries pushed a runner round to third.

Again Ephraim struck out.

"You vos a peach uf a hitter—I don'd pelief!" sneered Dunnerwurst.

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"Gol dinged if I could hit a haouse!" muttered Gallup. "I'm jest abaout the rottenest thing that ever swung a bat! I wish I was to hum on the farm!"

In the last of the seventh the Rovers had their opportunity. With one man out, they landed a runner on the third corner. The next hitter succeeded in lifting a short fly to center field.

Gallup made a wonderful run for the ball, but muffed it, although it struck fairly in his hands. As Ephraim dropped the ball the runner at third started for the plate.

Now Gallup had a reputation as a thrower. Many a time from deep center he had cut off a man at the plate. With remarkable quickness for one who seemed so awkward he caught up the ball and lined it to Hodge.

Had Ephraim taken more time it would have been better for him. His anxiety caused him to throw with too much haste, and, as a result, the ball passed fully ten feet over Bart's head.

The runner scored.

Before Hodge could recover the ball and return it to the diamond the man who had hit it was safe on third.

Basil Bearover slapped Casper Silence on the shoulder.

"We've got them now!" he chuckled. "They'll never get a run off Bender! The game is ours! You've won that ten thousand!" [Pg 310]

"It looks that way," replied Silence, as he produced a fresh cigarette and lighted it. "It's a pretty good thing for me that we have got them. I counted on winning this game a great deal easier than this. Had we lost, I'd been practically busted. I'm afraid the Rovers would have been compelled to disband."

Imagine the feelings of Gallup. After making that throw Ephraim walked round and round in a circle for at least half a dozen times.

"That's about the most expensive gol-darned fool thing I ever done!" he mumbled to himself. "Waal, by gum, I deserve it! Any man that's fool enough to bet every dollar he's gut in the world on a baseball game oughter lose. I don't keer a rap for myself, but Frank was right in saying I had no business to throw away money that my wife and kid has a claim on. I guess this will teach me a lesson. I won't be able to look Teresa in the face arter this game is over."

He was aroused by Merry's voice calling him to take his position and play ball.

"Better put a baby in my place, Frank." he said dolefully. "Any blamed fool could do better'n I'm doing to-day. I guess I've lost the game."

"The game isn't over yet," said Frank grimly. "We'll play it out."

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The Rovers secured no more runs in that inning. Nevertheless, Bender had no difficulty in blanking the Merries in the first of the eighth.

In the last of the eighth just three men faced Merriwell. He struck them all out.

"It's all over!" cried Mike McCann, with a grin, as the Rovers again took the field. "This finishes it!"

Frank was the first man up.

In spite of Bender's skill Merriwell cracked out a clean single. Badger followed with a bunt that advanced Merry to second. Buck was thrown out at first.

Diamond tried hard for a hit, with Frank leading off second ready to do his best to score.

Jack finally drove a grounder into the hands of McCann, who whistled it over for a put-out.

"Two gone!" shouted the captain of the Rovers. "Only one more to git, Bender, me boy!"

A few of the disappointed spectators began to leave the field.

The first two balls pitched by Bender were strikes, Browning touching neither of them. Then the pitcher tried some wide ones on the big first baseman of the Merries. Bruce had a good eye, and he let the wide ones pass.

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Two balls were called. Bender attempted to curve one over, but missed the plate by fully six inches.

"Three balls!" came from Carker.

"Smash it if he puts one over!" called Frank.

Browning gripped his bat and stood ready.

The crowd was silent and breathless.

Bender tried to put a speedy ball across Bruce's shoulders, but it was far too high.

"Four balls—take your base!" cried Carker.

"The best thing you could have done, Mitt," laughed McCann. "Here comes the tall jay, and he never made a hit in his life."

Ephraim Gallup's hands were trembling as he picked up a bat and walked out. His legs were weak, and there was a mist before his eyes.

"I'll never touch it!" he whispered to himself. "There's too much depending on it; I can't do it!"

As if from a great distance he seemed to hear Frank Merriwell crying:

"Just a little single, Ephraim! You never failed in a pinch in all your life! You can't fail now!"

Those words seemed to brush the mist from Gallup's eyes, and something like confidence crept back into his heavy heart.

Nevertheless he merely fouled Bender's first shoot.

"One strike!"

The next ball was far too high, but Gallup swung at it and missed.

"Two strikes!"

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"All over! all over!" whooped McCann.

The spectators in the stand and on the bleachers were standing.

"I knowed I couldn't do it!" thought Gallup.

Once more he heard Frank calling to him.

"For Teresa and the baby!" cried Merriwell. "Lace it out, Gallup! Get against it!"

For Teresa and the baby! Those words rang through Ephraim's brain. Was it possible he was going to prove himself a miserable failure under such circumstances? With only himself to consider he might fail, but he had believed himself capable of great things for the sake of Teresa and the baby. He was capable of great things! He knew it now, and suddenly his hands were steady as iron. There was not the slightest quiver of his nerves. His eyes were clear, and his face wore a look of confidence as he watched Bender prepare to deliver the ball.

The pitcher started the ball wide, but, with a sudden break it took an inshoot across the plate.

Gallup knew he was going to hit the ball when he swung at it. He hit it fairly and squarely with all the strength and skill that he possessed. It brought a wild roar from the crowd as the ball went sailing out on a line about fifteen feet from the ground.

Apparently Grifford would have little trouble in catching the ball. He changed his position a foot or two and prepared to take it. Just before it reached him he made a sudden backward move and then leaped desperately into the air, thrusting up his hand.

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Instead of dropping, as Grifford had expected, the ball held up in a marvelous manner and passed fully two feet beyond his reach as he made that leap. It finally touched the ground and went bounding away, with Grifford rushing after it as fast as he could race over the turf.

The white chalk of the base lines seemed to spin out beneath Gallup's feet like a thread as he literally flew over the ground. He heard a sound like the roaring of many waters. It was the joyous shouting of the great crowd as Merriwell crossed the plate and Diamond came speeding in from third.

Gallup did not realize that these two runs put the Merries in the lead. He was determined to score if possible. As he came up from second he saw Hans Dunnerwurst dancing like a clown and furiously waving his arms, while he yelled:

"Ephie, you vos a tandy! Ephie, you vos a peach! Ephie, I luf you! Dot score vill git you, und don'd nobody forgit him! Mine cootness, dot vos der most peautiful home run you efer saw in my life!"

A homer it was, for Gallup reached the pan ahead of the ball, which Grifford had returned to the diamond.

Frank seized Ephraim by the hand as he came over the plate. The rest of the team rushed at the Vermonter, hammering him joyously over the head and shoulders, much to the agitation of Teresa, who feared her husband had done some terrible thing and that his friends were beating him on that account.

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Bender looked sick and weary as Carson seized a bat and rushed out to the plate. The pitcher delivered an easy one, which Berlin drove into left field. Roach took the ball on the run, and this made the third out.

Casper Silence was like a caged tiger as the Rovers gathered at the bench.

"Get in here and win this game, you slobs!" he hissed. "If you don't, this team disbands to-night!"

Against Frank Merriwell's pitching there was no chance for them, however. As in the previous inning, only three men faced Merry, and all three struck out.

Gallup overtook Frank ere the excited crowd that rushed onto the field could reach Merry.

"It's ten thousand for the consumptives' home at Wellsburg, by ginger!" laughed Ephraim.

"Remember your promise, Gallup," said Frank, as he seized the Vermonter's hand. "You'll never bet again."

"Never again!" vowed Ephraim.

Then, like Merriwell, he was caught up by the rejoicing spectators, who triumphantly bore these two heroes of the game around the diamond, while they cheered themselves hoarse.

When Merry at last had been successful in freeing himself from the grasp of jubilant admirers, he joined Inza and the ladies who had watched the game from the stand. Frank and his wife had fallen a little behind the others as they were approaching the house, and they were speaking quietly when a heavy slap on Frank's back caused him to turn around quickly. He was confronted by Berlin Carson. [Pg 316]

"A great game, Merry, old man!" exclaimed Berlin enthusiastically. "By Jove! that wing of yours has lost none of the tricks that enabled it to send team after team to the bad in the old days at Yale. And Gallup—Gallup! What a wallop that was he gave the ball in the last, eh? Great Cæsar, I feel almost as exultant over it as if I had made it myself, but I'm more than half inclined to believe that it was something you called to him that put him on his mettle. What was it, Merry?"

But before Frank had an opportunity to speak, Bart Hodge, who was several paces distant, called Berlin's name.

"See you later—see you later, Merry," laughed Berlin, as he patted Frank on the back and broke away.

Then, with almost boyish lightness, he ran in the direction of Hodge.

Frank and Inza looked after him smilingly. Inza laid a hand on one of her husband's arms.

"These last few days appear to have made quite a difference in Berlin," she said. [Pg 317]

"Yes, Inza," replied Frank, as he pressed his wife's hand, "yes, and the fact that the old chap is a boy again is due to that suggestion of yours. Had it not been for you, the 'old flock' would not have been here, casting over Merry Home the glamour of the good old times. The spirit which our old friends have invoked is one that could not be resisted even by faithful old Berlin Carson, who had learned to love, and since has learned to forget, the unfortunate young woman who tried to rob Frank Merriwell of his son."

"And, after all, it is Frank Merriwell's son whom we have to thank for the happiness which these last few weeks have brought," Inza murmured softly.

THE END.

No. 138, the next thrilling tale to appear in the MERRIWELL SERIES is "Dick Merriwell's Team Mate," by Burt L. Standish.

BOOKS FOR YOUNG MEN

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Stories of Frank and Dick Merriwell

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129. Dick Merriwell's Resource By Burt L. Standish
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In order that there may be no confusion, we desire to say that the books listed below will be issued during the respective months in New York City and vicinity. They may not reach the readers at a distance promptly, on account of delays in transportation.

To be published in January, 1926.

1. Frank Merriwell's Tigers By Burt L. Standish
2. Dick Merriwell's Polo Team By Burt L. Standish

To be published in February, 1926.

1. Frank Merriwell's Pupils By Burt L. Standish
2. Frank Merriwell's New Boy By Burt L. Standish

To be published in March, 1926.

1. Dick Merriwell's Home Run By Burt L. Standish
2. Dick Merriwell's Dare By Burt L. Standish
3. Frank Merriwell's Son By Burt L. Standish

To be published in April, 1926.

1. Dick Merriwell's Team Mate. By Burt L. Standish
2. Frank Merriwell's Leaguers By Burt L. Standish

To be published in May, 1926.

1. Frank Merriwell's Happy Camp By Burt L. Standish
2. Dick Merriwell's Influence By Burt L. Standish

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Splendid, Interesting, Big Stories

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1. The Testing of Noyes By William Wallace Cook

2. The Fateful Seventh By William Wallace Cook

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1. Montana By William Wallace Cook
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1. Fools for Luck By William Wallace Cook
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RATTLING GOOD ADVENTURE

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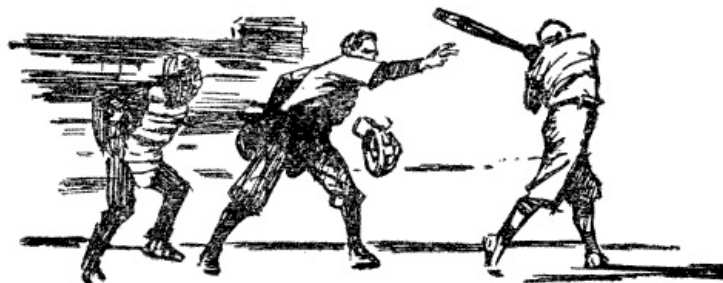
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11. Jack Lightfoot's Blind By Maxwell Stevens
12. Jack Lightfoot's Capture By Maxwell Stevens
13. Jack Lightfoot's Head Work By Maxwell Stevens
14. Jack Lightfoot's Wisdom By Maxwell Stevens



[Transcriber's Note: There was no table of contents in the original edition. A table of contents has been created for this electronic edition.

Advertisements have been moved from the front of the text to the back.

In addition, the following typographical errors from the original edition have been corrected.

The subtitle has been changed from "A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK" to "A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK".

In Chapter VIII, "his sytem of signals" has been changed to "his system of signals".

In Chapter XIV, a missing period has been added after "'What's that?' asked Merry".

In Chapter XXI, "Didn't you introduce me." has been changed to "Didn't you introduce me?"

In Chapter XXIV, "should she see Murilla free his knife hand" has been changed to "should she see Murillo free his knife hand".

In Chapter XXXI, a missing period has been added after "Why, it would break the poor creature's heart".

In Chapter XXXVII, "on the first page youll find something" has been changed to "on the first page you'll find something".

In Chapter XXXVIII, a missing quotation mark has been added after "we'll go out now."

In Chapter XXXIX, "Clever took the ball handsomely" has been changed to "Clover took the ball handsomely".

In Chapter XLI, "A great came, Merry, old man!" has been changed to "A great game, Merry, old man!"

In the list of Frank Merriwell novels, "Frank Merriwells' Victories" has been changed to "Frank Merriwell's Victories".

A blank line has been removed from the middle of the paragraph beginning "In order that there may be no confusion..."

In the description of the Adventure Library, "Spendid, Interesting, Big Stories" has been changed to "Splendid, Interesting, Big Stories".]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK MERRIWELL'S SON; OR, A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK ***

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